

'International Congress of Medicine, XVIIth, London, 1913'

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INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF MEDICINE, XVIITH - LONDON, 1913^x '10/'14

GRECO-ROMAN SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS REPRESENTED
IN EGYPTIAN SCULPTURE.

by Henry S. Wellcome.

When in Egypt in 1910, I noticed and photographed an interesting incised sculptured tablet in the Temple at Kom-Ombos, situate on the Nile, 556 miles south of Cairo. It consists of representations of a number of gynaecological instruments.

Kom-Ombos marks the site of the ancient Egyptian city of Pa-Sebek, "the House of Sebek," where the Crocodile god was worshipped, together with the Hawk-headed Horus, called Heru-Ur, or "the Greater Horus," the Aroneris of the Greeks. This great temple was built by Ptolemy VII., B.C. 181-146, but ^{were} there ~~are~~ traces of an earlier building in the form of a sandstone gate-way, built by Thothmes III., and dedicated to the god Sebek, which dates therefore from B.C. 1600.

The temple was built on a broad terrace which ran along the river bank facing south. On this terrace were a propylon and a small temple built by the Roman Emperor Domitian, about A.D. 83, whose cartouches appear on the walls. They are written in a peculiar hieroglyphic form, and read "Domitianus who defendeth."

Near to the temple of Domitian are the ruins, now in a very fragmentary state, of a small sacred building, which, from the inscriptions, appears to have been built by or for Ptolemy IX., or Euergetes II., about B.C. 146.

The sculptures which remain from this edifice show that it was one of those structures peculiar to Egyptian religious architecture called "the Mammisi," or "Birth House," a building which commemorated the "Divine Birth of the King."

The Mammisis in the form in which we find them at Philae, Edfu, Abydos, Esneh, and Kom-Ombos, where essentially of Ptolemaic or Roman character, although their origin can be traced back to the representations depicted in the Egyptian temples of the eighteenth dynasty, B.C. 1600, which represent the birth of the King or Queen as the divine offspring of Amen-Ra. Such representations are found on the walls of the Theban temples of Deir-el-Bahari, built by the great Queen Hatshepsu, B.C. 1600, and of Amenophis III. at Karnak. The scenes there depicted show the visit of the god Amen-Ra in human form to the queen-mother, the accouchement of the queen attended by the Hathors, and the presentation of the child to his divine parents.

The Theban birth sculptures have a regular historical sequence, and tell a somewhat complete story, but the Ptolemaic "Birth House" belongs to a period when the religious ideas in Egypt were very confused and often mixed with the Greek ideas and symbolism, which renders them very difficult of explanation.

The sculpture of special interest in the "Birth House" at Kom-Ombos, represents a seated deity, who forms the central figure. Unfortunately, the head is missing, but judging from other fragments of sculpture in the vicinity, it may be reasonably assumed to represent the hawk-headed Heru-Ur. Behind him stands a perfect figure of a female deity, with one hand uplifted, and in the other holding the ANKH, the Symbol of Life. This undoubtedly

represents Isis, as the long three-lined inscription in the centre of the tablet is addressed to that goddess.

Before the seated male divinity is a tall incense burner and a table altar. The left hand portion in front of the latter is a greater figure, probably representing a kneeling king, who wears a peculiar girdle around his waist, the ends of which terminate in the heads of Uraei serpents. He kneels before two shrine-shaped altars, on which are seated figures of Isis and Nephthys. Behind him is a similar shrine-shaped altar on which stands a large Uchat Eye, which has a figure of the Hawk of Horus on the lower lash. In front of this is an inscription, the translation of which reads "Making his way to the House of Joy. These are the words." Followed by the second ^{around him, like Ra,} "All power and life ~~to his might~~ eternally."

The important and most interesting part of the sculpture from a medical point of view, however, is the altar in front of the seated deity, on which stands an upright panel, divided into four compartments or divisions. This panel is probably intended to represent a surgical instrument cabinet or case, each compartment of which contains a number of gynaecological instruments, which were employed in midwifery in Ptolemaic times. That these instruments are not strictly Egyptian may be gathered from the fact that the tablet and sculpture probably do not date back further than B.C. 150, but that they are of an extremely interesting nature may be judged from the following detailed description.

Although we have but little evidence of surgical instruments being used in obstetrics in ancient times, there can be little doubt that these sculptures depict the instruments used at accouchements by the Greco-Roman accoucheurs of the period.

Beginning with the top compartment from the left hand side, the instruments appear to be

1. A bifurcated probe.
2. A spoon, used for mixing foods and unguents.
3. A knife, for cutting the umbilicus.
4. A probe.
5. Ditto.
6. A cautery.
7. A bifurcated probe.
8. A pessary, At this period pessaries were made of horn, ivory, bone or bronze.
9. A saw.
10. A cautery.
11. A bandage or roll of linen, used for swathing or binding the infant.
This swathing banage is an interesting emblem, which is often figured in connection with Ta-Urt, and Thoueris, the "Hippopotamus goddess", who was the Egyptian protectoress of pregnant women.
12. A vaginal speculum.
13. Curved retractors.

