

A MAGICAL BOWL IN JUDAEO-ARAMAIC

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SUMMARY

In this paper, a new text inscribed on a magical bowl belonging to the 'Museo Sefardí de Toledo' is published. This bowl, like other similar bowls, has its origin in southern Mesopotamia (south Iraq and the bordering area of Iran), and is dated to about the sixth century a.D. These bowls are written in Judaeo-Aramaic, Syriac or Mandaic, the Aramaic dialects of that period. This bowl is written in Judaeo-Aramaic. The text is a popular incantation to save some persons that are tormented by harmful ghosts and spirits. The pattern or form of the spell and its elements are studied and compared with others similar magical texts inscribed in bowls like this one. A transcription of the Aramaic text is offered, as well as its translation and a commentary.

KEYWORDS

Aramaic, Aramaic Incantation Text, Magic Aramaic Bowl, Preislamic Irak, Late Oriental Antiquity

RESUMEN

Se publica un texto inédito inscrito en un cuenco mágico perteneciente al Museo Sefardí de Toledo. Perteneció al conjunto de cuencos mágicos de barro producidos en el sur del actual Iraq, y que se datan en los siglos V-VI d.C. Estos cuencos están inscritos en alguno de los tres dialectos arameos de la época, judeo-arameo, siriano o mandeo, y su texto consiste en conjuros mágicos de carácter popular, que se usaban para proteger a las personas de diversos males. El que presentamos en este trabajo está escrito en judeo-arameo, ofrece un tipo de conjuro cuyo modelo, con los distintos elementos que lo conforman, aparece usado en otros cuencos de la época, ya conocidos. Se publica su transcripción y traducción, y se estudia su fórmula con los elementos que la componen. Se hace, además, un estudio comparativo con otros cuencos con fórmulas afines.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Arameo, conjuro en arameo, cuenco arameo mágico, Iraq preislámico, Antiguo Oriente Tardío

1. This paper aims to edit an unpublished magical Aramaic bowl, in Judeo-Aramaic writing, belonging to the "Museo Sefardí de Toledo" (Spain)¹. The bowl was acquired by auction, from the auction house Fernando Durán in Madrid, through the "Asociación de Amigos del Museo Sefardí". Though it is not clear the immediate origin of the piece, it does for sure belong to the group of magic bowls from southern Iraq and the bordering area of Iran, dated to about the VI century². They were written in three Aramaic dialects, Jewish-Aramaic (like this), Syriac and Mandaic.

¹ I am very grateful to the "Museo Sefardí de Toledo", and its director, Dr. Ana-María López Álvarez, for allowing me to study this bowl and to publish the results.

² For further information on magical bowls, refer to, among others, E.M. Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts*, New Haven - Connecticut, 1967 (= Yamauchi 1967), pp. 1-67, regarding Mandaic bowls, J. Naveh - S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, Leiden 1985 (= Naveh-Shaked 1985), pp.13-21, about Jewish-Aramaic bowls, V.P. Hamilton, *Syriac Incantations Bowls* (a Dissertation presented to the Brandeis University) 1971, pp. 1-35 and T. Harviainen, "Pagan Incantations in Aramaic Magic Bowls", *Journal of Semitic Studies - Supplement 4*, 1995 (= Harviainen 1995), pp. 53-60 for Syriac bowls.

The magical spells during this period in Mesopotamia were inscribed mainly on bowls made of fired clay. The spells were written with ink in the inner part of the bowls, sometimes also in the outside, usually creating spiral lines or just concentric circles in independent lines. The inscription may start in the central part of the concave side of the bowl, most frequently, or in the outer part. In some of the bowls, although very few, the inner area is divided into several parts, with text written in each of them.

The bowl I want to present, which I will refer to as *ac-msef* (Spanish abbreviation of “a[rameo] c[uenco del]M[useo]Sef[ardí de Toledo]”, that is, Aramaic bowl in the Sephardic Museum in Toledo)³, is a yellowish coloured, baked clay bowl. Its dimensions are 15 centimetres in diameter at the opening and 5.6 centimetres in depth. The text is divided into ten lines. The average diameter of a magical bowl at the lip is approximately 16 cm of upper diameter and it is usually 5-6 cm deep. There are some bowls which are much bigger, such as *ac-ab13*, which is 30-34 cm in diameter and 14.5 cm high. Obviously, the text is longer in bowls with bigger dimensions when the inner part of the piece is completely filled with writing. In the previously mentioned bowl, *ac-ab13*, we have 22 lines of text. Of course, the number of lines may vary among bowls of similar dimensions, depending on the size of the signs used as the text characters.

Some bowls have been found in archaeological excavations and certain specific locations, such as the collection from Nippur⁴ or Khubair, located to the west of the present day Baghdad⁵. However, many of the bowls that we know nowadays have been sold by private individuals and, therefore, we are not sure about their exact origin, though all of them are originally from the southern Iraq and the bordering area of Iran, as I stated above.

