



Health and the City

Isla Fay

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In 1559, William Cuningham MD published an image of a quintessentially healthy city. The source of his inspiration was Norwich, one of England's largest and wealthiest provincial boroughs. Though idealized, Cuningham's "map" fairly represented the municipalities' attempts to rebuild and improve the infrastructure. But his image also covered up many problems: Norwich in reality was pocked by decayed housing, deteriorating streets and polluted waterways, and was home to significant numbers of sick and impoverished residents. This book brings both viewpoints to life. Cuningham's particular brand of "environmental health" imitated ancient ideas (in particular the Hippocratic text *Airs, Waters, Places*), and drew upon astrology, the study of the weather, and local topography. The book shows that amongst the citizens, a complementary form of medical culture existed that put individuals under the spotlight. It included neighbourhood reactions to illness and disability; the responsibilities of the governing elite for sanitation; and judgments about the lifestyles of different members of the community. Hygiene from this perspective was not only about cleanliness, but also about behaviour, hierarchy, and property. The study draws together a wide range of source materials (including images, medical notebooks and objects, human remains, the corporation's archives, and civic ritual and drama), considering both high and low culture.

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