

Overview of the Health Care of Royal Workmen in Ancient Egypt—Take Deir el-Medina as an Example

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Keywords: Ancient Egypt, Deir el-Medina, royal workmen, health care

Abstract: In Deir el-Medina, the workmen can take a sick leave, take care of female and relatives help each other, the physicians treatment and are subsidized by their state subsidies, and magician casting spells and prayers for the living. They constitute the main content of the workmen health care in Medina. Based on the original historical materials, this paper tries to investigate the medical practices such as sick leave from workmen, physicians' treatment, magic spell, and explore the general situation of the ancient Egyptian royal workmen health care, to arouse the attention of the Chinese academic circle to this problem.

Deir el-Medina was located on the west bank of the Nile, in the desert valley west of modern Luxor. This village was built in the 18th Dynasty of the New Kingdom in ancient Egypt. In order to build the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens, they gathered all kinds of workmen and their families. These workmen enjoyed some degree of health care while building the royal tombs. For the village residents, physical health could not be ignored, medical health care widely existed in them.

From the existing foreign research results, the research results focus on the channels for the workmen of the workmen to receive assistance and the specific methods to cure diseases, so as to reflect the real situation of rural life [1]. In the study of ancient Egyptian medicine, the representative and magic combination of diagnosis and treatment means, and deeply explore its medical connotation [2]. It could be seen that the medical care situation of workmen in Medina has indeed attracted attention from foreign scholars, but it was often mentioned sporadically. From above, in the late 19th century to the 20th century, foreign Egyptian academia has spent the key stage of original historical accumulation, sorting, publishing, turning to focus and explore the village internal health care details and its religious culture. Until the 21st 10s, domestic academic began to pay attention to and preliminary research wheat the Medina and few medical cross research. Consequently, the author tries to discuss the medical treatment enjoyed by the royal workmen as the center, sort out the medical situation of the workmen village, starting from the original historical materials and briefly mention the concept of ancient Egypt afterlife reflected in it. This paper hopes to attract the attention of the domestic Egyptology academic circle to this problem.

1. Leave of Absence for the Workmen, Care of Women and Help from Relatives and Friends

In Medina, workmen could take a sick leave and receive some medical support. About the reason for taking a leave could be divided into public leave and private leave. Private leave includes: the workmen sick, taking care of the sick wife and daughter, burial or memorial of dead relatives and other affairs. The most common reason for absenteeism was sick leave, which occurs 100 times, excluding the original holidays of workmen, who take a day off every ten days. As the Egyptologist Janssen Views: “Like workers in a modern Welfare State, they could stay home when they were too ill to work and were attended by a physicians.”[3]

Although the reasons for the absenteeism and the reasons for leave were unclear, and the information was not necessarily useful, the details and necessity of the record were sufficient to demonstrate the importance of the workmen groups and their injuries. Workmen could take holidays in any season based on their own illness, relatives or treating others. By the 40th year of Ramesses II, the royal tomb was in full swing and nearing completion. At this time, the workmen began to shift to their focus the royal mausoleum of the Valley of the Queens, which provided them to take a large number of sick leave. “If during the short reign Sethos II whose tomb never had been finished, half the time of the workmen was free, it was not improbable that during the fortieth year of Ramesses II they merely did work one out of every four days.”[3] The workmen have the right to sick leave and the exercise of that right is freer and more secure.

In addition to sick leave in the workplace, women in the family as families of workmen also enjoy a prominent position in health care. On the one hand, they influence the attendance of the workmen. A workman (Si-Wadjyt) in the 40th year of Ramesses II took leave to care for her sick daughter. A Workman (Pellnub) took two consecutive days off due to her mother's illness [4]. Another example in the absence record on Medina 209 shows the workmen (P1-J1w-[m-di-1mn]) leaving work due to the illness of his wife (Snt-nfrt) during the second year of the reign of Seti II [5]. For women in the village, disease was an insurmountable gap between age and death. Even so, they enjoy the right to be cared, which extends their life to some extent.

