

Oral Charms in Structural and Comparative Light



Заговорные тексты
в структурном
и сравнительном освещении

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**Syriac Charms in Near Eastern Context:
Tracing the Origin of Formulas**

Syriac charms are known to the scholarly world since the middle of the 19th c. when George Percy Badger, Anglican missionary and orientalist, after his three-year travel to Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, published a book dedicated to the Assyrian Church of the East (Badger 1852). However, the study of these texts began much later, with the publication of the Syriac amulet from the collection of the Semitic Museum at the Harvard University (Hazard 1893). It would be unfair to say that these texts are neglected by scholars, but there are many issues which remain to be explored. One of the main problems connected with the study of Syriac charms is that they are known mostly to orientalists and, as other Near Eastern magic texts, are rarely analyzed in the comparative and typological perspective. One of the aims of the present paper, which is in its methodology comparative, though restricted to the Near Eastern context, is to introduce these texts to the community of scholars dealing mostly with European charms.

At the moment there are not less than forty manuscripts with Syriac charms in libraries and private collections around the world, but published texts constitute but a very small part of this corpus¹. There are two different types of these manuscripts. The more widespread type is a book, usually of a small format, containing several dozens of charms of different type. These booklets were apparently copied and kept by priests of the Assyrian Church of the East, and they could be used as compendiums of charms for various purposes. Some of these charms could be recited or copied from this book on certain specific occasions – illness, dangerous endeavor like travel or war etc. These booklets were also used by lay people as protective amulets, for example, being kept under a pillow². Another type of manuscripts consists of amulets in the form of a scroll with a much lesser amount of text, usually not more than

¹ The published material includes three books of charms (Gollancz 1912), three scroll amulets (Hazard 1893; Hunter 1993, 1999), and a small number of separate charms (Nau 1907; Hunter 1987, 1992).

² As told me by late Michael Sado, an owner of a collection of Syriac charms.

four or five charms. The scrolls were created for individual use: they were generally worn wrapped around the body under clothes. Syriac charm manuscripts date to the 18th–20th cc. Most of them were created and copied in Kurdistan, the original settlement area of Assyrians (Syriac-speaking Christians who belong to the Assyrian Church of the East).

The manuscripts in question are not the only type of recorded Syriac charms. There are much older specimens of verbal magic in Syriac which are written on clay bowls (Hamilton 1971) and on animal skins (Gignoux 1987). These texts belong to another tradition which was probably invented by Jews or Mandaean in antiquity and later apparently adopted by Syriac-speaking, or, more correctly, Syriac-writing people. This tradition is represented mainly by Aramaic magic bowls from Mesopotamia (ca. 5th–7th cc. CE). There are certain similarities between this older tradition of magic bowls and skin and metal amulets from Mesopotamia-Syria cultural area (ca. 5th–7th cc. CE) and the later tradition of manuscripts from Kurdistan (18th–20th cc.). It is also hard to imagine that Syriac charm manuscripts were not being created earlier than 18th c.³

The sources of the tradition of Syriac charms as registered in manuscripts are multiple. For obvious reasons they are not restricted only to cultures of Ancient Near East or medieval Middle East. Since this magical tradition had evolved within a Christian culture, it incorporated popular figures, motives and formulas from other Christian traditions, for example Byzantine. As characteristic probably of most magical traditions, it was open almost to any influence of the adjacent cultures. In this paper I will concentrate on the genealogy of two formulas which occur in Syriac charms and have Medieval and Ancient Near Eastern parallels.

1. ‘*Gabriel on his [protected person’s] right and Michael on his left*’ (Cod A §7; IOM Syr. 4, 11r: 14 – 11v: 1)

This formula usually occurs in charms entitled “Before the authorities” and is an integral part of a longer formula as exemplified by the following text: “Gabriel (being) on his right and Michael on his left, I Am That I Am, Al-

³ The absence of earlier manuscripts of Syriac charms in collections and libraries may be explained by the fact that this type of texts was certainly not an object of constant copying in monastic scriptoria and careful preservation in libraries, as it happened with the writings of Church Fathers or the Bible (Peshitta). The copying of charms by local priests was apparently tolerated by church authorities but not welcomed. As the existing corpus demonstrates, the copying of charms was only possible within the Assyrian Church of the East, among Syrian-speaking Christians.

mighty God, Adonai (being) above his head, the Cherubim in front of him, and the Seraphim behind him” (Cod A §7). This longer formula and the motives contained in it are widespread in Ancient Near Eastern magical texts (Krämer 1928) and European Christian magic (Топорков 2005:221–2).

