

Essays on the history of herbal medicine

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History of phytotherapy

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SUMMARY

The third article in a series of essays on the history of herbal medicine. In close connection with the development of medicine, the contribution of the civilizations of Ancient Mesopotamia to the development of phytotherapy is considered. Particular attention is paid to the first civilization on Earth - Sumer. An analytical study of the first written documents, which are essentially the prototype of the pharmacopoeia, has been carried out. The development of herbal medicine in Babylon and Assyria is considered.

Key words: herbal medicine, civilization, Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, cuneiform, pharmacopoeia, medicinal plants, medicine.

RESUME

The third article in the series of publications about history of phytotherapy is considering input of civilizations of Ancient Mesopotamia in development of phytotherapy. Special attention is given to first civilization of Earth - Sumeru. Analytical examination of first written documents being a prototype for pharmacopeia is presented. Development of phytotherapy in Babylon and Assyria is considered.

Keywords: phytotherapy, civilization, Babylon, Assyria, cuneiform, pharmacopeia, medicinal plants, medicine.

"You, who in future days will see this inscription,
which I ordered to knock out in the rock, or these images, -
don't destroy them! But protect it while you can! "

The rock inscription of the Persian king Darius I [11] We will again take advantage of the extraordinary capabilities of our wonderful train and, piercing the thickness of time, we will slow down at the level of the VI-VII millennium BC. Why there? Because during this period (it is possible that even a little earlier), as historians say, the most important event in the history of mankind took place - the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture and cattle breeding. This fact, or rather, a process stretched out in time, was a powerful stimulator of the social and cultural leap of mankind. Life in a sedentary large society, and not in a nomadic tribe, demanded a lot from a person and, first of all, the development of language as a means of communication and exchange of information. It became necessary to radically change living conditions (the family cave was too remote

from the place of cultivation of cereals and points of concentration of livestock), running a joint economy, a significant increase in the volume of mutual assistance, including the isolation from the general mass of people for whom healing is becoming the main occupation, profession. For our study, the determining factor is the fact that these processes led to the formation of a new social state of mankind - civilization. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia defines this term as follows:

“Civilization (from lat. Civilis - civil, public): 1) The level of social development and material culture achieved by one or another socio-economic pharmacy. 2)

According to the periodization of world history, proposed by L. Morgan and F. Engels, this is the era of human development, which came after the era of savagery and barbarism “[16]. In this case, we will be guided by both definitions, civilizations will interest us both as a stage in the development of human society, and as the level of this development. For many years, historians have argued about what attributes a civilization must certainly possess. There was no doubt about the need for cities, agriculture, crafts, division of the population into separate groups (classes), trade, private property, money, etc. Guided by these criteria, some scholars have proposed to consider as civilizations city-states, appeared in the VI-V millennia BC. The most famous example of this kind was Jericho, the first city on Earth (more correctly, the first city that has survived to our time) [1]. He had all of the above. And yet another criterion was found, the absence of which does not allow Jericho and his ilk to take their rightful place in the list of ancient civilizations. This criterion is the presence of writing. As I.A. Bunin:

“Tombs, mummies and bones are silent, -

Only the word is life given:

From the ancient darkness, on the world

churchyard, Only Letters sound. " [5]

Having included this criterion determining for civilization, we can safely rush on our train after more than two millennia and find ourselves in the middle of the 4th millennium BC.

We'll stay here. If, in addition to the miracle train, we could have a magic carpet-flying (and what is stopping us?), Then, having risen above the planet in this time interval, we would see flashing sparks of emerging civilizations on different continents, and against their flickering background in front of the most ancient of them would shine brightly with us.

