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# Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Federico Manuelli – Giovanni Siracusano<br><i>Economies in Transformation: A Zooarchaeological Perspective from Early Iron Age Arslantepe (Southeastern Türkiye)</i> ..... | 1   |
| Nihal Tüner Önen – Betül Gürel<br><i>Inscribed Ostotheks, Sarcophagi, and a Grave Stele from Phaselis</i> .....  | 31  |
| Dominique Kassab Tezgör<br><i>From the Miltoş / Sinopsis of Ancient Sinope to the Yoşa of Modern Cappadocia</i> .....  | 45  |
| Banu Yener-Marksteiner – Philip Bes<br><i>Big Brothers: Two North Pontic Amphorae of Type Zeest 83 / 89 found in Limyra</i> .....  | 71  |
| Melih Arslan – Richard Gordon – Yavuz Yeğın<br><i>Six Amuletic Gems in Ankara</i> .....  | 89  |
| F. Eray Dökü – Şenkal Kileci<br><i>Ares Reliefs and a New Votive Inscription to Ares in the Rural Highlands of Kabalis / Kabalia</i> .....                                 | 105 |
| Ahmet Oğuz Alp<br><i>Ancient Quarries in the Vicinity of Başara and a Local Roman Grave Stele Workshop</i> .....   | 125 |
| Elizabeth A. Murphy – Inge Uytterhoeven<br><i>Late Antique Industry in the Urban Public and Private Spaces of Asia Minor</i> .....   | 137 |
| Hale Güney – Erman Yanık<br><i>New Inscriptions from Northeast Phrygia: The 2021 Survey</i> .....  | 161 |
| Koray Durak<br><i>The Story of Storax in the Byzantine World: A Fragrant Resin of International Fame from Southern Anatolia</i> .....                                      | 179 |



## Six Amuletic Gems in Ankara

MELİH ARSLAN – RICHARD GORDON – YAVUZ YEĞİN\*

### Abstract

Though often neglected, amulets on semi-precious stones, including the subclass of “magical amulets,” provide important evidence not only for personal religious practice but also, indirectly, for networks of ritual specialists in the cities of the eastern Mediterranean during the Roman imperial period. This article presents six objects found in Asia Minor and held in Turkish collections. Two gems carry rare magical motifs - Isis comforting Harpocrates and Kronos / Saturn on a lion. Two non-magical items are likewise exceptional - Hermes / Mercury crowning Harpocrates and a set of four stones inscribed with an acclamation to Serapis.

**Keywords:** Amuletic gems, Anguipede, Egyptian deities, Turkish museum collections, Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database

### Öz

Sıklıkla ihmal edilse de “büyülü amuletler” grubunun da dahil olduğu yarı değerli taşlar üzerindeki amuletler, yalnızca kişisel dini uygulamalar için değil, aynı zamanda dolaylı olarak Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi’nde Doğu Akdeniz şehirlerindeki ritüel uzmanlarının birbirleriyle olan bağlantıları noktasında da önemli kanıtlar sağlar. Bu çalışma, Anadolu’daki Türk müze ve koleksiyonlarında bulunan altı objeyi tanıtmaktadır. İki sihirli taştan biri, Isis’in Harpocrates’i teselli ettiği bir ikonografi sunmaktadır. İkinci sihirli taş üzerinde, bir aslan üzerinde Kronos / Satürn’ün olduğu ve nadir bulunan büyümlü motifler taşıyan bir sahne betimlenmiştir. Sihirli olmayan diğer iki taştan birinde Harpocrates’i taçlandıran Hermes / Merkür yer alır. Diğer örnek ise Serapis’e övgü yazan dört yüzlü taş boncuktur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Muska (Amulet) Taşlar, Anguiped, Mısır tanrıları, Türk müze koleksiyonları, Campbell Bonner Sihirli Taşlar Veritabanı

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## Introduction

Protective amulets made of degradable natural substances, such as herbs and animal parts, were employed in the Graeco-Roman world since time immemorial. In the later Hellenistic, and especially the Roman Imperial periods, however, with increasing literacy, improved communications and intercultural exchange, the range of amuletic types increased dramatically.<sup>1</sup> Prominent among these are semi-precious stones mainly set in rings and bearing a wide variety of divine images. Although any divine image might be considered to have protective or salvific value, even if primarily intended as a seal-stone, from the first century AD there developed in the interface between Egyptian and Greek culture a novel, highly-specialized type of protective glyptic known in modern scholarship as “magical amulets.” This is an etic term not found in antiquity. Combining Greek technical resources with mainly Greek, Egyptian, and (to a smaller extent) Jewish iconographic motifs, such amulets proved a highly successful genre that for two centuries was widely favored, mainly in the eastern Mediterranean cultural area.<sup>2</sup>

Two aspects of this phenomenon are worth emphasizing here. The first is the role of market forces. One striking feature of these Graeco-Egyptian amulets is the variety of motifs and combinations of motifs with magical words (*voces magicae*) and signs (*charaktêres*). This interest in combination is a typical form of creativity in a visual medium. The ideal of the ritual specialist in this field was to create satisfying and coherent combinations of images and words that expressed the notion of directed efficacy. The demands of selling wares in a market freed such designers and their cutters from over-dependence upon existing patterns. Starting from the notion of a Graeco-Egyptian magical *koine*, the market thus encouraged a search for new types, not only within Egyptian and Greek traditions but also beyond. The most successful of all such innovations is, in fact, the type of the cock-headed Anguipede, which seems to have been developed indirectly from an esoteric Jewish tradition (see below).

