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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Taking Pains with Aloe for More Than 35 Centuries: From Tightening Skin to Loosening Bowels



Native to the southwest Arabian peninsula, species of the Aloe have provided soothing and antiseptic preparations for wounds and burns since at least the time that the Ebers papyrus was composed (c. 1550 BCE). A Greek surgeon in the Roman army, Dioscorides lauded the bitter juice of aloe for “conglutinating of wounds and loosening of the belly.” Indeed, aloe was prized as a laxative orally and as a healing astringent topically. As depicted on this French-language trade card from the Liebig Company (above), *Aloe perryi* (Zanzibar or Socotrine Aloe), is native to Socotra, an island east of Somalia. Closely related to *A. perryi*, the gray-green *A. vera* (Barbados or burn aloe) is employed worldwide as a household remedy for minor burns and wounds. *A. vera* was called “true aloe” in Latin to distinguish it from the unrelated but similarly spiky-leaved Agave (century or tequila) plant, with which Aloe was confused centuries ago. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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