

DIETRICH BOSCHUNG AND JAN N. BREMMER (EDS.)

# THE MATERIALITY OF MAGIC

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MORPHOMATA

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*The Materiality of Magic* is an exciting new book about an aspect of magic that is usually neglected. In the last two decades we have had many books and proceedings of conferences on the concept of magic itself as well as its history, formulas and incantations in antiquity, both in East and West. Much less attention, however, has been paid to the material that was used by the magicians for their conjuring activities. This is the first book of its kind that focuses on the material aspects of magic, such as amulets, drawings, figurines, gems, grimoires, rings, and voodoo dolls. The practice of magic required a specialist expertise that knew how to handle material such as lead, gold, stones, papyrus and terra cotta—material that sometimes was used for specific genres of magic. That is why we present in this well illustrated collection of studies new insights on the materiality of magic in antiquity by studying both the materials used for magic as well as the books in which the expertise was preserved. The main focus of the book is on antiquity, but we complement and contrast our material with examples ranging from the Ancient Near East, via early modern Europe, to the present time.

BOSCHUNG, BREMMER (EDS.) - THE MATERIALITY  
OF MAGIC



**MORPHOMATA**

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AND DIETRICH BOSCHUNG  
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AND JAN N. BREMMER

# THE MATERIALITY OF MAGIC

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## CONTENT

JAN N. BREMMER	
Preface: The Materiality of Magic	7
Abbreviations	21
JACCO DIELEMAN	
The Materiality of Textual Amulets in Ancient Egypt	23
LAURA FELDT	
Monstrous Figurines from Mesopotamia. Textuality, Spatiality and Materiality in Rituals and Incantations for the Protection of Houses in First-Millennium Aššur	59
JAIME CURBERA	
From the Magician's Workshop: Notes on the Materiality of Greek Curse Tablets	97
JAIME CURBERA AND SERGIO GIANNOBILE	
A 'Voodoo Doll' from Keos in Berlin's Antikensammlung	123
Appendix by JOCHEN VOGL and MARTIN ROSNER: Lead Isotope Analysis of an Ancient Voodoo Doll	127
RICHARD L. GORDON	
From Substances to Texts: Three Materialities of 'Magic' in the Roman Imperial Period	133
VÉRONIQUE DASEN	
Probaskania: Amulets and Magic in Antiquity	177
ÁRPÁD M. NAGY	
Engineering Ancient Amulets: Magical Gems of the Roman Imperial Period	205

JAN N. BREMMER From Books with Magic to Magical Books in Ancient Greece and Rome?	241
JITSE DIJKSTRA The Interplay between Image and Text. On Greek Amulets Containing Christian Elements from Late Antique Egypt	271
JÜRGEN BLÄNSDORF The Curse Inscriptions and the <i>Materia Magica</i> of the Anna-Perenna-Nymphaeum at Rome	293
ANNEWIES VAN DEN HOEK, DENIS FEISSEL, JOHN J. HERRMANN, JR. More Lucky Wearers: The Magic of Portable Inscriptions	309
PETER J. FORSHAW Magical Material & Material Survivals: Amulets, Talismans, and Mirrors in Early Modern Europe	357
OWEN DAVIES The Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic in Europe: Evidence, Comparisons and Interpretations	379
Notes on Contributors	419
Plates	427



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JAN N. BREMMER

## PREFACE: THE MATERIALITY OF MAGIC

The modern study of ancient magic started, arguably, around 1900 with the publications of several *corpora* of magical texts by Richard Wünsch (1869–1915) and Auguste Audollent (1864–1943).<sup>1</sup> Although in the intervening period some interesting and still useful studies appeared, such as the edition of the magical papyri,<sup>2</sup> it seems fair to say that a second wave of interest began only in the middle of the 1980s, when David Jordan published a new survey of Greek *defixiones*, and an *équipe* around Hans-Dieter Betz issued a translation of the Greek magical papyri.<sup>3</sup> It would not last long before a real tsunami of monographs, translations and proceedings of conferences on magic appeared,<sup>4</sup> the first of them

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1 R. Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae = IG III.3: Appendix* (Berlin 1897), reprinted by A. L. Oikonomides, *IG P, II/III<sup>2</sup> Paraleipomena et Addenda: Inscriptiones Atticae. Supplementum Inscriptionum Atticarum I* (Chicago, 1976) 1–250, *Sethianische Verfluchungstafeln aus Rom* (Leipzig, 1898) and ‘Neue Fluchtafeln’, *Rhein. Mus.* 55 (1900) 62–85, 232–71; A. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae* (Paris, 1904, repr. Frankfurt, 1967); R. Wünsch, *Antike Fluchtafeln* (Bonn, 1907, 1912<sup>2</sup>). For Wünsch, see H. Hepding, ‘Richard Wünsch’, *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde* 14 (1915) 136–43; W. Kroll, ‘Richard Wünsch’, *Biographisches Jahrbuch für die Altertumswissenschaft* 38 (1916/1918) 1–11 (with bibliography). For Audollent, see G. Németh, *Supplementum Audollentianum* (Saragoza et al., 2013) 15–22.

2 K. Preisendanz, *Papyri graecae magicae*, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1928–31, re-ed. A. Henrichs, 2 vols (Stuttgart, 1973–74<sup>2</sup>).

3 D. R. Jordan, ‘A Survey of Greek Defixiones not included in the Special Corpora’, *GRBS* 26 (1985) 151–97; H.-D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago and London, 1986<sup>1</sup>, 1992<sup>2</sup>), to be read with the still useful review by W. Brashear, ‘“Botokudenphilologie” Vindicated’, *Intern. J. Classical Tradition* 5 (1998) 66–79.

4 For good bibliographies, see P. Brilllet and A. Moreau, ‘Bibliographie

being the 1991 volume *Magika Hiera*, edited by Chris Faraone and Dirk Obbink. Although the editors tell us in their Preface that they set out to ‘establish the study of magic as an area to be ignored by students of ancient religion and society only at their peril’, their Preface only makes a few observations on the problem of the relationship between magic and religion (below), although not defining either of these terms, and pays no attention to other aspects of magic; in fact, the Preface leaves no impression that the editors realised the innovative character of their collection at the time.<sup>5</sup> Given the available *corpora*, it is not surprising that most of the subsequent publications concentrated on the Greek world rather than on the Latin one. It would even last to 2010 before a collective volume appeared that concentrated exclusively on the Latin West.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the Greek world is clearly overrepresented in the best general studies of ancient magic, those by Fritz Graf and Matthew Dickie, which appeared in the initial wake of the renewed interest.<sup>7</sup>

The earlier studies concentrated much more on the edition of texts and their categorisations, on the person of the magician himself and on the social practices connected with magic than on the material side of magic. This can also be easily demonstrated from the indices of the books by Graf and Dickie. When we look at the objects discussed in the present volume, we note that neither index contains the lemmata ‘book’, ‘*charaktêres*’, ‘gem’, ‘phylactery’, ‘plants’, ‘ring’, ‘stones’, and ‘voodoo doll’. ‘Figurines’ are mentioned by Graf but not by Dickie who, in turn, gives much more attention to amulets than Graf. It is clear from these omissions, which are not compensated by other studies, that there is room for a volume that looks at the artifacts used in magic. In other words, instead of looking at the social, intellectual or philological side of magic, the time is ripe for a volume that primarily concentrates on the materiality of magic.

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générale’, in A. Moreau and J.-C. Turpin (eds), *La magie*, 4 vols (Montpellier, 2000) 4. 7–159; J. L. Calvo Martínez, ‘Cien años de investigación sobre la magia antigua’, *MHNH* 1 (2001) 7–60; P. Fabrini, *Magica antiqua. Indice e guida a una bibliografia informatica* (Pisa, 2006); R. Gordon and F. Marco Simón (eds), *Magical Practice in the Latin West* (Leiden, 2010) 1–4.

5 C. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera* (New York and Oxford, 1991) vii (quotation).

6 Gordon and Marco Simón, *Magical Practice in the Latin West*.

7 F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge MA and London, 1997); M. W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London, 2001).

Interest in the material side of magic well fits the recent phenomenon of what has been called ‘the material turn’, which in turn derived from the so-called ‘cultural turn’. A proper genealogy of these ‘turns’ still has to be written, although we can observe that they started to take off in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>8</sup> The emergence of the material turn is a complicated process, but it can hardly be separated from the rise of the consumer society. As things became more important in our lives, sooner or later, the scholars followed. One need not necessarily accept the vocabulary of ‘the agency of things’ in order to understand that things have an increasing impact on our lives. It is therefore not surprising that this growing interest in the material side of our existence has also led to an increasing attention to the material side of religion, especially since the beginning of the new millennium. A series of studies, ranging from Etruscan religion via the Dutch Golden Age to popular culture,<sup>9</sup> is sharpening our eyes for the fact that our modern idea of religion as consisting especially of belief and faith should be complemented by a new understanding that things are just as important in religion, perhaps not always for us in the Western world today, but certainly elsewhere and in other times.<sup>10</sup> The ‘material turn’ has finally also reached the world of ancient magic, witness the appearance of a book studying the archaeological contexts of magical practices in the same year as the conference took place on which this volume is based (below).<sup>11</sup>

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**8** But see D. Hicks, ‘The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect’, in M. C. Beaudry and D. Hicks (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Oxford, 2010) 1–45; P. J. Bräunlein, ‘Material turn’, in Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (ed.), *Dinge des Wissens. Die Sammlungen, Museen und Gärten der Universität Göttingen* (Göttingen, 2012) 30–44; H. Green, ‘Cultural History and the Material(s) Turn’, *Cultural History* 1 (2012) 61–82. In general: D. Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek, 2006).

**9** M. M. Mochizuki, *The Netherlandish Image after Iconoclasm, 1566–1672: Material Religion in the Dutch Golden Age* (Aldershot, 2008); E. F. King, *Material Religion and Popular Culture* (New York, 2010); L. B. van der Meer (ed.), *Material Aspects of Etruscan Religion* (Leuven, 2010).

**10** See, most recently, D. Houtman and B. Meyer (eds), *Things. Religion and the Question of Materiality* (New York, 2012); B. Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence. Towards a Material Approach to Religion* (Utrecht, 2012).

**11** A. T. Wilburn, *Materia Magica. The Archaeology of Magic in Roman Egypt, Cyprus, and Spain* (Ann Arbor, 2012).

Now magic is a much debated concept. Recently, studies have even pleaded for a total abolishment of the term or called it a ‘tainted terminology’.<sup>12</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Richard Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón write, in an otherwise excellent introduction, that, ‘as historians, we eschew here any reference to the emic/etic “problem” and that they adopt C. R. Philips’ ‘rough and ready operational definition’ of magic as ‘unsanctioned religious activity’.<sup>13</sup> Neither affirmation seems warranted. Although it is true that historians have applied the opposition emic/etic much less often than anthropologists,<sup>14</sup> there can be no doubt that the better ones have seen its usefulness. Carlo Ginzburg has convincingly argued that the etic approach offers only tentative results, which have to be modified by ‘retrieving answers that are articulated in the actors’ language, and related to categories peculiar to their society, which is utterly different from ours’.<sup>15</sup>

This approach is very helpful for antiquity and the Ancient Near East as, for example, in the latter area we do not find a distinct concept of magic or an emic contrast between magic and normative religious practice. Yet, as Laura Feldt (this volume: pp. 59–95) notes, magic still seems to cover an obvious area of religious activity in Mesopotamia. In fact, the ideas connected with what we call magic can be shown to have experienced continuous transformations from Greek antiquity, which coined the term,<sup>16</sup> to the modern age. It is obvious that with the world of Ficino and other Renaissance scholars, as studied by Peter Forshaw

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**12** B.-C. Otto, *Magie. Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin and New York, 2011); W. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy* (Cambridge, 2012) 164–77.

**13** Gordon and Marco Simón, ‘Introduction’, in *eid.*, *Magical Practice in the Latin West*, 1–49 at 5.

**14** For anthropology, see the survey by J. P. Olivier de Sardan, ‘Emique’, *L’homme* 147 (1998) 151–66.

**15** C. Ginzburg, ‘Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian’s Craft, Today’, in S. Fellman and M. Rahikainen (eds), *Historical Knowledge. In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence* (Cambridge, 2012) 97–119, reprinted in *Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography)* 18 (2013), at 105 (quotation). Note also N. Jardine, ‘Etics and Emics (Not to Mention Anemics and Emetics) in the History of the Sciences’, *History of Science* 42 (2004) 261–78.

**16** Cf. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 2008) 235–47, updated from ‘The Birth of the Term “Magic”’, *ZPE* 126 (1999) 1–12.

(pp. 357–378), we are miles away from the ‘primitive’ world of Greek herbal remedies or its rationalization by the Hippocratics, as we are with the Marian British apotropaic marks studied by Owen Davies (pp. 379–417). It is only in the later nineteenth century that magic became opposed to religion,<sup>17</sup> which in its modern meaning is a product of the late eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

As with other contested concepts, magic can best be approached from the Wittgensteinian idea of ‘family resemblances’.<sup>19</sup> As I observed before, when we look at the most frequent noted oppositions between what is normally called magic and religion, such as secret/public, night/day, individual/collective, anti-social/social, *vores magicae*/understandable language, coercive manipulation/supplicative negotiation, negative gods/positive gods and so on, we note that most religions approve of the positive characteristics, whereas the negative ones are generally disapproved of or negatively valued.<sup>20</sup> None of these negative characteristics in itself defines magic, but taken together they alert us to a specific type of religious activity that we call magic. Yet cultures may differ in what they disapprove of, and even within cultures people not necessarily approve or disapprove of the same magical activities.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, even for antiquity magic can clearly not be defined as ‘unsanctioned religious activity’, although Gordon and Marco Simón overlooked that their definition is very close to Robert Parker’s characterization of magic as ‘unlicensed religion’.<sup>22</sup> What is the authority that would sanction or license these activities? Why should the use of all kinds of magical substances and their gathering, as analysed by Richard Gordon (pp. 133–176), be problematic and become scrutinized by some kind of authority? It is evident that the definition has been influenced by the increasingly perilous status of magic in Late Antiquity, when paganism and magic started to converge in the eyes of the Christian

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**17** Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture*, 347–52.

**18** E. Feil, *Religio*, 4 vols (Göttingen, 1986–2012<sup>2</sup>); B. Nongbri, *Before Religion* (New Haven and London, 2012).

**19** For the term, see C. Ginzburg, ‘Family Resemblances and Family Trees: Two Cognitive Metaphors’, *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004) 537–56.

**20** Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture*, 350.

**21** As is stressed by R. L. Fowler, ‘The Concept of Magic’, *ThesCRA III* (2005) 283–87.

**22** R. Parker, *Polytheism and Society in Athens* (Oxford, 2005) 116–35.

emperors.<sup>23</sup> In the end ‘magic’ remains a fuzzy concept, but that does not matter as long as we remain conscious of this circumstance and keep reflecting about it.<sup>24</sup>

Let us now turn to the volume at hand, which is based on a conference held at the *Morphomata International Center for Advanced Studies – Genesis, Dynamics and Mediality of Cultural Figurations* in Cologne in May 2012. The focus of the conference was classical antiquity but in order to acquire a better idea of the *longue durée* of the materiality of magic, we invited some contributions on older cultures and some on succeeding eras. As not all speakers were able to contribute to the proceedings, subsequently some new contributions were also invited. Taken together they offer a kaleidoscopic overview of the various materialisations of magic. In that respect they also well fit the programme of *Morphomata*. Admittedly, we cannot say anything about the genesis of magic. Yet, given its widespread occurrence, there can be little doubt that acts we now label as magic go back a long time in history. That suggestion does not imply a claim that magic is ‘an unproblematically universal human phenomenon existing already long before it was named’,<sup>25</sup> but it simply concludes from its widespread occurrence in the Mediterranean and Ancient Near East that its genesis will have preceded its first attestation, textual or material. On the other hand, magic is clearly a dynamic concept, and we have therefore ordered the volume chronologically so that local developments and mutual influences become better visible. Finally, magic, as we already noted, is not limited to words and actions, but is also expressed via medial forms, such as amulets, books, curse tablets, or gems, amongst other forms of mediality. The material presence of these media shaped the life world of the people that used, carried or buried them. In that respect we can indeed see these objects as agents that influenced the lives of those around them as long as they were part of their social or magical imagination.

The volume is opened by *Jacco Dieleman* (Los Angeles) with an investigation into the history of the textual amulets in Egypt, artifacts he defines as ‘an apotropaic text written on a separate strip or sheet of

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**23** Cf. H. Leppin, ‘Zum Wandel des spätantiken Heidentums’, *Milennium* 1 (2004) 59–81 at 71–75.

**24** Compare the reflections about the usage of ‘pagan monotheism’ by P. Van Nuffelen, ‘Beyond Categorisation. “Pagan monotheism” and the Study of Ancient Religion’, *Common Knowledge* 18 (2012) 451–63.

**25** *Contra* Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 168 n. 63.

linen, papyrus, or metal which, when folded or rolled and tied, was worn as a personal form of protection on the body, usually on a string around the neck'. Its origin goes back to the earlier second millennium BC and is thus one of our oldest examples of material magic historically attested. Its small shape must have made it easy to transport beyond the borders of Egypt, and in the first millennium BC we find these amulets in those areas that were in close contact with Egypt, such as Phoenicia and Israel. In the latter area, they probably had a long life as rabbinic literature confirms that amulets could be worn in public without being considered unlawful or problematic.<sup>26</sup> The custom lasted well into the Roman period of Egypt, when they can be seen on the famous mummy portraits – once again a testimony to the fact that magic need not be seen as negative or 'unsanctioned'.<sup>27</sup>

From Egypt we turn to Mesopotamia. Although incantations are already attested in the third millennium BC in Sumer, and magic in all kinds of manifestations is well attested also for the whole of the Ancient Near East in the second millennium BC,<sup>28</sup> *Laura Feldt* (Odense) focuses on the neo-Assyrian empire of the first millennium. Looking at a ritual assemblage of monster figurines, she argues that these figurines are not just representations of transempirical beings, but by being mediated into material forms bridge the gap between the human world and that of the invisible superhuman beings. At the same time, through their material form and the place where they were situated, they helped to avert evil demons by being present. As she stresses, magic is not just a case of communication, but effective through what it does.

From Mesopotamia we proceed to Greece. *Jaime Curbera* (Berlin) studies the *defixiones*, 'curse tablets', of the collection published by Wünsch in 1898 (above), republishing a number of them as well in im-

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**26** G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic* (Cambridge, 2008) 150.

**27** For a list of the relevant mummy portraits, see R. Kotansky, 'Two Inscribed Jewish Aramaic Amulets from Syria', *Israel Exploration Journal* 41 (1991) 267–81 at 268 n. 5.

**28** D. Schwemer, 'Magic Rituals: Conceptualization and Performance', in K. Radner and E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford, 2011) 418–42 and 'Gauging the Influence of Babylonian Magic: the Reception of Mesopotamian Traditions in Hittite Ritual Practice', in E. Cancik-Kirschbaum et al. (eds), *More Info: Diversity and Standardization. Perspectives on Social and Political Norms in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin, 2013) 145–71.

proved editions. He notes its material, lead, but also observes that we should not consider this material typically fit for magic because of its coldness and pale colour. In fact, lead was used by the Greeks for letter writing at an early stage because of the ease with which the material can be inscribed, rolled and reused.<sup>29</sup> That is why lead was used for curse tablets, which also enabled the users to easily pierce the tablets with nails.<sup>30</sup> Under influence from the Carthaginians, curse tablets probably originated in Sicily, most likely in Selinuntum with its very mixed population.<sup>31</sup> From there they quickly spread to Athens where the lead of the Laurion mines was widely available.<sup>32</sup> Curbera notes that sometimes these curses are shaped as long strips so as to represent the bands that were supposed to bind their victims, but also that there often is no connection between the shape and the content of the curse. In one case, we might even have to do with a flat voodoo-doll. Together with *Sergio Giannobile* Curbera is even able to publish a new example of a lead ‘voodoo doll’, Greek *kolossos*,<sup>33</sup> a kind of figurine of which about 90 have been found in antiquity.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the doll contains a list of names,

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**29** But see Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 132–33; G. Baratta, ‘Il piombo e la magia: il rapporto tra l’oggetto e il materiale a proposito degli specchi plumbei’, in M. Piranomonte and F. Marco Simón (eds), *Contesti magici – Contextos mágicos* (Rome, 2012) 23–27.

**30** P. Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing* (Oxford, 2013) 47–58.

**31** See now, with bibliography, A. Willi, *Sikelismos. Sprache, Literatur und Gesellschaft im griechischen Sizilien (8.–5. Jh. V. Chr.)* (Basel, 2008) 317–21; Bremmer, ‘Manteis, Magic, Mysteries and Mythography: Messy Margins of Polis Religion?’, *Kernos* 23 (2010) 13–35 at 17f.

**32** Interestingly, they also spread to Southern Italy where the Oscans used the Greek alphabet for *defixiones*, cf. Gordon and Marco Simón, ‘Introduction’, 2 n. 8; F. Murano, *Le tabellae defixionum osche. Ricerche sulle lingue di frammentaria attestazione* (Pisa and Rome, 2013).

**33** For its etymology, long debated, see now B. Vine, ‘Autour de sud-picé-nien *qolofitúr*’, in G. J. Pinault and D. Petit (eds), *La langue poétique indo-européenne* (Leuven, 2006) 499–515.

**34** For these dolls, see C. Faraone, ‘Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of “Voodoo Dolls” in Ancient Greece’, *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1991) 165–221; D. Ogden, ‘Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds’, in B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds) *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 2 (London, 1999) 1–90; M. Witteyer, ‘Curse-tablets and Voodoo-Dolls from Mainz. The Archaeological Evidence for Magical Practices in the Sanctuary of Isis and Magna Mater’, *MHNH* 5 (2005) 105–24.



which shows that the figurine was more generic rather than meant to harm one specific person. Its orthography suggests a provenance from the island of Keos, which is supported by a lead isotope analysis by *Jochen Vogl* (Berlin) and *Martin Rosner* (Berlin).

In a contribution rich in theoretical reflections, *Richard Gordon* (Erfurt) concentrates on natural substances, manufactured objects, such as the voodoo doll, and complex diagrams, magisterially ranging over Greek, Roman and Graeco-Egyptian magic. He notes the usage of plants, which is perhaps one of the oldest uses of magic in Greece. At least, we can infer this already from the way *Hermes* offers *Odysseus* the plant called *moly* by the gods of which it is explicitly said that mortals have difficulty in digging it up. *Homer* did not have the vocabulary of magic at his disposal, but the way the plant and its effects are described suggests magic *avant la lettre*.<sup>35</sup> *Gordon* traces the development of the rhizotomists from the stage of orality to the production of books with herbal medicines, thus arguing that these natural substances were good to think with and ended up in iatrobotanic schemes. He proceeds by stressing that especially in religion materials call attention to themselves. This makes that in magic we might find rather unusual objects, which set them apart from every-day items. Striking examples are the texts that transcend the usual limitations of textuality and strive to become themselves objects.<sup>36</sup> In other words, *Gordon* presents us a trajectory in which he proceeds from the natural world, through manufactured objects, to texts, thus well illustrating the enormous variety of magic and the magical imagination.

A category, which was deliberately not discussed by *Gordon*, is taken up by *Véronique Dasen* (Fribourg), namely amuletic charms. As they were usually not very costly, amulets have not yet received the attention they deserve. Yet they must have been in frequent use, given the precarious state of life in antiquity. *Dasen* notes that the well known device figuring the Eye developed only in the Hellenistic period and becomes common only in the Roman imperial period;<sup>37</sup> indeed, the word *amu-*

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**35** So, rightly, *D. Collins*, *Magic in the Ancient Greek world* (Malden, 2008) 28.

**36** See also *C. Faraone*, *Vanishing Acts on Ancient Greek Amulets: from Oral Performance to Visual Design* (London, 2012).

**37** *M. W. Dickie*, 'The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye', in *H. Maguire* (ed.), *Byzantine Magic* (Washington D. C., 1995). 9–34; *R. Kalmin*, 'The Evil Eye in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity', in *B. Isaac and Y. Shahar* (eds), *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2012) 11–28.

*letum* is attested first in Pliny (*HN* 27.124). Earlier examples may have simply perished as a well known, probably apocryphal, anecdote by Theophrastus (F 463 Fortenbaugh) relates that women had hung an amulet around Pericles' neck when he was ill from the plague. At the same time, the story suggests that women were particularly connected with amulets. This gender aspect is also visible in the fact that women, unlike boys, do not normally wear phallus amulets, just as males did not normally wear the crescent moon-shaped *lunula*. In addition to this gender aspect, Dasen also notes the social aspects of amulets, as originally only elite boys could wear a gold *bullā*. Clearly, in the hierarchical society of antiquity even magic did not always transcend social differences.

Another long neglected area constitutes the magical gems, which are studied here by *Árpád M. Nagy* (Budapest). He introduces the reader to the most recent developments in the study of these gems, which, like the amulets studied by Dasen, are typical of the Roman Imperial period. The gems are part of a development in the early Roman Empire, when magic increasingly became transmitted via written records, although writing was of course not absent from magic before – witness the classical *defixiones*. Nagy analyses their shape, production and usage, noting that they are basically Graeco-Egyptian, but different from the magical papyri. By condensing into a single object the power of its precious substance and performative image, word and sign as well as inventing new schemes and integrating different cultural traditions (Jewish, Egyptian, Greek),<sup>38</sup> they made these magical gems part of everyday life. Nagy illustrates these insights by a detailed study of the unique case of the famous Perseus gem from Saint Petersburg.

The rise of written magic also reflected itself in books with magic, here studied by *Jan N. Bremmer* (Groningen), which start to be attested in the first century BC. Books were expensive,<sup>39</sup> which might partly explain their lack of survival. Yet we do find occasional references to books with magic,<sup>40</sup> but they do not develop into magical books in the pagan world. It is only in the developed literate culture of the fourth-century Christians that we can start to notice that miniature Gospels are carried

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<sup>38</sup> For the *voces magicae* on these gems, see now also M. Tardieu *et al.* (eds), *Noms barbares I: Formes et contextes d'une pratique magique* (Turnhout, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> For the price of books, see R. S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton, 2009) 50–69.

<sup>40</sup> For a special case, see C. Faraone, 'A Greek Magical gemstone from the Black Sea: Amulet or Miniature Handbook?', *Kernos* 23 (2010) 91–114.

around the necks. It is in line with what Véronique Dasen noted that Jerome connects them especially with women. Amulets and women seem to be a long lasting combination.

As Árpád Nagy noted, the iconography of magical gems is different from that of the magical papyri. Yet these also deserve interest as *Jitse Dijkstra* (Ottawa) shows. Although they have been noticed by previous scholars,<sup>41</sup> they have not yet received systematic attention and detailed discussion. Dijkstra concentrates on proper figures in the corpus of Greek amuletic papyri with Christian elements. These figures, as he demonstrates, reflect the cultural Greco-Egyptian milieu of their production and show how Christian elements penetrated an existing format with Jewish, Greek and Egyptian elements. As such, they also show the Christian appropriation of pagan magic.

We move to the end of Late Antiquity with a sensational discovery in Rome. Around 2000 a rescue excavation revealed a fountain of the Roman goddess Anna Perenna,<sup>42</sup> which was used for depositing lead and copper *defixiones* and ‘voodoo dolls’ in small round canisters.<sup>43</sup> Jürgen Blänsdorf (Mainz) studies the inscriptions of the curse tablets. As he notes, the main divinity is not Anna Perenna, but Abraxas who is made here into the father of Jesus Christ, a rather surprising but not unknown heresy. The curse inscriptions are accompanied by manlike figures, magic symbols and the so-called *Ephesia grammata*, which were supposed to be embroidered on the girdle of Artemis of Ephesus and to ward off evil.<sup>44</sup> Blänsdorf presents a typology of the *defixio* objects and concludes that they were written by non-professionals, if not the petitioners themselves.

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, N. West, ‘Egyptian Iconography on Late Antique Magical Gems and the Greek and Demotic Magical Papyri’, *Pallas* 86 (2011) 135–66.

<sup>42</sup> M. Piranomonte, ‘Rome. The Anna Perenna Fountain, Religious and Magical Rituals Connected with Water’, in A. Schäfer (ed.), *Rituelle Deponierungen in Heiligtümern der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (Mainz, 2013) 151–66; for these and other recent discoveries, see R. Gordon, *JRA* 27 (1914) 774–85.

<sup>43</sup> The *defixiones* have not yet been included in A. Kropp, *Magische Sprachverwendung in vulgärlateinischen Fluchtafeln (defixiones)* (Tübingen, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> See, most recently, A. Bernabé, ‘Las *Ephesia grammata*: genesis de una formula magica’, *MHNH* 3 (2005) 5–28; L. Bettarini, ‘Testo e lingua nei documenti con Ἐφέσια γράμματα’, *ZPE* 183 (2012) 111–28; A. Bernabé, ‘The *Ephesia Grammata*: Genesis of a Magical formula’, in C. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds), *The Getty Hexameters* (Oxford, 2013) 71–96.

Equally in Late Antiquity and even far into Byzantine times we move with *Annezvies van den Hoek* (Harvard), *Denis Feissel* (Paris) and *John J. Herrmann, Jr* (Boston), who study a great variety of objects with a reference to the wearer coupled with an equally great variety of some sort of good wish, ranging from plainly secular to overtly magical. However, they all have in common that they are easy to wear, be they finger-rings, stone amulets, splendid jewelry or glitzy helmets. The formula on these objects can wish the wearer luck but it can also ask the Lord for help. In the latter case, we may suppose the wearer to have been Christian, the more so as the latter often date from the Byzantine period. In a number of cases the amulets wish the wearer well from all kinds of diseases and even of ‘every creeping thing’. The long life of this kind of inscription shows how the pagan amulets were appropriated by the Christians, as they were confronted with the same problems in life as their pagan ancestors.<sup>45</sup>

Although definitely living in full Christian times, the Platonic philosopher and theologian Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) bridged the gap between ancient and Arabic magic and his own world. *Peter Forshaw* (Amsterdam) studies his ideas about ‘subtle’ matter (*Spiritus*) in connection with the fashioning of magical amulets and talismans. As he shows, Ficino used all kinds of works from antiquity but carefully avoided the suspicion of idolatry. His considerations and recommendations concerning suitable materials for amulets and talismans show how the fashioning of these objects had become the subject of a curious mixture of Neoplatonic and Scholastic philosophy as well as ancient medicine and astro-medical theory. His ideas would exert a great deal of influence on famous later ‘magicians’, such as Paracelsus (1493–1541) and John Dee (1527–1609).

Our volume is concluded by *Owen Davies* ((Hertfordshire), who focuses his expertise in both archaeology and history on a rich survey of modern research in the post-medieval material side of magic. He notes how difficult it is to study modern manifestations of magic, but also observes that both texts and archeological material have to be studied hand in hand. The former often suffers from bias of its collectors, the latter suffers from the vulnerability of much archaeological material and the absence of the performance that left its material traces. Moreover,

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<sup>45</sup> For this transformation, see F. Graf, ‘The Christian Transformation of Magic’, in E. Suárez de la Torre and A. Pérez Jiménez, *Mito y Magia en Grecia y Roma* (Barcelona, 2013) 299–310.

in interpreting the material remains of the past, we might be hindered by our terminology, which is often inadequate or suggests connotations that are misleading: to call special deposits, such as old shoes or animal remains, ‘foundation sacrifice/offering’ suggests a connection with divinities without any evidence of them having been invoked in one way or another. Yet the usage of the category ‘ritual’ should not be avoided, as ritual suffused life in early modern Europe. Davies suggests that the concept of ‘object biographies’ may help us to study the *longue durée* life of objects, as objects change meaning over time. Similarly, we have to be alert to the life of buildings in which these objects have been placed. They, too, have a kind of life with a beginning and an end, although their ‘closure rituals’ have been studied much less. Buildings also supply a rich variety of apotropaic symbols, created by cunning folk, masons and carpenters as well as by people who learned about these things from their family or community. The usage of such symbols, but also of modern time capsules, does also show us something of our sentiments regarding that vague, intangible sense of a happy home.

Surveying Davies’ material we can see how in the course of the nearly 4 millennia of magic that have been studied in this volume, magic has become increasingly reduced to its material side in the last centuries. Christianisation and secularisation have gradually destroyed the old magical imaginary with its divinities, formulae and ritual performances. What seems to be left are simple acts, such as the use of horseshoes or the planting of certain plants such as rowan. Whatever meaning we may attach to these acts, they do show something of the long lasting influence of the materiality of magic.

As noted above, this volume is the product of a conference in Cologne in May 2012. It is a pleasure to thank my co-editor Dietrich Boschung, who took the initiative for the conference. He also made it possible for the conference to take place in the inspiring environment of Morphomata. To speak of the magic of Morphomata might be stretching the concept, but there is no doubt that the conference was highly successful. I hope that something of that spirit remains visible in this volume.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BE</i>	<i>Bulletin Épigraphique</i> , 14 vols (Paris 1972–2007); from 2002 onward in <i>Revue des Études Grecques</i>
<i>BSAF</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France</i>
<i>CBD</i>	The Campbell Bonner database: <a href="http://classics.mfab.hu/talismans">http://classics.mfab.hu/talismans</a>
<i>CCAG</i>	<i>Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum</i> (Brussels, 1898–1953)
<i>CIG</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> (Berlin, 1828–1877)
<i>DACL</i>	Cabrol F. and H. Leclercq: <i>Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie</i> . 15 vols (Paris, 1907–1953)
<i>DTA</i>	Audollent, A.: <i>Defixionum tabellae quotquot innotuerunt</i> (Paris, 1904)
<i>DTW</i>	Wünsch, R.: <i>Corpus inscriptionum Atticarum. Appendix continens defixionum tabellas in Attica regione repertas</i> (= <i>IG III 3</i> ) (Berlin, 1898)
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
<i>IGLS</i>	<i>Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie</i>
<i>I Olympia</i>	<i>Die Inschriften von Olympia</i> (Berlin, 1896)
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> (Zurich, 1981–2009)
<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i> , ed. K. Preisendanz, Leipzig-Berlin 1928 und 1931, second edition by A. Henrichs (Stuttgart 1973, 1974)
<i>RPh</i>	<i>Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>

- SupplMag* R. Daniel and F. Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum*,  
2 vols (Opladen, 1990–92)
- ThesCRA* *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*, 8 vols (Los  
Angeles, 2005–12)
- ZPE* *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*



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JACCO DIELEMAN

# THE MATERIALITY OF TEXTUAL AMULETS IN ANCIENT EGYPT

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This article sketches the history of textual amulets in pharaonic Egypt. It describes the development of this object category by studying how choice of material determined the amulet's format and handling. A textual amulet is defined here as an apotropaic text written on a separate strip or sheet of linen, papyrus, or metal, which, when folded or rolled and tied, was worn as a personal form of protection on the body, usually on a string around the neck.<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, the term 'textual amulet' may denote exclusively the apotropaic text itself, but in the present contribution it will be used primarily in reference to the artifact as a whole, that is, the physical object carrying the text.

The paper offers some preliminary results of a larger project on the history of textual amulets in antiquity. The earliest evidence of the practice comes from Egypt and dates to the beginning of the New Kingdom or slightly earlier, that is, about the sixteenth century BCE. Its origin is likely to reach further back into time, although, following my interpretation of the evidence currently available, not before the second millennium BCE. The practice was to have a widespread and long-lasting legacy. Already in the Iron Age, it was adopted, directly from Egyptian ritual experts or through intermediaries, by various peoples in the Levant and Mediterranean basin, such as the Israelites, Phoenicians, and Greeks, and eventually became popular throughout the Roman Empire. Later

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'textual amulet' and its definition are borrowed and adapted from Skemer 2006; cf. Kotansky 1994, xv–xvi.

on, the practice is also attested for the Byzantine and Arabic worlds, the Medieval West, and Ethiopia. In fact, it continues up to today in multiple communities across the globe.

This study is not concerned with these historical connections and cross-cultural adaptations, but rather with studying the specimens of pharaonic date in their Egyptian context. The main aim is to develop a methodology that provides us with the tools and vocabulary to study textual amulets not as disembodied ‘magical discourse,’ but rather as scribal artifacts – both as a manifestation of institutional habitus *and* as an expression of individual agency. Hopefully, this will enable in the future a nuanced study of the use and format of textual amulets through time and across cultures.

## 2 HOW DID A TEXTUAL AMULET WORK?

Of the small corpus of extant Egyptian textual amulets, one item in particular provides valuable information about the design, handling, and meaning of textual amulets in ancient Egypt. Unlike most other preserved specimens, this amulet was unearthed in a controlled excavation. It exhibits all features characteristic of a textual amulet, features that are reviewed in more detail in the sections to follow. Most importantly, the artefact shows that textual amulets usually formed part of an assemblage of amuletic objects of different designs and materials. In this particular case, the artifact consists of a linen necklace twisted and fitted with seven knots as well as a small sheet of papyrus that was tightly folded into a squarish packet, then tied and attached to the necklace by a short string (fig. 1). Both the linen necklace and the papyrus sheet were inscribed on the inside. The artifact thus combined various media and forms of manipulation into one composite amulet seemingly without privileging one element over another. Furthermore, the artifact is also unique in including the directions for use in the text inscribed on the papyrus sheet. Unlike any other extant textual amulet, it explicates its own manufacture and intended use.

On December 14, 1950, the French archaeologist Bernard Bruyère discovered the amulet immediately next to the Great Pit or trash dump of the village of Deir el-Medina.<sup>2</sup> Deir el-Medina was a state-sponsored,

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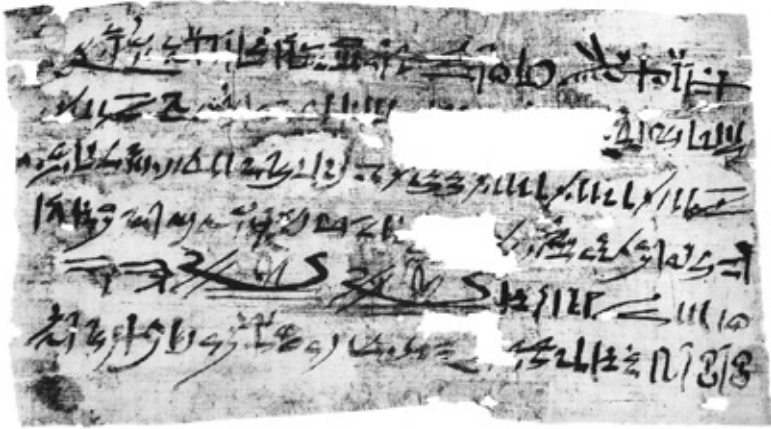
<sup>2</sup> Bruyère 1953, 71–73; Sauneron 1970a.



1 Amulet worn by Anynakht from Deir el-Medina, Egypt, ca. 1200 BCE

purpose-built community of workmen and artisans who constructed and decorated the rock-cut tombs of the New Kingdom pharaohs in the nearby Valley of the Kings (inhabited from about 1500 to 1100 BCE, the duration of Egypt's New Kingdom). Whoever discarded it must have considered the amulet to no longer be of use.

The papyrus sheet was inscribed with a running text of six lines in the cursive hieratic script (fig. 2). Judging from the shapes of the hieratic signs, it was written a little after 1200 BCE, during the reign of King Ramesses III (Dynasty 20). The text grants by decree of the king-god Osiris healing from a skin disease to a certain Anynakht, son of Wabkhe, a villager of Deir el-Medina. The demons that are believed to be the cause of the disease shall, on orders of Osiris himself, be deported by



2 Papyrus Deir el-Medina 36



3 Hieroglyphic transcription of Papyrus Deir el-Medina 36

the god Geb to the Yalu fields in the netherworld. Thus Anynakht will be set free from the disease demons that plague him and recover from his afflictions.

- (1) Royal Decree: The king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Osiris, says to the vizier, the hereditary prince Geb: ‘Set up your mast, unfold your sail, [set out for] the Yalu-field! Take the male *nsy*, the female *nsy*, the male opponent, the female opponent, the male dead, the female dead who faces Anynakhte born of Wabkhe as well as the burning (*pꜣ srf*) and the itching (*tꜣ rmnt*) [and anything] bad or evil along after they have come for him for a period(?) of 3 days’. [pDeir el-Medina 36 ll. 1–5]<sup>3</sup>

The ritual specialist who prepared the amulet ostensibly copied the spell from a formulary, because it is followed immediately by instructions on how to prepare the amulet. Such directions for use are a common feature of recipes in formularies, but have in principle no place in an activated amulet.<sup>4</sup>

- (2) God’s words, to be said over two divine barks and two udjat-eyes, two scarabs, drawn on a new piece of papyrus (*dmꜥ n mꜣw*). To be applied at his throat, that it may drive him out quickly. [pDeir el-Medina 36 ll. 5–6]

According to these instructions, the papyrus should have been inscribed with drawings of two divine barks, two udjat-eyes (the Horus or Sound Eye), and two scarabs, not, however, with running text. The divine decree was merely meant to be recited as an incantation over the thus prepared amulet. Instead of keeping to the letter of the instructions, the ritual specialist thoughtlessly copied the recipe in its entirety from his manual. This aberration did not make the amulet ineffective, though. Thanks to the iconic nature of the hieroglyphic script (fig. 3), the hieroglyphs denoting the two divine barks, two udjat-eyes, and two scarabs in the running text can serve as the required drawings.

The directions then instruct the practitioner to attach the amulet to the client’s neck without giving any further details on how to do this. In this particular case, the ritual specialist folded the papyrus seven times

<sup>3</sup> Translation, here slightly adapted: Borghouts 1978, 36–37 (#55); for identification of *tꜣ rmnt*, here tentatively translated as ‘itching’, see Quack 2011, 415. For further philological notes, see Sauneron 1970a, 12–18.

<sup>4</sup> On the format of recipes in Egyptian formularies, see Dieleman 2011.



4 Drawings on linen strip to which Papyrus Deir el Medina 36 had been attached

from bottom to top with one fold from top to bottom, five times from left to right, and finally twice to the right and twice to the left.<sup>5</sup> He tied the resultant square packet ( $2 \times 2 \times 1$  cm) with a short string and attached it to a linen strip that was meant to serve as a necklace. The present recipe does not call specifically for such a linen strip, but other recipes for similar textual amulets attest that the ritual specialist followed a common procedure. Such recipes often prescribe inscribing the linen strip with apotropaic imagery and fitting it with a set number of knots. In the present case, the ritual specialist drew a row of six seated deities (Re, Osiris, Horus, Seth, Isis, and Nephthys)<sup>6</sup> to the right and to the left a symmetrical scene of two stickmen, each attacked by a crocodile, and with an unidentified mummiform figure standing between them (fig. 4). He then twisted the linen strip and fitted it with seven knots, whose number matches the number of deities (including the mummiform figure) drawn on the linen strip.<sup>7</sup> The patient Anynakht could now wear the textual amulet around his neck. The *heka* or restorative power that was mobilized by means of the spell and the drawings could thus flow freely from the amulet to the patient's body, hopefully healing him from his skin rash.

On close inspection, the artifact appears thus to be a complex amuletic apparatus. It combines multiple media and strategies to mobilize ritual power. It is the combination of the physical objects and the in-

5 Sauneron 1970a, 7. Sauneron writes that the sheet was folded eight times from top to bottom. This is, however, impossible in light of the increase in size of the three holes from bottom to top.

6 Together these six deities represent the 365 days of the Egyptian solar year. The sun god stands for the calendar period of 360 days formed of twelve months of 30 days each. The other five deities stand for one of the five epagomenal days each, that is, the five final days of the year. Thus they guarantee that the amulet will be effective for every day of the year.

7 The number seven was in general a meaningful number in Egyptian ritual; Rochholz 2002.

terplay between their symbolic meanings that gave the assemblage its protective or curative power in the eyes of those who produced these amulets and those who subsequently wore them. Anynakht's amulet may thus serve as a reminder to us that textual amulets should not be studied in isolation as disembodied texts, but always as physical artifacts in combination with the objects with which they were found. Unfortunately, this standard cannot always be upheld. Few objects discussed in this article were unearthed in controlled excavations. Most are without secure provenance and lack any information about stratigraphic deposition and associated objects. Those that were found still rolled-up and more or less intact in the nineteenth century were described in insufficient detail before being unrolled. Even today, publications of textual amulets rarely include a full description of the amulet's physical features.

### 3 TYPES OF EVIDENCE

Evidence for the use of textual amulets in ancient Egypt is both direct and indirect. The direct evidence is represented by a small corpus of applied textual amulets, that is, textual amulets worn in life by the individual whose name is inscribed with the apotropaic text. The corpus of textual amulets of pharaonic date used for this article comprises 61 items: 52 written on papyrus, 9 on linen (see further below).<sup>8</sup> The precise provenance and archaeological context of most of them remain unknown, but, given their generally good state of preservation, one may assume that most come from graves, where they were buried with the person who wore the amulet in life. Two associated corpora are textual amulets that carry a single Book of the Dead spell, usually spell 166, 100 or 129,<sup>9</sup> and those that carry an abridged or adapted version of one of the so-called Documents for Breathing or similar short funerary formulae.<sup>10</sup> As these amulets were produced for the dead, they are not included in the present study. They exhibit obvious similarities with textual amulets produced for the living, but also crucial differences.

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<sup>8</sup> The corpus of textual amulets is in fact a little larger. I am aware of the existence of several unedited items in museums; undoubtedly, several more remain unidentified. I hope to collect and study these items in the future.

<sup>9</sup> Illes 2006; Černý 1942, 120, fn. 1; Wüthrich 2010, 100–03.

<sup>10</sup> For a representative selection of such documents, see Smith 2009, texts 31, 33–45. For the Demotic Documents of Breathing, see Scalf 2014.

The indirect evidence is trifold.<sup>11</sup> First, multiple recipes in magic formularies include instructions for preparing textual amulets and placing them at the client's throat. They thus testify that textual amulets were part and parcel of the repertoire of Egyptian ritual experts for the period for which these recipes are attested in the formularies. Assigning a date to these documents and the procedures they prescribe is not easy, however. Even if most formularies can be dated by means of paleography within the range of one century, it is obvious that they are miscellanies of edited materials that may be generations, if not centuries, older than the preserved manuscript. In other words, formularies can provide a *terminus post quem* but not a *terminus ante quem non* for the existence of any of the procedures and objects they prescribe.

Secondly, to protect the textual amulet from wear and tear, it was usually worn in a protective container such as a linen or leather pouch or, probably not before the first millennium BCE, a narrow metal tube with removable ends. Whereas such pouches have survived in just a few rare cases, metal capsules have been excavated in some numbers in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> Even if none preserved an intact textual amulet when found, they still serve as an index for the use of textual amulets in the place and period concerned. It must however be borne in mind that amulet tubes were also used to hold other amuletic materials such as loose garnets, bone fragments, resin, beeswax, etc.<sup>13</sup> In other words, not every preserved amulet tube necessarily contained a textual amulet. This applies for example to the cylindrical amulets dating to the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2040–1656 BCE) and early New Kingdom (ca. 1548–1400 BCE).<sup>14</sup> Most are solid, while the hollow specimens contained beads, garnets, and seeds, but not, as often assumed, textual amulets.<sup>15</sup>

The third type of indirect evidence is representational art, that is, depictions in painting, sculptural relief and statuary of persons wearing

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**11** A possible fourth type of indirect evidence is narrative fiction. To my knowledge, however, no extant Egyptian narratives feature characters making or wearing textual amulets; neither do they contain descriptions of textual amulets.

**12** Petrie 1914, plate 19; Ray 1972; Ogden 1973; Bourriau and Ray 1975; Leclant 1980; Andrews 1981, 92 and 1994, 42.

**13** Kotansky 1988, 34–38.

**14** For a convenient list and typology, see Andrews 1981, 92.

**15** Janssen and Janssen 1992, 160–63; Andrews 1981, 62.



such amulets. It is noteworthy that few such depictions exist. To my knowledge, no examples are extant for pharaonic Egypt.<sup>16</sup> The situation is different for the Roman period, though. The large corpus of mummy portraits, comprising more than 1,000 items, includes several portraits of boys wearing an amulet tube on a cord around the neck.<sup>17</sup> A fragment of a plaster mummy mask for a child features a similar amulet tube.<sup>18</sup> These funerary materials thus document how and by whom textual amulets could be worn in Roman Egypt.

#### 4 THE DATASET

Textual amulets were written either on linen or papyrus in the pharaonic period. In Roman Egypt, which period will be briefly addressed at the end of this article, textual amulets were also inscribed on silver and gold foil (today these artifacts are usually called ‘lamellae’).<sup>19</sup> The choice of these materials can be attributed to their smooth surface, pliable nature, and light weight. They allow for easy inscription, can be made conveniently small through folding or rolling, and do not weigh heavy when worn around the neck. Of the four types of evidence listed above, the first two types – that is, extant textual amulets and instructions for textual amulets in formularies – can be used to chart the chronological distribution of these three materials as in table 1.

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**16** The question of why so few amulets are displayed in representational art is addressed in Baines 2006.

**17** For a list of mummy portraits displaying an amulet tube, see Kotansky 1988, 38–43. For boys wearing such amulets, see also Montserrat 1993, 224 and Borg 1996, 167–72.

**18** Aubert and Cortopassi 2004, 28 and 201 (cat. no. G 14).

**19** In his dissertation, Roy Kotansky has collected 161 such lamellae recovered from sites all across the Roman Empire, including Egypt: Kotansky 1988. A selection of 68 lamellae (those of known provenance) are available in Kotansky 1994.

	Middle Kingdom	New Kingdom, Dyn. 18	New Kingdom, Dyn. 19–20	Third Intermedi- ate Period	Nubian & Late Period	Late Dyn. / Ptolemaic Period	Roman Period
linen	∅	(2)	(2)	∅	(1, 2)	(2)	(2)
papyrus	∅	∅	(1, 2)	(1)	(1, 2)	(1, 2)	(1, 2)
metal	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	(1, 2)

**Table 1** chronological distribution of materials used for textual amulets in ancient Egypt. Key to the table: Middle Kingdom = Dynasties 11–14 (2040–1656 BCE); New Kingdom = Dynasties 18–20 (1548–1086 BCE); Third Intermediate Period = Dynasties 21–24 (1086–712 BCE); Nubian Period = Dynasty 25 (712–664 BCE); Late Period = Dynasties 26–27 (664–404 BCE); Late Dynastic Period = Dynasties 28–30 (404–332 BCE); Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE); Roman Period (30 BCE–400 CE). Types of evidence: (1) = extant textual amulets, (2) = instructions in formularies

The table displays a clear pattern. First, evidence for textual amulets is not available before the New Kingdom. Second, the number of material options increased over time. The use of linen, referenced in formularies dating to the early New Kingdom, predates that of papyrus, which is attested only since the late New Kingdom, whereas metal is not attested before the Roman period. In each case, the introduction of an alternative material meant an addition to the repertoire, not a replacement of the earlier custom.

The corpus of extant textual amulets comprises artifacts of linen, papyrus, and metal. The number of preserved items is charted for material and time period in table 2. For the pharaonic period, the total number of textual amulets used for this article is 61. Nine are inscribed on linen, while as many as 52 are written on papyrus. For the Roman period, no textual amulets of linen are extant, even though linen continued being prescribed as a material suitable for textual amulets in formularies dating to this period. Papyrus was as before a common material for textual amulets: more than 20 papyrus amulets have been preserved for the period of the second to the fourth century CE. Unattested before this period, metal was now also used for textual amulets. Twelve textual amulets inscribed on metal foil are extant.<sup>20</sup>

	Middle Kingdom	New Kingdom, Dyn. 18	New Kingdom, Dyn. 19–20	Third Intermedi- ate Period	Nubian & Late Period	Late Dyn. / Ptolemaic Period	Roman Period
linen	Ø	0	3	0	5	1	0
papyrus	Ø	Ø	12	26	11	3	20+
metal	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø	12

**Table 2** number of textual amulets divided by material and time period

Date, material, and language of inscription are correlated in the corpus of extant textual amulets. Textual amulets dating to the pharaonic periods are inscribed in Egyptian in the hieratic script. They are made of linen and papyrus. Those of the Roman period are, irrespective of material, inscribed in Greek. Lamellae inscribed in Egyptian are not known to date. No textual amulets in Demotic Egyptian are extant.

## 5 THE ORIGIN OF TEXTUAL AMULETS

The oldest preserved textual amulets date to the Ramessid period (Dynasties 19–20, ca. 1300–1086 BCE; 16 items). The practice was certainly older, though. The earliest reference occurs in the Edwin Smith Papyrus, which was inscribed around the transition from the Second Intermediate Period to the New Kingdom (around 1600 BCE).<sup>21</sup> Better known for the Surgical Treatise on its front side, the manuscript contains on its back side a series of recipes for protection against the dangers at the end of the year (*i3dt rnpt*, ‘plague of the year’; cols. 18–20). The fifth incantation is to be spoken over a strip of fine linen inscribed with drawings of four named gods. When the linen strip has thus been activated as an amulet, it is to be hung around the beneficiary’s neck:

<sup>20</sup> Kotansky 1988, 520–31 (#110–21); 2 items are published in Kotansky 1994, 347–60 (#59–60); also in Daniel and Maltomini 1990, #2 and Daniel and Maltomini 1992, #64.

<sup>21</sup> Edition: Breasted 1930. For the manuscript’s date, see pp. 25–29 and 593–95 and Westendorf 1999, 16.

- (3) Recitation over (images of) Sakhmet, Bastet, Osiris, and Nehebkau drawn (*zš*) with myrrh on a strip of fine linen (*sšd n pꜣkt*). To be given to a man at his throat. [pEdwin Smith 19/9–11]

Although it is not the incantation proper that is to be written on the linen strip, the resultant amulet counts as a textual amulet, because the Egyptian language does not distinguish between writing and drawing. Both actions were denoted with the verb *zš*.<sup>22</sup> The earliest reference to a *true* textual amulet, that is, an amulet inscribed with the protective incantation itself, is to be found in the London Medical Papyrus (P. BM EA 10059), dating to the late Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1350–1300 BCE), in a recipe to prevent bleeding in a woman.<sup>23</sup>

- (4) This incantation is to be recited over a strip of fine linen (*stp n ḥꜣtyw*). This incantation is to be written (*zš*) on it in its entirety. To be given to the woman <at> her rear. [pBM 10059 9/8–9 (#27)]

As mentioned above, the date of a formulary and the date of its contents are usually not identical. Most formularies comprise copies of older, edited recipes. Also in these two cases, it is highly probable that the recipes and the procedure they prescribe are older than the time when the respective manuscripts were inscribed. How much older is impossible to ascertain. There is, however, some circumstantial evidence to suggest that, although the procedure of hanging ritually charged objects around the neck is well attested in the archaeology, representational art, and formularies predating the New Kingdom, the idea of the textual amulet proper may in fact not be so much older. It is, for instance, noteworthy that these earlier formularies do not include textual amulets among the various methods they prescribe for protection and healing. Admittedly, this observation cannot be conclusive, because few formularies predating the Edwin Smith Papyrus have been preserved, while those that are extant are incomplete and, to a greater or lesser degree, fragmentary. It can therefore not be ruled out that formularies with recipes for textual amulets were already in circulation in the Middle Kingdom. Be this as it

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<sup>22</sup> Wb 3, 475.6–476.15.

<sup>23</sup> Edition: Leitz 1999. The name of King Amenhotep III (ca. 1389–1349 BCE) is mentioned in three unrelated recipes (nos. 32, 39, 49), providing a *terminus post quem* for the manuscript's date of inscription. The hieratic hand fits a late Eighteenth Dynasty date.

may, two unrelated recipes might offer substantiating evidence that the procedure did in fact not yet exist in the Middle Kingdom.

The earliest version of the well-attested spell ‘Protection of the Body’ (*mkt ḥꜣw*) is preserved on a late Middle Kingdom manuscript (Papyrus Ramesseum X; ca. 1700 BCE).<sup>24</sup> Like the Edwin Smith Papyrus (#3) and the London Medical Papyrus (#4), it prescribes making a ritually charged linen strip to protect against danger. Unlike the instructions in the former two, the strip is here not to be inscribed with the incantation or drawn with figures. In this case, the linen amulet is charged merely by means of recitation and tying two knots in it:<sup>25</sup>

- (5) Recitation over a [linen strip (*ꜣt*)] of the hem (*r*) of *iꜣꜣt*-cloth.<sup>26</sup> To make two knots. To give to a man at his left hand. It is a protection of the body against any male and female snake. [pRamesseum X 2/1–2]

In Papyrus Berlin 3027, a collection of spells for the protection of mother and child dating back to the Middle Kingdom, a strip of fine linen is likewise provided with knots as part of a procedure to cure a newborn from the *ssmy* disease.<sup>27</sup>

- (6) This incantation is to be recited while one lets the child eat the cooked mouse, or its mother; its bones are to be placed at its throat in a strip of fine linen (*stp n ḥꜣtyw*) provided with seven knots. [pBerlin 3027 8/1–3 = incantation L]

Instead of being the amulet proper, the linen strip serves here primarily as a convenient container for the curative substances, to wit, the bones of a cooked mouse. By placing those small, fragile bones into a linen strip, they are protected from breakage and can thus be hung around

<sup>24</sup> Edition of the manuscript: Gardiner 1955, 13 with plate 43. For its date, see Parkinson 2009, 149–54. Edition of the spell and its variants: Altenmüller 1979.

<sup>25</sup> For the significance of knots in Egyptian magic, see Wendrich 2006 and Eschweiler 1994, 197–203.

<sup>26</sup> For *ꜣt nt r iꜣꜣt* (‘linen strip of the hem of cloth’), see Borghouts 1971, 59 (note 66). The same material is prescribed in two recipes to prevent bleeding in a woman in the London Medical Papyrus: pBM 10059, incantations 29 and 30 (= Wreszinski 41 and 42); Leitz 1999, 69–70 and fn. 177. Given its usage there as a tampon, it follows that *ꜣt* denotes a full strip of linen rather than simply a thread (cf. Borghouts). In the second case (incantation 30), the strip has to be knotted twice, like the instructions quoted here.

<sup>27</sup> Edition: Yamazaki 2003.

the child's neck without discomfort to the child or fear that (s)he will accidentally choke on them. In this respect, the linen strip is similar in function to the linen threads, flax yarn, and animal hair that are prescribed in these early formularies so as to be spun into a cord. Such cords are then often provided with a set number of knots and used as an amuletic necklace, with or without additional object amulets, as in these two examples.

- (7) This incantation is to be recited over seven yarns of flax, spun and twisted with a spindle by a woman who has recently given birth; seven knots to be made in it; given to the child at its throat. [pRamesseum III B33–34]<sup>28</sup>
- (8) This incantation is to be recited over pellets of gold, a bead of carnelian, a seal, a crocodile, and a hand; threaded (*mnḥ*) upon a fine thread of fabric (*tpt nt nd*);<sup>29</sup> made into an amulet (*wḏs*); placed at the child's throat. [pBerlin 3027 vs. 2/6–7 = incantation P]<sup>30</sup>

The foregoing review of the various instructions suggests that the practice of wearing linen strips inscribed with drawings or a written spell as a means of personal protection developed out of an earlier practice of using linen strips simply as a bandage applied to an injury, for mummification, or, when twisted and provided with knots, as a necklace for wearing object amulets around the neck. In other words, over the course of time, the linen strip was promoted from being a convenient material for preparing medicaments and amulets to an object suitable for being the amulet itself. Unfortunately, due to our small and deficient dataset, it is not possible to determine with any precision when such linen strips began to be inscribed with protective imagery and spells. It happened most likely in the period of transition from the Middle to the New Kingdom, probably not much earlier than 1700 BCE.

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**28** Edition: Gardiner 1955, 9 with plates 7–10 and Barns 1956, 15–23; for further examples in this manuscript, see Barns 1956, 16, note to line A5.

**29** For this word, see Borghouts 1971, 57 (note 56).

**30** Cf. Janssen and Janssen 1992, 163. For further examples in this manuscript, see incantations A, O, Q, and V; Yamazaki 2003.

## 6 TEXTUAL AMULETS MADE OF LINEN

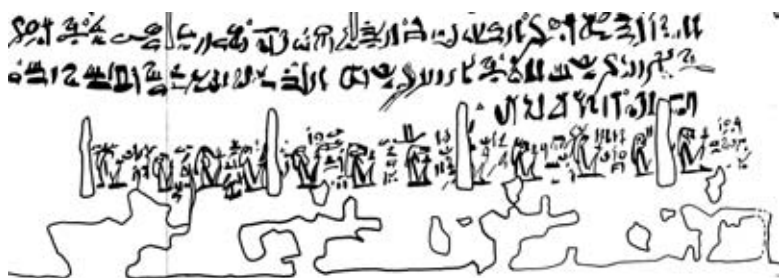
As mentioned before, the oldest extant textual amulets date to the Ramessid Period (Dynasties 19–20, ca. 1300–1086 BCE). This early group consists of twelve items inscribed on papyrus and three on linen. The relative frequency of papyrus is at odds with the instructions found in formularies of the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1086 BCE). Instead of papyrus, most New Kingdom recipes prescribe linen as the material of choice for textual amulets. In fact, it is not until the Ramessid Period that papyrus features occasionally as a suitable alternative.<sup>31</sup> This discrepancy between formularies and activated textual amulets – that is, between theory and practice – begs for an explanation. Does this mean that the current sample of textual amulets is somehow skewed and thus not representative of the procedures that Egyptian ritual specialists followed in making textual amulets in the late New Kingdom? Or is it the other way around? If our sample is representative notwithstanding, we are left to conclude that ritual specialists did not follow the instructions given in the formularies to the letter.

The sample exhibits an overt correlation between material and type of inscription. Without exception, the papyrus amulets are inscribed with an incantation (*true* textual amulets). The linen amulets, on the other hand, carry apotropaic designs only.<sup>32</sup> The presence of apotropaic imagery on the preserved linen strips agrees with the instructions in New Kingdom formularies. In the majority of cases, recipes prescribe the drawing of apotropaic designs onto the linen strip, but not the incantation itself. Such are the instructions in the Edwin Smith Papyrus (#3). Another manuscript, also dealing with personal protection for the five final days of the year, gives similar directions. It dates to the mid Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1400 BCE).

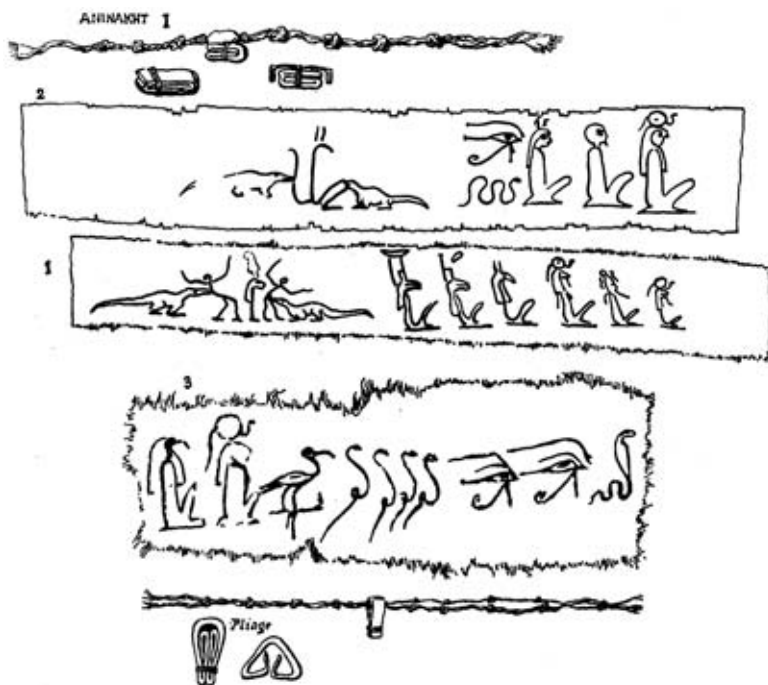
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**31** E.g.: pBudapest 51.1960 A/1; pChester Beatty VIII rto 4/7; pDeir el Medina 1 vso 5/6; pDeir el Medina 36 line 6. The gloss ‘a manuscript without writing’ in Papyrus Ebers (30/7: *mdꜣt iwtt sš=s*) is not an instruction to the reader to prepare a textual amulet, but a notification from the ancient copyist that he encountered at this spot a lacuna in the master copy; Westendorf, 569, fn. 28.

**32** Bruyère 1953, 72, fig. 17 (reproduced in Eschweiler 1994, plate 2, fig. 4); for no. 1, see section 2 above.



5 Papyrus Leiden I 346: row of seated deities invoked in incantation (bottom of col. III)



6 Three inscribed linen strips used as textual amulets from Deir el Medina, Egypt



- (9) Recitation over a strip of fine linen (*stp n pꜣkt*), these deities drawn (*šš*) on it and fitted with twelve knots. They are to be offered bread, beer, and burning incense. To be given to a man at his throat. (It is a means) to save a man [from] the plague of the year; no enemy can have power over him. [pLeiden I 346 2/3–4]<sup>33</sup>

The deities mentioned in these instructions are drawn seated and labeled by name at the end of the manuscript's third and final column (fig. 5). They are invoked in the associated incantation with the same epithets and in the same relative order. They are twelve in number, which is as many knots as are to be fitted in the linen strip. The rite is thus a beautiful example of the meaningful interplay between object, words, images, and actions.

These and similar instructions suggest that linen strips were initially used for drawings rather than running text. The earliest example of a recipe that orders one to inscribe a linen strip with the incantation proper occurs in the London Medical Papyrus, which dates to the late Eighteenth Dynasty (#4). Formularies dating to the subsequent Ramessid Period and later regularly give instructions to inscribe linen strips with running text, but the prominence of papyrus over linen in the corpus of extant textual amulets suggests that, in practice, papyrus was much preferred over linen for writing running text. It is then no coincidence that all preserved linen amulets – only eight in number – carry drawings, not running text.

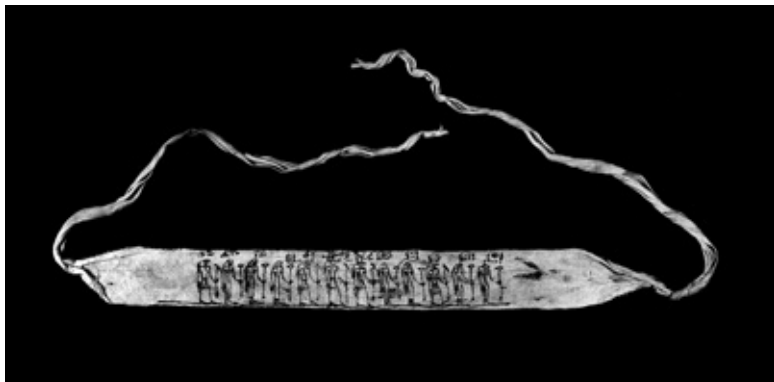
For the Ramessid period, I know of three linen specimens from Deir el-Medina (fig. 6).<sup>34</sup> They are inscribed with an assortment of seated deities, udjat Eyes, cobras, and crocodiles. One of them is the linen amulet discussed at the beginning of this article.<sup>35</sup> In this particular case, the ritual specialist made a conscious decision to reserve the papyrus sheet for inscribing the incantation and to use the linen strip for drawing apotropaic imagery. Even if the preserved formularies do not give such instructions, his method may well have been common procedure. This would explain why no linen amulets with running text are extant.

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**33** Publication: Bommas 1999; cf. Leitz 2002. For similar instructions to prepare linen amulets for the five final days of the year, see pCairo JE 86637 vo. 16/3–4 and 11/5–7; Leitz 1994, 416–27 (the manuscript dates also to the Ramessid period).

**34** Bruyère 1953, 72, fig. 17 (reproduced in Eschweiler 1994, plate 2, fig. 4).

**35** This is no. 1; see section 2 above.



7 Linen strip Leiden inv. 134a, inscribed with a file of twelve standing deities

Five linen amulets date to the Late Period (664–525 BCE). They are in fact an assemblage of five similar amuletic linen strips once worn by one individual for protection during the five final days of the year.<sup>36</sup> All five carry drawings of deities, but no running text. One of them (linen strip Leiden inv. 134a) features twelve standing deities, each one labeled by name (fig. 7). They happen to be identical, except for one, to those mentioned in the New Kingdom formulary discussed above (#9; fig. 5). As the deities are depicted standing rather than seated, the amulet assemblage dates, however, to the Late Period rather than the New Kingdom.<sup>37</sup> One linen amulet may be dated after the Late Period on the basis of the paleography of the hieratic hand.<sup>38</sup> Like the previous amulets it is inscribed with apotropaic drawings. These linen amulets thus demonstrates that – *one* – some formularies continued to be copied and consulted for centuries; *two*, that linen strips continued to be used as textual amulets after papyrus appears to have become the standard in actual practice; and *three*, that linen continued to be reserved for drawings at a time when the *true* textual amulet (on papyrus) appears to have become the norm.

Taken together, these observations lead me to suggest the following line of development for textual amulets in ancient Egypt. Initially, linen was used for two practical purposes only: *one*, as a bandage to apply to

<sup>36</sup> Raven 1997.

<sup>37</sup> Raven 1997, 285.

<sup>38</sup> Leiden I 356: Leemans 1853–62, , plate 170; Raven 2012, 54–55, fig. 36.

wounds and for mummification; and *two*, when twisted and provided with knots, as a necklace to wear object amulets around the neck. Due to their association with these object amulets, such linen necklaces came to be regarded as more than just a necklace. They became an intrinsic part of the amuletic apparatus. As a consequence, ritual specialists started to inscribe them with apotropaic imagery as a means of enhancing their amuletic efficacy. The logical next step was to include running text, that is, the incantation, with the drawn images. Although such instructions occur in formularies, the corpus of extant textual amulets suggests that this was never very popular. The reluctance to inscribe linen strips with running text may well have a very practical reason. Linen offers after all a rather rough writing surface. To produce a legible text, papyrus is more suitable. It is therefore my contention that, at this stage, papyrus was introduced as a preferred material for textual amulets. Once introduced, papyrus quickly replaced linen as the material of choice in actual practice.

If this line of development is correct, it remains to be explained why linen remained prescribed as the material of choice in formularies. It is useful at this point to reference the concepts of ‘institutional habitus’ and ‘individual agency.’ In my view, the formularies are a manifestation of the former, whereas the extant amulets are an expression of the latter. In other words, they are the product of two different (yet related) domains of social practice and two distinct modes of production. The production of formularies was governed by scribal conventions coupled with reverence for received texts, their authors, and idioms. By nature, this type of text production is conservative. On the other hand, the production of activated amulets was governed by the ever-shifting forces of the marketplace. Such a mode of production is quick to respond to new demands from clients and to adapt to technological and procedural innovations. Cost and availability determine to a large degree how the product is manufactured. If an alternative ingredient, material, or procedure proves to be more efficient, more readily available, or cheaper, it will supersede the conventional one. The shift from linen to papyrus in the production of textual amulets is a case in point. In actual practice, papyrus became the preferred material for textual amulets over linen in the Ramessid period. Nonetheless, formularies continued prescribing linen, because copyists were reluctant to change the wording of the received text.

## 7 TEXTUAL AMULETS MADE OF PAPYRUS

The majority of extant textual amulets are made of papyrus (see table 2). This material is also prescribed in formularies, albeit less often than linen. In those cases, the recipe calls for a papyrus sheet that is new (*dm<sup>c</sup> n mꜣw/mꜣj*) and blank (*šw*), thus proscribing palimpsests:

- (10) Recitation over this image, which is (given here) in drawing (*sš*), drawn (*sš*) on a new sheet of papyrus (*dm<sup>c</sup> n mꜣw*). To be placed at the throat of a man. It is a means to save him from a male dead, a female dead, a male opponent, a female opponent, etcetera, the sow(?), the vixen(?), the devourer of the West, from everything bad and evil. [pBrooklyn 47.218.156 5/7–8]<sup>39</sup>
- (11) Recitation over an image of Ptah, a figure of Isis, and a figure of Serqet, drawn (*sš*) on a new, blank sheet of papyrus (*šw n mꜣw*). To be placed at the throat of the man who suffers from the bite of a *henep*-snake. [pBrooklyn 47.218.48+85 5/8 = §79c]<sup>40</sup>

At present, the corpus of extant papyrus amulets numbers 52 items (see appendix). A few are dated by archaeological context and one by prosopography.<sup>41</sup> Most, however, are datable by paleography alone. They range in date from the Ramessid period (Dynasties 19–20, ca. 1300–1086 BCE) to the early Ptolemaic period (fourth-third century BCE). This larger number and their fairly even chronological distribution allow for tracing developments through time in the creation and handling of textual amulets made of papyrus. To track and describe these changes, I have identified eight variables, all of which are concerned with the material features of the artifacts:

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**39** Publication: Sauneron 1970b. Date: although ascribed to fourth–third c. BCE by the first editor, I prefer sixth c. BCE following Ursula Verhoeven’s redating of the Saite Snake Book (next footnote), which forms part of the same assemblage of manuscripts; Verhoeven 2001, 304–7.

**40** Publication: Sauneron 1989. Date: sixth c. BCE (second half of Dynasty 26); Verhoeven 2001, 304–7.

**41** The textual amulet dated by prosopography is pLeiden I 358. It is inscribed for the high priest of Amun, Harmakhis, son of King Shabaqo (r. 722/21–706 BCE), whose tenure was from 704–660 BCE. Klasens 1975, 22.

1. Dimensions of manuscript (height x width)
2. Ratio of height to width
3. Number of sheets (single or multiple)
4. Layout of fibers on writing surface (Vertical/Horizontal or H/V)
5. Layout of text (number of lines and columns, width of column)
6. Posture of drawn deities (seated or standing)
7. Method of packaging (folded into packet or narrow roll)
8. Method of suspension (hanging vertically or horizontally from neck)

These variables are to a large degree correlated.<sup>42</sup> Taking variable 2 as the guiding principle, it is possible to identify four distinct types or formats that correspond with four distinct, successive periods as shown in table 3. Because most items are without secure provenance, it is not possible to identify regional variation within and across time periods.

type	format	ratio h:w	period	number
I	broad	0.40 – 0.68	New Kingdom, Dyn. 19–20	13
II	tall	2.04 – 3,8	Third Interme- diate Period	26
III	broad and short, single column	0.1 – 0.33	Nubian and Late Period	10
IV	extra broad and short, multiple columns	0.04 – 0.06	Late Dynastic/ Ptolemaic	3

**Table 3** typology of textual amulets made of papyrus dating to the pharaonic period

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<sup>42</sup> Honesty compels me to admit that so far I have studied the amulets with published photographs only. I have not yet had the opportunity to examine the artifacts in person. This means that I do not yet have reliable data regarding variables 3 and 4. Likewise, in multiple cases, variable 7 cannot be determined from examination of a photo only. I hope to collect these data in the near future. The data presented here are thus preliminary.

Type I amulets date to the Ramessid period (Dynasties 19–20, ca. 1300–1086 BCE). All items are relatively small, consisting of one custom-cut papyrus sheet only. With a height-to-width ratio between 0.40 and 0.68, they display a broad format.<sup>43</sup> The text runs parallel with the sheet's long side (width), completely filling the available writing surface with at least six lines. When drawings of deities are included, they are depicted seated. After the papyrus sheet was inscribed, it was folded several times, first horizontally and then vertically into either a small squarish packet or a short, rectangular strip bent across the middle of its long side.<sup>44</sup> It was then tied with a string and worn on a cord or necklace around the neck. With the latter folding method, the amulet suspended vertically from the neck. This mode of production is also common among textual amulets inscribed for the dead (see section 3 above), some of which date to as late as the second century CE. Evidently, scribes continued using the method after the Ramessid Period.

Type II amulets date to the early Third Intermediate Period (Dynasties 21–24; 1086–712 BCE). They include the well-known corpus of the Oracular Amuletic Decrees.<sup>45</sup> Their format is tall, with a height-to-width ratio of 2.04 to 3.8. In the case of the Oracular Amuletic Decrees, the amulet can be made up of multiple narrow papyrus sheets and measure more than one meter in length. The writing runs parallel with the sheet's short side (width), in most cases filling the available writing surface from top to bottom. Deities are drawn seated. The amulets were either folded into a small packet like type I or rolled horizontally, that is, perpendicular to the writing direction, into a scroll. In the latter case, thanks to the sheet's narrow width, the amulet could then be worn in an amulet tube. As amulet tubes have the suspension loop at their upper cap, it follows that in such cases the amulet was worn suspending vertically from the neck.<sup>46</sup>

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**43** Papyri Deir el Medina 44 and Louvre E 32315 represent outliers with ratios of 1.05 and 2.08 respectively. They serve as reminders that the typology adopted here is a heuristic device and cannot capture the phenomenon's full complexity.

**44** pDeir el Medina 36 is a good example of a textual amulet folded into a squarish packet; see section 2 above. For other examples, see Bruyère 1953, 72, fig. 17 (reproduced in Eschweiler 1994, plate 2, fig. 4); the items are unnumbered and thus not identifiable. For textual amulets folded into a vertical strip, see pLeiden I 353 and I 354; Leemans 1853–62, plate 169.

**45** Edwards 1960; Bohleke 1997; Wilfong 2013.

Type III amulets date to the late Third Intermediate Period (Dynasty 25; 712–664 BCE) and the Late Period (Dynasties 26–27; 664–404 BCE). Their height-to-width ratio ranges from 0.1 to 0.33, thus displaying a format that is both broad and short. The text is written parallel to the sheet's long side (width). Due to the sheet's short height, the number of lines does not exceed five. When drawings are included, deities are depicted standing. Like the Oracular Amuletic Decrees (type II) they were folded into a roll, but vertically, that is, parallel to the writing direction, rather than horizontally. Like type II, they were worn as short rolls suspending vertically from the neck.<sup>47</sup>

Type IV amulets date to the Late Dynastic period (Dynasties 28–30; 404–332 BCE) or the early Ptolemaic period (late fourth–third century BCE). They are short in height like type III, but substantially longer in width, consisting of multiple sheets of papyrus. Their height-to-width ratio is as reduced as 0.04–0.06. Unlike any of the previous types, the text is laid out in multiple columns, running parallel with the manuscript's long side (width). Deities are drawn standing up, thus continuing the shift in posture introduced with type III. Like types II and III, the amulets were worn rolled vertically.

It is obvious that this rudimentary typology requires refinement. For the moment, however, it deserves consideration. First, it offers us a set of correlated dating criteria for an object category whose individual members are mostly without precise archaeological context and thus difficult to date other than by the unreliable method of paleography. Second, it may well provide unexpected insight into the institutional location of the amulets' production and usage. For example, it is noteworthy that type I amulets resemble letters in their format and folding, whereas types II, III and IV were rather conceived of and treated as book rolls.<sup>48</sup> This may suggest that the textual amulets of the Ramessid period are the product

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**46** A certain Shaq wore three such amulet containers of gold: Ray 1972 and Bourriau and Ray 1975. The Museum of Antiquities in Leiden has a wooden specimen: Klasens 1975, 23–24 and plate VII, no. 2. For a drawing of another wooden amulet container, see Edwards 1960, xix.

**47** Two specimens were drawn and described before being unrolled: pLeiden I 358 and Bibliothèque Nationale 178. For the former, see Leemans 1853–62, plate 170. For the latter, see Vercoutter 1945, plate 29, figs. IIa and IIb (same object).

**48** For the scribal methods in letter writing in Ramessid Egypt, see Černý 1939, xix and Bakir 1970, 24–28.

of scribes accustomed to drafting and dispatching letters, whereas the later ones were produced by scribes perhaps more familiar with handling scrolls in the temple and its associated library.<sup>49</sup> This shift in professional abilities could indicate that, after the New Kingdom, the production of textual amulets was no longer a side-job of lowly administrators, but had been co-opted by cultic personnel. For the moment, this must remain a hypothesis.

## 8 TEXTUAL AMULETS IN ROMAN EGYPT

The use of textual amulets continued in Egypt after the pharaonic period. As tables 1 and 2 demonstrate, the evidence for their use is plentiful and varied for the Roman period. In fact, it is only for this period that the full range of the four types of evidence defined above is available. Compared to the pharaonic period, more amulet tubes are extant. Moreover, the extensive corpus of mummy portraits provides striking visual evidence for the practice in this period, a type of evidence altogether lacking for the earlier periods. As before, ritual specialists produced textual amulets for general protection and healing, while their clients continued wearing them on their body, usually on a string around the neck.

Despite obvious similarities between the pharaonic and Roman-period materials, there are three essential differences between the two corpora. First, all extant Roman-period textual amulets are inscribed in Greek. Even if contemporary Egyptian formularies (the so-called ‘Demotic Magical Papyri’ of the late second–third century CE) include recipes for preparing textual amulets, no such items inscribed with a spell in Demotic Egyptian are attested. Second, in addition to linen and papyrus, gold and silver foil were now also considered suitable materials for textual amulets. It remains unclear when and where this innovation in material and technology was introduced. The earliest evidence for their use in textual amulets worn in life does not come from Egypt, but

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**49** In his study of the Oracular Amuletic Decrees (type II), Edwards points out that these amulets are usually written perpendicular to the fibers of the writing surface. This agrees with common practice in letter writing in the New Kingdom: Edwards 1960, xii; Černý 1939, xvii–xx; Bakir 1970, 19–21. This means that the Oracular Amuletic Decrees were still written as letters, even if they were otherwise treated as book rolls. Possibly they represent thus a transitional phase.



from seventh/sixth century BCE Israel (Ketef Hinnom) and from various sixth/fifth century BCE Phoenician sites across the Mediterranean.<sup>50</sup> In contemporaneous Egypt, gold foil was now also used for amulets, but for funerary purposes only.<sup>51</sup> As these funerary amulets are very different in design, handling, and context, they are unrelated to the development of the type of textual amulet discussed in the present article. Lastly, the mummy portraits and extant amulet tubes document that textual amulets were now worn suspending horizontally from the neck, rather than vertically as had always been the norm in the pharaonic periods (see previous section). The horizontal alignment of amulet tubes can be observed already much earlier at sites as wide apart as Meroe (seventh c. BCE), Cyprus (late Archaic to mid-Hellenistic periods), the Black Sea region (fourth/third c. BCE), and Attica (fourth c. BCE).<sup>52</sup>

These three differences demonstrate that we cannot assume direct, linear continuity between the pharaonic and Roman-period textual amulets. To complicate matters further, there is a significant time gap between the two corpora. The youngest pharaonic specimens date by paleography to the early Ptolemaic period (fourth–third century BCE), whereas the earliest Roman-period textual amulets date, again by paleography, to the second century CE. This represents a gap of at least three centuries. Therefore, it is far from clear how the manufacture and use of textual amulets developed in Egypt in the intervening centuries. Before the two corpora can be fruitfully compared, the corpus of Roman-period textual amulets must be studied first in its own right and in its international context – a daunting task which will not be undertaken here.

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**50** For the two silver Ketef Hinnom amulets, see Barkay et al. 2004. Information on the corpus of Phoenician metal foil amulets is concisely presented in Ben Guiza 2005.

**51** The object group awaits an integral study; for now, see Stünkel 2013.

**52** In general, see Schienerl 1980, 12–13, Idem 1984, 49–53 and Kotansky 1988, 21–43. Meroe: Dunham 1963, 61, 64 (two amulet cases from the western cemetery). Cyprus: Beer 1993, 18–32 (temple-boys sculptures). Attica: Ziva 2009 (pyxis decorated with amulets).

## 9 CONCLUSIONS

Textual amulets knew a long history in ancient Egypt. Evidence for their use is attested as early as the beginning of the New Kingdom, about the sixteenth century BCE. When the practice started is impossible to say, but likely it originated from the common use of linen bandages in mummification and the treatment of injuries, and from the use of linen necklaces for wearing object amulets around the neck. To enhance the linen's amuletic power, ritual specialists started at some point in time drawing apotropaic imagery on the strip before applying it to the beneficiary. Once they started also including a copy of the incantation, they quickly made the shift to papyrus as a more suitable writing medium. The origin of the use of metal foil for textual amulets remains to be further explored, but it is a fact that it had become an alternative to papyrus in the Roman period.

These shifts in choice of material together with the changes in formatting and handling that can be observed in the corpus of extant papyrus amulets, offer us an opportunity to study the mechanisms and institutional locations of the production of textual amulets in ancient Egypt. Ritual specialists did obviously not follow the instructions in the formularies to the letter. Whereas recipes usually prescribe linen, most preserved artifacts are in actuality of papyrus. In my view, this deviation points to a tension between institutional habitus and individual agency, a phenomenon which deserves further inquiry. Likewise, the succession of distinctive types of papyrus amulets could well be related to shifts in the social and professional location of their production. More detailed examination of the preserved specimens will hopefully yield further information and thus corroborate or dismiss the suggestions offered in the present article.

APPENDIX: CORPUS OF EGYPTIAN TEXTUAL AMULETS MADE OF PAPYRUS<sup>53</sup>**Group I** New Kingdom, Ramessid Period (Dynasties 19–20)

Total number: 12

	dimensions (h/w)	ratio (h:w)
pLouvre E 32311 <sup>54</sup>	8.1 × 20.5	0.40
pLouvre E 32310 <sup>55</sup>	9.9 × 20.8	0.48
pDeir el Medina 40 <sup>56</sup>	10.5 × 20	0.53
pLeiden I 353 <sup>57</sup>	11 × 21	0.53
pLeiden I 354 <sup>58</sup>	11.5 × 21	0.55
pDeir el Medina 36 <sup>59</sup>	11.8 × 21	0.56
pLouvre E 32313 <sup>60</sup>	8.5 × 15	0.57
pBritish Museum 10731 <sup>61</sup>	19 × 33	0.58
pLouvre E 32308 <sup>62</sup>	14.6 × 21.6	0.68
pDeir el Medina 44 <sup>63</sup>	22.5 × 21.5	1.05
pLouvre E 32315 <sup>64</sup>	20.2 × 9.7	2.08
pLeiden I 355 <sup>65</sup>	<i>fragments</i>	x

**53** List of sources as of August 2013. Textual amulets that came to my attention after this date have not been included.

**54** Étienne 2000, 108, #158. Original cord with seven knots preserved: Étienne 2000, 106, #115.

**55** Étienne 2000, 108, #160; Andreu and Barbotin 2002, 135, #78a. Original cord with seven knots preserved: Étienne 2000, 106, #115.

**56** Koenig 1981.

**57** Leemans 1853–62, plate 169.

**58** Leemans 1853–62, plate 169.

**59** Sauneron 1970a.

**60** Étienne 2000, 106, #114; Andreu and Barbotin 2002, 135, #78b. Original cord with seven knots preserved: Étienne 2000, 106, #115.

**61** Edwards 1968.

**62** Koenig 2004; Étienne 2000, 59 and 108, #159; Andreu and Barbotin 2002, 132, #72. Original cord with seven knots preserved: Étienne 2000, 106, #115.

