

A Charm Against Demons of Time*

Christa Müller-Kessler — Jena

Der Mensch besitzt nichts wertvolleres als seine Zeit
Ludwig van Beethoven

The Mandaic charm against demons of time has been awaiting publication since 1924. It belongs to a set of lead, silver and gold amulets attributed to the family archive of Mah-Adur-Gušnasp, who is also called Bewazig bar Mama, and other family members: Mama pat Adurdukt and Šabur bar Narsaydukt.¹ The archive was discovered by Lt. Col. H.S. Alexander in a lead jar under the foundations of a private house in a mound near el-Qurnah situated at the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates in southern Iraq during a private dig between 1910 and 1920. A few years later in 1924 the lead pot and its contents passed into the possession of the British Library, and is housed today in the Department of the Ancient Near East in the British Museum.² In previous articles I have presented a few examples of incantations and excerpts from the archive of Mah-Adur-Gušnasp and shall continue in this fashion before publishing the final and complete edition.³

The selected charm on BM 135794 II has an unusual content that aimed to protect the client against the harms of demons of time, that means terms like season, month, day, hour, minute and other terms of time that were considered threatening evil elements. The

* The work on the lead roll archive was made possible by a fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation's Feodor-Lynen program and several research visits were supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. I am indebted to the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to publish the lead amulet BM 135794 II.

1 The clients appear here under their alias names, which are zodiacal names. The real client names were not employed in such magical texts.

2 Former Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities.

3 Ch. Müller-Kessler, "A Mandaic Gold Amulet in the British Museum," *BASOR* 311 (1998), 83–88; *idem*, "Aramäische Beschwörungen und astronomische Ormina in nachbabylonischer Zeit. Das Fortleben mesopotamischer Kultur im Vorderen Orient," in J. Renger (ed.), *Babylon: Focus Mesopotamischer Geschichte. Wiege früher Gelehrtheit, Mythos in der Moderne*. 2. Internationales Colloquium der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft, 1998, Berlin 1999, 427–443; *idem*, "Dann(š)is – Gott und Dämon," in J. Marzahn and H. Neumann (eds.), *Assyriologica et Semitica. Festschrift für Joachim Oelsner anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages*, Münster 2000, 311–318; *idem*, "Phraseology in Mandaic Incantations and Its Rendering in Various Eastern Aramaic Dialects. A Collection of Magic Terminology," *Aram* 11/12 (2000), 293–310; *idem* and K. Kessler, "Spätbabylonische Gottheiten in spätanuken mandäischen Texten," *ZA* 89 (1999), 65–87.

incantation content is appropriate for the occasion of Christopher B.F. Walker's 60th birthday. He has been one of the staff members who has always taken very seriously the endless Museum duties, to the neglect of his own personal scholarly interests. I still recall — then a beginner in Assyriology — the energy Christopher B.F. Walker put into the arrangements for the successful XX. Rencontre Assyriologique in London in the summer of 1982.

The charm against demons of time is the third incantation within the older version of the incantation series *šapta d-pišra d-ainia* "incantation of solving the eyes" and follows directly after incantation 1Aa, 1Ab⁵, (= BM 135793 I, BM 135794 II, ll. 1–9), but is incised on the second lead sheet (BM 135794 II, ll. 10–100). It was customary to combine several charms within an incantation series, and to divide the text over several lead rolls. This can be proven by another incantation series on three lead strips, 1Ca–f (= BM 134699 = 1965–10–13.4), where the continuation of the text from one lead sheet to another is indicated by a catch-line, *i.e.*, the last line of the text on the first lead strip is repeated as the first line on a new lead strip. This kind of text distribution appeared already in the (two) lead roll(s) published by M. Lidzbarski in 1909, although Lidzbarski considered the catch line a scribal mistake and did not indicate the extra line in his transliteration.⁶ For the present incantation it could be deduced by the parallel text passages of the later version of *šapta d-pišra d-ainia*.⁷

The first two thirds (ll. 1–74) of the text of the charm against demons of time are very repetitive, employing the same banning formula "bound, subdued and destroyed is ..., the cruel and evil one of war" with each of the various terms for time units. Then follows a demon story (ll. 74–90) that is told by an anonymous speaker (usually a higher demon) from whom one learns about the Mandaic gnostic tree that consists of three demon groups Dews (= trunk), Larabas (= foliage) and Lilits (= branches), but the root of the tree is not mentioned here. One Dew of this tree is singled out by the speaker. With this act of ritual power the Dew's strength is destroyed. Finally, all evil elements are driven out by the help of the archangel Gabriel and the Mandaic highest being "Life." The incantation is enclosed within a line corresponding to the magic circle appearing on magic bowls.

4 A parallel of 1Aa, but a shorter and modified version written by the same scribe, was auctioned by Christie's, London, in April 1998 and is published as an appendix in Müller-Kessler, "Aramäische Beschwörungen und astronomische Omina" (n. 3), 440–443.

5 The text passage of incantation 1Ab is identical with the late version from the nineteenth century of *šapta d-pišra d-ainia* ll. 376–379, 406–410 which hardly deviates from the older one, see E.S. Drower, "Šafta d Pišra d Ainia," JRAS 1937, 589–611; 1938, 1–20, esp. 596/7.

