

## WHO WROTE THE SYRIAC INCANTATION BOWLS?

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In the classical languages of the Middle East, one often notes a close connection between the use of a particular script and the religious background of the writer. For instance, Jews, and only Jews, have used the Jewish script (i.e. Hebrew square characters). The late professor Jonas Greenfield states in connection with the Aramaic incantation bowls:

It has become almost a dogma in this field of research, and this writer is also guilty of having believed in it, that the use of a particular script – Jewish, Mandaic, Syriac, etc. – indicated that the scribe and person for whom the bowl was written adhered to a particular religion (Greenfield 1973: 150).

However, in the very case of the Aramaic incantation bowls this 'dogma' has been contested by various scholars. The same goes in a lesser degree for the Aramaic amulets, too. In his extensive review article of James Montgomery's *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, J. N. Epstein argued that several bowl texts written in the Syriac script are in fact Jewish, even though Syriac is normally considered to be the language of Eastern Aramaic Christians (Epstein 1922: 41-45). Later on, for instance Jonas Greenfield has argued that one Mandaic text is 'clearly the work of a Jewish scribe' (Greenfield 1973: 154-155)<sup>1</sup>, and Philippe Gignoux, for his part, assumes that the scribe(s) of three Syriac amulets, published by him, may have been of Jewish origin (Gignoux 1987: 3-4), in spite of the fact that two of these three texts have the Trinitarian formula 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. On the basis of the presence of this formula and the general syncretistic nature of the texts, Michael O. Wise rejects Gignoux's suggestion and remains sceptical of the possibilities of saying anything definite about the scribes' religious background (Wise 1994: 44). J. W. Wesselius, too, rejects the Jewishness of these texts and maintains that due to the use of Syriac script and the appearance of the Trinitarian formula 'it is very likely that both the client and the magician(s) were Christians' (Wesselius 1991: 707). In addition to the syncretistic nature of the bowl texts, the fact that texts were transmitted (apparently both orally

<sup>1</sup> See also Levine 1970: 343, 358-359.

and copied from a written *Vorlage*)<sup>2</sup> from one dialect to another dialect and, consequently, from one religious group to another, complicates the possibilities of being certain of the religious background of a given bowl text. Thus, it may always be argued that a Babylonian Jewish Aramaic text, for instance, with Mandaic religious features may be based on a Mandaic *Vorlage* rather than testifying to a Mandaic scribe using the 'Jewish' script.

It is clear that in the case of Syriac bowl texts, the situation is more complex than with Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic texts. At least the majority of the latter two are written by Jews and Mandaeans respectively, but in the case of Syriac bowl texts, we have no convincing evidence that even the greater part of the texts are of Christian origin. As a matter of fact, only a small minority of all known Syriac texts show any telltale signs of Christian background. One text ends with the Trinitarian formula 'In the name of the Farther and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Hamilton 2:10). According to Hamilton, the phrase 'in the name of the Father' also occurs in Hamilton 18:9, but the context is uncertain, since this phrase is followed by 'in the holy name' and then, after some uncertain letters, by variations from the Tetragrammaton. Thus it remains uncertain whether the 'Father' has a Christian implication. Another text begins with a Christian formula in a promising way: 'accept peace from your Father who is in heaven', but the rest is less convincing: 'and sevenfold peace from male gods and from female goddesses' (N&Sh 1:9-10).<sup>3</sup> Further, N&Sh 17:6 reads 'may the power of Christ/Messiah rise and become awake', and the same text has an uncertain allusion to the Resurrection, as noted by Naveh and Shaked (1993: 121). Otherwise, Christian formulae are lacking. Importantly, no quotations from the New Testament or early Christian literature are encountered, as opposed to the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts which commonly quote the Hebrew Bible and occasionally refer to Talmudic tradition as well (on the quotations in the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts, see e.g. Naveh & Shaked 1993: 22ff.).

The characteristic feature of the Syriac bowl texts seems to be the lack of any specific religious terminology. They, for instance, typically have no invocation of a deity in the beginning, as opposed to relatively many Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic bowls (Harviainen 1995: 55, 58). Based on the aforementioned facts, Tapani Harviainen has suggested that Syriac bowl texts represent 'the last vestiges of non-Christian Syriac writings' (Harviainen 1995: 60; see also Harviainen 1993: 32). This possibility is further supported by the common use of Proto-Manichaean script (alongside Estrangela) in the Syriac bowl texts. Since the Estrangela was beginning to be considered as a Christian script, the use of Proto-Manichaean script – so goes the argument – was an important mark which distinguished pagan texts

<sup>2</sup> The transmission of magical formulae and texts from one Aramaic dialect to another is discussed in several articles. See e.g. Hunter 1995; Müller-Kessler 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The same phrase appears in another bowl (A Syriac bowl in the Finnish National Museum, line 9). See Harviainen 1978.

from the Christian ones written in Estrangela (Harviainen 1995: 59-60). This, however, is possibly not correct, at least in every case, since one of the most 'Christian' among the Syriac texts (N&Sh 17) is indeed written in the Proto-Manichaean script.