The second aspect is the role of urban contexts. All known centers of Graeco-Roman gem-production are urban. The implied infrastructure of the mining of and trade in suitable stones, training the cutters who were presumably slaves (and thus in themselves a costly investment), and finding markets and buyers, required concentrations of capital and expertise only to be found in cities. Even if magical amulets constitute only a small proportion of all Imperial-period gem production, it is a reasonable assumption that their relative cost meant that they were primarily intended for urban customers who were, by implication, capable of understanding at least some of the intentionality of the exotic types to be worn on their fingers. Such calculated display of access to rare knowledge can be considered itself a distinctive form of urban culture.

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Faraone 2018. Specifically on textual amulets in various media, see Kotansky 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Bonner SMA, 22-44; an excellent recent introduction by Dasen and Nagy 2019; cf. also Nagy 2015. On possible distinctions between talismans and amulets as well as between protection, treatment, and personal advantage, which we ignore here, see, e.g., Canzobre Martínez 2017, 178-80.

## Catalogue

### A. Magical Amulets

#### 1. Isis coming to the aid of Harpokrates<sup>3</sup> (fig. 1a, b)

Dark green and brown jasper. Two small chips at the top right edge caused by forcing the stone out of its setting.

Upright oval. Profile classification: Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, no. 8 = Henig 2007, flat 1.

Erimtan Archaeology and Arts Museum, inv. no. 1102.

Dimensions: 14.5 x 13 x 2 mm.

Unpublished

Obverse: With his knees raised, Harpokrates (“Horus the child”) squats facing left on a schematic stand or stool, wearing a solar disk on his head, kept in place by a band of material, and perhaps his characteristic sidelock of hair as worn by children. The young god is naked, with facial features clearly delineated. The index-finger of his right hand is raised, as usual, to his lips, while in his left he holds a schematic representation of a flail (*flagellum*).<sup>4</sup> Behind him kneels Isis, bent slightly forward, with her right hand gently touching her son’s head.<sup>5</sup> She wears typical female garb, a “closed” *peplos* and a veil that billows out behind her. This, and the fact that her knees barely touch the podium or stool and her lower legs and feet are represented at an extreme angle, give the impression that she has just arrived in haste to help her child. Details of her profile, including the left eye, have been carefully indicated, the hair by means of tiny vertical grooves. The schematic feather-crown (*basileion*) is flanked, as usual, on either side by an equally schematic ear of grain and seems again to be held in place by a band.

Reverse (fig. 1b): A simple vowel (or note) sequence  $\alpha \epsilon \eta \iota / \omicron \upsilon \omega$ .<sup>6</sup>

Discussion

It is a truism in iconographic studies that, whereas a single figure requires additional signs to communicate meanings or readings, just two interacting figures, as here, allow the viewer to infer a narrative, a denser form of communication that includes an inherently temporal dimension.<sup>7</sup> In our case, we have an implied *historiola*, a mythical “paradigmatic narrative of crisis and resolution” of the kind we also find in the Graeco-Roman magical papyri. This provides a mythical analogy with the force of a precedent or exemplum to be followed in the present case.<sup>8</sup> Procedures of Egyptian temple-medicine that invoke a *historiola* in which Isis heals her son of a headache are known already from the later New Kingdom (say 1300-1100 BC), while there are several analogous texts relating to scorpion stings on the Metternich stela of the late period



FIG. 1 a) Isis and Harpokrates;  
b) Seven Greek vowels.

<sup>3</sup> Compare the four images of the same type so far catalogued in CBd, nos. 394, 1298, 1607, 1756.

<sup>4</sup> These details are already found in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic images of young Horus (*Hr brd*) / Harpokrates, who by the Late New Kingdom represents the first hours of the risen Sun; see Meeks 1977, 1003-4. The flail connotes the deity’s close relationship to agrarian fertility thanks to his absorption of the earlier deity Neper. In the Graeco-Roman period, this sometimes led to his name being represented as Karpokrates.

<sup>5</sup> The left hand overlaps with the groove representing part of the flail.

<sup>6</sup> Despite their great potential interest as phonetic devices emptied of semantic significance, there is no systematic recent discussion of vowel sequences in the Graeco-Egyptian context, but see briefly Frankfurter 1994, 199-205; 2019a, 637-40; Dieleman 2005, 63-71 (emphasizing their adoption into Demotic formularies); see also Crippa 2015, 245-47.

<sup>7</sup> Wolf 2003, 188-94 terms such images “depictions of frozen action,” which suggest an immediate past and a possible future, and generally appeal to the viewer’s wider cultural knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> Frankfurter 2019b, 732-34, cf. 1995, 472-74.

(fourth century BC).<sup>9</sup> However, none of the recipes against headache in the magical papyri invoke this model.<sup>10</sup>

Only six other examples of this motif are known, and this one alone has a provenance of any kind.<sup>11</sup> All but one of the others are engraved on variations of (green / yellow or red) jasper.<sup>12</sup> All are faithful to the hypothetical model.<sup>13</sup> The sole variable is the treatment of the platform on which, in four of the examples, the action takes place. It seems to represent a wooden or wickerwork podium or stool (*Schemel* in German) or a wooden stand on which to place objects or offerings.<sup>14</sup> However, the version here - a rectangular frame apparently consisting of a top, two legs, and a base created by circumspect use of the wheel - is identical to that shown on one of the two examples in the Skoluda collection. This may suggest the use of a template deriving (ultimately) from the same pattern-book.<sup>15</sup> The major contrast between this example and the others, however, is the rudimentary text on the reverse (see above), whereas the rest carry fairly complex semi-fixed *logoi*, either entire or as abbreviated quotations, implying designer(s) with a wider range of rare knowledge.<sup>16</sup> It is, of course, possible that considerations of cost played a part in the choice here of such a perfunctory empowering text. Yet the quality of the execution on the obverse speaks against this.

