

**Between Demon and Witch: A material religion approach to
Lamaštu's role in ancient Mesopotamian folk witchcraft.**

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**This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of a Master of Arts
in Ancient Religions**

**University of Wales, Trinity St. David
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of small Bronze age portable amulets depicting the Mesopotamian demoness Lamaštu within the context of ancient Mesopotamian magical practices. While Lamaštu has been widely studied through her associations with illness, childbirth and threats to infants, less attention has been given to the relationship between her iconography, her incantations and the material practices through which protective witchcraft was used against her evil actions. This study therefore approaches Lamaštu amulets through the study of magic, materiality and counter-witchcraft.

The analysis focuses on a corpus of small portable Lamaštu amulets featuring recurring motifs, particularly the comb, spindle, dog, and pigs. These images are examined alongside Lamaštu incantations and anti-witchcraft rituals in order to explore how the objects and images represented on the amulets may have functioned within magical practices. Particular attention is given to the relationship between the comb and spindle and the magical act of binding or “seizing” the mouth, as well as to the role of the depicted animals in the representation and management of the demoness.

This dissertation argues that these motifs should not be understood solely as symbolic representations of the demoness. Rather, their combination on amulets reflects a broader magical system in which material objects could participate in attempts to constrain and repel supernatural agents. By bringing textual and iconographic evidence together, this study demonstrates how Lamaštu amulets can provide insight into the material dimension of Mesopotamian witchcraft and aggressive magic and brings light to the magical agency of the demoness herself by examining her magical actions which appears to be similar to the figure of the witch. As such, this dissertation explores how to constraint witches and demons.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research problem: Why Lamaštu?

Birth and death are two non-negotiable truths of human existence. Once one is being born, one cannot escape the inevitability of death. As such, bearing children and becoming a mother have always represented a state of extreme vulnerability for women (De-Whyte 2024:156). Moreover, infant mortality was also very high in antiquity, and surviving children required protection throughout childhood (De-Whyte 2024:158). This rite of passage therefore demanded protection: protection for the mother-to-be and protection for the child yet to be born. In antiquity many objects were used to protect mothers and children, such as ivory magic wands that can be found in ancient Egypt (Larson 2021:345) or votive figurines found in ancient Greece and Cyprus. This practice was deemed necessary to prevent evil spirits from harming women and children. This worldview is also found in the ancient Near-Eastern context, where many amulets have been found, pointing towards beliefs that these objects helped safeguard the vulnerable population (Konstantopoulos 2020:2). Protection from what, one might ask? From illness and death embodied in the form of the demoness Lamaštu.

Lamaštu was a central figure in ancient Mesopotamian demonology. Demons were supernatural entities that were associated with nature's forces, illnesses and disconnection to personal gods (Konstantopoulos 2020: 2). The Mesopotamians lived a life that seemed to be dangerous at all times, where gods and spirits were a constant threat (Konstantopoulos 2020:3). The Mesopotamian civilization of the Bronze age spanned from the 4th millennium to the 1st millennium B.C.E. It encompassed many different civilizations such as the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians and Assyrians. During the Middle to Late Bronze age the Hittite empire founded in Anatolia also integrated part of the Levant and Upper Mesopotamia in its kingdom, as shown on the map below. Many cultures and civilizations shared spaces, religions and rituals on these ancient territories, leaving rich traditions and material cultures for us to find.

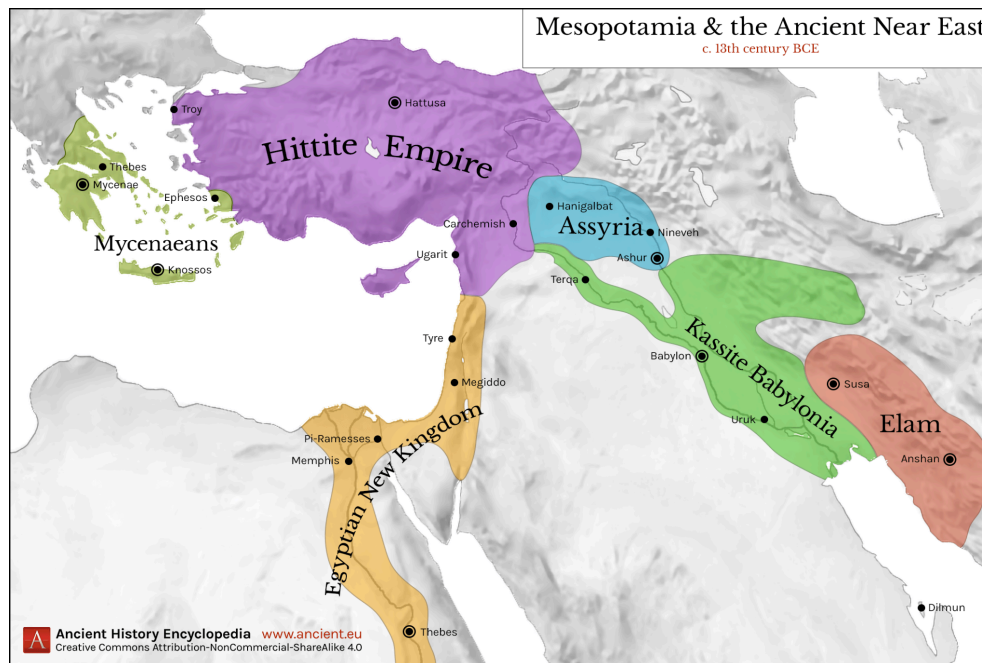


Fig.1 Map of late bronze age Mesopotamia and the surrounding regions. (Jan van der Crabben: 2020)

This research addresses material and incantations dating from the Middle to late Bronze Age (2000-1000 B.C.E) that belonged to Mesopotamian, Levantine and Anatolian cultures. As cultural exchanges and trading were common practice for this time period in history. It is also noteworthy to mention that ancient Mesopotamian magic is probably one of the oldest original source for European magic, as it is the oldest attestation we have and it is also a source of knowledge that has disseminated around the ancient world and continued to survive to this day (Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999:10)

The demon Lamaštu was considered a threat to pregnant women and newborns and numerous incantations mention her as the cause of many dangers. The reason I chose to explore the demoness Lamaštu's ritual function in ancient Mesopotamian magic is therefore linked to the fact that she is one of the only Mesopotamian demons to have been represented iconographically and materialistically (Wiggerman 2000: 219). That means that she is also part of one of the oldest forms of known magic in history. Most demons in ancient Mesopotamia are known only through textual sources and have left little or no archaeological evidence (Wiggerman 2000: 217). Lamaštu, however, appears in a dozen of magical texts and on numerous ritual objects such as amulets, plaques and cylinder-seals, suggesting that she occupied a significant place in the religious and ritual life of Mesopotamian society. The only other demon regularly represented in material culture is Pazuzu, whose primary function was

to repel Lamaštu (Said, 2020), but he appears much later, during the Neo-Assyrian period in the 8th century B.C.E.

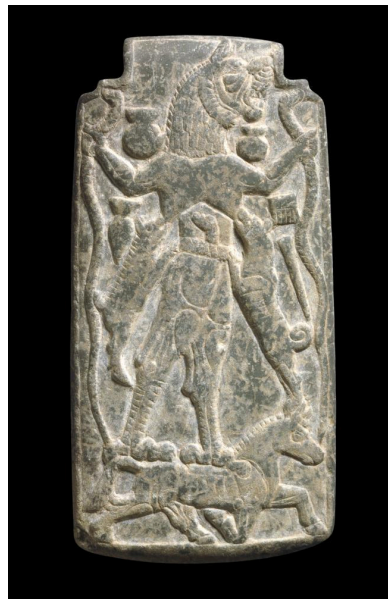


Fig.2 Neo-Assyrian amulet representing Lamaštu. BM11759

The influence of the demoness extended far beyond Mesopotamia. Her mythological counterparts can be identified in Greece and Europe under the mythological child-eating demon Lamia, while both her function and aspects of her iconography spread into Byzantine magical amulets in the form of the demoness Abyzou or Greek Gello (Johnston 1995:361-362). Some researchers have further suggested that Lamaštu's iconography may have influenced the later figure of Lilith, who today occupies a central place in various contemporary feminist magical practices (Vilozny 2015, Clay 2024).

The study of Lamaštu's role and iconography in a magical context is therefore valuable for understanding ancient Mesopotamian magic and its relationship with the non-human world, particularly because her cultural influence appears to have crossed both geographical boundaries and historical periods. It is also a good way to understand how feminine monsters were thought to be powerful and how it can shape our understanding of the feminine when it comes to magical practices. This relationship will be studied through the lens of magic and witchcraft.

It is important to briefly introduce how the human mythical mind works. In every religious tradition, myths and mythical figures help societies manage social anxieties and provide explanations for otherwise unanswerable questions. Simply put, they explain the human

condition and humanity's relationship with its environment (Graf 2007:50). In ancient Mesopotamia, myth was also closely associated with ritual, and mythical narratives served to legitimize ritual performances (Graf 2007:51). Motherhood, with its accompanying vulnerability and uncertainty, constitutes one of these universal human experiences. In ancient Mesopotamia and neighboring cultures, maternal and infant mortality were frequently understood through the actions of specific supernatural beings bringing illness and dangers, among whom Lamaštu occupied a particularly prominent place. The only way to prevent such misfortune would have been to use magic and witchcraft.

This may be explained by the fact that many cultures of antiquity, including the Mesopotamians, held a highly animistic understanding of the world, in the sense that every element of nature was perceived as either alive or as a divinity or spirit possessing its own personality and agency (Perdibon 2019:172). As a result, encounters with the supernatural world were considered an integral part of everyday life and the Mesopotamian demonological landscape was highly populated. This dissertation is concerned with how ancient Mesopotamians engaged with these supernatural beings, and more specifically with demons. Supernatural is not exactly the right term to discuss demons in the sense that they were considered very real beings that were part of the natural world (Konstantopoulos 2020:3). Nevertheless I am using the term supernatural to demonstrate the more-than-human nature of demons.

As mentioned above, ritual permeated many aspects of Mesopotamian life. But what relationship did rituals have with demons? If we acknowledge that the Mesopotamians perceived the world through an animistic understanding, it becomes clear that rituals were intended to "handle living things" (Goff 1963:169). As Goff further explains:

"everything was potentially charged with power, and recognizably potent objects were sought for every concern [...] The objects in antiquity were thought to be potent because they were animate. People sought them because they wished to use friendly spirits to help them with potentially dangerous spirits" (Goff 1963: 169).

