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Canonical Power:
A “Tactical” Approach to the Use of the Christian Canon in
P. Berlin 954^{†*}

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On February 20, 1899 a worker of Ulrich Wilcken discovered a tightly folded piece of papyrus (2 cm x 1 cm) at Herakleopolis Magna, which was intended to be worn as an amulet (P. Berlin 954 hereafter).¹ Wilcken provided an edition of P. Berlin 954 two years

[†] This article is dedicated to the memory of my brother, Steven J. Sanzo

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¹ Ulrich Wilcken, “Heidnisches und Christliches aus Ägypten,” *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* Vol. I (1901), 431. Wilcken later republished this amulet in *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden*, vol. 3 (Berlin 1903), pp. 278-279 [inv. 954; hence, P. Berlin 954], and in L. Mitteis and U. Wilcken, eds., *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde*, 2 vols. (Leipzig 1912; repr. Hildesheim 1963), 1.2:159, no. 133. Meyer notes that the papyrus was tied with a red thread. (Meyer and Smith, 42). PGM LXXXVI. 1-2 (=SM 80), a 3rd or 4th century amulet reads, “φύλαξον τὸν δεῖνα ὃν ἔτεκεν ἡ δεῖνα περιάψου περι τὸν τράχηλον.” On the likelihood that this amulet would have been worn for life, see Roy Kotansky, “Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets,” in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 120.

after its discovery, assigning it to the 6th century CE.² The amulet was later recited by Carl Wessely³ and then by Karl Preisendanz, who included it in his two-volume collection, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*.⁴ What is notable about this amulet is that it is part of a small corpus of so-called Christian “magical” texts,⁵ many of which employ citations from the Christian “canon.”⁶ It is the purpose of this paper to provide

² Wilcken, 434. Unfortunately, shortly after its discovery, the manuscript was burned in a fire. (Preisendanz, 217; Meyer and Smith, 42).

³ Carl Wessely, “Les plus anciens monuments du Christianisme écrits sur papyrus (II),” in *Patrologia Orientalis. Tomus Decimus Octavus*, ed. P. Graffin and F. Nau (Paris: Firmin-Didot et C^{ie}, Imprimeurs-Éditeurs, 1924), 399-512. pp. 420-22.

⁴ p. 9.

⁵ In this essay, I intentionally avoid the problematic designations “magic” and its frequent counterpart “religion.” While a complete treatment of the nuances of the “religion” vs. “magic” discussion goes beyond the scope of this paper, a couple of words are in order. In addition to the perennial problems associated with the definitions and distinctions of the terms “magic” and “religion,” this dichotomy often impedes the investigator from comparing like phenomena in the opposite category: “magical” texts are compared with other “magical” texts and “religious” texts are compared with other “religious” texts. Furthermore, the designation “magic” often gives the impression that the phenomena are explained when they are merely labeled. Rather than employing this problematic dichotomy, I prefer to operate from the general observation that there are texts (or portions of texts) in the ancient Mediterranean which, according to their authors or conjurers, mediate transcendent power and those which do not.

⁶ Much of my thinking with respect to the issue of canon has been impacted by the work of David L. Dungan. David L. Dungan, *Constantine’s Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). Dungan, taking a “comparative religions perspective,” has argued that the “formation” of a “canon” is an extremely rare event, only occurring three times in history: (1) fourth-fifth century “orthodox” Christianity [the Old and New Testaments]; (2) seventh century Islam [the canonization of the Qu’ran under Caliph Uthman] and (3) canonization of halakah in third-century Rabbinic Judaism. He argues that the “official” actions of Constantine in his edict to Eusebius, requesting fifty copies of sacred scripture (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 4.36), fundamentally altered the notion of such texts by explicitly limiting the books that were “officially” recognized as normative for the faith. This idea was further reinforced by the list of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament in Athanasius’ *39th Festal Letter* (367 CE) and assumed by the time of Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* (397-c. 426 CE), though it is very likely that, among certain “Christian” groups, other texts continued to be used authoritatively long after that date. In light of this information, it is appropriate to speak of a “canon” somewhere in the late fourth century/early fifth-century CE. Therefore, I will use the term “canon” to refer to the 39 books (or 22 books according to Josephus) of the Hebrew Bible and the 27 books of the New Testament starting at the end of the fourth century CE. This chronological approach

an updated English translation of P. Berlin 954 as well as to develop and illustrate a recent approach to “magical” media, applying it specifically to the use of the Christian canon in this sixth century CE exemplar.

Translation and Occasion of P. Berlin 954

To date, there have been two English translations of P. Berlin 954. The first was published by George Milligan in 1910.⁷ This translation’s strength was also its weakness: faithfulness to Wilcken’s edition. While Wilcken, and consequently Milligan, was able to construct the phrase “ἐν ἀρχῇ” and the word “βίβλος” in line 26, he did not recognize them as the *incipits* (“beginnings”) of the Gospels of John and Matthew and neither passage was included in his German translation;⁸ Milligan followed suit in his English translation. The second translation, which utilized the superior Greek edition of Preisendanz, was offered by Marvin Meyer in 1999.⁹ While the Gospel *incipits* are extant in Meyer’s English translation of P. Berlin 954,¹⁰ Meyer’s version unfortunately included a translational element which fundamentally altered the situation of the amulet as I will be discussing later. A new translation of P. Berlin 954, therefore, is required before discussion of its content can proceed on solid ground.

