

# **MA in Greek and Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology**

## **Key Themes in Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology**



### **FEAR AND DESIRE An Overview Of Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine**

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## Introduction

In the myth of Atra-hasis, the gods create men out of clay and blood to be dispensed from strenuous labour, but distressed by men's noise they begin inflicting woeful measures upon their creatures. This passage, certainly reminiscent of the Biblical tale of the *Genesis*, marks the rise of fear in men, and so foreruns the entire corpus of medical literature as the moment the experience of the body ceases to be the domain of carefree immediate actions to turn into a matter of scrutiny.

Medicine in Mesopotamia is the fruit of a complex society and encompasses different branches of knowledge, from botany and mineralogy to psychology. Moreover, it integrates religious conceptions and shows man's attitude towards the divine. If man's primary purpose is to serve the gods<sup>1</sup>, disease always appears in response to gods' wrath, their dissatisfaction and the consequence of man's perceived shortcomings.

The remedies ranged over herbal concoctions, ingredients of not easy identification or understanding, and incantations to propitiate the gods. These approaches, today readily stigmatised as naive and primitive, simply mirror the beliefs that all matter is to some degree animate and that word is still transformative. These unavoidably merge with magic, and by doing so also reveal a particular attention for the dynamics of human thinking, fears and desires of that time, not so dissimilar from our own.

In this brief overview written by a non-Assyriologist, I will highlight aspects of ancient Mesopotamian medicine through the meaning given to fertility as a source of both profound joy and concerns. *Prepartum care* texts are peculiar in that they deal with the mystery of life under a new light, showing the preoccupations of that time. Moreover, they constitute a special case of prophylactic treatments in the corpus.

In this picture, mental and physical conditions are inseparable.

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1 Kramer 1971.

## Background

The oldest so far unearthed archaeological evidence of medical activity is in the Royal Palace of Ebla, in Syria, one of the most flourishing centres of the late Early Bronze Age in the Near East. Along with a vast archive of cuneiform tablets, the excavation revealed a palace complex named ‘G’ dating to 2450-2300 BC with working installations for the processing of plants, ‘eighty percent of which toxic’<sup>2</sup> but all with medicinal properties<sup>3</sup>. These plant remains are contemporary with the first medical tablets written in Sumerian, containing prescriptions, elaborate recipes of poultices and beverages<sup>4</sup>. One of these tablets does not indicate the ailments for which the therapies are needed, and merely displays a vast arrays of ingredients, not exclusively from the botanical world<sup>5</sup>. The second tablet is a prescription for someone afflicted by ‘a disorder in the *tun* and the *nu*’, which Kramer identifies as a venereal disease:

‘After rubbing with the crushed (turtle) shell, you should rub (again) with fine beer, you shall wash with water; then you shall fill (the sick spot) with crushed fir wood’.

The largest collection of texts, however, mainly comes from the from the library of Assurbanipal in Niniveh, discovered by A. H. Layard in 1849, or from the site of Asshur, Kuyunjik and Sultantepe. All these texts are Neo-Assyrian in date, but constitute copies of older archives from Babylonian temples<sup>6</sup>.

These are traditionally divided in prognostic-diagnostic texts, therapeutic texts and lexical lists. Overall, despite the thoroughness of the descriptions of the ailments and corresponding therapies, the entire theoretical apparatus remains in the dark. There is no indication of how the remedies were contrived, the quantities, on what basis the practitioner chose one over another in the presence of the same symptom. Most of the theory, apparently, ‘was never recorded in writing’<sup>7</sup>. Another way to put it, ‘the entries represent the distillation of millennia of first hand observation’<sup>8</sup>. Oils and bandages could

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2 Rumor 2021.

3 Plant residues were both in the room (L.2890) and in the pots. Prevalence of Euphorbiaceae. Catagnoti 2013.

4 Kramer 1971. Text published by M. Civil in the *Revue d’Assyriologie*, LIV (1960).

5 Kramer lists: thyme, mustard, plum tree, pears, figs, willow, *Atriplex halimus* L., *Prosopis stephaniana*, ‘manna’-plant, fir, pine, often diluted in beer, wine and oils. River bitumen, crude oil, animal products and ‘snake water’ also figure.

6 Jastrow 1913, Biggs. 2005.

7 Geller 2006, Worthington 2009.

8 Scurlock 2005.

have possibly belonged to folk wisdom, but the tablets were meant to be consulted by healing professionals, capable of discerning the right trial in a multitude of signs.