The meaning of animate here refers to the presence of a spirit within a particular object such as an amulet. This perspective helps explain why the study of Lamaštu amulets is essential for understanding how Mesopotamians interacted with and sought to control harmful spiritual beings in a world full of spirits.

Rather than functioning simply as the demoness representations, these amulets participated directly in ritual practice by materializing and mediating the presence of the demoness within the physical world. Although it is impossible to determine precisely who used these objects, it is possible that women participated in their use, particularly given the association between women and domestic knowledge related to the protection of families and children (Frankfurter 2021). However, the identities of the users remain uncertain and cannot be established solely through the material evidence.

In this dissertation, I demonstrate that the iconographic attributes visible on amulets, such as the comb and the spindle specifically, associated with Lamaštu, correspond to ritual instruments described in anti-witchcraft incantations and rituals. Their presence on the amulets suggests that these images materialize a specific spell performed within witchcraft rituals. In other words, the demoness and the objects standing besides her on amulets are represented iconographically in order to make that power accessible in the physical reality and make them potentially effective against her own harmful influence. The amulets therefore raise an important question: were these symbols representations of Lamaštu's own magical agency, instruments used against her or both simultaneously? The study of such an important feminine figure also offers a journey into the human imagination and its structures of fear and hope, such are concerns that continue to resonate in contemporary societies.

This dissertation consists of three main chapters. The first chapter introduces Lamaštu within a Mesopotamian context as well as the literature review, the methodology and corpus used for this dissertation.

Chapter two discusses the history of Lamaštu and how she acts as a magical agent within Mesopotamian witchcraft texts. The history of demons in ancient Mesopotamian culture is introduced, followed by the history of magic and witchcraft and its relation to ancient demons. Then some textual evidence is studied to demonstrate how Lamaštu is perceived as a magical agent.

Finally, Chapter three discusses the chosen amulet corpus and demonstrates how each element of the iconography is related to magic and witchcraft and could be interpreted as tools used to bind Lamaštu or as magical tools for herself.

1.2 Literature review

In this section I will give an outlook of the existent scholarship on the demoness to explain and identify the existing gap in the literature. Lamaštu is traditionally studied through demonological studies, medical texts and iconographical studies. As a mythological figure she does not appear in mythological stories but her background story is given within the canonical incantations texts. It is an interesting fact that this mythological creature was born from ritual performances, she is a real entity first and a myth second (Farber 2014: 7). It is possible that a very ancient myth predates the fixed Lamaštu but it is not known to us so far.

1.2.1 Scholarship on Lamaštu

No demoness literature review would be complete without starting with the necessary work of Walter Farber who published in 2014 *An Edition of the Canonical Series of Lamaštu Incantations and Rituals and Related Texts from the Second and First Millennia b.c.e.*, a very much needed compilation of the most important magical texts related to Lamaštu. He dedicated this full volume of the canonical ritual texts mentioning Lamaštu and used by the ritual specialists. It also includes spells found on the amulets. This volume helps us understand the ritual setting necessary for Lamaštu to be conjured and expelled. Unfortunately it does not cover all of the texts that mention Lamaštu, such as the anti-witchcraft rituals which can be found in the Maqlû texts (Abusch 1987). Before Farber's publication, the most complete text about the role and nature of the demoness was the essay from Wiggerman (2000) in his *Lamaštu Daughter of Anu*. A complete study of the Lamaštu amulets was completed in 2009 in the M.A dissertation of Eva Götting but only her work from 2020 has been published as an article titled *A Demon's Travel Kit. An Introduction to the Items Depicted on Amulets against the Demoness Lamaštu* where the author argues that each item we can see on the amulets can be thought as specific feminine items arranged as a travel kit to help the demoness depart. Her analysis is very thorough and she critiques the fact that many researchers before her thought of Lamaštu's items presence on the amulets as paraphernalia (bridal dowry). She argues convincingly that this cannot really be simply feminine items or wedding dowry as Lamaštu has no companion. I agree with her and I would add that Lamaštu has very few feminine attributes as well. The items discussed in the

iconography of the Phenotype A amulets will be at the center of my analysis as I will add to this argument by looking at these objects differently to explain how they fit in a magical setting.

To continue with the Lamaštu amulets, in very recent years there has been some very original research trying to demonstrate that not only is the iconography relevant but also the material substance of the amulets themselves and their cognitive function in a ritual setting. For example Maiden Brett (2018) discussed the counterintuitive iconography of Lamaštu and her enemy, the demon Pazuzu, depicted as beastly beings and monsters purposefully to demonstrate their supernatural nature to humans. On the materiality of the amulet itself, Miriam Said (2020) demonstrated that the stones used as amulets are chosen for specific purposes. She argues that some Lamaštu amulets are made of obsidian because of its capacity to reflect and make Lamaštu disappear when you move it. This article is groundbreaking because it explores an aspect of magical technology that is not often explained when it comes to understanding how amulets work. Said demonstrates clearly the importance of the Mesopotamian radiance (*melammu*), a quality that divinities and some demons shared, to explain how this obsidian captures Lamaštu's radiance, materializing her presence and when the ritual is performed, the owner can make her disappear. This approach serves as a basis for my own argument about the function of the Lamaštu amulets acting as magical agents.

On the interpretative aspects, John Z. Wee (2021) interprets Lamaštu as a representative of foreign otherness, the foreign woman, particularly the midwife, that third party who cares for women and children. He analyzes Lamaštu's role as similar to that of witches in Mesopotamia, who, through acts such as "washing, feeding, and caring" (Wee 2021: 14) are able to poison others without arousing suspicion. The poisoned maternal aspect of Lamaštu could also, according to him, represent women experiencing postpartum depression or the rejection of breastfeeding: in this sense, protection against Lamaštu might help avoid such situations (Wee 2021:15) This is one of the only articles connecting Lamaštu with the function of the witch, which will be more thoroughly explored in this dissertation. One of the most recent articles trying to bridge the gap between textual sources and iconography is the portrait of Lamaštu by Erika Roboz (2024) where a global portrait of the demoness is superficially discussed. Although very recent, it does not contribute to this conversation. As Farber stated in his monograph, there is a need for a complete volume about Lamaštu that

interprets both the texts and the iconography together, as it does not exist at the moment (Farber 2014:2).

What has been observed from these previous researches is that specific studies focused either on textual analysis of the role of Lamaštu within incantations or the iconographical interpretation of Lamaštu with some tentative understanding of her role in rituals but very few studies, to my knowledge, focus on the materialization of magic through objects and ritual settings. There is a gap in trying to understand the function of amulets and their agency but also there is no study that can link Lamaštu's role as demon and as a magical agent, which this dissertation will tentatively explore by asking: Are the objects depicted on the Bronze age Lamaštu's amulets tools of witchcraft?

1.3. Methodology

Although this dissertation focuses specifically on Lamaštu amulets within the context of ancient Mesopotamia, the methodological framework employed here can also be applied to other cultures across both space and time. This dissertation asks different questions about those objects. Rather, I approach this subject from the perspective of religious studies, adopting an anthropological approach to the study of both ancient and modern religions.

Studying ancient religions and rituals through material objects, such as amulets, allows us to better understand how humans have always interacted with the world around them. In the last decades, “the material turn” (Houlbrook & Armitage 2015:4) has taken more place in the study of ancient religions. Objects have always held profound significance for our species, and in order to understand their potency within magic and witchcraft, they must be studied through a framework that considers both the historical context preserved in the textual sources and the amuletic function of magical practice. The material religion approach to ancient magic explores how objects have inherent agency (Gell 1998) and let us consider the role of the bodies: i.e the body wearing the amulets and the body of the monster by representing its image.

An amulet is indeed an object that is usually small and wearable and is made of various precious stones or metals (Dasen 2018: 128). The proximity of the amulet to the body was important for the wearer to receive its magical properties, demonstrating that the amulet has physical properties (Dasen 2018: 128). Such an approach contributes to a broader understanding of the ancient magical mind and the ways in which supernatural agency was

materialized through ritual. Consequently, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions:

- Why do objects matter?
- How do objects act?
- How does magic happen through material things?

As an interdisciplinary methodology using material religion studies to examine Lamaštu as a magical figure situated within Mesopotamian systems of defensive witchcraft and by analyzing incantations, ritual instructions and amulets together, the study seeks to reconstruct how ritual practice mediated magical defence between humans and demons.

Material religion provides a framework for understanding how religious meaning is not only expressed through texts or ideas, but also through objects and practices. Material religion is the academic field that studies the past lives of objects, spaces and places and how people used to interact with those. It can encompass clothing, pottery, images, architecture and many more things, even trash can tell us about the way ancient humans used to live (B.Meyer & al. 2010: 209). Therefore there is no study of religions and the religious mind without studying the material aspect of said religions (B.Meyer & al. 2010: 210). The materiality of religions will also imbricate the materiality of magic, specifically when it comes to the ancient world because there was no specific separation between religion and magic in the past and the study of magic is better understood through its materiality (Hoolbrook & Armitage 2015: 3).

When I use the word *materiality* of magic in this paper, I understand it as the physical substance and tangibility of an artefact (Hoolbrook & Armitage 2015:3), such as defined in the publication *The materiality of magic* (2015). This means that I consider the use of objects in the performance of rituals or magical actions to be actively involved in the materialization of magic itself. I also argue that the objects analysed in this research possess agency through their iconography and use, as defined by Alfred Gell (1998) and David Morgan (2021).

In the context of this dissertation: amulets, figurines and rituals associated with Lamaštu are analyzed as active agents of an entire magical system rather than seeing these objects as passive representations. These objects do not simply symbolize protection because they participate in its production through their placement on the body, their presence within domestic space and their activation through ritual speech and action. Indeed, the amulets I study in this paper were found to be placed on head, neck, waist, hands and feet (Götting

2020:185). This methodological approach makes it possible to examine how material transformation and manipulation as well as material images mediate relationships between humans and perceived demonic forces and how protection is enacted through embodied and counterwitchcraft practices (Morgan 2021:76).

1.4. Corpus and Sources

This dissertation is based on a combined textual and material corpus that brings together Mesopotamian witchcraft literature and archaeological evidence related to Lamaštu and her associated protective traditions. The aim of this corpus is to allow for a reading of Lamaštu not only as a figure described in texts, but also as an active presence within ritual and material practices.

