

“Place in my hands the inexhaustible craft of medicine!”¹

Physicians and healing at the royal court of Esarhaddon

Kateřina Šašková

University of Western Bohemia in Pilsen

ABSTRACT:

The medicine of ancient Mesopotamia has long been the topic of investigation, but the texts explored within this field are mainly “handbooks” for persons practising medicine and lists of diseases. This medical literature, however, comprises theoretical information rather than data on actual medical practices. Therefore, the Neo-Assyrian letters and divinatory queries (especially from the reign of the king Esarhaddon) that provide a more colourful picture of diseases of concrete individuals and their healing by specific physicians are a priceless source for our knowledge of “real” Mesopotamian medicine, despite the fact that this picture is limited only to a small group of persons standing closest to the king (mostly members of the royal family) in the role of patients, with the highest-ranking specialists as their healers.

KEYWORDS:

Assyria, Esarhaddon, Neo-Assyrian letters, divinatory queries, medicine, medicinal texts, healing, physicians, exorcists, royal court

The medicine of ancient Mesopotamia has been a field of great importance ever since the “handbooks” for persons practising medicine — originating chiefly in the libraries at Nineveh and Aššur² — were discovered. These “medical texts”, however, contain just a designation of causes of disease, instructions for acting in case of specific ailments, and the prognosis for the further course of the disease, or they simply list various names of diseases. Notably less evidence exists for actual medical practice or answers to relevant questions, for example, in which way a specific patient was cured or who was the person entrusted with observing the course of the disease and assigning appropriate procedures and medication. A relatively large number of such sources survives from the Neo-Assyrian Period; nevertheless, the information on patients and treatment given by these texts is concerned exclusively with high-ranked persons, for the most part members of the royal family, and the doctors acting in

1 SAA III 48, l. 12’.

2 See, e.g. Köcher 1963: VII, Scurlock 2006: 2–3, and Biggs 1987: 624. For texts written in Babylonian script, see Fincke 2003 and Fincke 2004.



these texts were also notable members of the royal court. Therefore, although these texts are valuable source of information, they illustrate medical practise merely in a particular social rank and limited period of time, and they certainly cannot be regarded as evidence for Assyrian (and even less for Mesopotamian) medical practise in general because the treatment was undoubtedly different for other social strata, as well as in other states and historical periods.³

SOURCES

The crucial sources for medical practise at the Assyrian royal court are of two kinds. On the one hand, we have Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence containing letters written by the king's foremost scholars,⁴ who advised the ruler in connection with his health and ailments. They suggested treatments, sent recipes for medicaments (sometimes attached directly to the letter), and gave him reports on the health of other members of the royal family. The king himself is the author of several letters, in which he asks about the health condition of himself and his relatives. The second important type of sources are divinatory queries to the god Šamaš in which the questions were — beside political matters — concerned with the recovery of some patient and, in some cases, also with the success of a planned treatment.⁵

It is interesting that both the scholarly letters as well as the queries — the majority of these texts can be dated⁶ — come from the reign of Esarhaddon (681⁷–669⁸ BCE) and his son Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE),⁹ whereas practically all texts dealing with medicine (but also exorcism) are attributed to Esarhaddon's era.¹⁰ The question arises why this is so. The scant amount of scholarly letters — not only those relating to medicine but scholarly letters in general — addressed to other Neo-Assyrian

3 This text was written within the framework of the project “Blížký východ a jeho duchovní svět” (SGS-2013-062).

4 These texts were published in Waterman 1930a, Waterman 1930b, Parpola 1970, and SAA X, partly also in SAA VIII and SAA XVI.

5 See SAA IV.

6 About 70% of the letters, according to Parpola (1983: XIII). The letters cover a relatively short period of 35 years, and most of them (more than 160) date from the years 672–669 BCE (Parpola 1983: XIII). On the contrary, only a few letters can be dated between the years 664 and 652 (SAA X: XXIX).

7 His father Sennacherib was murdered on the 20th of Tebētu, and Esarhaddon ascended the throne on 28th/18th of Addaru, 681 BCE (Parpola 1980: 171; Grayson 1975: 81–82, Chronicle 1, ll. 34–38).

8 Esarhaddon died on the 10th of Araḫsamna, 669 BCE (Grayson 1975: 86, Chronicle 1, ll. 30–32).

9 About 80% of the texts can be dated to the reign of Esarhaddon, while 20% of them come from the era of Assurbanipal (Parpola 1983: XII).

10 SAA X: XXIX–XXX. The letters make up 45% of the whole corpus of scholarly correspondence.



kings¹¹ as well as the lack of queries to the gods from their reign cannot be entirely explained by the conclusion that texts of this type are the result of the poor health of Esarhaddon, because it can be proved on the basis of other sources that scholarly experts also functioned at the courts of previous rulers, to whom they also sent their reports and recommendations. Moreover, their position at the court was already firmly established by the time of Esarhaddon, which implies a longer tradition of close connection between such persons and the ruler. There is therefore good reason to believe that similar letters and divinatory queries were written in previous times (at least during the reign of Sargon II and Sennacherib¹²), but they have not been yet found, or they were destroyed already in antiquity.¹³ Whatever the reasons for the lack of similar texts from other periods, it is clear, however, that the choice of time with which the following study is concerned is not accidental. The reign of Esarhaddon is also the time from which the largest number of sources relating to the topic at hand has survived.

Issues related to health are also reflected in treaties and loyalty oaths in which the act of disloyalty and violation of conditions is to be punished in a form of illness or health troubles, and the sinner does not receive help in case of injury caused by the enemy. In this respect, the most important text is SAA II 6, also known as Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty.

PHYSICIANS AND OTHER PERSONS ENGAGED IN MEDICINE

Regarding the care of his health, the Assyrian ruler was, in comparison to other people, in a somewhat different situation, and not only for the simple fact that he was head of state and thus stood at the top of the social scale. The king was also the person who had been entrusted by the Assyrian gods — headed by the state god Aššur — with the control of the whole of the land and all its inhabitants, for whose prosperity and welfare he was responsible. Hence, only a physically and mentally healthy and strong ruler was able to fulfill this function properly. In addition, the ruler held at the same time the office of high priest of all temples in the whole country. He therefore stood closest to the gods of all humans, he was a mediator between the gods and people, and he represented and personalized the entire country before the deities by some means. Again, a man of such importance had to be physically perfect in all respects. Furthermore, medical and ritual care largely coincided, because ailments and physical and mental discomfort as well as other problems were attributed to activities of divine or other supernatural forces, whose attack on a certain person had been

11 This mainly concerns Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II and Sennacherib whose political correspondence is at least partially preserved.

12 See e.g. the text The Sin of Sargon: "I w[ent and collected the haruspices], the courtiers of my palace guarding the mystery of god and king; I split them [into several groups] (...)" (SAA III 33, l. 13'-15').

13 Parpola 1983: XII, SAA IV: XXI, SAA X: XXIX-XXX.



caused by — witting or unwitting — offence¹⁴ which provoked the anger of the gods. They then either afflicted the person with disease, set demons upon him, or did not protect him against the energy of witches or evil-minded persons.¹⁵

It is therefore no surprise that the king's health and perfectness — in both physical and ritual respects — were daily watched over by numerous persons who had to ensure the king's patronage by the gods. If the ruler fell ill, it was their task to find out the causes and provide a remedy by all possible means. At court, a large number of Assyrian experts (*ummânû*) educated in various fields of Mesopotamian scholarship were employed; however, experts also came from abroad, such as from Babylon, Egypt or Elam.¹⁶ These scholars resided in the major Assyrian and Babylonian cities,¹⁷ from where they carried on frequent correspondence with the king. The most significant specialists worked directly in the king's vicinity in the capital, but the king sometimes entrusted one of them with a task of high importance in other parts of the empire. The names and professions of some scholars functioning at the royal court are preserved in two lists of experts,¹⁸ which were probably made out in connection with swearing a loyalty oath to the newly appointed crown prince Assurbanipal in the year 672 BCE at Calah.¹⁹

From these experts arose a group of the most respected men standing closest to the king, called by Simo Parpola the "inner circle".²⁰ In the time of Esarhaddon, according to Parpola, the "inner circle" comprised 15 or 16 members,²¹ and precisely

14 See e.g. the incantation series Šurpu (Reiner 1970).

15 See e.g. Robson 2012.

16 E.g. the list of experts SAA VII 1 names "3 Egyptian scholars" (rev. ii 2). In letter SAA X 160, the Babylonian astrologer Marduk-šāpik-zēri offers to the king the service of twenty able scholars, and he says about one of them that he "has crossed over from Elam" (rev. 1).

17 SAA IV: XXXI. The letter SAA X 6 mentions "scribes of the cities of Nin[evēh], Kilizi and Arbela" (SAA X 6, l. 6ff). See also chapters 6 and 7 in SAA X.

18 See SAA VII 1 and 2. Only astrologers, exorcists, and physicians are named in these two lists, but people of other scholarly professions also appear in two lists of royal officers SAA VII 5 and 7: scribe (SAA VII 5, l. i 41), deputy of the chief scribe (SAA VII 5, l. i 50), lamentation priest (SAA VII 5, l. i 51), and chief diviner (SAA VII 7, rev. ii 7).

