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Geç Antikçağ Phaselis’inde Dinsel Pratikler ve İşlevsel Süreklilik: Phaselis Merkezi Limanı ve Çevresinden Epigrafik Buluntular

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Abstract: This article adopts a holistic approach to evaluating the new finds unearthed during the 2023–2024 excavation seasons at the Central Harbor Structures of Phaselis, together with epigraphic documents from the 2015 surveys and earlier research. The study focuses primarily on three inscribed metal finds of the Late Antique and Byzantine periods (two protective rings and a bronze reliquary cross), unearthed in the Central Harbor Structures and in a shop outside the harbor area. In addition, three inscribed stone fragments recovered from various parts of the city and from earlier excavations and surveys are analyzed with respect to their epigraphic content, as they provide comparative data on the religious practices and urban onomastics of the period. The recovery of the inscribed amuletic metal finds from contexts such as shops, workshops and store-rooms documents that, in Late Antique Phaselis, religious and apotropaic practices extended beyond institutional architecture and formed an integral part of commercial and everyday life. Traces of uninterrupted use of the Central Harbor from the 4th century BCE to the mid-7th century CE, together with subsequent architectural adaptations, demonstrate that the area retained its functional flexibility even during periods of urban contraction. The Middle Byzantine reliquary cross from the shop sector further confirms that habitation in the area continued into later periods. In conclusion, the study sheds light not only on the commercial functions of the Central Harbor Structures of Phaselis but also on their multilayered character, in which socio-religious practices were intertwined, and on their functional continuity over time.

Keywords: Phaselis, Central Harbor Structures, Epigraphy, Byzantine Period, Ring, Reliquary Cross

Öz: Bu çalışma, Phaselis Merkezi Liman Yapıları’nda yürütülen 2023–2024 kazı sezonlarında ele geçen yeni buluntuları, 2015 yılı yüzey araştırmaları ve önceki çalışmalardan elde edilen epigrafik belgelerle birlikte bütüncül bir yaklaşımla değerlendirmektedir. Çalışmada esas olarak, Merkezi Liman Yapıları’nda ve liman alanı dışındaki bir dükkânda gün ışığına çıkarılan, Geç Antik ve Bizans dönemlerine ait üç yazıtlı metal buluntu (iki koruyucu yüzük ve bir bronz röliker haç) ele alınmaktadır. Bunlara ek olarak, kentin farklı alanlarından ve önceki kazı ve araştırmalardan elde edilen üç yazıtlı taş fragmanı, dönemin dinsel pratiklerine ve kentsel onomastiğine ilişkin karşılaştırmalı veri sunduğu için epigrafik içerikleri açısından incelenmektedir. Amulet niteliğindeki yazıtlı metal buluntuların dükkân, ışık ve depo gibi alanlarda ele geçmesi, Geç Antik Çağ Phaselis’inde dinsel ve apotropaik pratiklerin kurumsal mimarinin ötesine geçerek ticari ve gündelik yaşamın ayrılmaz bir parçası olduğunu belgelemektedir. Merkezi Liman’daki MÖ 4. yüzyıldan MS 7. yüzyıl ortalarına uzanan kesintisiz kullanım izleri ve sonraki mimari uyarlamalar, alanın kentsel daralma dönemlerinde dahi işlevsel esnekliğini koruduğunu göstermektedir. Dükkânlar bölgesinde ele geçen Orta Bizans Dönemi’ne ait röliker haç ise alandaki yerleşimin sonraki dönemlerde de sürdüğünü doğrulamaktadır. Sonuç olarak çalışma, Phaselis Merkezi Liman Yapıları’nın ticari işlevlerinin yanı sıra, sosyo-dinî pratiklerin iç içe geçtiği çok katmanlı yapı-sına ve tarihsel süreç içindeki işlevsel sürekliliğine ışık tutmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Phaselis, Merkezi Liman Yapıları, Epigrafi, Bizans Dönemi, Yüzük, Röliker Haç

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Introduction: Excavations at the Central Harbor Structures of Phaselis and the Architectural Framework

In the coastal cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, urban spatial organization evolved from the *emporion*-oriented character of the Archaic and Classical periods into the monumental public architecture of the Roman Imperial period, and subsequently, in Late Antiquity (4th–7th centuries CE), into a multifunctional and flexible fabric integrated with religious elements. Phaselis, one of the most tangible witnesses to this transformation in the Eastern Mediterranean, entered a turbulent period from the late 3rd century CE onwards, following its golden age under Roman rule, and contracted under the impact of barbarian raids¹. Nevertheless, the city retained its strategic importance and served as an episcopal see from the 4th century CE onwards². During the Arab raids in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 7th century CE, it was partly rebuilt and fortified using *spolia*³, and in the 8th century CE it was incorporated into the *Thema Kibyrrhaïoton*⁴. Finally, upon coming under Seljuk rule in 1158, Phaselis was reduced to a small harbor settlement⁵.

The gradual transformation of the earlier fabric of the Central Harbor complex appears to be of decisive importance for understanding the spatial changes that Phaselis underwent in Late Antiquity. This sector had occupied a strategic position in the urban topography since the Classical and Hellenistic periods, yet no distinct architectural remains attributable to its earlier phases have so far been encountered during cleaning, landscaping, and excavation work. This suggests that the area largely retained its character as an open public space until at least the early 3rd century CE. From the 4th century CE onwards, however, the area appears to have entered a new phase reflecting a gradual alteration of the city's traditional layout. It is plausible that, at the beginning of this process, the area was converted into secondary marketplaces and rows of shops through civic or local initiatives. This use, which arose organically from civic interventions, was probably brought within a more formal planning framework over time under the supervision of public and administrative authorities. Indeed, the available architectural and archaeological evidence demonstrates that the area ultimately developed into a multifunctional building complex consisting of shops, workshops, storerooms, and administrative units, and that it functioned as one of the city's Late Antique agoras. While the Christianization of public spaces throughout the city is evident in structures such as the Agora Basilica, the Acropolis churches, and the Necropolis Baths, the Central Harbor precinct constituted the city's most dynamic spatial focus, where secular commercial activity was intertwined with apotropaic and religious practices⁶.

¹ Schäfer 1981, 36; Lenski 1999, 440; Feld 2005, 119–137; Tüner Önen 2008, 181.

² Hild 2004, 1–17.

³ *TIB* 8, 798–802; Tüner Önen 2008, 183.

⁴ *TIB* 8, 118ff.

⁵ Bayburtluoğlu 2004, 68–75; Tüner Önen 2008, 158–159.

⁶ Late Antique building activity in Phaselis is also attested in the basilica within the Agora, the churches and



Fig. 1a. Central Harbor Settlement, Aerial Photograph, Excavation Archive 2020



Fig. 1b. Central Harbor Settlement Sketch Plan, Excavation Archive L. Kaderli 2023

chapels on the Acropolis, and the Necropolis Baths. These structures indicate that public spaces acquired religious functions in Late Antiquity and that the city remained active during this period (see also Blackman 1973, 355-364; Schäfer 1981, 1-181).

