

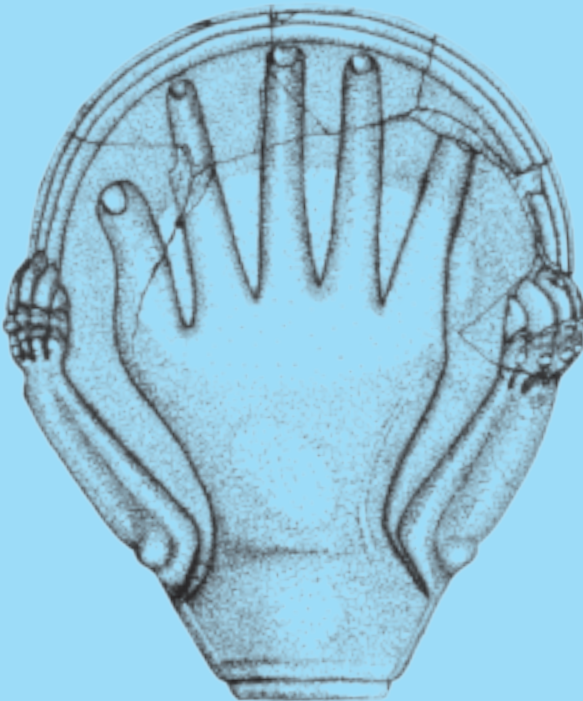
Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins



Jens Kamlah, Rolf Schäfer
und Markus Witte (Hrsg.)

ADPV 46

Zauber und Magie im antiken Palästina und in seiner Umwelt



**Abhandlungen
des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins**

Herausgegeben von
HERBERT NIEHR
und
HERMANN MICHAEL NIEMANN

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In Kommission

Zauber und Magie im antiken Palästina und in seiner Umwelt

Kolloquium des Deutschen Vereins zur Erforschung Palästinas
vom 14. bis 16. November 2014 in Mainz

Herausgegeben von
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Ulrich Hübner zum 65. Geburtstag

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Vorwort

„Zauber und Magie im antiken Palästina und in seiner Umwelt“ lautete der Titel eines wissenschaftlichen Kolloquiums, das der Deutsche Verein zur Erforschung Palästinas (DPV) vom 14. bis zum 16. November 2014 im Erbacher Hof in Mainz veranstaltet hat. Das Kolloquium umfasste neben fünf Vorträgen zu laufenden Ausgrabungsprojekten in der Levante neun thematische Beiträge, deren schriftliche Fassungen alle in diesem Band vorgelegt werden können (siehe die Beiträge von DANIEL SCHWEMER, CHRISTA MÜLLER-KESSLER, MARKHAM J. GELLER, HANS-WERNER FISCHER-ELFERT, CHRISTIAN HERRMANN, JOACHIM FRIEDRICH QUACK, BRIAN B. SCHMIDT, ANNETTE STEUDEL und MARCO FRENSCHKOWSKI). Zusätzlich konnten neun weitere Beiträge für diesen Band gewonnen werden, um das Thema der Magie auch für solche Kulturräume, Zeitspannen und Quellengattungen wissenschaftlich zu erfassen, die auf dem zweitägigen Kolloquium aus organisatorischen Gründen nicht vertreten waren (siehe die Beiträge von DORIS PRECHEL, RÜDIGER SCHMITT, HELGA WEIPPERT und HENRIKE MICHELAU, ANGELIKA BERLEJUNG und ALEXANDER FANTALKIN, SIMONE PAGANINI, MICHAEL PIETSCH, BEATE EGO, STEFAN BEYERLE und REINHARD VON BENDEMANN).

Als Herausgeber sind wir den Autorinnen und Autoren sehr dankbar, dass sie ihre Vorträge und Artikel für die Veröffentlichung zur Verfügung gestellt und sich an der Erstellung dieses Bandes mit großem Engagement beteiligt haben. Insbesondere danken wir HELGA WEIPPERT, die das Thema „Zauber und Magie“ seinerzeit angeregt hatte und dann an dem Kolloquium leider nicht teilnehmen konnte, für ihren Text. Ohne ihre Impulse wären das Kolloquium und dieser Band nicht zustande gekommen.