According to Louis Ginzberg, the similar formula occurs several times in ancient Jewish sources. My main concern here is the spacial orientation of the angels. As it appears, the most common orientation of (arch)angels in respect to the center in Jewish sources is the following: Michael to the right, Gabriel to the left⁴. In addition to a number of ancient Jewish sources it is also found in the Ashkenazic (Franco-Germanic) Jewish prayerbooks (in the text of the bedtime prayer) in the form very similar to the Syriac text in question. The angels are positioned around the praying person: ‘May Michael be at my right hand, Gabriel at my left; in front of me, Uriel, behind me, Raphael; and above my head the Presence of God’ (Sacks 2009:300).

The shift in orientation of Michael and Gabriel, attested in Syriac charms manuscripts, may have happened for several reasons, but now I want to point out some Arabic sources which exhibit the same orientation of angels as the Syriac charms. One of such texts was discussed by famous arabist Ignaz Goldziher, who endeavored to demonstrate the presence of Jewish influence in Arabic magical texts (Goldziher 1894). He quotes from an Arabic legend about the fight of ‘Ali (the forth caliph) with the dragon, published by René Basset (Basset 1893). In one version of this legend ‘Ali overcomes the demonic forces with the help of incantation, which includes a number of quotations from Koran and the following formula: ‘I spell you by the Name of God, by Ehye Asher Ehye Adonay Tsvaot El Shadday, Gabriel is to my right, Michael – to my left, Israfil is behind me and Allah appears before me’ (Goldziher 1894:359). A. Kohut testifies that this orientation of angels in Arabic sources is not casual, as it is recorded e.g. in al-Baydawi’s (ob. ca. 1316–7) commentary to Sura II, 91 (Kohut 1866:30).

Taking into account that Syriac-speaking Christians were in a lasting contact with Arabic-speaking people, e.g. Kurds, it is no surprise that ancient Jewish protective formula could be borrowed by Syriac Christians from Arabic written or oral sources. The presence of Arabic influence on Syriac charms tradi-

⁴ E.g., ‘Four classes of ministering angels minister and utter praise before the Holy One, blessed be He: the first camp (led by) Michael on His right, the second camp (led by) Gabriel on His left, the third camp (led by) Uriel before Him, and the fourth camp (led by) Raphael behind Him; and the Shekhinah of the Holy One, blessed be He, is in the centre’ (Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer 4; Friedlander 1916:22).

tion is undisputed since a number of manuscripts contain a charm built on Arabic formulas (Cod A §19; NYPL Syr. 2 f. 9r).

2. ‘Mother who strangles children’ (Cod B §7; Cod C §2, §25)

This formula usually appears in a typical text where a female demon reveals her names to a protective figure who is represented in Syriac charms by Mar ‘Avdisho (Odisho)⁵: ‘My first name (is) Geos⁶: second, Edilta: . . . eleventh, Zarduch, Lilita, Malvita, and the Strangling Mother of boys’ (Gollancz 1912: lxix). The female demonic figure in this story, at least in the aspect of child-killing, is a representative of the well-known type of demons sometimes called ‘a child-stealing witch’ (Gaster 1900), but probably it is better to use a more general label ‘child-harming’ or ‘child-killing’ female demon. The concept of such a demonic figure is probably universal, but most of the material we have is from Mediterranean, Middle East and Europe. According to J. Spier, who follows in many respects the earlier work of A. Barb, it is exemplified by Mesopotamian Lilitu and Lamashtu, Jewish Lilith, Greek Gello and Byzantine Gylou (Spier 1993; Barb 1966). The specific story associated with this figure was analyzed in many studies and is known as the ‘Sisinios/Melitene type’ according to the classification of R. Greenfield (Greenfield 1989).

As regards Syriac charms and their Near Eastern context, it is interesting to note the ‘strangling’ capacity of this personage. First of all, in Syriac charms manuscripts this feature of a female demon had been fossilised in a certain formula which appears almost invariably with the same wording as ‘*m’ hnwqt’ dtly*’ ‘mother who strangles children’. As most of the texts attest, this phrase is used in Syriac charms as one of the designations of a female demon who may have different names, including Lilita, Malwita, Zardukh and many other names. The tradition of Mesopotamian magic bowls, most closely related to Syriac charms linguistically and geographically, exhibits the same concept: ‘Just as there was a lilith who strangled (*dhnq*) human beings...’ (Naveh&Shaked 1998:159); ‘I adjure you, Haldas the lilith... who... strikes and kills and bewitches and throttles (*wh’nq*) boys and girls’ (Yamaouchi 1967:231)⁷.

