

**Յուռուրթ Հայոց ընդդէմ դիւազ եւ այւոց**

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Swithune footed thrice the old,  
A met the night-mare and her nine fold;  
Bid her alight,  
And her troth plight,  
And aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!

— *King Lear*, Act III Scene 4

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**Յուռուրթ Ա<sup>1</sup>**

Աղօթք վասն թաղայի եւ ալի (FF)

Սուրբն Պետրոս եւ սուրբն Պօղոս եւ սուրբն Մինաս եւ սուրբն Շեղաթ գնացին ճանապարհաւ եւ տեսին այր մի նստեալ 'ի վերայ աւազոյ եւ մագն նորա իբրեւ ձար ձիոյ եւ ըղունկն նորա պղնձի, աչք նորա ապակի, ատամունք նորա երկաթի եւ ժանիքն նորա որպէս վարազի խոզի, լինդքն այլակերպք քան զամենայն կենդանեաց եւ ատամունք յետոյ եւ պոկունքն առաջի, թաթ ոտիցն յետոյ եւ կրունկն առաջի: Հարցին ցնա սուրբքն եւ ասէն. — Չի՞նչ ես դու պեղծ դժնիկ կամ զի՞նչ գործոց գործակել ես դու կամ զի՞նչ է անունդ քո: Ստոյգ խոստովանեա մեզ: (FF)

Ասէ պեղծն. — Ես եմ մայրն ամենայն չարեաց, ես եմ ալն չար որ նստիմ 'ի վերայ տղացկանի, զաչսն խաւարեցուցանեմ, զականջն խլացուցանեմ, զմարմինն թմրեցուցանեմ, զղասապն<sup>2</sup> քարշեմ եւ խեղդեմ զմայրն եւ զմանուկն: Մեր կերակուրն մանր տղայոց միսն է եւ տղացկանի դասապն: Խեղդեմ ՁԷ ամսական տղայն յորովայնի մօր իւրոյ, զողանամք, խուլ եւ մունջ առնեմք եւ տանիմք առ թագաւորն մեր յանդունդս եւ նա մեծարէ զմեզ: Չտղայն 'ի յօրօրոցն խեղդեմք, զտղացկանն 'ի յանկողինն, զմանուկն 'ի տաշտին. Ռք հազարաց եմք եւ մեր թագաւորն սաթայ հելն է: Եւ ոչ թողումք որ տղայն 'ի փեսայութիւն մտանէ եւ ոչ աղջիկն 'ի հարսնութիւն: Եւ մեր բնակութիւնն յանկիւնս տանն է եւ յախոռն է եւ դրան ետեւն է եւ աղբրեզերն է. զանասունն եւ զամենայն չորքոտանիք ոչ թողումք որ աճին. զոմանս քամոտ առնեմք եւ զոմանս չըռաթափ: Ահա՛, ասացի զամենայն. ով սուրբքդ Աստուծոյ, մի՛ տանջեք զիս: (FF)

Յայնժամ հանին սուրբքն Աստուծոյ զսուրն հրեղեն և նոցա չարչարեին և ասէին. — Երդմնեցուցանեմք զքեզ, չար դեք, զՀայր և զՌդդին և զսուրբ Հոզին և միածին Աստուած կենդանին և ածեմ[ք] 'ի վերայ ձեր անողորմ հրեշտակքն բազում: (SH)

Եւ ասէ մայրն ալին. — Մի՛ չարչարեք զանդրանիկն իմ, զի մեք երդնումք 'ի ձեզ Աստուածն կենդանի և 'ի կաթն սուրբ կուսին Մարիամու, 'ի քնարն Դաւթի, Դ

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<sup>1</sup> In the corpus of Armenian prayer-incantations against demons and evil spirits, there are a number of similar narratives with varying amounts of detail regarding the appearance of the demons, their malevolent deeds, and the means by which they are controlled. In order to provide a more-complete representation of the narrative type involving the demons *al* and *t'pgha*, this incantation combines portions of texts from Feydit: pp. 306–312, and Harutyunyan: No. 1(159) դ, p. 131. The specific source (FF or SH) is noted after each paragraph. Text corrections in brackets are as indicated in these sources.

<sup>2</sup> Դասապ is glossed by Ghevont Alishan as լեարդ (Alishan). One variant of this incantation reads ճիկար (Feydit: 308 n. 12).

## Յուրուրթ Հայոց ընդդէմ դիւաց եւ այսոց

ավետարանչացն, ԻԴ մարգարէիցն, 'ի տախտակն Մովսէսի, 'ի բլեռնն Քրիստոսի, 'ի մատանին Սողոմոնի. յոր տունն սոքայ անուանքն լինի[ն] կամ յիշուի[ն] կամ գրած լինի[ն] անդ, ոչ մտանենք 'ի յայն կին և գմանուկն ոչ զօղանամք և ոչ առնունք պակաս: Եւ անուանքն մեր այս են. յառաջինն Ծնելոց, Բ. Աղլագո, Գ. Մայրոյէ, Դ. Աղքատէ, Ե. Այսմէ, Զ. Այսզին, Է. Մարմարոյէ, Ը. Այրոյ, Թ. Կալիշի, Ժ. Յուլիցայ, ԺԱ. Եկիտուն, ԺԲ. Անկանես: Ուր այս բանքս լինի և անուանքն սրբոց լինի[ն]՝ հալածիմք 'ի սահմանաց դիւացն և փարատենք զգաւս և բժշկենք զգաւս ընդդէմ ծառայիս Աստուծոյ տիրացու Գրիգորին (*name*)<sup>3</sup>: (SH)