**Group II** Third Intermediate Period (Dynasties 21–24)

Total number: 26

	dimensions (h/w)	ratio (h:w)
pBerlin 15749 <sup>66</sup>	21.8 × 10.7	2.04
pLouvre E 3237 <sup>67</sup>	19.7 × 6.1	3.23
pLouvre E 3239 <sup>68</sup>	19 × 5	3.8
pLouvre E 8083 (OAD P2) <sup>69</sup>	46 × 8.2 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>5.61
pLouvre E 3234 (OAD P1)	32.5 × 5.5	5.91
pCleveland 14.723 (OAD)	18.5 × 3	6.17
pBN 182 (OAD P4)	35 × 5.2	6.73
pMichaelides (OAD C2)	47 × 6.3	7.46
pBM 10320 (OAD L4)	41.5 × 5.5 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>7.55
pBM 10321 (OAD L5)	50 × 5.5 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>9.09
pBN 238-3 (OAD P5)	44.5 × 4.3	10.3
pBM 10083 (OAD L1)	65 × 6 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>10.8
pBM 10251 (OAD L2)	92 × 7.5 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>12.3
pMMA 10.53 (OAD NY)	91.5 × 6.1	15
pChicago OI (OAD Ch)	98 × 6.5	15.1
pTurin 1984 (OAD T2)	104.5 × 6.5	16.1
pBM 10308 (OAD L3)	93 × 5.75 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>16.2
pLouvre E 25354 (OAD P3)	102.5 × 6 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>17.1
pTurin 1983 (OAD T1)	112 × 6.5	17.2
pBM 10587 (OAD L6)	113 × 6.5 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>17.4
pBM 10730 (OAD L7)	147 × 8 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>18.4
pTurin 1985 (OAD T3)	107 × 5.5	19.5
pCairo CG 58035 (OAD C1)	122 × 6	20.3
pBerlin 10462 (OAD B)	109.5 × 4.5 ( <i>incomplete</i> )	>24.3
pU-Penn Museum E 10462 (OAD Ph)	<i>fragments</i>	x
pTheban Tomb 11 (Djehuty) <sup>70</sup>	<i>no information</i>	x

**Group III** Nubian and Late Period (Dynasties 25–27)

Total number: 11

	dimensions (h/w)	ratio (h:w)
pLouvre N 3233 A-B <sup>71</sup>	5 × 49,5	0.1
pLeiden I 358 <sup>72</sup>	3.4 × 24.5	0.14
pBibliothèque Nationale 178 <sup>73</sup>	3 × 16	0.19
pDeir el Medina 37 <sup>74</sup>	5 × 25	0.2
pRylands 50 <sup>75</sup>	5 × 24.13	0.21
pDeir el Medina 38 <sup>76</sup>	5.5 × 19.5 <sup>77</sup>	0.22
pLeiden I 359 <sup>78</sup>	4 × 15.5	0.26
pBerlin P. 23032 <sup>79</sup>	6.5 × 23	0.28
pBerlin P. 23031 <sup>80</sup>	6 × 18	0.33
pBerlin P. 23051 <sup>81</sup>	2.5 × 10 ( <i>fragment</i> )	x
pBerlin P. 10101 a-b <sup>82</sup>	6.5 × 28 & 7 × 32 ( <i>fragment</i> )	x

**63** Koenig 1999.

**64** Étienne, *Heka*, 106 #113. Original cord with seven knots preserved: Étienne 2000, 106, #115.

**65** Leemans 1853–62, plate 169.

**66** Luft 1974.

**67** Chassinat 1893; Barbotin 2005, 116–117.

**68** Chassinat 1893; Barbotin 2005, 118–119.

**69** Edwards 1960. The following papyri labeled OAD are also published in Edwards 1960.

**70** The amulet was found under rubble in the courtyard of Theban Tomb 11 (Djehuty) in 2005. According to the excavator, it dates to Dynasty 21. It remains unpublished. <[http://www.excavacionegipto.com/campana/campana05\\_ing.jsp.htm](http://www.excavacionegipto.com/campana/campana05_ing.jsp.htm)> and <[http://www.excavacionegipto.com/campana/campana06\\_ing.jsp.htm](http://www.excavacionegipto.com/campana/campana06_ing.jsp.htm)>

**71** Goyon 1977; Étienne 2000, 54, #130.

**72** Klasens 1975.

**73** Vercoutter 1945, plate 29, nos. IIa and IIb; <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8304604s/f1.item>>.

**74** Koenig 1979.

**75** Fischer-Elfert 1995.

**76** Koenig 1979.

**77** About 5 cms missing at right end.

**Group IV** Late Dynastic Period (Dynasties 28–30) to early Ptolemaic Period  
Total number: 3

	dimensions (h/w)	ratio (h:w)
pBibliothèque Nationale 177 <sup>83</sup>	3.5 × 98.5	0.04
pCologne 3547 <sup>84</sup>	6 × 95	0.06
pMunich 5882 <sup>85</sup>	6.5 × 120	0.05

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PHOTO CREDITS

**Fig. 1** From: Sauneron 1970a, p. 8, fig. 1

**Fig. 2** From: Sauneron 1970a, plate 1

**Fig. 3** From: Sauneron 1970a, p.10, fig. 2

**Fig. 4** From: Bruyère 1953, p. 72, fig. 17

**Fig. 5** From: Bommas 1999

**Fig. 6** From: Bruyère 1953, p. 72, fig. 17

**Fig. 7** © Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden

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**78** Leemans 1853–62, plate 170. Burkard 2006.

**79** Burkard 2006.

**80** Burkard 2006.

**81** Kaplony-Heckel 1986, #100.

**82** <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8304603c/f1.zoom.r=phylact%C3%A8re%20.langFR>>.

**83** Kurth 1980.

**84** Burkard and Fischer-Elfert 1994, 166–67, #253.

**85** Kaplony-Heckel 1986, #100.

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LAURA FELDT

## **MONSTROUS FIGURINES FROM MESOPOTAMIA.**

# Textuality, Spatiality and Materiality in Rituals and Incantations for the Protection of Houses in First-Millennium Aššur

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The recent turn towards materiality and visual culture in the comparative study of religion (Meyer et al. 2009; Morgan 2010, 2012; Meyer 2012) has emphasized how attributing reality and presence to deities and other transempirical beings in the world's religions depends fundamentally on material forms of mediation.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, ritual practice and the use of materiality are some of the most important preconditions for the representation of superhuman beings as active agents. Therefore, studies of the materiality of magic as called for by Jan N. Bremmer in the Preface of this volume are both timely and important in the contemporary study of religion. In this paper, I present an analysis of a magical practice involving the production of a set of monster figurines for the protection of houses against intruding evil from first millennium Mesopotamia. Placing the practices with these figurines in the broader context of magic and of religious image use in ancient Mesopotamia, I focus on how the materiality of these miniature monster figurines achieves magical efficacy in the context of the ritual, arguing that they are produced and installed as media for the presence of benign supernatural beings in the house.

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**1** Many thanks to Jan N. Bremmer for his helpful and meticulous editing.

Understanding materiality, and human sensual interaction with it, as intrinsic to magic and religion (Meyer 2008; Meyer et al. 2010; Meyer 2012; Morgan 2012), does not only entail an empirical focus on material culture, but has broader implications for the practice of the history of religions. The ‘material turn’ contrasts with an earlier implicit understanding of religion and materiality as belonging to two opposed registers, spirit and matter, and to a (largely abandoned) problematic emphasis on religion as a question of inner belief, and so it has the potential to affect our research foci in illuminating ways. In ancient Mesopotamia, practices with material images and religious things, from the temple-cult to monuments, reliefs, cylinder seals, and amulets, are much more ubiquitous and far-reaching in terms of audiences and reception than the religious *texts*, often written for an elite academic audience.<sup>2</sup> The focus on materiality may also serve as a welcome reminder to take seriously the material sides of religion in ancient Mesopotamia.<sup>3</sup> But before I turn to the sources, let me first say a few words about the use of the term ‘magic’ in this essay.

## 2 MAGIC AS A PERSPECTIVE

Magic is one of the most contested and difficult terms in the academic study of religion. This situation has led some scholars to conclude that the concept of magic should be abandoned, because it is seen as irrevocably tied to an ethnocentric division between ‘religion’ as a truer, higher, and more profound activity, and ‘magic’ as a false, lower, and more superficial practice aimed at manipulating the world. Yet, to my mind it would be both impractical and unproductive to ban the word ‘magic’ from academic use or scrutiny today. An obvious reason is its use as a polemical concept in discourses of religious identity formation both today and in the ancient world (Stratton 2007), as well as in popular cul-

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**2** It should be noted, though, that texts are of course also material culture, that texts are also ‘media’.

**3** In all likelihood influenced by the polemics of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isa 44), the unhelpful split between ‘spirit’ and ‘matter’ is also visible in former work on the history of Mesopotamian religions (e.g., Oppenheim’s famous sceptical position in the essay ‘Why a ‘Mesopotamian Religion’ Should Not Be Written’ (1977).

ture and new religious movements,<sup>4</sup> and for that reason alone the (discursive) use of magic in differing historical situations remains an important field of research for the academic study of religion. Investigations of the cognitive underpinnings of magical rituals further show the general, theoretical relevance and usefulness of the concept (Sørensen 2007). More classical history of religions investigations of magic demonstrate the analytical value of the term ‘magic’, also in contexts not deemed ‘magical’ by the religious participants (Bohak 2008). While ‘magic’ and ‘religion’ – like many other broad concepts – are difficult to define, they may still be useful analytically, if used critically and strategically and if relevant traits, structures and relations at a lower level are specified.

In a Mesopotamian context, we do not find a distinct concept of ‘magic’ in the discursive sense – magic as opposed to ‘religion’<sup>5</sup> – or an emic contrast between magic and normative religious practice; we do not see magic used as a polemical concept in religious self-identification discourses. And yet, it does not make sense to get rid of the concept of magic, as it seems to cover an obvious area of religious activity in Mesopotamia. In ancient Mesopotamia, ‘magic’ is legitimate, practiced by learned experts, and part of ‘official religion’. Therefore, we must focus on other aspects. Here, I will view ‘magic’ as a quality or mode of ritualizing that focuses on the production or use of ‘charismatic’ materiality for pragmatic ends,<sup>6</sup> which may in some contexts (but not the Mesopotamian) involve an emphasis on marginalized social location.<sup>7</sup> The term

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4 E.g., when new religious groups today self-identify as ‘magical’ and ‘spiritual’, but not as ‘religious’ (e.g., modern female witches).

5 See Bremmer 2002b (updated 2008, 347–52) for a critique of the use of ‘religion’ as a contrast to magic.

6 By ‘charismatic’ I refer to the ‘fantastic’ (Feldt 2012 for ‘literary’ versions), ‘miraculous’, ‘metamorphosis’-like qualities ascribed to materiality in magical rituals which we see both in late medieval host veneration and theology (Bynum 2012) as well as in Mesopotamian statue worship (Dick and Walker 2001). The phrase ‘charismatic materiality’ is inspired by ideas in David Frankfurter’s talk at the 2012 American Academy of Religions meeting in Chicago; somewhat similar ideas with regard to priestly ritual authority can be found in Frankfurter 2006.

7 I recognize that this is often the case, and this is the trait most often used by scholars who believe in the use of the term magic. Yet, I think that the Mesopotamian material with its absence of a polemical idea of magic may act as an incentive to think about types of ritualising that are more ‘magical’ than others – but not necessarily better or worse than other types

magic may, in this way, be used to call attention to certain types of ritualizing, or segments of larger rituals, that we would not otherwise single out for detailed analysis, and it allows us to chart a continuum. I thus focus on ritualizing that places heightened emphasis on a charismatic, category-transgressive, or ‘fantastic’ materiality used for practical purposes.<sup>8</sup> Practical ends, as understood here, would involve areas such as an individual’s health, well-being, wealth, feelings, or potency or the like, emphasizing the production of, or use of, a form of materiality (objects, figurines, bodies) ascribed a ‘material charisma’ or ‘fantastic’ efficacy.

This understanding of magic enables us to identify and analyse magical types of ritual, or magical segments of larger rituals, within the wider corpus of Mesopotamian religious sources.<sup>9</sup> My understanding of magic is thus strategic and mode-based,<sup>10</sup> which entails that rituals or rites may be more or less ‘magical’ along a continuum. My point of departure is an identification of the rituals for the protection of houses

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of religious ritual – for all religion fundamentally involves a magical base (Sørensen 2007, 191). With the focus on ‘ritualizing’ I also intend to suggest a distinction between magical rituals and *narratives about* magic, which are a different matter (see here Feldt 2011, Feldt 2012). The distinction is important to make, because narratives about magic often speak more about a culture’s fantasies about, or caricatures of, religious outsiders than about the practices and attitudes of those ‘outsiders’. As for religious practices deemed illegitimate in Mesopotamia, even the anti-witchcraft incantations and rituals known as *Maqlû* (‘Burning’) do not seem to construe the religious *practices* of the witches and sorcerers as illegitimate.

**8** For an argument in favour of ‘the fantastic’ as a term in the history of religions, see Feldt 2012, ch.1–3 and 7.

**9** It may perhaps also be helpful for other cultural contexts in which there is no culturally specific discursive distinction between types of religious practices along the lines of ‘religion’ versus ‘magic’.

**10** It may be likened to Catharine Bell’s modebased view of ritual, ‘ritualizing’ (Bell 1997, 138–170), and to my own view of the fantastic in religious discourses (Feldt 2012) – it may be present to greater or smaller extent, it may be a small part of a larger ritual, etc. Magic is a part of religion. This is thus not a ‘definition’ and ‘categorization’ of magic in an essentialist way, but a strategic perspective enabling a particular focus. This perspective relieves us from the – to my mind – unhelpful talk of a ‘magical’ worldview. As research in ‘lived religion’ (McGuire 2008) shows, religious people adapt to different situations – and use whatever strategies might work – we need not assume a magical ‘worldview’ in order for someone to use magic, cf. Jesper Sørensen’s cognitive study of magic (2007).



in Mesopotamia as ‘magical’; as I hope to show, they involve the production of a charismatic or ritually efficacious materiality used for pragmatic ends. Before turning to the analysis, let me briefly place the rituals and material practices in the general context of Mesopotamian magic.

### 3 MAGIC IN MESOPOTAMIA

As mentioned, a distinction between illegitimate and legitimate ‘magic’ is not of much relevance in the study of religion in ancient Mesopotamia. Specialized, official ‘priests’ such as the *asû* (‘healer’) or the *āšipu* (‘exorcist’, ‘magician’) performed the rituals we would see as magical (Scurlock 2000), and many of them were performed for the king. These ritual specialists engaged in diverse functions – from performing the daily ritual of feeding and caring for the divine statue in a specific temple, working as a ‘scholar’ or ‘physician’, meticulously copying and editing the text of a prayer to a deity or trying to find the correct prescription for a sick person, or engaging in a ritual to avert evil exerted by a witch from a person, involving the burning of small figurines (Oppenheim 1977).

Contrary to common-sense understandings of magic, in Mesopotamian sources, the effect of the words of the magician is not seen as ‘automatic’, and it depends at least in part on the will and inclination of deities, just as it depends on particular types of ritually prepared objects (Bottéro 1987–1990, Thomsen 1992; Farber 1995; Abusch and van der Toorn 2000). In the rituals, incantations and prayers are often addressed to deities, whose action is not mechanically the outcome of the ‘magician’s’ words and actions, but who are invited or implored to act in and through material media (Thomsen 1987). Prayers may also be addressed to plants and objects used in the rituals, but even a quick glance at their textual contexts demonstrates that a traditional, mechanistic view of magic is (also) insufficient and invalid in the Mesopotamian context. As mentioned, magic as religious practice which is considered ‘illegitimate’ is difficult to locate in ancient Mesopotamia (Farber 1995). Ritual practices involving the production of charismatic materials to be used for practical purposes were an entirely natural and legitimate part of ‘religion’.

The Akkadian term for ‘incantation’ is *šiptu*, the Sumerian *én or inim-inim-ma*. These terms are used of incantation texts recited in connection with magical rituals, and they address a deity, demons, or remedies used in the ritual (Bottéro 1987–1990; Abusch and van der Toorn

2000). The purpose of the ritual action is often mentioned explicitly at the outset – for instance, to avert illnesses, nightmares, misfortune, bad omens, or snakes, to return potency, to soothe crying babies, etc. – and the incantations that invariably form part of the ritual implore deities (of varying rank) to act according to the incantations and prayers. The distinction between prayer and incantation was blurry: prayers to deities, prayers for happiness, a long life, etc., the so-called incantation-prayer, the *inim-inim-ma šu-íl-la*, the incantation with raised hand, all have purposes and goals that were commonly very concrete and practical. Often, the incantations, prayers and rituals are directed against specific opponents or adversaries, supernatural or human, demons and witches, which were thought to cause the problem at hand. However, it is important to note that incantation rituals were also used for benign purposes like ensuring fertility or the proper functioning of a ritual utensil or prop.

In Old Babylonian times (ca. 2000 to ca. 1600 BCE), the Sumerian types of incantations reached a degree of formalization in the culture of transmission, which was preserved into the first millennium (Cunningham 1997, 160–183).<sup>11</sup> Also in the Old Babylonian period, many important changes were introduced in the structure and content of the incantations. The incantations now described demons in more detail and different types of demons were enumerated, and the Sumerian texts were given Akkadian interlineary translations, so the understanding of them was preserved well after the death of Sumerian as an active, spoken language (ca. 2000 BCE).<sup>12</sup> Just like the omen collections, the incantations were now collected in great compendia, which gradually led to a sort of ‘canonization’, a normative order and sequence. Another new characteristic is the ever more abstract nature of the problem to be solved by means of the incantation ritual. Later incantations can still be addressed to demons and serpents, but they then symbolize types of evil or illness, sometimes seen as the result of some wrongdoing on part of the ‘patient’, deliberately or unwittingly (Bottéro 1987–1990; Farber 1995; Cunningham 1997).

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**11** Incantations from the third millennium are simpler, mentioning primarily scorpions, snakes and certain illnesses (Cunningham 1997, chs.2–5).

**12** The time of death of Sumerian as a spoken language is a matter of debate in Assyriology, which I will not delve further into here. For a recent discussion, see Woods 2006.

When we reach the first millennium, specific texts in the incantation ritual genre had assumed a status as ‘classics’. Some of them involved the use of miniature figurines. A special ritual series against witchcraft and sorcery, widely known in the first millennium, is the series *Maqlû* (‘Burning’). In this Akkadian, canonical magical series, illness is seen as the result of the acts of demons or of human witches. In *Maqlû*, several figurines of evil demons, *utukkû*, *šēdû*, *rābišû* etc., and of human witches are used and burned in the course of the ritual, and combined with incantations and prayers to gods for the analogous destruction of the



1 Clay bird-headed *apkallu* figurine, Neo-Assyrian. Find-spot: South-West Palace, Nimrud. Height: 11.9 centimetres. Width: 7.3 centimetres. Thickness: 2.4 centimetres. Recorded as having been found in a brick receptacle let into the floor

witch or demon. The figurines were destroyed as part of the ritual, so we have no material sources apart from the tablets. The series, consisting of eight tablets of incantations and one ritual tablet (Abusch 1974; cf. also Abusch and van der Toorn 2000), contains many fine examples of poetry and offers a good example of how magical rituals did indeed have an official and legitimate status in this period, as its transmission history and royal use bear witness to. Magic making use of figurines is also found in sexual incantation rituals (Farber 1995), and in apotropaic rituals against illnesses (Schwemer 2007). It may be found in ceremonies meant to protect persons, or the king specifically, against evil, as well as in rituals for the aversion of evil from an individual's house. It is the latter type of ritual which is my object of analysis here.

#### 4 PROTECTING A HOUSE FROM EVIL

From residences and palaces at important political and religious capitals of the Neo-Assyrian empire (858–612 BCE), including Nimrud, Aššur, Nineveh, Khorsabad and Ur in Babylonia, archaeologists have revealed numerous brick boxes containing figurines made of sun-dried clay, found buried underneath the corners, thresholds, and central spaces of room floors (Mallowan 1966; Rittig 1977; Oates and Oates 2001, 253–254).<sup>13</sup> Many of these boxes contained figurines of monsters, both human-animal hybrids as well as animal-animal hybrids.<sup>14</sup>

The deposits of monster figurines buried under the ground contained one, two or seven figurines standing in the boxes. From Aššur alone come roughly 117 clay figurines, thirty-four deposits and eight different figure types, two of which have subtypes (for catalogues, see Klengel-Brandt 1968, Rittig 1977). The general practice of floor level de-

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**13** And also some temples; Maul (2000, 64), mentions the burial of figurines at the gates of the Aššur-temple in Sankerib's time (704–681 BC). References to the production of protective figurines are also found in the Substitute King Ritual (Parpola 1993, State Archives of Assyria 10,263), and as part of the House of Detention Ritual (*bīt mēseri*) for the ritual cleansing of the king.

**14** Others were 'empty', containing some sandy material (perhaps decomposed organic matter), while some contained animal bones, remnants of grain, and pottery (references above). As documented by Rittig, some of the containers also contained miniature bronze weapons.

posits is known from the end of the second millennium onwards from Aššur and Nineveh temple entrances, but it is only from the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian period that we see this practice also at entrances to temple compounds and in the inner rooms of palaces. From the eighth century to the fall of the Neo-Assyrian empire (612 BCE), the boxes are found in public spaces such as palaces, temples, city walls and in private houses (Rittig 1977, 227–29) (fig. 1).<sup>15</sup>

Texts preserving the instructions for a ritual involving the burial of clay and wood figurines of monsters underneath the room floors in the manner described have also been preserved (Rittig 1977; Wiggermann 1992 with references to previous literature). The first twenty lines of the best preserved text name its purpose: *šēp lemutti ina bīt amēli parāsu*, ‘to block the entry of ‘evil’ (lit. ‘the foot of evil’) into a person’s house’ (K2987B+), and lists the types of evil the ritual is intended to block. The rest of the text is a guide to the ritual specialist for the fabrication of the figurines and their subsequent installation in the house. A related text, KAR 298, which is an extract of *šēp lemutti* and a related text *di’a šibṭa mūtānī* (‘to make *di’u* –disease, stroke and plague pass by’), details the making, function, character, number, and placement of these figurines underneath the floor (Wiggermann 1992). For consistency, and following the editor of the texts, F. A. M. Wiggermann, I will refer to these two texts as *Text 1* (K2987b+) and *Text 2* (KAR 298) respectively. The archaeological record is very consistent with the texts regarding the form, surface treatment, inscriptions, positions and groupings of the figurines.<sup>16</sup> The focus of this contribution is on these textual and material sources

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**15** In the late Babylonian period, the practice of burying small figurines is only attested at entrances to temples and in the Nabopalassar palace in Babylon. No attestations from private houses at this time (Rittig 1977, 229). We should also keep in mind the differences between religion in Assyria and Babylonia; in Assyria the connections between the state, the king and the religious domain were stronger and more intertwined (Farber 1995).

**16** The figurines have been published with comments and analysis by Rittig (1977) and Green (1983, 1984); the archaeological context by Andreae (1938), Preusser (1954) and Klengel-Brandt (1968). In terms of the materiality involved, the *Haus des Beschwörungspriesters* is the best-known example from neo-Assyrian Aššur, because corresponding material and textual evidence stems from this same context (Andreae 1938, Preusser 1954, Klengel-Brandt 1968, Rittig 1977). As the name indicates, this house belonged to religious experts, an *āšīpu*-family, and perhaps housed a school during Sargonid (721–705 BCE) times. Here, however, I aim to analyse the general features



2 Floor level brick boxes in Room 3 of the *Haus des Beschwörungspriesters*, Aššur

as exemplary of a type of ‘material magic’, as a type of magical rituals that involve the production of efficacious materiality – in this case: the figurines – not on text editorial, philological, or archaeological issues (fig. 2).<sup>17</sup>

Previous work has focused mainly on the important work of publishing the texts and material remains, as well as on the crucial, and difficult, identifications of the monsters by means of other sources, especially mythology (Klengel-Brandt 1958; Rittig 1977; Wiggermann 1992; Green 1993).<sup>18</sup> The question of the relations between the monsters used

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of this type of religious practice, not the placement of figurines in the *Haus des Beschwörungspriesters* specifically.

**17** My focus here is on the texts K2987B+ *šēp lemutti* and KAR 298 in combination with the material remains and information about the figurines and their archaeological context. I take these two texts in combination with the material remains as exemplary of this religious practice; it is thus not a comprehensive and detailed analysis of all the relevant material – there are many interesting aspects that I leave out of sight. For the full list of manuscripts and further texts that relate to this type of ritual practice, see Wiggermann (1992). Also, I do not delve into the details of tablets and manuscripts, but I rely on Wiggerman’s valuable edition.

in this type of religious practice, and those of mythology is indeed important. Many of the names of the monsters of Text 1 and 2 also appear in the Babylonian myth *Enūma eliš* as part of the army of Tīāmat, who is the monstrous enemy of the protagonist deity Marduk.<sup>19</sup> Some monsters are also known from the hero god Ninurta's mythology.<sup>20</sup> In several of these combat myths, but not all (Feldt 2006, 2010),<sup>21</sup> the monsters feature as inimical and dangerous beings. The dangerous and inimical character of the monsters in the myths, especially in *Enūma eliš*, has been used by several interpreters as a key for understanding the monsters of the rituals. These have accordingly been understood primarily as negative, inimical and dangerous beings – on the understanding that evil is used to repel evil (Wiggermann 1992, 151–59; Maul 2000; Nakamura 2004, 21–22).<sup>22</sup>

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**18** Nakamura (2003, 2005) offers a theory-heavy, archaeological perspective on these materials, where – notwithstanding some good observations – a closer interaction with the Mesopotamian textual sources could be an advantage.

**19** Often dubbed (somewhat misleadingly) ‘the Babylonian epic of creation’. The cuneiform text may be found in Lambert and Parker 1966. For a recent edition, see Kämmerer and Metzler 2012.

**20** Many more could be mentioned; most famously the monsters of Sumerian epic literature, and of the Akkadian Gilgamesh epic; full details of Mesopotamian monster traditions are, however, beyond the scope of this essay.

**21** I have argued elsewhere that the monsters in Angim are not represented as dangerous (Feldt 2010). Indeed, there is a clash between the usual Assyriological descriptions of monsters as negative chaos creatures and the use of monsters in ritual as generators for change, for bringing positive things, blessings. This clash is usually explained, in Assyriology, by means of a historical model or historical hypothesis about the monsters first of all being negative creatures, and only later on in history developing into benign creatures after having been attached to the god who conquered them when they were negative opponents. Against this historical hypothesis speak the contemporary or earlier benign monster traditions (compared to the “negative” chaos monsters), e.g. Anzu in the Lugalbanda stories, Anzu in Gudea, the texts from the *é-mí Baba*, in Lagash, the ‘benign’ monsters in the Old Babylonian incantations.

**22** Although Wiggermann, in his notes to the ritual texts, does demonstrate a similar understanding that the function of the monsters is benign in the ritual context, or state that they may stand for ‘awe inspiring phenomena’ (1992, 152) or otherwise be benign or not dangerous (Wiggermann 1992, 171, 183). However, in his general interpretative sections (e.g., Wiggermann 1992,

Although it has been recognized by other scholars that the monster figurines are seen as having a protective-benign function in this ritual context, warding off evil (Green 1984), their directly benign functions in securing the presence of good things (life, abundance, etc.) have not been recognized or spelled out in much detail.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, this ritual and figurine assemblage has not been analysed from a history of religions perspective before. While it is of course highly relevant to discuss the links to mythology, just as the crucial work of identification of the monsters by especially Wiggermann is a great step forward, an analysis of the function of these ‘monsters’ in their synchronic ritual context is necessary. I propose to analyse the meaning and function of these *Mischwesen* in terms of the ritual texts, their materiality and the archaeological context from the perspective of their current or synchronic ritual context according to Text 1 and 2 to see what this may bring. I argue that, in this ritual context, the monsters function as benign transempirical beings, as minor deities.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.1 MONSTER MAGIC: TEXTS, MATERIALITY, AND RITUAL PRACTICE

I take my starting point in the textual sources, because they offer the essential information about the materiality involved, the fashioning, ritual preparation, treatment and placement of the figurines, as well as ritual instructions. Afterwards, I discuss the materiality of the figurines and their placement in underground boxes. The analysis shows that the ritu-

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151–59) he advances the view that the monsters are threatening and unpredictable adversaries, and that their apotropaic use is well covered by the mythology of defeated enemies and subsequent servants (1992, 157). In sum, Wiggermann seems to privilege the roles of the monsters in mythology, and their etymologies, somewhat with respect to his analyses of these monsters over their roles in the rituals.

**23** Anthony Green clearly recognizes that these hybrid beings are indeed benign in their current ritual context (as does the entry ‘Figurines’ in Black and Green 1992), that they are used to attract good things. Green suggests that it is the connection of the monsters to creation and primeval times that makes them effective for protection (1984, 83–86). Still when he discusses their benign nature in the rituals vis-à-vis their negative role in mythology, he explains their ritual use as a way of setting ‘a thief to catch a thief’ (an expression that goes back to Mallowan; Green 1984).

**24** I thus return here to an early, personal interest in these monster figurines and the related rituals to elaborate and substantiate suggestions and ideas I put forward in Feldt 2003.



al practices with the figurines, and the materiality and use of the figurines, point in the direction of understanding these monsters as benign, and that the ritual practices involved tap into broader discourses about divine presence and image representation in ancient Mesopotamia.

While both Text 1 and Text 2 make it clear that the purpose of the ritual is to ward off 'evil things' (Text 1,1–19; Text 2, rev.30–46),<sup>25</sup> this is not done by installing evil and dangerous, but conquered and subdued, monsters to ward off other evil beings as it has often been understood (Wiggermann 1992, Maul 2000). I suggest instead that the figurines deflect evil because they enable and attract the presence of benign beings in the house, which bring with them good things like abundance, life and good health. As a result of the presence of benign beings and the good forces and things they bring with them, evil beings cannot enter. We find this 'presence-effect' idea of divine nearness also in relation to the divine statues in the official temple cult. It is a basic line of religious thought in ancient Mesopotamia that if benign transempirical beings are present – from the deity in his or her statue in the temple, to one's personal gods (*ilu* and *ištar*), or an individual's minor, personal guardian deities (*lamassu* and *šēdu*) – then evil or disease will not harm you. Similar ideas are found on a societal level: if an enemy attacks and destroys the statue in the temple, it is seen as an expression of the deity's anger and abandonment of his or her temple. On the personal level: if you fall ill, the religious explanation will be that you have done something to anger your personal gods to make them leave you (Oppenheim 1977, 183–198; Wiggermann 1995,1861; Dick and Walker 2001,6–8). Plausibly, this type of magical practice for the protection of houses taps into these general religious ideas in ancient Mesopotamia: in order to ward off the presence of demons in the house: you attract the presence of benign supernatural beings.

I will try to show that the ritual texts analysed here labour to produce monster figurines that function as media for the presence of benign beings, and that they present them as possessing benevolent functions that go beyond simply warding off evil demons. Let us look first at the texts. How are the monster figurines produced, how are they referred to in the texts, and what may this lead us to conclude about their function and valuation? And secondly, what is said about their ritual treatment

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<sup>25</sup> Text 1 mentions a series of evil spirits and demons, ghosts, diseases, illness, death, damage, theft, and losses; Text 2 details evil, illness and witchcraft.

Table 1: References to the Mischwesen figurines<sup>26</sup>

Figure / material / name <sup>27</sup> / line nos.	Origin	Inscription or name	Incantation	Function / valuation
Statues of cornel wood / <i>apkalit</i> -sages / ll. 41–65	'The forest' <sup>28</sup>	Being <sup>29</sup> of life, offspring of Ur / Being of plenty, son of Nippur, good one / Being of splendor, who grew up in Eridu / Benign being, who appeared in Kullab / Fair faced being, brought up in Keš / Righteous being, exalted judge of Lagas / Being that gives life to the slain, shade of Šuruppak (ll.54–65)	'Evil spirit in the broad steppe'	Securing blessing, plenty, life in the house / Benign
Statues of tamarisk wood / ll.66–85	'The forest'		'Šamash, great lord, exalted judge...' (may the ritual prosper)	Divine beings (lit. addressed as 'bone of divinity') that throw back the evil ones (line 81–83)
Seven Sebettu / ll.86–96	Ditto			
Four Lugalirra of tamarisk / ll.97–105	Ditto			
Seven weapon-men of tamarisk / ll.106–114	Ditto			
One-Cubit-Is-His-Length, tamarisk / ll.115–123	Ditto	Right: Who repels the evil constables Left: who causes to enter the <i>šedu</i> (minor guardian deity) of good and the <i>lamassu</i> (minor, guardian deity) of good		
Four Meslam-taea, tamarisk / ll. 124–137				
One Narudda, tamarisk / ll.138–142				
				<i>Summary designation for all statues until now:</i> 'creatures of heaven', l. 143

Creatures of <i>Apsû</i> / clay	Clay pit, line 144ff		Clay pit, clay pit (line 150; 151–157)	<i>Summary designation for the following statues:</i> Statues of Ea and Marduk repelling the evil ones to be placed in the house of NN, son of NN to expel the foot of evil (ll.158–160 + 165–166) (ditto: repelling the evil ones, to expel the foot of evil)
<i>Aphkalu</i> -sages (bird, fish) 3 times 7 statues / l.170–183				
2 statues of Hairies / l.184				(ditto)
2 Viper / l.185				(ditto)
2 Furious-Snake / l.185				(ditto)
2 Big Weather-beast / l.185				(ditto)
2 Mad-Lions / l. 186				(ditto)
2 Bison / l.186				(ditto)
2 Scorpion-Men, male and female / l. 186				(ditto)
2 Lion-Man / l. 187				(ditto)
2 Lulal / l. 188				(ditto)
2 Latarak / l. 189				(ditto)
2 Fishman / l. 190				(ditto)
2 Carpgoat / l. 190				(ditto)
10 dogs / l. 191–205		1: Do not reconsider, speak up / 2: Do not reconsider, bite / 3: Destroy his life / 4: Strong is his bark / 5: Who chases away the asakku / 6: Who overcomes the enemy / 7: Who repels the chest of evil / 8: Who bites his foe / 9: Who lets enter the good ones (multicoloured dog) / 10: Who makes the evil ones go out (multicoloured)		Guardians (ditto: repelling the evil ones, to expel the foot of evil)

and their role in the ritual, and what does this say about their use? After the textual analysis, I turn to the materiality and archaeological context of the figurines.

## 5 TEXT 1: FUNCTIONS, VALUATIONS, AND RITUAL TREATMENT OF THE MONSTER FIGURINES

Text 1 is a ritual text giving the ritual instructions for the protection of a house against all kinds of intruding evil (evil demons, diseases, death, damages, loss). The text does not place much emphasis on the kinds of intruding evil (19 lines out of a total of ca.355 lines). Rather, the text focuses on the production, installation, manufacture and ritual treatment of a large number of monster figurines to be installed in the house, and on the necessary incantations, offerings, and purifications of the house. Since my interest here is in the functions and valuations of the monster figurines/beings, I will first look at how the figurines are referred to and evaluated in the ritual texts. Then, I proceed to a discussion of how the ritual manufacture and treatment of the figurines speak of their functions and valuation. Table 1 provides an overview of the details that Text 1 gives regarding the material, adornments, inscriptions, incantations, placement and, important for the argument of this paper, – the functions and valuations of the *Mischwesen* in the text. Afterwards, I turn to the ritual actions with the figurines.

As the text (cf. Table 1) shows there are three basic emic categories of figurines – the creatures of heaven made of wood in the forest, the crea-

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**26** My analysis here relies on Wiggermann's edition (Wiggermann 1992). It should also be noted that this contribution is an attempt to analyse the general features and functions of this magical materiality, not a detailed treatment of types of figurines, their manufacture, adornments, paint, plaster, etc.; therefore many interesting details are left out. See Rittig 1977 for detailed descriptions of individual figurines.

**27** For simplicity, I here use the names of the various types of monsters given to them by the text editor, Wiggermann, but it should be noted that some of these translations can be disputed (cf. Ellis 1995).

**28** An ideological space; more on this below.

**29** I translate the word UD/ūmu with 'being' rather than 'day', 'storm' (or 'spirit' as Wiggermann does); the import of this word when applied to supernatural creatures has yet to be clarified, and 'being' seems to be more descriptive (Feldt 2011, 149–50).

tures of *Apsû* made of clay in the clay pit, and the dogs. The inscriptions on the figurines and the functions these inscriptions mark out, suggest that the figurines, and the beings whose presence they enable, must be interpreted as benign supernatural beings that attract good things: life, blessing, plenty, splendour, righteousness. Some beings are referred to as at once repelling ‘the evil ones’ and letting the ‘good ones’ enter. The function of the last items of the list, the ten dogs of clay, differs slightly in that the dogs seem to primarily repel evil by means of warning barks and bites. However, even some of the dogs are ascribed the function of letting ‘the good ones’ enter (dog no.9). Now, I turn to the ritual manufacture and treatment of the figurines.

#### 5.1 RITUAL MANUFACTURE AND TREATMENT OF THE FIGURINES ACCORDING TO TEXT 1: SPATIALITY

The ritual can be divided into five parts: 1) The initial description of the purpose of the ritual, lines 1–19; 2) The manufacture of the figurines of wood (‘creatures of heaven’), ascribed to the deity Shamash, lines 20–142); 3) Manufacture of the figurines of clay, ‘creatures of *Apsû*<sup>30</sup>, ascribed to the deity Ea, lines 143–205; 4) Rite de passage for the figurines (presumably mouth opening) at the riverside, lines 206–229; 5) Rituals for installation of the figurines in the house (offerings, purification rituals, incantations to the figurines and subsequent instalment/burial underground), lines 230–352 (end fragmented). For an analysis of the ritual production and treatment of these figurines, parts 2–5 of the ritual are especially relevant. In addition to these ritual sections, it is important also to note that during the ritual, the figurines are spatially relocated from their spaces of origin in ‘the forest’ and in the ‘clay pit’, to the riverside, ending up in their installation in the house. The overall spatial relocation of the figurines that the ritual ‘narrates’ or marks out is also of fundamental importance for understanding their functions.

The ritual production and treatment of the figurines of wood in section 2 involves a consecration (root *qdš*) of the cornel tree used for the figurines (l.32), a food offering to the deity Šamaš (l.32–38), and an incantation to the cornel tree (l.39).<sup>31</sup> Then the ritual expert is to

<sup>30</sup> *Apsû* is the subterranean sweet water domain of the deity of magic, artisans, wisdom, Ea; see Black and Green 1992, s.v.

<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, we have only the title of the incantation (‘Evil spirit in the broad steppe’), but in all likelihood the purpose of the incantation was repel evil spirits from the tree used for the figurines.

touch the cornel tree with a golden axe and a silver saw, and only afterwards cut down the tree with a hatchet (l.41–42). Here is an interesting parallel to the ritual for the opening of the mouth of the divine statue in the temple (the Akkadian title is *mīš pī*, Dick and Walker 2001), in which craftsmen's equipment of silver and gold also features in the ritual production and preparation/consecration of the divine statue (Nineveh Ritual Tablet, l.70–94). In the *mīš pī*-ritual, the ritual equipment of axe and saw is sown into the thigh of a ram and offered to the river / to Ea (ll.78–79, Nineveh Ritual Tablet; ll. 8–9, Babylonian Ritual Tablet, Dick and Walker 2001, ll. 58.78). In the ritual context of our Text 1, the golden axe and silver saw referred to probably have similar functions of symbolizing the work of divine craftsmen deities.<sup>32</sup>

After having cut down the tree with a regular hatchet, the ritual specialist purifies the wood and takes it to the city where he fashions and adorns the cornel figurines, giving them their proper equipment (tiaras, garments, tools, colours, and inscriptions, ll. 44–65). Then a similar procedure is used for the figurines of tamarisk wood: consecration, offering to Šamaš, purification, and then an incantation to Šamaš. After a brief praise of Šamaš (ll.79–81), the incantation states that the consecrated tamarisk is 'the bone of divinity' (*ešem-ilūti*, l.81) and *išu ellu*, 'pure wood' (l.82), phrases regularly used for the divine temple statue (Dick and Walker 2001, 5–6), and Šamaš is asked to ensure that what the ritual specialist does is profitable and prospers (l.84–85). Then the tamarisk wood is similarly touched with the ritual axe and saw and then cut down with a hatchet and brought to the city, where the figurines are fashioned and adorned (ll.88–141). Finally, a statue of the 'god of the house' (*il bīti*) is to be fashioned (l.142). This section of the ritual clearly shows that what we are dealing with is not the production of statues of monstrous opponents turned into servants of any particular god, but meant to be media for the presence of minor divine beings, small gods, in the house.

The production of the creatures of *Apsū*, the figurines of clay, is quite similar: the ritual expert goes to the clay pit in the morning and consecrates it, purifies it, makes an offering of seven grains of silver, seven grains of gold, carnelian and hualalustone to the clay pit, and of incense and beer to Šamaš. Then he recites the incantation 'Clay pit, clay pit' to the clay pit. Its content is related in the ritual text (ll.151–157).

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<sup>32</sup> Although our Text 1 does not mention actions meant to remove the work of human artisans explicitly.

This incantation addresses the clay pit as the clay pit of the deities Anu, Enlil and Ea,<sup>33</sup> and specifies that the precious metals and stones was a gift to the clay pit, and the clay pit is asked to let the ritual actions prosper (what the ritual expert does in the morning when he pinches off clay for the figurines). After this incantation, Šamaš is addressed, and it is stated that these statues are statues of Ea and Marduk (the gods of magic, wisdom, and incantations) (ll.158–159). Then, the hybrid figurines of clay are fashioned and adorned (l.168–190), and then the ten dogs too (l.191–205).

The ritual action taking place at the riverside at night also bears a clear resemblance to the ritual for the opening of the mouth of the divine statues of the temples (see ll.95–108 of the Nineveh Ritual Tablet, Dick and Walker 2001,59–60): All of the figurines are placed at the riverside, facing the sunrise, standing there throughout the night. At sunrise, the ground is swept and holy water is sprinkled, food sacrifices to Ea, Šamaš and Marduk are made, and the statues are purified (ll.207–216). This sequence of actions may reasonably be understood as a simplified version of the ritual sequence at the riverside performed for the divine temple statue, or at least as remarkably similar. The similarities further corroborate that this is a ritual for the production of media for divine presence.

Then, all of the figurines are taken to the house, set on a reed mat (just as the divine temple statues are also placed on reed mats in the mouth-opening ritual, Dick and Walker 2001, Nineveh Ritual Tablet, line 96), made to face the sunrise, a food offering is made to Marduk, and then to the deities Anu, Enlil, Ea and Ninurta (ll.230–242). Then food offerings are made to Kusu and Ningirim, two deities of purification that also play an important role in the mouth-opening ritual with regard to the washing of the mouth and the *egubbû*, the ritual basin containing the liquid for the washing of the mouth (Dick and Walker 2001,53), which indicates – as suggested by Wiggermann in his notes to these lines – that a mouth-washing may have been performed in the gap between lines 217–230 (Wiggermann 1992, 29). Food offerings are also made to the god of the house, the goddess of the house, and the *lamassu* (protective ‘daimon’) of the house (ll.243–245). Then, the house is purified with an elaborate and expensive ritual material (l.246–248), by

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**33** The text says ‘you have made the lord for lordship, you have made the king for kingship, you have made the prince for future days’, ll.153–155, which references these three deities, the ancient Sumerian cosmic deities in charge of sky, earth and the subterranean waters.

touching all corners, doorposts of the court, the roof and the attic rooms, and the windows with this substance. Then, the house is rubbed with another kind of magical material (l.250–256), which is removed after the rubbing. Rubbing as a purificatory action is otherwise known from day five of the *akitu*-ritual / New Year's celebrations in Babylon (see Thureau-Dangin 1921, 136–46; Bidmead 2002).<sup>34</sup> Finally, the incantation 'You shall not enter for him through the window', which is not preserved here, is recited. In the morning, the house is cleansed by sweeping, and the materials swept up are thrown into the river; the house is purified and the incantation 'Evil go out' is recited (ll.257–265).

Again, these ritual actions indicate that we are dealing with the installation of media for the presence of benign divine beings in the house. Once present, the benign deities will repel evil. The incantations are – arguably – recited to make sure that any evil demons present in the house leave it, before the small gods are installed. To be sure, the ritual actions and purifications indicate that the figurines mediate divine presence, securing the presence in the house of 'good ones' and resulting 'blessing'.

The next section further supports this conclusion, because in ll.266–351, the newly fashioned figurines are addressed as media for divine beings. First, a food offering is made to some of the figurines produced in this ritual, namely 'One-Cubit-Is-His-Length', Lugalgirra and Meslamtaea. Food offerings are broadly recognized as the basic form of communication with and sacrifice to the deities in Mesopotamia. Then, an incantation is recited in front of One-Cubit, in which it is stated that he has dropped down from heaven, and that he is strong and powerful among the gods and endowed with lofty radiance (*melammu*, the quintessential sign of divinity in Mesopotamia) (ll.276–279). We see a similar differentiation in the mouth-opening ritual – when the divine statue's incorporation into the community of deities is complete, the priest recites incantations and prayers 'in front of' the statue' (Nineveh Ritual Tablet, l.187), rather than as before beside it (Dick and Walker 2001, 66). Further, a phrase that echoes the mouth-opening ritual is found here: 'from the beginning you stay before your father Ea'. The divine status of this figurine can hardly be stated any clearer. Then, the incantation asks this deity to guard the house and repel the evil ones at the command

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<sup>34</sup> The tablets attesting to the *akitu*-ritual in Babylon are quite late (ca. 200 BCE); how this should be understood is discussed in Smith (1976) and Sommer (2006).



of Ea and Marduk (ll.280–288). The incantation recited in front of the four statues of Meslamtaea also clearly shows that these figurines are statues of gods (ll.291–307): they are referred to as statues of gods, sons of Anu, living in heaven, who keep watch and kill the evil ones. Similar procedures pertain to the statues of Sebetu (ll.308–318), the four statues of Lugalgirra (ll.319–328), the statues of the ‘weapon-men’ (329–339), which are all referred to as ‘gods’. Finally, the statue of the god of the house fashioned in this ritual is addressed in an incantation, asking him to guard his house, and the other figurines are addressed in an incantation, the wording of which is unfortunately lost (ll.340–353). The end of Text 1 is damaged.

As for the sequence of spatial relocations of the figurines during the ritual (from the forest and the clay pit, to the city, to the riverside, and finally to the installation in the house the next morning), this sequence also seems consequential for understanding the function of the figurines. It is worth noting – first of all – that the sequence resembles the sequence of spatial relocation of the divine temple statue in the mouth-opening ritual from the craftsmens’ workshop to the river bank, to the orchard at the river bank, to the installation in the temple the next morning (Dick and Walker 2001, 29–31). Secondly, the spaces of origin of the figurines (‘the forest’ and ‘the clay pit’) can arguably be seen as benign ‘wilderness spaces’ associated with natural abundance and fertility (cf. the benign connotations of wilderness spaces especially related to natural abundance and fertility analysed in Feldt forthcoming). The many references to Šamaš and to Ea in this ritual may corroborate the view that these two spaces of origins for the monstrous beings are variant types of wilderness spaces with benign-creative connotations (Feldt 2012).<sup>35</sup> In Mesopotamian religious literature, Šamaš is the quintessential ancient deity in charge of the wilderness regions (Woods 2009), the overseer of the margins, just like Ea, the creative, wise and cunning god, is the keeper of the subterranean fresh water domain of *Apsû*, which is the domain of origin for the figurines of clay, lending the clay pit important connotations to creation. In both cases, these ‘wilderness’ spaces are referenced and used for their benign and creative potentiality, as a symbol of generation/creation and abundance.<sup>36</sup>

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**35** In fact, there is much to suggest that Šamaš is as important as Ea in this ritual.

**36** There is a long tradition for wilderness spaces with benign connotations in ancient Mesopotamia which has been overlooked in Assyriology to some

6 TEXT 2: FUNCTIONS AND VALUATIONS OF THE MONSTERS<sup>37</sup>

Text 2 (KAR 298) is a 94 lines long text found in Aššur in the ‘exorcists’ house’.<sup>38</sup> It offers less detailed information about the ritual treatment of the figurines; yet it evidently documents the same type of ritual practice. Text 2 is primarily a description, for the ritual specialist, of the manufacture of the figurines – their material, adornments, inscriptions, incantations, and placement of the figurines – although it also contains some ritual directions on the reverse side of the tablet. The figurines mentioned in the text are of the same types as in Text 1, clearly referring to and matching the same materiality (thus also Rittig 1977; Wiggermann 1992). To elucidate the function and evaluation of the figurines in this text, let us look at the inscriptions as well as the ritual directions towards the end of the text.

As the short texts for inscription on the sides of the figurines, detailed in the text, show, the figurines are verbalized and treated as benign: their inscriptions and/or the functions they are ascribed testify that they are benign supernatural beings. For instance, the inscriptions for the first seven figurines of the ritual are these (KAR 298, obv. ll.4–11):

- 1: Being of life, offspring of Ur
- 2: Being of abundance, good son of Nippur
- 3: Being of joy, raised in Eridu
- 4: Good being, famous in Kullab
- 5: Beautiful being, favourite of Keš
- 6: Fair being, elevated judge of Lagaš
- 7: Being who gives life to the slain, guardian of Šuruppak

These are figurines of ‘sages’, wise men, (in Akkadian: *apkallu*) adorned with crowns, a likely sign of divinity.<sup>39</sup> The incantation ‘Seven distinguished

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extent, see Feldt 2012 and Feldt forthcoming.

<sup>37</sup> The analyses of Text 2 are based on my own translation of the text; Wiggermann provides only collations and comments for this text (Wiggermann 1992).

<sup>38</sup> The abovementioned house (*Haus des Beschwörungspriesters*) that belonged to a family many of the men of which were exorcists. Its colophon states that it was “hastily excerpted” by Kisir-Aššur, an exorcist from about the middle of the seventh century BCE.

<sup>39</sup> I return to what is known about the probable cultural pre-understanding

*apkallū*<sup>40</sup> (sages)' is to be recited in front of them<sup>41</sup> and they are to be placed at the head-end of the bed. It is quite clear that the first group of seven *apkallū* figurines are addressed as media for the presence of benign beings that bring life, abundance, joy, and similar good things, here spatially connected to major, old Sumerian and Babylonian religious sites of southern Mesopotamia (fig. 3).

A connection in all likelihood exists to the myth of the seven sages, a narrative tradition mentioned by Berossos, a Marduk priest or temple employee from Babylon in the Hellenistic period. His *Babyloniaca* relates the story of the sages / fish-hybrids from Oannes to Odakon (Burstein 1978), who rose from the sea to teach humankind about the techniques of civilization. This antediluvian knowledge about civilization and culture, embodied by the fish-hybrids, was highly and positively valued in Mesopotamian culture (Lambert 1962, 72).<sup>42</sup> The Greek version from Berossos reflects a narrative tradition which does not correspond directly with any Akkadian text that mentions the wise benevolent fish-sage hybrid beings. A mythic tradition has plausibly existed, but not sur-

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of sage/*apkallu* in ancient Mesopotamia below. Several types of figurines are called *apkallu* – both human figurines, and fish-human and bird-human hybrids. The term is also used as a divine epithet, especially of the deities Ea, Marduk and Nabû (von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, s.v.) The horned crown is the quintessential sign of divinity in Mesopotamian art; however, they are not preserved on the relevant figurines (Rittig 1977).

**40** The length of the 'u' changes in the plural.

**41** Again, a sign that the figurine or statue enables divine presence – as in the *mīš pī* ritual (Dick and Walker 2001).

**42** In all likelihood, Oannes can be identified with Adapa, a sage from primeval times, who was called *apkallu*. Therefore we may assume that there is a connection to the fish-'clad' beings in art, who are also called *apkallu* (Lambert 1962, Green 1984). Berossos' narrative has clear connections to the traditions about the seven sages from before the flood. These narrative traditions are, however, only hinted at in Akkadian texts; we have no substantial sources. In the *Erra Epic* (I, 147 and 162) the deity Marduk makes 'these wise men' descend to the *Apsû* (I, 147), and later he mourns their absence: 'where are the seven sages from the *apsû*, the pure *purādu*-fish, who like their master Ea possess unique wisdom?' (I, 162). The text LKA 76 (rev.), a text alternating between incantations and ritual instructions (Reiner 1966), mentions the seven glorious *apkallū*, the *purādu*-fish, the seven *apkallū*, who have grown up in the river, and who secure the correct functioning of the plans of heaven and earth.



**3** Unbaked clay fish-cloaked apkallu figurine. Findspot: Nineveh. Height: 12.7 centimetres. Width: 3.1 centimetres. Thickness: 4.1 centimetres

vived, apart from sporadic references. Yet, we clearly see here a narrative tradition about fish-‘monsters’ possessing unsurpassed wisdom, who are thoroughly benign. Rittig argues convincingly that the male figurines with ‘fish capes’ are minor gods, carrying the crown, with the horns attached to the fish-head, – thus being monstrous, trans-empirical beings, not priests with fish capes (Rittig 1977, 86–88).

The next four groups of seven *apkallu*-figurines of other types are also benign, as seen in their inscriptions (KAR 298, obv.14), as are the figurines of the seven *Sebetti*-figurines, which are addressed in an incantation as ‘great gods’ (*ilī rabūti*) (KAR 298, obv.25), and *Narudu*. The seven figurines of ‘Those with Weapons’ (KAR 298, obv. 29–32), the figurine of One-Cubit-is-His-Length (‘overthrowing the evil *gallū* demons, bringer of the good *šēdu* and the good *lamassu*’, obv.33–37), the Housegod (‘House-God, protect your house!’, KAR 298, obv. 38–40), the *Big ūmu*, the *Lahmu*-figurines, the *Kusarikku*-figurines, *Lamassu*, and on the reverse the *bašmu*, *mušhuššu*, *suhurmāšu* (Rev. 4–5, ‘come in, attention (*tašmu*) and consent (*magāru*)’), *kulullū*, *girtablullū*, *dx* – all of these beings/figurines seem to have benign functions in this text. While some figurines do not carry inscriptions (e.g., Lulal, Latarak), other figurines



4 Fired clay dog figurines originally painted and inscribed on the left side in cuneiform. Findspot: Nineveh, North Palace. Height: 5.6 centimetres. Length: 7.3 centimetres. Width: 2.8 centimetres

are even directly addressed as gods (cf. above), wear tiaras, or carry the divine determinative (the *dingir*-sign), and most inscriptions speak of the benign functions ascribed to the figurines.

After this group of monstrous figurines, a series of 20 dogs to be buried in the gate follows. The white, black, red-brown, and yellow-green dogs all seem to have primarily warning functions – they are meant to scare off evil by means of barks and bites. However, the series of dogs also includes two multi-coloured dogs, which resemble the monstrous figurines more, in that their inscriptions are detailed thus: ‘bringer of good’ and ‘remover of evil’ (KAR 298, rev.21). While the lack of monstrosity perhaps suggests that these figurines are not straightforwardly divine, the inscription on the multi-coloured dogs suggests that their function resembles that of the other figurines (fig. 4).

The figurines that are placed towards the outer perimeter (the outer gate and at the entrances) seem to have slightly more of a directly protective or evil-averting function, but they are still clearly understood as benign. Most of their inscriptions show that they ward off evil things, death, demons, etc. *and* enable the presence of good things, benign protective beings (such as, for instance, the *lamassu*), blessing, and life,

which is consistent with the interpretation that it is by being media for the presence of benign divine beings that these figurines ward off evil.

This ritual generally exhibits a preponderance of Ea-related figurines (also noted by Rittig 1977, 86–88), which is consistent with the deity Ea being the god of cunning intelligence, magic, and healing (Feldt 2012b). This further supports the interpretation of this material as ‘benign’. Based on her studies of the materiality of the figurines, Rittig sees the function of the figurines as protective and apotropaic, while she interprets the Ea-related figurines as possessing a ‘heilbringende’ effect (Rittig 1977, 229), thus also indirectly supporting the conclusion that they enable the presence of small deities.

The reverse side of the tablet does contain some ritual instructions, but most of the relevant lines are unfortunately damaged. In lines 23–25 a magical substance is described, which is to be packed together in a ship (*en miniature*) and buried; lines 26–29 similarly describe both some images as well as magical substances (among these, carp skin / scales) which are also to be buried. In lines 30–37, the purpose of the ritual is mentioned: to aid a man who is ill because of the ‘foot of evil’, and another magical substance (among many other things involving dust, honey, plants, wool, oil) is described. Lines 38–40 describe yet another magical substance (to be buried), and, interestingly describes the duration of the protection that the ritual enables as ‘one year’. Towards the end of Text 2, we get some indications that this ritual was a multipurpose ritual against several types of evil: to remove evil influence, to provide protection against illness, damage to the liver, sleeplessness, sorcery (*kišpu*) (KAR 298, rev. ll.30–46). The multiple purpose of the ritual indeed seems to speak of the general divine protection generated by these small figurine media; of the effects of divine protection. Now, I turn to a consideration of the materiality and archaeological placement of the figurines from a general history of religions perspective.

## 7 MATERIALITY AND PLACEMENT: MONSTERS IN LITTLE HOUSES UNDERGROUND?

In this section, I will discuss two general traits pertaining to this magical practice: First, the monstrosity or animal hybridity of the figurines, which is perhaps part of the reason why many assume that they cannot be small deities. Secondly, their placement in little boxes underground, inside the house and in the gate, which is also puzzling since once they

have been installed, the figurines remain out of sight of humans, out of sight of the inhabitants of the house. I will not delve further into the possible patterns of placement of different figurine types in the house, although such a pattern in all likelihood did exist, as it is not consequential for the present argument. As for the material form of the figurines, the monstrous figurines made of unbaked clay are often damaged, and the wood figurines are not preserved or are in fragments. Almost all of the clay figurines were found covered in gypsum, with details added with red or black paint (eyes, beards, fish scales, etc., Rittig 1977, 225–226).

Often, monstrosity is understood in negative terms. In many anthropological analyses, the emphasis is on the monsters as dangerous and inimical beings; the monster is ascribed hybrid traits in order to stand for, and often marginalize, the other, the alien, the stranger, whom the culture in question tries to suppress, overcome, or kill (Cohen 1996).

Yet, I find that this understanding of monster form is not adequate for interpreting the functions of monsters in some religious discourses, such as the Mesopotamian *Mischwesen*. Our contemporary perspective on the monstrous as predominantly evil and scary may impede our understanding. Instead of understanding the hybridity of these monsters solely as fearful and scary, we might consider that the category of the monstrous may carry a broader signification. Above all, monsters are *liminal* beings. It is worth recalling that liminality always has both a benign, generative, creative side, and a negative, inimical, and dangerous side (van Gennep 1909; Turner 1969), and that conceptually, liminality can be understood as a much broader category than a phase in a ritual: liminality may be expressed also in space, action, and person categories (Endsjø 2000; Feldt 2003).

Monsters in religious symbolism often thematize different spaces and their relations, or, in other words, the relations between humans and the strong, transformative forces and powers of ‘the other world’ (Feldt 2003). Monsters may therefore be presented as benign, friendly helpers and as malign, dangerous enemies, because they embody access to the strong powers of the other world. So, instead of seeing the monstrous as embodying only danger and fear, we should perhaps focus more on the fundamental ambiguity of monsters – on their power as ambiguous, just as ritual power may be seen as fundamentally ambiguous (Frankfurter 2006): the monstrous may bring blessing as well as curse. *Qua* their monstrosity, their hybrid bodies, monsters belong to two worlds, two orders – this world as well as the other world.

Monsters may thus be seen as commuters between, or media for communication and exchange between, the other world and this world, the world of supernatural beings and the everyday world of human life. Of course the value ascription of some monsters may become culturally entrenched over time, but monsters may also be simultaneously benign and malign, just as they may be only benign. In a word, monsters are, as hybrids, *liminal* – and this is their most significant feature. As we can see on illustration 1 and 3, and in conjunction with the textual evidence, the present material indicates that it is the benign, creative side of liminality that is in focus here. The material appearance and treatment of these small ‘monsters’ point in the same direction as the texts. Indeed, we may conclude that the word ‘apotropaic’ reflects a too narrow understanding of what these figurines ‘do’; here they secure the presence of the benign powers of the other world, as much as ‘ward off’ – or, they ward off by securing the presence of benign powers.

The other very remarkable trait is the placement of these monster figurines in little boxes right underneath the floors.<sup>43</sup> Figurines were buried in several different types of containers made of brick and sealed, most commonly, with bitumen; however most of the Neo-Assyrian containers are of the same type (Rittig 1977, 219–223). These boxes or containers are not mentioned in the ritual texts, apart from the reference in Text 2 (KAR 298, rev. l.10) that two figurines are to be placed and buried in a container (fig. 5).<sup>44</sup>

How should this be understood? As is well known from the temple cult as well as from mythology (Dick and Walker 2001); and e.g., the Atrahasis-epic (Lambert and Millard 1989), deities in Mesopotamia live in houses (Oppenheim 1977). The production of the figurines, which resembles the production of the divine statues in the temples on several counts, as detailed above, leads me to suggest that the boxes could be understood as the *houses* of these minor divine beings.<sup>45</sup> It is a very

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**43** A few were not buried directly underneath the floors, but underneath the foundation – these are probably to be seen as a different type (Rittig 1977, 219–223). I will not delve into the specific placement of individual figurines inside the house. But as Wiggermann notes, there is a tendency to place for instance the dogs in the outer gate and the ‘sages’ (*apkallū*) in the interior of the house (Wiggermann 1992, 58–59).

**44** The text specifies that the container was of the comparatively large *kannu*-type.

**45** That the boxes may be houses is also suggested by Nakamura (2005, 38).





5 Brick box number 11, with fish-cloaked sage (apkallu) figurines, from the ‘Haus des Beschwörungspriesters’, Aššur

basic idea in religion in Mesopotamia that divine beings live in houses and may be accessed by humans there; it is a fundamental method for ensuring the nearness of the gods, without which enemies would attack successfully, fertility would decline, people would fall ill, etc. Their placement underground at floor level does thus not necessarily signify burial.<sup>46</sup> For while it is true that humans were often buried under the room floors, and that the underworld could be accessed through the ground (Scurlock 1995), a more plausible reason for placing their houses underground and not over the ground and more accessible to human interaction, we could speculate that the spaces in which they are so carefully placed are seen as entry points for demons and other evil beings (Lambert 1974, 296; Bottéro 1980, 29–31). Indeed, the floor level is in a basic way the *boundary* of the house. Placed underground, the *Mischwesen* are not subject to the human gaze, or direct daily human interaction. We may only speculate whether they were, once installed, thought to function as ‘automata’, or whether humans indeed did interact with them, perhaps even feed them through tubes or channels in

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<sup>46</sup> Although this is of course the other connotation that comes to mind (for funerary customs, see Scurlock 1995).

the ground.<sup>47</sup> The time frame during which the ritual was thought to be effective according to Text 2 (KAR 298, rev.l.40), namely one year, can perhaps be taken to suggest that once installed, the figurines functioned of their own accord. By being installed at such sites, by living there, as it were, these minor deities could repel evil before it even entered the house. As suggested above, these minor deities repel evil by being present. As we see in Text 2, their presence entailed the ‘bringing in’ of blessing: life, abundance, prosperity, etc.

## 8 CONCLUSION

Approaching the monster figurines from the perspective of materiality and ritual practice has meant that I have paid attention to what the figurines *do* (or, are construed as doing) in their synchronic material-textual context, favouring the ritual actions with the figurines over the communicative links to, for instance, mythology. While it is certainly interesting and relevant that most of the names of the monsters of these two ritual texts also appear in *Enūma eliš* and other narrative, mythological and epic literature, I hope to have made it clear that these figurines have separate synchronic functions in these rituals for the protection of houses; functions for which mythology cannot be used as an answer book.<sup>48</sup> While *Enūma eliš* is indeed an important mythological source, in comparison to other narrative texts, *Enūma eliš* was neither as ‘canonical’ or culturally disseminated as often assumed (cf. Veldhuis 2003) nor is it the only source offering information about the mythology of monsters

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<sup>47</sup> Such practices are known from human interaction with the ancestors (see Scurlock 1995), and there is also a Neo-Assyrian *NAM. BUR.BI*-incantation lending plausibility to the idea that offerings could be made to the small gods of the present rituals – which Scurlock (2003) interprets to speak of the house gods, by which she does not mean the gods referred to in our ritual, but a set of different ones. Even if the gods of our rituals are not the house gods, I still find that the incantation analysed by Scurlock lends some suggestive support to the idea that that offerings may have been made to the gods of the present rituals. Why would the food offerings to the house gods, mentioned in Scurlock’s *namburbû*, be buried, if those gods were present in statues above the ground?

<sup>48</sup> Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, the monsters of the narrative literature are not always negative and inimical beings (Feldt 2006, 2010, 2011, and Feldt forthcoming).

(cf. Feldt 2006, 2010, 2011, Feldt forthcoming).<sup>49</sup> As pointed out above, the ritual for the opening of the mouth of the divine statue in the temple is as pertinent a context to consider with regard to the *functions* of these figurines, since they are used as media for the presence of benign supernatural beings.

The figurine and text assemblage presented here attests to an ancient Mesopotamian mode of ritualizing that focuses on the production of charismatic materiality for pragmatic ends – the pragmatic purpose here being (primarily) the aversion of evil demons that cause illnesses.<sup>50</sup> It is also a magical practice and a magical materiality that intersects with and lends efficacy from broader, culturally entrenched discourses about ritual efficacy, statue use, and divine presence in ancient Mesopotamia and consequently there is nothing marginal or illegitimate about the practices and materialities analyzed here.<sup>51</sup> As is clear, I fully agree with those researchers of magic who take an etic approach and argue that we need to retain word ‘magic’ as a history of religions-term. Yet, this piece calls into question the use of ‘religion’ as one of the obvious models of contrast to magic, a criticism earlier raised by Jan N. Bremmer (2002b, updated 2008, 347–52) as well as Jesper Sørensen (2007). Certainly, in ancient Mesopotamia, ‘magic’ was official and legitimate, ‘magic’ was ‘religion’.

Much suggests that materiality generally is effective more by what it does than what it communicates (Bynum 2012, 293 n.32). Similarly, magic may be effective not by what it communicates, but by what it does – a doing that involves a ‘materiality’. This is not to say that magic does all its communication purports to do, but to say that the proof of the pudding is indeed, in this case, in the eating. The ‘reality’,

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**49** We should also regard the functions of the monsters in *Enūma eliš* as an empirical question open to investigation. Even though they clearly occupy the narrative role of the enemy or opponent, it cannot be ruled out – pending a detailed analysis – that they too have some ‘creative’ connotations.

**50** But indeed, the multiplicity of purposes also lends support to the idea that these ritual practices enable divine presence in the house – simply because divine presence was seen as having not just one, but several, general benign ‘effects’.

**51** Bailliot explains the efficacy of the magic analyzed there in a similar way – it works not because of some kind of private cathartic drama, but because the ritual expert, the client/performer, and the targeted individual all operate within a common system of symbolic limits (Bailliot 2010).

functions, and importance attributed to transempirical beings in religion and magic depend fundamentally on mediation and materiality. Ritual practice and the manipulation of objects are some of the most important preconditions for the representation of superhuman beings as active agents. The burial of monster figurines with inscriptions certainly tell of the production of material charisma enabling superhuman presence, of figurines thought to enable the presence of minor divine beings out of sight of humans; a practice made all the more plausible because it connects to more general patterns of action and lines of religious thought in Mesopotamian society in the first millennium. These monster figurines are not just representations of transempirical beings, for the rituals labour to produce a charismatic materiality, to transform the figurines into media for the presence of the minor divine beings that protect the house. This Mesopotamian example illustrates beautifully how the materiality of magic is an important way in which the distance between the human world and the invisible world of the superhuman beings is bridged in religions worldwide (Meyer 2008; Morgan 2012). It also interestingly illustrates how gods and other superhuman beings as mediated in religious thoughts, practices and materialities invariably involve a measure of transgression of standard cognitive categories, or in other words, some measure of monstrosity.

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**Fig. 3** ©Trustees of the British Museum. Museum number: 91836  
**Fig. 4** ©Trustees of the British Museum. Museum number: 30005  
**Fig. 5** Reproduced after Preusser 1954, table 28b

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JAIME CURBERA

## FROM THE MAGICIAN'S WORKSHOP: NOTES ON THE MATERIALITY OF GREEK CURSE TABLETS

Curse tablets are thin plaques of lead etched with tiny letters and meant to summon supernatural forces against one's foes. They were usually placed in tombs or buried near the sanctuaries of Underworld deities. Although the oldest were produced in sixth-century BC Sicily, the practice spread rapidly and they were particularly popular in fourth-century BC Athens.<sup>1</sup> The following comments are based on a direct study of the collection of fourth-century BC Attic tablets that Richard Wünsch published in 1898 and for many years thought to be lost. After the war the collection was sent to Russia but in September 1958 it was returned to the German Democratic Republic. Today most of the tablets are in Berlin's Antikensammlung.<sup>2</sup> With sponsorship from the TOPOI Cluster of Excellence (a German government initiative to promote top-level research) they have been restored and cleaned, and are now being republished by the *Inscriptiones Graecae* in Berlin.

1. *The lead.* – Inevitably, the material is the first point to consider. We know of ancient curses written on pots and pieces of pottery, on schist, on papyrus, wax and other materials, but most of the tablets we know of are made of lead. There are many reasons for this. Lead is easy to cut and to inscribe. In Athens the abundance of lead curse tablets (almost

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1 Today we know of some 1200 tablets written in Greek. The main editions of Greek curse tablets are those by Wünsch (DTW), Audollent (DTA), and Ziebarth 1934. The new texts discovered up to the year 2000 are listed by Jordan (1985 and 2000). Complete information and bibliography can be found in Gager 1992 and Ogden 1999. The texts of items marked with \* can be found in the appendix below.

2 On the history of the collection, see Curbera 2012.

half of the known Greek tablets) is no doubt related to the fact that the Laurion silver mines, 60 km SE of Athens, provided lots of cheap lead – a by-product of extensive silver smelting. But, of course, the proximity of Laurion alone does not explain why curse tablets were so popular in Athens, just as the abundance of marble does not explain the unparalleled number of stone inscriptions in Attica – other factors are at work here, such as the spread of literacy and social attitudes towards writing. An important reason why we have so many lead curse tablets (not only in Attica and not only in Greek) is that at some point lead became part of the curse-writing process, as shown by the contents of some tablets (e.g. DTW 96, 106, 107) and by the instructions for making curse tablets in ancient magical handbooks. Ancient magicians explained this by citing the (real or imaginary) properties of lead. Rudolf Münsterberg (1864–1926), an Austrian numismatist, rightly considered such explanations as secondary and (endorsed by modern scholars) argued that the use of lead was originally a normal, if old-fashioned, way of writing that later became part of the ritual.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, that is part of it, but (in view of the numbers) it is difficult to ignore the role of Attica in this development. Taking Münsterberg's idea one step further: the widespread use of lead in ancient magic could actually be a by-product of the popularity of curse tablets in Attica. It is true that lead curse tablets were written in Sicily before they became popular in Athens, and Athens was certainly not the only place with magic specialists. However, just as Attic public inscriptions influenced those of other regions, Attic curse tablets may have influenced those made in other places, as indicated by the spread of Attic formulae in tablets from other regions.<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, an isotope analysis of a group of curse tablets by the Bundesanstalt für Materialforschung und –prüfung in Berlin has shown that those from Tanagra, Megara and Melos published by Wünsch (DTW vii–ix) were all made from Laurion lead, perhaps brought to these places by itinerant Attic magicians.<sup>5</sup>

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**3** Münsterberg 1904, 142: 'Während auf anderen Gebieten das Blei aus praktischen Gründen anderen Beschreibstoffen weichen mußte, wurde es im Kultgebrauch –beim Fluch wie im dodonäischen Orakeldienst– aus religiöser Scheu beibehalten'. See also DTA praefatio p. III.

**4** Cf. Eidinow 2007, 141: 'It may be that Athens became the hub of the practice, the city's inhabitants adopting this practice from the Sicilians, along with the arts of rhetoric, and becoming the source for its development elsewhere'.

**5** The results will be published by J. Vogl, M. Rosner, and J. Curbera.



1 DTW 33: flattened lead offcut with inscription



2 DTW 34: flattened lead offcut with inscription



3 Written Lead Bands. From the top DTW 87, 84, 78, 72, 73



4 DTW 79: a voodoo-doll?

2. *Shapes*. – Lead was cheap and processing it into a shape suitable for curses was not difficult. Many tablets were simply cut from pipes or other lead objects (the straight lines along the edges of some tablets are most likely guidelines for cutting), while others are made from melted offcuts with irregular shapes (figs. 1, 2, 13A, 14A). The pieces of metal (either cut or melted) had to be flattened out before being inscribed. Crucially, the now lost tablet DTW 100 mentions a *μολυβδοκόπος*, almost certainly the person responsible for cutting and flattening the lead – the last part of the word contains the stem of the verb *κόπτω*, ‘to smite’.<sup>6</sup> For obvious reasons, documents in everyday life often served as a model for curse tablets. Rectangular tablets (DTW 30, 94, 96, 97, 110, etc.), especially those which are rolled up, are reminiscent of letters and documents written on papyrus. DTW 1, 2, 18, 27 are in the shape of labels. They are so carefully written that only the use of lead and the lack of the official naming-style (i.e. patronymics and demotics) indicate that they are curses and not public documents, like the bronze labels used in Athens for casting lots for judges. Several tablets are long strips of lead, between 15 and 40 cm long (fig. 3). These are most likely ‘speaking objects,’ viz. representations of the *δεσμοί* or *κατάδεσμοι* (‘bands’) that were supposed to immobilize or bind their victims – exactly the same as the ones which bind the hands of the small lead figures found in the Athenian *Kerameikos* and elsewhere. The writer of the ‘curse-band’ DTW 86 explicitly binds the victim’s feet and hands (*καταδῶ πόδας χεῖρας*). In DTW 78 (also a ‘curse-band’) it is asked that Aristokydes does not sleep around with other women or boys. In both cases, shape and contents are consistent. More often, however, and with an inconsistency typical of magic, there is no relation between the shape of the tablets and nature of the curses written on them, no doubt because the writers were following formulae intended for tablets of a different shape. The writer of DTW 45, for example, calls his curse *μολύβδινος δεσμός* (‘lead-band’), even though the tablet itself (6 × 4 cm) is not shaped like a band. Another common shape is that of the roughly oval tablets (\*DTW 74, 75, 77, 89, 116, 117 al.). They could be attempts at representing the victims’ tongue

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6 The *μολυβδοκόπος* may have also written the tablet, but ‘scribe of curses’ is not the original meaning of the word, as Wunsch and the LSJ Greek English Lexicon (based on the parallel of *λιθοκόπος*, ‘stone-cutter’) assume. Jordan (1990, 440) points out that the use of *πλάτυμμα μολυβοῦν* for curse tablets in the Greek magical papyri suggests flattening.

(which is often cursed), although in many of these tablets the tongue itself is not mentioned.

3. *A Flat Doll?* – Other systems besides tablets were on offer to bind one's enemies. The so-called 'voodoo-dolls' were normally made of wax or unbaked clay, which is one reason why only a few have been found in Athens. Those of lead and bronze are often skilfully made (sometimes using casts) and were no doubt more expensive than simple tablets. No such doll was known in Attica when Wünsch published his collection (today we know of nine), but his DTW 79 could be an overlooked case. Wünsch described this tablet as roughly triangular ('forma fere τριγώνου ἰσοπλεύρου') and Walter Rabehl's drawing does not help to get an idea of the shape (Rabehl 1906, 44–45). An examination of the object shows that its author tried to make a rudimentary voodoo-doll by flattening a piece of melted lead, probably without using a mould (fig. 4). So far, only one such flat doll is known from Antiquity,<sup>7</sup> but they were probably more frequent than our documentation allows us to infer. Winifred S. Blackman documents the use of flat paper figures with charms in rural Egypt, and Phaidon Koukoules mentions similar objects, made of pieces of fabric with painted eyes and noses, as used in 20th cent. Greece.<sup>8</sup> The curse written on DTW 79 is not just a name (or a list of names, as usually on these dolls) but a text that hardly differs from those written on normal lead sheets.

4. *Reused objects.* – As already mentioned, several tablets were cut from pipes, but pipes were of course not the only objects used for making curse tablets. \*DTW 156 consists of two lead sheets (5 cm long, 0.6–0.9 wide) separated from each other 0.52 cm and joined by two lead cylinders (diam. 0.45 cm) (figs. 5A and 5B). Wünsch thought this was one of those λάμναι μολυβαῖ ἀπὸ ἡμιόνων (perhaps lead ornaments for pack-saddles) mentioned in a fourth–fifth century AD magical papyrus with instructions for making curses (*PGM X* 37). In reality, this is not an ornament, but a staple used to join together broken parts of a ceramic vase, a well documented practice. Repairs were made in different ways. In the present case, a pair of holes were drilled along the edges of the crack, a connecting groove was cut between them, and the lead-staple was cast

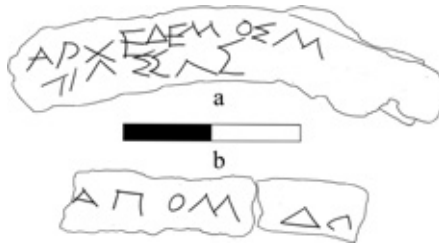
7 Robert 1936, 17–18 with plate VIII (13) (= Jordan 1985, 64 n. 64 = SEG 35.978)

8 Blackman 1927, 192–193 with fig. 117; Koukoules 1921, 324. For ancient voodoo-dolls, see Faraone 1991 (with a catalogue of items) and Ogden 1999, 71–79. See also Curbera – Giannobile in this volume.





5A DTW 156: a lead staple



5B Text of DTW 156



6 Nails from tablets of the Wunsch Collection

directly on the vase.<sup>9</sup> What is interesting in the present case is that the object bears vestiges of a scratched inscription (early fourth century BC), consisting of proper names. Someone found this staple on a rubbish tip among broken vases (or in a grave he was plundering) and used it for writing without even bothering to flatten it. The use of lead and the fact that only names were inscribed hint that this was a curse tablet.



7A DTW 31 I, with holes from four nails



7B Text of DTW 31 I

5. *Nails*. – Quite a few tablets in the Wünsch collection (72 out of c. 200 whole tablets) were pierced with a nail. The nails used in fourth-century BC Athens were not nails of crucifixes like those that Apuleius' witch had in her workshop (Golden Ass 3.17), but rather thin iron nails, usually with a square shank, like those for carpentry and other jobs, and they were all hammered right down.<sup>10</sup> Several such nails are found among Wünsch's tablets (fig. 6), still with remnants of lead carbonate near the head. The normal practice was to use only one, but DTW 31 I-II are pierced with four (I) and three (II) nails (figs. 7A–7B). Other alleged cases of multiple nails are mistaken. According to Wünsch, for example, DTW 82 was pierced with two nails, but in fact it was pierced by only one nail after being folded (twice vertically and twice horizontally).<sup>11</sup> We cannot know whether piercing the tablets was an Attic innovation (nails were not more frequent in Attica than elsewhere), but the abundance of nailed curse tablets in Attica no doubt helped to spread the practice. Interestingly, Attic curse tablets of the Roman period (which follow the Greco-Egyptian magic) were not pierced, while Latin 'defixiones' (which follow the pattern of Hellenistic Greek tablets) often were. Magic scholars cannot decide the significance of piercing curse tablets, partly because ancient magicians too had different views about it. An interest in damaging the inscribed names or in sealing the contents seems an obvious reason. Yet, a tablet from Carthage was fixed to the floor with a nail, no doubt by someone who (like us) was not sure what the nails were for.<sup>12</sup>

6. *Sealing the Tablets*. – A fourth-century BC curse tablet from Pella in Macedonia states that opening and reading the tablet would deactivate the curse: 'And were I ever to unfold and read these words again after digging the tablet up, only then should Dionysophon marry, not

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**9** On these repairs see Dooijies and Nieuwenhuyse 2007; Nadalini 2007; Schöne-Denkinger 2007.

**10** The so-called 'umbrella-head nails' (German 'Schirmkopf-Nägel'), on which see Peltz 2010, 28 and 2011, 9 with plate 1.

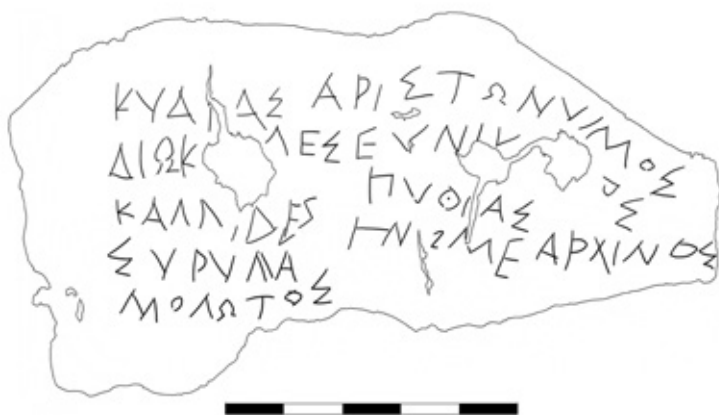
**11** Krutzsch 2009, 113. According to Ogden (1999, 14) DTA 49 'displays no less than five nail holes' ('quinquiens clavo transfixa' Audollent). In fact, it displays nine holes (plus one lost with the left bottom edge), all made by one nail after the round tablet was folded three times horizontally and then twice vertically.

**12** For the different interpretations, see Münsterberg 1904, 43; Gager 1992, 18–19; Ogden 1999, 14.

before' (Voutiras 1998). There are indications that curse tablet writers did not want their tablets to be opened and read, probably (as the text of Pella indicates) to ensure the effectiveness of the spell. This interest in hiding the contents explains why some texts are encrypted in such a way that they are impossible to decode and read, as DTW 85B or a fourth-century BC tablet in the Athenian Museum Kanellopoulos (Jordan 1985, 163 nr. 41). It is not surprising that most of the spelling methods used in curse tablets (metathesis of syllables and letters, backwards



8A DTW 8, inscribed after it was pierced



8B Text of DTW 8

spelling) are used to conceal the meaning in modern jargons and secret languages.<sup>13</sup> An easier way to seal a tablet is to fold it, as indeed are 81 tablets of the Wünsch collection. In addition, most were pierced through with a nail (and so effectively that many tablets in our collections cannot be opened), but not all folded tablets have a nail (20 in Wünsch's collection), just as not all nailed tablets were folded (13 in the same collection).<sup>14</sup> It is not certain whether the occasional use of boxes should be interpreted in the same way. Five lead dolls from Athens have been found inside lead boxes, usually interpreted as coffins, which may be true. Yet SEG 58.265 – a curse tablet against some hundred people – was also placed inside a lead box.<sup>15</sup> Were these containers representations of coffins, or were they designed (like the small boxes of papyri amulets) to encapsulate the magical object and protect the spell?<sup>16</sup>

7. *Second-Hand Tablets.* – A fifth-century BC tablet from Aegina shows signs of having been pierced and was found folded around an iron nail. Since it contains two different texts, it is very likely that after it was folded, pierced and buried, someone unearthed it, removed the nail, wrote a new text, replaced the nail inside the tablet, and then closed and buried it again.<sup>17</sup> There is plenty of evidence to suggest that curse tablets were reused. Consider the case of \*DTW 8 (figs. 8A and 8B) and 10. Piercing a tablet usually damages the text. Yet the text on these tablets makes perfect sense despite the holes. The likeliest explanation is that in both cases a previous inscription was scraped off and the tablets reused, like a palimpsest, although (as the tablet from Aegina shows) they were not nailed through again. Wünsch imagined (quite improbably)

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**13** Some ancient practioners (DTW 67, 110 etc.) explained backwards spelling means of analogical magic. According to Münsterberg (1904, 143) it originated as an archaism.

**14** Tablets folded without nail: DTW 19, 24, 34, 35, 41, 67, 75, 78, 94, 110, 112, 114, 119, 120, 124, 125, 136, 137, 152, 164. Tablets nailed without having been folded: DTW 13, 14, 36, 44, 17–50, 72–73, 77, 156, 173, 184. Seven tablets were rolled up: DTW 30, 58, 64, 65, 105, 106, 107.

**15** Jordan and Curbera 2008 (SEG LVIII 265). The editors failed to mention that the tablet was found in a box, as stated in the museum inventories.

**16** Cf. Krutsch 2008, 71: magic texts from Egypt were often folded in such a way 'that the contents could not leak out nor anything from outside get in: nothing should disrupt the spell'. For more examples of this practice, see Németh 2013, 79–83 ('Texts in Boxes').

**17** Published by Papachristodoulou 2007–09 (with photos) and IG IV 2<sup>2</sup> 1012 (SEG 57.313).

that the scribe of \*DTW 8 had already calculated the places that would be pierced by the nail while he was writing the names.<sup>18</sup> True, in \*DTW 8 there is no trace of a previous text, but it is easier to explain this (the original text may have been carefully erased, or written with ink) than an unusual interest in keeping the names undamaged (one might expect the opposite). Remains of previous inscriptions can also be seen in DTW 12, 16, 23, 67, 84, 90, 125 or \*138. In the latter, an earlier list of names was erased (some names are still legible) and the name Ὑπερείδης written at the top and with deeper letters.<sup>19</sup>

The practice of recycling may also explain why so many tablets in the collection show such shallow (often hardly legible) letters, which is probably the main difficulty of the new edition. It is very likely indeed that these texts were erased for the tablets to be used again, but no new text was written. In most cases the authors were using tablets that they themselves had written and buried, for only they knew where they were hidden. After a period of time, enough for the curse to have the desired effect, the magicians may have thought useless to leave them in the ground and dug them up to be used again. There is evidence that the tablets were cheap, so why were old tablets reused? In Aegina the lack of lead could be a motive, but in Attica it is quite likely that (as Daniel Ogden puts it) ‘those inserting tablets into graves took the opportunity to avail themselves of supplies [i.e. tablets already placed there] for future spells’. One interesting point about this observation is that the ‘plates of metal engraved with strange characters’ in the workshop of Pamphile, the witch in Apuleius’ *Golden Ass* 3.17, could be old curse tablets inscribed with magical characters (as was common in the Roman period) and waiting to be used again.<sup>20</sup>

8. *Double or Multiple Curses*. – Some tablets that do not seem to have been reused contain curses written on behalf of different people. DTW

**18** ‘Foramina, quae percussus clavus facturus erat, in scribendo iam curasse videntur; nulla enim ab illo deleta est littera.’

**19** Since this is a rare name in Attica, this is probably the famous Athenian politician (390–322 BC), who is also cursed in a tablet from the Kerameikos (SEG 40.269; cf. SEG 42.218).

**20** Ogden 1999, 19. Of course, these ‘ignorabiliter laminae litteratae’ could also be a reminiscence of Homers’ σήματα λυγρὰ ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῶ (*Il.* VI.168). Hesychios τ 163 s.v. τυμβάς γυνή mentions witches (φαρμακίδες) who haunted cemeteries and took pieces of corpses (and no doubt other objects too) from the graves.

102 has two different curses on one side – one against the boxers Aristomachos and Aristonymos, and another against Euandria and a group of women (written between the lines of the first curse, after the tablet had been turned upside down) – and on the other side a curse against a woman called Tibitis and her family.<sup>21</sup> There is an indication that the magician wrote the three curses in one session: at the end of the curse against Euandria and her friends, the tip of stylus broke, but (without sharpening it) the writer continued a new curse on the other side. DTW 95 (only partially read by Wünsch) may be a similar case – both sides were obviously written by the same person, but on each side a different group of some 25 of people is cursed. We do not know how was the process of writing these texts (did the magician inscribe in his workshop orders from different customers jotted down earlier? Did he gradually fill up the tablet as and when customers came along?), nor we know if customers of multiple curses got a better price or if they paid the same for a worse product. With these multiple tablets, in any case, the magician no doubt saved himself time and trouble, for ‘it was not easy or pleasant to open a grave, presumably at night, insert something into it carefully and close it again without being caught’ (Ogden 1999, 17).

9. *A Magician's Workshop?* – Among the tablets of the Wünsch collection preserved in the Antikensammlung there is a stylus used to write on lead, which was undoubtedly found together with some tablets. It is made of iron, 10 cm long, weighing 2 grams and slightly corroded (fig. 12). Most known curse tablets were found in the place they were deposited by their authors. The presence in the Wünsch collection of a stylus, of a group of uninscribed tablets (boxes labelled as ἀνεπίγραφον by Wünsch), and of tablets with a text that has been erased, all points to the fact that some of the items sold to Wünsch in Athens did not come from a grave, but from a magician's workshop or from a hideaway where he kept his tools.<sup>22</sup>

10. *Handwriting.* – The texts were inscribed on the tablets with a sharp stylus, which occasionally split leaving two lines, as in DTW 34 and 102. Letters (average height 0.5 cm) are in general similar to those found in fourth-century BC stone inscriptions. Sometimes we find cursive features, as if the scribes were used to writing with ink on papyrus.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> On this text, see now Papakonstantinou 2013.

<sup>22</sup> For a magician's toolkit, see also Curbera, Gordon and Bremmer, this volume.

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm 1904, 108–12; Jordan and Curbera 2008, 135–36.

