



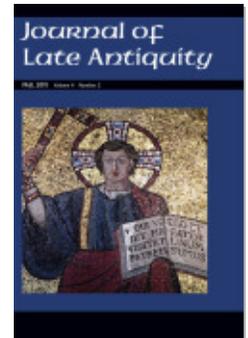
PROJECT MUSE®

Archangels, Magical Amulets, and the Defense of Late Antique Miletus

Rangar H. Cline

Journal of Late Antiquity, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 2011, pp. 55-78
(Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/jla.2011.0001



➔ For additional information about this article
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jla/summary/v004/4.1.cline.html>

Archangels, Magical Amulets, and the Defense of Late Antique Miletus

This study challenges Deissmann's authoritative interpretation and dating of the archangel inscription on the ancient theater of Miletus (CIG 2.2895). Deissmann maintained that the inscription was clearly Christian and from the sixth century, after the conversion of the theater into a citadel. This study argues that the inscription is not distinctively Christian and probably dates from the fourth or fifth century. Recent archaeological research indicates that the conversion of the theater into a citadel occurred in the seventh, rather than in the sixth century. Thus, the palaeographical characteristics of the inscription can be explained only if the inscription originated earlier than the conversion of the theater. This earlier date suggests that the purpose of the inscription was probably not magical protection from military foes but rather protection from plague or other diseases. An analysis of a selection of magical gems demonstrates that the ovals of the inscription bear a significant resemblance to ovoid protective magical amulets from the late Roman period. The study concludes that an inscription long held to be Justinianic and Christian is most likely neither.

On the northwest corner of the theater of Miletus the so-called *Erzengelinschrift* invokes archangels to protect the city of Miletus and its inhabitants.¹ Following Deissmann's 1909 commentary on the inscription, which argued that the text was Christian and should date to the sixth century, subsequent publications of the inscription have assumed both the Christian identity of the inscription and its sixth-century date.² This study challenges both these

¹ CIG 2.2895; SEG 4.440; Peter Herrmann, *Inscripfen von Milet*, (hereafter *IMilet*), vol.2 (Berlin, 1998), no.943.

² A. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten* (Tübingen, 1909), 339; photo and commentary are republished in the English translation of the fourth German edition of 1924, entitled *Light from the Ancient East*, Lionel R.M. Strachan, tr. (New York, 1927; repr. 1995), 454–55. Page references hereafter are to the 1927/1995 English translation of the 4th German edition. Deissmann's conclusions have been accepted by H. Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'asie mineure* (Paris, 1922), no.221; and L. Feissel, "Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes," *Bulletin de*

assumptions, and argues that the content of the archangel invocation bears a resemblance closer to invocations found on fourth and fifth century protective amulets than to the overtly Nicene Christian inscriptions of Justinian's reign to which Deissmann and others have compared it.³ This study contends that the unique design of the Miletus inscription was intended to imitate the appearance of a series of magical amulets, which further indicate the context in which the invocation should be interpreted. Although previous scholars have assumed that the invocation of archangels indicates the Christian identity of the inscription, this study suggests that angel and archangel invocations are a common feature of Greek and Jewish magical texts from the third through fifth centuries CE.⁴

In addition, Deissmann believed, along with early excavators of the Miletus theater, that its conversion into a citadel occurred in the era of Justinian.⁵ More recent research, however, suggests that the theater-to-citadel conversion did not occur until the seventh century, which offers an additional challenge to Deissmann's interpretation of the inscription as a sixth-century addition.⁶ Moreover, the letter forms of the archangel inscription find their closest parallels in fourth and fifth century inscriptions. Such evidence indicates the inscription is unlikely to be associated with a seventh-century theater-to-citadel conversion. Our improved knowledge of late antique Miletus, Anatolian inscriptions, and late Roman magical texts, then, necessitate a reexamination of this well-known inscription. The present study reveals the manner in which typically personal protective magic was put into service to

correspondence hellénique, suppl. 8 (1983) 190; L. Feissel with A. Philippidis-Braat "Inscriptions du péloponnèse," *Travaux et mémoires* 9 (1985), 280–81; and Herrmann, *IMilet*, 127–28.

³Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 459–60; Feissel, "Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes," 190; Idem, "Inscriptions du péloponnèse," 280–81.

⁴ See N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews, Christians* (New York, 2001), 27–46; Eadem, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* (University Park, 2002), 85–108; J. Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems* (Wiesbaden, 2007), 81–86, 163–67; G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge, 2008), 158–75; R.H. Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire* (Leiden, 2011), 105–36.

⁵ Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 459–60, citing discussions with Theodor Wiegand. See also Armin von Gerkan, *Milet II/3—Die Stadtmauern* (Berlin, 1935), 115–17.

⁶ See W. Muller-Wiener, "Das Theaterkastell von Milet," *Ist. Mitt.* 17 (1967), 279–90; Clive Foss, "Archaeology and the 'Twenty Cities' of Byzantine Asia Minor," *AJA* 81 (1977), 478 = Idem, *History and Archeology of Byzantine Asia Minor* (Aldershot, 1990); Idem, *Byzantine Cities of Western Asia Minor* (diss. Harvard University, 1972), 278, 293–94, 297, 481 n.45, 483 n.55; Idem, *Byzantine Fortifications* (Pretoria, 1986), 137–38. Recent and on-going excavations and surveys by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Istanbul have supported arguments against a Justinianic date for the theater-citadel conversion, as reported at Phillip Niewöhner, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, "Byzantine Miletus," www.dainst.org/index.php?id=7259&session-Language=en, 14 June 2010.

protect Miletus, at a time when followers of many religions believed archangels could provide powerful protection against disease and armed foes.

Appearance of the Inscription

The appearance and position of the archangel invocation provide important information about its religious character and how it was believed to function. The map below (fig.1) illustrates the position of the inscription on the north-west corner of the Miletus theater, facing outward toward the theater harbor. It is at eye level for passers-by walking toward the theater entrance, as the photograph below illustrates (fig.2). The photograph in figure 3 and transcription in figure 4 portray the appearance of the inscription and the four principal zones.