2. THE BOWL *ac-msef*

2. 1. TRANSLITERATION OF THE ARAMAIC TEXT:

- 01 ʔyl ʔswr
- 02 bgdnʔ mlkyhwn
- 03 ddywy
- 04 wšlṭʔ rbʔ dlylytʔ mšbʿnʔ ʿlky ḥbls
- 05 lylytʔ bt brt{t} dzrny lylytʔ dšrʔ ʿl ʔskypṭ (sic)
- 06 btyh mḥyʔ wtrpʔ drdqy wdrdqʔ mwmnʔ ʿlk dtmḥny
- 07 bṭrps lb{l}ky bmrynṭh drqw/ys gy/wbrʔ dšlṭ ʿl šydy wʿl dywy
- 08 wʿl lylytʔ wktbt lyky wptṛt yʔtky kmh dktybyn šydy gyṭʔ lnšhwn wtwb
- 09 lʔ ḥdryn šqwly gyṭky wqbl mwmṭky wqdḥy wpwqy wʿrwqy mn bytyh
dʔšpʔ br ḥwbʔ
- 10 wmn ḥ/ttn bt ʔymy ʔntty {bš} bšwm šʔdyqhwn

Notes:

The letters *d/r* and *w/y* are not usually distinguished.

Line 06: *wdrdqʔ*, the *q* letter is quite irregular, but there is no other possible reading;

³ Other abbreviations used: JA: Jewish-Aramaic; Mand.: Mandaic; Syr.: Syriac; Ac-ab#: JA texts published by Naveh-Shaked 1985, followed by the text number and the line. Sc-gel: Syr. bowl published by Geller 1986, pp. 111f.; ac-ms#: JA texts published by Naveh-Shaked 1993; isb#: JA texts published by Isbell 1975; sc-ms#: Syr. texts published by Naveh-Shaked 1985; sc-ms#: Syr. texts published by Naveh-Shaked 1993; Yam#: Mand. texts published by Yamauchi 1967.

⁴ Forty, published by Montgomery 1913.

⁵ Thirty, published by Pognon 1898-1899.

dtmḥny, is to be read as dtmḥyn.

2. 2. TRANSLATION:

- (1) To bind
- (2) Bagdana, king
- (3) of the demons
- (4) and Great Lord of the Lilits. I exorcise you, Lilit Ḥablas,
- (5) grand-daughter of Lilit Zarne, who dwell on the threshold of
- (6) his house, who hurt and weaken boys and girls. I exorcise you to be stabbed
- (7) through the membrane of the heart with the lance of Raqo/is (=Qatros ?), the hero,
- who governs over the demons, the devils
- (8) and the Lilits. And I have written to you and I have dismissed, like the devils write
- the document of divorce to their wives and never
- (9) they return (to them). Have your divorce and accept your spell, and flee, go forth,
- and run away from the house of Aṣpa, son of Ḥoba,
- (10) and from *Ḥ/Ttn*, daughter of 'Immi, his wife, in the name of ṣ'dydhwn (= "of their Just").

We can distinguish the following parts of the spell:

- A) An introduction, which states also the purpose of the spell, in lines 01-04a
- B) The spell itself, lines 04b- 08a, which is divided into two minor units:
 - Ba) Call forth the lilit Ḥablas, describing the harms she causes
 - Bb) Invocation of Raqo/is (= Qatros) for his help (06b-08a)
- C) Expulsion of the Lilit who causes harm, in lines 08b-10a, with the following minor parts:
 - Ca) Reference to the divorce-separation topic (08b-09a)
 - Cb) Expulsion of the Lilit, invoking her divorce (09b)
 - Cc) Presentation of the names of the beneficiaries of the spell (09c-10a)
- D) End of the spell, specifying the name of the guarantor of the spell's effectiveness.

According to this scheme, the text would be divided as follows:

- A) (1) To bind (2) Bagdana, king (3) of the demons (4) and Great Lord of the Lilits.
- Ba) I exorcise you, Lilit Ḥablas, (5) grand-daughter of Lilit Zarne, who dwell on the threshold of (6) his house, who hurt and weaken boys and girls
- Bb) I exorcise you to be stabbed (7) through the membrane of the heart with the lance of Raqo/is (=Qatros ?), the hero, who governs over the demons, the devils, (8) and the Lilits.
- Ca) And I have written to you and I have dismissed you, like the devils write the document of divorce to their wives and never (9) they return (to them).
- Cb) Have your divorce and accept your spell, and flee, go forth, and run away
- Cc) from the house of Aṣpa, son of Ḥoba, (10) and from *Ḥ/Ttn*, daughter of 'Immi, his wife,
- D) In the name of ṣ'dydhwn (= "of their Just")

2. 3. THE DEMI-GODS AND DEMONS OF THE TEXT:

