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Syriac Spells for a Mill and Their Historical Context

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Abstract

This article considers a text-unit known in five Syriac codices and consisting of up to three magical recipes. The target of all these recipes is a mill: two of them are curses (*'assārā* 'binding spell') and intend to stop the mill, while the third one is a counter-spell (*šeryānā* 'loosening spell'), which aims to annul the curse. One of the two binding spells includes a rare example of an Arabic incantation written in *Garshuni*. The main purpose of this article is to make these texts available via critical editions. In addition, light is shed on the broader context of magical practices, by drawing attention to Syriac recipes for an oven and their Jewish parallels, and by presenting two Jewish parallels of spells related to a mill: a Judaeo-Arabic text from the Cairo Genizah and a spell from a Byzantine manuscript. We offer a reconsideration of the interpretation of the Judaeo-Arabic text, as our reading differs from that of the *Editio Priceps*.

Keywords

Syriac charms – Book of Protection – binding spell – magic – Syriac-Arabic – Garshuni – Cairo Geniza – Judaeo-Arabic – Aramaic

1 Introduction

Syriac charms¹ collected in codices widely known as *Book of Protection* did not receive much scholarly attention and as noted by A. Pearson, “the field is still in its early stage”.² Pearson states that in order for the field to progress, “our first task is to publish more source material”.³ An edition of these three recipes is thus valuable, not only to bring more source material to light, but for three more reasons. First, although they have not yet been truly edited, they have been interpreted incorrectly by previous scholars, H. Gollancz and K. Fr. Krämer (see below). Second, two of the recipes belong to the category of aggressive magic,⁴ which is even less studied than other types of Syriac magical texts. Third, one of the binding spells contains an Arabic incantation written in Syriac script. Only two Syriac recipes of this kind have been edited before the current publication.⁵

Though this article focusses on Syriac recipes for the mill, attention is paid to the broader context of related magic practices. A separate section is devoted to Syriac recipes for the oven and their Jewish parallels, and another one to Jewish and Coptic recipes for the mill. Such contextualization assists in better understanding the place of magic within Syriac culture, and sheds further light on connections between Syriac Christianity and other cultures.

2 The Manuscripts

Below we provide short catalogue descriptions of the Syriac manuscripts⁶ in which the recipes for the mill are found.

1 Our credits go to Maria C. H. Cioată for proof-reading this article and Nikita Kuzin (Freie Universität Berlin) for his valuable remarks.

2 Abigail Pearson, “Syriac Magic: an Overview of Previous Approach and Prospects for the Future,” in: *Studies in the Syriac Magical Traditions*, eds. Marco Moriggi & Siam Bhayro (Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity, 9), Leiden, 2022, p. 13.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

4 Since the usage of the term ‘magic’ remains a subject of discussions, we affirm that it is being used in this paper for the sake of convenience and without implying negative connotations.

5 See Cod. A §19 (Hermann Gollancz, *The Book of Protection: Being a Collection of Charms, Now Edited for the First Time from Syriac mss*, London, 1912, p. 14) and a dream-request recently published by Zellmann-Rohrer (Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, “A Syriac-Arabic Dream-Request and Its Jewish Tradition,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 78/1 (2019), pp. 59–74.

6 Images of the relevant folios of the manuscripts at our disposal are provided in the Appendix.

Houghton Syr. 160⁷ (H)

Harvard University (Cambridge MA), Houghton Library, ms. Syriac 160. Former owner: I. H. Hall (1837–1896). Title: *kṭibtā da-nṭuryā* ‘Protective Amulet’.⁸ Paper, 49 leaves, bound, 12 × 8 cm. Up to 18 lines to page. Script: unvocalized East Syriac. 74 chapters, 17 coloured illustrations. Date and place: 1804, the village of Shibāni, Tergawar district (Hakkari, Turkey). Scribe: Gewargis bar Zay⁹ from Shamsdin.

BL Or. 6673⁹ (BLa¹⁰)

London, British Library Ms. Or. 6673. Paper, 12.5 × 9.0 cm, 48 leaves. Script: unvocalized East Syriac. Date and place: 1804, the village of Shibāni, Tergawar district (Hakkari, Turkey). 67 chapters and illustrations. Up to 18 lines to page. Scribe: Gewargis.¹¹ Described by Gollancz, who collated the ms. with Cod. A, and edited most of the additional content, which was not in Cod. A. This part of the manuscript is available to us only via Gollancz’s edition.

7 A recent description with further references can be found in Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, “More on the ‘Book of Protection’ and the Syriac ‘Charms’: New Texts and Perspectives for the Study of Magic and Religion,” in: *Studies in the Syriac Magical Traditions*, eds. Marco Moriggi & Siam Bhayro (Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity, 9), Leiden, 2022, p. 83; and Anna Cherkashina & Alexey Lyavdansky, “Syriac Love Charms. Part I. The Recipe-Type,” *Scrinium* 17 (2021), p. 85.

8 We prefer this translation instead of the common “Book of Protection”. Syriac magic codices are very rarely entitled with the Syriac term for “book”, i.e., *kṭābā* (for which see, e.g., StP18 in Michael Zellmann-Rohrer “More on the ‘Book of Protection,’” p. 88). Instead, most of them are titled with *ܟܬܒܬܐ* (so, e.g., H and I), while in NH3 we find its supposedly orthographic variant *ܟܬܒܬܐ* (NH3). Following Alexey Lyavdansky’s suggestion, we regard these words as rendering the Neo-Aramaic terms for “amulet, talisman”: *kṭawta*/*kṭuta* (and similar), see e.g., Geoffrey Khan, *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of the Assyrian Christians of Urmi*, Vol. 3, Leiden–Boston, 2016, p. 123; Shabo Talay, *Neuaramäische Texte in den Dialekten der Khabur-Assyrer in Nordostsyrien*, Wiesbaden, 2009, p. 444; Hezy Mutzafi, *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Betanure (Province of Dihok)*, Wiesbaden, 2008, p. 358.

9 Former “BM Or. 6673”. For the description of the manuscript see Hermann Gollancz, *Book of Protection*, p. 93; more recently Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, “More on the ‘Book of Protection,’” pp. 85–86.

10 Hermann Gollancz, *The Book of Protection*, pp. 101–102, §64.

11 Michael Zellmann-Rohrer suggests, that BLa and H can be written by the same scribe, which seems improbable. The two manuscripts are visibly written in two different hands.

BL Or. 5281¹² (Blb)

London, British Library Ms. Or. 5281. Paper, 38 × 23 cm, 146 leaves. A convolute volume consisting of three manuscripts written in three different hands. It contains magical, divinatory, and astrological sections. The magical section has no beginning. The first two manuscripts contain magical texts (ff. 1–2 and ff. 2–41). This part consists of 62 chapters with 1 illustration in black. Up to 16 lines to page. Script: sporadically vocalized East Syriac. Date: unknown, paleographically dated to the 18th century. The codex also contains 47 chapters of the *Book of the Bee*.

IOM 4¹³ (I)

Russia, St. Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts,¹⁴ Osnovnoy fond, ms. Sir. 4. Title: *ktābtā d-nuṭṭār bnaynāšā* ‘Amulet for protecting people’. Paper, 10.5 × 6.5 cm, 40 leaves, bound. Script: sporadically vocalized East Syriac. Up to 14 lines on page. 46 sections, 13 colored illustrations. Colophon lacking. Paleographically dated to the 17th–18th century by Pigulevskaya; later ownership notes of Yoḥannan bar Tērō, and of Saggō bar Merzā.

NH3¹⁵

New Haven, CT, Beinecke Library, Hartford Seminary collection no. 3. Title: *ktābtā*¹⁶ *d-nuṭṭār bnaynāšā* ‘Amulet for protecting people’. Paper, 11 × 7 cm, 41 leaves. Script: vocalized East Syriac. Colophon lacking; assigned to the 19th century. 50 chapters, 14 illustrations. Up to 14 lines to page. The ms. belongs to the same textual tradition as I but is written in a less skilled hand.

12 For the most recent and full description and further references see Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, “More on the ‘Book of Protection,’” p. 93.

13 Described by Нина Викторовна Пигулевская, “Каталог сирийских рукописей Ленинграда” [Nina Viktorovna Pigulevskaya, Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in Leningrad], *Палестинский сборник [Palestinian Collection]*, 6 (69) (1960), pp. 124–128 (ms. XXXIX). For a Russian edition see the MA thesis of Мария Чамурлиева, *Сирийская заклинательная традиция на примере рукописи из рукописного фонда ИВР РАН Сир. 4* [Mariya Chamurliieva, *Syriac Magical Tradition by the Example of the Manuscript Syr. 4 from the IOM RAS Manuscript Collection*], РГГУ [RSUH], 2009. For the most recent mention see Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, “More on the ‘Book of Protection,’” p. 88.

14 *Contra* Zellman-Rohrer, *ibid.*: “Institute of Oriental Studies”.

15 See further Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, “More on the ‘Book of Protection,’” p. 87.

16 Ms.: *ktdt*?

3 Text and Translation

Among the five manuscripts at our disposal, we have chosen H as the main manuscript. Since NH3 follows I, but is less reliable, we do not address it separately. The text-critical discrepancies between the four compared manuscripts are provided in the footnotes. A synopsis of all four versions is presented in the next section.

