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Siam Bhayro, James Nathan Ford, Dan Levene and Ortal-Paz Saar, *Aramaic Magic Bowls in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin: Descriptive List and Edition of Selected Texts*. Brill, Leiden, 2018. xiii, 240 pp. €94.00. ISBN 978 9 00434 447 1.

The present volume is the seventh in Brill's Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity (MRLA) series and the fourth in this series to deal exclusively with the Mesopotamian magic bowls. As its subtitle indicates, the volume provides a descriptive overview of the collection in Berlin's Vorderasiatisches Museum (VAM). It also furnishes fifteen bowl texts in Latin transliteration. The collection of bowls in the VAM is among the largest (public) collections of its kind in the world, and the texts and preliminary catalogue presented herein represent a collaborative effort to detail the 165 bowls and bowl fragments in the collection alongside several related items (three inscribed human skulls, and the fragments of one inscribed eggshell).

The volume is divided into three main sections. The largest is the 'Catalogue' (pp. 71–173), which consists of detailed (technical) entries for the 169 items in the VAM. It is preceded by a short 'Introduction' (pp. 1–7) plus the fifteen 'Text Editions' (pp. 11–64) and a discussion of two 'pseudo-script' items in the collection (pp. 65–8). The text editions consist of seven Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (JBA), four Mandaic and four Syriac bowls written in the Estrangelo script. These 15 incantation texts, six of which are re-editions of previous publications, are tendered by the editors as representative of the collection as a whole. They are complemented by three glossaries

divided according to the Aramaic dialects of the texts published in the volume. In addition to the glossaries, the catalogue is followed by a table of terms discussed in both the catalogue and the text editions; a table of divine names, angels, demons and exemplary figures that appear in the Aramaic bowls in the collection; a table of the human beneficiaries and adversaries named in the bowls; a list of biblical quotations that appear in 15 of the JBA bowls in the collection; a table of (parallel bowl) texts referred to by the editors or quoted in the bowls in the collection; and a bibliography.

The introduction provides an overview of the contents of the VAM bowl collection, the items' state of preservation and publication history, and the methodological guidelines that structure the volume. Some 80 items in the collection were acquired on the antiquities market (mostly in Baghdad in the 1880s) and were either purchased by or presented to the museum. Approximately half of the items derive from controlled excavations; most of these were unearthed at dig sites along the east bank of Babylon. Roughly one hundred of the items in the collection carry inscriptions whose writing is fully or mostly legible, including 46 wholly intact bowls and 24 nearly complete bowls. The inscriptions on other items range from partly legible to illegible. Of the bowls which can be read, approximately one hundred – or 60 per cent – are inscribed in JBA. At

least ten bowls in the collection contain a Mandaic text, and at least eight bowls carry texts written in Syriac (seven in Estrangelo and one in the Manichaean script). A number of other items are inscribed with invented or pseudo-scripts.

Of the legible bowls and bowl fragments inscribed in Aramaic, the editors have selected to publish 15. Of these, six are re-editions of previously published bowls. These re-editions are the texts numbered II (VA.3854), III (VA.2418), VIII (VA.2419), XI (VA.2435), XII (VA.3383) and XIV (VA. Bab.4167i). The readings of these bowls are not markedly different from those provided in their *editiones principes*, though in every case the editors have provided some improvement upon their predecessors' work. For example, the edition of VA.3854 in the present volume settles several minor uncertainties in Dan Levene's earlier edition, parses the beneficiary's name differently, and better reflects the sense of the para-biblical historiola in ll. 18–22. Of the JBA bowls newly edited, text I (VA. 2182) provides a variant of the Elisur Bagdana *geṭ* formula (ll. 1–12). It further parallels Gordon 7:1–9 (ll. 12–18). Text IV (VA.2428) is written on a broken but largely complete bowl and provides a further parallel to the *hpyk'* formula found in numerous published bowls, for example AMB 2:1–6 and ten British Museum bowls. Text V is inscribed on 11 connected fragments and features Rabbi Joshua bar Peraḥia and the overseas *geṭ* formula (it closely parallels IMJ 80.1.1 = AMB 5, cf. MS 2053/280 = JBA 25:3–10 = Shaul Shaked, James

Nathan Ford and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, Brill, Leiden, 2013, pp. 140–42). Bowl VI (VA.2269) consists of the base fragment of a broken bowl, a large part of which features a drawing of an armed, unbound figure that may represent the bowl practitioner. Its text is very brief, but it contains a historiola that summarily recounts the divine revelation on Mount Sinai and the presentation of the Torah to Israel. Text VII (VA.2510) is written on a tiny fragment; the preserved writing is negligible. Of the Mandaic bowls newly edited, texts IX (VA.2445 + a further unnumbered fragment) and X (VA.2439 + two further fragments) furnish two damaged parallels to text VIII. Of the Syriac bowls newly edited, text XIII (VA. Bab.2765) bears the Christian trinitarian formula and adapts the Trisagion to the beneficiary, though much of the bowl is lost. Bowl XV (VA. Bab.2792) represents an even smaller fragment, though the preserved text reveals it to be a spell for success in business (cf. Dan Levene and Siam Bhayro, “‘Bring to the Gates ... upon a Good Smell and upon Good Fragrances’: An Aramaic Incantation Bowl for Success in Business”, *Archiv für Orientforschung* 51 [2005/2006], pp. 242–6).

