

This is not remotely an exhaustive look at texts that were widely understood to transmit agency, however. There are many and varied ways in which texts performed such functions in the Hebrew Bible and in other related material remains. The ritual described in Num 5:11–31 is one such example. Part of the prescribed process includes writing out the priest's curse and then wiping the ink of the text off either with or into the water that had been prepared with dust from the floor of the sacred space. This seems to imbue the water with the words of the curse, which, while already materialized in their pronunciation, took on a more durative and manipulable state when written out. When mixed with water and drunk, the curse is interiorized, physically and conceptually, by the drinker. This passage clearly indicates the primarily artifactual function of the text, as well as the perception that, when properly produced in the appropriate circumstances and environments, cultic text can transmit the agency necessary to reify the events or states prescribed by the text.

The necessity of embeddedness within the appropriate environment should be emphasized here. Prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the temple and other cultic structures, including city gates and other significant locations, delineated sacred space and provided an environment dedicated to acts associated with the divine and its agency. That space could be controlled so that socio-material cues and ritualistic acts facilitated the desired encounter with divine agency, but in the absence of such sacred spaces, textual means of presencing the divine could rise to the challenge of enacting the appropriate cognitive ecology. This challenge could be overcome by embedding the engagement with the text within narrative, within ritual (such as recitation), within a closed-off space, or within some combination of the three. In this way, conventionalized means of reifying boundaries between mundane cognitive acts and the presencing media could provide that sense of separation and facilitate the desired cognitive effects.

AMULETS, INSCRIPTIONS, AND OTHER MAGICAL TEXTS

Among the earliest material witnesses to magical texts among worshippers of YHWH is the eighth-century BCE Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, discussed in chapter 1 (cf. Schmidt 2016, 144–62; cf. Cohn 2008). Like other presencing texts, the function of this inscription must be interrogated in connection with the socio-material ecology in which it was situated, which includes (1) its separation from everyday activities (Suriano 2018, 43–49), (2) its location within a darkened tomb, and (3) the funerary and mortuary rites associated with it. Alice Mandell and Jeremy Smoak (2017, 190) describe this and related inscriptions as “bound to the protection of the dead, and burial and funerary ritual enacted by the living kin. These inscriptions also communicated a warning to unseen malevolent forces, such as ghosts, demons, or potential intruders seeking to loot the tomb.” Such inscriptions frequently occur with pictorial reliefs—the Khirbet el-Qôm