

Alisha Meininghaus

Magic everywhere?

On the Conceptualisation of Jewish Amulets in Museums

1 The appreciation of *magic*

*Magic*¹ is a topic that fascinates scholars and curators as well as visitors to museums. The numerous exhibitions on *magic* are an expression of the great academic and non-academic interest in this field. This can be understood in the context of the appreciation discourse ('Aufwertungsdiskurs') on *magic*, which Bernd-Christian Otto ascribes to the present day.² Previously, in the course of its 2500-year history, the term *magic* appeared in Greek, Roman, and Christian sources to designate phenomena that were branded as harmful, immoral, fraudulent, or ineffective.³ Persons defamed as *magicians* were therefore excluded, devalued, and sometimes threatened with the death penalty. It is therefore not surprising that the use of the term as a positive self-designation was the absolute exception until the end of the 19th century.⁴ It is interesting to note that for some observers, similar phenomena could be described pejoratively as *magic* when encountered outside of the observer's own context, and yet as *miracles* when found within it. In its beginnings, the study of religion adopted the negative connotations of the term *magic* from its roots in Christian theology and the European Enlightenment. Thus, *magic* as an academic meta-category appeared as the inferior opposite of either *religion* or *science* and was especially attributed to non-European cultures.⁵

By contrast, except for strictly conservative groups, *magic* in today's everyday language is often associated with phenomena that are perceived as fascinating, exotic, and positive. An example of the recent appreciation discourse is the use of the adjective *magic* in advertising. The current dominance, unique in history, of the appreciation discourse is understood by Otto to be a development paralleling

1 Since this article critiques the concept of *magic*, the word is consistently italicised to indicate that the term is not intended to denote a consistent field of phenomena. Instead, the term is used to denote the respective discourses that refer to the term *magic*.

2 See Bernd-Christian Otto, *Magie: Rezeptions- und Diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 338.

3 See Otto, *Magie*, 617–20.

4 For historical examples of the discourses of exclusion and appreciation, see *ibid.*, 135–614.

5 For example, in the work of James George Frazer and Émile Durkheim. See Otto, *Magie*, 6f. and 39–134.

changes in the forms of contemporary European religion, such as pluralisation, individualisation, and deinstitutionalisation.⁶ The connotations of the term *magic* have also changed in some academic disciplines since the 1960s at the latest, when its ethnocentric and polemical implications were deconstructed.⁷ Today, the academic world is highly interested in *magic*, a fascination which even leads to occasional concerns that it could evoke a distorting overemphasis on *magical* phenomena in their respective cultural contexts.⁸

This article sheds light on some of the problematic implications of the appreciation discourse on *magic* for museums, which are an interface between everyday language and academic discourses, and thus require a special sensitivity for language. In particular, the equation of the meta-category *magic* with emic terms from different religious contexts can lead to misunderstandings. This will be illustrated through the case study of five special exhibitions on Jewish *magic*. For this purpose, the various underlying concepts of *magic* will be highlighted. Subsequently, the problems associated with these approaches will be discussed with regard to amulets, which appear in these exhibitions as prime examples of *magical* objects. These considerations lead to a plea for an alternative conceptualisation of amulets, and thus also for a reimagining of their presentation in museums.

2 Exhibiting Jewish *magic*

In recent decades, at least five special exhibitions in Israel, Europe and the USA have been devoted to the subject of Jewish *magic*. Their exhibition concepts and the various notions of *magic* will be described below, based on the respective exhibition catalogues.⁹ The exhibitions mentioned are *Magic and Superstition in the Jewish Tradition* (Spertus Museum of Judaica in Chicago, 1975),¹⁰ *1001 Amulet. Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie* (BIBEL + ORIENT Museum in Fribourg, 2010/11; Jewish Museum of Switzerland in Ba-

6 See *ibid.*, 653.

7 See *ibid.*, 110–13.

8 See, for example, Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7.

9 It must be taken into account that the catalogues can only partially convey the effect of these exhibitions. For example, the catalogues contain only a few references to the spatial design of the exhibition rooms or their lighting effects. On the other hand, the underlying concepts of *magic* are very clearly reflected in the catalogues. It should also be noted that exhibitions are not homogeneous, but are characterised by the curators' individual, and sometimes divergent, concepts of *magic*.

