

# Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period

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# Oneiric Aggressive Magic: Sleep Disorders in Late Antique Jewish Tradition

*Alessia Bellusci*

## Introduction

Modern medicine distinguishes between several sleep disturbances and disorders, which may be primary conditions or may be secondary to other physiological or psychiatric disorders. At least once in a lifetime, a person experiences a sleep disorder, such as night terror, insomnia, hypersomnia, bruxism, and suffers a certain level of discomfort caused by the alteration of his/her regular sleeping and dreaming faculties. Depending on their frequency, duration and recurrence, even common sleep disorders might result in severe daytime impairments and may require pharmaceutical, somatic or behavioral-psychotherapeutic treatment. Similarly, chronic sleep disorders and sleep disturbances, that are secondary to physical or mental pathologies, are treated or managed in different manners by modern sleep medicine.<sup>1</sup>

Sleep disorders are not exclusive to the modern world, but clearly affected our ancestors as well. Nevertheless, recognizing references to sleep impairments in ancient writings is often quite challenging. In most cases, the terminology used in ancient textual corpora to refer to sleep disorders hardly finds intelligible parallels in contemporary medical science.<sup>2</sup> Often, in antiquity,

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- 1 For an introduction to sleep disorders, see Lori A. Panossian and Alon Y. Avidan, "Review of Sleep Disorders," *Medical Clinics of North America* 93 (2009), 407–425.
- 2 Scholars should acknowledge the discrepancy between the ancient and modern designations of sleep impairments and avoid anachronistically adopting categories formed in the later western tradition in order to interpret references to these phenomena in ancient texts. This methodological problem is discussed in length in relation to the identification and study of nightmares in ancient texts in Sanskrit, ancient Greek, Hittite, Akkadian, Egyptian,

sleep disturbances were not perceived as a phenomenon pertaining to the biological and medical sphere, but were related to archaic conceptions of dreams, according to which the oneiric experience represented the bridge between the human and extra-human domains.<sup>3</sup> Ancient cultures generally understood sleep disorders in the context of magical and demonic traditions and developed magical rituals either to protect themselves from a particular sleep ailment or to affect the regular sleep of a certain victim, as is proved by several sources from the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean.

In the present article, I discuss a selection of late antique Jewish sources that attest to the existence of magical rituals relating to sleep disorders within late antique Judaism. After a brief introduction to oneiric aggressive magic, I present some passages referring to magical practices relating to insomnia and nightmares, respectively from *Sefer ha-Razim*, *Harba de-Moshe*, and the corpus of Babylonian magic bowls. These sources demonstrate that, at least since Late Antiquity, Jews were well aware of the distress caused by sleep disorders. They attempted to treat or to manage such disturbances with magical aids and, in certain instances, attempted to cause sleep impairment in their victims.

### Jewish Oneiric Aggressive Magic

Since antiquity, Jews, like their neighbours, paid great attention to phenomena relating to sleeping and dreaming. The occurrence of dream accounts in the Hebrew Bible legitimized the discussion of the oneiric experience also in later Jewish texts.<sup>4</sup> The practice of “oneiric magic,” i.e., magical and divinatory rituals

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Hebrew and Aramaic, in the introduction by Jean-Marie Husser and Alice Mouton to *Le Cauchemar dans les Sociétés Antiques* (Paris, 2010), pp. 9–20.

- 3 Although a few Greek and Roman intellectuals—such as Heraclitus of Ephesus, Xenophanes, Democritus, the medical school of Hippocrates and Galen, Aristotle, and Cicero—considered the phenomenon of dreaming a nonsensical product of the mind, the ancients, in general, placed the origin of oneiric communication in the extra-human world and believed that dreams convey a supernatural message. For an exhaustive discussion of ancient naturalistic explanations of the oneiric phenomenon, see William Vernon Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge MA, 2009), pp. 229–278.
- 4 Since the Hebrew Bible referred to dreams as divine messages, even the rabbis could not completely deny the authority of the oneiric experience as a *medium* between God and man, concluding that “dreams are one sixtieth of prophecy” (b*Berakhot*, 57b). On dreams in the Hebrew Bible, see Ruth Fidler, *Dreams Speak Falsely? Dream Theophanies in the Bible: Their Place in Ancient Israelite Faith and Tradition* (Jerusalem, 2005) [Heb.]; on dreams in the Babylonian Talmud, see Philip S. Alexander, “*Bavli Berakhot* 55a–57b: The Talmudic Dream

including within their structure a specific stage of dreaming, or aimed at interfering with the natural activity of dreaming and sleeping, is attested to within Jewish culture, at least from Late Antiquity.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, only a few Jewish sources mention sleep disturbances. Yet these texts turn out to be particularly important, providing us with an insight into ancient Jewish conceptions of the origins of dreams and sleep ailments, as well as into specific developments in Jewish demonology.

Most of the Jewish writings concerning sleep impairments, and all the textual excerpts discussed in this paper, refer to specific techniques, which belong to a category of ancient magic that I suggest we call “oneiric aggressive magic.” By the term “oneiric,” I refer to the natural and universal human experience of sleeping and dreaming.<sup>6</sup> In this study, I regard these two interwoven activities as “somatic techniques,” which can be managed, regulated and even provoked according to different socio-cultural models.<sup>7</sup> By “aggressive magic,” I refer to

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Book in Context,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 46 (1995), 230–248 and Haim Weiss, *All Dreams Follow the Mouth: A Reading in the Talmudic Dreams Tractate* (Be’er Sheva, 2011) [Heb.].

- 5 Examples of *oneiric magic* are the *ḥaṭavat ḥalom*, a practice aimed at reversing a bad dream, and the *she’elat ḥalom*, a technique aimed at obtaining hidden information in a dream; for a general overview on these techniques in Jewish tradition, see Weiss, *All Dreams Follow the Mouth*, respectively, pp. 39–46 and pp. 81–89. Seventeen recipes for *She’elat Ḥalom* are edited in Alessia Bellusci, *Dream Requests from the Cairo Genizah*, unpubl. MA Thesis (Tel Aviv University, 2011); in my PhD dissertation, which is currently in preparation, I study the development and evolution of this oneiric technique in late antique and medieval Jewish traditions.
- 6 In my work, I often use the term “oneiric,” which etymologically derives from the Greek *ὄναρ-ὄνειρατος*, instead of the English word “dream,” in an adjectival meaning. With that, I do not intend to indicate necessarily a Greek connotation of the phenomenon that I discuss, nor do I refer to Artemidorus’ five categories of dreams, on which, see Artemidorus Daldianus, *ONEIPOKPITIKA*, ed. Robert J. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Park Ridge, 1975). For scientific information on sleeping and dreaming activities, see John Allan Hobson, *The Dreaming Brain* (New York, 1988); Id., “Sleep is of the Brain, by the Brain and for the Brain,” *Nature* 438 (2005), 1254–1256.
- 7 Sleeping and dreaming are behavioural activities susceptible to cultural and historical influences like any other wakeful act. With the expression “somatic technique” I follow two important anthropological contributions. On the one hand, I refer by the term “technique” to Marcel Mauss’ notion of technique, i.e. every act, which is traditional and functional, and to his definition of “techniques of the body”—among which also the “techniques of sleeping”—as highly developed bodily actions that embody aspects of a given culture; see Marcel Mauss, “Les techniques du corps,” *Journal de Psychologie* 32 (1936), 365–386. On the other hand, the term “somatic” is taken from Claudia Mattalucci-Yilmaz’s work and alludes to the concept of “embodiment.” The body is not only a biological entity, but embodies also cultural and historical phenomena; similarly, culture and history can represent, in a

every magical act aimed at wielding a certain power on individuals, either on their psychophysical faculties or on their properties.<sup>8</sup> By the expression “oneiric aggressive magic,” I indicate every magical act aimed at wielding a certain power on individuals, by operating on their sleeping and dreaming behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

Under the category of oneiric aggressive magic, I include techniques for causing insomnia, controlling/orienting dreams, sending a dream or a nightmare. From an *etic* point of view, these techniques all share the use of psychological means, in order to operate on the conscious and unconscious mind of an individual. From an *emic* point of view, they all aim to achieve a certain influence on another person.

Oneiric aggressive magical techniques involve at least two characters. On the one side of the magical chain, the user of the incantation actively engages in the ritual, on his/her behalf or on behalf of a client, attempting to exert some sort of influence on the sleeping and dreaming behavior of a third party. On the other side, a victim, generally unaware of the occurrence of the magical practice perpetrated to his/her detriment, experiences an alteration of his/her regular sleeping and dreaming faculties. There are also sources attesting to inverse ritual dynamics, in which victims, or experts on their behalf, actively engage in the magical practice as an act of defense or revenge. In these cases, the victim overcomes her/his unawareness and passiveness through protective spells aimed at interrupting or reversing the sleeping/dreaming impairment caused by the original curse. Occasionally, the roles are inverted and the perpetrator becomes the new victim of the oneiric aggression.

Oneiric aggressive magical techniques are, generally, undertaken either to achieve an erotic purpose, by sending a spell of attraction to the victim through a dream, or to induce victims to fulfill the user’s will, by blackmailing them with insomnia or by sending them a coercive dream. A third and most extreme use involves the actual damage of victims, generally enemies of the perpetrator, both from a physiological and psychological point of view, by provoking in them insomnia or by sending them disturbing nightmares. Oneiric aggressive rituals of this kind, aimed at gravely harming a third person, imply a certain level of awareness that physiological sleep is indispensable for good

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certain measure, corporeal phenomena; see Claudia Mattalucci-Yilmaz, “Introduzione,” *Corpi, Annuario di Antropologia* 3 (2003), 5–18.

8 On “aggressive magic,” see Yuval Harari, “If You Wish to Kill A Man: Aggressive Magic and the Defense Against it in Ancient Jewish Magic,” *Jewish Studies* 37 (1997) [Heb.], 111–42.

9 Recently, Yuval Harari has been working on a series of papers devoted to dreams in Jewish magic. Harari’s forthcoming studies mainly cover materials and examples that date from later periods than those studied below.



health and that the lack of natural rest leads to serious physical and psychological impairments.

Evidence for late antique Jewish aggressive magic is either in the form of general and impersonal recipes preserved in magical handbooks, or finished products written by a professional magician for a certain client or for a group of individuals.<sup>10</sup> Finished products are generally represented by protective amulets, aimed at preventing the demons from appearing to users in their dreams, defending the users-victims from an oneiric aggressive spell perpetrated by a human party, or revenging the users-victims' oneiric aggression by sending the aggressor a counter-spell.

In the next three sections, I will examine Jewish magical recipes and finished products, respectively excerpts from *Sefer ha-Razim*, *Ḥarba de-Moshe*, and the corpus of the Babylonian magic bowls, which attest to the practice of oneiric aggressive magical rituals for causing insomnia and sending nightmares within late antique Judaism.

### A Recipe for Causing Insomnia from *Sefer ha-Razim* [SHR I §§137–140]

The name *Sefer ha-Razim* (SHR), *The Book of Mysteries*, refers to a book of magic, whose earliest edition was probably written in late antique Palestine before the Muslim conquest, by an erudite Jewish author familiar with both the Jewish orthodox tradition and 'Pagan' magical knowledge.<sup>11</sup> After a brief

<sup>10</sup> On the difference between recipes and finished products, see Gideon Bohak, "Reconstructing Jewish Magical Recipe Books from the Cairo Genizah," *Ginzei Qedem* 1 (2005), pp. 9–29, especially pp. 12–13, and Id., *Ancient Jewish Magic* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 144–148.