Bei der formalen Vereinheitlichung der Beiträge und der Erstellung des Registers haben uns RUBEN BURKHARDT (Berlin), GESINE MEIER (Berlin), HENRIKE MICHELAU (Tübingen), NORBERT RABE (Tübingen) und TATJANA VOLL (Tübingen) tatkräftig unterstützt, wofür wir ihnen herzlich danken. HENRIKE MICHELAU verdanken wir die Druckvorlage. Weiterhin sind wir den Herausgebern der Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins, HERBERT NIEHR und HERMANN MICHAEL NIEMANN, für die Aufnahme des Bandes in die Reihe zu Dank verpflichtet sowie dem Harrassowitz Verlag für die verlegerische Betreuung. Schließlich danken wir der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft dafür, dass sie das vom DPV finanzierte Kolloquium durch Zuschüsse zu den Reisekosten für Vortragende aus dem Ausland unterstützt

hat. Den Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern des Erbacher Hofes in Mainz, insbesondere Herrn Studienleiter RALF ROTHENBUSCH, danken wir für die ausgezeichnete organisatorische Betreuung der Veranstaltung und für die sehr freundliche Bewirtung.

Gewidmet ist der Band dem langjährigen Vorsitzenden des DPV, Herrn Kollegen ULRICH HÜBNER, anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstags und seines Eintritts in den wohlverdienten Ruhestand. ULRICH HÜBNER hat sich durch die Planung zahlreicher wissenschaftlicher Kolloquien für den DPV große Verdienste erworben. Die Vorträge, die auf den von ihm organisierten Kolloquien gehalten wurden, sind zum Teil als Beiträge in der ZDPV publiziert oder als Sammelbände in den ADPV erschienen. Vor allem die aus DPV-Kolloquien hervorgegangenen Bände ADPV 34 („Palaestina exploranda. Studien zur Erforschung Palästinas im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert anlässlich des 125jährigen Bestehens des Deutschen Vereins zur Erforschung Palästinas“; herausgegeben von U. HÜBNER 2006) und ADPV 43 („Sprachen in Palästina im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.“; herausgegeben von U. HÜBNER und H. NIEHR 2017) sind hier zu nennen. Als Herausgeber möchten wir mit dem hier vorliegenden Band diese von U. HÜBNER begründete Praxis weiterführen, in der Hoffnung, dass noch viele weitere ertragreiche Kolloquien des DPV folgen werden.

Tübingen, Stuttgart und Berlin im Mai 2017
Jens Kamlah, Rolf Schäfer und Markus Witte

Magic Bowls Belong in Babylonia

By Markham J. Geller

Magic bowls have always been a rather controversial topic, for a variety of reasons. The early magic bowl publications, from the French scholar MOSHE SCHWAB, were remarkably incompetent and made little impression on the academic world¹. Subsequent editions by JAMES MONTGOMERY and CYRUS GORDON placed the study of bowls on a sound basis², but the problem remained that only a few bowls were recorded in their proper archaeological context, mostly appearing as surface finds, and this remains a problem today, since the bowls have become icons of unprovenanced antiquities. Even their contents and very existence are controversial: the bowls suddenly appeared in Mesopotamia in late antiquity and then just as suddenly disappeared, without explanation. The incantations are uncomfortably syncretistic, but have little in common with Greek magical papyri³, nor even much overlap with magic in the Babylonian Talmud. Despite the fact that incantation bowls come from Nippur, Babylon, Cuthah, and other sites where the incantation literature is rich and well documented, magic bowls reflect very little of the extensive earlier Sumero-Akkadian magic from the same region⁴. The predominantly Jewish character of magic bowls tells us little about the clients and their religious affiliations, but the conspicuous lack of similarity with Jewish

¹ For the complete list of SCHWAB articles, see NAVEH/SHAKED 1985, 261.243.

² See MONTGOMERY 1913, and CYRUS GORDON's complete work on magic bowls which is listed in SHAKED/FORD/BHAYRO 2013, 361.

³ The Greek spells themselves have only general similarities to Jewish magic bowls, despite the fact that the god most frequently cited in the papyri is Iao (Sabaoth), see BETZ (*ed.*) 1986, xlvii. Nevertheless, the crude drawings and magical characters in the magical papyri have an uncanny resemblance to similar drawings in magic bowls; see for an example BETZ (*ed.* 1986, 318), and for a general discussion of bowl iconography, cf. VILOZNY 2013, and see also BOHAK 2008, 271–280.