The first component of the corpus consists of the Lamaštu incantation tradition, primarily preserved on cuneiform tablets from the second and first-millennium B.C in Mesopotamia. These texts form a relatively coherent group of anti-Lamaštu rituals that include incantations, ritual instructions and prescriptions for protective actions. They typically describe the invocation of deities and protective forces, the expulsion or binding of Lamaštu and the use of ritual substances and spoken formulas intended to keep vulnerable individuals safe, particularly mothers and infants. This textual corpus is central for understanding how Lamaštu was conceptualized within Mesopotamian magical practice (Farber, 2014). The main source for these incantations can be found in *Farber, 2014, Lamastu : An Edition of the Canonical Series of Lamastu Incantations and Rituals and Related Texts from the Second and First Millennia B. C*

The textual corpus will also be composed of the analysis of anti-witchcraft spells that systematically retrace the same elements necessary for rituals concerning Lamaštu, demonstrating a certain uniformity in the conceptualisation of ancient rituals. These spells come from the digital library from Oracc: *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals online* hosted by the University of Würzburg . It should be noted, however, that although at times the description of the rituals and incantations seems to correspond with what can be found on the amulets, this does not necessarily mean that the objects found were all objects associated with the official rites of the *āšipus* (priest-exorcists). Such rituals and magic could have been performed by other people as well, as the amulets seem to demonstrate.

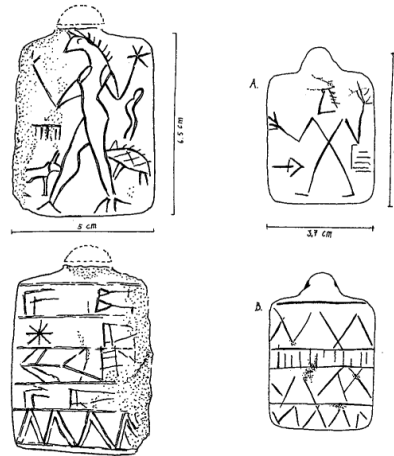


Fig.3 Examples of Type A Bronze age amulets (no.85 and no.22) from Wiggerman 2000:221

The choice for the object corpus was not simple since several objects belonging to the demoness exist. For example, exorcistic plaques, amulets, and sometimes even cylinder seals have been found and clearly belong to the Lamaštu corpus. Given the limitations of this short research, I will focus on specific amulets. Indeed, there are several types of amulets representing Lamaštu, categorized first by Wiggermann as types A, B, and C, D (2000). Eva Götting, for her part, introduced phenotypes I, II, and III (2009). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus only on Type A amulets, such as defined by Wiggerman, as these are small amulets dating from the Bronze Age and are probably more personal. A total of 125 amulets are currently catalogued of all types combined (Blanchard 2026). For the purposes of this analysis, I will include ten type A amulets to demonstrate my argument. The corpus of amulets examined in this study was established through consultation of the online collections of several museums, including the Penn Museum, the British Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Each object is identified by its museum accession number in the picture's captions.

One of the main reasons for choosing these small amulets are because of the objects represented on them, as well as the type of stone upon which Lamaštu rests. The Type A phenotypes systematically present Lamaštu with a comb and a spindle as well as a pig and a dog (Wiggerman 2000: 220). Such items are relevant to my argument and are always present on these types of amulets with sometimes a few variations. I will therefore explore the function of the symbolic objects in order to understand and situate the role of the demoness in the rituals that invoke or repel her as a form of defensive witchcraft. Most of them are from the south of Mesopotamia, including Elam and some of them are inscribed in Old or Middle

Babylonian. A few are inscribed with incantations against evil in general and not specifically against Lamaštu: those are the oldest one (Wiggerman 2000: 220).

The iconography and shape of the amulets provide essential evidence for understanding how Lamaštu was engaged with beyond textual traditions, particularly through practices of counter-witchcraft. Understanding how people used the amulets and how the symbols act in ritual will be useful in this research. In addition to drawing on the recent studies by Götting and Said, which have demonstrated the use and agency of Lamaštu amulets, I will explore the idea that these may be amulets that allow Lamaštu to be materialized with the tools necessary to perform a witchcraft binding ritual. We will explore in greater detail the relationship between iconography and binding witchcraft.

Chapter 2: Lamaštu and Magical Agency in Mesopotamian Ritual

This chapter examines the textual tradition surrounding Lamaštu in order to identify the forms of magical agency attributed to her and the ritual strategies developed to counter them. It first introduces Lamaštu within the broader framework of Mesopotamian demonology before considering the relationship between demons, witchcraft, and harmful supernatural action in Mesopotamian magical systems. Particular attention is given to the anti-Lamaštu incantations and ritual prescriptions, which reveal the object and spoken formulae employed to oppose the demoness. As will be argued, these texts establish the ritual vocabulary that later reappears in the iconography of the portable Lamaštu amulets. Chapter Two provides the historical and textual foundation necessary for understanding how Lamaštu is acting as a magical agent and fought against with counterspells.

2.1 Who is Lamaštu?

2.1.1 Lamaštu in Mesopotamian Cosmology

Before examining Lamaštu on her own, we must first explain demons within Mesopotamian cosmology. First of all, ancient Mesopotamian demons are beings that are difficult to categorize, since they represent several of the most abstract aspects of the human world. Demons in ancient Mesopotamia were not perceived in the same way as they are today in the

western world from a post-Christian perspective. They were not creatures that were inherently evil in their nature, but rather they emerged from chaos:

“Demons were created by the gods to be the instruments, the weapons, and the messengers of divine wrath: ‘they are the evil demons-rābi’u who have come forth from the dwelling of the Ekur: they are the messengers of Enlil, lord of the lands.’ But sometimes they can act on their own. Their harmful actions can endanger the whole of creation: in the sky, they attack the moon (they are the cause of eclipses): on earth, they sow confusion, pain, and physical and mental illness (they can lead an individual’s reason astray).” (Translation of Rendu-Loisel & Barbu 2009: 312)

Acting as intermediaries for the gods and goddesses, they therefore possessed a certain degree of free will. This free will allows them to decide whether they attack a person or not, whether they wish to obey the more powerful authorities or not. This is precisely what makes demons distinctive: chaotic by nature, they defy the laws of the cosmos, and only the deities can control them (Konstantopoulos 2019:2). In incantations it is also mentioned that they are neither male nor female (Konstantinopoulos 2015: 245) meaning that certain demons are genderless. The gender associated with demons, when mentioned, appears according to the role attributed to them at the moment.

As creatures wandering on earth, they do not have fixed places such as temples or palaces where they can live and receive a cult (Rendu-Loisel 2009:310). A few demons seem to have received a cult, but usually it was rare (Konstantopoulos 2019:3). It is their itinerancy that can make them dangerous, because they can decide to attack humans at any moment. In older texts, however, wandering spirits and demons would still have a place where they could take refuge if needed, and this would be with the god Enlil (god of wind and destiny). He is said to have established a house for the wandering spirits of the cosmos (Wiggerman 2000:226)

There are different categories of demons such as the weather-demons, protective demons, astral demons, time demons and ghost-demons (Wiggerman 2007). These latter are important to understand Lamaštu’s role. These demons were sometimes the spirits of people who had died a “bad death”, that is, in a brutal and unexpected way. They thus became demons who were continually enraged at receiving neither food nor drink, nor even an appropriate burial (Rendu-Loisel & Barbu 2009: 316). One can therefore understand that a human could become a demon if the circumstances of their death and commemoration were not optimal. We are therefore faced with the earliest ghost stories, but also with a form of demonic spirit

that does not have a divine origin. The most popular demons of this type, the ones who died a brutal death, are the specters of the triad named Lilitu, Ardat-lili, and Lilu.

These demonesses, and one demon, the Lilu, are the spirits of young people who died prematurely without having been married or having had children (Rendu-Loisel & Barbu 2009:316). Wandering at night, they attack young people who are about to marry by driving them to suicide or separation. Young men alone in a house are also the prey of Lilitu, who acts as a succubus to steal the “seed” of these men. These eternally enraged spirits therefore take revenge for their fate by punishing those who have the misfortune of crossing their path. People therefore had to avoid going out at night and protect their homes against such spirits to prevent them from entering households. Protective amulets and apotropaic figurines were therefore used for this purpose (Wiggerman 2000, Rendu-Loisel & Barbu 2009).

The case of Lamaštu is particular, because very few demons have a story that explains their origin and even fewer have such an individualized place within these beliefs. Lamaštu is also a very ancient entity that already appears in texts in the 3rd millennium, but whose role evolves over the centuries. She is the daughter of the god Anu (the cosmos) and the sister of Inanna (Venus), and is therefore fully a goddess (Konstantopolos 2019:3). At the very beginning of her appearance in the texts, she is a *Dimme*, that is, one of the “seven *Dimme* maidens” (Wiggerman 2000: 226). The term *Dimme* is not clear, but it would be related to the notion of a figurine, and the seven maidens refer to a group of stars (Wiggerman 2000:218). The seven *Dimme* are called the children of the gods and are responsible for several diseases (Wiggerman, 2000: 218). As such she is first identified as jaundice in 1908 as Labartu, a disease that is linked to young babies.

Eventually, by the end of the 2nd millennium, Lamaštu becomes individualized as a type of demon responsible for several illnesses. Nevertheless, the texts continue to attribute to her a plural nature: from her plural form she retains only the seven names that become her epithets. *Dimme* becomes synonymous with disease, and Lamaštu becomes associated with the Lilitu of the night. Thus the succubus triad that I mentioned earlier converges with Lamaštu and eventually becomes synonymous with her (Wiggerman, 2000: 227).

What makes Lamaštu unique is that she decides not to obey the laws of the cosmos and to act against the divine order. Indeed, she wishes to eliminate overpopulation, a necessary evil. This decision therefore brings about the wrath of her father, who decides to banish her from

the domain of the sky, and she ends up wandering in the desert and the mountains, thus becoming a demon. Lamaštu's decision to attack young babies or mothers is justified by a desire to regulate the population (Konstantopolous 2019:5). It is because she is of divine nature that she can allow herself to disobey the gods, and only the gods can intervene with humans to help them prevent the attacks of Lamaštu. Although mostly known in the texts as a danger for childbirth and infantile deaths, we can also find that she has different names depending on her victims:

“When she has seized an old man, they call her “The Annihilator.”
When she has seized a young man, they call her “The Scorcher.”
When she has seized a young woman, they call her “Lamaštu.”
When she has seized a baby, they call her “Dimme.”(Farber 2014:153)

It appears that the name Lamaštu is specifically tied to young women and could therefore be important in domestic rituals for them. I would also like to note that one of the rituals described in texts to protect children consisted of making three effigies of Lamaštu under three of her names, some of which are borrowed from the goddess Inanna. Two of the figurines were buried and represented childhood and old age, and the third figurine, which represented the mother, received a cult (Wiggerman 2000: 216). What the canonical texts make of Lamaštu and what archaeology presents therefore show certain divergences based on these findings by Wiggerman.