Architectural Layout and Building Groups

The remains of the ancient harbor now lie approximately 1.5 m below present-day sea level, and earthquakes and subsidence have destroyed part of the coastal architecture⁷. Nevertheless, 19 building groups and 70 spatial units have been identified in the Central Harbor basin (Figs. 1a-b, 2). Spatial subdivisions and blocked doorways observed in the settlement archaeology of the Central Harbor document functional changes in the late period. The construction falls into two main groups:

North and Northeast Building Group (2M1-2M8): Structure 2M1, built upon the sea walls, together with structures 2M3 and 2M5 in the harbor basin, functioned with their west-facing large courtyards and elongated rooms as the main storage areas (*horreum*/warehouse) serving the harbor (Fig. 2)⁸.

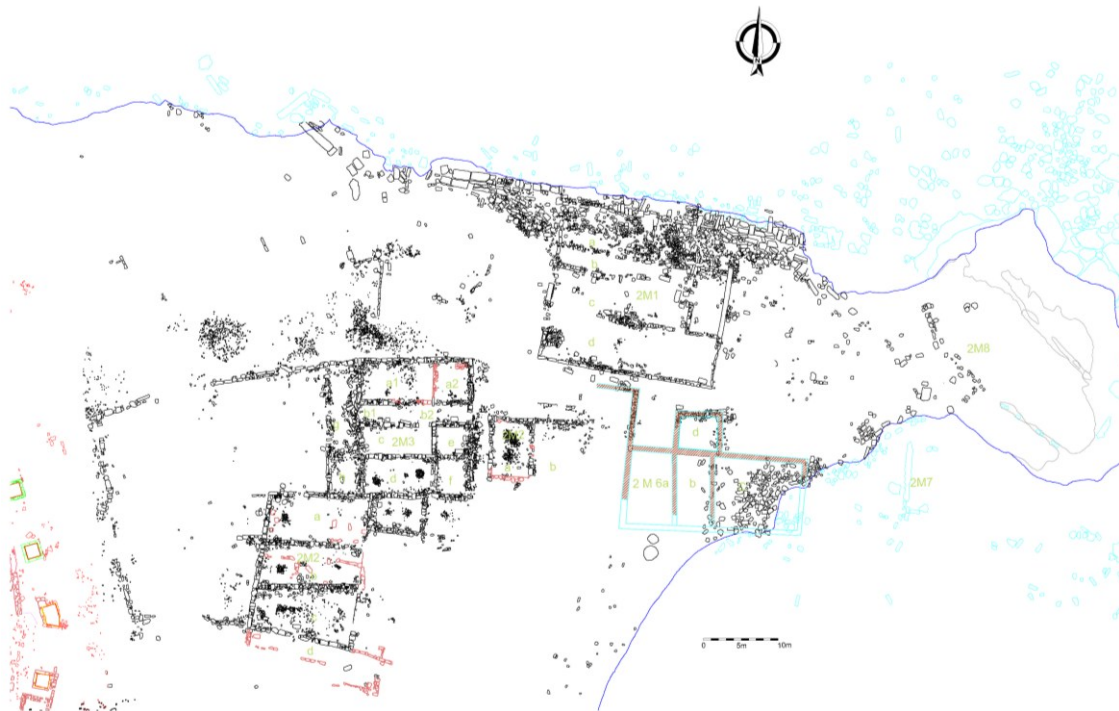


Fig. 2. Plan of the North and Northeast building group of the Central Harbor (L. Kaderli & K. Cesur, 2022)

South-Southwest Building Group (2M9-2M19): Arranged to the east of the *aquaeductus* as contiguous blocks divided by side streets. The most noteworthy architectural unit within this group is the late-period small-scale bath structure (2M9), which stands out with its small basin, apse (*caldarium*), and *apodyterium*-like adjoining spaces⁹.

⁷ See also Schäfer 1981, 29; *TIB* 8, 85.

⁸ Arslan & Tüner Önen 2023, 107-148.

⁹ There are differing interpretations regarding the development of the city in the Late Antique and Byzantine periods. J. Schäfer (1981, 172, 174) suggests that the settlement core retreated to the Acropolis in the 3rd century CE and subsequently once again with the Arab raids in the 7th century CE. C. Foss (1994, 44-

Excavation Finds and Their Spatial Distribution

Finds recovered during the 2023–2024 excavation seasons indicate that the area was in continuous use from the mid-4th century BCE to the second half of the 7th century CE. They also corroborate the functional specialization of the architectural units and shed light on the social profile of the area:

