

STUDIES IN
MAGICAL AMULETS
CHIEFLY GRAECO-EGYPTIAN

CAMPBELL BONNER



ANN ARBOR · THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS
LONDON · GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE · OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1950

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

MOST of the objects to be discussed in this book belong to the class known as "Gnostic" amulets. That term has been so widely accepted that there is something to be said for retaining it; for even those who recognize its inaccuracy find it a convenient designation for things that cannot easily be brought under any other descriptive name.

Gnosis is a name applied to certain systems of religious philosophy whose origin has been much debated, but which certainly manifested themselves as heresies in the Christian church of the second and third centuries. Now amulets, though fundamentally magical, tend to take religion as an aid and ally, just as the converse is often true; and wherever amulets are made with the help of the graphic and plastic arts, they are likely to invoke, by their designs and inscriptions, the support of local divinities, and to absorb into themselves local religious ideas, or at least religious expressions and symbols. But the tendency does not stop there. In its desire to enlist all possible supernatural aid, magic, especially in its later development, calls upon many deities without regard to their local connections. Even in the classical period people regarded magic that came from a distance as especially powerful, particularly when it seemed to spring from a primitive way of life; hence Athenian writers refer to the unusual powers of Thessalian witches.¹ In the magical documents of the Graeco-Roman period gods and demons of several countries are summoned to aid the operator. Magicians who were Egyptians or Egyptianized Greeks name Babylonian and Jewish or Syrian divinities in their charms. Wherever any knowledge of Gnostic mythology or Gnostic ideas had got abroad, it was natural that Gnostic elements should make their appearance in magical texts.

The writers may or may not have belonged to a Gnostic sect; but the documents themselves, whether written on papyrus or carved on gem stones, can seldom be regarded as monuments of Gnostic religion, just as an incantation containing the words *Iao Sabaoth* cannot safely be claimed as the work of a Jewish master of magic. In brief, Gnosticism is merely one of several religious influences that have left their mark on these amulets. As a group they cannot be labeled as Gnostic; individual pieces that can be so described are rare, and still rarer are those that can be safely assigned to a particular Gnostic sect. We find that earlier writers from Baronius and Macarius to Bellermand and King confidently treat many of these amulets, especially those inscribed

¹ *Ar. Nub.* 749.

with the name Abrasax, as Basilidian;² yet Harnack's remark still holds good, that it is doubtful whether even one of the hundreds of gems inscribed Abrasax is really a product of the school of Basilides.³

Before we proceed further, it is worth while to define the subject and roughly outline the scope of this investigation. In the broadest sense of the word, an amulet is any object which by its contact or its close proximity to the person who owns it, or to any possession of his, exerts power for his good, either by keeping evil from him and his property or by endowing him with positive advantages. The word "talisman" is virtually a synonym of "amulet," although some writers have attempted, without support in general usage, to differentiate the two words. The material of an amulet may be of any sort, animal, vegetable, or mineral, and the amulet maker does not shrink from using the most repulsive matter for his purpose, herein resembling the medicineman; in fact, one can scarcely draw a line between popular *materia medica* and the things that were believed to be useful as amulets. Small bags taken from the necks of child patients in a hospital in Egypt were found to contain such oddments as the dried head of a hoopoe, a dried chameleon, the cast skin of a snake, other unrecognizable débris of vegetable or animal origin, pebbles, etc.⁴ Doubtless the virtues ascribed to these ingredients were partly medical, partly magical. If amulets such as these were used in ancient Greece and Egypt, as they probably were, they have disintegrated and disappeared; but one class of perishable amulets has come down to us in considerable numbers, and often in good preservation. These are charms and incantations written on small pieces of papyrus, then rolled or folded into compact form and worn upon the person. The texts of these papyri have much in common with the necessarily briefer inscriptions on magical stones, and must be studied in connection with them; but they will be used here only for occasional illustration. The amulets with which this work is concerned are, with a very few exceptions, made of stone or metal.

Belief in the efficacy of amulets depends upon certain primitive concepts of the mind, namely, notions that supernatural power may be inherent in some person, animal, or material object, or that it may at least reside there temporarily. The latter lies at the root of fetichism, as it is known among the negroes of West Africa; both are akin to the idea of *mana*, that vague supernatural power which was brought to the attention of anthropologists by the Melanesian studies of Codrington,⁵ and which has added a useful term

² Caes. Baronius, *Annales Ecclesiastici* (ed. Theiner, 1864), 2, 188 f. (A. C. 120, 12-17); Joannes Macarius, *Abraxas seu Apistopistus* (1657), pp. 9-11; J. J. Bellermann, *Versuch über die Gemmen der Alten mit dem Abraxas-Bilde* (1817), pp. 7-10; C. W. King, *The Gnostics and their Remains* ² (1887), p. 245.

³ A. Harnack, *Gesch. der altchristlichen Litteratur*, I, 161.

⁴ A number of such bags were sent to the Museum of the University of Michigan, because of their interest from an anthropological point of view, along with the objects that the University expedition was allowed to retain from its excavation at Karanis. A close parallel in ancient times is to be found in Jul. Africanus 7, 17 (p. 39 Vieillefond); the dried head of a bat sewn up in a leather bag makes the wearer wakeful as long as he has it on.

⁵ R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians*, Oxford, 1891.

to the technical vocabulary of workers in the history of religion.⁶ A fetich, or an amulet, may be apprehended as something that can give any sort of benefit that the possessor may desire; but it is probable that from the beginning certain objects were believed to have powers peculiar to themselves, and the special powers imputed to them were often determined by the principle of similarity. To mention only examples that fall within the scope of these studies, certain gem stones were believed to exert powers suggested by their color. Galactite, an unidentified stone, evidently whitish, was supposed to promote the flow of milk in women and animals; amethyst, apparently because of its winelike color, was believed to enable a man to drink heavily without becoming intoxicated.⁷ This idea of medicomagical power manifested through similarity doubtless goes back to a remote period, and it continued, as the "doctrine of signatures," to exert an influence in medicine down to modern times, when scientific methods gradually got the upper hand. Most of the precious and semiprecious stones were endowed by popular belief with medicinal or magical virtues; and while our knowledge of those beliefs is derived from the later Greek and Roman authors, there can be no doubt that many of the superstitions are far more ancient than the writers who record them.

The belief in magic is attested even in Homer by the Circe episode in the *Odyssey* and by the healing of the young Odysseus' wound with the aid of an incantation.⁸ In the fifth century allusions to magical acts and objects become quite numerous, and in the fourth there are several allusions to amulets, *περίαπτα*, *περιάμματα*. The words mean "things tied round the body." In their simplest form, which was probably for a long time the commonest, such amulets were merely cords or narrow bands tied round the neck, the arm, the ankle, or looped from one shoulder across the body.⁹ On painted pottery young men are seen wearing them, and nude hetairai sometimes wear such a band round a thigh. When it was thought that magical power lay in an object small enough to wear, it might be hung round the body; and the virtue of the suspended object came to be regarded as more important than that of the encircling cord. Thus pendant amulets became exceedingly numerous, though they never entirely superseded the old magical knots.

Here a passage of late date is instructive. Gregory of Nazianzos had said in his sermon "On Baptism": "You have no need of amulets (*periammata*) and incantations (*epasmata*), along with which the Evil One makes his way into the minds of the simpler folk, stealing for himself the honor that belongs to God."¹⁰ A scholium on that passage runs as follows:

⁶ See the article "Mana" in Hastings, *ERE*, VIII, 375-380, for a good discussion of both the local application of the term and its use in scientific terminology.

