

Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone

Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock

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ILLUSTRATING CHARMS: A SYRIAC MANUSCRIPT WITH MAGIC DRAWINGS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY*

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Among the Syriac manuscripts preserved in the British Library there is one, catalogued as Or. 6673,¹ which has hitherto been almost unknown to scholarship. Entitled *kəthābhā dā-huddāyā*—“The Book of Guidance,”² it is a collection of prayers, biblical excerpts, incantations and supplications which were believed to preserve people from all evils.³ According to the colophon, the manuscript was written in “2129⁴ of the blessed Greeks”⁵

* I am indebted to Witold Witakowski who during my work on this paper patiently guided me through the meanders of the Syriac language. The transcription applied is for Classical Syriac.

Abbreviations:

Enciclopedia dei Santi = *Enciclopedia dei Santi: le chiese orientali*, ed. J. N. Cañellas, S. Virgulin, Roma 1999;

GollanczBP = *The Book of Protection being a Collection of Charms*, ed. & trans. H. Gollancz, London 1912;

Hunter Anathemas = E. C. D. Hunter, “Saints in Syriac Anathemas. A Form-critical Analysis of Role,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32, 1987, pp. 83–104;

MaclerFM = F. Macler, “Formules magiques de l’Orient chrétien,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 58, 1908, pp. 9–33.

¹ The manuscript is also included in the British Library’s *List of Oriental Manuscripts acquired from 1890–1908*, p. 288. On the last page of the manuscript there is a note, possibly added by a librarian, mentioning that the book was bought from A. Thomas, 2. 12. 1905.

² Also “The Book of Rules.”

³ Depending on genre, they are introduced by the words: *ṣəlōthā*—prayer, *ḥarmā*—anathema, *’asrā*—binding, cf. Hunter Anathemas, p. 85.

⁴ As usual in such manuscripts, the date is very precise, namely 5th *elul*, on Thursday.

⁵ i.e., according to the Era of Seleucids.

which corresponds to 1818 A.D., for a certain Benjamin son of Ya'yawnan from the village Bakhyanateh,⁶ by Agin from the village Shabhnā.⁷ Before the book found its way to Britain, it was seen in Paris⁸ in the possession of a Christian Chaldean merchant from the region of Urmiah.⁹

The manuscript measures 8.3 x 11.5 x 1.5 cm and has 48 folios, presently paginated in pencil. It is written on parchment, in somewhat careless Nestorian script, and bound with a modern cover. Some prayers and anathemas have illustrations.¹⁰

The manuscript belongs to a small group of similar books distributed among libraries and private collections. One, very similar in size and content to the British Library volume, belonged to Hermann Gollancz, professor of Hebrew at London University College, who published it in 1912.¹¹ There is another, Syriac 52, in the collection of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, from which only one prayer was published.¹² The French Armenologist, François Macler, described and partially translated a smaller manuscript which he owned,¹³ at the same time listing similar texts, some original, some copied by scholars in Kurdistan. All were written between the last quarter of the 18th C and the first quarter of the 19th C.¹⁴

⁶ In the bishopric of Mar George.

⁷ The note also informs that he was a travelling monk from the family of Mar Yohannan, the bishop of Mar Ezekiel.

⁸ MaclerFM, p. 9f.

⁹ Presently Turkish Kurdistan.

¹⁰ Among fifty four prayers, sixteen have figural pictures and six have a different kind of ornamentation.

¹¹ H. Gollancz, "A Selection of Charms from Syriac Manuscripts," *Actes du Onzième Congrès International des Orientalistes*, Paris 1897, IV, 85–87; GollanczBP: in the Appendix, pp. 91–103, the author indicates differences between his manuscript and those from the British Library. He also owned a smaller book of the same kind, which he edited and translated alongside his first, adding one more, also smaller, in the collection of the Cambridge University Library (Add. 3086) and previously described in W. Wright, *A Catalogue of the Syriac manuscripts preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, with an introduction and appendix by Stanley Arthur Cook, Cambridge, 1901, vol. II, pp. 1214f.

¹² *An Amulet for the Binding of Guns, Spears, Swords, Daggers and All Implements of War*, edited and translated from a Syriac Manuscript in the John Rylands Library by E. C. D. Hunter, Oxford 1992.

¹³ MaclerFM, pp. 11–27.

¹⁴ H. W. Hatfield, "A Syriac Charm," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 15, 1893, pp. 284–96; E. Sachau, *Verzeichnis der syrischen Handschriften der Königlichen*

The British Library manuscript opens with the *Lord's Prayer* written in red ink inside a horseshoe-shaped frame. It is followed by the so-called "Prayer of Adam," which in fact is the liturgical anathema: *lakh-[h]ūmārē mawdēnnan*—"You, Lord, we acknowledge." Then there is the "Prayer of the holy angels," a paraphrase of the *Trisagion* and finally an invocation in the name of the owner of the book. After the prayers, the first three verses of the Gospel of John are cited, written diagonally inside a square and divided into twenty five chequered compartments (FIG. 1). Such a layout gives the text a more special and mysterious meaning,¹⁵ even though its enigmatic character, barely comprehensible to the common people, already has made it a sacred writ.¹⁶ The quotation from John develops into a very general incantation against the evil powers, pains and sicknesses, its last part written diagonally. The whole fragment is illustrated by the figures of the Four Evangelists, each with hands clasped in a gesture of prayer and each identified by an inscription¹⁷ (FIG. 1).

The next supplication, for protection against distress and any kind of fear, is connected to St. George. According to legend, the saint who endured many tortures in his martyrdom¹⁸ prayed to God for extra strength and support. His prayer was so effective that the saint would die and be returned to life no less than seven times. Because of that tradition many widely circulating supplications were addressed to him, although they did not necessarily refer to pain comparable to the sufferings of the saint. In the present case, for instance, the supplicant seeks protection against precisely

Bibliothek zu Berlin, Berlin 1899, nr. 107, Bd. 1, pp. 367–72, nr. 345, Bd. 2, p. 911; In Hunter, *Anathemas*, p. 83, two manuscripts from the Selly Oak Library are added to Macler's list and the Gollancz collection (Mignana, Syr. 316 and 587), and one from the Harvard, Houghton Library, (Syr. 159).

