

Articoli/Articles

AN ANEURYSM IN THE PAPYRUS OF EBERS (108, 3-9)

DONATELLA LIPPI

Istituto di Storia della Medicina dell'Università di Bologna

SUMMARY

AN ANEURYSM IN THE PAPYRUS OF EBERS (108, 3-9)

One of the most ancient descriptions of arterial aneurysm occurs in a paragraph of the Ebers Papyrus: Egyptians considered it a consequence of a vascular lesion and treated it surgically, through an instrument, which had to be previously cauterized on fire.

One of the most ancient descriptions of arterial aneurysm occurs very probably in a paragraph of Ebers Papyrus, in the section related to "swellings".¹

This kind of tumefactions can happen in every part of the body, differentiating in many pathologies, according to its localization² and nature.³

In the symptomatological picture of tumefaction (dilatation?) of a vessel, which can arise everywhere in human body, it seems possible to recognize a form of arterial aneurysm, with cystic aspect, which is described with many details.

Main characteristics of this swelling are its sphericity and its firmness under palpation, small dimensions and subcutaneous, circumscribed, localization.

Egyptian physician considered aneurysm the consequence of a vessel-lesion which he could treat by "dw'-method, a particular surgical technique:⁴ the instrument was made red-hot on fire (*sšmn*) in order to restrain haemorrhage.

This paragraph adds moreover to treat it as *sš-hmn*: this expression occurs five times in Ebers papyrus in cases of surgical operations and it is very complicated; *s* literally means "son";

Parole chiave/Key words: Aneurisms - Ebers Papyrus

hmn has been translated as the hame of a particular instrument, which has not been identified yet, but it is always associated to fire and cauterization: scholars agree in considering it a thermo-coagulation but there are many interpretations of the whole expression.

Literal translation, as a matter of fact, "son of *hmn*- instrument" has been variously understood: Grapow⁵ considers it a specific pathology, bringing parallel structure of other paragraphs as examples; Ebbel⁶ thinks that it is the name of the surger himself in a lexical construction, which is very common in ancient near-eastern languages; Jonckheere⁷ believes that it is neither the name of the surger, nor of his assistant, but of another specialist, whose instrument is used by the physician in this particular pathological circumstance.

Ghalioungui,⁸ examining these different interpretations, concludes that *shmn* is who does this particular treatment; the instrument, which was called *hmn*, which is always used of swellings and ruptures, is supposed to be a kind of cautery, which had to be used after another cutting-, red hot made instrument.

It is difficult to choose one of these hypothesis: common point is however the thermo-coagulation treatment of aneurysm and we want to underline that therapy is scientifically pertinent to diagnostic interpretation.

Operations on blood vessels has always been considered very difficult, because of the great haemorrhagical consequence: Aetius Amidenus, during the VI. th century a.C., suggested not to operate *ἀνεύρωμα* which he considered an arterial tumour, due to the corrosion of a vessel's wall or to the break and dissection of arteria itself, with eventual local thrombotical complications.⁹

Only in simple cases surgical operation was suggested as Antyllus and Oribasius had proved, exposing arteria and binding it with two knots, cutting the vessel and introducing in the aneurysm an oily and honey-like substance *τό μάννα* dividing it.

Afterwards, coagula had to be cleaned and arteria unfastened; an anti-inflammatory treatment was also provided.¹⁰

Johannes Actuarius¹¹ began surgical method sistematically to cure aneurysm, *arteriae dilationes*, through a cautery which cut and, in the same time restrained blood haemorrhage.

In this historical perspective, prescription of egyptian papyrus has the value to have been one of the most ancient evidences of thermo-coagulation treatment on aneurysm.

