

Aegyptus et Pannonia VIII.



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Aegyptus et Pannonia VIII.

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“Plants for Health from Ancient Egypt to Present Day” Conference and the HEFS AEC

DR. HEDVIG GYŐRY PHD
HEFT AEC president

After the realization of the 2019 mummy conference, the need arose to discuss the new trends, methodologies and achievements in ancient materia medica from a phytotherapeutic point of view and to disseminate the results achieved by our in-depth research. With this conference, we also wanted to explore how many different ways there are to approach ancient plants and medicine, also from historical, cultural, religious, ethnographic and pharmacological points of view, and to compare it with other related fields. We also wanted to draw attention to other areas of research into plants that maintain and improve health. In this way, contemporary and historical treatments were juxtaposed, Egyptian, Hittite, Greek, Roman and later European herbal medicine, to mention only the most important regions studied in these proceedings. The conference was held in two languages, English and Hungarian, but all the articles in the proceedings are English. We hope that this way we can bring these issues to the attention of as many people as possible.

This time we have chosen to discuss the plants used for health problems. A significant proportion of the substances in ancient Egyptian prescriptions are of plant origin. Reviewing and studying their effects and data can also provide new opportunities for the current pharmacopoeia. Our group of doctors thought that there was a lot of new knowledge to be gained in this area worldwide, and that the knowledge of plants is becoming increasingly important, if we only think of the research into pathogens, many of which have adapted to synthetic drugs. We need thus new materials to use to eliminate them, and earlier medical practices may lead to the discovery of new active substances that are important for people today. Knowledge of these active ingredients makes it possible to apply these drugs as new medicines in a consistent quantity and quality. On the other hand, there are also many places where conditions do not allow the use of drugs produced by modern technology, but nature can help patients with its often hidden treasures. In addition to pharmacological research, folk remedies studied by ethnomedicine

and historical medical research play an essential role in getting to know them.

The HEFS AEC partly organizes its activities in cooperation with other organizations – the above-mentioned international workshop of the Nephthys project in 2022 was co-organized by the Hungarian Natural History Museum, while this very conference took place in partnership with the HNM Semmelweis Museum of Medical History, whose members gave several lectures on historical medicine and modern ethnomedicine, and where a special chamber exhibition would have welcomed the participants in honour of the conference, if the COVID had not prevented the organization of a face-to-face meeting. Nevertheless, we were able to offer the possibility of discussions and consultations in special virtual chambers, allowing the exchange of professional experiences.

The HEFS AEC has published these new proceedings, this time in two volumes (Aegyptus et Pannonia VII-VIII), containing more than half of the papers presented at the conference: “Plants for Health from Ancient Egypt to Present Day”. As we focused on our main research topic in the Medical Research Group of the HEFC Ancient Egyptian Committee, we wondered what the scientific community thought about the ancient Egyptian use of plants in various fields of human and natural sciences, the continuity of related knowledge, and the implications and possibilities of these ancient practices for people today. We also wanted to present the ideas we had developed and the results we had achieved in the professional field, and to provide an opportunity for specialists to discuss different topics. In terms of the structure of the proceedings, we have returned to the previous method of the series, so that the articles are once again listed in alphabetical order of authors, rather than by subjects

THE HEFS ANCIENT EGYPTIAN COMMITTEE AND THE MEDICAL HISTORY

The HEFS, which has been operating since 1995, carries out several activities in the tradition of its earlier activities: the general programs focus on the last five thousand years, selecting interesting and important topics, while the work of the AEC is mainly directed in three directions. An important objective is (1) the cultural transmission and dissemination of knowledge about ancient Egyptian culture through lectures and public meetings for interested adults, also in the framework of the Hungexpo. We also organise (2) artistic and handicraft activities, workshops accompanied by discussions on various topics with children, launching every year a fine arts competition (drawing/painting), the results of which will be exhibited for the third time in January 2023 in the Deák 17 Children’s and Youth Art Gallery of the Budapest History Museum; and (3) following scientific and scholarly research into the use of ancient objects, human and animal remains – including an international event of the Nephthys Project in 2022 – and medical history, concentrated on phytotherapy and surgery.

