

Apotropaia and Phylakteria



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Confronting Evil in Ancient Greece

edited by

Maria G. Spathi, Maria Chidioglou
and Jenny Wallensten

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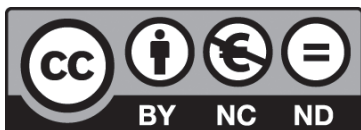
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Preface

The present volume is the outcome of the Conference *Apotropaia and Phylakteria. Confronting Evil in Ancient Greece* held in Athens in June 2021 and hosted by the Swedish Institute at Athens. The conference and the edited volume were funded by the Åke Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, the Åke Wiberg and Magnus Bergvall Foundations. Since it was held during the Covid pandemic, it was a hybrid event: a challenge for both organisers and participants.

Almost all the articles in the volume originated as papers given at the conference, with the exception of the one by D. Paleothodoros and Ch. Karagiannopoulos. Each paper was reviewed by two anonymous peer reviewers.

The idea of holding a conference related not only to the objects but also the rituals and practices applied to ensure the individual and collective protection and prevention against any kind of evil, was born from the clear need for their further investigation, mainly here in the area defined by the modern Greek territory. One might expect that the project would be linked to the editors' engagement with the subject, in fact it was more our 'ignorance' and the need to learn more that encouraged us to hold the conference. This necessity arose from the realization of the influence such items and practices exercised over all aspects of the private and public life of the ancient Greeks. And of course, our desire to present new material from recent excavations was a strong motivating factor, as archaeologists in the field constantly feel. Indeed, the present volume proves once again how important the archaeological context is for the interpretation of all kinds of material, rituals and practices.

The volume addresses the *apotropaia* and *phylakteria* from different perspectives: via literary sources, archaeological material, and iconography. It sets out to cross disciplinary boundaries. As fittingly stated by Ch. Faraone, the title of the volume refers to every object, literary text or any kind of representation that aims to protect, heal or even help fulfill a wish. The chronological period covered in the contributions generally spans from the early Archaic to Late Roman period. The volume cannot be organized strictly chronologically or geographically, but an effort is made to organize it thematically, following a rather loose chronological sequence.

Each contribution is a separate chapter with footnotes and bibliography. The transliteration of Greek words such as names and places is always a complicated matter and complete coherence is not possible. Therefore, the authors have chosen their own preferences.

The first piece by Ch. Faraone serves as a general introduction to this volume. V. Kousoulini refers to the literary evidence of women performing *apotropaia* songs in ancient Greek tragedy; M. Giannopoulou to literary evidence on practices and rituals of apotropaic and prophylactic character from Troizen and Methana. O. Pilz examines the textual sources on competition and envy among craftspeople, as well as the iconographic evidence on the use of apotropaic devices in ceramic production, taking into account the social system that fostered such a behavior.

Apart from the above papers on literary sources, it is the material evidence, i.e. the archaeological finds, that are mostly represented in this volume. And of course we could not omit the terracotta figurines, which represent a group of finds that mainly characterizes sacred contexts. When they come from known archaeological contexts too, they offer valuable information on the character and attributes of the worshiped deities.

A. Touchais investigates early Archaic female figurines from sacred contexts in Argos. M. Chidioglou discusses terracotta figurines of various types in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens with a possible prophylactic or apotropaic character. E. Peppa Papaioannou scrutinizes a group of terracotta figurines of the Hellenistic period that has been intrigued scholars for many decades and still remains open, namely the interpretation of the figurines displaying deformed features.

M. Spathi writes on the meaning and use of clay gorgoneion roundels found in sacred contexts, amongst which is a foundation deposit in ancient Messene. D. Koletti surveys a number of inscribed sherds found in Piraeus of a probable magic-related character.

E. Lambropoulou re-examines reliefs from Messene with the representation of an open hand from the Late Hellenistic and Roman periods, while E. Pavlidis and A. Giovanopoulou describe a Roman bas-relief from Actia Nicopolis with the depiction of a legged double-phallus with an apotropaic Latin inscription. V. Garaffa deals with

the apotropaic devices and practices, mainly in the form of niches, employed for the defence by sacred means of city walls and gates in Sicily and Magna Graecia.

After the reference to literary sources, practices in the form of inscriptions and niches, as well as those larger archaeological finds like terracotta figurines, clay roundels, and stone reliefs, there follow those smaller objects that belong to the broader category of amulets.

