

BOOK REVIEW

Ayurvedic Man: Encounters with Indian Medicine

Hardback, 80 pages
Wellcome Collection
November 2017

This book has been produced by the Wellcome Collection to accompany their recent exhibition of the same name running in London until 8 April 2018. The title is taken from a Nepali painting from the 18th century in the Wellcome Collection.

Ayurvedic translates as knowledge of long life and is an early form of medicine practised in South Asia centuries before Galen and his teachings. Today, there are still practitioners of this form of healing alongside the Unani practitioners of the Greek/Arabic school.

Many of the images and objects pertaining to Ayurvedic medicine in this exhibition were collected by an Indian doctor, Dr Paira Mall, between 1911 and 1917. Although born in India, he trained in Europe and was an expert on Asian culture and language. Mall collected Sanskrit and Persian medical manuscripts as well as paintings, anatomical maps and old surgical instruments. He also translated ancient Ayurvedic medical manuscripts and even purchased medicinal plants, which were brought back to the Wellcome labs for further study at the request of C.J.S. Thompson, then curator of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum.

The book of the exhibition is illustrated with the manuscript exhibits and the early anatomical drawings, which display a remarkable knowledge for their time. Illustrations of botanical plants and surgical instruments serve to show that the Ayurvedic tradition had its own therapeutic and surgical armamentarium. There is also a section that covers the relationship between ill health and spiritual matters as religion and illness were closely intertwined in this era.

The illustrations of the exhibits are of high quality and the book enables the reader to absorb and view the remarkable detailed exhibits at their own pace and read the accompanying texts which place the pictures and information in a digestible format. *Ayurvedic Man* is a superlative book to accompany this truly fascinating exhibition on ancient medical practice. The curator of the exhibition, Bárbara Muñoz, and the Wellcome are to be congratulated for this fine effort.

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