

PART II

The Discursive Boundaries
of Texts and Traditions

Words, Images, Materials, and Gestures

A certain ritual specialist practicing his craft in Oxyrhynchus during the early seventh century CE created one of the most intriguing extant objects from late antiquity (P.Oxy. 8.1077; see fig. 3).¹ This parchment amulet, which measures 11.1 × 6 centimeters, was folded and then cut to create a series of fifteen octagons, fourteen of which were inscribed with a portion of Matt 4:23–24 organized into cross-shaped patterns.² The central octagon, however, includes an image of a person, whom most scholars have appropriately interpreted as the client.³ In a prior venue, I have argued that this amulet was designed in such a way that the client (image) would be wrapped through the (performative) folding of the object in the overlapping authoritative traditions of Matt 4:23–24 (text), the crucifixion (the format of the text), and the resurrection (the octagonal shape of the material artifact).⁴

In addition to this interesting amulet on parchment, a sixth- or seventh-century CE amulet made from hematite (Metropolitan Museum of Art 17.190.491; figs. 4 and 5) seems to have engaged with the client's ailment (probably a bleeding problem) across textual, visual, and material registers. First, the gemstone, which measures 4.8 × 3.6 × 1 centimeters, includes an image of Jesus with the women who had an issue of blood (bowing before him)—a story found in Mark 5:25–34 (= Matt 9:20–22; Luke 8:43–48). This narrative connection is reinforced through a *historiola*, which is taken directly from the Markan account: “And the woman was in a flow of blood and going through much suffering and spending without being healed but rather trembling.”⁵ This quasi-biblical text on the obverse of the pendant works in dialogue with the text on the reverse, which is inscribed around an image of the woman as an orant (with plants to her right and left) and which reads: “The spring of her blood was dried in the name of her faith.”⁶ Given the presence of the biblically based story, the text on the reverse, and the nature of the image, the use of hematite is almost certainly intentional: hematite—also known as “blood stone”—was associated with bleeding issues in the ancient world. Such bleeding issues ranged from nose bleeds to bleeding associated with

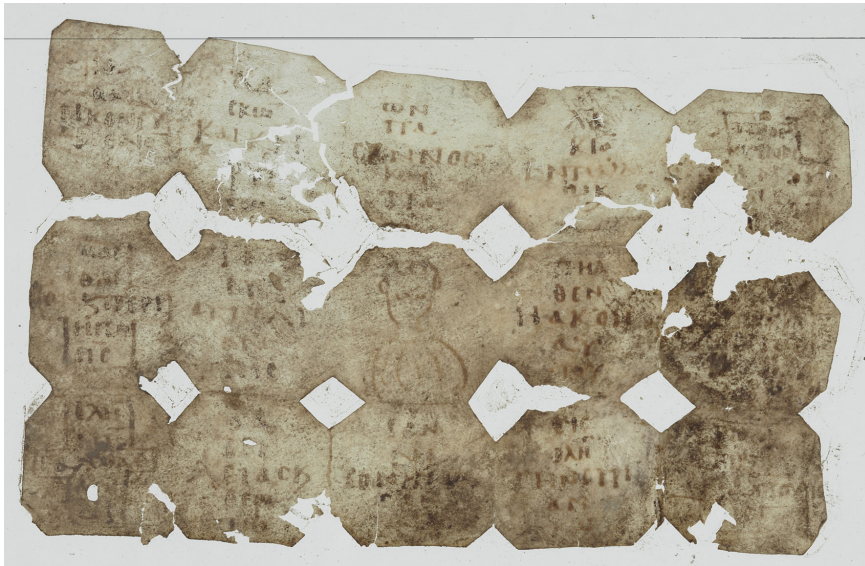


FIGURE 3. Greek amulet with Matt 4:23, 24 written in cross shapes inside octagons, with an image of the client in the central octagon. P.Oxy. 8.1077. Courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Trexler Library, Muhlenberg College.

childbirth to uterine problems more generally. In fact, the connection with blood was so strong that PGM XII. 410 uses the phrase “snake’s blood” (*haima oph[e]ōs*) as a code word for hematite.⁷ Hematite was used as the material for another gem, which was created for uterine bleeding and which includes the text “Thirsty Tantalus, drink the blood!”⁸ The interface of text, image, and material suggest that this Christian gem was likewise produced to address some kind of uterine bleeding.⁹

These fascinating objects exemplify some of the ways in which practitioners crossed, merged, and reconfigured the boundaries between and within verbal, visual, material, and performative domains.¹⁰ They also raise larger questions about how practitioners’ creative mixing and reimagining of these domains impacted reading practices, bodily dispositions, religious experiences, and communal boundaries. How did the material characteristics of these objects affect the meaning of the words or images? What types of (performative) gestures or bodily movements would have been necessary to read these texts in light of those material properties? How did such mergers of text, image, material, and bodily movement impact religious experiences, especially when sacred texts were involved? Can such textual-material-bodily interfaces provide a site for comparing the ritual experiences of late antique people from different religious communities or even attest to intercultural contact in lived religion?

In this chapter, I will examine a range of artifacts that, much like the two amulets highlighted above, adroitly navigated within and around our assumed boundaries between words, images, materials, and bodily gestures. I begin with an



FIGURE 4. Amuletic pendant (obverse) with text and an image of the woman from Mark 5:25–34. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: 17.190.491 (obverse). Image in Public Domain.



FIGURE 5. Amuletic pendant (reverse) with text and an image of a woman with arms raised in the orans position. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number: 17.190.491 (reverse). Image in public domain.

analysis of a collection of Jewish and Christian magical objects that incorporate the same biblical passage (MT Ps 91:1 = LXX Ps 90:1) into their rituals and that involve complex interactions between words, images, materials, and bodily movements. I then turn my attention to the literary and material evidence for gesturing the cross in apotropaic and curative contexts. As part of these analyses, I reflect on how the objects speak to broader discussions about late antique intercultural interaction, religious experiences, and reading practices.

MT PS 91:1 (LXX PS 90:1) ON JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN
AMULETS: INTERCULTURAL CONTACT, READING,
AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

MT Psalm 91 (LXX Ps 90) was the most commonly used biblical text in ancient apotropaic and curative practice.¹¹ In ostensibly “early Jewish” contexts, one can find this psalm incorporated into a leather scroll from Qumran (11Q11), which most scholars have appropriately interpreted as exorcistic or apotropaic in function.¹² Ida Fröhlich is probably correct when she speculates that this object was not an amulet given its large size (approx. 71 × 9.5 cm) and absence of folding; instead, she argues it was most likely “a library copy, used as a manual for appointed days, in special liturgies against physical harms and sicknesses brought by demons.”¹³ This psalm also had a long afterlife in early Jewish and Christian narrative and ritual contexts.¹⁴ In fact, its impact on early Jewish discourses on demons and sickness was so significant that this psalm was even nicknamed “the song of the afflicted” or the “song against the demons” within rabbinic circles.¹⁵