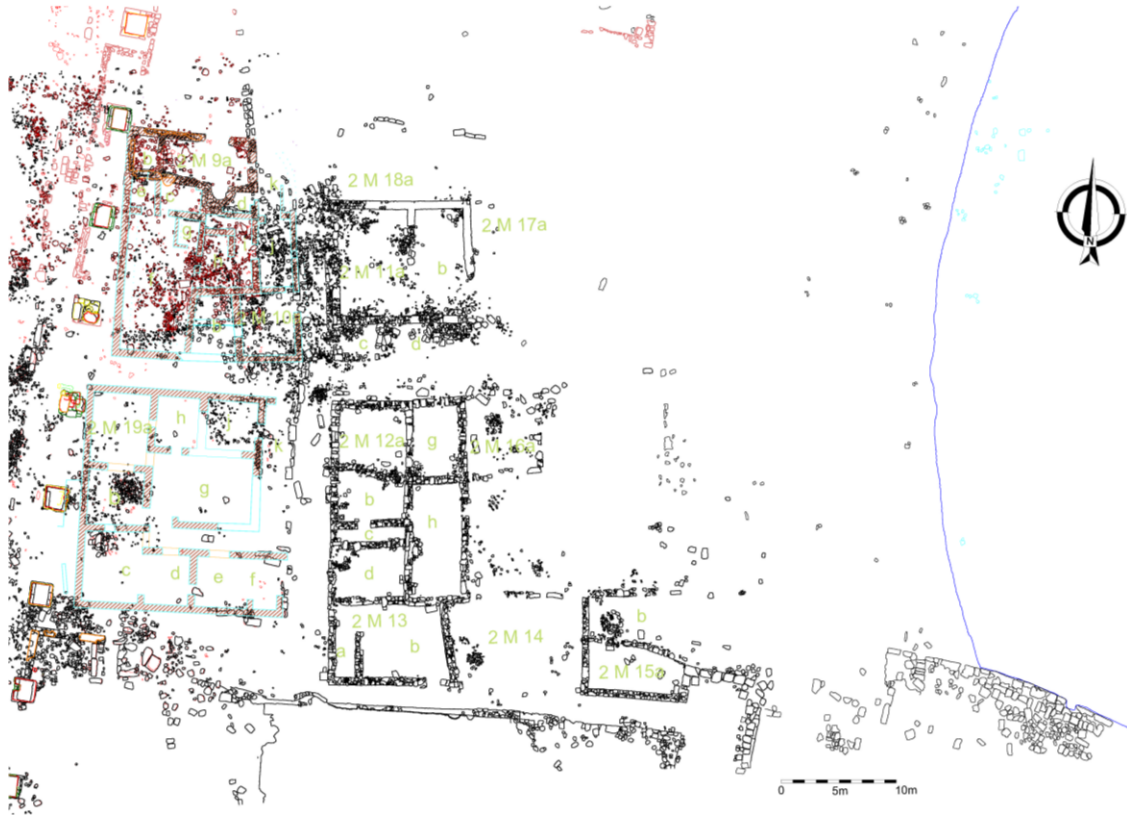


Fig. 3. Plan of the South building group of the Central Harbor (L. Kaderli & K. Cesur, 2022)

Numismatic Data: Of the 403 coins recovered (1 gold, 402 bronze), the majority were concentrated in Units 2M19 (108), 2M5 (64), 2M3 (46), and MLS2 (28), indicating that commercial transactions took place within these rooms. The single gold coin, recovered from Unit 2M2, suggests that high-value monetary transactions were also conducted in the North Structures¹⁰.

Ceramic and Stone Artifacts: The predominance of amphora and pithos fragments in the North Structures (particularly 2M3 and 2M5) points to a storage function¹¹; whereas the presence of

46), on the other hand, states that the entire area of the city was actively utilized in Late Antiquity, and that in the Byzantine Period, despite the contraction of the settlement area, the ports were fortified and continued their function as a theme naval base. The finds from the Central Harbor support Foss's interpretation regarding Late Antiquity.

¹⁰ For the coin findings of Phaselis in general, see Heipp-Tamer 1993; for a detailed analysis of the coin finds recovered from the harbor settlements (147 from the North building group, 256 from the South building group), see also Dursun 2026.

¹¹ Cf. see Alkaç & Tomay 2023, 149-169; Arslan & Tüner Önen 2023, 107-148 (L. Kaderli); Tüner Önen *et al.* 2024, 69-93.



Fig. 4. Findings in the Central Harbors and Shops, Inscribed Objects nos. 1–2 (2M5c, 2M10b), Reliquary Cross no. 3 (2CB2)

lamps, unguentaria, cooking vessels, and loom weights in the South Structures reflects domestic activity and small-scale household production. The terracotta spacer pins found in bath space 2M9A and on street MLS2 belong to the wall-heating system of the bath. Furthermore, reused architectural reliefs (*spolia*), remains of mosaic pavements (2M4, 2M19), and fragments of stone mortars (MLS2) reflect the varied character of the spaces.

Metalworking and Amuletic Finds: The 283 nails recovered from the structures point to wooden roofing and joinery; the hearths, melting pits, slag, and bronze sheet fragments in 2M1 and 2M16 to metalworking workshops; and the fishhooks, harpoons, and netting needles to fishing and other maritime activities¹².

The concentration of personal and household items (belt buckles, lock fittings, bells) in the

¹² A detailed evaluation of the numismatic, ceramic, metallic, and architectural assemblage of the area in question will be presented in a forthcoming independent study currently in preparation by L. Kaderli.

South Structures suggests that this area saw intense human activity. Taken together, the archaeological, numismatic, and architectural evidence demonstrates that the Central Harbor was a multilayered space that accommodated not only storage and commerce but also craft production and daily life, and, most importantly, the apotropaic, medical, and religious practices of the harbor community, which are also attested in the epigraphic evidence.

Epigraphical Finds

This section examines two inscribed finds from the Central Harbor structures (2M5c and 2M10b), together with a reliquary cross recovered from shop structures outside the harbor area (2CB2) and inscription fragments identified around the excavation house during the 2015 surveys (Fig. 4). The material from outside the harbor area has been included to provide a holistic and comparative perspective on religious practices in the city during the Late Antique and Byzantine periods. It is, however, treated as secondary evidence in assessing the phases of use of the harbor complex itself.



Fig. 5. Inscribed Protective Ring

No. 1. Inscribed Protective Ring and Its Place in Late Antique / Early Byzantine Apotropaic-Medical Syncretism

Findspot and Date of Discovery: September 2023, Phaselis, Central Harbor Structures, Space

2M5c (Surface find).

Material/Technique: Bronze/silver alloy (billon); cast and incised technique.

Dimensions: Diam.: 1.7 cm; H.: 2.2 cm.

Date: 6th-7th century CE (Early Byzantine Period).

Description: A bronze/silver alloy ring featuring an oval, flat bezel soldered onto a slender hoop. Corrosion, dense patina, and localized abrasions are present on the metal surface.

ὁ κατυκῶν ἐν βοειθίᾳ τοῦ ὑψ(ίστου)

He who dwells under the protection of the Most High.

Iconographic Analysis: Chnoubis, Hystera, and Syncretic Images

The oval bezel bears a complex symbolic composition executed in incised technique. At the center is a horizontal bar inscribed with the letters ΛΒΛ, on which rests a circular head with rays or branches (palm branches?) radiating upward. To the left of the figure is an eight-pointed star, and to the right a worn symbol, presumably magical. The lower field contains magical signs (*charaktes*) with globular terminals, followed by two spiral lines¹³. In the lowest register, a serpent coils around the ring as far as its midpoint.

This motif on the ring bezel, featuring rays emanating from around the head and combined with a serpent, should be considered a schematic/debased reflection (*degenerate form*) of the Greco-Egyptian and Gnostic Chnoubis iconography in Early Byzantine apotropaic art. In classical depictions of Chnoubis, the body is a coiled serpent (renewal and healing), while the head is that of a lion emitting 7 or 12 solar rays (divine power and light). Due to the restricted surface area on Byzantine and Late Antique magical rings, gnostic jewelry, and amulets, Chnoubis gradually transformed into a stylized image over time. As in the case of the parallel silver ring in the Menil Collection (Houston) (cat. no. 490.740)¹⁴, in Byzantine examples, Chnoubis iconography became interwoven with Christian symbols and texts (particularly Psalm 90 [91] and the cross motif). These transformed amulets were regarded as a protective force against digestive ailments, the evil eye, and especially gynecological/uterine disorders¹⁵.

The serpent figure and the arrangement of gnostic symbols in the lower register of the bezel are directly associated with the *hystera* (womb) motif widespread in the Late Antique world. Stylized frequently on amulets and rings as a head or organ encircled by a serpent, the *hystera* motif constitutes the focal point of charms aimed at female anatomy and health¹⁶. According to

¹³ For the iconography in question, cf. Spier 1993, pl. 4c no. 49.