— Կապեն զքեզ ավն չար 'ի մեջ աւագանին. կապեն ['ի վերայ] խաչին, քաջ, որ ոչ 'ի մայրն մտանես եւ կորուսանես եւ ոչ 'ի տղան (*name*): Կապեն զքեզ քաջ 'ի հայր եւ [յ]որդին եւ 'ի սուրբ հոգին: Հաւատամ 'ի Հայր, [յ]Որդին որ ընդ աջմէ Հօրն, Տէր մեր Յիսուս Քրիստոս յերկինս համբարձեալ սուրբ մարմնով: Գ խաչեր կանգու[ն]ք կային<sup>4</sup>. խաչեցին մէկն, զդուռն փակեցին. այն խաչն սուին էր 'ի մարտի. ան պահապան ծննդկանիս որ ոչ վնասի մինչ 'ի գալուստն Քրիստոսի: Յանուն Հօր եւ Որդոյ եւ Հոգւոյն սրբոյ: Ծառայիս Աստուծոյ. Ամէն: (FF)

### Incantation 1

Prayer against *t'pgha* and *al*. (FF)

Saint Peter and Saint Paul and Saint Minas and Saint Sheghat' walked with the road and saw one man sitting on the sand, and his hair [was] like the mane of a horse and his claw[s] [like] copper, his eyes [like] glass, his teeth [like] iron and his tusks like [those of] wild-boar swine, the gums [were] different than [those of] all living things, and the teeth [were] backwards and the lips forward, the toes<sup>5</sup> [were] backward and the heel forward. The saints asked him and said, "What are you, foul thorn bush?<sup>6</sup> or What deeds are you doing? or What is your name? Truly confess to us." (FF)

The foul [one] said, "I am the mother of all evils, I am the evil *al*<sup>7</sup> who sits on a pregnant woman.

<sup>3</sup> In prayer-incantations such as this, which are typically found in Armenian *hmayils*, spaces would be left open where the name(s) of the hmayil's owner was to be written.

<sup>4</sup> Reading կար in the text as կայր, and correcting it to plural կային.

<sup>5</sup> թաթ նսիցն, "toes", literally "paw of the foot".

<sup>6</sup> դժնիկ, "thorn bush", is sometimes rendered "bramble"; cf. Psa. 57:10 (58:9), Judg. 9:14–15.

<sup>7</sup> The *al* (ալ) or *alk'* (ալք) is a demon that enters into the wombs of pregnant women to kill them and/or their unborn children. In some Armenian dialects, *al* is expressed as the *plurale tantum* form *alk'*. Ghevont Alishan (1820–1901), the great poet, historian and Priest of the Mkhitarist Congregation in Venice, discusses the *alk'*:

As an ordinary word, *Alk'* means deep places, like abysses, and corresponds to the word *Hell* of the Goths, Germans and those of the same tongue, which means Hell. In the north, the Goddess of Hell was also called Hel; [the place was] suitable for the inhabitation of *Alk'*, which live in damp places. And they mostly harmed women in childbirth and children, as if they were adversaries of their Eternal Brides. Such Spirits are, says Grigor Tatewats'i the Moralist, "who in the water and the childbirth of women, are called *Alk'*, for with the wet disease [i.e., lust] they destroy souls, and in births [they destroy] bodies and souls." (Alishan.)

Manuk Abeghyan (1865–1944), the great scholar of Armenian folklore, states:

There is a category of evil spirits which are especially hostile to human reproduction. These spirits are called *als* (*alk'*) and appear as bristly and shaggy half-animal half-human figures. ... They like to sit in the road at sandy spots. From there they come and enter homes, staying in stables in dark corners or near the eaves. ... The mother of the *al* frequently appears in folk tales and spells. They have a king who lives chained

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I darken the eyes, deafen the ear[s], [and] benumb the flesh. I pull out the liver and strangle the mother and the baby. Our food is the flesh of small children and the liver<sup>8</sup> of a pregnant woman. I strangle the 6-7 month-[old] child in the womb of its mother. We steal [it], make [it] deaf and dumb and bring [it] to our king in the abyss, and he exalts us. We strangle the child in the cradle, the pregnant woman in the bed, [and] the baby in the [bath] basin. We are 1,000s of thousands and our king is Sathael.<sup>9</sup> And we do not allow that the boy becomes a groom<sup>10</sup> nor the girl [becomes] a bride.<sup>11</sup> And we dwell<sup>12</sup> in the corners of the house, the stable, behind the door, and [at] the edge of the spring. We do not allow the animal[s] and all quadrupeds to multiply;<sup>13</sup> we make them arthritic and [make] them impotent. Behold, I [have] said all. O saints of God, do not torment me.”<sup>14</sup> (FF)

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and constantly shrieking in the abyss, buried up to the neck in lead.

One legend says that God created the *al* to be a comrade to Adam. However, they did not suit each other since Adam was made of earth while the *al* was made of fire. When God saw that, he create Eve. From that time forth, the *al* has been inimical to Eve and to her sex. It imposes sexual abstinence on young couples, enters the womb, and destroys the fetus. (Abeghyan: 118.)

The demon *t'pgha* (թփղա) is often mentioned in together with an *al* in the titles of incantations, but usually does not appear in the texts themselves. When it does appear, it often shares the same characteristics as the *al*. It appears to be an evil spirit of disease affecting women and unborn/newborn children, and it may have its origin in the Persian *tabāh*, the Hittite *telepinu*, the Mesopotamian *khumut-tabal*, the Syrian *tabi'ah*, and/or the Arabic *teb'ah*. (Toporkov 2017: 346.) Thus it would appear that two separate demons of antiquity were merged into one demon in Armenian folklore, with both names surviving in the tradition.

<sup>8</sup> դասապ, Middle Armenian “butcher”, is glossed by Ghevont Alishan as “liver” (Alishan).

<sup>9</sup> սաթայ հելն = սաթայելն, “Sathael” or “Satael”, a fallen angel in some traditions.

<sup>10</sup> 'ի փեսայութիւն մտանէ, “becomes a groom”, literally “(he) enters into groomship”.