10 See Marcia Reines Josephy, ed., *Magic and Superstition in the Jewish Tradition* (Chicago: Spertus Museum of Judaica Press, 1975).

sel, 2013/14),¹¹ *Angels and Demons. Jewish Magic through the Ages* (Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, 2010),¹² *Magie. Anges et démons dans la tradition juive* (Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris, 2015),¹³ and *Kabbalah* (Jewish Museum in Vienna, 2018/19; Joods Historisch Museum in Amsterdam, 2019).¹⁴

In all five exhibitions, Jewish amulets, among other objects, were presented as examples of *magic*. Furthermore, all of the exhibitions imply a specific chain of translations and associations in relation to amulets: Objects that are traditionally designated by the Hebrew term *kame'a* (קמיע) are described in translation as *amulets*. Amulets, in turn, are associatively assigned to the field of *magic*, which, in a further step, is equated with the Hebrew verb *khashaf* (כָּשַׁף) that appears in the Torah and rabbinical texts. The equation of these three words is not based on ancient text sources, since the word *kame'a* does not occur in the Torah and is therefore not mentioned in connection with *khashaf*.¹⁵ The translation of *khashaf* as 'practising magic' is also not based on the Torah, in which the Greek term *mageia* does not appear either.¹⁶ Against the background that *kashaf* is explicitly forbidden in Deut 18:9ff. and Ex 22:17, there is a tension between the recent appreciation of *magic*, and the simultaneous assumption that *magic/khashaf* is forbidden in the Torah. As examined in the following, all five special exhibitions follow different strategies for dealing with this tension.

Despite the implicitly pejorative tone that resonates in its title, and although it explicitly interprets Deut 18:9f as a ban on *magic*, the exhibition *Magic and Superstition* nevertheless proves to be part of the appreciation discourse:

They [*magical* actions, AM] serve to underscore the sanctity and the significance of the occasion. The striking use of amulets and the preponderance of superstitions associated with the life cycle suggest that the greater

11 See Christian Herrmann and Thomas Staubli, eds., *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie* (Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010).

12 See Filip Vučosavić, ed., *Angels and Demons: Jewish Magic through the Ages* (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 2010).

13 See Gideon Bohak and Anne Hélène Hoog, eds., *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive* (Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, 2015).

14 See Domagoj Akrap et al., eds., *Kabbalah* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018).

15 In later rabbinical writings such as the Talmud, amulets (hebr. *kame'ot*) are mentioned, but also not associated with *khashaf*.

16 Interestingly, in the important early translations of the Torah, grammatical forms of *khashaf* are also not explicitly translated as 'practising magic'. The Greek Septuagint translates the feminine participle *mekhashefa* in Ex 22:17 as *pharmákos* (from *phármakon* – 'medicine' / 'poison' / 'drug', a word with a semantically similar spectrum to the Greek *mageia*, see Otto, *Magie*, 163), while in the Latin Vulgate the word is translated as *maleficos* ('Evildoer'). Luther chooses *Zauberinnen* ('sorceresses'), see Otto, *Magie*, 281.

the danger, the more precious the moment. Thus, magic and superstition serve to enhance and affirm life's value. [...] Though long denied and often disapproved of, the traditions of *magic* and superstition constitute a fascinating part of a multifaceted heritage.¹⁷

Magical practices are thus explained as a human need and psychological support in particularly delicate phases of life. In this way, the tension between the appreciation for these practices and the supposed ban on *magic* is reduced, though it is not resolved at the level of religious law.

The same is true for the exhibition *Kabbalah. Magic*, although not conceptually in the foreground, is presented as an integral part of cabbalistic practices.¹⁸ Jewish amulets are explicitly associated with forbidden *magic*:

Magical elements and traditions can be traced back from Antiquity to the present day. Although magic practices were in fact forbidden, the many magic works and amulets provide eloquent testimony to their popularity and acceptance. [...] But did the Bible not forbid magic? In spite of the deterrent warnings, as in Deuteronomy 18:10–12, magic has existed in Judaism in all ages. It even occurs in the Bible itself.¹⁹

Again, the tension is not resolved.

