

An incisive and startling international review of the evolution of dentistry from the Bronze Age to the present day, presented in a beautifully crafted book of cult appeal.

The Smile Stealers

The Fine and Foul Art of Dentistry

Richard Barnett

c. 350 illustrations

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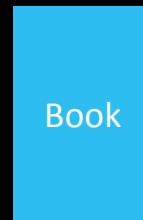
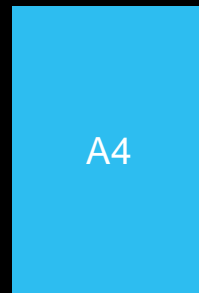
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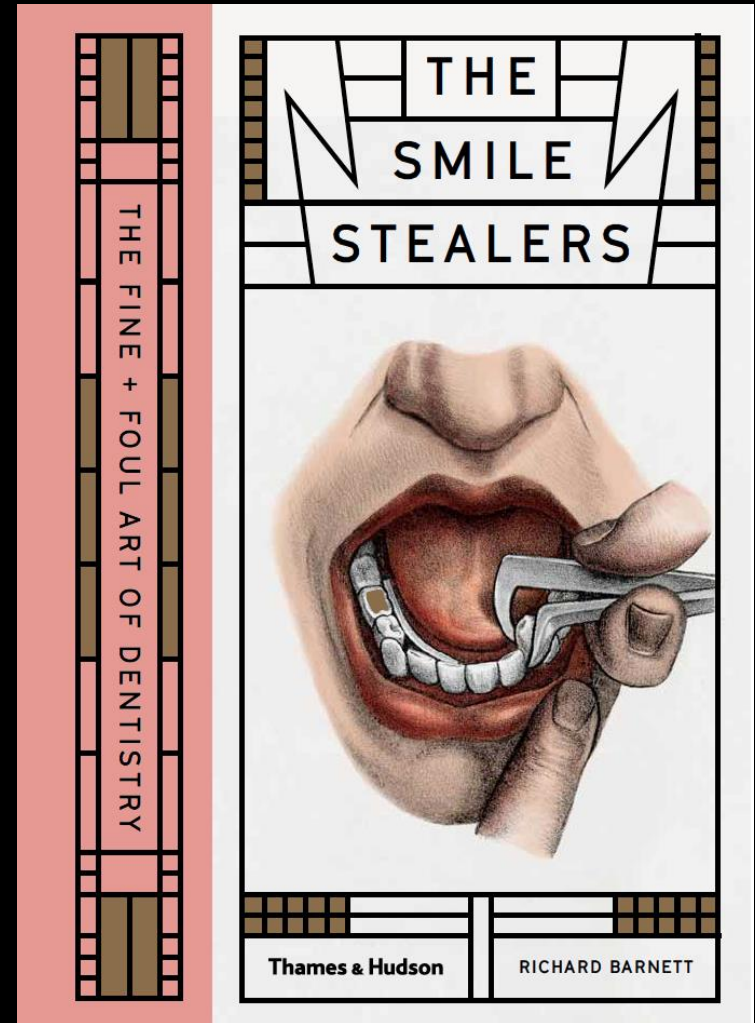
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Key Sales Points

- Third volume in the 'ill-ogy' that began with *The Sick Rose* and *Crucial Interventions*. *The Sick Rose* won 'Book of the Year' at the Design and Production Awards 2014, and was described by Will Self as 'astonishing ... superbly erudite and lucid'
- Features previously unseen illustrations of dentistry procedures and instruments from rare international publications in the Wellcome Collection's archive, a library of more than 750,000 books and journals relating to medicine and its role in society
- Written by the award-winning author of *The Sick Rose* – an engaging medical historian and prominent media personality