19 The oath which had to be sworn by scholars as well as other inhabitants of Assyria and subordinated regions is also reflected in a letter written by king's *ummānu* Issār-šumu-ēreš, who had designated the propitious day for this event: "The scribes, the haruspices, the exorcists, the physicians and the augurs staying in the palace and living in the city will enter the treaty on the 16th of Nisannu. Now, let them conclude the treaty tomorrow" (SAA X 7, ll. 6 — rev. 3). See also SAA X 5 and 6 and Parpola 1983: 3–4.

20 E.g. Parpola 1983: XV–XVI and SAA X: XXV–XXVII.

21 Nabû-zēru-lēšir (chief scribe and king's *ummānu*; see Baker 2001: 911), Issār-šumu-ēreš (chief scribe/astrologer and king's *ummānu*; see Baker 2000: 577–579), Balasî (astrologer and crown prince's *ummānu*; see Radner 1999: 254–255), Nabû-aḥḥē-erība (astrologer; Baker 2001: 794–796), Marduk-šumu-ušur (chief haruspex; see Baker 2001: 733–734), Marduk-šākin-šumi (chief exorcist; Baker 2001: 722–725), Adad-šumu-ušur (king's chief exorcist; see Radner 1998: 38–40), Urdu-Gula (exorcist; see Baker 2011: 1402–1403), Nabû-nādin-šumi (chief exorcist; see Baker 2001: 852), Nabû-nāšir (exor-



these persons are the authors of the majority of all known letters,²² because they apparently were the only individuals among the royal scholars who were entitled to send letters to the king regularly, and occasionally even receive letters from him.²³ Scholars of the “inner circle” usually practised²⁴ the profession of astrologer,²⁵ lamentation priest,²⁶ exorcist,²⁷ diviner,²⁸ and physician.²⁹ The highest-ranking of them bore the title of chief scribe (*rab tuššarrē*), and he was the king’s personal scholar and advisor (*ummānu*).³⁰ These five scholarly professions represented essential branches of Mesopotamian wisdom.³¹ From the evidence it is apparent, however, that the knowledge of individual experts was not necessarily limited to one of these five branches, but at least some of them were acquainted with two or more fields.³²

The access of members of the “inner circle” to the presence of the king was due to the nature of their services and was much less restricted than in the case of high-ranked magnates and officers of state administration.³³ Members of the “inner cir-

cist; see Baker 2001: 856), Urdu-Nanāia (chief physician; see Baker 2011: 1411), Ikkāru (physician; see Baker 2000: 509), Urdu-Ea (chief lamentation priest; see Baker 2011: 1396–1398), Akkullānu (astrologer and *ērib bitī* priest of Aššur; see Radner 1998: 95–96), Mār-Issār (scribe and special agent in Babylonia; see Baker 2001: 739–740). See Parpola 1983: XV–XVI and SAA X: XXVI. In his later work, however, Parpola also adds to this group the Babylonian scholar Bēl-ušēzib (SAA X: XXVI; concerning this scholar, see Radner 1999: 338–339).

- 22 Parpola 1983: XIV. See the authors of letters in Parpola 1970 and Parpola 1983, SAA VIII and SAA X in general.
- 23 Parpola 1983: XVI–XVII.
- 24 The title of Bēl-ušēzib is unknown, but it is apparent that he belonged to the high-ranked scholars (see Parpola 1983: XV–XVI).
- 25 *Tuššar Enūma Anu Enlil* or only *tuššarru* (Fincke 2003: 117, SAA X: XIII and XXXIV n. 1).
- 26 *Kalū* (SAA X: XIII and XXXIV n. 1).
- 27 *Āšipu* (SAA X: XIII and XXXIV n. 1).
- 28 *Bārū* (SAA X: XIII and XXXIV n. 1).
- 29 *Asū* (SAA X: XIII and XXXIV n. 1).
- 30 SAA X: XXIV.
- 31 See SAA X: XIV.
- 32 For example Issār-šumu-ēreš, chief scribe (e.g. SAA VI 314, SAA VI 329, SAA VI 330) and *ummānu* of the king Esarhaddon and also of his son Assurbanipal (Parpola 1983: 449, no. 1, ll. iv 13 and 16), advised the king chiefly on matters relating to astrology (see SAA X and SAA VIII), but his texts also concern the explanation of other ominous phenomena (e.g. SAA X 33) and the king’s health condition (SAA X 37 and SAA VIII 1). Adad-šumu-ušur, another of Esarhaddon’s scholars and uncle of Issār-šumu-ēreš, usually bore the title of chief exorcist, but he is sometimes given the title of *šangamaḥḥu* of king Esarhaddon (RIMB II: 56 (B.2.8.5, l. 16) = Hunger 1968: 135 (498, l. 5) and Parpola 1983: 452–453 (14, l. 11)), and in some other texts he acts as a scribe or astrologer (*tuššarru*) (Hunger 1972: 101). His son, Urdu-Gula, held the office of deputy of the chief physician (*šaniu rab asē*) at the end of the reign of Sennacherib (SAA VI 193, rev. 8’), but later texts imply that he assumed the profession of his father and he bears the title of exorcist (*āšipu*; e.g. RIMB II: 56 (B.2.8.5, l. 15)).
- 33 Radner 2012.



cle” were often descendants of old scholar families,³⁴ they held notable posts at the court³⁵ — the names of *ummānu* even figure in one king list right beside the names of Assyrian rulers³⁶ — and their relationship to the ruler was of an extraordinary nature in some cases. Their advice held a crucial importance for the king, and thus for the whole country, hence their influence on the king’s decisions was undoubtedly enormous. It is probably not far from the truth to say that in some cases, scholars tried to abuse their importance to affect the king’s decisions through their advice for their own benefit and to ingratiate themselves with the ruler to the prejudice of their colleagues. However, it is likely that they acted primarily in the interest of their king and country, and they themselves indeed believed their recommendations, based on wisdom which was collected and tested over many centuries.³⁷ After all, their power and influence stood and fell with the person of the ruler and the prosperity of the country which he ruled. Nevertheless, even despite all their importance, they were not released from their *ilku*-duty.³⁸

The writers of letters relating to health, whether of the ruler or of his relatives, were often individuals with the title of *asû*. In texts dealing with medicine, however, persons titled *āšipu* figure frequently as well. The term *asû* is usually translated as “physician” in itself,³⁹ and Simo Parpola, for example, regards the persons of this profession as experts “in the art of curing diseases by means of drugs and other physical remedies.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, the profession of *āšipu* is commonly translated as “exorcist”,⁴¹ and these scholars acted “as experts in the art of manipulating supernatural forces (such as illness-causing demons) by magical means.”⁴² It would therefore seem that the *asû* was rather a practitioner, while the *āšipu* performed supporting rituals and influenced supernatural powers by means of magic. Yet this definition is overly simplistic, because *āšipus* also examined the patient,⁴³ and, furthermore, the diagnostic omen series *Sakikkû* (“Symptom(s)”⁴⁴ or “Diagnostic Handbook”), which contained forty tablets,⁴⁵ belongs to the sphere of exorcism (*āšipûtu*), while medicine

34 Some of them were even relatives (Parpola 1983: XVII–XIX). See above and especially the family tree in Parpola 1983: XIX; cf. also Hunger 1968: 17–19.

35 SAA IV: XXXI.

36 For the era of Esarhaddon, the text states: “(When) Esarhaddon son of Sennacherib was king of Assyria and Babylon. Nabû-zêru-lêšir and Ištar-šumu-êreš were his *ummānu*” (Parpola 1983: 449, no. 1, ll. 12–13).

37 SAA X: XXVII.

38 See SAA X 324, rev. 4–7.

39 CAD A₂: 344ff.

40 Parpola 1983: XIV.

41 CAD A₂: 431ff.

42 Parpola 1983: XIV.

43 E.g. Douek 2007: 216–217. According to three texts in which the examination of a patient is mentioned, this procedure was actually carried out by *āšipus*, not by *asûs* (SAA X 202, rev. 8’–9’, SAA X 160, l. 39, and SAA X 230, l. 3’).

44 Regarding the uncertainty between plural and singular, see AHW: 1012.

45 CAD S: 75.

(*asûtu*)⁴⁶ comprised mostly medical recipes and lists of ingredients.⁴⁷ The corpus of Neo-Assyrian correspondence reveals, moreover, that these two professions were closely connected and overlapped one another to a certain degree.⁴⁸ This means that an *āšipu* could prescribe the use of certain drugs or medicaments.⁴⁹ And vice versa, an *asû* could recommend performing some ritual⁵⁰ or applying amulets which he could directly send to the patient,⁵¹ or he could even be a mediator in connection with the interpretation of portents.⁵² The ruler asked scholars of both professions about his health and various medical problems,⁵³ and likewise both physicians and exorcists informed him on the health condition of himself as well as other members of the royal family.⁵⁴ Even the examination and diagnostics were obviously not exclusively in the