<sup>11</sup> SHR was first published in an eclectic edition in Morderchai Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim, A Newly Recovered Book of Magic from the Talmudic Period Collected from Genizah Fragments and other Sources* (Jerusalem, 1966) [Heb.]. Margalioth dates the composition of SHR to the Talmudic era, between the first and the fifth centuries AD, probably in third century Alexandria, ib., pp. 21–28. Nowadays, there is a scholarly consensus that SHR was composed in Late Antiquity, before the Muslim conquest. Particularly, according to Bohak, the reference to the "fifteen-year *indiction* cycle," which might establish the date only of a specific recipe in the book, represents the *terminus post quem* of the composition, while the lack of Arabisms in the text suggests the Muslim conquest as *terminus ante quem*. According to Bohak, the book was composed in any "region where Hebrew-writing Jews came into contact with Greco-Roman culture and Egyptian magic"; see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, pp. 173–175. A synopsis of the most relevant manuscripts

preface describing its use and its chain of transmission,<sup>12</sup> the book is organized in seven main sections, which reflect an imaginary celestial environment and are, therefore, called “firmaments.” The first six firmaments are divided into further subsections, each of which is inhabited by angels assigned certain functions and endowed with specific powers. Every subsection contains several magical recipes for different purposes, generally related to the role of the angels appointed in that specific part of the book. Arguably, some of these magical recipes might once have circulated independent of the literary framework of the book.<sup>13</sup> The angelic names listed in the book were originally meant to be uttered, or written down, during the actual magical practice associated with them.<sup>14</sup> SHR preserves twenty-eight magical recipes for different purposes, whose goal is in part anticipated in the preface of the book.<sup>15</sup>

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of *Sefer ha-Razim* is published in Bill Rebigier and Peter Schäfer, eds., *Sefer ha-Razim I und II: Das Buch der Geheimnisse I und II*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, 2009). This edition includes also a later redaction of the book, SHR 2, generally known under the name *Sefer Adam*. On SHR, see Jens-Heinrich Niggemeyer, *Beschwörungsformeln aus dem “Buch der Geheimnisse” (Sefar ha-Razim): Zur Topologie der magischen Rede* (Jüdische Texte und Studien) 3 (Hildesheim, 1975); Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums) 14 (Leiden, 1980), pp. 225–34; Philip S. Alexander, “Incantations and Books of Magic,” in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, ed. Emil Schürer, vol. 3.1, (Edinburgh, 1986) pp. 342–379; Shifra Sznol, “Sefer Ha Razim—El libro de los secretos introduccion y comentario al vocabulario griego,” *Erytheia* 10 (1989), pp. 265–88; Philip S. Alexander, “*Sepher ha-Razim* and the Problem of Black Magic in Early Judaism,” in *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, ed. Todd Klutz (Journal of the Study of the New Testament Suppl. 245) (London, 2003), pp. 170–90. For the Arabic version, see Alexander Fodor, “An Arabic Version of *Sefer Ha-Razim*,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13 (2006), 412–427. In this paper, when I refer to SHR, I follow the numeration of paragraphs of the synopsis in Rebigier and Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II*.

- 12 The angel Razi’el transmitted the book to Noah, according to ms. Oxford Heb. C 18/30, or Adam, according to ms. JTSL ENA 2750.4–5, and then to different biblical figures. The chain of transmission described in SHR follows a common pattern attested also in *Pirqei Avot* and in Jewish Apocalyptic and Pseudepigraphic texts, and was probably aimed at legitimizing the composition in the eyes of a Jewish public; see Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1996), p. 188.
- 13 Alexander, “*Sepher ha-Razim*,” p. 173.
- 14 SHR follows a well-known structure typical of ancient books of magic, which describe each magical technique together with the magical or angelic names essential to activate the spell; see, for instance, the Jewish book *Ḥarba de-Moshe* discussed below.
- 15 The count is according to Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim*; if we count separately the different applications of certain recipes, in which some alterations are required, the total number of recipes is thirty-eight. The seventh firmament does not contain magical recipes.

In the fourth step of the second firmament, a celestial section inhabited by angels who prevent human beings from their natural and vital rest, “מפרידים מברי אדם” [§136], SHR registers an oneiric aggressive magical recipe for “causing insomnia” [§§137–140].<sup>16</sup> The recipe immediately follows a magical procedure aimed at nullifying someone’s intentions and thoughts [§§132–134], enabled by angels in charge of “shaking and agitating the hearts of men, making void their intentions and nullifying their thoughts,” “מעמדם להגעיש ולהרעיש,” “את לב בני אדם ולהפר עצתם ולבטל מחשבותם” [§131].<sup>17</sup> The proximity of the angels controlling, respectively, the vigilant and dreaming human mind reflects a cultural understanding of the sleeping/dreaming state as a mental phenomenon comparable to the act of thinking, willing and making choices. Yet, the separation of offices between the angels of the third and fourth encampments points also to the idea that dreams and vigilant thoughts express slightly different perceptions on the spectrum of human consciousness.

In what follows, I offer a transcription and English translation of, and an extensive commentary on, the oneiric aggressive magical recipe preserved in SHR I §§137–140.<sup>18</sup>

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The later edition of the magical handbook (SHR 2) does not preserve any magical procedures, but a long divinatory ritual based on dream incubation; see Rebiger and Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II*, vol. 2, p. 12.

- 16 The recipe registered in this section represents one of the three references to dreaming/sleeping preserved in SHR. The other two are found in the prologue [§10] and in the seventh encampment of the first firmament [§§109–114].
- 17 The belief in demonic creatures affecting human thought is attested also in a Babylonian incantation bowl, aimed at protecting the user from “BNQ the TWT’ spirit, who confounds the thoughts of the heart,” “ובנק רוחא טותא דימנשקא ית רעיוני ליבא,” and from “the evil spirit that sits on the brain and makes the eyes weep, greed, gonorrhoea, fluid of the eyes, imaginations,” “ורוחא בישתא דיתבא על מוחא ומדמעא עינין ורחבא ודיבא וציר,”—see Cyrus Herzl Gordon, “Aramaic and Mandaic Magical Bowls,” *Archiv Orientální* 9 (1937), p. 87.
- 18 For the transcription and translation of the recipe, I follow the tenth century Genizah fragment St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Antonin 238, fol. 1b (from now on, Ant. 238), published in Rebiger and Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II*, vol. 1, pp. \*44–\*46; for an image of the fragment, see Figure 9.1. The English translation is mine; see also Michael A. Morgan, *Sefer Ha-Razim (The Book of Mysteries)* (Chico, 1983). The other relevant manuscripts for this passage are: Moscow, Russian State Library, Günzburg 738 (from now on, Günz. 738), an Italian xv century codex; Tel Aviv, Bill Gross Private Collection, Bill Gross 42 (from now on, Gross 42), a Yemenite xix century codex; Moscow, Russian State Library, Günzburg 248 (from now on, Günz. 248), a Sefardi-Oriental xvi century codex; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Hébr. 849 (from now on, Hébr. 849), an Ashkenazi xv–xvi century codex; Florence, *Biblioteca Laurenziana*, Plut. 44.23 (from

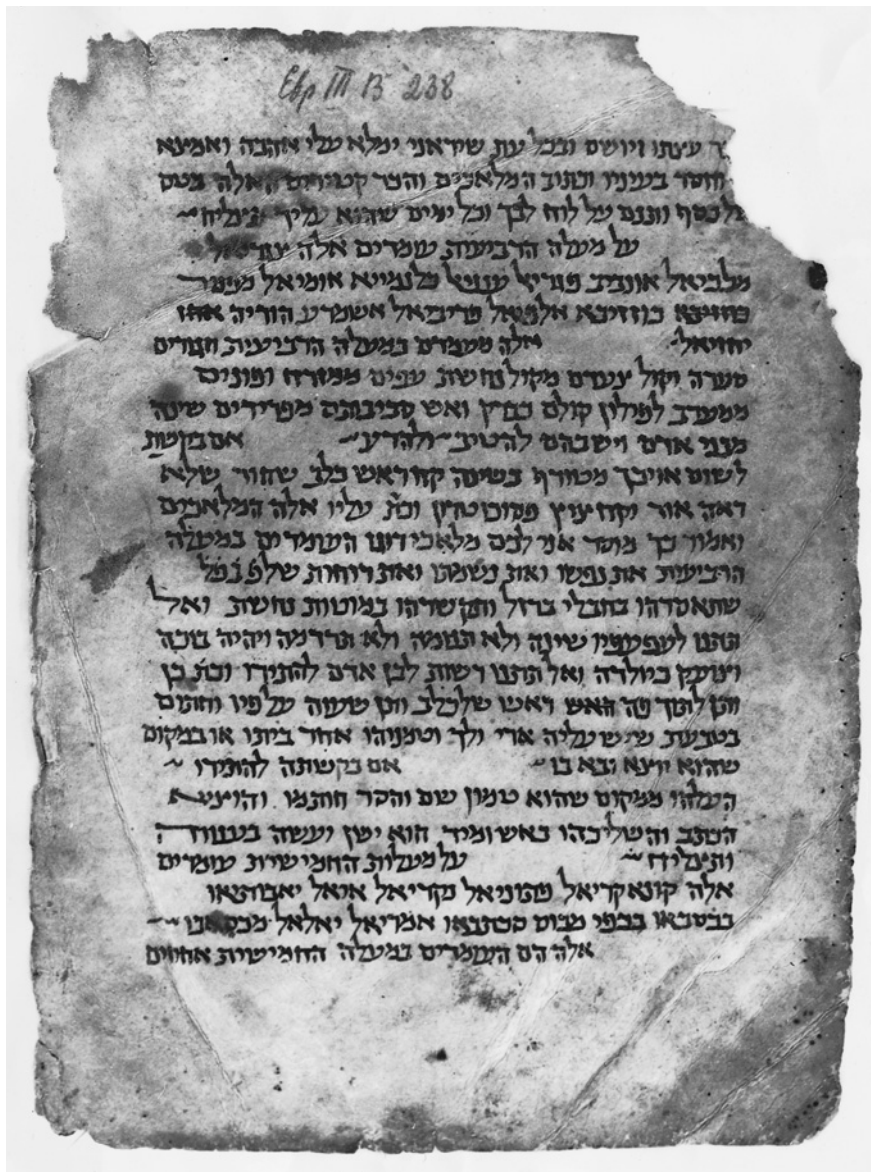


FIGURE 9.1 *Fragment Antonin 238, fol. 1b.*  
 REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF  
 RUSSIA.

[137§] אם בקשת\ לשום אויבך מטורף בשינה קח ראש כלב שחור שלא\ ראה אור  
 וקח ציץ פסוכוטרון וכת' עליו אלה המלאכים\ ואמור כך  
 [138§] מוסר אני לכם מלאכי רוגז העומדים במעלה\ הרביעית את נפשו ואת נשמתו  
 ואת רוחות של פ'ב'פ'ל'\ שתאסרהו בחבלי ברזל ותקשרהו במוטות נחשת ואל\  
 תתנו לעפעפיו שינה ולא תנומה ולא תרדמה ויהיה בוכה\ וצועק כיולדה ואל תתנו  
 רשות לבן אדם להתירו  
 [139§] וכת' כן\ ותן לתוך פה {האש} ראש שלכלב ותן שעוה על פיו וחתום\ בטבעת  
 שיש עליה ארי ולך וטמניהו אחר ביתו או במקום\ שהוא יוצא ובא בו  
 [140§] אם בקשתה להתירו\ העלהו ממקום שהוא טמון שם והסר חותמו והוציא\  
 הכתב והשליכהו באש ומיד הוא ישן ועשה בענווה\ ותצליח

[§137] If you want to make your enemy sleep disturbed, take the head of a black dog that never saw light and take a lamella of PSWKWTRWN,<sup>19</sup> and write on it (the names of) these angels and say this:

[§138] “I consign to you, O Angels of Wrath who stand in the fourth encampment, the life, the soul and the spirit<sup>20</sup> of N son of N, so that you bind him in iron chains and tie him in bronze rods. And do not give sleep, neither light sleep nor deep sleep, to his eyelids. And he will cry and scream like a parturient woman. And do not give any man permission to release him (from the spell).”

[§139] And write this and put (it) in the mouth of the dog and put wax on the mouth and seal (it) with a ring, which has a lion engraved upon it. And go and hide it (the dog's head) behind his house or in a place in which he goes out and enters.

[§140] If you want to release him (from the spell), take it (the dog's head) from the place where it is hidden and remove its seal and take out the (lamella with the) text and throw it in the fire and he will immediately fall asleep. Do this with humility and you will succeed.

Like other ancient magical compositions, the recipe in SHR I §§137–140 is structured according to definite patterns, including a title aimed at conveying the purpose of the recipe, instructions on the required *materia magica*, an

now on, Plut. 44.23), an Italian, XVI century manuscript; New York, Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, JTS 8117 (from now on, JTS 8117), an Italian, XVII–XVIII century codex; on these manuscripts, see Rebiger and Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II*, vol. 1, pp. 3, 18, 20–22, 24, 26, 27.

19 Or “take a lamella from the cold water pipe,” for which see below.

20 For “רוחות,” read “רוחו.”



invocation of the non-human entities involved in the magical practice, further ritual prescriptions, and a conclusive formula.

