Research article
Ohad Abudraham*, Matthew Morgenstern

“His Children Destroy the Residence and Building”: An Unpublished Mandaic Amulet on Ptahil’s Creations (MLSC 4)

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Abstract: This article presents the editio princeps of a Mandaean amulet inscribed on a lead lamella (MLSC 4). The amulet contains two formula. The first describes how the children of Ptahil, who are described as “the guardians of the ruins”, wreak havoc in the world. The formula draws heavily on Mandaean lore. The second formula is mostly lost, and only the end survives. The article discusses material aspects of the artefact and provides a full transliteration and translation of its contents, a reconstruction of some broken sections based upon unpublished parallels, and notes that relate to linguistic and literary aspects of the text.

Keywords: Mandaic, magic, epigraphy, Semitic languages, Aramaic, amulets

1 Introduction

This article presents the first edition of a Mandaean amulet inscribed upon a lead lamella, MLSC 4, as part of our ongoing project to publish the entire corpus of the Mandaean amulets in the Martin Schøyen Collection with reference to related materials. In total, the Schøyen Collection contains 36 separately numbered items (some consisting of several lamellae or fragments), from which it has been possible to reconstruct 20 amulets.1 On the basis of their scripts, these appear to be the work of 11 scribes. It is generally agreed that the Mandaic epigraphic sources written on lamellae and clay bowls are to be dated to the fifth to seventh centuries CE, though we lack precise details on their context as these items were apparently not discovered in orderly archaeological excavations.

2 Description

MLSC 4 (= MS 2087/4) is a single lead lamella inscribed upon both sides in opposite directions. At its maximal dimensions, the lamella measures 21.7 cm x 5 cm, but it has split into two uneven fragments that form a perfect join between lines 51–52 of the recto, and correspondingly between lines 12–13 of the verso. The larger fragment is generally well preserved, allowing for a confident reading in most places, while the smaller fragment has been significantly damaged. Regrettably, the text on the recto of the small fragment is no longer legible owing to severe corrosion; most of the verso, however, is

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1 Accordingly, our numbering of the amulets does not always match the item numbers in the Schøyen Collection. To differentiate between these numbering systems, we now refer to the reconstructed amulets with the abbreviation MLSC (Mandaean Lamellae in the Schøyen Collection) and a numeral, while individual items from the Schøyen Collection are referred to by their catalogue numbers: MS and a numeral. Other publications: MLSC 1 in Morgenstern and Schlüter 2016; MLSC 2 in Morgenstern and Abudraham 2023; MLSC 7 in Morgenstern and Abudraham, forthcoming; MLSC 10 in Morgenstern 2015; MLSC 11 in Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017; MLSC 13 in Abudraham, 2021; and MLSC 17 in Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017; MLSC 18 and 19 in Abudraham and Morgenstern, forthcoming.

* Tel Aviv University, Israel, E-mail: ohadabudraham@gmail.com
1 Tel Aviv University, Israel, E-mail: mmorgen@tauex.tau.ac.il

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still visible. Corrosion is also apparent on the lower part of the larger fragment’s verso where there is no writing.

Our reconstruction of the amulet is based upon both textual and material considerations. It is apparent from textual parallels that the surviving lamella contains the remains of two independent spells. One spell is likely to have stood at the start of the amulet, as it begins at the top of the cleanly cut and demarcated lamella. Accordingly, we regard this side to be the recto (see Figs 2–3). The other formula, preserved only on the verso, was presumably the last in the series of formulae that the amulet contained, as its conclusion is marked by a horizontal score about a third of the way down the verso, and the remainder is left blank (see Figs 4–5). The green-tinted corrosion that appears only on the lower portion of the verso may be ascribed to contact with the casing in which the amulet was placed. The parallel copies of these spells indicate that a considerable portion of text has been lost at the end of the first formula and the start of the other, in all likelihood inscribed on a separate lamella.

The scribe had a tendency to extend the baseline of the letters m (מ) and q (ק) to the end of the line (see I:22, 27, 30, 34) and, with the exception of one instance (II:6–7), avoided splitting words between two lines. As is the case with the majority of the Mandaic amulets on lamellae in the Schøyen Collection, the margins on both sides are demarcated by vertical lines (left and right). There are two indications that these vertical lines were incised on the surface of the lamella before the execution of the text: 1. in one place, the scribe marks with a semi-circular line a word that crosses the margin boundaries (see Fig. 1); 2. although the text on the verso occupies only one third of the surface, the two vertical lines stretched far below the end of the text.