Second Division.

1. (Horizontal). A bifurcated probe with hooked end.
2. A blunt hook or decapitator.
3. Ditto.
4. A scappel.
5. Ditto.
6. Ditto.

7. Appears to represent a pair of obstetric forceps, and is of special interest, as no specimens of Greek forceps of this character are known. It has been doubted that the Greeks ever used instruments in cases of difficult labour, but Adams, commenting in a note on Paul of Aegina, states, "Though they, the Roman and Greek writers, do not mention the forceps, Avicenna does so, and says that a forceps was dug up in the house of an obstetrix at Pompeii, bearing a considerable resemblance to the modern forceps." The sculptured representation will be noticed to bear a very close resemblance to forceps that were in use a few years ago.
8. A cranioclast, or forceps to crush the head.
9. Spatula for incising the head.
10. A knife.
11. Symbol for fire or heat, in the form of a basket.

Third Division.

1. Cranioclast or forceps for crushing the head.
2. Ditto.
- 3 & 4. Two very interesting objects, consisting of two bags or vases, to each of which is placed near a Utchat Eye. These are believed to represent drugs or unguents, called "Utchat", or "the Eye of Horus," which may have been symbolic of an ointment for application to the eyes of the infants.
5. (Beneath the eyes). A strigil, which may have been used as a uterine curette.
6. (On top). A balance or pair of scales.
- 7 & 8. (Below). Two hieroglyphics, which might probably represent medicaments used at the accouchement.

Fourth Division.

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4. Scissors, or shears.
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The long inscription over the incense altar in front of Heru-Ur or Aroueris, appears to be a list of offerings or products brought at the time of the accouchement from various cities. Translated it reads:-

".....the House of Hapi (the Nile).

One half henen-Suten (Heracleopolis),

Half and..... cloth(?) or wax(?) of the House of Spirit of Mendel.

One third (of) the city of Amm (Heliopolis).

One eighth (of) Memphis.

One eighth(for) Pa or Het-Resi.

One fourth (for) Sessenu-Khemensi (Hermopolis).

One sixth(for) Neti.

One hundred and twenty eight part (for) Abdu (Abydos).

The above would seem to be an inventory of some special offerings probably to the god Heru-Ur, at the time of the birth, but owing to the inscription having crumbled away, and becoming partly obliterated, a number of the lines also being missing, it is impossible to make a complete translation. That the objects were offered, there seems little doubt from the short inscription incised between the seated god and Isis, which reads, "may there be given to them in every place

established in Light of Ra (daily) in (before) their faces, gifts and offerings."

So far as I can learn, we have, in this most interesting piece of sculpture the only complete and authentic representations of instruments used in gynaecology in Egypt in Ptolemaic times.

An attempt has been made to re-construct the instrument cabinet and models of the instruments as far as identified in the Historical Medical Museum.

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The long inscription over the incense altar in front of Heru-Ur or Aroueris, appears to be a list of offerings or products brought at the time of the accouchement from various cities. Translated it reads:-

Probably a fraction — "Given in the House of Hapi (the Nile).
the house of — *Sais* — "Given in Suten-henen (Heliopolis), *Heracleopolis*
One Half — (Given) cloth or wax of the Spirit of — *house of Spirit of Ment*
Half and —
one eighth — One third [of] the city of Annu (Heliopolis), *16 / 48*
 One eighth [of] Memphis. *6*
 Four parts [for] Pa or Het-Suten. *Hesi ? Het-nesi 6*
 One fourth [for] Sessenu. *Khemmi (Heliopolis) 12*
 One sixth [for] Khoti. *Neti? 3*
 One hundred and twenty parts [for] Abtu (Abydos). *Abdu 48 / 48*

The above would seem to be an inventory of some special offerings probably given to the god Heru-Ur, at the time of the birth, but, owing to the inscription having crumbled away, and becoming partly obliterated, a number of the lines also being missing, it is impossible to make a complete translation. That the objects were offered, there seems little doubt from the short inscription incised between the seated god and Isis, which reads, "may there be given to them in every place

All fractions followed by a place name possibly implying a direct genitive but as there is no preposition it cannot be translated by "For".

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~~Hellander in 1912 published a reproduction of the tablet, describing the instruments as those of a goldsmith and jeweller.~~

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Mr. Wellcome's Paper
for the Inter. Med. Congress.

1913 年 12 月 1 日

Ham

12 January 1914.

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for your letter of the 10th inst. from which I note with pleasure that the officers of the International Medical Congress do not object to our suggestion.

I thank you again on behalf of Mr. Wellcome for your kindness and the trouble you have taken in the matter.

Faithfully yours,

C. T.

Dr. Herringham,
40, Wimpole Street, W.

