

"Bring to the Gates ... upon a good smell and upon good fragrances:" An Aramaic Incantation Bowl for Success in Business*

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To our teacher,
Professor M. J. Geller
(Dan. 5:12)

Introduction

In this paper, we are presenting a hitherto unpublished Aramaic incantation bowl from the collection of Samir Dehays. The bowl, designated SD34, measures 153 mm across and 55 mm in depth, contains fourteen lines written in a neat formal hand spiralling clockwise from the bottom of the concave side to its rim, and is mostly well preserved. The bowl most likely comes from Mesopotamia and should be reckoned to date from between the fourth and seventh centuries of the Common Era.

This text is an incantation for success in business. As Shaked has noted, in a recent introduction to Aramaic incantation bowls, texts for this purpose are surprisingly rare, so we are pleased to be able to present this particular example.¹ Harari, in an article that addresses the wider issue of the economic aspect of Jewish magic, discusses a variety of purposes underlying economic magic texts, including incantations for getting rich, industry, agriculture, gambling and those seeking to bring success to commercial ventures, whether for a travelling merchant or for the owner of a shop.² It is this latter type that corresponds best with our present text, which is seeking to bring customers to the client's business premises. Thus the theme of "gathering" is central to the functional terminology of this bowl and other such texts. Other examples of this type of incantation include BM 127396 (021A) and BM 127395 (022A),³ TS K1.26,⁴ TS K1.100 and TS

K1.152,⁵ TS NS 246.32,⁶ as well as two charms found in the Syriac "Book of Protection" (§§ 15 and 31).⁷

The text seeks to secure success in business for a certain Wartan, son of Miriai. The incantation is said to be *lšrywt ydyh d*, literally "for the untying of the

these duplicate texts, Segal misunderstands the opening word *lkynp*, translating it as *for the edge* and suggesting that it relates to the placing of the bowl in the corner of a room or house. We suggest that this term should be translated as *for the gathering*, and this appears to be confirmed by the bowls' content, which makes it clear that economic success is being sought by the clients, as well as by the use of this same root in our present text (Sections III and V). This appears to be further confirmed by the use of the phrase *lkynp* for the title of a ritual, described in the *Sword of Moses*, in which, in order to bring trade from the streets into the house, one deposits dust from the house in the streets and then deposits dust from the streets in the house – see Y. Harari, *The Sword of Moses: A New Edition and Study* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem, Academ, 1997), 42. In general, readers consulting Segal's *Catalogue* should also consult the reviews by J. N. Ford (*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 26 [2002], 237-272), C. Kessler (*Archiv für Orientforschung* 48/49 [2001-2002], 115-145) and S. Bhayro (*Bibliotheca Orientalis* 61 [2004], 390-393).

⁴ P. Schäfer – S. Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*: Band II (*Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum* 64; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 266-273.

⁵ L. H. Schiffman – M. D. Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Geniza: Selected Texts from Taylor-Schechter Box K1* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 106-109 and 137-142.

⁶ J. Naveh – S. Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1993), 235-238.

⁷ H. Gollancz, *The Book of Protection, Being a Collection of Syriac Charms now edited for the first time from Syriac mss, with translation, introduction and notes* (London, Oxford University Press, 1912), xxxiv-xxxv, xliii-xliv, 11-12, 19-20.

hand of," which we have translated "for the prosperity of." This is probably a general idiom, which in this case is being applied to economic activity. It is possible that the client was concerned that his success in business was threatened by a curse that was binding his hand, i.e. restricting his trade,⁸ in which case the present text would be a counter-charm intended to loosen his hand and enable him to trade and prosper.⁹

Section I includes this idiom with the standard opening formula ("May there be healing from Heaven ..."), and also with the first call for customers to come to the client's premises. This motif of gathering/assembling recurs in respect of customers in Section III, and also in Section VIII where it is accompanied by a simile concerning nesting birds. In Sections IV and V, the gathering motif is also applied to the angels invoked in the bowl, almost as if the assembling of the angels is a symbolic precursor to the assembling of the customers. Not surprisingly, given the purpose of the bowl, the summoned angels are described, in Section V, as being angels of profit and business affairs. The motif of gathering is also applied in a more abstract way to trade in Section VII.¹⁰

The incantation ends with three quotations from Isaiah 60 (Sections X-XII), which confirm the purpose of the bowl. Apart from the use of *waw* (three times for *holem* and twice for *qibbūs*) and *yudh* (once for *serē* and six times for *hīreq*) as *matres lectionis*, the bowl differs from the Masoretic Text (MT) in only two instances – these are discussed in the accompanying *Notes* section.