Figure 1: natrica hurbia “O guardians of the ruins” (MLSC 4 I [MS 2087/4]:10)

The amulet was written for the protection of a pregnant woman named Bahrândū daughter of Mariai and her foetus (I:4–6; II:12–14). She would appear to be the same Bahrândū mentioned in another Mandaic amulet in the Schøyen Collection as the client’s mother. As we have seen, MLSC 4 comprises two independent formulae, (a) and (b) below:

a. bnจำหน์ mhrbilẖ lhikla ubniana “His children destroy the residence and building”.

These words, taken from the opening of the spell, appear as its title on the back of an unpublished bowl containing a badly damaged parallel copy of it (MS 2054/85). The formula is designated against a group of maleficent forces referred to as “the guardians of the ruins of the residences and buildings of the children of Adam” (natricia hurbia hiklia ubniania 殄(ca) dadam). These forces are also described as the children of Ptahil.

2 For similar cases in the epigraphic corpus, see Amulet BM 135796 I verso (unpublished), MLSC 15 Part IV (= MS 2087/15; verso: unpublished).
3 We owe this observation to Iliya Remitsky.
4 The writing of amulets on series of lamellae was common practice amongst the Mandaeans (see, e.g., Lidzbarski 1909; Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017).
In his seminal study of the Mandaean religion, Brandt noted the ambivalent attitude in Mandaean literature towards Ptahil. On the one hand, he is a descendant of the light-world who creates the world on the instructions of his father, Aḇaṯor (Gy. 336ff.), to which we may add that he is not only described as bania baita “the builder of the house” (Gy. 127:5) but also natar baita “the guardian of the house” (Jb. 5:6). On the other hand, Ptahil exceeds his brief and calls into being evil creeping animals, creations of darkness, and the evil Ruha and her seven children (Gy. 339:14). Although Ptahil is horrified by the results of his actions and tells his corrupt creations that they can only serve him if they do good deeds, he is punished by his father Aḇaṯor by a bond of separation, and Hiḇil Ziwa is dispatched to the world to repair the damage (Gy. 339:14 ff.). Another account in The Book of the Zodiac refers to the seven stars and twelve zodiac signs as Ptahil’s children (AM 201:20).

Our text appears to share a similar attitude towards the act of creation: it is not regarded as inherently evil, but rather it is the corrupt “guardians”, the children of Ptahil, who wreak havoc by destroying what should have been the goodly residence and building (i.e., the material world) that their father built (I:6–9). The guardians kill the cattle, scourge and weaken people, darken their dwellings and impose upon them dreadful afflictions (I:9–27). To prevent the guardians from harming people – amongst them the client for whom the present lamella was written – the anonymous protagonist has cast upon them “the great spell of the primordial Life” which came from “the single great name of the great primordial Life” (I:27–34). As a result of this counteraction, a series of celestial elements and their malevolent companions have been bound and tied up (I:35–51ff.). These elements include the stars and Pleiades (kukbia ukima), the whole sphere of heaven and earth in its entirety (kulha ‘uspira dsumia uarqa kulha), the primordial inhabitant heroes of the world (gbaria daiaria qdamaiẖ), the seven angels of the house (suba mlakia dbita), the twelve constellations (trisar maluasia), their amulet-spirits and imprecations (humraihn [u]aqria ‘tun*), etc. The narrative of the spell thus draws extensively on various aspects of Mandaean lore found also in the canonical Mandaean works.

While not a direct parallel, the formula found on the Mandaic magic bowl Wolfe 37 shares many themes and expressions with our text and, where appropriate, these are cited in our commentary.

b. ktibitin l’iata bšumaikun (?) “You are written, O liliths, by your names”

As noted, the verso of the lamella includes the final lines of a much longer spell that survives in a more complete version on an unpublished magic bowl (PC 28). In the parallel, the spell opens with the words that we have proposed here as its title. A looser parallel is to be found in Qmaha d-Gastata, a protective formula known to date only from late manuscripts. The spell includes a repetitive theme of binding of various liliths that are harming the client, and the liliths mentioned in the formula by their explicit names are finally bound and sealed and subdued by “Zarzanit/Zarz’el the signet, by which are sealed the gates of heaven and earth” (II:5–11).