## 2. Saturn (?) on lion (fig. 2a, b, c [obverse]; fig. 3 [reverse] and fig. 4 [bezel])

Granulated brown, green and yellow jasper.<sup>17</sup> Undamaged.

Upright oval. Profile classification: Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, no. 8 = Henig 2007, flat 1.

Erimtan Archaeology and Arts Museum, inv. no. 19.

Dimensions: 15.5 x 12.2 x 3.2 mm.

Published in Erimtan 191, no. 167 = CBd, no. 1150.

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- <sup>9</sup> Headaches: Borghouts 1978, nos. 44, 45; scorpion stings: nos. 91, 93, 94 (translations). On Egyptian texts against scorpions and ~-stings, including those on the Metternich stela, which were a specialty of the “scorpion-charmers” (*brp-Srq.t*), see Maaßen 2015, 174-85.
- <sup>10</sup> PGM, 7.199-202, 18.2-3, 20.col. ii 1-2, 15-20, 65.4-5; SM, 1:14, 1.5, 22, 1.4, 2:72, ll.26-30; cf. Brashear 1995, 3499. Of these, only the last employs a *historiola* of any kind.
- <sup>11</sup> Listed by Michel MG, 298 §30.2b 1-6. Four carry the Iaeō-palindrome of (more or less) 58 letters on the reverse, while Skoluda, no. 11 carries: *χυχ βαχυχ βαχαχιχυχ*, an abbreviated version of a 42-letter *logos* only known from the amulets (see Michel BM 2, no. 15 s.v.). The only relatively routine text is Bonner SMA, 258, pl. 2, no. 35: *βαυηχωωωχ*, (the Power of) Darkness, which is in fact the final element of the same *logos* (on the formula as a whole, see Mastrocinque 2004, 112). There is a magnificent example of the Iaeō-palindrome in SM, no. 48 §A, on which see Martinez 1991, 105-11.
- <sup>12</sup> The exception is again Bonner SMA, 258, pl. 2, no. 35 = Michel MG, 30.2, b3 (black jasper). For some reason, this is not entered in CBd.
- <sup>13</sup> Bonner SMA, 258, pl. 2, no. 35 suggested that the model was a well-known statue group, but none is known.
- <sup>14</sup> Michel BM 1, no. 15 lists some different suggestions by earlier authors: “boat,” a “hieroglyph for water” (e.g. Gardiner 1988, 491, N36 or 37), and the coffin of Osiris. She herself there suggested a mat (appropriate for Bonner SMA, 258, pl. 2, nos. 34 and 35, which simply show the figures on a base-line), but elsewhere (Skoluda, nos. 11, 149) identifies the object as a podium (“*Podest*”). The object depicted in Skoluda, no. 149 looks very much like a wickerwork or even papyrus stand or stool, whereas that in Michel BM, no. 11 seems to represent a stand made of wood and decorated with a series of thin horizontal lathes. A couple of low stands of different materials can be found in Schulz and Seidel 1997, 351, fig. 44 (painting, 19th Dynasty, stuccoed and painted wooden podium); 399, fig. 119 (wooden stand, three racks, 18th Dynasty); 440, fig. 34 (podium for a statuette of mourning Isis, 26th Dynasty).
- <sup>15</sup> Skoluda, no. 149. On the use of pattern-books, see Dasen and Nagy 2019, 431-33. However, the design on the obverse of our amulet, particularly the impression of Isis’ hasty arrival, is much more dramatic than in the Skoluda example, which shows her thoroughly settled behind Harpokrates.
- <sup>16</sup> See n. 11 above.
- <sup>17</sup> The original publication, described as “heliotrope,” is simply repeated in the CBd entry.

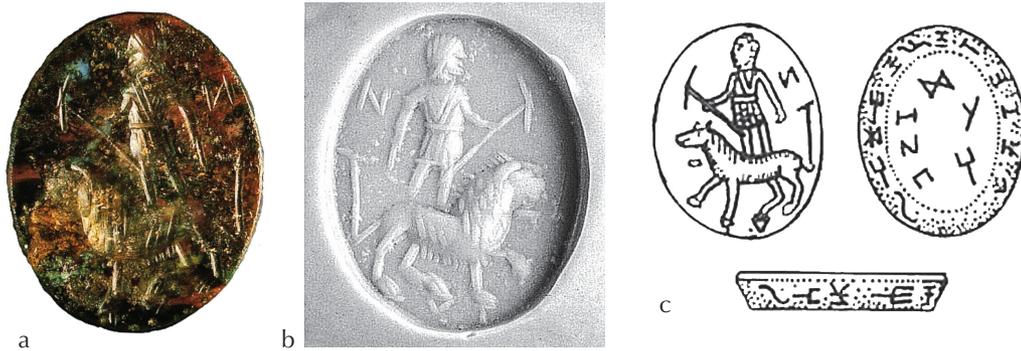


FIG. 2 a, b) Kronos / Saturnus (?) on lion; c) Reduced view of the *charaktères* on reverse.

Although this amulet has been entered in the Campbell Bonner database, the description there follows the original entry closely (omitting the identification as Helios), with the sole addition of the claim that the figure is youthful, which we believe to be incorrect. The item therefore merits fuller discussion here.

