

Abstract:

Body is a biological system, but also a medium, through which an individual as well as their culture are actualized in the world. Both the individual and culture conceptualize the body in notions that, together with physical perceptions, constitute bodily experience. In studying ancient cultures, such as Mesopotamia, the actual bodily experience is lost for us, but the cultural notions can be reconstructed.

The present thesis focuses on the notions of body and disease in Mesopotamian healing practice recorded in professional medical literature that was being canonized and copied since the late second millennium BCE. The collections of prescriptions called “therapeutic texts” are of main interest, since they present the healing procedure itself. In these texts, I analyzed the verbal descriptions of disease and healing as well as the physical treatment of the body with regard to general context and with focus on cases of fever.

The thesis concludes, that the texts present the interaction between the body and the disease as spatial and physical, in their metaphors as well as in the prescribed treatment of the body and of surrounding space. Fever entered from outer space, attached itself to the body, it “seized” or “took hold” of the person, and needed to be removed. Its independent agency, the way its attack is described, as well as the need to remove it from the body, show similarities with the attacks of demons. Like other ailments, it transcended the physical body and affected the whole person, their identity, and environment.