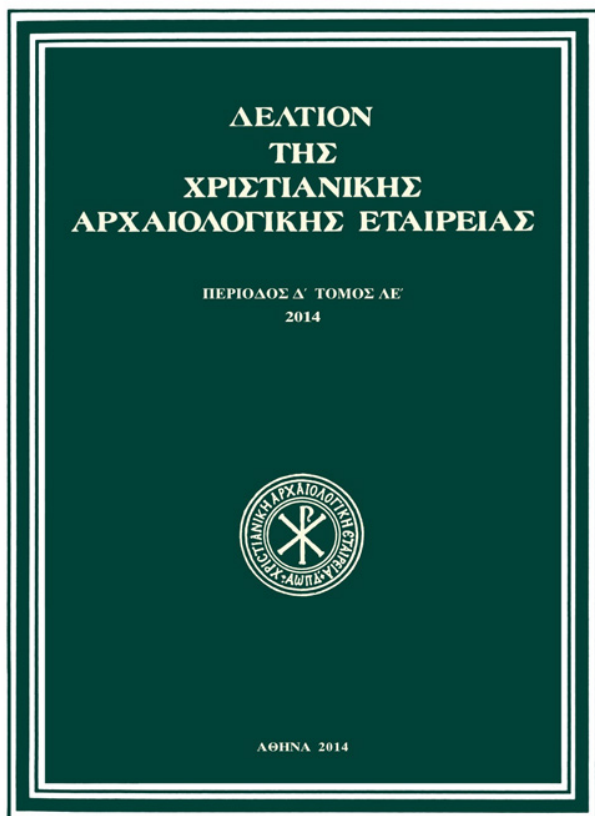


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### The Magic of the Written Word: The Evidence of Inscriptions on Byzantine Magical Amulets

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Vicky A. Foskolou

## THE MAGIC OF THE WRITTEN WORD: THE EVIDENCE OF INSCRIPTIONS ON BYZANTINE MAGICAL AMULETS\*

Το άρθρο μελετά την αποτροπαϊκή χρήση του γραπτού λόγου μέσω των επιγραφών που αναγράφονται σε βυζαντινά φυλακτά, δηλαδή σε προσωπικής φύσης φορητά αντικείμενα, τα οποία απευθύνονταν σε ένα χριστιανικό κοινό και έχουν ένα μαγικό χαρακτήρα, φέρουν δηλαδή παραστάσεις, σύμβολα και επιγραφές που δεν προέρχονται από τις παραδόσεις και τη διδασκαλία της επίσημης Εκκλησίας. Στόχος είναι να διερευνηθούν οι αντιλήψεις που κρύβονται πίσω από τη δημιουργία, κατοχή και χρήση αυτών των τεχνέργων και να αποδειχθεί πως ο λόγος που αναγράφεται σε αυτά τα αντικείμενα έχει τα χαρακτηριστικά μιας τελετουργικής γλώσσας, όπως αυτή ορίζεται σε ανθρωπολογικές και θρησκευολογικές μελέτες.

### Λέξεις κλειδιά

Βυζαντινή περίοδος, επιγραφές, τελετουργική γλώσσα, μαγεία, μαγικά φυλακτά, μαγικοί πάπυροι, μαγικά ελάσματα, επιτελεσιτικότητα, θεωρία λεκτικών πράξεων J. L. Austin.

Early one evening while I was working on this article my five-years-old daughter came up with a Mickey Mouse doll in her hand, asking me to say “something magic to send him home.” Without giving it much thought I said “Time to go home, Mickey!” whereupon she gave me a disappointed look. Then she walked a few steps away, turned a full circle while waving her arms about, held up a small wand and chanted rhythmically: “Micksy home, micksa mickey mouse!” adding “*That’s magic, mummy!*”

*The article explores the apotropaic use of the written word through the inscriptions found on Byzantine amulets, i.e. portable items of a private use, which were addressed to a Christian audience and have a magical character because of their depictions, symbols and inscriptions, which are not derived from the traditions of the official Church. The aim of the paper is to investigate the perceptions behind the creation, possession and use of these artifacts and to demonstrate that the written word appearing on these objects has all the characteristics of a ritual language, as defined in anthropological and religious studies.*

### Keywords

Byzantine period, inscriptions, ritual language, magic, magic amulets, magic papyri, magic *lamellae*, performativity, speech act theory J. L. Austin.

This episode, apart from apprising me of my daughter’s specialist knowledge on the subject of magic, strikingly confirmed what anthropologists and experts in religious studies have been maintaining for years about the importance, the role and the characteristics of speech in ceremonial procedures and especially in magic rituals. In other words that in these circumstances language does not just transfer ideas or information, but is an instrument used to achieve the purpose of the ritual operation, an

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\* I first presented a paper on this subject at the round table on “Inscriptions on artefacts,” held in the course of the corresponding colloquium of the 28th Symposium of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Archaeology and Art of the Christian Archaeological Society (Athens 15-17 May 2008). My interest in Byzantine amulets began with my post-doctoral study on “Byzantine Amulets: the Objects

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and the Mechanics of their Apotropaic Function,” which was funded throughout by a scholarship from the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY). I am indebted to Prof. Olga Gratzou for her crucial observations and her constructive, if often devastating, comments. My thanks also to Valerie Nunn, who provided, as always with great care, the English translation.

instrument which can also incorporate non-verbal symbols, such as gestures and actions and the symbolic use of ritual objects. This language is also mysterious and *quasi incomprehensible*, because it requires initiation into these practices. Finally, the words which are uttered in a magic ritual do not simply express a desire for something, but create the impression that they have the power to bring it about. Ritual language is, consequently, a form of words which is active and creates situations in which the participants in the ritual are involved.<sup>1</sup>

These properties also characterize the inscriptions on Byzantine magic amulets, as will be shown below. However, before we turn our attention to the inscriptions, we must define the relevant category of magical amulets, i.e. clarify which objects, out of all the many items of individual use or personal devotion from the Byzantine period that could be described as amulets, we shall be dealing with in this paper.

### Byzantine Magical Amulets: Definition and Research History

The word *φυλακτήριον* (phylacterium or phylactery) was used in the Byzantine world to describe a very wide range of objects.<sup>2</sup> As is clear from the sources, a phylacterium

could be a cross,<sup>3</sup> an icon,<sup>4</sup> a holy book<sup>5</sup> or a pilgrim memento.<sup>6</sup> Simple everyday objects too, which acquired apotropaic and healing properties through Christian worship, such as, for example, the consecrated oil from the lamp above a saint's tomb, were considered amulets.<sup>7</sup> Thus objects of personal devotion with a purely Christian character and provenance were used as protection from the dangers threatening humankind.<sup>8</sup>

Naturally the official Church was against the use of amulets, and no doubt this can be related to the parallel existence of objects and practices of an apotropaic nature which neither came from within the Church itself nor were inspired by its teachings. However, the main reason for the reservations of the church authorities or even their positively hostile attitude to amulets was the fact that in many instances the boundaries between an orthodox, "Christian" form of protection (and therefore one potentially acceptable to the church) and the magical rituals, which manipulated demonic spirits using Christian symbols, were blurred.<sup>9</sup> The episode from the 7th-century Life of St. Symeon Salos of Emesa, regularly mentioned in the literature, is revealing in this respect: having gained the trust of a sorceress, Symeon asks her if she would like him to make her an amulet against the evil eye. Naturally she accepted and the saint gave her a tablet inscribed in Syriac

<sup>1</sup> S. J. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," *Man* 3/2 (1968), 175-208. W. T. Wheelock, "The Problem of Ritual Language: From Information to Situation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982), 49-71.

<sup>2</sup> On the etymology of the word *φυλακτήριον* and its meanings from the Classical period up to Patristic Greek, see G. J. M. Bartelink, "Φυλακτήριον-phylacterium," *Mélanges Christine Mohrmann. Nouveau recueil offert par ses anciens élèves*, Utrecht - Antwerp 1973, 25-60.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 381) described the small cross with a relic of the True Cross that his sister Makrina wore around her neck as a phylacterium (*τὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ φυλακτήριον*), Grégoire de Nyse, *Vie de Sainte Macrine* (ed. P. Maraval), Paris 1971, 240 n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> H. J. Magoulias, "The Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources for the History of Magic in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries A.D.: Sorcery, Relics and Icons," *Byzantion* 37 (1967), 266. In the Life of St. Stephen the Younger (8th century) it is said that the only phylacterium the saint had was an icon of Christ and his mother: *μόνην τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰκόνα καὶ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ εἰς φυλακτήριον κατασχών*, M.-F. Auzéry (ed.), *La vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 3), Aldershot 1997, 149, line 6.

<sup>5</sup> For example John Chrysostom, Homily 72, PG 58, col. 669: *ἃ φυλακτήρια ἐκάλουν, ὡς πολλὰ νῦν τῶν γυναικῶν Εὐαγγέλια τῶν*

*τραχίλων ἐξαργῶσαι ἔχουσι* (the Gospels that many women now have hung round their necks are called phylacteria). It seems likely in this case that they were not whole books but just excerpts, which they would keep on their person, written on a sheet of papyrus or vellum.

<sup>6</sup> On the apotropaic properties of pilgrim tokens, see especially G. Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, Washington, D.C. 2011 (Revised Edition).

<sup>7</sup> A typical example is the episode in the life of Niketas Patrikios (8th-9th century) when the oil from the tomb of the saint saved those who had it from a sudden violent squall at sea. D. Papachryssanthou, "Un Confesseur du second Iconoclisme: La Vie du Patrice Nicétas (+836)," *TM* 3 (1968), 347. On the healing properties of the oil associated with holy places and tombs of the martyrs in general see also, J. Engemann, "Pilgerwesen und Pilgerkunst," *Byzanz. Das Licht aus dem Osten* (Exhibition catalogue), Paderborn - Mainz 2001, 46-47.

<sup>8</sup> A simple search using the keyword "phylakterion" in the Dumbarton Oaks Hagiographic Database or in *TLG*, produces a wealth of examples, including objects of a purely Christian nature or content described as phylacteria.