Bagdana, as the "king of demons and Lilits" is called in this text, is a being

frequently mentioned in the JA⁶ and also Syr.⁷ or Mand.⁸ bowls. It is sometimes a common name for a group of demons, maybe the group commanded by Bagdana; the group of Bagdana, so to speak⁹. It is a Persian name, *bagdāna*, “a temple”¹⁰. A description of his power and his impressive, terrible figure is provided in ac-ab13: “the Lord Bagdana, powerful, the great one of the gods, and the king, head of sixty kingdoms, whose power is the power of a blast, whose heat (4) is the heat of fire, whose practice is the practice of slaying, whose chastisement is the chastisement of battle, that which is alive he eats, that which is unmixed he drinks. His head is the head of a lion, his molar teeth are the molar teeth of a she-wolf, his teeth are (5) the teeth of a tiger, the draughts of his mouth are furnaces of fire, his eyes are glowing lightnings, his shoulders are the spheres in a cloud, his temples are an anvil of iron, his arms are two hammers, his chest is the chest of an evil man, (6) his belly is a lake without canals, his back is alum, his legs are legs of brass and iron, his sandals are the sandals of sparks, his chariot is the chariot of the evil ones; he comes and in his hand there is a sword of slaying”¹¹.

The name of Lilit Hablas has slight spelling variations in the different bowls: *hbsls* “Habsalas”¹², *hlbs* “Halbas”¹³, *hbls* “Hablas”¹⁴. As we have seen in the aforementioned example, and also in some other similar spells in the bowls discussed later in this paper for comparative purposes, this Lilit represents, together with Bagdana, the most important element of evil. Both of them are malicious beings which have to be dispelled since they are responsible for the dangers affecting the human beings, for whom the spells are written.

The name of Lilit Zarne, *zrny*, is also written in the same way in isb 17.06, isb 18.05 and isb 20.05, but it is written *Zarnay*, *zrn’y*, in isb 19.03 and 11.

There are also differences in the hero’s name, whose famous spear is necessary in order to defeat Hablas: Qatros¹⁵, Tiqas¹⁶, Raqo/is in this text ac-msef.07. The blow of his lance is invoked in this spell, like in the similar spells mentioned later, as the effective remedy to mortally wound the heart of Hablas, in a manner similar to the stake driven through the heart of Dracula.

The reference to the letter of divorce we find in the text by which demons are supposed to be moved apart from the persons they harm, seems to have a late Jewish origin. In fact, in the JA bowls the divorce is sometimes associated with a Jewish figure called Yehoshua bar Perahya, although it must be said that this character is also present in other non-JA bowls, such as those in Syr.¹⁷. In the text, the letter of divorce is said to be similar to the divorces between demons and their devil-wives.

3. SIMILARITIES FOUND IN OTHER MAGIC BOWLS

We find other incantations inscribed on bowls, already published and studied, containing the same units which form the pattern of the spell of ac-msef. These similarities are next described, in order to show that we are dealing with a well-known form or pattern,

⁶ See the similar spells discussed later in this paper.

⁷ Cf. Sc-ms 16.5 and 8.

⁸ Like the Mand. bowl with a similar form or pattern to this ac-msef, as can be seen at the end of this paper.

⁹ Cf. Sc-gel, lines 5 and 8.

¹⁰ Cf. Naveh-Shaked 1985, p. 205.

¹¹ Cf. Naveh-Shaked 1985, 198-199.

¹² Isb18.4.

¹³ Isb17.05 and isb20.05.

¹⁴ Isb19.03 and 11.

¹⁵ Cf. isb17.11; isb19.04 and 11.

¹⁶ Cf. isb18.05.

¹⁷ Cf. Montgomery 1913, texts 32 and 33.

not with something new. However, it must be noted that in ac-msef the pattern is used in a simpler fashion, not being included in a more complex structure, as it occurs in the similar texts we will describe next.

There are at least six other bowls where we can find texts using this exact same pattern, including all the different parts in which we have divided the spell. That is, they do not use some of the units of the spell in ac-msef, but the whole pattern. Nevertheless, the distribution and way in which the spell is organized may vary in some cases as we will see.

Sometimes, almost the exact same pattern of ac-msef is used. The most striking parallel is isb22¹⁸:

X (1) 'pykn lwtt' 'l bwrzyn bt mhy'
 A 'l 'yswr (2) bgdyn' {w}mlk<yh>wn ddyw' wšlyt' rbh dl<y>lyt'
 Ba 'šb'yt (3) 'lky ḥbls lylyt' bt brth d<z>rny {ly}lylyt' dšry' 'l (4) 'skwpt byth dmhyšy
 bt dwdy {w}mhy' wsrp' drtq' wdrtqt' (5) mrmysy wmrmsyt'
 Bb 'šb'yt 'lky dtmhn btp̄rs l{1}bky wbm̄r'nyt<y>h dqtrws gwbr'
 Ca h' ktbyt (6) lyky {wh'}wh' t'rkyt y'tky km' dktbyn šydy gy' lñ<y>hwn wtwb l'
 ḥdryn
 Cb wšqwly (7) gṭky wqbly mwmtky wqdhy w'qwry wpwqy
 Cc mn byth wmn gwbh dmhyšy bt dwdy
 D bšwm rt mḥš mḥš mḥš (8) šm mpwrš myššyt ym<y> br<'>š<y>t hll<w>yh lyšmk
 hllwyh lmlkwtk šbyrt šbyrt ywdg' ywdb' šbyrt šbyrt ywdg' ywdb' šbyrt šbyrt
 ywdg' (9) ywdb' lyšmk 'ny 'š<y>ty 'mn