Ms Syriac 160, Houghton Library, Harvard University, f. 44r, ll. 1–17

1	ܠܗܘܘܢ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ^a ܠܥܝܢܐ	Binding of a mill. Say
2	ܫܠܡܐ ^b ܩܘܡܘܢܐ ^c ܒܗ ܡܘܨܘܚܘܢܐ	these words from the psalm
3	ܕܕܘܡܝܕ ^d ܕܠܘܫܘܢܐ ^e ܫܘܠܘܢܐ ^f :	of David: “For You have lifted me up and cast me away” ^g –
4	ܕܫܠܘܫ ܘܥܬܘܒܐ ^h ܗܘܐ ܥܠ ܕܥܦܘܢܐ ⁱ	three times. Bless ^j upon the dust
5	ܘܩܘܒܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ^k ܕܢܫܘܢܐ ^l ܕܡܘܨܘܚܘܢܐ ^m	and throw [it] into the eye of the mill. [Another recipe] Take
6	ܫܒܘܥܐ ܩܘܒܐ ⁿ ܕܫܦܝܐ ܕܗܘܐ	seven grains of wheat. Bless

a Here and in all the following occurrences of this word Gollancz reads ܕܢܫܘܢܐ.

b Absent from BLa.

c These three words are absent from I. In BLb they are placed after the citation from the Psalm ending in ܫܘܠܘܢܐ.

d The last three words are absent from BLb.

e BLa: ܫܘܠܘܢܐ with an odd *syāmē*.

f BLa: ܫܘܠܘܢܐ ‘and you have loosened me’, which contradicts the text of Ps. 102:11. In I after these we find a prescription similar to that of the second spell (ll. 5–13):
ܡܘܨܘܚܘܢܐ ܥܒܘܕܐ ܘܦܩܘܒܐ ܥܠ: ܩܘܒܐ ܕܫܦܝܐ: ܘܥܒܘܕܐ ܕܩܘܒܐ ܕܢܫܘܢܐ:
“And recite [it] seven times above seven grains of wheat and throw them in the lower part of the mill”. On the meaning of *reḡlā* see commentary to ‘ayna d-rahya in section 5 below. The text of the charm in I ends here.

g Ps 102:11 according to the Peshitta numeration.

h BLb: ܕܫܠܘܫ ܘܥܬܘܒܐ, the words are placed after ܩܘܡܘܢܐ.

i BLa: ܕܥܦܘܢܐ with an odd *syāmē*.

j On the meaning of this word see section 5.

k BLb: ܕܩܘܒܐ with the same meaning.

l BLa has no punctuation mark, while BLb puts a colon and adds ܠܡܘܨܘܚܘܢܐ ‘another [charm]’ after it.

m BLb: ܫܘܠܘܢܐ with an unusual mark of abbreviation.

n BLb: ܩܘܒܐ *prīdē*. The word does not mean ‘grain’ or ‘seed’ in Syriac, but a very close meaning is attested for its cognate in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, see *pryd*² ‘pomegranate seed’ in Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*, Ramat-Gan, 2002, p. 932.

The crucial place is l. 5, where we think the second spell begins. In **BLa** the first two spells are not divided even by a punctuation mark. In **H** the second piece can be distinguished as a separate spell not only due to the red ink, highlighting the words *škol šab'ā perdē d-ḥeṭṭē* 'take seven grains of wheat', but also because of the mark of the end of a paragraph (❖). However, it is **BLb** which distinguishes the second spell in the most explicit way, introducing it with Syr. *ʾhrēnā* 'another [recipe]':

Where **BLb** is concerned, a few important features of this variant can be noticed. Though it lacks the ending of the ritual instruction in the second recipe and omits the whole third recipe, it expands the text of the second recipe with a few lines (verse 6). This reading is partly supported by **BLa**. This verse expands the ritual instruction by adding "another word" in **BLb** (see section 5 under * below) and increasing the number of times the spell should be recited to up to forty (in **BLb** and **BLa**). While in **BLa** this last instruction contradicts the recommendation to recite the spell five times (compared with seven in **H**), in **BLb** no such contradiction is found, since this is the only place where the number of utterances is mentioned. Although the assumptions on the reconstruction of the proto text are usually vulnerable, here it seems highly probable that this contradiction was present in the original text of the recipe, which in this aspect was close to the text as preserved in **BLa**, but it was eliminated in the course of transmission. **H** and **BLb** represent two different decisions: to keep only the first prescription (**H**), or only the second one (**BLb**). Second, **BLb** provides partial vocalization of the text. Third, its manner of rendering Arabic words seems closer to the *Garshuni* scribal system than the manner of **BLa** and **H**. The clearest case is rendering of Arb. *خ* with Syr. *ܥ* (with or without *rukkāḳā*) which is found twice in *w-ktmt b-ktmt ʾlgyn* (*wa-xatamtu bi-xātimatʾ al-ǧinni* 'I seal with the seal of jinn') instead of *ḥtmt b-ḥtymt ʾlgyn* in **H** and **BLa**.¹⁷ Finally, rendering the Arabic incantation, **H** and **BLa** use a colon sign as a word divider, while **BLb** uses either no word divider at all, or uses it rarely. The only certain case is *sndwk bndwk*: **BLb** places a horizontal colon between the two words, and a dot after the second word – most probably to mark the end of the phrase.

17 Other possible cases are *ʾlkr*² which probably stands for **ʾlh ʾkbr* (*ʾallāhu ʾakbar* 'God is the greatest'). Here Syriac *ܥ* renders Arabic *ك*, while in **H** and **BLa** *ܟ* is used instead.

5 Philological Commentary

ll. 4, 6, 16: *brk* (*barrek*) ‘bless’

In what follows we place the word between quotation marks, because its meaning is not easy to establish. Two questions arise here:

- 1) Does the word refer to the words mentioned before/after it, or does it refer to the separate blessing which is to be pronounced besides the other words?
- 2) What does “blessing” mean in the context of the two supposedly aggressive spells?

Concerning the first question, if we look at all the three passages, it appears that *barrek* refers to the words mentioned before or after it. A schematic representation of the three passages seems to be helpful.

ll. 1–4: “say these words from the psalm” – [the words from the psalm] – “bless upon the dust” – “throw it”

ll. 5–13: “take 7 grains” – “bless upon them [with the following] words” – [the Arabic incantation] – “throw them”

ll. 14–17: [the words from the psalm] – “bless upon the wheat” – “throw it”

The second passage presumably gives a clue to our question, because it allows us to equate the following incantation with the “blessing words”. If we expand this interpretation to the other two passages, we can argue that in the three texts the object of the verb *barrek* is the words mentioned before or after it. Turning to the second question, the problem is that when *barrek* occurs in two passages that we attribute to aggressive magic, we hardly can render it as “bless”. Similarly, if we ascribe to the verb a euphemistic meaning and render it as “curse”,¹⁸ the meaning does not fit the third passage from the loosening spell. We suggest, that in these three texts *barrek* designates an action of pronouncing words which have magic power, be it a citation from the Bible or an Arabic incantation – with a good intention, same as with an evil one. However, the issue requires further investigation based on the corpus of Syriac charms.

18 Cf. the Rabbinic corpus, where both Heb. *brk* and Aram. *brk* have a meaning “to blaspheme”, see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, Vol. 1, London–New York, 1903, p. 195.

ll. 5, 13, 16–17: ܣܝܢܐ ܕ-ܪܗܝܐ (‘aynā d-rahya) ‘the mill’s eye’, i.e., the opening in a hand mill where the grain is put

Our main interpretation of this expression is based on metaphorical usages of ‘aynā ‘eye’ in Aramaic languages, such as JPA ܣܝܢܐ ‘draft hole of an oven’.¹⁹ Though we are unable to confirm or refute this interpretation based on the Syriac lexical data, a similar usage is found in JBA: *bt ܣܝܢܐ* ‘pupil of the eye’, ‘hole in the millstone’.²⁰

Another interpretation worth considering is based on the second core meaning of ‘aynā, i.e., ‘spring’. In this case, *rahya* would mean ‘watermill’ and ‘aynā d-rahya would denote a spring, or a water source, which refers to this watermill.²¹ A support for this interpretation may be found in I, where instead of ‘aynā we see *reġlā*. The term’s core meaning is ‘foot’, but it can also denote a stream, which would fit this interpretation. However, we cannot exclude that *reġlā* refers to some other part of the mill, since the term can also mean ‘foundation’ or ‘leg (e.g., of a table)’. Also, our main interpretation is supported by the external evidence, the recipe from the Cairo Geniza, which also requires throwing dust into the opening in the upper mill, which is denoted by Arb. *ḥalq-*.

l. 8: *sndwk bndwk* (*sundūk bundūk*)

All three manuscripts give the same writing, and, as it seems, here we have a beginning of an Arabic spell. Initially this phrase probably was an Arabic paronomastic construction called *itbāʿ*. According to Pellat, this figure of speech is used in Classical Arabic when one wants to reinforce the meaning of a word. Usually, the phrase consists of two words the second of which has no existence in the language and is formed by alteration of mainly the first radical, for example *ḥasan basan* ‘wonderfully attractive’.²² The reconstruction

19 Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*. Ramat-Gan, 1990, p. 403, cf. also *īnu* in Akkadian: meaning 2. ‘hole (of a kiln)’, ‘interstice (of a net)’, ‘hub (of a wheel)’ (*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Vol. 7 (I and J), eds. Ignace J. Gelb, Benno Landsberger & A. Leo Oppenheim, Chicago, 1960, p. 157).

20 Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*, Ramat-Gan–Baltimore, 2002, p. 249, see also Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, Vol. 3, Gütersloh, 1933, p. 227.

21 We owe this idea to Sergey Minov (personal communication).

22 See Charles Pellat, “Muzāwajah,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, Vol. 7, Leiden, 1960–2007, p. 823.

of the original Arabic phrase would supposedly give *ṣundūq bundūq*, which indeed is attested in Classical Arabic texts.²³ Given this the phrase should mean ‘an impressive chest’ which is not supported by the context and does not fit our text. However, Schorch in his study of puns in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible in a wider context argues that paronomasia has more functions than merely creating emphasis.²⁴ He also states that some kinds of “paronomasia are related in a certain way to the use of paronomasia in imitative magic, well attested in the neighbouring cultures of ancient Israel”.²⁵ Moreover, this phrase occurs in a children’s game, in which a player exclaims *ṣundūq bundūq* beside other incomprehensible words and phrases in a colloquial Arabic, loosely connected with each other.²⁶

l. 9: *wʿlh ʿgbr* (*wa-ʿaḷlāh ʿakbar*) ‘and God is the greatest’

The BLb’s reading *ʿlkbr*² could be interpreted as the Arabic word *al-kubrā*,²⁷ but this does not seem to fit the context. Two other manuscripts agree with each other and give what we assume to be a more spontaneous rather than a systematic rendering of the Arabic exclamation (الله أكبر).²⁸ If it were transliterated according to the *Garshuni* scribal system, the second word would have looked as *ʿkbr* (كبر).²⁹ Krämer gives the whole Arabic part of the spell under the title “Ein unverschtändlicher Text zur Beschwörung des Windes” where he renders this phrase in Arabic as “والله أكبر”.³⁰ This rendering is obscure to us.