As noted above, J. E. Epstein argues that several Syriac bowl texts published by Montgomery (AIT 31-35) 'sont d'origine juive' (Epstein 1922: 44). Epstein's conclusion is based on various facts (see Epstein 1922: 41-45). First, Epstein noted, on the basis of the clients' names, that texts both in Jewish Aramaic and in Syriac were written for the same persons (see the chart in Epstein 1922: 43). Thus, the same persons who commissioned Jewish texts in Hebrew letters, also commissioned more or less parallel texts in Syriac letters, a fact which suggests the Jewish origin of those Syriac texts. Secondly, the Syriac texts under discussion include Jewish modes of expression and religious concepts, such as the Jewish legal system of divorce and references to the Talmudic sage Rabbi Joshua bar Peraḥya. No evident Christian concepts are present. In this connection, Epstein argues that several crosses or cross-like symbols in the Syriac bowls have nothing to do with the Christian cross, but are graphic symbols which may be compared to the stylized *aleph* employed in many Jewish MSS (see also below). Further, Epstein points out that the Syriac texts published by Montgomery are written in the script he calls 'araméo-manichéenne' (i.e., Proto-Manichaean). He argues that this script was used by all non-Christians in Mesopotamia as opposed to the Christian Syriac script. On the basis of a quotation from Rab Hay Gaon (d. 1038), Montgomery assumes that the same script was also used by the Jews, alongside the Hebrew script.

As a matter of fact, many of the Jewish elements pointed out by Epstein are found in other Syriac bowl texts, too. Further, we may have some additional evidence which supports the possibility that some of the Syriac bowl texts stem in one form or another from a Jewish origin.

The aim of this article is to have a bit closer look at a couple of Syriac texts published by Naveh & Shaked (N&Sh 10 and N&Sh 26), and try to find out – in the light of these texts – whether there is anything which would reveal the religious background of the Syriac bowl texts. The focus is on both outstanding religious concepts, formulae, deities, etc., and exceptional linguistic features.

### 1. NAVEH & SHAKED 10 (N&Sh 10)

The text is written in Estrangela, and it possibly comes from the same provenance as N&Sh 11 (i.e., near modern Baghdad), written in Jewish Aramaic (see Naveh & Shaked 1985: 180-181). At least linguistically, it is one of the most peculiar Syriac bowl texts.

### Cultural affinities (religious concepts, etc.)

The deities appealed to are:

- *šb'wty šb'wty hy' wqym'* (*šb'wty, šb'wty* the living and the existent) (line 5)
- *yh yhw* (line 5)
- *mry' rb' wq[dy]š'* (great and holy Lord) (line 8)
- *qdhy'yl mpqy'yl kbšy'[yl] prhy'yl* (Qadḥiel, Mappediel, Kabshiel, Parḥiel) (lines 12-13)

These deities or angels are appealed to using the phrase 'in the name of' followed by the name of the deity and/or (additional) descriptive phrase, e.g. *[b]šwm yh yhw* 'in the name of yh yh yhw' (line 5); *bšwm mry' rb' wq[dy]š'* 'in the name of the great and holy Lord' (line 8). Importantly, all the specific religious concepts in this text are Jewish.

Despite the curious and uncertain final *y* (see Naveh & Shaked 1985: 182), *šb'wty* seems to be a Syriac (corrupt) spelling of the Hebrew צבאות (cf. e.g. N&Sh amulet 4:34). Another Syriac text (Louvre AO 17.284, line 7) has *šb'[w]t* (Müller-Kessler 1998). To my knowledge, it is otherwise unattested in the Syriac bowl texts.

Variations of the phrase *hy' wqym'* 'the living and the existent' as referring to the God of Israel are attested in many Jewish texts, both in Aramaic and Hebrew.<sup>4</sup> Note, for instance, the Targum Neophyti rendering of Gen 27:27:

הוא שורא ברך יתיה חי וקים כל עלמא (the Masoretic text has יהוה) and N&Sh amulet 9:5: בשמה דמן דחיה וקמה. The Hebrew variant has also found its way in to the standard Jewish prayerbook, e.g. אל חי וקים (השכמת הבקר) and אל חי וקים (קריאת שמע וברכותיה).

*yh* and *yhw* are, of course, variants of *yhw*; variations from the Tetragrammaton are frequent in both the Jewish Aramaic and Syriac bowl texts. Note e.g. *bšwm y'h yhw y'w* in AIT 31:6 (= Hamilton 3), a text which, according to Epstein, is of Jewish origin. Various permutations of the Tetragrammaton also occur in the Syriac amulets (e.g. Gignoux 1:28). *yh yhw* is followed by *bšwm h' hyhn h'* 'in the name of h' hyhn h'', which remains uncertain.

The angels Kabshiel and Parḥiel are well attested in Jewish magical literature,<sup>5</sup> and Kabshiel also occurs in the Mandaic bowl texts (Yamauchi 10:17, 11:31). By contrast, Qadḥiel and Mappediel (probably from the root *npq* 'to take out' *af.*) are not known to me elsewhere. As is well known, Jewish angels often occur both in the Mandaic (see Yamauchi 1967: 37) and Syriac bowl texts (e.g. AIT 34:7 =

<sup>4</sup> Naveh and Shaked render *qym'* as 'existent'. Another possibility would be 'enduring'.

<sup>5</sup> For Kabshiel, see e.g. Go 6:4, Go D:14, T.-S. K 1.37 2a:8 (Schäfer & Shaked 1994: 58), and T. S. K 1.26 1b:4 (Schäfer & Shaked 1997: 267), and for Parḥiel, e.g., N&Sh amulet 30:11, and T.-S. K 1.37 2b:1 (Schäfer & Shaked 1994: 59).

Hamilton 6), and they frequently appear in the Syriac amulets, too (see Gignoux 1987: 3-4).

One cannot be certain that the phrase ‘great and holy Lord’ (*mry’rb’wq[dy]š’*) in line 8 refers to the same lord as the earlier ‘šb’wty, šb’wty the living and the existent’ and *yh yhw*, but this is probable.

