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MAGICAL GEMS IN THE NUMISMATIC MUSEUM OF ATHENS: 60 YEARS AFTER DERCHAIN

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ABSTRACT

60 years ago, Philippe Derchain published an article in which he studied and discussed 23 magical gems preserved in the collections of the Numismatic Museum of Athens. 60 years later, as part of our efforts to document and study all magical gems within Greek territory, we discovered that, despite the significant work done by Derchain, there were omissions in his study. Considering the substantial increase in scholarly work on magical gems, we deemed a reassessment and reissue of these amulets necessary. In this article, we present these amulets with new colored photographs, utilizing a great deal of new comparative data that has emerged in the meantime.

KEY WORDS: MAGICAL GEMS, AMULETS.

GEMAS MÁGICAS EN EL MUSEO NUMISMÁTICO DE ATENAS 60 AÑOS DESPUÉS DE DERCHAIN

RESUMEN

Hace 60 años, Philippe Derchain publicó un artículo en el que estudió y discutió 23 gemas mágicas conservadas en las colecciones del Museo Numismático de Atenas. Sesenta años después, como parte de nuestros esfuerzos por documentar y estudiar todas las gemas mágicas dentro del territorio griego, descubrimos que, a pesar del trabajo significativo realizado por Derchain, hubo omisiones en su estudio. Considerando el aumento sustancial en el trabajo académico sobre gemas mágicas, consideramos necesaria una reevaluación y reedición de estos amuletos. En este artículo, presentamos estas gemas con nuevas fotografías a color, utilizando los datos más recientes que han surgido en el ínterin.

PALABRAS CLAVE: GEMAS MÁGICAS, AMULETOS.

1. Introduction

60 years ago, the Belgian Egyptologist Philippe Derchain published an article in *Chronique d'Égypte* (Derchain 1964) in which he described and discussed 23 magical gems preserved in the collections of the Numismatic Museum of Athens. Most of these were unpublished, with some having been presented by Ioannis Svoronos in the *Journal International d'Archéologie Numismatique* (Svoronos 1913 and 1915). The magical amulets described and analyzed originated from three collections, namely those of Karapanos, Tsivanopoulos, and Empedocles. However, the donors did not provide information regarding the discovery, provenance, creators, or users of the artifacts. This knowledge gap poses a significant challenge for the comprehensive analysis of these magical amulets.

The term “magical amulet” is a modern construct rather than an emic term, indicating a categorization imposed by contemporary scholarship¹. In antiquity, these objects were referred to as *περίαπτα* and *φυλακτήρια*. The Latin term *amuletum* introduced by Marcus Terentius Varro in the 1st century BCE within the context of Roman religion, likely derives from the verb *amolari* signifying warding off and protective qualities.

The magical amulets of Greco-Roman antiquity are powerful personal tools used to mediate between the human world and the divine, imbuing individuals with special powers and abilities, or protecting them from diseases and unfavorable situations. Their efficacy depends on a combination of factors that transform them from inert stone fragments into active agents.

Their material and shape, the images, the inscriptions, the magical names, and the *charaktères* engraved on them, as well as the individuals who wear them, lead us to formulate intriguing questions not only concerning the interpretation of textual and visual elements but also regarding the dynamic interplay between human agents and the artifacts they employ, thereby delving into inquiries pertaining to human cognition and behavior.

However, until the late 20th century, few scholars had realized the extraordinarily significant role that these small relics of antiquity played in understanding not only religious ideas but also overall perceptions, thoughts, desires, and emotions of everyday people. One of these was Philippe Derchain.

Derchain's study on the gems of the *Numismatic Museum of Athens* was excellent for its time. However there has been a significant increase in scholarly work

¹ For magical amulets in general see BONNER 1950; MASTROCINQUE 2003 and 2007; FARAONE 2011 and 2018; DASEN & NAGY 2018 and 2019.

on all types of Greek magical texts, especially in the area of the magical gems, which in recent years has seen new publications or republications of major collections in London, Paris, Germany and Italy, as well as important studies on them. The creation of the *Campbell Bonner Database CBd* by Arpad Nagy and his colleagues in Budapest has, moreover, provided a fantastic new resource for studying the gems and finding appropriate parallels.² If Derchain were alive today, we are sure that he himself would have insisted that these gems be restudied.

Between 2019 and 2022, we each visited the Numismatic Museum of Athens independently and examined the gems.³ During these inspections, we discovered that in some cases Derchain omitted or only partially recorded inscriptions on the reverse side of the stones. He also categorized as amulets six gems with retrograde inscriptions, which are more plausibly interpreted as signet rings employed for sealing documents (these are included in an Appendix in the present article). In other cases, the use and enlargement of digital photographs allowed us to see the inscriptions more clearly than was possibly sixty years ago. This article constitutes part of a comprehensive initiative to document and study all magical gems within Greek territory, whether housed in the collections of Greek museums or discovered *in situ*.

1) Tzivanopoulos collection 94 (88) - Derchain 1964 no. 1



² <http://cbd.mfab.hu/>

³ We would like to thank the director of the Numismatic Museum of Athens Dr. George Kakavas, as well as the archaeologist - numismatist Dr. Antonia Nikolakopoulou and their very helpful staffs. We also wish to thank the J.F. Costopoulos Foundation for the financial support to carry out this study.

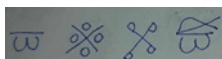
Medium: heliotrope (green jasper with red flecks).

Measurement: 23 x 17 x 3 mm.

Shape: oval with both sides flat. The gem is in a gold setting with a suspension ring.

Obverse: Cock-headed *anguipede* in Roman armour with its head to the right. He holds a whip in his right hand and a shield in his left hand that bears on its inner surface the inscription ΙΑΩ. In the field there are 7 stars. Around the figure the inscription ΑΒΛΑΝΑΘΑΛΒΑ ΙΑΗΙCΙΑΗΙΕ ΗΙΟΥΩΙΗ. The *sigma* (C) in the second word is probably an E without the middle bar, which would yield the repeated vocalic pattern ΙΑΗΙΕ ΙΑΗΙΕ. Derchain printed ΑΒΛΑΝΑΘΑΝΑΛΒΑΙΑΗΙΩΑΗΙΕ, correcting without comment the well-known palindrome *ablanathanalba*, of which the engraver neglected two letters: *ablanath*<*an*>*alba*.

Reverse: On a baseline, Osiris appears as a standing mummy with his left hand to his mouth and holding a branch of a palm tree in his right. Above, below, and to the right of the figure, there are four *charaktêres*:



Around the margin, there is an inscription in two concentric lines. The mounting of the gem obscures the top third or quarter of the inscription, but for the most part, it is not difficult to restore: Starting from the line closest to the figure and beginning near the top of his head, the text reads as follows: ΦΡΙΞΑΩΝΟΥΘ ΙΩ ΩΩΩΙΑΗΩΩΙΙΙΟΥΩΝ. On the outer perimeter, beginning near the top of the head we see: CHMOBIZIZO CEMECEIΛAMΨ ABPACAΞ ΒΘΖ-. Derchain printed only ABPACAΞ ΟΥC.ΙΗ Ω.../ΩΩΩ ΙΑΗΩΩ ΙΙΙΙ ΕΥ ΩΝΦΡΙC ΑΩΩΟΥΘ.

Discussion: The combination of the anguipede and the mummy Osiris is not rare. Such depictions are more commonly found engraved on dark green jasper or heliotrope.⁴ Sometimes we encounter both within the same composition. For example, on an amulet engraved on hematite, we find an anguipede holding a small mummy of Osiris in its left hand.⁵ One of the *charaktêres* accompanying this depiction is similar to the *charaktêr*:



⁴ MICHEL 2001, nos 216-220; see also *CbD* 119, 614, 615, 616, 617, 1821, and 3241.