As far as our material at the conference is concerned, we present here as a starting point our research focused primarily on the use of plants in surgery, if only because several members of the group are doctors from the Department of Surgical Research and Techniques at the Faculty of Medicine in Semmelweis University, Budapest. The first scientific results of this new direction are published of today's surgical tools and materials. Thus our conference papers focus on the ancient Egyptian surgery from the point of view of the application of plants in these volumes, but research is also being carried out in other areas. Firstly we present research in the direction that is mainly focused on comparative analysis, directed towards the ancestors surgical kit, the plant materials used for wound care and the general knowledge of ancient Egyptian surgeons, with a view to the surgical culture of other peoples and periods or the use of pharmacognostic knowledge. We have also considered it essential to investigate into possible reasons for the use of plants, which may allow us to consider modern phytotherapeutic applications.

Two other areas of our phytotherapy research are also represented in these volumes. The origin and treatment of various diseases throughout the world, and especially in ancient Egypt, is also an interesting topic. In this direction, we have chosen to focus one disease in particular. Diabetes is one of the most widespread diseases of our time, and we have chosen to study its ancient treatment methods. In this case, as in the case of surgery, we have compared several cultures to find out the ancient knowledge and problem-solving methods, and have pointed out herbs that are officially used in the world, or in Hungary.

Another problem of our time, seemingly far removed from the history of medicine, is the conservation and preservation of biodiversity, which is affected not only by climate change and other natural factors, but also by human activity. This phenomenon can be traced back even to ancient Egypt, although the process has accelerated in the last hundred years. One of our topics in this respect is presented here, showing how an ancient curiosity herb has become a plant of large-scale production in the 21st century, and saving this way the species from extinction.

A new direction of the group is the study of the history of Hungarian phytotherapy in partnership with the Semmelweis Museum for Medical History. We have just taken the first steps in this direction, but we can already say that the classical Roman authors, and the ancient Egyptian knowledge they transmitted also played an important role in official medical practice and influenced folk medicine in our country. It seems that the herbaria published in Hungarian language played a key role in this process.

The interweaving of contemporary and historical issues characterizes many of the articles in the volumes. At the same time, mutual influences, shifts of emphasis and reinterpretations within the ancient world, or elements of later historical periods that reach into the past or present, play a prominent role. In this field, it is essential to collect and examine the sources from a new perspective in order to obtain a clearer picture of certain details of the past. Historical, artistic, literary, religious, economic, museological, pharmaceutical, phytotherapeutic, ethnobotanical or even chemical points of view appear in individual articles. It has been proven that the ingredients listed in many of the ancient Egyptian recipes studied so far can still be used as effective medicines today.

This volume contains 16 contributions on the role of drug use in different periods. There are chapters on the reconstruction of some ancient Egyptian remedies, on the ancient method prescribed for the preparation of antjw ointment, or on the preparation and action of kyphi, and pelargonium, traced through biochemical and experimental research; Others are devoted to the materia medica used in Hungary over the centuries, or to the comparison of contemporary Egyptian folk medicine and pharaonic materia medica in the field of gynaecology; another is devoted to studies on the possible identification of magical Egyptian plant names with a dominant connection to the moon, or to the ritual and non-ritual use of some plant substances with religious names in Egypt. Others relate to the popular treatment of diseases such as tuberculosis and cholera in Hungary, or which edible plants have been identified in Coptic medical therapies. Sedative plants are also featured in the current volume, and a plant closely associated with a butterfly is discussed. Another article focuses on the pomegranate, with its many meanings as a symbol of fertility and female power. Yet another focuses on the worldwide surgical use of plants, while others discuss the balance between practical and religious beliefs in the use of medicinal plants. The pop-up exhibition for the conference is briefly introduced, hinting at the museological aspect of medical history.

