Essays on the history of herbal medicine

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History of phytotherapy

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SUMMARY

The work continues a series of materials on the history of herbal medicine. This essay examines the history of herbal medicine in Ancient Egypt. A short historical background is given, aspects of the development of medicine in the country, including herbal medicine, are considered. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of medical papyri.

Key words: Ancient Egypt, medicine, medicinal plants,medical papyri.

RESUME

The paper continues a series of articles on the history of herbal medicine. This essay examines the history of herbal medicine in ancient Egypt. Short historical background is given, development of medicine in the country is considered, including herbal medicine. Special attention is paid to the analysis of medicalpapyri.

Keywords: Ancient Egypt, medicine, medicinal plants, medical papyri.

“The land is rich there, there are many
Cereals give birth to both good, healing, and evil, poisonous; Each of the people
there is a doctor who has a profound knowledge of the rest of the people, since
everyone is from the Pean family there. "
Homer, The Odyssey [4]

Unlike the previous trip, to which we had no alternative, this time we have a wide choice. As we already know, after the civilization of Sumer, several civilizations developed almost simultaneously in the world, with a small part of which (Babylon and Assyria) we have already briefly met. Who is next? What criteria should be used as the basis for priority? There are a lot of these criteria, but none of them can become decisive without infringing on the significance and dignity of any of these civilizations. Therefore, without further ado, let us define the next civilization of Ancient Egypt in this outstanding list, especially since it meets the most neutral criterion - territorial proximity to the previous object.

It is hardly worth spending a lot of time justifying the occurrence

civilization in the Nile Valley. Where else can it arise, if not along the banks of the great and abundant river, which annually enriches the earth with fertile silt, in an area with fertile, moderately hot, and, most importantly, inaccessible to evil northern winds. In this area, people began to engage in cattle breeding and agriculture early enough, which resulted in their transition to a settled life with the formation of large settlements and cities.

It is interesting that the existing name of the country - Egypt - was given by the ancient Greeks, having changed the name of one of the first cities they visited - Memphis, which the Greeks called Hikupta. The Egyptians themselves still call their country - Misr, which means "inhabited place, city."

The history of the ancient Egyptian civilization, like the history of other great civilizations, is filled with pronounced dynamism and drama. Great creations, discoveries, achievements that contribute to the progress of all mankind are here side by side with a bloody struggle for power, a constant threat from external enemies hungry for material benefits created by the labor of the whole society, the sword of Damocles constantly hanging over the state with the problems of the relationship between the government and the people, etc. .NS. Numerous studies of the world's best historians are devoted to these events; they are reflected in wonderful works of art. It is known that ancient Greek scientists, poets and playwrights willingly visited Egypt (Homer, Lycurgus, Solon, Plato, Pythagoras, Democritus, etc.), talked with the population, most often with the priests, borrowed a lot from them (in any case, more than the Byzantines) [3]. Therefore, in order to have reliable time guidelines necessary for the movement of our magic train, we will have in mind two generally accepted facts: the unification of the supreme ruler Menes (by Herodotus he is called Min) of the two states - Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom around 3000 BC .NS. and the well-known suicide of the last Egyptian queen, Cleopatra VII, in 30 BC. Between these two dates - the entire history of the civilization of Ancient Egypt, which had a tremendous impact on world history. the unification of the supreme ruler Menes (Herodotus called him Min) of the two states - Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom around 3000 BC. and the well-known suicide of the last Egyptian queen, Cleopatra VII, in 30 BC. Between these two dates - the entire history of the civilization of Ancient Egypt, which had a tremendous impact on world history. the unification of the supreme ruler Menes (Herodotus called him Min) of the two states - Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom around 3000 BC. and the well-known suicide of the last Egyptian queen, Cleopatra VII, in 30 BC. Between these two dates - the entire history of the civilization of Ancient Egypt, which had a tremendous impact on world history.