## Linguistic features

### 1. Gutturals

I have pointed out elsewhere that the Syriac bowl texts show surprisingly frequent instances of weakening in the gutturals, if we bear in mind the conservatism of literary Syriac (Juusola 1999: 40). The Jewish Aramaic incantations are more conservative than the Syriac bowl texts in this respect, probably due to the fact that the Jewish Aramaic texts follow a long-established and conservative spelling tradition. Nevertheless, both the Jewish Aramaic and Syriac bowl texts display similar types of instances of weakening in the gutturals. The text under discussion here is by far the most Mandaean type Syriac bowl in the treatment of gutturals; it frequently shows instances of confusion of the gutturals, e.g. *wtybdwn* ‘and that you may make’ (line 5) for the expected *t(y)‘bdwn* (from the root ‘*bd*’; *tqtlw* ‘be killed’ (line 8) for *‘tqtlw*; *d’yt* (lines 6, 10) for *d’yt*; *wdnywn* ‘and who will be’ (line 10) for *wdn(y)hwn*; *ḥdyn* ‘this’ (line 13) for *hdyn*.

### 2. *bšwm* ‘in the name of’

The text has repeatedly *bšwm* instead of the standard Syriac *bšm*. As is well known, *šwm* ‘name’ (construct state) is normal in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic. The exceptional form *šwm* also predominates in other Syriac bowl texts, e.g. N&Sh 26:5, Hamilton 2:5, 9; AIT 31:6 (= Hamilton 3); AIT 32:6 (= Hamilton 4).

### 3. *bnyh* for *bnwhy*

In this text, we have *bnyh* ‘his sons’ (lines 6, 10) for the expected *bnwhy*. Parallel instances commonly appear in other Syriac bowl texts too, a fact neglected in Hamilton’s treatment of suffixed pronouns in his grammar (see Hamilton 1971: 65). In the Syriac incantations, ‘his sons’ is regularly written *bnh* (e.g. Hamilton 1:11; AIT 33:13 = Hamilton 5).<sup>6</sup> Only rarely does one encounter the expected suffix *-why*; most instances occur with the prepositions *qdm* and *‘l*, e.g. *qdmwhy* ‘in front of him’ in Hamilton 14:3. The spelling *bnwhy* is found in a Louvre text (AO 17.284, line 7), published by Müller-Kessler (1998), and it also occurs in the Syriac amulets (Gignoux 1:25). The Louvre text is – according to Müller-Kessler –

<sup>6</sup> See also Montgomery 1913: 35.

probably based on a Mandaic *Vorlage*. Therefore it is a bit surprising to find the proper literary Syriac form in this particular text. Note that *-why* is unattested in Mandaic. In contrast with other Syriac texts, the Louvre text also employs *-(w)hy* as the sole form of 3rd p. masc. sg. (Müller-Kessler 1998: 336). Such forms as *bnthy* 'his daughters' (for *bntyh*) and *bythy* 'his house' (for *byth*) are likely to be understood as hypercorrections.

In the Aramaic bowl texts, and in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic in general, the distinction between the forms used with nouns in the sg. and with fem. pl. nouns and the forms used with masc. pl. nouns is apparently neutralized. Thus, for instance,  $\text{ܝܗ}$ - (3rd p. masc. sg.) commonly appears alongside  $\text{ܝܗܝ}$ - (Juusola 1999: 81ff.). The same is true of the prepositions which follow the model of masc. pl. nouns in this respect, e.g.,  $\text{ܥܠܝܗ}$  occurs alongside  $\text{ܥܠܝܗܝ}$  (see Juusola 1999: 86-87). Mandaic, too, employs the same form, *-yhl-h*, with both numbers (Macuch 1965: 158). Yet, as opposed to Mandaic, but in accordance with the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts, Syriac bowl texts show fluctuation between these two forms, e.g. *'lyh* versus *qdmwhy*.

#### 4. Demonstrative pronouns

The regular masc. demonstrative pronoun 'this' in Jewish Aramaic bowl texts is  $\text{ܗܕܝܢ}$  (Juusola 1999: 106). The same form is also met with in the bowl texts written in Syriac, alongside the standard Syriac *hn'* (Hamilton 1971: 67). In Mandaic, the spelling *hdyn* is only (and rarely!) attested in the bowl texts, alongside the regular *h'zyn*, which is the standard Mandaic form (Yamauchi 1967: 78; Macuch 1965: 165). The occurrence of the Jewish Aramaic *hdyn* both in Syriac and Mandaic may probably be explained by the influence of the Jewish tradition or by Jewish Aramaic *Vorlage* (see also Juusola 1999: 22-23). In this text, this form, spelt curiously *ḥdyn*, appears as a feminine form (line 13). Parallel instances of exceptional use of this demonstrative are again found in Jewish Aramaic bowl texts (see Juusola 1999: 108-110). Further, the fem. form, spelt *ḥd'*, is used in this text for both the masc. and fem. names, e.g. *ḥd' bršpt br 'ḥtbw* (line 7); *wḥd' rbyt' bt ḥw'* (line 11) (see also Naveh & Shaked 1985: 182-183). The exceptional use and spellings of these proximal demonstratives suggest that they were not used in the actual vernacular and, consequently, less well-educated scribes were unfamiliar with their proper use and spelling. Be that as it may, the appearance of *hdyn* in a Syriac text speaks of Jewish Aramaic influence.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See also Naveh & Shaked 1985: 128. Christa Müller-Kessler is probably right in arguing that the Syriac bowl text published by her (Louvre AO 17.284) goes back to a Mandaic *Vorlage*, but, in my opinion, the appearance of *hdyn* in that text does not favour her assumption (see Müller-Kessler 1998: 346). I cannot understand why she argues that *hdyn* is 'das mandäische Demonstrativpronomen' (see Müller-Kessler 1998: 336). Wesselius (1991: 710) takes the same position concerning the origin of *hdyn* in another Syriac text

5. *l-* as the imperfect prefix of 3rd p. masc. pl.

