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Between Demonology and Hagiology

The Slavonic Rendering of the Semitic Magical *Historiola* of the Child-Stealing Witch

на Цвети за Цветница

Abstract: This contribution traces the history of some basic narrative elements of the *historiola* about the child-stealing demon, as presented in Jewish Aramaic amulets (from Palestine) and magic/incantation bowls (from Mesopotamia), as well as in the *Alphabetum Siracidis* (in which a reference to the Lilith legend is made). The names of the three angels of healing – Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangelof – are also provided in this cluster of esoteric texts. This *historiola* is attested not only in Semitic (Hebrew, Aramaic, late Syriac, Ethiopic and Arabic) sources, but also in Greek, Coptic, Armenian, Romanian, and Slavonic medieval literature, where the name of the holy protagonist fighting against the fiend is Sisinnius (a "domesticated" abbreviation of the above listed Semitic angelonyms). The names of the child-stealing demon (and/or that of the saint-warrior counteracting her) were frequently used as amulets or talismans for the protection of infants and lying-in women and this story provides an etiology for that practice. I focus on a previously unpublished seventeenth-century Serbian version, known as "The Prayer of Saints Sisin, Isidore, Simeon and Theodor". The paper concludes with an edition of this text as well as a number of oral versions of the same story that were recorded in Bulgaria in the second half of the 20th century. The Slavonic apocryphal and folklore redactions of the *historiola* of the child-stealing demon are considered as distant witnesses to an original Semitic story composed in an Hellenistic Jewish environment; the incantation later became Christianized, while its Semitic (Aramaic) counterpart continued – quite independently – its life in later Jewish magic.

1 Historiographical overview

1.1 Moses Gaster on the Semitic Urtext in Slavonic tradition

In 1900, Rabbi Moses Gaster, the Haham of the Sephardi Jewish Community in Britain, drew attention to Slavonic, Romanian and Greek parallels to Semitic (actually Aramaic) charms against the child-stealing witch and highlighted that they were widely attested among Christian communities in the Balkans in both oral and written forms.[1] The written witnesses frequently begin with an instructive rubric recom-

1 Cf. Gaster 1900, 133–162.

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mending that the object on which the chant is inscribed "is to be placed in the cradle of the child and then the Devil will not come near it".[2] This detail indicates that the manuscripts containing the incantation had a pragmatic function: they were used as protective amulets and talismans.[3] Gaster further emphasized that the contents of the written accounts of the charm are "almost identical" with the folklore invocations and spells, while the names "differ very considerably, and in some they have a decidedly Slavonic form".[4] Gaster also implied that the oral renditions of this type of incantations must have originated in written apocryphal heritage, with the Romanian corpus "being merely a translation" of the Slavonic.[5] As for the Slavonic witnesses, he identifies them as offshoots of defensive magical incantations deriving from a Greek protograph.[6] Born in Romania and fluent in Romanian, M. Gaster was well acquainted with indigenous folklore tradition and apocryphal literature, but he also showed remarkable knowledge of Slavonic material and was the first to classify the Orthodox Christian charms against the child-stealing witch. He divided them into two major categories, represented by shorter and longer recensions. Characteristic for the first type (designated by him as *Avestitsa*)[7] is that the pursuer of the "unclean" evil spirit (who intends to steal the new-born Child of the Virgin Mary) is Archangel Michael. For the purposes of the current discussion, we

2 *Ibid*., 139.

3 As pointed out by L. Kovačević, it is recommended that women in whose households infants suffer sudden death should attach such amulets (often prepared by the local priests) to their clothing; alternatively, they should place them next to the child (Kovačević 1878, 283). One such scroll-amulet containing the 'Sisinnius prayer' (dated to the end of the 17th – beginning of the 18th century) was described and transcribed by Iv. Duichev (1971, 157–166, esp. 161–163). Written on a band of paper glued on cloth (thus forming a scroll 5.20 meters long and 18 cm wide), it begins with the recommendation that it was the Lord God himself who endorsed its protective functions: those, who attach it to their clothes, or keep it in their homes, will not be affected by the Devil and evil people; those who read it three times every day will be saved from the Eternal Sorrow (Duichev 1971, 158). For the role of the 'Sisinnius prayers' in folk medicine and magic, see also the discussion in Pantelić 1973, Panaiotov 2003, 247.

4 Cf. Gaster 1900, 138.

5 *Ibid*., 139; see also Veselovskii 1883, 40–53, 428–430.

6 Cf. Gaster 1900, 142–143.

7 The Romanian demononym *Avestitsa* derives from the Slavonic nouns denoting 'witch' (e.g. Bulgarian *вещица*, Serbian *вештица*, etc.); they are etymologically related to the Church Slavonic nouns *вѣщица* (= maga), *вѣдецъ* / *вѣдьць* / *вѣдѣтель* (Gr. γνώστης), *вѣщецъ* / *вѣштьць* (Gr. μάγος), *вѣдь* / *вѣдѣныє* / *вѣдѣнїє* 'knowledge' (rendering Gr. γνῶσις, ἐπιστήμη, δόγμα, τρόπος); the verb *вѣдѣти* ('to know') and the adjective *вѣщь* ('wise', peritus) belong to the same semantic cluster. Consult in this connection I. Sreznevskii's *Materials for the Dictionary of the Old Russian Language According to the Written Sources* (1893 (1), 478–482, 502–503), the Russian edition of M. Vasmer's *Russisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Fasmer 1986 (I), 283, 309), *The Dictionary of the Old Bulgarian Language* (under the editorship of D. Ivanova-Mircheva 1999, 319–321), and A. Bonchev's *Dictionary of Church Slavonic Language* (2002, 123, 125).

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reproduce below one such folk incantation/conjuration "collected from the mouth of the peasants in Roumania".[8] The charm runs thus:

> The Archangel Michael, descending on the Mount of Olives, met Avezuha, the wing of Satan, and she was dreadful to behold; the hair of her head was hanging down to the ground, her eyes were like stars, her hands of iron, the nails of her hands and feet were like sickles, and from her mouth came forth a flame of fire.[9] The Archangel Michael, Lord over the Heavenly hosts, said unto her, 'Whence dost thou come, thou unclean Spirit, and whither art thou going?' 'I am going to Bethlehem in Judea, for I have heard that Jesus Christ is going to be born of his His Virgin Mother Maria, and I am going to hurt her.' Whereupon the Archangel Michael took hold of the hair of her head, fastened an iron chain around her,[10] stuck his sword into her side, and began to beat her terribly, in order to make her tell him all her secret arts. She began and said, 'I change myself into a dog, a cat, a fly, a spider, a raven, an evil-looking girl, and thus enter into the houses of the people and hurt the women and bring trouble upon the children, and I bring changelings, and I have nineteen names. First, Vestitza; second, Novadaria; third, Valnomia; fourth, Sina; fifth, Nicozda; sixth, Avezuha; seventh, Scorcoila; eighth, Tiha; ninth, Miha; tenth, Grompa; eleventh, Slalo; twelfth, Necausa; thirteenth, Hatav; fourteenth, Hulila; fifteenth, Huva; sixteenth, Ghiana; seventeenth, Gluviana; eighteenth, Prava; nineteenth, Samca; and wherever these names will be found written I shall not be able to approach that house within a distance of three thousand steps.' And the Archangel Michael, the Lord over the Heavenly Hosts said unto her, 'I tell thee, and I conjure thee, that thou shalt have neither the power to approach the house of X the servant of the Lord, nor to hurt his property, his flocks, or anything that belongs to him.[11] Thou shalt go to the desolate mountains where no one lives, there shalt thou abide. Amen.'[12]

In the second type of charms against the child-stealing witch (designated as the *Sisoe-type*), the role of the protagonist is not played by the Archangel Michael but

8 Gaster 1900, 132.

9 A strikingly similar formula constructed on 'iron imagery' (as iron itself is considered to be an apotropaic metal, along with bronze and lead) occurs in the description of a male demon in an Aramaic magic bowl, whose "temples are an anvil of iron, his arms are two hammers, his chest is the chest of an evil man, his belly is a lake without canals, his back is alum, his legs are legs of brass and iron", see Naveh & Shaked 1985, 199.

10 For the iconography of a demoness with a chain around her neck, as well as shackles binding her ankles (as attested in Aramaic magic bowls), see Levene 2003, 180.

11 From the perspective of structural typology, the attestation of such a formula (e.g. "I conjure you, that you will have neither the power to approach the house of X the servant of the Lord, nor to hurt his property, his flocks, or anything that belongs to him") in Romanian charms is symptomatic. In fact, such statements are commonplace in Aramaic magic bowls; see for instance the text published in Naveh & Shaked 1985, 181, in which the client calls for protection "to his house and the members of his house, to his property and to his cattle, and to the body [...]". Another bowl reads, "sealed and counter-sealed are the house, dwelling, possessions, sons, daughters, cattle, foetus, seed and soul of (the client)" (Levene 2003, 108–109). However, by acknowledging this type of common features between the Aramaic and Romanian magic texts I am not suggesting that the latter are direct descendants of the former; rather, I am suggesting that they share some common structural patterns and idioms.