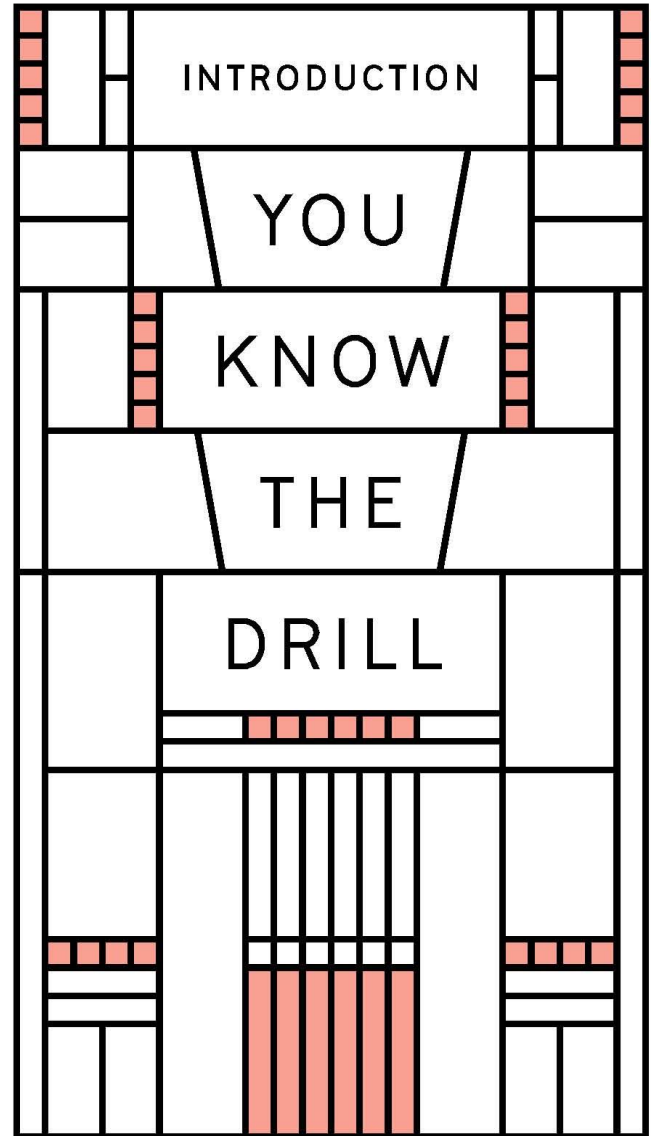


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of arguments over their position within (or outside) medicine and their troublesome relationship with the state.

In his *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (Physiognomic Fragments for Furthering the Knowledge and Love of Man), published between 1775 and 1778, the Swiss physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater insisted that 'clean, white and well-arranged teeth ... [show] a sweet and polished mind and a good and honest heart', while rotten or misaligned teeth reveal 'either sickness or else some melange of moral imperfection'. Whatever we think of his notion that one can read human character directly from the face, Lavater reminds us that dentistry has never been only about teeth. Possession of a functional, pain-free mouth is a practical necessity—we all must breathe and eat and talk—but it is also central to our sense of self. Pain in the head can seem unbearably close to the core of who we are, and stinking breath or black teeth carry a stigma that is both peculiarly personal and



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entirely public. Dental treatment has, as we will see, always been cosmetic, concerned with aesthetics as much as function—but in contemporary consumer culture Lavater has had the last laugh. A booklet published in 2000 by the American Association of Orthodontists claims that straightened teeth represent 'a highly visible commitment to self-improvement' and 'tangible proof that mom and dad are doing right by the kids', expressing 'the beauty of conformity' and 'the beauty of achievement'.¹

This twenty-first-century version of *la bouche ornée* is a world away from the experiences of most of our ancestors, their teeth worn down by millstone grit in bread or eroded by cheap sugar. The images collected in *The Smile Stealers* tell stories of health and disease, chronicling the shift away from heroic extraction and towards contemporary preventative dentistry, but they also cast light on the history of beauty and ugliness, food and fashion, cultural ideals and individual unease. Writers and artists from Dante Alighieri to Francis Bacon have taken the gaping,

screaming, jagged-toothed mouth as an emblem of the most profound human suffering. In the words of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin:

... FOR THE GROTESQUE THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE ENTIRE FACE IS THE MOUTH. IT DOMINATES ALL. A GROTESQUE FACE CAN BASICALLY BE REDUCED TO A GAPING MOUTH AND ALL THE REST SERVES MERELY AS A FRAME FOR THIS MOUTH, FOR THIS BODILY ABYSS THAT GAPES WIDE AND SWALLOWS.²

Let's follow Bakhtin, and fall in.