Note the interchange between *aleph* and *ayin* in the word '*syq*' in line 11 and '*syq*' in line 13, as well as the use of '*bd*' for '*bd*' (lines 11 and 13) whereas the *ayin* is preserved in the noun '*ybd*' (line 5). This reduction of *ayin* to *aleph* is well known for Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic,¹¹ but, as Juusola notes, it is infrequent in the bowl texts.¹²

⁸ For several examples of such curses, see J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), 151-174.

⁹ We have not found any exact parallels for this phrase. Compare, however, BM 91707 (028A), lines 8-9, which refers to "all that is loosed (*šry*) from him in his right hand" returning into his left hand. Although *yd* is not the object of the verb, but rather the location of the loosening, the context still appears to involve the transfer of wealth – see Segal (2000), 69 (above n. 3).

¹⁰ The theme of gathering also occurs in TS K1.100: 13 and TS K1.152: 28, although in these cases the root '*sp*' is used; see Schiffman – Swartz (1992), 107-108 and 139-140 (above n. 5).

¹¹ J. N. Epstein, *A Grammar of Babylonian Aramaic* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1960), 17-18.

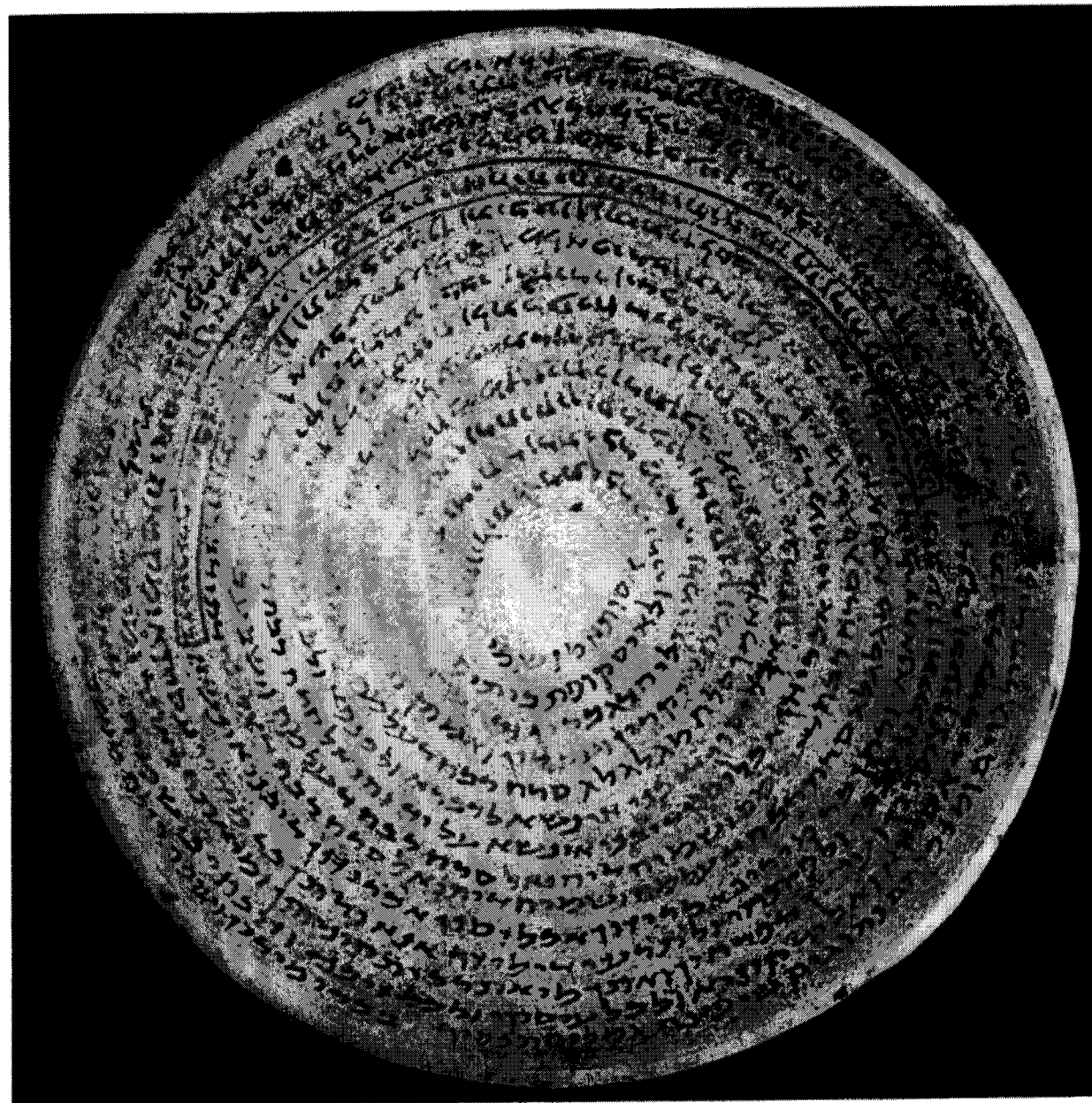
¹² H. Juusola, *Linguistic Peculiarities in the Aramaic Magic Bowl Texts* (Helsinki, Finnish Oriental Society, 1999), 36-37.