My translation of P. Berlin 954, followed by the Greek edition of Preisendanz, is as follows:

to the definition of canon helps me make a clear distinction between the otherwise confused and ambiguous terms “canon” and “scripture(s).” Since P. Berlin is dated to the 6th century CE, I will use the term “canon” to refer to any quotations from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in it. For a recent discussion on the issues associated with the “formation” of the Christian canon, see the essays in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002).

⁷ George Milligan ed. *Selections from the Greek Papyri* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 132.

⁸ It is likely that his inability to associate the Gospel *incipits* with P. Berlin 954 was occasioned by his reconstructions “εἰου” (instead of ἦν) after “ἐν ἀρχῇ” and “κε” (instead of γε[νέσεως]) after βίβλος.

⁹ ACM 18.

¹⁰ The Gospel *incipits* were first reconstructed by Wessely; Preisendanz agreed with Wessely’s reconstruction and included them in his edition. It is the edition of Preisendanz (not Wessely), however, which provided the basis for Marvin Meyer’s English translation. It is noteworthy that Preisendanz, who had several problems with Wessely’s reconstructions (see notes 14-16, and 18 below), agreed with Wessely on the *incipits*.

Master, Oh God¹¹ Almighty, The Fath[er] of our Lord and Savior
 5 [Jesus Christ], and Saint Serenus,¹² I, Silvanus, Son of Sarapinus, give
 thanks and bow [my] head before you, asking and beseeching in order
 that you might chase away from me, your slave, the demon of the evil
 10 eye, the (demon)¹³ of the e[vil] d[emon] an[d] the (demon) of

¹¹ Commenting on the unusual Greek vocative Θεε in Greek texts from Roman Egypt, Robert Ritner writes, “The usage is not ‘irreverent’ in PGM (as elsewhere in Greek contexts); rather it translates the standard Egyptian address ‘O God,’ used (piously) throughout rituals and hymns.” Robert K. Ritner, “Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II. 18.5 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995) 3333-3379, pp. 3333-3363. I have, therefore, utilized the observation of Ritner in my translation of P. Berlin 954.

¹² The identity of St. Serenus is shrouded in mystery. Serenus is mentioned in another apotropaic (or to ward off evil) text (P. 5.b) in connection with St. Philoxenus, St. Biktorus, St. Justin and “all the saints.” (lines 46-50) There are at least three saints from late antique Egypt by the name Serenus. Two are mentioned in Eusebius’ *Church History* as disciples of Origen. Eusebius writes, “After Plutarch, the second martyr among the pupils of Origen was Serenus who gave through fire a proof of the faith which he had received... the fifth from the same school proclaimed as an athlete of piety was another Serenus, who, it is reported, was beheaded, after a long endurance of tortures.” (Eusebius, *Church History*, vi. 4). Eusebius, *Church History*, trans. J. E. L. Oulton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932). In addition to the two Saints mentioned by Eusebius, John Cassian visited a Nitrian abbot in 395 by the name of Serenus. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Part XI* (England: Oxford University Press, 1915), 35. It is likely that the St. Serenus mentioned three times (lines 4; 28-29, 53) in a calendar of church services from Oxyrhynchus (P. Oxy. 1357), is the same Saint Serenus as is found in P. Berlin 954. This is because of the date of P. Oxy. 1357 (6th century), its location (Oxyrhynchus: approximately 100 miles from Herakleopolis) and the association of St. Serenus with St. Philoxenus and St. Biktorus to which both P. Oxy. 1357 (lines 24-27, 38, 58-59, 64 for Philoxenus; line 20 for Biktorus) and the apotropaic tradition of P. 5b. 46-48 attest. Grenfell and Hunt consider it more likely that one of the disciples of Origen is present in P. Oxy. 1357. (Idem, 35).

¹³ It is important to note that there was not always a negative association with the term “δαίμονον.” Iamblichus classified “daimons” in the second position (next to gods) in his taxonomy of entities ranging from the divine to the human. These intermediary beings carry a largely positive image for Iamblichus. He wrote concerning them, “...it [daimon] is not a primary initiator of action, but submits itself to the service of the good will of the gods it follows, revealing in action their invisible goodness, while likening itself to it...” (Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, I. 5.). Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, et al. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). Furthermore, while the term “daimon” does not necessarily carry a positive connotation in PGM (cf. PGM IV. 1227-64), there are instances in which these beings are depicted as beneficiary. For example, PGM I. 1-42 refers to itself as a spell “for acquiring an assistant daimon (παρεδρικήως προσγιγνεται δαίμων).” Kotansky has contended that the respective demonologies

15 unpleasantness and remove every sickness and every malady from me
in order that I might be healthy and [able] to speak the Gospel-prayer
[of health]. Our Father, who resides in the heaven[s], may [your] name
[be holy,] may [y]our ki[n]gdom arrive, may [your] will be done on
20 earth [as] it is in heaven. Give u[s] today o[ur] daily bread and forgive
our deb[t]s [a]s also [we] forgive those who are indeb[t]ed to us,] and
do [not] bring us into temptation, Lord, b[ut] deliv[er] us from ev[il].
25 For yours is the glor[y] forev[er] and the [?] of those [?]. In the
beginning was the [Wor]ld. The book of the ge[n]ealogy of Jesus
Christ, S[on] of David, Son of Abraham.] Oh Light of light. True
30 God, grant me, your servant, light graciously. Saint Serenus, beg for
me that I may be completely healthy.