Word spaces are not used but scribes occasionally put in punctuation marks, viz. two or three stacked dots (DTW 80, 87, 89, 103 al.). Several texts are the work of skilful hands. The elegant lettering of DTW 31, with an easy flow and slighty cursive features (fig. 7B), is reminiscent of the papyrus sheet of Peukestas, the officer of Alexander the Great (Seider 1990, 131–134). There is evidence that tablets were not always written freehand. For example, to prevent uneven lines some writers used guidelines before writing, as in DTW 37 (fig. 9). Between lines 4–5 and 5–6 of \*DTW 74 (in Bœotian dialect) there are remnants of a previous text (with shallower letters) which, it turns out, was also in Bœotian and close to the one finally written (figs. 10A and 10B). A similar case is found in DTW 30, of which the first lines were written twice, first with shallow letters and (curiously) the bottom part shows traces of a text



9 DTW 27: curse tablet with guide lines



which, unlike the final one, is written from left to right (figs. 11A and 11B). These are not palimpsests like those discussed above. Just like the stone-cutters of official inscriptions, some magicians made a first draft in order to have an idea of how to fit the final text onto the tablet, and only later wrote it with deep letters.

The variety in the handwriting is striking but natural in such a disparate collection as Wunsch's. Only occasionally, it is possible to identify tablets written by the same hand. Clear cases are DTW \*33 and 34, written against a group of didaskaloi and hypodidaskaloi; DTW 89 and



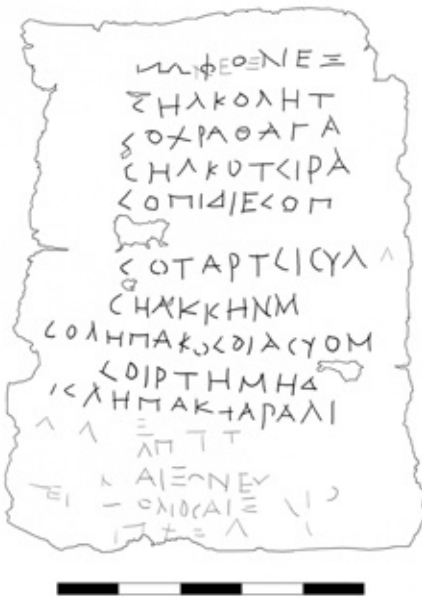
10A DTW 74: curse table with remnants of draft



10B Text of DTW 74



11A DTW 30: tablet with remnants of draft



11B Text of DTW 30



12 Stylus and uninscribed tablets

90, both addressed to Hermes Katochos and containing a list of body parts; DTW 106 and 107, both addressed to Hermes and Hekate Chthonioi, written horizontally and rolled up; and DTW 60–62, probably the latest tablets in the collection. DTW 92 and 93 were buried together ('duae laminae inter se cohaerentes': Wunsch) but they exhibit different handwritings (DTW 93 is more cursive) and different styles of text. This is intriguing but not all that extraordinary if we consider that plundering graves and reusing and recycling tablets was a common practice (see § 7).

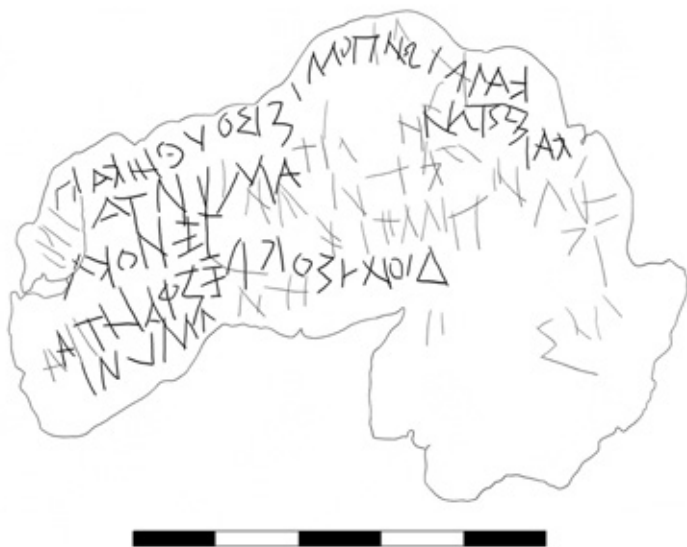
11. *Poor Quality Tablets.* – Besides tablets written by skilful scribes, Wunsch's collection contains many items of mediocre quality and so clumsily written that they are often difficult to decipher. Wunsch interpreted some of these texts as 'Ephesia grammata' (magical mumbo-jumbo), which, however, began to be used in curse tablets only some centuries later. These tablets are irregular in shape (sometimes just flattened offcuts of lead) or vaguely square pieces, and are usually not nailed. They contain only names or names with very simple formulae, and the only magic device they exhibit is retrograde writing.<sup>24</sup> There is no need to cite extreme examples to make the point. \*DTW 119 consists of three names

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24 Only names DTW 15, 16, 17, 119, 122, 126, 127; names with simple formulae: DTW 111, 117, 118.



13A DTW 126: curse tablet with scratched text



13B Text of DTW 126



14A DTW 124: curse tablet with scratched text



14B Text of DTW 124

and different spellings of the word καταδῶ, 'I bind down'; \*DTW 128 is a crudely fashioned lead band with two hardly legible names; \*DTW 126 (figs. 13A and 13B) is a reused offcut of lead, \*DTW 156 is a reused lead staple (§ 4), \*DTW 124 (figs. 14A and 14B) a piece of lead with scratched names. Nothing indicates that these tablets are older or more recent than the 'normal' ones. We cannot know whether they were made by ordinary people (too poor to pay a magician or unwilling, because of the secrecy of the subject matter, to seek help from third parties), or whether they are the careless but convincing work of a different kind of practitioner, who relied more on his theatrical skills than on the final product.

12. *Conclusions.*— The most striking characteristic of the Wünsch's collection is its great diversity. This is only partly due to the fact that the tablets cover a timespan of at least a century and that they come from different places within Attica. There were different kinds of customers and magicians, as were the nature and quality of the products on offer. The overall impression is that in fourth-century BC Athens magic was not in any sense a closed or entirely codified system, but a structure in flux. Absence of established and regulated traditions left lots of space for reinterpreting old practices and improvising new ones. Some authors were indeed skilled scribes, but it is not clear whether curse writing was a specialised profession.<sup>25</sup>

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**25** I am grateful to Helmut Franke and Uwe Peltz for providing the photos and to Andreas Scholl, director of the Antikensammlung of Berlin, for the permission to publish them.



**DTW 74** Lead tablet, H 6, W 12 cm, which was folded twice vertically, but not nailed. Letters H 0.3 cm. Text in Boeotian (but lead from Laurion). The use of η for ει found in καδδίδημι and ἐργαστήρια is characteristic of late 4th cent. Boeotian. 21. See above §§ 2 and 10 (figs. 10A and 10B).

Μάλλον καὶ Δεξία(ν) καδδίδημι  
 κὴ αὐτὰν κὴ ψυχὰν καὶ αὐτὸν  
 κὴ γλῶταν κὴ σῶμα κὴ ἐρ-  
 γασίαν κὴ ἐργαστήρια καὶ  
 5 τέχναν καδδίδημι πᾶ[σ]αν·  
 Θεόξενον καδδίδημι κ[ῆ]  
 αὐτὸν κὴ ψυχὰν καὶ τὰ ἐκε[ίνου]  
 πάντα.

1 in. Λα . . λον καὶ Αεξ. Wunsch || 4 fin. κὴ Wunsch || 5 τέχναν  
 καδδίδη[μι] . Wunsch || Between lines 4–5 (κα]δδίδημι) and 5–6  
 (Φερσεφόνη [= Boeotian Φερσεφόνοι] κ- ) remnants of a previ-  
 ous text (a draft).

**DTW 119** Lead tablet, H 6.4, W 7.4 cm, which was folded twice vertically towards the reader. Letters H 0.5 cm 4th cent. BC. See above § 11.

Δημητρίαν  
 ακατωδα  
 ακατωδα  
 Θάλλουσαν ακαταδ  
 5 Ἄφροδι[σί]αν  
 ακατ                      ακατα  
 ακατα.

Lines 4 and 5 were left unread by Wunsch; ακατωδα (2–3. 4. 6–7)  
 = καταδῶ.

**DTW 124** Tablet triangular, H 8, W 11 cm, folded four times vertically. Letters H 0.5 cm. The text seems to have been scratched. 4th cent. BC. See above § 11. (figs. 14A and 14B).

Μα(ν)τικλέα  
 καὶ — — — δικαστήν



κ α τ α δ ῶ Ἀλκαίαν (?)  
κατα[δῶ] Ἀρχέλαν

Wünsch muddled lines 1 and 2 and read τὴν Κλε || 2 Ἀρ[ισ]  
τοκρ[άτης] Wünsch || 4 The scribe seems to have written first  
Ἀρχέλας (καταδῶ καὶ ΑΣΦΑΓΑΙΣ Wünsch).

**DTW 126** Lead tablet irregular in shape, H 6.5, W 8.3 cm, Letters H  
0.3–0.6 cm. Ca. 350 BC. See above § 11 (figs. 13A and 13B).

Καλλίων Πρόλλις Βοῦθιν καὶ Π - - - - -  
καὶ Σώτων - - - - - Ἄ μ ὕ ν τ α [ς]  
- - - - - <Ξ>ενοκλ[ῆς]  
- - - - -  
5 - - - - - Διονυσοκλ· ς Φαντία[ς]  
- - - - - -ν Ἀμύντ[ας]

Not read by Wünsch.

**DTW 128** Lead tablet, H 2.7, W 12 cm, Letters H 0.5 cm, 4th cent. BC. See  
above § 11.

Πυθ<ά>ρατος ←  
Καλλιμήδης Πυθάρat[o]ς ←

1 written ΣΤΩΑΡΘΥΠ. ‘Latere videtur nomen, quod in μήδης  
desinebat’ Wünsch.

**DTW 138** Found 1883 in Athens near the monument of Philopappus. Lead  
tablet, H 7.8, W 11 cm, originally folded once and pierced with a nail.  
Letters H 0.5 cm, Mid 4th cent. BC. See above § 7.

Ὑπερείδης - - - - - ←  
Λεύκα Ἄροπος  
Δημαγό[ρ]α Λάνπωνος  
Λάμπων Πολύξενος  
5 Ποθέας Πραξεάδης  
- - - - - Ἄλεξάνδρας  
Παύσιππος Ἄσ- - -

	Σπεύσιππος	Λάμπων
	Ξ[εν?]ώ Ἀλέξιππος	
10	[Εὔκ][ολον Ἀμύντας· Λ- - -	
	Καλλίππη Δάμαλις Ἄροπος	
	Φανόθεος Περίανδρος Ἄσπα- -	
	Πολεμ . . . .ος - - - - -	

Lines 2–13 were erased before 1 was written. Wunsch read the first line as ὑπὲρ {ε} το(ῦ) Α- -. The remaining names were misread or omitted.

**DTW 156** Lead stable used for repairing a vase, H 5, W 0.6–0.9 cm. Letters H. c. 0.3 cm. 4th cent. BC. See above § 5 (figs. 5A and 5B).

	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>
	Ἀρχέδεμος Μ-	Ἀπολλ[ό]δω[ρος]
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 PHOTO CREDITS

**Figs. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7A, 8A, 9, 10A, 11A, 12, 13B, 14A** Berlin, Antikensammlung. Photo: H. Franke

**Figs. 3, 5B, 7B, 8B, 11B, 13A, 14B** Drawing: J. Curbera

**Fig. 5A** Berlin, Antikensammlung. Photo: U. Peltz

**Fig. 10B** Drawing: S. Giannobile

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JAIME CURBERA AND SERGIO GIANNOBILE

## A 'VOODOO DOLL' FROM KEOS IN BERLIN'S ANTIENSAMMLUNG

This object (inv. 30741; pl. 1–4) was purchased in 1904 by Hans Schrader (1869–1945), then assistant director of the German Archaeological Institute in Athens, from an antiquarian who told him it came from Corinth.<sup>1</sup> In 1918 Schrader sold it on to the Antikensammlung in Berlin. It is briefly mentioned in the *Amtliche Berichte aus den königlichen Kunstsammlungen* 39 (11) (1918) 256,<sup>2</sup> and a photo was recently published in the catalogue of the Berlin exhibition *Jenseits des Horizonts. Raum und Wissen in den Kulturen der alten Welt* (Stuttgart, 2012) 120. It is a lead statuette, 9.6 cm high, made with a cast. Reminders of molten lead near the head were cut off with a blade, which was also used to separate the arms from the body and to carve out the details of hair, face and chest. The arms twisted behind the back, as if bound, and the list of names leave no doubt about the nature of the object – it is a 'voodoo doll' (Greek κολοσσός, German *Rachepuppe*) used to curse one's foes.

The geographical and chronological spread of these objects is similar to that of curse tablets, but they are on average more archaic and could therefore constitute a forerunner of curse tablets (as a matter of fact, images of enemies with bound hands were used in Assyria and Egypt, in

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**1** Our thanks to Prof. Dr. Andreas Scholl, director of the Antikensammlung, for permission to publish this object and to Johannes Laurentius for providing the photos. The object was cleaned in 2010 by Helmut Franke (Potsdam). Curbera is responsible for the text and Giannobile for the drawing and reading.

**2** "Sog. Rachepuppe aus Blei mit eingeritzten Namen. Angeblich aus Korinth."

private and public rites, from the second millenium BC).<sup>3</sup> Today some 90 such objects are known from ancient times, most of them made of lead, although bronze, wax, clay and other materials were also used. The Greek examples come from Athens, Arcadia, Kephallonia, Delos, Crete and Euboea. The quality of the objects ranges from crude figures to crafted pieces, such as this one. The statuette's style means it is unlikely to date from before c. 350 BC, as Stephan Schröder (Madrid) informs us. Some letter forms (Π with a shorter right stroke, open Σ, V-shaped Υ) and lack of familiarity with the Ionic alphabet (see next §) point to the late fifth or early fourth cent. BC. Yet it is possible that archaic features in the handwriting continued to be used for longer in some Greek regions than in Athens. As usual in these objects, the text consists of a list of names (pl. 5), an indication that the doll was not intended to represent a specific victim, but rather the act of binding (cf. the curse-bands discussed in Curbera's contribution to this volume).

Χαλκιδηύς	
Γνάθιος	Εϋδικος
Κάπανις	Νικόδικος.
Ἡπιγένης	
5 Τίμαρχος	

The most interesting feature in the text is the use of Η instead of Ε, as seen in Χαλκιδηύς (= Χαλκιδεύς) and Ἡπιγένης (= Ἐπιγένης). This uneasiness, when using the Ionic alphabet, gives a clue as to where the object comes from, for the use of η for ε is characteristic of the epichoric alphabet of Keos, the first large island to the south-east of Attica.<sup>4</sup> As in Naxos, in Keos η was originally used for the ē resulting from ā, while ε was used for the inherited ē. Yet forms such as εϋζάμηνος, τήγδη, ἀνέθ[η]κην (*SEG XXV 960*) and others point to a wider confusion between Ε and Η. True, Χαλκιδηύς could preserve the original quantity of

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<sup>3</sup> On voodoo dolls in general, see Faraone 1991 and Ogden 1999, 71–79. To Faraone's catalogue (pp. 200–05) should be added (besides the present item) the lead doll, Antikensammlung inv. 30899, lost during the Second World War. It was 10.5 cm high and had the hands bound behind its back. It was bought in Athens by the archaeologist Albert Ippel (1885–1962) and sold to the Antikensammlung in 1923.

<sup>4</sup> Knitl 1938, 2–3; Bechtel 1924, 35; Jeffery 1963, 296.

the diphthong, but it is likelier to be a graphic variant of common Greek Χαλκιδεύς.<sup>5</sup> Crucially, also the isotopic ratio of the lead points to Keos (see below the contribution by Jochen Vogl and Martin Rosner).

The most noteworthy name in the list is Καπανίς, which can be interpreted either as feminine (Καπανίς) or masculine (Κάπανις), as the remaining names, all masculine, seem to indicate. The name's etymology is uncertain. Louis Robert explained the name Καπανᾶς in Smyrna as formed on Photios' καπανοί· ἀλφίτων εἶδος. Yet, the correct reading of the name is Καπνᾶς (: καπνός) and Photios' glosse is probably corrupt.<sup>6</sup> Καπανίς can be related to καπάνη, a Thessalian word for 'chariot' which was also used in other regions. According to Pollux I 142 καπάναξ was part of a wagon box. Later writers explained Aristophanes' καπανικά (δεῖπνα) as ἀμαξιαῖα (: ἄμαξα), 'enormous,' which could be the meaning of the name.<sup>7</sup> Yet other derivations are also possible. Interestingly, the name was so far only documented on a dedication at the Athenian Acropolis (*IG I<sup>3</sup> 565* Καπανίς δεκά[τ]εν ἀνέθεκεν τάθεναία), where editors have interpreted the name as feminine. The remaining names in the inscription are common Greek but, significantly, they are more frequent in Attica than in any other Greek region, as the published volumes of the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* show. Thus, Γνάθιος is documented 17 times in Athens and 6 in the rest of the Greek world. Χαλκιδεύς 5 times in Athens and 7 in the remaining regions, Εὐδικός 31 times in Athens and 62 outside Attica, Ἐπιγένης 108 times in Athens and 174 in the rest. This is certainly not enough to infer that the targets were Athenians. If they were, the statuette could be product of the tensions between Keans and Athenians, as those described in the the inscription *IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 111*, issued in 363/2 BC after two successive rebellions in Karthaea and Iulis against Athens.<sup>8</sup> Due to the uncertainty

**5** Cf. Ζηύς, together with Ἀθηνάη and Ὑπέρβιος, in a black-figure amphora probably painted by a Kean (Wachter 2001, 204–207). Forms such as Ῥωπηύς and Φηγηύς in Keos are monophthonged datives in -ηοίς, unrelated to our Χαλκιδεύς (see Bechtel 1924, 45 and Knitl 1938, 87).

**6** Robert 1938, 153. For the reading of the name see Petzl 1980 (= Petzl 1982 nr. 293). Photios κ 162 †καπανοί†· ἀλφίτων εἶδος and κ 169 †καπνοί†· ἄλφριτα· οὕτω Φερεκράτης (fr. 250 Kassel/Austin) are considered corrupt by the editor Chr. Theodoridis. Both Pierre Chantraine's and Robert Beekes' etymological dictionaries adopt Robert's interpretation of Καπ(α)νᾶς.

**7** Aristophanes, fr. 507 K–A (ap. Athenaeus 10.418D).

**8** See the commentary by Rhodes and Osborne 2003, nr. 39.

about the origin of the victims and the absence of patronymics, however, there is no point in speculating further about the identity of these seven people.

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#### PHOTO CREDITS

**Pl. 1-4** Berlin, Antikensammlung. Photo: J. Laurentius

**Pl. 5** Drawing: S. Giannobile

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JOCHEN VOGL AND MARTIN ROSNER

## APPENDIX: LEAD ISOTOPE ANALYSIS OF AN ANCIENT VODOO DOLL

The voodoo doll (pl. 1–5) which was the subject of investigation is catalogued in the *Antikensammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* with inventory number 30741. The object was purchased in 1904 by Hans Schrader (see Curbera and Giannobile, in this volume) in Greece. Although the seller stated that the voodoo doll came from Corinth, there is no reliable information about its origin. To investigate where it came from, we determined the lead isotopic composition to find out the provenance of the lead. The isotopic composition of an ancient lead voodoo doll presented here has been completed as part of a broader study of ancient lead artefacts.

The chemical element lead has four stable isotopes  $^{204}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{206}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{208}\text{Pb}$ , with isotopic abundances of 1.4 %, 24.1 %, 22.1% und 52.4 % respectively.<sup>1</sup> Characteristic isotopic compositions develop in lead ore deposits depending on the initial concentrations of lead, thorium and uranium, and how much time has passed since lithogenesis. The isotopic composition of the lead ore (mainly galena) stays the same when the lead is extracted from the ore, even if silver has previously been separated using cupellation.<sup>2</sup> Artefacts made from lead extracted in this way therefore reflect the isotopic composition of the raw materials used. Nowadays, isotopic compositions can be determined by mass spectrometry on very small samples (1 mg of a lead alloy). Pairing up the isotopic composition of ancient lead artefacts with the isotopic compositions of

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<sup>1</sup> De Laeter et al., 2003, 728.

<sup>2</sup> Gale and Stos-Gale, 1996, 295; Cui and Wu, 2011, 213–2.

lead ore deposits potentially makes it possible to identify the geographical origin of the lead ores used and/or the reconstruction of lead-ore or processed-lead trade routes.

## ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

A small subsample (~1 mg) of the voodoo doll was provided by Uwe Peltz (*Antikensammlung*) for lead isotope analysis. The sample was cleaned with ultrapure water in an ultrasonic bath and was subsequently dissolved in ultrapure nitric acid. The dissolved sample has been used to separate the lead from any impurities and alloying components by liquid ion chromatography. From the purified lead fraction, two independent sample filaments were prepared, of which the isotopic composition was analysed using thermal ionization mass spectrometry. Mass fractionation was corrected with the isotope reference material NIST SRM 981. Reproducibility is typically less than 0.05 % for the observed isotope ratios  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ . The analysed lead isotope amount ratios are displayed in Table 1 together with their corresponding expanded measurement uncertainties ( $k=2$ ), which range between 0.067 % and 0.080 %. The isotope reference material NIST SRM 981 was also separated the same way as the sample to validate the analytical procedure. The analysed isotope amount ratios in the separated NIST SRM 981 overlap the certified data within uncertainty and demonstrate the validity of the procedure used.<sup>3</sup>

## RESULT

A geographical assessment of the lead isotopes in the voodoo doll can only be made by comparing it with isotopic compositions in ore deposits, which are mainly galena, cerussite, anglesite or plumbojarosite. For this purpose, already published lead isotopic compositions of lead ores from Europe (especially from the Mediterranean area) have been collected and evaluated.<sup>4</sup> To identify the provenance of lead in the artefact,

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**3** More details on the analytical procedure can be obtained from Vogl et al., 2013.

**4** The Pb isotopic composition of these lead ores will be made publicly available at a later date.

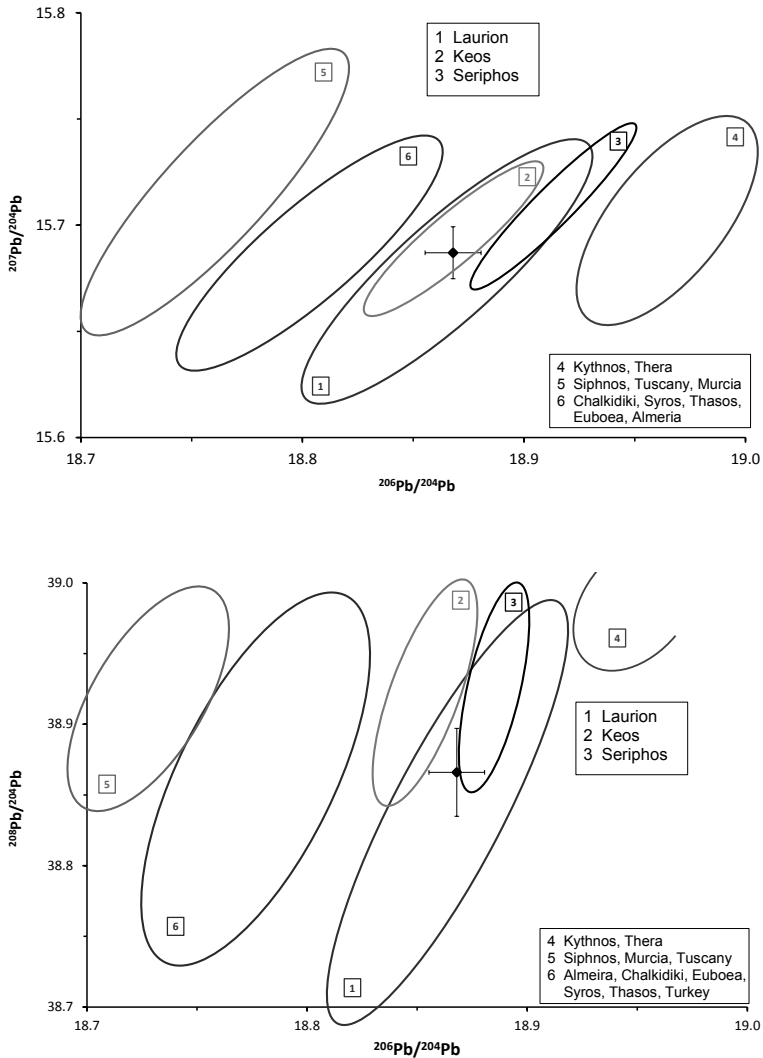
the isotopic composition of ores have been grouped by their geographic origin and displayed in a simplified manner in form of ellipses plotted in  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  and  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  diagrams (Fig. 1). The isotopic composition of the voodoo doll is plotted as a black diamond together with the error bars representing the expanded uncertainty.

The isotopic composition ( $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ( $18.868 \pm 13$ ),  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ( $15.687 \pm 12$ ),  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ( $38.866 \pm 31$ )) of the voodoo doll is located in the middle of the isotopic variation of Aegean lead ores. In the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  diagram the isotopic composition of the voodoo doll corresponds to lead ores from Keos and Laurion – while Seriphos is less probable according to the ore database. In the  $^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  diagram, however, the isotopic composition of the voodoo doll corresponds to lead ores from Laurion and Seriphos, while based on the ore database Keos is less probable.

Ranking the three locations with descending probability is very difficult, because not much information is available on the full natural variability of isotopic compositions in lead ore deposits. Based on the available data, Seriphos is less probable than the others, because there is no real overlap in the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  diagram. Laurion and Keos are almost equally probable. If we consider the fact that in the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs.  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  diagram the isotopic composition of the voodoo doll is located right in the centre of the isotopic variation of the ore deposits on Keos, although covered by Laurion ores, one might tend slightly more to Keos.

A mixture of lead ores from different places is implausible, because the ore was usually processed where it was mined. In principle, it is possible that the lead was recycled. However, as the isotopic composition points directly to the lead ore deposits in a relatively small geographic region (Keos/Laurion) it is rather unlikely that lead artefacts from completely different places have been mixed. A plausible scenario might be that lead artefacts from Keos, Seriphos and Laurion have been recycled.

To conclude, it is most likely that the lead used for the voodoo doll comes from Keos or Laurion; however, there is no clear indication which location is more probable.



**Fig. 1** Pb isotope ratios of the voodoo doll (black diamond) with the corresponding expanded uncertainties; additionally the Pb isotope ratios of the relevant lead ores are displayed schematically.

Sample	Description	N1 / N2 *	Isotope amount ratio **		
			<sup>206</sup> Pb/ <sup>204</sup> Pb	<sup>207</sup> Pb/ <sup>204</sup> Pb	<sup>208</sup> Pb/ <sup>204</sup> Pb
K-factor		-/12	1.00294 (66)	1.00370 (76)	1.00544 (77)
NIST SRM 981	After separation	3/2	16.943 (11)	15.497 (12)	36.738 (29)
NIST SRM 981	Certificate ***	-/-	16.937 (11)	15.491 (11)	36.721 (27)
Artefact	Voodoo doll	1/2	18.868 (13)	15.687 (12)	38.866 (31)

\* N1: Number of parallel prepared samples; N2: Number of parallel performed measurements of the same sample.

\*\* Expanded measurement uncertainties ( $U=k \cdot uc$ ,  $k=2$ ) are given in brackets and apply to the last two digits.

\*\*\* Calculated from certificate's data.

**Tab. 1** Pb isotope ratios of the voodoo doll and of the separated isotope reference material NIST SRM 981, together with the K-factors for correcting mass fractionation.

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RICHARD L. GORDON

# FROM SUBSTANCES TO TEXTS: THREE MATERIALITIES OF 'MAGIC' IN THE ROMAN IMPERIAL PERIOD

*This paper approaches the notion of materiality in magical practice from three different angles. The most obvious and pervasive sense of materiality relates to products, plants, animal-parts, stones, metals, taken from the natural world. The second aspect to be considered is the manufacture of ritual objects, seen as essential to the expressivity of practice; these merge with objects that are 'good to think' in that they serve as jumping-off points for imaginative rationalisations. But materiality can be seen as a feature of texts too, most interestingly in experiments in transcending the limitations of text. With the exception of pseudo-paragraphia (reversal or other manipulation of individual letters and lines, the basic elements of textuality), these textual experiments are found almost exclusively in Graeco-Egyptian practice. One of the old clichés about 'magic' is that it remained fixed in immovable tradition; focusing upon materiality helps to show that such supposed facts are mere apriorisms whose function was to help construct the categorial difference between Magic and Religion.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of a collective volume devoted to the materiality of magic, or magic and materiality, it is hardly necessary to defend one's use of the term magic at any great length – that, we may think, is the task of the Editor's Introduction. Here it is only necessary to say that magic has no

essence, is not a term of art,<sup>1</sup> cannot satisfactorily be distinguished from 'religion', and can only be discussed in relation to particular cultures and specific practices. Classic *Begriffsgeschichte* is here virtually useless, since it concerns itself only with usages among a narrow educated and literate élite. It is always necessary to distinguish between local or indigenous discourse(s) about magic, possible legal sanctions, and the view-point and aims of individual practitioners, whether specialists or self-helpers. In the context of historical rather than social-anthropological analysis, all three of these are subject to sometimes considerable change, both short- and long-term.<sup>2</sup> Awareness of historical change is particularly important in the case of historians who study complex societies that incorporate numerous local traditions, what are now called pre-industrial 'agrarian empires', such as the Mughul, Safavid, Javan, Ottoman, Spanish-American and Russian multi-cultural states, whose ancient proto-types were the Assyrian, Achaemenid, Seleucid and Roman Empires.<sup>3</sup>

Just as all these régimes differed sharply one from another within a larger homology, so too there were sharp differences of perspective, aims, skills and procedures, and appeal to literate modes even within the groups we might call 'religious specialists', none of whom would have applied to themselves the negative or derogatory terms current in the discourse(s) regarding their powers, abilities and social standing. To speak only of the Roman Empire and late-antique Egypt, what did, say, an illiterate root-collector in Italian Ariminum in the late first century BC have in common with a doctor such as Sextius Niger, fascinated by the medicinal lore accumulated in the Hellenistic *Inventarisierung der Welt*, or with Eleazar the Jewish specialist who exorcised a demoniac before Vespasian and his generals, or a *prophêtês* whose recipes were allegedly housed in one of the temples of Egyptian Heliopolis, or the Demetrios who wrote on the stars' answers to queries about runaway slaves, or the learned author of the Coptic magical *Book of Mary and the Angels*?<sup>4</sup> Yet in the magic-discourse(s) of antiquity all, at any rate in these rôles, might be considered as experts in relevant skills. For good

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1 The history of attempts to construct 'magic' as a scientific concept can be followed in the critical account by Styers 2004, 25–68.

2 Gordon 1999; Frenschkowski 2009, 873–76; Otto 2011, 1–31.

3 For the term 'agrarian empires', see e.g. Bayly 2004, 27–48.

4 Ariminum: Pliny, HN 27.131; Sextius Niger (who wrote at least one of his works in Greek) e.g. Pliny, HN 1.32 and 33, 29.74 with Deichgräber 1931, 971f.; Eleazar: Josephus, AntJ 8.3.5 = §46–49; Heliopolis (Pachrates): PGM



reasons, therefore, historians need to be flexible in their use of heuristic models, cutting their concepts to suit their material in a reflexive or dialogic manner.

In the context of the present collection of essays, ‘materiality’ counts as a heuristic model, directing attention to a specific aspect of magical practice and thus serving as a grid, albeit a generous one, for the selection of information. Materiality however can be taken to mean a variety of things. It might for example refer to physical actions, to embodiment.<sup>5</sup> A few years ago Ariel Glucklich, who had recorded stories about magic in the Indian city of Banaras/Varanasi in the early 1990s, and made notes on magical practice he encountered there, insisted upon the role of physical acts in magic:

The history of magic should consist first and foremost of a taxonomy of physical acts connected with the magical rite: tasting, pointing, beating, stepping, inhaling, exhaling, blowing and many others. Which are the senses used, how does pantomime convey information, how are ideas integrated with manipulations of the body and other objects? ... As a unique discipline, the study of magic has to focus on such topics and then ground its material in specific cultural and natural settings.<sup>6</sup>

Against the rationalist grain, Glucklich argued that magic, or rather the practice of magic by ritual specialists, is really a state of mind, based on an awareness of the interrelatedness of things, what he calls empathy, an acquired ability to respond to social and natural environments, combined with locally-effective communicative skills. Whatever we think of this phenomenological approach,<sup>7</sup> we can welcome both Glucklich’s readiness to take seriously the claims to power of practitioners (however

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IV 2447; Demetrios, *περὶ δραπετευόντων* ap. CCAG 1 (1898) 104–106 (ed. A. Olivieri); Coptic magical book (P.Heid.inv.kopt. 685); Meyer 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Zito 2011, 20: ‘It is through the practical, ritual, and moral maintenance of embodied persons that religions thrive or fail, and this maintenance does entail an enormity[sic] of material sustenance/support/contrivance’.

<sup>6</sup> Glucklich 1997, 230–31.

<sup>7</sup> Glucklich’s main target was the invocation of the ‘supernatural’ in attempts to account for magical claims, which he saw as an intellectualist appeal to an irrelevant but academically respectable category.

we are to comprehend them) and his emphasis upon the role of embodied agency in mediating between the material and the immaterial worlds.

That the significance of materiality here might really lie in its relation to the immaterial had already occurred to the late Alfred Gell, who in the late 1970s wrote a highly suggestive paper on scents, perfumes and fragrances, which he presented as synecdoches, *inter alia*, for the relation posited in any given culture, starting in his case with the Umeda of New Guinea, between the material and the immaterial worlds, between the world of concrete, daily experience and the ideational world inhabited by transcendent, or at any rate, normally invisible beings.<sup>8</sup> ‘To manifest itself as a smell is the nearest an objective reality can go towards becoming a concept without leaving the realm of the sensible altogether’. Just as the scent emanating from aromatics penetrates and sweetens the surrounding air, so they are apt mediators between this world of substance and the Other World: scent is the nearest thing in this world to the insubstantial quality of the denizens of that Other World: ‘Perfumes, in their disembodiedness and typicality, serve as the vehicle for symbolic awareness of an ideal order’.<sup>9</sup> The evanescence of fragrances figures them as communicative vehicles, but also registers in this world that ‘constituted transcendence’ – the world as it ideally is – which magical practice seeks for a moment to realize. Paradoxically enough, then, looking at materiality might provide the basis for an insight into what magic ‘is’ or ‘does’. But if so, this will never be more than an insight, an ordering thought among innumerable others.

## 2 MATERIALITY AND THE IMMATERIAL

The inspiration for examining magical texts and artefacts from the point of view of their materiality derives, I suppose, from two sources, the renewed interest in material culture among anthropologists and sociologists on the one hand, and the ‘new philology’ on the other.<sup>10</sup> The basic thesis of materiality studies is that, rather than starting from an aprio-

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<sup>8</sup> Gell 1977; see also Howes 2006. An excellent ancient example is Egyptian *kapet/kyphi*: Perea Yébenes 2014, 271–284.

<sup>9</sup> Citations from Gell 1977, 28 and 33 = 2006, 403 and 406. Shulman, who worked on S. India, remarked rather on the sense of distance and loss evoked by scents in Hindu poetry (1987).

<sup>10</sup> On the ‘new philology’, which takes a special interest in actual text

ristic opposition between human agents and inert things, we might consider the consequences of treating objects as agents. This recomposition is obviously reflexive: humans make things, an activity that in turn helps to transform the world into how it ought to be; but those very choices in turn circumscribe or channel human agency in certain directions or modes, while at the same time opening up new creative possibilities:

Thus, even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.<sup>11</sup>

An immediate response to this, for obvious reasons favoured by archaeologists, was to pick up Mauss' ideas in *Le don* (1923–24) and trace the (cultural) biographies of things.<sup>12</sup> This was most promisingly done by setting up a polarity between commoditisation and singularisation, between public valuations and subjective or individual ones.<sup>13</sup> But it soon became clear that the reflexivity of the relation between humans and the material world needed to be taken account of.<sup>14</sup> The anthropological classic that best exemplified this point is Bourdieu's *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (1972), which showed how the material environment of the Kabyle of Algeria structured a dense set of organised meanings constantly re-performed and re-enacted in daily life, an imbrication between the material environment, significations and performativity he termed *habitus*.<sup>15</sup> *Habitus* is shorthand for the manner in which the structure of the material/man-made world is internalised to create subjects and then

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carriers and their vicissitudes, see e.g. Cerquiglini 1989; Marcello-Nizia 1990; Drout & Klienman 2010.

**11** Appadurai 1986a, 5.

**12** Mauss 1950.

**13** Kopytoff 1986.

**14** Miller 2005, 8–10, cf. 40, using Hegelian 'Objektivierung' as his starting-point, but without reference to the well-known criticisms of Wilhelm Dilthey e.g. 2013, 69–74 (= Chap. 3.3).

**15** Bourdieu 1972. Actually the English translation (1977) is in some ways superior to the French, since Bourdieu evidently added a number of important passages, which were not taken up into the reprinted French ed. of 2000, though it claims to have been revised by the author. The reverse is the case with Bourdieu's *La distinction* (Paris 1979), the English version of which, also by R. Nice, is incomprehensible.

externalised as norms governing appropriate behaviour.<sup>16</sup> Valuable as Bourdieu's demonstration was, it remains trapped in the ethnological present, and the model is scarcely capable of assimilating relative materialities, dynamic inequalities of wealth, thesaurisation, or radical de-racination such as indenturation and slavery. These appear only by way of contrast, introduced by the expression "dans nos sociétés ...".<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu was equally uninterested in the production and value of expressly extraordinary objects, such as those acquired, created and exploited in the context of magical practice, where nothing can be taken for granted and nothing is done unconsciously. It is of course this type of object that is our concern.

Daniel Miller has stressed the paradox that the immaterial often depends heavily for its expression on materiality.<sup>18</sup> Artefacts such as temples, statues and votives are so many "technologies for the imagination of the divine". Intellectuals may stress immateriality and distance, practice requires substance.<sup>19</sup> In the case of magic as practised in developed or complex religious régimes, where the channelling of identifiable or nameable spirit or divine power in specific contexts is the aim, material culture helps both to signal unequal access to such power and to communicate its immanent transmissibility. Material culture is thus intimately linked to claims to (social) power and (pragmatic) efficacy.

Here we can perhaps pick up another of Gell's ideas, 'abduction of agency', which denotes the process by which quasi-personal agency is inferred as causing events. Starting from the Piercean concept of the index, a 'natural sign' from which an observer can make causal inferences (e.g. smoke → fire), Gell argued that we incline to treat objects – he was especially concerned with art-objects – as quasi-social beings, such that the index is treated as the outcome, and/or the instrument of, social agency.<sup>20</sup> To take the smoke → fire example, abduction of agency occurs when we think, "X is burning his garden-rubbish", when we move on from treat-

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**16** Miller 2005, 6f. Miller is a member of the Advisory Board of the interesting journal *Material Religion*, recently bought up from Berg by Bloomsbury Publishing.

**17** E.g. Bourdieu 1994, 186.

**18** Miller 2005, 29–35.

**19** I do not follow Miller in his claim (2005, 28) that it is precisely transcendent conceptions of deity that have greatest need of media of objectification – a paradox too far, one may think.

**20** Gell 1998, 14–16.

ing the smoke as a mere index of fire to an interesting, because social, inference. It is enough in this context to treat agency as a folk-concept:

The idea of agency is a culturally-prescribed framework for thinking about causation, when what happens is (in some vague sense) supposed to be intended in advance by some person-agent or thing-agent.<sup>21</sup>

Agency is normally inferred *ex post facto*, once a change occurs in the relevant milieu; in the case of magic, this change is often in the area of illness or physical well-being, whether of humans or animals. The notion of milieu, the focus on culturally-constructed foci of interesting action, is here crucial. Moving beyond Gell's concerns, we may say that in the case of magical action, the practitioner's exercise of knowledge, skill and choice of appropriate intervention, bound up with an internal model of the field of action in which he or she is engaged, invests the material objects used or made with a specific agency to effect a given alteration in the milieu.

The essential complement of this activity on the part of practitioners, who themselves do not in any complex – agrarian-imperial – social formation constitute any sort of unitary group but follow numerous historically-conditioned specialisms with their own implicit hypotheses, solutions and performativities, is the set of frame-representations within a culture that recognises certain changes within the milieu as resulting from such intervention, and offers certain types of appropriate response as possible solutions. These exchanges of information ground a dialectic between interventions and experiences, by which each exploits the other and so produces objectification. 'Agency' here is a social construction in which practitioners, patients, victims and witnesses all have an interest. In this process the circulation of narratives, subtending or implying a variety of different models of action, style and possibility, plays a fundamental rôle. It is such narratives that in turn legitimate attempts by non-specialists to appropriate specialist techniques insofar as they comprehend them, and if so turn them to their own advantage. The knowledge of specialists, however, remains primary, paradigmatic, and thus offers itself both as a model for occultic strategies among intellectuals and as a resource for textualisation.

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<sup>21</sup> Gell 1998, 17.

## 3 THREE MATERIALITIES OF 'MAGIC' IN THE ROMAN IMPERIAL PERIOD

The usual way of referring in Greek and Roman antiquity to magical practice in a relatively neutral way was through a hendiadys, in Greek φάρμακα καὶ ἐπωδαί, in Latin *venena et carmina*.<sup>22</sup> Such expressions imply a widespread awareness of the essential rôles of substances and performativity in such knowledge-practices. This awareness was founded upon familiarity, either direct or indirect, with the practice of herbalists, termed in Ancient Greek ῥιζοτόμοι, 'root-cutters', and φαρμακοπῶλα, 'herb-dealers', and in Latin *herbarii* and *medicamentarii*.<sup>23</sup>

The well-known ambiguity in meaning of words such as φάρμακον and *venenum* is due to the fundamental moral ambiguity of the skills of such practitioners, who claimed not only to be able to cure illnesses of various kinds, divine various sorts of truth, past, present and future, save marriages and cause irresistible erotic attraction,<sup>24</sup> but also to bring about misfortune and even death to those who, on the representation of third parties, deserved it.<sup>25</sup> To this ambiguity inherent in practitioners' claims we may add the basic conflicts of interest that 'magic' exposed

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**22** This rather fundamental point has escaped Otto 2011.

**23** Cf. still the material collected by Pfister 1938. Theophrastus cites a number of apparently literate rhizotomists, such as Thrasyas of Mantinea and Eudemus of Chios, who were famous enough for stories to circulate about their claims and experiments (e.g. *Hist.plant.* 9.16.8f.; 17.2f.)

**24** In Latin poetry of the early Empire, see Fauth 1999, 133–149. On the word φίλτρον, specifically connected with the project of changing people's minds in such contexts, see now Armoni 2001, 33–55.

**25** Pfister 1938, 1446f. The word φαρμακώδης, 'connected with φάρμακα', for example, could mean 'rich in herbs' of an area such as Telethron on Euboea, 'effective' of a natural substance, 'of medical value' of certain herbs, wines or even water, but also '(deadly) poisonous' (e.g. Diosc., *Med.* 3.80.4, smeared on arrows; Aelian, *NA* 6.4, of a snake). The title of a spurious work attributed to Dioscorides is περὶ δηλητηρίων φαρμάκων, 'On noxious drugs', i.e. animal poisons. This ambivalence was compounded by the realisation that what is poison to one person may be harmless for another, as Thrasyas of Mantinea pointed out (Theophr. *Hist.plant.* 9.17.2). As for *venenum*, the jurist Gaius observes in the mid-IP: *Qui 'venenum' dicit, adicere debet, utrum malum an bonum; nam et medicamenta venena sunt, quia eo nomine omne continetur, quod adhibitum naturam eius, cui adhibitum esset, mutat (de verb. obligat. Bk. 1): Dig. 50.16.23, comparing the Greek word φάρμακον and citing the locus classicus, Hom. Od. 4.230.*

between those who wished to right a perceived wrong done to them and the targets of their efforts at enforcing justice outside the framework of the legal system – which anyway had no interest in their plight (the classic case is that of Deianeira, wife of Herakles and mother of his children, who mistakenly caused her husband's death 'by poison' when all she intended to do was restrain him from casting her aside for a younger, more sexually attractive partner).<sup>26</sup> The translations of these words, and the representations of the practitioners, thus necessarily shift according to the speaker's perspective in a given situation.<sup>27</sup>

Given the centrality of natural substances – not just herbs but also innumerable parts of animals of all descriptions, minerals and stones – to rhizotomic practice, one might easily devote an entire paper to a selective description of their use. This however has already been done, at any rate for herbs,<sup>28</sup> which are today considered respectable enough ('ethnobotany') to study in this fashion, whereas animal parts are not, and indeed are regularly omitted more or less completely from accounts of rhizotomic practice, since they can hardly be recruited into claims for the empirical thrust of rhizotomic practice.<sup>29</sup> I would rather take the opportunity here of distinguishing between three more specific senses of materiality: (1) natural substances, (2) manufactured objects, including poppets,<sup>30</sup> but then shifting to a highly specialised and inventive type of materiality found only in certain texts in the Graeco-Egyptian tradition, namely (3) complex diagrams. This sequence does not pretend to insinuate a development from simple → sophisticated, but simply to illustrate some of the variety of strategies devised by practitioners in different specialisms for enhancing the pragmatic efficacy of their knowledge-practice. On the one hand it is obvious that, from sheer ignorance, we tend to under-estimate the knowledge of illiterate practitioners, since they are not the kind of people we might meet in the street, and, at any rate until

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**26** Faraone 1994; Armoni 2001, 68–100.

**27** The point is well made by Fauth 1999, 103–119 in relation to representations of the mythical figure of Medea in Latin poetry.

**28** E.g. Martini 1977 (selection of Pliny's herbs); Ducourthial 2003 (a synthetic account that includes many pages on astrobotany).

**29** E.g. Martini 1977; Beagon 1992, 233–239, though see p.107, where a couple of animal parts are mentioned. Gil 1969, 188–94 and Riddle 1985, 132–167 are laudable exceptions.

**30** Véronique Dasen's contribution to the volume excuses me from including amulets.

their knowledge of local pharmacopœias suddenly made them valuable to western pharmaceutical companies in pursuit of hitherto unknown chemical compounds, they were generally considered exhibits in the museum of primitive or irrational ideas; and on the other, literacy demands a heavy price in encouraging the construction of elaborately fantastic schemes, typified by astrobotany, which depreciates and even occludes pragmatic familiarity with actual substances and their (supposed) effects. Yet literacy also opens up quite new possibilities of magical experimentation, though, as far as we know, this was only taken seriously as an option within the temple-tradition of Graeco-Roman Egypt.

### 3.1 NATURAL SUBSTANCES

My first Materiality is thus what we would term natural substances. Here we think in the first place of Lévi-Strauss' 'la science du concret', the prodigious albeit selective scale of indigenous classifications of nature and their complex transformation for mythopœic (which was Lévi-Strauss' larger concern) and pragmatic ends.<sup>31</sup> Lévi-Strauss was particularly concerned to stress that indigenous peoples are (or were) extremely interested in detail. Of the Tewa (Pueblo Indian) language, for example, he observes:

*La langue tewa utilise des termes distincts pour chaque partie ou presque du corps des oiseaux et des mammifères ... La description morphologique des feuilles d'arbres ou des plantes comporte quarante termes, et il y a quinze termes distincts correspondant aux différentes parties d'un plante de maïs.*<sup>32</sup>

Such interest in details is not random, but motivated – by the demands of hunting, animal-domestication, food-gathering, agricultural experimentation, the search for remedies, the desire to elaborate a cosmology and so on. It is therefore not amenable to discussion framed in terms of an opposition between empiricism versus apriorism, or between (proto-scientific) rationality and superstition. 'Observation' is always a cultural matter, always framed by discourse.

From antiquity, a similar tradition survives in the lore preserved (to say nothing of late-antique and early medieval, mostly pseudonymous

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**31** 'La science du concret' is the title of the first chapter of Lévi-Strauss 2008, 559–596.

**32** Lévi-Strauss 2008, 566. This group of Pueblo lives in New Mexico.



collections)<sup>33</sup> by Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum*, in the second half of the fourth century BC, who lists some 660 distinguishable plants, including grains and trees,<sup>34</sup> the *De materia medica* by Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus in Cilicia, who names c. 700 plants and over 1000 substances, and the tens of thousands of ‘facts’ enumerated in Pliny, *HN* Books 8–32; especially Bks. 20–32 on materia medica derived from herbs, trees and animals, including protective amulets made from natural substances.<sup>35</sup> By no means all of this extensive lore was collected in mainland Greece and the islands: already Theophrastus had heard of numerous plants and shrubs from Anatolia and farther east (India), from Arabia and Africa, from Scythia too;<sup>36</sup> Pliny likewise was aware of numerous Asiatic herbs, described, often with exaggerations in the direction of the marvellous, in herbalist compilations of the later Hellenistic period (Scarborough 1982). Although Dioscorides did undertake field-trips in order to discover plants and the attendant lore concerning their properties, he names (and criticises) many of the writers whose works he had used.<sup>37</sup>

The direct source of most of this surviving information was therefore the written herbalist-medical tradition, to which Hippocratic doctors, Asclepiads and the Peripatetic tradition had contributed.<sup>38</sup> But prior to that, and underlying that great effort of catalogisation and synthesis, came the work of unknown numbers of rhizotomists and herb-sellers, almost all anonymous, and including some women,<sup>39</sup> who had their own

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**33** As far as I know nothing has yet replaced the admirable account of Singer 1927.

**34** This total excludes cases where two names are given for a single plant. Hort’s tr. in the Loeb series (vol. 2, p.484f.) lists in addition 27 unnamed plants, several of them from places very far afield.

**35** Theophrastus: Lloyd 1983, 119–135; Dioscorides: Riddle 1985, 1–25; Pliny: Scarborough 1986.

**36** E.g. *Hist. plant.* 9.1.1–7; 2.2.3; 3.1–4; 4.1–10; 7.1–4; 15.1f.

**37** *Travels: Mat. Med. Praef.* 4 (1 p.2.16–18 W.); authors, older and more recent, esp. Petronius Niger: *ibid.* 1–3 (1 p.1f. W.).

**38** According to my count, Pliny claims to have consulted 129 specialist authors (not counting literary sources such as Homer, Sophocles, Menander, Cicero or Ovid) in Bks 20–32 alone.

**39** Apart from Thrasyas of Mantinea and Eudemus of Chios (see n.23 above), Theophrastus names Antiphilos of Plataea (*HP* 9.18.4 [this passage omitted from Hort’s ed. on account of ‘indecenty’]). Galen mentions the impressive knowledge of Antonius (Musa), ‘the rhizotomist’, e.g. *De comp.*

classification-systems, means of valuation, procedures of collection and so on.<sup>40</sup> Very little about their procedures is known – Theophrastus, near the beginning of this transformation-process, provides just a few insights<sup>41</sup> – since the literate tradition, under Hippocratic influence, did its best to eliminate traces of magical practice and treated such φάρμακα/medicamenta as pure substances with more or less precise properties, though Theophrastus at least was quite aware of the inherent difficulties here (e.g. *HP* 9.19.4). This enregistration into a quite different discourse of power shifted substances into the category of ‘natural’ things, gifts of providential Nature (a concept that only existed thanks to the late Sophistic discursive shift, and never penetrated beyond the educated élite), whereas the aim of rhizotomic knowledge-practices was on the contrary to locate φάρμακα/medicamenta as firmly as possible within a frame we can best describe as numinous.<sup>42</sup>

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*med. sec. locos* XII p.580.2 K., cf. *ibid.*.p.557.3; *De comp. med. per genera*, XIII p.935.1. Galen also cites the work of Pharnakes ‘the rhizotomist’, XIII p.204.1 and 571.7 K.. On the rhizotomists in general: *In Hippocr. epidem. comm.*, XVIIb p.231.7 K. Pliny mentions a small number of (literate) female rhizotomists, such as Olympias of Thebes (*HN* 20.226); they seem all to have mainly practised as midwives.

**40** I take it that Pliny, *NH* 25.3 is a reference to this anonymous labour of generations. In what follows, I include φαρμακοπῶλαι, φαρμακῶδεις, ὑλότομοι, ἀντιτόμοι ριζοπῶλαι, βοτανικοί, *herbarii* and *medicamentarii* and their congeners (cf. Delatte 1938, 1 n.2) under the term ‘rhizotomists’. The proliferation of such terms in later Greek was due to the semantic drift of φαρμακ- words in the direction of ‘witchcraft’.

**41** E.g. Theophrastus, *Hist. plant.* 9.8.5–8, a section he ends with the remark, ‘These (claims) seem to belong to fictions (ἐπιθέτοις), as has been said (above)’. LSJ cite only this passage prior to Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom* 4.70.4. for this sense; it seems to be an extension of the sense ‘adventitious’, used e.g. by Aristotle. Earlier in the same passage (9.8.5) he uses the word ἐπιτραγωδοῦντες, ‘exaggerating’, for rhizotomists who make such claims – again, by far the earliest occurrence of such a sense.

**42** Lucian makes Herakles tease Asklepios by describing him as a weedy ριζοτόμος καὶ ἀγύρτης, an itinerant root-cutter (*Dial. deor.* 15.1 [13 Dindorf]). It is this ignorance/rejection of school medicine on the part of rhizotomists that produced the topos of the superiority of school doctors over rhizotomists, e.g. Sextus Empir. *Adv. Math.* 2.41; Maximus of Tyre, *Dial.* 20.3; Themistius, Ὑπὲρ τοῦ λέγειν ... p.329a9 Harduin. But one can equally find narratives claiming precisely the opposite, e.g. Posidonius frg. 85 ll.94ff. Theiler.

I choose this word because rhizotomists did not generally locate their practice within the discursive frame of recognised divinities, though some late prayers represent them as having invoked Gê or Gaia and a variety of other named deities,<sup>43</sup> but constructed the power they ascribed to their materia by means of a complex system of rules (and rituals) for collection, legitimated by the claim that otherwise the materia would be ineffective, but also through direct addresses to the plants, through danger-narratives, and through the ἐπωδαί/*carmina* which for them were the indispensable complement to the substances they applied.<sup>44</sup> I give just two examples from Theophrastus:

When one is cutting *xiris* one should deposit in its place as payment (μισθόν) honey-cakes made of wheat sown in spring. It should be cut with a two-edged knife after first cutting a circle [in the earth] round it three times. The part one cuts off first should be held up in the air, while the remainder is being cut.<sup>45</sup>

The plant here is ritually separated ('cut three times round') from its 'proper' place and treated as a kind of *daimon* (e.g. a house-snake) by being offered a specially-baked cake, which is however termed a μισθός, thus alluding explicitly to the fee paid to a doctor or healer.<sup>46</sup> This 'fee' substitutes for the usual utterance. The rule that the firstling is not to touch the ground repeats the separation ritual, while implying that otherwise – if it touches the ground from which it came – the plant's efficacy will be impaired.<sup>47</sup>

They say one should draw a circle round the *helleboros* and cut it standing to the east, while uttering a prayer (κατευχόμενον). And one should keep an eye out for eagles either to the right or the left;

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<sup>43</sup> Delatte 1938, 97–108, who gaily mixes medieval iatrobotanist, late-antique, and Graeco-Egyptian evidence.

<sup>44</sup> The standard account of the rules for collection is Delatte 1938; see also briefly Gordon 2011a, 53–61. Specifically on ἐπωδαί/*carmina*, see Gil 1969, 217–244.

<sup>45</sup> Theophr. *HP* 9.8.7 (tr. Hort, adapted).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 3.10., 1287a36f.: (doctors) ἄρνουνται τὸν μισθὸν τοῦς κάμνοντας ὑγιάσαντες, 'earn their fee by healing their patients'.

<sup>47</sup> The rules for cutting the Pisidian iris are very similar: *Pliny*, *HN* 21.42.

for if an eagle should come near, it may well be that one dies within a year.<sup>48</sup>

Here the danger of failing to follow the estranging rules, merely implicit in the first example, has become explicit: the practitioner may actually die. The ill-chance, the appearance of an eagle, alludes to another rhizotomist practice, *oiônoscopy*, the art of divining from the behaviour of birds. Although Theophrastus does not mention it, the use of the plant *helleboros* was surrounded by further dangers: for example, it should not be used in cloudy weather, otherwise unbearable pains would follow; and elaborate precautions had to be taken in the way of diet before it could be tolerated (Pliny, *HN* 25.59).

In some cases, however, the ‘prayer’, of central importance in the frame set up in this last example, is reduced to a mere statement of the purpose of the action:

After a circle has been drawn round it, the root of the quince (*coto-neum*) is pulled up with the left hand, while the practitioner declares the purpose for which he intends to use it and the name of the patient. When made into an amulet, the root heals *strumae*.<sup>49</sup>

Although the utterance remains a declarative, there is here no direct address either to the plant or to the gods, so that the *Entfremdungseffekt* is perceptibly reduced.

The powers inherent in animal parts were exploited in an analogous but apparently simpler way, namely by stressing the conditions under which they were acquired. Pliny’s account of the suggestions for making

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**48** *HP* 9.8.8 (tr. Hort, adapted), copied by Pliny, *HN* 25.50, who says the prayer requested permission from the gods, *concedentibus diis*. The term *κατευχόμενον* denotes the utterance that is normally referred to as *ἐπωδαί*. Assuming that this is a term Theophrastus’ informants used (whether or not he was relying on written texts), we have an insight into the rhizotomists’ own conception of what they were doing, rather than the outsiders’ view of ‘incantation’. Theophrastus however uses the word *ἐπωδή* in relation to the utterances employed in purifying a house with *helleboros* (9.10.4).

**49** Pliny, *HN* 23.103. *OLD* defines *struma* as a ‘swelling the lymphatic glands’; the Neuer Georges as ‘die skrophulöse Anschwellung u. Vereiterung der Lymphdrüsen’.

amulets in the treatment of quartan fevers (*quartani*) to be found in the books ascribed to the 'Magi', i.e. Zoroaster, Ostanes, Dardanus and others, provides a characteristic example:

The dust in which a hawk has rolled himself, tied in a linen cloth by a red thread. The longest tooth of a black dog; the solitary wasp named Pseudosphex, caught with the left hand, and suspended under the chin; or: the first (such) wasp seen in the spring. The severed head of a viper (*vipera*) wrapped in a linen cloth; (or:) a viper's heart extracted while it is alive. (Cut off) the snout and ear-tips of a mouse and let it go free, and wrap them in a red cloth. Gouge the right eye out of a lizard while it is alive. Cut the head off a fly and place it in a piece of goat-skin.<sup>50</sup>

In all these cases, the difficulty or unpleasantness of the means of acquisition fulfils the same distancing function as the rhizotomist rules for the collection of plants. Although Pliny, for whom the Magian books were generally scandalous, does not do so, the competent practitioner could have set out the motivation for choosing the species and the specific part in the locally-customary explanatory idiom.<sup>51</sup>

Rhizotomists thus linked 'natural' substances as closely as possible to another order of things, represented as the source of the substances' power to heal.<sup>52</sup> Pliny tells us that some rhizotomists would retain part of a plant, for example the iris, that they had gathered in a particular ritualised manner for a specific purpose and a named patient; and, if they reckoned later they had not been paid enough for their services, would replace it in its original position, on the assumption that the problem it had cured would thereby recur (e.g. *HN* 21.144, cf. 25.174 etc.). For him

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**50** *HN* 30.98–99 (tr.W. H. S. Jones, adapted). The nature of the instrument to be used is sometimes specified, e.g. bronze, iron, a flint, a reed (for example, to cut off the head of slugs: *HN* 30.101).

**51** Actually Pliny does go on to cite from the grammarian Apion a priestly rationale for the use of the dung-beetle (*scarabaeus sacer*, whose Egyptian name *khepre* was the same as the name of the sun-god Ra in the early morning) as an amulet (30.99). An exhaustive account will be found in Sicherl 1939, 60–74.

**52** Pliny's conception of the providential creation of remedies (e.g. *HN* 22.1; 22.30) is a stoicised version of this account. At 19.21 he terms the medicinal properties of plants and herbs *opus ingens occultumque divinitatis*.

this was a *scelus*, a crime, in that the (implied) contract to provide a healing service had been broken; but it shows quite clearly the rhizotomists' belief that it was their collection procedures that mainly imparted the curative powers to the substances they used.

On the other hand, elements of the 'natural world' might also be claimed to possess inherently marvellous capacities. The most obvious example here are semi-precious stones, which were the subject of an entire genre, *Lithika*, and heavily exploited in the 'Magian' literature.<sup>53</sup> Pliny mentions that certain plants, such as asphodel and squill, were used to nullify or break aggressive magic (e.g. *HN* 21.108; 20.101),<sup>54</sup> while others had amazing effects – for example if one binds a twig or branch of the *caprifigus* round a bull's neck, however fierce, it is prevented from moving an inch – such is the *mirabilis natura* of the wild fig (23.130).<sup>55</sup> The juice of other plants, such as *eleiochrysos*, might actually cause the wearer to be well spoken of (Theophr. *HP* 9.19.2f.); the root of pale *eryn-ge*, if it happens to grow in the shape of the male sexual organs, makes the finder, if a man, attractive to women.<sup>56</sup> And, finally, the system was naturalised by ascribing a version of it to animals: deer, for example, eat *elaphoboscon* to protect themselves against snakes; wild goats eat rue to improve their vision; certain wasps refresh their stings with the poison of dead adders (ἔχιδναί); caterpillars can be got rid of by nailing the

<sup>53</sup> See still Höpfnér 1926; Gil 1969, 194–200; Halleux & Schamp 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Similarly the *panakeia* that grows round Psophis and Mt. Kyllene, between Achaea and Arcadia, which locals claimed to resemble Homer's *moly*, except that it was not difficult to dig up, was used πρὸς τὰ ἀλεξιφάρμακα καὶ μαγείας (Theophr. *HP* 9.15.7). μαγείαι are 'bewitchments'; against LSJ, ἀλεξιφάρμακα must here mean 'charms' in general, as in *HP* 9.19.2, and not 'antidotes' as usual; cf. the expression Ἐφέσια ἀλεξιφάρμακα, 'Ephesian charms' sung to prevent the evil eye from harming a bridal couple, Menander F 274 Kassel-Austin.

<sup>55</sup> Drawing a circle round a scorpion with a sprig of heliotropium has the same effect on it (22.60). Expressions noting the marvellous qualities of esp. plants occur repeatedly in Pliny, e.g. *HN* 17.241; 20.224; 22.29; 57, 62; 23. 130 (different from the passage cited in the text), 135, 137f.; 25.19. Already in Theophrastus, e.g. *HP* 7.13.5

<sup>56</sup> Pliny, *HN* 22.18f.; cf. the value of juice of *cichorium*, which, according the 'Magi', helps one to be looked on favourably (by the great) and to obtain boons, *HN* 20.74. Likewise *heliochrysus*, whose flower resembles gold (21.66) and the *aetitês* amulet proposed by Cyran. 1.1.173–75 (= p.32 Kaimakis).

skull of a *female* perissodactyl up on a wall.<sup>57</sup> It was this ‘magical’ frame, essential to traditional rhizotomic practice, that the Hippocratics, Asclepiads and the Peripatetic tradition ignored as best they could.<sup>58</sup>

A further means of bridging the gap between material substance and the immaterial world was to reduce substances to unrecognisable forms by subjecting the various parts (leaves, stems, branches, twigs, buds, fruits, pith, sap or juice, rind, roots ...) to a variety of operations, peeling, chopping, pounding, mashing, boiling, drying, soaking. Animal parts were frequently dried, pounded, burned to ash.<sup>59</sup> Sometimes elaborate methods of preparation are specified, which often include details that have no purely ‘pragmatic’ purpose, for example in the case of the medicinal squill:

Remove the dried rind, chop what is left of the pith into pieces, and hang them up close together on a line. When they are dry put them into a jar of the most acidic vinegar possible, but without touching the sides of the vessel. Plaster the jar with gypsum and put it under the roof-tiles that are in the full sun all day long. Do this for 48 days before the (summer) solstice. Then take the jar down and remove the squills, and reserve the vinegar to another pot. This vinegar sharpens the vision, and, if taken over two consecutive days, helps with pains of the stomach and sides. But if one takes too much it causes one to appear dead for a time ...<sup>60</sup>

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**57** Resp. Pliny, *HN* 22.79; 20.134; Aelian, *NA* 5.16; Pliny, *HN* 20.180. The *pseudosphex* cannot be identified with any known species.

**58** Aristotle, *Oecon.* 1346b22 includes *pharmakopôlai* in a list of shady characters, wonder-workers, diviners καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τοιουτοτρόπων; Epicurus in turn called Aristotle a ‘wastrel’ for getting through his patrimony, and a *pharmakopôlês*, no doubt for his interest in biology and natural history (Diog. Laert. 10.8). The various comedies with this title by Critias, Alexias and Krateuas (all lost) no doubt played on this reputation. Galen however was prepared to accept some of their remedies, e.g. *De comp. medic. sec. locos* XII p.587l.12 K. It must however be noted that the Asklepieion on Cos posted some ‘rhizotomic’ remedies against poisonous animals: Pliny, *HN* 20.264.

**59** See Delatte 1938, 149–156, though again he spends much of his time discussing much later evidence; Ducourthial 2003, 185–193, rightly stressing the development of complex compounds. On traditional observation of natural ‘signs’, see Fernández Delgado 2011.

**60** Pliny, *HN* 20.97f. (extensively adapted from W. H. S. Jones’ tr.).

This recipe incorporates yet another strategy for increasing the numinous quality of substances, namely the stipulation of a specific time-period related to the astronomical calendar – a phase of the moon, an entire lunar cycle, part of the solar cycle, the heliacal rising of certain familiar constellations, such as the Pleiades.<sup>61</sup> The increased circulation of astrological discourse made it possible to add to these traditional schemes on a grand scale, by invoking the planets and the twelve zodiacal constellations. An entirely new branch of occult knowledge, astro-botany and astrolithy, could thus be created, whose *raison d'être* lay in the establishment of correlations between heavenly bodies and specific plants and stones.<sup>62</sup> Works such as the *Cyranides* Bk 1 (originally second century AD) pushed such correlations still further by systematising supposed relations of sympathy between four different types of 'substance', stones, plants, animals and fish, correlations themselves ordered by the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet.<sup>63</sup> Such schemes in turn provided the theoretical basis for melothesia, the establishment of correlations between astronomical bodies and the human anatomy (Pérez Jiménez 1998 [1999]).

There are two related variables in all this, competition between rhizotomists and the impact of literacy on an originally illiterate, highly localised knowledge-practice. The 'ideal' location of rhizotomists was in the villages near the best areas for herbs, such as (in Greece) the northern Peloponnese and northern Thessaly. However, such individuals needed to sell their preparations where the main markets were, namely in larger settlements and regular *poleis*. This explains the early emergence of traders skilled in the preparation of drugs, the *φαρμακοπῶλαι*, who set up their stalls in markets, or at cross-roads, with their signs hung up, just as in numerous countries today in the developing world.<sup>64</sup> Some of these were themselves collectors, others bought up herbs and

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<sup>61</sup> Delatte 1938, 24–52.

<sup>62</sup> Festugière 2006, 123–86. Ducourthial devotes a good third of his book to astrobotany, divided between planets and zodiacal signs (2003, 257–473).

<sup>63</sup> Waegeman 1987; Perea Yébenes 2014, 75–128. The names of each item in each group begin with the same letter, which a) gets quite difficult by the time you reach the end of the alphabet, and b) the lack of substantial relation between the items becomes increasingly glaring.

<sup>64</sup> Stall in the market-place: Theophr. *HP* 9.17.3; cross-roads: Galen, *De diebus decret.*, IX p.823.7 Kühn.



other items, made them into products for sale; yet others were simply more or less knowledgeable traders.

Movement into markets produced the conditions required for competition,<sup>65</sup> which evidently often took the form of taking dangerous drugs and seeing whether one would survive. Theophrastus recounts a story about Eudemus of Chios, who claimed he would survive taking 22 doses of hellebore, a notoriously effective purge or emetic, in a single day, and managed to sit unmoved until sundown because he knew an antidote (Theophr. *HP* 9.17.3). An unnamed *φαρμακοπώλης* who was admired in the agora for being able to eat a couple of roots of hellebore, was not so fortunate. One day a simple shepherd, used to living in the mountains and eating hellebore, came up to him and ate not just one or two, but the whole bundle, and so ruined the man's reputation (*ἐποίησεν ἀδόκιμον*).<sup>66</sup> A *φαρμακοπώλης* named Lysias was sufficiently well-known in fourth-century BC Athens for his question to Diogenes, "Do you believe in the gods?" to go down in the doxographic tradition.<sup>67</sup>

But as competition increased, evidently by the fourth century BC, the attractions of gaining a wider reputation by recording, and so in many ways altering, one's knowledge in a book became irresistible. Whereas one line of transmission here remained relatively close to traditional rhizotomic practice, including details of the rules of collection and preparation, other authors tried to interest school-medicine in their knowledge, and ended up by suppressing 'unacceptable' aspects of their practice. Such differences in aim seem clearly to be reflected in the unevennesses of Pliny's accounts of different plants and animal parts. Reduction to a written version in turn made a completely new type of organisation of such knowledge possible, in alphabetical order, instead of

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**65** As early as Aristophanes we find hints that *φαρμακοπῶλαι* might display rare items, such as a burning-glass, in order to attract attention from passers-by (*Nub.* 765–772).

**66** Theophr. *HP* 9.17.1. In the following section (17.2) he specifically mentions the high reputation (*εὐδοκιμῶν σφόδρα*) of another such specialist, Eudemus (not of Chios, however). Such experts in their fields are known all over the world: for the enormous *pharmacopectia* of Laduma Madela and his brother Susa in Kwa Zulu, S. Africa, for example, see Schlosser 1972; 1984.

**67** Diog.Laert. 6.42. Admittedly, only because Diogenes played on the trope of the superstitious *φαρμακοπώλης*.

the mnemonic-symbolic-locative organisation of illiterate rhizotomists.<sup>68</sup> A further step, taken around the turn of the second and first centuries BC, was the creation of illustrated phamacopœias, for example that of Crateuas, a rhizotomist who held a post at the court of Mithradates VI of Pontus, which actually had coloured pictures and was afterwards imitated or revised by Cassius Dionysius of Utica and a certain Metrodorus.<sup>69</sup> Such efforts were by no means purely pragmatic (though they must have served to disseminate some knowledge of remedies to literate heads of households) but appealed to the growing class of leisured readers interested in organised knowledge. Access to such books thus provided yet another way of turning material substances into ideas: substances became good to think, and ended up in iatrobotanic and melothesic schemes.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.2 MANUFACTURED OBJECTS

My second Materiality concerns objects manufactured specifically for magical ends (again excluding amulets or phylacteries,<sup>71</sup> which are specific material forms that aim to transmute different types of knowledge, mainly of substances but also invocatory, into relatively long-term *ad hoc* efficacy through physical contact or proximity to the beneficiary). I distinguish here three different types of manufactured objects, 1) those whose materiality confirms the meaningfulness of the magical project by turning claims to knowledge into performance; 2) those that communicate in their very form the pragmatic aim of a ritual procedure; and 3) mimetic objects whose salient property is their intended resemblance to an original model (person).

#### 3.2.1 KNOWLEDGE INTO PERFORMANCE

One of the older insights of materiality theory is that manufactured objects are frequently important precisely because we do not *see* them but take them for granted, and thus also the way in which such objects, not merely tools, armaments, clothes and furniture, but also architecture,

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<sup>68</sup> Totelin rightly points out that oral recipes tend to differ markedly from written versions (2009, 18).

<sup>69</sup> Pliny, *HN* 25.8; see also Kind 1922. This Metrodorus might be the man of the same name cited by Pliny at 20.214 as the author of an ἐπιτομή ρίζοτομουμένων.

<sup>70</sup> For books with magic, see also Bremmer, this volume.

<sup>71</sup> For phylacteries, see also Dieleman, this volume.

vehicles, and media condition what we do and how we do it.<sup>72</sup> Not-noticing is thus a form of naturalisation. Objects manufactured for largely non-utilitarian purposes such as religion, on the other hand, constantly call attention to themselves, through their aesthetic claims, the intrinsic value of the materials they are made of, the modes of storage, care and presentation to an audience, or their palpable inutility for everyday pragmatic ends. In the case of Graeco-Roman magical practice, it is primarily the framing of such objects, though sometimes also their very manufacture, that simultaneously calls attention to the exceptional nature of the claims made for the knowledge that motivates their production, and the meaningfulness of that knowledge within the totality of knowledge-claims on offer. We may take two examples to illustrate the point.

In 2005 a Roman cellar dating from the Flavian period was discovered by chance in the centre of Chartres (Roman Autricum/Ludgunensis), and turned out to contain 424 separate objects.<sup>73</sup> The house belonged to a man of unknown social status (Roman citizen? Libertus? Junian Latin?) named C. Verius Sedatus. Some of the objects found were quite unremarkable, fragments of local coarse-ware pottery, for example, glass-ware, or the nails, hinges and other attachments from a small wooden chest and a larger but portable cupboard.<sup>74</sup> Some others – a (sacrificial) knife, 68 animal bones, a few lamps – might point to ritual activity (pl. 6).<sup>75</sup> Much more unusual were the remains of three round-bellied vessels with suspension loops, which were decorated with moulded snakes, stereotyped ivy-leaves and supernumerary kernos-type receptacles (“couples”) at the mouth-rims.<sup>76</sup> They look very exotic, but

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<sup>72</sup> Miller 2005, 5.

<sup>73</sup> On the circumstances of the find and the location in Chartres, see Joly 2010, 126–135; for the fire that destroyed the house at the end of IP, but saved the objects by covering them with layers of ash and débris, *ibid.* 137–140.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 140–155 (chest, cupboard); 189–196 (coarse-ware); 199f. (glass).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 187f. (knife); 189 (bones, 51% pig); 196–199 (lamps). It is undecidable whether the bones derived from sacrificial meals. Since they were found in a cellar, it is possible that carcasses were simply hung there. Knives of this type were used for slaughtering, skinning and for cooking.

<sup>76</sup> Dimensions: c. 16 cm high and 21–23.5 cm wide at the broadest point.



1 The ceramic *turibulum* of C. Verius Sedatus, showing the text *Oriens*

Oriens	Meridie<s>	Occidens	Septentrio
Vos rogo omnipot[e]n- tia numina ut omnia bona conferatis Verio	Vos rogo omnipotentia numina ut omnia bona conferatis C(aio) Verio	Vos rogo omnipotentia [n]u- mina ut omnia bona conferatis C(aio) Verio	Vos rogo omnipotentia nu- mina ut omnia bona confe- ratis C(aio) Verio Sedato
5 Sedato quia ille est (flange)	5 Sedato quia ille est (flange)	5 Sedato quia ille est (flange)	5 quia ille est vester custos (flange)
vester custos Echar Aha Bru Stna Bros Dru Chor [D]r a \$x	vester custos Echar Aha Bru Stna Bros Dru Chor Drax	vester custos Echar Aha Bru Stna Bros Dru Chor Drax	Echar Aha [Br]u Stna [Bros] D ru [Chor] D]r ax [Chos]
10 Cos (flange)	10 Chos (flange)	10 [Ch]os (flange)	10 [Chos] (flange)
Halcemedme Halcehalar Halcemedme	Halcemedme Halcehalar Halcem(e)dme	Halcemedme Halcehalar Halcemedm[e]	Halcemedme Halcehalar Halcemedme

2 The four texts of the *turribulum* (= AE 2010: 940) set out in columns (created by K. Meinking)

their glaze is characteristic of local wares, so that they were probably made in the neighbourhood of Chartres.<sup>77</sup>

The most interesting object, however, was a small ceramic *turibulum* (fig. 1) which had been carefully inscribed while wet with four short virtually identical prayers, prefaced by the four cardinal points in the nominative: *Oriens*, *Meridies*, *Occidens* and *Septentrio* (see fig. 2).<sup>78</sup> Presumably the *turibulum* played a rôle in private rituals whose nature is unknown. The prayers request blessings (*vos rogo ...*) from the *omnipotentia numina*, omnipotent powers, upon Verius Sedatus on the grounds that he is their guardian (*quia ille est vester custos*). These powers are then listed, to the number of twelve: the first nine names are monosyllabic, the final three quadrisyllabic (*Halcedmedme* / *Halcehalar* / *Halcedmedme*); the phonetics are all deliberately non Latinate and exotic. Such a request seems to be unparalleled, so we may conclude that Sedatus was a religious bricoleur, creating his own personal ritual idiom from a variety of sources and inspirations.

Three features of the prayers suggest some connection with the ritual-magical procedures known to us mainly from the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri.<sup>79</sup> First, Sedatus must have considered the unintelligible 'words' that follow *vester custos* to be the secret or powerful names of the *omnipotentia numina*. Second, claiming that one deserves to be listened to because one is the 'guardian' of such powers is a version of a basic claim in the magical papyri, that knowledge of *onomata barbarika* gives power over the divinities addressed, or at any rate the right to claim very special consideration. Third, the four cardinal directions are invoked in some Graeco-Egyptian prayers to provide, as here, concrete blessings. In these cases however the addressee is invariably the Agathos Daimon of Alexandria. If Sedatus' prayer is indeed linked to the magical papyri, it is an exceptionally early appropriation; and, as we would expect, it shows no proper grasp of the relevant invocatory techniques, so that he

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77 Ibid. 175–187. None of the vessels adduced by Dominique Joly as comparanda seem very similar, at any rate to my eyes. The closest are perhaps the vessels from Augst and Avrenches, though their overall shape is quite different, being inspired by the wine-krater.

78 Well described and illustrated in Joly 2010, 155–165. The texts are most easily consulted in *Année Épigraphique* 2010: 940. Two small fragments of similar vessels with virtually identical, albeit incomplete, texts were also found in the débris (*AE* 2010: 941, 942).

79 See my remarks in Joly 2010, 168–175.

was probably relying on hear-say rather than on some sort of text.<sup>80</sup> The *onomata barbarika*, in particular, are extremely primitive.

Without the four prayers, we would never have known that Sedatus had devised a ritual practice that ensured him special divine favour by virtue of his knowledge of arcane ‘names’. The remains in the cellar would have simply been evidence for household or private religion. But thanks to the inscribed prayers, i.e. the framing, it is clear that the *turibulum* was an essential prop in a private ritual, oriented towards the cosmos as a whole, whose repeated performance underwrote the validity of Sedatus’ claim to *know*.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the strange initial choice of words in each case, e.g. ORIENS / VOS ROGO OMNIPOTENTIA NVMINA ... , may intimate that it is the cardinal direction itself that speaks,<sup>82</sup> and that the *turibulum* itself has agency, inasmuch as it is to waft the messages via the rising scent of incense into the other world where the all-mighty powers dwell.

The second example is the group of objects found, probably by Turkish treasure-hunters, somewhere in the lower town at Pergamum in the Roman province of Asia, and given (or sold) to the German excavators of the Upper City, led by Alexander Conze, at some point between 1886 and 1898.<sup>83</sup> They were published as an ensemble by Richard Wünsch in 1905, who dated them roughly to II/III<sup>p</sup>.<sup>84</sup> The group consisted of ten objects, seven of them of bronze, while three were amulets sawn from the same small black stone. The bronze objects include a small triangular stand

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**80** There seem however to be some hints of an awareness of Graeco-Egyptian ‘practical theory’ of magic claims (compulsion or piety?) in Lucan’s presentation of the witch Erictho (*BC* 6.443–48; 492–999).

**81** At any rate, as long as he continued subjectively to receive *omnia bona*. Presumably the disastrous fire put an end to these beliefs.

**82** In our earlier readings, William Van Andringa and I proposed, since it seemed most natural that Sedatus himself was the subject of *rogo*, a full-stop after the name of each cardinal point, thus treating it as a kind of label or heading grammatically separate from the prayer. This is the text that appears e.g. in *AE* 2010: 940.

**83** The origins of the group of objects are shrouded in mystery; it is not even sure that they were found in the Lower Town, or even that they were originally found in Pergamum. Although it is highly unlikely that the Turkish authorities would have permitted their export had they known about them, Conze promptly removed them to Berlin, where they remain. For magicians’ toolkits, see also Curbera, this volume; Bremmer, this volume.

**84** Wünsch 1905.



**3** Part of the diviner's ensemble from Pergamum, including the three amuletic stones (front and back), the two rings, the surviving plaque, the nail, the disc and the table (the latter as displayed in the Museum). This image was created on commercial software, so that the rings are shown far too large in relation to their actual size, thus permitting a view of the *charaktères*



with an image of Hekate at each angle, a somewhat concave disc with a handle, two rings and a nail (fig. 3).<sup>85</sup> All were distinguished from utilitarian objects by being inscribed with *charaktêres*, signs that do not obey the normal rules of local orthography and are therefore unrecoverable by those who are in the ordinary sense literate.

Wünsch, delighted at finding a report by Ammianus Marcellinus (29.1.30), based on a confession extorted by torture, of the ‘divination of AD 371’, which his reconstruction followed closely, argued that they were all intended for sessions to acquire alphabet-oracles (p.47f.): he imagined the ‘magician’ standing on the stones, driving the nail into a rafter and suspending the smaller ring by a string over the concave disk, which, he thought, was placed on the triangular stand. The ring was then supposed to produce the oracle by moving among the fields of the disk and so producing words. For him it was a coherent ‘Zaubergerät’. This scenario is extremely implausible, not least because the *charaktêres* on each of the items are all different, which implies that they were not designed as a coherent set, but had different ritual purposes. Nor is it at all clear why the disc is concave if it was intended to be placed on the triangular table, why it had a handle, or how the 74 *charaktêres* on the disc could possibly have been used to produce *alphabetic* oracles.<sup>86</sup>

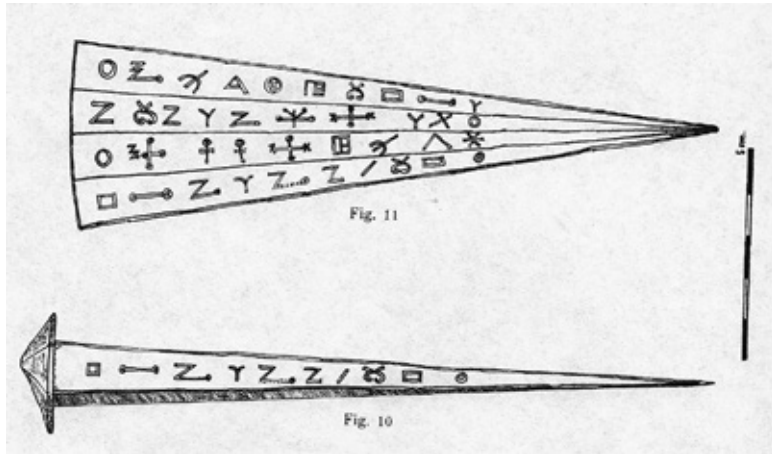
It is not to my purpose here to speculate on the different possible uses of the items in the ensemble.<sup>87</sup> My only point is to emphasise how the engraving of *charaktêres* even on the rings and the nail (fig. 4) creates a quite different sense of the agency of these objects vis-à-vis the

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**85** Wünsch 1905, 10–17. There were also two bronze plaques, the larger measuring 16 × 5 cm. The other, which was somewhat smaller, was lost before the objects reached Berlin, though a drawing was made of it beforehand.

**86** Cf. Gordon 2002, 189–191. Wünsch refrained from telling his readers quite how many *charaktêres* there are on the disc, contenting himself with observing that there are 24 compartments in the three outer rings. The remains of a wire handle, clearly reproduced – indeed completed – in Wünsch’s drawing (fig. 3), were still attached to the disc when it reached Berlin. In order to make Wünsch’s scenario more plausible (the table is on show with the disc on top, as in the collage), the museum has removed this handle – a victory of ideology over empirical evidence.

**87** See recently Mastrocinque 2002; Jackson 2012. The most plausible use for the nail is sphallomancy (divination by direction of fall of a long thin object), for the triangular table, as a miniature altar for incense, statuettes etc.



4 The nail from the ensemble, as presented by Wunsch 1905 plate 3, figs. 10 and 11

spirit world, within their appropriate contexts of use.<sup>88</sup> The theory of *charaktêres* assured their immediate recognition in the spirit-world as valid communicative powers.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, the *charaktêres* serve as a powerful framing device, setting these objects in a different category from every-day items.<sup>90</sup> Finally, the different forms imply the construction over time of a ritualised body, habituated to the performance, in specific contexts, of different means of acquiring rare, privileged information about the past, present and future of clients, but also privileged information for his own practice – the revelation, say, of the true or proper form of *charaktêres* or *onomata barbarika*.

### 3.2.2 COMMUNICATING PRAGMATIC AIM THROUGH FORM

A rescue excavation in the north of Rome (Piazza Euclide) in 2000 revealed a simple revetment-fountain, shown by the votive altars found nearby to be the Fountain of Anna Perenna.<sup>91</sup> The cistern behind, which

<sup>88</sup> Similar nails have been found in Italy: Bevilacqua 2001; 2012.

<sup>89</sup> Gordon 2011b.

<sup>90</sup> The *onomata barbarika* on the base of the triangular table, and the three images of Hekate, serve the same purpose.

<sup>91</sup> Piranomonte 2005; 2010. The inscriptions on the votive-altars are republished as *AE* 2003: 251–253. A provisional reading of most of the texts



5 One of the sets of lead containers from the cistern of the Fons Annae Perennae, Rome (inv. no. SAR 475539). Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Dipartimento Epigrafico

stored the water, turned out to have been used for centuries as a votive deposit. In late antiquity, around AD 400, and perhaps earlier, it was used by a number of different individuals as a suitable place to deposit *defixiones*. Many of these, in different scripts, were the usual kind of lead-sheets either rolled or folded. Some however took the form of tiny pieces of lead stuffed into the nozzles of Warzen-Lampen,<sup>92</sup> an apparently unique device signalling the despatch of the curse into the other world by appropriating one of the commonest types of votive-offering in the late-antique period, the (once- or never-used) oil-lamp. Here a creative imagination has devised effective ritual alternatives to the authority that once was acquired by composing competent curses, adapting routinised methods of offering to enforce the acceptance of the message in the other world.

The most original device however was to commission sets of three lead containers from a specialist practitioner, fitting inside one another like Russian dolls (fig. 5), and inscribed with an image of a cock-shaped

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found in the cistern is provided by Blänsdorf 2010. The best current overview is Piranomonte & Blänsdorf 2012. The definitive publication is expected shortly. See also Blänsdorf, this volume.

<sup>92</sup> See Piranomonte & Blänsdorf 2012, 631 (inv. No. IX.49.13)



**6** The Abraxas demon with the name *Leontius*, on one of the lead containers from the Fons (inv. no. SAR 475558). Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Dipartimento Epigrafico

deity, apparently named Abraxas, *charaktêres* and the name of the target (fig. 6). It has recently been shown that some of the letters on one of these sets, namely IXNOΠXNKΘΘΘ, are probably acronym invocations of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.<sup>93</sup> The act of enclosing poppets within multiple sealed containers is a performative substitute for the linguistic expression of the curse, which in these cases is either non-existent or purely rudimentary.

Others hit upon the further device of preparing a poppet made of some vegetable material, built around a sliver of animal-bone itself inscribed with the name of the target, and placed this inside the innermost cylinder (fig. 7).<sup>94</sup> Another (or the same man on another occasion), in addition to the triple cylinders, enclosed the poppet in a lead carapace, and drove two nails through the body.<sup>95</sup> One of the nails penetrates a human face represented on the lead carapace. Finally, he constructed a

<sup>93</sup> Inscribed on two of the containers belonging to inv. no. 475558; Piranomonte 2010, 208f. = Blänsdorf 2010, 217 no.2. The suggestion was made by Németh 2012. See also Blänsdorf, this volume.

<sup>94</sup> In one case, there is no poppet, just an inscribed sliver of bone and a piece of parchment: Piranomonte 2010, 208.