¹⁵ In the manuscripts many texts and fragments are written in such a way, cf. FIG. 11.

¹⁶ This fragment can effectively be compared with the invocation to the relics of the True Cross which, similarly presented, appears in many Armenian magic scrolls, cf. F. Feydit, *Amulettes de l'Arménie chrétienne*, Venice 1986, for instance: mss II:8, 9; VII:7; XVI:9; figs 4, 5, 84; Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, "Armenian Scroll in the Uppsala University Library," *XXe Congrès International des Études Byzantines, Collège de France-Sorbonne, 19–25 Août 2001*, Pré-Actes III, Paris 2001, 36f.

¹⁷ From right to left: Matthew, Marc, Luke, John. The same picture is to be found in GollanczBP, fig. facing p. 3.

¹⁸ D. Balboni, M. Ch. Celletti, "San Giorgio martire," *Biblioteca Sanctorum* VI, 1965, cols. 512–31.

enumerated illnesses, handicaps, violent dreams, nightmares and many other misfortunes.

The accompanying picture, inserted into the middle of the text, shows St. George (*Mār(y) Giorgīs*) on a black horse using a long lance to pierce a snake identified by the inscription as “a great dragon” or “monster” (*tanninā rabbā*)¹⁹ (FIG. II). The drawing is a conventional representation of the saint²⁰ depicting him as a rider struggling with menacing force, the pictorial equivalent of the popular spell “let the evil be pierced by the lance of George.” We observe however that the saint is not killing a dragon, echoing the most popular event of his *vita*²¹ but a giant snake. Confusion between these two creatures was not uncommon in the Christian Orient where both were very popular symbols of evil.²²

The next prayer seeks help in dealing with the authorities. The petitioner asks to be in favour with a judge,²³ not tremble in front of him, and not look frightened and guilty. He recalls a forceful symbol, “the garment with which Constantine subdued the whole earth.”²⁴ Furthermore, a list of biblical figures is enumerated, all of whom managed to face the powerful and escaped persecution, due to divine protection: “Joseph who was delivered from the prison-well; Moses who escaped from the hands of the pharaoh; David who was protected from the rage of Saul; three youths who survived the fiery furnace” etc.

¹⁹ Also in GollanczBP, fig. facing p. 4; MaclerFM, fig. 1.

²⁰ E. Lucchessi Palli, “Georg Erzmartyr. I. Ostkirche,” *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Bd. VI, ed. W. Braunfels, Rome-Freiburg 1974, pp. 366–73.

²¹ E. Bergermann, *Zur Legende vom Heiligen Georg dem Drachermörder*, Altona 1905; H. Delehaye, *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires*, Paris 1909, pp. 45–76; Ch. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, London 2003, pp. 109–44.

²² L. Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Bestiaire du Christ: la mystérieuse emblématique de Jésus-Christ*, Milan 1975 (2), pp. 397–400, 777f.

²³ Later on in the supplication “kings, tyrants, commanders of this world, princes, governors and the furious ones” are also mentioned.

²⁴ It seems that the scribe putting down the name of Constantine did not understand the concept of the “garment with which the earth was subdued.” The manuscript published by Gollancz has correctly in this place “Alexander the son of Philip,” which allows us to connect the cloth with the scarlet robe “without seam” known from a legend developed by Syrians and Armenians. These texts tell that it was sent from heaven and that after changing hands from Alexander the Great, Jonathan Maccabeus, Magi and King Abgar was finally put upon Jesus by the Roman soldiers when he was mocked and led to trial. Cf. for instance a version in: *The Book of the Cave of Treasures...*, trans. E. A. W. Budge, London 1927, pp. 212f.

The picture which accompanies the entreaty (FIG. 3), depicts a figure, who according to the inscription is “a ruler.”²⁵ He sits on a throne and smokes a huge pipe described by the accompanying legend.²⁶ The other objects gathered around the figure are also identified, a sword, a saddle bag,²⁷ a gun,²⁸ a dagger²⁹ and a falcon tied to a perch.³⁰ It seems that the intention of the picture was to represent a supremely mighty person with the attributes of power, authority and wealth and by this act of “binding” make him less frightening and mysterious.

Next come two thematically connected prayers divided by a picture showing an encircled rosette inside a rectangle. This represents the most multifunctional magic talisman, the seal or ring of Solomon, which, according to legend, the king received from the archangel Michael.³¹ The ineffable names of God engraved on the ring enabled the king to control the world of spirits. In this particular case the intention is to introduce one of the many stories about Solomon which obviously was considered as a curative spell. It recounts how the king, while building the Temple, dropped a stone handed to him by the Holy Spirit. He hurt his back badly and ruptured himself. In his pain he cried so loudly that Jesus heard him and gave him the recipe for a “paradisiacal” remedy, also noted in the text.

The next prayer is intended for “binding” different kinds of weapons, enumerated in the text, some of which, a dagger, sword, mace, a bow with arrows and two axes, are depicted and identified by the inscriptions³² (FIG. 4).

²⁵ In GollanczBP, fig. facing p. 6.

²⁶ Strangely, smoke coming from the pipe is identified and called a “fire.”

²⁷ *kāstā, kēstā*, a textile pack-bag to put on a beast of burden. GollanczBP, p. XXII, curiously translates it as “purse” and MaclerFM, p. 11 as “tobacco pouch.”

²⁸ *tūph*, from Turkish.

²⁹ *ḥanger*, from Arabic.

³⁰ *bāzā* (*bazyā*?) from Persian where also = hawk. Gollancz, strangely calls the same bird depicted in his manuscripts a goose! Cf. GollanczBP, p. XXII.

³¹ S. Euringer, “Das Netz Salomons: ein äthiopischer Zaubertext.” Nach der Hs. im ethnographischen Museum in München, herausgegeben, übersetzt und erläutert von...,” *Zeitschrift für Semitistik* 6, 1928, pp. 76–100, 178–199, 300–314 and 7, 1929 pp. 68–85.

³² The same prayer is illustrated in GollanczBP, fig. facing p. 7, by the drawing representing a large group of weapons: sword, gun, mace, axe, bow with arrows and two daggers. The manuscript Syr. 59 from the John Ryland Library (cf. n. 12) similarly illustrates this prayer.