12 Gaster 1900, 132–133.

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by Saint Sisoe. In contrast to the first (i.e. the *Avestitsa-type*), the targeted victim of the Devil is not the Virgin Mary, but the saint's sister, whose name is Melentia (var. Meletia, Melitena, Melentina, etc.). As an example of the *Sisoe type* of the written charm, Gaster provides the text of a lengthy historiola (entitled by the copyist "The prayer of the Holy Sisoe for the little children who are killed by the Devil") from a manuscript-amulet dated by him to the middle of the 18th century. The storyline unfolds according to the following scheme: three saints-warriors, among them Sisoe, had waged successful wars in Arabian lands. Meanwhile, Sisoe's sister Meletia had given birth to five children, whom the Devil had stolen and swallowed. While pregnant with her sixth child, Meletia, wary of the Devil, runs away from her former abode and reaches the seashore, where she finds a cave of lead with doors of lead; having prepared food for one year, she hides inside it and prays to God for help and protection against the Devil. God listens to her prayer and sends one of his angels to her brother Sisoe, ordering him to go "with fear of God against the Devil", who had swallowed his five nephews. The saint, however, sets off on a hunting expedition, but is caught by a terrible storm in a forest, and almost by accident arrives at the cave in which Meletia and the new-born infant are hiding. Initially Meletia is reluctant to open the door, since she is frightened that the Devil may come and steal her child, "as forty days have not yet passed since its birth", but Sisoe informs her that he is sent by God to fight the Adversary. Meletia lets her brother in, but the Devil changed himself into a millet-grain and hid inside the shoe of the saint's horse, and once inside snatched the child away. Sisoe mounts his horse and begins pursuing the Devil; on the way he encounters a willow tree and asks it about the whereabouts of the Devil; although the tree has seen the Adversary, it fails to inform the saint, who curses it to "only bloom and never bear fruit". The same happens to the dishonest briar, which is also cursed by Sisoe to have its roots where its branches ought to be; then the saint encounters a plane-tree which he blesses, as it informs him about the whereabouts of the Devil, whom it had not seen, but whose song it overheard. Finally, the saint blesses the olive-tree, which tells him that it has seen the Devil plunging into the sea, and having prayed to the Lord, the saint throws his hook into the waters, catches the Devil and drags him onto land. Sisoe then orders him to return the children of his sister and beats him with a fiery sword. The Devil replies that he will bring back the saint's nephews only when the saint vomits up the milk which he sucked from his mother's breast; Sisoe does this and the Devil brings back "all six children hale and hearty, and not hurt in the least". The saint lets the Devil free only when the latter swears "by the Lord, who created heaven and earth, that wherever he would see the name of the book of the Holy Sisoe he would have no power to harm or hurt the people".

As briefly mentioned above, Gaster was also the first to identify the etiology of the Romanian and Slavonic charms against the child-stealing witch, stating that they are based upon Greek texts in which the role of the antagonist is played by

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the demonic character "which goes by the name of *Gelu* or *Geloo*";[13] in order to support his thesis, he further supplies as evidence two Greek accounts.

The first legend (defined by Gaster as the longer recension) concerns the contest between "the saints of the Lord, Sisynios and Synidores"[14] and "the accursed *Gylo*" – a female spirit[15] who snatched the children of their sister Melitena.[16] Incorporated into the storyline are the familiar motifs of the pursuit of the demon by the saint(s), during which the encounter with the cursed and the blessed trees takes place, followed by the motif of the regurgitated mother's milk and the safe return of the snatched infants. However, there are also some idiosyncratic topics included in the narrative. These include the metamorphosis of the hunted demon into a fish, a swallow, and goat's hair hidden in the King's beard; furthermore, after her defeat "the accursed *Gylo*" negotiates with her captors the conditions of her release and confesses that she will no longer be able to enter people's homes and harm their households if they possess an amulet-prayer containing her "twelve and a half" names:

> She said: "My first name is Gylo, the second Morrha, the third Byza, the fourth Marmaro, the fifth Betasia, the sixth Balagia, the seventh Bordona, the eight Apleto, the ninth Chomodracaena, the tenth Anabardalea, the eleventh Psychoanaspastria, the twelfth Paedopnictria, the half Strigla."[17]

The charm ends with an appeal to Holy Sisynios and Synidores (complemented by an elaborate list of names of additional saints-protagonists) to protect the client

13 *Ibid*., 142–143; see also in this connecton the discussion in Greenfield 1989 and Chekha 2014.

14 As pointed out by Naveh and Shaked, although in the Greek account provided by Gaster there are only two helpers, the number of protagonists varies in the different versions of the historiola; thus in the Greek story reproduced by them (after Perdrizet 1985, 112–115), the brothers of Meletinē are three: Saint Sisinios, Sinēs and Sēnodōros; see *ibid*., 115, n. 6.

15 The literature on the demonic figure of Gello/Gylo is vast, since the epistemological models applied by different scholars to analyze it vary, e.g. the observations of Spier (1993, 34), who suggests that "the name and belief are probably of Babylonian derivation" (33–39, esp. 34) and Burkert, who highlights the Sumerian-Akkadian Gallu-demon and advocates the hypothesis that the Gello phenomenon represents "a borrowing from Mesopotamia" (1997, 82–83). However, evidence based on the name alone is insufficient, since the two demons, Gello and Gallu, do not resemble each other in their essential characters or functions; for instance, the Gallu-demon is neither a female demon nor a child-stealer, but simply a netherworld gendarme (see *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* G, 19). See also the discussion in Johnston 2001, 364, 380–381.

16 Naveh and Shaked are tentatively suggesting a possible "zoological association" in the Greek renditions of this magical historiola: "Meletine may be connected with the Greek word for a bee (μέλιττα). The fiend has a strong association with a fly (Greek μυῖα), which is both the form it assumes when it entered with the brothers' horses and one of its names"; see *ibid*., 115, n. 7.

17 Gaster 1900, 145; for the motif of the "twelve and a half" names of "the abominable Gyllou", see the Greek text reproduced (after Perdrizet) by Naveh & Shaked 1985, 112–115.

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"who holds this amulet", together with his entire household, from "every unclean spirit, every earthly and airy demon, and the abominable Gylo".[18]

Omitted in the shorter recension of the Greek version of the charm against the child-stealing witch, however, is the list of the names of the demon; in fact, she is nameless, despite her testimony in the epilogue in which she promises that "wherever this amulet (Phylacterium) be found I will not go, and wherever this will be read I will not enter, but run away a distance of sixty miles", and "whoever will write down my twelve names, his house will I not hurt, nor will I enter his abode, nor harm his cattle, nor have power over his household".[19] As in the longer recension, the names of the saints-protagonists are Sisynne/Sisynnios and Sisynnodoros/Synidores. Still, it is the Holy Sisynnios who adjures her "by the name of the Lord," and by a cluster of saints, the list of whose names differs significantly from that found in the longer recension (see above).

Having examined the contents of the Romanian, Slavonic and Greek versions of the charm, Gaster points out, that "there are a number of parallels in other literatures much older than the Slavonic and even the Greek", and refers to Hebrew tradition, and especially to the Lilith legend; he further clarifies that the object on which it is written is "used as an amulet in the room where the child is born, hanging round the walls",[20] while the text itself functions as a verbal conjuration. As noted by Gaster, the Hebrew text shows a remarkable similarity with its Romanian and Slavonic counterparts. In the Hebrew version, however, the protagonist is the Prophet Elijah, while the antagonist is Lilith. Described in the incipit of the charm is the encounter between the Prophet Elijah and Lilith (who was traveling with her host); it is followed by the formulaic piece of dialogue: "Where are you going, you unclean host?" "My Lord Elijah, I am going to that woman who has given birth to a child, to give her the sleep of death, to take her new-born child, to drink its blood, to suck the marrow of its bones," etc. When warned by the Prophet that he will conjure her with "a great excommunication" that she will be "changed into a dumb stone by the will of God", Lilith swears "by the name of God" that she will avoid the roads leading to the house of a lying-in woman and will not harm her child, should the amulet containing her names be hung up on the walls. She furthermore reveals to the Prophet the list of her secret names: "Satrina, Lilith, Abito, Amizo, Izorpo, Kokos, Odam, Ita, Podo, Eilo, Patrota, Abeko, Kea, Kali, Batha, Talto, and Partasah".[21] Finally, Gaster brings to the discussion the Syriac version, and emphasized that, regardless of whether they are Jewish (Hebrew, Aramaic) or Christian (Greek, Slavonic, Romanian), the lists of demonic names bring about protection against the evil spirits; their demonic power is compromised once their identities are known.

