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RESEÑAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS/BOOK REVIEWS

PAULA ALEXANDRA DA SILVA VEIGA, *Health and Medicine in Ancient Egypt: Magic and Science*. BAR International Series 1967. Oxford, Archaeopress, 2009. ii + 80 pp. ISBN 978-1-4073-0500-4. £27.00

When I initially got this book I thought of how nice and useful it would be to acquire a new work concerned with the ancient Egyptian Medicine, examined both through its scientific and magical (or religious) components. However, from the very first pages the feelings of enthusiasm have been suddenly transformed into unpleasant feelings and thoughts related to the great hastiness and carelessness with which this book has been (not written) but compiled. In general the reader gets an immediate impression of scrap-paper notes put unscrupulously together, of hastiness, of careless and erroneous writing, and he/she is bombarded from the very beginning with a great number of flaws and unacceptable errors, the most significant of which we are going to present later on, after a short synopsis of the contents. One gets the impression that although the author knows her subject well, she fails to present it in the most perfect and scientifically approved way. There are, for instance, many errors in both the text and the footnotes, as well as in the Bibliography, that is not only orthographic and syntactic errors (a book published by BAR should have been more thoroughly checked by a native speaker of English, in order to make it more idiomatic!), but also important mistakes concerned with Sciences and Egyptology, as we are going to show (see *infra*). Another principal minus of a book like this is the lack of any Index at the end. For a work like this it is unacceptable not to give any *Index Nominum et Rerum*, as well as an Index of the ancient Egyptian medical terms in transliteration, & c. Yes, the author is indeed aware of her subject (at least superficially), but she definitely fails to intrigue the interest of the reader both due to her innumerable mistakes and perfunctory and desultory way of compiling her book, as well as because of her desiccated and unpleasant style of writing. No matter how one loves something, if he/she fails to present it in the most perfect and irresistible way, the book will be a useless effort! If one compares, for instance, the excellent book on ancient Egyptian Medicine by Dr. John F. Nunn¹ (a book

¹Nunn 1996. On the ancient Egyptian Medicine and its relation to magical practices and rituals, see also Chapter VI in *Μαραβέλια* 2003, i.e.: pp. 163–178.

perfect in every aspect and a serious and very basic introduction to the subject, probably the best until now!), he/she will understand exactly what I mean.

The author begins her book with a Table of Contents, followed by a short Introduction. Chapter I starts the main part of the book with a short presentation of the extant sources of information on the ancient Egyptian Medicine that is *per se* medical, but also magical papyri. Then follows Chapter II, devoted to the notion and the conception of *hk3/magic* and its relation to Medicine in the ancient Egyptian *forma mentis*. Chapter III comes next with a reference to the types of diseases and sicknesses met and discussed in the ancient Egyptian sources. Follows then the extremely short Chapter IV that is dedicated to the ancient Egyptian magico-medical prescriptions and the used ingredients of medications. A short Chapter of Conclusions follows, that does not convince us of the originality of these very conclusions, because we think that the use and the practicality of this book are rather debatable. The book ends with a short Appendix of several Egyptian floral species, whose use in the medico-magical practice was to be noted, although it does not convince us of its usefulness and practicality, since after the well-written book by Dr. Lise Manniche on the ancient Egyptian flora,² we do not think that something more than that needed to be written! Finally, the book ends with a Bibliography that is regrettably incomplete, missing several important works that should be indispensable, instead of some irrelevant and insignificant references, as well as full of mistakes, repetitions of entries, too many website references, orthographic mistakes, & c. Also, the fragmentary and actually copy-and-paste texture of this book, which is characterized by a plethora of paragraph divisions (reminding to the readers a mosaic of reference- or memo-cards, whose content has been unsuccessfully collated), most of them unnecessary, shows its superficial compilation. Having read and studied carefully this book, the reader is left spiritually unsatisfied and actually irritated by the plethora of errors, the facile way of writing and compiling this book, as well as by the unpleasant feeling of asking himself/herself what was the true purpose of writing this very book and if this has something new to offer to both Egyptology and the History of Medicine? I am not at all sure about this and I would leave the matter to the readers to decide ...

