

REVIEWS

THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

MARKHAM J. GELLER:

Melothesia in Babylonia: Medicine, Magic, and Astrology in the Ancient Near East.

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This slim hardback is in a new series on the interdisciplinary study of ancient science spanning the Mediterranean to East Asia. The preprint, *Look to the Stars: Babylonian Medicine, Magic, Astrology and Melothesia* (Max Planck Preprint 401, Berlin, 2010: <http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/de/resources/preprints>), has been extensively revised with corrections and new Classical and Mesopotamian material.

This volume focuses on Late Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian scholarly texts, specifically medicine and astrology, with Classical comparators. The central thesis is that the zodiac became an organizing principle across a range of Late Babylonian textual genres and that the key text from Achaemenid Uruk, SBTU I 43, might be a forerunner of zodiacal melothesia.

The colour frontispiece from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* sets the tone. Mapping the zodiacal signs onto the human body represents the system of zodiacal melothesia where each sign governed the health of a bodily region. Eleven black and white figures in the text illustrate key cuneiform sources. An illustration list would have been helpful.

The brief introduction “Globalisation of Knowledge” (p. 1) proposes astro-medical/magical texts as a corpus for exploring knowledge-sharing by Babylonian and Greek medical scholars. Innovations in Late Babylonian astronomy and astrology, such as the zodiac, influenced Babylonian therapeutic texts. Two Late Babylonian texts from Uruk could both represent innovative scientific thinking: SBTU I 43, a list of body parts and associated diseases, and BRM 4 20, an astro-magical text adapting earlier traditions to the zodiac. The author aims to present both texts in their scholarly contexts and argue for a shared approach.

The three main chapters focus on Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets. Chapter I “The Uruk ‘taxonomy’ (SBTU I 43)” and Chapter II “Uruk astral magic (BRM 4 20 and BRM 4 19)” treat the key sources. Chapter III, “The Neo-Assyrian precursor: before the Zodiac”, investigates earlier material plus three Late Babylonian texts.

Chapter I (pp. 3–25) presents SBTU I 43, a tablet of 36 lines, from Achaemenid Uruk and held in the Iraq Museum. A reproduced cuneiform copy (rather small) and tablet photographs are helpful (Figs 1–2). The edition, with collation by photograph, is cramped through alignment of the transliteration and translation. The column division sometimes goes adrift (lines 1, 7, 25) and the presentation of logograms with Akkadian transcription varies. The hand-copy and an earlier edition are available as P348464 at <http://cdli.ucla.edu> and P. Clancier’s edition from 2009 is at <http://orac.museum.upenn.edu/cams/gkab/corpus/>. The tablet has four ruled-off sections and a colophon. In each section an internal organ or body part (*lib₃-bi*, “heart”; *pī(ka) kar-šu₂*, “throat” (reading and meaning disputed); *ḫa-še-e*, “lungs”; *kalāti*(ellag₂)^{mes},

“kidneys”) is identified as the source of a list of symptoms or disorders. The owner of this copy is Rīmūt-Anu of the Šangû-Ninurta *āšipu* family. After philological notes, the author focuses on the tablet’s unusual system or possible taxonomy. The first comparator is the earlier *āšipu* therapeutic text BAM 212, edited with reproduced hand-copy (Figs 3–4). This Neo-Assyrian magical text to transfer “suffering, illness” (*mursu(gig)*) describes the body traditionally from head to toe and does not shed light on SBTU I 43. Non-Mesopotamian medical material, with the human body as a shared field of enquiry, is considered. Greek Methodism of the second to first centuries BC with its non-theoretical approach based on general symptom observation may reflect Babylonian influence. Methodism’s association of diseases with particular organs, the Hippocratic notion of “seats” of diseases and Galen’s theory of “archai” governing four bodily organs could all be seen as relevant to SBTU I 43. However, the author rightly views none of this material as decisive.

Chapter II (pp. 27–46) seeks comparators in Late Babylonian texts concerning astral magic and medicine with zodiacal aspects. The key source is BRM 4 20, a tablet of 68 lines from Hellenistic Uruk, and the shorter Uruk parallel, BRM 4 19, both held by the Pierpont Morgan Library. These tablets are transliterated with reproduced hand-copies (Figs 5–8). The translation and philological commentary cover them both. The hand-copies are online as P296512 and P363411 at <http://cdli.ucla.edu> and E. Robson edited the tablets in 2009 at <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/cams/gkab/corpus/>. The tablets are essentially a zodiacal reinterpretation of STT 300 from Sultantepe, which relates astral magic performance to days in the lunar year. In 43 lines of BRM 4, 20 magical acts are linked with specific zodiacal signs, presumably indicating performance when a planet or the moon was in that particular sign. After scribal notes mentioning earlier copies and commentary, a colophon identifies the owner as Iqīšāya of the Ekur-zakir *āšipu* family.