⁷ Galactite, *Orph. Lith.* 201 ff.; amethyst, *Plin. N. H.* 37, 124.

⁸ *Odys.* 10, 203 ff., 19, 457.

⁹ O. Jahn, "Der Aberglaube des bösen Blicks," *Ber. sächs. Akad.*, 7 (1855), 40-43; P. Wolters, "Faden und Knoten als Amulett," *ARW* 8, Beiheft, 1-22. See also the recent monograph of Count Du Mesnil du Buisson, "Le Sautoir d'Atargatis et la chaîne d'amulettes" (*Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui*, I), 1947.

¹⁰ Migne, *PG* 36, 381 A.

"*Periarmata*: 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. *Epasmata*: the chants sung over young children by the same old women, muttering to avert evil, and at the same time licking the babes' foreheads with their tongues and spitting, blowing to each side."¹¹

Similar behavior on the part of Greek nurses has been observed within living memory, and may still continue among the ignorant classes.

We do not know of what magical pendants were made in Hellenic times. Some animal and vegetable materials may have been used, and these would of course disappear, leaving no trace. On the other hand, we hear of magical rings, which were certainly less perishable, and magical pendants were probably made of durable metals or stones at a date much earlier than we can determine from extant remains.

A ring intended to protect the wearer from colic and other digestive ailments is mentioned by the comic poet Antiphanes, who was apparently a contemporary of Demosthenes (fr. 177 Kock):

οὐ γὰρ κακὸν ἔχω, μηδ' ἔχοιμ'. ἐὰν δ' ἄρα
στρέφη με περὶ τὴν γαστέρ' ἢ τὸν ὀμφαλόν,
παρὰ Φερτάτου δακτύλιος ἔστι μοι δραχμῆς.

"There's nothing wrong with me and I hope there won't be; but if after all I get a twist about the stomach or the navel, I have a ring, bought of Phertatus for a drachma."

More interesting is a passage in Aristophanes' *Plutus*, which was presented in 388. The Just Man, threatened by a blackmailer, says (883 f.):

οὐδὲν προτιμῶ σου· φορῶ γὰρ πριάμενος
τὸν δακτύλιον τονδὶ παρ' Εὐδάμου δραχμῆς.

"I don't care a hang for you; I am wearing this ring, bought of Eudamus for a drachma."

Obviously the ring was supposed to have apotropaic power; one may compare the formula often found on amulets of much later times, *φύλαξον ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ*, "protect from every evil thing." But it may have been of some well-known pattern designed specially to protect against the bites of snakes and other vermin, in which case the speech gains point as a slap at the odious character of the blackmailer. An interesting problem is introduced by the next line (885), where the slave Carion puts in the remark, *ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔνεστι συκοφάντου δῆγματος*. This should be written *ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔνεστι "συκοφάντου δῆγματος"*, and translated, as Fritzsche recommended, "But it is not marked 'for blackmailer-bite.'"¹² Recent critics have rejected this interpre-

¹¹ Migne, PG 36, 907 B-C.

¹² F. V. Fritzsche, *De Socrate veterum comoedorum* (*Quaestiones Aristophaneae*, p. 216).

tation and have emended the passage in different ways, but I believe that Fritzsche was right; at any rate amulet inscriptions are known in which the part to be protected is put in the genitive case, and the malady against which protection was desired may well have been indicated in the same way.¹³ If this interpretation is correct, the passage gives evidence that amulets inscribed for a specific purpose were known early in the fourth century and probably even in the fifth. Written charms of one sort or another are implied in an allusion to the wearing of Ἐφέσια γράμματα in the fourth-century comic poet Anaxilas (Fr. 18 K.):

ἐν σκυταρίοις ῥαπτοῦσι φορῶν
Ἐφεσῆια γράμματα καλά.

"Wearing fine Ephesian charms in little sewed bags." The σκυτάρια ῥαπτὰ are little leather amulet bags to be hung round the neck or shoulders. The *Ephesia grammata* were actually employed in a charm inscribed on a lead tablet found in Crete; it is assigned to the fourth century B.C.¹⁴

Rings sold for a drachma could hardly have been set with engraved stones; the kind mentioned by Antiphanes and Aristophanes must have been of bronze, upon which even a mediocre craftsman could cut magical designs or inscriptions with a moderate expenditure of time and labor. Gems shown by inscriptions to be magical have not come down to us from classical or even from Hellenistic times; in fact, except for the names of owners and occasionally of artists, which are found even on stones of the archaic period, gem inscriptions belong to the Roman period. Of the 750 that Le Blant publishes, he dates none earlier than the Christian era.¹⁵ Before that time the wearing of magic rings with inscriptions was probably common only among the lower classes of society, whose purses limited them to cheap works of silver, bronze, or iron. Theophrastus related that Pericles showed a friend, who visited him in an illness, an amulet that the women of the household had hung round his neck, intimating that he must be in a bad way to put up with such nonsense as that.¹⁶ The amulet (περίαπτον) may have been a bronze plaque or a small bag containing some of the well-known "similars" supposed to be suited to the sick man's case.

It should be remembered that many earlier gems that are usually considered merely artistic seal stones may have been amulets also; or at least they may have been worn by the owner with feelings such as we associate with amulet wearers. We have seen that certain stones were believed, probably from

¹³ Cf. Mousterde, "Le Glaive de Dardanos," *Mélanges de l'Univ. Saint-Joseph*, 15, 3 (1930), 74 f., who publishes a specimen of the common Chnoumis gems with the inscription στομαχον. See De Ridder, *Coll. De Clercq*, VII (*Pierres gravées*), 3456; also a chrysoprase in the British Museum (56062), an "Abraxas" stone with an inscription σφεων, probably to be read ὄφεων.

¹⁴ See C. C. McCown in *TAPA* 54 (1923), 128-140; he edits the Cretan tablet (132-133) and refers to previous publications of it. See also a stone (N 5) in the Southesk collection, which bears on its margin an imperfect version of the formula.

¹⁵ E. Le Blant, *750 Inscriptions de pierres gravées*, *Mém. Acad. Inscr.*, 36, p. 12.

¹⁶ Apud Plut. *Pericl.* 38, 2.

very early times, to possess magical qualities in themselves, and people may well have thought that those powers could be reinforced by carving certain images or symbols upon such stones. A god who could give his worshipers desirable gifts might appropriately adorn their pendants and rings; here the contact with purely religious ideas is very close. Nowadays one type of Christian may wear the image of a saint in all reverence, gaining a certain comfort of mind from the constant remembrance of a power beyond himself; to another such an image may become a mere lucky piece, which, he hopes, may give him an undeserved deliverance from the consequences of his escapades. Just so in Greece one man's ring might be a sincere tribute, through a delicate and beautiful art, to a deity in whom he believed and by whom he hoped to be helped and protected; to another man such a ring might be a talisman and nothing more.¹⁷

In some instances the presumption that classical ring stones had a quasi-amuletic value is rather strong. Considering the popularity of athletics in ancient Greece, it is not hard to believe that gems representing vigorous youthful gods or heroes, such as Apollo, Hermes, and Herakles, were worn by athletes to insure their success in the games. In the case of Herakles, who was often invoked as ἀλεξίκακος, "averted of evil," an apotropaic power might be imputed to the stone as well as a positive value in giving strength and endurance. Strong and swift animals might become popular symbols for similar reasons; and if one runs over a series of gems with other than human designs, it is no abuse of the imagination to see a magical meaning in some or many of them.

