

Text, Image and Medium

The Evolution of Graeco-Roman Magical Gemstones

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Scholars generally agree that in the Classical and Hellenistic periods only a scant handful of images, for example, the head of the Medusa, the phallus, or the frontal eye were used as traditional amulets to ward off evil or disease,¹ but they find it difficult to identify many other protective or curative amulets or to distinguish them from ornaments used for aesthetic or other purposes. The world of the Roman Empire, on the other hand, seems marked by an explosion of images and texts on metal *lamellae*, papyri, mosaics and gemstones – all designed to protect or to heal. By some scholarly accounts this proliferation of readily identifiable amulets is best explained by a sudden need for magic or a precipitous rise in superstition in this period.² In my wider work on Greek amulets, I have taken to calling this historical argument or assumption the ‘big-bang theory’ of creation for Graeco-Roman amulets and it is a problematic one. First and foremost, I argue that it is unlikely that the diverse populations of such a large geographic area (from Great Britain to Afghanistan and from the banks of the Danube to the edge of the Sahara) all ‘got superstition’ within a few generations. I suggest, in fact, that these amulets were not invented out of whole cloth in this period, but rather that they only become visible to us in the archaeological record, because of the increased epigraphic habit of the Roman Imperial period. Or to put it another way: it is only when magical texts appear side by side with traditional pairings of media and images that we become aware that these media and images themselves were thought to have innate magical powers to protect or heal.

Such an argument is, of course, much larger than I can attempt in this essay, and so I limit myself to a handful of test cases, all of them engraved gemstones that have in the past been described as ‘Gnostic’, ‘Graeco-Egyptian’ or simply ‘magical’.³ These gems generally date to the Roman period and they comprise by far the largest corpus of extant Greek amulets.⁴ They usually have three important components: medium, image and text. In the past scholars have focused primarily on the images and texts and have often ignored the specific medium or colour, despite the fact that it is logically more probable that the type of stone on which various images and texts were inscribed was of basic or even original importance.⁵

In what follows I examine five popular types of gems – haematite, lapis lazuli and three differently coloured kinds of jasper – and argue that prior to the Roman period simpler versions of these same gems (with images only) were used as amulets and that the sorcerers and stonecutters of the Roman period innovated primarily by adding text to the stone. In each case I shall define a basic typology (defined by a consistent correlation between medium, image and text) and then trace the evolution of this type, in which the final stage is the addition of text.⁶ The elaborately inscribed gems of the Roman

period, in short, provide excellent evidence for the scribalisation of amulets, not for their invention or recent arrival from the East. This argument relies, in part, on the fact that prior to the Roman period inscriptions of any sort are rare on gems and limited almost exclusively to the single names of their owners or occasionally the artists who carved them.⁷ We shall see, moreover, that in each of my five studies, although various literary sources – for example, medical books, lapidaries and natural histories – describe or prescribe the making of various gem amulets, they almost never mention the inscription or text.⁸

Translucent green or white jasper and the radiant serpent

I begin with a series of light-green jasper gems used to cure stomach ache and heartburn, a type discussed in some detail by the Greek physician Galen:⁹

The testimony of some authorities attributes to certain stones a peculiar quality, which is actually possessed by the light green¹⁰ jasper. Worn as an amulet, it benefits the stomach and the oesophagus. Some set it in a ring and engrave on it a radiate serpent, just as King Nechepso prescribed in his fourteenth book. Of this stone I, too, have personal experience. I made a string of small stones of this type and hung it from my neck at such a length that the stones touched the oesophagus. They seemed no less beneficial, even though they had not the design that Nechepso prescribed.

Galen lived in the Roman Imperial period, but the book he cites was written several centuries earlier in the Ptolemaic period, probably by a hellenised Egyptian pretending to be Nechepso, one of the last native pharaohs.¹¹ A few centuries after Galen made his experiment, Marcellus of Bordeaux recorded a similar recipe in Latin: ‘This is a powerful remedy for pain of the stomach: on a jasper stone carve a radiant serpent, so that it has seven rays; enclose it in gold and employ it on the neck’.¹² He does not say, however, what colour the jasper should be. We have, then, three different recipes to guide us, each from a different era: Nechepso’s Hellenistic version (green jasper and radiant serpent set in a finger-ring); Galen’s Roman-Imperial one (a string of plain jasper stones hung over the oesophagus); and Marcellus’ Late Antique one (jasper and radiant serpent set in gold and hung around the neck). All, however, aim at curing pains in the digestive tract by using the same gem and – in two cases – the same image, but none make any mention of inscribed text.

Numerous examples of this type of light green jasper have, in fact, been discovered in the Mediterranean basin and Europe and they are conventionally dated to the Roman Imperial period in which Galen lived.¹³ There is some variation in the type of stone, running the gamut from translucent jaspers of various shades of lighter green to more transparent gems of the same hue, such as olivine.¹⁴ A good example of the type is a green jasper in the British Museum (Pls 1a–d): on the obverse



Plates 1a–d Jasper with Chnoubis, 15 x 12 x 3mm. London, British Museum, PE G 397

side of this gem we find the radiant lion-headed serpent that the two medical writers describe. This gem has on its reverse a pair of inscriptions that almost always appear on such stones: the name Chnoumis or Chnoubis in Greek and a symbol formed by three Ss with a horizontal line running through them.

A treatise on gems by Socrates and Dionysus, roughly contemporaneous with Galen, confirms some of his description, but recommends a transparent or translucent white stone, rather than a green one:¹⁵

Another onyx stone, white and entirely transparent, just like the air. It is a type of onyx. Engrave on it, then, a serpent coil with the upper part or head of a lion and rays. If worn this stone completely prevents pain in the stomach; rather you will easily digest however many foods you make use of. Let the wearer not set it aside.

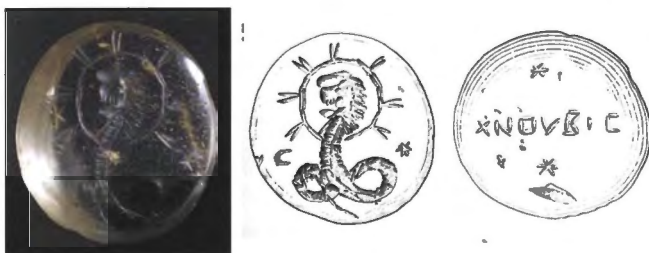
A number of these translucent stones have survived from antiquity, for example, one in the British Museum.¹⁶ Here we see the serpent with seven rays around its head sitting between a small crescent moon and a six-pointed star (Pls 2a–b); on the reverse the name Chnoubis with stars above and below (Pl. 2c). The word Chnoubis or Chnoumis seems to be the Greek rendition of the name of the Egyptian god Khnum, who in earlier native iconography was depicted as a ram-headed man. He appears independently, however, as a decan in Ptolemaic astrological tables, where among other things he is connected with an ‘amulet for the stomach’.¹⁷ This astrological feature is also probably reflected in the stars and crescent moons that we see on the example in Pl. 2.

Three other kinds of inscriptions, also in Greek letters, appear frequently on these Chnoubis gems: NABIS BIENNOUTH, for which both Egyptian and Hebrew interpretations have been proposed,¹⁸ and two other words which seem to be Greek epithets in the vocative case, for GIGANTORĒKTA (‘breaker of giants’) and perhaps BAROPHITA (‘crusher of snakes’),¹⁹ as on the gray-green jasper gem in Pl. 3c. On the back of this stone we see the name Chnoubis and the -SSS- symbol surrounded by the epithet ‘breaker of giants’.