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5 Brandt 1889: 49–55.
6 Häberl and McGrath 2020: 341.
7 See in detail below, comments to I:6–9.
8 To be published in Ford and Morgenstern, forthcoming.
9 The earliest dated textual witness of Qmaha d-Gastata known to us is DC 23, copied in 1226 AH (1811 CE). Another textual tradition is represented by DC 43F, copied in 1270 AH (1853 CE). Other manuscripts include RRC 2A, copied in 1250 AH (1834–35 CE), and RRC 1F, copied in 1286 AH (1869–70 CE). RRC 1Y and RRC 3Z are undated but both are written in a late hand. Fragmentary manuscripts include RRC 2A, copied in 1250 AH (1834–35 CE), which is missing several lines and begins at the text corresponding to l. 39 of our CAL edition; and RRC 3V of which only a short section survives, corresponding to ll. 7–36 of the CAL edition (its text is close to that of DC 23).
3 Text and Translation

Part I – MS 2087/4 recto

In the name of the great transcendent Life from the superior worlds of light that is above all deeds. May there be healing and arming and sealing unto the body and foetus of Bahrāndū daughter of Mariai from Life! His children that their father Ptahil built – of the children of Adam. I have adjured you and made you swear, O guardians of the ruins of the residences and buildings of the children of Adam and killers of the cattle that are within it. And in their fury they kill … cattle with their hands. and scourge the children of Adam and corrupt the forces that are within them. And they take the sleep of their eyes and set the residences and buildings of the children of Adam in clouds of darkness – before them and before their faces – to let loose pain upon their heads, vertigo upon their brains, fear in their hearts, darkness upon their eyes, knocking upon their heels, trembling upon their limbs. Moreover, I have adjured you and made you swear, O guardians of the ruins, residences and buildings of the children of Adam by that great saying of the Primordial Life that from one name – the great name of the great primordial Life – has confronted you. Bound was heaven and the earth within it. Bound were the stars and Pleiades. And bound was the entire sphere of heaven and the earth O guardians of the ruins, residences and buildings of the children of Adam in clouds of darkness – before them and before their faces – to let loose pain upon their heads, vertigo upon their brains, fear in their hearts, darkness upon their eyes, knocking upon their heels, trembling upon their limbs. Moreover, I have adjured you and made you swear, O guardians of the ruins, residences and buildings of the children of Adam by that great saying of the Primordial Life that from one name – the great name of the great primordial Life – has confronted you. Bound was heaven and the earth within it. 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11 For the conventions used herein, see the end of this article.
12 Read: kulhun.
13 The horizontal upper stroke of the r was rewritten.
14 Read: ubrugzaihun (cf. below I:15).
15 Defective spelling of hurbia (cf. above I:10).
16 The base of the b was rewritten.
Abudraham's children destroy the residence and building that are within it. And bound were the seven angels of the house by their seven mysteries. And bound were the twelve mysteries. [Bound were their amulet-spirits and their imprecations] that endure with them. Bound were their amulet-spirits [and] their imprecations that endure with them. Bound were the sahirs and the spirits [and] the liliths.

Part II – MS 2087/4 verso

And [....]
lower ... [and] may [the mysteries] of the Seven pla[nets but annulled] from Bahrāndū daughter of Mariai. You are bound and sealed and subdued, lilitths that har[m] unto the body of Bahrāndū, by the signet of Zarzanit, by which are sealed the gates of the heaven and earth. And may there be healing unto the body of Bahrāndū daughter of Mariai.

17 The ḫ is written above a.
Abdraham, Morgenstern: His Children Destroy the Residence and Building

Figures 2–3: MLSC 41
 Figures 4–5: MLSC 4 II
4 Comments

Incantation a: `bnẖ mhrbilẖ lhikla ubniana “His children destroy the residence and building”

I 2. **nukraiẖ** “transcendent”. Here and in **qdamaih** “primordial” (I 32), our scribe has employed the orthography –aih for the gentilic and adjectival morpheme –āyē that is characteristic of Early Mandaic.18

I 5–6. **bhrandu pt miriai** “Bahrandū daughter of Mariai”. The client’s name is found in a slightly different spelling on another lamella from the Schøyen Collection as part of the lineage of a male client: **pšar [upu]q mn hazin pgrh uništmt ḏsar⟩uqia br bhrandu unm bhrandu pt miriai unm narasai zauh” “be exorcised and [depar]t from this the body and soul of Šaroqi son of Bahrandū and from Bahrandū daughter of Mirai and from Narasai his spouse” (MLSC 9 II [MS 2087/8]:30–36). On the derivation of the name **bhrandu** “Daughter of Bahram” and its variant forms in Mandaic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic sources, see Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017: 754. Note that in the two following attestations of the client’s name, the matronymic is written with plene spelling **mariai** (II:5, 14) in contrast to **miriai** in MLSC 9 (cited above). The biblical name **Miryām/Maryām** is now attested in Mandaic in at least six alternative spellings or forms: **miriai, mariai, miriai, mariam, miriam and miria**.19

