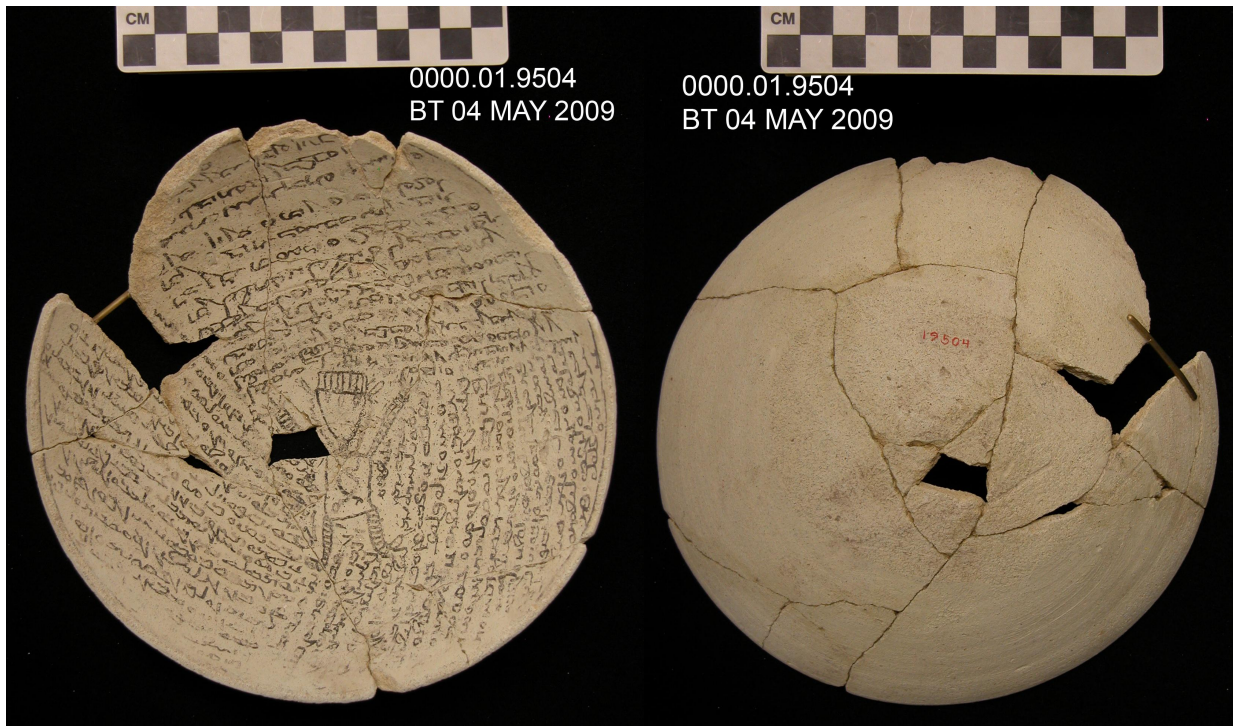


Ancient Medicines

- Look carefully at the object pictured here.
- In the space at the bottom of this page, make a sketch of the object. (Don't worry — you don't need to show it to anyone. Sketching helps you see details you might otherwise miss.)
- Answer questions 1–4 on page 2 about how this object was used in the ancient Mediterranean.
- When you have answered all the questions, read the museum label below (no peeking!) and answer question 5.



Questions

1. What material do you think the object is made of? Do you think it's rare or common? How do you think it was made? Why is this important to know?
2. Does this object look like a medical tool to you? Why or why not?
3. How do you think you might use this object to treat a patient?
4. How does this object compare with other medical tools you have seen, such as in a doctor's office or at a healing ceremony?

Museum Label

Title: Incantation bowl

Material: Ceramic bowl with carbon-based pigment

Date: 226–622 CE (Sasanian Period)

Findspot: U-M excavations at Seleucia on the Tigris, Iraq

Object number: KM 19504

This clay bowl is painted with an image of a human figure wearing protective amulets. The inscription, in legible Aramaic (Mandaic), tells us that the bowl was made for a woman named Negray.

People living in Mesopotamia during the Sasanian period used bowls like this one to protect themselves from curses and evil spirits. A person could purchase a bowl from a ritual expert and have it inscribed with a protective spell (or have an existing inscription personalized). The person seeking protection would then bring the bowl home and bury it under the floor of their house. The best place to bury an incantation bowl was in a corner or near a doorway — places where an evil spirit might enter. It was believed that an evil spirit who entered the house would be drawn to the bowl and be trapped by the net-like writing.

The inscription says:

[...] Negray daughter of Denday and from her male sons and [...] I have heard and the voice of the weak [...] of the men who are fighting [...] of raging women who curse and afflict and cause pain they have descended against them [Azdai], Yazdun and Yaqrun, Prael the great and Ruphael and Sahtiel and seized them and by the tufts of hair and the tresses of their heads and broke the horns which were high and tied them by the tufts of hair of their heads and said to them "remove that which you have cursed" and they said to him "from the pain of our heart we cursed and from the bitterness of our palate we resolved to curse" I have made you swear and adjure you in the name of Azdai and Yazdun and Yaqrun and Prael the great and Ruphael and Sahtiel that you release and free [...] Negray daughter of Denday and [...] male and female from [...] all the curses [...] cursed and from the curses of [...] and the mother and from the curse of the prostitute [...] and the fetus and from the curse of the employee and employer who stole the wage and from the curse of the brothers who did not

divide truthfully among themselves and from the curses of all people who curse in the name of idol demons and their surrenderings you are the healer you are the healer who heals sicknesses with words you are the healer who turns away the sicknesses and the curses of those who cursed Negray daughter of Denday in the name of Azdai and Yazdun and Yaqrun and Prael and Ruphael and heal and annul the curses of those who curse Negray daughter of Denday. And upon a stone which is unsplit I sat [...] and I wrote all of the curses upon a new bowl of clay and I sent back the curses of those who cursed Negray daughter of Denday to their masters until they release and bless in the name of Sariel the angel and Barakiel the angel and in the name of Sariel and Barakiel you release from the curses of those who curse Negray daughter of Denday as a man is freed from the house of bondage and from the house of weapons amen amen selah [...] may there be health and sealing [...] and to the house of Negray daughter of Denday and to the male sons [...].

5. How do your ideas about this object compare with what you read in the museum label?