⁵ The story is certainly belongs to ‘the Michael type’ of Gylou story (Greenfield 1989).

⁶ One version has ‘Gelos,’ and it is tempting to compare this name to Gylou, a female demon, mentioned e.g. in a Byzantine text *peri daimonon* (Spier 1993:35).

⁷ Lilith is written with lowercase letter because it is often understood in Mesopotamian bowls not as a personal name, but as a designation of a species of demons.

Probably the same idea is found in the incantation from Arslan Tash (Syria, ca. 7th c. BCE), whose dialect is believed to be Aramaic with some admixture of Phoenician: ‘Incantation against “T”, goddess, against SSM, son of PDRŠŠ’, god, and against the Breaker-of-the-lamb’s neck (*ḥnqt ’mr*)’ (Gibson 1982:83)⁸. One particular aspect of this comparison between Syriac *ḥnwqt’ dtly* ‘(female) strangler of children’ and Arslan Tash *ḥnqt ’mr* ‘(female) strangler of lamb’ may be of special interest here. Syriac *ṭly* is an old Aramaic term which is attested in Syriac and other Aramaic dialects. In Syriac and Mandaic it has the meaning ‘child, youth’, but in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and in Targumic Aramaic, where it has the same meaning ‘child’, it also had retained one of the older meanings – ‘lamb’ (Sokoloff 2002:504)⁹. The possible semantic overtone in Syriac phrase *ḥnwqt’ dtly* ‘(female) strangler of children/lambs(?)’ may point to the archaic nature of this phrase, but the question needs further study.

The Mesopotamian background of the phrase ‘(female) strangler of children’ is possible, taking into account commonly accepted Mesopotamian origin of the demon described in the Arslan Tash incantation. Indeed, the ‘strangling’ character of a female demon is seen e.g. in the Old Babylonian incantation against Lamashtu: *še-he-ru-tim ḥu-nu-quí ú-ḥa-an-na-aq* ‘She strangles little ones’ (YOS 11, 20.11; Cunningham 1997:109).

Among the texts discussed by J. Spier, there are two passages which deserve our attention in this connection. The first one is from The Testament of Salomon, chap. 13, where a female demon is saying: ‘I do not rest at night, but travel around all the world visiting women and, divining the hour [when they give birth], I search [for them] and strangle their newborn infants’ (Spier 1993:34). This passage was put by J. Spier historically into the Byzantine period, but for me it is important that this Greek document ‘incorporates early demonological beliefs and Jewish legends’ (Ibid.). Another passage is a quotation from *peri daimonon*, ‘a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century text formerly attributed to Michael Psellos’ (Ibid.). It demonstrates the survival of the concept of ‘strangling female demon’ in the later Byzantine literature. These are the words of the demon Gylou, who is met by archangel Michael: ‘I will strangle [their] children, or I will let them live for a while and then kill them...’ (Ibid.:35).

Now I may try to trace the history of the specific concept of ‘strangling female demon’, or ‘female demon, who strangles children’. As the above-

⁸ T. Gaster points to this parallel between Arslan Tash, Mesopotamian magic bowls and Syriac charms (Gaster 1947:186).

⁹ I am grateful to Leonid Kogan who drew my attention to this term in Arslan Tash and to the etymological aspect of this parallel.

mentioned texts demonstrate, the concept in question may have been born in Ancient Mesopotamia, not later than in the Old Babylonian period (1800–1600 BCE). It was borrowed by adjacent Aramaic-speaking people in Syria, as attested by the text from Arslan Tash (ca. 7th c. BCE), and by the creators of Aramaic magic bowls in Sassanian Mesopotamia (5th–7th cc. CE). It is most natural to think that the ‘strangling female demon’ was inherited by the Syriac charm tradition from the tradition of Aramaic magic bowls together with many other figures, motives and formulas common to these two traditions. The borrowing of a concept from Byzantine magic is possible in principle, but less probable in this particular case.

The genealogy of the two formulas used in Syriac charms which I tried to trace above demonstrates two types of borrowing. The formula ‘Gabriel on his right and Michael on his left’ was apparently borrowed from Arabic texts by way of a loan translation. The Arabic formula in the legend about ‘Ali fighting with dragon which includes the phrase ‘Ehye Asher Ehye Adonay Tsvaot El Shadday’ was also taken from an unknown Jewish source, most probably in this exact wording. In this and other similar cases we are dealing with direct verbal borrowing, sometimes through a loan translation (*calque*). In the case of the Syriac formula ‘mother who strangles children’ the mechanism of borrowing is different: the object of borrowing represents an idea of a certain demonic *modus operandi*, or a concept which may be expressed by different morphological models and syntactic constructions.

