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Elma Brenner, *Leprosy and Charity in Medieval Rouen*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, for the Royal Historical Society, 2015. xii + 203 pp. Map, photos, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$90 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-86193-339-6; ISSN 0269-2244.

Review by David S. Spear, Furman University.

Rouen was one of medieval Europe's most important cities. Leprosy was one of Europe's most notorious diseases. It is good, therefore, to have Elma Brenner's new book, *Leprosy and Charity in Medieval Rouen*. Aside from a few transitory *leprosaria* (listed on pages 77-78), Brenner focuses on Rouen's two main establishments. The house of St. Jacques at Mont-aux-Malades is well documented, although Brenner is the first modern historian to make full use of these materials. The *leprosarium* of Salle-aux-Puelles has fewer materials, but is interesting because it was for the exclusive use of female elites. Amazingly, architectural vestiges remain for both institutions.

As Brenner notes, there is no single pattern for dealing with leprosy because both understanding of the disease and its treatment changed over the course of the Middle Ages. For example, the twelfth century exhibited more compassion than the fourteenth, a time that, in the wake of the Black Death, regarded lepers with suspicion. In general, though, leper houses were located outside the city walls, albeit on main-travelled roads, and received consistent financial support. Brenner successfully highlights the tension between community acceptance of lepers and their isolation.

The *leprosarium* of St. Jacques at Mont-aux-Malades (today in the suburb of Mont-Saint-Aignan) was situated a mile and a half northwest of Rouen Cathedral, on a former Roman road. The short distance is deceptive, however, because it is atop a steep hill. Brenner proposes that this meant seclusion, but also clean, healthy air. The Augustinian canons there saw as their main function the care of a community of lepers. King Henry II was the primary benefactor, although it is possible there were antecedents (there is no official foundation date), and he was imitated by local aristocrats and eventually by Rouen's town fathers. By 1174 a new church dedicated to St. Thomas Becket adorned the leper complex. This connection did not arise from thin air. Becket was a friend of the local prior, and of course his family had originally come from Rouen. Thus, at medieval Mont-aux-Malades it seems that the lepers themselves had the church of St. Thomas, the canons had the church of St. Jacques, and the locals had a new parish church dedicated to St. Giles.

The leper house of Salle-aux-Puelles (earlier called the Salle du Roi and the *Aula Puellarum*) was located about two miles southwest of the Cathedral, on a wooded plain (today in the suburb of Petit Quevilly). It, too, was first funded by Henry II, converting his royal chapel of St. Julien to a new church for lepers. This house had fewer patients and, as previously mentioned, seems to have "admitted women of aristocratic birth only." (59)

Brenner's ongoing interest is with charity: how the lepers were regarded and dealt with. She finds a great outpouring of concern for them, with both fraternal and financial support. Lepers weren't just

shunted off into some dark cell to die. Rather, monastic communities (usually Augustinian canons) took care of them with food, shelter, and clothing. Their spiritual wellbeing was also ministered to: the lepers attended mass, took confession, and received Christian burials. Lay brothers and sisters tended to them. In 1264 Mont-aux-Malades had twelve male and seventeen female lepers who were served by five lay brothers and sixteen lay sisters. At about that same time Salle-aux-Puelles had ten female lepers served by one lay sister. According to Brenner, these numbers imply a cadre of people directly concerned with health care for the sick. Moreover, Brenner surveys the medical culture in general, arguing that of the many physicians who lived in medieval Rouen, some doubtless visited the leper communities.

Leprosy and Charity in Medieval Rouen is an admirable study. It certainly fills a gap in religious, health-care, and women's studies. The tone is honest and even a bit tentative, indicated by the frequent presence of the verb "to suggest" (it is used three times on page 55 in paragraph one alone). There is a forty-page appendix, cataloguing all the documents related to Rouen's *leprosaria* (mostly, of course, to Mont-aux-Malades). There are no editions of the documents, but a summary is provided for each. The book is graced with black and white photos of the surviving structures of St. Jacques, St. Thomas, and St. Julien (although lacking the interior of St. Thomas, see photo below). I do have a few minor complaints, one major one, and some suggestions for future consideration.

My quibbles: First, the striking color photo of a twelfth-century charter which adorns the book's cover is not identified as such in catalogue number 92-c. Second, I ask in ignorance, can an author claim copyright (p. viii, figure 10) of a photograph of a document from a French archive? Third, in the last line of document 4 on p. 143, for 425-60, read 425-6.

