

Table ronde « Médecine Mésopotamienne »

1 Mark Geller

Title: Notes from the desk of an Assur apothecary

Abstract:

The text of BAM 1 has been thoroughly commented upon but never translated. Wrestling with the meanings behind this unusual catalogue of drug lore leads to some surprising results.

2 Nils Heeßel

Title: Disease Names and Disease Lists: Towards an understanding of Babylonian taxonomy of disease

Abstract: Research on Babylonian and Assyrian diseases in Assyriology has largely focused on identifying diseases according to our modern taxonomy. This has been increasingly criticized in recent years

because of theoretical and methodological problems, often under the heading of “problems of retrospective diagnosis”. However, while scholars invested much time and effort into this debate, there has been surprisingly few attempts to understand the emic perspective: By analysing the way Babylonians named and ordered diseases, the Babylonian rationale of disease taxonomy comes into view, which promises interesting results concerning the Babylonian view of sickness, disease and medicine. Preliminary results of an analysis of disease lists and disease names will be presented in this paper, pointing beyond the current debate on the problems of retrospective diagnosis and outlining possible ways for future investigations.

3 Strahil Panayotov

Title: “Pros and Cons of Mesopotamian Eye Disease Texts”

Abstract:

Babylonian therapeutic practices and drugs for healing eye ailments had a great success in the ancient world. Babylonian remedies were acculturated into other ancient medical systems in a variety of regional languages, including Aramaic, Syriac, Egyptian, Hittite, Greek, and Latin. For now, the largest corpus of Babylonian Eye Disease Texts is the second chapter of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia (7th century BCE), which is arguably the best preserved and systematically standardized collection of medical treatises (series) from the ancient world, prior to the Hippocratic Corpus and Galen. While the heterogeneous Hippocratic Corpus comprised dozens of individual treatises collected over several centuries, the cuneiform tablets of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia are original manuscripts, which were edited within a short period of time by a team of expert scholars, who incorporated sources from all of Mesopotamia that can be traced back to the Middle Babylonian period.

Although, there is abundant evidence of Babylonian medical acculturation, structure and serialization of Babylonian eye disease texts, the technical nature of cuneiform medicine is highly laconic and often seemingly impossible to grasp from modern perspective. There is a conundrum: how was it possible to heal eye disease with laconic practices recorded in cuneiform texts? The present paper will discuss this issue and the pros and cons of cuneiform medical texts on eye disease vis-à-vis medical theory and practice.

4 Ulrike Steinert

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Title: Healing substances in Mesopotamian women’s health care texts: properties, effects and cultural meanings

Abstract:

Medical historians and anthropologists suggest that there is an intimate relationship in folk medical traditions and in ancient medical systems, between concepts of the body and disease processes on the

one hand, and therapeutic substances, their preparation and application on the other. This paper analyses such patterns of interrelation in the corpus of Mesopotamian women's health care texts of the first millennium BCE. In particular, it is argued that Mesopotamian healers chose particular ingredients and applied them in particular types of therapy on the basis on their understanding and knowledge about the ingredients' properties and effects, which were perceived to interact with and exert an impact on the patient's body. The contribution will present case studies illustrating recurring principles of this dynamic interaction between the body and healing substances, such as *like cures like (similia similibus curentur)*, *curing through opposites*, and well as examples of ingredients with cultural connotations or associations that determined their choice in particular medical contexts (e.g. fertility, childbirth).

5 JoAnn Scurlock

Title: The Effectiveness of Ancient Mesopotamian Medical Practices: The Example of *kurkānu*-turmeric

Abstract:

It is conventional wisdom in American medicine that plants are either a) poisonous or b) useless for any medical purpose or c) both at the same time. Cutting edge pharmacological research in the United States is in the field of designer drugs and genetic modification experiments. Meanwhile in Asia and the so-called third world where it is increasingly impossible to afford the exorbitant cost of the medicine produced (and "tested") by the big drug companies, what is truly cutting edge research is being performed on plants that can be grown locally at minimal cost. What is emerging from these studies is the realization that traditional herbal medicines "really" do work and, in the process of understanding how they work, manifold new discoveries have been made. For the most part, Ancient Mesopotamia has been shut out of this exciting new field of medicine due to the fact that we do not know the modern equivalents of most of the plants. However, there are exceptions, words with secure etymological connections to known Aramaic and Arabic plant names. In an article now in publication, I was able to present in great detail what modern experiments can tell us about *šūšu*. In this paper, we shall examine a few uses of *kurkānu*.