I 6–9. **bnẖ mhrbilẖ lhikla ubniana dabnna abhun ptaḥil ḏbnẖ ḏadam “His children destroy the residence and building – that their father Ptahil built – of the children of Adam”. The syntax of this sentence is complex, with the relative clause breaking up the genitive construction, but the meaning is apparent: the children of Ptahil are destroying his creation. These two themes can be found together elsewhere in the Mandaic epigraphic corpus in one sequence:

Let me go and provoke wrath against you
before the great name
and before the great primordial word
against you, O angels of this world
the children of Ptahil – for you and your temples and your amulet spirits
and your idols and your sahirs and your dēvs
and your spirits and your amulet spirits and your liths and your beguiling spirits –
for you have harmed and done ill unto the spirits and souls of people.
I shall provoke to wrath against you
Ptahil, who b[u]ilt the heaven and the earth
(BM 91733 [CAMIB 080M]:2–7).20

An echo of this account also appears in The Book of Zodiac:

And then Ptahil went to the world
and raged against the seven stars
and the twelve zodiac signs, his children,

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19 See Morgenstern and Schlüter 2016: 122.
dmn hsiruta\(^{21}\) hun
knap sahria udaiuia

who were created from deficiency.
The sahirs and dēvs assembled

(AM 201:20–22).

I 8. **dabna** “that he built”. Here we find one of the rare examples of the subordinating/genitive particle written with the following vowel generated by the “rule of Shewa”; the regular spelling is simple \(\text{ḏ} \).\(^{22}\)

I 10–11. **naṭria hurbia hiklia ubniania** “O guardians of the ruins of the residences and buildings”. The role of Ptahil’s children here stands in sharp contrast to that of Ptahil, who, as we have seen in the introduction, is the “guardian of the house” and “the builder of the house”. In the closely related formula in Wolfe 37, the identity of the “guardians of the ruins” is made even more explicit: ‘ṣṭar diuia umlakia naṭria hurbia hiklia ubniania ḏbn ḥadam “the dēvs and the angels, the guardians of the ruins of the residences and buildings of the children of Adam have been bound” (Wolfe 37:1–3). Similarly, in Ṣalḥapita ḏ-Mhria, a protective formula attested widely in manuscript sources, the guardians of the ruins appear in a lengthy enumeration of malevolent forces: mn daiua bšum ṭmn liliata ḏbkinian ṭmn šidia ušibṭia ṭmn sahria uruhia uhumria zadaniata umarkabata rurbata ḏšuka ṭmn naṭria hurbia ṭmn abinia zuaita ḏqurnata\(^{23}\) “from a dēv by his name, and from a lilith by his/her appellation, and from šēds and afflictions and from sahirs and spirits and malevolent amulet spirits and great chariots of darkness and from guardians of ruins and from between the corners of protrusions (?)”\(^{24}\) (ŠM 63–66).

I 12. **uagaṭlia hiua bʿira** “and killers of the cattle”. In a Jewish magic-bowl formulae, the demons are specifically instructed to go to uninhabited places and attack animals: אסיריתון וחתימתון כולכון מן ר אחתבו ותיזלון ותיפלון על טורי ועל ראמתא ועל בעירא מסאבא\(^{25}\) “all of you are bound and sealed from Aḥaddabuy [s]on of Aḥāttabu and go and attack the mountains and the highlands and the unclean beasts” (VA 2422:7).

I 12 // 14. **hiua bʿira** “the cattle”. The CM spelling is **hiua bira** (see MD 62, s.v. bira 2). The use of the digraph ‘i in medial position to represent a simple i/e vowel (irrespective of length) is a characteristic feature of several Early Mandaic sources.\(^{26}\)

I 13–14. **ubrugzhaihn gaṭlia dmu hiua bʿidaiun** “And in their fury they kill … cattle with their hands”. The reading is clear, but the translation is uncertain, in particular the meaning of **dmu** “appearance, apparition” here. It is possible that the text is corrupt, but no parallel is known to us that might clarify this problem.

I 15–16. **mpgmailhun umṣlplhu ḏbn ḥadam** “they injure and scourge the children of Adam”. The verb-pair p-g-m and s-l-p is also attested in Mandaean magical texts preserved in late witnesses to describe both the activity of hostile entities and the chastisement of such entities by light-world figures, e.g.:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mpgmi} & \text{li} \text{ uṃ} \text{s} \text{al} \text{p} \text{lu} \text{ hуu} \\
\text{um} & \text{absi} \text{b} \text{u} \text{n} \text{l} \text{'} \text{n} \text{a} \text{d} \text{a} \text{m} \text{a} \text{u} \text{a} \text{u} \\
\end{align*}
\]

They injure and scourge
and do ill to the sons of Adam and Eve

(ŠpuM:91–93).

