



Shorter Notices

*Sasm, Sesen, St. Sisinnios, Sesengen Barpharangēs, and . . . "Semanglof"

The following is a summary of an article which I intend to publish in honor of V. A. Livshits in the next volume of *BAI*. This study ultimately owes its origin to Professor Livshits. It was he who first made the important discovery that the name of a god previously unobserved for the Iranian pantheon is represented consonantly by the letters *ssn*, occurring as part of various theophorically compounded personal names in Arsacid Parthian inscriptions (*AAnASH* 25 [1977], pp. 174ff.).

The assumption has been that this divine name *ssn* stands for *Sāsān*, found as a personal name which is somehow the source of the designation of the Sasanian dynasty. The interpretation *Sāsān* for the Parthian divine name spelled *ssn* understandably was attractive to Iranists as providing a correlation for the unexplained Parthian-Middle Persian name *Sāsān*. Thus the same interpretation of the divine name as *Sāsān* was subsequently applied to the spelling *ssn* (etc.) on Pahlavi magical seal-amulets (Sh. Shaked, and in much greater detail Ph. Gignoux, followed by R. Gyselen).

Now, although *ssn* is not problematic as the Arsacid Parthian spelling of the personal name *Sāsān*, since the orthography does not ordinarily employ ²aleph (ʔ) as *mater lectionis* for *-ā-* (cf. *ssndt*, with *-dt = dāt*), the divine name *ssn* cannot stand for *Sāsān* if, as we must, we equate this *ssn* with the name also spelled *ssn* (var. *ssny*, *ssn'*, *ssyn*, always without ²aleph) for the name of the god in the Sasanian inscriptions of the magical documents: The late Pahlavi orthography of these documents demands internal ²aleph for *-ā-*, as we find without exception in

the inscriptions containing the divine name, e.g., ²byd²t = *āyād*, ²kt²dy = *ardā*, n²mky = *nāmag*; [p²t]p[²(s)y = *pādīfrāh*; dlm²n = *darmān*; p²sp²n = *pāsbān*; ptg²m = *pay(γ)ām*; further wḥl²n = *Wahrān*; d²tbwlcmt(r)²n = *Dād-Burzmihrān*; ²twrp²t' = *Ādurbād*; etc. Note also that *ssyn* cannot stand for *Sāsān*, and that *Sāsān*, as a personal name on proprietary seals, has the *plene* spelling with ²aleph. Consequently, I distinguish two different names:

[1] The personal name *Sāsān* (eponym of the Sasanian dynasty), for which unconvincing etymologies from various roots have been offered, but which I think is merely a patronymic of *Sās* < **Sāsa-*, attested in Indo-Parthian, Sogdian, and Scythian materials, itself a reduplicative hypocoristic name like Italian *Sasa* < *Salvatore*; Persian *Sūsū* < *Sūdābe*; Mod. Hebrew *Bībī* < *Binyamīn*; Eng. *Bob* < *Robert*; or French *Zaza* < *Élisabeth*; Ital. *Totò* again < *Salvatore*; Mod. Greek *Nanos* from *Yōanis*; Spanish *Kiki* < *Enrique*, etc.

[2] The divine name *Sesen* (which explains the Pahlavi *ssyn* alongside *ssn*), from Aramaic **Sāsæn* (whence also the Late Antique Greek ΣΕΣΕΝ = *Sesen*, etc.), continuing a divinity **Sasm-* of great antiquity in the Near East.

Thus the first attestations of the form *ssn* in Aramaic, the theophoric ²bdssn on 4th cent. B.C.E. coinage from Cappadocia and Sinope, are comparable with 4th/3d cent. B.C.E. Phoenician **Abd-Sasom* (Cypriot syll. *A-pa-sa-so-mo*, Gr. ΑΨΑΣΩΜΟΣ), and, from the middle of the 2d millennium B.C.E., Ugaritic ²bdssm (alongside *bnsnm*), the oldest evidence for **Sasm-*. From the Aramaic cultural sphere the cult of *Sāsæn/Sesen* entered the realm of the Arsacids, spreading east to the capital Nisa, and further to Marv, etc. The Sasanian magical cult of *Sesen*

may be regarded both as a continuation of the Parthian cult and as an extension of the Late Antique East Mediterranean importance of Sesen in magic, itself developed and diffused by Aramaic culture.

