Psychiatrists in Ancient Egypt¹

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Abstract

Priesthood line in ancient Egypt was the gate to the hidden secrets of many sciences, medicine was one of them. Medicine practitioners in ancient Egypt varied as the ways of healing varied as well. Patient medical condition was main factor in assigning the way of healing, whether clinical or Psychiatric. Since the secular doctor take the responsibility of healing, the psychiatrist takes part in the same mission on the road of recovery. The later was able to assist the patient getting rid of his pain through ritual rites within or near the temple. This study deals with the cure stages that the patient passed with. Three different missions started from those who prepared the patient psychologically and spiritually, the interpreters, those who interpreted visions, and finished with those who were responsible for preparing medicine. The aim of the study is to explore the ancient Egyptian root of the modern medical profession of the psychiatrist and identifies the successively phrases of ancient Egyptian psychiatrist's life, mainly his job nature. This study follows a descriptive and annalistic methodology to achieve its aim. Among the study findings: firstly, the role of ancient Egypt religion as a backbone of this medical issue. Secondly, despite modernity of psychiatrist term but the aim of the practitioners now and before alike.

Keywords: Psychiatrist, Priesthood, Medicine, Interpreter, Ancient Egypt.

Introduction

Priesthood line in ancient Egypt was the gate to the hidden secrets and one step up to the ladder of knowledge since the ancient Egyptians considered ignorance is darkness. The ancient Egyptian priesthood hierarchy was regarded as a well organized, powerful and authorized sect caused a high priest such that one of god Amon's temple acquire a rank after the ruler king(Rawlinson, 1881, pp.433-434). Herodotus, the Greek historian, stated that priesthood was a hereditary mission (Sauneron, 1960, p.43) i.e. the son came after his father's death and take his position; however it was not a common base, but was rooted in traditions.

¹ This paper is extracted from the Master Thesis under the Title of Therapeutic dream as a kind of heeling in Ancient Egypt till the End of the Roman Period, prepared by Mohamed AbedelGhany under the supervision of Professor Engy Elkilany, Nagua Zoier and Dr. Doaa Abdelmotaal, Minia University, 2018.

The organization chart of the priestly system differed from an era to another, one of them classified the sacerdotal class downwards into six positions (high priest- prophets- divine fathers- hierostolistos or responsible of sacred vestment- hieogrammateis or sacred scribes and semi priestly team which include sweepers, fan bearers and shrine bearers) (Rawlinson, 1881, p.434) while another classification Counted six different² ranks (high priest- specialist priest- low rank priest- temporary priest- priestess and administrators) (خزعل) Since medicine was the science enable the ill bearer overcoming his pain, it was sacred. Moreover, this science was passed orally from the father to the son in order to confirm the conception of how that science an esoteric one was (ماري أديب من ٢٠٠٠، من ٢٠٠٠ من ٢٠٠٠ من الماري أديب الماري

Notably, correlated relationship between medicine and religion was not an exception as the Iatro-Mathematic was a product of mixing medicine and astrology at an instance of "the sun and constellations influenced on different parts of the human body due to the place in the heaven which they occupied" (John Kenrick, M.A., 1852, P. 292) Strouhal³ also talk about a coherent relationship between astronomy and temples structure.

There are many studies that have dealt with the subject of the temple sleep in ancient Egypt as:

- Renberg, Gil H. (2017). Where Dreams May Come: Incubation Sanctuaries in the Greco-Roman World. (Vol.1). Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Lang, Philippa. (2013). *Medicine and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Meier, C. A. (2009). Healing Dream and Ritual: Ancient Incubation and Modern Psychotherapy. Switzerland. Daimon Verlag.
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² Note: Dr. El-magdy in the above mentioned reference stated that there are seven ranks of priests, despite the reader will discover that six ranks only were mentioned.

³ For further reading, Strouhal, E., *Life of the Ancient Egyptians*, London 1992.

- Catón, R. (1904). The Harveian Oralion, I. *J-em-hotep and Ancient Egyptian Medicine. Londres, Clay and sons*, 8, 34.
- **Burdett, Henry Charles**. (1893). *Hospitals and Asylums of the World: their Origin, History, Construction, Administration, Management, and Legislation*. Vol. (3). London: J. & A. Churchill.

