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“His Children Destroy the Residence and Building”: An Unpublished Mandaic Amulet on Ptahil’s Creations (MLSC 4)

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Abstract: This article presents the *editio princeps* of a Mandaean amulet inscribed on a lead lamella (MLSC 4). The amulet contains two formula. The first describes how the children of Ptahil, who are described as “the guardians of the ruins”, wreak havoc in the world. The formula draws heavily on Mandaean lore. The second formula is mostly lost, and only the end survives. The article discusses material aspects of the artefact and provides a full transliteration and translation of its contents, a reconstruction of some broken sections based upon unpublished parallels, and notes that relate to linguistic and literary aspects of the text.

Keywords: Mandaic, magic, epigraphy, Semitic languages, Aramaic, amulets

1 Introduction

This article presents the first edition of a Mandaean amulet inscribed upon a lead lamella, MLSC 4, as part of our ongoing project to publish the entire corpus of the Mandaean amulets in the Martin Schøyen Collection with reference to related materials. In total, the Schøyen Collection contains 36 separately numbered items (some consisting of several lamellae or fragments), from which it has been possible to reconstruct 20 amulets.¹ On the basis of their scripts, these appear to be the work of 11 scribes. It is generally agreed that the Mandaic epigraphic sources written on lamellae and clay bowls are to be dated to the fifth to seventh centuries CE, though we lack precise details on their context as these items were apparently not discovered in orderly archaeological excavations.

2 Description

MLSC 4 (= MS 2087/4) is a single lead lamella inscribed upon both sides in opposite directions. At its maximal dimensions, the lamella measures 21.7 cm x 5 cm, but it has split into two uneven fragments that form a perfect join between lines 51–52 of the recto, and correspondingly between lines 12–13 of the verso. The larger fragment is generally well preserved, allowing for a confident reading in most places, while the smaller fragment has been significantly damaged. Regrettably, the text on the recto of the small fragment is no longer legible owing to severe corrosion; most of the verso, however, is

¹ Accordingly, our numbering of the amulets does not always match the item numbers in the Schøyen Collection. To differentiate between these numbering systems, we now refer to the reconstructed amulets with the abbreviation MLSC (Mandaean Lamellae in the Schøyen Collection) and a numeral, while individual items from the Schøyen Collection are referred to by their catalogue numbers: MS and a numeral. Other publications: MLSC 1 in Morgenstern and Schlüter 2016; MLSC 2 in Morgenstern and Abudraham 2023; MLSC 7 in Morgenstern and Abudraham, forthcoming; MLSC 10 in Morgenstern 2015; MLSC 11 in Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017; MLSC 13 in Abudraham, 2021; and MLSC 17 in Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017; MLSC 18 and 19 in Abudraham and Morgenstern, forthcoming.

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still visible. Corrosion is also apparent on the lower part of the larger fragment's verso where there is no writing.

Our reconstruction of the amulet is based upon both textual and material considerations. It is apparent from textual parallels that the surviving lamella contains the remains of two independent spells. One spell is likely to have stood at the start of the amulet, as it begins at the top of the cleanly cut and demarcated lamella. Accordingly, we regard this side to be the recto (see Figs 2–3). The other formula, preserved only on the verso, was presumably the last in the series of formulae that the amulet contained, as its conclusion is marked by a horizontal score about a third of the way down the verso, and the remainder is left blank (see Figs 4–5).² The green-tinted corrosion that appears only on the lower portion of the verso may be ascribed to contact with the casing in which the amulet was placed.³ The parallel copies of these spells indicate that a considerable portion of text has been lost at the end of the first formula and the start of the other, in all likelihood inscribed on a separate lamella.⁴

The scribe had a tendency to extend the baseline of the letters **m** (𐤌) and **q** (𐤒) to the end of the line (see I:22, 27, 30, 34) and, with the exception of one instance (II:6–7), avoided splitting words between two lines. As is the case with the majority of the Mandaic amulets on lamellae in the Schøyen Collection, the margins on both sides are demarcated by vertical lines (left and right). There are two indications that these vertical lines were incised on the surface of the lamella before the execution of the text: 1. in one place, the scribe marks with a semi-circular line a word that crosses the margin boundaries (see Fig. 1); 2. although the text on the verso occupies only one third of the surface, the two vertical lines stretched far below the end of the text.



Figure 1: **naṭria hurbia** “O guardians of the ruins” (MLSC 4 I [MS 2087/4]:10)

The amulet was written for the protection of a pregnant woman named Bahrāndū daughter of Mariai and her foetus (I:4–6; II:12–14). She would appear to be the same Bahrāndū mentioned in another Mandaic amulet in the Schøyen Collection as the client's mother. As we have seen, MLSC 4 comprises two independent formulae, (a) and (b) below:

- a. **bnḥ mhrbilḥ lhikla ubniana** “His children destroy the residence and building”.

These words, taken from the opening of the spell, appear as its title on the back of an unpublished bowl containing a badly damaged parallel copy of it (MS 2054/85). The formula is designated against a group of maleficent forces referred to as “the guardians of the ruins of the residences and buildings of the children of Adam” (**naṭria hurbia hiklia ubniana ḏbnḥ ḏadam**). These forces are also described as the children of Ptahil.

² For similar cases in the epigraphic corpus, see Amulet BM 135796 I verso (unpublished), MLSC 15 Part IV (= MS 2087/15, verso; unpublished).

³ We owe this observation to Iliya Reznitsky.

⁴ The writing of amulets on series of lamellae was common practice amongst the Mandaean (see, e.g., Lidzbarski 1909; Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017).