X (1) Overturned are the curses upon Burzin the daughter of Maḥya.
 A Against the bond¹⁹ of (2) Bagdana, the king of the devils and the great ruler of the
 lilits.
 Ba I adjure (3) you, Lilit Ḥablas, the granddaughter of Lilit Zarne who dwells on the
 (4) threshold of the house of Meḥiše the daughter of Dode, smiter and burner of
 boys and girls, (5) male and female foetuses²⁰.
 Bb I adjure you that you be struck in the membrane of your heart, and with the spear of
 Qatros the mighty.
 Ca Lo, I have written (6) to you and Lo, I have expelled you. As demons write divorces
 for their wives and furthermore, (they) do not return.
 Cb Take (7) your divorce, receive your oath, flee, take flight, and go forth
 Cc from the house and from behind of Meḥiše the daughter of Dode.
 D In the name of *rt mḥš mḥš mḥš*, (8) the Ineffable Name from the six days of
 Creation. Hallelujah for Your Name! Hallelujah for Your Kingdom! *šbyrt šbyrt*
ywdg' (9) *ywdb'* I have acted for Your name. Amen.

¹⁸ = C.H. GORDON 1934b, pp. 141-143. The smaller size in some of the signs used in the transcription points out that these signs are not seen with absolute clarity in the original text. The elements not present in the pattern of ac-msef are marked with X.

¹⁹ "bond" is how I translate the word 'ysr, construct from 'yswr, which Isbell 1975, p. 69, translates as "prince". In the "Glossary", we find both meanings: 'ysr' (p. 158) as the "prince" and 'yswr' (p. 159) as "bond". The latter spelling supports the meaning I choose in this paper, although the spelling of the words in these texts is not consistent as regard to the use of vowel letters. Thus, Naveh-Shaked 1993, in the Glossary, p. 264, brings the following spelling variations for "bond": 'sr'/srh'/swr'/yswrh. What seems to be a clue is the fact that the sentence matches the same pattern used in other texts where it is clear the meaning of the term as "the bond" (meaning "spell, incantation"), or, used a verb, "to bind" Bagdana.

²⁰ "male and female foetuses", Aramaic *mrmysy wmrmsyt'*, see on these words C.H. Gordon 1934a, pp. 466-474, especially p. 472.

Except for the expression marked with X, we have the same pattern and the same elements shown for ac-msef, with slight variations in some of them, which are enough to prove that they are not just repetitions of the different parts of the spell of ac-msef, and confirm that there is not a fixed, stipulated pattern, but a certain freedom is observed.

The phrase at the beginning “Overturned are the curses upon ... (NP)” (20) is frequently used in Mand. bowls. T. Harviainen²¹ considers this expression as the most used initial words in these spells, after the favourite one: “There shall be health/salvation for... (NP)”. However, that phrase is used in JA bowls as well. This is the case of isb 33, a clear example of a Jewish text since in line 5 it is written exactly: “to the Saint Yahweh of the armies”, a typical Jewish expression for the name of God. Nevertheless, in line 1, several expressions using the term “overturn”, *ʾpk*, are repeated. This fact makes it clear that many of the expressions used in these types of spells, written for the benefit of persons belonging to different religious groups, are part of a common fund, which is employed as it is convenient whenever someone needs these magical resources.

The most significant variation in this spell is found in the unit marked with D, where the name of the guarantor of the spells effectiveness seems to reflect the faith of somebody belonging to the Jewish community. However, it is not sure since Christians and Mandaean also share the idea of Creation. Therefore, the person who would benefit from the spell might belong to any of these groups, taking into account only this reference to the Creation.

The pattern of the incantation in ac-msef is used again in isb20²².

