

Ancient Egyptian Bodies: Medicine and magic



Dr Serena Love

Principal Research Archaeologist

EVERICK FOUNDATION



Gods of medicine

Osiris and Isis

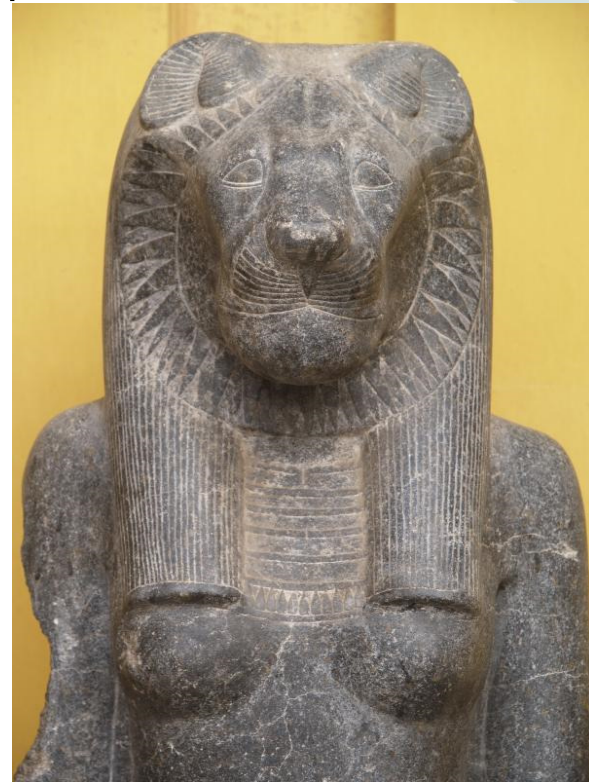


Thoth (later Hermes)



Physicians

- Usually only in reference to the king
- Nedjemou, chief priest of Sekhmet and chief of the physicians
- Heryshefnakht, chief magician, high priest of Sekhmet, and royal physician



Doctor 'swnw'

- "Doctor who supervises butchers"
- "Inspector of liquids"
- "Shepard of the anus"

- Ophthalmologist
- Gastroenterologist
- Rheumatologist
- Paediatrician
- Dentist
- Proctologist



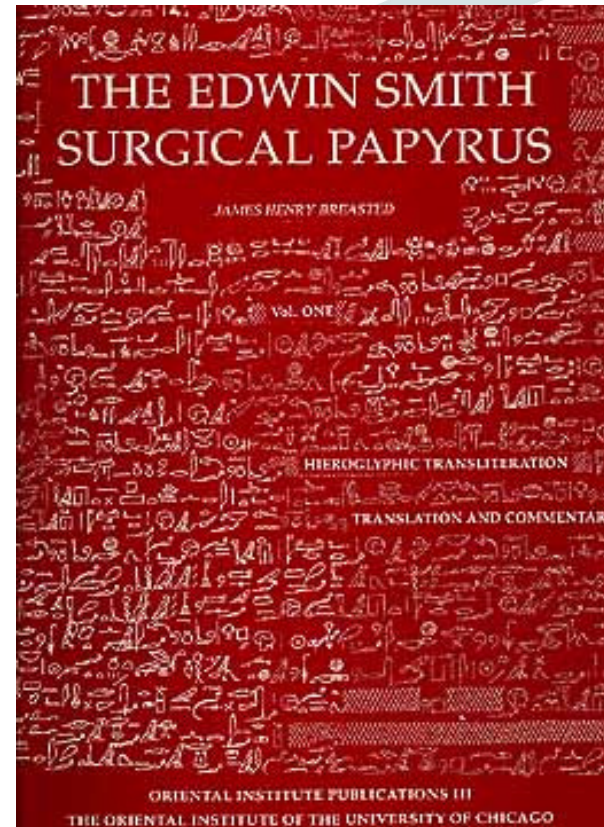
Imhotep

- 2,650–2,600 BC
- Served King Djoser
- Designed and built Step Pyramid at Saqqara
- Chief physician
- Legendary figure



Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus

- Examination
- Diagnosis
- *"Ailments to treat"*
- *"Ailments to contend"*
- *"Ailments not to be treated"*
- No actual discussion of "surgery"
 - 1700 BC
 - 48 specific injuries
 - 900 types of drugs



J.H. Breasted, 2006

"Cases to be treated"

For a crushed forehead, magic is advised.

Apply a poultice of ostrich shell and grease and recite:

"Repelled is the enemy that is in the wound!

Cast out the evil that is in the blood

The adversary of Hours on the side of the mouth is Isis.

This temple does not fall down

I am under the protection of Isis"



Papyrus Ebers, 1550 BC



“Medical Instruments” at
Kom Ombo, 180-145 BC



Medicine and magic

Clinical



Magical



Disease and ailments

- Schistosomiasis
- Lung disorders
 - Tuberculosis
- Tooth decay
- Arteriosclerosis (hardening of arteries)
- Malaria
- Conjunctivitis
- Arthritis
- Infertility/ impotence
- Trauma
- Constipation
- Headaches
- Hemorrhoids
- Aging

Disease to the eyes, lungs, teeth and stomach were the most common.

