

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Medicine and Healing Practices in Ancient Egypt** *by Rosalie David and Roger Forshaw*

Hardback, 306 pages, 34 colour plates  
Liverpool University Press  
December 2023, ISBN 978-1837644292

The Manchester Method investigates Egyptian mummies by a combination of archaeology and modern science so who better to write a new volume on this topic than Rosalie David and Roger Forshaw of Manchester's KNH Centre for Biomedical Egyptology. The result is a most readable and well-laid out text that is easy to navigate with its liberal use of subheadings, a chronology of Dynasties (5300BC-395AD) that brings clarity to this difficult area, and also details of many papyri.

A classic text is the 1995 work of John Nunn. Exciting new information will now enthuse those who enjoy the current prolific television documentaries. The magazine *Ancient Egypt* (2024;24:20-26) provides a brief and illustrated account of Ancient Egyptian Surgery too in an article by both these authors.

Ancient Egyptian medicine was comprised of empirico-rational and of magico-religious elements. Nowadays the former is mainly the province of co-called orthodox medicine whereas those who seek the magic need to look to religious practitioners so there are some enduring similarities. The former include surgical procedures for wounds and fractures, suturing and crude anaesthesia, ophthalmology and trepanning, amputations, deformities and prostheses. Instruments are reminiscent of those we know from museums of Roman instruments. In our terminology medical treatments included burns and bites, infections, and a wide range of pharmaceuticals.

The ruins of hospital buildings tell us a little of the organisation of healthcare, and the wealth of excavations and the continuing discoveries within tombs with remarkable scripts, enduring for millennia in dramatic colour and interpreted by painstaking logic, will surely reveal lots more. Ground-penetrating radar yields secrets but future technology should yield much more without damaging the objects of study in much the same way that imaging and biochemistry have shed light on mummies when adopting the Manchester Method, which has already achieved significant advances. In Egypt, cremation was frowned upon as it prevented the resurrection of an intact body. Mummification was the elaborate method chosen to prepare and preserve the body for the afterlife.

As before with publications from Manchester, this text prompts further thought and this reviewer hopes that there will be many more stimulating contributions, including the educational tours down the Nile run by the first author, to keep us examining ancient Egypt so that we can learn and advance our own approach to this life and anything that might follow.

**Christopher Gardner-Thorpe**  
February 2024

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