

no disqualification, for the history of science shows that scientific enquiry has until very recently been, more often than not, no pure and autonomous discipline but motivated by religious and theological ideologies.

The Babylonians, who inhabited a world where the gods left, constantly and everywhere, portents for decoding as signs of their intentions, could not do otherwise than include the study of these portents in their attempts to organize and advance their knowledge of the world around them. And in seeking to understand such signs they could not do otherwise than employ the hermeneutic tools that they customarily used in their search for deeper understanding, for example of the names of gods and temples. For them this was the method that offered the best hope of revealing how signs and portents, as well as names, conveyed meaning. They also employed analogy. Many of the basic analogical principles that underlie Babylonian divination are self-evident, for example the convention by which right = *pars familiaris* and left = *pars hostilis*. But because the signs were god-given, it was taken for granted that they often transcended human understanding, and that sometimes their exact significance necessarily defied complete explanation by the rational mind. Ultimately, any scientific exploration of Babylonian divination in search of underlying principles is then doomed to find a shortage of consistent rules, but Koch's texts show that ancient minds grappled with theory as rigorously as modern scholars.

A. R. George

DANIEL SCHWEMER:

Abwehrzauber und Behexung: Studien zum Schadenauberglauben im alten Mesopotamien.

xix, 330 pp. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007. €58. ISBN 978 3 447 05640 3.

This important book is a convenient and insightful survey of all Akkadian, Sumerian and Hittite texts relating to witchcraft, based upon published and unpublished sources.

As comprehensive as this book is, one can legitimately wonder about the psychology behind witchcraft; Schwemer makes some comments in this direction, but more could be said. The crucial point is that one need not have witches in order to have witchcraft. We have little evidence for any cuneiform witchcraft vademecum or comprehensive textbook explaining exactly how one bewitches an adversary or rival. We have a few love incantations which try to help one seduce a lady, but this is as close as we come to black magic. Our textual evidence concentrates predominantly on the danger posed by witches and witchcraft and how to protect oneself against it. In all of these cases, there is a psychological aspect to incantations and rituals which needs to be considered, rather than simply accepting the descriptions of witches and witchcraft at face value. Each of these colourful depictions of witches, as well as the dramatic peregrinations of anti-witchcraft rituals, were calculated to have a predetermined impact upon the patient's psyche, which is the real explanation for why and how this magic is used and becomes effective. The use of figurines, for instance, allowed the patient to transfer his or her fear or loathing of witchcraft (whatever it represents) onto an object which could then

be subjected to various ritual acts, such as piercing with sharp objects, being destroyed, or being sent away, symbolically, to the Netherworld. Witchcraft, to an anxious patient, represents any unseen or invisible inimical force. It is not obvious whether the various ailments attributed to witchcraft (pp. 170 ff.) could be psychosomatic. Although this cannot be ruled out, it is more likely that witchcraft was simply another type of diagnosis for diseases, the real causes of which were far beyond the technical comprehension of the ancient physician. Nevertheless, the positive psychological impact on the patient of a diagnosis is well known, in the same way that ancient medicines often relied upon placebo effects. Even the various anti-witchcraft rituals were probably calculated to have a specific appeal to patients suffering from different states of anxiety. In one ritual, for instance, Ishtar and Dumuzi figurines mimic the storyline of Ishtar's Descent to the Netherworld, in which she takes revenge on her husband Dumuzi; this probably had great appeal to a patient whose "problem" had some sort of sexual component, even at a subconscious level. Another ritual, based upon burying a household mouse, may have appealed to a patient who was obsessive about uncleanness or impurity. Yet another called for the intentional loss of a leather bag containing gold, silver and precious stones, for someone else to find, as a way of transferring the witchcraft to an unsuspecting passer-by (p. 221). There is a subtle advantage to the patient who performs this ritual, who feels unjustly and arbitrarily attacked in the first place – through no fault of his own – and the ritual allows him to pass on the evil in the same haphazard way to someone else. These incantations and rituals play with basic human emotions, such as feelings of revenge, guilt, and fear of the unknown, and they allow the patient to feel more in control of his or her own fate.

Another approach to studying the wealth of material Schwemer presents is to see a wider context, particularly with reference to Aramaic magic. Although very few parallels between Akkadian magic and Aramaic magic bowls can be found, one passage cited in this book qualifies as a significant parallel text (see p. 88):

The witch has fed me with bread and gave me beer to drink, bathed me in water, anointed me in oil, fed me with provisions. Regarding whatever she fed me, regarding whatever she gave me to drink, regarding whatever in which she bathed me, regarding whatever in which she anointed me, she offered it dutifully, so that (now) my name is invoked pejoratively.

The passage is noticeably close to an Aramaic magic bowl studied by see C. Müller-Kessler and T. Kwasman ("A unique talmudic Aramaic incantation bowl", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, 2000, 159–65). The Aramaic dialect of this bowl is exceptional, being close to that of the Babylonian Talmud and hence probably reflects an older stratum of magic bowls. In this bowl, the client addresses the demon (or perhaps witch) as follows: "that you will eat what I eat and you will drink what I drink and you will anoint what I anoint", which is repeated in the converse way, "let my palate eat what you eat and let me drink what you drink and let me anoint what you anoint".

The point is that the human victim and demon or witch share the same fare, bath, and anointing practices, which is one way in which witchcraft causes harm. Such passages are relatively rare in magic bowls, although one other shared motif is that the witch's harmful words are being reversed back into her own mouth (p. 143), an equivalent phrase which occurs in Aramaic magic bowls (see D. Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls* (London, 2003), 44 f.).

