

evidence is factual and descriptive and thorough, but her conclusions are sometimes circumspect. Compelling questions that are raised in conclusions are not pursued. How did Egyptians explain physical deformity, and why did they have deformed gods? Her comparison of attitudes towards dwarfism with attitudes to other forms of physical disability loses potency by the brevity of the discussion.

The paucity of literary evidence that has compelled Dasen to concentrate on iconographic material is one reason for this. But the unstated and unrepresented are as noteworthy as the depicted. That Egyptians only represented members of the working class and not the upper class with physical disabilities is arresting. The Athenian artists who replaced ethnic characteristics of pygmies with physical abnormalities as symbols of otherness were also making a comment. So too the stereotyping of dwarfs as childish, as actors, as caricatures, and as marginalized identities. In other words, those attitudes that were unrepresented, misrepresented and altered in iconography also need interpretation.

These observations aside, Dasen has tackled a large subject, and has done an admirable job at ordering an immense amount of evidence. With the currently expanding interest in medicine, health, body and disability in the ancient world (at least two books on disability and two studies of dwarfism in the Roman world are in the pipelines), Dasen's book is a timely and valuable contribution.

Nicholas Vlahogiannis,
King's College London

M Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia*, Cuneiform Monographs 2, Groningen, Styx Publications, 1993, pp. viii, 157, Hfl. 65.00 (90-72371-63-1).

The history of epilepsy in antiquity has been pursued in a number of valuable studies, most notably Temkin's classic *The falling sickness* (second edition, 1971); but while epilepsy in Babylonia has not been overlooked in this

research, the Akkadian materials have hitherto been examined in only piecemeal fashion. Stol's work marks the first comprehensive effort to collect and study this especially rich corpus. Much of his discussion rests upon the *Diagnostic handbook*, a collection of traditions edited by Esagil-kin-apli in the eleventh century BC, and an older text (of which only fragments survive) to which the *Diagnostic handbook* may be a reaction. But other Akkadian and Sumerian texts are fully exploited, and the author also draws parallels and contrasts founded on the Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic sources pertaining to epilepsy. Some of the tablets are previously unpublished, and the relevant chapters in the diagnostic texts are translated and analysed in detail.

Stol argues that the Akkadian word *bennu* was a specific term for epilepsy, and orients it within a context of Babylonian terminology for symptoms, heavenly afflictions, and gods and demons associated with *bennu*. Epilepsy was closely linked to melancholy, madness, and possession, and its supernatural aspects emerge in the elaborate demonology revolving around *bennu* and in crucial influences attributed to the moon. Not surprisingly, prophylactic and therapeutic measures were heavily magical. Most prominent were leather bags containing a wide range of *materia medica (et magica)*, and other amulets, charms, magic stones, and fumigants were also used. Particular days were identified as times when *bennu* was most easily contracted or cured, and in the lore on such lucky and unlucky days Stol sees the origins of iatromathematics. The extant evidence does not allow for a social history of epilepsy in Babylonia, but diagnostic and legal texts provide vignettes on epilepsy in children, legal issues in marriage and slavery, tests for epilepsy in other cultures, and the public attitude toward epileptics.

This study will undoubtedly serve as a valuable point of departure for further research on epilepsy in the ancient Near East; and in view of its heavily comparative and cross-cultural perspective, it must be stressed that

Stol's work is a volume of far wider interest than its title would suggest. It is precisely for these reasons, however, that this reviewer ventures to raise a few cautionary points.

First, to identify the Akkadian *bennu* specifically as "epilepsy" implies that—at least in this case—the Babylonians 3,000 years ago organized disease phenomena into symptoms and causes in ways similar to those of modern medicine. But in ancient and medieval times, and in many cultures, what are now regarded as symptoms were then considered "diseases" in their own right, for example "fever" in Greek and Arab-Islamic medicine. In the Akkadian texts there are similar indications for *bennu*, which is sometimes described as an epidemic disease and contagious (epilepsy is neither) or paired with "leprosy" as the inner manifestation of some other disease. Stol is undoubtedly right in seeing epilepsy in many accounts of *bennu*, but in others it seems to mean nothing more specific than "convulsions" or "fits", and this of course raises an important problem—obvious cases excepted, how is one to distinguish among these varying usages?

A second consideration may be raised concerning the epithets and titles used in association with *bennu* in Akkadian texts. Stol views these as the names of Babylonian gods and demons believed to figure as causes or agents of epilepsy, and in some cases this must be correct. In the ancient Near East, however, the name of a deity or spirit in one era could survive later as nothing more than a word designating the affliction with which it had once been associated. A prominent example is the name of the Canaanite god of pestilence, Reshep, which in Old Testament Hebrew is demoted to merely one of several general words for "pestilence". It should perhaps be asked how many Akkadian terms (e.g., "Spawn of Šulpaëa", "Lord of the Roof", "Hand of the God") reflect similar transformations, and would therefore have to be excluded from the demonology associated with *bennu*.

Finally, one might query the prominent dichotomy between rational medicine and

irrational magic which informs this book's discussion. The former is applauded and identified with Greek medicine, especially Hippocrates, who "showed mankind the way out of the realm of magical lore" (p. 2) in his *On the sacred disease*. Apart from the question of whether or not the historical Hippocrates is the author of this treatise, many cultures—modern as well as ancient and medieval—have viewed medicine in terms of complementary rather than (as in western biomedicine) exclusive options. Thus, the predominance of supernatural causes and remedies for one disease does not make all of that society's medicine magical, and it is not necessarily desperation that causes physicians to lend credence to supernatural views where natural explanations and cures are already to hand. Stol's study itself provides many examples of the marked fluidity and pluralism of medical thinking and practice—not only in Babylonia, but also in other cultures of the region in ancient and later times.

Lawrence I Conrad, Wellcome Institute

Andrew Scull, *The most solitary of afflictions: madness and society in Britain, 1700–1900*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993, pp. xviii, 442, illus., £29.95, \$45.00 (0–300–05051–8).

An indistinct tranquillity has settled over studies in the history of psychiatry. Where once red-blooded social and linguistic critiques clashed with the stubborn defences of a medical speciality yearning, as ever, to magnify its smallest achievements, there is now a kind of falling together. The asylums are closing down all around us, just as their critics wanted them to, but their old inmates have refused to change into acceptable clothes. A careless community complains of their sometimes unreasonable behaviour, just as they always did, and Foucault's children prefer introspective analyses of the master's oeuvre to looking at mad people and their "*existence facilement errante*". The detailed studies of