The Akkadian and Sumerian texts associated with the profession of the exorcist in ancient Mesopotamia — commonly referred to as ẖišipûtu, the lore of the exorcist — form one of the largest and most complex bodies of cuneiform texts. At the same time, the ritual instructions, prescriptions, prayers and incantations of this corpus of texts, often subsumed under the broad category ‘magic’, represent a prolific source of information on ancient Mesopotamian religious thought, intellectual concepts, ritual practice and social structure.

The reconstruction of the corpus of ẖišipûtu texts and the editorial work on the pertinent cuneiform manuscripts and compositions usually follow the lead of the organizational patterns that have shaped the transmission and arrangement of exorcistic texts in antiquity. The most pervasive of these patterns is the principle of aetiology that categorizes texts according to the source of evil, the agency (Akkadian qatu), that was considered to be the (potential) cause of a person’s suffering or misfortune: the ghost of a deceased person, a specific demon, the transgression of a taboo, witchcraft, the wrath of a deity, etc. Other organizational patterns include the type of remedy that is used (e.g., amulet necklaces) or the type of person that is concerned (e.g., infants).

Especially when dealing with comparatively well-defined bodies of texts that were already organized in (more or less) fixed series and collections by Babylonian and Assyrian scholars, there is a tendency of fragmentation in Assyriological research. Grappling with the challenges of decipherment and text reconstruction, scholars often have to neglect a broader approach to ‘their’ individual branch of ẖišipûtu that would compare its development to other text groups of the overall body of exorcistic texts and explore its relationship and potential connections to such texts (conceptual, textual, contextual).

Conversely, the editorial work on exorcistic texts that did not form part of an ancient series often has to cope with a multiplicity of transmission contexts, some of them with implications for the actual use of a ritual, incantation or prescription. With regard to many text groups, the definition of what actually constituted the body of ẖišipûtu texts is far from self-evident, especially when ‘magical’ and ‘medical’ texts (or therapeutic strategies) are transmitted together or explicitly combined.

By bringing together a group of specialists with extensive experience in editing cuneiform magical and related texts, the conference ‘Sources of Evil’ aims to explore various perspectives of interpreting the lore of ẖišipûtu beyond the editorial work on individual subgroups of texts.
Wednesday, 15 April
from 12:00 Refreshments

Session 1 (Chair: Daniel Schwemer)
14:00–14:30 Welcome and Introduction
Daniel Schwemer (Würzburg)
14:30–15:30 Concepts of Illness in the Exorcist’s Lore: Magic and Medicine, Magic versus Medicine, or neither Magic nor Medicine?
Nils P. Heeßel (Würzburg)
15:30–16:00 Coffee

Session 2 (Chair: Barbara Böck)
16:00–17:00 Mesopotamian Incantations in the Schøyen Collection
Andrew R. George (London)
17:00–18:00 Ina luminum attali Sin: On Evil and Lunar Eclipses
Francesca Rochberg (Berkeley)
18:30 Reception in the Antikensammlung of the Martin von Wagner Museum

Thursday, 16 April

Session 3 (Chair: Nils P. Heeßel)
9:00–9:55 Witchcraft and Incantations against Human Rivals in the Old Babylonian Period
Avigail Wagschal (Jerusalem)
9:55–10:50 Making New from Old: The Case of the Collection of Incantations ‘Embrocation’ (Muššu’u)
Barbara Böck (Madrid)
10:50–11:00 Coffee

Session 4 (Chair: Andrew R. George)
11:00–12:00 Aspects of the Transmission and Contextualization of Magical and Medical Knowledge
Troels Pank Arbøll (Copenhagen)
12:00–13:00 The Growth of Akkadian Incantations: Some Examples
I. Tzvi Abusch (Waltham)
13:00–14:00 Lunch

Session 5 (Chair: Stefan M. Maul)
14:00–15:00 The “Exorcist’s Manual”: Structure, Language, ‘Sitz im Leben’
Eckart Frahm (New Haven)
15:00–16:00 The Assur Medical Catalogue: Some Thoughts Regarding the Mesopotamian Healing Professions
Strahil V. Panayotov / Ulrike Steinert (Berlin)
16:00–16:30 Coffee

Session 6 (Chair: I. Tzvi Abusch)
16:30–17:30 Between Man and the Netherworld. The Winds as Means of Transport in Mesopotamian Incantation Texts
Enrique Jiménez (New Haven)
17:30–18:30 A Taxonomy of Gods and Demons
Frans A. M. Wiggermann (Leiden)
19:00 Dinner for all speakers

Friday, 17 April

Session 7 (Chair: Francesca Rochberg)
9:00–10:00 Heilvorschriften zur Lösung eines ‘Banns’
Stefan M. Maul (Heidelberg)
10:00–10:30 Coffee

Session 8 (Chair: Eckart Frahm)
10:30–11:30 Jenseits von Gut und Böse – Patterns of Power Play in Egalkura and Related Texts
Henry Stadhouders (Utrecht)
11:30–12:30 Evil Helpers: Instrumentalizing Agents of Evil in Anti-witchcraft Rituals
Daniel Schwemer (Würzburg)
12:30 Lunch