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From *Man's* to *Practical Anatomy*: The evolution of an anatomical textbook

G Štrkalj[1] and BK Billings[2]

Abstract

This paper traces the history of *Man's Anatomy*, one of the most influential anatomy textbooks produced on the African continent. Authored by the two renowned South African educators Phillip Vallentine Tobias and Maurice Arnold, the first volume of this book was published in 1963. Both an anatomy textbook and a dissection manual *Man's Anatomy* included an in-depth exposition of structures of the human body, presented in an innovative and engaging way. In 1999, in line with the developments in medical and anatomy education as well as broader societal changes, the book was significantly condensed, and its name changed to *Practical Anatomy*. The second edition of *Practical Anatomy* was published in 2020 and is currently still in use at many South African universities.

Keywords

Medical education, anatomy, *Man's Anatomy*, *Practical Anatomy*, history of medicine, South Africa

Introduction

The history of anatomy textbooks is as long, rich, and complex as the discipline itself. As anatomy started to emerge as one of the key medical disciplines in Antiquity, the earliest texts providing attempts at codifying the knowledge of anatomical structures appeared. Some of these early works such as those of Aristotle and particularly Galen, served as chief reference works in anatomy for the unprecedented length of time of almost 15 centuries.[1]

These early authors also emphasized that the textbook itself is a useful resource that represents a guide which engages students with the human body rather than a substitute for dissection or the study of prepared human tissue. This is exemplified by Galen's advice to students in his *On Anatomical Procedures*, "make it rather serious endeavor not only to acquire accurate book-knowledge of each bone but also to examine assiduously with your own eyes the human bones themselves" (Galen, 1956, p. 3).[2]

Anatomy textbooks reflect the evolution of anatomy as a discipline and, more broadly, of medical education, coupled with the social and cultural contexts within which they originated. Andreas Vesalius's seminal *De Humani Corporis Fabrica,* for example, introduced his new, empirically and experimentally based anatomy and is hailed as a book that marks the beginnings of the modern science of anatomy and medicine.[3,4] This book is also a testament to the development of technology and its utilization in scientific and educational contexts as *Fabrica*'s superbly accurate illustrations of anatomical structures (one of its key strengths), were only possible due to substantial improvements of the printing process.[5,6] At the same time, reflecting the zeitgeist of the early Renaissance these illustrations, via the positions of models and the backgrounds, had strong moral and philosophical underpinnings, particularly about human mortality. Furthermore, some passages focusing on the methodology and approaches to the study of human structures reveal darker aspects of the anatomy at the time.[4,7] Vesalius advocated a "hands-on" approach in which anatomists and students themselves dissect the human body instead of relying on infrequent public demonstrations carried out by demonstrators. This meant the need for more cadavers and the only method practiced at the time included the acquisition of bodies of executed criminals. Vesalius advised students to be inventive in the way they acquire bodies and tissues (meaning stealing from

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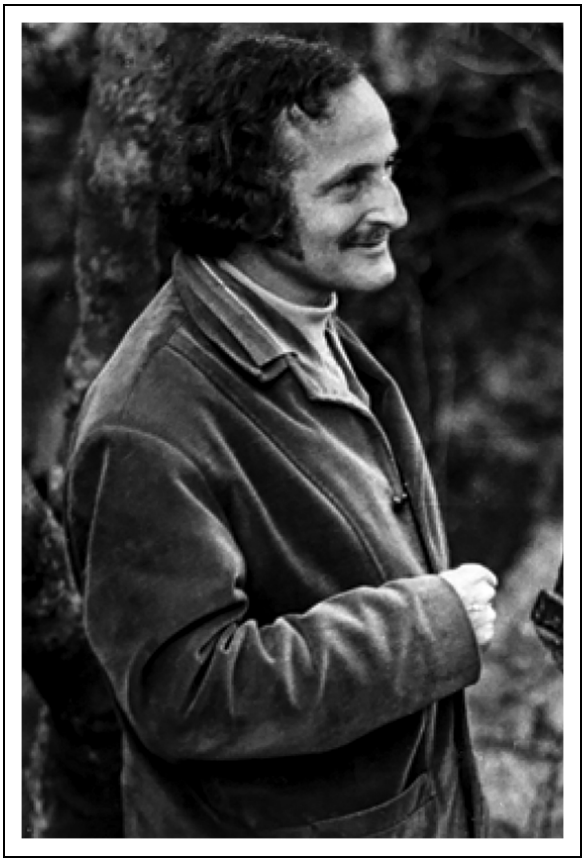


Figure 1. Professor Phillip Valentine Tobias (source: Prof Goran Strkalj).

graveyards and mortuaries). These gruesome practices would plague anatomy for centuries.[1,8] Indeed, the histories of anatomical textbooks, both influential ones such as Henry Gray and Henry Vandyke Carter's *Anatomy: Descriptive and Surgical* (*Gray's Anatomy*)[9] and controversial ones such as Eduard Pernkopf's *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen*,[10] tell complex but enlightening stories of science, medicine, ethics, and society.