Δέσποτα, Θεέ παντοκράτωρ, | ό πατή[ρ] του κυρίου και
σωτήρος ημών | Ιησού Χριστού, και άγιε Σερήνε, | ευχαριστώ
5 έγω Σιλουανός, υίος || Σαραπίωνος, και κλίνω την | κεφαλήν
[μου] κατενώπιόν σου | αιτών και παρακαλών, όπως διώξης
10 απ' εμού, του δούλου σου, τον | δαίμονα προβασκανίας και || τον
κ[ακο]ε[ρ]γίας¹⁴ και τον της | αηδίας, κα[ι] π[α]σαν δε νόσον | και
π[α]σαν μαλακίαν άφελε | απ' εμού, όπως υγιάνω και
15 [με]λ[ι]ήσω¹⁵ ειπείν την ευαγγελικήν || ευχήν [υ]γιής¹⁶ πάτερ
ημών, ό εν τοις | ούραν[ο]ις, αγιασθήτω | το όνομά σου, έλθάτω
ή βασιλεία σου, γενηθήτω το θέλημά [σου ώς] εν ούραν[ω] και
20 επί γης. τον | άρτον η[μ]ών τον επιούσιον δός η[μ]ιν || σήμεραν
και άφες ημίν τα όφειλ[η]ματα ημών, [κα]θά και ημείς άφείε[μεν]
τοίς όφειλ[έ]ταις ημών, και [μη] άγε | ημάς εις πειρασμόν,
κύριε, ά[λλ]ά ρύσαι η[μ]άς από της πονηρ[ι]ας¹⁷ σου γάρ εστιν

of the "Jewish" and "Greek" worlds created a bifurcation of adjurations in which the "Jews" created an "exorcistic ritual" and the "Greeks" implemented a ritual in which the "daimon" could be called upon for assistance. When later "Greek" texts implement "exorcistic" rituals (e.g., PGM IV. 1227-64), they were borrowing from their Jewish neighbors. Roy Kotansky, "Greek Exorcistic Amulets," in *ACM* 243-277. Given the exclusively negative association of δαίμονον in P. Berlin 954, ultimately derived from the "Jewish" demonological tradition via "Christianity," I have decided to translate this noun as "demon" and not use the transliterated form.

¹⁴ Wessely reads κ[ε]φαλ[α]γίας.

¹⁵ Wessely has [ι]χ[ύ]σω.

¹⁶ Wessely's edition, following that of Wilcken, reads [ο]ίτως(?).

¹⁷ It should be noted that the masculine or neuter phrase in Matthew 6:13, which is replaced in P. Berlin 954, is adjectival, not nominal. Hence, it is possible that the original text read "της πονηρας."

25 ή δόξ[α εις || τους αιών[ας.....] και ή των... | εν αρχή ην ό
[λόγ]ος. Βίβλος γενέσεως Ιησού Χριστού, υί]ο[υ] Δαυίδ, υί[ο]υ
30 Αβραάμ. | ώ¹⁸ φώς εκ φωτός, θεός αληθινός, χάρισον | έμέ, τον
δουλον σου, το φως. άγιε Σερήνε, || πρόσπεσε υπέρ εμού, ινα
τελείως υγιάνω.

Before I turn my attention to the issue of canon citation in P. Berlin 954, a remark is in order concerning the occasion of this amulet. As should be evident from lines 7-11 of the text, Silvanus was concerned with a demonic threat. It is important, however, to determine whether Silvanus believed himself to be a victim of demonic possession and thus, indicate that P. Berlin 954 was functioning as a ritual for "exorcism." A critical distinction must be made between ailments caused by a demonic encounter or influence, on the one hand, and "exorcisms" or "possessions," which may have negative physical effects, on the other hand. Both phenomena have precedents within ancient Christian demonological traditions.¹⁹ I contend that while Silvanus had already experienced physical suffering, probably as a perceived result of demonic encounters, he did not think that he was possessed at the time of the composition of the amulet and thus, P. Berlin 954 does not function as a ritual for "exorcism." In fact, one of the purposes of this amulet was probably to thwart any demonic attempts to take possession of Silvanus.²⁰ This contention primarily derives from my understanding of the phrase "διώξης απ' εμού" in lines 7-8.

I have translated the Greek phrase "διώξης απ' εμού" as "chase away from me," implying that Silvanus has had a close encounter

¹⁸ Wessely's text reads ό φως.

¹⁹ For examples of the former, see the various tales of the "non-exorcistic" encounters of the eremitic monks with the demonic realm in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, trans. Norman Russell (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1980), 58, 91 [cf. Idem, 116], 109. For an example of a young man whose exorcism had health benefits, see Besa, *The Life of Shenoute*, trans. David Bell (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 43.

²⁰ Therefore, I only find Kotansky's temporal distinction between "preventative" or "curative" apotropaic situations partially helpful for an analysis of P. Berlin 954. (Kotansky 1991, 121). The problem with his dichotomy is that it does not make the abovementioned distinction: I believe that P. Berlin 954 presumes that Silvanus was already ill (hence, "curative"), but does not suggest that he was a victim at this time of demonic possession (hence, "preventative").

with these demons, but has not been taken over by them.²¹ Meyer, on the other hand, has translated lines 4-9 of this amulet as follows: "I, Silvanus son of Sarapion, pray and bow [my] head before you, and ask and beseech that you *drive out of me*, your servant, the demon of witchcraft..."²² Meyer's use of the phrase "drive out of me" gives the reader the impression that this text presumes that Silvanus had already become a victim of demonic possession.

