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p. 148 In H07 we have the only example from Sippar of a seal owned by a woman.

p. 165 The name of the *šangû* in the first year of Xerxes is to be read Nadin-ahi, and not Šum-ušur as previously supposed.

p. 170 In one case (C02) it can be suggested that the seal was inherited, having passed from Ki-Nabû down to his nephew Uballissu-Gula (*cf.* also p. 136); in other cases it appears that a seal has come back into use though the evidence is insufficient to say whether or not this was through inheritance.

In summary this is a truly exceptional work. The level of detail given to identifying and grouping the sealings is extraordinary and the photographic archive of impressions is a model of its kind. Undoubtedly this work will serve as a foundation for further research. On the iconographic front this resource offers a treasure trove of dated images which will make a significant contribution to art history. This will be all the more important as, extraordinary as it may seem, the finds sent back by Rassam unfortunately included no actual seals. This is a circumstance which is inconceivable given the scale of his excavations (the explanation for this may be that the seals were stolen by his workmen), and the loss is doubly unfortunate as it has robbed us of the opportunity to compare the sealings with actual seals from the site. Any opportunity to redress this is highly welcome.

As stated, in the opinion of the reviewer it is a shame that the authors did not go on to produce reconstructions of each seal – admittedly it could be argued that this is outside the aims of a catalogue *stricto sensu* but having paved the way so superbly it seems a shame not to go this one extra step. The significance on the Assyriological side is even more fundamental. The opportunities for analysis of seal usage are huge and anyone taking on the challenge is likely to be richly rewarded. It is difficult to thank the authors sufficiently for the effort and intelligence which they have put into creating this exceptional resource.

Cambridge.

John MacGinnis.

B. Böck, *The Healing Goddess Gula. Towards an Understanding of Ancient Babylonian Medicine*. X + 222 S. 1 Tab. (= CHANE 67). Leiden – Boston. Brill, 2014. € 133,-. ISBN 9789004261457.

Unlike an Agatha Christie novel, it is occasionally useful to read a book from back to front, since one can see where the author is leading us. In this particular case, the author concludes unequivocally that Babylonian medicine “cannot be considered a science” but was “based on religious conceptions or experience to control pain and cure symptoms” (p. 194). This conclusion hardly advances the subject beyond what the great medical historian Henry Sigerist decided some 65 years ago, that Babylonians possessed “a system of medicine which was

dominated by magic and religion” (Sigerist 1951: I, 490). However, if one focuses primarily on a healing goddess to understand Babylonian medicine, the end result is likely to be a view of Babylonian medicine as being rooted in religion rather than in science. In fact, Babylonian medicine is much more multi-faceted than the discussion in this book might lead one to believe.

Is it even legitimate to use the goddess Gula to reflect generally upon the nature of Babylonian medicine? This book argues that various incantations, medical recipes, and even *materia medica* reflect Gula’s personal involvement in general therapy, childbirth, or disease prognosis. The assumption is that the goddess patronised various disciplines behind the healing professions, *i.e.*, exorcism, medical therapy, surgery, and midwifery.

Apart from the detailed philological discussions, the main theoretical underpinnings of the argument are based upon the use of metaphor in Gula texts, an approach which is quite sober as far as it goes, based on standard theory (such as Lakoff and Johnson 2003). However, the use of metaphor both within *āšipūtu* and *asūtu* does not prove very much, since it essentially served as a rhetorical device to encourage the patient during therapy. A thorough survey of metaphors in this book which refer to Gula all deal specifically with medical problems and disease, rather than with other issues relevant to magic in general, such as misfortune, loss of property, general distress, etc. The point is that Gula’s role even within incantations was firmly allied with the discipline of *asūtu*, rather than with exorcism and *āšipūtu*. This clear delineation of Gula’s role in healing is essential for unravelling the picture of medicine in this book.

Relatively little attention has been paid to an important hymn addressed to Gula composed by Bullussa-rabi, a scholar whose name appears among a catalogue of sages (see Lambert 1967: 107); only the relevant lines of the hymn referring to Gula as a physician are translated (pp. 2-3). It is understandable why so little attention has been given to this hymn, which casts praise upon Gula (with her various syncretic names drawn from other Sumerian gods) and her husband Ninurta. One might think that Gula’s reputation as divine physician would feature prominently, but the reality is that only eight lines from a 200-line hymn clearly praise Gula’s medical interests (ll. 79-87), while the rest of the text is very general, lacking reference to healing and certainly no allusions to magic or incantations. The lines translated by Böck refer to the fact that Gula comes along with her drugs (*šammū*), as well as her leather bag (*tukannu*) with medical incantations (*šipāt balāti*) and her scalpel (ll. 80-82, l. 180); this conforms with the iconography of Gula appearing with a scalpel in one hand and a tablet in the other hand (rather than a swab or bandage, as suggested by Böck on p. 22). Gula’s ‘incantations of healing’ mentioned in the hymn were to be employed together with drugs and rudimentary (probably dermatological) surgery, but these