Abbreviations

Cod A – Codex A, published in Gollancz 1912: xxv–lx, 1–35

Cod B – Codex B, published in Gollancz 1912: lxi–lxxii, 36–76

Cod C – Codex C, published in Gollancz 1912: lxxiii–lxxxvii, 77–92

IOM – Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St. Petersburg

NYPL – New York Public Library

YOS 11 Van Dijk, J., Goetze, A., Hussey, M.I. *Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals* (Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, XI). New Haven and London, 1985

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Incantations in the Dead Sea Scrolls

11Q11, the fragmentary manuscript of an Essene composition found in Qumran contains four short texts. Another manuscript from the Qumran library, the Great Psalms Scroll, gives a list of the songs written by David (11Q5 27.4–10). According to this, the king wrote 3600 psalms, 364 songs for the daily perpetual burnt-offerings, 52 songs for the Sabbath offerings, and 30 songs (*šyr*) for the New Moon offerings, festival days and the Day of Atonement. The list is added with four ‘songs for charming the demon possessed with music’.

The list shows a clear calendrical character. 364 is the number of the days in the ideal calendar related to the solar year. Further numbers refer to the monthly and weekly division of this year. The exorcising songs were supposed to be recited on four different days of the year: on solar equinoxes and solstices, considered in many cultures as the four liminal days of the year. The additional element ‘to recite’ (*Ingn*) in the title refers explicitly to the musical accompaniment of the song, probably provided with a stringed instrument. The four compositions in 11Q11 were identified with the four davidic songs ‘for the afflicted’ mentioned in 11Q5. Songs 1–3 of 11Q11 are not known from any other source while Song 4 is identical (with only minor changes and additions) with Psalm 91. It is the only one among the four compositions the text of which can be reconstructed *in extenso*, thus its structure and meaning can be expounded. Accordingly, it is appropriate to begin our examination with this song.

Song 4 (Psalm 91), (11Q11 6:3–34)

The composition bears the title ‘A song of David’ (*šyr ldwyd*). This title is not present in the Masoretic text. Psalm 91 is one of the so-called *ašrē*-psalms (known also as macarism), a type named after the blessing form *ašrē* (‘blessed is the one who’) that introduces the psalms. Being blessed means a special status for the recipient of the blessing; it means being protected by divine power from the plagues that are enumerated in the following text. This status is expressed with the metaphor of being sheltered, staying in the shadow of the source of protection (Ps 91:1). God, the source of the ritual power, is called by several names in Psalm 91: Most High, Almighty (Ps 91:1), YHWH (Ps 91:2, 9), and God (Ps 91:2) (=11Q11 6:3–4) – the second name being the name used for magical purposes in the incantations. This is followed by a reference to God as a permanent source of assisting magical power: ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust’ (91:2).

To keep off evil forces Psalm 91 uses the form of negative affirmation declaring the ineffectiveness of any evil power in respect to those who hold the blessing of God. The plagues are listed in three sequences, The first series involves three items: 'the fowler's snare/trap', 'pestilence' (*dbr*), and 'destruction' (Ps 91:3) (11Q11 6:5). The second series comprises four names: 'nocturnal dread', 'arrow which flies by day', 'pestilence coming in darkness', and 'destruction devastating at noon' (Ps 91:5–8) (11Q11 6:7–8). The third series includes five components, namely 'stone', 'lion', 'adder', 'young lion', and 'serpent' (Ps 91:121–3) (11Q11.11–12). Two animals (serpent, lion) are doubled by synonyms. The total number of the plagues is twelve (3+4+5=12) so as to maintain numeric symbolism.

The items of the three series evoke a sense of helplessness, pestilence (*deber*, *qeteb*), plague, nocturnal angst, and physical dangers caused by natural obstacles (stone) and by animal onslaughts and snakebites (the latter one being the object of a number of incantations and amulet texts written throughout the ancient Near East). The metaphor of the arrow may refer to both sun stroke and pestilence, arrows (of the sun) being particularly associated with pestilence in antiquity. The temporal adverbs connected with some plagues allude to the continuous presence of danger of plague in the community. A number of evil agents listed in Ps 91 have a demonic character.

The negotiator of the divine help in Psalm 91 is God's angel (*ml'kw*) who guards the suppliant on his ways (Ps 91:11). The expression refers to the religious practice governed by the right interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Divine blessing assures magical power and protection against physical evil represented in the form of plagues.

