



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

PERCEPTIONS OF HEALTH IN THE NILE VALLEY

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION OF HEALING PRACTICE IN THE EGYPTIAN CONTEXT
FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE MIDDLE AGES (4TH MILLENNIUM BCE – 15TH CENTURY CE)

ORGANISED BY:

GABRIELE CONTE

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ABSTRACTS



Aly, Mennah (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Cairo)

“Drive This Fear Away ... Place This Heart in Its Place”: Exploring the Ancient Egyptian Antecedents of the Folk Medicine Tool Ṭāsāt al-ḥaḍḍa (the Bowl of Fright)

Ṭāsāt al-ḥaḍḍa, literally the “Bowl of Fright,” also known as talismanic, magic, or incantation bowl, remains a persistent tool of modern Egyptian folk medicine, yet its origins remain insufficiently examined. Attested in Egypt from at least the tenth century and often compared to Aramaic and Mesopotamian counterparts, these bowls are not only displayed in museums in Egypt and worldwide, but are also preserved within Egyptian households inherited through generations as traditional healing objects. Despite the advancement of medicine, Ṭāsāt al-ḥaḍḍa, mainly used in popular contexts, are typically metal vessels inscribed with Qur’anic verses, supplications, pseudo-script, talismans, and images of snakes, dogs, and scorpions. According to their inscriptions, as well as accounts by travellers, orientalist, and anthropologists, these bowls cure maladies, animal bites, demonic afflictions, psychological disturbances, and women-related conditions. Comparatively, many ancient Egyptian objects were employed in similar healing contexts, for example magico-medical texts prescribe spells to be written on bowls then washed into liquids to “drive fear away”, “restore the heart in its place”, as well as heal and/or protect from ailments usually caused by malevolent forces. Although several scholars have suggested the ancient Egyptian antecedency of Ṭāsāt al-ḥaḍḍa, no study has systematically demonstrated the resemblance of the magico-medical spells, techniques, and therapeutic concerns involved.

This study proposes an Egyptological and anthropologically informed hypothesis that Ṭāsāt al-ḥaḍḍa preserve core elements of ancient Egyptian folk medical traditions. Through analysing ancient Egyptian magico-medical spells, therapeutic rituals, and related material culture, and by situating the modern use of these bowls within contemporary folk-healing practices, the paper argues that Ṭāsāt al-ḥaḍḍa represent a long-lived continuity of cultural memory within Egyptian popular medicine. This interdisciplinary approach demonstrates the resilience of Egyptian folk therapeutic knowledge and shows how specific healing techniques and treatments for comparable ailments have persisted, been reconfigured, and adapted across millennia.



Austin, Anne (University of Missouri-St. Louis)

Healthmaking in the Past: A Social Model of Health Disparities in Ancient Egypt

The history of human health has often been framed through the development of biomedicine in Europe with relatively little agency given to people more broadly in the ancient world. Social disparities in health, however, have persisted globally since prehistory. In modern public health studies, social disparities in health have been largely explained through factors like social support, physical environment, healthcare access, and economic stability. Together, these Social Determinants of Health explain the health gradients that persist across countries and socioeconomic groups in the 21st century. If such social determinants are so impactful in the present, what role did they play in the past and how might that move research beyond a biomedical definition of medicine and care?

In this talk, I argue that such social determinants are a critical pathway for us to understand health in ancient Egypt. After illustrating overall health patterns across Egyptian sites and periods, I model how we can use the Social Determinants of Health to explain health outcomes at Deir el-Medina based on over a decade of bioarchaeological research that my team has conducted at the site. Using the site's ubiquitous texts, I argue that the people at Deir el-Medina were healthmakers—they used their social, economic, and medical knowledge in combination to benefit their health outcomes. I conclude by evaluating the broader applicability of this framework to other Egyptian sites in order to identify key factors impacting health in ancient Egypt.



Conte, Gabriele Mario (Ifao-PCMA, Cairo)

“A Disease That I Will Contend with”: Anthropological Significance of Ancient Egyptian Healing Instructions

The medical remedies preserved in Egyptian healing papyri provide a wealth of information on the practice and its founding concepts. In addition to this, the texts often contain meta-textual elements, through which the author addresses directly anyone consulting the papyrus. This occurs in particular in the instructions given at the end of the spell or observation of symptoms, in which, through a genuine diagnostic procedure, the healer declared whether the illness was curable or not.

These instructions have long been interpreted from a strictly medical point of view, as realistic guidelines on how to proceed with treatment (effective intervention or simple observation of an incurable case) in the face of medical practice still lacking the innovations of the scientific method and microscopic observation. However, the application of sociological and anthropological models can add further layers of interpretation that can better inform us about the role that healing practices played in society and how they sought to present themselves to non-specialists.

