

‘THIS IS A QYBL’ FOR OVERTURNING SORCERIES’:
FORM, FORMULA—THREADS IN A WEB OF TRANSMISSION¹

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I have been visiting the Vorderasiatische Museum’s (VA) collection of magic bowls in Berlin for some years.² The texts that have particularly attracted my attention are a number of bowls that contain aggressive formulae which are now in preparation for publication as part of a volume on such texts within the greater corpus of magic bowls.³ Of the Berlin aggressive texts there are five that share a number of common characteristics that pertain to their literary content and peculiarities of physical form that go beyond the simple fact that they are all earthenware bowls. It is this sub-group of five texts that will be the focus of this paper. We shall see what we can learn about this group of bowls in terms of: purpose, praxis, physical form and structure of formulae. Through a comparison with other groups of bowls from Berlin and London I hope also to map some of the traditions found within them and trace evidence for trails of transmission.

The most obvious connection between all the bowls in this group of five from Berlin is the fact that all define themselves as being a *qybl*’ (קִיבְּלָא)—in this particular group of texts meaning that they are a kind of counter-charm. Thus they are all intended to return adverse magical actions to their origin—in these cases identified specifically as individuals who are personally named. As such, these spells have an aggressive tone in that they clearly intend harm to be wreaked upon humans they identify by name who are perceived by the clients as adversaries—whom I shall refer to, in general, as “the antagonists.” A question which I will not go into in this chapter is whether we consider these “counter-charm” bowl texts as curses—since they constitute an attack on human individuals—or whether we still perceive them as

¹ I would like to dedicate this chapter to Professor Shaul Shaked who is always an inspiring and patient teacher.

² I would like to thank Dr Joachim Marzahn, the curator of the collection, who has been most helpful over the years.

³ The title of the forthcoming volume is “*May These Curses Flee*”; *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity*.

apotropaic—as they define their *raison d'être* as being the aversion of an attack and a returning of it to its culpable human origin.

The bowls

The five Berlin *qybl'* bowls are:

- VA 2423 and VA 2416⁴ which are written by the same hand for the same client and against the same antagonist,
- VA 2434 and VA 2424 are also a pair that are written by one scribe for the same client and against the same antagonist, and
- VA 2484 which, like the other 4, describes itself as a *qybl'* and specifies the names of the client as well as the antagonist; for this last bowl there is none to make it a pair as with the others though, as we shall see, the evidence suggests there was originally an accompanying bowl.

Another group of bowls that describe themselves as *qybl'* bowls, and therefore relevant to this study, are three from the British Museum (BM): 039A, 040A and 041A.⁵ 039A and 041A share the names of both client and antagonist. 040A shares with these two only the name of the antagonist. Though I am not entirely certain, it seems to me that these three bowls were written by the same scribe.

In the table below is a synopsis of the opening formulae of the Berlin bowls. VA 2423 and VA 2416 are one of the pairs and are therefore beside each other. As can be seen in the table, VA 2416 has a repetition of the opening formula which is also presented in this synopsis. The beginning of the text of the partner of VA 2434—i.e., VA 2424—has faded, hence its absence from the table. It is, however, clear from the rest of the text visible on VA 2424 that this text is very close in content to VA 2434 in which most of its text is present, despite the fact that it is in a slightly different order. It is, therefore, possible that its beginning might have included a variation of the same formula.

⁴ Published by Wohlstein (1893), pp. 11–27, late in the 19th century and re-edited by myself.

⁵ Segal (2000), pp. 79–85.

Berlin bowls	VA 2423	VA 2416	VA 2434	VA 2484		
a			בישמך אני עושה	לישמך אני עושה	(18)...	
	הדין קיבלא לבטולי חרשי	הדין קיבלא למיפך חרשי	הדין קיבלא למיפך	הדין למיפך ולשדורי ולאכמורי	דין קיבלא למיפך ושדורי ואכמרי	
	ונידרי ולוטתא ונידרא	ונידרי ולוטתא ושיקופתא ואשלמתא ואכמרתא	ירור בישתא (17)	ירור ו(א)רחק ירור בישתא	ירור בישתא	
b		מן אבא בר ברכיתא	מן ביתיה דכטיא בר מחלפתא ומן אמא בת מחלפתא	מן שילתא בת אימי על דשישין בת אי>ס<מנדוך	מן שילתא בת א'ימי	
c	דאימי בת ריבקא ומר ולילי בני אימי דלטוי ונידרוי	על אימי בת רבקא על לילי ועל מר בני אימי ועל כל דלט יתהון	תיתהפך על אימי בת ריבקא	ועל אימידבי בת שילתא	[ועל] שיש(ין) בת אסמנדוך ועל אימידבי בת שי[ל]תא	
a1		ותיזח ותיפוק מיניה מן אבא בר ברכיתא	ותיזח ותיפוק מיבניה מן ביתיה דכטיא בר מחלפתא			
a	This is a counter- charm to make void sorceries and curses and oaths and aver- sions	This is a counter- charm to overturn sorceries and oaths and curses and knocks/ blasts and magic rites and aversions,	This is a counter- charm for overturning an evil yaror (17)	In your name I make (this). This is a counter- charm for overturning an evil yaror	For thy name-sake I make this (counter- charm) to overturn and to send and to return the evil yaror and <i>I shall remove</i> (it)	(18)... This is a counter- charm to overturn and to send and to return the evil yaror

Table (*cont.*)

Berlin bowls	VA 2423	VA 2416	VA 2434	VA 2484		
b		from Aba son of Barkhita onto Imi daughter of Rivka,	that is upon Abba son of Barkhita.	from the house of Katia son of Makhlafta and from Imma daughter of Makhlafta	from Shilta daughter of Imi against Shishin daughter of Ismandukh	from Shilta daughter of Imi
c	of Imi daughter of Rebecca and Mar and Lili the sons of Imi who have cursed him and vowed [concerning] him.	onto Lili and onto Mar the children of Imi and onto all who cursed them.	May it be overturned upon Imi daughter of Rivka	upon Kafnai son of Dadai	and against Imidevi daughter of Shilta.	against Shishin daughter of Asmandukh and against Imidevi daughter of Shilta.
a1			and may it turn away and go out from him, from Abba son of Barkhita.	and may it depart and go out from the house of Katia son of Maklafta		

Even though it is clear at first glance that these formulae all share the same *vorlage*, it is nevertheless interesting to note the slight differences between the texts. This variance in detail of duplicate formulae is typical of the magic bowl text as a genre and suggests it to have been a feature of its literary tradition. Note also that although this is a type of curse formula, in that it is definitely intended to the detriment of another human, it also presents itself as being ultimately a protective measure. The supernatural entity that is attacking the client is described as having been conjured up by a human foe to whom it is promptly returned.