We are talking about the Sumerian civilization - not only the most ancient, but also the most mysterious. Where did the Sumerians come from (it is known that this people was ethnically alien to the Semitic tribes inhabiting Mesopotamia)? Which way - by sea or by land - did they get to Mesopotamia? Why did they choose not the most favorable area for their residence, treeless and swampy? [9] Why are linguists still unable to find analogues of the Sumerian language? [7] Why does the "father of history" Herodotus (and he is not alone), describing the civilization of ancient Mesopotamia (Babylon, Assyria), do not mention a single word about Sumer? Why did the Sumerians call themselves "blackheads"? Did they mean hair or skin color? And, most importantly, -

it is logical to assume that they called themselves that, in contrast to some "light-headed" with whom they had to communicate. In this light, the theory of the extraterrestrial origin of the Sumerians seems no longer so fantastic. According to Sumerian mythology, a long time ago (according to scientists, this could have happened 400-450 thousand years ago, back in the pre-Neanderthal era), the Earth was repeatedly visited by the inhabitants of the distant planet Nibiru, whose orbit was between Mars and Jupiter (perhaps they flew to mine gold, which explains the duration of their business trips) [14]. It can be assumed that blonde giants from extraterrestrial civilization contacted native black women, thus laying the foundation for the Sumerian people. Unfortunately, this conjecture cannot be confirmed (however, as well as refuted!) By studies of the Sumerian genome, since this people mysteriously disappeared in the II millennium BC. The famous American researcher of Sumer Zakharia Sitchin (a native of Soviet Azerbaijan) in his most interesting book "The Twelfth Planet", relying on the Sumerian epic, not only substantiates the creation of this civilization by aliens, but also goes further, insisting on the creation of a modern man by them through genetic engineering, cloning [fourteen]. I will not expand on the content of this exciting book, leaving the reader to get carried away by reading it on his own and agree or argue with the author. not only substantiates the creation of this civilization by aliens, but also goes further, insisting on the creation of a modern man by them through genetic engineering, cloning [14]. I will not expand on the content of this exciting book, leaving the reader to get carried away by reading it on his own and agree or argue with the author. not only substantiates the creation of this civilization by aliens, but also goes further, insisting on the creation of a modern man by them through genetic engineering, cloning [14]. I will not expand on the content of this exciting book, leaving the reader to get carried away by reading it on his own and agree or argue with the author.

The mystery and mystery of Sumer is reinforced by the fact that he has enriched mankind with such an amount of knowledge that no ancient civilization gave him. The wheel, money, schools, parliament - and this is not a complete list of what we got from Sumer. This civilization is the cradle of human culture and written tradition. We still use the Sumerian system of dividing the year into 12 months, weeks - 7 days, days - 24 hours, hours - 60 minutes, minutes - 60 seconds.

But the amount of their knowledge in the field of astronomy is especially striking. A natural question arises - why did these herders and farmers need such in-depth information about outer space, planets, stars?

We, of course, are primarily interested in the state of medicine and, in particular, herbal medicine in Sumer. Moreover, given the colossal contribution of this civilization to the development of mankind, we would like the legacy of the Sumerians in world medicine to be outstanding. Z. Sitchin in the above-mentioned work claims that in medicine "the level of their knowledge was surprisingly high" [14]. Unfortunately, from the scant data that we have thanks to the deciphering of the cuneiform tablets, it is difficult to form a full-fledged impression of Sumerian medicine. Nevertheless, we can confidently talk about the literacy of the Sumerian doctors who, in addition to the fact that most of them belonged to the class of priests, superior in literacy to other classes, should have been able to read the prescriptions recorded on clay tablets [13]. Doctors in Sumer were divided into two groups: soothsayers and healers [3, 4]. The first established the cause of the disease (by the flight of birds, by the insides of killed animals, etc.), the second - treated with conspiracies and spells. This division was largely arbitrary, since both in that and in

in other groups, magic played a leading role. Her authority was indisputable, she dominated both diagnosis and treatment. The German specialist in the history of Sumer H. Schmeckel claims that the inhabitant of Sumer, before he "resorted to drugs or sought salvation under the surgeon's knife, tried to exorcise the disease, the work of evil demons, using appropriate spells on behalf of his deity" [4]. It should be noted that a significant part of the relatively sparsely populated pantheon of Sumerian gods was related to healing: Martu - the god of healing, Gula - the goddess-healer, Ninisinna, called "the great healer of the blackheads." One of the three supreme gods of Sumer, Ea (Enki), was engaged in healing. Baba, the daughter of the supreme god Anu, was considered the patroness of Sumerian medicine) [4].

At the same time, in the medicine of ancient Mesopotamia, not a single mortal doctor was found who subsequently replenished the synclides of the gods, like Asclepius in Ancient Greece and Imhotep in Ancient Egypt.