The first zone consists of a row of five *charakteres* (probably originally seven), ring-signs of the type known from magical papyri and amulets of the late Roman period.⁷ Boeckh, in the *CIG* publication of the inscription, argued that the symbols referred to planets and he devoted the majority of his commentary to determining which symbol represented which planet before finally concluding that the order of the symbols was Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, and Venus, with Mercury and the Moon presumably in the missing portion of the inscription.⁸ Recently discovered fourth- and fifth-century papyrus horoscopes demonstrate, however, that the symbols in the Miletus inscription have no parallels among late antique and Byzantine planetary symbols.⁹ Furthermore, the inscription makes no explicit reference to planets. Rather, as Deissmann argued, the symbols appear to refer to particular archangels, as archangels are explicitly mentioned in the inscription.¹⁰

In the second zone, below the *charakteres*, there is a line of thirty-one repeating Greek vowels, along with two Ns. Although the order of vowels and Ns would appear to be intentional, the method behind the repetition is not apparent.¹¹ One notes, however, that formulas in magical papyri and on late Roman amulets frequently combine *charakteres* with series of Greek

⁷ For *charakteres*, see D. Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in the Egyptian and Greek Traditions," *Helios* 21 (1994), 205–11; also J. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1992), 4–12. M. Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries* (Chico, 1983), 46 n.14, suggests that the punched-hole letter forms of the *charakteres* may derive those found on Athenian bronze allotment plates, for which see J.H. Kroll, *Athenian Bronze Allotment Plates* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 24–33.

⁸ Boeckh, *CIG* 2.2895, 568–70.

⁹ See A. Jones, *Astronomical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus (P. Oxy. 4133–4300a)*, vol.1 (Philadelphia, 1999), 61–3, esp. figure 17.

¹⁰ Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 455–59.

¹¹ On vowel and letter repetitions, see Patricia Cox Miller, "In Praise of Nonsense," in A.H. Armstrong, ed., *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality*, (New York, 1986), 481–505.

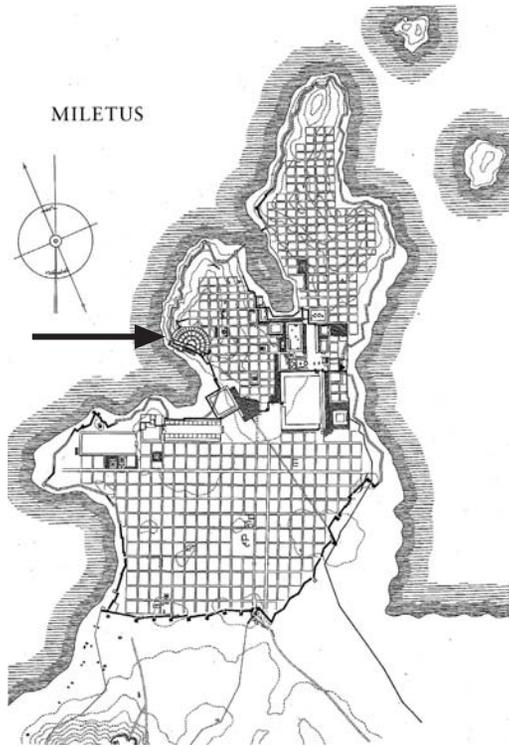


Fig. 1: Map of Miletus (From A. von Gerkan, *Milet 2.3* [Berlin, DAI: 1935]).

vowels.¹² It is likely that this vowel series, whether pronounced or simply presented, was believed to increase the efficacy of the invocation.

The third zone consists of five and one-half ovals, each situated below one of the *charakteres*. Inside of each oval the seven vowels appear. The list of vowels follows a regular variation of moving the first vowel to the end of the list in the succeeding oval. As Deissmann observed, this method of invoking angels by means of the rotating pattern of the seven vowels also appears in a magical spell recorded in London Papyrus 104.¹³ That spell calls upon seven archangels by name, each one paired with a unique ordering of the seven Greek vowels. Specifically, the spell in the London Papyrus invokes Michael, paired with “αηιουω,” Raphael, paired with “ηιουωα,”

¹² See H. Versnel, “The Poetics of the Magical Charm,” in P. Mirecki, M. Meyer, eds., *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden, 2002), 114–15; Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic,” 199–205.

¹³ PGM 10.36–50: see Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 455–59.



Fig. 2: Position of the archangel inscription on the Miletus theater (Photo: R. Cline).



Fig. 3: Archangel inscription (Photo: R. Cline).

1	5 <i>charakteres</i> [probably originally seven]						
2	Ι Ε Ο Α Η Ω Ι Α Ω Α Ι Ε Ο Υ Η Ω Ι Ω Α Ε Η Ο Υ Ι Α Ω Ε Ο Υ Ε Ν Ο Ν [ca. 14]						
3	ΑΕΗΙ ΟΥΩ Ἄγιε φύλαξον τὴν πόλιν Μιλησίων καὶ πάντας τοὺς κατοικούντας	ΕΗΙΟ ΥΩΑ Ἄγιε φύλαξον τὴν πόλιν Μιλησίων καὶ πάντας τοὺς κατοικούντας	ΗΙΟΥ ΩΑΕἌγιε φύλαξον τὴν πόλιν Μιλησίων καὶ πάντας τοὺς κατοικούντας	ΙΟΥΩ ΑΕΗἌγιε φύλαξον τὴν πόλιν Μιλησίων καὶ πάντας τοὺς κατοικούντας	ΟΥΩ ΑΕΗΙἌγιε φύλαξον τὴν πόλιν Μιλησίων καὶ πάντας τοὺς κατοικούντας	[ΥΩ Α[ΕΗΙΟ Ἄγιε φύ[λαξον τὴν πόλιν Μιλησί[ων καὶ πάντ[ας τοὺς κατ[οικου[ν]τας	[ΩΑΕ] ΗΙΟΥ] Ἄγιε] etc.
4	Ἀρχάγγελοι φυλάσσετε τὴν πόλιν Μιλησίων καὶ πάντες οἱ κατοικούντες]						

Fig. 4: Text of the archangel invocation, text following P. Hermann, IMilet, no.943 (Table: R. Cline).

and so on through seven archangels. Because the spell in the London Papyrus and the Miletus invocation follow the same order of vowel rotation, it may be possible to extrapolate from the London Papyrus which archangels the Miletus inscription was intended to invoke. On this basis, the invocations inside the ovals at Miletus correspond to Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Souriel, and Zaziel, from left to right, with Badakiel and Suliel assigned to the missing portions of the inscription. In addition, more recent studies of the Greek magical papyri date the London spell to the fourth or fifth century, further suggesting that the Miletus inscription could be earlier than Deissmann's Justinianic date.¹⁴

Inside of each oval, below the vowels, the following invocation appears, identical in each of the surviving ovals, with only minor variations in letter forms and length of line:

Ἄγιε φύλαξον τὴν πόλιν Μιλησίων καὶ πάντας τοὺς κατοικούντας
Holy One! Guard the city of the Milesians and all its inhabitants.

