

Prospectus

The Cambridge History of Medicine, 6 Volumes

General Editor: Lauren Kassell (University of Cambridge/European University Institute)

Volume 1. Ancient Medicine, c. 3000 BCE–650 CE

Rebecca Flemming (University of Exeter)

Laurence Totelin (University of Cardiff)

Volume 2. Medieval Medicine, c. 600–1500

Zubin Mistry (University of Edinburgh)

Ahmed Ragab (Johns Hopkins University)

Volume 3. Early Modern Medicine, c. 1450–1700

Elaine Leong (University College London)

Alisha Rankin (Tufts University)

Volume 4. Eighteenth-Century Medicine, c. 1700–1830

Suman Seth (Cornell University)

Yi-Li Wu (University of Michigan)

Volume 5. Nineteenth-Century Medicine, c. 1820–1920

Rana Hogarth (University of Pennsylvania)

Projit Mukharji (Ashoka University)

Volume 6. Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Medicine, c. 1920–2023

Guillaume Lachenal (Sciences Po)

Dora Vargha (University of Exeter/Humboldt-University of Berlin)

Once dominated by progressive narratives written by practitioners focused on national contexts, over the past fifty years the history of medicine has become a recognized field within the historical discipline on an international stage. It has been written as intellectual, social, and cultural history, and relates to historical demography and the histories of representation and material culture, gender history, and the history of science. More recently, it has been allied to environmental history and sometimes folded together with medical humanities. In the process, the history of medicine has been extended to include broad definitions of health and healing, spanning the spectrum of living beings from microbes to humans, and extending to life and death. As a result of this capaciousness—and despite its formalization within university departments and curricula, and learned societies and journals—the history of medicine has become increasingly eclectic as a professional category, instantiated differently depending on national and institutional context and topic of specialization.

The Cambridge History of Medicine is underpinned by the question: what is the history of medicine? To find answers, the volumes will bring the critical tools of history and cognate disciplines to bear on understanding medicine, as an ideal and as a reality. We will consider what global histories of medicine from 3000 BCE to the present day can look like. Our approach fosters a polycentric, multi-disciplinary perspective that foregrounds syncretic and hybrid knowledges and encourages history writing as montage not panorama, made from moments and fragments seen from multiple perspectives, not a single vantage point. Moreover, to fulfil the remit of a twenty-first-century reference work, when information is readily available digitally and dynamically, these volumes make explicit the analysis implicit in history writing. They include state-of-the-field knowledge about the subject, as well as reflections on the politics of how these

knowledges are made and used. Central problematics of what it means to write ‘global’ histories and to study a ‘scientific’ discipline run throughout the volumes. By asking fundamental questions about the meaning of medicine and the meaning of history, and by working collectively and collaboratively, we will contribute to a new, plural, and decentred vision of history that complicates Eurocentric narratives of progress and builds on historical traditions from across the globe.

Although the volumes follow a conventional periodization, each volume reflects critically on this periodization and what makes its chronological span distinctive. Likewise, each volume will explicitly address the challenge of its geographical coverage through an introductory chapter, in addition to the general introduction, with the exception of Volume 1, in which the whole of the first part takes a geographical approach. All volumes contain the same sequence of four sections, underpinned by simple interrogatives—who?, what?, why?, and where?—and labelled to prompt a critical engagement with existing historiographies: Patients and Practitioners; Beings, Bodies and Minds; Health and Disease; Places, Institutions, and Networks. Across the volumes, topics migrate between headings because we designed their structures conceptually rather than programmatically to best capture the main themes and arguments at stake in a particular period. Each chapter will address its designated topic in the broadest possible terms, attending to changes and continuities across historical periods and places, while at the same time drawing on case studies from the field of expertise of the author(s). Previous historiographies will be critiqued, and future directions identified and modeled.

Individually and together, through these six volumes, and through the process of producing them, *The Cambridge History of Medicine* aims to showcase the richness and variety of on-going work and to inspire future scholars to continue to remake the field.

Timetable and approach to the work

The project has been developed through three editorial workshops, held annually beginning in spring 2022. The general editor and volume editors—with geographical expertise including Europe, the Middle East, Africa, North America, East Asia, and Southeast Asia—asked fundamental questions about the field, pooled our expertise, and shared our experiences as editors and expectations as scholars and teachers. The proposal was submitted to our commissioning editor, Lucy Rhymer, in November 2023, then refined in response to rich and encouraging referees’ reports, and accepted by the Syndics of Cambridge University Press in spring 2024. We are contracted to deliver the manuscripts of all six volumes by 31 October 2029.

In commissioning and producing the volumes, we will continue our iterative and collaborative approach through author workshops and review processes. Our contributors will include early-career, mid-career, and senior scholars, some of whom consider themselves schooled historians of medicine, while some do not. We are committed to working with our contributors to make their chapters ‘count’ (e.g. for promotion). We see editorial work as an opportunity to foster intellectual communities and to support excellent research.

Our general working timetable for the producing the chapters is:

Around March 2026	First drafts due (pre-circulated for workshops, see below)
Spring/Summer/Autumn 2026	Volume workshops (for feedback from other authors and volume editors)
Winter/Spring/Summer 2027 (9 months after workshop)	Revised drafts due (for feedback from editors and subject specialists)
Around July 2028	Final drafts of chapters due (for final round of editing)
Spring 2029	Polished final draft due