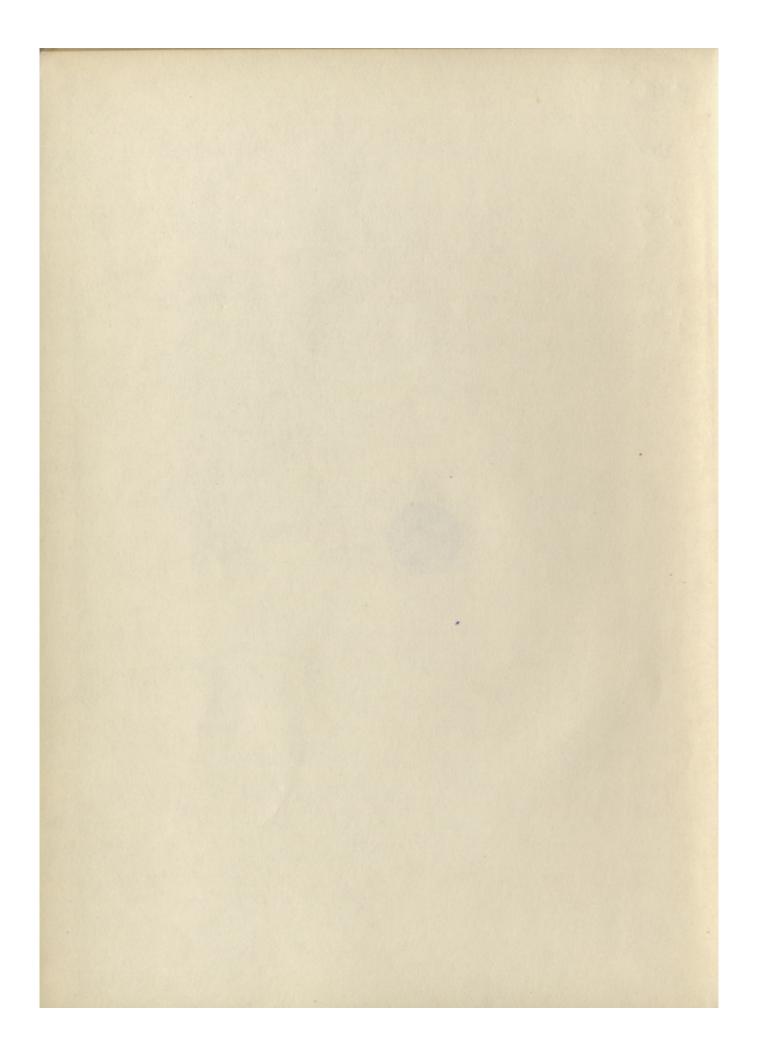
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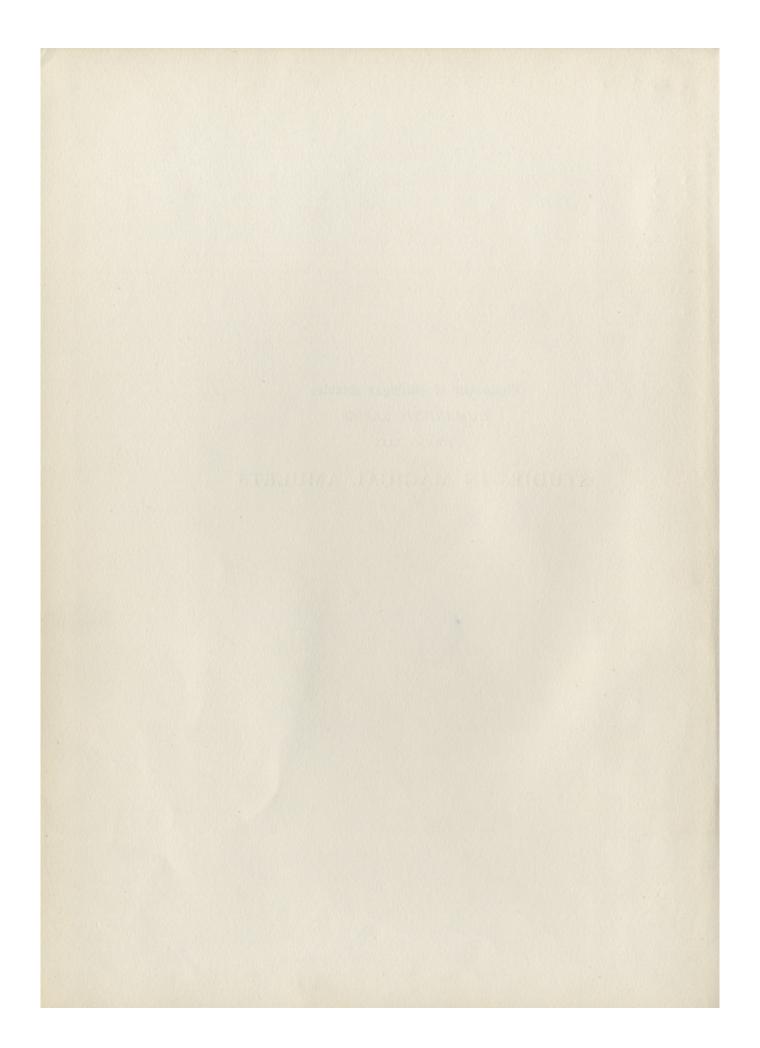