<sup>11</sup> 'ի հարսնութիւն [մտանէ], “[becomes] a bride”, literally “(she) [enters] into brideship”.

<sup>12</sup> մեր բնակութիւնն... է, “we dwell”, literally “our dwelling is”.

<sup>13</sup> որ աճիւն, “to multiply”, literally “which are multiplying”.

<sup>14</sup> This incantation is an example of the Armenian version of a demon-binding amulet or incantation narrative, going back to late antiquity, that has been labeled by scholars of folklore as the “Sisinnius Legend”, and which is known in a number of other traditions, including Aramaic, Jewish, Coptic, Arabic, Ethiopian, Classical Syriac, Byzantine Greek, Modern Greek, South Slavic (Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian), Romanian and East Slavic (Russian, Ukrainian). The designation “Sisinnius Legend” is based on one of the Byzantine Greek versions of the narrative, in which St. Sisinnius confronts a female demon who has stolen and killed the children of his sister. The widespread tradition of the child-stealing-killing-eating witch goes back to Lamashtu, the ancient Mesopotamian demon of the 2nd millennium B.C.; among other malicious deeds, Lamashtu killed unborn and newborn babies. In the Armenian version of the Sisinnius Legend, the female demon is the *al*, or the mother of the *al* in the narratives in which her offspring are characters. In one of the Jewish versions, the demon is Lilith, the first wife of Adam, who is confronted by the triad of angels Senoy, Sasanoy, and Semangelof. Since the narrative source from which the Armenian tradition developed did not include these angels or St. Sisinnius, the names of the triad of saints were usually changed to familiar ones, which often included St. Peter and St. Paul, and additional saints were sometimes added to the triad. (Toporkov 2017 and 2019: *passim*.)

Sisinnius Legend incantations are a type of “Encounter Charm” (Ger. *Begegnungssegen*), as defined by the Danish folklorist Ferdinand Ohrt (1873–1938), which are composed of three parts: an introduction, a dialogue, and a conclusion. Ohrt noted that the various types of Encounter Charms had certain aspects in common: a description of the meeting of two or more characters, and interaction between the characters which changes the situation for the better. In the Sisinnius Legend, the characteristics of the Encounter Charm are (1) a sacred character meets an evil spirit, demon or personified disease; (2) the sacred character has a dialogue with it; and

Then the Saints of God drew the fiery sword,<sup>15</sup> tormented them and said, “We make you swear,<sup>16</sup> evil demons,<sup>17</sup> [to] the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and [to] the Only-begotten living God, and we bring over you the numerous merciless angels.” (SH)

And the mother of the *al* said, “Do not torment my first-born, for we swear to you God of Life, and on the milk of the holy Virgin Mary, on the harp of David, to the 4 Evangelists, to the 24 Prophets,

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(3) the sacred character binds it or drives it away. (Toporkov 2017: 87, Toporkov 2019: 315–316.)

Without specifically referring to the Sisinnius Legend, James R. Russell, Emeritus Professor of Armenian Studies at Harvard University, associates the *alk'* with Lilith of Jewish tradition:

In Jewish folklore, Lilith is believed to have been not a supernatural being at first, but the first wife of Adam, made from earth as he was, and not from his rib, either—more an equal than a helpmate. Once, the first human couple quarreled: Lilith pronounced the ineffable Name of God, the Tetragrammaton, and was instantly spirited into the air. She flew away. Adam complained of his loneliness to God, who dispatched three angels to find Lilith. These become the triumvirate of saints commonly encountered in Christian spells. They caught up with her at the Red Sea, where she declared she was determined to kill any children Adam might father on a second wife. They wanted to drown her then, but Lilith begged mercy, and they struck a deal: they would protect from her any child born in a home where their names were invoked. The three are named Sinoi, Sasanoy, and Samangluf, and are invoked in various texts, including the magical “Book of the Angel of Secrets”, the *Sefer Raziel*. ... So Lilith appears as the succubus who flies to sleeping men for spectral and barren intercourse, and, in her boundless bitterness against the fertile daughters of Eve, acts as the murderous Child-stealing Witch. ...

Armenian tradition calls a fiery being named *Al* the first wife of Adam, too; so there is no doubt she is the same being called Lilith, or Night-mare, elsewhere. In the Armenian tale, the *Al*, called in the dialect of Kharberd, Turkish Harput, *Elk'* (with the Classical plural, *k'*, as *pluralis tantum*), takes a young mother’s liver, but cannot eat it unless she dips it first in water—perhaps a recollection of Lilith’s flight to the Red Sea. She is caught with a metal pin stuck into her clothes, for iron pins or scissors are a common charm against these monsters; and, once she is captured, we learn she has many children herself, and has stolen the liver in order to feed them. She returns the human mother’s liver to her, and becomes her servant. Eventually the *Elk'* is freed, after promising not to harm seven generations of the family, only making their wooden spoons break easily. ... The *Al* is shown in Armenian talismanic scrolls as a long-clawed, horned, bearded, tailed, club-footed monster, pitchblack, holding the innards of some victim. ... The Armenian talismans against the *Al* invoke three saints, *Siovn* (i.e., Zion), *Sisi* (perhaps from *Sis*, the capital of Cilician Armenia), and *Sisiane* (i.e., the Greek vocative of *Sisianos*): the same triad, and same story, as in the Jewish magical texts—and both in their present form derive from a Byzantine Greek prototype, as Gaster pointed out long ago. (Russell: 12–14.)