The magical text starts with an introductory expression, which functions as the title of the recipe and is aimed at helping users to orientate themselves within the book. All the different *lectiōnes* convey the idea of damaging an enemy in relation to his/her sleep faculties, as is demonstrated by the use of the substantive “שינה,” meaning “sleep,” and verbal expressions from the root טרף\*, which assumes, in this contest, the meaning of “being torn apart/disturbed.”<sup>21</sup> Mss. Ant. 238, Günz. 738, Gross 42 preserve the expression “ואם בקשת לשום לעשות אויבך מטורף בשינה,” “if you want to make your enemy disturbed during his/her sleep,” thus referring to an undetermined disturbance experienced while sleeping.<sup>22</sup> With the *lectiō* “ואם בקשת לטרוף שינה מאויבך,” Mss. Günz. 248, Hébr. 849 and Plut. 44.23 explicitly refer to the act of depriving someone of sleep.<sup>23</sup> The goal of the recipe is explicitly repeated in §138, “ואל תתנו לעפעפיו שינה ולא תנומה ולא תרדמה,” and seems to correspond to the psychophysical impairment known in contemporary medicine as “insomnia.”<sup>24</sup>

After stating the purpose of the magical procedure, the recipe continues with a first series of instructions, aimed at directing the user in the selection of the *materia magica*. The first required element for the spell is the head of a dog, probably a puppy born dead or a fetus, which, according to the *lectiōnes* in mss. Ant. 238, Günz. 738, and Gross 42, has to be black.<sup>25</sup> While the use of a

21 For the root טרף\*, see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols. (1903, repr. New York, 2004), pp. 555–557.

22 A similar use of the root טרף\* in the *pi'el*, passive participle, is found in *BeMidbar Rabah*, 10:8, “לבו מטורף,” see Jastrow, *A Dictionary*, p. 556.

23 In Mss. Günz. 248, Hébr. 849, Plut. 44.23, the root טרף\* is used in the *pa'al*, infinitive, probably rephrasing the expression “מפרידים שינה מבני אדם,” “they separate sleep from human beings,” in §136.

24 By the term “insomnia” contemporary medicine refers to a pathologic alteration in the sleep/wake rhythm, which results from an interaction of biological, physical, psychological, environmental and, in some cases, genetic factors. According to epidemiological studies, insomnia represents a common sleep disorder and about one-third of a general population suffers from at least one of the insomnia symptoms, whether as quantitative or qualitative sleep deficit; see Daniel J. Buysse, “Insomnia,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 309 (2013), pp. 706–716.

25 The expression “שלא ראה אור מימיו,” “which never saw light,” might refer to either an embryo or a puppy born dead. The “embryo of a dog” is mentioned in PGM IV.2441–2621 (vv. 2578–79), an incantation also aimed at sending dreams and accomplishing dream revelations, and in PGM IV.2622–2707 (vv. 2645–46), a spell for “protection, attraction, sending dreams, causing sickness, producing dream visions and removing enemies,”—see Hans

dog is not attested elsewhere in *Sefer ha-Razim*, dead dogs and canine organic material (“magical material,” embryos, blood, excrements, afterbirths, ticks, dog-bitten stones) are listed among the common magical ingredients registered in the Corpus of the Greek and Demotic Magical Papyri (from now on, PGM and PDM), especially in the spells of the fourth papyrus.<sup>26</sup> The second material required in the magical ritual is a metallic surface—either a foil “צ״י” or a tablet “לוח,” according to the different *lectiōnes*—on which to engrave the magical names and the spell. All the manuscripts report an incomprehensible corrupted word, probably derived from the Greek term “ψυχροφόρον.”<sup>27</sup> This term occurs in the expressions “ψυχροφόρου σωλήνος” (“a cold-water pipe”) in a magical recipe preserved in PGM VII.396–404 and “ψυχροφόρου τόπου” (“a cold-water system”) in PGM VII.429–58.<sup>28</sup> Both the recipes from the seventh

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Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation. Including the Demotic Texts* (Chicago, 1986), respectively, pp. 85, 87. Black animals and organic material obtained from black animals, mainly cats and dogs, have been often employed in magic—see, for instance, the use of the afterbirth of a black she-cat, descendant of two generations of black she-cats, in a practice for seeing demons in b*Berakhot* 6a.

- 26 “Magical material of dog” or “magical material of a dead dog” is mentioned in three spells of attraction: PGM IV 2441–2621 (vv. 2578–79), see above (note 26), in PGM IV.2708–84 (v. 2690) and in PGM IV.2891–2942 (v. 2875)—see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, respectively, pp. 85, 88, 92. In PGM XI.1 a 1–40, which preserves the spell of Apollonius of Tyana for causing the apparition of a woman, the “blood of a black dog” (v. 3) is used as ink, with which to inscribe an ass’s skull—see *ib.*, p. 150. The “Eight Book of Moses” in PGM XIII. 1–343 preserves a spell for making someone repulsive by placing “dog’s excrement” in the post-hole of the victim (v. 241)—see *ib.*, p. 179. PGM XXXVI.361–71, another spell of attraction, instructs to place the required magical material in “the mouth of a dead dog” (vv. 370–371)—see *ib.*, p. 278. The magical procedure described in PGM LXII.24–46 requires “the afterbirth of a dog called “white” which is born of a white dog” (vv. 45–46)—see *ib.*, p. 293. In PGM CXXVII. 1–12, one has to “rub a tick from a dead dog on the loins” in order to get a certain lover at the baths (v. 4) and to “throw a dog-bitten stone into the middle” in order to cause a fight at a banquet (v. 9)—see *ib.*, pp. 322–23. For the “embryo of a dog,” see above (note 26).
- 27 The *lectiōnes* are: “צ״י פסוכוטרון” in Ant. 238; “צ״י מקל פסוכוטרון” in Günz. 738; “לוח” “צ״י שעופרת של שפוך על טסת\ נחשת בסינרופירון” in Gross 42; “ספידרו פסיכו טרון” in Günz. 248; “צ״י של עופרת של שפוך על טסת נחשת בסינרופירון” in Hébr. 849 and Plut. 44.23; “לאמינה מעופרת שתהיה מותכת תוך אֶלְבָּאנוּ ס׳א׳ על טסת נחשת בסינרופירון” in JTS 817, where “לאמינה” corresponds to the Italian “lamina” [Latin: “*lāmīna*”] and “אֶלְבָּאנוּ” might refer to the Italian word “alambiccio,” for “alembic.” The term Greek “ψυχροφόρον” means “*frigidarium*,”—see this lemma on the *Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon* (from now on, LSJ); see also Margalioth, *Sefer Ha-Razim*, pp. 3–4.
- 28 For PGM VII.396–404 and PGM VII.429–58, see Karl Preisendanz et al., eds., *Papyri Graecae Magicae, Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri* (Leipzig, 1928–1931), vol. 2, respectively,

papyrus attest to the custom—at least in Greco-Egyptian magic—of scraping lead from the pipes of an aqueduct or any other water system in order to produce a lead lamella, which will be subsequently inscribed during the ritual practice. This use is confirmed also in a fourth or fifth century Roman *dēfixiō* [*DefixTab* 155] belonging to the so called *Sethianorum Tabellae*,<sup>29</sup> in which the term “ψυχροφόρον,” occurs twice in an adjectival form, in the expression “τό

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p. 18 and pp. 19–20; Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, respectively, p. 128 and p. 129. The term “ὁ σωλήν,” translated as “pipe” in LSJ, also entered Hebrew vocabulary as “וְיִלְדֹ” with an analogous meaning. “ψυχροφόρου σωλήνος” is translated as “water pipe” in LSJ and “Rohr einer Kaltwasserleitung” in Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, p. 18. According to the recipe in PGM VII.396–404, the user has to take lead from a cold-water pipe (“λαβὼν μόλιβον ἀπὸ ψυχροφόρου σωλήνος”) and make from it a lamella (“ποίησον λάμναν”) on which to inscribe, with a bronze stylus (“ἐπίγραψε χαλκῷ γραφεῖω”), a series of magic names and *characterēs*, which are listed afterwards in the text (“ὡς ὑπόκειται”)—see ib. In PGM VII.429–58, the recipe instructs to “engrave in a plate made of lead from a cold-water channel,” “πλάκκην ἐς μόλιβὴν ἀπὸ ψυχροφόρου τόπου ἐνχάραξον,”—see ib., p. 20.

- 29 The *Sethianorium Tabellae*, or *defixiones* of Porta San Sebastiano, were discovered along the Appia road (Rome) in 1850 and first studied by Carl Richard Wünsch, who dated them to the end of the IV century—see Carl Richard Wünsch, *Sethianische Verfluchungstafeln aus Rom* (Leipzig 1898). Only three tablets remain today, preserved in the Roman National Museum in Rome. Several of these lead tablets include drawings of anthropomorphic figures characterized by a horse-like/ass-like head, which were identified by Wünsch with the Egyptian god Seth. Wünsch considered the *Sethianorium Tabellae* to be the product of a lower form of Gnosticism, which recognized in Seth, the spiritual son of Adam who was identified with Adam and Christ, the source of Gnosis—see ib., p. 103. Auguste Marie Audollent, relying on Wünsch's publication, related the tablets to the “*Sethianorium secta cuius erant participes qui exsecrationibus huiuscendi utebatur, in primisque de Typhone-Seth, Osiri et ceteris Aeguptiorum diis aut demonibus qui ab eis figurati sunt et invocati*,”—see Auguste Marie Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae quotquot innotuerunt tam in Graecis Orientis quam in totius Occidentis partibus praeter Atticas in Corpore Inscriptionum Atticarum editas* (Paris, 1904), p. XXIX. Attilio Mastrocinque agrees with the identification of the figure with the equine head with Seth. Nevertheless, he believes that the tablets do not express a form of Gnosticism, but the relics of the Egyptian religion. Mastrocinque considers Osiris the main deity invoked in the tablets and understands the reference to Seth—in figure in most of the *Sethianorium Tabellae* and quoted in *DefixTab* 155—as a threat to coerce Osiris, in relation to the Egyptian myth of Seth and Osiris—see Attilio Mastrocinque, “Le *defixiones* di Porta San Sebastiano,” *MHNH: Revista Internacional de Investigación sobre Magia y Astrología Antiguas* 5 (2005), pp. 45–60, particularly pp. 50–51. For *DefixTab* 155, see also John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York, 1992), pp. 67–71.



ψυχροφόρον πέταλον,” a tablet made out of a cold-water pipe.”<sup>30</sup> In light of the aforementioned Greek parallels, the *lectio* “צײן פסוֹכוֹטרוֹן” in ms. Ant. 238 appears to be the most correct, corresponding to the Hebrew translation and corrupted transliteration from the Greek “ψυχροφόρον πέταλον” in *DefixTab* 155.<sup>31</sup> The lack of understanding of the Greek term “ψυχροφόρον,” evident already in the ninth century ms. Ant. 238, determined the textual additions in the later testimonies.

After the description of the *materia magica*, the recipe instructs the user to inscribe the lamella with the names of the angels appointed to the fourth encampment. Although the typical formula for the adjuration, “משביע אני, עליכם,” is absent in the recipe, the angels are commanded to bind the victim in chains, a common feature of aggressive magic, and make him/her suffer from lack of sleep. The juxtaposition of the specific terms “שינה,” “תנומה” and “תרדמה” emphasizes the condition of absolute restlessness brought about by the curse. These expressions, attested to also in the Bible, might refer to the prayer *Birkat ha-mapyl*, which represents, in my view, the “orthodox” counterpart of the prophylactic spells against oneiric aggressive magic that I will discuss below.<sup>32</sup> The recipe aims at harming the victim in his/her entire persona,

30 “τῷ πετάλῳ τῷ ψυχροφώρω,” *DefixTab* 155, A27–28 and B22–23—see Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*, pp. 208 and 210. John Gager translates: “tablet [taken from a water conduit],”—see Gager, *Curse Tablets*, pp. 70–71; for an Italian translation, see Mastrocinque, “Le defixiones,” pp. 47 and 49.