The psalm text in 11Q11 ends with the words, 'And [t]he[y] shall an[swer]: Amen, amen.] Selah' (11Q11 vi.14), the closing formula of numerous biblical psalms. This serves as a magical reinforcement of the content of the speech act. The words preceding the formula lead to suppose a practice of communal recitation of the psalm.

Song 3 (11Q11 5:4–6:3)

According to its title, this is a composition attributed to David, 'a charm for the stricken, in Yahweh's name' (11Q11). The generic term 'charm' (*lḥš*) is unattested in Psalms. It clearly refers to a magical song used against demonic forces. The title also indicates at what time the song is to be recited (11Q11 5:5). A possible reconstruction of the text leads one to see here a reference to the *lyl šmrym*, the vigil before the day of the Exodus (Exod 12:42).

The title is followed by a question: ‘Who are you?’ It leads one to reconstruct a scene of encountering the demon which is to be made harmless. Learning the name of the demon (if not known to the exorcist) is the first objective of any exorcism and the initial phase of the ritual. It seems that in 11Q11 the person attacked by the demon and the exorcist are the same person.

The demon is described in 11Q11 as a visible phenomenon, probably with human traits (face) and animal characteristics (horns) (11Q11 5:7). The natural element associated with the demon is darkness – demons usually are thought to be dwelling in the nether world, the country of dust and darkness. Moreover, darkness in Essene thinking has a peculiar function being identified with sins and impurity.

Further characteristics of the demon are originating ‘from humans and from the seed of the holy ones’ (11Q11 5:6). This refers to the tradition of the Watchers known from the Enochic collection (1 En. 6–11) according to which the sexual union of human women with the Watchers (heavenly beings called also ‘holy ones’) resulted in the emergence of giants, originators of the demons. This tradition is attested in several Qumran texts. It seems that the demon described here is a *phantasma*, mentioned also in amulet texts. The image of the horned demon may have its origin in the figures of horned semi-divine figures known throughout Mesopotamia and Syria. No sickness or plague is named in the text of the third song of 11Q11. It seems that the ‘plague’ was the *phantasma* itself, the apparition of the demon.

Legible words of the subsequent part of the text (11Q11 5:8–6:3) refer to the nether world (*ṯḥtyt*, 11Q11 5:9), Sheol, and bronze gates (11Q11 5:9). Sheol is depicted as the world of darkness through the use of the antonym to light (*lw’wr*, 11Q11 5:10). This part can be reconstructed with the help of well-known pieces of the exorcistic literature where the conquest of the demon is described as its binding, *defixatio*. The line containing words referring to God, the nether world, and its bronze gates (11Q11 5:9) is, most likely, a statement concerning the disempowering of the demon and its binding and casting into the nether world. The next line depicts the dark realm of Sheol, the place of punishment of the demon.

The readable words in lines 11Q11 5:11–14 are ‘angel’, ‘guard’, ‘[spirit of] justice’, ‘spirit of hostility’, ‘through his power’, ‘Go[d]’. These terms suggest that this portion of the text is a report on the punishment of sinners and the deliverance of righteous, supposedly by an angel (11Q11 5:11–14). This act will end with the complete annihilation of the lot of ‘the sons of Belial’ (11Q11 6:1–3), the group diametrically opposite to that of the righteous.

The word *selah*, preceded probably by two *amen*, most likely marks the end of the composition (11Q11 6:3).

Song 2 (11Q11 2:1–5:3)

There are good reasons to reconstruct its title, purpose, and genre on the basis of the third and fourth as, '[David's composition. For the stricken; a charm] in the name of [YHWH]'. In view of the very fragmentary character of the text only some motifs and names can be recognized in the text. Solomon's name is mentioned in a context of incantation, together with spirits and demons (11Q11 2:2–3). This may be a reference to the origin and efficacy of the incantation (and at the same time the first reference to Solomon in magical literature).

Subsequent lines enumerate names and characteristics of the demons (11Q11 2:3–5), together with YHWH as the creator God of the universe (11Q11 3:6–[14]), enumerating the signs and wonders of YHWH's almighty power (11Q11 3:1–3). This reference serves for attesting God's universal power, and his supremacy over the demons.