The three BM bowls mentioned above start with variants of the same formulae that are found in the five VA bowls.

BM bowls	039A (BM 91771)	040A (BM 91767)	041A (BM 91763)
a	הדין קיבלא למיפך חרשי ונידרי ולוטתא ו...	הדין קיבלא לשדורי רוחא	הדין קיבלא למיפך חרשי
b	מן מחלפא בר בתשיתין		מן מחלפא בר בתשיתין...
c	על מרזותרא בר אוכמאי	על מרזותרא בר אוכמאי	מרזותרא בר אוכמאי...
a	This is a counter- charm to overturn sorceries and oaths and curses...	This is a counter- charm to send an evil spirit	This is a counter- charm to overturn sorceries
b	from Makhlaptha son of Batshitin		from Makhlaptha son of Batshitin...
c	upon Marzutra son of Ukmai	upon Marzutra son of Ukmai	Marzutra son of Ukmai

These three texts are written against a certain Mar-Zutra son of Ukmai, the antagonist, who is mentioned in all of them. The client, however, is mentioned in only two of the texts: 039A and 041A, and omitted from 040A.

The meaning of qybl'

In Mandaic Drower and Macuch also assign to *qybl'* the more specific meaning of “counter-charm.”⁶ This is poignant in our context as this is the translation Wohlstein provided for *qybl'* in his edition of VA 2416, as did Segal in his edition of the BM bowls. Indeed, our group of texts are all charms that state their purpose to be the countering of the aggressive magic conjured up against the clients they were written for and meant to protect. One must, however, note that in the Babylonian Talmud this word is attested in the plainer sense of just “charm”;⁷ not specifically warranting the expanded sense of “counter-charm.” It is, nevertheless, clear from our bowls that this expanded

⁶ Drower and Macuch (1963), p. 405b.

⁷ Sokoloff (2002), p. 1009b, bBer 62a.

sense be considered, at the very least, as included in the meaning of the term. For even the simple sense of “charm”—to ward off harmful magical forces—is not exclusive of the fact that they might well have had their origin with a human agent. Jastrow provides the gloss “[a means against,] charm (to ward of danger)”⁸ that fits the case of the particular bowl texts mentioned above rather well. In the nominal form **קבילתא** it has the meaning of “complaint,”⁹ which in Syriac has the more forceful sense of “accusation” or “rebuke.”¹⁰ These meanings fit well the legalistic sense and force that often underpins the tone of the magic bowl incantation texts. Indeed, the Akkadian cognates based on the root *qbl*: *qabalu(m)* II meaning “battle”¹¹ and *qubbulu* “to fight,”¹² also incorporate the aggressive tone that we note in the Aramaic *qybl* of our bowls.

Other meanings derived from the root **קבל** that are worth noting are “darkness,”¹³ “to become dark”¹⁴ and the preposition **לקבל**—“junction,” “meeting”¹⁵ and “opposite.”¹⁶ These meanings bring to mind two things that, as we shall presently see, prove to be significant. The first is the fact that all but one of the bowls (040A) with the *qybl* formula under discussion have bitumen markings¹⁷ on them; the second is a comment made by Hilprecht regarding the excavation of magic bowls that: “Sometimes two bowls facing one another had been cemented together with bitumen.”¹⁸ If our *qybl* bowls with bitumen markings constitute such pairs—i.e. pairs of bowls that were custom made to be set rim to rim opposite each other to be fixed with bitumen and interred as a unit—then we may consider *qybl*’s other meanings of “darkness,” “junction,” “meeting” and “opposite,” that are such apt descriptions of such a physical configuration, to bear relevance

⁸ Jastrow (1903), p. 1309b.

⁹ Sokoloff (2002), p. 978b.

¹⁰ Brockelmann (1966), p. 641b—**ܩܒܠܐ** *accusatio*—rebuke, “charge, accusation,” and Sokoloff (2009), p. 1310, “accusation, complaint.”

(Payne Smith [1903], p. 487a). See also the participial form **ܩܒܠܐ** “to accuse,” “impeach,” “complain” (Payne Smith, 1903], p. 487b).

¹¹ Black et al. (2000), p. 281b.

¹² Black et al. (2000), p. 290a.

¹³ Jastrow (1903), p. 1309b; Sokoloff (2002), p. 472.

¹⁴ Sokoloff (2002), p. 980b.

¹⁵ Jastrow (1903), p. 1309b.

¹⁶ Sokoloff (2002), p. 978.

¹⁷ For the use of and trade in bitumen in Antiquity, see Connan (1999).

¹⁸ Hilprecht et al. (1903), p. 447. See also Hamilton’s comments on bowls found joined in this way (1971, p. 10).

that goes beyond its meanings of “charm” and “counter-charm” that are clearly implied in the texts. Thus the word *qybl*’ would be used in this context as a pun referring to both the purpose of the amulet—a “charm,” “counter-charm”—and to its physical form—two bowls that are “opposite” each other, their rims “meeting” at a “junction” and the space between them in “darkness.” Indeed, the bitumen markings on the verso of VA 2484, as can be seen in figure 1, reveal that this bowl was once lashed to another that is now missing. The two bowls were bound together with some sort of cord wrapped twice around the two bowls, forming a cross shape when viewed from above. This cord was fastened to the bowls in six places with globules of bitumen—upon the four points where the cord traversed the joined rims of the two bowls and at the apex of each of them where the cord crossed itself. Thus the pair of bowls that were a *qybl*’ in purpose—“charm” or “counter-charm”—were also a *qybl*’ in the physical sense—being “opposite” each other, their rims “meeting” and a “darkness” formed between them.

