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Page 1

Scorpions insaisissables
Antoine Cavigneaux

Page 4

Two medical conditions at night
Klaus Wagenonner

Page 9

Symptomatologie dans Suâlam (seconde partie)
Danielle Cadelli

Page 31

Demons, Deputies of the Gods,
and How to Get Rid of Them?
Eric Schmidtchen

Cunéiformes

Two medical conditions at night

Klaus Wagensohnner*

1 Introduction

The small tablet YBC 4955 (YPM BC 019019; measurements: 50.6 × 42.6 × 14.0 mm) is inscribed with eight lines of text on its obverse and six lines on its reverse. Damage is confined to the upper left corner (see Fig. 1). One line on top of the reverse was erased by the scribe. The tablet is slightly oval and rather thin. Its text is not ruled except for a single ruling after line 5, which separates the content into two sections. The text itself is quite intriguing. Each of the two sections appears to deal with medical conditions that happen during the patient's sleep (lines 3 and 8: *ina mušīti*).¹ Each "case" is introduced by a date. The first case happened on the 25th, the second on the 24th of the second month (Ayyāru). Occasionally, similar dates occur in medical texts in therapeutic descriptions after the identification of symptoms. Thus we read in one of these texts as follows:² "If a man, his right ear hurts him intensely, is full of 'clay' and is continually swollen, on the eighth of Abu (V), you extract the juice of a sweet *nurmū*-pomegranate, ..."

Case 1 (lines 1-5) describes an incident from the point of view of the speaker: "in my dream/night-time" (line 3: *ina mušītiya*). While the patient sleeps, the nose started to bleed (line 4-5: *damū ina appiya illikū*). The *Assur Medical Catalogue*, which contains all the medical treatises a first millennium BC physician needed to master, refers also to a tablet that deals with nosebleed: "If blood [flows from] a man's nose, [in order to] stop the nosebleed" (line 19: 'DIŠ NA MUD₂' *ina* KIR₄-š_u₂ [DU-ku ana] 'MUD₂' KIR₄ TAR-[si]).³ Nosebleed is a comparatively common condition and is frequently referred to in medical texts. See, for instance, *TDP* 56:19 *šumma ina appišu damū illakū*, "if blood runs from his nose."

Case 2 (lines 6-14) is not concerned with nosebleed, but with a more elusive condition. This case happens on the 24th of the second month, again during night-time, but this time the condition happens to a woman named Lamassāni. This name, (lit.) "our guardian deity," is not uncommon, at least in Babylonia, and still occurs in the Kassite period.⁴ As pointed out by Klaas Veenhof (1968: 197-198), names such as Lamassī, Lamassāni, and Lamassatum are often found with *nadītum*-priestesses. Apart from the Old Assyrian period, names of this type appear to be rather uncommon in the north in later periods. This might be indicative for the place of origin of our text (see below).

According to the text, Lamassāni's affliction is of a different nature than the first case. She is "filled with water" (line 10: *mē maliat*). "Filled with water" in a medical sense is attested in

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¹ For *ina mušītiya*, "in my dream," compare the Old Babylonian manuscript of Gilgamesh IM 58451 (3N-T 376) o,16; see George 2003: 244. Akk. *mušītu*, "night," is here to be understood as "night-time, sleep."

² K 4023 (*CDLI* P395359 = *AMT* 105/1 col. iv): (7') DIŠ NA GEŠTU ZA₃-š_u₂ TAG-su IM DIRI-at u MU₂^{meš} U₄ 8°.KAM₂ : U₄ 9.KAM₂ ša^{ti}NE (8') geš^{su}NU.UR₂.MA KU₇.KU₇ ša₂ ina UGU GEŠ-š_u₂ zaq-pat A^{meš}-š_u₂ ta-še-ša-'; see also Scurlock 2014: 387-388.

³ See Steinert 2018: 210 and her remarks on p. 226. A photograph of the tablet is published in Steinert 2019: 131, Fig. 10.5.