The decipherable Greek inscriptions on these green and white gems, then, all seem to be names or epithets used to invoke the radiant serpent-god Chnoubis.²⁰ This idea is occasionally spelled out in brief prayers inscribed, for example, on the back of a Chnoubis gem of greenish black jasper in Paris (‘Keep the stomach of Proclus healthy!’) or a light green gem in Berkeley (‘Avert all tension, all indigestion and all pain from the stomach of Julian, whom Nonna bore’).²¹ A badly chipped greenish yellow jasper in the British Museum has a different prayer inscribed around the head of the serpent (‘[Chnou]bis, digest, dig[est]!’), one in which Chnoubis himself is apparently imagined to enter the stomach and help digest the food.²²

Scholars have, then, made some sense of the combination of Greek text and image on these stones, but Galen makes it clear that the medium was crucial to their efficacy. Such power also seems to be assumed in the final command of Socrates and Dionysus: ‘let the wearer not set it aside’ – the jasper stones had to be in contact with the patient’s body to be effective. The image of the divine solar serpent, on the other hand, seems to indicate the protective presence of the god, like a statue in a temple or a house.²³ The names and epithets (sometimes in the vocative) and especially the prayers support this idea, because they all seem to invoke Chnoubis to stop the stomach ache or help digest the food. Their absence in the literary sources may mean that they were perhaps originally spoken aloud to the image of the serpent and only later inscribed on the gemstone. The -SSS- symbol is, of course, another story, as it presumably cannot be spoken aloud; like the image of Chnoubis himself, it probably derives from a Ptolemaic Egyptian tradition of representing the decan Khnum, for example at Edfu and Dendera.²⁴ In a section of *De medicamentis* on remedies for pleurisy and pains in the sides, moreover, Marcellus reveals that this symbol could magically heal by itself (24.7):

If the letters noted below [that is: -SSS-] will have been carved into a jasper stone of the Phrygian translucent type, and the stone worn suspended from the neck of the sufferer, it will work marvelously.²⁵



Plates 2a–c Rock crystal with Chnoubis, 21 x 7mm. London, British Museum, PE 1986,0501.19



Plates 3a–c Jasper with Chnoubis, 16 x 13 x 5mm. London, British Museum, PE G 23

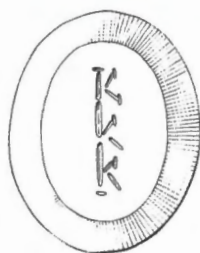


Plate 4 Black-figure vase with Heracles and the lion, 520 BC. H. 43.18cm. London, British Museum, GR 1843,1103.67

Here we see that the -SSS- alone heals pains in the lungs and sides, if inscribed on a whitish translucent stone.²⁶ Very few gems of this type have actually survived²⁷ and Marcellus is the only author to report the independent power of the -SSS-, which appears on the reverse of most Chnoubis amulets, but is never mentioned by any other writers. It is unwise, finally, to dismiss the astrological features on some of these amulets: both the name and image of Chnoubis and the -SSS- symbol appear in astrological texts in the Hellenistic period and in these texts the god is connected with the healing of the stomach. This suggests that astrology probably always played a role in the Chnoubis amulets. We run into a different problem below when the discussion turns to scorpion amulets, where the image of the eight-legged scorpion is much older and its role in the astrological healing system differs significantly from the amuletic. There, as we shall see, the protective nature of the image clearly precedes its later astrological application.

Red jasper and Heracles strangling the lion

My second case is a series of opaque red stones with images of Heracles and the lion that were designed to heal colic. This is a more complicated assemblage, because unlike the image of the Chnoubis serpent, this scene is not a recent Hellenistic invention, but a very old icon, already popular in Archaic Greece, as can be seen on a vase in the British Museum (Pl. 4). This scene of Heracles' famous labour was, however, thought to have curative power: in his chapter 'On the colicky condition' Alexander of Tralles, a 6th-century AD Greek physician, prescribes the following treatment for colic, a painful disease of the lower intestine: 'On a Median stone engrave Heracles standing upright and throttling a lion. Set it in a gold ring and give it to the patient to wear' (2.579).²⁸ There is some confusion about the precise identity of the 'Median stone' in this passage, which may have been a form of haematite or magnetite²⁹ but Alexander's description coincides well with a popular series of amulets that consist of an opaque red stone (almost always jasper) engraved with the wrestling scene that he describes; for example, three gemstones in the British Museum (Pls 5a, 6a, 7a).³⁰



Plates 5a–d Jasper with Heracles and the lion, 12 x 10 x 3mm. London, British Museum, PE 1986,0501.80



Plates 6a–d Jasper with Heracles and the lion, 15 x 11 x 3mm. London, British Museum, PE G 224



Plates 7a–d Jasper with Heracles and the lion, 18 x 13 x 3mm. London, British Museum, PE 1986,0501.81



Plate 8 Jasper with Heracles and the lion, and Hecate. Paris, Cabinet des médailles

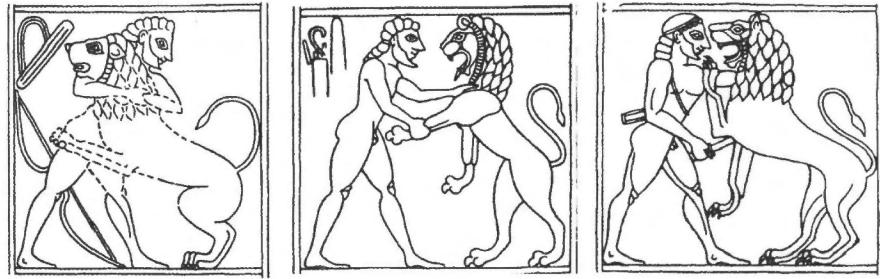


Plate 9 Archaic bronze shield-band reliefs, with Heracles and the lion, 600–550 BC. Olympia, Olympia Museum

Alexander tells us that his colic-amulet has only two parts, a special stone and a special image, but the extant gemstones almost always include a third feature: three *kappas* inscribed on the reverse of the gem (Pls 5–7b and d). Another red jasper gem in the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, (Pl. 8) confirms that these gems were, in fact, used to cure colic several centuries before Alexander wrote down his recipe: Heracles and the lion are partially surrounded by the command: ‘Withdraw colic! the divine one pursues you’.³¹ On this gem the three *kappas* (along with an eight-pointed star) lie beneath the feet of the struggling pair, and on the reverse is another common magical image: the tri-form Hecate with the magical names Iao above and Abrasax below.

The use of Heracles and the lion on the Paris gem is not, perhaps, difficult to decipher: the image of the dangerous lion strangled by a powerful hero is designed to frighten the colic and cause it to flee from the person wearing the ring. The flee-formula, however, appears on this gem alone and is part of a much older Greek tradition of protective incantations.³² It is more likely, in fact, that on most of these gems the sharp-clawed lion itself somehow represented the sharp abdominal pain of colic, which by the process of persuasive or sympathetic magic is strangled and extinguished, just as Heracles strangles the lion. A similar kind of operation is, in fact, imagined in a recipe for weed-killer in a late Greek agricultural handbook (*Geoponica* 2.42.2):³³

If you wish that this plant [= ‘lion-pulse’] in no way appears [i.e. in your field], take five potsherds and draw on them in chalk or in another kind of white [a picture of] Heracles strangling the lion. Place these in the four corners [i.e. of the field] and in the middle.

The power of these amulets is presumably triggered by the analogy between the annoying weed, ‘lion-pulse’ (so named, perhaps, because its grassy leaves resembled the mane of a lion) and the lion. Here, too, although the author of this recipe carefully specifies the image and the two media to be used (white chalk on potsherds), he says nothing – just as Alexander says nothing – about inscribing Greek words or letters on the potsherds.

In the case of Heracles strangling the lion there are numerous pre-Roman examples on gems that date as early as the Archaic period. In the version of the scene on the colic amulets, Heracles always stands, rather than kneels or crouches; this is a less common version, but a very early one: it shows up, for example, on Archaic bronze shield-band reliefs in the Olympia Museum (Pl. 9), two of which show the hero’s weapons in the background. Note also the alternate version of the encounter in the right-hand example, where the hero stabs the beast, rather than chokes it.³⁴ There are, moreover, a

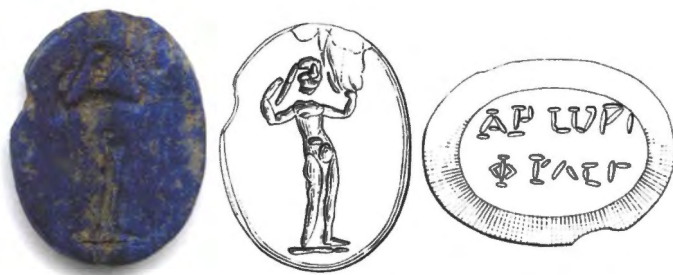
number of examples of this scene on Archaic scarabs, often carved in more translucent red gems, like carnelian or sardonyx. If we use Alexander’s two criteria for a colic amulet, these gems could presumably serve as amulets, because they have the correct medium (a red stone) and the right image (Heracles and the lion). But according to modern scholarship, they are merely ornaments, because they lack the triple *kappas* on the reverse side.

But how does one begin to argue that these Archaic or Classical examples of the type might have also been used as amulets? The first thing to point out is that the image of Heracles and the lion is, in fact, a special one: it is by far the most frequently depicted of all his labours and it is the only episode in the cycle that regularly appears on gemstones from the Archaic to the Roman period. It seems, in short, to be popular beyond its place in mythic narrative. There is no doubt, of course, that the image was used widely for ornamental purposes on pots, shields, armour and elsewhere, but at what point can we tell that it is being used as an amulet?