<sup>95</sup> For nails and poppets, see also Curbera et al., this volume.



7 Lead receptacle and the female poppet found in it (inv. nos. SAR 475555-465556). Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Dipartimento Epigrafico

snake in the act of devouring or attacking the face of the poppet (fig. 8). Elsewhere poppets are known that have been broken in two and the two sections put together but back to front, thus enacting the reversal or inversion desired by the curse.<sup>96</sup> The act of manufacturing the containers (which are very competently made) and their lids, of inserting the image of the target or an adequate substitute (see below), of fitting them into one another, of sealing them with various organic substances, and finally consigning them to the cistern, all of these extend the period of imaginative fixation upon the target and the harm intended to befall him. The materiality of these curse-forms, and the virtually unlimited scope given the principal by materials of different kinds, was thus indispensable to the realisation of the pragmatic aim of imposing one's will upon another *at a distance*.

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<sup>96</sup> See e.g. one of the poppets found in the joint shrine of Isis and Mater Magna in Moguntiacum/Mainz: Witteyer 2005, 113 fig. 6. In this case, the poppet was also stuck with pins.



**8** Poppet enclosed by a lead tablet with nails, and being attacked by a snake (inv. no. SAR 475550). Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Dipartimento Epigrafico

### 3.2.3 INTENDED RESEMBLANCE TO AN ORIGINAL MODEL

I have already introduced the idea of the poppet, that is, the figurine created by a practitioner or a principal as the vehicle of what is now known in anthropological circles as ‘volt-sorcery’.<sup>97</sup> Poppets or figurines are of course one of the most wide-spread forms of aggressive magical action the world over.<sup>98</sup> The traditional rationalist view, following Frazer, is that such figurines worked according to a supposed homeopathic ‘law of magic’, imitative sympathy, based on a mistaken (‘primitive’) view of causation, that like causes like. Some find this claim meaningful, at any rate once it is translated into different terms such as metaphor.<sup>99</sup> But, as Gell rightly pointed out, Frazer could never explain why mere

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**97** The term is derived from the development in the literature of the 1930s of the use of ‘volt’ (a physical measurement of electrical force) as a verb, to mean ‘to energize or shock’ or ‘to travel like an electric current’. The (first) Supplement to the OED gives as an example: ‘Give man the grace to find a firm abode, ... Not in power’s seat that volts the sitter dead’ (Roy Campbell, *TLS* 28 March 1936).

**98** For Greek poppets, see the not wholly convincing treatment by Faraone 1991; see also Ogden 1999, 71–79; Feldt, this volume.

**99** Cf. Tambiah 1990, 51–54 (albeit in general rightly critical).

resemblance should, even in the mind of a ‘primitive’, be a conduit for mutual *agency*.<sup>100</sup>

Gell’s approach was quite different, and based squarely on the notion of intentionality. “Magic”, on his reading, “registers and publicizes the strength of desire”.<sup>101</sup> This view is based once again on his rejection of the Saussurean sign and is in fact not too far from Glucklich’s claim about the essentially psychological nature of magical practice (above, *Introduction*). The quasi-universality of volt-sorcery is based on the indexicality of the image, that is, the notion that the image of the prototype is bound to, or fixed in, the index. Just as people feel irritated or embarrassed at the uncontrolled exploitation of their photos, especially indiscreet or ridiculous photos, in on-line social networks, thus treating images of themselves as indistinguishable from their social self and –reputation, so the aggressive creation of a moulded image in those societies in which the institution of magic is a social fact is felt to threaten social- and well-being. This is the phenomenon that Gell terms ‘distributed personhood’, the sociological view whereby artefacts and possessions, and not simply psychological traits, constitute the persona. Volt-sorcery is thus a straightforward “exploitation of the predicament of representability, uniting causes and effects all too closely” (1998, 102). The *condicio sine qua non* in volt-sorcery is the malign intention of the practitioner or principal, as expressed both in the materiality of the poppet – which, as we saw, can be deictically reinforced in several ways, e.g. by writing the name on a sliver of bone and moulding the figurine round that, enclosing it in a *defixio*, by the choice of (friable) substance, through ‘shaming’ by indicating the genitals, by adding *ousiai/exuviae*, substances such as hair from the target – and in the more or less elaborate performativity involved in manipulating the figurine, e.g. twisting the limbs or breaking it in half or reversing the parts, piercing with sharp instruments, whether nails or pins.

Since it is the intentionality of the practitioner or principal that matters in volt-sorcery, it is quite irrelevant whether the poppet bears any other than the remotest generic resemblance to the ‘prototype’ (i.e. the target). I agree with Gell that the indexicality itself is sufficient. Nevertheless, the frequent evidence for further, more elaborate and intense deictic manipulations, suggest the perception of a gap or failure of

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100 Gell 1998, 100.

101 Gell 1998, 101.

connection, so that the mere index, the poppet, might often need to be supplemented if its agency was to unfold itself in the maximally effective manner. And, as I have observed earlier, it is the circulation of narratives in which the agency of the index is taken for granted, that creates the indispensable framing for faith in the agency.

#### 4 THE MATERIALITY OF TEXT

I turn finally to my third Materiality, the use of text as it were to transcend the limitations of (mere) text.<sup>102</sup> Although we do find attempts to manipulate text, not merely names but deliberate reversal of script (letters, lines, complete texts), in Attic binding texts of the fourth century BCE, which I call pseudo-paragraphia, it is in only in the Graeco-Egyptian tradition, and mainly in the III<sup>P</sup>-V<sup>P</sup>, that such transcendence was expressly attempted – precisely because it was based in a scribal/priestly tradition of temple ritual practice and looked back nostalgically to a grand past of heroic temple practice.<sup>103</sup>

In accordance with the rule of pleonastic reduplication, competent practitioners in the Graeco-Egyptian tradition assumed that their texts could acquire greater force by combining the basic elements recognized in their scriptural practice, especially ‘hearts’ and ‘wings’.<sup>104</sup> But curiously enough, with the partial exception of *PLond* 121 (PGM VII), complex forms scarcely occur in the receptaries. Apart from one design to induce menstruation (PGM XLII 76–106), all the more elaborate and inventive formal designs occur in ‘activated’ texts. This fact itself suggests one of the selection processes at work in the majority of formularies, and that it was the performativity of these designs that impressed itself on the practitioners. There are two other reasons for thinking that there was a close connection between particular context and individual inspiration:

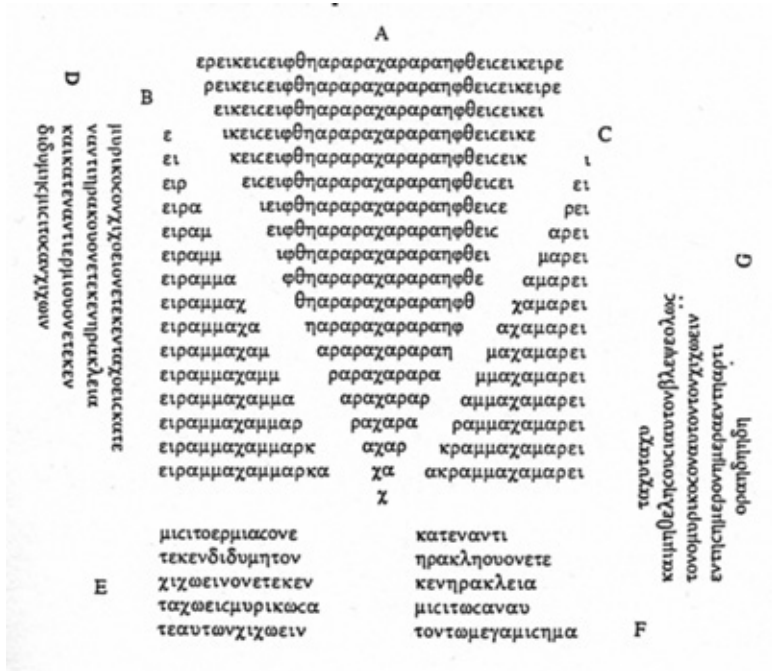
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**102** For the textuality of magic in Graeco-Roman antiquity, see the excellent volume edited by Gabriella Bevilacqua (Bevilacqua 2010).

**103** See Frankfurter 1998, 198–237; Dieleman 2005, 185–284; Gordon 2012.

**104** ‘Hearts’ are formal devices, usually based on a longish palindrome, which is repeated line after line, with the first and last letter of the preceding line omitted, until vanishing point is reached. ‘Wings’ are based on the same ‘subtractive’ principle, but only on one side. Both devices can be seen in figs. 9–11.





9 A printed version of the ‘calligram’ of T.Cairo Mus. JdE 36059, in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo

all known complex designs are unique; and the great majority are found in documents aiming to perform non-routine, relatively difficult tasks.<sup>105</sup>

The majority of complex text-figures employ as their central motif a palindrome in the form of a ‘heart’, which is often flanked by analogous but inverted figures, as in a text on lead from Oxyrhynchus for creating enmity between a man named Chichoeis and two other persons (fig. 9). Here the two sides of the diagram are conceived as precise mirror-images, the *onomata* of each inverted lateral ‘wing’ (B, C) being the exact inverse of the other.<sup>106</sup> The curse too has been symmetrically divided, beginning on the left at right angles to the diagram (D) continuing in the two small 5-line sections below each ‘wing’ (E, F) and finishing in four lines on the right (G), again at right angles to the diagram. Here the ‘calligram’ completely dominates the curse-text, which appears almost

105 The earliest instances of complex formal composition seem to date to III<sup>P</sup>.

106 *SupplMag* 2 no. 55 (III<sup>P</sup>)



10 A printed version of P.Mich. inv.6925, now in the Harlan Hatcher Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

as an after-thought, being required merely to specify what is already shown by the calligram, whose violent ‘heart’ (A) forces its way between the sundered pair of *onomata*. These *onomata* themselves constitute an inverted pair: the *ακραμμαχαμμαι* on the left ‘turns its back’ to the *ακραμμαχαμμαι* on the right. The incantation is reduced to an appendix; the supplement has moved centre-stage. We might suspect that the stimulus towards this development derived from the rôle of ‘calligrams’ in the construction of phylacteries, where they often are visually dominant – at least to the practitioner before they were folded.<sup>107</sup> It is unusual that in this instance at any rate the lead sheet (15 × 19 cm) was never folded or rolled, simply hammered cold into a rough rectangle: the design may have been open to view.

A similar, but quite independent, design can be found on an erotic text, also on lead, from an unknown site in the University of Michigan collection (fig. 10).<sup>108</sup> Here the central palindrome (A) is the *ιαεωβαφρνεμουν*-palindrome of 59 letters, with descending ‘wings’ based on *αβλαναθαναλβα* (C) and *ακραμμαχαμμαι* (E) as lateral supporters, and tall columns of vowel-sequences forming an outer frame

107 For phylacteries, see also Dieleman, this volume.

108 *SupplMag* 1 no. 48 (III–IV<sup>p</sup>).



11 A printed version of P. gr. 9909 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin/Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung

(B, G, H). Long palindromes are technically interesting since they cannot be uttered and exist solely for the visual sense, which alone can appreciate the recursivity.

In these complex figures, an attempt seems to have been made to create a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk* from the various design elements. The finest example of all occurs as the visual centre-piece of a text from Eshmunen in Egypt (IV-V<sup>p</sup>), this time on papyrus (fig. 11). The various standard figures here, again based on the  $\alpha\epsilon\omega\beta\alpha\phi\rho\rho\epsilon\nu\epsilon\mu\omicron\upsilon\nu$ -palindrome, are linked with different types of vowel-sequences, and are supplemented or annotated with syntagmatic combinations of *onomata*. The text itself begins with one of the longest known sequences of ‘names’, containing 170 elements, many doubled or tripled. In this graphic tour-de-force, the practitioner’s assault upon the rules for writing reaches its most brilliant expression. Spatial logic is here supreme. Eye and tongue are baffled alike, the very spaces between the figures beginning to assume phantom significations. Reversals, symmetries and replications animate the text’s figural margins around its palindromic heart, containing its own integral symmetry and reversal. Here text truly transcends text, beyond all voicing, and acquires its own special form of agency.

## 5 CONCLUSION

I have taken Materiality from its most obvious and pervasive sense, materials appropriated – I stress appropriated, i.e. re-interpreted and re-valued – from the natural world, through manufactured objects, which are essential to the expressivity of practice, to texts that transcend the usual limitations of textuality and strive to become themselves objects. I have followed Miller in emphasising the intimate association between materiality and immateriality, especially in relation to natural substances, poppets and complex textual diagrams. ‘If there is an inherent cultural trajectory towards immateriality implicated in most religious belief and practice, then it is not surprising that from time to time we see this trajectory break free to become a dominant imperative of particular religious groups’ – or, we might add, dispositifs such as magic.<sup>109</sup> For me however the main value in considering magic from the point of view of materiality is the insight such an approach provides into the constant inventiveness and ever more ingenious appropriations on the part of what we might call the magical imagination, always on the look-out for improved means – more knowledge, greater precision, better communicative devices – of effecting its pragmatic ends.

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 PHOTO CREDITS

**Fig. 1** Courtesy of Service Archéologique municipal de Chartres

**Fig. 2** Created by K. Meinking

**Fig. 3** Antikensammlung/Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz. The individual photos: Ingrid Geske

**Fig. 4** From Wunsch 1905 plate 3, figs. 10 and 11

**Fig. 5** Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Dipartimento Epigrafico (inv. no. SAR 475539)

**Fig. 6** Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Dipartimento Epigrafico (inv. no. SAR 475558)

**Fig. 7** Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Dipartimento Epigrafico (inv. nos. SAR 475555-465556)

**Fig. 8** Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Dipartimento Epigrafico (inv. no. SAR 475550)

**Fig. 9** From SupplMag 2 no. 55 p. 27

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**109** Miller 2005, 21f.

**Fig. 10** From SupplMag 1 no. 48 p. 86

**Fig. 11** From PGM XIXa (vol. 2, p.143)

**Pl. 6** Courtesy of Service Archéologique municipal de Chartres

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VÉRONIQUE DASEN

# PROBASKANIA: AMULETS AND MAGIC IN ANTIQUITY

*A large number of jewellery items, in precious or cheap material, were used as charms in Antiquity, especially by children and women, attached to the body as pendants, earrings or bracelets. This paper reviews the typology and the meaning of the most common sets found in contexts of the Roman imperial period, looking for similarities and differences, continuities and discrepancies in other periods and regions. It analyses how amulets acted at different levels, medical, religious, and social, defining gender and status. It also examines how charms constructed a visual discourse on health, coming of age, and the life course in Antiquity.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Long neglected by the mainstream of academic research because they are usually not very costly, nor elaborate, amuletic charms were ubiquitous in ancient daily life for at least three reasons, medical, social, and religious. First, medical because they served as protection against evil influences believed to be responsible for unexpected illness and death, bewildering infections and epidemics. Some amulets also aimed not just at protecting in a generic way, but at preserving or healing a specific part of the body. Second, social strategies are at work because amulets can characterise status and gender, as in Rome, where the gold *bullae* were allegedly reserved to freeborn elite boys. Third, amulets had religious functions and could be part of transition rites. The three levels often mingle, as most amulets combine defensive, social, and religious functions. All construct a visual discourse on health, coming of age and the life course in Antiquity.

Like other objects relating to magical practices, such as magical gems, the study of amulets has expanded over the last years thanks to an increasing attention to the archaeological evidence, which is now abundant and diversified. It demonstrates the materiality of objects that used to be known only in iconography; some finds, such as the presence of *bullae* in Roman female jewellery, also reveal uses not mentioned by literary evidence.

I will discuss here a selection of charms relating to children and women, who owned many because they were the most vulnerable members of the community. Pregnancy and delivery were regular causes of female mortality. A wide range of sources record deaths in childbed. The situation must have been similar to that of the pre-modern era, where about 3% women died during delivery or in the following weeks, and they had repeated deliveries. Childhood was also a very hazardous time; about one in four babies died in the first year of life, and only about 50% of all neonates reached adulthood (i.e. the age of 18). In iconography, their special need for protection is visualised by amulets. Even divine children wear them, such as the plump bronze figurine of Harpocrates holding a hand to his mouth found in Augusta Raurica (1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD) (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

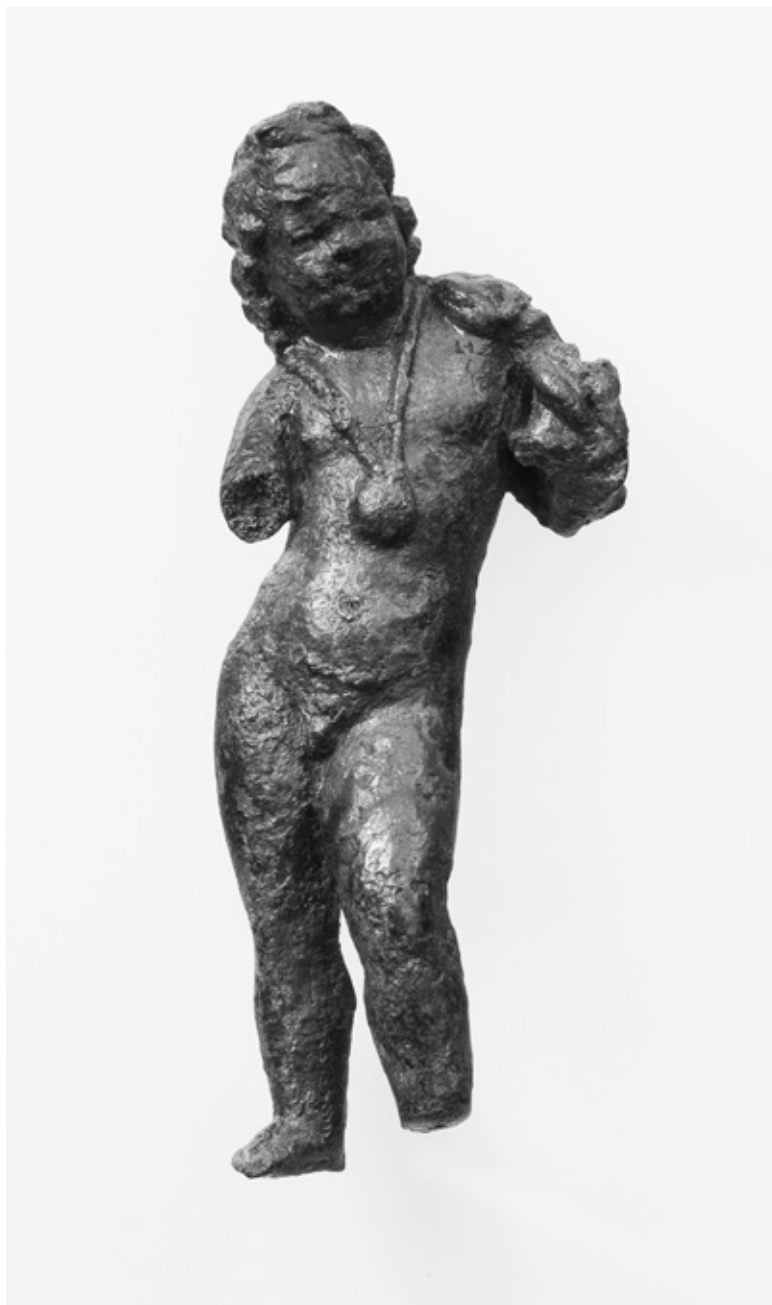
The use of amuletic protections, however, was not restricted to children and women. Men also carried them, especially when facing dangers or in critical situations. I cite three cases from widely separate periods of ancient history. Plutarch records that when Pericles had fallen ill during the ‘plague’ of 431–27 BC, he was persuaded to wear an amulet. In keeping with his general dislike of ‘superstition’, Plutarch cites Theophrastus for the claim that Pericles was prevailed upon by women to do something he himself considered ‘foolish’:

Theophrastus in his *Ethics* [...] records this fact, that Pericles, as he lay sick, showed one of his friends who was come to see him an amulet (*periapton*) that the women had hung round his neck, as much as to say that he was very badly off to put up with such folly (*abelteria*) as that.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Cf. the birth of Erichthonios with a chain of amulets in Attic vase-painting; e.g. on the attic red-figure calyx-krater, Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Art; Neils/Oakley 2003, 88 (fig.), 208, cat. 6.

2 Plutarch, *Pericles*, 38.2; transl. B. Perrin, Loeb. Cf. Pliny, *HN* 28.29 on two magistrates who used to wear little bags containing a *remedium* against ophthalmia.



**1** Bronze Harpocrates (H. 7 cm). From Augusta Raurica, lower town, Reg. 17, C Augusta Raurica. 1987.003.C03258.1

We are not told whether the amulet consisted of an item of jewellery, a gem, or some medicine wrapped in a little bag. In the first century BC, the Roman general L. Cornelius Sulla used to wear at war a small golden image (*agalation*) of Apollo ‘from Delphi’, which was perhaps a religious token from a shop in the sanctuary:

There is also a story that Sulla had a little golden image of Apollo from Delphi which he always carried in his bosom when he was in battle, but that on this occasion he took out and kissed affectionately, saying: ‘O Pythian Apollo, now that thou hast in so many struggles raised the fortunate Cornelius Sulla to glory and greatness, can it be that thou hast brought him to the gates of his native city only to cast him down there, to perish most shamefully with his fellow-countryment?’<sup>3</sup>

It may have resembled the amuletic figurine of Apollo in hammered gold, with a loop in the back for suspension, now in the Derek J. Content collection (pl. 7 a, b). Finally, in late antiquity, the Cynic philosopher Asclepiades always travelled with a little silver figurine (*argenteum breue figmentum*) of the *Dea Caelestis*, which in 362 AD he dedicated in the temple of Apollo at Daphne – thus inadvertently causing the fire that destroyed the temple.<sup>4</sup>

I will first define how the Ancients conceived the action of malevolent powers, and second review a series of common devices. I will focus on Roman material, looking for similarities and differences, continuities and discrepancies in other periods and regions, aware that many amulets were made of perishable material that disappeared archaeologically, but survive in iconography, such as the Heracles knot, *nodus Herculanus*, the strings tied up around the wrist, ankle or thigh, sometimes with a pendant, perhaps of the type that still exists in modern Greece.<sup>5</sup>

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**3** Plutarch, *Sulla*, 29.6, transl. B. Perrin, Loeb. See Dölger 1934. Plutarch’s *Lives* of Lysander and Sulla were written as negative foils in respect of the proper attitude to religion to those of Pericles and Q. Fabius Maximus.

**4** Ammianus Marcellinus 22.13.3.

**5** Cf. Wolters 1905; Saglio 1906, 87–88; Keyssner 1936, col. 807–809. A red cord on the wrist of children is described by John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 1.12.13. On strings with pendant at the thigh, Kreilinger 2007, 151–152; Dasen 2009b.

## 2 NAMING AND DEPICTING THE EVIL EYE

Belief in the Evil Eye assigned a destructive power to the gaze due to envy or jealousy, called in Greek *phthonos* or *baskania*, in Latin *fascinum*, that arises from the view of happiness, beauty and prosperity.<sup>6</sup> Plutarch explains that such gaze strikes like poisoned arrows and can harm, or even kill:

When those possessed by envy (*phthonos*) to this degree let their glance fall upon a person, their eyes [...] then assail that person as if with poisoned arrows. [...] What I have said shows why the so-called amulets (*probaskania*) are thought to be a protection against malice. The strange look of them (*atopia*) attracts the gaze, so that it exerts less pressure upon its victim.<sup>7</sup>

*Atopia* and *geloia* are thus appreciated because unusual or awkward shapes will distract the Evil Eye from its victim. This harmful power may not depend from the will:

[...] and in some cases even fathers have the Evil Eye, so that their wives will not show them their children nor allow the children to be gazed upon by them for very long.<sup>8</sup>

The extent of the damage caused by jealousy or dislike (*zelos*) and envy (*phthonos*) is impressive. Plutarch equates it with a public health problem. It is 'the most shameful disease (*nosemata*) and baneful plagues (*keras*), ruinous not only for private houses, but for the state as well.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a review of the literary sources, see e.g. Bernand 1990, 92–105; Clerc 1995, 88–97; Rakoczy 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, *Table-Talk*, 681E–682A; transl. P. A. Clement, H. B. Hoffleit, Loeb. The shaping power of the gaze also explains the phenomenon of 'maternal impressions' on the fetus; Dasen 2009a.

<sup>8</sup> Plutarch, *Table-Talk*, 682A. Full discussion of the literary texts: Alvar Nuño 2012, 87–157.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *Table-Talk*, 484 C; see also 787 C. The most critical moments are associated with pleasure, especially eating, as well as with the display of wealth and success that attracts envy. On table manners aiming at avoiding troubles, see pseudo-Aristotle, *Problemata* 20.34 (926b21–31).



2a-b Silver-plated copper. Schlumberger collection 1

Material damages on objects too can be caused by envy, and Pollux explains how potters nailed *geloia* on their furnace to protect the firing process.<sup>10</sup>

The protective image of eyes and gaze appears very early in various media in the ancient Mediterranean world,<sup>11</sup> but an amuletic device figuring the Eye was developed only in the Hellenistic period, and does not become common until the Roman Imperial period. It is always a human eye, attacked by various animals and weapons. It is often found on small personal objects, such as a gold disc in the British Museum (pl. 8)<sup>12</sup> that can be compared with a silver pendant from a child's cinerary urn in Aventicum<sup>13</sup> (160–200 AD). The Eye is encircled by eleven destructive elements: offensive weapons (thunderbolt, trident, club), apotropaic animals (two birds, dog, lion, scorpion, snake), a figure in a vessel (?), and a winged (?) phallus. Similar depictions occur in domestic contexts, such as the famous mosaic at the entrance of the so-called 'House of the Evil Eye' in Antioch (early 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD)<sup>14</sup>, on funerary monuments, such as

<sup>10</sup> Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 7.108. Cf. n. 32 below on the phallus in a bakery at Pompeii.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. in Egypt Herrmann/Staubli 2010, no 72, 124–29. On Greek vessels, K. Karagianni in Merkouri 2010, 33–42.

<sup>12</sup> Engemann 1975, 26, pl. 11c. See similar devices in Engemann 1975, 26, fig. 2. Good survey of the archaeology in Alvar Nuño 2012, 159–233.

<sup>13</sup> Castella et al. 1999, 313–4, no 1810, pl. 172.

<sup>14</sup> The Evil Eye is attacked by weapons (trident, sword), animals (scorpion, snake, dog, leopard, raven), and the phallus of the dwarf (possibly also little



the stela of Geminius Saturninus at Auzia in Roman Africa,<sup>15</sup> in public and religious places, such as the entrance pavement of the Basilica Hilariana in Rome.<sup>16</sup>

On a series of late antique gems and Byzantine pendants, the Evil is personified by a female demon, lying on the ground, and speared by a rider, called Solomon, after the biblical king who was believed to be an expert in magic and exorcism, as on the Schlumberger medallion (fig. 2a).<sup>17</sup> This polyonymous malevolent female figure – Gello, Gyllou, Alabasdria, Abyzou, Obyzouth – is made responsible for the death of pregnant women and children:

I am called among men Obizuth; and by night I sleep not, but go my rounds over all the world, and visit women in childbirth. And divining the hour I take my stand; and if I am lucky, I strangle the child. But if not, I retire to another place. For I cannot for a single night retire unsuccessful. For I am a fierce spirit, of myriad names and many shapes.<sup>18</sup>

She belongs to the category of ‘the reproductive demon’,<sup>19</sup> governing sudden illnesses hard to explain that strike parturient women and infants, such as eclampsia, puerperal fever and neonatal death. Aitiological stories explain the action of these frightful female demons. They are believed to be human women who failed to complete their reproductive cycle and turned into evil spirits, stealing and killing the offspring of more successful mothers, such as Lamia who became insane because she bore many children to Zeus, but lost each baby soon after birth. All these demons turn into ‘vampires’ that feed on young children and women, whose main protection are specialised amulets carried on the body. Most

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phalluses on top of the dwarf’s head); Levi 1947, 28–34, pl. IV; Engemann 1975, pl. 10 a; Dunbabin/Dickie 1983, pl. 8 a; Clarke 2007, 64–67, fig. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Engemann 1975, 29–30, pl. 13 b, d.

<sup>16</sup> Engemann 1975, 28–29, pl. 11 a, b.

<sup>17</sup> Schlumberger 1892, 74, no 1 (fig.); Engemann 1975, 25, fig. 1; Faraone 2012, 74–75, fig. 5.3. On this type of amulet, Spier 1993.

<sup>18</sup> *Testament of Solomon* 58, transl. F. C. Conybeare, ‘The Testament of Solomon’, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 11 (1899) 30.

<sup>19</sup> For the expression, Johnston 1995. On the demon and its post-antique afterlife, Barb 1966; Sorlin 1991; Cusumano 2008. On the threat of Mormo, see also Patera 2005.

likely, the power of the trampling motif was not limited to the protection of women and children. Late antique gems are inscribed *sphragis theou*, with the double meaning ‘god’s seal’ and ‘god’s medicine’, suggesting the wide range of action ascribed to them.<sup>20</sup> The reverse of the Schlumberger medallion (fig. 2b) equates the power of the demon with that of the Evil Eye. Above the prostrate woman, the Evil Eye, named *Phthonos*, Envy, is being attacked by five animals (lions, ibis, snake, scorpion), and three daggers.<sup>21</sup>

Evil power is also personified by a male figure that can interchange with the picture of the malevolent eye. It depicts Phthonos, Envy, as a man strangling himself, demonstrating the destructive might of envy. On a gold pendant from Cyprus (ca 100–200 AD)<sup>22</sup>, he holds both hands to his throat (pl. 9), like Livor in the Underworld: ‘there jealousy which strangles herself with both hands (*hinc angens utraque manu sua guttura Liuor*)’.<sup>23</sup> Like the Evil Eye, the man is attacked by animals in more complex scenes. This image of Phthonos is found in different contexts, mostly private, such as pendants for personal protection, or on pavements for the protection of the house.<sup>24</sup> Variants depict emaciated persons tearing open their belly, visualising the extreme feelings caused by unrelieved envy.<sup>25</sup>

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**20** On the double meaning of the term *sphragis*, Dasen 2011. Two byzantine amulets are inscribed with male personal names, suggesting that Gyllou could harm men as well; Spier 1993, 38 and 43.

**21** Cf. the famous fresco on the walls of the Bawit monastery (6th cent. AD) where the rider, named Sisinnios, spears the demon Alabasdria, topped with the Evil Eye attacked by opponents; Engeman 1975, 39–40, fig. 10.

**22** Dunbabin/Dickie 1983, 22, pl. 4c. The pendant contains calcite, a carbonate mineral. I am grateful to Th. Kiely for this information.

**23** Silius Italicus 13.584, transl. J. D. Duff, Loeb.

**24** Dunbabin/Dickie 1983; Slane/Dickie 1993, 494–7. On the function of *phthonos* figurines, see also Jeammet 2011.

**25** The notion of choking or bursting out of jealousy is common in Greek and Latin literature and inscriptions; cf. Martial 9.97 (*rumpere*); Lucian, *Timon the Misanthrope*, 40. See the sources collected by Slane/Dickie 1993, 495–97, esp. n. 82 and 85–86.

### 3 NAMING AMULETS

The main terms express the idea of tie because an amulet is primarily an object or substance that you have ‘on you’ (*habere secum*), attached to the body, usually around the neck, the thigh, the ankle, or the wrist. Physical contact is essential in order to transmit the properties of the charm to its wearer. In Greek, amulets are thus called *periammata*, *peripta*, in Latin, *ligatura* or *alligatura* (‘what is attached around’). Some terms refer to their medico-magical qualities. In Latin, *remedia* means ‘remedies’, *praebia*, ‘providing protection’:

*Praebia*, ‘amulets’, from *praebere* ‘providing’, that he may be safe, because they are prophylactics to be hung on boys’ necks, *in collo pueris*.<sup>26</sup>

Other terms describe the shape of the amulet, such as *fascinum* for the phallus, *lunula* for the moon-shaped pendant, or *bullā* for the famous Roman gold container.

### 4 GROWING HEALTHY

Charms often combine the power of the material, such as gold, amber or animal teeth, and of crafted shape, such as the *lunula*. Some define the social and gendered identity of its wearer and relate to transition stages characterised by specific biological changes, such as teething for infants and menstruation for girls. They are often found in tombs, but aimed primarily at protecting the living.

#### 4.1 THE PHALLUS AND THE CLUB

The best-known charm in the Roman period is the phallus, which was used by all, from infant to *imperator*, as Pliny the Elder reports.<sup>27</sup> Varro explains that its efficacy is associated with obscenity:

<sup>26</sup> Varro, *On the Latin Language*, 7.107, transl. R. G. Kent, Loeb.

<sup>27</sup> Pliny, *NH* 28.39: ‘And yet the baby (*infans*) is further under the divine protection of *Fascinus*, guardian not only of babies but of generals (*imperatores*) [...] hanging under the chariots of generals at their triumphs he defends them as a physician from jealousy (*medicus invidiae*)’ (transl. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb).

Perhaps it is from this that a certain indecent object (*turpicula res*) that is hung on the necks of boys (*pueris*), to prevent harm from coming to them, *ne quid obsit* is called a *scaeuola*, on account of the fact that *scaeva* is 'good'.<sup>28</sup>

Most phallic devices are in bronze, but other materials are used, such as gold or amber.<sup>29</sup> Pliny the Elder details the curative and apotropaic value of gold. The incorruptible metal protects against all kind of aggressions:

Gold is efficacious as a remedy (*remedium*) in a variety of ways, and is used as an amulet for wounded people and for infants to render less harmful poisonous charms (*ueneficia, uis malefica*) that may be directed against them.<sup>30</sup>

Few images show a person with a phallic charm;<sup>31</sup> most depict the phallus alone, or as part of fantastic figures, in public and private spaces. The protective function of the phallus is usually related to the virile and regenerative power of an erected phallus. In Pompeii (VI, 6, 18), the well-known plaque with an erected phallus inscribed *Hic habitat felicitas*, was placed above an oven. One can assume that the image promoted two actions: averting demons from damaging the bakery, as did potters for their kilns, and inciting the bread to rise.<sup>32</sup> In most examples, however, the emotion, shame or laughter, created by obscenity is chiefly at work, diverting the envious gaze of onlookers. Another aspect, often neglected, also explains the efficacy of the device: the phallus is equated with a weapon in collective imagery. Greek and Latin sexual vocabulary have explicit weaponry metaphors for male sexuality. In numerous inscrip-

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**28** *On the Latin Language*, 7.97, transl. R. G. Kent, Loeb.

**29** On gold and coral phallic pendants and rings, see e.g. Johns 1982, 63 and fig. 10; Johns/Wise 2003. Three amber phallic pendants were part of a set in the tomb of a child in Poitiers; Brives 2008, 165, nos 11–13, fig. 2. Specifically on the phallus types, see Alvar Nuño 2012, 162–86.

**30** Pliny, *HN* 33.25.

**31** An Etruscan bronze statue in Kassel shows a boy standing holding a bird; a typical male set is suspended to a string across his chest: a phallic amulet, an oil flask, and a strigil; Bieber 1915, 70, fig. 214.

**32** Cf. Clarke 2007, 72–73, fig. 28, who reads a pun in the word *felicitas* 'Here lives fertility/happiness together'.

tions and images, the phallus threatens to violate the envious sexually.<sup>33</sup> In the *Priapea*, Priapus protects the garden against thieves by inflicting them a sexual penalty, *poena*, explicitly using his erect phallus instead of a club or a sickle.<sup>34</sup> The association is also reflected by verbal puns. In Greek, the phallus can be addressed as a club, *skutale* or *rhopalon*.<sup>35</sup> It is thus connected with another device, the club of Heracles, which is likewise found very frequently as a protective device in both public and private contexts.<sup>36</sup> Such associations are more than metaphorical.<sup>37</sup>

In an amuletic context, I thus regard Heracles' club as interchangeable with the phallus as a weapon against the Evil Eye. Their similar metaphorical meaning may explain why women usually do not wear phallus amulets (at least not ostensibly), but enjoy clubs as earrings or pendants.<sup>38</sup> The hero's attribute is a more suitable ornament, with a similar generic protective meaning, and an added value for women. A sexual and erotic connotation is at work, as Heracles is a renowned lover, who fathered many children; his unusual intimacy with women is exemplified by his servitude in the house of Omphale, where, according to Ovid, he was forced to wear women's clothes and hold the wool while Omphale and her women spin.<sup>39</sup> Heracles was hence a most appropriate guardian of seductiveness as well as of reproduction.<sup>40</sup> This competence of Heracles explains the use of a *nodus Herculeus* for the bride's girdle in Roman rites of marriage. According to Festus, the bridegroom loosed it in the hope of being as blessed with children as Heracles, who had 70 children.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See the list of monuments collected by Slane/Dickie 1993, 488–94.

<sup>34</sup> *Corpus Priapeorum*, 11; see also 9 and 20.

<sup>35</sup> Several words are used in Latin, such as *telum*; see Adams 1982, 19–24.

<sup>36</sup> Bruneau 1964 (phallus and clubs).

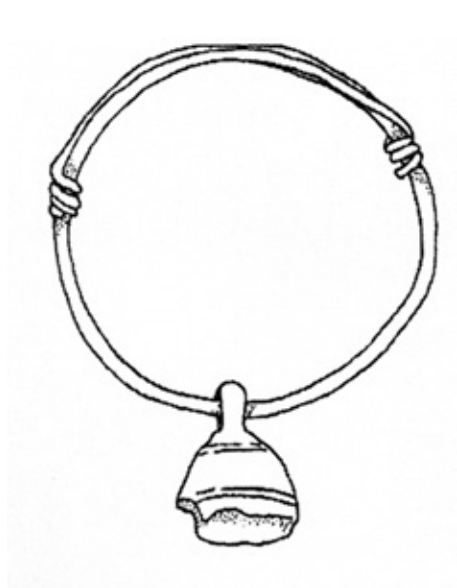
<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, II, Paris, 1798, 155 ('nerf de boeuf'). The English word 'pizzle' (derived from the Middle Dutch *peserik*, sinew, string, whip of bull's hide, pizzle) means both a bull's penis and a whip made of a dried penis. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a letter by Sir Walter Scott to Robert Southey in 1814: 'The wholesome discipline of a bull's pizzle and straitjacket'.

<sup>38</sup> See the catalogue of club pendants and earrings collected on German sites by Werner 1966.

<sup>39</sup> Ovid, *Heroides*, 9.53–118.

<sup>40</sup> On Heracles and Omphale in a magical context, Dasen 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Festus 55.18 Lindsay, s.v. *cingulum*; see Bettini 1998, 114–120.



3 Silver bracelet with bell (L. 5 cm). Poitiers

Heracles' club had a more specific apotropaic meaning for children. Heracles is the model of the child surviving fatal dangers in early childhood, as demonstrated by his strangling the snakes sent by Hera against him as an infant. A sexual reference too is not unlikely. The club may have protected children against sexual assaults, just like the *bulla*, of which Plutarch says:

Or the Romans of early times [...] strictly refrained from (sexual relations with) boys of free birth; and that they might not be in any uncertainty, even when they encountered them unclad, did the boys wear this badge? Or is this a safeguard to insure orderly conduct, a sort of bridle on incontinence?<sup>42</sup>

A *bulla* and a club pendant, both in gold, are thus meaningfully combined as a set in the tomb of a boy in Saint-Fréjus (1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD) (pl. 10a).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Roman Questions*, 101, transl. F. C. Babbitt, Loeb. The recent commentary by J. Scheid does not discuss either issue.

<sup>43</sup> Bel 2012, 210 and 213, fig. 18 (belonging to a child two–five years old). The amber set from the child's grave in Poitiers, included a club with the three phallus; Brives 2008, 165, no 10, fig. 2.

Plautus alludes to rattling devices, *crepundia*, at the neck of children.<sup>44</sup> Such necklaces perhaps incorporated a little bell that is found only with children, of both sex, probably as a noisy protection against evil.<sup>45</sup> Bells were often attached to bracelets, such as the one found in a child's tomb in Poitiers (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD) (fig. 3).<sup>46</sup> Some bronze or gold items have devices and inscriptions wishing good luck and averting evil, such as small bronze bell in Budapest.<sup>47</sup> John Chrysostom (347–407 AD) still complains about their use:

What shall we say about the amulets, *periapta*, and the bell, *kodon*, which are hung upon the hand, and the scarlet woof, and the other things full of such extreme folly; when they ought to invest the child with nothing else save the protection of the Cross.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4.2 THE LUNULA AND THE POWER OF THE MOON

Another common amulet, in Greek as in Roman contexts, has the shape of the crescent moon, usually made in bronze or silver. In his *Lexicon* (6th century AD), Hesychius describes it thus: 'Selenis, an amulet (*phylacterion*) at the neck of children (*paides*)'. Also called in Greek *meniskos*, in Latin *lunula*, it is found alone or associated with other charms. Iconography as well as archaeological finds confirms its regular use by children, women... and animals, since ancient Egypt.<sup>49</sup> Adult men do not seem to have worn them. In Greece, a few items go back to the Mycenaean period (13<sup>th</sup> century BC), but most date to the Principate.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Plautus, *The Braggart Soldier*, 1399: *quasi puero in collo pendeant crepundia*.

<sup>45</sup> Little bells are also part of phallic mobiles or *tintinnabula*, suggesting their value as evil averters. See e.g. Johns 1982, 67–71, fig. 52, 54; Clarke 2007, 69–70, fig. 25; G. Bapheiadis in Merkouri 2010, 62, figs 13–14.

<sup>46</sup> Brives 2008, 163, nos 2–3, fig. 1. See e.g. the bronze bells in Aventicum; Castella et al. 1999, 330, nos 1793 and 1794, pl. 171; Dasen 2003, 287, pl. IV, fig. 11. In Arras, the bell was attached to a chain with a phallic *lunula*; Jelski 1984, 264, no 8, pl. I.

<sup>47</sup> Nagy 1992 with a list of extant clay, bronze and gold bells for the living and the dead.

<sup>48</sup> *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 1.12.13.

<sup>49</sup> On animals' amulets, see Wrede 1975.

<sup>50</sup> On their chronological distribution, Wrede 1975. Cf. the silver *lunula* from the cremation urn of a 3–4 years old child (125–130 AD); Dasen 2003, 286, pl. IV, fig. 8.

The repeated – and stereotyped – complaints by various Church fathers reveal how widespread their use was, in particular for children. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nazianzus laments in his speech *On Baptism*:

You have no need of amulets, *periammata*, and incantations, *epasmata*, along which the Evil One makes his way into the minds of the simpler folk, stealing for himself the honour that belongs to God.

The *scholium* comments:

*Periammata*: the bits of colored thread round wrists, arms, and necks; and moon-shaped plates of gold, silver or cheaper material, which foolish old women fasten upon infants.<sup>51</sup>

The *lunula* most likely placed children and women under the protection of Artemis-Selene who controls the growth, maturation and procreation of humans as well as of animals.<sup>52</sup> The image of the moon had a more specific meaning for women. The monthly menstrual cycle (*katamenia, menses*) was believed to be synchronized with that of the moon, symbolised by the *lunula*.<sup>53</sup> The crescent-shaped pendant thus governed the regular evacuation of excess of blood, regarded as a condition for the maintenance of health and for becoming pregnant, the ultimate aim of women's lives. It probably also watched over the onset of *menarche*, an expected event in the lives of girls. In Augusta Raurica, an adult woman wore two silver earrings in the shape of stylised clubs, averting diseases as well as protecting her sex appeal, and a glass bead string with a silver *lunula* pendant aiming at preserving a healthy humoral balance, a perfect set displaying her conscious control over her body (pl. 10b).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Migne PG 36, 907 B–C, transl. Bonner 1950, 3–4.

<sup>52</sup> Some are combined with a phallic device; Jelski 1984, 264, no 7, pl. I.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 8.2 (582a 34); Dean-Jones 1994, 94–101. For its use in ancient Near East and Egypt, esp. by breastfeeding women, see e.g. Wrede 1975, 249–50.

<sup>54</sup> Swift 2003, 341 and 345, fig. 5.



## 5 AVERTING AND CURING DISEASES

## 5.1 TEETHING

Specific sets are associated with teething, the first major step in early childhood, that occurs at about six or seven months. Teething implies change of food and change of status, as the infant progressively takes place in the life of the community by sharing its food. This process lasts until weaning is achieved, at about two or three years. Medical writers were very concerned with changes inducing potential imbalance and sickness, and they mention the dangers of this critical period. A Hippocratic treatise devoted to teething, *On Dentition*, reflects the importance credited to that stage.<sup>55</sup> The Hippocratic *Aphorisms* (5th cent. BC) detail the most feared symptoms: ulceration of the gums, fevers, spasms, and diarrhoeas, ‘especially when cutting the canine teeth’. The fragile humoral balance of small children was threatened by these troubles that can quickly degenerate with dramatic consequences. Harmless disorders, explains Celsus (1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC/AD), such as aphthous ulcers (‘thrush’), are innocuous for adults but can be lethal for sucklings as they hamper proper feeding.<sup>56</sup>

The idea that teeth can ‘kill’ is proverbial in many languages: ‘Soon todd [toothed], soon with God’, warns a seventeenth-century proverb.<sup>57</sup> This commonplace lasted until the nineteenth century. In 1836, a Berlin medical doctor, W. Andresse, wrote a book in order to deconstruct it, reporting that teething was indeed a cause of mortality, but because the real diseases, unrelated to dentition, were not treated.<sup>58</sup> The teething process was an object of great attention in folk medicine. P. Gaillard-Seux collected about 23 amulets for the teething of infants in Greek and Latin authors of the Roman Imperial period.<sup>59</sup> Alone Pliny the Elder’s *Natural*

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**55** *On dentition* (Littré VIII, 542–549), dating to the Common Era.

**56** Celsus, *On Medicine*, 6.11.3.

**57** Cf. the French expression ‘mourir des dents’, in German: ‘An den Zähnen sterben’.

**58** *Ueber das schwere Zahnen der Kinder*, Reutlingen, 1836, 79–80: ‘Ich habe in der That gefunden, dass in den meisten Fällen wirkliche Krankheiten vorhanden waren, die [...] mit den Zähnen in keiner Weise in Verbindung standen (...) Es war daher meine Aufgabe, bei dieser Arbeit das allgemein herrschende Vorurtheil über das schwere Zahnen gründlich zu widerlegen’.

**59** Gaillard-Seux 2013, 196, note 30.

*History* lists about a dozen amulets for averting or relieving the feared symptoms. Most remedies use real teeth and function according to sympathetic magic. The teeth of a range of strong or symbolically qualified animals are much valued, such as wolf's, dog's, mole's and dolphin's teeth, usually attached to the body (*adalligati*) to ease the process.<sup>60</sup>



4 Boar tusk (tusk: L. 3,2 cm; boar: 3,2 cm). Bruxelles, Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire R. 1054



5 Bone imitating a tooth (L. 6, 6 cm). Augusta Raurica 1973.550

Tooth-ache of adults also benefits from teeth's power.<sup>61</sup> The aesthetic of the amulet could add to its efficacy, such as the wild boar tusk kept in Brussels, embellished with a bronze boar head (fig. 4)<sup>62</sup> or a lion's tooth set in gold from Augusta Raurica (pl. 11a).

In Roman Gaul, parental anxiety is displayed by the large number of charms from the graves of children in the crucial period of alimentary change, between six months and about three years, at the time of weaning.<sup>63</sup> Various types of animal teeth, worn as pendants, are found.<sup>64</sup> The need for teeth seems to have led to the production of artificial ones, such as the bone pendant imitating a tooth from Augusta Raurica (fig. 5).<sup>65</sup> Animals incorporated in the set may express a similar protection. Our 'little mouse', who comes into action when the milk teeth fall out was perhaps replaced by the hare because of the impressive teeth of the rodent; the animal is often present in the form of little pierced plaques included in a necklace, often in amber, possibly for its medical qualities in the teething process.<sup>66</sup> Parts of the hare are also used as remedies. Hare's brain was prescribed for rubbing the gum of infants to ease dentition,

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**60** Pliny, *HN* 28.257 (wolf); 28.258 (horse), 30.20 (living mole), 30.21–22 (dog); 32.48 (dolphin). The teeth of some animals, such as the wolf and the dolphin, also prevented anxiety attacks in children.

**61** Pliny, *HN* 28.95 and 181; 30.21–22 (dog, horse, hyena, snake).

**62** De Meester de Ravestein 1884, 312, no 1054. I thank C. Evers for providing me this information, and the photograph.

**63** Cf. the table showing the distribution and type of objects according to the age of the child in Bel 2012, 205, fig. 9.

**64** A beaver's tooth is reported by Bel 2012, 202, fig. 13 in the grave of a child (one–four months old), with several amulets, including a *lunula* and a gold phallic pendant; see also Bel 2012, 206, on a fossilised shark's tooth in Nîmes.

**65** See e.g. the false tooth from the tomb of a one-year old child in Sainte-Barbe, Marseille; Dasen in press, fig. 6a (associated with a dog's tooth, fig. 6b).

**66** Brives 2008, 162, no 6, fig. 2. On this popular legend in France and Switzerland, Loux 1981, 54–57. See also the amber rabbit and the fish (a dolphin ?) with animal teeth in a six-month old baby in Nîmes; Bel 2012, 209, fig. 14; Dasen in press, fig. 5. On the marked association of amber with the infantile population, see Swift 2003, 342–3 and 345. On its medical and apotropaic qualities, see e.g. Causey 2011.

gums could be scarified with a needle-like bone from its body, whereas hare's rennet was injected in the ear in order to relieve toothache.<sup>67</sup>

## 5.2 REMEDIES' CONTAINERS

The word *phylacterion*, *phylacterium*, can designate a container for phylacteries, inscribed with a prayer against fever or other diseases on a papyrus or metallic sheet, made of silver or gold. It could also contain medicine.<sup>68</sup> A sealed silver tube found in the tomb of a woman in Judaea thus contained a remedy made of 50% haematite (early 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. AD).<sup>69</sup> Beside the famous gold *bullae*, which I have already mentioned, which was reserved to elite freeborn boys (see further below), bronze globular lockets fall into this category. They were worn by children, male and female, as well as by adult females. Some texts refer to their use as containers of *remedia*. For example, a recipe recorded by Marcellus Empiricus (5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD) recommends extracting the eyes of a green lizard with a copper needle and placing them in a *bullae* or gold case in order to protect the wearer from eye diseases.<sup>70</sup>

Archaeological finds confirm that lockets enclosed curatives. In Pannonia, the bronze *bullae* studied by Magdolna Szilágyi were not reserved to boys. All those found at Intercisa and Aquincum came from the tombs of women and children, none from that of an adult male.<sup>71</sup> Most lockets contained various vegetal products wrapped in textile remains, such as a dried grape, thorns of a rose, and medicinal plants, such as coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), aniseed (*Pimpinella anisum*), and snap-dragon (*Antirrhinum majus*). One *bullae* made of bronze contained an inscribed silver *lamella* and a coin.<sup>72</sup> The presence of dried grapes may be associated with magico-medical practice. In Greek medicine, the word for

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67 Pliny, *Natural History*, 28.178–179; 259.

68 For phylacteries, see also Dieleman, this volume.

69 Ilani et al. 1999.

70 *The Book of Medicaments*, 8.50; the same procedure in relation to the lizard's liver, *ibid.* 22.41 = Heim 1892, 483, no.71. See also Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.6.9; Palmer 1989, 66–67. Cf. the powers attributed to the green lizard in magical recipes and magical gems; Nock 1931/1972; Gaillard-Seux 1998.

71 Szilágyi 2004, 17–18, table 4: of 28 *bullae* from Pannonian graves, 18 belonged to children, 9 to adult women; see the similar observation by Swift 2003, 345.

72 Kotansky 1994, 91–92, no 20.

bunch of grapes, *staphule* also designates a swollen uvula<sup>73</sup>, a metaphor used in magical formulae. Marcellus Empiricus thus prescribes placing a grape on the throat, while reciting: *uua uuam emendat*, ‘the grape cures the uvula’.<sup>74</sup> Recently, a small *bullae* made in bronze was found in a collective tomb in Hierapolis (Phrygia); it contained a small lacteal tooth (first-seventh century AD).<sup>75</sup>

The history and function of the gold *bullae*, which could also contain remedies, must be distinguished from that of bronze *bullae*. Ancient authors associate the precious jewellery with social and gendered identity because only freeborn, and originally elite boys, could wear it as a token of virile courage.<sup>76</sup> It was also a token offered to the Lares at puberty, which could vary between 14 and 17 years old, marking the passage to adulthood of boys who passed from the status of *puer* to *iuuenis* and took the *toga virilis*. According to R. E. A. Palmer,<sup>77</sup> the gold *bullae* became a regular attribute of elite children in the mid-Republic. In the Augustan period, the custom was appropriated by freedmen families as a visual sign of social and familial success in funerary iconography.<sup>78</sup> The chronology and the modalities of its use, however, needs to be re-examined in the light of both written and archaeological sources. Very few gold *bullae* come from a funerary context (pl. 10a).<sup>79</sup> Is it because it was a costly familial token, transmitted from father to son, which would generally be transmitted to another child if its wearer died?

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<sup>73</sup> Hippocrates, *Prognostic*, 23 l.30 (Littré 2.177–81).

<sup>74</sup> Marcus Empiricus, *The Book of Medicaments* 14.26 = Heim 1892, 486, no.80. Cf. P.Laur III 58, a third-cent. AD charm in which the Greek word *staphulotomos*, ‘cutting the uvula’, has been subjected to serial reduction in each of 12 lines; see Daniel/Maltomini 1990, 1: 3–6 no.1; also Faraone 2012, 64 fig.4.5.

<sup>75</sup> Tomb 163d, belonging to a Jewish family according to the inscription. Unpublished. I thank Caroline Laforest, Dominique Castex et Francesco D’Andria (Mission archéologique italienne de Hiéropolis) for providing me this information.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Pliny, *HN* 33.4; Plutarch, *Roman Questions*, 101.

<sup>77</sup> Palmer 1989; Goette 1986.

<sup>78</sup> See e.g. the funerary relief of the Augustan period illustrated in Dasen 2003, pl. III, fig. 6.

<sup>79</sup> See above n. 42, the context of the *bullae* from Fréjus. See also e.g. the list of *bullae* found in Roman Gaul by Péchoux 2010.

## 6 RITES OF PASSAGE

Amulets also construct a discourse on growing up that was not perceived as a *continuum*: the process was composed of steps that successively accomplished full integration into the community, often marked by ritual acts, which may in turn be associated with amuletic charms. Greek sets are the most explicit evidence for this. They compose a relatively stable iconographic vocabulary relating to coming of age; a good example is offered by a string of twelve gold charms from the necropolis of Akanthus in northern Greece (pl. 11b).<sup>80</sup> A number of items on this string refer to the maturation of girls, such as the pomegranate, associated with Kore/Persephone, and the tortoise, perhaps here an emblem of Aphrodite, alluding to the modesty prescribed for women, or as an attribute of Hermes, the patron of children.<sup>81</sup> The tortoise also averts magical spells, says the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.<sup>82</sup> The double axe and the open hand, however, are found with children of both sexes and may express strength and divine protection.<sup>83</sup> The Silen's head may assume the function of the phallus, which is absent from Greek charms, with the added dimension of the Silen's guardian role as paedagogue. The gold knucklebone is particularly interesting, since it could allude to play, characteristic of childhood, but also to the divinatory dimension of the play, determining the fate of the child.<sup>84</sup> It is striking to find the equivalent of the concept in Roman children's graves; a regular playing die, not a charm to hang, is often associated with juveniles, most likely with the same polysemic connotations of play, fate, and reference to the status of childhood, when labour is not required of one.<sup>85</sup>

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**80** Ziva 2009, 33, fig. 19. I thank B. Tsigarida for providing me this photograph.

**81** See a similar bone set from the tomb of a girl in Abdera, Papaikononou 2006, pl. 36, 2, and in a silver necklace from a funeral pyre in Thasos; Sgourou/Agelarakis 2001, 343–346, figs 29–33 (Silen's head, lion's head, double axe, tortoise, amber knucklebone, frog).

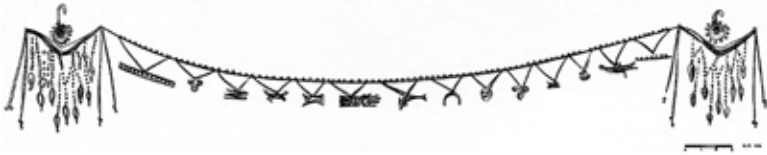
**82** *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, 37–38. Repeated e.g. by Pliny, *HN* 32.33, adding the value of its flesh against all poisons.

**83** Cf. the value of the open hand and clenched fist (with *fica*) in Egyptian amulets, Herrmann/Staubli 2010, no 73, 130.

**84** On knucklebones in children's tombs, Carè 2012.

**85** E.g. the small dice in the child's grave in Poitiers; Brives 2008, 165, fig. 2, no 16.

Similar amuletic sets are represented in vase-painting. Necklaces with charms are depicted on vessels that may have contained the actual jewellery, such as the pyxis in the Benaki Museum (fig. 6) (330–320 BC). The front depicts a luxurious necklace with a double row of pendants and wedding earrings on the side, the back shows a string with fourteen amulets. For A. Ziva, the items evoke a premature death before marriage, with insects such as the cicada alluding to death and rebirth. However, a number of devices relate to the protection of the living, such as the apotropaic eye, the crescent-shaped *meniskos* for regular growth and menstruation, the *embolon*, attribute of Tyche, alluding to luck (which is also found in Roman times in the form of Tyche/Fortuna pendants), while the life cycle of the cicada, believed to be born from the earth, could ensure a harmonious transition from the status of *parthenos* to that of *gynê*, the married woman who has borne a child.<sup>86</sup>



6 Black-glaze Pyxis. Benaki Museum. Line-drawing

## 7 CONCLUSION

The elusive nature of the evidence for amuletic charms, drawn as it is from literary, iconographic and archaeological sources, with their different biases and shortcomings, demands circumspection.

On Greek vase-painting and in statuary, for example, most depictions show boys with amulet cords and very few girls,<sup>87</sup> whereas most of the relevant archaeological evidence come from girls' graves. Such iconography may focus on boys because amulets were a device to indicate their legitimate status and thus relevant to an event that marked their entry into social life. Martine Seifert has recently suggested that, at any rate at Athens, they received the amulets after being introduced by the

<sup>86</sup> Kallintzi/Papaikononou 2006, 483.

<sup>87</sup> See e.g. the children, mainly boys, on *choai*; Neils/Oakley 2003, cat. 96, 99 with bibliography.

father to the phratry at the Apatouria, a festival that took place each autumn.<sup>88</sup> However, these objects may have been given them still earlier, as is suggested by the newborn babies in swaddling clothes with chains of amulets from the Greek colony of Poseidonia, and perhaps the birth scenes of divine children with charms.<sup>89</sup>

Virtually no text either in Greece or in Rome specifies the circumstances under which such gifts were given. Only Plautus (250–184 BC) seems to suggest that they were considered suitable as birthday presents, for in his *Epidicus* the hero asks Telestis: ‘Don’t you remember my bringing you a crescent (*lunula*) upon your birthday, *dies natalis*, and a little gold ring for your finger?’<sup>90</sup> Small, cheap, often strange, amuletic charms offer the opportunity of discovering another side of ancient societies. Studying amulets can make an important contribution to our understanding of the place of children in ancient communities. In the context of high infant mortality, these objects attest to a close interest in the welfare of children. They can be used to infer the parents’ emotional investment in the survival of neonates, and so the formation of parental bonding. Some shapes and material correspond to diseases described in texts.

These objects may also transmit the traces of lost oral traditions. They may perhaps embody a memory of the ‘foolish tales’ told by wet-nurses about female demons that kill babies, and the protective animals, such as the hare, that substitute for our little mouse.<sup>91</sup>

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## PHOTO CREDITS

**Figs. 1, 5** Photo S. Schenker

**Fig. 2** After Schlumberger, 74 (fig.)

**Fig. 3** After Brives 2008, fig. 1, no 2

**Fig. 4** Photo Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire

**Fig. 6** Line-drawing after Ziva 2009, fig. 25

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**88** Seifert 2011. See also the numerous temple-boys from Cyprus with amulets; Dasen 2008, pl. II, fig. 5, with earlier bibliography.

**89** Ammerman 2007, 142–43, figs 7.12–7.14.

**90** Plautus, *Epidicus*, 639–40; transl. P. Nixon (Loeb).

**91** Dunham 1993, on Syrian amulets part of the tale Lamashtu, the child-killer demon, in children’s graves. More on amulets, see Dasen 2015.



- Pl. 7a-b** Photo Claudia Wagner, Beazley Archive, Oxford University  
**Pl. 8, 9** © Trustees of the British Museum  
**Pl. 10a** Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, DRAC Rhône-Alpes. Photo Chr. Thioc  
**Pl. 10b, 11a, 12** Photo S. Schenker  
**Pl. 11b** Photo 16th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities

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ÁRPÁD M. NAGY

## ENGINEERING ANCIENT AMULETS: MAGICAL GEMS OF THE ROMAN IMPERIAL PERIOD\*

*Hommage à Oleg Y. Neverov*

*The so-called magical gems constitute a type of Roman Imperial Period amulets. Relegated to the periphery of research until recently, magical gems have by now aroused the interest of a number of disciples (such as classical archaeology, Egyptology, Jewish studies, history of religion, medieval studies). The first part of the study presents the most important characteristics of the object group from five aspects (What is a magical gem? How were they made? How were they used and to what purpose? Magical gems – ‘chiefly Graeco-Egyptian’? The significance of magical gems), outlining the social contexts of the use of these gems as well. The second part analyses what is perhaps the most famous Imperial Period example, the Perseus gem in Saint Petersburg, which belongs to the border area of the category, thus offering an almost outside perspective on magical gems. The analysis lists the characteristics of the gem intended to cure gout, reconstructs the ancient reception of the healing praxis it represents, and also interprets the phenomenon.*

*It was John Davidson Beazley (1885–1970), perhaps the greatest master of classical archaeology, who pointed out an alternative to the scholarly attitude that seeks originality by feverishly striving to uncover new finds –*

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*the rediscovery of forgotten treasures gathering dust in museum storerooms.<sup>1</sup> I believe all of us could bring many examples to show how right he was. It is striking, however, that in today's world not only individual items, but a complete Gattung is being recovered from warehouse fossilisation. Even fifteen years ago, a past communis opinio relegated magical gems to the sphere of the Wissenschaft des Unwissenswerten.<sup>2</sup> Today, however, this is one of the most dynamically developing fields of classical studies.*

*In the first part of this paper, I will give an overview of the magical gems from five aspects. In the second part, I will look at a gem which belongs on the border lines of the genre, thus offering almost an outside perspective on magical gems.*

## 1 MAGICAL GEMS - AN OVERVIEW

### 1.1 WHAT IS A 'MAGICAL GEM'?

The term 'magical' (or, as they are less frequently called even today: 'gnostic') gems is not an ancient invention, but a concept imposed by modern archaeology. It denotes a certain amulet type of the Roman Imperial period.<sup>3</sup> These amulets are precious stones, 1 to 3 centimeters in size, primarily of haematite, carnelian, lapis lazuli and different colours of jasper; or, more seldom, glass substitutes for these kinds of stone. Their typology follows the shapes usual in Graeco-Roman glyptics complemented by a few Mesopotamian and Egyptian variants.<sup>4</sup> The iden-

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<sup>1</sup> Kurtz 1989, 98.

<sup>2</sup> See the story mentioned by Gordon 2008, 716. My use of the word 'magic' in this paper is wholly conventional, and I intend no opposition between 'religious' and 'magical' uses of the gems. Similarly, I use the word *magos* in the sense 'ritual expert' or 'ritual specialist'.

<sup>3</sup> The fundamental work is still Campbell Bonner's 1950 study: Bonner 1950. A later synthesis: Michel 2004. The most recent overview: Entwistle and Adams 2011. New possibilities are offered by *The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database (CBd)*: <http://classics.mfab.hu/talismans> edited by the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest in cooperation with the University of Fribourg, and realized through international collaboration.

<sup>4</sup> For the most recent version of the list of shapes developed by Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, see Vitellozzi 2010a, 31. Among the Graeco-Roman versions the most frequent type is oval, flat on both faces, with a trapezoid cross-section (e.g. CBd-10). The heart-shaped type (e.g. CBd-778, -779,



tification of *Zaubergemmen* is based on three formal and two structural characteristics (a single gem does not need to show all five features). The first group is connected to the three constituents that may be engraved on magical gems: text, image and sign.

Magical gems feature three characteristic types of text. The first consists of divine names. Greek deities are mentioned only rarely, Egyptian gods are not numerous either,<sup>5</sup> but the majority of divine names belong to the Jewish tradition: the names of Deus Israel (Iaô, Sabaôth, Adônai), angels, archangels and a few protagonists from the Bible (Abraham, Jacob, Solomon). Numerous examples show, however, that the Jewish divine names are also to be taken as magical names independent of their original meaning.<sup>6</sup> The second type of text consists of these very *voces magicae*: a word or a sequence of letters written in Greek,<sup>7</sup> but lacking a meaning (*barbaron onoma, logos*).<sup>8</sup> These served as an important tool for the magician: each represents the formula most suitable for evoking the divine power for the desired aim. Most elude the clear identification of cultural tradition. Just as in all cultures and periods, they are exotic elements which attest to the expertise of the magician in the eyes of his clients.<sup>9</sup> The third type of text is the rarest: the meaningful text. These usually attest the function of the gem, or – more rarely – it may consist of an acclamation or a prayer.

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-1040) may be of Egyptian origin, whereas the Mesopotamian types are cylindrical (e.g. CBd-944. On this type: Mastrocinque 2014).

**5** See for example Michel 2001, 2, no. 3 (= CBd-382, Artemis), 40, no. 61 (= CBd-440, Thoth), 3, no 5 (= CBd-384, Osiris).

**6** A clear overview: Bohak 2003, especially 71–74.

**7** Latin letters are only seldom found: e.g. Zwierlein-Diehl 1992, 103–04, no. 31 (= CBd-1961); Michel 2001, 176, no. 281 (= CBd-667); New York, Metropolitan Museum 81.6.314 (= CBd-1147); Gesztelyi 1998, 140, no. 34 (= CBd-1554). On Hebrew letters, pseudo-Hebrew inscriptions and Jewish magical gems: Spier 2007, 112–14, especially 163–67.

**8** The authoritative analysis of magical names is Versnel 2002, especially 144–47 (the principal perspective: ‘What is the sense of the nonsense?’). In the wider context of Graeco-Roman literature, see Martin 2005, 215–21. For a *Glossary of Voces Magicae*: Brashear 1995, 3576–3603.

**9** It still happens quite frequently that researchers attempt to explain the origins of magical names from cultures they know little about. For a critique of this method, see Bohak 2003 (Israel), and Thissen 1988; Quack, forthcoming (Egypt).

Magical gems use two principal types of iconographical schemes and elements to create the engraved composition. The first type features traditional, mainly Greek and Egyptian imagery (e.g. an Aphrodite *anadyomene*, Harpocrates sitting on the lotus flower, the Gorgoneion), or other schemes often taken from contemporary coins (such as the phoenix and the reaper – see below, 1.2 and 3). The other uses new schemes exclusively created for this genre. In this second category, the two most important classes consist, first, of representations of the lion-headed, ratiated snake, Chnoubis; and, second, of the cock-headed, snake-legged god referred to in contemporary scholarship as the Anguipes (see below, 1.2). The third constituent engraved element on magical gems is the magical sign, in Greek: the *charactêr*. This never occurs elsewhere in ancient glyptics, but is quite frequently found in other genres of *magica* (metal amulets, for example, or defixiones).<sup>10</sup> Much like the *voces magicae*, the *charactêres* were also believed to serve (and attest to) direct contact with divine powers. The origin of these signs is only seldom identifiable.<sup>11</sup>

Identification is further based on two structural elements. First: most magical gems are engraved on the reverse, as well – and sometimes even on the edge. Second: the inscription is not engraved in mirror writing.<sup>12</sup> Both features together mark a significant difference from regular gems. As a rule, ancient gems could be used as signet-rings to legally identify their owners, much like today's credit cards or official signatures (engravers were punished for creating identical gems<sup>13</sup>). A magical gem is not meant to be used as a stamp: it is the *sphragis* ('seal') itself – the *sphragis Theou* ('Seal of God') as inscribed on the type featuring King Solomon.<sup>14</sup>

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**10** As a starting point: Collins 2008, 73–78; Gordon 2011a; see also Gordon and Dijkstra, this volume.

**11** The best example for *charactêres* with identified origins is the Chnoubis-sign, see Lieven 2000.

**12** Neither of these features is an exclusive characteristic of magical gems, see Nagy 2012b, 73, n. 5, with examples. Addendum: gem engraved on both faces, bust of Christ on one side, that of Mary on the other: Martiniani-Reber 2011, 34, no. 9.

**13** The most famous example is probably the tradition of the two identical signet-rings of Augustus, representing a sphinx: Plinius, *NH* 37.4.10. The *opus magnum* on ancient glyptics is Zwierlein-Diehl 2007.

**14** On the Solomon gems, as a starting point: Michel 2001, 268–70; Michel 2004, 323–24. Magical gem and seal: Dasen 2011.

Based on the above definition, magical gems are as different from other gems as the Sargasso Sea is from the Atlantic Ocean that encircles it on all sides. This is all the more natural in the case of a genre of objects that belonged entirely to the private sphere, without obligatory, externally imposed prescriptions as to how they should be made. The vagueness of the definition is clearly shown by the following example: excavations at Zeugma (Commagene province, Asia Minor) between 1998 and 2000 unearthed the remains of the ancient city's archives, which had burnt down. The rolled papyrus documents were destroyed, but 102,500 clay seals survived, baked hard in the fire. Among the material published so far are two Anguipes-impressions.<sup>15</sup> Thus in Zeugma this scheme, which researchers automatically define as a magical gem, decorated signet-rings (which, of course, does not rule out that the rings in question had a talismanic function as well). The boundary can also be crossed in the opposite direction: many gems that were used as amulets do not belong among magical gems.<sup>16</sup> These uncertainties, however, do not render the category useless: there is no doubt that magical gems form a genre of their own in Roman glyptics.

The gems' date of production in the Roman Imperial period was established in the seventeenth century by the first great scholars to work on them: Jean l'Heureux (Johannes Macarius, c. 1551–1614) and Jean Chifflet (Johannes Chifletius, 1588–1660).<sup>17</sup> Further progress in this area has, however, only been made recently. A chronological framework for magical gems was developed by Erika Zwierlein-Diehl.<sup>18</sup> Her work de-

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**15** Önal 2010, 42, no. 50 (= CBd-1573) and 43, no. 51 (= CBd-1574), with further literature. The significance of the find is enhanced by the fact that so far this is the only well-defined archaeological context not belonging to the funeral sphere, i. e. it attests to the *in vivo* function of the gems.

**16** Two critical analyses on the definition of magical gems: Gordon 2011b, 44–45; Nagy 2012b, 82–88 (with a list of healing amulet-gems known from written sources, and not belonging to magical gems).

**17** On Macarius, see Spier 2007, 2. His study in manuscript form (*Abraxas, seu Apistopistus*) was published by Chifflet: *Ioannis Macarii canonici Ariensis Abraxas, seu Apistopistus; quae est antiquaria de gemmis Basilidianis disquisitio. Accedit Abraxas Proteus, seu multiformis gemmae Basilidianae portentosa varietas; Exhibita, et Commentario illustrata à Ioanne Chifletio, Canonico Tornacensi, Philippo IV. Regi Catholico, et Serenissimo Principi Ioanni Austriaco à Sacris Oratorii* (Antwerpen, 1657). An overview of the work: Heenes 2003, 45–47.

**18** Zwierlein-Diehl forthcoming.

monstrates that production began in the late Hellenistic period, its heyday falling in the second and third centuries AD, followed by a slow decline. Only through research carried out in the past years are we beginning to realize that the post-antique history of these objects is equally noteworthy.<sup>19</sup> Anathemizing magical gems only began in classical studies at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It was then that the definition of the genre developed, which – though resting on a completely different approach – still holds today.<sup>20</sup>

Today about 4,000 individual magical gems are known. In her 2004 book, Simone Michel published a list of 2.700 pieces.<sup>21</sup> Since then, almost one thousand further pieces have come to light; with a few exceptions all from museum storerooms. Magical gems are usually said to have been produced in Alexandria, even though there is no archaeological evidence to support this. It seems more likely that they were not created in a single centre. The majority of the production is sufficiently unified, and pieces created far from the major centres are relatively easily differentiated.<sup>22</sup> Still, it is generally held that magical gems were mainly made and used in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. Hardly a dozen pieces come from authentic excavations,<sup>23</sup> and these too are almost

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**19** As a starting point: Zwierlein-Diehl 2014; Nagy 2014. It is getting more and more evident that one of the most important steps in upcoming research will be to tell apart ancient and post-antique gems, as was pointed out by Joachim F. Quack as early as 2004 (Quack 2004, 262).

**20** Nagy 2012b, 88–89.

**21** Michel 2004, 235–345. For a concordance of Michel's list with CBd, s.v. Bibliography, Michel, DMG.

**22** On the Alexandrian theory, see most recently, with serious counter-arguments: Gordon 2011b, 40–41. For provincial workshops, see for example a group of Chnoubis-gems (Kerbenstil-group): Michel 2001, 261–64, no. 417–23 (= CBd-109-13; CBd-122, CBd-153); silver ring with Chnoubis-gem from Aventicum: Guisan 1975, 11–12 (= CBd-1021).

**23** The first list of pieces with known provenance: Philipp 1986, 8, n. 18. Supplements: Kotansky 1997, 257–60; Michel 2004, 2, n. 7. An important new find is the piece discovered in Augsburg, since it was recovered from a dated stratum: Platz-Horster 2012, 40–41, no. 13. 'Aus der Benutzungsschicht einer Holzbauphase des letzten Drittel des 1. – Anfang 2. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. On a Chnoubis gem recently found in a tomb in Pella, see Chrysostomou 2008, 80–81 (see also 82 and fig. 11: silver ring with the inscription: *Heis Zeus Serapis*). I thank Marianna Dági (Budapest) for pointing out this reference to me.

all tomb finds, thus marking only the final destination of their ancient history. This makes it basically impossible to know anything about the owners of the gems. It is nevertheless possible to define five important features of the social context in which they were used (see below).

The invention of magical gems fits into a wider religious process in Mediterranean history that is usually regarded as having experienced a ‘turn’ around the beginning of the first century AD. Before this date, ancient magic was primarily transmitted through the oral tradition; after that point, however, written records became generally widespread and the different – to use a highly anachronistic term – ‘national’ traditions of ancient magic combined into a cross-cultural science.<sup>24</sup> The most spectacular sign of the change was precisely the spread of magical names and signs in genres of *magica* like curse tablets, papyri and precious metal amulets. In all probability, the invention of magical gems was also part of this change. This Hellenised cross-cultural context is the first fundamental feature of the social world to which the magical gems belong.

## 1.2 HOW WERE THEY MADE?

The production of magical gems required two kinds of expertise, which – in theory – differed greatly from each other. One was the knowledge of the ritual expert (*magos*) who designed the gem and the magical *praxis* it formed part of, and who performed the rite (*teletê*)<sup>25</sup> when the object was finished. The other craft which required practical skills and tools was that of an engraver skilled at engraving precious stones (*daktyliographos*), who engraved the gem based on the recipe of the *magos*. The two roles may have been played by different people;<sup>26</sup> some gems, however, were designed and produced by the same person.<sup>27</sup>

Based on all these, there are two ideal ways of classifying gems. One is to reconstruct the oeuvre of the engravers irrespective of whether they created regular or magical gems. The other is to collect magical gems belonging to the *praxeis* developed by individual magicians, irrespective

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<sup>24</sup> For the first time on this shift: Wunsch 1909, 19. Most recently: Gordon 2011b, 43–44.

<sup>25</sup> The fundamental study on *teletê* is still Samson Eitrem’s work (Eitrem 1939).

<sup>26</sup> The Budapest gem CBd-4, for example, is not engraved with what was prescribed, but with the inscription ‘as it is prescribed’ (*hōs prokeitai*).

<sup>27</sup> A recent attempt at attributing three gems: Nagy 2011, 77–79.

of the number of engravers who cut the pieces. At present, the former method would still prove very difficult. The sort of stylistic analysis devised by Beazley to attribute painted vases cannot be applied here; moreover our knowledge of glyptical workshops in the Imperial Period is extremely limited.<sup>28</sup> The other method seems more promising. Today the *praxis* seems to be the constitutive basis for the classification of magical gems. They can be categorized into series defined by the material, colour, shape and size of the precious stone on the one hand, and by the relationship of the three formal constituents mentioned above: text, image and magical sign. This may be exemplified by a class of digestive amulets, the phoenix gems.

Today we know of twenty-five ancient gems that belong to this class.<sup>29</sup> (fig. 1) All are haematite. With two exceptions, all are oval in shape with a trapezoidal cross-section. Twenty are engraved with a designation of function (e.g. '*pepte*': 'digest', or '*stomachou*': 'for the stomach!'). The structure of the composition is identical in all cases: i.e. the longitudinal axis of the obverse features a deity with pairs of animals arranged vertically on each side, while the reverse generally bears an inscription that refers to the function of the gem. It is important to note that the principal image engraved in the focus of the obverse is not always identical: in seventeen cases we have a phoenix, while four times it is an ibis-headed figure (identified by Armand Delatte and Philippe Derchain as *Thoth*), three times Harpocrates, and once a crab. At present it is impossible to tell how many engravers worked on gems of the phoenix class. We do not know their date of production either, although the basic type cannot predate the second quarter of the second century AD, since the principal image, the phoenix on a globe was only present in Imperial coinage from AD 121/122 with no known earlier parallels.<sup>30</sup> The iconographic composition follows an Egyptian tradition whose single further source is Herodotus.<sup>31</sup> The interpretation of a variant attested by a single piece, however, was made possible solely through Horapollon (5th–6th centuries AD).<sup>32</sup> The Roman Imperial period phoenix gems thus connect, and

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**28** A thorough overview: Tassinari 2008.

**29** Nagy 2012a, with the detailed elaboration of the summary below. A post-antique piece also belongs here: Michel 2004, 323, pl. VIII 6.

**30** See Nagy 2011, 79.

**31** The most frequent central motif of the scheme is the phoenix standing on a globe. For the interpretation of this image, see Herodotus 2.73.

**32** There are two phoenixes on a lost gem: Bonner 1950, 270, no. D. 104



**1** Haematite gem. Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts. Classical Collection, inv. no. 55.154 (= CBd-2). Photo: László Mátyus

moreover, unite in a single tradition, sources which span a millenium or more, from Herodotus to Horapollon. In doing so, they neatly exemplify the cross-cultural nature of the gems.

An important conclusion may be drawn from the comparison of surviving recipes and the gems that may be related to them: the correspondence is never complete.<sup>33</sup> We cannot speak of a relation of ‘design’ to ‘mass produced object’. Practically speaking, no two magical gems are identical. Another important conclusion: the motifs on the gems do not simply infiltrate from other genres of art and literature. Rather the gems remake established iconographic and textual motifs and conventions: they are individual compositions. Contrived for a particular purpose,

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(= CBd-198). For the story of the two phoenixes, see Horapollon, *Hieroglyphica* II 57.

**33** The list of recipes mentioned in magical papyri and lithical works (*Lithika*): Nagy 2002a, 170–79. Addendum, apart from the items listed in Nagy 2012b, 84, n. 46: Vitellozzi 2010b, 122–25 (ad PGM V 2916–2441, cf. Nagy 2002a, 174, no. 21).

the basis of their construction is the magical *praxis*.<sup>34</sup> It is through the *praxis* that the *magos* defines what the piece will represent. He chooses ‘components’ he deems are the most efficient, and which will bring the success of the ritual. The magical gem represents living practice: it is a living genre. Its makers were entrepreneurs; they lived off the ‘market’, and tried to make their products more appealing by suggesting two contradictory statements at the same time.<sup>35</sup> They claimed their products represented a repository of ancient, often exotic knowledge; but also that they represented the latest in cutting-edge magical technology, personally designed to fit the needs of the customer. This double nature is the second important characteristic of the social context of magical gems. As attested by the great number of surviving gems, these marketing messages of their makers proved to be just as effective two thousand years ago as they are today.

The makers of magical gems were creative not only on the level of individual gems. Among their far-reaching innovations, two are worthy mentioning here. The ‘Chnoubis’ gems transformed a minor figure of Egyptian astrology, one of the 36 decans, into an important solar deity easily interpreted from the perspective of different cultures, and thus created the largest series of digestive amulets.<sup>36</sup> The Anguipes-scheme (a cock-headed, snake-legged human figure in armour with one hand holding a whip and the other holding a shield, which is often inscribed with the name Iaô) was a completely new invention and should be understood as an important intellectual attempt to incorporate through this unique imagery the God of Israel not solely through his names, but also through a unique image, into the pagan magical *koinê* of the Imperial period.<sup>37</sup> (It is important to note: the image does not represent God,

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<sup>34</sup> Nagy 2011, 77.

<sup>35</sup> As a starting point: Dickie 1999, 163–93, especially 184; Versnel 2002, especially 154–56.

<sup>36</sup> Bonner 1950, Michel 2004. Most recently: Dasen and Nagy 2012. The most detailed analysis: Quack in press. I would hereby like to thank the author for providing me with access to the relevant parts of his manuscript.

<sup>37</sup> According to a theory elaborated elsewhere (Nagy 2002b) the scheme defines one name of the Lord through words deriving from an identical Hebrew root (*GBR* – גבר). For example, *gever*: rooster, man; *gibbor*: warrior, gigas, usually represented in Graeco-Roman art with double snake’s legs. The inventor of the scheme transformed these words into an image, and organized the elements into a unified figure. The scheme creates a coherent picture as a reference to the Almighty (*Ha-Geura*). The shield has been



only one of his names, thus it does not break the Law). Elements from roughly contemporary Christian culture also appear among the motifs of magical gems. The earliest pictorial representation of the crucifixion is known from a magical gem.<sup>38</sup>

### 1.3 HOW WERE THEY USED AND TO WHAT PURPOSE?

Although the papyri show that they had other uses as well,<sup>39</sup> gems were usually mounted in rings or pendants, which means they were used as jewellery.<sup>40</sup> This fact points to the third important social characteristic of their users: contrary to previous presuppositions, magical gems were not necessarily the amulets of the poor. It will suffice to give here only a brief outline of their functions, since the subject has been treated by many since the fundamental work of Campbell Bonner.<sup>41</sup> The gems' uses may be inferred from the objects themselves and from outside sources as well. Of these, the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri are the most important.<sup>42</sup> It must first be stressed that among the four thousand or so

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interpreted by E. Zwierlein-Diehl: it depicts God as *hyperaspistês* – ‘who protects with his shield’ – well-known from the Septuagint (Zwierlein-Diehl 1992, 30–31). Against a possible *interpretatio Aegyptiaca* (most recently: Koenig 2009): Quack forthcoming.

**38** Michel 2001, 283–84, no. 457; Spier 2007, 73, no. 443; CBd-815. On this piece and the issue in general, see most recently Engemann 2011; Harley-McGowan 2011.

**39** An overview of the sources related to function: Nagy 2012b, 89, n. 65. A number of haematite gems survived broken in two; Erika Zwierlein-Diehl has suggested that this may be a reference to a healing practice widespread in Antiquity: stones were broken into two, then one half ground and drunk (Zwierlein-Diehl 1992, 50).

**40** Precious metal mounts have also survived in some cases, and their one-time existence may be traceable in many more examples. Many gems show unique, shell-like chippings on their edges, which suggests that the stones were once forced out of their mounts (see for example CBd-387, -525, -1132, -1392, -1554). Pieces surviving in their precious metal mounts: Dunand 1939, 44–45, no. 1248–51, pl. 137 (Byblos); Vikan 1990, 155–56 (= CBd-1253. Roma, Piazza della Consolazione-treasure). A few further examples: CBd-14, -617, -913, -1021.

**41** Some overviews: Bonner 1950; Mastrocinque 2003; Michel 2004; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 210–31.

**42** The sources: PGM; Suppl. Mag. The authoritative English translation: GMPT. An overview of the recipes recommending the use of gems and rings: above, n. 33.

known magical gems, only a couple can be securely identified as harmful.<sup>43</sup> It is thus clear what a grave mistake it would be to connect these gems with some kind of black magic. Their three main fields of use, love, health and general success in life, are perennial concerns. Thus, a fourth conclusion as to their users also presents itself. Magical gems were the amulets of the living: they were neither magical weapons of destruction, nor parting gifts for the dead.

One fundamental type of love charm was made of lapis lazuli. The engraving represents the Aphrodite *anadyomene*-scheme after Apelles' famous painting, usually accompanied by the magical name *arrôriphrasis*.<sup>44</sup> It is hardly surprising that love charms should have been engraved with the image of Aphrodite, although we would be mistaken to think that listing the gods in a simplified classification ('Aphrodite is the goddess of love') would provide a safe key to understanding the function of the gems. The image of the *par excellence* infant god, Harpocrates on the lotus flower, was also used for love charms, as is attested by a recipe known from a papyrus<sup>45</sup> and by the inscription on a number of gems.<sup>46</sup> These types were thus engraved – if we want to understand the function of the gem – with the image of the deity who ensured success. It is in the name of this deity that the *magos* attempts to force the achievement of the aims of the *praxis*.

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**43** Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 229–30; probably Michel 2001, 5, no. 8 (= CBd-387), and 133–34, no. 216 (= CBd-614). Joachim F. Quack doubts the dating of the latter piece as ancient: Quack 2004, 262. Our present concepts would also list pieces belonging to coercive love magic in this category. The most famous example for these is the *praxis* of 'The Sword of Dardanos', see below, n. 55.

**44** E.g. Michel 2001, 51, no. 76 (= CBd-476); 52–53, nos. 78–79 (= CBd-478, 479). The list of known gems: Michel 2004, 250–51. This function is also attested by an external source, the Cyranides containing magical recipes (s.v. *epsilon*, see Waegeman 1987, 40–46).

**45** PGM LXI 1–38.

**46** The Harpocrates-scheme may at times be accompanied by other types of love charms: e.g. Michel 2001, 86–87, no. 133 (= CBd-533): *arrôriphrasis*, Aphrodite (but cf. Quack 2004, 262: post-antique?); Michel 2001, 173–74, no. 278 (= CBd-664): *arrôriphrasis*, Aphrodite and Ares, further motives; Bonner 1950, 263, D. 61 (= CBd-1100): the three Graces. The function of a further gem is specified by the engraved inscription: 'Grant Theanous favor in the eyes of Serapammon!' (Michel 2001, 87–88, no. 134 = CBd-534).

The other important area in which the gems were used was personal health. Some areas of medicine developed clearly delineated series. Magical gems were most often used to protect mothers and infants, and to cure digestive problems, gynecological, joint and eye diseases. For example, the most frequent iconographical motif of ophthalmic gems is the lizard, which was actually used in curing eye diseases.<sup>47</sup> Although we know of only a few examples of the type, its popularity is shown by the fact that its characteristic scheme is also attested on a medieval copper lamella (of thirteenth- or fourteenth-century date?) with an Arabic inscription – the first case in which the unique motifs of magical gems could be identified in an Arabic cultural context.<sup>48</sup> The principal iconographic motif of these gems is thus also the main instrument of the *praxis*.

The variant aimed at curing articular diseases follows an entirely different logic. It depicts a reaper, characteristically accompanied by a Greek inscription: *schîdn*: '(for the health of) the hips!'<sup>49</sup> The reaper scheme easily associated with the function of the gem can perhaps be traced back to a prototype in pharaonic Egyptian art: the representation of the deceased happily living off the products of his fields, which acquired renewed popularity through Alexandrian coins during the reign of Antoninus Pius.<sup>50</sup> The image here may therefore help the healing process by evoking a concept of happiness in the afterlife, (*historiola*; see below, 2.3). This is the third type of operational mechanisms that can be reconstructed for magical gems.

A fourth type features the body part to be protected as the principal element of the iconographical scheme. The most frequent type of gynecological gem thus represents the uterus, while the long key below it refers to the eternal desire to control ('lock' or 'unlock') childbirth.