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STUDIES IN MAGICAL AMULETS





STUDIES IN MAGICAL AMULETS CHIEFLY GRAECO-EGYPTIAN

CAMPBELL BONNER





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TO THE GENEROUS FRIENDSHIP OF
HENRI SEYRIG
AND THE HONORED MEMORY OF
EDWARD THEODORE NEWELL
THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED



PREFACE

Few subjects are more remote from the interests of most classical students, to say nothing of educated readers in general, than magical amulets; and yet the present work responds to a practical need, though a minor one. Many museums possess large or small collections of such objects as are here examined, but few curators have done justice to them. The amulets are often poorly displayed, if shown at all, and not infrequently they are misinterpreted and wrongly labeled. This neglect, though regrettable, is easily explained. Magical gems have little artistic value, and many of them are so crudely executed as to offend an eye accustomed to the fine work of the classical period; though one hears now and then of people who find a special charm in these bizarre designs. Another reason for the slighting of these objects is that they do not fall clearly within the province of any single specialist. The classical archaeologist is likely to disregard them as late and degenerate; he is also well aware that the designs and inscriptions carved upon many magical stones contain foreign elements that call for knowledge outside of his field. On the other hand, the Egyptologist is reluctant to lay aside his studies in the history and art of dynastic Egypt in order to examine the last hybrid products of a largely Hellenized culture.

There is also the embarrassing circumstance that these amulets are hard to interpret because many of the designs are obscure and the inscriptions contain words that belong to no known language; furthermore, there is no convenient and trustworthy guide to the subject. Such works as have dealt ex professo with what are called "Gnostic" amulets are based upon a false supposition which the word "Gnostic" reflects; and some of them indulge in wild speculations now universally rejected.

Within the last fifty years several capable scholars have given some attention to the so-called Gnostic amulets, and have recognized that by far the greater number of them are not monuments of religious Gnosticism, but relics of Graeco-Egyptian magic; these writers have done a great service by explaining the meaning and purpose of several important types. But much of this excellent work was published in articles scattered through many journals, oriental as well as classical, not all of which are to be found in every archaeologist's working library.

No wonder, therefore, that the custodian of one of the largest collections expressed an earnest desire to see an introduction to the study of Graeco-Egyptian magical amulets. His opinion that such a work is needed has encouraged me to proceed with the series of studies here offered. They do not aspire to exhaust the subject; and, conscious of their incompleteness, I have avoided using any title that might seem to label this work as a handbook or as a general treatment of ancient magical amulets. Those discussed here

belong to a late and limited period, roughly A.D. 100-500, though several Byzantine pieces of still later times have been included. Much of my purpose will have been accomplished if the book helps the curators of museums to understand the character and significance of such amulets as fall to their charge, and to present them more effectively to the public. Students of ancient religion may find in these objects some help towards the understanding of the religious atmosphere in which simpler folk lived during the early centuries of our era. In this book, unfortunately, considerations of space limit the discussion, and sometimes preclude even the mention, of some religious questions upon which certain magical types may have a bearing. I trust that I shall not be thought blind to lines of connection which I cannot follow to the end.