One lucky bit of evidence for the pre-Roman amuletic power of this image was discovered in an early 5th-century BC grave in Cyprus (Pl. 10): a red carnelian scarab that shows a young, beardless Heracles standing and attacking a lion with a sword as he did on one of the shield-band reliefs discussed earlier. This is one of the earliest versions of the scene and the method of killing, stabbing rather than strangulation, seems to have been borrowed originally from Mesopotamia, where one often finds images of various heroes and even the Assyrian king dispatching a standing lion in this fashion.³⁵ In the field of the gem, however, behind the hero we see that something has been added to the traditional design: two stylised eyes that are, in fact, the so-called ‘eyes of Horus’ or the *udjat*-eyes. These symbols are easily the most common device on Egyptian



Plate 10 Carnelian scarab with Heracles and the lion. 15 x 12mm. London, British Museum, GR 1894,1101.458



Plates 11a–c Lapis with Aphrodite Anadyomene, 12 x 9 x 2mm. London, British Museum, PE 1986.0501.141



Plates 12a–c Lapis with Aphrodite Anadyomene, 14 x 10 x 3mm. London, British Museum, PE G 194

protective amulets throughout the Pharaonic period and down into Roman times.³⁶ On this Cypriot gem, then, we have all three of the features that modern scholars, at least, expect to find on a ‘magical’ amulet: a potent medium (a red gem); a powerful image (Heracles and the lion) and a magical symbol or text (the *udjat*-eyes, instead of KKK) that somehow gives it added curative or protective power. Do these eyes of Horus, then, reveal the innate amuletic power of all of the other Archaic red-carnelian scarabs inscribed with Heracles and the lion? Or do they simply reflect a single idiosyncratic impulse that, in just this one example, recasts an ornamental gem into the role of an amulet?

Lapis lazuli and Aphrodite Anadyomene

My third category is a series of blue gemstones, usually of lapis lazuli or blue glass,³⁷ that show the famous image of Aphrodite Anadyomene (‘Rising from the Sea’), for instance on two lapis lazuli gemstones in London (Pls 11–12).³⁸ On the back of the stone we find the magical word *ARÔRIPHRA* which is typical of these amulets, as we can see from one of the lapis stones in the British Museum (Pl. 12c). Scholars, myself included, sometimes repeat the claim that *arôriphras* transliterates an Egyptian title of the goddess Hathor as ‘The Lady of the Blue Stone’; the epithet exists, but apparently bears no phonetic resemblance to the word *arôriphras* on the gemstone.³⁹

We do find, however, on one lapis gem of this type the name ‘<H>athor’ inscribed before *arôriphras*,⁴⁰ suggesting that the word – whatever it means – was, indeed, an epithet of some sort, and since Hathor and Aphrodite are assimilated in Graeco-Roman Egypt, there is some logic to the appearance of the name and Aphrodite on these blue stones. As in the case of the other types, a rare inscribed prayer tells us much about the perceived power of this kind of amulet: on a greenish lapis gem of another type (with Aphrodite and Ares) we read: ‘*Arôriphras*, give your charm to the bearer’.⁴¹ It would seem, then, that like the name Chnoubis, *arôriphras* identifies a divinity – probably Aphrodite/Hathor – who is thereby invoked to produce charm and beauty in the person who wears the gem. We find this same focus on ‘charm’ or ‘grace’ on two other stones that depict Aphrodite Anadyomene: a circular lapis gem in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, which has on its back, instead of the expected epithet, the Greek noun for ‘charm’ (*charis*); and a recently discovered, but unpublished, blue-glass version with a command along the bevel: ‘Give power (*dynamis*) and charm (*charis*) to the one who wears it!’⁴²

This crossover between power and charm is illustrated well by the authors of the *Kyranides*, an encyclopaedic work of

Imperial date, but preserving more ancient traditions:⁴³

In the *euanthes* stone, the multi-coloured one, Aphrodite is engraved binding up her hair and the locks on her head and the root of the plant (i.e. arugula) and the tongue of the nightingale are put underneath. Set the stone and wear it and you will be loved by everyone and will be well known and seem sweet-voiced not only to human beings but also to gods and demons (*Kyranides* 1.5.27–31).

If someone bears the right eye [i.e. of a bird called the wryneck] under stainless lapis lazuli, in which Aphrodite is engraved, the bearer will be charming, he will be famous amongst people and he will gain every lawsuit. The left eye has the same effect if borne by women (*Kyranides* 1.10.39–42).

As in the other medical or lapidarian descriptions of amulets, there is no command here to inscribe magical names or symbols on these bluish gems (opal and lapis lazuli), although these recipes do add another feature that is invisible to us in the archaeological record: plant or animal matter placed beneath the gem, presumably between the gemstone and its gold or silver setting.⁴⁴



Plate 13 Necklace pendant. Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks Collection

It is difficult to see any obvious evolution in the case of these blue amulets. Given the focus on erotic charm, classicists and classical archaeologists are apt to see the image of Aphrodite as the most important and original focus for this series,⁴⁵ but here, too, I suspect that the magical name, the possible connection with Hathor and the type of stone all point to an earlier Egyptian practice, since lapis lazuli was popular in Egypt for many centuries before the Greeks discovered it.⁴⁶ It is also interesting to note that the use of this traditional amulet seems to have continued in Egypt down to Byzantine times, as we can see in a gold and lapis lazuli necklace in Dumbarton Oaks said to come from Egypt (Pl. 13).⁴⁷ Here Aphrodite is rendered in gold and strikes her familiar pose against a background of lapis lazuli. There are no discernible words or magic symbols on this pendant, but I suspect that I would not be too far off the mark, if I were to suggest that its owner may have known about the charm-giving power of this image and this attractive blue stone.

Yellow jasper and the scorpion

A fourth type of popular amulet in the Roman world was a yellow jasper gemstone inscribed with an eight-legged scorpion (Pls 14a–b). This stone has the yet-to-be-deciphered magical name or word *ORTHMENCHINIAMBON* inscribed on the reverse (Pl. 14c), as do many in this series. Museum catalogues are apt to file a gem like this under the rubric ‘magical’, but if a scorpion is inscribed on a yellow jasper with no magical word, it is more liable to be categorised as an ‘animal-type’.⁴⁸ In modern eyes, then, text is once again the crucial feature that makes a scorpion gem ‘magical’.

The fact that Scorpio is one of the signs of the zodiac and that these yellow scorpion-gems sometimes depict stars, crescent moons and even the scales of Libra further complicates matters – indeed some authorities regularly categorise scorpion gems as ‘astrological’.⁴⁹ As in the case of the Chnoubis amulets discussed earlier, one cannot dismiss these astrological elements, because over time an elaborate connection between astrology and healing clearly did evolve, according to which each zodiac sign governed a special part of the human body; and since the region assigned to Scorpio was the genital organs, it is reasonable to suggest that some of these amulets may indeed have been designed to heal that part of the body.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, it seems that here (unlike the case of the Chnoubis amulets) the astrological use of these gems constitutes a later and novel adaptation or interpretation generated by the appearance of the scorpion in both systems.⁵¹

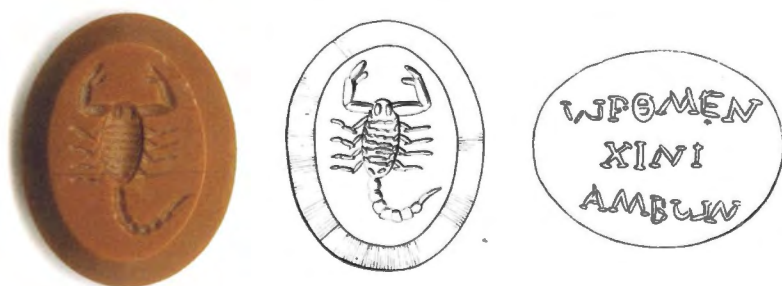
This argument is supported by, among other things, the images of scorpions that often appear on Egyptian amulets of all periods, where they clearly work by the logic of like-banning-like.⁵² Here, too, a simple inscribed prayer reveals this

protective function: one of the yellow jasper gems mentioned above has on its reverse a magical word, *AIAËILEGREÔ* (presumably the name of a protective entity), followed by the command ‘Protect!’⁵³ Yellow jasper was also useful by itself as a painkiller for a scorpion-sting. Here once again the lapidary of Socrates and Dionysus is crucially helpful (39.1–4):⁵⁴

Agate stone: The agates have the greatest power. They are from Hermes. The one that has a colour similar to the pelt of a lion is powerful, if set upon those who have been stung by a scorpion or if ground up and applied with water. For immediately it makes the victim painless. It is also suitable for those bitten by vipers, ground up and applied to the bite or even drunk with wine.

The innate power of this tawny gem is deployed in various ways: as a gemstone placed directly on the patient (presumably on the sting or bite), when ground up with water and applied as an ointment, or when drunk with wine.⁵⁵ The authors make no mention of an image of the scorpion or any magical letters in these recipes: the power lies in the stone itself.