Speaking about Sumerian medicine, one cannot but take into account that Sumerian doctors knew the basics of human anatomy, hygiene, and performed some surgical operations. Apparently this is what allowed Z. Sitchin to give a high assessment to Sumerian medicine. But this assessment is unlikely to pour water on the mill of his theory of the extraterrestrial origin of the civilization of Sumer, rather the opposite. Indeed, according to his assumptions, there were many aliens, and it is difficult to imagine that they went on a long journey without providing themselves with medical help and medicines. At the same time, according to the author, they established a regular communication between the Earth and their planet, which continued until the flood. This time would be more than enough to transfer advanced medical and pharmaceutical technologies to their cloned creations. Where are their traces? However ... it is known that the Sumerians called their doctors A-zu (in another spelling A.ZU) - "one who knows water." Why is that? Why not "the one who knows diseases", not "the one who knows the drugs." By the way, in the Sumerian language the concepts of "medicine" and "herbs" are identical) [13]. Maybe this testified to the Sumerian worship of water (one of the most revered Sumerian goddesses Tiamat had about fifty honorary titles and they were all associated with water)? Or maybe they saw how the aliens, when they were unwell, drank water (perhaps, washed it down with medicine), and this brought them recovery? Or maybe earth water, structured in a certain way (remember the folklore "living" and "dead" water, discussions of our time about melt and spring water, a number of theories about the ability of water to store and transfer information, the recent excitement around F. Batmanghijia "Water for health. You are not sick - you are thirsty" etc.), was it really used by aliens as a medicine? If we admit this, then it is quite possible to understand the admiration of people before a person who has learned (of course, through the mediation of the gods) the secrets of water.

Or maybe the point is different. In ancient Sumerian drawings, doctors were depicted in clothes made of fish scales. In the Sumerian myth about the adventures of King Gilgamesh (see below), his ancestors who fell into the kingdom of the dead were sincerely surprised at the absence of membranes between his fingers.

It is possible that this is gleaned from the ancient Sumerian myth of Oann -

a fish man who came out of the water and taught people different crafts. This myth has come down to us in the exposition of the Egyptian priest Berossus, who reported in a papyrus that this same Oann taught people that "since then nothing has been invented that would go beyond this." It is noteworthy that the Sumerian gods, like people, were sick, were treated (almost always with spells), and recovered [3]. In the Sumerian-Akkadian epic we mentioned about the wanderings of the earthly king Gilgamesh, it is reported that he managed to find the "grass of life" at the bottom of the ocean, which could provide people with immortality, but the gods did not want people to live forever and sent a snake that stole the grass from lost vigilance Gilgamesh [17]. It is interesting that in a very informative book by S.M. Marchukova "Medicine in the mirror of history" [10] this epic is called Babylonian,

But let's return from the realm of fantasy to reality. One of its manifestations was two clay cuneiform tablets found during excavations on the territory of former Sumer (now it is the territory of Iraq), which some researchers declared the first pharmacopoeia in the world, and others more carefully call the first recipe reference books [(6, 12).

One small tablet contains a recipe for the preparation of a medicine for external use (rubbing). It contains crushed turtle shell and oil. Another tablet (it was written more than four thousand years ago, discovered in 1889 and deciphered only in 1955) is much larger and more informative. It contains 15 prescriptions that can be divided into three parts. The first includes eight recipes for poultices. Not only are the constituent parts of the medicine indicated, but also recommendations for grinding them, observing the proportions when mixing them with liquids in order to obtain a paste suitable for use. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine a thorough qualitative composition of drugs, although there is no doubt about the presence of grapevine, pine wood, plum in it. The second part consists of three recipes for medicines for internal use (it is recommended to mix the seeds of thyme, myrrh and some unknown plants with beer, pour into oil and drink). In the third part, recommendations are given on the preparation of medicinal solutions for ablution of diseased organs. Their constituent parts are called tortoise shell, which is very popular in Sumerian medicine, an unknown creeping plant, salt and mustard. Other parts of this document also mention thyme, pear, fig, willow, fir sap, blackthorn, dried figs, vegetable oil [3, 4, 6, 9]. Their constituent parts are called tortoise shell, which is very popular in Sumerian medicine, an unknown creeping plant, salt and mustard. Other parts of this document also mention thyme, pear, fig, willow, fir sap, blackthorn, dried figs, vegetable oil [3, 4, 6, 9]. Their constituent parts are called tortoise shell, which is very popular in Sumerian medicine, an unknown creeping plant, salt and mustard. Other parts of this document also mention thyme, pear, fig, willow, fir sap, blackthorn, dried figs, vegetable oil [3, 4, 6, 9].