¹⁴ Vikan 1984, 77; Spier 1993, 57 pl. 4a no. 47. The text/opening words of Psalm 90 (91) are incised on the hoop of the ring; on the bezel, there is a *hystera* (womb) motif encircled by a serpent alongside protective symbols derived from Chnoubis.

¹⁵ Vikan 1984, 75ff.

¹⁶ Björklund 2017, 12-13.

the magical and medical beliefs of the period, the womb was perceived almost like a “wild beast” capable of moving independently within the body, causing suffocation, pain, and illness when out of control. For this reason, special “flee-formulas” addressed to the *hystera* and *hystera* formulas were employed in Late Antique and Byzantine magical amulets¹⁷. In the formulas in question, the womb is described as “black, blackening” (μελάνη μελανωμένη); its behavior is likened to that of a snake, lion, or dragon (ὕστέρα μελάνη μελανωμένη ὡς ὄφης ἤλῃσε κὲ ὡς δράκον συρίζι) “womb, black, blackening, slither like a serpent and hiss like a dragon”¹⁸, and it was subsequently commanded to calm down like a lamb (ὡς ἀρνίον) or a tranquil sea (ὡς θάλατταν γαλήνησιναι)¹⁹. The combination of Chnoubis and the serpent on the Phaselis ring bears a medical-apotropaic character aimed at protecting its bearer (presumably an Early Byzantine woman) from gynecological ailments, complications of childbirth, and demons that prey upon women and infants (e.g., Gello/Lilith).

Epigraphical Analysis and Psalm 90 (91):1

A single-line Ancient Greek inscription incised in capital letters is present on the silver hoop band of the ring:

ὁ κατυκὼν ἐν βοειθείᾳ τοῦ ὑψ(ίστου)

He who dwells under the protection of the Most High.

The text is a quotation of Psalm 90:1 of the Septuagint (Psalm 91:1 in Masoretic numbering), the most renowned apotropaic canon of the Late Antique and Byzantine world. Its full text reads Ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν βοηθείᾳ τοῦ Ὑψίστου, ἐν σκέπῃ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀβύσθησεται (= *He who dwells in the help of the Most High shall abide in the shelter of the God of heaven*). Distinct phonetic/grammatical deviations (*itacism*) are observed in the inscription on the Phaselis ring: κατυκὼν = κατυκῶν / κατοικῶν²⁰.

βοειθείᾳ = βοηθείᾳ²¹.

Since the concluding section of the sentence did not fit onto the narrow surface of the hoop, it was rendered as an abbreviation in the form of ὑψ(ίστου).

As evidenced by examples from the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Syria, Cyprus, and Sicily, the quotation in question is remarkably widespread on jewelry, amulets, papyri, *enkolpia*, and even funerary graffiti / wall inscriptions²². Because it was impossible to fit the entire Psalm onto the

¹⁷ Björklund 2017, 35f.

¹⁸ See also Vikan 1984, 75ff.; Spier 1993, 29 no. 1, pl. 1a; Björklund 2017, 12 fn. 27.

¹⁹ Vikan 1984, 77 fn. 78; Björklund 2017, 35–36.

²⁰ Cf. Preisigke 1915 no. 1576; SEG 32 no. 1573; for the change of /υ/ to /οι/ see, Gignac 1976, 197–199.

²¹ Gignac 1976, 235–242.

²² SEG 32, 1573 (in the Gabbari necropolis in Alexandria, in a tomb chamber reused by Christians, a graffito executed in reddish-brown paint near the burial niches reads ὁ κατικῶν ἐν βοηθείᾳ τοῦ ὑψ<ι>στού). SEG 52,

narrow surfaces of rings or small charms, Byzantine artisans inscribed the opening sentence of the text, invoking the divine power of the whole Psalm upon the object in accordance with the principle of *pars pro toto*. Once the initial words were incised on the ring, it was believed that the bearer was “sealed” under the wings of God. Psalm 90 (91) occupies a central place in Late Antique and Byzantine apotropaic practice, and several features of the text help to explain its prominence. In Byzantine thought, disease, the evil eye, and misfortune were commonly attributed to demonic agency, and the Septuagint text of the psalm lent itself readily to this understanding. Verses 5-6 promise deliverance from the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the affliction that walks in darkness, and the noonday demon (δαίμόνιον μεσημβρινόν). Read in this way, the psalm offered its bearer protection that extended through every hour of the day and night, which made it particularly suited to amulets worn on the body. Verse 13, in which the faithful are promised that they will tread upon the asp and the basilisk and trample the lion and the dragon, was of equal significance. The creatures named here could readily be identified with the demons held responsible for illness and misfortune, such as the child-killing Gylou or the *hystera*, the personified womb depicted as a head encircled by serpents and regarded as a source of gynecological disorders. On amulets of this kind, the threat was frequently countered by Chnoubis, the radiate, lion-headed serpent of Greco-Egyptian tradition. Long invoked on Roman magical gems against ailments of the stomach and womb, Chnoubis appears in this context not as an adversary but as a protective power, which allowed the biblical promise of victory over hostile beasts and an older healing iconography to be combined within a single object. Patristic exegesis, notably that of Eusebius and Augustine, interpreted the same verse as a prophecy of Christ’s victory over Satan. This reading found visual expression in the motif of the Holy Rider, identified as Solomon or Saint Sisinnios, spearing a prostrate demon beneath his horse. The motif recurs frequently on Late Antique and Byzantine amulets and may be regarded as a pictorial counterpart to the verse. The psalm also derived a particular authority from its place in the Gospel narratives. In the accounts of the Temptation of Christ (Matt.

916 (on an amulet dated to the 5th-6th century CE from the Grammichele region of Sicily, reading Ὁ κα[τοι]κῶν ἐν | βωηθείᾳ); SEG 52, 937 (a heart-shaped amulet dated to the 5th-6th century CE in a private collection from Sicily, provenance unknown; the obverse depicts a holy rider spearing a prostrate figure, while the reverse reads Ὁ κατοικῶν | [ἐν βοη]θείᾳ τοῦ || ὑψίστου[υ]); SEG 52, 1488 (a bronze pendant-shaped amulet from Amathous, Cyprus, dated to the 7th century CE; the obverse depicts the Holy Rider with a nimbus, his lance terminating in a cross, spearing a prostrate woman; to the right, the evil eye presumably threatened by two daggers; the reverse reads Ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν βοειθείᾳ τοῦ ὑψίστου ἐν || σκεῖπῃ τοῦ). For Egyptian finds, cf. Preisigke 1915 no. 1572, 1574-1577, and 1579. For Syrian finds, cf. IGLSyr 2, 341, 675; 4, 1675, 1714, 1748; 5, 2061 and 2234. Similarly, on a medallion of an armband recovered from Syria or Palestine, these scenes, accompanied by magical motifs, were designed to protect the wearer. Likewise, the words “He who dwells in the help of the Most High,” taken from Psalm 90 and featured on the first medallion, also serve as a kind of charm (magical formula) (dated to the 6th-7th century CE) Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum, 54.2657; Bagnoli 2011, 122; see also Bonner 1950, 208ff.; 306, plate XVI no: 321 A-D; Feisel 1984, 571 ff; Vikan 2003, 251ff.; Gillingham 2015, par. 23 fn. 32; Kraus 2018, 47ff.

