

Black Britain

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Scientists find evidence proving ancient Egyptians were fathers of modern medicine

Researchers at the University of Manchester have uncovered new evidence which firmly places the origins of modern medicine in ancient Egypt and not Greece.

The researchers from the Knowledge Horizon Centre for Biomedical Egyptology (KNH) examined ancient texts written on papyrus – made from the plant- which ancient Egyptians used to make scrolls. The medical papyri were written at least 3500 years ago, 1000 years before Hippocrates, who it is claimed was the father of medicine, was even born.

The Egyptian papyri contain medical treatments and prescriptions used in ancient Egypt. Professor Rosalie David, Director of the KNH Centre told Black Britain: "The evidence we are finding with the plants is that they did have these very valid remedies from at least 1500BC and almost certainly these were copies of earlier papyri which were also the same, so I think you could put the founding of medical science back in the time of the periods in Egypt."

The papyri from ancient Egypt were discovered in the 19th century and translated from hieroglyphs into European languages, but initially it was believed that the ancient medical texts were just "magical treatments." The team at KNH looked at the evidence from the plants used in ancient medical remedies to check if they were valid as pharmaceutical treatments and compared this with the translations.

The researchers discovered that early assumptions were wrong and that the papyri contained treatments that would be valid for the illnesses they described: "It's showing that very early on, the ancient Egyptians had a very systematic method of treating the sick. It wasn't just spells and random treatment," Professor David said.

African scholars have long identified Imhotep, the Prime Minister of Pharaoh Djoser, the 2nd King of the 3rd Egyptian Dynasty, as the founding father of medicine, including Dr Molefi Kete Asante, John Henrik Clarke and Cheik Anta Diop – who provided substantial anthropological evidence of the black origin of the ancient Egyptians. Professor David told Black Britain:

"Imhotep was a man we know from the Egyptian records as the architect of the first pyramid in Egypt – the step pyramid at Saqqara that goes back to the very beginnings of their history to about 2600 BC. In Egyptology we've always thought of Imhotep as an architect, the people later in Egyptian history and indeed the Greeks, regarded him as the father of medical science... He probably was the founder of medical science in Egypt right back at the time when they were building the earliest pyramids."

Many of the remedies used by the ancient Egyptians are used today, although the active ingredients are synthetically produced. However, Professor David told Black Britain that there is a possibility that the remedies could be made using natural ingredients.

Researchers found 70 per cent of the ingredients mentioned in the Egyptian papyri that are still in use in modern medicine. The KNH Centre is in partnership with modern Egyptians

who have a scheme in Sinai where they are growing medicinal plants according to the information they are given by the Bedouin living there. These are used to make traditional medicines.

“What we are trying to do is to see whether the very ancient medicine in Egypt traces through to this preserved traditional medicine and maybe through to the modern times,” Professor David said. However, for many of the prescriptions, researchers have been unable to identify the ingredients, because they cannot be accurate about the translation of the ingredients. “We may be able to find plants that fill those gaps as the work goes on,” she said.

The ancient Egyptians’ traditional form of medicine may yet revolutionise the medical industry if holistic medicines can be reproduced without costly synthetic materials produced by giant drug companies. “It opens up possibilities for all sorts of exploration, so we think it’s really exciting,” Professor David told Black Britain.

In his book *Exiled Egyptians*, Moustafa Gadalla argues that substantial numbers of ancient Egyptians migrated south to escape the incessant Islamic Jihads which began in the 11th century B.C. Many of them travelled to western Africa, to modern day Sudan, to Benin City in Nigeria, modern day Ghana, Mali, eastern Guinea and beyond. These descendants of ancient Egyptians are today scattered across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Professor David told Black Britain: “There are interesting possibilities of them moving perhaps to the south, when there were periods of trouble in Egypt. One of the other interesting things that we are doing with the plants is that the links have always been looked back within Mediterranean evidence, but we want to look at the African evidence as well and see if African plants were used in these treatments and whether that knowledge had come from the south came northwards up the Nile.”