But we have to consider two aspects of the ancient Egyptian civilization in more detail - the state of medicine and the place of herbal medicine in it. It must be said right away that, unlike many civilizations in the ancient Egyptian culture, health has always been considered as one of the most important benefits [7]. The overwhelming number of reviews about ancient Egyptian medicine are positive, often even laudatory. We find similar responses from the already mentioned Homer, Diodorus, Strabo, Plutarch [6]. But most of all, Herodotus admired ancient Egyptian medicine [3]. He traveled all over the country from north to south, saw a lot, and his reputation as an objective observer and fixator forces us to take his information with confidence. Clear, that this high assessment was given by Herodotus after comparing ancient Egyptian medicine with Assyrian-Babylonian (we remember what a repulsive impression was made on the historian by the practice of Assyrians to take patients out to the square in order to get advice from passers-by on diagnosis and treatment), but also in many other indicators, the medicine of the ancient Egyptians was significantly higher than the medicine of its neighbors. It is no coincidence that many of the medical

The achievements of Ancient Egypt were eagerly embraced in other countries, especially in Ancient Greece.

The civilization of Ancient Egypt had a huge impact on the development of science, technology, art throughout the world. But let's not forget about the discovery that literally turned the world upside down. It is about creating material for writing - papyrus [6]. It is difficult to imagine that in the world until now, information would be spread through cuneiform clay tablets. How much of the most valuable information could not be saved due to the fragility of the material, how much it would not appear at all due to the inconvenience of creation and transmission. But botanists, pharmacognosts, phytotherapists can be proud - after all, papyrus is a plant of Cyperus papyrus of the Osokov family. The importance of this plant for Ancient Egypt cannot be overestimated. The papyrus rhizome is edible. From the stems of papyrus, the Egyptians made double shuttles, sails for ships [5]. Vessels were caulked with papyrus, mats, baskets were woven from it, made fabrics and shoes. But most importantly, the Egyptians learned how to make paper out of papyrus. This process is very complicated and multi-stage. The papyrus stalks were first peeled off the bark, the core (the main starting material) was cut lengthwise into thin strips and laid out overlapping on a flat surface. Another layer of strips was laid on them at right angles and placed under oppression in the form of a heavy stone. Then there was a drying process under the scorching sun. Then the material was beaten with a hammer and smoothed. After that, the sheets were pressed against each other. In their final form, the sheets were long enough to be preserved in scrolls. This technology, developed almost simultaneously with the advent of writing, was constantly improved to the point that images could be transferred to papyri. This process is very complicated and multi-stage. The papyrus stalks were first peeled off the bark, the core (the main starting material) was cut lengthwise into thin strips and laid out overlapping on a flat surface. Another layer of strips was laid on them at right angles and placed under oppression in the form of a heavy stone. Then there was a drying process under the scorching sun. Then the material was beaten with a hammer and smoothed. After that, the sheets were pressed against each other. In their final form, the sheets were long enough to be preserved in scrolls. This technology, developed almost simultaneously with the advent of writing, was constantly improved to the point that images could be transferred to papyri. This process is very complicated and multi-stage. The papyrus stalks were first peeled off the bark, the core (the main starting material) was cut lengthwise into thin strips and laid out overlapping on a flat surface. Another layer of strips was laid on them at right angles and placed under oppression in the form of a heavy stone. Then there was a drying process under the scorching sun. Then the material was beaten with a hammer and smoothed. After that, the sheets were pressed against each other. In their final form, the sheets were long enough to be preserved in scrolls. This technology, developed almost simultaneously with the advent of writing, was constantly improved to the point that images could be transferred to papyri. the core (main starting material) was cut lengthwise into thin strips and laid out overlapping on a flat surface. Another layer of strips was laid on them at right angles and placed under oppression in the form of a heavy stone. Then there was a drying process under the scorching sun. Then the material was beaten with a hammer and smoothed. After that, the sheets were pressed against each other. In their final form, the sheets were long enough to be preserved in scrolls. This technology, developed almost simultaneously with the advent of writing, was constantly improved to the point that images could be transferred to papyri. the core (main starting material) was cut lengthwise into thin strips and laid out overlapping on a flat surface. Another layer of strips was laid on them at right angles and placed under oppression in the form of a heavy stone. Then there was a drying process under the scorching sun. Then the material was beaten with a hammer and smoothed. After that, the sheets were pressed against each other. In their final form, the sheets were lo

The process of making papyrus is described in sufficient detail in the works of Pliny the Elder and Theophrastus [8, 11].

