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CONTENTS

Constantinos BALAMOSHEV

SB V 8754: Apostoloi, antapostoloi, and the Ptolemaic grain transport 1

Abstract: This paper offers new annotated readings and corrections to the original edition of P. Berlin inv. 16876 = *SB V 8754* (from the archive of Harchebis, the royal scribe of the Herakleopolite nome), also discussing subsequent corrections proposed by various scholars in the past. Special attention is placed on the *hapax legomenon* technical term *antapostoloi*. The connection of these documents with the term *apostoloi* is investigated as well as their function within the framework of the shipping procedure and the officials involved in their issuance. Finally, appended is a transcription that reflects the current state of the papyrus, together with a translation into English.

Keywords: Ptolemaic, first century BC, grain transport, samples, administration, archives, *naukleros*, *dioiketes*, *sitologos*, *strategos*, *basilikos grammateus*, *apostoloi*, *antapostoloi*, *phylakitai*, ship security guards, shipping, shipowners, corrections.

Tomasz BARAŃSKI

*The Arabic text of SPP VIII 1198 and its significance
for the study of Arabisation of the Egyptian administration* 17

Abstract: The paper offers a reading of remnants of the Arabic text of *SPP VIII 1198*. The Greek part of this bilingual document has been known for a long time, but it could not be dated precisely with the indiction date preserved in the text. The dating formula that can be deciphered in the Arabic part allows the reconstruction of the exact dates for this and another tax receipt, *PERF 573* = *SB XVIII 13771*, issued most probably by the same official.

Different tax quotas indicated in the document are discussed as well. Moreover, an effort is made in the article to understand the identity of the issuing official and the document's place of origin. Although it is almost certain that the tax receipt comes from the Egyptian province, it can be hypothesized that it was written originally in the capital city Al-Fuṣṭāṭ. Finally, some general conclusions about the process of the Arabisation of the Egyptian administration are drawn.

Keywords: Greek, Arabic, bilingual documents, early Islamic Egypt, fiscal administration, tax receipt, Herakleopolis Magna, Ihnās.

Lajos BERKES & Naïm VANTHIEGHEM

Maṭar and metron in papyri: The Greek origin of an Arabic measure 31

Abstract: Edition of the Arabic account P. Louvre inv. E 6380 originating from the Fayum and dating to the second half of the eighth century. The document strongly suggests that the Arabic measure *maṭar* derives from the Greek *metron*.

Keywords: papyrus, Arabic, metrology, villages, Fayum, administration, lexicography.

Anne BOUD'HORS

The Coptic ostraca of the Theban hermitage MMA 1152.

3. *Exercises (O. Gurna Górecki 97–161)* 41

Abstract: Following the articles published in *JJP* 47 and 48, further sixty-five ostraca discovered by Tomasz Górecki in the Theban hermitage MMA 1152 are published here. They are labelled 'Exercises', a general designation covering different categories, namely extracts of Psalms and other edifying texts, prayers, lists of word, alphabets, and drawings. They are somehow introducing us to the intellectual and spiritual life in the hermitage.

Keywords: Coptic, ostraca, Western Thebes, MMA 1152, exercises, education, piety.

Lucia C. COLELLA

P. Vindob. inv. G 13753 recto e verso:

Due documenti del dossier di Aurelia Demetria alias Ammonia 97

Abstract: In this paper, two documentary texts preserved on P. Vindob. G 13753 are edited. The first one, written on the recto, is a further copy of the

marriage document already known from SB XXVI 16502. The other one, on the verso, is an account of receipts and expenditures. Both texts can be ascribed to the Hermopolitan dossier of Aurelia Demetria *alias* Ammonia.

Keywords: P. Vindob. G 13753, *P. Vindob. Boswinkel* 5, SB XXVI 16502, marriage document, account, Aurelia Demetria *alias* Ammonia.

Karol KŁODZIŃSKI

An equestrian procurator's 'unequal colleague'?

Reinterpreting the career of the imperial freedman Ulpian Paean 125

Abstract: The role of freedman procurators in Roman administration of the principate period is still unclear. While the division into equestrian and freedman procuratorships is well documented and studied (particularly by H.-G. Pflaum and P.R.C. Weaver), neither the explanation behind it nor adopting the criterion of less important (freedman) or more important (equestrian) procuratorships is entirely convincing. Reducing the work of freedman procurators (having the same titles as *equites*) to merely assisting equestrian procurators (under 'unequal collegiality') can be disputed as well. By re-interpreting the career of the imperial freedman Ulpian Paean and calling upon other careers, the article argues that some imperial freedmen could have held equestrian procuratorships as their superiors.

Keywords: inscriptions, procuratorships, roman government, principate, provincial administration, appointment policy, Roman emperor, imperial freedmen, *equites*.

Grzegorz OCHAŁA

Nubica onomastica miscellanea IV. Notes on and corrections to personal names found in Old Nubian documents from Qasr Ibrim 143

Abstract: The fourth instalment of the 'Nubica onomastica miscellanea' series offers a massive batch of corrections to personal names found in Christian Nubian sources. The anthroponyms discussed in this paper come exclusively from Old Nubian documents discovered at Qasr Ibrim and published by Gerald M. Browne and Giovanni Ruffini. The article includes simple re-readings of anthroponyms on the one hand and more elaborate reinterpretations of whole phrases containing them on the other. Identification with known foreign names and etymologies for many local Nubian names are proposed, greatly contributing to our understanding of medieval Nubian naming practices. Last but not least, many ghost-names are identified and their true meaning is explained.

Keywords: Christian Nubia, Qasr Ibrim, Old Nubian, onomastics, ghost names.

Przemysław PIWOWARCZYK

<i>Microtheologies behind the Biblical amulets: Six case studies</i>	253
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Abstract: Recent years witnessed an increasing interest in Christin amulets with Biblical texts. Several catalogues and monographic contributions have been published, facilitating the research on historical and religious aspects of these artefacts. The paper offers a methodological framework, founded mainly on the concept of semiophore formulated by Krzysztof Pomian, as well as six case studies, which show how the analysis of material and textual aspects of a scriptural amulet might reveal theological ideas, more or less consciously shared by its producers and users.

Keywords: magic, Biblical amulets, scriptural amulets, texts of ritual power.

Angelina TROIANO

<i>Sul Fragmentum Riccardi e la Lex Aelia Sentia in TH² 89</i>	281
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Abstract: In the recent *secunda cura* of the *Tabulae Herculanenses*, Giuseppe Camodeca has completely rebuilt the dossier TH² 8911 about the acquisition of the Roman citizenship by the *Latinus Iunianus* Venidio Ennico. Thanks to this study, it is currently possible to make further considerations about the procedure described in the *Fragmentum Riccardi* and its relationship with the *lex Aelia Sentia*.

Keywords: *Tabulae Herculanenses*, Roman citizenship, *Lex Aelia Sentia*, *Fragmentum Riccardi*, *anniculi causae* probation.

Jakub URBANIK

<i>Józef inter gentes: On status and law between the centre and periphery</i>	289
---	-----

Abstract: Following the footsteps of Józef Méléze Modrzejewski and reassessing his law-custom theory, the essay explores the principles of law-application under Roman law. Passages from Ps.-Menander's *Epideictic Treatises* and Gregory the Miracle-Worker's *Eulogy of Origen* are confronted with the selected papyrological evidence of apparent 'conflict of laws' faced by the Roman jurisdiction: the petition of Dionysia (*P. Oxy.* II 237), and a text concerning the testamentary freedom of the Egyptians (*P. Oxy.* XLII 3015), and finally with a fragment of a juridical work attributed to Volusius Maecianus (*D. XIV 2.9 pr.*). In conclusions, a new take of the problem is presented. I suggest the principle ordering the choice of competent law be *lex posterior derogat legi priori*. Thus, after the Roman conquest the old norms remained in force until expressively abrogated by a new Roman precept: be it in a form of a judicial decision (in line of the Roman magistrate-law making), or new imperial legislation.

Keywords: *Constitutio Antoniana*, *consuetudo*, usage, *Reichsrecht*, *Volksrecht*, Menander Rhetor, Dionysia, provincial law, conflict of laws.

Marzena WOJTCZAK

'Legal representation' of monastic communities in late antique papyri 347

Abstract: While focusing on the issues such as spirituality, faith, prayer, and discipline, the late antique literary discourse pays little attention to the engagement of monks in the mundane realities of daily life. The symbolic significance of the total withdrawal from the earthly matters have paved its way into common imagination of the monastic existence. One must, however, remain cautious while attempting to translate monastic writings into the reality of day-to-day life of a monk in Egypt. As shown by numerous papyri, social and economic relations between monks and the surrounding world were not sporadic, but an inevitable element of the monastic movement. The picture of Egyptian monasticism depicts a web of contacts with the 'outside world' and an entanglement of religious landscape in the local economy. In this article, I discuss only one aspect of the much broader issue, that is the existence of 'legal capacity' of monastic communities in late antique Egypt. I address the problem of 'legal representation' of monasteries as outlined in the sources of legal practice. For a lawyer, these observations are all the more stimulating as there has been an ongoing debate whether 'legal persons' as such existed at all in Roman law, and whether we could talk about anything approaching our current understanding of 'legal personality'.