An examination of the two pairs of *qybl*’ bowls from Berlin yielded the following: VA 2434 and VA 2424 is one of the pairs of *qybl*’ texts that were each written by the same scribe for the same client against the same antagonist. As can be seen in figure 2 below, when this pair of bowls were placed together, rim to rim, the bitumen markings matched up, verifying that these two bowls were lashed and bitumened to each other in the same way as we saw above was true regarding VA 2484. They both have the *qybl*’ formula and together they constitute a *qybl*’ form.



Figure 1. VA 2484—two angles of the verso with a reconstruction of how the bowl might have been lashed together with a partner.

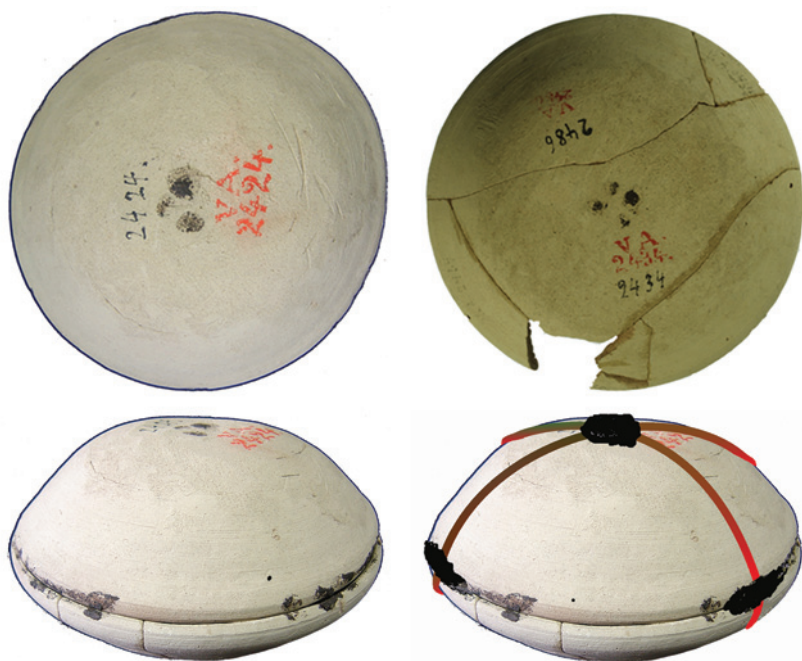


Figure 2. VA 2434 and VA 2424 separately, together, and reconstructed as they would have looked with cord and bitumen.



Figure 3. VA 2423 and VA 2416, separately and together.

The other pair of *qybl'* texts from Berlin, VA 2423 and VA 2416, like VA 2434 and VA 2424, are dedicated to the same client, directed at the same antagonist and written by the same scribe. Placed opposite each other, they too reveal the bitumen markings on their rims that match up. The only difference with this pair, in regard to the previous two examples, was that the markings on the extremities of the bowls suggest that the cord was wrapped around them more than twice. This third pair could then also be seen as containing both the *qybl'* formula and *qybl'* form.

Figure 4. 039A, 040A and 041A.¹⁹

The BM bowls 039A and 041A also share the names of client and antagonist and seem to have been written by the same scribe. They also have bitumen markings on the rims but not on the apex of the verso as with the Berlin bowls. These bowls did not seem to match up very neatly when placed rim to rim. If not a pair in themselves, they most surely had each been parts of separate pairs. 040A, on the other hand, has no signs of bitumen, suggesting that either it was not bitumened to another bowl or that if bitumen had been there it had fallen off, the markings having faded or been removed in some way.

So far it can be observed that within this group of bowls there is a correlation between the type of formula, the *qybl'* formula, and the physical arrangement of these bowls in that they were made in pairs that were set together, rim to rim, lashed with a cord in some cases and bitumened together prior to interment. It can now be stated that the Berlin and BM bowls discussed above constitute the material remains of at least five pairs of joined bowls: 1) VA 2484 and ?, 2) VA 2434 and VA 2424, 3) VA 2423 and VA 2416, 4) 039A and ?, and 5) 041A and ?.

*Other aspects of the formulae that appear in this group of qybl' texts
(duplicate section "a")*

We have seen that both the Berlin and BM *qybl'* bowls share an opening formula—a formula that, despite variations, is present in all of the texts where the opening formula is visible. Beyond the opening formula we find that the Berlin bowls share other portions of formula. The text below is from VA 2416 and is found only with minor

¹⁹ The images of the British Museum bowls are from Segal (2000).

variations in VA 2423 and VA 2484;²⁰ thus it appears in each of the pairs of matching bowls.

VA 2416 (near perfect duplicate to sections in VA 2434 and VA 2484)—
Duplicate section 'a'

- a אידמרת ברזי ארעה I was astonished by mysteries of the earth
ואסתכלית {בדיכרי} בדיכרי and I beheld the paths of the Merkabah.
מרכבתא טוב חזיתי ירור Again, I have seen the evil and powerful
בישתא ותקיפתא וידיניתא and malicious yaror and the destroyer
ומחבלתא דימחבלתא who destroys and the tormentor yaror
ומבכלתא ירור who were dispatched (18) against him.
דאישתדרו (18) עלוהי
- b ירור בישתא ותקיפתא Evil and powerful and malicious yaror,
וידיניתא ירור פוקי ופרחי yaror go out and flee from Abba son of
מן אבא בר ברכיתא Barkhita and go upon any that have cursed
ואיזילי על כל מאן דלט them and upon his house and upon his
יתהון ועל ביתיה ועל dwelling and upon his threshold.
דירתיה ועל איסקופתיה
- c ובשום ישמירימאל By the name, Shamirimiel and Hantitiel
וחנתיאל וחניניאל and Haniniel and Hahaziel. Those are (19)
(19) וחזיאל אילין אינון ten holy and distinguished and faithful
עשרא מלאכין קדישין angels,
ומפרשין ומהימנין אינון
- ויזעון ויבטלון ויפקון ירור and may they shake and annul and remove
בישתא מיפנריה דאבא the evil yaror from the body of Abba son
בר ברכיתא ומן מאתן of Barkhita and from the two hundred and
וארבי'עין ותמניא הרמין forty eight limbs of his body.
קומתיה
- ובשום גבר[יאל ומי] יכ'אל And by the name of Gabriel and Michael
ורפאל ובישמיה דעניאל and Raphael and by the name of Aniel who
דקאים אחורי גלגלי שמשא stands behind the spheres of the sun