Even if we allow a potential magical value to Greek gems of the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods, and concede that magical rings made from perishable metals were known in those times, it is undeniable that a marked change took place in the first century of the Christian era. Then we begin to find rings and pendants of semiprecious stones which show that they are magical, either by designs of so peculiar a character as to admit of no other classification, or by the unmistakable evidence of inscriptions. Brief petitions such as διαφύλασσε, "preserve," or δός μοι χάριν, "grant me favor," could be regarded merely as a special development, in a religious direction, of the so-called motto or posy inscriptions which make their appearance in this period, and which are sometimes of amuletic character. They are expressions of good will, wishes for luck, health, or long life; many have been published by Le Blant and others.¹⁸ But the striking change just mentioned is really

¹⁷ Cf. E. Bevan, *Holy Images* (London, 1940), p. 177: "If in the past the question of images in religion has excited such passion, for and against, that is certainly because they were not thought of as simply a means to bring home to the mind of the worshipper an unseen person, but because the other view of them, as means to act upon the unseen person, or as themselves charged with a quasi-personal supernatural power, was always there in the background."

H. C. Youtie, who read this chapter in manuscript, remarks: "The nobler attitude towards religious symbols is illustrated in Apuleius, *Apol.* 55-56; the vulgar view is exemplified by the ring made of iron nails drawn from crosses (a charm against demons) and by the speaking Apollo carved on a ring stone (Lucian, *Philops.* 17 and 38)."

¹⁸ Le Blant, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-46.

a transition, as Wünsch expressed it, from an older national magic to a later international magic.¹⁹ It shows itself in longer inscriptions containing invocations to non-Greek deities, often accompanied by words that are sometimes corruptions of Egyptian, Hebrew, or Aramaic speech forms, sometimes entirely unintelligible combinations of letters. In some instances words seem to have been invented chiefly to produce a jingling sound; in others the object may have been to impress the hearer or reader by their obscurity. Yet it would be wrong to assume that cynical knavery accounts for all such language. Even meaningless formulas were probably believed to have power in themselves.

Such inscriptions are usually, but not always, accompanied by incised figures of various deities, sometimes the well-known gods of Greece in slightly Egyptianized forms, sometimes Egyptian gods more or less Hellenized in appearance, sometimes unfamiliar divine or demonic forms. Among the last are certain monstrous combinations of human and animal elements, symbolizing a fusion of various supernatural beings. These amuletic demons often occur without inscriptions; in such cases the wearer of the design was probably content with the general protection it gave him, and dispensed with the written charm or prayer.

In a passage that has often been brought to the attention of archaeologists the elder Pliny says: "Now, indeed, men also are beginning to wear on their fingers Harpocrates and figures of Egyptian deities."²⁰ The words *virique* seem to imply that women had adopted the custom even earlier, and it is probable that rings of the sort described began to appear in Rome shortly after the conquest of Egypt, a century before the time when Pliny wrote. Egyptian custom, in fact, was the chief formative influence in amulets of the "Gnostic" type. Amulets of specialized form, recognizable as such and serving no other purpose, had been made from durable materials in Egypt for many centuries, and have been preserved in large numbers. They are an important part of the material of Egyptian archaeology and have been described and discussed by many authorities.²¹ On the other hand, among genuine Hellenic remains we can point to nothing of the kind with certainty. There is little doubt, however, that superstitious Greeks used simple amulets made of perishable materials, and as we have seen, a quasi-amuletic quality may have been ascribed to certain gem stones, especially when they bore designs or symbols with which the common people associated ideas of power, wealth, strength, or beauty.

In an important paper published in 1934, Max Pieper showed that even in Ptolemaic Egypt Greek gem seals were substituted for scarabs in attesting signatures to legal documents; this seems to have come about chiefly because exact duplicates are common among the scarabs, while no two Greek seals

¹⁹ R. Wünsch, "Deisidaimoniaka," *ARW* 12, 19.

²⁰ Plin. *N. H.* 33, 41.

²¹ E. A. W. Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions* (Oxford and London, 1930), pp. 133-150; Flinders Petrie, *Amulets* (London, 1914).

are exactly alike.²² Thus scarabs, which were used both as seals and as amulets, gradually disappear, and it may be that other old types of amulets fell into disuse along with the scarabs, all the more easily because the original meaning of some of them was forgotten. Strong as was the influence of Egypt upon the conquering people, Graeco-Egyptian amulets did not, as a rule, take over the shapes of dynastic amulets. This can scarcely have been because of their funerary associations, since the amulets used in daily life were probably much the same as those deposited with the dead. As far as I know, such shapes as the *tet* (so-called spine of Osiris), *udjat* (eye), *nefer*, etc., were not imitated by the makers of Graeco-Egyptian amulets. It is true, however, that some of the old amulets appear as parts of the intaglio designs on the "Gnostic" stones: the *ankh* is seen in the hands of divinities, the scarabaeus beetle occurs frequently, sometimes as the main design, and there is an interesting example of an *udjat* carved on a Graeco-Egyptian gem.²³ Further, the heart continues in the form of a common digestive amulet, but its actual shape is different from that of the *ab*, the Egyptian heart amulet.²⁴

The impact of Egypt is shown in two ways. First, Egyptian deities and demons, also certain symbols like the scarabaeus beetle, were represented upon ring stones and pendants which were generally of the normal Greek form; and second, the practice of accompanying the design with a brief inscribed prayer or incantation is carried over to the so-called Gnostic amulets. In early dynastic times huge heart scarabs were inscribed with a prayer spell from the Book of the Dead; and from the Saite period on, the combination of divine and demonic figures with incantations is well illustrated in the stelae of Horus,²⁵ which have influenced the designs of some Graeco-Egyptian amulets, and have bequeathed to them a very common demonic type, the compound pantheistic being sometimes called the pantheistic Bes.

Palestinian and Babylonian influences manifest themselves in certain divine names and in the occasional appearance of astrological symbols. It is probable that amuletic devices appear on Babylonian and Assyrian seal cylinders, and one might look to Babylon for an influence as powerful as the Egyptian.²⁶ But the predominance of Egyptian over all other non-Greek elements is abundantly proved not only by the close relation that exists between papyrus amulets and magical gems, but even more by the longer magical papyri, really handbooks of magic, which virtually offer us commentaries upon certain designs and inscriptions found on the stones.

Bearing these points in mind, we may now recapitulate the principal characteristics of Graeco-Egyptian magical amulets. They are of such sizes as could be comfortably worn as pendants, ring stones, or beads, and are usually intaglios cut in various stones, most commonly of the semiprecious

²² M. Pieper, "Die Siegelung in den griech. Papyri Ägyptens," *Aegyptus* 14 (1934), 245-252.

²³ M. Pieper, "Die Abraxasgemmen," *Mitteilungen des deutschen Instituts für ägypt. Altertumskunde in Kairo*, 5 (1934), 141 (Berlin 9792), and Pl. 22, b.

²⁴ Budge, *Amulets*, p. 138.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 165-171.