A holy monk Zaya (*Mār(y) Zaycā*), who flourished in the 4th-century, is recalled, as a defender against pestilences and plagues. He came originally from Palestine but went to Syria where he first dwelled in a grotto and later travelled from village to village healing people. He settled at Mount Dūrāḥ and built a church in which he was eventually buried.³³ The saint is portrayed riding a brown horse and spearing a figure called the Angel of Death (*mal'akh mawtā*) (FIG. I). The creature has an unusual, triangular form covered with some kind of thorns and seems to be female with a new little demon in her womb.³⁴

In the following passage also a Syrian saint is recalled and depicted, namely the martyr Tamasys (*Mār(y) Tmsys*)³⁵ (FIG. II). The charm is almost entirely a quotation of the prayer ascribed to the saint in which he expels lunacy from 366 parts of the human body.³⁶ In the picture Tamasys rides a black horse and spears the representation of the illness which is called here the “Spirit (female) of Moon” (*rūḥā dā-bha(r)t sahrā*).³⁷

The question arises as to why Tamasys was considered to be particularly successful at combating lunacy. The explanation seems to be found in the closing formula of his prayer. When the expelled spirit leaves the body and soul of the patient it is directed to the ground, from the ground transferred to iron, from iron to stone and from stone to its final prison in a mountain. Since the saint spent forty years in a mountainous area living as a hermit, he was believed to know how to imprison the evil spirit inside a rock.³⁸

³³ P. Bedjan (ed.), *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, I, Paris 1890, 398–423; Habib Joseph, “Zay’a” in: *Enciclopedia dei Santi*, vol. 2, p. 1386f; J. M. Fiey, “Sanctuaires et villages syriaques orientaux de la vallée de la Şapna (Kurdistan iraquien),” *Le Muséon*, 102, 1989, 58–60.

³⁴ Both the text and picture are omitted in the manuscript of GollanczBP but are present in the manuscript described by MaclerFM, p. 11, fig. 2. Here the Angel of Death seems hidden inside two triangular, roof-like forms and is armed with a spear “to spear the side of a human,” according to the accompanying inscription.

³⁵ W. H. Hazard, “Mar Thamasias: a Syriac charm,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 15, 1893, pp. 292–94.

³⁶ Text and picture are included to GollanczBP, pp. XXXIIIf, fig. facing p. 10, to MaclerFM, pp. 11, 16, fig. 6 and Hazard, (note 35).

³⁷ Hazard, *op. cit.*, p. 292 translates the expression as: “the daughter of the moon” and adds that it designates a ring or a halo around the moon.

³⁸ Hunt, *Anathemas*, p. 89.

The next picture, representing five animals carefully identified by the inscriptions³⁹ as a stag, fox, billy goat, buck and gazelle⁴⁰ (FIG. 5), relates to two prayers asking for successful hunting and riches. The first text refers to the apostles Peter and Andrew's miraculous catch of fish⁴¹ and asks God to drive the prey in front of the huntsman's gun. The second recalls Adam and his domination of the animal kingdom, as well as Noah who, by the will of God, was able to gather all the animal species into his Ark.

A subsequent illustrated charm seeks strength, in the name of the power which Jesus used to calm the storm at sea,⁴² for all weapons throwing bullets and stones. The text is followed by a picture of three nicely-framed guns, identified by an inscription⁴³ (FIG. 6).

After a group of short spells of different kinds which are not illustrated, the anathema against the "Evil Eye," also called the "Eye of Seven Evil Neighbours," is written down. This most-feared misfortune is described in the text as a demonesse stepping out from the rock with intention of destroying "men, women, boys and girls, the souls of cattle and the fowls of heaven." However, her adversary, the archangel Gabriel, prevents the wicked action by impounding the "Evil Eye" in the name of God and myriads of angels.

In the picture related to this story Gabriel is represented on a white horse (FIG. III). The angel is deprived of wings and would be difficult to recognize if it were not for a large inscription with his name. He is piercing with a lance an awkward figure with long hair, named "Evil Eye" (*ʿaynā bīštā*) and armed with a spear. The rock from which she emerges is faithfully recalled in the picture by the black background.⁴⁴

After a couple of non illustrated charms a supplication ascribed to *mar rabban* Hormizd is quoted. Known as the prayer which he uttered at the time of martyrdom, it is believed to be effective against mad dogs and by extension against all carnivorous beasts, among which are enumerated the lion, tiger, wolf and boar.

³⁹ The prayers and the illustrations are also in GollanczBP, p. XXXIVf, fig. facing p. 12.

⁴⁰ *darqaš*, from Greek *dorkas*.

⁴¹ Luke 5:4–9.

⁴² Matt. 8:23–26.

⁴³ *hällēn tūphē ʿīthayhōn*

⁴⁴ The text and a similar picture are included in GollanczBP, p. XI, fig. facing p. 18, and MaclerFM, pp. 12, 17f, fig. 3.

It is obvious here that two Syrian saints were confused: Hormizd the martyr, decapitated about the year 421, during the persecution ordered by Bahrām V,⁴⁵ and *rabban* Hormizd, the monk and organizer of coenobitic life.⁴⁶ Since the latter was known for his miracles and healing, which gave him the nickname the “doctor of brothers,” we may surmise that the author of the incantation had him in mind. The connection of *rabban* Hormizd with mad dogs also makes sense. The *vita* of that monk recounts that he went on the long pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Egypt and Byzantium, during which he might certainly have faced that kind of danger.

The saint is represented on horseback, just about to spear in the eye an animal, whose black hair is standing on end, (FIG. 7) and identified as *hānā ʾaryā ʾaw kalbā paqrā*—“this is a lion or a mad dog.”⁴⁷

The next illustrated prayer concerns the protection of sheep and cattle against wolves, bears and lions. The addition of the last of three is not surprising because the charm “binds mouths” of the animals in the name of Daniel who survived the den of lions.⁴⁸ In the picture (FIG. 8) the prophet, riding on a white horse, spears a black quadruped identified as “wolf lying in ambush for the sheep”—(*hānā d(ʿ)ēbhā dā-khāmen ʿal ʿerbē*).⁴⁹ It is somewhat surprising to find Daniel as protector of the sheep and cattle. Certainly he was considered to be a person able to deal with wild animals, because he was not devoured by the hungry lions, but in this particular context one would have expected a holy figure involved in pastoral life.