²⁰ For the purpose of this article I have found it sufficient to provide only one version. A full synopsis of variants and discussion will appear in my forthcoming volume *"May These Curses Flee"; Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity*.

Table (cont.)

VA 2416 (near perfect duplicate to sections in VA 2434 and VA 2484)—
Duplicate section 'a'

d	<p> (20) ובשום זיקיאל ופרקיאל וברקיאל וערכיאל דימשמשין קדם כורסי יקרא דאלהא דשליט(ג) ון בארעה ורשותהון בר[קיעה]ה אינון ייזעון ויבטלון ויפקון יירור י'י[ליתא ו] 'מ'בכלתא בישתא מיניה דאבא בר ברכיתא ומן מאתן וארבעין ותמניא הדמין קומתיה בשום אהיה אשר אהיה אין ואמן ובשום חץ מץ תץ ו(ק) נתיאל וחי חי מץ אמן אמן סלה הללו(י)ה ות(ר)²¹ </p>	<p> (20) and by the name of Zikiel and Parkiel and Barkiel and Arkiel who minister before the throne of the glory of God, whose government is in earth, and authority in heaven. May they shake and neutralize and remove the evil yaror and Lilith and evil tormentor from Abba son of Barkhita and from the two hundred and forty eight limbs of his body. By the name of I-Am-That-I-Am 'YN and Amen. And by the name ḤṢ MṢ TṢ and Qantiel and ḤY ḤY MṢ. Amen amen selah Hallelujah immediately. </p>
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A relationship between the Hekhalot and Merkabah literature and the bowl texts has already been noted.²² Indeed, this section, of which I have made mention elsewhere,²³ suggests a direct connection between the Merkabah mystic and the magic bowl practitioner. Whether this formula is a particular feature of the *qybl'* text or not is a question that will have to await verification or dispute according to whether it crops up in other texts that are either related to the *qybl'* or not.

The Yaror ירור

We saw in the opening formula of these charms that they were for overturning a yaror so as to send it back to the person or persons who conjured it up and dispatched it. The yaror appears from the texts to

²¹ I would like to thank James Ford for elucidating to me the correct reading here of תר which occurs in the bowls as an abbreviation of אלתר.

²² See Shaked (1995) and Levene (2003), pp. 14–17. For the relationship between the mystic and the sorcerer see also Davila (2001).

²³ Levene (2003) pp. 15–16. All these texts will be discussed in fuller detail in my forthcoming book *“May These Curses Flee”*; *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity*.

be a malicious supernatural entity whose speciality is to be conjured and supplied with a human target—a supernatural homing device.

The precise meaning of the word is not clear. In its various manifestations in the rabbinic literature it occurs either as ירור or ירוד, the final letter interchanging between ר and ד. This seems to have already caused problems of interpretation in the Middle Ages.²⁴ There is, however, the Syriac term ܝܪܘܪ that means “jackal.” Understandings of this term have been arrived at also on the basis of the versions where *yrwr* appears as a translation of the Hebrew תנים “jackals”²⁵ and בנות יענה “ostriches.”²⁶ Besides our texts there is the one case where this term is associated with the demonic world—in the Syro-Hexapla to Is 34:14 the translation of לילית is ܠܝܠܝܬ.²⁷ Montgomery adds a note to the meaning of ירור, that “the root is onomatopoeic, connoting a howling creature.”²⁸ He then suggests that choosing this word to represent the demon is based on the fact that the “Babylonians represented their demons in uncouth shapes of birds and animals.” Hunter also discussed this word in reference to Micha 1:8 and a section from the *Acta* of St. Simeon Stylites, where the cry of the jackal is likened to the cry of mourners.²⁹ It is quite astonishing considering the nature of this term in our texts, and it might only be a coincidence, that in Akkadian we find the term *arāru* “curse,”³⁰ and its Hebrew cognate אָרַר that has the same meaning.³¹

One of the Berlin texts, VA 2484, tells a chilling tale of what the yaror can do:

²⁴ Nathan ben Jehiel et al., vol. 4, pp. 159–60. See also Lieberman (1992), vol. 2, p. 652.

²⁵ Job 30:29 תנים—Targum ירורין—Peshitta ܝܪܘܪ ; Micha 1:8 תנים—Targum Jonathan ירורין—Peshitta ܝܪܘܪ.

²⁶ Micha 1:8 בנות יענה—Peshitta ܒܢܘܬ ܝܥܢܐ.

²⁷ Payne Smith et al. (1879), vol. 1, p. 1630.

²⁸ Montgomery (1913), p. 81.

²⁹ Hunter (2000), pp. 144–45.

³⁰ Oppenheim, L., et al., pp. 234 ff. Thanks to Tzvi Abusch who alerted me to this possible connection.

³¹ The dictionary favors the spelling יָרוּרָא (Sokoloff 2002, p. 541b)—yarora, whereas the Syriac is ܝܪܘܪ (Payne Smith 1903, p. 197)—Yoruro. It has been suggested to me by Yuval Harari that a spelling on the basis of the Hebrew form יָרוּר—Yarur—might be considered, on the basis of the passive form אָרַר that is common in Biblical Hebrew.