⁴ See GELLER 2005, 54–56, and see the recent survey of Mesopotamian magic (SCHWEMER 2015), which demonstrates the intimate connections between incantations and rituals in cuneiform magic; rituals are virtually absent from magic bowl practices, perhaps because they were simply not recorded.

magic from ancient Palestine is perhaps the most troubling feature of magic bowls⁵. Talmud scholars and historians of late antiquity usually assume a constant traffic of scholars, intellectuals, and even tourists between Persian and Greco-Roman Palestine, but the magic bowls represent a substantial counter-argument against this point of view⁶. The two worlds were far apart, both physically and culturally. The magic bowls belong to Mesopotamia, and we need to examine why this is the case.

There are two aspects of magic bowls which I would like to highlight, together with a closer look at a particular magic bowl which shows distinctly older Babylonian features. The first and perhaps the most crucial question is why magic bowls so suddenly appeared and disappeared, as just mentioned. These incantations are written on relatively durable clay bowls, and if they existed before the 5th cent. C.E., we would have found them, and if after the 8th cent. C.E., we would have found those as well. One popular misconception is that the advent of Islam brought an end to writing magic bowls, but this is hardly plausible, since Arabic culture inherited and integrated great amounts of earlier Greek and Syriac learning⁷, and there is no reason to assume a priori that magic bowls would have been rejected as heretical or that the magical techniques could not have been adapted to Islamic doctrine. Moreover, we cannot explain why anyone began writing magic bowls in the first place⁸.

My own theory is really very simple: magic bowls were a response to the demise of cuneiform script, which represented a serious cultural calamity in

⁵ Cf. BOHAK 2008, 183–194, also noting the difference between magic of Babylonia and Palestine, based on the fact that these two communities were far apart and inhabited two different empires which were often at war with each other (BOHAK 2008, 193).

⁶ It is worth noting that magic bowls were not used in Palestine and were not imported from Babylonia. Although it is assumed that there was regular traffic between these two Jewish communities, texts and narratives are usually thought to have gone predominantly from West to East; see RUBENSTEIN (2003, 7), that Palestinian texts tended to be the sources for similar (and later) Babylonian texts. Even if bowls were not transportable on practical grounds, it would seem possible for the same magical texts to have been known in both places, at least in copies or oral transmission, but this appears not to be the case. For a nuanced view of differences in viewpoints between rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia, see KALMIN (2006, 31–36), which might also explain different attitudes towards magic.

⁷ See GUTAS 1999, 20–24.

⁸ BOHAK 2008, 189–190, noting that “the reason for their sudden emergence in the fifth or sixth century CE remains obscure”.

late antiquity, probably occurring sometime in the late 3rd cent. C.E.⁹. This can only be compared to the loss of one's computer hard disk without any backups: no one had further access to the large collections of cuneiform tablets extending over more than two millennia, including both magic and medicine. This means that the comprehensive technical literature on healing arts from Mesopotamian could no longer be consulted. A new genre of magic was required to deal with persistent physical and psychological illnesses, incorporating some of the same old demons, such as Lilith, but with new kinds of powers against demons, now often drawn from the Old Testament. This new genre of magic was all pretty basic and relatively unsophisticated, offering little evidence of magical rituals or medical procedures.

So if this was the case, why do magic bowls disappear so suddenly, after having become so widespread and popular throughout Mesopotamia? I would argue that the reason has less to do with Islam but more to do with the Syriac Book of Medicines, much of which consists of a Syriac translation of Galen¹⁰. At some point in Late Antiquity, probably not prior to the 5th or 6th cent. C.E., works such as the Syriac Book of Medicines were introduced into Mesopotamia, and suddenly technical medicine was available on a scale which had only existed previously on cuneiform tablets¹¹. The magic bowls were now no longer necessary; technical medicine from Greek through Syriac was suddenly available, with therapies and prescriptions, prognosis and diagnosis, in ample amounts. So the magic bowls – a stopgap between Akkadian and Greek medicine – disappear as quickly as they appear, as outmoded technologies, and uniquely Mesopotamian. The awareness of Greek science in ancient Palestine already existed much earlier and Akkadian influence in Palestine in any case had become negligible.