⁵ MASTROCIQUE 2007 (= *SGG* II) ToE 1.

found in the discussed amulet. In another instance, on a dark green jasper, we encounter a rooster-headed god with human legs holding a scepter in his right hand and a small mummy of Osiris in his left.⁶ In yet another amulet made of yellow jasper, we encounter a rooster-headed figure with snake legs. Here, the body of the figure is wrapped like a mummy and holds its hand in front of its mouth, in the same way as the Osiris mummy on the discussed amulet.⁷

As the anguipede is associated with the sun and carries solar characteristics, its connection with Osiris seems peculiar. However, as suggested by Mastrocinque, it is possible that this relationship arises from the idea of the sun's nightly journey in the realm of the dead and may relate to the phenomenon of the solar-Osirian unity that we will discuss later.⁸

Damigeron (*De lapidibus*, II.9) reports that the heliotrope “preserves the faculties and bodily health of the wearer, brings him a good reputation and respect, and provides child-blessing; it expels poisons; and removes all kinds of bugbears”. Albertus Magnus (*De mineralibus*, II.5) adds that, in addition to the above, the heliotrope stops the flow of blood, restores and maintains sexual health.

The magical names inscribed on the stone are well-known: αβρασαξ, σεμεσειλαμψ and a slightly truncated form of αβλαναθαναλβα. The careful scribe may have even crossed out βσξ as a mistake (unless this is a scratch) and corrected an *omega* to a *nu* in the name αωνουθ. Derchain correctly identified the four *iotas* (*uu*) with a super-linear stroke as a mistake for the divine name of Yahweh: πππ.

The position of the mummy's hand over its mouth in a gesture of silence is peculiar. Perhaps this iconography conflates Osiris and Harpocrates. It may be possible, of course, that the amulet was used within or generally reflects the context of silence in the performance of a mystery cult. It is more likely however that it aimed at a far more practical purpose. As it turns out, a solar god with a radiant lion's head, dressed in a long tunic and raising his right hand flat against his mouth appears on nine gems (all green gems like this one),

⁶ MICHEL 2001, no. 231.

⁷ *SGG* I, 245 = *SGG* II, Na 16.

⁸ On the association Osiris-anguipede see MASTROCINQUE 2003 (= *SGG* I).

that were probably used as amulets against the angry speech of others, a goal indicated by the gesture of the god covering his mouth and especially by the additional inscription on two of the nine (MICHEL 2001, no. 271): “Restrain the angry outbursts of Tasos!” (κατάσχεσ τοὺς θυμοὺς Τάσοι) and “Let all anger against me, Cassianus(?), be restrained!” (κατεχέσθω πᾶς θυμὸς πρὸς ἐμὲ Κασσιανόν).⁹

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, 177-178; Papanikola-Bakirtzi 2002, p. 524.

2) Tzivanopoulos collection 93 (74) - Derchain 1964, no 2



Medium: dark green jasper mounted in a gold ring.

Measurement: 14 x 11 x 5 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: Lion-headed serpent (Chnoubis) with his head to the left. Around the head, a nimbus with seven rays.

Reverse: the inscription XNOY/BIC and the Chnoubis symbol. (Derchain fails to mention both).

⁹ See FARAONE 2022, pp. 284-286; for the second inscription, see MOUTERDE 1930, pp. 77-80.

Discussion: Typically, Chnoubis amulets were used to heal abdominal illnesses and digestive problems.¹⁰

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 179.

3) Tzivanopoulos collection 92 (55) - Derchain 1964, no 3



Medium: white chalcedony mounted in a gold ring.

Measurement: 18 x 14 x 2 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: Lion-headed radiant serpent (Chnoubis) with seven rays, having his head to the left, on a cylindrical base that has a rim.

Reverse: the inscription XNOYBIC and the Chnoubis symbol. (Derchain fails to mention both).

Discussion: This gem belongs to an alternate type of Chnoubis amulet in white translucent stone. Many ancient lapidaries, from the first century (such as Pliny) up to at least the 11th century (as mentioned by Michael Psellus), inform us about gems that were made of milky, semi-transparent stones and

¹⁰ For the use of this type of gems in antiquity see *Orphica, Lithica kerygmata*, 35. 3-6., Hephaestion, *Apotelesmatica*, 12.20-24, Marcellus of Bordeaux, *De Medicamentis*, 20.98. See also Michael Psellus, *Libellus de Lapidum Virtutibus, Patrologiæ cursus completus*, vol. 122, 900. See *Patrologia Graeca (PG)*, vol. 122, p. 900.

were believed to promote breastfeeding and suckling.¹¹ They were worn as pendants or rings with the aim of increasing the flow of milk in women.

It appears that these stones were sometimes crushed and mixed with a liquid, which women consumed, or they were sucked like candies.¹²

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 179.

4) Tzivanopoulos collection 100 (94) - Derchain 1964, no 4



Medium: yellow jasper.

Measurement: 22 x 17 x 3 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: Lion-headed serpent (Chnoubis) with radiate head with seven rays. Below the image, the inscription XNOYMHC (a variant spelling of the name) is written along the edge.

Reverse: plain.

¹¹ *Orpheus' Lithika* 191-223; *Orphica, Lithica kerygmata* 139-40; MICHAEL PSELLOS, *Libellus de Lapidum Virtutibus, Patrologiae cursus completes*, vol. 122, p. 892. See also DASEN 2019 and 2023.

¹² DASEN 2023, p. 655.

Discussion: A yellow jasper with an image of Chnoubis is much rarer than the green or white.¹³ Ancient lapidaries provide insights into the use of yellow jasper. According to Pliny, “stones are found that resemble a lion’s skin, and these, they claim, are effective against scorpions” (*NH* 37.54.2). According to *Orphei Lithica*, the stone that bears the color of a lion’s skin is called *leontoderes* and it repels the pain caused by scorpion stings when one hangs it around the wound or grinds it and applies the dust to the wound (619-624). *Socrates and Dionysius* inform us that the agate that has a color 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 (39.1-4).¹⁴

Of all the different images appearing on amulets made of yellow stone believed to have antivenom properties, the image of a scorpion is the most frequent, suggesting that these gems expel the venom, by the power of ‘like banning like’. In some cases, the image of the scorpion is accompanied by the inscription “BAPXA”, perhaps a reverse writing of the Semitic “aqrab” (scorpion).¹⁵

According to the *Book of Numbers*, Moses employs the same process of like banning like when he constructs a bronze likeness of a serpent aiming to protect the Israelites from snakebites.¹⁶ The addition of the image of the lion-headed serpent onto a yellow stone, like the one we discuss here, might be associated with this idea that one snake could repel the action of the venom of snakes and, by extension, the venom of scorpions.

However, it is possible that the presence of Chnoubis on this amulet was used to activate and enhance the believed therapeutic action of the yellow gem, whatever its function may have been. This perspective is in line with the opinion of Galen, who considered the engraving of images on stones unnecessary as it did not strengthen the effectiveness of amulets.¹⁷

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 179.

¹³ See e.g. CBd 2669, CBd 1782, CBd 146, CBd 151, CBd 106 etc.

¹⁴ See also FARAONE 2018, p. 99 and note 189.

¹⁵ CBd 2389, CBd 4020. See also MASTROCINQUE 2014, p. 199, where further bibliography.

¹⁶ *Numbers* 21:7-9.

¹⁷ Galenus, *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus*, 12. 207. 1-10.

5) Tzivanopoulos collection 83 (97) - Derchain 1964, no 5



Medium: bluish white jasper.

Measurement: 22 x 15 x 5 mm.

Shape: oval, flat on the obverse and convex on the reverse.

Obverse: Chnoubis-Agathodaimon to the left.

Reverse: The inscription XNOYBIC NAA BIC BOENOYT.