The yaror is adjured to return to its dispatcher and wreak vengeance
(VA 2484)

(1) For thy name-sake I (2) make this (counter-
charm) to overturn and to send (3) and to
return a yaror and *I shall remove* (it) from
Shilta daughter (4) of Imi against Shishin
daughter of Ismandukh and against Imidevi
daughter (5) of Shilta.

I have adjured and put you under oath that you
may go against Shishin daughter of Ismandukh
(6) and demand of her all that she has said
before you and send against her dogs (7) and
bitches and your children and your maid
servants and your jailors and your messengers.
They shall go against her in great anger.
(8) If she gets up and flees to the field and is
in exhaustion, strike upon her head and eat
from her flesh and drink from (9) her blood
until she will serve you.

I adjure you and put you under oath by your
father and your mother, that you shall be upon
Shishin daughter of Asmandukh (10) and may
your anger punish her (*in accordance with*) all
that I said before you, and she will depart. And
you will be released from Shilta daughter of
Imi. And you will not delay a time (more than)
seven days.

(1) לישמד אני (2) עושה
הדין למיפך ולשדורי (3)
ולאכמורי ירור ו(א)רחק
מן שילתא בת (4) אימי על
דשישין בת אי>ס<מנדוך ועל
אימידבי בת (5) שילתא

אומיתי ואשבעתי עליכי
דתיזלין עליהי דשישין
בת אסמנדוך (6) ותיבעין
מינה כל דאמרת קדמך
ותישדרן עלה כלבי (7) וג
וגריתא ודרדקיך ופריסתיך
וזנ>ד<יקנך ושליחך יזילון
עליהי ברוגזא רבא (8) אם
קימא ודימזילא בארעה
ובשופלא תמחין על ראשה
ותיכלין מן בישרה ותישתין
מן (9) דמה עד תיקום קדמך

אומיתי יתך ואשבעתי יתך
באבוך ובאימך תיהוי עליהי
דשישין בת אסמנדוך ותי(פ)
רע (10) קינך מינה כל
דאמרית ק(מ)דמך ותיזח
ותיפקין מינה מן שילתא
בת אימי ולא תיעכ(ב)ין זמן
שבועא יומין

This narrative is not entirely clear in all its details, though it is sufficiently so to illustrate that the yaror was considered a powerful and deadly entity that could be conjured with fatal consequence.

Summary

If we look at the eight bowls discussed so far we can observe the following aspects in common: Apart from 040A of which we cannot prove there was a pair, all the other bowls were made in pairs that were positioned rim to rim and sealed with bitumen; all the bowls include the *qybl'* formula within them; all state the name of the antagonist/s; all the Berlin pairs include in one or other of each of the pairs the duplicate section “a.”

Bowl no	One of a matching bitumened pair	Survivor of a bitumened pair	No bitumen	<i>qybl'</i> formula	Antagonist named	Yaror formula	Duplicate section (a)	Use of the verb תפח 'to overturn'	(Which bowls)
VA 2423	•			•	•	•		•	Berlin <i>qybl'</i> bowls
VA 2416	•			•	•	•	•	•	
VA 2434	•			•	•	•	• ³²	•	
VA 2424	•			•	•	•	•	•	
VA 2484		•		•	•	•	•	•	
039A		•		•	•	•		•	London <i>qybl'</i> bowls
041A		•		•	•	•		•	
040A			•	•	•				
Counter-charm Chart 1									

³² The beginning of VA 2424 has faded. However, this text looks as if it is a near exact duplicate of VA 2434; we assume the likelihood that it did include this part of the formula in the beginning where it has faded.

Other bowls with bitumen markings

In order to ascertain whether the physical praxis implied by the bitumen markings found on the five pairs of bowls discussed above was inextricably related in some way to the particular kind of counter-charm formulae that are found in these bowls, it is important to identify any other bowls with such markings and examine their literary contents.

Following are some examples of bowls that display similar markings of bitumen that suggest the praxis of inscribing bowls in pairs with the purpose of sealing them with bitumen to form a single magical object. Examining their textual content, we shall try and ascertain whether they are related in any way to the counter-charm *qybl'* texts found in the Berlin and BM bowls.³³

020A³⁴

The first bowl that we shall look at is 020A. The bitumen markings found on this bowl are identical to those found on five of the eight bowls examined above. These marks clearly attest that this was one of a pair that were originally lashed together and sealed with bitumen.



Figure 5. 020A (▲—the triangles point to the gaps in the bitumen where once there was a cord.)

³³ The choice of bowls that follow are those that were available to me at the time of writing the article. There is, therefore, a randomness in this selection. At a late stage of writing a small number of new examples became available; their contribution to the points made in this chapter will be published in due course.

³⁴ Segal (2000), pp. 61–62.

Looking at the content of the incantation we find two aspects in common with our other texts: (1) the existence of a formula stating its purpose to be the removal of a yaror; and (2) the presence of part of the duplicate section "a" that we found in VA 2416, VA 2434 and VA 2484.

A distinct difference between this bowl and the ones that we have discussed above is the fact that the antagonist is not mentioned or alluded to directly in this bowl.

020A

VA 2416, VA 2434 and VA 2484

ויגערון וזיעון ויפרחון (3) ויפקון ויפרזון
 ירור בישתא מן ביתיה ומן דירתיה ומן
 מדורתיה דאחתו בר (4) בתשיתי ומן
 איספרם בת אחתונתו
 בשום שמורימאל וחנתיאל וחניניאל
 החזיאל ובכליאל (5) ושלשזיאל
 אינון עשרא מלאכין קדישין ומפרשין
 ומהימנין אינון וזיעון ויבטלון ויפקון יבי
 ירור (6) בישתא מן ביתיה ומן דירה
 מן בתדרתיה ומן איסקופתיה דאחתו
 בר בתשיתי ומן איספרם בת אחתונתו
 ומן ביתיה (7) ומן דירתיה אמן אמן
 סלה הללויה

ובשום ישמי'רימאל וחנתיאל
 וחניניאל וחחזיאל אילין אינון (19)
 עשרא מלאכין קדישין ומפרשין
 ומהימנין
 אינון וזיעון ויבטלון ויפקון ירור בישתא
 מיפגריה ד...