The magically protective nature of the god is already shown from the famous "first amulet" of Arslan Tash (North Syria), a plaque which contains an extensive inscription in Phoenician written in 7th cent. B.C.E. Aramaic letters, an incantation for the god *ssm bn pdr* (the current reading, after A. Caquot and others), to ban from house and courtyard the "Stranglers (fem.)" (*ḥnqt*) and "Fliers (fem.)" (*ʿptʿ*), associated with "dark chambers." These figures are illustrated on the plaque: Sasm, wielding an axe, strides forth against the figures on the reverse: a she-wolf from whose mouth protrudes the legs of a small-scale nude human; and a winged female sphinx (note *sphinx* < Gr. = "Strangler (fem.)."

The combined inscriptional and iconographic data make it likely that this amulet is directed against an early form of the demoness(es) who attack(s) pregnant women and young children, like the Akkadian Lamashtu and the later Jewish Lilith. In Aramaic, Syriac, and Byzantine texts this demoness is referred to as a strangler (fem.) of children (similarly in Arabic), and on Byzantine and Coptic material is shown to be a winged female. As I shall discuss below, Aram. *Sisinn, Byz. Greek (St.) Sisinnios = Sesen is the opponent of this demoness.

In the corpus of Pahlavi magic seals (see R. Gyselen, *Les sceaux magiques en Iran sassanide* [1995]) we find Sesen described as "the guardian" (*pʿspʿn*) (cf. Gignoux *apud* Gyselen, p. 56, n. 182), and as a "good protector" (*ḥwpʿy* < OIr. *hu-pāya-*), the latter with iconography of sciatica (cf. Gyselen, pp. 45, 56; for "bien protégé" one would expect **ḥwpʿtk*). However, Sesen as opponent of a Lilith-like entity seems evidenced by the Sasanian seal-amulet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, on which Shaked (*BAI* 7 [1993], p. 166) has read the name of the god *ssny* and his demonic opponent *ssnmly* "death of S." P. Harper (*BAI* 6 [1992], pp. 44-45) notes that the text and iconography parallel those of Aramaic (etc.) incantation bowls, with the demonic form on the seal-amulet resembling liliths on the bowls, and the spearheads pointed at the figures comparable to the spear-

point on amulets protecting women in child birth against Lamashtu (Harper also compare the antidemonic "spear of Qatros" mentioned in Aramaic incantations). This Sesen amule (like others in the Sasanian magical corpus, c. Gyselen, p. 57) was made for a woman.

The demonic force is conjured, "Be not *mklsy* and do not seize her. If you have seized her, then quickly release her . . ." (Shaked, *BAI* [1993], p. 167). The hitherto mysterious word *mklsy* should be interpreted as further evidence of the Mesopotamian (East Semitic) background adduced by Harper. Syriac **m{ə}qarres* would mean "treating harshly, brutally" (see Payne Smith, *Lexicon*, s.v. *√qrs* in *Pa^{cc}el* form), with an exact equivalent in Mandaic meaning something like "destroying" (Drower and Macuch, *Mandaic Dict.* s.v. *QRS*, citing *ulmišdinu: uʿlmiqarsinun* "to cast them down and to destroy them" from a magical scroll).

The foregoing evidence that the Iranian seal-amulets of Sesen continue Aramaic tradition which themselves are based on older Near Eastern lore permits the interpretation of a consequential iconographic detail. One seal-amulet with close variations (Gyselen, p. 38, figs. 36-37-a, and 38, discussed pp. 36-37 and 40) show a hermaphroditic demon being smitten by an Iranian hero, to whose right is shown a palm branch. The hero is identifiable as Sesen via the inscription, *ssn mgw* "Sesen the Mage"; cf. on a similar seal the Pahlavi inscription *ssy* (thus Gignoux *apud* Gyselen, p. 37, n. 103). Another series of Sasanian seal-amulets (Gyselen p. 43, figs. 43-a and 43-b, described p. 41) show a hero brandishing a palm branch against a monster. The reverse of one of these depicts an Evil Eye attacked by beasts and weapons, for which a similar depiction occurs on a Byzantine "Seal of Solomon," on the reverse of an illustration of a mounted hero transfixing a demoness, with inscription invoking Sisinnios and Sisinnarios (the totality of iconographic elements of this Byzantine amulet being found again on a Coptic fresco of St. Sisinnios at Bawit Egypt). Gyselen reproduces the Byzantine amulet and compares it with the Sasanian (p. 59 fig. III, pp. 47 and 89-90), noting the correspondence of Gr. *Sisinnios* with Pahl. *ss(y)n* (reading this *Sāsān*, an aporia unrelieved by her allusion to the old theory that Sisinnios is of Iranian ori-

gin), and she notes the parallelism between the equestrian's cross-hafted lance and the Iranian figure's palm branch weapon.