18 Gaster 1900, 146.
19 *Ibid*, 148.
20 *Ibid*, 149.
21 *Ibid*, 149.

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1.2 James Montgomery's contribution

Thirteen years after its publication, Gaster's pioneering work was highlighted by James Montgomery in his celebrated *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, in the comments on text No. 42 from the archival collection of the University Museum.[22] In fact, Montgomery did not include this incantation in his Glossaries, since the bowl containing the inscription was no longer found in the Museum at the time when he produced his catalogue; instead, "on the hypothesis that the original text was once in the Museum",[23] he published the copy of the transcription prepared earlier by Richard Gottheil.[24] Although Montgomery was somewhat puzzled by the text, since "it differed so radically from the other inscriptions", he "ventured" to publish his colleague's copy, "and do so the more readily because of its interesting character". Most importantly, as highlighted by Montgomery, "it contains a form of the Lilith legend, widespread in folklore, and a bowl would have been a perfectly proper place for a text of this prophylactic character";[25] furthermore he points out

22 Cf. Montgomery 1913, 258–264.

23 *Ibid*, 258.

24 The text of the incantation in question runs as follows:

> Shaddai // Sanui Sansannui Semniglaph Adam YHWH Kadmon Life Lilith // In the name of Y" the God of Israel who besits the cherubs, whose name is living and enduring forever. Elija the prophet was walking in the road and he met the wicked Lilith and all her band. He said to her, "Where art thou going, Foul one and Spirit of foulness, with all thy foul band walking along?" And she answered and said to him: "My lord Elija, I am going to the house of the woman in childbirth who is in pangs (?), of So-and-so daughter of Such-a-one, to give her the sleep of death and to take the child she is bearing, to suck his blood and to suck the marrow of his bones and to devour his flesh." And said Elija the prophet – blessed his name! – "With a ban from the Name – bless it – shalt thou be restrained and like a stone shalt thou be!" And she answered and said to him: "For the sake of Y" postpone the ban and I will flee, and will swear to thee in the name of Y" God of Israel that I will let go this business in the case of this woman in childbirth and the child to be born to her and every inmate so as do no injury. And every time that they repeat or I see my names written, it will not be in the power of me or of all my band to do evil or harm. And these are my names: Lilith, Abitar (Abito?), Abikar (Abiko?), Amorpho, Hakaš, Odam, Kephido, Ailo, Matrota, Abnukta, Šatriha, Kali, Batzeh, Taltui, Kitša." And Elija answered and said to her: "Lo, I adjure thee and all thy band, in the name of Y" God of Israel, by gematria 613, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and in the name of his holy Shekina, and in the name of the ten holy Seraphs, the Wheels and the holy Beasts and the Ten Books of the Law, and by the might of the God of Hosts, blessed is he! – that thou come not, thou nor thy band to injure this woman or the child she is bearing, nor to drink his blood nor to suck the marrow of his bones nor to devour his flesh, nor to touch them neither in their 256 limbs nor in their 365 ligaments and veins, even as she is (= thou art?) not able to count the number of the stars of heaven nor to dry up the water of the sea. In the name of: 'Hasdiel Šamriel has rent Satan'" (Montgomery 1913, 259–260).

25 *Ibid*, 258, but Naveh & Shaked (1985, 118) doubt the antiquity of Montgomery's unprovenanced-text. However, one feature of the text certainly looks archaic, namely the reference to the woman victim having 256 bones and 365 ligaments; the former figure may be erroneous for 252 female bones. This tradition harks back to a Talmudic dictum that the body has 248 bones and 365 sinews,

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that "similar charms against Lilith are to be found at the end of the *Sefer Raziel*" and other related sources.[26]

The template of the narrative about the encounter between the Prophet Elijah and the wicked Lilith (accompanied by her band of demons) is simple;[27] the demon intends to harm a woman in childbirth by giving her the sleep of death, and to deprive her of her child by devouring its flesh and sucking its blood; Elijah adjures Lilith and her band, by forcing her to reveal to him her names, thus preventing her from killing infants and their mothers. According to their contract, if Lilith's names are invoked in a certain household, she will have no power to kill children and women in childbirth there. In this way the list of her demonic names serves as an amulet against the fiend herself. The narrative from Montgomery's text about the contract between Lilith and Elijah is tentatively related to a story in the Talmud according to which Lilith is only allowed to cause harm on Wednesday and Satur-

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which add up to 613, equal to the number of Mosaic commandments in the Pentateuch; this relates to a Talmudic account of the first-century CE Palestinian sage Rabbi Ishmael, whose students dissected the body of a prostitute and were surprised to discover that she had 252 bones (rather than 248), the problem being solved by the explanation that a woman has four additional bones (doors and hinges) in her vagina (Babylonian Talmud *Bekorot* 45a). The theme is fairly common in Aramaic magic bowls, which also distinguish between 252 bones for females and 248 bones in males; see Shaked, Ford & Bhayro 2013, 55. See also two magic bowls published by Dan Levene in which a male client is to be protected by the spell in all his 248 limbs, and alternatively the demon is forbidden from harming a female client in all her 252 limbs (Levene 2003, 46, 116).

26 Montgomery 1913, 259.

27 A somewhat abbreviated version of the charm published by Montgomery is presented in the eighteenth-century Jewish amulet from the collection of *The Museum of the History of the Jews in Russia* (Moscow); the amulet is of German provenance, and is prepared for a girl. Provided below is the author's translation of the Russian version of the text, as published by M. Kaspina (2014, 49–50):

> In the name of the Lord God of Israel who is seated on the Cherubim, His name is great and awesome. Elijah the Prophet – may his memory be blessed – went along the road and met Lilith and all her band; and he said to Lilith the sinner, "You, unclean! You, the spirit of uncleanliness, and all your impious band, where are you going?" She replied, saying, "Master Elijah, I am going to the woman who has just delivered, whose name is So-and-so, to give her the sleep of death and take away her newborn daughter, to drink her blood and slurp the marrow from her bones, and consume her flesh." The Prophet Elijah – may his memory be blessed – answered her saying, "You will be stopped with a curse from the blessed Name and you will be like a stone." She answered him and said, "In the name of God, let me go and I will run away. I swear to you in the name of the Lord, God of the hosts of Israel, to depart from all these paths leading to this woman and her newborn daughter, and every time when I hear my names, I will run away. And now I will tell you all my names and every time when they are mentioned, neither I nor my band will have any power to bring evil, to harm, and to enter the house of the lying-in woman or to cause harm to her. And here are my names: Lilith, Abitu, Abizu, Amzarko, Hekesh, Orem, Ikpodu, Ilu, Tatrota, Abunukta, Shatruna, Kalikataza, Tilatui, Piratsha."

It is worth noting that in the versions published by Montgomery (1913) and Kaspina (2014), there are some similarities between the names of Lilith.

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day nights; in both cases there is a reference to some kind of deal or contract with the demon allowing her to cause harm only under certain circumstances.[28]

1.3 Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked's observations

Almost a century after Gaster and Montgomery, Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked do an excellent job of tracing the early history of the basic elements of the story of the child-stealing witch, as presented in Aramaic amulets (from Palestine)[29] and

28 The historiola of Agrat bat Mahlat and her encounter with Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa is recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (*Pesachim* 112b) and is quoted in full by Shaked, Ford & Bhayro (2013, 53), because of its close affinity to Aramaic magic bowls. The story is as follows.

> One should not go out alone at night on either the eve of Wednesday or on the eve of the Sabbath, because Agrat daughter of Mahlat goes out in company with 180,000 harmful angels, each of which has the authority to cause harm on their own. Originally they would be found abroad every day. On one occasion she happened to come against Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa. She said to him, "If it were not for the fact that there is a proclamation in heaven (saying): Beware of Hanina and his (knowledge of the) Torah, I would put you in danger." He said to her: "If I have a considerable position in heaven, I decree against you that you should never go through an inhabited place." She said to him, "Please give me a little respite," and he allowed her (to roam about) on the eves of the Sabbath and Wednesday.

29 See the comments on Amulet No 15 (Naveh & Shaked 1985, 104–122). The fragmentary text reads:

> "Smamit gave birth to sons. [They were killed by Side]ros. She fled from h[im] . . . She stood in . . . . . She built a house for herself in . . . . . [She provided it with] gates of iron . . . . . and she locked . . . . . the gate . . . . SWNY and SWSWNY and SNYGLY knocked on . . . . . We shall pass and get in . . . . [She stood] up and opened [the door] for them. There came in with [them Side]ros and killed her son."

The amulet relates that the three angels chased Sideros to the sea, to kill him, but he swears an oath and the result is that "wherever [people] mention the name of SWNY and SWSWNY and SNYGLY, I shall not [kill]" the female client of the amulet.