¹⁴ H.D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago, 1992), xxii; following K. Preisandanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri* (Stuttgart, 1973–1974).

If the vowel variations in each oval in fact refer to a particular archangel,¹⁵ the vocative “Holy One” would be addressed to the archangel represented in the oval.

Although previous studies have commented upon the magical character of the inscription, none has noted that the appearance of the ovals is strikingly similar to that of protective amulets, discussed below, from the late Roman period. Such amulets were typically ovoid, made of semiprecious stones or metal, engraved with protective language and symbols, and worn around the neck. The amuletic appearance of the ovals, together with the type of protective formula employed in this inscription, suggests that its author intended for the spell to function like personal protective magic. Of course, in this case the amulets are for an entire city rather than a single person.

Below the ovals, the fourth zone consists of a one-line inscription that runs the length of the inscribed area. The last line of the inscription is particularly explicit. It is in this line that the term “archangels” appears, confirming that the “holy ones” invoked inside the ovals should be identified as archangels.¹⁶ The syntax of this sentence, however, is unusual, and any attempt to read it requires emendations if it is to be connected to the formula of the invocations in the ovals. The line reads:

Ἀρχάγγελοι φυλάσσεται ἡ πόλις Μιλησίων καὶ πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες]

The text is similar to what is found in the ovals, and commentators have attempted to translate the line thus as a collective invocation that summarizes the individual invocations:¹⁷

Archangels! Protect the city of the Milesians and all the inhabitants!

The translation is problematic, however, because the verb φυλάσσεται is a singular present middle/passive form even though more than one archangel is being invoked. In addition, ἡ πόλις (the city) and πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες (all the inhabitants) are in the nominative case, when they should be in the accusative as the objects of the imperative verb. Thus, the translation above requires the emendations of a verb form and two direct objects. This is what Grégoire and Herrmann have suggested, positing that φυλάσσεται was an

¹⁵ Suggested by Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 455–59.

¹⁶ The mention of archangels suggests that there were originally seven ovals; in biblical sources, seven archangels frequently are cited: note I Enoch 20:1–7: Suruel (Uriel), Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqa’el, Gabriel, and Remiel; also Revelation 8:2.

¹⁷ Thus Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, 455–59; Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes*, no.221; Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic,” 202; Herrmann, *IMilet*, no.943.

alternative form, or more likely a late Roman vulgarism, for φυλάσσετε with incorrect nominatives following it.¹⁸ The use of φυλάσσεται as an alternative spelling of φυλάσσετε is plausible, as both endings would likely have been pronounced in the same way. The restoration is attractive because it makes the final invocation fit the paradigm of the invocations in the ovals, the only difference being the invocation of multiple archangels collectively rather than “Holy Ones” individually. Thus, based on this reading, the last line functions as a summary invocation of the seven archangels collectively to protect the city and its inhabitants.

Dating and Epigraphic Comparanda

Deissmann’s criteria for dating the text relied partly upon the proposed Justinianic date of the conversion of the Miletus theater into a citadel, and partly upon his comparison of the Miletus inscription with two Justinianic inscriptions from Greece.¹⁹ Deissmann assumed that an inscription with a Christian invocation would not have been carved onto a functioning theater and that only after the theater had been converted into a citadel was it carved on its outer wall.²⁰ Subsequent studies, however, challenged the sixth-century date of the conversion, proposing a seventh-century date instead,²¹ and seventh-century inscriptions are rare at Miletus and in Asia Minor generally.²² Those inscriptions that can be dated to the seventh century or later are quite unlike the Miletus archangel inscription in form and content, as they contain explicit

¹⁸ Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes*, no.221; Herrmann, *IMilet*, no.943.

¹⁹ For the connection, see Theodor Wiegand, “Fünfter vorläufiger Bericht über die von den Königlichen Museen in Milet unternommenen Ausgrabungen,” *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 8 (1906), 249–65, esp. 257; also A. von Gerkan, *Milet II.3: Die Stadtmauer* (Berlin, 1935), 116 ff. On the market inscription, see Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes*, no.219; A. Rehm, H. Des-sau, P. Herrmann, *IMilet I (VI/I)* (Berlin, 1997), no.206, with image of central portion.

²⁰ Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 459.

²¹ C. Foss, “Archaeology and the ‘Twenty Cities’ of Byzantine Asia Minor,” 478; Idem, *Byzantine Fortifications*, 137–38; also www.dainst.org/index.php?id=7259&sessionLanguage=en.

²² Only a handful of over the 1,500 inscriptions catalogued at Miletus can be dated securely to the seventh century or later, e.g. *IMilet* 2.965 (an ecclesiastical inscription, dated ca. twelfth century) and 2.1007 (the dedicatory inscription for the church of St. Michael, late sixth/early seventh centuries). Likewise, at nearby Aphrodisias, of 254 inscriptions dated to the third through twelfth centuries, only seven inscriptions date to the seventh century or later; see C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity: The Late Roman and Byzantine Inscriptions* (London, 1989); and Eadem, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity: The Late Roman and Byzantine Inscriptions*, revised second edition, 2004, <<http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004>>, nos. 91 and 167 (seventh century); 108 (ninth/tenth centuries); 99, 173, 246 (tenth century); and 110 (twelfth century). On the decline of the “epigraphic habit” after the sixth century in Asia Minor and Greece, see C. Mango, “Epigraphy,” in E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon, R. Cormack, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford, 2008), 144–49.

Christian symbols and liturgical terms and are related to Christian buildings, such as the church of St. Michael at Miletus.²³ Thus, it now appears that the archangel inscription is unlikely to have been associated with a seventh-century conversion of the theater into a citadel.

