

The Art and Science of Healing: From Antiquity to the Renaissance

This digital exhibit explores the early history of Western medicine through a selection of archaeological artifacts, papyri, medieval manuscripts, and early printed books. Hosted by the University of Michigan Library, it is the fruit of an extraordinary collaboration between three repositories at the University of Michigan: the Special Collections Library, the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, and the Papyrology Collection. The digital exhibit was designed to accompany and expand a physical exhibit of the same name held at two different venues, the Kelsey Museum and the University Library (Feb. 10-April 30, 2017). In brief, both versions of the exhibit explore various themes such as the role of religion and magic in healing the soul and body, the influence of Graeco-Roman methods of diagnosis and treatment in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and the multilingual transmission of medical knowledge in both manuscript and printed form.

The intended audience of the digital exhibit is both academic and the general public. While the display strongly participates in recent academic debates by addressing topics like the relationship between medicine and religion, or the role of art in the transmission of medical ideas, it also reaches out to the larger community by keeping the dialogue between words and images at an inclusive level. To achieve this, and following the strongly pedagogical approach commonly encouraged by museums, the amount of text has been kept at a minimum. Moreover, numerous additional resources in various media are included, such as pedagogical video clips, audio- recording of English translations of ancient texts, and blog posts. Many pages are equipped with a zoom-in tool that allows the viewer to explore ancient manuscripts and early printed books in greater detail. The website is fully responsive and strives to provide an optimal user experience on various devices: desktops, laptops, tablets, and mobile phones.

In general, the online exhibit attempts to overcome the challenge of covering such an extensive period of time: fifteen centuries! The design of the exhibit, including information architecture and the choice of colors, works as an excellent medium that keeps all the parts intertwined. Indeed, it is very easy to travel between different periods and artifacts, allowing the viewer to establish comparisons and connections that would be fairly difficult to find in a physical venue. For instance, one of the aims of the exhibit is to explore how medical texts transmitted in ancient papyri, medieval manuscripts, and early printed books, help us understand the full meaning of archaeological artifacts. Thus the user can view examples of ancient probes held at the Kelsey Museum and, simultaneously, listen to the English translation of a passage taken from the *editio princeps* of Celsus' *De medicina*, where the author describes how probes are employed to test the condition of a fistula.

The online exhibit also became a platform for student participation and creativity. There are two undergraduate essays about the exhibit; and in a video clip, graduate student Robin Miller explains how she used laser-printing technology to create large woodblocks directly inspired by the musclemen woodcuts in Andreas Vesalius' *De Fabrica* (Basel, 1543).

Credits:

Exhibition curators: Pablo Alvarez and Evyn Kropf

Editor: Margaret Lourie

Website designer: Julia Falkovitch-Khain