Transcription¹³

- I.
(1) 'swt' mn šmyh tyhwy lyh lwrtm br myryy
(2) wlysqwpt bytyh wšrywt ydyh dwrtm br myryy
(3) wlmtylyh dgbryn wdynšyn yhw'dyn w'rm'yn wrhyqyn
wqrybyn wdtqyn (4) wmyštqryn w'bdyn w'mhn y(twn
wy)'sqwn lyh bymzwnyh lwrtm br myryy (5) 'mn 'mn
slh
- II.
mglglg srh rbh d'lmh (.) dhw' rb wšlyt 'l 'ybdy rzy 'lmh
wlyh pqydy
- III.
'kryzwn (6) 'klysyn dy bny 'ynš' ldr' wlknp' wlkns'
lbbyh wlpthyh wlt'ryh dylyh dwrtm br myryy
- IV.
(7) 'kryzwn 'klysyn dy bny 'ynš' 'l yd yhw'l srh rbh
d'lmh dyqwm btr'y bby wyqyry wydkr šmk 'nt' mglglg
srh (8) rbh d'lmh wšmyh dyhw'l srh rbh d'lmh wysb'
byšmh hdyn
- V.
'šb'yt 'lykwn ml'ky rbwt' wml'ky šbw't' 'nt' (9) mglglg
srh rbh d'lmh wšmyh dyhw'l srh rbh d'lmh dtydbrwn
wtytknpwn wtytknšwn wtyb'wn wtytwn lbby wlpthyh
wlt'ry dyly (10) zh 'n' wrtn br myryy
- VI.
'kryzwn 'klysyn {'kryzwn} dy bny 'ynš' byšmyh d'b(...
gs) hš yh ktbyt yhw'h yhw'h yhw'h yhw'h yhw hw wrwh
pysqnywt
- VII.
(11) tyb'wn wtytwn lbby wlpthyh wlt'ry dyly zh 'n' wrtn
br myryy 'syq' wmqn'h w'by<d> qyny' 'l ryh tš w'l
bwsmyyn tšyn
- VIII.
k'yn 'wrbyn qlylyn wk'yn lpydyn dnwr (12) wk'yn
sypryn w'wpyn dprhyn w'tn my'tr byt qynyhwn wmy'tr
l'tr wmymdynh l'tr kyn yprhwn wtytwn bny 'ynš' b'glh
lbby wlpthyh wlt'ry dyly zh 'n' (13) wrtn br myryy 'syq'
w'byd qyny' wkl 'ysqy wkl zybyny wzybwny
- IX.
byšmyh d'l šdy yhw'h šb'wt 'mn 'mn slh {p} hllwyh
- X.
pythw š'ryyk tmyd ywmm wlylh w'p' ysgrw lhy' (14) 'lyk
hyl gwym wmlkyhm nhwgym

¹³ We have divided the text into eleven sections, numbered with Roman numerals, to enable our discussion of its structure. Line numbers in parentheses correspond to the text as it appears in the bowl.

