

## A MAGICAL AMULET FROM THE CEMETERY ON ŞALLAḤ ED-DIN STREET, JERUSALEM

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A magical amulet was discovered in a burial cave during the excavations of a Roman-period cemetery on Şallaḥ ed-Din Street in Jerusalem (see Avni and Adawi, this volume).<sup>1</sup>

### DESCRIPTION

Northern area, Burial Cave 1, L105, B1025 (Fig. 1).

Oval (21.86 × 17.48 mm, Th 2.43 mm); beveled edge.

Cobalt glass.

Engraved (intaglio) design (obverse); incised Greek letters (reverse). Fair workmanship.

Perfectly preserved.

*Obverse:* Artemis/Diana stands in a frontal hunting posture, facing left. Her spread legs are firmly set over a ground line; the body leans slightly forward with its weight resting over the left foot, while the right foot lends support. The

outstretched left hand holds a bow and the right hand draws an arrow from a quiver behind her shoulder.<sup>2</sup> Although held in one hand, the bow string is outstretched. Artemis/Diana wears a short tunic (*chiton*) and most probably hunting boots, although these are barely discernible. She has a wide, crescent moon-shaped diadem on her forehead and a radiating crown (*strahlenkrone*) on her head.<sup>3</sup>

*Reverse:* The large, square Greek letters ΣΑΒΑΩ appear in three registers, and are adorned with upper and lower, horizontal and vertical strokes.

### DISCUSSION

Artemis (Gr. Ἀρτεμις, L. Diana Venatrix—the huntress) was the daughter of Zeus and Leto, and sister of Apollo. Known as the Hellenic celestial goddess of hunting, wild animals, wilderness, childbirth and virginity, she seems to have been popular among the Greco-Roman *poleis* and the legions. She was often depicted as an archer in a hunting posture, equipped with a golden bow and a quiver of arrows, occasionally accompanied by a deer or hound. As an archer, she is usually dressed in a *chiton* and hunting boots (Henig 1970:254–258). The crescent-moon diadem and the radiating crown are two of her attributes (Brand 1972 1:1; Henig and Whiting 1987:67).

During the Hellenistic period, Artemis often appeared on seals wearing a *chiton* and carrying a torch (Invernizzi 2004, II: Fig. 40), while in the Roman period, she was usually depicted as an archer (Wagner and Boardman 2003:281).



Fig. 1. The amulet, obverse and reverse.

The closest parallels in Syria-Palaestina for the Jerusalem scene are seven engraved finger-ring gems from Gadara (Sa'ad Private Collection) dated to the first–second centuries CE (Henig and Whiting 1987: Figs. 70–76). They bear almost identical scenes depicting Artemis as an archer in a hunting posture standing upon a ground line; in five of the gems she turns to the right and in two, to the left, with small variations in dress and head cover, while a hound in a leaping stance is depicted next to her leg. The goddess also appears in a similar posture on two gems from Caesarea Maritima (Hamburger 1968:9, Nos. 52, 53, Pl. III). Another gem bearing the same scene as that of the Jerusalem amulet, displayed in the Sdot-Yam Museum (Inv. No. CMG.72.2), was dated by Amorai-Stark (1999:91, No. 29, Fig. 12) to the first–second centuries CE.

Some of the finger rings depicting Artemis derive from contexts that may be related to legionary camps. A second-century CE carnelian gem with the scene of Artemis Venatrix found its way to the Giv'at 'Oz Museum. It is an accidental surface find, presumably from the surrounding area of Kefar 'Otnai, the legionary camp of Legio (Peleg-Barkat and Tepper 2011:100–111, Pl. 8). A sard gem from Asia Minor, presumably from a legionary camp as well, now in the Yüksel Erimtan Collection in Ankara and dated to the second century CE, depicts Artemis in the same posture with a hound at her feet (Konuk and Arslan 2000:38, No. 14). Two gems from the legionary bathhouse at Caerleon, England (Zienkiewicz 1986:135, 140, Pls. XI:40; XVII:88) also depict Diana Venatrix in the same posture. The first, of cloudy, orange-brown carnelian, was dated to c. 160–230 CE, and the second, of clear, rich, orange-brown carnelian, to c. 110–230 CE. In both gems, the goddess wears a diadem and in the first, her hair is partly radiated. It should be noted that in the Temple Mount excavations conducted by B. Mazar between 1968 and 1976, a dozen Roman intaglios were revealed bearing a variety of scenes (Peleg 2003; Peleg-Barkat 2011), some

or most of which may have belonged, according to Peleg-Barkat and Tepper (2011:102–103), to Roman soldiers serving in the legionary camp of Aelia Capitolina.