4: 6; Luke 4: 10–11), it is the devil himself who quotes verses 11–12. That even Satan should invoke this text may well have enhanced its perceived efficacy against demonic powers.

In the Byzantine period (4th–12th centuries CE), rings were not merely decorative jewelry, but rather “preventive health and protective devices” (medical-apotropaic jewelry) wherein rational medicine (*iatrike*) and religious/magical protection (*mageia*) were inextricably intertwined. In this mindset, where illnesses were frequently attributed to the agency of demons, the evil eye, or malevolent spirits acting upon the body, the verbal potency of prayers and biblical verses acquired permanence once incised onto a metallic surface. As long as the ring remained in physical contact with the body (the finger), the protective and curative efficacy was believed to persist uninterruptedly²³. The heavy patina and marked wear documented on the metal surface provide tangible physical proof that this object was not crafted merely for symbolic or funerary deposition; on the contrary, driven by gynecological/medical concerns, it was worn continuously on the finger in daily life over a prolonged period, presumably by a Christian woman.

In conclusion the ring from Phaselis is thus a syncretic amulet that brings together, within a single composition, Judaeo-Christian elements (the text of Psalm 90:1 and the demonological beliefs associated with it), Greco-Egyptian imagery (the Chnoubis motif), and signs drawn from the wider magical tradition (the *charakteres* and the iconography of the *hystera*). It provides tangible evidence from Early Byzantine Phaselis (6th–7th centuries CE) for the belief that a metal object inscribed with sacred text and magical signs, worn on the body, conferred divine protection on its bearer.

No. 2. Inscribed Reliquary Cross (Enkolpion)

Findspot and Date of Discovery: December 2023, Phaselis, Central Harbor Street Shop Structures, Sector 2CB2.

Material/Technique: Bronze, incised technique.

Dimensions: W.: 3.3 cm; H.: 6.4 cm.

Date: 9th–11th centuries CE (Middle Byzantine Period).

Description: Bronze reliquary pendant in the form of a cross (reliquary cross lid/valve). Ancient Greek letters are incised within the cross arms on both faces.

Inscription and Epigraphic Analysis:

Obverse: A cruciform acrostic inscription intersecting across the vertical and horizontal arms is present. On the vertical axis, the word ΦΩC (*Phos* / Light) is formed by *Phi* (Φ) at the top, *Omega* (Ω) in the center, and lunate *Sigma* (C) at the bottom; on the horizontal axis, the word ΖΩΗ (*Zoe* / Life) is formed by *Zeta* (Ζ) on the left, the shared *Omega* (Ω) in the center, and *Eta* (Η) on the right.

²³ Vikan 1984, 65–66, 75–77.

Reverse: It opens with a small cross motif (†) on the upper arm. *Nomina Sacra* (Sacred Name Abbreviations) and the formula of victory are inscribed across the cross arms. The letters *Iota-Sigma* (IC) and *Chi-Sigma* (XC) are read in the upper and central sections, while *Nu-Iota* (NI) [or NH] and *Kappa-Alpha* (KA) appear on the lateral arms (IC XC NIKA).



Fig. 6a. Inscribed Reliquary Cross, obverse



Fig. 6b. Inscribed Reliquary Cross, reverse

Obverse:

(vertically): ΦΩΣ *Light*

(horizontally): ΖΩΗ *Life*

Reverse:

(vertically): † Ι(ησοῦ)ς Χ(ριστὸ)ς *Jesus Christ*

(horizontally): νηκᾱ *conquers / is victorious*

The equivalence νηκᾱ = νικᾱ in the text stems from the effect of itacism, which is frequently encountered in Middle Byzantine epigraphy. An identical reading of IC XC NHKA is likewise inscribed on a bronze reliquary cross dated to the 10th to 11th centuries, cataloged under inventory number 1980,0603.1 in the British Museum collection²⁴. The spelling NHKA is also

²⁴ In addition to the parallel specimen in the British Museum Collection (Inv. No. 1980,0603.1), a bronze reliquary cross of Anatolian provenance in the Haluk Perk Museum Collection in Istanbul also displays complete typological and epigraphic correspondence with the Phaselis example. This specimen likewise bears the inscriptional arrangement consisting of the formulas IC XC NHKA and ΦΩC-ΖΩΗ (Çakmakçı & Ünal 2026, 220 fn. 55-56, Table 9b-c). As classified by B. Pitarakis (2006, cat. nos. 626-631), this group is evaluated under the category of “aniconic examples” of Constantinopolitan or Anatolian origin, dated to

documented in finds from Ephesos²⁵.

Deriving from the Christological designations in the Gospel of John (for example, “*I am the light of the world*” [John 8:12] and “*I am the resurrection and the life*” [John 11:25]), the ΦΩC-ZΩH formula symbolizes the cross itself as the source of universal light and eternal life. The inscription IC XC NHKA (Jesus Christ Conquers) on the reverse, together with the ΦΩC-ZΩH device on the obverse, was employed in Byzantine metalwork (particularly on reliquary crosses, seals, and votive plaques) as an indivisible apotropaic and triumphal pairing²⁶. The distribution, typical production centers, and iconographic combinations of these theological formulas on bronze reliquary crosses in the Middle Byzantine Period were thoroughly documented and dated in the comprehensive corpus study conducted by B. Pitarakis²⁷.

No. 3. Inscribed Ring Bezel

Findspot and Date of Discovery: October 2023, Phaselis, Central Harbor Structures, Room 2M10b.

Material/Technique: Bronze / Incised technique.

Dimensions: Diam.: 3.0 cm.

Date: 5th-7th centuries CE (Late Roman – Early Byzantine Period).

Description: Circular bronze ring bezel. The outer circumference of the bezel is decorated with a closed wreath formed of stylized herringbone/braid motifs. It is possible that the wreath represents laurel or myrtle leaves, but it is difficult to determine the species of the motif with certainty. A heavy brownish-red and locally green corrosion/patina layer is present on the surface. The rough casting/soldering residue located in the center of the reverse of the bezel indicates that the flat hoop was joined to the bezel by soldering and was detached as a result of mechanical stress.

✠ ἀγ(ί)α σο(φ)ία Ε (?)