Obverse: The mottling of the stone renders the details of the design difficult to make out, making a resort to the (reversed) impression (fig. 2b) unavoidable. A male figure, facing left and apparently bearded, is dressed in a belted tunic and wearing some sort of headgear or diadem. In his right hand he holds an object resembling a Roman-type double adze or hoe, although the haft seems to be rather long for such an instrument and there is an anomalous protuberance at the end. His left arm hangs down and holds a hooked object (visible only on the impression) turned towards his left leg. This object has no contact with the long T-shaped object on the extreme right of the field. No effort has been made to model the legs. In the field to the rear is a reversed “N.” The figure stands still on the rump of a large maned lion, likewise facing left, with long raised neck and open jaws. Beneath each of the animal’s two central paws is an (incomplete) star. To judge again from the impression, its tail is directly connected to the long straight object on the extreme right of the design, but this is probably unintentional. No ground-line exists.

Reverse: The field is inscribed with six unusually abstract (i.e., non-alphabetic) *charaktères* arranged in the shape of a horseshoe (fig. 3).

The bezel carries 13 similarly abstract *charaktères* (fig. 4).

Both sets would have been concealed when the stone was fitted into a ring.

#### Discussion

In the original publication, the motif was misidentified as Helios standing on a lion, although the standing figure bears no resemblance to the alleged comparanda.<sup>18</sup> This is, however, excusable, since the identification of the figure is problematic. The crucial features are the gender, the stance on a lion, and the object held in the right hand. Designs on magical amulets showing a deity standing on a lion



FIG. 3 Enlargement of the *charaktères* on the reverse.



FIG. 4 Enlargement of the *charaktères* on the bezel.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Mastrocinque IM, no. 320 rev.: Helios wearing a solar crown, wielding a whip, and raising his hand in the usual gesture of blessing. Here the lion (with a star at the end of the tail) represents the zodiacal constellation Leo, the unique domicile of Helios. Moreover, the late-Egyptian name of Ra, Φρη(ν), appears in the field.

must be clearly distinguished from those on which the figure rides (or, like the Osiris-mummy, lies) on one.<sup>19</sup> Although motifs involving lions - entire or in part - are very common, the only well-recognized types of anthropomorphic male figures standing on lions are Helios / Helios-Horus-Miôs and a version of the “Pantheus”-type.<sup>20</sup> Our figure here bears no relation to either.

There seems to be just one possible parallel, although it differs in a number of significant details. This is a male figure dressed in a tunic and standing, or rather walking, on a lion on a serpentine in the British Museum, identified by Michel as Kronos / Saturn.<sup>21</sup> Although the head is disfigured by an unfinished drill-hole, it seems clearly to wear a kind of covering (“Kopftuch”). In the right hand the figure holds a rudimentary thunderbolt, and in the crook of his left arm a hooked object that must be a sketchy version of a semi-circular sickle (Gk. δρέπανον; Lat. *falx messoria*)<sup>22</sup> unmentioned in the original publication or in CBd. This is to be distinguished from the more elaborate type with a straight blade with a hook protruding halfway up (conventionally termed *harpê*; German *Sichelschwert*) that other magical gems associate with Kronos / Saturn.<sup>23</sup>

The combination in our amulet of headdress, tunic, sickle in the left hand, and stance on a lion make it virtually certain that the original model was similar: Kronos / Saturn as a cosmic power with specific responsibility for agrarian prosperity and so good fortune, whether or not it was also read as a reference to the reign of Kronos / Saturn in myth. The major anomaly is the object in the right hand.<sup>24</sup> On both of the two comparanda on magical amulets cited by Michel, Kronos / Saturn holds or supports a miniature crocodile in the right hand or arm.<sup>25</sup> In this type, lacking the stance on the lion, Kronos / Saturn is thus associated with the crocodile deity Sobek who, by the Graeco-Roman period, had become a universal deity widely worshiped throughout Egypt, especially Upper Egypt.<sup>26</sup> In the hymns to Sobek of Šedet found in the Ramesseum at Thebes, the god is said to be the most ancient god to have come into

<sup>19</sup> Figures riding on a lion include the type identified by Mastrocinque as Helios-Horus-Miôs of Leontopolis: Mastrocinque IM, nos. 49-54; one or two untypical types identified as Helios (e.g., Michel BM, nos. 282-84; Bonner SMA, no. 226) may also depict this deity; baboons/hamadryads: Michel MG, §42.4 (6 items). Very rare instances include an *akephalos* with seven snakes emerging from the shoulders and holding a flail (i.e., a Harpokrates variant), not riding the lion but squatting on his back (Michel MG, §42.4 with pl. 59.2); see also Juno Caelestis (Mastrocinque IM, no. 364) and Tyche (no. 433). For the Osiris-mummy (accompanied by Anubis), see, e.g., Mastrocinque IM, nos. 66-69; Skoluda, no. 4; Zweierlein-Diehl 2007, pl. 174, fig. 785.

<sup>20</sup> Helios standing: e.g. Michel BM, no. 259; Michel MG, §22.2.d (7 items); Mastrocinque IM, nos. 272 rev., 320 rev., 393-94; Bonner SMA, no. 225; AG Wien 3, no. 2701a. For numerous non-magical types see AGDS 1.3, no. 2911b [footnote]. Helios-Horus-Miôs: Mastrocinque IM, no. 55; Zweierlein-Diehl 2007, pl. 174, fig. 783 (on three lions). “Pantheos”: e.g., Michel BM, nos. 289-94; Michel MG, §41.5 (9 items) including Zweierlein-Diehl 2007, pl. 178, fig. 788; Mastrocinque IM, no. 165. Mastrocinque identifies a figure with four ibis heads standing on a lion as a decan with various names including Brysous (Mastrocinque IM, no. 471). This may simply be another indirect solar allusion.

<sup>21</sup> Michel BM 1, 187, no. 296 obv. (with drawing); 2, pl. 44. Both deity and lion likewise face left.

<sup>22</sup> On varieties of Roman sickles, see White 1967, 69-103, 205-11. In some images, however, the object held by Kronos / Saturn is more like a heavy billhook for clearing undergrowth.