The palm branch wielded by Sesen should, like the palm branch shown alongside Sesen, be the god's symbol. Remarkably, the same symbol is found on a Phoenician artifact from the coast of Syria, published by Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, a pyramidal stone amulet pierced for stringing, three sides of which spell out in Phoenician letters respectively s-s-m, and the fourth side shows a stylized date palm branch. I propose that here we have a kind of rebus, in which the Phoenician name of the god, *Sas(o)m*, is approximated by the sound of the Phoen. word for "[fruited] date palm branch," **sassan(n)*- or **sassin*-, cf. Bibl. Heb. *sansann-īm* pl., Neo-Aram. *sansannā*, and further Akkad. *sissinnu* "id." This rebus, I believe, has ritual underpinnings. The date palm branch was an ancient Near Eastern magic implement for curatively eliminating evil. The Phoenician rebus is comparable to a sound-play, one of a number of "conspicuous puns and alliterations" (M. Astour) in a Ugaritic charm, in which the god Hōrōn (a close associate and analogue of Sasm, see below), works against snake poison: . . . *ssnm ysynh* "and the palm-stalk [**sassin*- or the like] eliminated [**ya-sīn*-] it." The bridge between the Phoenician and Sasanian palm branch iconography of Sasm/Sesen must have been the Aramaic culture of Mesopotamia, the source of the West Iranian magical cult of Sesen, and demonstrably a continuator of the association between date palm branch and the god. [Cf. now P. O. Harper, review of Gyselen, in *BAI* 9 (1995 [1997]), p. 275, where Harper compares the palm fronds on the above-described Iranian seal-amulets with branches held by a hero/sorcerer on Aramaic incantation bowls, and she notes that Montgomery, in connection with these bowls, referred to the Babylonians' ritually repelling demons by holding aloft a date palm.]

In Mesopotamia the Akkadian word *sissinnu* was maintained as Syriac *sysn*² [**sīsinnā*] "the fruited branch of a date palm" (cf. Bab. Talm. *sysyn* "name of a medicinal plant"). This plant name was the source of the personal name Bab. Talm. *sysyn* (*Sīsīn*) and of *Sisinnios/Sisinēs* (WMIr. *sysyn*, Arab. *sysn*, i.e., **Sisin*{n}, the name of Mani's successor, as noted [from D. Arnaud]

in M. Tardieu's demonstration that the famed Manichee was from Kas(h)kar on the eastern bank of the Tigris in Babylonia. *Sisinnios* was also a Christian name from the end of the first century onwards, frequent for martyrs of the 4th cent., especially under Diocletian, to whose period was attributed St. *Sisinnios* of Antioch, the magical opponent of the demonic afflictress of childbirth.

The name of the mythical "saint" shows the secondary association of *Sesen* with **sīsinn*- "fruited date palm branch." The coexistence of the names *Sesen* and *Sisinnios* for this magical figure is attested, alongside the West Iranian material, in Armenian charms for childbirth which associate Saints *Kiprianos* (Cyprian) and the rhyming *Sisianos* (= *Sisinnios*), paralleling Syriac charms concluding with the names of St. Cyprian and St. Sesen (mry ssn). Apart from St. *Sisinnios* of Antioch and Christian contexts, the vocalism **SisVn* (V = various vowels) is found in a variety of forms in incantations: ΣΙΣΙΕΡΩ alongside ΣΕΣΕΣΡΩ and ΣΕΣΕΝΡΩ in Greek magical papyri; Mandaic *Sisan*; Coptic **Sisin*; and Gr. ΣΙΣΟΧΩΡ; see below. The variation *i* for *e* is explained by the word for "date palm branch," influencing the independent but similar-sounding name of the god (see paragraph after next), who subsequently became one of the saints with the "vegetal" and/or pagan cultic name *Sisinnios*.