2.2 Demons and witches in Mesopotamian magic

One of the central methodological challenges in studying ancient magic lies in defining the term itself. “Magic” is not a native category in most ancient cultures and its modern usage is shaped by centuries of theological polemic and colonial anthropology. Ancient magic and religions should indeed be studied in their cultural and historical context (Binsbergen &Wiggermann 1999: 6) Rather than imposing a rigid or universal definition, this dissertation adopts a functional and practice-oriented understanding of magic as a set of materialistic actions intended to produce tangible effects by engaging with unseen forces. As Katharina Zinn defines it: “Magic describes actions or knowledge relating to the supernatural or the demonic”(Zinn 2012:1) which is exactly the actions of Mesopotamian witchcraft that is used with Lamaštu. The defining of Mesopotamian magic was often mostly focused on the

literature so when it comes to the ancient Near-East for the longest time the broad definition of magic was :

“a relatively self-evident term by which we may conveniently label genres of texts, because we identify the practices referred to or implied in those texts as 'magical': curses, incantations and spells: divination: human attempts at interaction with invisible beings of a lower order ('demons'): charms, amulets, talismans: and finally cures involving *materia medica*” (Wim van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999 : 4)

In this sense, magic is understood not as a category opposed to religion or science, but as an integral component of ancient ritual life. Magical practices often overlapped with healing, prayer or domestic cults, particularly in contexts such as childbirth, illness or misfortune. The main problem of this descriptive definition here is that it was largely based on the textual evidence and less on the objects itself, which can tell different stories.

Objects played a crucial role in these practices, acting as agents of power or even agents of protection. By focusing on material objects and comparing with textual evidence, it lets us evaluate practices that are often invisible in elite textual sources, particularly those associated with women and folk practices. There were indeed different categories of magic and the more official versions found in texts were performed by specialist whereas the non-documented magic belonged to the sphere of folk magic:

“There are other forms of Mesopotamian magic, however, less well adapted to the hegemonic enterprise, and therefore less well attested, but especially worthy of attention in the present context. All of them seem to stem from a rural or popular background.” (Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999: 29)

In any case Magic could be defined as the action of controlling one's environment by manipulating objects and speaking magical words (Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999: 15)

The reason Magic was inseparable from religious life and beliefs in ancient Mesopotamia is because the people of these lands feared the gods tremendously. Religion included the relationship with: “gods, spirits, ancestors, the dead, demons, angels, or other creatures who exercise agency in human affairs as beings or forces that are not strictly human or any other form of animal life” (Morgan 2021:57). Everyday there existed the possibility of being hurt or cursed by the gods or encountering dangers such as ghosts and demons. Mesopotamian believed they were created to serve the gods and as such could use magic for different reasons such as: “therapeutic, apotropaic, purificatory, and anti-witchcraft” (Peled 2026: 3-11) If someone failed to heal from an illness or failed to gain the god's favor or a trial, magic was used.

In Mesopotamian magic there were different types of practices. One finds divination, a practice used to discover what fate holds through the signs sent by the gods (extispicy, astrology, etc.). There is also the practice of incantatory magic used in medicine and healing, notably through the practice of astral magic (see Reiner 1995). There is also the practice of exorcism, which was performed by a caste of priests, called *ašipu*, specifically trained to remove demons and spells sent against a victim.

This leads us to the practice of witchcraft, which seems to be of a different nature according to the textual traditions. Indeed, the practice of witchcraft in the incantations tells us that these practices aimed to harm animals and the health of people (Konstantopoulos 2019:7): several magical rituals are found in the text series called *Maqlû* (The burning) and are intended to counter the spells sent by witches. Indeed, those who practiced harmful magic were marginalized in society, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

“One who practiced evil magic was treated as a person who did not respect the normal order of things established by the gods. Interestingly, only certain forms of non-normative behaviour, such as the laying of curses, appear as evil magic in antiquity, whereas other behaviours appear as entirely normative forms of ritual action undertaken by some kinds of professionals and priests to protect the king, his army and the whole empire.” (Ulanowski, 190)

Magic was therefore a practice considered relatively normal in the daily life of the ancients, but it nevertheless remained a practice codified by the norms of ancient Mesopotamian society. What was considered malevolent was therefore a practice outside of these norms, such as what Lamaštu did. She acted against the norms established by her divine family. Malevolent witchcraft was so prevalent that there exists an entire corpus of counter-witchcraft spells intended to protect patients and heal them or to punish those who had used harmful spells (Abusch 1987, Peled 2026)

Witchcraft in the ancient Mesopotamian context was conceived as a foul substance that could make the patient impure and bind him from doing any regular activities. It could be washed off or taken out with the proper ritual, as defined here:

“ The concept of witchcraft as a transferable quality or substance is also implied in the ubiquitous motif of returning the witchcraft to those who performed it. The performers of such actions were either of demonic nature or humans labeled as witch and sorcerer” (Abusch and Schwemer, *CMAwRo*).

As noted in this definition, the act of witchcraft is something that was used to bind someone but people were also able to defend themselves by using witchcraft and sending it back in return. These are important aspects because this could explain how anti-Lamaštu rituals were acts of witchcraft and why she is represented with items linked to witchcraft actions.

As such malevolent magic, or witchcraft, for lack of a better term, was associated with the figure of the witch or witches. The witch in ancient Mesopotamia was an abstract notion that did not necessarily point towards humans (Abusch 2004, Konstantopoulos 2019: 6). The witch is indeed very often an unknown enemy whose function evolved over time. At first the witch was not automatically a source of evil magic, but belonged in the sphere of popular folk magic (Abusch 2004:65) At first she could help and heal her community or send curses as well, her role was a specialist of magic, just like the official state-exorcist. Eventually the official exorcist seemed to have been threatened by the role of the witch, as Abusch mentions:

“Perhaps, because the witch was often a woman who possessed knowledge and power, the female witch eventually became a focus of interest and even a threat to the prerogatives of the male exorcist” (Abusch 2004: 66)

The witch then became demonized and became a supernatural figure she has to be fought against, sometimes representing a human person but sometimes also a demon or a ghost (Abusch 2011:343) The Mesopotamian witch is the one that is capable of sending illnesses to humans or animals and the curse of the witch will render anyone useless or not able to live an ordinary life:

“The witch performed her evil witchcraft against me, she had me eat her wicked sorceries, she gave me to drink ((her)) deadly potion, she bathed me with ((her)) dirty wash water that is killing me, she anointed me with her evil oil that is harming me, she had ((her)) bad illness, which is the seizure of curse, take hold of me, she entrusted me to a strange, roaming ghost that does not have a family.” (CMAwoR Text 7.11.2:1)

The suspected human witch was never mentioned though, so it seems that anti-witchcraft rituals were made to stop a potential curse without aiming at anyone specifically. Useful for my research, Abusch notes that there are many relationships with witches and demons in the anti-witchcrafts rituals.

First, Abusch mentions that there are spells that link the demons specifically to witches. Second, some spells explicitly mention the use of demons by witches to harm their victims and, the most interesting point, there are spells that use demons against witches :

“In Maqlû the involvement of witches with demons take several forms: 1) addresses to demons in which there is an explicit or implicit identification of the demons with the witches: 2) the use of demons by witches to harm their victims: 3) the use of demons against witches” (Abusch 2011:343)

It is also important to note, for the purpose of my argument, that sometimes the witch took the place or the role of the demon, specifically if she was dead and took the form of a ghost (Abusch 2011: 346) as the ambiguity between both types of supernatural creatures is not clearly separated (Abusch 2011: 355, Konstantopoulos 2020:6) But sometimes the witch acts like a demon without being dead, exemplifying her supernatural nature. The witch had the ability to change the weather:

“ Whoever you are, O witch, who like the South wind has piled up for fifteen days, Nine days fog, a year dew, Who has formed a cloud against me and stood over me: I am rising up against you like the shearer of the heavens, the North [wind], I am scattering your cloud, I am annihilating [your storm]” (CMAwRo Maqlû 5:76)

The witch could also control demons and make people sick, she can be herself a disease and she had to be ritually burned to be tamed, paralleling conceptions of the Witch centuries later in Europe. Lamaštu shares similar functions as will be explored in more details further on.

Witchcraft is not only found in texts, it can also be found in objects related to the practice of magic and witchcraft such as amulets, plaques, figurines, musical instruments and so on. Why are they considered magical? Because the relationship between the objects and the person is very important to produce a magical action. In the magical system of the ancient world, the relationship between humans and artifacts is expressed through the creation of things and/or through practices that treat them as agents in their own right (Sánchez Natalías 2018:9). This agency is two-way, sometimes the object itself creates an action on the receiver of the spell, and sometimes it creates power for the user of the spell/object (Sánchez Natalías 2018 :9)

The advantage of studying material amulets is that it allows us to observe things sometimes a bit differently. For example, the Lamaštu amulets demonstrate sometimes good and sometimes bad craftsmanship and they show signs of being very worn-out. They were portable around the neck and seemed heavily used, they were possibly beloved amulets. Could they have been worn by witches themselves? We could never know, but based on their function, I like to think that it may have been the case.



Fig.4 Lamaštu amulet represented as a dog or scorpion shown as a pendant (B14311, Penn Museum)

Official exorcistic texts are oriented toward a certain codification and were written mostly by the religious elite. Amulets, on the other hand, may have been produced by specialist artisans, but we also find Lamaštu amulets that bear rather clumsy traces and can shed light on more domestic uses rather than official ones. Such as this example below.



Fig.5 Type A Bronze age Lamaštu amulet with spindle and comb showing clumsy design (BM 122999)

Amulets are objects that are often described as having potency (Goff 1965:169), that is, they serve as protection against demons and evil spells or to heal a part of the body etc. They carry a special symbolic force in the ancient magical worlds as they are found in all spheres of human activities.

However, according to theories drawn from material religion, an amulet represents much more than a simple protective function. Indeed, representing the deity or demon on the amulet makes it possible to materialize it in space and then act upon this entity in a physical way. Amulets would therefore have their own agency, as will be argued further on (Gell,1998), allowing them to act towards the supernatural entity. By materializing the entity iconographically, the ritual reinforces its presence through repetition and specific ritual gestures. One must not forget the spoken incantations, because the power of speech is also necessary for the invocation ritual to function.

