

Discussing Health & Wellness Virtually

**Selections from the
Cravens Collection &
Edgar R. McGuire
Historical Medical
Instrument Collection**



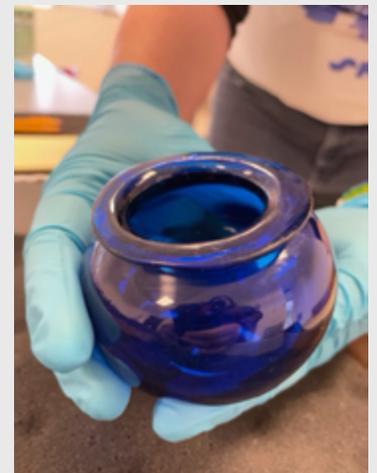
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Discussing Health and Wellness Virtually is the culmination of a semester of research conducted by the University at Buffalo's combined Anthropology Museum Studies course and interdisciplinary Master's Program in Critical Museum Studies. This online presentation is a selection of objects from the Cravens and Edgar R. McGuire Historical Medical Instrument collections. The Cravens Collection comprises more than 1,100 artifacts from across the globe and represents 10,000 years of human achievements, while the Edgar R. McGuire Historical Medical Instrument Collection contains more than 150 medical instruments spanning from the Classical Period to nineteenth century.

This project explores the topics of health and wellness from a global point of view, inspired by the current COVID pandemic. In December 2019, news spread across the world about an outbreak of a new type of coronavirus, first reported in Wuhan, China. By March 2020, universities and schools worldwide rapidly closed and transitioned to online learning. Educators were forced to adapt to new ways of teaching and communicating with students. In light of the current conditions, this presentation explores various concepts of health, well-being, and diseases through a diverse group of objects dating from the Late Roman Period to the early twentieth century and spanning Africa, the Americas, and Europe.

The featured objects include vessels for medicine (Gourd Vessel, Miniature Flask, Zoomorphic Figure, Leech Jar), surgical tools for everyday life and urgent procedures (Set of Three Roman Instruments, George Tiemann & Co. Surgical Kit), objects used to ask for fertility and agricultural abundance (Legba Fetish, Lagalagana/lagalagana Figure), and items of protective or good energy (Lidded Vessel). Collectively, these objects tell stories of how humans have sought to heal and protect ourselves and ensure the same for our progeny through resourcefulness, ingenuity, and spiritual exploration.



Origins of the Objects



Miniature Flask, 800 CE
Mayan, Central America
Ceramic
Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Set of Three Roman Instruments, 100–300 CE
Roman, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East
Bronze
Edgar R. McGuire Historical Medical Instrument
Collection, University Libraries



George Tiemann & Co. Surgical Kit, 1865
American, United States, North America
Steel, cloth, ivory, ebony, and wood
Edgar R. McGuire Historical Medical Instrument
Collection, University Libraries



Lidded Jar, 1901–2000 CE
Yoruba, Nigeria, Africa
Terracotta
Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Leech Jar, 1901–2000 CE
English or French, Europe
Glass
Edgar R. McGuire Historical Medical Instrument
Collection, University Libraries



Figure (Igalagana), 1924
Mumuye, Nigeria, Africa
Wood
Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Gourd Vessel, 1901–2000 CE
Bamileke, Cameroon, Africa
Calabash gourd, feathers, corn, woven rope
Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Zoomorphic Figure, 1801–2000 CE
Makonde, Southeast Tanzania, Africa
Terracotta, cloth
Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Legba Fetish, 1801–2000 CE
Fon, Benin, Africa
Iron
Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries

Set of Three Roman Instruments, 100–300 CE

Roman, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East

Bronze

Edgar R. McGuire Historical Medical Instrument Collection, University Libraries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Photo: Nicholas Ostness.