Since snakes and scorpions are creatures which frighten most people it is not surprising to find in our manuscript a special spell, reinforced by a drawing, to keep them at bay.⁵⁰ Two serpents, decoratively twinned in the picture which accompanies the text, are identified by a general name “these

⁴⁵ P. Peeters, “Une passion arménienne des saints Hormisdas, Abdas, Sahin et Benjamin,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 28, 1909, pp. 399–415; J. M. Fiey, “Hormizd martire,” in: *Enciclopedia dei Santi*, vol. 2, pp. 166f.

⁴⁶ Joseph Habib “Hormizd Rabban,” in: *Enciclopedia dei Santi*, vol. 2, pp.167–69; E. A. W. Budge, *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar Idta. Metrical Life of R. Hormizd*, London 1902; G. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Märtyrer*, Leipzig 1880, pp. 179–81.

⁴⁷ In GollanczBP, fig. facing p. 18, an identical picture is labelled with the same inscription while in MaclerFM, p. 19, fig. 4 the animal is identified as a wolf.

⁴⁸ Dan. 6:16–23.

⁴⁹ The text and picture are included in GollanczBP, p. XLVI and fig. facing p. 22.

⁵⁰ Also in GollanczBP, p. XLVIII and figs. facing p. 22.

are snakes” (*hällēn hawawwāthā*) (FIG. 9), but the prayer is expected to work against all serpent species which are carefully enumerated in the text. In the case of the scorpions, the incantation is preceded by words that should be pronounced when two of the creatures are put together. This is also illustrated by the picture with the inscription “these are the scorpions” (*hällēn ʿeqqarbē ʾithayhōn*) (FIG. 10) and should be understood as a form of drawn instruction.⁵¹

The next drawing shows again the “seal of Solomon” (FIG. 11). This time the image, encircled by sequences of words, is applied as a magic formula introduced by the caption: “the names on the ring of King Solomon which prevail over kings.” The charm is believed to work when the bearer finds himself in front of a ruler or judge. The mystical names of God written around the seal are, according to Gollancz,⁵² transposed Hebrew letters standing for “God” (YHWH), “Great Angel” (PŠP ŠYH) and “Eternal” (Yah).

The “seal” is followed by a drawing representing Solomon, depicted on a green horse, spearing Asmodeus (FIG. IV). A Jewish tradition identified the latter as the demon that killed seven husbands of Sara, the daughter of Raguel, and was finally defeated by Tobit with the help of the archangel Raphael.⁵³ However, the text which appears after the drawing does not include this story. It is a short formula for binding sorcerers, deriving from the widely known text called the “Net of Solomon,”⁵⁴ which recounts how the king subdued the chief of the demon-blacksmiths and forced him to reveal all the evil spells used in his work.

Asmodeus is presented as a black creature with a big mouth full of teeth, one eye and one leg.⁵⁵ It may be of interest to note, that representations of dismembered demons were characteristic of the art of

⁵¹ When two scorpions are put close together they attack each other and are harmless to people. That is the moment to “bind” them by recitation of the spell.

⁵² GollanczBP p. XII.

⁵³ *Book of Tobit* 6:12–17. The story was developed in the Babylonian Talmud, cf. A. Wünsche, *Der babylonische Talmud in seinem bagdadischen Bestandteil*, wortgetreu, übersetzt und durch Noten erläutert von..., Leipzig 1887, 2. Halbband, 1. Abt. (Naschim).

⁵⁴ Cf. supra n. 31. On the representations of Solomon combating the demons, cf. G. Schlumberger, “Amulettes byzantines anciens destinant à combattre les maléfices et maladies,” *Revue des Études Grecques* 5, 1892, pp. 73–93.

⁵⁵ He is represented in the same way in GollanczBP, fig. facing p. 26; In MaclerFM, fig. 5, Asmodeus looks like a hand puppet.

Late Antiquity,⁵⁶ while the single eye should be connected to the convention that particularly dangerous evil spirits be depicted thus, in order to diminish the destructive force of their gaze.⁵⁷

The last in the long series of holy riders is Mar Shalita (Šallitā), called “the martyr” in the text. He utters the prayer-supplication in the hour of his martyrdom and so that prayer is believed to be effective against the calamity connected with the *rūḥā bīšā*,⁵⁸ which in the picture is portrayed as a demonic figure with long nails and armed with a stick (FIG. 12).⁵⁹

It seems that here also two saints were confused—St. Shalita, called Arthemios, who died the death of a martyr under the persecution of Julian the Apostate⁶⁰ and St. Shalita, the monk and founder of monasteries, among them the famous Beth Zabday.⁶¹ The presence of the latter saint, who was known for miracles of healing and also recognised as the guardian against pneumonic plague, would be more justifiable here.

The prayer entitled “Anathema of the fathers of paradise which avails for all pains” is a long list of names of saints and biblical figures, who, it was believed, were taken to heaven directly after death. In the picture this holy crowd is represented by Elijah and Enoch (FIG. 13),⁶² allowed to dwell in paradise long before other righteous people.

Two drawings mark the end of the book: rosettes arranged in the form of the cross and an interlaced cross (FIG. 14). In liturgical manuscripts the cross was commonly used to announce the beginning and end of a holy text but here it is undoubtedly used as an apotropaic sign, the invincible seal of Christ, both blessing and protective.⁶³

⁵⁶ M. Schapiro, “From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos,” *Art Bulletin* 21, 1939, 330f.

⁵⁷ About that practice cf. W. Staude, “Le mauvais oeil dans la peinture chrétienne d’Abyssinie,” *Journal asiatique* 225, 1935, pp. 232–257.

⁵⁸ J. M. Fiey, “De quelques saints vénérés au Liban,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 28, 1978, p. 39f. The author mentions that in Lebanon (region of Batrun) the saint is regarded as offering protection against a cattle epidemic.

⁵⁹ The same figure is represented in GollanczBP, fig. facing p. 30.

⁶⁰ J. M. Fiey “Šalitā, martire” in: *Enciclopedia dei Santi*, vol. 2, p. 922.

⁶¹ J. M. Fiey “Šalitā, asceta,” *id.*, p. 921f.

⁶² They are almost identically depicted in GollanczBP, fig. facing p. 30.

