



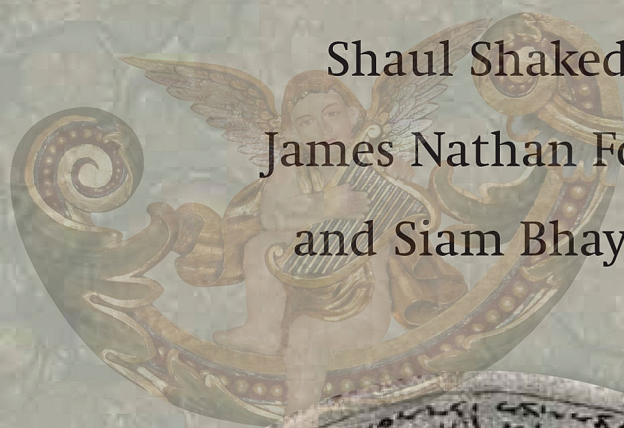
CHRISTIAN  
MUSICOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY OF INDIA

# Aramaic Bowl Spells

*Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*

VOLUME ONE

Shaul Shaked,  
James Nathan Ford,  
and Siam Bhayro



MAGICAL AND RELIGIOUS LITERATURE OF LATE ANTIQUITY 1

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# Aramaic Bowl Spells

Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls

Volume One

*By*

Shaul Shaked

James Nathan Ford

Siam Bhayro

*With contributions from*

Matthew Morgenstern

Naama Vilozny

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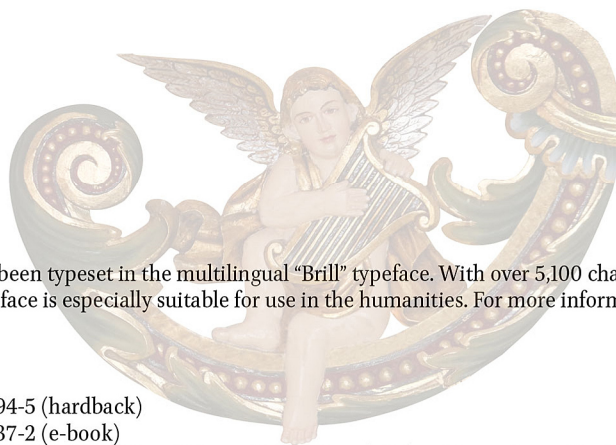
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## CONTENTS

Preface .....	XIII
List of Figures .....	XVII
List of Photographs .....	XIX
Abbreviations .....	XXI
List of Other Bowls .....	XXV
Sigla .....	XXVII
Introduction .....	1
The Historical, Literary and Religious Context .....	1
Terms Designating “Bowl”, “Amulet” and “Spell” .....	8
The Structure of an Incantation .....	8
Single-Spell Incantations .....	9
Multi-Spell Incantations .....	10
Literary Features .....	13
<i>Historiola</i> e .....	13
Biblical Quotations .....	18
Echoes of Biblical Themes .....	20
Prayer Book Quotations and Allusions .....	21
Mishnaic Quotations .....	22
Echoes of Hekhalot .....	23
The Art of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls ( <i>Naama Vilozny</i> ) .....	29
Stylistic Aspects of the Figures Appearing on the Incantation Bowls .....	30
The Artists’ Sources .....	33
The Link between the Texts and the Drawings .....	35
The Drawings of the Incantation Bowls—A Magic Art .....	36
Summary .....	37
Linguistic Features of the Texts in This Volume ( <i>Matthew Morgenstern</i> ) .....	39
Orthography and Phonology .....	40
Use of <i>’aleph</i> and <i>he</i> .....	40
<i>Shewa</i> .....	41
/ <i>ā</i> / .....	41
Assimilation, Dissimilation, and Other Sound Changes .....	41
Affixed Pronouns .....	42
The Verb .....	43
Perfect .....	43
Imperfect .....	44
Imperative .....	44
Participles .....	45
Numerals .....	45
Syntax .....	46
Particles .....	46