This paper traces the history of one of the 20th century's most original anatomical textbooks first published in Johannesburg in 1963 as *Man's Anatomy: A Study in Dissection* and currently used in its 2020 edition, with the new title of *Practical Anatomy: The Human Body Dissected*. This unique book was originally written by South Africa's leading anatomists Phillip Vallentine Tobias (1925–2012), Figure 1, and Maurice Arnold (1907–1994), Figure 2, later updated by John Cameron Allan (1919–2012) and Jules Kieser (1950–2014), and most recently by Erin Hutchinson, Jason Hemingway, and Desiré Brits. The book and its history reflect not only some of the major changes that the discipline of anatomy endured in the last half-century, but also the turbulent history of its country of origin.



Figure 2. Professor Maurice Arnold (source: Peter Arnold).

The history of *Man's/Practical Anatomy*

Anatomy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Man's Anatomy originated from the dissection notes prepared by Tobias and Arnold at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits). Now one of the leading South African tertiary institutions, Wits had evolved from the South African School of Mines (originally formed in Kimberly in 1896) and received its university charter in 1922.[11] One of the six original faculties of the new university was Medicine with Anatomy, established in 1919,[11] as one of its first departments. Following the first cause célèbre at the newly established university, Anatomy's first Head of the Department, Edward Phillip Stibbe (1884–1943) left South Africa to be replaced by Australian-born anatomist Raymond Arthur Dart (1893–1988) who took over this role in January 1923.[12] Dart remained the Head for 36 years transforming the Department from an unknown provincial institution to an internationally recognized center of academic excellence.

Raymond Dart, now remembered primarily for his contribution to paleoanthropology, was a multifaceted scientist who gave contributions to several medical and scientific disciplines. Some of his accolades, like the description and interpretation of the famous hominin fossil known as the Taung Child, a representative of the species he named *Australopithecus africanus*, proved to be crucial to the discipline's development.[13,14] At the same time Dart's other contributions, like his research on the local human populations carried out within the racial typology paradigm, remain controversial and contested.[15–17] As Dart took over the department, the facilities for teaching and research were almost non-existent. As such, his first and most important task was to build up these facilities, by employing

and training academic and technical staff. Significantly, during Dart's early years at Wits, the production of the first textbook in the anatomy department was authored by Alexander Lee McGregor (1895–1969). McGregor was a Lecturer on Surgical Anatomy, who also acted as an interim Head of the Department of Anatomy prior to Dart's arrival.[18] Dart encouraged McGregor in his effort to produce a textbook and when it was written agreed to write an introduction. The book entitled *A Synopsis of Surgical Anatomy,* was based on a series of articles previously published in the Wits Students' Medical Council journal, *The Leech*.[19,20] First published in 1932, this textbook was well received and endured no less than 12 subsequent editions.

During his 36-year tenure, Dart managed to expand the department and its capacities. He developed the necessary infrastructure for high-quality educational delivery and introduced new courses and degrees leading to an exponential increase in the number of students.[11] At the same time, following the philosophy of his mentor Grafton Elliot Smith, based at the University College London, Dart and his students and collaborators developed research in different disciplines often transcending anatomical and medical sciences.[21,22] Dart retired in 1956 and the headship was succeeded by his young protégé Philip Tobias who followed the same philosophy of multiple scientific engagements.[23,24]

Man's Anatomy The origin, authorship, and context

Tobias obtained his medical qualification (MBBCh) in 1950 and received a PhD in the field of cytogenetics three years later.[23–25] Following his mentor Dart, Tobias gave a significant contribution to multiple scientific disciplines and excelled as an academic manager, administrator, and anatomy educator. While his early scientific investigations were in the emerging field of medical genetics his research interests soon broadened and ramified to include the study of human diversity, evolution, growth, and development, as well as the fields of archeology, and history and philosophy of science. In all these areas he gave significant contributions and established himself as one of the most significant biological anthropologists and anatomists of the 20th century. He is the recipient of some of the most prestigious science awards, including the Balzan Prize and appointments as a Foreign Associate of the National Academy of Sciences (USA) and Fellow of the Royal Society.[25] He received honorary doctorates from seventeen universities spread across Africa, North America, and Europe. Interestingly, this versatile scholar stated that he saw himself primarily as an anatomist alluding specifically to his role as an anatomy teacher.[24,26]