Keywords: monks, monasteries, legal capacity, Late Antiquity, papyri, legal representation, *dikaion*, *diakonia*, Roman law, legal practice, Justinian, Egypt.

Przemysław Piwowarczyk

**MICROTHEOLOGIES
BEHIND THE BIBLICAL AMULETS
SIX CASE STUDIES***

INTRODUCTION

THE PAST TEN OR SO YEARS have brought an intensified interest in Christian biblical amulets.¹ Several catalogues have appeared, as well

* The article was written as part of the project nr. 2015/18/A/HS3/00485 funded by the National Science Centre (Poland). The concept of this paper was first presented during the conference ‘Od zwoju do e-booka’ at the Jagiellonian University, Poland, 15 October 2018, and later, in an expanded form, at the Seminar of Ewa Wipszycka held at the Warsaw University, 11 April 2019. I thank all the participants of both meetings for their valuable comments and suggestions. I also thank Joseph Sanzo for providing me with the essential literature and useful remarks. I thank also two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggested improvements. All errors are my responsibility alone.

¹ In the case of amulets consisting of biblical passages alone or the major part thereof, their Christian nature does not seem to raise any doubts. The non-Christian elements are usually absent and recognition of the Scripture’s power confirms the Christian identity of their users and producers. To that, we may add that the amulets under consideration were produced in the period after the Christianisation of Egypt was completed. Technically, the amulets containing Psalm verses might have been of Jewish origin, but the Jewish community in Byzantine Egypt was marginal and did not use Septuagint – quoted in all extant amulets (except for short passages according from Genesis in Aquila’s translation quoted

as studies on particular categories of these artefacts.² Although a major catalogue of Christian amulets, not to mention a corpus, is still a desideratum, and the amount of source material grows every year, it has already been made possible to research the historical and religious context of these objects.

By 'amulet' I mean, in the words of Theodore de Bruyn, 'an item that is believed to convey in and of itself, as well as in association with incantation and other actions, supernatural power for protective, beneficial, or antagonistic effect, and that is worn on one's body or fixed, displayed, or deposited at some place.'³

By 'biblical amulet' I mean an amulet which quotes a biblical passage or passages even if other texts are also present. Amulets of this kind belong to a wider category of textual amulets.⁴ Such semiophores (I will elaborate upon this term in a later section of this paper) are usually considered magical artefacts. However, in this paper, I restrain from the term 'magic' since, for many ancient Christians, the ritual use of the biblical words opposed 'magic' as such. Origen insisted: 'it is clear that Christians make no use of spells (οὐδεμιᾷ μελέτῃ ἐπωδῶν), but only of the name of

together with LXX in *P. Amb.* I 3) – anymore. In the case of amulets in Coptic, we have no single piece of evidence of its usage in a Jewish milieu.

² R. M. HERNÁNDEZ, S. TORALLAS TOVAR, 'The use of the ostrakon in magical practice in Late Antique Egypt. Magical handbooks vs. material evidence', *Studia Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 80.2 (2014), pp. 780–800 (the paper contains a survey of ostraca containing texts of ritual power); J. SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt. Text, Typology, and Theory* [= *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum* 84], Tübingen 2014; B. C. JONES, *New Testament Texts on Greek Amulets from Late Antiquity*, London 2016 (these two studies include the corpora of relevant texts); T. S. DE BRUYN, *Making Amulets Christian. Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts*, Oxford 2017. R. B. SARRAZIN prepared a general catalogue of the texts of ritual power in Coptic: 'Catalogue des textes magiques coptes', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 63 (2017), pp. 367–408.

³ T. S. DE BRUYN, 'Papyri, parchments, ostraca, and tablets written with biblical texts in Greek and used as amulets: A preliminary list', [in:] T. J. KRAUS, T. NICKLAS (eds.), *Early Christian Manuscripts. Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, Leiden – Boston 2010, pp. 145–189, esp. p. 147.

⁴ Terminology regarding the amulets has been scrutinised by D. C. SKEMER, *Binding Words. Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, University Park, Pennsylvania 2006, pp. 10–19. The book as such deals with late medieval amulets.

Jesus with other words which are believed to be effective, taken from the divine scripture.⁵ Near the end of the 4th century, John Chrysostom, who in principle condemned the wearing of amulets by Christians,⁶ had nothing against keeping a book of the Gospel on the body.⁷

Amulets containing biblical passages constitute a significant but not dominant group among the amulets used by Egyptian Christians. In their catalogue of 85 certain amulets in Greek containing Christian elements, Theodore de Bruyn and Jitse Dijkstra listed 23 items with biblical quotations. It is, however, evident that this number does not represent the entire body of evidence and, in the case studies presented below, I also reached beyond it.⁸

I apply two theoretical approaches which originated outside papyrology and were not originally designed for analysis of the ‘magical’ material to research on biblical amulets. In addition, I use intuition born in the circle of literary critics and book designers. All three perspectives seem to have the potential to contribute significantly to our understanding of the theological ideas behind biblical amulets.

New Philology (also known as Material Philology) was born out of traditional philology dealing with medieval texts. Since the manuscript tra-

⁵ Origen, *C. Cels.* 1.6, text: Origène, *Contre Celse*, vol. 1 (livres I et II), par M. BORRET [= *Sources Chrétiennes* 132], Paris 1967, p. 92; tr. H. CHADWICK, [in:] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Cambridge 1980, p. 10. On anti-magical rhetoric in the Christian texts of ritual power, see J. SANZO, ‘At the crossroads of ritual practice and anti-magical discourse in Late Antiquity: Taxonomies of licit and illicit rituals in Leiden, Ms. AMS 9 and Related Sources’ (forthcoming).

⁶ John Chrysostom, *Jud.* 8.6.

⁷ John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.* 72.2.

⁸ T. S. DE BRUYN, & J. H. F. DIJKSTRA, ‘Greek amulets and formularies from Egypt containing Christian elements: A checklist of papyri, parchments, ostraka, and tablets’, *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 48 (2011), pp. 163–216. Additional thirty semiophores containing biblical passages appear on the list of 47 probable amulets. This proportion proves that the presence of biblical passages was an important criterion in compiling this part of the catalogue. Among the semiophores presented here as case studies, DE BRUYN and DIJKSTRA list only *P. Oxy.* VIII 1151 (no. 21), and *MPER N.S.* XVII 10 (no. 8). *P. Oxy.* LXXXVI 5073 was published after their paper had appeared, and the other three are Coptic.

dition remains highly complex in many cases, some philologists came to the conclusion that the basis for a study on old texts should be a given manuscript in its physical form because no text exists without its material support. Therefore, New Philology does not attempt to establish a hypothetical archetype that finally proves to be nothing more than the creation of modern philologists and differs from all extant manuscripts.⁹ Thus, in the case of amulets, it is not important how much they could contribute to the restoration of the 'original' biblical texts, but why, in a particular semiophore, the biblical quotations are represented in given form, referring especially to their length, textual variations (*variae lectiones*) and organisation in more complex textual units. The biblical amulets indeed play a minor role in the biblical criticism since they are usually short and relatively late, but, nevertheless, they are mainly investigated for comparison with other witnesses of biblical tradition. Obviously, New Philology demands a precise description of a given manuscript from papyrological, codicological and palaeographical point of view. Referring to these issues, I rely on the opinions of proficient scholars.

Krzysztof Pomian's metahistorical concept of the semiophore is based on a similar assumption about the indissoluble link between literary work and the material medium.¹⁰ Pomian defines semiophores as objects 'which were of absolutely no use (...) but which, being endowed with meaning, represented the invisible.'¹¹ The point of departure for study on a semiophores ought to be a description of a given object in its material form and only subsequently a reconstruction of its social or theological meanings. It is important to stress that the status of a semiophore (as well

⁹ Introduction of basic principles of New Philology by H. LUNDHAUG & L. I. LIED, 'Studying snapshots: On manuscript culture, textual fluidity, and New Philology', [in:] IDEM, *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions. Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, Berlin 2017, pp. 1-19.

¹⁰ The early stage of this concept was outlined by K. POMIAN in his *Collectors and Curiosities. Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 26-34 (first published in French in 1987). Over the course of time, Pomian developed his ideas, cf. K. POMIAN, 'Jak uprawiać historię kultury', *Przegląd Historyczny* 86.1 (1995), pp. 1-13, at pp. 4-8, and *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, Lublin 2006, pp. 120-130 (both accessible only in Polish).