Vocabulary .....	46
Conclusion .....	49

## I.1 RABBI HANINA BEN DOSA

Introduction .....	53
JBA 1 (MS 1927/8) .....	56
JBA 2 (MS 1927/29) .....	59
JBA 3 (MS 1927/45) .....	62
JBA 4 (MS 1927/47) .....	65
JBA 5 (MS 1927/64) .....	68
JBA 6 (MS 2053/10) .....	71
JBA 7 (MS 2053/12) .....	74
JBA 8 (MS 2053/55) .....	77
JBA 9 (MS 2053/183) .....	79
JBA 10 (MS 2053/185) .....	83

### *I.1.1 Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa: Omitted by Haplography*

Introduction .....	89
JBA 11 (MS 2053/79) .....	91
JBA 12 (MS 2053/178) .....	94

## I.2 DIVORCE TEXTS

Introduction .....	99
--------------------	----

### *I.2.1 Divorce Texts: Joshua bar Peraḥia*

Introduction .....	103
JBA 13 (MS 1927/5) .....	105
JBA 14 (MS 1927/39) .....	107
JBA 15 (MS 1927/43) .....	110
JBA 16 (MS 1929/16) .....	114
JBA 17 (MS 2053/33) .....	117
JBA 18 (MS 2053/103) .....	119
JBA 19 (MS 2053/132) .....	123
JBA 20 (MS 2053/150) .....	126
JBA 21 (MS 2053/164) .....	129
JBA 22 (MS 2053/165) .....	132
JBA 23 (MS 2053/206) .....	134
JBA 24 (MS 2053/251) .....	137
JBA 25 (MS 2053/280) .....	140

### *I.2.1.1 Divorce Texts: Joshua bar Peraḥia (with Magical Excommunication rather than Divorce)*

Introduction .....	151
JBA 26 (MS 1928/43) .....	152





*I.2.2 Divorce Texts: Elisur Bagdana*

Introduction .....	157
JBA 27 (MS 1927/16) .....	160
JBA 28 (MS 1927/25) .....	162
JBA 29 (MS 1927/51) .....	164
JBA 30 (MS 1928/47) .....	166
JBA 31 (MS 2053/41) .....	169
JBA 32 (MS 2053/64) .....	172
JBA 33 (MS 2053/83) .....	174
JBA 34 (MS 2053/86) .....	177
JBA 35 (MS 2053/89) .....	181
JBA 36 (MS 2053/110) .....	183
JBA 37 (MS 2053/123) .....	185
JBA 38 (MS 2053/151) .....	187
JBA 39 (MS 2053/162) .....	190
JBA 40 (MS 2053/167) .....	192
JBA 41 (MS 2053/184) .....	195
JBA 42 (MS 2053/190) .....	197
JBA 43 (MS 2053/193) .....	200
JBA 44 (MS 2053/213) .....	202
JBA 45 (MS 2053/237) .....	204
JBA 46 (MS 2053/249) .....	208
JBA 47 (MS 2053/258) .....	211

*I.2.2.1 Divorce Texts: Elisur Bagdana (Divorce Formula not Present)*

Introduction .....	217
JBA 48 (MS 2053/200) .....	218
JBA 49 (MS 2053/270) .....	221

*I.2.3 Divorce Texts: The Lilith Zanay, the Fornicating Singing-Girl*

Introduction .....	225
JBA 50 (MS 2053/207) .....	226
JBA 51 (MS 2053/209) .....	229
JBA 52 (MS 2053/231) .....	232
JBA 53 (MS 2053/253) .....	235
JBA 54 (MS 2053/273) .....	238

*I.2.4 Divorce Texts: Other Divorce Texts*

Introduction .....	243
JBA 55 (MS 1928/1) .....	245
JBA 56 (MS 1928/8) .....	249
JBA 57 (MS 2053/36) .....	254
JBA 58 (MS 2053/166) .....	258
JBA 59 (MS 2053/174) .....	260
JBA 60 (MS 2053/212) .....	263
JBA 61 (MS 2053/214) .....	266





JBA 62 (MS 2053/242) .....	268
JBA 63 (MS 2053/250) .....	270
JBA 64 (MS 2053/256) .....	273
Glossary .....	279
List of Divine Names, Names of Angels, Demons and Exemplary Figures, and <i>nomina barbara</i> ....	333
List of Clients and Adversaries .....	345
List of Biblical Quotations .....	353
List of Texts .....	355
Bibliography .....	359
Index .....	367



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SOCIETY OF INDIA



## PREFACE

The magic bowls in the Schøyen Collection form part of a vast and unique collection of written documents on various surfaces assembled from many parts of the globe and representing a large number of cultures, languages, religions, and periods.