Henig (2007:55–70) discerns a close connection between the type of site, i.e., military or civilian, and the choice of scenes depicted on gems found there. Various scholars claim that the presence of gems depicting Artemis/Diana in a hunting posture in legionary camps, such as Legio and Aelia Capitolina in the east, and Caerleon in the west, attests that the scene had a favorable appeal among military personnel. Peleg-Barkat and Tepper (2011:101) claim that Artemis/Diana Venatrix, along with the armed Venus Victrix, were suitable goddesses for finger rings of Roman soldiers.

Although all the above-described finger-ring gems share the same scene of Artemis/Diana Venatrix in her hunting posture, none of them is an amulet, and none carry a magical inscription on the reverse, as does the amulet from Şallah ed-Din Street. Magical amulets, popular among pagan populations in the Roman East, were valued for their magical healing and protective powers. Previously published amulets from Syria-Palaestina, most of which come from museum collections and are of unknown provenance, are usually dated to the first–third centuries CE and assumed to have belonged to pagans. However, magical amulets bearing inscriptions on their reverse were also popular in later periods among Jewish and Christian communities as well (Bonner 1950:208–225).

An amulet of the 'reaper' type with the word ΣΧΙΩΝ (hip) was found in a Jewish mausoleum at Tiberias dated to the Roman period (Vitto 2008:21\*–23\*), and a close parallel, with the inscription ΣΧΙΩΝ ΘΕΡΑΠΙΑΣ (cure for the hip), was retrieved in a Byzantine-dated stratum at Tel Bet She'an (Khamis 2006). Two amulets of the Greco-Egyptian type, dated by type and style to the second century CE and adorned with characteristic Egyptian symbols and the word ΣΤΟΜΑΧΟΥ (stomach), were recovered in undated contexts, either Roman or Byzantine, one at Nysa-Scythopolis (Mazor

2012) and the other at Mazzuvah (Dauphin 1993). A perfectly preserved amulet of the Greco-Egyptian type, still set within its original gold frame, was found in a Christian context dated to the sixth century CE at Hippos, stashed in the *diakonikon* of the northeastern church (Schuler 2005:70–71, Fig. 99) among other jewelry items.

Rather intriguing is the transliterated Hebrew word written in Greek on the reverse of the Jerusalem amulet: ΣΑΒΑΩ (צבאות, *sabao[th]*, ‘of hosts’). The word is used in the Bible as a glorifying term, usually related to the Israelite god (ה' צבאות; I Samuel 15:2) and associated with his role as an avenging warrior defeating the Israelites’ enemies. In amulets dating to the Roman and Byzantine periods, it is also occasionally associated with god, for example ΙΑΩ ΣΑΒΑΩ. The latter inscription is also relatively common on Jewish amulets in Hebrew, as for instance, יאו צבאות inscribed on an amulet from Tarsus in Syria (Spier 2007:962) accompanied by three illegible Hebrew words: כסרם, ארהרא, סכארא, presumably magical gibberish; however, it is far more common transliterated into Greek. A small lead phylactery mentioned by Bonner (1950:226, No. 66) is inscribed on one side with ΡΕΦΑΗΛ, and ΣΑΒΑΩ on the other, with both inscriptions running from right to left as in Hebrew. Bonner states that Mouterde, who first published the phylactery, remarked that here, *sabao[th]* is conceived not as god but as an angel alongside Raphael. The term frequently appears on Greco-Roman finger rings and amulets as the word ΣΑΒΑΩ, for instance in our example (*sabao[th]*; Philip 1986:51, 53), or inscribed on a finger ring: Ο ΩΝ ΣΑΒΑΩΘ ΘΕΟΣ (O Lord Sabaoth; Middleton 1892:80), or accompanied by a Jewish magical name and a request: ΟΥΡΙΗΛ ΣΑΒΑΩ ΒΟΗΘΙ (Ouriel sabao[th] help; Spier 2007:112, No. 652). A hematite amulet of unknown provenance, now in the British Museum (Michel 2001:93, Pl. 20:144) and dated to the third century CE, depicts on its obverse Harpocrates sitting on a crocodile and surrounded by a scorpion, a scarab and a falcon,

while on the reverse the three-line inscription reads: ΙΑΩ ΣΑΒΑΩΘ (Lord Sabaoth). Three other hematite amulets of the same type that vary in theme and inscriptions, also bear the word ΣΑΒΑΩΘ (Michel 2001:253–254, Pl. 59:401–403).

All of these inscriptions were considered by Bonner (1950:187) typical magic words, names and formulae, derived mostly from Jewish magical literature, which were frequently transliterated onto Greco-Roman amulets and carried by pagans throughout the eastern Roman provinces. Faraon (2011:50) states that when magical texts appear with traditional images, these combinations were thought to have stronger magical protecting and healing powers. The appearance of magical texts replacing the earlier practice of inscribing the owner’s names on the reverse, should be dated, in Faraon’s opinion, to the Roman period. As for their assumed Greco-Egyptian origin, specifically Alexandria, as claimed by some scholars (e.g., Dauphin 1993:145–147), Faraon states that there is no reason to reject the existence of other candidates throughout the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire as possible origins and distribution centers for such amulets.