In response to Meyer's translation, it should be noted first that the usual Greek verbs for an exorcistic context in the New Testament and the so-called "magical" corpora are ἐκβάλλω, (ἐξ)ορκίζω, ἐξέρχομαι, φεύγω, and ἐλεύω (in conjunction with βίος).²³ The verb "διώκω" usually carries the notion of "chasing" or "pursuing."²⁴ Secondly, the desire on the part of the author²⁵ of P. Berlin 954 to make a distinction between the need to chase away (διώξῃς ἅπ') the demonic entities and the removal of any physical ailments (ἄφελε ἅπ'), captured by the Matthean formula (Matt. 4:23; 9:35), suggests that he felt that he did *not yet* require a demon to be removed from his body.²⁶ Finally, even in the earliest period, the Christian understanding of exorcism included the idea that the "possessed" would be out of his or her mind and hence, without the faculties of

²¹ Wilcken's translation reads, "daß du von mir...vertribest." "In order that you *drive away from me*..." (435, emphasis mine). Preisendanz agrees verbatim with Wilcken in his translation of this line. (217). Milligan agrees with Wilcken and translates this phrase as "drive from me." (133). Wessely's French translation reads, "que vous chassiez hors de moi." (421).

²² ACM, 18. (Emphasis mine).

²³ Kotansky 1995, *passim*. In no place of his treatment of the subject does Kotansky imply that διώκω carries "exorcistic" connotations.

²⁴ Liddel and Scott put "chase" and "pursue" under the first entry. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, et al., *Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 440. They nowhere include a context in which this verb is used for an exorcism.

²⁵ To what extent Silvanus participated in the formation of this amulet is uncertain. It is likely, however, that Silvanus was simply the client, who utilized P. Berlin 954, not the author of the amulet. Thus, in order to keep this distinction between the author (ritual expert) and the client (Silvanus), I will employ the generic reference "author" to indicate the individual who made the tactical decisions. The reader should note that such a distinction is conjectural; it is possible that Silvanus was the composer of the amulet.

²⁶ For the difference between "healing" and "exorcism," it is helpful to compare Mark's description of the "Gerasene demoniac" (Mark 5: 1-20) with the story of the "hemorrhaging" woman a few verses later (Mark 5:25-34).

rational discourse necessary to carry out the prescribed formula.²⁷ An "exorcistic" occasion of P. Berlin 954 is, therefore, improbable.

A "Tactical" Approach to P. Berlin 954

In what follows, I would like to build on a recent approach to apotropaic media and other related material, proffered by H. S. Versnel. He has suggested an examination of the "magical" material,²⁸ which pays close attention to the various "strategies" employed by the authors of such media.²⁹ The advantage of this approach is that it allows the "modern" investigator to interact with texts like P. Berlin 954 within the pragmatic context out of which they arose.³⁰ That is to

²⁷ E.g., Mark 5: 1-20; Mark 9:14-29. This idea also seems to be implied in PGM IV, 1227-64, a papyrus for "driving out" (ἐκβάλλουσα) demons, in which the formula is to be said by someone other than the victim of possession. Instead, the practitioner is to say the proscribed formula over the head of the victim. The same procedure is followed in PGM IV, 3007-86.

²⁸ See n. 5 above.

²⁹ H. S. Versnel, "The Poetics of the Magical Charm: An Essay in the Power of Words," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 105-158. A similar approach was taken up by Steve Weitzman in his study of the tactics employed by the Jews to ensure their "cultural survival." Steve Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). Weitzman provides three categories which are meant to encompass "most" of the tactics he discusses: "Appeasement and Symbiosis"; "Resistance"; and "Fight, Concealment, Deflection." (Ibid, 7-8). What is valuable about Weitzman's study for the concerns of this essay is that he properly situates the tactics of the Jewish people within the larger Greek and Roman military world. He writes, "Greek and Roman military theorists, developing a science of strategy and tactics, identified a whole assortment of tricks or ruses by which a weaker army could overcome the advantages of a stronger foe... [the] Jews developed analogous tactics to preserve their rituals, in some cases probably under the influence of Greek and Roman strategic thinking." (Ibid, 7). The Greek and Roman military realm also may have provided the metaphorical framework (linguistic and hence, conceptual) for the Christian amuletic tradition. For instance, P 21 (lines 35ff.) reads, "guard (φυλάξατε) me from every male and female demon and from every στρατηγήματος and from every name..." The amuletic tradition seems to part of a larger "combative" approach to the demonic realm found in early Christian monastic culture (especially in Egypt). For an important recent study of this approach, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³⁰ One should use caution, however, in this endeavor. For the emic and edic uses of the term "magic" can provide for much confusion as is illustrated by E. A. Judge, "The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri," in *Perspectives on Language and Text*, ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 339-349, p. 348. After correctly relating the "magical" use of the Christian scriptures

say, the author of P. Berlin 954 and other authors of apotropaic media attempted to improve their plights or the plights of their clients through a variety of "techniques" in order to mediate transcendent power.³¹ While I find Versnel's approach fruitful for analysis of the Christian amuletic tradition, I would like to expand on his work by providing the groundwork for a more coherent taxonomy.³² In order to proceed, the term "strategy" requires nuance, especially as it relates to the locution "tactic."

