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Ancient Documents Lead Stockton Professor to Conclusions About Early Medicine and Religion

Laura Zucconi Takes a Closer Look at the Relationships Between Medicine and Culture in Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel

For Immediate Release

Thursday, February 10, 2011

Contact: Tim Kelly
Office of Public Relations
Galloway Township, NJ 08240
Tim.Kelly@stockton.edu
(609) 652-4950

Galloway Township, NJ- The ancient symbols inscribed onto baked clay tablets and papyri dating back to 2700 BCE (Before Common Era) revealed a wealth of knowledge to one Richard Stockton College professor.

Dr. Laura Zucconi, an associate professor of history, studied reproductions of these early documents to explore how religion and medicine shaped each other and evolved in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel.

The idea to investigate how various cultures and religious groups react to medicine occurred to Zucconi during an archaeological dig in the Middle Eastern country of Jordan. While searching for artifacts on the dig, Zucconi and a number of other archaeologists were exposed to parasites. As a result, infection began to spread amongst the group, which included American, Canadian, British and Jordanian scholars.

Zucconi was surprised to discover that from an emotional standpoint, each of the cultural groups reacted differently to the illness. While the non-Jordanians panicked, the Jordanians listened to their bodies. She explained, "The British felt that only medical tests were necessary, while the Jordanians believed that tests should follow a doctor's physical examination as a method of confirmation."

Zucconi, who originally studied pre-med and later switched to history, immediately became curious about how different religious groups reacted to sickness during a time period when modern day medicine was still thousands of years away. She decided to pursue her interest and to answer her questions.

Her findings were recently published in her book, *Can No Physician Be Found?: The Influence of Religion on Medical Pluralism in Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel*.

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Gorgias Press, Zucconi's publisher, said that Zucconi's book "sheds light on how religious concepts shaped not only the particular medical identity of each society, but also how they can simultaneously participate in a broader medical culture spanning the ancient Near East."

Zucconi, a resident of Galloway, has taught at Stockton College for the past six years. Previously, she taught at Mesa Community College in San Diego and at the University of California, San Diego. Zucconi earned her Ph.D. and her second master's in history from the University of California, San Diego, and she earned her first master's in medieval studies from the University of Connecticut.

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