

Physicians and Surgeons, South West Asia and Egypt (Medicine and Surgery)

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2.

The messenger (the Rab Mag) has told me,
Yesterday at evening much blood ran,
The dressings were unskilful, h
They had been placed on the breathing parts of the nose,
And impeded the breathing and come off because of the flow
of blood.
Let them be placed within the nostrils (plugging), they will
preserve the breathing and the blood will be held back.
If in the eyes of the King in the morning I will come and
attend to him,
Let me hear as to his condition (submu = health)."

The next letter, K.83.1.18.2, relates to the sickness of the King himself,
and after the usual salutations the writer says:-

"Constantly (Kaivanu) has the King my lord said to me in this manner -
"The establishment (nature) of my sickness is this, thou hast not seen to its
nature, its removal thou hast not effected." In former time I myself spake
thus - "The ulcer is not to be removed (curable). I cannot know (understand)
it." Now however I sealed a letter and send it. In the presence of the
King let it be read. For the King my lord I will prescribe (teach). If
in the eyes (face) of the King my lord it is favourable, let the seer (barū)
do his treatment. Let the King apply the lotion. The sore will be loosed.
The dressing of oils let the King apply it two or three times."

In another case the King attends to a young prince, Assur-mukin-paleya,
the brother of Assurbanipal, who is suffering from an abscess under a tooth.
He says he "has lifted the head of the tooth," and no doubt lanced the abscess
and that the pain has ceased.

After the same salutations as in the former letter the writer says:-

"In regard to the abscess of the tooth
in which the King sent to me.
I caused him to raise up his head.
The abscess of the tooth is serious
In regard to which the King sent to me.
And thou thyself art anxious in respect of it.
He is pale of face.
I myself examined the face of Assur-mukin-paleya,
For the satisfaction of the King.
And to the King I am now coming.
Thus that for the King my lord.
During the month and during the days,
I may perform the necessary ceremonies."

3.

Both these letters show that the physician was closely associated with the seer or baru, and indeed in the roll of precedents of the Assyrian court, the Asu is classed with the Baru or Seer and the Abba or Astrologer. When the medical man failed, recourse was had to the magician. This association is no doubt a survival of the times when the Asipu, or "witch doctor" was consulted in case of illness, which in most ancient times was regarded as a species of demoniacal possession. The medical men in Assyria and Babylonia like most trades and professions in the East, formed a guild with the Asu rabu or chief physician at the head, and frequently on occasions of trouble a council of consultation (adu) was held, at which both physicians, magicians and wise men (abba) met. One such consultation took place at Assur in the reign of Esarhaddon, when the abbas or "sages" of Nineveh, Kakzi, and Arbila, we are told in Tablet 83.1.19.9, British Museum, entered into agreement and consultation. These consultations usually took place at night and under "the face of the starry Heaven." Thus the tablet says, "They enter in consultation on the night of the 16th day (curiously the Sabbath day) in the face of the stars they appoint it." Another text, K.572, states that the 16th of Nisan there was a general consultation, probably annually held at the palace, when the scribes, physicians, the Seers (bari), the Necromancers (Mas.Mas), the seers who observed birds (dagil izzuri) assembled. This text shows that certain medical men more or less attached to the person of the King, lived in the palace.

This seems confirmed by a letter from the prince Samas-mitu-uballit, who was the son of Esarhaddon, and therefore the younger brother of Assurbanipal, who writes asking that a physician may be sent to visit a sick lady. It reads:- "To the King my lord thy servant Samas-mitu-uballit (the Sun-god who raises the dead). Verily peace to the King my lord. May Nebo and Marduk be continually gracious to the King my lord. Verily the hand-maid (amat) of the King my lord, Baū Gamilat, is extremely ill. She can eat nothing. Therefore let the King my lord give an order that a physician

4.

(asu) come and see her."

In the famous letter of Kudurru we have a record of a doctor having been sent by the King.

The association between the doctor and the magician was so close that the former had to consult the latter as to the day being one favourable for the attempted cure of a patient. Thus we find that certain are said to be such "that the doctor touches not the sick with his hand." A similar belief is found in Hippocrates and in the hemerologies of the Babylonians we find the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, and 19th days are days on which it was unfortunate to take medicine (asu) for the body.

He (the god) has spoken the word.

It is soothed & all.

Let the heart of the King my lord rejoice.

In about (ade) seven or eight days he will be well.

Here it is to be noted that the writer begins his letter with an invocation to Ninurta & Gula the patron divinities of the medical profession.

K 579

The next letter is K 579 of the British Museum Collection.

The writer Arad Nana, salutes the King in the usual

terms & associates his son with him. The medical problem

"For the treatment we carried out we were

given 5/6 of a shekel.

The day he came, when he was much cured

he recovered his strength. he ^{stayed} ~~stayed~~ until.

In regard to the sick man, who had blood

running from his nose, The messenger ^(the Rat Man) &

has told me, "Yesterday at evening much

blood ran. The dressings were unskillful.

This had been placed in the fleshy parts of

the nose, & impeded the breathing & come off

because of the flow of blood.

Let them be placed within the nostrils they

will preserve the breathing & the blood will be

held back.

If in the eyes of the King in the morning I

will come and attend to him

let me hear as to his condition (Submissio = health)

Muggins

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"Constantly (Kaivance) has the King my lord said to me, in this manner." The establishment (mathe) of my sickness, is this there has not seen to its nature - its removal there has not effected. In former time I myself spoke thus "the ulcer the ulcer is not to be removed. (curable).

Now I cannot know (under stand it).

Now however, as I sealed a ~~letter~~^{letter}, said it

In the presence of the King let it be read.

For the King my lord, I will prescribe (treat).

By in the eyes (face) of the King my lord.

It is favorable, let the Seer (baru) let ^{do this} the treatment let the King apply the to him

The sore will be loosed, The dressing of ~~do~~ oils

Let the King apply it two or three times."

In another case the King attends to a young prince Asser-mukeri-pat-e-ya - the brother of Assur-bani-pal who is suffering from an abscess under a tooth. He says he "has lifted the head of the tooth" & has done lance the abscess, and that the pain has ceased.

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I caused him to raise up his head.

The ailment of the tooth is serious
in regard to which the King sent ~~to~~ me.

And thus they self are anxious in respect of it
He is pale of face.

I myself examined the face of Assur. ^{in the} ~~face~~ - pale ya

for the sake of a cure of the King
and to the King I am now coming

Thus that for the King my lord
during the month & during the days

I ~~also~~ may perform the necessary ceremonies

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5.

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 "To the King my lord thy servant Samasmita uballit
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 Verily the hand maid (amat) of the King my lord.
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Bayesian Median
Sept. 23-1910

Medical Ethics -
Function of Doctors

36