Though in common parlance, and even in scholarship, "strategy" and "tactic" are often interchangeable, it is helpful to suggest at least a provisional distinction between these terms and, more importantly, their taxonomical relationship to one another. While acknowledging considerable overlap between the categories of "strategy" and "tactic," John Drogo Montagu writes, "Strategy produces the master plan, which determines the tactics and formulates their objective."³³ In this essay, I follow Montagu in using the term "strategy" to designate the "master plan" of the author: his decision to make an amulet to combat a demonic threat. His "tactics," on the other hand, relate to his decision to utilize invocation, quote passages from the

to Constantine's production of Bibles and the Jewish *tephillin*. Judge questions (though never answers) whether the amulets and other media "deserve to be called magic." (Idem). In postulating an answer to this question Judge juxtaposes ancient (cross-cultural) and modern testimonies concerning "magic" as if they were meant to achieve the same ends. (Idem, 348-349).

³¹ Roy Kotansky appropriately writes, "From a purely psychological point of view, to a person who is thus racked with pain or wasting away with fever, any and all techniques for empowering an amulet were acceptable. (Idem 1991, 122).

³² Though Versnel implements an outline of his various "strategies," the taxonomical relationship between the first "strategy," which describes the (sometimes intentional) "arbitrariness" and "ambiguity" of the so-called *voes magicae*, the second "strategy," which employs various "informal" analogies (e.g., comparison, similes, *historiola*), and the third "strategy," which utilizes various "formal" techniques (some "comprehensible" and others nonsensical) to form an analogy with the "other" (i.e., "magical") world, remains unexplained and unclear. (Versnel, 112-141). In all fairness to Versnel, the purpose of his essay was to show the creative (or "poetic") nature of the "magical" material and hence, the multiplicity of options (both "logical" and "illogical" from the vantage point of *this world*) at the disposal of the practitioner and/or composer. (Idem, *passim*).

³³ John Drogo Montagu, *Greek and Roman Warfare: Battles, Tactics and Trickery* (London: Greenhill Books, 2006), 25. Richard Smith, in personal correspondence, has also been very helpful in clarifying this distinction for me.

canon, and even cite portions of the Nicene Creed.³⁴ For the purposes of this study, I will focus on one particular tactic in P. Berlin 954, canon quotation.³⁵

As can be seen above, the author of P. Berlin 954 quoted from at least four different New Testament passages after his introductory petitions (Matthew 4:23 [or Matthew 9:35]; Matthew 6:9-13; John 1:1; and Matthew 1:1). Simply acknowledging that he quoted from portions of the canon, however, does not provide much information and is, consequently, not very helpful. Why did this author quote the passages he did? And furthermore, why did he quote them in this particular form?

In order to answer these questions, the remainder of this essay will discuss a particular "sub-tactic" in P. Berlin 954.³⁶ Restricting my treatment to the citations of John 1:1 and Matthew 1:1, I will contend that the author quoted these Gospel *incipits* in order to mediate the power associated with each of these Gospels in their entirety. In other words, this amulet quotes metonymically the Gospel *incipits*. I will then focus my attention on the matter of Gospel selection in this amulet, attempting to answer the following question: why did the author of P. Berlin 954 pick the Gospels of John and Matthew and in that order? In a similar vein, I will argue that the introductory phrases of John and Matthew correspond to an alternate order of the Gospels and functioned metonymically for the entire Gospel tradition.

³⁴ P. Berlin 954, line 28. The author of P. Berlin 954 also lists afflictions (in association with a particular demonic force) in lines 9-11. In antiquity, this was a common tactic to mediate the transcendent power in an apotropaic situation. (Kotansky 1991, 119).

³⁵ The tactic of using sacred material to mediate transcendent power is not unique to the ancient Christian tradition. For instance, selections from Homer's *Iliad* are utilized in order to restrain anger (PGM IV, 467-68; 831-32), to get friends (PGM IV, 469-70; 833-34), as well as acquire divine assistance (PGM IV, 2146ff.). For the use of Homer in other portions of PGM, see Kotansky 1991, 132 (n.61).

³⁶ Or, to use proper taxonomical nomenclature, I will examine a particular tactic at a lower "rank" on the "clade" of canonical citation. Cf. Alberto Marradi, "Classification, Typology, Taxonomy," *Quality and Quantity* 24.2 (1990): 129-157. In order to prevent unnecessary confusion, however, I will avoid the jargon of taxonomical specialists in this essay.

The Metonymic Use of *Incipits* as a Sub-Tactic —John 1:1 and Matthew 1:1 in P. Berlin 954

After the lacuna which probably included a form of the doxological ending of the Lord's Prayer,³⁷ P. Berlin 954 likely contained the introductory phrases of John and Matthew. The use of such Gospel *incipits* was commonplace in the amulets and other apotropaic material from the ancient "Christian" world.³⁸ It is my intention in this section to explain how the author of P. Berlin 954 used the introductory phrases of the Gospels to mediate the transcendent power inherent in the canon.

