

A New Testament Text on a Syriac Incantation Bowl:

Eph. 6:10-17 on IBC 3

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Abstract: This article demonstrates the use of Eph. 6:10-17 on a Syriac incantation bowl (IBC 3), thereby challenging the commonly held opinion that there are no direct uses of the New Testament among the Syriac bowls. We then situate the use of this biblical passage on IBC 3 within the context of biblical citation and reference in Mediterranean magic more generally. Finally, we briefly reflect on the significance of the usage of the Bible on IBC 3 for the study of Syriac incantation bowls and for the value of categories of religious identification, such as “Christian,” “Jewish,” and “Pagan,” as it pertains to the study of late antique apotropaia.

Keywords: Magic; Syriac; Incantation bowls; Bible; New Testament; Ephesians; Biblical Reception; Late Antiquity

Biblical traditions figured prominently in the overlapping domains of early Jewish and Christian “magic.”¹ The proliferation of texts taken from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures on Greek, Coptic, Latin, Hebrew, and Jewish-Aramaic amulets and other ostensibly magical materials demonstrates that many ancient practitioners perceived a need to ground ritual efficacy in the authority of holy writ and, by extension, in divinely sanctioned precedents and paradigms of healing, protection from demons, exorcisms, and the like.²

¹ On the problems associated with the term “magic,” see e.g., D. Aune, “‘Magic’ in Early Christianity and Its Ancient Mediterranean Context: A Survey of Some Recent Scholarship,” *Annali di storia dell' egesi* 24 (2007) 229-294; B.-C. Otto, “Towards Historicizing ‘Magic’ in Antiquity,” *Numen* 60 (2013) 308-347.

² See, for instance, C. Müller-Kessler, “The Use of Biblical Quotations in Jewish Aramaic Incantation Bowls,” in *Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World*, ed. H.R. Jacobus, A.K. de Hemmer Gudme and P. Guillaume, vol. 11 in *Biblical Intersections* (Piscataway, N.J. 2013) 227-245; T. de Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchments, Ostraca, and Tablets Written with Biblical Texts in Greek and Used as Amulets: A Preliminary List,” in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, ed. T.J. Kraus and T. Nicklas (Leiden 2010) 145-190; J.E. Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt: Text, Typology, and Theory*, vol 84 in *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum* (Tübingen 2014). For the use of biblical texts on amulets for the textual criticism of the Bible, see A. Leonas, “The Septuagint and the Magical Papyri: Some Preliminary Notes,”

While the extant record has disproportionately favored artifacts from late antiquity (especially from Egypt), the relationship between ritual efficacy and scriptural tradition was certainly not a late-antique invention. For instance, one can find in the Dead Sea Scrolls several apotropaic devices (from Cave 11) that cite MT Ps 91.³ Perhaps even more intriguing is the fact that two silver *lamellae* dated to the seventh or sixth century B.C.E preserve the earliest attestation of a text that corresponds to our Hebrew Bible.⁴ Alongside this rich material evidence, talmudic and patristic sources describe or complain about Jews and Christians utilizing biblical texts and artifacts for ritual efficacy.⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars consider the use of biblical texts to be one of the hallmarks of Jewish and Christian apotropaic practice.⁶

Given the prominence of biblical texts and motifs in ancient and late antique apotropaic, curative, and exorcistic contexts, the dearth of biblical citations in the Syriac

Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies 32 (1999) 51-64; P.T. Lanfer, "Why Biblical Scholars Should Study Aramaic Bowl Spells," *Aramaic Studies* 13 (2015) 9-23; B.C. Jones, *New Testament Texts on Greek Amulets from Late Antiquity*, vol. 554 in *Library of New Testament Studies* (London 2016). For the importance of precedent and paradigm in ancient "magical" contexts, see D. Frankfurter, "Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical Historiola in Ritual Spells," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. M.W. Meyer and P.A. Mirecki, vol. 129 in *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden 2001) 457-476; T. Schneider, "Die Waffe der Analogie: Altägyptische Magie als System," in *Analogiedenke: Vorstöße in ein neues Gebiet der Rationalitätstheorie*, ed. M. Bachmann and K. Gloy (Freiburg 2000) 37-85; Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits*, 65-69.

³ For discussion, see É. Puech, "11QPsAp^a: Un rituel d'exorcismes. Essai de reconstruction," *Revue de Qumran* 14 (1990) 377-408; idem, "Les deux derniers Psaumes Davidiques du rituel d'exorcisme, 11QPsAp^a IV 4-V14," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport (Leiden 1992) 64-89; idem, "Les Psaumes Davidiques du rituel d'exorcisme (11Q11)," in *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies Oslo 1998*, ed. D.K. Falk, F.G. Martinez, and E.M. Schuller (Leiden 2000) 160-181.

⁴ These *lamellae* from Ketef Hinnom cite what would eventually be called the "Priestly Blessing" (cf. Num 6:24-26). For a recent analysis of these amulets, see J.D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription & Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24-26* (New York, NY. 2016). See also G. Barkay, M. J. Lundberg, A.G. Vaughn, B. Zuckerman and K. Zuckerman, "The Challenges of Ketef Hinnom: Using Advanced Technologies to Reclaim the Earliest Biblical Texts and Their Context," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 (2003) 162-171; J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem 1993) 26.