As Laura Feldt notes, the importance of materializing monsters in order to obtain ritual efficacy is not insignificant. We indeed find in the texts the mention that one had to make a figurine representing the entity, and this is true for Lamaštu , and after the ritual, the figurine was destroyed. Unfortunately, this is also the reason why few material traces of these figurines remain. Feldt therefore mentions that in the religious mindset of ancient Mesopotamia, it was necessary to materialize the presence of an entity in order for its presence to be magically effective:

“We find this ‘presence-effect’ idea of divine nearness also in relation to the divine statues in the official temple cult. It is a basic line of religious thought in ancient Mesopotamia that if benign transempirical beings are present – from the deity in his or her statue in the temple, to one’s personal gods (ilu and ištar), or an individual’s minor, personal guardian deities (lamassu and šēdu) – then evil or disease will not harm you.” (Feldt 2015: 71)

In this excerpt she refers to the invocation of the presence of benign monsters to obtain protection for the house, but this can also apply to demons. Indeed, invoking the presence of a demon, whether considered benign or malicious, could either provide protection against other demons or allow it to be banished from the house. This type of magic therefore allows us to think about the materiality of Mesopotamian magic in another way and to better understand why amulets seemed to be widely used.

2.3 Lamaštu as a magical agent: textual evidences

Since we established the links between witchcraft, magical rituals and demons, let’s take a look at how Lamaštu worked as a magical agent. In the Farber’s canonical edition we can read the rituals that were performed to materialize the demoness, such as creating a figurine representing her physically and how the figurine was banished to keep her from reappearing,

but only for a time. The rituals indicate that the demoness had to be materialized in order to be controlled, such as can be exemplified here:

“You make a Daughter-of-Anu from clay. [You cover her head with hair]. A soiled towel you give her as clothing. You prick her with the th[orn of a date palm.] You give her a comb, a d[is]taff, (and) a halvesūtu ? fla[sk] of oil. (Farber 2014:151)

To bring Lamaštu into ritual presence, it was first necessary to create an effigy of her and then perform the prescribed ritual actions against that representation. Indeed, it was common practice in ancient Mesopotamia to materialize the spirit from which one sought either assistance or protection, or that one wished to banish (Goff 1956:16). As discussed at the beginning of this dissertation, the animistic ontology of ancient Mesopotamian implied that one could not simply act upon the invisible realm. An image or material object was required to make the spirit present and thereby materialize it (Perdibon 2019:175).

We also learn more from Lamaštu’s nature and where she lives in those incantations, in general though it is thought that no woman could be an exorcist, that is a professional magical practitioner, but in this excerpt it seems a woman has either made the spell or casted it as it was translated as “her” by Farber:

“She is fierce, (represents) fear, is a goddess, glaringly bright, the she-wolf, the Daughter-of-Anum. Her dwelling is in the grass, her den in the alfalfa grass. She holds back the young man when he runs, pulls the fast donkey at its tail. The little ones she really has crushed, the old ones she forces to drink, so they say, water of dissolution . The spell is not my own, it is a spell of Nikkilil, the one in charge of magic spells. Nikkarrak cast it, and I have taken it over (from her).” (Farber 2014: 149)

Here we can read how Lamaštu lives in the wilderness and is responsible for misfortunes and illness. Not just infants are her victims but also the elderly, the young men and animals, specifically mentioning here the Donkey. Lamaštu also seemingly has the ability to cast magic on her own and this is an important piece to understand Lamaštu as being a magical agent and not just a figurative monster. In this excerpt of the canonical series, Lamaštu “enchants” young mothers to give her their babies:

“The Daughter-of-Anu counts the pregnant women daily, keeps following [behi]nd the ones about to give birth. She counts their months, marks their days on the wall. Those about to give birth she puts under a spell: “Bring me your sons— I want to suckle (them)! In the mouth of your daughters I want to place (my) breast.” She holds in her hand fever, cold, chills (and) frost (as a) katimtu -net ? . Her body is full of scorching flames. She spatters venom all over the place, she spatters venom quite suddenly. Inc. 5 [.].] (Farber 2014:155)

Although not a witch herself, she embodies the characteristics of a witch, like them she lives in the mountains and sends illness to babies, like witches she can cast spells and like witches she very often attacks at night. With this in mind, only magic and witchcraft can counter her attacks or conjure her help.

2.4 Ritual responses to Lamaštu

What is remarkable about Lamaštu is that, in addition to the magical objects associated with her, there are numerous incantations that provide insight into the role she played in magical formulations. I nonetheless hypothesize that these written incantations may have belonged to mostly a literate elite, whereas the objects, as we will see, could have been produced for individuals from more modest backgrounds. Although this study does not focus on the interpretation of the incantations themselves, I would still like to examine some of the different incantations, in order to better understand the magical role of Lamaštu.

It appears that as early as the first millennium, incantations concerning Lamaštu became crystallized into a canonical form that was then repeated as needed (Farber 2014:16). These incantations are most often found in medical texts invoking healing or protection. Amulets have been discovered from Assur to Ugarit, and even in Hittite cities, indicating the wide diffusion of rituals involving the demoness (Farber 2014:8).

To control the demoness, incantations and ritual actions were necessary. It is believed that most of these rituals were performed by a ritual specialist, at least for the spells that were preserved and written on tablets. Exorcists were scholars who compiled, translated, and sometimes modified texts according to their cultural contexts. In anti-Lamaštu and anti-witchcraft rituals, malevolent magic is fought against through the use of many objects. As mentioned earlier, Lamaštu had to be represented as a figurine, but we can also find in the textual rituals the need to have her image placed on a specific support, such as an amulet. Before any ritual could be performed, an incantation was required, not only to appease the demoness but also to identify the reasons and causes for which she needed to be banished.

The objects used against her include cylinder seals, amulets, clay figurines of dogs, date palm sticks, and a dagger, as illustrated in the following ritual:

“Its Ritual: You purify the clay pit, take clay from the pit, (and) make a figurine of Lamaštu. You have her sit at the head of the patient. You fill a (vessel of one)

sūtu (capacity) with ashes and stick a dagger in it. For three days you place it at the head of the patient. On the third day, in late afternoon, you take her outside and strike her with the dagger. You bury her in a corner of the city wall. You surround her with a magic circle (and return) without looking back.”(Farber 2014: 155).

To appease the demoness, offerings were also used, such as a travel companion, a donkey made of clay, and an offering of a piglet’s heart to replace human flesh:

“You make a figurine of the Daughter-of-Anu using clay from a ditch. You make a donkey with clay from a ditch, supply him with provisions. Fourteen tiny breads made of šeguššu-flour you string onto a twine of palm fiber, place it around her (i.e., the figurine’s) neck. You serve her a hot meal. You pour her water and beer. You slaughter a piglet, place the heart in the mouth of the Daughter-of-Anu. For three days, three times, all day long, you recite the incantation before her. On the third day, toward evening, you take her out into the wilderness and [turn] her face toward sunset. At xx [xx, you dra]w a magic circle of še[guš]šu-flour in fr[ont of her]. You t[ie her] t[o a bal]tu (and/or) an ašāgu thorn bush.” (Farber 2014:163).

The texts are more numerous than those illustrated here, but these examples demonstrate that, in order to counter Lamaštu’s own agency and magic, objects from the physical world were necessary to banish her. It is also noteworthy that demons who did not receive offerings were often considered angry and thirsty, whereas in the case of Lamaštu, offerings of flesh and drink were presented to appease her. This practice emphasizes her status as an ancient divine figure and not solely as a demon.

Finally, amulets were placed in domestic spaces, particularly in locations where the demoness could potentially enter, such as cracks in windows, the space between the door and the floor, and the roof. To prevent her from entering the house at night, figurines of dogs could protect these spaces, or amulets could be placed on dog figurines, as mentioned in the following ritual text:

“[On the tablet], you draw [a sun disc, a moon cr]escent, a crook (and) a star. You write the incantation [‘Fierce is the Dau]ghter-of-Anu’ on it. [You] hang it up at the he[ad of the bed]. The dogs you paint in different colors, using gypsum and charcoal. Hair from a [black] dog (you attach) to their upper foreheads, hair from a [vi]rgin kid you attach to their tails. You write their names on the left sides of their backs. Windows to the right and left of the outer door, of the inner door [and of the door to the bedroom you open]. Lower down, [you o]p[en] a hole facing the do[or. (The dogs) ‘Fast-is-his-attack,’] (and) ‘Watch-(all)-night, fend-off-the-Daughter-of-Anu!’” (Farber 2014: 171.)

Part of this ritual has not been included here, but the text indicates that a tablet containing symbols and incantations was to be created alongside clay dogs intended to protect the house. It appears that studying the textual traditions also informs us on the materiality required for magic. Although some of these ritual objects were not found, we can read what material was necessary such as wool strings, palm sticks, hair, dagger and various figurines.

This leads us to the study of our amulet corpus in order to understand how the objects surrounding Lamaštu functioned as magical tools when she was invoked and how material objects participated in the negotiation of her supernatural agency through looking at anti-witchcraft rituals evidence. This will be useful to understand the witchcraft actions and objects depicted on the amulets I chose to analyse.

CHAPTER 3:Materializing Magical Agency: The Iconography of Lamaštu Amulets

The previous rituals demonstrated that the demoness could not be confronted as an invisible force alone. Before ritual actions could be performed, Lamaštu first had to be materialized through an effigy upon which the prescribed incantations and ritual gestures could act. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mesopotamian magical practices relied upon the creation of a tangible body capable of receiving ritual intervention. The image therefore did not merely represent the demoness but functioned as a material place through which supernatural power could be controlled and ultimately expelled.

Rather than understanding the amulets as protective images identifying a dangerous demon, this last chapter argues that they materialize the mechanisms of witchcraft itself . The iconography repeatedly incorporates objects whose functions are described in the anti-Lamaštu incantations or in anti-witchcraft incantations, suggesting that the imagery reproduces elements of ritual practice, possibly the “seizing-of-the-mouth” ritual, rather than serving as only decorative or descriptive object. The repeated appearance of attributes such as the comb, the spindle, dogs and pigs invites a reconsideration of their role within Mesopotamian magical practice.

3.1 The small Lamaštu amulet corpus

The Lamaštu amulet corpus has a long history. It is now well documented that in Mesopotamia and Anatolia, people protected themselves from the Demoness with numerous amulets and cylinder-seals (Götting 2020:185). However, there has been an evolution of the iconography appearing on those amulets through different periods. During the late Bronze age period, Lamaštu's appearance was variable (Götting 2020:186) Indeed, during the 3rd and 2nd millennium, her head could vary between one of a bird or a Wolf (Farber 2014:3) and sometimes she could be depicted with two heads (Farber 2014:4) The oldest amulets, the ones that are analysed in this research, show her in a menacing (or is it menacing?) posture, the hands are specifically animal-like because they are stretched at the side and present very long claws reaching out for something or someone (Farber 2014:4). She is always accompanied by a spindle and a comb, pig and/or dog and clearly looks like a she-wolf or an eagle (Farber 2014:5).