David Frankfurter has provided a cross-cultural and cross-temporal survey of materials, which implement a phenomenon known to scholars as *historiola*.³⁹ The term is used to designate a "paradigmatic" narrative, which is to be recited or inscribed for the purpose of transferring the power associated with *that* narrative from the "mythic dimension" into the "human dimension."⁴⁰ As part of his detailed discussion of the practice, theory, manner of perceived efficacy, etc. of *historiola*, Frankfurter briefly touched on the use of canon in "ritual contexts." Three elements of this treatment are particularly germane to my discussion. First of all, influenced by the approach of Gerardus Van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade, Frankfurter asserted that citations of "scripture" can be understood as *historiolae*.⁴¹ Second is his thesis, *contra* Van der Leeuw and Eliade, that the "power," after which the *historiola* seeks, is not power as an abstraction; rather, it is the "narrative power" associated with the "paradigm" or "precedent" of the event "narrated."⁴² Thirdly, he correctly observed that there is usually an analogical relationship between the passages of "sacred scripture," which are cited, and the concerns of the apotropaic medium.⁴³ Frankfurter argued that the citations of the Gospel *incipits*,

³⁷ Cf. Didache, 8:10 and the following New Testament manuscripts: L, W, Δ, Θ et al.

³⁸ Cf. John Chrysostom, *Concerning the Statues* 19.14; Idem, *Homily on First Corinthians* 16.9.7.

³⁹ David Frankfurter, "Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical *Historiola* in Ritual Spells," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 457-476.

⁴⁰ Adapted from Frankfurter 1995.

⁴¹ Frankfurter 1995, 464-65.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 465.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

however, are an exception to this procedure.⁴⁴ It is in response to this final point that I will commence my discussion.

At first glance, the apparent absence of analogy between the *incipits* and Silvanus' apotropaic situation seems to substantiate Frankfurter's thesis. Neither John 1:1 nor Matthew 1:1 has any mention or allusion to apotropaic concerns. Furthermore, given the emphasis on "light" in the latter portion of P. Berlin 954 (lines, 27-28), one would not expect a quotation from John 1:1, but from John 1:4-5: "in Him [i.e., Jesus] was the life and the life was the light of men; and the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it." Yet if we understand the Gospel *incipits* as pointing toward something larger, the picture changes.

One alternative to conceiving of the Gospel *incipits* as irrelevant to the concerns of Silvanus would be to suggest that the composer believed these quotations mediated *metonymically* the power of these Gospels and used them accordingly.⁴⁵ That is to say, by tapping into the introductory phrases of the Gospels of John and Matthew through quotation, the amulet was able to mediate the power of these Gospels *in their entirety* in a minimal amount of space. This "sub-tactic" (a.k.a. *pars pro toto*) has been widely recognized in scholarship on amulets in general, though the insights of Frankfurter's discussion on *historiolae* have not been brought to bear in any of the previous analyses.⁴⁶ In light of Frankfurter's discussion of "power" in the *historiolae*, we can note that the metonymic use of the *incipits* in P. Berlin 954 would give Silvanus access to all of the "narrative power" associated with *all* of the individual pericopae of the Gospels of John and Matthew not simply some generic power affiliated with the Gospels or the "Bible." A couple of examples of the metonymic use

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Versnel argued that practitioners and composers of "magical" material were able to utilize "strategies" that may appear "arbitrary" to us. (Versnel, *passim*). While there is much to commend Versnel's observation, we should exhaust every "rational" way of accounting for the material before concluding that its use only "made sense" in the mind of the author.

⁴⁵ This is not to suggest, of course, that they would have used the term "metonymy." For a helpful discussion of metonymy, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 35-40.

⁴⁶ E.g., Tommy Wasserman, "1⁷⁸ (P. OXY. XXXIV 2684): The Epistle of Jude on an Amulet?," in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 150 (n. 44); Judge 1987, 341.

of sacred literature from antiquity (non-Christian and Christian) will both contextualize and complicate the evidence from P. Berlin 954.

An apotropaic bowl in Jewish Aramaic,⁴⁷ discovered 700 meters north of Kadhimain (near modern-day Baghdad),⁴⁸ contains a curious detail. After the description of the problems from which the author would like protection, a series of three passages from the Hebrew Bible are quoted to convey power (Zach. 3:2; Deut. 6:4 and Ps. 91:1). Zach. 3:2, which describes the rebuke of Satan by YHWH, and Deut. 6:4 (the Shema) are logical choices: the former describing what the composer would have God do and the latter is a passage which proclaims the monotheistic nature of God.⁴⁹ The third reference, Ps. 91:1 (LXX Ps. 90:1), is unexpected. The passage reads, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."⁵⁰ What is curious about this reference is not necessarily its inclusion (the protection of the Almighty is appropriate to be sure), but rather the exclusion of other more relevant portions from that psalm. For instance, Ps. 91:3-4 reads: "For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler" (NRSV).⁵¹ I believe

⁴⁷ AMB, bowl 11.

⁴⁸ Naveh and Shaked, 180-181.

⁴⁹ The practice of proclaiming the nature and titles of God is common in the apotropaic tradition (e.g., P. Berlin 954; P. 8; P. 12; P. 14; P. 16).

⁵⁰ Translation by Naveh and Shaked, 185.