To date scholars have offered no compelling explanation for this close connection between yellow jasper and scorpions.⁵⁶ As it turns out of the several species of scorpion found in the eastern Mediterranean, two were especially feared: the familiar large black scorpion with its arched tail and a much smaller species called the ‘yellow Palestinian scorpion’, which (because of its yellow or light brown colour) blends in more easily with soil and sand. The yellow scorpion is, in fact, the most dangerous because of its camouflage and the power of its venom: it can kill a small child in a matter of hours and completely disable a grown man for a day or two.⁵⁷ I suggest, then, that the consistent yellow colour of these scorpion gems is as important as the image: a yellow stone inscribed with a scorpion is designed to keep yellow scorpions away by a two-fold strategy of like-banning-like. The yellow Palestinian scorpion is, moreover, found all around the Mediterranean basin, but not in northern Europe, so it is interesting to note that only a single yellow scorpion gem has been found in northern European soil,⁵⁸ in sharp contrast to other gem types used for colic, stomach ache or gynaecological problems. This insight can, of course, be overturned by future discoveries, but it suggests that yellow scorpion amulets were limited to the areas where yellow scorpions dwelt. Thus it would seem that both the image and the yellow medium work together to ban the dangerous yellow scorpion. And indeed we do have some evidence that the combination of the eight-legged scorpion and a yellow stone continues a very old Egyptian tradition: a yellowish brown stone, in this case a glazed steatite, set in a ring discovered on the left hand of the mummy of a noblewoman named Hanofer, who apparently served in the court of Queen Hatshepsut.⁵⁹



Plates 14a–c Jasper with scorpion, 15 x 11 x 2mm. London, British Museum, PE G 180



Plate 15 Haematite with womb, 18 x 13 x 2mm. London, British Museum, PE G 540

The bloodstone, the womb and the key

My fifth example is the use of bloodstone (haematite) for a variety of gynaecological amulets (Pl. 15). This gem is a good example of the typical reddish brown colour and slightly metallic texture of the haematite stone, which is in fact a mineral form of iron oxide. The name of this gem means 'bloodstone' in Greek and explains its medical usefulness: one of its primary functions seems to have been to control the flow of blood, usually from a woman's uterus, although these same gems could also be used to prevent premature birth, to stop the womb from wandering and even to heal intestinal diseases, which presumably are also marked by internal bleeding.⁶⁰

The imagery on the simplest version of the series (see above, Pl. 15) is entirely Greek. The idea that a woman's womb resembled an upside-down jug appears in the earliest Greek medical writers,⁶¹ and is nicely illustrated in a late manuscript of the gynaecologist Soranus (Pl. 16).⁶² The small device below the womb on the gemstone in Pl. 15 – it looks like a modern toothbrush with a short and contorted handle or crank – is in fact an ancient Greek door-key that in this scheme controls the opening and closing of the patient's womb.⁶³ On the other side of these gems, we most often find the single word *ORÔRIOUTH* (Pl. 17c).⁶⁴ There is no consensus on the meaning of *orôriouth*: it is not Greek and although a number of Egyptian and Hebrew phrases and words have been adduced to explain it, none have been convincing.⁶⁵ The expansive and unique title on the back of a gem from Cairo – 'Lord of the womb of women, *ORÔRIOUTH AUBAX*' – suggests a male demon, god or angel, but that is all one can say.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the commands found on other stones point in another direction: three contain a command composed as a full iambic trimeter: 'Contract, womb, lest Typhon sieze you!'⁶⁷ The other examples are truncated, but always retain the initial imperative and sometimes its direct object as well.⁶⁸ In every case, however, the womb is invoked, not a god, and since the womb is indeed depicted on the gem, perhaps *orôriouth* is a word or epithet for 'womb'.

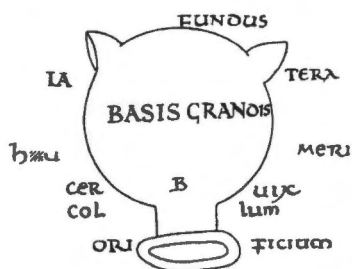


Plate 16 Drawing of a womb from a manuscript of Soranus, AD 900



Plates 17a–c Haematite with womb, 16 x 9 x 3mm. London, British Museum, PE G 371

In a slightly more complex version of this series, the uterus and key are surrounded by an *ouroboros*, the well-known Egyptian device of a snake eating its own tail (Pls 18a–b).⁶⁹ In this case the snake either protects the womb from outside harm or prevents it from moving.⁷⁰ On many gems of this type we also find Egyptian gods standing or sitting on top of the womb as, for example, Chnoubis flanked by Isis and Nephthys (Pls 19a–b).⁷¹ Because of the large number of complicated images like this one, it is commonplace to label all of these womb-amulets 'Graeco-Egyptian' and assert, for example, that 'Egyptian ideas and practices exercised the strongest influence upon the makers and users of Greek magical amulets'.⁷² This is certainly the case in this, the most complex version of the uterus gem, but theorising Egyptian influence as the 'strongest' makes it difficult to explain the existence of the simplest designs, which show Greek images of the womb and the key and the magic word *orôriouth*, but no Egyptian iconography at all.

The evidence suggests, in fact, that like the other series discussed in this essay, these haematite gems underwent some period of evolution from a simple form to gradually more complex ones. I suggest that uninscribed haematite was first used alone in the Greek world as an amulet for gynaecological bleeding and other complaints. This first stage gains considerable support from the fact that already in the Classical period Greek doctors were prescribing the use of ground-up haematite in drinks and ointments for similar complaints.⁷³ The second step seems to have been the addition of the womb and key: both images are Greek and seem to engage, as the image of Heracles and the lion does, in a simple form of sympathetic magic designed to lock up the contents of the womb and make the bleeding stop. We know, moreover, that the womb-and-key device lies at the heart of the magical operation, because it appears on almost all of the nearly 200 amulets of this type; the Egyptian gods, on the other hand, appear on only two-thirds of them, usually in the same peripheral position on top of the



Plates 18a–c Haematite with womb, 17 x 13 x 2mm. London, British Museum, PE G 320



Plates 19a–c Haematite with Egyptian gods and womb, 18 x 12 x 3mm. London, British Museum, PE G 77

womb and having little to do with the key and the magical action of closure or containment.⁷⁴ The Egyptian accretions, in other words, apparently enhance the power of the original womb-and-key device, but they are not central to its mission.

Conclusions

I have, then, traced the evolution of some of these popular magical gems, beginning with the idea that a powerful, but unadorned, stone has some innate curative, painkilling or other power. We know from Greek medical texts and lapidaries that haematite and yellow jasper were thought to have such natural powers when ground up and mixed in with liquids for drinking or application; Galen's experiment with green jasper, moreover, proved to his satisfaction, at least, that this gemstone when placed near the site of his heartburn was also effective without any image engraved upon it. Socrates and Dionysus likewise recommend that we place an unadorned yellow stone on a scorpion sting to alleviate the pain. The power to kill pain may, in fact, be an important feature of jasper gems more generally: the green or white ones were thought to heal stomach ache, the sky-blue ones pleurisy; the red ones intestinal pain and the yellow ones snakebite and scorpion-sting. The Aphrodite amulets are anomalous in this regard: they do not obviously fit the category of a curative or protective amulet⁷⁵ and we have no independent evidence that lapis lazuli had any magic power of its own, beyond its status (in the Greek mind) as a rare and exotic stone connected with Egypt and the Near East.

At the second stage it seems that the sorcerers or stonecutters added images. In the case of the scorpion or Heracles and the lion these images were very old, imported from the East and probably thought to have inherent powers of their own. The scorpion appears alone on a yellowish gem from the time of Hatshepsut and the 5th-century BC Cypriot gem with Heracles, the lion and the two 'eyes of Horus' suggests that a number of the other pre-Roman red stones that carry the scene may have also been used as an amulet. The three other images discussed here are, however, relatively novel. Aphrodite Anadyomene was, for example, the late 4th-century BC invention of the Greek painter Apelles and Chnoubis in the form of a radiant lion-headed snake, is first attested in Hellenistic Egypt. And although we have no direct iconographic evidence, there is literary evidence from the late Classical period for the metaphor of the womb as an inverted jug. All this suggests that the Hellenistic period may have been a time when some of the most popular images were beginning

to be added to already powerful stones: Greek Aphrodite to Egyptian lapis lazuli; Egyptian Chnoubis to green jasper and the Greek womb and key to haematite.