<sup>15</sup> The fiery sword wielded by the saints is presumably that of the archangel Michael. Scholars of folklore have categorized the traditions of the Sisinnius Legend into two types, the Sisinnius-Melitine-type and the Michael-type, based on similar elements of the incantation narratives. The designation Michael-type is based on one of the Byzantine Greek versions of the narrative, in which the archangel Michael confronts the female demon. The Armenian tradition of the Sisinnius Legend has been classified as Michael-type, although the archangel himself does not appear in the narratives, having been replaced by various saints during the transmission of the narrative into the Armenian tradition. (Toporkov 2017: 13–14, Toporkov 2019: 314–325.)

<sup>16</sup> Երդմնեցուցանենք զքեզ, “We make you swear”. The verb երդմնեցուցանեն, from երդմնեն, “swear an oath” (< երդումն, “oath”) and ցուցանեն, “show, demonstrate” (in a causative sense as a component of another verb), is also rendered “adjure”, from Latin *ad*, “to” and *jurare*, “swear” (< *jus/jur-*, “oath”). Երդմնեցուցանեն can also be rendered “conjure”; however, the Middle English sense of the verb, to oblige by way of an oath, because of its use in the context of an incantation to compel (i.e., bind) demons or evil spirits, has evolved into the modern sense of “conjure” as calling on someone or something to appear by magic. See also note 20 below in regard to the demons’ oath or promise as a narrative element in Sisinnius Legend incantations.

<sup>17</sup> “Then the saints... tormented them and said, ‘We make you swear, evil demons...’” After encountering one *al* in the sand, the saints are now tormenting more than one (although զքեզ, “you” singular, is inconsistent with “them” and “demons”). In the next sentence, “the mother of the *al*” (մայրն ալիւն) appears in the narrative.

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on the tablet[s] of Moses, on the nail[s] of Christ, [and] on the ring of Solomon<sup>18</sup>—in that house

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<sup>18</sup> Legends of Solomon the Wise and his demon-exorcising ability go back to antiquity. Flavius Josephus, the 1st century A.D. Roman–Jewish historian and military leader, states that Solomon was able to expel demons, and that he personally witnessed exorcisms that were performed using Solomon’s method and incantations:

Now so great was the prudence and wisdom which God granted Solomon that he surpassed the ancients, and even the Egyptians... And God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men. He also composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved, and left behind forms of exorcisms with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return. And this kind of cure is of very great power among us to this day, for I have seen a certain Eleazar, a countryman of mine, in the presence of Vespasian, his sons, tribunes and a number of other soldiers, free men possessed by demons, and this was the manner of the cure: he put to the nose of the possessed man a ring which had under its seal one of the roots prescribed by Solomon, and then, as the man smelled it, drew out the demon through his nostrils, and, when the man at once fell down, adjured the demon never to come back into him, speaking Solomon’s name and reciting the incantations which he had composed... (Josephus 1930: 8.2.5.)

The Ring or Seal of Solomon, in many traditions dating back to antiquity, is a signet ring used by Solomon to control or bind demons. In some narratives, the ring was engraved by God and given to Solomon by the archangel Michael, and had one part of the ring made of brass, used to seal written commands to good spirits, and another part made of iron, used to seal commands to evil spirits. In the *Testament of Solomon*, a magico-mystical narrative with early forms that date back to the 3rd century A.D., Solomon uses the ring to control demons and conscript them to construct the Temple of Jerusalem, which according to legend was built without the use of tools. (Cf. 1 Kings 6:7, “And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built.”)

Ra’anan Boustan, Research Scholar in the Program in Judaic Studies at Princeton University, and Michael Beshay, then a doctoral student at Ohio State University, discuss the Ring of Solomon in the context of early Christianity:

Objects associated with figures from the Hebrew Bible, such as staffs, swords, cultic vessels and garments, and, of course, scrolls and books, appear in a wide range of ritual texts from late antiquity. As artifacts linked to venerable persons or institutions from the biblical past, they imbued a given practice, practitioner, or performance with authority and thereby rendered the ritual especially efficacious.

Prominent among these sacred insignia is the signet-ring or seal of Solomon, which was understood to point to—and thus, under the right circumstances, to serve as a conduit for—the Israelite king’s legendary capacity to repel or control the malevolent spirits that plague humanity. This emblem of Solomon’s ritual power appears in either discursive or iconographic form from the first-century onwards...

... Solomon made use of a signet-ring to marshal the demons as a labor-force for the construction of the Jerusalem Temple. ... this constellation of themes—Solomon’s signet-ring, the demons, and the construction of the temple—is a Christian innovation of the third and fourth centuries rather than a venerable Jewish tradition with roots in the Second Temple period. ... this idea emerged within the context of internal Christian debates of the third century concerning proper baptismal practice, where the power of baptism to provide protection from the demons was linked to debates concerning the efficacy of Solomon’s act of sealing the demons in the temple. In the post-Constantinian period, however, the primary context for the tradition concerning the ring, the demons, and the construction of the temple shifted to the discursive domain of Christian Holy Land pilgrimage. By the end of the fourth century, the ring of Solomon—apparently now in the form of an actual object deposited at the ecclesiastical complex of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre—was venerated by pilgrims as a “relic” of Israelite kingship alongside the True Cross. ... Solomon’s ring gave concrete expression to Christian claims on the Old Testament past, while also mediating between imperial and ecclesiastical power.

... the Greek *Testament of Solomon*... represents the fullest articulation of the linkage between the anti-demonic function of the signet-ring and the construction of the Jerusalem Temple. ... the Christian appropriation of the signet-ring of Solomon was part and parcel of the enthusiastic incorporation of “biblical objects” within Christian ritual and narrative. ... the *Testament* (or at least some segments or strata of this work) presents Christ’s victory on the cross as the fulfillment—once and for all—of Solomon’s only provisional mastery over the demons. (Boustan and Beshay 2015.)