Some statistical data may be quoted from the description given in the internet site of the Schøyen Collection (<http://www.schoyencollection.com>):

The whole collection comprises 13,717 manuscript items, including 2,269 volumes. 6,860 manuscript items are from the ancient period, 3300 BC–500 AD; 3,844 are from the medieval period, 500–1500; and 3,013 are post-medieval. There are manuscripts from 134 different countries and territories in 120 languages and 184 scripts.

For the incantation bowls in the Schøyen Collection, the following data, borrowed from the same site (with slight modifications), may be given:

The collection comprises 654 Aramaic incantation bowls and jugs from the Near East, dated between the fifth and the seventh or eighth centuries AD. In the majority of bowls there are written texts of spells and incantations against demons in several varieties of Aramaic. Bowls with Jewish Aramaic texts very often contain quotations from the Hebrew Bible. Some of these quotations are not attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and this makes them the earliest witnesses to the original text of the Old Testament.

The bowls are not only part of our common heritage and that of the Sasanian Empire but, more specifically, of the Jewish, Christian and Mandaic communities. The Jewish Aramaic bowls also have the earliest examples of *Hekhalot* or Jewish mystical texts, as well as part of the *Shema* prayer or extracts from the Mishna. We also find named Jewish rabbis and demons as well as information about Jewish legal practice.

The earlier bowls acquired for the collection carry numbers starting with MS 1911, MS 1927, MS 1928, MS 1929, MS 2046. In these groups, the bowls in different languages were put together. Subsequent numbers were designated for a specific language: MS 2053 contains Jewish Babylonian Aramaic bowls; MS 2054 contains Mandaic; MS 2055 has Syriac; MS 2056 has Middle Persian, and MS 2057 comprises bowls with artificial scripts and drawings.

No study of this kind can succeed without the help and support of many people. I began work on the collection in 1995, when I spent a year at NIAS, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies, as member of a research group working on magic in Antiquity. The papers delivered at a conference at the end of that year in a volume with the title *Mesopotamian magic: textual, historical, and interpretive perspectives*, ed. by T. Abusch and K. van der Toorn, Groningen 1999, convey an idea of the work done by the group.

The Schøyen Collection of bowls was at first deposited temporarily at University College London to facilitate the scholarly work, carried out with Martin Schøyen's support. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Mr Schøyen for the opportunity to study these fascinating documents and for his patience in the face of the very prolonged period of gestation that this work demanded.

Students from the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London generously helped organize the bowls and facilitate my study of them. Dan Levene, now Reader in History at the University of Southampton and an expert in the Aramaic magic bowls, was my first assistant. He was followed in 1997 by Siam Bhayro. Dr Bhayro, now Senior Lecturer in Early Jewish Studies at the University of Exeter, has continued to be associated with this project in various ways up to the present. In 2008 I asked him to join the publication team. He has undertaken, to my great relief, the arduous charge of editing the complex text of this series of volumes, and I am deeply grateful to him.





Professor Mark Geller of University College London was of enormous help in getting the work started and in facilitating the process of studying the bowls. As head of the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UCL, he helped with logistics and provided a congenial intellectual and physical environment; most of all, he contributed his great enthusiasm for the subject-matter of the magic bowls. I am deeply grateful for his friendship and kindness. Other heads of the department, the late Professor John Klier and his successor, Professor Ada Rapoport-Albert, were also kindly disposed to provide help and advice.

Wolfson College, Cambridge, provided warm hospitality to the present writer on a number of occasions. I worked there in 1988 on the Cambridge Geniza collection, and in 2000/1 on the Schøyen Collection. This enabled me to work on the magic bowls in a congenial scholarly environment. In particular I would like to thank Professors Nicholas de Lange and Geoffrey Khan for their friendship and help, as well as Professor Stefan Reif, former head of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit in the Cambridge University Library.

In 2001 I finished the first stage of the work, with most of the bowls in the three major languages transcribed and provided with provisional translations. The sheer size and complexity of the undertaking was quite daunting. I was, besides, engaged in other large-scale projects, which prevented me from devoting the necessary time to this edition.