<sup>9</sup> M. Theres-Fögen, "Balsamon on Magic: From Roman Secular Law to Byzantine Canon Law," *Byzantine Magic* (ed. H. Maguire), Washington 1995, 105ff. H. Maguire, "Magic and the Christian Image," *ibid.*, 60-66. Id., *The Icons of their Bodies. Saints and their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton 1996, 132-137.

with the words: “may God destroy you and prevent you from leading people astray from Him.” And so he managed to overpower her.<sup>10</sup> In this case the saint acts like a sorcerer,<sup>11</sup> something which, of course, could be explained by his capacity as a holy fool.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that similar practices were used by other saints too, without causing any surprise or indeed provoking any objections. A typical example is the case of St. Anthony the Younger (9th century), who, when he was still a layman was given hospitality by a wealthy but childless couple. In order to help them have children he wrote out prayers from the Old and New Testaments and invocations to holy persons on a small roll of parchment. The wife had to wear this the next time she lay with her husband. And indeed, by following the saint’s counsel, the couple were able to have a son.<sup>13</sup>

The above narratives raise the question of the definition of magic and its relationship to religion, a subject which on a theoretical framework has troubled enough historians of classical Antiquity and western Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Byzantinist have discussed marginally these issues. According to R. Greenfield magic is “as a form of religious belief and activity which did not conform to the doctrinally defined dominant orthodox Christianity; it was essentially associated with the demons and/or with the notion of automatic control of desired outcome or response.”<sup>15</sup> In this view he is mainly based in D. E. Aune’s approach. The latter agrees firstly that magic and religion are two concepts which from a sociological and cultural perspective can not be separated and defines

magic as “that form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution.” These activities must also fit a second criterion to be classified as magical, i.e. their goals are fulfilled through the manipulation of supernatural forces in such a way that their results are *a priori* guaranteed.<sup>16</sup>

According to Aune’s definition, the saints’ amulets mentioned above could be described as *magical*. They were probably the same as regards types, functions and method of manufacture as those which would have been used by the so-called *φυλακτηρίου*s mentioned in the sources, i.e. sorcerers who specialized in creating amulets. However, what differentiates the saints’ phylacteria is the content itself, i.e. the text[s] inscribed on them. Symeon makes a direct appeal to God, while Anthony uses passages from the Bible. Essentially the difference lies in the identity of the supernatural forces invoked by the saint and the sorcerer respectively.<sup>17</sup> Thus these two examples confirm the lack of clear boundaries between Christian and magical protective rituals and also reveal the role played by the written word in this respect.

I shall attempt to illustrate this role below and moreover to demonstrate the special characteristics of the written word when used in apotropaic practices. To this end I shall focus on inscriptions on portable items of a personal nature that were meant to protect their owners (i.e. were used as amulets) and had imagery with clear references to the Christian religion combined with iconographical

<sup>10</sup> Ἦν δὲ κατ’ ἐκείνον τὸν καιρὸν γυνὴ μάντισσα καὶ φυλακταρέα καὶ ἐπαοιδίας ποιούσα. ταύτην ὁ δίκαιος ἐμηχανεύσατο κτήσασθαι φίλην διδοὺς αὐτῇ ἃ συνήγεν ἐκ τῶν διδόντων αὐτῷ, εἴτε φολερά, εἴτε ψωμία, εἴτε καὶ ἱμάτια. ἐν μιᾷ οὖν λέγει αὐτῇ. «θέλεις ποιῆσω σοι ἐγὼ φυλακτόν, ἵνα μηδέποτε λάβῃς ἀπὸ ὀφθαλμοῦ»; λέγει αὐτῷ ἐκείνη «ναί, Σαλέ» λογισαμένη ὅτι κἂν εἰ σαλός ἐστιν, ἴσως ἐπιτυγχάνει. ἀπελθὼν οὖν ἔγραψεν εἰς πιττάκιον Συριστί «καταργήση σε ὁ θεὸς καὶ παύση σε ἀποστρέφουσιν ἐξ αὐτοῦ πρὸς σὲ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους». ἔδωκεν οὖν αὐτῇ, καὶ ἐφόρεσεν αὐτὸ καὶ οὐκέτι ἠδυνήθη ποιῆσαί τι οὔτε μαντεῖαν οὔτε φυλακτόν, Léontios de Néapolis, *Vie de Syméon le fou et vie de Jean de Chypre* (ed. A. J. Festugière - L. Rydén), Paris 1974, 96-97.

<sup>11</sup> In legal texts the making of such phylacteria comes under magical practices, see S. Troianos, “Ἡ μαγεία στα βυζαντινὰ νομικὰ κείμενα,” *Ἡ καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο. Τομές και συνέχειες στην ελληνιστική και ρωμαϊκή παράδοση* (ed. Chr. Angelidi), Athens 1989, 555, 558, 561. On sorcerers and their activities, see also Theres-Fögen, *op.cit.* (n. 9), 99-101. D. de F. Abrahamse, “Magic and Sorcery in the Hagiography of the Middle Byzantine Period,” *ByzF* 8 (1982), 3-17.

<sup>12</sup> As a holy fool he represented a “non-standard” expression of religiosity. On the special nature of holy fools, see L. Rydén, “The Holy

Fool,” *The Byzantine Saint. Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (ed. S. Hackel), London 1981, 106-113. S. A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (transl. S. Franklin), Oxford 2006.

<sup>13</sup> A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.), *Pravoslavnij Palestinskij Sbornik XII* (1907), 196 [=Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database, <http://128.103.33.14/saints2/TEXTS/2.html> (25/09/2012)].

<sup>14</sup> The relevant literature is very large, see indicatively, Ch. A. Faraone - D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, New York - Oxford 1991. M. Meyer - P. Mirecki (eds), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden - New York - Cologne 1995. J. N. Bremmer - J. R. Veenstra (eds), *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, Leuven 2002.

<sup>15</sup> R. Greenfield, “Contribution to the Study of Palaeologan Magic,” *Byzantine Magic*, *op.cit.* (n. 9), 118.

<sup>16</sup> D. E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 23.2 (ed. H. Temporini - W. Haase), Berlin - New York 1980, 1515.

<sup>17</sup> See also, A. Kazhdan, “Holy and Unholy Miracle Workers,” *Byzantine Magic*, *op.cit.* (n. 9), 73-82. For the *φυλακτηρίου*s, see Theres-Fögen, *op.cit.* (n. 9), 99-100 n. 5.

motifs, symbols and inscriptions taken from outside or from the fringes of the official religion, traditions and teachings of the Orthodox Church.<sup>18</sup>

Such objects are described in the scholarly literature nowadays as *magical amulets*.<sup>19</sup> The first systematic publication of them was by C. Bonner in 1950. In studying what were until then known to scholars as “gnostic” amulets, he identified a specific group which reveal a Jewish character, but also distinctly Hellenistic survivals and pagan elements. He speculated that these objects might have been intended for a Christian public, who either suppressed their pagan or Jewish characteristics or else gave them a Christian interpretation, and therefore described them as “Christian” amulets. It is interesting that Bonner introduced the term “amulets” very diffidently, fearing the reactions that might be aroused in the academic community of his day by the very idea of such things being used by Christians.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently new examples were added in catalogues of exhibitions, museums and private collections,<sup>21</sup> while gradually papers also began to be published, which dealt in detail with some specific groups of this large category of artefacts.<sup>22</sup>

For the most part they are metal, usually copper alloy, and more rarely stone, bone, glass or clay, medallions and pendants, as well as rings or armbands. There were also engraved gems, that were probably used as jewellery too, i.e. set in pendants or rings. They mainly date to the Early Byzantine period, in other words the 6th to 7th centuries.<sup>23</sup> The only group of similar objects which continues into the Middle Byzantine period are the so-called

*uterus amulets* (ύστερικὰ φυλακτήρια) with images of the Gorgoneion.<sup>24</sup>

Bonner also laid down the fundamental tenets for studying magical amulets, guidelines which have to a large extent been adopted and continue to be used by researchers in this field. He suggested that there are two kind of tasks for the students of magical amulets, i.e. to describe them in all details of the designs and inscriptions and then to examine them from a historical point of view, in order to understand on the one hand the various purposes for which these objects were employed and on the other to determine the national (sic), cultural, religious or literary influences that have contributed to their development.<sup>25</sup>

In this paper I shall concentrate on the inscriptions on magical amulets. As mentioned above, my aim is to demonstrate that the texts inscribed on them have all the characteristics of a *ritual language*. Moreover, I will be dealing exclusively with the inscriptions, because I believe they can help us identify the traditions and practices behind these artefacts and by extension enable us to get to grips with the ideas and perceptions woven around them.

To this end I shall be looking for information in contemporary magical texts, i.e. in the so-called *magical papyri* and the *lamellae* or inscribed magical amulets. The term *Greek magical papyri* refers to a corpus of papyri from Greco-Roman Egypt which include a variety of spells and incantations as well as collections of recipes and instructions for rituals. They date from the 2nd century BC up to the 5th century AD and contain miscellaneous material from various religious traditions with

<sup>18</sup> They are, in fact, inspired by the so-called “alternative traditions,” a term coined by P. Greenfield, which refers both to the “magical” texts which were disapproved of by the official Church (e.g. the Testament of Solomon) and books or commentaries by Byzantine authors on related subjects, such as for example the treatise *On Demons* (περὶ δαιμόνων) by Pseudo-Psellos, see R. P. H. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology*, Amsterdam 1988, 153-164.

<sup>19</sup> Or “apotropaic amulets” (αποτροπαϊκά φυλακτά) in the Greek literature. See for example the relevant terminology in the Exhibition catalogue *Η καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο* [*Everyday Life in Byzantium*] (ed. D. Papanikola-Mpakirtzes), Athens 2002], 523. See also P. Kambanis, “Παλαιοχριστιανικά φυλακτά της συλλογής Γ. Τσολοζίδη,” *Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη του Σωτήρη Κίτσα*, Thessalonike 2001, 91. For the corresponding bibliography in other languages see C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, Ann Arbor 1950. G. Vikan, “Amulet (φυλακτήριον),” *ODB* 1, 82-83.

<sup>20</sup> Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 208-228 and n. 1.

<sup>21</sup> See for example *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian*

*House* (ed. E. Dauterman-Maguire – H. Maguire – M. J. Duncan-Flowers) (Illinois Byzantine Studies II), Urbana – Chicago 1989.

<sup>22</sup> As, for example, the articles by Ch. Walter on the so-called “seals of Solomon” and by G. Vikan on a group of amuletic armbands (see below nn. 54 and 48 respectively).