Treatments

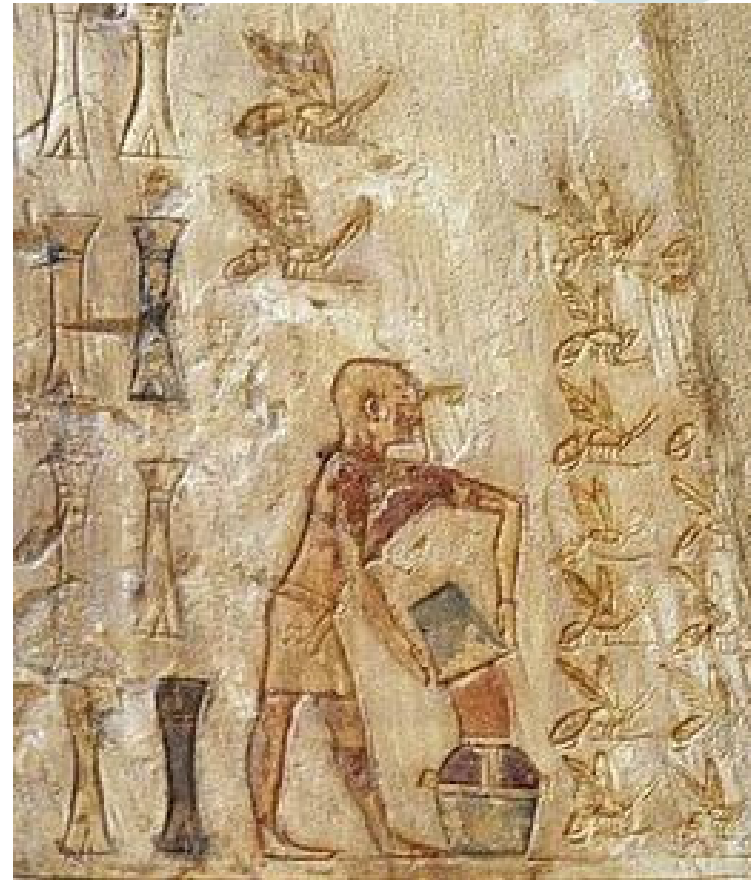
- Oral
- Rectal
- Vaginal
- Topical
- Fumigation

- Pills
- Cakes
- Suppositories
- Ointments
- Drops
- Gargles
- Fumigations
- Bath



Remedies

- Acacia for cough
- Aloe to soothe and heal the skin
- Pomegranate to eradicate tapeworms
- Celery and saffron for rheumatism
- Honey was antimicrobial
- Figs were a laxative
- Cumin and coriander used to relieve gas and bloating



Tomb of Pabasa, Thebes
25th Dynasty, 664–610 BC

Pharmacology

- Minerals
 - Plants and herbs
 - Opium (?)
 - Animal: meat, blood, urine, bone, skin, milk and faeces
 - Honey
- Tail of mouse mixed with onion, meal, honey and water- drink for 4 days
 - Frankincense, myrrh and cinnamon boiled with honey and shaped into pellets

Elixir of Life

“How to transform an Old Man into a Youth”



Thutmose III, 1479-1425 BC



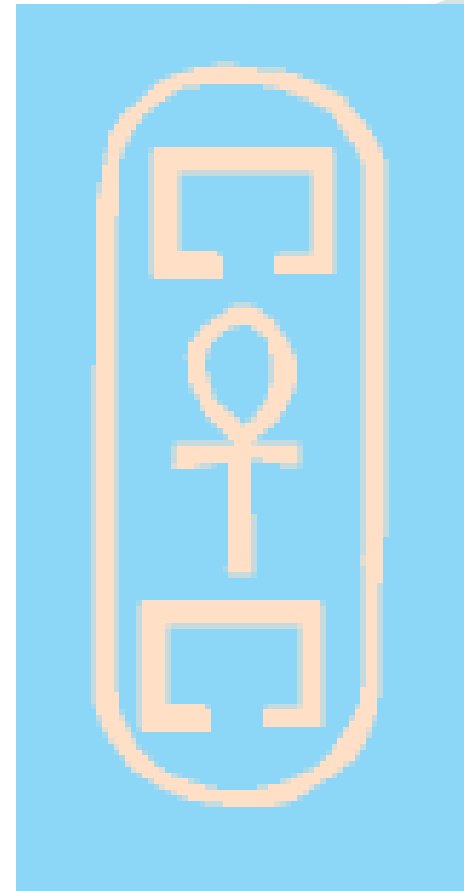
Medical knowledge



'Houses of Life'



House of Life at Amarna,
1351-1334 BC



Pr-ankh

Dentistry

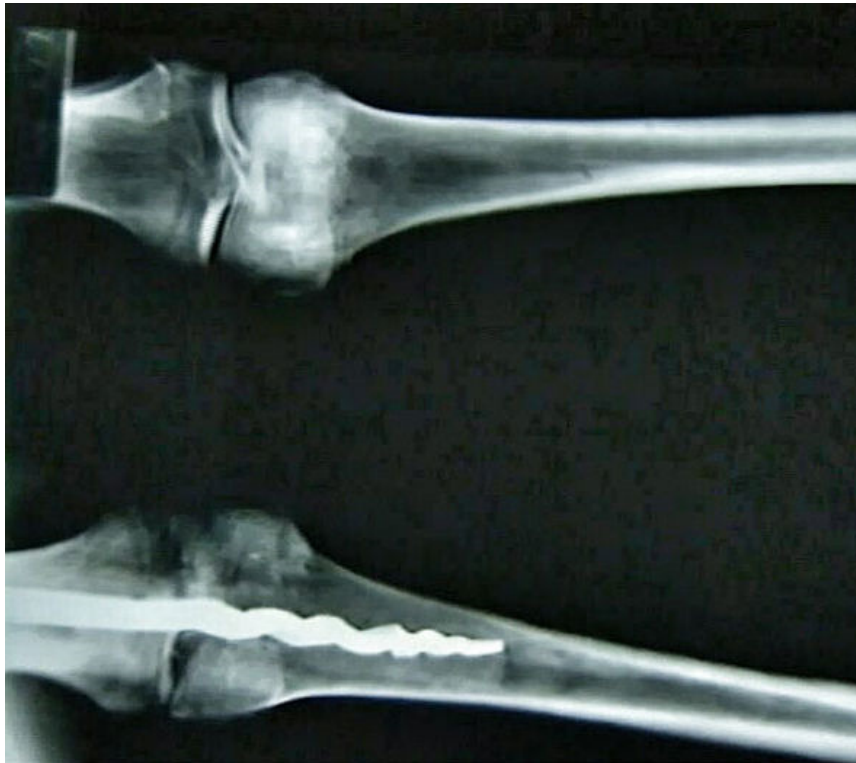
- No sugar
- Grit in diet
 - Sand, stone grit
- Abscesses are common
- Breath mints
 - Boiled frankincense, myrrh, cinnamon mixed with honey and pressed into tablets



Heavily worn teeth and evidence of dental abscesses. Early 12th Dynasty from Asyut

Surgery

23 cm screw in knee of
male mummy, Usermontu
1600-1100 BC



Rosicrucian Museum, California

Prosthetic toe on a female
mummy, c. 900 BC



Surgical tools



Copper tools from the Tomb of Qar Saqqara, 6th Dynasty, 2300 BC.