The papyri, the overwhelming majority of which, unfortunately, have not survived, in addition to informational ones, also performed administrative functions. In medicine, for example, papyri, which detailed the symptoms of the disease and provided recommendations for treatment, not only stimulated the literacy of doctors, but were essentially the prototype of the medical standards that must be met. In addition, according to many researchers, the most famous of the surviving medical papyri are the so-called. the papyri of Smith and Ebers, written by the great ancient Egyptian physician Imhotep, who was later deified. It is known that Imhotep, who was also an outstanding architect who took part in the design and construction of the Joster pyramid - one of the most famous ancient Egyptian pyramids [9, 14], knew medicinal plants very well and only he could, in papyrus (known as the Ebers papyrus), give about 900 recipes for the treatment of diseases, including mainly using herbs. By the way, in ancient Egyptian mythology, Imhotep is repeatedly referred to as an emanation of the plant god Nefertum. For many years, scientists-Egyptologists argued about the reality of the existence of Imhotep. In the end, the point of view that affirms the reality of this outstanding figure in world medicine won out. The admiration of the ancient Egyptians before this remarkable scientist is evidenced by the fact For many years, scientists-Egyptologists argued about the reality of the existence of Imhotep. In the end, the point of view that affirms the reality of this outstanding figure in world medicine won out. The admiration of the ancient Egyptians before this remarkable scientist is evidenced by the fact For many years, scientists-Egyptologists argued about the reality of the existence of Imhotep. In the end, the point of view that affirms the reality of this outstanding figure in world medicine won out. The admiration of the ancient Egyptians before this remarkable scientist is evidenced by the fact

that in his honor many large and small statues were made, which were often used as a magical means in the process of healing. These images are currently on display in many museums around the world (they are also in Russia - 9 bronze and one faience image of Imhotep can be seen in the Hermitage, and one bronze statuette of an outstanding doctor is presented in the Pushkin State Museum [6].

A huge number of medical papyri have not survived. Currently, scientists have only nine (according to other sources - ten) medical papyri created at different times (from the Berlin papyrus of the XXI century BC to the Carlsberg papyrus, created in the II century BC). They are, of course, unequal in content, the information contained in them is often duplicated, medicinal plants for the most part do not lend themselves to identification, nevertheless, the significance of these documents is enormous. The study of these primary sources has been going on for more than a century, and we have the right to wait for further discoveries.

Let's take a closer look at the two most famous medical papyri. The first of these, the Ebers papyrus, was discovered in Thebes in 1872. German Egyptologist and writer Georg Ebers purchased this papyrus for the Leipzig Museum. The papyrus was published in 1874. Unfortunately, during the war years during the Anglo-American bombing of Leipzig, the papyrus was badly damaged. More than 20 sections have died. From 4 sections, only fragments remain. According to experts, the Ebers papyrus is a kind of medical (and we will add “pharmaceutical”) encyclopedia. More than 900 prescriptions for the treatment of diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, respiratory and cardiac systems, disorders of the organs of vision and hearing, some infectious diseases, helminthic invasions are contained in this unique essay. What medicines does the author offer (it is possible that that it was Imhotep)? We see here onions, pomegranate, aloe, grapes, dates, poppy, lotus, papyrus. There are also minerals - sulfur, antimony, iron, lead, alabaster, soda, clay, saltpeter. Numerous publications devoted to the Ebert papyrus cite a recipe for the preparation of a diuretic as an example, apparently due to its brevity. We will not escape the temptation either. So: wheat groats 1/8 part, fruits shed (?) 1/8 part, ocher 1/32, water 5 parts. Cook at night, drink 4 days. wheat groats 1/8 part, fruit shed (?) 1/8 part, ocher 1/32, water 5 parts. Cook at night, drink 4 days. wheat groats 1/8 part, fruit shed (?) 1/8 part, ocher 1/32, water 5 parts. Cook at night, drink 4 days.

The Ebers papyrus is distinguished by great information content, literacy and complexity of recipes and a very respectful attitude towards readers (doctors). In it, for the first time in the world, an analysis of the work of the heart is given, essential considerations are given about its role in human life. The papyrus says: “The beginning of the doctor’s secrets is the knowledge of the course of the heart, from which the vessels go to all members, for every doctor, every priest of the goddess Sokhmat, every exorcist (here we simultaneously learn about the categories of people who had access to the treatment of people in Ancient Egypt) touching the back of the head, hands, palms, legs - it touches the heart everywhere. "

As for herbs, we see a lot of them in the recipe, whole plants, their flowers, roots, stems, leaves, fruits - dry, fresh, mashed, soaked, boiled (apparently, the author was also a pharmacognostician!). They were mixed with beer, vinegar, honey, fat. Unfortunately, we repeat - not all plants have been deciphered and further work in this direction promises us new discoveries.