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We would also like to express our gratitude to all those colleagues and volunteers who have shared their expertise and offered their generosity by providing scientific or linguistic proofreading for these volumes.

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THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN EGYPT: ANCIENT AND MODERN HERBAL APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

The ancient Egyptian medical texts provide us with specialised cases focusing on the female part of the population. They mention various types of problems related to women's diseases but also conception, pregnancy and birth. The paper intends to compare the preserved ancient texts with methods of traditional herbal treatments used in Egypt today.

KEYWORDS: Egypt, women, herbal medicine, herbs

INTRODUCTION

Many aspects of Egyptian culture provide us with traces of the continuity of traditions. These have been shown especially by Egyptian scholars, such as Fayza Haikal, who has identified ancient Egyptian traces in popular culture, funerary customs, songs and stories and published a number of articles on this subject,¹ or Ahmad Youssef, who has found ancient traces in the modern Egyptian language, including specific expressions and phrases not used in other Arabic dialects.² Focusing on healing traditions, continuity can be seen, for instance, in the use of healing water, i.e. water that gained special properties through magic when it was poured over a *cippi* stela covered with magical texts in ancient times or to a special bowl (in Arabic *ṭāsit el-khadda*) covered with magical or Quranic texts from medieval times until modern Egypt.³ The question remains whether a similar continuity of tradition can be traced in healing with plants. Such a study subject is naturally rather wide and requires the study of ancient Egyptian, Coptic, early medieval, modern and contemporary Arabic

1 HAIKAL 2011 with further bibliography of her works on the subject.

2 YOUSSEF 2003; see also e.g. HAIKAL 1999.

3 JANÁK – MEGAHED – VYMAZALOVÁ 2011.

medical treatises. This is beyond the capacity of a single scholar and one short paper. Therefore, the aim of this article is to take an initial step, focusing on ancient as well as contemporary Egyptian herbal treatments, but leaving several millennia of the development of the tradition aside for the moment.

The subject of women's medicine has been chosen for this paper because traditions and customs are particularly significant in this specific field of medicine. Naturally, women formed about half of the population; in addition to the usual dangers of living in antiquity, they were at a higher risk during pregnancies, births and postnatal periods.⁴ Almost every woman in all times of history knew the fear of infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth but also unwanted pregnancy. We presume that in ancient Egypt as well as in many other cultures of the world, this field was often in the hands of women themselves, the more experienced ones who helped their family and friends, midwives and herbalists, with all their informal knowledge and also prejudice.⁵

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sources on the ancient Egyptian treatment of women include several medical papyri, especially the Kahun gynaecological papyrus,⁶ but also the papyri from the Ramesseum, pEbers, pBerlin 3038, pCarlsberg VIII as well as magical medical texts on pLondon BM 10059 and pBerlin 3027.⁷ The recently identified gynaecological text on pBrooklyn 47.218.75+.86 (see the paper of Juliane Unger in this volume) is not yet fully published, and thus it has not been included in this study. For contemporary Egyptian sources, we use the works of Amin El-Hadary Zaki El-Hadary, who has published the most complete encyclopaedia of herbs and summarised the recommendations for their use in healing all kinds of medical conditions in modern period.⁸

PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

Pregnancy was one of the most frequent subjects in the ancient medical papyri, including its various aspects such as conception support or

4 STROUHAL 1992.

5 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 97-203.

6 The best-known gynaecological text on pKahun, see above all GRIFFITH 1898; DEINES – GRAPOW – WESTENDORF 1958; STEVENS 1975; BARDINET 1995, 221–229, 437–434; WESTENDORF 1999, 412-417, 425-426, 429-435; COLLIER – QUIRKE 2004, 58-64; STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 98-99, 107–112.

7 For an overview of these texts, see also STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 97-102. For their translations, see 107-135. See also BARDINET 1995; WESTENDORF 1999, 411-446, and an overview of preserved medical texts: WESTENDORF 1999, 6-79.