Archaeologists as well as laymen have sometimes asked me whether there are many forgeries of magical gems. The question is not easy to answer, especially since I am not an expert judge of ancient glyptic art. I think, however - and this opinion is shared by better judges than I - that the extent of forgery in magical amulets has been much exaggerated. The demand for amulets in ancient times produced great numbers of crudely executed stones, which few competent modern authorities have considered worthy of study. On the other hand, casual critics have viewed these pieces with suspicion because of their great number and their inferior execution. Yet both the quantity and the crudeness are explained by the simple fact that the poor, even more than the rich, were eager to possess pieces supposedly endowed with supernatural virtues, and many were content with familiar designs coarsely reproduced. In the seventeenth century, when magical amulets were comparatively new to amateurs, there was probably some fabrication of socalled Gnostic gems; I cannot otherwise account for certain designs in Chiffet, Gorlaeus, and Capello, which show no relation to any of the known genuine types. After a more refined taste had fixed the attention of collectors upon older and finer gems of Greek and early Roman workmanship, it was scarcely worth while to imitate late magical stones, which commanded no high price, and yet could not be forged without considerable labor. For this reason I doubt that many spurious magical amulets have been fabricated since Winckelmann's influence came to dominate the interest of archaeologists and amateurs.

When I began my studies of these objects, I hoped that a corpus of magical amulets might be prepared and published through the coöperation of several scholars, and there were suggestions from other quarters that such a work was to be desired. Further experience shows that even under more favorable conditions than now prevail, a complete publication of all magical amulets would be a labor of many years and that it would encounter almost insuperable obstacles. Even if the material for a corpus could be assembled, the expense of publishing it in full would not be justified, because the commoner types are repeated in many scores of specimens, often with the slightest of variations. As individual pieces, many contribute nothing new.

Apart from the introductory chapter, the plan of this book is to present

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studies of several groups or types, some well known, others less common, to interpret them in the light of our present knowledge, and to illustrate them, as far as possible, from hitherto unpublished specimens. There was a temptation to publish all the pieces in American collections, since I have at hand casts or photographs of almost all of them, but this plan, like that of a corpus, is open to the objection that it would entail reproduction of many almost identical examples. The studies of various types are followed by methodical descriptions, in catalogue form, of the objects shown in the accompanying plates; and this catalogue is introduced by an explanation of its method, which would be out of place here. Plates XIX and XXI exhibit several objects for which I could propose no convincing interpretation. The illustrations of them, taken in conjunction with the descriptions—which, in such cases, I have sometimes expanded by pointing out parallels and offering tentative suggestions—may help an ingenious observer to explain designs and inscriptions that I have found obscure.

The footnotes will show that little of importance that has been written on the subject has escaped my attention, and yet I cannot hope to have made use of all the widely scattered literature of magical amulets. With regard to one important work I plead guilty to a neglect imposed by circumstances. Professor Theodor Hopfner's *Griechischer Offenbarungszauber* has been used only here and there for special topics, and there is little doubt that ideas and interpretations put forward here may be found in his book, and probably supported by wider learning and stronger arguments. Unfortunately, the form in which that work had to be published, lithograph from manuscript, proved too taxing for eyesight which was already strained by the effort of deciphering minutely engraved inscriptions, and by previous work on papyri. For that reason I consulted the book much less than its importance deserved.

Any well-informed student of ancient religion and magic, and many archaeologists, will be able to correct these studies at various points, and to supplement them in many respects. For that matter, I could have gathered more material and used more of what is at hand, and could perhaps have corrected some errors and strengthened some hazardous suggestions, if time were not a consideration. But it is better to send the book out as it is than to strive for an unattainable perfection and in the end leave it unfinished. Such service as it can render to inquirers must make up for defects that are all but unavoidable when one is dealing with a great number of small and often puzzling objects.

CAMPBELL BONNER

NOVEMBER, 1948



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to record my obligations to the owners of many objects here discussed and illustrated, and to the authorities of several museums, who have allowed me to publish amulets in their custody, answering many questions and granting many requests for casts and photographs. Their generosity has far exceeded anything that I could have hoped for, and some of them

have given useful information and wise advice.

At an early period of my study, the late Edward Theodore Newell, a distinguished numismatist and a connoisseur of many branches of ancient art, gave me free access to an excellent collection of amulets in his possession, and allowed me to examine them for a considerable time. His kindness has been continued by Mrs. Newell, to whom I have more than once had to turn in order to reëxamine some detail not understood at first inspection. President A. G. Ruthven has shown like generosity in making his own collection, which contains some unusual specimens, available for examination. Professor A. B. Cook provided me with excellent casts of a few fine amulets in his collection of antiquities. In a generous act of cooperation, Mr. Henri Seyrig offered me the use of his collection, and corrected my interpretation of certain pieces. Not long before his death Mr. Joseph Brummer courteously gave me permission to publish a group of stones in his possession, some of them presenting unique features. Several owners of interesting single pieces have been equally gracious; among them I would mention Mrs. E. G. Goerk, Mr. George Aronstamm, Professor D. M. Robinson, and Mr. R. L. Whitty.