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- 46 *Asûtu* “medical practice, medical treatment, medical lore” (CAD A₂: 351–352). The texts also mention the term *azugallûtu* (“higher medical art”; CAD A₂: 529) which in one colophon from Assurbanipal’s era is explained as “a skillful lore, *azugallûtu* of Ninurta (and) Gula” (Streck 1916: 368–371, l. 4–5).
- 47 E.g. Douek 2007: 216 and Robson 2012.
- 48 See also Panayotov 2018: 90–91 and Steinert 2018: 178–191.
- 49 E.g. Adad-šumu-ušur, chief exorcist, in SAA X 191, l. 5–10 and SAA X 230, l. 3’. Another exorcist, Marduk-šākin-šumi, advises the king in connection with the application of a poultice (SAA X 241, ll. 5–6), and in another letter he deals with the use of salve and fumigants (SAA X 250, ll. 8’–9’). Cf. e.g.: “The *āšipu* was not the expert who treated the sick person; that task fell to the medical practitioner, the *asû*, who had at his disposal a set of therapeutic handbooks whose chapters dealt with diseases affecting a particular part of the body” (Reiner 2006: 316). See also below.
- 50 Urdu-Nanāia, the chief physician, sent together with the letter SAA X 316 some herbs which “are good for counterspells” to the king (SAA X 316, rev. 15–21), and in the text SAA X 321 he recommends the recitation of an incantation (l. 15). In connection with rites against witchcraft (*ušburrudû*, see below), Parpola points out that while most therapeutic texts belonged to the *āšipûtu*, some of them — especially texts containing lists of drugs against witchcraft and instructions for their use — were a part of *asûtu* (Parpola 1983: 147).
- 51 E.g. in letter SAA X 315 (rev. 15 — r.e. 18) Urdu-Nanāia sends “certain phylacteries to the king” and advises that “the king should put them around his neck”.
- 52 SAA X 314.
- 53 In the letter SAA X 236, for example, the chief exorcist Marduk-šākin-šumi gives the king an answer concerning the duration of his chills, while in another text he explains to him that his weakness is caused by “fever [that] has lingered inside the very bones” (SAA X 242, ll. 10–11), and he assures him that his illness will soon disappear. Adad-šumu-ušur advises the ruler that “restlessness, not eating and not drinking disturbs the mind and adds to illness” (SAA X 196, rev. 15 — r.e. 18), and another exorcist, Nabû-nāšir, writes to the king that “the “burning” wherewith his head, arms and feet were “burnt” was because of his teeth: his teeth were (trying) to come out” (SAA X 302, ll. 11 — rev. 3). Similarly, the chief physician Urdu-Nanāia, for example, writes in letter SAA X 315 about the nature and treatment of the king’s ailment, in letter SAA X 318 he helps to cure his rash, in letter SAA X 325 blotches on the skin, etc.
- 54 Reports on royal children and grandchildren are contained in the letters written by the exorcists Marduk-šākin-šumi (SAA X 238, SAA X 239, SAA X 244, SAA X 247), Adad-šumu-ušur (SAA X 187, SAA X 191, SAA X 192, SAA X 193, SAA X 194, SAA X 196, SAA X 197, SAA

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hands of *āšipus*, as it might seem on the basis of scholarly texts, because, for example, the chief physician Urdu-Nanāia writes to Esarhaddon: “The king, my lord, keeps on saying to me: “Why do you not diagnose the nature of this illness of mine and bring about its cure?” — formerly I spoke to the king at the audience and could not clarify his symptoms (*sakikkēšu*).”⁵⁵ The close connection of both professions is likewise evident from the fact that Urdu-Gula bears the title of deputy of the chief physician in one earlier document,⁵⁶ and the colophon of another text (of astrological character) dating from the reign of Assurbanipal designates him as a physician.⁵⁷ In other texts, however, he is called an exorcist,⁵⁸ and during the reign of Esarhaddon he sent several letters relating to rituals and incantations.⁵⁹ Eleanor Robson also observes the interesting fact that, although there are many letters available written by *āšipus*, none of them mentions “so-called *āšipus*’ omen series such as *Sakikkū* in support of their diagnoses, recommendations, or instructions.”⁶⁰ It is therefore questionable to what extent the scholars really used these works.⁶¹ Evidently, there is some discrepancy between the theoretical works which were found in the library of Assurbanipal and elsewhere and which — among other things — separate the spheres of competence of *asū* and *āšipu*, and the practice documented in Neo-Assyrian correspondence.

Neither physicians nor exorcists formed a group of equally ranked persons; both professions were hierarchically structured. This is proved especially by a few records from contracts which contain the names and titles of the various witnesses, including *asūs* and *āšipus* of different rank. The head of royal physicians bore the title *rab asē* (LU₂.GAL A.ZU).⁶² At the beginning of Esarhaddon’s reign, this position was perhaps

X 199, SAA X 213, SAA X 214, SAA X 217, SAA X 218, SAA X 219, SAA X 222, SAA X 223, SAA X 310), and Nabû-nāšir (SAA X 296, SAA X 298, SAA X 299, SAA X 300, SAA X 301, SAA X 302, SAA X 304, SAA X 305, SAA X 306, SAA X 307). Some pregnant woman of the royal family (king’s wife, daughter or daughter-in-law) is mentioned in a report written by Urdu-Gula (SAA X 293). The reports on the health of the queen mother are included in the letters of the exorcists Adad-šumu-ušur (SAA X 201, SAA X 223) and Marduk-šākin-šumi (SAA X 244), and in a letter written by the exorcist Nabû-nāšir and the physician Urdu-Nanāia (SAA X 297). Considerably less abundant reports of physicians are as follows: Urdu-Nanāia (SAA X 314, SAA X 320, SAA X 321, SAA X 322, SAA X 323) and Ikkāru (SAA X 328, SAA X 329). The reports of physicians are — with the one exception mentioned above — concerned solely with children of the royal family.

55 SAA X 315, ll. 7–12.

56 SAA VI 193, rev. 8’–9’.

57 Parpola 1983: 453 (no. 15, l.e.e. 2).

58 Parpola 1983: 452–453 (no. 14, rev. 10) and Hunger 1968: 135 (no. 498, l. 4).

59 E.g. SAA X 290 and SAA X 295.

60 Robson 2011: 603, see also Robson 2008: 474. However, the chief exorcist Marduk-šākin-šumi writes, perhaps in connection with the illness of the queen mother: “I am presently [col]-lecting all the 30 to 40 canonical tablets that are relevant to the matter, as well as (all) the existing non-canonical ones that are ever [per]formed (in this connection)” (SAA X 245, rev. 12–19), but he names none of them.

61 For more, see Robson 2008.

62 E.g. SAA XI 183, rev. 1.

held by Ikkāru, but later it was taken over by Urdu-Nanāia.⁶³ The assistant to the chief physician was *šaniu ša rab asê* (LU₂.2-u₂ ša LU₂.GAL A.ZU).⁶⁴ The title of deputy of the chief physician appears next the name of the just mentioned exorcist Urdu-Gula at the beginning of the year 681 BCE.⁶⁵ A position of common *asû* serving at the royal court was apparently occupied by Nabû-tabni-ušur, who asks the king for a reward in the text SAA X 334,⁶⁶ possibly also by a certain Zarutî about whom nothing else is known,⁶⁷ and by nine scholars named in the lists of royal experts SAA VII 1 and SAA VII 2, who however probably stood even lower and none of whose letters has survived.⁶⁸ One of them, Ši-Ḥuru, actually bears a name indicating an Egyptian origin. We know also Šemaḥu, a personal physician of Esarhaddon at the time of his crown princehood.⁶⁹ This function is quite extraordinary because, according to later correspondence, the royal physicians and exorcists usually watched over multiple patients at the same time and their titles — with the exception of Adad-šumu-ušur, the king's exorcist — did not contain the name or title of a concrete member of the royal family. Another known physician is the Babylonian scholar Aḥu-šubši, whose service is offered to the king by astrologer Marduk-šāpik-zēri in letter SAA X 160. Marduk-šāpik-zēri writes about him that he is a “very able physician; he is useful to (the king) my lord.”⁷⁰ It is unknown, however, whether Aḥu-šubši was hired in the end.⁷¹

The authors of Neo-Assyrian correspondence usually did not write their titles, but designated themselves simply as “servant”;⁷² however, the letters of physicians differ from other scholarly letters by their greeting (more accurately blessing) formulae to the king. Unlike other scholars, the physicians in the introductory part of their letters name the divine patroness of medicine Gula⁷³ and her spouse

63 Parpola 1983: XVI, SAA X: XXVI and Baker 2000: 509. The fact that Ikkāru was superior to the rest of the royal physicians is illustrated by the — unfortunately badly damaged — text SAA X 330 in which he notifies the king of other physicians.

64 E.g. SAA VI 193, rev. 8'-9'.

65 See above.

66 SAA X 334. See also Baker 2001: 893.

67 He figures only as a witness in the contract SAA VI 271 from the year 678 BCE.

68 Ninurta-ballissu (SAA VII 2, l. 4; SAA VII 1, l. ii 10; see Baker 2000: 548 (Inūrta-ballissu)), Ši-Ḥuru (SAA VII 2, l. 5; SAA VII 1, l. ii 15 see Baker 2002: 1170), Sîn-šarru-ušur (SAA VII 2, rev. 1; SAA VII 1, l. ii 12; see Baker 2002: 1145), Puḡlu (SAA VII 2, rev. 2; SAA VII 1, l. ii 14; see Baker 2002: 998), Qurdi-Arbail (SAA VII 1, l. ii 7; see Baker 2002: 1020), Nabû'a (SAA VII 1, l. ii 8; see Baker 2001: 790), Nabû-aḥḥē-balliṭ (SAA VII 1, l. ii 9; see Baker 2001: 793), Asqūdu (SAA VII 1, l. ii 11; see Radner 1998: 137), and Nabû-šumu-iddina (SAA VII 1, l. ii 13; see Baker 2001: 886).

69 Šemaḥu bought an estate of 10 hectares of land in the contract SAA VI 126, dated to the year 697 BCE.