8 EL-HADARY 2000; EL-HADARY 2003; EL-HADARY 2007. The author would like to thank Mohamed Megahed for his help with reading and translating the Arabic publications for this article.

prevention, foetal protection, and the recovery after childbirth or miscarriage. A fragmentary prescription for conception support can be found in pKahun, which mentioned a mixture of herb decoction (in Egyptian *ḥs3*), incense (Eg. *sntr*), dates (Eg. *bnr*) and milk fat boiled with oil and sweet beer, and the text continued with fumigation; the latter part of the texts is badly preserved (pKahun 20).⁹ In the modern works of El-Hadary, referring to ancient texts, we can find recommendations to consume Romaine lettuce (Ar. *khas*) by both men and women to increase fertility.¹⁰ (In ancient Egypt, lettuce was associated with the god Min and with fertility.¹¹) In addition, women were recommended to take a teaspoon of baby wheat germ oil (Ar. *zeit ganeen el-amḥ*) twice a day for a month or a teaspoon of ginseng with honey to support conception.¹²

If the opposite – birth control – was desired in ancient times, tampons soaked in contraceptive mixtures were used as attested by the texts.¹³ A tampon could have been soaked in a liquid with crocodile dung (pKahun 21),¹⁴ in honey with natron (pKahun 22),¹⁵ or in honey with dates, carob (Eg. *ḏbr:t*) and an unknown part of acacia (Eg. *ḳ33 n šnd.t*) (pEbers 783).¹⁶

The modern Egyptian tradition recommends a tampon with castor oil (Ar. *zeit el-kharwa*) as a means of contraception, and El-Hadary again acknowledges the ancient use of this oil.¹⁷ Castor oil is not attested in this particular use in extant ancient texts, but it was used as a laxative and for the treatment of skin, wounds and the head.¹⁸

During pregnancy, purely magical means were used in ancient times to prevent miscarriage and premature birth, sometimes in combination with other remedies. The spells in the magico-medical pLondon invoked the help of the gods of Heliopolis, together with god Anubis and goddess Tait, and sometimes recommended that a tampon be inserted into the rectum and other times into the vagina (pLondon 40–42, 45),¹⁹ in a clear reference to the “*knot of Isis*”, the

9 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 110, 156.

10 EL-HADARY 2003, 291.

11 Eg. *ḳw, ḳ3*, see GERMER 1980, 85-87; GERMER 1985, 185; MANNICHE 1993, 112-114; GERMER 2002, 126-128; GERMER 2008, 40-41, 278-280.

12 EL-HADARY 2003, 294, 296.

13 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 157-158.

14 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 110, 157

15 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 110, 157-158.

16 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 117, 158. The *ḳ33*-part of the acacia is sometimes identified as a bark, but such identification is not certain – see e.g. GERMER 2008, 137-138. For the acacia and its medicinal use, see GERMER 2008, 135-139, 176-178; also, MANNICHE 1993, 65-67.

17 EL-HADARY 2003, 542.

18 GERMER 2008, 332-333.

19 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 123-124, 165-167.

protective amulet tampon used by this goddess to protect her son Horus in her uterus.

Despite the improvement in medical science since the antiquity, not even modern medicine has effective means in this matter, and miscarriage and stillbirth are still rather common. A large percentage of pregnancies end prematurely, and women often use the old wives' tales to help to protect their unborn child. In the Egyptian herbal practice of today, it is recommended that pregnancy be improved by eating a whole Romaine lettuce every day, taking a teaspoon of baby wheat germ oil after breakfast every day,²⁰ and eating a quarter of a kilo of green fava beans (Ar. *el-foul el-heraty*), which are said to stabilise the pregnancy in the first trimester.²¹ Other plants are, on the other hand, best to be avoided because they can be harmful during pregnancy. According to El-Hadary, these include among others anise (Ar. *yansoun*), rosemary (Ar. *ikleel el-gabal*), sesame (Ar. *simsim*), but also dates (Ar. *balah*) as well as plants that are beneficial for the heart and blood circulation, such as oleander (Ar. *el-dafila*), colocynt (Ar. *el-hanzal*) and squill (Ar. *basal el-'anşal*).²²