Given the popularity of this psalm among early Jews and Christians, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that the incipit (or opening line) of this psalm, in particular, found its way into various ritual contexts during late antiquity. The text of this incipit according to the Masoretic text might be translated as follows: “Who abides in the shelter of the Most High shall stay the night in the shadow of the Almighty.”¹⁶ The Septuagint version requires a slightly different translation: “He who dwells in the help of the Most High will reside in the shelter of the God of heaven.”¹⁷ Several Egyptian amulets (in both Greek and Coptic) incorporate LXX Ps 90:1 (the equivalent to MT Ps 91:1) into their texts, often in conjunction with the incipits of the four canonical Gospels.¹⁸ To mention just one example, the practitioner behind BKT VI. 7.1—a sixth- or seventh-century CE Greek amulet from the Fayyum—listed (after a brief Trinitarian invocation) the incipit of LXX Ps 90 followed by the incipits of each of the canonical Gospels in the order John, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.¹⁹

In this section, I will focus on the magical use of this psalmic incipit on three groups of late antique objects: amuletic armbands from various parts of the Mediterranean; incantation bowls from Mesopotamia; and late antique amuletic pendants and rings, which likely come from Palestine. I will attempt to show that, when approached both in isolation and in comparison, these respective corpora

not only reveal inter- and intracommunal contact among Jewish and Christian practitioners, but they also hint at complex confluences of text, format, materiality, and even bodily movement as it relates to biblical reception among practitioners and their clients. In so doing, these three groups contribute to our reconstruction of late antique reading habits in lived religious contexts, as I will emphasize in the conclusions to this chapter.

Armbands

Thanks to the important cataloguing work of Thomas J. Kraus, we know that LXX Ps 90:1 was used apotropaically in various material settings during late antiquity, including lintels and sarcophagi from Syria.²⁰ Building on the work of Jean Maspero and Gary Vikan, Kraus has also catalogued a series of Greek amuletic metal armbands, which circulated widely within Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Cyprus and date to the mid-sixth or early seventh century CE.²¹ At least twenty-five of the extant armbands divide the text of LXX Ps 90:1 into a series of units, which were placed in between medallions with visual representations from the life of Christ or with apotropaic images and symbols.²² One of the best preserved exemplars is a silver armband now housed at the Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Missouri (no. 77.246; see fig. 6), which divides up the entire text of LXX Ps 90:1²³ and places it in between medallions (dia.: 7.9 cm each) with images from the life of Christ (e.g., the annunciation, Jesus's baptism, the women at the tomb; and the ascension).²⁴ The armband also includes a range of other symbols and images (e.g., a Medusa-headed serpent, *charaktēres*, and the *pentalpha* [medallion 4]), which scholars have typically—though not unproblematically—identified as “non-Christian” (see chapter 2). Other armbands juxtapose scenes from the life of Christ with more abbreviated versions of LXX Ps 90:1, stopping after the sigma in *skepē* or “shelter” (SB I 1574a),²⁵ after the genitive *tou hypsistou* or “of the Most High” (SB I 1575),²⁶ or even halfway through a misspelled version of *boētheia* or “help” (SBI 1576).²⁷

As several scholars have noted, the images found on these armbands strongly suggest that their practitioners were heavily involved in—or influenced by—not only contemporary ritual practice, but also by the early Christian pilgrimage trade.²⁸ Indeed, beginning shortly after the Edict of Milan (313 CE) and waning around the time of Muslim conquest in the seventh century CE, Christian pilgrims flocked to sacred sites in Jerusalem, Egypt, and Asia Minor and acquired a host of ritual objects (e.g., tokens, flasks, and rings) that, inter alia, displayed visual cycles from the life of Christ.²⁹ Among the most common biblical scenes found on such objects are the annunciation, the assumption, and the crucifixion of Jesus—the very scenes that proliferate on the armbands.³⁰

Despite the close relationship between the other pilgrimage artifacts and the armbands, the latter clearly developed into a robust and international tradition of their own. In fact, Gary Vikan has organized the armbands into three distinct categories, with one class stemming from Egypt and two classes coming from



FIGURE 6. Silver amuletic armband with scenes from the life of Jesus. Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri, inv. no. 77.246.

Syria/Palestine/Cyprus.³¹ Whatever number of rubrics one prefers, two points seem clear: first, all textual, material, and visual differences notwithstanding, the presence of similar, closely overlapping, and in some cases nearly identical exemplars suggest that these armbands were probably manufactured in workshops.³² Second, their parallels in text and format (especially LXX Ps 90:1 written in between often the same Christological scenes on medallions) suggest that these workshops—or individual artisans from these workshops—interacted with one another, resulting in a far-reaching ritual practice in the Eastern Mediterranean.³³

It is no wonder, therefore, that a mid-sixth- to mid-seventh-century CE armband (Israel Museum, Jerusalem 2010.65.381; fig. 7) now housed in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, strongly implies that at least some Jewish practitioners were aware of the Christian armbands.³⁴ Since the armband was not uncovered through a controlled archaeological dig, we are forced to rely solely on internal, textual, and comparative features to reconstruct its original religious and geographical contexts.³⁵ As we will see, the armband's original editor, Nancy Benovitz, has sensibly hypothesized that it was created by a Greek-speaking Jew, who probably came from Egypt or Palestine.³⁶

Although there are no images on the armband (see below), the texts on it are written across eight medallions (four small medallions [dia. approx. 2.7 cm each] and four larger ones [dia. approx. 3.0 cm each]) and eight “narrow, lozenge-shaped links [h. 1.5 each; one partially missing]” that connect the medallions.³⁷ The Greek inscriptions on the armband consist mostly of biblical texts from Deuteronomy

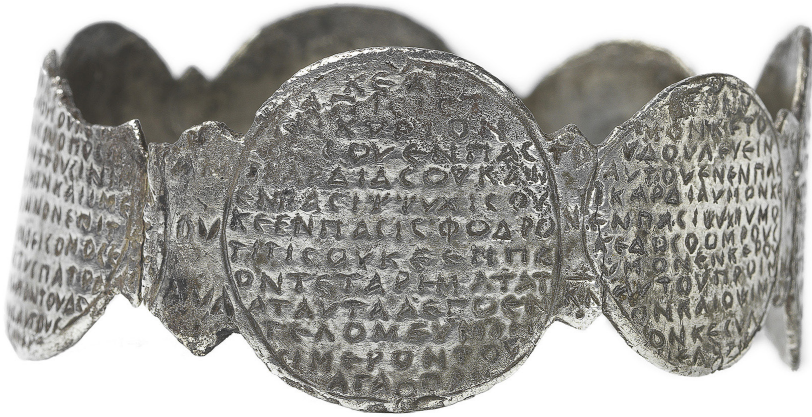


FIGURE 7. Amuletic armband bearing a conflation of the first two paragraphs of the Shema in Greek. Egypt or Israel, mid-sixth–mid-seventh century, silver. Height 3.2 cm, present diameter 7.4 cm. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Bequest of Dan Barag, Jerusalem 2010.65.381. Photo © the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Elie Posner.

that correspond to the Shema (i.e., Deut 6:4–9; a conflation of Deut 6:5–9 and Deut 11:13–21), which especially have affinities with the translation of Aquila.³⁸ What is particularly interesting for our purposes is that the armband may have also included a citation from MT Ps 91:1; Benovitz has offered a reasonable—though tentative—reconstruction of the armband based on the presence of a few extant letters, which seem to make up the final portion of the verse (i.e., “of the sky he will lodge”).³⁹ Based on the fact that Deut 6:5 follows this possible citation of MT Ps 91:1, Benovitz has reasonably speculated that the current lacuna in the artifact originally contained the first portion of MT Ps 91:1 preceded by Deut 6:4 (on the connection between these two passages, see the discussion below).⁴⁰ Furthermore, on account of the various passages cited, which were deployed in rabbinic ritual contexts, Benovitz has appropriately argued that this armband represents a rabbinic Jewish “adaptation of the common Christian model.”⁴¹ In a more recent venue, Benovitz has contextualized this armband further:

its lack of Christian iconography and the fact that it is inscribed with the Shema indicate that its owner was probably a Jew . . . who wished to adapt an apotropaic prestige item used by his Christian neighbors to his own faith by infusing it with the powerful verses of the Shema.⁴²

As Benovitz highlights, this artifact seems to show that ritual armbands constituted a site for interaction and sharing between and among early Jewish and Christian practitioners. I will return to the broader implications of this instance of intercultural exchange in the conclusions to the book.