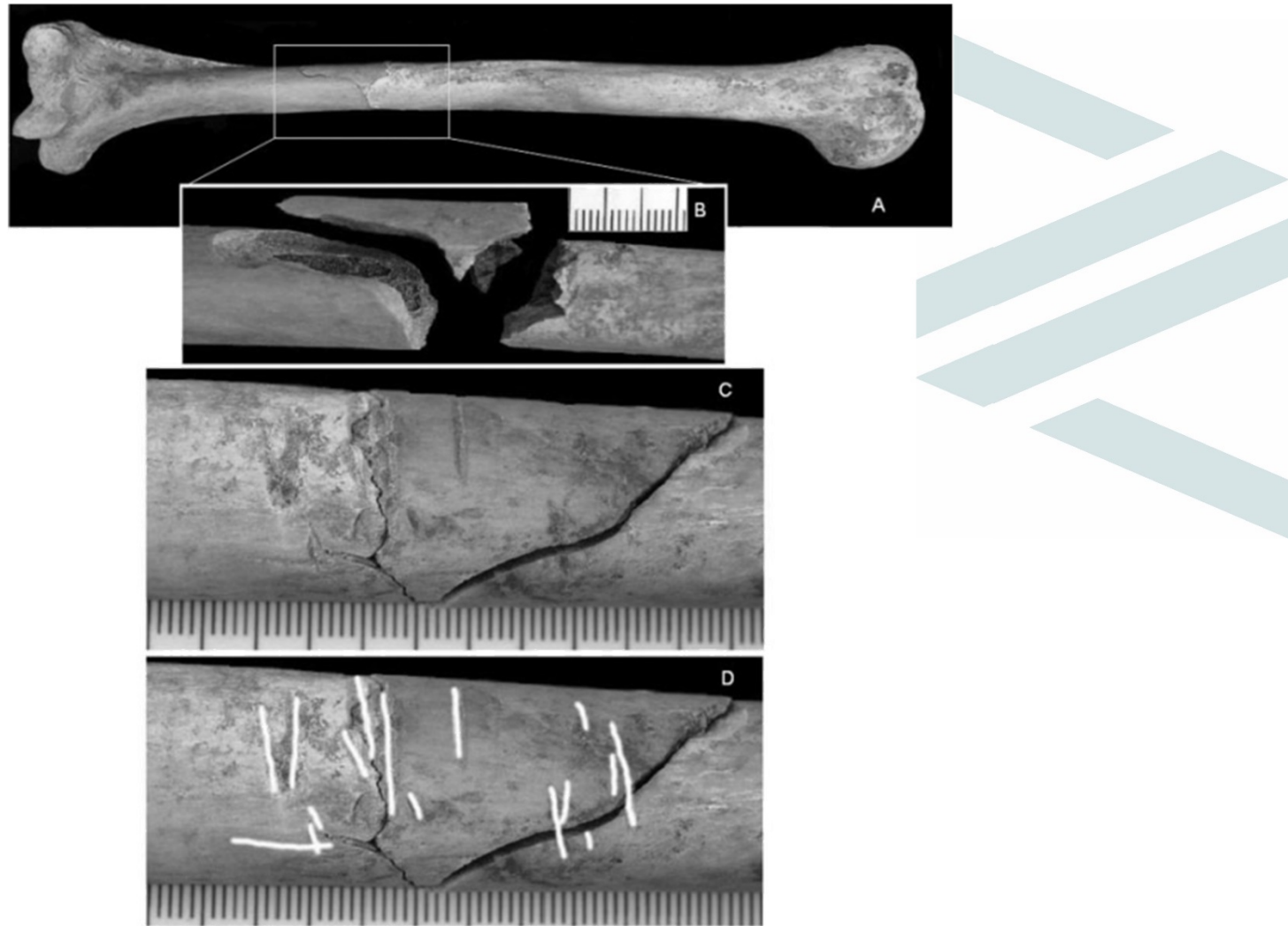


Figure 14. Perimortem butterfly fracture of the right humerus from the individual from Zone 9B. The point of impact is on the medial aspect of the humeral shaft (A and B). Macro-view of cut marks on top of the butterfly fracture of the right humerus (C). These cut marks are highlighted in white (D) to show the number and extent of each cut.

T. Dupras *et al.* 2010. “Evidence of Amputation as Medical Treatment in Ancient Egypt”. *Int’l J. of Osteology* 20: 405-423.

Manchester Mummy Project



False leg made
of wood,
wrapped in
mud and linen

X-ray showing
both legs are
missing



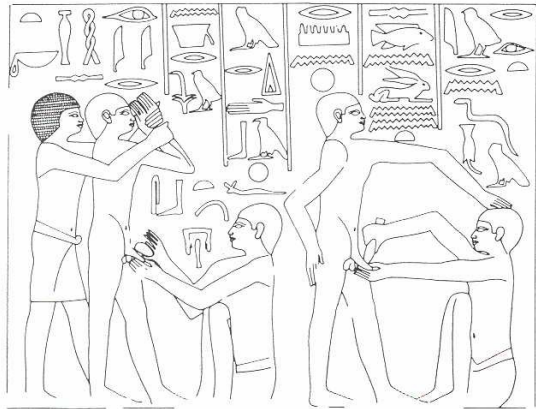
Physiotherapy



TOMB OF ANKH-MA-HOR

From Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* 2002: 133.