<sup>23</sup> As most of them belong to collections and museums, often having no detailed provenance, they are difficult to date. In general terms they are attributed to the 6th and 7th centuries and thought to come from Syria-Palestine. However, finds from excavations have revealed that they could go on being used over long periods of time, see for example T. Matantseva, “Les amulettes contre le mauvais oeil du Cabinet des Médailles,” *JbAC* 37 (1994), 113 n. 27, where it is noted that medallions with the “much-suffering eye” (see below p. 342) have been found in excavations in Cherson in 12th-/13th-centuries levels.

<sup>24</sup> On this group of amulets, see J. Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993), 25-62.

<sup>25</sup> Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 21.

a variety of uses. They include both individual spells/amulets, produced for a specific purpose and client, as well as compilations of spells and magic recipes for professional or scholarly use, i.e. “handbooks” for sorcerers.<sup>26</sup> These texts are a rare source of information on popular religion in the Late Roman Mediterranean world and have been used systematically since Bonner’s day as complementary material to help us understand the Byzantine medallions/pendant-amulets.

However, closer in type to the medallions/pendant-amulets are the *lamellae*, that is the thin sheets of metal, that their owners usually wore folded up in cylindrical metal cases.<sup>27</sup> As well as being called *lamellae* objects of this kind are usually referred to in the literature as *inscribed (magical) phylacteria/amulets* and indeed they are magical texts engraved with a sharp instrument on thin sheets of precious metal foil (usually gold or silver).<sup>28</sup> Their content was usually of a protective nature, i.e. healing or apotropaic incantations, for the benefit of their owner, whom they often accompanied even to the grave. In other words *lamellae* are those objects which would have been made using the ‘recipes’ and instructions we find in the *magical papyri*. They have been discovered in various parts of the Roman Empire and date from the 1st century BC up to the 6th century AD, something which indicates amongst other things that the *magical papyri* were not just a product of Roman Egypt, but reflect practices of the Late Roman world more generally<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 1). The gradual decline in their use from the 6th century on is probably connected with the spread of medallions/pendant-amulets, which are the subject of this paper, and which the Christian population seems to have preferred.<sup>30</sup>

The fundamental generic difference between the *lamellae* and the medallions/pendant-amulets lies in the fact



Fig. 1. A gold Roman amulet (lamella), 3rd-4th century AD. The Portable Antiquities Scheme/The Trustees of the British Museum.

that the former owe their protective properties to the apotropaic text inscribed on them, but also probably to the magic ritual which preceded its inscription on the metal,<sup>31</sup> while on the pendants the protective phraseology

<sup>26</sup> On Greek *magical papyri* (*Papyri Graecae Magicae*), H. D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation. Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago 1986, xli-liv. W. M. Brashear, “The ‘Greek Magical Papyri.’ An Introduction and Survey; Annotated Bibliography,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 18.5 (1995), 3380-3684.

<sup>27</sup> P. W. Schienerl, “Der Ursprung und die Entwicklung von Amulettbehältnissen in der antiken Welt,” *Antike Welt* 15 (1984), 45-54. E. Lucchesi-Palli, “Untersuchungen zum Inhalt der Bullae und anderer Amulettkapseln in Antike, Spätantike und im frühen Mittelalter,” in M. Jordan-Ruwe – U. Real (eds), *Bild- und Formensprache der Spätantiken Kunst, Hugo Bradenburg zum 65. Geburtstag*, Munster 1994, 171-176.

<sup>28</sup> R. Kotansky, “Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets,” in C. A. Faraone – D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, New York – Oxford 1991, 107-137,

especially 114ff. Id., *Greek Magical Amulets. The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae*, Part I: Published Texts of Known Provenance (*Papyrologica Coloniensia* XXII/1), Opladen 1994, XV-XIX. There are clear features in a number of the inscribed *lamellae* of the Christian period which indicate a Christian owner or the influence of the Christian religion, see *ibid.*, no. 53 and no. 68. Kotansky, “Incantations,” *op.cit.*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> This is demonstrated in the corpus of *lamellae* of known provenance published by Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, *op.cit.* (n. 28), which includes artifacts found from Wales to the southern Mediterranean. See the book review by David Frankfurter, in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 95.04.12, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1995/95.04.12.html> (last accessed 25/09/2011).

<sup>30</sup> Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, *op.cit.* (n. 28), *supra*.

<sup>31</sup> Frankfurter, *op.cit.* (n. 29).

was also combined with visual symbols and images. An initial attempt will be made below at producing a more systematic study, bringing together the texts inscribed on these two different categories of amulets, a study which may help us understand and formulate new questions for research on Byzantine magical medallions/pendant-amulets.

Before starting to study the inscriptions on the Byzantine magical amulets a brief comment is required on the terminology used in the article for the two different kinds of phylacteria. Namely in order to distinguish the magical amulets from the *lamellae*, which in the relevant literature are called inscribed magical amulets, I have adopted for the former a modern descriptive term: medallion/pendant-amulets.<sup>32</sup>

### Words and Visual Symbols on Byzantine Magical Amulets: an Initial Classification

The use of words as the principal apotropaic medium is first revealed in those medallion-amulets which have no images on one side, only inscriptions, and in particular invocations of holy persons, unintelligible words,<sup>33</sup> or small motifs that look like letters and are called “characters” (*χαρακτῆρες*) in the *magical papyri*. An example, often cited as typical in the literature, is a large bronze pendant bearing the inscription: ἅγια ὀνόματα κ(αὶ) σύ<μ>βολα κ(αὶ) φοβεροὶ] χαρακτῆρες φυλάξατ[ε τ]ὸν φοροῦντα ἢ τὴν φο[ο]ροῦ<σ>αν τὰς . . . τὰς θιάς ὑ[μῶν] δυνάμεις [ἅ]πὸ πά<ν>των κινδ[ύνων] (i.e. holy names and symbols and dreadful characters, protect from

all dangers the man or woman who carries your ... divine powers).<sup>34</sup>

The expression “holy names” (*ἅγια ὀνόματα*) refers to the various appellations of God. This invocation is frequent on *lamellae* and in the *magical papyri*, where it usually appears in the singular, i.e. ἅγιον ὄνομα (“holy name”), though sometimes in the plural as an allusion to the various names for (the Jewish?) God.<sup>35</sup> Consequently on the other (now missing) side of the above mentioned medallion various denominations of God or the names of other holy figures that could triumph over evil would have been inscribed together with magical symbols. A typical example of such talismans is seen in a group of copper alloy amulets, dating as early as the first half of the 4th century AD<sup>36</sup> and bearing the incised words ΙΑΩ ΣΑΒΑΩΘ (Jehovah, Sabaoth) and names of archangels together with a depiction of a roaring lion<sup>37</sup> (Fig. 2). Thus simply citing the names of divine protecting forces was enough to drive out evil. As a ‘recipe’ for making an inscribed phylactery recorded in a *magical papyrus* informs us: “on a thin sheet of gold in the shape of a sword write once Thuriel, Michael, Gabriel...”<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the written word the writing itself had protective power. The ‘vores magicae’ and the *dreadful characters*, referred to in the above mentioned medallion, are the best possible evidence of the magical use of writing.

*Character* is the general term for the small designs and figures drawn in the form of letter, in rows or groups on *magical papyri* and amulets. The N-shaped symbol, which is depicted next to a lion treading on a snake on a 6th- to 7th-century copper alloy medallion in the Benaki Museum,

<sup>32</sup> On the terminology of magical amulets, see also D. C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, Pennsylvania 2006, 6-19.

<sup>33</sup> The “unintelligible words” otherwise known as *vores magicae*, that is strings of consonants and vowels which make no sense, are one of the most characteristic peculiarities of the magical papyri, see Brashear, *op.cit.* (n. 26), 3429-3428. They are often found in exactly the same form in many different kinds of magical texts, which shows that they are conventional in nature rather than improvised, Aune, *op.cit.* (n.16), 1548-1549. See also D. Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions,” *Helios* 21 (1994), 199-205.

<sup>34</sup> This medallion was found in an excavation at Beisan in Palestine, but Bonner who published it gives no other information, see Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 215, no. 317.

<sup>35</sup> Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, *op.cit.* (n. 28), 335, no. 58, ll. 11-12. The “great name of God” (μέγα ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ) is also found in a liturgical exorcism inscribed on an early 3rd-century AD precious stone from Asia Minor: “Ἐξορκίζω σε τοῦς ἑπτὰ οὐρα/νοῦς καὶ τοῦς δύο ἀρχαγγ/έλους καὶ τὸ {μ/ε} μέγα ὄνομα Χερουβί<τ>ν

Ἰάω/σῶσον τὸν φοροῦντα” (I adjure you by the seven heavens and the two archangels and the great-name Cherubim Iāō, save the bearer), R. Kotansky, “Remnants of a liturgical exorcism on a gem,” *Le Muséon* 108, 1-2 (1995), 143-156; on the “holy name” see 151-154. See also the use of the phrase “the holy name” on another early magical amulet made from a gemstone, D. Wortmann, “Neue magische Gemmen,” *Bonner Jahrbücher* 175 (1975), 76-80.

<sup>36</sup> An amulet of this kind was found in a Christian tomb dated to the first half of the 4th century AD, see H. Glitter, “Four Magical and Christian Amulets,” *Liber Annuus* 40 (1990), 371, n. 28.

<sup>37</sup> P. Schlumberger, “Amulettes byzantins anciens,” *REG* 5 (1892), 82-83, n. 11. Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 214, nos 309-312. On the magical use of names for God from the Old Testament or which in general terms have Jewish roots, Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, *op.cit.* (n. 18), 271. On the use of the names of angels, Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 170-171. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, *op.cit.* (n. 18), 272-273. And see J. Engemann, “Zur Verbreitung magischer Übelabwehr in der nichtchristlichen und christlichen Spätantike,” *JACH* 18 (1975), 37.

<sup>38</sup> Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, *op.cit.* (n. 28), 106



Fig. 2. Medallion-pendant amulets with the inscribed words Jehovah, Sabaoth, names of archangels and a roaring lion. Private Collection.



Fig. 3. Copper alloy medallion, 6th-7th century. Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. no. 11497 (© Benaki Museum, Athens).