²⁶ H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, pp. 175, 200-203.

kinds though sometimes of no intrinsic value. The commonest materials are jasper (green, red, and yellow in about that order of frequency),²⁷ haematite, chalcedony, lapis lazuli, rock crystal, carnelian, agate, plasma, obsidian, and steatite; and some of these stones were preferred for one design, others for another. The more valuable gem stones are not common in this class of objects. Metal seems to have been less commonly used for amulets in Graeco-Roman Egypt; but it must be remembered that artifacts made of the baser metals are soon destroyed by wear and corrosion unless kept under favorable conditions, and that charms made of silver and gold might, after a time, be melted down for their value as bullion. In a tract incorporated in the Paris magical papyrus (*PGM* IV, 256 ff.) there are directions for making a *φυλακτήριον*, which is a thin silver plate (*λεπίς*) upon which a sacred name containing a hundred letters is to be inscribed with a bronze stylus; the amulet is to be worn on a thong of ass's hide.²⁸ Artemidorus (5, 26) tells of a man who dreamed that he was wearing around his neck, like an amulet case (*σκυτίς*), the name of Sarapis cut upon a bronze plate (*λεπίς*).²⁹ The dream evidently reflects a perfectly natural situation, and is related, not for its strangeness, but because of its meaning as interpreted in the system of Artemidorus. In Palestine and Syria many bronze amulet pendants have been found in a fair state of preservation, and some of them are in perfect condition, probably because they were treasured down to our own times (D. 298-306, 309-319). They are made in a distinctive form, sometimes spade-shaped, sometimes leaf-shaped, and a suspension loop at the top is cast or wrought as an integral part of the piece.³⁰

The shapes of most amulets differ little from those used for the later Greek and Hellenistic nonmagical gems. Rectangular pendants are perhaps more common than in earlier periods, and in this we may see the influence of Egypt, because of the frequent use there of a stele form for magical designs and inscriptions.³¹ In general, pendants were mounted in gold or some other metal, and the suspension loop was part of the mounting; but some heart-shaped digestive amulets have a projection at the top, perforated for a cord. Holes drilled within the field of a gem are often of modern origin. Ring stones are usually oval, sometimes circular or octagonal. Beads sometimes

²⁷ Pliny (*N. H.* 37, 118) says of the jaspers, *totus vero oriens pro amuleto gestare eas traditur*. But he seems not to know of the yellow kind, and it is not certain that we know what he means by *iaspis*. Dioscurides (*De mat. medica* 5, 142) also does not mention red jasper, but says that all kinds are used as amulets, and particularly that when attached to the thigh, they were believed to shorten the pains of childbirth.

²⁸ *PGM* IV, 256-260. In *Studies in Honor of E. K. Rand*, p. 246, D. M. Robinson gives a useful bibliography of gold and silver lamellae in connection with his publication of a silver tablet which was rolled up in a bronze tube.

²⁹ In *LSJ* *σκυτίς* is translated "leather amulet"; but it is doubtful whether amulets were made of leather, and "amulet bag" or "amulet case" would be more accurate. In popular speech the container might be carelessly used for the contained. Cf. *Jul. Africanus* 7, 17 (p. 39 ed. Vieillefond).

³⁰ Some specimens of this form were published by Schlumberger, *REG* 5 (1892), 80-84; also by Perdrizet in the same journal, 16, 49. A Hebrew amulet from Palestine is of similar form, but the material is silver; cf. Budge, *Amulets*, p. 237.

³¹ Rectangular stone amulets with a projection at the top (for hanging) were also made in Babylonia in the time of Esarhaddon (ca. 680 B.C.); see Budge, *Amulets*, pp. 92-98, with Pls. 12-13.

occur among objects of this class; they are usually elongated rectangular prisms, occasionally small cubes or fusiform (D. 358-369). Unusual shapes are to be seen here and there. In the British Museum there is a lapis lazuli scarab with extended wings, a form taken over from dynastic amulets, and two pieces with triangular outline, the corners rounded.³² The University of Michigan has a fine gray-blue chalcedony (D. 83), a Chnoubis amulet, the ovate outline and unusual thickness of which show that it was meant to resemble the stone of a peach or a persea fruit. A few prehistoric stone axes (celts) have been found inscribed, at a much later date, with magical symbols and inscriptions.³³ The amulet makers undoubtedly regarded these "thunder-stones" as possessing magical powers in themselves, and added their own magic to that of the ancient weapon.

With some noteworthy exceptions the figures shown on magical amulets are crudely designed, and the execution is often hasty and careless. Much of the work seems to have been done with the wheel, and not infrequently it is marred by cuts that have run slightly beyond the proper outlines of the design. One who takes up the study of these objects after learning something of the glyptic art of the classical period will observe an important difference in their plan; the designs are meant to be looked at on the stone itself, not in an impression. They are not cut for seals; consequently the relations of right and left, e.g., with regard to objects carried in the hands of a god, are as they appear on the stone, and the inscriptions read from left to right. Exceptions to this practice are rare. For this reason illustrations of Graeco-Egyptian amulets should be made from casts of the stones, not from impressions. Neglect of this point has made it needlessly inconvenient to read the inscriptions on gems published in many of the older books.

The inscriptions require a fuller treatment than can be entered upon here, but some preliminary comments are in order. There are brief pious exclamations, like *εἰς θεὸς Σάραπης*, "one God, Sarapis," or *νικᾷ ἡ Ἰσις*, "Isis conquers," and brief prayers like the common "grant favor" or "protect the wearer from all harm." There are occasionally phrases, sentences, or even invocations of some length, that show genuine religious feeling. A few amulets have a peculiarity that has not received proper attention. In addition to some design and inscription of the usual kind, intended to further and protect the wearer's general welfare, these pieces include a petition concerned with his relations to other people; and some of the desires thus recorded are distinctly antisocial. Such stones contradict Budge's view that "the use of the amulet . . . has never been, and can never be, connected with what is commonly called 'Black Magic.'" ³⁴ It is doubtless true that the magic of

³² B. M. 56277, 56001, 56024.

³³ To the examples cited and figured by Cook, *Zeus*, II, 512 f., add the remarkable celt in the Royal Ontario Museum at Toronto (published by J. H. Iliffe, *AJA* 35 [1931], 304-309); also B. M. +2402, which is still, I think, unpublished. It is labeled "Prehistoric stone celt used in later Greek times as an amulet; an invocation to Bacchus is carved on the base." I examined it in 1937, but found the inscription unintelligible. The invocation to Bacchus consists of the word *ΒΑΚΧΕ* alone; the remainder makes no sense.

³⁴ Budge, *Amulets*, Preface, p. xxiii.

amulets is usually "white" rather than "black," yet there are Graeco-Egyptian amulets that express such wishes as might be scratched on a curse tablet (*κατάδεσμος*, *defixionis tabella*). However, the true curse tablet, made for the sole purpose of destroying an enemy, is never worn by the person uttering the curse, but is hidden away or buried. When "black-magical" words are inscribed on a gem stone it may mean that the stone was intended to be used in a ceremony (*πρᾶξις*) directed against an enemy, or that the inscription represents a desire so passionately felt that the person who expresses it wishes to be constantly reminded of it.

A special problem is presented by the very numerous inscriptions which, though written in Greek letters, are not Greek; they are usually unintelligible jargon, though some Egyptian and Semitic words have been recognized. Certain words recur in connection with particular designs often enough to suggest that they are secret names of the god or demon represented or symbolized on the stone. These recurring names should be recorded, and the accompanying images or symbols noted, in the hope that some light may eventually be thrown upon their origin. Among them are *Αρωριφρασις* in connection with Aphrodite, *Ηναμαρω* with designs representing the baboon of Thoth, *Κρατοναθ* with Horus-Harpocrates. In the last example we may perhaps recognize an element in the name Harpocrates.

Other long words or combinations of words are found on both magical gems and magical papyri, and several passages in the papyri indicate that these jargon words constitute the "great" or "secret" name of the god invoked. Nevertheless, I am convinced that most of them have no meaning in any language. Some are meant to impress by their sonorous syllables and their suggestion of foreign speech, which is helped out by borrowed sound elements characteristic of other tongues. Others are mere babbling sequences of similar sounds, like *αθθα βαθθα*, *ιβι αβι σελτι βελτι*, and are comparable in their meaningless jingle to some of the "counting-out" rhymes used by children in their games. The questionable character of this jargon did not escape such ancient critics as Jerome, who fathers much of this magical nonsense upon the Basilidians, probably unjustly.