A variety of remedies listed in ancient texts were beneficial for the uterus, helping it to clean, recover and contract. Thus, we can find here prescriptions for the preparation of medicinal mixtures of oil with sorghum (Eg. *mimi*) and yellow nutsedge (Eg. *giw*²³), which helped the uterus to contract after birth (pEbers 820),²⁴ or also honey with hemp (?) (Eg. *šmšm.t*²⁵) (pEbers 821).²⁶ Other times, the womb was to be washed with various substances, such as strained milk with incense and celery (Eg. *m3tt*) (pEbers 822),²⁷ milk with carob, honey and wild carrot (Eg. *hpr-wr*) (pEbers 823),²⁸ and the juice of Potamogeton (?) (*nš3*²⁹) (pEbers 825).³⁰ Besides, some recipes in this group contain plants unknown to us, like the remedies that consist of water and the *mst3*-drink (pEbers 824),³¹

20 EL-HADARY 2003, 532-534.

21 EL-HADARY 2003, 531-532.

22 For the list of plants dangerous during pregnancy, see EL-HADARY 2003, 119-138.

23 For the uncertain identification of the *giw*-plant and for its medicinal uses, see GERMER 2008, 146-148.

24 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 121, 179.

25 The identification of this plant name is uncertain – see for instance MANNICHE 1993, 82-83; GERMER 2008, 132-133.

26 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 121, 179.

27 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 121, 179.

28 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 121, 179.

29 The identification of the *nš3*-plant is uncertain – see MANNICHE 1993, 138; GERMER 2008, 90.

30 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 122, 179.

31 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 121, 179.

ktkt-plant (pEbers 826),³² or *ni3i3*-plant (pEbers 827).³³

The modern Egyptian herbal treatise does not provide direct parallels to ancient remedies, but it recommends a general treatment to the uterus, its infections and bleeding. Even though El-Hadary does not specify the particular medical conditions in his work, his recommendations may generally be applied to various conditions including those after childbirth.

To calm the uterus, El-Hadary recommends a teaspoon of castor oil with milk or milk-tea once a day before breakfast.³⁴ For bleeding uterus, he recommends a tea infused with a tablespoon of the flowers, skin or root of a pomegranate in the morning or at night.³⁵ The same condition can also be treated with herbal tea from a tablespoon of a mixture of *Alchemilla vulgaris* (Ar. *regl el-'asad*), sage (Ar. *marmareyia*) and dragon blood tree (Ar. *damm el-akhawein*) with honey or sugar, which should be drunk twice a day after food.³⁶ The consumption of green celery (Ar. *karafs*) is recommended for healing the uterus in general.³⁷ The infection of the uterus can be treated with washing or drinking recommended plant-based remedies. A handful of crushed camomile (Ar. *babong*) should be boiled in a litre of water and drunk in the amount of two cups a day.³⁸ Other times, twenty crushed juniper berries (Ar. *'ar'ar*) can be boiled in water and drunk or used to wash the uterus once a day for a month.³⁹ Another wash is prepared from a handful of juniper berries boiled in water⁴⁰ or a handful of *Malva pusilla* (Ar. *khubeiza*) boiled in water and used as douche spray.⁴¹ Two litres of boiled water can also be mixed with the juice of one lemon (Ar. *lamoun adalyia* or *lamoun banzaheer*).⁴² Other times, the same amount of water can be boiled with sage or crushed quince seeds (Ar. *el-safargel*), sieved, cooled and applied as a wash five to eight times a day or as a bath for half an hour.⁴³

Other drinks for infections in the uterus can be made in the form of

32 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 122, 180. For the *ktkt*-plant and its medicinal uses, see GERMER 2008, 143.