The point is that magic bowls present an approach to magic which is typical of Mesopotamia but foreign to ancient Palestine. This argument can partially be explained through reference to the reputations of holy men and charismatic healers, many of whom we know by name, such as Apollonius of

⁹ See GELLER 2008, although for a different viewpoint for dating the latest cuneiform tablets, see WESTENHOLZ 2007, 294–309.

¹⁰ See BUDGE 1913, and the unpublished dissertation of RUDOLF 2015.

¹¹ See DEGEN (1972) for a list of Syriac medical texts which were translated from Greek, and see also GUTAS (1999, 118–119) for the transmission of medical knowledge into Arabic.

Tyana or Simeon Stylites, to name only two¹². The Babylonian Talmud also knows miracle-performing rabbis who, like Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, could harvest a field of cucumbers by uttering a magic phrase, or Honi Ha-Me'aggel, who could bring rain by drawing a magic circle¹³. One of the most famous of the Talmudic wonder-rabbis was Hanina ben Dosa, who managed to heal the son of a colleague miraculously by putting his head between his legs and praying (bBer 34b). Other stories are told about Hanina ben Dosa, the best known of which is a dialogue between Hanina and Igrath, queen of lilithe, in which it emerged that Hanina had such great authority in heaven that Lilithe was unable to harm him. When hearing this, Hanina tried to ban Igrath from interfering with humans, but after a brief negotiation a compromise was reached: lilithe and demons could only be active on Wednesday and Saturday nights, so it was best to stay at home on these evenings. This amusing story from in the Babylonian Talmud has something in common with all other such miraculous accounts in the Talmud: they concern a rabbi from ancient Palestine and not from Babylonia¹⁴.

It appears, therefore, that the paradigm of rabbis who heal or perform wonders by means of their own charisma and reputations belongs exclusively to Palestine; the fact that no Babylonian rabbis claim to indulge in charismatic magical therapy is hardly coincidental but has to do with the differences in healing cultures between West and East. Charismatic healers in the West were known far-and-wide by name and by their ability to have dialogues with demons, heal through magic words or through the use of their therapeutic spittle. By way of contrast, nothing of this kind is known from traditional Akkadian magic, which operates under a very different set of rules, which also happens to apply to local Babylonian rabbis of the Talmud.

Let us review the evidence from the Babylonian side of the border. First of all, there is no demonic possession in Babylonia, no Akkadian-speaking demon inhabits its victim's body or speaks through the victim's mouth; Mesopotamian demons never act like a *dybbuk*. Second, all exorcists in

¹² PETER BROWN succinctly describes the power (*dynamis*) and miracles of Christian holy men (1971, 87), and for exorcism in cases of demonic possession (see 88–90). However, the assumption that Babylonian rabbis resembled Christian holy men (as suggested in KALMIN 2006, 9) does not work in magical contexts, since magic in the Babylonian Talmud only resembles the miracles of Christian holy men if referring specifically to Palestinian rabbis and their magic, and not to local Babylonian rabbis.

¹³ See GELLER 2006, 5, and BOHAK 2008, 53.

¹⁴ bPes 112b, see the discussion in SHAKED/FORD/BHAYRO 2013, 53.

cuneiform incantations are anonymous, because the effective power of the incantation comes from Marduk, god of exorcism and his father Ea, god of Wisdom. The exorcist himself is only instrumental in the process of procuring healing magic for an ill patient or preventing the attacks of demons. In fact, in one lengthy Akkadian incantation known as “Marduk’s Address to the Demons”, the exorcist is not only the personal representative of the god, but he actually declares himself to be Marduk, for the purposes of magic, and he announces time and time again, “I am Marduk”¹⁵. There is no charisma here, but only the authority which comes from gods, not from men. The incantations are combined with powerful rituals, which also serve as instruments in the healing process, as an anonymous *technē* aimed at therapy and prophylaxis. Let me repeat: Mesopotamian magic relies upon authority, not charisma.

The remarkable consistency of this scheme persists into the Talmud: Babylonia claims none of its own rabbis as charismatic wonder-healers, while at the same time acclaiming and celebrating Palestinian rabbis for their great miracles. The cultures of West and East are easily distinguishable within the magical traditions of the Talmud. There are, of course, Babylonian rabbis who, like Abbaye, are known for technical magical cures and medical recipes¹⁶, or the acerbic and sharp-tongued Rav Sheshet, who has remarkable powers of perception despite being blind¹⁷. These rabbis never heal the sick by laying hands on them or pronouncing magic words. They have no following.