- X1D (01) brḥmy šmyʾ
 ʾswtʾ [lnpšʾ w]lbyʾ dʾprh br ʾymy wkl (02) šwm dʾyt lyh dytqymwn lyh [bnyn] mn
 ʾyšpndwy ʾytt<y>h wyḥwn (03) wytqymwn wlʾ ygʿ bhwn kl mzyq [bhdyn] ʾlmʾ
 bšwm ʾhyh ʾšr ʾhyh
 A (04) ʾl ʾyswr bgdnʾ mlkʾ mlkyhwn dšyd[y wdywy wšlytʾ] rbh dlylytʾ
 Ba ʾšbʾyt (05) ʾlyky bḥlbs lylytʾ bt brth dzrny ly[lytʾ dytbʾ] ʾl ʾysqwpt bʾbh dʾ (06)
 wdʾbyʾ wdmḥyʾ wṭrpʾ wḥnqʾ wʾklʾ drdqy w[drdqʾ bšwm] (07) mr myšy wmr
 myšytʾ
 Bb ʾšbʾyt ʾlyky dty<t>mḥyn bt<w>rps lylybyky wbmwrnytʾ dsq2 [gbd]ʾ
 dhw<ʾ>šlytʾ ʾl šydy wʾl dywy wʾl (08) ptkry {wl} wʾl lylytʾ
 Ca hʾ ktbyt lkyn gyʾʾ whptryt yt[kyn kmʾ dktby]n šydy gyʾʾ lynšyhwn wtwb (09) lʾ
 ḥdryn ʾlyhw[n]
 Cb šqwl gyʾ<y>kyn wqbyl mwmṭkyn wqdḥw wʾy[ryqy
 Cc mn bylʾtʾ ḥdyn dʾprʾ (sic) br ʾyyy (sic)
 X2 wlʾ tyḥzyn (10) lyh ʾwd lʾ lh lʾyšpndwy ʾyttyh wlʾ tygʾyn wlʾ tyqr[byn lhwn
 wlbryn] dʾyt lhwn lʾ bḥylmh dlylyh (11) wlʾ bḥylmʾ dymmh
 D bšwm mṭḥmn yʾbgbyg dydy ṭdty b[ʾyzqtʾ dšyr wglyp ʾlh šm] mpwrš mn
 ywmy ʾlmʾ (12) wmn šyšt ymy brʾšyt ʾmn ʾmn slh hllwyh

- X1D (01) By the love of the heavens²³,
 Salvation [for the life and for] the house of ʾEfra the son of ʾImmi, and every (02)
 person who belongs to him, that [his children] may be established from ʾIšpandoi
 his wife and may live (03) and be established, and that no harmer [in this] world

²¹ Harviainen 1995, p. 54.

²² = Montgomery 1913, No. 18; cf. J.N. Epstein 1921, p. 49.

²³ The translation is by Isbell 1975, pp. 64f., with some minor corrections.

- may touch them, in the name of “I-am-who-I-am”.
- A (04) For the binding of king Bagdana, the king of demon[s and devils and] the great [ruler] of lilit.
- Ba I adjure (05) you by Lilit Ḥalbas the granddaughter of Li[lit] Zarne [who is sitting] upon the threshold of *Bʾbhdʾ* (06) and lurking and who smites and knocks down and strangles and devours boys and [girls] (07) male and female foetuses²⁴.
- Bb I adjure you that you be struck in the membrane of your heart and with the spear of the [mighty] *sq....*²⁵ who is the ruler over demons, over devils, over (08) idols, and over lilit.
- Ca Lo, I have written to you the divorce and I have separated y[ou. As] demons [writ]e divorces for their wives and furthermore, (09) they do not return to them.
- Cb Take your divorce and accept you adjuration and flee and run [away
- Cc from the ho]use of this ʾEfra the son of ʾImmi
- X2 and do not appear (10) to him any more, nor to ʾIspandoi his wife. Do not touch and do not come [near to them or to] their [sons] either in a dream of the night (11) or in a dream of the day, in the name of *mthmn yʾbgbyg dydy tdy* by [the signet-ring upon which has been carved and engraved the] Ineffable [Name] from the (first) days of the world, (12) even the six days of Creation. Amen. Amen. Selah. Hallelujah!

The additions we find with respect to the text of ac-msef clearly show the Jewish religious origin of the person that will profit from the spell. This is also suggested through the use of the name ʾImmi, ʾymy, which is frequent in the Talmuds. The most significant addition with respect to ac-msef is the beginning of the text, as it was the case of the preceeding text, isb22. The same pattern described for ac-msef is followed continuously and consecutively, except for the inclusion of X2, where a frequent resource in other magical patterns is added, that is the appearance of the devil, harmful beings, either physically or in dreams, to the persons they want to threaten.

The text isb17 (= Montgomery 1913, no. 11; cf. S.N. Epstein 1921, pp. 40-42), written for the salvation of a woman named Newanduk, daughter of Kapne, is very similar to the previous case (isb20). The pattern is followed continuously, with the same order, except that an additon is inserted between the units Cc and D, with the mentioned topic of the appearance of the evil beings “either by night or by day” (line 8). At the beginning of the text, like in isb20, some material is added before the first words of the pattern, “for the binding of Bagdana...”

There are texts in incantation bowls where, although all of the elements that form the pattern of ac-msef are used, they are modified or their order is changed with respect to ac-msef and the similar texts studied above.

Isb 18 contains a text with an incantation in favour of “Bahamenduk, daughter of Newanduk, and Bahrad, son of ʾIspandermid, and all of his house”. It is made up by the units present in ac-msef, but they are not displayed in the same order. The divorce subject is mentioned at the beginning and is also repeated at the same position as in the pattern of the spells previously seen, but the wording of the expressions Ca, Cb, Cc is somehow different and repetitive:

- Ca Lo, I have written in writing.
 (+Cb) Lo, I make you cease

²⁴ See note 20 above.

