

Bibliotek for Læger

A journal devoted to medical history, ethics, philosophy and clinical theory, founded in 1809

Anne-Marie Worm:

The Greek medical moulages.

Bibl Læger 2005;197:279–99.

Medical moulages are three-dimensional wax figures describing pathological changes of the human body. From the 1890s the art of moulaging flourished all over Europe and collections, useful when teaching students, nurses and medical doctors, were established. The Greek dermatologist G. Photinos learned the technique in Berlin and succeeded in establishing a huge production in Athens from 1910. A rather unknown hospital museum in Athens still stores 1660 of these moulages depicting skin manifestations most prevalent in the beginning of the last century such as those seen in syphilis, tuberculosis and lepra together with a wide range of other skin and venereal diseases. The art of moulaging and the historical background behind the Greek moulages are described. The collection is impressive even though the need of preservation and restoration is urgent in order to prevent a total decay.

John Christiansen:

Thomas Linacre – physician and humanist at the court of Henry VIII.

Bibl Læger 2005;197:305–22.

Thomas Linacre was born in Canterbury probably in 1460. Around 1480 Linacre went to Oxford where he became a Fellow of All Souls College and studied Greek under Cornelio Vitelli, an Italian exile living in Oxford at that time. There is no indication of any interest in medicine from this period.

In 1487 he joined his teacher from Canterbury, William Selling, who was sent on a diplomatic mission to Italy. Linacre went to Florence where he together with Giovanni de Medici (the later Pope Leo X) studied Greek under two of Italy's leading humanists, Angelo Poliziano and Dimitri Chalcondylas. He went to Padua to study medicine and graduated in 1496, but why he relatively late in life, at the age of 30, became interested in medicine is unknown. Back in England he soon became a member of the group of London-humanists around Thomas More, thanks to whom he became physician for King Henry VII and King Henry VIII as well as physician and tutor for his daughters Mary and Elisabeth.

His greatest achievement in medicine was the founding of the Royal College of Physicians in 1518, an organisation which got a profound influence on medicine in Britain. He was the president of the College until he died in 1524.

In his last years he founded three lectureships in medicine in Oxford and Cambridge which periodically in modern time were held by outstanding physicians. Since Linacre, however, was a dogmatic believer in galenic medicine, neither he nor his lectureships accomplished any progress in the science of medicine in his own lifetime. He was a brilliant humanist scholar, highly respected by some of the greatest renaissance humanists like Erasmus of Rotterdam and Rabelais.

Daniel Andersen:

The bleeding corpse. A phenomenon from the Middle Ages – illustrated by the narratives on The Knight with the Lion and the Last Journey of the bishop of Hereford.

Bibl Læger 2005;197:323–37.

The medieval fascination of the bleeding corpse was probably a reflection of Christ's Passion and burial with the added narratives of Joseph of Arimathea's collection of His blood in the Sacred Grail.

The first secular account of bleeding from a dead body was found in Chrétien de Troyes' *The Knight with the Lion*, where the phenomenon was taken as evidence of the presence of his killer. This tale from the Arthurian legends can be seen as a reflection of the firm popular belief in the reality of the bleeding as a proof of guilt.

Likewise was the account of bleeding from the bones of bishop Thomas of Hereford under their passage through the parish of the archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, seen as an indication of his complicity in the bishop's death.

The strange phenomenon was interpreted in terms of the scholastic belief in the power of the human spirits of one person to exert its effect on the body of another person. Originally no religious concept was involved, but later on – in the 15th and the 16th century – the phenomenon was taken as God's judgement and it was to a certain extent used as a judicial evidence of guilt in court under the name of *jus feretri* – the *biar-test*. It was used in Denmark until 1738 and in Norway until 1845.

Nils Rosdahl:

The first occurrence of measles in Greenland in 1935.

Bibl Læger 2005;197:338–52.

Measles is a highly contagious disease with a relatively high fatality rate in susceptible populations. It had been possible to protect the Greenlandic population from the infection until 1951 when some 98 percent of the population in southern Greenland were infected.

A major measles epidemic on the Faroe Islands in 1935 infected approximately 20 per cent of the population including many adults. This summer some 2000 men were fishing off the west coast of Greenland from designated ports. On a number of vessels, members of the crew developed measles en route to Greenland and a large, but unknown, number of the fishermen became infected. The medical authorities in Greenland imposed successfully strict quarantine and isolation measures to protect the indigenous population. Health assistance to the Faroese fishermen was given from the Danish Navy and the Greenland health service and only one or two Greenlanders became infected. The episode has never been recorded in official Greenlandic or Danish reports.

Bjørn Hofmann:

“Just in case”: about the challenges in our search for safety.

Bibl Læger 2005;197:353–64.

Clinicians tend to use the phrase “just in case”, e.g. in taking an X-ray “just in case” or removing a lump “just in case”. However, this “just in case” tends to have a wide variety of meanings. Many of these are rational and legitimate, but actions “just in case” can have a series of adverse side effects that challenge us emotionally, epistemologically and morally. This article applies the case of diagnostic X-ray in order to investigate some of these challenges. It is argued that actions “just in case” are unjust in many cases.