This set of three Roman bronze instruments consists of epilation forceps (tweezers), a scraper (also known as a *spathomele* or a *spatula probe*), and a long needle. These tools were likely used for both surgical and non-medical purposes. The scraper could be used for stirring and spreading medicine as well as for artists to mix their paint. The most common use for tweezers would be to pull hair, but they could also be used as a medical tool for removing sutures and small objects from wounds. The long needle was likely used for sewing both skin and fabric.

The Roman Empire consisted of present-day Europe, coastal northern Africa, the Balkans, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, Western Asia, and the Middle East at its zenith, and their medical world was heav-

ily influenced by Hellenistic ideas of health. Roman physicians had to base their anatomical knowledge on observation alone, as human dissection was outlawed. The physician Galen (130–200 CE) dissected apes as a way to study the human body vicariously, as he thought they would be anatomically similar to humans. Nonetheless, there are records of Roman surgeons performing procedures as complex as cataract surgery and even reconstructive surgeries for injured soldiers or cosmetic procedures like removing brand marks from freed slaves. These instruments may have been used in such procedures.

—Alek Brusgul

Legba Fetish, 1801–2000 CE

Fon, Benin, Africa

Iron

Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Photo: Nicholas Ostness.

This phallus-shaped object was created by the Fon people of West Africa. In general, a phallus is an image of the male reproductive organ used throughout history and various cultures to symbolize fecundity. The Fon are primarily located in present-day Benin, Togo, and Nigeria. In Vodoun, the Fon theological belief, spirits and gods govern all forces of nature and determine life-paths for individuals. Spirits and gods can inhabit objects called fetishes, which are used for healing and rejuvenating purposes. This particular phallus is a Legba fetish, named for the deity who inhabits it. Legba is often represented as a phallus or as a man with a prominent genital. Legba is a trickster, celebrated as a god of crossroads, language, and communication.

Iron phalluses, such as this object, have several purposes. The fetish may be used in worship on an altar where libations are poured over it. The fetish may also be used as part of fertility blessings. Its handles are used to drive the phallus into the earth at the four cardinal points. In order to ensure abundant crops, the phallus would be placed in agricultural crops. This same method is used to bless an entire village, wherein the fetishes are driven in the center of the village at cardinal points in order to bless all residents.

—Amy Ressler

Figure (*Iagalagana*), 1924

Mumuye, Nigeria, Africa

Wood

Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Photo: Nicholas Ostness.

The Mumuye people of present-day northeastern Nigeria are well known for their distinctive art style. Following the British Colonial Period, which ended with Nigeria's independence in 1960, and the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), the Mumuye people who inhabited the geographically secluded Benue River Valley were increasingly exposed to external political and religious influence. Beginning in early twentieth century, it became so popular for Europeans to collect Mumuye art objects that artisans of the neighboring Chamba tribe began to specialize in obtaining and creating Mumuye art resulting in it being misattributed until the 1970s.

Religious Mumuye objects are carved from a single piece of wood and are the link between the physical and spiritual lives of the living and dead members of the agricultural communities. Referred to as *iagalaga-*

na or *lagalagana*, the figures would be kept present in daily life, either in the home or in sacred huts. Other purposes for the statues include ritual use for healing, harvest and planting cycles, disease prevention, and divining the future. It is unlikely that the figure is depicting a singular person, but rather the spirits of male ancestors as a whole. This particular figure has a crest on the head, which indicates a male ancestor spirit; its columnal body, the protruding navel, and the notched knees are consistent with some of the stylistic conventions of Mumuye carving.

— Andy D'Agostino

Zoomorphic Figure, 1801–2000 CE

Makonde, Southeast Tanzania, Africa

Terracotta, cloth

Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Photo: Nicholas Ostness.