The word *mšby* ('adjuring') occurs twice in the text of the second song (11Q11 3:4, 4:1). This term (and its equivalents in other languages) is a substantial element of the exorcistic formula: the exorcist calls up the demon and, with the help of the divine/magic power that is invoked by him, compels it to leave the human community or the person possessed. The demon is sent to a place that lies outside the borders of the local human community. This can either be an impure place, the desert (thought to be a space frequented by demons), or the nether world, i.e., the home of ghosts and other demons. In 11Q11 it is the nether world, to which the expressions 'into the great Abyss' (11Q11 4:7) and the 'curse of Abaddon' (11Q11 4:10) refer. The text mentions 'spirits', without any specification of their character; the specific name of the illness or the plague caused by them is not known either. The mention of these terms together with Raphael's name (11Q11 5:3), and the well-known background of the angel's healing role lead us to suppose that the theme of Song 2 was an illness caused by spirits.

The incantation was probably closed by the formula 'Amen, amen, selah' (11Q11 v.3).

The First Song (11Q11 1:1–[14])

Due to the fragmentary state of the text we can only suppose that it began with a title similar to those of songs 2 and 3. The word 'seventy' (2 ii 7) – a 'magical' number – may refer to demons mentioned later in the song (*šḏym*, 1:10). Specific words, such as 'earth', 'man', and 'water', probably allude to the works of the creation and the role of YHWH as a creator God whose omnipotence is the basis for the success of the charm. The nature of the plague cannot be reconstructed from the fragments. The words 'oath' (1:3), and 'adjuring you' (1:7)

may refer to the forcing and expelling of the demon. The word ‘he will dwell’ (i:11) may refer to the nether world, the dwelling place of the demon overpowered. The end of the song was probably ‘Amen, amen, Selah’, the common ending of individual and communal prayers recited aloud.

To sum up, it can be established that probably all of the four songs have a title with a reference to David as its author. Song 2 mentions also Solomon, probably as a person who successfully used the incantation. The title of Song 4 (Psalm 91) has no generic reference. Song 3, according to its title, is an incantation (*lahas̄*), and Songs 1–2 might have been labeled with the same generic term (*lahas̄*).

Song 4 (Psalm 91) shows a tripartite structure, with three series containing names of various plagues. The series repeatedly end with a reference to the magical power. The composition is concluded with a formula that refers to a communal recitation. Psalm 91 is a blessing text, used in 11Q11 probably with an apotropaic purpose, intended to keep away demonic dangers and plagues. It seems that songs 1–3 have a common structure different from that of Song 4 (Ps 91) and the *ašrē*-psalms in general. The title and the reference to the magical power in these songs is followed by a section that gives a description of the demonic harm and refers to the almighty God, the creator of the universe. This is followed by an exorcistic formula, the ‘fixation’ of the demon, introduced by the term ‘[I am] adjuring’ (*mšby*). The act of the disempowering of the demon is followed by a description of its lot: to be sent to the nether world and locked there. Following a repeated reference to the source of the magical power the compositions are closed by the formula ‘Amen, amen, selah’. Song 4 (Psalm 91) of 11Q11 was probably performed during a communal recitation while this cannot be proven for the rest of the songs.

In light of the calendrical setting of the list of 11Q5 the question arises: which dates and occasions were the four songs recited on, and what was their possible role and function? Equinoxes and solstices were considered in ancient cultures as liminal time and there is good reason to suppose that the four songs were recited at the turning-points of the solar year. The beginning of the year in the schematic form of the Jewish ritual calendar might have been fixed to the time of the fall equinox. The date of the recitation of the first song was this date. The second song may have been recited at the winter solstice, the third one at the spring equinox, and the fourth one (Ps 91) at the summer solstice. The sun at the time of summer solstice was thought to be the cause of noxious effects and plagues, and Psalm 91 was written against sunstroke, pestilence, and physical dangers. Rescue from these dangers is attributed to God who dominates over heavenly bodies. Mesopotamian hymns recited at the

summer solstice and addressed to the sun-god Nergal serve as a good parallel to this apotropaic practice.

Song 3, a charm (*lhš*) describing a *phantasma* seen in a nocturnal vision, may have been recited at the spring equinox and was probably connected with the night vigil that preceded the feast of Passover. Songs 2 and 1 might have been recited, respectively, at the winter solstice and the autumn equinox. The content of Song 2 is not known; the mentioning of the angel Raphael at the end of the text (11Q11 5.3) leads one to suppose that it was written against illnesses and physical evil (perhaps plagues and epidemics). Song 1 was supposedly recited at the fall equinox, neither its purpose nor its content are known.