In his research of fourth–fifth centuries CE Christian amulets, Spier (2007) records a considerable number of inscribed examples, some of which also include the term ΣΑΒΑΩΘ. A green jasper amulet, said to be from Tyre (Spier 2007:83, Cat. No. 472), depicts Solomon wearing a long *chiton* and *himation* over his shoulder with the surrounding name ΣΟΛΟΜΩΝ (Solomon) on one side and the inscription ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ ΜΙΧΑΗΛ ΟΥΡΙΗΛ ΣΑΒΑΩΘ (Gabriel Michael Ouriel Sabaoth) on the other. A lapis lazuli amulet, said to be from Syria (Spier 2007:84, Cat. No. 481), has various Christian symbols on one side and the inscription ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΣΑΒΑΩΘ (Holy Holy Holy is the Lord Sabaoth) on the other. A red jasper amulet from the National Museum at Copenhagen (Spier 2007:35, Cat. No. 169) mentions ΧΡΕΙΣΤΟΣ (Christ) on one side and

ΙΑΩ ΣΑΒΑΩ ΕΛΩΑΙ ΑΔΩΝΑΙ (Iao Sabao[th], Eloai Adonai) on the other. Two amulets, one from the Louvre, the other from the Newell Collection (Spier 2007:112, Cat. Nos. 654, 652), carry the inscriptions: ΣΑΒΑΩ ΒΟΗΘΙ (Sabao[th] help) and ΟΥΡΙΗΛ ΣΑΒΑΩ ΒΟΗΘΙ (Ouriel Sabao[th] help), both requesting help. The first depicts an ornate figure on the obverse, while the second depicts Daniel and the Dragon of Babylon, taken from the apocryphal chapters of the Book of Daniel. An amulet from a private collection (Spier 2007:109, Cat. No. 628) bears a depiction of the sacrifice of Isaac on the obverse and the magical inscription ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ ΙΑΩ ΣΑΒΑΩΘ (Abraksax Iao Sabaoth) on the reverse. These three scenes: Solomon, Daniel and the Dragon, and the Sacrifice of Isaac, all of Jewish origins, were adopted during the fourth–fifth centuries CE as Christian narratives. Supplemented by the name of God, Christians and Jews alike believed that those scenes controlled demons. The reputation of Jews, mainly in Syria-Palaestina, as masters of the powers of magic, was influential among Christian communities, who rapidly adopted the use of Hebrew or transliterated holy names, verses and scenes in their amulets (Spier 2007:113).

## CONCLUSION

The amulet from the excavation on Şallah ed-Din Street was retrieved from a Roman burial cave dated to the second–third centuries CE. The burial cave was apparently part of the northern cemetery of Aelia Capitolina, a Roman *colonia* founded by Hadrian prior to the Bar Kokhba Revolt.<sup>4</sup> The *colonia* accommodated for centuries the camp of the tenth legion (*Fretensis*), the exact location of which has long been in dispute among scholars (Geva 1982; Tsafirir 1999:124–135; Stiebel 1999). As no Jewish-related finds were revealed in the burial cave, and in light of the assumed connection of Artemis/Diana Venatrix with active or discharged military personnel, it would be reasonable to assume that the cave may have served the family of a Roman veteran of the tenth legion, who resided in Aelia Capitolina sometime during the second–third centuries CE. The pseudo-Greek magical word ΣΑΒΑΩ, transliterated from Hebrew and inscribed on the amulet reverse, has its origins in the Jewish magical world. Due to the strong therapeutic powers attributed to the magical term, it became popular, first among pagans and later among Christians of the Roman East.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A Magical Amulet from the Cemetery on Şallah ed-Din Street, Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks are due to the excavators for permission to publish the amulet. It was photographed by Clara Amit and drawn by Irina Lidsky, of the IAA.

<sup>3</sup> Compare position of right hand in the statue of Diana of Versailles, a Roman copy of a Greek sculpture by Leochares (*The Theoi Project: Greek Mythology*).

<sup>3</sup> Compare a rectangular tessera (Inv. No. AO 11761) in the Louvre Museum, depicting a bust of a *dieu radié* (Dentzer-Feydy and Texidor 1993:91).

<sup>4</sup> According to Dio Cassius, the founding of the *colonia* antedates the revolt (Dio *HR* LXIX:12.1), while Eusebius states that Aelia Capitolina was founded as a result of the revolt (Eus. *HE* 9, 1–2; for further discussion of the founding of the *colonia*, see Isaac 1998:87–111). However, the recovery of revolt-related coins together with coins of Aelia Capitolina suggests that the *colonia* existed prior to the revolt, and its foundation should most probably be related to Hadrian's visit to the region in 130 CE (Meshorer 1999).

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