In a cultural context where healing was administered by various figures with different levels of education and literacy, the success of a remedy was a fundamental factor in ensuring the necessary authority and affirming one's competence. From this authority and expertise, which was inextricably linked to people's perception of them, the healers derived the social capital necessary to assert their presence within the community. The texts and instructions, with indications of their level of effectiveness, are therefore a form of embodiment of this social capital built on expertise. Starting from these instructions, this study aims to offer a reflection on the social role of ancient Egyptian healers, the importance of personal experience in the constitution of healing know-how and the strategies adopted to present this experience within the community.



De Faveri, Beatrice (University of California, Berkeley)

New perspectives on the 'blue lotus' (*Nymphaea Caerulea*) as a psychoactive aid in New Kingdom rituals

The textual and iconographic attestations of the so-called 'blue lotus' (*Nymphaea Caerulea*) during ancient Egyptian history are nothing short than ubiquitous. Mythological texts crystallized its cosmic significance by establishing a close link to creation, rebirth, and the infant sun god's daily emergence from the primordial waters. In visual art, the flower has become the par excellence emblem of rejuvenation and rebirth, depicted in countless funerary scenes as early as the Old Kingdom.

In the medical sphere, the lotus flower is very well known from several medical papyri, most notably from pEbers and pLeiden, which document its narcotic and analgesic properties. During the New Kingdom, numerous banquet and ritual scenes point to the connection between the lotus and altered states of consciousness, while daily life scenes depict the pressing of the flowers into a soluble oil.

Recent archaeometric research has however brought attention to the fact that *Nymphaea Caerulea* is naturally rich in psychoactive alkaloids (apomorphine, nuciferine). The employment of this botanical species in ritual contexts for its psychoactive properties has been postulated in Egyptological literature, yet no systematic study has been conducted. Relying on the most recent scientific literature, this paper compares current knowledge about the psychotropic properties of *Nymphaea Caerulea* with the textual and material evidence coming from the ritual context of the New Kingdom. The paper finally argues that the investigation of the concept of 'drunkenness' in ancient Egyptian ritual practices must be updated to also include the notion of psychoactive compound-induced intoxication.



Ezzat, Azza (Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria) and Mohamed Hassan Ismaeel (Alexandria University)

The Medicinal Plants in Ahmed Pasha Kamal's Dictionary of Plants and Trees: A Glimpse into Ancient Egyptian Remedies

Ahmed Pasha Kamal was the first Egyptian scholar to write his own ancient Egyptian dictionary, *Le lexique de la langue Egyptienne ancienne* totaling 22 volumes, including more than 13,000 hieroglyphic entries translated to French and Arabic, yet following different methodology. Kamal's knowledge production was varied in languages and in targeting audience. He published in Arabic for the Egyptian people and in French (mainly) and English for westerners. He published about fifty-two articles, of which twenty-nine articles were published in the *Annales du service des antiquités*. He authored eight Arabic books and two French which were about the Greco Roman Stela and the offering tables in Cairo Museum.

Among his publications is "The Dictionary of the ancient Plants and Trees" *اللاكي الدرية في النباتات والأشجار القديمة المصرية Al-La'ali' Al-Durriya fi Al-Nabatat wa Al-Ashjar Al-Qadima Al-Misriyya* which is an encyclopedic work that is considered one of the most important references in the study of ancient Egyptian flora. Published in the late 19th century, this dictionary provides comprehensive information about plants used in ancient Egypt, including their names in hieroglyphics, along with translations into Arabic and French. The dictionary is organized alphabetically, it includes detailed descriptions of specific plants and trees, noting their physical characteristics and traditional uses. Moreover, it outlines how these plants were used in religious rituals, medicinal treatments, and daily life, such as growing grains, preparing oils, and crafting wood. In the context of this paper, the researchers adopted a systematic methodology in studying Ahmed Pasha Kamal's Dictionary of Plants and Trees, focusing on its relevance to ancient Egyptian medicine and pharmacy. It was noted that Kamal listed 24 words related to medicine along with their remedies. These 24 terms will form the core of our study, focusing on how Kamal investigated and documented the medical plants in his dictionary. The study begins by identifying and analyzing the plant and herb names listed in the dictionary that were historically associated with medicinal practices.



Insoll, Timothy (University of Exeter)

Materialising Medicine in the past of Sub-Saharan Africa - Beyond Interpretation? Insights from Archaeology, Ethnography, and Archaeometry

Until recently, archaeological focus on medicinal materiality in sub-Saharan Africa had been minimal, primarily as it was considered to be intangible and irretrievable, and therefore beyond reconstruction and interpretation. The lecture will firstly examine how this perspective is flawed, and how insights derived from historical ethnography and archaeometry can inform understanding. This will be examined with reference to medicine meanings and definition, and how metaphorical and metonymical qualities recur. Medicine substances and associations, and the importance placed on exotic materia medica and on their quantity and essence will then be examined as will the contexts of medicine practice, including surgical procedures and equipment. Medicine (knowledge and substance) dispersal will also be examined drawing on a range of archaeological and ethnographic examples particularly relating to shrines and the dual agency of religious syncretism and conversion. The importance of divination as an agent of diagnosis will likewise be explored, especially its material culture implications and archaeological recognition, and the significance of archaeobotanical research as a mechanism for recognising medicinal plants emphasised.