ΚΘΜΕΑΡ

ἐκε(ῖ) ἀμοῦ Λ (?)

τε ῥῶσε μ-

5 ἐ ἀπὸ κ(ι)-

νδύ(νου).

Bless (?) me O divine master AP(?)

and protect me from danger wherever I am

the 11th century. On this subject, see also Sayın & Seçkin 2023, 510 ff; Şirin 2026, 55, 63-65 cat. nos. 3-6; 32; especially cat. no. 11.

²⁵ Pülz 2020, 110 pl. 37 K 39-40, pl. 38 K 42.

²⁶ For detailed information on the origins, development, and use of the IC XC NIKA device in Byzantine art, cf. Walter 1997, 193-215. For its use on bread stamps, cf. Galavaris 1970, 74-75; see also Horsley 1983, 110; Felle 2006, 241 no. 519; TAM IV 369 and 371.

²⁷ Pitarakis 2006, 128-135 figs. 84-89; 152 fn. 763. B. Pitarakis (2006, 80-82 cat. nos. 626-631) generally dates the parallel specimens, which typologically belong to this aniconic inscriptional group and originate from Constantinople or Anatolia, to the 11th century.



Fig. 7a. Inscribed Reliquary Cross, obverse



Fig. 7b. Inscribed Reliquary Cross, reverse

L. 1: ΑΓΝ = Ἀγν(ός)²⁸ / ἁγ(ίασο)ν²⁹.

L. 2: Κ(ύριε) θ(εῖ)³⁰ μέ?.

L. 4: ῥῦσε³¹ = ῥῦσαι.

Epigraphic and Philological Commentary

On the upper surface of the bezel, there is an Ancient Greek inscription arranged in six lines. A portion of the letters cannot be read with certainty due to surface wear and damage. In the first line, a cross sign is followed by the letters ΑΓΝ; furthermore, an E descending toward the lower line is discernible. In the second line, while the first two letters are read as ΚΘ, reading the subsequent sequence is difficult due to damage on the surface. Here, although faint, a straight stroke is visible after the *theta*, and following this letter, a diagonal descent and ascent similar to the letter M, which is clearly read as the last letter of the fourth line, is seen. Here too, as in the fourth line, the straight right leg of the *mu* is not discernible. Following this letter, E and A are clearly read. To the right of the *alpha*, a letter with its upper loop preserved is seen, which may be a *rho* descending toward the lower line just like the last letter of the preceding line. In the third line, although the letter following the letters EKE cannot be read clearly, it has been evaluated as an A because it bears notches resembling the crossbar of an *alpha*. To the right of the letters MOY read subsequently, a *lambda* is read in a low position, again toward the lower line. In the fourth line, ΤΕΡΥΣΕΜ; in the fifth and sixth lines, the sequences ΕΑΠΟΚ and ΝΔΥ, respectively, can be distinguished.

²⁸ For the abbreviation, cf. Avi-Yonah 1974, 45. For examples of usage and the meaning of the epithet *Hagnos*, cf. Nowakowski 2018, 219; Heller & Suspène 2019, 509-516.

²⁹ Cf. Felle 2006, 65 no. 47:.. ἀ[γίασον το]ῦς | υιοῦς ..; for its use together with ῥῦσε cf. Felle 2006, 147-148 no. 268; 258 no. 559.

³⁰ For κ(ύριε) θ(εῖ) cf. *Ieph* 1284; *MAMA* VIII 283.

³¹ The diphthong -αι shifted to the short vowel -ε (epsilon) (-αι > -ε), see Gignac 1976, 192-193. For its use, cf. Felle 2006, 147-148 no. 268: .. ῥῦσε ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ ..; 258 no. 559: .. ρῦσε εἰ[[μᾶς ἁ]πὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ | [κ]ύριε.

The present reading of the inscription suggests that it may be a religious text containing an invocation or a plea for protection. In particular, the reading ῥῦσε proposed in the fourth line and the sequences ἀπὸ and κινδύ(νου) identified in the subsequent lines can be compared with formulas expressing a plea for deliverance from danger in the Greek Christian prayer tradition. However, since the letter sequences in the first three lines of the inscription cannot yet be explained within a definitive syntactic coherence, it is not possible to provide a definitive translation of the entire text. When the abbreviation ΑΓΝ in the first line is restored as ἀγ(ίᾱσο)ν (“bless, consecrate”), it forms a semantic unity with the expression ῥῦσε μέ ἀπὸ κ(ι)νδύ(νου) (“deliver me from danger”) read in lines 4-6. The use of ῥῦσε in line 4 points to a common phonetic phenomenon (monophthongization/itacism, αἰ > ε) observed as a result of the reduction of diphthongs in *Koine* Greek and Byzantine epigraphy. The letters ΚΘ in line 2 represent a typical *Nomen Sacrum* abbreviation known in Early Christian epigraphy [Κ(ύριε) Θ(εέ) - “Lord God”]. Viewed from this perspective, the general composition of the inscription resembles a variation of the prayer formula in the Gospel of Matthew (6: 13) applied to a votive object. Similar invocations and ῥῦσαι protective formulas were frequently engraved on Early Byzantine amulets, phylacteries, and rings in the pursuit of security and healing³².

In the center of the reverse of the bezel, there is a raised, rough, and irregular protrusion. This feature can be interpreted as a soldering residue that may belong to the attachment of the ring hoop. The position and form of the protrusion suggest that the bezel and the hoop might have been joined as separate pieces. However, a more detailed technical examination is required to determine with certainty whether the joint was created by soldering or by another joining technique. Still, the width and form of this attachment bed indicate that a flat hoop was directly attached to this point (most likely by soldering) and later snapped and detached due to mechanical stress. In Late Roman and Early Byzantine (5th-7th centuries CE) metalwork, rather than being cast in one piece, signet and amuletic rings with large bezels were produced by casting/incising the bezel separately and joining it to the hoop by soldering (just as in the ring inscribed with Psalm 90:1, cf. no. 1).

No. 4. Fragments

The inscription fragments presented here were recovered as surface finds during the 2015 survey season of the Phaselis and Its Territory Survey in the open area between the structure group, sanitary facilities and the guardhouse, behind the building used as the excavation house and research station, and are currently preserved in the depot of the excavation house. However, it is also possible that the fragments in question were unearthed during the excavation and

³² For manufacturing techniques of votive/amuletic rings in the Late Antique and Early Byzantine periods whose bezel and hoop were worked separately and soldered, cf. Spier 2007, 11 fn. 3; 13; 184ff.; 189ff.; for apotropaic protection prayers and inscribed specimens, cf. Spier 2007, 109; 135ff. plates 104-106 nos. 732-758; see also Dalton 1912, 10-14; Middleton 1998, 108.

restoration works conducted between 1981-1985 under the direction of Prof. Dr. Cevdet Bayburtluoğlu, or during the excavation, cleaning, and landscaping activities carried out by the Antalya Museum from the 1990s onward, and were transferred to the depot of the excavation house at a later date. Nevertheless, the lack of definitive data regarding the earlier find contexts of the fragments and the processes of their transfer to the depot requires that these possibilities be evaluated with caution.