Signs used in the transcription are: () for uncertain readings; < > for omissions; and { } for superfluous writing or an erasure in the text.



SD 34

XI.
šyp't gmlym tksyk bkry mydyn w'yph kwlm myšb' ybw'w
zhb wl(bw)nh yš'w wthylwt yhwh ybsrw

XII.
my 'lh k'b t'wph wkywnym 'l 'rwbwtyhm

Translation

I.
(1) May there be healing from Heaven for Wartan son of Miriai, (2) and for the threshold of his house, and for the prosperity of Wartan son of Miriai, (3) and for the coming to him of men and of women, Jews and Gentiles, and strangers and relatives, and of those who are honest (4) and dishonest, and male servants and female servants; may they come and deal with him,

with regard to his livelihood, namely Wartan son of Miriai, (5) amen amen selah.

II.
MGLGLG, the great prince of the world who is master and ruler over the working of the mysteries of the world, and by him they are commanded.

III.
(6) The multitudes of the people have proclaimed to lead and to assemble and to gather together to the door and to the entrance and to the gate of Wartan son of Miriai.

IV.
(7) The multitudes of the people have proclaimed by the hand of Yeho'el, the great prince of the world, that he shall stand at the gates of my door, and he shall call

out and mention your name – you MGLGLG, the great (8) prince of the world, and the name of Yeho'el, the great prince of the world – and he shall adjure in this name.

V.
I adjure you angels of profit and angels of business affairs – you (9) MGLGLG, the great prince of the world, and the name of Yeho'el, the great prince of the world – that you shall be taken and you shall assemble and gather together and seek and bring to my door and to my entrance and to my gate, (10) I, Wartan son of Miriai.

VI.
The multitudes of the people have proclaimed in the name of ... YH; I have written YHWH YWYH YWYH YWYH YHW HW and the intercessory spirit.

VII.
(11) May you seek and bring to my door and to my entrance and to my gate, I, Wartan son of Miriai, the businessman and the seller and the purchaser upon a good smell and upon good fragrances.

VIII.
Like swift ravens and like torches of fire (12) and like birds and fowls that depart and come from the place of the house of their nests, and from place to place, and from city to place, thus may people depart and come swiftly to my door and to my entrance and to my gate, I, (13) Wartan son of Miriai; the businessman and the purchaser, indeed, for all my business and for all my buying and my selling.

IX.
In the name of El Shaddai YHWH Sebaot, amen amen selah. Hallelujah.

X. "Open your gates continually; and they shall not be shut day or night, to bring (14) to you the wealth of nations; and their kings are led." [Isaiah 60:11]

XI. "The abundance of camels shall cover you, dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all of them from Sheba shall come; gold and incense they shall bring, and the praises of the LORD they shall announce." [Isaiah 60:6]

XII. "Who are these that as a cloud fly, and as doves to their windows?" [Isaiah 60:8]

Notes

(1) 'swt' mn šmyh tyhwy "May there be healing from Heaven"

A not uncommon opening formula for incantation bowls, the "healing" usually refers to medical conditions or demonic affliction – see D. Levene, "A Happy Thought of the Magician, The Magical Get," in R. Deutsch (ed.), *Shlomo: Studies in Epigraphy, Iconog-*

raphy, History and Archaeology in Honor of Shlomo Moussaieff (Tel-Aviv – Jaffa, Archaeological Center Publications, 2003), 175-184 (184); the healing being sought in this case, however, is financial rather than physical or spiritual.

wrtm br myryy "Wartan son of Miriai"

Wartan appears to be the Persian name *Wardan* – cf. F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch* (Marburg, N. G. Elwert, 1895), 351-353. The mother's name appears to be a form of the name Miriam, akin to the Mandaic *Miriai* (DM 270).

(2) wšrywt ydyh "and for the prosperity"

Lit. "and for the untying of the hand" (see the Introduction for more on this terminology).

