



The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore (Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture)

Piero Camporesi

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What significance did the body have for the obsessively religious, superstitious, yet materially bound minds of the pre-industrial age? The human body was a constant prey to disease, plague, unhealthy living conditions, the evil effects of druggery and nutritional deficiency, yet the saints seemed to testify to the existence of life beyond this, to a tangible Garden of Eden where all suffering was reversed. The right to entry to this haven was also seen in corporeal terms. The practice of abstemiousness, self-inflicted torture, even the courting of humiliation could trigger visions of beatitude, of the longed-for paradise. In this extraordinary and often astounding book, Professor Camporesi traces these experiences back to various documents across the centuries and explores the juxtaposition of medicine and sorcery, cookery and surgery, pharmacy and alchemy. He opens the window on a fascinating and colourful, if at times violent, world: of levitating and gyrating saints, gardens full of candied fruits and crystalline fountains, amazing exorcisms and arcane medical practices.

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