In line 13, we have *l-* as the imperfect prefix of 3rd p. masc. pl.: *wl' lkbyšwh* 'that they may not press her down' (see also Naveh & Shaked 1985: 185). Other instances of *l-* as a 3rd p. masc. imperfect prefix appear in N&Sh 26, discussed below. Otherwise this prefix is unattested in the Syriac bowl texts. As is well known, *l-* is regular, alongside the less common *n-*, in standard Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic (Epstein 1960: 31), and also appears in Mandaic, in which it, by contrast, is less common than *n-* (Macuch 1965: 262). In the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts, *y-*, *n-* and *l-* occur with this function, *y-* being most frequently attested (Juusola 1999: 179-181).

**NAVEH & SHAKED 26 (N&Sh 26)**

The text is written in the Estrangela script. Since the bowl also contains a cross depicted on the inner centre of the bowl, Naveh and Shaked assume that it is 'of Christian origin' (Naveh & Shaked 1993: 140-141).

**Cultural affinities (religious concepts, etc.)**

*1. Crosses*

As noted, Naveh and Shaked argue that the large Maltese type of cross on the inner centre of the bowl suggests that the bowl is of Christian origin.<sup>8</sup> A similar cross is familiar from a Syriac bowl published by Tapani Harviainen (see the photo in Harviainen 1978). In addition to this cross, the bowl also contains numerous other magical symbols (see Naveh & Shaked 1993, Plate 31), many of them well attested on other bowls and magical literature in general. Among the drawings, there are at least two other cross types of marks, which, however, are different from the large cross. The main cross on this bowl clearly differs from the normal type of cross on the Syriac bowls, a small cross or a group of crosses within a circle (see Hamilton 1971: 8-9). Sometimes the circle is missing and/or a dot appears in each quarter of the cross. Since crosses seem to be typical of the Syriac bowls, it has been argued that they are indeed indicative of Christian provenance. Crosses, however, also occur on some bowls written in Mandaic (McCullough C) and in Jewish Aramaic (AIT 7, 19, 27). Further, they are found on Jewish amulets (e.g. N&Sh 8, 27) and,

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(Gignoux 1). He states: '...the demonstrative pronoun *hdyn* is probably from Mandaic.' However, the appearance of *hdyn* in any Syriac text is problematic if we accept the theory of a Mandaic *Vorlage* for the particular text.

<sup>8</sup> Naveh and Shaked also think that a cross at the beginning of a Palestinian Christian Aramaic amulet (N&Sh 32) indicates the Christian background for that text (Naveh & Shaked 1993: 108).

rather commonly, magical texts from the Cairo Geniza (e.g. N&Sh Geniza 23).<sup>9</sup> Crosses also occur on those Syriac bowls, which, according to Epstein, have a Jewish origin. Therefore, it has also been assumed that the crosses are not connected with the Christian cross (see e.g. Epstein 1922: 44). It is interesting to note that crosses that closely resemble the standard cross of the Syriac bowls are found depicted on the festival cakes eaten by Mandaeans, Muslims, Christians, and Jews in 20th century Iraq (see Drower 1937: 85, 97). Similar signs, with magical purpose, are used in tattooing. According to Drower, the sign is pre-Christian.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it is apparent that the use of a particular script and the artistic design of bowls go hand in hand. Whether this is connected with the religious background or not is uncertain. In any case, we cannot take crosses as self-evident signs of Christianity in these bowls.

## 2. Deities

The deities appealed to (*bšwm* + name of the deity / *lšmk* + name of the deity) are:

- *pqrwn zyw' rb' dšymš'* (Paqrun, the great splendour of the sun) (line 5)
- *'lpyšr' rb' dmy'* (Alpishara, the lord of water) (line 5)
- *'lh' hy'* (living God) (line 12)

Paqrun and Alpishara are probably spirits, angels, or deities connected with nature (the sun, water). Both of them are as such unknown in other sources, as far as I know. Deities whose name is based on the ending *-un* are, however, encountered in the Mandaic bowl texts and lead amulets. Note Yazrun, Yaqrun and Yazdun, listed in the Glossary “Angels, Gods, and Demons” of Yamauchi 1967 and Babgun-Abubdana in Müller-Kessler 1996.<sup>11</sup> Yazrun, Yaqrun and Yazdun appear in the lists of benevolent creatures, together with typical angelic names (Urpael, Sahtiel, etc.). The epithet of *pqrwn, zyw' rb'* ‘the great splendour’ is attested in a Jewish Aramaic incantation (*zyw' rb' dqdwš* in AIT 7:5). The term *zyw' rb'* may be connected with one of the central figures of Gnostic Mandaic theology, *Ayar Ziwa*

<sup>9</sup> One may impressionistically note that the artistic design on this Syriac bowl and on some other Syriac bowls is much closer to the design on the later Jewish magical literature than, for instance, the one on the Aramaic magic bowls. Both several Syriac bowls and the later Jewish magical texts from the Cairo Geniza are typically adorned with a group of geometric forms and figures, such as crosses tipped with circles, magical alphabets, triangles, spirals, etc. Similar forms are common on medieval Jewish amulets (see Trachtenberg 1939: 140-142). By contrast, the Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic bowls favour anthropomorphic figures representing demons or, in some cases, magicians. The latter two, however, differ in details (Hunter 1998: 96ff.). Some Syriac bowls, however, follow the model of the Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic bowls and include drawings of demons or the like (e.g. Aaron bowl C in Geller 1986).