Two Aramaic magic bowls from Mesopotamia (roughly 6th century CE) give an equally concise account but the text is better preserved (Naveh & Shaked 1985, 189):

> Smamit gave birth to twelve sons. All of them were killed by Sideros the Wicked. She got up and fled from him, and she went to a mountain, whose name is unique in the world. She performed sorceries of copper and magic acts of iron. There came S'WNY and SS'WNY and SNGRW and 'RTYQW and said to her: "Open (the door) for us." She said to them: "I shall not open (it) for you." They said: "This is a place (for us) to pass through and enter into." She stood up and opened (the door) for them. With them there came in Sideros. He killed her son and strangled him. She stood up and cried at him: "O S'WNY and SS'WNY and SNGRW and 'RTYQW! What have they done to him?" They stood up and chased him and found him in pelagos, the great sea, to kill him and strangle him. He said to them: "Let go of me, and I swear to you in the name of He 'who has measured the water in the hollow of his hand' [Is. 40: 12] that wherever the name of S'WNY and SS'WNY and SNGRW and 'RTYQW is mentioned I shall not kill or strangle the house of (the client)."

See also Finkel (1997, 21–22), for suggestions regarding Akkadian motifs in these magic bowls, in regard to the Smamit historiola.

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magic/incantation bowls (from Mesopotamia).[30] They further emphasise that the plot is attested not only in Semitic (Hebrew, Aramaic, late Syriac, Ethiopic and Arabic) sources, but also in Greek, Coptic, Armenian, Romanian, and Slavonic medieval literature. According to Naveh and Shaked, the magical narrative originated as a Jewish Aramaic text in Palestine; later it found its way to Mesopotamia, and was copied in Aramaic magic bowls, "where a number of corruptions and perhaps some Babylonian linguistic features were introduced into the text".[31] The Palestinian Aramaic historiola, however, was independently adopted by Christians in Greek,[32] Syriac and Ethiopic as a self-sufficient narrative. The Greek witnesses further facilitated the spread of the historiola into various other languages and cultures, including Slavonic apocryphal and folklore tradition. Naveh and Shaked mention (in a footnote)[33] that the same story of the harmful child-stealing demon is alluded to in *Alphabetum Siracidis* in relation to Lilith being Adam's first wife (who demanded equal rights with Adam) and, when denied them, fled from her husband. Three unnamed angels are sent by God to capture and convince her to return to her spouse, but she refuses. Even when they threaten to drown her, she does not consent. Lilith claims that her divine purpose is to punish Adam's offspring, males in their 7th day and girls in their 20th day. However, if she sees the three angelic names in an amulet, she will restrain herself from doing harm. So she made a deal to protect her vindictive cause, even agreeing that one hundred of her demonic children would die each day.

Ben Sira also gives the names of these angels of healing – Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangelof, in his narrative about the illness of the young son of King Nebuchadnezzar. Having been summoned by the King to heal the young prince, Ben Sira writes an amulet invoking the names of these three angels of healing. These names hence became standard features of childbirth amulets. It seems obvious that the Ben Sira amulet for the sick prince was based upon an earlier existing narrative about Lilith and her encounter with the three angels and her subsequent surrender to them. These narratives belong to the same tradition. Then again, the three formulaic names Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangelof of Ben Sira (rendered as Sanui, Sansanui and Semniglaph in Montgomery's text and Naveh-Shaked Amulet No. 15), are clearly related to the name of Saint Sisinnius – the holy protagonist of the Greek, Slavonic, and Romanian accounts of the child-stealing witch; however, while in Ben Sira and Aramaic magic bowls the protagonists are angels, in Christian texts they are described as saints.

30 See the comments on Bowls 12a and 12b (Naveh & Shaked 1985, 190–197).

31 Cf. Naveh & Shaked 1985, 120.

32 Its domestication within the Greek obstetric and neonatal magic and medicinal lore was most probably facilitated by the indigenous tradition related to the child-killing demons Gyllo/Gello, Mormo and Lamia; for Gyllo in the Graeco-Roman Classical and Hellenistic "physical, moral and social *kosmoi*", and within Byzantine religious beliefs, see Johnston 2001.

33 *Ibid*., 118 n. 17. See also the discussion in Yassif 1982, 56–57.

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2 The Slavonic phase

Slavonic magic texts do not remember Lilith. The historiola of the child-stealing witch, however, is well attested in both oral and written versions. While the recordings of oral renditions are rather scarce, the written versions are found in various manuscripts circulating in the Byzantine Commonwealth; these can be copied with either Cyrillic, or Glagolitic characters. However, the survey of the existing database[34] shows that the charms against the child-stealing witch are attested only in South-Slavonic and Balkan (Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian and Romanian) sources, but not in East-Slavonic (Russian, Belorussian and Ukrainian) tradition.[35] In some of the texts the major protagonist is the rider-saint called Sisinnius (var. Sisin, Sisoi, etc.), a mighty warrior defeating the demon (often identified as the Devil himself) who harmed the newborn sons of his sister Melentia (var. Meletia, Melitena, Melentina, etc.). He is envisaged as a mounted horsemen with all the necessary paraphernalia – a verbal portrayal which coexists with a distinctive iconographic tradition.[36] This class of apotropaic invocations can be designated as 'the Sisinnius type' (following Gaster's taxonomy).[37] Along with 'the Sisinnius type', there exists a parallel cluster of texts in which the role of the protagonist who conjures the child-stealing demon is played by the Archangel Michael; these can be labeled as 'the Archangel Michael type' (*Avestitsa* in Gaster's taxonomy).[38] It is suggested in the latter group of texts that, when "the Living Word of God" (that is, Jesus Christ) was born, the Archangel Michael defeated, captured and shackled the wicked demoness, who had attempted to destroy the Infant. Furthermore, in the list of her evil deeds the snatching of the newborn infants is mentioned just as one among many

34 See Iudin 1997, 109–110, 233–235, 244–245; Kliaus 1997, 148–150 (1/X.1.1/A6: Сисиниева легенда), 252 (1/XXXIV.1.2/B1: Дьявол уносит ребенка; св. Сисиний догоняет Дьявола, возвращает ребенка).

35 Among Russians, Belorussians and Ukrainians the charms about Saint Sisinnius exclusively concern the etiology of fevers and ethnomedicinal strategies of how to counteract them (Agapkina & Toporkov 2012, 84); see also the discussion below.

36 The earliest iconographic representation of the 'Holy Rider' St. Sisinius is the sixth-seventh-century wall painting at the Monastery of St. Apollo at Bawit (Egypt); see Maguire 2008, 57; Grotowski 2011, 129–137; Velinova 2010, 167, n. 27. See also the discussion in Spier 1993, 33–44]; Ryan 1999, 246–250 and Fulghum 2001, 142–143.

37 Cf. Gaster 1900, 139–148; see also Veselovskii 1883, 40–53, 427; 1895, 226–234; 1889, 314–316; Sokolov 1888, 24–50; 1889, 339–368; Vasil'evskii 1889, 369–371; Uspenskii 1906, 78–79, Poznanskii 1912; Iatsimirskii 1921, 48–49; Duichev 1971; Pantelić 1973, 161–203; Petkanova 1978, 138–144; 1982, 313–314, 405–406; Greenfield 1989, 83–141; Spier 1993, 33–40; Radenković 1997, 158–159; Ryan 1999, 244–250; 2006, 37–58; Detelić 2001, 225–40; Gippius 2005, 136–142; Toporkov 2005, 306; 2011, 173–179; 2014, 100–102; Agapkina 2010, 681–784; Agapkina & Toporkov 2012; Velinova 2010, 164–175; Timotin 2009, 366–376; Antonov & Maizul's 2011, 126–129, 163, 320–321; Rychkov 2014.

38 The Romanian counterpart of this type of charms is designated by Gaster as *Avestitsa* (see above).

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other acts (e.g. making the fruitful trees barren, and women infertile, etc.). At the end of the apocryphal prayers of 'the Archangel Michael type' a list of the names of the demon is provided, with the recommendation that people should copy it and keep the manuscript-amulet in their homes, since it will protect them from misfortune and all kings of evil spirits. Finally, there is an intermediate, miscellaneous type of apocryphal prayers against the Devil and witches, in which Saint Sisinnius and Archangel Michael, along with the Apostles Peter and Paul, the four Evangelists and other saints, are portrayed as protagonists. These charms are usually brief and have universal purposes; they function as defensive magic against all kinds of hardships and evil spirits, and protection against the child-snatching demoness is only one of them.

The survey of manuscripts containing the witnesses to either 'the Sisinnius', or 'the Archangel Michael' types of charms shows that often they are copied next to each other; this indicates that they were perceived by the medieval scribes as a single textual entity (as is the case with the amulets published by Iv. Duichev 1971, 161–163 and M. Pantelić 1973, 197–203). Still, it is possible to find such charms as autonomous constituents of larger miscellanies,[39] or as independently circulating and totally self-sufficient specimens of one single incantation.