Interestingly, this rather lengthy document is completely devoid of the slightest mention of magic spells and conspiracies. Perhaps this is evidence that not all Sumerian doctors were strictly guided by the standards of medical care prevailing at that time.

Of course, from a modern point of view, these recipes seem primitive, but we must remember that they were created more than 4 thousand years ago. At the same time, similar technologies for the preparation of drugs were preserved until the 17th – 18th centuries of our era [4]. Completing the Sumerian theme, I will allow myself a few

comments. How to objectively assess the state of medicine in Sumer and its component - herbal medicine? Let me remind you that we are talking about a society that is four to five thousand years away from us, about a society that has just begun a gradual exit from the primitive era and bears a huge number of its "birthmarks". Against this background, the contribution of the Sumerians to world medicine is really great - the separation of a separate group of doctors from the class of priests (the intellectual elite of society), certain achievements in surgery, the creation of the first prescription reference books (pharmacopoeias?) - this is already quite enough for a high assessment. What about herbal medicine? We note the presence of herbs in medicinal recipes, but we do not see their expected predominance (perhaps this is due to the fact that we have very scanty material at our disposal - only two documents). We don't know by what principle were medicinal plants prescribed (one can only assume that in the then magical medicine there already existed the appointment of medicinal herbs according to the principle of similarity, which after three millennia was put by Paracelsus as the basis of the famous "theory of signatures"), what the Sumerian doctors knew about their action is unknown sources of this knowledge. One of the later Assyrian texts mentions "tried and tested ointments and poultices according to lists compiled from the words of the ancient antediluvian sages" [15]. Of course, medicinal plants in the medical arsenal of the Sumerian doctors could not compete with spells and conspiracies, but they were undoubtedly present in it. Here another question arises - what opportunities did the doctors have in providing medicinal herbs, how wide was their assortment? Let's remember that the Sumerians settled in an unfavorable swampy area (even the goddess Ninhursag, known to us, experienced great difficulties when growing only eight medicinal herbs) [9]. True, in the future they turned this territory into a blooming garden, but nothing is known about the cultivation of medicinal plants by them. The conclusion suggests itself: phytotherapy in Sumerian medicine did not play a decisive role in the therapeutic process, its use was complementary, complementary, completely subordinate to magical components, and did not prevail over the use of animal and mineral products. By the 18th century BC. the state of Sumer, like its younger (in age) neighbor Akkad, the first empire in world history, fell into decay and was destroyed by the inhabitants of the mountains and deserts, invading these states for the sole purpose of plundering and appropriating wealth from wealthy cities. At the same time, cultural and religious values were mercilessly destroyed, which largely explains the scarcity of our knowledge about these civilizations [8]. By the way, the disappearance of the Sumerian people, like its emergence, still remains a mystery.

They were replaced by Babylon and Assyria. These civilizations not only organically adopted and preserved many of the achievements of the Sumerian civilization, but also developed them to a certain extent. They turned out to be worthy of inclusion in world history under the general name "Ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia". And it was about them that the German historian E. Tseren spoke so highly: "There is the cradle of our culture, the cradle of human genius, his ideas and concepts, his faith and convictions" [6]. Does this estimate apply to

Mesopotamian medicine, it is difficult to answer unequivocally.

On the one hand, in the world-famous code of laws of the Babylonian ruler Hammurabi, as many as 11 articles were devoted to medicine, which indicates a lot of attention to this issue (by the way, for the first time in world history, they set tariffs for the provision of surgical care - 10 shekels of silver from slave owners, 5 shekels for ordinary citizens, 2 shekels for a slave - a very democratic approach to collecting fees for services) [2].

