

Leprosy Sketches from a Chinese Brush

In Medieval and Renaissance European art, leprosy appears as a subject quite frequently, usually with the disease victim depicted as receiving charity from some saint or as illustrating some Biblical account of leprosy. In a search extending over more than two decades we have been unable to uncover any old, indigenous representation of leprosy in the art of the Far East. Old Japanese woodblock prints do occasionally relate to medicine and in several instances we have noted social reaction against the victim of some "spotted" skin disease which we initially assumed to be leprosy. Careful attention to the inscriptions on the prints have, however, always indicated that *hashika* (measles), rather than leprosy, was being depicted. Veith¹ resurrected an old

¹ Veith, Ilza. A Japanese Picture of Leprosy. Bull. Hist. Med. **21** (1947) 905-917.

picture of leprosy in Japan in a Dutch book of 1669 by Arnold Montanus, which has a title running to 73 words. The representation, a woodcut print, is of a man and a woman said to be Japanese leprosy cases but their appearance together with other features of the print strongly suggest that the European artist was probably working from second-hand description. In any case, the representation is not Oriental.

We present here a set of Biblical paintings, dating from 1954, from the brush of Johnny Shek.² In four panels they illustrate the cure of ten persons with leprosy, of whom only one showed gratitude, as recounted in the Bible; Luke 17:11-19.

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² Presently, Electron Microscope Technologist, ALM Leprosy Atelier, University of Hawaii School of Medicine.



"In the course of his journey to Jerusalem he was travelling through the borderlands of Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village he was met by ten men with leprosy. They stood some way off and called out to him, 'Jesus, Master, take pity on us.'



“When he saw them he said, “Go and show yourselves to the priests’;



“and while they were on their way, they were made clean.”



"One of them, finding himself cured, turned back praising God aloud. He threw himself down at Jesus's feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. At this Jesus said: "Were not all ten cleansed? The other nine, where are they? Could none be found to come back and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to the man, 'Stand up and go on your way; your faith has cured you.'"