At this point I must present some specific remarks. The author of such a book must—at least in principle—be aware (if not awarded a related University Degree) of the basic ancient languages, that is Hellenic and Latin, as well as of the language in which this book is written, that is English in our

²Manniche 1989.

case. Still, the overall sense after studying carefully this book is that this is not the case for the present author! There are unacceptable mistakes, showing a superficial “knowledge” of these very languages, especially the ancient-ones, which is very sad indeed. In p. 61, col. I, § 2, for instance, she fails to admit that the word *pharmakon* (φάρμακον) is purely Hellenic, while she also claims that it means “magic”; this word usually means *medication* and of course metaphorically it can also mean *magic* or *hexing*, but the word *pharmakeia* (φαρμακεία) actually almost always means *magical poisoning* (*veneficium*) and *hexing*;³ on the other hand (cf. p. 58, col. I, § 4 & p. 61, col. I, § 2) what she also claims there about *nēpenthes* (νηπενθές), that is an adjective not a noun in Hellenic and that it is not a *pharmakon*, but characterizes the medicine referred to in Homer’s *Odyssey* (IV: ll. 220–221, which is actually true) are not well expressed, and for sure this word is of Hellenic and not of Latin origin as she falsely claims (the carnivorous *nepenthaceae* plants have nothing to do with this!). Additionally, in several cases the author is using the Portuguese, i.e.: her maternal language instead of English (e.g.: p. 22, col. I, Table: *passim*; pp. 31–32, Table, col. II; p. 39, col. I, § 2; p. 41, col. II, § 5; & c.). Another thing that is egyptologically unacceptable is that the author is using in almost all instances assumed phonetic renderings of the ancient Egyptian words, instead of the correct reference to the hieroglyphic word itself, closely accompanied by its phonetic transliteration (e.g.: p. 28, col. II, § 2: “maat-kheru”, instead of the correct *m3^c-ḫrw*; p. 37, col. I, § 3: “Per-Ankh”, instead of the correct *Pr-^cnh*; p. 37, col. II, § 7: “O pesechef” (*sic!*), instead of the correct *ps^š-kf*; p. 46, col. I, § 3: “senef”, instead of the correct *znf* & “ueseshet”, instead of the correct *ws^št*; p. 63, col. II, § 4: “hemat” & “hesmen”, instead of the correct *ḥm3t* & *ḥsmn*; & c.). Additionally, the appearance of the hieroglyphic words and inscriptions is many times very asymmetrical in relation to the normal text of the book, which is a cause of aesthetically unpleasant feelings (e.g.: book-cover: the word *snb/health*; main title’s page: *idem*; pp. i & 1: the word *ḥk3*; p. 3: the names of the ancient Egyptian seasons & the word *itrw/river*; p. 5: the word *3/disease*; p. 29: the word *wḥdw/pain*; pp. 61–63: *passim*, with words like *irtt/milk*, *swḥt/egg*, *rri/pig*, *rm/fish*, *ḥm3t/salt*, *ḥsmn/natron*; & c.). Finally, important works have not been mentioned in her Bibliography, which shows not only a certain hastiness and carelessness, but also incomplete knowledge of the basic and significant bibliography, which is usually replaced by hasty website references and also

³ Cf. e.g.: Liddel and Scott 1968: art. “φάρμακον”; art. “φαρμακεία”.

some insignificant papers (e.g.: there is not a single reference to the most important *Lexika* of Dr. Rainer Hannig;⁴ no reference to the very significant papers by Dr. Ann–Macy Roth on the *wp-r3/opening of the mouth liturgy*;⁵ no reference to the paper of Prof. Dr. Joris Borghouts on the evil eye of Apophis;⁶ no reference to Dr. Lise Manniche’s book on the ancient Egyptian luxuries, that is closely related to the subject of Veiga’s book);⁷ no reference to the new important work by Drs. A.H. Gordon and C.W. Schwabe on the ancient Egyptian Medicine, Forensics and the probable origin of the ‘*nh*-sign; & c.⁸ (see also the Bibliographical References, *infra*).