23 See, e.g., a commentary to ibn al-Farīd’s verse in *Šarḥ Dīwān al-Fārīd liš-Šayḥ Hasan al-Būrīnī wa-liš-Šayḥ ʿAbda al-Ganī an-Nābulusī*, Arnaud, 1853, p. 508.

24 Stephan Schorch, “Between Science and Magic: the Function and Roots of Paronomasia in the Prophetic Books of the Hebrew Bible,” in: *Pun and Pundits. Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel, Maryland, 2000, pp. 206–7.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

26 See, e.g., Muḥammad Rajab al-Sāmarrāʿī, “Iṣdārāt Nādī Turāt al-ʿImārāt,” *al-Taḳāfah al-Šaʿbiyyah* 5 (2009), p. 190, <https://www.folkculturebh.org/upload/issues/issue5.pdf> (2022, May 4).

27 But for use of *y* instead of *al-ʿalif bi-šūrat al-yāʿ* in *Garshuni* see, e.g., Joseph Moukarzel, “Le Garchouni. Remarques sur son Histoire et son Évolution,” in: *Scripts beyond Borders: A Survey of Allographic Traditions in the Euro-Mediterranean World*, ed. Heijer, J., Schmidt, A. & Pataridze, T., Louvain-la-Neuve, 2014, p. 135.

28 On phonetic rendering of the word *aḷlāh* in *Garshuni* see, e.g., *ibid.*

29 See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 133.

30 Karl Friedrich Krämer, *Textstudien zu Ostsyrischen Beschwörungsgebeten* (unpubl. diss.), Berlin, 1924, p. 84.

l. 9: *klmwy* (*kalimātī*) ‘my words’

BLa has *klmty*, while **H** and **BLb** read *klmwy* which we assume to be a mistake. Considering the possibility of incomprehension of the scribe, which will be mentioned below, this mistake could also be attributed to peculiarities of the scribal hand, in which shapes of *t* and *w* are alike.

l. 9: *hdʿll* ‘these?’

All three manuscripts give different sequences of letters, none of which makes any sense in this context (**H**: *hdʿll*, **BLa**: *hll*, **BLb**: *bhdʿll*). The syntax of the phrase suggests that we have here a demonstrative pronoun with *kalimātī* ‘my words’ as its antecedent. It is hard to equate this with Classical Arabic *hādīhī* or *hāʿulāʿī*. The probable interpretation is to consider these letters as a distorted form of a colloquial demonstrative pronoun, cf. *hadōl(e)*³¹ in dialects of Levant, *hādōl(lah)/hādōl(ayn)*, *hādōl/hādēl*, *hādōl* in Bedouin Arabic dialects of Arabian Peninsula and Near East.³²

l. 10: *wldy* (*wa-llādī*) ‘and which’

Both manuscripts agree and the reading of the phrase is clear.³³

l. 10: *tkyl bh* (*ittakal bihi*) ‘relied on this?’

Two manuscripts read *tkl* (**BLa**, **BLb**) and one has *tkyl* (**H**). It is quite hard to understand this word especially with the next word (**H** and **BLa**: *bh*, but **BLb**: *bhh*, the last *h* of which is without doubt taken from the next word). The context suggests that we have here a verb with the meaning “to rely upon”. The writing of the assumed verb is not only unclear, but also it cannot be easily construed with the following alleged preposition *b-*. Although the verb *ittakala* occurs in Arabic with the preposition *fī*, in other stems of the root *w-k-l* the preposition *b-* is used in reference to things which someone is put in charge of.³⁴

31 Peter Behnstedt, “Árabe Levantino,” in: *Manual de Dialectología Neoárabe*, ed. Federico Corriente & Ángeles Vicente, Zaragoza, 2008, p. 163.

32 Peter Behnstedt, “Árabe Beduino (Península Árabe y Oriente Próximo),” p. 81.

33 For this kind of spelling see, e.g., Joseph Moukarzel, “Le Garchouni. Remarques sur son Histoire et son Evolution,” p. 135.

34 For Classical Arabic see, e.g., Albert de Biberstein-Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français*, Vol. 4, Barrois, 1860, p. 1599 (?*ittakala* ‘Se fier entièrement à quelqu’un, s’en remettre de

ll. 10–11: *slmwn ʿbn dwwd* (*sulaymān ʿibn dawūd*) ‘Solomon, son of David’

Every manuscript has different writing (H: *hlmwn ʿbn dwwd*, BLA: *hslmn ʿb dwwd*, BLb: *slmn ʿbn dwwd*, note the previous commentary about *h*), but its reading is obvious.

l. 11: *ḥtmt* (*xatamt*) ‘I hereby seal’

Two manuscripts have *ḥtmt* (H and BLA) and the last has *wktmt* (BLb). It is remarkable that in these manuscripts both recorded possibilities for rendering Arabic *x* are present, namely with the letters *ḥ* and *k*.³⁵ Here we apparently have the performative use of the verb *ḥtm* (‘I hereby seal’).³⁶

ll. 11–12: *bḥtymt ʿlgyn* (*bi-xātimatʿ ʿal-ǧinn*) ‘with the seal of the jinn’

H and BLA agree with each other (*bḥtymt ʿlgyn*) against BLb (*bktmt ʿlgyn*). The context suggests “with the seal of the jinn”, but the Arabic word *xātimah* which fits the writing usually means ‘end, conclusion’³⁷ with the only exception we found being ‘signature, caractère’.³⁸ Both meanings do not allow to get the assumed meaning of the phrase. The interpretation of *ʿlgyn* as Arabic الجِنَّ ‘the jinn’ is of no doubt.³⁹

tout à sa volonté, av. *علي de la p. et في de la ch.*, *wakkala* ‘Constituer quelqu’un son agent, son fondé de pouvoirs, son avocat, son homme d’affaires, av. acc. de la p. et ب de la ch.’); Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy, *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes*, Vol. 2., Leyden, 1881, p. 837 (*tawakkala bi-* ‘se charge de’), and for the colloquial Arabic see, e.g., D. R. Woodhead, *Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic*, Washington, D. C., 1967, p. 502 (*ttikal* ‘to rely, depend, place one’s trust’, *ʿāni ʿattkil ʿalēk ib-hal-qazīyya* ‘I’m depending on you in this matter’, note the use of the preposition *b-*); Hamdi Qafisheh, *NTC’s Gulf Arabic-English Dictionary*, Chicago, 1997, p. 637 (*twakkal* with *ب b-* ‘to act as a counsel for (a case)’); Adrien Barthélemy, *Dialectes de Syrie: Alep, Damas, Liban, Jérusalem*, Paris, 1969, p. 906 (*attākal*).

35 Joseph Moukarzel, “Le Garchouni. Remarques sur son Histoire et son Évolution,” p. 133 and Emanuela Braida, “Neo-Aramaic Garshuni: Observations Based on Manuscripts,” *Hugoye*, 17/1 (2014), p. 21.

36 See, e.g., Wolfdietrich Fischer, *A Grammar of Classical Arabic*, New Haven–London, 2002, p. 103.

37 See, e.g., J. Milton Cowan (ed.), *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Urbana, 1993, p. 265; and Martin Hinds & El-Said Badawi, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic Arabic-English*, Beirut, 1986, p. 241.

38 Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy, *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes*, Vol. 1., p. 352.

39 Michael Zellman-Rohrer, “A Syriac-Arabic Dream-Request and Its Jewish Tradition,” p. 65; and Michael Zellman-Rohrer, “More on the ‘Book of Protection,’” p. 123.

l. 12: ʔrb^{ʕʔ} (ʔarba^ʕ) ‘four’

The reading is obvious (**H** and **BLb**: ʔrb^{ʕʔ}, but **BLa**: ʔrb^ʕ), but the syntax is obscure. There could be at least two interpretations. First, it could be in apposition to the previous word ‘the jinn’ meaning ‘the four jinn’.⁴⁰ This interpretation suggests that the object (the mill) of the verb *xatamt* ‘I seal’ is omitted. In this case the loss of the definite article before the number must be assumed. Second, it could be construed as a direct object of the verbal form “I seal”, but then it is unclear what four things are sealed especially considering unclarity of the following phrase.

l. 12: *mn sʔyt* (*min as-sayyid*)

The writing of the two manuscripts (**H** and **BLa**: *sʔyt*) does not lend itself to understanding.⁴¹ The interpretation of the third manuscript’s writing (**BLb**: *syd*) is clear (*sayyid* ‘master, owner’), nevertheless its syntactic position is difficult to comprehend. Also, the absence of the article in writing complicates interpretation of the phrase even more although this kind of recording is possible in *Garshuni*.⁴²

l. 12: *dfwhʔ* (*dī-fūhāʔ*) ‘of its opening (lit. “mouth”)’

Two manuscripts agree in writing (**H** and **BLb**: *dfwhʔ*, but **BLa**: *wfwhʔ*). Although the grammatical rules of Classical Arabic seem to permit such a use of the Arabic *nota genitivi dū* still it seems here redundant and clumsy.⁴³ One can reasonably suppose contamination with Syriac particle *dī-*. Combination of the letters *fwhʔ* according to the context should refer to the mill and prompts to

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ For possible reading of *sʔyt* see the word *sāyah* in Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Vol. 1, London–Edinburgh, 1877, p. 1458 (*daraba fulānun ʕalā fulānin sāyatan* ‘Such a one did to such a one a thing that caused displeasure to him, such a one made a way to do what he desired to such a one’). Other possible interpretations that assume corruption are reading the word *saʔt* ‘side of the throat’ (J. G. Hava, *Arabic-English Dictionary for the Use of Students*, Beirut, 1899, p. 296) or the word *saʔaʔah* ‘cambrure au bout de l’arc retourné en dehors’ (Albert de Bibrestein-Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français*, Vol. 1, p. 1039). None of these interpretations easily fits the context.

