

Dear Sir William,

CUS 417/127.119 1/2

I hope that the enclosed will give you the information which you wish to have. As to the care of the tablet I believe I would give it to our attendant (Young) of the Asmoleum Museum and have him protect the lower and upper edge with a thin layer of plaster. That would prevent further cracking. On the other hand if the lost portion is ever found (and such cases frequently arise) you could not join the new piece to this until the plaster is removed. If you mount the fragment in cotton and keep it in a box with glass cover it will last forever as it is. The main thing is to keep it dry. I will and show you what to do at any time you suggest if we can arrange it.

Yours sincerely, (over)

S. Langdon.

Explanation in S. Langdon's writing

Medical Tablet in the possession of Sir William Osler, Bt. Oxford.

Fragment of a long thin baked tablet: clay, light brown; broken across the middle and a few lines broken from the top. Obverse 24 lines. Reverse 9 lines and colophon. Sent to Professor Scheil of the Academie Francaise by Pere Sebastien Scheil, who found the tablet in the possession of Arabs near Mosul. The tablet belongs to the school of Assur, ancient capitol of Assyria, modern Kalat Shergaat on the right bank of the Tigris about 35 miles south of ancient Ninevah. This is the first medical treatise which has been found at Assur. The Library note at the end of the reverse states that it is the 32nd. extract from a large treatise on medicine, a scientific work which probably ran into a hundred tablets or more. The fragment Osler is then the 32nd tablet of the treatise. The whole series is a copy from an older Babylonian work. According to the librarian's note the tablet belonged to "Kiser Assur the student, son of Nabu taklat su son of Nabu katsun, the magician of the temple of Assur, son of Bau sum ibni, the libation priest of the temple Esarra."

The young medical student who possessed this huge medical work belonged, therefore, to an ancient family who had been priests of one order or another in the famous temple of Assur viz., Esarra (House of the Universe) for at least four generations. The family probably belonged to the priesthood of this temple from the period of its foundation 12 centuries or more before the date of our tablet. From the script we may assign the date of the writing of this tablet to the reign of Sargon king of Assyria, 721 706 B.C. or perhaps to the reign of Senecherib 705 681, the Assyrian conqueror who captured Jerusalem and its king Hezekiah in 701 B.C. In any case the text is earlier than the more famous library of Asurbanipel.

The beginning of the obverse is lost, and thus we do not know the nature of the disease treated. From the preserved lines we know that a disease which affects the eyes is the subject of various prescriptions. The text of the obverse really contains a list of prescriptions all for the same symptom. In other words the doctor tries one after the other until one succeeds. The beginning of each line has KIMIN that is "ditto" referring to the lost diagnosis. From line 12 it seems evident that some sexual disease is the original cause of the eye trouble.

Yours sincerely,