¹¹ POMIAN, *Collectors and Curiosities* (cit. n. 10), p. 30.

as other objects) is not an intrinsic feature of the object but is conferred upon it by an observer who takes it out of its context and puts it on public display. In the case of amulets, we are often dealing with hidden objects (covered by clothing, buried), which nonetheless retain a certain presence and functionality, and therefore do not lose their status. But if their function is lost, they become 'things,' which in Pomian's terminology refers to objects used for actions on other objects, or 'waste.'¹² The roles can, after all, vary and depend on the contexts in which the given semiophore takes place. In regard to amulets, the concept of the semiophore needs not only a precise description of material support (which would be enough in light of the New Philology), but encourages us to search for social and religious interpretations by enquiring into its meaning.

The producer of an amulet did not have freedom comparable to that of modern poets in terms of creating the material and textual shape of the semiophore. He was restricted by the capabilities of technology, the long shadow of literary traditions and scribal habits. However, we may assume that he enjoyed a certain liberty, an assumption which seems justified when we take into account the variety of ancient amulet production.¹³ If so, he was writing down a given amulet with a view to its future readers. The textual amulet, then, is a direct source for an investigation into the implicit knowledge of how the ancient Christians imagined the reading habits of spiritual beings, deities and demons and means applied to control their reading – since the assumed readers of amulets of this kind were spiritual beings, and outsiders were not supposed to read them.¹⁴ Because

¹² The very recent 'thing theory,' formulated by Bill BROWN (*A Sense of Things*, Chicago 2003) and popular especially among American scholars in humanities, uses similar technical vocabulary, but the meanings are quite different. For Pomian, 'things' are the objects (more general term) that work as usual; for Brown, on the contrary, 'things' are the 'objects' which have lost their common function.

¹³ On creativity in the text of ritual power, see R. GORDON, 'Shaping the Text: Theory and Practice in Graeco-Egyptian Malign Magic', [in:] H. F. J. HORSTMANSHOFF *et al.* (eds.), *Kykeon. Studies in Honour of H. S. Versnel*, Leiden 2002, pp. 82–97 (on innovative visual devices); J. SANZO, 'The innovative use of biblical traditions for ritual power: The crucifixion of Jesus on a Coptic exorcistic spell (Brit. Lib. Or. 6796[4], 6796) as a test case', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 16 (2015), pp. 67–98.

there are no two identical amulets (even if they contain the same text, New Philology teaches us to treat them as separate artefacts), it is reasonable to assume that their shape is not coincidental, but reflects a reasonable choice made under certain presuppositions about the preferences of addresses and ways to influence them.¹⁵

The main aim of this paper is to show, how, by investigating both material and textual aspects of the biblical amulets, we could go further and deduce the ideas which their producers had about spiritual agents involved in the ritual. The concepts of supernatural powers belong to the area of theology, so when referring to minor and indirect theological sources like the amulets, I feel justified to use the term ‘microtheologies.’ Focused on the theological side of amulet production, the research offers a new perspective on these semiophores.

GENERAL SURVEY OF THE CHRISTIAN TEXTUAL AMULETS

The amulets containing the biblical passages are mainly made of papyrus and parchment, but there are also examples of wooden pieces¹⁶ or even silver¹⁷ and iron¹⁸ armbands. Pottery shards (ostraca) and limestone

¹⁴ The problem of divine readership of amulets has been raised by J. SANZO, ‘Wrapped up in the Bible: The multifaceted ritual on a Late Antique amulet (*P Oxy. VIII 1077*)’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24 (2016), pp. 569–597, at pp. 593–594.

¹⁵ My approach was directly influenced by the concept of *Liberature* by Zenon FAJFER. His programmatic essays are collected in a volume *Liberature Or Total Literature. Collected Essays 1999–2009*, Belfast – Kraków 2010. I also draw inspiration from Allan BELL’s Audience Design Model.

¹⁶ *SB I 970* (identification as an amulet remains uncertain; LDAB 3463; SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* [cit. n. 2], pp. 115–116 [no. 37]); *SB I 2021* (LDAB 3449; SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* [cit. n. 2], p. 119 [no. 42]); *SB I 3573* (LDAB 3443; SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* [cit. n. 2], p. 119 [no. 43]).

¹⁷ *SB I 1572* (SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* [cit. n. 2], p. 116, no. 38); *SB I 1574a* (SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* [cit. n. 2], p. 117 [no. 39]); *SB I 1575* (SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* [cit. n. 2], pp. 117–118 [no. 40]); Cairo, IFAO inv. Copte T. 26 (LDAB 108148).

flakes, due to their very nature, are not well suited for wearing on the body. Although they might be placed indoors on display or buried, there are only two or three cases when an ostrakon could be interpreted as an amulet with some degree of certainty.¹⁹ Since Egyptian Christians used to write short scriptural passages down for many purposes²⁰, the physical characteristic of support is of crucial importance for meaning which we grasp from the text. The ritual application may be indicated first of all by perforation or creases that bear witness to fixing or folding. Similarly, discolouring resulting from humidity is in some cases interpreted as traces of sweating.

Biblical amulets feature a very limited set of passages. First of all, they contain incipits of the four gospels, the incipit of Psalm 90 (LXX),²¹ and excerpts from Matthew²² (and in single cases Luke and John as well)²³, the

¹⁸ SB I 1576 (SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* [cit. n. 2], p. 118 [no. 41]).

¹⁹ HERNÁNDEZ & TORALLAS TOVAR, 'The use' (cit. n. 1), pp. 790–792. The unusually large limestone flake with Christian texts, among them incipits of the four Gospels, published by P. MIRECKI, might be an exception, see P. MIRECKI, 'A seventh-century Coptic limestone in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford [Bodl. Copt. Inscr. 426]', [in:] P. MIRECKI & M. MEYER (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, Leiden 2002, pp. 47–69. Although this semiophore almost certainly expressed a ritual power, its exact ritual context remains obscure. The same refers to O. Hamb. Copt. Inv. I, published by A. DELATTRE & N. VANTHIEGHEM, 'Trois ostraca coptes de Hambourg', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 16 (2014), pp. 103–113, at pp. 104–105. Another possible biblical amulet on ostrakon might have been recently published *O. Bachit* 119, 120 <https://www.koptolys.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/showOstraka.php?id=132>, accessed 20 July 2019.

²⁰ The excerpts from the Scriptures written down on scraps of papyrus or ostraca might have served as mnemotechnical tools (aide-mémoire), text for a private meditation or common liturgy, school-texts or writing exercises, see P. PIWOWARCZYK, 'Ostraka z Teb Zachodnich jako źródło do badań nad duchowością i wyobrażeniami religijnymi mnichów egipskich', *U schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłoznawcze* 16 (2016), pp. 165–193, at pp. 175–178 (in Polish).

²¹ Th. J. KRAUS wrote several papers dealing with this psalm, see for instance, 'Psalm 90 der Septuaginta in apotropäischer Funktion' [in:] *PapCongr.* XXIV, pp. 497–514.

²² The following amulets contain alone or *inter alia* passages from Matthew: Matt 4:23–24 (*BKT* VI 7,1, LDAB 6091; *P. Oxy.* VIII 1077, LDAB 2959); 6:4–6 (*P. Köln* XI 293, LDAB 2953); 8:14 (London, BL EA 6948 (2); LDAB 100114); 27:62–64 (*P. Oxy.* LXIV 4406, LDAB 2957); 28:2–5 (*P. Oxy.* LXIV 4406, LDAB 2957). On the references to Matt 4:23 in amulets, see T. DE BRUYN, 'Appeals to Jesus as the One 'Who heals every illness and every infirmity' Matt 4:23, 9:35) in amulets in Late Antiquity', [in:] L. DiTOMMASO & L. TURCESCU

New Testament letters and certain other Psalms. The Lord's Prayer²⁴ and *trisagion*²⁵ are also relatively common and ultimately have biblical provenance, although they found their way into texts of ritual power through liturgy, not directly from the Scriptures.

The provenance of the power that made the biblical amulet effective is of crucial importance. There are three main solutions.

At first, the words of Scripture alone, as the Word of God, might be taken as an effective weapon against demons. This idea was certainly already deeply rooted in the Christian tradition long before the emergence of monasticism, to which the abovementioned passages from Origen testify best. Nevertheless, monastic sources provide the most substantial evidence, from *Life of Antony*,²⁶ through Pachomian dossier,²⁷ apophthegms,²⁸ up to the systematisation of Evagrius' *Antirrheticus*. Of course, we can find reservations that the recitation of the Scriptures

(eds.), *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11–13 October 2006*, Leiden 2008, pp. 65–81.

²³ Luke 8:41–56 (Cairo, IFAO inv. Copte T. 26, LDAB 108148); 10:19 (P. Yale inv. 1792; LDAB 98049); 11:1–2 (P. Iand. I 6; LDAB 6107); John 1:5–6 (P. Vindob. G 29831, LDAB 2823); 2:1–2a (P. Vindob. G 2312, LDAB 3488).

²⁴ T. J. KRAUS, 'Manuscripts with the Lord's prayer – They are more than simply witnesses to that text itself', [in:] T. J. KRAUS & T. NICKLAS, *New Testament Manuscripts. Their Texts and Their World* [= *Texts and Editions for New Testament Study* 2], Leiden – Boston 2006, pp. 227–266.