6 M. Lidzbarski, "Ein mandaïisches Amulett," in *Floriilegium ou recueil de travaux d'érudition dédiés à Monsieur le Marquis Melchior de Vogüé*, Paris 1909, 349–373. By neglecting the catchline *š-pšr-š* (l. 97) the counting differs now by one line. The lead roll formerly owned by a Mr. H.T. Lyon, but today in the possession of the Royal Asiatic Society, consists of two separate incantations divided by a line after l. 115, now l. 116 for the coming republication in Ch. Müller-Kessler, *Incantations for the House of Pir Nukerya. Mandaic Lead Rolls from the British Museum*, Part I [in preparation]. This division into two separate documents was already mentioned by Lidzbarski in his introduction to the publication of the text.

7 Drower, "Šafta d Pišra d Ainia" (n. 5), 596, ll. 376–379, 406–410.

1Ac⁸ (= BM 135794 II, ll. 10–109)

Transliteration

obverse

1. 'swr' šhuyšlš km' d'ur gušm'
2. sp byw' zyg' br' nm' 'syr
3. kbšš' umbt' l' d'n'
4. h šk' qšy' wbyš' d-
5. qr' b' 'syr kbšš'
6. umbt' l' p'yg' 'pyk' qšy' n'
7. wbyš' d-qr' b' 'syr kbšš'
8. umbt' l' p' l'g' 'pyk' qšy'
9. wbyš' d-qr' b' 'syr
10. kbšš' umbt' l' n' g' 'pyk'
11. qšy' wbyš' d-qr' b'
12. 'syr kbšš' umbt' l' rps'
13. 'pyk' qšy' wbyš' d-qr'
14. b' 'syr kbšš' umbt' l'
15. šwš' 'pyk' qšy' wbyš' n'
16. d-qr' b' 'syr' kbššy'
17. umbtšy' šry' d'ny'
18. ruhy' humry' wbyš' t'
19. pkyry' umal'ky' 'pyky'
20. qšy' wbyšy' d-s' gybwn
21. um' šgybwn um' byšybnm
22. bbnš' d- d'm wbušlym
23. zry' t' d-'hw' 'syr'
24. kbšš' umbt' l' šy' t'
25. 'pyk' t' qšy' t' wbyš' [t']
26. 'pyky' kbššy' umbtšy'
27. šry' d'ny' wbyš' t'
28. ruhy' humry' pkyry'
29. umal'ky' 'pyky' qšyš'
30. wbyšyš' d-s' gybwn um' šy'
31. bwn um' byšybnm bbnš' d-
32. 'd'm bzry' t' d-'hw' 'syr'
33. kbššy' umbtšy' yumy'
34. um' nny' 'pyky' qšyš'
35. wbyšy' d-qr' b' 'syr'
36. kbššy' umbtšy' byšy' w- t'
37. 'pyky' qšyš' wbyšyš' d-
38. qr' b' 'syr' kbššy'
39. umbtšy' ršy' yry'

Translation

Let there be healing for Mah-Adur-Gušnasp, Bewazig bar Mama. Bound, subdued and destroyed is the dark season, the cruel and evil one of war; bound, subdued and destroyed is the minute, the perverted, cruel and evil one of war; bound, subdued and destroyed is the half minute, the perverted, cruel and evil one of war; bound, subdued and destroyed is Naga, the perverted, cruel and evil one of war; bound, subdued and destroyed is Ripša, the perverted, cruel and evil one of war; bound, subdued and destroyed is Šuša, the perverted, cruel and evil one of war; bound, subdued and destroyed are Sahras, Dews, Ruhas, Humarras and Lilits, Pačikars and Mlakas, the perverted, cruel and evil ones who move and walk about and harm the children of Adam and all offspring of Hawa (= Eve); bound, subdued and destroyed is the hour, the perverted, cruel and evil one; overturned, subdued and destroyed are Sahras, Dews und Lilits, Ruhas, Humarras, Pačikars and Mlakas, the perverted, cruel and evil ones who move and walk about in them and harm the children of Adam (and) the offspring of Eve; bound subdued and destroyed are the days and daytimes, the perverted, cruel and evil ones of war; bound, subdued and destroyed are the nights, the perverted, cruel and evil ones of war; bound, subdued and destroyed is the first day of the months,

8 [...] superfluous letters, [...] missing letters, [...] partly legible letters, [...] supralinear letters, [...] editorial addition.

15 Thanks to Nöldeke *šwš'* is understood in Mandaic as one-twelfth of an hour, but in Akkadian of the Seleucid period *šwš' n* denotes 1/60 (of a day), see CAD sub voce. This should be assumed for Mandaic as well.¹⁴

24 As expected *š'yy' r'* 'the hour' follows *šwš'* as a higher unit and shows an unusual plene spelling in contrast to the variant *šy'* in another lead roll from Khuzistan.¹⁵

25 In the feminine ending of the emphatic state Mandaic hardly ever distinguishes between the singular and the plural *'pyk' r'*, *šy' r'*, *wbyw' r'*. Here we have clearly a singular referring to *š'yy' r'*, but in l. 27 the number of *šy' r'* is plural.