In his seminal study of the Mandaean religion, Brandt noted the ambivalent attitude in Mandaean literature towards Ptahil.⁵ On the one hand, he is a descendant of the light-world who creates the world on the instructions of his father, Aḇaṭor (Gy. 336ff.), to which we may add that he is not only described as **bania baita** “the builder of the house” (Gy. 127:5) but also **naṭar baita** “the guardian of the house” (Jb. 5:6).⁶ On the other hand, Ptahil exceeds his brief and calls into being evil creeping animals, creations of darkness, and the evil Ruha and her seven children (Gy. 339:14). Although Ptahil is horrified by the results of his actions and tells his corrupt creations that they can only serve him if they do good deeds, he is punished by his father Aḇaṭor by a bond of separation, and Hiḇil Ziwa is dispatched to the world to repair the damage (Gy. 339:14 ff.). Another account in *The Book of the Zodiac* refers to the seven stars and twelve zodiac signs as Ptahil’s children (AM 201:20).⁷

Our text appears to share a similar attitude towards the act of creation: it is not regarded as inherently evil, but rather it is the corrupt “guardians”, the children of Ptahil, who wreak havoc by destroying what should have been the goodly residence and building (i.e., the material world) that their father built (I:6–9). The guardians kill the cattle, scourge and weaken people, darken their dwellings and impose upon them dreadful afflictions (I:9–27). To prevent the guardians from harming people – amongst them the client for whom the present lamella was written – the anonymous protagonist has cast upon them “the great spell of the primordial Life” which came from “the single great name of the great primordial Life” (I:27–34). As a result of this counteraction, a series of celestial elements and their malevolent companions have been bound and tied up (I:35–51ff.). These elements include the stars and Pleiades (**kukbia ukima**), the whole sphere of heaven and earth in its entirety (**kulha ‘us-pira dšumia uarqa kulha**), the primordial inhabitant heroes of the world (**gbaria daiaria qdamaiḥ**), the seven angels of the house (**šuba mlakia dḇita**), the twelve constellations (**trisar maluašia**), their amulet-spirits and imprecations (**humraiḥn [u]aqria[^]tun[^]**), etc. The narrative of the spell thus draws extensively on various aspects of Mandaean lore found also in the canonical Mandaean works.

While not a direct parallel, the formula found on the Mandaic magic bowl Wolfe 37 shares many themes and expressions with our text and, where appropriate, these are cited in our commentary.⁸

b. **ktibitin l’liata bšumaikun** (?) “You are written, O liliths, by your names”

As noted, the verso of the lamella includes the final lines of a much longer spell that survives in a more complete version on an unpublished magic bowl (PC 28).⁹ In the parallel, the spell opens with the words that we have proposed here as its title. A looser parallel is to be found in *Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata*, a protective formula known to date only from late manuscripts.¹⁰ The spell includes a repetitive theme of binding of various liliths that are harming the client, and the liliths mentioned in the formula by their explicit names are finally bound and sealed and subdued by “Zarzanit/Zarz’el the signet, by which are sealed the gates of heaven and earth” (II:5–11).

5 Brandt 1889: 49–55.

6 Häberl and McGrath 2020: 341.

7 See in detail below, comments to I:6–9.

8 To be published in Ford and Morgenstern, forthcoming.

9 This text too will be published in Ford and Morgenstern, forthcoming.

10 The earliest dated textual witness of *Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata* known to us is DC 23, copied in 1226 AH (1811 CE). Another textual tradition is represented by DC 43F, copied in 1270 AH (1853 CE). Other manuscripts include RRC 2A, copied in 1250 AH (1834–35 CE), and RRC 1F, copied in 1286 AH (1869–70 CE). RRC 1Y and RRC 3Z are undated but both are written in a late hand. Fragmentary manuscripts include RRC 2A, copied in 1250 AH (1834–35 CE), which is missing several lines and begins at the text corresponding to l. 39 of our CAL edition; and RRC 3V of which only a short section survives, corresponding to ll. 7–36 of the CAL edition (its text is close to that of DC 23).

3 Text and Translation¹¹

Part I – MS 2087/4 recto

bšumaihun dhiia rbia	1	In the name of the great transcendent
nukraiḥ mn almia dnhura	2	Life from the superior worlds of light
iatiria d'lauia kulhn ¹² 'ubadi^a^	3	that is above all deeds.
asuta uzarzata uhatamta	4	May there be healing and arming and sealing
thuiḥ lpgra ul'ula dbhrandu	5	unto the body and foetus of Bahrāndū
pt mriai mn hiia bnḥ	6	daughter of Mariai from Life! His children
mhrbilḥ lhikla ubniana	7	destroy the residence and building –
ḍabna abhun ptahil	8	that their father Ptahil built –
ḍbnḥ ḍadam ašbitala^ikun^	9	of the children of Adam. I have adjured you
umumnalaikun naṭria hurbia	10	and made you swear, O guardians of the ruins of
hiklia ubniana ḍbnḥ d	11	the residences and buildings of the children of
adam uagaṭlia hiua b'ira ¹³	12	Adam and killers of the cattle
ḍbguḥ ubrugzaihn ¹⁴ gaṭlia	13	that are within it. And in their fury they kill
dmu hiua b'ira b'idaiun	14	... cattle with their hands.
brugzaihun mpgmailhun	15	In their fury they injure
umšplhun lbnḥ ḍadam	16	and scourge the children of Adam
umšaušilun lrazia d	17	and corrupt the forces that
bguaihun unasibila lšinata	18	are within them. And they take the sleep
ḍainaihun umaqimlhun	19	of their eyes and set
lhiklaiun ubnianun ḍbnḥ d	20	the residences and buildings of the children of
adam barplia dhišuka	21	Adam in clouds of darkness
lqudamiun ulqudam	22	– before them and before
anpaihun lmišbaq kiba	23	their faces – to let loose pain
lrišaihun hidara lmuqraiun	24	upon their heads, vertigo upon their brains,
dhlata blilbabaihun hišuka	25	fear in their hearts, darkness
lainaiun nqišia l'qbaihun	26	upon their eyes, knocking upon their heels,
ratitia lhanadamaikun tum	27	trembling upon their limbs. Moreover,
ašbitalaikun umumnalkun	28	I have adjured you and made you swear,
naṭaria hrbia ¹⁵ hiklia	29	O guardians of the ruins, residences
ubniana ¹⁶ ḍbnḥ ḍadam	30	and buildings of the children of Adam
bhahu pugdama rba d	31	by that great saying of the
hiia qdamiḥ ḍmn had	32	Primordial Life that from one
šuma šuma rba dhiia	33	name – the great name of the great
rbia qdamiḥ npaq	34	primordial Life – has
'lauaikun 'šṭirat šumia	35	confronted you. Bound was heaven
uarqa bguḥ 'šṭar kukbia	36	and the earth within it. Bound were the stars
ukima u'šṭirat kulha	37	and Pleiades. And bound was the entire
'ušpira dšumia uarqa	38	sphere of heaven and the earth
kulha u'šṭar kulhun	39	in its entirety. And bound were all the
gbaria daiaria qdamiḥ	40	mighty men, the primordial dwellers

¹¹ For the conventions used herein, see the end of this article.

¹² Read: **kulhun**.

¹³ The horizontal upper stroke of the **r** was rewritten.

