

Antiquarian medical books in the 1650s

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In 1652 the antiquary and amateur physician, Elias Ashmole (1617-92) printed a collection of alchemical manuscripts, the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*. It argued for the importance of marrying Paracelsianism to Galenism in order to produce new medicines. It also contained the story of the antiquary and alchemist John Dee, who found the philosopher's stone, the universal medicine, in the wall of an abbey.

In 1658 Ashmole edited another medical manuscript, *The Way to Bliss*, a regimen of health, advising that a balanced diet, moderate exercise and enough sleep would keep men healthy. In case of illness, however, *The Way to Bliss* recommended medicines prepared according to both Paracelsian and Galenical principles. In the preface, Ashmole announced that he had found the philosopher's stone among the leaves of the very manuscript which he was publishing.

Ashmole's books were about both therapeutic and preventive medicine. They were also antiquarian undertakings, since he had collected, compared, amended and edited medical manuscripts. But why go through all this antiquarian work, if the universal medicine could be found ready-made, as the stories of people finding the philosopher's stone seem to suggest? I will argue that they were examples of antiquarian rhetoric applied to contemporary medical issues, such as the reform of the medical regime and publishing medicine in English. Thus I will address the issue of the relationship between antiquarianism and medicine in the 1650s through the neglected topic of antiquarian medical books.