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Neurological stamp

Andreas Vesalius (1514-64)

Vesalius, creator of modern human anatomy, was born in Brussels and initially studied in Paris where he was taught Galenic anatomy. He was banished from France for dissecting corpses from old cemeteries and gallows. Vesalius graduated with an MD from Padua in 1537 and the following day was appointed Professor.

At first he followed the dogmatic teaching of Galen but soon based lectures on his own observations. His teachings and book *De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septum*, published in 1543, replaced traditional anatomy. In the *Fabrica* Vesalius also enlarged and amended the work of Galen. The concepts of Galen, who had only dissected animals, had dominated medical teaching for 1500 years. The *Fabrica* contained some magnificent plates, particularly of muscles, and included excellent descriptions of the brain and nervous system. Vesalius, who had a hostile reception from the Galenists, gave up teaching to become physician to Charles V of Spain and 12 years later to his successor Philip II. Shipwrecked off Greece while home-bound after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem he died at the age of 50.

In 1964 Belgium commemorated the 400th anniversary of his death with a postage stamp. (Stanley Gibbons No 1884, Scott No 570). The illustration, a woodcut from the *Fabrica*, displays muscular details of the arm.

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