70 SAA X 160, rev. 33-34.

71 See Radner 1998: 88.

72 The form of the beginning formula of letters is in most cases the following: “To the king, my lord: your servant PN.”

73 The epithet of the goddess Gula is *azugallatu* “chief woman physician” (CAD A₂: 529). Her title appears, for example, in Esarhaddon's treaties (SAA II 5, rev. iv 2'-3', SAA II 6, l. 461).



Ninurta,⁷⁴ while the vast majority of other scholars mention Nabû and Marduk,⁷⁵ and occasionally some other gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon such as Aššur, Šamaš, Šin, Nergal, or Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela.⁷⁶ This also applies to exorcists with the exception of Adad-šumu-ušur,⁷⁷ Nabû-nādin-šumi,⁷⁸ Nabû-nāšir,⁷⁹ and Urdu-Gula.⁸⁰ These scholars sometimes name Gula and Ninurta, but in comparison with the physicians, they do not mention them consistently, and Gula and Ninurta always occur together with other gods. Nevertheless, the mention of patrons of medicine by these exorcists is not surprising, because their activities were very closely connected with medicine, and they cooperated with the physicians.⁸¹ For example, the authors

74 Urdu-Nanāia names these gods in all of his letters with the exception of SAA X 326, in which the beginning is destroyed, and one list of remedies (SAA X 327). Ikkāru is not so consistent: he lists at first Bēl/Marduk and Nabû, but together with the Lady of Life (SAA X 328, ll. 4–6) or Ninurta and Gula (SAA X 329, ll. 5–8). In his other greeting formulae, the mention of gods is even missing (SAA X 330–332), but this can be attributed to the distinctive style of Ikkāru (see also Parpola 1983: 437–438). Ninurta and Gula are also mentioned by the physician Nabû-tabni-ušur (SAA X 334, l. 5).

75 E.g. the astrologers Nabû'a, Balasî or Nabû-aḥḥē-erība, the chief haruspex Marduk-šumu-ušur and his colleagues, and most letters of the exorcist Nabu-našir and Mār-Issār, Esarhaddon's agent in Babylonia (see the texts in SAA VIII and X).

76 E.g. SAA VIII 137, SAA X 61, SAA X 82, SAA X 83. What is rather unique among the blessing formulae is the enormously luxuriant style of Adad-šumu-ušur, the king's chief exorcist, in whose blessings to the king occurs a myriad of deities. E.g.: "May Aššur, Šin, Šamaš, Adad, Nu[sku], Jupiter, Venus, Marduk, [Šarpanītu], Nabû, Tašmētu, Sa[turn], Mercury, Lady [of Nineveh], Lady of Kidmuri, [Lady] of Arbela, Ninurta, [Gula], Nergal and Laš, the great gods of heaven and earth, the gods dwelling in Assyria, [the gods] dwelling in Akkad, and all the gods of the world [very greatly bless the ki]ng" (SAA X 197, ll. 7–19).

77 SAA X 197, l. 12, SAA X 227, l. 6 (in this text, however, the name of the god Ninurta is written twice in a row) and SAA X 227, l. 5.

78 SAA X 286, l. 6.

79 SAA X 297, l. 7.

80 SAA X 293, ll. 4–5, SAA X 294, l. 3.

81 Markham J. Geller, on the contrary, is not quite sure of the cooperation between these professions: "the correspondence show that exorcist and physician were consulted at about the same time regarding the king's condition, and that both physician and exorcist were aware of the patient's recent medical history. The question is whether physician and exorcist were working in tandem or in competition with each other" (Geller 2010: 86). It would be strange, however, if they did not cooperate while taking care of the same patient. Moreover, the evidence shows that the health of the king and other members of the royal family, especially royal children, was cared for by multiple people at the same time, physicians as well as exorcists, and these people then informed the king not only on his progress in case of disease, but they also reported that their charges — one or more together — were healthy (exorcists Adad-šumu-ušur: SAA X 193, SAA X 194, SAA X 196, SAA X 197, SAA X 201, SAA X 217, SAA X 219, SAA X 223, Marduk-šakin-šumi: SAA X 238, SAA X 244, Nabû-nāšir: SAA X 296, SAA X 298, SAA X 299, SAA X 301, SAA X 305, SAA X 306, and the physician Urdu-Nanāia: SAA X 320, SAA X 321). This implies that these persons were not summoned fitfully in the case of acute illness, but their control was long-lasting



of letter SAA X 297, a report on the recovery of the queen mother Naqī'a, were the physician Urdu-Nanāia together with the exorcist Nabû-nāšir. From this text, Simo Parpola concludes that it is possible that exorcists “ranked higher in the hierarchy of scholars in Sargonid times”, because the name of the exorcist precedes that of the physician.⁸² This would indeed correspond with the fact that the letters of exorcists have survived in considerably greater numbers. Close cooperation of exorcists and physicians is also indicated by letter SAA X 334 written by the physician Nabû-tabni-ušur, who mentions the exorcist Nabû-rība-aḥu⁸³ as “an associate of mine”.⁸⁴ This letter could signal the higher position of exorcists as well, because the writer complains of being rewarded less than his colleagues, including Nabû-rība-aḥu.

The head of the exorcists was *rab āšipī*. During the reign of Esarhaddon, this position was occupied by two persons: Marduk-šakin-šumi and Nabû-nādin-šumi, perhaps the successor of the former.⁸⁵ In addition to these two scholars, an especially high position was held by the exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur,⁸⁶ who enjoyed the extraordinary favour of Esarhaddon as he was his personal exorcist.⁸⁷ But the “common” exorcists Urdu-Gula and Nabû-nāšir were also members of the “inner circle”.⁸⁸ Apart from this group, the exorcists Ana-Nabû-atkal,⁸⁹ Nabû-gāmil,⁹⁰ and Nabû-šumalēšir⁹¹ worked in the service of the king. From each of them one letter is known,⁹² but only the text of Ana-Nabû-atkal is related to medicine. Some other 10 exorcists are — together with Nabû-gāmil — listed in the just mentioned lists of experts at the court SAA VII 1 and SAA VII 2.⁹³

and they supervised multiple members of the royal family at the same time. For this reason as well, cooperation seems more probable.

82 Parpola 1983: 215.

83 Parpola 1983: 258. The text SAA X 257 names Nabû-rība-aḥu as one of the possible substitutes for the ill exorcist of the crown prince (SAA X 257, rev. 6).

84 SAA X 334, rev. 6–7.

85 SAA X, p. XXVI.

86 Adad-šumu-ušur titles himself *āšipu* of the king in a colophon of one astrological text, perhaps the tablet from the series *Enūma Anu Enlil* (Bezold 1891: 423, also Parpola 1983: 450), and his position differed from the officer bearing the title of chief exorcist, as indicated by the following words of his son Urdu-Gula: “(...) neither the chief [exorcist] nor Adad-šumu-ušur” (SAA X 289, rev. 7’–8’). Due to his close relationship to the king, however, he may be considered as at least equal to the two chief exorcists. He does figure explicitly as a chief exorcist in a later contract dating from the year 666 BCE (SAA VI 314, rev. 12).

87 Parpola 1983: XV, SAA X: XXVI.

88 See above.

89 See Radner 1998: 110.

90 See Baker 2001: 832–833.

91 See Baker 2001: 891.

92 SAA X 308, 309, and 313.

93 SAA VII, 1 and 2. Bēl-ēpuš (SAA VII 2, l. 2), Nāširu (SAA VII 2, l. 1), Nabû-nādin-šumi (SAA VII 1, l. i 9), Nabû-gāmil (SAA VII 1, l. i 10), [...]āia (SAA VII 1, l. i 11), [...]b]u (SAA VII 1, l. i 12), [...]nāia (SAA VII 1, l. i 13), Nabû-sakip (SAA VII 1, l. i 14), Remuttu (SAA VII 1, l. i 15), Bēl-ušēzib (SAA VII 1, l. i 16), Nabû-per’u-lēšir (SAA VII 1, l. i 17).



Neither physicians nor exorcists worked separately, but, as the surviving texts show, they formed teams according to need. Some teams were composed of persons of one profession, but others were made up of persons trained in different disciplines, each working in terms of his field. For this reason, medical issues are addressed in reports and letters of scholars of various professions, not just *āšipus* and *asûs*. Thus letters dealing with health, whether they concerned concrete advice or the interpretation of astrological omens, were also sent by the astrologers Balasî,⁹⁴ Issâr-šumu-ēreš,⁹⁵ Nabû-ahhē-erība,⁹⁶ Nabû-mušēši,⁹⁷ Nergal-ētir,⁹⁸ and Nabû-iqīša,⁹⁹ and there are several divinatory queries whose authors are diviners (*bārû*).¹⁰⁰ Concerning such cooperation, the chief exorcist Marduk-šakin-šumi for instance states: “I am collaborating with my colleagues; we shall take counsel together (and then) speak out.”¹⁰¹ The physician Ikkāru writes about “one of the physicians [serving] with us”,¹⁰² while Adad-šumu-ušur, the king’s exorcist, notifies the king in connection with performing rituals as follows: “I shall perform one against “Loss of Flesh”, and Urdu-Ea another one before Enlil”,¹⁰³ Urdu-Ea being the chief lamentation priest.¹⁰⁴ The exorcist Urdu-Gula, son of Adad-šumu-ušur, writes to Esarhaddon: “Concerning what the king, my lord, said: “[Whi]ch exorcists are with you?” — there are (only) Nabû-le’utu, his son, and I. At present Adad-šumu-ušur is coming to us, checking our work and instructing us; we are collaborating closely. It is because of this that I am writing to the king, my lord.”¹⁰⁵ Letter SAA X 232 relating to the treatment of an unknown ailment (the text is unfortunately damaged) was even written by four scholars of different professions, none of them a physician: Adad-šumu-ušur (exorcist), Urdu-Ea (chief lamentation priest), Issâr-šumu-ēreš (chief scribe/astrologer), and Akkullānu (astrologer and *ērib bīti* priest of Aššur).¹⁰⁶

Despite such frequent collaboration, however, there was also a great rivalry among the scholars,¹⁰⁷ because all of them were existentially dependent on the king’s favour. That is also why some authors of letters sometimes do not hesitate to write about their colleagues in a very unseemly manner.¹⁰⁸ Markham J. Geller points out

94 SAA X 43.

95 In letter SAA VIII 1, moreover, this scholar assures Esarhaddon that his illness is just a seasonal disease. Texts SAA VIII 4, SAA VIII 36, and SAA X 37 are also related to medicine.

