**­­Abstract**

The topic of medicine and healing in rabbinic literature has been the subject of a considerable amount of research since Julius Preuss’s monumental *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin*, both in comparison to other ancient cultures and measured against science in our own time. For the most part, however, scholars have approached the Talmud, and sometimes rabbinic literature *in toto*, from a synchronic perspective, uninformed by critical Talmudic scholarship, and have organized the material by medical subject, often with an apologetic outlook that tried to present a systematic and comprehensive “Talmudic medicine” that was even advanced by the standards of its own time.

This work examines **medicine in the Babylonian Talmud from a diachronic perspective**, taking into account the fact that the medical material in the Talmud belongs to different periods and attempting to locate major trends and salient concepts that characterize each. We find reflected in the Babylonian Talmud three distinct medical periods that differ in their contents, styles, and sources of cultural inspiration. A diachronic look at these Talmudic period enables us to discern trends, changes, influences, transitions, and even revolutions in medical approaches within the Talmud.

The first chapter deals with the first period of medicine in the Babylonian Talmud. The medical scene that characterizes this period, the era of the early Amoraim, actually begins at the end of the Tannaitic era. The medical instructions attributed to speakers of that period—from the last few Tannaim to the third generation of Amoraim (approximately, the 2nd–3rd centuries CE)—appear in *baraitot* (statements by Tannaim not included in the Mishnah) and *memrot* (statements by Amoraim), mostly in Hebrew, and as brief, simple medical directions.

Instructions from this period reveal a connection to a unique genre of Greek medicine, the “health practices,” a medical genre that deals primarily with preventing illness through nutrition and physical activity, without the use of medication. The adoption of this Greek genre by the Rabbis was accompanied by adaptation and reworking—from directions addressed to an elite to directions intended for the general population. The appearance of a Greek genre in the Babylonian Talmud is not a common phenomenon, and in this study I propose two possible paths for its entry into Talmudic culture: influence from Palestine and intra-Iranian influence. The domestication a Greek genre in the medical culture of the Babylonian Amoraim is exemplified in this study by a *sugya* dealing with bloodletting in *b. Shab.* 129, a *sugya* based on statements by Babylonian sages discussing the performance of a distinctly Greek medical procedure.

The second chapter deals with the second period of medicine in the Babylonian Talmud, the time of the later Amoraim (the fourth to seventh generations, approximately the 4th–5th centuries CE). In this second period, a significant change of direction is noticeable; instructions of the “health practices” genre are almost entirely absent, and their place is taken by medical instructions in Babylonian Aramaic, written at detailed length and containing complex prescriptions that sometimes integrate medical magic as well. The main and nearly sole figure dispensing medical instructions in this period is Abbaye. I suggest that the medical instructions found in the later stammaitic (anonymous) stratum actually belong to this period (i.e., “early *stamma*,” parallel in time to the Babylonian Amoraim of the fourth and fifth generations.).

The instructions from the second period reveal a connection in content and style to ancient Babylonian medicine. As an example of that connection, I present a comparison between two lists of prescriptions dealing with fever, one from *b. Shab.* 66b–67a and the other from cuneiform tablet BM 42272. While so doing, I have proposed a new understanding of the Talmudic concept of *ḥalala de-vei tsavra* (usually understood as the neck-hole of a garment). At the conclusion of the chapter is an examination of Abbaye’s role in the revolutionary introduction of Babylonian medicine into the Babylonian Talmud.

The third chapter deals with the third period of medicine, paralleling the period of the Talmud’s redaction (approximately the 6th–7th centuries CE). In this period, instructions come to a halt, and the main medical considerations are in interpretation and editing. The anonymous sages (the Talmud’s stammaitic voice) deal frequently with medical issues. In their interpretations, they coin characteristic terms and develop structures of medical deliberation to the point of creating *sugyot* that can be regarded as a sort of medical protocol. Another characteristic of this period is synthesis. If, in the preceding period, one could point to a regnant cultural-medical approach, in this period, as the redactor comes to construct the *sugya*, he uses all the medical information at his disposal to build a “medical protocol.” Conflicting approaches in the form of Greek and Babylonian medicine coexist together in a single *sugya*. Thus, for example, in the *sugya* of “those afflicted with *ra’atan* [a skin disease]” in *b. Ket.* 77b and in the medical *sugya* about *kordeyakos* (temporary insanity) in *b. Git*. 67b–70a.

These trends of redaction and synthesis are salient features of this period in the larger medical world as well. In works from that period—both Byzantine encyclopedias and the compositions *Sefer Refu’ot* (“The Book of Medicines”) attributed to Assaf and the *Syriac Book of Medicines* (the time and place of the publication of these latter works are subject to many opinions, and here it is suggested that they be ascribed to the Sasanian period)—the work of gathering and redacting is evident, as is the synthesis of disparate medical cultures. The conclusion of the chapter postulates on some of the causes of this phenomenon of synthesis. Highlighted in particular is the important role of the cosmopolitan medical scene at the court of Khosrow I, which intentionally synthesized local Mesopotamian material with Greek material from the West and Indian material from the East. While this approach is absent from the Byzantine encyclopedias, it forms the basis for medical compositions from the Sasanian realm— *Sefer Refu’ot,* the *Syriac Book of Medicines*, and the redaction of the medical material in the Babylonian Talmud.

The diachronic view adopted in this work with regard to medicine in the Babylonian Talmud also contributes to broader topics in Talmudic research. The insights offered here may have implications for the study of the redaction of the Talmud and its strata, the sources of influence and inspiration of the various strata, and the unique contribution of Abbaye to the character of the Babylonian Talmud. The three periods of medicine described in this work parallel the accepted stratification in Talmudic scholarship, namely early Amoraim, later Amoraim, and the stammaitic stratum. This parallel provides confirmation from a new direction for the conception of a tripartite division. In addition, this parallel contains within it the possibility of examining the sources of influence and inspiration in each stratum of the Talmud. Are the cultural sources of inspiration and influence pointed out here in the medical area relevant to other areas?

This study also enriches the discussion in Talmudic research about the uniquely dominant role of Abbaye (and Rava). In this study, Abbaye’s figure stands out, with an emphasis on the uniqueness of his sources, his cultural approach, and his methods of operation. These aspects may have also found expression in Abbaye’s activities beyond the medical realm.

This work has the potential of contributing to the study of the history of medicine in the Sasanian Empire as well. There is limited textual evidence regarding the medical cultural of Sasanian Iran. This work presents hundreds of medical instructions that are in fact medical texts that clearly belong to the Sasanian context. In addition, the description of medical cultures present in the Talmud, especially the description of the late-Sasanian synthetic approach, contributes to the scholarly effort to create a portrait of medicine in the empire. In so doing, this work underlies the significance of the Jewish context in the medical-cultural-religious mosaic of the Sasanian Empire.