Discussion: The inscription is a version of the Νααβίς βιενουθ *logos*, which appears almost exclusively on Chnoubis gems.¹⁸ In this case, however, instead of Chnoubis, we find a bearded snake, who is probably Agathodaimon, the snake god who, after the founding of Alexandria by Alexander the Great, became the protective deity of the city.¹⁹ Ancient writers appear to view Agathodaimon and Chnoubis as counterparts, given the similarity in their characteristics. In the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, the first-century historian Philo of Byblos notes that “the Phoenicians refer to (the snake) as Agathos Daimon, and similarly, the Egyptians name it Kneph”.²⁰ Kneph seems to have been an

¹⁸ From the twenty magical gems in the CBd that bear the specific inscription, only one doesn't depict Chnoubis.

¹⁹ For Agathodaimon in general see FRASER 1972, pp. 209-211; MITROPOULOU 1977, pp. 155-168; DUNAND 1981, pp. 277-278.

²⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.10.

early form of the name Chnoubis.²¹ This amulet serves as additional evidence of the connection between the two.

The Νααβις βιενουθ *logos* has been interpreted in two ways. Bonner, following Kopp, asserts that it is connected to the Hebrew “nthbsh b’noth,” which means “bound with incantations.”²² Derchain argues that the first name is associated with the Egyptian “nhp”, signifying the potter’s wheel, which he believes is another element linking Chnoubis to the Egyptian god Khnum. Regarding the name Βιενουθ, he interprets it as the first part of the phrase “the soul of the god.”²³

In a series of inscriptions from the Hellenistic period, there is a reference to the god Chnoubis as Χνούβω Νεβιήβ²⁴ or Χνόμω Νεβιήβ.²⁵ According to Bouché-Leclercq, “Νεβιήβ” means “magnus” and is associated with the Egyptian word “νεβουθ”.²⁶ Νεβ (Neb) means “master” and is apparently closely connected with the vox magica “Νεβουτο σουαληθ”.²⁷ Due to the confusion between the Egyptian and the Greek modes of spelling names there may be a connection between the epithet “Νεβιήβ” of Chnoubis with the name NAABIC found on Chnoubis amulets from the Greco-Roman era.²⁸

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, pp.179-180.

²¹ For the relationship between Kneph and Chnoubis see THISEN 1996.

²² BONNER 1932.

²³ DERCHAIN 1964, p. 177-193 at 181. See also BRASHEAR 1995, pp. 3380-3684 at 3583.

²⁴ *OGIS* 168: Ἐλεφαντίνην ἱερεῦσι τοῦ Χνούβω Νεβιήβ καὶ θεῶν Ἀδελφῶν.

²⁵ *OGIS* 111: βασιλεῖ Πτολεμαίῳ καὶ βασιλίσσῃ
Κλεοπάτραι τῇ ἀδελ[φῇ, θε]οῖς Φιλομήτορσι[ι],
καὶ τοῖς τούτων τέκνοις καὶ Ἀμμωνι
τῷ καὶ Χνού[βει κ]αὶ [Ἦ]ραι [τῇ κ]αὶ Σάτει,
καὶ Ἑστία [τ]ῇ[ι καὶ] Ἀνούκ[ει] καὶ Διονύσῳι
τῷ καὶ Πετρεμπαμέντει κ[α]ὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις
θεοῖς..... καὶ προφῆτης τοῦ Χν[ούβεως]
..... καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι [ἱερεῖς τῆς πεν]ταφυλίας
τοῦ Χνόμω Νεβιήβ [καὶ θεῶν Ἀδελφῶν καὶ]
θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν [καὶ θεῶν Φιλο]πατόρων

²⁶ BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ 1906, p. 212, n. 6.

²⁷ PHILONENKO 1985, pp. 433-452, 444; BRASHEAR 1995, p. 3593; BRICAULT 2005.

²⁸ In *SEG* 42:933,24 we read ««ροορμερφε/ργαρβαρμα/φριουιριγξ χν/ουβι νεααβι β/αροφια γειγ/αντοπληκ-/τα βιεν-/υθ.» Next to the name of Chnoubis, which is linked here with the Chnoubis of the amulets, appears the name “νεααβι”. For the finding that bears the inscription, there are no additional details available. It may possibly be a leaflet.

6) Tzivanopoulos collection 104(95) -Derchain 1964, no 7



Medium: burnt chalcedony.

Measurement: 22 x 29 x 10 mm.

Shape: convex oval.

Obverse: roughly engraved frontal mummiform figure with solar disk on its head, its arms crossed in front of its chest and surrounded by nine animals difficult to distinguish, who all seem to face the central figure.

Reverse: five rows of *charaktères*



Discussion: The nine animal-like forms placed around a central figure, who is probably Osiris, are reminiscent of the common arrangement of triads of animals around Horus-Harpocrates seated on a lotus. The animals on this gem, arranged clockwise from the top, are most likely a swallow, an ibis, a seated baboon, two unspecified animal figures, two donkeys, and two goats. Among the magical gems, there exists a similar representation, depicting Osiris wearing the atef crown on his head and surrounded by five animals (CBd 1604).

Gems depicting the solar Osiris²⁹ seem to reflect a development that took place during the New Kingdom, when the representation of Osiris with a sun disk

²⁹ CBd 570, CBd 1599, CBd 1603, CBd 1806, CBd 2383, CBd 2652, CBd 3133, CBd 3189.

on his head is interpreted as an attempt to merge the gods Ra and Osiris into a solar-Osirian unity.³⁰ In Spell 181 of the *Book of the Dead*, we encounter the idea that “knowledge regarding the relationship between Osiris and Ra, offered by the text, can protect the deceased from all evil in the other world”.³¹

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 182.

7) Tzivanopoulos collection 80 - Derchain 1964, no 8

Isis with snake, holding a scepter, the letters EA in field (Derchain 1964, p. 182). The gem was not available for study.

8) Tzivanopoulos collection 95 (109) - Derchain 1964, no 9



Medium: red jasper mounted in a gold pendant.

Measurement: 23 x 18 mm.

Shape: oval.

³⁰ For this idea see HORNUNG 1999, p. 87. For a more detailed description of the Amduat and a translation of this text, see HORNUNG 2007; DARNELL & DARNELL 2018, pp. 127-248; NIWINSKI 1987-1988, p. 98; LUCARELLI 2006, p. 2. The theory was challenged by QUACK 2012, pp. 180-181. See also SMITH 2017, p. 330.

³¹ See SMITH 2017, p. 337, who cites BUDGE 1910, p. 99, lines 2-5. See also FAULKNER 1919, p. 132.

Obverse: Two profile gods, male and female, facing left.³² The first is the god Shu, identified by the ostrich feather upon his head. Derchain thought that Shu holds in the crook of his left hand the curved hieroglyph for the word *time* (*tr*), but it is more likely a stylized *rnpt*-symbol (“year”), which is composed, in part, of a palm branch, whose ribs are indicated by two lines on the gem. The *rnpt* is very commonly held by deities, who present it to the king to ensure years of rule. In his right hand, Shu holds a staff that is composed of the *djed*-pillar and burning torch. The associated inscription (see below) suggests that the goddess who follows Shu is Hathor, and one can perhaps make out a squashed version of the headdress typically worn by Hathor, Isis and other goddesses: a sun disk with lyre horns and an uraeus. If not for the inscription, one might have thought the goddess was Tefnut, Shu’s sister, who often appears with him and who, in her fully anthropomorphic form also wears a headdress similar to Hathor and Isis. Below Hathor’s feet is a ram, that jumps though a hoop, while turning its head up and looking back. This is an image of the zodiac sign, as we can see in a medieval manuscript now in Wales (Figure 1).³³ There are also some coins from cities in the eastern Roman Empire that show this kind of astrological iconography.³⁴ Under the male god we find the name IEO, perhaps a mistake for IAΩ, and on the other side a long text beginning on top of the goddess’ headdress and curving down around to the left and under the ram: AΘOYΠΘOYΠOYIAΘOYΠOYBATAYIE.



FIGURE 1

³² Most of the interpretation that follows is deeply indebted to Dr. Emily Teeter.