⁶³ In the talismanic context the cross was not conceived as the instrument of Christ’s passion but as his trophy received for the victory over Satan and Death, cf. E. Dinkler, E. Dinkler-von Schubert, “Kreuz I: Kreuz vorikonoklastisch” in *Reallexikon zur byzantinische Kunst*, V, Stuttgart 1991, 135ff.

The pictures which illustrate the text do not represent a very high artistic level and most probably were executed by the scribe of the manuscripts. They are sketched in black ink and slightly coloured with emerald green and brownish red. The human figures are not individualised. All have diminished bodies in comparison with large circular heads and barely-marked facial features, with the exception of large, open eyes, always very important in the talismanic context. The greatest variety is shown in the representations of evil spirits, but even here the visualization of their terrifying appearance is limited to standard practices such as non-human form of the body, dismemberment, black skin, over-sized nails etc. It is obvious that all these figures are treated symbolically.

The animals and the objects are not differentiated either within their categories: for instance the arms could hardly be identified without the help of inscriptions and a lion and a dog are represented as similar-looking black quadrupeds. Each picture is simply a generalization of danger and “binds” it through visualization.

The same thought processes resulted in the depiction of almost all saints and holy figures on horseback. Although, according to his *vita*, only St. George should have been portrayed as an equestrian, the ability to conquer ascribed to other protectors allowed them to be represented within the iconographical scheme normally reserved for equestrian saints.⁶⁴

Similar thinking accounts for another striking feature of the illustrations, namely their position on the page in relation to the text. Some are turned by 45 degrees, some by 90 degrees, while the others do not convey any particular viewpoint. Such lack of concern for correct text-and-picture layout is not unusual in Syriac manuscripts⁶⁵ but in this particular

⁶⁴ In Gollancz's manuscript called Codex B, even St. Mary is represented on horseback, about to hit an evil spirit, GollanczBP, p. 60. See also W. Fauth, “Der christliche Reiterheilige des Sisinnios-Typs im Kampf gegen eine vielnamige Dämonin,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 53:4, 1999, pp. 401–403.

⁶⁵ M. Schapiro “The Miniatures of the Florence Diatessaron (Laurentian ms Or. 81): Their Place in Late Medieval Art and Supposed Connection with Early Christian and Insular Art,” *The Art Bulletin*, 55:4, 1973, p. 497; Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, “Remarks on the Decoration and Iconography of the Syriac Gospels, British Library, Add. 7174,” in: *Symposium Syriacum VII*, Uppsala University 11–14, August 1996, ed., R. Lavenant, (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 256), Roma 1998, pp. 641–659, part. 644f. Position of the pictures (or their elements) is not followed by the explanatory inscriptions, which are written in all possible directions.

case it proves again that the drawings were not meant to be seen as more than conceptual signs.

The texts which appear in this book belong to a category which certainly might have been sanctioned by the Church.⁶⁶ None of them contains magical gibberish, curses or astrological formulae. They are ordinary supplications, well known from the liturgy and prayer books. Sometimes their mysterious character and prophylactic intent is accentuated by an unusual, diagonal text layout.

The drawings do not have an obvious purely magical character either. One group represents the holy readers struggling with evil powers, a subject that belongs to the classical repertory of religious painting, another group seeks to visualise and thus “disarm” all threatening dangers, evil occurrences and fears.

Finally, it should be noted that our collection of texts and drawings may be of interest beyond the history of religion and art history. It offers much valuable information for sociological and historical studies. For instance, the spells against evil spirits said to cause various and precisely named diseases, often followed by recipes for home remedies, may provide information about the contemporary state of people’s health and medical care. The long list of social calamities against which the spiritual powers were invoked informs about the daily life of the Christian communities in the Urmiah region, and the repeated occurrences of exorcisms against authority shows how insecure the Christians felt under Muslim rule. The “binding” of firearms and the inclusion of a spell to assist in the correct composition of a business letter bear witness to the fact that the charms were relevant to everyday life. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the connection of demons to illnesses and to the upheavals of daily life which made them seem more down-to-earth beings.

⁶⁶ It should be noted that our manuscript and many others belonging to the same group were executed by priests or by scribes drawn from the families of clergy. Hunter, *Anathemas*, p. 83.