¹⁴ Read: **ubrugzaihun** (cf. below I:15).

¹⁵ Defective spelling of **hurbia** (cf. above I:10).

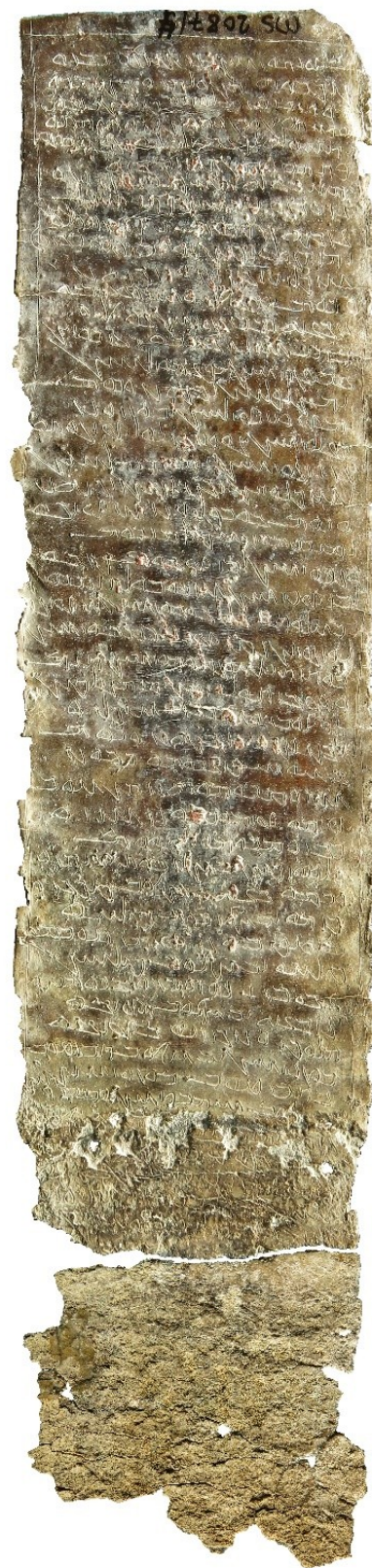
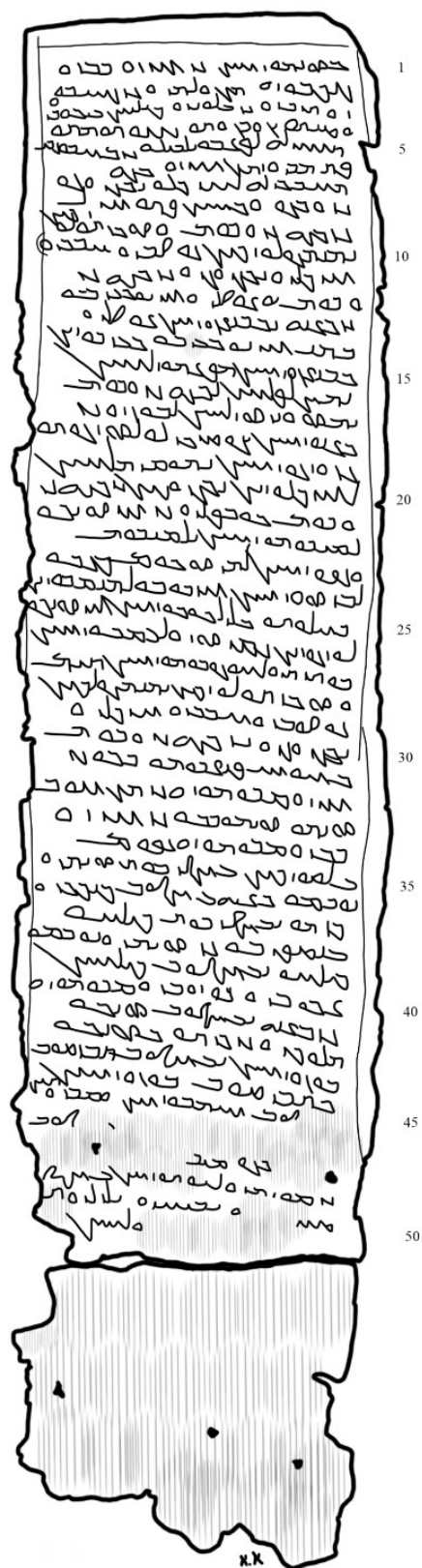
¹⁶ The base of the **b** was rewritten.

ḏbguḥ uʿṣṭar šuba	41	that are within it. And bound were the seven
mlakia ḏbita bšuba	42	angels of the house by their seven
razaihun uʿṣṭar trisar	43	mysteries. And bound were the twelve
btrisar razaihun	44	by their twelve mysteries.
[ʿṣ]ṭar humraiḥn [u]aqriaʿ tunʿ	45	[B]ound were their amulet-spirits [and] their impreca-
		tions
ḏq[ai]ma [l]u[atai]hun [ʿṣ]ṭar	46	that en[du]re w[ith] them. Bound were
[...]bna qr[nata...]	47	[...] of the cor[ners ...] (?)
ḏqaimia luataihun ʿṣṭa[r]	48	that endure with them. Bound were
sh[ri]a uruhia [u]liliat[a]	49	the <i>sahirs</i> and the spirits [and] the lilit[h]s
[...]alhun	50	[...]
uʿṣṭ[...]	51	And bou[nd were ...]
[...]	52	[...]
[...]	53	[...]
[...]	54	[...]
[...]	55	[...]
[...]	56	[...]