31 For the other *lectiōnes*, see note 28.

32 For the use of “תנומה” in the Bible, see, for instance, “אַל-תִּתֶן שְׁנָה לְעֵינֶיךָ; וְתַנּוּמָה;” *לְעֵפְעֵפְיךָ*,” Prov. 6:4 (“Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyes”); “מַעַט תַּנּוּמוֹת, מַעַט תִּנּוּמוֹת,” Prov. 6:10 (“Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep”). For the use of “תרדמה,” see “וַיִּשָׁן” על-הָאָדָם, וַיִּשָׁן” Gen. 2:21 (“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept”); “וַיְהִי הַשְׁמָשׁ” וַיִּהְיֶה חֹשֶׁךְ” וַיִּפֹּל אֶלְהֵים תִּרְדָּמָה עַל-הָאָדָם, וַיִּשָׁן” Gen. 15:12 (“And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram”). The two terms are used together in Job 33:15, “בְּנִפֹל בְּנִפֹל תִּרְדָּמָה, בְּנִפֹל בְּנִפֹל תִּרְדָּמָה, בְּנִפֹל בְּנִפֹל תִּרְדָּמָה” (“In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed”). The source for the *Birkat ha-mapyl* is in b*Berakhot* 60b: “ברוך המפיל חבלי שינה על עיני ותנומה על עפעפי ומאיר לאישון בת” (“Blessed is He who causes the bands of sleep to fall upon my eyes and slumber on my eyelids, and gives light to the apple of the light”). Quotations from the *Qri’at shemah ‘al-ha-miṭah* prayer, recited together with the *Ha-mapyl* benediction, are found in a few magical texts—see Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1985), p. 42 and Dan Levene, “If You Appear as A Pig’: Another Incantation Bowl (Moussaiéff 164),” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 52 (2007), pp. 59–70, particularly, p. 66. Interestingly, both the *Qri’at shemah ‘al-ha-miṭah* and *Birkat ha-mapyl* are in part quoted in an eleventh-twelfth century Genizah recipe for *she’elat halom*, proving a possible relationship between these *tefilloth* and oneiric magic.

as is suggested by the conjunct use of the terms “נפש,” “נשמה” and “רוח.” The pain wished for the victim is very intense and is compared to that suffered in childbirth. The expression “ביולדה,” attested with minor changes in all the manuscripts, might be a mistranslation of the Greek “ὡς κύων,” “like a dog,” misunderstood for a participle from the verb “κύω,” “to give birth.”<sup>33</sup> The victim is compared to a barking dog in mss. Günz. 248, Hébr. 849, Plut. 44.23 and JTS N8117. The metaphor of a barking dog might refer to an ill mind, confused and troubled with voices and fright, indicating that one of the effects of insomnia could be madness.<sup>34</sup> The mention of a dog’s head and a barking dog possibly suggests a strong association of dogs with disturbed sleep.<sup>35</sup> The invocation ends with a command to the angels to prevent anyone else, besides the user, from releasing the victim, thus wielding complete power over the victim and nullifying any counter spell intended to break the first incantation.

After the invocation and the curse, the recipe continues in §139 with further ritual instructions, regarding the introduction of the inscribed lamella inside the dog head, its seal and burial. According to the logic of sympathetic magic, the head of the dog symbolizes the head of the victim. The insertion of the lamella, upon which the curse is inscribed, into the head of the dog figuratively represents the entrance of fury and madness into the head of the chosen victim and, therefore, brings about the sleep disorder. As long as the lamella is in the dog’s head, the victim is granted no rest at all. The detail that the dog’s mouth has to be hermetically sealed with wax refers to the indissolubility of the curse, which can be broken only by the user who activated it. The lion engraved on the signet ring, requested in the recipe, might personify the power of a certain deity, originally invoked in the Greco-Egyptian

33 For a similar misunderstanding of the Greek word “κύων,” which in Greek assumes the meaning of both “a dog” and “pregnant,” see Gideon Bohak’s discussion of an Aramaic Genizah recipe translated or adapted from Greek—Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, p. 236.

34 For instance, see “ὡς οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅς σῆς γε κύνας κεφαλῆς ἀπαλλάξοι,” “no one could keep the dogs off your head,” Iliad 22.348.

35 In his study on Pan and the nightmare, Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher observed that in many cultures the nightmare is often associated with the apparition of a black dog. For instance, Roscher reports the collective nightmare dreamt by “a complete battalion of French soldiers quartered in an old abbey near Tropea in Calabria,” in which “the devil in the shape of a large black shaggy dog had entered through the door, rushed on their chests with the speed of lightning and then disappeared through a door opposite the entrance,”—Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher, *Ephialtes: ein pathologisch-mythologische Abhandlung über die Alpträume und Alpdämonen des Klassischen Altertms* (Saxon Academy of Sciences, vol. 20.2) (Leipzig, 1900), republished in James Hillman, *Pan and the Nightmare: Two Essays* (New York, 1972), pp. 106–108.

parallel of this ritual. Although the image of the lion is “common on ancient seals, glass pendants, rings and magical gems,” it is impossible to establish the effective function of the seal ring depicting a lion in this specific recipe, in its present Jewish form in SHR.<sup>36</sup>

The last section of the recipe contains instructions for releasing the victim from the spell and some general purity rules that need to be observed for the success of the incantation.

The recipe preserved in SHR I §§137–140 corresponds, in all respects, to an oneiric aggressive magical procedure that aims to harm a certain victim using sleep disorders. Although the Hebrew text does not employ a technical term for “insomnia,” it clearly refers to this specific sleep disturbance. According to the text, the impossibility of experiencing “sleep,” “light sleep,” or “deep sleep,” i.e. an extended phase of insomnia, is a curse dreadful enough to be sent to an enemy. Although the recipe does not specify why the enemy is inflicted with insomnia, the final clause regarding the release of the victim might indicate that the user employs insomnia to blackmail the victim about a certain issue. Whatever reasons drove users to punish or threaten their enemies with lack of sleep, the recipe in SHR demonstrates that this specific sleep impairment was regarded as an annoying and dangerous condition, difficult to endure, especially when protracted over a long period. Further evidence for the belief that a healthy life demands physiological sleep is provided by a recipe for restoring someone’s sleep preserved in a published eleventh century fragment from the Cairo Genizah, which reads as follows: “לשינה שאין אדם יכול לישון אסותא מן\| בשם סתקיאל טריראל שריאל צפציאל\| הנדיאל אתון מלאביא קדישיא דממנין\| על טעם שינה הבו שינה דחיים טבין לפ'ב'פ' בפריע אמן אמן סלה ויפל יי תרדמה על\| פל'ב'פ' ויפגע וגו' (וגו') ויפגע וגו'” (“For sleep, when a person cannot sleep: Healing from/ Heaven, in the name of STQY’L, ṬRYR’L, ŚRY’L/ ŠPŠY’L/ HNDY’L, You are the holy angels who are appointed/ to the indulgence of sleep, bring sleep of good life to N son of N/ quickly, Amen Amen Selah. *And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon* [Gen. 2:21]/ N son of N, *And he slept and dreamed* [Gen. 41:5] etc., *And he lighted* [Gen. 28:11] etc.”) [T.-S. K 1.28, 2b, 2–7].<sup>37</sup> The

36 For the quotation, see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, p. 174, n. 78. On ancient magical gems and rings, see Campbell Bonner, “Amulets Chiefly in the British Museum: A Supplementary Article,” *Hesperia* 20 (1951), pp. 301–345; Simone Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, 2 vols. (London, 2001); Jeffrey Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems* (Wiesbaden, 2007); Gideon Bohak, “The Use of Engraved Gems and Rings in Ancient Jewish Magic,” in *Magical Gems in their Contexts*, ed. Arpad Nagy and Ildiko Csepregi (forthcoming).

37 See Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza* (Tübingen, 1994–1999), vol. 1, p. 137.

above-mentioned text cannot be regarded with certainty as a counter spell against a recipe for causing insomnia such as the one found in SHR, since it does not mention whether the user's sleeplessness was imputed to a demonic or human magical activity. Like the recipe in SHR, however, the Genizah recipe (a.) concerns human sleep (or lack of sleep), (b.) uses the specific term "תרדמה" ("deep sleep") and (c.) refers to the belief that specific angels control the sleeping faculties of human beings. It is not surprising that the angel names in the two magical texts do not match, since the angels adjured in the recipe for causing insomnia in SHR are in charge of preventing human beings from natural rest ("מפרידים שינה מבני אדם," §136), while those invoked in the Genizah recipe for restoring sleep are believed to be appointed to the "indulgence of sleep" ("דממנין על טעם שינה," T.-S. K 1.28, 2b, 4–5).

The recipe for causing insomnia in SHR shows several analogies with non-Jewish late antique spells and seems largely indebted to Greco-Egyptian magic. Above, I discussed some of its linguistic features that also occur in PGM VII.396–404, PGM VII.429–58 and *DefixTab* 155. The similarities between the aforementioned Greek spells and the recipe in the Jewish book of magic are not limited to the *materia magica*, but also relate to the scope of the recipes and some ritual patterns. Although PGM VII.396–404 does not explicitly indicate that its purpose is to cause insomnia, it represents a spell for silencing people, bringing people into subjection and inhibiting people ("Φιμωτικὸν καὶ ὑποτακτικὸν γενναῖον καὶ κάτοχος"), i.e. an aggressive incantation aimed at gaining power over a certain individual, like the recipe in SHR I §§137–140. Furthermore, both texts instruct users to insert the inscribed lamella into a dead body, a person who died prematurely in the Greco-Egyptian recipe ("καὶ θῆς παρὰ ἄωρον"), and a dog in the Jewish incantation [§139].<sup>38</sup> The recipe in PGM VII.429–58 is not explicitly aimed at making a victim insomniac; nevertheless, it is "a restraining rite for anything" that "works even on chariots" ("κάτοχος παντὸς πράγματος καὶ ἐπὶ ἄρμάτων ποιῶν"), and which also causes sickness ("κατακλιτικὸν").<sup>39</sup> The aggressive spell preserved in *DefixTab* 155 is a fourth century finished product probably written by a charioteer or by someone acquainted with circus magic.<sup>40</sup> It aims at provoking a cruel death for a certain Kardelos son of

38 PGM VII.396–404, Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, p. 18.

39 See Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, p. 19; Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, p. 129. The mention of the efficacy of the spell on chariots might imply the familiarity of the author of the recipe with "circus magic," as in the case of *DefixTab* 155; on this argument, see below. Interestingly, among the deities invoked in the recipe preserved in PGM VII.429–58, there are Osiris and Mnevis, like in *DefixTab* 155.

40 See Mastrocinque, "Le *defixiones*," pp. 58–59. On circus magic, see Florent Heintz, "Circus Curses and their Archaeological Contexts," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 11 (1998),

Fulgentia, most likely a rival charioteer, within five days: “Κάρδηλον, ὃν ἔτεκεν μήτηρ Φωλγεν[τία,] οὕτως αὐτὸν ποιήσητε κατὰ κράβατον τιμωρίας τιμωρισθῆνε κακῶ θανάτῳ ἐκλιπῆν εἰσὼ ἡμερῶν πέντε,” “Kardelos son of Fulgentia, so that you make possible that he is punished and die of a bad death within five days” [*DefixTab* 155, A50–58].<sup>41</sup> Again, the magical procedure described in the *defixio* does not refer to insomnia, yet, as with the recipe in SHR [§138], it mentions that the victim, “the impious and damned and miserable Kardelos son of Fulgentia,” is bound and handed over to the non-human entities that are coerced to harm him: “εἶνα ὡσπερα ὑμῖν παραθίθομε τοῦτον τὸν δυσεβῆν καὶ ἄνομον καὶ ἐπικατάρων Κάρδηλον ὃν ἔτεκεν μήτηρ Φωλγεντία ἐδεμένον συνδεμένον κατεδεμένον εἶνα αὐτὸν συνεργήσητε καὶ κατήσχητε καὶ παραδώσητε τῷ καταχθονίῳ εἰς τὸν τῶν ταρτάρων οἶκον τῶν ἐνφερνίων τὸν δυσεβῆν καὶ ἄνομον καὶ δύσμορον Κάρδηλον ὃν ἔτεκεν μήτηρ Φωλγεντία,” “like we deliver to you this impious, outlaw and damned Kardelos, son of Fulgentia; bound, bound together, bound below, so that together you fasten him, hold him and deliver him to the (god) of the underworld in the house of Tartaros, of the Inferno, the impious, outlaw and miserable Kardelos, son of Fulgentia” [*DefixTab* 155, B3–10].<sup>42</sup> The will to magically and fatally bind the victim is emphasized by a detail from the picture carved on the tablet, which shows a human figure tied with ropes. Following John Gager’s interpretation, I argue that the figure portrays Kardelos.<sup>43</sup> In my view, the black circle in the torso of the figure (see Figures 9.2 and 9.8) might represent the heart of the victim, fatally perforated by two ropes that seem to be serpents with the head of a dog.

