

BOOK REVIEW

Wound Man: The Many Lives of a Surgical Image *by Jack Hartnell*

Hardcover 344 pages
Princeton University Press
August 2025

Jack Hartnell is an associate professor of Art History at the University of East Anglia and head of research at the National Gallery, London. This is his second book, following the 2018 publication: *Medieval Bodies: Life, Death and Art in the Middle Ages*.

A short introduction presents 'The Wound Man', undoubtedly the most iconic and enduring image in surgical history, and outlines the strategy employed by the author in the five main chapters that follow. The first chapter describes the place of diagrams in scholarly texts of the medieval period and considers precursor images with a particular focus on bloodletting figures.

The second chapter entitled 'Medicine: Wound Mechanics' begins with the earliest known Wound Man image, dating from 1399, and continues with a well-informed historical account of wounds and wound management up to the late fifteenth century. The second half of this chapter details the early series of fifteenth century publications, described by the medical historian Karl Sudhoff as the '*Dreibilderserie*' manuscripts, that included a triptych of Disease Man, Disease Woman and Wound Man. These images usually included textual annotations (*wundarzney*) describing treatment.

The teutonic theme continues in chapter three: 'Affect: Wounds in the World', which places the Wound Man within the broader cultural setting of central Europe by examining relevant aspects of legal, literary, military and religious concepts and also considering the representation of pain.

Using the Venetian Gregori press publications: *Fasciculus Medicinae* (1491) and the related vernacular edition *Fasciculo de medicina in volgare* (1494) as examples, chapter four considers the impact of the earliest European print publications, known as incunables, on the Wound Man and other medical images.

The fifth and final chapter, the longest at 66 pages, considers the further development of the Wound Man in relation to chronology, culture and geography featuring selected publications from sixteenth-century France, seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century Japan. It starts in the last few years of the fifteenth century with Brunschwig's *Buch der Chirurgie* featuring a novel Wound Man image on the title page. There is a good account of Hans von Gersdorff's influential publication, *Feldtbuch der Wundartzney* (1517) which appears to include the first depiction of high-energy firearm injuries in a Wound Man figure with cannonballs flanked by flames striking the right shin and left wrist. These images, particularly the latter, appear to have resonated through successive centuries and multiple surgical publications, including in fractional reproduction as a wounded head and 'Wound Leg'. The impact of Gersdorff's publication on Ambroise Paré's publications is clearly demonstrated. The first British publication to feature the Wound Man, Thomas Gale's fascinating

Certaine Workes of Chirurgie (1563), is included here. Gale was interested in gunpowder-related injuries, and it is a copy of the Gersdorff-style Wound Man that features in his book alongside a poem. Johannes Scultetus's groundbreaking posthumous publication, *Armamentarium Chirurgicum* (1655) features further evolution of the Wound Man; the final figure in the book shows Wound Man with some injuries already treated and bandaged and others in the moment of surgical treatment. The final part of this chapter includes a coherent account of how Scultetus's updated Wound Man became important in Japanese publications, reappearing in Narabayashi Chinzan's *Geka Sōden* in the early eighteenth century.

There is a short epilogue, copious endnotes and an index. The extensive bibliography extends to 34 pages and there are 195 illustrations, some of these would have benefited from being full-page size. Overall, this is a book that will appeal to both art historians and medical historians, particularly those with an interest in trauma or the visual representation of surgical disease and wounds. This is an important book, beautifully constructed, and the author has managed to trace Wound Man's development and place him back where he belongs: at the pinnacle of surgical iconography.

Bryan Rhodes
January 2026

Published online at www.bshbm.org.uk.