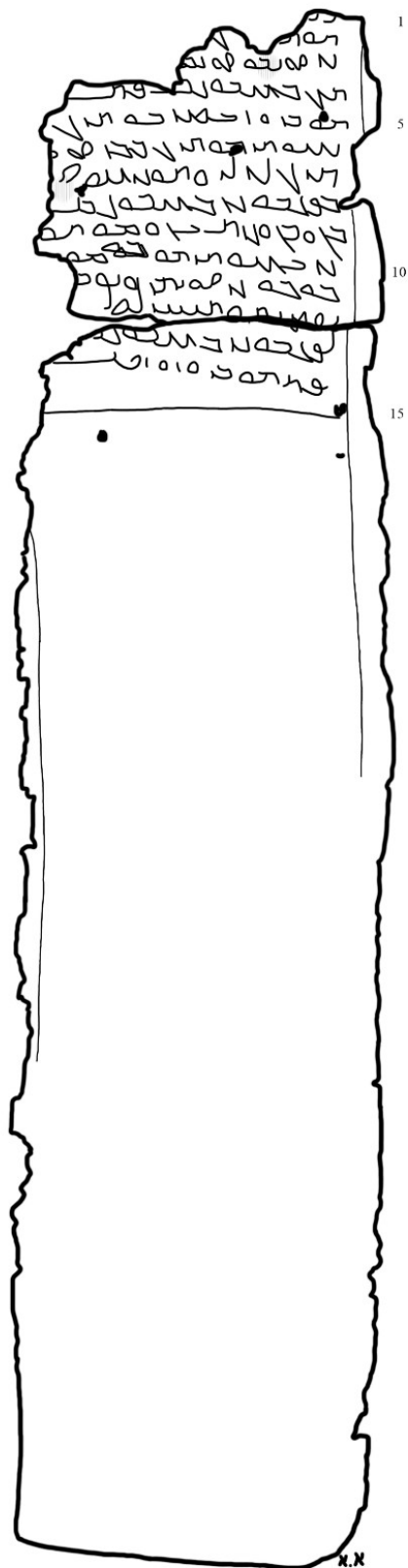
Part II – MS 2087/4 verso

u[...]	1	and [...]
tat[aiḥ] [u]n[ibṭl razaiun]	2	lower ... [and] may [the mysteries]
ḏšuba šubʿ[ahia]	3	of the Seven pla[nets but annulled]
mn bhrand[u] pt	4	from Bahrāndū daughter
mariai ʿsiratin	5	of Mariai. You are bound
uhatimatin ukbiša-	6	and sealed and subdued,
tin liliata ḏhaṭ[ia]	7	liliths that har[m]
bpgra ḏbhrandu	8	unto the body of Bahrāndū,
bzarzanit ʿzaqata	9	by the signet of Zarzanit,
ḏʿhatimabh¹⁷	10	by which are sealed
baba ḏšumia uarʿqaʿ	11	the gates of the heaven and earth.
uasuta thuilh	12	And may there be healing
lpgra ḏbhrand[u]	13	unto the body of Bahrāndū
pt mariaai ai s_____	14	daughter of Mariai.
	15	_____

17 The **h** is written above a.



Figures 2–3: MLSC 4 I



Figures 4–5: MLSC 4 II

4 Comments

Incantation a: **bnh mhrbilh lhikla ubniana** “His children destroy the residence and building”

I 2. **nukraih** “transcendent”. Here and in **qdamaih** “primordial” (I 32), our scribe has employed the orthography **-aih** for the gentilic and adjectival morpheme **-āyē** that is characteristic of Early Mandaic.¹⁸

I 5–6. **bhrandu pt miriai** “Bahrāndū daughter of Miriai”. The client’s name is found in a slightly different spelling on another lamella from the Schøyen Collection as part of the lineage of a male client: **pšar [upu]q mn hazin pgrh unišmth dšar[uqia br bhrandu umn bhrandu pt miriai umn narasai zauh** “be exorcised and [depar]t from this the body and soul of Šaroqi son of Bahrāndū and from Bahrāndū daughter of Miriai and from Narasai his spouse” (MLSC 9 II [MS 2087/8_b]:30–36). On the derivation of the name **bhrandu** “Daughter of Bahrām” and its variant forms in Mandaic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic sources, see Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017: 754. Note that in the two following attestations of the client’s name, the matronymic is written with plene spelling **mariai** (II:5, 14) in contrast to **miriai** in MLSC 9 (cited above). The biblical name *Miryām/Maryām* is now attested in Mandaic in at least six alternative spellings or forms: **miriai**, **mariai**, **mriai**, **mariam**, **miriam** and **miria**.¹⁹

I 6–9. **bnh mhrbilh lhikla ubniana dabna abhun ptahil dbnh dadam** “His children destroy the residence and building – that their father Ptahil built – of the children of Adam”. The syntax of this sentence is complex, with the relative clause breaking up the genitive construction, but the meaning is apparent: the children of Ptahil are destroying his creation. These two themes can be found together elsewhere in the Mandaic epigraphic corpus in one sequence:

‘saq ‘iargiz ‘luaikun
lqudam šuma rba
ulqudam mimra rba qdmaih
aluai kun mlakia dālma hazin
bnh dptahil
danatun u‘kuraikun uhumraikun

uptikraikun ushraikun udiuiakun
uruhaikun uhumraikun uliliatkun umn-
klatkun
d[h]tītun umbištun bruhia un‘šimata dbnia
anaša
‘iargiz ‘luaikun
lptahil db[a]n[ia] lšumia ularqa

Let me go and provoke wrath against you
before the great name
and before the great primordial word
against you, O angels of this world
the children of Ptahil –
for you and your temples and your amulet spir-
its
and your idols and your *sahirs* and your *dēvs*
and your spirits and your amulet spirits and
your liliths and your beguiling spirits –
for you have harmed and done ill unto the spir-
its and souls of people.
I shall provoke to wrath against you
Ptahil, who b[u]ilt the heaven and the earth
(BM 91733 [CAMIB 080M]:2–7).²⁰

An echo of this account also appears in *The Book of Zodiac*:

uhaizak asgia ptahil ltibil
urgaz lšuba kukbia
ultrisar maluašia bnh

And then Ptahil went to the world
and raged against the seven stars
and the twelve zodiac signs, his children,

¹⁸ See Müller-Kessler 1996: 190 and Abudraham 2022: 28–29.

¹⁹ See Morgenstern and Schlüter 2016: 122.

²⁰ Collated reading based on Ford 2022: 241–242 (cf. Müller-Kessler 2001–2002: 131). Compare also: **ašar ‘lh pta‘il dbnh lbita** “Ptahil the one who built the house strengthened him” (Amulet BM Dep 2197 [MIT 22]: 245–246).

dmn hsiruta²¹ hun
knap sahrīa udaiūia

who were created from deficiency.
 The *sahirs* and *dēvs* assembled
 (AM 201:20–22).