In his department, Tobias was surrounded by like-minded anatomists most notably surgeon-anatomist Maurice Arnold. A Wits graduate, Arnold started teaching in the Department of Anatomy in 1946 and stayed in that position until 1960 when he immigrated to Australia. In Australia, Arnold established himself as a leading anatomy educator being employed at the Universities of Queensland, Sydney, and New South Wales.[27]

Tobias and Arnold made numerous improvements to anatomy education at Wits and developed their own style of teaching and dissection. Many of these were inspired by Tobias's visit to American and British universities, prior to his taking the Headship, where he was exposed to the latest trends in anatomy education.[24] As Arnold was a practicing surgeon and Tobias both scientist and medically qualified educator, they both acknowledged the applied and clinical aspects of anatomy and emphasized the importance of surface and radiological anatomy. They also developed a practice of "living anatomy," that is, a combination of surface and functional anatomy, where students were asked to study the anatomy of their own and their classmates' bodies while performing different activities. During this period approximately 420 h of anatomy teaching per annum was the norm within the department and dissection comprised the largest proportion.[24]

The bodies dissected at Wits, in the early 1960s when *Man's Anatomy* was created and published, were mostly unclaimed by government institutions. In apartheid South Africa, this process of sourcing unclaimed bodies had an additional disturbing dimension, a distinct racial undertone, as most of the unclaimed bodies were those of unprivileged people of African ancestry.[16,17,28] This body sourcing in South Africa was based on a frightful asymmetry where those who benefit from the dissections (students, recipients of the benefits of the high-end health services) were of the privileged minority in the society, namely the people of European ancestry, while those who were dissected were of the exploited majority—people of African ancestry. Tobias, a vocal opponent of the apartheid system, was actively trying to change this situation by devising a body donation program, introducing a dedication ceremony to honor the people whose bodies were dissected and opposing any discrimination at Wits and society at large.[29,30] However, the body sourcing asymmetry will only start to reverse in the era after the fall of apartheid due to sociopolitical change and the efforts of the new generations of anatomists, many of whom were educated by Tobias. In South Africa, unclaimed bodies are still sourced by some Medical Schools, however, there has been a strong shift in recent years toward accepting only donated bodies for dissections, based on in-depth multidisciplinary research and sophisticated outreach programs.[28,31,32]

As they were developing their own method of dissection, Tobias and Arnold prepared the notes for the students, which they would deliver to them prior to every session. These notes were eventually compiled and edited into a three-volume book (Volume 1: Thorax and Abdomen, pp. xii + 416 (refer to Figure 3); Volume 2: Head, Neck and Central Nervous System, pp. iv+430; Volume III:

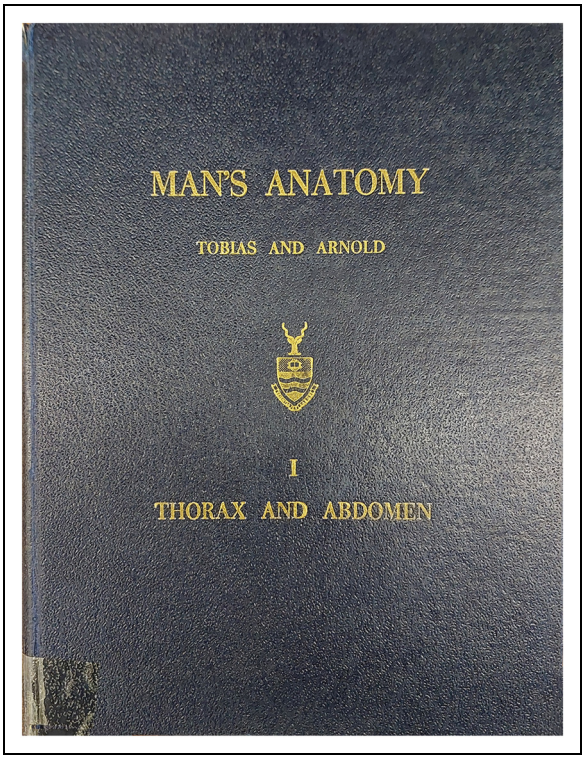


Figure 3. A photograph depicting the book cover of the first edition of *Man's Anatomy*, Volume I with a focus on the Thorax and Abdomen.

