

# Robert Bogdan international collection on disability, healthcare, and body modification

Ms Coll 84



Katherine Isham

February 2022

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Medical Historical Library, Cushing/Whitney Medical Library  
Yale University  
333 Cedar St.  
New Haven, CT 06520-8014  
203-737-1192  
203-785-5636  
historical.library@yale.edu  
<http://historical.medicine.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** Ms Coll 84

**CREATOR:** Bogdan, Robert

**TITLE:** Robert Bogdan international collection on disability, healthcare, and body modification

**DATES:** circa 1890-1969

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 1.5 linear feet (5 binders)

**LANGUAGE:** English; French; German

**SUMMARY:** The collection consists of five binders of materials related to people with disabilities, healthcare practices, and body modification collected by Robert Bogdan, a professor and author whose work focuses on disability studies. Materials include photographic postcards, picture postcards, photographs, pamphlets, and ephemera primarily documenting peoples in Africa, Asia, and Europe. The collection also includes materials documenting peoples in South America, the Caribbean, Pacific islands, and North American indigenous communities. Materials are grouped by geographic area and theme.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/med.ms.0084>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/med.ms.0084>.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

 vol. volume

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Robert Bogdan, 2021.

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## Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

Copyright has not been transferred to Yale University for unpublished materials in the collection. Copyright status for other collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

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## Preferred Citation

Robert Bogdan international collection on disability, healthcare, and body modification. Historical Library, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library, Yale University.

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## Related Materials

Ms Coll 61 the Robert Bogdan disability collection, 1820s-1990s.

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## Biographical / Historical

Robert Bogdan (1941-) is Professor Emeritus of Social Science and Education at Syracuse University where his specialties were qualitative methods, special education, disability studies, sociology of difference, and visual sociology. His pioneering work in the field of disability studies focuses on "disability" as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon. Bogdan started collecting disability ephemera in the early 1980s in order to advance his research and writing. His publications include *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*; *Picturing Disability: Beggar, Freak, Citizen, and Other Photographic Rhetoric (Critical Perspectives on Disability)*; and *Inside Out: The Social Meaning of Mental Retardation (Heritage)*.

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## Content Description

The collection consists of five binders of materials related to people with disabilities, healthcare practices, and body modification in Africa, Asia, and Europe. The collection also includes some materials documenting peoples in South America, the Caribbean, Southern Pacific islands, and North American indigenous communities. Materials include photographic postcards, picture postcards, photographs, pamphlets, and ephemera primarily documenting peoples in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Materials are grouped by geographic area and theme.

Collection documentation received from Bogdan includes the following description:

### Non Western Nations

Three of the six binders contain ephemera related to disability and healthcare in non-Western countries. Most of the geographic areas covered have been referred to as "developing nations." Most were European colonies when the images were produced. While the majority of items are from areas in Africa there is one binding devoted to cards are from Asia, Oceanian, and other locations.

Two of the binders are devoted to Africa. One focuses on Western health care practices employed in Africa. Most of the cards show missionaries and colonial medical functionaries working with local people—vaccinations, infirmaries, clinics, nutrition, baby care, elderly care, etc. In addition, images of people inflicted with leprosy, sleeping sickness and other tropical diseases are included.

The second African volume contains images of indigenous healthcare practices, images of ordinary people's self-administrated procedures as well as the work of specially designated healers. In addition, there are images of body modifying customs such as head binding and scarring. There is also a small section on unusual genetic and other conditions—people referred to as "pygmies," "albinos," and "dwarfs." The second volume also contains an extensive collection documenting both male and female circumcision (genital mutilation).

The third volume of non-Western material includes material from areas in Asia and other countries outside of Africa. It covers Western practices employed in these areas as well as indigenous practices and other disability and healthcare related items.

Images in the three non-Western binders are both taxing and rewarding to interpret. They provide documentation of actual practices while at the same time reveal colonial picture takers' visual tropes. For example, in the section on indigenous practices there are many cards that show individuals referred to in the captions as "witch doctor" and other similar titles. These cards are supposed to represent indigenous healers who had special powers, knowledge and skills. While such healers were an important part of these cultures, images on the cards magnify their exoticism. The abundance of these and other images in the collection allows a more complex interpretation that gets beyond the dichotomy of accurate documentation verses slanderous misrepresentation.

