

the version found in the book of Numbers, verse 27 explains, “So they will put my name upon [*wəśāmû* ‘*et-šamî* ‘*al*] the children of Israel and I will bless them [*‘ābārākēm*].” The notion that YHWH’s name is “upon” the people of Israel is frequently understood to suggest the community’s identification as the people of YHWH, but the silver scrolls demonstrate another sense in which that blessing could be realized, namely in bearing the materially present divine name.⁹

As was mentioned in chapter 1, the scrolls likely served apotropaic functions, perhaps both in life and death, but some additional observations may be made about their materiality. First, the scrolls were silver, which we have seen in previous chapters was one of a limited number of substances thought to either originate with the divine or be particularly conducive to transmitting divine agency. That would have made them more effective conduits for the divine agency that would have aided in warding off evil. Unlike the JPFs, however, they were explicitly associated with a specific deity, namely YHWH, whose name was inscribed at least seven times in the silver. This leads to a second observation: the use of the divine name was likely understood as a means of invoking that deity’s specific agency, particularly via the possessor’s vocal recitation of the blessing. Even when not speaking the blessing, however, the material inscription of the name in the silver could be understood as a means of perpetual invocation (Radner 2005; Tigay 2007). Third, the text on the scrolls appears to have been closely connected with the temple cult, which may indicate the small-scale and private appropriation and reallocation of ritual practices prototypically associated with the temple (see Smoak 2017). Finally, the scrolls were rolled up, meaning the text inscribed upon them, including the divine name, was not immediately accessible.¹⁰ The text itself was closed off, separate, and yet, still materially present and available to remind the person (who likely wore them on a chain or string around their neck) of their presence and of the words of the blessing. Jeremy Smoak (2019, 445) comments, “It did not matter if the words on the amulets were visible to the eye. Their silver scripts touched the wearer’s body and projected the words of the divine blessing into the wearer’s mind. The brilliance of these metal objects was their ability to ‘produce the presence’ of Yahweh’s blessings and protection throughout the day as the body ‘awakened,’ ‘jarred,’ and ‘livened’ their words.”¹¹

⁹ Gabriel Levy (2012, 104–5) states, “these verses are clearly focused on a mantra-like reinscription of the divine name, and this is perhaps where they get their ‘numinous power.’” Note that a Greek-Aramaic silver amulet discovered in Egypt and dating to the late Roman period (Kotansky, Naveh, and Shaked 1992, 11) begins the Aramaic section with “I bind this amulet from Jerusalem, in the name of YH.”

¹⁰ They were likely too small to easily read, as well. On this, see Smoak 2018.

¹¹ This is related to Radner’s (2005, 130) observation, mentioned in chapter 6 (see above, p. 168), that hidden texts were particularly effective at perpetuating the existence of the named while protecting the written name from prying hands and eyes.