This zoomorphic figure originates from the Makonde in present-day Southeast Tanzania, and was likely used for traditional rituals. On the back of the cloth-wrapped, terracotta figure is a small opening which can be used to hold various ceremonial substances. Traditional Makonde art was left in the domain of one or two men in a village who would pass down their expertise and craft to their sons. Sculptures were made for initiation ceremonies and other rituals. By the late nineteenth century, Makonde art became of high interest to tourists looking for regional art. By the 1950s, Makonde artists were making pieces en masse to be sold at major markets in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

In *Modern Makonde Art*, Jörn Korn proposes *shetani*, an East African term derived from Arabic *shaitan* or devil, is “the background against which Makonde art developed.” In Makonde art, the term *shetani* is liberally applied to any creature or spirit. Rarely are pieces identified as animals; more often than not, they will be labeled *shetani*. Makonde art additionally takes on themes of ritual and substance use, including hallucinogens, which is exemplified in this piece. The use of drugs is well-integrated into spirituality, and it is understood that the drug allows the users to communicate with spirits.

—Fiona Jones

Lidded Jar, 1901–2000 CE

Yoruba, Nigeria, Africa

Terracotta

Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries.

This terracotta bowl originates from the Oyo Yoruba people. Yorubaland, originally established on the western coast of Africa, encompasses present-day Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. Today, the Yoruba culture has spread across the globe, most notably in Latin American and Caribbean countries, such as Brazil and Cuba. Atop the bowl is a lid in the form of an Orisha, or a Yoruba deity. Known by many names, Erinle is a God of fairness, wealth, wisdom, and craftiness. Described as having been originally a hunter or farmer, Erinle sacrificed himself for the benefit of his family by entering the earth through a river to ensure that his family would always have fresh drinking water.

Erinle is a popular Orisha in the Oyo Yoruba community of southwestern Nigeria and eastern Benin.

This vessel, referred to as *awo ota eyinle*, is a critical mode of worship for Erinle. *Awo ota eyinle* vessels tend to range between ten and seventeen inches, and are meant to hold water sourced from a flowing river, as well as smooth stones from the Erinle River. The stones are representative of Erinle, while the small amount of river sand found at the bottom of the vessel represents Erinle's devotees. Finally, the water contained in the vessel signifies the energy of the Orisha and therefore his capacity to be present and infinite for his devotees.

— Jordan Anthony

Miniature Flask, 800 CE

Mayan, Central America

Ceramic

Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Photo: Nicholas Ostness.

The outside of the flask depicts two Mayan gods sitting across from each other, with glyphs down the center. On the left is *K'awiil*, also known as God K, and on the right is God L. *K'awiil* is recognizable by an upturned nose, a mirror on his forehead, and a snake functioning as one of his legs, while God L is identifiable through his characteristic royal shawl, wide-brimmed hat topped with owl feathers and an owl, and often a large cigar. *K'awiil* and God L are commonly depicted together on miniature flasks, such as this one, because of their association with cigars and loose tobacco.

While most flasks, previously known as poison bottles, lack provenance, it has been hypothesized that they were mass-produced at the city of Copán located on the modern-day borders of Honduras and

Guatemala, and exchanged across the Classic Mayan Lowlands. Residue analysis on these types of vessels have revealed the presence of oxidation products of nicotine, meaning their main function was probably to store tobacco. For the Maya, tobacco played a large role in both rituals and medicine. Smoke was viewed as an offering on its own and whole cigarettes and cigars were often left on altars. On the other hand, tobacco was consumed medicinally to cure bites and stings from parasitic insects, diminish fatigue, ease digestion, and reduce headaches.

— Joshua Albanese

Gourd Vessel, 1901–2000 CE

Bamileke, Cameroon, Africa

Calabash gourd, feathers, corn, woven rope

Cravens Collection, UB Art Galleries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Photo: Nicholas Ostness.