Furthermore, one would not necessarily expect to find references to the Bible in a work of this kind, but there is a highly relevant comparison between one biblical verse and the texts presented in this volume. Ex. 2:17 commands, “do not allow a witch (*mkšph*) to live”, which has been a defining statement in Western notions of biblical magic and has fostered the widespread belief in the Bible’s opposition to magic of all kinds. There is no doubt about the close cognate relationship between biblical *mkšph* and Akkadian *kaššaptu*, “witch”, whose nature and activities Schwemer comprehensively explains (p. 118 f.). The point worth emphasizing is that this biblical verse is not expressing opposition to magic in general but to “witchcraft”, which was universally vilified in antiquity as *Schadenzauber*, the type of magic calculated to cause harm or cause someone to act against his/her will (even by falling in love). It is also worth mentioning that it is the female witch most often cited in the context of witchcraft, which has less to do with misogyny and more to do with some aspect of witchcraft which still requires explanation. In any case, the biblical references to witchcraft, probably based upon Akkadian prototypes, had an enormous impact in later Judaism and Christianity on subsequent attitudes towards magic in general as an illegal and immoral endeavour, the methods and aims of which were thought contrary to established religion. The Akkadian context shows how biblical passages on witchcraft were widely misunderstood and misinterpreted.

Finally, the author has reviewed the entire history of witchcraft texts, and among the earliest is the following Sumerian incantation which he has edited and provisionally translated. The present reviewer would like to offer the following alternative proposals for understanding this text (VS 17 31, collated by Schwemer):

1. munus-uš₁₁-zu šu bal-e-da
 2. nam-gir-pad-rá-ni-ta pa an<-ni>-íb-ku₄-ku₄
 3. ka-ni abul gi₆-da kéš-da
 4. ^dutu ki-ku₅ tu₆ zu-dè al-bal-e-da
 5. sahar-bi íd-da šub-ba
 6. i-bí-bi an-na íb-e₁₁
 7. ^dnin-girim nin tu₆-tu₆-^rke₄ ^r
 8. ki-gub-ba-mu nu-gub-ba ki-gál-la-mu nu-gál-la
- rev.
9. igi ^dutu e-sír ti-la du-du-àm
 10. šà ti-la gar-ra-àm
 11. ka-inim-ma uš₁₁-búr-ru-da-kam

1. To counteract a witch–
2. (who) has hidden it (= a spell) from in (a victim’s) skeleton–
3. her mouth is a city gate to be bound (closed) at night.
4. O Judge Utu, to know the incantation is to overturn (the spell),
5. its dust (i.e. of the incantation) is thrown in the river,
6. its smoke (i.e. of the incantation) rises up in heaven.
7. O Ningiramma lady of incantations,
8. by (the witch) not standing where I stand and not being where I am,
9. is like walking the path of good health in broad daylight,
10. is like having a healthy “heart”.
11. It is an incantation to break a spell.

Notes:

2) Schwemer left this line untranslated, being unsure as to whether *nam* should be joined to *gir-pad* or not. It would be unlikely for “*nam*” to be an independent word here for “fate” (Akk. *šimtu*), since “fate” would normally be rendered as *nam-tar*. As an abstract noun, *nam-gir-pad* expresses the idea of the frame of the body (or skeleton) as hidden internal anatomy, into which the spell is deposited and remains hidden from view; for this idea, for convenience, see *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* E 343b.

The verb *pa ku₄* (-*ku₄*) is an antonym of the compound verb *pa -è*, “to make manifest”, and hence means “to conceal” or perhaps “to deposit” (and hence being hidden from sight). There is no Sum. expression yet found to correspond in bilingual texts to Akk. *puzzuru*, “to conceal”.

3) A similar type of metaphor appears in Maqlu I 31, “may (the witch’s) mouth be tallow, may her tongue be salt”.

4) This line looks proverbial, expressing the rule that one can only counter witchcraft by learning the appropriate incantation (with its accompanying rituals). A similar idea occurs in Udughul incantations, in which the exorcist is told “to hasten and learn the ways of the Sibitti-demons” (UH 12: 46 and 13–15: 65, see now M. J. Geller, *Evil Demons* (Helsinki, 2007), pp. 159 and 168). 5–6) The “its” of “its dust” and “its smoke” refer to the rituals which accompany the incantation, and not to the witch, as suggested by Schwemer. In this case, the ritual instructions are purely schematic, somewhat similar to *namburbî* type rituals.

7) The e-postposition particle at the end of this line is presumed to be an alternative form of the vocative.

9–10) The *àm* suffixes are interpreted here as similes, as alternatives to *gim*. I can find no specific grammatical justification for Schwemer’s translation in the first person, “werde ich gesund” and “wird mir zuteil”, although the text is vague and open to a variety of interpretations.

Schwemer’s book is a great contribution to the study of Mesopotamian magic. It is not written in a popular style and it is clearly meant for specialists and colleagues who can follow the complex arguments and data. As such, it pushes back the boundaries of our knowledge in many fundamental ways.

M. J. Geller

JOHN ALAN HALLORAN:

Sumerian Lexicon: A Dictionary Guide to the Ancient Sumerian Language.

xiv, 318 pp. Los Angeles: Logogram Publishing, 2006. ISBN 978 0 9786429 0 7.

CATHERINE MITTERMAYER:

Altbabylonische Zeichenliste der sumerisch-literarischen Texte.

(Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis.) xii, 292 pp. Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006. ISBN 978 3 7278 1551 5.

These books are being reviewed together because both intend to work towards the common goal of providing basic working tools for students studying Sumerian language, although from rather different perspectives. Both