96 SAA VIII 62, SAA X 67.

97 SAA VIII 158. See Baker 2001: 847–848.

98 SAA VIII 247, SAA VIII 274. See Baker 2001: 945–946.

99 SAA VIII 288, See Baker 2001: 836–837.

100 SAA IV 183–199.

101 SAA X 244, rev. 4–7.

102 SAA X 330.

103 SAA X 212, ll. 12 — rev. 2.

104 See above.

105 SAA X 290, rev. 4–12.

106 SAA X 232. For commentary, see Baker 2001: 153. The cooperation of scholars educated in various professions is also documented by other texts, e.g. SAA X 215, SAA X 227, SAA X 228.

107 Parpola 1983: XVIII.

108 E.g. Nabû-ahhē-erība (astrologer) writes to the king: “[He who] wrote to the king, my lord, “The planet Venus is visible, it is visible [in the month Ad]daru,” is a vile man, an ignora-

an enormous tension especially between Adad-šumu-ušur and Urdu-Nanāia.¹⁰⁹ Such a rivalry between the king's personal exorcist, who was often engaged in medical matters, and his chief physician is certainly possible, but it is not obvious from the reported cases.¹¹⁰ In addition, Simo Parpola believes that this rivalry and the pursuit of better results than one's colleagues led to a significant advance in knowledge in Sargonid times.¹¹¹



APPROACHES TO HEALING

The Neo-Assyrian correspondence offers reports on various sorts of health troubles and, in some cases, also gives a relatively detailed description of the method of treatment. From today's perspective, the therapy was carried out in two ways:¹¹² by means of medical/rational methods and magical/irrational methods, to use the current terminology. Ancient Assyrians, however, did not distinguish between these two methods, and they considered them rather as mingling aspects of one and the same treatment process which was to remove the cause of the patient's ailments. The state of a person — health or illness — was understood, as already mentioned, as an indication of the favour or disfavour of the gods; no distinction was therefore made between natural and supernatural causes. The primary causation of disease was always located in the supernatural realm,¹¹³ in losing the favour and protection of the gods, or even directly in their anger,¹¹⁴ and that is why diseases and injuries with a com-

mus, a cheat!" (SAA X 72, ll. 6–10). Issār-šumu-ēreš comments on the work of one of his colleagues by saying: "An incompetent one can frustrate [a j]udge, an uneducated one can make the mighty worry" (SAA X 23, rev. 3–6). Complaints about salaries and rewards of one's colleagues are themes of the letters of Urdu-Gula (SAA X 289) and Nabû-tabni-ušur (SAA X 334). In his first edition of the Neo-Assyrian scholarly corpus, Simo Parpola writes that "echoes of rivalry, competition and struggle for jobs are a priori not likely to be found in the LAS correspondence, with its writers safely anchored in the highest positions available." But "it is more indirectly yet unmistakably manifested in the general mental disposition that permeates and tinges the entire correspondence: humbleness and servile fear towards the monarch, and arrogance, contempt and hatred towards colleagues and other persons felt as a potential threat to one's own position" (Parpola 1983: XVIII).

¹⁰⁹ Geller 2010: 79.

¹¹⁰ Pursuant to the letter SAA X 314, it is more probable that the ruler himself wanted to verify the correctness of the conclusions of Adad-šumu-ušur, and therefore he commanded Urdu-Nanāia to ask Adad-šumu-ušur about the reasons for his decision. The author of the letter SAA X 328 is Ikkāru (l. 2), not Urdu-Nanāia.

¹¹¹ SAA X: XXVIII and Parpola 1983: XXI.

¹¹² E.g. Parpola 1983: 146.

¹¹³ Robson 2012.

¹¹⁴ This is particularly apparent in curse formulas included in royal inscriptions and vassal treaties in which damage to the inscription or violation of the rules of the treaty angered the gods, who then punished the sinner with injury or disease. E.g. "May Nergal, hero of the gods, extinguish your life with his merciless sword, and send slaughter and pes[til]

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pletely natural cause (for people today) were viewed from this perspective as well. This, of course, does not exclude the knowledge and recognition of effects of certain medicinal substances and procedures; nevertheless, their lasting impact and the recovery of the patient was believed to lie in the hands of the gods,¹¹⁵ because only they could ensure human health.¹¹⁶ Hence, the purpose of the treatment was to reverse the state of divine disfavour, provide a patient with the renewed favour of the gods by performing rituals, reciting incantations, and using amulets, and relieve and help him during this process by means of drugs and healing treatments. Some terms for healing (*pašāru*, log. DU₈,¹¹⁷ *pašāru*¹¹⁸) are thus related rather to the profession of *āšipu* and were in fact used by exorcists. *Asûs*, on the other hand, used the terms *balātu*¹¹⁹ or *bulṭu* to express “(to) cure, recover”.¹²⁰ The second word also means, among others, “remedy” or “medical literature”.¹²¹ Another term for treatment, *dullu*, means “medical treatment”, but also “ritual”,¹²² and it was used by exorcists¹²³ as well as by physicians.¹²⁴ In the List of Remedies SAA X 327 written by the physician

ence among you” (SAA II 6, ll. 455–456), “May Gula, the great physician, put sickness and weariness [in your hearts] and an unhealing wound in your body. Bathe in [blood and pus] as if in water!” (ibid., ll. 461–163), “May Kubaba, the god[dess of] Carchemish, put a serious venereal disease within you; may your [urine] drip to the ground like raindrops” (ibid., ll. 469–471), “May Anu, king of the gods, let disease, exhaustion, malaria, sleeplessness, worries and ill health rain upon all your houses” (ibid., ll. 418A–418C), or “May Šamaš, the light of heaven and earth, not judge you justly. May he remove your eyesight. Walk about in darkness!” (ibid., ll. 422–424).

115 E.g. “[When] Bēl took away the illness of the king [...]” (SAA X 200, l. 10), “May Aššur, Šamaš, Bēl and Nabû feel concern over the health of the king, my lord!” (SAA X 284, rev. 10–12), or “Your gods [Bēl] and Nabû, who give you confidence, they made him recover! The Lady of Life, your gracious, who gives the king, my lord, long-lasting days, old age, fullness of life, health and vigour, she grasped his hand! He got well thanks to the god and genie of the king, my lord!” (SAA X 333, rev. 1–13).

116 E.g. “(Thanks to) Bēl, Nabû and the Lady of Life, the flesh of Šamaš-šumu-ukin is much better” (SAA X 328, rev. 18–20).

117 *Pašāru* (ABZ: 102, no. 167), “to undo, release, to remove, dispel” (CAD P: 286ff, esp. 290–292). SAA X 187, l. 10; SAA X 232, rev. 3’; SAA X 236, l. 8; possibly also SAA IV 184, l. 2’.

118 *Pašāru* “to exorcise, release (a person), to undo (evil, sorcery, curse, sin, divine anger)” (CAD P: 236ff, esp. 237ff); see also Parpola 1983: 174. SAA X, l. 7.

119 *Balātu* “to get well, to recover from a sickness” (CAD B: 46ff). SAA X 317, l. 3; SAA X 319, l. e. 1; SAA X 326, rev. 3.

120 *Bulṭu* “life, lifetime, health, vigor, remedy, medication, prescription” (CAD B: 311–312). SAA X 315, l. 10; SAA X 320, rev. 1; SAA X 324, 8 and rev. 1; SAA X 325, l. 6; SAA X 327, ll. 3’, 9’, 12’ and rev. 3.

121 SAA X 326, l. 3’.

122 *Dullu* “ritual, medical treatment” (CAD D: 173ff).

123 SAA X 222, l. 14 and rev. 9; SAA X 273, ll. 9, 10, 16 and rev. 2; SAA X 274, l. 11; SAA X 277, ll. 8 and 14; SAA X 296, rev. 17; SAA X 298, rev. 9; SAA X 300, rev. 2; SAA X 304, l. 11.