\(^{21}\) Variant reading: **husirta** (CS 26).
\(^{22}\) Abudraham 2022: 79.
\(^{23}\) Variant reading: **dqarnata** (CS 27).
\(^{24}\) The latter expression is extremely unclear and may result from scribal error.
\(^{26}\) Abudraham 2022: 84–85.
gabra ḏqiruia hiya ḏbia qadmaiia
zarzuia upaqduia uṣadruia
lalma hazin ḏḥuša
‘launui ẓuβa ʼṣibhia
‘launui ḏṭrisar malašia
upagminun ʼusalpinun
ulgiṭinun ul[l]’sirinun

The man whom the great primordial light summoned.
They armed and commanded and sent him unto this world of darkness against the seven planets against the twelve zodiac signs – and he injured them and scourged them and seized them and bound them (ZP:83–87).

The word pair is also found in Jewish Babylonian magic texts from the same period as our amulet but in reverse order: “I have adjured you, all types of liliths... (that) they trample and scourge and injure” (CBS 8639:8–10)27 // ' (CBS 8639:8–10)27 // ' (JBA 64 = MS 2053/256:2).28

I 15. mpgmailhun "they injure them”. Note again the non-standard use of the digraph ai in medial position to indicate a simple i/e vowel (mapagmilloshon ; CM mp gmailhun).29

I 17–18. umsauisišilun Iraziq dbguaihun "and corrupt the forces that are within them”. Our interpretation of razia follows Emanuel (2022: 131–132), who has noted that the term may refer to the inner forces of the body corresponding to the Greek concept of δόντης.

I 18. unasišila “and they take it”. In several places in this amulet – usually in the environment of laryngeal, sibilant, and sonant consonants – an historical shewa mobile is represented with plene orthography, as here, wonšābilla.30 We have noted the following examples: šinataš = šinatāš "the sleep" (I 18),31 ḏidara = ḏadārā “vertigo” (I:24), ḏhlata = dahlāṭa “fear” (I:25), ratitia = raṭiṭē “trembling” (I:27), naṭaria = nāṭriē "guardians” (I:29), haṭimatin = haṭimatten "you are sealed” (II:6). No less salient are examples for plene orthography at the end of a historically closed syllable: zaqataš = ḏtzqataš “signet” (II:9), qdamaiić = qadmāyā “primordial (sg.)” (I:34; JBA 8277), qdanaib = qadmāyā “primordial (pl.)” (I:32, 40; Syr. ܐܹܐܒܫܩܝܐ). See further our note on lihanadamaihun “to their limbs” (I:27).

I 19–21. umaqmilhun lihkleiuni ubniuni ḏbni ḏadam barpia ḏhišuka “and they set the residences and buildings of the children of Adam in clouds of darkness”. Mandaic sources hold the demonic forces responsible for all forms of corruption in the world, ranging from material entropy to moral error. Compare, for example, the following passage from the popular magic formula ‘I klīl nhur aiar “Upon a Wreath of Ether Light”:32 urumga niatrau atraun bhumruin udiaun ushruiun uṛuhiun uilituuni ḏstā ‘launian lahrubha btaiuu uṣuia hiklun uļquına btiqia ḏbnia anasa ḏhuβa uṣidia ṣubhišuka ghiu uḷququina bniqia anasa uļṣuia lbnia sūba ḏbi tiqa “and they (the evil angels) are appointed to various places with their amulet spirits and dēvs and sahs and spirits and liliths, for they have been sent against them to destroy their houses and to uproot their residences and set the houses of people in ruin and desolation and in the screaming darkness and to strike people and to humiliate the children of the great stem of Life” (IBC 43:10–11).33