But what happens in magic bowls? One rabbi appears regularly in bowls, namely Rabbi Joshua bar Perahia, but his role in the bowls is to act as an halachic authority who issues divorce writes against demons; nothing miraculous about this. This rather obscure rabbi from 2nd cent. B. C. E. Palestine was known to magic bowls, perhaps because he had the legendary distinction of being the teacher of Jesus, despite obvious chronological discrepancies¹⁸. However, the recent publication of Aramaic Bowl Spells, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls (JBA, also referred to here as SHAKED/FORD/BHAYRO 2013) has now given us a number of magic bowls citing another Palestinian sage,

¹⁵ LAMBERT 1999, 295. LAMBERT’s posthumous edition and translation of Marduk’s Address to the Demons is now published in GELLER 2016, 340–398.

¹⁶ Cf. GELLER (2006, 5–8), that Babylonian rabbis employed magic as a *technē*, rather than as an expression of personal power against demons based upon piety.

¹⁷ bGit 67b, R. Sheshet engaged in a contest of wits with the officials (or servants) of the Babylonian Exilarch, ostensibly accusing them of banqueting on the limbs of live animals, but more likely to have been a debate about vivisection. For a different view, see the discussion in HERMAN 2012, 241.

¹⁸ See SHAKED/FORD/BHAYRO 2013, 103–104, referring to the exchange between R. Joshua and his disciple Jesus as recorded in the Babylonian Talmud.

Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, with a clear allusion to the story in the Babylonian Talmud about his encounter with Lilith Igrath, mentioned above¹⁹. This discrete group of bowls repeats the phrase, “you, evil spirits, who met Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa”, and the bowls add that Hanina ben Dosa responded to the demons with a countercharm, a verse from Ps 104,20. These Hanina ben Dosa magic bowls merit a closer look, since they preserve an historical memory or reminiscence of earlier magic from the region, something that we do not generally expect to find. These bowls are not the heirs of Akkadian magic, but they do allude to themes known from Akkadian magic.

Several of the bowls citing Hanina ben Dosa all contain a similar phrase, translated by the editors of the bowls as follows (JBA 12,6–8):

[...] the spirit that reclines among the roof-tops, the spirit that reclines among the graves, and the spirit that reclines in her head, in her temple, in her eyelid, in her eye, in her ear, in her heart, in her stomach, in her lungs, [in her liver and], in her kidneys, and in all the sinews of her body, in the point of her loins, the two hundred and forty-eight members of the body of (the client) [...]

The text continues after naming the client (JBA 12,9):

[...] the spirit whose name is Agag, daughter of Baroq, (a variant reads: daughter of Baroqta), daughter of Naqor, daughter of the evil spirit, and daughter of the evil eye, and daughter of migraine.

Finally, the passage addresses the demons directly (JBA 12,19):

They call you sightless, they call you blinder, they call you itchy.

The editors have failed to understand this bowl fully, although the translation they provide is sensible and technically correct, and it is even possible that the scribe who copied this bowl understood his text in the way that it is translated above. But I suggest that this is not the original meaning of these lines, which can only be fully comprehended through reference to Akkadian incantations.

Since the image of demons reclining among graves or on roof-tops is hardly a prominent motif in incantation literature, I offer an alternative translation. First and foremost, the term *škbh* “to recline” has a well-documented meaning in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic as a masculine noun: it means “dead

¹⁹ SHAKED/FORD/BHAYRO 2013, 56–99 = bowls 1–12.

body”. So the term *rwḥ? dškbh* would have the simple meaning, “spirit of the corpse” and also provides a new meaning to this passage: it concerns ghosts. The salient point is that Sumerian and Akkadian magic concentrated heavily on ghosts, giving them almost top billing together with demons, while the ghosts have almost completely disappeared from magic bowls; they have merged into demons. The distinction between a demon and a ghost is not trivial: I am fond of saying that a demon is a professional and the ghost an amateur. The ghost finds no proper place in the netherworld and returns to humans – usually someone he or she knows – to find a substitute, while a demon was created for the purpose of causing havoc.