A particular focus will be a decade of work completed on medicine, ritual, shrines, and substances in Northern Ghana both on the Talensi ethno-linguistic group (Insoll et al. 2013) made anthropologically famous by Meyer Fortes (e.g., Fortes 1987) and in Koma Land, where a series of mounds dated to the 6th to 12th centuries AD and containing medicinal related material culture were excavated (e.g., Insoll et al. 2012). The implications of the data from this field research will be discussed as it provides a case study indicating what can be achieved, the limits to interpretation, and how the insights gained may have relevance within other contexts..



Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin, Iwona (University of Exeter – University of Warsaw)

The Body of Evidence: Bioarchaeological contributions to the study of health and disease in Ancient Egypt

While ancient Egypt's vast monumental, pictorial and written records offer an unparalleled insight into its civilization, the physical remains of the individuals who created it provide an indispensable biological perspective for a comprehensive understanding of ancient health, disease, treatment and healing practices. Human remains are key to the study of individual and societal lived experiences by providing an invaluable augmentation to the existing textual knowledge on health and disease in the ancient Egyptian context and beyond.

Owing to the climatic and environmental conditions of the region, coupled with the ancient Egyptian religious and burial practices, human remains have survived exceptionally well for thousands of years, bearing the most direct evidence of people's health, illness and treatment of various conditions through time.

The scientific studies of ancient Egyptian human remains began over a hundred years ago and continue today under the banner of bioarchaeology, governed by the established methodologies and ethical approaches, taking full advantage of modern scientific advances and technologies to reconstruct the lives and health and disease patterns of people in the past.

Textual sources, such as medical papyri, inform of an array of conditions and diseases that affected the ancient Egyptians, offering treatment but also recognizing that some cases could not be treated. Evidence of both cases where administered treatment was successful and where no treatment could help the person affected have been evidenced in human remains. Using case studies of common and rare diseases and their treatment, this presentation will highlight the importance of bioarchaeological research in the study of ancient Egyptian lives, its progression against many existing limitations and future directions.



Rita Lucarelli (University of California, Berkeley)

The so-called Magico-Medical Papyri and Magical Thinking in Ancient Egypt

In this lecture, ancient Egyptian healing practices will be presented as a complex system in which medicine, religion, and magic were deeply intertwined. Drawing on key sources such as the Brooklyn medical papyrus, the discussion will explore how empirical treatments, herbal remedies, dietary prescriptions, and surgical techniques, coexisted with ritual incantations and appeals to divine powers. The figure of the physician-priest will be examined as a mediator between technical knowledge and sacred authority, operating within a cosmology in which illness could signify both physical disorder and spiritual imbalance.

In a second part, the lecture will introduce the phenomenon of tarantism in southern Italy, as interpreted by Ernesto de Martino in *La terra del rimorso* (The Land of Remorse). Tarantism will be discussed as a culturally structured crisis attributed to the symbolic bite of the tarantula, expressed through trance, melancholy, and somatic distress. The therapeutic response, centered on music, dance, color, and ritual performance, will be analyzed as a form of symbolic reordering that enabled the afflicted individual to reintegrate into the social world. The lecture will offer a comparative reflection on these two healing systems; it will highlight both convergences and differences: the institutionalization and textual codification of Egyptian medicine versus the performative and communal character of tarantism. Through this comparison, the broader anthropological question of how societies (and in particular the ancient Egyptian society) construct meaningful responses to suffering will be critically discussed.



Martínez-Moreno, Clara (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

The Ancient Egyptian Cosmos Mirrored in Healing Practices: A Study Proposal

Ancient Egyptian healing practices constitute a significant domain for examining emic perspectives on pathological thought, anatomical knowledge, and pharmacology, as scholarship has recognized since the earliest stages of Egyptology. Yet a further question emerges: what if these practices also allow us to identify the ideological, classificatory, and hierarchical frameworks that underpinned ancient Egyptian society, and through which health and illness were conceptualized?

Latromagical papyri constitutes the primary sources capable of addressing this question. Across the thousands of preserved remedies, the development of healing procedures could be identified, with explicit mentions of who the patient or healer was, the types of actions they were expected to perform, and how both parties might have responded to the various therapeutic processes. Such data provides valuable insights into the distribution of roles, responsibilities, and expectations within healing procedures, and into how these textual traditions encoded broader cultural understandings of agency, performance and authority.