One episode in the *Testament of Solomon*, involving Solomon’s encounter, dialogue with, and binding of the demon Abizuth (Obizu), is presumed to be the source of the Michael-type narratives of the Sisinnius Legend (see notes 14 and 15 above), which was transmitted into one of the Byzantine Greek versions of the legend, and thence

[where] these names are, or are remembered, or are written there, we do not enter into that woman nor steal the baby nor diminish [them]. And these are our names: to the first [one], *Tsnelots'*, [then] 2. *Aghlazo*, 3. *Mayroyē*, 4. *Aght'atē*, 5. *Aysmē*, 6. *Ayszin*, 7. *Marmaroyē*, 8. *Ayroy*, 9. *Kalishi*, 10. *Yulits'ay*, 11. *Ekitun*, [and] 12. *Ankanes*. Where these words are and the names of the Saints are, we are expelled to the regions of demons, and we disperse the *ts'aws*<sup>19</sup> and heal the *ts'aws* facing this servant of God (*name*),<sup>20</sup> [here before] *tirats'u*<sup>21</sup> Grigor.” (SH)

“I bind you, evil *al*, within the cistern,<sup>22</sup> I bind you on the cross, *k'aj*,<sup>23</sup> that you do not enter into and destroy the mother nor the child (*name*). I bind you, *k'aj*, in [the name of] the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Father, [and] in the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who at the right hand of the Father ascended to heaven with [his] holy body. 3 upright crosses stood—they crucified the One, [and] shut the door. That cross was a lance in battle.<sup>24</sup> It [is] a guardian of this

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into the Armenian tradition. (Toporkov 2017 and Toporkov 2019.)

<sup>19</sup> *ts'aw* (ցաւ), is an evil spirit that causes illness or disease. (Abeghyan 1899: 122.) The word *ts'aw* is often rendered “pain” when paired with a specific body part, e.g., գլխացաւ, “head pain” or “headache”, աչացաւ, “eye pain”, etc., although the source of the pain is the evil spirit.

<sup>20</sup> “And the mother of the *al* said, ‘Do not torment my first-born, for we swear to you... in that house [where] these names are, or are remembered, or are written there, we do not enter into that woman nor steal the baby nor diminish [them].’” Two narrative elements that are common to most traditions of the Sisinnius Legend are: (1) the female demon pleading with the angel-saints for her life and/or the lives of her offspring, and (2) the demon promising to stay away from, and not harm anyone in, the place in which the names of the demons and/or angel-saints are spoken, written and/or remembered. (Toporkov 2017 and Toporkov 2019.) In the Armenian tradition, the oath to stay away is usually forced upon the demon, either by the indirect threat of the confrontation, or by a direct “we make you swear” threat from the angel-saints, often at the point of the fiery sword. The demon’s oath is usually sworn on or to various sacred-magic objects and persons, which gives it strength and makes it harder for the demon to break.

“And these are our names. ... Where these words are and the names of the Saints are, we are expelled... and we disperse... and heal...” Another narrative element often seen in some traditions of the Sisinnius Legend, part and parcel with the oath, is the disclosure of names by the demon. (Ibid.) In revealing the demons’ names, their magical power is transferred to the angel-saints, who use this power, and that of their own names, to bind or expel the demons. The tradition of protection afforded by the demons’ names dates back to ancient Mesopotamia: “The mesopotamian rituals against Lamashtu specifically prescribe that Lamashtu’s seven names be written on a cylinder seal of clay to be worn on the body, and in fact incantations concerning her names are a persistent feature of the actual amulets.” (Wiggermann 2000: 230.)

<sup>21</sup> *tirats'u* (տիրացուն), often rendered “clerk” or “chorister”, is a person who was not ordained as a priest, but was permitted to perform some sacerdotal functions. Many of the scribes who wrote and illustrated Armenian hmayils had the title of *tirats'u*, with the role of a clerk-enchanter, similar to a *debtera* in Ethiopian tradition. (Russell: 22–25.)

<sup>22</sup> The word աւազան has a number of meanings related to the containment of water, such as basin, pool, reservoir, cistern, trough, well, etc. Here, “cistern” was chosen because it is a secure vessel in which demons could be locked.

<sup>23</sup> In Armenian folk belief, a *k'aj* (քաջ) is a human-like creature who lives in mountain caves, crevasses, and deep valleys, and is the husband-counterpart of the water-nymph known as a *peri* (փերի). Among the various malevolent deeds for which they are known, the *k'ajs* steal beautiful, healthy babies from unprotected cradles, and substitute their own ugly, sickly babies, which usually do not survive. (Abeghyan 1899: 104–110.) Similar to *al* and *alk'*, in some Armenian dialects, *k'aj* is expressed as the *plurale tantum* form *k'ajk'*.

<sup>24</sup> The three crosses are, obviously, the ones upon which Christ and the two thieves were crucified. Through the crucifixion of Christ (the One), the door(s) to evil and death were shut—good prevailed over evil, and life

## Armenian Incantations Against Demons and Evil Spirits

woman giving birth, that no harm [will come to her] until the coming of Christ. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. For this servant of God. Amen.” (FF)

### Յուժուժ Բ<sup>25</sup>

Գիր դիւացհար մարդոյ վերայ, կարդայ կամ գրէ,  
վերայ պահէ, լաւանայ Աստուծով

Ծառ մի կայր 'ի մէջ երկրի ոչ ճուղն ունէր և ոչ տերև և ոչ արմատ. արծիւ մի նստեալ էր 'ի վերայ նորա, որ ոչ գլուխ ունէր և ոչ թել և ոչ ոտք: Հարցումք եղեն յարծևին և ասէին. — Չի՞ նստեալ ես 'ի ծառոյդ, որ ոչ ճուղն ունի և ոչ տերև և ոչ արմատ:

Ասէ արծիւն այն դշիղն<sup>26</sup>. — Երթամ 'ի գլուխն մարդոյ, զմիսն որսեմ, զուղուղն ծըծեմ, զաչից լոյսն պակասացնեմ:

Լսեցին զայն հրեշտակք և հրեշտակապետք, հրամայեցին և ասեն. — Կապեալ կապենք զքեզ երեք հարիւր և ԿԵ սրբովք, որք կան 'ի սիրտ արեգական, որ ոչ հրեշտակք գիտեն և ոչ հրեշտակապետք, բայց միայն հայր Աստուած:

Եւ դարձեալ ասեն. — Կապեն զքեզ 'ի քնարն Դաւթի, 'ի մատանին Սողոմոնի, 'ի տախտակն Մովսէսի, 'ի պատմունճանն Ահարօնի, 'ի դաստառակն Քրիստոսի, 'ի քաղցր կաթն սուրբ կուսին, 'ի չորեք բլեռն Քրիստոսի, որ Տեառն արեամբ ներկեալ ես: Կալենք կապենք զքեզ կապանօքն Պօղոսի և Պետրոսի, պայծառակերպութեամբն Քրիստոսի, որ պայծառակերպեցաւ 'ի Թաբոր լերինն երեք սրբեացն լուսովն, որ երևեցաւ 'ի վերայ անմահ զագարն Քրիստոսի: Չունիս իշխանութիւն, ոչ աճիս և ոչ նիւթիս, և ոչ զօրանաս, իստանաս, այլ չորանաս և կորրնչիս: Չիք ես, չիք դառնաս բանիւ տեառն մերոյ Յիսուսի Քրիստոսի, ծառայիս Աստուծոյ տիրացու Գրիգորին, (*name*)<sup>27</sup> դիւահար մարդոյն:

— Կապեն զքեզ ԻԴ մարգարէիւքն, երկոյտասան առաքելովքն, ՀԲ աշակերտովքն, 'ի փառքն Ադամայ՝ 'ի վայելչութիւնն դրախտին, խոտն, որ հովանի եղև, 'ի բանն, որ ասաց Յիսուս 'ի վերայ իսաչին՝ Էլի, Էլի, լամա սաբաքթանի: Կապեն զքեզ 'ի պետութիւնքն և իշխանութիւնքն և 'ի բարձրեալ սերօրէքն և քերօրէքն: Կապեն զքեզ, պիղծ դևք, 'ի իսաչին Քրիստոսի, զի նա է լուս և լուսատու տիեզերաց:

— Կապեն զքեզ, ՅԿԶ ցաւ կամ ախտաժեռք, 'ի դիմաց որոյ ոչ այլ երևիս. եթէ կլիսիվայր ես, եթէ կլիսիվեր ես, եթէ գնա[յ]ուն ես, եթէ կերնի ես, եթէ առիքեն ես, եթէ կետի առիւծ ես, եթէ կուլեկ ես, եթէ աղվիսուկ ես, եթէ ձերնուկ ես, եթէ խուլեկ ես, եթէ խլորան ես, եթէ աչքունքն ես, եթէ մաչիկ ես, եթէ շուտիկ ես, եթէ կորտնիկ ես, եթէ սև բազուկ ես, եթէ խումիան ես, եթէ խոցունկ ես, եթէ անցաւ ես, որ մարկարկոյ<sup>28</sup> ես, չիք

prevailed over death. “That cross”, i.e., the Cross upon which the One was crucified, was a weapon which helped Christian forces to be victorious in battle. Now, it is a weapon in the battle against demons, by which the door to their imprisonment is shut.

<sup>25</sup> Harutyunyan: No. 1(143), pp. 117, 300.

<sup>26</sup> Դշիղ - դժխեմ, դժնի, չարաբարո, ժանտ (Harutyunyan: 457).

<sup>27</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>28</sup> Մարկարկոյ - ինչ-որ հիվանդություն (Harutyunyan: 469).

## Յուռուրթ Հայոց ընդդէմ դիւաց եւ այսոց

Եւ եւ չիք դառնաս: Չգիրս եւ կարդամ և դեղ Յիսուս Քրիստոս լինի ծառայիս Աստուծոյ տիրացու Գրիգորին (*name*):

— Կապեն գրեզ, եթէ երկնային եւ, եթէ երկրային եւ, եթէ 'ի ծովու եւ, եթէ ցամաքու եւ, եթէ յարևելից եւ, եթէ յարևմտից եւ, եթէ յարաւային եւ, եթէ յիւսիսային եւ, եթէ դև եւ, եթէ սատանայ եւ, եթէ Բեեզդեբուդ եւ, եթէ ալ եւ, եթէ քաջք եւ, կենդար<sup>29</sup> եւ, եթէ Նովիադն եւ, եթէ դասն եւ, եթէ իշխան դիւաց եւ, եթէ համր եւ, եթէ խուլ եւ:

— Կապեցի գրեզ իշխանութեամբն Հօր, տերութեամբն Որդոյ, զօրութեամբն սուրբ Հոգոյն, բարեխօսութեամբ սուրբ կուսին Մարիամայ և ամենայն սուրբ կուսանացն և աղօթիք սուրբ հայրապետաց և ճգնաւորաց, եղեցի բժշկութիւն տիրացու Գրիգորին, (*name*) դիւահար մարդուն:

### Incantation 2

Writing<sup>30</sup> over a demons-possessed<sup>31</sup> man, [which] invokes or writes:<sup>32</sup>  
it guards over [him], [and] through God he gets well.

One tree stood in the middle of the earth, [which] had neither branch nor leaf nor root. One eagle was sitting on it, which had neither head nor wing[s] nor feet. Questions were [given] to the eagle and said, “Why are you sitting in that tree, which has neither branch nor leaf nor root?”

That pestilent<sup>33</sup> eagle said, “I go into the head of man, prey upon the flesh, suck the brain, [and] diminish the light of the eyes.”