36 Scribal confusion with *Lilith*.

72 'gr' occurs very rarely in such lists.

76 *'wph* belongs to a series of homonyms in Mandaic, but from the contents it is conceivable that it should be connected with *'wph'*, *'wpyy'* 'branch'.¹⁶

81 *bg' n* can be taken in the Mandaic context only in a positive sense, although it is generally understood by R. Degen and predecessors as 'curse' and by K. Beyer as 'invocation' in Aramaic (Hartman).¹⁷ Sh. Shaked suggested in his contribution on Iranian loan verbs in Middle Aramaic to derive *bg' n* from the Iranian verb *bgz*, *pgz* 'to cry for help', which is supported by the Mandaic evidence,¹⁸ where in some formulas the incantation is opened by *bg' n šwm' r'*, *bg' n m' m' qdm' yb' l'* 'by the help of the great Name, by the help of the first Word against' 13Aa1-3 (= BM 135791; unpublished) instead of the usual Mandaic doxological introduction *šwm' r' d' hyy'*, ... 'in the name of Life ...'¹⁹

Of the name of a higher being *h'g' g' g' r'* *br l' bws* only the name part *h'g* occurs as one demiurge of the underworld pair *h'g* and *m' g' g' g' r'*, which is attested in Mandaic for the first time in this spelling.²⁰

83 *gšš' n* is an Akkadian loanword from *gšš' n* 'hip, side,' which is attested in Mandaic for the first time in this spelling.²¹

86 The passive participle feminine *'nyy'* is derived from *'MY*, which occurs for the first time in the Mandaic, but is attested in the original root *'MY'* to be blind, become dim' in Syriac and in the Targums.²²

95 *mby' m'* is a misspelling for *lmyht' m'*.
97/18 *'štrdbw'm* is an *itpaipal* of the dissimilated root *SNDR*. This is a metathesis of *SRD*, which is also employed in Mandaic. A similar expression *m' ny' r' wby' r'* *d' štrdbw'm šwm' r'* *w' r' g'* occurs in an unpublished incantation bowl the whereabouts of which are today unknown: *šwm' r' n' d' r' w' r' g'* *'zdr' mby' r'* (London Private Collection bowl 1, 13).

14 Th. Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik*, Halle 1875, XXVII, CAD §/3, 388.

15 See J. C. Greenfield and J. Naveh, "A Mandaic Lead Amulet with Four Incantations [Hebr.]," *Eretz Israel* 18 (1985), 98, a25.

16 Drower — Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (n. 13), 10b.

17 R. Degen, "Zur Bedeutung von *bgz* in den Hatra Inschriften," in R. Degen, W. W. Müller, W. Röhlig (eds.), *Neue Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik*, Bd. II, Wiesbaden 1974; K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Inschriften aus Assur, Hatra und dem übrigen Osnnesopotamien*, Göttingen 1997, 170 'Anrufung'.

18 S. Shaked, I. "III. Iranian Loanwords in Middle Aramaic," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. I, London 1985, 261.

19 Drower, *Šafra d' Fighra d' Aina'* (n. 5), 596, l. 376-379, 406-410.

20 See Drower and Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (n. 13), 115b.

21 See Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Assyriological Studies 19), Chicago 1974, 52.

22 See C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, Halle 1928, 529a; M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli mid Jerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, London 1886-1903, 1087b.

APPENDIX

Units of Time as Cosmic Powers in Sumero-Babylonian Texts

W. G. Lambert — Birmingham

The Mandaic demons of time have at least one parallel in Sumerian *zi-pà* ("be exorcised by ...") texts. These texts were essentially texts of primarily gods invoked to drive away evil demons and other black magic forces, but in addition to the gods geographical features such as mountains and rivers were also invoked, and one such text in addition also invokes the main divisions of time:

zi ud sakar-ud(sic) collated) mu-a hē
niš u₄-mu ar-bu u šat-ti

PBS 1/2 115 obv. 113-14

Be (exorcised) by day, month and year!

(ud-sakar = *arbu*, see CAD sub voce).

A second parallel occurs in BM 68593 (82-9-18, 8592) obv. 8 and 10. The text is a hymn to Marduk in which various gods are invited to bless Marduk, e.g., obv. 5:

šamaš ana d-marduk ku-ru-ub den-lil ana bel é-sag-t[*l*] kurub

Šamaš, bless Marduk. Enlil, [bless] the lord of Esagil.

Obv. 10 reads:

u₄-mu arbu(ri) u šattu(mu-an-na) ana bel-šid ku-ru-ub x[...]

Day, month and year, bless Bel. [...]

Obv. 8 has the same three nouns sign for sign, but what follows is broken off.

Thus these calendrical elements were considered to be cosmic powers capable of driving away forces of evil and bringing about blessings. This is the opposite of the Mandaic demons of time, but evidence for the antiquity and wide spread of the basic notion. The cuneiform passages are written on Late Babylonian tablets, but no doubt go back to an earlier origin.