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History of Medicine

Mesopotamian

Medicine in Assyria and Babylonia was influenced by demonology and magical practices. Surprisingly accurate terra-cotta models of the liver, then considered the seat of the soul, indicate the importance attached to the study of that organ in determining the intentions of the gods. Dreams also were studied to learn the gods' intentions.

While magic played a role in healing, surviving cuneiform tablets indicate a surprisingly empirical approach to some diseases. The tablets present an extensive series of medical case histories, indicating a large number of medical remedies were used in Mesopotamia, including more than 500 drugs made from plants, trees, roots, seeds, and minerals. Emollient enemas were given to reduce inflammation; massage was performed to ease gastric pain; the need for rest and quiet was stressed for some diseases; and some attention was paid to diet. Water was regarded as particularly important, since it was the sacred element of the god Ea, the chief among the numerous healing gods. The serpent Sachan was also venerated as a medical deity.