Back and Limbs, pp. ii+356)—*Man's Anatomy*, published in 1963/64. There was a considerable discussion on the title of the book which the authors involved famous South African author Sarah Gertrude Millin. Millin provided several artistic and extravagant titles such as *Once "twas a Man*," but Tobias and Arnold decided on a simple and straightforward title *Man's Anatomy* to which they added *A Study in Dissection.*[29]

In 1988, the book was published in its 4th edition with John Cameron Allan, another Wits graduate and renowned surgeon-anatomist, joining Tobias and Arnold as a co-author. This edition changed the format from the original hardcover, crown quarto to a paperback, A4. This new format enabled bigger images and, being paperbacks and significantly thinner, easier handling in the environment of dissection laboratories.

An innovative textbook

The aim of creating *Man's Anatomy* was more than producing yet another, potentially better dissection manual. It was purposely written in clear, simple, and easy-to-understand English, as many of the Wits students did not speak it as their first language.[24,29] Furthermore, it was foreseen by the authors that such a book would be useful not just at Wits and South Africa, but many other countries and universities in which English is an official language, but where students do not speak the language as their mother tongue. However, for political reasons the book never made any impact outside of South Africa. At the time the book came out, sanctions against the South African apartheid regime were materializing and were especially stringent among developing countries and those recently liberated from colonial rule, which were, in fact, the intended prime market for *Man's Anatomy*. Unfortunately, although Tobias himself was an opponent of the apartheid regime, his personal views and activism could not counteract the general sentiment against the country in which he lived.[24,29]

Man's Anatomy was conceptualized to be both a dissection manual and a textbook of anatomy. The dissection instruction and the "textbook" sections were easily distinguishable as they were printed in different fonts. Thus, although the authors recommended the use of other anatomical literature, particularly the atlases, the content of *Man's Anatomy* was "on its own … adequate to meet the requirements in Gross Anatomy of medical and dental students" (Tobias and Arnold,1963/64, p. i).[33] The book also combined regional (topographical) and systematic approaches in presenting anatomy. While at the most general level a regional approach was adopted, each region was presented by systems. This combined approach enabled both vertical and horizontal integration of the anatomical content. While the regional presentation was important in terms of clinical application, particularly surgical, systematic presentation allowed for integration with disciplines, which use such an approach, for example, physiology, pathology, and diagnostic medicine. The book was also meant to be used in conjunction with other activities, namely radiological and living anatomy.

The authors also included various elements of interactivity in *Man's Anatomy*, which were meant to promote active learning and engage the student in preparation for dissections and in revisions. The book comprised around 600 illustrations produced by two illustrators, Phyllis and Deirdre Samson, which were made upon the drafts and instructions provided by the authors. Most of the illustrations were relatively simple black-and-white drawings. The reason for this was that the students were supposed to produce copies of these drawings, annotate and analyze them. Furthermore, students were expected to color-in the drawings in their copies of the book. To facilitate this process the book was printed on a paper "especially selected to take coloring with pencil-crayons" (Tobias and Arnold, 1963/64, p. vii).[33]

The reception and evolution

While praised by reviewers in various anatomical journals, *Man's Anatomy* was also seen as a book that might be too detailed for the requirements of medical students. This sentiment is best represented in Joseph's (1966, p. 208)[34]

emphatic statements in his review of the book, "Dare one say that it [*Man's Anatomy*] could rival Cunningham's *Dissectors*? And dare one add that it is difficult to use this type of book in a modern preclinical medical curriculum?" This issue was, in a way, foreshadowed by Raymond Dart who in the Introduction to McGregor's textbook noted that "if a student absorbed the whole of Anatomy, he would have no mental room left for the absorption of anything else" (McGregor, 1932, p. xiii).[19] It could be argued that the early criticism of the book for being too detailed (see also Singer, 1964[35]) was, perhaps, too harsh and neglected the fact that this book was envisaged as both a textbook and dissection manual. Be it as it may, the amount of detail in *Man's Anatomy* became a serious impetus to the book's usefulness in the 1990s with the changes in medical programs with a number of new subjects entering the curriculum. Consequently, anatomy, while still maintaining its importance, endured significant changes in delivery becoming more clinically oriented and enduring a significant reduction in contact hours.[36,37]

The transformation of medical curricula in the 1990s and consequent changes in anatomy education thus called for a significant re-write and shortening of *Man's Anatomy*. Allan prepared the new edition of the book first published in 1999 in conjunction with a new contributor Jules Kieser. Kieser, another Wits alumnus, a dentist and forensic scientist. Because of his expertise, Kieser was entrusted with a contribution to the areas of the head and neck. The book was reduced to a single volume and, following the societal changes, was given a new title—*Practical Anatomy: The Human Body Dissected*. As the book was shortened from a three- to a single-volume edition it also gained a form of dissection manual with a diminishing textbook component. *Practical Anatomy* came in numerous prints and was updated for its second edition published in 2020, refer to Figure 4. This latest version of the book was edited by the youngest generation of anatomy lecturers at Wits, Erin Hutchinson, Jason Hemingway, and Desiré Brits. This "new" *Practical Anatomy* has improved visual presentation (to cater to the need of Millennial and younger generations of learners, courtesy of Dr Joshua Davimes) and has updated anatomical terminology, in line with the changes in *Terminologia Anatomica*.[38]