To the best of my knowledge, among the earliest attestations of 'the Sisinnius' type of apocryphal prayers is the one discovered by Klimentina Ivanova (1994, 26–27). Dated to the 12th century, it is written on a palimpsest (fols 43b and 43a)[40] in a manuscript containing a Serbian Aprakos Gospel (13th century).[41] Although some fragments of the text cannot be read due to the bad state of the manuscript (after all, this is a palimpsest!), it is clear that on the third line (on fol. 43b) a catalogue of (some demonic) names is presented, with that of *Velzevul* (Вельзѣвв8ль) being placed under number 14 in the list; then follows an obscure phrase which most probably suggests that *Velzevul* (that is, Beelzebub or Beel-Zebub) is "the superior of the devils" (сотонамъ наставникъ).[42] The next phrase is perhaps the best preserved in the entire palimpsest (lines 4–6 on Fol. 43b). It reads as follows: "And Saint Sisi[n] said: 'If you do not swear [that you will stop causing harm], I will not let you go!' And the cursed Devil [said]: 'By the awesome God and by His Throne' ..."; then the text breaks again, but on line 11 the name of Melentina appears, along with that of her brothers Sinador and (T)inador; one can speculate that perhaps next to them was written the name of Saint Sisinnius, the main protagonist of the story. Immediately after that a new charm/incantation begins (lines 15–33 on Fol. 43b and lines 1–3), entitled "Saint Sisin's prayer against witches" (Мтва ѡ вещінц[ь]

39 See for instance the text of the prayer entitled "A writ against the witch" (Ꙁапнсъ от вѣштнце), (with the Archangel Michael as the protagonist), published by Kovačević (1878, 283).

40 The pagination of the palimpsest is in reverse order.

41 The manuscript is kept in the Library of the Patriarchate in Jerusalem (Slav No. 19).

42 Lit. "the superior of the satans."

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ст҃аго Снснна). It is difficult to reconstruct the opening paragraph of the charm in question, but it is clear that line 17 ends with the word "hair" (власн), most probably referring to one of the stock characteristics of the witches – their long unbound hair. Then the text on line 18 contains the word "answered" (҃ѡвеща) and the phrase "sai[d], I..." (ре[ѵ]: азъ); on line 22 the word "children" (дѣтн) can be read, on line 23 – the neuter singular form of the adjective "true" (нстнное), on line 24 – "Archangel" (архагг). Lines 1–3 on fol. 43a give the name of the client (a certain George, along with that of his wife Marina and their children) who are to be protected from the witches (иже родь вѣщици); the latter are not supposed "to touch" (ннже нмать прнкосноутн се) either the client or his wife or children; furthermore, the demons are not "to touch" his livestock ([н]нже нмать прн[к]осноутн се къ скотоу его).[43] The text of the charm ends with the traditional stock phrase "From now until the end of times – amen" (҃ѡ селѣ н до вѣка – амннь).

The richest anthology of Slavonic historiolae about the child-stealing witch is the so-called *Miscellany of Priest Dragol* (dated to the third quarter of the 13th century); significantly, four of the 'Sisinius prayers' come from this particular source.[44] Since these charms are studied by other scholars, I will focus on a text which has not been examined previously, a seventeenth-century incantation preserved in a manuscript currently kept in the Sofia National Library (Ms No. 631).[45] The text is entitled, "Prayer of Saints Sisin, Isidore, Simeon, and Theodor". Although mentioned in the title and then in the opening paragraph, the three other saints listed along with Sisin as his companions disappear from the text; in fact, only Sisin remains as the male protagonist of the charm. The storyline is simple: after defeating Saracens and Ishmaelites, the saint-warrior goes to Arab lands and sets off hunting. An angel appears to him and tells him to go to his sister Melentia, who gave birth to five sons, all of which were snatched by the Devil. Sisin's mission is to go to his sister and chase away the Devil so that he no longer harms her one remaining child. Melentia, having lost five infants, now takes precautions. She constructs a tower fortifying it with iron, lead and bronze. Naveh and Shaked are fascinated by the reference to iron in their Aramaic version of this narrative, since the name of the Devil in their amulet is Sideros (Greek for 'iron'), and they find similar details in Ethiopic.[46] Significantly, the Slavonic story gives the name Isidore (a version of Sideros) as a protagonist and saint, but not as the demonic antagonist. Then again, in Slavonic incantations Melentia does not just use iron but all three apotropaic metals – iron, bronze, and lead. Quite intriguing in this connection is the fact that in the Aramaic magic bowls, the child's mother Smamit practiced

43 See the discussion above (note 11).

44 See Sokolov 1888, 25–50 and Velinova 2010, 164–175.

45 The original Church Slavonic text, with translation and commentaries, is to be found in the Appendix (see text 1 below).

46 Naveh & Shaked 1985, 116.

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defensive magic with bronze and iron on a mountain, while in the Slavonic text Melentia's place of refuge[47] is more tangible: a tower fortified by metallic armour of the amuletic metals iron, bronze and lead.[48] Being warned by a divine angel that his sister is in danger, Sisin proceeds to Melentia's tower, but he is now caught in a tempest. He asks his sister to open the door because he was suffering in the cold, without reference to any warnings about her being in danger. She initially refuses, but after her being reassured by his credentials for pursuing the Devil, she lets Sisin in. However, the Devil transforms himself into a grain of millet and hides under the horse's shoe;[49] thus he enters into Melentia's tower and the newborn infant is taken away from his mother. The warrior-saint now mounts his horse and pursues Satan. On the way, however, Sisin meets various trees (willow, bramble, sycamore, and olive). Two of the trees failed to inform him about the whereabouts of the Devil abducting the child and were cursed, while two other trees were blessed; they informed on the Devil. (This interesting detail is found in both Romanian and Slavonic[50] versions). Due to the advice from the blessed trees, Sisin learns that the child-snatching fiend (which in the current version appears to be designated as the Devil, the Mora-spirit, and a witch) has dived into the sea.[51] The saint manages to catch the demon and drag him onto dry land, punish him and recover his sister's children. The Adversary admits to swallowing them, but makes an astonishing bargain with Sisin, that if the saint can regurgitate his own mother's milk, he will restore the children. Then again, in South-Slavonic tradition, according to the conventions of indigenous customary law, you swear by your mother's milk (*кълна/заклевам се в майчиното си мляко*), and this kind of oath is never to be

47 This specific detail may implicitly allude to particular childbirth rites of passage, namely the seclusion of the woman for a certain period after giving birth, and if this custom is violated, either the mother or infant will become ill.

48 The Greek text also mentions a tower, but sealed with lead, not iron. Furthermore most medieval Bulgarian amulets on which defensive charms are written, are made of lead; see the discussion in Popkonstantinov & Konstantinova 1987; Popkonstantinov 2004; 2008; 2009; 2010.

49 A similar story occurs in the Slavonic (Greek) *Apocalypse of Baruch* (*3 Baruch*), where the Devil turns himself into a worm and asks the Serpent to swallow him and sneak him into Paradise; see Gaylord 1982; Badalanova Geller 2011, 95–96.

50 In 1989, an almost identical folk historiola was recorded by my colleague Valentina Ganeva in the village Maluk Dervent; the audio-recording is stored in the Archival Collection of the Institute of Folklore of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (ФнАИФ 1. Б.Г. 1989, 3.2.5, text 59); see also the text published by Kuzmanova & Kotseva (1983, 202–203). A cluster of rather similar stories were recorded by the present author in some other small villages in Bulgaria, but this time it was the Virgin Mary looking for her Child, who was taken away by enemies. She had similar encounters with various trees, cursing and blessing them in the identical manner as St. Sisinnius had done in the current text. These narratives will be published in my forthcoming *Folk Bible*, but for short excerpts from such historiolae see the second part of the Appendix (below).

51 This detail is also mentioned in Aramaic amulets and magic bowls, where the three angelic protagonists (SWNY, SWSWNY, SNYGLY) chase after the demon Sideros and find him in the sea (Naveh & Shaked 1985, 105, 191).

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broken. Its violation is considered to be an unpardonable sin; those who commit it are severely punished by their community. It is believed that the well-being of their immediate households is endangered, along with that of their descendants, since they will be ultimately exposed to divine wrath, retribution and vengeance. Not only are such individuals potentially subjected to severe social penalties, but they are also dishonored by and excluded from their own clan; the memory of them is erased from the annals of their family chronicles, as they bring shame on their entire lineage generations down the line.[52] It is exactly against this particular sociolinguistic and cultural background that the subtext of the current historiola is to be examined; the motif of Sisin having to regurgitate his own mother's milk may be interpreted thus as an implicit reference to the act of pledging; the saint makes the most solemn type of vow. For those performing (or copying) the text, the symbolism of this act is transparent – a certain oath is sworn on Saint Sisin's mother's milk.

The saint then performs a miracle: he vomits up his mother's milk and the children of his sister are given back. The final outcome is that Sisin does not release the Devil until he swears not to approach places where any prayer mentioning the name of his captor is recited, and this is the common motif of many of these stories. The pattern here is what we likewise find in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, in which the protective names are those of the protagonist rather than the antagonists.

One further point. The Slavonic material knows yet another type of 'Sisinnios prayer',[53] according to which he pursues and defeats fevers,[54] either 12 or 40 or 72 in number.[55] The fevers are perceived as Herod's daughters,[56] whom the saint also

52 On the other hand, along with the idiom, "to swear by your own mother's milk" (*кълна/заклевам се в майчиното си мляко*), there also exists a related phraseological expression, "to tell/say/divulge your own mother's milk" (*казвам си майчиното мляко*), which means "to tell/reveal a secret" (usually, but not always, under duress, against one's own will); see Gerov's *Lexicon of the Bulgarian Language* (1899 (3), 74).