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**47** See Bonner 1950, 69–71; Gaillard-Seux 1998; most recently: Faraone in press. I warmly thank the author for showing me his manuscript. A gem in Berlin that bears an engraved inscription in Latin beside the image of the lizard testifies to the memory of a healing attributed to such a *praxis*: it is a votive gift offered in return for the vision restored (*lumina restituta*). See Mastrocinque 2009, 55–56 (= CBd-178).

**48** Dasen and Nagy 2012, 307–08, fig. 10. Two Chnoubis-figures and the name of Chnoubis on the lamella are also motifs from magical gems. The Arabic inscription still awaits interpretation.

**49** As a starting point: Michel 2004, 175–77, 329.

**50** Geissen 2010.

Contrary to what present-day associations would suggest, the primary aim of the motif was not contraception, but rather a successful birth.<sup>51</sup>

Lastly, the third main area to which the use of magical gems applied was individual prosperity: personal success, gaining the sympathy of one's superior, the opening of all closed doors, etc. These functions are, however, only rarely spelled out in detail by the inscriptions on the gems.<sup>52</sup>

#### 1.4 MAGICAL GEMS - 'CHIEFLY GRAECO-EGYPTIAN'?

As stated above, a number of magical gems were produced following the prescriptions of Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri. These provide the most important key to the interpretation of the gems – and in two senses: because of what they tell us, and because of what they don't. As regards the former: we know of fifteen recipes that prescribe the use of gems and rings,<sup>53</sup> and a more or less corresponding gem can be found for all of them. The conclusion thus arises that we should regard magical gems as the products of Graeco-Egyptian culture, an idea that is reinforced by the significant presence on them of Egyptian and Greek iconographic motifs.<sup>54</sup> Even so, it has become increasingly evident that some distinctions are called for here. The closest connection between the papyri and the magical gems is exemplified by a love charm, the Sword of Dardanos – its prescriptions are mirrored with a surprising precision by a gem in Perugia and another piece in Beirut (although even here we cannot speak of a perfect identity).<sup>55</sup> But the 'Sword of Dardanos' *praxis* is represented only by these two examples in the vast corpus of gems, whereas the most frequent love charm, the above mentioned Aphrodite *anadyomene* – *arrôriphrasis*-type is attested by almost fifty examples.

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**51** On this type, as a starting point: Michel 2004, 178–202; Dasen 2007.

**52** E.g. CBd-5 (cf. Dasen and Nagy 2012, 296, n. 16); Michel 2001, 167, no. 271 (= CBd-158); *ibid.*, 17, no 28 (= CBd-407) etc. The most important Imperial Period source on the use of magical gems is Lucian, *Navigium*. See most recently Nagy 2012b, especially 102–03.

**53** For their list, see Nagy 2002a, 177–79, and above, n. 33.

**54** This was the subtitle of Campbell Bonner's fundamental work (Bonner 1950): *Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*.

**55** Sword of Dardanos: PGM IV 1716–1870). The gem in Beyrouth: CBd-1555. The Perugia gem: Vitellozzi 2010a, 419–20, no. 518. For the detailed analysis of the *praxis*, see Vitellozzi forthcoming.

Thus, from the perspective of magical gems, the Sword of Dardanos proved to be a dead-end development.

A survey of the other fourteen gem types recommended by the papyri gives a similar picture. The types indicated in the recipes are attested only in a few pieces (such as PGM I 144–49 and the five related ‘Heliôros’-gems<sup>56</sup>), or the scheme referred to is too general for us to decide whether any given gem really belongs to this praxis or not (PGM LXI 1–38 and Harpocrates on the lotus flower with the magical name *abrasax*<sup>57</sup>). But the reverse of all this is also true: the two most significant deities on the gems, Chnoubis and the Anguipes, are represented on over eight hundred pieces, or more than 20 percent of all magical gems. Neither, however, is attested in the papyri. These gems are really ‘chiefly Graeco-Egyptian’ – as Campbell Bonner once wrote – but *not in the same way* as the papyri.<sup>58</sup> The two sources – the gems and the papyri – overlap, but far from completely: they represent two close dialects of Imperial magic. The pictorial motifs, that are most important on the gems are not represented in the papyri, and the gem-motifs that are mentioned in the papyri, are underrepresented on the gems. Among the characteristics of the version of this magical practice represented by the magical gems it is the following that seems most important. As stated above, the majority of magical gems were intended as jewellery (rings or a pendants): they were jewellery and amulets at the same time. In consequence, they were part of a Hellenised material culture, making visible in everyday life the magical names, signs, and composite iconographical schemes that were only seldom disclosed on the other genres of *magica* (defixiones, papyri or precious

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**56** As a starting point: Michel 2001, 163, no. 265 (= CBd-159).

**57** The Harpocrates-scheme is too frequent, and the recipe too concise to decide on the exact number of gems belonging to this praxis. The basic syntagm: Michel 2001, 74, no. 112 (= CBd-512). Complemented with the name Iaô: Philipp 1986, 75, no. 96 (= CBd-2070). Harpocrates in papyrus boat, with baboon and two falcons: Michel 2001, 81, no. 123 (= CBd-523); on papyrus boat, with pairs of baboons, snakes and falcons: Michel 2001, 81–82, no. 124 (= CBd-524). The Harpocrates-scheme with a different magical name: Bonner 1950, 285, no. D. 191 (= CBd-1101).

**58** It is important to note that the majority of magical papyri come from a single context, although the precise identification of the find has not been possible. The most recent overview of the so-called Theban library, also known as the Anastasi-papyri: Dieleman 2005, 11–21. A different reconstruction of the group: Gordon 2012, 148–51.

metal amulets rolled up and hidden in capsules).<sup>59</sup> In other words: these gems made the tradition of Imperial Period magic a part of everyday life, and in this sense made it legitimate. This is the fifth and perhaps most significant characteristic of the social context of magical gems.

#### 1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAGICAL GEMS - ONE AMULET TO RULE THEM ALL

As a summary, it is worth highlighting the four characteristics of magical gems that make this object group the most 'developed' talisman genre known to ancient magic. They represent, in *concentrated* form, all of the most active ingredients of magical technology, condensing into a single object the power of the precious stone, of jewellery, of colour, and the performative image, word and sign. Their makers *integrated* all the cultural traditions, both ancient and contemporary, that they found effective. They were also *inventors*: the radical re-interpretation of the figure of Chnoubis or the creation of the Anguipes-scheme are both to their credit. Finally, they *incorporated* the elements of *magica* into the Hellenized culture of the Imperial period, making them an integral part of everyday life.

In the light of all the above, let us now examine what is perhaps the best known glyptic amulet from Antiquity, the nicolo Perseus gem from the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg.

#### 2 A SMALL MASTERPIECE: THE PERSEUS GEM FROM SAINT PETERSBURG

The obverse shows the flying Perseus with his usual attributes: sandals, chlamys, and cap. He is holding a curved sword (*harpê*) in his right hand, and the head of Medusa in his left. The reverse bears a Greek inscription (fig. 2):

ΦΥ[- -] / ΠΟΔΑΓΓΡΑ / [-] ΕΡΣΕΥΣΣ / ΕΔΙΩΧΙ.  
 Φύ[γε] ποδάγγρα, [Π]ερσεύς σε διώχι (that is: διώκει).  
*Flee from here, Gout! Perseus is after you!*<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> See also the important comment of Richard Gordon: it is worth examining magical gems in the context of the 'social life of things' as well (Gordon 2011b, 44). Judicial prayers were sometimes also made public, see Versnel 2010, especially n. 281 and 22.

<sup>60</sup> Inv. no. Ж.1517. 16 × 13 mm.

The piece is of unknown provenance: it was acquired by the Hermitage in 1836 from the Breteuil Collection. The gem was possibly made around the middle of the Imperial period, but the lack of definite evidence makes precise dating impossible. It is set in a modern golden ring, but there is no way of knowing whether it was also used this way in Antiquity. Although it is one of the talismans most often mentioned in the literature,<sup>61</sup> little has really been said about the piece, possibly because the way it worked seems so obvious. It is generally considered as a classic example for magic operating on the principle of analogy. *Pars pro toto*: ‘He who is capable of defeating the Gorgo can also overcome the other horrors that threaten mankind’.<sup>62</sup> But the gem can only be considered to function evidently as a talisman, if magic – whatever is understood by the word – is taken to be something trivial. In Cartesian everyday experience a legendary hero like Luke Skywalker cannot cure gout by himself, just like that: such a dull analogy in itself has no healing power.

But there is a point worth considering behind the apparent simplicity of the gem. The Hermitage gem is one of those rare pieces that belong to two worlds at the same time: the inscription and the genre connect it with Imperial-period magic, while the iconography associates it with Greek mythology. It may thus be regarded as a witness to an experiment that aimed to connect the two worlds. In the second part of my paper I will analyse this experiment, first by placing it in four different contexts: (1) comparing it to similar magical texts; (2) to representations of Perseus; (3) to similar healing practices; and (4) discussing the genre of the Perseus gem. Afterwards, I will try to reconstruct the outcome of the experiment: the ancient reception of the Perseus *praxis* (5). The assessment of this response will, finally, designate the place of the Perseus gem among magical gems (6).

## 2.1 THE INSCRIPTION OF THE GEM

The inscribed text is an incantation. The so-called *pheuge*-formula (*‘Flee from here, So-and-so! So-and-so is after you!’*) was one of the principal incantation types in international magic. It is known from Greek magical texts from the fourth century BC, but is also attested in countless

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<sup>61</sup> The bibliography expanding since 1836 today numbers c. 30 items. See e.g.: Bonner 1950, 43, 75–76; Kotansky 1991, 118–19, esp. n. 86; Michel 2004, 174–75; Faraone 2012, 61, n. 169.

<sup>62</sup> Wilcken 1901, 422.



2a Nicolo gem. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. Ж.1517 (GR-21714)

Latin and post-antique examples.<sup>63</sup> The inventor of the *Perseuspraxis* was following one of the most frequently employed magical techniques.

The shape of the letters is well known from the paleographical repertoire, with nothing indicating that the text could have been incised at a later date.<sup>64</sup> It will suffice to refer briefly to two of its linguistic characteristics. The *pheuge*-formule contains an aorist imperative instead of the usual present imperative – which, although infrequent, does appear in other genres of *magica*.<sup>65</sup> The alteration of k and ch (*diôchi* – *diôki*) is

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**63** Its earliest example is the early Hellenistic lead amulet from Phalasarna in Crete: Jordan 1992; Faraone 2000, 211–12. The fundamental collection of Greek and Latin magical texts containing the *pheuge*-formula: Heim 1892, 463–575, esp. 477, 479–82. A few supplements: Björck 1944, 61–62; Maltoni 1988, 46; Önnersfors 1993, 177–81. See also Versnel 2002, 111, 117–18.

**64** Thus, cautiously, Michel 2004, 174, n. 899.

**65** Papyrus: PGM P 5 d, 4 (see PGM vol. II, 214). Silver *lamella*: Kotansky 1994, 279, no. 52, 91 (with commentary on pp. 295–96). The uniqueness of the aorist is also indicated by the fact that the verb form engraved on the





2b Reverse with a Greek inscription

a well known phenomenon in Greek linguistics, but only a few examples of it are known from magical gems.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.2 THE IMAGE

Analysis of the image leads us further. The *daktyliographos* represented the attributes which had defined the iconography of Perseus since the Archaic period with elaborate precision: defining the characteristic shape of the *harpê*, the winged sandals which gave the hero the ability to fly, and the winged cap which made him invisible (the wings of the sandals are indicated by two slanting incisions, the cap is marked by a

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Perseus gem is sometimes emended as an imperfectum: Bonner 1950, 43; Mastrocinque 2003, 60, n. 73.

<sup>66</sup> Kühner 1890, 148; Robert 1965, 265 and n. 4; Gignac 1976, 92. The best example of this phenomenon on magical gems that Chnoubis is sometimes written with *kappa* instead of *chi*. See e.g. Michel 2004, 257, 11.2.d), nos. 1–2; Zwierlein-Diehl 1991, 182–83, 2266–67. I am grateful for the kind help of Andrea Hasznos (Budapest) in resolving this question. A linguistic analysis of the inscriptions engraved on magical gems is still a *desideratum*.

groove above the head). The Gorgoneion and the representation of the hero as naked except for a single chlamys is also traditional in ancient art. All this suggests that the engraver was following a model, the composition of which is easily identified — it is known mostly from fresco painting and represents Perseus fighting the sea monster about to devour Andromeda. The most famous example is the fresco of the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase (pl. 12).<sup>67</sup> The ancient fame of the iconographical scheme is also attested by its echo in Greek literature: detailed descriptions are to be found in two second-century authors, Achilles Tatius<sup>68</sup> and Lucian.<sup>69</sup>

We may perhaps get even closer to the direct iconographical source of the gem. Another jasper gem in the Hermitage displays — in a unique manner — the miniature version of the composition known from the frescoes (fig. 3).<sup>70</sup> We can see Andromeda fastened to the rock, on her left the misshapen representation of the wreath intended as a ‘wedding present’ (the identification is solely based on the frescoes), and on her right a torch (which is missing from the paintings). The engraver departed from his models: it was his invention to show the hero nosediving and the monster turning towards his attacker instead of his victim. The iconographic similarity of the two Perseus figures indicates some connection between the gems. Still, they can hardly be regarded as the works of the same master.

The Perseusamulet also shows, however, some unique iconographical traits. In ancient glyptic art, Perseus always appears in the vertical axis of the gem. The hero is either shown as standing, or, in a few cases,

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**67** Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990, 33–40, pl. 43. (with a list of further Campanian paintings representing the subject in 38, n. 37); Jones Roccas 1994, 342, no. 178; Squire 2009, 337–38; Colpo and Salvadori 2010. The freeing of Andromeda was depicted on other object groups in the Imperial Period: Schauenburg 1981, 780, the majority of items listed as no. 53–63.

**68** *Leucippe and Cleitophon* 3.6–7 (= Schauenburg 1981, 778, no. 24; Jones Roccas 1994, 342, no. 175). Its recent analysis: Laplace 2007, 132–37.

**69** *Peri oikou* 22 (= Jones Roccas 1994, 343, no. 186); *Dialogi marini* 14.3. Descriptions have survived of other ancient paintings representing the freeing of Andromeda, such as Philostratos, *Imagines* 1.29 (iconographical comments: Abbondanza 2008, 178–81); Heliodoros, *Aethiopiaca* 4.8.

**70** Jasper gem, inv. no. Ж.6589. 19 × 13 mm. Purchased from the collection of J. B. Mallia in 1813. I am grateful to Oleg Y. Neverov and Elena Arsentieva for granting me the possibility of studying the piece.



3 Dark green jasper gem. St. Petersburg,  
The State Hermitage Museum, inv. no.  
ж.6589 (GR-26783)

as he flees the Gorgons.<sup>71</sup> But the Perseus gem is a diagonal composition, since this provided the greatest space for showing the flying hero. The stretched feet and the cape waving behind the figure also emphasize flight. The hero is not simply holding the Gorgoneion, but is lifting it up; his right hand, grasping the sword, is slightly bent in attack: this is indicated by the fine shortening of the forearm. These tiny differences allowed the engraver to make a new scheme from the old model. In the frescoes, Perseus is attacking the sea monster, on the gem he has another opponent: he must repel *gout*, flying always in its footsteps (*diôkei*).

This interpretation is evident in light of the inscription. But it was precisely this obviousness that has concealed the fact that the maker of the Hermitage gem created a new way to represent Perseus. He changed the scheme he had taken as his model in one crucial point: he set the figure of the hero in the context of a new story, and subordinated his com-

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71 This mode of representation is so general that in *LIMC* the picture of the gem was rotated so that Perseus could be seen in the usual way, standing: see Jones Roccas 1994, 336, no. 55, and the relevant commentary, 347.

position to this new context. A new iconographical version of a Greek hero creates a new version in the mythology of that hero. The mythological tradition does not know of a fight between Perseus and Podagra. The Hermitage gem is thus the only known source of a Perseus story: a new variant of his myth. Its maker set Perseus at the service of curing gout by creating the small story of his struggle with the personalized Podagra through iconographic means. The gem is a *historiola* in a picture.

### 2.3 HISTORIOLA

The *historiola* is one of the most often used magical techniques in the ancient Mediterranean. It is attested in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Hellas, from the Bronze Age to Late Antiquity.<sup>72</sup> In such magical practices, the magician attempts to achieve his aim by telling a story. One of the protagonists of the story is the malady to be repelled, the other is the repelling god or hero. The following incantation – perhaps the most well-known ancient magical *historiola* –, which was incised on a silver tablet, and found hidden in a third-century tomb in the military cemetery of Carnuntum (Pannonia),<sup>73</sup> may serve as an example (I follow Roy Kotansky's translation): '*For the 'Half-Head'[Migraine]. Antaura (the demon of the disease) came out of the sea. She shouted like a hind. She cried out like a cow. Artemis of Ephesos met her (saying): 'Antaura, where are you going?' (Antaura): 'Into the half-part of the head.'* (Artemis): 'No, do not [go] into the [half-part of the head...]. The text breaks off here, but it can safely be reconstructed on the basis of parallels: the goddess probably ordered the demon not to harm her victim, and sent her to the end of the human world. As is well known, this magical procedure was also widespread in medieval and modern Europe: it is attested till recently in Hungarian folk tradition:<sup>74</sup> '*And the blessed Virgin Mary set off with her blessed, holy son. And she came upon the evil spell. Where are you heading, you evil spell? To see Anna's beauty, pain her bones, drink her red blood. Get back, you evil spell. Get back, behind the hills, behind the valleys, behind the rocks...*'<sup>75</sup>

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**72** As a starting point: Brashear 1995, 3395, 3438–40; Faraone 1995; Versnel 2002, 122–30, 150–51. The *historiola* in magical healing: Gordon 1995, especially 371: '*historiolae*, by which the (imputed) past is established as a normative parallel to a present instance'.

**73** Kotansky 1994, 58–71, no. 13.

**74** The *opus magnum* compiled by Zsuzsanna Erdélyi: Erdélyi 1999.

**75** Salamon 1987, 191, no. 177.

In research on ancient magic, it was David Frankfurter who recognized that these ‘small stories’ are not remnants of lost myths; the Antaura story is not the distant reflection of an ancient, pre-existent ‘Babylonian’ myth, but rather is the myth itself.<sup>76</sup> The *historiola* is a living shoot from the tree of mythology. It is not the work of a great artist or poet, but a witness to live tradition’s ability to renew itself. It indicates that myth is able to describe the world; that there is still life that is expressed through the language of mythology.<sup>77</sup>

The maker of the gem did not regard Perseus as a figure of a rigidly prescribed cultural tradition, but as a living, effective force, ready to be mobilized for the realization of a direct, everyday purpose.<sup>78</sup> Achilles was doing the same thing when in Book XXIV of the *Iliad* he comforted the tormented Priam by telling him the story of Niobe losing her children (597–620). The magician intended to heal through the help of the *historiola*, but not by word of mouth, which was how these stories most frequently operated, and not by writing the text on a papyrus or on a sheet of precious metal. He was an innovator in this respect, too: he transformed the story into an image and engraved it upon a precious stone. One thing that might have stimulated this enterprise is easy to define. To wit: despite all the uncertainties concerning its dating, the Perseus gem was created in the heyday of magical gems and rings.

#### 2.4 THE GENRE OF THE PERSEUS GEM

Greek sources testify to the use of healing magic rings, the so-called *daktylios pharmakitês* from the end of the fifth century BC. Reference works on the healing effect of images incised into precious stones (*Lithika*)

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**76** Frankfurter 1995. See also Brashear 1995, 3438–40, with a selected bibliography of the general religious historical analyses of the *historiola* on 3439, n. 288.

**77** Two vivid examples from our days that may serve as distant parallels: in the fall of 2006 a 96-year-old woman described the rich harvest of the year before: ‘*there was as much corn as in the Garden of Eden before Adam’s sin*’. But where the corn came up only in patches because of the weeds, it ‘*was not sown by me, but by the devil, whose sack had got torn there, and the seeds fell out. That’s why it shoots up like that, in bulk*’. I am grateful for Gábor Komjáthy (Vanyarc) for the information.

**78** It is important to note here that in the Middle Imperial Period the interpretation of myth as opposed to ‘logos’ as customary today was far from general, see e.g. Calame 1992.

are attested since the Hellenistic Period in Hellas.<sup>79</sup> What is common in these rings and gems is that their magical purpose is not indicated by any exterior, formal, textual or iconographical characteristic – an outsider cannot tell the difference between ordinary pieces and the ones used for magical purposes. The use of such rings and gems continued into the Imperial period, but by this time their story ran parallel with that of the new category of magical gems. The new genre established a new stage for the rivalry of different magical traditions.

The Perseus gem shows two of the structural characteristics of magical gems (engraved on both sides, inscription read directly), but none of the unique constituents (see above, 1.1). The engraved image depicts a mythical hero without any reference to magic; without the reverse it would be impossible to interpret the gem as an amulet – and in this sense it is much like a *daktylios pharmakitês*. The inscribed text is an incantation, one of the most general magical ‘technologies’. As regards the structure, the gem thus belongs on the periphery of magical gems:<sup>80</sup> it is modelled after magical gems, but uses the technique of traditional amulets.

## 2.5 THE ANCIENT RESPONSE TO THE PERSEUS PRAXIS

The idea of the creator of the Perseus gem was to take a *praxis* established for curing gout that was based on the structural principle of the *historiola* and to realize it in a new genre characteristic of his time. This promised to be an excellent idea: the endless power of Greek mythological tradition must have seemed a token of success. But that success apparently never came. There are five signs that indicate that the path blazed by the Perseus gem proved to be impracticable.

First, the piece has no parallels. In this case, the *argumentum ex silentio* provides stronger than usual evidence, since a gem’s chances of survival are higher than those of any other kind of archaeological object (precious stones are indestructible, and ancient engraved gems continued to be valued and collected). There was free competition on the market of Imperial-period talismans, and lacking official support, it was only the judgement of the customer that counted. Amulets deemed effective were, as we have seen, produced in series. In contrast, the Perseus gem is unique: it does not constitute a series. It seems not to have been in

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<sup>79</sup> Nagy 2012b.

<sup>80</sup> Pace Nagy 2011, 76, where I did not take into consideration the structural motifs connecting the piece with magical gems.

demand. Nicolo, the material of the gem, is also extremely rare among magical gems.<sup>81</sup> The third sign of failure is that no such *praxis* has so far been found among ancient cures for gout. There are two longer lists worth mentioning here. The author of the first is Alexander of Tralles, a great figure of sixth-century AD medicine, who does mention the use of magical gems for other illnesses. Even though he recommends a number of ‘alternative’ cures for gout, he does not mention any gems.<sup>82</sup> The second is a mock tragedy of disputed authorship which survives in the textual corpus of Lucian, where the protagonist, the goddess Podagra, enumerates all the cures which ineffectively try to limit her endless power, making however no mention of a healing gem.<sup>83</sup>

The remaining two factors are even more important than the first three just mentioned. Representations of Greek hero-myths on precious stones intended for magical healing are few and far between. Among the thousands of magical gems, there is only one significant iconographic type of this kind: it represents Heracles’ fight with the Nemean lion.<sup>84</sup> Many examples are known, which proves that it was held to be effective. Its use is attested in written sources, including the recommendations of Alexander of Tralles himself, as a possible cure for colic. But other Greek heroes seem to have remained outside the sphere of magical gems: they were not associated with healing *in this way*, even though they are frequently mentioned in incantations.<sup>85</sup> Last, the impracticality of the Perseus gem is also indicated by its unique structure: there is no other

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**81** Among the 649 magical gems kept in the British Museum, and published by Simone Michel, there are altogether 3 made of nicolo. None of them belong to the usual types of magical gems. Michel 2001, nos. 18, 19 and 468 (= CBd-397, -398, -826). Among the 1120 gems accessible now in CBd today there are three further nicolo gems: the votive gem CBd-178 mentioned above, see n. 47; an amulet-gem with Latin inscription (Nagy 2011, 76, pl. 2, = CBd-1020) and a gem representing Anubis (Bonner 1950, 259, no. D. 37, = CBd-1031). Strictly speaking, only the last one belongs among magical gems.

**82** Alexandros, ed. Puschman II p. 581–85. Amulets against gout: Kotansky 1991, 109–10, 118–19. On the palaeopathological identification of articular diseases: Roberts and Manchester 2005, 132–63.

**83** *Podagra* 138–90; cf. Karavas 2005, especially 305–09. Rheumatic diseases in the Lucianian corpus, see also *Philopseudes* 6–8; *Ocypus* passim (recently attributed to Acacius rhetor, cf. Karavas 2005, 237–42).

**84** Bonner 1950, 62–64; Blakely 2006, 139–51; Faraone 2013.

**85** See above, n. 63.

example for the simultaneous use of a *historiola* both in picture and in text. The *pheuge*-formula, though common in incantations, appears on only one surviving gem – an example of the Heracles-scheme mentioned before.<sup>86</sup> We may occasionally come upon a textual *historiola*: for example, the inscription ‘*Are you thirsty, Tantalos? Drink blood!*’ can be read on a talisman-group used presumably against internal bleeding. These gems, however, bore the representation of the god Ares, which means that the image was not itself connected to the myth of Tantalus.<sup>87</sup> The figure of Omphale also appears on a series of gynecological magical gems, although these do not represent the myth itself, but a cross-cultural net of puns and pictorial motifs, as recently analysed by Véronique Dasen.<sup>88</sup> There is thus every indication that the Perseus gem, as an attempt to create a magical cure for gout, simply failed.

## 2.6 THE PERSEUS GEM: GREEK MYTH VERSUS CROSS-CULTURAL MAGIC

We can only guess about the reasons for the failure, since the question is by and large outside the scope of science. Two possible factors can nevertheless be outlined. It seems that the attempt did not prove effective from the perspective of either myth or magic. If we take myth, the maker of the gem was too ambitious. The solution he chose, transforming a story into an image, was more ambitious than to serve as a single *historiola*. Greek art was an equal partner to poetry in the continuous recomposition of myth and in ensuring its topicality. But this needed an intellectual and artistic force, through which the story transmitted in the picture said something true and timely to its viewers, something that was more than a mere summary of its elements. Apparently, the Perseus gem did not have this force: the power of images is not unlimited. The gem seems to have continued the myth-making tradition of Greek art, but it hardly had more to say about Perseus than the following incantation about its own hero: ‘*Circe and Medeia were sitting facing east, looking for*

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<sup>86</sup> Most recently: Faraone 2013, 90.

<sup>87</sup> Barb 1952; most recently see Faraone 2012, 35–49. I do not agree with the translation he proposes (‘O Tantalus, because you thirst, drink [the] blood [of the patient]!’). As pointed out by Faraone himself, the participle would be *dipsêsas*, but gems are always engraved with *dipsais*. This question is still to be resolved.

<sup>88</sup> Dasen 2008.



*some medicine against inflammation using stone, wood or dog-bite...*<sup>89</sup> The gem speaks about the same thing in word and in picture: about Perseus chasing Podagra. The image, however, has no independent meaning: it is a mere illustration to the text – something that never occurs in a living representation of a myth. It is worth referring here to the above mentioned Heracles gems. We do not know how the defeat of the Nemean lion and overcoming colic became associated. But Heracles' healing and apotropaic role was widespread and manifest in cult from the Archaic period,<sup>90</sup> and according to a plausible interpretation of a comedy fragment, the voracious hero was connected to the idea of being free from colic from as early as the fourth century BC.<sup>91</sup> It must have been easy to link healing gems to this network of ideas, as a further thread.

The situation is not better from the perspective of magic either. Even Campbell Bonner noted that this gem is a talisman constructed from purely Greek elements.<sup>92</sup> It bears no magical names or *charactères*, and without the incantation on its reverse no one would classify it as an amulet. The gem stayed wholly within Greek tradition, yet it tried to join a market one of whose main features was its cross-cultural character. Taking the example of the Heracles gems yet again: these offered their uses more than one way of interpretation. While in the *interpretatio Graeca* the incised image may have represented Heracles, others may have seen him as Melqart. Researchers today are looking for the interpretation of two magical names characteristic of this genre and still undeciphered – *kkk* and *kolokerkolophoseir* – both in the Greek and Egyptian and also in the Jewish tradition<sup>93</sup> This multiplicity of meanings could hardly have been different in Antiquity. The 'monstrous figures' and *barbara onomata* of magical gems may have seemed grotesque and ridiculous to Neo-clas-

<sup>89</sup> Oder and Hoppe 1927, 40, 22–4. Cf. Björck 1944, 63–65.

<sup>90</sup> See: Salowey 2002; Manganaro 2005; Fusco 2009, 455–62 (for Etruria). The cult of Perseus was far less widespread. As a starting point, see Jameson 1990; Jones Roccas 1994, 332.

<sup>91</sup> PCG II, 409, fr. 175 (177) = Athenaeus 3.123B. Its analysis: Nagy 2012b, 94–95. For similar texts and the interpretation of the meaning of *stomachos*: Dasen 2008, 269–71.

<sup>92</sup> Bonner 1950, 43, *pace* Michel 2004, 174–75.

<sup>93</sup> A summary of the two above: Bonner 1950, 63–64. A good overview of the *interpretatio Hebraica* (*kkk* = *trishagion*): Barb 1969, 302, n. 1, *kolokerkolophoseir*: Michel 2004, 281. A new, Greek interpretation: Faraone 2013, 90, n. 15. The possible international character of the iconographical scheme has most recently been analysed by Faraone 2013, 85–92, especially 91–92.

sically trained taste, but in its own context the Perseus-gem might well have been regarded as old-school and anachronistically simplistic in the cross-cultural variety of magical traditions. Apparently, in the world of Imperial-period magic the key to success lay in staying traditional and creative at the same time, in being able to make something new from various different cultures.<sup>94</sup> The inventor of the Perseus *praxis* definitely lacked this ability.

Perseus thus never made his way into the world of Imperial period magical gems. But a hero has time: he spends his life waiting for his strategic moment. Perseus' time came with the Middle Ages: it was then that he became an important figure of so-called astrological images.<sup>95</sup> The scheme represented on the Hermitage gem is to be found in a number of important medieval lapidaria (e.g., Techel, Albertus Magnus, Arnoldus Saxonus) – pars pro toto: '*Perseus, sword in his right hand, and the head of the Gorgo in his left: he is said to protect from lightning, storm and the curse of the envious*'.<sup>96</sup> It is attested up until the end of the tradition of medieval lapidaries.<sup>97</sup> There is a perfect iconographic correspondence between the Saint Petersburg gem and the medieval recipes. However, the correspondence is only illusory. The recipes belong to the series of constellations and planets in medieval astrological lapidaries, and even differ from the gem in their suggested fields of application. It seems thus that these medieval amulets do not belong to the *praxis* represented by the Hermitage gem.

The Perseus gem failed: as a myth told in pictures it did not have enough power, while as a magical *praxis*, it was not up-to-date. The strategy of turning inwards into a single tradition did not prove success-

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<sup>94</sup> See above, n. 35.

<sup>95</sup> Weill-Parot 2002. On the medieval tradition of ancient magic: Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 249–264, esp. 256–58; Zwierlein-Diehl 2014; Nagy 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Albertus Magnus, *De mineralibus et rebus metallicis libri quinque*, 2.3.5. A few further sources, as a starting point: Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 252 (Arnoldus Saxonus); Evans 1922, 244, cf. 104–05 (Thetel/Techel; on the author see Zwierlein-Diehl 2014, 103–07). The comprehensive analysis of these sources is still a future task. Attempt at surveying the medieval sources of Anguipes gems: Nagy 2014.

<sup>97</sup> It was a version of this text encountered by Edmond Le Blant, who noticed for the first time the medieval sources of this iconographical type: Le Blant 1892, esp. 56.

ful at a time and in an area that aimed precisely at the creative connection of different cultures.

To sum up: thanks to the intensive research and exemplary cooperation of scholars in the past one and a half decades, magical gems have become an important genre of classical material culture. The earlier instinctive anathema is fading away, and the significance of magical gems is beginning to be recognized by a growing number of disciplines. They can no longer be regarded as the *par excellence* object group of an Imperial period ‘counterculture’.

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PHOTO CREDITS

**Fig. 1** Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts

**Fig. 2, 3** Saint Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, Photo: Svetlana Svetova and Konstantin Sinyavsky

**Pl. 12** New York, Metropolitan Museum

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JAN N. BREMMER

## FROM BOOKS WITH MAGIC TO MAGICAL BOOKS IN ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME?

‘A book with magic is also a magical book’.<sup>1</sup> With this lapidary statement the renowned expert on medieval magic Richard Kieckhefer starts his discussion of books of magic as cultural artifacts. But is this statement really true? It is the aim of my contribution to investigate this claim as regards its validity in antiquity. I will therefore look at the place of the book and writing in Greek and Roman religion (§ 1), the rise of magic (§ 2), the emergence of books with magic (§ 3) and, finally, the magical book (§ 4). As I have written before on the first two subjects, I will summarise my views of these aspects fairly briefly. So let us start with the book.

### 1 THE BOOK AND WRITING IN GREEK AND ROMAN RELIGION

As is well known, Greek and Roman religion was not a ‘religion of the book’ (German: *Buchreligion*), an expression coined in 1873 by Friedrich Max Müller, who was very interested in the place of the book within religion.<sup>2</sup> Although the Greeks and Romans, then, were not *ahl al-kitab*,

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park, 1997) 4; A. Cambers, ‘Demonic Possession, Literacy and ‘Superstition’ in Early Modern England’, *Past & Present* 202 (2009) 3–35 at 16 notes that in early Protestant England, ‘the physical force of the book as object was indistinguishable from the sacred power of its words’.

<sup>2</sup> F. M. Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London 1873) 102ff.

‘people of the book’,<sup>3</sup> as the Muslims call the Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians and the now vanished medieval Sabians, that is not to say that literacy played no role in ancient religion at all. It is obvious that Homer and Hesiod had an important impact on Greek religion, as was realised already by Herodotus, but it is also clear that these poems were not seen as sacred texts. Yet, on the whole, the place of books was fairly limited, as the only areas of religious ritual in which they became prominent in classical Greece were divination and initiation. This should not lead us to conclude, however, that writing was otherwise absent from Greek and Roman religion – we need only think of the many curses that have been published or re-edited in recent years. If we may consider these curses to be the textual underground of Greek religion, this is of course not true for the composition of hymns, tragedies, novels, oracles, aretalogies, Orphic Gold Leaves, Sibylline Books, the textualisation of oracles such as Delphi, Didyma and Dodona, the *commentarii* of the Roman priestly colleges or the books by Cicero and Seneca on religion – to mention only a few of the many examples that could be cited. They all attest to the importance of texts for Greek and Roman religion.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of divination, the oldest example can be deduced from a curious expression that has survived in the Suda and a collection of proverbs: ‘the skin of Epimenides’.<sup>5</sup> We know that the grave of this miracle worker, who was active in Athens around 600 BC, was in the official building of the ephors in Sparta.<sup>6</sup> ‘Skin’ strongly suggests that the ephors made use of a leather sheet with oracles, a so-called *diphthera*, in order to be independent of the kings, who were entitled to consult the oracle of Delphi not only in political matters but also in questions

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**3** For interesting reflections on the expression, see G. Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice* (Paris, 2005) 71–74.

**4** As is well stressed by R. Gordon, ‘Memory and Authority in the Magical Papyri’, in B. Dignas and R. Smith (eds), *Historical & Religious Memory in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 2012) 145–80 at 145–47. See also several studies in A. Lardinois *et al.* (eds), *Sacred Words: Orality, Literacy and Religion* (Leiden, 2011).

**5** Zenobius 2.72 Bühler; Suda ε 2471; Diogenian. 8.28; Bremmer, ‘The Skins of Pherekydes and Epimenides’, *Mnemosyne* IV 46 (1993) 234–36 (which I use here, but updated), overlooked by W. Bühler, *Zenobii Athoi proverbialia V* (Göttingen, 1999) 324–31 (with additional testimonia).

**6** Epimenides *FGrH* 457 T 5 (and Addendum) with Jacoby *ad loc.*; Sosibius *FGrH* 595 F 15; Paus. 3.11.11.

affecting relations with the gods.<sup>7</sup> Such old-fashioned parchment sheets with chanted oracles are still mentioned by Euripides (F 627 Kannicht),<sup>8</sup> but in the *Birds* Aristophanes has the oracle expert say: ‘take the papyrus sheet (*byblion*)’ (981). The fact that he attributes this sheet to the legendary Boeotian seer Bakis, whose name literally means ‘Speaker’,<sup>9</sup> shows that literacy was a new arrival in the traditionally oral performance of seers. Yet already in the middle of the fifth century, a certain Polemainetos bequeathed his books on divination to his friend Thrasyllus (Isocr. 19.5–9), and oracle collections and collectors are well attested from that time on, as is abundantly illustrated by the comedies of Aristophanes.<sup>10</sup>

Probably at the same time that books with oracles started to appear, we find the birth of a genre which probably would not immediately occur to most of us when talking about ancient religion and books: mythography.<sup>11</sup> The practice of producing books with mythography started in Greece around 500 BC with the *Genealogies* of Akousilaos and Hekataios. Yet nowadays the term mythography is also commonly used in connection with fifth- and fourth-century local historians such as the

7 Sheets: Zenobius 4.11; Schol. *Il.* 1.175; Diogenian. 3.2; W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution* (Cambridge Mass. and London, 1992) 33–5. *Diphthera*: O. Panagl, ‘Griechisch diphthera’, in W. Meid and H. Schmeja (eds), *Philologie und Sprachwissenschaft* (Innsbruck 1983) 185–94; Burkert, *Orientalizing Revolution*, 31, 33.

8 For the chanting, note Soph. F 573 Radt; Eur. F 481.16 and F 627 Kannicht; Eupolis F 231 Kassel/Austin; A. Henrichs, ‘*Hieroi Logoi* and *Hierai Bibloi*: The (Un)written Margins of the Sacred in Ancient Greece’, *Harvard Stud. Class. Philol.* 101 (2003) 207–66 at 216–17 note 29.

9 Suda s.v. *Bakis*; schol. Ar. *Pax* 1071, O. Masson, *Onomastica Graeca Selecta* III (Geneva, 2000) 207–8 (etymology); add L. Jonnes, *The Inscriptions of Heraclea Pontica* (Bonn, 1994) 128 (Bakides); *I. Sestos* 35 (Bakon); W. Burkert, *Kleine Schriften* IV (Göttingen, 2011) 218–19 (Bakis, although Burkert’s etymology of his name is refuted by Masson).

10 Aristophanes, *Eq.* 109–30, *Av.* 970–89, *Pax* 1045–95; J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1978) 158–65; W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* III (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1979) 320; M. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London and New York, 2001) 67–72.

11 See now A. Cameron, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World* (New York, 2004); M. Alganza Roldán, ‘La mitografía como género de la prosa helenística: cuestiones previas’, *Florentia Iiberritana* 17 (2006) 9–37; S. M. Trzaskoma and R. S. Smith (eds), *Writing Myth: Mythography in the Ancient World* (Leuven, 2013).

Atthidographers, the fourth-century plots and *hypotheseis* of the major tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides,<sup>12</sup> and the Hellenistic collections of myths organised around a uniform theme, such as the star-myths of Eratosthenes or the love stories by Parthenius,<sup>13</sup> as well as the handbooks by Hyginus and Apollodorus<sup>14</sup> – and this list does not at all exhaust the genre.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the function of the genre clearly varied according to the time and place of its production. To put it in a somewhat simplified way, the first mythographers usually practised mythography to locate their own community in the present by connecting it to the mythical traditions of Greece as a whole,<sup>16</sup> but the authors of the summaries of tragedies collected myths to facilitate the understanding of the works of the major tragedians, and the later handbooks served as a source for those who wanted to use knowledge of myth to enlarge their cultural capital.<sup>17</sup> In other words, in the course of time the relation between such texts and religion could also change.

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**12** Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 58 (the fullest list).

**13** Eratosthenes: J. Pàmias i Massana, *Eratòstenes de Cirene, Catasterismes* (Barcelona, 2004); J. Pàmias and K. Geus, *Eratosthenes, Sternsagen (Catasterismi)* (Oberhaid, 2007); J. Pàmias and A. Zucker *Eratosthène de Cyrène, Catasterismes* (Paris, 2013). Parthenius: J. Lightfoot, *Parthenius of Nicaea* (Oxford, 1999) with her study of ‘Mythography’ (224–40). Note now also her lightly corrected text and translation in J. L. Lightfoot, *Hellenistic Anthology* (Cambridge Mass. and London, 2009) 467–647.

**14** Hyginus: Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 33–51. For the most recent text and translation, see P. K. Marshall, *Hyginus, Fabulae* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1993) and R. Smith and S. Trzaskoma, *Apollodorus’ Library and Hyginus’ Fabulae* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 2007) 95–182. Apollodorus: M. Huys, ‘125 Years of Scholarship on Apollodorus the Mythographer: A Bibliographical Survey’, *L’Antiquité Classique* 66 (1997) 319–51, to be added to Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 93–106; M. Huys and D. Colomo, ‘Bibliographical Survey on Apollodorus the Mythographer. A Supplement’, *L’Antiquité Classique* 73 (2004) 219–37. New editions: M. Papatthomopoulos, *Apollodorou Vivliothēkē = Apollodori Bibliotheca: post Richardum Wagnerum recognita* (Athens, 2010); F. J. Cuartero I Iborra, *Pseudo-Apollodor, Biblioteca I, II* (Barcelona, 2010–2012). A good modern translation: Smith and Trzaskoma, *Apollodorus’ Library and Hyginus’ Fabulae*, 1–93.

**15** For more details, see Smith and Trzaskoma, *Writing Myth*.

**16** For the early mythographers, see now the important edition and commentary by R. L. Fowler, *Early Greek Mythography*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2000–2013).

**17** See the excellent discussion by Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 217–52.

At the same time as books of divination and local mythographies appeared, there also emerged a new current on the religious scene, Orphism.<sup>18</sup> One of its characteristics was the prominent use of the book, and we know quite a few titles of these works and, in a number of cases, even some of their contents. Whereas most of these books seem to have been traditional, at least regarding their genre, for example the Orphic *Hymns*, the *Katabasis* and the *Theogony*, the fact that the latter was probably used during initiations was highly unusual. Demosthenes ridiculed his opponent Aeschines accordingly, by saying: ‘when you became a man, you used to read for your mother the books as she performed the initiation rites’ (18.259). Still, although recited at religious occasions, these texts were not called ‘holy books’, but *hieroi logoi*, ‘holy tales’,<sup>19</sup> a strong reminder of the originally oral nature of Greek religion. Although Homer and Hesiod were highly authoritative in religion, it would be hard to claim that they were read primarily as religious books. Greg Woolf has recently raised the question of when was the first time the Greeks read a book as a primarily religious experience.<sup>20</sup> I do not think that we have the material to answer such a question but, if any, one might think of the Orphic books as giving that experience. Yet even they were primarily written, it seems, for performance during ritual or as a kind of philosophical book, not as a book for spiritual experience, such as we find in our bookshops today. Woolf wonders if Plutarch’s *On Isis and Osiris* is such a book, but it is clear that we are by then already far from classical Greece and have moved into a time when literacy was much more widespread.

Unlike in Greece, in Italy books did play a role in religious life: witness the Etruscan *libri fatales* or *libri pontificales* and the Roman Sibylline Books. In line with the structure of Roman religion, however, there was no free access to these important books, and the senate kept them

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**18** For Orphism, see most recently R. Edmonds III, *Redefining Ancient Orphism: A Study in Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 2013); J. N. Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World* (Berlin and Boston, 2014) 56–80.

**19** Henrichs, ‘*Hieroi Logoi* and *Hierai Bibloi*’, 222–39; Bremmer, ‘From Holy Books to Holy Bible: an Itinerary from Ancient Greece to Modern Islam via Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity’, in M. Popović (ed.), *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden, 2010) 327–60 at 331–33.

**20** G. Woolf, ‘Reading and Religion in Rome’, in J. Rüpke and W. Spickermann (eds), *Reflections on Religious Individuality: Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Texts and Practices* (Berlin, 2012) 193–208 at 197.

under lock and key.<sup>21</sup> There is an important difference, then, regarding the status of books in Greek and Roman religion, respectively. In the latter case, the influence of Etruscan practices may well have been an important factor, even though that is to explain *obscurum per obscurius!* Another difference is the status of the works of Homer and Hesiod in Greece compared to Vergil's *Aeneid* in Rome. The latter never gained the same canonical status regarding religion as the former did in Greek religion. We can note this difference between Greece and Rome also in the writings of the first Roman Christian apologists Tertullian and Minucius Felix, who engaged with their Latin predecessors as rhetorical models and not as potential pagan threats to their Christian beliefs.

But, as in Greece, there was a much wider use of writing in Rome than just books that have some resemblance to our sacred books. As has become increasingly clear in recent years, there actually was a widespread use of texts and especially of ritualised acts of writing in Roman religious activity. Indeed, writing was important for the management of Roman cults and sanctuaries, although that is not to say that the Romans used a written liturgy to perform their rituals, such as we know from Christian services. As Greg Woolf has recently argued in a stimulating article, books like the Sibylline Books were there to help with the exegesis of ritual performance, rather than functioning as archives of theological knowledge – though we have to be careful with such statements, as none of the books have survived.<sup>22</sup> Other texts produced by priests were presumably of use and interest only to themselves, such as mundane lists of temple property and contracts, letters and perhaps documents for court cases. But there were also documents on public display, such as calendars and notices displayed on wooden boards, and it seems to have been easy enough to obtain the *commentarii* of senior priests or prodigy lists. More private examples would include the displays of vows in temples, and monuments to their fulfilment, such as we of course also find in Greek temples. Yet the Romans never even came close to having a sacred book.

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21 Ch. Guittard, *Carmen et prophéties à Rome* (Turnhout, 2007); H. Cancik, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 2 vols (Tübingen, 2008) 2.88–114; A. Gillmeister, 'Sibyl in Republican Rome – literary construction or ritual reality?', in D. Musiał (ed.), *Society and Religions. Studies in Greek and Roman History*, vol. 3 (Toruń, 2010) 9–25.

22 Woolf, 'Reading and Religion in Rome'. My present paragraph leans heavily on this study.



## 2 THE RISE OF MAGIC IN GREECE AND ROME

Recent investigations have largely elucidated the rise of the term ‘magic’ in Greece and Rome.<sup>23</sup> It is clear that ‘magic’ is a new category, which only gradually supplanted older notions of non-normative religion in the course of the fifth century BC. Whereas Homer used a vocabulary with words like *pharmakon* and *epaoidê*, the gradual development of the field of ‘magic’ can be observed from about 500 BC onwards. Our oldest mention of the Iranian term *magos* is probably in a fragment of the philosopher Heraclitus (14B DK), which has been handed down by the Church Father Clement of Alexandria: ‘night-wanderers (*nyktipolois*), magi (*magois*), bacchants (*bakchois*), maenads (*lênais*), initiates (*mystais*)’. Although the precise text of this fragment is debated, the presence of *magoi* in this enumeration seems authentic, since its meaning hardly points to magic but to practitioners of private cults, like the other three categories listed, all of which belong to the Dionysiac sphere.<sup>24</sup> Nor does the second-oldest reference in Greek to a *magos* refer to ‘magic’. In Aeschylus’ *Persians* the messenger to the Persian queen mentions *Magos Arabos*, ‘Magos the Arab’ (317). The name is indirectly attested on an Elamite tablet found in Persepolis and therefore supports the interpretation as ‘Magian’,<sup>25</sup> but Aeschylus’ association of *Magos* with Arabia shows that he was not really thinking of magic here. It is only in the later fifth century BC that we see a gradual rise in the popularity of the vocabulary linked to *magos* referring to practices we call ‘magic’.

<sup>23</sup> J. N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 2008) 235–47 (‘Persian *magoi* and the Birth of the Term “Magic”’, 1999f); add M. Brust, *Die indischen und iranischen Lehnwörter im Griechischen* (Innsbruck, 2005) 385–93; J. Rives, ‘*Magus* and its Cognates in Classical Latin’, in R. Gordon and F. Marco Simón (eds), *Magical Practice in the Latin West* (Leiden, 2010) 53–77. The extensive discussion by B.-C. Otto, *Magie. Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin and New York, 2011) 143–218 is not an improvement.

<sup>24</sup> This is well observed by F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge MA, 1997) 21f. However, his new interpretation of these *magoi* as priests in Bacchic mystery cults is hardly persuasive, *contra* F. Graf, ‘Derveni and Ritual’, in I. Papadopoulou and L. Muellner (eds), *Poetry as Initiation* (Washington DC, 2014) 67–88 at 78–84.

<sup>25</sup> M. Mayrhofer, *Onomastica Persepolitana* (Vienna, 1973) 187; R. Schmitt, *Die Iranier-Namen bei Aischylos* (Vienna, 1978) 38–39 and *Iranische Personennamen in der griechischen Literatur vor Alexander d. Gr.* (Vienna, 2011) 230f.

The reason why this vocabulary became popular is still unclear. There is not even unanimity about the reason why non-normative religious practices were called 'magic'. Fritz Graf has looked for an explanation in Tylorian terms.<sup>26</sup> In his *Primitive Culture*, Edward Tylor (1832–1917), one of the founding fathers of social anthropology and the history of religion, observed that many cultures have called their neighbours 'magicians', for example as the southern Scandinavians did with the Lapps and Finns.<sup>27</sup> It is true that the Greeks in general, and the Athenians in particular, had developed a rhetoric in which the Persians were 'the Other', the opponents whose despotism, slavishness, luxury and cruelty were the exact opposite of all the virtues of the Greeks.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, however, they had been highly impressed by the Persians and energetically copied them in many spheres of life.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, they did not look down on Persia in the way that southern Scandinavians once viewed Lapps and Finns. I have therefore suggested that the Greeks came to consider the Magi as magicians for a different reason. Unlike Greek priests, the Magi customarily whispered their Avestan and other ritual texts in a low voice: Prudentius' *Zoroastreos susurros* (*Apoth.* 494).<sup>30</sup> This whispering must have made the activities of Magi look like 'magical' rites in the eyes of the ancients, since murmuring was closely associated with magic by both Greeks and Romans.<sup>31</sup> Recently, Graf has

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**26** Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 20–27.

**27** C.-H. Tillhagen, 'Finnen und Lappen als Zauberkundige in der skandinavischen Volks-überlieferung', in *Kontakte und Grenzen. Probleme der Volks-, Kultur- und Sozialforschung. Festschrift Für Gerhard Heilfurth zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* (Göttingen, 1969) 129–43.

**28** E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (Oxford, 1989) 56–100 and *passim*.

**29** See the splendid overview by M. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the fifth century BC* (Cambridge, 1997); W. Gauer, 'Die Aegaeis, Hellas und die Barbaren', *Saeculum* 49 (1998) 22–60.

**30** As is frequently attested, cf. J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés*, 2 vols (Paris, 1938) 2. 112–3, 245, 285–6; G. Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans* (Stuttgart, 1965) 249–50; J. C. Greenfield, 'r̥tyn mgw̥s', in S. Hoenig and L. Stitskin (eds), *Joshua Finkel Festschrift* (New York, 1974) 63–9.

**31** Admittedly, our earliest Greek examples are Hellenistic, but they are so widespread and persistent that it seems hyper-critical not to assume the same for classical times, cf. Theocr. 2.11, 62: Orpheus, *Lith.* 320; Lucian, *Nec.* 7; Ach. Tat. 2.7; Helioid. 6.14.4; L. Soverini, 'Hermes, Afrodite e il susurro nella Grecia antica', in S. Alessandri (ed.), *Historie. Studi Giuseppe Nenci* (Galabina, 1994) 183–210; L. Moscardi, "Murmur" nella terminologia

returned to the problem and has argued that ‘our arguments are not mutually exclusive’.<sup>32</sup> That is undoubtedly true, and it would indeed be far-fetched to deny that the ‘otherness’ of the Magi would also have contributed, in one way or another, to the rise of the term ‘magic’.

In Rome, the situation is even more complicated. Although practices that *we* would call magical already occur in the Twelve Tables,<sup>33</sup> the term *magus* seems to be a real latecomer in Latin. It is not attested before Catullus and Cicero in our available texts, where it exclusively denotes the Persian, or rather Median, religious specialist. It is only towards the end of the first century AD that we find *magus* and its cognates associated with two areas in particular: divination and necromancy, as seen in Quintilian, Suetonius and Tacitus.<sup>34</sup> In other words, a new development regarding magic seems to be emerging in the imperial period, undoubtedly associated with the rise of the emperors as monarchic figures and the concomitant fears regarding their special position.

So far I have been focusing on the terminology connected with ‘magic’ as it appears in the Greek *magos* and Latin *magus*. These words will now help us trace the emic view, for Greeks and Romans used these words to denote religious practices that were not acceptable in mainstream religion. It is therefore primarily this vocabulary that, in the first instance, we will take into account when looking for books connected with magic and magical books. But is every book with magic also a magical book?

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magica’, *Studi Ital. Filol. Class.* 48 (1976) 254–62; E. Valette-Cagnac, *La lecture à Rome* (s.l., 1997) 42–7; P. W. van der Horst, *Hellenism-Judaism-Christianity* (Leuven, 1998<sup>2</sup>) 300–02; D. K. van Mal-Maeder, *Apuleius Madagascariensis, Metamorphoses: Livre II* (Groningen, 2001) 60; M. Andreassi, ‘Implicazioni magiche in Meleagro AP 5.152’, *ZPE* 176 (2011) 69–81 at 74f.

<sup>32</sup> F. Graf, ‘Magic and Divination: Two Apolline Oracles on Magic’, in G. Bohak *et al.* (eds), *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition* (Leiden, 2011) 119–33 at 128 note 31.

<sup>33</sup> J. B. Rives, ‘Magic in the XII Tables Revisited’, *Classical Quarterly* 52 (2002) 270–90 and ‘Magic in Roman Law: The Reconstruction of a Crime’, *Classical Antiquity* 22 (2003) 313–39, reprinted with an ‘Afterword’ (2009) in J. North and S. Price (eds), *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Oxford, 2011) 71–108.

<sup>34</sup> For a full survey, see Rives, ‘*Magus* and its Cognates in Classical Latin’.

## 3 BOOKS WITH MAGIC

When do we start to find books with magic in the Greek and Roman era?<sup>35</sup> Given the slow development of the vocabulary of magic and the slow emergence of the book in ancient religion, it would be surprising to find books with magic or magical books at an early stage in ancient religion. And indeed, it will be a long time before we hear of books with magic. Moreover, we nearly always hear of such books in negative contexts, usually burning, destruction or prohibition. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the first occurrence is in Rome, where religion was strongly controlled – no polytheistic tolerance here.<sup>36</sup> Livy (25.1.12) tells us about the order by the *praetor urbanus* M. Atilius in 213 BC, at the height of the Second Punic War, to hand in *libros vaticinios*, that is, books with private oracles. It is clear that we have here a case on the borderline of magic and licensed religion. The books are not conceptualised as books with magic, but from a modern point of view those private oracles could well have been used in ways we today would call magical. Rather worryingly, we find the same request in Livy (39.16.8) in connection with the famous Bacchanalia scandal of 186 BC. Unlike his report about Atilius, Livy's account can be checked here, as we are fortunate to have the authentic text of the *Senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 581.10 = *ILLRP* 511) regarding this affair. As we could perhaps have expected, this text does not mention books at all, and we may plausibly conclude that such books with magic did not yet exist in the Middle Republic. In fact, it seems likely that Livy was inspired by an act of Augustus in 13 BC when, according to Suetonius: 'he collected

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**35** In an otherwise excellent collection on magic and writing, there is virtually no attention to magical books or books with magic, cf. G. Bevilacqua *et al.*, *Scrittura e magia* (Rome, 2010) 81–82. E. Suárez de la Torre, 'The Library of the Magician', in M. Piranomonte and F. Marco Simón (eds), *Contesti magici – Contextos mágicos* (Rome, 2012) 299–306 focuses on the literary and technical knowledge of the authors of magical papyri rather than on their actual libraries.

**36** For the debate about polytheistic tolerance or intolerance, see the many writings of Jan Assmann and my reactions in Bremmer, 'Religious Violence and its Roots: a view from antiquity', *Asdiwal* 6 (2011) 71–79 and 'Religious Violence between Greeks, Romans, Christians and Jews', in A.-K. Geljon and R. Roukema (eds), *Violence in Early Christianity: Victims and Perpetrators* (Leiden, 2014) 8–30.

whatever prophetic writings of Greek or Latin origin were in circulation anonymously or under the names of authors of little repute, and burned more than two thousand of them, retaining only the Sibylline Books and making a choice even among those; and he deposited them in two gilded cases under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo' (*Augustus* 31). But it is noteworthy that Augustus apparently did not request that books with magic be handed over.

Now books with 'black magic' have come to be called *grimoires* in modern times,<sup>37</sup> an interesting term the history of which has not yet been wholly elucidated. Its oldest occurrence seems to occur in the French poem *Le Roman de Troie* (ca. 1165) where we find the term *gramaire* for a book with magic ('par nigromance et par gramaire'),<sup>38</sup> a spelling that in the later Middle Ages, for unclear reasons, first developed into *grymoire* before ending as the well known *grimoire*.<sup>39</sup> Apparently, the word developed from the term for Latin grammar, which was incomprehensible to many people. Its arrival in English is late. The *Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. *grimoire* gives 1849 as its earliest example: 'A witch with a Bible! It should be a grimoire'. It is a quote from a well known novel about a witchcraft trial, *The Lancashire Witches*, by the English historical novelist William Harrison Ainsworth (1805–1882), which indeed appeared in 1849, but had already been serialised in the *Sunday Times* the previous year.<sup>40</sup> Yet the word is quoted earlier at least twice: in an 1835 review of a French folkloristic book in the monthly *The Gentleman's Magazine* and in an 1845 report on the French region Touraine in the Scottish weekly *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*.<sup>41</sup> There can be no doubt, then, that the

<sup>37</sup> See now, for a full study, O. Davies, *Grimoires* (Oxford, 2009). For additional bibliography, see R. Suitner, 'La diffusion clandestine di manuali di magia nella Germania del primo settecento: il caso della *pneumatologia occulta*', *Historia Philosophica* 11 (2013) 47–57.

<sup>38</sup> Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. Constans, v. 6268.

<sup>39</sup> A. de Montaiglon and G. Raynaud, *Recueil général et complet des Fabliaux des XIII et XIV siècles*, 6 vols (Paris, 1872–1890) 2. 242 (14: 'font parroistre par lur grymoire / Voir come mençonge, mençonge come voire', in *Le roi d'Angleterre et le jongleur d'Ely* [thirteenth century]).

<sup>40</sup> W. H. Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, 3 vols (London, 1849) III. iii. v. 201.

<sup>41</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 158 (1835) 159, glossing *grimoire* as 'magical book' in a review of F. Pluquet, *Contes populaires, Prejuges, Patois, Proverbes, Noms de Lieux, de l'Arrondissement de Bayeux* (Rouen and London, 1835<sup>2</sup>); *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* 3 (1845) 195.

word was transferred from French to English in the last decades of the first half of the nineteenth century. Incidentally, in Germany it is still a foreign term and does not appear in the standard etymological dictionaries, the German term being *Zauberbuch*. *Grimoire* occurs only in German handbooks of French language and etymology in the 19th century and seems, as far as I can tell, only to be used by scholars as ‘book of magic’ in reference to English or French or the titles of the actual works, although the term is certainly becoming more familiar.

*Grimoires* are also well attested for antiquity, even for Rome. If I am not mistaken, the oldest example of such a *grimoire* in Western literature is mentioned by Horace in his *Epodes*. In the last of these poems, Horace supplicates the witch Canidia.

I already capitulate for the effective science,  
 and as a suppliant I pray in the name of the rule of Persephone,  
 in the name of the not to be (rashly) provoked powers of Diana  
 and in the name of the books with the spells (*libros carminum*) that  
 are able  
 to call down the stars that are fixed in heaven. (1–5)

The ability to draw down the stars is a typical Roman variant of the Greek claim that witches are able to draw down the moon, which is mentioned first in the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease*, where the author rejects as human trickery the feat of a person bringing down the moon ‘*mageuōn* and sacrificing’ (1.31). This feat, which was associated in particular with Thessalian women, helped to produce the dark night suitable for ‘black magic’ or enhance the power of the witch by the proximity of spooky Hecate’s moon.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Horace we should

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<sup>42</sup> For the trick and Thessaly as *the* country of witches, see D. E. Hill, ‘The Thessalian Trick’, *Rheinisches Museum* 116 (1973) 222–38; S. Lunais, *Recherches sur la lune*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1979) 225–33; B. Marzullo, ‘Aristoph. *Nub.* 749–755’, *Mus. Crit.* 21–22 (1986–87) 153–76; R. Nicolai, ‘La Tessaglia lucanea e il rovesciamento del Vergilio augusteo’, *Materiali e Discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici* 23 (1989) 119–34; R. Gordon, ‘Imagining Greek and Roman Magic’, in B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (Philadelphia, 1999) 159–275 at 223–4; O. Phillips, ‘The Witches’ Thessaly’, in P. Mirecki and M. Meyer (eds), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden, 2002) 378–86; L. C. Watson on Horace, *Epodes* 5.45–46 (stars, moon, Thessalian women), 51 (Diana and

probably think of a papyrus with spells, of the kind we indeed start to hear of in the time of Augustus.

It does not seem impossible that the book with spells used by Canidia was similar to the so-called Philinna Papyrus,<sup>43</sup> a book which Chris Faraone has persuasively argued contained a series of incantations from the Greek tradition, although some Egyptian and Mesopotamian lore has been added. Some of the charms seem to go back to or to draw on Greek incantations of the fourth century, but at that time they were not yet collected in a book.<sup>44</sup> The Greek character is indeed supported by the ascription of one of the incantations to 'Philinna the Thessalian'. Faraone has also argued that the designation 'Thessalian' served to distinguish our Philinna from another one.<sup>45</sup> That is perhaps debatable, as the number of female magicians known to us is rather limited, and the name Philinna is well attested in Thessaly.<sup>46</sup> Surely the author wanted to give the charm a special authority by connecting it to a woman whose ethnic origin put her magical qualities beyond doubt.

A more or less contemporaneous late Hellenistic collection of Greek spells was published in 1979.<sup>47</sup> This collection of, probably, six spells was written on a single sheet of papyrus, and we may suspect that the larger books with spells were simply collections of several of these sheets. It starts by stressing its Egyptian character:

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Hecate); N. Villagra Hidalgo, 'Tesalias: brujas ciegas, cojas y sin hijos', in E. Suárez de la Torre and A. Pérez Jiménez (eds), *Mito y magia en Grecia y Roma* (Barcelona, 2013) 67–76; for more or less contemporary representations, M. Schmidt, 'Sorceresses', in E. Reeder (ed.), *Pandora* (Baltimore, 1995) 57–62 at 61.

<sup>43</sup> *Editio princeps*: P. Maas, 'The Philinna Papyrus', *JHS* 62 (1942) 33–38 = H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parsons, *Supplementum Hellenisticum* (Berlin, 1983) no. 900 = *PGM* XX. For the history of the edition, see L. Lehnus, *Incontri con la filologia del passato* (Bari, 2012) 711–17 ('Maas e Filinna').

<sup>44</sup> C. Faraone, 'Handbooks and Anthologies: The Collection of Greek and Egyptian Incantations in Late Hellenistic Egypt', *Archiv f. Religionsgesch.* 2 (2000) 195–214 at 197–202.

<sup>45</sup> Faraone, *ibid.*, 210.

<sup>46</sup> P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names III.B* (Oxford, 2000) 422.

<sup>47</sup> *Editio princeps*: W. Brashear, 'Ein Berliner Zauber-papyrus', *ZPE* 33 (1979) 261–78 = *PGM* CXXII = R. W. Daniel and F. Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum*, 2 vols (Opladen, 1990) 2.72.

Excerpt of incantations from the (...) found  
in Heliopolis, in the holy book called  
'Of Hermes' in the *adyton*  
written with Egyptian letters and translated into Greek.

The book thus asserts its authority in a different manner. No Greek magician, but an Egyptian temple guarantees its efficacy.<sup>48</sup> Admittedly, Heliopolis was not as famous for its wisdom as Memphis or Thebes,<sup>49</sup> but both Herodotus and Eudoxus had conversed with its priests<sup>50</sup> – though already Strabo (17.1.29) lamented the vanishing of its learned tradition – and holy books of Hermes and Hermes Trismegistos are well attested in Late Antiquity, this one being our earliest example.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the mention of the *adyton* refers to the interior of the temple, especially the Egyptian temple. When he visited Egypt in AD 199, the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus took away every book with secret, mysterious teaching 'from practically all the secret chambers'.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Egypt would remain celebrated, sometimes even notorious, as *the* centre of magic in the ancient world.<sup>53</sup>

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**48** For the Egyptian temple library and the expression 'holy book', see now Bremmer, 'From Holy Books to Holy Bible', 333–36.

**49** For their 'magical' reputation, see Bremmer (ed.), *The Pseudo-Clementines* (Leuven, 2010) 18f. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 92 has Thessalus travel to Heliopolis, but he actually went to Diospolis, that is, Thebes, cf. A. Geissen and M. Weber, 'Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Namenprägungen', *ZPE* 144 (2003) 277–300 at 292f.

**50** Herodotus: 2.3.1. Eudoxus: Strabo 17.1.29–30; Seneca, *Quaest. Nat.* 7.3.2; Diogenes Laertius 8.8.86; M. Lefkowitz, 'Visits to Egypt in the Biographical Tradition', in M. Erler and S. Schorn (eds), *Die griechische Biographie in hellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin and New York, 2007) 101–13; I. Moyer, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism* (Cambridge, 2011) 238f.

**51** This example has to be added to those in Bremmer, 'From Holy Books to Holy Bible', 334–36; for texts of Hermes/Thoth found in temples, see G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton, 1993<sup>2</sup>) 32 note 115, 35, 140.

**52** Cassius Dio 75.13.2, cf. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 90f.

**53** For Egypt as the country of magic *par excellence*, see most recently P. Achtemeier, 'Jesus and the Disciples as Miracle Workers in the Apocryphal New Testament', in E. Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Notre Dame and London, 1976) 149–86 at 155–6; F. Graf, 'How to Cope with a Difficult Life. A View of Ancient Magic' and D. Frankfurter, 'Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category "Magician"', in H. Kippenberg and P. Schäfer



Unlike the spells of the Philinna Papyrus, most of the incantations in this sheet are of Egyptian origin, but the fact that the compiler ended the spells with a traditional Greek coda suggests that they were directed to a local Greek audience, who could of course copy them for the use of Greeks outside Egypt. The fact that the compiler of the Philinna papyrus has selected, organised and presented the incantations like an anthology mirrors the fact, as Faraone persuasively argues, that the Hellenistic Greeks started to anthologise their literature in connection with the Alexandrian library. This suggestion also implies that Greek collections of spells do not predate the Hellenistic period, and therefore it is not strange that we find the first notices of Greek and Roman books with magic only in the first century BC.

Yet they seem to have soon multiplied, if we are to believe the first literary mention of books with magic in the *Acts of the Apostles*, which can be dated to the later decades of the first century AD. Here Luke relates how, after certain Jews had tried to appropriate the name of Jesus for exorcism and had received a sound beating instead, ‘When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practised sorcery brought their scrolls together and publicly burned them. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas’ (17–19, tr. NIVUK). The mention of books with magic – the Greek uses the term βιβλος – coincides with the mention of conversion. Magic is clearly out of bounds for the early Christians, and the name of Jesus is not to be used by people who do not believe in him.

The interesting aspect of this burning is that until now we have not encountered books with magic by Jews. It might well be that Luke was thinking of Jewish writings on exorcism and divination, such as we find in the Second Temple Period, in particular in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>54</sup> Here we hear of exorcistic hymns and books with various types of divination. To give one example of such an exorcistic hymn:

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(eds), *Envisioning Magic* (Leiden, 1997) 93–114 at 94–5 and 115–35 at 119–21, respectively; G. Bohak, ‘Rabbinic Perspectives on Egyptian Religion’, *Arch. f. Religionsgesch.* 2 (2000) 215–31 at 220–1; Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 203–5, 215–7, 229–31; J. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites* (Leiden, 2005) 239–54.

<sup>54</sup> G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic* (Cambridge, 2008) 70–142.

Of David: Against ... an incantation in the name of YHWH. Invoke at any time the heavens. When he comes upon you in the night, you shall say to him: Who are you, oh offspring of man and of the seed of the holy ones? Your face is a face of delusion, and your horns are horns of illusion. You are darkness and not light, injustice and not justice ... the chief of the army. YHWH will bring you down to the deepest Sheol, he will shut the two bronze gates through which no light penetrates. On you shall not shine the sun which rises upon the just man to ... You shall say ... (11Q11 (*ApocPs<sup>a</sup>*) V 1.1–14)

As my former colleague Florentino García Martínez has noted, ‘The song is addressed to a sick person (in the second person singular) who is exhorted to confront the demon and it is intended to remind the demon of God’s power and of the guardian angels’ strength, which can imprison him in the abyss’. In the case of the books of divination, we find in the same group of scrolls both a *Brontologion* and a *Selenodromion*. These books were meant to be read together so that it would be possible to predict what would happen when it thundered at the moment when the moon was in one of the zodiacal signs. Given the strongly dualistic and deterministic world view of the Qumran community, exorcism and divination helped to keep the members in the camp of light and prepared them against the assaults of the forces of darkness.<sup>55</sup>

Although García Martínez discusses these and other texts as examples of magic in Qumran, we must note that the community itself did not consider these texts to be magic, which, as is well known, was strictly forbidden to Jews in the Old Testament and which surely explains the extreme paucity of Jewish magical texts.<sup>56</sup> Once again we are confronted by the emic/etic problem of ancient magic. On the other hand, after the destruction of the Qumran community, or even before it, similar writings may well have spread in the Diaspora, where they might certainly have been considered magical and been burned in public. In any case, the passage in Luke is not wholly unique, as we find the exhortation ‘from books of magic keep away’ among the precepts of Pseudo-Pho-

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**55** F. García Martínez, ‘Magic in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in J. N. Bremmer and J. R. Veenstra (eds), *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Leuven 2002) 14–33 at 25 (quotation) = *Qumranica Minora*, 2 vols (Leiden, 2007) 2.109–30 at 121 (quotation).

**56** Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 70–87, 137.

cyliides (149), a Jewish tractate from the first century AD. This mention suggests that such books were not uncommon among Jews.<sup>57</sup>

It is remarkable that references to books with magic remain rare in the following centuries but are especially connected with Egypt. A rather early example is found in Antonius Diogenes' novel *Incredible Things beyond Thule*, which we know only from an epitome in Photius and some papyri.<sup>58</sup> Recent studies are inclined, not unpersuasively, to place the author towards the end of the first or the beginning of the second century AD.<sup>59</sup> In the novel we find an Egyptian priest with an authentic Egyptian name, Paapis, literally 'He of Apis' or 'He who belongs to the god Apis', whose magical equipment consists of a 'satchel of books and his herb-chest' (Photius 110a 18–19), a nice combination of ancient practices (herbs) and modern technology (books).<sup>60</sup> In the course of time

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**57** C. Alcalde Martín, 'Nota a Pseudo-Focílides, *Sentencias*, 149', *MHNH* 11 (2011) 212–17.

**58** Text and Italian translation: M. Fusillo, *Antonio Diogene: Le incredibili avventure al di là di Tule* (Palermo, 1990). Papyri: S. A. Stephens and J. J. Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels: the fragments* (Princeton, 1995) 148–72, who also supply an English translation of Photius and other literary fragments (121–29); add now *P. Oxy.* 90.4760 (where Paapis appears) and 4761 (most likely from Antonius). For Antonius' origin in Aphrodisias, see G. Bowersock, *Fiction as History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994) 38–40; S. Tilg, *Chariton of Aphrodisias and the Invention of the Greek Love Novel* (Oxford, 2010) 98–99, 126f. For a new study that takes into account the recent papyri, see H. Bernsdorff, 'Antonios-Diogenes-Interpretationen', in Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (ed.), *Studien zur Philologie und Musikwissenschaft* (Berlin and New York, 2009) = Abh. Ak. Wissensch. Göttingen, Philolog.-Hist. Kl., NF 7, Sammelband I, 1–52.

**59** See, most recently, E. Bowie, 'Links Between Antonius Diogenes and Petronius', in M. Paschalis *et al.* (eds), *The Greek and the Roman Novel. Parallel Readings = Ancient Narrative* Suppl. 8 (Groningen, 2007) 121–32; Tilg, *Chariton*, 127.

**60** Several such magical equipments have been found back, see A. Mastrocinque, 'The Divinatory Kit from Pergamon and Greek Magic in Late Antiquity' and R. Gordon, 'Another View of the Pergamon Divination Kit', *JRA* 15 (2002) 173–87, 188–98, respectively; K. Dzwiza, 'Das "Zaubergerät" aus Pergamon', in R. Grüssinger *et al.* (eds), *Pergamon: Panorama der antiken Metropole* (Berlin and Petersberg, 2011) 239–41; D. Joly *et al.*, 'L'attirail d'un magicien rangé dans une cave de Chartres/*Autricum*', *Gallia* 67 (2010) 125–208; R. Gordon *et al.*, 'A Prayer for Blessings on Three Ritual Objects Discovered at Chartres-*Autricum* (France/Eure-et Loir)', in R. L. Gordon

he emerges as a villainous magician,<sup>61</sup> which is not all that surprising, as Egypt was the country of magic *par excellence*, as we just saw. In fact, Paapis is probably the earliest literary depiction of an Egyptian priest who is also a magician, a combination that will soon be followed by Thessalos in his *De virtutibus herbarum*, which should probably be dated to the first half of the second century AD.<sup>62</sup>

Books occur again in Lucian's pamphlet *Lover of Lies*, in which the Pythagorean Arignotus tells a story about a ghost whom he managed to confront in Corinth and who turned out to be a badly buried corpse. The philosopher was clearly well versed in Egyptian wisdom, as he stressed that he possessed many Egyptian books concerned with magic (31) and, moreover, had been a pupil of the Egyptian 'holy man' Pankrates (34), whose proper Egyptian name Pachrates has turned up in the magical papyri, where he is connected with Heliopolis.<sup>63</sup> Apparently, such Egyptian books – and Arignotus stresses, albeit unconvincingly, that he actually pronounced a spell in Egyptian – were not unfamiliar, and we also hear about books with magic in Origen's *Contra Celsum* (4.33), which was completed in AD 248. As Origen was born in Alexandria and had lived a long time in Egypt, he may well be referring to books that he had seen in his younger years.

Yet we do not hear of any legal measures regarding books with magic. It is indeed a fact that legal scholars do not bother much with

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and F. Marco Simón (eds), *Magical Practice in the Latin West* (Leiden, 2010) 487–518.

**61** F. de Salvia, 'Paapis in Magna Grecia', in M. Capasso and E. Puglia (eds), *Scritti di varia umanità in memoria di Benito Iezzi* (Sorrento 1994) 15–24.

**62** For Thessalos and his treatise, see now Moyer, *Egypt and the limits of Hellenism*, 208–73 (discussion), 224–26 (Egyptian priests as wise men or magicians, although Paapis has been overlooked), 287–92 (translation), 293–97 (date). For Egyptian priests as magicians, see also D. Frankfurter, 'Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category "Magician"', in Kippenberg and Schäfer, *Envisioning Magic*, 115–35 at 119–21.

**63** PGM IV.2446, cf. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, 212–13, but also note the doubts of R. Gordon, 'Reporting the Marvellous: private divination in the Greek magical papyri', in Kippenberg and Schäfer, *Envisioning Magic*, 65–92 at 78. For Lucian's stay in Egypt, which may have contributed to this vignette, see A. Martin, 'Lucien et l'Égypte', in F. Mestre and P. Gómez (eds), *Lucian of Samosata. Greek Writer and Roman Citizen* (Barcelona, 2010) 191–201.

the area of religion until around 300 AD.<sup>64</sup> This changes in the late third century, as we see from the *Sententiae* of Paulus, a work that is associated with the early third-century jurist Paulus, but which certainly derives from the late third or early fourth century.<sup>65</sup> In the fifth book of the *Sententiae* there are a number of passages that are directed against astrologers, *harioli* and *haruspices*, all people who concerned themselves with predicting the future, in one way or another. They will be condemned to death when they apply their knowledge to the emperor or the government (5.21.3). Moreover, they have to abstain from their books and their knowledge (5.21.4).

It is when the author comes to speak about the Lex Cornelia that we see that the law has developed in a surprising direction.<sup>66</sup> It is not only seers, but also those knowledgeable in the *ars magica* who will be condemned to death. They themselves will be burned alive and, further, no-one is permitted to possess any books with magic. If such books are discovered, they will be publicly burned. Their owners will have their possessions confiscated and will be exiled to an island; if they are of a lower rank, they will even be condemned to death. Thus, it is now not only the practice of magic but also knowledge of it that is forbidden. This new law (5.23.17–18) introduces a whole new era in the history of magic.

We do have another reference to books with magic in the *Digesta* (10.2.4.1), a comment by Ulpian in his nineteenth book on the Edict. In this passage concerning cases of inheritance, Ulpian, the most prominent legal scholar of the third century, notes that the relevant judge should not divide up the poisons and malicious medicines in an inheritance, but that these should be destroyed. Books with magic, *libri magici*, are to be destroyed at once. Unfortunately, students of this passage have long argued that the sentence about the books with magic is a later interpolation.<sup>67</sup> We should probably ascribe the passage to the same period as the passage of Paulus we have just discussed. Evidently, both the qualification of books as *magicus* and their prescribed destruction

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64 M. Th. Fögen, *Die Enteignung der Wahrsager* (Frankfurt, 1993) 74, to be added to Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 55.

65 Fögen, *ibid.*, 75f.

66 For this law, see now J. Rives, 'Magic, Religion, and Law: The Case of the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis*', in C. Ando and J. Rüpke (eds), *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome* (Wiesbaden, 2006) 47–67.

67 Fögen, *ibid.*, 59f.

by the Roman government was a gradual process, which accelerated in the late third and early fourth century. It should not be projected back to earlier centuries.

In the fourth century, we also hear of some other collections of books with magic that were burned. Diocletian, who had ordered the handing over and subsequent destruction of Christian scriptures, gave orders to burn the Egyptian books on the chemistry of silver and gold. This would keep the Egyptians from luxuriating in wealth, he said, so that, in the future, lack of financial resources would deter them from resisting Roman power.<sup>68</sup> Now alchemy is not the same as magic, but the fact that the owner of the magical library in Egyptian Thebes that has given us so many magical papyri also owned two texts on alchemy surely points to a close association of the two.<sup>69</sup>

Before the middle of the fourth century Bishop Paulinus of Dacia, accused of trafficking in magic, was expelled from the Church and his books of enchantments (*maleficiorum libros*) were burned by Macedonius, the bishop of Mopsuestia.<sup>70</sup> Shortly afterwards, in AD 368, Lollianus, the young son of a former prefect of Rome, wrote a book on 'black magic' (*noxiarum artium*) and was duly executed; and, in AD 371–72, in the Orient people burned their whole libraries in order to escape suspicion of being involved in magic.<sup>71</sup> Around the same time, John Chrysostom

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68 Suda s.v. *Diokletianos*.

69 Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*, 13; Moyer, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism*, 252.

70 Hilarius Pictaviensis, *Op. Hist. Fr.* 3.27 (PL 10.674) = Hilarius, *Frag. Hist. A* 4.1.27 (CSEL 65, 66): . . . *quod convixerit in Oriente cum sceleratis ac perditis. Turpiter namque Paulino quondam episcopo Daciae individuus amicus fuit, homini, qui primo maleficus fuerit accusatus et de ecclesia pulsus usque in hodiernum diem in apostasia permanens cum concubinis publice et meretrices fornicetur, cuius maleficiorum libros Machedonius episcopus atque confessor a Mobso combussit*. H. Chadwick, 'Ossius of Cordova and the Presidency of the Council of Antioch (325)', *J. Theol. Stud.* (1958) 292–304 at 299–300 unpersuasively corrects 'Dacia' to 'Adana', cf. T. D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge and London 1993) 74.

71 Ammianus Marcellinus 28.1.26, 29.1.41, 29.2.4, cf. A. H. Funke, 'Majestäts- und Magieprozesse bei Ammianus Marcellinus', *Jahrb. Ant. Christ.* 10 (1967) 145–75; T. Zawadzki, 'Les procès politiques de l'an 371–372 (Amm. Marc. XXIX, 1, 29–33; Eunapius, *Vitae Soph.* VII, 6, 3–4; D. 480)', in *Labor omnibus unus: G. Walsler zum 70. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 1989) 274–87.

relates that when walking along the river Orontes with a friend they saw something floating in the water. Picking it up, he recognised its prohibited character and, at that very moment, noticed soldiers close by. Having hidden the book under his garment, he immediately threw it back into the water as soon as the soldiers had left; its owner was later caught and executed.<sup>72</sup> Finally, in 379 Gregory of Nazianzus tells us that the magician Cyprian, the *Urgestalt* of Faust, publicly burned his books with magic (*goêtikas biblous*) as a sign of his conversion, and later sources relate the same about other real or fictional magicians, as we will see in a moment.<sup>73</sup> It is typical of most of these burnings that our sources mention that they happened in public. Apparently, these ‘auto-da-fés’ had the purpose not only of purifying the world from impure books, but also of setting a clear example for other possible owners.<sup>74</sup>

Typically, the last mentions of books with magic in Late Antiquity are to be found in cases of or in connection with ecclesiastical functionaries or saints: we are no longer in the world of Egyptian temples or the homes of people with pagan sympathies. In the new Christian world of late fifth-century Beirut we hear of a young student, John Phoulon, who, perhaps significantly, came from Egyptian Thebes. He had hidden his books with magic, which contained ‘certain drawings of perverse dai-

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<sup>72</sup> John Chrysostom, in *Acta hom.* 18.3 (= PG 60.274), 38.5 (= PG 60.274f).

<sup>73</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 24. 12, ed. Mossay (*Sources Chrétiennes* 284), cf. L. Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen zur Faustsage*, SB Wien 206 (1927.4) 105–06, 235 (picture of Cyprian with his books, from a ninth-century manuscript); W. Speyer, *Büchervernichtung und Zensur des Geistes bei Heiden, Juden und Christen* (Stuttgart, 1981) 171.

<sup>74</sup> C. A. Forbes, ‘Books for the Burning’, *TAPA* 97 (1936) 114–25 (written against the background of Nazi book burning); A. S. Pease, ‘Notes on Bookburning’, in M. H. Shepherd and S. E. Johnson (eds), *Munera studiosa* (Cambridge, Mass. 1946) 145–60; D. Sarefield, ‘Bookburning in the Christian Roman Empire: Transforming a Pagan Rite of Purification’, in H. A. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot, 2006) 287–96 and ‘The Symbolics of Book Burning: The Establishment of a Christian Ritual of Persecution’, in W. Klingshirn and L. Safran (eds), *The Early Christian Book* (Washington DC, 2007) 159–73; J. Herrin, ‘Book Burning as Purification’, in Ph. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis (eds), *Transformations of Late Antiquity* (Farnham, 2009) 205–22; see also H. J. Hillebrand, ‘On Book Burning and Book Burners: Reflections on the Power (and Powerlessness) of Ideas’, *J. Am. Ac. Rel.* 74 (2006) 593–614; T. Werner, *Den Irrtum liquidieren. Bücherverbrennungen im Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 2007).

*mones*, barbaric names, and harmful, presumptuous commands replete with arrogance and quite fit for perverse *daimones*' from his Christian friends under the seat of his chair.<sup>75</sup> After their discovery, they were of course publicly burned. The Christians then tracked down one of his friends, who had asked a scribe to copy out a magical text on a codex for him. The whole affair seems to suggest a group of young men who wanted to experience the *frisson* of black magic and thus tried to procure *grimoires* for themselves.<sup>76</sup> And in the early sixth-century biography of the monk Hypatios of Bithynia we find an anecdote about a pagan magician who betrayed himself by his bad smell during a church service. The saint interrogated him, and he confessed to the possession of a kind of amulet in the shape of a girdle, which belonged to Artemis. After the saint had disposed of this amulet with some effort, he summoned the magician to give up his book, clearly a *grimoire*, and his magical equipment.<sup>77</sup>

When in the sixth century Mark the Deacon describes the *Life of Bishop Porphyry of Gaza*, he relates that in AD 402 the Christians destroyed the sanctuary of the main god of Gaza, Marnas, under the bishop's guidance. Notwithstanding that the biography is a fictional account from the time of Justinian, it is important to note that the Christians were supposed to have burned the temple with the image of the god and 'books filled with magic'.<sup>78</sup>

Our last example derives from the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, which dates from some time after the death of the saint, who was born ca. 530 and died in 613.<sup>79</sup> The *Life* was written by George, a *hegoumenos* of Theodore's monastery, and not completed before the death of Heraclius in 641; it is a valuable testimony of Christianity in Galatia.<sup>80</sup> It relates (c.

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75 Zachariah, *Vita Severi*, 61, cf. F. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization C. 370–529*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1994) 2.35–38.

76 Zachariah, *Vita Severi*, 65f.

77 Callinicus, *Life of Hypatios* 43.4–8 Bartelink. For its date, see T. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen, 2010) 246–48.

78 Marcus Diaconus, *Life of Porphyry*, Ch. 71. For the date and fictionality of this account, see Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, 260–83.

79 S. Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1993) 2.122. I have used the critical edition with commentary by A.-J. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, 2 vols (Brussels, 1970), but also the English translation of E. Dawes and N. H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Oxford, 1948) 87–192.

80 Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2.123.



38) how Theodore managed to defeat the senior sorcerer Theodotus in the village of Mazamia. Moved by envy of the saint's miracles, he had sent his demons to attack the saint. When these attacks proved to be in vain, and an attempt to poison the saint also failed, he surrendered and asked the saint to release him from the Devil and to baptise him. The saint was willing to do so, but asked that if he had a book with magic spells he should bring it to him in public. Moreover: 'Loose from the binding spell (*katadesmos*) of your magic every person you have bewitched and every house or beast or anything else, whatsoever it be, and in future never cast a spell on anyone'. The sorcerer did as ordered and burnt all his books in Theodore's presence. The anecdote shows that books with spells continued to circulate long after the prohibition of magic. Evidently, there was too much demand to do away with them altogether.<sup>81</sup>

As we have seen, around AD 400 there was an important turning point in the attitude to books with magic. This growing opposition to magic gives a special weight to the fact that it is precisely the fourth century that has yielded our largest extant library of magical papyrus scrolls, found in Egypt in the early nineteenth century: the so-called Anastasi library.<sup>82</sup> Could the owner have tried to save the magical tradition from destruction?<sup>83</sup> And was the same true for the so-called Nag Hammadi library of Gnostic books, considering that heresy became assimilated to sorcery in Late Antiquity, which of course also expanded the range of books seen as magical books?<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, we will never know the

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**81** For Byzantine magic, see H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic* (Washington DC, 1995); A. Bravo Martinez, 'Η μαγική κακοτεχνία. Materiales para una historia de la magia y la demonología bizantinas', *MHNH* 2 (2002) 5–70; J. C. B. Petropoulos (ed.), *Greek Magic: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (Abingdon and New York, 2008) 39–81.

**82** Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 168–72; H.-D. Betz, *Hellenismus und Urchristentum* (Tübingen, 1990) 173–83 ('The Formation of Authoritative Tradition in the Greek Magical Papyri', 1982<sup>1</sup>); Dieleman, *Priest, Tongues, and Rites*, 11–21; M. Zago, *Tebe magica e alchemica. L'idea di biblioteca nell'Egitto romano: la collezione Anastasi* (Padua, 2010); for its content, see also Moyer, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism*, 252–53; Gordon, 'Memory and Authority', 147–51.

**83** I had already written these lines when I saw that Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 170, 173 poses the same question.

