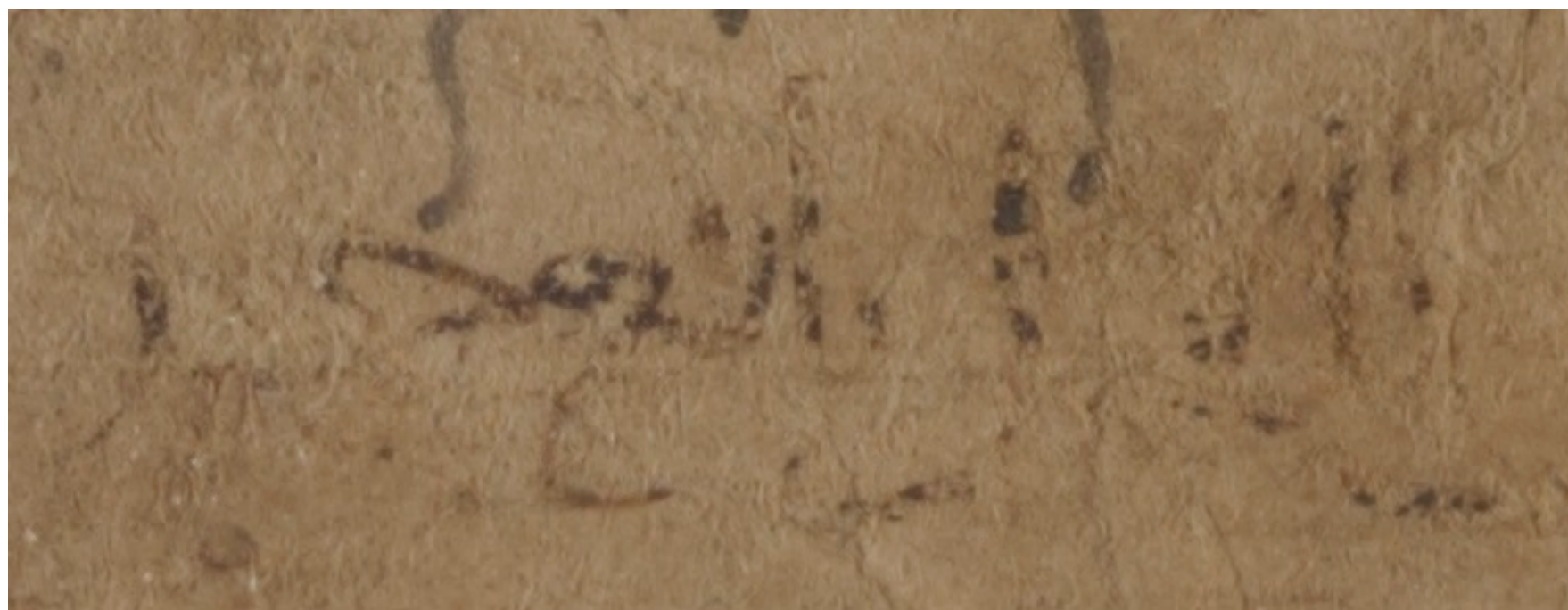


Fragment of the Month: September 2007

‘Destroy the life of N.N.!’: A magical recipe: T-S AS 162.51

Friedrich Niessen, Gideon Bohak



Cropped section from T-S AS 162.51 recto

‘Take a plate of lead and write on it in the first hour of the day; bury it in a new grave which is three days old’. Thus starts a Judaeo-Arabic instruction preserved in the Additional Series (T-S AS 162.51) that we have recently discovered and identified. The paper sheet measures 12.8 cm x 8.9 cm with 14 lines of text on one side only.

One may ask why somebody would offer such strange advice. Yet, the real nature of the text emerges from the Aramaic/Hebrew portion that follows in which certain angels are addressed by their Hebrew names ‘Anger’, ‘Wrath’, ‘Rage’, ‘Fury’ and ‘Destroyer’ and characterised as ‘those who are appointed (read: דממנין instead of: רחמנין) to destroy all mankind’.