Circumcision



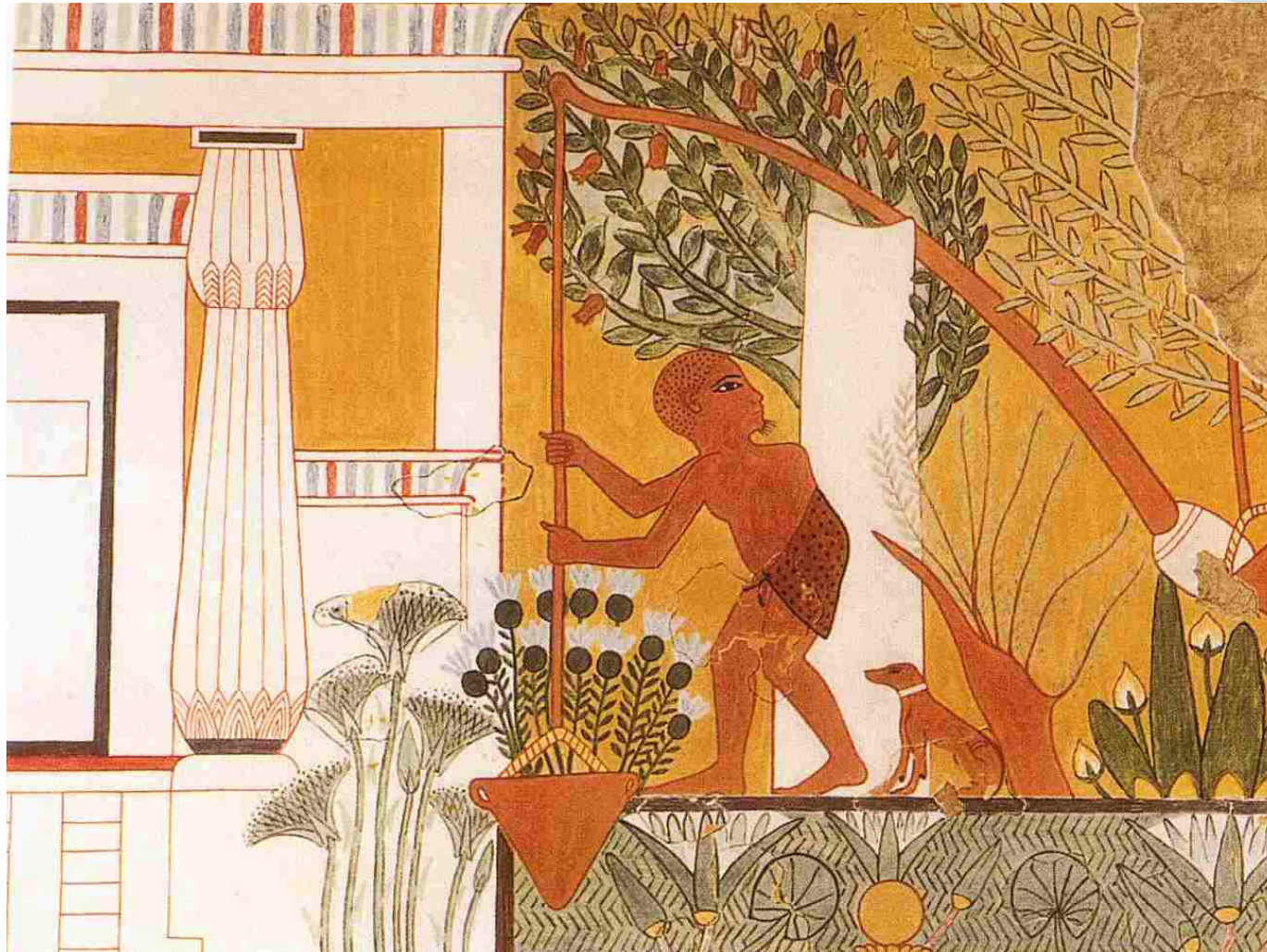
Tomb of Ankhmahor, Saqqara
6th Dynasty, 2345-2181 BC.



Scene from Luxor Temple,
Precinct of Mut. 18th Dynasty,
Amenhotep III, 1360 BC.