⁴² Joseph Moukarzel, “Le Garchouni. Remarques sur son Histoire et son Évolution,” p. 135.

⁴³ For the use of *dū* in Classical Arabic see, e.g., Hermann Reckendorf, *Arabische Syntax*, Heidelberg, 1921, p. 152 (note the attributive use: الحَبُّ ذُو الْعُصْفِ ‘das Korn mit der Hülse,’ and the use with pronominal suffix: ذُو ضَرِّهِمْ ‘ihr Schädiger’).

read it as ‘a mouth (of the mill)’. This naming of the opening of the upper stone indeed occurs in Arabic,⁴⁴ but nevertheless the exact form of a used Arabic word (or a combination with the pronominal suffix *hā*)⁴⁵ as well as the syntax of the whole phrase are obscure.

* verse 6

In **BLa** we find an additional instruction to repeat the spell given in the previous lines “for a period of forty times”. In **BLb** there is one more sentence. It says: “And one other word [you repeat] for many times”. The interpretation of the following two words, *bh ʔytn* (vocalised as *bēh ʔaytān*) is complicated, since they can be understood either as a Syriac, or as an Arabic phrase – in each case, the text seems corrupted and requires emendations.

A. If a Syriac hypothesis is considered, there are a few possibilities. Here we discuss the two which do not require changing the consonantal text.

A1. *bēh ʔaytān* ‘which we adduced [above]’

A2. *bēh ʔaytān* ‘with which he came upon us’

Both suggestions involve a few problems. First, the verb *ʔy* in C-stem is not normally used with *b-*, instead the object of bringing is introduced as a second direct object. Second, any Syriac interpretation of this phrase would imply a disruption in normal Syriac syntax, since a subordinate clause, i.e., “the word, which ...”, is to be marked with a relative pronoun *d-*. Third, none of these two makes sense in our context, because none of them mentions this *another word* or *phrase* which should be uttered.

B. Alternatively, the phrase can be explained as another corrupted rendering of Arabic. The most attractive interpretation is, probably, *bihī ʔtinī* (به اتني) ‘give me this’, i.e., ‘do this for me’. In this case we must suppose omitting of *alif al-waṣl* in writing of the imperative of the verb *ʔatā*, as well as a specific syntax of the phrase possibly for the emphasis, when the preposition with the pronoun (*bihī*) goes before the verb (*ʔti*). Nevertheless, assuming an Arabic citation has an advantage compared

44 See, e.g., al-Murtaḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿArūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, Vol. 39, al-Kuwait, 2001, p. 498 (اللَّهُوَةُ... مَا الْقَيْتَةُ فِي فَمِ الرَّحَى). Also note the use in Colloquial Arabic of the words *ḥalq* and *tumm* both meaning ‘mouth’ for the same part of a hand mill (Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, Vol. 3, p. 222).

45 For possible variants see, e.g., the whole article under *fūhun* in Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Vol. 6, p. 2464.

with a Syriac one, because it allows us to avoid the problem of syntactic disruption. Also, another Arabic phrase in this charm would fit the context better.

6 Interpretation

In this section we provide a short overview of the three Syriac recipes for the mill followed by our interpretation. As already mentioned, in every place where we read *rahyā* ‘mill’, Gollancz reads *ryh*², which corresponds to Syr. *rīhā* ‘smell’. Even though this reading is supported by K. Fr. Krämer, to whose interpretation we will turn further on, we would rather suspect an editorial mistake, made by Gollancz and replicated by Krämer, than a scribal one, since the two words look very similar in the Syriac script: ܪܝܗܐ ‘smell’ vs. ܪܝܗܐ ‘mill’. Evidently following Gollancz’s reading of *rahyā* ‘mill’ as *rīhā* ‘smell’, Krämer interprets the whole text-unit as “Psalmen zur ‘Bindung’ und ‘Lösung’ des Windes”.⁴⁶ Since the Syriac term does not mean ‘wind’, such translation could be possible only if we interpret *rīhā* not as a Syr. term for ‘smell’, but as an Arabic word *rīh*- ‘wind’.⁴⁷ In this case, the Syriac ending *-ā*, typical for the inherited Aramaic lexica or well-adapted loanwords, requires an explanation.

There are a few reasons to treat Gollancz’s reading as erroneous. First, in the case of **H**, the consonantal writing is clear enough to eliminate any doubts, while in **BLb** the word is vocalized as *rehyā*. Though not found in Syriac dictionaries,⁴⁸ this vocalization is supported by the lexical data of other Aramaic idioms.⁴⁹ Second, the sphere of usage of the textual block can be deduced from the content of the recipes, abundant with agricultural lexica.⁵⁰

46 Karl Friedrich Krämer, *Textstudien zu Ostsyrischen Beschwörungsgebeten*, pp. 8–9, §13. See also p. 84, §40 “Ein unverständlicher Text zur Beschwörung des Windes”, which also refers to our block of texts, namely, the Arabic charm.

47 J. Milton Cowan (ed.), *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Urbana, 1993, p. 432.

48 Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, Oxonii, 1879–1901, p. 3878, Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon. A Translation from the Latin. Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann’s Lexicon Syriacum*, Winona Lake–Piscataway, 2009, p. 1455.

49 Cf. Jewish Babylonian Aramaic *ryhy*² ‘mill, millstone’ (Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, p. 1075), Jewish Palestinian Aramaic *rhy*, det. *ryhyyh* ‘millstone, mill’ (Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, p. 520). Both forms go back to **rīhy*-.

50 See ʿ*aynā d-r^a/eḥyā* ‘mill’s eye’ in ll. 5, 13, 16–17; (*perdē d-)**ḥettē* ‘(grains of) wheat’ in ll. 6, 16. Also see presumably *pwh*² ‘its (i.e. the mill’s) opening’ in l. 12. See also what follows on the Geniza parallel.

The lexical issues, together with the text-critical data and comparative data from Jewish and Coptic magic discussed below, makes the reading offered by Gollancz and Krämer's interpretation unconvincing.

If the most extensive textual variants are considered (H and BL_a), the text-unit consists of three fragments, each of them containing a ritual prescription.

1) *ʔassārā d-raḥyā* 'Binding of a mill' (verses 1–2)

The first binding spell prescribes reciting Psalm 102:11 three times above the dust⁵¹ and throwing it, most probably, into the opening in the upper mill, or "mill's eye" (see the commentary to l. 5 below in section 5). The cited words from Ps. 102:11 are probably connected with the following prescription to take and *throw* dust into the mill's eye. However, one cannot leave unmentioned the fact that the previous verse of the psalm (Ps. 102:10 according to the Peshitta numeration) reminds us of the aim of the spell: "For I was eating *ashes like bread* and was mingling tears with my drink". Although, in the Syriac Peshitta we find the term *qetmā* 'ashes', while in the spell for a mill (verse 2) in all the manuscripts *ʔaprā* 'dust, clay' is used, we still find probable that alluding to Ps. 102:11 both verses 10 and 11 were meant here. It is also worth mentioning that the Hebrew terms for "ashes" (*ʔēpār*), used in the Hebrew version of the verse, and "dry earth, dust" (*ʔāpār*) can sound similar and have close semantics.

2) *ʔhrēnā* 'Another [recipe]' (verses 3–7)

The second fragment, also a binding spell, starts with a prescription, involving manipulations with seven wheat grains that should be thrown into the mill after being "blessed" five, seven or up to forty times – depending on the manuscript.

Verses 4–5 contain an Arabic spell written in Syriac script (*Garshuni*) with a supposed infusion of colloquial Arabic traits (on which see above). The scribal manner of H and BL_a to separate each Arabic word with a word divider was discussed above in the text-critical section. It seems, that both scribes were uncertain as to where the Arabic text ends and ritual instructions in Syriac begin (verse 5). In H, the last word with a colon is *ʔlgyn* 'the jinn', while in BL_a the last colon is found two words before, after *ḥtmt* '[hereby] I seal'. Though the language of these last sentences appears to be corrupted and, in some cases, may represent a mixture of Syriac and Arabic, according to our interpretation the Arabic text ends no earlier than after the word *pwh*² '(its?) opening'.

51 Here all the manuscripts but I agree, the peculiarities of which were discussed above.

Some Arabic words were correctly interpreted by K. Fr. Krämer in his unpublished doctoral thesis (see section 5 above). We cannot restore the exact wording of the original Arabic spell based on the current form of the text, but the general meaning is obvious. The form of the Arabic part indicates that at some stage the text became completely incomprehensible for the copyists of the recipes.⁵² If they would have had any command of Arabic, the scribes would not have misspelled the name Solomon or written ‘father’ (*ʔb*) instead of ‘son’ (*ʔbn* in “Solomon son of David”) not to mention the facts that only a few words in this spell are clearly readable in Arabic and the syntax is sometimes impenetrable.

The Arabic spell alludes to the legend of king Solomon’s magic ring, which frequently occurs in both Syriac⁵³ and Arabic⁵⁴ magic. According to our interpretation the opening in the upper mill is claimed to be sealed by the seal of the four jinn. The four jinn here most probably symbolize the four cardinal points, i.e., the mill is intended to be bound from all four sides. Each cardinal point is thus governed by its jinn. This reminds us of a protective Jewish formula used in magic and in prayers: “May Michael be at my right hand, Gabriel at my left; in front of me, Uriel, behind me, Raphael; and above my head the Presence of God”. Bearing the exact opposite goal, i.e., protection instead of harm, the formula also implies positioning of the named supernatural beings according to the four cardinal points. Notably, a similar protective formula is found in Syriac and in Muslim magic texts.⁵⁵

52 Zellmann-Rohrer plausibly assumes “successive cycles of copying by uncomprehending scribes” (Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, “A Syriac-Arabic dream-request and its Jewish tradition,” p. 70).