⁵¹ That the whole Psalm is relevant for apotropaic concerns is evident from its use in 11Q11 VI.3-15. 11Q11 VI. 3-15 is the fourth and final apotropaic "psalm" in 11Q11. The apotropaic context of these four "psalms" can be seen from 11Q11.V. 4-11: An incanta[ti]on in the name of YHW[H. Invoke at any] time the heav[ens. When] he comes to you in the nig[ht,] you will [s]ay to him: 'Who are you, [oh offspring of] man and of the seed of the ho[ly one]s? Your face is a face of [delu]sion and your horns are horns of ill[us]ion, you are darkness and not light, [in]just[ice] and not justice [...] the chief of the army, YHWH [will bring] you [down to the] deepest [Sheo], [and he will shut the] two bronze [ga]tes th[rough which n]o light [penetrates,] and [the] sun [will] not [shine for you] tha[t] rises upon the] just man....' Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov ed. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 6 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2005). For a general treatment of these "psalms," see Emile Peuch, "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. Daniel K. Falk, Florentino Garcia Martinez and Eileen M. Schuller (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 160-181. For the use of the first few words

that it is likely that the practitioner quoted Ps. 91:1 metonymically, perhaps to consolidate space, and would thus have perceived to have access to the "narrative power" of the entire Psalm.⁵²

There is also evidence from the later Coptic amuletic tradition, which attests to the metonymic use of the "canon." In a 7th century CE amulet, P. Michigan 1559, the *incipits* of all four Gospels in "canonical order" occur in tandem with "magical symbols."⁵³ The *incipits* of all four Gospels in "canonical order," followed by a repetition of the Matthean *incipit*, are also present in P. Berlin 22235.⁵⁴ The inclusion of the introductory words of each of the four Gospels, especially the Gospel of Luke, in these texts shows, I believe, unequivocally that the authors are calling upon the "narrative power" associated with all of the individual pericopae of each of the four Gospels. The occurrence of all four Gospels in P. Michigan 1559 and P. Berlin 22235, however, raises an important question about P. Berlin 954: why are the Gospels of Mark and Luke missing?

It is important to note that as we move into the Coptic period, the identity of the "ritual expert" began to change in direct correlation to the growing number of Egyptian "Christians." In a recent article, Frankfurter has attempted to analyze "ritual experts" in terms of "local" or "peripheral" proximity to given communities.⁵⁵ As part of

of Ps. 91 in apotropaic contexts, see H. Güttler, "Four Magical and Christian Amulets," *LA* 40 (1990), 365-374, 372-73.

⁵² This seems to be the case with the text of *Shevas Zutari* according to Oxford 1531. The author quotes the first verse of Ps. 145 and immediately follows the quotation with the words, "all of the psalm (כָּל־הַפְּסַלְמִים)." ⁵³ MCT 12.

⁵⁴ See Paul Mirecki, "A Seventh-Century Coptic Limestone in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Bodl. Copt. Inscr., 426)," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 47-69, p. 53 [n. 23]. The Gospel *incipits* of all four Gospels also occur on a limestone acquired in Thebes by Norman de Garis Davies, which likely dates to sometime between the 10th and 11th centuries. (Idem, *passim*). The stone was originally edited by W. E. Crum, who assigned to it a 7th century CE date. W. E. Crum, "La Magie Copte: nouveaux textes" *Recueil d'études égyptologiques dédiées à la mémoire de Jean-François Champollion* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne [H & E. Champion, 1922], 537-544, p. 544.

⁵⁵ David Frankfurter, "Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Towards a New Taxonomy of 'Magicians,'" in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 159-178. Cf. idem, "Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category 'Magician,'" in

his treatment, Frankfurter contended that "the extensive corpus of Coptic amulets and grimoires reflects local Christian priests and monks."⁵⁶ With the help of cross-cultural models, Frankfurter has shown that among these "quasi-institutional *literati*" two particular elements endemic of their ecclesiastical position make them ideal "ritual experts": (1) "their *literacy*, particularly in the texts and scripts of the Great Tradition,"⁵⁷ and (2) "their *official or quasi-official status* as designated representatives...of the Great Tradition."⁵⁸ In light of Frankfurter's research, two of the most obvious explanations for the absence of the *incipits* of Mark and Luke become problematic: (1) ignorance of Mark and Luke and (2) the perception of the special apotropaic appropriateness of the Gospels of John and Matthew.

It is highly improbable that a literate 6th century CE "Christian" priest or monk would be ignorant of the Gospels of Mark and Luke. First of all, the imperial edict of Constantine to issue fifty copies of the Christian "scriptures" seems to have marked a significant shift toward a creation of a Christian "canon."⁵⁹ This is indicated by the emergence of "canonical" lists and the presumption of an "orthodox" collection of Christian sacred texts by the time of Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, completed c. 426 CE.⁶⁰ That the four Gospels figured prominently in this new "canon" is evident from their presence in the fifteen "undisputed lists" of "canonical" books, dating from the 4th and 5th centuries CE and covering a wide geographical distribution.⁶¹ Hence, there is good reason to suggest that by the 6th

Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 115-135, p. 129.

⁵⁶ Frankfurter 2002, 168.

⁵⁷ While P. Berlin 954 is written in Greek, it seems to part of this same milieu as is indicated by the use of "canonical" texts as well as passages from the Nicene Creed.

⁵⁸ Frankfurter 2002, 169. (emphasis in original).

⁵⁹ Cf. n. 6 above.

⁶⁰ *De doctrina Christiana* 2.8.12 reads, "The most skillful interpreter of the sacred writings, then, will be he who in the first place has read them all and retained them in his knowledge, if not yet with full understanding, still with such knowledge as reading gives,—those of them, at least, that are called canonical...Now, in regard to the canonical Scriptures, he must follow the judgment of the greater number of catholic churches." Text and translation provided in David L. Dungan, 134. (emphasis in original).