Frg. no. 1. Inscribed Block Fragment

State of Preservation: Molded at the top; left edge preserved, right and lower edges broken and missing.

Material / Preservation: Fine-grained, light gray/whitish limestone. Surface shows wear, a layer of lichen/moss, and secondary greenish/grayish encrustations.

Dimensions: H.: 32 cm; W.: 13.5 cm; D.h: 33.5 cm; L.h.: 2.0 cm.

Date: Late Republican? – Roman Imperial Period.

Description: Fragment of an honorary/votive or funerary inscription in Latin, molded at the top and with its left edge preserved in its original state. The lower edge is partially preserved, while the right and rear parts are broken and missing; it is made of fine-grained, light gray/whitish limestone. On the surface of the stone, there are dense localized discolorations, greenish/grayish encrustations, and traces of lichen/moss. On its front surface, it bears a Latin inscription arranged in three lines, with 4-6 letters preserved in each line. Although the inscription is quite worn, the letters on it can be read. Considering its present depth (33.5 cm), it suggests that it is the left side portion of an architectural block or a votive/funerary base rather than an independent stele.



Fig. 8a. Inscribed Obverse



Fig. 8b. Reverse

P. Servi[lius (?)]...

OLVM.....

3 Nost[er/ri/rorum (?)]

Epigraphic and Onomastic Commentary

Despite the heavy wear on the surface, the sequence P · SERVI [...] in line 1 points to the beginning of the *tria nomina* system in Roman onomastics. The punctiform separator (*interpunctio*) following the first letter yields the abbreviation P(ublius) as the praenomen; the subsequent letter group gives the name Servi[lius] (or alternatively Servi[us]) as the nomen gentile. This praenomen-nomen gentile pairing, which is extremely common in Roman epigraphy, points directly to a personal identity.

In regional epigraphy, the name Servilius is associated with the activities of the proconsul Publius Servilius Vatia Isauricus (78-74 BCE), who directed the military and administrative operations conducted against piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the regions of Lycia, Pamphylia, and Isauria in the 1st century BCE. Considering that Isauricus personally conducted military operations against the pirate Zeniketes in and around Phaselis in 77/76 BCE, the possibility that the text is an early votive/honorific inscription erected in honor of P. Servilius Isauricus by the people of Phaselis due to the liberation of the city from pirate oppression or granted privileges (even if a low probability) cannot be completely excluded. On the other hand, although faint, the present letter paleography and architectural block form date the object to the Roman Imperial Period (1st-3rd centuries CE) and make more likely the possibility that the inscription is a funerary/votive text belonging to a local resident belonging to the Servilii family in the region, a family member descended from the freedmen of Isauricus, or a Roman citizen in the region.

The reading OLVM [...] in line 2 does not permit a definitive cognomen restoration due to the insufficient number of preserved letters. The letters NOST [...] in line 3 point to the stem of the Latin possessive pronoun *nost[er]* (“our”) and may be part of the title *patronus noster* or *dominus noster*, which is frequently encountered in Late Period votive or funerary formulas. Since the right and lower edges of the architectural piece are broken and missing, and the extent of the missing portion of the inscription cannot be determined with certainty, a complete restoration of the text and the determination of its precise function are not possible.

Frg. no. 2. Inscribed Architectural Panel Fragment (Spolium): Invocation to Jesus Christ

State of Preservation: Left, right, and lower edges broken and missing; upper edge partially preserved.

Material / Preservation: Whitish/gray marble panel fragment.

Dimensions: H.: 22.5 cm; W.: 9.5 cm; D.: 4.0 cm; L.h.: 1.5-2.0 cm.

Date: Phase I (Architectural Plastic Decoration): Late Antique - Early Byzantine Period (5th-6th centuries CE); Phase II (Secondary Inscription / Spolia): Middle Byzantine Period (10th-12th centuries CE?).

Description and Typology: Marble slab fragment belonging to an architectural element (probably a templon chancel panel). On the surface belonging to the primary function of the object (*recto*), there is a Lesbian *kymation* (a decorative frieze with leaf and dart motif) at the division of the coffer/molding and the remnant of a cross arm carved in relief on its lower/upper part. After losing its function, the panel acquired a secondary use as reused material (*spolia*); an ancient Greek votive/commemorative prayer consisting of four lines was incised on its smoothed reverse (*verso*). Inside the letter *theta* (Θ) in the second line, a small cross motif was carved. Paleographically, the inscription presents a distinct Middle Byzantine epigraphic character with its narrow-elongated tapered letter forms (especially Θ and Ο) and lunate *epsilon* (ε) characteristics.



Fig. 9a. Relief, Obverse



Fig. 9b. Inscribed Reverse

[κ]ύριε Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χ(ριστ)έ

[βο]ήθῃ, θεοῦ [δοῦλῳ?]

3 ΥΠΟΥ

vac.

ἀμ[ήν].

Lord Jesus Christ! Help your servant, so-and-so,
son of [...]yros. Amen.

L. 1: Κ(ύρι)ε Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χ(ριστ)έ in Byzantine short prayer inscriptions.

L. 2: [βο]ήθι = βοήθει³³.

L. 3: -υρου.

Epigraphic Commentary

The formula [Κ]ύριε Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χ(ριστ)έ in line 1 is a typical *invocatio* pattern frequently employed in Byzantine period votive, commemorative, and funerary inscriptions³⁴. The word [βο]ήθι in line 2 was used instead of βοήθει (*imperativus*) as a result of phonetic narrowing (itacism). Furthermore, the expression θεοῦ δούλω (“servant of God”) in the same line has become formulaic in Christian epigraphy as a title of humility of the supplicant.

In line 3, where the personal name and patronymic of the supplicant are located, the word ending preserved in the genitive case (-υρου) immediately before the broken edge points to the patronymic. In front of this letter group, a trace of a letter whose vertical axis extends upward and downward from its center can be discerned. Considering that the circular letters in the inscription, such as O (*omicron*) and E (*epsilon*), are carved in a distinctly narrow-conical scheme, it is understood that this stemmed trace with vertical extensions belongs only to the letter Φ (*phi*). Accordingly, the strongest restorations from an onomastic perspective for the patronymic are the names [Πορ]φύρου (*Porphyros*) or [Ζε]φύρου (*Zephyros*). However, if the possibility that the conical O letter formation gives the impression of a vertical line due to surface wear is cautiously taken into consideration, the name [Ἐπικ]οῦρου can also be included in the discussion as a secondary possibility; yet the paleographic data clearly support the reading of Φ (*phi*).