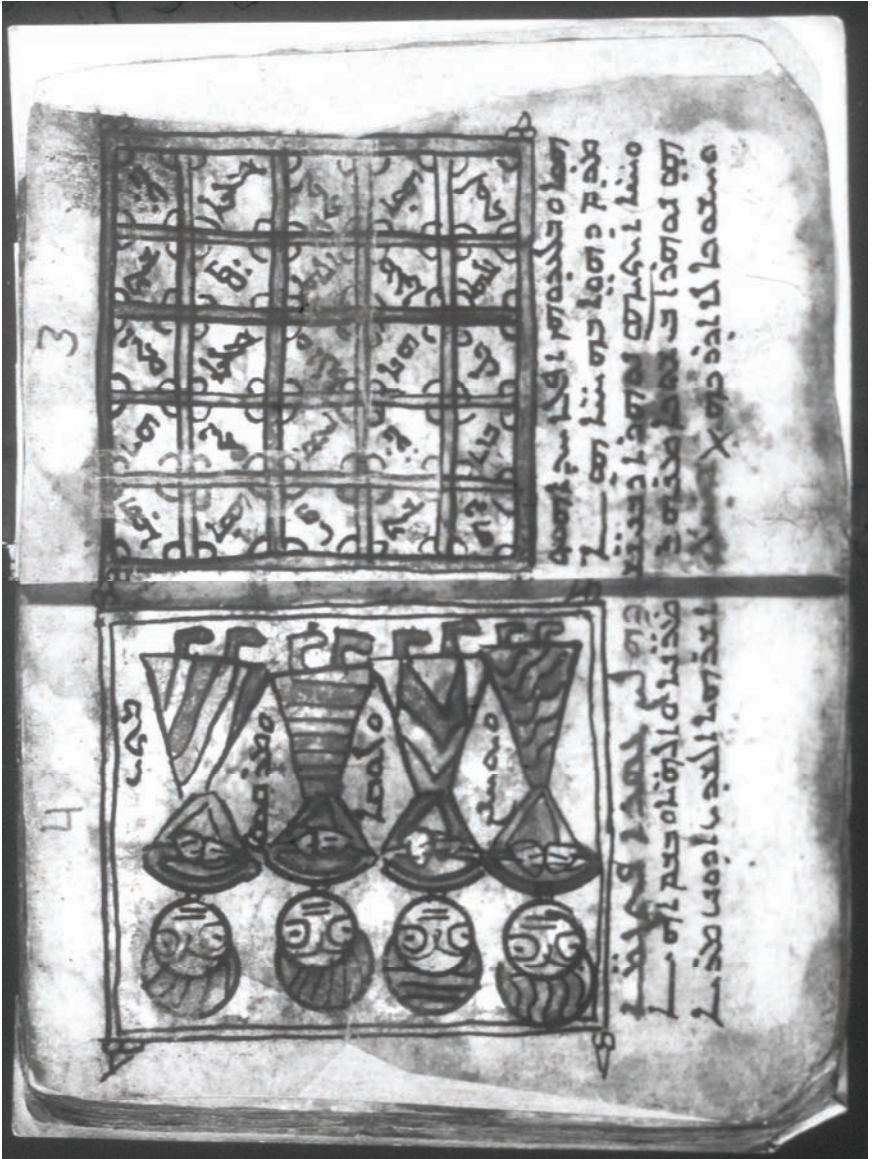


Fig. 1. Beginning of St. John's Gospel and the Four Evangelists



Fig. 2. St. George and a serpent



Fig. 3. Ruler with his attributes

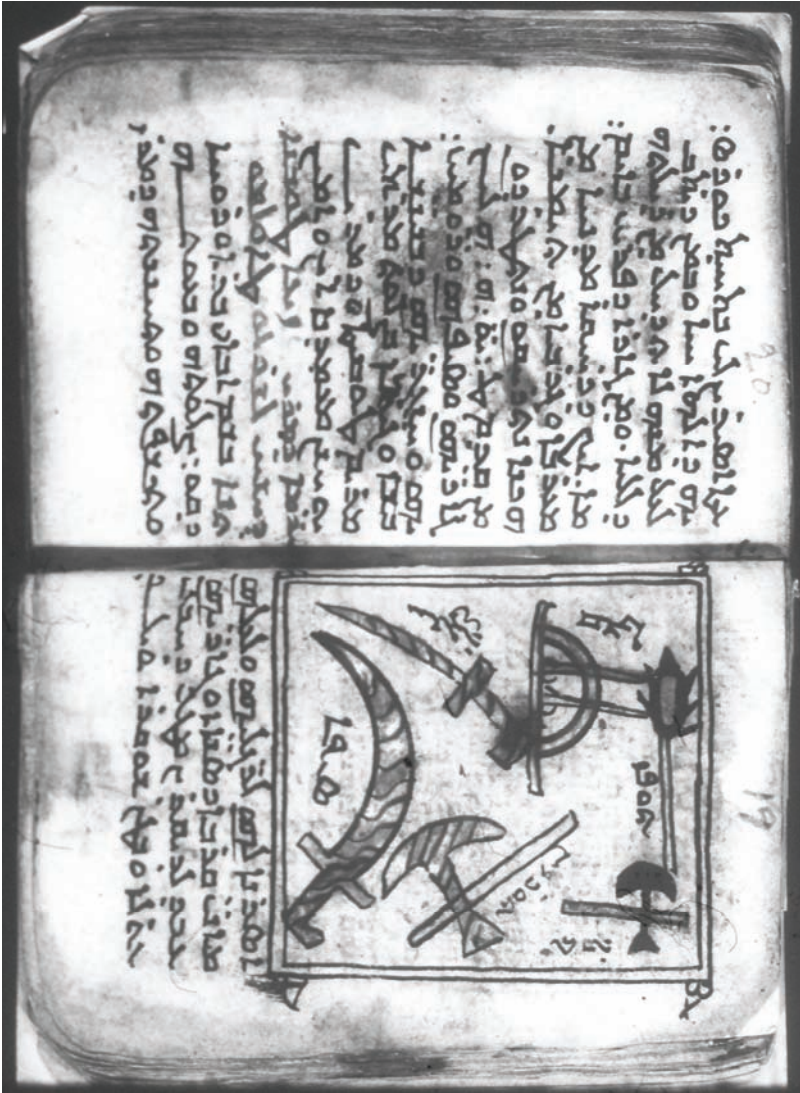


Fig. 4. Weapon and the accompanying spell



Fig. 5. Game animals and the prayer for a successful hunt



Fig. 6. Firearms



Fig. 7. Rabban Hormizd with a mad dog and the text of his "prayer"