The two securely dated Justinianic inscriptions that have been used to prove the sixth-century date of the archangel inscription and its Christian identity²⁴ in fact have dissimilarities with the Miletus archangel invocation. Deissmann's first comparison was a public inscription carved on a block in the Justinianic Hexamillion, a wall and fortress that spanned the Greek isthmus near Corinth (fig.5):

+φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸς
ἀληθινὸς ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ,
φυλάξῃ τὸν Αὐτοκράτορα
Ἰουστινιανὸν καὶ τὸν
πιστὸν αὐτοῦ δοῦλον
Βικτωρίνον ἅμα τοῖς
οἰκούσιν ἐν Ἑλλάδι τοὺς κ(α)τ(ὰ) θε<δ>ν
ζῶντας+²⁵

+Light from Light, True
God from True God
guard the Emperor
Justinian and his
faithful servant
Victorinus along with those
who dwell in Greece according to the God who lives.+

This inscription goes out of its way to indicate its Christian identity and begins and ends with inscribed crosses. The text also proclaims its Nicene Orthodoxy, beginning with a formula from the Nicene Creed, "Light from Light, True God from True God." It continues with a reference to the emperor Justinian and an affirmation that the donor is faithful. Apart from asking for the protection of a community, this inscription appears quite unlike the Miletus inscription, which does not contain clear Christian symbols, such as the cross, or any reference to God, the Nicene Creed, or the emperor. Whereas this inscription draws upon the vocabulary of creedal formulas, the Miletus

²³ *IMilet* 2.965 and 2.1007.

²⁴ Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 459. Subsequent commentary: e.g., Feissel, "Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes," 190; Feissel, Philippidis-Braat, "Inscriptions du péloponnèse," 280–81.

²⁵ *IG* 4.204; see also Feissel, Philippidis-Braat, "Inscriptions du péloponnèse," no.16; T. Gregory, *Isthmia V* (Princeton, 1993), 12–14.



Fig. 5: IG 4.204 (Photo: T. Gregory, *Isthmia V: The Hexamillion and The Fortress* [Princeton, 1993], plate 1.a. Reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens).

inscription, it will be seen, draws from the vocabulary and symbols of later Roman protective magic.

Deissmann also compared the Miletus inscription with a protective inscription from near Corinth, also inscribed by the order of a Victorinus:

+ἀγ(ία) Μαρία, θεοτόκε, φύλαξον
 τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ
 φιλοχρίστου Ἰουστινιανοῦ
 καὶ τὸν γνησίως
 δουλεύοντα αὐτῷ
 Βικτωρίνον + σὺν τοῖς
 οἰκοῦσιν ἐν Κορίνθῳ κ(ατὰ) θε<ὸ>ν
 ζῶντα²⁶

+Holy Mary, Mother of God, guard
 the kingdom of
 Christ-loving Justinian
 and he who genuinely
 serves him,

²⁶ IG 4.205. See also Feissel, Philippidis-Braat, “Inscriptions du péloponnèse,” no.17; Gregory, *Isthmia*, 12–4.

Victorinus,+ with those
who dwell in Corinth according to the God who lives+.

This inscription likewise is explicitly Christian, containing three inscribed crosses and describing Justinian as “Christ-loving.” It also calls upon Mary as Theotokos, making it not only Christian, but also consistent with the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), where Mary’s title as “God-bearer” was affirmed.²⁷ Thus, it goes out of its way to indicate Victorinus’ Christian identity and orthodoxy. This inscription was publicly displayed and it asks for the protection of a city, but its explicit Christianity and orthodoxy distinguish it from the religious ambiguity of the Miletus inscription. Deissmann’s inscripational comparanda thus are unlike the Miletus inscription in several respects. They are explicitly Christian and orthodox, while the Miletus archangel inscription is not. Although Deissmann identified the Miletus inscription as Christian, there is nothing, aside from the archangels, distinctively Christian about it.²⁸

Letter Forms

As a result of the fluidity of styles and intentional mixing of letter forms, the dating of later Roman inscriptions is notoriously problematic.²⁹ In addition, because of its unofficial character, the letter forms of the Miletus inscription make it even more difficult to date it. Nevertheless, a comparison of the inscription’s letter forms with datable examples from Miletus and nearby Aphrodisias suggests a likely date in the fourth or fifth century, and possibly as late as the early sixth century. The compact and rounded letter forms of the Miletus inscription are visibly dissimilar from the rectilinear script of some Justinianic inscriptions³⁰ and the more elongated forms of some Justinianic texts and later Byzantine inscriptions.³¹ The inscription’s cursive-style M, which could appear to be a late form, appears as early as the second century at Miletus,³² where it continues in use into the sixth century.³³ The straight-bar form of the letter alpha (A) used on the archangel invocation

²⁷ See J. Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago, 1971), 243–77; A. Cameron, “The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople,” *JTS* 29 (1978), 79–108.

²⁸ Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes*, 69–70; Herrmann, *IMilet*, 127–28.

²⁹ See Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*, xix–xxi; Eadem, *Aphrodisias*, rev.ed., “Letter Forms” (<http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004/narrative/script.html>).

³⁰ E.g. *IMilet*, T. 3 (VI/3), no.1575b, cf. no.1577 (6th c. ?) and T.2 (VI/2), no.1007 (from St. Michael’s Church), late sixth/early seventh centuries.

³¹ As on the above Justinianic inscriptions from Isthmia. For the style, see Roueché, *Aphrodisias*, rev.ed., no.21. For elongated forms at Miletus, note, e.g., *IMilet* T. 3 (VI/3), no.1129 (late fifth century); T. 2 (VI/2), no.965 (twelfth century).

³² *IMilet* T. 3 (VI/3), no.1341.

³³ *IMilet* T. 3 (VI/3), no.1576.

also is suggestive, as Roueché notes that it is found on multiple examples of fourth century inscriptions from Aphrodisias, where it continues in use into the fifth century.³⁴ This style of A is to be distinguished from the slanted-bar A, which is used from the imperial period into the sixth century, and from the flat-topped A and the A with accentuated serif, both of which are found in late fifth- and sixth- century inscriptions.³⁵ Absent from the Miletus inscription are ligatures, which are common on inscriptions of the sixth century and afterwards.³⁶ Although none of the letter forms used in the archangel inscription precludes a sixth-century date,³⁷ the weight of datable epigraphic comparanda suggests a date in the fourth or fifth century.

Amulets, Lamellae, and Spells for Personal Protection

The Miletus inscription exhibits several features common to magical amulets and formulas in the Greek magical papyri and Jewish magical texts, such as the invocation of archangels combined with *charakteres* and *voces magicae*.³⁸ Although identifiably Christian amulets sometimes exhibit these features as well, they typically do so in combination with Christian symbols, Christian ritual formulas, or Christian names.³⁹ As seen above, the absence of any uniquely Christian symbols or language on the inscription makes its religious identity ambiguous. The inscription combines images of amulets, magical symbols, and ritual sounds in order to compose an efficacious archangel invocation.