²⁵ The following PN is illegible, but it should be the hero present within a similiar context in other texts but variously spelled. Cf. commentary on ac-msef, line 7 above. In this case, we cannot determine how the name of the hero was spelled here due to the state of the text, but we can say it is a variant that starts with *sq...*

- (+Cc) from her and from the house of Bahmanduk the daughter of Newanduk (7) and from her son, as demons write divorces and give (them) to their wives and furthermore, they do not return to them.
- Cb Take your divorce and accept the writings and go forth, (8) and ... and run away, and go
- Cc from the house of Bahmanduk the daughter of Newanduk

Sometimes the whole pattern of the spell in ac-msef is merely used as an element of a much more extensive and repetitive incantation text. That is the case of isb19 (= Gordon 1934a). We are dealing basically with a very complex text, made up by the ac-msef pattern, as well as by other patterns which are complete spells by themselves. The elements of the ac-msef pattern are interwoven within other elements, and the order and sequence of the original pattern has been lost. The text is now reproduced and divided into the different units that form the text, but only in translation²⁶.

- DX (1) In your name.
Mazdeway, the daughter of ʾImma Salma, (and) Beryl, son of ʾImma, her husband.
- (2) I act in your name.
Salvation from the heavens. Mazdeway, the daughter of ʾImma Salma, Beryl, the son of ʾImma, her husband. That sons and daughters may live and be preserved for her, and nothing evil at all shall touch them.
- D In the name of the Lord and of "I am who I am".
- A To the binding of Bagdana, (3) the king of the demons and the devils, and Great Lord of the lilit.
- Ba I adjure you, Lilit Ḥablas, the grand daughter of the lilit Zarne, (you) who dwell in the threshold of the house of this Mazdeway, the daughter of ʾImma Salma, and of this Berila the son of ʾImma. Amen.
- X (4) You who fill the depths, smite, strike, cast down, strangle, kill and cast down boys and girls, male and female foetuses.
- Bb I adjure you that you be struck in the membrane of your heart and with the lance of Qatros, the hero, and you will be uprooted.
- X And again, (5) you will cease and go far away
- X from this Mazdeway, the daughter of ʾImma Salma, and from this Beryl, the son of ʾImma, her husband -- amen -- from their sons and daughters, that they have and or will have, and from their house, and from all of their dwelling, and from all of their threshold.
- Ca Lo, I have written (a divorce) for you.
- [+Cb) Lo, I have dismissed you.
(6) Look, I have abandoned you.
Lo, I have banished you with a deed of divorce for you. And amen...
Like demons and devils write divorces and give them to their wives and they never return to them in their residence.]
- Cb So you, evil lilit, (7) (be you) male lilit or female lilit, strangler, daughter (of lilit), *šalanit* ghost, old one, profane, take (your) divorce and your banishment document and your letter of dismissal and flee, leave, go out and depart
- Cc from this Mazdeway, the daughter of ʾImma Salma, and from her husband Beryl, (8) the son of ʾImma -- amen --, and from her sons, from her daughters, and from all of her dwelling.

²⁶ The Aramaic text may be consulted by the reader in Gordon 1934a and isb19.

- X And do not appear to them in visions by day or in impure fancies by night, neither in man nor woman likeness, nor any... ..
- X Do not approach them and do not hurt them, (9) do not devour their sons and their daughters, that they have or will have.
- X Sealed with the great seal of the Holy One, it is sealed on your divorce. The Holy One, Yah, the Holy One is He, Hosts is His name, Yah, Yah, Yah, Yah, "I-am-who-I-am", awful and holy. Amen (10) amen, amen, Sela. TL' KBL TL' in them TL'
- X Just as the mountains encircle Jerusalem, so the Lord encircles his people from now and forever²⁷.
Beloved and pitied are you, Israel. I will receive you and I will bring you up to the ark. I will feed you choice meat, (11) choice wine I will give you to drink.
- XD Again, salvation from the heavens for this Mazdeway, the daughter of 'Imma Salma. Saved in the name of the Lord.
- Ba I adjure you, Lilit Bablas, the granddaughter of the Lilit Zarne, striker, smiter, and killer.
- Bb I adjure you to be struck in the membrane of your heart and with the lance of Qatros, the mighty.
- Ca Lo, I have written (a divorce) for you. Lo, I have dismissed you. As demons write divorces and give them to their wives and they never return to them.
- Cb Now, take your divorce and receive your adjuration and fly off, (12) go away, go forth
- Cc from the house, from the dwelling, from the threshold, from the four (walls), (from the) midst of the house, from the body of Mazdeway, the daughter of 'Imma Salma. Amen, amen. Selah.

It is clear that the portion of this text between lines 2b-8a would basically correspond to the pattern of ac-msef, although with important variations:

- 1) The invocation of God in whose name the incantation is performed (the element marked with D) is placed at the beginning of the pattern, not at the end.
 - 2) The command for the Lilit Hāblas to move away and leave, which in ac-msef is associated to the effectiveness of the divorce deed, is anticipated in lines 4(end)-5, and is also repeated in lines 6(end)-8a (the element marked with Cb-Cc) in the spot corresponding to the position it has in ac-msef.
 - 3) The strict word order in the "C" element as it is shown in the prior analyzed texts, is not followed here due, as we can see, to the addition of "Cb" inside "Ca", although it is also repeated below (lines 11b-12) with its usual word order.
- In lines 11-12 we have a repetition, in a shorter form, of the same pattern, following the same order established in this bowl, that is, starting with the invocation of the power in whose name the spell is written.

