

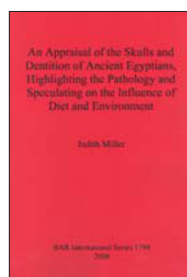
Book reviews

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REVIEWS

AN APPRAISAL OF THE SKULLS AND DENTITION OF ANCIENT EGYPTIANS, HIGHLIGHTING THE PATHOLOGY AND SPECULATING ON THE INFLUENCE OF DIET AND ENVIRONMENT



J. Miller

UK: Archaeopress

price £29.00; pp 143

ISBN 9781407302829

This book is a detailed examination of the oral health of the ancient Egyptians from the period of 5000 BC until the time of Christ. Following this meticulous research, a number of conclusions were drawn from the evidence observed.

This ancient population was assessed by an extensive examination of specimens excavated from tombs and tomb paintings principally from the world famous Duckworth Collection in Cambridge and the Department of Paleopathology in the British Museum. The total number of skulls assessed was in excess of 5,000, which must have been a time consuming and dedicated undertaking.

The conclusions drawn from the evidence are very revealing. The incidence of dental coronal caries appears to be relatively low, presumably due to the absence of refined sugars in the diet. However, the presence of unusual amounts of root caries probably indicates that oral hygiene regimes were ill understood and not practised. The amount of abrasion and wear of the teeth is excessive by current standards, often to the

extent of causing pulpal exposure. Many of the specimens exhibited a history of periodontal diseases and periapical lesions which are graphically illustrated by photographic evidence of the skulls. Oral malignancies were seemingly rare, but maybe this reflects short life expectancy of the population or the lack of soft tissues to analyse. Whilst it is apparent that there was extensive and severe oral disease, it is surprising that no evidence exists to suggest any technical dental skills and little dentistry performed, although there is some evidence of a sort of 'bridgework' being attempted by wiring teeth together.

The skull examinations also leads to an insight into the diet experienced by the population which varied according to the climatic conditions experienced during those millennia. For example, many times the Nile Valley was very productive in fruit and other useful crops, whilst during other periods extensive and prolonged periods of drought rendered crop production very difficult, often resulting in famine. The dietary habits were also, and not unsurprisingly, varied according to the social stratus within the population. The better off had access to wine, beer and joints of beef whilst the less affluent had diets highly dependent on various forms of bread made from varying constituents according to what was available, often contaminated with sand which was a substantial contributor to the excessive tooth abrasion. In later years the diet became more stable as the development of the Nile Valley irrigation systems helped to overcome the effects of droughts.

I was particularly fascinated by the chapter on Medical Papyrus revealing

the development of medical matters in Ancient Egypt. From translations of papyri there are few references to only 100 medical practitioners, of whom only six held a title of 'dentist'. The most notable was Khuam who was 'Chief of the Dentists' and 'Chief Physician of Lower and Upper Egypt', maybe an ancient CDO and CMO. The medical men relied on hazardous remedies, the authority of the healer and the mutual balance of mind over body. In other words apart from the well documented pharmacological effects of opium for pain relief and quinine for malaria the majority of other cures relied on a placebo effect. Another curious section deals with the vocabulary of dental terms in the papyri, all being translated by an Egyptologist into English.

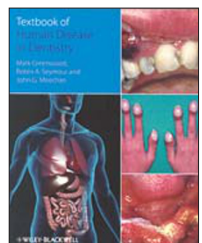
This book is very well indexed, including a most comprehensive list of references compiled from 175 sources from archaeologists, anthropologists, pathologists, forensic and dentally qualified experts. Additionally the book is very well illustrated with 91 photographs, sadly all in black and white. These would have been better produced in colour, but maybe additional production costs may have prevented this. Many graphs are included and whilst informative and no doubt scientifically sound, a deeper understanding of statistics would be an advantage to pass an informed opinion, and perhaps this aspect of the book is better directed to the serious specialist researcher.

In conclusion, and notwithstanding the above comments, the eight written chapters do provide a most readable narrative and insight into exploring the development of agriculture processes on the variation in oral health of what

was considered an advance civilisation in its time. The author must be commended on her diligent and extensive research which culminated in a remarkable extensive review of aspects of these ancient communities.