Incantation Bowls

The armbands were not the only type of magical artifact in which this psalmic incipit was placed in a complex relationship with other authoritative traditions. There are several incantation bowls, which juxtapose the incipit of MT Ps 91 with Deut 6:4 in an every-other-word pattern.⁴³ Since these bowls are relatively unknown among scholars of Christian antiquity, it is worth highlighting in detail some of their textual features. One bowl, which probably dates to the sixth or seventh century CE, was published as Bowl 11 in Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked's important 1985 edition of amulets, magic bowls, and texts from the Cairo Genizah (hereafter AMS, bowl 11).⁴⁴ Naveh and Shaked explain that this bowl was discovered together with a Syriac bowl six kilometers north of Baghdad by a Yugoslavian engineer, who then took both bowls to Belgrade.⁴⁵

The lacunose text on this bowl is written from the outside inward and was designed for a certain Khusrau son of Izdān-dukh. Although the bowl seems to have been designed primarily as a healing object, its text also challenges our heuristic distinctions between curative, apotropaic, and anti-magical functions, including a list of problems that range from "pains and illness" to "mighty spells" to a concluding statement "and all evil things."⁴⁶ The bowl also has an image, which, as Naveh and Shaked note, seems to be "a human figure with two smaller drawings to the left."⁴⁷

In order to achieve ritual efficacy, the practitioner cites three biblical passages: Zech 3:2, followed by an every-other-word juxtaposition of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1, both of which are cited in full:

שמע יושב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּסֹתֶר יְהוָה עֲלֵיוֹן אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּצֶל יְהוָה שְׂדֵי אֶחָד יִתְלוֹן

Hear/ He who dwells/ Oh Israel/ in the shelter/ the Lord/ of the Most High/ our God/
in the shadow/ the Lord/ of the Almighty/ [is] one/ will abide.

In addition to MT Ps 91:1, which, as we have seen, was commonly used in apotropaic settings in the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds, the other two passages—especially Zech 3:2—are well attested among the extant bowls; in his recent survey of biblical texts found on the published incantation bowls, Nils Korsvold lists twelve bowls that cite Zech 3:2 and three that make use of Deut 6:4.⁴⁸

The every-other-word pattern of the entire first verse of MT Ps 91:1 and the entire formula from Deut 6:4 is likewise found among the unpublished bowls in an anonymous private collection, which James Nathan Ford is currently editing.⁴⁹ The every-other-word juxtaposition of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1 appears in toto in lines 11–12 of JNF 119, with only slight orthographical variations from our bowl and the Masoretic text.⁵⁰ That these bowls would have orthographical variations from one another—and from the Masoretic text—is not altogether surprising; as Matthew Morgenstern has stressed, the bowls frequently utilize non-standard orthography (especially the deployment of *matres lectionis*), presumably reflecting the spoken language.⁵¹

Cyrus Gordon published another incantation bowl (ZRL 48) that preserves this basic pattern.⁵² Gordon did not provide a specific date for this bowl, but simply noted that incantation bowls date broadly from the third to the seventh centuries CE.⁵³ Although Gordon mentions nothing about the bowl's provenance, he does note that, at the time of publication, this bowl was housed in the now-closed Zion Research Library (Boston, Massachusetts). This bowl is written to protect the family of a certain Min-Malka, daughter of Immay, their heirs, and their possessions from the rabbinic arch-demon and angel of death Samael—further qualified as “the Satan”—as well as from various ritual attacks. The incantation opens with Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1 in the every-other-word pattern. In contrast to AMS, bowl 11, however, the citations of these passages are considerably abbreviated: they are condensed to only two words each (“Hear/ He who dwells/ Oh Israel/ in the shelter”).⁵⁴ Similarly, another bowl that James Nathan Ford is preparing for publication (JNF 207) includes only four words from each verse in its every-other-word pattern.⁵⁵ In both cases, it is clear that the practitioners cited these words metonymically since the words themselves are rather meaningless without reference to a larger body of text.⁵⁶ Unlike AMS, bowl 11, ZRL 48 places the text of Zech 3:2 at the end of the incantatory text.

The final incantation bowl at the center of our discussion (Aaron bowl B) is part of the collection “David Aaron” (formerly London’s Aaron Gallery).⁵⁷ Like AMS, bowl 11, the text on this bowl is written from the outside inward. The incantation was written on behalf of a certain Yezid bar Oni and is designed to protect him and all his possessions and animals—including his pigs!—from a host of malevolent forces, including “the evil eye of Satan,” Lilith, and various kinds of demons. At the end of his incantation, the practitioner cites Zech 3:2, followed by Num 9:23, and then the every-other-word alternation of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1:

שמע יושב ישראל בסתר לעלון אלהינו בטל יהוה שדי אחד יתלנו

Hear/ He who dwells/ Oh Israel/ in the shelter/ [the Lord]/ of the Most High/ our God/in the shadow/ the Lord/ of the Almighty/ [is] one/ will abide.

Two observations about the practitioner’s approach to these biblical texts are worth noting. First, in addition to several orthographical oddities, the practitioner seems to have made a mistake in his implementation of the every-other-word pattern: he has included two words in a row from MT Ps 91:1⁵⁸ and leaves out the first Tetragrammaton from Deut 6:4. Second, his particular combination of passages is intriguing. In addition to several bowls, which cite Num 9:23 either independently or in combination with other biblical texts, there is an incantation bowl in Isbell’s edition (bowl 35), which includes Num 9:23; Zech 3:2; and Deut 6:4.⁵⁹ This practitioner, therefore, seems to have combined two magical biblical traditions that are attested in the extant record: the sequence Zech 3:2, Num 9:23, and Deut 6:4, on the one hand, and the sequence Zech 3:2 and Deut 6:4 together with MT Ps 91:1 in the every-other-word pattern, on the other.