Luckily there were, among the students who took part in my courses on the Aramaic incantation bowls at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a number of young scholars who have since distinguished themselves in this and related fields. Dr James Nathan Ford, who is also an expert in Ugaritic, deserves particular mention. He has since proved himself to be an outstanding Semitic philologist and one of the foremost specialists in the study of the bowls. He possesses detailed knowledge of bowl texts, published and unpublished, more than any other person I know. He undertook to review and revise my readings and translations, and contributed numerous philological comments that have been embedded in the work. Beyond this, he has given this work its shape and structure. I am profoundly grateful to him.

Dr Matthew Morgenstern contributed to the Introduction a chapter on language issues in the bowls. His contribution, however, goes far deeper, as he read and commented on a considerable number of the bowls and has been frequently consulted regarding their language. His extraordinary sensitivity to the nuances of Aramaic has been the basis for many valuable suggestions concerning the reading and interpretation of the texts. In addition, in 2010, he volunteered to undertake the enormous task of taking fresh photographs of the entire Schøyen collection of bowls. The result was over 10,000 high-resolution digital images that significantly improved our ability to study the bowls and set a new standard for the documentation of incantation bowls. Dr Morgenstern's photographs are being published in the volumes of this series in conjunction with our editions. They are of a quality that will allow other scholars to check the readings proposed in our study without the necessity of going back to the originals.

Dr Naama Vilozy, who recently completed a Ph.D. thesis at the Hebrew University on the artistic aspects of the bowls, undertook to provide a chapter on this topic for the Introduction and also kindly put at our disposal her hand copies of the drawings that are on the bowls. Her thesis constitutes a pioneering attempt to interpret the illustrations on the bowls against the background of the artistic conventions of Sasanian Iran.

We consulted Dr Ada Yardeni on the script and the terminology to use in order to describe the various types of hand that may be distinguished on the bowls, and she gave us advice that can only come from an expert in this field.

I should also like to express my tribute to Joseph Naveh, with whom I worked for many years on amulets and magic bowls. I learned a great deal in the course of our joint work. May he rest in peace.

I feel an immense sense of gratitude to all the people mentioned above. Without their labour of love, their expertise and their dedication, this book would have never seen the light of day.



Finally, I would also like to express my indebtedness to Miriam, my wife, for the unfailing support she has given me over the years when I worked on these materials and often felt unsure whether I could ever bring the project to completion.

The plan of this publication of magic bowls in the Schøyen Collection consists of some nine volumes, distributed as follows: five volumes of bowls in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic; two volumes in Mandaic; one volume in Syriac; and one volume for the rest of the collection, where bowls in Pahlavi and in artificial scripts and bowls that have no text will be published.

The introduction to this volume discusses selected topics relating to the study of the bowls in general, their language, their design, their illustrations, and their historical setting. The introductions to subsequent volumes will probably take up other topics.

With the present volume a new series is launched with E.J. Brill, called *Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity* (MRLA). We are planning to publish in this series texts and studies relating to ancient and medieval magic, besides studies in the religious literatures of the Mediterranean and in particular the Iranian environment.

The study of the Aramaic magic bowls is a matter of great interest and importance: they constitute the only direct epigraphical documents of Mesopotamia written mostly by some of the most important minority groups, Jews, Christians, Mandaean, Manichaeans and others. Since the bowls are original manuscripts, they can teach us a great deal about the languages spoken (mostly varieties of Aramaic); popular religious practices, that take the form of magical texts; and certain aspects of social life, family structure and dwellings.

The last few decades have been a period of lively and fertile activity in the field of the magic bowls. Full publication of several large collections, and book-length editions of selected bowls from other large collections have appeared recently. To mention just a few major publications of this period: the publication of the Aramaic bowls in the British Museum (Segal 2000);<sup>1</sup> the publication of the Aramaic bowls in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome (Moriggi 2001); a selection of JBA bowls from the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection (Levene 2003a); the Aramaic bowls in the Hilprecht Collection in Jena (Müller-Kessler 2005). In addition, numerous lengthy articles containing editions of new bowls or studies of aspects of the language, contents and structure of the texts of bowls have been published (see the Bibliography under J.N. Ford, D. Levene, M. Morgenstern, C. Müller-Kessler, and S. Shaked).

