

**Babylonian Elements in Aramaic Childbirth Magic?** — In their exemplary first volume entitled *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (Jerusalem 1985), J. Naveh and S. Shaked have considered the occurrence in Aramaic magic bowls and amulets of well-known and long-lived *historiola* in which Smamit suffers the murder of her children by Sideros, and, on fleeing to the mountain to hide, receives an offer of help from three persons, *swny*, *swny* and *syngly*. Reluctantly she lets them in when they appear, and the wicked Sideros enters with them and kills her new-born child. The helpers pursue Sideros to the midst of the sea, where he evades death at her hands by promising to desist from killing a mother or her child whenever the names of the helpers are invoked. The story appears widely in Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Rumanian, Slavonic, late Syriac, Arabic and Hebrew; see in detail Naveh and Shaked op. cit. 111-122, and 188-197, and the refs. given there.

While many scholars have pointed to later reflexes of this motif, the purpose of the present note is to draw attention to two features that seem to echo earlier cuneiform magical sources for the same general purpose, that is the protection of women in travail and newborn babies.

### 1. The Three Helpers

As has been well demonstrated, the names *swny*, *swny*, and *syngly* occur in varying dress in the later versions, such as Greek *Sisinios*, *Sinēs* and *Šenodōros*, or *swny*, *snsny* and *smnglp* in late Jewish sources.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly not all later versions mention as many as three helpers (see *ibid.*, fn. 6), but the three survive together in Jewish magic at least into the eighteenth century, and Naveh and Shaked remark that the « three names, in the Greek as well as in the Aramaic, play about with the phonemes *s* and *n*. »

It might be suggested that the topos of these helpers derives ultimately from the passages in the widely-distributed birth incantation sometimes entitled *Sin and the Cow*,<sup>2</sup> in which the heroine Geme-Su'en, in extreme labour pains, is rescued by intercessors. In BAM 248 iii 25-28 assistance is provided by two anonymous divine figures, <sup>d</sup>LAMMA.MEŠ, who provide « oil-from-the-jar » and « water-of-labour. » In the variant version BAM 248 iii 40 it seems to be Narundi and Naḥundi instead who are called upon by Sin, in an incantation beginning na-ru-un-di na-ḥu-un-di na-nam-gi-ši-ir.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. The Twelve and a Half Names

In the Greek version quoted by Naveh and Shaked the evil child-killer is trapped by the saints, and forced to reveal her names so that they can be used against her prophylactically :

Then they started flogging her. The abominable one said to the saints : « Saints of God, do not torture me too much, and I swear to you by the disc of the sun and the horn of the moon that wherever your name is written and your association is known, and my twelve and a half names, I shall not dare approach

that house to a distance of three miles. » Then they said to her, « Disclose to us your twelve and a half names. » The abominable one, burning in fire, said : « My first and special name is called Gyllou ; the second Amorphous ; the third Abyzou ; the fourth Karkhous ; the fifth Brianē ; the sixth Bardellous ; the seventh Aigyptianē ; the eighth Barna ; the ninth Kharkhanistrea ; the tenth Adikia ; [the eleventh ...] ; the twelfth Myia ; the half Petomene. »

It might be suggested that this passage provides the explanation for the spell on those not uncommon Lamaštu amulets whose inscription consists of a list of her various names, of which a good example was published by F. Thureau Dangin, *RA* 18 (1921) 1 98. The mythology of Lamaštu remains obscure, but it might be conjectured that an episode will one day come to light in which it is revealed how Lamaštu was coerced into revealing those very names which could be so potently listed and used against her.

1. An unnoticed variant from late Jewish magic occurs in the manuscript given by R. Campbell Thompson, *PSBA* 29 (1907) 168, where recipe no. 24, against *qry* in the night, mentions *Seno*, *Sansepho* and *Shamagglaq*.
2. On which see most recently N. Veldhuis, *A Cow of Sin*.
3. For Narundi and Naḥundi as the sun and the moon in this context see M. Civil, *JNES* 33 (1974) 334. Nanamgišir is unexplained, but is this a third helper?

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