

CHAPTER III

GENERAL PROTECTION AND BENEFIT

TAKEN as a whole, King's *The Gnostics and Their Remains* is a book from which a modern investigator can draw little profit. Yet it contains a sound paragraph which may serve as text for this division of our study.¹

"It sounds like a paradox to assert that our 'Gnostic' gems are not the work of the Gnostics; but taking that appellation in its strictest sense, the thing is perfectly true. The talismans we are considering never exhibit any traces of that admixture of Christian and Pagan doctrines which properly constitutes the Gnosis, that subject of the descriptions and the attacks of the Fathers of the Church. The 'Gnostic' stones are in reality the paraphernalia of magicians and dealers in charms (charm-doctors in modern phrase), and only belong to the Ophites, Valentinians, and other subdivisions of the Christian Gnosis, in so far as those theosophists were especially given to the cultivation of the Black Art."

Conviction grows upon the student of these gems that by far the greater number of them are first and foremost magical, and that their relations to religion, of whatever kind, are much less important than their magical significance. Consequently it is reasonable and necessary to devote a considerable part of these studies to explaining the specimens that can be understood as documents of practical magic. Under that head, protective amulets must be considered first.

The least interesting among the magical amulets are those which the makers intended to be the most widely useful, that is to say, amulets designed to give the owner general protection or vaguely indicated positive advantages. It has previously been suggested that this class embraces some gems, perhaps many, that show no mark of magical purpose either in their design or by an inscription.² In such cases the innate quality imputed to the stone itself, or the mere presence of a divine image carved upon it and kept in contact with the person of the wearer, was believed to guard him against ills or to insure him certain advantages that he might otherwise lack.

Another step is taken when a brief inscription praying for protection is carved somewhere on a stone bearing the image of a deity, or a mere symbol, or one or more sacred names. The petition is often expressed by a single word, *φύλασσε, διαφύλασσε, φύλαξον, φυλάξαι* (which I take to be infinitive active

¹ P. 241. Compare a similar expression of opinion in Burkitt's *Church and Gnosis*, pp. 35 f.

² Pp. 5-7, 43 above.

as a command, rather than imperative middle). Much more rarely one finds the nouns *φύλαξ*, *σωματοφύλαξ*.³ Many inscriptions of this kind have been collected by Drexler,⁴ and they are connected with various designs, among which the type of Sarapis is most common, as is natural considering the popularity of that deity; but the legend is also found with the cock-headed demon, the four-winged pantheos, and other types. A small green glass paste in Mr. Seyrig's collection has a rude representation of a frog on one side, *φυλαξαι* on the other.⁵ The formula *φύλαξον ἀπὸ κακοῦ* or *φύλαξον ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ* is also found occasionally.⁶

Although there is no verb of asking, a prayer for general protection is often implicit in the very common *εἰς θεός* inscriptions and in such phrases as *νικᾷ ἡ Ἴσις*, "Isis conquers." This point is well illustrated by the very numerous bronze pendants, mainly of Syrian origin, which bear on the obverse a figure of the Rider Saint and the legend *εἰς θεός ὁ νικῶν τὰ κακά*, "One God who overcomes evil," while the reverse often shows a design intended to avert the evil eye.

The inscription *βοήθει* differs little in effect from *φύλαξον*. The verb originally denoted going to the aid of somebody in danger, and it never lost the suggestion of help against an enemy. It is comparatively rare on the earlier amulets, though common in the late Syrian pendants and in Christian inscriptions. The verb *παραστάθητι*, "stand by," "defend," occurs in a similar sense on a gem of the British Museum; the obverse shows the chariots of the sun and the moon, the reverse has *Ἰαῶ Σαβαωθ Αβρασαξ ὁ ὦν κ(ύριε) παραστάθητι*.⁷ A similar imperative is probably to be restored on a sard of the same collection, published by Walters.⁸ The latter part of its inscription, which the editor abandoned as unintelligible, was probably meant for *τῷ Ἰωσηφ' συνπαραστάθητι*, the dative being construed with the preceding words *δός μοι χάριν*, which are not in doubt. The inscription is treated more fully in Chapter XIII, p. 180.⁹