From the seminal efforts of Tobias and Arnold to the latest updates of Hutchinson, Hemingway and Brits, *Man's/Practical Anatomy* remained a reliable and engaging guide to generations of anatomy students.

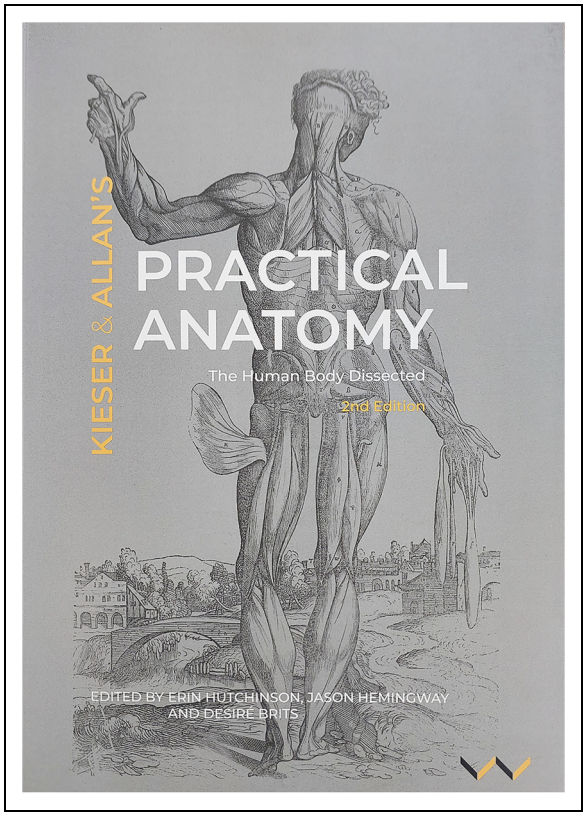


Figure 4. A photograph depicting the book cover of the most recent *Practical Anatomy: The Human Body Dissected*. The 2nd Edition.

Conclusion

Man's Anatomy and its successor *Practical Anatomy* have been playing an important role in anatomy education in South Africa for close to six decades. The book evolved to adopt to the changes in medical curricula, science, and society and it will undoubtedly continue to assist in the education of future generations of anatomy students.[39–43]

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BK Billings is a senior lecturer, and curator of research collections in the School of Anatomical Sciences at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. His main research interests are in morphological anatomy, biological anthropology, and comparative neuroscience.

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William Butler (1535–1618): A biography of a singular physician

Matt Butler

Abstract

William Butler (1535–1618) was a man without a medical degree who was styled as the 'greatest physician of his age'. He was famous in his lifetime, and in the latter stages of his career was involved with the royal court, attending to King James I and his son, Prince Henry. Butler was an empiricist who practiced confidently and compassionately in a time of limited medical understanding. He was also a man of contradictions: he was loved and respected by his contemporaries but could be cantankerous and obtuse; he was anti-establishment, complaining bitterly about the restrictive monopolisation of medicine sustained by the Royal College of Physicians, but advanced his career via connections within the aristocracy; he sometimes practiced orthodox Galenic medicine, but was at times highly unconventional in his treatments. Posthumously, despite some compelling historical studies of Butler, there has been a great deal of embellishment of his behaviour and practice. This biography draws from Butler's own letters, contemporary writers and modern scholarly literature. It aims to arrange these sources into a verifiable narrative of this singular physician's life.

Keywords

William Butler, physician, Cambridge, King James I

Background

Early years

William Butler was born in Ipswich in 1535. Little is known about his early life. According to an account of Cambridge apothecary John Crane (1571–1652), his friend and partner, Butler had three sisters and two brothers – one a doctor of physick and one a goldsmith – all of whom died without children, as Butler himself would.[1] One of his brothers may have sailed overseas and converted to Catholicism.[2]

Butler probably matriculated from Peterhouse, Cambridge, in 1558, becoming BA in 1561 and MA in 1564.[3] He was often referred to as 'doctor', though he never actually took a medical degree. In October 1572, at the age of 37 years, the University of Cambridge granted him a licence to practice physic and he became a fellow

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