Metal Amuletic Jewelry

A final corpus of materials, which might be classified as “jewelry,” serves as a kind of bridge between the armbands and the bowls.⁶⁰ Rivka Elitzur-Leiman has recently published a group of pendants and rings—all made of silver—that juxtapose in Hebrew the opening line of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1.⁶¹ Again, the fact that they did not come from a controlled archaeological dig means that, unfortunately, we must rely on internal/textual features in reconstructing their original locations and dates.⁶² In the words of Elitzur-Leiman:

Though this amuletic jewelry did not come to light in properly documented archaeological excavations, the shapes of the letters, the design, and the magical content of the inscriptions suggest that they were made in the land of Israel in the sixth or seventh century [CE].⁶³

These artifacts thus present one more example of the analytical limitations and challenges associated with artifacts whose provenance and provenience are unknown or poorly attested.⁶⁴

First, a fifth- or sixth-century CE leaf-shaped pendant from Israel (6 cm [h] × 4.5 cm [w]), now part of the Braginsky Collection in Zurich, features an *ouroboros* with three bulbs at the meeting point. The *ouroboros* surrounds a text that begins with the now-familiar intertwining of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1,⁶⁵ which is followed by a star-shaped symbol or magical character. The remainder of the text consists of Deut 6:5–7 and Prov 18:10. As Elitzur-Leiman notes, this pendant was designed to be worn on the chest.⁶⁶

Another pendant in this group (5.5 cm [h] × 4.2 cm [w]), now part of the David and Jemima Jeselsohn Collection in Zurich, is inscribed on both sides with a loop that is adorned with six bulbs in a kind of grape cluster.⁶⁷ Its visual and verbal features on the obverse side resemble in many ways the prior example: the presence of bulbs; a dotted border, which is probably an *ouroboros*;⁶⁸ and the every-other-word juxtaposition of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1. All similarities to the pendant from the Braginsky Collection notwithstanding, there are important differences: in addition to several differences of text and format (e.g., the second pendant has text on both sides, begins with MT Ps 138:2, and includes two other verses from MT Ps 91 [vv. 5–6]), this amuletic pendant also dons images of a scorpion, a demon's face, and a star. The texts on the two sides also seem to have been prepared by different artisans and, consequently, might suggest a secondary amuletic usage.⁶⁹

Two rings from Israel likewise attest to the every-other-word juxtaposition of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1. The first ring (2.6 cm [h] × 2.3 cm [w]) includes in its bezel the Deut 6:4–MT Ps 91:1 combination; however, in this case, the artisan uniquely incorporates Lev 1:1 into the formula. The unprecedented use of the (slightly modified) incipit of Leviticus (“And God [MT: “the Lord”] called Moses and spoke to him from the meeting tent, saying”) seems to suggest that the practitioner was metonymically gesturing beyond these words to (portions of) the book



FIGURE 8. Amuletic ring with the every-other-word juxtaposition of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1. Israel, sixth–seventh century, silver and gold. Height 2.2 cm, width 1.9 cm. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Gift of Jeannie and David Hendin, New York, to American Friends of the Israel Museum | 2020.15.21. Photo © the Israel Museum, Jerusalem by Elie Posner.

of Leviticus or, perhaps more generally, to relevant Mosaic traditions.⁷⁰ In either case, the text continues with a citation of MT Ps 55:8⁷¹ and concludes with the phrase “Amen Selah,” a common expression on late antique Jewish amulets and spells.⁷² The top of the bezel in its current state displays a “wavy decorative silver element,” while the lower half bears traces of an embellishment that perhaps framed the entire bezel.⁷³

The text on the second ring (2.2 cm [h] × 1.9 cm [w]), which is now housed in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (see fig. 8), consists solely of the Deut 6:4–MT Ps 91:1 pattern followed by “a rounded line above which appear five vertical lines adorned on each side with three dots.”⁷⁴ Elitzur-Leiman entertains the possibility that this lacunose drawing originally depicted in part a demonic face.⁷⁵ It is worth noting that, much like Aaron bowl B (see above), the practitioner has deviated from the every-other-word pattern, inscribing two words in sequence from MT Ps 91:1 (‘*elyôn bāṣēl*); however, in the case of the amuletic ring (in contrast to Aaron bowl B), this sequence is followed by two words from Deut 6:4 (‘*ēlōhênû yy* [= YHWH]). It is also worth noting that the artisan behind this ring has left out the final word from each of the two verses.

*Comparative Analysis at the Intersection of Text, Material,
Gesture, and Experience*

Engaging with these respective corpora side by side raises some interesting questions and analytical horizons, especially since all the objects—albeit in different ways—engaged with the very same biblical verse (MT Ps 91:1 [= LXX Ps 90:1]), and, with the possible exception of the Jewish amuletic armband, divided up and interspersed this passage with other authoritative traditions. To be sure, despite this point of commonality, these objects could differ concerning the material

support (e.g., armbands, pendants, or bowls); orthography; the length of the citation; whether—and which—images were juxtaposed with the biblical text (see below); the specific biblical texts accompanying MT Ps 91:1 (= LXX Ps 90:1); and whether the practitioner made mistakes in his implementation. Of course, these relatively minor differences need not imply that these objects and practices developed in isolation: we might reasonably hypothesize some kind of chain of influence not only between the Christian and Jewish amuletic armbands but also between the incantation bowls and the amuletic jewelry; I consider it unlikely that the Deut 6:4–MT Ps 91:1 pattern would emerge on both the incantation bowls and the amuletic jewelry by mere coincidence. It is, however, more difficult to establish a connection between these latter Jewish ritual technologies and the Christian amuletic armbands (though, of course, this is a possibility to consider).

As interesting as such philological, descriptive, and genealogical observations on these materials might be, they only offer us a limited portrait of lived religion. In order to address other important questions, such as those having to do with the relationships between magical ritual, images (or lack thereof), and biblical text, as well as the kinds of (religious) experiences and bodily entanglements that these objects engendered, we must compare them using other—albeit more speculative—analytical and hermeneutical approaches.

To begin, it is worth underscoring the different ways these objects engaged with the interface of text and image. Although the bowls might include an image in the center and the pendants and rings might be bordered by an *ouroboros* or include other images, none of the ostensibly “Jewish” objects follow the armbands in placing visual depictions of biblical scenes in between the words of MT Ps 91:1. Instead, we find the words of Deut 6:4. This preference is perhaps most apparent in the case of the Jewish amuletic armband (see above), which seems to have been otherwise based on Christian precedents. Why not replace the New Testament scenes on the medallions, for instance, with a scene from the Hebrew Bible or with a menorah, a *lulav*, an *ethrog*, or even zodiacal signs—visual elements that have been found on other Jewish magical objects and in synagogues?⁷⁶ We can only speculate as to why the artisan behind this armband might have preferred to inscribe a series of biblical texts over against images; however, four possibilities—which are not necessarily mutually exclusive—could account for the state of the evidence. First, it is possible that the absence of images on the Jewish armband merely reflects a lack of artistic specialization. As scholars have long noted, artifacts such as gems, curse tablets, and, we might add, armbands would have required different kinds of specializations (e.g., cutting the object, inscribing the text, and drawing the images).⁷⁷ This scholarship has shown that, although a single individual might have had proficiencies in each of these specializations, we might also envision a situation in which multiple artisans worked in collaboration on a given object. From this latter perspective, it would certainly be possible that there was no person available to draw images on the Jewish armband. Consequently, only texts were inscribed.

But if we allow for the possibility that the presence of only text on the Jewish armband was not simply a reflection of the absence of a specialist and was, therefore, intentional on some level, we might entertain a second option. It is possible that the practitioner simply preferred biblical text over and against images taken from the Bible or other Jewish performative contexts.⁷⁸ Despite his predilection for the Greek text (in particular, the translation of Aquila), his armband resonates in this regard with the Jewish Babylonian incantation bowls, which likewise adopt a *textual approach* to biblical tradition and not the image-oriented approach to holy writ found in the Christian armbands (see below). In this vein, Matthew Morgenstern has recently discussed a Jewish incantation bowl that cites Deut 6:4, followed immediately by MT Ps 91:1.⁷⁹ If Nancy Benovitz's reconstruction of the armband is correct, the armband would follow the same basic pattern as found on this bowl.