(3) wlmtylyh "and for the coming to him"

A Pe'al infinitive with dative preposition and 3rd m. sg. pronominal suffix, only it lacks the *yudh*. The expected form would be *lmytylyh*.

wrhyqyn wqrybyn "and strangers and relatives"

Or, alternatively, "and those far and near."

(3-4) wdtqnyn wmyštqryn "and of those who are honest and dishonest"

This strange phrase also occurs in BM 91707 (028A), line 7 – see Segal (2000), 69.

(4) y(twn wy)t'sqwn "may they come and deal"

Several letters are very unclear; alternatively: w(hnyn y)t'sqwn "and may these deal."

(7) yhw'l "Yeho'el"

Not an uncommon angel name, cf. J. Naveh – S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, second corrected edition, 1987), 158-163.

(8) m'ky rbwt' wml'ky šbw't' "angels of profit and angels of business affairs"

Cf. Mandaic *rbuta* "profit" (DM 423) and the equivalent of *šbw't'* in Syriac (PS 3353) and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (DJBA 950).

(9) wtytwn "and (you shall) bring"

Although it could be a Pe'al, "and (you shall) come," we have opted to treat this as an Aph'el because the same form also occurs in line 11, where it is a certain Aph'el, having "the businessman and the seller and the purchaser" as its object.

(9-10) wltr'y dylz zh 'n' "and to my gate, I"

The same expression occurs in lines 11 and 12, and a similar expression occurs in line 6. The phrase is very emphatic – lit. "and to my gate, that is mine, I ... (PN)" – but clearly attested elsewhere; see, for example, T. Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 334, note 2. We have not been able to identify the particle *zh*, and it is thus not translated. It could be another

emphatic feature of the phrase “and to my gate, that is mine, *namely* I ... (PN)”, or it could be an alternative form of *zy*, cf. New Persian *zihi* (DJBA 405), which is used as an enclitic particle following an imperative, in which case its use here would have the effect of emphasising the preceding subjunctive verbs rather than the identity of the client.

(10) {*kryzwn*}

Comparing with the other occurrences of this formula in lines 6 and 7, this word is probably redundant.

wrwh pysqnywt “and the intercessory spirit”

The expected form of this word is *pysqwnyt*, cf. *rwħ psqwnyt* in bSan 44b. The corrupt form *psq(yw)nywt* does occur, however, in Schäfer’s *Synopse* § 628 – see P. Schäfer *et al.*, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 2)*; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1981). See also D. Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London, Kegan Paul, 2003), 112–113.

(11) {*syq*} *wmqn’h w’by<d> qyny* “the businessman and the seller and the purchaser”

The *daleth* is restored on the basis of the *w’byd qyny* in line 13. We have chosen to translate these terms as referring to people, although the rendering “business and acquisition and the making of property” is also possible. See also line 13.

{*l ryħ tħ w’l bwsmnyn tħyn* “upon a good smell and upon good fragrances”

This may be a reference to the burning of incense at the conclusion of a business deal. The apparent relationship between *√gmr* “to finish,” *m(w)gmr* “spices put on coals” and *gwmrt* “hot coal” could hint at this practice.

(12) *√prħ* “depart”

The use of the root *prħ* “depart,” first in relation to birds and then in relation to potential customers, makes a pun, as it can also mean “to fly.”

wytwn “and (they shall) come”

Unlike the occurrences in lines 9 and 11, this is more likely to be a Pe‘al, as the phrase *yprhwn wytwn* corresponds to the *prħyn w’tn* which occurs earlier in the same line, and in which the *’tn* is an unambiguous Pe‘al.

(13) *zybny wzybwny* “my buying and my selling”

Cf. Mandaic *zybn’k wz’bwn’k* “your purchase and your selling” (DM 157); Sokoloff glosses this idiomatically as “business dealings” (DJBA 406).

{*p*}

It appears that the scribe started to write the quote from Isaiah 60:11 (*pythw*), but then crossed out the initial *pe*, opting first to write *hllwyh*.

pythw “open”

The MT has *wptħw* “And open.”

(14) {*wpnh*} “fly”

Note that the bowl does not have the *yudh* that accompanies the *s’gôl* in the MT (*’wpynh*).

Abbreviations

- DJBA M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan – Baltimore, Bar Ilan University Press – The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002)
- DM E. S. Drower – R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963)
- PS R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1879–1898)