Two main specialists are known in the tradition of Babylonian medicine, *ašipu* and *asû*. Their roles at times overlap, although it is conventionally agreed that the diagnostic interpretation of the omens was a prerogative of the former, whereas the healing was performed by both practitioners: *asû* in the role of pharmacist or physician, and *ašipu* as the *maestro of incantations*, therefore often translated as ‘conjurer’ or ‘exorcist’. Since the very beginning, we do not ignore the predominance of magical elements in the ways of treating the body in Ancient Babylonia. Magic did not coincide with blind beliefs, resorted to out of despair, but consisted in a solid system meant to operate a meticulous translation of empirical data into the logic acknowledged at the time.

Disease was seen as caused by sorcery or the interference of a demon. This condition was ultimately the consequence of a negligence towards the gods or one’s personal protector who in turn refused to shield the person from pernicious forces. Healing had to be two-fold: drugs to affect the body, incantations to overturn the mind<sup>9</sup>. Scope was to restore harmony between the two: this could be a way to read men’s relationship with the gods.

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9 ‘The incantation or charm is thus essentially a medical prescription, in which, however, the words of the medical formula are as significant as the prescription itself’ (Jastrow 1913).

## Part I - Fear

The gathering in forty tablets of omina known as the diagnostic-prognostic book generally associates a set of symptoms (SA.GIG, or *sakikku*)<sup>10</sup> with the name of a disease and the consequent prognosis based on the pattern observed. Disease names begin with the formula ‘Hand of’ a god, in relation to the magical entity being outraged or that allowed the sorcery to take effect. For instance, the ‘Hand of Gula’ was particularly dreaded, for Gula was the goddess of health and medicine, obviously invoked for healing. ‘Hand of Gula’ occurred to those ‘who broke an oath’, and caused ‘persistent sores’. ‘Hand of Ishtar’, the Assyrian goddess of love and war, caused mania, depression and all the abrupt transitions between these two:

‘If he rejoices and is terrified, hand of Ishtar’ (AOAT 43.256)<sup>11</sup>.

Medicine, in fact, does not just deal with ailments, but primarily presupposes a discourse on how the body should be<sup>12</sup>, and suitable for what purpose.

Progeny was seen as the highest bliss, fertility as the essence of life: anything deviating from it stood for a curse<sup>13</sup>. Because of this, not only do we read the earliest medical texts in Mesopotamia, we also find the first ascertained ‘sex therapist’, in the figure of the *ašipu*. There was an entire collection known as ŠÀ.ZI.GA (Sumerian for the Akkadian *niš libbi*, ‘the lifting of the heart’) which treated male impotence by the means of erotic incantations, leather bags hanging from the neck, plants and components of sexually aroused animals:

‘If a man loses his potency, you dry and crush a male bat that is ready to mate,  
you put it into water which has sat out on the roof, you give it to him to drink;  
that man will then recover potency’<sup>14</sup>.

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10 Transliterations of Sumerian are rendered in capital letters, of Akkadian in italics.

11 Scurlock 2005.

12 It should not surprise to find entire sections on cosmetics in the Egyptian medical papyri. See the Papyrus Ebers.

13 <<He (the moon-god) added many days and years of happiness to my life, and kept me alive. One hundred and four happy years. My eyesight was good (to the end), my hearing excellent, my hands and feet were sound, my words well chosen, food and drink agreed with me, my health was fine and my mind happy. I saw my great-great grandchildren, up to the fourth generation, in good health and (thus) had my fill of old age>>. These are the words of Adad-Guppi, mother of the Babylonian king Nabonidus, joyful about her successful life, translated by Oppenheim in Biggs 2005.

14 Biggs 2005.

Other remedies expected the *ašipu* to rub oils containing ‘magnetic hematite’ on both the male and female partners while reciting erotic poems<sup>15</sup>. If the male’s loss of libido became chronic, the *ašipu* diagnosed a ‘hand of a ghost’:

‘If *hand of a ghost* is persistent in a man’s body and cannot be gotten rid of, to expel it you take (various minerals) and carob seeds, you char them over coals, you pulverize them, you mix cedar resin; you recite the (following) incantation seven times)<sup>16</sup>.

Ghosts were the wandering souls of men dead by cruel acts and were notorious to vex any living man with whom they had matters to settle. ‘Hand of a ghost’ would be translatable in modern terms as self-destructive behaviour and stress responses:

‘If he chews on his arms, he had a person strangled to death and the ‘double’ of the dead person afflicts him’. (TDP88 r. 6)<sup>17</sup>.