124 SAA X 315, b.e. 19 (in the context of performing an extispicy); SAA X 322, l. 8; SAA X 325, rev. 5’.

Urdu-Nanāia, pharmaceuticals and rituals are listed together, and drugs were among the substances employed during some rituals.¹²⁵



MEDICAMENTS

The available texts mention various — known as well as unknown — plants and drugs (*šammu*, log. U₂),¹²⁶ or directly healing drugs (*šammi pašāri*, log. U₂.BUR₂),¹²⁷ in contrast to poisons (*šammu ša muāti*).¹²⁸ There are also listed names of specific plants or their parts, and occasionally even their processing and utilization: “long plant” (*šammu arku*, log. U₂.GID₂), “staff of life” (*ḥaṭṭi balāti*, log. U₂.PA.TI),¹²⁹ seed of the *kasū* plant (*zēr kasī*, log. NUMUN GAZI.SAR),¹³⁰ *martakal* seed (NUMUN U₂.*martakal*),¹³¹ roasted barley (*qalāti/qalītu/laptu*, log. ŠE.SA.A),¹³² cedar resin (*dam erēni*, log. MUD₂.GIŠ.ERIN),¹³³ 134. There is also a list of aromatics SAA VII 146 in which the following substances are recorded: cedar,¹³⁵ cypress (*šurmēnu*, log. ŠUR.MIN₃),¹³⁶ *daprānu*-juniper (*daprānu/duprānu*),¹³⁷ myrtle (*asu*, log. ŠEM.GIR₂),¹³⁸ boxwood (*šimšalū*, log.

125 “The herbs which I am sending to the king are of two kinds; (...) They are good for counterspells, and they are good for a woman in lab[our]” (SAA X 316, rev. 15–23).

126 *Šammu* (ABZ: 129–130, no. 318) “herb, medicinal plant” (CAD Š₁: 315ff), “drug” (SAA X: 360). SAA IV 185, l. 2’ and rev. 7’; SAA IV 187, ll. 2’, 3’, 7’ and rev. 8, 10; SAA X 191, l. 6; SAA X 316, rev. 15.

127 ABZ: 59, no. 11; for *pašāru*, see above. SAA III 28, rev. 4’.

128 SAA II 6, l. 262.

129 SAA X: 321, see also Parpola 1983: 243. “They are called “long plant” and “staff of life” and are different from each other. The one which looks like a base of an earring is important and very rare” (SAA X 316, rev. 16–19).

130 *Zēru* (ABZ: 74, no. 72), “seed” (CAD Z: 89ff). *Kasū* (ABZ: 118, no. 252) “a native spice plant, specifically, its pungent seeds” (CAD K: 248ff), “a garden herb, perhaps “common beet”” (SAA X: 340), “mustard, *Sinapis nigra*” (Parpola 1983: 255), “Senf(-Kohl), *Sinapis nigra*” (AHw: 455), “*cuscuta*” (Parpola et al. 2007: 48). SAA X 325, l. 9.

131 *Martakal/maštakal* “soapwort, possibly *Struthium*, *Saponaria*” (Parpola 1983: 246), “ein Seifenkraut” (AHw: 630), “a medical plant” (Parpola et al. 2007: 61; CAD M₁: 391–392). SAA X 321, l. 9 and rev. 10.

132 *Qalāti/qalītu* (ABZ: 150, no. 367), “roasted barley” (SAA X: 354; Parpola et al. 2007: 86), “parched grain” (CAD Q: 59–60); *laptu* “roasted barley” (CAD L: 96–97), “Röst Korn” (AHw: 894). SAA X 327, l. 5.

133 *Damu/dāmu* (ABZ: 72, no. 69), “blood” (CAD D: 75ff).

134 For MUD₂, see above. *Erēnu/erinnu* (ABZ: 190, no. 541), “cedar” (CAD E: 274ff). SAA II 6, l. 644; SAA X 321, l. 13.

135 For details, see above. SAA VII 146, l. 1.

136 *Šurmēnu* (ABZ: 86, no. 101), “cypress” (CAD Š₃: 349ff, esp. 351–353), “Zypresse?” (ABZ: 86). SAA VII 146, l. 2.

137 *Daprānu/duprānu* “a treelike variety of juniper” (*Juniperus drupacea*; CAD D: 189–190), “(Syrian) juniper, *Juniperus drupacea*” (Parpola et al. 2007: 22), “Wacholder” (AHw: 162). SAA VII 146, l. 3.

138 *Asu* (ABZ: 59, no. 10), “myrtle” (CAD A₂: 342ff). SAA VII 146, l. 4.



ŠEM.SAL),¹³⁹ *nikiptu* (ŠEM.^dMAŠ),¹⁴⁰ *kurdinnu*-aromatic (ŠEM.*kurdinnu*),¹⁴¹ turmeric (*kurkânû*),¹⁴² terebinth-like-plant (*buṭnānu*),¹⁴³ *ḥašānu*,¹⁴⁴ styrax (*ballukku*, log. ŠEM. BAL),¹⁴⁵ sweet cane (*qanû ṭābu*, log. GI DUG₃.GA),¹⁴⁶ *burāšu*-juniper (*burāšu*, log. ŠEM. LI)¹⁴⁷. It is not entirely clear, however, whether these substances were intended for medical purposes or for something else,¹⁴⁸ but in other medical texts, these aromatics are mentioned as well.¹⁴⁹

Oils and fats (*šamnu*, log. I₃/I₃.GIŠ;¹⁵⁰ e.g. *kanaktu* oil (I₃ ŠEM.GIG),¹⁵¹ *nikiptu* oil (I₃ ŠEM.^dMAŠ),¹⁵² and bird fat (*šaman iṣṣûri*, log. I₃ MUŠEN),¹⁵³ honey (*dišpu*, log. LAL₃),¹⁵⁴ and even blood¹⁵⁵ are presented as remedies. A beneficial effect was also seen in pure water (*mû zakātu*), in which it was recommended to wash the

139 *Šimšalû/šimšālu/šimiššalû/šimeššalû* (ABZ: 113, no. 215), “a tree, possibly the box” (CAD Š₃: 4–5), “box-tree, juniper” (Parpola et al. 2007: 116), “Buchsbaumart” (AHw: 1237), “Buchsbaum?” (ABZ: 113). SAA VII 146, l. 5.

140 *Nikiptu* (ABZ: 113, no. 215), “a plant” (CAD N₂: 222), “ein Euphorbia-Strauch?” (AHw: 788), “spurge” (Parpola et al. 2007: 77), “a gum-yielding shrub, possibly Euphorbia Antiquorum L., or the like” (Parpola 1983: 251). SAA VII 146, l. 6.

141 *Kurdinnu* “a plant” (CAD K: 557), “eine übelriechende Pflanze” (AHw: 510), “an aromatic plant” (Parpola et al. 2007: 52). SAA VII 146, l. 7.

142 *Kurkânû/kurkanû* “a medical plant” (CAD K: 560–561), “turmeric?” (Parpola et al. 2007: 52), “Curcuma, Gilbwurz” (AHw: 510). SAA VII 146, l. 8.

143 *Buṭnānu* “an aromatic plant, lit. terebinth-like-plant” (CAD B: 358), “pistachio-like garden herb” (Parpola et al. 2007: 18), “eine Pflanze” (AHw: 144). SAA VII 146, l. 9.

144 *Ḥašānu/ḥašānu/ḥašīānu* “a plant, lit. ḥašû-like plant, thyme” (Parpola et al. 2007: 36), “eine Pflanze” (AHw: 334). SAA VII 146, l. 10.

145 *Ballukku* (ABZ: 58, no. 9), “an aromatic substance of vegetal origin, the tree which produces this substance” (CAD B: 64–65), “an aromatic plant, oleander?” (Parpola et al. 2007: 13), “ein Baum, Styrax?” (AHw: 100), “ein Baum” (ABZ: 58). SAA VII 146, l. 11.

146 *Qanû ṭābu* (ABZ: 81 and 159, no. 85 and 396), “sweet reed” (CAD Q: 88–89), “sweet reed, aromatic cane, sweet calamus” (Parpola et al. 2007: 86). SAA VII 146, l. 12.

147 *Burāšu* (ABZ: 68, no. 59), “juniper tree, an aromatic substance obtained from the juniper tree” (CAD B: 326–328), “cade, (prickly) juniper, prickly cedar” (Parpola et al. 2007: 18), “Wacholder” (ABZ: 68), “(phönikischer) Wacholder” (AHw: 139). SAA VII 146, l. 13.

148 See SAA VII: XXX–XXXI.

149 In connection with lists of stones and plants from Assurbanipal’s Library in Nineveh, Jeanette C. Fincke states: “Moreover, it is likely that all lists of stones (8 fragments), or plants and stones (1 fragment), belong to the medical lore, because the Assyrian and Babylonian therapists used plants and stones for the cure of diseases” (Fincke 2003: 131).

150 *Šamnu* (ABZ: 115, no. 231), “oil, fat, cream” (CAD Š₁: 321ff). SAA II 6, 644; SAA X 323, rev. 6.

151 *Kanaktu* (ABZ: 172, no. 446), “a tree, an aromatic product obtained from the tree” (CAD K: 135–136), “Weihrauchbaum” (AHw: 434), “frankincense” (Parpola et al. 2007: 46), “a gum-yielding plant or tree growing in mountains” (Parpola 1983: 251). SAA X 323, b.e. 15.

152 SAA X 323, b.e. 16.

153 *Iṣṣûru* (ABZ: 78, no. 78), “bird, poultry” (CAD I/J: 210ff). SAA X 318, rev. 3.

154 *Dišpu* (ABZ: 88, no. 109), “honey” (CAD D: 161–163). SAA II 6, l. 644.