Another phrase praying for positive benefit of a general character is illustrated by a relief inscription of the British Museum, *εἰ(ς) Ζεὺς Σάραπισ ἔλεως τῷ φοροῦντι*; there is no accompanying design.¹⁰ A remarkable object belonging to the Austrian imperial cabinet is a piece of emerald matrix which has on the obverse, carved in relief, a figure of the infant Harpocrates, without attributes but recognizable by the traditional gesture — the finger in his

³ A brown-red jasper in the Newell collection (D. 268) has *φύλαξ* inscribed on a tabula ansata; the reverse side has the word *αβρασαξ*. For *σωματοφύλαξ*, inscribed in the field of a green jasper showing Anubis, see De Ridder 3475.

⁴ *Woch. Klass. Phil.*, 1886, pp. 1240 ff.

⁵ D. 370. For the frog as a symbol of fertility and of resurrection see F. X. Kraus, article "Frosch" in *Realencykl. d. christl. Alterthümer*, I, 544 f.

⁶ B. M. 56010 and 56011. On both gems, which are very much alike, there is a representation of the pantheos.

⁷ 56147. Illustration in King, *Gnostics*, Pl. J 1.

⁸ *B. M. Cat. Gems*, 2702.

⁹ Compare the use of *συνπαραστάτει* in the invocation to Demeter, *Ar. Ran.* 385.

¹⁰ 56523. The stone has *ιαεως το φορουνται*. Such errors occur often and will not always be mentioned in these notes.

mouth.¹¹ The reverse bears an intaglio design, more Egyptian in style, representing the god seated on a lotus capsule, holding a whip over his left shoulder. Below is the inscription Μέγας Ὁρος Ἀπόλλων Ἄρποκράτης εὐίλατος τῷ φοροῦντι, "Great Horus Apollo Harpocrates (be) propitious to the wearer." The object is evidently a trinket of a kind which, as Pliny said, was fashionable in Rome, and the inscription, like some that we have already considered, is in itself little more than a posy, conveying a brief wish for the welfare of the wearer, like the numerous specimens with χαῖρε, viuas, valeas, etc. From these, however, the use of a divine type sets it apart, as does the addition of magical words on other stones.

Here belong also two amulets that have been mentioned before¹² and will be described in detail later — the closely similar rock crystals in the Boston Museum and the Newell collection, bearing the inscriptions, here given in normal spelling, Ἰλεως τῇ ἐμῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς τέκνοις, and Ἰλεως τῇ ἐμῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τῷ ἐμῷ βίῳ,¹³ "Be gracious to me and my children," "Be gracious to me and my property."

Another prayer which seeks a benefit of a general nature is δὸς χάριν τῷ φοροῦντι, "Grant favor to the wearer." In this simple form it is found on the bevel of a jasper amulet in my collection (D. 206) which shows on the obverse Harpocrates seated on a small raft — not the more common lotus flower — surrounded by triads of adoring animals; the reverse has the formula χαβραχ φνεσχηρ φιχρο φνυρω φωχω βωχ, which, as I have shown elsewhere, is the "sacred name" whose value, according to the Greek alphabetic-numerical system, is 9999.¹⁴ On another interesting but unfortunately damaged stone, also in my possession (D. 355), δὸς χάριν τῷ φοροῦντι is a certain restoration. Here also it occurs in connection with Harpocrates, in this instance seated on a lotus. It is a reverse design; the obverse is an elaborate type which will be examined later. Instead of the phrase "to the bearer" the name of the owner is cut in an inscription on a Cassel gem belonging to the same general type as the two just described. The obverse is Harpocrates on the lotus with a worshiping baboon facing him, and the acclamation εἰς Ζεὺς Σάραπισ in the field; the reverse has a confused version of the χαβραχ formula followed by two common magical words, βαινχωωωχ and αβρασαξ, and the brief petition δὸς χάριν Ἀλεξανδρ[. The omission of the last letter leaves the sex of the owner in doubt.¹⁵