A different strategy is apparent in the exhibition *1001 Amulett*, characterised by a strong emphasis on the diachronic, cross-cultural approach stimulated by the term *magic*:

Im überaus zauberkundigen Alten Ägypten nahm das Amulettwesen seinen Anfang und zog den ganzen Mittelmeerraum mit einer Fülle von wirkmächtigen Symbolen in seinen Bann. Samaritanische, jüdische, muslimische und christliche Amulette belegen, dass Amulette unter dem aufklärerischen Einfluss des Monotheismus nicht verschwanden, sondern sich nur wandelten. Eine «vertikale Ökumene» der Magie wird sichtbar, die hineinreicht bis in die säkularisierte Gegenwart.²⁰

In the exceedingly magical ancient Egypt, the tradition of amulets started and fascinated the whole Mediterranean area with an abundance of powerful symbols. Samaritan, Jewish, Muslim and Christian amulets prove that amulets did not disappear under the enlightening influence of monothe-

17 Josephy, *Magic and Superstition*, 2f.

18 See Klaus Davidowicz, "Was ist Kabbala?," in *Kabbalah*, ed. Domagoj Akrap et al. (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018), 20.

19 Klaus Davidowicz, "Engel und Dämonen," in *Kabbalah*, ed. Domagoj Akrap et al. (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018), 159.

20 Herrmann and Staubli, *1001 Amulett*, cover copy.

ism, but only changed. A 'vertical ecumenism' of magic becomes visible, reaching into the secularised present.²¹

With regard to the Torah, Ex 22:17 is understood as a ban on *magic/khashaf*. But it is pointed out in the exhibition's catalogue that, in other verses, the forbidden *magic/khashaf* is associated with non-Israelite practices in particular.²² This implies that Israelite amulets were originally not part of the prohibition. In addition, the catalogue's authors emphasise the positive attitude of many Jewish scholars towards amulets.²³ In summary, in this exhibition the alleged ban on *magic* in the Torah is specified through a historical-critical text analysis as a ban on non-Israelite *magic*, and thus decoupled from Jewish amulets. Therefore, there is no longer any contradiction in the appreciation of these *magical* objects.

The exhibition *Angels and Demons. Jewish Magic through the Ages* offers another solution to the apparent tension between the appreciation discourse on *magic* on the one hand, and the Torah's supposed ban on *magic* on the other. Here, the ban is understood as a distinction between aggressive *witchcraft* and apotropaic *white magic*. The Hebrew term *khashaf* is thus translated exclusively as *witchcraft*, distinguishing it from *white magic*, which includes amulets:

Biblical laws strictly forbid the Jewish people from having anything to do with witchcraft (black magic) [...]. However, (white) magic – i.e. defense against the dark arts [...] was not forbidden in Judaism. This is clear both from biblical and rabbinical writings and from many of the preserved amulets, covering various functions, some of which were written by rabbis.²⁴

The spatial structure of the exhibition was designed according to this distinction: At the beginning, a section on *black magic* awaited the visitors, followed by four sections on *white magic*.²⁵ The predominance of sections on *white magic* implies that Jewish *magic* is positive in most cases, reflecting the appreciation discourse underlying the exhibition concept. In this approach, the supposed biblical ban on *magic* is interpreted as an ethical distinction.

The catalogue of *Magic. Anges et démons dans la tradition juive* includes an intensive examination of the theoretical implications of the concept of *magic*. In

21 Translation by Alisha Meininghaus (hereafter: 'AM').

22 See Thomas Staubli, "III Amulette in der Levante und in der Bibel," in *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie*, ed. Christian Herrmann and Thomas Staubli (Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010), 168–74, 172f.

23 See Thomas Staubli, "V Jüdische Amulette," in *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie*, ed. Christian Herrmann and Thomas Staubli (Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010), 178.

24 See Yükošavović, *Angels and Demons*, 10.

25 See *ibid.*

particular, the articles by Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari, and Gabriel Hagai represent three different approaches to the topic.