33 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 122, 180. For the *ni3i3*-plant and its medicinal uses, see GERMER 2008, 81-82.

34 EL-HADARY 2003, 291.

35 EL-HADARY 2003, 290.

36 EL-HADARY 2003, 663.

37 EL-HADARY 2007, 572.

38 EL-HADARY 2003, 665.

39 EL-HADARY 2003, 289-290.

40 EL-HADARY 2007, 575-576.

41 EL-HADARY 2007, 573-574.

42 EL-HADARY 2007, 577.

43 EL-HADARY 2007, 579, 581.

herbal tea from hot water and plant ingredients, usually left to infuse for five to ten minutes before drinking. Tea made from a tablespoon of rosemary with honey or sugar should be drunk twice a day for a month.⁴⁴ Another mixture, consisting of a tablespoon of willow bark (Ar. *sefsaf*) with honey or sugar, should be drunk twice a day,⁴⁵ which also applies to water boiled for a minute with a teaspoon of crushed yellow sweet clover (Ar. *ḥanduquq ḥaqli*) and Plantago (Ar. *lesan el-ḥaml el-senani*).⁴⁶

Another composite mixture of crushed oak bark (Ar. *el-baloot*), camomile flowers, marjoram (Ar. *bardaḡosh*) and rosemary can be used in various ways: a tablespoon can be infused in a cup of hot water or boiled in the water for two to three minutes, after which honey or sugar should be added – this tea should be drunk once a day after food either for a week or yet another week after recovery. A bath can be prepared from a handful of the mixture boiled for five to ten minutes in two litres of water and sieved; this can also be used to wash multiple times during the day even after recovery.⁴⁷

PAINS AND BLOOD-RELATED CONDITIONS

Apart from pregnancy, childbirth, and the conditions associated with them, the ancient texts contain descriptions of the treatment of various gynaecological problems. These are often incompletely preserved, which complicates our understanding and interpretation of these cases. The cases include pains, cramps, swelling, fever, bleeding and menstrual disorders, but also urinary problems and conditions that we cannot translate today.⁴⁸ The causes of these problems are usually not given and were probably not fully understood in antiquity.

According to the ancient texts, the pains could occur in different parts of the body – not only in the pubic region but also in the eyes, ears, neck, or legs and feet, and all these were said to be associated with the uterus.⁴⁹ It is impossible today to estimate the possible causes, and it may seem strange that such pains could be related to the uterus. The ancient Egyptians may have included in this group some types of pains that we would not consider specific for females in our time.

Some of the pains can also be assigned to pregnancy, when women often suffer from swellings of the lower limbs, constipation, and other conditions.

44 EL-HADARY 2007, 571.

45 EL-HADARY 2007, 572-573.

46 EL-HADARY 2007, 574-575.

47 EL-HADARY 2007, 582-584.

48 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 140-154.

49 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 140-147.

In these cases, bandages with myrrh (Eg. *ḥntiw*⁵⁰) or mud applied on legs could have been beneficial for leg pain relief (pKahun 12, pKahun 7),⁵¹ and a cup of milk boiled with tiger nuts (Eg. *wḥ*) and the yet unidentified *ššš*-seeds⁵² for easing evacuation (pKahun 3).⁵³

In addition, most women know all kinds of pains associated with the menstrual cycle, such as headaches, light and sound sensitivity, toothaches, and also pains of the lower limbs, besides the more usual pain in the lower belly and back. Whether these pains may have been the subject in the preserved texts cannot be certain today. Disorders of menstrual cycle, however, constituted another group of cases in the ancient texts, which focused on the bleeding, its stagnation or its removal. The precise descriptions of the conditions are not given in the texts, but we can presume that these cases refer to various problems in the menstrual cycle.⁵⁴