The most principal errors are the following (there are actually numerous, but due to the lack of space and time, we present a brief synopsis of only the basic-ones, otherwise we should be writing another article or booklet, which would be highly unpractical!): **1.** p. 29, col. II, § 2: the author fails to refer to divinities related to magic and its conception and transmission other than Heka (*Hk3*), that is Hu (*Hw*) and Sia (*Si3*);⁹ in the last paragraph of the same column, the classification of ancient Egyptian magic in only three and such categories is not complete, neither the only-one; **2.** p. 33, col. II, § 5: Imhotep was not the prototype for Asklepīos, a fact that can be proven very easily if one cares to study the classical monograph of the late Prof. Dr. Alice Walton on his cult, that I have, by the way, translated from English into modern Hellenic;¹⁰ the fact that ancient Hellēnes during the LP identified Asklepīos with Imhotep is another thing; **3.** p. 34, col. I, §§ 2–3: Thoth was not the prototype for the conception of the Hellenic god Hermēs, but for the imaginary figure of Hermēs Trismegistos; additionally the correct is *Corpus Hippocraticum* and not *Corpus “Hippocratum”* (*sic!*); **4.** p. 34, col. II, § 2: Paulos Aiginītēs was a famous Hellenic medical doctor of the Byzantine Period, not of the 7th century BC (*sic!*) and important papers of Prof. Dr. Stephanos Geroulanos, President of the International Hippocratic Foundation, on his work are unacceptably missing from the bibliography of this book;¹¹ **5.** the

⁴ Hannig 2000; 2009.

⁵ Roth 1992; 1993.

⁶ Borghouts 1973.

⁷ Manniche 1999.

⁸ Gordon and Schwabe 2004.

⁹ On this topic, see a full discussion in LÄ III, 1980, cols 1137–151: art. “Magie”.

¹⁰ Walton 1979. On the constellated Asklepīos, see Maravelia 2010. On Imhotep and the deification of wise men in ancient Egypt, cf. Wildung 1977a; 1977b.

¹¹ See e.g.: Geroulanos 2011 and the references to his earlier works therein (mainly in pp. 51–52).

author ought to be more informed about basic scientific notions, i.e.: fundamental notions of Chemistry: e.g.: in p. 21, col. II, § 1 & n. 211, *sodium chlo-rate* has the chemical formula NaClO_3 and not NaCl (which is actually the formula of the common eatable salt that is called *sodium chloride*); additionally, and talking about *natron*, the author gives no reference to the important paper of Dr. A.T. Sandison on natron and its use in Egyptian mummification;¹² furthermore (cf. p. 63, col. II, §§ 2), the author confuses the mineral *calcite* (that is *calcium carbonate*, whose correct chemical formula is CaCO_3) with *calcium hydro{gen}carbonate* (i.e.: actually *calcium bicarbonate*, with chemical formula $\text{Ca}(\text{HCO}_3)_2$, which is also called *calcium hydrogencarbonate*, which in fact does not refer to any known solid compound, but exists only in aqueous solution);¹³ 6. p. 36, col. II, §§ 2 & 6: what is the word “inwindr” (*sic!*) supposed to mean, a kind of false transliteration or maybe the word *inventor* erroneously written (?!); additionally, the teaching of Medicine, according to the author was done by the papyri, but papyri do not and cannot teach, they are just being studied and the teachers teach their contents; 7. p. 42, col. I, § 5: why the author does not refer to a recent paper on the *hypocephali* by M^{me} Brigitte Valée¹⁴ and why the word *hr tp* is not correctly written in transliteration, but rather erroneously as *hr tp* (*sic!*) (?); 8. p. 44, col. II, § 5: the ancient Egyptian word *satisfaction of the spirit* should be correctly written as *h̄tp-k3*, not as *http-k’*; 9. p. 49, cols I & II, §§ 3 & 1 (respectively) there are no “evil smells”, but rather *bad smells*; 10. p. 50, col. I, § 2: the correct medical term in English is *polyuria*; 11. p. 66, col. II, § 2: the correct name of the Venetian physician who visited Egypt during the 16th century should be *Prosper Alpinus* (always in Latin!); 12. p. 68, col. I, § 7: *Papaver rhœas* has nothing to do with opium and its derivatives, but only *Papaver somniferum* L. or *Papaver album*; & c. Finally, it is absolutely wrong to consider that the Egyptians of Antiquity were glorifying death, as the author claims (cf. p. 64, col. II, § 1), as is erroneous to think that their High Culture was death-centered! On the contrary they were glorifying life and that is why they were virtually preoccupied with death and the afterlife, in order just to be able to continue their lives in a Paradise of elation! Additionally, the author is definitely confused when she states that “the Egyptians were the precursors of Medicine, not the Greeks” (cf. p. 65, col. I, § 2). It is not at all a matter of a “cultures’ war” that enters here! The

¹² Sandison 1963.