Since the iconographical allure of Lamaštu changed over time, so has her role as can be seen in the texts over a long period of time (Wiggerman 2000). I do not think we can consider all Lamaštu's amulets as having the same function and meaning. There are indeed iconographical differences between amulets that may be used to bind her like the ones I focus on for this research versus amulets that offer her gifts she might appreciate to invoke her presence and power in a healing ritual. This can be seen in some rituals that explicitly invoke *Dimme*'s name (one of her seven names) to heal a baby:

“ When you rub the baby: The spell : “‘Dimme, Child-of-An’ is her first ‘name’” you recite three times over his head. The spell : “Dimme, Child-of-An, famous one among the gods . . . I have made you seize a black dog” you recite over his neck. The spell : “She [is fierce], (and although) not a goddess, she is terrifying” you recite over his right hand. The spell : “She is clad in scorching heat you recite over his left hand. The spell : “Dimme, Child-of-An, famous one among the gods (Farber 2014:191).

After the Neo-Assyrian period though, when her iconography and spells spread out throughout the Mediterranean, her role and function seemed to have crystallised in different cultures. It is during the 1st millennium, under the Assyrian kingdom, that the famous imagery that is associated with Lamaštu has been officially canonized (Wiggerman 2000, Götting:186)

The amulets I chose to analyze for this dissertation are small stone amulets that were all portable and were worn around the neck. Six can be found in the Penn Museum and a few of these were documented only in 2026 at the time of writing this dissertation. Indeed, the Near-Eastern keeper Katherine Blanchard revisited artifacts that were catalogued a long time ago and found four new amulets that belong to the Lamaštu small amulets corpus

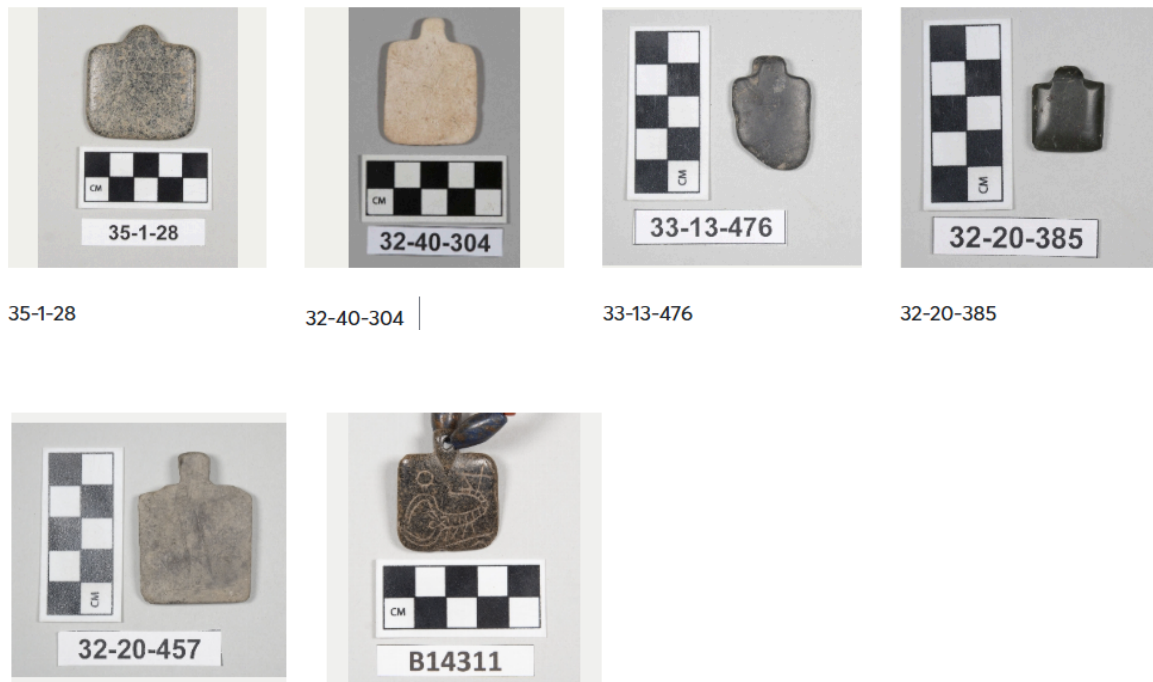


Fig 6. The six Type A Lamaštu amulets available on the Penn Museum online collection

The other four amulets can be found in the British Museum and one is from the MET Museum in New-York.



Fig 7 Small Type A amulets from (left) BM12299 (center) BM 1851,0101.18 and BM 1899,0418.13 (right) Obsidian Lamaštu amulet Met 1984.348

These amulets all have the same spade shape and are made of different stones but seem to follow a pattern in the type of stone that was used, which are darker stones usually with only a few exceptions. All the examples used here show the same iconographic elements and are all about the same size. On our amulets, Lamaštu is depicted in a frontal position with stretched arms and the head looking on the right or left side. Pigs, dogs, spindles and wool-combs are present. One example from the Penn Museum features a dog on one side and a scorpion on the other side, which is believed to represent Lamaštu herself (Blanchard 2026). About three amulets are heavily worn so the image does not appear anymore but by the shape of it and the chosen stone, these amulets are also thought to belong to the Lamaštu corpus (Blanchard 2026).

The importance of those small amulets for this research is that these are the oldest versions of Lamaštu, the one before her iconography became canonised and fixed, representing a Lamaštu that is possibly born from oral cultures (Wiggerman 2000: 248) Later on, during the Iron age we see a different variation of Lamaštu that matches the canonised incantations against her and are made by possibly more expensive artisans. I agree with Wiggerman when he argues that Bronze age Lamaštu represents an ancient form of folk magic demoness that has eventually spread to the Mediterranean (Wiggerman 2000:248-249). We can indeed find Lamaštu's amulets from Anatolia, Syria and Egypt.

Materials: The amulets we are studying for this dissertation show very similar characteristics and are made of dark stones such as obsidian, chlorite and serpentine.

Portability: All the illustrated examples of the amulets studied for this research present a very small size and were all perforated to be worn around the neck, many of them are heavily worn out, showing they must have been used extensively by the people wearing them. As the shape was very small, it is most likely that they were also valued protective items rubbed in moments of need, like people do with their crosses nowadays.

The evidence studied demonstrates that the amulets were not mere decorations, signs of being worn and touched demonstrate that they were objects of ritual practice that probably had specific agency when something was needed, most possibly when a child was sick as some incantations can show us.

3.2 Lamaštu's body: She-wolf and Lion.

A whole animal symbolism surrounds the mythology of Lamaštu. Indeed, the presence of dogs, pigs, and scorpions forms an integral part of Lamaštu's symbolism. She is often represented as a female monster nursing these animals on some amulets. These representations would have been used in rituals to drive Lamaštu away from women and attract her toward baby animals that would replace human babies (Wee 2021: 12) Lamaštu is indeed depicted in Mesopotamian iconography as a hybrid female figure with a series of consistent visual attributes that recur across plaques and amulets. She is commonly shown with a wolf-like face, characterized by a wide mouth, exposed teeth and prominent facial features close to a lion. Her hair is often unbound or falling in thick strands and in many representations she is shown holding a comb in one hand. In the other hand, she frequently holds a spindle. Sometimes the comb and spindle features alongside her, like the ones we can identify in our Bronze age amulets. Her arms may also be raised and grasping animals, most commonly snakes, dogs, pigs, or scorpions, which are depicted either in her hands or positioned around her body. In the Bronze age amulets, she rarely has something in her hands.

In several examples, Lamaštu is shown standing in a frontal pose, sometimes on the back of a donkey or a boat-shaped support in later iconography. She is often depicted with bare breasts and in a number of representations she holds or nurses a piglet or a puppy. Her lower body is

usually human in form, with a dress or skirt that may be decorated with linear or geometric patterns. In some plaques, her feet are shown in a striding position, while in others she appears static. Her feet are very often similar to that of a bird of prey.

Additional associated elements include accompanying inscriptions placed around the figure on the object. In later cases, the demon Pazuzu is depicted nearby on the same object, usually in a smaller scale and positioned in relation to Lamaštu's figure.

Regarding the iconography of Lamaštu, there appears to be a consensus, indicating a specific practice for the effective use of symbols. Lamaštu is indeed always depicted with a distinctive physique and accompanied by specific objects or animals. As a liminal and non-human entity, it is necessary that she not be represented as human, in order to clearly differentiate her role within the world of images (Maiden 2018:91).

Since the canonical and anti-witchcraft texts date primarily from the late Bronze age/Iron Age, it is difficult to truly consider that the images on the amulets fully reflect the rituals that are presented and performed by the exorcists. It is highly probable, as Wiggerman indicates, that attitudes changed over time concerning the demoness herself, or alternatively that the domestic sphere, as opposed to that of the priests, may present possible divergences regarding the significance represented by the demoness (Wiggerman 2000:249).

Ancient demons were often thought to have the shape of birds, like the anzu-bird that used to terrorize the population in second millennium texts. It is not surprising to consider that Lamaštu was first thought to be a terrifying bird coming to snatch babies. The ten amulets I studied for this research demonstrates that the more popular iconography representing Lamaštu is that of a She-wolf. The She-wolf appearance is not random, the incantations tell us, she is a roaming and terrible She-wolf attacking like these mythical animals that were thought to live in the mountains and hide in the grass:

“Indeed, she is a she-wolf, the Daughter-of-Anu” (Farber 2014:149).

Wolves and lions were the most dangerous animals found in ancient Mesopotamia (Mertens-Wagschal 2018:159) and there is no coincidence that the most terrible demon is associated with these beasts. Lamaštu is named and seen as a She-wolf with a lion's face, which will be more evidently elaborated over time. The wolf and the lion are two animals that are linked to magic and the figure of the witch in ancient magical incantations

(Mertens-Wagschal 2018: 159). The wolf and lion are two animals that are used in aggressive defensive spells. The definition of aggressive magic can be understood as this: “ Aggressive magic can be defined as the use of rituals and incantations for gaining advantage or control over another person, such as an opponent or lover” (Mertens-Wagschal 2018:158). The demon is therefore the enemy that has to be controlled in order to expel her from the place where she has infiltrated.

These attributes that construct Lamaštu’s appearance are therefore not randomly chosen, they participate in her magical agency and symbolism of aggressive magic. Feeding from blood and human flesh, Lamaštu represents the deviation from societal expectation. Appearing as a supernatural beast filled with magical abilities, it is possible that Lamaštu is associated with witchcraft because she herself is sent by a suspected witch or because she might be considered a witch herself, as we have explored in the previous chapter.