<sup>23</sup> Hook-like sickle: e.g., AG Wien 2, no. 1220; BM Gems, no. 1675a; probably AGDS 4, Hannover, no. 1427 (left). On some of the Kronos-types in the abundant Zodiac series issued by the mint of Alexandria under Antoninus Pius in AD 144-145, a bust of Kronos is shown veiled, with a solar orb on his head and a billhook over his shoulder (Dattari 1901, 1:192, nos. 2975, 2977 [in Aquarius]; 193, no. 2979 [in Capricorn]; see his pl. XXVI; see also Milne 1971, cat. no. 1824a). For Kronos, *capite velato*, with a solar orb on his head and holding a true *Sichelschwert*, see Michel MG, §35.1.a, pl. 58.2 (rev.) and 3.

<sup>24</sup> We have no suggestion to make for the T-shaped object on the extreme right.

<sup>25</sup> Both listed under Michel MG, §35.1.a.

<sup>26</sup> Brovanski 1984, 1012.

existence in the primeval ocean, and on appearance to have taken over heaven and earth.<sup>27</sup> The stance on a lion, as in our case, would rather imply an esoteric reference to Kronos / Saturn as the Chaldaean Sun,<sup>28</sup> which at the same time enjoys the greatest power in the universe (just as the lion is king of the beasts).<sup>29</sup>

Although Kronos / Saturn is often represented *capite velato*, this is by no means always the case. The major irritant here is thus the object resembling a double adze or mattock with a long haft<sup>30</sup> held in the figure's right hand, which is unique both among magical amulets and in the wider iconography of Kronos / Saturn.<sup>31</sup> There are two possible hypotheses to account for it. The first is that our image was cut on the basis of a poor or indistinct *Vorlage*, representing the figure holding a thunderbolt in his right hand, as in the British Museum example. The cutter of our image understood this as an object held on a stick – creative interpretations occur frequently among magical amulets.<sup>32</sup> The alternative would be the deliberate introduction by the designer of a “hybrid” variant taken from another type.<sup>33</sup> In view of the fact that no gem known to us, magical or not, represents a similar object, and that all staffs held by male divine figures among Egyptianizing magical amulets are vertical, we conclude that the first hypothesis is more plausible.

### 3-4. Two Anguipede amulets

In view of the sheer familiarity of this type, we forego detailed descriptions of these two items, which are published here mainly as a gesture towards completing the inventory of the Campbell Bonner Database in Budapest.

We have nothing to add to the description in CBd, no. 1149 of a third Anguipede gem in the Erimtan



FIG. 5  
Anguipede in the Erimtan Archaeology and Arts Museum,  
Ankara, inv. no. 754 = CBd, no. 1149.

<sup>27</sup> From the primeval ocean (*wbn m mwn*): Gardiner 1957, cols. 1 and 6-7; control: cols. 105-6; cf. Zecchi 2010, 95-97.

<sup>28</sup> Diod. Sic., 2.30.3: (the Chaldaeans) Κρόνον... ἐπιφανέστατον δὲ καὶ πλεῖστα καὶ μέγιστα προσημαίνοντα, καλοῦσιν ἡλίου; cf. Hyg., *Poet. astr.* 2.24.2 (from Eratosthenes).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Tac., *Hist.* 5.4: *de septem sideribus qui mortales reguntur altissimo orbe et praecipua potentia stella Saturni feratur*; [Manetho] *Astr.* 4.14: πρῶτα μὲν οὖν Τίταν πάντος Κρόνος αἴθερος ἄρχει ....

<sup>30</sup> Gk. δίκηλλα, Lat. *bidens*. For Roman hoe-types, see White 1967, 36-47. Vitellozzi 2018, 215, no. 2.25 notes an entry in Socrates and Dionysius 50.2 (= Halleux and Schamp 1985, 176) describing a magical chalcedony showing a naked man holding a δίκηλλα. However, no known gem corresponds to the description.

<sup>31</sup> See the selection of images in Serbeti 1992. However, in one of the variants of the Kronos / Saturn type noted by Michel MG, §35.2, pl. 58.3 (= Mastrocinque SGG, 45, no. Fi 32, who interprets the figure as “Alexandrian Saturn or Sarapis”), in which the figure stands on a crocodile, he is represented as holding an elongated staff in his right hand, terminating in a single cross-bar above, a double one below, and a curved hook in the middle.

<sup>32</sup> Nagy (2015, 215) writes: “Practically speaking no two magical gems are identical ... the gems remake established iconographic and textual motifs and conventions.” Michel notes dozens of variations to dominant types under her headings “Sonstige,” “Motivkombinationen,” “Abwandlungen,” and “Variá” (Michel MG, 237-345).

<sup>33</sup> For many examples of hybridization of non-magical types see, e.g., Henig 2007, 27-42. Attilio Mastrocinque (pers. comm.) has suggested to us that the model might have been the long staff held by Persephone on South Italian vases, but these are surely too early. The angle is wrong, and our image is certainly masculine. There is an apparently unique example in Vienna of a three-headed and six-armed Hekate standing rigid on a lion, which itself stands on a subdued enemy / corpse; see AG Wien 3, no. 2182 = Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, pl. 173, fig. 778V.

collection, published as Erimtan 190, no. 166. It includes a reading of the vowel-sequences / *voces magicae* on the obverse (εη ω ξι εωεηγεγ + beneath the snake-legs υη or perhaps ΗΛ [ηλ]), which was omitted from the original publication (fig. 5).<sup>34</sup>

However, we doubt the claim, repeated in the CBd entry, that it is made of glass.<sup>35</sup> And note that the unusual “interrupted” snake legs indicate that this type belongs to a small subset of Anguipede gems in which the legs do not form a single or a double undulation, as in the great majority of cases, nor a complete circle, as in a few others. Rather they are formed in two distinct sections (CBd offers some ten more or less good parallels, including nos. 580, 585, 590, 596, 1056, 1126, 1973, 3478).