In the Jewish world, the Babylonian incantation bowls, which will be discussed below, sometimes preserve images portraying demonic and human figures bound with chains and shackles (see Figures 9.3, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6 and 9.7), possibly implying that they are prevented from attacking the users of the bowl.

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337–342; Id., *Agonistic Magic in the Late Antique Circus*, PhD dissertation (Harvard University, 1999), where the author also discusses a recipe for victory in a horse race preserved in SHR I §§193–196—see *ib.*, pp. 155–158.

41 Analogous expressions are also found in A12–18, A37–40 and B10–16—see Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*, p. 209. For an English translation of these passages, see Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 70; for an Italian translation, see Mastrocinque, “Le *defixiones*,” pp. 47 and 49.

42 Similar expressions are used in A29–36 and A47–52, see Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*, pp. 208–209.

43 “The mummified figure at the bottom [of the tablet], being attacked by two snakes, probably represents the target of the binding action, in this case a rival jockey”—see Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 69.



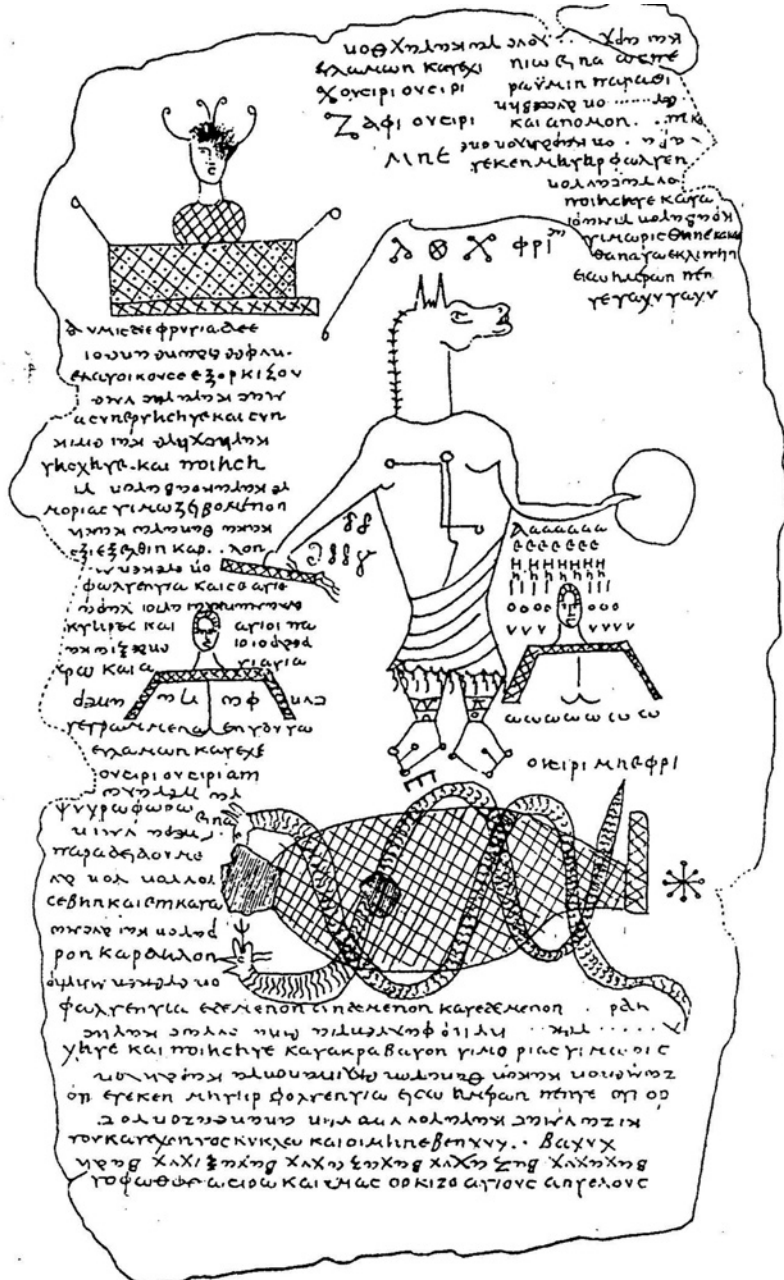


FIGURE 9.2 Drawing by Carl Richard Wünsch, reproducing the Roman lead tablet, DefixTab 155. The human figure at the bottom probably represents the victim of the spell, bound by two ropes/snakes with the head of a dog. REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE NATIONAL ROMAN MUSEUM AND THE SPECIAL SUPERINTENDENCE FOR THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF ROME.



FIGURE 9.3 *Babylonian Incantation Bowl in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Schøyen Collection, MS 1927/34. The human figure, whose hand and feet are bound, probably represents a female Lilith demon.*

REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF MARTIN SCHØYEN AND MATTHEW MORGENSTERN.



FIGURE 9.4 *Babylonian Incantation Bowl in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Schøyen Collection, MS 2053/198. The figures bound with chains probably represent the demons. REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF MARTIN SCHØYEN AND MATTHEW MORGENSTERN.*

Some of these human figures depicted upon the bowls might even represent the cursed magician, who becomes the victim in counter-spells (see Figures 9.5, 9.6, and 9.7).

Furthermore, a published bowl in Aramaic includes the drawing of a human figure, which might be bound by a serpent, with an iconography similar to that observed in *DefixTab* 155 (see Figure 9.8).<sup>44</sup>

44 See Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 124–126 [Bowl 19, Plate 24]. The “wraps” of the serpent around the human figure might also be interpreted as the arms of the anthropomorphic character; see Naama Viložny, *Figure and Image in Magic and Popular Art: between Babylonia and Palestine, during the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Heb., unpubl. PhD Thesis (The Hebrew University, 2010), p. 59. In general, on the iconography of the Babylonian incantation bowls, see Viložny, *Figure and Image*; Naama Viložny, “The Art of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls” in *Aramaic Bowl Spells, Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity* 1, ed., Shaul Shaked, James N. Ford, Siam Bhayro (with contributions from Matthew Morgenstern and Naama Viložny) (Leiden and Boston, 2013), pp. 29–37.





FIGURE 9.5 *Babylonian Incantation Bowl in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Schøyen Collection, MS 1929/12. The human figure appears to be bound and might represent the victim of the spell.*

REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF MARTIN SCHØYEN AND MATTHEW MORGENSTERN.



FIGURE 9.6 *Babylonian Incantation Bowl in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Schøyen Collection, MS 2053/250. The human figure appears to be bound and might represent the victim of the spell.*

REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF MARTIN SCHØYEN AND MATTHEW MORGENSTERN.





FIGURE 9.7 *Babylonian Incantation Bowl in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Schøyen Collection, MS 2053/259. The human figure appears to be bound and might represent the victim of the spell.*

REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF MARTIN SCHØYEN AND MATTHEW MORGENSTERN.

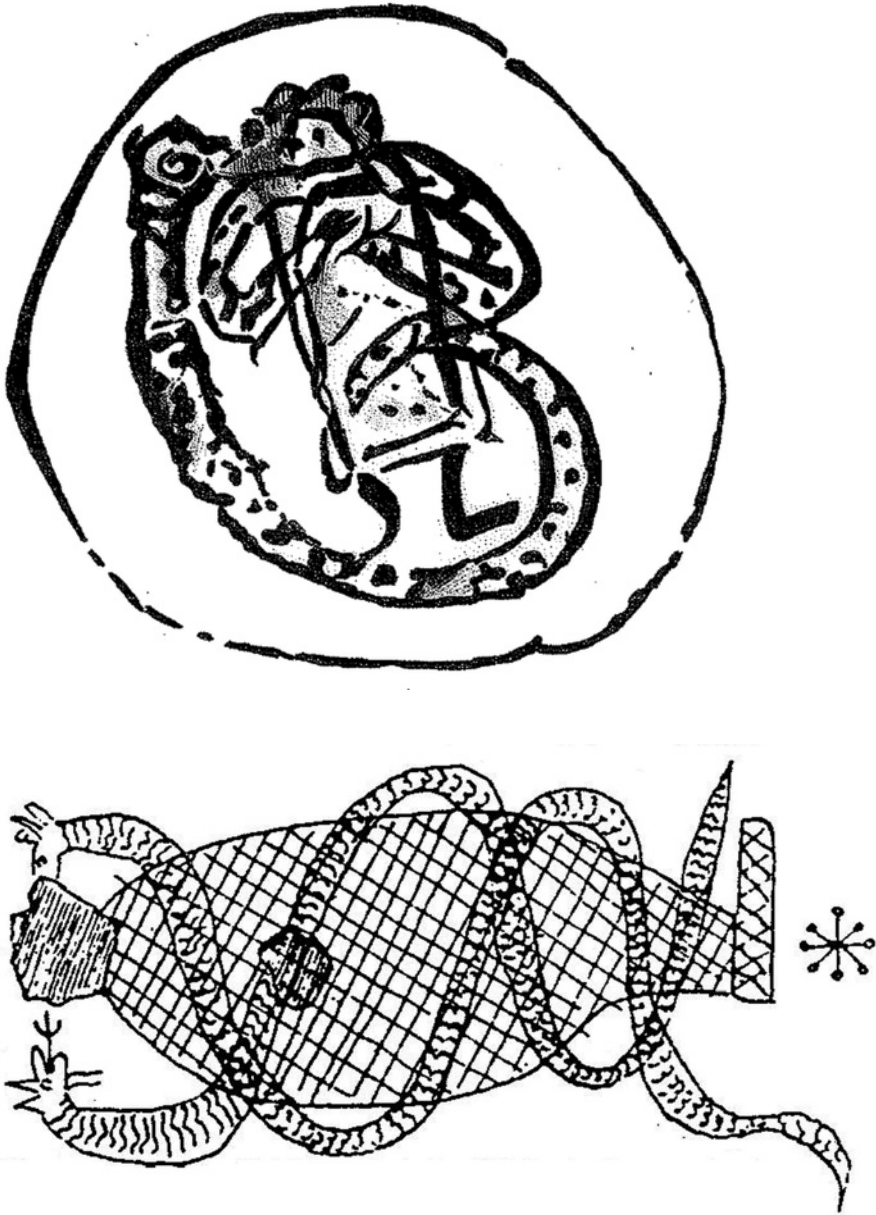


FIGURE 9.8 On the bottom, a detail from DefixTab 155, depicting a human figure bound by two ropes/snakes with the head of a dog. On the top, drawing by Alessia Bellusci of a detail from an Aramaic incantation bowl [Bowl 19 in Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*] depicting an anthropomorphic figure that is also possibly bound by a serpent.

Like in the oneiric aggressive recipe in SHR [§138], in the *dēfixio* the entire persona of the victim is harmed: “καὶ ὡσπερα οὖτος ωπιονεπι ψυχρὸς καταψυχρένετε ἐπανγωνίζετε μαρένετε καταμαρένετε ἐπανγωνίζετε συνζαρι καταραζι ὄντα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ ὄστέα καὶ τοὺς μυαλοὺς καὶ τὰ νεύρα καὶ τὰς σάρκας καὶ τὴν δύναμιν Κάρδηλον ὃν ἔτεκεν μήτηρ Φωλεγεντία,” “freeze him like this *ōpionepi* is frozen, strangle, destroy, extinguish, strangle him, who is *synzari* and damned, the soul, the bones, the marrow, the nerves, the flesh, and the vigor of Kardelos, son of Fulgentia” [*DefixTab* 155, B10–15].<sup>45</sup> While the Greek text mostly refers to the physical body of the victim, “bones” (“ὄστέα”), “marrow” (“μυαλοὺς”), “nerves” (“νεύρα”), “flesh” (“σάρκας”), adopting only two terms for the “immaterial” body, “soul” (“ψυχὴν”) and “vigor” (“δύναμιν”), the Hebrew recipe entirely considers the spiritual body of the victim, “life” (“שׁפּוּט”), “soul” (“הַנְּשׁוּמָה”) and “spirit” (“רוּחַ”).<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, on account of the above-mentioned similarities, the two magical texts are, in my view, deeply related.<sup>47</sup> At least six recipes in the corpus of PGM are explicitly aimed at producing wakefulness, as indicated by their title “ἀγρυπνητικόν.”<sup>48</sup> Although the Greek verb “ἀγρυπνέω” might possess the meaning “lying in bed and thinking of” and, metaphorically,

45 Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*, p. 209.

46 A similar list of physical and non-physical terms used to refer to the entire persona of Kardelos occurs in *DefixTab* 155, B24–26. Particularly, the list includes the terms “μυαλοὺς,” “νεύρα,” “σάρκας;” the reference to Kardelos’s strength is given by the term “ἰσχὺν” and the expression “δύναμιν ἐν ἡλικία,” referring to the “vigor in (his) age” and, thus, implying that the charioteer Kardelos was in his youth when the spell was written against him.