²⁵ On *trisagion* in text of ritual power, see bibliography in KRAUS, 'Manuscripts', (cit. n. 24), pp. 262–263.

²⁶ Athanasius, *V. Anton.* 6, 4–5, A quotation of Psalm 117:7 (LXX) drives the demon out.

²⁷ SBo 186 (tr. A. VEILLEUX, [in:] *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 1, Kalamazoo 1980, pp. 224–225); *Instruction concerning a spiteful monk* I 9 (tr. A. VEILLEUX, [in:] *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 3, Kalamazoo 1982, p. 14) recommends using the passage 117:11 against *logisomoi*.

²⁸ *Collectio Systematica* 15.90 (1313) – the passage refers to Matt 24:23; N.366, ed. and tr. J. WORTLEY, *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers. A Select Edition and Complete English Translation*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 238–239; F. L. GRIFFITH, 'Oxford excavations in Nubia', *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* 14 (1927), pp. 57–116, esp. p. 87 (no. 17, translation only), plate LXIX (text) – according to the inscription in the monk's cell, the passage Ps 90:13 (LXX) makes the snake's bite harmless. On invocations inspired by the Scriptures, see D. BURTON-CHRISTIE, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, New York – Oxford 1993, pp. 199–200.

would not help against Satan if a monk remains in sin,²⁹ but there are good reasons to doubt whether all producers and users of the biblical amulets shared such concerns, or maybe rather assumed more automatic efficacy of the scriptural verses. In the *Sayings of Desert Fathers*, we can find passages testifying to the latter:

I heard that Abba Poemen and many of the fathers uttered this saying: 'The snake-charmer does not know the force of the words he speaks but the beast hears and knows: it is rendered obedient and subservient.' That is how it is with us; even if we do not know the force of the words we are saying yet the demons hear and retreat in fear.³⁰

The power of the amulet may also come not from the words but from the semiophore as a whole. In some instances, it could effectively work as a *pars pro toto* representation of the book of the Bible. In the late antiquity, Christians were generally convinced that the books of Scriptures as objects possessed power on their own – which means that they regarded books as semiophores. The Christians in Egypt were no exception. We know that Bible was kept by the body. John Chrysostom reproaches his audience in a homily held in Antioch in 387: 'Dost thou not see how women and little children suspend Gospels from their necks as a powerful amulet, and carry them about in all places wherever they go?'³¹ In another homily delivered in 390, he digresses from his main subject of the Jewish phylacteries: 'And what are these phylacteries, and these borders? Since they were continually forgetting God's benefits, He commanded His marvellous works to be inscribed on little tablets, and that these

²⁹ D. W. YOUNG, 'An unplaced fragment from Shenoute's fourth canon', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 3 (2001), pp. 133–147, at p. 138.

³⁰ N. 184, ed. and tr. WORTLEY, *The Anonymous Sayings* (cit. n. 28), pp. 128–129. A very similar automatic effect takes place in the case of magical books that contain words denying Christ written in foreign languages, see *Questions of Cyril* 7 [in:] *Der Papyruscodex saec. VI–VII der Philippsbibliothek in Cheltenham: Koptische theologische Schriften*, ed. W. E. CRUM, Strasbourg 1915, pp. 7 (text), 58 (German translation).

³¹ John Chrysostom, *Stat.* 19.4 (Patrologia Graeca 49, kol. 196), tr. W. R. W. STEPHENS, [in:] P. SCHAFF (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, *Saint Chrysostom*, New York 1889, p. 470.

should be suspended from their hands (...) as many of our women now wear Gospels hung from their necks.’³² Palladius recounts of Amun, a founder of Nitria, when he was still a layman and was persuading his newly-married wife to keep purity by ‘drawing from the fold of garment a little book’ and reading from it the Apostle and the Saviour.³³ An unnamed man in the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus ‘threw out a little book from his own sleeve (ἐκβάλλει ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας μασχάλης μικρὸν βιβλίον)’³⁴ and used it to successfully expel a demon from the possessed girl, despite the fact that the book had been earlier stolen by him. This story proves that the power of the book was not contingent upon the moral qualifications of its owner. In the life of Nilus the Younger (died 1004), we read that when he was on his deathbed, he ‘pulled out of the fold of his garment a phylactery (φυλακτήριον) which he always kept there. And this was a small book (πυκτίον), a treasury (θησαύρισμα) of the New Testament.’³⁵

³² John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.* 72.2 (*Patrologia Graeca* 58, col. 669), tr. G. PREVOST, [in:] P. SCHAFF (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 10, *Saint Chrysostom*, New York 1908, p. 437.

³³ Palladius, *H. Laus.* 8, 2: ἐξενεγκὼν ἐκ τοῦ κόλπου αὐτοῦ βιβλιδάριον ἐκ προσώπῳ τοῦ ἀποστόλου καὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος, ed. G. J. M. BARTELINK, [in:] Palladio, *La Storia Lausiaca* [= *Vite dei Santi* 2], Milano 1974, p. 42, tr. W. K. CLARKE, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, New York 1918, p. 60 (modified); SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* (cit. n. 2), p. 164, comments about this place ‘has worn a biblical codex around his neck.’ In Greek literature, there is a long tradition of wearing aphrodisiacs in the *kolpos*, see Ch. A. FARAONE, ‘Aphrodite’s κεστός and apples for Atalanta: Aphrodisiacs in Early Greek myth and ritual’, *Phoenix* 44 (1990), pp. 221–322. The point of controversy is whether in Iliad *kolpos* means ‘bosom’ or ‘fold of garment.’ The same question is relevant in the case of our sources. The meaning ‘fold’ seems more reasonable in that context.

³⁴ E. MIONI, ‘Il Pratum Spirituale di Giovanni Mosco’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 17 (1951), on-line, TLG; tr. J. WORTLEY, [in:] John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow* [= *Cistercian Studies* 139], Collegeville 2008, p. 224 (modified). By analogy with *kolpos*, it seems reasonable to understand *maskhalē* not as ‘arm-pit’ but as ‘sleeve.’

³⁵ *Vitae sancti Nili junioris* 63, ed. G. GIOVANELLI, *Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Νείλου τοῦ Νέου*, Grottaferrata 1972, on-line, TLG. tr. by myself, cf. translation in SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* (cit. n. 2), p. 63 (see also SANZO’s commentary to this text). A rare word *thesaurisma* which I give etymologically as ‘treasury’ means a collection of excerpts from the Gospel, not the New Testament in its integrity. In his *On the Miracles of the Blessed*

In fact, we know of a few miniature codices which probably served as amulets.³⁶ Codex Anastasi 9 (LDAB 100023), consisting of 15 pages, would be the best example of a ‘treasury’ of this ilk. Although it seems too large to keep it by one’s body, the introductory *Prayer of Gregory* acknowledges such usage.³⁷ The Anastasi codex contains a collection of invocations and religious texts of evidently apotropaic character. It holds within, among others, correspondence between Jesus and Abgar. The collection begins with words of encouragement: ‘A prayer and exorcism that I wrote, I, Gregory, the servant of the living God, to become an amulet for everyone who will receive and read it.’³⁸ Of course, this textual unit is not organically tied to the following texts and the codex as a whole. However, the producer deliberately put it at the beginning of the collection as a fitting résumé of the rationale behind the codex in its entirety. This interesting introduction clearly shows that the power of the amulet, understood as a semiophore, depends intrinsically on reading its textual content aloud which blurs the clear-cut division between the

Apostle Andrew, chapter 23, Gregory of Tours mentions a Christian woman, Trophima, who put a Gospel on her breast to protect her virginity when thrown in a public house.

³⁶ There are only a few examples: P. Berlin inv. 11710 (LDAB 6211; double-sheet); *P. Leid. Inst.* 10 (LDAB 3241; two double-sheets; Ps 90:1–4, 7–9); *P. Lond. Lit.* 239 (LDAB 3369; 9 folios; a collection of texts); *P. Oxy* XVII 2065 (LDAB 3285; double-sheet; Ps 90:5–10); *P. Oxy* XXXIV 2684 (LDAB 2846; double-sheet; Jud 4–5, 7–8); An issue of the miniature codices used as amulets is discussed by M. J. KRUGER, ‘P. Oxy. 840: Amulet or miniature codex?’, *The Journal of Theological Studies* NS 53 (2002), pp. 81–94.

³⁷ *P. Anastasi* 9, p. 1v, ll. 18–22 ἐκε[ταν]ζε οὖν νῖμ ἐτνα[ταογο] νῆπρὸς ἐχῆ ἢ [ἐτνακ]ᾶς ναϗ ἡφγ[λακτηρ]ιον (‘You must [enliven] every one who will [recite] this prayer or [who will] put it on himself as an [amulet]’); Coptic text in *Manuscripts coptes du Musée d’Antiquités des Pays-Bas à Leide*, éd. W. PLEYTE & P. A. A. BOESER, Leiden 1897, p. 443; tr. R. SMITH, [in:] M. MEYER, R. SMITH (eds.) *Ancient Christian Magic. Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, Princeton 1999, p. 314. J. SANZO ‘At the crossroads’ (cit. n. 5), corrects an erroneous pagination given by Smith in his translation. I follow this improved page numbering.