27 Montgomery 1913: 117 (for the correct meaning of this phrase, see the reference in the next footnote).
30 For more information on this phenomenon, see Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017: 740–741; Abudraham 2022: 201–215.
31 The proleptic 3 f.s. suffix of the preceding verb unasišila "and they take it (f.s.)" indicates that šinata "the sleep" must be singular.
32 The title is taken from the label found on the back of several magic bowls, e.g., IBC 43: 2–4 (outer text). See the next footnote.
33 Published in Abousamra 2013: 55–57.
I 23–27. Imisbaq kiba Irišaihun hidara Imuqrain dhlata blilbabaihun hišuka lainaiun nqisia Iqbaihun ratitia Ihanadamaihun “to let loose pain upon their heads, vertigo upon their brains, fear in their hearts, darkness upon their eyes, knocking upon their heels, trembling upon their limbs”. The demonic forces are also held responsible for various human afflictions. The majority of this passage is closely paralleled in Wolfe 37, wherein the first person narrator addresses the ðēvūs and the evil angels (= “the guardians of the ruins”) and adjures them to take their evil deeds away from the house and body of the client: dīsqiqlun utsiqqlun hišuka mn bita ḏpnahi br ḏu[u]stia mn ainha ukibia mn rišt hdra mn muqrh uziuihta udhlta mn lbbh “that you should take and remove darkness from the house of Panah son of Doste (and) from his eyes, and pains from his head, vertigo from his brain, and trembling and fear from his heart” (Wolfe 37:43–52). These passages from the magic corpus recall the conclusion of the first prayer in Sidra ԁ-Nišnata:

kulhun almia dhazilh
mn qudamh niktabsun
mradpanh mśargizanhan
bhuqa udahalta uziuihta
urtitia unqisia
niqmun mn qudamai
plan br planita

May all those34 that see him35 be subdued before him.
May his oppressors and his provokers
in panic and fear and terror
and trembling and knocking,
stand before me,”40
PN son of PN
(SN 1 [CP 4:14–18])

I 25. blilbabaihun “in their hearts”. The forms of the noun “heart” in Mandaic are derived from two earlier Aramaic patterns, *libb and *lshū. In CM, the pattern lbb is restricted solely to the singular in the absolute and construct states (MD 228, s.v. lbb; CAL s.v. lbb, lbb n.m. heart [with KWIK search]), while the plural form is most frequently llibia, apparently reflecting the dissimilation *libbē > llibē. By contrast, Early Mandaic texts present a wide variety of forms, including libbaïun and libbaikun with possessive suffixes and l'babia in the plural. The form llibia in our text is unique because of the appearance of non-historical l alongside the duplication of the b. It is likely that these Early Mandaic forms result from a series of analogies between the two patterns, but it is not possible to reconstruct the sequence of these analogies.

I 27. Ihanadamaihun “to their limbs”. Etymological and comparative considerations indicate that a vowel has been added following the n of the noun base, perhaps to prevent its total assimilation to the following consonant: lhanadāmayhon > lhanadāmayhon (cf. Old Persian *handāmā; Biblical Aramaic ܢܢܓܢ; Syriac ܕܐܢܓܢ). The insertion of a vowel after n in similar circumstances has been documented in other Early Mandaic sources, e.g.: anapaihun for anapaihun “their faces”, sanadilia for

34 The order of the afflictions here is somewhat unusual, as other Mandaean magic texts follow the more linear head-to-toe sequence that is common in Mesopotamian (Akkadian and Aramaic) sources. See e.g., Stol 1991: 49; Müller-Kessler 1999: 344; Geller 2000: 15.
35 This may also be translated ‘sores’.
36 Compare further in a magic bowl text in the Jewish script: מפרישת שמשוןolume שד ותפשה והם יקראו ויגאלו פתן והנהר (…): “I adjure and beswear you, demons, afflictions, ðēvūs, Satan and satans, servitors … that you may move away and depart from the head, brain, and heart of Namanūs daughter of Čihrazad” (MS 2053/236:1–2). Shaul Shaked apud Bohak 2012: 48–49.
37 For the connection between the Mandaean liturgy and the magical epigraphic corpus, see Morgenstern, forthcoming.
38 Or: all generations.
39 I.e., the righteous Nasorean.
40 The pronoun refers to the priest who recites the prayer.
41 Nöldeke 1875: 77. On this phenomenon in early Mandaic sources, see further Abudraham 2022: 127. For parallel JBA forms, see Morgenstern 2013: 41 and Ford 2014: 256.
sandilia “sandals”. These examples may also be compared to Classical Mandaic independent personal pronouns: anat “you (2c sg.)”, anatun “you (2m pl.)”.