53 An example found in Tikhonravov's *Monuments of Proscribed Russian Literature* (1863 (2), 351–352) is among the earliest publications of this type of 'false prayers'; see also Maikov 1994 [1869], 45–52 (№ 103, № 105, № 106, № № 109–114). For a survey of folk charms and apocryphal prayers associated with the name of Saint Sisinnius as a guardian against fevers, see Iudin 1997, 109–110, 233–235, 244–245. See also Mansvetov 1881, 24–36; Ryan 2006; Toporkov 2014.

54 On the iconography of fevers in Slavonic tradition, see Golyshev 1872, 36–41; Uspenskii 1906, 78–79; Antonov & Maizul's 2011, 320–321; Toporkov 2011; Maslova 2014.

55 For a survey of the hitherto registered texts concerning the names of fevers in folk charms and apocryphal prayers, see Iudin 1997, 233–261.

56 See also the discussion in Veselovskii 1882, 217–221; 1883, 40–53, 221–223, 427–430; 1883 a, 87–88; 1886, 290–291; 1886, 288–302; 1889, 306–329. On 'the Sisinnius prayer' in Slavonic indices of prohibited books, see clause 28 in the fourteenth-century codex of the *Podogin Nomocanon* (the Pogodin Collection, № 31, the archival collection of the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg), under the rubric concerning the decrees of the Council of Laodicea, Canon № 59 («Лаодикийского собора правило 59»):

> (28) Недугъ естьственый, егоже трясавицами именують, якоже баеть Еремія попъ Болгарьскый; глаголеть бо оканный сице, яко «Сѣдящу святому отцю Сисѣнью на горѣ

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neutralises by recovering them from the sea and defeating them. In some cases, the figure of Sisin/Sisinnios is replaced by the Archangel Michael. The overarching narrative is that Saint Sisinnios/Sisin and/or the Archangel Michael, either single-handedly, or together, force the harmful demon to recite his or her demonic names,

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Синайстѣй», и ангела Сихаила именують, еже на соблазнь мнозѣмъ. И седмь трясавиць Иродовы дщери басньствоваше, злый, иже ни евангелисти и ни единъ же отъ святыхъ седми именоваше, но едина, испрошьшія главу Предтечеву усѣщи, о нейже явѣ есть, яко Филипова дщи бѣ, а не Иродова. Великый же Сисѣній патрітріархъ Костянтиня града … (Iatsimirskii 1921, 48).

See also the banned "vernacular Psalms" («мірские псалмы») in the *Canons of the Holy Apostles* («Отъ правилъ свв. апостолъ»), where the "false prayer" against shaking-fevers («ложная» молитва от трясавиц) is designated as a "yarn of the Bulgarian Priest Jeremiah" («басня Иеремии попа Болгарскаго»):

42. О недузѣ естьственнѣмъ, егоже именують трясавица, яко баеть Іеремѣа попъ Болгарскыи (вар. басни суть Іереміа попа Болгарскаго); глаголеть бо окаанный сый (вар. сей; онъ), яко «Сѣдящу святому (отцу) Сисѣнію на горѣ Синайстѣй», и ангела Сихаила именуеть, еже есть на соблазнъ людемъ мнозѣмъ (многымъ). И (рекше) седмь дшерій Иродовы трясавицами баснословяше (вар. басньсловяше; блазньствоваше), злый, иже (вар. сих же) ни евангелисти, ни единъ же отъ святыхъ седми (седмь) именоваше, но едина, испросшіа (испроссивши) главу Предтечеву … (Iatsimirskii 1921, 48).

See also the same designation in the sixteenth-century *Suzdal' Kormchaia* [«Суздальская Кормчая»]:

29. О недузе естьственнѣмъ, егоже именують трясавица, – басни суть Іереми попа Болгарскаго; глаголеть бо окаанный сей, яко «Сѣдящу святому Сисѣнію на горѣ святѣй».

44. К семуж и ангела Сихаила именуеть, еже есть на соблазнъ людемъ мноземь, и седмь дщереи Иродовы трясавицами басньствоваша, злыи, ниже ни евангелисты, ни единъ же отъ святыхъ седмь именоваше, но едина, испросшіа главу Предтечеву, и отъ (sic) ней же явѣ есть, яко и та дщи Филипова, а не Иродова … (Iatsimrskii 1921, 48).

Symptomatically, the author of the prayers against fevers was considered to be the Bulgarian Priest Jeremiah («болгарский поп Иеремия»), who was believed to be a son and disciple of Priest Bogomil, the founder of the heresy of the Bogomils in Bulgaia; see, for instance, the following description:

24. Недугъ естественныи, еже трясавицами именуютъ: о Сисиніи и о Сихаилѣ что, – сіа солгалъ Іеремѣа попъ Богумиловъ (сынъ и) ученикъ, паче же Богу не милъ … (Iatsimirskii 1921, 48).

See also the list of prohibited books («ложных книг») from the *Kiprian Index* («Киприановский индекс»), which begins with an excerpt from the rules of the Council of Chalcedon and ends with a note about the heretics in Bulgaria:

58. и Молитвы составливая лживыя отъ трясавицы – Еремія попа Болгарскаго басни; глаголетъ бо окаанный: «Седящу святому отцу Сисѣнию на горѣ Синайстѣй, и видѣ седмь жонъ исходящи отъ моря», и ангела Сихаила именуеть … (Iatsimirskii 1921, 49).

See also the data concerning "The Bulgarian Priest Jeremiah" (о «болгарском попе Иеремии») in *The Book of Cyril* (Кирилловая книга), dated 1644:

67. и ѵто провъ царь дрѳго^{м} х҃а наꙁвалъ. н то попъ іереміа болгарскїн солгалъ.

68. гл҃еть бо окаанныи сей, ꙗко сѣдащ^{и} сто^{м} сѵснїю на горѣ сѵнанстѣн, н а҃гла снханла нменѳеть еже на соблаꙁнъ многнмъ людемъ н седмь дщерей нродовыхъ трасавнцамн басньствоваше, злын … (Iatsimirskii 1921, 49).

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which are to be written into apotropaic texts (very much like the Lilith narrative quoted by Montgomery). Many of the demonic names in the above-mentioned stories (such as Abutar, Abikar, Abnukta, etc.) have no apparent meaning (as in the Aramaic magic bowls, Hebrew amulets, or other esoteric texts); these could be described as glossographia. Others (such as Mora, as attested in Ms. No 631 from the Sofia National Library, see below) are etymologically related to lexemes denoting 'death'.

3 Conclusion

The Slavonic text, certainly based on an early Greek protograph, may be a distant witness to an original story which was most probably composed in an Hellenistic Jewish environment; the incantation later became Christianized, while its Semitic (Aramaic) counterpart continued – quite independently – its life in later Jewish magic.

Appendix

Part 1: Apocryphal tradition

Text 1.1: Prayer of St. Sisin, Isidore, Simeon, and Theodor

Published below is a seventeenth-century Serbian redaction of 'the Sisinnius prayer'. It comes from a miscellany containing *The Book of Hours* (Часослов); the manuscript is currently kept in the Sofia National Library (record No. 631, fols 165–171). The first edition of the text was produced by B. Tsonev (1923, 149–151). The original Slavonic version in the current publication was transcribed by Dr. Iva Trifonova. The translation is made by the author. The text below follows the following conventions:

< > mark reconstructions of (missing and corrupt) passages, as suggested by B. Tsonev on the basis of the other complementary text-witnesses

[ ] indicate conjectural additions in the English translation.