These ghosts appearing in incantations usually have characteristic descriptions, which is why I would no longer translate as “reclining among the graves” or “reclining among the root-tops”; even though one scribe spells the word *byn* like the preposition “among”, most other bowls in this group simply write *bet + nun*, namely “son”. This small variant makes a big difference, allowing us to recognise these terms as epithets: *ben ʔigrê* and *ben qibrê*, literally “son of the rooves” and “son of the graves”. While “son of graves” sounds reasonably convincing for ghost nomenclature, the clue to these terms comes from the phrase “son of the rooves”, as written in duplicate Hanina ben Dosa bowls. It is a characteristic feature of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic magic, both in bowls and in the later Cairo Genizah, that demonic (or in this case ghostly) names are given as genealogies: son of something-or-other. The pattern is well established and has been pointed out by THEODORE KWASMAN in an important and largely overlooked article: the “*ben ʔigrê* – son of the rooves” is known to the Talmud and in the Mandaic Book of the Zodiac as “*bnê ʔigrê*”, a calque on the Akkadian term *bēl urri*, “lord of the roof” (from Sumerian *lugal-urra*), which developed from a divine name into an abstract term for the disease “epilepsy”, or the demon responsible for this disease. The association with “son of the roof” and epilepsy appears in the Peshitta translation of Mt 17,14–18, in which Syriac *bar ʔeggāra* “son of the roof” describes the epilepsy being healed by Jesus. There are other Aramaic demonic names of this same type: *bnê ḥašbê*, “sons of vessels”, or *bnê mazzalê*, “sons of constellations”, or *bnê diqlê*, “sons of palm-trees”; these other names are probably metaphors for diseases which have not yet been identified²⁰.

²⁰ KWASMAN (2007, 165–170), who is the first to notice the similarity between the “sons of rooves”-demon in Aramaic and Akkadian *bēl urri*, “master of the roof”, which is actually a term for “epilepsy” (although not the modern clinical disease by that name, but any form of seizure).

In the light of this information, we need to re-examine our magic bowl for other disease names, namely those that appear in line 9 of our bowl (JBA 12). The translators give:

[...] the spirit whose name is Agag, daughter of Baroq, daughter of Naqor, daughter of the evil spirit, daughter of the evil eye, and daughter of migraine.

Notice that the editors translate the final entry, *bt ʕylḥtʔ* as “daughter of migraine”, since the *ʕylḥtʔ*-migraine occurs in a Talmudic medical handbook in tractate Gittin 69a. By this same logic, all of the “daughter” designations are conventional, this time indicating diseases rather than ghosts (JBA 12,9):

bt brwq, (with a variant *bt brwqtʔ*), *bt nqwr*, *bt rwḥʔ byštʔ*, *bt ʕynʔ byštʔ*, *bt ʕylḥtʔ*.

There is little doubt about the meaning of the penultimate term in this list, since “daughter of the evil eye” simply refers to the evil eye. The twin terms *brwq* and *brwqtʔ* are forms of the same disease, *brwqty*, “cataract” or an eye disease which also appears in the Babylonian Talmud medical handbook in tractate Gittin (69a). This leaves *bt nqwr*, probably related to Aramaic *nyqrʔ* for “worm”, seen as a cause of disease²¹.

So the balance of evidence is that demons are not reclining anywhere and that there are no proper names of demons, but these are all likely to be designations of diseases or malevolent agents. The other interesting feature of this bowl (JBA 12) is the list of anatomical designations it contains, which should indicate that the spirit of the dead or ghost attacks various parts of the patient’s body, *de capite ad calcem*, from head to foot. It is somewhat revealing to look at the designations of the various body parts in this list:

Aram. <i>ryšʔ</i>	head	Akk. <i>rēšu</i>
Aram. <i>ʕydʔ</i>	temple	
Aram. <i>gbynʔ</i>	eye-lid	Akk. <i>kappi īni</i>
Aram. <i>ʕynʔ</i>	eye	Akk. <i>īnu</i>
Aram. <i>ʔwdnʔ</i>	ear	Akk. <i>uznu</i>
Aram. <i>lybʔ</i>	‘heart’	Akk. <i>libbu</i>
Aram. <i>krsʔ</i>	stomach	Akk. <i>karšu</i>

²¹ Cf. the Akkadian incantation against the tooth-worm which causes toothache, for which see COLLINS 1999, 262–276.