Fig. 8. Prophet Daniel and a wolf

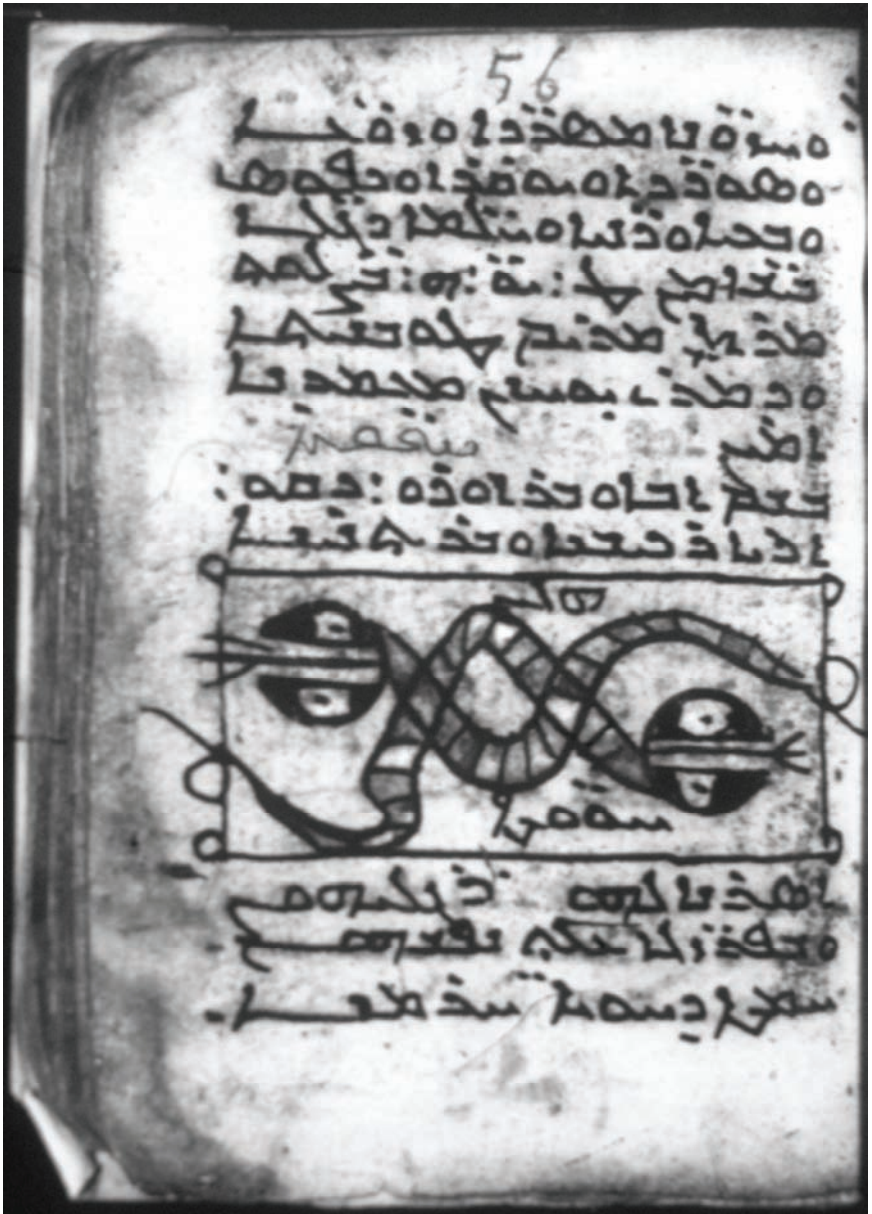


Fig. 9. Fragment of spell against the bite of a snake

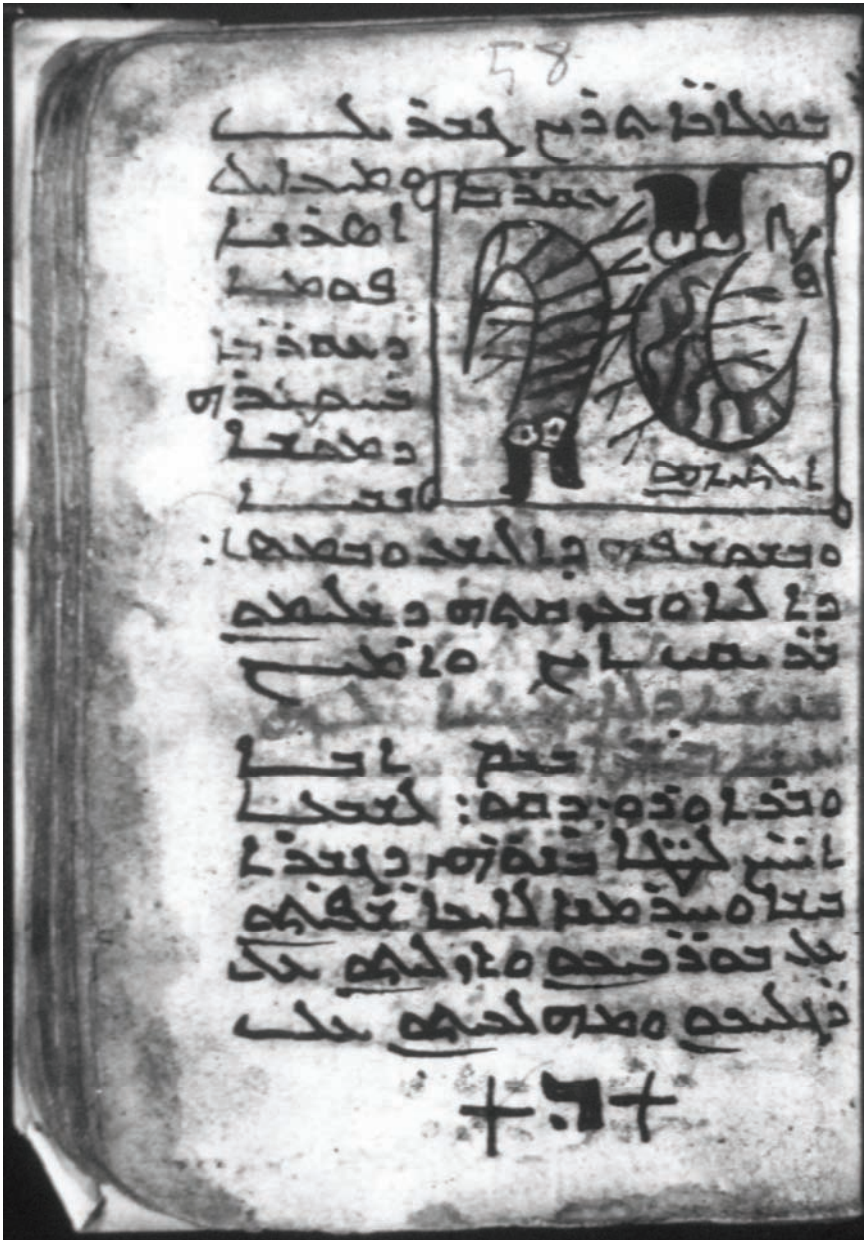


Fig. 10. Spell and remedy against the bites of scorpions



Fig. 11. Diagonally written prayer and the “seal of Solomon”