...(2).....And may they rebuke and
 move and (3) carry off and exclude
 and keep away the evil yaror from
 the house and dwelling of Aḥatu son
 of (4) Batshiti and from Ešparam
 daughter of Aḥatonatu.

By the name of by Shamurimiel and
 Hantitiel and Haniniel, Haḥaziel and
 Bakliel and (5) Shalashziel. Those are
 ten holy and distinguished and faith-
 ful angels, may they shake and cancel
 and send away **the evil** (6) **yaror**
 from the house and...of Aḥatu son
 of Batshiti and from Ešparam daugh-
 ter of Aḥatonatu and from his house
 (7) and from his residence. Amen
 amen sela halleluiaḥ

By the name, Shamirimiēl and Hanti-
 tiel and Haniniel and Hahaziel.
 Those are (19) ten holy and distin-
 guished and faithful angels, and may
 they shake and annul and remove
the evil yaror from the body of...



Figure 6. VA 2575 and VA 2496

*VA 2575 and VA 2496*³⁵

These two bowls are almost exact duplicates. They were written by the same scribe and for the same client. Bitumen markings appear only around the rims, suggesting that these bowls were glued to each other. The lack of the type of bitumen marks found upon the apexes of the outer surfaces of the other bowls suggest that this pair were not lashed together with a cord as some of the others appear to have been.

A glance at the text reveals two additional elements—beyond the fact that these bowls constitute a physical *qybl* form—in common with the other bowls that we have been looking at: (1) these bowls are against yarors, though their activators (the antagonists) are not named; (2) the use of the verb הפך “to overturn.” The formula employed in these two bowls does not refer to itself as a *qybl*.

...(2)...May the sorceries and magical acts and **evil yarors** (3) and bindings... (4) and curses and mishaps and evil rites and neck charms and the weeping of all (5) humanity and types of destruction and types of punishment (מיני משחית וכל מיני פרענות) that are in the world be overturned (יתהפכו). (6) They will leave, depart and go out from her, Dandukh daughter of Kurzai and from all the members (7) of her household, may they go and be cast on those that worked them and upon those that sent them and upon their masters. Likewise, they will be overturned (יתהפכו),

³⁵ I have provided here only what is necessary for the argument in this article. An edition with commentary will be published in my forthcoming volume *“May These Curses Flee”*; *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity*.

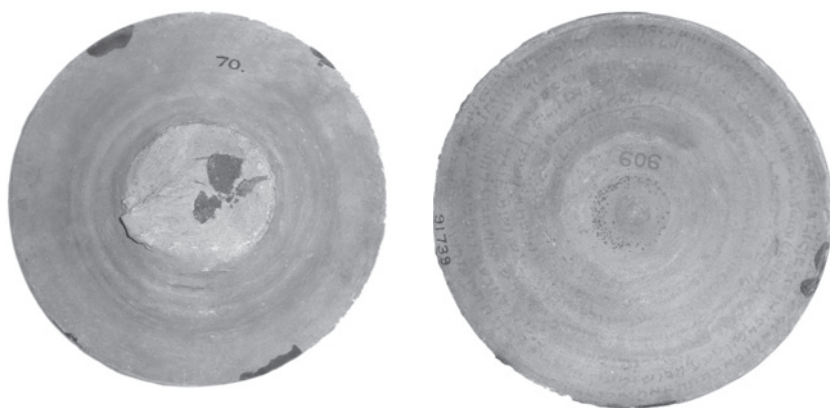


Figure 7. 025A

returned (8) and overturned from her, Dandukh daughter of Kurzai and is called Qaqai; in the name of Hadriel and...iel the angel...

025A (duplicate section “b”)³⁶

The bitumen markings on this bowl indicate that this is one of a pair of bowls that were lashed together and sealed with bitumen. Although much of the text of this bowl is faded and unreadable, there is what appears to be a near perfect duplicate to it in the British Museum—024A—which is completely legible.³⁷ As the formulae in what remains of 025A are so close to 024A, we might assume the likely probability that like the latter, 025A too is a counter-charm text in which the antagonist was named.³⁸ Both 024A and 025A contain a parallel section of a formula that occurs in a *qybl’* text that is one of our Berlin pairs—VA 2423. The most distinct parts of this parallel formula are unique to these three texts that are all counter-charms for averting the magical acts of a human antagonist. The longest version of this section of parallel formula occurs in VA 2423. This formula states itself to be for dissolving (שרי) and making flee (אזל) “a vow, a curse, a knock and a spell” from the client to the human origin, to which these are attributed.

³⁶ Segal (2000), p. 66.

³⁷ Segal refers to 025A as “an inferior duplicate of 024A” (2000, p. 66).

³⁸ We might add that despite the fact that these two bowls share the same formula, 024A does not display the bitumen markings on the back that would suggest that it was made as one of a pair.

Synopsis of parallel sections of VA 2423, 024A and 025A—Duplicate section "b":³⁹

VA 2423	024A	025A
ומיפוס (4) תלתא סבין דאהוי יתבין באתונא ותרין ודהוי יתבין על ימא דמילחא (5) ושרין ליה לאבא בר ברכיתא	מיפוס תלתא (3) סבין דיתבין על פומה דאתונא ותרין דיתבין על ימא דמילחא ושרין ⁴⁰ (4) לרב מארי בר ממה ולאניה בת מאמה וילריתיהון בתריהון	
לוטתא ונידרא ושיקופתא וקריתא וענקתא (6) ושיקופתא ומשקופתא ואשלמתא ...	נידרא ולוטתא (5) ושיקופתא ואשלמתא דבתשיתין בת מדודאי ונדרא (3) ולוטתא ושיקופתא ⁴² ואשלמתא מעבדי וכלם. (4) בישי
דעבדי ליה (11) ודעבדין לאבא בר ברכיתא יתהפכון ויזילין על עבדינהון ועל משדרנהון	ושמהתהון דיתלתא סבין דיתבין על פומה (6) דאתונה ותרין דיתבין על ימא דמילחא	ושמיהון דיתלתא סבין {ואתו ⁴³ } דיתבין על פומה את(ונ)[א] ⁴⁴
מישמהון דיתלתא סבין דהון יתבין באתונא ותרין דהון יתבין על >ימא דמילחא < (ב)אתונא {	רברבי בר מרתי וצרויה בר שילתי וברבעמה בר משרשתנא (7)	(5) (ש)רשיתא