But referring to a psychological treatment for some ancient Egyptian medical cases was not much researches had dealt with, among them:

-Nasser, Mervat. (December 1987). *Psychiatry in Ancient Egypt*. Bulletin of the Royal Collage of Psychiatrists, Vol. (11).

The process of cure required interlaced relationship between patient and healer. Halioua (Halioua, Bruno, & Ziskind, Bernard, 2005) mentioned four types of cure which probably summarized a semi intact conception of healing art in ancient Egypt.

Deep sleep was one of these types; hence the ancient Egyptians valued the dream as a remedy for illness. Nowadays applications for psychotherapy included also deep sleep practicing under the name of incubation (Pesant, Nicholas & Zadra, Antonio, 2004, pp 489–512).

The sanatorium of Dendera is one of the best examples for that in the Graeco-Roman period, Diseased persons rested in chambers built around the sides of this building awaiting the dreams that brought divine prescriptions for their recovery. Other temples such as Komombo must have housed similar institutions in the Graeco-Roman period.

Among the aims of the study is to explore the ancient Egyptian root of the modern medical profession of psychiatrist. This study follows a descriptive and annalistic methodology to achieve its aims.

1-Medical case and Diagnosis:

Patient examination was a primary step as in Edwin Smith papyri, three estimated results were offered by the healer, possible cured, hard cured and incurable disease⁴. Experienced illness with no origin at that time opened the door for estimation. Failure in facing a disease provoked search for an alternative, based on Religious and magical analyses, such as religious vows (Kidder, D.P., 1854, p. 179).

Believe in magic and its influence was widely known. This believe established on a psychological factors. This issue was demonstrated in a simple intellectual sequence as this thought was not of mere chance. It comes from full faith in a hidden power that controlled and organized the world (ص ، ۱۹۲۰، بول غلیونجی، ۱۹۳۰).

⁴ For further reading, Breasted, James, the Edwin Smith Surgical papyrus, vol. 1, Chicago 1930.

We are now facing abnormal cases. Regular disease never was a problem whereupon not mush effort was needed and this study does not deal with the surgical side of the Egyptian medicine. Regarding the irregular disorders of ultimate causes, it was sometimes seen as god power which could be sorted out through penitential hymens, or incantations (Pinch, Geraldine, 1994, p.138).

Those who found no remedy for their pain, a cure system based on psychological and spiritual approach was erected through analyzing patient's dream content: signs, hints and indications that elucidate and ease the cure process (۳۲۷ سمیر یحیی الجمال ۱۹۹۶، سمیر یحیی الجمال). The coming points explain Psychiatric activity done by a medical hierarchy towards who had nothing within his grasp to do against his malady.

2- Therapists and their varied job titles

Only, the proficient healers were concerned with irremediable diseases because acting opposite the divine regulations of medicine books at that time probably led to a rigorous penalty reached to demise (۲٤٤ ص، ۱۸۹۱ ، أحمد كمال). The deity himself, in some cases, was a sole healer without any other human interferes as goddess Isis had been prepared the drug before she derived out the headache of her father god Re (Bryan, Cyril P,1930,p.40). The following deities Hathor, Thoth and Amon-Re obtained the titles of healers as well, thus justify describing the later as the god who listen to the prayers (Pinch, Geraldine, 1994, p.136).

The ancient Egyptian history gives us some examples for those who were sanctified and had been ascended to deification grade after their death, whilst they were of normal human nature with or without sacerdotal tittles during their lifetime as in case of Imhotep⁵.

Non- Egyptian dream specialists get their chance in practicing their skills inside the Egyptian temples during the Greaco-Roman period (Szpakowska, K., 2011, P.517). The female part in such process of therapeutic dream if existed, restricted to deliver sacred songs to the patient (Wilkinson, Toby A. H., 2007, P.116).

2-1 The priest

As a religious mediator between god and patient, priestly skills were experienced by the healer priest ($^{\circ V}$, $^{\circ}$). The sufferer found his way to the temple intending to involve in a religious medical rite. No wonder when believers spent a night or more near to or inside the temple hopping to receive a massage since they thought it was a prophetic dream from the god (Brier, Bob & Hobbs, Hoyt, 2008, P.43).