⁵ J. Angel, "The Use of the Hebrew Bible in Early Jewish Magic," *Religion Compass* 3 (2009) 785-798; C. Rapp, "Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes: Aspects of Scriptural Holiness in Late Antiquity," in *The Early Christian Book*, ed. W.E. Klingshirn and L. Safran (Washington D.C. 2007) 199; D. Frankfurter, "Beyond Magic and Superstition," in *Late Ancient Christianity: A People's History of Christianity 2*, ed. V. Burrus (Minneapolis 2005) 279.

⁶ T. de Bruyn and J. Dijkstra, "Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 48 (2011) 164 (Greek); M. Meyer and R. Smith, eds., *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, NJ. 1994) 105-109 (Coptic); J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem 1985) 17 (Aramaic-Jewish).

incantation bowls is worth noting. To be sure, one can certainly find scattered references to Jesus, Moses, and other biblical characters in the extant Syriac bowls.⁷ Nevertheless, H. Juusola's negative assessment of the evidence succinctly captures *prima facie* the situation confronting specialists of Syriac magic: "...no quotations from the New Testament or early Christian literature are encountered, as opposed to the Jewish Aramaic bowl texts which commonly quote the Hebrew Bible and occasionally refer to Talmudic tradition as well."⁸ Although several Syriac bowls have been published in the intervening years since Juusola penned these words, his position still aptly reflects conventional scholarly wisdom. In fact, one cannot find a discussion or index of biblical citations in Marco Moriggi's magisterial volume of the Syriac bowls.⁹ This perceived absence of biblical texts in Syriac incantations is not without implications for the social context behind this material. In fact, many scholars have used the lack of scriptural texts to buttress their argument that the Syriac incantation bowls reflect a milieu outside of the various Christian traditions.¹⁰

In this essay, we point out that the New Testament does in fact appear in the extant Syriac magical tradition. Specifically, we demonstrate that prior editions and commentaries of a recently published Syriac incantation bowl (IBC 3) have missed its direct engagement with Eph. 6:10-17 (i.e., the so-called "armor of God" passage). Our observation not only contributes to a better understanding of this particular artifact, but it also requires scholars to nuance – if not to rethink entirely – the perceived contrast between the Syriac materials and other corpora of ancient and late antique magical artifacts as it pertains to the relationship between scriptural citation and ritual efficacy.

⁷ E.g., CBS 9012 ll. 2, 4, 7, 8; CBS 16097 l. 6; BLMJ 0070 l. 6.

⁸ H. Juusola, "Who Wrote the Syriac Incantation Bowls?" *Studia Orientalia* 85 (Helsinki 1999) 76.

⁹ M. Moriggi, *A Corpus of Syriac Incantation Bowls: Syriac Magical Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia*, vol. 3 in *Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity* (Leiden 2014) 1-9.

¹⁰ H. Juusola, "Who Wrote," 76. See also T. Harviainen, "Pagan Incantations in Aramaic Magic Bowls," in *Studia Aramaica: New Sources and New Approaches. Papers Delivered at the London Conference of The Institute of Jewish Studies University College London 26th-28th June 1991*, ed. M.J. Geller, J.C. Greenfield and M.P. Weitzman, vol. 4 in *Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement* (Oxford 1995) 58; S. Shaked, J.N. Ford and S. Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, vol. 1 in *Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity* (Leiden 2013) 18-20.

I. IBC 3 and the Bible: Description and Prior Scholarship

The Mesopotamian “incantation bowls” (a.k.a. “magic bowls”) are ceramic bowls, typically with a diameter between 15 and 20 cm and a depth of 7 to 8 cm, although much larger and smaller examples exist. The incantations are written in ink, mainly on the inside of the bowl, and in most cases the texts are formatted into a spiral shape that moves from the center to the rim.¹¹ What little contextual information we have comes primarily from the excavations at Nippur (Iraq) in the 1880s, where a number of bowls were found in a layer dated to the sixth or seventh century C.E.¹² This information, however, has been confirmed by more recent discoveries of a few incantation bowls in modern, controlled excavations:¹³ The bowls are found in what is thought to have been domestic buildings; several are buried upside-down while in a few cases two bowls are sealed together.¹⁴ It has been suggested that the inverted deposition of the bowls indicates that they were designed to trap the demons inside.¹⁵

The bowl at the center of our discussion – IBC 3 – was recently acquired by the Bibliothèque Centrale de l’Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik in Lebanon. It was among the many archaeological artifacts that flooded the country’s antiquities markets after the 2003-

¹¹ See for instance J.A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, vol. 3 in *University of Pennsylvania, The Museum, Publications of the Babylonian Section* (Philadelphia 1913); V.P. Hamilton, “Syriac Incantation Bowls.” (Ph.Diss., Brandeis University, 1971); C. Müller-Kessler, “Aramäische Koine - Ein Beschwörungsformular aus Mesopotamien,” *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 29 (1998) 331-348.

¹² J.P. Peters, *Nippur: Explorations and Adventures on the Euphrates: The Narrative of the University of Pennsylvania Expedition to Babylonia in the Years 1888-1890 II* (London 1897) 153; Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, 14.