³⁹ A complete synopsis and detailed discussion of these parallel sections will appear in my forthcoming volume "May These Curses Flee"; *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity*. As in other parts of this chapter, I have only provided what is necessary for making the argument presented here. It is for this reason that I only give a translation of the section from VA 2423 which is the longest of the three. Both transcriptions of the BM bowls that are provided here include the emendations of Christa Müller-Kessler (2001/2002). Where I have made additional corrections, I have put Segal's reading in the footnotes.

⁴⁰ ושרין read ושרק. One can see in the line above that the ין in סבין, and elsewhere in the bowl, is written in exactly the same way.

⁴¹ נחלה read נחלה on the basis of the reading נחלא in our text and the fact that in 024A the ת is distinguished from ה and ח quite clearly, as its bottom left leg is always extended further out to the left.

⁴² Segal reads ופתא ופתיא.

⁴³ This seems to yield either דאהוי or more likely דיהוי.

⁴⁴ Segal reads ----- דאתא.

VA 2423	024A	025A
ותרין דהון יתבין על ימא דמילחא אבי(ד)ג בר גדרי וספקונא בר נחלא	וקניה בר נחלה ⁴⁵	ויתרין דהון יתבין על ימא דמיל<ח>א
אילין דאיתממנין (13) עליכין ושדרנא לי יכון דיסקא הדין בשום רבי יהושוע בר פרחאיה	קבילו דיסקא הדין דשדר לכון רבי יהושוע בר פרחיה	אינון דאיתממנין עליכון ושגרין לכון איגרתא הדא ⁴⁵ דרבי [יהושוע] בר [פרחיה]
מיתי מיתי דשכבין בארעה ומידמכין בעפרא קבילו איגרתא דשדרנא ליכון חאוי וסבי (14) וקביל כל מידעם יד' [2-3 words] 'איגרתא'		(מיתי מיתי) דשכבין (6) בארעה ⁴⁶ ודמכין בעפרא קבילו ⁴⁷ איגרתא דשדר(ו) לכון ...
ושקולו וקבילו לוטתיה ונידריה וקריתיה וענקתיה ושיקופתיה ומשקופתיה ואשלמתיה ואחרמתיה ואסכמתיה ושדרתיה (15) וחרשי וקיטרי [וקיברי וקובלי ומיא עזי] בי דעבדו ליה ודעבדין {ליה} ליה ודמעבדין לאבא בר ברכיתא	שקולו וקבילו נידרא ולוטתא (8) ושיקופתא ואשלמתא	שקולו וקבילו נידרא יד' מומתה די כל ברעלא
	דבתשיתין בת דודאי בישמיה דקנגמיאל מלאכה הוא יפרחה מן רב מארי בר ממה (9) נידרא דילוטתא וכל מידעם דביש ומעיק	וכל מידעם דביש ומעיק (7) תחתא וחרשתא... ת שדר(ין) שמי.....שמי (ק) לימא בת יותא

Translation of VA 2423:

And from the mouths (4) of three old men who are sitting in a furnace and two who are sitting on the Sea of Salt (5) and are undoing for Abba son of Barkhita curses, and oaths, and afflictions, and mishaps, and *neck charms*, (6) and afflictions, and [other types of] afflictions, and evil rites,...that have acted against him (11) and that are acting

⁴⁵ Segal has for all this sequence only חדא --- .

⁴⁶ Segal reads דארע (6) ----- .

⁴⁷ Segal reads קרו לי.

against Abba son of Barkhita. May they overturn and go against those who performed them and against those who sent them.

In the names of the three old men who are sitting in the furnace and the two who are sitting upon [the Sea of Salt] {in the furnace} (12)—Debybw son of Shilta and Tsarikha son of Marta and Paquman son of Mesharshita, and the two who are sitting upon the Sea of Salt—Abidag son of Gadri and Sapquna son of Nakhla—those who are appointed (13) over you.

And we have sent you this document in the name of Rabbi Joshua bar Perahia. Dead people dead people who are lying in the ground and sleeping in the earth accept the document that I have sent you, look and take (14) and receive every....document and take and accept his curse, and his oath, and his mishap, and his *neck charm*, his afflictions, and his [other types of] afflictions, and his evil rites, and his anathemas, and his hypocrisies, and his dispatches, (15) and sorceries, and knots,...that are being enacted and being prepared for Abba son of Barkhita.

04A⁴⁸

This final bowl is another of the BM bowls that displays the markings that indicate it to have been one of a pair that were lashed together with some kind of cord and secured with bitumen.



Figure 8. 04A

⁴⁸ Segal, 2000, pp. 45–46.

The text in this bowl does not, however, on first inspection seem to include elements that obviously connect it to the *qybl'* counter-charm texts discussed above. A closer look at three close parallels to this short text⁴⁹ reveals a definite relationship with our other texts. These parallels to 04A appear as sections of longer formulae all of which start with one or another permutation containing the verb אפך/הפך—"to overturn"—within them. They all belong to a family of permutations of a formula that is for overturning sorceries, curses and other harmful entities.⁵⁰ These texts present themselves as being for the overturning of sorceries and the like. One of these, 05A, even names an antagonist whom the client must have believed had cursed him—using this formula to overturn it.

Below is a synopsis of portions of the start and end of four versions of this formula. Note that like with other duplicates, there is considerable variance between the different texts, such as for instance the fact that in 04A:1 we have בולבול ("nightingale"), in 05A:7 כריבא ("crow"), whereas in the 11th line of the Yamauchi bowl we have דיבה ("wolf").