<sup>10</sup> For details and archaeological evidence, see Drower 1937: 97.

<sup>11</sup> According to Müller-Kessler (1996: 193), Babgun-Abubdana is a kind of ‘higher being or a demon leader’.



*Rabba*, or with other *zywas* appearing in Mandaic sources.<sup>12</sup> The term *zywa* 'spendour' or 'radiance' alone and as part of various concepts (e.g. *Hibil Ziwa*) is common in the Mandaic bowl texts and the Mandaic cosmology on the whole. Note also that the sun is one of the planetary spirits in Mandaean theology. The sun has with him ten spirits of power and brightness, including such as *Zahrūn* and *Bahrūn*, with the ending *-un*. It seems evident that at least *pqrwn zyw' rb' dšymš'* stems from the Gnostic Mandaic background. Since water, alongside the 'radiance', has a major position in Mandaic cosmology, it is very possible that *'lpyšr' rb' dmy'* also points in that direction.

*lšmk 'lh' hy'* 'by your name, the living God' appears in line 12. The 'living God' has an additional epithet: *'lh' dbtyl kwl š'dyn wkwl dyw'yn* 'the God who annuls all demons and *dēws*'. The word 'living' as an epithet of a deity occurs in the afore-mentioned N&Sh 10, in which the text reads *šb'wty šb'wty hy' wqym'* (see above). In a Mandaic bowl text (Yamauchi 23:7), one encounters the plural form *'lhy' hyy'*. Further, *'lh' hy'* and its cognates (both in Hebrew and Aramaic) are, of course, well known in various Jewish texts, including the Hebrew Bible (Jos 3:10). Note that in Mandaic, the pl. form *alahia* is normally used of false gods (see Drower & Macuch 1963: 18). Thus, one may assume that the term in Mandaic texts may be compared to the Jewish angels, which, too, play a remarkable role in Mandaic incantations, as opposed to Mandaic literature in general (see Yamauchi 1967: 37-38). In Yamauchi 23, *alahi* appears as a benevolent agent, together with angels.

### 3. Seals

As common in the magic bowl texts, this text frequently refers to seals (*h̄tm'*) and seal rings ('*zqt'*) (see Levine 1970: 364-368).<sup>13</sup> The text under treatment here refers to 'the seal ('*zqt'*) by which heaven and earth are sealed' (line 10); to the 'seal (*h̄tm'*) by which Noah sealed his ark' (line 10); to the 'seal ('*zqt'*) of Solomon by which the demons and the *dēws* are sealed' (lines 10-11); and to the 'great seal' (*h̄tm' rbh*) (line 11).

The seals and seal rings are frequently mentioned in bowl texts in Syriac<sup>14</sup>, Jewish Aramaic<sup>15</sup> and Mandaic<sup>16</sup>. Many of the seals and signet rings are mentioned as belonging to respected Biblical figures. Thus, the instances in this bowl

<sup>12</sup> For the Mandaic cosmology, see Yamauchi 1967: 39-41; Drower 1937: 73ff.

<sup>13</sup> The translations do not necessary make any distinction between the two terms.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., 'by the seal of King Solomon son of David' (AIT 34:8 = Hamilton 6); 'by the great seal with which were sealed heaven and earth and all demons' (AIT 34:9).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., 'with the great seal of Shaddai' (AIT 7:4 Myhrman); 'with the seal of El Shaddai and with the seal of the house of Joshua b. Perahya' (AIT 8:11).

<sup>16</sup> E.g., 'with the seal ring of King Solomon, the son of David' (Yamauchi 21:19-20); 'the seal of the angel Biudai' (Yamauchi 23:7-8).

have several parallels in other magic bowl texts and elsewhere. The seal of Noah with which he sealed his ark (line 10) is also attested in AIT 10 (line 5), a text in Jewish Aramaic. Noah is an important figure in Jewish magical literature in general. For instance *Sefer ha-Razim* says in the introduction (פתיחה) that the text was revealed by the angel *Raziel* to Noah (see Margalioth 1966: 65).

The seal ring of Solomon is found in Jewish Aramaic texts (e.g. Aaron bowl B:3; N&Sh amulet 27:2), Mandaic texts (e.g. Yamauchi 21:19), and in another Syriac text (AIT 34:8 = Hamilton 6), which, according to Epstein, is indeed of Jewish origin (see above). The ability of Solomon to subdue evil spirits is a well-known feature in Jewish magical literature (cf. e.g. N&Sh Geniza 22:3), and the same tradition is reflected in the Christian texts, too (see Alexander 1986: 375-379). 'The great seal' (*ḥtm' rb*) is attested, e.g., in the Jewish Aramaic Geller B:10, the Syriac AIT 34:9 (= Hamilton 6:9) and the Mandaic Yamauchi 22:29, 71. Further, 'the great seal' (חרום גדול) by which the heavens and the earth were sealed' is well attested in the *Hekhalot* texts (see Alexander 1986: 363; Schäfer 1981, §§318-321, 651-654). As is well known, seals frequently appear in the Jewish magical and mystical literature of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages (see Alexander 1986: 361-363).

It is obvious that seals of various Biblical heroes and 'the great seal' represent originally Jewish material in the bowl texts. Yet, by the time when the bowl incantations were written they had apparently become interconfessional magical material, which does not automatically reveal the religious background of any text in which they appear.

## Linguistic evidence (exceptional linguistic features, etc.)

### 1. *Seyame*

As pointed out by Naveh and Shaked, *seyame* is used in a peculiar way: it is also used with pl. verbs and pl. pronominal suffixes (Naveh & Shaked 1993: 141). A similar trend is also attested in many other Syriac bowl texts (see Hamilton 1971: 49; Naveh & Shaked 1985: 31). The exceptional use of *seyame* evidently indicates that the scribes were not familiar with the standard Syriac orthographic tradition.