" . . . Armazel, Barbelon, Abraxan, Balsamum et ridiculum Leusiboram ceteraque magis portenta quam nomina, quae ad imperitorum et muliercularum animos concitandos, quasi de Hebraicis fontibus hauriunt, barbaro simplices quosque terrentes sono, ut quod non intelligunt plus mirentur."³⁵

"To stir up the minds of ignorant men and foolish women, they pretend to draw from Hebrew sources Armazel, Barbelo, Abraxas, Balsamus and the absurd Leusiboras, and other monsters rather than names, terrifying simple folk with barbarous sounds, that they may be the more amazed at what they cannot understand."

There was a magic power even in the arrangement of the letters in certain words. Palindromes, words that read the same forwards and backwards,

³⁵ Hier. *Epist.* 75, 3, 1 (*CSEL* 55).

were sometimes inscribed on gem amulets; the commonest of these is $\alpha\beta\lambda\alpha\nu\alpha\theta\alpha\nu\alpha\lambda\beta\alpha$, but there are several longer ones. Even the seven Greek vowels, which were commonly interpreted as symbols of the seven planets, were used as elements in magical charms, particularly when they were arranged in certain ways. Some words or groups of words had isopsephic value; that is to say, that when each letter is given the value that belongs to it as a Greek numeral ($\alpha = 1$, $\beta = 2$, $\iota = 10$, $\rho = 100$), the sum of these numerical values equals a number of magical import, such as 365, 3663, 9999. Some inscriptions that seem meaningless at first glance prove upon examination to be mere childish attempts to disguise familiar names. Thus a two-line inscription IMX|HAA is merely the name of the archangel Michael with the letters pied;³⁶ ABΩ|XΩN|IΩX is the demonic name Βαινχωωωχ. Somewhat similar is a sort of anagram inscribed on a gem in the Lewis collection, A|I|ΣAB|OΩN|EΘH|T.³⁷ Here, it would seem, each letter was meant to be used, not once only, but as often as it might be necessary in order to make certain words. The editor, J. H. Middleton, saw that one could read $\delta\omega\nu$, Σαβαωθ, θεός; we may add Ιαω, and since the presence of η and υ is not otherwise accounted for, it is likely that the sequence of the seven vowels αεηιουω was part of the plan. I would arrange it thus: Ιαω Σαβαωθ, $\delta\omega\nu$ θεός, βοήθει, αεηιουω. This particular device has escaped the notice of most observers, and it may explain other apparently meaningless groups of letters that appear on gem amulets. Further, we must not forget that significant mottoes and religious passwords were indicated by the initial letters of their words; the Christian symbols IXΘΥΣ and ΧΜΙ are well known, but obscure religious groups may have concealed their watchwords behind other combinations of initial letters that are meaningless to us.

Besides inscriptions that are legible, even though meaningless, many amulets bear inscribed signs that belong to no known alphabet. They are also drawn in some of the magical papyri, which call them *χαρακτήρες*, and the term "characters," in a special limited sense, has been adopted by archaeologists in referring to these signs.³⁸ Some of them may be adapted from Egyptian hieroglyphs, others remind one slightly of some signs in the Cypriote syllabary, but most of them present no likeness to any known system of writing; and the resemblances to hieroglyphs have shed no light upon the meaning of the characters. It is most likely that they are ideographic symbols for sacred names or magical terms, rather than alphabetic signs, and it is significant that in inscriptions the characters are occasionally addressed as if they were sentient beings. Certain characters, however, differ from the Greek alphabet just enough to suggest that they may have been borrowed from some system of cryptography; we know that several systems of the kind were in use.

It is possible that we may yet learn something about the characters if

³⁶ J. Chifflet, tab. 16, 67 (following J. Macarius, *Abraxas seu Apistopistus*, Antwerp, 1657; B. M. 56054).

³⁷ J. H. Middleton, *The Lewis Collection of Gems and Rings*, p. 80 (Class B, 20).

³⁸ There are many examples in P. London 121 (PGM VII) as at 196, 392, 399, 589, etc.

some investigator is patient enough to follow up all the leads, but at present they are still undeciphered. Even if, as is likely, they represented something definite to those who invented them, there is little doubt that they were ignorantly imitated and repeated by later and less learned operators, in whose hands they became mere hocus-pocus.

The crowded appearance of the work on many magical stones is very noticeable. A single figure may be surrounded by an inscription of many letters, or the field may be dotted with characters; and sometimes groups of several divinities or demonic creatures are forced into a surprisingly small space. Even when the obverse of such stones shows only a single figure in an adequate field, the reverse will often contain an inscription running into several scores of minute letters; and since it is evident that some of these stones were set in rings, the inscription, being invisible, was the wearer's secret, and hence exerted greater magical power. Even the beveled edges of some ring stones and pendants had magical words carved upon them; and these were completely hidden by the setting of the stone.

The lettering is in general of a kind known from the second century on, with much greater use of rectilinear letter forms, because of the difficulty of cutting curves on the hard stone; but the lapidary's indifference to certain distinctions gives some trouble to the reader. The cross stroke of A is omitted so often that Λ may be read as A, and A and Δ are not always carefully distinguished from each other. Neglect of the middle stroke of E causes it to be confused with the square sigma (Σ). Theta is usually lozenge-shaped, and when the cross stroke is slighted, as is often done, it may be mistaken for omicron; when it is square, omission or shallow cutting of the right-hand upright may cause it to be read as E. K and B are sometimes almost undistinguishable, and one may hesitate between Γ and T. Xi is regularly like a zeta with a short stroke across the diagonal, and since this is often neglected or lightly scratched, the two letters may be confused. Failure on the part of editors to take account of such epigraphic laxities makes it necessary to correct the readings of many inscriptions, particularly those published by the early students of these objects.

Although the workmanship of Graeco-Egyptian amulets is far inferior to that of classical and Hellenistic gems, they were not always cheaply executed. Occasionally the more valuable stones were used, and the work, even on the cheaper materials, must have been expensive. Some of the designs show several figures carefully differentiated by costume or attributes. There are long inscriptions, some of which must have been copied from written directions, since different gems show them, with only slight variations; and even rude cutting of an inscription running to a hundred letters or more would cost many hours of labor. The expense of making the more elaborate amulets shows clearly how important a part magic had come to play in the lives of the wealthier classes; and the remarkable pieces of magical apparatus found at Pergamon, adorned with carefully executed symbols and inscriptions, as well as with the three forms of Hecate, prove that a master

magician here and there could afford expensive working tools.³⁹ On the other hand, unscrupulous amulet makers undoubtedly scamped their work; they carved figures of deities that were barely recognizable, and some jumbled inscriptions are probably to be laid to their charge. Some stones puzzle the archaeologist because the lapidary was an impostor who cut designs and inscriptions at haphazard; and men and women bought such work because they were so gullible as to be satisfied, perhaps to be even more impressed, by the lack of meaning in figures and text.

Further evidence that many amulets required careful technical preparation is supplied by certain texts which mention a process of consecration (*τελετή, ἀποτέλεσμα, καθιέρωσις*) as necessary to give a stone its full efficacy. In some of these passages it would seem that the mere carving of an appropriate design and inscription constituted a *τελετή* which gave full effect to the powers latent in the unwrought stone. Thus in the treatise *περὶ λίθων* ascribed to Socrates and Dionysius we read of the jacinth (*ἰάκινθος*): γλύφεται ἐν τούτῳ τῷ λίθῳ Ποσειδῶν ἔχων δελφίνα τῷ δεξιῷ ποδὶ καὶ τρίαιναν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ. τελέσας οὖν οὕτως ἔχε φορῶν τὸ δακτύλιον, καὶ ποιεῖ πάντα ὅσα ὁ σμάραγδος.⁴⁰

"On this stone Poseidon is to be engraved, holding a dolphin under his right foot and a trident in his right hand. After consecrating the ring in this way, keep it and wear it, and it will have all the powers possessed by the emerald."