Therefore, when examined through anthropologically informed methodologies, such as practice theory and embodiment frameworks, these textual and linguistic features may enable the identification of the agential attributes ascribed to each actant, as well as elucidate the ways in which agency intersects with wider sociocultural categories, including gender, class, ontology, and ethnicity, within the healing procedures delineated in this corpus. This dual philological and anthropological approach allows us to move beyond the descriptive level of remedies and prescriptions, and to interrogate the extent to which healing procedures operated as mechanisms for the (re)creation of normative social structures.

This paper aims to provide an interdisciplinary methodological framework that isolates agential roles and the interactions among healing actants, while evaluating how these ritual practices mirrored and reinforced Ancient Egyptian cosmic order ($m_3^c t$). Through this proposal, we seek to contribute to the understanding of medical-magical texts as culturally situated performances of personhood and social harmony.



Gianluca Miniaci (Università di Pisa)

Traces of Healing Practices on the Clay Figurines of Middle Bronze Age Egypt

Small figurines made in clay from the Middle and Late Bronze Age Egypt have been found in several different contexts, nonetheless their full scope and meaning are still obscure. Scholars proposed diverse hypotheses sustaining the interpretation of these figurines as symbolic and religious artefacts or even toys. However, the analysis of textual sources (medical and magical papyri) reveal that some of these figurines could be considered part of a kit for ancient healing practice. Based on textual evidence and material analysis of clay figurines, the seminar aims to provide new insights into the objects used in Egyptian healing, offering a broader picture of the presence of medicine in ancient society and culture.



Mohimont, Lola (Université de Lille)

Ailment and healing approaches in Ancient Egypt: exploring the magic-medicine spectrum through medical compilations analysis

Recent research on ancient Egyptian healing practices often considers magic and medicine as a single discipline, arguing that the separation between them is a modern construct. However, while studying the lexical semantics of illness and suffering for my PhD thesis, I encountered various types of ancient Egyptian texts written to prevent or heal diseases and ailments in all their forms, not all of which are treated through magical spells.

The diversity of text types (*šs₃.w*, recipes, thematic treatises, magical incantations), their frequency within compilations, and the kinds of ailments they address may provide key insights into the relationship between magic and medicine in the healing process. The Ebers Papyrus opens with three spells of specific functions (to apply a remedy, to drink a remedy, and to remove a dressing), which seem to form part of the therapeutic protocol; by contrast, the recto of the Edwin Smith Papyrus is composed solely of didactic texts (*šs₃.w*). These types of texts, and the variation in their frequency depending on the papyrus, raise questions about their compilation, knowledge transmission, and, consequently, the conception of healing in ancient Egyptian thought.

In this paper, I propose an overview of the types of texts, according to their titles, found in the main medical papyri, and a focus on their magical spells and the ailments or body parts treated. The objective is to explore the relationship between descriptive and incantatory texts, showing how they complement each other within the different medical papyri. By examining their distribution, functions, and interactions, this study aims to offer a new perspective on how magic and medicine operated in the healing process — not as two distinct or fully merged approaches, but as a spectrum that may have depended on the nature of the ailment.



Celestial Waters in Healing: Reconstructing the Indigenous Classification of Dew (ỉꜣd.t) as Ritual Enhancer and Rain (ḥw.t) as Purifying Agent in Ancient Egyptian Medical Recipes

This paper presents a detailed analysis addressing the systematisation and textual diffusion of healing knowledge concerning atmospheric waters (hydrometeors). Employing the Lexical Trail methodology across a broad corpus (Old Kingdom–Late Period), we explore the distinct therapeutic functions of the terms ỉꜣd.t (“dew, moisture”) and ḥw.t (“rain”).

The analysis centres on the iatromagical formula: sḏr n ỉꜣd.t (“to be exposed to the dew”), which exhibits remarkable textual stability, appearing 94 times in medical corpora (e.g., P. Ebers). This procedure prescribes a specific nocturnal ritual necessary for the preparation to absorb the dew, linking the therapeutic action directly to the atmospheric cycle of dew formation. The formula is consistently placed as the final stage of pharmaceutical processing. Its syntactic structure possibly emphasizes receptivity, reflecting dew’s conceptualization as a subtle, divine emanation intended to activate or enhance medicinal properties. This function is potentially reinforced by ỉꜣd.t’s semantic convergence with ỉd.t (“perfumed oil”) and fumigation rituals (ỉdi), positioning it as a “divine permeating substance”.

We contrast this with rainwater (mw n(.j).w ḥ(wj).t), which is designated as an uncontaminated ingredient required for anti-venom and fever treatments (P. Berlin 3038). Graphic analysis supports this distinction: ḥw.t often uses the determinative N35a, emphasizing tangible liquid, while ỉꜣd.t uses N4, reflecting its atmospheric classification. Based on these trends, this research reconstructs the autochthonous classification systems that governed the integration of weather phenomena into therapeutics. The functional differentiation between raw purifying substance versus a ritualized enhancement process indicate that ancient Egyptian medical texts utilized specific structures to organize and transmit therapeutic prowess, thereby offering an analytical framework for understanding the dimension of healing practice in the Nile Valley.