³³ From a medieval manuscript in the National Library of Wales (MS 735 F29 verso).

³⁴ CARBONE 2022 issue.

Reverse: Ram-headed god, with a well-muscled frontal torso, but profile head and legs. He wears an Egyptian kilt, has a solar disk on top of his head and holds the *was*-scepter in his left hand and the *ankh*-symbol in his right.

Discussion: The name ΑΘΟΥΡΘΟΥΡΟΥΙΑΘΟΥΡΟΥΒΑΤΑΥΙΕ on the obverse is unknown on magical gems, but it seems to involve some repetitive play on the name of Hathor, whose name usually appears in Greek as Αθωρ or Αθορ. The name is not common on gemstones but there are two gems that mention it. The first depicts a seated Isis-Hathor, with a crown of feathers breastfeeding an Apis bull; on the reverse, the first of three lines of text reads: Αθορ.³⁵ The Αθωρ on the second amulet is masculine and addressed as “father of the universe”.³⁶

A ram-headed figure is common enough on uterine amulets,³⁷ but the representation on the reverse of this gem seems to be unique. When seen from the neck down, the figure has obvious parallels, for example, with male figures carrying similar implements that have ibis-heads³⁸ and snake heads.³⁹ Even closer are the falcon-headed images Horus that carry the same implements and have solar disks on their heads.⁴⁰

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 18.

9) Empedocles collection (without number) - Derchain 1964, no 12



³⁵ MICHEL 2001.

³⁶ MICHEL 2001. MASTROCINQUE 2014, p. 48

³⁷ MASTROCINQUE 2014, pp.133, 206, 225, 226.

³⁸ MICHEL 2001.

³⁹ MICHEL 2001. BONNER 1950, p. 262. MASTROCINQUE 2014 p. 271.

⁴⁰ MICHEL 2001.

Medium: black hematite (Derchain describes it as green-black jasper).

Measurement: 1 x 13 x 2 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: a lion walking to the left. In the upper part a crescent moon and stars on the right and left.

Reverse: Harpocrates seated on a lotus flower facing left, with his right index finger in his mouth and holding a flail in his left. On either side, magical symbols including an E, an inverted F, an inverted N and two other symbols.

Discussion: There are similar examples of Harpocrates on a lotus in combination with a lion and also carved into hematite or dark-colored jasper.⁴¹ Such images have strong solar characteristics, since Harpocrates represents the young sun-god, while the lion also symbolizes the sun.⁴² In the inscriptions at the Temple of Edfu, significant sources from the Ptolemaic period, we encounter a form of Horus, who embodies a lion shape, and is called Horus of Behdet. The lion is presented as a great warrior who prevails against the forces of chaos and subdues the enemies.⁴³

The image of Horus-Harpocrates in combination with the lion has been interpreted as a symbolic representation of the astrological position described as “the Sun in Leo”.⁴⁴ When the Sun (Harpocrates) enters the constellation of Leo, the inundations of the Nile follow. The lion is thus associated with fertility and the abundance of goods that follows the inundations.⁴⁵ According to Michel these types of amulets have an astrological character, which on our amulet is emphasized by the presence of the two stars and the crescent moon.⁴⁶

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, pp. 85-86.

⁴¹ Sometimes the amulets depict on one side Harpocrates on a lotus and on the other side a lion (*Cbd* 1321), while at other times, Harpocrates is seated on a lotus, which is supported on the back of a lion. In some cases, Harpocrates is shown riding on a lion (*Cbd* 1099). There are also two gems (*Cbd* 322 and 326) depicting Harpocrates sitting on a lotus flower that is placed on the back of a lion. These may have been manufactured after antiquity and likely replicate the type of amulet we are discussing here.

⁴² BONNER 1950, pp.150-151.

⁴³ ELSAYED 2019.

⁴⁴ PHILIPP 1986, p. 43, no. 32.

⁴⁵ AMORAI-STARK 1988, pp. 104-105; PHILIPP 1986, p. 43, no. 32; SHAICK 2012, p. 137.

⁴⁶ MICHEL 2001.

10) Tzivanopoulos collection 101 (58) - Derchain 1964, no 14



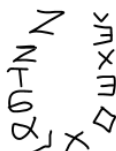
Medium: carnelian (the orange variety of chalcedony) mounted in a gold ring.

Measurement: 2 x 21 x 6 mm.

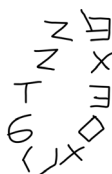
Shape: oval.

Obverse: *Ouroboros* enclosing a Phoenix facing right with its head surrounded with a nimbus and seven rays. Derchain claims that the phoenix is surrounded (*entouré*) by symbols, but it is more accurate to say that the bird stands between two circles of the same twelve symbols.

The circle to the left is as follows:



and to the right is as follows:



Reverse: The inscription is a variant of the *αιαναγβα* *logos*:

ΑΙΑΝΑΚΒΑ
 CΑΛΑΜΑΞΑΑΜ
 ΟΡΑΧΘΗΒΑΜΑΙΑ
 ΖΑΑΖΑΗΛΛΥΚΑΗ
 ΛΒΕΛΙΑΜΤΟΤΡ
 ΩΑΡΜΑΦΡΗ.

Derchain reads ΑΙΑΝΑΚΒΑ/CAΛΑΜΑΖΑ ΑΜ/ΟΡΑΧΘΗ ΒΑΜΑΙΖΑ
 ΑΖΑΗΛ ΛΥΚΑΗ/Λ ΒΕΛΙΑΜΤΟ ΤΡ/Ω ΑΡΜΑ ΦΡΗ.

Discussion: Herodotus, in one of the earliest references to the phoenix, associates the bird with the Egyptian Benu bird, a manifestation of the solar creator god. Both Benu and the phoenix are connected to the concept of a blissful afterlife and possess the ability to easily traverse the boundaries between life and death. In the early first century, Ovid describes the phoenix as a bird that “reproduces and renews itself” (Ov., *Met.* 15.391). Christians, adopting the connection of the phoenix with rebirth and victory over death, interpreted the phoenix’s regenerative power as an allegory for the resurrection of Christ.⁴⁷

In one of the earliest depictions of the phoenix, the bird is accompanied by the phrase “Phoenix felix et tu” (Nagy 2001, p. 59). The similarity in the sound of the words *phoenix* and *felix* leads to their connection, emphasizing the link between the bird and happiness. During the reign of Hadrian in the 2nd century CE, the phoenix with a nimbus around its head appeared on coins symbolizing the onset of a new era promising happiness and prosperity (see Lecocq 2016, p. 465). The nimbus connects the bird with Helios (Ach. Tat., 3.25) and in an analogous way to other solar figures such as Helios-Harpocrates, the lion-headed god, and Chnoubis, all of whom often bear a nimbus with or without rays around their heads. In the Magical Papyri, the connection of the phoenix with Helios and Harpocrates

⁴⁷ For the phoenix bird and its symbolism see K. VAN DEN BROE 1972; LABRIQUE 2013; LECOCQ 2016 AND 2019 ; HENKE 2020; for Phoenix on the magical gems see NAGY 2001; PEREA YÉBENES 2022.

is explicitly stated: “I am the sacred bird, Phoenix. I am Krates the holy, called Marmarauoth. I am Helios who showed forth light.”⁴⁸ This connection is also evident in the vox magica “AMOPAXΘH” carved on the amulet in discussion, interpreted as “Horus of the horizon”.⁴⁹

On a ceremonial tunic unearthed from a 2nd-century tomb in Saqqara, the phoenix is depicted with a vulture’s head. The hieroglyph representing a vulture signifies “year”. The bird stands atop a small hill composed of twelve stones, corresponding to the months of the year.⁵⁰ The number twelve seems to appear in the discussed amulet, as the bird stands between two circles of twelve symbols each, which may symbolize the twelve months of the year. Since the phoenix is associated with the floods of the Nile, this symbolism aligns with the Egyptian belief that the period of floods, marking the onset of the solar year, signaled the end of the dry season and the rejuvenation of nature, ushering in a new era characterized by hope and prosperity.⁵¹

The phoenix is found often on gems made of hematite stone that bear the inscription ‘πεπτε’. In these cases, the amulets were used to confront digestion problems and belong to a series of digestive amulets that are often called the “Phoenix class”.⁵² However, the gem in discussion does not bear such an inscription.