Aram. <i>ḥšī</i> ²	lungs	Akk. <i>hašû</i>
Aram. <i>kbd</i> ²	liver	Akk. <i>kabîdu</i>
Aram. <i>kwlyt</i> ²	kidney	Akk. <i>kalîtu</i>
Aram. <i>šwryn</i> ²	sinews	Akk. <i>šer²ānu</i>
Aram. <i>gys</i> ²	hip	Akk. <i>giššu < gilšu</i>

What one notices is that all of the anatomical terms except for one (“temple”) has a clear Akkadian cognate, and in fact some of these terms are better understood in Akkadian than in Aramaic. Moreover, there is a certain conservatism in the rendering of anatomical terms. In the Babylonian Talmud, for example, the terms for parts of the body often appear in Hebrew rather than in an Aramaic equivalent term²², and Akkadian often uses Sumerian logograms for parts of the body, rather than syllabically written Akkadian. We infer from this that the human body parts mentioned in JBA 12 probably relate directly to Akkadian anatomical terminology. This brings us to the last citation from our magic bowl, which addresses the demons in the following rather insulting terms, as translated by the editors (JBA 12,10):

[...] they call you sightless [*ʿwyr̄t*²], they call you blinder [*msmt̄*²],
they call you itchy [*grbn̄yt*²].

Variant readings have two other terms: “they call you smiter” [*m̄tryt*²] or “lame” [*m̄hgr̄t*²]. I would prefer terms like “blinder” and “smiter” to be passive, to make them all consistent, hence “blinded” and “smitten”, and the at least one contributor to the magic bowl volume agrees that this is possible²³. Why is this so important? Because these terms all describe human attributes of disease or disability, reflecting a serious deformity or defect, rather than being insults. One key expression, *grbn̄yt*², translated as “itchy”, happens to match up with a commentary on an Akkadian omen clearly stating that a *garbānu* or leper (the same word as in our bowl) is one who has sinned²⁴. In fact, all of the characteristics mentioned in this list refer to ghosts rather than demons, since such terms as “blinded” or “smitten” or “leprous” can only describe humans, or in the present case, ghosts who find no rest in the netherworld,

²² See PRINCIPE (1993) for a survey of anatomical terms in the Mishnah, but these same terms are predominantly found in the Aramaic passages of the Talmud as well.

²³ MORGENSTERN 2013b, 47 translates all these terms as passive.

²⁴ Cf. DE ZORZI (2014, 383) giving the full text of the omen commentary passage.

possibly because of their disabilities. Sumerian and Akkadian magic has long descriptions of different types of ghosts, none exactly like those in our bowl, but the idea is the same: ghosts are just as threatening as demons and have to be conjured magically²⁵. So we end up with a number of possibilities to ponder. On one hand, the magic bowls never duplicate cuneiform incantations nor do the great majority of bowls even resemble their Akkadian precursors²⁶. There is no doubt that magic bowls represent a new genre of magical texts, and some of their magical formulae persisted into later periods, even though the technique of using bowls was soon abandoned. What is also clear, however, is that the bowls developed themes which belonged to earlier phases of Babylonian magic and much of the orientation of the bowl magic can only be explained in reference to Akkadian concepts of demons and ghosts, and this realisation profoundly changes the ways in which we read Jewish Aramaic incantation bowls.

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²⁵ See SCURLOCK 2006, 5–20. Ghosts played a dominant role in both Mesopotamian magic and medicine, since they were thought to be responsible for causing both physical and mental illnesses. It is therefore somewhat surprising that ghosts are so rarely mentioned within magic bowls or within Jewish magic in general, even as a sub-category of demons.

²⁶ One exceptional bowl in a non-typical literary Aramaic with similarities to Akkadian incantations was published in a catalogue of British Museum incantation bowls (SEGAL 2000, 92–93) as BM 135563. The dialect of this bowl was correctly analysed and the bowl was re-interpreted in MÜLLER-KESSLER/KWASMAN 2000, and although a lively debate about this bowl ensued (see MORGENSTERN 2013a), the Akkadian parallels to its formulae were not further elaborated (see GELLER 2005, 57–61).

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