In the case of blood stagnation (Eg. *šnw*), a combination of a drink, wash and fumigation was recommended in the ancient texts. The drink was prepared from sweet beer with oil and the *w3m*-plant⁵⁵ for four days; a mixture made of cedar oil (Eg. *sf.t*),⁵⁶ cumin (Eg. *tpnm*), myrrh (Eg. *ḥntiw*) and galenite (Eg. *msdm.t*) was to be applied regularly, followed by the wash of oil with the *msdr-ḥdr.t*-plant⁵⁷ when bleeding started; in addition, the treatment included fumigation of the intimate parts with myrrh and incense⁵⁸ (pSmith verso 20).⁵⁹ Another case dedicated to the absence of menstruation mentions milk boiled with bone marrow, with the addition of juniper berries (Eg. *prt wḥn*), cumin, incense and tiger nuts (Eg. *wḥ*) (pEbers 833).⁶⁰ Irregular bleeding and pain in one side of the pubic region can be treated with a bandage with a mixture of mashed onion (Eg. *ḥdw*),⁶¹ melon (Eg. *šbt*) and cedar sawdust (Eg. *ws.t n.t ḥš*) (pEbers 832).⁶²

Modern remedies for increasing the bleeding include a drink of water or milk with a tablespoon of arugula juice (Ar. *gargeer*) or in another case

50 For the identification of the *ḥntiw*-plant, see above all GERMER 2008, 43-45.

51 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 108-109, 142-143.

52 The identification of the *ššš*-plant and seeds is uncertain – see above all GERMER 2008, 127-129.

53 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 107, 142.

54 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 147-149.

55 For this unidentified plant and its medicinal uses, see GERMER 2008, 14-50.

56 For the *sf.t* as a resinous product of cedar, see GERMER 2002, 63-66; GERMER 2008, 48.

57 The name of this plant can be translated as “*ear of a hyena*”, see GERMER 2008, 80.

58 For the *ḥntiw* and *snr* (“myrrh” and “incense”), see also GERMER 2002, 94-102.

59 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 147-148.

60 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 122-123, 149.

61 The natural antibiotic, see MANNICHE 1993, 69; GERMER 2002, 114-118; GERMER 2008, 96-98.

62 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 122, 149.

anise, which should be drunk two to three times a day.⁶³

On the other hand, the cases to “remove” (Eg. *ith*) bleeding in the ancient texts may have referred to the aims to decrease or stop it. They recommended several mixtures for a douche spray, including wine mixed with onion (pEbers 828),⁶⁴ another time oil, moringa oil (Eg. *b3k*), acacia leaves, pea seeds (Eg. *pr.t thw3*), the *p3h-sry.t*-plant and honey (pEbers 829),⁶⁵ and fennel (Eg. *bsbs*) with honey, sweet beer and milk fat (pEbers 830).⁶⁶

El-Hadary, on the other hand, recommends herbal drinks to decrease or stop the bleeding. One is made of juniper boiled in water, another one of orchis (Ar. *saḥleb*) boiled in water with sugar, or a tea from a tablespoon of camomile flowers, or lime tree flowers (Ar. *tilio*), boiled together with marjoram and hyssop flowers (Ar. *zoofa*). This should be drunk twice a day a week before the period.⁶⁷

For the period in general, irregular cycle and pains, the modern remedies include a herbal tea infused with a teaspoon of parsley (Ar. *ba`qdunis*) or mint (Ar. *na`na`*), which should be drunk twice or three times a day,⁶⁸ or an ointment that should be rubbed onto the belly, made of caraway seed oil (Ar. *karawaya*) either by itself or combined with olive oil and white wine and boiled.⁶⁹ For painful ovaries, one can drink a tea infused with a teaspoon of camomile twice a day.⁷⁰

GENERAL GYNAECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

For the more general gynaecological problems, the ancient texts use several specific expressions, which we do not precisely understand today. The cases do not describe the symptoms clearly enough to state a modern diagnosis. In addition, we cannot be sure to what extent the ancient Egyptians understood the causes of these problems. According to them, pains in the eyes and neck were somehow associated with the uterus,⁷¹ the condition called the *ti3w* of the uterus showed in the teeth,⁷² *kʿhw* and *kmtw* in the legs and

63 EL-HADARY 2003, 561.

64 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 122, 149.