The closest parallels for this type of archangel invocation are found on late antique magical amulets. Such amulets typically invoke archangels using *charakteres* and vowel repetitions much like the Miletus inscription, as examples below illustrate. In a study of amulets in the British Museum, Michel dates magical amulets that combine archangel invocations with names and symbols drawn from Egyptian, Greek, and Gnostic religious traditions to the third century CE.⁴⁰ She also dates magical amulets that combine archangel

³⁴ Roueché, "Letter Forms," e.g. nos. 12, 14, 39, 40.

³⁵ Roueché, "Letter Forms."

³⁶ E.g. *IMilet* T. 3 (VI/3), no.1576, Justinian's rescript concerning the sanctuary of the church of Archangel Gabriel (dated 539–542) contains letter forms similar to those of the theater inscription, but also employs ligatures.

³⁷ *IMilet* T. 3 (VI/3), no.1576, noted above, contains shorter, rounded letter forms and the cursive style M, but also contains a slanted-bar A and ligatures.

³⁸ See G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 270–81, 258–65, 305–14, and passim.

³⁹ Spier, *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems*, 81–6, 163–7.

⁴⁰ Simone Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, 2 vols. (London, 2001). nos. 41, 46, 47, 103, 130, 215, 243, 273, 288, 289, 424. See also Eadem, *Die magischen Gemmen: zu Bildern und Zauberformeln auf geschnittenen Steinen der Antike und Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2004), 1–16; Michel's study has a more specific dating criteria than earlier studies such as C. Bonner,

invocations with Jewish or Christian terms or symbols but without Greek or Egyptian religious images to the fourth or fifth centuries CE.⁴¹ Thus, the Miletus inscription is more similar to magical amulets datable to the fourth or fifth centuries than those of the third century.

The following examples of Greco-Roman protective amulets from the third through fifth centuries illustrate the symbols and ritual formulas used to invoke archangels for protection. They demonstrate that the appearance of archangels alone should not be used to identify an inscription as “Christian.” Rather, the invocation of archangels as powerful intermediaries formed part of the late antique magical *koiné*, first via the Jewish diaspora, and perhaps later through contact with Christianity.⁴² They also illustrate that the ovals on the Miletus inscription were intended to imitate the appearance of personal, protective amulets.⁴³ Only, in the case of the Miletus inscription, it is not one person that wears one amulet, but a city that wears seven amulets, each one invoking one of the seven archangels. Thus, this is a case of typically personal protective magic put to civic use.

Although amuletic protection for a city is attested primarily in the Greco-Roman world, a parallel is found in seventh-century BCE Assyria. The armory building inscriptions from Nineveh assert that Sennacherib had two protective colossi built out of the *ashlan*-stone; his account observed that this material was “highly prized for necklaces (lit. stones of the neck) and amulets to bring on rain . . . and to keep disease from approaching a man.”⁴⁴ Sennacherib appears to have found the material’s use in personal amulets a good reason to use it in the talismans at Nineveh. A similar understanding may lie behind the use of the images and ritual formulas from amulets to protect the city of Miletus.

Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Greco-Egyptian (Ann Arbor, 1950); and A. Delatte, P. Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes* (Paris, 1964).

⁴¹ Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen*, e.g. nos. 445, 451, 452, 465, 468, 521, 527. This group of archangel invocations consists of examples that seem ambiguously Jewish or Christian, as they do not exhibit uniquely Christian words or symbols. They contrast with others that exhibit distinctly Christian symbols, such as crosses and crucifixes, and are datable to the late second through sixth centuries, e.g. nos. 456, 457, 458, 460, 461.

⁴² See G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 169–226.

⁴³ For Roman-era magical amulets, see C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*; Delatte, Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes*; E. Zwiwerlein-Diehl, *Magische Amulette und andere Gemmen des Instituts für Altertumskunde der Universität zu Köln*, *Papyrologica Colonien*sa, Vol. 20. (Opladen, 1992); R. Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets: The Inscribed Gold, Silver, and Bronze Lamellae. Part I: Published Texts of Known Provenance* (Opladen, 1994). For slightly later Aramaic comparisons, see Joseph Naveh, Shaul Shaked. *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1987).

⁴⁴ See D.D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* Volume 2 (Chicago, 1922), §430–31, p. 182.



Fig. 6: Amulet with archangel names, depiction of Seth, and *charakteres*. 2.3 x 1.8 x 0.35 cm. (Photo from Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen*, no.46, © The Trustees of the British Museum, reproduced with permission).

The first example, from the British Museum (fig.6), is characteristic of amulets that display the names of archangels combined with Egyptian deities; Michel dates this amulet to the third century.⁴⁵ The obverse depicts the donkey-headed god Seth, holding an ankh and a flail. To the left of Seth are the seven Greek vowels, and to the right is the name Ιαω̄, the Greek approximation of the Hebrew tetragrammaton. Surrounding Seth are the names of four archangels: Uriel, Suriel, Gabriel, and Michael. On the back of the amulet are six *charakteres*, similar in design to those at Miletus. Like the Miletus inscription, this amulet invokes archangels with the aid of *charakteres* and the Greek vowels. The amulet is ovoid, like the ovals depicted at Miletus. But the amulet also contains a depiction of an Egyptian god and the Greek rendering of the Lord of Israel's ineffable name. Late antique syncretism is a subject beyond

⁴⁵ Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen*, no.46; cf. 41 and 47. The names of archangels also were cited with the image of the Egyptian god Harpocrates, e.g. nos.103 and 130. For archangel invocation combined with Anubis, see, from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Delatte, Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-egyptiennes*, no.116.



Fig. 7: Amulet with vowels, charakteres, and angel names, 1.6 x 1.7 cm (Photo from Delatte and Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, no.471, © Bibliothèque nationale de France, reproduced with permission).

the scope of this study, but this amulet reveals aspects of late antique religion and magic that are important for understanding the Miletus inscription. First, as Seth's appearance indicates, the invocation of archangels does not make an inscription Christian. Secondly, when it comes to protective magic, efficacy is more important than orthodoxy.

Another example (fig.7), from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, displays the names of archangels, *charakteres*, and vowel series—three of the ritual elements that are found in the Miletus inscription.⁴⁶ The amulet invokes the archangels Ouriel and Souriel on the outer edge, whereas the obverse contains magical *charakteres*, and the reverse displays the vowel series. Neither the vowel series nor the characters are precisely the same as those at Miletus, but the intent of these signs would seem to be similar, to increase the efficacy of the invocation of the angels. Like the Miletus inscription, this amulet does not contain a depiction of a deity. Based on comparison with dated examples in Michel's study, this amulet likely was produced in the third or fourth century.⁴⁷ It shares with the Miletus inscription such features as the use of vowel repetition, *charakteres*, and angel invocations. The amulet's invocations of archangels are most likely for protection, like the apotropaic inscription at Miletus, but the inscriptions on them do not state this explicitly. The next examples reveal how and why one might invoke archangels.