The *αναγβα* *logos* on the reverse of the amulet is often encountered on gems made of carnelian stone, on whose obverse we find (within an *ouroboros*) four symbols that represent the *tetragrammaton*. Here the image of phoenix and the two rings of symbols seem to have replaced the *tetragrammaton*.⁵³

Bibliography : Derchain 1964, p. 186. Van den Broek 1972, p. 438; Papanikola-Bakirtzi 2002, p. 527.

⁴⁸ PGM XII 231-232.

⁴⁹ BRASHEAR 1995, p. 3579.

⁵⁰ F. LABRIQUE & I. PAPADOPOULOU 2012.

⁵¹ Horapollo, *Hierogl.* II 57.

⁵² BONNER 1950, pp. 60-61; DASEN & NAGY 2019, pp. 425-426.

⁵³ MICHEL 2004, p. 482, and FARAONE 2022.

11) Tzivanopoulos collection 97 (75) - Derchain 1964, no 15



Medium: heliotrope mounted in a gold ring.

Measurement: 17 x 14 x 2 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: Composite image of Harpocrates and baboon. Viewed in one direction a cynocephalus faces left with solar disk. His paws are raised in greeting. The two figures of the gem have the same body, with the baboon's tail acting as Harpocrates' whip. Viewed in the opposite direction, we see Harpocrates facing right with his hand on his mouth and the solar disk on his head.

Reverse: the inscription APXIΘE/IONTI.

Discussion: This double representation is depicted on a series of gems⁵⁴ and appears to symbolize the continuous cycle of time, as it depicts the ever-recurring ascent of the sun god Harpocrates and his daily worship by the baboon, who represents the lunar god Thoth, which thus explains the lunar disk on its head.⁵⁵

According to the *DGE*, the noun ἀρχίθεος means something like “principal god”. Perhaps read ἀρχιθειω οντι, “for the one who is the principal god”.

According to LSJ (ἀρχίθεος, -ον, ὁ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς θεὸς ὢν), the word ἀρχιθειοντι may be a reference to Jahweh, the god who was there from the beginning, «Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν» (*Exodus* 3:14). Derchain reads incorrectly APXIΘE/ONTI.

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, pp. 186-188.

⁵⁴ CBd 546, 547, 1611, 2441, 3187.

⁵⁵ See the discussions of ZWIERLEIN-DIEH 1991, p. 160, no. 2198 and MICHEL 2001b, pp. 33-34.

12) Tzivanopoulos collection 98 (99) - Derchain 1964, no 16



Medium: hematite.

Measurement: 19 x 20 x 2 mm.

Shape: oval, nearly circular.

Obverse: A well-known design: an *ouroboros* encircles a symbol resembling a uterus, with a five-toothed key beneath and four deities standing above. Moving from left to right, we first encounter Isis, crowned with her hieroglyph, extending her left hand in greeting. Next, we see Chnoubis, the radiate lion-headed snake. Following Chnoubis is Anubis, though with some uncertainty whether the mummy is dog-headed. Nephthys is the final figure in the group, raising her right hand and holding what appears to be a vessel in her left hand.

An additional, unidentified figure is depicted either holding the key of the uterus or seated upon it. This figure in the lower register on the right is likely Khnum, the deity associated with the creation of human and animal bodies on his potter's wheel, bestowing life upon them.⁵⁶

In the field there are the seven vowels. Above the four figures the letters AEI. In the left, next to the uterus the OY, to the right the Ω and next to the fourth figure the H. Around the margin the *soroor*-formula, an Egyptian formula used to lock and

⁵⁶ On CBd 233, 1355 and 3092, Khnum is holding the key; on CBd 1356 and 3425, Khnum is holding the uterus and the key. For Khnum on uterine amulets see DELATTE 1914, p. 86; DELATTE & DERCHAIN 1964, pp. 255-256; BARB 1953, pp. 195-196 and 216, nn. 43 and 4; RITNER 1984.

unlock doors.⁵⁷ We can only read the letters: COPOOP ΜΕΡΦΕΡΓΑΡΒ.....
PIOY..ΙΓΞ.

Reverse: the inscription ΟΡΩΡ/ΙΟΥΘ.

Discussion: It is a typical uterine amulet.⁵⁸

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p.188.

13) Karapanos collection 614/799 - Derchain 1964, no 18



Medium: yellow jasper.

Measurement: 14 x 20 x 3 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: Wild boar with a bee in its mouth, running to the left. In the upper part of the gem, the inscription TO THC ΦΙΛΙΑC.

Reverse: the inscription ΜΥΕΡΩ.

Discussion: In ancient Greek imagery, the wild boar is associated with virility, strong sexual prowess, and dominance.⁵⁹ There are many examples of rings from the Greco-Roman period that depict a wild boar and sow mating, which were

⁵⁷ RITNER, 1984.

⁵⁸ For uterine amulets in general, see AUBERT 1989; HANSON 1995; DASEN 2005, 2007 and 2015; FARAONE 2011, pp. 56-57. For a new interpretation, see TSATSOU 2019.

⁵⁹ For the boar in ancient Greek tradition see LEVANIUK 2011, esp. Chapter 10 (“Odysseus and the Boar”); SAGIV 2018, pp. 84-87. On the representation of animals in gems, see PEREA YÉBENES 2021.

likely used to enhance sexual potency. Among them, there is at least one that belongs to the category of magical gems.⁶⁰

The wild boar holding a bee or a bull's head in its mouth appears on at least eight other gems made of yellow to dark orange stone.⁶¹

Here the image of the boar is employed in a manner similar to the depictions of those lions who hold bees, butterflies or bull's heads in their mouths or stepping on bull's heads with their front paws. Gemstones depicting lions, however, usually do not have any inscription on their back, whereas gems depicting wild boars, like this one, have variations of the *voces magicae* MOYI CPΩ.⁶²

The inscription 'MYEPΩ' on our amulet is likely a misspelling of the MOYI CPΩ. MOY is the Egyptian word for lion, while MOYI is the name of the third decan of Leo. MOYI CPΩ are parts of the ΣΕΡΦΟΥΘ MOYI ΣΡΩ sequence, which transliterates into the Greek language the Egyptian *srpt-mꜣi-srt*, which are three forms of the solar deity at different times of the day: dawn (lotus), midday (lion), sunset (ram), as is evident in a protective recipe from a magical handbook, where they are associated with the sun god Ammon (ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ἐν τῷ Πηλουσίῳ καθιδρυμένος ΣΕΡΦΟΥΘ MOYIΣΡΩ ΣΤΡΟΜΜΩ).⁶³

MOYI CPΩ is also associated with Eros-Harpocrates. It appears in a love charm,⁶⁴ and it is encountered in a depiction of the god Eros riding a lion.⁶⁵

The amulet under discussion depicts a wild boar with a bee in its mouth. This element may possibly carry some erotic connotations, as the bee could be associated with Eros, whose arrows, like the stinger of a bee, inflict intense pain—an association found in the tradition of Greek lyric poetry.⁶⁶ According to Mastrocinque, amulets of this kind are erotic in nature. In some cases, a woman's name is even engraved on them, who is evidently the target of the charm. If this is the case, then

⁶⁰ CBd 4290.

⁶¹ See MASTROCINQUE 2011b, pp. 44-47.

⁶² The inscription on CBd 2250 is μοισρω, on CBd 3164 is μουροσ|ρω, on CBd 3799 is μαειτη.

⁶³ PGM VII 498. For the interpretation of the vox see BONNER 1950, p. 200; BRASHEAR 1995, p. 3598; MICHEL 2001, no. 257; KOENIG 2009, esp. p. 320.