Two large-scale surveys of Jewish magic, which deal *inter alia* with the magic bowls, have also appeared (Bohak 2008; Harari 2010), and additional books have been published as a result of conferences on themes connected to the magic of the bowls and on magic in Antiquity in general, among them the conferences convened by P. Schäfer and H.G. Kippenberg in Princeton (1997); G. Bohak and others in Jerusalem (see Bohak et al. 2011); and by I. Csepregi and C. Burnett in London (see Csepregi and Burnett 2012). This intellectual productivity has brought about a real revolution in the perception of the languages used on bowls, the structure of the magic texts, their contents, and their importance for the history of religion in Mesopotamia and in Palestine in Late Antiquity.

Shaul Shaked  
Jerusalem

<sup>1</sup> Curiously carrying the title *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic incantation bowls in the British Museum*, as if Mandaic was not a dialect of Aramaic, and Syriac (another form of Aramaic) not deserving mention.





I began working on the bowls in the Schøyen Collection in 1997 as a doctoral student at the Hebrew University after taking a course on incantation bowls given by Prof. Shaked. The work, which mainly involved checking the transcriptions of the bowls from photographs, was intended as a supplement to my study of Ugaritic magic, but eventually developed into my main field of research. I am sincerely grateful for the continuing privilege of working with the leading scholar in the discipline on this remarkable corpus of texts.

Dr Siam Bhayro has been the catalyst that ensured that this volume finally went to press. Were it not for his prodigious efforts, tenacity and expertise, the publication of this book would likely have been delayed for years.

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr Matthew Morgenstern for his support and unfailing willingness to share with me his profound knowledge of the Aramaic language.

The decipherment and interpretation of many of the bowls in the Schøyen Collection has been facilitated by magic bowls in various private collections that I am editing. These have occasionally been cited in the present volume with the labels JNF, Wolfe, and Davidovitz. I would particularly like to thank Ms Lisa Marie Knothe, Mr Lenny Wolfe, Ms Ester Davidovitz and Mr Gil Davidovitz for access to bowls in their collections.

My work on the bowls was partially supported by a Kreitman post-doctoral fellowship (2002–2004) from Ben-Gurion University and a Lady Davis post-doctoral fellowship (2004–2005) from the Hebrew University and by Israel Science Foundation grant No. 1306/12 (2012–2013).

Finally, I wish to thank my mother for her love and support over the years.

James Nathan Ford  
Petach Tiqwa

It has been a great privilege for me to work on this project for the past four years. I would like to express profound gratitude to Shaul Shaked, who has been the very best of mentors, both professionally and personally. I am also grateful to Miriam Shaked, who looked after me during my many research visits, showing great hospitality and patience, especially when I was “volcanoed” and ended up staying much longer than planned.

It has also been an honour to work with James Nathan Ford, from whom I continue to learn much. For the most part, the wider community of “bowls scholars” is very much like a family and, in many respects, I esteem James like an older brother—I hope I have not been too annoying a younger sibling. I would like to take this opportunity to thank some members of the extended family: Mark Geller, Dan Levene, Matthew Morgenstern, Marco Moriggi and Ortal-Paz Saar.

I was given two terms of research leave by the University of Exeter, which allowed me to devote myself to the preparation of this volume. I am grateful to my colleagues in Exeter, particularly those in the Department of Theology and Religion, who, despite being compelled to put up with me for the past six years, have been the epitome of grace and humour.

I am grateful to the British Academy, particularly Ken Emond, for a Small Research Grant (SG-52081), which funded my numerous visits to Israel among other things. I am particularly grateful to Geoffrey Khan for his support in this respect.

Our publisher, E.J. Brill, has been very supportive in establishing the new series devoted to the bowls and related literatures. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Jennifer Pavelko, Katelyn Chin and, more recently, Julia Berick for their support and patience with this and other projects.