04A	05A ⁵¹	IM 9726 ⁵²	Yamauchi ⁵³
	(1) הפיכא הפיכא	(1) הפיך היפיכה	(1) מזמן הדין
	הפיכה שמיה הפיכה	{ארע} ארעה היפכה	מילתא (2) לאפוכי
	ארעה הפיכי כוכבי	שיקא היפיכה אופיכה	חרשי ומעבדי
	הפיכי מזלי הפיכא	אופיכה לוטתא דכל	מן (3) מירדבוך
	לוטתא הפיכה שעותא	בני (2) אינשה אופיכה	{ו}>ד>מתקרי מירדא
	הפיכה לוטתא חדא	לוטתא דכל בני	בר כוסיג הפיכא
	דאימה ודיברתא	אינשה אופיכה לוטתא	הפ>י>כא (4) הפיכא
	ודיחמתא (2) ודכלתא	דאימא וברתא דכלתא	ארעא הפיכא שמיא
	רחיקתא ודקריבתא	וחמותא דרחקתא	הפיכא כל מילי הפיכא
	דקימא ברוהקא	וקרבתא דקיימא	לוטתא (5) דאימא
	ודקימא בקורבא על		וברתא לכלתא וחמתא

⁴⁹ See Geller (1986), p. 105 and Hunter (2000).

⁵⁰ For a discussion of some of the versions in which this formula occurs, see also Naveh and Shaked (1985), p. 136.

⁵¹ With Müller-Kessler's corrections (2001/2, p. 120).

⁵² Hunter (2000).

⁵³ Yamauchi 1965, pp. 514–15.

04A	05A	IM 9726	Yamauchi
	בירכה רכבה ועל אנפיה נפל בפומיה ליט ...	בדברה (3) וקיימא במתא קיימא בדברה מלתה רכבה על אפה שקפה בפומה לוטיא ...	וּדְרַחֲקִתָּא וּדְקִרְיַבְתָּא דְקִימָא בְּדִבְרָא (6) וּדְקִימָא בְּמִתָּא דְקִימָא בִּיבְשָׁא עַל אִפֵּה נִפְלָא אֲרַעָא תִּקְפָּא וּזִידְנָא דְבִרָא וּפּוּמָא (7) לוּטָא ...(11)...
(1) קל בולבול בלילי קל תרנגלא בנגהי קלה דידי (2) מהוא דיקדח תני ויאלל תוב קדחתני (3) ויאלל תוב קדח תני ותני קח ותבי ויאלל	קל כריבא בלילי (8) קל תרנגלא בנגהי קלה דימשרשיא בר פורתי דקדח וצנף וממללא לוטתיה	וקל ברבל בלילי קל תרנגל בנגהי קלה דאימא ובת אוימאו קדח צנף ילילי (7) ותוב קדח צנף יליל ותוב קדח צנף יליל...	קל דיב>ה< ביל[יל] קל תרנגיל ב>נ<גה קלהין דנשי זידניתא ריקדתא וצנפא ותנחא וילילא

Translation of 05A:

(1) Overturned, overturned. Overturned be the heavens, overturned the earth, overturned the stars, overturned the planets, overturned the curse, overturned the hour, overturned the curse of the mother and of the daughter and of the mother-in-law (2) and of the daughter-in-law, far and near, standing afar and standing near. Upon his knees kneeling and upon his face falling, with his mouth cursing—

...

the voice of the crow by night, (8) the voice of the cock by daybreak; the voice of Mešaršiya son of Porti who wails and screams and utters his curse...

The text that we find in 04A seems truncated, as if incomplete. One might suggest the possibility that the bowl to which it was attached did have the “overturned” (הפִּיךְ הַפִּיכָה) formula that occurs in the other bowls before the formula that we have in 04A. In any event, we have seen that most of the *qybl* bowls that we have looked at above employ the verb הפִּיךְ “to overturn” within them. Indeed, the formula of which 04A is clearly a part has the verb הפִּיךְ “to overturn” as its main theme—like the *qybl* texts these are for “overturning” malicious magic.

Bowl no	One of a matching bitumened pair	Survivor of a bitumened pair	No bitumen	<i>qybl'</i> formula	Antagonist named pair	Yaror formula	Duplicate section (a)	Use of the verb הַפִּיכָה 'to overturn'	הַפִּיכָה overturning formula	Duplicate section (b)	(Which bowls)
Berlin <i>qybl'</i> bowls											
VA 2423	•			•	•	•		•		•	
VA 2416	•			•	•	•	•	•			
VA 2434	•			•	•	•	•	•			
VA 2424	•			•	•	•		•			
VA 2484		•		•	•	•	•	•			
VA 2575	•					•		•			
VA 2496	•					•		•			
London <i>qybl'</i> bowls											
039A		•		•	•	•		•			
041A		•		•	•	•		•			
040A			•	•	•						
020A		•				•	•				
025A		•			•					•	
04A		•							•		

Counter-charm Chart 2

Conclusion

The evidence is far from conclusive, but if we were to infer anything from what we looked at we would consider that joined pairs of bowls that were sealed with bitumen are related in some way to the *qybl'* texts. This could not be said of the *hpykh* texts—04A and its parallels—most of which do not show evidence of joining and sealing with bitumen. However, the fact that 04A, a *hpykh* text—also a counter-charm by definition—was lashed and sealed with bitumen suggests the possibility that this, the physical aspect of praxis, was adopted from its initial use in the *qybl'* type.

I would argue the possibility that the *qybl'* form has a special relation to the *qybl'* formula. It might be that the form originated from its use with the formula. However, the *qybl'* form and formula might have evolved independently, yet became more closely associated in praxis as the punning connection between the form and formula implied in the word *qybl'* was realized and exploited. If, however, it could be proved that the former is the case—i.e., the *qybl'* form was conceived as part of the function of the *qybl'* formula—then the trail of transmission of joining bowls and sealing with bitumen could be traced from its use with the *qybl'* formula to use in conjunction with the *hpykh* formula and beyond.

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