**84** M. V. Escribano Paño, 'Heretical Texts and *Maleficium* in the *Codex Theodosianus* (CTH. 16.5.34)', in Gordon and Marco Simón, *Magical Practice*

answer. One thing is certain, though: as we have seen, books with magic are well attested from the beginning of the Christian era onwards. But were they also magical books?

#### 4 MAGICAL BOOKS?

It is clear from the material presented so far that there is no evidence whatsoever that these books with magic were also considered to be magical books. One might even wonder if the ancients even knew of anything that would resemble such books. Depending on how we view it, we may however postulate that the Bible was a magical book in earlier Christianity in antiquity.

Contrary to what is often popularly thought, the rise of the Bible as a single book was a long and laborious process. It is only in the fourth century AD that we start to find the megacodex, such as the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus, which contained all the books of the Bible, perhaps produced in a scriptorium in Alexandria.<sup>85</sup> Such codices were extremely rare and too expensive for most Christians.<sup>86</sup> It is, presumably, this appearance as a single book that greatly enhanced the status of the Bible as a holy book. We should realise, though, that this was a new development. In a recent, stimulating article, the Princeton papyrologist and scholar of early Christianity, AnneMarie Luijendijk, has drawn attention to the fact that most New Testament papyri with a known provenance were found in the rubbish mounds of Oxyrhynchus. Taking a 'garbological' approach, she expresses astonishment that the Christians dumped their sacred scriptures in this manner, for, according to her, they considered not only the content of their writings sacred but

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*in the Latin West*, 105–38.

**85** Cf. P.-M. Bogaert, 'Aux origines de la fixation du canon: Scriptoria, listes et titres', in J.-M. Auwers and H.J. de Jonge (eds), *The Biblical Canons* (Leuven, 2003) 153–76; J. J. Brogan, 'Another Look at Codex Sinaiticus', in J. J. Brogan and O. O'Sullivan (eds), *The Bible as Book: The Transmission of the Greek Text* (London, 2003), 17–32, both overlooked by D. Jongkind, *Scribal Habits of Codex Sinaiticus* (Piscataway, N. J., 2007).

**86** For our scarce information regarding the costs of copying books, see most recently R. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton, 2009) 50–69.

also the physical manuscripts.<sup>87</sup> To support her case, she quotes a number of examples of the special treatment of Christian books, but she has not noticed that all her examples date from the late fourth, fifth and later centuries. In fact, there is not a single example of special treatment of the physical Bible before that time. Evidently, the Christians only slowly started to consider the physical side of their scriptures as sacred, just as they only gradually started to call the writings 'sacred' or 'divine'.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the many textual variants of the Biblical papyri in the first centuries, as well as the fact that the hands of these papyri are usually clear, competent and readable, but not calligraphic in visual appearance, indicate that the earlier Christians did not attach any great value either to the precise wording of their sacred scriptures or to their physical appearance.<sup>89</sup> In other words, the 'performative Valenz', as Martin Wallraff calls it,<sup>90</sup> of the Bible is a relatively late development.<sup>91</sup>

It fits these observations that it is only in the late fourth century that Jerome warns people not to touch the Gospel (not the Bible, which must still have been rare) with unwashed hands (*Comm. Matt.* 2.6). He also opposed swearing on a Gospel, but his authority did not prevail, and we still find such an oath in the *Life of Hypatios* already mentioned

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**87** A. Luijendijk, 'Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus', *Vigiliae Christianae* 64 (2010) 217–54.

**88** Bremmer, 'Holy Books', 347–54.

**89** For the appearance of early Christian codices, see most recently S. D. Charlesworth, 'Public and Private – Second- and Third-Century Gospel Manuscripts', in C. A. Evans and H. D. Zacharias (eds), *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (London, 2009) 148–75; L. Hurtado, 'Manuscripts and the Sociology of Early Christian Reading', in C. E. Hill and M. J. Kruger (eds), *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford, 2012) 49–62. For the dates of the early NT papyri, see P. Orsini and W. Clarysse, 'Early New Testament Manuscripts and Their Dates: A Critique of Theological Palaeography', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 88 (2012) 443–74; B. Nongbri, 'The Limits of Palaeographic Dating of Literary Papyri: Some Observations on the Date and Provenance of P. Bodmer II (P66)', *Museum Helveticum* 71 (2014) 1–35.

**90** See his stimulating study *Kodex und Kanon. Das Buch im frühen Christentum* (Berlin and New York, 2013) 48–53.

**91** For this development, see now J. Kloppenborg, 'Literate Media in Early Christ Groups: The Creation of a Christian Book Culture', *J. Early Christian Stud.* 22 (2014) 21–59.

above (28.11 Bartelink).<sup>92</sup> It cannot be chance, then, that from the fourth century onwards we start to find many quotations from the Bible that were used as amulets.<sup>93</sup> But an amulet is not yet a book. We already find real booklets mentioned in the *Apocryphal Acts of Andrew*, which were written around AD 200. Here the wife of the *proconsul* Lesbios had condemned her husband's former concubine, Trophime, to a brothel, which was not an uncommon penalty at the time,<sup>94</sup> but she was protected by an *euangelium* hidden on her bosom. Apparently, this method of protection proved effective, since it rendered impotent all those who wanted to 'touch' her (*contingerent*) and even helped to kill a youth who wanted to 'sexually humiliate' her (*inluderet: AAlat 23*).<sup>95</sup> This power of the Gospel also became apparent in the case of an old man of 74, evidently still *compōs mentulae*, who had converted after a life of debauchery and taken an *euangelium* with him. Yet life-long habits are not easily shed. He again succumbed to his lust and approached a prostitute, but this time she did not let him get near her – evidently, she had felt the presence of the Gospel.<sup>96</sup>

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92 O. Michel, 'Evangelium', in *RAC* 6 (1966) 1107–60 at 1155, to which the example from the *Life of Hypatios* should be added.

93 See most recently Th. Kraus, 'Amulette als wichtige Zeugnisse für das frühe Christentum – einige grundsätzliche Anmerkungen', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 24 (2007) 423–35; E. A. Judge, *Jerusalem and Athens* (Tübingen, 2010) 198–208 ('The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri', 1987) at 205; T. de Bruyn and J. Dijkstra, 'Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets', *Bull. Am. Soc. Papyr.* 48 (2011) 163–216 at 174, with a different explanation; W. M. Shandruck, 'Christian Use of Magic in late Antique Egypt', *J. Early Christian Stud.* 20 (2012) 31–57; A. Papatomas, 'Ein griechisches Papyrusamulett mit Teilen aus zwei Septuaginta Psalmen', *Tyche* 27 (2012) 113–18; A. Luijendijk, 'A Gospel Amulet for Joannia (P.Oxy. VIII 1151)', in K. B. Stratton and D. S. Kalleres (eds), *Daughters of Hecate. Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 2014) 418–43; P. Oxy. 78.5127.

94 J. N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of John* (Kampen, 1995) 51.

95 In late Latin, *contingere* is a well attested euphemism for sexual intercourse, cf. J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London, 1982) 184; for *inludo* see Adams, *ibid.*, 200.

96 For the sexual connotation of *exercere* in *AAlat* 28, cf. Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, 158 n. 1.

Undoubtedly, these episodes were introduced by our source, Gregory the Great, or a later translator (revisor?), into the original text of the *Acts of Andrew*, as there are no contemporary testimonies for such ‘magical’ usage of the Gospel; we know that Gregory also mentions that a disciple of Martin of Tours named Maximus wore a Gospel codex, a paten and a chalice around his neck.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, there can be no doubt that Christian miniature codices are attested from the fourth century onwards and were used for apotropaic purposes.<sup>98</sup> The hermit Amoun was reputed to have worn a codex around his neck, and John Chrysostom, who mentions the belief that the presence of Gospels in the house keeps the Devil away, rails against ‘women who wear Gospels hung from their necks’.<sup>99</sup> Like him, Jerome reproaches *superstitiosae mulierculae* for carrying small Gospels on their persons like the Pharisees with their phylacteries.<sup>100</sup> According to Augustine (*In Joh. tr.* 6.1), one could sleep with a copy of the Gospel of John under the pillow when suffering from fever, but John Chrysostom (*Hom* 43–4 = *PG* 61.373) said that it was useless hanging a Gospel text above your bed unless you also put alms into a container kept there for the purpose.<sup>101</sup> Small Gospels have even been found in graves from the fourth or fifth century onwards – surely as

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**97** Gregory, *Glory of the Confessors* 22.

**98** E. Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Philadelphia, 1977) 22, 30; add now *P.Kell.* 91, 92, 94 and *P. Kell.Copt.* 1; M. Kruger, *The Gospel of the Savior: An Analysis of P. Oxy. 840 and Its Place in the Gospel Traditions of Early Christianity* (Leiden, 2005) 23–40; T. J. Kraus, ‘Die Welt der Miniaturbücher in der Antike und Spätantike’, *Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt*. A 35 (2010) 79–110 and ‘Fragmente zweier christlicher Kodizes in der Bodleian Library, Oxford’, in D. Minutoli (ed.), *Inediti offerto a Rosario Pintaudi per il suo 65° compleanno* (Florence, 2012) 39–52; A. Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?: The Gospel of the Lots of Mary* (Tübingen, 2014) 52 n. 82.

**99** Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 8 (Amoun); Chrysostom, *Hom.* 32 (31) in *Joh.* (*PG* 59.187: Devil), *Hom. ad pop. ant.* 19.14 (*PG* 49.196: women); note also *Hom. in Cor.* 43 (Gospels worn as amulets).

**100** Jerome, *Epist.* 60.11; R. Kaczynski, *Das Wort Gottes in Liturgie und Alltag der Gemeinden des Johannes Chrysostomus* (Freiburg, 1974) 326–29; De Bruyn and Dijkstra, ‘Greek Amulets’, 176f.

**101** For other, hagiographical examples, see C. Rapp, ‘Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes. Aspects of Scriptural Holiness in Late Antiquity’, in Klingshirn and Safran, *Early Christian Book*, 194–222 at 199f.

amulets.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, in contemporaneous Jewish practice small codices of the Torah were used for magical protection,<sup>103</sup> and the Manichaeans wrote a biography of Mani on a miniature codex, the famous Cologne Mani Codex, which may well have been used for magical purposes too.

For final examples of the Gospel as a possibly magical book we turn to the *Acts of Barnabas*, dating from the fifth century; the *Miracles of Saint Thecla*, a book dating from about AD 470, and to the *Life of St. Nicholas of Sion*, a booklet probably written in AD 564.<sup>104</sup>

In the *Acts of Barnabas* (c. 14), Barnabas and John Mark crossed to Crommautica on Cyprus by night, where they were received by the temple-servants Timon and Ariston. When Timon fell ill, Barnabas cured him by laying his hands upon him, but he also cured many others in the regions where they proceeded by laying upon them ‘the Gospel he had received from Matthew, a book of the voice of God, a narrative of miracles and teachings’.

One of the *Miracles of Saint Thecla* (no. 45) relates how a certain Xenarchis received a book, a codex, as a present. The book was the Gospel, and she declared: ‘This present is divine, admirable, extraordinary and unlike anything else on earth’. Yet as she was illiterate, she wondered what use the present could be to her. However, when she opened the book and started to look at the letters, she began to read – and really fast – so there can be no doubt that this was a very special book! Although Xenarchis’ ability to read is subsequently ascribed to Thecla by the author, it seems clear that the Gospel codex was no ordinary book and came close to being a magical book.<sup>105</sup>

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**102** J. Vezin, ‘Les livres utilisés comme amulettes et comme reliques’, in P. Ganz (ed.), *Das Buch als magisches und als Repräsentationsobjekt* (Wiesbaden, 1992) 100–15 at 103–5.

**103** L. Blau, ‘Das neue Evangelienfragment von Oxyrhynchos buch- und zaubergeschichtlich betrachtet nebst sonstigen Bemerkungen’, *ZNW* 9 (1908) 204–15; J.-M. Prieur, *Acta Andreae*, 2 vols (Turnhout, 1989) 2.622 n.6.

**104** See, respectively, M. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 2.2 (Leipzig, 1903) 299–302, cf. I. Czachesz, *Commission Narratives* (Leuven, 2007) 184–207; G. Dagron, *Vie et Miracles de Sainte Thècle* (Brussels, 1978); I. and N. P. Ševčenko, *The Life of St. Nicholas of Sion* (Brookline, 1984), with a new Greek text and an English translation.

**105** For the miracle, see Th. Kraus, ‘“Knowing letters” – (il)literacy, books, and literary concept in the Life and Miracles of Saint Thecla (*Mir. Thcl.*45)’, *Annali di storia dell’eggesi* 23 (2006) 281–306.

In the *Life of St. Nicholas* the inhabitants of the village of Arnabanda wanted to implore the saint to purify their spring which had become muddy after an old woman fell into it, which was clearly the work of the Devil. So when they gathered to meet the saint, ‘they took up the Gospel Book and the venerable crosses’ (21). The presence of the Gospel clearly served to support their supplication, and a special power of the Gospel Book also seems to be presupposed when they go out with the saint to find a hidden source of water, as the holy man tells them: ‘In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, gather all of you, young and old, and let us take in our hands God’s Gospel, with the venerable crosses, and let us go eagerly to the spot and perform the feat which lies before us, and Lord God will reveal what you have requested’ (23). Interestingly, in these cases, as in the one by Thecla, there is no specification of which Gospel is meant. We can only guess whether it was a single Gospel or a codex with the four Gospels. Similarly, when the Council of Ephesus gathered in 431, they met in the church called Mary ‘with the holy Gospel exposed on the throne in the very middle, and displaying Christ himself present with us’.<sup>106</sup> Here, too, we can only guess which Gospel was meant.

## 5 CONCLUSION

From an etic point of view, the uses of a Gospel or the Bible discussed above might be considered as magical.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, these books certainly were not *grimoires*, and neither did most Christians consider them as magical, although some Church Fathers clearly thought the use of Gospels as amulets a sign of superstition.<sup>108</sup> Thus, from an emic point of view, magical books did not exist in antiquity, given that Jewish books

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**106** From the Acts of the Council as quoted by Luijendijk, ‘Sacred Scriptures’, 234 note 60.

**107** For examples of the Bible as oracle, see P.W. van der Horst, ‘Bibliomancy’, in C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter (eds), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove and Leicester, 2000) 165–68; C. Marksches, ‘Heilige Texte als magische Texte’, in A. Kablitz and C. Marksches (eds), *Heilige Texte* (Berlin and Boston, 2013) 105–20; Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?*

**108** For the Fathers and amulets, see F. Graf, ‘The Christian Transformation of Magic’, in Suárez de la Torre and Pérez Jiménez, *Mito y Magia en Grecia y Roma*, 299–310.

with magic, such as the *Sepher ha-Razim*, were probably written too late to qualify as examples from Late Antiquity.<sup>109</sup> In the end, Richard Kieckhefer was perhaps a little bit too fast with his statement that every book with magic is also a magical book.<sup>110</sup>

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**109** Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 169–83.

**110** I am most grateful to Ton Hilhorst for information, to Jacco Dieleman and Andrzej Gillmeister for comments, to Jitse Dijkstra for his helpful scrutiny of my text, and Orla Mulholland for her careful correction of my English.



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JITSE DIJKSTRA

## THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN IMAGE AND TEXT.

### On Greek Amulets Containing Christian Elements from Late Antique Egypt

*Although many magical papyri contain figures, scholarly attention has thus far mostly focused on the texts that are frequently found side by side with them. When we approach magical papyri as artefacts, it becomes clear that these figures deserve as much attention as the texts and that they should be studied in conjunction. In this contribution, I will concentrate on six magical papyri with drawings which occur in a corpus of Greek magical texts with Christian elements from Late Antique Egypt and demonstrate the essential role that the images play in connection with the texts. As such, like the texts found in the same corpus, they reflect the syncretistic environment of Late Antique Egypt.*

In his *Life of Severus* (written after 512 CE), Zachariah of Mytilene relates an incident of around 490 in which a group of zealous Christian students at the law school of Berytus, including Zachariah and Severus of Antioch, expose the magical practices of their fellow student John the Fuller, a Christian from Thebes in Egypt. In an amusing scene, they visit his house in order to inspect his books. Initially they do not find any magical books, until his slave, whom John had nearly killed in order to activate a love charm, informs the visitors that his master hides the books underneath his chair! Zachariah describes the books that they found as follows:

... these books of magic which contained pictures of evil demons, and barbarous names, and presumptuous and pernicious promises, [books] filled with pride, and utterly pleasing to the evil demons.

Some of them were actually written by Zoroaster, the *magus*, and some by Ostanes, the magician, and others by Manetho.<sup>1</sup>

As this passage illustrates, a crucial aspect of the materiality of magic are the images that are often found alongside magical texts, including magical papyri, in the Graeco-Roman period and Late Antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

Although the focus in studies of magical papyri has always been on the texts, considerable attention has been paid to drawings in magical papyri.<sup>3</sup> The *PGM* usually includes images of figures in the plates sec-

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**1** *Life of Severus*, p. 62 Kugener; trans. Ambjörn 2008, 62 (slightly adapted). For the incident surrounding John the Fuller, see e.g. Trombley 1994, 34–38 (who cites this passage at p. 36); Dickie 2001, 263–64, 314–15; Watts 2010, 67; Greatrex 2011, 7; Bremmer, this volume.

**2** I am grateful first of all to my colleague Theodore de Bruyn who initially checked his database of Late Antique amulets for texts with drawings, and offered bibliographical advice and insightful comments on many occasions. During the Winter of 2012/2013, the magical papyri discussed in this article were read in a study group together with my PhD-student Mélanie Houle, whom I thank for stimulating discussions about the texts, as well as De Bruyn, who participated in one session. Paul Schubert (Université de Genève)/Barbara Roth (Bibliothèque de Genève), Robert Daniel (Papyrussammlung der Universität Köln) and Diane Koch (Trexler Library, Muhlenberg College) kindly provided me with high resolution images of *Suppl. Mag.* I 38, *P.Köln* VIII 340 and *PGM* P<sub>4</sub>, respectively, and permission to publish them (reproduced here as figs. 1–4). A preliminary version of this paper was presented during the conference ‘Ancient Amulets: Words, Images and Social Contexts’, held at the University of Chicago from 15–17 February 2013; many thanks are owed to Chris Faraone for inviting me, to Jan Bremmer for offering to publish my paper in the current volume and, once more, to De Bruyn for comments on a final draft.

**3** Cf. e.g. with figural graffiti from Egypt (that is, drawings incised in stone surfaces, such as temples, that were not originally intended for that purpose), which until not that long ago were largely neglected, certainly when compared with textual graffiti. A telling example is the edition of the Greek inscriptions from the temple island of Philae, in which in three cases (*I.Philae* II 241–243) a cross has been included only because the letters *alpha* and *omega* were inscribed beside it. Meanwhile almost all other figural graffiti from Philae remain unedited. My study of the temple of Isis at Aswan tries to redress the balance somewhat by studying all 352 graffiti from the temple, both figures and texts, together within their architectural context. See Dijkstra 2012, 19–22; example of Philae on p. 83.

tion or records their position within the text, though without a detailed description or analysis.<sup>4</sup> *Suppl. Mag.* goes one step further and includes the images in the texts as well as provides an interpretation of them in the commentary.<sup>5</sup> And several studies have been devoted to specific figures, such as the Ouroboros.<sup>6</sup> In 1992, William Brashear offered a survey of figures in magical papyri, providing some examples, but the most extensive treatment of the topic to date, which came out in the same year, can be found in Ulrike Horak's *Illuminierte Papyri*, where she provides a brief discussion focusing mostly on art historical aspects, publishes a group of 14 magical drawings with little or no text, all but one from the Vienna collection, and includes in her catalogue 'Verzeichnis illuminiertes edierter Papyri' a list of 133 drawings in magical papyri, though as she herself admits this list is not exhaustive.<sup>7</sup>

The reason for this considerable interest in *figurae magicae* is no doubt that these drawings often have a clear function within the magical text.<sup>8</sup> To adduce just a random example, *Suppl. Mag.* I 38 (see fig. 1), a second-century lead tablet now in Geneva containing a love charm,<sup>9</sup> begins with several parts of animals, 'the tail of the snake' (τὴν οὐρὰν τοῦ ὄφεως), 'the mouth of the crocodile' (τὸ στόμα τοῦ κορκοδείλου, read κροκοδίλου), 'the horns of the ram' (τοῖς κέρασι τοῦ κρειοῦ, read κριοῦ), 'the poison of the asp' (τῶ ἰῶ τῆς ἀσπίδος), 'the whiskers of

4 Cf. e.g. *PGM XXXV*, where the three busts (to be discussed below) are noted (at p. 162), but no drawing or photograph is provided; the crosses above the text are also omitted from the text, though they are mentioned in the commentary on line 1 (p. 160).

5 E.g. the image of a *stela* included in the text of *Suppl. Mag.* I 23 (see further below) with discussion at pp. 65–66.

6 Brashear 1995, 3442–43, with references.

7 Brashear 1992, esp. 40–51; Horak 1992, 55–58 (discussion), 150–84 (edition of magical drawings, nos 48–61), 244–52, 258–61 (catalogue nos 166–275e, 330a, 330b, 330c, 331–37, 337b [?], 338–339a, 341–44, 345, 345a, 346, 347, 359). List not exhaustive: p. 227: 'In diese Zusammenstellung sind auch Zeichnungen in magischen Texten aufgenommen, ohne daß diese in systematischer Weise gesucht worden wären'. An example of a text that Horak has missed is *Suppl. Mag.* I 23, to be discussed below.

8 Brashear 1992, 44.

9 The text was first published by Martin 1928, with comments by Preisendanz 1928, and is included in Jordan 1985, 190 (no. 161). Note that the text was originally dated to the third/fourth century, but that in *Suppl. Mag.* I, p. 118 a date in the second century is preferred.



1 *Suppl. Mag. I 38 (P. Gen. inv. 269)*

the cat' (ταῖς θριξὶ τῆς ἐλούρου), and 'the forepart of the god' (τῷ προσθέματι τοῦ θεοῦ), to which the object of Ammonion's devotion – or perhaps rather of his lust –, Theodotis, daughter of Eus, is magically bound in order that she 'can never have intercourse with another man' (ἵνα μὴ δυνηθῆς ἐτέρῳ ἀνδρὶ συνμιγῆναι) and so on (the text becomes quite graphic here) except with him, Ammonion, son of Hermitaris (lines 1–6).<sup>10</sup> At the end of this charm, the words 'These are the figures' (ἔστιν δὲ ζῴδια ταῦτα, l. 13) are added, no doubt a remnant of the formula the scribe used, followed by drawings of what is mentioned in the text and a series of magical signs or symbols (called *characteres*).<sup>11</sup>

In their commentary, Daniel and Maltomini interpret the figures as follows: 'to the left, the god holding a staff; at his feet, the snake; to the upper right of the snake, the crocodile; at the extreme right, the cat (?); above the crocodile, two figures, presumably the ram (though we do not recognize it) and the woman; yet more magical signs and letters, and drawings that remain obscure'.<sup>12</sup> While it is true that the snake and crocodile are clearly depicted underneath the two figures and to the utmost right we probably indeed see the head of a cat (in profile), the interpretation of the two figures above the snake and crocodile is certainly wrong, for they depict the lovers kissing, as is confirmed by the recent publication of a similar graffito from the Athenian market dated to the second or third century.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the divinity with the staff to the left carries what appears to be a *wadj*-sceptre, and so most likely represents a goddess, which could well be Isis mentioned in l. 9, while the person to the right seems to be the god mentioned in l. 3 (though he lacks divine

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**10** In this article, translations of magical texts included in *Suppl. Mag.* are taken over, unless otherwise indicated. All translations of other texts are mine.

**11** On *characteres* see, for a general orientation, Brashear 1995, 3440–42, and the preliminary explorations of the material by Gordon 2011 and Dzwiza forthcoming.

**12** *Suppl. Mag.* I, p. 122.

**13** Hoff 2006, 179–81 (figs. 2–3). Cf. p. 181, where in his description of the Geneva lead tablet, Hoff identifies the figure on the left as the man on the basis of a phallus he sees attached to this figure and the one on the right as the woman based on an indentation that would indicate a vagina, but a close look at the photograph of the tablet (reproduced here as fig. 1) does not confirm this interpretation.

attributes).<sup>14</sup> Finally, at the utmost right, but to the left of the cat, I see a schematic representation of a ram with horns, and to its left a phallus.<sup>15</sup>

This short discussion demonstrates not only that figures form an integral part of magical texts, but also that – while some work has been done – they require a much fuller and more systematic treatment than attempted thus far.<sup>16</sup> Even if an exhaustive study of magical drawings cannot be attempted here, this article will take a first step in that direction, albeit a small one, by focusing on a well-defined corpus of magical texts.<sup>17</sup> In 2011, my colleague Theodore de Bruyn and I published a catalogue of 187 Greek (and Latin) amulets containing Christian elements from Late Antique Egypt.<sup>18</sup> This catalogue allows one to comprehensively study how Christian elements were introduced in an existing format, leading to a complex interaction between traditional (Jewish, Egyptian, Greek and other) elements and Christian ones, which may well be called ‘syncretistic’.<sup>19</sup> In this article, we shall discuss the figures found in some of these magical texts, with which I mean drawings properly speaking, not *caractères* or crosses, which are much more common. In addition to discussing how these drawings figure in relation to the texts, this article

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**14** For the *wadj*-sceptre, see e.g. Traunecker 1992, 58. I would like to thank Jacco Dieleman for discussion on this matter.

**15** Cf. similar representations of rams in graffiti from the Isis temple at Aswan, Dijkstra 2012, 53 (no. 26), 56 (no. 37), 58 (no. 45: ?), 59–60 (no. 50), with further parallels from elsewhere.

**16** Horak 1992, 55; Brashear 1995, 3443: ‘a corpus of *figurae magicae* is still as much a desideratum as ever’.

**17** Cf. now Martín Hernández 2012, who provides a survey of magical drawings in the *PGM*.

**18** De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011. The catalogue contains 186 entries, but in the postscript (p. 216) another text, which was published too late for inclusion in the catalogue, is added.

**19** De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011, 178–82. For the term ‘syncretism’, see most recently Bremmer 2010<sup>2</sup>, 41–42, with the references cited there. In scholarship the term has traditionally had the connotation of a mixture of a ‘pure’ Christianity with other elements of ancient religions, but Frankfurter 2003 has argued for a more nuanced and complex meaning of the term and has applied it specifically to religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt as ‘the creative, synthetic process by which any idea, symbol, or idiom is appropriated and embraced in a culture’ (discussion at pp. 340–44; quote at pp. 343–44). Within this context of a dynamic interaction between different religious elements, he also discusses magical texts, at pp. 378–79 and 384.

also aims to show how the syncretistic environment of Late Antique Egypt is reflected in these figures.

The choice to focus on Greek amulets with Christian elements means that other categories of magical texts from Late Antique Egypt, that is, magical drawings without significant textual component,<sup>20</sup> Greek amulets from Late Antique Egypt without Christian elements<sup>21</sup> and Coptic amulets,<sup>22</sup> for which exhaustive *corpora* are not yet available, have been excluded from consideration, though some of them will occasionally be referred to.<sup>23</sup> Having thus delineated the material, six magical texts remain, which will be divided into two groups, and will be discussed, within each group, in chronological order. The first group consists of two texts (*Suppl. Mag.* I 23 and 19) of which the drawings are more figurative, though – as we shall see – their role in relation to the accompanying texts is no less important than the other drawings discussed here. The second group comprises three texts containing human busts and figures (*PGM XXXV*; *P.Köln VIII* 340; *PGM P4*). We end with a text (*Suppl. Mag.* II 96A) that will be discussed as part of a group of papyri from a magical workshop containing several drawings of which the function is difficult to determine and thus categorize.

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**20** Brashear 1995, 3479, referring to Horak 1992, 55–58, 150–84 (already mentioned in n. 7 above).

**21** E.g. *Suppl. Mag.* I 10, dated to the third or fourth century and, like *Suppl. Mag.* I 19 and 23 to be discussed below, a healing amulet containing a drawing (see also n. 66 below, where this text is referred to). Cf. *PGM LXVI*, a spell dated to the third/fourth century with a drawing of two naked men (pl. IV 1), which has been assigned to the fourth–sixth centuries and is placed in a Christian milieu by Daniel 1991.

**22** For figures in Coptic amulets, see primarily Kropp 1930, 211–16, where he describes the figures in magical texts he has collected. Some further examples are found in Meyer and Smith 1994, 168, 173, 214, 219–20, 223, 242–43. See also Grumach 1970.

**23** Greek amulets containing Christian elements with a date that is definitely later than the seventh century have been excluded from the catalogue in De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011, and will also be excluded here. An example is *P.Laur. inv.* III/960, a Greek phylactery of the tenth century written on Arab paper with a version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, for the edition of which see Pinaudi 2001, and for the drawings Horak 2001, who discusses several other drawings on late(r) magical texts.

To start with *Suppl. Mag.* I 23, this text is a healing amulet against fever and shivering dated to the fifth century.<sup>24</sup> The text contains elements from the creed (ll. 1–6), followed by the healing incantation itself, which is meant for a woman called Kale (ll. 6–9). We then see two *characterēs* and in the centre a drawing in the form of a *stela*, in which are written the letters *sigma* and *êta* (several times). Left of the drawing the following text is written, ‘holy *stela* and powerful *characterēs*’ (ἅγια στήλη καὶ εἰσχυροὶ χαρακτῆραις, read ἰσχυροὶ χαρακτῆρες), and then a return to the healing incantation, ‘chase away the healing with shivering’ (ἀποδιόξεται [read ἀποδιώξατε] τὸ ῥιγοπύρετον) and so on (ll. 10–17).

In the first edition, the *stela* was interpreted as a real *stela*, to be set up in a temple, or as an Egyptian amulet *stela*.<sup>25</sup> The editors of *Suppl. Mag.*, however, have shown that στήλη in magical papyri means either ‘inscribed charm’ or ‘drawing with or without text’. The latter meaning clearly prevails here, as the parallels they cite underline: the first contains directions for a ‘*stela* of Aphrodite, in order to gain love, favour, success and friends’ (Ἀφροδίτης στήλη, πρὸς φιλίαν καὶ χάριν καὶ πρᾶξιν καὶ φίλους), by carving the drawing depicted below the text containing *characterēs* and *voces magicae* with a bronze pen in a tin leaf;<sup>26</sup> the second, from the same formulary, ‘a spell for restraining anger and bringing people in submission’ (θυμοκάτοχον καὶ ὑποτακτικόν), includes directions for writing, on a blank papyrus, ‘these names with the *stela*’ (τὰ ὀνόματα ταῦτα σὺν τῇ στήλῃ), which clearly refers to the drawing with *voces magicae* on both sides included below.<sup>27</sup> Daniel and Maltomini thus conclude that ‘the stele addressed is the one depicted between the two magical signs’.<sup>28</sup> While I agree with this interpretation, I think one could go even further, for besides its meaning of a ‘figure with text written inside’ (in this case), the actual drawing – unlike the

<sup>24</sup> First published as *P.Haun.* III 51, included in De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011, 192–93 (no. 64).

<sup>25</sup> *P.Haun.* III, p. 36, for the interpretation of the drawing as a real *stela* referring to *PGM* VIII 41–43 (fourth/fifth century): ‘your true name has been inscribed on the holy *stela* in the sanctuary at Hermopolis, where you are born’ (τὸ δὲ ἀληθινὸν ὄνομά σου <ἐπ>εγραμμένον <ἐστὶ> τῇ ἱερᾷ στήλῃ ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ ἐν Ἐρμουπόλει, οὐ ἔστιν ἢ γένεσις σου).

<sup>26</sup> *PGM* VII 215–17 (third century), for the drawing see *PGM* II, pl. I 1.

<sup>27</sup> *PGM* VII 940–51, with *PGM* II, pl. I 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Suppl. Mag.* I, pp. 65–66.



previously mentioned cases – is also in the shape of a *stela*, which is surely significant.<sup>29</sup>

The second text in this group is *Suppl. Mag.* I 19, another healing amulet against fever and shivering, this one for Amatis, daughter of Adone, and dated to the sixth century.<sup>30</sup> Since its first publication, the text has received important comments from none other than Louis Robert, who noted that in l. 9 the *nomen sacrum*  $\theta(\epsilon\omicron)\tilde{\upsilon}$  can be read, and William Brashear, who deciphered the first seven lines, consisting of *caractères* and the *voces magicae* *Damnameneus* and *Akramachamari* within a figure, though he could also not make progress with the reading of the *voces magicae* in ll. 8–14.<sup>31</sup> In the further improved text in *Suppl. Mag.*, Robert’s reading is taken over, but the editors remark: ‘the immediate context of magical words with bars above suggests that we are not dealing with a *nomen sacrum*’.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, this text was not included in our catalogue, though we discuss it in the introduction as an example of the problems involved in isolating Christian elements.<sup>33</sup>

To turn to the figure, Brashear described it as ‘a headless, armless, hour-glass-shaped figure with two wavy, serpentine lines for legs’.<sup>34</sup> However, it is clear from the plate in *Suppl. Mag.* that there are no legs sticking out below; moreover, the hour glass as found, for instance, in many graffiti from Egypt looks very different from the shape found here.<sup>35</sup> A more convincing interpretation is that we are dealing here with

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**29** I thus disagree with the translation of  $\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\lambda\eta$  by Preisendanz in *PGM* VII 215 (‘Aufschrift’), which seems to have been taken over by *Suppl. Mag.* I, p. 64, in the translation of our text (‘holy inscription’), since  $\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\lambda\eta$  is not just the inscription, but the whole drawing with text, which is, in addition, in the shape of a *stela*. It is best to render the term as ‘*stela*’, then, as in the first edition, *P.Haun.* III, p. 33.

**30** First published as *P.IFAO* III 50, where a date in the fourth–fifth century (?) is proposed; included in Horak 1992, 245 (no. 184).

**31** Robert 1981, 12; Brashear 1984, 65–66 (no. 7).

**32** *Suppl. Mag.* I, p. 51.

**33** De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011, 170 (n. 27).

**34** Brashear 1984, 65. Cf. Horak 1992, 245, who speaks of a “schlüssel-lochartige” *Textumrahmung*. *P.IFAO* III and *Suppl. Mag.* do not discuss the image.

**35** *Suppl. Mag.* I, Pl. IV. For the hour glass, see e.g. an Old Kingdom graffito from the Dakhleh Oasis (Kaper 2009, 174, 178 [no. 15]), 184 Late Period quarry marks in this form from Deir el-Bersha (Depauw 2009a, 206, 210, and 2009b, 94–95, 98, 99 [no. 1]), and a Roman-period graffito from

a *stela* in the sense of a drawing with text inside. In fact, Brashear used one of these, the ‘*stela* of Aphrodite’ mentioned above, to support his reading of the names Damnameneus and Akramachamari inside the figure.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, we have to assume that the figure is a magical *stela*. As to the shape of the drawing, I propose that it represents a *stela*, as in *Suppl. Mag.* I 23, though in this case one that – for whatever reason – is turned upside down.

Having discussed two texts with *stela* (or *stela*-like) representations, we move on to three texts with human busts and figures. The first of these is *PGM* XXXV, which is also not included in our catalogue, but in this case it should have been since above the text have been written seven crosses. They are not mentioned in the first edition published in 1912 by L. Cammelli in *PSI* I 29. In his 1925 re-edition of this text, Preisendanz notes the crosses, but only in the commentary, and he does not include them in his text,<sup>37</sup> and the same holds for the revised version published in *PGM*, where he notes about the crosses in the commentary: ‘Protective signs?’ and includes the text among the ‘pagan’ ones.<sup>38</sup> However, according to our criteria, the crosses are Christian elements and this text will therefore have to be added to our catalogue.<sup>39</sup>

The first editor dated the text to the fourth century (?), which Preisendanz corrected to the fifth century, but a recent palaeographic study confirms the fourth-century date, which makes it the earliest text in our group with figures.<sup>40</sup> The text is an amulet to obtain favour, power, victory and strength from everyone (ll. 16–17), and can therefore be called a *charitêsion*.<sup>41</sup> It contains Jewish elements, in particular the angels invoked in the first part, each responsible for their sphere of influence

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Elephantine (Jaritz 1980, 84 [no. F 16; pl. 29c]), the latter interpreted as ‘Brandopferständer?’.

**36** *PGM* VII 215–17. See Brashear 1984, 65–66, 1992, 50, and 1995, 3441.

**37** Preisendanz 1925, 214 (note at line 1: ‘septem cruces delinatae supra lineam 1’).

**38** *PGM* II, p. 160: ‘sieben Kreuze, Schutzzeichen?’.

**39** Cf. Merkelbach 1996, 71–79 (no. VI), who offers a new text and for the first time places the crosses above the text. However, his corrections to the *PGM* text are hardly an improvement.

**40** E. Crisci in Cavallo et al. 1998, 119 (no. 38).

**41** For *charitêsia*, see De Bruyn forthcoming.

(ll. 1–13).<sup>42</sup> At the end of the text (l. 30) a row with *characteres* follows,<sup>43</sup> below which two further adjurations (ll. 31–42), repeating elements from earlier on in the text, continue on both sides of three busts which are drawn in the middle of the papyrus.

Between the first and second head (ll. 32–35) the name Paulos Ioulianos is clearly written, which cannot be other than that of the possessor of the amulet.<sup>44</sup> So who are the three persons represented here? It could be that Paulos is depicted three times, but Preisendanz suggests another, more plausible option. In l. 26 (again ll. 39–40) Paulos is called ‘the third crown bearing master’ (κοιρ[ά]νου διαδηματωφόρου τρίτο<υ>),<sup>45</sup> which presumably refers back to the two persons with esoteric names, Albanathanalba and Akramachamari, mentioned in ll. 23–24, who allegedly had already received ‘good gifts’ (ἀγαθὰ δορήματα) from the divine powers called upon and whom Paulos Ioulianos invokes as precedents.<sup>46</sup> These three ‘persons’ may thus explain the three busts. As to which of them is Paulos Ioulianos – the first or the second person from the left – the busts are all of similar execution and it seems most likely that he has the most prominent position in the middle.<sup>47</sup>

42 *PGM* II, p. 160: ‘stark jüdisch beeinflusst’. For a similar text with a catalogue of angels, see Kotansky 1994, 270–300 (no. 52), with a collection of more parallels and discussion in the introduction. See also De Bruyn forthcoming.

43 Cf. Horak 1992, 247 (no. 212), who interprets the magical sign to the utmost left in the line of *characteres* as ‘Tier mit messerförmigen Stacheln und Rüssel (= Schwein oder Igel?’).

44 *PGM* II, p. 160: ‘für einen Paulus Iulianus’; p. 162: ‘die Name des Amulett-Trägers’.

45 Cf. R. F. Hock in Betz 1992, 268, who translates this phrase as ‘the three-crown-bearing ruler’.

46 *PGM* II, p. 162: ‘Der Zaubernde stellt sich als dritten neben die 2 Dämonen in Z. 23 f.’. See Fauth 1995, 95 and De Bruyn forthcoming, for further discussion and references. The spelling Ἀβαναθαβαλβα of *PGM* XXXV 23 needs to be corrected to Ἀβλαθαβαλβα, as found e.g. in *PGM* VII 1020, which results in the correct palindrome. Cf. Merkelbach 1996, 74, who in his text prints Ἀβλαθαβαλβα, whereas the papyrus has Ἀβαναθαβαλβα; for this name, see also Gordon and Blänsdorf, this volume.

47 Cf. *PGM* II, p. 162, who says that the first bust is ‘stärker ausgeführt als die anderen’ and suggests that this one is the possessor of the amulet, while the others are ‘zwei schützende Paredroi’. However, while some of the lines of the first bust from the left are thicker than the other two (nose

We next turn to *P.Köln VIII 340*, a protective spell, which dates to the fifth-sixth century.<sup>48</sup> Like the previous text, this one also has seven crosses above the text, in this case seven staurograms (fig. 2–3). The papyrus has the typical long and narrow shape used for folding the amulet; the top and bottom fragments do not join, though not much seems to be missing.<sup>49</sup> After the *incipit* of the Gospel of John (1:1–11; fr. A, ll. 2–33), in the second part of the text God – and the Theotokos Mary – are invoked to send ‘your angel of healing’ (fr. A, ll. 39–40, τὸν ἄγγελόν σου ἐπὶ τῶν ἰμάτων, read τῶν ἰμάτων) to the carrier of the adjuration and to chase away ‘every illness and every infirmity’ (fr. A, ll. 44–46, πᾶσαν νό[σον κ]αὶ πᾶ[σαν] μαλα[κίαν]), the well-known phrase from the Gospel of Matthew (4:23, 9:35, cf. 10:1) used in Christian healing incantations (fr. A, ll. 33–46).<sup>50</sup> After the break, the text becomes much more fragmentary, but it seems that protection is requested here against ‘every impure spirit’ (fr. B, ll. 4–5, α.αθ[.] [.]ον, that is, ἀκάθ[α]ρ[τ]ον?, πᾶ[ν] πνεῦμα), ‘the malignant eye’ (ll. 6–7, ὀφθαλμὸν πονηρὸν) and ‘a plot of men’ (ll. 7–8, ἐπιβουλή(ν) ἀνθρώπων, read ἀνθρώπων), so the amulet is protective not only against sickness, but also more generally against evil spirits and actions. The text ends with a *character*, flanked by two crosses and the *alpha* and *omega*, on the left hand side and a sequence of letters or *voces magicae* in a box on the right hand side (ll. 14–17).

On the back side a figure is depicted with his hands raised in prayer, or *orans*, who wears a simple, short tunic draped over both arms (fig. 3).<sup>51</sup> Text, which remains mostly undecipherable, is squeezed in on the avail-

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and eyebrows, and chin), it is doubtful whether this is significant. All three busts seem to have been drawn in much the same way.

<sup>48</sup> De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011, 190–91 (no. 45).

<sup>49</sup> For a more detailed description see *P.Köln VIII*, pp. 82–83.

<sup>50</sup> For invocations of Mary in Greek amulets, see De Bruyn 2012, esp. pp. 58, 60, where he briefly discusses our text, with a translation of fr. A, ll. 33–46 in the appendix (pp. 62–63). For the formula ‘every illness and every infirmity’, see De Bruyn 2008, esp. p. 69 for *P.Köln VIII 340*.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the representation of Theodosius I on the so-called ‘Alexandrian World Chronicle’ (Moscow, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 310), fol. VI v<sup>o</sup>, an illustrated chronograph dating to the second half of the sixth century, where the emperor wears a longer, belted tunic, though the position of the legs is similar. See now Burgess and Dijkstra 2013, with a description of picture 4 at p. 84 (pl. 2).



2-3 *P.Köln VIII 340* r<sup>o</sup> (left) and v<sup>o</sup> (right)

able spaces at the top, to the right and at the bottom of the figure.<sup>52</sup> According to the editor, Maltomini, the hand is different from the one on the front, though it is roughly contemporary, and the text also seems to be of a magical character. He thus leaves open the possibility that front and back are related in some way.<sup>53</sup> Such a connection seems all the more likely because the amulet on the front contains a prayer (fr. A, ll. 33–47, B, ll. 1–13), and one can expect, or should at least consider, a relationship of some sort with the *orans*, the figure of praying, on the back. Maltomini sees two more figures further below. Above is a head similar to the one of the *orans*, with long hair draped on both sides where the *orans* has ears, so a woman. Below her neck, he sees another head, this one consisting only of eyes (without pupils) and a vertical line to indicate the nose, which he connects to the raised arms and interprets as a second *orans*. In this interpretation, then, the two *orantes* are praying for the woman, for whom the amulet may have been intended.<sup>54</sup>

This interpretation is hardly convincing, however. Because of the great similarity between the first two heads and the proportions of the first and second *orans*, it is far more likely that the woman's head belongs to the rest of the second *orans*. The so-called third 'head' is executed very differently, does not have eyebrows, hair, ears or pupils, and is in the wrong position if it really belonged to the body. In fact, close inspection of a high-resolution image of the papyrus (Fig. 3) reveals that to the right of the two rounded shapes (the 'eyes' of the 'third' head), another rounded shape is visible, which clearly rejects the interpretation of a 'head' and indicates that the three rounded shapes, divided by vertical lines, rather belong to the woman's clothes.<sup>55</sup> In short, we have here just two *orantes*, a man and a woman. Since the text, at least what is left of it, only speaks of the user of the amulet invoking God (and Mary) to protect, not someone praying for him or her, it seems more likely that the two *orantes* represent the owners of the text. A good parallel is a bronze phylactery from Xanthos, dated to the fourth–sixth centuries (?), which contains (the upper part of) a man in praying gesture, directly above

<sup>52</sup> For the traces, see *P.Köln VIII*, p. 86 with commentary.

<sup>53</sup> *P.Köln VIII*, pp. 83, 94.

<sup>54</sup> *P.Köln VIII*, p. 94, followed by De Bruyn 2012, 60.

<sup>55</sup> Note that the line drawing included in *P.Köln VIII*, p. 86 is misleading, as it leaves out some important elements of the drawing and shows the 'head' in mirror image.



4 PGM P4 (*P.Oxy.* VIII 1077)

which is written the name Epiphánios, the bearer of the phylactery.<sup>56</sup> True, on the front side, our text speaks of the masculine αὐτοῦ (fr. A, l. 44), but the text is generic here, that is, not personalized, and the figures may have been intended to cover any kind of owner, male or female.<sup>57</sup>

The third and last text in this group is PGM P4 (fig. 4), which is perhaps the most ‘figural’ of all the texts discussed here.<sup>58</sup> It is an amulet against disease, written on vellum and dated to the sixth century, which contains the often-repeated words from ‘the healing gospel’ (ἰαματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον), Matthew 4:23–24.<sup>59</sup> The text is spaced out over three rows of five columns, shaped in the form of crosses, which in some cases are still indicated with a thin line around the text (as is the case with the column in the lower left corner, see fig. 4). The amulet is further

<sup>56</sup> Jordan and Kotansky 1996, 167–71 (figs. 2–3), esp. p. 170 identifying the *orans* as Epiphánios.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Suppl. Mag.* I 29.6–8 (fifth/sixth century, with commentary at p. 80), cited by De Bruyn 2012, 60 (n. 42), which uses the generic masculine formula τοῦ φοροῦντος (...) αὐτοῦ in an amulet intended for a woman, Taiolles, daughter of Isidoros.

<sup>58</sup> First published by Grenfell and Hunt as *P. Oxy.* VIII 1077, and included in the catalogues of Horak 1992, 247 (no. 206) and De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011, 186–87 (no. 19).

<sup>59</sup> See above, n. 50. De Bruyn 2008 discusses our text on pp. 66 and 79.

decorated with holes in diamond shape cut out of the vellum, and was meant to be folded. In the middle of the vellum, instead of a column a simple bust of a man is drawn, with eyes, ears and hair.<sup>60</sup> The image is comparable to the representation of St. Laurence on the so-called 'Berlin Chronicle' (*P.Berol.* inv. 13296), an illustrated *consularia* or consul list with historical entries dated to ca. 500 and also written on parchment, though our image has fewer details and no outstretched arms.<sup>61</sup> In line with the discussion of the two preceding amulets, it can be assumed that this is the person for whom the amulet was intended.

The last text that will be discussed here is *Suppl. Mag.* II 96A. It is part of a larger group of papyri, mostly in Greek but also including some *folia* of a miniature codex in Coptic and Aramaic fragments, dating to the fifth-sixth century and deriving from a magical workshop.<sup>62</sup> Only the first of the Greek texts, which are all formularies, was included in our catalogue, because it contains the name 'Christ' (l. 49, Χριστός),<sup>63</sup> but it is clear that the producers of these texts, written in three different languages, were using elements from different traditions, and thus they perfectly embody the syncretism of Late Antique Egypt we spoke of at the start of this paper.<sup>64</sup> The syncretism is also reflected in the figures that accompany the texts.

*Suppl. Mag.* II 96A starts out with a section with magical words, signs and drawings (ll. 1–48), followed by a series of short prescriptions (ll. 48–72). Above a man is drawn, with his arms down. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know what the role of this or the other figures is within the text, as the meaning of this section is mostly unclear.<sup>65</sup> *Suppl. Mag.* II 96B–F repeat parts of this formulary. The last of these (F) contains on fragment A an Ouroboros, which is a common figure in Graeco-Roman magical texts that continued to be used in Late Antiquity, and on frag-

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Horak 1992, 247, who thinks that the bust is a 'nackte weibliche Figur'.

<sup>61</sup> Burgess and Dijkstra 2012, 292 (Pl. XIII).

<sup>62</sup> These texts were all published together in *Studi classici e orientali* 29 (1979): the Coptic codex (and another Coptic fragment) by Pernigotti, pp. 19–53, the Greek fragments by Maltomini, pp. 55–124, and the Aramaic fragments by Marrassini, pp. 125–30. The Greek fragments were included in *Suppl. Mag.* II 96–98.

<sup>63</sup> De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011, 194–95 (no. 83).

<sup>64</sup> *Suppl. Mag.* II, p. 231.

<sup>65</sup> *Suppl. Mag.* II, p. 233, for some ideas. Cf. Horak 1992, 247 (no. 208).



ment B a human head.<sup>66</sup> In the next papyrus, *Suppl. Mag.* II 97, which contains three spells, a man is drawn with magical signs and letters above his head. The editors interpret the figure as an *orans* because of the raised arms, but it is not immediately evident whether this interpretation can be made, since the arms are folded above the figure's head and not stretched out as is normal with *orantes*. What is more, the text beside the figure demonstrates that it in fact represents a wax figurine in which the letters need to be scratched (ll. 12–32). Interestingly, the same figure is found in the Coptic codex, at the end of a series of invocations of angels, where the interpretation, however, is not as straightforward.<sup>67</sup> Finally, *Suppl. Mag.* II 98, fragment C has a drawing on one of its fragments, but the context is almost completely lacking so that an interpretation remains speculative.<sup>68</sup>

To conclude, in this article we have examined the figures that occur in our corpus of Greek amulets with Christian elements. Of the 188 texts in this catalogue (if we add *PGM XXXV*), only 5 texts contain images; and we discussed a sixth text (*Suppl. Mag.* I 19) of which inclusion in our catalogue is debatable. The relatively low number of figures in our corpus can be explained by the fact that the vast majority of papyri in the second and third parts of the catalogue (the 'probable' and 'possible' categories) consists merely of biblical or liturgical passages that do not require a figure, and so the number of figures in Late Antique magical texts may in reality be somewhat higher.<sup>69</sup>

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**66** *Suppl. Mag.* II, p. 252, referring for the Ouroboros to *Suppl. Mag.* I 10 (see n. 21 above), with further references on p. 28, and proposing that a radiate crown is depicted above the head. Cf. Horak 1992, 247 (no. 209), who interprets the head as 'mit gestäubtem Haar'.

**67** Cf. Pernigotti 1979, 20; Maltomini 1979, 97; *Suppl. Mag.* II, p. 253, who interpret both figures as *orantes*, with Horak 1992, 247 (no. 210), who more prudently speaks only of a 'Figur mit quadratischem Körper und erhobenen Händen, die hinter den Kopf geführt sind'.

**68** Cf. *Suppl. Mag.* II, p. 267, who see the figure to the left as having an animal head and the one to the right as a woman, the scene perhaps representing 'an attack by the figure to the left against the other', with Horak 1992, 157–58, 247 (no. 211), who interprets the figure to the right as horse-headed (perhaps Seth-Typhon?) and the one to the left as an animal (presumably a cat).

**69** For the distinction between the 'probable' and 'possible' categories in our catalogue, see De Bruyn and Dijkstra 2011, 172–73.

The syncretistic environment of these texts did not only become apparent from their contents, but also from the images. For example, drawings referred to as *stelae* – the first two texts discussed (*Suppl. Mag.* I 23 and 19) – are also encountered in earlier periods, as appears from the formulary with the *stela* of Aphrodite (*PGM VII* 215–217), dating to the third century. Figures representing the owner of the papyrus or persons mentioned in the text – the next three texts (*PGM XXXV*; *P.Köln VIII* 340; *PGM P4*) – are also found previously, as we saw with the love charm (*Suppl. Mag.* I 38) dating to the second century with which we started this article, and which has a picture of Ammonion and his lover kissing. At the same time new elements are introduced, such as the two *orantes* found in *P.Köln VIII* 340, a figure that has pre-Christian roots but became the predominant way to portray Christians in praying gesture in Late Antiquity, as is witnessed by the hundreds, if not thousands, of graffiti found in Egypt.<sup>70</sup>

What I also hope to have illustrated is that these figures, though never as common as *caractères*, have an integral role to play in magical texts. As such, they merit more extensive study than they have received thus far, not only by looking at the image in connection with a close reading of the text, but also by studying them in groups and comparing them with the wider repertoire of images available from graffiti and illustrated papyri, which will bring them more to the forefront of studies in magical papyri, and thus enrich our understanding of these fascinating texts.

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<sup>70</sup> For the pre-Christian origins of the *orans*, see the classic article by Klauser 1959. For graffiti of the *orans*-type, see Dijkstra 2012, 64–65, with reference to several sites in Egypt. At pp. 66 (nos 54: ?; 55), 69 (no. 62), 72 (no. 66: ?) four *orantes* from the temple of Isis at Aswan are published.

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 PHOTO CREDITS

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**Figs. 2, 3** Courtesy Papyrussammlung der Universität Köln

**Fig. 4** Courtesy Robert C. Horn Papyrus Collection, Special Collections, Trexler Library, Muhlenberg College

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JÜRGEN BLÄNSDORF

## **THE CURSE INSCRIPTIONS AND THE *MATERIA MAGICA* OF THE ANNA-PERENNA-NYMPHAEUM AT ROME**

In 1998–1999, Marina Piranomonte (Direttore archeologo coordinatore, Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Roma) excavated the nymphaeum of Anna Perenna at Rome (Piazza Euclide, situated in the quarter called Parioli). The research of the objects found there has proved many considerable findings, which now enable us to characterize the types of the curse texts of the find place.<sup>1</sup> The religious or especially magical nature of the various genres of the inscriptions has to be examined by philological as well as semiotic methods, because the huge amount of ancient curse texts and other magic objects are only a small part of the difficult and lengthy practices necessary for an effective malediction of personal enemies.<sup>2</sup> So we have to bear in mind that the objects and inscriptions found in various sites of the ancient world are incomplete in regard to the semiotic aspect.

The most information about rituals practised during a curse-action we find in Coptic and Greek papyrus-texts discovered in Egypt. They give exact instructions about what had to be done for banning a beloved person or for keeping illness away or to prevent counter-magic and determine the best times of the day, the secret places suitable for the ritual,

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**1** The first report of the excavation and the finds: Piranomonte 2002 and 2010. My publication of the inscriptions (in Italian language) is scheduled for 2014 or 2015. See also Gordon, this volume.

**2** On ancient magic cf. Brashear 1995; Graf 1996; Flint 1999; Gordon and Simón 2010.

the gods and demons to be invoked, the offerings to be brought. The defigens also learned the various magic actions like the correct way to stand or kneel and the maltreatment and the killing of the animal to be offered during the ritual. Finally it was most important to know the long and difficult curse-formulas and to accomplish them at the right time and place. Finally, instructions had to be looked for how to deposit the magic objects in rivers, springs, fountains or graves or in the



1 Beaker set inv. 475539



2 Bottom of the innermost beaker inv. 475539



basements of the house of the defixi or in the amphitheatre or stadium in order to paralyze the racers and their horses.<sup>3</sup>

Let us begin with the lead and copper tablets which certainly belong to the *materia magica* inscribed with curse texts, figures and magic symbols. Surely also the 27 lead beakers assembled to sets of three pieces and decorated by similar graphic signs are means of black magic (inv. 475539 (fig. 1 and 2), 475541, 475543, 475547, 475549, 475551, 475553, 475555, 475558). Four of these beaker-sets are nearly identical and are only decorated by the figure of Abraxas (see below) and the invocation ‘Αβλαναθαναλβα / Ablanathanalba’,<sup>4</sup> but there are no other texts giving individual information about the cursed person (inv. 475547, 475551, 475553, 475555). In spite of this, they can certainly be identified as means of a defixion by the curse-puppets found in them.<sup>5</sup> So for methodical reasons these puppets have to be highly indicative for the magic nature of the beakers although except only one of them (inv. 475542) they bear no inscriptions (fig. 3). These puppets are of special interest, as puppets found outside of Egypt were made of clay or ceramic or metal (lead or bronze).<sup>6</sup> The Roman ones are the first made of organic materials found outside Egypt.

## 1 THE DEITIES OF THE SANCTUARY

From the beginnings in the early Roman Republic until the first centuries of the Empire the cult of Anna Perenna obviously was not the place for magic practice.<sup>7</sup> Anna Perenna was a deity of vegetation, especially in springtime; her birthday (*festum geniale*) was celebrated on March 15,

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gager 1992, 18–21 about the deposition of magic objects.

<sup>4</sup> For the name, see also Gordon and Dijkstra, this volume.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Faraone 1991a on the history of the so-called voodoo dolls (private voodoo dolls 189–96) and a list of all of the pieces found in the ancient world (200–205); cf. Preisendanz 1972, 4.

<sup>6</sup> PGM IV 335–406. Gager 1992, 15–18; Brashear 3394 with note. 27 f. about the use of wax figures in Egyptian magic; Marco Simón 2007, 27 f.; Piranomonte 2010, 204–08.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pugliese Carratelli 1951 about the cult of Anna and her nymphs in Sicily, but he obviously did not find any signs of magic practices.

the first day of the Roman spring.<sup>8</sup> Ovid (*Fasti*)<sup>9</sup> tells about her joyous and boisterous festival and narrates two versions of the myth of Anna, the sister of Dido, who became one of the nymphs of river Numicus,<sup>10</sup> and a frivolous tale about Anna of Bovillae.<sup>11</sup>

From none of these texts we would have realised the new functions of the location proceeding from popular religion in late antiquity. The new finds of the figures and texts written on the beakers and lead and copper sheets enable us to conclude that it was never Anna Perenna herself, who was invoked for helping in defixions, but oriental gods and demons, especially Abraxas, who were transferred into the sanctuaries



3 Wax puppet inv. 475542

situated outside the walls of Rome.<sup>12</sup> As foreign intruders into Roman cults, they offered the possibility of performing magic rites and particularly curse-activities. The connection between the Roman and oriental cults were the nymphs who were present in both of them. Abraxas was regarded as the ruler of the year, the stars and the whole cosmos because his name – as well in the Greek version (Ἀβρασαξ)<sup>13</sup> as in the Latin version (Abraxas) consists of seven letters like the seven planets and, taken as numbers, symbolizes the 365 days of the year. In magic papyri and on magic amulets and rings this demon is represented as a cock with his head turned left, with a three-pointed crest, a big eye, two curly legs (*anguipes*), a long tail, a lance and a whip in his hands. In the sanctuary of Anna Perenna, Abraxas is represented in the traditional form, but with human feet turned outside.

The inscription Abraxas, as shown in the designs of five of the beakers, remained mysterious for a long time (inv. 475539, 475547 (fig. 4), 475551, 475553, 475555):

IXNOII or IXNOY

XNKΘ

ΘΘ

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**8** The *Fasti Vaticani* CIL XII 342, *Fasti Antiates* and *Farnesini* CIL XII 311 tell the festival of Anna Perenna was celebrated near the Via Flaminia ‘ad lapidem primum’ on March 15 – that is at the beginning of spring.

**9** *Ov. Fasti* 3.523–542; Bömer 1958, 179–92, quotes and discusses the literary testimonies mostly depending on Ovid (*Silius Italicus* 8.49–201; and some minor remarks by Varro, Martial and Macrobius, *Sat.* 1, 12, 6) and the religious interpretations of the legends; cf. also Piranomonte 2002; 2005, 88–90; 2006; 2010, 192–95 on the archeological remains and the mythic traditions of the cult.

**10** *Ov. Fasti* 3.543–660.

**11** *Ov. Fasti* 3.661–674.

**12** Literary testimonies and archeological research by Le Glay 1981 s.v. Abraxas. Cf. Audollent p. 499–516; Harrauer 1996, 31 and Barb 1957, 67–87; Marco Simón 1992; Michel 2004 on representations of Abraxas on magic gems and their meaning.

**13** The orthography of the holy names and the magic formulas is variable: *Abrasax*, *Abrasaxsax* usw., *Ablanathanalba*, *Ablanathanabla*, *Ablanatha Nafla* and others.



4 Lead beaker with inscription: Abraxas (inv. 475547)

Finally G. Németh<sup>14</sup> succeeded in explaining the letters as an acronym of the invocation of Jesus Christ, copied by a person not necessarily being a Christian: Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Ναζωραῖος ὁ Παιῖς / Χριστὸς Ναζωραῖος καὶ Θεὸς / Θεὸς Θεός.<sup>15</sup> The full name Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὁ Ναζωραῖος is attested in the Acts of the Apostles 3.6 and 4.10; but instead of παῖς he is always called υἱὸς θεοῦ, and παιδίον only in his childhood (Matthew 2 ff.). But when I checked the inscriptions again using a binocular microscope, I found out that Németh's interpretation proved exactly right. For at the end of the first line only once Π is written for παῖς, but three times Υ for υἱός. So by the modified invocation Jesus Christ was made a son of Abraxas – a heresy certainly, but attested by the Fathers of the church Irenaeus (*Adv. haeres.* 1.24.3 ff.), Tertullian (*De praescript.* 46), and Hieronymus (*Ep.* 75.3), who report that Basileides, an Alexandrian theologian of the second century AD thought Jesus was not the son of God, but of Abraxas! The Roman text is the first testimony of this heresy.

<sup>14</sup> Németh in Friggeri 2012, 168.

<sup>15</sup> Acronyms on a magic gem: Michel 2004, 122 Nr. 153: E X S (with abbreviation stroke above the letter) = Εἰσοῦς Χριστέ Σωτήρ; cf. Le Glay 2001 s.v. Abraxas Nr. 63: on the obverse Hermes with rod and tortoise, on the reverse ΘΧ, which means Θεὸς Χριστὸς or Θεὸς χθόνιος.

Near the figure of Abraxas we read six times – in slightly different readings – the palindromic word *Ablanathanalba* which is not a name of a deity but a magic invocational formula often used in series of other formulas for the invocation of deities or demons of exclusively oriental origin. So it certainly cannot mean Anna Perenna, but Abraxas.

## 2 THE TYPOLOGY OF THE INSCRIPTIONS

As far as the inscriptions are legible and understandable, we find only judiciary curses (*tabulae iudicariae*) and only once an erotic ban. The other types are lacking, especially the otherwise very numerous curses on charioteers (*tabulae agonisticae*).<sup>16</sup> Gager 1992, 116 ff. shows that except cases of lawsuits of heritage and ownership the tablets are written only by the defendant who frequently added curse puppets.

## 3 THE GRAPHIC COMPONENTS OF THE CURSE-INSCRIPTIONS

The most frequent non-verbal components of the defixion-objects are designs of manlike figures.<sup>17</sup> But because very often captions of these magic illustrations are lacking, the only evidence whether the figure means the invoked deity or the cursed person is the literal context.

The second group of components are the magic symbols and letter-like signs, the so-called ἅγιοι χαρακτήρες ('holy letters', fig. 5).<sup>18</sup> As far as they resemble Greek or Latin letters, they are qualified as magic signs by small rings added at the ends of the lines or at their crossings (so-called ring-letters). They were supposed to be holy and gifted with magic power. On the curse tablets they are often to be found at the beginning and the ending of the literal text, but also interspersed between or within the lines. There are already many essays discussing their exact

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**16** Cf. the list given by Gager 1992, 42 ff., who however adds the new group craftsmen'. Ogden 1999, 31–44 distinguishes 1. *litigation curses (including political curses)*, 2. *competition curses*, 3. *trade curses*, 4. *erotic curses*, 5. *prayers for justice*, cf. Nisoli 2007 for a typology of the Greek curse texts; see also Gordon 2012.

**17** Cf. Gager 1992, 5 ff. on the non-verbal components.

**18** Cf. Suppl. Mag. II 66, 92, 94, 96–98; PGM II 18 f, 26, 36 f., 130, 140, 170 f. 182, 188; DT 272, 276, 278; Brashear 1995, 3440–43.



5 *Characteres* on the curse tablet inv. 475565

meaning. Gordon, however, proved definitely that the *characteres* give only an additional power to the magic texts, but do not include a phonetic value nor any literal meaning.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Augustine, listing them in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.30.4 among other magical means, distinguishes them from the incantations realized by words: *Superstitiosum est, quidquid institutum est ab hominibus ad facienda et colenda idola pertinens ... qualia sunt molimina magicarum artium ... 75 ad hoc genus pertinent omnes etiam ligaturae atque remedia, quae medicorum quoque disciplina condemnat, siue in praecantationibus siue in quibusdam notis quos characteres uocant* ('Everything belongs to superstition that is invented by men for making and worshipping idols ... as for instance the activities of magic arts. ... All amulets belong to the genre, and the remedies condemned also by the discipline of the physicians, whether they consist of songs or certain signs called characters').

Equally non-verbal are the arrangements of letters in geometric figures, frequently arranged in the 'Schwindeschema' by which the same magical formula was repeated in the following lines by dropping always one letter at the beginning and the end of the line till only one letter remained in the middle of the writing space. On the Anna-Perenna tablets, there are some geometric arrangements of meaningless letters, but because they are very short, we consequently don't find the 'Schwindeschema'. In some of them, however, we find the so-called Ἐφεσια γράμματα, *voces magicae* ('Ephesian letters', 'magical words'), derived

<sup>19</sup> Gordon 2011.

from Egyptian, Coptic and Hebrew words.<sup>20</sup> Most of them are unintelligible, but at least they can be pronounced and certainly have an optical value giving more magical power to the surrounding text. Often long or short strokes are added in order to frame the text or the figures and to join them together to form a magical unity.

#### 4 THE TYPOLOGY OF THE DEFIXION OBJECTS OF THE NYMPHAEUM

The following list is mainly a typology, not the historical development of a basic scheme. The most frequent text components are the invocation of the deity with her name and her competence, the name and the surname of the cursed person, the reason of the punishment and its purpose and if possible the scheduled time. But the number and the order of these components are mostly optional. Some of them (except the name of the cursed person) could be omitted – even if they were indispensable for an effective curse – if they were pronounced in the prayer or if the real context of the curse ritual was thought to be sufficient for expressing the wish of the author of the curse.

According to the realisation of the single text components the forms and genres of the curse inscriptions are remarkably variable – which means they were mostly written by non-professionals or the petitioners themselves:

1. The basic form of the curse-inscriptions is the mentioning of the name (*nomen gentile, cognomen*) of the curse-victim (*defixus*). For exact identification of the *defixus*, frequently the name of the mother was added (*qui natus est de ...*) or that of the master or husband or lover. The name of the author of the curse (*defigens*), however, was nearly always omitted because in Roman law black magic was punishable.

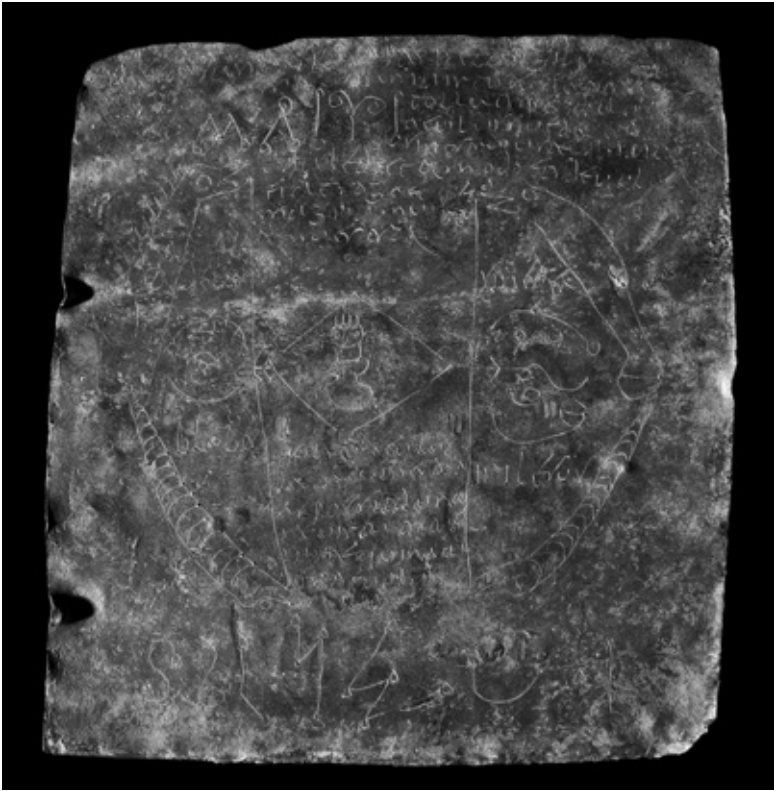
2. In seven of the tablets we find texts exclusively written in perfect sentences and containing the following text components: invocation of the deity called for help against the *defixus*, the name of the *defixus* in the accusative or in the vocative case, information about his crime, request for avowal, intended punishment (failure, paralysis, illness, death), hope for accomplishment, magic words, cryptic order of letters, syllables and words. Individual informations used to be less detailed in objects pro-

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<sup>20</sup> On the *voces magicae*, cf. Brashear 1995, 3429–38, who gives a complete list 3576–3603. For the *Ephesia grammata*, see now Bernabé 2013.



6 Curse tablet inv. 475566



7 Curse tablet inv. 475567



duced professionally. The reason probably is that the *defigens* was afraid to let others know that he practised black magic. The tablet inv. 475566 may be cited (fig. 6). The text is written in Vulgar Latin with vulgar orthography, short and paratactic sentences, but with a remarkable technique of cryptographic transpositions of letters, syllables and words. In this case, the *defigens* thought it was not necessary to express the name of the deities he invoked.

1. Faniu(m), (H)erculiu(m) et Fapricilianu(m) (h)oc divini et
2. (h)os accipi. vigent. depona(m) or depona(s).
3. (h)oc nume depomante etigautilese = hoc nomen deponam. et agite, ut il(l)e se
4. {na} bona nise(/i) nati(v)a.
5. et quo(d) petimus
6. et rimus que a te = et qu(a)erimus a te

‘Fanius, Herculus et Fapricilianus: (Do as I request in performing) this divine (ritual) and receive them (as a ritual offering). They are strong. I want to ban them (or: take them down below). And act in order that he shall [...] the property except the physical one. And what we demand and request from you.’

3. Text and magic symbols like the ring-letters mentioned above, Greek letters like N, Θ, Ω with horizontal strokes above them and often repeated several times meant that the letters are magic symbols. These symbols may be arranged above and beneath the curse text, or inserted between or in the lines of the text.

4. Text and manlike figures. Whether they are the god invoked or the *defixus*, can only be shown by interpreting the whole context of the magic object. The cock mentioned above certainly is a demon, a man bound by ties is the *defixus*. Other persons not characterized by iconographic details can only be explained by the curse texts.

5. Text, figure, magic letters and symbols. The most remarkable tablet containing all these components is inv. 475567 (fig. 7). Their arrangement and the order of crossing strokes show that at the beginning the graphic symbols were designed: in the middle part a head with eyes wide open and hair standing up and a body without arms and legs, framed by a lozenge. Then two round figures were added on the left and the right side, which seem to be eyes, the two words ‘left’ and ‘right’ written above the eyes, and two Coptic words beneath of them: *blobes* and *irilesus*. Near the borders of the tablet in symmetrical arrangement we see four

animals, resembling snakes, two of them with their heads up and with crests on their back, the others with their heads downward. As chthonian animals they were certainly added in order to support the magic power of the text.<sup>21</sup> Above and beneath this middle group two lines of big magic letters were inscribed. Finally the curse text was added above the designs and between two perpendicular strokes consisting of a remarkably long text.

The interpretation of this puzzling ensemble was difficult and led to various results. Finally, Edina Gradvohl, gynecologist and archaeologist at the university of Budapest, found out by comparing ancient magic gems that the limbless figure meant an embryo in the womb, and the lozenge the vulva.<sup>22</sup> This interpretation matches the curse text by which a very young ‘judge just born from a cursed vulva’ is derided and both his eyes, by which he was assumed to have seen too many things disadvantageous to the *defigens*, are cursed to get blind. Equally the two Coptic words refer to the act of seeing.

- 1 sacras san(c)tas ku(m) sup(er)is et angilis et quod
- 2 rogo et peto magnam uirtutem uestram:
- 3 tollatis pertolla{e}tis
- 4 oculus siue dextrum et (oculus = oculos)
- 5 sinisteru(m) Surae, qui nat(us)
- 6 maledicta modo e<st> de uulua.
- 7 fiat rogo et peto
- 8 magnam uirtu-
- 9 tem uestra(m).
- 10 tollite oculus
- 11 dextru(m) sinisteru(m),
- 12 ne possit dura-
- 13 re uirtus arbitri
- 14 Surae, qui natu(s)
- 15 est de uulua
- 16 maledicta.

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**21** Audollent p. 30: *Serpens nempe, δαίμων χθόνιος, saepe magicis artibus interest*, cf. p. 273; Wuensch 1897, 100–02.

**22** Gradvohl 2009.

(‘The sacred and holy (nymphs) together with the infernal gods and the messengers: what I wish and demand from your great virtue: remove, utterly remove the eyes, the right or the left one, of Sura, who just was born from a cursed womb. I wish and demand from your great virtue it shall happen: take the eyes, the right and the left one in order the virtue of Sura the judge may not persist, who was born from a cursed womb.’)

The defixion texts and their magic components resemble those found near Porta San Sebastiano and edited by Richard Wünsch in 1898, which he called *Tabulae Sethianae*.<sup>23</sup> They differ, however, from those of the Anna Perenna sanctuary by their length and the repetitiveness of the stereotyped invocation and curse formulas.

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**Fig. 1-7** Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma

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**23** The lead tablets of the Porta San Sebastiano are now dated in the period of 390–420; cf. Wuensch 1898 and recently Bevilacqua 2012, 602–16.

**DTA** cf. Wuensch.

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**Jordan** cf. NGC.

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ANNEWIES VAN DEN HOEK, DENIS FEISSEL, AND JOHN J. HERRMANN, JR.

## MORE LUCKY WEARERS: THE MAGIC OF PORTABLE INSCRIPTIONS

Magic is closely linked to luck, and good luck was a concept frequently evoked by inscriptions on late antique items of personal property.<sup>1</sup> Even by itself an augury of good luck can have a magical flavor, since an immaterial power is invoked. The subtle flavor of magic is intensified when the wish for luck is inscribed on a material artifact. The immaterial force can seem to enter the object, and thereby becomes a vehicle that acts upon the user. The object becomes personified as an ally who pronounces more-or-less hidden messages of encouragement. The power of these inscribed formulas can be further reinforced and focused by a reference to the user. The kinship between luck and magic becomes more evident when generic invocations of good fortune evolve into specific requests for help and when they are joined or modified by formulas or phrases that are overtly religious or magical. Supernatural powers are invoked or unintelligible incantations are spelled out. This paper collects a series of

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**1** This is an updated version of an article published as 'Lucky Wearers: A Ring in Boston and a Greek Epigraphic Tradition of Late Roman and Byzantine Times', *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 6 (1994) 44–62; also accessible at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20519762/> (consulted: 13/08/2013). We have incorporated over thirty new entries in the Appendix. Most of them are based on references in the *SEG*; in some cases we have tried to clarify the readings. Another new tool we used (not available before) is The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database [<http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/>]. We have included three inscriptions (Appendix, F 2b and G 2k: a ring and two belt buckles) that had not been fully published before. We revised and updated the text of the article but left the original divisions of the Appendix intact, while adding new inscriptions. We have replaced the original figures 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14 with new images.

late antique inscribed artifacts that progressively move from ingenuous and seemingly straightforward to more overtly magical. They are linked together not only by the wish for good things but also by the focus on the user of the artifact.

This study, which appeared in a first version almost twenty years ago, takes as its point of departure a gold ring in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston whose inscription had long remained untranslated because of damage to its lettering.<sup>2</sup> Comparison with other objects of its class, however, makes the reconstruction and the translation evident. The comparisons also make it clear that the ring contained a formula that was widespread and variable. These variations were arranged in groups in an appendix. In the intervening years many other examples have come to light and are added here.

The ring, which came to the Museum of Fine Arts in 1898, is an octagonal gold band with flat sides. Each of the eight facets is incised with two Greek letters (figs. 1a–b). The ring must originally have been much more geometrically defined. A gold ring from the British Museum is likewise eight-sided, and it has a similar, if simpler, inscription.<sup>3</sup> In this case, its facets are concave and meet at sharp angles, but originally the Boston ring probably had a similar crisp, geometric quality. The ring was purchased as part of a large group of objects from Edward Perry Warren, a dealer, collector, philanthropist, and expatriate Bostonian living in England. Warren transmitted the information that one of his friends had purchased the ring in Cairo from a Cypriot, who said that it had come from Smyrna. One might take this report at face value and assume that the ring had been found in western Asia Minor, making its way to the nearest major market. It is striking, however, that gold rings with analogous inscriptions are especially common in the Cypriot's native land.<sup>4</sup> Judging by other finds or reported finds of comparable rings, this piece could have come from a grave or from a buried hoard of objects of precious metal.

Simple octagonal rings along these lines have usually been dated to the third or fourth century CE, and there is some archaeological support for this chronology. Two octagonal rings in the Rhineland have been

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<sup>2</sup> MFA 98.803: see Appendix, B. For a detailed description of the ring, see Van den Hoek, Feissel, and Herrmann 1994, 41.

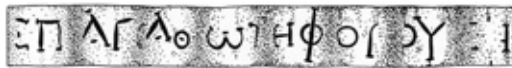
<sup>3</sup> See Appendix, A 3, Marshall 1907: no. 642.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix, A 1–4.





**1a** Gold octagonal ring with Greek inscription, 3<sup>rd</sup> c., from the eastern Mediterranean. MFA, Boston; H.L.Pierce Fund. 98.803



**1b** Inscription on the gold octagonal ring MFA 98.803

found in contexts that suggest a date in the third century.<sup>5</sup> Both have flat sides, and another octagonal ring with flat sides has appeared in a hoard of metalwork from Veillon, France.<sup>6</sup> The hoard can be dated in 266 CE or shortly thereafter from the literally thousands of coins it contained. The Boston ring could well date from the same century.<sup>7</sup>

Although it seems to offer no firm support for a more precise dating, the lettering of the Boston ring also has the flavor of later Roman

<sup>5</sup> Henkel 1913: nos. 10, 15

<sup>6</sup> Baratte 1989, 148–51, nos. 2.1 1, 2.12.

<sup>7</sup> This date appears on the file card in the Department of Classical Art. Jeffrey Spier also dated the Boston ring in the third century: letter of April 7, 1993.

Imperial times. As in many late antique inscriptions, some of the letters have the rounded form of cursive writing. This is particularly evident in the omega, and it must have been equally true of the epsilon. Another feature is the elongation of vertical strokes in some letters; the phi takes up the full height of the band, and the uprights of the rho and the upsilon run down to the lower margin. In the alphas, one diagonal stroke is elongated. The other letters are smaller and have comfortable margins above and below.

The principal difficulty presented by the Boston ring has always been translating the somewhat damaged inscription. In the past, only the first two words have been identified: ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ, "good luck." With the aid of comparable inscriptions, however, the full text can be reconstructed as: ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ τῆ φορούσῃ, "good luck to the one who wears (it)."<sup>8</sup> Since the article and the present participle in the second part of the formula are written in the feminine form, it is clear that "the one who wears it" was a woman. It should be noted how well the sixteen-letter inscription is suited to the octagonal format. Since its inscription runs around the band rather than being concentrated on a bezel, this ring could not conveniently have been a signet ring (used for authenticating documents and sealing containers), a type of ring discussed extensively by Roman and Early Christian writers, such as Pliny the Elder and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>9</sup> It also would not have served merely as an ornament or symbol of status; as its inscribed message makes clear, it was evidently intended to be a good-luck charm for its wearer.

Inscribing an invocation to an unnamed wearer, as is done on this ring, is puzzling from many points of view. As on modern-day wedding rings, rings were inscribed with owners' names; in antiquity, however, the inscription was often on the ring's stone. A carnelian intaglio in the Boston collection is a typical example of the later second century CE and is inscribed Κέρδονος, "of Cerdon", in mirror-writing, which would

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**8** The Greek verb φορέω, 'to bear,' 'to wear,' 'to carry,' is a frequentative of φέρω, implying repeated or habitual action, for example, wearing clothes, jewelry, or armor. In the Boston ring, the P in ΦΟΡΟΥΣΗ looks like an I (iota); there are other similar cases; in one, Ο ΦΟΙΩΝ stands for Ο ΦΟΡΩΝ, see Appendix, C 6b; in another inscription, it says: ΕΥΤΥΧΗC Ο ΦΟΙΩΝ, see Appendix, C 6a.

**9** Pliny, *HN* 33.6.26–28; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.59.2.

have been legible in the impression.<sup>10</sup> The ring belonged to the young man named Cerdon, who is depicted in the stone. Such an intaglio with both a portrait and a name was clearly made to order – or, at any rate, inscribed to order. Anonymous ‘wearer’ inscriptions, on the other hand, may well be the result of prefabrication; the goldsmith or gem cutter did not wait for his clients to dictate the desired text and specific name. Many of these objects are rather unpretentious and were presumably relatively inexpensive when made. Eventually, however, the mention of an unnamed wearer apparently became so established that it also came to be used on very luxurious objects that probably were special commissions.

An effort to assemble objects with similar formulas referring “to the wearer” has turned up a substantial number of examples. Some of these inscriptions have been mistranslated, and many others were unpublished; some have even been ignored altogether when the objects on which they are written have been discussed. The Boston ring can, thus, serve as a point of departure for the exploration of this neglected tradition of Greek ‘portable epigraphy.’

Inscriptions “to the wearer” are not only numerous, but they are also combined with a great variety of wishes or auguries. Furthermore, they continued to be produced over a long period of time. In many cases, as on the Museum’s third-century ring, the inscription is the most striking feature of the object. At other times the inscriptions were applied to very elaborate and ornate showpieces. Whether placed on simple or elaborate objects, wearer inscriptions have an extra reason for attention; due to the nature of the Greek language, they identify the gender of the intended customer, even though no specific name is given.

In the discussion and the appendix that follows, the wearer inscriptions have been arranged into nine main groups, which are indicated

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**10** MFA 62.1145; published in *Romans and Barbarians* 1976, 124, no. 139, but without interpretation of the name. [<http://www.mfa.org/search/collections?keyword=62.1145>] (consulted Sept. 4 2013). The ring was there dated to the middle of the fourth century CE. The image, however, can be compared to youthful portraits of the emperor Commodus (177–191 CE), and the stone could be a modest work of about that time. For comparably sketchy second-century portrait intaglios, see Spier 1992, nos. 329–331. The Uzman collection, from which the Cerdon intaglio came, was formed primarily of objects coming from Asia Minor and the nearby Greek islands; see Vermeule 1963, 4, 16–17, note 1, fig. 17.

parenthetically throughout the article.<sup>11</sup> The groups are based on their accessory content: that is, the wishes offered to the wearer. These wishes begin with auguries of good luck, as on the Boston ring, an early and relatively straightforward version of the formula. They move on to good health, long life, and favorable circumstances. Invocations of divine protection for the wearer also appear.<sup>12</sup> Some wishes mention specific or generalized evils against which protection is sought, and some formulae are coupled with overtly magical incantations, often consisting of cryptic letters, words, or names.<sup>13</sup> Many of these formulas may have emerged more or less simultaneously in late Roman times, about the third century, but new variations on the formula appeared in Early Byzantine times, from the fourth century onward.

The objects most commonly inscribed with invocations of good luck and protection are pieces of jewelry. Usually, the inscriptions appear on cameos and intaglios of precious and semiprecious stone that were used as bezels in rings, or as pendants, brooches, or amulets. As the Boston ring demonstrates, the metal of a ring could also be inscribed. Occasionally, the invocations are found on other types of jewelry, such as bracelets, necklaces, fibulae, medallions, decorative panels, and marriage belts. In addition, these inscriptions appear on objects that were not jewelry,

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**11** The groups are composed on the basis of epigraphic content, but the classification should not be taken too strictly, since many inscriptions could fit into more than one group.

**12** Studies by Le Blant 1896 and Bonner 1950 were of particular help in collecting material. The nineteenth-century work by Le Blant brings together a multitude of inscriptions on gems. He describes objects he saw in private collections, in museums, or at dealers in Paris and Rome. In other cases, he drew on literature, catalogs, and documents that sometimes go back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He also relied on reports of colleagues and collector-friends of his own time. The work by Bonner is also fundamental. In addition to recording a large number of magical objects, he gives much useful supplementary information. See now also The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database (<http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/>).

**13** It should also be noted that the opposite of favorable auguries could also be expressed in antiquity; some inscriptions invoke all the bad luck possible. Unlike the good-luck charms, these maledictions, or ‘curse tablets,’ were not supposed to be worn, but rather were hidden away or buried. Some of these stones have inscriptions like: Φθόνε and ἀτύχι, “envy” and “bad luck to you”; see Bonner 1950, 11, 97, and Gager 1992, 18–21.

such as a silver plate, a bell, a helmet, a pair of sandals, bronze medals, belt buckles, and small sculptures of bronze and stone.

Since most of these inscribed objects have come into private collections or museums from the art market, there is rarely any external contextual basis for dating them. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that many are quite simple and provide few stylistic clues. Their geographical origins are often equally obscure. When provenances are known, however, the objects are generally from the eastern, Greek-speaking provinces of the Roman Empire, as would be expected. A number, however, have been found in Spain, France, Germany, Austria, and England, areas where Latin had a dominant role in antiquity.

The first part of the formula on the Boston ring, ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ – literally “to the good,” that is, “to good fortune” – is a widespread acclamation in antiquity. It appears frequently on votive inscriptions and epitaphs.<sup>14</sup> For example, a lamp from Asia Minor carries on one side the letters: ἄπτε ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ, “kindle successfully”.<sup>15</sup> Many gold rings have only the expression “to the good,” without any accompanying address to the wearer (Appendix, A). In fact, the Boston example (Appendix, B) may be the only ring that adds another phrase to the ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ. The position of this inscription is also unusual. Most rings are inscribed on a bezel rather than around the hoop. The octagonal shape of the Boston ring is also uncommon in this context. Of the nearly fifty rings with the ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ inscription, only three are octagonal. Two of the three have the inscription circling the hoop.<sup>16</sup> As already noted, the Boston ring is similar to these inscribed octagonal hoops. The third octagonal ring has the inscription packed onto one facet as a kind of bezel.<sup>17</sup> As noted above, the majority of the ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ rings were either found or excavated on Cyprus,<sup>18</sup> and some of them are so small that they seem to have been made either for children or for the upper joints of the smaller fingers,

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**14** The phrase εἰσελθε ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ “come in with good fortune” appeared in a mosaic pavement recently uncovered in Hippos-Sussita in the Galilee, see <http://hippos.archaeology.csp.edu> (consulted Dec. 6, 2014).

**15** ΑΠΤΕ ΑΠΠΑΓΑΘΩ, see Le Blant 1896, 39, sub no. 89; also Miller 1879, 43–44.

**16** See Appendix, A 1, no. 588, and A 3, no. 642.

**17** See Appendix, A 6, no. 69.

**18** See Appendix, A 1–4; cf. Myres 1914, repr. 1974, 410.



2 Onyx cameo with inscription, 3<sup>rd</sup> c CE. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Antikensammlung, Vienna, no. IX B 105

a custom that is described in literary sources.<sup>19</sup> The frequency of such rings on Cyprus suggests the possibility that Boston's ring was made there, even though it was reported to have come from Smyrna. It could have traveled to Asia Minor in either ancient or modern times.

Comparable to the legend of the Boston ring is a group of inscriptions with a reference to the wearer in which the first two words – ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ – are replaced by εὐτύχ(ε)ι, εὐτυχῶς, or εὐτυχίης, words that equally express wishes for success and good luck.<sup>20</sup> This group (Appendix, C) is composed largely of cameos that apparently date from the

19 Cf. Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones* 7.31; Petronius, *Satyricon* 32.3; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.59.1.