The length and the form of 11Q11 do not allow for the possibility that the text could be stored inside an amulet worn on the body. The leather on which the text was written shows no traces of folding. The manuscript was, in all probability, a library copy used as a manual for appointed days, in special liturgies. The text of 11Q11 is the earliest example for the use of a psalm text in a magical liturgical context. Songs 1–3 are not known from any other collection. They are apparently ‘new’ texts, written for the special objects of an apotropaic collection. They reflect the characteristics of magical incantations, containing an invocation to the magical power, describing the demonic harm, the disempowering the demon, its and expelling to the nether world.

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**‘Do not allow sleep or health to him who has done me wrong...’:
Charms against Thefts in Ancient Rome and Modern Russia**

The present paper continues our earlier work on the functions of personal names within charm texts. We had suggested before that any personal name found within a charm fitted into one of the two categories: it is a background name (a name of a deity/saint, according to the author’s confessional identity) or a subject name (the particular name of a person for/against whom the charm is intended)¹. By the ‘subject name’ we understand any proper name in the text of a charm, which transforms a ‘receipt’ (the term of J.G. Gager, see Gager 1992) of a potentially magical text into a real magical performance. According to the observation of V.N. Toporov, introducing a personal name into a charm is mandatory, ‘A text of a charm is a mere text and nothing more, until a name is incorporated into its large immutable body. It is only adding the name, uttering it turns a verbal text into a ritual performance, that is, into an actual charm that works as such’ (Toporov 1993:100).

However, in many cases putting a name (subject name) into the charm is impossible, because it is not known either to the charmer or to his/her customer, the charm not being intended against a particular person. This is exactly the case with charms against thieves, which are quite widespread. Charms of this type are generally referred to as ‘Justice Prayers’ (for the history of the term and of research on this category of *tabellae*, see Versnel 1991).

The first known Latin *tabella defixionum* of this type was found in 1972, in Italica (Spain). Its text roughly translates:

Domna Fons Foyi [...] ut tu persequaris tuas res demando quiscunque caligas meas telluit et solias tibi illa demando (ut) illas aboitor si quis puella si mulier siue [ho]mo inuolauit [...] illos persequaris.

(O Mistress Spring Foyi... I ask you track down your possessions. Whoever has stolen my shoes and sandals I ask that you... Whether it is a girl, a woman or a man who stole them... pursue them.)

(Versnel 1991:60)

Calling the stolen sandals the ‘possessions’ of Mistress Spring Foyi may seem baffling for a modern reader, yet it is fully explicable through the idea

¹ For more details, see (Mikhailova 2006, 2010).

that the deity owned the objects entrusted to her or brought under her protection.

Many lead tablets of the same type – aimed at getting back one’s stolen properties – are known from the earlier Greek tradition. Compare, for instance, the tablet found in 1957 on the island of Delos (1st cent. BC?). Its text pleads the gods to put their fury against the unknown people who had stolen the customer’s necklace (the customer’s gender is unidentifiable):

Κύριοι Θεοί οἱ Συκοναίοι Κ[...]
Κυρία Θεά Συρία ἡ Συκονα Σ[...]
ΕΑ ἐκδικήσετε καὶ ἀρετὴν
γεννήσετε κέ διοργιάσετε
τὸν ἄραντα, τὸν κλέψαντα τόδρακιον,
τοῦ συνιδότες, τοῦ μέρος
λαβόντες ἴδε γυνὴ ἢτε ἀνὴρ.

(Lords gods Sykoniai, Lady goddess Syria Sykona, punish, and give expression to your wondrous power and direct your anger to the one who took away my necklace, who stole it, those who had knowledge of it and those who were accomplices, whether man or woman.)

(Jordan 1985:158)

Tablets of that type were found in abundance during the excavations at the Bath site of the Gallo-Roman temple dedicated to the goddess Sulis Minerva (see Tomlin 1988). This site, with its natural hot spring that is up to now believed to have healing properties had already been worshiped in the pre-Roman era and was associated with the goddess Sulis whom the Romans would later identify with Minerva. The 1st century AD saw the building of a temple and baths at the site. Later the temple was enlarged and decorated with statues. ‘Visited by many thousands of tourists today, Roman Bath was also, as is proved by inscriptions on stone from the areas, visited by travelers from far and wide during the glory years of the Empire’ (Mees 2009:30).

Among the multiple archaeological findings made at the site (such as coins or votive images of body parts allegedly healed by the goddess), there are 130 lead tablets of diverse content. Along with name lists and commendations addressed to the goddess, there is a considerable proportion of tablets that can also be categorized as Justice Prayers. Their authors address Sulis in order to return stolen things. See, for instance:

Docilianus Bruceri deae sanctissimae Suli devoveo eum qui caracellam
meam involaverit si vir si femina si servus si liber ut [...] dea Sulis maximo

letum adigat nec ei somnum permittat nec natos nec nascentes donec caracallam ad templum sui numinis pertulerit.