³⁸ *P. Anastasi* 9, p. 1r, ll. 1–6 οὕτως ἀγὼ οὕτως ὁρισμός ἐαις ἀεὶ ἀνοκ ἡρηγορίος πρῆμαλ μπινογτε ἐτονῆ ἐτρεσῶππε ἡφγλακτηρίον νογὼν νῖμ ἐτναχῖτς ἀγὼ ἡσῶσῶς, ed. PLEYTE & BOESER, *Manuscripts* (cit. n. 37), p. 441, tr. R. SMITH, [in:] M. MEYER, R. SMITH (eds.) *Ancient Christian Magic* (cit. n. 37), p. 314 (modified). See the recent remarks on this prayer by J. VAN DER VLIET, ‘Roman and Byzantine Egypt’ [in:] D. FRANKFURTER (ed.), *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, Leiden – Boston 2019, pp. 240–276, at pp. 258–259.

power of the book and the power of the words. Since the biblical amulets usually contain only short biblical passages, it is quite difficult to judge from the content whether the producer intended to represent the whole Bible. The situation is clearer when he shaped the amulet to imitate the physical form of the biblical book, i.e. a codex.

Finally, the efficacy of an amulet may not be contingent upon a word alone, or even upon a semiophore as such, but upon interrelation between the words and the paradigmatic actions which the words refer to. In such a case, we would have an analogy to *historiolae* known from non-Christian spells. The *historiola* recounts the mighty deeds of divinity to recreate them once again in favour of a practitioner. Quotations from the Gospels or even indirect references to them might serve in exactly the same way.³⁹ This idea is pivotal for Joseph Sanzo's study on scriptural incipits. He understands such references to the Bible as effective *pars pro partibus* (*partes* mean here single biblical narratives or words) not *part pro toto*. It was never overtly formulated by the ancient Christians, but the structure of some scriptural amulets could be best explained in light of this hypothesis.

Below, I present six case studies based on which I show how semiophores can provide information about the religious imagery concerning spiritual beings, as shared by their producers and users. Furthermore, I interpret the *modus operandi* of the given amulets in light of three concepts of their efficacy presented above.

1. *P. Oxy.* LXXVI 5073,⁴⁰ (LDAB 140277);
papyrus; late 3rd – mid 4th century AD; Oxyrhynchos; Greek

Read the beginning of the gospel, and see (ἀνάγνωτι τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ
εὐαγγελίου καὶ ἴδε): | 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Christ. | As

³⁹ Cf. *P. Oxy.* VIII 1077 'Curative gospel of Matthew (ἱαματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον) κατὰ Ματθαῖον' using Matthew 4:23–24. On this amulet, see J. SANZO, 'Wrapped up in the Bible', (cit. n.).

⁴⁰ DE BRUYN, *Making Amulets* (cit. n. 2), pp. 147–148; JONES, *New Testament Texts on Greek Amulets* (cit. n. 2), p. 130 (no. 16).

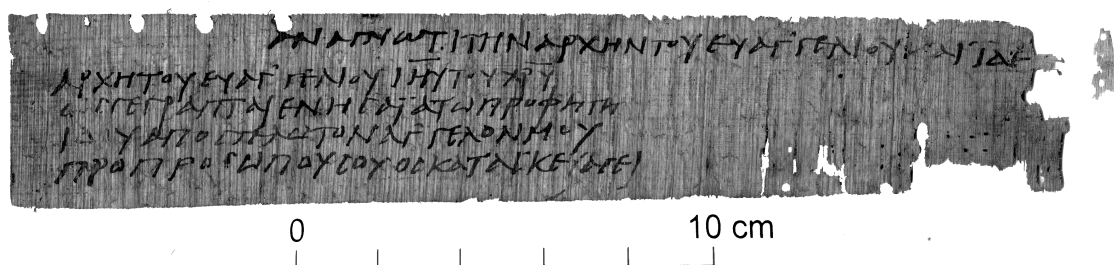


Fig. 1. *P. Oxy. LXXVI 5073*.

Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society and the University of Oxford
Imaging Papyri Project; digitally processed by the editors

it is written in Isaiah the prophet, | “Behold, I shall send my messenger
(ἄγγελον) | before your face, who will prepare” (Mark 1:1–2).⁴¹

It is a long strip of papyrus measuring 25.2 × 4.5 cm, folded probably from left to right which resulted in the destruction of the right side through friction. The perforation in the upper-left has been characterised by the editors as wormholes. The lack of creases testifies to the fact that the papyrus was not folded but rolled up. The writing is careful and the orthography correct. The text consists of an invocation and incipit of Mark.

The opening invocation does not belong to Gospel. It is addressed to the reader to make him act in a certain way. We may call it a performative or, more precisely, directive utterance.⁴² Since the amulet was rolled up, human beings cannot be the intended readers, the owner of the amulet included.⁴³ The proper addressee was certainly an evil spirit.⁴⁴ The abili-

⁴¹ Tr. *P. Oxy. LXXVI*, p. 22 (slightly modified).

⁴² Here, I refer to the differentiation made by D. FRANKFURTER, ‘Narrating power: The theory and practice of the magical historiola in ritual spells’, [in:] M. W. MEYER & P. A. MIRECKI, *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden 1995, pp. 457–476, at p. 467.

⁴³ JONES, *New Testament Texts on Greek Amulets* (cit. n. 2), p. 130.

⁴⁴ Cf. *P. Oxy. VIII 1151* (LDAB 2802).

ties of the demons to read through a material barrier and to see hidden things were presupposed, so the folding and concealment of the amulet posed no obstacle. To my knowledge, the amulet contains the only known direct call for reading addressed to spiritual powers on a protective amulet to date, but the references to reading associated with *nekydaimones* appear in *defixiones*.⁴⁵

The invocation is clearly graphically separated from the text of the Gospel. When we assume that behind such an organisation of the writing space lies a certain way of understanding the reading practices of the evil spirits, it turns out that in the lecture they need tips and instructions. Moreover, the legibility of writing plays an important role. Although the New Testament certifies that the evil powers know and use the Bible – which was already presupposed in the paradigmatic scene of the temptation of Jesus – the author of this amulet feels obliged to identify the scriptural origin of the quoted text: ‘The beginning of the gospel...’

The incipit, suspended in the middle of the sentence, does not represent the Gospel as a whole. The focus seems to be put upon God’s messenger.⁴⁶ In the traditional exegesis, both ancient and modern, this passage refers to John the Baptist. Here, however, *angelos* applies rather to a tutelary spirit who should guard the owner of the amulet against demonic assaults. The demon, when reading the text, would evoke the protective power of God’s angel (we may now give this translation of *angelos*). The amulet presents then an untraditional exegesis and creative angelology imagined by its producer and maybe also a user of the semiophore.

Perhaps, an even more clever trap was set for a demon by this amulet. One of the sayings from the *Anonymous Collection* brings a hint concerning its mechanism.

Once when one of the fathers was staying in his own cell, a demon came and got into the elder’s bed then began reciting the book of Numbers by

⁴⁵ A. AUDOLLENT, *Defixionum tabellae quotquot innotuerunt tam in Graecis orientis quam in totius occidentis partibus praeter Atticas in corpore inscriptionum atticarum editas*, Paris 1904, pp. 78, 87–88 (nos. 43–44, 52).

⁴⁶ DE BRUYN, *Making Amulets* (cit. n. 2), p. 147, comments on the function of the angel.

heart. Discouraged, the demon transformed himself into a form of a pauper and went limping out the elder with a staff and a little basket. The elder said to him: 'Do you know how to recite by heart?' 'Yes,' he said, 'the Old Testament.' The elder said to him: 'Do you know the New [Testament]?' When the demon heard 'the New [Testament]' he became invisible.⁴⁷

This story may explain the mechanics of the amulet under scrutiny. The imperative, characteristic of spells, causes the demon to come into contact with the New Testament, 'the beginning of gospel' and, in effect, to disappear⁴⁸.

2. *MPER* N.S. XVII 10 (= P. Vindob. G 29831, LDAB 2823);⁴⁹
parchment; 5th to mid-6th century AD; provenance unknown; Greek

I call on you (ἐπικαλοῦμέ σε) God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to send forth your messenger (ἐξαποστέλλης τὸν ἄγγελόν σου) to the one carrying this. 'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from (ἀπεσταλμένος)' (John 1:5-6)⁵⁰

It is a single-sheet quire (in codicological terms a 'bifolium'), measuring 6.5 × 4.2 cm; along the central fold there are holes indicating a binding. The hand is elegant and careful.

