

125) An ointment for ‘beating the hand of ghost’. An edition of a Late Babylonian tablet BM 46885¹⁾

— A small Late Babylonian tablet BM 46885 (1881,0830.351) belongs to the consignment originating from three northern Babylonian sites (Babylon, Dilbat or Borsippa) excavated by H. Rassam.²⁾ According to the register of the British Museum, BM 46885 comes from Babylon.³⁾ The tablet contains a single medical treatment for ‘beating the hand of ghost’ (*miḫiṣ qāt eṭemmi*). The archival context of the tablet is not known and due to the lack of a colophon, the name of the owner of the tablet remains unknown. Medical tablets with a single prescription against a ghost are not frequent in published text material, and I know of only two further Late Babylonian medical tablets which similarly include a single treatment against the hand of a ghost.⁴⁾ The discussed tablet has a landscape format and it includes fifteen lines which were written on both sides and also on its edges. The text was written in a neat Late Babylonian script and the determinatives were always carefully placed before the drug names. The tablet seems to be a product of an experienced scribe or physician who probably made it as an *aide-mémoire*. Unfortunately, any duplicate of this text is not known to me but similar treatments against a ghost or hand of a ghost were part of Late Babylonian medical compendium tablets.⁵⁾

Transliteration, translation and hand-copy

Obverse	Reverse
1. ^{na} mu-ša	7. ^{UŠ} it ⁷ . ^d ĪD
2. ^{na} KUR-nu DAB	8. NUMUN ^d DILI NUMUN ^{ma} MA.NU
3. ^{na} ALGAMESŠ	9. ^{ma} EREN SUMUN ^u <šu->-ba-rim
4. Ú ILLU LI.DUR	10. ^u ĀB.DUḪ ^u si-ḫa
5. ^u úr-né-e	11. ^u NAM.TAR
Lower edge	12. ^u me-er-gi-ra-nu
6. ^{šim} MAŠ.SAL ¹	Upper edge
	13. ^u KU ₆
	Left edge
	14. ^{na} p-šal-ti ¹
	15. ^{ana} ŠIG ŠU.GIDIM ₇

¹Mūšu stone, ²magnetite, ³algamešu-stone, ⁴juice of *abukkātu*-plant, ⁵urnū-plant, ⁶nikkiptu-aromatic plant, ⁷rutūtu-sulphur, ⁸seed of *ēdu*-plant, seed of *ēru*-tree, ⁹old cedar-tree, Subarian plant, ¹⁰kamantu-plant, *siḫu*-plant, ¹¹mandrake, ¹²mergirānu-plant, ¹³šimru-plant: ¹⁴an ointment ¹⁵for beating of the hand of ghost.

Commentary

The medical incipit ‘for beating of the hand of ghost’ (*ana miḫiṣ qāt eṭemmi*) is not known to me in another medical prescription against ghost. The attack of the ghost was described usually with the terms DIB (*šibtu* = ‘seizure’) or KIN (*šipru* = ‘affliction’) and the term ŠIG (*miḫiṣu* = ‘beating’ or ‘strike’) relates mostly to the attack of various demons (references in CAD M/2 p. 61). On the other hand, the verb *maḫāšu* occurs in the description of physical pains caused by the ghost ‘(which) strikes my skull and so paralyzes my head, (which) strikes my cheek’ (Scurlock 2005, 514 no. 219 line 42). The treatment is an ointment (*naṣāltu*) which consists of sixteen drugs. The list of drugs starts with three stones which was followed by healing plants. The addition of ^u<šu->-ba-rim in line 9 is quite hypothetical (I owe this suggestion to M. Geller). Similar writing form of *urnū*-plant can be found in a further prescription against ghost: CT 23 plates 15-22 i 12 (Scurlock 2005, no. 53 line 2), BAM 221 ii 16’ // AMT 97/6 i 8 (Scurlock 2005, no. 308a line 3) and AO 17618 line 6 (Kessler 1992, 471 and Scurlock 2005, no. 323). In the case of the drug ‘juice of *abukkātu*-plant’ (line 4) the determinative of the plant stands before ILLU which seems a scribal error.

The sequence of the three stones (*mūšu*-stone, magnetite and *algamešu*-stone) in lines 1-3 is not known to me in another medical prescription against a ghost or a hand of ghost. It is important to note that the *mūšu*-stone was also used as an ingredient of various ointments against the attack of a ghost (Scurlock 2005, nos. 87 (together with magnetite), 88-89, 114a (together with magnetite), 114b (together with magnetite), 122? (together with magnetite), 123, 124 (simplicium), 125 (together with magnetite), 127 (together with magnetite), 188 (together with magnetite), 213, 215, 290, 291 (together with magnetite), 299, 300). This stone was also applied as an ingredient of a



phylactery (Scurlock 2005, nos. 31, 32, 58, 59 (together with magnetite), 127 (together with magnetite), 204, 206, 208, 209, 210, 214, 238, 241, 242, 245, 344, 345) or for fumigation (Scurlock 2005, nos. 140, 245) for diseases related to the ghost. The *mūšu*-stone also occurs in all amulet stone lists against ghosts (Schuster-Brandis 2008, Kette nos. 136-141), furthermore, in one of them the three mentioned stones can be attested together (Schuster-Brandis 2008, Kette no. 138). The sequence of plant seeds can be identified in line 8 (seed of *ēdu*-plant and seed of *ēru*-tree). I know only single further prescription against ghosts which mentions these two types of seed together: 'tamarisk seed, seed of *ēru*-tree, seed of *ēdu*-plant, flax seed' (BAM 199 2-3 // BAM 471 ii 14'-15' // BAM 385 I 4'-5' edited by Scurlock 2005 no. 187b).

Notes

1. I thank the Trustees of the British Museum, for permission to publish this tablet. I am greatly indebted to Mark Geller for his suggestions and corrections, but the responsibility for all remaining errors is mine.

2. Reade 1986 xxxi-xxxii. Finkel identified 115 tablets and fragments with mixed contents as follows: lexical texts, royal cylinders, omens, hemerological texts, magical and medical texts, mathematical texts, god lists, astrological texts, administrative texts, school texts (Finkel 2013, 19-20). The consignment was described in the relevant catalogue of the British Museum (Leichty – Finkel Walker 2019, 632-656) and it contains eighteen further therapeutic tablets.

3. Leichty – Finkel – Walker 2019, 632.

4. The tablet W 21276 is a landscape format tablet from Uruk and it contains a list of seven drugs (Kessler 1992, 470 and Scurlock 2005, 634 no. 313). The tablet AO 17618 is a portrait format tablet of unknown provenance and it contains a rinse made of nine drugs (Labat 1960, 171 Kessler 1992, 471 and Scurlock 2005, 648 no. 323).

5. A recent example can be identified in the unpublished Late Babylonian medical compendium tablet BM 32277+ i 10-12, which is a duplicate of the text preserved on W 21276. BM 32277+ will be published soon by the present author (Bácskay forthcoming).

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