¹³ M. Gawlikowski, “Une coupe magique araméenne,” *Semitica* 38 (1990) 137; E.C.D. Hunter, “Combat and Conflict in Incantation Bowls: Studies on Two Aramaic Specimens from Nippur,” in *Studia Aramaica: New Sources and New Approaches. Papers Delivered at the London Conference of The Institute of Jewish Studies University College London 26th-28th June 1991*, ed. M.J. Geller, J.C. Greenfield and M.P. Weitzman, vol. 4 in *Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement* (Oxford 1995) 61-63.

¹⁴ H.V. Hilprecht, *Explorations in Bible Lands During the 19th Century* (Philadelphia 1903) 447-448. On the possible semantics of sealing bowls together, see D. Levene, “This Is a *Qybl*’ for Overturning Sorceries,” in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, ed. G. Bohak, Y. Harari, and S. Shaked (Leiden 2011) 219-244.

¹⁵ Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, 42. See also Hamilton, “Syriac Incantation Bowls,” 13; E. M. Yamauchi, “Aramaic Magic Bowls,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965) 522; H. Juisola, *Linguistic Peculiarities in the Aramaic Magic Bowl Texts*, vol. 86 in *Studia Orientalia* (Helsinki 1999) 5; D. Frankfurter, “On the Origin of the Mesopotamian Apotropaic Bowl,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74 (2015) 9-18. It has also been suggested that the bowls were used for *hydromancy* (Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 16; Hamilton, “Syriac Incantation Bowls,” 11-12; Yamauchi, “Aramaic Magic Bowls,” 522).

invasion of Iraq.¹⁶ The bowl was first published by Gaby Abousamra in 2010.¹⁷ Marco Moriggi subsequently reedited IBC 3 in his 2014 corpus of Syriac incantation bowls (no. 49).¹⁸

IBC 3 is almost complete, consisting of 17 fragments that have been glued back together. It is 7 cm high and has a diameter of 16 cm. The incantation consists of eight lines that are written in accordance with the typical format (i.e., spiralling outward). IBC 3 is written in Estrangelo and is quite well preserved, although Moriggi notes that the script is “characterized by a considerable inconsistency.”¹⁹ The incantation of IBC 3 closes with a “doubly written alphabet” – a ritual phenomenon that is also found on other bowls and amulets, Syriac and otherwise.²⁰ In addition to text, there is also a drawing of a human-like face in the center, with rays or petals emerging from it. This facial image closely resembles two other bowls (IBC 2 and IM 142513).²¹ There are thus several aspects of IBC 3 that overlap with other, known apotropaic devices.

Such parallels aside, the text of IBC 3 also differs in some ways from the texts of other Syriac bowls. Most important, instead of the typical opening line of incantation bowls, in which the client(s) is presented and the apotropaic device introduced, this incantation starts with an extended invocation *'sy' wmsyn' hy'* (“physician and living healer”).²² In fact, the client(s) is not named at all in this incantation, which is quite rare. Instead, the incantation proceeds with an extensive appeal for the healing and protection of an unidentified third person plural (ll. 3-7) and closes with something akin to a doxology (l. 7), an “Amen” and

¹⁶ G. Abousamra, “Coupe de prière syriaque chrétienne,” *Parole de l'Orient* 35 (2010) 27; Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 208.

¹⁷ Abousamra, “Coupe de prière,” 27-38.

¹⁸ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 208-211.

¹⁹ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 208.

²⁰ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 210; Abousamra, “Coupe de prière,” 34-35.

²¹ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 202-203 and 207. We cannot see the drawing in IM 142513 in the photos, but Moriggi notes that traces of “a drawing similar to that of bowls nos. 48 and 49 are visible at the bottom of the basin” (Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 200).

²² Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 209.

Trinitarian invocation, and the aforementioned alphabet (ll.7-8).²³ Abousamra highlights a few phrases and terms in the appeal that he postulates might have a connection to New Testament texts, and furthermore proposes some parallels with the Maronite breviary.²⁴ Moriggi does not comment on or suggest any use of biblical text, but agrees with Abousamra that “one is strongly induced to think that it could well be a copy, slightly readjusted, of a Syriac liturgical text or of a section of a Syriac prayer-book.”²⁵ Both Abousamra and Moriggi, therefore, conclude that IBC 3 bears more resemblance to Syriac prayers or liturgical texts than to the incantations used in other Syriac bowls.²⁶

Abousamra and Moriggi’s identification of possible liturgical parallels is indeed worthy of note. Yet, the terms and phrases in IBC 3, which Abousamra tentatively claims have some kind of connection to New Testament texts, are unlikely to be in a direct relationship with the biblical text. In line 3, IBC 3 starts with *swm ʿly{kw}ħwn ʿydyk qdyšt* (“Put on them your holy hands”),²⁷ which Abousamra reads in connection with Matt. 9:18: *t’ sym ʿydk ʿlyh wth* (“come put your hand on her and she shall live”) or Acts 13:3/19:6: *swm ʿlyhwn ʿyd* (“put hands on them”).²⁸ Abousamra suggests *lbrñšhwn gwy* (“to their interior man”) in line 4 echoes the discourse in 2 Cor. 4:16: “even if our external person is wearing away, our inner person is renewed day by day.” He also proposes that the use of *dbsr ʿdlbyšyn* (“of the fleshs which they are dressed with”) in line 4 echoes the description of Christ’s incarnation in Heb. 5:7.²⁹ Finally, he suggests that *zynyk ʿlhy* (“your divine arms”) in line 5 evokes the discussion on the weapons of the faithful in 2 Cor. 10:4 or Rom. 13:12: *nibš zynh*

²³ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 209.