6 Martin Worthington

Title: Investigating *lil*-demons

Abstract:

A recently completed book project led me, via the word *līlāti*, to the family of *lil*-demons (*lilū*, *lilītu*, etc). Though there are many perceptive comments on this group in scholarly literature, there has never been a detailed treatment of them, and a number of questions and ideas about them remain largely unexplored. To do so is my current research project, and in this paper I will present some of my results so far. In particular, I will propose a new solution to a problem of gender (failed gender polarity) in the Diagnostic Handbook, and unravel links between *lil*-demons and *Ištar* (and *Dumuzi*). I also explore issues of circulation and standardisation of knowledge: there appears to have been more 'systematic theology' surrounding *lil*-demons than is apparent on the surface of the sources.

7 Chalendar Vèrène

Titre : Hématite et magnétite dans les pratiques thérapeutiques mésopotamiennes

Résumé : La pierre *šadānu* est particulièrement bien attestée dans les textes thérapeutiques mésopotamiens. Sur un total de 115 mentions de ce minéral dans la documentation cunéiforme, M. Melein (2018) recense 98 attestations dans le corpus médico-magique. Utilisée sous plusieurs formes : portée en amulettes ou entrant dans la réalisation de recettes plus complexes, elle pouvait être indiquée dans le soin de multiples tableaux cliniques. Cette communication se propose d'étudier les utilisations thérapeutiques de cet ingrédient minéral en lien avec sa symbolique telle qu'elle nous apparaît par les entrées dans Ur_5 -ra = *hubullu* ou encore par le texte du Lugal-e.

8 Bácskay András

Title: Six glosses in six manuscripts of one therapeutic prescription. A case study.

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to provide a case study of my on-going research on glosses and embedded variants attested in therapeutic text corpus. The presented therapeutic prescription is preserved on six clay tablets from different Assyrian and Babylonian scientific libraries which have been kept in tablet collections of four different Museums (British Museum, Vorderasiatisches Museum, Metropolitan Museum and Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire). Through the example of the presented text I would like to demonstrate the methodology of the research and present some preliminary results.

9 Simkó Krisztián

**Title: How to make a string of amulet stones?
Evidence from an unpublished Late Babylonian tablet**

Abstract:

The corpus of amulet stone lists is a varied group of texts, encompassing all kinds of sources from simple inventories to multi-column tablets, and with a clear focus on the magico-medical importance of the discussed materials. Ranging from basic physiological problems like headache to complex issues with the social standing or religious affairs of the patient, the possible uses of stones are described in great detail. In addition, these sources unequivocally attest to a custom, according to which not a single piece, but a well-defined group of different stone types was employed for any given magico-medical problem. As for the technological aspect of how such strings of amulet stones were created, the information comes from standardized descriptions provided by sources, which always list the necessary stones first. In the case of more detailed texts, references to the cord type, the making of small pouches or leather bags and the ritual context are also included.

The presentation will centre around an incantation, which is known only from an unpublished Late Babylonian tablet. Even though this small tablet does not have a colophon, indirect evidence clearly suggests that it represents an excerpt from a longer collection that contained not only the basic information about the necessary amulet stones, but also references to the corresponding ritual context, including the incantations to be recited over the finished strings. As one such incantation of the consecratory type, our text can be used to infer hitherto unknown details about the techniques surrounding the preparation and, to a lesser degree, application of strings. The presentation will thus demonstrate that, apart from a remotely comparable Sumerian spell known from a collection of prescriptions and incantations against the neck disease *gu₂ gig-ga*, this incantation is one of the most important sources we have to date for studying the technological aspect of string making.

10 Rumor Maddalena

Title: "Dreck-, Deck-, or What the Heck? – Puzzling *materia medica* in Mesopotamia"

Abstract:

"Babylonian and other ancient medical traditions display a fair amount of medical ingredients with names that suggest they are made of foul substances, such as animal body parts or excremental products, the purpose of which is often unintelligible to the modern reader. Such ingredients are generally classified by Assyriologists as *Dreckapotheke*, implying a literal interpretation of the substances, but in some cases their names clearly refer to medicinal, and in no way "Dreck", plants. Furthermore, their pairing with less puzzling, if not *normal, materia medica* in the pharmacological list Uruanna has sparked curiosity as to their exact function in Babylonian medicine. Various suggestions have been proffered, ranging from their serving as *secret* or *coded* names (*Decknamen* theory – Köcher 1995) to their originating from *popular* or even *alternative* names, yet none seems conclusive. What do we make of these strange names and their (sometimes seemingly appalling) presence in ancient therapy? Our appreciation of Mesopotamian pharmacology, and ancient medicine in general, would benefit from a better understanding of this still obscure area. In this paper I

will return to this topic by re-examining and reflecting on Köcher's *Decknamen* theory while trying to reframe and place it in a wider historical context."