¹ Eric K. Curtis, *Orthodontics at 2000*, American Association of Orthodontists, 2000, p. 10.
² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, MIT Press, 1968, p. 317.

[A] Aihillein ius. Et porumncepes auoansu lissis auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata. [B] Aihillein ius. Et porumncepes auoansu lissis auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata. [C] Aihillein ius. Et porumncepes auoansu lissis auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata. [D] Aihillein ius. Et porumncepes auoansu lissis auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata. [E] Aihillein ius. Et porumncepes auoansu lissis auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata auc rei pere pro, C. Patum untelienata.

emergence of modern humans.

Hillson points out that the appearance of the genus *Homo*, with its smaller molars, could be interpreted as a move away from the omnivorous foraging of the great apes and towards meat-eating and ‘persistence hunting’—wounding prey in a surprise attack, then chasing it until it is exhausted. Teeth from more recent archaeological sites have been used to date the next great shift, from nomadic hunter-gathering to farming and a more settled lifestyle, and also to provide evidence of the changing burden of dental disease. Most prehistoric peoples suffered comparatively little caries, but a diet full of grit from quernstones and pots caused extensive wearing of molar enamel and dentine. Teeth with exposed pulps bear mute witness to the pain that must have burdened our ancestors if they survived into their thirties or forties.

What we do not find in the archaeological record and in the earliest surviving texts are the roots of a story that leads directly and inexorably to modern dentistry. Modification of the teeth may have many meanings and contexts, and indigenous cultures around the world—from Australia and Papua New Guinea to the Americas—have marked rites of passage or expressed their notions of beauty and belonging by chipping and filing teeth, and inlaying them with rock crystal, gold or obsidian. However, we do find a diverse and culturally embedded set of myths and stories woven around the suffering and disfigurement caused by bad teeth, and a collection of rituals and practices intended to mitigate or correct them. The most widespread and enduring of these stories, discovered in sources across the Middle East and Asia, explained toothache as the work of a malevolent worm. A vivid version of this tale was inscribed on a clay tablet in the library of King Ashurbanipal in Nineveh some time in the seventh century BC. A worm comes crawling out of the marshes to demand food from the gods, but is outraged by their offer:

FOR ME! WHAT IS THIS? DRIED FIGS OR APRICOTS?
LET ME INSERT MYSELF INTO THE INNER OF
THE TOOTH AND GIVE ME HIS FLESH FOR MY
DWELLING. OUT OF THE TOOTH I WILL SUCK HIS
BLOOD, AND FROM THE GUM I WILL CHEW THE
MALLOW. SO I HAVE ENTRANCE TO THE TOOTH!