²⁴ Abousamra, “Coupe de prière,” 33-34.

²⁵ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 208.

²⁶ This resemblance (combined with the recent acquisition and uncertain provenance) raises the possibility that IBC 3 could be among the many forgeries that are found on the antiquities market. That said, Moriggi notes that there are two parallel formulae in Ford’s forthcoming publications, hailing from the Schøyen and other collections, which then speaks for the authenticity of this bowl (Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 208).

²⁷ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 209. Moriggi and Abousamra here read *ʿydyk*. Yet, it seems from the photograph in Moriggi’s *Corpus* at least, that the dots they interpret as a seyame are in fact marks or dirt in the clay.

²⁸ Abousamra, “Coupe de prière,” 33.

²⁹ Abousamra, “Coupe de prière,” 33-34.

dnwhr’ (“put on the weapons of light”).³⁰ We find that these possible references are too general and too fragmentary to indicate a specific biblical passage. Instead, we think they merely reflect general Christian idioms.

Nevertheless, we suggest that IBC 3 does in fact engage with a New Testament text. In the analysis that follows, we argue that ll. 5-6 of this bowl consist of a sequence of parallels with Eph. 6:10-17 (“the armor of god” passage), thus reflecting the direct usage of a biblical passage. Despite engaging with Eph. 6:10-17, however, the bowl’s text and the biblical text differ in marked ways. In order to contextualize such differences, we situate IBC 3 within the world of biblical citation on late antique amulets and spells more generally, highlighting the creative ways late antique practitioners engaged with the Bible for ritual efficacy. We conclude with a few brief remarks on the broader implications of IBC 3’s biblical usage for the study of Syriac incantation bowls and the bowls’ relationship to the broader world of late antique Mediterranean magic.

II. IBC 3 and Eph. 6:10-17

It must be stressed at the outset that the reference to Eph. 6:10-17 on IBC 3 is not tantamount to a quotation proper, but constitutes a series of phrases derived from this biblical passage: (1) the gospel of peace; (2) arrows of evil; (3) helmet of salvation; and (4) the armor of God. We present Moriggi’s transcription and translation of the bowl, which he did based on photographs provided by Abousamra. We then compare the bowl’s text to the Peshitta-text of Eph. 6:10-17. Since there are a few differences between the readings of Moriggi and Abousamra, we include both transcriptions and translations in our discussion. It should also be noted that, given the specific parameters of our study, we will not provide a complete and

³⁰ Abousamra, “Coupe de prière,” 34.

detailed analysis of IBC 3, ll. 5-6 and the Peshitta-text of Eph. 6:10-17, but restrict our discussion to the elements shared by these two texts.

II. 1. The Text IBC 3, ll. 5-6 and the Peshitta Text of Eph. 6:10-17

IBC 3 ³¹	Ephesians 6:10-17 ³²
<p>(...)</p> <p>ʿtʿyp ʿnwn (5) zynyk ʿlhy dmn ymynhwn smlhwn swm bryšhwn s[n]wrwt ʿdhy dbh {dbh} ntbtl hylh dbyšʿ (6) wtʿw[yb]h dʿwnglywn dʿytyhy dʿythy³³ dšlmʿ nhwʿ bdmwt šwrʿ mylʿ mn kwl gyrwhy dbyšʿ, (...)</p>	<p>(10) <i>mkyl ʿhy. ʿthylw bmrn wbtwqpʿ dhylyh</i> (11) wlbšw kwlh zynʿ dʿlhʿ, ʿyknʿ dtškḥwn lmqm lwqbl šnʿth dʿkl qršʿ. (12) <i>mṯl</i> <i>dtktwškwn lʿ hwʿ ʿm bsrʿ wdmʿ ʿl ʿm ʿrks wʿm šlyṯnʿ. wʿm ʿhydy</i> <i>ʿlmʿ dhnʿ ḥšwkʿ. wʿm řwhʿ byštʿ dthyt šmyʿ.</i> (13) <i>mṯl hnʿ lbšw</i> klh zynʿ dʿlhʿ, dtškḥwn tʿrʿwn byšʿ. <i>wkd mʿtryn ʿntwn bklmdm</i> <i>tqwmwn.</i> (14) <i>qwmw hkyl. wḥzwqw ḥšykwn bqwštʿ. wlbšw</i> <i>šrynʿ dzdyqwtʿ.</i> (15) <i>wsʿnw brglykwn tʿwybh dʿwnglywn</i> dšlmʿ. (16) <i>wʿm hlyn sbw lkwn skrʿ dhymnwṯʿ, dbh ttmšwn</i> <i>hylʿ lmdʿkw klhwn gʿřwhy yqdʿ dbyšʿ.</i> (17) <i>wsymw snwrtʿ</i> dpwrqnʿ. <i>wʿḥwdw sypʿ drwhʿ dʿytwhy mltʿ dʿlhʿ.</i></p>
<p>(...)</p> <p>dress them (5) of your divine armor,³⁴ in order that they will be on their right (and) left sides,</p>	<p>(10) Therefore my brothers be strengthened in our Lord and in the force of his power (11) and put on the whole armor of God, so that you will be able to stand against the scheme of slander (12) because your fight will not be against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and against the Rulers and against the powers of the world of</p>

³¹ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 209.