Rashdan, Taha Ismail Shehata (The National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, Cairo)

Healing, Care, and Vulnerability: Three cases from the New Kingdom, Qubbet el-Hawa (Aswan)

Healing and therapeutic practices in ancient Egypt are often examined through textual and artistic traditions, yet human remains provide a direct record of how individuals experienced, coped with, and survived illness and injury. This study presents three case studies from the recent anthropological campaigns at Qubbet el-Hawa (Aswan), centred on non-adult and adult individuals interred in the New Kingdom (18th Dynasty) tomb QH34ff. The analysis focuses on skeletal evidence for long-term survival, chronic disease, and socially mediated care. Grounded in biosocial models of health and disability, and informed by current theoretical approaches in Egyptian bioarchaeology, these cases shed light on the everyday caregiving practices that shaped lived experiences of illness in the Nile Valley.

The first case concerns an individual with a fully healed femoral fracture, exhibiting extensive remodelling and functional realignment indicative of prolonged survival supported by sustained household assistance. The second case involves advanced femoral necrosis, likely resulting from vascular compromise and chronic biomechanical stress; the degree of remodelling reflects adaptive responses to long-term physical impairment. The third case documents a rare instance of chronic infectious disease—osteomyelitis of the mandible—in a child aged approximately 10–11 years, demonstrating survival with a severe, painful, and debilitating condition.

Collectively, these cases highlight the interplay between biological vulnerability, social support, and cultural perceptions of health within New Kingdom communities. They underscore the significance of non-elite caregiving practices—immobilisation, protection, provisioning, and sustained embodied care—as essential components of health management in ancient Egypt. By integrating osteological evidence with biocultural theory, this study contributes a nuanced bioarchaeology of care perspective to broader discussions on health, disability, and lived experience in the Nile Valley.



Sahu-Hough, Jasmine (Yale University)

Disability and the Dynamics of Healing in Ancient Egypt

This paper seeks to re-examine the dynamics of healing institutions in ancient Egypt by thinking with the concept of disability. Theoretical work on disability in the last few decades within medical sociology, and even more recently in the burgeoning field of disability studies, has rapidly advanced our understanding of disability as a socially constructed phenomenon. Some of the most transformative insights from this work pertain to the role of medicine in defining disability, both in terms of the way medical thought constructs impairment and how the mechanics of power play out in doctor-patient relationships (e.g. Amundson 2000 or Davis 2013). By utilising these analyses to develop a suitable consciousness of the assumptions which govern modern interactions with medicine, I look with fresh eyes upon the abundant evidence from ancient Egyptian healing institutions in order to recover something of their emic responses to impairment.

I approach this examination through a case study on infertility, an impairment which some have characterised as a specifically female disability in ancient times (Edwards 1998; Schipper 2007; Walls 2007; Stahl 2011; Shigley 2017; Belser and Lehmhaus 2017). Delving into the discourses of the body found within the magico-medical papyri from the Middle and New Kingdoms and contextualising this evidence against alternative avenues to healing, such as offerings of fertility figurines, I demonstrate that while Egyptian medical writing sought to systematise impairment, fluidity in the boundaries of knowledge production ultimately enables encounters with healing institutions to act as sites of negotiation around the meanings of impairment.



Salem, Aya (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Alexandria)

Children's Health in Graeco-Roman Alexandria: An Archeoanthropological Study of Newly Excavated Child Burials from the Eastern Necropolis

This study explores the health and life conditions of children in Graeco-Roman Alexandria through an archeoanthropological analysis of approximately 30 infant and child burials, ranging in age from one month to 15 years, recently uncovered in the Eastern Necropolis. These burials provide a unique lens to understand the biological and social realities of childhood in a major Mediterranean urban centre. By applying archeoanthropology, the research combines skeletal data with funerary context to investigate how health, care, and societal perceptions of children were intertwined in this complex urban community.

The skeletal analysis reveals evidence of nutritional deficiencies, infectious diseases, metabolic disorders, and growth disruptions. Particular markers such as enamel hypoplasia, cribra orbitalia, and other paleopathological indicators point to episodes of physiological stress during infancy and early childhood. Interestingly, these biological observations gain added meaning when considered alongside burial arrangements, body positioning, and associated material culture, which together reflect societal attitudes toward child mortality, care practices, and the status of children within the population.

The study highlights significant variations in access to care, suggesting that social and economic factors influenced how childhood illness was experienced and managed. Moreover, the results indicate that even within a single urban necropolis, cultural norms and family practices shaped children's lived experiences of health and vulnerability. Such findings underscore the importance of integrating biological and archaeological evidence to reconstruct the social dimensions of health in antiquity.