Fig. 12. St. Shalita and a bad spirit

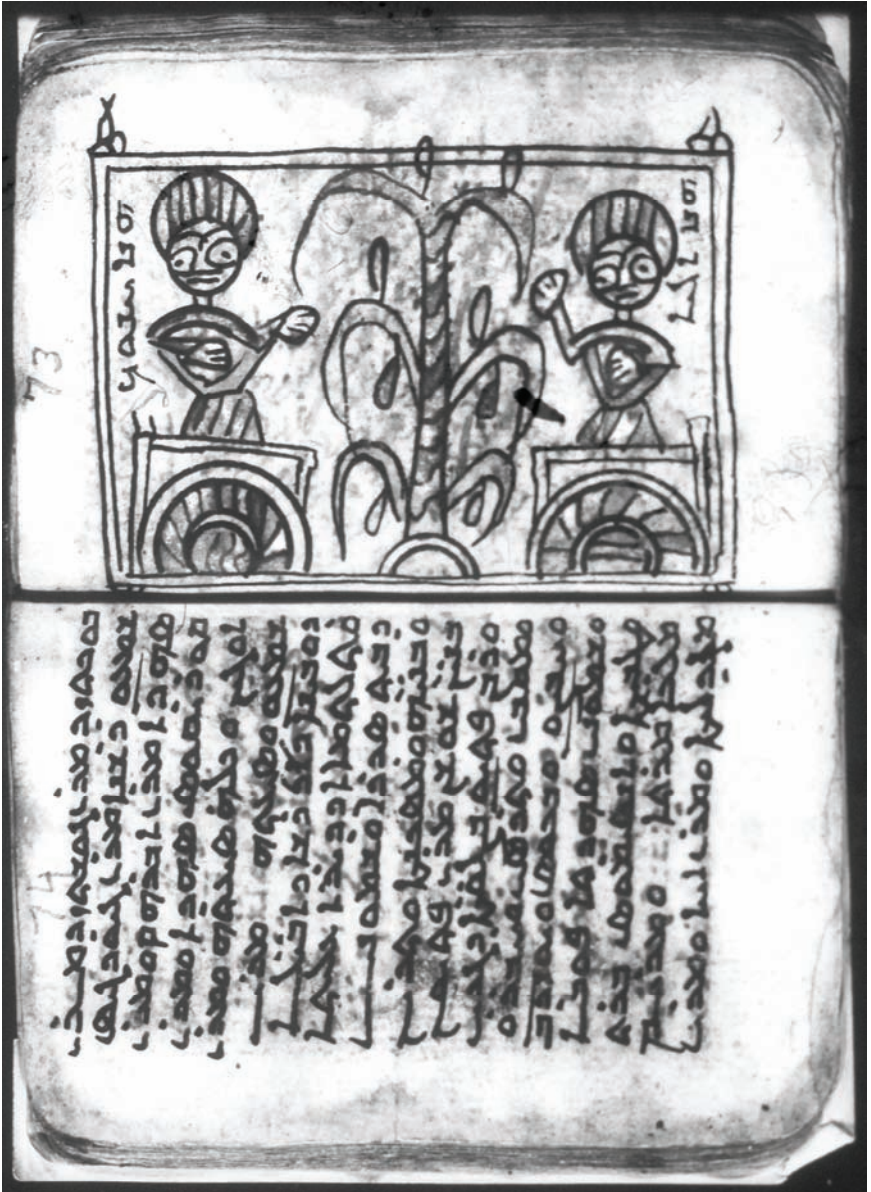


Fig. 13. Elijah, Enoch and the "Tree of Paradise"

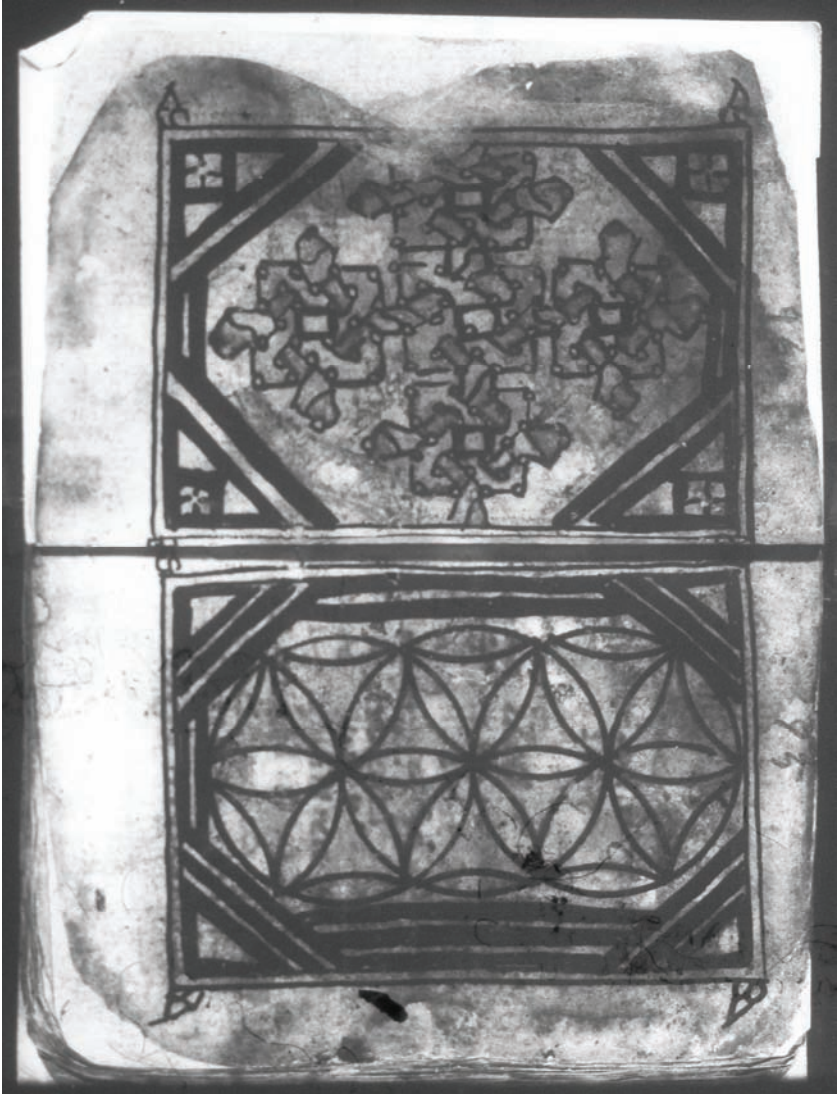


Fig. 14. Rosettes and cross



Fig. I. St. Zaya and the "Angel of Death"



Fig. II. St. Tamasys and the “Spirit of Lunacy”



Fig. III. Archangel Gabriel and the "Evil Eye"



Fig. IV. Solomon spearing Asmodeus