11 Troels Pank Arbøll

Title: Practice Makes Perfect: The Career of a Neo-Assyrian Healer

Abstract:

The family of the exorcist Kišir-Aššur from the so-called "Haus des Beschwörungspriesters" in Assur has left us a remarkable collection of magico-medical texts. Not only does this collection form the basis for much of our knowledge about Neo-Assyrian healing outside the Nineveh libraries, but many tablets also provide detailed information about individual family members via their colophons. Especially the numerous texts with Kišir-Aššur's name form a coherent group of manuscripts. My dissertation, *Medicine in Ancient Assur: A Microhistorical Study of the Neo-Assyrian Healer Kišir-Aššur*, provides the first detailed analysis of a single exorcist's education and practice in ancient Mesopotamia. By analyzing 66 texts securely assigned to Kišir-Aššur and allocated to six specific phases of his career, ranging from "junior apprentice" (*šamallû šehru*) to "exorcist of the Aššur temple" (*mašmaš bīt Aššur*), the study investigates how Kišir-Aššur was educated, how he practiced his craft, and how he produced and organized his knowledge. This paper will outline the background and framework of the dissertation in order to investigate Kišir-Aššur's individual career phases. I will examine specific texts from each phase to discuss his education and practice, as well as consider his training in, for example, diagnostics, anatomy, and physiology.

13 Sona Choukassizian Eypper

Title: What is *kasû*(^UGAZISAR)?

Abstract:

The botanical identification of the plant substances used in Babylonian-Assyrian medicine is one of the major challenges in understanding the prescriptions in medical texts. In Babylonian-Assyrian medical texts in general and texts dealing with conditions of the feet in particular, a particular plant stands out which is mentioned in many prescriptions for a number of diseases. This plant is *kasû*. In spite of its wide range of usage, the botanical identity of *kasû* is still debated by Assyriologists. It is, therefore, fitting to take another look at the various attempts at identifying this plant, as the arguments so far presented for any particular identification often consider only selected aspects of the textual evidence.

Practically all the parts of the *kasû* were used as medication, its leaves, seeds, sprouts, the fruity pulp (presumably in those instances where a particular part is not specified), and most importantly the *mê kasî* "kasû-juice" which is used to wash parts of the body or as the liquid base in which other *materia medica* were boiled or soaked and the resulting decoctions applied to the body on bandages. In treating the conditions of the feet, *kasû* juice was used to wash the feet prior to the application of other *materia medica*. It could be crushed, boiled, roasted and/or finely ground into powder (*kasû* flour) that was used as a dry medication sprinkled on boils or wet lesions. This flour made from roasted *kasû*, *qēm*(ZÌ) *kasû*(GAZISAR) *qalûti*(BÍL.MEŠ) is mentioned in a list of various kinds of flour and other powdered substances (BAM 124 iii 44-54; BM 30918, 18-29). Interestingly, there are no references mentioning the root of the *kasû* as having been used as medication or otherwise.

In my presentation I will offer a new identification of *kasû* not mentioned by other commentators and which is based on the total description obtained from the texts, and not only on selective bits.

14 Lynette Talbot

Title: The language(s) of pathology in diagnostic and therapeutic sources: a quantitative approach

Abstract:

The relationship between diagnostic/prognostic and therapeutic sources has long been a topic of interest in the study of Mesopotamian medicine. Questions regarding structural similarities at the series and Tablet level have been widely explored but the utility and methodology of comparison at the micro-scale of vocabulary and idioms has not yet been fully examined.

In this paper I present an analytical method for comparing descriptions of pathological states in different medical corpora. I demonstrate that by examining symptom descriptions from the vantage point of vocabulary the underlying structures of pathological concepts in medical scholarship can be accessed. Detailed studies of the attestations of particular verbs and noun phrases and the circumstances in which they correlate help to build a comprehensive picture of the conventions each source uses to convey broad symptom types such as changes in temperature, pain and appetite changes.

Using the case studies of SA.GIG Tablet 13 and *šumma amēlu suālam maruṣ*—a subseries of the UGU therapeutic series—I show how the proposed quantitative approaches reveal differences in the deployment of anatomical and disease terminology between the two sources. Whilst considering broadly similar types of symptomatology, the differences between the vocabulary used in the two sources hints at disparities in their symptomatic foci and the deployment of differing descriptive conventions.

15 Robert Hawley

Titre: “On the Canaanite and Aramaic glosses in Uruanna”

Abstract:

Alongside *Šammu šikinšu* and the so-called *Vade mecum* (BAM 1), a third major Assyrian pharmacological treatise, known by its incipit as “URU.AN.NA = *maštaka*”, has been the subject of much recent work. Within the framework of a recent European-funded project, JoAnn Scurlock and Jeanette Fincke have prepared a new critical edition of the text, based on the full collation of the known manuscripts, and the time thus is now right for launching some adjacent inquiries. Among the curious features of this series, already attested in the Middle Assyrian period but nevertheless best known from 1st millennium witnesses, is the set of glosses for various plant names, to the effect that a given plant is known as such-and-such “in Canaanite”, “in Aramaic” or “in Subarian” (to cite just a few examples). This paper presents a preliminary overview of these glosses, with some reflections on their socio-linguistic background.