Occupational Health



Tomb of Ipuy, Deir el-Medina, 20th Dynasty

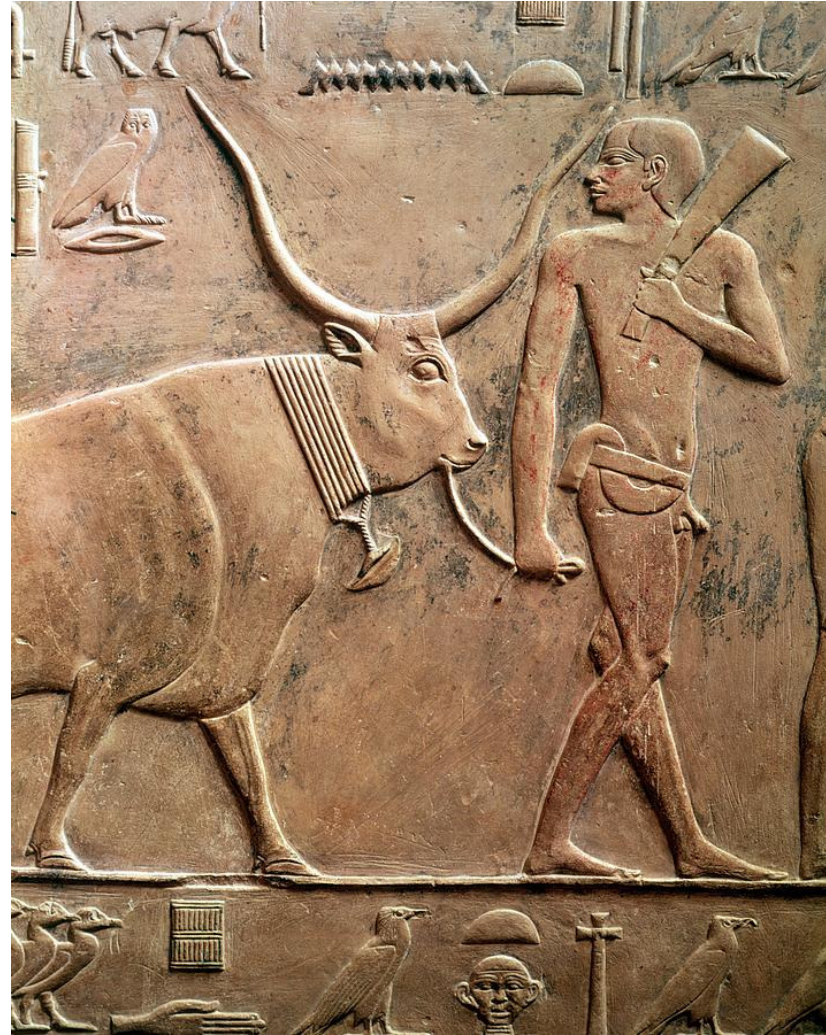
Bilharzia



Tomb of Ptahhotep, Saqqara
5th Dynasty, 2,350 BC



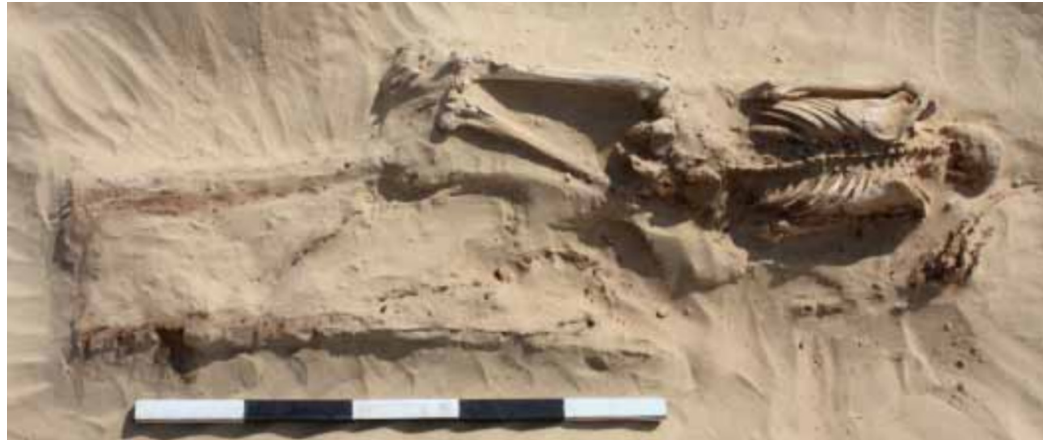
Tomb of Neferkahay, Saqqara
5th Dynasty, 2,400 BC



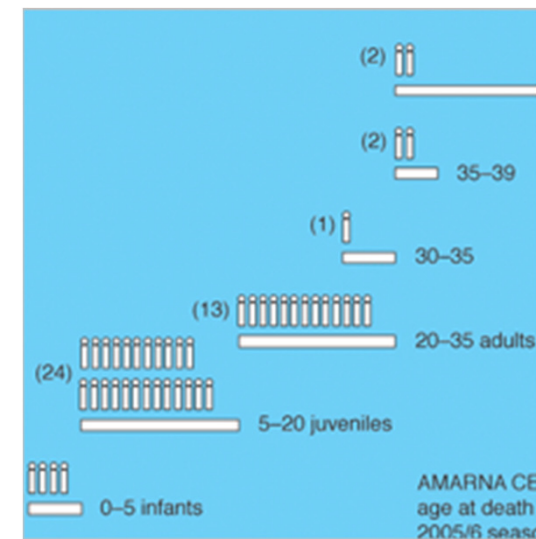
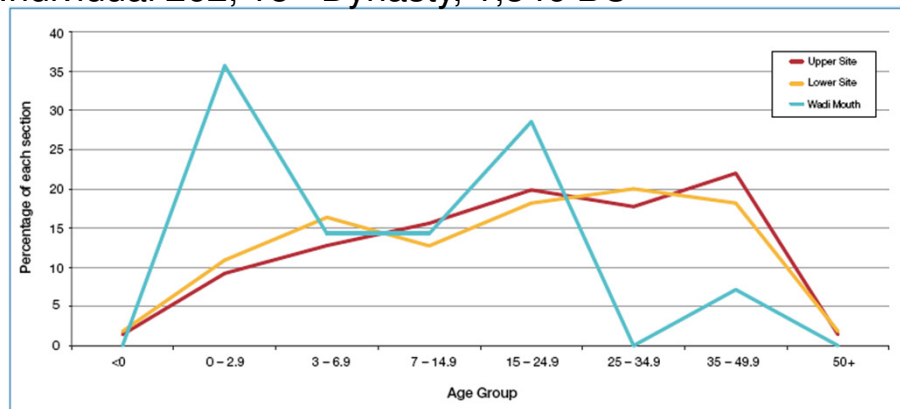
Tomb of Ptahhotep, Saqqara
5th Dynasty, 2,350 BC



Amarna Graves



Individual 262, 18th Dynasty, 1,346 BC



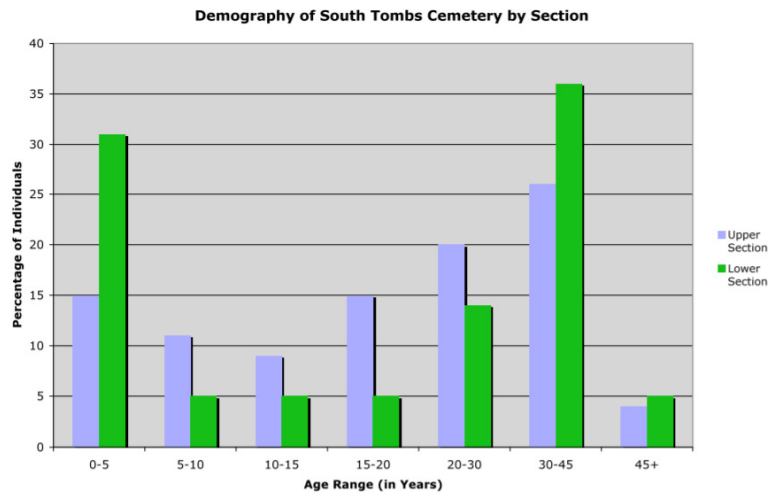


Figure 1: Graph showing the demography of the South Tombs Cemetery individuals.

