

DEATH-DEALING WITCHCRAFT IN THE BIBLE?

NOTES ON THE CONDEMNATION OF THE ‘DAUGHTERS’ IN EZEKIEL 13:17–23¹

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Summary

The essay proposes a new reading of Ezekiel 13:17–23, drawing on ancient Near Eastern materials to argue that the exiled ‘daughters’ were likely not practising the binding magic of the kaššāptu (Akk.) ‘witch’ but a defensive, even therapeutic, binding magic similar to that of the Babylonian āšipu ‘exorcist’. Through their magic-bands Ezekiel’s female opponents are said to bring ‘death’ (v. 19), but this is best explained as either the women’s prophetic declaration of who was to live or die, or as the judgement of YHWH upon those in the community who believed their ‘lies’ and ‘false visions’, refusing to heed Ezekiel’s warnings. Deception by unauthorised prophecy, divination, and magic is the key issue.

1. Introduction

In Africa Ezekiel 13:17–23 arouses great interest because many Bible readers see practices there akin to what they term witchcraft, and some claim the text proves that witchcraft can kill people.² There are

¹ Earlier forms of this paper were read at the 2013 Tyndale Fellowship Biblical Theology Study Group, and a Nairobi Consultation on Witchcraft Accusations in March 2013. This essay is dedicated to the memory of a young friend, Gordon Wolf Fein, 1989–2009.

² Some Africans and Westerners understand the oracle as suggesting sorcery can kill. My colleague, Tewoldemedhin Habtu, says the women were ‘engaged in witchcraft and sorcery’. He adds, ‘Such magic is not harmless. Rather it is a matter of life and death for those who believe in it: You have killed those who should not have died’ (*Africa Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006]:

discussions in East Africa as to whether Ezekiel 13 substantiates people's fears of *uchawi* (witchcraft) as a deadly menace. Certainly it is widely suggested, occasionally even in the Church, that killing accused witches can be justified for the sake of protection on account of texts such as Exodus 22:18[17]. One finds this news distressing, especially in light of the murder of over a thousand accused witches across Africa each year.³

From the standpoint of Old Testament scholarship, the oracle against the 'daughters' attracts attention because it is so enigmatic, touches on ancient magic (a growth-industry in OT and ANE studies today), and is one of the few texts in all the Old Testament prophetic literature that condemns the sins of women. An increasing number of recent studies also contend that the oracle represents a 'demonisation' of Ezekiel's female competitors among the religious specialists in the exilic community and aims to marginalise them as unauthorised.⁴

This paper discusses the literary context of the oracle, treats the main exegetical issues in the text, draws on extrabiblical materials to set out a fresh interpretation of the daughters' practices and role within the Jewish exilic community in Babylonia, and addresses the question, is there death-dealing witchcraft in this text? Finally the paper offers a biblical theological reflection on the oracle and magical activities denounced in Scripture.

949). Keith Ferdinando, a theological educator in Congo-DR, is open to the possibility that the 'female diviners' could kill through their magic arts: 'They were not only lying to their hearers, but also using magic spells to control, and perhaps kill, them' (The Battle Is God's: Reflecting on Spiritual Warfare for African Believers [Bukuru, Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks, 2012]: 42).

3 Upwards of 500 accused 'witches' are killed annually in Tanzania alone (<http://www.africareview.com/News/Tanzanians-pay-dearly-for-witchcraft-/979180/1415806/-/10pht4az/-/index.html>). Such murders also occur on other continents, exemplified in the cases of Kepari Leniata (Papua New Guinea) and Kristy Bamu (London). A NGO estimates that 200 'witches' are murdered in India annually (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/article533407.ece>).

4 Angelika Berlejung, 'Falsche Prophetinnen: Zur Dämonisierung der Frauen von Ez 13:17–21' in *Theologie des Alten Testaments aus der Perspektive von Frauen*, ed. Manfred Oeming (BVB 1; Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2003): 179–210. Nancy R. Bowen, 'The Daughters of Your People: Female Prophets in Ezekiel 13:17–23', *JBL* 118.3 (1999): 417–33; Rüdiger Schmitt, *Magie im Alten Testament* (AOAT 313; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004): 283–87, 360–62; Jonathan Stökl, 'The מְתַבְּאוֹת in Ezekiel 13 Reconsidered', *JBL* 132.1 (2013): 61–76; Silvia Schroer, 'Part Two: Toward a Feminist Reconstruction of the History of Israel' in *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective*, ed. Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker (tr. Martin and Barbara Rumscheidt [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998]: 129.

2. The Literary Context

Some studies of this oracle pay inadequate attention to the ‘rings’ of literary context and the structure of chapter 13. On the macro-level chapters 1–24 are entirely concerned with the doom of Judah, and the prophet sounds like a Johnny-one-note: ‘Jerusalem will fall. Jerusalem will certainly fall. The nation will go into exile. Judah faces the sword, famine, and plagues.’ By contrast, the male false prophets were declaring peace and security (11:3, 15; 13:10, 16) to a people who refused to listen to Ezekiel (chs. 2–3; 12:2).

Ezekiel scholars view 13:17–23 as the fourth in a complex of five oracles (12:21–14:11), reflecting his conflict with other religious professionals.⁵ His opponents all seem to be classed as prophets, and this is a significant datum, often missed in the controversy over identifying the daughters’ practices and role. Even more important for interpreting our text is the tight connection between it and the immediately preceding oracle against the male false prophets, who peddled lies (כָּזָב *kāzāb* 13:6, 7, 8, 9) and falsehood (שָׁוְא *šāw* vv. 6, 7, 8, 9). If the daughters were repeatedly said to tell lies (בָּזָב *bāzāb* 2× in v. 19, שֶׁקֶר *šeqer* v. 22) to God’s people, interpreters are inclined to believe they too were contradicting Ezekiel’s message of certain judgement. The oracles are a pair with similar structures, themes, and ‘verbal texture’.⁶ The integrity of the pairing is even more obvious with the lack of the introductory word-event formula (‘the word of YHWH came to me’) in verse 17. The links are fascinating.

Links between 13:1–16 and 17–23 in Structure and Verbal Texture

Command to the prophet

‘Son of man’	v. 2	v. 17
‘Prophesy against ...’	v. 2	v. 17
‘Who prophesy out of their own imaginations’	v. 2	v. 17

Declarative indictment

‘Thus says the Lord YHWH’ (messenger formula)	v. 3	v. 18
‘Woe to ...’	v. 3	v. 18

⁵ See Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997): 384–85.

⁶ Among those who detail the links, see especially Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (AB 22; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983): 242.

Use of rare שַׁעַל for ‘jackal’ and ‘handful’ ⁷	v. 4	v. 19
Metaphorical descriptions of evil (plastering, hunting)	vv.4–6	vv.18–19
Interrogative indictment		
‘Have you not seen false visions?’		
/ ‘will you hunt down souls?’	v. 7	v. 18
Pronouncement of judgement		
‘Therefore, thus says the Lord YHWH’	vv. 8, 13	v. 20
‘Behold, I am against ...’ (הִנְנִי אֵלַיְכֶם / הִנְנִי אֵל־)	v. 8	v. 20
Divine intervention described	vv.8b–9a	vv.20–21a
Result announced (‘they shall not be in the council ...’)		
/ ‘they shall no more be in your hand as prey’)	v. 9b	v. 21b
Concluding recognition formula		
(‘you shall know that I am YHWH’)	v. 9c	v. 21c
Resumed indictment & judgement — ‘halving’		
‘Because you ...’ (לְכֵן)	v. 10	v. 22
Indictment	v. 10	v. 22
Divine intervention	vv.11–14a	v. 23a
Result announced (‘when it falls you shall perish’)	v. 14b	----
Concluding recognition formula	v. 14c	v. 23b
Second ‘afterwave’		
Summarising announcement of result	vv.15–16	----

The linkage detailed above and the shared theme of lying leads to two conclusions. First, the pair are best interpreted together and are probably addressing the same problem in Ezekiel’s ministry, his battle against substitutes for divine prophecy. Second, if the prophet addresses male and female opponents together and even uses arguably harsher language to condemn the males, feminist interpreters have little basis for complaining that Ezekiel is especially targeting and demonising the women.

3. The Exegetical Issues

It was long commonplace in scholarship to distinguish sharply between ‘magic’ and religion, and many contend that biblical teaching reinforces this viewpoint. ‘Traditionally, magic is understood to represent

⁷ Henry Van Dyke Parunak, ‘Structural Studies in Ezekiel’, (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1978): 225. ‘These are the only occurrences in Ezekiel of this root-form.’

the manipulation and coercion of supernatural powers in order to control events (e.g. in war and politics) or people, for good (e.g. healing) or for harm (e.g. inflicting disease and death).⁸ The Old Testament regularly attaches a stigma to esoteric, unsanctioned magic rituals as foreign⁹ and contrary to the law (Deut. 18:9–14). Biblical religion, on the other hand, is traditionally viewed as sanctioned, honouring to YHWH, and needing to be kept pure and separate from ‘the detestable ways of the nations’. In our Ezekiel text things are not so tidy.¹⁰

Among the daughters we see a portrayal of religious activity confused with something like magic rituals. The text describes the women as imposters who speak prophecy ‘out of their own imagination (lit. hearts)’.¹¹ Like their male counterparts in verses 1–16, the women

⁸ A. Jeffers, ‘Magic and Divination’ in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005): 670. Jeffers suggests that this definition ‘derives from a Platonic model that has been passed down over centuries without sufficient critical attention being paid to the presuppositions of that worldview’. Magical practices are now classed as part of religion by the field of comparative religion.

