
This oversized, fully-illustrated volume offers an eclectic survey of medical history and a sampling of the extraordinary collection amassed by Sir Henry Wellcome (1853-1936), founder with Silas Burroughs of the pharmaceutical company Burroughs Wellcome & Co. Wellcome’s museum-worthy collection, housed today at both the Wellcome Collection and Library, and the Science Museum, in London, consists of “images and objects, relics and specimens: bits from real bodies sliced, dried, and pickled and maps and models of its inner workings,” according to British sculptor Antony Gormley in the foreword. The authors have combined their varied talents to comprise a lively and highly readable volume.

The book is one of many illustrated medical surveys published in recent years, like Oriental Medicine: An Illustrated Guide to the Asian Arts of Healing (1996); The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine (1996; revised 2006); Western Medicine: An Illustrated History (1997); Five Hundred Years of Medicine in Art (2001); Ars Medica (2006); and Medicine in Art (2010), however none is perhaps as visually stunning as this title. It is not a medical reference book in the same manner as a couple of these others, but is a worthy addition to art libraries with an interest in health or medicine.

Within the six chapters such as “Understanding Illness and Developing Cures” and “Treating with Surgery and Healing Wounds” are a series of sub-headings by topic, such as: Anatomy; The Brain; Nurses; Acupuncture in China; Cancer; Amputation; Military Medicine; Curing Mental Illness; and Preventing Smallpox. Every topic is accompanied by several images, each with a detailed caption. The book includes a bibliography, a list of illustrations by title, an index, and a list of further references, including both books and web resources.

While the illustrations are the focus of the volume, the text is informative and full of interesting facts, figures, and names. The glossy paper is a heavy stock, and the text is well placed in relation to the high-resolution, generously sized images. While citing many British examples in the text, many of the chapter sub-headings and collection examples draw from Asia, Africa, and indigenous cultures in addition to Europe and North America, and the coverage spans antiquity to the present day. The book would be a useful addition to public libraries with art or medical collections, and would serve the undergraduate as well as the graduate student.

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