In such charms the meaning of χάρις will vary according to the circumstances of the petitioner, but "favor" and "success" are in general the most suitable words, particularly when the user of the charm is a man who desires to stand well in business relations and be kindly treated by his superiors in station.¹⁶ The scope of the petition is broadened in an inscription published

¹¹ Eckhel, *Choix des pierres gravées du Cabinet Impérial*, Pl. 30. In connection with the form of the inscription the editor cites one reported by Spon, *Miscellanea*, p. 297, εὐτύχι πανοικί ὁ φορῶν.

¹² P. 19 above.

¹³ D. 234, 235.

¹⁴ *JEA* 16 (1930), 6-9.

¹⁵ Kopp, *Palaeographia Critica*, IV, 266.

¹⁶ For a good discussion of the meaning of χάρις in magical texts see Nock's note in Bell, Nock, and Thompson, *Magical Texts from a Bilingual Papyrus*, pp. 259-261.

by Raspe; *δῶται* (i. *δότε*) *χάριν τοῖς φοροῦσι πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους* is cut round the edge of a reverse type representing a serpent-headed demon; the obverse represents Harpocrates on the lotus attended by an adoring baboon and a serpent-headed god like the one on the reverse.¹⁷ On the other hand, the scope is narrowed to one person in an important heliotrope of the British Museum, which is virtually a love charm.¹⁸ The obverse shows Harpocrates seated on a lotus in a papyrus boat, and playing on a flute. The reverse has a ring of characters, and inside that, cut in a spiral, the words *δὸς χάριν Θεανούτι πρὸς Σεραπάμμωνα*. Different from the charms aimed at a single desired lover are several which were evidently worn by women who received many lovers; in such cases *χάρις* is "charm" as well as "favor." Thus we find on another amulet in the same collection a long palindrome (the formula beginning *Ιαεοβαφρηνεμουη*) followed by the words *δῶται χάριν Ἑρωνίλλα πρὸς πάντας*; the obverse type is the pantheos holding a lion and a scorpion and standing on a cartouche which encloses indistinct representations of several animals.¹⁹ With this we may compare the petition *δὸς μοι χάριν Διονυσίατι κύριε θεῆ ἤδη πρὸς πάντες* (for *πάντας*) on a gem in the Ashmolean Museum (D. 7). The god invoked would seem to be Osiris, since the obverse type is the mummy of that deity lying in a boat supported by Anubis. But before the petition just cited there are several well-known magical formulas, one of which, *βριντατηνωφρι*, Perdrizet has connected with Chnum (Chnou-bis).²⁰ A hetaira who looked to the coming years with some forebodings may have ordered the inscription (Southesk coll. N 51) *συντήρησόν με ἀγήρατον κεχαριτωμένην*, "Keep me ever young and charming" (preceded by two *voces magicæ*). The divine type in this case is Helios or, as the editor thought, Horus as Helios.

The frequent, though not regular, occurrence of Horus-Harpocrates with these *δὸς χάριν* charms is probably significant; it will be remembered that stelae of Horus give us the pantheos type, which appears once as one of the exceptions, and that an identification of Helios with Horus may account for another. The youthful god, who is assimilated to Eros, is a natural patron for such prayers.

In addition to *χάρις*, "favor," a petitioner prays for *νίκη*, "victory," in two other inscriptions which are so closely similar, even to errors and the arrangement of letters in the lines, that they might have come from the same workshop. The obverse types, however, are different; in one example re-

¹⁷ R. E. Raspe, *Descriptive Catalogue of a Collection of Ancient Gems Cast by James Tassie* (London, 1791), No. 354, Pl. 8.