I 31–35. bhuha puquna rba ḏhia qa dmaiẖ ḏmn had ṣuma ṣuma rba ḏhia rbia qa dmaiẖ npaq ḫlauaikun “by that great saying of the Primordial Life that from one name – the great name of the great Primordial Life – has confronted you”. The first-person narrator emphasizes that the spell by which he adjures the guardians stems directly from the great name of Heyyi Rabbi Qadmāyi “the great Primordial Life”. This idea is stated in yet stronger terms in another Mandaic formula:

ašabitlik umuminalik I have adjured you and made you swear,
punaqit lilita O Punaqit the lilith,
zuṭratia dhūata the youngest of her sisters
ḏmītqiria naqpiṯ ṣtra who is called Naqpiṯ the Goddess,
bḥak ṣuma rba by that great name
ubḥak minra rba qadmaiaia and by that great primordial speech
ubḥak r[az]a qadmaiaia and by that primordial appellation
ubḥak ṣkinata qadmaiaia and by that primordial speech
ubḥak mnalata qadmaiaia and by that great primordial word
ubḥak mlala rba qadmaiaia and by that great primordial speech
bin ula by the “yes” and “no”
ḏ’mun qadmaiaia uladhib that the primordial ones swore and did not break (their oath)

The Mandaean liturgy similarly emphasizes the primacy of the great name. Compare: tusbīhan lhahu ṣuma rba ḏhia ḫlauia ṣkulhu ṣumhata “Praises unto that one great name of Life which is above all names” (SN 76 [CP 108:14–16]).

The phrase npaq ḫlauaikun has been translated here as “has confronted you”. For the collocation על קַנֵפ in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic in the senses of “to attack, challenge”, see Sokoloff 2020: 731 s.v. קַנֵפ, Pe. II.9; CAL s.v. npq vb. a/u “to go out” G. 1.a2.

I 36–37. kukbīa uḵma “the stars and Pleiades”. The same word pair appears in early versions of the magic formula “By the Signet of the Small Boy”, in which the basic elements of the universe are described as nurturing entities:

madna umrba hualiia munqa East and west are my fosterer,
šamiš usira hulia mnasbana the sun and moon are my provider,
kukbīa uḵ’mal hulia mrajbana the stars and Pleiades are my raiser

(YM 1:18–20).

44 Nöldeke 1875: 86–87.
45 The reading is certain and is shared with MLSC 9 (variant: kinta CAR 2). From the context, it must refer to some form of speech, but it is not known to us from other texts. We have hesitatingly translated it as “appellation”, as though derived from "k-y-n = *k-n-y. Compare, e.g., Mandaic binta “building” = *b-n-y.
46 On this meaning of the D-stem of k-d-b, see Abudraham and Morgenstern 2017: 760–761.
47 Abudraham 2014: 64.
48 Published in Nu’mān 1996: 87–89. Nu’mān read uḵ’mal as ukrma. For more details, see Morgenstern and Abudraham, forthcoming.
The same word pair is found in a Jewish incantation bowl formula, though the order is reversed: "and in the place where the sun and the moon and the Pleiades and the stars are not let out" (Moussaieff NNL 75 [formerly 131]:3–4).

I 37 // 39. kulha “all of her”. Our amulet contributes two additional attestations of the 3f.sg. genitive pronoun suffix –ha, which is unique to Early Mandaic sources (CM –a, NM –a). Its pronunciation is uncertain, and it is unlikely to be a survival of the earlier Aramaic pronoun –hā, as the form –ha is never found in Early Mandaic as an object suffix following a long vowel. Conversely, it is found in positions where the pre-modern Aramaic employs the suffix –ah, e.g., in affixed –lha for common Aramaic lah. It is possible that the digraph –ha was employed by early Mandaean scribes to indicate consonantal h in word-final position.

I 39–41. uṣṭar kulhun gbaria daiaria qdamaīh dbghuḥ “And bound were all the mighty men, the primordial dwellers that are within it”. The close parallel in Wolfe 37 identifies the giants with Adam and Eve, apparently reflecting the tradition of Adam’s primordial stature: ‘ṣṭar adam uha52 gbra uṭta gbaria qdmaia ḏhubẖ balma hazin “Bound were Adam and Eve, the man and woman, the primordial giants who were in this world” (Wolfe 37:4–6).

I 41–43. šuba mlakia ḏbita “the seven angels of the house”. The seven angels are presumably the seven planets (šuba šibiahia). In other epigraphic and literary sources, they are described as šuba marḇ ḏbaita “the seven Lords of the House” (Pognon 23 [MIT 11]:10, collated; Gy. 265:17–19).54 The use of a malevolent power’s own spells against it is well attested in Mandaic magical texts.55 See for example: sdimitun bkulhun razikun sdmia šuba razia ḏusahaan mlakia ḏbit[a] “you are sealed with all your spells, sealed are the seven spells of the seven angels of [the] house” (Amulet KM 29883-29887 II:10–12; collated).56

I 43. uṣṭar trisar “And bound were the twelve”. That is, the twelve constellations (trisar malu-asia).