Fig. 4. Dreadful characters inscribed on a 3rd-4th century achates gem. Athens, Numismatic Museum, inv. no. 96.

is a typical example of these very common magical devices<sup>39</sup> (Fig. 3). These symbols first emerge as early as the 1st century AD and are found in different magical contexts, i.e. on *lamellae*, in papyri, on medallions and pendants<sup>40</sup> (Fig. 4). Although unrelated to any known alphabet, they have a standard appearance – bent or crossed lines with bulbous terminals – and are employed in such a way as to produce some sort of “meaning” simply by their

depiction. In the papyri writing them down is a part of the magic ritual. Thus these signs functioned as visual symbols associated both with the preparation and the performance of a magical rite. Their typical shapes and the great care that was taken to reproduce them exactly according to given instructions, reveals that the characters operate not so much as an artificial language or cryptography, but as “sacred” texts.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, op.cit. (n. 19), 530, no. 732. The medallion belongs to the group of so-called seals of Solomon, see below p. 338 ff.

<sup>40</sup> Brashear, op.cit. (n. 26), 3414.

<sup>41</sup> Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing,” op.cit. (n. 33), 205-207.

It is interesting to note that their use is not confined to the Early Byzantine period. Documentary sources from the 13th and 14th centuries mention the existence of amulets with such symbols and indicate that the same practices continued to be used over a long period. For example the Miracles of St. Demetrios, written in the late 13th century by John Stavrakios, describe a parchment phylactery on which were incised “names of gods and drawings of circles and semi-circles and all sorts of differently shaped characters and types of images.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly in the 14th century we find people appearing in the Patriarchal Court charged with sorcery for having written the name of Christ alongside “characters and invocations of demons,”<sup>43</sup> while around the same time Nikephoros Gregoras refers to the signs, called “characters,” which have the power to charm the demons and ascribes their origins to the Chaldaeans and the Egyptians.<sup>44</sup> These Late Byzantine sources refer mainly to amulets on parchment or paper on which the symbols and invocations or incantations are inscribed, basically continuing the Late Antique tradition of the *lamellae*.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from the Old Testament appellations for God and the names of the archangels, the first verse of Psalm 90 constitute the most common phrase with autonomous apotropaic force and this was often inscribed without any other symbols or imagery on magical amulets. Typical examples can be seen in the metal amulets in the shape of an eye, which could have been made in a stone mould, now in the Benaki Museum, on which the only depiction is the first words of Psalm 90/91: Ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν βοηθείᾳ τοῦ ὑψίστου (He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High)<sup>46</sup>

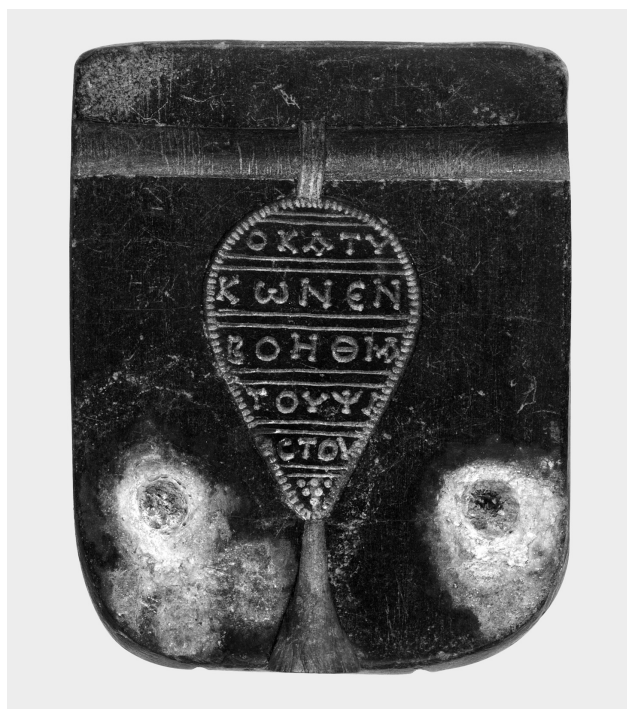


Fig. 5. Stone mould for metal amulets with first verse of Psalm 90/91, 6th-7th century. Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. no. 12733 (© Benaki Museum, Athens).

(Fig. 5). The existence of another similar mould that could produce two separate small metal plaques with suspension hooks on which the first six words of the same Psalm were inscribed, demonstrates the protective power of these verses.<sup>47</sup> In addition there is a large group of metal

<sup>42</sup> Ὄνόματα θεῶν καὶ κύκλων περιγραφὰ καὶ ἡμικύκλια καὶ σχημάτων χαρακτῆρες παντοδαπῶν καὶ εἰδώλων τύποι ὑπερφανεῖς τῇ μεμβράνῃ κεχάραται, J. Iberites, “Λόγος εἰς τὰ θαύματα τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου,” *Μακεδονικά* 1 (1940), 340, ll. 33-34.

<sup>43</sup> “Χαρακτῆρας καὶ ἐπικλήσεις δαιμόνων,” H. Hunger, et al. (eds), *Das Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel, Edition und Übersetzung der Urkunden aus den Jahren 1337-1350*, Vienna 1995, vol. 2, no. 113,4. See also another ruling given on a Cappadocian, who was charged with writing “some names and characters” on a piece of paper. He exposed this paper to the stars and then gave it to a monk, who, “taking it for a phylactery,” sewed it into his cloak at chest level, see J. Koder, et al. (eds), *Das Register des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel, Edition und Übersetzung der Urkunden aus den Jahren 1350-1363*, Vienna 2001, vol. 3, no. 199. On this passage see also C. Cupane, “La magia a Bisanzio nel secolo XIV: azione e reazione. Dal Registro del Patriarcato costantinopolitano (1315-1402),” *JÖB* 29 (1980) 237-262, especially 243f.

<sup>44</sup> Nikephori Gregorae, “In librum Synesii de Insomnis,” *PG* 149, col. 538. This belief probably goes back to the commonplace perception,

widespread from as early as the Roman period, that sorcery was connected with the Chaldaeans and more generally with Orientals, see G. Lacerenza, “Jewish Magicians and Christian Clients in Late Antiquity: the Testimony of Amulets and Inscriptions,” *What Athens has to do with Jerusalem. Essays on Classical, Jewish, and Early Christian Art and Archeology in Honor of Gideon Foerster* (ed. L. V. Rutgers), Leuven 2002, 395-399. Nevertheless this may not be far from the truth, as modern scholarship sees a relationship between “characters” and Egyptian hieroglyphs, see Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing,” op.cit. (n. 33), 207-211.

<sup>45</sup> Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, op.cit. (n. 18), 279-285. It should be noted that textual amulets have survived in great numbers from the medieval Latin West, see Skemer, op.cit. (n. 32).

<sup>46</sup> The mould in the Benaki Museum has a particularly finely engraved inscription, see A. Drandaki, “Copper Alloy Jewellery at the Benaki Museum: 4th to 7th Century,” *AT* 13 (2005), 74, fig. 11b.

<sup>47</sup> It belonged to a private collection and was purchased in Istanbul, see Bonner, op.cit. (n. 19), 221, no. 328.



Fig. 6. Two amuletic armbands. The smaller one with the depiction of the Holy Rider is made of silver, while the second one, made of iron, is inscribed with the first verse of the Psalm 90, 6th-7th century. Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. nos 11472, 11474 (© Benaki Museum, Athens).

amuletic armbands of the second half of the 6th to the early 7th century, on which the first words of the same psalm are inscribed together with Christian images and magical symbols.<sup>48</sup> Actually in one example of this group, now belonging to the Benaki Museum, the whole of the first verse of the psalm forms its sole decoration: Ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν βοηθείᾳ τοῦ ὑψίστου ἐν σκέπῃ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀύλισθήσεται (He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty)<sup>49</sup> (Fig. 6). At this point it is interesting to note the interpretation put on this phrase by the 12th-century theologian Euthymios Zigabenos, who wrote: “It means the help of God and the law

of God’s commandments, which he gave to mankind to help them against demons.”<sup>50</sup> Zigabenos’s commentary on the psalm, referring to the driving out of demons, suggests firstly that the same apotropaic practices were employed over a long period and secondly, and more importantly, it reveals the ways in which over time these practices were overlaid with an Orthodox interpretation and became accepted by the official Church.

Finally, there is another group of medallion-amulets featuring Psalm 90 which illustrate in the clearest possible manner the ritual character of the texts inscribed on Byzantine magical amulets. They are a series of copper-

<sup>48</sup> For example the Holy Rider and Chnoubis, see G. Vikan, “Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands and the Group to which They Belong,” *The Journal of Walters Art Gallery* 45 (1987), 35. This group of armbands has 34 examples known to date, see T. J. Kraus, “Fragmente eines Amulett-Armbands im *British Museum* (London) mit Septuaginta-Psalm 90 und der Huldigung der Magier,” *JbAC* 48/49 (2005-2006), 114-127. Id., “He that dwelleth in the Help of the Highest: Septuagint Psalm 90 and the iconographic Program on Byzantine Armbands,” in *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (eds C. A. Evans – H. D. Zacharias), London 2009, 137-147.

<sup>49</sup> *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, op.cit. (n. 19), no. 731. It is interesting to note that we find the same verse with a similarly apotropaic function on the lintels of doors in Syria, Lesbos and Cyprus and also on tombs and sarcophagi, see W. K. Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels of the Christian Period in Syria,” *AJA* 10 (1906), 144. D. Feissel, “Une inscription de Salamine de Chypre et les citations du psaume 90,” *BCH* 108 (1984), 571-579. On the more general apotropaic use of this psalm, see T. Kraus, “Septuaginta-Psalm 90 im

apotropaischer Verwendung: Vorüberlegungen für eine kritische Edition und (bisheriges) Datenmaterial,” *Biblische Notizen* 125 (2005), 39-73

<sup>50</sup> *Νοεῖται δὲ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὁ νόμος τῶν θείων ἐντολῶν, ὃν δέδωκε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις εἰς βοήθειαν κατὰ τῶν δαιμόνων*, PG 128, l. 937c. Euthymios Zigabenos was a monk and a celebrated theologian, who at the invitation of Alexios I Komnenos wrote a treatise refuting heresies, see brief note under “Zigabenos, Euthymios,” *ODB* 3, 2227. See also the more “predictable” interpretations of this psalm by Athanasios of Alexandria (4th century), PG 27, 400; Ὁ μένων ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ βοηθείᾳ σκέπεται καὶ φυλάσσεται (whoever resides in this help is shielded and protected) and by Nikephoros Blemmydes (13th century), PG 142, 1542: Ὁ ἐπιμόνον ἔχων τὸν νοῦν τῇ βοηθείᾳ τῇ ἐκ Θεοῦ, διὰ τὸ εἰς μόνον τὸν Θεὸν ἐλπίζειν, ἀεὶ δὲ οὗτος τῇ σκέπῃ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Θεοῦ διάξει, τουτέστιν ὑπὸ θεοῦ φυλαχθήσεται πάντοτε (he who ceaselessly looks to God’s help, has his hope in the one and only God, he will always dwell in the shelter of the heavenly God, in other words God will watch over him always).

