inscription, for instance, surrounds an impression of a downward-facing hand—which suggests the overlap of the semiotic and performative functions of picture and text. Both were often combined in inscriptions like these to invoke the agency of the deities whose names the inscription materialized in order to (hopefully) ward off the influence of malevolent forces operating among the living or the dead.[2] Touching or tracing these words may have been just as salient a means of engagement as reading, and repetition of divine names may have been a way to amplify their power. Even many of those who could not read were likely able to recognize a small number of words, and particularly names, even if only from the pattern they visually formed and not from the characters themselves. A standardized way to write a divine name could be recognizable to literate and illiterate alike, in a sense functioning for both as a divine image in and of itself.[3]

The commonality of inscriptions like these was likely due to the ubiquitous perception of the pervasiveness of unseen agents and agency in the surrounding world, as well as the notion that those agents and agencies could be employed, controlled, or at least held at a distance through the recitation and/or inscription of their names.[4] Another medium for influencing this agency was inscribed amulets, which have been described as "the most pervasive of magical tools in antiquity" (Cohn 2008, 17; cf. Smoak 2010). Yehuda Cohn (2008, 19) has traced the apotropaic use of written amulets back to eighth-century BCE Egypt, at the latest, from where it soon spread out to Greek, Phoenician, Mesopotamian, and other societies.[5] Cohn (2008, 18) favorably cites John Gager's (1992, 220)

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[2] In a discussion of the apotropaic use of the "evil eye," Sarah Bond (2015) highlights the combination on mosaics of text and a plurality of images in what she calls the "'kitchen sink' approach to protecting one's self."

[3] William Schniedewind (2003, 228) has argued that by the time of the second temple, "the name of God became a hypostasis of Yahweh himself." Writing the name could therefore reify the divine presence, and for some became taboo in most circumstances.

[4] Note John Gager's (1992, 12) comments prefacing his discussion of the use of curse tablets and binding spells: "The role of images and figures as mediators of power brings us finally to the names of deities and other spiritual entities on *defixiones*. In discussing these names, it is essential to keep in mind three fundamental characteristics of the 'spiritual universe' of ancient Mediterranean culture: first, the cosmos literally teemed, at every level and in every location, with supernatural beings; second, although ancient theoreticians sometimes tried to sort these beings into clear and distinct categories, most people were less certain about where to draw the lines between gods, *daimones*, planets, stars, angels, cherubim, and the like; and third, the spirit or soul of dead persons, especially of those who had died prematurely or by violence, roamed about in a restless and vengeful mood near their buried body."

[5] Psalm 91 pops up throughout the history of early Judaism and even early Christianity as a text with a clear apotropaic function. It is not unlikely it was inscribed on amulets or other