I 8. **dabna** “that he built”. Here we find one of the rare examples of the subordinating/genitive particle written with the following vowel generated by the “rule of Shewa”; the regular spelling is simple **d**.²²

I 10–11. **naṭria hurbia hiklia ubniania** “O guardians of the ruins of the residences and buildings”. The role of Ptahil’s children here stands in sharp contrast to that of Ptahil, who, as we have seen in the introduction, is the “the guardian of the house” and “the builder of the house”. In the closely related formula in Wolfe 37, the identity of the “guardians of the ruins” is made even more explicit: **ṣṭar diūia umlakia naṭria hurbia hiklia ubniania ḏbnḥ ḏadam** “the *dēvs* and the angels, the guardians of the ruins of the residences and buildings of the children of Adam have been bound” (Wolfe 37:1–3). Similarly, in *Šalhaṭta d-Mahria*, a protective formula attested widely in manuscript sources, the guardians of the ruins appear in a lengthy enumeration of malevolent forces: **mn daiua bšumḥ umn liliata ḏbkinianḥ umn šidia ušibṭia umn sahrīa uruhia uhumria zadaniata umarkabata rurbata ḏḥšuka umn naṭria hurbia umn abinia zaiūia ḏqurnata²³** “from a *dēv* by his name, and from a lilit by his/her appellation, and from *šēds* and afflictions and from *sahirs* and sprits and malevolent amulet spirits and great chariots of darkness and from guardians of ruins and from between the corners of protrusions (?)²⁴” (ŠM 63–66).

I 12. **uagaṭlia hiua b’ira** “and killers of the cattle”. In a Jewish magic-bowl formulae, the demons are specifically instructed to go to uninhabited places and attack animals: אסיריתון וחתימיתון כולכון מן אסיריתון וחתימיתון על טורי ועל ראמתא ועל בעירא מסאבא אהדבוי [ב]ר אהתבו ותזלון ותפלון על טורי ועל ראמתא ועל בעירא מסאבא “all of you are bound and sealed from Aḥaddabuy [s]on of Aḥattabu and go and attack the mountains and the highlands and the unclean beasts” (VA 2422:7).²⁵

I 12 // 14. **hiua b’ira** “the cattle”. The CM spelling is **hiua bira** (see MD 62, s.v. **bira** 2). The use of the digraph ‘i in medial position to represent a simple *i* / *e* vowel (irrespective of length) is a characteristic feature of several Early Mandaic sources.²⁶

I 13–14. **ubrugzaihn gaṭlia dmu hiua b’ira b’idaiun** “And in their fury they kill ... cattle with their hands”. The reading is clear, but the translation is uncertain, in particular the meaning of **dmu** “appearance, apparition” here. It is possible that the text is corrupt, but no parallel is known to us that might clarify this problem.

I 15–16. **mpgmaihun umšlplhun lbnḥ ḏadam** “they injure and scourge the children of Adam”. The verb-pair *p-g-m* and *š-l-p* is also attested in Mandaean magical texts preserved in late witnesses to describe both the activity of hostile entities and the chastisement of such entities by light-world figures, e.g.:

mpagmilun umšalpilun
umabšibun ‘l ‘bna ḏadam uhaua

They injure and scourge
 and do ill to the sons of Adam and Eve
 (ŠpuM:91–93).

²¹ Variant reading: **husirta** (CS 26).

²² Abudraham 2022: 79.

²³ Variant reading: **ḏqarnata** (CS 27).

²⁴ The latter expression is extremely unclear and may result from scribal error.

²⁵ See Ford and Levene 2012: 56–57.

²⁶ Abudraham 2022: 84–85.

gabra ḡqiriuiā hiia rbia qadmaia

zarzuia upaqduia ušadruia

lalma hazin ḡhšuka

‘lauaiun ḡšuba šibiahia

‘lauaiun ḡtrisar maluašia

upagminun ušalpinun

ulḡiṭinun u{ḡ}‘sirinun

The man whom the great primordial light summoned.

They armed and commanded and sent him
unto this world of darkness
against the seven planets
against the twelve zodiac signs –
and he injured them and scourged them
and seized them and bound them
(ZP:83–87).

The word pair is also found in Jewish Babylonian magic texts from the same period as our amulet but in reverse order: רמסין וצלפין ומפגמין (...) “I have adjured you, all types of liliths... (that) they trample and scourge and injure” (CBS 8639:8–10)²⁷ // אשבעית ע[ל]יכין כל מיני ליליתא (...) [א] וצלפין ומפגמין (JBA 64 = MS 2053/256:2).²⁸

I 15. **mpgmaihun** “they injure them”. Note again the non-standard use of the digraph **ai** in medial position to indicate a simple *i/e* vowel (*māḡaggamillāhon* ; CM **mpagmilhun**).²⁹

I 17–18. **umšaušilun lrazia ḡbguaihun** “and corrupt the forces that are within them”. Our interpretation of **razia** follows Emanuel (2022: 131–132), who has noted that the term may refer to the inner forces of the body corresponding to the Greek concept of δύνανμις.

I 18. **unasibila** “and they take it”. In several places in this amulet – usually in the environment of laryngeal, sibilant, and sonant consonants – an historical *shewa mobile* is represented with *plene* orthography, as here, *wanāsāḡilla*.³⁰ We have noted the following examples: **lšinata** = *lāšinātā* “the sleep” (I 18),³¹ **hidara** = *hādārā* “vertigo” (I:24), **dhlata** = *dahlātā* “fear” (I:25), **ratitia** = *raṭītē* “trembling” (I:27), **naṭaria** = *nāṭarē* “guardians” (I:29), **hatimatin** = *haṭīmatten* “you are sealed” (II:6). No less salient are examples for *plene* orthography at the end of a historically closed syllable: **‘zaqata** < *‘izqatā* “signet” (II:9), **qdamaiḡ** < *qadmāyā* “primordial (sg.)” (I:34; JBA קדמא), **qdamaiḡ** < *qadmāyē* “primordial (pl.)” (I:32, 40; Syr. ܩܕܡܝܐ). See further our note on **lhanadamaiahun** “to their limbs” (I:27).

I 19–21. **umaqimihun lhiklaiun ubnianun ḡbnḡ ḡadam barplia ḡhišuka** “and they set the residences and buildings of the children of Adam in clouds of darkness”. Mandaic sources hold the demonic forces responsible for all forms of corruption in the world, ranging from material entropy to moral error. Compare, for example, the following passage from the popular magic formula **‘l klil nhur aiar** “Upon a Wreath of Ether Light”:³² **umitgmria latruan atrauan bhumriun udiuiauun ushriun uruhiun uliliatun ḡštla ‘lauiun lahrubia btaian ulšua hiklhun ulqumia batia ḡb- nia anaša bburba ušdia ubhišuka ḡhia ulnqupia bnia anaša ulšutia lbnia šurba rba ḡhi[i]a** “and they (the evil angels) are appointed to various places with their amulet spirits and *dēvs* and *sahirs* and spirits and liliths, for they have been sent against them to destroy their houses and to uproot their residences and set the houses of people in ruin and desolation and in the screaming darkness and to strike people and to humiliate the children of the great stem of Life” (IBC 43:10–11).³³

²⁷ Montgomery 1913: 117 (for the correct meaning of this phrase, see the reference in the next footnote).