Ultimately, this research contributes to broader discussions on health and healing in the Nile Valley, offering a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between biology, culture, and society in the lives of children—arguably one of the most vulnerable groups in the ancient world. By bringing together osteobiographical and funerary data, the study illustrates not only patterns of illness and stress but also how communities responded to and understood childhood health in Graeco-Roman Alexandria.



Salem, Noha Abdelaal (Ain Shams University, Cairo)

Mobile Kits of Healing: The Circulation of Portable Medical Instruments in Roman Egypt

This paper investigates the material and social cultures of medical practice in Roman Egypt by examining the role of portable medical toolkits and their circulation among physicians, assistants, and household networks. Papyrological evidence reveals a mobile mode of therapeutic activity grounded in the continuous movement of instruments, remedies, and expertise. The aim of the study is to shed light on actual practices between individuals and the flexible circulation of medical kits in order to provide better medical care within the limits of available resources.

The paper explores how the circulation of portable medical instruments shaped the social organisation of care in Roman Egypt. Private letters and documentary papyri record the exchange, transport, and routine use of medical equipment, including detailed lists of surgical and therapeutic tools required by practitioners. These sources suggest that practitioners often knew one another personally and were familiar with the instruments each carried, making the sharing and circulation of tools a common and accepted practice. Additional evidence from labelled drug containers further attests to a culture of small, transportable medical ware, reinforcing the material foundations of everyday healing practices.



Samir, Nermeen (Ain Shams University, Cairo)

The Echo of Anatomy in Alexandrian Sculpture: The Votive Foot from El-Ras el-Suda Temple as a Case Study

The votive foot from the El-Ras el-Suda Temple in Alexandria provides a unique lens through which to examine the intersection of anatomical knowledge and visual culture in Roman-period Egypt. Votive body-part offerings were widespread in the Graeco-Roman world, yet the Ras el-Suda foot exhibits exceptional anatomical precision, suggesting that Alexandrian sculptors incorporated systematic anatomical understanding into their work. Alexandria, as the locus of the 3rd-century BCE anatomical revolution under Herophilus and Erasistratus, developed unparalleled knowledge of human musculature, tendons, and skeletal structure, knowledge that appears to have informed contemporary sculptural practice.

This study conducts a detailed morphological analysis of el Ras el-Suda foot, examining proportionality, toe articulation, plantar arch, and the rendering of tendons and soft tissue. These features are then compared with other votive feet from Alexandria and the wider Hellenistic world, demonstrating that Alexandrian examples consistently achieve superior anatomical realism. Such precision indicates that artists possessed both observational expertise and conceptual understanding of the human body that extended beyond traditional artistic canon.

El Ras el-Suda foot thus exemplifies how votive sculpture functioned simultaneously as devotional offering and as a medium reflecting contemporary anatomical knowledge. Its naturalistic execution provides evidence of an artistic environment in which scientific and medical insights were materially translated into sculptural form. By highlighting the anatomical sophistication of Alexandrian votive sculpture, this case study situates Alexandria as a centre where medical science and artistic practice were mutually reinforcing, and traces the diffusion of anatomical realism into the broader Hellenistic world.

Ultimately, el Ras el-Suda foot exemplifies the tangible imprint of Alexandrian anatomical expertise on artistic production, demonstrating that Roman-period votive offerings served not only religious purposes but also as a testament to the city's advanced understanding of human anatomy.



Schiødt, Sofie (Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg)

Written Medicine, Oral Remedies: Professional and Popular Healing Practices in New Kingdom Egypt

The ancient Egyptian medical texts reflect the intellectual production of a well-educated elite, as indicated by their content—encompassing specialized knowledge of the body, its diseases, and etiologies as well as expert knowledge of the divine world—and the very fact that they were written down. This circumstance begs the question: how representative of ancient Egyptian healing practices are the medical texts? In this paper, I will attempt to answer that question by examining healing activities recorded in documentary sources (namely letters) and comparing them with the treatments outlined in the medical texts to establish whether they represent an extension of or a tradition separate from the formalized, professional medical system.

In doing so, I will also determine whether it is possible to gain insight into folk medical practices in Egypt, that is, medicine originating from the beliefs and customs of ordinary people, which typically exists in the oral sphere. Finally, I will discuss possible references to dietetic therapy in the documentary sources, something that is not described in the medical literature. I will focus on the New Kingdom period, a time when medical texts are best attested, which provides an excellent basis for comparison with the documentary sources.



Serrati, Francesco (École normale supérieure – École pratique des hautes études, Paris)

Dry or Wet? A Lexical Approach to Fumigation and Fomentation in Egyptian, Greek, and Coptic

Therapies involving smoke or steam constitute a cornerstone of medical practice in the Nile Valley, persisting from the Pharaonic period through Late Antiquity. While the clinical application of these remedies is well-attested in the archaeological and papyrological record, the linguistic categorization of these treatments reveals a complex evolution.