Other causes of male impotence could have been ‘Hand of Ishtar’, or sorcery performed ‘generally by a woman’ against him, also known as the ‘Hand of man’. The system of diagnostic was rather sophisticated:

‘You mix together dough made of emmer-wheat and potter’s clay; you make figurines of a man and a woman, put them one upon the other, and place them at the (sick) man’s head, then recite [the incantation] seven times. You remove them and [put them n]ear a pig. If the pig approaches, Hand of Ishtar. If the pig does not approach [the figurines], (it means) Sorcery has seized that man’<sup>18</sup>.

From the description of this ritual, we notice a few elements: a) the meaning of clay figurines in the ancient world goes beyond the religious sphere, b) the number seven recurs as apotropaic measure, c) animal behaviour had predictive value, d) the meaning of medical conditions goes beyond physicality.

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15 Scurlock 2005. Biggs 2005.

16 BAM 221, in Biggs 2005.

17 Scurlock 2005.

18 KAR 70, in Stol 1999.

Hand of Ishtar is known to be fatal only if compounded with other symptoms, such as traumatic injuries, severe wounds, venereal diseases, haemorrhage, for which the goddess was also responsible<sup>19</sup>. All these other ailments must have been absent for the man needing the aforementioned ritual. The cause is invisible, but the condition is not causeless: a pig will determine it. Both ‘Hand of Ishtar’ – in absence of other ailments – and ‘Hand of man’ have psychological repercussions. One is associated with psychotic episodes, the other with fear instigation.

The most common form of sorcery was crafted by shaping clay figurines resembling the target and making them ‘lie with a corpse’, an expression often found in diagnostic tablets: the witch would operate in such a manner to arouse Gods’ wrath against the target. The target would then tumble down a vortex of misery: inescapable melancholy, self-inflicted isolation, financial losses, calumny, constant sense of fear and lameness<sup>20</sup>. Many tablets describe the man undermined by ‘Hand of man’ as being rejected by any interlocutor, by princes and by his own woman.

Most of these are not medical conditions, but not being able to ‘get up the energy to accomplish what one wants’ was taken rather seriously in ancient Mesopotamia. Another cause of mental afflictions were lilû-demons (*ardat lili*), spirits of young boys and girls who died before getting married, whose only entertainment remained to torment the youth of the opposite sex. Lilû-demons triggered insomnia, hyperactivity, abnormal sexual behaviour in both young boys and girls, leading them astray from their duties. Alongside lilû-demons, Hand of Ishtar could alter woman’s sensibilities too, if she raves about ‘her womb to be too short’<sup>21</sup>.

All in all, similar states of detachment and apprehension were not neglected in the *materia medica* of Ancient Mesopotamia, but were all thought to be absolutely curable.

To extinguish any fear, and dispel the effects of the witchcrafts or the demons’ siege, incantations recited by the *ašipu* were essential. The strategy consisted in evoking the sick person’s own personal god, asking for forgiveness or benevolence. Everyone had their personal god and this ‘guardian angel’ was the only one able to protect the person and defeat any negative influence.

These two ideas that emerge – the disease or fear coming from outside, and the summoned angel coming to save the troubled person – may sound primitive to modern man’s ears. This perhaps happens

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19 Scurlock 2005, Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine, pages 468-470.

20 Stol 1999.

21 TDP214 in Scurlock 2005.



because modern man cannot understand poetry and how it affects life, much more than how ancient man cannot understand modern science.

The conception that ‘disease comes from outside’, as Jastrow highlights in 1913, is the foundation of ‘germ theory’ and the entire rhetoric on viruses. However, the very distinction between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ is blurred in the ancient world. The aforementioned pig approaching the figurines could reveal what stirs the ‘heart’ of a man, so does the practice of extispicy – held in high regard in Mesopotamia – the inspection of sheep’s liver, by predicting human endeavours. We instantly realise how a different sensibility is at play. Everything was felt as animate, potentially bearing a crucial sign. The *ašipu*, both doctor and magician, but primarily a man with literary propensities, was fervently devoted to his work of *axiopoiesis*<sup>22</sup>, not only by carving meanings out of his surrounding, but also by validating them on clay. Those who came after him could adopt his interpretation, implement it, or (this remains an option) destroy the tablets. With no doubt, what makes a system work is belief. It has always been so and so will always be. Definitions and worldviews, even when describing external agents, come from ‘inside’: from the way our mind has processed the events which it proceeds to name and explain. We tend to make use of the scientific concepts of our time, Babylonians needed an order of deities to understand the same phenomena. They ‘differentiated their demons, just as we do our germs’<sup>23</sup>. As twentieth-century logician W. O. Quine once said in a much-quoted passage, ‘in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind’. The paradigm resists till its application proves to be fruitful. If vital energy is restored after a series of songs that follow a pig circumventing clay statuettes, the method will survive.