⁶⁴ PGM XXXVI 351.

⁶⁵ CBd 655: ΠΥΠΟΙΟΙ / ΙΑΩ / ΜΟΥΙΣΡΩ.

⁶⁶ See *Anacreontea* 35; Theocritus, *Idyll* 19.

the boar is an avatar of Cronos and the word ‘φιλίας’ might refer to *eros*, a term sometimes has a sexual component.⁶⁷

It is also possible that the image of the wild boar evokes qualities such as courage and strength.⁶⁸ In this case, the phrase ‘τὸ τῆς φιλίας’ may not have erotic connotations. After all, in ancient Greek discourse, the term ‘φιλία’ usually describes the mutual emotional relationship between two individuals. Amulets or incantations to acquire friendship were frequently used in the ancient world.⁶⁹ In the magical papyri, there is a recipe describing the construction of a ring made of a heliotrope stone and engraved with the depiction of Helios, which will offer ‘grace and victory’ and enable the wearer to make friends with rich and powerful people.⁷⁰ The mention of the term ‘φιλία’ on our gem might also serve the same purpose, to provide and ensure positive emotional responses. The meaning of the neuter article (τὸ) before the genitive is unclear.

Bibliography: DERCHAIN 1964, pp. 190-191; MASTROCINQUE 2011b, 44-49.

14) Tzivanopoulos collection 105 (100) - Derchain 1964, no 19



⁶⁷ MASTROCINQUE 2011b, pp. 44-49.

⁶⁸ The inclusion of the wild boar in the category of predators distinguished for their courage and strength led to its use as a substitute for the lion image. In Plato, we find at least two references to the courage and strength of the wild boar, qualities typically attributed to the lion (Plato, *Euthydemus* 294D; *Laches* 196E-197B).

⁶⁹ PGM VII 215-218. Stele of Aphrodite; PGM VII 405: Φίλτρον ἐπὶ φιλίας; *GEMF* 15.320-321 (PGM XII 272). *GEMF* 15.445 (PGM XII 398-399).

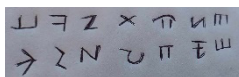
⁷⁰ *GEMF* 15.320-321 (PGM XII 272): A little ring for success and favor and victory. It makes men reputable and great and admirable and rich according to their ability, or it enables friendships with men of this sort.

Medium: brown agate.

Measurement: 35 x 26 x 15 mm.

Shape: oval in the form of a scarab.

Obverse: In a kind of cartouche, the following symbols are carved:



Reverse: On the flat underside a double-headed bird with a tail of a snake. Around both heads there are nimbuses and between them there seems to be the head of a snake. On the body of the bird there are letters and symbols:

Ω
H V
H ∇ Θ
I N W
∇

Discussion: The scarab beetle has a significant role in ancient Egyptian tradition, symbolizing the divine manifestation of the morning sun. Amulets in the form of a scarab beetle are commonly found in funerary contexts due to their association with rebirth and eternal life.⁷¹ In Pharaonic times, such “scarabs” are also used as signet seals, bearing the engraved names of their owners, providing protection and bringing good luck.⁷²

⁷¹ ANDREWS 1994, pp. 50-56.

⁷² From the First Intermediate Period onwards, scarabs, primarily crafted from glazed steatite and later from green jasper or carnelian, function as signet seals. During the Middle Kingdom, their usage becomes notably widespread, characterized by the engraving of the owners' names on their surfaces. In the 12th Dynasty, scarabs are also worn as finger rings, serving as amulets when worn on one side and as signet seals when reversed. For the topic see ANDREWS 1994, pp. 51-53. Subsequently, with the introduction of solid metal signet seals, their role as seal amulets diminishes. They are now predominantly worn as amuletic jewelry, adorned with inscriptions or images designed to reinforce their efficacy in providing protection and bestowing good fortune.

In the Roman period, Scarab beetles are often depicted on magical gems,⁷³ but gems in the shape of a scarab beetle are not at all common.⁷⁴ This gem exhibits several other peculiarities. The double-headed eagle was initially documented in Hittite iconography around the 2nd millennium BCE,⁷⁵ but there is no indication that it was in use again until the 10th century CE, when it reappears in the Byzantine empire.⁷⁶ Additionally the two-headed eagle on the amulet is different from any other depictions of the bird because it has a serpent's tail. The symbols in the 'cartouche' on the upper side of the gem are reminiscent of those encountered frequently in amulets and magical texts of the era.⁷⁷

The unique characteristics of the gem suggest that it may have been crafted much later than the Greco-Roman era or that the scarab was originally made in ancient times and some of the engraved elements were added in post-classical times.

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 191.

15) Tzivanopoulos collection 99 (78) - Derchain 1964, no 20



Medium: dark brown agate mounted in a gold ring.

Measurement: 13 x 15 x 3 mm.

Shape: oval.

⁷³ CBd 500, 501, 502.

⁷⁴ CBd 923-933.

⁷⁵ COLLINS 2010; BERAN 1967.

⁷⁶ MÜLLER-CHRISTENSEN 1973, pp. 22-25.

⁷⁷ GORDON 2005, pp. 78-79.

Obverse: Ithyphallic donkey stands with ears flattened back and facing to the right. In the upper left corner XAEI /ΛAM is vertically inscribed (Derchain read XAEΞ /ΛAM) and in front of the donkey we see five horizontal rows of letters: P/OΩ/ CE . /CEI /Ω (instead of CEI, Derchain reads CEC). Of the sixth letter, only the bare beginning survives; it was probably A or Λ or less likely a M. In smaller letters between the legs, we see a *sigma* on top of an *omicron* and in the bottom left we can read CAΩ Ω. XAEI /ΛAM follows CE. /CEI. The result (CE[M]CEIXAEIΛAM) is a sequence close to the magical word Σεμεσειλαμ. Some gems add extra vowels in the penultimate section of the word.

Reverse: plain.

Discussion: The ithyphallic donkey is commonly associated with the deity Seth in Egyptian mythology, an association that can be traced to Old Kingdom hieroglyphs, in which the image of a donkey was complemented by an ensemble of biliteral signs and phonetic elements, among which the phallus was notably featured, although it lacked any specific meaning.⁷⁸ From the Middle Kingdom onward, the donkey becomes closely linked with Seth, who, as the defender of Ra and his solar supremacy, held a significantly elevated position in the hierarchy compared to other deities. Consequently, the donkey was employed as a symbol denoting determination, vigor, persistence, and dominion. But from the beginning of the first millennium BCE, Seth acquires negative attributes, being identified as the murderer of Osiris and an adversary of Horus. This perception endures through the Ptolemaic and Roman periods when Seth was considered the god of the desert, barren landscapes, and chaos, linked to sexual violence and to unnatural sex.⁷⁹ However, native Egyptians, especially those living in the oases, persist in attributing positive characteristics to him, such as his strength and determination.⁸⁰ It seems possible that he serves as a role model in their efforts to defend their country against the initial rule of the Ptolemies and later the Romans.⁸¹ For them, he is the god who desires to shake up the existing order, and they associate him with disobedience to authority, upheaval, and persistence. Thus, the invocation of the power of Seth is linked to two competitive semantic fields, one

⁷⁸ CLOSSE 1998, pp. 27-39; VANDENBEUSCH 2019.

⁷⁹ PINCH 1995 p. 32; For Seth, see TE VELDE 1968 and 1977.

⁸⁰ For Seth with positive characteristics see FRANFURTER 1998; SCHORSCH and WYPYSKI 2009; KAPER 1997.

⁸¹ KEMBOLY 2010 p. 244; TURNER 2013 p. 160.

which emphasizes his destructive and ruthless aspect and his hostile relationship with Osiris, and the other associated with his fearless defense of sovereignty on the side of Ra and against his cosmic adversary, Apophis.