⁹ Since Evans-Pritchard’s research on the Azande of South Sudan (1937), scholars in the fields of cultural anthropology, sociology, and magic studies have inclined toward sociological interpretation of witchcraft accusations, arguing that these reflect a situation of social tension. In line with this, most scholars today regard ‘magic’ and ‘magician’ as socially defined, with ‘the privileged’ working to stigmatise and marginalise ‘the outsider’ with terms of disapprobation. See Stephen D. Ricks, ‘The Magician as Outsider in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament’ in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, 131–43 (RGW 129; Leiden: Brill, 1995); and Bowen, ‘Daughters’, 417–33.

¹⁰ Evangelical scholarship today understands that ‘magic cannot be dissociated from the category of religion. W. Farber defines “magic” as falling within the boundaries of religion in a way that orients it in relationship to the pursuit of self-interest’ (John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006): 264, citing Farber, ‘Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia’ in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East (CANE)*, ed. Jack M. Sasson [4 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000]: III:1896).

¹¹ Block argues that the oracle ‘refuses to dignify’ the women by using the term ‘prophetess’ (*nēbī’ā*). Instead, the Hithpael participle of the verb *nb’* appears, and it carries the (here derogatory) sense of ‘acting as a prophet’ or ‘playing prophet’ (*Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, 413). See also Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 239; and Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I*, tr. by R. E. Clements (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979): 296. This has recently become disputable, however. Research by Jost and Stökl takes issue with such an understanding of the participle, raising the objection that Ezekiel uses the Hithpael to describe his own work in 37:10. How, then, could it be derogatory? See Stökl (‘The מַתְנַבְּאוֹת in Ezekiel 13’, 66) and Renate Jost, ‘Die Töchter deines Volkes Prophezeien’ in *Für Gerechtigkeit streiten*, ed. Dorothee Sölle (Schottroff Festschrift; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1994): 59. Past scholarship was not unaware of the complication in 37:10, with its anomalous form הַנְּבִיאִי being vocalised as a Hithpael and showing an assimilated *taw*. See the commentaries of Block (*The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]: 369), who ponders

have invented their messages, seen false visions, and practised a kind of divination (*qesem*, v. 23) that has contradicted the word of God spoken through the true prophets. With all the references to lying and falsehood in this chapter (11×), both the men and women who prophesy are presented as frauds. What distinguish the women from the men are their sorcery-like rituals, which apparently have been combined with prophesying in God's name¹² and divination practices.

I class this text as among the most difficult in the entire Hebrew Bible, and a prime reason for this is the obscurity of two key terms. The lexemes commonly translated as 'magic bands' (כֶּסֶּטוֹת *kēsātōt* in vv. 18, 20)¹³ and 'veils' (מִסְפָּחוֹת in vv. 18, 21) are *hapaxes*. Translators over the centuries have rendered the first word differently,¹⁴ but the majority of scholars today see 'bands' as the best translation. As best we can tell, these women were sewing magical charms or amulets in bands on clients' arms (probably wrists),¹⁵ and onto their own arms too (v. 20). What were the bands supposed to do: impart power to the wearer, ward off danger, or perhaps 'bind' someone to the daughters in a controlling sense? Whatever their purpose, these bands are the Bible's only descriptive example of binding magic (cf. חֵבֶר חָבֵר *hōbēr hāber*).¹⁶ In his judgement YHWH declares that he will 'tear off

the possibility of 'a scribal error for the Niphal'; Zimmerli (*Ezekiel* 2 (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983): 255–56); and Greenberg (*Ezekiel* 21–37 [AB 22A; New York: Doubleday, 1997]): 744). It is best to avoid overloading the Hithpael in 13:7 with significance.

¹² This is based on 13:19 and the reference to 'profaning me among the people'. Lying and invoking the divine name to bolster authority profaned God.

¹³ Hebraists note the different vocalisation in v. 20 (כֶּסֶּטוֹת *kissētōt*), but it is not significant.

¹⁴ The ancients were puzzled by the obscure words. The Targum reads the Hebrew *kēsātōt* as 'black/dark patches' (רַקְעֵי חֲשׁוֹד) sewn onto elbows (יָדַיִן מְרַבְּקֵי יָדַיִן); see Samson H. Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987): 45. LXX rendered *kēsātōt* as προσκεφάλαια ('pillows'), and this, combined with a similar Syriac rendering, still influences translators. See the AV's 'pillows' and the NJPS's 'pads' (cf. Greenberg, *Ezekiel* 1–20, 239). Most today follow the brilliant suggestion in the 1907 Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon (s.v. כֶּסֶּה II, p. 492) and D. Johannes Herrmann's 1924 commentary that the Hebrew is related to the Akkadian *kasū*, meaning to 'bind magically' (cf. *kasītu*, 'bondage'). Herrmann is important for explicitly linking Ezek. 13 with the Babylonian anti-witchcraft *Maqlû* series (*Ezechiel, übersetzt und erklärt* [Leipzig/Erlangen: Deichert, 1924]: 86).

¹⁵ The Hebrew presents an anomalous form (יָדַי *yādāy*), 'my hands/arms'. Scholars commonly translate the phrase it concludes (כָּל-אַצְבָּלֵי יָדַי) as 'every wrist' or 'every arm-joint (elbow?)'.

¹⁶ Literally 'one binding with a band' (Deut. 18:11; cf. Ps. 58:5[6]; Isa. 47:9, 12). 'Many interpreters relate this concept to the practice of tying or wrapping magical knots or threads around people or objects, understood either to bind the gods to do

the bands', indicating perhaps that sewn-on bands could not be easily slipped off and had to be removed by cutting or tearing.

The word for 'veils' (מִסְפָּחוֹת *mispāhōt*), the second *hapax legomenon*, is even more uncertain in meaning, but is usually rendered as veil, scarf, or other type of head-covering.¹⁷ The veil's 'size or shape depended on the height of the wearer'.¹⁸ There are other scholarly opinions, some not far removed from 'veil', that cannot be considered here.¹⁹ Given that both the 'bands' and 'veils' had the effect of trapping people (vv. 18, 20–21), Greenberg rightly concludes, 'they are almost certainly magical appurtenances'.²⁰ Exactly how they were used remains a mystery.

one's will or to bind (disable) the object or person to be affected' (Joanne K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, 'Magic, Old Testament', *Anchor Bible Dictionary [ABD]*, ed. David Noel Freedman [New York: Doubleday, 1992]: 4:469). Cf. Frederick H. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment* (JSOTSup 142; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994): 258–59. Moshe Held supports this interpretation by relating חֶבֶר to the Akkadian *ubburu* ('Studies in Biblical Lexicography in Light of Akkadian' [Heb.], *Erlsr* 16 (1982): 78–79).

¹⁷ The Targum of Ezekiel (A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic* [4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1962]: III:288) renders the Hebrew as פַּתְכֵּמָרִין 'veils or scarves' (*Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (CAL)* <call.cn.huc.edu>) or 'embroidered shawls' (Levey, 45). LXX translates it as ἐπιβόλαια 'coverings, head-scarves'. Those favouring this interpretation include G. R. Driver ('Linguistic and Textual Problems: Ezekiel', *Biblica* 19 (1938): 63–64), Zimmerli (*Ezekiel* 1, 297), and Paul Joyce (*Ezekiel: A Commentary* [LHBOTS 482; London: T&T Clark, 2007]: 121); they draw a connection between the Hebrew and the Akkadian *sapāhu* ('to loose').

¹⁸ P. Jenson, '5029 מִסְפָּחָה' in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998): 2:1008. Cf. *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)*, ed. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, et al. (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2001): 607; *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (DCH)*, ed. David J. A. Clines (8 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic/Phoenix, 1993–2011): 5:370.

¹⁹ Because of the motif of hunting and releasing birds, Allen considers the veils to be functioning as nets (*Ezekiel 1–19* [WBC; Dallas: Word, 1994]: 195). This interpretation was proposed by Saggs, who related the Hebrew to the Akkadian *musahḫiptu* ('"External Souls" in the Old Testament', *JSS* 19.1 (1974): 1–12), but few have accepted it. Greenberg draws evidence from old Jewish tradition to suggest that the term מִסְפָּחוֹת is a derogatory reference to rags that the women wore on their heads (*Ezekiel* 1–20, 239). Block has an altogether different and simpler proposal that מִסְפָּחוֹת comes from the Hebrew root *sph*, 'to join, attach'. Thus the 'attachments' might be charms tied to the head in a manner similar to a phylactery (*Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, 414). Block adds that 'Origen's Hexapla renders both *kēsātōt* and *mispāhōt* by the single word φουλακτήρια'. His proposal deserves more consideration than can be given it here.

²⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel* 1–20, 240. Zimmerli writes, 'The two-fold oracle of vv. 17ff. undeniably enters into a sphere of minor mantic acts and magic—a sphere which can only be put quite improperly under the catchword "prophetic"' (*Ezekiel* 1, 296).

The mention of barley and bread in verse 19 raises questions about whether the foodstuff was a means of divination or a payment for requested rituals. The question, then, is whether to translate the Hebrew preposition (בְּ) as ‘you profane me *with* handfuls of barley and morsels of bread’, or ‘you profane me *for* handfuls of barley’. Foodstuffs could be used for divination in two ways: performing the rituals with the barley and bread, or making a grain-offering, as in Numbers 5:15. In support of the payment interpretation, Micah 3:5 can be cited.²¹ No firm conclusion seems possible, but it was more likely payment for services rendered.²²

Ancient Israel lived in a world suffused with belief in the supernatural world of the gods, spirits, divination, astrology, magic, and sorcery. There was no Enlightenment divide between the natural and supernatural for the inhabitants of the ancient Near East. All required protection from sorcery and curses, including the Israelites who were to rely upon their sovereign God (Num. 22:12, 35). As we read the description of the women’s practices with ‘bands’, we should expect to find parallels with both Mesopotamian and other west Semitic cultures.

Bodi adduces two of the clearest examples of binding-and-loosing magic to illuminate our text. First there is the famous Akkadian *Maqlû* series of incantations which uses binding (*kasû*) in a ritual of sympathetic magic: ‘I magically bound your figure, I paralyzed [*ukassi*, lit. ‘I bound’] your limbs’. Secondly, if a person were the victim of a binding spell, the incantator would be called in to administer a magical loosing procedure, illustrated by an incantation in the *Šurpu* series: ‘May the gods of HA.A release the bond, disperse the conspiracy, sever the knot of evil magic, loosen the *kasîtu*, release the oath.’ Bodi rightly concludes, ‘[i]t is fitting, therefore, that we understand Ezekiel’s use of *keset* in the sense of the Akkadian *kasîtu*’.²³

²¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 297; Block, *Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, 416–17. Others regard the amount as too paltry to serve as payment (e.g. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 240). One could argue against this, however, considering both the deprivation experienced in exile and in Judah and the price of a seer mentioned in 1 Sam. 9:7.

²² See the Talmud (*b. ‘Erub.* 64b, cited in Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel*, 45); Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 297; *pace* Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 244–45. Block tentatively supports the *beth pretii* understanding: ‘for handfuls’ (*Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, 411, 416–17).

²³ Daniel Bodi, ‘Ezekiel’ in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009): 4:433. He cites two collections: Gerhard Meier, *Die assyrische Beschwörungssammlung Maqlû* (Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1967): VII:71; and E. Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian*

A Sumerian incantation (CT 58 79, lines 5–7) charges seven semi-divine ‘mother-sorceresses’ who reside in the netherworld as the archetypes of all human sorcerers inflicting witchcraft on our world. The specific accusations are similar to the language of Ezekiel 13:

<i>ki.sikil.ra šu mu.un.du.u.ne</i>	They bind the hand of a maid,
<i>guruš.ra á mu.un.lá.e.ne</i>	They tie the arms of a lad,
<i>lú.ulu3 níĝ.aka im.mi.in.ak.aka.ne</i>	They make machinations against a man. ²⁴

Scholars have found an abundance of similar ancient ‘binding’ texts from many eras and locales, including the ancient Near East²⁵ and the ancient Mediterranean.²⁶ Binding and loosing magic was apparently ubiquitous.

Incantations (AfOB 11; Graz: E. Weidner, 1958): IV:67–70. Another *Maqlû* incantation (I: 34–35) includes the words, *kišruša puṭṭuru ipšētuša ḥulluqu ; kal amātuša mala šēra*, ‘Her knot is loosed, her sorcery is brought to naught, and all her charms fill the desert’ (tr. R. Campbell Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia* [London: Luzac, 1904]: II:xxxvii). The *Maqlû* series in its present form probably dates to the early first millennium BC and is the fullest and most important of the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft texts. Tzvi Abusch announced he will publish a new English translation in the series, *Writings from the Ancient World*. A new German translation from Abusch and Schwemer appeared in the *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments (NF)* series, vol. 4 (2008): 128–86.

²⁴ Cited in Yitschak Sefati and Jacob Klein, ‘The Role of Women in Mesopotamian Witchcraft’ in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, Part II, ed. Simo Parpola and R. M. Whiting (CRRAI 47/II; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002): 573. For the full text, see A. Cavigneaux and F. N. H. Al-Rawi, ‘Textes Magiques de Tell Haddad (Textes de Tell Haddad II). Deuxième partie’, *ZA* 85 (1995): 19–46.

²⁵ One is an Akkadian complaint against witches to the sun-god Šamaš: ‘They have seized my mouth, caused my neck to tremble, ... Weakened my heart, bound (*√kasû*) my arms, bound (*√kasû*) my knees, bound up my moving feet, ... filled my body with stiffness and debility’ (W. G. Lambert, ‘An Incantation of the *Maqlû* Type’, *AfO* 18 [1957–58]: 290–91 [16–19]), cited by Tzvi Abusch, *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature* (AMD 5; Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2002): 90. Cf. the Sumerian text K 1289, which speaks of a witch tying the sufferer’s tongue, blocking his mouth, and binding his limbs by applying sorcery to a substitute figurine (A. Falkenstein, *Die Haupttypen der sumerischen Beschwörung literarisch untersucht* [LSS (NF) 1; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1931]: 25–27); the Hittite ‘Ritual for the Purification of God and Man’, tr. by Albrecht Goetze (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts [ANET]*, ed. James B. Pritchard [3rd edn; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969]: 346, lines 33–38), and ‘Ritual to Counteract Sorcery’ (*ANET*, 347, ii.29–iii.9); and the Egyptian evidence in Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (SAOC 54; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1993): 113–44.

²⁶ Christopher A. Faraone, ‘The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells’ in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): 3–32; John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

4. A Fresh Look at the Daughters' Activities and Roles

Many commentators identify the daughters as malevolent witches among the exiles²⁷ who cast binding spells in black magic. Block writes, 'These are not prophets as Ezekiel understands the office; they are witches, black magicians, charlatans'.²⁸ Hals too regards them as engaged in 'black magic', a 'syncretistic practice' likely influenced by Babylonian 'manipulative magic'.²⁹ There are probably two connected ideas implicit in such discussion, both debatable: (1) binding magic is black magic, and (2) the women fit the category of the evil *mēkaššēpah* (מְכַשְׁפָּה 'witch' or 'sorceress'), though this term is not found in Ezekiel 13. The Hebrew root *kešep/kaššāp* (כַּשָּׁף 'witchcraft'/כַּשְׁפָּן 'sorcerer') is a cognate of the Akkadian *kišpū/kaššāpūtu* ('witchcraft'), which 'designates both the evil actions performed by a witch and the resulting evil which takes possession of the patient, makes him impure and binds him'.³⁰ Akkadian terms for practitioners of black magic are *kaššāpu* (m.)/*kaššāptu* (f.) ('sorcerer/sorceress').³¹ One finds some

²⁷ The judgement in 13:9, 'they shall not enter the land of Israel', indicates that the male prophets were exiles. See Block, *Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, 405. On account of the linkage between vv. 1–16 and 17–23, readers surmise that both the male and female groups had been exiled in 597 BC.

²⁸ Block, *Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, 417.

²⁹ Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel* (FOTL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989): 88–89. G. A. Cooke says, 'Prophetesses is too good a name for them; witches or sorceresses would suit the description better. They played upon the credulity of the people by magic arts, designed to injure the good and benefit the bad' (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936]: 144). Marjo Korpel has written that the daughters hunted souls for use in 'black magic', killing them, ultimately so 'the prophetesses turned sorceresses will be able to manipulate' them as birdlike spirits ('Avian Spirits in Ugarit and in Ezekiel 13' in *Ugarit, Religion and Culture*, ed. N. Wyatt, W. G. E. Watson, and J. B. Lloyd. [UBL 12; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996]: 104). Bowen believes the oracle presents the women as 'witches', with Ezekiel filling the role of a Mesopotamian *āšipu* or priest-exorcist, known for using the *Maqlû* incantations ('Daughters', 420–22). Similar is the view of Dale Launderville, *Spirit & Reason: The Embodied Character of Ezekiel's Symbolic Thinking* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007): 217–34.

³⁰ Tzvi Abusch and Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals* (vol. 1; AMD 8/1; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011): 2. In Mesopotamia the sorcerer was typically not construed as 'someone whose innate character and abilities identify him or her as a witch' or as 'a demonic, superhuman being'. Rather, that one was regarded as a fellow human being who has 'used specific sorcerous techniques' or 'acquired a professional knowledge of such techniques and ... been employed by other people to deploy [his/her] skills against the patient' (3). However, *Maqlû* sometimes does portray the witch as a demonic, superhuman figure (6).

³¹ See *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD)*, ed. Ignace J. Gelb et al. (21 vols.; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–2006): K:291–92. In the literature, the male agent

slight evidence that identifiable ‘sorcerers’ could find acceptance and positions of influence in ancient Near Eastern society,³² if they employed their magic to good ends, but the general picture is that they were ‘outsiders’, feared and cursed by the general population as a potent, malicious threat to people’s well-being.³³ They were, in fact, associated with demons in popular thinking because of the ‘misuse’ of magic.