On the other hand, the "father of history" mentioned by us, Herodotus, spoke very disparagingly of Babylonian-Assyrian medicine, while admiring ancient Egyptian medicine. The reason for his rejection of Mesopotamian medicine was the tradition that existed in Babylon and Assyria to take the patient out to the square in the hope that among the passers-by there will be a person who has already suffered a similar disease and will give recommendations for treatment. This practice made such an impression on Herodotus that he generally denied the presence of doctors in Assyria. Apparently, under the influence of his authority, some modern researchers, recognizing the existence of Assyrian medicine, deny the presence in it of medical schools and teaching healing [2].

This, of course, is not the case. Another thing is that any person could not be initiated into the sacrament of medicine, medical knowledge was passed on in a narrow circle in compliance with a certain ritual. But we know that in this way medical knowledge was transmitted in Ancient Greece, and in Ancient Egypt, and in Ancient China - the art of healing was everywhere esoteric. It is known that when the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenhotep II needed medical assistance, his subjects turned to the Assyrian doctors [11].

It should also be remembered that in the famous library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, containing the world's first books in the form of clay tablets, along with other dictionaries, there was also a medical one [11], as well as 33 tablets with texts about the healing effect of plants - mustard, pine, fir, pears, plums, willows, manna, lichens [10]. Unfortunately, the cuneiform tablets that have come down to us, including those of medical content, are far from fully deciphered, especially those in private collections. How can you not recall the kind word of the Russian patron of the arts N.P. Likhachev, who spent huge amounts of money on the acquisition of Assyrian-Babylonian cuneiform tablets and opened access to them for scientists [11]. Of course, Assyrian and Babylonian medicine, like the previous Sumerian medicine, was magical. The main decisive role was played by magical conspiracies and rituals. It is interesting that the magic formulas of these conspiracies over the next millennia wandered around different nations and were used by magicians and healers. Sometimes only incomprehensible words used in ritual actions remained of these magical images. So, in the magical texts of medieval healers, the words "hilka" and "besha" were often used. They seemed like gibberish, but after deciphering the Babylonian clay tablets, it turned out that these words mean "perish!" and with them the Babylonian doctors turned to the spirits [10]. used in ritual activities. So, in the magical texts of medieval healers, the words "hilka" and "besha" were often used. They seemed like gibberish, but after deciphering the Babylonian clay tablets it turned out that these words mean "perish!" and with them the Babylonian doctors turned to the spirits [10]. used in ritual activities. So, in the magical texts of medieval healers, the words "hilka" and "besha" were often used. They seemed like gibberish, but after deciphering the Babylonian clay tablets, it turned out that these words mean "perish!" and with them the Babylonian doctors turned to the spirits [10].

As for the use of medicinal plants in Assyro-Babylonian medicine, let's start with the fact that the supreme god of Babylon, Marduk

(who migrated from the Sumerian pantheon of gods, where he, however, did not occupy a leading position), described himself as follows: "I am a healer, I know how to heal, I carry all the herbs with me" [12]. It is not surprising that medicinal plants have taken their rightful leading place among other means of natural origin, periodically (albeit briefly) encroaching even on the priority of omnipotent magic. In cuneiform tablets found during excavations of the two Assyrian capitals of Ashur and Nineveh and dating from the period between 1000 and 612. BC, we first come across information about the use of plant parts for medicinal purposes (roots, stems, leaves, fruits, seeds), moreover, the composition of medicines sometimes included up to 20 components, instructions for their preparation (dry or fresh, crushed or sifted, soaked or boiled, etc.). Most often they were mixed with beer, vinegar, honey, or tallow. In total, more than a hundred medicinal plants are mentioned in the tablets [12]. From the tablets it can be concluded that the doctors of Assyria received medicinal plants from the authorities. Plant names were often encrypted. The tablets contain "sunny plants", "sweet grass", "bitter grass", "field stem". This, apparently, came from the Sumerians, who called castor oil "blood of a black snake" and the juice of a poppy head - "lion's fat". For deep scientific research, this information is, of course, extremely scarce. The analysis shows that medicinal plants with laxative, diuretic and antitussive effects were most often used, but the principle of drawing up fees is unknown, we can only guess at what diseases they were used. In this respect, their information content is noticeably inferior to the information captured in the medical papyri of Ancient Egypt, in the scrolls of Ancient China. But this in no way diminishes the importance of the civilizations of Ancient Mesopotamia for the world history of medicine and, in particular, herbal medicine.

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