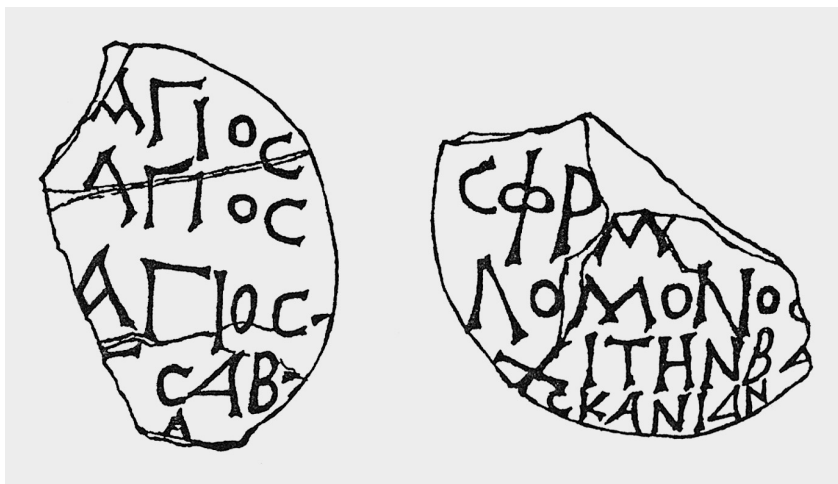


Fig. 7. Glass medallion (Solomon seal) from Anemurium, late 6th century.

alloy pendants in the form of an eye with a depiction of the so-called holy rider on one side and the letters *ο κατ* on the other, i.e. the beginning of the first word *ὁ κατοικῶν* (“he who dwells”) of Psalm 90.<sup>51</sup> These four letters substitute for the apotropaic text in an abstract manner and thus acquire the role of a magic symbol. Its obscurity and ambiguity, a typical trait of magic spells and incantations, can be deciphered only by someone initiated in the protective power of the Psalm.

Another very common apotropaic formula is made up of the first words of the Trisagion hymn, i.e. the acclamation “Holy! Holy! Holy!” It is attested in the *magical papyri*, where apart from its protective power it also acquires an exorcising function.<sup>52</sup> It is often the only element found on one side of a medallion/pendant-amulet, as for example on a late 6th-century glass medallion from Anemurium.<sup>53</sup> On the other side of this glass medallion is the inscription: *Σφραγίς Σολομόνος ἔχει τὴν βασκανία*

(the seal of Solomon restrains the evil eye), which makes it part of a very large group of Early Byzantine phylacteries, the so-called seals of Solomon<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 7).

These objects are inspired by an Old Testament apocryphal text, the *Testament of Solomon*, probably written in Egypt by a Greek-speaking Christian some time between the 1st and the 3rd century AD. According to the Testament the prophet king had the power to control all demons with a seal given to him by God.<sup>55</sup> Thus this kind of amulet usually has the words *Σφραγίς Σολομόντος* (seal of Solomon) or *Σφραγίς Θεοῦ* (seal of God) on one side, which somehow makes them the owner’s own personal copy of the original seal. The earliest group, dating from the 3rd to the 5th century AD, are intaglios mainly made of haematite and depict a mounted male figure, identified by inscription as Solomon, spearing a semi-naked woman on the ground with his lance, while on the other side the words *seal of God* are inscribed<sup>56</sup> (Fig. 8).

<sup>51</sup> Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 218-219, no. 319. *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, *op.cit.* (n. 21), 217, no. 136. On the subject of the Holy Rider see below, n. 57.

<sup>52</sup> On the Trisagion Hymn in magical papyri, F. Maltomini, “Christo all’Eufrate. P. Heid. G.1101: Amuleto Christiano,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 48 (1982), 158, with earlier bibliography. See also Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, *op.cit.* (n. 28), 316, D. G. Martinez, *P. Michigan XIX. Baptized for Our Sakes: A Leather Trisagion from Egypt (P. Mich. 799)* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde, bd. 120), Stuttgart – Leipzig 1999.

<sup>53</sup> J. Russell, “The Archeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period,” *Byzantine Magic*, *op.cit.* (n. 9), 39, 46 (on dating), figs 2-4. The words “Holy, holy, holy” are almost always inscribed on the so-called uterus phylacteries with the Gorgoneion, see Spier, *op.cit.* (n. 24), 30.

<sup>54</sup> The literature on this category of amulets is extremely extensive. The most important studies are: P. Perdrizet, “Σφραγίς Σολομῶνος,” *REG* 16 (1903), 42-61. Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 209-211. Ch. Walter, “The Intaglio of Solomon in the Benaki Museum and the Origins of the Iconography of Warrior Saints,” *ΔΧΑΕ* 16 (1989-1990), 33-42.

<sup>55</sup> S. Iles Johnston, “The Testament of Solomon from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance,” in J. N. Bremmer – J. R. Veenstra (eds), *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, Leuven 2002, 35-50.

<sup>56</sup> Walter, “The intaglio of Solomon,” *op.cit.* (n. 54). Idem, “Some Unpublished Intaglios of Solomon in the British Museum, London,” *Θυμιάμα στη μνήμη της Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα*, Athens 1994, 365-368, pl. XXXIV, 205-206.



Fig. 8. Solomon seal, hematite intaglio, 3rd-4th century. Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. no. 13539 (© Benaki Museum, Athens).

More numerous are the later examples of *seals of Solomon*, which are dated to the 6th–7th century AD. These are usually copper alloy pendants and medallions which depict an equestrian saint killing a female demon on one side mainly accompanied by the inscription: *flee hated one, pursued by....* and the name or names of the



Fig. 9. Medallion-pendant amulet (Solomon Seal) with the depiction of the Holy Rider on one side and the “much suffering eye” on the other. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, inv. Schlumberger 68.



Fig. 10. Copper alloy medallion, 7th century. Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. no. 11497 (© Benaki Museum, Athens).

saintly pursuers, e.g. *Saint Sissinios, Sissinarios, the angel Araph or Solomon*<sup>57</sup> (Figs 9, 10).

The expression “*flee demon so-and-so, the hero such-and-such is pursuing you*” is a very common magical formula found on spells and exorcisms in the *magical papyri* from the Imperial period on. Moreover it seems to have

<sup>57</sup> Φεύγε μειμισμένη διώκει σὲ Σισσίνιος, Σισσινάριος, ἄγγελος Ἀράφ ἢ Σολομών, There are numerous examples of this kind of medallion-amulet, see Perdrizet, “Σφραγὶς Σολομῶνος,” op.cit. (n. 54), 46-48. Bonner, op.cit. (n. 19), no. 318-326. *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, op.cit. (n. 21), 25-28. Matantseva, op.cit. (n. 23). Russel, op.cit. (n. 53), 40-41. Spier, op.cit. (n. 24), 60-62. There are, of course, variations on this type as for example a

copper alloy medallion in the Benaki Museum collection, which depicts an angel striking a smaller, naked female figure on the head (Fig. 10). The inscription which runs around this side of the medallion says: ΦΕΥΓΕ ΜΕΜΙΣΜΕΝΗ ΔΙΟΚΙ CE Ο ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ ΑΡΑΦ (Flee, hated one! The angel Araph is pursuing you!), See *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, op.cit. (n. 19), 530, no. 732.

been used in a comparable way as early as the 4th century BC.<sup>58</sup> The same goes for the similar command “flee! flee, evil spirit!” which is accompanied by the threat that some strong protector, e.g. Herakles, and later in the Christian period, Christ or some other saint, “resides within,” which we find in many different contexts, e.g. in the *magical papyri*, on domestic lintels, as well as on metal inscribed phylacteria and medallion/pendant-amulets.<sup>59</sup>

The invocation of the demons and the use of the imperative in these short magical formulas indicate that they are incantations directly addressed to the evil spirits. It seems likely moreover that they were probably also intended to be read out loud, so that the expulsion of the demon would be accomplished by the very act of uttering the command. Thus there was a “performative” element in these inscriptions, something that – according to social anthropologists – is one of the basic characteristics of ritual language. In other words these formulae can be regarded as *performative utterances*, a term that was defined in the theory of *speech acts* by the British philosopher J. L. Austin and first adopted by anthropologists such as S. J. Tambiah and Ruth Finnegan in order to explain the nature of ritual language in non-literate societies and the belief in the power of ritual words.<sup>60</sup> According to Austin’s theory some utterances do not describe or report or make true or false statements, but rather perform an action. One of the most typical examples of a “performative utterance” is the phrase: “I take this man/woman as my lawfully wedded husband/wife,” used in the marriage ceremony. In this case the sentence is not being used to describe or state what one is ‘doing,’ but actually “to do it.” The same is true of the above mentioned magi-

cal formulas inscribed on medallion-amulets. In other words the engraving or pronouncing of these phrases actually *performs* the act of driving out the demon.

The female demon must be identified with Gello or Gylou, who mainly threatened mothers and children.<sup>61</sup> In the exorcising texts against this demonic figure, Gylou appears facing the saint who kills her, Sissinios with his brother Sissinarios or the Archangel Michael, and reveals all her different names, which in effect correspond to the various aspects of her malevolent actions, in order that her full elimination is accomplished.<sup>62</sup> One of her appellations in these exorcisms is *Βασκανία*, a designation that connects her with the belief in the evil eye,<sup>63</sup> and another is *Abyzou* (*Ἀβυζοῦ*), a name which also appears on some of these medallion-amulets.<sup>64</sup>

Concealing her name on the medallions was necessary according to the rules of magical ritual. Primarily it was a way of protecting the owner of the amulet against her schemes, something also observed in modern Greek popular tradition where the devil is usually referred to as the “get outta here!” (*ο οξ’ αποδώ*).<sup>65</sup> Moreover by using the designation the “hated one” (*μεμισσημένη*) instead of one of her numerous appellations, which in essence represent the various aspects of her malicious activity, the magical power of the amulet is reinforced against all the harm this dreadful demon could cause.