³² B. Aland and A. Juckel, *Das Neue Testament in syrischer Überlieferung: II. Die paulinischen Briefe: Teil 2: 2.Korintherbrief, Galaterbrief, Epheserbrief, Philipperbrief und Kolosserbrief*, vol. 23 in *Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung* (Berlin 1995) 324-332. Korsvoll's translation here attempts to offer a literal translation from the Syriac.

³³ *dʿytyhy dʿythy* is likely to be one of the several instances in IBC 3 in which the practitioner seems to have made a false start, or some other mistake, leading to a doubling of a word (Abousamra, "Coupe de prière," 29; Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 209).

³⁴ Moriggi translates *zynyk* with "arms," which is certainly a possible translation. Nevertheless, since the verb here is "to dress" (*tʿyp*), it seems more appropriate to translate it to "armor."

<p>put on their heads helmets of life, by means of which it is abolished the strength of evil (6) and the preparation of the Gospel which is of peace, may it be a in the form of a wall raising against all darts of evil (...)</p>	<p>this darkness, and against the evil spirits under heaven. (13) Because of this put on the whole armor of God, so that you will be able to encounter the evil one. And when you are ready in all things you will stand. (14) Stand then and gird your loins with truth and put on the breastplate of righteousness. (15) And put on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace. (16) And with these, take to you the shield of faith, so that with it you will have the power to put out all the burning arrows of the evil one. (17) And put on the helmet of salvation. And take the sword of the spirit that is the word of God.</p>
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II.2. Eph. 6:10-17 on IBC 3: Analysis

The most striking parallel is perhaps in line 6 in IBC 3, which starts with the sub-clause *wṭw[yb]h d'wnglywn d'ytyhy d'ythy dšlm*, “and the preparation of the Gospel which is of peace.” This phrase parallels Eph. 6:15: *ws'nw br̄glykwn ṭwybh d'wnglywn dšlm*, “and put on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace.” Unfortunately, there are several cracks in the bowl across this sentence (as well as some wear), which make it difficult to read. In the first publication of IBC 3, Abousamra had some difficulty reading this portion of the bowl and suggested a different reconstruction than the one above (which is based on Moriggi’s subsequent edition).³⁵ Moriggi bases his reading and reconstruction of the lacunose words on a parallel, unpublished bowl (JNF 221:6),³⁶ and his reconstruction is plausible in light of our analysis of the photograph. Moreover, given the other parallels to Eph. 6, which we will

³⁵ For the first word he proposes *[wtwhy]h* from the root *th*’ (“wonder, marvel”) or alternatively *wlhylh d'wnglywn* (“la force de l’Évangile”). He then reads *šyn*’ (“powerful, mighty”) instead of *dšlm*’ (“of peace”). Altogether, his translation reads: “Et que la merveille du puissant Évangile,” (Abousamra, “Coupe de prière,” 31-32). This explains why Abousamra then misses the reference to Eph. 6:15 here.

³⁶ Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 210.

discuss below, the clear reference here to Eph. 6:15 constitutes another indication that Moriggi's reconstruction is correct.

Line 6 of IBC 3 then continues with the phrase *nhw' bdmwt šwr' myl' mn kwl gyrwhy*³⁷ *dbyš'* ("may it be a in the form of a wall raising against all darts of evil"). Here there is no significant difference between readings of Abousamra and Moriggi. While this phrase does not stand in direct parallel with Eph. 6:10-17, there is a similar appeal to overcome attack in the form of darts or arrows in verse 16: "take to you the shield of faith, so that with it you will have the power to put out *all the burning arrows of the evil one* (or "of evil")": *sbw lkwn skr' dhymnw't, dbh ttmšwn hyl' lmd'kw klhwn g'rwby yqd' dbyš'*. To be sure, references to protection from darts or other weapons constitute a common motif in apotropaic contexts – including but not limited to Syriac bowls.³⁸ Nevertheless, the close proximity of the phrase "darts of evil" to "the Gospel which is of peace" in l. 6 of IBC 3 significantly increases the likelihood that there was a direct connection between the use of the word "darts" (*g'rwby*) on the bowl and in the Peshitta-text of Eph. 6:15-16.

In the middle of line 5, IBC 3 reads *swm bryšhwn s[n]wrwt' dhy'* ("put on their heads helmets of life"), which corresponds to Eph. 6:17: *wsymw snwrt' dpwrqn'* ("and put on the helmet of salvation").³⁹ Admittedly, the biblical text does not mention *bryšhwn*, "on their heads," but Barbara Aland and Andreas Juckel note in their critical edition of the Pauline letters in Syriac that Aphrahat opens with *nsym bršn snwrt' dpwrqn'* ("we shall put on our heads the helmet of salvation") when he renders this verse in *Demonstrations* 1/224,2. Likewise, Cyrus of Edessa in his *Six Explanations of the Liturgical Feasts* 33,24 quotes it as

³⁷ Both Abousamra and Moriggi note that *gyrwhy* is likely to be a misspelling or phonetic spelling of *g'rwby* (Abousamra, "Coupe de prière," 29; Moriggi, *A Corpus*, 210).