155 SAA X 328, rev. 15.



hands.¹⁵⁶ Other materials appearing in the texts are *zinzaru'u*,¹⁵⁷ red wool (SIG₂. *tabrēbu*),¹⁵⁸ *mūšu*-stone,¹⁵⁹ beryl (NA₄.*burallu*),¹⁶⁰ and dust from a crossroads (*eper* (log. SAĦAR) *ša sūqi*).¹⁶¹

These ingredients were used — according to the prescriptions (*maṭṭiru*)¹⁶² — for producing ointments and salves (*piššatu*,¹⁶³ *napšaštu/napšaltu*¹⁶⁴) for anointing,¹⁶⁵ and for lotions (*marḥušu*).¹⁶⁶ Drugs were also administered orally, of course, often as a potion (*mašqītu*),¹⁶⁷ they were used as fumigants (*qutāru*, *qut-PA*)¹⁶⁸ for fumigation (*qutturu*),¹⁶⁹ and they were applied (*karāru*)¹⁷⁰ directly to the wounds¹⁷¹ as well. During treatment, Assyrian experts also used lint (*širṭu*),¹⁷² tampons (*lippu*),¹⁷³ bandages (*šindu*),¹⁷⁴ absorp-

156 *Mû* (ABZ: 197, no. 579), “water” (CAD M₂: 149ff). *Zakātu* (f.) “clear, clean, cleansed” (CAD Z: 23–25). SAA X 318, rev. 6–7.

157 *Zinzaru'u* “mng. uncert.” (CAD Z: 124), “etwas wie Öl?” (AHw: 1529), “ginger” (Parpola et al. 2007: 134). SAA II 6, l. 644.

158 *Tabribu/tabrēbu/tabribu* “a red-dyed wool” (CAD T: 30–31), “rote Wolle” (AHw: 1299), “red wool” (Parpola et al. 2007: 120; SAA X: 366). SAA X 323, rev. 7.

159 *Mūšu* “a disease of the urinary tract, a stone” (CAD M₂: 246–247), “ein Mineral, geronnener Ausfluß” (AHw: 679), “a stone” (Parpola et al. 2007: 68), “a well-known ingredient of medical preparations” (Parpola 1983: 244). SAA X 324, e. 1.

160 *Burallu* “a stone or stone object” (CAD B: 326), “Beryll” (AHw: 139), “beryl” (SAA X: 331; Parpola 1983: 251). SAA X 32, rev. 10 and 12.

161 *Eperu* (ABZ: 111, no. 212), “dust, earth” (CAD E: 184ff). SAA X 321, rev. 6.

162 *Maṭṭiru/mašṭiru* “inscription, text” (CAD M₁: 396). SAA X 321, r.e. 17.

163 *Piššatu* “oil” (CAD P: 430ff), “unguent, ointment” (Parpola et al. 2007: 84). SAA II 6, l. 491.

164 *Napšaštu/napšaltu* “ointment, salve” (CAD N₁: 317–318). SAA VII 147, l. 5'; SAA X 250, l. 8'; SAA X 294, rev. 1; SAA X 315, r.e. 18; SAA X 327, l. 1, 7', 10', 13', b.e. 15', rev. 13, e. 1; SAA X 328, l. 8.

165 *Pašāšu* “to smear, anoint” (CAD P: 245ff). SAA X 315, r.e. 21; SAA X 318, b.e. 11 and rev. 4.

166 *Marḥušu* “lotion, rinse” (Parpola et al. 2007: 61). SAA X 315, rev. 4; SAA X 329, rev. 8; SAA XVI 165, rev. 5.

167 *Mašqītu* “potion, drink” (CAD M₁: 382–384). SAA X 294, rev. 1 (*mašqīt asūti*); SAA X 324, l. 14; SAA X 327, rev. 13; SAA X 328, l. 9.

168 *Qutāru* (ABZ: 120, no. 295), “fumigant” (CAD Q: 321–322), “fumigation, (drug for) smoke therapy” (Parpola 1983: 250). SAA VII 147, l. 1'–3' and 5', SAA X 250, l. 8', SAA X 323, l. 13; SAA X 327, rev. 13, 16 and 17; SAA X 328, l. 8.

169 *Qatāru* (*qutturu*) “to cause something to smoke, to make an incense offering, to cense, fumigate, to fume incense” (CAD Q: 166–168). SAA X 323, rev. 4 and 5.

170 *Karāru* “to put an object in place, to set” (CAD K: 207–208). SAA X 241, l. 5.

171 “May there be no honey, oil, *zinzaru'u* or cedar-resin available to place on your wound” (SAA II 6, l. 644–645).

172 *Širṭu* “strip of cloth, shred, rag, tatter” (CAD Š₃: 113), “lint, bandage, gauze, shred, strip, tatter” (Parpola et al. 2007: 117), “lint(?)” (SAA X: 364). SAA X 319, rev. 2.

173 *Lippu* “tampon, wad, burl” (CAD L: 200), “tampon, wad” (Parpola et al. 2007: 56), “tampon” (SAA X: 344). SAA X 321, l. 8 (tampons of *martakal*-seed); SAA X 322, rev. 7.

174 *Šindu/šimdu* “bandage” (CAD Š: 196–197). SAA X 335, l. 4'.



tive dressings (*tal'itu*),¹⁷⁵ tufts of wool (*nipšu*),¹⁷⁶ and *šilbānu*¹⁷⁷ poultice made out of these materials and substances.

RITUALS, INCANTATIONS AND AMULETS

Along with¹⁷⁸ these therapeutic procedures, rituals (*epištu*, log. DU₃.DU₃.BI;¹⁷⁹ *nēpešu*¹⁸⁰) and recitation (*manû*)¹⁸¹ of incantations (*šiptu*, log. EN₂)¹⁸² — which should provide the support of the gods and drive off evil forces — were also performed, and prayers¹⁸³ for reconciliation with the divine sphere were said. It is sometimes difficult to determine, however, whether a ritual mentioned in a text actually relates to the treatment of some patient, or whether it was performed without any relation to the illness of the person mentioned in the text.

The texts name “rituals against the loss of flesh” (*nēpešē ša ḫaliḫti širi*),¹⁸⁴ a ritual “Sick [...]” ([x x x].GIG.GA.MEŠ),¹⁸⁵ a ritual “Nullifying the Curse” (*māmit pašāri*) against diseases caused by curses which included the incantation “Ea, Šamaš, Asalluḫi” (EN₂ ^dE₂.A ^dUTU ^dASAR.LU₂.ḪI),¹⁸⁶ and rituals for driving out the evil demon and epilepsy (*ana alû*¹⁸⁷

175 *Tal'itu* “dressing, bandage” (CAD T: 97), “(absorptive) dressing” (SAA X: 366; Parpola et al. 2007: 121), “Salbenverband” (AHw: 1310). SAA X 319, l. 12.

176 *Nipšu* “combed wool, tuft of wool, fluff” (CAD N₂: 248–249), “tuft of wool, fluff, wisp” (Parpola et al. 2007: 77), “tuft of wool” (SAA X: 350). SAA X 321, rev. 8 and 14.

177 *Šilbānu* “poultice” (SAA X: 357; Parpola et al. 2007: 104), *šilbu* (pl. *šilbānu*, *šilibānu*) “crosswise arrangement of bandages or wood” (CAD Š: 187), “perhaps related to Syr. *šulbānā* “dry root of licorice” used as a poultice” (Parpola 1983: 173). SAA X 241, l. 6; SAA X 315, rev. 9.

178 A close connection between remedies and magic is for example documented by the — unfortunately badly damaged — text SAA X 327, in which the chief physician Urdu-Nanāia lists some remedies, but also mentions several rites and incantations, e.g.: “Salv[es], fumigants, poti[ons] against buzzing [ears], fumigants to go with the incantation ...[...]” (SAA X 327, rev. 13–16).

179 *Epištu/epuštu*(?) (ABZ: 114, no. 230), “act, activity, ritual (act), evil magic” (CAD E: 241ff), “ritual” (SAA X: 319 and 334), “der dazuhörigte Ritus” (ABZ: 114, no. 230). SAA X 295, l. 9; SAA X 201, rev. 7'.

180 *Nēpešu* “ritual, ritual procedure” (CAD N₂: 168ff). SAA X 200, rev. 4'; SAA X 243, rev. 2'; SAA X 327, ll. 8', 11', 14', rev. 7; SAA X 238, l. 7; SAA X 296, ll. 10 and rev. 2; SAA X 298, ll. 8 and rev. 9; SAA X 300, ll. 4' and rev. 2.

181 *Manû* “to recite, to recount events” (CAD M₁: 221ff). SAA X 321, l. 16, rev. 4.

182 *Šiptu* (ABZ: 191, no. 546), “incantation, spell” (CAD Š₃: 86ff). SAA X 201, rev. 4', 6'; SAA X 238, l. 7, rev. 4 and 9; SAA X 321, l. 15, rev. 4.