S. Klinger pronounces on some different objects with an amuletic function from the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Corinth, as does A. Avramidou from the sanctuary of Parthenos at ancient Neapolis. D. Grigoropoulos focuses on the use and symbolic significance of bells during the Roman period. D. Paleothodoros and Ch. Karagiannopoulos present an Etruscan Archaic ring with the depiction of a scorpion found in a pit inside a house in Philia, Thessaly. C. Kallintzi and K. Chatziprokopiou offer different kinds of jewelry from Abdera with an amuletic function, dated from the 7th century BC to the early Roman period.

The final set of contributions concern engraved stones, the so-called magical gems, dated mainly to the Graeco-Roman period. Their study has been widely developed in recent years based on the literary sources as much as on the actual gems, most of which come from collections around the world. B. Takács, based on the descriptions of the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri, recognizes an amulet type used to protect the ritual practitioner and the other participants from the divine agency invoked. D. Barcat studies a small set of gems to decipher the way Greek mythological figures were perceived in the cultural context of Egypt. A. Maravela reviews the verbal process of banishment (as well as a gemstone) used to protect someone when they encounter Empousa. E. Tsatsou presents a gem that has come to light in the Roman cemetery of Pella in Central Macedonia and depicts the serpent deity Chnoubis. P. Vitellozi discusses a magical gem from the Museum in Perugia, that can be recognized as a phylactery against a demon.

As can be seen from the above contributions in the volume, the identification as well as the interpretation of the rituals and practices associated with acts of prevention and deterrence is anything but simple. It requires an inclusive consideration of the results of the excavations, of the sources and even of the historical/social conditions from which they emerged.

It is our hope that this volume will bring this large and complicated topic to the attention of a wider range of scholars and so inspire new conferences and publications.

We warmly thank all the participants and colleagues who contributed to the publication of the volume, as well as the staff of the Swedish Institute and the Swedish foundations for their generous support.

M. Spathi

Confronting Evil at the Boundaries of the City, the House, and the Human Body

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Abstract

This chapter, which serves as a general introduction to this volume about protective amulets, defines an “amulet” as any object, text or image attached to a human or animal body, to a house or city or in fact to any valuable human possession that aims at one of three goals: (i) protection; (ii) healing; or (iii) the acquisition of some abstract goal, such as victory or erotic charm. *Phylakteria*, a word derived from the verb *phulassein*, “to protect”, are amulets that protect and *apotropaia*, a word derived from the verb *apotrepein*, “to turn away”, are a subset of *phylakteria*, that protect by turning evil aside or away. Since *apotropaia* are mainly found at entrances, they are the primary focus of this chapter.

According to a later Roman source, the philosopher Diogenes was unhappy, when he saw two iambic verses inscribed on the house of some newlyweds in the northern Greek city of Cyzicus:²

‘The son of Zeus, resplendent-in-victory (Kallinikos), Heracles lives here. Let no evil enter!’ And when he saw this couplet a second time, written on a different house, he became annoyed and asked a bystander:

Why, if this practice profits you, do you not inscribe the same text on the doors of the city, but rather on your houses, into which Heracles is unable to go? Is it because you are willing to let the city suffer evilly, but not your individual households?

The philosopher’s critique seems to have been two-fold. First, there was the logistical problem that Heracles, because of his great size, would be ‘unable’ to fit inside of a Greek house, and second was the philosophical complaint—wouldn’t it make more sense to put a single copy of these same verses at the gates of the city and thereby protect all of the people of Cyzicus? The bystander admits he is unable to answer and, when Diogenes asks him what kind of evil did these people imagine Heracles to ward off, he responds, ‘disease, poverty and death, these sorts of things.’

The inscribed iambic verses that allegedly provoked the philosopher’s questions have been discovered, in fact, throughout the Roman Empire in both Greek and Latin, inscribed or painted, on the walls of houses and shops.³ Because all of the extant examples were at first dated to

the Imperial Period, scholars for a long time assumed that this protective inscription was a later invention and that the story about Diogenes was entirely apocryphal.⁴ But in the 1960s archaeologists excavating a residential quarter of the Hellenistic city of Gela in Sicily discovered a small terracotta disk that had on its obverse a gorgoneion and on the reverse a shorter trochaic variant of the same inscription that caught Diogenes’ attention:⁵ “Heracles lives here, let no evil enter!” This terracotta disk, then, effectively combined two different devices — the gorgoneion and the poetic verses — into a single amulet. And when another, even earlier version came to light near a doorway on Thasos, it became clear that the anecdotes about Diogenes in the 4th century BC did indeed have some kernel of truth and that this practice was fairly widespread in the Greek world.⁶