On the other hand, sick women were able to receive treatment by their physicians, although the effectiveness of the treatment was difficult to guarantee. Based on the information available, “Furthermore, the workman *P3-hry-pdt* who was acting as physicians was once absent in order to prepare medicine for the scribes wife .”[6] Here was an example of a husband mentioning his wife's illness: from the end of the 19th Dynasty to the early 20th century, a letter (O. Wente) wrote:

“To the police captain Montumose:

Whats the point of my sending that *hin*-measure of oil to the marketplace? Search for a goat for my wife who was ill and take possession of it. Im not aware that I have been removed from the necropolis community!”[6]

The letter does not mention the nature of the disease or the use of goats, which may be a sacrifice for a god, intended to restore a woman to health. But it could be seen that women were not quietly waiting for care. Above that, men speak for sick women, and women also have the right to fully express their subjective willingness to be taken care of and treated. A letter (serial number: O. DM 562) Record the following contents:

“Addressed by Khor to Minmose:

Whats means your taking away the hair of sandals and your taking away my [.....] and your failing to bring the [.....] which I mentioned to you? Please give your personal attention and bring a [.....] and also the jug filled with milk, and whatever else you may have on hand. Dont leave me in the lurch while Im [in] this sorry plight in which I am. It was good if you take note.”[6]

Egyptologist Jaana Toivari-Viitala highly summarized the letter as a woman begged a man not to abandon her when she was ill. Another letter recorded a situation in which the writer was scolded

by a sick woman for her poor mutual assistance, and protested to defend himself: "As for the matters of illness about which you write me, what have I done against you? As for the medicines which you mentioned, did you write me about and did I fail to give them to you." [7] It could be seen that women not only enjoy a certain right to speak in Medina workmen village, but also could boldly and directly seek attention to the physical accidents, showing their desire to be taken care.

With the harassment of disease, mutual assistance between friends and relatives among workmen has become an important part of health care. Because in the process of disease treatment, it was inevitable to need the help of relatives and friends. Papyri Deir el-Medina VI recorded the correspondence between friends, one of which reads: "When my letter reaches you, you shall send the ointment about which I wrote you." [8] During the reign of Ramesses II, a letter (O. Berlin 11247) written by blind painter Pay to his son As follows:

"Don't not turn your back on me-I am not well. Don not cease weeping for me, because I am in the darkness since my lord Amen [has turned] his back on me. May you bring me some honey for my eyes, and also ochre which was made into bricks again, and real black eye-paint. Hurry! Look to it! Am I not your father? Now, I am wretched and searching for my sight but it was gone." [7]

During the construction of Valley of the Kings, workmen often carry magic spells with them to help each other in an emergency. A calligrapher named Pa-hem-netjer outside the village brought a curse to a colleague (Pa-nefer-em-djed) [7]. It could be seen that the subjective willingness of the patients to treat the diseases was relatively strong, and the mutual assistance of the workmen's relatives and friends could be regarded as an important way of medical care, which maintains the health of the workmen.

2. Physicians' treatment and State Subsidies

The construction of Valley of the Kings made the workmen suffer from various diseases. Poor sanitation, including contaminated water, desert dust, infected animals, poisonous plants or insects, could cause workmen from diseases such as respiratory infections. For example, the picture in the tomb of Ipuw in Medina depicts the dislocation of his shoulder [9]. In order to treat these diseases, in addition to the above mentioned the help from workmen relatives and friends, the more important thing was through physicians. Physicians were one of the groups involved in the medical work in ancient Egypt. They learned medicine in the House of Life, played an important role in the pharaoh and the country, and were the creators, practitioners and inheritors of the developed medical achievements in ancient Egypt. The medical practice of the workmen village shows the world a fairly developed level of medical development. The excavation activities of Medina show that physicians have "operated" on a workmen's brain, making him live for two more years. Physicians' specialty was medication, prescribing prescriptions and solving their health problems.