⁴ See, for instance, a Kassite seal in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which mentions this name in the same spelling; see Konstantopoulos 2018: 98, fig. 1. Lamassāni is certainly a female name, which also becomes clear from the suffix -š_u and the feminine stative forms. See, for instance, the Old Babylonian letter *AbB* 1, 98, that uses 2. sg. f. suffixes throughout the letter, or ^fla-ma-sa₃-ni LUKUR ^dUTU in *AbB* 14, 54 (line 30).

both medical as well as divinatory texts. Occasionally it qualifies the state of a body part or organ such as in *YOS* 10, 31: (iv,29) *šum-ma mar-tum* (30) *me-{\times}-e* (31) *im-^rta-na-alⁿ-la-ma* (...), “If the gall bladder is constantly filled with water.”⁵ The present text, however, does not specify any body part.⁶ It is therefore plausible to assume that Lamassāni suffers from *aganutillû*-disease.⁷ Lexical texts such as the *List of Diseases* (K 207+) describe this disease as *malia mē*, “filled with water.”⁸

(ii,1)	a - m u d - a - s e ₃ - g a	<i>ma-li-a me-e</i>
(ii,2)	a - š a ₃ - g a - s i	KI.MIN
(ii,3)	a - g a l - l a - t i - l a	KI.MIN
	(ruling)	
(ii,4)	a - g a l - l a - t i - l a	<i>ra-ah im-tu</i>

Similar descriptions of this disease occur in royal inscriptions of Ashurbanipal, as for instance in the following passage:⁹

(iv,56) ^{md}MUATI-MU-KAM-*eš* ^{lu2}GU2.EN.NA *la na-šir a-de-e*
 (iv,57) *iš-ši a-ga-nu-til-la-a* A^{meš} SA₅^{meš}

“Nabû-šuma-ēreš, the *šandabakku* who did not honor (my) treaty, he suffered from dropsy, (that is) ‘full water’.”

In curse formulae gods often cause dropsy for the evildoer who, for instance, effaces an inscription. A Kassite Kudurru-inscription dating to the reign of Marduk-nādin-ahhē states as follows:¹⁰

(v,29) ^dAMAR.UTU *be-lu₄ GAL-u₂*
 (v,30) *ša qi₂-bi-is-su la ut-tak-ka-ru*
 (v,31) A.GA.NU.TIL.LA-a
 (v,32) *ša ri-ki-is-su la ip-paṭ-ṭa-ru*
 (v,33) *li-šeš-ši-šu-ma*
 (vi,1) *a-di bal-ṭu ki-ma ka-re-e*
 (vi,2) *lu-u₂ na-šu-u₂ lib₂-bu-šu*

“May Marduk, the great lord, whose command cannot be altered, impose on him dropsy, whose bond cannot be loosened, and as long as he is alive, his innerds shall be swollen like sheaves.”

⁵ YBC 4638 (YPM BC 018703 = CDLI P293400; collated); see also *CAD* M/I, 177, 2’-3’.

⁶ Probably unlikely, but worth mentioning is the possibility that *la-ma-sa₃-ni* is a corrupt or sandhi spelling for the pupil of the eye, *lamassat īni*. Compare the Old Babylonian medical text *TLB* 2, 21: (11’) *šum-ma mar-šum i-na-a-šu da-ma-am ma-li-a*, “If a man’s eyes are full of blood”; see Geller 2001–2002: 73-74.

⁷ I would like to thank Mark Geller for this suggestion. For this disease or condition see Scurlock and Andersen 2005: 170.

⁸ See *MSL* IX, 93 and *CAD* A/I, 144 s.v. *aganutillû*.

⁹ Ashurbanipal 3; see Novotny and Jeffers 2018: 67.

¹⁰ *Sumer* 38, 128 (Fig. 1.c) and 129 (2.b); see Paulus 2014: 558.