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Мл҃тва ст҃го снсѝна ѝснᴬора ѝ снмеѡ̀на ѝ θеѡᴬра. Вь ѝме о҆ц҃а ѝ ст҃го дх҃а. ꙗко бѝсть воѝнь ꙗкоже сн҃ѣ сѝсннь ѝ снмеѡ̀нь ѝснд҃орь ѝже мнѡ́гнмь вьсемь ѡ҆дела́ваше .а҃ а҆снрнꙗно́мь .в҃. ѝзмѝтелено́мь. є҆гдаже бе́ше .в҃.п҃. земл҆ю а҆равѝскон ѝзнд҃о́ше сн҃ѣ на ло́вь ѝ ꙗвѝ се снсѝну а҆г҃гль г҃нь ѝ ре́уе ѐмѕ. ѝдн кь сестре свое мела́ньтн. ꙗко

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е͡ родѝла .Е̅ снно́ве ѝ днѣволь вьзель. нн̅ѣ млáдо ѡтро́уе ѝмать ѝ хо́щеть ѝ него днѣво́ль хощеть оу̀зéть нь дá те сьтво́рн лов'ца днѣво́лѫ ѝ то́мѫ прогонѝль ѝ вьсéмь днѣво́ль тогᴬа с̅т̅н снсѝнь оу̀стрьмѝ се ѝдн кь сéстре свое мелен'тн. ѝ тн беше сьтво́рнла слъпь мрамо́рень ѝ ѡковала го бе гво́зде ѝзлнѣ го ѡло́во ѝ заково (!) медн-

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а̀мн ѝ вьнела бе брашно за s̅ леть ѝ д̅ве ѡтроко́внцн на слѫ́жбѫ себѣ̀ ѐгᴬа прнблнжн сѐ с̅т̅н снсѝнь кь слъпѫ ѝ вьнезапѫ ѝ бн͡ бѫра велѝка ѝ зѝма ѝ ре́уе с̅т̅н снсѝнь сестро моѣ мелен'тне ѿврьзѝ мн да вьнндѫ понéже бѫра велѝѣ сьмѫщает' ме ѝ реуе мелетнѣ не смею тн ѿврьзн бра́те мон понеже ѝмать мла́до ѡтроуе

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ѝ бою се ѿ днѣвола н реуе с̅т̅н снсѝнь не бон се а̀зь ѐсьмь ловець днѣво́лѫ томѫ прогóннтель мелен'тнѣ слѝша гла͡ ѐго ѿврьзе ѐмѫ слъпь тогᴬа днѣво́ль сьтво́рн се просéно зрьно ѝ прнлепѝ се ко́ню поть копѝто ѝ вьнѝде вь слъпь то́гᴬа вѝсть вь полѫно́цн мелент'нѣ ѡсезав'цн ѡтро᷈ своѐ ѡбра́те ѐго мрьтво ѝ вьзѫпн гла́сомь велнемь

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г̅л̅ѭцн брате мон снсѝне ѣко тѝ рекóхь такó мн бн͡ то́гда с̅т̅н снсѝнь вьсеᴬа на ко́нь свон ѣкоже пламень днхаше врага гонéща ѡбрате врьбо бж̅н <н реуе> внде лн врага бежѫща ѡтро́уе носéща ѡна бе внделa ѝ р᷈е не вндехь. тогᴬа с̅т̅н снсѝнь прокле ѭ цветь да ѝмашь а̀ пло́дь да немашь. ѝ пакн ѡбрете кѫпнна ѝ реуе

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вндé лн врага бежѫща ѡтроуе носеща ѡна бе вндéла ѝ реуе не вѝдехь. то́гда с̅т̅н снсѝнь про́кле а кѫпннѡ да́ сн у̅л̅кѫ не пре́петїе а̀ себѣ̀ на прокле́тїе де тн коре́нь тѫ ѝ врьхь ѝ пакн ѡбре́те а̀ворь дре́во бж̅їе <н реуе> ѣворе, внде лн вра́га бежѫща ѡтро́уе носéща ѡна бе вндéла ѝ реуе вндéхь. ѝ ре᷈

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с̅т̅н снсѝнь да сн бл̅свено ѣворе да сн вь ц̅р̅квахь клепало да прозове́шь праве́дннкн на сп͡енїе а̀ грѣшннкн на покаанїе. ѝ пакн ѡбрѣ́те масли́на дре́во бж̅їе <н реуе>масли́но не внде лн врага бѣжѫща ѡтро́уе носéща ѡна бѣ вѝдела ѝ реуе вндéхь понѫ́рн се вь мо́ре сь рѝбамн мор'скнмн ѝ реуе с̅т̅н снсѝнъ масллно <да

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сн бл$^{\breve{c}}$вена ѕ цр҃ква н ѵ҃лкѕ на нсцелennе> тог$^{\wedge}$а с҃тн снснnь сьтво́рн м҃лтва кь т҃ѕ н҃ вьврьже вь$^{\wedge}$нцѕ вь мо́ре н҃звле́ve врага на сѣхо

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н҃ наvéтн е҃го би́тн н҃ мѕvи́тн г҃лющин. даж$^{\wedge}$ь мн детн сестренн мон меле́н$^{\prime}$тнnн. н҃ зел$^{\prime}$хн н҃ ре́ve с҃тн снси́нь жи́вь т҃ь б҃ь мо҃ѝ на н҃бсн н҃ на землн. не нма те пѕстнтн днıа́воле не н҃знн$^{\wedge}$ешн н҃з рѕкн моеѝ. дон$^{\prime}$деже не $^{\wedge}$асть детн мелен$^{\prime}$тнnн н҃ ревe днıаволь н҃зель гн самь н҃ ревe н҃зьблюн мн мле́ко матер$^{\prime}$но своѐ ѐже ѐсн снса́ль мла$^{\wedge}$ь. да а҃зь блюва́мь де́тн оу҃пори́раше се

fol. 169.

деıава́ль тог$^{\wedge}$а с҃тн сѝснnь м҃лтвѕ сьтво́рн кь т҃ѕ г҃лющe. т҃н т҃с х҃е оу҃сли́шн ра́ба твое́го дн$^{\breve{c}}$ь да просла́влю те рабь твоѝ днıа́воль да посра́мнт$^{\prime}$ се н҃ бла́ѕна мле́ко мате́рьно своѐ. посрамн$^{\breve{c}}$ днıа́воль н҃ оу҃кра́тнше се снлѝ е҃го н҃ з$^{\prime}$блю́ва s̄ снnове меленьтнnн н ревe с҃тн снси́нь жи́вь т҃ь б҃ь моѝ на н҃бсн н҃ на землѝ. не н҃ма те пѕстнтн днıа́воле не н҃злежешь н҃з$^{\prime}$ рѕкн моѝ. а҃ще не кльнше се н҃деже м҃лтва моа̀

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вететь сѐ н҃ме моѐ поме́нѕть ме. тѕ не мо́жеть прни́тн мо́ра нн вещи́ца нн днıа́воль тог$^{\wedge}$а днıа́воль кльне́ть се снснне тако́ мн вншнıа́го н҃ тако́ мн си́лн н҃бснн н҃ та́ко мн .м̄. попове н҃же поıо́ть непре́стано на н҃бсн н҃деже н҃ме помен̄ѕ ме м҃лтва моа̀ вете́ се вь до́мѕ тво́емѕ раба б҃ж̄ıа н҃м$^{\breve{p}}$. то҃ н҃ да не прнстѕпнть нн

fol. 170.

мора нн вещица нѝ зль дх̄ь ѿ ве́ка н до века а҃мнnь.

Prayer of St. Sisin, Isidore, Simeon, and Theodor

In the name of the Father and the Holy Spirit: once there were warriors like Saint Sisin and [St.] Simeon and [St.] Isidor, who defeated everyone – first the Assyrians and second the Ishmaelites. While on his [exploits] in the Arab lands, Sisin went hunting. The angel of the Lord then appeared before Sisin and said to him, "Go to your sister Melentia, who gave birth to five sons, which the Devil has snatched. She now delivered a newborn child and the Devil wants to take it away as well. In order [to prevent this from happening], you should become Devil's hunter: chase him away together will all [other] devils."

Then Saint Sisin set off towards his sister Melentia. She had erected a marble tower, bolting it properly with nails, covering it with [molten] lead and bronze

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bands. She has taken provisions inside it for six years, along with two maidens to serve her.

When St. Sisin approached the tower, a great storm and cold suddenly broke out. St. Sisin said, "My sister Melentia, open and let me in, because this great storm is bothering me!" Melentia said, "I don't dare opening and let you in, my brother, because I have an infant, and I am afraid of the Devil." St. Sisin replied, "Don't be afraid, I am the hunter and chaser of the Devil." Having heard his voice, Melentia opened the tower.

The Devil then turned himself into a grain of millet and got stuck beneath the hoof of [Sisin's] horse and entered the tower. When midnight arrived, Melentia touched her child and realised that it was dead. And she cried with a loud voice, and said, "O my brother Sisin, as I told you, so it happened."

Then St. Sisin mounted his horse, which was breathing fire, and while chasing the Devil he encountered [a willow-tree], and said, "You God's willow, have you seen the Adversary running and carrying a child?" It had seen it but said, "I did not see that." [St.] Sisin then cursed it, "May you blossom but never bear fruit!"[57] Afterwards he encountered a bramble and said, "Have you seen the Adversary running and carrying a child?" It had seen it but said, "I did not see that." Then St. Sisin cursed it, "Bramble, may you become an obstacle for man and a curse for yourself; may your top be wherever the roots [of your bush] are." He then encountered the sycamore, and said, "Sycamore, you God's tree, have you seen the Adversary running and carrying a child?" It had seen it and said, "I saw that." And St. Sisin said, "May you be blessed, O sycamore! May you become a semantron[58] in the churches, to call the righteous towards salvation and sinners towards repentance." He then encountered the olive-tree, and said, "O olive-tree, you God's tree, have you seen the Adversary running a carrying a child?" It had seen it and said, "I did see that. He dived into the sea along with the fishes of the sea." St. Sisin said, "O olive – may you be blessed in the church[59] and be a remedy for people."[60]

St. Sisin then prayed to the Lord and threw a fishhook into the sea, and pulled out the Devil onto dry [land] and began beating and torturing him, saying, "Give me the children of my sister Melentia, whom you have snatched from her!" Again then Sisin said, "By the living Lord God of heaven and earth, I will not let you

57 Cf. Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*: A2776. Why certain plants are cursed, A2771.10 (*Why willow flowers do not bear fruit*), A2776.2. (*Why weeping-willow is cursed*).