This preference for a textual approach to the Bible might have worked in dialogue with a third, more general explanatory framework: although there was considerable diversity in terms of the ways Jews and Christians engaged with visual culture during late antiquity, there does seem to be a general difference in attitude between Jews and Christians toward art that could explain the Jewish preference for text in this case; the didactic, devotional, and pilgrimage dimensions that presumably buttressed the visual depictions of Jesus in the Christian amuletic armbands would probably not have resonated to the same degree with their Jewish counterparts—even if the images were “Judaized.” As Lee Levine has noted:

One would be hard pressed to make a case for comparable complex doctrines among Jews [as among Christians] which might have required the assistance of narrative or symbolic art. Admittedly, it has been suggested at times that synagogue art might have been intended to illustrate one or another aspect of Jewish liturgy (e.g., the zodiac signs mentioned in some *piyyutim*, the *Aqedah* narrative read at least several times annually, or an eschatological theme). Even if such a claim is entertained, it would be of an entirely different order than the situation envisioned for the contemporary Christian context.⁸⁰

A fourth explanation could be that the practitioner wanted to dissociate his armband as much as possible from the religious or communal associations with the Christian exemplars. As we saw in chapter 2, shared practices and intercultural contact do not necessarily reflect amicable relations; a Jewish practitioner or client who might have been inspired by a particular Christian ritual technology would not necessarily have wanted to associate his ritual with Jesus or with Christianity more generally. Because the images on this armband would have been relatively small in light of the size of the medallions (i.e., dia. approx. 2.7 cm for the small ones; dia. approx. 3.0 cm each for the large ones), the practitioner might have feared that a depiction of a biblical scene, a *lulav*, an *ethrog*, or zodiacal signs would be confused (by other Jews or by God) with Christian imagery, especially since the outward design of the artifact itself is otherwise indistinguishable from the Christian

exemplars. From this perspective, the written word in the medallions would have also been a *visual* strategy, in the sense that it would have communicated—irrespective of its biblical content—(*Jewish*) *text* instead of (*Christian*) *image*.

The practitioner's preference for the Aquila translation might also signal on a textual level an interest in distancing the ritual from Christian associations; despite its limited role in rabbinic literature (e.g., as useful for difficult words), many Christian authors imply that Aquila's translation proliferated in Jewish circles and, moreover, believed it was a marker of Jewishness.⁸¹ To be sure, some Christians seem to have used or tolerated this translation;⁸² however, most Christians preferred the Septuagint, and some Christian writers, such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Epiphanius of Salamis, even thought that Aquila intentionally obscured prophecies about Jesus.⁸³ From this latter patristic perspective, Aquila's translation was a *Jewish* translation. Unfortunately, the extant evidence makes it difficult to measure the extent to which Jews recognized Aquila's translation to be a marker of religious difference from Christians; however, if our practitioner was aware of Christian views of this translation, we might imagine that its use on the armband would signal clearly to God that the ritual was not tainted by any Christian pollution, which could impede ritual efficacy (see chapter 2). Of course, it is also possible that this was the only Greek translation of which he was aware. Although all solutions to the practitioner's decision to choose text over image will remain speculative, further research into this matter is no doubt a desideratum.

As it relates to the incantation bowls and amulets, the presence of Deut 6:4 in this every-other-word format is more easily explained in reference to broader trends in early Jewish magic, especially in Babylonia. In addition to its presence on various incantation bowls, Deut 6:4 was also included among the texts in the early Jewish *tefillin* or "phylacteries," which, as Yehudah B. Cohn has observed, often carried an apotropaic value.⁸⁴ The particular word-alternating pattern of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1 also makes a great deal of formatting sense; Deut 6:4 and the first line of MT Ps 91 both consist of six words (when fully written out in Hebrew), thus forming an equal alternating arrangement. It is interesting to note in this regard that, even in the abbreviated versions of this pattern on the texts of the two bowls mentioned above (ZRL 48 and JNF 207), the practitioners chose to select an equal number of words from each biblical passage.

To appreciate better the implications of these objects for understanding late antique lived religion (in the specific sense [see introduction]), it is worth extending this comparative analysis to the relationships between biblical text, materiality, and bodily movement or gesture. One promising avenue of research relates to the implications of this text-artifact-body interface for the religious experiences that presumably took place when engaging with these objects. To account for this experiential and material dimension, it is useful to consider the category "mediality," as described by the LAR project (see introduction). The LAR team used the term "mediality" to capture how "the focus on communication (both vertical and

horizontal) required specific concern with the roles of material culture, embodiment and group-styles in the construction of religious experience.”⁸⁵

Some scholars working within this framework have stressed the interaction between the senses and material things in ancient lived religion. For instance, Emma-Jayne Graham has drawn particular attention to senses, such as sight, touch, and smell, in her analysis of the religious experiences behind Roman votive hands. She writes:

a votive hand might . . . be handled, smelled, and viewed in various ways, potentially being gripped with differing degrees of force, and possibly even presented balanced on an outstretched palm, a gesture that because of the model's weight would be felt in the muscles of the arm and the upper body, as well as impacted upon balance and movement.⁸⁶

Graham's words invite us to imagine the diverse ways magical objects might have elicited certain kinds of religious experiences across a range of senses. Since the objects discussed above engaged with MT Ps 91:1/LXX Ps 90:1 through different material interfaces, this discussion helps us construct a robust approach to biblical reception that moves beyond mere textuality.

Toward this end, it is worth reflecting comparatively on the kinds of body-text engagements that bowls, armbands, pendants, and rings would have engendered; the individuals engaging with MT Ps 91:1 through these respective media would have experienced the passage in a range of ways. At a basic level, for instance, we can observe that the armbands and incantation bowls required rotation in order to read their texts. Although this is a more general feature of texts on media like incantation bowls, this tactile engagement with the text was part of the ritual performance. To be sure, the armbands and bowls would have necessitated different kinds of movements and gestures of rotation: an armband required a counter-clockwise movement to read it via the contortion of one's arm or the removal of the object; a bowl would need to be set on one's lap (or on the floor or other surface) and rotated clockwise or counterclockwise, depending on the direction of the spiral writing.

To take another example, the armbands, pendants, and rings would presumably have made a longer physical impact on the wearer than the incantation bowls—exerting their weight on the finger, arm, or chest. The fact that these objects were made of silver would have also affected their exertion on the body diversely in light of environmental and climatic changes: for instance, the thermal affects that these objects would have imposed on human bodies would have been different depending on the time of day/night or the season of the year (not to mention topography); simply put, we might assume that the physical sensations of wearing a silver armband or pendant outside at night in the dead of winter would not have been the same as at midday during the dog days of summer. Following in the tradition of Graham, one might also cautiously consider how additional senses (e.g., smell

and taste) associated with these and similar objects might have exerted themselves diversely on their clients.⁸⁷

But these objects would have also functioned as a kind of biblical extension of the body itself. In this vein, archeologists, anthropologists, cognitive scientists, and philosophers have highlighted the various entanglements of material objects and human bodies, which can result in situations in which objects serve as extensions of the person; we might think of the classic examples of the soldier with a sword or the visually impaired person with a walking stick. One might usefully ask in these cases where the human self ends, and the object begins. Lambros Malafouris has noted:

if there is such a thing as the embodied self, then it is a self that constantly projects and extends itself beyond the skin actively engaging and incorporating its material surroundings via the interface of the body.⁸⁸

For Malafouris, therefore, the “self” is not limited by biological boundaries but extends into the material world. Another scholar who has worked in conjunction with the LAR project, Heather Hunter-Crawley, has drawn on the work of Malafouris and others to demonstrate how “both cognitively and historically, objects can become parts of living bodies.”⁸⁹ Hunter-Crawley uses these theoretical insights to demonstrate the diverse ways in which late antique humans merged with iconography, souvenir dust, tokens, and the site, more generally, of Qal’at Semān—the most important pilgrimage complex devoted to Symeon the Stylite on the route through northern Syria to the Holy Land.