65 STROUHAL, VACHALA, VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 122, 149.

66 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 122, 149.

67 EL-HADARY 2003, 561-562.

68 EL-HADARY 2003, 560-561.

69 EL-HADARY 2003, 560-561.

70 EL-HADARY 2003, 108.

71 pKahun 1, STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 107, 142.

72 pKahun 5, pKahun 24, pKahun 33, STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 108, 110, 112, 144-145.

abdomen,⁷³ *nriw* in the pubic region and also ears,⁷⁴ whereas *3mmw* showed as crumps.⁷⁵ To fight them, women were recommended to eat liver, fumigate their painful places, drink and vomit, and consume mixtures of pine nuts and certain fruits.⁷⁶ For general pains, a douche spray was prepared from milk, acacia leaves and the *ksnty* ingredient (pEbers 815),⁷⁷ or water, oil, acacia leaves and dates (pEbers 816).⁷⁸

The modern treatise of El-Hadary includes remedies for vaginal infections, such as a wash with hot water and vinegar,⁷⁹ and other washes that were prepared in the same manner and from the same herbs as in the case of the uterus infections mentioned above, namely quince, sage, *Malva pusilla* and camomile.⁸⁰ Some of these mixtures could also be used as drinks; in addition, oak bark, hyssop and achillea (Ar. *akheela*) were also prepared in the form of herbal tea to be drunk twice a day, or as baths.⁸¹

CONCLUSION

The short overview of the ancient and modern approach to the herbal treatment of women shows general similarities in the use of herbal drinks, washes and baths, douche sprays, fumigations and ointments. This is natural in herbal medicine and the form of application was dependent on the type of the problem. The modern recommended treatments included in el-Hadary's works are rather similar to the modern herbal medicine practiced in other parts of the world, and they rely on the well-known effects of such ingredients as *Alchemilla vulgaris*, which is beneficial for the menstrual cycle and the balancing of the thyroid hormones, baby wheat germ oil, which is full of minerals, vitamins and fatty acid, or sage, which is anti-inflammatory and, among other benefits, supports the digestive system, etc. A certain choice of food and drinks can, of course, influence the menstrual cycle, ovulation, and thus fertility and health during pregnancy.

On the other hand, we find no direct parallels between the ancient Egyptian texts and el-Hadary's works. This may be simply caused by the fragmentary state of preservation of the ancient medical papyri, and our limited understanding of them. Too little is preserved of the ancient knowledge;

73 pKahun 13, pKahun16, STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 109, 143-144.

74 pKahun 8, STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 108, 143.

75 pKahun 9, pKahun 11, STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 108-109, 143.

76 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 140-146.

77 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 120, 145.

78 STROUHAL – VACHALA – VYMAZALOVÁ 2014, 121, 145.

79 EL-HADARY 2003, 1135-1142.

80 EL-HADARY 2000, 704-705, 2003, 288-289.

81 EL-HADARY 2000, 706-707.

only a handful of fragmentary papyri have survived to this day, attesting to a mere fragment of the vast knowledge of the ancient physicians and healers. Moreover, many of the ancient plant names and names of other ingredients are not understood today, and the identification of some of them is uncertain.

At the moment – and at this stage of research – there is no obvious ancient inspiration in modern Egyptian herbal treatment in the field of women's medicine. However, it should be emphasised that only two types of sources have been used in this paper – the ancient texts and el-Hadary's modern treatise. Further research of Coptic, early medieval and Islamic texts may reveal more on this issue, and other medical fields should also be studied in a similar manner in order to trace any signs of the continuity of healing tradition in Egypt.

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