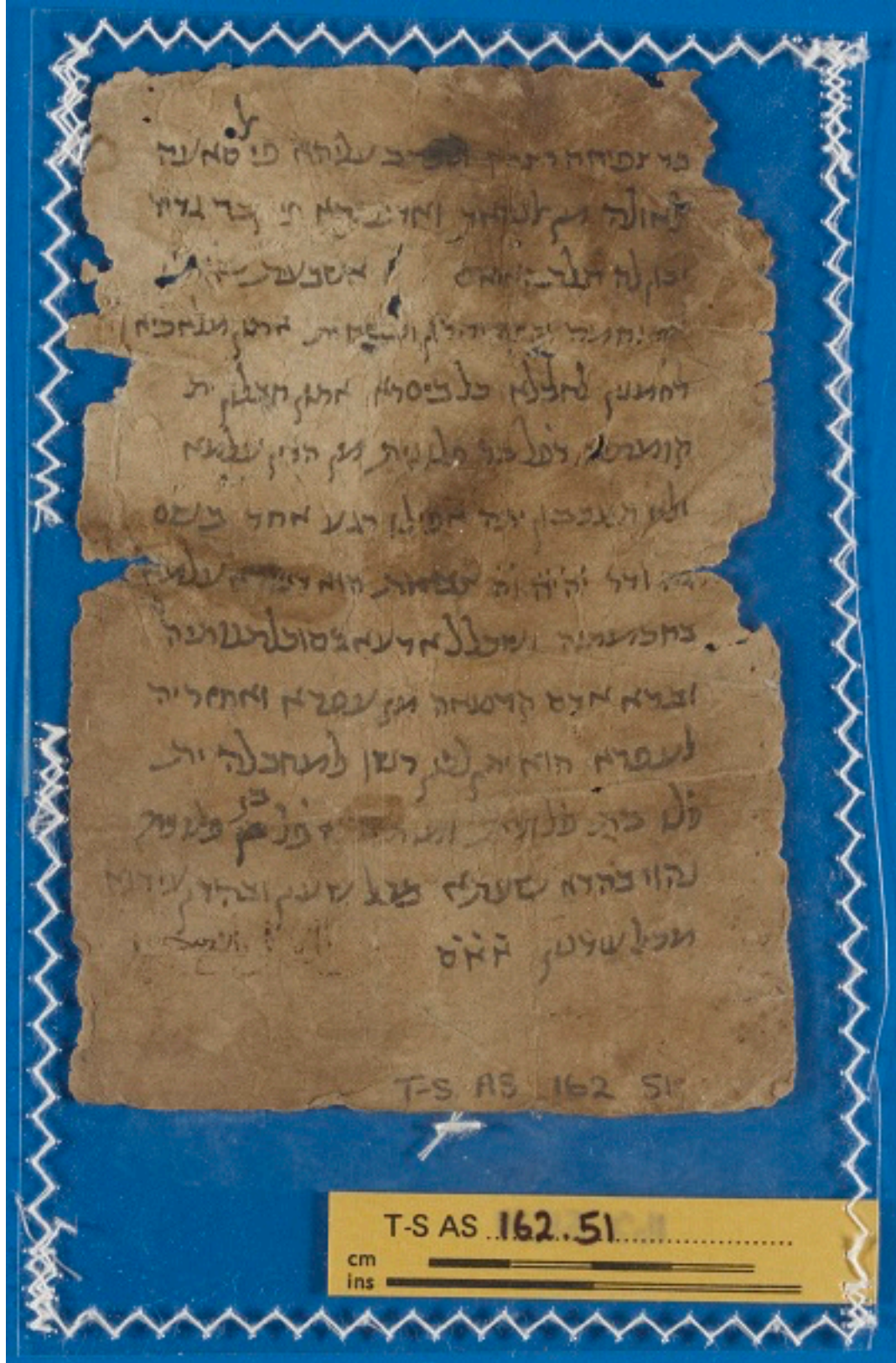
These angels are adjured to invoke their destructive power: ‘Destroy the life of N. son of N. from this world and do not delay it (i.e. his death) – not even for a moment – in the name of Gehudar Yahyah Wah of Hosts who has created the world in His wisdom and completed the earth in His thoughtfulness and created

the First Man from dust and let him return to dust – He shall give you permission to destroy N. daughter of N., and the death of N. son of N. shall be in this very hour and in this very moment. Amen. Amen. Sela.'

After the Aramaic/Hebrew text, we find the remark in Arabic that this curse is very useful and effective for causing death (للقتل نافع جيد).

This text is one of many magical texts which ended up in the Cairo Genizah. It can be categorised as a magical recipe for eliminating the existence of a certain person. The name of this person is not mentioned, but only the phrase 'N. son/daughter of N.' In other words, the text is a form to be activated by adding the names of the person intended.

Close parallels to this magical recipe are found in T-S K1.56 and Mosseri VI.26.2. There is also a curse produced according to this recipe in Mosseri VI.17.2 with blank spaces awaiting the name of the unfortunate victim.



T-S AS 162.51 (recto)

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