Consequently, we may assume that the representation of the ithyphallic donkey on the magical gems may be employed for diverse purposes. In a series of depictions, wherein a naked pregnant woman appears with an ithyphallic donkey, the purpose is to threaten woman's uterus either to ensure a safe pregnancy or to promote the overall health of the uterus outside of pregnancy. Therefore, in such instances the use of the ithyphallic donkey's image may be threatening and destructive.⁸² However, the use of the ithyphallic donkey's image on this amulet might be linked to Seth's determination, courage, and persistence in the pursuit of a specific goal.

There are few parallels for the inscriptions that the amulet bears: a gem in Paris has on its reverse the seven vowels followed by the magical name ΣΕΙΣΕΩΘ, which, according to Mastrocinque, is generated by the verb *σείω* and means 'le dieu qui secoue';⁸³ this name is quite similar to the letters placed before the donkey's phallus ΣΕ.ΣΕΙΩ.

Another possibility suggested above would be that the sequence *χαίλαμ ... σε[μ]σει* hides some version of the popular pair of magical words *λαίλαμ σεμσειλαμ*.⁸⁴ The three letters ΕΙΩ in the lower right corner may signify 'done key' in the Coptic language.⁸⁵

At last, it is important to note that the ithyphallic donkey is not solely associated with Seth. In the ancient Greek tradition, the donkey is closely linked to the worship of Dionysus, where various phallic rituals held significant importance.⁸⁶ There are also depictions of ithyphallic donkeys on coins from Macedonia and Paonia dating to the Classical and early Hellenistic period, which may be

⁸² CBd 1176, 760, 1703, 2338, 3033. See also DASEN 2007 and 2008. For the uterus seen as an independent animal that sometimes threaten women's health, see AUBERT 1989.

⁸³ MASTROCINQUE 2014, p. 298.

⁸⁴ Cf. CBd 386, 520, 675, 1066, 1317.

⁸⁵ BRASHEAR 1995, p. 3588; BONNER 1950, p. 198.

⁸⁶ ARISTOPHANES, *Acharnians* 260-261. See also LISSARRAGUE 1990.

associated with the intention to protect a territory, repel enemies, and simultaneously reinforce or explicitly declare superiority.⁸⁷

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 191.

16) Tzivanopoulos collection 96 (98) - Derchain 1964, no 22



Medium: striped red/brown agate.

Measurement: 23 x 18 x 4 mm.

Shape: with flat front and back.

Obverse: three magical symbols, an eight-pointed star and two barred Z-symbols, surrounded by an *ouroboros*. The eight-pointed star is made of four crossing lines and has little circles at the ends. Along its outer edge, the inscription: ΙΑΩ ΛΒΗΛ COYPIHΛ KABPHIΛ PAΦAHΛ (Derchain reads ΙΑΩΛΒΗΛ COYPIHΛ KABPHIΛ PAΦAHΛ).

Reverse: plain.

Discussion: The gem bears some of the most popular symbols from the world of Greco-Roman gems: one eight-pointed star and two barred Z-symbols.⁸⁸ Representations of these three magical symbols within an *ouroboros* are usually engraved on gems of red hues, such as carnelian or red agate.⁸⁹ In the context of CBd, we encounter this same combination of symbols four more times.⁹⁰ It seems

⁸⁷ GAEBLER 1906.

⁸⁸ For the *charaktères* in general see GORDON 2011; DZWIZA 2013.

⁸⁹ FARAONE 2022.

⁹⁰ CBd 1720, 881, 893, 71.

to be one of a number of renditions of the *tetragrammaton* or name of Yahweh that was thought to be inscribed on the seal stone of Solomon's powerful ring. As we can see in an intriguing amulet found in Aleppo, the three symbols within an *ouroboros* are accompanied by two inscriptions, both linked to the name of the Hebrew god. Unfortunately, there is not mention of the color of the Aleppo gem. The inscriptions on the front side of the amulet are as follows: ΙΑΩ ΖΖΧ ΠΠΠ.



In the first line, ΙΑΩ represents the name of the Hebrew god. In the third line, we find the inscription ΠΠΠ, which is a version of the πππ, a kind of “visual transposition” into Greek script of the letters of the *tetragrammaton* (YHWH) as they are written in Hebrew letters.⁹¹ In the second line, we see three symbols resembling on the gem under discussion, which likely represent a transcription of the name of the Hebrew god into the language of magical symbols. Therefore, the Aleppo gem seems to bear three different versions of the name of the Hebrew god.

On the reverse side of our amulet the inscription encircling the *ouroboros* references five theophoric names: the name of the Jewish god “ΙΑΩ”, the names of three archangels Suriel, Gabriel, and Raphael and the name *Abel*, the younger son of Adam and Eve from the book of Genesis, who seems unrelated to this context. *Abel* appears twice in the Magical Papyri⁹² and is, to the best of our knowledge, absent from any other magical gem. Perhaps this is an erroneous reference to some other angelic name. Nonetheless, the mention of ΙΑΩ in combination with the names of the four angels is not rare.⁹³

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 193. Papanikola-Bakirtzi 2002, p. 526.

⁹¹ JORDAN & KOTANSKY 1997, p. 65; PHILONENKO 1979, pp. 299-302; MASTROCINQUE 2005, pp. 150-151; GRAHAM 2012-2016.

⁹² GEMF 17.220 [α]λ[α]βαχαβηλ; PGM XI a 8.

⁹³ See CBd 425 and 823. For the names of the Hebrews angels see PEREA YÉBENES, 2018.

17) Empedocles collection - Derchain 1964, no 23



Medium: white, opaque stone with green veins.

Measurement: 20 x 14 x 7 mm.

Shape: convex oval with flat back.

Obverse: In the center we see the first nine letters of the Greek alphabet (including the digamma) in three equal lines (ΑΒΓ ΔΕΖ ΗΘΙ) surrounded by eight vowels: ΑΕΗΙΟΥΩΩ, with *omicron* appearing twice (Derchain read only the seven vowels ΑΕΗΙΟΥΩ).

Reverse: on bezel the entire Greek alphabet (see Faraone 2018, 69).

Discussion: The use of the alphabet on magical gems is a rarity, with one known example, now lost: a carnelian stone on which some letters of the Hebrew alphabet were transcribed into Greek, following the rules of the *Atbash cipher*.⁹⁴ In the Magical Papyri one can find a compilation of 24 divine names meticulously arranged in alphabetical order, commencing and culminating with the same Greek letter.⁹⁵ In late antiquity, the Greek alphabet served as an apotropaic amulet. The *Testament of Solomon*, for example, recommended writing it (probably on the front door) in order to exorcise evil demons,⁹⁶ and alphabetic inscriptions found on Jewish Graves were thought to repel both demonic entities and tomb

⁹⁴ SPIER 2007, no. 961; BOHAC 2018, pp. 161-162.

⁹⁵ WORTMANN 1968. See DORNSEIFF 1925, pp. 146-51; BETZ 1986. PGM CI 23-29.

⁹⁶ CHARLESWORTH 1983. 18:38. For a new understanding of the origins and date of Book 18, see DANIEL 1983; KLUTZ 2006, p. 107.

raiders.⁹⁷ In medieval times, the Greek alphabet continued to be used in magical recipes of diverse intent, sometimes to shield warriors on the battlefield, facilitate unimpeded trade for merchants, and foster the augmentation of wealth.⁹⁸ Irenaeus' condemnation of the use of the alphabet should be interpreted in this context. He denounces all those who sought to replace the power of religion 'by means of *alpha* and *beta*, and through the aid of numbers'.⁹⁹ This use of the alphabet endures at least until the 18th century within the ceremonial practices associated with the establishment of Catholic churches.¹⁰⁰

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 193.