In Chapter III (pp. 47–68) the seventh-century BC tablet STT 300 is edited with reproduced hand-copy and new collations by S. Panayotov (Figs 9–11). This text displays the traditional hemerology-based system of favourable and unfavourable days for rituals that was reinterpreted, probably in the Persian period, as a zodiacal system with astral influences in BRM 4 20 and 19. The author also assesses other Late Babylonian texts with related zodiacal content. After editions of LBAT 1626 and SBTU V 243, two fragmentary texts similar to BRM 4 20 and 19, he gives editions of two previously unpublished commentaries on the incantation *Marduk’s Address to the Demons* from W.G. Lambert’s Nachlass. The Late Babylonian tablet BM 47529 + BM 47685 from Babylon, of fifth or fourth century BC date, relates praise of Marduk to zodiacal and other astral material. An edition with new collations is available at <http://ccp.yale.edu/P461231>. The second commentary attested by the Neo-Assyrian source Ass. 13955/gt from a seventh-century BC *āšipu* context in Assur lacks zodiacal or astral content. It is also edited at <http://ccp.yale.edu/P461327>. The relationship between the two commentaries can be compared to that of BRM 4 20 and 19 to STT 300. Using the zodiac as a principal hermeneutical tool across different textual genres could support a zodiacal context for SBTU I 43.

Chapter IV, “Ancient Aramaic and Greek parallels” (pp. 69–71), offers brief comments on the Greek Magical papyri, Ptolemy and Aramaic sources, while chapter V, “Astrological interpretation of SBTU I 43” (pp. 73–5), presents an edition of the Late Babylonian astral-medical text LBAT 1598, which links the moon’s zodiacal position with the changing zodiacal relationships of an illness.

Chapter VII, “Melothesia”, (pp. 77–89), is the last substantial chapter. In the classical doctrine of melothesia each zodiacal sign exerted influence over a different body part, from Aries for the head to Pisces for the feet, but another doctrine of

melothesia concerned planetary influence in the context of relative planetary positions. Planetary melothesia has been identified in the Achaemenid medical commentary from Nippur, edited with collation by photograph at <http://ccp.yale.edu/P459065>. Hermeneutics link Jupiter with the spleen and Mars with the kidneys. Zodiacal lunar and planetary phenomena also influence disease on a Late Babylonian lunar eclipse tablet. The author gives a collated edition of the astral-medical text LBAT 1597, which links illnesses with zodiacal position, presumably lunar, and in some instances with planets. Other Late Babylonian texts are cited, some linking materia medica with months and/or zodiacal signs, and others developing hemerological traditions in a zodiacal context. An edition of duplicate entries in three texts includes sequences where a star has affected a patient, so that a body part hurts.

In Chapter VIII, “Concluding hypothesis” (pp. 91–3), the author considers that SBTU I 43 could be a forerunner of melothesia. The listing of the four body parts and associated diseases would reflect zodiacal influence on those four bodily areas. At present this hypothesis can only remain unproven. As the author rightly concludes, more research is needed on the complex systems of Late Babylonian zodiacal influences.

In a brief appendix, “Modern reflections” (pp. 95–6), Bach Remedies are used to highlight the universal human condition and the possible role of unwritten knowledge. With initial bibliography, the volume closes with short indexes of Akkadian, Classical and general terms.

This stimulating book covers a range of difficult material and, while the central thesis remains unproven and the structure could be more balanced, it is a very welcome addition to studies of Late Babylonian scholarship, in particular medicine and astrology. The two new commentaries on *Marduk's Address* are a rich resource.

Frances Reynolds

Oriental Institute, University of Oxford

Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch:

Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer.

(Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 28.) xlii, 322 pp. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2014. £45. ISBN 978 1 9343 0957 5. doi:10.1017/S0041977X15001007

This book brings to light everyday economic and legal sources of three large exiled West Semitic communities, first resettled on Babylonian soil following the western campaigns of Nebuchadnezzar II (which took place throughout his reign, 604–562 BCE; R. Da Riva, *Afo Beih.* 32, Vienna, 2012); more specifically our corpus starts 15 years after the final destruction of Jerusalem and the subjugation of the kingdom of Judah (earliest text 33 Nbk, i.e. 572 BCE). Nearly two decades after appearing on the antiquities market, this volume encapsulates the editions of around half of a lot of some 200 Neo-Babylonian and Early Achaemenid cuneiform tablets now housed in private collections (Sofer, Schøyen and Moussaieff). In particular the book is commended for publishing 54 texts (20 still pending publication by Wunsch; see below) of a now famous archive detailing the business, agricultural and legal activities across three generations (pp. 7–8) of a prominent Judean family from the “town of Judah” (*Āl-Yahūdu*; initially *Ālu ša Yahūdāyi* “town of the Judeans”), or simply