This time the invocation is addressed by the creator or user of the amulet to God himself. Similar calls on God,⁵¹ the Virgin Mary⁵² and the

⁴⁷ N. 632, ed. and tr. WORTLEY, *Anonymous Sayings* (cit. n. 28), pp. 512–513.

⁴⁸ Cf. interpretation of this saying from another perspective in BURTON-CHRISTIE, *The Word in the Desert* (cit. n. 28), p. 113.

⁴⁹ To the literature given by LDAB, we would note B. C. JONES, 'P. Vindob. G 29831; Amulet or miniature codex?', [on-line] <https://www.bricecjones.com/blog/pvindob-g-29831-amulet-or-miniature-codex>, accessed 25 Jan. 2019.

⁵⁰ I give the reading corrected by G. H. R. HORSLEY, 'Reconstructing a biblical codex: the prehistory of *MPER* N.S. XVII. 10 (P. Vindob. G 29 831)', *PapCongr.* XXI, pp. 473–481, at p. 473, tr. JONES, *New Testament Texts on Greek Amulets* (cit. n. 2), p. 148 (slightly modified).

⁵¹ Similar invocation to God to send down his archangel, see *P. Wessely Prag. Gr.* 1 (LDAB 5739; it contains biblical echoes); Cf. also *P. Ryl. Copt.* 104.

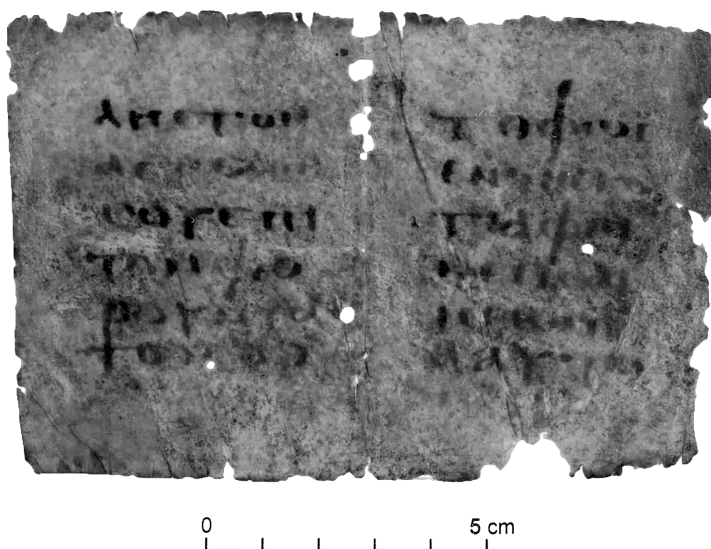


Fig. 2. *MPER* N.S. XVII 10, ÖNB/Wien P. Vindob. G 29831.
 Courtesy of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Bildarchiv
 und Grafiksammlung; digitally processed by the editors

angels⁵² also appear in the other amulets. It is worth noting that this invocation refers to the amulet itself.

There is interplay between the invocation and the biblical text (note that it is not an incipit) based on the verb *apostellō*. In the biblical context and in the traditional exegesis, once again, we have a clear reference to John the Baptist, but the creator of the amulet seems to link 'a messenger' with an angel – again as in *P. Oxy.* LXXVI 5073. The suspension of the biblical passages in the middle of a sentence was also testified in a precedent amulet.

⁵² *P. Berol.* inv. 21911 = *Supp. Mag.* I 26 (LDAB 5937; it contains Ps 90:1).

⁵³ *P. Princ.* II 107 (LDAB 5835; besides adjurations and *nomina barbara*, it contains Ps 90:1–2, 'Our Father' according to Matt 6:9, 11, and the liturgical echoes); Cf. also *Supp. Mag.* I 29, ll. 3–8.

In spite of the voices recognising *MPER* N.S. XVII 10 as part of a larger codex,⁵⁴ the majority of scholars identify this double-sheet as a complete amulet in the form of the single-quire codex (*unio*). Due to practical reasons, above all the relatively high price of a codex, the acquisition of such a book, even in a form of a miniature ‘treasury,’ remained beyond the capacities of many Christians.⁵⁵

The intended reader of this codex-substitute was God himself. He was expected to send his angel again – as he had done it before in paradigmatic intervention brought into his memory by the scriptural citations. It seems that, for the creator (and maybe also the user) of this particular amulet, the effectiveness was guaranteed not so much by the text itself, but by the underlying narrative pattern and the form of a codex. The powerful acts of God rely not only upon the content but also the shape of the book.

3. *P. Oxy.* VIII 1151 (LDAB 2802),⁵⁶
papyrus; 431–499? (LDAB, Orsini); Oxyrhynchos

+ Flee, hateful spirit! | Christ pursues you (φεύγε πν(εῦμ)α μεμισιμένον, Χ(ριστό)ς σε διώκει); | the son of God and the Holy Spirit have overtaken you. | O God of the sheep-pool, deliver from all evil your handmaid Joannia whom Anastasia, also called Euphemia, bore. | + ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.’ (John 1:1–3) | O lord, + Christ, son and Word of the living God, who heals every disease and every infirmity, also heal and watch over your handmaid Joannia whom Anastasia, also called Euphemia, bore, and chase

⁵⁴ HORSLEY, ‘Reconstructing a biblical codex’ (cit. n. 50), pp. 473–481.

⁵⁵ R. S. BAGNALL, *Early Christian Books in Egypt*, Princeton – Oxford 2009, pp. 50–69 (the chapter ‘The economics of book production’). Bagnall discusses the prices in the 4th century AD.

⁵⁶ Detailed study on this amulet by A. M. LUIJENDIJK, ‘A Gospel amulet for Joannia (*P. Oxy.* VIII 1151)’, [in:] K. B. STRATTON & D. S. KALLERES (eds.), *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, Oxford 2014, pp. 418–433. The general conclusions of this paper, however, raise some doubts. See also DE BRUYN, *Making Amulets* (cit. n. 2), pp. 107–109.

away and banish from her every fever and every sort of chill⁵⁷ – quotidian, tertian, quartan – and every evil. Pray through the intercession of our lady the mother of God, and the glorious archangels, and the holy and glorious apostle and evangelist and theologian John, and St. Serenus and St. Philoxenos and St. Victor and St. Justus and all the saints. For your name, O lord God, have I invoked, the name that is wonderful and exceedingly glorious and fearful to your adversaries, Amen. +⁵⁸

This strip of papyrus, with dimensions of 23.4 × 4.4 cm, was found rolled up and tied with a string. The editor described the script as ‘a clear upright hand, approximating to a literary type.’⁵⁹ The text is written in 56 short lines, but the main textual units, especially in the first half of the spell, begin on a new line. The crosses precede the invocation to the evil spirit and the incipit. Both begin from a new line. The invocation to Christ also begins on a new line, but the cross is placed between κ(ύρι)ε and χ(ριστ)έ.

The practitioner addresses at least two readers – the evil spirit and God/Christ. The opening directive invocation, which structurally resembles the formulas also present in non-Christian spells,⁶⁰ reminds the evil

⁵⁷ φυγάδευσον ἀπ’ αὐτῆς πάντα πυρετὸν κ(αὶ) παντοῖον ῥήγος, cf. Deut 28:22 (LXX): πυρετῶ καὶ ῥύγει. In the biblical passage, the fever and the chill function as God’s punishment for trespasses, not as a sign of an activity of the evil spirit. So, this phrase has to be interpreted as a verbal echo rather than a deliberate allusion. On terminology referring to fevers in the papyrological material, see M. DE HARO SANCHEZ, ‘Le vocabulaire de la pathologie et de la thérapeutique dans les papyrus iatromagiques grecs. Fièvres, traumatismes et “épilepsie”’, *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 47 (2010), pp. 131–153; see also bibliography on amulets against fever in KRAUS, ‘Manuscripts with the Lord’s prayer’ (cit. n. 24), pp. 260–261. We may add the recently published *P. Oxy.* LXXXII 5306 (TM 702431) and 5307 (TM 702432). The lists of various kinds of fever (i.e. malaria) also appear in *defixiones*, see A. KROPP, *Defixiones. Ein aktuelles Corpus lateinischer Fluchtafeln*, Speyer 2008, nos. 1.4.4/8 (pages not numbered).

⁵⁸ Tr. MEYER, [in:] MEYER & SMITH (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic* (cit. n. 37), pp. 40–41 (slightly modified). The line divisions are only indicated in the places relevant to my analysis.

⁵⁹ *P. Oxy.* VIII, p. 251.