53 For the Syriac charms which mention Solomon and their Jewish parallels see Hermann Gollancz, *The Book of Protection*, pp. xii–xix; for a Syriac charm, belonging to Solomonic tradition, specifically close to the *Testament of Solomon*, and not attested in Gollancz’s corpus, see Анна Черкашина, “Соломон и демоны в заклинаниях сирийских христиан” [Anna Cherkashina, “Solomon and the Demons in the Charms of Syriac Christians”], *Христианский Восток* [*Christian Orient*], 9 (xv) (2021), pp. 149–162.

54 Hans Alexander Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere in der Muhammedanischen Zauberei*, Berlin–Leipzig, 1930, especially pp. 110–114, 127–132, for Solomon’s ring in Arabic literature see Georg Salzberger, *Die Salomo-Sage in der Semitischen Literatur*, Berlin–Nikolassee, 1907, pp. 120–129; see also Allegra Iafate, *The Long Life of Magical Objects: A Study in the Solomonic Tradition*, Pennsylvania, 2019, pp. 50–59.

55 Alexey Lyavdanský, “Syriac Charms in Near Eastern Context: Tracing the Origin of Formulas,” in: *Oral Charms in Structural and Comparative Light. Proceedings of the Conference of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research’s (ISFNR) Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming, 27–29 October, Moscow*, eds. T. A. Mikhailova, J. Roper, A. L. Toporkov, D. S. Nikolayev, Moscow, 2011, pp. 17–18; Hans Alexander Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere in der Muhammedanischen Zauberei*, p. 17.

Also, it is worth to mention that seven grains occur in a Muslim story about the origins of first breadmaking.⁵⁶ In this story God, via Gabriel, gave Adam after his exile from Heaven seven grains which he then sowed and harvested. After that Gabriel gave him two stones with which Adam made a hand mill. He ground the wheat and kneaded it. Gabriel taught him how to kindle a fire, so Adam was able to bake the first loaf of bread.

3) *šeryānā d-rahya* 'loosening of a mill' (verse 8)

The last spell is a counter-spell to the two previous ones or to any other curse intended to affect one's mill. The recipe requires the user to recite Psalm 146 over wheat (without specifying the quantity required) which, just as in the two cursing rituals, is to be thrown into the mill's eye.

7 The Broader Context

The first two recipes supposedly aim to stop (cf. Syr. *bṭl* in l. 13) the mill that belongs to the spell beneficiary's adversary. The final goal of the two spells is presumably to harm the adversary. By causing problems with the production of flour, the spell beneficiary may seek to affect the sustenance of the spell target and his family. These considerations allow us to attribute the two recipes to aggressive magic and to compare them with various cursing techniques attested in magical texts from Egypt, both in Coptic⁵⁷ and in Jewish⁵⁸ contexts.

The textual variant of the text-unit found in **BLb** has been mentioned recently by M. Zellmann-Rohrer, who also ascribes an aggressive intention to these recipes, assuming their usage in a context of commercial rivalry⁵⁹ and comparing them with recipes aimed to hinder the heating of an oven.

56 See, e.g., *The History of al-Tabari. An Annotated Translation. General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood*, Vol. 1, translated and annotated by Franz Rosenthal, Albany, 1989, p. 298 (English translation); *Annales quos Scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir at-Tabari*, Vol.1, ed. M. J. De Goeje, Leiden, 1979–1881, p. 127 (original text).

57 Cf. Text 106 ("Curse to bring seventy different diseases upon victim") in Marvin W. Meyer & Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, Princeton–New Jersey, 1999, pp. 215–216, Text 110 ("Curse to harm a person through the use of wax dolls") in *ibid.*, pp. 222–223, and other curses against enemies (Texts 88–112) in *ibid.*

58 Cf., e.g., Geniza 16 7:1–13 ("causing fire") in Joseph Naveh & Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem, 1993, pp. 174–181, Geniza 24 2:8–12 ("for hatred") *ibid.*, pp. 222–225, Geniza 26 2:1–8 ("meant for every need, for causing disease, for killing, for causing fire, also for hatred") *ibid.*, pp. 230–232.

59 Michael Zellmann-Rohrer, "More on the 'Book of Protection,'" pp. 122–123.

There are three text-units related to a furnace found in three manuscripts, which notably also contain the binding spells for a mill. The first text-unit is found in **BLb** (ff. 22v–23v), the first recipe is titled *ʿAssārā d-ʿattūnā w-mānāy d-ʿt̄ bēh* ‘Binding of a furnace and the implements which are in it’. The second text-unit is contained in **I** (f. 37r), where only the ending of the binding spell has been preserved, but the full text is found in the closely related manuscript **NH3**, where it is called *ʿAssārā d-tannūrā* ‘Binding of the oven’ (f. 36v). The third text-unit for an oven is found in **I** (f. 35, partly lost due to the torn page) and **NH3** (f. 35r): *ʿAssārā d-kūrā d-p̄arzlā* ‘Binding of an iron smelter’ (**NH3**, **I** 35). All three text-units contain both a binding and a loosening spell. Sharing a similar target, they are completely different on the formulaic and structural level, allowing us to regard them as three different text-units designed for similar purposes. These texts deserve to be the subject of a separate research, therefore, below we cite only a few excerpts from the recipes.

In **BLb** (the 1st text-unit) the text reads:

(...) I bind this furnace (*ʿattūnā*) and the smelter (*kūrā*). Let it be like snow and hail. (...) I bind the furnace and everything that is in the smelter. (...) And all the utensils that are in it. (...) And let them not burn but let them get broken and become like chaff that the wind carries away (**BLb** ff. 22v–23r).

The respective loosening spells for a furnace (*šeryānā dīlēh* ‘Loosening spell for it’) in **BLb** reads:

(...) Let this binding of the furnace and the smelter disappear, let [the furnace] return to its initial state. Let the utensils in it be heated (*or* inflamed), let them not be pierced², nor broken, the small [ones] together with the big [ones] (**BLb** f. 23v).

The binding spell of the second text-unit contains a ritual prescription to recite the incantation above a piece of wood and throw it into the furnace, absent from **BLb**. As for the loosening spell, instead of a mid-length text found in **BLb**, in **I** and **NH3** there is only a short prescription to recite Psalm 146 three times. Notably, the same psalm is used in the ‘Loosening of a mill’ (verses 8–9). The binding spell says:

They are igniting the furnace in vain, let [the fire in it] go out as [the fire in] the furnace of the house of Hananiah.⁶⁰ By that power let the fire not

⁶⁰ Dan. 3.

burn in it and not be ignited in the furnace of so-and-so son of so-and-so (I f. 37r).

A prescription to recite the spell over three pieces of wood is found in the third text-unit, found in NH3 and I. The spell says:

“He rode upon the cherubim and flew⁶¹ – three sentences (lit. “words”). Cut three pieces of wood, recite [the words] over them and throw them into the furnace (NH3 35r).

Indeed, at least the first and the third text-units appear to refer to an industrial furnace for firing pottery or smelting metals, while the second can be designed for a baking oven – either domestic or industrial. One should note, however, that also at household level the binding of an oven could have had adverse economic implications, since this would result in more wood needing to be used and more work invested in attempting to kindle the fire. This is evident when we consider the reverse type of magical practices: those intended to hasten the cooking of food, presumably to require less wood and work. Examples of this type are found in rabbinic literature, for instance Tosefta Shabbat 7.7–8, where several practices are adduced (and prohibited) for hastening the cooking of food.⁶² Similarly, the Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 67b mentions “A woman who urinates in front of her pot so it will cook quickly: that action contains an element of the ways of the Amorite.”⁶³ To conclude, whether the aggressive charms in the Syriac manuscripts referred to industrial or to home ovens, preventing them from burning would have harmed their owners.

A parallel to these oven-binding charms is found in a recipe for binding the furnace of a bathhouse from the Jewish composition *Sefer ha-Razim* (*The Book of Secrets*). The recipe begins with the words “If you wish to extinguish (the fire which heats) a bathhouse so it will neither flare up nor burn”, and continues with a practice involving the adjuration of a salamander dipped in oil.⁶⁴ The

61 Ps. 18:10.

62 “She who shouts at the oven so that the bread does not fall (...), she who silences for the lentils and she who cools/sucks for the rice” (המצוחת להגור שלא תנפל הפת ;... המשתקת) והמוצצת לאורז / והמוצצת לאורז hmswh̄t ltnwr šlʔ tnp̄l hpt...; hmšqt lʔdš̄ym whmšnnt/ whmwšst lʔwrz). It is not entirely clear what the last two practices, for the lentils and rice, entailed.

63 המשתנת בפני קדירתה בשביל שתתבשל מהרה יש בו משום דרכי האמורי. (hmšnt bpny qdyrth bšbyl šttbšl mhrh yš bw mšwm drky hʔmwry).

64 *Sefer ha-Razim*, Third firmament, §186–188 (Bill Rebiger & Peter Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim i und ii: Das Buch der Geheimnisse i und ii*, 2 vols, Tübingen, 2009. Vol. 1, in collaboration with E. Burkhardt, G. Reeg and H. Wels: *Edition*, pp. *64–*65): אם בקשת לכבות

oil is then dripped at the four corners of the bathhouse, with the intention to “make it like cold snow or cold water”.⁶⁵ This spell is followed by a loosening formula, meant to ignite the furnace again: “I adjure you, angel of fire and angel of conflagration, that you will undo what I have bound”.⁶⁶ Obviously, preventing the furnace from heating the bathhouse would have inflicted economic damage on its owners, just as the binding of an industrial or home-oven would. However, the target addressed in all the above spells is not the owner but the fire.

Additional parallels to the oven-binding and releasing recipes can be found in another Jewish composition, *Harba de-Moshe* (*The Sword of Moses*), in a recipe titled “If you wish to close an oven or a basin or a pot so that (foods) will not be put (in them)”.⁶⁷ This binding recipe is followed by a counter one, so that “they will be (released for) cooking”.