The second idea around the necessity of the protector will be discussed in the conclusion.

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22 From ἀξία, values, and ποιησις, making.

23 Jastrow 1913.

## Part II - Desire

In a society as cerebral as the Mesopotamian, fertility was the supreme good but also a source of concern. Both men and women desired progeny and looked for answers in plants, stones, and animals. A new section in the medical corpus appeared, the only one to be of prophylactic nature.

The Babylonian *herbarium* included several plants to help the woman to ‘get the seed’ and to go through any stage of childbirth<sup>24</sup>. Most plants and stones are not yet identified, and are known to stand for either plants or stones merely because most names in Sumerian are accompanied by determinatives (the sign ‘U’ preceding the name of plants, ‘NA’ of stones). The mysterious plant *Imhur-lim* is indicated for ‘a woman who does not bear’ and it is also known as the ‘Plant of Birth’ in the myth of Etana. Etana was the king of Kiš and wanted to become father even though he could not. A version of the myth tells that he saved an eagle from the clutches of a snake and in return he asked the eagle to show him the plant *Imhur-lim* from heaven. This is a fascinating story, the king begot a son in the end (as it is known from historical records), and the name ‘eagle’ seems to be homographic with the verb ‘to be pregnant’ and ‘copper’<sup>25</sup>. Another instance of language being magical. Moreover, the eagle is associated with the ‘stone of birth’ of later medical traditions<sup>26</sup>. Is this plant *Imhur-lim* a rattling stone? Stol suggested Etana’s plant could possibly correspond to mandrake, native in North-West Mesopotamia, where the story is thought to take place, and therefore be the Hebrew *duda’im* or ‘love apples’.<sup>27</sup> This is peculiar because Ancient Egyptians also believed *Mandragora Officinarum* to be an aphrodisiac and to facilitate conception<sup>28</sup>. But the debate is far from being solved, as other scholars had already assigned mandrake to other unknown plants.

In lack of botanical knowledge and availability, traditional concoctions were also advised:

‘You flay an edible mouse, open it up, and fill it with myrrh: you dry in the shade, crush and grind it up, and mix it with fat; you place it in her vagina, and she will become pregnant’  
(Finkel in Stol).

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24 Stol 2000.

25 Stol, chapter III. The word is ‘*erû*’.

26 Aetites or Eagle-Stone, which Theophrastus could have hinted at without naming it. The first scientist to name it was Dioscorides in 69AD. See Bromehead 1947.

27 Stol 2000.

28 Reeves 1992.

The efficacy of the mouse is unknown but this magical ingredient recurs in a recipe to prevent miscarriage:

‘If a woman is about to lose her foetus in either the first, or the second, or the third month, you dry a *hulu mouse*, crush it and grind it up, (add) water three times, and mix it with oil; add alluharu (a mineral). You give it to her to drink, and she will not lose her foetus’ (Finkel in Stol).

Stones in the form of amulets were also of great help during pregnancy<sup>29</sup>. Stol reports lists of one-hundred-thirty stones and coloured strings of wool, needed in rites to be performed to protect the woman from miscarriages. The woman often had to strive against another face of fear similar to what we described in the first part. On the one hand, she had to be diffident towards the jealousy of her neighbourhood<sup>30</sup>, on the other hand she had to neutralise the fear of the ‘baby-snatching demon’ Lamaštu<sup>31</sup>. This fear of losing the child could only be extinguished by the *ašipu* driving out any residue of the ‘seven witches’, providing protective amulets (especially the seal *haltu*, the stone *ittamir*, or a specific one with the effigy of the benevolent Pazuzu to combat the influx of Lamaštu), bandages, leather bags with herbs and, *dulcis in fundo*, reciting traditional incantations.