3.3 Amulets and aggressive magic

After briefly describing the iconographical elements that are observable on our amulets, I will now demonstrate how the symbols carved on the stone are acting as tools of witchcraft spells that enable the binding of Lamaštu. This is one possible interpretation, but I think the spell could also be used by Lamaštu herself towards someone.

Lamaštu appears in anti-witchcraft rituals, showing her association with the practice of witchcraft and the acts of the witches, for example in this extract, the petitioner in the ceremony Maqlû accuses the Witch to have handed a figurine of himself (the petitioner) to Lamaštu, amongst other evil beings:

“ You have handed over figurines of me to Lamaštu, daughter of Anu, You (have performed against me, have had performed against me: may Girra release” (Maqlû 4:4)

In the mindset of anti-witchcraft rituals, the person who performs the spell tries to stop the curse that is afflicting them, here having a figurine handed to Lamaštu could mean that she comes and afflicts him with disease and fever. The anti-witchcraft rituals functioned as a “return to sender” model. What was done to the victim was then reversed and sent back to the witch. These are the mechanics of witchcraft spells and why I think Lamaštu amulets were objects used to practice witchcraft as a form of aggressive magic against her. The small

amulets corpus, as I mentioned before, show the presence of many objects besides the demon, let us now explore what are the links between the comb, spindle, dogs and pigs in a magical setting. The elements that are present on the amulets are mentioned in the rituals, emphasizing that they are very important for the potency of the ritual such as exemplified here:

“When you want to perfo[rm] the ritual against Lamaštu, you dr[aw] a Daughter-of-Anu ⟨at⟩ the right side of the door, the left side of the door, or in the direction of the entrance to the bedroom. To the right and left of the Daughter-of-Anu, a dog, a pig, a lamp, a scor[pion, a distaff], a comb, a mirror(-case), (and) a donkey’s ankle.” (Farber 2014:187)

This incantation specifically explains to us how the drawing of Lamaštu is efficient against her, the same as the making of the figurine, but it fails to tell us what purpose the objects have in this situation. Nevertheless we will now explore what the comb, the spindle, the dog, the pig, sometimes the scorpion are for in witchcraft rituals and maybe that can help us interpret and understand the presence of these objects on the amulets to help the petitioner in his spell against the demon.

3.3.1 The Comb: Binding and Magical Control

The comb very often appears besides Lamaštu and sometimes it appears in her hands. When it stands besides her, specifically with an arrow indicating a possible attack against her, I tend to think that this positioning could indicate a binding spell against her, whereas if she has the comb in her hand that could signify that she is using the comb to cast a spell. In the amulets that are analysed for this research, the comb is always standing beside Lamaštu.

Why do I think the comb is a magical agent of restraint? In anti-witchcraft rituals we find mentions of the use of a wool-comb to cause “seizure-of-the-mouth” spell. This spell is made specifically to stop someone from speaking and the Akkadian term was *kadabbedû*. In Mesopotamian witchcraft the “Seizing-of-the-mouth” renders someone unable to defend themselves, suggesting here that Lamaštu is being binded by this spell to make her incapable to defend herself (Abusch & Schwemer, CMAwRo glossary).



Fig.8 Example of a wool comb from the Viking age (Museum of Cultural History, Oslo)

I suggest that the comb is part of the witchcraft ritual to make the spell effective. Indeed, there has been some evidence in Babylonian anti-witchcraft rituals that a wool-comb, which resembles exactly what we see on amulets, has been used to “gag” a tongue in a spell which was used to disable someone’s speech (Abusch 2015: 125) It appears that in folk magic the comb is used as a binding tool, which reinforces the idea that Lamaštu may use the tools around her to make the spell efficient or that by materializing the comb with Lamahstu, the practitioner was able to bind her from doing any harm by her speech as we can witness in this ritual :

“She gagged his tongue with wool-combing and bound his members. She seized his mouth so that he would be unable to open his mouth. She constricted his tongue so that he would be unable to refute (her) accusation” (Abusch 1987:125).

This is what a witch was thought to do to silence its victim, and this is why I think the presence of the comb on Lamaštu’s amulet serves the purpose to silence her.

3.3.2 The Spindle and Wool: Domestic Object and Ritual Agency

It is known to us that women in the ancient world were responsible for weaving the wool and making clothes, as such, common “feminine” objects became associated with feminine “magic” (Frankfurter 2021 :131). Wool was the most common fiber used in ancient Mesopotamia and as such we find mention of the wool as an element of witchcraft in almost all rituals. The anti-witchcraft and anti-Lamaštu are no exception, the wool and its colors may they be red, blue ,white or black are everywhere as magical elements protecting from witchcraft and from Lamaštu herself:

“you knot into a white cord and place (it) around his neck. All of the eye-stones and mule -stones you string onto black wool. You roll wads, ... -s of seven (strands of) dyed wool. šubû -stone you string onto a cord of white wool, roll (it) up in white wool, tie four eye-stones (and) four mule -stones to his right hand. Black obsidian you string onto a black woollen cord, roll (it) up in black wool, tie three eye-stones (and) three mule -stones to his left hand. kapašu -shell you string onto a cord of red wool, roll (it) up in red wool, tie four eye-stones (and) four mule -stones to his right foot..” (Farber 2014: 189)

This is an excerpt from the previously cited anti-Lamaštu ritual, demonstrating the use of the wool for amuletic purposes and how it has a prominent place in ancient magic. In other corpuses of anti-witchcraft, the wool is also mentioned to be as important to create knots or for keeping amulets against evil on the body of people that need protection. The color of the wool seems to also be important in this matter but I couldn’t find the meaning of the colors at

the time of writing this paper. It appears that wool was important against illness and to repel evil in all of ancient Anatolian and Mesopotamian society (Dilek & Kirmizioglu 2022)

When talking about wool it is hard not to talk about the object that helps us get a nice thread, which is the spindle. The spindle or distaff always accompanies Lamaštu in all of her representations, but is she a domestic weaver? As Götting (2020) has explored before, the comb and spindle could have potentially been offered to the demon as travel resources, but the spindle is also an object that acts as a magical agent in itself. It was used in Hittite rituals to harm and curse an enemy (Yakar 2011:4) and in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals there is mention of the spinning the wool to make a thread, or a cord and knots to prevent bewitchment:

“You spin a cord of combed wool, you knot seven knots (into it). 'Wherever you have made a knot, you wrap 'heals-a-thousand'-plant in combed wool. You recite the incantation seven times over (it). 'You put (it) [around] his [neck], then witchcraft will not approach him.” (CMAwRo Text 7.8.3:32)

The spindle appears in many cultures as a magical tool that could be used to weave the fate of humans and is known in many cultures from antiquity as a magical item that is used to curse and bind people (Frankfurter 2021 :118) In roman times it was forbidden to spin in public because people were fearful of its power: “An act like spinning or grinding or stirring, if performed in particular (or traditionally inappropriate) places, or accompanied by particular incantations, or with the addition of unusual materials, could serve as a gesture of magical control or be perceived as conveying danger, even inadvertently.” (Frankfurter 2021 :118)

Once again it appears that the comb and the spindle accompanying Lamaštu are not just “feminine” items but powerful tools of binding magic.

3.3.3 Obsidian: Material Protection Against Magical Harm

The material itself producing an amulet is as important as the iconography and incantations. Different stones were chosen for their specific magical abilities. Luminous stones were of particular interest as they represented the gods themselves and their “*melammu*” which is an Akkadian term referring to the luminous radiant nature of the gods aka the stars (Reiner, 1995). The obsidian has been explored as having the faculty of mirroring but also erasing the

images when Lamaštu is moved as studied by Said (2020a). Divinities, and maybe demons, were also associated to specific stones without the need to be carved :

“In the ancient Near East, materials were used to represent the divine iconically—as material supports for carved and sculpted images that became vital parts of those images—but also aniconically—that is, through the (uncarved) material itself. Some texts link, and possibly equate, various materials with deities in list form. The associations of gods with specific materials vary from text to text and seem to have been quite fluid rather than firmly set” (Amrhein 2019 :95)

In Mesopotamian spells we can find the names of the stones that are useful against specific sorcery as exemplified here:

“Alabaster, *ašgigû*-stone, *ayyartu*-shell, ‘male copper stone’, *emesallu*-salt, *ḫilibû*-stone, magnetite, ‘gold stone’, ‘dark obsidian’: Nine stones against ‘seizing-of-the-mouth’ magic” (CMAwRo Text 6.1.1:1)

Here there is no doubt that the obsidian with similar dark stones, are useful stones for the binding spell “seizing-of-the-mouth” that seems to be the purpose of our Lamaštu amulets. One interesting study also corroborated that the Obsidian used for the Lamaštu amulets came from a specific place in Anatolia and suggested that it is that specific location and material that makes it efficient in the amuletic magical system (Frahm 2019).

In ancient Mesopotamia, luster or radiance not only conveyed physical information about the materiality of an object but was also believed to be a “divine endowment, thus carrying connotations of power, awe, or dread” (Said, 2020: 108) The other amulets studied here are made of different colors of stone (grey, green, black), diorite and chlorite that mirrors the dark obsidian and its potential magic against binding.