We have seen, too, that the creators of these gems often distinguished a central and ever present image from the peripheral and more transient additions. Chnoubis and the scorpion appear centrally on every gem of their type, whereas the stars and crescent moons, which appear on a minority of examples and around the edges of the central figures, seem in the case of the scorpion amulets to be later accretions designed to adapt the traditional central image to new astrological uses. And although uterine amulets sometimes deploy along their periphery an old Egyptian image like the *ouroboros*-serpent or place tiny Egyptian gods on top of the womb, the central and ever present womb-and-key device deploys only native Greek images and ideas that are attested no earlier than the Classical period. A motif's position in the visual field of the gem, in short, can tell us something important about the evolution of the type from a simple core image to which peripheral or encircling designs are later added.

Text, then, is clearly the last to arrive of the three important features of magical gems. This is perfectly obvious in the medical and lapidary sources, which occasionally describe images (e.g. the Chnoubis serpent or Heracles and the lion) and even a symbol, like the -SSS-, but only rarely tell us to add Greek words to the amulet. Scholars speculate that these recipes, preserved in later encyclopaedic works (like the *Kyranides* or the lapidary of Socrates and Dionysus) or in even later medical writers (like Marcellus of Bordeaux or Alexander of Tralles), often preserve material of Hellenistic or earlier date, and Galen proves this is so, when he (unlike the others) actually cites a Hellenistic source (Nechepso) for his description of the green jasper Chnoubis amulet. Thus the pre-Roman recipes seem to be copied or translated into Latin in a closed bookish manner, apparently without any detailed examination of contemporary Roman practices, although their ignorance can perhaps be partially explained by the fact that on some of these gems (e.g. the Heracles and lion or the scorpion) the inscriptions usually appear only on the reverse and thus would be invisible to the observer.

The title of this essay begins with the words 'Text, image and medium' and, in addition to being a gently rising tricolon, it reflects perfectly my own philological training and prejudice: I tend to begin with texts, add in a few images if necessary and only rarely think about media. In the course of my study of the magical gemstones I am, however, more and more convinced that we should, perhaps, acknowledge their importance in precisely the reversed order and that this view reflects their evolution over time. It is, I suggest, only in the Roman period when the written text takes on any importance at all. Indeed, as we have seen, there were probably a number of powerful stones and powerful images circulating independently around the Mediterranean basin long before the advent of the Roman Empire. The 'big-bang' approach to magical gems, therefore, misreads the texts on these gems as evidence for an historic rise of superstition or magic, when we would do better to see these texts as additional evidence for the rise in Roman epigraphic habits and the increasing scribalisation of magic.

Notes

- 1 They are all usually thought to guard against the evil eye; see O. Jahn, 'Über den Aberglauben des bösen Blicks bei den Alten', *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Classe* 7 (1855), 28–110, at 59–60 (*gorgoneia*), 63–6 (frontal eyes) 76–80 (*phalloi*); for a recent survey and bibliography for the Roman world, see A. Alvar Nuño, *El mal de ojo en el occidente Romano: Materiales de Italia, norte de África, Península Ibérica y Galia* (doctoral diss.), Madrid, 2009, *passim*, especially for the use of the phallus first on the Italian peninsula in the 2nd century BC and then spreading to the provinces. For the *gorgoneion* in earlier Greek culture, see M. Halm-Tisserant, 'Le gorgonéion, emblème d'Athènes: introduction du motif sur le bouclier et l'épée', *Revue Archéologique* (1986), 245–78; G.H. Clarke, *The Shield Devices of the Greeks in Art and Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., 1902, 50–2, discusses frontal eyes and *gorgoneia* on Archaic and Classical Greek shields.
- 2 Regarding the gemstones, see, C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series 4), Ann Arbor, 1950, 22: 'The very great number of magical gemstones ... from the first few centuries of the Christian era suggests that in some way magic had got a stronger hold upon people of those times than ever before'. A.A. Barb, 'The survival of the magical arts', in A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford, 1963, 100–25, speaking generally about magic provides the classic formulation, e.g., in a discussion of Roman Imperial laws against sorcery, 'when the syncretistic, rotting refuse-heap of the dead and dying religions of the ancient world grew to a monstrous height' (at 104) or 'magic-ridden centuries' (at 105).
- 3 For recent reviews of the history of these terms, see, M.G. Lancellotti, 'Médecine et religion dans les gemmes magiques', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 218 (2001), 427–56, and R. Gordon, rev. of S. Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, 2 vols, London, 2001, in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 15 (2002), 666–70. A. Delatte, 'Études sur la magie grecque IV. Amulettes inédites des Musées d'Athènes', *Musée Belge* 18 (1914), 21–96, at 21–22, seems to be the first to call them 'magical gems', which was then made popular by Bonner (n. 2), 1–2. A. Nagy, 'Daktylios pharmakites: magical healing gems and rings in the Graeco-Roman world', in C. Burnett and I. Csepregi-Vardabasso (eds), *Ritual Healing in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (The Warburg Institute Colloquia Series), London, 2010 (in press), agrees that 'magical gems' is a convenient archaeological designation for a phenomenon of the Roman period 'with three defining iconographic motifs: magical names (*voces magicae*), magical signs (*charaktères*) and non-standard iconographical types'. But he openly acknowledges that magical protective rings and gems existed as early as the Classical period, but since these do not carry any of the three criteria listed above, he dubs them 'talismanic' to avoid confusion.
- 4 S. Michel's catalogue (*Die magischen Gemmen: eine Studie zu Zaubersymbolen und magischen Bildern auf geschnittenen Steinen der Antike und Neuzeit*, Geissen, 2004) lists around 2600 examples, but scholars rightly estimate that the number could be twice as large; see, M. Smith, 'Relations between magical papyri and magical gems', *Papyrologica Bruxellensia* 18 (1979), 129–36, at 131, or R. Gordon, rev. of Michel *ibid.*, in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 21 (2008), 713–18, at 713, n. 3. This is a huge number when compared with the 68 amulets inscribed on metal foil collected in R. Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, vol. 1 (Papyrologica Coloniensia 22.1), Opladen, 1994, or the 36 papyrus amulets collected in the first volume of R. Daniel and F. Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum*, 2 vols (Papyrologica Coloniensia 16.1 and 2), Opladen, 1990–1.
- 5 Bonner (n. 2), 3, for example, begins his study by acknowledging the inherent power of stones like amethyst and galactite and cautiously avers that 'the presumption that classical ringstones had quasi-amuletic value is quite strong' (at 6), but then he notes a 'marked change' in the 1st century AD when 'rings and pendants of semi-precious stones ... show that they are magical, either by designs of so particular a character as to admit to no other classification or by the unmistakable evidence of the inscriptions'. Here his distinction between 'amuletic' and 'magical' begs the question.
- 6 This process is similar to that adopted in A.M. Nagy, 'Gemmae magicae selectae. Sept notes sur l'interprétation des gemmes magiques', in A. Mastrocinque (ed.), *Atti dell'incontro di studio 'Gemmae gnostiche e cultura ellenistica'*, Verona, 22–23 ottobre 1999, Bologna, 2002, 153–79, at 157–62, for a series of gemstones depicting a *gorgoneion* on the obverse, a tri-form Hecate on the reverse, and some form of the magical word or name *gomandarêarêgoro*. I extend his method in two ways: (i) I add medium as a significant feature of the 'type' (of the 12 examples he discusses eight are of red jasper or a similar red-orange stone); and (ii) where he sees different schools of magicians and creative individuals simultaneously making different versions of the same archetype (he suggests that 'it is not possible to establish relative chronologies between the original and its variations'), I will argue that some of these differences reflect historical change and can be organised in an evolutionary scheme.
- 7 Bonner (n. 2), 5.
- 8 The disparities between the lapidaries and the extant stones has been noted before. Bonner (n. 2), 41, for example, while discussing a recipe in a lapidary for the positive effects of carrying a topaz engraved with an image of Poseidon, says that without an extant example of this kind of stone with magical words or *charaktères* we cannot know if the stone was used in that fashion; Lancellotti (n. 3), 446–7, responds, rightly in my view, that the lapidary in this case is 'un témoignage éloquent des pouvoirs magiques attribués à cette iconographie même sans l'addition d'inscriptions'.
- 9 *De simpl.* 10.19 (XII 207 = C.G. Kühn, ed. and Latin trans., *Galenii opera omnia*, 20 vols, Leipzig, 1821–1833). I follow the translation of Bonner (n. 2), 54.
- 10 The adjective *chlôros* usually refers to lighter, paler or yellowish shades of green.
- 11 Bonner (n. 2), 54 dates Nechepso's book to about 150 BC.
- 12 Marcellus, *De medicamentis* 20.98 (M. Niedermann (ed.), *Marcellus: De medicamentis liber* [Corpus Medicorum Latinorum 5], Berlin, 1916).
- 13 These amulets were popular; Michel (n. 4), 255–62, lists over 150. Most of these gems were chance finds and ended up in private collections, but recently some have appeared in controlled archaeological excavations, for instance: a green jasper with serpent, name and SSS- from an industrial installation with several large kilns or vats at Tel Dor in Palestine; see E. Stern and I. Sharon, 'Tel Dor, 1993: a preliminary report', *Israel Exploration Journal* 45 (1995), 26–36, at 35, fig. 35; G. Bohak, 'A note on the Chnoubis gem from Tel Dor', *Israel Exploration Journal* 47 (1997), 255–6, corrects their reading of the inscription and notes that the Chnoubis serpent is explicitly mentioned several times in Rabbinic literature.
- 14 In the collection of the British Museum, for example, we find two green jaspers (Michel [n. 3], nos 305 and 317), three greenish chalcedonies (nos 306 and 308–9) and two olivines (nos 307 and 310; see the colour photos in Michel [n. 4], 'Farbtafeln IV') and a grayish green chalcedony (no. 329; also in Michel [n. 4]). The nomenclature for gems is fuzzy both among the ancient Greeks and modern scholars. M. Sax, 'Recognition and nomenclature of quartz materials with specific reference to engraved gemstones', *Jewellery Studies* 7 (1996), 63–72, for instance, divides (at 63, fig. 1) microcrystalline quartz (a category into which most magical gems fall) into two categories: (i) those that are 'commonly translucent with a fibrous microstructure' and commonly called 'chalcedonies', with subgroups such as 'chalcedony', 'carnelian', 'agate' and (ii) those that are 'commonly opaque with a granular microstructure' and commonly called 'cherts' or 'jaspers', the latter having subgroups such as 'jasper', 'plasma' and 'banded jasper'. One can see immediately the problem that 'chalcedony' and 'jasper' appear as both categories and subcategories. Since it is nearly impossible with the naked eye to tell a granular microstructure from a fibrous one, the distinction can only be made roughly in terms of opaque vs. translucent. The green digestive gems under discussion are always called 'jaspers', but their translucence should give one pause.
- 15 Socrates and Dionysius no. 35 = R. Halleux and J. Schamp (eds and trans.), *Les lapidaires grecs*, Paris, 2003, 170 = Ch. Mély-Ruelle, *Lapidaires grecs*, Paris, 1898, vol. 2, 177. Since the authors make no mention of bands of colour, we should probably understand that a light-coloured chalcedony or jasper is used here.
- 16 It is a rock crystal as is Michel (n. 3), no. 326; there are also three