Moreover, the *ašipu* had the task of reading signs on the woman’s body to interpret her condition, forecast the outcome of the birth, and give her advice. Sexual intercourse before the third month and after the seventh was almost prohibited if she wanted to survive and not compromise the child, on the fifth and sixth months it was still problematic<sup>32</sup>. Days were also relevant:

‘If a woman of childbearing age is pregnant and at (five) months (and) nine days they approach her, she will die’. ‘If at (five) months (and) seven days they approach her, she will live (TDP 210:112-110).<sup>33</sup>

Not surprisingly, the *ašipu* could also tell the sex of the baby by observing the mother, and recommend the most favourable situations for conception<sup>34</sup>.

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29 Stone amulets in the form of scarabs were of crucial important to protect pregnant women in Ancient Egypt.

30 Scurlock 2005.

31 Lamaštu was a goddess, the daughter whom Anu repudiated. Since then she wanders on earth with the sole intent of killing children. She also caused typhoid symptoms in both males and females. She is depicted with a head of dog or lion.

32 Scurlock 2005.

33 Scurlock 2005.

34 The tablet 104 of the omen book *Shumma alu*. See Stol 2021. For example, ‘siesta time’ is described as an excellent occasion for conception.

In this way the *ašipu* wielded the scientific schemes of his time but, above all, acted as an intermediary power with the gods, capable of dispelling any evil and of interpreting reality. He presided over the purification ceremonies, initially carried in the temples, necessary for the patient who was cured. His role was baptised as ‘magician’ because he was the one enabling the transformations of natural states.

He could discern the vulnerability which had procured the ailments or instilled fear, and conciliate the patient’s personal god and other gods if mistreated by the patient.

To propitiate birth in Mesopotamia, along with the mother goddess – Ninhursag with her various names –, the moon god was often invoked. In Sumerian mythology, the moon god engenders the sun god, which does not reflect their astronomical observations but the simple idea that light comes into being from darkness. The birth of a child is often described as the navigation of a beautiful vessel, going ‘from the quay of death to the quay of life’<sup>35</sup>. Nanna, in Sumerian, or Sin, in Akkadian, the moon god, is also associated with cattle and cycles of life, he is the god allowing ‘water’ to fertilise the field. Water is another word for ‘semen’, and in the prayers Sin figures as ‘the lord of the seed’<sup>36</sup>. And Sin’s mother, Ninlil, rejoices in him: ‘You can desire everything precious to the heart!’<sup>37</sup>.

A known incantation for protecting the woman in labour is the ‘Cow of Sin’. Six copies so far known of this myth, four from Assyria and the others from Ugarit and Hattusa, approximately date to the end of the second millennium BC. The tablet of Ugarit was found in an archive named ‘House of the Lamaštu tablets’<sup>38</sup>. It is the story of the moon god Sin who falls in love with one of his cows.

In the guise of a bull, he descended on earth to approach her. When the cow is about to give birth, Sin sends divine helpers to quell her pain:

‘When her days came to an end, her months were finished.

The cow trembled and terrified her herdsman. [...]

Sin heard the screaming in heaven and lifted high his hand,

Two Lamassus descended from heaven.

One of them carried *oil-from-the-jar*, the other brought *water-of-labour*.

With the *oil-from-the-jar*, she touched her forehead,

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35 Stol, *ibidem*.

36 Stol, *ibidem*.

37 A balbale to Sin (Nanna), <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.13.01#>.

38 Marquez 2015.

with water-of-labour she sprinkled her whole body. [Repeated twice]  
When she touched for the third time,  
the calf fell down on the ground like a gazelle's young.  
Amar-ga (Milk-calf) she called the calf.  
Just as Geme-Sin gave birth normally,  
may also the young woman in labour give birth.  
Let the midwife not be held back,  
let the pregnant one be all right.'<sup>39</sup>

Bovine imagery recurs to represent human birth. In the oldest Sumerian incantation dating to the Fara period, only fragments are left, with references to milk, and bulls in the divine stable of Enlil. In an incantation of Ur, a bull impregnates a woman / cow in the cattle compound, so she eats 'The Sweet Herb'. The mood god, Nanna (or Sin in Akkadian) was the patron of Ur.

We can infer that incantations were powerful analgesics in Ancient Mesopotamia, and that traditional images and words were apt to affect people's mind and body. Animals were not deemed inferior, but seen as part of those 'energies' which man also partakes in and returns to in search of purity and answers on his own destiny.

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39 Stol 2000.