¹⁸ B. M. 56283. Formerly in the collection of Feuardent. In his *Mélanges d'épigraphie et d'archéologie*, pp. 6-7, W. Froehner wrongly read *θεῆ Νοῦτι* (vocative). But the ancient goddess Nut is not likely to have been invoked in such a charm and, on the other hand, *Θεανούς*, as the papyri show, was a common name in Egypt; see Preisigke, *Namenbuch*, s.v.

¹⁹ B. M. 56012. The name has been read *Ἑρωνίμα* by others who have referred to the gem, but, I think, wrongly; further, *Ἑρωνίμα* is a doubtful formation, while *Ἑρωνίλλα* has a parallel in *Ἀμωνίλλα* (Preisigke, *Namenbuch*, s.v.). Cf. also *Ἑρωνίνος*, where a Latin formative element has been added to a non-Latin name.

²⁰ *Mélanges Maspero*, II, 137-144.

ported by that very poor witness Capello,²¹ it is the cock-headed demon with snake legs; in the other, in the Correr collection, it is the lion-headed serpent, Chnoubis.²² The very corrupt text is probably a garbled version of *δός μοι χάριν νίκην ὅτι εἶρηκά σου τὸ κρυπτόν καὶ ἀληθινόν (?) ὄνομα ἤδη ἤδη ταχύ*, followed by some completely unintelligible letters. The Capello gem had on the bevel the name 'Αλεξάνδρα, apparently preceded by a Roman gentile name, perhaps [Οὐ]βία. A less amiable aspect of the prayer for victory is presented by a jasper published by Vincent from the Clark collection in Jerusalem: *βορβοροντοκομβα Ιαω δός ἐμοὶ Ἀπολλωνίω τὸ νεῖκος κατὰ πάσης ψυχῆς τῆς ἀντιπασχούσης μοι*, where *νεῖκος* (*νῖκος*) is a late Koine form used for *νίκη*; the obverse type, an eagle, has no special meaning here.²³

A carnelian of more than ordinary interest was sent me for examination some fifteen years ago by a private owner with whom I have since lost touch (D. 192). The obverse shows Harpocrates seated on a lotus flower in the usual attitude and with the ordinary attributes of disk, flail whip, and, in the field, star and crescent. In addition, at the lower left, opposite the base of the lotus, there is a head of the moon-goddess with a crescent over her forehead. There must have been on the other side a bust of the sun-god, now destroyed by a flaking of the stone. On the reverse is the inscription *σαλαμαξα δός χάριν πόρον ἐπιτυχίαν ἰωη*. I know of no other occurrence of *πόρος*, "means," and *ἐπιτυχία*, "success," in such petitions. Salamaxa may be a magical name of Harpocrates; but it occurs also on a stone in my possession which represents Min (formerly Wyndham Cook 249, where it is wrongly described). There may have been a tendency to merge the ancient Min in Horus; but Salamaxa may be merely a "word of power."

A considerable number of amulets bear in the field of the obverse, or, much more commonly, on the reverse, the words *ἡ χάρις*, which would seem to be another form of the prayer for favor; certainly the nominative case cannot be used as an argument against that interpretation, for we find *δύναμις* on a stone in the British Museum, and *τύχη* on one in the Michigan collection; in both cases the type contains a figure of Anubis.²⁴ But the use of the definite article before *χάρις* suggests that this inscription stands on a different footing from the formula *δός χάριν*, with its variations; and it is at least probable that a religious concept is present, a hypostatized Charis, which enters into the Gnostic mythology. For this reason this particular inscription will be discussed in connection with religious elements and ideas.

Besides the circumstance that the benefit sought is general, several of these inscriptions have another feature in common, namely, that while a blessing is asked "for the bearer," he is not named. Obviously the more general the possible uses of an amulet, the more readily could it be sold to any pur-

²¹ Capello, *Prodromus Iconicus*, No. 14.