58 The semantron (Gr. σήμαντρον) is a portable percussion instrument made of piece of timber (usually heart of sycamore); in the Byzantine commonwealth, in the period predating bells, it was used to gather congregants. This tradition survives in some Orthodox monasteries in the Balkans until today.

59 Olive oil is the basic substance for the producton of the chrism (i.e. the consecrated oil) which has ecclesiastical functions in liturgical ceremonies.

60 Olive oil is one of the main constituents in producing various remedies, due to its healing properties.

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go, Devil! You will not be released from my hands until you give me Melentia's children."

The Devil said, "I ate them." The Devil remained defiant, and said, "Regurgitate your mother's milk which you sucked when young, and then I will regurgitate the children!" Then St. Sisin prayed to the Lord with these words, "Lord Jesus Christ, listen to your servant! Today I, your servant, will glorify You and will put the Devil to shame." And he vomited up his mother's milk. The Devil was ashamed and his strength diminished and he regurgitated the six sons of Melentia. St. Sisin said, "Alive is my God of heaven and earth! I will not release you, Devil! You will not be freed from my hands unless you swear that where my prayer is recited and my name is mentioned, there can not come either [the demon] Mora, or a witch, or the Devil." The Devil then swore before/to Sisin, "In the name of the Most High and heavenly powers and forty priests who constantly sing in heaven, there where my[61] name is mentioned, and my[62] prayer is recited, in the house of God's servant (say the name), may there not enter neither [the demon] Mora, nor witch nor evil spirit, for ever, amen."

Part 2: Folklore tradition

Published below are the author's English translations of oral accounts recorded during field work in Bulgaria.

Text 2.1: Saint Sisoy and the Devil

There was a certain Sisoy, whose sister gave birth to five children, and they all died, since the Devil was snatching them away. He was snatching them as soon as they were born, and they perished. And she was about to give birth to her sixth child. Her brother, however, decided to pay her a visit. Sisoy mounted his horse and set off. She said to him:
"My brother! I am sorry but I am not opening the door to anybody, since if I open it, the Devil will snatch this child of mine as well."
"My sister, the Devil cannot hide away from me even if he goes to the abyss of the sea. Wherever he goes, I will find him."
So far so good, but as soon as she opened the door, the Devil, who got stuck on the horse as dust, entered as well, and took the child, to whom she has just given birth. And the baby died: it happened just like before.
"Did I not tell you, my brother, not to open to anyone?"

61 Should read "your."
62 Should read "your."

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He said, “My sister, I will find the Devil, no matter where he hides!”
So he set off and encountered the willow-tree, and said, “Willow-tree, I am going to ask you something. Have you seen the Devil passing by, with a child in his mouth?”
“No, I have not seen such a thing.”
“Willow-tree, may you flourish with blossoms, but never bear fruit!”
That’s how he cursed it.
Then he encountered the olive-tree and said, “Olive-tree, I am going to ask you and beg you to tell me the truth. Have you seen the Devil passing by, with a child in his mouth?”
It said, “Indeed, it passed by.”
“Where did he go?”
“In the abyss of the sea, in the sea.”
He told it, “May you flourish with blossoms, and bear fruit, and open monasteries!”
The olive-tree gives olive oil, does it not?
And then he went to the sea straight away. And he inserted there his staff, so that he may catch the Devil. Indeed, Saint Sisoy caught him by the nose, dragged him to the seashore, and said to him, “Listen to what I am going to ask you. Have you snatched away the children of my sister, five or six of them, who were alive?”
“I took them.”
“Why did you take them? I want you to give them back to me straight away!”
Then the Devil told him, “Only if you can regurgitate the milk which you sucked from your mother, the milk which you sucked [as an infant], only then will I give you back the children of your sister safe and sound!”
Then Saint Sisoy prayed to the Lord:
“O God my Lord! Help me regurgitate my mother’s milk, so that I may put the Devil to shame!”
And then Saint Sisoy regurgitated his mother’s milk. Then the Devil regurgitated the six children, safe and sound. Saint Sisoy mounted them on his horse and took them with him.
“My sister, open the door!”
“What are you bringing along, my brother?”
“I am bringing you back your six children – alive! I took them from the Devil!”
And then he [=Saint Sisoy] attached two huge stones to the Devil’s neck and pushed him into the sea.
“You will never harm people anymore!”

And this is how the Devil sunk into the sea; that is why there is no more Devil [who snatches the children away].

The text was recorded 9 March 1989 in the village of Maluk Dervent [Малък Дервент], the district of Ivaylovgrad [Ивайловград], South-Eastern Bulgaria by Valentina Ganeva. The story was narrated by Gela Ivanova Ruseva, born 1898 in the same village.

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Text 2.2: About the willow tree and the olive tree

Saint Sisoy had a sister whose name was Meletia. The Devil had strangled all her children. With trickery he snatched away her last child and ran away. Saint Sisoy set off to find him. When he passed near by a willow tree, he asked whether it had seen the Devil with an infant in his mouth. But it mislead him and he cursed it, "You willow tree! May you blossom, but never bear a fruit!"
Later Saint Sisoy saw an olive tree and asked it as to whether it saw the Devil. She answered that he hid with the child in the abyss of the sea. Then the saint blessed it that its fruit becomes oil in the church – to bring light before God.

The text was recorded in the village of Raduil, Samokov area, Western Bulgaria, by Rositsa Angelova; the account was given by the 46-years old woman by the name of Gergina Stankova. This historiola was first published in Sofia, in 1948, in Vol. 8–9 of the *Transactions of the Slavonic Philology Seminar at the University of Sofia* (*Известия на Семинара по Славянска филология при Университета в София*), p. 138; it was reprinted by Kuzmanova & Kotseva (1983, 202–203).

Text 2.3: "Did you happen to see my child?"

Well, when He [Christ] had set off to hide [from His pursuers], His mother [had tried to find Him and] had asked [each and every creature]:
"Have you seen my Child?"
She first asked the aspen. [The aspen answered,]
"Oh, well, I am, myself, all shaken", it said, "would I care and would I look for your Child?"
She [the Virgin Mary] said:
"May you shake for ever! May you never stop shaking!"
Then she asked the willow,
"Did you happen to see my Child?"
And the willow (doesn't the willow-tree tremble as if flying?) answered:
"I am, myself, flying here all alone, how can I possibly [look for] your Child?"
"May you forever", she [the Virgin Mary] uttered, "be flying! May you never stop!"
She went further along and asked the blackberry bush, "Did you happen to see my Child?"
"I saw Him indeed", it said. "And also those who were pursuing Him. I made them stumble and they fell … So that they were left behind back, they did not capture Him!"
Then she [the Virgin Mary] told the blackberry bush:
"May the digger dig you out on one side, and may you take root on your other side! May you never wither!"

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And it is indeed, like this. Even if that little[63] is left in the earth, it [the blackberry bush] would take root. It would not wither! For it made those that pursued Him, the Jews, stumble!

The text was recorded 3 June 1993 in the village of Bulgari [Българи], the district of Malko Turnovo [Малко Търново], South-Eastern Bulgaria by the present author. The story was narrated by Yanka Lefterova Georgieva [Янка Лефтерова Георгиева], born 1929 in the same village, no formal education.

Text 2.4: "Have you seen my child?"

[When Christ tried to escape] they set out in pursuit of Him. And He ran away and they kept chasing Him. Thus He happened to meet a willow. And the willow asked Him where He was fleeing to.
And it is as if weeping – you see, it lets [its branches down] as if it is [weeping] ...
And while weeping, it asked Him [where He was going], and He said, "May you weep", He said, "forever! May you weep forever!"
Later on, His Mother set off after Him and asked everywhere everyone, "Did you happen to see my Child?"
She, His mother, went to the linden tree and asked it, "Did you happen to see my Child?"
The linden tree answered, "No, I did not! Shaken as I have been – how could I see your Child?!"
"May you shake", she said, "for ever!"
The blackberry bush made Him trip, so He fell down and thus He was held back, so that they could capture Him.
And He blessed it, "May the digger dig you out from the one side, and may you take root on the other!"
And it is precisely like this, if even that much is left from the blackberry bush, it takes root!

The text was recorded 3 June 1993 in the village of Bulgari [Българи], the district of Malko Turnovo [Малко Търново], South-Eastern Bulgaria by the present author. The story was narrated by Dona Filcheva Filcheva [Дона Филчева Филчева], born 1912 in the same village. She was the churchwarden of the Holy Chapel of Saint Constantine.

63 The storyteller shows the palm of her hand, to indicate the size.

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