183 Parpola 1983: 145. E.g. SAA X 214, rev. 1.

184 SAA X 200, rev. 4'–5'; SAA X 212, l. 12. For more, see Parpola 1983: 156.

185 SAA X 201, rev. 3'. For more, see Parpola 1983: 148.

186 SAA X 201, rev. 4'–5'. For more, see Parpola 1983: 148.

187 *Alû* “an individualized demonic power or ghost causing a specific disease” (CAD A₁: 375–377).



lemnu u AN.TA.ŠUB.BA¹⁸⁸ *nasāhi*)¹⁸⁹ which included the incantation “Verily You are Evil” (EN₂ ĤUL.GAL₂ ĤE₂.ME.EN)¹⁹⁰ and “Be gone, Evil *ħultuppu*” (EN₂ ĤUL.DUB₂ E₃.BA.RA).¹⁹¹ There were also performed rituals against witchcraft (*ušburrudū*, log. UŠ₁₁.BUR₂.RU.DA),¹⁹² which served against health problems whose cause was seen in evil sorcery. Diseases caused by black magic were also treated by using *zikurudāni*-rites (*nēpeši ša* ZI.KU.RU.DA.MEŠ).¹⁹³ Some rituals related to a specific period are known as well, but in some cases they were rather to prevent diseases than fight against their causes. This category is represented by rites of the month Ajaru against inflammation of the eyes (*nēpešē ša* ITI.GUD *ša ĥunṭi ša ēnāte*), rites of the month Abu (*nēpešē ša* ITI.NE)¹⁹⁴ with the purpose of treating diseases caused by ghosts and spirits of the dead,¹⁹⁵ rites of the month Ulūlu (*nēpeši ša* ITI.KIN)¹⁹⁶ for ensuring the favour of (the dream god) Zaḳiḳu, good dreams¹⁹⁷ and dream-oracles¹⁹⁸ for the patient.¹⁹⁹ In letter SAA X 296, there are listed other rituals related to a specific month whose purpose was to protect against various illnesses: “[Concerning] the rites about which the ki[ng, my lord], wrote to us, in Kislimu we performed “To keep ma[laria], plague and pestilence away from a man’s home”,²⁰⁰ [in Ṭeb]ētu we performed “To keep disease

188 AN.TA.ŠUB.BA (ABZ: 60, no. 13), “*miqit šamē* (auch *antašubbū*), Fallsucht?” (ABZ: 60), “*miqtu*, epilepsy” (SAA X: 348), “*miqtu*, a disease” (CAD M₂: 103–104).

189 SAA X 238, ll. 9–10. These rituals perhaps pertained to the incantation series *Utukkū lemnu* (Parpola 1983: 162–163; for the series, see Geller 2007). This letter even contains a detailed description of the ritual: “As soon as something has afflicted him (= the patient), the exorcist rises and hangs a mouse and a shoot of a thornbush on the vault of the (patient’s) door. The exorcist dresses in a red garment and puts on a red cloak. He (holds) a ra[ven on] his right, a falcon on [his left], and po[urs ...] on the censer of the “7 gates”, grasps a [...], holds a t[orch in his han]d, stri[kes] with a [w]hip and recites [the incantation] “Verily You are [Evil]”. [After] he has finished, he makes another exorcist go around the bed of the patient, followed by a censer and a torch, recites the incantation “Be gone, Evil *ħultuppu*” (going) as far as to the door and (then) conjures the door. Until (the demon) is driven out, he does (this) (every) morning and evening” (SAA X 238, ll. 10 — rev. 12).

190 SAA X 238, ll. 7 and rev. 4. For more, see Parpola 1983: 162–163.

191 SAA X 238, rev. 9. For more, see Parpola 1983: 162–163.

192 *Ušburrudū* (ABZ: 64, no. 17), “rites to counteract witchcraft” (CAD U/W: 300), “Beschwörung um Zauber zu lösen” (ABZ: 64). SAA X 200, rev. 6’; SAA X 296, l. 15; SAA X 316, rev. 21. For more, see Parpola 1983: 147, and Abusch — Schwemer 2011: 13–14, 115–245.

193 *Zikurudū* ““throat-cutting”, a magical rite” (Parpola et al. 2007: 134), “a pernicious magical practice, lit. “cutting of the breath”” (CAD Z: 117), “Lebensabschneidung, eine magische Praktik” (AHw: 1527–1528). SAA X 300, l. 4’. For more, see Parpola 1983: 144–145, and Abusch — Schwemer 2011: 15–16, 399–424, 434–443.

194 SAA X 274, rev. 2–3. For more, see Parpola 1983: 203–204.

195 Parpola 1983: 204.

196 SAA X 298, l. 8.

197 *Šuttu* “dream” (CAD Š₃: 405–407). SAA X 298, ll. 12 and rev. 1.

198 *Egirrū* “an oracular utterance of uncertain nature” (CAD E: 43–45). SAA X 298, rev. 2.

199 SAA X 298, ll. 8 — rev. 1. For more, see Parpola 1983: 213–214 and also 210–211.

200 “*Di’u šiṭṭu mūtānu ana* E₂ LU₂ NU TE-*e*” (SAA X 296, ll. 11–12).



and malaria away from a man's home",²⁰¹ and numerous counterspells; in Šabātu we performed "hand-lifting" prayers,²⁰² an apotropaic ritual to counteract evil sorcery²⁰³ and a ritual against malaria and plague.²⁰⁴ On the 1st day we initiated the rites (to be performed) in Addaru."²⁰⁵ Adad-šumu-ušur writes in letter SAA X 193 about "(the ritual entitled) "A substitute for Ereškigal""²⁰⁶ held for the crown prince. During this ritual, a virgin kid was killed and buried as a substitute for the person to be cured.²⁰⁷

Therapeutic effects of treatment were also strengthened by various stones (*abnu*, log. NA₄),²⁰⁸ phylacteries ((KUŠ.)*mē'elu*),²⁰⁹ and strings of amulet stones (*ṭurru*)²¹⁰ which were sent by physicians as well as by exorcists.²¹¹ These objects were placed close to the patient²¹² or directly on his body (hung on his neck,²¹³ for example) in order to relieve him of his ailment.²¹⁴

201 "GIG di'u ana E₂ NA NU TE-e" (SAA X 296, l. 14).

202 "ŠU.IL₂.KAM₂.MEŠ" (SAA X 296, l. 17).

203 "NAM.BUR₂.BI HUL kišpi" (SAA X 296, l. 18). It seems likely that the incantation "You, River, Creator of Everything" (EN₂ atti ID₂ DU₃-at kalāma) mentioned in SAA X 201 belonged to the type of *namburbi* against witchcraft (SAA X 201, rev. 6'; for more, see Parpola 1983: 148).

204 "ša di'u šiptu" (SAA X 296, rev. 1).

205 SAA X 296, ll. 10 — rev. 2. For more, see Parpola 1983: 211–213.

206 "Pūḫi amēli ana Ereškigal" (SAA X 193, l. 14). See also Parpola 1983: 126–127.

207 Parpola 1983: 127.

208 *Abnu* "stone (in natural form and location), stone (prepared for specific use), stone (as med. term referring to bladder stones)" (CAD A₁: 54ff, esp. 58–59), "stone, gem" (SAA X: 322). SAA X 309, l. 3'.

209 *Mē'elu/mēlu* "bandage, poultice worn around the neck" (CAD M₂: 14–15), "phylactery" (SAA X: 345), "phylactery, poultice" (Parpola et al. 2007: 63). SAA X 295, l. 7; SAA X 309, l. 3'; SAA X 315, rev. 16; SAA X 328, l. 9.

210 *Ṭurru* "yarn, twine, wire, string, band" (CAD T: 164–165), "band, string, wire; ribbon" (Ass-Dict. p. 127), "string (of amulet stones)" (SAA X: 368), "string (of perforated amulet stones hung around the neck), a well-known healing device of Mesopotamian exorcists" (Parpola 1983: 173). SAA X 241, rev. 3.

211 E.g. the physicians Ikkāru (SAA X 328) and Urdu-Nanāia (SAA X 315) and exorcists Urdu-Gula (SAA X 295) and Ana-Nabû-atkal (SAA X 309).

212 In the text SAA X 316, for example, there is mentioned some object called "healer" (*mušallimānu*; "a craftsman, uncert. mng." (CAD M₂: 256)). This "healer" was sent together with some medicinal herbs, and it was probably to be placed into the bed of a sick person (SAA X 316, rev. 23 — r.e. 26). Nevertheless, the tablet is damaged and the context therefore remains unclear.

213 "I am sending certain phylacteries to the king, my lord. The king should put them around his neck" (SAA X 315, rev. 16 — r.e. 18).

214 E.g. "I prepared the [sto]nes and the phylactery (used) against epilepsy and put them upon him, (and see), the epilepsy left him. Once the child had calmed down, they put (the amulets) upon the nephew of Zēru-ukin: he, too, calmed down. [O]nce the nephew of Zēru-ukin had calmed down, they put (the amulets) upon that shepherd — your sister [...]. He calmed down" (SAA X 309, ll. 3' — rev. 3).

After these medical procedures — application of drugs and performing magical acts — the patient could recover, or he could become much better (*širu* (of sb.) *ṭābu*;²¹⁵ *mursā našāru*²¹⁶), but his condition could also get worse²¹⁷ or remain unchanged.²¹⁸



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215 For *širu*, see above. *Ṭābu* “to become good” (CAD T: 34ff, esp. 36–37). SAA X 297, ll. 10–11 and rev. 4’–5’; SAA X 323, ll. 10–11; SAA X 328, ll. 19–20.

216 *Našāru* “to deduct, remove, to reduce in size, number, intensity” (CAD N₂: 60ff, esp. 62–63). SAA X 315, rev. 8–9.

217 “Do (all our) efforts really only result in regress?” (SAA X 328, rev. 7–8).

218 “He makes no progress” (*a-na pa-ni la-a il-lak*; SAA X 329, rev. 3); “he has not seen any improvement” (*tu-bu ŠA₃-bi la-a e-mur*; *ibid.*, ll. 9–10).



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