(Docilianus (son) of Brucerus to the most holy goddess Sulis. I curse him who has stolen my hooded cloak, whether man or woman, whether slave or free, that... the goddess Sulis inflict death upon... and not allow him sleep or children now and in the future, until he has brought my hooded cloak to the temple of her divinity.)

(Tomlin 1988:122)

or

deae Suli Minervae Solinus dono nutnini tuo maiestati paxsam balnearem et palleum nec permittas somnum nec sanitatem [...]ei qui mihi fraudem fecit si vir si femina si servus si liber nissi se retegens istas species ad templum tuum detulerit...

(Solinus to the goddess Sulis Minerva. I give to your divinity and majesty my bathing tunic and cloak. Do not allow sleep or health to him who has done me wrong, whether man or woman, whether slave or free, unless he reveals himself and bring those goods to your temple...)

(Tomlin 1988:150)

What is remarkable here, is the formulaic nature of these texts, which show variations depending on the object stolen yet almost identical in describing the supposed thief, ‘whether man or woman, whether slave or free’. However, all known inscriptions differ in handwriting which indicates that ‘written pages or preparatory models used in the manufacture of the tablets may have been prepared by professional curse-composers, but the individual curses of the *defixiones* were required to write the texts onto the specially created lamellas themselves’ (Mees 2009:33). It seems plausible to suggest that both the formula relating to the thieves and the list of curses intended to affect them in case they do not return the stolen properties circulated in oral tradition and were of folkloric origin, that is, they were incorporated in the background knowledge of any person belonging to this culture.

The abundance of such tablets in the temple dedicated to Sulis Minerva is hardly surprising, since the apodyterium where bath-goers would store their clothes had cubicles rather than lockers. Their addressing Sulis suggests that she was seen as the deity responsible for the belongings ‘entrusted’ to her.

The explainable absence of subject names in these texts seems to indicate that they were replaced in the charms (Graeco-Roman *defixiones* being indeed charms) by the formula identifying the potential victim as ‘the one who has stolen my property’. Therefore, the invariable rule of introducing a personal name into the body of the charm predicted by Toporov seems to be fulfilled. It

is also worth noticing that the Latin *nomen* had a broader meaning than just ‘personal name’ signifying also ‘identity’ (represented in a name). Compare, thereupon, a similar curse against an unspecified thief found on the foreshore of the Hamble Estuary, Hampshire:

domine Neptune, tibi dono hominem qui solidum involavit Muconi et argentiolos sex. ideo dono **nomina** qui decepit, si mascel si femina, si puuer si puuella. ideo dono tibi, Niske, et Neptuno vitam, valitudinem, sanguem eius qui conscius fueris eius deceptionis. animus qui hoc involavit et qui conscius fuerit ut eum decipias. furem qui hoc involavit sanguem eius consumas et decipias, domine Neptune.

(Lord Neptune, I give you the man who has stolen the solidus and six argentioli of Muconius. So I give the **names** who took them away, whether male or female, whether boy or girl. So I give you, Niskus, and to Neptune the life, health, blood of him who has been privy to that taking-away. The mind which stole this and which has been privy to it, may you take it away. The thief who stole this, may you consume his blood and take it away, Lord Neptune.)

(Bowman et al.:2)

The oral charming tradition faces the same challenge: to identify the thief and to return one’s belonging stolen by an unknown person. However, oral charms, unlike Graeco-Roman lead tablets, can also be protective. Texts and magical actions aimed at *preventing* the theft are not at all infrequent:

Ne forstolen, ne forholen nanuht þæs ðe ic age, þe ma ðe mihte Herod urne drihten.

(May nothing I own be stolen or concealed, any more than Herod could steal or conceal our Lord.)

(Storms 1948:209)

Compare the Russian text below:

Нужно взять палку из муравейника и объехать с нею вокруг стада три раза, а потом воткнуть по середине круга и сказать: Заговариваю я (имя рек), сей заговор над моим табуном. Как мураши где они ни ходят, ни гуляют, а приходят и не отлучаются от своего гнезда – так бы мои добрые кони не вышли бы из сего круга.

(Take a stick out of an anthill and ride with it around your herd three times; then stick it in the middle of the circle and say: Casting I am, [the speaker’s name], this charm upon my herd, As ants, wherever they come and go, come back to their nest and never leave it, so may my good horses never get out of this circle.)

(Majkov 1994:123)