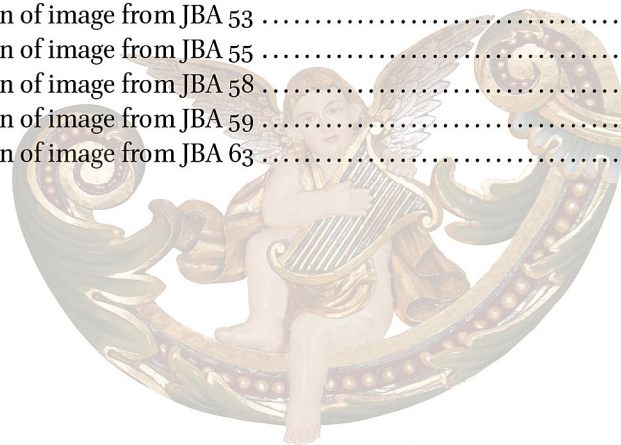
Finally, I would like to express my thanks to Lisa, my wife, for her constant love and support.

Siam Bhayro  
Exeter



LIST OF FIGURES

1. Bound demons with large eyes (from JBA 55) .....	31
2. Demon with prominent hair (from JBA 26) .....	31
3. Hybrid demon with horns (from JBA 14) .....	32
4. Demonic figure in human form (from MS 1927/34).....	33
5. Animal in profile (from JBA 40) .....	34
6. Artist's impression of image from JBA 2 .....	59
7. Artist's impression of image from JBA 14 .....	107
8. Artist's impression of image from JBA 23 .....	134
9. Artist's impression of image from JBA 26 .....	152
10. Artist's impression of image from JBA 34 .....	177
11. Artist's impression of image from JBA 38 .....	187
12. Artist's impression of image from JBA 40 .....	192
13. Artist's impression of image from JBA 45 .....	204
14. Artist's impression of image from JBA 48 .....	218
15. Artist's impression of image from JBA 53 .....	235
16. Artist's impression of image from JBA 55 .....	245
17. Artist's impression of image from JBA 58 .....	258
18. Artist's impression of image from JBA 59 .....	260
19. Artist's impression of image from JBA 63 .....	270



CHRISTIAN  
MUSICOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY OF INDIA





LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1. JBA 1 (MS 1927/8) .....	58
2. JBA 2 (MS 1927/29) .....	61
3. JBA 3 (MS 1927/45).....	64
4. JBA 4 (MS 1927/47) .....	67
5. JBA 5 (MS 1927/64) .....	70
6. JBA 6 (MS 2053/10) .....	73
7. JBA 7 (MS 2053/12) with label.....	76
8. JBA 8 (MS 2053/55) .....	78
9. JBA 9 (MS 2053/183) .....	82
10. JBA 10 (MS 2053/185) .....	85
11. JBA 11 (MS 2053/79) .....	93
12. JBA 12 (MS 2053/178).....	96
13. JBA 13 (MS 1927/5) .....	106
14. JBA 14 (MS 1927/39).....	109
15. JBA 15 (MS 1927/43).....	113
16. JBA 16 (MS 1929/16).....	116
17. JBA 17 (MS 2053/33) .....	118
18. JBA 18 (MS 2053/103)—general view .....	120
19. JBA 18 (MS 2053/103)—section one.....	121
20. JBA 18 (MS 2053/103)—section two.....	121
21. JBA 18 (MS 2053/103)—section three .....	122
22. JBA 18 (MS 2053/103)—section four .....	122
23. JBA 19 (MS 2053/132) with label.....	125
24. JBA 20 (MS 2053/150) .....	128
25. JBA 21 (MS 2053/164) .....	131
26. JBA 22 (MS 2053/165) .....	133
27. JBA 23 (MS 2053/206).....	136
28. JBA 24 (MS 2053/251).....	139
29. JBA 25 (MS 2053/280)—general view .....	143
30. JBA 25 (MS 2053/280)—section one .....	144
31. JBA 25 (MS 2053/280)—section two.....	144
32. JBA 25 (MS 2053/280)—section three .....	145
33. JBA 25 (MS 2053/280)—section four .....	145
34. JBA 25 (MS 2053/280)—section five .....	146
35. JBA 25 (MS 2053/280)—section six .....	146
36. JBA 25 (MS 2053/280)—section seven .....	147
37. JBA 26 (MS 1928/43) .....	154
38. JBA 27 (MS 1927/16).....	161
39. JBA 28 (MS 1927/25) .....	163
40. JBA 29 (MS 1927/51).....	165
41. JBA 30 (MS 1928/47) .....	168
42. JBA 31 (MS 2053/41).....	171
43. JBA 32 (MS 2053/64) .....	173