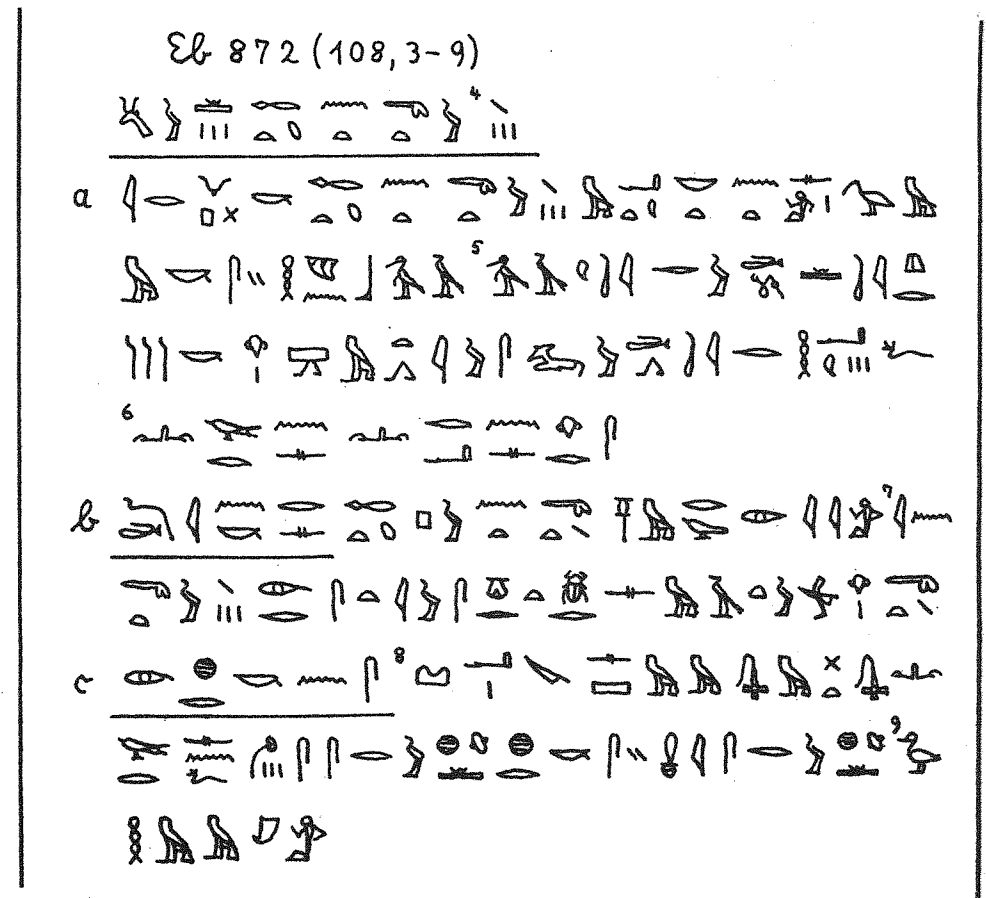


Fig. 1 — Papyrus of Ebers (108,3-9).

D. Lippi

NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. GRAPOW H., *Grundrider Medizin der alten Aegypter*, vol. IV.1, Berlin 1958, pp. 224-229.
2. P. Eb. 864, 865, 870.
3. P. Eb. 867, 869, 871.
4. GHALIOUNGUI P., *Magic and medical science in ancient Egypt*, Amsterdam 1973.
5. GRAPOW H., *op. cit.*, p. 225.
6. EBBEL B., *Die altaegyptische Chirurgie, Skifter ut. av Det Nor. Vid. Akad. Oslo*, II, n. 2, 1939, p. 54.
7. JONCKHEERE F., *A la recherche du chirurgien égyptien*, CdE 51, 1951, p. 43-45.
8. GHALIOUNGUI P., *The Physicians of pharaonic Egypt*, Mainz 1983, p. 5.
9. ΑΕΤΙΙ, Λόγος πεντεκαδέκατος, περί οίδημάτων, έμφυσημάτων, σκίρρων και χαιράδων, άθερωμάτων και των παραπλησιών κ. π. εμπ. ποικίλων, ed. Sk. Zervos, 'Athena' tom. KA' (1909), p. 31-2.
10. EFTYCHIADIS A.C.-MARKETOS S.C., *The first reference to arteriosclerosis and the original surgery of the arterial aneurysm*, Atti XXIX Cong. Int. Storia della Med.-Cairo 1984-85, pp. 336-337.
11. JOANNIS ACTUARIJ, Περί διαγνώσεως παθ. λόγοι δύο in *Physici et Medici Graeci Minores*, ed. J.L. Ideler, vol. II, p. 363-4.

MEDICINA NEI SECOLI ARTE E SCIENZA, 2 (1990) 5-45
Journal of History of Medicine

Articoli/Articles

HOMEOPATHY: FROM HAHNEMANN TO THE PRESENT

ALICE TAMACCIO, Ed. D
Department of Science and Mathematics
University of La Verne, Athens, Greece

SUMMARY

HOMEOPATHY: FROM HAHNEMANN TO THE PRESENT

The foundations and philosophical underpinnings of Homeopathy are discussed within the framework of a nineteenth century medical controversy. During this era, Hahnemannian doctrine rose in response to the need for conservative healing practices yet faced a decline as key spokesmen of orthodox medicine successfully articulated its shortcomings. These historical events relegated Homeopathy to the status of an eclectic medical art. Its greatest discoveries and contributions, such as the medicinals founded by Hahnemann and the attitude of patient education have become incorporated into modern day medical practice.

Introduction

«It would be difficult to cite any proposition less obnoxious to science than that advanced by Hahnemann: to wit, that drugs which in large doses produce certain symptoms, counteract them in very small doses, just as in more modern practice it is found that a sufficiently small inoculation with typhoid rallies our powers to resist the disease...» (George Bernard Shaw, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, circa 1906)

These words made by G.B. Shaw at the turn of the century reflect the main premise which undergirds the practice of homeopathy. Hahnemann introduced a radical medical system completely antagonistic to the prevailing orthodoxy of the day.

Parole chiave/Key words: Homeopathy - Hahnemann's System - Nineteenth Century Medicine - Hahnemann - Homeopathy, History of.