This paper proposes a diachronic lexical analysis of the terminology used for fumigation and fomentation, tracing the semantic shifts from the indigenous Egyptian medical corpus (e.g., the root k_3p) into the Greek medical lexicon (e.g., the verbs $\thetaυμιάω$ and $καπνίζω$), and finally into Coptic pharmaceutical texts (e.g., the verb $καπνιζε$). By focusing on the dichotomy of “dry” (fumigations) versus “wet” (fomentations), this study investigates how language shaped, and was shaped by, the underlying medical theories of each era.

Specifically, we will examine whether the translation of these concepts in Coptic texts represents a continuation of Pharaonic “vessel theory” – where fumigation was often used to unblock or sanitize internal conduits – or if it reflects an adoption of the Greek humoral emphasis on balancing dry and moist qualities. Through a comparative analysis of prescriptions found in Pharaonic, Greek, and Coptic medical papyri from Egypt, this paper aims to demonstrate how the vocabulary of heating and steaming served as a vehicle for the systematization of healing knowledge.



Unger, Juliane (University of Heidelberg)

Semen of a goddess? - A reexamination of the pathogen C_3C

The ancient Egyptian term C_3C has been attributed with several different meanings and conceptualisations during the course of its investigation. Bendix Ebbell, and Frans Jonckheere both proposed an identification as haematuria caused by parasitic infection, interpreting C_3C as both a symptom and a disease name. Ever since Wolfhart Westendorf's paper on incubus concepts the conceptualisation of C_3C as poisonous semen with a strong connection to the god Seth seems to have been widely accepted, and given preference over the older approach. So here C_3C is understood as a bodily fluid and a pathogen. However, several sources which – it seems – have not been taken into account to their full extent also mention C_3C as originating from female entities. The Late Period medical papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.75+.86 now adds to said sources, challenging the established translation and conceptualisation of this term even further. Starting from this source this paper aims to reexamine the available information concerning C_3C in medical texts and beyond as well as the possibility of diachronic changes concerning the conceptualisation of this term, and to arrive at an interpretation that also takes into account the sources mentioning a female origin.



Warwick, Alexandra CJ, Antony Payton, and Jenefer Metcalfe (University of Manchester)

Subadult health in the Archaeological Survey of Nubia: Preliminary results from Cemetery 2

Background: Cemetery 2 of the Archaeological Survey of Nubia (1907–11) dates to the Early Christian Period and yielded nearly 2,000 human remains, though time constraints limited detailed examination. Only a small proportion of the assemblage was retained for further study, with 133 individuals now housed in the Duckworth Collection, University of Cambridge. Eleven of these individuals are subadults and form the focus of this study, which aims to explore subadult health and mortality in this region and period.

Methods: Age-at-death was estimated using dental eruption and wear alongside established epiphyseal fusion standards rates (the established age ranges at which specific growth plates fuse). Sex estimation was attempted for older subadults using sexually dimorphic traits of the innominate and skull. Dental health was assessed through macroscopic examination of the dentition, mandible, and maxilla for caries, abscesses, and calculus. Skeletal pathology was recorded through visual assessment of osteolytic and osteoblastic activity, vascular changes, congenital variation, bone density, and colour. Differential diagnoses were informed by comparison with published archaeological case studies.

Results: To date, five individuals have been analysed. Cribra orbitalia was present in three individuals, though all lesions were inactive, suggesting episodes of early childhood stressors that had been resolved. Dental health was generally good, with only one small carious lesion observed. One individual exhibited extensive osteolytic lesions indicative of chronic disease. Anatomical variations were identified in three individuals; while unlikely to have affected health, these features may have influenced their retention in the collection.

Conclusion: This study contributes insight into individual subadult health but cannot be readily extrapolated to population-level patterns of health, disease, or care. Nevertheless, evidence suggests early childhood stressors were regularly survived, potentially reflecting supportive community practices. Interpretation is limited by the complexities of subadult bioarchaeology, including skeletal fragility, diagnostic ambiguity, and underrepresentation in archaeological collections.



Zampaki, Theodora (Hellenic Open University)

Greek Medical Knowledge in the Nile Valley: Hippocratic and Galenic Healing in Ibn Riḍwān's "On the Prevention of Bodily Ills in Egypt"

This paper explores Ibn Riḍwān's "On the Prevention of Bodily Ills in Egypt" as a key example of how Greek medical knowledge was adapted to the Egyptian environment. The treatise combines Hippocratic environmental theory - emphasizing air, water, climate, and geography - with Galenic humoral medicine, through which Ibn Riḍwān prescribes diet, regimen, and remedies to maintain bodily equilibrium. He analyses how Nile cycles, seasonal variation, urban conditions, and diet influence health, offering both preventive strategies and practical interventions tailored to local conditions.

By situating classical medical thought in the Nile Valley, the paper highlights the perception of health, healing, and daily well-being in medieval Egypt, showing how individuals and communities engaged with environmental, social, and cultural factors. This study contributes to the dynamic integration of Hippocratic and Galenic medical ideas into the practice of healing in medieval Egypt.