¹³ See e.g.: Merck Index 2006: № 1657.

¹⁴ Valée 2009.

Egyptians were the initial inventors of Monotheism, they managed to present excellent pre-scientific cosmovisional models through meta-physical allegories and religious metaphors, they enriched the Human Culture with unique and majestic artefacts, as well as the Hellēnes did! However, only the latter were those who first put the firm foundations for proto-scientific and scientific models, consequently they were actually the first to exercise Medicine in a fully scientific way! And let us not forget that the depiction of advanced surgical tools that the author refers to (p. 64, col. II, § 1) come from the temple at Kom Ombo, hence they are dated from the Ptolemaic Period, when the Hellenic Science and Reason prevailed in Egypt, not only in Medicine, but in Astronomy and in Mathematics too (cf. e.g.: the *Carlsberg Papyri*¹⁵). As for the assumed “University Hospitals” that the author is imagining (p. 64, col. II, § 1), with her more than “fertile” imagination, what one could say? It will remain an unproven scenario that bears no textual or other archaeological evidence whatsoever. And behold what the author claims (cf. p. 65, col. I, § 2): “Are not cosmetics, perfumery and all alternative medicines based on energy transference, phytotherapy, animal substances, accompanying prayers in certain treatments, as they did in ancient Egypt?”! What kind of conclusion is that? It is a great pity that an Egyptologist thinks like a superficially educated esoteric lay-person! It is unacceptable to confuse the Science of Medicine with semi-religious treatments, psychological “transference” and alternative “medicines”! What might be this so-called “energy transfer”? *Energy* is a physical quantity that expresses in a rationalistic and mathematically formalized manner the capacity of a physical system to produce work, it can be *kinetic*, *dynamic*, and so on ... but in any case NOT esoteric! Pity that the author has written such nonsensical and esoteric mumbo-jumbo “arguments” in her “conclusions”, for they are absolutely unacceptable and characteristic of the desultory way her book (that regrettably contains countless errors) was made!

This book review is probably the more austere I have been writing in the last decade, however it is only a tribute to scientific honesty and truth, to fair judgment and to consistency, that has nothing to do with personal issues. The fact that actually I have nothing personal against the author of the book must be pointed out, in order to avoid any possible misunderstandings! In the Hellenic Institute of Egyptology we are currently running a Forensic and Egyptological Project to study ten Ptolemaic mummies from Panopolis, in close collaboration with the National Archaeological Museum, the Medical Centre

¹⁵ Lange and Neugebauer 1940.

of Athens, the Athens Forensic Authority and the International Hippocratic Foundation, thus I had the opportunity to show the reviewed book to two very experienced and esteemed medical doctors (whom I should like to thank once more for their comments and expertise offered), one of whom is also a specialist in the History of Medicine: the opinions of both on this book were rather negative, a fact that unequivocally proves that this book review, no matter how strict it is, consists of an undoubtedly fair and scientifically correct short paper, both in terms of Egyptology and of History of Medicine.

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LUCA BOMBARDIERI, *Pietre da Macina, macine per Mulini. Definizione e sviluppo delle tecniche per la macinazione nell'area del Vicino Oriente e del Mediterraneo orientale antico*. BAR International Series 2055. Oxford, Archaeopress, 2010. iii + 251 pp., 166 pp. en láminas. ISBN 978–1–4073–0544–8. £ 61.00.

El presente volumen se propone trazar una reconstrucción del carácter y las líneas de desarrollo de las técnicas ligadas a la molienda de harina de grano en el Antiguo Cercano Oriente. El tema es realmente apasionante si se piensa que como dice Luca Bombardieri, el mismo se refiere a un capítulo de la evolución tecnológica de la humanidad no tratada debidamente.

El volumen está dividido en cuatro partes. La primera es en realidad una introducción (pp.1–15) que integra una historia de los estudios relativos a la técnica de la molienda, un análisis de las formaciones geológicas y los tipos de piedra al alcance del hombre antiguo en la región, y las formas de aprovisionamiento de dichas materias primas.