³⁸ Abousamra, "Coupe de prière," 34. Weapons are used in analogies of apotropaic rituals in various bowls (e.g., CBS 2943, BM 91712, IM 44107 and VK 5738:3).

³⁹ Again, Abousamra's reading obscures the reference to Eph. 6:10-17, as he reads *sym b'ydhwn s['wr?]wt' dhy'* ("mets dans leur main le trésor de la vie") (Abousamra, "Coupe de prière," 31-32).

wsym bršh snwrt' dpwrqn' (“and put on his head the helmet of salvation”).⁴⁰ IBC 3’s inclusion of “head” here, therefore, seems to have been part of the verse’s reception in late antiquity – even if it is not included in the Peshitta. Similarly, although *dhy'* in IBC 3 is not lexically the same as *dpwrqn'* in Eph. 6:17, *hy'* is commonly used to refer to salvation.⁴¹ Moreover, it is the word used when this imagery is taken up briefly in 1 Thess. 5:8: ... *wnsym snwrt' dsbr' dhÿ'* (“... and take as a helmet the hope for salvation”).⁴² We, therefore, consider it likely that the practitioner is alluding to the helmet of salvation from Eph. 6:17.⁴³

All in all, this list of parallels between IBC 3, ll. 4-6 and Eph. 6:10-17 leads us to the conclusion that IBC 3 is the first published Syriac incantation bowl that directly engages with a biblical text. This direct engagement with a biblical text stands in contrast to the purported “echoes” and topical parallels that Abousamra associates with IBC 3. To be sure, the text in IBC 3 is not a quotation in the purest sense of the word. Nevertheless, these parallels suggest that the practitioner is intentionally and explicitly interacting with a biblical text. This manifest approach to a specific biblical passage thus moves beyond the two other known instances of biblical reference in Syriac bowls, in which a biblical story or topic is simply mentioned *en passant*.⁴⁴

III. The Creative uses of Biblical Texts and References in Late Antique Apotropaia

Biblical texts and references came in a variety of forms and variations in late antique apotropaia. In some cases, practitioners rendered biblical texts in relative agreement with our

⁴⁰ Aland and Juckel, *Das Neue Testament*, 331.

⁴¹ J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, D.D. (Winona Lake, IN. 1998) 139.

⁴² We would like to thank Hilde Brekke Møller for pointing out this parallel. For an amulet that conflates Eph. 6:16 and 1 Thess. 5:8, see P. Vindob. G 26034 + 30453 (see discussion below).

⁴³ This segment of IBC 3 opens with *'t'yp 'nwn (5) zynyk 'lhy'* (“dress them of your divine arms”), which parallels the opening of Eph. 6:11, *wlbšw kwlh zyn' d'lh'* (“and put on the whole armor of God”). This theme is also repeated in Eph. 6:13. As we mentioned above, Abousamra claims this text references 2 Cor. 10:4 or Rom. 13:12 (Abousamra, “Coupe de prière,” 34). Nevertheless, given the close correspondences to the “armor of God” passage that we have already observed, we find that an allusion to Eph. 6:11 is far more likely here.

⁴⁴ CBS 9012 invokes Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, and BLMJ 0070 appears to invoke the resurrection.

modern editions.⁴⁵ In other cases, however, the biblical texts and traditions mentioned deviate quite significantly from these editions. Theodore de Bruyn and Jitse Dijkstra have stressed that on Greek amulets from late antiquity “[o]ften several [biblical] passages are juxtaposed one with another, and sometimes they are quoted in an incomplete or confused manner.”⁴⁶ Indeed, in addition to changing the orthography or other elements of biblical texts⁴⁷ and inserting words into well-known passages, such as the Lord’s Prayer⁴⁸ and LXX Ps 90:1,⁴⁹ late antique practitioners writing in Greek and Coptic could invent their own “biblical” traditions, in which Jesus *inter alia* stops the Euphrates River⁵⁰ or has a conversation with a “unicorn” (παπιταπ νοϋωτ) while hanging on the cross.⁵¹

Similar variation is found in the Jewish-Aramaic incantation bowls. While some bowls cite the biblical text more or less in accordance with the Masoretic text,⁵² Dan Levene has observed that a practitioner might “adapt” a biblical verse “to fit the subject of the

⁴⁵ E.g., Brit. Lib. Or. 4919(2); P. Berol. 22 235.

⁴⁶ de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets and Formularies,” 172.

⁴⁷ E.g., P. Princ. II.107; BGU III.954; BKT VI.7.1; PSI VI 719; SB I 1576; P. Oxy. 2684. Christa Müller-Kessler notes that the spelling on the incantation bowls sometimes differs so much from the later Masoretic text that the quotes in the bowls “können wohl nicht im Sinne textlicher Varianten verstanden werden” (C. Müller-Kessler, *Die Zauberschalentexte in der Hilprecht-Sammlung, Jena, und weitere Nippur-Texte anderer Sammlungen*, vol. 7 in *Texte und Materialien der Frau Professor Hilprecht Collection of Babylonian Antiquities im Eigentum der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, Jena* (Wiesbaden 2005) 11).