Bohak refers to the supposed ban on *magic* in Deut 18:10f., but also to the difficulty in adequately interpreting those verses, since many phenomena (including amulets) are not explicitly mentioned. It therefore remains open to interpretation whether any particular phenomenon is forbidden or permitted. He also refers to biblical stories of practices with positive connotations, e.g. by various prophets, which today can be regarded as *magic*.²⁶ Against this background, he ascribes to the Torah a contradictory attitude towards *magic*, in which what matters is not so much the nature of the respective practices, but rather who carried out these practices.²⁷ After these considerations, he applies a rather intuitive concept of *magic* to various ancient Jewish phenomena.²⁸

Harari, on the other hand, sketches the history of the academic concept of *magic* and deconstructs its implicitly pejorative and ethnocentric undertones, as well as the rigorous dichotomisation of religion and *magic*:

La magie juive est fondée sur la croyance en la capacité de l'être humain à agir sur le monde et à le modifier au moyen de paroles et de rituels. En ce sens, elle ne diffère guère, dans son essence, du canon religieux juif, lequel place la prière au centre du culte. La magie comme la religion croient en la puissance créatrice de la parole [...], ainsi qu'en la capacité de l'homme à l'employer à son profit. L'une et l'autre ont recours au langage et à des rituels pour obtenir des puissantes entités surnaturelles qui règnent sur le monde qu'elles modifient le cours des choses.²⁹

Jewish magic is based on the belief in the ability of human beings to act on the world and change it through words and rituals. In this sense, it differs little in essence from the Jewish religious canon, which places prayer at the centre of worship. Both magic and religion believe in the creative power of the word [...] and in the capacity of man to use it for his own benefit. Both use language and rituals to make powerful supernatural entities that rule the world change the course of things.³⁰

26 See Bohak and Hoog, "Anges et demons," 29.

27 See *ibid.*, 30f.

28 This becomes clear in the fact that in the so-called prohibitions of *magic* in the Torah, amulets are not mentioned, which, as Bohak explains, can be interpreted as either their implicit permission or their implicit prohibition. Later in the article, however, he describes the history of Jewish *magic* on the basis of findings of antique amulets, among other things.

29 Yuval Harari, "Principes de la magie juive, croyances et pratiques," in *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive*, ed. Gideon Bohak and Anne Héléne Hoog (Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, 2015), 54.

30 Translation: AM.

The only striking differences between *religion* and *magic* to him seem to be in the underlying intention and in the linguistic realm. According to Harari, *magical* incantations are mostly related to the individual, whereas religious prayers are related to the collective.³¹

Of the three authors, Hagai signals the greatest reservations about the concept of *magic* and refers to its insulting dimension for contemporary practitioners. However, he nonetheless uses the term, both due to the lack of a conceptual alternative and because doing so allows contact with academic tradition:

Incidentement, il serait simpliste (et presque irrespectueux) de parler de «magie» juive quand les acteurs de ces pratiques eux-mêmes n'emploient pas cette dénomination. Mais il est difficile de trouver en français un terme plus adéquat, qui satisferait l'acribie et la sensibilité juive, tout en restant intelligible. En hébreu, la racine consonantique k-sh-p – qui couvre le champ sémantique de «magie, sorcellerie» – est utilisée dans la Torah justement pour l'interdire [...]. Un rabbin écrivant des amulettes, ou prescrivant certaines pratiques mystérieuses, ne saurait donc être traité de mekhashef (magicien, sorcier), surtout lorsque celui-ci estime que ces procédés appartiennent à la qabbalah ma'assit, kabbale «pratique», considérée comme une «science des miracles» et provenant de Dieu. Toutefois, nous emploierons ici le vocabulaire de la magie [...], en adéquation avec le consensus universitaire, faute d'une meilleure terminologie, laissant au lecteur le soin de rectifier à chaque occurrence (en tout cas, de lire en y ajoutant de nombreux guillemets).³²

Incidentally, it would be simplistic (and almost disrespectful) to speak of Jewish 'magic' when actors of these practices themselves do not use this denomination. But it would be difficult to find a more adequate term in French that would satisfy Jewish meticulousness and sensitivity while remaining intelligible. In Hebrew, the consonant root k-sh-p – which covers the semantic field of 'magic, sorcery' – is used in the Torah precisely to prohibit it [...]. A rabbi writing amulets, or prescribing certain mysterious practices, cannot, therefore, be called a mekhashef (magician, sorcerer), especially when he believes that these procedures belong to the qabbalah ma'assit, a 'practical' kabbalah, considered as a 'science of miracles' and coming from God. However, we will use here the vocabulary of magic [...], in accordance with the academic consensus, for lack of better terminology, leaving it to the reader to rectify each occurrence (in any case, to read with the addition of many quotation marks).³³

31 See Harari, "Principes de la magie juive," 54.

32 Gabriel Hagai, "Savoir et pratiques magiques dans la société juive contemporaine, l'exemple français," in *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive*, ed. Gideon Bohak and Anne Hélène Hoog (Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, 2015), 125.