asūtu-spells have no connection with *āšipūtu*-exorcism. The only other link between Gula and healing occurs in one later line of the hymn (l. 183), partially translated by Böck (p. 3): *asāku bārāku āšipāk ša ina arē hīṭāku sattakku mamma ul uštāpi*, “I am a physician (*asū*), haruspex (*bārū*) and exorcist (*āšipu*), (meaning) that I am an expert in maths and no one has had to clarify cuneiform (for me).” The inference is that Gula has all relevant professional qualifications and is fully literate, but that is all. In fact, the importance of the Bullussa-rabi hymn is how it does *not* depict Gula primarily in her role as healing goddess, and even her iconic dog who always accompanies her is not mentioned in this hymn. What we find is a description of a goddess of anodyne character, as in l. 65, “I am a daughter, I am a bride, I am a spouse, I am a housekeeper.”

Nevertheless, the Gula Hymn was popular in the first millennium (judging by its many copies, even in late Seleucid or Parthian period manuscripts), which means that it was being read and copied at the same time that most of the medical texts in which Gula appears were being composed, copied, and studied. Bullussa-rabi’s Gula hymn is aware of her credentials as a divine physician (not exorcist), when she is depicted with her scalpel and prescriptions, nor is it a coincidence that she shares the spotlight with her spouse Ninurta. Ninurta and Gula are the pair of gods most often invoked in their letters by physicians of the Assyrian court, as discussed by Böck (p. 69). This practice stands in contrast to royal exorcists, who usually invoke Nabū and Marduk in their letters, and in fact, the appearance of Ninurta and Gula within the introductory formula is one way of identifying the writer of a letter as an *asū*.

A similar picture results from examining a *šuil-la*-prayer to Gula, republished by Lenzi 2011: 243-259, which makes no reference at all to Gula’s healing capabilities. It is understandable why a book on Gula as a healing goddess would avoid dwelling on texts with so little to contribute towards the central theme of the book, but these texts nevertheless raise serious questions regarding her prominence as a goddess in relation to other gods and goddesses, such as Marduk and Ištar, who feature prominently within incantations. The lengthiest corpus of healing incantations, *Utukkū lemnūtu*, makes no mention of Gula, and in fact the goddess makes little impression on technical incantation literature (*āšipūtu*) of the first millennium BCE, judging by available sources. Those healing spells surveyed in Chapter Four of the book under review are all related to a specific disease, e.g., Samana, or to a magical-medical procedure *muššu²u* “massage” (see pp. 94-98), or to dog bite, parasites, skin disease, or some other specific medical condition. Hardly any of these texts represent classic *āšipūtu* in the broader sense. Furthermore, one can speculate that Gula’s interest in scalpels and surgery only extended to skin disease (*simmu*), since this seems to be an area of her forte (see

Böck’s discussion on pp. 109-113), and as such might reflect the professional role of the *gallābu*-barber, in addition to the *asū* or *āšipu/mašmaššu*.

Based on this lack of data from incantations, we turn now to medical contexts, where Gula makes regular appearances in her role as divine physician. Böck has done a good job in surveying Gula’s role within the *Diagnostic Handbook* (*Sakkikū*), together with her spouse Ninurta, but here is where we begin to encounter problems of interpretation. Her argument centres around the expression *qāt Gula* or *qāt Ninurta*, ‘hand of Gula’ and ‘hand of Ninurta,’ referring to the ‘hand’ of a god as a diagnostic term. The implication is that these terms represent the personal involvement of the deity in the health of the patient, or “the attribution of the symptoms to the action of supernatural agents” (p. 47). She proceeds to catalogue all instances in which the ‘hands’ of Gula and Ninurta appear within the *Diagnostic Handbook*, which are not many, compared with ‘hands’ of other gods; Gula’s ‘hand’ is associated with nosebleed, and symptoms from the midriff and belly. Otherwise Gula features repeatedly in one tablet the *Diagnostic Handbook* referring to paediatric symptoms (Tablet XL); the majority of gods and demons mentioned in this tablet are female (e.g., Lamaštu and Ištar), and this may be a factor why Gula appears as well, although it remains unclear what her role is. The only other passage of relevance mentioning Gula’s (and Ninurta’s) ‘hand’ is a unique tablet of *Simmu šikinšu*, identifying technical disease symptoms and names; the text was incorporated into the *Diagnostic Handbook* as Tablet XXXIII (see Heeßel 2000: 357-358). Böck’s treatment (p. 54) fails to capture the unique tabular layout of the text, which provides a table (as an appendix) of technical disease names, each corresponding to a ‘hand of a DN’ label. Within this table, the ‘hand of Gula’ corresponds to seven diseases, the ‘hand’ of Gula’s spouse Ninurta corresponds to at least two diseases, the ‘hand of Šamaš’ to at least nine diseases, the ‘hand of Marduk’ to two diseases, ‘hand of Ištar’ to at least four diseases, etc.