To the authorities of the Metropolitan Museum I owe a debt of long standing, not only for permission to publish several pieces in that collection, but even more for the patience with which several members of the learned staff—particularly Miss G. M. A. Richter, Miss Christine Alexander, and Dr. Ludlow

Bull - have answered many troublesome questions.

Both at the time when I first examined the Newell and the Duffield Osborne collections, and on various occasions since, the staff of the American Numismatic Museum have been most helpful, especially Mr. Sydney P. Noe, Mr. Howland Wood, and Mrs. Agnes Baldwin Brett. A group of amulets in the Walters Art Gallery was placed at my disposal through the good offices of Mr. Marvin C. Ross; and Professor Homer A. Thompson, Mrs. Thompson, and Miss Margaret Thomson have provided me with casts of rare types in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology at Toronto, and have given useful information on sundry occasions. For similar courtesies I am indebted to the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Brooklyn Museum, where Mrs. Elizabeth Riefstahl has given me valuable help; also to Mrs. Caroline Ransom Williams, and to Professor A. W. Van Buren, of the American Academy in Rome.

To Sir George Hill and Professor Sidney Smith I owe the privilege of making a prolonged study — now more than twelve years ago — of the large collection of magical amulets in the British Museum. If I had availed myself of their liberality as freely as they would have readily permitted me to do, this book would be richer by many more illustrations. To my lasting regret, after obtaining a score of casts, the fear of seeming importunate led me to postpone further requests until the oncoming of war made it impossible for the authorities of the Museum to grant them; and because of the damage that the building suffered during the war, the minor treasures of this kind have not yet been re-opened to general use.

Among other foreign museums and libraries to which I am under obligation, I would mention the following, together with the officers who were at the time concerned, or the friends who favored me with their mediation:

The Cabinet de Médailles (Jean Babelon); the Ashmolean Museum (D. B. Harden); the Victoria and Albert Museum (A. J. B. Wace, A. J. Koop); the Fitzwilliam Museum, and the authorities of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (C. T. Seltman); the University of London (S. R. K. Glanville and M. A. Murray); the Geneva Museum (W. Deonna); the Cairo Museum (O. Guéraud); the Université St. Joseph, Beirut (Fr. R. Mouterde); the Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim (G. Roeder); the Gotha Museum (K. Purgold, A. Hundt); the Berlin Museum (R. Zahn).

My obligations to previous investigators are manifest throughout these studies, and I trust that they are adequately acknowledged in the frequent references to their writings. The works of several scholars merit special mention — Drexler, Delatte, Perdrizet, Preisendanz, Erik Peterson, and Mouterde.

Certain parts of this book have previously appeared as articles in the Harvard Theological Review, the American Journal of Archaeology, Hesperia, and the Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society. For permission to republish this matter my thanks are due to their editors or editorial committees.

Valuable advice and criticism about occasional problems have been given by A. D. Nock and H. C. Youtie. The work would have profited by a broader revision at the hands of these friendly critics had I thought it proper to ask of them so exacting a service.

John G. Winter, Director, and Enoch E. Peterson, Curator, of our Museum of Archaeology have forwarded the progress of these studies in many ways, especially by making possible the acquisition of new specimens, and by contributing the technical facilities of the Museum. Professor Winter has laid me under a further obligation by reading a set of proofs. Miss Louise Shier, Associate Curator of the Museum, has made a substantial contribution to this work by finding time, amid the duties of her office, to make most of the casts of the objects illustrated. The majority of the necessary photographs were made by the late George R. Swain, whose skill is well remembered by many American archaeologists.

The Director, the Associate Director, and several other members of our

Library staff, have been helpful in many ways, and have shown an exemplary patience in attending to the wants of an exacting and not always patient researcher.

I am very grateful to the University of Michigan for undertaking the heavy cost of publishing this book, and for aid to its preparation given through a grant from the Faculty Research Fund.

The title vignette is the work of my friend Wilfred B. Shaw.