## Conclusion

Not much is still known about prophylactic measures in Mesopotamia. Scurlock reports a few excerpts which highlight a certain attention for cleanliness, such as warnings on not touching eyes with unwashed hands, not to get close to rabid dogs, on how to sweep the house and to throw the sweepings into the river (possibly meant to cast any residue of ‘evil eye’ away). Infections and chances of contagion were taken into account: ‘He must not go into the lowlands by the river or an infectious disease will infect him’ (KAR177 r.ii 34).<sup>40</sup> Statuettes buried beneath the floor of the houses discovered in Ur also served the apotropaic scope of keeping negative influences at bay.<sup>41</sup> Purification rites lie at the foundations of any religious system, to the point of assuming the need for religion arises from the realisation of pollution.

However, prophylactic measures in Mesopotamia are not as elaborate as we find in Egyptian papyri.<sup>42</sup> The only exception so far known is *prepartum care*, which reveals a careful observation on the woman’s psychological state.

‘If a woman of childbearing age is properly respectful of pregnancy, she will get well from her being with child’; ‘if she is careless of pregnancy, she will die from her being with child’ (TDP210).

Moreover, man’s behaviour was not indifferent either:

‘If a man goes regularly to a tavern: one year (long) his heart (mood) will change: his wife will have a difficult birth’ (Omen V of Shumma ala, tablet 104, in Stol).

And long-sightedness was at times peculiar. In the Babylonian Talmud ‘pious men’ bury or burn their nails, instead of carelessly throwing them: a pregnant woman would be in danger if she caught sight of them.

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40 Scurlock 2005. ‘General Health and Public Health Practices’.

41 Wooley 1926.

42 Example from the Ebers Papyrus: ‘To protect the vulva from the entry of disease by injecting a douche in which garlic and horn-of-a-cow. If this fails and inflammation ensues, the douche becomes one of bile-of-the-cow, cassia and oil. If pustules appear, douche is composed of fresh dates and ass’s milk

In the end, we saw how medicine in Mesopotamia relied upon herbal remedies, mineral sources and symbolic acts. The utterances of magical words with the scope of evoking a deity or dispelling oppressive influences had certainly the effect of transforming the psychological state of the patient.

There were known lethal infections, but all the curable conditions required a radical change in the person's attitude towards 'one's own god'. After all, Lamaštu's victim is *bēt tā ilim*: 'he who does not have a personal god'<sup>43</sup>. This personal god had the crucial role of protecting the person from the rage of the other gods. Mesopotamian approach to health is often dismissed as primitive because the disease or psychosomatic disorder seems to be 'coming from the outside', originated by gods' caprices, demons and witchcraft.

Nevertheless, I believe the idea is to say the least imprecise.

The significance of Mesopotamian Medicine is to have emphasis on the nature of the interaction between forces. Misfortune is not sent by the external occurrence of the gods, but it is the consequence of gods' dissatisfaction towards the discipline and actions of men. By being attuned to gods' will, men could fulfil their own will, as in a *feedback loop*. Venomous demons and malignant witches might have been freely circulating, people just needed to become invulnerable to them.

This principle of vulnerability, or 'the abandonment by the personal god', as the cause of any misfortune, might possibly be the greatest intuition in their system, and today could only roughly correspond to the notion of immunity. Their approach to healing was broader, touching on what is still inexplicable by the science of today, but constitutes the core of all our experiences: how word affects us, what is fear and desire, what is the meaning of being in harmony with oneself and the surrounding? The concerns around the mystery of fertility, not yet disjointed from the communion with the divine, entered the magico-medical sphere and spurred new questions on the behaviour of men.

Babylonian science can hardly be called scientific when measurements – quantities in the pharmacopoeia – are missing, but it was entirely developed on strong empirical bases.

Observation was *conditio prima*. This is the real root of science and often forgotten.

In future, further studies on the identification of plants and stone will be needed to begin understanding how these people in Ancient Mesopotamia must have actually felt.

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43 BIN 4 126:18 in Wiggermann 2000.

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## Abbreviations

**AOAT:** Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn 1969 ff.); S = Sonderreihe (1971 ff.)

**BAM** (aka Köcher Medizin): F. Köcher, Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen (Berlin 1963 ff.)

**BIN:** Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of J. B. Nies (New Haven 1917 ff.)

**TDP:** R. Labat, Traité Akkadien de Diagnostics et Pronostics Médicaux, Paris à Leiden 1951.