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# "In the Teeth of History: Dental Decay in the *Longue Durée*"

Zelko, Frank



Miniature on a initial "D" with a scene representing teeth (dentes). A dentist with silver forceps and a necklace of large teeth, extracting the tooth of a seated man. Originally published in James le Palmer, Omne Bonum (London, 1360–75).

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> Every now and then, however, I view the subject through a wider aperture. When did tooth decay become a significant problem, and why? How did humans become so vulnerable to dental deterioration, and why have we gravitated toward foods that are most likely to cause it? Learning

about the long history of dental maladies involves detours into physical anthropology, while understanding their etiology requires a dive into microbiology. The overall impression is that the mouth is its own ecosystem, or microbiome, subject to the same kind of perturbations that ecologists find in ponds or forests. (From the article)

This article was originally published in *Springs: The Rachel Carson Center Review* . *Springs* is an online publication featuring peer-reviewed articles, creative nonfiction, and artistic contributions that showcase the work of the Rachel Carson Center and its community across the world.

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