This notion of the extended self is particularly useful to “think with” as it relates to the study of late antique amulets; such objects were designed to be worn on the body, exerting themselves physically on the client perhaps daily for an extended period of time. All differences between rings, armbands, and pendants notwithstanding, it is worth highlighting that MT Ps 91:1/LXX Ps 90:1—in conjunction with the other authoritative traditions—merged with the human body in tactile, cognitive, and presumably visceral senses in each of these cases; they were worn on the body. By contrast, the bowls—much heavier than the armbands—could likewise have imposed themselves physically in some way on the client (though presumably for a much shorter time). The material artifacts, in this case, were not designed to be worn, but to be deposited somewhere.⁹⁰

In summary, the magical corpora at the center of this section highlight the extent to which both Christians and Jews interacted with sacred traditions within and across the domains of text, image, material, format, and body in their everyday rituals, even as they adapted such aspects to reflect their religious and ritual proclivities, more generally. Whether or not one can appropriately posit a direct line of communication between the specific Jewish networks behind the objects with Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1, on the one hand, and those behind the Christian amuletic armbands, on the other, the Jewish amuletic armband published by

Nancy Benovitz demonstrates that armbands could facilitate interactions between Jewish and Christian practitioners. From an experiential and material perspective, we have also seen how objects might exert themselves on and merge with practitioners and ritual participants in ways that transcend religious boundaries in lived contexts, yet, at the same time, help shape the ways individuals experienced their authoritative traditions in practice.

There are many implications of this type of analysis for the study of late antiquity. Perhaps most important, the haptic and material dimensions central to ancient religious experiences necessitate a simple, but significant shift in the editing of ancient textual artifacts: the inclusion of the *weight* of the object in our editions. By attending to this dimension of the ancient and late antique material artifacts, we can better assess the interface of body, object, and text and their implications for lived religion. It would, therefore, be useful if archaeologists, papyrologists, epigraphers, and others working with textual objects consistently included weight alongside other basic information (e.g., size, text, material).

But attending to the bodily movements and dispositions required to read these objects does not fully exhaust the range of possible ways that bodies and texts might have merged in late antique magical texts. In the section that follows, I will draw from the literary record to help identify and contextualize the ritual gesturing of the cross on selected magical objects.

GESTURING THE CROSS IN LIVED RELIGION

As we have already noted, the material properties of certain objects necessitated gestures and bodily movements. In other cases, however, the gestural component seems to have played a more central role in the ritual performance. In this section, I will examine the signing of the cross on ancient amulets and related contexts. By focusing on this cruciform gesture—which is especially highlighted in late antique Christian literary sources—we gain further insight into the ways in which human bodies became entangled with texts, materials, and the like in lived religion.

Crosses and related markings constituted some of the most pervasive symbols in ostensibly magical contexts during late antiquity.⁹¹ Several interrelated forms occur in the extant magical record, including the *crux immissa*; the so-called “tau cross”; the christogram; and the staurogram. These symbols could be used to mark off the beginning of a text or an invocation⁹² or a biblical citation.⁹³ They could also be used to separate elements within a magical text, such as alpha-omega formulations⁹⁴ and repetitions of the XMT-formula.⁹⁵ While the number of crosses could vary, the extant evidence reflects a tendency to include either one cross or sets of three or seven crosses.⁹⁶

Of course, the ubiquity of crosses and the like on amulets has not gone unnoticed by scholars of antiquity. Lincoln Blumell, Brice Jones, and Gillian Spalding-Stracey have emphasized the broader scribal contexts in which these symbols

circulated, as well as their symbolic and artistic valences.⁹⁷ Accordingly, they have drawn appropriate connections between amulets and other scribal technologies as it pertains to the particular forms (e.g., shapes, sizes, etc.) of crosses and related symbols. Indeed, these symbols proliferated in late antiquity in a wide range of material contexts, including chancel screens, column capitals, grave monuments, coins, jewelry, literary manuscripts, documentary letters, and textiles.⁹⁸

I would like to build on this scholarship by highlighting another dimension of these symbols: most notably, their possible function within a performative setting. In the tradition of Malafouris, Graham, and Hunter-Crawley, I will be asking how magical objects (and their various attributes, including their texts) might have interacted with the performers' bodies. Of course, these kinds of readings of ancient religious experiences rest on a relatively high degree of speculation; however, they are important because they force us to ask important questions about religious performances and experiences.

Identifying if and how an amuletic ritual was performed is a challenging endeavor. Nevertheless, the extant record suggests that the scribal or visual uses of crosses occasionally merged in complex ways with the ritual performance and the materiality of the object. For instance, the text of a papyrus object from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt (P.Oxy. 81.5260), which dates between the fifth and sixth century CE, consists of the so-called "Hymn to the Cross," a text known from a range of early Christian literary sources.⁹⁹ Based on several material and textual characteristics (e.g., it was never part of a codex; it has traces of folding, which likely implies wearing), the editors of this manuscript reasonably concluded that its primary function in antiquity was amuletic.¹⁰⁰

What is particularly striking about this artifact is how the practitioner has modified the text of this hymn. In place of the Greek word *stauros* (or "cross") throughout this text, the ritual specialist has inserted a staurogram. Within its performative context, therefore, the practitioner would have needed to say "*stauros*" each time he came across this scribal mark. The editors of the papyrus have thus translated this text as follows:

[O cross,] hope of the Christians; [o cross] resurrection of the dead; [o cross,] guide of the blind; [o cross,] way of those who have gone astray; [o cross,] consolation of the poor; [o cross,] bridle of the rich; [o cross,] destruction of the arrogant; [o cross,] victory against the Devil; [o cross,] instructor of infants; . . . o cross, symbol of righteousness; o cross, release of the oppressed; o cross, guardian of infants; o cross, head of men; o cross, fulfillment of the old; o cross, light to those sitting in darkness; o cross, the eternal shield; o cross, law of the lawless; o cross, proclamation of the prophets; o cross, [??] of the apostles; o cross, self-control of the monks; o cross, covering of the naked; o cross, security of the inhabited world.¹⁰¹

In this amulet, the cruciform symbol has been integrated into the ritual performance as a verbal cue, applying the cross as an "eternal shield" against threats, such as the one posed by "the devil." At the same time, the fact that the piece of

papyrus was probably worn suggests that the material thing would have exerted itself on the wearer, reminding and perhaps recreating this performance in his or her daily life. In this vein, it is interesting to note that this papyrus artifact is relatively large, measuring 24.2×18.5 centimeters; therefore, its physical impact on the body would have been greater than most amulets.