⁴⁸ E.g., BGU III 954 (= PGM P9), P. Duk. inv. 778, and Athens Nat. Mus. nr. 12 227 (= PGM O4).

⁴⁹ E.g., P. Princ. II 107 (= Suppl. Mag. 29) and PSI VII 759.

⁵⁰ P. Heid. 1101. For the editio princeps, see F. Maltomini, “Cristo all’Eufrate P. Heid. G. 1101: Amuleto cristiano,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 48 (1982) 149-170. For discussions of this *historiola*, see G. Fiaccadori, “Cristo all’Eufrate (P. Heid. G. 1101, 8 ss.),” *La parola del passato* 41 (1986) 59-63; R. Mazza, “P. Oxy. XI, 1384: Medicina, rituali di guarigione e Cristianesimi nell’Egitto tardoantico,” *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 24 (2007) 444-445. On the opening phrase of this *historiola*, see J.E. Sanzo, “‘For our Lord was pursued by the Jews...’: The (Ab)Use of the Motif of ‘Jewish’ Violence against Jesus on a Greek Amulet (P. Heid. 1101),” in *One in Christ Jesus: Essays on Early Christianity and “All that Jazz,” in Honor of S. Scott Bartchy*, ed. D. Matson and K.C. Richardson (Eugene, OR. 2014) 86-98.

⁵¹ Bib. Lib. Or. 6796(4), 6796 For the editio princeps, see A.M. Kropp, *Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte*, 3 vols. (Bruxelles 1930-31), 1: 47-50 (J); 2: 57-62 (XV). For a discussion of this practitioner’s creative use of biblical traditions, see J.E. Sanzo, “The Innovative Use of Biblical Traditions for Ritual Power: The Crucifixion of Jesus on a Coptic Exorcistic Spell (Brit. Lib. Or. 6796[4], 6796) as a Test Case,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 16 (2015) 67-98. For other instances in which “biblical” traditions do not correspond to specific bible texts, see W. Brashear and R. Kotansky, “A new Magical Formulary,” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. P. Mirecki and M. Meyer, vol. 141 in *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden 2002) 15-16. See also Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 29 and R. Kontansky, *Greek Magical Amulets: The Written Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae*, part 1 of *Published Texts of Known Provenance*, vol. 22 in *Papyrologica Coloniensis* (Opladen 1994) 155-166.

⁵² E.g., Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 184-187, B11. Indeed, some scholars have characterized many of the incantation bowls as basically corresponding to the Masoretic text – though with variation in spelling and orthography. See Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 18; C. Müller-Kessler, “The Use of Biblical Quotations,” 228.

incantation.”⁵³ Moreover, as Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked once noted about the Jewish-Aramaic incantation bowls, the “practice of inverting the order of the words of verses is quite widespread.”⁵⁴ All in all, the selective and creative approach to Eph. 6:10-17 – which, we propose, is operative in IBC 3 – resonates with the complex ways late antique practitioners engaged with biblical traditions to achieve efficacy on behalf of their clients.

IV. The Implications of a Biblical Text on IBC 3

This rendering of Eph. 6:10-17 in the incantation of IBC 3 is significant because it represents a clear attempt on the part of a Syriac practitioner to engage directly with a biblical text. Accordingly, this bowl helps bridge the Syriac incantation bowls with the Greek amulets from late antique Egypt. In his useful catalogue of Greek amulets that utilize biblical passages, Theodore de Bruyn lists one amulet which cites a portion of Eph. 6:10-17.⁵⁵ This sixth-century C.E. Greek amulet, P. Vindob. G 26034 + 30453, includes the following phrase: “Take up the breastplate of faith and a helmet the hope of salvation” (θώρακα πίστεως ἀναλάβω καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας).⁵⁶ As Brice Jones notes, the text cited on this amulet is an apparent conflation of Eph. 6:16 (cf. the shared use of ἀναλαμβάνω) and 1 Thess. 5:8 (cf. “the breastplate of faith” and “the hope of salvation”).⁵⁷ On the balance, however, the text cited is more closely connected with 1 Thess. 5:8 than with Eph. 6:16.

⁵³ D. Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London 2003) 11. This variety has led some scholars inappropriately to deny the citation of biblical texts on incantation bowls. James A. Montgomery, the first to publish extensively on the incantation bowls, held that these artifacts included almost no biblical quotations. Instead, he claimed that they simply contained a number of references to biblical stories (Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts*, 63-64).

⁵⁴ Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 27.

⁵⁵ de Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchment,” 173.

⁵⁶ For the editio princeps, see H. Hunger, “Zwei unbekannte neutestamentliche Papyrusfragmente der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek,” *Biblios* 8 (1959) 11-12 (for G 30453); idem, “Ergänzungen zu zwei neutestamentlichen Papyrusfragmenten der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek,” *Biblios* 19 (1970) 71-75 (G 26034+ G 30453). The edition and translation cited above have been taken from Jones, *New Testament Texts*, 167-168.

⁵⁷ Jones, *New Testament Texts*, 169.

