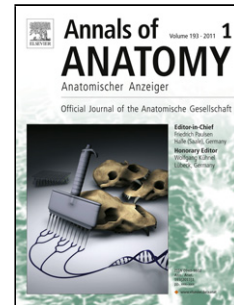


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William Hunter and Lymphatics

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Historical article

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ABSTRACT

William Hunter along with his brother, John, and their colleagues William Hewson, William Cruikshank and John Sheldon made a large contribution to understanding of lymphatic vessels. Hewson, Cruikshank and Sheldon all carried out mercury injections and made much progress in mapping the distribution of lymphatics in the human body. William Hunter appreciated that lymphatics absorbed fluid from the tissues of the body and that lacteals of the intestine and lymphatics are similar structures. John Hunter carried out an elegant series of experiments that proved that lacteals absorb products of digestion. The Hunters, however, were wrong in dismissing absorption by blood vessels and missed the importance of blood capillaries. William Hewson showed that lymphatics were not confined to mammals but that they are present in reptiles, birds and fish. Hewson also demonstrated that tracheobronchial glands are lymph nodes and not mucus-secreting glands as previously thought. Although William Hunter appreciated that tuberculosis and venereal diseases might involve the regional lymph nodes, he does not seem to have fully grasped that malignant disease might involve the local nodes or the concept that knowledge of lymph drainage could be used to define the likely site of a primary malignancy.

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