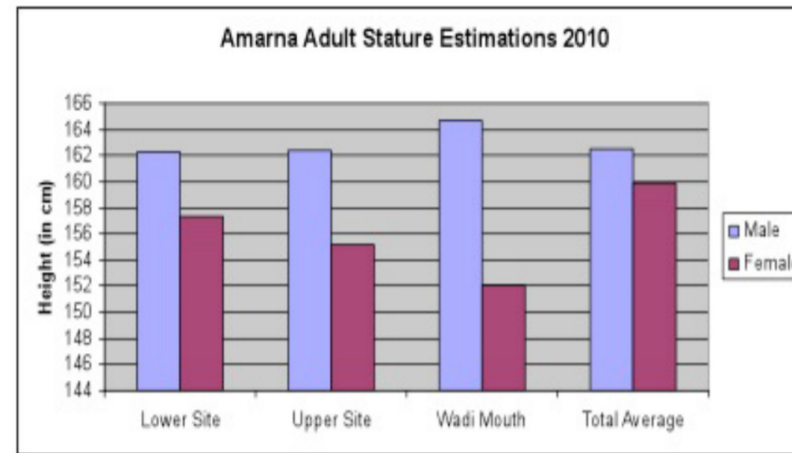


Figure 3. Average height of males and females from each excavation area, and from the South Tombs Cemetery overall.



Figure 5: Photograph showing skeletal lesions in left eye orbit left by cribra orbitalia.

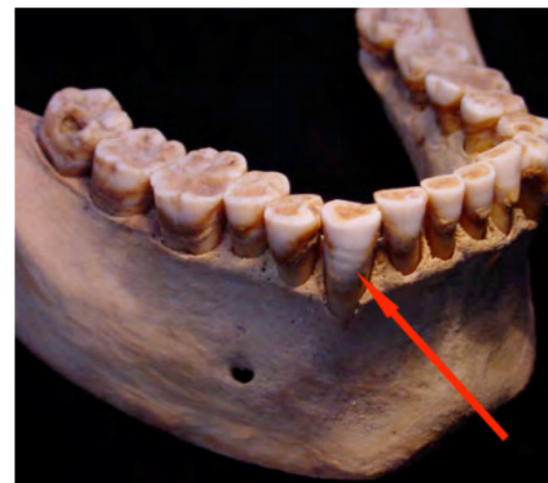


Figure 6: Photograph of mandible displaying enamel hypoplasia.

Amarna Project. "Amarna South Tombs Cemetery 2009: bioarchaeology report"



Indiv. 142 with healed stab wound, left shoulder



Indiv. 232 with healed stab wound, left shoulder



Indiv. 214 healed femoral fracture

Amarna Project. "South Tombs Cemetery 2012: bioarchaeology report"



From Kemp *et al.* 2013. "Life, death and beyond in Akhenaten's Egypt : excavating the South Tombs Cemetery at Amarna". *Antiquity*.87.



Figure 7: Photograph of lumbar vertebra displaying Schmorl's nodes.