## Europe

There are two binders of Disability and Healthcare in Europe. Both the topic and the geographic area covered are immense, lending to more of a sampling of materials than an in-depth exploration of the subject. This being said, certain areas are well represented.

The first binder contains postcards and other material depicting institutional care of people with disabilities (deaf, blind, cognitively and physically impaired) as well as hospitals and sanitariums. A number of asylums are particularly well documented. Although France and Germany are covered, the collection is particularly strong on institutions in Belgium. Another section focuses on European hospitals including ward scenes as well as other areas of hospitals including operating rooms and early X-ray facilities. The last section documents sanitariums, holistic treatments such as mud baths and hydrotherapy, and other forms of what we would now think of as alternative health care. The items in the collection have documentary value but they were a form of institutional propaganda and likely reveal as much about how the administrators wanted their facilities to appear as the actual living conditions.

The second binder in the European genre is a mixture of categories. The largest section contains a wide variety of images related to disability and health care in general. There are cards showing people with disabilities engaged in a variety of activities including playing musical instruments and being out and about with their support animals. There are also items related to fund raising, humor, advertising, religion, and other topics. There is a section on begging. One large section has depictions of the wounded during WWI both in the field and after they returned home. Another section has cards of famous European physicians and related scientists such as Louis Pasteur. There is a small section of postcards of people who at the time were referred to as "midgets," little people who performed in "midget villages," "circuses" and other such venues. These postcards are all from Germany post WWI, before the domination of Hitler and the Nazi party. Many of these people fled Germany; some were sent to concentration centers.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged in five binders as received from the collector, Robert Bogdan.

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## Collection Contents

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| ☰ vol. 1 | <b>Book 1: Africa</b><br>Topics in this binder include health care in general, afflicted, vaccination, children, transport, clinics, hospitals, medical care in the field, other, leprosy, and sleeping sickness.   |
| ☰ vol. 2 | <b>Book 2: Africa</b><br>Topics in this binder include indigenous health care practices; dentistry; enemas; general care; healers; indigenous body modifying practices and body types (including head binding, stretched piercings with plates, scarification, teeth filing, and tattooing); female circumcision in Sierra Leone and Cameroon; male circumcision; and other.  |
| ☰ vol. 3 | <b>Book 3: Asia and other regions</b><br>In addition to Asia, materials in this binder document Central America, North American indigenous peoples, the Caribbean, and Pacific islands. Several themes in this binder also include materials from Europe and Africa. Topics include healthcare in India/South Asia; healthcare in China/East Asia; healthcare in Southeast Asia; other (includes Caribbean, Russia, Israel); leprosy in Asia and other countries; indigenous Asia plus (includes Central America and indigenous North Americans); other Asia plus (includes foot binding, neck extension, religious ceremonies involving suspending weights from body piercings); leprosy, general (includes European images); Hawaii, Father Damien leper colony; and beggars (includes materials from Africa and Asia). |
| ☰ vol. 4 | <b>Book 4: Europe</b><br>Topics in this binder include disability institutions, Belgium; disability institutions, France; institutions in Germany and other materials related to disability in that country; institutions in other countries; hospitals; sanatoriums, natural cures, and water and mud treatments.  |
| ☰ vol. 5 | <b>Book 5: Europe</b><br>Topics in this binder include health and disability related, general; beggars; war wounded/medical; medically related famous doctors and scientists; and dwarves, pre-Holocaust.   |

## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

Beggars  
Blindness  
Body marking  
Charities, Medical  
Children with disabilities  
Circumcision  
Clinics  
Dentistry  
Dwarfs (Persons)  
Female circumcision  
Healers  
Health  
Hospitals  
Indigenous peoples  
Indigenous physicians  
Intellectual disability  
Leprosy  
Medical photography  
Missionaries, Medical  
People with disabilities  
Rural health clinics  
Sanatoriums  
Trypanosomiasis  
Vaccination

### **Genres / Formats**

Photographic postcards  
Photographs  
Photographs -- Africa  
Picture postcards