### 2. /ā/ in a medial position

The letter 'alaph is rather commonly used to indicate an /ā/ vowel in a medial position, e.g., *ym'm* 'a day' (line 2); *dš't* 'who drinks' (line 3). The same trend, exceptional in Syriac, is well attested both in Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic bowl texts (Juusola 1999: 31-32; Yamauchi 1967: 70-71). Parallel examples are also attested in other Syriac bowl texts, e.g. *k's* 'bowl' (AIT 32:1 = Hamilton 4); *r'z* 'mystery' (N&Sh 16:7); *q'ym* 'stands' (N&Sh 17:5).

### 3. *he* as a sign of the final /ā/

According to Naveh and Shaked, the letter *he* appears once as the ending of the masc. sg. determinate state: *wbḥtm'rbh* 'and by the great seal' (line 11). Otherwise, 'alaph is used, as is regular in the Syriac bowl texts. It must be admitted that I would rather read *wbḥtm'rb* (*rb*' instead of *rbh*), as is regular.<sup>17</sup> However, some other examples of *he* as a sign of the final /ā/ vowel are found in the Syriac bowl texts, e.g. *nwr'ḥdrh* 'fire surrounds' (N&Sh 1:7);<sup>18</sup> *šlhbyt'* 'tyh' 'and the flame comes' (N&Sh 1:7).<sup>19</sup> In the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts, the use of *he* as the sign of the final /ā/ is common, alongside the preferred 'alef. This holds true both concerning the fem. sg. ending and the ending of the determinate state (Juusola 1999: 30-31).

### 4. *bt* 'daughter'

The word 'daughter' is spelt *bt* instead of the regular Syriac *brt*, the former being the more frequent form in the Syriac bowl texts (Hamilton 1971: 54; Harviainen 1978: 15).

### 5. Gutturals

This text has some instances of confusion in the gutturals, e.g. 'ylyn 'who come in' (line 10) (from the root 'll). In comparison with N&Sh 10, however, instances are few.

### 6. *bnh* 'her sons'

The spelling *bnh* appears repeatedly for 'her sons' (lines 4, 6, 7, 11) instead of the regular Syriac *bnyh* (see Muraoka 1997: 19, 33). The same spelling is also attested in AIT 35:2 (= Hamilton 7), a text which, according to Epstein, is of Jewish origin. On the basis of this instance and parallel instances in the 3rd p. masc. (i.e. *bn(y)h* 'his sons' for the expected *bnwhy*), one may assume that the forms used with sg. and fem. pl. nouns and the ones used with masc. pl. nouns had become identical. The trend is evident in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic (see above).

### 7. Use of the masc. pl. absolute state

In line 1, the masc. pl. absolute state (-*yn*) is used side by side with the determinate state (-'): *ḥtymyn ḥrš'* (determinate) *wš'(d)yn* (absolute) 'and sealed are the sorcerers and demons.' In similar contexts, the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts often

<sup>17</sup> See the photograph in Naveh & Shaked 1993, Plate 31. Note *wḥtm'rb*' in AIT 34:9 (= Hamilton 6).

<sup>18</sup> Note *nwr'ḥdr'* in parallel texts (A Syriac bowl in the Finnish National Museum, line 7) and AIT 37:8-9 (read according to the emendation by Epstein). See Harviainen 1978; Epstein 1922: 56.

<sup>19</sup> 'ty' in AIT 37:9, as emended by Epstein (1922: 56).

present side by side forms in the absolute state (ⲓ-) and the determinate state (ⲓ-) (for details, see Juusola 1999: 134ff.). In the lists of benevolent and malevolent agents, nouns in the absolute state and those in the determinate state often vary with no evident motivation. By contrast, the Syriac bowl texts normally employ the determinate state for masc. pl. nouns, in line with standard Syriac usage (Hamilton 1971: 71-72). However, some exceptions are noted by Hamilton. In the Mandaic incantations, too, the determinate state (for nouns) is regular, the absolute state being rare, especially in the plural (Yamauchi 1967: 95-97).

#### 8. The pl. ending -y'

The regular masc. pl. ending (determinate state) in the Syriac bowl texts is -' (Hamilton 1971: 70). However, the text under discussion employs the masc. pl. ending -y' more than normal in Syriac. In addition to such spellings as *hy'* and *šmy'* (which are well attested in literary Syriac), the following are met with: *pwrhy'* 'warnings' (line 4); *qm'y'* *hlyn'* 'these amulets' (line 11).<sup>20</sup> The ending -y' is standard in Mandaic, including the bowl texts (Yamauchi 1967: 95), and it also occurs in the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts, alongside the regular ⲓ- (Juusola 1999: 144-145), e.g. ⲓⲧⲓⲛ 'stones' (N&Sh 7:7).<sup>21</sup> The masc. pl. determinate state ending -(y)y' seems to be common in the Aramaic parts of *Ḥarba de-Mošē* (e.g. *qdyšyy'* in XXIV:15; *sry'* XXIV:19; *ml'kyy'* XXV:3)<sup>22</sup> and in the *Havdala de-Rabbi 'Aqiva* (e.g. *mrwby'*, *ṭhy'*, *ḥršy'*, *ḥwpry'*).<sup>23</sup> The Aramaic portions of *Ḥarba de-Mošē* and *Havdala de-Rabbi 'Aqiva* are both basically written in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic and at least the latter probably stems from there.<sup>24</sup> This may indicate that the ending -y' in the Jewish Aramaic incantations is not to be understood as influence of the Mandaic spelling convention (cf. Montgomery 1913: 30), but as the Official Aramaic ending -*ayyā*. It is apparent that the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts were written in a type of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic with numerous archaic linguistic traits (see Juusola 1999: 245ff.). The ending in the Syriac texts may thus reflect either Mandaic or Jewish Aramaic influence.