In addition to P. Vindob. G 26034 + 30453, P. Cair. inv. 10236 (= PGM P13), an early fifth-century C.E. Greek amulet, includes the phrase, “the principalities and powers and cosmic rulers of darkness”: “αἱ ἀρχα[ὶ καὶ ἐξ]ουσίαι καὶ κοσμ[ο]κράτορες τοῦ σκούτου” (l.15).⁵⁸ This phrase seems to be alluding to Eph. 6:12: “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, *but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic rulers of this darkness...* (NRSV [modified]): ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰς ἀρχάς, πρὸς τὰς ἐξουσίας, πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκούτου τούτου...” The text of the amulet and that of the biblical text slightly differ: for instance, the practitioner has changed the case of the preternatural “powers” from nominative to accusative; the practitioner has removed the preposition πρὸς before each of the “powers”; and the practitioner has removed the genitive demonstrative pronoun τούτου from the final clause. Nevertheless, Ágnes Mihálykó’s claim – that this reference to Eph. 6:12 “remains intact except for the changes necessary to fit it into the [amulet’s] grammatical structure” – is basically correct.⁵⁹ IBC 3 thus falls within this broader Mediterranean magical tradition, in which elements derived from – or corresponding to – the “armor of God” passage from Eph. 6:10-17 were deemed relevant for achieving ritual efficacy. Nevertheless, by including “helmets,” “the preparation of the Gospel which is of peace,” and “darts,” the practitioner has directly engaged with more elements from the “armor of God” passage than any other practitioner from the late antique Mediterranean more generally – at least according to the extant record of magical objects.

Moreover, that the Syriac practitioner has engaged with a New Testament text is important since the presumed absence of New Testament texts on the incantation bowls has

⁵⁸ For the editio princeps, see A. Jacoby, *Ein neues Evangelienfragment* (Strasbourg 1900) 31-55. The translation and edition above has been taken from Á. Mihálykó, “Christ and Charon: P13 Reconsidered,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 89 (2015) 186-188.

⁵⁹ Mihálykó, “Christ and Charon,” 203. Jones is, therefore, incorrect when he states that P. Vindob. G 2312, P. Berol. inv. 13997, and P. Vindob. G 26034 + 30453 are the only Greek amulets that contain (pseudo-)Pauline materials (Jones, *New Testament Texts*, 164).

played a considerable role in the scholarly debate on the socio-religious context of the Syriac incantation bowls. While identifying the religious self-identification of a practitioner behind a specific ritual artifact is a difficult task, the fact that the ritual expert behind IBC 3 does not merely reference “Christian” characters *en passant*, but engages directly with a single biblical passage, makes it likely the practitioner or his or her client – or both – self-identified as “Christian” in one way or another.⁶⁰ Thus, at the very least, IBC 3 complicates arguments against the circulation of Syriac incantation bowls within “Christian” communities.

To be sure, IBC 3 is an outlier among the published Syriac incantation bowls. Nonetheless, James Nathan Ford is currently working on a series of previously unpublished Syriac incantation bowls that utilize various “Christian” elements, including perhaps New Testament references.⁶¹ When published, therefore, these new witnesses will demonstrate that the approach to the Bible in IBC 3 was not completely anomalous within the Syriac tradition. What is more, many of its other features (e.g., the double alphabet and the drawing of the face in the center) help place IBC 3 firmly in the magical milieu of other Syriac incantation bowls.

At the same time, when we place IBC 3 alongside the other extant Syriac incantation bowls, we ought to be reminded that our facile categories of ancient religious affiliation (e.g., “Christian,” “Jewish,” and “Pagan”) simply do not do justice to the complex ways ancients constructed their religious identities and negotiated those identities in dialogue with religious,

⁶⁰ On the problems with the label “Christian” as it relates to ancient magic, see e.g., Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits*, 10-14.

⁶¹ James Nathan Ford presented editions of many of these bowls at the European Association for Jewish Studies in Paris, France in 2014. We are most grateful to him for sharing the handout from his presentation. One of the artifacts he lists on his handout (T 027989: 5-6) seems to be referencing Matt. 4:23 (as Ford suggests). For the edition of this particular bowl, see J.N. Ford and O. Abudraham, “Syriac and Mandaic Incantation Bowls,” in *Finds Gone Astray: ADCA Confiscated Items*, ed. D. Regev (Jerusalem forthcoming). Matt. 4:23 is well known among the extant Greek amulets from late antiquity. For a survey of the use of this passage on such amulets, see T. de Bruyn, “Appeals to Jesus and the One ‘Who Heals Every Illness and Every Infirmity’ (Matt 4:23, 9:35) in Amulets in Late Antiquity,” in *Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. DiTommaso and L. Turcescu, vol. 6 in *The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden 2008) 65-81.

ethnic, and cultural “others.”⁶² From this perspective, our analysis of the use of Eph. 6:10-17 on IBC 3 does not necessarily lend itself to simple conclusions concerning the religious environment behind the Syriac incantation bowls. Instead, we hope that this study opens up further avenues of research within the ongoing exploration of the traditional, social, and religious contexts of apotropaic practices in late antiquity.

⁶² On this point, see also R. Boustán and J.E. Sanzo, “Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms, and the Shared Magical Culture of Late Antiquity,” *Harvard Theological Review* (forthcoming).