8 Historical Context

Aggressive magic, both in antiquity and in later periods, was usually meant to directly affect human targets. Some examples would be practices for causing bodily harm, such as disease, fever, impotence, bareness, and inability to speak, along with more psychologically oriented practices, such as those meant to cause memory loss and a change of feelings from love to hatred or vice versa. A smaller number of aggressive magical practices were directed at animals, with the intention to obliquely affect a human target. Prominent examples of this category are curses and binding spells directed at racing horses.⁶⁸ Lastly,

ותלהט מרחץ שלא תעלה ותלהט (?m bqšt lkbwt mrḥṣ šl' t'lh wtlht). English translation from Michael A. Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim: the Book of Mysteries*, Chico (CA), 1983, p. 62.

65 ועשוה כצנת שלג וכמים קרים (w'swh kšnt šlg wkmym qrym).

66 *Sefer ha-Razim*, Third firmament, §189 (Rebiger & Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim i und ii*, Vol. 1, p. *66): משביע אני עליך מלאך אש ומלאך שלהבת שתתיר את מה שאסרת: (mšb' ny 'lk ml'k 'š wml'k šlhbt štr 't mh š'srt). English translation from Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim*, p. 63.

67 אם בעית למיצר תנור או כיוור או קידרא דלא נטמין (?m b'yt lmyšr tnrw 'w kywr 'w qydr' dl' ntmyyn). For the English translation, see Yuval Harari, “The Sword of Moses (*Harba de-Moshe*): A New Translation and Introduction,” *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft*, 7 (2012), pp. 58–98 (90).

68 See, e.g., *PGM* III. 1–164 (Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago–London, 1992, pp. 18–22). For recipes for binding wild animals, see *Sefer ha-Razim*, Second Firmament, §155 (Rebiger & Schafer, *Sefer ha-Razim i und ii*, Vol. 1, p. *52); *Harba de-Moshe* (Yuval Harari, “The Sword of Moses,” p. 91).

some aggressive practices focused on inanimate targets. Here, too, the ultimate intention was to affect humans, as shown in the examples below. However, the notion of binding an inanimate entity is particularly intriguing, as it addresses the inanimate as a living being.

Binding and aggressive magical practices targeting inanimate entities could include natural formations such as rivers or seas,⁶⁹ agricultural products,⁷⁰ and also objects and installations, such as a ship⁷¹ or the mill which is the focus of this article. The latter type of practices is found already in Late Antiquity, as evidenced by the recipes for binding the furnace of a bathhouse mentioned above. Further parallels to this type of practices can be found in Coptic magic, for instance in a manuscript currently located in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, inventory number JdE 42573, roughly dated between the tenth and the twelfth century.⁷² The aim of this magical text is to affect a water-wheel and prevent it from supplying water. A water-wheel is a type of revolving installation similar to the mill mentioned in the recipes we discuss. In the Coptic text, the binding of the water-wheel is to be effected by pouring a mixture of liquids onto it: acacia juice (?) and snake water, the latter possibly meaning venom. This practice is similar in form to that attested in the Syriac recipes, but lacks the verbal element.

Aggressive magic against a water-wheel is also mentioned in another Coptic text currently located in Heidelberg, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 408. This magical procedure – which also involves pouring a mixture of liquids – is accompanied by a *historiola* in which a supernatural entity named Khoubin Harpak describes himself to King Solomon and claims: “My work is destruction. (...) A thresher,

69 See, e.g. *Sefer ha-Razim*, Second Firmament, §155 (Rebiger & Schafer, *Sefer ha-Razim i und ii*, Vol. 1, p. *52): “(if you wish to quell) a river or a sea which is rising and washing against buildings” (נהר או ים העולה ושטף בבתים) *nhr ʾw ym hʾwlh wštp bbtym* (English translation from Morgan, *Sefer Ha-Razim*, p. 53).

70 This category may have been alluded to in the Twelve Tables law on “enchanting” crops (*qui fruges excantassit*), that was interpreted in later periods either as stealing crops with the help of magic, or ruining them by invoking storms. For a recent treatment of this law, with reference to previous literature, see J. B. Rives, “Magic in the XII Tables Revisited,” *Classical Quarterly*, 52 (2002), pp. 270–290. Conversely, for examples of magical practices meant to positively affect agricultural products, see *Harba de-Moshe*: “For trees that do not produce fruit” “For white rot that afflicts fruit”, “For blight that afflicts the field” (Yuval Harari, “The Sword of Moses,” pp. 87–88, 92).

71 See *Harba de-Moshe*, a binding recipe “to detain a ship at sea”, followed by a releasing recipe: למיכלא אילפא בימא (*lmyklʾ ʾylpʾ bymʾ*) (Yuval Harari, “The Sword of Moses,” p. 90).

72 See Korshi Dosoo, Edward O. D. Love & Markéta Preininger (chief editors). “KYP T55: Destruction of a water-wheel,” Kyprianos Database of Ancient Ritual Texts and Objects, www.coptic-magic.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/index.php/text/kyp-t-55. Accessed on 07/04/2022. We are grateful to Korshi Dosoo for this reference and the following one.

I destroy it, a [...] I destroy it, a shovel, I lay waste to it, a water-wheel, I destroy it, a garden, I destroy it, [...] I destroy it, a storehouse, I destroy it (...).⁷³ As can be seen from the above list, this Coptic text was meant to affect a variety of inanimate entities (both objects and installations) and presumably ultimately to harm their human owners.

Moving now to the Jewish parallels to the mill spells, we start with the observation that two parallels have been found. The first is part of a bifolio with magical recipes from the Cairo Geniza, T-S Ar. 49.54 1:12–3:5, that has been published by Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked.⁷⁴ Below we revise the reading of Naveh and Shaked.

Cambridge T-S Ar. 49.54 1:12–3:5. Paper bifolio, ca. 13.5 × 19.5 cm, each leaf measures ca. 13.5 × 10 cm. Inscribed in black ink by one or two hands. Oriental square script. The text contains Judaeo-Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic.

Our reading revises that offered by the first editors of this text, Naveh and Shaked, on several points. In the first recipe, lines 14–15, they read the last letters of the magic names as a final *mem*, while we suggest reading *samekh*. The scribe wrote these two letters in nearly identical form (cf. 4, line 8: **המקום ואסך**). However, a comparison with the releasing recipe found in this manuscript, where similar magic words end with a clear *samekh*, as well as with the parallel recipe from NYPL 190, tips the scales in favor of a *samekh*. Second, in line 15 the previous editors read “לפנונים” (*lpnwnym*), but the first *nun* is mistaken, and the word is לפנויס (*lpwnys*). Third, in line 16 the last word begins with a clear *ṭet*, the first letter in the noun טחונתה, but this part was not reconstructed nor translated by Naveh and Shaked. The last line of the recipe, line 17, is poorly preserved. It clearly contains the goal of the recipe, namely that the mill should not function, but the verb is missing. We reconstruct here תהלך (*thlk*) based on two indications: a partially preserved *lamed* in the middle of the sequence, and the verb found in the releasing recipe, which is תהלך. The parallel from NYPL 190 contains two different verbs: תשוב ותרגיש (*tswb w-trgys*). Neither seems to fit the lacuna in T-S Ar. 49.54 due to the presence of the *lamed*. Lastly, we reconstruct the preposition ב (*b*) ‘at’ in the phrase “at this moment (lit. hour)”. The expression שעתה בהדא (*bhd[?] ṣ[?]th*) is found in other magic recipes, e.g., T-S Misc. 27.4.11, 1:14 (א עבידו לי צביוני בהדא שעתא) (*bydw ly ṣbywny bhd[?] ṣ[?]t[?]*).⁷⁵

73 See Korshi Dosoo, Edward O. D. Love & Markéta Preininger (chief editors), “KYP T174: Curse to destroy a business (?),” Kyprianos Database of Ancient Ritual Texts and Objects, www.coptic-magic.phil.uni-wuerzburg.de/index.php/text/kyp-t-174. Accessed on 07/04/2022.

74 Joseph Naveh & Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, pp. 227–230, Geniza 25.

75 Joseph Naveh & Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, pp. 216–219, Geniza 22.

T-S Ar. 49.54 1:12–17

12	b [?] b l-ṭḥwnh	באב לטחונה ^a	A section for a mill. ^b
13	kwd twr [?] b mn ṭḥt rḡlk ʔl-ys [?] r w-ʔlqyh	כוד תוראב מן תחת רגלך אליסארא ^c ואלקיה	Take some dust from under your left foot, and throw it
14	py ḥlqh [?] w-qwl b-šm ʔlpwnys	פי חלקהא וקול בשם ^d אלפונים	into its opening and say: “In the name of ʔlpwnys
15	lpwnys w-ʔkpwnys ʔtwn ʔtyh qd[yšyh]	לפונים ואכפונים אתון אתיה קד[ישיה]	lpwnys and ʔkpwnys! You, holy letters
16	w-šmht [?] qdyšyh ʔswrw hd [?] ṭ[ḥwnth]	ושמהתא קדישיה אסורו הדא ט[חונתה]	and holy names, bind this mill,
17	dl[ʔ thlk b-h] [?] d [?] š [?] t [?] :	דל[א תהלך (?)] ב[ה(?)] אדא :שעתא	so that it does not [move, at] this moment!”

T-S Ar. 49.54 2:1–5

1	[...]	^e [...] [...] ^f	
2	qwl ʔnpynws ʔpntpynws	קול אנפינוס אפנתפינוס	Say: “ʔnpynws ʔpntpynws!”
3	ʔtwn šmth qdyšyh	אתון שמהתה קדישיה	You, holy names,
4	šrwn hd [?] ṭḥwnth xx	שרון הדא טחונתה ^g	loosen this mill xx
5	w-thlk: mḡrb	ותהלך: מגרב	and let it move ^h . Proven.

- a The title is emphasized with supralinear clusters of three dots/short strokes.
- b The translation provided by Naveh and Shaked is as follows:
- 12) <<A chapter for a lame woman (?)
 - 13) Take dust from underneath your left foot and throw it
 - 14) into her gullet, and say:>> “In the name of (*magic*
 - 15) *words*). You, holy characters
 - 16) and holy names, bind this ...
 - 17) that he may not ... this hour.”
- c Both here and in the following word the “al” is written as ligature.
- d From this word until the word הדיא in line 16 (including) all the words are emphasized with supralinear clusters of three dots.
- e The missing text is centered and was probably the title of the recipe.
- f The translation provided by Naveh and Shaked is as follows:
- 1) <<Say:>> (*magic names*)
 - 2) you, holy names,
 - 3) release this female lame (?) person
 - 4) that she may walk. <<Tested.>>
- g The word is followed by two smaller signs resembling the *qamatz* of the Babylonian vocalization system. These might have functioned as graphic line fillers.