#### 9. The perfect ending -ty

The 1st p. sg. perfect ending -*ty* is attested in line 13: 'n' *ktby* 'I have written'. As far as I know, it is otherwise unattested in Syriac (see also Naveh & Shaked 1993: 142). By contrast, the ending -*ty* is familiar from Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, including the Aramaic bowl texts (see Juusola 1999: 172-173 and the references

<sup>20</sup> The form *qm'y'* also occurs in Gignoux 2:53.

<sup>21</sup> The same form also occurs in *Ḥarba de-Mošē* (Naveh & Shaked 1985: 171).

<sup>22</sup> The instances are enumerated from Harrari 1997: 46-47.

<sup>23</sup> The instances are enumerated from Sholem 1980-81: 18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Sholem 1980-81: 245, 249. The provenance of *Ḥarba de-Mošē* is very uncertain. See Alexander 1986: 350-352; Harrari 1997: 52-53.

given there). However, it is only used with the verba tertiae *waw/yod*. The appearance of the suffix *-ty* with a regular verb (*ktb*) could be understood as a hyper-correction, if not a scribal slip or even a Hebraism.

#### 10. Imperfect prefix *l-*

As already noted above in treating N&Sh 10, this text, too, uses *l-* as the prefix of 3rd p. masc. pl. imperfect tense. The prefix *l-* occurs five times (e.g. *wl' lrmwn* 'and they should not cast' in line 5; *lythpkwn* 'they should return' in line 5), and the regular Syriac *n-* only once (*dl' n'brwn* 'that they should not transgress' in line 4). Further, the latter occurs once with the corresponding sg. form (*'lh' n's* 'the God cures' in line 13).

## CONCLUSIONS

The study of Syriac bowl incantations and amulets is complicated by the limited size of the corpus at our disposal if compared with the number of texts in Jewish Aramaic or Mandaic. Yet, it is safe to say that the Syriac bowl texts (and amulets) differ from the bowl texts written in the Jewish Aramaic letters or in Mandaic. Despite the syncretistic nature of the bowl texts, inscribed in any dialect, the Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic texts nevertheless include features which make it evident that they, at least in most cases, stem from the Jewish and Mandaic origin respectively. These features are, for instance, biblical quotations in the Jewish Aramaic texts and Mandaic *basmalas*, such as 'in the name of Life' or 'Life is victorious', in the Mandaic texts.<sup>25</sup> Linguistically, both the Jewish Aramaic texts and probably also the Mandaic texts, despite some dialectal, etc. peculiarities, more or less tally with the corresponding literary Aramaic dialects. The texts in the Jewish script are basically written in a conservative Aramaic dialect with many affinities to the Targum Onqelos type of Aramaic. Yet, at the same time they reveal features typical of standard Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic (see Juusola 1999: 245ff.). Even though we know for certain that texts were rendered and copied from one dialect to another, evident Syriac traits are exceptional in the Aramaic bowl texts (see Juusola 1999: 23). As far as I know, the Mandaic texts, too, show few, if any, telltale Syriac features.

By contrast, the situation in the texts written in the Syriac letters seems to be different. Montgomery, in his 1913 classic *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, already noted that the Syriac texts are 'corrupted' and demonstrate – as he then understood – several features typical of Mandaic (Montgomery 1913: 35 and elsewhere).

<sup>25</sup> The Jewish Aramaic texts use several typically Jewish formulae, such as 'in your name I am acting, Yahwe the Great God' and 'in the name of Yahwe Sebaoth, the God of Israel'. See Harviainen 1995: 54, n. 11.

In the light of the two bowl texts discussed in this article and additional remarks on other Syriac texts, it is evident that the Syriac bowl texts show close linguistic affinities with both the Jewish Aramaic incantations and the Mandaic incantations. Montgomery, owing to the limited knowledge of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic in his time, interpreted many of these features simply as Mandaisms.

The mutual closeness of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic and Mandaic makes it often difficult to ascertain whether a given peculiarity in the Syriac texts could represent Jewish Aramaic or Mandaic influence. In any case, it is probable that the peculiar features in the Syriac texts cannot be understood as representing the actual vernacular. Features such as the demonstrative pronoun *hdyn* occur side by side with literary Syriac features and the scribes often have evident difficulties in using these non-Syriac elements properly,<sup>26</sup> a fact which results in misspellings and hypercorrect forms. I find it more probable that the peculiar features in the Syriac texts are best explained by assuming that the scribes copied texts from the originals in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic/Mandaic or transcribed oral formulae originally uttered in either of those two dialects (see Shaked 1999: 176, n. 17). Here it is worth bearing in mind that the extant Syriac bowls are few in comparison with the Mandaic and, especially, Jewish Aramaic bowls. It may, of course, be merely accidental, but on the other hand, it may imply that they represent a minor tradition, which was heavily dependent on the main traditions in bowl magic.