⁶⁰ R. HEIM, *Incantamenta magica Graeca Latina*, Lipsiae 1892, pp. 479–482; R. KOTANSKY, ‘Incantations and prayers for salvation on inscribed Greek amulets’, [in:] Ch. A. FARAONE, D. OBBINK (eds.), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, New York – Oxford 1991, pp. 107–137, at p. 113. For a similar amulet against fever, see *P. Prag* I 6 (= *Suppl. Mag.* I 25). Among the biblical amulets, see *BGU* III 956, 7–9: ὅπως διώξῃς ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ τοῦ δούλου σου

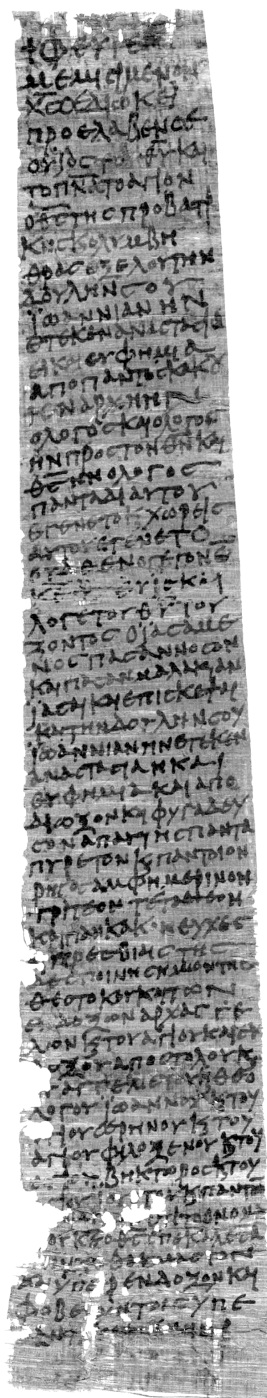


Fig. 3. *P. Oxy.* VIII 1151.
Courtesy of University of Glasgow Library,
Special Collections; digitally processed
by the editors



spirit that he has been already defeated. It might be called an exorcism. The subsequent invocation, this time addressed to God, recalls the time and the place of this battle – the healing by the sheep-pool. The *historiola* does not appear in full, but the allusion is clear, although it is not certain if it refers to the angel descending and stirring up the water (John 5:4) or to Jesus who healed the lame in this place (John 5:8-9). However, the invocation to Christ makes the latter interpretation more plausible. Both invocations cause the antagonists of the spiritual combat to replay the story evoked by recalling the paradigmatic biblical event.⁶¹

Usually, the *historiola* intends to put only a beneficial power action. In our case, the practitioner also felt the need to address the evil spirit. He probably presupposed that both the adversaries would read the amulet that would force them to follow the biblical script. Interestingly, the author of the amulet does not focus on deterring the evil, but he also strengthens God's power by bringing in the incipit of John (the gospel that contains the passages on the sheeppool), references to intercessions of Mary and the saints (notably John the Evangelist) and, at the very end, the name of God.

4. P. Palau Rib. inv. 412 (LDAB 749383);⁶²
papyrus; 6th to 7th century(?); provenance unknown; Coptic

XMT | '[In the beg]inning was [the Word] and the Word was [with | God]
and [the W]ord w[as Go]d.' (John 1:1) : 'The book of the gen[ealogy of

τὸν δαίμονα προβασκανίας. The idea of God's angels chasing the evil spirits is expressed by Shenoute: 'We pray to God that his angels may abide with us and we with them, while they protect us and chase every unclean spirit and every demon from Christ's house and his establishments', Shenoute, *Acephalous Work* (A13), MS Michigan 158,14a, ll. 37-48 ed. and tr. D. W. YOUNG, *Coptic Manuscripts from the White Monastery: Works of Shenoute* [= *Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek* 22], Vienna 1993, pp. 169-170.

⁶¹ In Frankfurter's analysis of narrative power used in the spells, a *historiola* combined with a directive utterance works as a guarantee for the efficacy of the command—a central speech-act in the spell; see, FRANKFURTER, 'Narrative power' (cit. n. 42), pp. 468-469.

⁶² Edition by J. G. GIVEN, 'An incipits amulet featuring Jesus's *Letter to Abgar*', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 19 (2017), pp. 42-49, image on figure 9, p. 169.

Jesus | the Christ, the] son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham [begat | Isaac], and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judah [and] his | brothers.’ (Matthew 1:1): ‘Since many undertook to write the words according to the things | which have been agreed upon among them, just as it was given to us by those who | saw with their own eyes from the first.’ (Luke 1:1): ‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Christ | just as it was written in the prophet Isaiah, “Behold, I will send | my messenger before you.”’ (Mark 1:1–2): ‘The praise of song of David. The one who dwells | in the aid of the exalted one will be in the shadow of the God | of heaven. <He> will say to the Lord, “You are the one who receives me.”’ (Ps 90:1–2 LXX) | ^{vacat} ‘The copy of the letter of Jesus the Christ writing to Abgar | the king of Edessa. Greetings! Blessed are you and blessed is your city, | whose name is Edessa. The Lord God the one who heals [every illness]’ | [-? -] Heal these animals. Amen. Let it be (..ταλβο νιτεβνοογε ζαμην εσεωωπε) +⁶³

The scrap of papyrus measures 23.8 × 12.3 cm. The holes in the upper-left and lower-right corner suggest that the papyrus was fixed by nails or pins to some surface. The vertical crease indicates that it was folded or rolled and then crushed. There are no horizontal creases.

The Gospel incipits do not start from a new line. However, they are separated by dicola. The letter of Christ to Abgar not only begins on a new line but is also preceded by the partially blank line 12. The exhortation to heal also begins on a new line.

A closing invocation to heal the animals was addressed undoubtedly to Christ who, in the letter to Abgar, does not mention cattle but promises protection against evil. It remains uncertain who the subject of these words is, but it would be reasonable to assume the creator of the amulet or the owner of the cattle and that we are dealing with an actual case of animal disease. If so, the expression refers to a particular context.

The correspondence between Abgar and Jesus circulated in many ancient languages. In Coptic it is known from numerous manuscripts. Writing to Abgar, Jesus promises that his letter will protect against enemies and aggressive magic.⁶⁴ Certainly, that is the reason behind the

⁶³ Tr. GIVEN, ‘An incipits amulet’ (cit. n. 62), p. 48.

⁶⁴ Greek text of correspondence originated in the context of the Acts of Thaddaeus the Apostle. Cf. *Acta apostolorum apocrypha*, vol. 1, ed. R. A. LIPSIVS & M. BONNET, Leipzig

incorporation of this incipit into the body of the amulet. It refers to exactly that point of correspondence, so to the letter as a whole. Moreover, the Coptic version of Christ's letter to Abgar proves that the demons would not even approach a copy of the letter displayed (literally fixed) in a certain place: 'At the place where this manuscript will be affixed, no power of the adversary or unclean spirit will be able to approach or to reach into that place, for ever.'⁶⁵

Similarly, the Gospel incipits refer to the wider context. They represent *pars pro partibus* a given Gospel (or four Gospels altogether) as the sum of God's mighty deeds and healings (and certainly as a whole Scripture as such). It seems that in the case of the amulet under scrutiny, its power does not reside in the words written down, so it is not an antirrhetical strategy. Incipits invoke immaterial 'literary works,' not 'books' – to maintain a distinction made by Pomian.⁶⁶ Those works are replete with descriptions of Jesus' power.⁶⁷ Certainly, the amulet was not conceived as a substitute for the Gospel codex. In that case, it would not contain the letter to Abgar.

5. *P. Lond. Copt.* I 317 (LDAB 112657);⁶⁸

parchment; 6th to 7th century; provenance unknown; Coptic

+ 'The copy of the letter of Jesus the Christ, the son of the living God'
(Jesus' letter to Abgar) 'The book of the genealogy of Jesus the Christ'

1891, p. 281: αὐτῇ δέ μου ἐπιστολή, ὅπου ἂν προβληθῇ εἴτε ἐν δίκη ἢ ἐν δικαστηρίῳ. εἴτε ἐν ὁδῷ, εἴτε ἐν θαλάσῃ εἴτε ἐν ῥιγῶσιν, εἴτε ἐν πυρέσσουσιν ἢ φρικιῶσιν ἢ ἐκβράζουσιν, ἢ κατάδεσμον ἔχουσιν ἢ ὑπέρβρασιν, ἢ φαρμακευθεῖσιν ἢ ὅσα τούτοις ὅμοια, διαλυθήσονται.

⁶⁵ P. Anastasi 9, p. 12r, ll. 10-19, ed. PLEYTE & BOESER, *Manuscripts* (cit. n. 37), pp. 468-469: πᾶς ἐτοῦνατῶς ἐβολ νῆντῃ ντίσιχῆςραι ἡνελααγ ἡληναις ἡτεπαντικίμενος οὔδε λααγ ἡπῆα νακαθαρτον ἐρωσημον ἐρωνη ἐρογν οὔδε ἐχωρ ἐχογν ἐπτοπος ἐτῆμαγ; tr. R. SMITH, [in:] MEYER & SMITH (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic* (cit. n. 37), p. 321.

⁶⁶ POMIAN, 'Jak uprawiać historię kultury' (cit. n. 10), pp. 1-2.

⁶⁷ See SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* (cit. n. 2), pp. 158-161. Sanzo underlines exactly the passages describing the mighty deeds of Jesus, not the Gospel narrative as a whole.