The difficulties in identifying the daughters simply as black magicians are several. They seem to have had acceptance and influence within the exilic community, and feared practitioners of malignant, odious *kešep*³⁴ are unlikely to have had such a social status. Ezekiel 13 indicates that the women were combining several roles: they practised prophecy (v. 17), binding magic³⁵ (v. 18), and *qesem* divination (קֶסֶם, v. 23), and saw visions (v. 23).³⁶ Though interpreters challenge a traditional, strict functional dichotomy between religion and ‘licit’ magic, terming the daughters ‘black magicians’ denies them a religious role. It scarcely seems possible that the women did not understand their actions as ‘religious’ in a real sense.

We turn now to the first of the debatable ideas mentioned previously: can we say that binding magic is categorically black magic? Certainly it is true that the ANE sorceress continually used

noun never appears on its own without reference to a female counterpart, and ‘the Babylonian stereotype of the witch is clearly gendered’ as female (Abusch and Schwemer, *Corpus*, 5).

³² See Jer. 27:9 (though the term may be used here, and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in the broad sense of a magician influenced by foreign religion, without discriminating between defensive ‘white magic’ and aggressive ‘black magic’); Exod. 7:11; and Dan. 2:2. In a letter to the Assyrian king, one of his servants, Kudurru, pleads to be received back into the monarch’s good graces; he proclaims, ‘I have sent many sorceresses to the king, my lord; the king may check’ (‘371. Plant of Life and Sorceresses to the King’ in Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* [SAA X; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993]: 308).

³³ See especially Tzvi Abusch, ‘The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature: The Reworking of Popular Conceptions by Learned Exorcists’ in *Babylonian Witchcraft*, 3–25; and CAD, K:291–92.

³⁴ The term appears only in the plural *kēšāpim* (כֶּשָׁפִים).

³⁵ The Akkadian for ‘binding magic’ is *kasītu* (CAD, K:243–44).

³⁶ Some recent scholarship reflects on this complication of activity by exploring whether the women were engaged in necromancy similar to that practiced in Ugarit (Korpel, ‘Avian Spirits’), or ‘ritual medical activity’, i.e. the work of ‘a titled holy woman (the female prophet) who assisted at birth, performed any required rituals, and provided a prognosis’ (Bowen, ‘Daughters’, 425, 427), or technical diviners performing necromancy like Emarite *munabbiātu* ritualists (Stökl, ‘The מַתְנַבְאוֹת in Ezekiel 13’, 69–76).

binding magic, and her ‘knots’ were dreaded. In addition to the examples cited earlier (fn. 24), here is a prayer-complaint to the god Šamaš against a witch:

She gripped me ($\sqrt{abāru}$ III), bound me ($\sqrt{kasū}$),
 grasped me, [... ed me],
 She filled me with stiffness and debility,
 Took away my sexual drive, caused me to turn against myself,
 Twisted my muscles, sapped my strength,
 Caused my arms to fall limp, bound ($\sqrt{kasū}$) my knees,
 Afflicted me with discord, squabbles, misery, anxiety,
 panic, fear, curse, terror, worry, sleeplessness, stupor, apathy, <misery>,
 unhappiness, and ill health.³⁷

One response to such binding black magic was to seek out the *āšipu*³⁸ (similarly ^{LÚ}MAŠ.MAŠ or *mašmaššu*), a religious ‘exorcist’, to untie the knots. In the famous *Maqlû* series of incantations against witchcraft, the *āšipu* was trained to recite the following (IV:108–16).³⁹

<i>6 ina māti irakkasani riksī</i>	Six in the land tie knots,
<i>6 riksišina 7 piṭrua</i>	Six are their knots; seven are my
	loosings.
<i>ša mūša ippušanimma</i>	What they tie by night
<i>ša kal ūmi apaššaršinati</i>	I untie by day.
<i>ša kal ūmi ippušanimma</i>	What they tie by day
<i>ša mūša apaššaršinati</i>	I untie by night.
<i>ašakkanšinati ana pī^dgirra qāmi</i>	I put them in the fire that scorches,
<i>qālī kāsī kāšidu</i>	burns, binds, and seizes
<i>ša kaššāpāti</i>	the witches.

³⁷ *Bît Rimki* (‘House of Ritual Bath’), the ‘second house’, lines 20–28. For full transliteration and (a different) translation, see Jørgen Læssøe, *Studies on the Assyrian Ritual and Series bît rimki* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1955): 37–45. Note that $\sqrt{abāru}$ III can be translated ‘bound’ (*CDA*, 2; *AHW*, I:4).

³⁸ See *CAD*, A/II:431–35. For more discussion, consult E. K. Ritter, ‘Magical-expert (= *āšipu*) and Physician (= *asû*): Notes on Two Complementary Professions in Babylonian Medicine’ in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger*, ed. H. G. Güterbock and Th. Jacobsen (AS 16; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965): 299–321; Brigitte Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, Band I: Untersuchungen zu Kult, Administration, und Personal (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981): 247; Michael S. Moore, *The Balaam Traditions: Their Character and Development* (SBLDS 113; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990): 33–41; Cynthia Jean, *La Magie Néo-assyrienne en Contexte: Recherches sur le métier d’exorciste et le concept d’āšipūtu* (SAAS 17; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2006); JoAnn Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia* (AMD 3; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006).

³⁹ Meier, *Maqlû*, 32–33 (transliteration modernised). Cf. *CAD*, K:437 which cites a text reading, ‘to untie the evil knots they have tied against him’ *kišir lumni ša iḫšurūšu paṭāri* (4R 55 No. 2:6).

Besides the defensive action of untying knots, there was also a second response, more directly relevant to our study. In a clear case of fighting fire with fire, or in this case curses with curses,⁴⁰ the *āšipu* could practise binding magic against the witch. This was more in the class of legitimate ‘white magic’ and could involve prayer, for example to the goddess Girra (II:82–84):

<i>attama nādin ūrti u tēmi</i>	It is you who give orders and instruction,
<i>epiš lumni attama arhiš takammu</i>	You are quick to bind ($\sqrt{\text{kamū}}$) the evil-doer
<i>lemnu ayyā[bu] takaššad arhiš</i>	and the wicked enemy you strike down. ⁴¹

The *āšipu* could also address the incantation directly to the witch, and the binding spell invokes the gods—Girra in the following—to deal in the severest way with the evil-doer and her magic (IV:69–73).

<i>aktamīkunūši aktasīkunūši</i>	I have bound you, have tied you,
<i>attadīkunūši</i>	have handed you over
<i>ana ^dgirra qāmī qālī kāsī</i>	to Girra, who scorches, burns, binds,
<i>kāšidu ša kaššāpāti</i>	and seizes the witches.
<i>^dgirra qāmū lipaṭṭir riksīkunu</i>	May the fiery Girra untie your knots,
<i>lipaššir kišpīkunu [lipašš]ir</i>	undo/loosen ⁴² your sorcery, [undo?] your offerings.
<i>sirqīkunu⁴³</i>	

One must conclude that binding magic was not the sole preserve of the *kaššāptu* ‘witch’, but was also used by the *āšipu* ‘exorcist’ against the

⁴⁰ In *Maqlû* V:147, the *āšipu* says to the witch, ‘May the curse of my mouth [... *destroy/undo?*] the curse of your mouth’.

⁴¹ Cf. *Maqlû*, V:55–60, where the authority of the goddesses is invoked. The exorcising incantator says, ‘Indeed, break (pl.) the knots of my sorcerer and my witch (*kaššāpiya u kaššāptiya*)! Turn her sorceries into a storm-wind, her words into wind! May her sorceries be blown away like chaff, broken off like a garlic-clove (peeled away like garlic-skin?), be beaten (stripped off?) like a date, undone like palm-fiber twine! By the order of Ištar, Tammuz, Nanaya, the mistress of love, and of Kanisurra, the mistress of the sorceresses (*kaššāpāti*).’

⁴² See $\sqrt{\text{pašāru}}$ 10.a in *CAD*, S:242.

⁴³ One must ignore Meier’s restoration (... [*li-na-as*]-*si ir-ki-ku-nu*) of line 73 (p. 31) and read the last word as *si-ir-ki-ku-nu* (Knut L. Tallqvist, *Die assyrische Beschwörungsserie Maqlû* [Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae 20.6, n.d. (1895)]: 68 [IV:73 in Meier is IV:59 in the Tallqvist edition]; cf. *CAD*, S:317 [*sirqu* A.b]). The restoration above follows the lead of Abusch in ‘The Revision of Babylonian Anti-witchcraft Incantations: The Critical Analysis of Incantations in the Ceremonial Series *Maqlû*’ in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, ed. Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked [Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011]: 41).

kaššāptu in a battle of magicians.⁴⁴ Binding magic could also be curative, as applied by the *āšipu*. Though one might be inclined to think otherwise, the term ‘exorcist’ is still a fitting moniker for the *āšipu* in his role as healer, since Mesopotamians regarded illness and other afflictions as often resulting from demonic activity. An example of binding magic from the *Ašakkī Maršūti* series (XI:89–95) for a suffering patient-client, illustrates that removing illness and expelling demonic influences were nearly identical aims.