An amulet with an apotropaic function comparable to the Miletus inscription comes from the Roman-era cemetery at Bulgarköy near ancient Cyzicus in Asia Minor (fig.8). This example belongs to a widespread type of amulet

⁴⁶ Delatte, Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, no.471.

⁴⁷ E.g. Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen*, nos. 521 (fourth century) invokes Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Iao; no.527 (third/fourth century) invokes Iao, Abrasax, and the Cherubim.



Fig. 8: Amulet from roman cemetery at Bulgarköy, 4.3 x 4.6 cm. (Drawing from A. Sorlin Dorigny, “Phylactère alexandrin” [1891], 287–96).

that depicts Solomon spearing a prostrate female demon.⁴⁸ It has been dated to the late third century.⁴⁹ The inscription on the amulet reads:

Obverse, along edge:

Μιχαήλ, Γαβριήλ, Οὐριήλ, Ῥαφαήλ διαφύλαξον τὸν φοροῦντα
Michael, Gabriel, Ouriel, Raphael, guard the bearer [of this amulet]

Obverse, among images:

Ἅγιος, Ἅγιος, Ἅγιος
 ΠΙΠΙ ΡΡSS
Holy, Holy, Holy
PIPI RPSS

Reverse, along edge:

⁴⁸ For the Jewish character, see E. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, Vol. 2: *The Archaeological Evidence from the Diaspora* (New York, 1953), 227–35; also Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, 216–21.

⁴⁹ A. Sorlin Dorigny, “Phylactère Alexandrin,” *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 4 (1891): 287–96. See also E. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 229–30, with Fig. 1052; P.S. Alexander, “Incantations and Books of Magic,” in E. Shürer, G. Vermes, et al., eds. *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Vol.3, Part 1. (Edinburgh, 1986), 337, republished by T. Matantseva, *UbAC* 37 (1994), 110–21 (photo and translation). Michel, *Die Magischen Gemmen*, nos. 430–50, generally dates this type of Solomon amulet to the fourth century. Unlike the Solomon amulets in Michel’s publication, this one also contains depictions of polytheist gods, which could support Sorlin Dorigny’s earlier dating.

Ἄγγελος Ἀρααφ, φεῦγε μιμισμένη Σολομῶν σε διώκι
*Angel Araaph! Flee hated one! Solomon pursues you!*⁵⁰

The inscription and the images on the amulet incorporate both Jewish and polytheistic elements. One side of the amulet depicts what appear to be solar and lunar deities, and the reverse depicts a “Holy Rider,” most likely Solomon, led by an angel, slaying a female demon.⁵¹ The amulet invokes four archangels by name for protection. The trisagion (Holy, Holy, Holy), which follows the invocation of the archangels is the chant that the seraphim sing to God in Isaiah’s vision of God’s throne.⁵² Thus, the second line is related to the opening invocation of the archangels. The third line is more difficult to interpret. Whereas the letters RPSS remain a mystery, the letters ΠΙΠΙ are perhaps an approximation of appearance of the ineffable Hebrew tetragrammaton using Greek characters.⁵³ Important for our comparison is the specific request for protection, asking four archangels to guard the one who wears the amulet.

The next amulet was excavated at Bet She’an, is made of bronze, and contains an invocation that is remarkably similar to that on the Miletus Theater (fig.9):⁵⁴

ἅγια ὀνόματα κ(αὶ) σύ(μ)βολα κ(αὶ) φοβερ[οὶ]
 χαρακτηρες φυλάξετε[ε τ]ὸν φοροῦνταν ἢ τὴν
 φ[ο]ροῦσασιν τὰς . . . τὰς θίας ὑ[μῶν] δυνάμεις
 [ἀ]πὸ πά(ν)των κινδ[ύ]νων . . .

Holy names and symbols and dread *charakteres*, guard the man or woman
 who bears them from all dangers . . . your divine powers . . .

The invocation of the “holy names” is similar to the invocation of the “holy one” found inside the ovals of the Miletus inscription. This amulet invokes “symbols” and “dread *charakteres*” whereas the Miletus inscription displays actual symbols and *charakteres*. Lastly, the amulet invokes the holy names and

⁵⁰ I know of no other occurrences of the demon “Araaph,” although the name evokes an episode in the Testament of Solomon 11:1–4, where Solomon interrogates a demon who claims to prevent the ill from the recovery: when Solomon demands to know the demon’s name, the demon replies: “Λεοντοφόρον, Ἀραψ τῷ γένει.” D.C. Duling, in J.H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York, 1983), 937, translates the phrase as “The Lion-Shaped Demon, an Arab by descent,” but notes that Araps also may be a name. If other late antique readers understood “Araps” as a name, this may explain the appearance of the similarly-named “Araaph” on an amulet that calls upon Solomon and depicts a lion.

⁵¹ See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 227–35; Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, 216–21.

⁵² Isaiah 6:3, LXX: “ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος, κύριος σαβαοθ.”

⁵³ Sorlin Dorigny, “Phylactère Alexandrin,” 291.

⁵⁴ Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, 215, no.317.



Fig. 9: Amulet (Bonner 317), 4.5 x 3.4 cm (Photo: University of Pennsylvania Museum, Penn Museum object 29-108-253, image 142027, reproduced with permission).

symbols to protect (φυλάξετε) the one who wears the amulet. This is explicitly comparable to the Miletus inscription, which uses the same verb and invokes the holy ones with *charakteres* to protect the city of Miletus and its inhabitants. The amulet's material and form suggest a date in the fifth or sixth century.⁵⁵

A gold lamina from Thessaly, now reportedly in the Athens Museum, contains an invocation of angels that is comparable to the Miletus inscription and the amulet from Bet She'an (fig.10).⁵⁶ It originally was folded and probably was worn as a phylactery. Although much of the text is damaged, the legible portion of its inscription calls upon the "power of the angels and the *charakteres*" to give victory to Ioannes and Gorgias and their household. In addition to calling upon the word *charakteres*, as the Bet She'an amulet does, the lamina displays seven actual *charakteres*, as at Miletus.⁵⁷ This

⁵⁵ See Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen*, nos. 451–56. Most of these feature Solomon as a holy rider slaying a female demon. Two, nos. 451 and 452, which Michel dates to the fifth/sixth century, contain archangel invocations, and another, no.455, featuring only text but lacking an archangel invocation, Michel dates to the sixth/seventh century.