A similarly ritualistic aspect must also be latent in a group of *seals of Solomon* where the holy rider is not identified but is simply surrounded by the acclamation: “*Ἐἶς Θεὸς ὁ νικῶν πάντα τὰ κακά*” (One God conquers all evil)<sup>66</sup> (Fig. 11). In these cases the anonymous holy figure is

<sup>58</sup> *φεῦγε δεῖνα, ὁ δεῖνα σε διώκει*, Kotansky, “Incantations,” op.cit. (n. 28), 111, 113. Id., *Greek Magical Amulets*, op.cit. (n. 28), 163. See also, Spier, op.cit. (n. 24), 38 n. 74, 61 n. 163.

<sup>59</sup> *φεῦγε, φεῦγε κακὸ πνεῦμα, ἔνθα κατοικεῖ ...* See L. Robert, *HelLENICA* 13 (1965), 265-271. A. A. Barb, “Magica Varia,” *Syria* 49 (1972), 344-55.

<sup>60</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford 1962. R. Finnegan, “How to Do Things with Words: Performative Utterances Among the Limba of Sierra Leone,” *Man* 4 (1969), 537-552. For the work of Tambiah, see n. 1 above.

<sup>61</sup> On this identification see Matantseva, op.cit. (n. 23), 116-117, with the earliest bibliography on the subject in n. 49. On this female demon, see I. Sorlin, “Striges et Géloudes. Histoire d’une croyance et d’une tradition,” *TM* 11 (1991), 411-436. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief*, op.cit. (n. 18), 182-188.

<sup>62</sup> R. Greenfield, “Saint Sissinios, the Archangel Michael and the Female Demon Gylou: The Typology of the Greek Literary Stories,”

*Βυζαντινά* (1989), 83-141. The earliest manuscripts containing these exorcising texts date to the 15th century, but according to Greenfield, the fact that this form of exorcism has been recorded over a long time period and widespread geographical area allows us to suppose that these texts have a long period of oral tradition behind them, 139-141.

<sup>63</sup> V. Foskolou, “The Virgin, the Christ-Child and the evil eye,” *Images of the Mother of God. Perception of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (ed. M. Vassilaki), Ashgate 2005, 256-257, with earlier bibliography.

<sup>64</sup> Barb, op.cit. (n. 59), 344-345.

<sup>65</sup> On the modern Greek popular perceptions of the devil see the pioneering work of C. Stewart, *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in the Modern Greek Culture*, Princeton 1991.

<sup>66</sup> In the book by E. Peterson, *EΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ. Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Göttingen, 1926, a great many examples of the use and by extension the apotropaic character of this acclamation can be found. On the different



Fig. 11. Medallion-pendant amulet (Solomon seal) with the depiction of the Holy Rider and the inscription “Εἷς Θεός” on the one side and the “much suffering eye” on the other, 5th-6th century. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, inv. no. 54.2653.

essentially an amalgam of all the benevolent forces which can confront the demon.<sup>67</sup> There are also some examples of *seals of Solomon* where the holy rider is accompanied by the names of all three saints who overpower the demon,<sup>68</sup> something that also points to ritual practices, and is probably linked to a group of exorcising texts, in which all these saints appear together to annihilate Gyllou in a common enterprise.<sup>69</sup>

The inscription *Seal of Solomon / of God* together with the invocation: *φύλαξε / βοήθει / ἀποδίωξον πᾶν κακὸν*

*ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντος* (i.e. protect, help or drive out all evil from the wearer) is usually found on the other side of this kind of amulet, as for example in the copper alloy medallion of the 6th-7th century AD from the Benaki Museum in Athens (Fig. 3). These appeals for protection, using apotropaic formulae commonly found in the Greco-Roman world of Late Antiquity,<sup>70</sup> could also be classified as a “performative utterance.” This is because they imply a kind of a dialogue between the owner of the amulet and the beneficent powers, and moreover because, if the relevant

opinions as to its origins, see H. Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2008, 156 n. 34.

<sup>67</sup> H. Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies. Saints and their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton 1996, 122-123.

<sup>68</sup> On related examples, see especially Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), nos. 298-303. Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies*, *op.cit.* (n. 67), figs 105, 106. *Art and the Holy Powers*, *op.cit.* (n. 21), nos 136-135.

<sup>69</sup> Indeed some exorcising texts refer to the fact that, where the

names of the saints are recorded together, the female demon cannot enter, see P. Perdrizet, *Negotium perambulans in Tenebris. Études de démonologie gréco-orientale*, Strasbourg 1922, 16-17, 20.

<sup>70</sup> For an overview of related examples, see A. van den Hoek - D. Feissel - J. J. Herrmann, “Lucky Wearers: A Ring in Boston and a Greek Epigraphic Tradition of Late Roman and Byzantine Times,” *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 6 (1994), 47-50, 56-60.



Fig. 12. Medallion-pendant amulet (Solomon seal) with the depiction of bird attacking a snake and the inscription “πίνω.” Former Bonner Collection, University of Michigan.

words are uttered in a specific context, i.e. a ritual, they could actually be the means of *achieving* the desired protection against the evil spirits.

Apart from the above mentioned inscriptions this side of the *seals of Solomon* usually features one of a series of

images related to the particular apotropaic function of each amulet. The most common is that of the “much suffering eye,” that is of an eye threatened by various sharp implements and terrifying animals, an apotropaic symbol against the evil eye<sup>71</sup> (Fig. 11). Another interesting iconographical theme found on this side of *seals of Solomon* is the image of a bird attacking a snake with the inscription “πίνω” (I drink)<sup>72</sup> (Fig. 12). According to one view the bird should be identified as an ibis, which in Egypt was thought never to drink poisoned or dirty water, i.e. water which might cause disease or even death. Consequently the depiction of the bird protected the owner of the amulet from poisoning by water or just from poisoning (*φαρμακεία*) in general.<sup>73</sup> Another view interprets the bird as an ostrich, well-known for its insatiable appetite and strong digestive system, and proposes that the inscription should be read as *πεινώ* (I’m hungry), and thus, in accordance with the principles of homeopathic magic, it is depicted as a protection for a weak stomach.<sup>74</sup> This second view imposes itself as all the more likely, given that another medallion with the ‘much suffering eye’ and the holy rider, inscribed on the reverse “στόμαχε ἀντιστομαχε ὃς αἷμα ἔφαγε ὃς αἷμα ἔπιε...” seems to have a similar function.<sup>75</sup>

Similar inscriptions, which specify the amulet’s protective effect and attribute specific healing abilities to it, appear on other types of object, e.g a bone medallion with an image of the Sacrifice of Abraham and the inscription “κύριος τοῦ Ἀβρααμ θεράπευσον τὸν σθώμαχον” (Lord of Abraham, heal the stomach!).<sup>76</sup> Another typical example is seen in a gold ring in Belgrade with the inscription: “Θεὸς κελεύω μὴ φύειν κολώπονον” (I, God, command [you] not to give the belly ache).<sup>77</sup> The phrases “God commands” (*θεὸς κελεύει*) and “angels put an end to [some]

<sup>71</sup> On the “much suffering eye” see Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 211, nos 298-303. Engemann, “Pilgerwesen,” *op.cit.* (n. 7), 22-40. *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, *op.cit.* (n. 21). Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies*, *op.cit.* (n. 67), 106-109. The connection of this iconographic motif with the popular belief in the evil eye is confirmed by the inscription *φθόνος* (envy) which accompanies one of the depictions of the theme on a *seal of Solomon* [see Matantseva, *op.cit.* (n. 23), 111, 114-115, pl. 14b], as well as the inscription on the glass medallion from Anemurium mentioned above (n. 51). It is moreover characteristic that the demon in the Testament of Solomon who causes the evil eye says: “ἐγὼ καὶ Ῥὶξ Φθηνεὼθ καλοῦμαι. Βασκαίνω πάντα ἄνθρωπον καταργεῖ με δὲ ὁ πολυπαθὴς ὀφθαλμὸς ἐγγραττόμενος,” C. C. McCown, *The Testament of Solomon, Edited from Manuscripts at Mount Athos, Bologna, Holkham Hall, Jerusalem, London, Milan, Paris and Vienna, with Introduction* (Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Heft 9), Leipzig 1922, 58\*.

<sup>72</sup> Schlumberger, “Amulettes byzantins anciens,” *op.cit.* (n. 37), 81, no. 8. Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), nos 304-306. Barb, *op.cit.* (n. 59), 357-359, figs 5-6.

<sup>73</sup> In accordance with their religious practices, in order for water to be drinkable and suitable for use in rituals, it had first to be tasted by an ibis. The owner might also have believed that by putting the amulet into the water or other liquid they were about to drink that it would have purified it, in other words that it was no longer dangerous and, as they were protected by the inscription on the amulet, they could go ahead and drink, Barb, *op.cit.* (n. 59), 360-362.

<sup>74</sup> Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 212-214.

<sup>75</sup> “*Stomach, antistomach, which ate blood, which drank blood*,” Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 217-218.

<sup>76</sup> G. Schlumberger, “Quelques monuments byzantins inédits,” *BZ* 1893, 188-189.

<sup>77</sup> I. Popović – A. Popović, “Greek Inscription on a Golden Finger



Fig. 13. Medallion-pendant amulet, 5th-6th century. Collection of the University of Michigan.

illness” “ἄγγελοι παύσατε τὴν τάδε ἀσθένεια” are also stereotypical phrases in magical ritual practices. They are a kind of threat made against demons responsible for physical problems and are often found in the magical papyri and on *lamellae* with incantations against diseases.<sup>78</sup>

In general terms it seems that, as regards the *seals of Solomon*, there was no prescribed way of formulating the inscriptions on the amulets, and perhaps we should just say that their makers could choose from a repository of interchangeable apotropaic expressions, often operating on the principle “the more the merrier.” The example from the Benaki Museum mentioned above (Figs 3, 11), as well as a similar medallion from the University of Michigan’s collection, which has Psalm 90 and the acclamation “one God” (εἷς θεός) inscribed on one side, and on the other “Holy! Holy! Holy!”, magic characters and the words *σφραγὶς θεοῦ ζώντος* (seal of the living God), is typical of this approach<sup>79</sup> (Fig. 13).