My deep obligations to E. S. McCartney, Editor of our Scholarly Publications, and to Mrs. Alice Foster of the Plimpton Press, cannot be adequately expressed here. These watchful critics have removed many disturbing inconsistencies, detected minor errors, and in many other ways contributed to the good appearance of the book.



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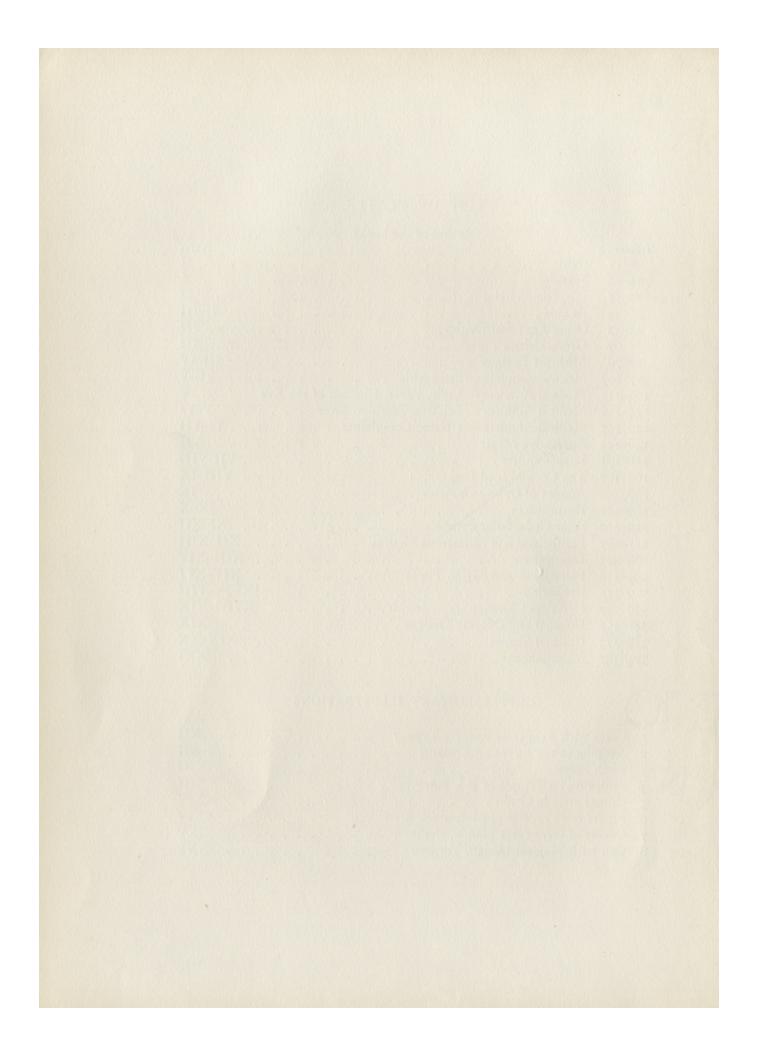
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PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY AND LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

This list includes mainly such books and periodicals as are not likely to be frequently consulted by classical archaeologists, and such abbreviations as may not be readily recognized. The arrangement is alphabetical, but initials have been placed before surnames rather than after.

AJA = American Journal of Archaeology. 1885-.

Ann. du serv. = Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte. 1900-.

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CIG = Corpus inscriptionum graecarum. Four volumes. Berlin, 1828-77.

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CRAI = Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres. Paris, 1858—.

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NOTE

The discussions of individual amulets and of type groups will be more useful to the reader if the pertinent illustrations are examined at the same time. In order to make this easier, both the text and the footnotes of the following chapters are provided with many references by number to the second part of the book, which consists of the plates preceded by methodical descriptions in catalogue form. These numbers are distinguished from others, such as registration numbers of museums, by the letter D., which is prefixed. Thus D. 135 means that the object thus marked is described in detail in the section "Descriptions of the Plates," and that a figure of it appears in its proper numerical order on one of the plates. In a few instances, when photographs could not be obtained, descriptions have been given without corresponding figures.

In references to printed catalogues of museums or large private collections, the numbers are those of the items described, not of the pages, unless p. or pp. is prefixed.

When objects in the British Museum are mentioned with a five-digit number beginning 56, that is to be understood as a registry or inventory number, not as an item in a published catalogue.

It has been found expedient to assemble on Plates XXII-XXV the eight figures to which reference is made in the body of the book.