It should be noted that medical papyri often contain information about the great importance that the ancient Egyptians attached to the issues of hygiene. Herodotus praised them very much for this, noting that “The Egyptians drink only from copper vessels, which are cleaned daily. They wear linen dresses ... Priests cut their hair all over their bodies every other day ... The priests' clothes are only linen, and their shoes are made of papyrus. They wash twice during the day and twice at night ”[3]. It would be nice to introduce these rules and a kind of dress code in our society, at least among officials and doctors.

I repeat: unfortunately, a significant part of the medicinal plants mentioned in the papyri have not yet been identified. This does not make it possible to fully assess the phytotherapeutic knowledge of the ancient Egyptians. This knowledge, apparently, exceeded the knowledge of previous generations and brought additional glory to Egyptian doctors. There is no doubt that knowledge of medicinal plants and training in their use has been an integral part of the professional training programs for doctors. It is no coincidence that the character of Homer's Odyssey, Elena Spartanskaya, after her stay in Egypt, became a specialist in pharmacology [4].

An invaluable phytotherapeutic storehouse, still hidden in undeciphered papyri, excites the imagination and promises a lot of interesting things in the future. An example of this is a mysterious plant mentioned in several papyri under different names and which was eventually identified. It turned out that we are dealing with the mandrake plant, widely known at that time. The roots of this amazing plant of the Solanaceae family often resemble the human body, which led to their use in magical practice. The mystery was added by the fact that the mandrake root, when trying to pull it out of the ground, makes a sound similar to a human scream. This gave rise to even such serious people as Pythagoras and Pliny the Elder to attribute mandrake to the animal kingdom [10]. Shakespeare in "Romeo and Juliet" gives the following comparison: "... the sharpness of the voices, monstrous as moans) ”[13]. In a very peculiar and gloomy manner, I.A. Bunin:

> “The Mandrake flower from the graves blooms, Over the coffins buried near the black gallows. Dead with the juices of decay nourishes Mandragora - And it blooms in wild and weedy herbs. Brother Cain, who raised Mandragora from poison! God will perhaps mercifully condemn the murderer. But the executioner is not a murderer: he is a devil,
> And a flower full of poison, God will not forget you! ”[2]

How we would like scientists to eventually reveal to us the true face of the mysterious plants that inhabit the papyri, and we would clearly understand what centurasta, aam, fall, giu, shau troubles and a number of other medicinal plants used by ancient Egyptian doctors are.

The second most important medical papyrus of Ancient Egypt, which researchers attribute to the 16th century, is completely surgical in nature. American archaeologist Edwin Smith bought it in Luxor in 1862. In life

archaeologist, the papyrus was not published. After the death of the owner, the papyrus was transferred to the New York Historical Society. The translation of the papyrus was carried out only in 1980. Since 1998, the papyrus has been in the New York Academy of Medicine.

The papyrus describes 48 different injuries [6]. The researchers note that the material is presented with a high degree of scientific credibility and accuracy. Noteworthy is the clarity of the presentation, which testifies to the great practical experience of the author and again gives rise to the idea of the authorship of a major and authoritative specialist, the most likely of which was Imhotep. By style, these are clear and intelligible advice from the teacher to the student.

When familiarizing with these and other medical papyri, the almost complete absence of information and indications of a magical nature attracts attention. In our opinion, this is further evidence that the authors of the texts lived in a more ancient time, when the influence of magic on healing was not as noticeable as later.

Giving the final assessment of the ancient Egyptian herbal medicine, we should undoubtedly note that, being an integral part of a sufficiently developed medicine, herbal medicine took its rightful place in it, but in the organization and popularity of treatment it continued to give way to the leadership of magical medicine. It should be noted here that magic in Egypt had a much more significant experience than religion. In the life of the people, magic conspiracies and spells have always played a special, significant role [1]. It is surprising that there are absolutely no plants among the huge number of magical objects (stones, drawings, animals, names, ceremonies, etc.). This fact requires study.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny the presence of certain dynamics in the development of herbal medicine, which led to its positive influence on the development of this method of treatment in other countries, and, first of all, in Ancient Greece.

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