⁶⁸ J. SANZO, 'Brit. Lib. Or. 4919(2): An unpublished Coptic amulet in the British Library', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 183 (2012), pp. 98-100. The paper also contains an image of this amulet; SANZO, *Scriptural Incipits* (cit. n. 2), pp. 81-82 [no. 4].

(Matthew 1:1) Inasmuch as many have attempted (Luke 1:1) 'In the beginning was the word' (John 1:1) 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Christ' (Mark 1:1)⁶⁹

This strip of parchment measures 1.6 × 6.7 cm and contains 21 lines of text. It has several horizontal creases and at least one vertical, which indicate that the amulet was folded. The letters are slightly sloping, but the hand is generally careful. The orthography is in line with standard Sahidic. Except for a sign of uncertain nature at the very beginning, the amulet contains only incipits of Christ's letter to Abgar and four Gospels. Besides Mark, all other incipits begin from a new line. The amulet gives no hint as to whether the spiritual powers should read the texts, or if the text itself keeps the evil spirits at distance. The quality of the writing and the clear organisation of the textual units suggest, however, that legibility matters.

Many remarks referring to the precedent amulet remain valid, in the case of this semiophore as well, but with one important difference. Here, the incipit of Christ's letter to Abgar precedes the beginnings of the Gospels. Such precedence may indicate that – contrary to the Gospels – the alleged author of the Letter was Jesus himself. The producer, and maybe also the user, would take such authorship for granted.

6. *P. Stras. Copt. 5* (LDAB 382628);⁷⁰

papyrus; 6th to 7th century; provenance unknown; Coptic.

According to Mark, 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Christ. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet' (Mark 1:1) | + 'He who resides in the help of the exalted one will dwell in the shade of the God of heaven, saying to

⁶⁹ Tr. SANZO, 'Brit. Lib. Or. 4919(2)' (cit. n. 68), p. 100 (biblical sigla introduced). The initial sign, as SANZO notes, might also be a christogram.

⁷⁰ Ed. A. KREPS, 'An ancient Christian amulet', [in:] A. BOUD'HORS *et al.* (eds.), *Coptica Argentoratensia. Textes et documents. Troisième université d'été de papyrologie copte. (Strasbourg, 18–25 juillet 2010) (P. Stras. Copt.)* [= *Cahiers de la Bibliothèque Copte* 19], Strasbourg 2014, pp. 111–115. The volume also contains the image of the papyrus.

the Lord, "You are | my receiver, my refuge, my God, whom I will trust. Because it is you who will save me from | the ambush of the hunter and from the harsh word. He will make shade for me under his breast | and I will trust under his wings. His truth will encircle you like armour. You will not | be afraid in it, the terror of night and the arrow that flies in the day | or anything walking in the darkness from the destruction of the demon | of the noonday. One thousand falls to your left, ten thousand to your right side | but it will not be able to approach you. However, you will fill your eyes, you will | see the requital of the sinners. You, the Lord, are my hope. You built | the most exalted refuge, no evil will approach you, no plague | will enter into your dwelling places. He will command his angels | for your sake to guard you in all your ways and they shall bear you upon their | hands, lest you trip on a stone with your foot. You will mount snake and | serpent, and trample on the lion and dragon. He will trust me, I will rescue him. | I will make shade for him because he got to know my name. You will cry out to me and I will hear you. | I am with you in all your afflictions. I will save you. I will honour you. I will allot you many days. | I will show you my salvation.' (Ps 90:1-16 LXX) Amen †^{vacat} According to Gospel of John † 'In the beginning was | the word and the word was in the presence of God and the word was divine.' (John 1:1) † According to Matthew | 'The book of Jesus the Christ the son of David the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac. Isaac begat Jacob. As for Jacob, | he begat Judah and his brothers.' (Matthew 1:1) † According to Luke † 'Now Jesus opened the book of the Lord. He found the place where it is written, | 'the spirit of the Lord is upon me.' (Luke 4:17-18) †⁷¹

A scrap of papyrus with dimensions 28.5×14.8 cm was folded six times vertically and once horizontally with blank verso on top. The left and right side of the text feature the sequences of characters or ephesia grammata, which are unfortunately not reproduced in the edition.

The amulet contains, in order, the incipit of Mark, Psalm 90 in its entirety,⁷² the incipit of John, the incipit of Matthew and a passage (not

⁷¹ Tr. KREPS, 'An ancient Christian amulet' (cit. n. 70), pp. 114-115 (translation of Ps 90 modified to a considerable extent by myself according to Coptic text).

⁷² Text of the Psalm does not contain its title (περσμοῦ ἡτῶδαν ἡλδγϵλδ) and ends with 'amen' which does not belong to the biblical text – it suggests that it reflects its liturgical usage; cf. E. A. W. BUDGE, *The Earliest Known Coptic Psalter*, London 1898, pp. 98-99.

an incipit) from Luke. The scribe ended Psalm 90 in the middle of line 19, then he started from the beginning of the new line but scribbled out the text and started once again from 'According to Gospel of John.' He did not forgo the indication beginnings of textual units, even at the expense of legibility. The Gospels are identified by their titles which are separated from scriptural passages by a staurogram (once also a cross). The scribe introduces Psalm 90 and John's Gospel from the new line. Later, however, he does not continue this practice, compelled by lack of space.

The text was written in a single hand. The script, executed carefully at the beginning, became denser and sloping in the course of lines, which proves that the textual corpus was planned beforehand to be included in its entirety. An evident sign of this is the references to Prophet Isaiah at the beginning in the incipit of Mark, and at the end in the passage from Luke. The latter is not an incipit but an excerpt from a narrative about Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth. In the amulet, we read, 'Now Jesus opened the book of the Lord. He found the place where it is written, 'the spirit of the Lord is upon me.' In the Bible, the sentence immediately preceding the words above explains that the book was exactly that of Isaiah.

Despite the absence of an invocation, the amulet should be interpreted as apotropaic, especially in light of Psalm 90, as it was very popular in such a function. The scriptural context of Luke's passage suggests that it was directed against illness or some oppression.⁷³ If so, the intended reader was an evil spirit who should be affected by God's power as introduced by the texts. The spirit, against whom this small scriptural corpus has been executed, seems to need guidance in reading, identification of particular textual units, flagging their beginnings and endings, and graphical dividers (staurograms, blank spaces).

⁷³ Luke 4:18 (= Isa 61:1 LXX) mentions blindness but also freedom for prisoners: ⲉⲧⲁⲡⲣⲟⲩⲱ ⲛⲟⲩⲕⲱ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲏⲁⲓⲭⲏⲁⲗⲱⲧⲟⲥ ⲛⲏ ⲟⲩⲛⲁϥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲏⲃⲗⲗⲉ. *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect otherwise called Sahidic or Thebaic*, vol. 2, *The Gospel of S. Luke*, ed. G. W. HORNER, Oxford 1911, pp. 66, 68

CONCLUSIONS

The New Philology stresses that each particular scriptural passage written on a scrap of papyrus or parchment is valuable in itself, even if brings nothing relevant to the textual criticism of the Bible. The Semio-phore Theory underlines the correspondence between material realisation present in a given object and the ideal literary work. This interrelation enables us to interpret the semiophore in search of meaning. Keeping that in mind, we may identify some producers of the biblical amulets as innovative exegetes (see the interpretations of *angelos*) or even supporters of a canon distinct from the one established by the Church authorities (note Christ's letter to Abgar).

The amulets given in case studies present a few different microtheologies referring to the nature of spiritual beings and the power of the Scriptures. Undoubtedly, in the vast majority of cases, they were not fully conceptualised but rooted in practices of operating on ritual power. It remains unclear whether such diversity points at a wide range of personal views and imaginaries, or rather at a deliberate choice of already well-established Scripture-based strategy applied towards the spiritual powers. The choice might be conditioned by the nature of the imminent danger or situational background.

The conviction of the ability of the spirits to read the hidden text seems widespread. It is worth noting that many amulets are executed carefully and with clear care about the legibility of the text, which suggests it was an important element of the effectiveness of the amulet. *P. Oxy.* LXXVI 5073 expressly shows that the amulet will be effective only if the evil spirit reads the text.

Of course, there are also many carelessly executed amulets. Naturally, some practitioners might have thought they were correct, but probably many were aware that they could have been better (in terms of regularity of the script, organization of the textual units etc. – I do not suppose that the producer might have deliberately made orthographic errors). In those cases, the producers must have had different opinions about the source of the effectiveness, linking it not to the particular realisation ('book') on papyrus or ostrakon but rather to the power of the ideal model ('literary

work'). In some amulets, the passages quoted are expressly identified as Gospels. It might have been motivated by an assumption that the spirit would not recognise the text, and therefore would not trigger an apotropaic mechanism.

The next step in the research based on the theoretical framework and case studies I have presented in this contribution would be an extensive analysis of the entire source material that would allow researchers to pinpoint the dominant tendencies.

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