⁵⁶ Otto Kern, ed., *Inscriptiones Graecae (IG) 9.2* (Berlin, 1908), no.232.

⁵⁷ Lines 15–16.



Fig. 10: IG 9.2.232, Gold Lamina from Thessaly, 1.28 x .34 cm (Drawing from Kern, IG 9.2 [Berlin, 1910] 65).

series of seven signs is followed by the request to guard the houses and the souls of Ioannes and Gorgias.⁵⁸ There is a further request to keep evil things away, in lines 24–25, followed by a list of angel names, in lines 27–42, which includes Ariel, Michael, Raphael, and Iao Sabaoth, Greek approximation of Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Hosts. Like the Miletus inscription, the lamina

⁵⁸ Line 17.

invokes angels and does so with the aid of *charakteres* and vowel sequences.⁵⁹ The vocabulary also is similar. The lamina asks for protection using the verb διαφυλάξετε,⁶⁰ which is comparable to the Miletus inscription's φύλαξον and φυλάσσειται. The lamina also makes a request on behalf of a household, οἶκος,⁶¹ which is the root of κατοικοῦντες, used in the Miletus inscription. The lamina is undated, but its use of archangel names, *charakteres*, and vowel series without reference to Greek or Egyptian deities suggest a date between the fourth and sixth centuries.

The amulets above are typical of those produced between the third and sixth centuries CE. They demonstrate the techniques used to invoke archangels by means of amulets and the reasons that one would invoke archangels by means of an amulet. The amulets also demonstrate that archangel invocations were not exclusively Christian or Jewish, but were part of a late antique magical koiné. The amulets are very general about what kind of protection was desired. The amulet from Bulgarköy was intended to guard the bearer from evil, as represented by the demon "Araaph." The amulet from Bet She'an was intended to guard the bearer from "all dangers." The lamina from Thessaly was intended to keep "evil things" from the persons and household of Ioannes and Gorgias, and to grant them victory. Thus, we can suggest that the invocation of archangels to protect the city of Miletus likewise was intended to keep away "evil things" and "all dangers." Such evils and dangers could include not only physical attack, but also disease, illness, and plague. Jewish literary sources, such as the Testament of Solomon and Sepher ha-Razim, which date from the third or fourth century, indicate that archangel invocations and associated amulets could be used to protect against headache, blindness, tumors, colic, danger in war, and lions.⁶² Thus, even though the texts are somewhat general in their requests, the wearers of these amulets may have sought protection from more specific threats, diseases, or ailments.

Purpose

Deissmann argued that the Miletus inscription should be interpreted in light of the conversion of the theater into a citadel and suggested that one understand

⁵⁹ Lines 6–10.

⁶⁰ Lines 18–19.

⁶¹ Lines 19 and 50

⁶² Invocations from the *Sepher ha-Razim* (*The Book of the Mysteries*). The datable portions of the text belong to the late third to fourth century CE. See Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 85–96; English translation and of the manuscript, in Morgan, *Sepher ha-Razim*. The Testament of Solomon, which probably dates to the third century CE, lists angels and archangels that protect against demons responsible for, e.g., sore throat, loss of strength, colic, kidney pain, sudden chills, and feuds in homes.

the request for angelic protection as military in nature.⁶³ Even though, as already seen, the inscription is unlikely to have been associated with the creation of the citadel, it remains possible that the invocation was intended to defend against armed foes. But the likelihood that the inscription was carved prior to the theater-citadel conversion permits other interpretations. Based on the archangel invocations found in the *Sepher ha-Razim* and the Testament of Solomon relating to physical infirmities, the original purpose of the inscription could have been to defend the residents of Miletus against plague or other epidemics that recurrently ravaged Asia Minor in Late Antiquity.⁶⁴ For example, inscriptions dedicated to the “gods and goddesses” appear to have been placed on walls and were intended to defend against the Antonine-era plague in accordance with a statement delivered by the oracle of Apollo at Claros.⁶⁵ And an inscription from the temple of Apollo at Didyma refers to a time when Apollo rid Miletus of a plague with the aid of an alphabetic hymn, the symbols of which were known to Clement of Alexandria in the second century.⁶⁶ Such references to an alphabetic hymn and symbols used to defend Miletus against the plague are evocative of the second zone of the Miletus inscription, where vowels and the consonant N are displayed for apotropaic effect.

If the inscription was intended to protect the city against disease, then the inscription’s location—facing outward towards the sea, looking over the old theater harbor, and past the silt marshes created by the Maeander River—could indicate the Milesians’ understanding of a possible source of disease, the sea, which connected Miletus to other Mediterranean ports and was a potential bringer of plague and death.⁶⁷ In addition, the Maeander River, which connected Miletus to the interior of Asia Minor, carried a large quantity of silt, which necessitated periodic dredging of the harbor during Late Antiquity.⁶⁸ The silting of the river also would have created a marshy plain, an environment hospitable to water-borne and mosquito-transmitted

⁶³ See Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 459.

⁶⁴ See D. Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire: A Systematic Survey of Crises and Epidemics* (London, 2004), esp. 177–309.

⁶⁵ C.P. Jones, “Ten Dedications ‘To the Gods and Goddesses’ and the Antonine Plague,” *JRA* 18 (2005), 293–301; *Idem*, “Cosa and the Antonine Plague?” *JRA* 19 (2006), 368–69.

⁶⁶ R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1985), 219; referring to Clement, *Stromata* 5.8.47.4. Inscription at Didyma: Albert Rehm, *Die Inschriften*, vol. 2 of T. Wiegand, Richard Harder, eds., *Didyma* (Berlin, 1958), 217; W. Peek, “Milesische Versinschriften,” *ZPE* 7 (1971), 196–98.

⁶⁷ On shipping, ports, trade, and the plague in the early Byzantine era, see Michael McCormick, “Bateaux de vie, bateaux de mort. Maladie, commerce, transports annonnaires et le passage économique de bas-empire au moyen âge,” *Settimane di studio del centro Italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo* 45 (1998), 35–118.