44. JBA 33 (MS 2053/83)—general view .....	175
45. JBA 33 (MS 2053/83)—centre of bowl .....	176
46. JBA 34 (MS 2053/86)—general view .....	179
47. JBA 34 (MS 2053/86)—sample section showing faded text .....	180
48. JBA 35 (MS 2053/89) .....	182
49. JBA 36 (MS 2053/110) .....	184
50. JBA 37 (MS 2053/123) .....	186
51. JBA 38 (MS 2053/151) .....	189
52. JBA 39 (MS 2053/162) .....	191
53. JBA 40 (MS 2053/167) .....	194
54. JBA 41 (MS 2053/184) .....	196
55. JBA 42 (MS 2053/190) .....	199
56. JBA 43 (MS 2053/193) .....	201
57. JBA 44 (MS 2053/213) .....	203
58. JBA 45 (MS 2053/237) .....	207
59. JBA 46 (MS 2053/249) .....	210
60. JBA 47 (MS 2053/258) .....	213
61. JBA 48 (MS 2053/200) .....	220
62. JBA 49 (MS 2053/270) .....	222
63. JBA 50 (MS 2053/207) .....	228
64. JBA 51 (MS 2053/209) .....	231
65. JBA 52 (MS 2053/231) .....	234
66. JBA 53 (MS 2053/253) .....	237
67. JBA 54 (MS 2053/273) .....	240
68. JBA 55 (MS 1928/1) .....	248
69. JBA 56 (MS 1928/8)—general view .....	251
70. JBA 56 (MS 1928/8)—section one .....	252
71. JBA 56 (MS 1928/8)—section two .....	252
72. JBA 56 (MS 1928/8)—section three .....	253
73. JBA 56 (MS 1928/8)—section four .....	253
74. JBA 57 (MS 2053/36)—general view .....	255
75. JBA 57 (MS 2053/36)—section one .....	256
76. JBA 57 (MS 2053/36)—section two .....	256
77. JBA 57 (MS 2053/36)—section three .....	257
78. JBA 57 (MS 2053/36)—section four .....	257
79. JBA 58 (MS 2053/166) .....	259
80. JBA 59 (MS 2053/174) .....	262
81. JBA 60 (MS 2053/212) .....	265
82. JBA 61 (MS 2053/214) .....	267
83. JBA 62 (MS 2053/242) .....	269
84. JBA 63 (MS 2053/250) with label .....	272
85. JBA 64 (MS 2053/256) .....	275





## ABBREVIATIONS

1 Kgs	1 Kings
1QM	the War Scroll from Qumran Cave 1
2Tim	2 Timothy
abs.	absolute
act.	active
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
<i>af.</i>	<i>af'el</i>
<i>AHw</i>	reference to von Soden 1965–1981
Akk.	Akkadian
AMB	text from Naveh and Shaked 1985
<i>AMT</i>	reference to Thompson 1924
Ar.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
art.	article
BT	Babylonian Talmud
<i>CAD</i>	reference to <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> , 1956–2011
CAMIB	text in the British Museum, published in Segal 2000
Cant	Song of Songs ( <i>Canticum Canticorum</i> )
ch.	chapter
conj.	conjunction
<i>CSD</i>	reference to Payne-Smith 1903
cstr.	construct
Dan	Daniel
Davidovitz	bowl in a private collection to be published by J.N. Ford
def.	definite
dem.	demonstrative
Deut	Deuteronomy
<i>DJBA</i>	reference to Sokoloff 2002
<i>DJD</i>	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>DJPA</i>	reference to Sokoloff 1990
<i>DMMPP</i>	reference to Durkin-Meisterernst 2004
<i>DSA</i>	reference to Tal 2000
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
du.	dual
encl.	enclitic
<i>etpa.</i>	<i>etpa'al</i>
Ex	Exodus
Ez	Ezekiel
fem.	feminine
Ge.	Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)
Gen	Genesis
Git	Gittin
Gr.	Greek
Gs	Ginza smala (Left Ginza)
<i>GTO</i>	reference to Cook 2008
Hab	Habakkuk
<i>haf.</i>	<i>haf'el</i>
Heb.	Hebrew
<i>hif.</i>	<i>hif'il</i>

