

HELIIX

AMGEN'S MAGAZINE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY

THE MOLECULAR GENETICS
OF CANCER
PART II: TUMOUR SUPPRESSOR GENES



SPECIAL REPORT

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ARNOLD J. LEVINE
SCIENCE ON THE EDGE OF LIFE

PRINCIPLES OF BIOTECHNOLOGY III
VACCINES AND
RECOMBINANT DNA TECHNOLOGY

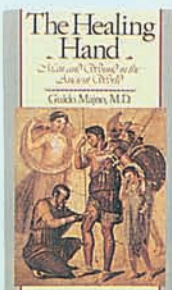


DNA FINGERPRINTING
ON TRIAL

THE HEALING HAND

HARVARD UNIVERSITY Press has issued this magnificent book in paperback for the first time, unrevised since its original hardback publication in 1975. Assisted by what appears to have been a small army of research assistants, subsidized by many foundation grants, Dr. Guido Majno has accomplished a task of such magnitude in scope and profundity that this is one of the great books on the history of medicine ever written. It is only compassed within one volume because it is meant to be specifically the history of the wound. But in the process of discussing wounds from the earliest times up through the time of Galen (2nd century AD), there is naturally much occasion for discussion of a variety of interesting topics along the way, such as the Arabian spice trade and the importance of perfumes in history. The paper is high quality, there is a section of full colour plates, and the lavish illustrations throughout are of the highest possible standard, making the paperback edition a wonderful acquisition for anyone interested in the history of medicine.

The long delay in the appearance of the paperback has some drawbacks, particularly with regard to Chinese and Indian medicine. The Chinese section of this book is seriously deficient as a result; the last medical work of



Joseph Needham referred to dates from 1969, so that the account given is a quarter of a century out of date. Similarly, things have moved on in Indian studies. However, as long as readers are aware that the material in Majno's book needs to be supplemented, there is nothing one can say about the volume that does not amount to high praise. It is a gigantic achievement.

Some of Majno's more impressive contributions include having carried out or commissioned actual physical experiments into ancient remedies and treatments, on which he not only reports but gives extensive photographic evidence. For instance, in order to verify the contentions of the ancient Egyptians that a substance called *wadj* was an antiseptic for wounds, and knowing that this material was what was later called verdigris, or 'scraped copper rust' in Greek, Majno decided to test the substance. He prepared it according to the directions preserved by the Greek herbalist Dioscorides (1st century AD) by hanging strips of copper plate over vinegar in a tall closed jar. Scraping these plates the next day, Majno put the copper acetate thus obtained into a dish of bacte-

ria and proved it to be a powerful bactericide, completely killing all the organisms near it, as the published photograph demonstrates. Majno did a number of ingenious things of this kind, making his book essential reading if only for the reports on his experiments alone.

Majno's book is a true treasure trove of fascinating and recondite lore. In it you will learn for instance that there are 147 wounds mentioned in the *Iliad* (31 to the head), and that the overall mortality rate from wounds in that ancient epic was 77.6%. And if you have ever wondered about the details of how the Egyptians mummified their dead, you will be surprised to learn that onions were placed over the eyes and in the ears, and that the embalming was done dry mostly with natron, a mixture of sodium carbonate and bicarbonate. Majno's book is a classic of medical literature, accessible to all readers and requiring no specialist knowledge of any kind. It is a book to enjoy leisurely over a long period, and to return to for reference purposes. ◀

ROBERT TEMPLE

The Healing Hand: Man and Wound in the Ancient World

by Guido Majno.

(571 pp. US \$19.95) Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1991. ISBN 0-674-38331-1.