### 3. White chalcedony.<sup>36</sup> Two chips at the top and one at the bottom, caused by forcing the stone out of its ring-setting (fig. 6a, b).

Upright oval.

Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, inv. no. 9-199-72.

Dimensions: 23 x 20.2 x 5.1 mm.

Unpublished

Description

Obverse: Anguipede, facing right, snake legs undulated only once and no inscription on the interior of the shield. Instead, the letters of the name IAW are distributed below, to the left and to the top right of the figure. This entire design is set within an ouroboros denoting the cosmos.<sup>37</sup>

Reverse: Five *charaktêres* based on manipulated Greek letters and arranged in the form of a George cross (†). A check of all 854 magical amulets with *charaktêres* listed in CBd suggests that, although such items are often treated less as “letters” than as elements of a design, this arrangement is unique (CBd, no. 1638 is a modern imitation). The usual “pommettes” - tiny circles at the ends of the long strokes of alphabetic *charaktêres* - have been replaced by simple wheel grooves.



FIG. 6 a) Anguipede; b) *Charaktêres* in † arrangement on reverse.

<sup>34</sup> Note that all the Greek vowels except for omicron are represented at least once, but only two (or possibly three) consonants (ξ, γ, possibly λ).

<sup>35</sup> CBd lists just one magical amulet made of orange glass (no. 190) and just six of red, only one of which looks at all like this (no. 4106). However, this list does not include our amulet (which *is*, however, entered under “glass”), so the site’s trawler-system is evidently given to omissions. For a very similar amulet of red-orange jasper, note Mastrocinque SGG, no. Ro 9 = CBd, no. 2232.

<sup>36</sup> So the Museum. One of the anonymous reviewers suggests a black jasper *vel sim* instead.

<sup>37</sup> Reemes 2015 argues that such interpretations of the Ouroboros post-date the Dynastic period.

#### 4. Red-speckled lapis-lazuli,<sup>38</sup> set in an iron ring (fig. 7a, b).

Upright oval.

Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, inv. no. 12-64-11.

Provenience: Juliopolis necropolis, tomb no. 148. Found together with a coin of Marcus Aurelius.<sup>39</sup>

Dimensions: 14.7 x 12.5 mm. Ring: 21.9 x 27.6 mm.

Unpublished

##### Description

Anguipede facing right, with the shield close up against the trunk in defensive position. The lash of the whip hangs down behind the figure's right shoulder. There is a single undulation of the snakes, who are depicted as basilisks with crown and beard.



FIG. 7 a) Anguipede; b) As inserted in iron ring.

##### Discussion

The Anguipede is by far the most common single type among the magical amulets.<sup>40</sup> The significance of the composition has always been a matter of debate. Even the simplest account, however, drawing attention to the association in the Greek world of the cockerel and the whip with the Sun and of snakes' legs with the Giants in the Underworld, understands the image as representing a magical deity of light and time, demiurge and world-ruler whose power spans the entire cosmos.<sup>41</sup> The most specific recent theory, based on earlier suggestions, contends that the image is to be understood more precisely as a visual rebus-image of the God of Israel based on different possible evocations of the Hebrew root GBR.<sup>42</sup> It is thus to be viewed as an "intellectual attempt to incorporate the God of Israel into the broader magical *koine* of the Roman Imperial period."<sup>43</sup>

Although such a development is most unlikely to have occurred within mainstream Jewish communities given their restrictions on graven images, it is thinkable that contacts in Alexandria between one or two learned Jews and Graeco-Egyptian specialists in gem design might have led to such a creation. Nevertheless, worries remain: the "popularity" of the image among designers / cutters is difficult to reconcile with such an esoteric Judeo-Egyptian origin. And it is impossible to conceive that all the known examples, with all their minor variants, can have been made in Alexandria. Would the mere name *Iaō* have been sufficient to cause the widespread adoption of the type throughout the eastern Mediterranean? Even if Nagy is right,

<sup>38</sup> Red-speckled lapis-lazuli is very rare; yellow speckling is more usual, e.g., CBd, nos. 557, 558, 659, 1127, 1941, 2335, 2352, 2959, 2960, 3304 (obv.), 3325; Bertolami Auc. 86, lot 211. Speckling may have been considered an additional value. One reviewer suggests a green jasper.

<sup>39</sup> On the excavations of the necropolis of Juliopolis (Bithynia), see Arslan and Metin 2013.

<sup>40</sup> CBd currently lists 395 items; Nagy 2019, 181 reports that in fact there are at least 708, with the total steadily growing.

<sup>41</sup> Bonner SMA, 123-39; Michel BM 1, 115-17, s.v. no. 181 (commentary). There is unfortunately no connected discussion of the type in Michel MG. Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 221-23 views the image as primarily solar, identified through the name *Iaō* with the Hebrew God, cf. AG Wien 3, no. 2231 (commentary).

<sup>42</sup> This is argued most fully in Nagy 2002; cf. also the statistical arguments advanced in Nagy 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Dasen and Nagy 2019, 417.

the Anguipede retains much of its enigmatic character, particularly in view of its extreme pragmatic polysemy.<sup>44</sup>

## B. Conventional Divine Image

### 5. Hermes / Mercury crowning Harpokrates (fig. 8)

White chalcedony. Slight chip at 2.30 o'clock.

Horizontal oval.

Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, inv. no. 50-2-74 (case 7, no. 53 b).