⊕ Elles sum explam debit mo blabo.
Et lab ipsustiaest, adignimus as in plit,
utem volesciat harchilique. ⊕ Elles sum
explam debit mo blabo. Et lab ipsustiaest,
adignimus as in plit, utem volesciat
harchilique. ⊕ Elles sum explam debit mo
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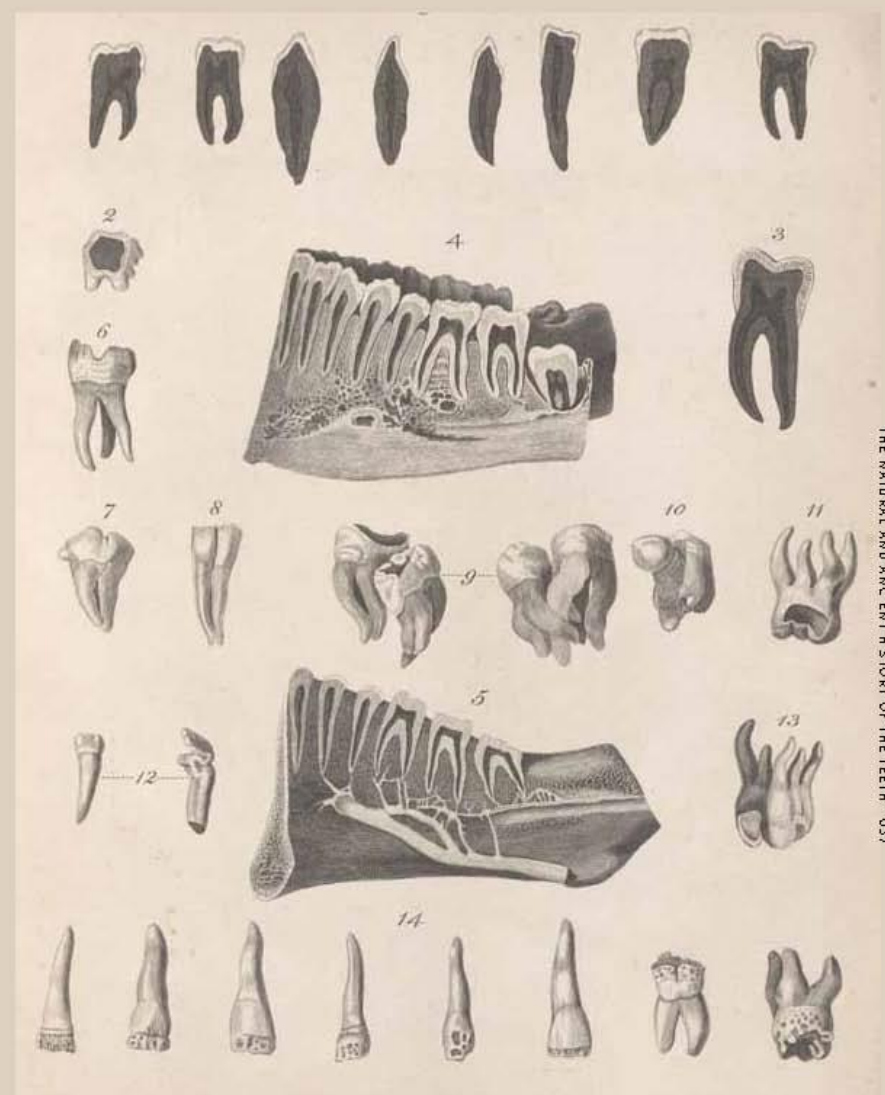
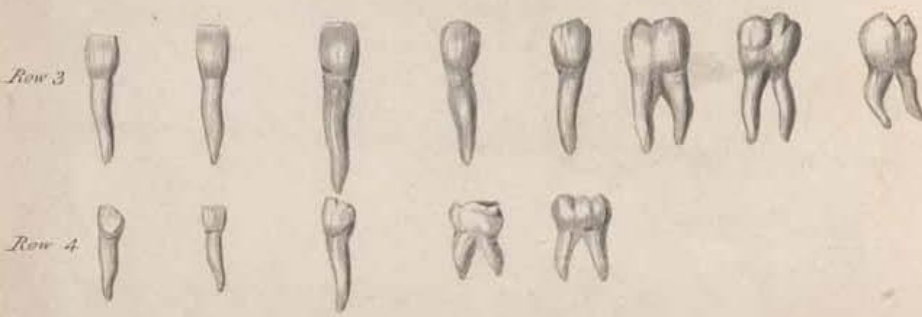
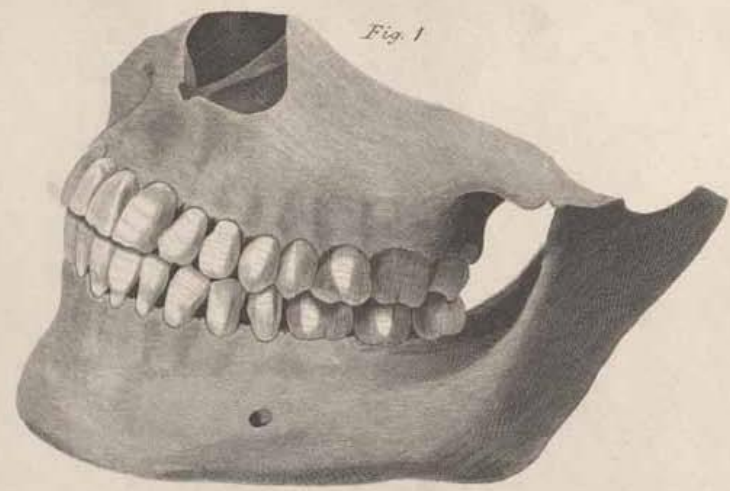
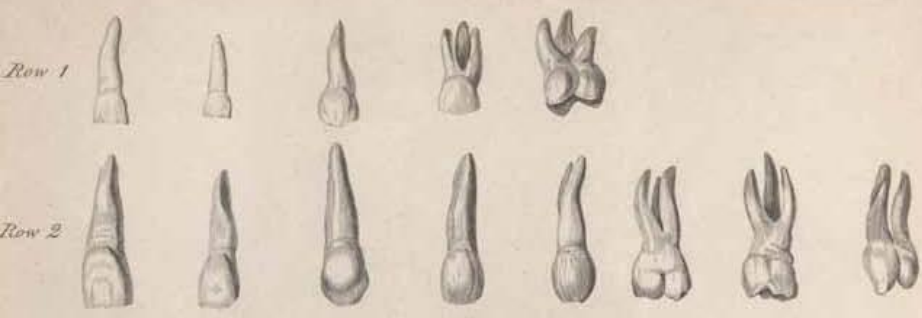