The text goes on to say that such a stone will save the wearer from shipwreck. Attention may be called to the fact that no inscription is required, and that the design of Poseidon resting his foot upon a dolphin and holding a trident in his hand is very like some gems that have been classed merely as ornaments or seals; consequently this passage confirms the view expressed above, that certain gems that bear no indication of a magical character may nevertheless have been worn as amulets. Other examples of a "consecration" that consists only in the cutting of a design, or a design with an inscription, are to be found in the Epitome of the Orphic *Lithika*.⁴¹

On the other hand, the magical papyri sometimes give directions for a ceremony of consecration, after the object has received its design and inscription, which involves some or all of the following preliminaries: sacrifice, libations, censuring, recitation of special formulas (*λόγοι*), and previous purification and continence. So, for example, the iron plate inscribed with Homeric verses, and the "Ring of Hermes," an emerald with a scarab cut on one side and a figure of Isis on the under side, the scarab to be pierced and strung on a golden wire.⁴² In the account of the *πρᾶξις* called the "Sword of Dardanus," a special incense that seems to have been used in the consecration is spoken

³⁹ See R. Wünsch, *Antikes Zaubergefäß aus Pergamon* (*Jahrb. deutsch. arch. Inst.*, Ergänzungsheft, 6), 1905.

⁴⁰ Mély-Ruelle, *Les Lapidaires de l'antiquité*, II (*Les Lapidaires grecs*), 175.

⁴¹ Mély-Ruelle, *op. cit.*, p. 162, 13, p. 168, 12.

⁴² PGM IV, 2145-2241; V, 213-300.

of as animating (*ἐμψυχοῦν*) an image of Eros,⁴³ which is an important part of the prescribed design, and the whole *πρᾶξις*; a curious idea, which requires some further comment.

Little is known about the consecration of divine images in the classical period of Greek history. Some of the most revered cult images were very ancient, and the circumstances of their establishment are lost in antiquity. Yet we may be sure that when such a statue as that of Zeus at Olympia or Athena in the Parthenon was set in its place, the occasion did not pass unmarked by some special ceremony. Such evidence as could be assembled by Hock, the chief authority on the subject, indicates that the consecration, more correctly called installation, consisted principally in the adornment of the statue and perhaps the attachment of certain symbols to it, such as *tainiai* or *stemmata*, and in the performance of the first sacrifice in the presence of the image.⁴⁴ The sacrifice implies, of course, that the god is invited to come and accept the gifts that his worshipers have provided. There might well be a procession accompanied by hymns and prayers; such details would vary with the importance of the occasion. But there seems to be nothing to show that the officiating priests performed any rite to compel the deity to take up his abode in the statue and give it power and life. Yet the late philosophers of the Neo-Platonic school clearly knew of actions which were believed to animate images of the gods and endow them with power and motion. The passages illustrating this department of theurgy have been assembled by Hock and Hopfner.⁴⁵ Full treatment of the subject is neither feasible nor appropriate here, but I cite a few passages that state the idea concisely; they are drawn from Hopfner's collections, except the one from Hermias.

Proclus *in Timaeum* (37 c-d), marg. pag. 240A (Vol. III, 6, ll. 8-15 Kroll):
καὶ πάλιν ἐκ τούτου ὁῦλον, ὅπως τὸν δημιουργὸν κατὰ τοὺς ἄκρους ἰδρύει τῶν
τελεστών, ἀγαματοποιὸν αὐτὸν ἀποφαίνων τοῦ κόσμου, καθάπερ ἔμπροσθεν
ὀνομάτων ποιητὴν θείων καὶ χαρακτήρων θείων ἐκφαντικόν, δι' ὧν τὴν ψυχὴν
ἐτέλεσε· ταῦτα γὰρ καὶ οἱ τῷ ὄντι τελεσταὶ ὀρώσι, διὰ χαρακτήρων καὶ ὀνο-
μάτων ζωτικῶν τελούντες τὰ ἀγάλματα καὶ ζῶντα καὶ κινούμενα ἀποτελοῦντες.

"Again this shows clearly how he sets the Demiurge among the supreme consecrators, revealing him as the sculptor of the universe, just as before he was shown to be the inventor of divine names and the revealer of divine marks, by which he consecrated the soul. For such are the actions of the real consecrators, who by means of vivifying signs and names consecrate images and make them living and moving things."

Proclus *in Rempublicam* (616 c Vol. II, 212 Kr.): . . . κατὰ τὸν Τίμαιον
(37c) ἀγαλμα τῶν αἰδίων ἐστὶν θεῶν ὅδε ὁ κόσμος, τελεστὴν μὲν εἶναι τοῦ
ἀγάλματος τούτου τὸν δημιουργόν, ὃς ἐπνευσεν εἰς αὐτὸν ζωὴν ἀμήχανον ὅσην

⁴³ PGM IV, 1830.

⁴⁴ G. Hock, *Griechische Weihegebräuche* (1905), pp. 49-52; see also E. Bevan, *Holy Images*, pp. 31-35.

⁴⁵ Hock, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-70; Th. Hopfner, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber*, I, §§ 808-812.

καὶ ἐποίησεν ἄγαλμα ἔνουν χρηματίζον διὰ τῆς αὐτοῦ κινήσεως τοῖς ὁρᾶν δυναμένοις καὶ διὰ τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ σημείων τὰ ἐσόμενα λέγον· τῷ δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς χαρακτήρι καὶ ταῖς περιφοραῖς, αἷς ὀνόματα αὐτὸς ἔθηκεν, περιέλαβεν αὐτὸ καὶ συνέδησεν· φυλακτῆρια δὲ αὐτῷ περιῆψεν καὶ ἐν μέσοις ἤδρασεν τοῖς κόλποις τοὺς εἰρημένους νόας κτλ.

“... according to the Timaeus, this universe is the image of the eternal gods, the Demiurge being the consecrator of this image, since he breathed into it an inexpressibly potent vitality, and made a sentient image operating through its own motion for those who are able to see, and foretelling the future through the signs in heaven. He has encompassed it with the character of the soul and bound it together with those revolutions to which he himself has given names; and he has hung phylacteries upon it, and in the midst of its bosom he has set the intellects whereof we have spoken.”

Here it is clear that Proclus thought of the officiating consecrator, to whom the Demiurge is compared, as inscribing characters upon the image and hanging amulets upon it.

Hermias Alex., *Schol. in Plat. Phaedrum*, ed. Couvreur, p. 87, 4 ff.: πῶς μὲν οὖν ἡ ψυχὴ ἐνθουσιᾷ εἴρηται. πῶς δὲ καὶ ἄγαλμα λέγεται ἐνθουσιᾶν; ἡ αὐτὸ μὲν οὐκ ἐνεργεῖ περὶ τὸ θεῖον, ὃ γε ἄψυχόν ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ὕλην ἢ τελεστικὴ διακαθήρασα καὶ τινὰς χαρακτῆρας καὶ σύμβολα περιθεῖσα τῷ ἀγάλματι, πρῶτον μὲν ἔμψυχον αὐτὸ διὰ τούτων ἐποίησε καὶ (οἷον τε) ζώῃν τινὰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου καταδέξασθαι, ἔπειτα μετὰ τοῦτο ἐλλαμφθῆναι παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτὸ παρεσκεύασεν.