This storage gourd was crafted by the Bamileke people of present-day Cameroon. Constructed from several subspecies of calabash gourds that grow across the northwestern portion of the African continent, this particular vessel would have been used in ceremonies performed by the Bamileke. Gourds of similar design are used commonly across the continent, but this particular gourd is linked to medicinal use. The vessel's creator coated the body of the gourd with dark organic fluid, creating a patina that has since chipped, revealing the natural hue of the gourd. Attached to the front face of the vessel is a tuft of feathers and corn, and looped into the apex of the gourd is woven rope, likely made from raffia palm fibers, which is a common material in the region. Calabash gourds with wide, round bases and stems with dramatic curvature were preferred for ceremony, but

other forms were multifunctional and used for storage of medicinal herbs and cooking spices. Traditional Bamileke practitioners, such as herbalists, diviners, spirit mediums, and other religious specialists are integral participants in ceremonial life. For instance, during the Life-Cycle ceremony in which the new king would be escorted away to learn their new duties, traditional practitioners would serve the soon-to-be king important medicines from gourds.

—Mary E. Himes

George Tiemann & Co. Surgical Kit, 1865

American, United States, North America

Steel, cloth, ivory, ebony, and wood

Edgar R. McGuire Historical Medical Instrument Collection, University Libraries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Photo: Nicholas Ostness.

This nineteenth century surgical kit consists of more than twenty instruments enclosed inside. The wooden case is composed of a lower portion containing larger tools and two inserts with smaller tools. The kit contains mostly amputation and trepanning tools, with other smaller surgical instruments dispersed within the case. The label on the kit dates this set of objects to sometime after 1865. According to a George Tiemann & Co. catalogue from 1879, a similar set costed \$52.00, or approximately \$1,377.36 today.

The 1820s introduced the surgical instrument industry to major American cities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City, with many of the artisans being immigrants from Europe. In 1826, German immigrant, George Tiemann and Englishman, William Goulding, began their work in this field. The manufacturer of this kit, George Tiemann & Co.,

was one of the leading surgical suppliers during the American Civil War (1861–65). Their sets, like this one, were typically produced for civilian or state militia consumption; the US Army was an important client of the company. The advances in military weaponry before and during the Civil War led to more detrimental injuries. Medical personnel were not prepared for the severity of the injuries and had to perform thousands of surgeries with about three-fourths of these operations being amputations. This period saw the busiest production of amputation and trepanning kits to meet the highest demand of cased surgical instrument kits.

—Nina Grena

Leech Jar, 1901–2000 CE

English or French, Europe

Glass

Edgar R. McGuire Historical Medical Instrument Collection, University Libraries



Courtesy of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Photo: Nicholas Ostness.

Leech jars, such as this one, were likely used by the general consumer to store their own supply of leeches after purchasing them from a doctor or apothecary. Consumer-orientated jars are comparatively smaller and less ornate than those kept by medical practitioners at the time. While leech jars can vary in size and color, this cobalt blue was popular among artisans at the time due to the relative ease of working with the pigment. A piece of cloth or gauze would have been tied around the neck of the jar covering the lid in order to keep the leeches from falling out while still allowing air to pass through. The uneven lip and the rough pontil break near the punt suggest that this jar was handmade.

Leeches were used widely throughout Europe as a treatment for various diseases due to their appeal as a more natural method of healthcare. Their saliva contains an anticoagulant, known as hirudin, which stimulates blood flow especially in damaged tissue. This ability makes leeches very effective for localized anti-inflammatory treatments. During a series of cholera outbreaks in the 1800s, leech therapy proved to be largely ineffective and fell out of favor with medical practitioners. However, in recent years, leeches have made a bit of a comeback. In 2004, the FDA approved the use of leeches in reconstructive and plastic surgeries and they can even be sold and kept as pets.

— Soli Foster Lopez

Project Director: Peter Biehl

Curator: Ashley Cercone

Advisors: Robert Scalise, Liz Park, Emily Reynolds, Nick Ostness

Student Curators: Joshua Albanese, Jordan Anthony, Alek Brusgul, Andy D'Agostino,
Soli Foster Lopez, Nina Grenga, Mary Himes, Fiona Jones, Devon Marr, Amy Ressler,
Olivia Trometer

Map and Icons: Devon Marr

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