A final category of inscriptions which appear on the medallion-pendant amulets covers a body of strange in-

cantations, which seem to be part of a myth or an exorcising text, or of a simple story and which are for the most part nowadays incomprehensible, such as the phrase: “A hungry wolf grazing, I drink water, I am thirsty, I eat bread” which is inscribed on the back of an amulet featuring the Holy Rider.<sup>80</sup> A long inscription also found on the back of a copper alloy encolpion featuring the holy rider and which basically consists of an enumeration of apotropaic symbols: “ἵππος, μούλος, ἴβις, εὐθεῖα κωλὴ ἀνδρός, στρουθοκάμηλος, Ἀπόλλων” seems equally simplistic but without the narrative element.<sup>81</sup>

However, the most characteristic incantation of this kind is the one for uterine conditions: “ὑστέρα μελάνη μελανομένη ὡς ὄφεις εἰλύεσαι καὶ ὡς λέων βρυχᾶσαι καὶ ὡς ἄρνιον κοιμοῦ” (black-stained womb, coil like a snake, roar like a lion and sleep like a lamb), which is found on a very large number of artefacts of the Middle Byzantine period, of widely varying type and quality, e.g. ranging from finely wrought, enamelled or silver medallions, such as the extraordinary 12th-century example belonging to the Benaki Museum collection<sup>82</sup> to roughly engraved copper

Ring from the National Museum in Belgrade,” *Starinar* 52 (2002), 157-160.

<sup>78</sup> Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, op.cit. (n. 28), no. 11, l. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Bonner, op.cit. (n. 19), 219, pl. XVII no. 324. *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, op.cit. (n. 21), no. 134.

<sup>80</sup> Bonner, op.cit. (n. 19), 216 no. 315.

<sup>81</sup> Schlumberger, “Amulettes byzantins anciens,” op.cit. (n. 37), 80 no. 7. Bonner, op.cit. (n. 19), 215. Barb, op.cit. (n. 59), 351-352.

<sup>82</sup> *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, op.cit. (n. 19), 487-488, no. 664.



Fig. 14. Silver medallion-pendant amulet with the Gorgoneion. Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. no. 11436 (© Benaki Museum, Athens).



Fig. 15. Two amuletic rings with the Gorgoneion. Archaeological Museum, Corinth, inv. nos 7677, 6669.

rings<sup>83</sup> (Figs 14, 15). The womb-incantation is accompanied by a Gorgoneion, i.e. a female head with snakes all around it. According to the most convincing interpretation the snake-haired head symbolizes the uterus itself, i.e. the womb, which in mediaeval thought was judged to be an independent being within the human body responsible

for various conditions and this also explains the fact that, judging by the inscriptions, the “uterine phylacteries” belonged to men as well as women.<sup>84</sup>

These kinds of magical formulas are a very common feature of the *magical papyri*. These are the so-called *historiolae*, that is the brief narratives incorporated into a magical

<sup>83</sup> The main publication on this group of amulets is by Spier, *op.cit.* (n. 24), where all the examples known to date, dating from the 10th to the 12th century, are listed.

<sup>84</sup> Spier, *op.cit.* (n. 24), 41-43. The uterine spell has not survived

intact in any other context. But elements of this magical formula can be found both in similar phrases from the magical papyri and in early amulets and indicate that it must go back to a similarly early model from the Late Roman period, *ibid.*, 44-48.

incantation or an exorcizing text.<sup>85</sup> A typical example of a *historiola* is the exorcism of Gyllou by the brothers Sissinios and Sissinarios, which begins with the narration of the troubles that the female demon had caused to their sister, followed by the saints' encounter with the demon and finally by her ritual destruction.<sup>86</sup> This spell is actually a tale that is recited every time the exorcist/sorcerer has to confront the demon. It is in this ritual re-enactment, i.e. oral narration or written record, that the apotropaic power of the *historiolae* resides, whereby myth is integrated into and blended with reality. In other words the mythical personages who appear in the narrative are conflated with the participants in its ritual "reconstruction:" i.e. the sorcerer is identified with the benevolent force taking the leading role in the myth and his "client" with the one who benefits from the action, i.e. the one who is cured or protected in the story. This is also why these narratives usually end by invoking the divine powers to do the same for the person seeking help as they did for the protagonist in the *historiola*.<sup>87</sup>

The inscriptions on the amulets that sound like part of a tale, i.e. the apotropaic phrase about the "uterus" or the "hungry wolf," may very well refer back to the most characteristic apostrophe in such a story, i.e. in a *historiola*, though this magical text is by no means easy to pin down today. Inscrubing them on an amulet is consequently a ritual repetition of the corresponding ritual narration, a reconstruction of the myth, intended to transfer its magical power to the present and the owner of the amulet.

Finally, we should also attribute a similar function to the images which probably illustrate such narratives, such as for example the Holy Rider spearing the prostrate female demon, which clearly illustrate the exorcisms of Gyllou, but also the scenes inspired by passages from the Bible, as both represent narratives from the supernatural world as perpetually present and effective in the world of physical reality.<sup>88</sup>

To this interpretation of biblical subjects as *historiolae*, i.e. as narratives of an apotropaic nature, proposed by D. Frankfurter, I would like to add a rider. This is based on two semi-precious stones, a haematite intaglio and an engraved jasper, which depict the miracle of the woman



Fig. 16. Jasper intaglio with the miracle of the woman with the issue of blood, 6th-7th century. Benaki Museum, Athens, inv. no. 13527 (© Benaki Museum, Athens).

with the issue of blood; they have been interpreted as amulets against haemorrhages and most probably intended for women. Their apotropaic and healing power was due both to the materials from which they were made, stones to which curative properties, and more specifically anti-haemorrhagic properties, had been attributed since antiquity, and to the scene depicted, which ultimately "narrates" the miraculous healing of a case of female bleeding.<sup>89</sup> Moreover the fact that on the haematite the image is accompanied by an inscription giving a free rendering of the corresponding passage from the Gospels reinforces the view that Christian subjects depicted on amulets are essentially, just like other iconographical motifs, reflections of ritual narratives, in this case from the Bible itself (Fig. 16).

<sup>85</sup> Brashear, op.cit. (n. 26), 3438-3440.

<sup>86</sup> On the texts aimed at exorcizing Gyllou, see Perdrizet, *Negotium perambulans in Tenebris*, op.cit. (n. 69). Greenfield, "Saint Sisinnios, the Archangel Michael," op.cit. (n. 62). See also K. N. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, Venice 1876, vol. V, 573-578.

<sup>87</sup> On the *historiola*'s function as part of the practice of magic, see D. Frankfurter, "Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the

Magical *Historiola* in Ritual Spells," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, op.cit. (n. 14), 457-476.

<sup>88</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> The haematite belongs to the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, see J. Tuerk, "An Early Byzantine Inscribed Amulet and its Narratives," *BMGS* 23 (1999), 25-42, while the jasper intaglio is in the Benaki Museum, Athens see *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, op.cit. (n. 19), 485, no. 659.

## Conclusions

One of the first issues to arise in studying these inscriptions is that of the religious affiliations of the amulets' owners and by extension the cultural context they came from. For example, the use of Old Testament names for God and the names of the angels, in examples where there are no other elements from the Christian tradition, raises the basic question linked to this category of artefacts: are they Christian, Jewish or "Gnostic" amulets?<sup>90</sup> This is not an easy question to answer, as is clearly indicated by the story of the sophist Theosebios. The pagan philosopher and teacher, as a certain Damaskios informs us in a 5th-century text, was struggling to exorcize a demon from a woman, and – along with all the other methods he tried – he addressed himself to "the god of the Jews."<sup>91</sup>

Basically the key to solving this problem lies in the pluralist religious environment of the Late Roman period in which these objects were created and the corresponding magical practices developed, which "blur" the boundaries between the various religious traditions of the day. As far as magic is concerned a contributing factor in this erosion of religious boundaries was the notion that using some foreign elements, such as a foreign language, or symbols from another religious tradition, gave the magical practices greater prestige and grandeur and ultimately made them more effective.<sup>92</sup> A typical example from this point of view is a series of amulets with inscriptions in the Samaritan language which, judging by the context in which they were found, belonged to Christians.<sup>93</sup>

Though the inscriptions cannot give us any precise information on the religious profile of the amulets' users, they can nevertheless enlighten us as to how they were used. More specifically, when combined with the imagery, they indicate the particular apotropaic function of any

given amulet, e.g. to protect against envy/the evil eye, illnesses or other dangers to which mankind is prey.<sup>94</sup>

On the other hand they rarely provide the identity of the amulet's owner, as they usually only say in general terms: Lord help/protect the wearer (male or female). The lack of owners' names on the early Byzantine amulets may well be due to the fact that they were mass produced, which can also be deduced from the cheap raw materials used and the simple method of manufacture.<sup>95</sup> It seems, in other words, that most of these objects were prefabricated. Nevertheless, it should have been possible to engrave the name of the purchaser on them. The few examples of extant medallions/amulets on which the owner is explicitly named<sup>96</sup> suggest that it may have been possible, even where mass production was the norm, to take on some private commissions and to produce more "personalized" amulets. It is interesting to note that in these cases they followed the practice seen in the *magical papyri*, i.e. the owner's name is given accompanied by that of her/his mother: e.g. protect so-and-so, born of such-and-such a woman ... (Φύλαξον τὸν ἢ τὴν τάδε, ἦν/ὄν ἔτεκε ἢ δεῖνα). This standard practice is once again due to the prescriptions of the *magical papyri*, according to which the person seeking help or protection must be identified and the only person by association with whom they can be recognized with certainty is their mother.<sup>97</sup>

The supposition that it would have been possible to inscribe the owner's name on these amulets is lent weight by a rock crystal pendant amulet inscribed "φύλαξον τὸν δεῖνα τὸν φοροῦντα τὸ φυλακτήριον τοῦτο τὸ ἀπάρτι" (may this phylactery preserve so-and-so, the wearer of this amulet from now on). This phrase, as Bonner maintains, was probably in the maker's pattern book, and depending on the circumstances he could either have replaced the term "so-and-so" with the name of the patron,

<sup>90</sup> On the term "Gnostic" and its erroneous use to describe Late Roman amulets, Bonner, *op.cit.* (n. 19), 1-2.