Dimensions: 13.4 x 15.4 x 2.7 mm.

Unpublished

#### Description

On the left, Hermes / Mercury stands, in slight *contrapposto*, facing the spectator's right. He wears what is conventionally known as a "lotus diadem" on his head, and holds the *kerykeion* / *caduceus* in the crook of his right arm, over which his chlamys / mantle is draped. With his left arm he offers a leafy crown to Harpokrates, who faces him. The ground-line is broken.

#### Discussion

This motif is a variant on the more common type of Hermes / Mercury crowning Tyche / Fortuna, an intaglio type in which their positions are usually reversed, with Hermes / Mercury on the spectator's right, facing left.<sup>45</sup> The figure to whom the crown is being offered here seems to have been intended as a free-standing Harpokrates, who is fairly often shown on intaglios holding a cornucopia and a draped mantle, sometimes against a tree.<sup>46</sup> The characteristic gesture of Harpokrates in this pose, as in other types, is the hand held up to the mouth. In adapting the free-standing model-type to the Hermes / Mercury crowning type, presumably at the wish of a customer, the cutter has ended up failing to take account of Hermes / Mercury's raised arm, and so been forced to render Harpokrates' right hand absurdly long. Moreover, the double-crown usually worn by Harpokrates in this pose has here been turned into a normal wreath. This perhaps suggests that the original model was in fact a Genius holding a patera, a type in which the figure holds a cornucopia and a draped mantle in the free hand in exactly the same manner.<sup>47</sup>



FIG. 8 Hermes / Mercury (l.) honoring Harpokrates with a crown.

Hermes / Mercury as bringer of wealth and success in business is here linked to Harpokrates as a symbol of agrarian prosperity. This thereby creates a visual reduplication of a wish or prayer for personal well-being and good fortune. There is a further, more complex type in

<sup>44</sup> There are a number of other Anguipede amuletic gems in Turkish museums; see, e.g., Altınoluk 2013; 2016, 246-47; Altınoluk and Atakan 2014.

<sup>45</sup> This is so the impression of the honorand (Tyche / Fortuna) will appear on the side of dignity, which is the right; e.g., AG Wien 2, nos. 1208-210; Henig and Whiting 1987, 14, nos. 93-95; AGDS 3, nos. 112, 165-66; AGDS 1.3, no. 2623; Fossing 1929, no. 1663; auctions: Bertolami E-Live Auc. 84, 106; probably Sotheby 1842, 367.

<sup>46</sup> AGDS 1.3, no. 2677 with 8 further examples; AGDS 4, Hamburg, no. 60 (against a tree), with numerous parallels; cf. AGDS 4, Hannover, no. 916 (facing front).

<sup>47</sup> Ringstones depicting a personal Genius, in which the figure is not depicted in a toga like the Genius p.R., but simply with cornucopia and patera, occur in small numbers, e.g., AGDS 1.3, nos. 2691, 3003-5; AGDS 3, no. 102; Henig 2007, nos. 104-8.

which Hermes / Mercury crowns Zeus / Jupiter, flanked by Tyche / Fortuna, a type that explicitly transfers the personal wish to the collective level.<sup>48</sup> We cannot however trace another gem in which this prosperity type is adapted to Harpokrates.

### C. Pendant in Red Jasper

#### 6. Neck ornament acclaiming Serapis (fig. 9)

Pale red jasper. Slight damage to nos. 1 and 3.

Four short parallelepipeds of slightly unequal lengths.

Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, inv. no. 64-42-11.

Provenience: Juliopolis necropolis, tomb no. 57.

Average dimensions: 17 x 4 x 4 mm. Not pierced through longitudinally.

Unpublished

#### Description

Four small parallelepipeds in pale red jasper were probably set into metal frames or woven holders. They would have been linked together either in a horizontal line as a choker, or one above the other, as a pendant over the upper chest, though other possibilities must remain open. Placed in sequence they read: 1: ΕΙΣ 2: ΖΕΥΣ 3: ΣΕΡΑΠΙΣ 4: ΑΙΩΝΟΣ.<sup>49</sup> This is the familiar acclamation εἰς Ζεὺς Σέραπις exalting Serapis as a Zeus and a *megatheos*, a deity who – here and now – is above all others in majesty and power.<sup>50</sup>

#### Discussion

Public and private acclamations of deities (and emperors) were a widespread feature of religious life in the eastern Mediterranean during the imperial period. It is now recognized that they are to be taken as ritualized expressions of homage to the τιμή of a specific deity, whether of local<sup>51</sup> or of “universal” importance, expressions especially favored in situations in which deities “compete” for omnipotence. Εἰς / μία acclamations are in principle no different from a range of other essentially communicative acclamation styles, such as μέγας / μεγάλη, μέγιστος / ἰστίη, μεγιστότατος, or μόνος / ἄν, ὑψιστος, εἰς ἅπ’ αἰῶνος.<sup>52</sup> Despite the apparent emphasis on the



FIG. 9 Collar from a tomb in Juliopolis (Bithynia) inscribed εἰς Ζεὺς Σέραπις.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., AGDS 4, Hannover, no. 1379, Hamburg, no. 59 with further references (Tyche / Fortuna broken away). Zeus / Jupiter is, of course, more usually crowned by Nike / Victoria, e.g., AGDS 1.3, no. 2445.

<sup>49</sup> The cutter seems to have made an error at the end of no. 4. The picking out of the letters in white paint is probably modern.

<sup>50</sup> Mastrocinque 2014, 163-67 has collected a small number of analogous “prisms.”

<sup>51</sup> E.g., Apollo in the context of the Delphian Pythia: Chaniotis 2010, 123-27 (“superlativism”) or Ephesian Artemis in *Act. apostol.* 19:34, with Chaniotis 2011, 272-76.