It seems that it is indeed the Jewish Aramaic which is strongly present in the Syriac texts, alongside the proper Syriac idiom. In the texts discussed in this article, there are several features in common with the Jewish Aramaic bowls. Most of them are shared by Mandaic as well. It is of importance, I believe, that, at least in these texts, there are no evident linguistic features which are found solely in Mandaic. By contrast, there occur some features which are if not exclusively Jewish Aramaic then at least typical of it. One may note, e.g., the demonstrative pronoun *hdyn* and the perfect ending *-ty* (1st p. sg.). It must be admitted that the instances are few, and, therefore, one has to see the notes made here only as tentative. However, some of the features attested in these two texts and some other typical Jewish Aramaic features are found in other Syriac texts. For instance, *hdyn* is common in the Syriac incantations (Juusola 1999: 22-23). In addition, one may note the 3rd p. imperfect prefix *y-* (*dyqrbw* in Aaron bowl C:7); the preposition *ky* 'like' (AIT 32:4 = Hamilton 4);<sup>27</sup> the 3rd p. pl. independent personal pronoun *'nwn* 'they' (AIT 35:6 = Hamilton 7);<sup>28</sup> *he* as the sign of the final /ā/ (see above), the *pa.* passive participle pattern *mquṭṭal* (AIT 34:7 = Hamilton 6),<sup>29</sup> and the direct object marker *y't* (in AIT

<sup>26</sup> In N&Sh 16, for instance, *hdyn* appears once (*hdyn byt'*), and the regular Syriac *hn'* four times (*hn' byt'* three times + *hn' r'z'*).

<sup>27</sup> See Montgomery 1913: 228.

<sup>28</sup> This pronoun normally appears in Syriac only as an enclitic personal pronoun (see Muraoka 1997: 18).

37: 7).<sup>30</sup> By studying properly all the published Syriac bowl texts and amulets, one would probably find more parallels.

The best example of possible Mandaic influence is the treatment of gutturals in some Syriac texts, which resembles their treatment in Mandaic.<sup>31</sup> Especially N&Sh 10, as noted, has many affinities to Mandaic in this respect. Furthermore, Tapani Harviainen has argued that Mandaic vocabulary is well attested, at least, in one particular Syriac text (Harviainen 1978: 26 and *passim*). As regards the examples of confusion of gutturals, one may alternatively argue that they simply appear in the Syriac texts owing to the fact that the scribes who wrote incantations in Syriac were rather poorly educated. It is evident that they had only superficial knowledge of the standard Syriac spelling tradition. Note, for instance, the exceptional use of *seyame* and the use of proto-Manichaean script, alongside the Estrangela. Therefore, they made apparent errors in the spelling, errors which sometimes reveal features of the actual vernacular. It is commonly assumed that the gutturals were in the middle of a weakening process in all the East Aramaic dialects. The scribes who wrote in the Jewish script were, by contrast, able to follow the long-established Jewish Aramaic spelling tradition and, consequently, avoid errors in spelling. As regards Mandaic, there never developed a strict spelling tradition.

The linguistic impression given by the Syriac texts is further supported by religious terminology appearing in those texts. In addition to the texts noted by Epstein (see above), N&Sh 10, for instance, shows influences of the Jewish tradition. Were it written in the Jewish script, no one would doubt its Jewish origin. Since the bowl texts frequently present syncretistic concepts and freely borrow idioms from neighbouring religions, it may be dangerous to make far-reaching conclusions merely on the basis of the contents of these texts. But when we take into account both the contents and the linguistic profile of the Syriac bowl texts, it is probable that many of the Syriac texts were closely connected with the Jewish Aramaic magical tradition. Does this mean that there were Jews among the scribes who wrote these texts? It is hard to say. More probably, in most cases, the Syriac texts were based on Jewish Aramaic models. But when one takes into account that the majority of the extant bowl texts are written in the Jewish script, even though Jews must have been a small minority in Babylonia, it is possible that some of the Syriac bowls, too, were produced by Jewish scribes who knew enough Syriac to do this. This would make it even more natural that both Jewish religious terminology and Jewish Aramaic features are so well attested in the Syriac texts.

By stressing the importance of Jewish tradition in bowl magic, I do not intend to minimize the influence of the Mandaic tradition. It is apparent that, alongside the

<sup>29</sup> See Epstein 1922: 50-51. The pattern is well attested in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic (alongside *mqattal*), but only some remains of it are extant in Mandaic (Juusola 1999: 215).

<sup>30</sup> See Hamilton 1971: 60.

<sup>31</sup> Note, for instance, Louvre AO 17.284 (Müller-Kessler 1998: 346).

Jewish tradition, Gnostic concepts of the Mandaic religion are self-evidently present both in the Syriac bowl texts (as is the case in N&Sh 26) and the Jewish ones (see Müller-Kessler 1998: 333; 1999). Often these two traditions are very much entangled together. In comparison with these two, the Christian tradition, which is probably present in some Syriac texts, played a minor role and for some reason could never become interconfessional material to be used freely in the Jewish or Mandaic bowl texts.<sup>32</sup>

### ABBREVIATIONS FOR THE TEXTS USED

Aaron bowls	=	Aaron bowls, published by M. J. Geller (1986)
AIT	=	Aramaic incantations, published by J. A. Montgomery (1913)
Gignoux	=	Syriac amulets, published by P. Gignoux (1987)
Geller B	=	A bowl text, published by M. J. Geller (1976)
Go	=	Aramaic incantations, published by C. H. Gordon (1934, 1941)
Hamilton	=	Syriac bowl texts, published by V. P. Hamilton (1971)
McCullough	=	Jewish and Mandaean incantations, published by W. S. McCullough (1967)
N&Sh	=	Incantation texts and amulets published by J. Naveh and S. Shaked (1985, 1993)
Yamauchi	=	Mandaic incantations, published by E. M. Yamauchi (1967)

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<sup>32</sup> Note, however, a Jewish Aramaic incantation recently published by Dan Levene (1999). The text includes an invocation of the divine name of Jesus (line 29).



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