The angels and archangels heard that, commanded and said, “We bind you bound by the three hundred and 65<sup>34</sup> saints, who exist in the heart of the sun, which neither the angels nor archangels perceive, except only Father God.”

And likewise I say,<sup>35</sup> “I bind you on the harp of David, the ring of Solomon,<sup>36</sup> the tablet[s] of Moses, the vestment of Aaron, the hand towel of Christ, the sweet milk of the Holy Virgin, [and] the four nail[s] of Christ, which are painted with the blood of the Lord. We capture [and] bind you by the shackles of Paul and Peter, [and] by the Transfiguration of Christ, who appeared bright on Mount

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<sup>29</sup> Կենդար – հավանաբար՝ կենտավրոս, առասպելական կենդանի ձիու և մարդու մարմնով, մարդաձի (Harutyunyan: 465).

<sup>30</sup> “Writing” (գիր) is here understood to mean a written spell or incantation. In printed incantation scrolls (*hmayils*), most texts begin with “prayer” (աղօթք) or “supplication” (աղերս).

<sup>31</sup> “demons-possessed” (դիւացհար), i.e., insane.

<sup>32</sup> “invokes or writes” (կարդայ կամ գրէ) is here read as the 3rd person present form of the verbs կարդամ and գրեմ. In Middle Armenian, it can also be read as the imperative form of the verbs, expressing a demand or request to invoke or write.

<sup>33</sup> The late Prof. Sargis Harutyunyan (1928–2018) defines դշիդ as դժխեմ (spiteful), դժնի (cruel), չարաբարո (malicious), and ժանտ (noxious) (Harutyunyan: 457). It is here rendered “pestilent”, based on ժանտ = λοιμός, λύμη, *pestis, pestilentia*, per the NBHL.

<sup>34</sup> In medieval tradition, the numbers 365 or 366, the astronomical time of the earth’s rotation around the sun, express the number of Christian saints, the number of veins or muscles in the human body, and the number of diseases and illnesses. (Harutyunyan: 301.)

<sup>35</sup> “I say” (ասեմ). After the introductory story, the *tirats’u* speaks the incantatory words to bind the demons.

<sup>36</sup> See note 18 above.



## Armenian Incantations Against Demons and Evil Spirits

Tabor [and] sanctified the three [disciples] with the light that appeared over the immortal head of Christ. You hold no authority, [and] you neither increase nor entwine, nor strengthen, [nor] harden, but you wither and vanish. You are nothing, [and] you return [to] nothing<sup>37</sup> by the word of our Lord Jesus Christ, for this servant of God (*name*), the demon-possessed man [here before] *tirats'u*<sup>38</sup> Grigor.

“I bind you by the 24 Prophets, the twelve Apostles, [and] the 72 Disciples; in the glory of Adam in the splendor of the Garden—the verdure which became a canopy; [and] in the word[s] which Jesus said on the Cross, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani.’<sup>39</sup> I bind you in the Powers and the Principalities,<sup>40</sup> and the most high Seraphim and Cherubim. I bind you, foul demons, to the Cross of Christ, for it is light and [is] light-giving to the universe.

“I bind you, 366 *ts'aw* or illnesses,<sup>41</sup> before whom you appear no different<sup>42</sup>—whether you are a *klkhivayr*, a *klkhiver*, a *gnayun*, a *kerni*, an *arik'en*, a *keti* lion, a *kulek*, an *aghvisuk*, a *dzernuk*, a *khulek*, a *khluran*, an *ach'k'unk'n*, a *mach'ik*, a *shutik*, a *kortnik*, a black *bazuk*, a *khumian*, a *khots'unk*, [or] are *ants'aw*,<sup>43</sup> that you are *markarkol*<sup>44</sup>—you are nothing and you return [to] nothing. I invoke the writings and Jesus Christ is the remedy for this servant of God (*name*), [here before] *tirats'u* Grigor.

“I bind you, whether you are heavenly, whether you are earthly, whether you are in the sea, whether you are on dry land, whether you are from the east, whether you are from the west, whether you are from the south, whether you are from the north, whether you are a *dew*,<sup>45</sup> whether you are Satan, whether you are Beelzebub, whether you are an *al*, whether you are a *k'ajk'*,<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “You are nothing, [and] you return [to] nothing” (Չիք էս, [և] չիք դառնաս) is a phrase commonly used at the end of an Armenian incantation for the annihilation of the demons or evil spirits.

<sup>38</sup> See note 21 above.

<sup>39</sup> “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The Hebrew words, likely incomprehensible to those who hear them uttered, are magic words that are invoked to bind the demon.

<sup>40</sup> “the Powers and the Principalities” (պետությունքն և իշխանությունքն) are two of the nine orders of angels in the celestial hierarchy.

<sup>41</sup> See notes 19 and 34 above. The names of some types of the *ts'aws* that follow may have an underlying meaning (e.g., *khluran* is likely *khlurt*, “mole”), but most of the words are distorted and incomprehensible. (Harutyunyan: 301, 463.)

<sup>42</sup> “before whom you appear no different” (’ի դիմաց որոյ ոչ այլ երևիս), i.e., in whatever form the *ts'aw* may appear in front of the demon-possessed man.

<sup>43</sup> *ants'aw* (անգամ), possibly “not-*ts'aw*”, i.e., some evil spirit of disease other than a *ts'aw*. See also the following note.

<sup>44</sup> *markarkol* (մարկարկոյ) is some sort of disease (Harutyunyan: 469). If the preceding *ants'aw* is read as “not-*ts'aw*”, this may be understood as “even if you’re not a *ts'aw*, you’re still *markarkol*-disease” that the *tirats'u* binds by way of the incantation.

<sup>45</sup> *dew* (դեւ) often refers to a demon in general. Here, among the aspects in which the demons may appear, it refers a specific type of demon-giant called a “dev”. In Armenian folk belief, these dev-giants have little impact on people’s lives, since they live far from humans on mountains or in their own Devastan (Դեւաստան), and they behave merely as robbers (Abeghyan: 111–113).