²² V. Lazari, *Notizie delle opere d'arte . . . della Raccolta Correr* (Venezia, 1859), 126, 571.

²³ *Rev. biblique*, N. S. 5 (1908), 412 ff. For a magical word resembling that at the beginning of this formula, and a possible explanation of it, see my note in *Byz.-neugriech. Jahrb.*, 9 (1932), 376 f.

²⁴ B. M. 56038, reverse; obverse, Anubis holding up mummy of Osiris. On the Michigan specimen (D. 37), *τύχη* is inscribed in the field of the obverse, which shows Anubis with situla and *was* scepter.

chaser. Amulets intended to operate against a special ill would be in demand according to the prevalence of fear that the ill might come the way of the buyer; and those that mention the name of the wearer were, of course, inscribed on special order, just as a piece of jewelry may now be marked with the name or initials of the person for whom it is intended. Not only the inscription but the design also might be a special commission if it represented a deity particularly worshiped by the person bespeaking it, or if it was desired to conform to directions laid down by a master of magic, like the prescriptions for magical stones found here and there in the papyri. But the vast majority of amulets — though, as previously noted, the least interesting — were meant to be as good for one wearer as another, and it goes without saying that this kind was the most profitable to the dealer. Thus it comes about that several common types exist in hundreds of specimens, and that many inscriptions are known in several identical or only slightly differing examples. Wholesale production of cheap amulets is indicated by an interesting object in the collection of Mr. Seyrig (D. 328). It is a piece of steatite which formed one side of a mould intended for casting small amulets of lead, two at a time. I cannot date the lettering accurately, but it is certainly Byzantine, perhaps of the fifth or sixth century. The side preserved was inscribed with the first words of the ninety-first Psalm, which was in very common use as an apotropaic text, appearing on scores of Syrian bronze pendants and medals. A lead pendant produced from a smaller and much simpler mould is in the University of Michigan collection; it bears only the names Ρεφαηλ and Σαβαω.²⁶

An inscription read by Zoega on a rock crystal of the Borgia collection presents a curious problem.²⁶ There is no design, and the inscription, which is carved on both faces of the stone, consists mainly of the seven vowels variously combined, a few "characters," and a few syllables that make no sense; but the inscription on the obverse ends thus: ΦΤΛΑΖΟΝ|ΤΟΝ ΑΕΙΝΑ ΤΟΝ ΦΟΡΟΥΝΤ|ΤΟ ΦΤΛΑΚΤΗΡΙΟΝ|ΤΤ ΤΟ ΑΦΑΡΤΗ. This should probably be read φύλαξον τὸν δείνα τὸν φοροῦντ(α) τὸ φυλακτήριον τ(οῦ)τ(ο) τὸ ἀπάρτι, though it might be hard to parallel the abbreviation for τοῦτο. For the τὸ before ἀπάρτι we may compare τὸ νῦν. ἀφάρτη is a credible misspelling of ἀπάρτι; that word occurs in the New Testament meaning "henceforth" or "just now." It seems in this place to be a substitute for ἤδη ἤδη ταχύ ταχύ, so common in papyrus spells. Now φύλαξον τὸν δείνα might stand in the gem cutter's copybook, and he would be expected to substitute an actual name if the customer desired it; φύλαξον τὸν φοροῦντα κτλ. would be the proper copy if the stone were to be offered for sale to any "bearer." It is odd to find τὸν δείνα actually cut along with the other formula. Either the engraver wrongly combined the two or the wearer was supposed to say the charm to himself, substituting his own name for τὸν δείνα.²⁷ Since many of these charms are like short prayers, it may be that the owner was expected to say them over at his pleasure.

²⁶ D. 342.

²⁶ Museo Borgiano, 481, 9.

²⁷ Cf. Plato *Phaedo* 77 c and Burnet's note.