²⁸ Shaked, Ford and Bhayro 2013: 273; Morgenstern 2013: 48.

²⁹ Abudraham 2022: 86–88.

³⁰ For more information on this phenomenon, see Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017: 740–741; Abudraham 2022: 201–215.

³¹ The proleptic 3 f.s. suffix of the preceding verb **unasibila** “and they take it (f.s.)” indicates that **šinata** “the sleep” must be singular.

³² The title is taken from the label found on the back of several magic bowls, e.g., IBC 43: 2–4 (outer text). See the next footnote.

³³ Published in Abousamra 2013: 55–57.

I 23–27. **Imišbaq kiba Irišaihun hidara Imuqraiun dhlata blilbabaihun hišuka lainaiun nqišia l'qbaihun ratitia lhanadamaiahun** “to let loose pain upon their heads, vertigo upon their brains, fear in their hearts, darkness upon their eyes, knocking upon their heels, trembling upon their limbs”. The demonic forces are also held responsible for various human afflictions.³⁴ The majority of this passage is closely paralleled in Wolfe 37, wherein the first person narrator addresses the *dēvs* and the evil angels (= “the guardians of the ruins”) and adjures them to take their evil deeds away from the house and body of the client: **ḏtišqlun utišqlun hišuka mn bita ḏpnahi br du{u}stia mn ainh ukibia mn rišh hdra mn muqrh uziuihta udhlta mn lbbh** “that you should take and remove darkness from the house of Panāhi son of Doste (and) from his eyes, and pains³⁵ from his head, vertigo from his brain, and trembling and fear from his heart” (Wolfe 37:43–52).³⁶ These passages from the magic corpus recall the conclusion of the first prayer in *Sidra d-Nišmata*.³⁷

**kulhun almia dhazilh
mn qudamh nitkabšun
mradpanh mšargizanh
bhauqa udahalta uziuihta
urtitia unqišia
niqmun mn qudamai
plan br planita**

May all those³⁸ that see him³⁹
be subdued before him.
May his oppressors and his provokers
in panic and fear and terror
and trembling and knocking,
stand before me,⁴⁰
PN son of PN
(SN 1 [CP 4:14–18])

I 25. **blilbabaihun** “in their hearts”. The forms of the noun “heart” in Mandaic are derived from two earlier Aramaic patterns, **libb* and **labbāb*. In CM, the pattern **lbab** is restricted solely to the singular in the absolute and construct states (MD 228, s.v. **lbab**; CAL s.v. *lbb*, *lbb'* n.m. heart [with KWIK search]), while the plural form is most frequently **libbia**, apparently reflecting the dissimilation **libbē* > *libbē*.⁴¹ By contrast, Early Mandaic texts present a wide variety of forms, including **libabaiun** and **libbaikun** with possessive suffixes and **l'babia** in the plural. The form **libbabia** in our text is unique because of the appearance of non-historical *l* alongside the duplication of the *b*. It is likely that these Early Mandaic forms result from a series of analogies between the two patterns, but it is not possible to reconstruct the sequence of these analogies.

I 27. **lhanadamaiahun** “to their limbs”. Etymological and comparative considerations indicate that a vowel has been added following the *n* of the noun base, perhaps to prevent its total assimilation to the following consonant: *lāhandāmayhon* > *lāhanadāmayhon* (cf. Old Persian **handāma*,⁴² Biblical Aramaic מַיְחָה; Syriac ܡܝܚܐ). The insertion of a vowel after *n* in similar circumstances has been documented in other Early Mandaic sources, e.g.: **anapaihun** for **anpaihun** “their faces”, **sanadilia** for

34 The order of the afflictions here is somewhat unusual, as other Mandaean magic texts follow the more linear head-to-toe sequence that is common in Mesopotamian (Akkadian and Aramaic) sources. See e.g., Stol 1991: 49; Müller-Kessler 1999: 344; Geller 2000: 15.

35 This may also be translated “sores”.

36 Compare further in a magic bowl text in the Jewish script: מוֹמִינָא וּמִשְׁבַּעְנָא עֲלִיכּוֹן שִׁידֵי וְשִׁפְטֵי וְדִיּוֹ וְשִׁטְנָא וְסַטְנֵי וְלִלְחָנֵי (...) “I adjure and beswear you, demons, afflictions, *dēvs*, Satan and satans, servitors ... that you may move away and depart from the head, brain, and heart of Namanuš daughter of Čihrazad” (MS 2053/236:1–2). Shaul Shaked apud Bohak 2012: 48–49.

37 For the connection between the Mandaean liturgy and the magical epigraphic corpus, see Morgenstern, forthcoming.

38 Or: all generations.

39 I.e., the righteous Nasorean.

40 The pronoun refers to the priest who recites the prayer.

41 Nöldeke 1875: 77. On this phenomenon in early Mandaic sources, see further Abudraham 2022: 127. For parallel JBA forms, see Morgenstern 2013: 41 and Ford 2014: 256.

42 Ciancaglini 2008: 160–161.

sandilia “sandals”.⁴³ These examples may also be compared to Classical Mandaic independent personal pronouns: **anat** “you (2c sg.)”, **anatun** “you (2m pl.)”.⁴⁴

I 31–35. **bhahu pugdama rba dhiia qdamaih dmn had šuma šuma rba dhiia rbia qdamaih npaq 'lauaikun** “by that great saying of the Primordial Life that from one name – the great name of the great Primordial Life – has confronted you”. The first-person narrator emphasizes that the spell by which he adjures the guardians stems directly from the great name of *Heyyi Rabbi Qadmāyi* “the great Primordial Life”. This idea is stated in yet stronger terms in another Mandaic formula:

ašabitlik umuminalik
punaqit lilita
zuṭratia dhuata
dmitqiria naqpil 'stra
bhak šuma rba
ubhak mimra rba qadmaia
ubhak r[az]a qadmaia
ubhak kinata qadmaita
bhak mnlata qadmaita
ubhak mlala rba qadmaia
bin ula
d'mun qadmaia ulakdib

I have adjured you and made you swear,
 O Punaqit the lilit,
 the youngest of her sisters
 who is called Naqp'el the Goddess,
 by that great name
 and by that great primordial speaking
 and by that primordial sp[ell]
 and by that primordial appellation⁴⁵ (?)
 and by that great primordial word
 and by that great primordial speech
 by the “yes” and “no”
 that the primordial ones swore and did not
 break (their oath)⁴⁶
 (YM 1:18–20).⁴⁷

The Mandaean liturgy similarly emphasizes the primacy of the great name. Compare: **tušbihan lhahu had šuma rba dhiia d'lauia kulhun šumhata** “Praises unto that one great name of Life which is above all names” (SN 76 [CP 108:14–16]).