It is worth noting that in this long incantation text we have several subjects which frequently occur in others spells: 1) the prohibition for the lilit to appear in any kind of vision by day or by night to the persons she is chasing, 2) that the lilit shall not devour children, boys or girls, 3) the incantation and the divorce are sealed, in this case with the special seal of "the Holy One", who is also invoked using different expressions, 4)

²⁷ Psalm 152:2.

references to biblical places.

The first lines in this bowl (marked with DX), that serve as an introduction, are indeed, as we stated above, a small but complete spell: the name of the guarantor of the spell is mentioned, the persons for whom the spell is written are also mentioned, as well as the desired purpose of the spell, which is usually the salvation of the whole family.

Finally, I am going to examine a Mand. incantation bowl, with a text that also contains the ac-msef pattern. This fact shows that the pattern and its various elements belong to a common tradition shared by the different communities or groups that lived together in southern preislamic Mesopotamia.

As in the last incantation text, only a translation is offered. The original in Mandaean can be read in Yamauchi 1967, Text 21.

Mand. Bowl Yam21 (= Lidzbarski 1902, Text V)²⁸.

- A (1) For the binding of ʾAbugdana, the king of the devils and the great ruler of all the lilits.
- Ba (2) I have made you swear and I adjure you, Lilit Ḥaldas, and Lilit Taklat, granddaughter (3) of Lilit Zarni, who dwells in the house and on the threshold of the house of Ḥormis the son of (4) Maḥlapta, and of ʾAḥata the daughter of Dade, and (who) strikes and kills and bewitches and throttles (5) boys and girls.
- Bb I have made you swear and I adjure you, Lilit Ḥaldas, and Lilit Taklat, (6) granddaughter of Lilit Zarni, that you may be struck in the membrane of your heart (7) with the spear of Qaṭriawis the angel, who rules over the sorcery-spirits, the devils, the demons, (8) the spirits, the amulet-spirits, and lilits.
- Ca This have I written against you, Lilit Ḥaldas, and thus (9) have I banished you from the house and the body of Ḥormis the son of Maḥlapta, and from his wife ʾAḥata (10) the daughter of Dade, and from his sons and daughters, as the demons write a bill of divorce for their wives (11) in truth, and may not return again and may not...
- Cb Behold: Take your bill of divorce and receive your oath, Ḥaldas. (12) O Lilit Ḥaldas, flee, depart, escape, and remove yourself
- Cc from the house, the dwelling, the mansion (13) and building, from the bed and pillow of Ḥormis the son of Maḥlapta, and from his wife ʾAḥata (14) the daughter of Dade, and from their sons and their daughters and from their beds and pillows,
- X and do not (15) show yourselves, neither in their dreams of the night nor in their visions of the day.
- X Because bound and (16) sealed is the house, the dwelling, the mansion, and the building of Ḥormis the son of Maḥlapta, and his wife ʾAḥata the daughter of (17) Dade, and his sons and his daughters with the seal-ring of Šir-Glif the god, in your name ʾAmatema. (18) (Magical formulae.)
- X Bound (19) and sealed are the lilits, male and female, with the seal-ring of King Solomon, (20) the son of David, of Šir-Glif the god, whose name is great and honored, Glif the god is his name, (21) which has been pronounced from the beginning, (since) the six days of the beginning. (Magical formulae.) (22)
- X This bill of divorce stands confirmed for eternity. On the bowl this lilit is bound (23) and removed from the house of Ḥormis the son of Maḥlapta, and from his wife ʾAḥata the daughter of Dade, (24) and from their children.
- D And Life is victorious!

We can say this form is almost identical to the ac-msef form, although its

²⁸ The translation is by Yamauchi 1967, pp. 231-233, with some minor corrections.

components are actually longer. The main difference is the addition of new elements placed between the “Cc” and “D” components (lines 14(end)-24).

In these lines, 14(end)-24, several recurrent topics in other bowls, including some of the spells already mentioned in this paper, are incorporated: 1) To give lilit Ḥaldas a command that she does not appear to the persons she is harming. 2) The house and the family mentioned in the text are safe since the spell is sealed with the seal of the protective god. 3) With this seal, together with the seal-ring of Solomon²⁹, the evil lilitis are bound and sealed. 4) Declaration that the text serves as a document of divorce, which removes the lilit from the house and the persons she harms.

At the end of the incantation, instead of the sentence with the name of the powerful spirit, guarantor of the spell's effectiveness, as we have seen above in ac-msef and isb22, we find here an expression of invocation and proclamation of the power of “Life”, one of the divine realities, very frequent in Mand. incantations³⁰.