47 The finished product in *DefixTab* 155 and the recipe in SHR §§137–140 are both aggressive spells, sharing a very technical and, yet, rare term, “ψυχροφόρον,” referring to the handover of the entire persona of the victim to non-human entities and employing the metaphor of ropes and chains in order to represent the pain inflicted on the enemy. In *DefixTab* 155, Osiris, Apis and Mnevis are invoked and asked to cause the death of the victim; yet, the manner of death is not indicated in the text—might it be lack of sleep? The *Sethianorum Tabellae* are considered examples of “circus magic,” since most of these tablets were intended for causing the death of one or more charioteers/horses in order to enable the user of the spell to win the horse race—see Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 68; Mastrocinque, “Le *defixiones*,” p. 58. The recipe for causing insomnia in SHR §§137–140, among other purposes, might have been used for damaging a charioteer and prevent his participation—and possibly victory—in a horse race. Such a hypothesis is plausible especially if we consider that SHR includes a recipe for assisting the user in winning at the racetrack [SHR I §§193–196].

48 PGM IV.3255–74, PGM VII.374–76, PGM VII.376–84, PGM VII.652–60, PGM XII.376–96, PGM LII.20–26; see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, respectively pp. 100–101; pp. 127–128; p. 136; pp. 166–167; p. 284. For insomnia in ancient Babylonia, see Sally A. L. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals* (Münster, 1998), p. 43.

“being watchful,” it is clear that the derived substantive “ἀγρυπνητικόν” refers to a spell aimed at making a victim insomniac, since all the incantations with this title in PGM exhibit an aggressive character.<sup>49</sup> Most of them involve a female victim or declare an erotic purpose, such as in PGM VII.374–76: “ἰψαῖ ἰαῶαι ἀγρυπνεῖτω μοι ἢ δεῖνα τῆς δεῖνα ἐκείνη τῆ νυκτὶ ἀγρυπνησει,” “IPSAË IAŌAI, let her, NN, daughter of NN, lie awake because of me.”<sup>50</sup> One of these recipes predicts the death of the woman within seven days through lack of sleep (“καὶ ἄυπνος τελευτήσει μὴ διαμηκύνασα ἡμέρας ζ’”), emphasizing, once again, the awareness of the importance of natural sleep in antiquity.<sup>51</sup> Another recipe for making a female victim insomniac, preserved in PGM VII. 376–84, prescribes an iron tablet (“ποίη δὲ καὶ σιδήρου πέταλον”) inscribed with the formula “turn cold, iron, and become snow” (“ψύγητι, σίδηρε, καὶ χιῶν γενοῦ”).<sup>52</sup> The reference to the coldness of the tablet in PGM VII. 376–84 is reminiscent of the expression “a lamella made from the cold-water pipe” in the recipe in SHR and in *DefixTab* 155, and of the command to the gods to “freeze him like this *ōpionepi* is frozen,” in the latter. While in the *dēfixio* coldness symbolizes the death of the victim, in the recipe for causing insomnia in PGM VII. 376–84 it might refer, as well, to a state of distress and disease experienced by the victim. Two of the spells for producing wakefulness in PGM employ a bat in the ritual.<sup>53</sup> The use of a bat’s head, either dried and sewn up in a leather amulet or sewn up in a pillow, is considered a useful aid for wakefulness by the third century author Julius Africanus [*Kestoi*, 7.17].<sup>54</sup>

49 See the lemma “ἀγρυπνέω” in LSJ.

50 See Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, p. 17.

51 PGM XII.376–96, Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, p. 82.

52 See Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, vol. 2, p. 17.

53 PGM VII.652–60 and PGM XII.376–96.

54 “Dried and sewn up in a leather amulet, its head keeps the one who has fastened it awake for however long he happens to wear it,” “ταύτης ἐσκελετευμένη μὲν ἡ κεφαλὴ καὶ ἐρραφέισα σκυτίδι ποιεῖ τὸν περιεψάμενον ἀγρυπνον ἔστ’ ἀνφορῆ;” Julius Africanus, *Kestoi*, 7.17—see Martin Wallraff, Carlo Scardino, Laura Mecella and Christophe Guignard, eds., William Adler, trans., *Julius Africanus Cesti. The Extant Fragments*, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte, Neue Folge 18 (Berlin, 2012), pp. 86–87. Another version of the spell, used to play a prank on someone and induce in them sleeplessness, consists in removing the head of a live bat and sewing it on the pillow on which he normally sleeps, “εἰ δὲ πῃ καὶ παῖξαι θέλοις ἐς ἀγρυπνίαν ἐμβαλῶν, ζώσης τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀφελῶν τῷ προσκεφαλαίῳ ἔνθα καθυδὲιν αὐτῷ σύνηθες ἔρραψον,” ib.. According to Africanus, the symptoms of sleeplessness are headache, lack of appetite, and enervation of the body, which might lead to fatal consequences when experienced regularly—*Kestoi*, 7.2.



In light of the Greek terminology adopted in the recipe in SHR and its parallels with Greco-Egyptian magical texts, it is plausible that the Jewish incantation was originally adapted from a Greco-Egyptian spell, expunged of explicit non-Jewish elements, such as the names of the invoked deities and the more “pagan” iconography on the signet ring. Although there is no concrete evidence of the effective use of SHR before the twelfth century, we cannot aprioristically exclude that it circulated widely within Jewish society and that, even before its final redaction, the individual recipes were used by Jews.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, the lack of material sources prevents us from conjecturing which part of the Jewish population may have actually engaged in magical rituals for hurting an enemy with prolonged sleeplessness as in the recipe discussed here.

### A Recipe for Sending Dreams in *Ḥarba de-Moshe* [ḤdM Recipe N° 70]

*Ḥarba de-Moshe* (ḤdM), *The Sword of Moses*, is a late antique Jewish magical treatise. It underwent several stages of redaction and exists in at least three different versions, all of which are preserved in relatively late manuscripts.<sup>56</sup> In its longest version, ḤdM includes a literary-theoretical introduction, a long list of magical names, which represents the sword itself, and a collection of about one hundred and forty recipes for various purposes, all based on the recitation of a particular section of *nomina barbara* from the sword.<sup>57</sup> In its extant forms, ḤdM is a late antique Babylonian composition, although it might

55 There are at least two eleventh-twelfth century Genizah fragments that quote directly from SHR. These represent the earliest finished products, found so far, that were composed following a recipe from SHR. These two fragments will be published respectively in Gideon Bohak and Alessia Bellusci, “The Greek Prayer to Helios in *Sefer Ha-Razim*, in Light of New Textual Evidence,” (forthcoming), and Alessia Bellusci, “Literary Books of Magic and Finished Products: A Genizah Finished Product for *She’elat Halom* Based on *Sefer Ha-Razim*,” (forthcoming).

56 ḤdM is edited and translated in Moses Gaster, *The Sword of Moses* (London, 1896); Yuval Harari, *Ḥarba de-Moshe: A New Edition and a Study (The Sword of Moses)* [Heb.] (Jerusalem, 1997); Id., “The Sword of Moses (*Ḥarba de-Moshe*): A New Translation and Introduction,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7 (2012), 58–98; see also Alexander, “Incantations and Books of Magic,” pp. 350–352; Yuval Harari, “Sword, Moses, and *The Sword of Moses*: Between Rabbinical and Magical Traditions,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12 (2005), 293–329; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, pp. 175–179.

57 This version was known by Hai Gaon; Simcha Emmanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa* [Heb.] (Jerusalem and Cleveland, 1995), pp. 131–132.

have originally also included late antique Palestinian materials, both Jewish and Greco-Egyptian.<sup>58</sup>

Among other magical procedures, the third part of ḤdM preserves also an oneiric aggressive magical recipe:<sup>59</sup>

לשדורי חלמא על חברך כת' על טסא דכספא מן אבנסנס ועד קיריואס ואחית בפום  
תרנגלא ושחוט יתיה כד מחת בפיו ואהדר פיו ואחית ביני ירכתיה וקבר בעקבא  
דשורא ואחית עקבך על דוכתיה ואמ' כן בשם [ ] ייזיל שליחא קלילא ויצער ית פ'ב'פ'  
בחלומיה עד דיתעביד ריעותי

To send a dream against someone, write on a silver plate from 'BNSNS until QYRYW'S and place (it) in the mouth of a cock and slaughter it while it is placed in its mouth and turn its mouth around and place it between its thighs and bury (it) at the bottom part of a wall. And put your heel on its place and say thus: in the name of [ ] may the swift messenger go and torment N, son of N, in his dreams until my will is fulfilled.

The recipe in ḤdM appears to be quite similar to the one preserved in SHR, in respect of both structure and content. As is clear from the title, the text represents an oneiric magical recipe aimed at sending dreams. The expression “ויצער ית פ'ב'פ'” at the end of the text, clarifies the aggressive nature of the spell, aimed, in all likelihood, at inducing a nightmare or a coercive dream in a victim, in order to damage and blackmail him/her for a certain purpose.<sup>60</sup>

As in SHR, the *materia magica* required for the ritual include a metallic tablet, in this case a silver plate, and the corpse of an animal, this time a rooster, which has to be taken alive and then killed during the magical practice.<sup>61</sup> According to the recipe, the silver lamella has to be inscribed with a specific section of magical words from the sword and then inserted into the mouth of the rooster while still alive.<sup>62</sup> Contrary to the procedure described in SHR,

58 Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, pp. 178–179.

59 The transcription and English translation are according to, respectively, Harari, *Harba de-Moshe*, p. 42 and Id., *The Sword of Moses*, p. 89.

60 For an introduction on nightmares according to contemporary medicine, see James F. Pagel, “Nightmares and Disorders of Dreaming,” *American Family Physician* 61(7) (2000), 2037–2042.

61 The percentage of recipes requiring a silver lamella is quite low in ḤdM—see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, p. 177. Like dogs, roosters were commonly employed in ancient magic.

62 The string of magical names from the Sword reads “סטותנוס ב' טטרומי אוזלאה ב' סותתנוס” —see Harari, *Harba de-Moshe*, p. 33.



there is no need to seal the mouth of the animal with wax and a signet ring. Once the silver tablet is inserted in its mouth, the rooster is slaughtered and its body is twisted so that its beak is between its thighs. Finally, it is buried at the base of a wall. Besides functioning as a sacrifice to the non-human entities involved in the ritual, the body of the animal clearly symbolizes the victim. The magical knot created using the body of the rooster might indicate the subversion of the victim's physical and mental faculties as a result of the sleep disorder.

A recipe for erotic purposes, preserved on a magical *rotulus* from the Cairo Genizah that dates to the early tenth century, describes almost the same ritual dynamics: the placement of an inscribed lamella inside the body of a white rooster; the slaughter of the animal; the twisting of its body; and its burial.<sup>63</sup> Both texts present a strong aggressive component: the recipe in ḤdM being aimed at coercing the victim to have a certain dream and the Genizah recipe being intended to coercively induce a man and a woman to make peace.<sup>64</sup> The analogies with the erotic incantation in the Genizah *rotulus* might suggest an erotic character also for the recipe preserved in ḤdM, whose purpose may have thus been sending a spell of attraction to the victim through a dream.

Spells of this kind are well attested also in PGM and PDM under the title “δνειροσομπός.”<sup>65</sup> Among them, an incantation in PGM XII.107–121 prescribes a strip of papyrus, written with myrrh, placed in the mouth of a black cat that

63 בסו נולטיף דכסיט וכת' א[לין מלייה] בגוזה: בסו דדוג נם יונאם הרבגד [בהו היתין] הלטיפב עזיבו הלגנרת הבו (!) הבתך הויג[ב בהו] (ה)פושן דפיל לגו מעוי וכוף ראשה: הלגנר (ת) [ד] יועמל רומטו תשרפב התחרוא and take a tin lamella, and write th[ese words] upon it. And take a thread from the clothes of the man [and place it] in the lamella and tear the cock apart and place the writing inside it [and place] fine flour of ??? inside its intestines and twist the head of the cock to its intestines and bury it at a crossroads,” (Bodleian Library, Heb. a3.31, recto 126–130)—see Gideon Bohak, “The Magical Rotuli from the Cairo Genizah,” in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, ed. Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari, and Shaul Shaked, (Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture) 15 (Leiden, 2011), pp. 335–336; for an exhaustive discussion of the whole Genizah *rotulus* written in Palestinian Jewish Aramaic and Hebrew and exhibiting several Greek loanwords, see *ib.*, pp. 321–340.