⁵ Renberg stated that the cause of assigning Antonius as therapeutic dream sender was relied on his nature as dead since dead were capable of sending dreams to the living see, Renberg, Gil H. (2010). *Hadrian and the Oracles of Antinous*. P.172-173.

The priest grasped the burdens which were carried on their shoulders towards the place wherein they had been resident and towards the people who came into; therefore they had to be prepared spiritually and morally through cleansed their bodies with water and natron as a kind of purification (Budge, Wallis, 1914, p.200). As a difficult may faced the priest in practicing such medical operation, those who could not sleep due to a great pain they suffered, hence hypnosis was a solution (77 199 19

"This cure was discovered at night by the hand of a minister of the temple of goddess who happened to go into the hall in the temple of the city of Tebmut in the secret places of that goddess".⁶

-Peteisis

Peteisis was a healer priest assigned in the 4th year of king Pesmetk II 593 B.C as the bearer of the incense of Amon (Sauneron, Serge, 1960, p.63).

2-2 Interpreter

The interpreter was a person assigned himself and his time for those who need to interpret their dreams during evening. He was a scribe in the rank of temple server beside his great cognition for night phenomena (خزعل الماجدى ، ۱۹۹۹، ص) ٤٢.

⁶ Translation and transliteration according to Birch, S.,(1871) *Medical Papyrus with the Name of Cheops*, p. 63.

El-Gammal (۳۲۸، ۳۲۷، ص. ۱۹۹۱، ص.) makes distinction between three kinds of interpreter:

- A- Interpreter priest: he was originally a priest.
- B- Interpreter doctor: give interpret according to the experience.
- D- Private interpreter: he lived and work outside the temple.

"You are your own best interpreter" that was said by Harris when describing another kind of interpreters as he believed that patient himself is the only person who can interpret and analyze his dream as his psyche revealed what he feel (Harris, L., Eleanor, 1998, p. 146). A Greek term for the interpreter was later given. The epithet of Anirocrites was later dedicated by Greeks to those who devoted their lives for dream interpreting (Shown, Ian / Nicholson, Paul, 2002, p. 87). During later times a sect of people called Enkatochoi, inhabited the sanctuaries and acted as dream interpreters (Renberg, Gil H, 2017, P.731)

It seems that such service of dream interpretation was declared to the publicity by hanging a guide sign on the place where the interpreter resident especially such place was chosen on the crowded road to the god temple (Bernand, Étienne ,1969, PP.436-438). By the time, interpretation techniques were changed as never was fixed (Remler, Pat, 2010, P.55) as Harrison (Harrisson, J. G., 2010, P.127) stated that interpretation techniques were relied on four principles:

- 1- Metonymy.
- 2- Based on the Opposite.
- 3- Based on the perceived symbolic quality of the symbol.
- 4- Literal interpretation.⁷

Among the famous interpreters were:

2- 2-A- Hor- Sebennytos the interpreter

The pastophoras or the gate-keeper Hor- Sebennytos was one of the dream interpreters but not with a cult hierarchy position as his demotic O show (Renberg, Gil H., 2015, P. 233-262) although he was in charge also of the cult of sacred Ibis at Memphis(Bunson, Margaret ,2002, P.171).

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⁷1-The metonymy as "when man sees himself in a dream uncovering his own backside (phwy), bad, he will be an orphan (hr phwy)". 2- The opposite as "when man sees himself in a dream dead, good, it means long life in front of him".3- Symbolically as "when man sees himself in a dream a head being given to him, good, it means opening his mouth to speak".4-Literally as "when man sees himself in a dream eating, good, it means food will come", Gardiner, Alan H., D.Litt., F.B.A., (eds.). (1910). Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift. Vol. (1) .London: Trustees of the British Museum etc.P.13-18.

Beside his regular habit of experiencing nocturnal visions (Gillam, Robyn Adams, & Jacobson, Jeffrey, 2015, P.50) he was a famous seer during the Ptolemaic period as he predicted that king Antiochus would leave Egypt peacefully (Bunson, Margaret, 2002, P.171).