The diverse iconography of the Sasanian corpus of seal amulets has what must be recognized as yet another representation of Sesen (Gyselen, pp. 27, 29, and 31, with progressive schematization), hitherto identified, on flimsy grounds, as Gayōmart or as an archdemon (for both, cf. Gyselen, pp. 80-85). The figure, whose outré face and direct glance (p. 27) are apotropaic features, bears lances transfixing a serpent and a scorpion, or otherwise controlling them. I compare with these a "gem," first published by Gori, showing a figure armed with two lances, and bearing the inscription ΣΕΣΕΝΙΕΜ. The Phoenician god Shadrappa on reliefs of the early c.e. from Palmyra, like the Iranian representation which I identify as Sesen, holds a lance around which winds a serpent, as on the staff of Asclepius, while a scorpion touches his shoulder. The connection of Shadrappa and Sesen is seen from, e.g., an Aramaic incantation with šsn̄y²l

and šdrps, which explains the š- of šsn- (for -g- and -y², see below). Already in 6th-5th cent. B.C.E. Sicily, the Punic Shadrappa was a chthonic god, like Hōrōn/Hawrān (with whose cult Shadrappa was associated, e.g., in Sardinia and Egypt), and as a chthonic god was also a controller of reptiles and a general repeller of poison and disease (as was Hōrōn) already in the Ugaritic snake charm; other Syrophenician chthonic gods, Eshmun and Merōh, similarly have power over reptiles and illnesses).

Still at 3d cent. C.E. Amathous, Cyprus, *Sisin = Sesen, merged with Hōrōn, is addressed as "the great ΣΙΣΟΧΩΡ, *Sisokhōr*, who opens the gates of Hades." Here Hōrōn is metonymized as his etymon, Hōr "The Pit." The underworldly Sisin alone is similarly addressed at the end of a Coptic papyrus containing a charm to ease childbirth: "the keeper of Hades, the ringlets of whose hair stretch out over the whole world, Sisinai Amin [= Gr. *ΣΙΣΙΝ, ΑΙΕΙ, ΑΜΗΝ "Sisin, forever, Amen!]." The connection of Sisin and Hōr is anticipated by the first Arslan Tash amulet, in which the incantation of Sasm is followed by one of Hōrōn/Hawrān. Here Sasm himself is also linked to the underworld, for his full epithet is *ssm bn pdr* "Sasm the son of Pidrai"; *Pidrai* (Ugar.) = "(the goddess) of the City (= the Underworld)," cf. Sumerian *Nergal* "Lord of the (Infernal) City," and perhaps similarly the underworldly Ugar. *Milk-qart*, Phoen. *Melqart* "King of the City."

This now allows an explanation of the very common fuller Late Antique name of Sesen, ΣΕΣΕΝ (more usually ΣΕΣΕΝΓΕΝ *Sesengen*) ΒΑΡΦΑΡΑΙΤΗΣ *Barpharaggēs*, to cite the most frequent spellings. The mysterious ΒΑΡΦΑΡΑΙΤΗΣ (pronounced /Barpharaggēs/, with ΓΓ = /ng/, as usual) is a hybrid Aramaic-Greek name like that of the magical divinity Syr. br t²wn, brt²wn *Bar-Theon*, either simply "Son of the Gods," from Syr. *bar* "son (of)" and Gr. θεῶν *theōn* "of the gods" (gen. pl.), or, as the context favors, from *bar* "son of" and Gr. -θεὸν *theōn* (stereotyped from acc. sg.). ΒΑΡΦΑΡΑΙΤΗΣ is accordingly from Aram. *bar* "son (of)" and *Φαραγγῆς *Pharaggēs* /Pharangēs/ "of *Pharangē," the latter *Φαραγγῆ being an adjectival feminine name created *ad hoc* upon Gr. φάραγξ *pháragx* /phárank/, stem φάραγγ- *pharagg-* /pharang-/ "gully, crevasse, chasm." The name of Sesen's mother would parallel Hōr(ōn) "The

Pit" in etymology and continue the same net erworldly reference as *Pidrai*, Sasm's mother.

The infernal nature of Sesen/Sisin(n)'s moth is further indicated in Late Antique Aramaic by *prgws lylyt²* "the lilit P," with *prgws *prgys* = ΦΑΡΑΓΓΗΣ via the frequent confusion of the Aram. letters y and w, in amulets Aram. *sngyn² ggn br prggws* = (Se)sengen *Barpharagg* (cf. *swwgn brprwngs* or *sysgyn brprwngs*) alongside *sng wprngys* "Seng and Pharangēs" (si The Syriac equivalent of *prgws lylyt²* is *prgrwh² qšy²* "P, the violent spirit" (Gignoux, *Incantations magiques syriaques* [1987], p. 1156; there is no connection with πέλαγος "sea

We find the paired names Byz. Sisinnios and Sisynodōros, or Sisinnios and Sinodōros, or Sisinios and Sisithia, or Sisinnios and Sisinarios, Sisinnios and Sinēs, etc., on magic texts against the afflictress of childbirth. With these compare the two flanking names on a Sasanian magic seal (Gyselen, p. 31, fig. 14), *ssn* and a second *nar* (Gyselen, p. 30 *snynyn*, and [on a *different* seal type 2.4.1, published by Gignoux!], p. 56 *snyn* (?) [standing opposite to *ssny*]; perhaps, alternatively to *snyn-*, one may read *sngn-*, cf. *Seseng* > *Seng* above, and see my next paragraph).