The presentation of each bowl text is followed either by a photograph of the bowl or by photographs of the remaining fragments. It is regrettable (if understandable) that the larger format of previous entries in the MRLA series has not been adopted here, as the photographs provided are in several cases – where the inscription

is particularly faded, or the bowl contains a long incantation – too small for the reader to verify the editors' readings with ease. Somewhat harder to understand is the decision to transliterate the bowl texts into the Latin alphabet. Even setting aside the Mandaic and Syriac bowls (for which some fonts have long been available) this decision is particularly mystifying in light of the fact that previous volumes in the same series have presented the JBA bowls in their own script. It is also a pity that the focus and present configuration of the volume did not allow for (an even slightly) more detailed commentary on the published texts. Most of the remarks accompanying the texts are palaeographic. Nevertheless, the publication of new bowl texts – especially by such meticulous philologists as make up part of the editorial team of this volume – is always a welcome event, and this small treasury of new data is also complemented by the new light the editors shed on the six previously published texts.

Much of the value of the present volume lies in vast accumulation of detail in the catalogue. Each entry is furnished with a detailed technical description of the item, which includes the following information:

- the dimensions and state of preservation of the item and its inscription, including the type of bowl and the type and size of fragment;
- any special features, e.g. circles around inscriptions;
- a description of any drawings;
- the dialect (and script) of the Aramaic incantations;
- the personal names of the human beneficiaries and any human adversaries;
- a description of the text, including the aim of the incantation, common spell formulae and the presence of specific transmundane figures;
- any biblical quotations;
- significant linguistic and lexicographical features;
- publication details, as well as both published and unpublished parallels;
- the origin of the item according to the museum log.

This exhaustive effort has benefited from the increasing nuance and consistency of vocabulary and presentation that have developed in the field of bowl studies over the past two decades. I would quibble only by suggesting that it may have been more useful to arrange the catalogue on a different basis than the objects' (essentially arbitrary) shelf numbering – according to the Aramaic dialects inscribed on the items, for example. The information presented in the catalogue can serve many purposes, such as surveying the collocation of specific biblical verses in the bowls or the distribution of certain spell formulae, as well as assessing the number of unpublished parallels to these formulae. The prosopographic data furnished by the catalogue and the insight these data provide into the make-up of different households also provide a useful complement to Michael Morony's sociological treatment of the bowls (Michael G. Morony, 'Magic and Society in Late

Sasanian Iraq', in Scott Noegel, Joel Walker and Brannon Wheeler [eds], *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park PA, 2003, pp. 83–107). In some cases, the appearance of the same beneficiaries in multiple bowls also helps to supply provenance for bowls whose origins were previously unknown. In this regard, the attention that the editors pay on pp. 65–8 to some of the so-called 'pseudo-script' items in the collection is also welcome. Not only can these much-neglected items shed valuable light on bowl praxis but attention to the hands behind these inscriptions may also help to

group different bowls together and to determine the geographic origins of unprovenanced bowls.

In sum – as the scale of the VAM collection and the provisional nature of some of the features listed in the catalogue indicate – there remains a great deal of work to be done on this important collection of bowls. The present volume represents a kind of stopgap or placeholder volume – an important first series of steps towards a comprehensive edition of the VAM collection. It remains to look forward to the continuation of this valuable work and the further publications that are promised by the editors concerning this collection.

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Yosef Ofer, *The Masora on Scripture and Its Methods*. De Gruyter, Berlin, 2019. ix, 286 pp. £118.00. ISBN 978 3 11059 574 1.

The challenge facing any introduction to the *masora* is how to follow Israel Yeivin's 1980 classic *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*. Professor Ofer has answered this challenge by producing a very different kind of book: a complement to this earlier work, not a replacement for it. The contents of *The Masora on Scripture* are notably different to those of *Introduction*. This is because Professor Ofer limits his definition of *masora* to Masoretic notes: that is, the *masora parva* and *masora magna* found beside the biblical text in Tiberian codices plus the accumulative *masora* found as appendices to Masoretic codices or as separate treatises. By

contrast, Professor Yeivin defined *masora* as every Masoretic addition to the consonantal text of the Hebrew Scriptures that was involved in its transmission. As a result, the forms and placement of the Tiberian vocalization and accentuation marks occupy one hundred pages in *Introduction*. This knowledge is presumed in *The Masora on Scripture*, which focuses on Masoretic notes, not Masoretic texts.

The Masora on Scripture is designed to educate its readers about how the Masoretic notes appear in manuscripts, what data is presented, how this can be re-presented for analysis, and how all these notes functioned to aid the