2-2-B- Cretan the interpreter

A limestone stele date back to around 200 BC bearing the following text which refers to a Cretan as an interpreter "I interpreted dreams by the command of god, to good success. A Cretan is the one who interpreter here" (Bernand, Étienne, 1969, P.436).



Fig. (1), Limestone stele of Cretan the interpreter. It was found near the temple of Serapis at Saqqara(Bernand, Étienne,1969, Plate. LXXIX).

2-3 The sorcerer and the magician

A band of special features and qualifications should be guaranteed to be a sorcerer. Body signs, experience a miracle in your life, your birth date relate to an astronomical origin or come from a magic practitioner ancestors, all these considered qualifications (۱۰ ص ۱۹۹۰).

The magicians were divided according to legality into two main types as following: ⁸

- 1- Legal magician, who worked under the control of the government authority.
- 2- Illegal magician, who practiced their skills in secret and were punished against it,

Confident sorcerer existence in a process such incubation was an inevitable issue raise from god hidden name which had been hold from sorcerer's side (Erman, Adolf,1909, p.174).

The ability to give dream interpretation was existed when needed according to sorcerer psychological thoughts($^{\Lambda}$ " سور ۱۹۹۱، سور ۱۹۹۱، سور المولال المولا

2-4 The doctor

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⁸ For more information,

يوليوس جيار، لويس ريتر (١٩٩٦). الطب والتحنيط في عهد الفراعنة ،تعريب أنطون زكرى، الطبعة الثانية مكتبة المدبولي، القاهرة ، مص ٨٢، ص ٨٥ . ،

⁹ For further reading, Shown, Ian / Nicholson, Paul, the British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt, p.86.

-Doctor protection

As long the ancient Egyptian paid a great attention for sick person cure, he did not forget to secure the healer also especially during his magical treatment. Three magical verses or texts in Ebres papyri were devoted to doctor protection against bad reaction may occur to the healer (Halioua, Bruno, & Ziskind, Bernard, 2005). "O, prince Amenhotep son of Hapu, I suffer in my eyes, cause me to be well immediately "this was placed by one of king Pesmetk I daughters 26th Dy. on a statue base found in Karnak, Luxor city (Nunn, John. F., 1996, p. 122).

2-5 The pharmacist

Possibly, the Greek term pharmakon is derived from ancient Egyptian title (Peh-ir-maki) which means "he who brings security" (Halioua, Bruno, & Ziskind, Bernard, 2005). Noteworthy, in harmony this medical rite of therapeutic dream was operated as the sufferer was referred to each specialist in the appropriate stage. The obvious example for pharmacist mission dates back to afterward the dynastic era, Edfu temple laboratory with its walls whereon hieroglyphic writings explain how drugs and holy oils were produced (Sauneron, Serge, 1960, p.168).

2-6- The Deities

Between venerable officials who reached to Sanctity degree and the major deities, Ray stated that both of them acted as healers since Imhotep, Amenhotep son of Hapu, Amon and Sobek were incubation deities (Ray.J.D,1975, P.186). Sometimes, the afflicted suppliant didn't mention the name of his cure god explicitly, whom he recourse to, whilst the place of incubation could not necessarily determine the meant god (Renberg, Gil H.,2017, P.491). The god could cure through various means such as touching, surgery or medicine (T.Compton, Michael ,1998, P. 303).

3-The ancient Egyptian psychological treatment

Cure system in ancient Egypt and its wide steps indicate a considerable difference between OK and NKs'cure approaches. Sometimes this difference became an argument between Egyptologist. A theory refers to the scientific way of healing treatment which became more practiced during the NK than before since not only the fetishism of reciting exorcises but also drug was used (Birch, S., 1960, p. 63). On the contrary, some believes in the importance of exorcism through liturgy aiming to improve patient's mood in parallel to the bodily state (۳۲٦ صر) ۱۹۹٤ (سمیر پیدیی الجمال). Not all the medical cases demanded magical invocation as in simple surgery whereas headache was demanded (Pinch, Geraldine, 1994, p.136). The ancient Egyptian take heed of the psychological impact on the patient's psych. In case of afflicted with dead person evil, who would take the challenge to word off that harm through reciting excrement until evils stop or destroying dead's tomb or deprived him from offerings that offered to him except the magician (Erman, Adolf, 1909, p.168).