The phrase **npaq 'lauaikun** has been translated here as “has confronted you”. For the collocation נפק על in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic in the senses of “to attack, challenge”, see Sokoloff 2020: 731 s.v. נפק, Pe. II.9; CAL s.v. npq vb. a/u “to go out” G. 1.a2.

I 36–37. **kukbia ukima** “the stars and Pleiades”. The same word pair appears in early versions of the magic formula “By the Signet of the Small Boy”, in which the basic elements of the universe are described as nurturing entities:

madna umrba hualia munqa
šamiš usira hulia mnasbana
kukbia uk'ma hulia mrbiana

East and west are my fosterer,
 the sun and moon are my provider,
 the stars and Pleiades are my raiser
 (IM 42121:7–8; collated).⁴⁸

⁴³ Abudraham 2022: 115–116, 210.

⁴⁴ Nöldeke 1875: 86–87.

⁴⁵ The reading is certain and is shared with MLSC 9 (variant: **kinta** CAR 2). From the context, it must refer to some form of speech, but it is not known to us from other texts. We have hesitatingly translated it as “appellation”, as though derived from **k-y-n* < **k-n-y*. Compare, e.g., Mandaic **binta** “building” < **b-n-y*.

⁴⁶ On this meaning of the D-stem of *k-d-b*, see Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017: 760–761.

⁴⁷ Abudraham 2014: 64.

⁴⁸ Published in Nu'mān 1996: 87–89. Nu'mān read **uk'ma** as **ukrma**. For more details, see Morgenstern and Abudraham, forthcoming.

The same word pair is found in a Jewish incantation bowl formula, though the order is reversed: **ובאתר דלא מפקין בה שמשא וסיהרא וכימא וכוכבי** “and in the place where the sun and the moon and the Pleiades and the stars are not let out” (Moussaieff NNL 75 [formerly 131]:3–4).⁴⁹

I 37 // 39. **kulha** “all of her”. Our amulet contributes two additional attestations of the 3f.sg. genitive pronominal suffix **-ha**, which is unique to Early Mandaic sources (CM **-a**, NM **-a**).⁵⁰ Its pronunciation is uncertain, and it is unlikely to be a survival of the earlier Aramaic pronoun **-hā**, as the form **-ha** is never found in Early Mandaic as an object suffix following a long vowel. Conversely, it is found in positions where the pre-modern Aramaic employs the suffix **-ah**, e.g., in affixed **-lha** for common Aramaic **lah**. It is possible that the digraph **-ha** was employed by early Mandaean scribes to indicate consonantal **h** in word-final position.⁵¹

I 39–41. **u'ṣṭar kulhun gbaria daiaria qdamaiḥ ḏbguḥ** “And bound were all the mighty men, the primordial dwellers that are within it”. The close parallel in Wolfe 37 identifies the giants with Adam and Eve, apparently reflecting the tradition of Adam’s primordial stature: **‘ṣṭar adam uha**⁵² **gbra u'tta gbaria qdmaia ḏhubḥ balma hazin** “Bound were Adam and Eve, the man and woman, the primordial giants who were in this world” (Wolfe 37:4–6).⁵³

I 41–43. **šuba mlakia ḏbita** “the seven angels of the house”. The seven angels are presumably the seven planets (**šuba šibiahia**). In other epigraphic and literary sources, they are described as **šuba marḥ ḏbaita** “the seven Lords of the House” (Pognon 23 [MIT 11]:10, collated; Gy. 265:17–19).⁵⁴ The use of a malevolent power’s own spells against it is well attested in Mandaic magical texts.⁵⁵ See for example: **sdimitun bkulhun razikun sdimia šuba razia ḏšuba mlakia ḏbit[a]** “you are sealed with all your spells, sealed are the seven spells of the seven angels of [the] house” (Amulet KM 29883–29887 II:10–12; collated).⁵⁶

I 43. **u'ṣṭar trisar** “And bound were the twelve”. That is, the twelve constellations (**trisar malu-ašia**).

Incantation b: **[ktibitin l'liata bšumaikun** “You are written, O liliths, by your names”]

II 1–11. As we have seen, these lines contain the end of a spell, the beginning of which has not survived in this copy. A more complete copy survives on the incantation bowl PC 28, while a looser parallel is found in the *Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata*, a formula that is found only in later manuscript sources (see above). In what follows, we refer briefly to some of the notable differences between MLSC 4 and the other early and late witnesses (PC 28 and *Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata*). A complete edition of PC 28, presenting the entire formula, will be published by Ford and Morgenstern, forthcoming.

II 2–5. Our reconstruction here is based upon the parallels.

⁴⁹ The current reading and interpretation are based on the revised edition proposed in Ford 2006: 210. The bowl was first published in Levene 2003: 91–92.

⁵⁰ Abudraham 2022: 245–247.

⁵¹ For more details, see Abudraham 2022: 246, 417–418.

⁵² Read: **uhua**.

⁵³ Much has been written on the topic of ancient traditions of Adam’s giant stature, which lies beyond the scope of this article. For a discussion of the topic, see e.g., Aaron 1996.

⁵⁴ See Morgenstern and Abudraham, forthcoming.

⁵⁵ For additional examples, see Morgenstern and Abudraham 2023: 115.

⁵⁶ Müller-Kessler 2010: 484.

Early Epigraphic Witnesses		Late Manuscripts
MLSC 4 (Amulet)	PC 28 (Bowl)	<i>Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata</i>
[u]n[ibṭl razaiun]	ulibṭal rzaiun	unibṭul razaikun
dšuba šub ^c [ahia]	dšuba šb ^c haiih	dšuba šibiahia
mn bhrand[u] pt mariaī	mn baith dahai umn {umn}<bnh> umn bnath	mn baith upagr ^h diahia bihram br haua simat

The stated purpose of our amulet written on a lamella is to protect the body of the client (see also I:5; II:13), while the versions preserved on the bowl and in *Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata* were also intended for the protection of the client's house. This difference may be explained by the different nature of the surviving artifacts: metal amulets were worn upon the body of the client, whereas the earthenware bowls were buried in strategic locations about the house. Regrettably, none of the late manuscript copies of *Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata* contain instructions for the formula's use.