Frg. no. 3. Inscribed Slab Fragment (Votive / Dipinto - Graffito)

State of Preservation: Broken on both sides, at the bottom, and at the top; upper left corner considerably worn and irregular.

Material / Preservation: Limestone or marble slab fragment. Wear and local discolorations are present on the surface.

Dimensions: H.: 19 cm; W.: 16 cm; D.: 5 cm; L.h.: 3 cm.

Date: Late Antique Period (4th-6th centuries CE).

Description and Typology: Broken fragment belonging to a stone slab. On its obverse (*recto*), there is the remnant of a single-line ancient Greek inscription carved with deep incising technique. On the reverse (*verso*) of the object, an inscription written in red paint (*dipinto*) in an extremely dilapidated condition of secondary nature, along with traces of a secondary drawing/inscription

³³ For the interchange of /ει/ to /ι/ see, Gignac 1976, 235-242.

³⁴ For two similar examples from Asia Minor, see SEG 14, 705: Κ(ύρι)ε Ἰε(σοῦ) Χρισ(τέ); 40, 1299: Κ(ύρι)ε Ἰ(ησοῦ) Χ(ριστ)έ.



Fig. 10a. Inscribed Obverse



Fig. 10b. Finely Incised Reverse

(*graffito*) consisting of fine incised lines, can be discerned.

Epigraphic Commentary

The letter group clearly read on the obverse (YXHC) constitutes the last four characters of an incomplete word. In terms of epigraphic context, the strongest possibility of restoration is the phrase [ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς] (“in fulfillment of a vow / for the prayer/intention of ... / on behalf of a vow”), which is a formulaic phrase in Late Antique and Early Christian votive inscriptions. This formula, usually accompanied by the name of the dedicator, frequently appears on keystones, votive plaques, floor mosaics of churches and synagogues, and architectural elements³⁵.

A second possibility is that the word is a personal name or an adjective in the nominative case, [Εὐ]τυχῆς (“fortunate, auspicious, prosperous”), or the personal name [Εὐτυχ]ίας in the genitive case. The adjective εὐτυχῆς in the nominative case bearing the meanings “favorable, successful” frequently encountered in inscriptions, the word τύχης in the genitive case bearing the meaning “luck, fortune” or the word εὐχῆς in the genitive case bearing the meaning “vow/prayer” are among the possibilities. Finally, the genitive use of the expression [ἀγαθῆς τ]ύχης (“with good fortune/luck”), which is encountered in formulas transferred from pagan traditions to Late Antiquity, should also be taken into consideration.

Due to the extreme destruction of the red-painted parts (*dipinto*) and the fine incising (*graffito*) on the reverse, establishing a direct causal connection with the text is not possible.

³⁵ The votive formula ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς in Late Antique and Early Christian epigraphy has been found abundantly in the inscriptions from the excavations of the Sardis Synagogue (Petzl 2019, cat. no. 516; SEG 51, 1646) and the Sinop Balatlar Church (Öztürk 2023, 58 no. 1: ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς Ἰωάννου ἀναγνώστου Ἀρμενίου, ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς Μαρίνου ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς Κοσμά Ζανγαρίου; 61 no. 2: ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς Πελαγίας; 61 no. 3: ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς οὗ ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν τὸ ὄνομα; see also 63ff. nos. 4-5).

Conclusion

By examining the numismatic, architectural, and above all epigraphic evidence within a holistic framework, the investigations in the Central Harbor structures of Phaselis have yielded new insights into the transformation of urban space and the socio-religious life of the harbor community in the Late Antique and Byzantine periods. The numismatic and archaeological evidence shows that the area was in continuous use from the mid-4th century BCE to the second half of the 7th century CE, and that its buildings were not abandoned during the period of urban contraction but were flexibly adapted to new uses. These adaptations included the subdivision of rooms, the blocking of doorways, and the reuse of metalworking workshops as lime kilns and of other buildings as small baths. Together with the late defensive repairs to the harbor towers and a reliquary cross dated to the 9th–11th centuries CE, they indicate that the harbor retained its function despite the contraction of the city.

Against this background of continuity, the epigraphic finds, which form the main focus of the study, have revealed a previously unrecognized socio-religious dimension of this commercial, industrial, and logistical area. The material examined attests to a broad spectrum of religious practice, ranging from personal amuletic jewelry to votive and supplicatory inscriptions on elements of public architecture.

In this group, primarily the ring inscribed with Psalm 90:1 recovered in space 2M5c presents an original synthesis of Jewish-Christian (Old Testament-origin Septuagint text and demonological perception), Pagan/Greco-Egyptian (Chnoubis motif), and Gnostic/Magical (*charakteres*, *hystera* gynecological iconography) traditions from epigraphic and iconographic perspectives. While the stylized Chnoubis and *hystera* (womb) motifs on the bezel of the ring indicate that this object was produced for gynecological and medical protection (probably for a Christian woman); the dense patina and distinct wear on the metal surface physically prove that the jewelry in question was not produced solely for votive or funerary purposes, but was worn continuously and for a long time on the body in daily life. The expression “protection from danger” (“ἀπὸ κινδύνου”) on the inscribed ring bezel found in space 2M10b, another concrete indicator of the search for individual protection, directly reflects the security concerns of the community living intertwined with the risks inherent to maritime trade and harbor life. Beyond personal jewelry, the chancel panel fragment with a cross in relief recovered around the excavation house, on the reverse of which a supplicatory inscription was later incised, and the other slab fragment containing the votive formula (“ὕπὲρ εὐχῆς”), demonstrate that material belonging to institutional religious architecture in the city was reused in a secondary context. These architectural pieces provide important clues regarding the continuity of belief in public areas in terms of documenting that the religious content and apotropaic/votive nature they bore were preserved even in their secondary uses. That the inscribed objects were recovered in shops, workshops, and storerooms, or in contexts of secondary use, rather than in ecclesiastical

buildings, shows that religious practice in Late Antique Phaselis was not separate from commercial and industrial life. On the contrary, it was maintained within everyday working spaces through portable and personal objects.

In conclusion, the Central Harbor structures of Phaselis thus emerge as a multilayered urban focus in which personal religious practice and the search for apotropaic protection were intertwined with commerce, storage, and craft production. The inscribed finds examined here offer tangible evidence of the beliefs of the harbor community and, together with the archaeological evidence, of the harbor's continued function despite changing socio-economic conditions.

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* Abbreviations of epigraphical editions and reference works follow the "Liste des abréviations des éditions et ouvrages de référence pour l'épigraphie grecque alphabétique (GrEpiAbbr – Version 03, Septembre 2024)" developed by the Association Internationale d'Épigraphie Grecque et Latine.

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