⁶¹ Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, "The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 405-415, p. 413. The "lists,"

century CE the four-fold Gospel tradition was an important element of the "orthodox" as well as many "unorthodox" churches throughout the Christian world, including Egypt. Finally, that all four Gospels were known by at least certain composers within the amuletic tradition of Egypt is indicated by P. Michigan 1559 and P. Berlin 2235, the aforementioned Coptic amulets which employ all four Gospel *incipits* in the "canonical order." Ignorance of Mark and Luke, therefore, on the part of the author of P. Berlin 954 is quite unlikely.

Another possible explanation for this absence is that the Gospels of John and Matthew would be perceived to be more appropriate for an apotropaic occasion than Mark and Luke. The problem with this solution, however, is that in the Gospel of John the exorcisms of Jesus are extracted,⁶² and his healings, in contrast with the Synoptic Gospels, "are preeminently signs designed to bring people to faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God."⁶³ When we turn to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' roles as exorcist and healer are diminished from that of the Gospel of Mark.⁶⁴ Matthew excludes the story of the demon in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mk. 1:23-27)⁶⁵ and does not include an exorcistic story until 8:24-34. In the end, any priest or monk remotely familiar with the Gospel material would not find anything *particularly* special about the Gospels of John and Matthew for an apotropaic occasion and, had this been the motivation for the

provided by Hahneman, are as follows: Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.1-7); Catalogue in Codex Claromontanus; Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Lectures* 4.33); Athanasius (*Festal Epistle* 39); Mommson Catalogue; Epiphanius (*Panarion* 76.5); Apostolic Canons 85; Gregory of Nazianzus (*Carmen de veris scripturae libris* 12.31); African Canons; Jerome (*Epistle* 53); Augustine (*On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.12); Amphilochius (*Iambics to Seleucus* 289-319); Rufinus (*Commentary on the Apostle's Creed* 36); Pope Innocent (*Letter to Exsuperius*); Syrian Catalogue of St. Catherine's. It should be observed that not all of these lists agree with respect to other books of the "canon"; thus, in the fifth century and beyond there were various "canons" throughout the "Christian" world.

⁶² G. H. Twelftree, "Demon, Devil, Satan," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 160-181, p. 171.

⁶³ C. L. Blomberg, "Healing," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 299-307, p. 304.

⁶⁴ See Twelftree, 169 and Blomberg, 305.

⁶⁵ This story is included in the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 4:31-37).

selection of *incipits*, would probably have included the Gospel of Mark.

A potential solution to this question may be found by returning to the phenomenon of metonymy. Could these Gospel *incipits* function as a metonym for the entire Gospel tradition? It may be helpful to examine a couple of "collections" of Gospel *incipits*, which date from the approximate period of P. Berlin 954. In P. Florenz 719, the author quotes the entire first verse of John, followed by the first verses of Matthew, Mark⁶⁶ and Luke.⁶⁷ The *incipits* of the four Gospels occur in the same order in P. Berlin 6096.⁶⁸ It should be noted that these texts arrange the Gospel *incipits* in the following order: John, Matthew, Mark, Luke. That there were multiple arrangements of the canonical gospels, popular among ancient Christians, is also evident from the so-called "Western order" (of which the manuscripts D, W, X are the principle representatives), which is as follows: Matthew, John, Luke, Mark.⁶⁹ Thus it is very possible that there was a textual tradition circulating in Egypt which reflects the order of P. Florenz 719 and P. Berlin 6096. If indeed these texts bear witness to an alternative order, the quotations from the Gospels of John and Matthew (the first two in the quartet) in P. Berlin 954 may be functioning as a metonym for the entire Gospel tradition. If this metonymic use is understood, Silvanus would have been able to access to the "narrative power" associated with *all* of the individual elements of the *entire Gospel tradition*, presumably the "miracle," "healing," and "exorcism" narratives in particular.

While any solution to this problem must remain tentative, the metonymic explanation has the advantage of accounting for the

⁶⁶ The author, either copying from an inferior text-type or suffering from a faulty memory, includes the phrase "Son of Abraham" after the controversial phrase "Son of God." For a text-critical discussion of the phrase "Son of God," see R. T. France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 49f.; Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 62.

⁶⁷ P. 19. The text also cites Ps. 91:1 and Matt. 6:9.

⁶⁸ Wessely, 412. This collection of canonical passages also includes other elements of the Gospels and psalms (e.g., Ps. 91:1).

⁶⁹ Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 49.

number of Gospels present in P. Berlin 954, the selection of the Gospels of John and Matthew, and the ordering of the Gospels in this amulet. Nevertheless, the issue of canonical selection in the Christian amuletic tradition is certainly an area which deserves further study.

Summary and Final Thoughts

In this essay I have attempted to provide a more nuanced treatment of the use of the canon in the amuletic tradition through a close reading of P. Berlin 954. If I have been successful, this paper should have accomplished four tasks: (1) provide an up-to-date translation of P. Berlin 954, which contained the Gospel *incipits*, on the one hand, yet did not insinuate an "exorcistic" context, on the other; (2) standing on the shoulders of Versnel, provide an alternative approach to texts like P. Berlin 954 by which one analyzed the tactics employed to mediate transcendent power; (3) detail one of the sub-tactics (i.e., metonymic use of Gospel *incipits*) for mediating the transcendent power of the canon in this amulet; and (4) provide an explanation for the selection of the Gospel *incipits* in P. Berlin 954.

It is my hope that this essay will spawn further study of Christian amulets, especially on the matter of selection when one or more of the Gospel *incipits* are absent. At the very least, however, I hope that the reader will gain an appreciation for the complexity of these amulets and how they capture an often untold story of the concerns and struggles of ancient Christians.