Alternatively the preposition could have been מן (*mn*), “from (this moment)”, but the space seems rather small for two letters (although it is not impossible that they were tightly spaced). The scribe could have used the preposition מ, in its Hebrew form, thus mixing Hebrew with Aramaic. This, too, is not impossible, given other imprecisions in the text, such as the spelling of הדיא with an extra *aleph*, הדיאא.

Naveh and Shaked, while noting that the term טחונה (*tḥwnh*) relates to the Aramaic noun “miller”, interpret it as an Arabic word “meaning something like ‘lame’ or ‘cripple’” based on the context (p. 230). It seems that they were confused by the verb in the releasing recipe, ותהלך (*w-thlk*), “and it shall move (lit. walk)”, and did not think of the possibility of a mill “walking”, consequently interpreting the text as referring to a person, not an installation. The Syriac parallel clearly shows this to be otherwise.

The Genizah recipe for releasing a mill found on the verso of this leaf (2:1–5) seems to be written by a different hand, or by the same scribe but in a very different form. The letters are much larger, thicker and less cursive, and there are no supralinear dots for emphasis. If the recipe was indeed written by the same person as the previous one, the reason for the change in writing style is unclear. We should note that the writing changes again on the following leaf, in the middle of a recipe (3: 3).

The first line of the releasing recipe probably consisted of one word, its title, which could have been the Aramaic לשריה ‘To release it’, or a Judaeo-Arabic version thereof. Such a title would stress its connection with the previous recipe for binding a mill. The practice is entirely oral, as opposed to the previous one, which involved a manipulation of materials. It consists of a simple invocation of two magical names, that are asked to “release this mill”. The result (or perhaps part of the spell to be uttered) is that the mill “shall walk”, that is, begin to turn and function again.

The two magical names in the releasing recipe closely resemble those in the binding one. However, while the binding recipe contains three variations of the sequence פוניס (*pwnys*), the releasing spell contains two variations of the sequence פינוס (*pynws*). It is probable that both spells were meant to invoke similarly sounding names, built on the basis of פינוס (suggesting that the releasing spell preserved the more accurate forms). This assumption is based on the parallel found in NYPL 190, where the magical names are clearly based on the sequence פינוס (*pynws*) and not on פוניס (*pwnys*).

Both recipes on T-S Ar. 49.54 contain a mixture of languages: Judaeo-Arabic, Aramaic, and a couple of Hebrew words. This situation will be discussed further below, after presenting the second parallel.

NYPL 190, fol. 180: 20–23⁷⁶

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/8cfbeodo-a5ee-0133-e6a4-00505686d14e>

This recipe is part of a paper manuscript of 258 pages, ca. 27 × 17 cm. Date: 1468. Hand: Byzantine. Scribe: Moshe ben Yaakov ben Mordechai and Marḥaba. The manuscript contains two works by Abraham Abulafia, *Ḥaye ha-Nefesh* and *Matsref ha-Hokmah*, followed by a long compendium of magical recipes in a combination of Judaeo-Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew (pp. 58–258 of the manuscript). The magic manuscript, including the recipe below, was edited by Gideon Bohak,⁷⁷ who noted the partial parallel to T-S Ar. 49.54 but did not provide an alternative interpretation.

The NYPL 190 recipe consists of a simple invocation of four magical names, followed by a series of synonym verbs denoting binding effects on the mill. The subsequent results, “it will not turn and not move” prove that the interpretation of טחונה as a mill is the correct one. The invocation is concluded by the name of the great and holy God and an abbreviated sequence of Amen.

20	l'qd 'lq'ḥwn tqwl hdh 'l'sm' llpynws 'lpynws	אלעקד אלטאחון ^b תקול הדה אלאסמא לפינוס אלפינוס	To bind a mill. Say these names: “ <i>llpynws 'lpynws</i>
21	pynws wkpynwš 'twn šmht' qdyšy'	פינוס וכפינוס אתון שמהתא קדישיא	<i>pynws and kpynwš</i> ”, You holy names,
22	'swrw hd' ḥwnt' wkptwh w'wqmwh wl' tswb wl' trgš b'lh'	אסורו הדא טחונתא וכפתוה ואוקמוה ולא תסוב ולא תרגיש באלהא	bind this mill and tie it and stop it and it will not turn and it will not move. By God
23	rb' wqydš' ' ' s'	רבא וקדישיא א'א'ס'	the great and the holy. A(men) A(men) S(ela).

a The recipe is numbered on the margin, שפח, “378”. The title is repeated on the margin.

b Under the title a different hand inscribed two letters (?) that resemble מן (*m*) but their meaning is unclear.

76 Gideon Bohak, *A Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of Jewish Magic, Ms New York Public Library Heb. 190 (formerly Sassoon 56): Introduction Annotated Edition and Facsimile* (in Hebrew), 2 vols., Los Angeles, 2014.

77 *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 222.

As opposed to the Genizah recipe, NYPL 190 only consists of an incantation to be uttered, whereas T-S Ar. 49.54 also involves a practical action (taking dust and feeding it to the mill). The magical words to be uttered, however, resemble each other and clearly reflect the same incantation:

T-S Ar. 49.54 binding	NYPL 190 binding	T-S Ar. 49.54 releasing
אלפונים	ללפינוס	
לפונים	אלפינוס	
	פינוס	אנפינוס
ואכפונים	וכפינוס	אפנתפינוס

The core of the magic words in NYPL 190 and in the releasing recipe from T-S Ar. 49.54 is פִּינוֹס (*pinos*), and (probably) this also was the original form of the core of the names of the T-S Ar. 49.54 binding recipe, where they were changed in the course of its transmission. Given the aim of the recipe, namely binding a mill, an installation meant to produce flour and consequently bread, could this core have a related meaning? It is perhaps possible to relate it to the Greek πεινώ, meaning “hungry”. However, to date we have not found any Greek magic recipes that are directed against a mill or a similar installation.

In terms of chronology, both the Aramaic text preserved in NYPL 190 and that in the middle of the Judaeo-Arabic version from T-S Ar. 49.54 attest to the antiquity of these spells. In the medieval period most Jews were no longer using Aramaic. Hence, in both manuscripts the title and instructions of the recipes are provided in Judaeo-Arabic, while the actual incantation remains in the original Aramaic.⁷⁸

78 For a broader discussion of the division of languages in magic texts, see Gideon Bohak, “Towards a Catalogue of the Magical, Astrological, Divinatory and Alchemical Fragments from the Cambridge Genizah Collections,” in: *From a Sacred Source: Genizah Studies in Honour of Professor Stefan C. Reif*, ed. Ben Outhwaite and Siam Bhayro, Leiden, 2011, pp. 53–79 (62–64, 68–69).

9 Conclusions

In this study of the Syriac text-unit for a mill we have shown that the magical practices attested in these recipes have a much broader cultural and historical context. Comparing the Syriac texts with Jewish recipes, we can try to identify the core of the binding and loosening practices shared by both magical traditions. In the case of the binding spell the core-practice is throwing dust into the opening in the upper mill, while reciting the incantation. In the case of the loosening spell, in both traditions Psalm 146:7 is used for this purpose.

Notably, both in the Syriac and in the Jewish text-units for a mill a part of the recipe is written in Arabic. As we have mentioned before, Arabic was frequently used as a language of both written and spoken communication for Oriental Jews in medieval times (written often in the form of Judaeo-Arabic). However, as has also been mentioned above, the Arabic language is a highly marginal phenomenon for Syriac magical manuscripts. It is worth mentioning here that the Arabic spell (verses 5–7) in the Syriac text-unit shows not only the kind of scribal mistakes which occur during the transmission of a poorly understood text, but also mistakes and discrepancies which clearly demonstrate that this incantation was written down from hearing. In addition to the arguments presented above, it should be outlined that unlike the Jewish recipes for a mill, the Arabic spell found in the Syriac manuscripts contains clear indications of its circulation in Muslim context, cf. *ʾallāh ʾakbar* (l. 9), *bi-xātimat ʾal-jinn* (l. 11), *sundūk bundūk* (l. 8). Taken together this evidence suggests that the binding practice for a mill was shared by Arabic-speaking Muslims, Jews and Syriac Christians. The Arabic spell written down in *Garshuni* attests to oral practice. To sum up, we do not assume, though it cannot be refuted either, that the Arabic magical tradition was a source for this practice in both the Syriac and the Jewish manuscripts. The available evidence allows us only to deduce that similar practices occurred in Arabic, Syriac and Jewish magical traditions.