Bind ($\sqrt{\text{kašāru}}$) a bandage on that man,
 Perform the incantation of Erida,
 Invoke the great gods
 That the evil Spirit, the evil Demon, evil Ghost,
 Hag-demon, Ghoul,
 Fever, or heavy Sickness
 May be removed and go forth from the house!
 May a kindly Spirit, a kindly Genius be present!
 O evil Spirit! O evil Demon! O evil Ghost!
 O Hag-demon! O Ghoul!
 O Sickness of the heart! O Heartache!
 O Headache! O Toothache!
 O Pestilence! O grievous Fever!
 By Heaven and Earth may ye be exorcised!⁴⁵

In Tablet IX of the *Ṭi'i (Di'u)* ‘Headache Series’ (74–92), we read an elaborate example of a binding ritual and spell to cure a headache. Note that later in the same tablet (235–39) the sick man is said to be bound so as to send away the ultimate cause of the malady: ‘the evil spirit’ and ‘the evil demon’.

Take the hair of a virgin kid,
 Let a wise woman spin (it) on the right side
 And double it on the left,
 Bind ($\sqrt{\text{kasû}}$) twice seven knots
 And perform the incantation of Eridu,
 And bind ($\sqrt{\text{rakāsu}}$) the head of the sick man,
 And bind ($\sqrt{\text{rakāsu}}$) the neck of the sick man,
 And bind ($\sqrt{\text{rakāsu}}$) his life [or ‘soul’],
 And bind ($\sqrt{\text{rakāsu}}$) up his limbs;

⁴⁴ Sometimes, however, the battle lines were not so clearly drawn. There is surprising evidence that the ‘exorcist’ might hire another ‘witch’ to join forces against the one targeted *kaššāptu*. In *Maqlû*, I:39–41, there is the boast, ‘What you have ensorcelled, I know it. What I have ensorcelled, you do not know. What my witches (*kaššāpātiya*) have ensorcelled, none can undo; it has no undoer.’

⁴⁵ Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits*, II:34–37. This volume is available digitalised (RCT_devils_babylonia2.pdf) from <http://rbedrosian.com> (96–99).

And surround [or ‘stand round’] his couch,
 And cast the water of the Incantation over him,
 That the headache may ascend to heaven
 Like the smoke of a peaceful homestead,
 That like water-lees poured out
 It may go down into the earth.⁴⁶

One concludes that ancient Near Eastern binding magic is not essentially black magic. It *could* be practised by the Babylonian *kaššāptu* or the Judahite *mēkaššēpah* as black magic, but binding magic was just as likely to be performed to alleviate disease, illness, suffering, and even non-physical afflictions brought on by an attack of witchcraft. A second conclusion follows. In Ezekiel 13 the daughters’ binding magic does not necessarily mean they fit the category of the *kaššāptu* witch. I propose that the binding magic in Ezekiel 13 may more plausibly be interpreted as defensive and curative ‘white magic’ such as was practised by the *āšipu*,⁴⁷ and even the *asû*-healer (fem. *asātu*)⁴⁸ who worked in conjunction with the *āšipu*. I make no argument that the women were formally initiated into the profession of *āšipu*,⁴⁹ merely that they could have been influenced, both in their homeland and in exile, to practise *āšipu*-type magic in their community. Consider the following points.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits*, II:70–73 (132–35). Rather than the symptom of ‘headache’, Jensen (KB 6/1 542–43) suggests that *di’u* may have been malaria (*CAD*, D:166).

⁴⁷ Other Ezekiel scholars have argued that the binding magic suggests Babylonian influence and called attention to the *Maqlû* series as relevant for understanding the actions and role of the daughters, but none to my knowledge has proposed interpreting the women as imitating the work of the *āšipu* and his female helpers in the art of *āšipûtu*. E.g. see Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, tr. Cosslett Quin (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970): 169; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 297; Block, *Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, 413; Bowen, ‘Daughters’, 420–22, 429.

⁴⁸ ‘The respective roles of the *āšipu* and *asû* have been reconsidered recently, and the clear-cut distinctions between their activities are no longer seen as definitive (Scurlock 1999). It now seems that the *āšipu* was required to have considerable knowledge of medicine, usually thought of as *asûtu*, and many medical texts have been found in the private archives of the *āšipu* of Assur’ (M. J. Geller, ‘Incantations within Akkadian Medical Texts’ in *The Babylonian World*, ed. Gwendolyn Leick [New York/London: Routledge, 2007]: 393). See the text ABL 1133 r. 11: *issēn āšipu issēn LÚ.A.ZU ina pañya lipqidma [is-sa-ḥ]a-meš dullī[šunu] lēpušu*, ‘let him appoint one exorcist and one physician for my service and let them perform their rites together’ (cited in *CAD*, A/II:346).

⁴⁹ ‘The professional art of magic and healing (*āšipûtu*) was restricted to males, but at the same time women, on a lower and more private social-level, were widely involved in the preparation of remedies and food, the care of the sick and the safe delivery of newborns’ (Abusch and Schwemer, *Corpus*, 5).

(1) There would not necessarily have been a language barrier to learning and using *āšipu*-style incantations taken from exorcistic and medical manuals like *Maqlû* and *Šurpu*. Though one may be dubious about Ezekiel or the daughters having any access to, or ability to read, cuneiform materials such as the *Maqlû* series,⁵⁰ it is plausible that they may have had available to them folk-versions of these or similar materials in another language. If the tradition of therapeutic and anti-witchcraft incantations was so ancient (e.g. Sumerian healing incantations (ŠÀ.GIG) from the mid-third millennium),⁵¹ the Jews may have had practitioners even well before the exile. With the increasing use of Aramaic in the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the early Sixth Century BC, one should consider the possibility of folk-versions of *Maqlû* materials and other magical texts being available in Aramaic. Such may have come into use with Jewish adaptations.⁵² There is archaeological evidence for Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft incantations similar to *Maqlû* being transmitted over the centuries to the Jews in the Aramaic language; could this have been occurring early on?⁵³ Further,

⁵⁰ This is a difficult question. Some scholars believe Ezekiel had access to Assyrian/Babylonian literature and cuneiform materials: Michael C. Astour, 'Ezekiel's Prophecy of Gog and the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin', *JBL* 95.4 (1976): 567–79; Stephen P. Garfinkel, 'Studies in Akkadian Influences in the Book of Ezekiel', (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1984); Margaret S. Odell, 'Genre and Persona in Ezekiel 24:15–24' in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong (SBLSS 9; Atlanta: SBL, 2000): 208–214; Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (OBO 104; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991); Donna Lee Pettey, *The Book of Ezekiel and Mesopotamian City Laments* (OBO 246; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

⁵¹ Robert D. Biggs, 'Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health in Ancient Mesopotamia', *CANE*, 3:1921.

⁵² I gratefully acknowledge assistance from Dr Selim Adali in personal conversations about the possible availability of folk-versions of *Maqlû*. He considers 'two possibilities, not mutually exclusive. (1) The first is the existence of Aramaic lore that included binding magical practices similar to those attested in *Maqlû*. It is not known, due to the present state of the evidence, if the oral and/or textual Aramaic tradition resembled *Maqlû* itself. (2) The binding magic practices in *Maqlû* have second millennium precedents and may have been imported early on into a uniquely Judean tradition.' Adali also referred to evidence from the second millennium that there was instruction in Akkadian cuneiform at Amarna, and cuneiform correspondence between Egypt and Canaan/Syria (Shlomo Izre'el, *The Amarna Scholarly Tablets* (CM 9; Groningen: Styx, 1997)). There was a long tradition of scribes in western regions using Akkadian and being able to translate such texts.

⁵³ Christa Müller-Kessler and Theodore Kwasman, 'A Unique Talmudic Aramaic Incantation Bowl', *JAOS* 120.2 (2000): 159–65.

one should take account of the existence of bilingual incantation texts⁵⁴ and spell-making in other languages besides Sumerian and Akkadian.⁵⁵ These facts make it more likely that therapeutic and defensive magic lore was widely available across linguistic barriers and not restricted to the scholarly Babylonian tradition of the *āšipu* guild.

(2) According to the biblical story in 2 Kings, Mesopotamian religious influence on Judah remained strong long after the reigns of Ahaz and his grandson Manasseh,⁵⁶ and religious materials were almost certainly being translated. Also, the book of Ezekiel depicts Judah's women as worshipping the god Tammuz, who is repeatedly invoked in the *Maqlû* series.

(3) The role of the Babylonian *āšipu* was known among Hebrew and Aramaic speakers, to judge from the usage of the cognate terms in Daniel ('*aššāp*, 1:20; 2:2; '*āšap*, 2:10, 27; 4:4[7]; 5:7, 11, 15), whatever date one might assign to that book.

