

For Immediate Release
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Magic and medicine, or magical medicine?

On Tuesday, Jan. 17, Foy Scalf of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago presented to 22 patrons at the Bartlett Library on the magical and medical lore of ancient Egypt.

Scalf explained that people think of “magic as non-scientific and irrational, and medicine as scientific and rational. But, in ancient Egypt, magic and medicine were not two separate entities; instead they were one category together.”

Scalf brought forward many examples as to show how advanced the ancient Egyptians were in the medical field, and also showed patrons their sophisticated ways of practicing and obtaining medical knowledge.

For medical training, the physicians or aspiring physicians would go to what they called a Scriptorium, or “House of Life.” It wasn’t so much of a school, but more so like a library, a collection of written works on medicines, procedures, ailments, etc. It was there that men would learn the practices of medicine, and then they would go back to their homes to treat the people there or to teach young boys the practice.

Patrons were then shown a translated Greek letter from a mother to her son, which said that she was so happy he was learning Egyptian letters and medicine so he could come back home and teach other boys and live comfortably for the rest of his life. It is through this letter that Scalf pointed out how revered the Egyptians were through their valuable medical knowledge as non-Egyptians often went to Egypt to specifically learn from them.

Evidence has been found that ancient Egyptians dealt with cancer, arthritis, hardened arteries, skeletal deformities, old age, battle injuries, famine and more. And mummies have been discovered to show signs of being in the middle of healing, operations, amputations, etc.

There were many procedures that the Egyptians performed, such as circumcision (In the boys’ teenage years), setting dislocated shoulders, dealing with sprains/broken bones, amputations and also general grooming (like how to take care of fingernails, toenails, etc.).

Then Scalf went into detail on the mummification process, one of the most well-known practices of ancient Egyptians. They would take out all of the internal organs, minus the heart. They wrapped the organs in tissue and put them into jars to then be placed back in the body. It was

believed that one needed all of the organs in the afterlife, so Egyptians wanted to protect them from evil substances that came with bodily decay. The heart remained within the body because Egyptians believed that it would be judged by the gods if the person would have a good or bad afterlife experience.

Now, in order to perform all of these procedures, ancient Egyptians had an advanced collection of medical instruments, which looked very similar to the equipment used today such as: Forceps, scalpels, scissors, knives, tweezers, etc.

They also had items of magical ability that they used to help the medicine along. For instance, they had a special bowl they used to pour water into that would instantly make it pure.

Then there were amuletic decrees, which consisted of a magical spell written out on a small scroll to be worn mostly by children. It is believed that the length of the scroll unraveled to be the height of the child wearing the item, customizing the spell to each individual.

Healing statues were men covered in hieroglyphics. People would pour water over the statue, and then collect it once it ran over the text, which was a spell of healing. They would then drink the water to protect their bodies. A different item very similar to this was the horuscippi, a small statue that people dunked into water, and then drank the water from the statue, which sort of resembled a scoop.

The last example that Scalf presented on was mother's milk. It was believed that the milk from a human mother who gave birth to a son held magical properties. If one was unable to attain this mother's milk from an actual human, there was a special vase-like structure that one could pour milk into and it would transform into mother's milk.

The ancient Egyptians had many magical practices intertwined with their medical ones, so Scalf ended the presentation with, "Our understanding of Egyptian medicine is more productive if we abandon the rational versus irrational approach."

Once the program was finished, a \$25 Jewel-Osco gift card was given out at random to one of the patrons in attendance. This program was one of four programs patrons can win a gift card at as part of the Cultures From Around the World campaign the Library is putting on this winter. The two programs that are left to win gift cards at are as follows:

Chocolates From Around the World
Wednesday, February 1 at 7:00 p.m.
Registration required.

Antarctica: A Journey to the
Bottom of the World
Thursday, February 23 at 7:00 p.m.

Another upcoming Adult Services program at the Bartlett Library is the "Your Antiques – What Are They Worth?" on Thursday, Jan. 26 at 6:30 p.m. John Leonard, of Leonard Auctions in

Addison, provides a presentation on the antique market, appraisals and a limited appraisal of items participants bring with them to this event. Participants are requested to bring only one item due to time restraints. Participant entry donation is \$5.00, and to have an item appraised is also \$5.00. Proceeds from this event will be donated to the Bartlett Public Library District to help underwrite the cost of the Ancestry.com and HeritageQuest.com genealogy databases available at and through the Library's website. The Bartlett Public Library District Foundation is a 501(c) tax-exempt organization. For more information, contact Library Director, Karolyn Nance at 630.213.5001 or via email at bpldfoundation@gmail.com.

For more information and a complete listing of scheduled programs, call 630.837.2855 or visit www.bartlettlibrary.org.

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The Bartlett Public Library District, located at 800 S. Bartlett Rd., provides programs and services to meet the needs of the community. For more information and a complete listing of scheduled programs, call 630.837.2855 or visit www.bartlettlibrary.org.