- white agates in the collection (nos 323–4 and 327). A chipped gem of this type (described as ‘crystal glass’) was discovered in Corinth (it has the serpent and the name, but the reverse is inscribed with the three Greek letters ZNX and then a symbol that looks like a sideways turned psi); see, G. Davidson, *Corinth XII: The Minor Objects*, Princeton, 1952, 225, no. 1777.
- 17 Chnoubis appears as a decan of Leo and Cancer in astrology, and thus also cures by an elaborate coordination of zodiac sign and body part; see Bonner (n. 2), 25 and 54–5, and especially Lancellotti (n. 3), 449–51, and Michel (n. 4), 165–70.
 - 18 W.M. Brashear, ‘The Greek magical papyri: an introduction and survey; annotated bibliography’, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II*, 18.5 (1995), 3593, cites two possible Hebrew interpretations (‘bound by chains’ or ‘bound by incantations’) and one Egyptian: ‘le tour à potier + âme de dieu’.
 - 19 Bonner (n. 2), 168–9, who also discusses some variants for the former, e.g. GIGANTOPANTORĒKTA (‘breaker of all giants’); or GIGANTOPNIKTORĒKTA (‘throttler-breaker of giants’). Michel (n. 4), 258–9, lists one example of GIGANTOPANTOPLĒKTA (‘striker of all giants’).
 - 20 See Nagy (n. 6), 164–5, for some PGM recipes for gems that are likewise engraved with the gods’ images and their names (PGM = K. Preisendanz [and A. Henrichs], *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*², 2 vols, Stuttgart, 1973–4).
 - 21 A. Delatte and P. Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris, 1964, no. 80 (a greenish black jasper in Paris) and C. Bonner, ‘A miscellany of engraved stones’, *Hesperia* 23 (1954), 138–57, pls 34–6, at no. 36 (a light green stone – possibly jadeite – which now resides in the collection of the Department of Near Eastern Languages at the University of California at Berkeley. The second prayer uses a plural imperative, suggesting that the author imagined Chnoubis and at least one other addressee. Michel (n. 4), 259–60, describes a haematite gem in the Skoluda collection, on the back of which appears the Chnoubis serpent sitting on the womb-and-key design (see below) beneath which lies the -SSS- symbol. Round the edge is the prayer: ‘Chnoubis, stop the pain of the stomach, Abrasax!’
 - 22 Michel (n. 3), no. 338. See the paper by Mastrocinque, this volume, pl. 12. For other examples, see Bonner (n. 2), no. 83, a bluish chalcedony that has the serpent, -SSS- and the name CHNOUBIS on the front and on the reverse ‘Digest, digest!’; Bonner (n. 2), 59, also mentions a ‘brownish chalcedony’ Chnoubis amulet in the Museo Borgiano that has ‘Digest!’ inscribed three times. He also observes, *ibid.* ad no. 83, that ‘many Chnoubis stones are strongly convex’; I would add that many of them are quite small and do not seem to have been designed for a ring or pendant setting: if Chnoubis is called on to ‘digest’ and if he is called the ‘crusher of snakes’, might it be the case that some of these smaller or seed shaped convex gems were actually swallowed so they could enter the stomach and allow the god to do his work directly? Recall how Galen insisted that the string of green jasper gems be placed over the oesophagus to cure pain in the oesophagus. Direct contact with the painful site, in short, seems to have been important for the efficacy of these amulets.
 - 23 For the idea of a gemstone as a miniature statue, see Theophrastus, *Charact.* 21.10, who describes a man who cleaned his Asclepius ring daily and then oiled it and crowned it with a wreath: see Nagy (n. 3) for a brief discussion.
 - 24 E.g. Bonner (n. 2), 25, and Michel (n. 4), 168, n. 859.
 - 25 Marcellus, *De med.* 24.7 (n. 12). For the preservation of the -SSS- in the manuscripts, see R. Heim, *Incantamenta Magica Graeca-Latina* (Jahrbücher für klassische Philologie suppl. 10), Leipzig, 1893, 480, n. 3.
 - 26 The Latin word *aerizusa* renders the Greek *aerizousa*, a participle of the verb *aerizō*, ‘to resemble the air, to be pure as the air’. See C. Lewis and C. Short (eds), *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1879, s.v., who define the verb as ‘to be light as air’ and ‘to be light blue’ (perhaps ‘grey, cloudy’). Bonner (n. 2), 60, suggests that *aerizusa* means ‘of gray or bluish colour’, but when Socrates and Dionysus describe a variation of the Chnoubis amulet (discussed above) as an ‘onyx stone ... white and transparent just like air’, I suspect they are describing the same type of crystalline or translucent white stone.
 - 27 For example: M. Buora and F. Prenc, *Gemme Romane da Aquileia*, Udine, 1996, no. 206 (chalcedony; -SSS- between an epsilon and a sigma and the magical word ABRAMAÔTH); and S. Amorai-Stark, *Engraved Gems and Seals from Two Collections in Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, 1993, no. 137, in a Jerusalem collection (‘white and light orange opal, opaque’ with an ouroboros serpent with -SSS- (missing the last S apparently) on top of its head on the obverse and on the reverse a badly corrupted inscription with ‘breaker of giants, crusher of snakes’).
 - 28 T. Puschmann, *Alexander von Tralles*, 2 vols, Vienna, 1879.
 - 29 Bonner (n. 2), 62–3.
 - 30 Michel (n. 4), 178–9, discusses the type: on 280–1, she lists 37 examples, all red jasper, except for a single green jasper, three carnelians and one obsidian. She lists only one example without the KKK (see Pls 6–7), which instead has on its reverse Zeus with an eagle, for which see *eadem*, ‘Medizinisch-magische Amulettgemmen’, *Antike Welt* 26 (1995), 379–87, at 383, pls 10a and b.
 - 31 Delatte and Derchain (n. 21), no. 280; the drawing is after the unnumbered figure in C. Lenormant, ‘Lettre à M. A. de Longpérier’, *Revue Archéologique* (1846), 510.
 - 32 C. Faraone, ‘Hipponax frag. 128W: epic parody or expulsive incantation?’, *Classical Antiquity* 23 (2004), 209–45.
 - 33 The *Geoponica* is a compilation of Byzantine date that preserves selections from a number of earlier Greek agricultural handbooks: H. Beckh (ed.), *Geoponica: sive Cassiani Bassi Scholastici De Re Rustica Eclogae* (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), Leipzig, 1895.
 - 34 Drawings after E. Kunze, *Archaische Schildebänder*, Berlin, 1950, IIIc, pl. 14 (600–575 BC); IVg, pl. 19 (575–550 BC) and XLIIg, pl. 66 (575–550 BC).
 - 35 J. Carter, ‘The beginning of narrative art in the Greek geometric period’, *Annual of the British School at Athens* 67 (1972), 25–58; T.H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece*, London, 1991, 120.
 - 36 See, W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Amulets, Illustrated by the Egyptian Collection in University College London*, London, 1914, 32–4, nos 138–43.
 - 37 As the list in Michel (n. 4), 250–1, shows, there is a clear correlation between the blue stone, the image and the word *arōriphrasis* (for which see below): of the 26 gems that have the image of Aphrodite Anadyomene alone and the word, only seven of the stones are not blue: three red stones, two green, one haematite and one chalcedony whose colour is not given. On the other hand on the 19 gems on which the Anadyomene figure appears with others (e.g. standing on a lion or in combination with a dog-headed figure) there is only one blue gem and this is the only one that also has the word *arōriphrasis* (= Michel [n. 3], no. 85). Likewise in Michel’s list *ibid.* of the 13 gems showing Ares and Aphrodite, there are only two blue stones (one lapis and another glass), neither of which have the word *arōriphrasis*.
 - 38 All of these gems imitate the pose of Aphrodite Anadyomene in a famous late-4th century BC painting of Apelles in the sanctuary of Asclepius on Cos that depicted the moment when the goddess first stepped out of the sea fully grown; see Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* XXXV.91 and *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, ‘Aphrodite’, nos 423–54. Scholars of these gems disagree about the pose of the goddess: Bonner (n. 2), 196, thinks she is drying out her hair, while Delatte (n. 3), 44–5, suggests she is tying up her hair, which seems to be how the gem-cutters understood it: as M. Waegeman, ‘ΑΡΩΡΙΦΡΑΣΙΣ: Aphrodite’s secret name’, *L’Antiquité Classique* 61 (1992), 237–42, at 237–8, points out, the *Kyranides* (in a passage quoted and discussed below) refers to this type as ‘Aphrodite ... binding up the hair and the locks of her head’.
 - 39 E.g. A.A. Barb, rev. of Delatte and Derchain (n. 21), *Gnomon* 41 (1969), 298–307, at 306, P. Zazoff, *Antike Gemmen in deutschen Sammlungen, III: Braunschweig, Göttingen, Kassel, Wiesbaden*, 1970, 244, ad no. 185, U. Mandel-Elzinga, ‘Eine Gemmensammlung aus Alexandria im Akademischen Kunstmuseum der Universität Bonn’, *Bonner Jahrbücher* 185 (1985), 243–98, at 290; M. Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet: Magical Amulets in the First Book of the Kyranides*, Amsterdam, 1987, or Michel (n. 4), 211, who all ultimately depend on the interpretation of W. Helck, ‘Zu den ägyptischen Sinai-Inschriften’, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 53 (1958), 423, of the Sinai Inscription. My Egyptologist colleague R. Ritner has (pers. comm.), however, recently studied the inscription and Helck’s article and although he agrees that ‘the titles he mentions for Hathor are correct: ‘Lady of Turquoise, Lapis or Amethyst’, none of these seem to match up phonetically with *arōriphrasis*. Brashear (n. 18), 3580, cites another possible Egyptian interpretation (‘fac me gaudere, redde me hilarem’) and Waegeman (n. 38), 239, notes that the name is often divided on the