64 “למרמי שלם [בין] גבר לבין איתה,” *ib.*, p. 335.

65 For instance, PGM XII.107–21; PGM XII.121–43; PDM Suppl. 1–6; PDM Suppl. 7–18; PDM Suppl. 19–27; PDM Suppl. 28–40; PDM Suppl. 40–60; PDM Suppl. 60–101; PDM Suppl. 101–16; PDM Suppl. 117–30—see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, respectively, pp. 157–158; pp. 323–327; on this subject, see Samson Eitrem, “Dreams and Divination in Magical Ritual” in *Magica Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York and Oxford, 1999), pp. 175–187. On sleep disorders in ancient Babylonian texts, see Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams*, pp. 43–72.

died a violent death, thus coinciding with the magical procedure described in H̄dM and in the Genizah recipe.<sup>66</sup>

The recipe in H̄dM lacks instructions for releasing the victim and the typical concluding formulae. It ends with an invocation to the “swift messenger” (שליח קלילא), a supernatural entity who is also mentioned, at the beginning of the book, as being sent down to earth by God to search for a righteous person to whom he can deliver the mysteries. A similar epithet, “the swift prince,” also occurs in a *historiola* in the Babylonian incantation bowls, where the supernatural entity is described as helping a woman against demonic attacks against her children.<sup>67</sup>

The brief recipe for sending a dream in H̄dM is much less sophisticated than the spell in SHR and contains no Graecisms.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, it exhibits all the main features typical of oneiric aggressive magic and shows several analogies with other ancient Jewish magical texts, both Babylonian and Palestinian, as well as with magical textual corpora outside the Jewish tradition.

### Evil Dreams and Insomnia in the Babylonian Incantation Bowls

The corpus of Babylonian incantation bowls (BIB) consists of about two thousand clay bowls that were produced in Sasanian Babylonia between the fifth and eighth centuries CE. They preserve magical texts written in five different scripts: square Aramaic script, Mandaic, Syriac (both Estrangelo and Proto-Manichean), Pahlavi and Arabic.<sup>69</sup> The spells inscribed upon the bowls, which

66 “Ονειροπο[μπὸ]ς Ἀγαθοκλεῦς: Λαβῶν αἰλουρον ὀλομέλανα βιοθ[άν]ατον, ποιήσας πιττάκιον καὶ ἐνγράφας ζμύρνη τὰ ὑποκείμενα καὶ ὄν θέλεις ὄν[ειροπ]ομπεῦσαι, καὶ ἔνθεσ εἰς τὸ στόμα τοῦ αἰλούρου,” “charm of Agathokles for sending dreams: take a completely black cat that died a violent death, make a strip of papyrus and write with myrrh the following, together with the [dream] you want sent, and place it into the mouth of the cat,” (PGM XII.107–09); see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, p. 157.

67 See the reconstruction of the *lectio* “שליח קלילא” in bowl M142 and its parallels in Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London, 2003), pp. 93–99.

68 This is true in general for the majority of the recipes in H̄dM, at least in the longer version—see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, p. 177.

69 For an introduction to the BIB, see James A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia, 1913), pp. 7–116; Cyrus H. Gordon, *Adventures in the Nearest East* (London 1957), pp. 160–174; Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, pp. 19–21; Shaul Shaked, “Magical Bowls and Incantation Texts: How to Get Rid of Demons and Pests” [Heb.], *Qadmoniot* 129 (2005), 2–13; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, pp. 183–194. The

were probably transmitted both orally and textually, are generally apotropaic, aimed at preserving and restoring the health and welfare of the user against demons and the evil eye. Some bowls, and particularly those exhibiting the *qybl'* formula, are explicitly aggressive and were intended to harm another human.<sup>70</sup> Since good health also meant restoring sleep and good dreams, the BIB were often used to keep insomnia and nightmares away from the user. Furthermore, a few bowls also contain oneiric aggressive techniques.

Ancient Mesopotamians believed that certain demons—*lilû*, “incubus,” the male form, or *lilitu* or *ardat lilû*, “succubus,” the female form,—sexually assaulted the dreamer and were responsible for erotic dreams.<sup>71</sup> The BIB

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major publications of BIB are: Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*; Cyrus H. Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums,” *Archiv Orientální* 6 (1934), 319–334; Id., “An Aramaic Exorcism,” *Archiv Orientální* 6 (1934), 466–474; Id., “An Aramaic Incantation,” *Annual of the American School of Oriental Research* 14 (1934), 141–143; Id., “Aramaic and Mandaic Magical Bowls,” *Archiv Orientální* 9 (1937), 84–106; Id., “Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” *Orientalia* 10 (1941), 116–141, 272–276, 278–289, 339–60; Id., “Two Magic Bowls in Teheran,” *Orientalia* 20 (1951), 306–315; Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts*, (American Oriental Series) 49, (New Haven, 1967); Charles D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls (Dissertation Series, 17)* (Missoula, 1975); Markham J. Geller, “Eight Incantation Bowls,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 17 (1986), 101–117; Judah B. Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the British Museum* (London, 2000); Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*; Christa Müller-Kessler, *Die Zauberschalentexte in der Hilprecht-Sammlung, Jena, und weitere Nippur-Texte anderer Sammlungen [Texte und Materialien der Frau Professor Hilprecht Collection of Babylonian Antiquities im Eigentum der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, Jena, Vol. 7]* (Wiesbaden, 2005); Ali H. Faraj, *Coppe Magiche dall'Antico Iraq con Testi in Aramaico Giudaico di Età Ellenistica* (Milano, 2010); Shaul Shaked, James N. Ford, and Siam Bhayro (with contributions from Matthew Morgenstern and Naama Vilozny), *Aramaic Bowl Spells, (Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity)* 1 (Leiden and Boston, 2013); Dan Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia: “May These Curses Go Out and Flee,”* (Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity) 2 (Leiden and Boston, 2013); Marco Moriggi, *A Corpus of Syriac Incantation Bowls. Syriac Magical Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia, (Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity)* 3 (Leiden and Boston, 2014).

70 See Dan Levene “This is a *qybl'* for overturning sorceries: Form, formula—threads in a web of transmission” in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, ed. Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari, and Shaul Shaked, (Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture) 15 (Leiden, 2011), pp. 219–244.

71 For the Akkadian ‘incubi’ and ‘succubi,’ see Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams*, pp. 62–63. For a Greco-Roman parallel, see Roscher, *Ephialtes*, pp. 131–140. On the history of erotic dreams, nightmares and erotic nightmares, see Charles Stewart, “Erotic Dreams and Nightmares from Antiquity to the Present,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8 (2002), 279–309.



her dwelling and out of her bedchamber and out of all bad dreams and out of [hated] apparitions,” [Bowl 2, 5].<sup>76</sup>

To refer to demonic attacks or to command the demons not to appear to their human victims, the BIB generally adopt a formula of the type “the demon/s that appears in a dream of night and in a vision of day/in the sleep of the day.” For instance, a formula of this kind occurs twice in a bowl aimed at divorcing demons in the name of Rabbi Joshua son of Peraḥiah: “כתבנא להין גיטי לכל” ליליתא דמיתחזין להון בהדין <ביתיה> דבבניש בר קיומ[תא] ודסרוסת בת שירין אינ תתיה בחילמא דליליה ובשינתא דיממא... ולא [תיתחזון להון] לא בחילמא דליליה ולא בחילמא דליליה, “I am writing divorces for them, for all lilitihs which appear to them, in this <house> of Babanoš the son of Qayom[ta] and of Saradust the daughter of Širin, his wife, in a dream by night and in sleep by day... you will not appe[ar to them] either in dream by nigh[t or] in sle[ep] by day” [Text 9, 3–6 and 9].<sup>77</sup> Another bowl for divorcing demons with an act of divorce in the name of Rabbi Joshua son of Peraḥiah, produced for a certain Ardoiy and conserved in the Iraq Museum, reads: “ולא תיתחזון לו לאירדוי דין וליויתא איתיה” “Do not appear to him, to this Ardoiy, and to his wife Iwita daughter of Mama, not in dreams of the night nor in the sleep of the day,” [IM 142131, 9–10].<sup>78</sup> A bowl for subduing the demons attached to the son and daughter of the user reads: “ולא תיתחזון להון לאדק” “בר האתוי ולאחת בת האתוי ולית לבניהו[ן] לא בחילמא דליליה ולא בשינתא דיממא” “and may they not appear to ‘Adaq the son of Ḥatoiy and ‘Ahat the daughter of Ḥatoiy and to their children, neither in a dream of the night nor in sleep of the day” [Text 6, 9–10].<sup>79</sup> Other bowls exhibit similar formulae, but list additional couples to the standard *parallelismus* “dream-vision,” i.e., “sleep-waking” and “twelve hours of the night-twelve hours of the day.” For instance, a bowl from the Schøyen Collection reads: “ולא תיתחזון להון לא בחילמא דל[ילי]א ולא בחי[זונא] ד[ימ]מ[ה] ולא בשינתהון ולא בעיליה[ה]ן ולא בתרתי עישרי שעי ליליה ולא בתרתי עשרי ד[ימ]מ[ה]” “and do not appear to them, neither by dream of n[igh]t nor by vi[sion of] d[ay], and neither during their sleep nor during th[e]ir waking, and neither during the twelve hours of the night nor during the twelve hours

76 Gordon, “Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” pp. 119–120. For another example, see a bowl from the Schøyen Collection: “מן בתיהון ומן דירתהון ומן מישכביהון ומן מיקמיהון ומן כל אתר” “(Depart from) ... their houses and from their dwelling and from their lying down and from their getting up and from every place of their sleeping quarters” [JBA 55 (MS 1928/1), 12–13]—see Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, p. 247.

77 Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, pp. 161–162.

78 Faraj, *Coppe Magiche*, pp. 88–89.

79 Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, p. 141.





Samuel saw a bad dream”) in *bBerakhot* 55b, or “מאי חזינא בחלמאי” (Lit. “what shall I see in my dream”) in *bBerakhot* 56a. In the incantation bowls, the use of this specific predicate to refer to demonic manifestations suggests that the apparition of evil creatures was imagined as a “physical” experience visually perceived. In the BIB, the neutral term “dream,” “חילמא,” generally takes on a negative connotation, due to the negativity implied in the demonic apparition, and might partially render the meaning of what contemporary science regards as a nightmare. The BIB show that those who wrote and used the bowls were aware of what it means to experience nightmares, and they understood them to be the result of a demonic power penetrating human sleep. Besides demons, the dead were also sometimes imagined to trouble the living in their dreams. For instance, a Mandaic bowl produced for Bardesa, daughter of Terme, daughter of Dadi, and for her unborn child, lists, among other demons, hateful ghosts and the deceased niece of the user: “עסירא ליליתא דמידאמילא” א, בת דתאתא פת אחאתה עסיראן כולחין דמואתא א, “bound is the lilith that appears to her in [the shape] of Tata, her sister’s daughter; bound are all the hateful ghosts,” [Text 39, 9].<sup>83</sup> A belief in the appearance of the dead in dreams was also widespread in ancient Mesopotamia. Akkadian sources show that a vision of a deceased family member was often perceived as an unpleasant torment rather than a comforting memory, and were explained as an act of “revenge for the cessation of funerary offerings.”<sup>84</sup>

In several bowls, unpleasant dreams and nightmares are not referred to as “by-products” of the demonic torment, but are instead listed among other demons as if they are the personification of the oneiric phenomenon. This would appear to be according to the same logic by which places of worship and diseases are personified in the corpus of BIB.<sup>85</sup> For instance, a bowl for protection reads: “גגור[ג] א ומקימ[ג] א . . . ליליתה ומבבלתא ושידין ושובטין ופגעין וסט-” א, “I ban and I decree and I confirm (the ban against) liliths, monsters, demons, bands (of spirits), plagues, satans, evil dreams, powerful satans, male liliths and female liliths,” [Bowl K, 1–3].<sup>86</sup>

In an incantation bowl produced for a certain Daday daughter of Širin and for her daughter Buzrin, “hated apparitions,” “חזיונין סניין,” and “evil dreams,”

83 Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, p. 248; on the appearance of ghosts in the BIB, see *ib.*, p. 82.

84 See Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams*, pp. 59–61.

85 See Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, pp. 67–93; on dreams, see *ib.*, pp. 82–83.

86 Gordon, “Aramaic and Mandaic Magical Bowls,” pp. 92–93; for *comparanda*, see BM 91719, 7–9, in Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls*, p. 53.