Böck’s interpretation of this text follows her magical/religious assessment of Babylonian medicine, since her argument appears to assume that the seven technical disease names actually indicate that the ‘hand of Gula’ was at play whenever these diseases appear (pp. 55-62); the same would presumably also apply to nine diseases corresponding to the ‘hand of Šamaš’, etc. In fact, the opposite is the case, that the technical names of diseases are intended to replace the ‘hand of a DN’ nomenclature, since the primary value is the disease name, not the deity [see the review of Heeßel, KAL 5 in this volume]. In other words, whenever the ‘hand of Gula’ appears in the *Diagnostic Handbook*, it really stands for one of at least seven possible diseases known by their technical names, rather than Gula’s personal involvement in the disease.

Nevertheless, there is one further point to be clarified regarding the ‘hand’ of a god or demon. The *Diagnostic*

Handbook is a rather mixed genre, because it generally deals with matters of *asûtu* but employs the methodology of divination. The first two tablets of the *Diagnostic Handbook* consist of unprovoked omens reminiscent of *Šumma ālu*, and in the other tablets the casuistic formulations (protasis-apodosis) of the symptoms reflect classic omen formats. Moreover, the idiomatic use of ‘hand of a god/demon’ as a term for calamity is found in both divination and diagnostic omens, but only rarely in therapeutic medical recipes or healing incantations, except in the expression ŠU GEDIM, ‘hand of a ghost’ as a designation of a disease (see Scurlock 2006). A good example of a ‘hand of a DN’ apodosis occurs in an extract from Assur of the standard *bārûtu*-series (Heeßel 2012: No. 1), which mentions the ‘hands’ of Marduk, Papnunanki, Ištar, Nanaya, Dilbat, Šamaš, Tašmetum, Adad, Zababa, Enlil, and even Ninkarrak (*i.e.*, Gula), among others. In most cases we suspect the malevolent indications of these ‘hands’, in line with one omen which explicitly states that “Ištar is full of anger towards the man” and “his illness will be prolonged” (Heeßel 2012: 36, No. 1 i 48-49). The crucial question is whether the ‘hand of the god/demon’ idiom could have originated in diagnostic omens? As a diagnostic term, ‘hand of a god’ is not entirely satisfactory in identifying a disease because of its lack of specificity; one cannot, for instance, clearly associate the ‘hand of Ištar’ with venereal disease, or the ‘hand of Gula’ with skin disease, which is why therapeutic texts and even incantations generally preferred technical disease names. With omens, however, the primary consideration was the protasis and its precise portentous sign, followed by an apodosis which was general rather than specific (war, famine, epidemic), for which the designation ‘hand of a god’ would suffice as a prediction of calamity; the expression was prognostic rather than diagnostic in such contexts. It seems likely, therefore, that in first millennium learned circles, references to gods (such as Gula) in medical contexts were being systematically replaced by technical disease names, which were much more specific and precise than a ‘hand of a god’ label. This is not to argue that Babylonian medicine was an atheistic enterprise and that its practitioners and adherents were lacking in religious sentiment, but that methods of observation became more systematic over time. No less a figure than Galen believed that he had once been healed by the god Asclepius and that gods communicated with mortals through dreams (Mattern 2013: 26 and 38), but this had little influence on his quest for rational explanations of disease and treatments, without reference to gods.

We now turn to Böck’s opinions regarding Gula’s association with plants, for which the logic inextricably breaks down. The argument commences with Gula and her dog, which were iconic as depicted on cylinder seals (see p. 22, 38-39, and also Collon 1987: 169 No. 793), although it is not clear why a dog is associated with a healing goddess. Nevertheless, Böck then makes the

logical leap of associating Gula with a common medical plant known as *lišān kalbi*, “dog’s tongue,” with the assumption being that the use of this plant is somehow associated with Gula or the ‘hand’ of Gula, or a disease caused by Gula. The next step is to associate Gula with a condition of the nose and mouth called *buʾšānu*, which can be treated by a plant called *buʾšānu*-plant (usually rendered by a Sumerogram ^uHAB). The connection with Gula (see p. 131) is based upon a single reference in a *vademecum* (BAM 1: iii 20-21 = Attia and Buisson 2012: 28) referring to this plant by another name, ‘dog of Ninkizibarra,’ an obscure goddess associated with Gula in Bullussa-rabi’s hymn mentioned above. The remainder of the argument consistently follows the same pattern, that the drug *buʾšānu* was used to treat diseases presumed to be brought about by Gula, which includes everything from liver disease, cough, erectile dysfunction, kidney stones, and fevers, among others. The logic speaks for itself; any inferred associations between Gula and drugs are based upon the flimsiest of evidence, since it is clear from medical recipes that drugs have numerous applications against different diseases determined through methods which are as yet impossible to define.

The fact that the present reviewer disagrees with the basic premises of the book does not mean that the study lacks value. As a collection of sources about Gula in medical texts, the book advances our knowledge of Gula and her activities within healing contexts, and this is certainly commendable. Gula’s role within magic is more questionable, and the background arguments about the religious components of Babylonian medicine will certainly be taken up again in future studies.

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