⁶⁸ See Foss, “Archaeology and the ‘Twenty Cities’ of Byzantine Asia Minor,” 477–78.

diseases.⁶⁹ Thus, from the late third through the sixth centuries, when disease and plague were rampant in the empire,⁷⁰ Miletus's position as a port city near stagnant water would have made it vulnerable to many of the era's diseases and epidemics. It is possible that the inscription is the community's attempt to call upon archangels to protect the city and its inhabitants from such evils.

Public/Private

Deissmann proposed that the Miletus inscription was not inscribed with government or church sanction and therefore was unofficial, but he also believed that it dated to a time when the theater was transformed into a citadel and much of the urban core of Miletus was abandoned; he even suggests that one of the guardsmen inscribed the invocation.⁷¹ This model presumes that in a city that was largely depopulated except for the citadel's garrison, church or government authorities would not have been so concerned about an unorthodox invocation of archangels. More recent research, however, indicates that the center of the city was inhabited at least to the era of Justinian, and that the markets and monuments of the city were repaired and maintained in the fourth through sixth centuries.⁷² This evidence suggests a somewhat different environment for the creation and life of the inscription. Indeed, even if the theater no longer was used for performances, the repair and construction of structures near the theater, including churches, in the sixth century, indicate a bustling late antique city where residents' eyes would scrutinize such a publicly displayed invocation.⁷³ The inscription's placement also testifies to its public character. Although it is not as well cut as some official inscriptions of the fourth through sixth centuries, it is better cut than most private inscriptions, and arguably better than some public ones.⁷⁴ The absence of the name

⁶⁹ For periodic dredging of the river, see Foss, "Archaeology and the 'Twenty Cities' of Byzantine Asia Minor," 477–78. Today, the silting of the Miletus harbor has carried the coastline far from the ruins of the ancient city and results in stagnant water in the lower parts of the city during the wetter parts of the year. The silting of the harbor no doubt had a similar effect in antiquity.

⁷⁰ See D. Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire*, 177–309. On the Justinianic plague, see P. Horden, "Mediterranean Plague in the Age of Justinian," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2005), 134–60; McCormick, "Bateaux de vie, bateaux de mort," 35–118.

⁷¹ Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 459. The guardsman suggestion seems unlikely given that invocations of this type required specialized knowledge: see M.W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York, 2001), 273–321.

⁷² Foss, "Archaeology and the 'Twenty Cities' of Byzantine Asia Minor," 478.

⁷³ See Foss, *Byzantine Cities of Western Asia Minor*, 291–95; Idem, "Archaeology and the 'Twenty Cities' of Byzantine Asia Minor," 477.

⁷⁴ E.g., *IMilet* 3.1575, 1576 (6th cent.); 3.1401 (late antique epigram). The "Place of the Jews" inscription from the theater, is a public inscription of comparable quality, although earlier in date

of any public official or other person taking responsibility for the inscription suggests that neither a civic body nor magistrate ordered its creation. Nevertheless, its placement, letter style, and mere existence still suggests that it had public approval even if it was not officially commissioned by the city.

What would the late antique inhabitants of Miletus have made of such an inscription? As discussed above, the style, content, and letter forms of the inscription indicate that it could date as early as the fourth century.⁷⁵ A fourth century date would explain some of the peculiarities of the inscription, as an invocation of archangels without distinctly Christian symbols would be appropriately ambiguous for the early fourth century, a time when the triumph of Christianity was far from certain. But even if the inscription was cut in the fourth century, it clearly survived into later, more theologically sensitive eras. How can we explain the later toleration of such a publicly displayed, ambiguously Christian inscription of magical character? Even though the inscription could be interpreted as Jewish or polytheistic,⁷⁶ the presence of archangels would have led to the conclusion that the inscription was Christian. Christian viewers of later centuries, including the garrison of the theater/citadel, would have noted the difference between the archangel invocation and the orthodox texts of their day, but the invocation of archangels, the antiquity of the inscription, and possibly the belief in its efficacy against disease or plague, would have saved the inscription from defacement in later, potentially more orthodox eras.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The sixth-century date proposed by Deissmann was based upon the supposed similarity of the Miletus inscription with the Justinianic inscriptions from Corinth and the argument that the Miletus inscription could only have been

(second-third centuries), see *IMilet* 2.296; Walter Ameling, ed. *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis. Band II, Kleinasien* (Tübingen, 2004), 168–72, no. 37.

⁷⁵ See also Angelos Chaniotis, “The Jews of Aphrodisias; New Evidence and Old Problems” *Scripta classica Israelica* 21 (2002), 213–21.

⁷⁶ As by Ernst Maass, *Die Tagesgötter in Rom und in den Provinzen* (Berlin, 1902), 244–45. Jewish influence remains a possibility, particularly in light of other Jewish inscriptions from the Miletus theater, on which see Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, 168–72, and the evidence for public Jewish inscriptions in Asia Minor more generally, for which note the Jewish inscriptions at nearby Aphrodisias: J. Reynolds, R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge, 1987), 3–24, the Jewish donor inscription, and Appendix no. 1, reserving seating in the Bouleuterion for the “Blue Hebrew Elders,” which may date as late as the sixth century. For reconsideration of the dating and implications of these inscriptions, see Chaniotis, “The Jews of Aphrodisias,” 213–21, and on the possibility of a synagogue at Miletus, see P. R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities of Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1991), 56–57.

⁷⁷ And even though the letter forms of the inscription could date as late as the early sixth century, one must wonder whether such an inscription could have been created when church authorities, empowered by the state, would have recognized the ambiguous theological nature of the inscription.

inscribed when the theater was transformed into a citadel. However, as discussed above, recent research suggests that the theater was not converted into a citadel until the seventh century. So, we cannot assume a sixth century date for this inscription because of its similarity to Deissmann's Justinianic comparanda, nor can we assume a sixth century date for this inscription because of the likelihood that it dates to a Justinianic conversion of the theater into a citadel, because that probably did not happen in the sixth century. The invocation of archangels is not distinctively Christian, and the inscription borrows its language and appearance from the religiously ambiguous magical amulets of Late Antiquity. So, what we are left with is an inscription that is not distinctively Christian and finds its greatest similarities with syncretistic invocations on personal phylacteries that date from the fourth through fifth centuries. Thus, an inscription that has been referred to as Justinianic and Christian is quite possibly neither. Rather, as the present study illustrates, this is a unique example of late Roman personal protective magic used for the defense of an entire city, employed at a time when the residents of Miletus sought refuge in the perceived efficacy of magical charms against diseases or foes whose identity has yet to be determined.

University of Oklahoma