“We have told, then, how the soul is inspired. But how can an image also be said to be inspired? Perhaps the thing itself cannot respond actively to the divine, inasmuch as it is without life; but the art of consecration purifies its matter, and, by attaching certain marks and symbols to the image, first gives it a soul by these means, and makes it capable of receiving a kind of life from the universe, thereafter preparing it to receive illumination from Divinity.”

In a curious passage (*De Myst.* 3, 13) Iamblichus censures those who think that by merely “standing on characters” (probably drawn on the ground) they can dispense with the other theurgic arts, and none the less εἰσκρίνειν τι πνεῦμα, “command the presence of a spirit.”

In accepting the idea that an image could be given life by theurgic processes, the Neo-Platonists were merely attempting to give a philosophical reason for a custom that was far older than their school, just as their doctrine of substances, persons, animals, and symbols sympathetic or antipathetic to particular divinities is merely a rationalizing of ancient popular beliefs about the magical qualities of things in the natural world.

It is certainly possible that in early days the Greeks had installation ceremonies involving the ritual animation of statues; but if they had no evidence for such ceremonies has come down to us. The nearest approach

to ritual animation is the annual cleansing of certain cult statues.⁴⁶ This may be viewed simply as a practical process, like an annual house cleaning, and with his usual sobriety of judgment, M. P. Nilsson so interprets it; but it is possible that the rite was performed with the purpose of giving renewed life and power to the image. Yet on the whole it is likely that the idea of ritual empsychosis came into magic and theurgy from Egyptian religious custom. Hopfner and Nock have rightly drawn attention to this point, and I owe to them the knowledge of Moret's work *Le Rituel du culte divin journalier*, which shows that the king as priest was believed to give life to the statue of the god.⁴⁷ The passage cited above from Proclus on the *Republic* implies that phylacteries were attached to the image as part of the theurgic process of vivifying it. This also indicates Egyptian influence; for as Naville says, in Egypt magic was as necessary to gods as to men.⁴⁸ Ancient sculptures and paintings show the gods carrying the ankh and other amulets, and late Graeco-Egyptian statuettes wear them.⁴⁹

These rites of consecration doubtless help us to understand the cultural background that produced magical amulets, but they are of little or no importance for the interpretation of individual objects. The elaborate procedure described in some passages of the magical papyri seems to have been required in the case of stones meant to be used in an important *πραξις*; and it is a reasonable conjecture that some elaborate amulets that have come down to us once played a part in a ceremony of more than ordinary importance. It is interesting to recall here that a stone has been published which answers closely to the design prescribed in the "Sword of Dardanus."⁵⁰ On the other hand, makers and vendors of amulets probably resembled their modern successors in exaggerating, or simply inventing, the elaborate precautions taken to insure the efficacy of their wares. It is impossible to believe that the thousands of magical gems and metal objects that are extant were all prepared with preliminary asceticism and elaborate sacrifices. Besides, we have already seen that in some authorities the "consecration" consists merely in the carving of a divine figure or symbol with or without an inscription.

A word may be said of methods of research in this field. No preparation for the study of Graeco-Egyptian amulets is more important than clearing one's mind of certain long-standing misconceptions. First and perhaps most important among these is the notion that the designs inscribed upon them partly reveal, partly conceal a body of mysterious occult doctrine, and that they affirm the devotion of the wearer to a religious system symbolized by

⁴⁶ Hock, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Hopfner, *op. cit.*, I, § 808 *ad fin.* (p. 217); A. D. Nock, *JEA* 11 (1925), 155. Moret's work was published in *Annales du Musée Guimet, Bibliothèque des Études*, 14 (1902), 79-102; note esp. 93-94.

⁴⁸ Hastings, *ERE*, III, 431 a.

⁴⁹ See Budge, *Gods*, I, 430 (Hathor); plate opposite 456 (Child Horus); II, 130 and plate opposite (Osiris); 210 (Child Horus); 286 (Bes); Lanzone, *Dizionario di mitologia egizia*, Pl. 122, i (Merut); Perdrizet, *Les Terres cuites . . . de la collection Fouquet*, Pls. 3, 15; Breccia, *Terrecotte figurate del Museo di Alessandria*, Nos. 11, 152, 157.

⁵⁰ R. Mouterde, "Le Glaive de Dardanos," *Mélanges Univ. St.-Joseph*, 15, 53-64.

images, characters, and significant names. In fact, a prepossession in favor of the occult has been the principal obstacle to a better understanding of these interesting objects. Religious influences do indeed manifest themselves in many ways, and there is some ostentation of mystery, because wherever there is magic there is secrecy. But the connections between the designs and inscriptions and the doctrines of any contemporary religion are too tenuous to justify us in accepting these amulets as important documents of religious history. A few here and there may be viewed in that light; in the great majority of examples we cannot definitely prove that the wearer of the amulet was a follower of the religion that might seem to be indicated by his pendant or ring. In that age of syncretism interest in extraneous doctrines and cults was very active, and it worked effectively with the well-known tendency of believers in magic to regard *omne ignotum pro mirifico*. Not every person who wore a ring engraved with the words *Iao Sabaoth* was a Jew, not every pendant with a figure of Aphrodite arranging her hair was worn by a Greek woman, not every stone inscribed *Abrasax* belonged to a member of a Gnostic sect. To state these facts may lessen the interest in these amulets that a student of religion might otherwise feel, but it at least contributes something to our understanding of the muddled magic prevalent in the early centuries of our era.

Another misconception is that a classification can be worked out into which all amulets of this period can be fitted. In a rough way we can distinguish certain types characterized by similar designs and legends; but the number of amulets that conform closely to such types is small as compared with specimens that vary from the standard, or combine features belonging to two or more types. The disposition to combine sometimes goes very far. In the remarkable bronze heart belonging to the Petrie Collection in University College, London, it would seem that the maker tried to bring together, in a sort of omnibus amulet, all the magical designs and formulas that he knew.⁵¹ We also have to reckon with a behavior like that of the makers and the users of patent medicines. Until they were restrained by law, the less scrupulous manufacturers of these nostrums were wont to claim for their products many virtues besides the one, itself dubious, which the chemical ingredients might seem to indicate; and ignorant patients will use their favorite patent preparation for many other ailments than the one it was intended to cure. They will even take liberties with a legitimate prescription given by a qualified physician. We find in the magical papyri various charms for which miscellaneous powers are claimed; in the first three lines of P. Mich. III, 154, a brief formula is described as giving favor, victory, and protection, and reversing spells. A similar crisscrossing of designs and their supposed powers is found in the gem amulets. Delatte has shown convinc-

⁵¹ Petrie, *Amulets*, No. 135 a2; pp. 30 ff., Pls. 22 and 49. See also a small stele illustrated in Montfaucon, II, 2, Pl. 167. It closely resembles a bronze Horus stele in the Geneva Museum, the back of which shows several figures that are common in magical designs, Osiris, Harpocrates on the lotus, the anguipede, pantheos, cynocephali; published by Deonna, *Rev. Arch.*, 18 (1923), 119-131. An illustration appears on Pl. XXIV, Fig. 5.

ingly that a certain design known to earlier students as the "Mystic Vase" is in reality a stylized representation of the uterus, intended to cure maladies affecting that organ.⁵² Yet a specimen of this type in my own collection is inscribed on the reverse ἐπὶ ποδία, "for the feet"; the diminutive, by the way, is of some lexicographical interest.