Herr

1. January 1914.

Dear Sir,

Mr. Wellcome intends having a medal struck to commemorate the founding of the Historical Medical Museum in London last year. The obverse will have an impression of the Egyptian figure of history with Aesculapius and Marduk on either side which adopted as a symbol, with the inscription "The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, founded London, 1913."

On the reverse, the medal will bear the figure of I-em-hotep with the following suggested inscription "Section of History of Medicine, XVIIth International Congress of Medicine, London, 1913." I should be glad if you would kindly let me know if there would be any official objection to the latter inscription showing the Museum's affiliation to the Section of History of Medicine of the Congress.

Thanking you in anticipation,

I am,

Faithfully yours,

CST

Dr. Herringham.

Herrington

July 15th, 1913.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 12th inst., I am sorry that I cannot accede to your request. The surgical instruments that you mention and that we have on exhibition have been arranged in a special way, so that they may be of real educational value and to take any one out of its place is to make the collection of very little use. I may say I was under the impression that a complete understanding had been arrived at some months ago that all objects of Historical interest were to be sent to the Museum in Wignmore Street, on the other hand we have informed those who have offered other objects of a more recent and modern character to send them on to the exhibition at South Kensington.

Faithfully yours,

H.W. Armit, Esq.,
Ravenhurst,
Talbot Road, Wembley.

XVIIth International Congress of Medicine (London, 1913).

President :—Sir THOMAS BARLOW, Bart., K.C.V.O., M.D., F.R.S.,
10, Wimpole Street, W.

Treasurers :—G. H. MARINS, Esq., C.B.,
49, Upper Brook Street, W.
Sir DYCE DUCKWORTH, Bart., M.D.,
28, Grosvenor Place, S.W.

Gen. Sec. :—Dr. HERRINGHAM,
40, Wimpole Street, W.

*Mr. decision you have
to bring him before
when he calls at 5-52*
XXXXXXXXXXXX

13 HUNDEX STREET

LONDON, W. 1

Ravenhurst,
Talbot Road,
Wembley,

July 12th 1913.

Henry S. Wellcome Esq.,
Snowhill,
E.C.

Dear Sir,

In organising the Museum for the International Congress of Medicine I have persistently refused to entertain offers of historic exhibits. In view of the existence of your magnificent collection in Wigmore Street, Dr. Herbert Spencer, however, has prevailed upon my Committee to exhibit a series of old obstetric instruments in the department dealing with obstetrics and gynaecology, and I propose placing in this series some interesting forceps, etc. from the College of Surgeons, the Royal Society of Medicine, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, University of Edinburgh, University College Hospital, and Trinity College, Dublin.

Mr. Alban Doran has suggested that the collection would gain considerably in value, if it were possible to obtain from your Historical Museum the Barton's (York) and Ylep's forceps, which, I understand, you have on view. I do not suppose that the loan of two or three instruments for the Congress week would be a serious

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28, Grosvenor Place, S.W.

Gen. Sec. :—DR. HERRINGHAM,
40, Wimpole Street, W.

~~General Office~~

~~11, Hoxton Street,~~

~~LONDON WXX~~

- 2 -

matter for your Museum, while my more modest collection would gain perceptibly thereby.

Apologising for the coolness of my request and thanking you in anticipation of your kind reply,

I am, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

J. W. Arncliffe

Hon. Secretary.

Museum Committee

Armit

H. W. Armit

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28, Grosvenor Place, S.W.

Gen. Sec.:—Dr. HERRINGHAM,
40, Wimpole Street, W.

Central Office:

13, HIND STREET,
LONDON, W.

Jan 10. 1913

C. J. S. Thompson Esq

Dear Sir.

I am glad to be able to inform you
that my officers do not see any objection
to the Comm proposed in your letter of
Jan 1.

I am sorry to have delayed my answer.
I was instructed to consult the Sectional
Authorities before replying.

Yours faithfully

W. P. Herringham

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Central Office:

13, HINDE STREET,
LONDON, W.

Jan 5. 1913

C. J. S. Thompson Esq

Dear Sir.

Yours of Jan 1.

I find that Mr Makins, to whom I
have referred such questions as yours,
is away until Wednesday. I will answer
you as soon as I have had the op-
portunity of consulting him. I hope the
delay will not inconvenience you.

Yrs faith.

W. D. Herringham

May 12th, 1910.

Dear Sir,

I shall be glad if you will kindly place the enclosed syllabus of the Historical Medical Exhibition before the Committee that has been appointed to make arrangements for the meeting of the International Medical Congress in London, in 1913. I may say that I have now decided to hold this Exhibition, which I have been organising for a number of years past, at some suitable building in London, when the meeting of the Conference takes place.

The Exhibition, which will be strictly professional and scientific in character will not be open to the general public, and will be arranged on the lines of the syllabus enclosed herewith.

I should greatly esteem the co-operation of your Committee in connection with the Exhibition, which I am endeavouring to make the most comprehensive and interesting of its kind that has ever been held.

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

Dr Herringham,
40 Wimpole Street,
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Enc.

Herringham