4. THE MAGICAL TEXT IN ac-msef

After analysing the different spells in which we find, with the variations already stated, the magical formula used in ac-msef, we can make the following conclusions:

- 1) All of the bowls follow the pattern used in ac-msef, but with different elements added.
- 2) These additions usually give clues about the religious group of the author or the beneficiary of the spell. We have seen, in the texts analysed, that the pattern can be found in a Mand. or a Jewish religious context.
- 3) In ac-msef, we find no clues that might indicate the religious inclination of the author or beneficiary of the spell.

T. Harviainen³¹ has noted the fact that in many Syr. magic bowls there is no trace pointing to any particular religion. The data about the ac-msef just mentioned suggests that the Syr. bowls are not the only bowls which do not contain references to the Mand., Christian or Jewish religions, very popular in southern Mesopotamia at the time these magical texts were written, but the same happens in the JA bowl ac-msef.

Certainly it is written in the dialect of the Mesopotamian Jews. But this only points at the authorship of the inscription. The Jews seemed to be famous for their capacity to formulate and write this kind of magical texts. That might be the reason why most of the bowls are written in JA although this does not mean that the person who requested the spell belonged necessarily to Judaism³².

Therefore, the ac-msef text is an example of a spell similar to the incantations in Syr. writing studied by T. Harviainen, where there was no expression that could indicate affiliation to the Christian community, which used, by that time in the Orient, the Syr. language as their own. Those Syriac spells are referred to as the “pagan incantations” by T. Harviainen. We might use the same expression to define the ac-msef bowl.

²⁹ The ring of Solomon is mentioned many times in the bowls, and the precious stones set into it, with the power each of them had, cf. Isbell 1975 p.7, who quotes H. Hyvernât, “Sur un vase judéo-babylonien de musée Lyklama de Cannes (Provence)”, especially pp. 124 ff.

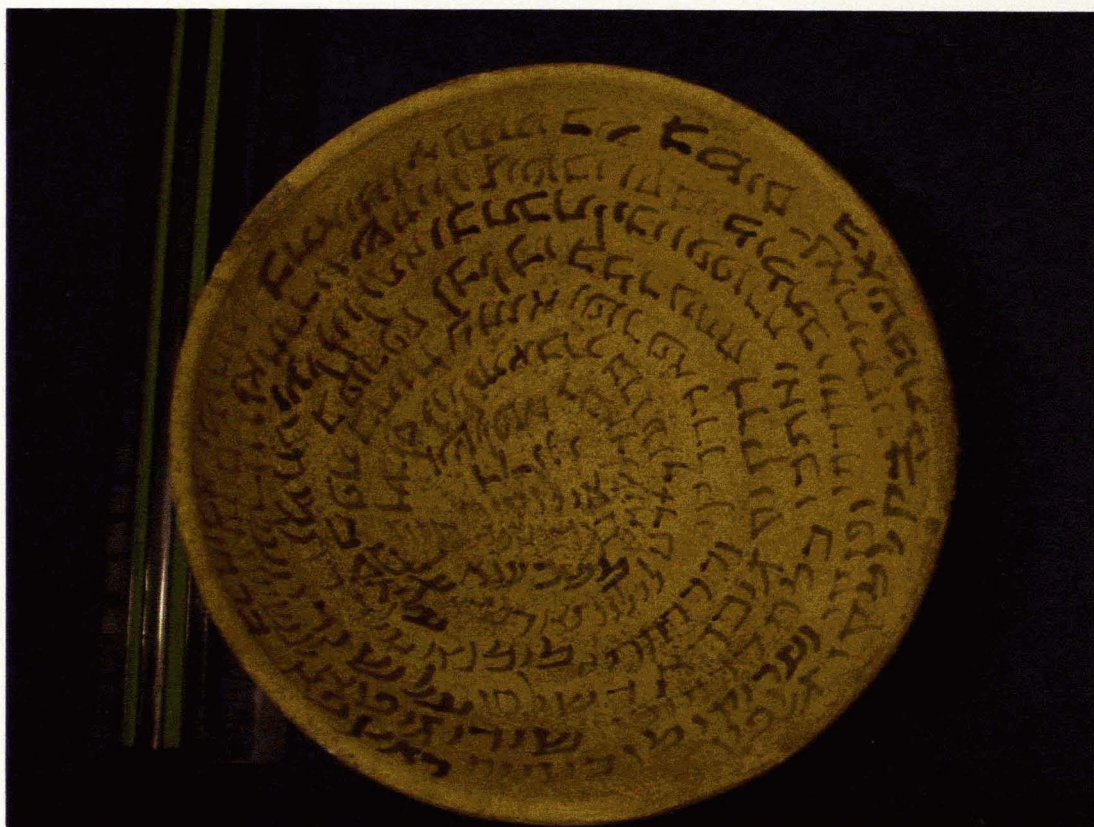
³⁰ See Yamauchi 1967, p. 39.

³¹ Harviainen 1995.

³² See Naveh-Shaked 1985, p. 18.

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The incantation bowl ac-msef