In ancient Egypt, physicians' concern for patients usually included examining the patient and touching the sick parts. In addition to using aloe, garlic and honey, lead, soot and other items were also loaded into the medicine cabinet. Qen-her khepesh-ef's Medical Papyrus for home prescriptions records the treatment of physicians in the village, including the procedures, methods and the "medicine" needed. For the workmen village, "benu" was a form of hemorrhoids with serious complications, with the following prescriptions:

"Another Remedy Made For The Throbbing Of A *BENU*

Sea-fish scales

Galingale (*a ginger-like root*) of the oasis

Leaves of flax

Mesta-liquid

Mix together with this(liquid). You shall make 12 pellets, and you shall apply 4 pellets to his

anus (every day) so that he becomes healthy.”[7]

Regardless of whether the prescription was scientific and effective or not, it shows that physicians have a certain degree of professionalism in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases, which plays an important role in the health and life safety of workmen. It fully shows that physicians were an important group of workmen in the workmen village. So, what was the income and treatment of physicians? What was the attitude of the state towards it? Some rations in Medina record a small payment to the "physicians". As the Egyptologist McDowell said:“Some if the ration lists from the village record a small payment to ‘the physicians’ similar to that received by the guardian. Therefore, he seems to have been a member of the gang who added medical care to his other duties, for which he was compensated by the state.”[7]

According to his view, the physician's rations were a supplement to his basic income as a workmen. The following table shows the distribution of rations based on the total daily capacity per household without food exchange.“The minimum monthly salary of physicians consisted of rations of cereal (wheat and barley), bread, and beer—in other words, the ingredients of a basic diet.”[10] Egyptologist Nunn holds a similar view that in the 19th Dynasty of Medina, physicians rations were probably the extra reward as the workmen' s rations [11]. A workmen received state compensation if he increased a medical care business in addition to his job. The compensation situation could be obtained in Table 1.

Table 1: Food rationing of different people in the 19th Dynasty workmen Village—— is expressed by the calorific value of food (part)

	Calories (kilocalorie / day)
chief of the workers	48,195
scribe	48,195
workman	35,343
female servant	19278
physician(swnw)	8033

(Data Source: John F. Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine*, London: British Museum Press, 1996, p. 121.)

According to Table 1, the daily ration of physicians is the least, even less than half of the remuneration of maids, and far from workman. Therefore, scholars once believed that physicians possessed the lowest remuneration. Egyptologist Janssen believes that physicians' income was actually a supplementary reward, exceeding the basic salary of the workmen [12]. In fact, the physician's low rations indicate that his job was still a workmen, and that his special tasks were only a small fraction of his time. The actual income of the physicians was comparable to that of the foreman and the clerks, and they could conclude that they enjoy higher treatment and state subsidies.

In addition, physicians could collect fees from the patient's family. The Turin Strike Papyrus, dating back to the 29th year of Ramses III, records the case that the wife of the widower Wese-hat died in a childbirth, including a bronze kettle worth 4 deben and two pairs of sandals worth 22 deben [8]. According to the Turin 1880 papyrus, a workmen (Usihe) paid the physicians 22 deben for his professional care [12]. The above shows that the workmen could control the price of a bed or a coffin for the health of himself or his family.

The state attaches importance to physicians and gives subsidies to physicians, which was nothing more than to express the importance to the health and life of workmen, and constitutes an important guarantee for the implementation of medical care in workmen villages. To sum up, physicians treat the sick workmen and their families with professional prescriptions. Patients could be compensated for treating patients. At the national level, workmen as part-time physicians repeatedly take leave

and get the support of the government, and the state will give them subsidies based on their treatment tasks to receive additional income. On a personal level, patients were free to use their property and pay their physicians.

3. The Magician Gives the Spell and the Living Pray

The magician spell and the living pray constitute one of the specific contents of Medina health care. As Burnham said, “Thus even in the religious or superstitious aspect of medicine, another basic of medicine appeared.”[13] The Instruction for Merikare (Dynasty 10), states that “god made for them [mankind] magic as weapons to ward off what might happen”[14]

A Dream Book kept on the papyrus shows that if a person has a nightmare, he compares himself to a baby Horus, asking for the help of his mother, who ordered the destruction of the nightmare and summoned the dream to replace it. The mantra part was written as follows:

“Come to me, come to me, my mother Isis! Behold, in my city, I see that which is far from me!

I am here, my son Horus! Come out with what you have seen so that your dumbness ceases and your dreams retreat. May fire come out against the thing that frightened you! Behold, I have come to see you, that I might drive out your evil, that I might destroy every harm.