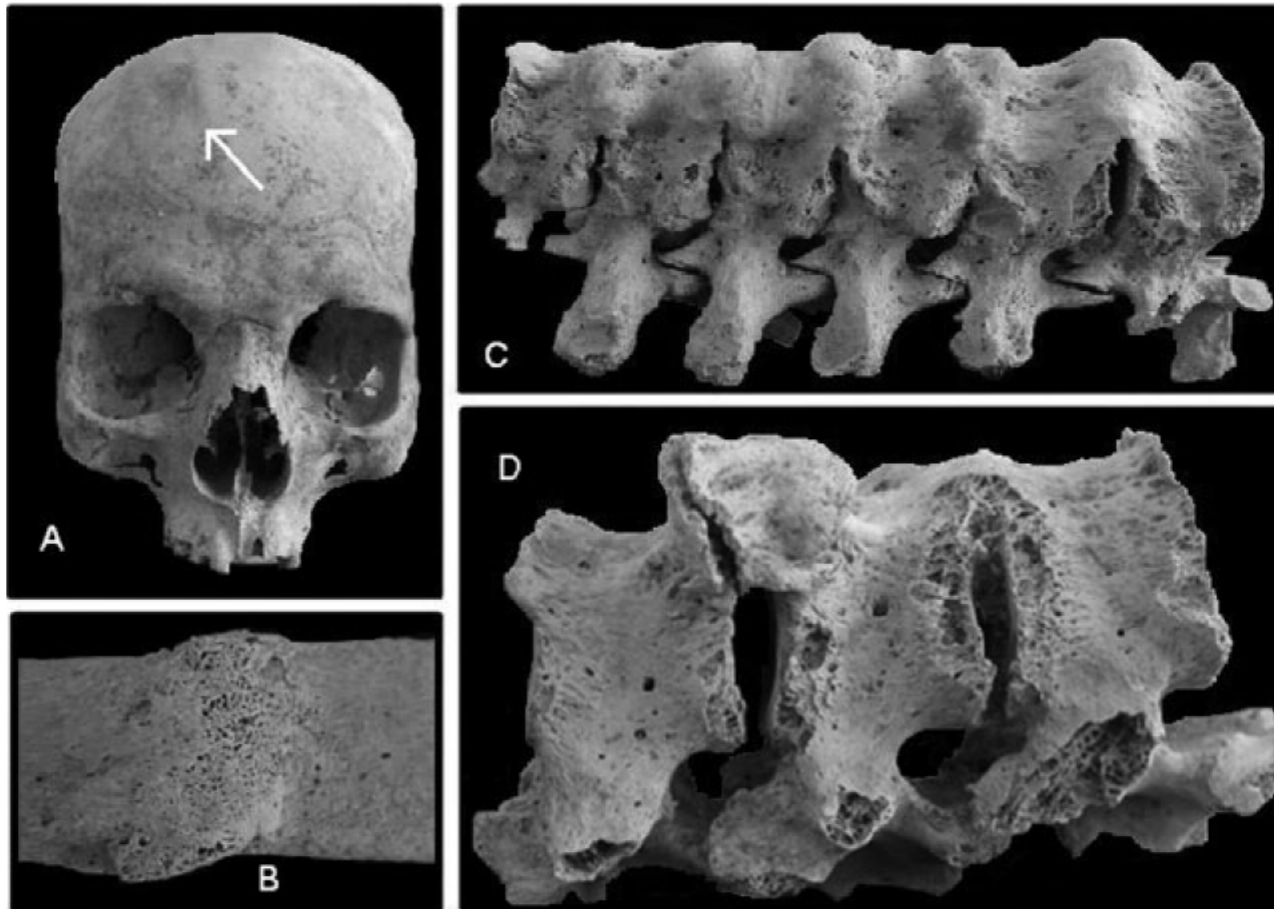


Figure 7. Pathology associated with the individual from Zone 9A, Tomb 10022/1—healed depressed fracture of the right frontal marked with arrow (A); healed rib fracture (B); fusion of thoracic vertebrae 6–11 (C); and fusion of lumbar vertebrae 1–3 (D).

T. Dupras *et al.* 2010. “Evidence of Amputation as Medical Treatment in Ancient Egypt”. *Int’l J. of Osteology* 20: 405-423.

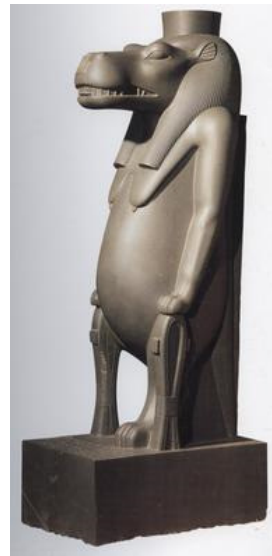
Giza Worker's Cemetery



Women in medicine

- 2,700 BC
- “Chief Physician”
- Attended the King
- Authority to teach
- Midwife
- Wet nurse

Goddess Tawaret



Merit-Ptah



Pesehet

- 2,500 BC
- “Lady Overseer of Female Physicians”
- Practicing physician



From Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* 2002: 125.

Kahun Gynecological Papyrus, 1800 BC

- Fertility issues
- Birth control
- Pregnancy tests
- Induce delivery
- Spells to assist with birth



Pregnancy test



Barley berries

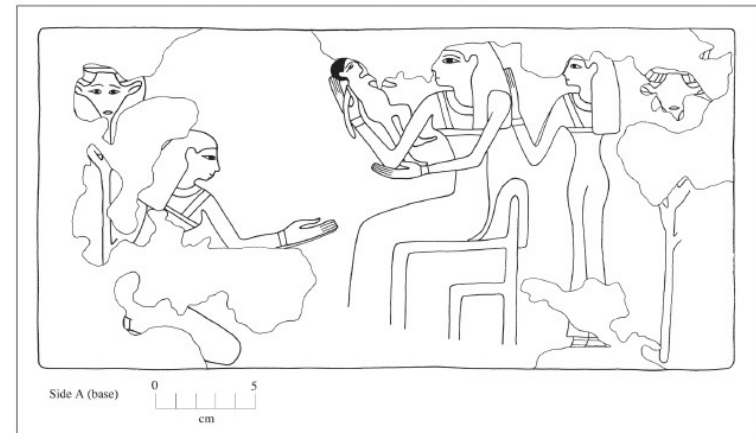


Wheat berries

Birthing bricks



Temple of Hathor, Dendera,
300 BC



Magical birth brick of princess
Reniseneb, Abydos, 1700 BC

Childbirth

Ptolemaic Era
Temple of Armant
50 BC

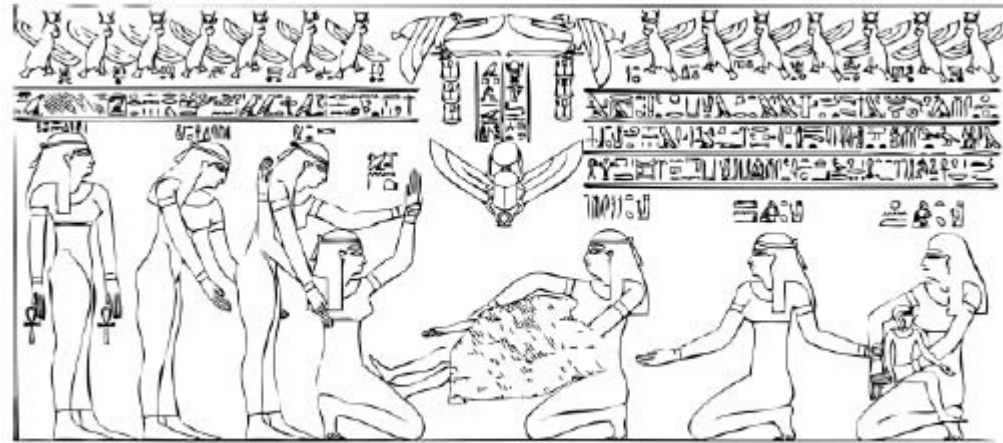


Figure 3. Birth-scene in the temple at Armant. Drawing after: Lepsius, Carl R. Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien. Band IX. Abteilung IV; Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung; 1849-1859; Pl. 60a.