These inscriptions also reveal how the Greeks conceptualized evil and the steps they took to confront it. According to the anecdote from Cyzicus, the Greeks thought that evils like death, poverty, and disease could enter the house and that they presumably did so by the doorways where we most often find these inscriptions. That they were thought to come into the house on their own two feet is also suggested by the iconographic traditions of depicting death and poverty, at least, in anthropomorphic form, most famously perhaps in the vase painting of Thanatos and Hypnos carrying away the body of Sarpedon, but even on the Athenian stage, where at the start of his *Alcestitis*, Euripides dresses Thanatos in a black robe, arms him with a sword and has him enter the front door to the heroine’s palace when she is about to die. It is also no accident that near the end of the play it is Heracles himself who physically

¹ Nearly all of the material in this introduction comes from Faraone 1992 or 2018, to which I direct those who desire further discussion or bibliography.

² Diogenes Laertius 6.50. See Weinreich 1915: 8-10 for texts, date and commentary. For more recent bibliography, see Faraone (2003e) and Zellmann-Rohrer (2015: 13-14) who also discusses the later Christian use of the formula.

³ For more examples, see Faraone 2018.

⁴ See, e.g., Weinreich 1915 or Robert 1965.

⁵ This inscription is a single trochaic tetrameter catalectic, whereas the other more popular version, is comprised of two iambic trimeters; see Faraone 2009 for full discussion.

⁶ Bernard and Salviat 1962: 608-609 no. 23.

stops Thanatos when he returns to the stage and tries to take Alcestis away with him. In what follows, therefore, I examine more fully the idea that the Greeks warded off evils at entrances by examining amulets placed at four different boundaries of diminishing dimensions: at the gates of their cities, at the doors of their homes, at the edges of their beds and finally on the throats or chests of their bodies. I begin at the furthest point out, at the city gate (and beyond), then discuss in turn each of these points of entry, ending with the innermost circle, namely the protective amulets that they hung on their bodies. As we will see, this final category raises an interesting problem: does it suggest a parallel between the house and the human body, between the door and the human throat, or was some other concept in play, one that imagines the body amulet as a shield that simply protects the owner from frontal attack?

Before we begin, however, let me define some of the key terms that appear in the title of this volume, that recur in this essay and that will appear in many of the chapters that follow. For me the most capacious term for the theme of this conference is ‘amulet,’ which refers to any object, text, or image attached to a human or animal body, to a house or city or in fact to any valuable human possession that aims at one of three goals: (i) protection; (ii) healing; or (iii) the acquisition of some abstract goal, such as victory or erotic charm. *Phulakteria*, a word derived from the verb *phulassein*, ‘to protect’, are amulets that protect and *apotropaia*, a word derived from the verb *apotrepein*, ‘to turn away,’ are a subset of *phulakteria*, that protect by turning evil aside or away. Since *apotropaia* are found mainly at entrances, they will be the primary focus of this essay.

The gates of the city and beyond

In his play *Wealth*, Aristophanes brings Hermes on stage as hungry god, who tries to get Cario, a slave of the homeowner, to give him some food. At one point he says, ‘By the gods, invite me as a fellow householder (ξύνοικον)!’ Cario responds by asking him: ‘Well, what’s in it for us, if you are here (ἐνθάδ’ ὄν)?’ and Hermes responds by saying ‘Install me (ἰδρύσασθέ με) as Strophaios.’ A scholiast on the passage tells us that the word *Strophaios* was ‘an eponym of Hermes because of his being placed beside the doors in protection against other thieves.’ This is a reference, of course, to the household herm, an amulet that is discussed in the next section, but for now let us notice the language that Aristophanes uses to describe the relationship that the newly installed Hermes will have with the household: Hermes Strophaios is imagined as a fellow ‘inhabitant’ (ξύνοικος) who is ‘here’ (ἐνθάδ’), just as Heracles Kallinikos is imagined to ‘live here’ (ἐνθάδε κατοικεῖ).