<sup>91</sup> F. R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization (c. 370-529)*, Leiden – New York – Cologne 1993, 1, 52-53. Lacerenza, *op.cit.* (n. 44), 404-405.

<sup>92</sup> Lacerenza, *op.cit.* (n. 44), 407-408.

<sup>93</sup> R. Pummer, "Amulets from the Roman-Byzantine Period and their Wearers," *Revue Biblique* 94 (1987), 251-263. Another amulet with a Samaritan inscription was found in Corinth in the Middle Byzantine level, G. R. Davinson, *Corinth XII. The Minor Objects, Results of the Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, Princeton – New Jersey 1952, 256, no.

2100. On this see also A. Hamburger, "A Graeco-Samaritan Amulet from Caesarea," *IEJ* 9 (1959), 43-45. R. Reich, "A Samaritan Amulet from Nahariya," *Revue Biblique* 92 (1985), 383-388.

<sup>94</sup> More specifically on the "healing/curative" amulets see, Vikan, "Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands," *op.cit.* (n. 48). Id., "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," *DOP* 38 (1984), 65-86.

<sup>95</sup> On the patterns of design and methods of production of similar copper alloy jewellery see also Drandaki, "Copper Alloy Jewellery at the Benaki Museum," *op.cit.* (n. 46).

<sup>96</sup> See, for example Barb, *op.cit.* (n. 59).

<sup>97</sup> Brashear, *op.cit.* (n. 26), 3394. For numerous related examples on *lamellae*, see Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, *op.cit.* (n. 28), index p. 399.

if he wanted, or completely deleted it, if the object he was making was intended for a run-of-the-mill purchaser.<sup>98</sup>

On the other hand, however, the use of the two substitutes for proper names (“so-and-so” and the “wearer”) and the emphasis on the anonymity of the owner by using two relative terms may not be accidental but could have some significance in the magic ritual.<sup>99</sup> In any case it suggests that these amulets were “off the shelf” and thus prefabricated.

Further evidence for the ritual significance of the owners’ anonymity is found in some Middle Byzantine uterine phylacteries featuring the Gorgoneion. In this group there are some particularly sumptuous pieces, such as the silver encolpion in the Benaki Museum (Fig. 14) or the enamel medallion in the Louvre.<sup>100</sup> The materials as well as the complex production techniques suggest that these artefacts were special commissions and certainly not mass produced. Despite this they still do not give us any information about their owners. Thus it seems likely that the anonymity of the owner was connected with the protective power of the amulets: i.e. when the owner remained unnamed, the effectiveness of the amulet would be transferred to anyone who wore it.<sup>101</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that, unlike what we see on the medallion/pendant-amulets, the *lamellae*, the inscribed magical phylacteries, almost always include the name of the owner. To be specific, of the 67 *lamellae* published in Kotansky’s corpus only three use the generalizing term *τον φοροούντα* (the wearer [m.]) or *τη φορούσα* (the wearer [f.]). This is probably because this type of phylactery was not bought off the shelf but was made to order, often in response to some specific problem. Moreover, the writing itself was part of the magic ritual and by extension of the phylacteries’ apotropaic power. For the same reason they were not just used in a general way against evil spirits or illnesses, but show considerable variety and were purpose made for very specific reasons. Thus *inscribed phylacteries* have come down to us which refer to epilepsy, eye problems, protecting the home, headaches, poisoning and so on.<sup>102</sup>

The absence of patrons’ names on pendant amulets makes it impossible to come up with answers as to the social class or the gender of their users. On the question of gender, judging by the examples we know of, it does not

look as if there were special amulets for men and women. Moreover, typically, those which we might expect to be exclusively for women, i.e. those with the incantations relating to the uterus, have inscriptions mentioning male owners. This makes the connection between these amulets and the idea that the womb (*ύστέρα*) was an autonomous being within the human body, responsible for many conditions, all the more compelling. This is also why incantations charging it to stay in its proper place and to calm down are found in the *magical papyri*, just as an incantation on the amulets commands it to sleep like a lamb.<sup>103</sup>

Finally the most generally applicable observation to come out of all the above inscriptions is that they follow the basic structures and formulae found in other magical contexts, i.e. in the *papyri* and the *lamellae*. The use of common apotropaic phrases, which are written in the *magical papyri* and on the *lamellae* is part of the magic ritual, and the proof that medallion/pendant amulets take their inspiration from and are ultimately part of the same practices, shaped by the pluralist religious environment of Late Antiquity. This also explains the fact that the use of metal, inscribed phylacteries, the *lamellae*, which, judging by their content were intended for owners of different religious persuasions, i.e. pagans, Jews as well as Christians, tails off from the 6th century onwards, i.e. when the pendant amulets, which the Christian population apparently preferred, were on the increase.<sup>104</sup>

The inscriptions on the medallions also underline the importance of the word, especially the written word, in these practices, as it is often the only motif to feature on this type of amulet, just as in the *papyri* and the *lamellae*. Moreover it seems that even the images and the symbolic depictions on the penant-amulets, such as, for example, the Holy Rider, refer to magical incantations, whether written down or oral, and their depiction is in effect a sort of ritual repetition of these spells. This realization finally also explains the enigmatic phrases, like those on the uterine amulets, often found in the metal encolpia-amulet category. They are in all probability the most common apostrophes from some *historiolae*, i.e. narrative-style apotropaic incantations, which are a commonplace in the *magical papyri*.

<sup>98</sup> Bonner, op.cit. (n. 19), 50.

<sup>99</sup> Hoek - Feissel - Herrmann, op.cit. (n. 70), 50

<sup>100</sup> On the medallion in the Benaki Museum, see V. Foskolou, “Ασημένιο φυλακτήριο Μέδουσας,” *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, op.cit. (n. 19), no. 664, 487-488. On the enamel medallion in the Louvre, see J. Durand, “Médaillon: tête de Gorgone et inscription prophylactique,” *Byzance. L’art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* (Exhibition catalogue), Musée du Louvre November

1992–February 1993, Paris 1992, no. 244, 330-331.

<sup>101</sup> And see Hoek - Feissel - Herrmann, op.cit. (n. 70), 50

<sup>102</sup> Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, op.cit. (n. 28). Id., “Incantations,” op.cit. (n. 28), 116-119. See also a review of Kotansky’s book by David Frankfurter, in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 95.04.12, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1995/95.04.12.html> (last sampled 6/5/2011).

<sup>103</sup> See Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, op.cit. (n. 28), no. 51, 265-269.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, XV-XIX.

Thus the inscriptions on the amulets do not just follow the forms of language of the magic rituals, but also consist of the same magic formulae that their owner reproduced, out loud or silently, in an attempt to protect her/himself. Commanding, for example, the “uterus” (*ύστέρα*) to stay in its proper place or exhorting the “hated one” to make herself scarce, the inscriptions are ultimately what J. L. Austin in his theory of speech acts called “performative utterances.” That is to say they are phrases which, simply by being uttered, bring about the action they describe, a property inherent in ritual discourse.<sup>105</sup>

In conclusion, the inscriptions on amulets have all the characteristics of a ritual language, as summarized at the

beginning of this paper. They are formulated in a faithfully repeated framework and format with a constant form and content. They may be unintelligible and mysterious, because they are intended for an initiated public but also because of their very ability to “communicate” with benevolent spirits and thus to achieve results in practice, i.e. protecting the owners of the amulets. These characteristics guarantee their effectiveness, as they create the impression that they are not only saying “something magic,” but they can do magic stuff, too!

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## Η ΜΑΓΕΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΓΡΑΠΤΟΥ ΛΟΓΟΥ: Η ΜΑΡΤΥΡΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΩΝ ΣΤΑ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΑ ΜΑΓΙΚΑ ΦΥΛΑΚΤΑ

Το άρθρο εξετάζει τη λειτουργία των επιγραφών στα βυζαντινά μαγικά φυλακτά. Στην πρώτη ενότητα ορίζονται τα μαγικά φυλακτά ως κατηγορία. Στο δεύτερο και μεγαλύτερο τμήμα αναλύονται διάφοροι τύποι επιγραφών, όπως π.χ. οι λεγόμενοι *φοβεροί χαρακτήρες*, αποσπάσματα από τις Γραφές, επικλήσεις, ξόρκια και φράσεις που σχετίζονται με την παράδοση των λεγόμενων *historiolae* κτλ., ενώ η τελευταία ενότητα αναλύει τις επιγραφές και γενικότερα τα τέχνηρα αυτά μέσα από το κοινωνικό πλαίσιο και τις θρησκευτικές αντιλήψεις. Το κύριο επιχείρημα του άρθρου είναι ότι ο γραπτός λόγος στα μαγικά φυλακτά έχει όλα τα χαρακτηριστικά μιας τελετουργικής γλώσσας, όπως αυτή ορίζεται στις ανθρωπολογικές και θρησκευσιολογικές μελέτες. Δηλαδή η γλώσσα και κατ' επέκταση ο γραπτός λόγος

δεν χρησιμεύει απλώς για τη μετάδοση πληροφοριών ή ως μέσο για την έκφραση μιας επιθυμίας, αλλά δημιουργεί την εντύπωση πως έχει τη δύναμη να πραγματοποιήσει αυτήν την επιθυμία. Η τελετουργική γλώσσα είναι, επομένως, ένας λόγος ενεργός, που πράττει και δημιουργεί καταστάσεις στις οποίες εμπλέκονται οι συμμετέχοντες στην τελετουργία, ερμηνεία που βασίζεται στη θεωρία των «λεκτικών πράξεων» του J. L. Austin (speech act theory), ένα θεωρητικό μοντέλο που έχει χρησιμοποιηθεί εκτεταμένα από ανθρωπολόγους και ιστορικούς των θρησκειών.

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<sup>105</sup> The British philosopher's theory of speech acts was a basic tool for the analysis and interpretation of ritual discourse. Apart from the articles by Tambiah and Wheelock (see n. 1) and R. Finnegan, op.cit. (n. 60), see also B. Ray, “Performative Utterances,” *African Rituals, History of Religions* 13 (1973), 16-35. See also J. L. McCreery, “Negotiating with Demons: the Uses of Magical Language,” *American Ethnologist* 22,1 (1995), 144-164, where other interpretative tools are proposed alongside the study of performative utterances.

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