- stones into two parts (ARÔri and PHRAſI) and then suggests (at 242) that the second half preserves a purposely scrambled version of the Greek transliteration of Hebrew saphir ('lapis lazuli'; the Greek word is *sappheiros*).
- 40 E. Drioton, 'Notes diverses', *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 45 (1947), 82–3, no. 12, who remarks: 'Il est remarquable que, pour illustrer la vieille formule qui débute par le nom Hathor, le graveur n'ait pas reproduit une déesse égyptienne'.
- 41 Delatte and Derchain (n. 21), no. 333. See, G. Bevilacqua, 'Ares e Afrodite sulle gemme magiche', in Mastrocinque (n. 6), 13–25.
- 42 Ashmolean: M. Henig and A. MacGregor, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Finger-Rings in the Ashmolean Museum. II: Roman* (BAR International Series 1332), London, 2004, no. 13.20.
- 43 On the date, see Lancellotti (n. 3), 437. I use the translation of Waegeman (n. 38), 41 and 79, with one change in each passage: in the first section the *Kyranides* describes the *euanthos* stone as 'all golden' (*pagchrusos*), but Waegeman (at 43–4) argues persuasively that this must be a mistake for the very similarly spelled adjective 'all colourful' (*pagchroos*), a kind of opal with bluish tinge. In the second recipe the gem is called 'sapphire' (*sappheiros*), but, as Waegeman (n. 38), 1, and C. Oldershaw, *Gems of the World*, Richmond Hill, 2008, 216, explain, this was a common way of referring to lapis lazuli in the ancient world.
- 44 We find a similar combination of Aphrodite's magical name and vegetal matter in the following recipe (PGM IV 2231–40): 'For (i.e. erotic) fetching spells: burn roses and sumac, then write a different spell on myrtle leaves and put them under the tablet. The spell: 'Steneriô arrôriphrasis yyyi i i i i, fetch her, so-and-so, for him, so-and-so! Wear it on a woollen cord'.
- 45 E.g. Delatte and Derchain (n. 21), 183–7, and Michel (n. 4), 250–1.
- 46 The name lapis lazuli combines Latin *lapis* ('stone') with the Persian word *lazhuward*, which means 'sky' or 'heaven' and was added to the Latin language as *lazulum*. It is a form of metamorphosed limestone, that has been mined in Afghanistan for more than 6000 years (it is mentioned in the epic of Gilgamesh). It was very popular in Mesopotamia and Persia and used extensively in religious ceremonies by the Egyptians: see Oldershaw (n. 43), 217–18. It is also interesting to note M.J. Treister, 'Bronze matrices in the Georg Ortiz collection', in A. Calinescu (ed.), *Ancient jewelry and archaeology*, Bloomington, 1996, 178: 'Aphrodite Anadyomene was so popular in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, where it was reproduced in bronze, marble, bone, terracotta and faience, that some scholars believe the type originated in Alexandria'. Cf. LIMC (n. 38), s.v. 'Aphrodite (in periphéria orientali)', nos 40–66.
- 47 M.C. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Volume 2: Jewelry, Enamels and Art of the Migration Period (With an Addendum by S.A. Boyd and S.R. Zwirn)*, Washington DC, 2005 (2nd edn), 18–19, no. 12 and LIMC (n. 38), 'Aphrodite', no. 89.
- 48 See e.g. G. Sena Chiesa, *Gemme di Luni*, Rome, 1978, who places under the general category of animals gems no. 149 (eight legs; sardonyx; no inscriptions; 1st century AD), 150 (yellow jasper with no inscriptions), and 151 (red carnelian with no inscriptions), but under magical gem no. 173 (red jasper with different and unique inscriptions), or Amorai-Stark (n. 27) who under animals catalogues no. 63 (a sardonyx with no inscription).
- 49 Delatte and Derchain (n. 21), for example, place under 'animaux astrologiques' nos 388 (orange translucent carnelian; inscription TTHDPGLI on obverse; back blank); 389 (yellow jasper; inscription ÔTHMENCHEILIANBÔ on reverse); and 390 (hexagonal yellow jasper; inscription ÔRTHMENCHINIAMBÔN on reverse). See, more recently, R. Casal García, *Colección Gléptica del Museo Arqueológico Nacional*, 2 vols, Bilbao, 1990, ad. no. 453 (rose carnelian inscribed with a *scorpio olivaceus*) 'probablemente ... zodiacal', or Henig and MacGregor (n. 42), ad. no. 13.25 (light brown jasper with scorpion and the usual magical name, but no star): 'Perhaps Scorpio as a cure for diseases of the genitals'.
- 50 Michel (n. 4), 160–5.
- 51 Bonner (n. 2), 77–8, following S. Eitrem, 'Der Skorpion in Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte', *Symbolae Osloenses* 7 (1928), 53–82, allows that these stones were designed 'to protect against the painful sting of the scorpion', but adds that they may have 'come under the influence of systematic astrology' according to which each zodiac sign governed a special part of the human body; since the region assigned to Scorpio was the genital organs, it is possible that these amulets 'were valued not only as a protection against scorpions, but also as a remedy for sexual disorders and disabilities'. See also Barb (n. 39), 305; M. Henig, 'An intaglio and sealing from Blackfriars, London', *Antiquaries Journal* 60 (1980), 331–2, at 331, with pl. LXa; J. Śliwa, *Egyptian Scarabs and Magical Amulets from the Collection of Constantine Schmidt-Ciążyński*, Warsaw, 1989, ad. no. 128. The astrological image is further transformed when Tiberius, born under this constellation, makes it a personal symbol of sorts that appears on the shields of his Praetorian guards; see A. Hamburger, 'Gems from Caesarea Maritima', *Atiqot* 8 (1968), 1–38, pls I–VIII, at 23.
- 52 For the use of scorpion images to ban scorpions in Pharaonic Egypt, see G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1994, 97 and 142–6, with pl. 76, and C. Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt*, London, 36, who comments on Fifth Dynasty examples: 'at so early a date the probability is that they were worn as apotropaic protection against this noxious reptile's sting'. For images of scorpions on papyrus amulets from Graeco-Roman Egypt, see M.N. Tod, 'The scorpion in Graeco-Roman Egypt', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 25 (1939), 55–61, and (for Aramaic ones from the Cairo Geniza) see G. Bohak, 'Some "mass produced" scorpion-amulets from the Cairo Genizah', in Z. Rodgers, M. Daly-Denton and A. F. McKinley (eds), *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honor of Sean Freyne*, Leiden, forthcoming. Sometimes amulets have a more complicated 'combat scene', like that of Heracles and the lion: they depict the scorpion being trampled and/or eaten by a large bird. For textual evidence see *Kyranides* 1.7.17–21 (a flamingo on top; this is 'a good phylacterion against all venomous animals') and 1.24.100–7 (a swallow on top 'turns away every venomous animal, reptile and quadruped') and *Geoponica* 1.7.8, which claims that a flamingo standing on a scorpion inscribed on copper pyrites bans venomous creatures. For extant examples of similar gems, see, e.g., Śliwa (n. 51), no. 72 (yellow jasper with falcon-headed person treading on large scorpion) and no. 142 (red jasper with rooster standing on scorpion). This motif of trampling scorpions also derives from Egypt; see R.K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Egyptian Magic*, Chicago, 1993, 127–8, with fig. 8, and Pinch (*ibid.*), 143–6.
- 53 M. Gramatopol, *Les pierres gravées du Cabinet numismatique de l'Académie Roumaine* (Collection Latomus 138), Brussels, 1974, no. 392.
- 54 Barb (n. 39), 305, n. 4, was the first to adduce this important text. The text uses the word 'agate' to describe this stone, which by modern parlance would mean a chalcedony or jasper that had curved bands of colour. I know of one near parallel: Śliwa (n. 51), no. 128, a yellow onyx in three layers with a scorpion carved on one side (in the onyx the layers are straight, in the agate curved). But as I have stressed throughout both ancient and modern terminology for these kinds of stones is inexact and the word 'agate' in this text could refer to any gold or tawny jasper.
- 55 The recipe (discussed above in n. 43) for an amulet depicting a swallow standing on a scorpion in *Kyranides* 1.24.100–7 adds that in addition to keeping venomous animals at bay 'If someone is struck by a scorpion and you seal the wound with this seal-ring, you will put the injured person out of danger'.
- 56 Yellow is by far the most frequent colour of these amulets, but as in the case of the other amulets discussed earlier, there is some variation in the colour and opacity; see, for example, Delatte and Derchain (n. 21), no. 388 (orange translucent cornaline); Buora and Prenc (n. 27), no. 148 (orange carnelian from Aquileia); M.-L. Vollenweider, *Deliciae Leonis: Antike geschnittene Steine und Ringe aus einer Privatsammlung*, Mainz, 1994, no. 501 (orange-red carnelian); Sena Chiesa (n. 48), nos 151 (red carnelian) and 173 (red jasper); Casal García (n. 49), nos 453 and 454 (both red carnelian).
- 57 J. Dalrymple, 'Snakes and scorpions in late-antique Egypt: remarks on papyri documenting envenomation', in J. Frösén, T. Purola and E. Salmenkivi (eds), *Proceedings of the 24th International Congress of Papyrology*, Helsinki, 2004, 205–13.
- 58 A yellow jasper gem inscribed with a scorpion and nothing else was found in the mud of the Thames river near Blackfriars; see Henig (n. 51), 331, who adds: 'the relative frequency with which scorpions are encountered amongst gems from the Mediterranean area where the creatures are found and their absence until now on intaglios from Britain may be significant. The presence of a foreigner from southern lands would not be surprising in the vicinity of the quays of *Londinium*'. For other – negative – evidence, I should mention that among the 658 gems found in or near the