Dream was identified by Harries not only as a path way to your unconscious mind but also as a primary link between conscious and unconscious (Harris, L., Eleanor, 1998, p. 144). Haliuoa justified the value of the medical religious rite such as dreams and incantations to achieve firstly, a complete cure degree through the psychological side and secondly, monopolize this mission for a specific faction (Halioua, Bruno, & Ziskind, Bernard, 2005)



Fig. (2): The first page of Ebres papyrus (Bryan, Cyril P.,1930,p.1).

Comment about the above hieratic text

The healer talks about him self " I belong to Re and he said to me: it is who protect him against his enemies, Thoth is his guide, he who makes it possible for the writing to speak, who makes (medical) books, he who gives the power to the learned ones and the doctors in his retinue...." 10

Conclusion

The entangled relationship between medicine, religion and magic could be clearly remarked in the process of incubation as an example. Growing up in a pious ambience deeply rooted the ancient Egyptian religion values inside those who lived with their sacerdotal families. Regardless diversity of priestly functions accompanied with a proper epithet that reflects job nature of every mission yet, the essence was beyond doubt and constant.

The ancient Egyptian spared no efforts to seek the assist of the god every moment in his life especially in his sickness and never been frustrated when facing mysterious bad power bearing in his mind the story of god Horus struggle against god Seth devil is a lifestyle Moreover, the patient should be qualified enough to receive the god massage, that was the mission of the priest who should be a symbol for purity and used to adhering it.

¹⁰ For more translation: Vinel, Abelle / Pialoux, Jacques. *Ancient Egyptian Medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine*. Paper presented at the conference given at the R.E.F.S, Aix-en-Provence, Congress, 2005, October. P.11.

The notion of dream therapy or incubation would not be valid unless there was a natural affinity from ancient Egyptians towards their religion. This affinity paved the way for the ancient Egyptian doctors to play the role of psychiatrist. The epithet of psychiatrist was applied for the second type of interpreters aforementioned as the medical and the psychological awareness abundantly existed, the healer treated the psyche firstly for the body's benefit. As long as he communicated the psyche the body recuperated. Although the clear role of doctor, sorcerer, interpreter, as well as pharmacist in the process of incubation, it can be said that the real healer is the deity because it can't be dispensed with his act while dispensing with the role of before mentioned participants was accepted. Presumably, the epithet of psychiatrist was applied for the second type of interpreters mentioned by El-gammal (Interpreter doctor) as the medical and the psychological awareness abundantly existed

It seems that underage sufferer hadn't the chance to practice such kind of cure as he had no ability to express his vision yet beside his incomplete notion about believe in supernatural. Despite modernity of this medical term of psychiatrist but the aim of the practitioners now and before alike.

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الملخص العربي

كان السلك الكهنوتى فى مصر القديمة بوابة عالم الأسرار وكان الطب أحد تلك الأسرار. تنوعت طرق العلاج فكانت حالة المريض أحيانا المحددة لطريقة العلاج سواء كانت طب سريرى أو نفسى أو مجتمعين حيث الجانب النفسى للمريض لعب دوره فى الشفاء. الدراسة تتناول التعامل النفسى مع المريض داخل المعبد. تبدأ مراسم العلاج بالكاهن الذي يستقبل المريض ويؤهله نفسيا للدخول فى تجربة الحلم وتلقى الاشارات والرسائل من الاله مباشرة فيرشده الى الخلاص من تلك الآلام يليه المفسر ثم ينتهى ذلك الطقس بمعد العقاقير. هدف الدراسة هو محاولة كشف جذور هذا النوع من العلاج وكيف كان يتم إعداد الطبيب النفسى لذلك قديما. منهجية البحث وصفيه تحليلية للوصول إلى هدف الدراسة. من أهم النتائج المترتبة على البحث أولا: بروز دور العقيدة الدينية لدى المصرى القديم والتى مهدت كثيرا لنقبل مثل هذا النوع من العلاج، ثانيا: بالرغم من حداثة ممارسة الطب النفسى إلا أن الهدف قديما وحديثا على حد سواء كان تطبيب المريض.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطبيب النفسى، الكهانة، الطب، المفسر، مصر القديمة.