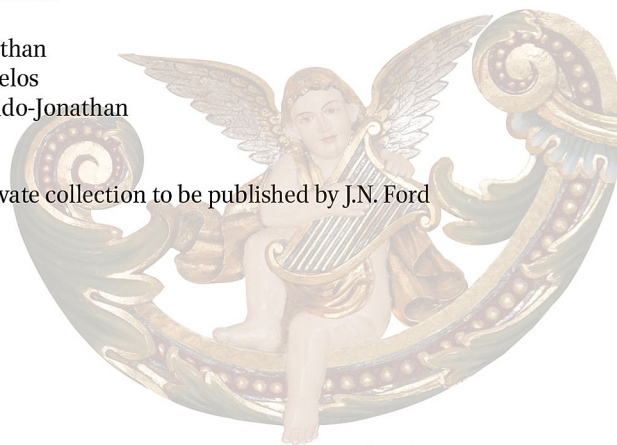


<i>hof.</i>	<i>hof'al</i>
IM	text in the Iraq Museum
impf.	imperfect
impv.	imperative
inf.	infinitive
int.	interjection
Is	Isaiah
<i>itpa.</i>	<i>itpa'al</i>
<i>itpe.</i>	<i>itpe'el</i>
JBA	Jewish Babylonian Aramaic
Jer	Jeremiah
JNF	bowl in an anonymous private collection to be published by J.N. Ford
JPA	Jewish Palestinian Aramaic
K.	<i>ketiv</i>
Kgs	Kings
l./ll.	line/lines
Lane	reference to Lane 1863–1893
Lev	Leviticus
LevR	Leviticus Rabbah
lit.	literally
LXX	the Septuagint
M	text in the Moussaieff Collection
m	mishna
Mand.	Mandaic
masc.	masculine
<i>MD</i>	reference to Drower and Macuch 1963
Meg	Megilla
Men	Menahot
M-K	text from Müller-Kessler 2005
MP	Middle Persian
MS	text in the Schøyen Collection
MSF	text from Naveh and Shaked 1993
MT	Massoretic Text
MTKG	text from Schäfer and Shaked 1994–1999
Mur	text from Wadi Murabba'at
n./nn.	note/notes (in main section); noun (in Glossary)
<i>ni.</i>	<i>nif'al</i>
NP	New Persian
Num	Numbers
num.	numeral
obj.	object/objective
Oldran.	Old Iranian
p.	person
<i>pa.</i>	<i>pa'el</i>
Pa.	Parthian
part.	particle
pass.	passive
<i>pe.</i>	<i>pe'al</i>
Pes	Pesaḥim
pf.	perfect
<i>pi.</i>	<i>pi'el</i>
pl.	plural
poss.	possessive
prep.	preposition
pron.	pronoun/pronominal
Prov	Proverbs





Ps	Psalms
PT	Palestinian Talmud
ptc.	participle
<i>pu.</i>	<i>pu'al</i>
Q.	<i>qerê</i>
rel.	relative
SA	Samaritan Aramaic
Sam	Samuel
Sanh	Sanhedrin
SD	text in the Samir Dehays Collection
sg.	singular
Shab	Shabbat
<i>shaf.</i>	<i>shaf'el</i>
SL	reference to Sokoloff 2009
Soṭ	Soṭah
s.v.	under the word ( <i>sub voce</i> )
Syr.	Syriac
TA	Targumic Aramaic
Taan	Ta'anit
TJ	Targum Jonathan
TO	Targum Onqelos
TPs-J	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan
Ug.	Ugaritic
vb.	verb
Wolfe	bowl in a private collection to be published by J.N. Ford
Zeb	Zebaḥim
Zech	Zechariah



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## LIST OF OTHER BOWLS

(in addition to AMB, CAMIB, Davidovitz, JNF, M, M-K, Montgomery, MSF, SD and Wolfe):

Ford & Ten-Ami	published in Ford and Ten-Ami 2011/2
Geller B	published in Geller 1980
Gordon G	published in Gordon 1934c
Gordon H	published in Gordon 1937
IM 9737	published in Gordon 1934a
IM 11113	published in Gordon 1941
K3449	published in Geller 1980
Moriah Bowl I	published in Gordon 1984



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[ - ]	missing letter
[ --- ]	missing letters
[ xxx ]	restored letters
{ xxx }	superfluous letters
< xxx >	scribal omission
⌘	partially preserved letter



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