POSTERS



Elgenedy, Walaa Abdel Hameed Ahmed (Fayoum University)

Midwifery (Μαία) in Byzantine Egypt: Roles, Tools, and Wages as Reflected in Greek Documentary Papyri

This study investigates the profession of the midwife in Byzantine Egypt (4th–7th centuries CE) through a systematic analysis of Greek documentary papyri. While previous scholarship has examined midwifery in the broader Greco-Roman and Byzantine medical traditions, the specific functions and socioeconomic status of midwives within the Egyptian context remain underexplored. This research aims to fill this gap by examining papyrus documents—such as legal contracts, household accounts, medical notes, and administrative records—that provide direct or indirect evidence for the activities, practical tools, and remuneration of midwives. The study reconstructs the midwife’s role in childbirth assistance, pregnancy examination, and post-natal care, and compares these findings with contemporary medical treatises. It also analyzes references to tools, medical substances, and practical procedures to shed light on the material culture of midwifery. Additionally, payroll lists and household expenditure records are evaluated to estimate midwives’ wages and economic standing relative to other workers. By integrating textual, socioeconomic, and medical perspectives, the research presents the first focused study of Byzantine Egyptian midwifery grounded in documentary papyrological evidence.



Goda, Dalia Mohamed (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Cairo)

Health and Disease in Tell El-Deir Cemetery during the Late Period: An Anthropological Insight into Medical Practices and Dietary Habits

This paper examines the human skeletal remains uncovered at Tell El-Deir cemetery in New Damietta, dating to the Late Period, with the aim of identifying health indicators and living conditions of the buried population. The assemblage includes men, women, and children, showing clear evidence of malnutrition, bone pathologies, and healed fractures as well as penetrating cranial injuries, reflecting both daily life challenges and possible medical practices.

The study applies a detailed anthropological analysis of the human remains, focusing on morphological features, pathological markers, and trauma-related lesions that may indicate healing or treatment.

The burials are characterized by their simplicity and the absence of funerary goods, suggesting specific social or economic conditions among the local population. Additionally, the presence of fish bones and marine shells highlights a diet strongly influenced by the site's proximity to both the Nile and the Mediterranean.



Ragone, Cosimo (University of California, Berkeley)

Healing as sm_3^c - hrw : Justification through Health in the Ancient Egyptian Afterlife

This research investigates the correlation between health and “justification” in ancient Egyptian conceptions of the afterlife, examining how physical and moral well-being functioned as interconnected criteria for securing vindication before Osiris. Through an analysis of funerary and literary texts, the study explores the relationship between health and the heart (jb) as evidence of moral integrity, and how this relationship contributes to defining the conditions required for accessing the Duat. Particular attention is given to the role of snb as a moral witness: good health is presented as a complementary component of happiness, an inner peace sought both in life and in the afterlife that encompasses physiological vigour, emotional appeasement, and harmony with the divine and the social order. Consequently, health is envisioned as the outcome of living a righteous life. The state of being healthy, framed as evidence of having upheld $m_3^c t$ during life, functions as an essential “exhibit” to be presented in the Judgment Hall of Osiris, which in turn explains the need for spells that ensure well-being in the afterlife. Magical protection granting good health reflects its conceptualization as an ideological model as much as a biological condition, closely linked to a notion of purity that encompasses every aspect of the being and ensures success in the Duat. By examining these dynamics, the research highlights the cultural and ideological significance of health as both a physical and moral construct within the Egyptian vision of the afterlife.



Sabot, Alix (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier)

Parasites and parasitic diseases in ancient Egypt: knowledge, diagnosis, pathologies, and remedies

Nowadays, parasites are responsible for several thousand deaths worldwide each year. In ancient Egypt, the inhabitants of the Nile Valley had to contend with myriad of parasites that populated their country, for example intestinal worms, lice, fleas, ticks, mosquitoes, etc. Parasites and the diseases they caused were part of everyday life for the ancient Egyptians, and the entire population was affected, regardless of social status. The aim of this presentation is to understand the “scientific” knowledge and cultural beliefs of the ancient Egyptians about parasites and parasitic diseases, but also to discuss the means of prevention and treatment used against parasites and the diseases they caused. We will focus primarily on parasitic worms, which are mentioned extensively in Egyptian medical literature, as well as on harmful substances that generate worms, for example C_3C -disease and st.t-pathology. To do this, we will rely on medical papyri for example Ebers, Hearst, and Berlin 3038, which provide a wealth of information on the clinical observations made by priest-physicians on the symptoms of diseases, as well as on the supposed causes of the appearance of parasites on the human body. These same medical papyri will help us further to understand the remedies prescribed against parasites by priest-physicians, who used a wide range of plants and even minerals with vermifuge properties.