33 Translation: AM.

But is it even necessary to mediate between the recent appreciation of *magic* and the alleged ban on *magic/khashaf* in the Torah? Do Jewish amulets necessarily have to be conceptualised and exhibited as *magic*?

3 How *magical* are Jewish amulets?

Indeed, the intuitive and associative equation of the Hebrew terms *kame'a* ('amulet') and *khashaf* ('magic'), that underlies the exhibition concepts, should not be taken for granted. Firstly, the term *amulet* is usually associated with objects that are worn directly on the body, which does not apply to Jewish amulet prints which were hung on the walls of the birth room. Secondly, the assumption that *magic* is an adequate translation of the Hebrew term *khashaf* should be questioned. The necessity of this becomes obvious when one considers that the term *khashaf* occurs several times in the Torah but is not explained,³⁴ and its rabbinical interpretations varied through antiquity and the Middle Ages.³⁵ Whether the semantic field of *khashaf* corresponds to one of the various and often contradictory meanings of the term *magic* remains to be verified. Finally, and most problematically, the equation of amulets with the terms *khashaf* and *magic* directly contradicts the emic perspective. This is demonstrated, for example, in the fact that the ban on *khashaf*-practising women in Ex 22:17 (traditionally translated as 'You must not let a witch live!') is written on many amulets. In the context of these amulets, the Hebrew term *mekhashefa* (traditionally translated as *witch*) refers to the demoness Lilith, who is to be banished by the amulet. Amulets are therefore understood as a protection against *khashaf*, rather than as belonging to this concept.³⁶

The assignment of amulets to the abstract category *magic* (instead of the emic term *khashaf*) does not solve the problem, however. The example of German-Jewish amulet prints from the 18th and 19th centuries,³⁷ intended to protect women in childbirth and their newborns, illustrates the issues with relating Jewish amulets

34 On the possible meanings of *khashaf*, see, for example, Rüdiger Schmitt, *Magie im Alten Testament* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 107–9.

35 See Giuseppe Veltri, *Magie und Halakha: Ansätze zu einem empirischen Wissenschaftsbegriff im Spätantiken und Frühmittelalterlichen Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997).

36 See Alisha Meininghaus, "Schrift als Schutz. Legitimationsstrategien für die Verwendung jüdischer Amulette am Beispiel eines Objekts aus der Religionskundlichen Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg," in *Spurenlesen. Methodische Ansätze der Sammlungs- und Objektforschung*, Junges Forum für Sammlungs- und Objektforschung, vol. 4, ed. Ernst Seidl et al. (Berlin: Gesellschaft für Universitätssammlungen e. V., 2020).

37 The considerations presented here result from the research for my dissertation on this topic.

to the concept of *magic*. In the following, as a result, an alternative paradigm for their academic study and their presentation in museums will be suggested. As Otto convincingly demonstrates, the problem with the academic concept of *magic* is that it is ethnocentric, arbitrarily applicable to completely divergent phenomena, and cannot differentiate between *magic* and *religion*.³⁸ Besides these fundamental theoretical arguments, which need not be repeated here in detail, there are other reasons for not using the term *magic* to describe concrete objects. Just like the term *magic* in everyday-language (which probably forms the basis of understanding for most exhibition visitors), the academic concept also implies that the phenomena it denotes have been branded as heterodox and suppressed by dominant groups.³⁹ However, this does not apply to Jewish amulets. On the contrary, in the Talmud they appear as an unquestionably legitimate item of clothing.⁴⁰ In fact, amulets were criticised at various times and by different Jewish groups,⁴¹ however this criticism never reached the status of a prohibition under religious law. Moreover, German-Jewish amulet prints were also considered legitimate in their religious context in the 18th century, which can be deduced from the fact that they were produced in printing houses where rabbis often worked as proofreaders.⁴² After their use, many amulets were stored in *genizot*. These were storage areas, often in the attics of synagogues, which were used to store religious books containing the name of God or Hebrew script in general once these books had become unusable. Because of the holiness attributed to these texts, they were not to be destroyed or thrown away, but had to decay by themselves. In this sense, *genizot* can be understood as the materialisation of concepts of holiness that were permanently negotiated by the Jewish community.⁴³ Thus, finds of amulets in numerous *genizot* testify that the objects were regarded as legitimate in the Jewish majority and were conceptualised as religious literature in a broader sense.⁴⁴

