

ASSYRIAN  
TALISMANS AND EXORCISMS.

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TRANSLATED BY  
H. F. TALBOT, F.R.S.

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DEMONIACAL POSSESSION AND EXORCISM.

Diseases were attributed to the influence of Evil Spirits. Exorcisms were used to drive away those tormentors: and this seems to have been the sole remedy employed, for I believe that no mention has been found of medicine.

This is a very frequent subject of the tablets.<sup>1</sup> One of them says of a sick man:

- 1 "May the goddess . . . .
- 2 wife of the god . . . .
- 3 turn his face in another direction ;
- 4 that the evil spirit may come out of him
- 5 and be thrust aside, and that Good Spirits and Good Powers
- 6 may dwell in his body !"

Sometimes divine images were brought into the chamber, and written texts taken from holy books were placed on the walls and bound around the sick man's brows. If these failed recourse was had to the influence of the *mamit*, which the evil powers were unable to resist. On a tablet

<sup>1</sup> Taken from 2 R plate 18.

2 R p. 17 the following is found, written in the Accadian language only, the Assyrian version being broken off.

- 1 Take a white cloth. In it place the *mamit*,
- 2 in the sick man's right hand.
- 3 And take a black cloth :
- 4 wrap it round his left hand.
- 5 Then all the evil spirits.<sup>1</sup>
- 6 and the sins which he has committed
- 7 shall quit their hold of him,
- 8 and shall never return<sup>2</sup>

The symbolism of the black cloth in the left hand seems evident. The dying man repudiates all his former evil deeds. And he puts his trust in holiness, symbolised by the white cloth in his right hand. Then follow some obscure lines about the spirits

Their heads shall remove from his head :

their hands shall let go his hands :

their feet shall depart from his feet :

which perhaps may be explained thus—we learn, from another tablet, that the various classes of evil spirits troubled different parts of the body. Some injured the head, some the hands and feet, etc., etc. Therefore the passage before us may mean : “The spirits whose power is over the hand, shall loose their hands from his,” etc., etc. But I can offer no decided opinion on such obscure points of their superstition.

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#### INHERITED OR IMPUTED SINS.

These were supposed to pursue a sick man and torment him.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 The *mamit* for him reveal ! The *mamit* for him unfold !<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A long list of them is given.

<sup>2</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> See *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Vol. 4, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> A holy object, the nature of which has not been ascertained.

- 2 Against the evil spirit, disturber of his body !
- 3 Whether it be the sin of his father :
- 4 or whether it be the sin of his mother :
- 5 or whether it be the sin of his elder brother :
- 6 or whether it be the sin of some one who is unknown !<sup>1</sup>

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MAGIC KNOTS.

Justin Martyr, speaking of the Jewish exorcists, says "They use magic ties or knots." A similar usage prevailed among the Babylonians.<sup>2</sup> The god Marduk wishes to soothe the last moments of a dying man. His father Hea says : Go my son !

- 1 Take a woman's linen kerchief
- 2 bind it round thy right hand ! loose it from the left hand !
- 3 Knot it with seven knots : do so twice :
- 4 Sprinkle it with bright *wine* :
- 5 bind it round the head of the sick man :
- 6 bind it round his hands and feet, like manacles and fetters.
- 7 Sit down on his bed :
- 8 sprinkle holy water over him.
- 9 He shall hear the voice of HEA,
- 10 DAVKINA<sup>3</sup> shall protect him !
- 11 And MARDUK, Eldest Son of heaven, shall find him a happy habitation !<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> One of the principal goddesses, the wife of the god Hea.

<sup>4</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 54.

## TALISMANS.

To cure diseases they seem to have relied wholly on charms and incantations.

The first step was to guard the entrance to the sick man's chamber.

A tablet says :

“That nothing evil may enter, place at the door the god (. . .) and the god (. . .).”

That is to say, their images. I believe these were little figures of the gods, brought by the priests, perhaps a sort of Teraphim.

The following line is more explicit :

“Place the guardian statues of HEA and MARDUK at the door, on the right hand and on the left.”

But they added to this another kind of protection :

- 1 Right and left of the threshold of the door, spread out holy texts and sentences.
- 2 Place on the statues texts bound around them.

These must have been long strips like ribbons of parchment or papyrus. The following line is still clearer :

“In the night time bind around the sick man's head a sentence taken from a good book.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Similar to these were the *phylacteries* of the Jews, which were considered to be protections from all evil. Schleusner in his Lexicon of the New Testament says that they were “Strips of parchment on which were written various portions of the Mosaic law, for the Jews believed that these ligaments had power to avert every kind of evil, *but especially to drive away demons*, as appears from the Targum on the Canticles, etc., etc. We see that the Babylonian precept was to bind holy sentences “around the head” and others “right and left of the threshold of the door.”

Cf. Deut. xi. 18: “Ye shall lay up these my words in your heart, and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, and as frontlets between your eyes.

“And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates.”

## HOLINESS OF THE NUMBER SEVEN.

Innumerable are the evidences of this opinion which are found on the tablets. Two or three instances may suffice here :

THE SONG OF THE SEVEN SPIRITS.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 They are seven ! they are seven !
- 2 In the depths of ocean they are seven !
- 3 In the heights of heaven they are seven !
- 4 In the ocean stream in a Palace they were born.
- 5 Male they are not : female they are not !
- 6 Wives they have not ! Children are not born to them !
- 7 Rule they have not ! Government they know not !
- 8 Prayers they hear not !
- 9 They are seven, and they are seven ! Twice over they are seven !

This wild chant touches one of the deepest chords of their religious feeling. They held that seven evil spirits at once might enter into a man : there are frequent allusions to them, and to their expulsion, on the tablets. One runs thus :

- 1 The god (. . .) shall stand by his bedside :
- 2 Those seven evil spirits he shall root out, and shall expel them from his body.
- 3 And those seven shall never return to the sick man again !

<sup>1</sup> Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch., Vol. 2, p. 58.

But sometimes this belief attained the grandeur of Epic poetry. There is a fine tale on one of the tablets<sup>1</sup> of the seven evil spirits assaulting heaven, and the gods alarmed standing upon the defensive, no doubt successfully, but unluckily the conclusion of the story is broken off.

<sup>1</sup> *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Vol. 4, plate 5.



# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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