(4) There is some overlap between the Hebrew understanding of a prophet and the Babylonian *āšipu*. The overlap is somewhat stronger if one compares the *āšipu* priest-incantator with a Hebrew priest-prophet like Ezekiel. (a) The 'exorcist' regarded himself as a servant-messenger of the gods (though not as a prophet).⁵⁷ (b) Like the Israelite charismatic prophets who healed the sick and even raised the dead (1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 5:1–14), the *āšipu* employed their magic arts to treat disease. Attached to gods' temples, the *āšipu* could be consulted to give a prognosis on the course of a disease, whether the afflicted would live or die; the same occurred with the prophets of YHWH (1 Kgs 14:1–3; 2 Kgs 8:7–11) and Baal (2 Kgs 1:1–4). (c) Like a Levitical priest, the *āšipu* could act in the capacity of a health-inspector, diagnosing diseases with the help of tablet lists of symptoms,

⁵⁴ Daniel Schwemer, 'Washing, Defiling, and Burning: Two Bilingual Anti-witchcraft Incantations', *Orientalia* 78 (2009): 44–68.

⁵⁵ Daniel Schwemer, 'Magic Rituals: Conceptualization and Performance' in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 425.

⁵⁶ See 2 Kgs 16:10–18; 17:15–19, 29–31; 21:5–6, 19–22; 23:4–12, 24, 37; 24:19.

⁵⁷ Abusch (*Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, 6) cites a self-presentation formula from Tablet VI of the Nineveh version of the exorcistic series *UDUG.ĜUL* ('Evil Demons'): 'I am the exorcist (*āšipu*), the chief temple administrator of Enki (Ea). / The lord Enki has sent me to him (the sick man), / Me has he sent to him as a messenger of E'engurra (Enki's temple in Eridu).'

assessing their seriousness,⁵⁸ and clearing people of ritual uncleanness. (d) Both the *āšipu* and Hebrew prophet could frequently be found in the palace courts or brought in as an expert consultant. (e) Both were relied upon to tell the future, at least in the sense of offering prognoses. (f) Both the *āšipu* and the ancient Near Eastern prophet were accustomed to use divination techniques. (g) The *āšipu*, who was ‘part of the scholarly world preserving myths of the gods’,⁵⁹ interceded with the gods, and sought to remove estrangement from the gods,⁶⁰ can be compared with ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew prophets. The prophets of YHWH told God’s story and interceded with him on people’s behalf.

(5) *Maqlû*-type incantations were thought (in ancient myth) to be communicated to professional practitioners by the gods and to have divine power. Thus we have the blending of magic and religion; they were one in Babylonia. The reader interpreting Ezekiel within its religio-cultural context should expect that many Jewish exiles would have felt pressure to use magic alongside religious rites carried from their homeland. There may even have been a preference for Babylonian magic among the daughters, considering that Babylonia was the dominant culture, and enculturation of conquered people was expected.

(6) The promises of white magic would have been especially attractive to the exiles with their emotional and physical needs. As traumatised people torn from the security of home,⁶¹ they would have felt especially vulnerable to all sorts of threats: to their physical safety and health, social position within the wider Jewish community and

⁵⁸ A. Leo Oppenheim writes that, after making a diagnosis based upon their tablet lists of symptoms, ‘[t]hey predicted the course of the disease from signs observed on the patient’s body, and they offered incantations and other magic as well as other remedies indicated by the diagnosis’ (*Ancient Mesopotamia* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964]: 304).

⁵⁹ Selim Adali, in private correspondence. He adds that Babylonian tradition viewed the exorcists, along with other experts, as responsible for the transmission of the literary and scientific corpus (Paul-Alain Beaulieu, ‘Late Babylonian Intellectual Life’ in *The Babylonian World*, edited by Leick, 477). Adali gives the example of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which was attributed to *Šin-lēqi-unninni*, identified as a *LÚMAŠ.MAŠ* (W. G. Lambert, ‘A Catalogue of Texts and Authors’, *JCS* 16 (1962): 59–77).

⁶⁰ See *Maqlû*, I:6, where the client complains that, owing to witchcraft, his god and goddess are estranged from him. Cf. the *Šurpu* series which deals with human guilt and the resulting anger of the gods.

⁶¹ See Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002): 49–104; and Ruth Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur* (VTSup 154; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012).

within the Neo-Babylonian Empire, economic situation, family stability, religious identity, as well as their spiritual protection in a society renowned for sorcery. The exiles would have felt drawn to prophecy specialists promising a quick return to their homeland and to 'gifted' women promising supernatural protection in the meantime.⁶²

(7) From the standpoint of marketability, one imagines that protective/therapeutic white magic would draw in far more business, and far more regular business, than malicious black magic. Most of the community would have feared the threat of witchcraft and welcomed promises of protection, while one imagines only a small minority would have been so motivated by envy or hatred as to pay for black magic in a difficult financial situation. The women may have been opportunists who stepped in, as Zimmerli says, 'to fill up the vacuum left with the loss of the cult'⁶³ by exploiting the spiritually needy and fearful.

(8) The women combined a number of activities, according to Ezekiel's oracle against them, and it makes sense to compare two possible activity-sets. Which is the more coherent?

Set one	Set two
prophecy	prophecy
white magic	black magic
(<i>āšipu</i> -type: defensive/healing)	
seeing visions	visions
divination	divination

To my thinking, the consistently religious activities—legitimate, sanctioned, and 'religious' in the conceptual world of the ancient Near East—in set one are far more coherent.

(9) There is general agreement in the fields of ancient Near Eastern and ancient Jewish magic regarding two conclusions: the odiousness of the black arts and 'the bulk of magic being protective and therapeutic, and hence beneficial'.⁶⁴

(10) There is no question that binding magic, similar in some respects to the *Maqlû* series,⁶⁵ was prevalent for centuries in later

⁶² Abusch and Schwemer (*Corpus*, 4) argue that for most Babylonians and Assyrians 'witchcraft belief became virulent only in situations of crisis, illness, insecurity and conflict'. The Jewish exiles were probably similar.

⁶³ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1, 298.

⁶⁴ M. J. Geller, 'The Babylonian Background to Talmudic Science', *European Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter* 6 (1999): 29.

⁶⁵ Geller, 'Babylonian Background', 29.

Palestinian and Mesopotamian Jewish anti-witchcraft, exorcising, and healing incantations. Was this, perhaps, a continuation of binding magic as practised among the exiles? One Aramaic incantation includes binding (‘*sr* אסר) the client for protection and declares, ‘You are bound, girded, and belted against all demons, daevas, and evil devils’ (‘*tw*n ‘*syry whlysy wzryzy ‘l kl šydy wstny byšy*).⁶⁶ Another Jewish Aramaic binding spell invoked God’s name against hostile spirits so as to bring healing to a client.

1. Healing from heaven for D. s. A.
2. and for S. d. D., his wife, and for H. and Y.
3. and K. and M. and P. and A. and S., the children of S.,
4. and for their houses and property; that they may have children, and that they may live and endure, and that
5. no ‘injurer’ who exists in the world may plague them. And in the great name of the holy one, the holy God, whose name is one,
6. who subdues darkness under light, disease under healing, wrecking
7. under construction, violence under order, disturbance under tranquility. Subdued are all the sons of darkness under the throne of God, whose name is one.
8. *Bound* and subdued are the daevas. Refuge is taken away from evil spirits and malicious pebble-spirits and bans, and the rulers
9. of darkness, and the evil spirit and the Na’alah demon, and the demons who chain, of the night and the day; and the curses, and the necklace charms and counter-charms; and spells (lit. words) and bans,
10. and demons who rap, and those who deliver to evil forces; male and female forces of misfortune, and the mysterious voice that cries out; and the prince of poverty, and demons and daevas and devils
11. and idol-spirits, and Liliths, and workers of black magic, and potent magicians, and the seven demons who chain, of the night and of the day. They are *bound*, subdued and pressed down,
12. away from D. s. A. (names of members of his family)
13. and from their entire household, and from their possessions, and from their entire courtyard, from this day and forever. Amen.
14. Amen. Selah. ‘God said to Satan: God is enraged at you, Satan! God is enraged at you; (enraged is) He who has chosen Jerusalem. Is this not a coal plucked from the fire?’ (Zech. 3:2) [emphasis added].⁶⁷

There are Jewish incantation bowls from Mesopotamia (of uncertain provenance) that provide additional evidence in Aramaic of binding magic, and some of the language—‘bind with seven knots’—invites

⁶⁶ J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, 19, 13, cited in Baruch A. Levine, ‘Appendix: The Language of the Magical Bowls’ in Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Vol 5: Later Sasanian Times; Leiden: Brill, 1970): 346.

⁶⁷ Levine, ‘Appendix’, 353.

comparisons with *Maqlû*.⁶⁸ They illustrate the ease with which YHWH worship was blended with the magical binding of demons and sorceries, even the binding of bindings. Does the common binding magic in later eras of Jewish history make more plausible the interpretation of white magic among the daughters in Ezekiel's oracle in earlier history?⁶⁹

In summary, then, the women in Ezekiel 13 were practising binding magic (Akk. *kasītu*), but this was not necessarily abusive black magic. On the balance of argument, it seems more likely that the daughters' acceptance by the exilic community and their influence are to be explained by their white magic activities—similar to those of a Babylonian *āšipu*—combined with their prophesying, visions, and divination. Further, it seems difficult and unwise to settle on a narrower description of their activity, such as prophetic work focused on pregnancy and childbirth (Bowen)⁷⁰ or necromancy (Korpel, Stökl). A final remark here is necessary. To suggest that the women practised white magic does not deny the evidence in Ezekiel 13 that their actions were judged as profoundly harmful, even deadly in their effect.