J. S. Robson

TEXTBOOK OF HUMAN DISEASE IN DENTISTRY



M. Greenwood, R. A. Seymour, J. G. Meechan
UK: Wiley-Blackwell
price £39.99; pp 325
ISBN 9781405170338

As the title suggests this book is presented as a reference textbook outlining important human disease in a context that is relevant to dentistry. To this end it is primarily aimed to be a resource for dental students. The well respected authors take a unique direction in integrating medicine, surgery, pharmacology, therapeutics, pathology and microbiology within one title.

The textbook is divided into 20 chapters, the majority of which are structured around individual systems of the body eg cardiovascular. A brief outline of anatomy and physiology is given and then the relevant pathological conditions are described. Each chapter then highlights clinical features and therapeutics and rounds off with the relevance of each condition to dental practice. The sections conclude tidily in this manner bringing together the management of and important complications in treating patients with common medical problems.

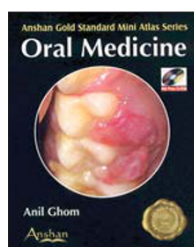
All the major physiological systems of the body are covered and in addition to this there are informative chapters concerning clinical history taking and sterilisation, disinfection and anti-septic techniques. It will be a boon to students to have clinical information such as this alongside the medicine and pharmacology. There are also chapters on child health and care of the elderly which are subjects often scantily covered in comparative texts but which are very relevant to daily general dental practice.

Generally each chapter gives sufficient depth of information to be useful for dental students and qualified practitioners alike. The clear structure of this book means it is successful as both a comprehensive textbook and as a resource to dip into when referencing individual conditions. The only downside to such an all-encompassing approach to medicine in dentistry is that in order to cover the subjects in detail there does have to be some compromises made in the depth of information presented. Some prior knowledge of physiology and medicine is also presumed and for pharmacology and therapeutics this is not a standalone text.

In conclusion the aim of this title has been achieved in providing an accessible and comprehensive textbook that will appeal to dentists at many stages in their career and is likely to become a student favourite.

D. Rogers

MINI ATLAS OF ORAL MEDICINE



A. Ghom
UK: Anshan
price £19.99; pp 579
ISBN 9781905740383

This book forms part of the Anshan Gold Standard Mini Atlas Series and aims to assist dental students, dentists and radiologists to make informed clinical decisions to ensure the optimal management of patients.

The book covers many aspects of oral medicine whilst also encompassing elements of cranio-facial disorders, dental and facial trauma, dental infections, periodontal disease, caries, TMJ disorders, disorders of tooth development and age related tooth changes.

The 579 page book consists of 23 chapters which are broken into various subchapters and sections covering the above mentioned areas. The information is delivered in text format with colour photographs and radiographs included to help illustrate some of the points covered in the text.

Many of the photographs are very useful and show the disease, or condition,

at a more advanced stage than is likely to be encountered in the UK. The author makes a pledge in the introduction to keep the clinical photographs and radiographs of high quality, however, this often falls short of the mark. A large number of the photographs poorly demonstrate the disease being shown, have poor lighting or are out of focus.

The text gives the impression it has not been proofread as errors in grammar, wording and spelling abound and this detracts from the information being provided. Outdated terminology is used throughout the book and many errors are also included.

The index is possibly the most confusing aspect of this book, for example, instead of lichen planus and lupus erythematosus being included in the 'L' section of the index they are filed under 'O' under the heading 'Oral lesion associated with tobacco use'. This is not only a bizarre system but is giving incorrect information to the reader.

The atlas comes with a free CD-ROM, but this offers no further information and is merely a CD containing all the images found within the print. It does allow the photographs to be viewed on a larger scale.

Overall this is a very disappointing book and needs a radical overhaul to become a text of value to practising or aspiring dentists. The book has tried to cover too many aspects of dentistry and has not concentrated on the supposed subject matter of oral medicine.

A. Shrimpton