But unfortunately, not all ritual objects with crosses mark out so clearly the presumed relationships between scribal and performative domains. Nevertheless, the material record—especially when understood through the lens of select literary sources—seems to suggest that so-called magical rituals occasionally incorporated crosses into their texts not only as verbal cues (as in P.Oxy. 76.5073 mentioned above) but also as gestural cues, telling the practitioner or client to sign the cross for his or her curative or protective benefit.¹⁰²

There is evidence—albeit limited—supporting this conclusion. First of all, several literary texts imply that this ritual gesture was ubiquitous in early Christianity.¹⁰³ Early Christian writings, such as the *Acts of Thomas* and the works of Tertullian of Carthage, indicate that gesturing the cross figured not only in eucharistic and baptismal celebrations but also in a wide range of everyday contexts (e.g., in bathing). The testimony from Egyptian monasticism suggests that, although we must allow for a certain level of exaggeration as it pertains to these testimonies, the ritual gesturing of the cross in fact played a significant role in early Christian quotidian life.¹⁰⁴

Of particular significance for our concerns is the use of the cross gesture in healing and protective contexts. Again, the literary evidence is instructive in this regard. As Saint Antony once boldly proclaimed in a text we have already seen several times: “where the sign of the cross is made, magic [*mageia*] wastes away and poison [*pharmakeia*] does not work.”¹⁰⁵ In close dialogue with Athanasius’s account, Jerome described Hilarion as one who healed by various means, including gesturing the sign of the cross.¹⁰⁶ Hippolytus underscores the importance of gesturing the cross in struggles against demons and the devil: “By sealing the forehead and eyes with the hand, we turn aside from the one who seeks to destroy us.”¹⁰⁷

The *Life of Aaron*, an approximately sixth-century CE monastic travelogue and collection of tales about monks, is particularly instructive in this regard.¹⁰⁸ For instance, we learn in *Life of Aaron* 46 that a monk named Macedonius used the sign of the cross to heal a camel, whose leg was broken. The narrator tells us that Macedonius gave the following instructions to a young deacon named Isaiah: “Go and bring me some water in a basin.’ . . . and then ‘Sprinkle it on its leg while saying, “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.’ And he made the sign of the cross [*sphragize*]¹⁰⁹ over it just as he had told him. Its leg was fixed as if it had not been broken at all.” A similar performative context associated with the Coptic verb for signing the cross (*sphragize*) is found in *Life of Aaron* 104, in which the monk Aaron brings the father of a young boy back to life in part through the gesturing of the cross. Again, the protagonist of the story gives specific instructions

to the participants in the narrative. He tells the narrator, who was apparently on the scene, “Bring me some water in order that he may take it and sprinkle it over him in the name of Christ . . .” The narrator then tells us that Aaron “made the sign of the cross [*sphragize*]” over the water and gave it to the boy, saying “Take it and sprinkle it” over his father. We learn that once this performative action was complete, the man arose, eventually paying homage to Aaron, who then corrected the boy and his father to direct their homage to God. In the *Life of Aaron* 114, the verb *sphragize* is also used for Aaron’s gesturing of the sign of the cross to heal a rich man, whose eyes had been blinded. Again, the monk instructs the participants to bring a basin of water, which is used to wash the face of the rich man—a ritual action that leads to the recovery of his sight.

In addition to passages in which the verb *sphragize* is used, the *Life of Aaron* also describes a situation in which a tempting demon, who had presented himself as an angel with a golden staff, is caused to disappear after Apa Aaron draws a cross on the ground (*afšōl^h noust(au)ros epkah*).¹¹⁰ The verb here (*šōl^h*) means in essence to “mark” or “trace the line of” something, and it was also used to signify the gesturing of the cross on one’s forehead.¹¹¹ Finally, we might mention in passing *Life of Aaron* 19, which reads, “in the same way everyone who will raise his hands after the model of the cross [*ptupos mpest(au)ros*] of Christ will defeat all his enemies just as Moses did, who defeated Amalek by raising his hands.”

Of course, the miraculous accounts of the signing of the cross in many—and perhaps all—of these literary texts served larger purposes in the narratives. For instance, in the *Life of Aaron* the story about the broken camel’s leg dealt with strife among people who were otherwise friends, whereas the story in which Aaron draws the cross on the ground is about the various manifestations of demons and their desire to tempt the faithful. But this literary evidence demonstrates at least two points worth highlighting. First, these sources show that within the world of late antique Egypt signing the cross was considered to be effective against the overlapping domains of illness, demons, illicit/harmful ritual, and the actions of one’s enemies. Second, and more important for our present concerns, the story from the *Life of Aaron* in which Aaron draws the cross on the ground in order to thwart the temptations of a demon hints at a simple but important point—namely, the act of inscribing a cross was at once scribal and gestural (*Life of Aaron* 96).

The interface of the material, visual, and textual dimensions of some magical objects required the physical gesturing of the cross with one’s body. This gesture, for example, seems to have been operative in P.Oxy. 8.1077 (fig. 3), mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Again, the practitioner behind this amulet has cut the piece of parchment into fifteen octagons, and inscribed a modified version of Matt 4:23–24 (with title) in cross shapes into all but one of the octagons; in the central octagon, an image of an individual—presumably the client—is drawn.¹¹² What is worth highlighting for the present discussion is that the cross shapes not

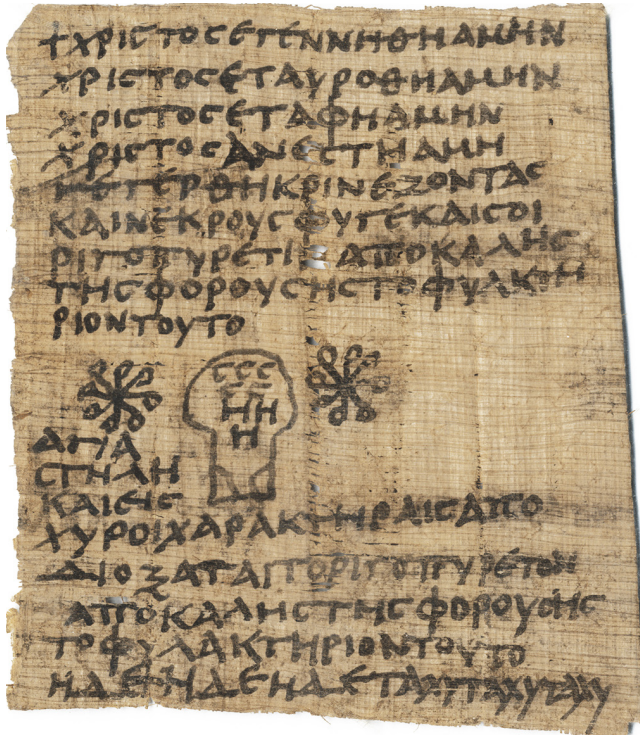


FIGURE 9. Greek amulet with a cross followed by a creedal-like formula. P.Haun. III.51. Courtesy of the Papyrus Haunienses Collection.

only provided the viewer with visual depictions of the cross but they also required the (human or divine) reader to gesture the cross with his or her head when reading the biblical passage.