5. Is There Death-Dealing Witchcraft in Ezekiel 13?

Just as scholarship has struggled to make sense of the terminology of binding magic and head-coverings (or amulets) in the oracle, interpreters have wondered about the effect of the rituals. Ezekiel 13:19 has the perplexing statement that the daughters are 'putting to death souls who should not die and keeping alive souls who should not live'

⁶⁸ See especially Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993): 113, 126–27 (Bowls #14 and 20). Cf. the Cairo Geniza magic recipe #16, 3.1 (T-S K, 1.91), prescribed 'to release someone who is bound (מַעֲקוּרִים)', which may well 'signify "one who is under a sorcerer's spell"' (Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells*, 178, 180).

⁶⁹ For a thorough historical treatment of the general topic, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁷⁰ Bowen offers a fascinating suggestion that the daughters' role is comparable to the Babylonian 'midwife (*šabsūtu*) and/or some other female cult functionary with similar responsibilities, such as the *qadištu*' ('Daughters', 425). Incantations including binding magic were in fact used to protect newborns. However, Bowen's still seems too restrictive an interpretation. She might have gone further and proposed a possible similarity to the *asû* medical practitioner, who could be male or female, who worked in conjunction with the *āšipu*, and was known to use incantations. See Biggs, 'Medicine, Surgery', *CANE*, 3:1911–24.

(ESV). What is this ‘putting to death’ and ‘keeping alive’? Who are the ‘persons (*nēpāšōt* נִפְשֹׁת) who should not die’ and the ‘persons who should not live’?

As expected, opinions vary. Some, including many African Bible readers, take the statement about ‘killing’ as a reference to literal physical death. This interpretation may or may not entail a world-view and witchcraft schema that believes witchcraft powers really exist, and that witchcraft *per se* has the power to harm, perhaps even the power of life and death. Besides death-dealing black magic, probably secretive in nature, how else could the victims have experienced physical death? One scholar, Hummel, discusses the possibility that the food payments to the daughters in times of shortage may have put clients’ lives at risk.⁷¹

The majority of interpreters prefer to understand the ‘putting to death’ not as an immediate and direct physical killing through the daughters’ magic practices. Instead the phrase referred to a declaration in their prophecies of who was to live and who was to die,⁷² or to the ultimate judgement of God upon ‘the Israelites (“my people”, 13:18–19) who are seduced into apostasy (“those who listen to lies”) by the prophetesses’ act of “lying” (13:19)’.⁷³ A variation on the first idea is that the women were engaged in acts of pretended ‘ritual authority’ which threatened harm to a ‘ritual enemy’ and preserved the life of a ‘ritual client’.⁷⁴ It may also be possible to blend these two ideas.

⁷¹ Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia, 2005): 375. However, he does not settle on this idea, preferring to read ‘killing’ with reference to ‘the spiritual condition of the people’.

⁷² “‘To put to death’ or “‘to keep alive’ meant no more than simply to give favourable or unfavourable omens’, according to Ann Jeffers (*Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* [Leiden: Brill, 1996]: 93). She believes Cooke (*The Book of Ezekiel*, 144–49) concurs.

⁷³ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 375.

⁷⁴ Rüdiger Schmitt explains, ‘The name of YHWH is being profaned (in v. 19) because these magical deeds were performed in the name of YHWH to mobilize him against a ritual enemy with the goal of killing him or doing him serious harm. The text also condemns healing rituals in cases where it is not the will of YHWH to let the client live. Yet the text presupposes that YHWH could be mobilized by ritual activity to heal someone who was supposed to die. ... Ezek. 13 is a text about ritual authority, and we have to keep in mind that the prophet is a priest according to Ezek. 1:3, and therefore he belongs to the group of official ritual specialists who are claiming a ritual monopoly for themselves. Thus the actual practices performed by the “daughters of Israel” are illegitimate, otherwise referred to as *kēšāpīm*, “witchcraft”’ (‘Theories Regarding Witchcraft Accusations in the Hebrew Bible’ in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion*, ed. Saul M. Olyan [Atlanta: SBL, 2012]: 191). Schmitt also speaks of the women as ‘freelance women healers’ (191). For fuller discussion, see Schmitt’s *Magie im Alten Testament*, 283–87, 360–62.

The women were certainly accused of hunting people⁷⁵ in some predatory sense (clients to manipulate?), but we cannot be certain that people were actually being killed by the ‘binding’ rituals. We may translate the Hiphil infinitive (לְהַמִּית) in verse 19 as ‘*putting to death* souls who should not die’ (ESV), or ‘*causing people to die* who should not die’, or perhaps ‘*sentencing to death* persons who should not die’ (Greenberg).⁷⁶ The last of these makes sense, if, ‘[t]hrough divinatory rituals in which they invoked God, they usurped the prophet’s privilege of declaring who would live and who would die (I Kings 14:1ff.; II Kings 1:6; 8:10; 20:1)’.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the whole Old Testament insists that putting to death and sparing life is ultimately a divine right (Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6; 2 Kgs 5:7); the women’s ritual actions and divination were thus an affront to God himself and a profanation (v. 19).

It is illuminating to compare the *āšipu* healing role at this point. As was mentioned above, the ‘exorcist’ was consulted for a sufferer to receive both a diagnosis of disease and a prognosis. The sufferer would often be told whether the affliction or disease would end in life or death. Moore helpfully summarises a huge amount of ancient Near Eastern material.

As “diagnostician,” the *āšipu* first had to decide whether an illness was of natural or supernatural origin. If (after consulting the appropriate handbooks) the diagnosis fell in the latter category, he then had to decide whether it was of divine or purely demonic origin. As “prognostician,” the *āšipu* had to face the risky task of predicting his client’s fate. Technical terms in these prognoses express the nuances between, say, an illness leading to death, or any number of less serious outcomes. Of the two major outcomes, “life” is predicted 176 times while “death” appears 423 times. In other words, the sufferer’s prognosis was usually gloomy.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ People, not ‘souls’ in the Greek sense.

⁷⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 234. The Hiphil of מוֹת (mūt) usually means ‘to kill, or have executed’ (HALOT, 563), but not uncommonly it should be rendered a bit differently, e.g. as ‘to cause to die’, or ‘to bring death’. Eugene Merrill writes, ‘One can command that another be put to death (2 Kgs 14:6), or in some other way be responsible for death, either someone else’s (Job 33:22) or his own (Prov. 21:25)’ (‘4637 מוֹת’ in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 2: 886).

⁷⁷ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 244.

⁷⁸ Moore, *The Balaam Traditions*, 39.

Is this an area where the ministry of a Jewish prophet,⁷⁹ which the women apparently claimed to undertake, and the work of the Babylonian *āšipu* overlap? Could religious syncretism have been easily practised at this point of contact? Yes, it seems so.

Biblical theology suggests a key to answering the question about ‘putting to death’. Bearing in mind the ‘watchman’ role of the prophet as explained repeatedly in the prophecy, I believe a strong case can be made for interpreting 13:19 as saying the women’s ritual actions and prophecies (essentially deceitful), were ‘causing the death’ of persons they targeted, probably through divine judgement. Ezekiel the prophet was commissioned as a watchman to speak God’s words of warning (2:4–7; 3:11, 17), and it was a matter of life and death.⁸⁰ If the prophecies were faithfully delivered and heeded, lives would be spared. Conversely, if the warnings were rejected, God’s people would die (3:17–21; 33:2–9). There would be a kind of blood-guilt upon Ezekiel if people died because he had failed to carry out his prophetic calling as a watchman. Coming back to chapter 13, we see that Ezekiel’s life-saving ministry was being thwarted by the deceitful oracles of the false prophets—those who ‘saw visions of peace for [Jerusalem] when there was no peace’ (v. 16)—and God’s wrath was about to break out. Lies and binding magic, if believed by the prophets’ audience and the daughters’ clientele, would ‘cause the death’ of many.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Here I have in mind the calling of Ezekiel and other prophets to deliver God’s promise of life to the repentant, and God’s sentence of death upon idolaters and covenant-breakers. It was not only the daughters who could declare a coming death. See, for example, Ezekiel’s using both execration rituals (4:1–3; 5:1–4) and the sharpest of judgement oracles to announce death. Indeed, even in 13:17–23 there is a ‘woe’ oracle which, as a form, declared, ‘Death is a certainty; we may as well start the funeral procession’. Cf. Erhard Gerstenberger, ‘The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets’, *JBL* 81 (1962): 249–63.

⁸⁰ To explain the term ‘putting to death’, Zimmerli (*Ezekiel* 1, 298–99) and Greenberg (*Ezekiel* 1–20, 244) make much of Ezekiel’s ‘watchman/lookout’ role and how the daughters contradicted his message. Zimmerli writes, ‘Not by chance do we find in this oracle formulations which recall by way of contrast the assertions about the prophet’s role as watchman (3:17–21; 33:1–9) and the explanations of Ezek. 18’ (296).