20 Although the general purport of these words is similar, the grammatical forms are different: respectively, a verbal form, an adverb, and an adjective. For a listing of stones with various forms of this inscription, see Pailler and Guiraud 1992, 78–79.

third century.<sup>21</sup> On a sardonyx cameo in the British Museum, the legend is: εὐτύχι ὁ φορῶν, “may you, the wearer, be fortunate”, and on a signet ring from a sixteenth-century collection, the inscription reads, εὐτύχι πανοικί(ι) ὁ φορῶν, “may you, the wearer, and your whole household be fortunate”. An onyx cameo in the Content collection displays a slight variant: εὐτύχι ζήσαις ὁ φορῶν, “may you, the wearer, live with good fortune”; or, elsewhere: εὐτυχῶς πρόκοπτε ὁ φορῶν, “may you, the wearer, prosper in good fortune”. A sardonyx gem reads, surprisingly: εὐτυχῶς ἀπόκοπτε ὁ φορῶν, “may you, the wearer, cut off in good fortune,” but this may just have been an epigraphical typo.<sup>22</sup> Some gems have inscriptions that say: εὐτυχῶς τῷ φοροῦντι, “good luck to him who wears (it)”. The formula is essentially identical on the Boston ring, substituting ἐπ’ ἀγαθῷ for εὐτυχῶς (and changing the gender). Other objects simply state: εὐτυχῆς ὁ φορῶν, “lucky he who wears (it)”.

Some gems have inscriptions that echo this formula in a peculiar and truncated way, ὁ φορῶν: “the wearer,” (Appendix, D; fig. 2). It seems likely that the phrase had taken on an independent existence in which the overtones of ‘good luck’ still existed but without being fully understood anymore. It may even have been considered a kind of magical incantation. It is striking that the Boston ring is so far unique in wishing good luck to a female wearer.

Another group of inscriptions refers to the good health of the wearer (Appendix, E).<sup>23</sup> This formula was popular from the fourth to the seventh centuries. Here, the gender balance tips in the opposite direction. Two members of this group, however, wish good health to a male wearer. Both inscriptions appear on helmets. One is a spectacular piece set with

<sup>21</sup> See Henig 1990: XII–XIII. Most of these cameos probably date from the first half of the third century CE; see Spier 1993. 47.

<sup>22</sup> As argued by Robert 1967, 12, note 36.

<sup>23</sup> Similar wishes – directed to both men and women – occur on various objects; they say: ‘use it in good health’ rather than “wear it in good health” (using χρῶ instead of φόρει; see *SEG* 39.1089.1760–62; also *BE* 1990, 885bis and 1991, 710; the inscriptions occur on sixth-century bronze buckets). The catalog *Byzance* 1992 includes two bracelets (no. 75) and a ‘toothpick’ (no. 93) that carry these inscriptions directed to women; similarly, on a bracelet in Berlin (see Appendix, E 2a) and on a ‘toothpick,’ see Miller 1879, 39–45. On a nicolo (a blue and black banded agate) in the Content collection that depicts Eros and a duck and was used as a pendant, the reading is, again, directed to a woman, ὑγιένουσα χρῶ, “use (it) in good health.”



**3** Gold openwork bracelet with inscription, c. 400 CE. The Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis. 54:1924

precious gems from the Berkasovo treasure of Serbia, deposited not long before 324 (pl. 13a). In this case, the specific wearer is named: Διζζων ὑγιένων φόρι “Dizzon, wear (it) in good health.” The other side of the helmet records the maker of this masterpiece and gives some measurements of weight.<sup>24</sup> The other member of the group, was also found in the Balkans at Heracleia Lyncestis, Republic of Macedonia and has been dated to the sixth century. Its inscription reads: ὑγιαίν[ων] φόρει, “wear (it) in good health.”<sup>25</sup>

The objects for women in this category (Appendix, E) are many and varied; some are quite elaborate and splendid. On a bracelet (fig. 3) from Tartous, in Syria, dated from about 400 CE, the inscription says: ψυχὴ καλή, ὑγιαίνουσα φόρι, “pretty one, wear (it) in good health.” Similarly, on a marriage belt of the late sixth century from Balanea in Syria and now in the Louvre, the addressant is a woman. The belt itself consists of a chain of medals and medallions displaying a surprising mixture of paganism and Christianity. On the medals, heads of Tyche alternate with Bacchants, while on the medallions, the figure of Christ unites the hands of the couple. The legend is: ὑγιένουσα φόρι, “wear (it) in good health.” A chalcedony gem from Rome now in the British Museum names its

<sup>24</sup> Appendix, E 1b.

<sup>25</sup> Appendix, E 1a.





4 Chalcedony cameo from Rome with inscription, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE, British Museum, London. 1859,0301.101

owner and addresses her more emphatically: Στρατονίκη ὑγιαίνουσα φόρει ἀεί, “Stratonike, wear it always in good health” (fig. 4).<sup>26</sup>

A similar formula occurs on a remarkable pair of red leather sandals embellished with gold from Antinoe in Egypt. Only some letters of the word for ‘wearing’ survive; the inscription on one of the sandals reads: ὑγιένουσα φό[ρει], “wear (them) in good health.” The letters on – the other sandal, υραπιθα, could be read as a vocative: Κύρα Πιθα[...] addressed to the wearer, so that the entire message becomes: “wear (them) in good health, Lady Pitha[...]!”<sup>27</sup> Since 1994 a few more examples have turned up in the ‘footwear department.’ Surprisingly, a very similar pair of red leather sandals from late antique Egypt (pl. 13b) and now in the Leather Museum in Offenbach, Germany, shows the same inscription in

<sup>26</sup> Appendix, E 2g.

<sup>27</sup> Appendix, E 2c. The full name in Greek could have been Π(ε)ιθάνη (see, CIG III 6514b; IV 9467); if it were Egyptian, one could think of a name like Πιθαυις. For a similar vocative in a comparable wish for good health, see *SEG* 39.1761. In this group, where an imperative is used instead of a present participle to express the ‘wearing’ or the ‘using’, personal names occasionally do occur. Post scriptum: the discovery of the name ‘Pithane’ on another pair of sandals (see below) supports our first reconstruction; see Nachtergaele and Russo 2005. Nachtergaele and Russo expressed surprise of the appearance of the same (not very common) Greek name.



5 Wooden sole of a sandal with inscription from Istanbul, 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE. Karamani Pekin, MRY'06-4381



6 Sardonyx cameo with hand pinching earlobe, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE. The Content Family Collection

full length: ὑγιένουσα φόρι Κύρα Πιθάνη, “wear (them) in good health, Lady Pithane!”<sup>28</sup> The sandals which seem to be in excellent condition reportedly came from Deir el Banat, an oasis 50 miles SW of Cairo. The design and ornament are very similar to the previous pair from Antinoë and suggest the same workshop. Naming the wearer of sandals seems to have been relatively frequent in late antique Egypt. A single sandal also from Antinoë, excavated in the Northern necropolis, shows a similar inscription but with a different name; following the reconstruction of Nachtergaele, it reads: ὑγιένουσα φόρι Κύρα Μαρού, “Wear (it) in good health, Lady Marous”.<sup>29</sup>

During recent excavations in another part of the Mediterranean, in Istanbul, Turkey, another piece of inscribed footwear with the name of its owner came to light (fig. 5). Two birds and lettering along the outer border of the sole convey a cheerful message to its wearer: Ὑγιένουσα χρῶ Κύρα Καλεί (= Καλή), ἡλαρι (= ἰλαρη = ἰλαρά) ὑπάρχουσα ἐπένισε (= ἐπένδουσαι ?), “use (it) in good health, Lady Kalè; put it on again in good spirits”.<sup>30</sup>

All kinds of other traditional wishes are used in combination with a reference to the wearer (Appendix, F). Formulas such as, χάρις ‘grace’ or ‘favor,’ and (ε)ἴλεως, a wish for ‘favorable’ circumstances, occur, as on a gold ring excavated in a tomb in Meroe, Sudan by the Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>31</sup> On a ring from Palestine is written: ἡ χάρις τῆ φορούση, ‘grace (be) with her who wears (it),’ and on a cameo (fig. 6) in the Content collection, probably found in Syria, the reading is: ἔστω ἡ χάρις τῷ φοροῦντι, ‘may grace be with him who wears

<sup>28</sup> See Nachtergaele and Russo 2005. Appendix, E 2d. For the alternation of κυρία and κύρα (as well as for the masculine κύριος and κυρός), see Fournet and Gascou 2001, 146, note 35. This feature is comparable to the change in later Latin from *dominus* to *domnus* or *domina* to *domna*.

<sup>29</sup> Appendix, E 2e.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix, E 2f; dated 5th–7th c.; length 25.5 cm.; reading proposed by Denis Feissel. The proper name of Lady Καλή, sometimes even spelled in Greek as the compound noun Κυρακάλη (“Kyrikalè”), is particularly known from Egypt. For other examples, such as Κυραπαντώ, see Fournet and Gascou 2001, 147–48; two of these are Jewish.

<sup>31</sup> MFA 24.528; [http://www.mfa.org/search/collections?keyword=24.528] (consulted Sept. 4, 2013). The ring inscribed with the words ἡ χάρις has been published in Dunham 1963, 168–70, fig. 122f. For χάρις in magical papyri and on amulets, see Robert 1981, 42–44.



**7a** Silver ring engraved with lion and bear with inscriptions, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE. MFA, Boston; gift of Mrs. Claude-Claire Grenier. 2005.291

(it).<sup>32</sup> An unusual octagonal silver ring with a reversible bezel from the Early Byzantine period is engraved with a lion and bear; they are labeled in mirror writing, as ΑΡΚΟΣ, ἄρκος “bear” and ΛΕΩΝ, λέων “lion” (figs. 7a–b).<sup>33</sup> Around the bezel an additional inscription reads in conventional script: ΧΑΡΙCΝΙΚΗΤΩΦΟΡΟΥΝΤΙ, χάρις, νίκη τῷ φοροῦντι, “grace, victory to the wearer!” Around the loop is written: ΜΟΝΟCΙΧΛΘΑΧΑΠΙΝΛΑΒΩΝΕΝΙΚΗCΑ, μόνος (ε)ισήλθα χάριν λαβῶν ἐνίκησα, “I entered alone; receiving grace I was victorious”.<sup>34</sup> It is conceivable that the owner of the ring was a successful *venator* or *bestiarius*. The images of the bear and lion may also have had cosmological significance.<sup>35</sup>

Both a man and a woman are addressed on a silver plate that may have originated in Syria. The inscription starts with a lengthy magical

**32** Appendix, F 2a.

**33** Appendix, F 2b. Both forms of ἄρκος and ἄρκτος occur; ἄρκος is common in biblical texts and inscriptions.

**34** MFA 2005.291. The ring was auctioned at Christie’s (Auction 1445, Dec. 9, 2004, lot 176) and donated to the MFA shortly thereafter by Mrs. C.-C. Grenier. See Kondoleon (ed.) 2008: 123; also <<http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/ring-engraved-with-a-lion-and-a-bear-466589>> (consulted 24 Aug. 2013).

**35** See Kondoleon 2008, 123.



7b Inscription around the bezel

incantation addressed to Iao (3x), Sabaoth Adonai, after which formulas of abracadabra follow. The archangels Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Suriel, and Gabriel are also entreated; the inscription ends in an inclusive way: εἴλεως ἔσται τῷ φορο[ῦν]τι [καὶ] τῇ φορούσῃ, “it will (hopefully) be favorable to him and her who carries (it).”<sup>36</sup> A magical intaglio (figs. 8 a–b) in the Museum of Fine Arts (like the octagonal ring, bought in Smyrna) is related to this group and sends the touching message of a caring parent across the centuries: εἴλεος τῇ ἐμῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τῷ ἐμοῦ τέκνῳ, “(may it be) favorable for me and my children.”<sup>37</sup>

A number of inscriptions ask to be favorable to the bearer and at the same time make an appeal to divinities of Graeco-Roman Egypt. On a paste cameo in the British Museum, the acclamation reads: εἷς Ζεὺς Σάραπις, followed by ἴλεως τῷ φοροῦντι, “One Zeus Sarapis, may (you) be favorable to him who wears (it).”<sup>38</sup> The monotheistic expression ‘One

<sup>36</sup> Appendix, F 4a.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix, F 4c. MFA 01.7556; see Bonner 1950, 19–20, 152, 292, no. 234, pl. 11; *Romans and Barbarians* 1976: no. 78. [<http://www.mfa.org/search/collections?keyword=01.7556>] (consulted 6 Sept. 2013). Bonner’s interpretation of the figure as Seth (rather than Abraxas or Heliorus) still seems correct.

<sup>38</sup> Appendix, F 4b. Cf. a double-sided cameo in Paris, Babelon 1897: no. 355. For the expression ‘One God,’ see Peterson 1926, 208ff.; Bonner 1950, 174–75; Versnel 2011, 296–301. See also the discussion of the inscription



**8a** Rock crystal amulet; obverse lion-headed divinity (Seth), 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE, Asia Minor (?). MFA, Boston; purchased by contribution. 01.7556

God’ is often related to Jewish and Christian traditions, but it also occurs in a pagan context. When used as an epithet of a pagan God – as here with Sarapis and elsewhere with Helios, Asklepios, Hades, Mithra, Men, Aion – ‘One’ expresses the great power of the deity rather than a monotheistic association.

Comparable with the previous inscription is one that appears on a two-sided hematite amulet with elaborate representations centered on Harpocrates and Sarapis. An experienced eye is needed to decipher the inscription, since the first part consists of magical gibberish: βαλακαμσθομβλη, ‘balakamsthombly,’ and half of the letters of the second part are missing, ιν τω φορυν; this can be reconstructed as: <δὸς χάρις> ιν τῷ φοροῦν(τι), “may you grant favor to the wearer.”<sup>39</sup> An especially remarkable inscription appears on an emerald figurine of Harpocrates: Μέγας Ὡρος Ἀπόλλων Ἄρποκράτης εὐίλατος τῷ φοροῦντι, “Great Horus, Apollo, Harpocrates (be) merciful to the bearer.”<sup>40</sup> It is as if the accumulation of divine names reinforces the magical strength of the small object. Horus, who as the Egyptian God with the

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Μέγα τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Σάραπισ, “great is the name of Sarapis” on an intaglio in the Content collection by Henig 1990, 34 and note 11.

<sup>39</sup> Appendix, F 3c.

<sup>40</sup> Appendix, F 5.



**8b** Reverse of rock crystal amulet with inscription. MFA 01.7556

falcon head represents the cosmic light, is identified with the Greek god Apollo, while Harpocrates is one of the youthful personifications of Horus.

So far, only the helmet from Herakleia, the marriage belt from Balanea (both of which are Christian), and the three ‘Egyptian’ objects reveal religious connections. All the others leave us uncertain whether the wearers were adherents of Graeco-Roman cults, followers of Isis or Mithras, or connected with Jewish, Christian, or Gnostic beliefs.<sup>41</sup> Uncertainties are reduced in the inscriptions of the following group, in which words such as Κύριε, “Lord,” and βοήθει, “help,” are combined on a great multitude of objects with unmistakably Christian images or symbols (Appendix, G). The invocation of ‘Lord’ can also be substituted by other names in the vocative, such as One God, Jesus Christ, the Virgin, or any of the archangels and angels; in addition, this kind of appeal for support can also be addressed to a magical seal, such as the Seal of the living God or of Solomon. Most of these objects are unlikely to be earlier than the fourth century, and many date far into the Byzantine period.

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<sup>41</sup> It should be noted, however, that wearers of amulets were not necessarily connected with the religious intentions expressed on the stones, see Bonner 1950, 18.



**9a** Gold medallion (obverse) with Adoration of the Magi and inscription, 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE. British Museum, London, 1983,0704.1

A splendid gold medallion (fig. 9 a–b) in the British Museum shows on the obverse the Virgin and child seated to the right with the three magi in oriental costume approaching from the left.<sup>42</sup> A star shines prominently above the Virgin’s head, while an angel hovers over the scene. The inscription below is introduced by a cross and reads: *Κύριε βοήθῃ τῆ φορούσῃ ἀμήν*, “Lord, help her who wears it, amen.” The other side of this imposing artifact shows an elaborate Ascension scene with Christ posing in a Mandorla supported by angels, with the Virgin and apostles standing below; this side has also an inscription referring to a gospel text (John 14, 27). In contrast, a bronze snake bracelet (fig. 10), dated to the sixth century, is not only simple but has a strikingly traditional or even pagan flavor, although the inscription with its crosses clearly identifies it as a work for Christians. Like the medallion, it reads: *Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τῆ φορούσῃ*, “Lord help her who wears (it).”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Appendix, G 1g.

<sup>43</sup> Appendix, G 1a.





**9b** Gold medallion (reverse) with Ascension of Christ and inscription, 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE. British Museum, London, 1983,0704.1

The sixth and seventh centuries seem to represent a flowering of elaborate and splendid jewelry with this kind of inscription. One of the most spectacular examples is the pectoral from the former von Gans collection, now in Berlin.<sup>44</sup> It is among the most imposing objects of personal adornment of its time (early seventh century). The inscription appears on both sides of its central medallion: *Κύ(ριε) βοήθι τῆ φορούσα*, “Lord help her who wears (it).” This formula also appears in the openwork band of a ring with a projecting bezel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.<sup>45</sup> The bezel itself has an incised image of the enthroned Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. This splendid ring can be dated to the seventh century. An invocation of the Virgin appears on a seventh-century gold plaque with intricate foliate and bird ornament in the Walters Art Gallery. This piece of jewelry might have been sewn onto

<sup>44</sup> Appendix, G 1b.

<sup>45</sup> Appendix, G 1c. MMA 17.190.1654. <<http://metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/464059>> (consulted 6 Sept. 2013). A similar ring is published in Orsi 1910, 66–67 (see Appendix, G 3c).



**10** Bronze bracelet from Olympia with inscription, 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE National Archaeological Museum, Athens. 6299



**11** Bronze belt buckle with inscription, late 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE. David G. Mitten collection



**12** Bronze belt buckle with inscription, late 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE. David G. Mitten collection

a cloth or band as an accessory to a woman's dress.<sup>46</sup> The inscription runs along the 'arch' and 'lintel' of the rounded end and reads: θεωτόκη βωέθι τῖ φορούσα, "Mother of God help her who wears (it)."

The male variant of this formula: Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τῷ φοροῦντι, "Lord help him who wears (it)," is very common and appears on many rings, ring stones, pendants, and crosses, many of which have additional magical signs or formulae. The usual dative can be replaced by the genitive or the accusative and the use of the latter two cases becomes particularly frequent in later times.<sup>47</sup> The accusative, mostly on rings, continues to appear throughout Middle and Late Byzantine periods. The inscriptions of this group (Appendix, G 2) are in the masculine form and are often severely abbreviated and scrambled; some are written in a continuous loop on the bezel of the ring. A bronze belt buckle datable in the fourth or fifth century CE, simply reads: Κύριε βοήθισον τοῦ φοροῦντι, "Lord, help him who wears (it)."<sup>48</sup> A nearly identical buckle in the same collection lacks an address to the wearer and uses a phrase with strong biblical and liturgical overtones: εὐλογειτὸς Κύριός μου, "blessed (be) my Lord" (figs. 11–12).<sup>49</sup>

One magical inscription, combining a reference to gods of Egypt with an incomprehensible incantation, has already been mentioned.<sup>50</sup> Others combine favorable wishes to the wearer with other material that is mildly or overtly magical (Appendix, H). Some of these inscriptions are rather picturesque and contain bizarre, unintelligible, and occasion-

<sup>46</sup> Appendix, G 1d. <<http://art.thewalters.org/detail/17344/dress-ornament/>> (consulted 6 Sept. 2013). See Yeroulanou 1988, 2–10.

<sup>47</sup> Remarkable Byzantine graffiti in caves on the south coast of Tinos show a great number of 'βοήθει' inscriptions; the dative is used in two, the accusative in two, and the genitive in twenty-six. On these graffiti and the evolving usage of cases, see Feissel 1980, 477–518, esp. 513; and Feissel 1983, 217.

<sup>48</sup> Appendix, G 2k, unpublished; in the collection of David G. Mitten, Cambridge, Mass. The imperative βοήθισον modifies either the genitive or the dative, but some inscriptions are known in which both cases appear simultaneously (solecism), see in group F 3d; G 2j, k, l, o; H 2c.

<sup>49</sup> Appendix, G 2k, unpublished; in the collection of David G. Mitten, Cambridge, Mass. For the biblical and liturgical background, cf. Gen. 24, 27; Ps. 67, 19; 143, 1 (and *passim*); Luke 1, 68; and Basil, *Liturgia (recensio breviar vetusta)*, PG 31.1649, l. 55.

<sup>50</sup> See above, on a two-sided hematite amulet with elaborate representations centered on Harpocrates and Sarapis (Appendix, F 3c).

ally almost unpronounceable sounds, such as one on an oval carnelian gem (fig. 13): σαλαμαξα βαλαιζα αματροπαθειρ Ιαω Ιαω σῶζε τὸν φοροῦντα τοῦτο τὸ φυλακτήριον, “salamaxa, balaiza, amatropatheir, Iao, Iao, save him who wears this amulet.”<sup>51</sup> The magical character is reinforced by the image on the gem – a snake with its tail in its mouth (an ouroboros). Some amulets name specific evils against which the wearer is to be protected.

A large number of these amulets had to do with disabilities or diseases.<sup>52</sup> An oval hematite amulet has Horus and the letters ΙΩΦΡΗ (containing the theonym Phre-Ra) on one side and an inscription against respiratory problems on the other: .ραθ Αωρ [. .]ριε, παῦσο[ν] τὴν δύσ[π]νοϊαν τ[ῆς] φορούσ[η]ς ἢ τοῦ φο[ρ]οῦντες (l. φοροῦντος). “Arath Aor, (Lord ?), stop the difficulty in breathing (dyspnoea) of the woman or man who wears (the amulet).”<sup>53</sup> The deity addressed here may be a combination of two divine beings brought into a single theonym, as read by the *SEG*, or a divinity by the name of Rathaor, as Chris Faraone has suggested.<sup>54</sup> A different health problem turns up on an Athenian amulet of greenish black jasper referring to a demon named from hydrophobia, horror of water, caused, as some literary texts say, by the bite of a mad dog. The amulet reads: φύγε δαίμων ὑδροφόβα ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντος τοῦτο τὸ φυλακτήρι(ο)ν, “flee, demon Hydrophobas, from him who wears this amulet.”<sup>55</sup> On a green stone in Hildesheim, Germany, the legend is: ὄλεθρον καὶ πύρηθρον φύγε ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντος τὸ φυλακτήριον τοῦτο, “plague and fever, flee from him who wears this amulet.” Only part of this phrase occurs on a bronze plaque, namely: ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντος, “from him who wears (it).”<sup>56</sup> It seems likely that this truncated version, like the formula ὁ φορῶν, “the wearer,” on the

**51** Appendix, H 1a.

**52** Amulets exist to fight problems with digestion, colics, fever, eye diseases, leg problems, sciatica, childbirth, or mental disorders. This tradition is in a sense long-lived, for even in present-day Greece, one can buy little metal plaques that show parts of the body – eyes, legs, arms, breasts – or women, men, or houses (whatever the desired objects may be) to hang as votives in church.

**53** Appendix, H 1d.

**54** *SEG* 53.2109; Faraone 2007, 158–59.

**55** Appendix, H 2a. LSJ, s. v. ὑδροφοβία. This disease, which was thought to be the result of demonic possession, apparently went far beyond the fear of water.

**56** Appendix, H 3.



13 Oval carnelian amulet with inscription enclosed in an ‘ouroboros,’ Bonner 1950: 248, no. 271

third-century cameo (fig. 2), had the value of a venerable magical formula for the ancient wearer.

One distinct group of amulets may be intended for some kind of protection of the *hystera*, the womb.<sup>57</sup> The group does not have a particular form of amulet – they come in many shapes and materials – but is distinguished by the character of its inscription.<sup>58</sup> The amulets often include words like *ύστέρα*, *μελάνη*, *μελανωμένη* ... (“womb, black, blackening” ...). A round face with a variable number of snake-headed tentacles usually accompanies these inscriptions. The identification of the image, which resembles the head of the Gorgon, remains disputed. Only some members of the *hystera* group have wearer inscriptions, and all five included here have Christian elements; the inscriptions not only address female but also male wearers.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of magic and the imagery of the womb, see Faraone 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Spier 1993b, 25–62, plates 1–6.

<sup>59</sup> Appendix, G 1f (2x for women), 3d (1x for a woman), 4o (2x for men).



**14** Bronze amulet (reverse): above, Christ in majesty; below, inscription, lion and scorpion; sixth or seventh century, from Syria. Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, KM 26119



**15** Sardonyx cameo with inscription, third century CE (including setting). Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris, Babelon 1897: no. 350

An intaglio, apparently from Egypt because of its image of Horus and two crocodiles, has the peculiar inscription: ακριμακραγετα Κύριε βοήθι καὶ διαφύλαξον τὸν φοροῦντα ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔρπετοῦ, “akrimakrageta, Lord help and protect him who wears this from every creeping thing.”<sup>60</sup> The creature from which the wearer had to be protected could, in general, be any animal that goes on all fours, but would more likely be a snake or scorpion. It could also metaphorically stand for evil.<sup>61</sup> Protection from evil in general is often the purport of these inscriptions, as can be read on the reverse of a bronze medal (fig. 14), probably of the sixth or seventh century, in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology: + σφραγὶς θεοῦ ζῶντος φύλαξον ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ τὸν φοροῦντα τὸ φυλακτήριον τοῦ(το), “seal of the living God, keep the wearer of this amulet away from all evil.”<sup>62</sup> The images of this seal are an unusual juxtaposition of an iconic Christian composition with magic signs, and ferocious animals not normally admitted into such an august setting. Above, Christ is enthroned in a mandorla and surrounded by symbols of the four Evangelists, while below are the inscription, a row of enigmatic signs, and a lion and a scorpion. The animals of the lowest register presumably symbolize the evil mentioned in the inscription.

The Museo Borgiano in Velletri (south of Rome) has a rock crystal that is covered with magical words and vowels; one intelligible sentence appears: φύλαξον τὸν δεῖνα τὸν φοροῦντα τὸ φυλακτήριον ττ.. το αφαρτη (l. ἀπάρτι), “guard so and so, who wears this amulet, just now.”<sup>63</sup> The reference to a mister ‘so and so’ is not uncommon; it may be that when the anonymous owner of this gem recited the formula, he would substitute his own name for ‘so and so.’ Therefore, a place to fill in the name had already been provided by the craftsman when he prefabricated this amulet. What makes it unusual is the doubly anonymous phrasing of mister ‘so and so’ and the unspecified wearer. This may simply be combining two formulas of prefabricated jewelry. On the other hand, the doubling may suggest that anonymity had a value in magical incantation.

Finally, a number of stones mentioning courtship and love include a reference to the wearer (Appendix, J). On a small black stone with

<sup>60</sup> Appendix, H 4a.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, κακὸν ἔρπερτόν πρᾶγμα, “an evil creeping thing,” in *Pap. Oxyr.* 1060. 7 (sixth century).

<sup>62</sup> Appendix, H 4c.

<sup>63</sup> Appendix, H 4f.

a winged Eros, the legend on the reverse is: δὸς τὴν ψυχὴν ἐμοὶ τῷ φοροῦντι Σεκουνδίλλης, “please, give her, Secundilla, to me, the wearer.”<sup>64</sup> In this case, the wearer stays anonymous while the object of his love is clearly defined. Other love charms are not so clear or straightforward. Two almost identical inscriptions mentioning the wearer may illustrate how richly developed, yet cryptic, some of them are. One, on a sardonyx cameo (fig. 15) in Paris, dated to the third century, says in iambic meter: οὐ φιλῶ [ῶ σε] μὴ πλανῶ νοῶ δὲ καὶ γελῶ εὐτυχῶς ὁ φορῶν ζήσῃσι πολλοῖς χρόνοις, “I do not love you, don’t fool yourself, I understand and I laugh, may you, the wearer, live many years in good fortune.”<sup>65</sup> This phrase is a strange combination of disparagement with compliment, as some scholars have remarked.<sup>66</sup> The meaning of this kind of inscription has been variously interpreted. It has been suggested that the gems were used as a charm against the evil eye or that they were composed in connection with men and courtesans or older men and young female fortune hunters.<sup>67</sup> The wearers were men, at least in the two above-mentioned inscriptions. The messages in this group of hate-love charms sound like personal inventions, but this is deceptive, since many similar inscriptions exist (omitting the reference to a wearer);<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Appendix, J 1.

<sup>65</sup> Appendix, J 2a–b.

<sup>66</sup> See King 1872, vol. I, 311–12; more recently Bevilacqua 1991, 225–37; *SEG* 41.1867; 44.1704; 46.1378; 56.2054; 58.1140.

<sup>67</sup> See Le Blant 1896, 55–56; Noll 1978, 151–57.

<sup>68</sup> Le Blant 1896, 55–56, gives a number of examples that illustrate how rich the tradition is. They are all slightly different and do not include a mention of the wearer: οὐ φιλῶ σε μὴ πλανῶ βλέπω δὲ καὶ γελῶ, “I do not love you, don’t fool yourself, I see and I laugh”; (similarly, in the collection of the Koninklijk Penningkabinet in the Netherlands, no. 867, and in Vienna, see Zwierlein–Diehl 1973–1991: vol. III, 218, no. 2471; οὐ φιλῶ μὴ πλανῶ νοῶ δὲ καὶ γελῶ σὺ φίλι με συνφέρει σοί, “I do not love (you), don’t fool yourself, I understand and I laugh; you, love me, it is useful to you!” (also in the Content collection; see Henig 1990, 22, no. 40); εἰ φιλεῖς ἀκολούθει οὐ φιλῶ μὴ πλανῶ νοῶ δὴ καὶ γελῶ, “If you love (me), follow (me), I do not love (you), don’t fool yourself, I understand and I laugh”; εἰ με φιλοῦντα φιλεῖς, δισσή χάρις· εἰ δὲ με μισεῖς, τόσον μισηθῆς ὅσον ἐγὼ σε φιλῶ, “If you love me who loves (you), the joy is double; if you hate me, may you be hated as much as I love you” (cf. *CIG* 7290–7292; 7293–7295; *SEG* 38 1925). Another variant is listed in Ficoroni 1757, 52; οὐ φιλῶ σε μηδαμῶς, “I don’t love you at all.” Although most of the objects are



they, too, are stereotyped in a way that seems to indicate that they had a kind of magical value.

From the ‘good-luck’ wish of the Boston ring to the ‘good-luck’ wish of the Paris love charm, a lot of epigraphic ground has been covered. The formulas were expanded into complicated invocations, or they were reduced to a few words that no longer make sense.<sup>69</sup> This rich epigraphic harvest appears in a great variety of settings, in terms of religious affiliation, types of object, geography, and chronological framework. Wearer inscriptions can apparently appear on spectacular objects, such as the gold-plated helmet of the early fourth century, at any time, but the splendor of the jewelry with these inscriptions seems to reach a peak in the sixth, and seventh centuries, perhaps because the phrases had become enshrined in venerable tradition.

This survey reinforces the impression that a simple ‘good-luck’ wish to the wearer, such as the one on the Boston ring, has great magical potential. Phrases mentioning an anonymous wearer migrated into inscriptions of outspokenly magical character. Inscriptions asking for favorable circumstances, for protection, or for deliverance from evil often have additional gibberish, and only a few words may express their message in clear syntax.<sup>70</sup> In other cases, magical influence is manifested more subtly. Truncated or severely abbreviated inscriptions present the reference to the wearer as an incantation rather than as a coherent statement.<sup>71</sup> The contradictory language of some love charms has some of the same illogical flavor.<sup>72</sup> In the case of the Boston ring and others that offer more apparently straightforward good-luck wishes, a magical component may be lurking just below the surface. A preservative function is implicitly embodied in the object that carries such words.

Some of the inscribed ‘wearable’ artifacts carry the names of their owners, such as the carved gem of Stratonike, the leather sandals from Egypt, the sole from Constantinople, and the spectacular helmet from the Berkasovo treasure of Serbia. In spite of their differences, all these ‘named’ pieces are luxurious artifacts that were made to order. In the

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cameos, this kind of formula can occur on other objects as well; see on a Byzantine silver spoon sold at Sotheby’s on July 11, 1988 (*SEG* 38 1927): ἦν φιλις μισῖ σε, “the one (fem.) whom you love, hates you.”

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix, D.

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix, F 3c; 4a; H 1a; 2b; 4a; 4c–f; J 1.

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix, D; G 2; 4.

<sup>72</sup> See Appendix, J 2a–b.

larger context of the ‘wearable’ artifacts, however, the named objects form only a small part of the total presented here; in most cases the wearers remain anonymous.

It seems likely that the anonymity of the wearer is often in some way linked to the protective function of many of these objects. In some instances, as in the case of the love charm naming Secundilla, it is striking that the wearer stays anonymous while the object of his desire is named.<sup>73</sup> It would seem that the anonymity of the wearer enhanced the magical effect of this charm, since it is clear that the inscription was commissioned by a specific lover of Secundilla. An atmosphere of secrecy, always helpful in magical arts, surrounds many of these objects; not only are identities hidden, but also the inscriptions would not have been easily visible. The anonymity of the wearer stresses the power of the ring itself by suggesting that whoever wears it will reap its benefits.<sup>74</sup> Significant in this context is the ring that was addressed as ‘you’; “may he who wears you be kept safe.”<sup>75</sup> The ring is thus personified and extends its power to all its wearers.

The gender of the wearers also shows a surprising pattern; it appears that virtually all the gems and amulets were intended for men.<sup>76</sup> Metal rings were also mostly for men, although in this group women are better represented. In the other objects, the gender tended to be dictated by the nature of the object; that is, a helmet has a masculine inscription, jewelry has a feminine one. So far, the Boston ring appears to be unique in its combination of being intended for a female wearer and having the ἐπ’ ἀγαθῶ formula.<sup>77</sup> In fact, no other examples, whether male or female, are known to us to have the two expressions combined.

<sup>73</sup> See above, on a small, black stone with a winged Eros (Appendix, J 1).

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Appendix, F 3b, in which the plural refers to multiple wearers, δόται (i. δότε) χάριν τοῖς φοροῦσιν πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους, “grant those who wear (it) favor in the eyes of all men”; see Bonner 1950, 163.

<sup>75</sup> See Appendix, C 2b, F 3d; when a personal pronoun and a participle are used (“the one wearing/who wears”) the construction can have a direct object, such as τοῦτο τὸ φυλακτήριον “this amulet,” τοῦτο/το “this/it,” σε “you,” or perhaps με “me”; if it is not spelled out, the direct object is implied.

<sup>76</sup> Gems and amulets: fifty four for men, four for women, one for both. Metal rings: fifteen for men and nine for women. Other objects: fifteen for men, eleven for women, two for both.

<sup>77</sup> See Appendix, B.

The inscriptions on these objects are not always easy to read, since they are often damaged, partly erased, or inscribed in abbreviated form. But, when they are properly deciphered, they give an authentic and lively picture of customs and habits, of religious and social beliefs into which classical literary compositions often give little insight. The words, of course, still have to be interpreted and put in their proper historical context, but since inscriptions seldom lie,<sup>77</sup> they form precious, primary documents—one of which the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is lucky to carry.

#### APPENDIX OF INSCRIPTIONS RELATED TO THE BOSTON RING

Group A does not have a reference to a ‘wearer.’ All the other groups (with only a few exceptions) include a reference to a ‘wearer.’ Translations given in the text are not repeated in the Appendix.

##### **GROUP A** Solid rings with ἐπ’ ἀγαθῶ or ἐπ’ ἀγαθοῖς

1. The former Guilhou collection; see Ricci 1912: nos. 41, 169, 234, 352, 518, 521, 525, 527, 528, 588; they all have the formula in the singular, ἐπ’ ἀγαθῶ, except for no. 525, which has it in the plural, ἐπ’ ἀγαθοῖς; no. 588, moreover, is octagonal; all of these rings are listed as coming from Cyprus; the collection was dispersed in the 1930s.

2. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; see Richter 1956: nos. 585–592 (ἐπ’ ἀγαθῶ); nos. 593–597 (ἐπ’ ἀγαθοῖς); these rings all came from Cyprus and were part of the Cesnola collection.

3. The British Museum; see Marshall 1907: nos. 600–610, 612, 614, 615, 642 (ἐπ’ ἀγαθῶ); 611, 616, 617 (ἐπ’ ἀγαθοῖς); no. 642 is octagonal (plate 1); nos. 602, 603, 607, 608, 609, 612, 616, 617 were either found or excavated in Cyprus came primarily from the Cesnola collection.

4. The Cyprus Museum; see Myres and Ohnefalsch-Richter 1899: nos. 4159 and 4160.

5. The Benaki Museum; see Segall 1938: 110, nos. 159 and 160.

6. Rings from the Rhineland; see Henkel: 1913: no. 69 (which is octagonal) and no. 1915.

7. Gold ring in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.

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**78** This is a noteworthy dictum of the late Prof. Sterling Dow, whose introduction to epigraphy at the Harvard Divinity School was very memorable.

**GROUP B** Rings with ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ including a wearer

1. (figs. 1 a–b) ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ τῇ φορούσῃ, MFA 98.803.

**GROUP C** Cameos and other objects with εὐτύχ(ε)ι, εὐτυχῶς, or εὐτυχής

1. a) εὐτύχι ὁ φορῶν, on a sardonyx cameo in the British Museum; see Walters 1926: no. 3705.

b) The same legend on a cameo in a third-century gold ring found in a Roman villa at Keynsham near Bristol; see Henig 1974: no. 743.

c) εὐτύχι πανοικί ὁ φορῶν, *CIG* 7343; Le Blant 1896: 34, no. 73, from the sixteenth-century collection of Fulvio Orsini.

d) εὐτύχι ὁ φορῶν, “may you the wearer be fortunate” on a silver bracelet in Bonham’s catalogue, *Fine Antiquities*, Tuesday 10th June 1997,<sup>1</sup> no. 24; read from the photo as ΥΧΙΟΦ by H. W. Pleket and R. A. Tybout, *SEG* 47 2219; the catalogue indicates a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> c. date, but the bracelet must be later.

e) The same legend within a tabula ansata on a two-layer sardonyx cameo, third century, in the Content collection; see Molesworth and Henig 2011: 183, pl. 21.

2. a) εὐτύχι ζήσαις [ὁ φ]ορῶν, on a third-century onyx cameo from the Content collection, exhibited in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford; see Henig 1990: no. 38.

b) Related is the inscription on a gold ring (possibly a wedding ring), found in Locri in southern Italy, *CIG* 8575: σῶζοιτο ὁ φορῶν σε, “may he who wears you be kept safe.” The wearer is addressed in the third person, while the ring-being personified – occurs in the second person.

3. a) εὐτυχῶς πρόκοπτε ὁ φορῶν, on an onyx cameo in the British Museum; see Dalton 1901: no. 280b.

b) Similarly, a gem listed in Jovanic 1978: 20, no. 23, from Bela Palanka, reads, εὐτύχι πρόκοπτε ὁ φορῶν, “may you, the wearer, be fortunate and prosper” (with thanks to Derek J. Content for the reference).

c) Martin Henig calls attention to a large cameo in the Bibliothèque Nationale (H. S. 1973, 152525) that reads, εὐτύχει ὁ φορῶν εὐτυχῶς, “may you, the wearer, be doubly fortunate”; see Henig 1990: 26.

4. εὐτύχι ἀπόκοπτε ὁ φορῶν, on a sardonyx cameo; see Le Blant 1896: 35, no. 78. Assuming that the transcription by Le Blant is correct and that the artisan did not mistakenly cut ἀπόκοπτε instead of πρόκοπτε, the inscription could be translated as above. No other examples, however, are known of this reading. ἀποκόπτω means literally, “cut off” or “hew off” and can mean metaphorically “to cut off doubt,” thus, “to take a decision”; cf. Alciphron 1.8 (2/3 century CE). A military

connection has been suggested for some of these cameos; if this piece was intended for a military user, the literal meaning of ἀποκόπτω could be preserved; see Alföldi 1961: 11–14; Henig 1990: 26.

5. a) εὐτυχῶς τῷ φοροῦντι; see Le Blant 1896: 36, sub no. 78 and no. 79.

b) A sardonyx gem formerly in the Kertz collection says, εὐτυχῶς τῷ φοροῦ(ν)τι, “good luck to him who wears (it)”; see Miller 1879: 45. Some of these inscriptions add χρῶ and read εὐτυχῶς χρῶ κτλ.; see *Bull. Soc. Nat. Ant. de France* 1971: 318ff.

6. a) εὐτυχῆς ὁ φορῶν; on a bell found in 1738 near Venice, *CIG* 6749; *IG*

XIV 2409, 6; Guarducci 1967: vol. IV.335.

b) The same inscription on an unspecified bronze object; see Le Blant 1896: 36, sub no. 78.

#### GROUP D Cameos with ὁ φορῶν

1. a) (fig. 2) ὁ φορῶν on an onyx cameo in Vienna, *CIG* 7343b; see Eichler and Kris 1927: no. 101, pl. 17

b) Another occurs on an agate cameo found at Carnuntum; see Swoboda 1956: 15, fig. 1. Both cameos have been dated to the third century CE.

c) A third one is in London; BM 1923,0401.973; see Walters 1926: no. 3709.

d) A similar, truncated version of a formula exists in: ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντος, “from the wearer,” see *CIG* 8575 (also Appendix, H 3).

#### GROUP E Various objects with ὑγιαίνων or ὑγιαίνουσα

1. a) ὑγιαίν[ων] φόρει, *SEG* 36 621bis, on a helmet from Heracleia Lyncestis, found in a Christian Basilica and dated about 497–523CE. The helmet belonged to an officer of the Byzantine army and shows, in addition to its inscriptions, various Christian representations. Other words on the helmet read: χάρις, ὑγία, Κύριε Χριστέ βοήθῃ ὑγία and Χριστέ βοήθῃ, “grace, health, Lord Christ help health” and “Lord Christ, help.” For the reading ὑγιαίνων instead of ὑγιαίν[ους], see Feissel, *BE* 1990: 897.

b) (plate1) ΔΙΖΖΩΝΥΤΙΕΝΩΝΦΟΡΠΙ on one side and on the other side: ΑΥΕΙΤΟΥ ΕΡΓΟΝ ΓΟ ΚΑ ΓΡ ΙΒ, Αὐείτου ἔργον ὀγ(κία) κα΄ γρ(άμματα) ιβ΄. “Work of Avitus, 21 unciae, 12 scrupuli.” See also Manoljlović-Marijanski 1964; Piusi (ed.) 2008: 110, pls III 4. Sena Chiesas (ed.) 2012: 235, no. 124.

2. a) (fig. 3) ψυχὴ καλή, ὑγιαίνουσα φόρι, on a bracelet from Tartous in Syria, now in the Saint Louis Art Museum, in Missouri; see Eisen 1970: vol. 1, 75–76, who lists an identical bracelet (except for the inscription) in Berlin, reportedly found in the same place; the reading on this bracelet is: εὐτυχῶς χρῶ διὰ βίου, “use (it) in good fortune throughout (your) life.” For other examples with similar inscriptions, see the catalog *Byzance* 1992: 126, no. 75.

b) ὑγιένουσα φόρι, on a marriage belt in the Louvre; in addition, θεοῦ χάρις, “grace of God” occurs, *IGLS* IV 356, addenda no. 1306; Catalogue *Byzance* 1992: 133, no. 89.

c) ὑγιένουσα φό[ρει]; Κύρα Πιθα [...], on a pair of sandals found in a rich tomb in Antinoe (*SEG* 44.1445). On one sandal, it says: υγιενουσαφο, and on the other: υραπιθα. For the inscription, see Lefebvre 1907: no. 779; Lefebvre does not offer a reconstruction. The reading of the first sandal has already been proposed by Feissel 1990: 897. An illustration of the sandals was given by *DACL* 1/2, col. 2333. The sandals were formerly in the Musée Guimet, in Paris, but their present location is unknown. Most other objects of the tomb went to the Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, in Brussels. The tomb is traditionally called ‘la tombe de la brodeuse’ because of its numerous embroideries; not only is the body of the buried woman clothed in three layers of embroidered dresses, but the pillowcases on which her head and feet rest and a scarf and a headcap are also embroidered, while her feet are now incongruously bare. For an illustration, see the recent exhibition catalog by Raven 1993: 17. For a description and further discussion of the tomb, see Gayet 1902: 32–33; *DACL* 1/2, col. 2333; Vanlathem 1983: 27. The second- or third-century date that has been given in earlier literature (Gayet and *DACL*) may have to be revised to a later date (late fourth or fifth century) in light of the other objects with comparable formulas.

d) (plate 2) ὑγιένουσα φόρι Κύρα Πιθάνη, on a pair of red leather sandals reportedly from Deir el Banat, Egypt; Deutsches Ledermuseum/Schuhmuseum, Offenbach, 6.71.20; Nachtergaele and Russo 2005, 308–09.

e) υγιενουσαφι / ι.ικυραμαρον = ὑγιένουσα φόρι Κύρα Μαροῦ. On a leather sandal from Antinoe. The reconstruction of the inscription was made by Nachtergaele and Russo on the basis of the previous inscription, see Nachtergaele and Russo 2005, 308–09.

f) (fig. 5) ὑγιένουσα χρῶ Κύρα Καλεί (= Καλή), ἡλαρι (= ἰλαρή = ἰλαρά) ὑπάρχουσα ἐπένισε (= ἐπένδυσαι ?). The inscription appears on a wooden sole, discovered in recent excavations in Istanbul; see Karamani Pekin (ed.) 2007, 277, n° Y39.

g) (fig. 3) Στρατονίκη ὑγιαίνουσα φόρει ἀεὶ, on a chalcedony cameo from Rome now in the British Museum, 1859,0301.101. See Walters 1926, 349, no. 3711. Correctly read by Bevilacqua 1991, 14–15, no 2; Tav. I 3. Bevilacqua published a number of inscribed gems and phylacteria, taken from the notebooks of Girolamo Amati in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Most of them probably came from Rome and Latium. *SEG* 42.933.2.

**GROUP F** Various objects with χάρις or (ε)ἴλεως

1. ἡ χάρις τῆ φορούση, on a ring from Palestine, see *SEG* 8.351. The ring was found in an unknown location with another ring (no. 350) that reads: Ὑγία Σαμουέλ, “good health, Samuel.”

2. a) (fig. 6) ἔστω ἡ χάρις τῷ φοροῦντι, on a third-century cameo in the Content collection; see Henig 1990: no. 56. Due to the nature of the stone, the inscription is carved in somewhat blocky and stylized letters. The epigraphic problems indicated in the catalog can be solved by taking the last letter of ΕCΤΩΗ (see Henig 1990: sub no. 56) as the article of χάρις, since χάρις often occurs with its article. Judging from the grammatical form of the participle, the wearer was a man and not a woman.

b) (fig. 7) ἄρκος/λέων/χάρις, νίκη τῷ φοροῦντι/μόνος (ε)ἰσηλθα χάριν λαβὼν ἐνίκησα. Silver ring engraved with a lion and a bear, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c., MFA, Boston; gift of Mrs. Claude-Claire Grenier, 2005.291.

3. a) A magic intaglio depicting Ares and Aphrodite reads on the obverse: Ἀρρωρίφρασις δὸς τὴν χάριν τῷ φοροῦντι, “Arroriphrasis, grant favor to the wearer”; see Delatte and Derchain 1964: 242, no. 333.

b) A similar wish occurs on a hematite with various Graeco-Egyptian deities; it reads: δόται (l. δότε) χάριν τοῖς φοροῦσιν πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους, “grant those who wear (it) favor in the eyes of all men”; see Bonner 1950: 163.

c) βαλακαμσθομβλη followed by ἰν τῷ φορῶν, which can be reconstructed as: (δὸς χάρι)ν τῷ φορῶν(τι), on a two-sided hematite amulet with elaborate representations centered on Harpocrates and Sarapis; see Bonner 1950: 236 and 313, no. 355.

d) (obverse) Βαινχωωωχ. Δαμναμενευς./ (reverse) δὸς χάριν τῷ σε φοροῦντα πρὸς πάντας καὶ πρὸς πάσας τὴν χάριν. “Bainchoooh; Damnameneus; /grant favor to the one who wears you, favor in the eyes of all men and women” (solecism), on a magical amulet in Oxford with Heracles fighting the Nemean lion on the obverse and wearer inscription on the reverse; the amulet dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE is of dark green porphy-

ry and has a suspension hole; see Henig e.a. 2004: 126, no. 13.22; *SEG* 54.1794. Now also on The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database (<http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/>).

4. a) εἴλεως ἔσται τῷ φορο[ῦντ]ι [καὶ] τῇ φορούσῃ, on a silver plate from Syria, *SEG* 28.1334. The plate contains a long magical inscription at the end of which the above-mentioned words could be identified.

b) εἰς Ζεὺς Σάρατις, followed ἴλεως τὸν φοροῦντι, on a paste cameo in the British Museum (BM 56523 or G 523); cf. a double-sided cameo in Paris; see Babelon 1897: no. 355. BM 56523 is now also on the Bonner Database (<http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/>)

c) (figs. 8 a–b) εἴλεος τῇ ἔμῃ ψυχῇ καὶ τῶν ἐμοῦς τέκνυς, on a rock crystal amulet with lion-headed divinity on the obverse and inscription on the reverse (but without mentioning a wearer); MFA 01.7556, 3<sup>d</sup> c. CE.

5. Μέγας Ὠρος Ἀπόλλων Ἄρποκράτης εὐίλατος τῷ φοροῦντι, on an emerald figurine of Harpocrates in Vienna, see von Eckhel 1788: 60–61, fig. 30; Le Blant 1896: 89, sub no. 226; Bonner 1950: 168.

**GROUP G** Various objects (mainly) with κύριε or θεοτόκε βοήθ(ε)ι

1. With a dative (fem. sing.).

a) (fig. 10) +ΚΕΒΟΗΘΙ +ΤΗΦΟΡῸΧΗ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθι τῇ φορούσῃ, “Lord help her who wears (it),” on a bronze bracelet from Olympia (Br. 13640; Athens Nat. Mus. 6299), dated to the sixth century, see *I Olympia* 706; Guarducci 1967: vol. IV, 334; Philipp 1981, 256, no. 964.

b) ΚΥΒΟΗΘΙΤΕΦΟΡΟΥΣΑ, on a pectoral from the former von Gans collection, now in Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Antikensammlung, 30219, 506; see Dennison 1918: 122; Grabar 1951: 34; Weitzmann (ed.) 1979: 319, no. 296. For the inscription, see Guarducci 1967: vol. IV 334.

c) x ΚΥΡΙΕΒΟΗΘΙΤΙΦΟΡΟΥΙ, Κύριε βοήθι τῇ φορού(σ)ι, “Lord, help her who wears (it),” on a Byzantine ring with a projecting signet in New York, MMA 17.190.1654. A similar ring, found with coins of the seventh century, is published in Orsi 1910: 66–67 (see below, G 3c).

d) ΘΕΩΤΟΚΗΒΩΕΘΙΤΙΦΟΡΟΥΣΑ, on a gold plaque in the Walters Art Gallery (WAG 57.547); note the confusion of epsilon and eta; see the catalogue *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, Walters Art Gallery 1947: no. 456, pl. LXV; [<http://art.thewalters.org/detail/17344/dress-ornament/>] (consulted 6 Sept. 2013); Yeroulanou 1988: 2–10.



e) Similarly, on a gold fibula with the adoration of the magi, dating from the sixth century from Medellín now in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, in Madrid, the inscription reads: +ΑΓΙΑΜΑΡΙΑΒΟΗΘΙΗ ΦΩΡΟΥΧΑΙ+ΑΜΗΝ+, “Holy Mary, help her who wears (it), amen”; see *The Art of Medieval Spain* 1993: 42.

f) Spier 1993: 53, no. 15a, Pl. 2a: ΑΓΙΟΑΓΙ...ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΒΟΗΘΗΤΗΦΟΡΟΥΣΕ, ‘Άγιος ἅγι...Κύριος βοήθη τῇ φορούσε’, “Holy, holy ... Lord, help her who wears (it),” inscribed around a ‘Hystera’ with serpents in Oxford; the inscription on the reverse includes: ΥΣΤΕΡΑ ΜΕΛΑΝΗ ΜΕΛΑΝΟΜ... . Similarly on p. 57, no. 46, Pl. 4e: ΚΕΡΩΗΘΙΤΙΦΟΡΟΥΣΙ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθι τί φορούσι, on the octagonal hoop of a silver signet ring in the British Museum, with a ‘Hystera’ with seven serpents on the bezel, see also Dalton 1901: 142.

g) (figs. 9 a–b) +ΚΥΡΙΑΒΟΗΘΙΗ/ΦΟΡΟΥΧΑΜΗΝ, Κύριε βοήθι τῇ φορούση ἀμήν, “Lord, help her who wears (it), Amen.” On a gold medallion in the British Museum (1983,0704.1) with the Adoration of the Magi on the obverse and the Ascension of Christ on the reverse; inscription on the reverse: ΕΙΡΗΝΗΝΤΕΝΗΜΕΝ / ΑΦΙΟΜΕΥΜΙΝ, εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν ἀφίομε(ν) ὑμῖν, “My peace we leave with you” (cf. John, 14, 27); Entwistle 2005: 267. Ager argues that this image formed the example of the type that provided the model of the gold fibula from Medellín (above G 1e), see Ager 2010: 74–75.

2. With a dative (masc. sing.).

a) On two rings in the British Museum: ΚΕΒΟΘΙΤΟΦΟΡ (no. 145) and ΚΕΒΟΗΘΗΤΟΦΟΡΟ (no. 147), Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθι τῷ φοροῦντι, “Lord help him who wears (it)”; see Dalton 1901: nos. 145 (bronze) and 147 [silver]. A variant appears on a silver ring from the former Castellani collection: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΗΤΟΝΕΧΟΤΑ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη τὸν ἔχο(ν) τα, Lord help him who owns (it), Dalton 1901: no. 146.

b) On a silver pectoral cross, the inscription reads: Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τῷ φοροῦντι τοῦτον, “Lord help him who wears this”; see Dalton 1901: no. 288.

c) A silver cross in the Stathatos collection reads: Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη τῷ φοροῦντι, “Lord help him who wears (it)”; see *Collection Hélène Stathatos III* 1963: 289, no. 233, pl. XLIV (with a different reading).

d) A carnelian cameo in Bucharest reads: Κύριε βοήθει τῷ φοροῦντι, “Lord help him who wears (it)”; see Gramatopol 1974: 94–95, no. 746, pl. XXXV.

e) Ἰησοῦ Χριστὲ βοήθι τῷ φοροῦντι, “Jesus Christ help him who wears (it),” on a carnelian gem in the Kelsey Museum of Ancient and

Medieval Archeology in Ann Arbor, Michigan, no. 26197; Bonner 1950: no. 277.

f) On an onyx cameo in the nineteenth-century Castellani collection: βοήθῃ τῷ φ(ο)ροῦντι, “help him who wears (it)”; see Le Blant 1896: 128, no. 333.

g) On a gold ring in the nineteenth-century Behr collection: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΙΤΟΦΝ, which can be read as: Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθῃ τῷ φ(οροῦ)ν(τι), “Lord, help him who wears (it)”; see Le Blant 1896: 128, no. 334.

h) Le Blant lists also an amulet with the same inscription in the possession of M. Schlumberger that was dated as late as the eleventh or twelfth century; Le Blant 1896: 128.

j) On an amulet published by Gottwald 1905: 240, the reading is: Χ(ριστ)έ βοήθ[ει τ]οῦ φορο[ῦν]τι, “Christ, help him who wears (it)” (note the solecism).

k) (figs. 11–12) Two bronze belt buckles in the collection of David G. Mitten, Cambridge, Mass.: ΚΥΠΙΕΒΟΗ/ΘΙCΟΝΤΟΥ/ΦΟΡΟΥΝΤΙ (note the solecism). A nearly identical buckle is inscribed: ΕΥΛΟΓΕΙ/ΤΟΚΥΡ/ΕΙΟCΜΟΥ, εὐλογεῖτὸς Κύριός μου, “blessed (be) my Lord.”

l) Ἄγιε Μιχαήλ, βοήθισον τοῦ φοροῦντι, “Holy Michael, help the wearer,” on a bronze fibula with an inscribed rectangular plate from Moesia, 6<sup>th</sup> c. For a picture, see Barnea 1994: 32–33, no. 14; *SEG* 44.647; note the solecism.

m) Εἷς θεὸς βοηθῶν τῷ φορντ(ι), “One God, helping the wearer”; the inscription appears around the face of a Medusa on a magical amulet (silver medallion) from Cebelda, 5<sup>th</sup> c.; Khroushkova 2006: 245, pl. 59c; Avram 2008: no. 438; *SEG* 58.1689.

n) Σφραγὶς Σολομοῦνος· βοήθῃ το φορο(ῦν)τι. φῶς, ζοή, “Seal of Solomon, help the wearer, light, life.” on a circular bronze disk with invocation, 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> c.; *SEG* 55.1938.

o) Ἄγιε Μιχαήλ, βοήθισον τοῦ φοροῦντι, “Holy Michael help the wearer,” on a bronze fibula; Gramatopol 1982: 264 no. 103; *SEG* 44.647; note the solecism.

3. With a genitive (masc. and fem. sing.).

a) Two signet rings in the British Museum; see Dalton 1901: no. 143 (bronze), no. 144 (bronze); legends: Κύριε βοήθει τῆς φορούσης, “Lord, help her who wears (it),” no. 143. The same inscription for a man: Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη τοῦ φοροῦντος, “Lord, help him who wears (it),” no. 144.

b) A female inscription occurs on a signet ring found near Syracuse in Sicily, *CIG* 9057: Κ(ύρι)ε β[οήθει] τῆς φοροῦ[σης], “Lord, help her who wears (it).”

c) An octagonal gold ring found in a Byzantine treasure on Mount Pentelia in Sicily is inscribed: +ΚΕΒΟΗΘΗΤΗΦΟΡΟΧΑΜΗΝ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τῆς φορόσης ἀμήν, “Lord help her who wears (it), amen”, see Orsi 1910: 66 (table A, fig. 3), 67.

d) Spier 1993: 53, no. 13a:  
ΘΚΕΚΟΗΘΗΤΗΦΟΡΟΥΧΑΜΗ[N]..., θ(εωτό)κη βοήθη τῆς φορούσας ἀμήν ..., “Mother of God, help her who wears (it), amen ...,” on bronze pendant in the Menil collection, inscribed around ‘Hystera’ with five serpents (Menil collection); the inscription on the reverse includes: ΥCTEPA ... .

4. With an accusative (masc. sing.); this group represents Byzantine objects (mostly rings) dated to Middle and Later Byzantine times, on which the inscriptions are often abbreviated and/or written in a continuous loop.

a) A ring in the former Guilhou collection, no. 831, has: ΚΕΒΟΗΟΙΤΟΝ ΦΟΡΟΤ, which could be reconstructed as Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθι τὸν φορο(ῦν)τ(α), “Lord, help him who wears (it).”

b) A silver round pendant with a cross in the Stathatos collection reads: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΗΤΟΦΟΡΟΤΑΤΟ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη τὸ(ν) φορο(ῦν)τ(α) το, “Lord, help him who wears it”; see *Collection Hélène Stathatos III* 1963: no. 234, pl. XLIV.

c) A gold ring in the Zucker collection possibly carries the same inscription: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΗΤΟΝΦΟΒΟΝΤΟΥΤΟ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη τὸ(ν) φο(ρ)οῦν(τα) τοῦτο, “Lord, help him who wears this”; see Vikan 1987: 40, fig. 17, and n. 45 (this reading is not certain, but Dr. Vikan informed us that the last five letters could be read as ΤΟΥΤΟ).

d) A similar inscription occurs on a Byzantine bronze ring in the Menil collection (no. R I2); see in chapter 2, fig. 2.26 of the catalogue by Gary Vikan.

e) A gold ring sold at Sotheby’s in the sales in Monaco (on December 5, 1987, 171, no. 202) says: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΗΤΟΝΦΟΡΟΝΤΑΤΩ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθι τὸν φοροῦντα τω, “Lord, help him who wears it.”

f) A bronze ring in the Canellopoulos collection in Athens (case 15, no. 9) reads: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΗΤΟΝΦΟΡΝΤΑΤΟ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τὸν φορ(οῦν)τα το, “Lord, help him who wears it”; see Spieser 1972: 132, no. 19, figs. 35–36; Brouskari 1985: 158.

g) A small gold cross in the same collection reads on one side: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΗΤΩΝΦΟΡΟΝΤΑ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη τῶν φοροῦντα, “Lord, help him who wears (it)”; see the catalog *L’Art Byzantin. Art Européen* 21964: 384–385.

h) A similar piece in silver is to be found in the Stathatos collection; see *Collection Hélène Stathatos III* 1963: no. 233.

j) On a silver gilt pectoral cross in the Dumbarton Oaks collection, the legend is: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΤΟΝΦΟΡΟΝΤΑ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθ(ει) τὸν φοροῦντα “Lord, help him who wears (it)”; see Ross 1965: vol. 2, 75, no. 99.

k) The same collection has a silver ring with the inscription: ΚΕΒΟΙΘΗΤΟΝΦΟΡΟΝΤΑΤ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοίθη τὸν φοροῦντα τ(ο), “Lord, help him who wears it”; see Ross 1965: vol. 2, 85, no. 118.

l) A bronze ring excavated in Corinth by the American School reads: ΚΕΒΟΗΘΙΤΩΝΦΟΡ, Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθι τῶν φορ(οῦντα), “Lord, help him who wears (it)”; see Davidson 1952: 239, no. 1888.

m) The Victoria and Albert Museum has a silver ring, of which the circular bezel is inscribed: ΚΕΒΤΟΝΦΟ, Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θι τὸν φο(ροῦντα), “Lord, help him who wears (it)”; see Oman 1930: 62, no. 222, pl. VIII.

n) A gold ring in the Stavropoulos collection reads, ΚΕΒ[ΟΗ]ΘΗΤΟΝΦΟΡΟΝΤΑΤΟ, Κ(ύρι)ε β[οή]θη τὸν φοροῦντα το, “Lord, help him who wears it”; see Hadzidakis 1944: 174–206.

o) Two inscriptions of this type can be found in Spier 1993: 52, no. 9b, Pl. 1d (Hermitage, St. Petersburg): ΘΕΟΤΟΚΗΒΟΗΘΗCΕΤΟΝΦΟ, θεωτόκη βοήθησε (= βοήθησον) τὸν φο(ροῦντα), “Mother of God, help the one who wears (it),” written in retrograde around the amulet; a ‘Hystera’ and seven arms on the other side; in the center of the amulet the word ΥCΤΕΡΑ is included. On p. 59, no. 57, Pl. 5c, ΚΕΒΟΘΗΤΟΝΦΟΡΟΝΤΑ, Κ(ύρι)ε βο(ή)θη τὸν φοροῦντα, “Lord, help him who wears (it),” inscribed around the ‘Hystera’ with eight serpents in Przemysl, Poland; the inscription on the reverse includes: ΥCΤΕΡΑ ΜΕΛΑΝΗ ΜΕΛΑΝΟΜΕΝΙ... .

#### GROUP H Magical amulets with protective inscriptions

1. a) (fig. 13) σαλαμαξα βαλαιζα αματροπαθειρ Ιαω Ιαω σῶζε τὸν φοροῦντα τοῦτο τὸ φυλακτήριον, on a carnelian gem, an ouroboros, formerly in the Brummer collection; see Bonner 1950: no. 271. The snake forms, as it were, the outer frame of the oval, inside which letters are inscribed.

b) A short version of this inscription reads: σῶζε τὸν φοροῦντα, “keep safe him who wears (it)”; Le Blant 1896: 89, sub no. 227.

c) Σ(ύ)ν(ε)ννος Εἴ(σ)ι Φθῶς ἐγὼ εἶμι, ὁ ἀλ(λ)ωστι(?) Μέγας· τοῦτο φορῶν εἶδω(λον) τὸν οὐρανὸν κατέσχευ, τοῦτο φορῶν Σαβαυν ἀντιδίκους κατέβαλε· τοῦτο φοροῦ. “I am Phtho(i)s, consort to Isis, otherwise (known as ?) the Great. The one wearing this image controlled the heaven; wearing this, Sabaun cast down his adversaries; wear this (for yourself) !” on a magical gem with Horus/Harpocrates on a lion and a trampled figure underneath; from Coele-Syria, Roman imperial period; Mouterde 1959: 53–84, esp. 62, no. 5; *SEG* 18.605.

d) .ραθ Αωρ [. ]ριε, παῦσο[ν] τὴν δύσ[π]νοϊαν τ[ῆς] | φορούσ[η]ς ἢ τοῦ φο[ρ]οῦντες (l. φοροῦντος), on a magical hematite amulet against respiratory problems, 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE; for the image, see Michel 2001: 35, no. 23, Tafel 4; for the inscription: Faraone 2007; Nachtergaele 2003; *SEG* 53 2109.

e) Ἐξορκίζω σε τοὺς ἑπτὰ οὐρανοὺς καὶ τοὺς δύο ἀρχαγγέλους καὶ τὸ μέγα ὄνομα Χερουβί(ν). Ἰάω σῶσον τὸν φοροῦντα, “I adjure you by the seven heavens and the two archangels and the great name, Cherubim. Iao, save the wearer,” on a blue chalcedony magical gem (2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>d</sup> c.); Spier 2007: 84 no. 477, Pl. 59; *SEG* 57 2057.

2. a) φύγε δαίμων ὑδροφόβα ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντος τοῦτο τοῦ φυλακτήρι(ο)ν, on an Athenian amulet of greenish black jasper; see Bonner 1950: 78.

b) ὄλεθρον καὶ πύρηθρον φύγε ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντος τὸ φυλακτήριον τοῦτο, on a green stone in the Pelizäus Museum in Hildesheim, in Germany; see Bonner 1950: no. 111.

c) A group of nine magical amulets with suspension holes in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris, two of which were unpublished (see *SEG* 44 1565/1566), while seven name a wearer; they share similar iconography: a rider piercing a fallen female creature with a lance; Early Byzantine period; (re)published by Matantseva 1994: 110–121, Tafel 14 a–h; *SEG* 44 1565/1566 (including 4).

† Φεῦγε, (με)μισιμένι, Ἀραὰφ ὁ ἄγγελός σε διόκι {κι} κὲ Σολομὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦν[τος]/Σφραγίς τοῦ ζῶντος θε(ο)ῦ, φύλαξον τὸν φοροῦντα, ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος κ(ύριος) Σαβαώθ πλί[ρις] οὐρανόσ κ(αί) ἢ γῑ τίς δόξις. “Flee, detested one (fem.); the angel Araaph expels you, as does Solomon from the wearer. / Seal of the living God, protect the wearer, holy, holy, holy Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth is full of your glory.”

† Φεῦγε, μεμισιμένοι, Σολομοῦν σε διόκι Σισίννιος Σισιννάριος (star)/Σφραγίς Σολομοῦνος, ἀποδίοξον πᾶν κακὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντο[ς], Φθόνος. “Flee, detested one, Solomon pursues you, Sisinios Sisinnarios; / Seal of Solomon chase away every evil from the wearer; Envy.”

Μιχαήλ, Γαβρι(ή)λ, Οὐριήλ, Ῥαφαήλ, βο(ή)θει τοῦ φοροῦ(ν)τι. ΠΙΠΠΙ/Σφραγίς Σολομοῦνος, φύλαξον τοῦ φοροῦ(ν)τ[ο]ς. “Michael, Gabriel, Ouriel, Raphael, help the wearer; (deformed Hebrew tetragram); / Seal of Solomon, protect the wearer.” (solecism)

Φεῦγε, μεμισιμένοι, διόκι [σε ὁ] ἄγγ[ε]λ[ο]ς Ἀραάφ. ΙΑΛΟΥΣ/Σφραγίς Σολομοῦνος, βοήθι τοῦ φορο(ῦ)ντι. Ιαω. “Flee, detested one, the angel Araaph pursues you; Ialous; / Seal of Solomon, help the wearer. Iao.” (solecism)

Φεῦγε, μεμισιμένοι, Σολομόν σε διόκι κ(αἰ) ἄγγελλος Ἀραάφ/Μιχαήλ, Γαβριήλ, Οὐριήλ, Ῥαφαήλ, διαφύλαξον τὸν φοροῦντα. ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος. ΠΙΠΠΙ. “Flee, detested one, Solomon pursues you, as does the angel Araaph. / Michael, Gabriel, Ouriel, Raphael, protect the wearer. Holy, holy, holy (deformed Hebrew tetragram).”

Φεῦγε, μεμισιμένοι, διόκι σε ὁ ἄγγελος Ἀρ[αάφ]. Ἰαω./Σφραγίς Σολομοῦνος, βοήθι τοῦ φοροῦντι. ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος, “Flee, detested one, the angel Araaph pursues you. Iao. / Seal of Solomon, help the wearer.” (solecism)

Ps. 91,1; θεὸς ὁ νικῶν τὰ κακά/Σφραγίς θε(εο)ῦ ζῶντος φύλαξον ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ τὸν φοροῦντα τὸ φυλακτήριον τοῦ(το). ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος. “God, the conqueror of evil / Seal of the living God, keep the wearer of this amulet away from all evil. Holy, holy, holy.” (see also H 4c)

3. ἀπὸ τοῦ φοροῦντος, on a bronze plaque, see *CIG* 8575 (see also Appendix, D 1d).

4. a) ακριμακραγετα Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθι καὶ διαφύλαξον τὸν φοροῦντα ἀπὸ παντὸς ἐρπετοῦ, on an intaglio from Egypt; see Bonner 1950: 325 (addenda).

b) On a large bronze pendant excavated in Beisan in Palestine, it reads: ἅγια ὀνόματα κ(αἰ) σύ(μ)βολα κ(αἰ) φοβερ[οἰ] χαρακτήρες φυλάξατ[ε τ]ὸν φοροῦνταν ἢ τὴν φ[ο]ροῦσα{σ}ν τὰς . . . τὰς θίας ὑ[μω]ν δυνάμεις [ἀ]πὸ π(ά)ντων κινδ[ύνω]ν, “holy names and symbols and dread characters, protect from all dangers the man or woman who carries your (august?) divine powers”; Bonner 1950: 215 (reconstruction and translation, Bonner, *Studies*).

c) (fig. 14) σφραγίς θεοῦ ζῶντος φύλαξον ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ τὸν φοροῦντα τὸ φυλακτήριον τοῦ(το), on the reverse of a bronze medal, from a collection assembled in Syria, now in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology (Mich. 26119), with Christ in a mandorla, flanked by the Evangelist symbols, the Trishagion, and a lion and scorpion. On the obverse, a rider spears a lioness with the head of a woman in the presence of an angel; there are further protective inscriptions and the first verse of Psalm 91; see Bonner 1950: 219–220 and 307, no. 324.

d) [φύλασ]σε [τὸν] φορο[ῦντ]α ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ, “keep the wearer away from all evil,” on a green jasper amulet in New York (MMA 41. 160. 639); see Bonner 1950: 263, no. 59. The obverse shows a horned Pan dancing and holding a syrinx to his mouth with unidentified letters and stars around him. The ‘wearer’ inscription occurs on the reverse. Now also on the Bonner Database (<http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/>).

e) φύλαξον ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ τὸν φοροῦντ[α], “keep the wearer away from all evil,” followed by three illegible letters and αἰαωι; on a two-sided hematite amulet in a collection in Beirut; see Bonner 1950: 321, no. 395. The inscription is in a tabula ansata on the obverse under the feet of the lion.

f) φύλαξον τὸν δεῖνα τὸν φοροῦντ(α) τὸ φυλακτήριον ττ..το αφαρτη (l. ἀπάρτι), on a rock crystal in the Museo Borgiano in Velletri; see Bonner 1950: 50, 180.

g) διαφύλαξον τὸν φοροῦντά σου τὴν ἁγίαν σφραγίδα, “protect him who wears your holy seal.” On a magical sard stone from Vienna with Harpokrates on a boat surrounded by magical inscriptions on one side and magical inscriptions with a legible line on the other; Zwierlein-Dieh 1991: 158–59, no. 2194; *SEG* 41.1767.

h) (ll. 10–12)...[αὐ]τὸ φορῶν οὐ φοβήσῃ μάγον οὐδὲ κατάδεσμον οὐδὲ πνεῦμ[α πον]ηρὸν οὐδέ τι δήποτε · καθαρείως δὲ [αὐ]τὸ φόρει, ὃ οὐ μεταδώσεις πλὴν γο[ν]ίμοις · ... “wearing this you will not fear magic (art) or a spell or an evil spirit or anything whatsoever; wear it with purity; you should not share this except with legitimate offspring.” / (ll. 27–31) [α]ὐτὸ φορῶν οὐ φοβήσῃ μάγον οὐδ[ὲ] κατάδεσμον οὐδ[ὲ] πνεῦμα πονηρὸν οὐδέ τι δήποτε· [κα]θαρείως δὲ αὐ[τ]ὸ φόρει, ὃ οὐ με[τα]δώσεις πλὴν γονίμοις · ; two identical formulas (for amulets?) on a fragmentary bronze tablet dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE from Sicily, which also contains a few lines about the ‘wearer’; the tablet was found in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. but disappeared about a hundred years ago. Its inscription has a long bibliographical pedigree, see *SEG* 55.1005; it was republished by

Rizzo 1994/1995: 1–61, who argues that the bronze was a manual with five magic formulas (‘prayers for salvation’) assigned to Moses as he went up the mountain and intended to be engraved on gold or silver tablets at the choice of clients. For the interpretation of γόνιμος, see also *Corpus Hermeticum, Fragmenta varia (verba Graeca solum)*, fr. 28, ed. Festugière and Nock.

ι) φύλαξον ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ τὸν φορ(οῦν)τα), “protect the wearer from all evil,” this inscriptions appears twice on tabulae ansatae of an obsidian amulet in the collection of the American Numismatic Society (Schwartz 34; Michel, DMG 41,5\_2); on the obverse the amulet shows a four-winged Pantheos on the back of a lion, and the reverse has three standing figures above a tabula ansata and two stars; the stone is covered with voces: a palindrome, names of archangels and various magical expressions. Now also on the Bonner Database (<http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/>).

#### GROUP J Stones referring to courtship and love

1. δὸς τὴν ψυχὴν ἐμοὶ τῷ φοροῦντι Σεκουνδίλης, on a small black stone with a winged Eros, see Bonner 1950: 118.

2. a) (fig. 15) οὐ φιλῶ σε) μὴ πλανῶ νοῶ δέ καὶ γελῶ εὐτυχῶς ὁ φορῶν ζήσῃς πολλοῖς χρόνοις, on a sardonyx cameo in Paris; see Babelon 1897: no. 350.

b) οὐ φιλῶ σε (1. σε) μὴ πλανῶ νοῶ δὲ σε καὶ γελῶ ὁ φορῶν ζήσῃς πολλοῖς χρόνοις, “I do not love, don’t fool yourself, I understand you and I laugh, may you, the wearer live many years” in the nineteenth-century publication of King 1872: vol. I (text), 311–312. This inscription is almost identical with the one in Paris. Unfortunately, nothing is said about the whereabouts of this gem. The obscurity of these inscriptions is reflected in the variety of translations that have been offered. Babelon translates: “Je ne t’aime pas. Cela ne me trouble point. Mais je comprends et je ris. Porteur, tu vivras heureusement pendant beaucoup d’années.” King renders: “I love thee not, lest I lead thee astray, but I think upon (behold) thee, and I smile. Wearer, mayest thou live many years!” In our interpretation, μὴ πλανῶ is translated as a present imperative middle (second person sing.) and not as a present subjunctive active (first person sing.)



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PHOTO CREDITS

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**Fig. 6** Photo: Bruce Frame  
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PETER J. FORSHAW

## MAGICAL MATERIAL & MATERIAL SURVIVALS.

### Amulets, Talismans, and Mirrors in Early Modern Europe

If the Italian Renaissance at the end of the fifteenth century can be described as the recovery of classical antiquity, including its writings on magic, then one of the main contributors to the spread of this rediscovered knowledge is the Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). Not only did Ficino translate Plato's collected works into Latin, but he also provided the republic of letters with Latin editions of influential neoplatonic thinkers like Plotinus, Proclus, Porphyry and Iamblichus, in addition to his edition of the corpus of works attributed to the *priscus philosophus* Hermes Trismegistus.

Ficino displays evident familiarity, too, with such medieval works of the Arabs as Thebit ibn Qurra's *De imaginibus* on astral magical talismans and Al Kindi's theoretical work on magic, *De radiis*, both dating from the ninth century, as well as the eleventh-century treatise on astral magic, *Ġāyat al-Ḥakīm* or *Goal of the Wise*, better known in the Christian West as the *Picatrix*, alongside works discussing magic attributed to such thirteenth-century authorities as Pietro d'Abano, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas among the Latins. What Ficino wrote about magic in its various forms (natural, astral, musical, spiritual, & demonic) was to have a profound impact on 'a host of magi, alchemists, astrologers, Paracelsian doctors' throughout the early modern period and some of his material will form the basis of this essay.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allen 1987, 416. On Ficino in relation to magic, see Walker 2000; Zambelli 2007; Voss 2002, Copenhaver 1986 & 1988, Culianu 1987; Tomlinson 1993.

Ficino is known as a practitioner of various types of magic; the focus here will be on his considerations and recommendations concerning suitable materials for amulets and talismans.<sup>2</sup> These writings, directly and indirectly, exerted a great deal of influence on subsequent theorists and practitioners of magic in the early modern period. Some of the most significant sixteenth-century figures, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Theophrastus Paracelsus, John Dee, and Heinrich Khunrath, shall be introduced in the second part of this essay.

For any consideration of the materiality of early modern magic, one of the most suggestive and informative places to begin is Ficino's *De Vita libri tres – Three Books on Life* (1489). Published just a couple of years after the appearance of the *Malleus Maleficarum – Hammer of the Witches* (1487), notorious for its advice on how to persecute anyone accused or suspected of witchcraft, Ficino's work is from a completely different perspective, though understandably very much aware of the dangers of displaying too enthusiastic an interest in the supernatural. *De Vita* presents itself as a medico-magical treatise with the avowed (and possibly quixotic) aim of teaching scholars how to be healthy.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars, we learn, are not healthy people, neither physically nor mentally. Their withdrawal from human affairs, solitude, addiction to matters of theology, more esoteric philosophy, and magic bring them under the influence of the malefic cold and extremely dry planet Saturn.<sup>4</sup> Ficino's *Three Books* deal with regimen, diet, abstinence, salves, fumigations, meditation and astrological advice for improving the condition of the suffering scholar. The controversial third book, entitled *De vita coelitus comparanda* ('On Obtaining Life from the Heavens'), is a com-

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**2** The general consensus among early modern practitioners of magic and their modern scholars is that amulets are natural items, such as the roots of plants or stones. They are usually unfashioned, bearing no words or images and operate of themselves by their intrinsic natural powers. Talismans, on the other hand, are artificial items, their power coming partly from inherent material qualities, occult or manifest, but augmented by human intervention, with the aid of magical operations, and invested with superior powers. See Weill-Parot 2002, 167 note 2 and Lecouteux, 2005, 20.

**3** Krayer 2002, 377. The treatise, which was completed in August 1489 and published on 3 December of that year, begins with a preface entitled: 'De cura valetudinis eorum qui incumbunt studio litterarum'. Ficino 1998, 106.

**4** Ficino 1998, 253.



plex exploration of scholarly melancholy and its treatment that makes continual reference to astrological influences.<sup>5</sup>

In a mixture of Scholastic and Neoplatonic philosophy, classical Hippocratic and Galenic medicine, and iatro-mathematical or astro-medical theory, Ficino explains that ‘the force of the World-soul is spread ... through all things by the quintessence, which is active everywhere’, as the spirit inside the World’s Body and the spirit in the body of man. This *spiritus* is ‘a very tenuous body, as if now it were soul and not body, and now body and not soul’,<sup>6</sup> and it bridges the gap between man’s material and immaterial natures.<sup>7</sup> The astrologically-informed physician and magus, aware of celestial influences on sublunar matter, should learn how to temper the *spiritus* of his sickly scholars so that it is once more in tune with the World Spirit.

Drawing from the *Tetrabiblos* of the Greco-Roman Egyptian astrologer Claudius Ptolemy (c.90–c.168), Ficino elaborates on the nature of *spiritus* in relation to the astrological qualities of the planets. *Spiritus* ‘is considered to be chiefly Jovial and Solar, with some measure of Mercurial and Venereal qualities’. *Spiritus* is a ‘vapour of the blood’, being hot, very subtle and arising from the heart. It is primarily a combination of the hot and dry power of the Sun, tempered by the hot and moist qualities of Jupiter, to which cold and dry Venus adds the properties of ‘flowing forth’ and propagation of offspring. These three planets, Sun, Jupiter and Venus, are Ficino’s ‘Three Graces’ and for his magical purposes are supplemented by the energies of mobile, mutable Mercury that ministers sense and imagination to the mind of man.<sup>8</sup>

Ficino advises his scholarly readers to seek out those things in nature that have absorbed the most quintessential spirit in its purer form. This will necessarily require a familiarity with the properties of matter, in Aristotelian terms a knowledge of both its manifest primary qualities (hot, cold, dry, moist) and secondary qualities (soft, hard, sweet, sour, etc), plus any occult qualities. One of Ficino’s major influences, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), had discussed such matters in *De occultis operibus*

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<sup>5</sup> Allen 2002, xiv. For more on Ficino in relation to astrology, see Clydesdale 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Ficino 1998, 247.

<sup>7</sup> Copenhaver 1988, 284.

<sup>8</sup> Ficino 1998, 293.

*naturae* – *On the occult works of nature*.<sup>9</sup> Aquinas had argued that there are some bodies, such as magnets, whose workings cannot be caused by the powers of the elements and their actions must be traced to higher principles. In the case of necromantic images, this is due to the activity of demons (though he believes that the power of relics can be ascribed to the action of God or good angels). He does not believe astrological explanations, however, that images or sculptures that are made for producing extraordinary effects have their efficacy from heavenly bodies, but this is due rather to superior agents that work through them. As for the forms of inanimate bodies, i.e., stones, metals and minerals, he considers that in addition to the powers which they share with the elements, they have certain more noble virtues, such as gold's ability to gladden the heart and the sapphire's power to stop bleeding. The more noble the form of these material bodies, so much the more excellent are their powers.<sup>10</sup> Although Ficino, contrary to Aquinas, subscribes to some theories of astral influence, he nevertheless follows Aquinas in the belief that certain substances have intrinsic, often occult, virtues that can be tapped by the well-informed magus.<sup>11</sup>

To alleviate the melancholy effects of Saturn, scholars need not just a little sunshine, but anything that contains solar properties and Ficino provides a list of substances to be consumed as food, applied as ointments, burnt as fumigations, ranging from metals, minerals, and precious stones to incenses, plants, and spices, and thence to animals, birds and insects; extending even to the type of human company that one should keep:

Solar things are: all those gems and flowers which are called heliotrope because they turn towards the Sun, likewise gold, orpiment and golden colours, chrysolite, carbuncle, myrrh, frankincense, musk, amber, balsam, yellow honey, sweet calamus, saffron, spikenard, cinnamon, aloe-wood, and the rest of the spices; the ram, the hawk, the cock, the swan, the lion, the scarab beetle, the crocodile, and people who are blond, curly-haired, prone to baldness, and magnanimous.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Copenhaver 1988, 283. On Aquinas in the context of magic, see Thorn-dike 1929, 593–615.

<sup>10</sup> McAllister 1939, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Klaassen 2013, 190.

<sup>12</sup> Ficino 1998, 249.

Too much Sun alone, however, is never a good idea, for its heat eventually dries up and dissipates the *spiritus*, just as an overdose of Venus risks softening and blunting it.<sup>13</sup> Substances of a Jovial quality should be included, for Jupiter tempers the solar heat, because it has a nature 'neither too fiery, nor all earthy nor simply watery; and a quality not very sharp or dull but moderate; smooth and somewhat soft to touch, or at least not hard or rough; sweet to taste; agreeable to smell; pleasant to see; charming and delightful to hear'.<sup>14</sup>

Ideal material combinations of Ficino's 'Three Graces' do exist, for example, in the three precious gemstones emerald, sapphire, and ruby, as well as in unicorn's horn and especially in the stone the Arabs call bezoar.<sup>15</sup> Bezoars were highly prized commodities during this period as defense and treatment against poison and many can still be found in museums.<sup>16</sup> Such treasured objects, however, are rather rare, and Ficino fortunately provides long lists of more readily available material from the three kingdoms of nature. He points out, too, that the material creations of lower terrestrial nature cannot be expected to contain all the forces of the higher nature of the stars in just *one* subject; instead different virtues of the celestial powers are dispersed through many earthly substances. Doubtless having the Galenic notion of theriac in mind, he recommends that, ideally, it would be wise to create compounds of hundreds of plants, animals and so forth, 'into one form', in order to 'possess completely the Sun or Jupiter'.<sup>17</sup>

When considering the natural properties of different materials, Ficino advises against fashioning talismans out of wood because they would have little force, being 'perhaps too hard to take on celestial influence easily and less tenacious, if it does receive it, in retaining it'. Gems and metals, on the other hand, although they may initially seem too hard to be capable of absorbing any celestial influence, nevertheless retain it longer if they do receive it, the reason being that the heavens 'have laboured an immense length of time in cococting and assembling' them.<sup>18</sup> Arguing from the experience of how a sword will cut the wood under a

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**13** Ficino 1998, 295.

**14** Ficino 1998, 295, 313.

**15** Ficino 1998, 301.

**16** On bezoars, see Born 1936; Milton & Axelrod 1951; Keezer 1964.

**17** Ficino 1998, 307. For explicit references to theriac, see Ficino 1998, 139–41, 301–03. On theriac, see Beecher 2002; Palmer 1985.

**18** Ficino 1998, 309.



1 Lunar Talisman, British Museum



2 Venus Talisman, British Museum

fleece while the fleece itself remains undamaged, Ficino wonders whether the very resistance of the harder material quality of metals and stones in fact exposes them to more celestial impacts.<sup>19</sup> Ficino's associations between stars, minerals and stones are complex, sometimes depending on colour associations – green for Venus, gold for the Sun, and blue for Jupiter – but at other times on the apparently undigested intricacies of star-lore transmitted from a wide variety of earlier sources.<sup>20</sup>

His correspondences for metals are more consistent (and rather less complicated). The association of metals with planets is mentioned by Celsus as early as the second century CE.<sup>21</sup> Ficino had already touched on the correspondences between the seven metals and seven planets in his *Argumentum* to Plato's *Critias* (1484) and his commentary on Plotinus's *Enneads* (1486–7). He originally provided a list of correspondences closely resembling those of the Neoplatonic philosopher and astrologer Olympiodorus (495–570): the Sun with gold, the Moon with silver, Saturn with lead, Jupiter with electrum, Mars with iron and copper, Venus with orichalc, and Mercury with tin.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, however, he settled on what was to become the standard set of associations between 'Superior' and 'Inferior' Astronomy, remarking that in the latter, 'alchemical authors' attribute tin to Jupiter, iron to Mars, copper to Venus, and quicksilver to Mercury.<sup>23</sup> These planet-metal correspondences form the basis of his recommendations for the fashioning of talismans. No examples that I know of survive from Ficino's time, but ones can be found in museum collections from the sixteenth century and later, many clearly displaying the influence of one author greatly indebted to Ficino, namely Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535), author of the well-known *De Occulta Philosophia libri tres – Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (1533).<sup>24</sup>

In Figure 1 we have a rather late, probably seventeenth-century, Lunar talisman, made of brass, an alloy of zinc and copper. Agrippa com-

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**19** Ficino 1998, 323.

**20** On the 'three colours of the world' related to the 'Three Graces', see Ficino 1998, 345. On magical gemstones, see Aakhus 2008. On Ficino in relation to plants, see Fabiani Giannetto 2008, esp. Chapter 3, 131–45.