<sup>52</sup> Belayche 2010, 145-47; Chaniotis 2009; 2011, 266-67. H. Versnel has termed the general phenomenon “acclamatory-ative” (Versnel 2011, 299). The acclamation εἰς ἅπ’ αἰῶνος was popular in the context of spectacles.

alterity of the deity, such utterances, chanted for minutes or even hours on end, sought to close the gap between the mortal and divine by establishing a subjective emotional closeness to the addressee, whether on the part of an individual, a small group or an (imagined) community.

Specifically in relation to “oneness,”<sup>53</sup> we need to distinguish between claims that a given deity is exceptional (which are frequent), and those that imply assimilation of other great gods (which are few), even if there can be no sharp division here.<sup>54</sup> The scrap of papyrus containing the remains of the “miracle of Pharos” ends with the direction that the narrative is to be kept in the libraries of the Alexandrian quarter Mercurius (or ~m), and that all those present (οἱ παρόντες) at the reading are to exclaim εἰς Ζεὺς Σέραπις!<sup>55</sup> There can thus be no doubt that this acclamation owed its Mediterranean-wide distribution to regular cult practice in Roman Egypt. Richard Veymiers has collected nearly 70 rings inscribed with this and similar acclamations to Serapis.<sup>56</sup> Of these, the only close parallel to our set is a jasper parallelepiped, square in section, inscribed 1: EIC 2: ZEYC 3: CEPA 4: ΠIC, an identical distribution of the letters to that of our case, albeit over the four faces of the amulet.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

Small finds lacking significant inscriptions have traditionally tended, with the obvious exception of imperial and civic coin issues, to be sidelined in writing the religious history of the Roman Empire. The increased attention now being paid to individual choice and innovation in religious practice, together with a focus on specifically urban religious styles, is beginning to alter this neglect. Moreover, the label “magical,” despite being confessedly etic, has been especially detrimental to acknowledging the evidential value of amuletic gems that draw upon Graeco-Egyptian knowledge-practice and have traditionally been regarded as impenetrably arcane, so best left to small numbers of aficionados of the obscure. With the creation by Árpád Nagy of the digital Campbell Bonner Magical Gems database in Budapest, however, the accessibility of these tiny objects has radically improved. Very few “magical amulets” found in the area of modern Türkiye have so far been published. It is hoped that papers such as this may stimulate museum directors and field archaeologists to arrange for the publication of such finds, whether lurking in their storerooms or – of special interest – excavated in tombs or houses.

<sup>53</sup> P.Oxy 1382 col. ii translates: “There is one Zeus Sarapis”; cf. Veymiers 2011, no. A47: “Un est Zeus Serapis”, whereas Chaniotis 2011, 269, n. 27, offers “unique.” We would prefer a looser equivalent, “Zeus Serapis is tops!”

<sup>54</sup> Versnel 2011, 296-303.

<sup>55</sup> P.Oxy 1382, col. ii; cf. Jördens 2014; Chaniotis 2011, 269.

<sup>56</sup> Veymiers 2009, 357-59, nos. VI DA 1-14; also 369-73, nos. A1-41; 2011, 255, nos. 42-9; 2014, 224, nos. 50-54.

<sup>57</sup> Veymiers 2009, 372, no. A21 with pl. 72 (Hermitage Museum), L.17 mm (i.e., the very same length as our items). AG Wien 3, no. 2139 = CBd, no. 2419 is a single parallelepiped in red jasper (11.6 x 6 mm) carrying the same text (but with Σάραπις), set in a modern swivel ring.

## Abbreviations

- AGDS 1.3 E. Brandt, W. Gercke, A. Krug, and E. Schmidt, *Antike Gemmen in Deutschen Sammlungen*. Vol. 1, *Staatliche Münzsammlung, München*. Part 3, *Gemmen und Glaspasten der römischen Kaiserzeit sowie Nachträge* Munich: Prestel, 1972.
- AGDS 3 V. Scherf, P. Gercke, and P. Zazoff, *Antike Gemmen in deutschen Sammlungen*. Vol. 3, *Braunschweig, Göttingen, Kassel*. 2 vols. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1970.
- AGDS 4 M. Schlüter, G. Platz-Horster, and P. Zazoff, *Antike Gemmen in deutschen Sammlungen*. Vol. 4, *Kestner Museum, Hannover; Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg*. 2 vols. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975.
- AG Wien 2 E. Zwierlein-Diehl, *Die antiken Gemmen des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien*. Vol. 2, *Die Glaskameen, Nachträge zu Band 1; Die Gemmen der späteren römischen Kaiserzeit*. Munich: Prestel, 1979.
- AG Wien 3 E. Zwierlein-Diehl, *Die antiken Gemmen des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien*. Vol. 3, *Die Gemmen der späteren römischen Kaiserzeit*. Munich: Prestel, 1991.
- BM Gems F.H. Marshall, *Catalogue of the Finger-Rings, Greek, Etruscan, and Roman in the Department of Antiquities, British Museum*. London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1907.
- Bonner SMA C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*. University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series 49. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press / London: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- CBD Campbell Bonner Database: <cbd.mfab.hu>
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### **Auction Catalogues**

- Bertolami Auc. 86: Bertolami Fine Art, Auction 86, Glyptics and Ancient Jewelry, London, 9 December, 2021.
- Bertolami E-Live Auc. 84: Bertolami Fine Art, E-Live Auction 84, Glyptic, London, 20 June, 2020.
- Sotheby's Catalogue of the Collection of Greek and Roman Gems of ... G.F. Nott, 9 June 1842, London 1842.