II 5–7. This passage provides a good example of the evolution of the 2.f.pl. participle in Mandaic:⁵⁷

Early Epigraphic Witnesses		Late Manuscripts
MLSC 4 (Amulet)	PC 28 (Bowl)	<i>Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata</i>
'siratin uhatimatin ukbiša tin	'siritin htimitin ukbiši[ti]n	'siritun uhtimitun

(1) In our amulet, the verbs are founded upon the marked feminine plural participle base with the affixed feminine plural subject morpheme: *gaṭilā(n)+ʔatten* > *gaṭilatten*. (2) In PC 28 the participle base takes the historically masculine/common plural form but the affixed subject morpheme remains the marked feminine form: *gaṭilīn+ʔatten* > *gaṭilitten*. (3) In the last stage represented in all the textual witnesses of *Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata*, the marked feminine forms have been entirely replaced by the common (historically masculine) forms: *gaṭilīn+ʔatton* > *gaṭilitton*.

II 9–11. The witnesses disagree regarding the name of the signet by which the gates of heaven and earth are sealed.

Early Epigraphic Witnesses		Late Manuscripts
MLSC 4 (Amulet)	PC 28 (Bowl)	<i>Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata</i>
bzarzanit 'zaqata	bzarz'i[l] 'zqta	bzarzaiil ⁵⁸ 'siqta
d'hatimabh baba	dhtimbh babia	dhtimbh
dšumia uar ^a q ^a	dšumia urqa	šumh ⁵⁹ uarqa

PC 28 and the late witnesses of *Qmaha d-Gaṣṭata* adduce the name of the more common Mandaean spirit **zarz'il/zarzaiil** "Zarz'el". Compare, for example, 'siritun htimitun braza {u}<d>zarz-i'il 'siqta dhtimbh babia dšumia uarqa dhuat b'dh dptahil rba qašiša "You are bound and sealed by the spell of Zarz'el the signet, by which the gates of heaven and earth are sealed, which is in the hand of the great elder Ptahil" (QSS: 48–50); bširšira ubzrz'il 'zqta dgbr'il mlaka "by Šir the

⁵⁷ See Morgenstern 2023: 187–189.

⁵⁸ Variant reading: **bzarziil** (DC 23b).

⁵⁹ Variant reading: **šumia** (DC 23b).

bond and by Zarz'el, the signet of Gabri'el the Angel" (MLSC 7 II [MS 2087/7_b recto]:15–16).⁶⁰ Similarly, in Syriac magic bowl text: ܠܫܝܪ ܕܡܢܐ ܕܒܝܬܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ ܕܡܨܚܐ
“by Šir the bond, by Ziw the ..., by Zarz’el the great signet, by which heaven and earth were bound” (MS 2055/13:8–9; unpublished).⁶¹

Nonetheless, the version of MLSC 4 (**zarzanit** ‘**zaqata**) cannot be regarded as an isolated scribal error, as the same reading appears in another epigraphic Mandaic magic text: **bšir šira ubzarzanit** ‘**zqta dainia lagta uhinkia dabqa** “by Šir the bond and by Zarzanit the signet that seizes mouths and snatches palates” (Moussaieff NLI94438 [formerly Moussaieff 23]:11).⁶² It is possible that the alternation between **zarza’il** and **zarzanit** evolved from cases in which the final consonant *l* shifted to *n* by a phonetic process, e.g., ‘**sira uhtima hlan nišmata dhaza baita bšaršira darqa ubzrz’n** ‘**zqata** “Bound and sealed are these the souls of this house by Šir the bond and by Zarzen the signet” (MS 2054/101:12). Compare further in a Jewish bowl text: חִימ בְּתַם דּוֹתָק בְּשִׁיר שִׁירָא בּוֹ זִימְרָא בּוֹרְזִיר יִזְקָתָא וְחַתְמָא “Sealed by a seal of righteousness, by the ring of Šir, by Ziw Zimra, by the signet of Zarzir, and the seal by which is sealed of (!) Yokabod Ziwa” (MS 2053/248 [JBA 88]:4).⁶³

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Editorial conventions

Citations from written Mandaic sources are presented in bold characters using Macuch's transliteration system, e.g., **hurbia**, while phonological transcriptions – attested or reconstructed – are presented in italics, e.g., *lah*. Partially preserved or damaged letters are represented in grey, e.g., **b**. Breaks in the source and reconstructions are marked with square brackets, e.g., [a]. Superlinear insertions are marked with carets, e.g., ^**tun**^. Editorial deletions are marked with curly brackets, e.g., {l}, while editorial additions are marked with angular brackets, e.g., <**d**>.

Abbreviations

- | | |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AM | <i>Asṗar Maluašia</i> (The Book of the Zodiac) published in Drower 1949 |
| BM | British Museum |
| CAL | Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (https://cal.huc.edu/) |
| CAMIB | Incantation bowl texts edited in Segal 2000 |
| CAR | Centre for Amuletic Research |
| CM | Classical Mandaic |
| CS | Codexes Sabéen, Bibliothèque nationale de France |
| DC | Drower Collection, the Bodleian Library in Oxford University |

60 To be published in Morgenstern and Abudraham, forthcoming.

61 For additional information, see Ford 2002: 246.

62 Published in Morgenstern 2021: 108–109.

63 Published in Shaked, Ford and Bhayro 2022: 91–92.

Gy	Ginza Yamina
Jb	John Book (<i>Draša d-Yahia</i>)
MD	Mandaic Dictionary, Drower and Macuch 1963
MIT	Mandaic Incantation Texts in Yamauchi 1967
MLSC	Mandaic Lamellae in Schøyen Collection
MS	Martin Schøyen Collection
NM	Neo-Mandaic
PC	Bowl in an anonymous private collection
SN	<i>Sidra d-Nišmata</i>
ŠM	<i>Šalhaḫta d-Mahria</i> (CAL)
ŠpuM	<i>Šaḫta Puḡdama d-Mia</i> (CAL)
QSS	<i>Qmaha d-Šir Sahra</i> (CAL)
ZP	<i>Zarazta d-Ptahil</i> (CAL)

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