The Byzantine material also shows a triadic format of names of the "saint": Sisin(n)ios, Sin and Synodōros (Sēnodōros, *yē = /i/*, etc. The corresponding birth-protecting triad of angels on the Jewish side, which figure on bowls and amulets containing *historiolae* very similar to the found on the Byzantine side, are *swny*, *swwr* and *snygly* (variants *s²wny*, *ss²wny*, and *sngw* or *s²wny*, *s²swny*, and *syngw*, etc.). These may represent **syny* (= Gr. *Sinēs*) and **sysyny*, again with *w* for *y*, and for *snygly/sngw*, *syngw*, etc. cf. Syr. *shsyghl* (*brprngys*) = *Sesengen Barpharaggēs*; the Aram. *-l* may have been dissimilated to Gr. *-n* (**Sesenangel* > **Sesengel* > *Sesengen*, cf. the invocation ANNNFA in a Greek magic papyrus?). Later (10th cent. seq.) Jewish childbirth amulets against Lilith spell the names *snw* (*synwy*), *snsnw*, and *smnglwp* or *smnglp*, although for the last angel, Iranian lapidary amulets of the 19th and early 20th cent. (reported often have only *smngl*. The latter *smngl* I derive from *ssngl*, with **smngly* > **smnglw* and = *-f* < *-w/v*.

The names of the later Jewish triad of angels were found on amuletic objects (paper hanging clothes, etc.) throughout the Jewish world in

the present century, and amulets bearing their names are still sold in Israel today (with iconography, once quite varied, now chiefly imitative of drawings in the Amsterdam, 1701, first printing of the *Sefer Raziel*).

My study brings together and expands three hitherto separate bodies of scholarship, which are addressed to (1) the continuum from the ancient Syrophoenician *Sasm to Late Antique Greek and Aramaic Sesen and Sesen Barpharangēs; (2) the Parthian and Middle Persian magical material featuring Sesen (until now mistaken for a god "Sāsān"); and (3) the mythical Eastern Christian St. Sisinnios and his company, and the related Jewish angel triad(s), who protect childbirth. The united data document the 3,500-year (and continuing) longevity of a magical god through various transformations, which have shown both an interesting variety and a recurrence of features across a great geographical spread and a great length of time.

For material summarized here I have made extensive use of data on the Syrophoenician and Late Antique material on the god in question given by W. Fauth, *ZDMG* (1970), pp. 229–55. The more recent studies of the first Arslan Tash amulet include those of A. Caquot, *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* (1973), pp. 45–51; G. Garbini, *OA* (1981), pp. 278–87; and (for the amulet's authenticity) J. van Dijk, *Iraq* (1992), pp. 65–68. For Phoenician

religion in general, I drew on E. Lipiński, *Dieux et déesses de l'univers phénicien et punique* (1995). For the Aramaic, note Ch. D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (1975). For the comparison of the Late Antique Jewish Aramaic birth incantations with similar Byzantine material, I have used *inter alia* J. Naveh and Sh. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 2d ed. (1987), esp. pp. 105–22 and 188–97; however, I offer a very different account of the etymological relationships of the numinous names: {*Sasm* > *Sesen* >} *Sisinn*- > {*sw*}*swny*, etc., which, with my account of *smnglwp*, would provide a solution to the long-sought problem of the origin of the angelic triad. Finally, for more details on the attestations and identifications of *ssn*, etc., on the Iranian magical seals, cf. Ph. Gignoux's paper, and my appendix to it, in the forthcoming *Proceedings of the 1995 Conference of the Societas Iranologica Europaea*.

My complete article will also discuss such matters as the role of *ssny*²l, etc., in Jewish angelology; the misreading of Aram. *sysyn* as *swswn*-, etc., and **sys(n)gr*, *swsgr*, etc., as the origin of a mystique of horses (Heb. *sws*, etc.) in Aramaic, Byzantine, Pahlāvi, and late Jewish birth amulets, etc.; and the broad role of *Sesengen Barpharangēs* in Late Antique magic.

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Martin Schwartz