3.3.4 pigs and dogs: magical protectors

The dog is almost always inseparable from Lamaštu, being herself a she-wolf. The black dog particularly was associated with the healing goddess Gula but also with demons and the underworld (Plantholt 2017: 166) The black dog is also an essential element to witchcraft rituals. In anti-Lamaštu rituals for example, figurines of dogs are important to guard off the house against her. Dogs, although loyal companions and guardians, are also part of the impure beasts, being that they roam in the streets and eat garbage, feces and sometimes corpses, they are similar to the spirits and demons: “ Dogs and demons have a lot in common. They float between the world of the living and the world of the dead, not really belonging to

either of the two, and therefore they inhabit the same peripheral areas. The steppe is one such common ground for dogs and demons “ (Plantholt 2017:169)

It seems the black dog specifically in ancient Mesopotamia and other folklores in the world associate it with the night, death, illness and the land of the deceased, harbouring Lamaštu's role. On the amulets, the dogs seem to be either attacking Lamaštu or preventing her from doing harm, especially when an arrow is pointing at her, maybe to indicate to the dog what to do as can be seen on the image below. The dog may also be Lamaštu's symbol or companion but on the amulets chosen for this dissertation, because of the presence of an arrow pointing at her, I tend to think that the dog has more of a protecting role against her, preventing her from moving. In the counter-witchcraft spells either against witches or against Lamaštu, it sometimes appears that the figurines that were formed of those evil doers were fed to the dogs:

“May dog and bitch tear you apart, May dog and bitch tear apart your flesh” (Maqlû 8:126-127)

As for pigs they are also considered impure animals in the ancient Mesopotamian context, related to the underworld because they like to dig underneath the soil. It was also sometimes considered an insult to some goddesses and forbidden to eat pigs, which may be why the human flesh is substituted by pig's flesh (Mouton 2004: 96). It appears that in some cultures the suckling of piglets could be used in domestic magic, or it could be that the presence of pigs with Lamaštu reinforce Lamaštu's impure nature. As Wiggerman tried to explore this problem he came to the conclusion that it was just a possible familiar imagery:

“To be effective the āšipu's treatment of Lamaštu's murderous behavior must have been rooted in reality, in domestic habits that his female clientele could recognize and project onto the demonic. Thus Mesopotamian magic, domestic by nature, attests to the existence of a habit otherwise undocumented for the region, the breast-feeding of puppies and piglets by women – for whatever reason. “ (Wiggerman 2011: 411)

This could be indeed true for the later Neo-Assyrian amulets that show Lamaštu suckling pigs and dogs but the amulets studied here do not. Here the pig is simply beside Lamaštu, maybe helping the dog or maybe acting as a representation of the underworld. In any case there is a study that indicates that the association of the dog and the pig in Hittite and Mesopotamian rituals served the purpose to absorb impurity (Mouton 2004:97).

3.4. Analysis: Binding Lamaštu

In the light of my initial argumentation about the magical tools of witchcraft that appears on the iconography, let us understand how Lamaštu was materialized to be silenced and possibly blocked from causing harm in the Mesopotamian magical thought. As introduced in the methodology section, it was necessary to have the presence of a monster, may it be to prevent other evils from coming or to simply banish the demon herself. Based on Gell's theory the presence of the image is therefore as powerful as the spell itself. Indeed, Gell's theory argues that in the case of sorcery and images, there is the presence of mimesis, that means that sometimes an image is reproduced to copy the original's agency:

“Mimesis, narrowly defined, involves the actual production of images (indexes) whose salient property is prototype, via resemblance to the original, and within this category artefacts, having visual resemblance to the originals, can be accorded a separate status.” (Gell 1998:100).

This is certainly true with the Lamaštu amulets as some of the more rustic ones seemed to have copied better made ones and pseudo-cuneiform appears on some of them, meaning that the person that fashioned them didn't necessarily knew how to read or write cuneiform but wanted to have the same efficacy for its ritual.

How do we bind Lamaštu then? Once again, the spell that intends to bind the person, or in our case the demoness, is as important as the image of the demoness herself, and by adding the items needed in a binding spell, like the comb, the spindle and a dog, we make sure that when she materializes that she is bound:

“Binding' is, indeed, a fundamental metaphor of magico-religious control which we will encounter below. The words 'I bind, I bind' provide a bridge between the linguistic side of magic (they are words) and the physical side of magic (they refer to a physical operation, carried out on the body of the victim). The action of making a representational image, of any kind, involves a kind of binding, in that the image of the prototype is bound to, or fixed and imprisoned within, the index” (Gell 1998 :102).

Lamaštu is therefore binded in the index, that is in the amulet itself. In ancient Mesopotamian magic, we have seen all along that binding figurines or images are the most used type of magic, many spells corroborate this idea, and demons and witches are specifically involved in binding, like this spell that mentions that a witch has bound a man:

“She fashioned a figurine, she wrapped (it) with combed-out hair,[Akk.:] She made (a figurine) and [...] with combed-out hair, the man was bound with his (own) hair.” (ref)

Lamaštu, being a demon, and/or sometimes a witch has this capacity of binding people, she is called the “binder” and it would just be usual to also bind her to stop her spells:

“Spell : Oh Lamaštu, daughter of Anu, prominent one among the gods, Innin, most princely lady— (but also) ‘binder,’ grievous asakku -demon, ghost that weighs heavily upon mankind: So that exalted Lamaštu should not come close to man, may you be bound by the spell of heaven, bound by the spell of earth!” (Farber 2014: 177)

Our amulets are efficient because they apply the causal magic by explicitly representing an entity that is highly recognisable, therefore there is no doubt about who is being bound. The amulets we studied could even be aniconic, and still, because of their shape they are easily linked to Lamaštu (Blanchard 2026). The presence of specific binding items such as those used in “seizing-of-the-mouth”, that is, silencing the victim, leads me to think that they were always useful to silence Lamaštu and stop her songs and spells of bewitchment. Although I did not have the space to treat the entirety of the amulet corpus, there is space in the future to study if some amulets could represent Lamaštu as using specific magical objects herself to help the petitioner bind someone else. Anyhow, we know that her presence was either needed for healing rituals or to repel evil in general.

If Lamaštu is portrayed as an agent of death, it is because she is a kind of mother of death. In ancient cosmology, deities are often represented through multiple aspects reflecting their radiance and their connection to the stars and the cosmos. As the sister of Inanna, Lamaštu thus represents the darker side of the goddess of war, assuming the role of one who takes life. Ritual texts do not always express a desire to repel Lamaštu: at times, she is invoked so that her presence may be felt and her role fulfilled for the person feeling unwell (Farber 2014:147).

Although she may be at the origin of certain misfortunes, she can also be the one who repels them, or the one entrusted with protecting others against other evils. I do not believe that she had only a single role or context, especially given that effigies have been found in tombs and that texts sometimes present her as a powerful, exalted goddess. Instead of interpreting Lamaštu as a figure of fear, her liminal role could be seen as a guardian of threshold. She mediates transition (birth, death, transformation). Therefore she could represent a very ancient non domesticated force, one that includes destruction as part of care. Lamaštu’s presence in ancient incantations appears to be simultaneously necessary and dangerous: she

must be confronted, controlled and redirected through ritual texts and ritual technologies. She appears to be more harmful towards pregnant women or the elderly than young children, but her presence is also invoked to bring a patient or baby back to health as have been observed throughout this research (Farber 2014:167).

In light of what has been presented here, Lamaštu is definitely a magical agent that is part of witchcraft rituals. The rituals against her are clearly following the same steps as the anti-witchcraft rituals. As previously discussed, to materialize and banish the demon you had to make an effigy of her to be able to cast spells on her. The same is true for the witch that some people wanted to eliminate, she had to be materialized as a figurine. Moreover, as we have covered the links between witches and demons, sometimes Lamaštu was sent to get the witches that were thought to have caused misfortune:

“Lamaštu, *labāšu* (disease), (and) *aḥḥāzu*-jaundice you have caused to seize me: May Lamaštu, *labāšu* (disease), (and) *aḥḥāzu*-jaundice seize you.” (Maqlû 5: 66)

Here again we can read the “return to sender” spell, which makes sense especially if you consider that Lamaštu may be able to use her own magic spells against others. We have seen that the dogs were protective agents against her and that the pigs were offerings, symbols of the underworld and sacred to the goddess of death, they deter Lamaštu by being present on the amulet with her. As for the spindle and the comb always being shown near her and not in her hand, we have deduced that these were tools of witchcraft, part of the Mesopotamian witchcraft and magical system and that their presence were enough to bind and seize the mouth of the demoness to stop her from enchanting others and causing harm. As Said said: “Indeed, images in Mesopotamia do not simply represent, they make things happen”(Said 2020:107). Finally the stones itself is thought to have had magical properties against this spell.

Conclusion

This thesis is about the role of the demoness Lamaštu’s amulets within a Mesopotamian witchcraft context. The first chapter discussed how very few studies looked at the incantations concerning Lamaštu in relation with the iconography. It introduced the possibility that the amulets reflected the language of a specific type of defensive magic. The

second chapter looked at how Lamaštu acted as an aggressive magical agent and how incantations and spells were used against her. It was argued that Lamaštu should be understood as an active agent in the more broad witchcraft systems by looking at anti-witchcraft rituals and materials used in this system. The incantations were a useful way to see what material was necessary, such as flour, dagger, wool strings or cords, plants etc. Finally the third chapter looked at how the iconography observed on the small amulet corpus reflected the objects used in a specific witchcraft spell and ritual called “the seizing-of-the-mouth” and that its role was to bind Lamaštu as an act of defensive witchcraft against her evil doings.

This research argued that the presence of the comb, the spindle, the dog and the pig as depicted on the amulets are part of an ancient folkloric magical system that was understood as efficient against such a powerful being. It introduced the idea that Lamaštu could be understood as a demon but also as a witch. It highlights the importance of studying objects and images alongside ancient texts to better understand the mechanisms of religious and magical beliefs because it gives us many different angles to study magic from an anthropological perspective. For example amulets and figurines tell us how ordinary people used objects, whereas texts demonstrate how this knowledge was organised by higher priestly caste. Since magic and witchcraft are categories that are part of religion, they cannot be considered separately within the thought of the ancient world.

It was demonstrated that her connection with witchcraft through textual examples identified Lamaštu as a magical agent of aggressive magic that necessitated aggressive forms of protection, since she possesses magical powers. She is the one who bewitches mothers or sends illnesses; she even has the capacity to stop other agents of chaos such as witches or to seize someone that was cursed. No studies before looked at iconography as part of the magical language present on these amulets. This research demonstrated that the symbols and tools necessary for witchcraft binding, a defensive spell, were identified on those amulets and that, through their manipulation, it was providing evidence that they were used to allow Lamaštu’s speech to be “seized” or bound, in order to prevent her from bewitching young mothers and children. By looking at how the small amulets were portable and worn around the neck, it demonstrates that these objects were used quite often to possibly bind the demoness in a distressing situation. Invoking and binding Lamasthu by touching and wearing these magical amulets was a useful way to either prevent disease or heal a sick person,

especially since the stones used were also imbued with magical properties (Amrhein 2019: 95).

We were therefore able to answer the initial question concerning the reason why the same objects were represented on the amulets. The spindle and the comb, as well as the dog and the pig, as argued, have specific functions that play a role in the binding witchcraft ritual, thus possibly preventing Lamaštu from bewitching through her speech. The presence of the animals also allows for the protection of the user since they restrain the demoness, as can be understood from the texts. The objects represented iconographically are therefore not simply attributes allowing the demoness to be identified, but become genuine tools of witchcraft. In this respect, can Lamaštu be considered a witch because she shares the same powers? This research argues that she can. This opens a broader question about how witches and witchcraft were understood in the ancient Near-Eastern world and it would be interesting to have more studies about the tools and materials of folkloric witchcraft in the ancient world.

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