Some omissions: In making the case that the priors of Mont-aux-Malades were well-connected, Brenner could have mentioned that Prior Robert served several times as a papal judge-delegate for Pope Innocent III.[1] In her list of physicians active in Rouen during the Middle Ages, she could also have noted the presence of Master Herbert.[2] But the really glaring omission is a map of Rouen. True, there is a map of upper Normandy, but most of those sites are referred to only occasionally. Readers who are not already familiar with the city of Rouen will quickly become frustrated as a flurry of churches, parishes, and other sites parade past. At the very least readers of this review can go to this Google Map URL where several of the sites are identified:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?usp=sharing&mid=1QNwISU0uqQSR-MnofP7-X-i-j-o>. [3]

One of Brenner's avowed aims is to examine the charitable communities that supported lepers. She writes: "Works of charity were one aspect of a web of devotional practices, including the commemoration of souls, the veneration of saints and their relics, and the lighting of sacred spaces" (p. 135). The author actually devotes several pages to candles and the lighting of altars. But surprisingly, hardly a word appears about the community of saints that linked the Rouen donors and lepers together. This seems a likely avenue that Brenner could take in future research on this topic. In the meantime, here is what occurs to me.

Thinking in terms of a spiritual geography we would begin with the three saints who presided over the monastic complex at Mont-aux-Malades, namely Saints Jacques (= James the Elder), Giles, and Thomas. Jacques was associated with pilgrimages in general, but more specifically with his church in northwest Spain, Santiago de Compostela. Saint Giles, the patron saint of cripples, was also associated with pilgrimages to Santiago, as one passed through his celebrated pilgrim-church in Toulouse. *Leprosaria* were commonly dedicated to St. Giles, including some nearby in Normandy (e.g., Pont-Audemer) and England (e.g., Wilton, Holborn) (Brenner, pp. 23-5). St. Thomas was well known for his cures, including of lepers. Into this mix we add St. Julien who was famous as "the Hospitaller," well known for hospitality, in all senses of the word, as well as a life of penance. His *vita* was enshrined in the thirteenth century in a still-surviving stained glass window sequence in Rouen cathedral. [4]

With the exception of Thomas Becket, these saints were not of Norman origin: they were not even common saints in Normandy, which increased their uniqueness.^[5] They allude to a wide-ranging geography, from Jerusalem to Santiago, from Toulouse to Canterbury. Their feast days were spread out across the entire year, from Feb. 12 (Julian) to July 24 (Jacques) to Sept. 1 (Giles) to December 29 (Thomas). But they thematically unified local donors and lepers, concerned as they all were with penance, pilgrimage, and cures. It is not hard, therefore, to conjure up a community of charity within Rouen that would have centered on the cults of these particular saints, linking Rouen's *leprosaria* in a sacred geography. Indeed, one wonders if Mont-aux-Malades itself could have been a minor pilgrimage site.

Brenner's book, then, forms a solid base for further research on medieval Rouen's religious history as well as for comparative studies with other locations.



Figure 1. Interior of St. Thomas of Mont-aux-Malades. Note twelfth-century drum piers, thick walls, and round arches. (Photo: David S. Spear)

NOTES

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[1] Harald Müller; *Päpstliche Delegationsgerichtsbarkeit in der Normandie*, volume 2 (Bonn : Bouvier, 1997), nos. 168 and 225; P. Langlois, *Histoire du Prieuré du Mont-aux-Malades-lès-Rouen* (Rouen: Fleury, 1851), pp. 435-7.

[2] David S. Spear, *The Personnel of the Norman Cathedrals during the Ducal Period, 911-1204* (London: University of London, School of Advanced Study, Institute of Historical Research, 2006), pp. 228 and 244.

[3] Alternatively, one can also use the following coordinates on Google Maps: the satellite view is more satisfactory than the conventional format. St. Jacques of Mont-aux-Malades: 49.457436, 1.081464. St. Thomas of Mont-aux-Malades: 49.458167, 1.081738. Note how close these two structures are: they are certainly part of the same complex. St. Julien in Petit-Quevilly, used by the lepers at Salle-aux-Puelles: 49.420828, 1.057978. La Madeleine hospital: 49.445940, 1.080334. This institution migrated around the city eventually settling west of the city walls. Place du Vieux Marché: 49.443066, 1.088400. The commercial center of the city, where the Leprosarium at Mont-aux-Malades had several land holdings. Rouen Cathedral: 49.440341, 1.094751. This was the center of Roman and medieval Rouen.

[4] For the attributes of these saints in general see Donald Attwater, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965). For Thomas Becket, see Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), pp. 89-109, esp. p. 96 where St. Thomas is effective at curing Lepers.

[5] Thus, of the fifty churches surveyed in the Risle Valley of Normandy, none were dedicated to Giles, Jacques, or Thomas; and only one to St. Julien. Véronique Gazeau, "Les saints dans la vallée de la Risle aux XI-XII siècles," *Les saints dans la Normandie médiévale*, eds. P. Bouet and F. Neveux (Caen : Presses universitaires de Caen, 2000), pp. 135-49, especially p. 148.

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