⁸¹ ‘Fulfillment of this [watchman] role is a means of turning the wicked from death to life and releases the prophet from responsibility for them. The women’s destructive work in this area, however, prevents the wicked from becoming aware of their true state, putting both their lives and the women’s own lives in jeopardy (13:18)’ (Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999): 175; cf. Duguid, *Ezekiel & the Leaders of Israel* [VTSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1994]: 95–98).

In conclusion the daughters brought ‘death’ to the nation by oracles that ‘encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives’ (v. 22). (In 18:31–32 God pleads, ‘Why will you die, O house of Israel? ... Repent and live!’). It is also possible that ‘the righteous’ of verse 22, who warned of divine judgement, were targeted for death-omens as the daughters’ ritual enemy, though in God’s sight they deserved to live. Those whom the daughters ‘kept alive’ (or declared life to), though they deserved to die, would be their clientele. Both the ‘causing death’ and ‘sparing life’ acts were accomplished by lies (v. 19b).

6. Biblical Theological Reflection on Ezekiel 13 and the Evil of Witchcraft/Magic

6.1 *The God of the Exodus*

A growing body of scholarship argues that Ezekiel’s prophecy not only alludes to the Exodus story but invites us to read Ezekiel and the book of Exodus (among other materials in our Pentateuch) alongside each other. The two books and the figures of Ezekiel and Moses have many parallels,⁸² and Ezekiel 13 adds to the list that the priest-prophets both face magician opponents. Ezekiel’s oracle against the women may be read as protest against any attempt to co-opt YHWH into a foreign magical belief-system. Instead of the YHWH the daughters think they can manipulate through magic, the YHWH who can be invoked in binding rituals, the YHWH they claim has inspired their prophecies, the women will come to recognise him for who he really is: the God of the Exodus who once confounded the magicians of Egypt,⁸³ the God who

⁸² Ezekiel and Moses are priest-prophets, called to declare the word of YHWH to his people captive in a foreign land, who on a high mountain receive detailed building plans for God’s sanctuary. Both use the recognition formula many times in oracles of judgement and salvation and speak of the Sabbath institution with identical language (cf. Exod. 31:13; and Ezek. 20:12, 20). Dozens of other links exist. See Block’s commentary; Henry McKeating, ‘Ezekiel the “Prophet Like Moses”’, *JSOT* 61 (1994): 97–109; John F. Evans, ‘An Inner-biblical Interpretation and Intertextual Reading of Ezekiel’s Recognition Formulae with the Book of Exodus’ (D.Th. dissertation, Universiteit van Stellenbosch, 2006): chapter 4; and Jacob Milgrom and Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel’s Hope: A Commentary on Ezekiel 38–48* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2012): 214–18.

⁸³ See the description in Exod. 7:11; 8:18 (חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם, חֲכָמִים).

acts in judgement and salvation to reveal his name, who once spoke through Moses and now speaks through a 'new Moses' named Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 20 retells Israel's story of redemption, emphasising that YHWH was delivering the nation not only from economic slavery but also from the idolatry of Egypt. God meant to take the nation out of Egypt, and take Egypt out of the hearts of his people, religiously speaking. Sorcery and magicians were part and parcel of Egypt's religion and her political power structures, to judge from the storyline of Exodus. The whole argument of Ezekiel 20 is that God now must deliver his people again along the lines of a New Exodus because she has never forsaken the idols of Egypt (and other associated habits, such as magic/sorcery). The daughters' magical practices, then, can be construed as a throwback to an idolatrous past.

6.2 *The Prophetic Role*

Ezekiel the watchman-prophet had a two-pronged calling: to warn the rebellious to turn from their evil ways and to encourage the righteous to remain faithful to the law of the Lord (3:16–21; 33:1–16). It is suggestive to ponder how Ezekiel and the daughters are presented as mirror opposites as he delivers YHWH's charge, 'you have disheartened the righteous with lies ... and you have encouraged the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way and live' (v. 22).

Because the oracle charges the women with 'profaning *me*',⁸⁴ scholars believe the daughters were delivering their unauthorised prophecies in YHWH's name. Moreover, that prophesying was condemned as lies; those exiles who accepted the women as trustworthy could impugn God with falsehood when prophecies did not come true. The knowledge of God is a dominant theme in Ezekiel's prophecy with its seventy-two recognition formulae, so Ezekiel's concern over the daughters' false prophecy with its misleading view of God is understandable.

According to the theology of Ezekiel's prophecy, the proper defence against magic and sorcery is not contravening magical incantations, but hearing and believing the word of YHWH, which speaks both grace and judgement. As the women are denounced for their manipulative ways, as the word of judgement rings out, and their power over others is

⁸⁴ This is shockingly direct language since we are accustomed to reading 'profaned *my name*'.

broken by God's intervention, they 'shall know that I am YHWH' (vv. 21, 23).⁸⁵

Both the false prophets in Ezekiel 13:1–16 and the daughters in verses 17–23 should be understood as presenting 'substitutes for true prophecy'.⁸⁶ In the religious culture of ancient Israel, what alternative was there to seeking out YHWH's word besides practising divination like the surrounding nations? Ezekiel's argument seems to set up that hard choice between competing faiths. Syncretism, though attempted by the women, does not appear possible from the biblical perspective. God's people must not practise divination and sorcery (Deut. 18:9–13), and they must not follow the ways of the nations by *listening* to diviners and sorcerers (18:14). Instead they must listen to a prophet like Moses (18:15), in this case Ezekiel, who opposes magical practices⁸⁷ and warns of coming judgement.

6.3 Assumptions in Ancient Near Eastern Magic Contrasted with Biblical Prophecy

From the perspective of biblical teaching, witchcraft and magical lore in the ancient Mediterranean and ancient Near East partook of several dangerous notions regarding the gods, the power of incantations, and the place of the messenger-servant of the gods, whether he/she be a prophet, priest, or magician. They are: (a) the gods/YHWH can be manipulated through incantations to do the will of the incantator; (b) incantations can even overpower the gods;⁸⁸ (c) the magician very nearly becomes a god in the power he/she wields.⁸⁹ This is in sharp

⁸⁵ This knowledge of YHWH, gained in the daughters' judgement, is best not construed as saving. The recognition formula ('you/they shall know that I am YHWH') does not have a positive use in Ezekiel when spoken to the nations or to the idolaters, false prophets, and 'sorceresses' of Israel. See Paul Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* (JSOTSup 51; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989): 94–97; John T. Strong, 'Ezekiel's Use of the Recognition Formula in His Oracles against the Nations', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 22 (1995): 115–33; and Evans, 'Ezekiel's Recognition Formulae', chapter 6; *pace* H. G. Reventlow, 'Die Völker als Jahwes Zeugen bei Ezechiel', *ZAW* 71 (1959): 33–43.

⁸⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 232.

⁸⁷ My colleague Steve Rasmussen prompted this line of thinking (private correspondence).

⁸⁸ According to *Maqlû*, III:50–52, the witch can 'capture [*kamû* A] the mouth of the gods, bind [*kasû*] the knees of the goddesses, and kill men'. See *CAD*, K:131.

⁸⁹ Writing about the ancient world in general, Anitra Bingham Kolenkow summarises the high status and perceived power of magicians, prophets, and diviners: 'Magicians and diviners are persons who claim a relationship with the divine; they can control the divine or become repositories or speakers of questions one asks the divine.' Describing

contrast to the true prophets of YHWH who identified themselves *with* the sinning people of God and *as* the humble servants of YHWH, dedicated to speaking his word and doing his will.

6.4 YHWH Is the One to Accuse and Punish

Ezekiel's prophecy features a predominance of divine first-person speech (*ca.* 85% in chs. 1–39). The entire oracle against the women is divine speech. Drawing from this, we make the observation that what some might term here a 'witchcraft accusation' is from God. It is not at all portrayed as an expression of suspicion on the part of society or an individual. It is rather a divine indictment of spiritual acts (prophecy, divination, visions, and binding magic) that mislead and harm.

Further, these women are not said to incur specific sanctions of the law (Exod. 22:18 [17]), but there will be, after all, a declared punishment. It is crucial to note that YHWH, not Judahite society in either the homeland or the Babylonian exile, will punish the pretend-prophetesses. The judgement is left to God. The oracle would have provided no impetus or justification for hunting down and killing accused 'witches' in Babylonia.

The findings of this paper can be applied to the issue of witchcraft today. This Ezekiel text has been used in some African churches to 'prove' that witches can kill. Horrifyingly, people then reason as follows: if witches can kill, we should find and kill them (in keeping with Exod. 22:18 [17]). Over a thousand people, mainly older women, are thus murdered as accused witches every year across Africa. But what the oracle suggests, if my reading is correct, is that the 'witch-finder'—one using supernatural means, specifically white magic, to hunt down and thwart the practitioners of black magic—is condemned for fighting magic with magic. It is more the modern witch-finder to whom this text may be applied, as a 'death-dealing' magician.

the power of magicians, she adds, 'Like a waterfall, power/energy is formed by a difference in levels; in the case of humans, between what is considered divine and human. A magician sees the need for power over what seems demonic; a god has this power; if the magician or any "divine person" has this power, the magician is a god.' ('Persons of Power and their Communities' in *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World*, ed. Leda Circolo and Jonathan Seidel [Ancient Magic & Divination II; Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2002]: 133, 142.)