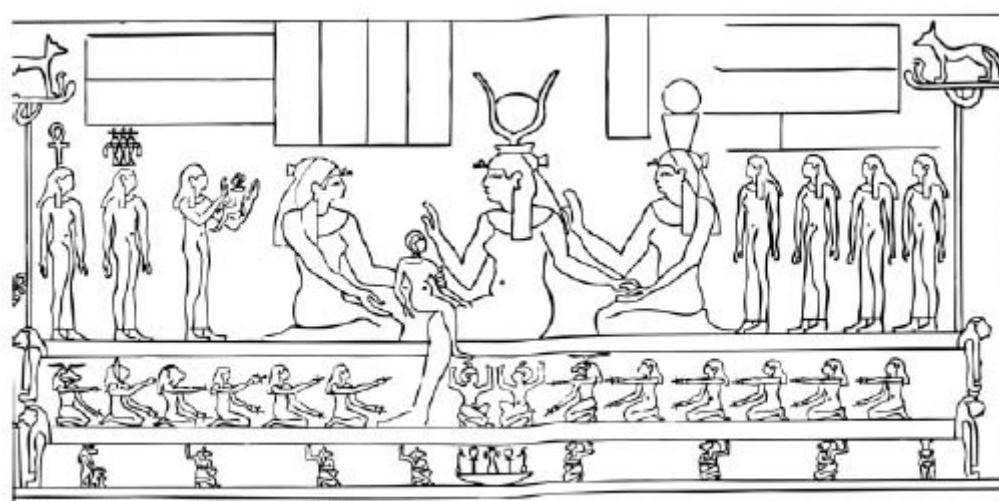
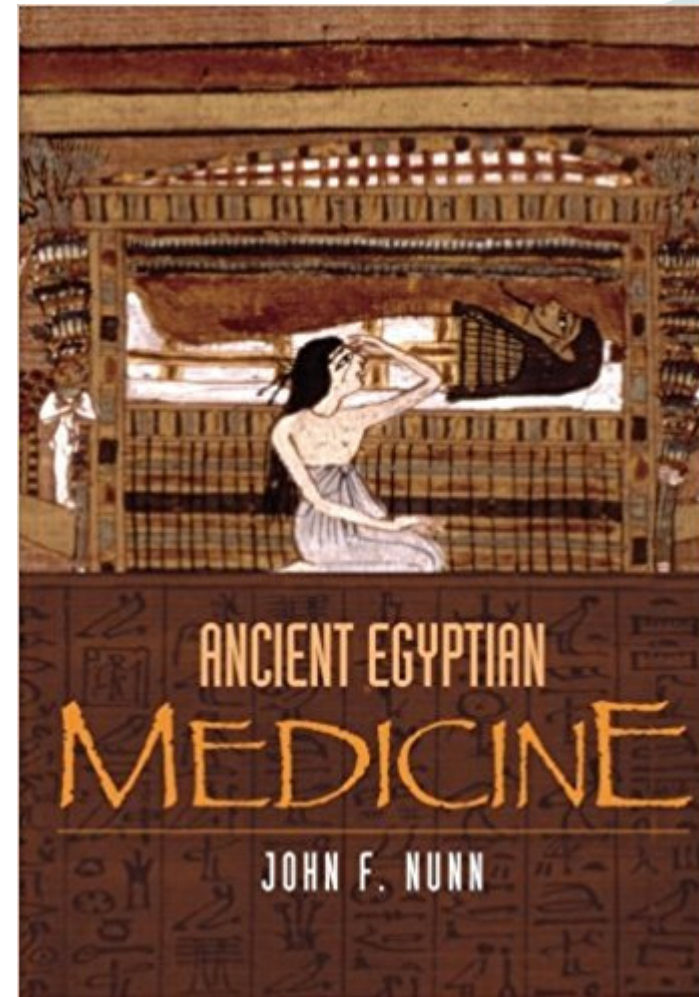
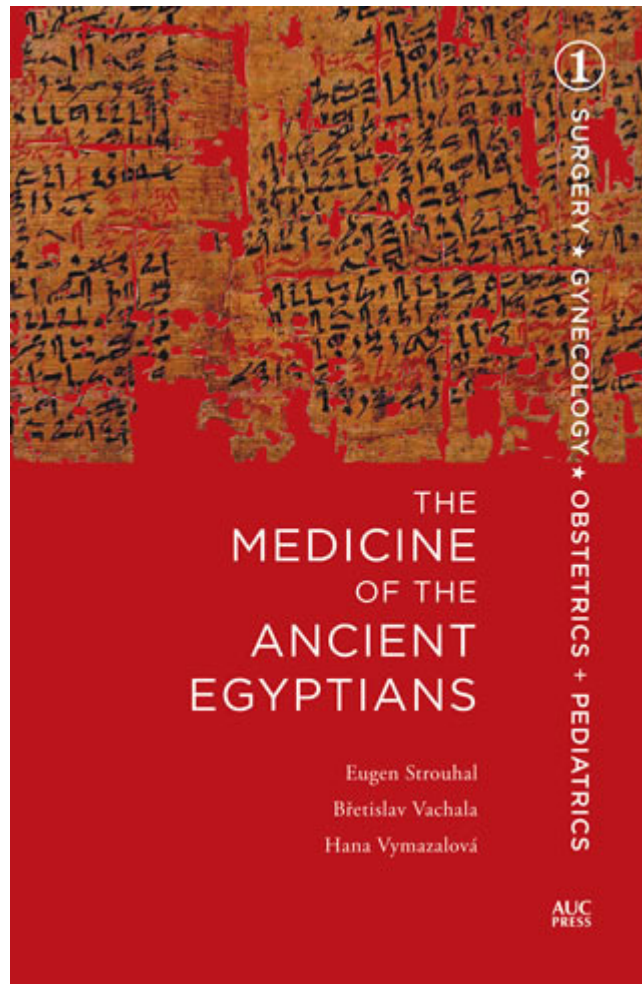


Figure 2. Birth-scene in the mammisi at Dendara. Drawing after: Daumas, n. 6, pl. LIX.

13th Dynasty
1700-1650 BC
Abydos

Further information



Thank you



*“May you be given life, stability, prosperity
and health forever and ever”*

Aged Care and Retirement Village Archaeology Seminar Series



Get in touch!

Dr Serena Love

Principal Research Archaeologist

Everick Foundation

@drserenalove



s.love@everick.net.au

Seminar topics include:

- Indigenous traditions
- Technology
- Folklore and Dreaming stories
- Indigenous justice systems
- Art and symbolism
- Archaeology and contemporary literature