A more important source of confusion is the variation in magical practice as taught by different masters, or as applied by different lapidaries. One example of this is so striking that it is worth citing at some length. In one of the Berlin magical papyri (*PGM* I, 143 ff.), immediately after a long λόγος consisting of many magical words and addressed to the sun, there follow these directions: "The image (ἀνδριάς) engraved on the stone is a lion-faced Heliorus holding in his left hand an orb (πόλος) and (in the right) a whip, and round about him an ouroboros (i.e., a serpent with his tail in his mouth), and under the bottom of the stone this name (keep it secret): acha achacha chach charchara chach."

The words "in the right" (τῇ δεξιᾷ) were added by Nock, and the supplement is certainly correct. The word translated "bottom" is ἔδαφος, which leaves us a little in doubt whether the legend was to be placed on the reverse of the stone or under the ground line of the design, i.e., in the exergue; the fact that τοῦ λίθου follows ἔδαφος rather favors the former alternative. Heliorus (Ἡλιωρος) is Preisendanz's reading; the papyrus shows only ωρος preceded by a sign which Preisendanz interprets as a corrupt symbol of the sun. Even if this point be called into question, Horus must stand as against the conjectures of other editors because of the solar relations of this deity, and perhaps also because the first of the prescribed magical words is found elsewhere in connection with Horus.

Now I know of five amulets, and have minutely examined four of the five, which have for their principal design a lion-headed figure holding a whip in the right hand and an orb in the left, corresponding exactly to the description in the Berlin papyrus.⁵³ They differ from it only in certain particulars that have nothing to do with the principal design, as follows. First, all five are cut on rock crystal, while the design in the papyrus is to be cut on a stone which will be brought to the operator by a hawk (! cf. l. 65). One may infer that it is the so-called *ιερακίτης*, which seems to be unidentified; from Pliny *N. H.* 37, 167, it would seem to have been colored like a hawk's plumage. Further, the papyrus directs that the design shall be encircled by an ouroboros; but this motif, which is extremely common on flat stones, would have been ineffective on the crystals, all of which are cut *en cabochon*, and it does not appear on them. Finally, all five bear inscriptions that agree closely, not taking into account personal petitions that are added on two of them, and all differ entirely from the inscription that the papyrus

⁵² A. Delatte, in *Musée Belge*, 18, 75-88.

⁵³ The stones are as follows: British Museum 56502; Cabinet des Médailles (Chabouillet 2171); Boston Museum of Fine Arts 01.7556; a stone in the collection of the late E. T. Newell; and one in the possession of President A. G. Ruthven, of the University of Michigan. For illustrations of three of the five see Nos. 234-236 on the plates.

calls for; and while they are in part unintelligible jargon, the first two words in all five are $\text{Ze}\theta\ \alpha\phi\omicron\beta\epsilon$. The "fearless Zeth" thus invoked must be the wicked god Set, the enemy of Osiris, Isis, and Horus. Thus one and the same design seems to have been used to represent either of two mutually hostile deities, and we are naturally led to suppose that it was used by two different religious groups. Either similar images were differently interpreted by different schools, or else syncretism had progressed so far that no distinctions counted.

There is further evidence of a negative kind showing that there was no authoritative system which determined the characteristics of these amulets, but rather that various magical practitioners, working with motifs that were widely known, made their prescriptions according to their own notions. Our magical papyri are made up of procedures and formulas supposed to be the work of various masters of magic, and it might therefore be expected that such directions as they give for the execution of gem amulets would be carried out on many extant stones. But close agreement of this kind is very unusual; the design prescribed in the "Sword of Dardanus," and recognized by Mouterde on a haematite found in Syria, is a remarkable exception.⁵⁴ Single motifs mentioned in the papyri are common — the ouroboros, Hecate, the lion treading on a mummy, etc.; but the papyri usually add further details that are not illustrated by the stones. The combination of a scarabaeus on one side of a gem and Isis on the other (*PGM* V, 239 ff.) might be expected to appear even fortuitously, in view of the common occurrence of the two separate motifs; yet I have not seen them combined just as the papyrus requires. One of the unexplained points in the interrelation of magical books and amulets is the fact that the cock-headed demon with snake legs, who is represented on hundreds of stones, is not described in extant papyri, though the names that accompany him, Iao and Abrasax, occur there numberless times.

These, then, are some of the considerations that warn us not to expect systematic regularity in amulets which may represent many different methods of magic, and which, furthermore, may have been made, or modified, by gem cutters to suit the whims of the purchasers. Yet there is reason to hope that we may still learn much by following scientific methods.

The first need is that the student should see and remember as many of these objects as possible, that he should recognize and bring together into groups all designs and inscriptions that have something in common, and that he should not be confused and diverted from his aim by the inconsistencies, overlappings, and apparent contradictions that he is sure to encounter. In some instances it will be possible to determine the art types from which certain magical designs are derived. Comparison of the inscriptions enables us to ascertain the normal text of certain formulas of prayer or adjuration, in spite of the gross corruptions arising from the illiteracy or the carelessness of the makers. Even in the case of the jargon inscriptions comparison of one amulet with another, and with the magical words that

⁵⁴ See note 50 above.

are to be found in the papyri, can elicit something like a true text for a *nomen sacrum* or a longer formula. Then it may be possible for linguistic experts to recognize more non-Greek elements, and contribute something to the interpretation; yet the task will be fruitless in many cases, owing to the known tendency of magicians to use impressive gibberish.

An investigation of amulets need not, and cannot, be made the occasion for a re-examination of the whole field of ancient magic. Some knowledge of magical ideas and practices is necessary in order to understand these objects; but their small size puts them in a limited and generally inferior class as compared with the papyrus texts and even the *defixiones* scratched on lead. On the whole, it may be said that they illustrate many phases of ancient magic without greatly extending our knowledge of its principles and methods; yet it is also true that because of the intimate and personal character of these amulets, they bring home to us very vividly the grasp of magic upon thousands of ignorant and sometimes unprincipled people. Thus the pitiful prayers or conjurations scratched on these ring stones and pendants may mean as much for our vision of the ancient world as the papyrus books which were written by master magicians and read by their apprentices.

The tasks immediately before the student of amulets seem to fall into two groups, of which one is, broadly speaking, historical, the other descriptive. Under the former head, the influences that have contributed to the development of various sorts of amulets should be investigated and illustrated. Some of these influences are national or cultural, and thus one must consider which among the types owe their characteristics to Egypt, and which contain Greek, Jewish, or Persian elements; and it goes without saying that in an age of syncretism two or more of these influences may often be detected in a single specimen. It is also necessary to inquire whether any of the prayers and invocations that are inscribed on some amulets express a genuine religious feeling, and if so, to determine its relation to known religious groups, such as the Jews, the orthodox Christians, and the Gnostics. There are also certain literary influences that can be traced in amulets where Greek mythology has suggested the design or the legend.

A second group of problems concerns the various purposes for which magical amulets were employed; and in order to determine them one must examine all details of the designs and inscriptions with the greatest care, and make use of such pertinent information as can be drawn from literary sources and from the magical books. A considerable number are general prophylactics, designed, as a common legend runs, to "protect the wearer from all evil." Others are directed against the evil eye and other forms of enchantment. Many, perhaps most of them, are meant to prevent or cure various diseases. Still others may be conveniently grouped under the head of social (or antisocial) magic — love charms, charms meant to gain favor for one person in the eyes of another (*χαριστήρια*), charms to break up love affairs or friendly relations between two people (*διάκοποι*), charms intended to bring serious harm or death to an enemy.