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NEUROLOGICAL STAMP

Papyrus of Ebers and Smith

Besides hieroglyphics usually engraved or painted on stone, the Egyptians employed certain cursive scripts, usually inscribed on thin sheets of the papyrus plant. The Ebers papyrus was advertised for sale in 1869 and obtained by Georg Ebers at Thebes in 1872. This dated back to about 1500 BC. The Edwin Smith papyrus is the oldest known medical writing and also the most complete and important treatise on the surgery of antiquity. It was written about 1700 BC and thought to be a copy of a much more ancient manuscript written about 3000 BC, being more or less contemporaneous with the great pyramids. It was acquired at Luxor in 1862 and given to the New York Historical Society by Smith's daughter in 1906. Among the matters recorded in the document are head injuries and an incomplete account of sprain to the spinal column. In the case of depressed fracture of the skull, the need for removing the bony fragments with an elevator is stated. The author noted that paralysis of the bladder and of the intestines occurred with lesions of the spinal cord and paraplegia resulting from injury to the head varied depending on which side of the brain was injured. The brain with its convolutions and meninges is mentioned for the first time. The papyrus contains no clues as to the author's name.

Whereas the Edwin Smith papyrus is a surgical document, the papyrus of Ebers, by contrast, is medical. For the most part it contains a collection of recipes for



various diseases and symptoms. There are few descriptions of diseases. The writer notes three types of healers: physicians, surgeons, and sorcerers who are exorcists. Among the medicines mentioned in the papyrus of Ebers, ox liver against night blindness, powdered hyoscyamus to expel pain caused by worms, and a favourite Egyptian pomade for baldness consisting of equal parts of lion, hippopotamus, crocodile, goose, serpent, and ibex fats. Another consisted simply of equal parts of writing ink and CSF.

In 1971 Egypt published a stamp showing Hesi Ra (an ancient physician) and a papyrus (Stanley Gibbons 1098, Scott 864).

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