- region of Xanten – published in G. Platz-Horster, *Die antike Gemmen aus Xanten*, Cologne, 1987, and *Die antike Gemmen aus Xanten, II*, Cologne, 1994, – there are no examples of yellow scorpions.
- 59 C.H. Roehrig, 'Life along the Nile: three Egyptians of ancient Thebes', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (Summer), (2002), 38, fig. 51.
- 60 A.A. Barb, 'Bois du sang, Tantale', *Syria* 29 (1952), 271–84, at 279–80, and *idem*, (n. 39); A.E. Hanson, 'Uterine amulets and Greek uterine medicine', *Medicina nei secoli* 7 (1995), 281–99, at 290–1; C. A. Faraone, 'Magical and medical approaches to the wandering womb in the ancient Greek world', *Classical Antiquity* 30 (2011), 1–32.
- 61 Hanson (n. 60), 286–7.
- 62 The drawing is after O. Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology*, Baltimore, 1955, 9, fig. 1, which is in turn based on the Muscio text of about AD 900 (Brussels MS 3714).
- 63 Delatte (n. 3); Bonner (n. 2), 87; R.K. Ritner, 'A uterine amulet in the Oriental Institute collection', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 43 (1984), 214–19.
- 64 Of the 191 examples tallied by Michel (n. 4), 334–9, nearly all are haematite and 151 have *ORORIOUTH* on their reverse, alone or at the start of a series of names.
- 65 Brashear (n. 18) records two possible derivations: (i) from an Egyptian word for 'uterus'; and (ii) from the Hebrew phrase 'Light of lights'. See Hanson (n. 60), 292–3, for a full review.
- 66 M.L. Barry, 'Notice sur quelques pierres gnostiques', *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 7 (1906), 242.
- 67 Barry (n. 66), no. 3; Bonner (n. 2), no. 140; Michel (n. 3), no. 379. C. A. Faraone, 'Stopping evil, pain, anger and blood: the ancient Greek tradition of protective iambic incantations', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 49 (2009), 73–102, discusses the iambic incantation.
- 68 Delatte (n. 3), nos 33 ('contract, womb!') and 34 ('contract!'); Michel (n. 3), no. 351 ('stop moving!'); H. Philipp, *Mira et Magica: Gemmen im Ägyptischen Museum der Staatlichen Museen · Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin-Charlottenburg*, Mainz, 1986, no. 184 ('Stop moving, womb!').
- 69 Ritner (n. 63), 219–20, and M.G. Lancellotti, 'Il serpente *ouroboros* nell gemme magiche', in Mastrocinque (n. 6), 71–85, show that the protective *ouroboros* serpent is a very old Egyptian device. The *ouroboros* also appears on the gem depicted in Pl. 17, but it is worn and difficult to make out.
- 70 Ritner *ibid.*
- 71 Other gods: e.g. Michel (n. 3), nos 358 (Chnoubis alone), 359–66 (Chnoubis flanked by other Egyptian gods) and 367–80 (various Egyptian gods).
- 72 Bonner (n. 2), 7–9 and 22–6; the quotation is on 22.
- 73 First mentioned explicitly by Theophrastus, but there may be some references to it in the Hippocratic corpus; see Hanson (n. 60), 290–2.
- 74 See the catalogue in Michel (n. 4), 334–41. There are, to be sure, some examples of Thoth or other Egyptian gods with their hands on the key and clearly involved in the magical process, but this is very rare. These and other more rarely appearing Egyptian gods, like Seth or Chnoubis, often point to different and novel adaptations of the series; see Ritner (n. 63).
- 75 Lancellotti (n. 3), 433 and *passim*. C.A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, Harvard, 1999, 96–131, discusses how these gemstones, along with knotted cords and other amuletic types of charm- and love-magic, comprise the sphere *philia*-magic that is distinct from *eros*-magic. The former mimics curative forms (e.g. amulets) because it aims to heal a pre-existing relationship.

'Gems of Heaven'



Recent Research on Engraved Gemstones in
Late Antiquity c.AD 200–600

Edited by Chris Entwistle and Noël Adams