“Congratulations and good dreams! May night be as day and may you drive away all the evil that Seth, son of Nut, has done. Like Re, I also will be justified before my enemies.”[7]

Scorpion stings and snake bites were a common pain for workmen. Many spells document the response to unexpected dangers such as attacks by animals such as scorpions and snakes. To combat the diseases caused by these animal and demon diseases, the magician often builds a mythic narrative in which the origin of the disease was investigated and the sufferer eventually becomes the winner. There were well-preserved magical texts on both papyrus and pottery tablets, which indicates that the workmen was given spells by a magician who treats scorpion wounds in order to heal when necessary. In this brief letter, Amen-mose wrote to a priest at Ramesseum asking about the ingredients of a healing drug. “The prophet was ill. When my letter reaches you will send him one grain, one jar of syrup, one festival date-juice.”[7] However, Amen-Moss was not a physicians, but a scorpion magician, who performs his duty to expel the scorpion through a combination of magic and medicine. In ancient Egypt, the role of the mantra was not only to ensure the survival of the king and the country, but also to allow people to seek treatment for diseases through both "reason" and "magic", from which the workmen of Medina village started to show the world a unique "medical" practice.

The living pray to the gods and the dead, which has the effect of "spiritual placebo" to prevent and treat diseases, and was conducive to the maintenance of health from the subjective psychological level. A stone tablet in the workmen village preserves information about personal piety, humility, and the concept of divine retribution and redemption. In local festivals, many popular statues were carried through Medina, where the workmen and the gods get closer to each other and get comfort and help. Whether it was to prevent disease, pray for the gods, or to cure disease and be grateful to the gods, prayer carries the spiritual sustenance of the workmen. The following prayer expresses the living's prayer for a good and healthy life:

“Giving praise to the good god lord of the two lands Djoserk, were son of Re, lord of diadems, Amenhotpe, given life, who kisses the ground, and to the King Mother and King Great Wife Ahmes-Nefertari, may she live, that they give life, prosperity, and health to the spirit of the chief workmen in the Place of Truth Neferhotep justified son of the chief workman Nebnufer justified beautiful in rest.”[15]

If the patient recovers from his illness, he will write a prayer to express his gratitude to the gods. For example, in order to celebrate the virtues of Amen-Re in healing his son Nakhtamun, Nebre

dedicated this tablet:

“I made praises to his name
Because of the greatness of his power.
I made prayers before him
In the presence of the whole land,
For the draughtsman Nakhtamun, justified,
Who lay sick unto death
Under the might of Amun on account of his sin.....
I will make this stela in your name,
And record this prayer in writing on it,
For you saved for me the draughtsman Nakhtamun.
So I said to you and you heard me.”[15]

According to Lichtheim, the only title these workmen prayed to the gods was the Servant in the Place of Truth. They built arranged graves for themselves and their families, prayed for health and happiness throughout their lives, and prayed for a good funeral and blessings from the afterlife, all of which were regarded as the rewards of justice. At the same time, every ordinary person, including women, has the right to ask the gods for this life and the afterlife [16]. In addition to praying to the gods, the attitude towards the dead was also a vivid manifestation of the workmen's emphasis on health care. In the chapel and house in the village, there were stelae and tables for ceremonies of deceased loved ones, and statues of the ancestors were busts. These lost ancestors were worshiped, awed and worshiped because to the workmen they may have an influence on the fate of the living people, while these busts provide the residents of the house with a means against the forces of evil. On the psychological level, mantra and prayer could be regarded as a way to maintain mental health and mental pleasure, which was a unique form of workmen health care.

4. Conclusion

This paper examines the specific content of workmen health care in Medina in detail. From the workmen's point of view, the workmen himself could take sick leave, give up work and take a rest. Mutual help between workmen was also an important means to solve the problems in the process of working. The workmen could also pray to the gods or the deceased for comfort. From the perspective of the family of the workmen, they could influence the attendance of the workmen, and take the initiative to seek advice and seek medicine to cure the disease. They all receive subsidies from the state or compensation from patients, and enjoy higher levels of treatment and social status.

Acknowledgement

My sincere and hearty thanks and appreciations go firstly to my tutor, Ms. Li Jiali, whose guidance and encouragement have given me much insight into this study. My gratitude to her knows no bounds. I am also extremely grateful to my parents, who gives me unfailing love and unwavering support. I sincerely wish you good health.

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