This gestural context might help us better understand the function of crosses on certain artifacts. In particular, an emphasis on gesture can, I believe, help us understand the use of the cross on P.Haun. III 51 (*Suppl. Mag.* 23; fig. 9). A gestural explanation not only resonates with the literary and material evidence I just mentioned; it also works with this practitioner's particular approach to visual signs.

P.Haun. III 51 has been dated by its original editor, Tage Larsen, on paleographical grounds to the fifth century CE.¹¹³ This fifth-century CE date has remained unchallenged by subsequent commentators, including Robert Daniel, Franco Maltomini, and Theodore de Bruyn.¹¹⁴ Its provenance is unknown, except that, as is the case with many late antique Christian amulets, it comes from Egypt. Theodore de Bruyn described the scribal hand as "upright majuscule," which resonates with Larsen's original description of the hand as a simple but not unknown

Byzantine uncial (the so-called Bibelstil).¹¹⁵ I will present here a translation of P.Haun. III 51, which is only slightly modified from that of Daniel and Maltomini:

† Christ was born, amen. Christ was crucified, amen. Christ was buried, amen. Christ arose, amen. He was woken to judge the living and the dead. You too, fever with shivering, flee from Kalē, who wears this phylactery [drawing and mag. Signs]. Holy inscription and mighty *charaktēres*, chase away the fever with shivering from Kalē, who wears this phylactery. Now now now, quickly quickly quickly.

Most scholarship has understandably focused on the opening creedal formula. While it does not correspond exactly to any known creed, it resembles the second article of contemporary creeds (e.g., the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed), creedal formulas found in roughly contemporary exorcistic contexts (e.g., those found in Justin Martyr and Origen), and those operative in later exorcisms, such as the ones in the collections of Vassiliev and Delatte.¹¹⁶ Scholars have especially highlighted the juxtaposition between this otherwise “orthodox”-sounding creed and the presence of “customary” elements—to use de Bruyn’s nomenclature. This research has especially emphasized in this regard the second portion of the incantation, which includes invocations of the “holy inscription” (or stele) and “mighty *charaktēres*” as well as the formula “now now now, quickly quickly quickly,” versions of which are ubiquitous in the extant magical record.¹¹⁷

Although I agree that P.Haun. III 51 is in fact quite interesting for reflecting on questions of Christianization, religious identity, intercultural contact, and the like, I will focus on an issue that has received much less—if any—attention: the implications of the material qualities, scribal markings, and possible performative gestures of and behind P.Haun. III 51 for understanding lived religious experience in late antiquity. In my discussion, I will contend that the cross at the beginning of the text was a performative cue for a ritual gesture.

A few points are worth noting about the text of P.Haun. III 51. The practitioner behind this healing amulet includes a cross at the beginning of the text—immediately before the list of important events from the life of Jesus that are organized into a creedal-like formula. But he or she has also incorporated other visual elements into the text—namely, two *charaktēres* and a drawing the practitioner deems a “holy inscription” (*hagia stēlē*) with five *sigmas* and three *etas* inscribed inside. What I would like to highlight here is that, beyond drawing these other elements, the practitioner also explicitly mentions them in the text. In fact, he or she personifies *and* even invokes them: “Holy inscription and mighty signs, chase away the fever with shivering from Kalē, who wears this *phylaktērion*.” Accordingly, these signs were not merely visual; they were integrated into the ritual performance. In this vein, an independent verbal reference to the cross as a symbol is conspicuously absent; the creedal reference to the crucifixion is part of the creed and not marked in any kind of relationship to the cross at the beginning of the text. In light of his or her preference for incorporating visual elements

into the ritual performance, I find it unlikely that he or she simply skipped over the cross. In other words, every textual detail seems to have figured into the performance.

Given the well-established tradition of gesturing the cross for healing (as reflected in the literary sources) and the scribe's particular approach to visual images, I tentatively suggest that, beyond its visual value, the inscribed cross constituted a performative cue for the practitioner to gesture the sign of the cross before reading his or her invented creed. This gesture would have reinforced the confessional and presumably liturgical connotations of this statement of faith—not to mention lend an air of authority to his or her invented creed. In this way, the amuletic object probably became “entangled” with the body of the performer on multiple levels: the performer touched the papyrus object; viewed its text; read and thus heard its words; and even manipulated his or her bodily movements to reflect a symbol on the text.

CONCLUSIONS: THE MAGIC OF READING AND THE READING OF MAGIC

The objects discussed in this chapter reinforce the well-known idea that reading was—and is—not simply a matter of words. As has long been noted, the material forms, performative contexts, and bodily dispositions on/through which a reader engages with texts fundamentally shapes the social practice we call reading. Reading, in the words of Laura Sterponi, “positions one in a web of culturally stipulated relations between bodies, minds, and texts as artifacts and symbols.”¹¹⁸ Shifts in material support, therefore, can significantly impact the ways people encounter specific texts and their notions of textuality more generally.¹¹⁹

As we have seen throughout this chapter, magical objects magnify the contingency of text and reading on material support. For instance, the bowls, rings, pendants, and armbands required different forms of physical activity to read MT Ps 91:1/LXX Ps 90:1, including diverse modes of rotation. The formatting of the objects could also impact reading practices: objects that used the every-other-word juxtaposition of Deut 6:4 and MT Ps 91:1—and, in one case, also Lev 1:1—disrupted sequential reading of their texts; the cruciform layout of Matt 4:23–24 on P.Oxy. 8.1077 also augmented reading in various ways (see also below).

Yet simultaneously, these late antique magical sources also invert, rearrange, and blend the very boundaries between texts, images, materials, performances, and bodies.¹²⁰ Objects such as armbands, rings, and pendants merged biblical texts with their readers/viewers in ways that codices, scrolls, and even incantation bowls typically did not; wearers of these objects engaged with a ritual technology that not only impacted them physically (e.g., the weight of the objects and fluctuating temperature of silver) but also made the biblical text an extension of their bodies. Moreover, the magical objects linked texts, materials, and images in different

ways: the armbands communicated their Christian content through visual images, while the Jewish armband *displayed* authoritative tradition—and perhaps religious difference—through mere text; the octagonal shape of the material artifact and the cruciform design of the written word not only conveyed textual content on P.Oxy. 8.1077 but the latter required the reader to sign the cross with his/her head while reading the text; the hematite material and the image of the woman being healed by Jesus were for all intents and purposes textual on Metropolitan Museum of Art 17.190.491; the cross on P.Haun. III 51 was not only a scribal mark but probably also a gestural cue. At a general level, many of these objects also required their readers conceptually to map biblical texts, among other things, onto the worlds of long-standing ritual designs (e.g., the *ouroboros* on a pendant; the magical character on a Christian armband) and performative settings (e.g., the liturgy via Deut 6:4 or gesturing the cross; Christian pilgrimage via scenes from the life of Christ). In this vein, we might also consider the life of the amulet or of the ritual practices contained therein: the transmission from one ritual specialist to another or from a parent to a child could have imbued the object, text, or tradition with a personal, familial, or communal story that transcended the words on the page.¹²¹

In short, the magical objects demonstrate that, at times, material supports could be texts and texts could be something else. In each of these cases, the performer encountered or experienced the Bible—or Jewish or Christian tradition—in ways that engaged the body and bodily senses. In the following chapter, we will likewise see how diverse traditions—via images and words—could bleed into perceptions of biblical lore.