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The Bible in the Bowls: A Catalogue of Biblical Quotations in Published Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Magic Bowls

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PREFACE

The Jewish Babylonian Aramaic incantation bowls represent our only significant corpus of direct epigraphic documents from late antique Mesopotamia written by that region's Jewish communities. They are of immense importance for our understanding of these communities, and scholarship has increasingly come to recognise just how far these previously marginalised artefacts may lead to new perceptions of ancient Jewish society. As of November 2022, over 460 Jewish Babylonian Aramaic bowls have been published in widely scattered editions of varying quality, a circumstance that impedes the systematic study of various aspects of the bowl texts, including their extensive quotation of the Hebrew Bible. The present work collates all of the biblical quotations found in these disparate publications.

By making these quotations easily accessible to scholars, this catalogue is designed to facilitate research not just by students of Jewish magic, but by linguists, liturgists, biblical text critics, and historians. It will hopefully aid and accelerate further research on the use and dynamics of scriptural citation in the magic bowls and ancient Jewish magic more broadly; on the social locations of biblical knowledge in the Jewish communities of Sasanian Mesopotamia; on the formation of the liturgy and the development of the Jewish prayer book; on the transmission of biblical texts in late antiquity and the phonology and morphology of the Babylonian reading tradition; and in the area of biblical text criticism, as some bowl texts contain the earliest attestations of biblical passages not found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The publication of bowl texts is an ongoing process, and unpublished bowl texts currently outnumber published bowl texts. The number of biblical quotations known from the bowls will thus continue to grow. As such—and given the possibilities afforded by publication in this series—it is my intention to periodically update this catalogue as editions of new bowl texts appear. In its current form, the present work represents a complete catalogue of biblical quotations from the corpus of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic bowls published as of November 2022.

Finally, it is my great pleasure to thank Dorota Molin for her contribution to §§3.0 and 4.0 of the introduction to the catalogue and for her help with several other aspects of the catalogue. I would also like to thank Hindy Najman for her generous encouragement and support; Siam Bhayro for his assistance; and Geoffrey Khan and Aaron Hornkohl for their patience with the technical aspects of the catalogue. I am also indebted to the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for their helpful comments, and for a meticulous reading of the catalogue. Work on the catalogue was made possible by funding from the Niels Stensen Fellowship and was completed while I was a Visiting Scholar of the Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies of the University of Oxford.

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I thank Geoffrey Khan for introducing me to the incantation bowls and for his support in my study of the Babylonian Hebrew pronunciation tradition.

Dorota Molin