Similarly, a short contemporaneous votive inscription by a governor of Ur to Šamaš-šumakīn, reads:¹¹

- (10) (...) ^dAMAR.UTU EN GAL-*u*₂
 (11) ^dEN.LIL₂ EN KUR.KUR *a-ga-nu-til-la-a*
 (12) *še-ret-su ša₂ la pa-ṭa-ru lu-šar-šiš*

“May Marduk, the great lord, Enlil, lord of the lands, afflict him with dropsy (as) his punishment which cannot be alleviated.”

After introducing Lamassāni’s condition, our text continues to mention an offering at the gate of Marduk (lines 11-12: *ina bāb Marduk naqiat*). The mentioning of Marduk, again, points to a Babylonian origin of the text, but not necessarily to Babylon itself. Returning to the name of the inflicted person, Lamassāni, one might entertain the possibility that she could have been a *nadītu* of Marduk. This type of *nadītu* co-existed with the *nadītu* of Šamaš in Sippar in the Old Babylonian period.¹²

The last two lines of the text, obviously describing the outcome of her offering, remain elusive. The reading *šalmat* (line 14) is tentative, but not unlikely.

2 Edition

Obverse

- | | | |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 | [<i>i+na</i>] ^{iti} GU ₄ .SI.SA ₂ | [In] the month Ayyāru (II), |
| 2 | [U ₄] 25.KAM | (on) the 25 th , |
| 3 | [<i>i</i>]+ ^r na ^r <i>mu-ši-ti-ia</i> | during my sleep (lit. my night) |
| 4 | ^r da ^r - <i>mu i+na ap-pi₂-ia</i> | blood ran out of my nose. |
| 5 | <i>il-li-ku</i>
(ruling) | |
| 6 | <i>i+na</i> ^{iti} GU ₄ .SI.SA ₂ | In the month Ayyāru, |
| 7 | U ₄ 24.KAM | (on) the 24 th , |
| 8 | <i>i+na mu-ši-ti-ša</i> | during her sleep, ¹³ |

Reverse

- | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------|
| 9 | <i>ša la-ma-sa₃-ni</i> | that of Lamassāni, |
| 10 | <i>me^o-e ma-li-a-at-ma</i> | she was full of water and |
| 11 | ^r i+na ^r KA ₂ ^d AMAR.UTU | at Marduk’s gate |
| 12 | [<i>n</i>]a ² - <i>qi₂-a-at</i> | she made an offering. |
| 13 | [^r] ^r × ak ² ti ma ² ^r | ... |
| 14 | [<i>ša</i>]- ^r al ² ^r - <i>ma-at</i> | she will be well. |

¹¹ RIMB 6.33.2001 (CDLI P387078). This composition is preserved on two manuscripts, TCL 12, 13 and HE 144.

¹² See Harris 1975: 315-323.

¹³ The feminine suffix *-ša* is added here parallel to the first case and can be considered redundant due to what follows.



Fig. 1 Photo and handcopy of YBC 4955

3 Palaeography and date

Putting a specific date on a text like the present tablet is rather difficult. Palaeographic considerations alone do not help to pinpoint its date and possible provenience, but at least seem to point clearly to a date after the Old Babylonian period.

Some consideration also needs to be given to the writing of the month name Ayyāru. Texts dating to the first millennium BC would conventionally abbreviate its orthography to ⁱⁱⁱGU4 instead its full form ⁱⁱⁱGU4.SI.SA₂ as it appears on the tablet. Since this text lies at the margin of scholarship, archaisms are not impossible. While Middle Assyrian royal inscriptions use abbreviated month names, Neo-Assyrian inscriptions frequently use the full form in their date formulas, but not in the main text.

Tentatively it may be proposed that the current text dates to the second half of the second millennium. The shapes of the signs IL and LI (line 5) seem to confirm that. Middle Assyrian appears to be less likely due to the text's orthography: *ap-pi₂-ia* instead of *ap-pi-ia*.

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