<sup>46</sup> See note 23 above.



## **Aroint Thee, Witch, Aroint Thee!**

Although the context of *King Lear* is not needed to understand the manner in which the “aroint thee, witch” passage relates to the Armenian incantations in this study, the background of the passage within the scene is provided nonetheless:

At the beginning of Act III, Scene 4, King Lear and his closest companions, Kent and the Fool, are outdoors on a heath during a storm. Kent tries to persuade them to take shelter in a nearby hovel, but Lear refuses, because to him “this contentious storme” is a lesser malady than “this tempest in [his] mind” caused by the ingratitude of his daughters Regan and Goneril. At Lear’s behest, the Fool enters the hovel, but quickly exits with a fright, having seen what he thinks is a spirit—Edgar, the older, legitimate son of Gloucester, in the guise of Poor Tom, nearly naked and feigning madness. Edgar emerges from the hovel and continues to play the part of a madman, and in the presence of this, Lear begins to lose his grip on sanity. With his own daughters in mind, Lear attributes Poor Tom’s miserable condition to Tom’s supposed children. He asks Poor Tom what he was before this, and Tom responds that he was proud servingman, but fell from that status as a result of drinking, gambling and fornication. Hearing this, Lear realizes that one’s identity does not depend on the clothes on his back, i.e., on his social status, and he begins to remove his own clothes. At this point in the scene, Gloucester arrives carrying a torch, and the Fool says “... Looke, heere comes a walking fire.” Poor Tom sees the approaching “demon” and exclaims:

EDGAR This is the foule fiend Flibbertigibbet; hee begins at Curfew, and walkes till the first  
Cocke: hee giues the Web and the Pin, squints the eye, and makes the Hare-lippe;  
Mildewes the white Wheate, and hurts the poore Creature of earth.

‘Sings<sup>1</sup>

*Swithune*<sup>50</sup> footed thrice the old,  
A met the Night-Mare and her nine fold;<sup>51</sup>  
Bid her a-light,  
And her troth plight,  
And aroynt thee, witch, aroynt thee!<sup>52</sup>

The song is nothing less than an incantation that Poor Tom invokes to ward-off or bind the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet. It can be rendered into Modern English as follows:

St. Swithun walked three times on the open, upland area,  
[Where] he met the female demon and her nine children;  
[He] demanded [that] she stand down [from what she’s doing],  
And [that] she pledge [an oath of] truth [that she will indeed desist],  
And aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “Swithold” in some editions of the play. St. Swithun († 863) was bishop of Winchester and later canonized as the patron saint of Winchester Cathedral.

<sup>51</sup> “her nine foals” in some editions.

<sup>52</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedie of King Lear: The Folio Text*. (Wells and Taylor 1986: 1085.)

<sup>53</sup> “Aroint thee” is an imprecation addressed to witches, which occurs only here and once in *Macbeth* (and in Shakespeare’s later imitators). The phrase appears to serve as some sort of deterrent against witches, and is usually glossed as “begone”. However, there is no compelling reason to classify *aroint* as verb. Germanic and

## Aroint Thee, Witch, Aroint Thee!

Shakespeare's Night-Mare is none other than the female child-stealing-killing-eating demon known in Armenian tradition as the *al* or *alk'*, and in Jewish tradition as Lilith,<sup>54</sup> which goes back to the ancient Mesopotamian demon Lamashtu.

Poor Tom's incantation-song includes all of the elements of an Encounter Charm: the sacred character (St. Swithune) meets the evil spirit or demon (the Night-Mare), the sacred character has a dialogue with it (bid her...), and the sacred character binds it (aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!).<sup>55</sup>

The incantation-song also contains narrative elements of the Sisinnius Legend: the demon is female (the Night-mare), her children (her nine fold) are characters in the story, and the demon gives an oath (troth plight) to the saint. However, some critical narrative elements are not present in the incantation-song: the female demon pleading with the saint for her and her children's lives, the disclosure children's names, and the demon promising to stay away from the place in which the names are spoken, written or remembered.<sup>56</sup>

\* \* \*

And so, having come full circle and commented on the passage from *King Lear* which prefaced this study, it is only fitting that we conclude it with the same passage in Classical Armenian:

Գնայր երիցս սուրբն Սուիթուն 'ի վերայ դաշտին,  
Հանդիպէր մաւր ալին և ինն տղայոց նորա.  
Հրամայէր նմա և ասէր – Էջ,  
Եւ երդմնեցուցանեմ զքեզ,  
Եւ կապանք 'ի քեզ՝ ջատուկ, կապանք 'ի քեզ:

— Թագաւորն Լեառ, Գիրք Գ Տեսարան Դ  
(Թարգմանեցեալ 'ի Մատթէոսէ Սարգիսեանէ)

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Romance etymons of the word have been proposed, but none are very convincing; thus dictionaries often identify *aroint* as a word of unknown or uncertain etymology. The word likely refers to the rowan tree, which is known in myth and folklore for its apotropaic properties. The rowan tree and its variants are of Scandinavian origin, but as far as can be determined, the imprecation was coined in England. (Lieberman: *passim*.)

<sup>54</sup> The correlation between the Night-Mare in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and female demons such as the Armenian *al* the Jewish Lilith, was pointed out in Russell: 13–14.

<sup>55</sup> See note 14 above.

<sup>56</sup> See note 20 above.

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### Abbreviations

*NBHL* = *Nor baḡirk' haykazean lezui* (Նոր բառգիրք հայկազեան լեզուի) [*New Dictionary of the Armenian Language*], edited by Gabriël Awetik'ean, Khach'atur Siwrmēlean, and Mkrtych' Awgerean. Venice: St. Lazarus Press, 1836–37.