A few lines later, the tablet combines prayer and the power of a medicinal plant to provide a remedy: ‘You shall pulverize henbane and knead it with gum mastic and place it in the upper part of the tooth, and three times you shall recite this incantation.’ When Ashurbanipal’s scribe set down this story, the notion of the tooth worm had been common currency for more than two thousand years in cultures across the Middle East and Asia. The authors of early Chinese medical texts such as the *Pen Ts’ao* (c. 3700 BC) and the *Canon of Medicine* (c. 2700 BC) argued over whether toothache was caused by tooth worms or a humoral imbalance, and recommended a pungent medicine for relieving it:

ROAST A PIECE OF GARLIC AND CRUSH IT
BETWEEN THE TEETH, MIX WITH CHOPPED
HORSERADISH SEEDS OR SALTPETRE, MAKE
INTO A PASTE WITH HUMAN MILK; FORM PILLS
AND INTRODUCE ONE INTO THE NOSTRIL ON THE
OPPOSITE SIDE TO WHERE THE PAIN IS FELT.

In these societies, greater power went hand in hand, generally speaking, with poorer teeth. The mummies of Egyptian Middle Kingdom priests and aristocrats are riddled with tooth cavities and abscesses, and in-life dental care became something of an obsession for them. Some employed servants specifically for cleaning the teeth, and when King Djoser’s ‘chief toother’, Hesi-Re, died in c. 2600 BC he was immured in his own well-appointed tomb. Around the same time, Indian court jewellers were securing the loose teeth of their wealthy clients with threads of silk or gold. Two and a half thousand years later, Roman dentistry had equalled and even surpassed this technical sophistication. Thanks to the early Roman habit of removing jewelry and dental work before cremating a body, then mixing them with the ashes for burial, we know that Roman practitioners could create elegant gold crowns, bridges and false teeth in ivory or boxwood.

As was so often the case in Classical culture, Roman thought and practice drew heavily on Greek antecedents. The authors of the Hippocratic Corpus (c. 400 BC) concluded that the immediate cause of caries was particles of food trapped between the teeth, but that an individual’s particular balance of humours might strongly predispose them to bad



Elles sum explam debi mo blabo. Et
 lab ipsustibest, adignimus as in plit,
 utem volesciat harchilique voluptatibus
 amusam facerum quiscia volupis si
 blabare nonse consequi ut qui con nus.





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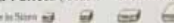
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