APPENDIX – not amulets but signets:

Sixty years ago, in his article regarding the magical gems of the Athens Numismatic museum, Derchain included six stones that, as it appears, do not belong to the category of magical gems but rather are seal stones or signets inscribed with the names of their owners in reverse. In many cases, seal stones are engraved with images of deities that also appear on amulets, a fact that likely led the Belgian scholar to place them in the magical category. Although the use of a deity's image on a seal stone may have a protective character, the primary purpose of these gems is not protection. The retrograde inscriptions indicate that they were primarily used as seal stones.

1) Tzivanopoulos collection 91(76) - Derchain 1964, no 6



⁹⁷ BIJ DE VAATE 1994, p. 156; MILLARD 1985; HACHLILI 1984.

⁹⁸ DELATTE 1927, pp. 634-635.

⁹⁹ IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies* 1.16.3.

¹⁰⁰ Papal decrees issued by Benedict XIV and Leo XIII recommend writing the Greek alphabet with the Pastoral Staff on the floor of the church in distinct letters that occupy the whole space on ashes to ensure the purification of the space: cf. *Pontificale Romanum Benedictus XIV., Leo XIII.*, (1895) 349-350 (<https://www.calameo.com/read/004473810ad7fabe3a84e>).

Medium: greenish nicolo mounted in a gold ring.

Measurement: 14 x 13 x 3,5 mm.

Shape: oval, nearly circular.

Obverse: Bearded Agathodaimon snake with *pschent*-crown. The name ΓΑΙΑ inscribed in retrograde.

Reverse: plain.

Discussion: Because the inscription is written backward it is a signet, not amulet. This is supported by the fact that Gaia's name is not found on magical gems, presumably because Gaia is associated with the tendency of the dead¹⁰¹ and appears on *defixiones*, for example, one that depicts a snake-formed giant.¹⁰² In mythological lore, Gaia is closely tied to the worship of serpents, as she is considered the mother not only of Typhon¹⁰³ but also of the giants that have serpents as legs. Moreover, Python of Delphi, Echidna, Ladon, and the Serpent of Ares are considered children of Gaia. The depiction of the serpentine Agathodaemon on our gem may indeed be linked to Gaia's mythological association with serpents in Greek tradition.

A more probable interpretation of the use of the name "Gaia" in this specific context, however, is that the name does not refer to the goddess of the earth, but rather to the name of the person who used the stone. It seems that in Roman times, the name 'Gaia' became so common that it was used as a generic term for any woman.¹⁰⁴

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, pp. 181-182.

101 There is one not so convincing exception: a protective gem located in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. See ARSLAN, YEGIN & GORDON 2020.

102 JORDAN 1985.

103 Hesiod, *Theogony* 821-822; Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 353.

104 CHASE 1897, esp. pp. 174-175. Compare Plut., *Quaest. Rom.* [en cursiva "Quaest. Rom."] 30, 271 E: "ὅπου σὺ Γάιος, ἐγὼ Γαῖα".

2) Karapanos collection 151/372- Derchain 1964 no 10



Medium: red jasper.

Measurement: 15 x 11 x 3 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: Hermes standing to right, with a mantle thrown over his right arm. In his right hand, he holds a caduceus and in his left, a money bag. Next to him, down to the right, a small dog who faces forward, and on his left the letters ΛAK are engraved in retrograde.

Reverse: plain.

Discussion: There is a series of gems portrays Hermes in a distinctive pose, clad in a mantle and clutching a money bag. These amulets were probably used for ensuring an abundance of goods and wealth, as well as securing profits in trade endeavors.¹⁰⁵ This gem, however, is not an amulet but rather a signet used to seal documents, as the inscription is written in retrograde script, likely indicating the name of the individual who used the gem.

Bibliography: Derchain 64, p. 185.

¹⁰⁵ FARAONE 2018, pp. 141-144.

3) Tzivanopoulos collection 38 (56) - Derchain 1964, no 11



Medium: semitransparent white chalcedony mounted in a gold ring.

Measurement: 16 x 10 x 6 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: Bearded god seated on a throne with a scepter in his right hand and perhaps making an apotropaic gesture with his left. There may be a small bird facing right under the throne. IIANKAY Inscribed down the left side in retrograde script with the last letter ending up on the other side in front of the upper shin of the god.

Reverse: plain.

Discussion: The deity is probably Zeus, although there is no specific characteristic that safely leads us to this conclusion, because the bird cannot be identified. Zeus and even more often Serapis appear on gems, enthroned, holding the scepter of power or a thunderbolt in his hand and accompanied with his eagle. Most of these gems are made of translucent white stone, like the one we are discussing here.

It is also interesting to observe the way he positions his left hand, resembling the familiar and repellent gesture often found in the iconography of the Greco-Roman period, used by both gods and humans, and carrying an apotropaic meaning¹⁰⁶. Nevertheless, we cannot find any representation in which the gesture is made with the left hand. This fact, along with the inscription in retrograde (likely the name of the owner) suggest that this is not an amulet but rather a seal stone.

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 185.

¹⁰⁶ ROSENTHAL-HEGINBOTTOM 2016, pp. 75-83.

4) Empedocles collection (without number) - Derchain 1964, no 13

Medium: carnelian.

Measurement: 12 x 11 x 3 mm.

Shape: oval, nearly circular.

Obverse: lion running to the left, with head fully frontal. In the upper part the inscription begins with ΛYO or AYO and ends along the bottom and upside down with Λ and E , producing in retrograde a name $\Lambda\text{YO}\Lambda\text{E}$ or $\text{AYO}\Lambda\text{E}$.

Reverse: plain.

Discussion: This gem is not an amulet but a signet. It is an interesting gem, as frontal depictions of lions are seldom encountered.

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, p. 186.

5) Tzivanopoulos collection 103 (96) - Derchain 1964, no 17

Medium: translucent quartz veined with green.

Measurement: 29 x 22 x 2 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: Small eight-legged scorpion centered on a large gem.

Reverse: plain.

Discussion: Eight-legged scorpions regularly appear on magical gemstones, usually yellow jaspers with $\omega\rho\theta\mu\epsilon\nu\chi\nu\iota\alpha\mu\beta\omicron\nu$ inscribed on the back. Socrates and Dionysius (39.1-4) say that an agate with the color of a lion's pelt immediately makes a scorpion bite painless if it is applied to the sting.¹⁰⁷ One cannot tell, however, whether this is an amulet or not, because it lacks inscriptions and is carved from an unusual medium.

Bibliography: Derchain 1964, pp. 189-190.

6) Tzivanopoulos collection 64 (42) - Derchain 1964, no 21



Medium: carnelian mounted in a gold ring.

Measurement: 16 x 13 x 3 mm.

Shape: oval.

Obverse: profile sea-horse moving to the left. Under his front foot a star and the retrograde inscription $\Xi\Lambda\Upsilon\Phi$ for $\Phi\Upsilon\Lambda\Lambda\Xi$ and above ΕΥΑΝΔΡ (Derchain reads EYAHAI), also written retrograde (Derchain reads EYAHAI).

Reverse: plain.

Discussion: Representations of seahorses are common in the Greco-Roman period, especially in funerary art, symbolizing primarily the journey to the afterlife. After Octavian's victory in Actium, the image of the seahorse begins to take on

¹⁰⁷ FARAONE 2012, p. 55.

victorious connotations.¹⁰⁸ However, its appearance in the realm of magical gems is rare. There is only one gem that is distinctly magical, as it includes not only the depiction of the seahorse but also an inscription with the seven vowels and the images of a crescent moon and a star.¹⁰⁹ Although the stone under discussion portrays the seahorse with a star, the retrograde inscription leads to the conclusion that it is not a magical gem but rather a seal stone. Because Φυλαξ means ‘guardian’ and ΕΥΑΝΔΡ(ΟΣ) is a good Greek name, this seems to have been the signet ring of Euandros the guardian.

Bibliography: DERCHAIN 1964, p. 191, ΚΑΜΠΑΝΗΣ 2017, p. 216.

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¹⁰⁸ SAGI 2018, pp. 140-142.

¹⁰⁹ DELATTE & DERCHAIN 1964, p. 273.

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