Incantation b: [ktibitin l’liata bšumaikun “You are written, O liliths, by your names”]

II 1–11. As we have seen, these lines contain the end of a spell, the beginning of which has not survived in this copy. A more complete copy survives on the incantation bowl PC 28, while a looser parallel is found in the Qmaha ḏ-Gastata, a formula that is found only in later manuscript sources (see above). In what follows, we refer briefly to some of the notable differences between MLSC 4 and the other early and late witnesses (PC 28 and Qmaha ḏ-Gastata). A complete edition of PC 28, presenting the entire formula, will be published by Ford and Morgenstern, forthcoming.

II 2–5. Our reconstruction here is based upon the parallels.
The stated purpose of our amulet written on a lamella is to protect the body of the client (see also I:5; II:13), while the versions preserved on the bowl and in Qmaha d-Gašṭata were also intended for the protection of the client’s house. This difference may be explained by the different nature of the surviving artifacts: metal amulets were worn upon the body of the client, whereas the earthenware bowls were buried in strategic locations about the house. Regrettably, none of the late manuscript copies of Qmaha d-Gašṭata contain instructions for the formula’s use. II 5–7. This passage provides a good example of the evolution of the 2.f.pl. participle in Mandaic.  

(1) In our amulet, the verbs are founded upon the marked feminine plural participle base with the affixed feminine plural subject morpheme: gәṭīlā(n)+ʔatten > gәṭīlatten. (2) In PC 28 the participle base takes the historically masculine/common plural form but the affixed subject morpheme remains the marked feminine form: gәṭīlīn+ʔatten > gәṭīlitten. (3) In the last stage represented in all the textual witnesses of Qmaha d-Gašṭata, the marked feminine forms have been entirely replaced by the common (historically masculine) forms: gәṭīlīn+ʔatton > gәṭīlitton. II 9–11. The witnesses disagree regarding the name of the signet by which the gates of heaven and earth are sealed.

PC 28 and the late witnesses of Qmaha d-Gašṭata adduce the name of the more common Mandaean spirit zarz’il/zarzial “Zarz’el”. Compare, for example, ‘siritin htimitun braza {u}-d-zarz-i’il ‘siqta dḥtimḥb babia ḏšumia uarqa ḏhuat b’dḥ dptahīl rba qašiša “You are bound and sealed by the spell of Zarz’el the signet, by which the gates of heaven and earth are sealed, which is in the hand of the great elder Ptahil” (Q(SS): 48–50); bšịrsira ubzrz’il ‘zqta dgbr’īl mlaka “by Sir the

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58 Variant reading: bzarzial (DC 23b).
59 Variant reading: ṣumia (DC 23b).
bond and by Zarzʾel, the signet of Gabriʾel the Angel” (MLSC 7 II [MS 2087/7b recto]:15–16). Similarly, in Syriac magic bowl text: “by Šir the bond and by Zarzʾel the great signet, by which heaven and earth were bound” (MS 2055/13:8–9; unpublished). Nonetheless, the version of MLSC 4 (zarzanit ‘zaqata) cannot be regarded as an isolated scribal error, as the same reading appears in another epigraphic Mandaic magic text: “Bound and sealed are these the souls of this house by Šir the bond and by Zarzen the signet” (MS 2054/101:12). It is possible that the alternation between zarzaʾil and zarzanit evolved from cases in which the final consonant l shifted to n by a phonetic process, e.g., “Sealed by a seal of righteousness, by the ring of Šir, by Ziw Zimra, by the signet of Zarzir, and the seal by which is sealed of (!) Yokabod Ziwa” (MS 2053/248 [JBA 88]:4).

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Editorial conventions

Citations from written Mandaic sources are presented in bold characters using Macuch’s transliteration system, e.g., hurbia, while phonological transcriptions – attested or reconstructed – are presented in italics, e.g., lah. Partially preserved or damaged letters are represented in grey, e.g., b. Breaks in the source and reconstructions are marked with square brackets, e.g., [a]. Superlinear insertions are marked with carets, e.g., ^tun^. Editorial deletions are marked with curly brackets, e.g., {l}, while editorial additions are marked with angular brackets, e.g., <d>.

Abbreviations

AM Aspar Maluašia (The Book of the Zodiac) published in Drower 1949
BM British Museum
CAL Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (https://cal.huc.edu/)
CAMIB Incantation bowl texts edited in Segal 2000
CAR Centre for Amuletic Research
CM Classical Mandaic
CS Codexes Sabéen, Bibliothèque nationale de France
DC Drower Collection, the Bodleian Library in Oxford University

60 To be published in Morgenstern and Abudraham, forthcoming.
61 For additional information, see Ford 2002: 246.
63 Published in Shaked, Ford and Bhayro 2022: 91–92.
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