38 See Otto, *Magie*.

39 See, for example, Sarah Kiyarad et al., "(Schrift-)Bildliche Magie," in *Bild und Schrift auf ‚magischen‘ Artefakten*, ed. Sarah Kiyarad et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 3.

40 See Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 370.

41 For example, by Moses Maimonides, the Karaites and the Maskilim.

42 For example, in the printing house in Sulzbach, see Magnus Weinberg, *Geschichte der Juden in der Oberpfalz, V. Herzogtum Sulzbach (Sulzbach und Floss)* (München: Ewer-Buchhandlung, 1927), 26, 53.

43 See Andreas Lehnardt, "Die Genisa der ehemaligen Synagoge Freudental. Dokumentation der Funde," *Freudentaler Blätter* (Pädagogisch-Kulturelles Centrum Ehemalige Synagoge Freudental) 11 (2019): 16f.

44 A large number of the German-Jewish amulets, which are exhibited in museums today, come from finds in these *genizot*. In the case of other amulets, records of how they came into the museums are unfortunately missing.

This is also reflected in the ‘amulet dispute’ of Hamburg, which began in 1752. In the course of this controversy, Jonathan Eybeschütz, Chief Rabbi of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek, was accused of writing and selling amulets that contained the encoded name of the ‘false messiah’ Shabbtai Zvi (1626–1676). Eybeschütz denied this accusation throughout his life. The controversy caused quite a stir and many rabbinical and political authorities were involved. It is conclusive in this context that the accusations did not refer to the production of amulets in general, but to Eybeschütz’s alleged affiliation to the group of Shabbtai Zvi.⁴⁵ From this, it can be concluded that the production of amulets in itself was considered legitimate, and could not be used as an accusation in religious conflicts. The designation of the amulets as *magic* in the context of museums, therefore, evokes ideas about the emic interpretations of these objects, which are simply wrong.

4 Alternative concepts

The concept of *magic* not only leads to false associations in museums but also often hinders attaining a deeper understanding of the objects in research. This is because the categorisation of certain objects as *magic* often leads to a comparison with other so-called *magical* phenomena. Thus, in the context of the above-mentioned exhibitions, Jewish amulets from various periods and regions were exhibited together with other objects, e.g. Egyptian scarabs, ‘secular amulets’, antique Mesopotamian incantation bowls or an inscribed human skull. As it became particularly clear in the case of the exhibition *1001 Amulett*, the concept of *magic* thus often implies a diachronic approach that traces the traditions of *magical* phenomena over long periods of time, in different regions, religions, and cultures. Apart from the discussion about the suitability of the term *magic*, a diachronic approach is worthwhile, as this way, the temporal depth dimension of traditions can be traced.

However, this approach often has the effect of ignoring synchronous approaches that locate the objects in their cultural setting. If we take the emic perspective seriously, the amulet prints are much closer to other objects from the field of religious literature than, for example, a human skull with Hebrew inscriptions. In fact, this approach is already pursued in exhibitions of regional Jewish museums, which, for example, contextualise the amulet prints with further finds from

45 See Sid Z. Leiman, “When a Rabbi is Accused of Heresy: R. Ezekiel Landau’s Attitude Toward R. Jonathan Eibeschutz in the Emden-Eibeschutz Controversy,” in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding; Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 179–96.

various *genizot*. One example is the Jewish Culture Museum in Veitshöchheim, where an amulet print is presented together with other *geniza* finds relating to the context of birth and circumcision. These finds are assigned to the exhibition section with the title 'Life'. Having explained the numerous misunderstandings and unproven associations evoked by the term *magic*, this article can only be concluded with a plea for an end to its use with regard to Judaism in general, and in the context of museums in particular. It would certainly be a gain for all those who wish to convey and experience the multifaceted nature of Jewish traditions, if more curators would have the courage to abandon the enticing but unhelpful concept of *magic* in favour of a contextualising perspective.