**21** Forshaw 2011b, 253–54. Berthelot 1887, 73–85.

**22** Ficino 1576a, 2: 1486.

**23** Ficino 1576b, 2: 1601.

**24** For a discussion of planetary talismans and their metals, see Agrippa 1992, 310–18; 1651, 239–52. For Ficino's influence on Agrippa's thought, see Walker 2000, 90–96.

plicates Ficino's planetary-metal associations by recommending variations. For example, if you engrave the Moon's characters on Silver, when the Moon is in a fortunate aspect (i.e., in a suitable geometrical configuration with other planets), then it renders the bearer grateful, amiable, honoured, provides security on a journey, health of the body, and so forth; if the Lunar characters are engraved, however, on Lead under a malign aspect, then wherever the talisman is buried it brings misfortune, hinders physicians and orators, and all men in office. Here, then, with a Lunar talisman engraved on copper, we appear to have a combination of the qualities of the two feminine planets, Venus and the Moon.<sup>25</sup> We can only hope that it was engraved at a fortuitous time.

In Figure 2 we have a talisman of Venus from around the same period, identified not just by the zodiac signs flanking her throne: Taurus and Libra, both of which have the goddess as their ruler, and the astrological sign for Venus, but also by the Seals or Characters of Venus provided by Agrippa in Book 2, Chapter 22 of *De occulta philosophia* (Fig. 3).<sup>26</sup>

Given the plethora of natural materials under consideration, what criteria can Ficino offer for selection? One consideration is to bear in mind the fifth-century text *De sacrificio et magia – On sacrifice and magic*, where Proclus (412–485) writes about chains of taxonomic kinship, the belief that 'down from every star ... there hangs its own series of things'.<sup>27</sup> Ficino illustrates this with the series of the solar star Sirius, which includes the Sun as its planet, then Phoebean daemons, the hawk or cockerel as bird, balsam or laurel among plants, gold among metals, carbuncle and *pantaura* among stones.<sup>28</sup> To this hierarchical series could also be added lion as mammal and salamander as reptile.<sup>29</sup> Armed with knowledge of these chains, Ficino believes his aspiring magus will be able to select the appropriate material qualities, such as colour, taste, or texture, that are required for his talisman. He advises the magus to select whichever substance has more chance of comprehending the rest of the astral series. As an amulet, the stone *pantaura*, for instance, 'contains

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**25** According to Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* I.4 the Moon's power is mostly humidifying and moderately heating, while Venus is moderately warming and mostly humidifying, hence they share compatible natures. See Ptolemy 1994, 35–36.

**26** Agrippa 1651, 247.

**27** Ficino 1998, 309; Wear 2011, 142.

**28** Ficino 1998, 310.

**29** Copenhaver 1988, 284.

Book II. *Of Occult Philosophy.* 247

*The Table of Venus in her Compass.*

22	47	16	41	10	25	4
5	21	8	17	43	11	19
20	6	34	49	18	16	12
13	31	7	35	41	19	17
18	14	11	5	26	44	10
21	18	8	11	1	17	41
46	11	40	9	14	1	25

*The Seals, or Characters*

*Of Venus.*



*Of the Intelligence*

*Of Venus.*



3 The Seals, or Characters of Venus. H.C. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (1651), 247. Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam

in itself the powers of all stones, as gold does of metals, and the Sun of stars.<sup>30</sup> Given its rarity, however, those with more limited resources should use whatever is best available.

Ficino's magic, then, is a combination of natural and astral magic. In the terms of the historian D. P. Walker, Ficino's magic is 'spiritual' in the sense that it works with the quasi material *spiritus*, but seeks to avoid daemonic intervention.<sup>31</sup> Ficino takes pains to avoid any implication that he is advocating such much maligned practices as the invocation of spirits in necromancy or that he is risking even the shadow of idolatry.<sup>32</sup> So how does he explain the virtues of talismans, what does he suggest are the reasons for their efficacy?

<sup>30</sup> Ficino 1998, 313. On the solar Pantaura stone, see also Agrippa 1651, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Walker 2000, 45, 53 argues that despite the clear demonic magic of his Neoplatonic sources, Ficino's magical practices were supposed to be non-demonic, but concedes that his magic is addressed to 'good planetary demons', while suggesting that he is advancing a 'programme for a non-demonic magic, utilizing the *spiritus mundi* ...'.

<sup>32</sup> Ficino 1998, 343.

In *De vita coelitus comparanda*, Ficino explains what his kind of Magus does:

[H]e seasonably introduces the celestial into the earthly by particular lures just as the farmer interested in grafting brings the fresh graft into the old stock. Ptolemy also strongly argues this, affirming that a wise man of this sort can help the work of the stars just as the farmer does the power of the earth. The Magus subjects earthly things to celestial, lower things everywhere to higher ....<sup>33</sup>

The most readily available explanation for the magical power of talismans was the existence of cosmic sympathies and antipathies between specific stars and planets and the substances in the macro and microcosm.<sup>34</sup> Ficino is not content, however, with simply reiterating the vague notion of cosmic sympathies but tries to explain magical action in more concrete material terms. He posits the mechanistic explanation, for example, that if an amulet or talisman touches the wearer's flesh and is warmed thereby, then it puts forth its power and introduces celestial force into the human *spiritus*. This is how he believes the bezoar stone assists in preserving the body from plague and poison.<sup>35</sup> The magical power in a particular material lies latent, like the flame in sulphur or the fire in flint, until the 'material is violently agitated by art', under a suitable celestial influence, and 'begins to get warm from the agitation.' A simple example of this is how 'a somewhat weak power to snatch up straws, given to amber by the heavens, after it has been strengthened by friction and heating suddenly snatches them up'.<sup>36</sup> Ficino suggests that a talisman's concealed magical power is activated by the heating, hammering and engraving of the metal and is in this way strengthened, just as blowing on a spark kindles and strengthens a flame and makes manifest what was latent before.<sup>37</sup> As he has anxieties about the presence of images and words on his talismans, which, according to Aquinas, risk attracting the attention of daemons, Ficino even suggests that it might

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<sup>33</sup> Ficino 1998, 387.

<sup>34</sup> On occult correspondences, see Brach 2006. On the related doctrine of Signatures, see Bianchi 1987.

<sup>35</sup> Ficino 1998, 301.

<sup>36</sup> Ficino 1998, 327.

<sup>37</sup> Ficino 1998, 343.



be better simply to strike and heat talismans rather than engrave them.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, in his consideration of the hylemorphic union of matter and form in his composite talismanic objects, he clearly subordinates the visual import of the talimans to their materiality in the declaration that

the making of figures has no efficacy except in cases where it is similar in material and effect to some star from which the maker wants to receive this effect; and, in addition, where the material itself is already from the beginning of almost such a quality as you desire to render it through the figure.<sup>39</sup>

It is clear that Ficino's speculations on how to tap into the magical properties of substances left a lasting impression. 150 years after the publication of *De vita*, Jacques Gaffarel (1601–1681), librarian to Louis XIII's chief minister, Cardinal Richelieu, writes in his *Curiositez inouyes, sur la Sculpture Talismanique des Persans – Unheard-of Curiosities in the Talismanic Sculpture of the Persians* (1629) that one should 'not take an indifferent matter to engrave and shape under the constellations, but one already hot and dry in its nature' and even when one does have a suitable material, it still needs human artifice to stimulate it into action: 'thus various things, if they are not excited, don't work;' just as it is necessary to crush certain herbs between the fingers to make them emit their odour; amber needs to be rubbed before it picks up straw, and the flintstone needs to be struck before it produces a flame.<sup>40</sup> His contemporary, Jean-Albert Belin (d. 1677), author of *Talismans justifiés* (1653) concurs, advising that one should pour molten metal either into a mould or sand for it to be imprinted by the heavens, then the metal should be 'excited' either by the process of fusion or by engraving.<sup>41</sup> Writing a further 100 years later, in *An Essay on the Virtue and Efficient Cause of Magnetical Cures* (1743), the Dutch physician Herman Boerhaave (1668–1738), while discussing iron mineral *siderites* declares that they 'actually spout or drive out an invisible hidden power' and that 'the native Heat and Rubbing and Touching draws out a Virtue, which it communicateth to

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**38** Ficino 1998, 343. On Aquinas's attitude towards talismans and demons, see Walker 2000, 43.

**39** Ficino 1998, 327. On Ficino and talismans, see Copenhaver 1988, 282.

**40** Gaffarel 1629, 279, 323, 325; Sorel 1636, 45. On Gaffarel, see Thorndike 1958, 304–309.

**41** Lecouteux 2005, 157.

the Heart and Brains'.<sup>42</sup> Calling to mind Ficino's consideration of the power of fumigations, in his 400-page catalogue of the diseases and other afflictions (such as being bewitched) that are curable with the use of amulets, the *Curiosus amuletorum scrutator – Curious Investigator of Amulets* (1692), Jacob Wolf (1642–1694),<sup>43</sup> relates that the operations of amulets depend on them being bound to the body in the required place so that they work astrally and spiritually, by radiation, irradiation, and illumination, emitting effluvia that enter the pores of the body.<sup>44</sup>

Although Ficino suspects that bodily contact, by friction, percussion and transmission of heat, is the main explanation for the efficacy of talismans, he is less sure about the problem of action at a distance.<sup>45</sup> He does however, report instances of such action, speaking of how the effluvia or material images emanating from a menstruous woman affect a mirror, how the serpent *regulus* (i.e., the basilisk), kills people by shooting rays from its eyes, and the marine torpedo fish instantly numbs the hand that touches it even at a distance with a rod.<sup>46</sup> Again, he is careful to provide examples that avoid the issue of demonic interference.

We have already heard Ficino advocating magical activity under a suitable celestial influence. This approach was followed by many medieval and early modern practitioners of magic. In his influential *Archidoxis Magicae – Chief Teachings of Magic* (c.1570), another of Ficino's readers, the sixteenth-century alchemist, magus and revolutionary physician, Theophrastus Paracelsus of Hohenheim (1493–1541), provides us with additional considerations.<sup>47</sup> In the seventh book of his *Archidoxis, De Sigillis Planetarum – On the Seals of the Planets*, Paracelsus emphasises the importance of combining astrological knowledge of the heavens with an operative natural magical knowledge of the earth:

None can deny that the superior stars and influences of heaven are capable of having a great influence in transient and mortal matters ... And it is even possible for man himself to bring them into

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<sup>42</sup> Boerhaave 1743, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Wolf 1692, 30ff.

<sup>44</sup> Wolf 1692, 467.

<sup>45</sup> Ficino 1998, 351.

<sup>46</sup> Ficino 1998, 325.

<sup>47</sup> For Ficino's influence on Paracelsus, see Walker 2000, 102; Pagel 1982, 218, 223. It is debatable whether the *Archidoxis* is a genuine or pseudepigraphal Paracelsian text. See Weeks 2008, 884 (for); Kahn 2001, 276 (against).

some Medium, in such a way that they may effectively operate in it, whether that Medium be a Metal, a Stone, an Image, or anything else similar. But this is most important of all: to know that the seven planets have greater force in nothing than they possess in their proper metals.<sup>48</sup>

Given the alchemical quest for the Philosophers' Stone, perhaps it should not be so surprising that Paracelsus has a particular fascination for materials that, like Ficino's *pantaura* stone, apparently combine the power of many substances. One such alchemo-magical material is *Mumia*, the essence of Egyptian mummies and other dessicated corpses, which the Swiss physician believes contains all the virtues of plants and stones, operating by an occult magnetic force to accomplish miracles.<sup>49</sup> He and later followers are particularly excited by the virtues of *Electrum Magicum*.

According to some authorities, Electrum is simply *aurargentum*, a combination of gold and silver,<sup>50</sup> for those engaged in magic, however, it is the perfect alloy of all seven planetary metals. Paracelsus claims that the sum is greater than its parts and that electrum contains not just the powers of all seven metals, but in this unique *Septiumum & Uniseptem-plice* the alchemist-magus will also discover supernatural powers.<sup>51</sup> Electrum is, indeed, a preparation of immense magical power, from which many ritual objects can be fashioned: talismans, seals, rings, mirrors, bells, and so forth.<sup>52</sup> It has similar properties to the bezoar stone: if you make a cup or plate of electrum, no one using it will suffer from poison or evil incantation. Paracelsus writes of a necromantic bell that he saw in Spain. When the magician wrote various words and characters on the bell and then rang it all sorts of spirit and spectres appeared. His claim that the fact that the bell was made of 'our Electrum', was more important than the words engraved on it,<sup>53</sup> would doubtless have been reassuring news to Ficino, were it not for its evident use in a necromantic ritual.

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<sup>48</sup> Paracelsus 1605, 155. For more, see Goodrick-Clarke 1999, 192ff.

<sup>49</sup> For Paracelsus on *Mumia*, see Book 4 of *De Causis Morborum Invisibilium*, in Weeks 2008, 845–65. See also Gaffarel 1629, 214; Boerhaave 1743, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Burggrav 1612, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Paracelsus 1605, 149 and quoted in Burggrav 1612, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Burggrav 1612, 59, 64.

<sup>53</sup> Paracelsus 1605, 151–52.

In the *Archidoxis Magicae*, not only does Paracelsus include a recipe for the creation of this magical Electrum,<sup>54</sup> but he then goes on to provide detailed instructions on how to fashion a magical mirror. Such mirrors were part and parcel of medieval catoptromancy, being used for scrying – seeing visions of spirits – as an alternative to the crystallo-mantic use of beryl stones and crystal balls. The ‘Mirror of Floron’, for example, is described in medieval manuscripts as being made of pure steel, on the first hour of Friday, under a waxing moon, inscribed with magical names, anointed with balsam and fumigated with incense.<sup>55</sup>

One vital piece of information provided is that the nativity, i.e., natal horoscope of the mirror’s user influences the choice of the material with which one begins the creation process. If, for instance, the mistress of the nativity is Venus (i.e., the user’s sun sign or ascendant is in the zodiac signs Taurus or Libra), one should begin construction with copper and follow the planetary and metallic sequence Venus-Copper, Mercury-Quicksilver, Sun-Gold, Moon-Silver, and then from Saturn-Lead, Jupiter-Tin and Mars-Iron, back to Venus-Copper. If the ruler of the nativity, however, is Saturn, then one should begin with the metal Lead, then add Tin, Iron and so forth, following the same sequence. The only variation to this formula is if Mercury is the master of the nativity: since quicksilver is so volatile it should never be used as the first ingredient and should be included as the last metal in the amalgam.<sup>56</sup>

It is rare to find any surviving magic mirrors, although a twelfth-century bronze mirror engraved with magic squares and Quranic verses can be found in the Louvre and a small sixteenth-century brass magical hand mirror was discovered by archaeologists in Rostock in 1999.<sup>57</sup> The British Museum possesses an obsidian Aztec mirror that reputedly belonged to Queen Elizabeth I’s magus, John Dee (1527–1608).<sup>58</sup> Dee’s library catalogue reveals a profound interest in the writings of Paracelsus, Agrippa and Ficino, as well as in the magical manuscripts of the Middle Ages.<sup>59</sup> He is well known to historians of early modern magic for the

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**54** Recipes for its preparation can be found in the works of Paracelsus 1605, 144 and Burggrav 1612, 80.

**55** See Kieckhefer 1997, 104–06; Boudet 2006, 380.

**56** Paracelsus 1605, 147.

**57** On the Arabic mirror, see Regourd 2007. On the German mirror, see Brashear 2001; Schäfer & Burrows 2005.

**58** See Ackermann & Devoy 2012.

**59** See Roberts & Watson 1990.

angelic conversations or ‘actions with spirits’ that he engaged in with his sryer, Edward Kelley (1555–c.1597) during the 1580s. It appears that Kelley did not make use of the obsidian mirror, but instead sought visions in a crystal ball or ‘shew-stone’.<sup>60</sup>

One of Dee’s acquaintances shall serve as the final figure in this consideration of magical materials and objects. This is the German practitioner of alchemy, magic and Christian Cabala, Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605), who has been flatteringly called ‘one of the greatest Hermetic philosophers’.<sup>61</sup> Khunrath is worthy of attention in any consideration of the materiality of magic. The Swedish Royal Library in Stockholm possesses one of his manuscripts, the *Consilium de Vulcani magica fabricatione armorum Achillis – Counsel concerning Vulcan’s Magical Fashioning of the Armour of Achilles*, that includes Paracelsus’s instructions for creating a magical mirror, as well as discussions of the preparation of electrum, the forging of martial magical armour, the creation of automata, and the medico-magical properties of different animals, birds, and plants.<sup>62</sup>

Khunrath is best known for his baroquely illustrated *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae – Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom* (1595/1609), that contains a series of elaborate esoteric engravings.<sup>63</sup> The first of these is a magical seal (Pl. 14), the *Sigillum Dei/Emet* (Seal of God/Truth), bearing 10 Hebrew *shemoth* or divine names, the 10 *sephiroth* or divine emanations of Jewish Kabbalah, the names of the Angelic orders and at its heart the cruciform image of Christ – the Logos incarnated in matter – surrounded by a fiery pentagram containing the Christian Cabalist Wonder-Working name of Christ (YHSVH). Khunrath’s *Sigillum Dei* is an important visual encapsulation of his ‘Hyperphysical’ or Divine Magic, for ‘pious and useful conversation, as much when awake as when sleeping, mediately and immediately, with good Angels, God’s fiery ministers’.<sup>64</sup>

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**60** For the publication of Dee’s personal records, see Casaubon 1659. For modern scholarly accounts of Dee and Dee-related scrying, see Szönyi 2006; Klaassen 2012.

**61** Khunrath 1783, Vorbericht des Herausgebers, 2.

**62** Tilton 2006.

**63** See Eco 1989; Forshaw 2006.

**64** Khunrath 1609, 147 [mispaginated as 145]. For more on Khunrath’s “Hyperphysical Magic”, see Forshaw 2011a.

While this *Sigillum Dei* stands as the first of a series of occult and theosophical paper engravings in Khunrath's *Amphitheatre*, it surely takes on another level of significance in an unusual manuscript found in the British Library, somewhat misleadingly labelled 'Tabulae theosophicae cabbalisticae'.<sup>65</sup> The opening passage of the manuscript's coverpage intimates of the significance of its contents by providing the blessing of the high priest Aaron from the biblical Book of Numbers 6:24–26:

The LORD bless thee (me),  
 And keep thee (me).  
 The LORD show his face to thee,  
 (me) and have mercy on thee (me).  
 The LORD turn his face to thee (me)  
 And give thee (me) peace.

Bearing in mind Khunrath's interest in both Christian Cabala and Divine Magic, it is little surprise to discover that the very same verses can be found on Jewish ritual amulets.<sup>66</sup> The significance of the curious mirroring, interchange and identification taking place in the verbal reversal of the personal pronouns (me and thee) immediately becomes apparent when one turns the page to see the contents of this curious artifact: the 'Tables of Cabalistic Theosophy' contain large reproductions of the first two circular engravings in Khunrath's *Amphitheatre*, with one very important modification: the centre of each image has been gilded onto a *mirror*.

Gazing at this transformed *Seal of God* (Pl. 15), Khunrath the magician, aspirant not only for divine union but indeed for deification, sees himself occupying a liminal space of reflection with the *theanthropos*, the divine-man, the Word made flesh, with the supremely transcendent power that – far more effectively than even astral forces into a talisman – descended into matter.

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<sup>65</sup> British Library Sloane MS. 181, ff. 1–2.

<sup>66</sup> Casanowicz 1916.

## CONCLUSION

With this last example, we have come a long way from Ficino's cautious experiments with astral magic and his combined fascination with and trepidation about contact with the supernatural realms. Ficino provided his readers with descriptions of pagan talismanic images found in medieval works of magic, while Khunrath appropriates and transforms these practices, giving them a new Judeo-Christian face. While the two men may differ on their relation to the 'Vis Imaginum', the power of images, both share, however, a deep interest in the 'Vis Rerum', the power of things,<sup>67</sup> of the materials employed by magicians seeking reservoirs, containers and channels for *materia spiritualis*, the *materia tenuissima*, the subtlest spiritual matter carrying the powerful emanations of the stars.<sup>68</sup> As Ficino and later writers make clear, the materials for their talismans require excitation by their creators, their magical mirrors work best when attuned to the particular user. Perhaps this was the case with Khunrath's mirror, its properties needing to be activated by the magician's concentrated gaze, so that its effluvia would flow forth to transform man the magus, the *materia magica* par excellence.

## PHOTO CREDITS

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**Fig. 3** Courtesy of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam

**Pl. 14** Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Pl. 15** Courtesy of the British Library

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**67** For the use of these terms, see Lehrich 2003, 49–50.

**68** On *spiritus* as composed of heat and most subtle matter, see Campanella 1637, 72, 84. On Campanella's performance of a magical ritual for Pope Urban VIII based on his knowledge of those in Ficino's *De Vita*, see Forshaw 2010.

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OWEN DAVIES

## THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF POST-MEDIEVAL DOMESTIC MAGIC IN EUROPE: EVIDENCE, COMPARISONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

In his retirement the Deputy Director of the Museum of London and specialist on Roman London, Ralph Merrifield (1913–1995), wrote a book entitled *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987) that drew upon his note-making during some forty years in the museums services of south-eastern England.<sup>1</sup> With his interest in folklore and religion, Merrifield was curious about odd finds found in odd locations, from sites dating from the Roman period through to the twentieth century, which were ignored by academic archaeologists and were a puzzle to the museums that received them. Shoes buried in walls, animal bones under hearthstones, bent coins and tokens found on the Thames foreshore, chickens found in wall cavities. Was it all rubbish? Did these stray finds have any meaning?

Merrifield had eclectic interests and by his retirement he had accumulated a large file of miscellaneous information. ‘Getting this into order not only revealed new complexities and some unexpected relationships, together with a number of curious survivals,’ he explained, ‘but also made it necessary to reconsider the theoretical basis of interpretation.’<sup>2</sup> The unexpected relationships were revealed by Merrifield’s comparison of artefacts and deposition behaviour across two millennia,

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**1** While known for his histories of magic, it should be noted that the author has a degree in European archaeology and worked on various prehistoric sites in England and France during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time when ritual deposition was beginning to be hotly debated in the field.

**2** Merrifield 1987, xiv.

an approach that was highly original for the time – and remains so today. He was also in the early vanguard of archaeologists interested in the ‘archaeology of the mind’ or cognitive archaeology, and in particular the study of *pervasive* ritual in prehistory and early history, interests he noted that potentially marked one out as within the ‘loony fringe’ of archaeology at the time.

Yet *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* has until recently been largely ignored by those archaeologists interested in ritual activities, except amongst a few Roman specialists drawn by the extensive Roman coverage in the book, the irony being that Merrifield singled out Romanists as being the worst of all archaeologists when it came to knee-jerk scepticism about ritual interpretations.<sup>3</sup> Few medieval and post-medieval archaeologists have been interested in ritual full stop. Merrifield’s work has been a bit more readily appreciated by historians of magic, but even then scholarly awareness of or interest in material culture is limited. The book has inspired independent scholars, however, amongst them vernacular architecture specialists, speleologists, folklorists, archaeologists, historians, museum curators and conservators, and they have been at the forefront of the recording and study of the post-medieval material culture of magic in Britain. Recent work on the archaeology of magic in Finland, America and Australia is hopefully a sign of a new era of sustained study of ritual in post-medieval Europe and its historic diaspora communities.

It should go without saying that different disciplines have much to learn from each other’s source base, theories, and methodologies when it comes to understanding ritual activity and magic. But while there are numerous different conversations going on, they are rarely shared because of disciplinary, chronological, and geographical boundaries between scholarly communities and individuals. Due to their shared social science origins, European archaeologists have long reached out to anthropology looking for parallel rites and ritual activities in societies with superficially similar social structures across the globe, in the hope that they might unlock the mysteries of the depositions and structures they uncover. Anthropology has not reciprocated to the same degree.<sup>4</sup> Few, however, have done what Merrifield did and looked at historical and archaeological evidence of ritual and belief from the recent European

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Henig 1995; Fulford 2001, 199–200; Hingley 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Garrow and Yarrow 2010.

past to cast light on depositional activities in prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman Europe. This is not to argue that comparing practices in the same region but with a gap of several thousand years or even just a millennium is any more methodologically sound or appropriate than the global ethnographic comparative approach, only that it needs to be recognised better and is worthy of being employed more. I also hasten to add that historians, particularly medieval and post-medieval ones, have been equally guilty of ignoring the archaeological evidence on their doorsteps while seeking out global anthropological comparisons.

Morris and Jervis's recent plea in *Medieval Archaeology* that 'special deposits should no longer be seen as the preserve of prehistorians' is followed by the observation that medieval archaeologists were not hampered by a long history of interpretative tradition, 'in effect the canvas is relatively clean and we should take advantage of this'.<sup>5</sup> It is true that prehistorians were the first to take the archaeology of ritual seriously. The interpretation of enigmatic monumental earthworks, megalithic structures, landscapes of death in terms of burial mounds, and the extraordinary material evidence from wetland sites, cried out for methodologies and interpretive strategies to understand the meaning of religions and rituals that were long lost. Interest in the ritual aspects of ostensibly domestic and secular structures certainly came later, but the debate over the identification of domestic ritual depositions in the ancient Middle East, for instance, has been going on for over seventy years. Back in the 1950s domestic objects such as pottery, figurines, bronze items associated with hearths, baths and columns were described by some as having 'cultic' purposes for worship, while others argued they were simply mundane high-status debris. The debate has intensified in the ensuing decades.<sup>6</sup> The study of ritual deposition in Iron Age settlement contexts only began in the 1980s though, and Richard Bradley's book *Ritual and Domestic Life in Prehistoric Europe* (2005), provided a breakthrough in taking a long range view of the evidence. It is only in the last decade or so that the issue has been raised and begun to be explored in depth with regard to Anglo-Saxon settlements and sunken-featured buildings or *grubenhäusers*.<sup>7</sup>

It is telling that in a useful recent survey article on the archaeology of religious change it was stated that work on religious transmission

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<sup>5</sup> Morris and Jervis 2011, 78.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Press 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson 1999; Hamerow 2011; Morris and Jervis 2011.

and interaction had been 'dominated by sociology, anthropology and comparative religion'.<sup>8</sup> No mention of history. Since the 1970s historians of the medieval and early modern periods have shown considerable interest in the role of ritual in everyday life and popular magical practices. They have the benefit of knowing intimately the theology and practice of the dominant religions of the societies they study, and to a lesser extent how those religions influenced behaviour and thought throughout society. The Reformation, for example, is hugely important for exploring religious transmission and interaction; how different religious beliefs created different material cultures of worship and observance; how suppressed forms of Catholic worship continued to manifest themselves in parochial popular customs centuries after; and how in overseas contexts Christianity and its liturgical practices were subverted and transformed by non-Christian religions through processes defined as syncretism and creolization. To understand better the meaning and practice of religion amongst general populations as distinct from the official religion of the Churches, historians have used the term 'popular religions' in similar ways to the 'little traditions' of anthropology. Like all such terms it has been heavily critiqued and largely weathered the storm, and in relation to pervasive ritual practices, and popular conceptions of religion and magic, it is a useful analytical category. Of course, historians still face huge challenges in trying to interpret the literary sources when it comes to popular ritual practices in a world where the vast majority of people were illiterate. Evidence of the emotion and meaning of those participating in rituals and customs, and the origins and exact nature of the practices, is filtered through the often narrow or fogging lenses of ecclesiastical and secular legal records, the jaundiced pen of clergymen, and the imagination of the early antiquarians. The material collected by nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century folklorists also has to be treated with considerable caution.

The Classicist and archaeologist Robin Osborne welcomes the dialogue between archaeologists and those who work with texts to further the study of votive deposition, but believes texts, along with ethnographic accounts, are no substitute for the material evidence because they 'cannot substitute for the archaeological material because they are necessarily and inevitably partial'.<sup>9</sup> This is true in many respects; after

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<sup>8</sup> Shaw 2013, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Osborne 2004, 6.



all some of the post-medieval domestic protective practices have left no trace in the literary record. But the archaeological material cannot always be given primacy, because it too is partial in what it represents. Many archaeological domestic sites rarely reveal the ephemeral, the possible role of feathers, plant leaves and flowers in domestic ritual deposits. C. Riley Augé's research on threshold magic in early modern New England, for instance, identifies a range of plants used as apotropaics to protect domestic boundaries, and in this vein Gazin-Swartz has observed that 'the ritual nature of the (natural) feature is not inherent or obvious in either the material or the context'.<sup>10</sup> I also have in mind the curious 'witch ladder' consisting of cock's feathers entwined along a length of rope that was found in the attic of a Somerset house in the late nineteenth century. Archaeologists puzzle over bones, but what of the flesh, the use of animal hearts for example. They have been found in situ in existing structures, but are very difficult to identify in 'below ground' archaeology. Archaeological science can now reveal the nature of liquids kept in ancient vessels, but it is far more difficult to detect those poured over deposited objects interred in the ground at domestic sites – where archaeologists are far less likely to be looking for libations anyway. How would we know from archaeology that a horse's head buried under the foundations of a nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist Chapel to protect it against witches had a glass of beer poured over it as part of the ritual if a folklorist had not recorded the memory?<sup>11</sup>

Neither can the material evidence reveal what might have been said during the entombment of a cat, the threshold burial of a dog, or the carving of an apotropaic symbol. The historical record often does not either, but we do know from the literature that words, prayers, and charms were spoken during some domestic rituals. Consider the report of the Lincolnshire folklorist Robert Heanley in 1898. He was led into the bedroom of a boy suffering from malaria by the boy's grandmother. She told Heanley she had a better cure than the quinine he brought. Three horseshoes were nailed to the centre of the bed's footboard with a hammer fixed cross-wise upon them. The old woman took the hammer and tapped each horseshoe saying:

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<sup>10</sup> Gazin-Schwartz 2001, 273; Augé 2013, appendix C.

<sup>11</sup> Porter 1969, 181.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
 Nail the devil to this post,  
 With this mell, I thrice do knock,  
 One for God,  
 And one for Wod,  
 And one for Lok.<sup>12</sup>

This example also illustrates the pitfalls of such oral evidence though, for Heanley was on a zealous search for survivals of Viking paganism, and mistook ‘wood’ (as in knock on wood for luck) for the god Wod (Woden), and ‘luck’ or the apostle ‘Luke’ for the god Lok (Loki).<sup>13</sup> We will return to this issue shortly.

Historians, like archaeologists, are faced with absences of evidence, but this only becomes evident to them if they recognize the significance of archaeology. As historical archaeologists Tarlow and West observed in their neatly-entitled edited collection *The Familiar Past?* ‘if prehistoric archaeology is about making the unknown more familiar, the archaeology of historic periods is often about defamiliarising what we think is the known past’.<sup>14</sup> Although not addressed in their book, this is particularly pertinent with regard to ritual and magic. Many building deposits have ended up in builders skips due to a false assumption that such finds cannot have any significant meaning in a familiar early modern or modern context. Writing in 2005, for instance, one French investigator of concealed shoes remarked that ‘Generally, no interest is given in France to old shoes found in buildings’. What Rainer Atzbach has aptly described as the ‘archaeology on the upper storeys’ is constantly ignored or under threat, even though, as he notes, ‘Hardly any other ar-

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**12** Heanley 1898, 186.

**13** Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote to a friend of his childhood use of this night-time prayer:

‘Matthew ! Mark ! Luke and John !  
 God bless the bed which I lie on.  
 Four angels round me spread,  
 Two at my foot, and two at my head.

This prayer I said nightly, and most firmly believed the truth of it. Frequently have I (half-awake and half-asleep, my body diseased and fevered by my imagination), seen armies of ugly things bursting in upon me, and these four angels keeping them off.’ Coleridge 1895, 13.

**14** Tarlow and West 1999, 1.

chaeological resource permits such an intimate look into the past'.<sup>15</sup> An exemplary story comes from Ireland where in the 1970s a cache of objects were found secreted in a bread oven, including an iron candle snuffer, iron bar, pewter spoon, two clay pipe bowls, four bottles, animal bones and ceramics. The items were clearly deposited purposefully when the oven was bricked up in the early twentieth century. The Irish Folklore Division of the National Museum of Ireland was consulted, but could make no sense of the finds. The Museum did not want to keep them either, so they were thrown away. It was only in 2012 that the curator who originally recorded the finds realised their significance while attending a panel session entitled 'Manifestations of Magic: The Archaeology and Material Culture of Magic and Folk Belief' at the Society for Historical Archaeology in Baltimore, which brought together key British, Australian and American researchers in the field.<sup>16</sup>

Terminology is another challenge, and can hinder cross-disciplinary collaboration and dialogue.<sup>17</sup> Terms such as cultic, sacrifice, votive, hoard, cache, apotropaic, numinous, sacred and profane, secular and religious, special properties, offerings, special deposits, foundation deposits, spiritual middens, foundation sacrifices, intentional deposition and structured deposition litter the literature. This is, in part, a result of the 'long history of interpretative tradition' in pre-medieval archaeology, with decades of debate leading to multiple definitions, and in part due to various independent disciplinary contributions to the field. The term 'spiritual midden', for example, was coined by Timothy Easton, an expert on East Anglian vernacular architecture, to describe the caches of seemingly worthless objects, including old shoes and animal remains, found concealed in buildings, particularly in voids near chimneys and hearths, that had been reported to him since the 1970s. These voids were not fully sealed, and depositions were added over time.<sup>18</sup> It has become a quite widely adopted term for those working on domestic sites in the post-medieval period, albeit not always used in the specific context of long-term use identified by Easton, yet it is not used by those working on pre-medieval periods.

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**15** Montebault 2005, 33; Atzbach 2012, 275.

**16** Kelly 2012, 16–18.

**17** For a good overview of terminological issues see Manning 2012; Osborne 2004, 5.

**18** Easton 1997.

It is important to be sensitive to the terminology. Several Scandinavian historical archaeologists have rightly taken exception to the term 'foundation sacrifice/offering'. For one, sacrifice is a very loaded term, implicitly or explicitly referring to offerings dedicated to, supplicating or coercing deities.<sup>19</sup> In most instances, whether prehistoric or historic, there is nothing to suggest from the evidence at domestic sites that the ritual practices are concerned with gods. Second, similar types of deposit are not just found in foundations but in other parts of buildings, near chimneys, doorways, and windows, and in the rafters, for example. The use of the term 'special deposit' has also been questioned recently on the basis that 'depositional activity should be seen as multi-thematic rather than simply functional or ritual'.<sup>20</sup> While Osborne notes that 'there is a tendency to think that classifying something as a foundation deposit is the end, rather than the beginning, of an analysis'.<sup>21</sup>

Can we use the same language across millennia and cultures to describe similar looking deposition behaviour? It would certainly help to get some consensus. Is the terminology used to categorise suspected ritual depositions in Iron Age roundhouses also appropriate for those found in nineteenth-century cottages? The use of 'cult' or 'cultic' behaviour is not uncommon in the literature on prehistory, and is used in historic contexts with regard to expressions of medieval popular religion, but seems entirely inappropriate with regard to post-medieval popular magical and depositional practices. We are not dealing with cults as understood in a modern historical context. The most striking difference in terminology concerns 'magic', which historians are habituated to and comfortable with using in generalised ways, but which pre-medieval Western and Northern European archaeologists evidently feel uncomfortable with and rarely use. The origin, concept and practice of both the term 'magic' and its expression in the ancient Mediterranean world and Near East has been much discussed by historians, and hence archaeologists of these regions feel comfortable with discussing magic along with religion and ritual. So Andrew T. Wilburn's stated aim in his recent book on Roman Egypt, Cyprus and Spain, *Materia Magica* (2012), is to 'locate and identify magical artifacts and then using the objects to reconstruct how magic was practised within the local environment'.<sup>22</sup> The post-me-

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<sup>19</sup> Hukantaival 2007, 66.

<sup>20</sup> Morris and Jervis 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Osborne 2004, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Wilburn 2012, 9.

dievalist could easily adopt the same ‘magical’ mission statement but not the British Bronze Age archaeologist it would seem. The relative comfort with which medieval and early modern historians use ‘magic’ is also due to it having been extensively chewed over and debated to the point where any sensitive scholar of magic uses it knowing that others are aware of the snags, the semantic developments, and need not hedge his or her language *ad exhaustum*.<sup>23</sup>

One reason for the sensitivity across disciplines is the legacy of the old social science three-stage division of human development into ages of magic, religion and science. This has cast a long shadow over history and anthropology in particular, but also infected archaeology. The idea that magic was an early stage of human cognition that led to the formation of religions has been amply discredited but the relationship between magic and religion remains problematic across disciplines. This is not the place to reflect deeply on this, but dichotomies of what is religion or magic slip easily into the discourse on the materiality of magic across disciplines. A lot of popular magic is religious, and one definition of popular magic is the use of religion for practical or profane rather than spiritual purposes, such as the placing of the Bible under the pillow to cure nightmares, the use of font water for curing a bewitched pig, the invocation of holy names in written charms. Compared with the totality of popular magical practice in the post-medieval period as understood from the archives, though, the material evidence in Protestant countries shows remarkably little overt religiosity. Yes, as will be discussed later, religion is central to genres of written and inscribed apotropaics, but in terms of the secretion or deposition of Bibles or pages from the Bible, or physical representations of the cross, the evidence is intriguingly limited. A copy of a miniature Bible printed in 1901 was found in a boot concealed in a Lincolnshire house, and Ian Evans’ Australian research turned up a Bible lodged in joist and one in a chimney.<sup>24</sup> Why do we find so few Bible deposits considering its fundamental role, both as a source and as an object in popular magic? Why so few object crosses (as distinct from carved crosses discussed later) placed in strategic places? The notion that the Reformation did away with all Catholic popular practices has been discredited, and we know from nineteenth-century folklore sources that crosses were made and used for domestic and live-

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<sup>23</sup> For an overview see Davies 2012; Bremmer 2008, 347–52.

<sup>24</sup> Manning 2012, 154; Evans 2010.

stock protection.<sup>25</sup> Then again, absence of evidence may not be evidence of absence.

Amy Gazin-Schwartz, and Herva and Ylimaunu, working on Scotland and Finland respectively, have made cogent arguments for the use of folklore or folk belief in interpreting the material culture of ritual in earlier periods. 'Folk belief', a term that encompasses popular religion and folklore but is distinct from it, defines a wide range of notions and practices at odds with elite intellectual moral and religious norms. Herva and Ylimaunu emphasise that these folk beliefs 'were inextricably embedded in the local mode of perceiving and engaging with the material world in everyday life'.<sup>26</sup> The exploration of folk belief for interpretive archaeological purposes requires great sensitivity though, as Gazin-Schwartz and Herva are well aware. The folklore record is inherently biased by the interests and assumptions of the collectors and the theories to which they subscribed. So cities were largely avoided because of the assumption that 'old' traditional practices and beliefs could not survive long in the urban-industrial environment.<sup>27</sup> For decades many folklorists were seduced by the theories of myth-ritualists like Max Müller, Edward Tylor and James Frazer. Popular beliefs were enthusiastically interpreted as being 'survivals' of ancient pagan religions, the last expressions of the first sun-worshipping or fertility religions at the dawn of humanity. Folklorists went looking for these vestiges amongst the rural poor and misguidedly thought they had found them in a myriad innocuous customs and beliefs. Few folklore collections are truly open-ended in terms of the information sought. The information recorded is shaped by the questions asked, and the guidance of conversations towards the information sought. The search for vestigial sacrifice is a case in point and the deliberate entombment of cats provides a useful illustration.

In 1911 an Irish folklorist noted from conversations with builders that several deliberately walled up cats, apparently entombed while alive, had been found in recesses in the walls of Dublin houses. He correctly identified them as having ritual significance, but leapt to the conclusion that they were 'substitutes for human sacrifices'.<sup>28</sup> A systematic survey of mummified cats in Britain, with a few examples from Sweden, was pub-

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<sup>25</sup> Hutton 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Gazin-Schwartz 2001; Herva and Ylimaunu 2009.

<sup>27</sup> In terms of material culture, this was amply disproved by the pioneering work in early twentieth-century London of Edward Lovett. See Hill 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Westropp 1911, 54–5.

lished in the anthropological journal *Man* in 1951. The author, Margaret Howard, from the Institute of Archaeology, noted the idea of them being foundation sacrifices but came up with a conclusion that was intriguingly contrary to the usual 'pagan vestiges' argument. Howard believed that for centuries after the arrival of the cat in Roman Britain it was valued in a utilitarian way as a rodent hunter, and only became an 'object of superstition' during the witch trial era when it became associated with witches and the Devil. Plentiful in supply, cats were now handy 'as sacrifices and offerings to their supposed master, the Devil, as the old gods had come to be called. The ancient idea of foundation sacrifice, to appease these powers of darkness, could thus, in due course, have become blended with the utilitarian conception of the cat as a vermin-scare'. The result was a new vague tradition by the seventeenth century that an entombed cat conferred luck.<sup>29</sup>

Howard's historical reflections are deeply problematic. For one, she erroneously locates the witch trials in the Middle Ages. Still, that aside, she is not the only one to ponder whether the era of the European witch trials (between 1450 and 1750) had a significant influence on the prevalence of material magic in the archaeological record. A recent German survey of mummified cats in the district of Ludwigsburg makes tentative links with protection against witchcraft at the time of the witch trials, noting though that some deposits were from the second half of the nineteenth century. Hukantaival, assessing the evidence of building deposits in Finland, poses the question of whether there any changes of pattern and frequency in building deposits dateable to the witch prosecution era. This is an interesting area for future investigation, but it is important to emphasise that the rise of witchcraft prosecutions, made possible by the institution of new laws, does not necessarily reflect increased popular fear of witches. It is quite likely levels of popular concern regarding witchcraft were not hugely different between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Likewise, fear of witchcraft was as pervasive in the nineteenth century as the seventeenth century. It is elite concerns over diabolic witchcraft that led to the legal judicial persecutions rather than overwhelming pressure from a groundswell of popular concern.

Back to the main theme, though, and Howard's interpretation is clearly influenced by the theories of fellow Institute member, the Egyptologist and folklorist Margaret Murray. Murray's body of work on the

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<sup>29</sup> Howard 1951.

survival into the early modern period of a persecuted pagan fertility cult that worshiped a horned god, was influential within academia and particularly outside. As Merrifield was perfectly aware, by the early 1970s the Murrayite interpretation that those persecuted as witches were members of an ancient pagan witch cult was largely discredited in academic circles. Yet Merrifield's assessment of the apparent continuity of the material evidence for ritual activity led him to suggest that, with regard to criticism of Murray's central theory, 'the pendulum may have swung too far'. Maybe some of those persecuted were 'groups of people who still met to perpetuate a traditional paganism'.<sup>30</sup> So Merrifield was perfectly comfortable with the explanation that cat deposition was a survival of 'the ancient custom of building sacrifice' and others have, by and large, followed suit.<sup>31</sup>

Howard, Merrifield and others were all aware of the more obvious explanation that the cats were placed there like scarecrows or the plastic owls put in vegetable plots to scare away vermin, a practice we find elsewhere. In France, owls were widely seen nailed to barn doors to chase away mice and rats, while in Belgium hawks were nailed on farm doors as a warning to other birds of prey.<sup>32</sup> But the general tendency is to seek *religious* antiquity in such practices when it may not exist. We do not have to go back to or get sucked into the old folkloric concerns with the vestiges of sacrificial practices or ancient fertility religions as an origin. The entombment of cats like other animals in domestic contexts can simply be interpreted as acts of sympathetic protective magic not religion. So in the French Alps, as in Denmark and Sweden, custom had it that one protection from witches was to bury a live adder under the threshold. The adder, a beast to be avoided, maintained its active property after death warding off unwanted visitors more generally.<sup>33</sup> The buried cat likewise, particularly if entombed alive, would continue its vermin deterrent function. Those finds where cats were deliberately positioned with a rat or mouse in or near their mouths are obvious examples of imitative magic.<sup>34</sup> There are also several finds of chickens

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**30** Merrifield 1987, 160.

**31** Merrifield, 1987, 131; Schad 2005; Sheehan 1990.

**32** Harou 1912 ; Seignolles 1978, 202; Notes sur les superstitions et coutumes de la province de Liège. In: *Revue des Traditions Populaires* 18 (1903) 397.

**33** Gennep 1948, 92; Seignolles 1978, 220.

**34** Manning 2012, 230–32.



being walled up in post-medieval buildings.<sup>35</sup> An offering to household spirits? As some have suggested. Or sympathetic magic once again with the chickens protecting the building from grubs, beetles, flies and wood-worm. Anyone who has raised chickens knows how effective they are at picking off such invertebrates that can infest houses. Dogs buried under the threshold continued to perform their guarding function against unwanted spiritual visitors and mundane thieves. In prehistoric contexts it should not be assumed that threshold dog burials are aspects of sacrifice or religion, and in post-medieval times no need to think in terms of the diminution of ancient religious ritual: both could be based on basic magical not religious principles.

Some historians, particularly those working on medieval and early modern theological and scientific texts concerning magic, ghosts and miracles, are precise in their usage of 'supernatural', preferring the term 'preternatural' in certain contexts. In the Christian theology of the periods 'supernatural' denoted a power beyond and above that of nature, in other words God, and all things were created by God. 'Preternatural' denoted an apparent unnatural state or a power unknown to human experience but which was not beyond nature. So from an early modern theological perspective the supposed powers of the Devil and witches were preternatural.<sup>36</sup> So in this context, from a theological point of view (not necessarily that of the actors), seventeenth-century Scottish farmers who made a protective building deposit to supplicate the fairies who shared their domestic space, were engaging in a preternatural not a supernatural act. In modern popular language such distinctions are completely lost and, of course, meant nothing to most people in the past. So should the prehistorian make such terminological distinctions when interpreting non-Christian ritual deposits, particularly with regard to the frequently invoked interpretation of religion as ancestor worship? It is generally not helpful to get too obsessed with the terminology in the search for answers – or at least interpretations of past behaviour, yet an expressed awareness of how different disciplines have different terminological concerns and definitions is a valuable step forward in uncovering the meaning of material magic.

Much of the deep discussion over terminology in the European archaeological and anthropological world has concerned the use and

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<sup>35</sup> Merrifield 1987, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Clark 1999, 262–66.

meaning of 'ritual' and the attempt to distinguish ritual deposition from 'mere' rubbish. This has led to questioning other either/or definitions such as 'domestic or ritual structures'. In her much cited 1999 article 'Ritual and Rationality' Joanna Brück concluded that archaeologists should stop using the term ritual altogether and instead focus on rationality. Ritual as used by archaeologist and anthropologists, she argued, was a post-Enlightenment construct based on the false certainty that secularity is functional and rational while ritual is the opposite. There is a lot of truth in this view about how history shapes modern interpretive paradigms about the distant past to the detriment of our understanding. We have moved away from talk of 'primitive' and 'savage' that so infused the work of the early social sciences, but more subtle legacies remain. Yet Brück chucks the baby out with the bathwater. Bradley and others came to a more nuanced resolution of the 'ritual' problem, arguing that we should consider domestic space as a ritual space, and that in essence there should be no distinction between ritual and profane.<sup>37</sup> As Kuijpers has pointed out in his study of Dutch Bronze Age artefacts, though, rejecting the term 'ritual' or adopting the Bradley approach simply shifts the problem of archaeological interpretation. 'The problem does not lay in the *term* 'ritual' but in the recognition and interpretation of it.'<sup>38</sup>

One need only research sixteenth-century European cultures to see that the secular as well as the religious environment was suffused with ritual in Protestant as well as Catholic societies, and to recognize that that there is a continuum of ritual behaviour from official spiritual centre to home and to workplace – just as we find in antiquity. Because ritual 'permeated all fields of life' does not make it a redundant tool for analysing behaviour, for trying to understand how religion, cultural belief and ritual were expressed differently in formal and informal spaces, in different social and cultural spheres, and over time. When exploring domestic ritual and magic we should not be guided entirely by a 'coefficient of weirdness' – to borrow Malinowski's phrase to describe the references, grammar, and structures that defined magical speech in his ethnographic research – when trying to determine the purpose of material domestic remains. As early modern historians of witchcraft accept,

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**37** Brück 1999, 2005. The history of the 'ritual turn' is discussed in Bremner 1998. For recent examinations of the ritual issue, see Insoll 2011.

**38** Kuijpers 2008.

sometimes we must throw away modern intuition and language, and our preconceptions of what is logical or rational, when studying past beliefs. Terms such as ‘witch craze’ or ‘witch hysteria’ are inappropriately modern psychiatric terms that accentuate the ‘them and us’ view of what is rational. Interpret the evidence sensitively and witchcraft makes perfect sense intellectually, theologically, environmentally, and socially in early modern terms. Beliefs and practices in the past should never be categorised as ‘weird’ or ‘bizarre’. Unfamiliar maybe, but that should lead to attempts to understand and not to dismiss or summarily categorize. In archaeological terms there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the standard practice of eliminating the possibly mundane or profane purpose of deposits before considering ritual, but inexplicability should not lead inexorably to ritual interpretation – and vice versa. Let us accept frankly the whole range of possibilities when things *seem* either obvious or inexplicable. Historic sources show that the ordinary can be magical and the magical appear ordinary. Rubbish such as a worn out shoe, a broken implement, an old horseshoe, some animal bones, can be as profound in their meaning, purpose, and use as any votive objects meticulously crafted for obvious ritual, religious or magical purposes.

A classic ‘ritual or profane’ argument in a modern historical context concerns the placement of horse skulls under floorboards and thresholds. Ethnographic work conducted in mid-twentieth century Ireland and Scandinavia revealed divergent theories. In Sweden, Albert Sandklef reported the practice of placing skulls under threshing floors to enhance the acoustics to create a more pleasing sound that aided the rhythmic syncopation of a flailing team. The desire for better acoustics was also behind many of the Irish instances reported a few years earlier by Sean O’Súilleabháin, though these related to floors used for dancing in domestic settings and in churches to enhance the audibility of the priest. Still, O’Súilleabháin concluded that the acoustic explanation was a rationalisation of a long forgotten foundation sacrifice. Sandklef rebutted this interpretation in 1949 claiming there was no evidence of horses’ heads being buried for domestic protection, although the burial of other animals, snakes in particular, coins, and prehistoric axes was widespread; so the horse head deposits were mundane. The year after, O’Súilleabháin wrote in the *Varbergs Museum Årsbok* (edited by Sandklef) that on reflection he agreed with Sandklef’s secular interpretation. Then Brita Egardt, whose thesis was on the ethnography of horse slaughtering, weighed in with a swingeing critique of Sandklef’s research methods, simplification

of evidence and conclusions.<sup>39</sup> For Egardt there was ample ethnographic evidence of the burial of horse skulls as a domestic apotropaic (and for protecting bridges) in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe. She cited evidence from a questionnaire about house building organized by the Swedish Nordic Museum. There was an account from Västmanland, for instance, concerning the mortaring of a horse's head into a fireplace wall to protect the house from fire. Egardt was cautious, though, about making any broad statements regarding the practice being the vestige of some horse-worshipping pagan past dedicated to fertility rites. Merri-field, apparently unaware of the Swedish language publications, weighed up O'Suilleabháin and Sandklef's initial findings and tended towards the former's ritual interpretation, further suggesting that the Scandinavian threshing floor acoustic skulls might still have had some deeper 'magico-religious purpose' in origin.<sup>40</sup> The issue rumbles on today. Hukantaival's recent Finnish study provides ethnographic evidence for the ritual practice there, as well as in Lithuania and Latvia. As with the Swedish and Danish evidence, however, there is more literary evidence than archaeological evidence for the practice. Only one skull has been found in a possible apotropaic context in post-medieval Finland, though two cases of complete horses being buried under hearths have been recorded. Hukantaival accepts the possibility, albeit not fully convinced, that the practice was 'an extension' of Iron Age horse cult practices, with the meaning having changed over the millennia.<sup>41</sup>

The concept of object biographies provides a useful methodology for enabling and opening up cross-disciplinary, *longue durée* approaches to the materiality of magic. Artefacts, as well as those who used or deposited them, have life histories that need to be considered and contextualised in order to understand better their meaning, and the societies that employed them, at any point in time. The study of material culture, which has emerged as a distinct scholarly field in the last couple of decades, is about the interaction between things and people in historical, archaeological, sociological and anthropological contexts, each being shaped and given new meaning in the process. As Dinah Eastop, an expert on the conservation of garments concealed in buildings, puts it, 'Things matter because people use them and give them meaning in action and in lan-

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**39** Varbergs museum årsbok 1950, 52; Egardt 1950.

**40** Sandklef 1949; O'Suilleabháin 1945.

**41** Hukantaival 2009; see also Carlie 2004.

guage so material culture is concerned with why things matter.<sup>42</sup> This requires raising a whole series of questions about the changing meaning of an object over time before beginning to categorize or label it. In terms of domestic magic, we need to consider why, at certain moments, magical and/or ritual meaning was given to everyday domestic objects such as pots, shoes and garments; in what contexts iron and silver were thought to have active apotropaic properties – by what conceptual processes did a broken piece of ploughshare rusting in the corner of a barn become valuable when placed in a chimney cavity?

The widespread use of Neolithic and Bronze Age stone tools in ritual domestic practices from the Iron Age to the twentieth century is a good case in point.<sup>43</sup> We know from literary sources that since the medieval period stone axes were considered to be thunderbolts from the heavens and possessed magical properties for healing and protection. They were kept in houses to ward off lightning and fire. Ethnographic sources reveal they were placed on shelves and in draws, under the stairs, and immured in walls, under thresholds and in the sill and eaves.<sup>44</sup> It has been argued that the notion of the magical potency of such axes developed in the last few centuries BCE because their location in archaeological contexts of that period suggests ritual deposition. The belief in them as thunderbolts for protection was clearly widespread in later periods, so perhaps the same beliefs held when the objects first became magical. Then again, the thunderbolt notion could have been a medieval development. The later biography of stone axes also has implications for understanding the much earlier period in which they were fabricated. The field archaeologist cannot assume that where a stone axe is found is where it was last placed, discarded or lost. The debate over the extent of Neolithic activity in the Black Forest has, for example, rested considerably on the presence and distribution of stone axes, with it being argued by some that the medieval and early modern trade in thunderstones for fire protection makes any attempt to extrapolate from stray finds worthless for understanding Neolithic settlement and economy in the region.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Eastop 2009, 145. For neat examples of this approach see Stensköld 2006; Wingfield 2010.

43 Adkins and Adkins 1985; Eckhardt and Williams 2003.

44 Carelli 1997; Johanson 2006, 2009; Vasks 2003 (Based on Material from the Daugava Basin).

45 Kienlin and Valde-Nowak 2004.

Here is an object biography scenario that illustrates the issues. A flint axe made 5000 years ago is left where it was discarded at a woodland site by its first possessor. Nearly three millennia later, it is found and placed under the threshold of an Iron Age roundhouse. Then it is picked up by a Roman farmer's wife a century later. She travels several miles to a Romano-Celtic temple one day and leaves it as a votive offering to the gods. A millennium passes and it is turned up by a ploughman and placed in the thatch of a barn to protect it from fire. A late nineteenth-century antiquarian comes across it when looking at old vernacular buildings. He purchases it from the farmer and puts it in his collection, and then decades later his collection is given to a local museum. Here it is put on display and labelled as a Neolithic axe from the area. Its original mundane purpose has been resurrected, its millennia as a ritual and magical object in different locations with different social and religious functions forgotten. Ceri Houlbrook's recent study of two English caches of concealed shoes dating to the nineteenth century adopts this object biography approach and takes their study in interesting new interpretive directions. She coins the term 'ritual recycling' to describe the process whereby during the shoes' existence they move from one category of meaning to another, changing value in the process of recontextualisation. The shoes can only be classified as 'objects' or 'subjects', 'profane' or 'numinous', at certain moments through its existence. A single classification cannot be imposed upon them.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, object biographies do not tell the whole story. The buildings in which they were placed also have their own complex life histories. Places gave meaning to objects and vice versa. Herva, for instance, has explored how 'converting trees into wood signifies a new phase in the cultural biography of trees', with timber houses assuming some of the influences that trees had on human cognition and belief.<sup>47</sup> The notion of the embodied home is another related way of understanding the different spiritual and magical meaning of its constituent parts, and the rituals conducted with and within it. The house-body metaphor can be explored through life cycles from birth, through the vicissitudes of daily life, to decay and erasure. In his study of the metaphors of place and space in colonial New England, Robert Blair St. George explored the personification of the house in terms of the threats it faced, ascribing the

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<sup>46</sup> Houlbrook 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Herva 2010.

properties of the heart to the hearth, the breast to the chimney, the roof to the head, the windows to the eyes, and the front door to the mouth. Devils and witches afflicted the home as they did the body, possessing it, attacking the vulnerable spots, the openings – the door (mouth), window (eyes) and hearth (heart). So these were the places that needed protecting most from external threats.<sup>48</sup> But like the body the home was also riddled with parasites and constantly eroded, scratched and dirtied by minor irritants, rats, mice, beetles, birds and bats. Protection of the home as well as the body was only partly about spiritual attack. Popular magic was concerned as much with fleas as fairies, warts as witches.

The idea of the home and its inhabitants sharing the same body leads to the possibility of sharing emotions, merging identities.<sup>49</sup> In Bulgarian folk belief buildings are guarded or given strength by a spirit named the *talasûm*. A building acquires a *talasûm* by imbuing its structure with human life by capturing the shadow of a living person or his or her footsteps in the structure. This person is thought to die within forty days and becomes the *talasûm*.<sup>50</sup> We could interpret the concealment of shoes and garments in buildings as another expression of this encapsulation of life, a ritual that gives identity and strength to the structure through the sharing of personal identities, materials of intimacy.<sup>51</sup>

With regard to the ritual life cycles of buildings, archaeologists have focussed principally on the start and end of a structure's existence, on the evidence of foundation and termination deposition. The former has received the most attention. Prevention is better than cure, so it made good sense to build protective devices into or around a domestic structure from the start of its life, with a particular focus on its boundaries, post-holes, wall ditches, and thresholds. Ecclesiastical cornerstone rituals are a good medieval example. The cornerstone was symbolic of Christ the foundation of all foundations, and therefore its placement was at the centre of a ceremony that involved the exorcism and purification of the land on which the edifice was to be built, followed by the laying of the stone and placement of a cross on top.<sup>52</sup> The identification and meaning of domestic termination or abandonment rituals has attracted less concerted attention. Merrifield's material was consequently thin in

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48 St. George 1998, 188–95.

49 Tilley 1999, 268.

50 MacDermott 1998, 66.

51 Swann 1996; Eastop 2006; Herva 2012.

52 Iogna-Prat 2009, 97.

this respect.<sup>53</sup> Bradley provides some striking prehistoric examples, and Hamerow's reading of the Anglo-Saxon evidence suggests that domestic foundation deposits were rare, whereas domestic termination deposits of animal and human bone, and to a lesser degree ceramics, were quite widespread with regard to sunken featured buildings Morris and Jervis, though have recently contested her emphasis on termination deposition.<sup>54</sup>

What could be described as closure rituals can also be found in post-medieval contexts. The excavation of several seventeenth-century Yorkshire limekilns has revealed the careful placement of horse bones and horse skulls at the bottom of redundant limekilns before being backfilled.<sup>55</sup> The closure deposits in an Irish oven have already been mentioned, and a dried cat, sardine tin, jam jar and a horseshoe were placed in an iron bread oven at a house in north Devon before it was bricked up sometime towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> The early medieval evidence, along with the few post-medieval examples, suggest that termination rituals may have been associated particularly with domestic industry. The placement of spindlewhorls and loom-weights in Anglo-Saxon backfill has been particularly noted, for example.<sup>57</sup> At the early medieval Irish Deer Park Farms site a wooden oak trough suited for kneading was deliberately left with a shoe last placed within it before the wattle walls and posts of the existing building were pushed over it and flattened, with a new building being built on the same spot on a foundation layer of clay and stones. Quernstones, whole and in pieces, have also been found near thresholds in ritual abandonment contexts at a number of Irish sites.<sup>58</sup> For the prehistoric period Bradley has also associated quernstones with both the creation and abandonment of dwellings.<sup>59</sup>

Once again the evidence raises the issue of the relationship between terminology and original purpose. Were these depositions really about abandonment, the 'death' of a house or building? Closure could also have been an act of rebirth. Once again, global ethnographic examples

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<sup>53</sup> Merrifield 1987, 48–50.

<sup>54</sup> Bradley 2005, 52–54; Hamerow 2006, 27; Morris and Jervis 2011, 67–68.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Hoggard, 176.

<sup>57</sup> Hamerow 2006, 18; Gibson and Murray, 210–11.

<sup>58</sup> O'Sullivan 2010, 46–8.

<sup>59</sup> Bradley 2005, 54.



have been used to make sense of the evidence.<sup>60</sup> Rituals associated with abandonment could have resulted from several motives. Some may have aimed to appease spirits that were thought to have plagued the dwelling, or to contain the spirits of deceased inhabitants. Perhaps some were to prevent re-use of a site. Maybe rituals were about memorialisation of a private space, about laying a claim to that space for perpetuity. The interpretation of purpose may depend on the nature of the deposited material, but also on whether abandonment was followed by re-building on the same site (continuity) or avoidance of the footprint of the structure. The depositions in ovens may simply concern warding off vermin and spirits from taking residence in voids. The post-medieval evidence provides few clues, partly because we are usually dealing with finds in 'living', lived-in buildings. There certainly were rituals associated with demolition and rebuilding, though, such as the twentieth-century Yorkshire mason who reported that it was an old custom to keep a piece of the old building in a newly re-built house, principally the fireplace, 'to give proof of the Common rights of the householder' – the rights to graze livestock, take peat, stones and plants in the vicinity.<sup>61</sup> Compare this with Bradley's evidence for re-use of elements of domestic structures in re-building, including the re-use of stone-lined hearths in Neolithic Orkney, 'as if to emphasise the continuity between each building and its successor'.<sup>62</sup> There is obviously no continuity of practice, but perhaps a continuity of concepts regarding the transition and transmission of domestic identity.

Much of the post-medieval evidence is concerned neither with foundation nor termination, but with the main period of a building's life cycle. Some of the ritual activities concerning below-ground deposition in this phase can be mistaken for foundation activity though. Burials under hearthstones could take place at any time dependent on need during a domestic crisis. So in central France to stop bovine miscarriages caused by disease or witchcraft a still-born calf was buried under the threshold of the byre.<sup>63</sup> Witch bottles buried under hearths provided protection at the point at which someone was afflicted with witchcraft. Written charms were concealed above doors as a similar response. A late fifteenth century Welsh example written on vellum, for the protection of all the oxen, cows and beasts of one David ap Res ap Jankyn, began with the fa-

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<sup>60</sup> See, for example, LaMotta and Schiffer 1999, 205.

<sup>61</sup> Nattrass 1958, 138.

<sup>62</sup> Bradley 2005, 53.

<sup>63</sup> Gennep 1948, 92; Seignolles 1978, 220.

miliar 'In nomine Dei + patris + et filii + et spiritus sancti', followed by the various names and titles of the Trinity in Latin and other languages, and was endorsed with the words 'Supra ostium' indicating that it was required to be concealed 'over the door' where the farm animals were sheltered. The practice of plugging, that is drilling a hole into building timbers, placing written charms and/or hair within, and then sealing with a plug of wood, is another such example.<sup>64</sup>

Concealment of objects in lived-in buildings was not always concerned with openings and voids. The burial of horse skulls under post-medieval buildings was sometimes associated with the corners of rooms. When the drawing room of a house in Ennis, Ireland, (built c. 1795–1810) was taken up early in the twentieth century four horse skulls were found, one in each corner. Two skulls found in 1965 under the floorboards during the renovation of a substantial seventeenth-century Flintshire farmhouse were located in a corner, while another example from the Isle of Man had been built into the north corner of a wall during the construction of an eighteenth-century rectory. The same association with corners is found in Scandinavia, where horse skulls were found in the four corners of a timber-framed house in Skåne demolished in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup> The placement of shoe and clothing concealments suggests ritual practice related to major building alterations and the juncture between old and new features.<sup>66</sup> C. Riley Augé's work on early New England suggests we need to consider the significance of left and right associations with regard to both objects and positioning.<sup>67</sup>

The importance of *concealment* can be over-emphasised in the study of domestic ritual and magic. *Display* was equally significant. The once widespread practice of placing a horseshoe above the front door is an obvious example, the combined apotropaic properties of iron, horse associations, and the crescent proving an excellent, overt deterrent against witches and evil spirits. The suspension of naturally perforated stones, known as 'witch stones' or 'hag stones' by some in England, in public view is a similar tradition.<sup>68</sup>

From antiquity there are numerous examples of the writing or carving of apotropaic symbols and texts on doorposts and lintels, just as they

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<sup>64</sup> Davies 2013, 110–11.

<sup>65</sup> Westropp 1911, 54; Brown 1966; Hayhurst 1989.

<sup>66</sup> Swann 1996, 59; Eastop 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Augé 2013, 122–23.

<sup>68</sup> Duffin 2011.

are to be found on entrances to tombs. According to the Old Testament the Israelites smeared the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts and lintels of their houses to ward off pestilence and evil. In ancient Egypt spells were written in mud on doorposts, and early Christians made the sign of the cross.<sup>69</sup> In western and northern Europe, survival of above ground wooden domestic structures in prehistoric and early medieval archaeology is extremely rare so we know little of whether such ritual carving or painting on domestic doorposts was widespread. The evidence for later medieval and post-medieval apotropaic building marks is growing, though, thanks in particular to the fieldwork of Tim Easton and others since the 1970s.

What may seem like mere decoration to us perhaps had more mixed or different meaning to the inhabitants in the past. It has been suggested, for instance, that the winged cherubs depicted above several entrances to colonial era New England and South Carolina properties served not only to demonstrate piety but also a domestic protective function.<sup>70</sup> The decorative apotropaic is explicit in the custom in Alpine Germany and Switzerland of painting or carving protective pious words and images above the main door. An example recorded in the nineteenth century from a village near Bozen, had a painted eye below which ran the sentence 'Pray for us, holy Florian, that Fire may not harm our building'.<sup>71</sup> The hexagram or Seal of Solomon carved into the stonework of thresholds and chimneys in Morbihan, Brittany, likewise express dual or multiple intentions regarding public or semi-public expressions of piety, protection and social standing.<sup>72</sup>

Since the late medieval period and the rise of brick buildings in northern and western Europe, over-burned bricks have been used to mark out patterns in external-facing walls, and we find crosses, hexagrams, hearts, St Andrew's crosses, and butterfly crosses (these consist of two triangles touching point to point like an egg-timer).<sup>73</sup> Questions as to the extent to which these originally had apotropaic functions also apply to the construction device of wall anchor plates and tie rods that reinforced the integrity of walls by binding them to the internal structure. Made of iron (note the significance) their over-riding principal

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<sup>69</sup> MacMullen 1997, 240.

<sup>70</sup> Nelson 1998, 159–60.

<sup>71</sup> Lawrence 1898, 101–02.

<sup>72</sup> Camus 2001, 52, 63.

<sup>73</sup> Robben 2013.

purpose was undeniably functional, but the exposed anchor plate offered ornamental possibilities to send social, religious and magical messages.<sup>74</sup> So across the European and European-American architectural world we find anchor plates that had mundane functions spelling out dates and the initials of the owners, but also pentagrams and various cross designs, that might have originally had, or at least subsequently accrued, apotropaic purpose. The English chronicler of rural life and customs George Ewart Evans was convinced that the S and double S anchor plate designs found in old East Anglian houses served to protect houses from lightning.<sup>75</sup>

Moving inside, and into semi-private spaces, we find several distinctive, regional wood carving traditions that were thought to ward off evil, such as the custom in parts of Wales of carving large (30–60 cm) paired phallic or hermaphroditic figures on either side of the main door. The most well-known example is the seventeenth and early eighteenth century ‘witch post’ tradition in Yorkshire (there is also one example in Lancashire). So-called witch posts are usually cited as having an apotropaic purpose, but this interpretation is riddled with problems.<sup>76</sup> For one, there is no mention of ‘witch posts’ in the rich nineteenth-century account of domestic life, buildings, culture, and magic in the area by the Rev Thomas Atkinson, published in 1891, or in any other nineteenth-century Yorkshire folklore collection. Indeed, in the second edition of Atkinson’s book he described a likely witch post in an account of a ruined longhouse in Danby parish, but makes no reference at all to its apotropaic functions or association with witches, merely noting ‘some rather rough ornamental carving on its inner face’. A couple of years later Atkinson donated to the Pitt Rivers in Oxford what he described in a letter as

the (assumed) witch post, which I think is worth taking care of ... so far there is no actual evidence of its original intention, over and above the testimony of the old lady at Egton touching the character of the like article in her own domicile. I have almost no doubt on the subject, but am disappointed that I get no confirmation from any of my correspondents.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Reynolds 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Evans 1966.

<sup>76</sup> William 1978; Hayes and Rutter 1972, 87–95; Price 2004; Nattrass 1958; Walker 2011.

The term 'witch post' began to be used widely only from the 1930s onwards and the tradition began to accrue unsubstantiated folkloric embellishments. It has been widely reported, for instance, that the posts were made of rowan (a tree well-known for warding off fairies and witches) though this has not been substantiated, and where properly identified rather than assumed, oak was used in keeping with other supporting timbers. The symbols carved in to the posts vary, though standard is the St Andrew's cross followed by horizontal bars. There is nothing obviously apotropaic about either in the context of the corpus of magical symbols and signs. The most overt evidence for a magical function concerns a post from Scarborough donated to the Pitt Rivers years before Atkinson's Danby example arrived. In the four triangles created by the cross four hearts have been carved, and one of them appears to have thirteen pin pricks that could represent the common practice of piercing animal hearts as a counter-witchcraft spell. Then again it could be a representation of the 'immaculate heart of Mary', which was often represented by a heart with multiple wounds (usually seven). It is quite possible that the origins of the witch post carvings were ornamental and, over time, accrued a magical significance – a reverse horseshoe effect. Below the original carved symbols of the Scarborough post are a series of more crude and lightly carved Xs and a square divided into segments. These may have more ritual significance than the original carving.

The process of accrued apotropaic powers is evident from the history of the famous Pennsylvania Dutch hex signs painted on barns. The original purpose of these colourful social statements in the landscape was primarily as expressions of spirituality, ethnic identity and prosperity. It was only from the early twentieth century that a predominantly apotropaic function was ascribed to the various geometric signs, rosettes, hearts and stars by folklorists – giving birth to the modern 'hex sign' industry.<sup>78</sup> The daisy wheel or hexafoil pattern, made with a compass, that is found carved on domestic door lintels and other parts, and is frequently found in church stonework, also requires cautious interpretation. It is highly unlikely that all the examples were protective in purpose. It was a common decorative symbol, and while it has possible geometrical planning functions, it was more likely the product of artistic doodling with a craftsman's compass than a practical device. It has been

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77 <<http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/prmap/mapresults/danbynorthyorkshire.html>> (2013-10-11).

78 Davies 2013, 116–17.

suggested sensibly that while some seventeenth-century daisy wheels had a magical purpose, many later examples were copied for purely decorative purposes, the original meaning having been lost.<sup>79</sup> Then again the argument could be turned the other way round.

Look carefully at old timber buildings and there are numerous other signs and symbols. In parts of medieval and early modern Northern Europe housemarks were inscribed above doors to denote the owner's lands and possessions. Sometimes symbols of the trade or craft of inhabitants were similarly recorded above doors or on the façade, with the same motifs being found on gravestones (and also occasionally on anchor plates).<sup>80</sup> Most marks, though, were the result of timber preparation and construction. A survey of the timber construction of a Manchester warehouse, built in 1830 as part of the Liverpool to Manchester railway, found more than 650 sets of timber marks. Carpenters had their systems of assembly marks when pre-fabricating sections of timber-framed buildings and furniture. While these included obvious Roman numerals there are various other obscure marks that could easily be interpreted as having 'occult' purposes – if they were not clearly an aspect of the construction planning. Plumb and levelling marks consisting of intersecting lines are also distinctive once you know what they are and where they are usually located. Hewing marks, used to signify logs to be used for timber baulks, and which can appear in the middle of a beam, are similar, such as the use of the butterfly cross symbol. This is a shape that Easton has interpreted as also having an apotropaic significance. Likewise, three lines intersecting to form a star shape, which is a symbol that can also be found amongst the medley of symbols on written charms produced by cunning-folk.

Then there are brack marks, which are letters and signs drawn or scored with a scribing iron by Baltic quality officials known as brackers on pine and oak timber imported from the Baltic to denote its provenance. Oak timber was being imported from the Baltic since the medieval period and Baltic pine was used, for instance, in the repair of Ely and Lincoln cathedrals in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The brack marks in English baulks were made back in the main Baltic ports such as Gdansk, where a language of brack marks was already developed by the fifteenth century, posing another problem with regard to identi-

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<sup>79</sup> Meeson 200545–47; <<http://www.medievalgraffitisurrey.org/circles.html>> (2013-10-11).

<sup>80</sup> Williams 1858; Garrioch 1994; Christison 1902; Dean 1997.

fying timber marks, particularly as it would seem each port had its own range of brack symbols. Joshua Oddy, writing in the early nineteenth century, described the marks made by Danzig brackers, which included Xs, double Bs, Ks, and double slanted lines.<sup>81</sup> Some beams in the Manchester warehouse have brack marks all along their length, including an interlocking V scored to make a W, and AM, which, as discussed below, are interpreted in some other contexts as apotropaic.<sup>82</sup>

As with below ground ritual deposits, assessing location, date, and wood provenance is crucial to determining purpose. Assembly marks are found in pairs on either side of a joint. Even if they look strange, any paired marks in this location are likely to have no apotropaic meaning; strange looking symbols with no decorative aesthetics near entrances, such as on the middle of a lintel beam or window are something else. Still, the reuse of timbers with assembly marks could lead to mundane marks appearing in such tell-tale places. So bearing in mind all these caveats and provisos what do possible apotropaic symbols look like? Easton identified several that he believes to be based on initials denoting the protection of the Virgin Mary. So intersecting Vs stand for Virgo Virginum (Virgin of Virgins); VMV stands for Virgo Maria Virginum (To Mary, Virgin of Virgins); the letter M for Mary and MR for Maria Regina; AMR means Ave Maria Regina; and AMB means 'Ave Maria Beata (Hail Blessed Mary). Some have suggested that they might have been inspired by illicit Catholic devotion, but they are more likely to represent continuance of received Catholic expressions in popular religion.<sup>83</sup> Then there are Xs and other variant crosses, as well as the aforementioned daisywheel and equally ambiguous interlinking compass circles. There are also more abstract markings such as hashed lines, ladders, 'egg-timer' shapes, and zig-zag lines.

It is worth noting that such symbols have also been found in high status buildings as well as houses, barns and cowsheds. Evidence of these has been seized upon by marketeers with Stirling Castle Palace (youthful home of James V/VI of England) and Kew Palace advertising 'witch marks' as part of their attractions. At Stirling a marigold or hexafoil design incised on the inner face of a closet door of the King James era has been 'formally' interpreted as an apotropaic sign due primarily to its location. The great outer door of the palace has a conjoined 'AMV'

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<sup>81</sup> Oddy 1807, Vol. 1, 251f.

<sup>82</sup> Higgins 2004; Sharpe 2011, 108; Greene 1995; Engqvist 1989.

<sup>83</sup> Lowe 2004, 107; Meeson 2005, 47.

(Ave Maria Virginius) inscribed upon it. In 2003 several marks were found in the roof timbers of Kew Palace, which was built in the 1630s. One is a double V mark and another M R (Maria Regina).<sup>84</sup>

At some sites possible apotropaic marks are jumbled up with a range of others. A series of marks were recently found on stone door jambs and a fireplace surround and lintel during the excavation of a sixteenth-to-seventeenth-century building in Brora, Scotland, for instance. Some were clearly builders' marks, some likely graffiti inscribed during its habitation or shortly after abandonment. Several, in positions unusual for builders' marks, bear resemblances to possible apotropaic marks found at another site in Scotland and in timber buildings in Norfolk and Suffolk.<sup>85</sup> Such accretions present an interpretive problem and yet they are also an opportunity to contextualise and refine our diagnostics. More systematic cataloguing work needs to be done on the range of historic construction marks, brack marks and the like, whether there are regional differences, or changes of signs over time, to clarify better the identity of apotropaic marks. If the same symbols crop up on other surfaces then one can eliminate carpenters' and masons' marks, brack marks or timber marks. This is well illustrated by the speleological investigations of C. J. Binding and L. J. Wilson in several caves in Somerset, England. They have found incised marks carved into the rock, probably dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. They include numerous examples of the interlocking V, including interlocking Vs conjoined with a P (which Easton has also found on timbers from the same period), and butterfly crosses in contexts that cannot serve any construction or building function.<sup>86</sup>

While abstruse, abstract symbols with no apparent astrological or alchemical meaning are no stranger to other literary forms of magic, the curious thing is that the Marian British apotropaic marks have no direct parallels in the British literary charm tradition. Neither does the hexafoil. The variant Marian initial strings are not prominent at all as magical letter combinations in the written charms found in domestic deposits, or in the manuscript and print grimoires we know were used for the benefit of popular protection. This does not invalidate the interpretation. Indeed, the point about the textual sometimes being sec-

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<sup>84</sup> Gallagher and Ewart n.d., 65.

<sup>85</sup> Brora Back Beach, 11, 23; Darwood and Sherriff 2003; Easton 1999; Dean 1997.

<sup>86</sup> Binding and Wilson 2004; Binding and Wilson 2010.



ondary to the material has already been made with regard to antiquity. The interpretation of the V and M marks as variant Marian protective devotions certainly makes sense. The carving of 'Mary' and 'Ave' on domestic items such as food and drink vessels and spindlewhorls, along with crosses and pentagrams, was a common practice in medieval Scandinavia.<sup>87</sup> We find documentary evidence for the use of the initials of other Biblical characters in early and later literary magic. The most obvious is the Christ monogram IHS, the first three letters of Jesus in Greek, which was widely used in protective charms, as was the acronym INRI (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews). The names of the three wise kings (though not named in the New Testament) [K]Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar were used in written charms in the medieval and early modern period to protect against epilepsy and fevers, and amulets with their initials were quite common. It was noted in the nineteenth century that in parts of Catholic Germany and Austria three crosses were painted on house doors along with 'KMB' to protect households. The CMB was usually chalked on doors on the 6 January (Christmas Day under the old calendar), though Catholic German-Canadians continued a variant of the tradition, making a cross on the door and the initials CMB on the last day of April to keep witches at bay.<sup>88</sup>

As well as the puzzle over the existence of popular Marian symbolism well into the early modern and modern periods, it is strange that other common magical formulae are apparently absent in the corpus of British apotropaic marks discovered to date. I would expect, for instance, that the IHS monogram would be prominent. A good example of this, including the name of the builder, is found carved in stone over the front door of an old house in Morbihan, Brittany.<sup>89</sup> Why do we not find other common powerful magical words such as tetragrammaton, abracadabra, and AGLA, as part of the portfolio? Why so few hexagrams or pentagrams in Britain even though they are found on timbers and stonework in other parts of Europe?<sup>90</sup> In Britain the ancient and enduring sator-arepo acrostic charm has been found carved on Roman pottery, incorporated into written charms from the medieval and post-medieval period, carved on a wooden panel dated 1614 in the Parish Church of St

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<sup>87</sup> MacLeod and Mees 2006, 198.

<sup>88</sup> Skemer 2006, 62; Veenstra 1998, 304, n. 269; *Chambers Journal* (1878), 784; Wintemberg 1950, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Camus 2001, 64.

<sup>90</sup> Sandklef 1949, 55–61.

Michael, Great Gidding, Cambridgeshire, and on a stone in Rivington Church, Lancashire. Yet, so far, we do not find examples carved in stone or wood in domestic settings. Practical reasons may, of course, have prevented anything more than several straight-line initials and symbols being carved into stone and wood in most modest domestic buildings. But one key to the disjuncture between literary and building apotropaic traditions lies in considering *who* was making material magic, at any period in the past, in different domestic and social contexts.

In the post-medieval period there were three main groups of people creating and providing apotropaics, and each drew upon different but overlapping pools of knowledge. Cunning-folk were key sources of magical knowledge but placed considerable emphasis on their literary resources – their books of magic. From these they cobbled together written charms to be placed in buildings.<sup>91</sup> It is almost certain that all the extant written charms found in British buildings were provided by cunning-folk. The candle smoke symbols written on ceilings in East Anglia, researched by Timothy Easton, were also almost certainly the work of cunning-folk as they mirror the bricolage of magical symbolism found in written charms.<sup>92</sup> We also know from trial records that cunning-folk often provided the information that led to the creation and interment of witch bottles, the burial of animals under thresholds, and the placement of pierced animal hearts up chimneys. It is important to consider that cunning-folk were an inventive lot. We may seek great meaning and evidence of venerable tradition in some puzzling domestic magic deposit, mark, or charm, when in fact a cunning-person has simply made something up and invented a formulae or practice that is reflective of his or her imagination and has no ‘deep time’ cultural significance. The concept may be the same at bottom but the material expression of it was unique to the practitioner.

The second group concerns carpenters and masons, who were undoubtedly primarily responsible for the apotropaic marks on timbers and masonry, and quite a few of the concealment traditions, particularly those relating to shoes and garments. The issue of freemasonry, and its occult traditions, is bound to be raised in this context, but as Ian Evans has concluded from his extensive research there is no evidence of these practices being an aspect of organised masonic tradition.<sup>93</sup> The

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<sup>91</sup> Davies 2003, chapters 5 and 6; Davies 2009.

<sup>92</sup> T. Easton personal comm.; Easton 2011, 56–60.

<sup>93</sup> Evans 2010, 83.

implication from the evidence is that there was a pervasive, unrecorded, professional building tradition in the post-medieval period that was particularly concerned with Marian references and the re-interpretation or eliding of mundane and apotropaic symbolism. We are in the realm of conjecture here, of course, and much more concerted work needs to be done in a European context.

Finally there are what can be described as self-service magic resources based on knowledge and practices handed down orally at a family and community level. Examples include the use of horseshoes, stone axes and perforated stones, the pinning of owls to doors in France, the burial of animals under thresholds, and the planting and hanging of certain apotropaic plants such as rowan. We know that cunning-folk advised on these practices but they were so pervasive in the past that they were clearly not dependent on professional advice. As Augé has begun to explore, self-service magic raises the important issue of gender in the generation of material magic. In early modern and modern England roughly a third of cunning-folk were woman, but when it came to household protection then it is likely that women were the principal agents in securing the well-being of the family and domestic industries such as dairying, spinning, and bread-making – all activities that relied heavily on magical protection for security.

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The study of post-medieval material magic is not only important for exploring past cultures of belief and practice, it has the potential to provide valuable ethnographic insights regarding contemporary popular emotions towards the past and the home. In 2010, for instance, the author was contacted by the owners of a property being renovated in northern France. On raising a door lintel the builder found a ball of straw deep inside the wall. Inside the ball was an old hand-stitched child's glove and a small bottle containing a feather, which had evidently also contained liquid when concealed. It is clearly an apotropaic device dating to the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. The find is fascinating in itself, but the owners' reaction to and relationship with the find is equally interesting. They were conscientious about maintaining the protective tradition and planned to place the find back in the wall above the new

lintel.<sup>94</sup> The couple mentioned earlier who found horses skulls under the floorboards of their Flintshire home in 1965 were conscientious in placing them back under the new floorboards.

One element of this response to finding domestic apotropaics is clearly the same as that which inspires people to conceal time capsules.<sup>95</sup> So a friend of my French correspondent suggested laminating an explanatory note and photograph of the house taken during the renovation and secreting them with the straw ball, in other words creating a time capsule 'for someone to discover in another 250 years' time'. The presidential White House provides an excellent if exceptional example of this ongoing re-depositional practice. During renovations in the 1940s a small marble box was found under an entrance. Its contents, newspaper clippings of Theodore Roosevelt's State of the Union address, a whisky bottle label, and seven Indian head one-cent coins, revealed that it had been placed there during refurbishments in 1902. The time capsule was reinterred in the foundations of another part of the White House with President Truman adding some further newspapers to this legacy midden.<sup>96</sup>

But when such finds are recognized by home owners as having some historic ritual, protective purpose then we seem to move beyond broad sentiments regarding continuity, legacy and customary duty, to a less well-defined sense of the need to maintain an emotional relationship with the identity of the house and its purpose to protect the latest of its custodians. Not to re-deposit the apotropaic objects would be to disturb the spiritual or emotional balance that creates that vague, intangible sense of a happy home.

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<sup>94</sup> Personal Comm. Danny Rippon.

<sup>95</sup> Jarvis 2003; Yablon 2011.

<sup>96</sup> Jarvis 2003, 101.

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# PLATES

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**1-4** 'Voodoo doll' from Keos, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Antikensammlung)  
inv. 30741, frontal view



2 'Voodoo doll', side view





3 'Voodoo doll', side view



4 'Voodoo doll', back view



5 'Voodoo doll', inscription



6 Part of the ensemble from the Roman cellar in the Place d'Épars, Chartres



7a-b Gold (H. 3,95 cm). Derek Content Collection 19



8 Gold (H. 3,5 cm). London, British Museum 1895,1025.4



9 Gold (diam. 2 cm). London, British Museum 1814,0704.1172



**10a** Gold bulla (L. 3,8 × 5,3 cm) and gold club pendant (L. 1,8 cm). Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, DRAC Rhône-Alpes



**10b** Glass beads necklace with a silver *lunula* (H. 1,6 cm) and two silver earrings (H. 3,5 cm). Augusta Raurica





**11a** Lion tooth (H. 2,3 cm). Augusta Raurica  
1959.2588



**11b** Gold charms. Polygyros, Archaeological Museum MT 7468



12 Fresco with Perseus and Andromeda. From the villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase. New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 20.192.16

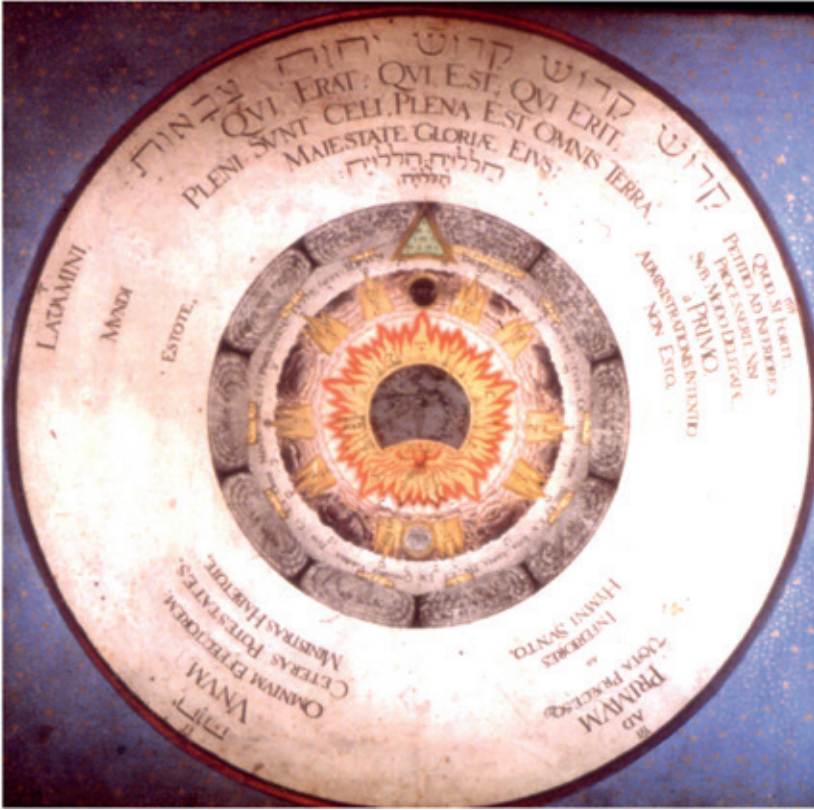


**13a** Gilded and bejeweled parade helmet with inscription, 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE, Berkasovo treasure. Museum of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, inv. AA 153



**13b** Pair of red leather sandals with inscription from Deir el Barat (?), Egypt, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century. Deutsches Ledermuseum/Schuhmuseum, Offenbach, inv. 6.71.20





15 Sigillum Dei. Tabulae theosophiae cabbalisticæ. British Library MS. Sloane 181



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