“חילמין בישין,” are listed among medical illnesses from which the women attempted to be healed: אסותא מן שמיא תיהוי ליהין לדדאי בת שירין ולבורוי בת” דדאי ותיתסי ברחמי שמיא מן רוחי זידניתא ומן שידין ומן שובטין ומן פגעין ומן לטבין ומן בישין “let there be health from the heavens for Daday daughter of Širin and for Burzoy the daughter of Daday and may she (Daday) be healed, by the love of heaven, from the impious spirits and from devils and from plagues and from strokes and from “no-good-ones” and from hated apparitions and from devils and from strokes and from hated apparitions and from all bad sorts” [Bowl 2, 1–5].<sup>87</sup> The fact that nightmares are listed together with medical illnesses might indicate, at least in this specific case, an understanding of sleep disorders from a medical perspective, although generally it was believed that diseases have a demonic origin.<sup>88</sup>

At least one bowl [BM 91771] can be classified in the category of *oneiric* aggressive magic, intending to cause insomnia and to send nightmares, performed by humans to the detriment of other humans.<sup>89</sup> With this bowl, the user, a certain Maḥlafa son of Batšiton, not only aims at nullifying the spell of which he and his family were the victims, but also at damaging his enemy, a certain Mar Zuṭra son of Ukmay, by sending back upon him all the evil charms they received: וכל דאישתדר עליה דמחלפא בר בתשיתון לישתדרו עליה דמר זוטרא” “and everything that was sent against him, Maḥlafa son of Batšiton, (that) they may be sent against Mar Zuṭra son of Ukmay, may they be returned against him and against his heirs and inheritance,” [BM 91771, 8–9].<sup>90</sup> According to the incantation, Maḥlafa sends back upon the sender a series of evil entities with the intention of harming him. Among other commands, the evil creatures are instructed to cause certain sleep disorders in Mar Zuṭra until he dies: ושדרי עלה דמר זוטרא בר” אוכמי פריסתיותין וז'נדיקנד רבנד ושליחך דתשרן כלבי מן סיכי וגוריתא מן שושלתא נשיחננה ונישבבוהי ונישגרוהי ונידחלוניה וליכיבשוניה ולא ליתבון ליה שינתא לעיניה ולא

87 Gordon, “Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” pp. 119–120.

88 Ancient Babylonian lists of woes also include unpleasant dreams—see Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams*, p. 50.

89 For the bowl, see Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls*, pp. 79–81; Christa Müller-Kessler, “Die Zauberschälensammlung des British Museum,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 48/49 (2001/2002), 125–128; Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts*, pp. 117–118. The bowl is related to two other bowls—see Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls*, pp. 81–86. The bowl contains the *qybl'* formula and thus represents a counter-charm for both protective and aggressive purposes; on the function of multiple copies of the same text belonging to the *qibl'* category, see Levene, “This is a *qybl'* for Overturning Sorceries,” pp. 219–244.

90 Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts*, p. 117.



ליתבון ליה נחא בפגריה בחילמיה ובחיוניה וחיויה יקיצון ליה וחי לא ניתבון ליה “And send against Mar Zutra son of Ukmay your maid servants and your jailors and your masters and your messengers, may you release dogs from leashes and cubs from chains. May they inflame him and burn him and heat him up and frighten him, and may they subdue him. And may they not give sleep to his eyes and not give him rest in his body in his dreams and in his visions, and may they terminate his life and not give him life” [BM 91771, 12–14].<sup>91</sup>

Like in the oneiric aggressive spells in SHR and HdM discussed above, insomnia and nightmares are used in this bowl to threaten and bewitch a victim. According to the bowl, the user is aware that, by distorting the victim’s sleeping/dreaming faculties, he will be able to physically exhaust him until his death. The forecast of the victim’s death might imply the belief that prolonged and pathological insomnia might lead to death.<sup>92</sup>

The magical logic and the language employed in the bowl are reminiscent of those expressed in the recipes for causing insomnia in SHR and in HdM. The expression used in the bowl for indicating the intent of causing insomnia in the victim, “ולא ליתבון ליה שינתא לעיניה,” “and may they not give sleep to his eyes” [BM 91771, 13] is analogous to that employed in SHR, “ואל תתנו לעפעפיו,” “and do not give sleep to his eyelids” [SHR I §138].<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, both texts create a figurative image of the insomniac characterized by animal confusion and agitation: SHR employs the symbolic image of a dog’s head and the metaphor of a barking dog to refer to the troubled mind of the insomniac, while the bowl describes the victim as assaulted and subdued with fire by dogs and wild animals.<sup>94</sup> In the bowl, the periphrasis used to express the command to the deity to send her messenger against the victim, “ומשבענא עליכי ניני מרתא,” “I adjure you, Nanay mistress of the world . . . that you send against him your messenger” (BM 91771, 10) is similar to that employed in HdM, although in this text the name of the non-human

91 Ib., p. 118.

92 One could imagine that the writer of this bowl had knowledge of the rare prion disease called “fatal familial insomnia” (FFI), which is the only lethal pathology associated with insomnia. On FFI and on the development of sleep disorders in prion diseases, see Pasquale Montagna and Federica Provini, “Prion Disorders and Sleep,” *Sleep Medicine Clinics* 3 (2008), 411–426.

93 Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts*, p. 118.

94 On animals in the BTB, see Levene, “If You Appear as A Pig,” pp. 59–70, and Marco Moriggi, “Devilish apparitions in Mesopotamian incantation bowls. Preliminary Remarks about Demons in the Guise of Animals,” in *Animals, Gods and Men from East to West. Papers on archaeology and history in honour of Roberta Venco Ricciardi*, ed. Alessandra Peruzzetto, Francesca Dorna Metzger and Lucinda Dirven (Oxford, 2013), pp. 119–122.

entity adjured is not preserved, “בשם [ ] ייזיל שליחא קלילא ויצער ית פ'ב'פ'” “in the name of [ ] may the swift messenger go and torment N, son of N” [HdM, 70].<sup>95</sup>

In the bowl, seeing an evil dream is regarded as an indication of a curse. Alongside other illnesses such as fever (אישתא), shivering (ערייתא) and headache (כיבראשה), insomnia and nightmares play an essential role in the curse that is to be returned to the sender, suggesting, at least in this case, the association of witchcraft with oneiric phenomena in a similar manner to that argued for the Akkadian anti-witchcraft series *Maqlû*.<sup>96</sup>

A Mandaic bowl [BM 91715], composed of two independent incantations, registers the nightmare dreamt by the user, Bašniray daughter of Šahafrid, in which she is violently bound and tortured: “אתואת <א> אַ אַנא באשנרַאי חזיאנא: בחילמאי וּחאזיאלי [א] רכישא ומרכשא רכישא ברכאשיא אַ פרזלא ותניא בתנאייא אַ אַ גירבא על אנפא חא סחיפא תותיא ארסא אַ פרזלא נחאשא ונירבא,” “The signs that I, Bašniray, saw in my dream: it seemed I was strapped and doubly strapped, strapped with straps of iron and chained with chains of lead, indeed thrown face down beneath a bed of iron, copper and lead, and I was filled with the water of *sahras* and (my) head was placed upon the skulls of *liliths*” [BM 91715, 13–18].<sup>97</sup> The vivid images used in this dream-report correspond, in part, to the description of the victim bound by angels with iron chains and copper rods in SHR I §138, “שתאסרהו בחבלי ברזל ותקשרהו במוטות נחשת,” and the victim punished on a bed of punishment and condemned to a bad death in the

95 Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts*, p. 117; Levene translate the expression “משדרניתא” as “visitation;” I follow Segal’s translation, “messenger;”—see Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls*, p. 80.

96 Ancient Babylonians believed that “sorcery could cause bad dreams as well as alienating one’s personal deities, who themselves then sent nightmares;”—Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams*, p. 53. Tzvi Abusch relates the later stage in the demonization of the witch in the anti-witchcraft series *Maqlû* to the association of witchcraft with dreams, stating that “the notion of witchcraft has merged with the idea of the dream,” since “to dream an evil dream is to be bewitched;”—see Tzvi Abusch, “The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature: The Reworking of Popular Conceptions by Learned Exorcists,” in *Religion, Science, and Magic in Concert and Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul V. McCracken Flesher (Oxford, 1989), p. 46. According to Abusch, whether the witch appears in the dream or not, in the *Maqlû* series, the witch “becomes the one who sends the dream or its associated forms and the one to whom they are to be returned;”—ib., p. 47.

97 Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls*, pp. 111–113; James N. Ford, “Another Look at the Mandaic Incantation Bowl BM 91715,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 29 (2002), 31–47; for the transcription and translation, I have followed Ford.



FIGURE 9.9 *Babylonian Incantation Bowl in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Schøyen Collection, MS 2053/233. The drawing might represent either a human figure or a demon in a bed. The rectangular shape dividing the feet from the head might be a blanket and the half-circle behind the head a pillow.*

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Roman *dēfixiō*, “ποίησῃτε κατὰ κράβατον τιμωρίας τιμωζοειδόμενον κακῶ θανάτω,” [*DefixTab* 155, A, 11–14].<sup>98</sup>

On the basis of a parallel found in a later Mandaic text, James Ford argues that the dream report preserved in the bowl “was not an actual dream, but a once well-known magical motif.”<sup>99</sup> Since the bowl mentions the bed and pillow of the user, “וארסה וביסאדיה” [BM 91715, 4, 12], and expresses the request that the user receives pleasant dreams while her hater, the *pit̄yarūta*-demon, is shown hateful dreams, “תיחווילה ותישאכאב על חילמיא טאביא ושאפיריא ועל חילמיא,” [BM 91715, 19–20], it might be considered an oneiric aggressive incantation that adopts a conventional magical motif to depict and reverse the sleep impairment of the user/victim.

The BIB clearly show a belief in nocturnal demonic attacks, either provoked by demons, the dead or the living (sorcerer/enemy). This belief was quite widespread in the surrounding context in which these texts were written and used. The BIB are finished products that preserve the names of their users, their family members and, sometimes, the enemies/victims for whom the spells were intended. For this reason, they are very important sources that provide crucial information about the world of the clients who commissioned the incantations and the scribes who produced them.

## Conclusion

It is clear that oneiric aggressive rituals played an important role in late antique Jewish tradition. According to the sources examined above, late antique Jews feared that an evil dream might draw misfortune to the dreamer and sleeplessness might even lead to death. Like their Babylonian ancestors and Greco-Egyptian neighbors, late antique Jews usually explained the occurrence of

98 There is a bowl in the Schøyen Collection that might include a sketch of a bed—ms 2053/233 (see Figure 9.9). The drawing on this bowl might represent either a human figure or a demon in a bed. The rectangular shape dividing the feet from the head might be a blanket and the half-circle behind the head might be a pillow. The inscription on the bowl reads, “you are a demon, go out.” If the anthropomorphic figure is the suffering person on behalf of whom the bowl was commissioned, the reference might be to a demonic apparition, which is commanded to leave the dreaming/thinking faculties of the victim/client. If the figure represents the demon itself, the reference is to the exit of the demonic entity from the bed of the victim/client. For a different interpretation of the drawing, see Viložny, *Figure and Image*, p. 55.

99 The parallel is Drower Collection, Bodleian Library, ms. Drower, fol. 37a; see Ford, “Another Look”, pp. 44–47.

good/evil dreams and lack of sleep as a result of a divine/demonic attack. The ancient belief that demons and other non-human beings were in charge of sleep and dreams gave rise to various magical rituals, aimed at controlling and affecting the sleep of a third person with the aid of a demonic/angelic assistant. Therefore, spells for sending evil dreams or causing insomnia in a chosen victim were commonly used by Jews in Late Antiquity for different purposes, as is demonstrated in the passages from SHR, HdM, and the BIB discussed in this article. Equally, people turned to magicians in order to prevent demons from appearing in their dreams or troubling their sleep and to protect themselves from possible *oneiric* aggressive incantations, perpetrated to their detriment by a sorcerer or an enemy.

Even though the Jewish *oneiric* aggressive techniques discussed in this essay exhibit, in part, foreign elements (either Old Babylonian or Greco-Egyptian), the extant sources are clearly Jewish and certainly prove a Jewish use of these practices. It is clear that Jews believed and feared *oneiric* aggressive magic and turned to magicians to purchase apotropaic or aggressive *oneiric* spells.