References

- Akrap, Domagoj, Klaus Davidowicz, and Mirjam Alexander-Knotter, eds. *Kabbalah*. Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018.
- Bohak, Gideon. *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Bohak, Gideon. "Anges et démons." In *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive*, edited by Gideon Bohak and Anne Héléne Hoog, 27–38. Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, 2015.
- Bohak, Gideon and Anne Héléne Hoog, eds. *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive*. Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, 2015.
- Davidowicz, Klaus. "Engel und Dämonen." In *Kabbalah*, edited by Domagoj Akrap, Klaus Davidowicz, and Mirjam Alexander-Knotter, 158–77. Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018.
- Davidowicz, Klaus. "Was ist Kabbala?" In *Kabbalah*, edited by Domagoj Akrap, Klaus Davidowicz, and Mirjam Alexander-Knotter, 16–31. Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2018.
- Hagaï, Gabriel. "Savoir et pratiques magiques dans la société juive contemporaine, l'exemple français." In *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive*, edited by Gideon Bohak and Anne Héléne Hoog, 125–30. Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, 2015.
- Harari, Yuval. "Principes de la magie juive, croyances et pratiques." In *Magie: Anges et démons dans la tradition juive*, edited by Gideon Bohak and Anne Héléne Hoog, 53–62. Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, 2015.
- Herrmann, Christian, and Thomas Staubli, eds. *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie*. Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010.
- Josephy, Marcia Reines, ed. *Magic and Superstition in the Jewish Tradition*. Chicago: Spertus Museum of Judaica Press, 1975.

- Kiyanrad, Sarah, Christoffer Theis, and Laura Willer. "(Schrift-)Bildliche Magie." In *Bild und Schrift auf 'magischen' Artefakten*, edited by Sarah Kiyanrad, Christoffer Theis, and Laura Willer, 1–14. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018.
- Lehnardt, Andreas. "Die Genisa der ehemaligen Synagoge Freudental. Dokumentation der Funde." *Freudentaler Blätter* (Pädagogisch-Kulturelles Centrum Ehemalige Synagoge Freudental) 11 (2019).
- Leiman, Sid Z. "When a Rabbi is Accused of Heresy: R. Ezekiel Landau's Attitude Toward R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz in the Emden-Eibeschuetz Controversy." In *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding; Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, Bd. 3, edited by Jacob Neusner and Ernest Frerichs, 179–96. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.
- Meininghaus, Alisha. "Schrift als Schutz. Legitimationsstrategien für die Verwendung jüdischer Amulette am Beispiel eines Objekts aus der Religionskundlichen Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg." In *Spurenlesen. Methodische Ansätze der Sammlungs- und Objektforschung*. Junges Forum für Sammlungs- und Objektforschung, vol. 4, edited by Ernst Seidl, Frank Steinheimer, and Cornelia Weber, 39–46. Berlin: Gesellschaft für Universitätssammlungen e. V., 2020.
- Otto, Bernd-Christian. *Magie: Rezeptions- und Diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit*. Berlin u.a.: De Gruyter, 2011.
- Schmitt, Rüdiger. *Magie im Alten Testament*. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004.
- Staubli, Thomas. "III Amulette in der Levante und in der Bibel." In *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie*, edited by Christian Herrmann and Thomas Staubli, 168–74. Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010.
- Staubli, Thomas. "V Jüdische Amulette." In *1001 Amulett: Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie*, edited by Christian Herrmann and Thomas Staubli, 178–88. Stuttgart: C. Maurer Druck und Verlag, 2010.
- Veltri, Giuseppe. *Magie und Halakha: Ansätze zu einem empirischen Wissenschaftsbegriff im spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Judentum*. Mohr: Tübingen. 1997.
- Ўukosavović, Filip, ed. *Angels and Demons: Jewish Magic through the Ages*. Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 2010.
- Weinberg, Magnus. *Geschichte der Juden in der Oberpfalz, V. Herzogtum Sulzbach (Sulzbach und Floss)*. München: Ewer-Buchhandlung, 1927.