Appendix



FIGURE 1 MS Syriac 160, Houghton Library, Harvard University, f. 44r (H)

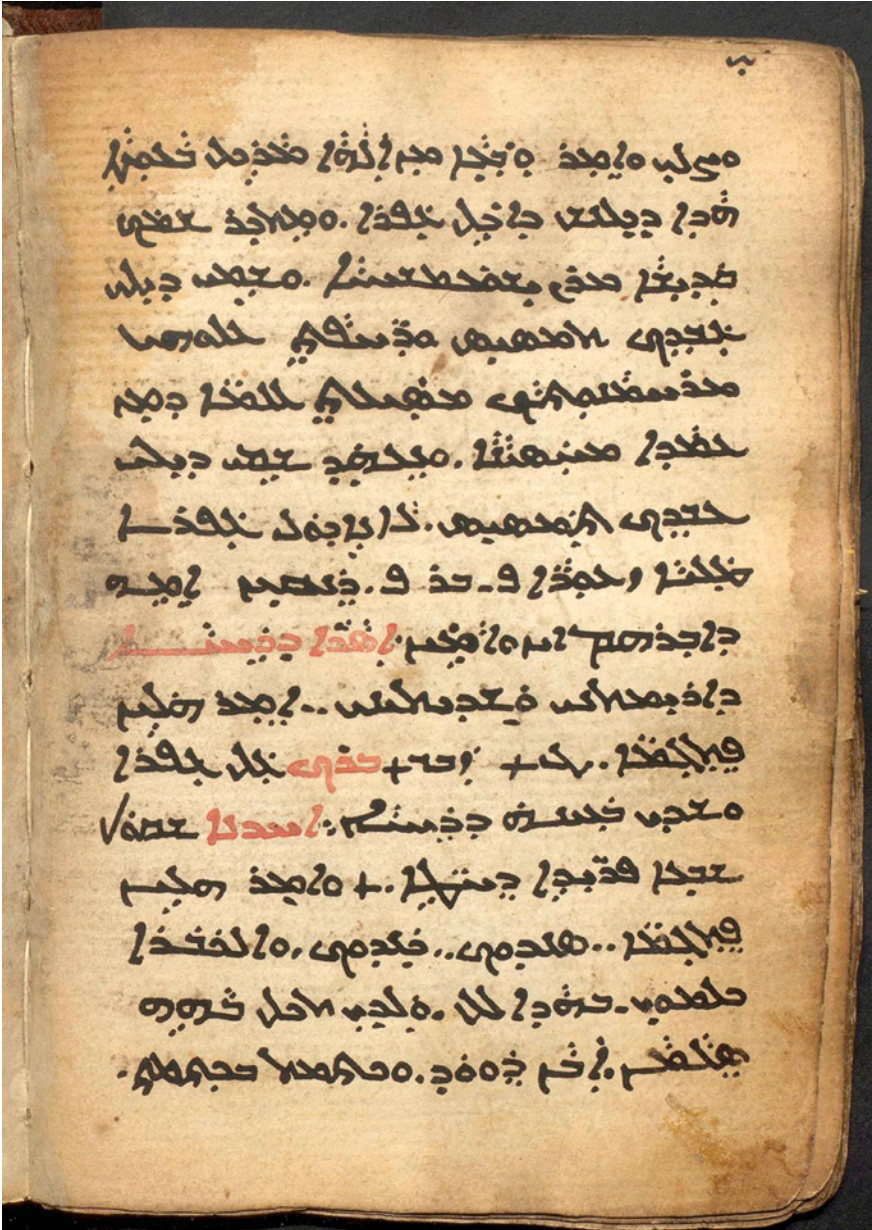


FIGURE 2 BL Or. 5281, f. 40v (Blb)
 © BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD (BL OR. 5281, F. 40V)

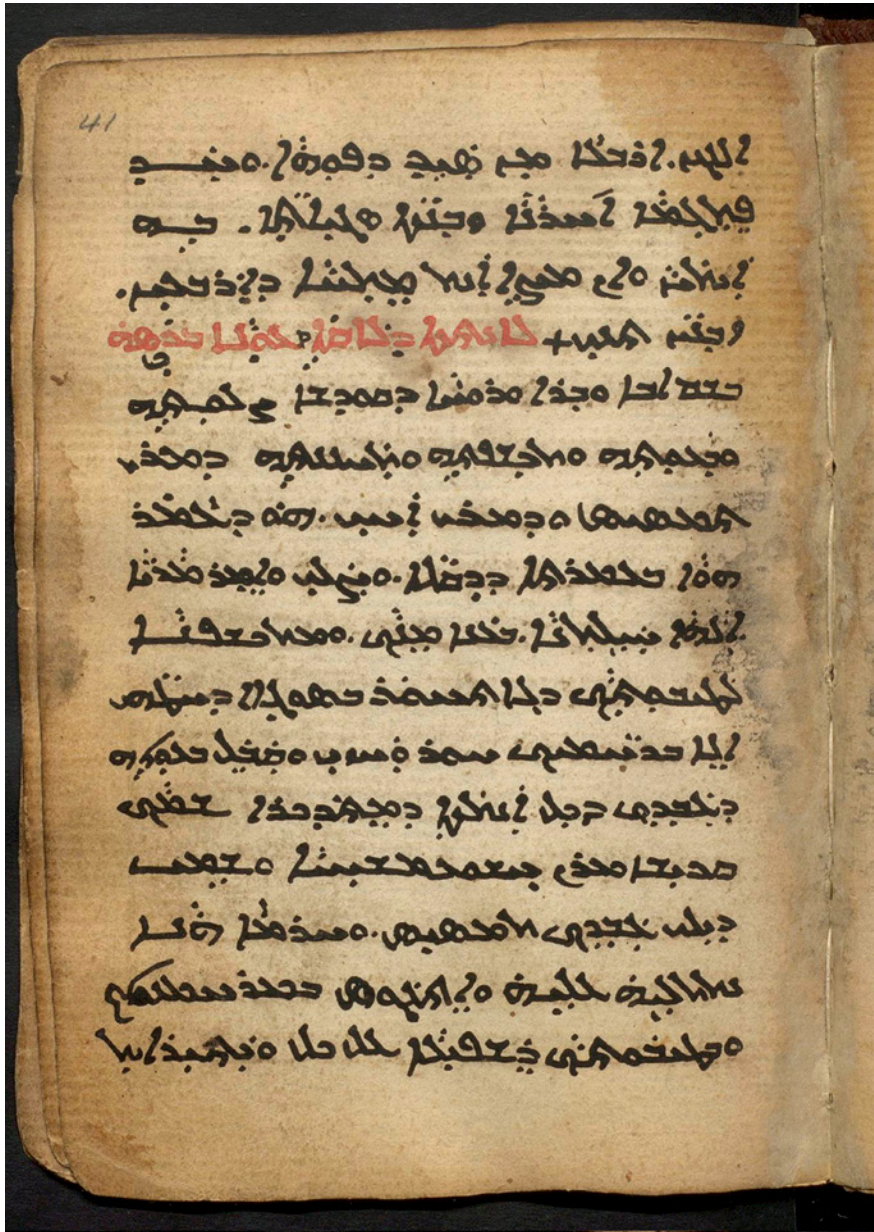


FIGURE 3 BL Or. 5281, f. 41r (Blb)
 © BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD (BL OR. 5281, F. 41R)



FIGURE 4 Cambridge University Library T-S Ar. 49.54 (recto)
 REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE SYNDICS OF CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



FIGURE 5 Cambridge University Library T-S Ar. 49.54 (verso)
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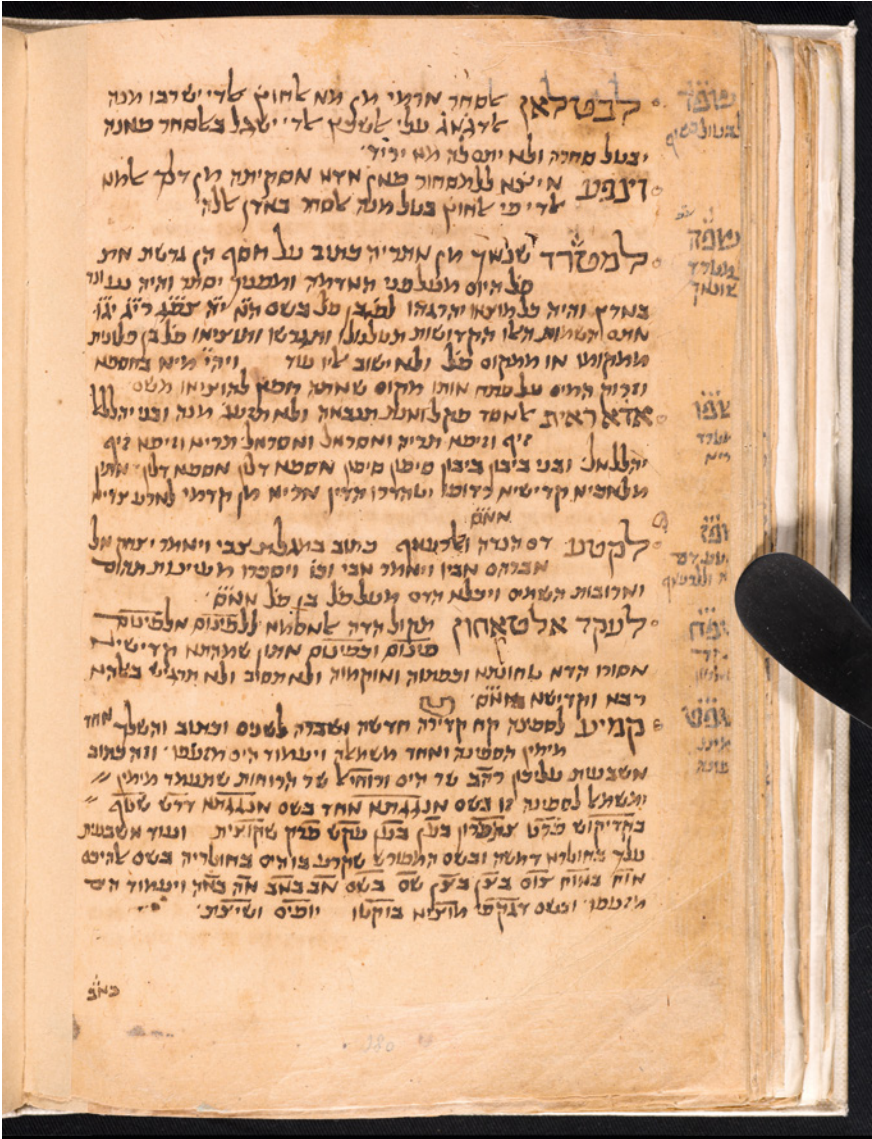


FIGURE 6 NYPL 190, fol. 180: 20–23. Dorot Jewish Division, The New York Public Library “HAYE HA-NEFESH” NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS. ACCESSED APRIL 19, 2022. [HTTPS://DIGITALCOLLECTIONS.NYPL.ORG/ITEMS/8CFBE0D0-A5EE-0133-E6A4-00505686D14E](https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/8CFBE0D0-A5EE-0133-E6A4-00505686D14E)