TWO NEW INCANTATION BOWLS FROM ROME (ITALY)*

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1. The Collection

There are no large collections of incantation bowls in Italy. We now have knowledge of the collection housed in the ‘Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale’ in Rome and another in possession of Ms. Louise Michail, an antique dealer in Milan.1 The specimens presented here are in their turn kept in a private archive near Rome and belong to Prof. Paolo Costa.

*This contribution is a shortened and revised version of the paper ‘A New Collection of Incantation Bowls from Rome (Italy)’ read at the ‘ARAMITH. Aramaic Lexicography’ Conference (Sheffield, 23-25 July 2002). The author would like to express his gratitude to the owner of the collection, Prof. Paolo Costa (Università di Bologna) and his wife, Dr. Germana Graziosi, for their kind permission to study the bowls here presented. The author wishes also to thank Dr. Siam Bhayro (Yale University), organizer of the ‘ARAMITH’ Conference, for his kindness and thoughtful help, Prof. Shaul Shaked (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) in acknowledgment of his precious support and useful suggestions, Prof. Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti (Università di Torino) for his indispensable assistance at every moment of both the research and the work on the text of this contribution. Thanks are due to Dr. Ezio Albrile for his constant support as regards cultural and bibliographical problems, Dr. Ruth Henderson (Università di Torino), English language consultant, Mr. Stefano Dorato for computer assistance.

1M. Moriggi, ‘Aramaean Demons in Rome: Incantation Bowls in the Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale’, EW 51 (2001), pp. 205-228; Idem, ‘Peculiarità linguistiche in una coppa magica aramaica inedita’, in P. Fronzaroli et al. (eds), Proceedings of the 10th Italian Meeting of Hamito-Semitic (Afroasiatic) Linguistics (Quaderni di Semitistica; Florence: forthcoming). In the present paper these abbreviations are used: n.e. = no editor; AcIr = Acta Iranica; BaM = Baghdader Mitteilungen; EW = East and West; JSAI = Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam; Me = Mesopotamia; StEL = Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico.

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The collection is made up of six bowls, all well preserved. One of them was broken, but has been completely restored. The bowls are numbered from no. 1 to no. 6. Here is a short description of each one:

1) Hemispherical bowl. The bowl (diameter 165 mm, height 70mm) is almost completely covered by a stiff calcareous glaze. A text is written spirally from the inner bottom to the rim of the basin. This text, 12 lines long, is enclosed within a line drawn on the rim. Aramaic square script text.

2) Hemispherical bowl. This specimen (diameter 160 mm, height 70mm) is better preserved than the preceding one. Only a small part of the surface is covered by a soft pale-brown patina. At the inner bottom of the basin a demon is drawn. An Aramaic square script text displayed spirally runs from the demon’s head to the internal rim of the bowl. The text is 10 lines long. About the demon one may note that, despite the small size of the drawing, it clearly presents a creature with long, curved horns coming out of a shroud which covers the head. On the head short hairs are stylised and, under a line (head-band?), there are two large eyes. The body is represented very simply, as one can recognize arms and legs, but no other detail.

3) Hemispherical bowl. This bowl (diameter 170 mm, height 55mm) is characterized by a greyish patina covering the bottom of the basin. The text is arranged in three sectors around the inner centre of the bowl. Each sector faces the others at right angles: this arrangement is typical of Mandaic bowls. There is a circle at the inner bottom and another on the rim. This bowl contains a Mandaic formula.

4) Hemispherical bowl. This one is the restored specimen and measures 150 mm in diameter and 65 mm in height. Despite the several breaks, the restorer was skilful in putting the pieces back in the correct position. The surface is clean, without any glaze. It is quite certain that

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4Bowl no. 3 presents many doubtful readings and its study has proved to be a very hard task. It will be presented in another publication.