The scholiast then goes on to say that ‘in order to avoid mischief and evil in the house, in the cities and

in the fields, even those unaffected by war, they (i.e. the Athenians) set up a statue of Ares in the fields, of Athena in the gates of the city and of Hermes, as we have said, at the doors of buildings.’⁷ Here, then, we are given a nice wide-angle view of various points of protection against evils: two statues are to be placed at domestic and civic entrances, and a third ‘in the fields.’ With regard to this outermost circle, we do have some evidence from the Roman period and much later that the Greeks did place bound images of Ares on or near their territorial boundaries in order to ward off attacks by the Thracians and Gauls.⁸ But beyond that there are few signs that the Greeks were concerned with protecting the territory that lay beyond their city walls or that they used images of Ares as protective amulets, although it would make sense to use such a frightening military god like Ares to this effect.

It is also possible that the scholiast is referring to amulets designed to protect agricultural fields. The late fifth-century poet and healer Empedocles seems, in fact, to have used such devices to ward off some kind of blight from the crops of Acragas:⁹

For, when the Etesian Winds were once blowing violently enough to blight the crops, he (sc. Empedocles) commanded that asses be flayed and bags (*askoi*) be made (i.e. from the skins) and he distended them along the hills and ridges in order to capture the *pneuma* (i.e. of the winds). And after it ceased, he was called ‘He who prevents the winds.’

The procedure that Empedocles deploys in this anecdote is not at all clear. Commentators over the years, relying on an outdated understanding of Empedocles as an early scientist, have suggested a kind of massive engineering project that involved stretching an untold number of donkey-skins as a physical barrier to prevent the winds from reaching the crops.¹⁰ But the passage does say quite clearly that the ass-skins were each fashioned into *askoi*, a kind of sack commonly used

⁷ Scholion to Aristophanes’ *Plutus* 1153; see Faraone 1992: 9–11 for full discussion. Ares is a puzzle here. If it were a bound statue of the god, it might make some sense as an amulet against military invasion — see the next note — but the scholiast specifically says that the statue will protect even those fields ‘unaffected by war.’

⁸ Faraone 1991.

⁹ Timaeus *FHG* 1.215–16 apud D.L. 8.60; the discussion in the paragraph below is drawn from Faraone 2021: 207–10.

¹⁰ E.g., Wright (1981: 261), who stated, ‘[the wind] is checked by stretching asses’ skins along hill (or cliff) tops,’ which is also an ancient understanding of the passage, as exemplified by a passing comment of Plutarch’s (*Moralia* 515c): ‘And Empedocles, the natural philosopher (φυσικός), by blocking up a certain mountain gorge, which permitted the south wind to blow a dire and pestilential draught down upon the plains, was thought to have shut plague out of his country.’ Timaios, however, writing about a half a millennium earlier and presumably using Sicilian sources, says the wind was causing damage to crops, not plague. Cook (1940: 105 n. 2) notes the tendency of Plutarch and other Second Sophistic authors ‘to minimize the marvelous’ with respect to Empedocles.

as a wine-skin; we are never told that these sacks were then stitched together as a continuous barrier or wall. In a recent study I have revived the idea of A.B. Cook, published more than a century ago, that Empedocles had created amulets of sort that were thought to bind the winds metonymically in sacks, precisely the way that Aeolus is said to control the winds in the *Odyssey*.¹¹

Eustathius, while commenting on Aeolus' activities in the poem, actually reports that Greek farmers, like Empedocles worried about their crops, also bound destructive winds in effigy in a 'consecrated sack' (*askos tetelesmenos*) that in this case was made from the skin of a dolphin.¹² The Greek agricultural handbook called the *Geoponica* tells us about another method, one that uses a powerful image of Heracles:¹³

If you wish that this plant (= 'lion-pulse') in no way appears (sc. in your fields), take five pots herds and draw on them in chalk or in another kind of white (a picture of) Heracles strangling the lion. Place these in the four corners (of the field) and in the middle.

Commentators presume that 'lion-pulse' was an invasive weed whose leaves resembled the mane of a lion and that it is by persuasive analogy that the famous image of Heracles strangling the Nemean lion will likewise strangle the lion-pulse, thereby preventing it from invading the field. We should note that Heracles here is not invoked in prayer to protect the field: the presence of his image is all that is needed.

Regarding the second line of defence suggested by the scholiast — an image of Athena at the gates of the city — here, too, little supporting archeological evidence exists for images of Athena set up at the gates of a city, although it would not be surprising, given the fact that the image of her known as the Palladion was believed to have protected many cities, most famously that of Troy, which could not be conquered as long as the statue remained in the city. To my knowledge, we have no evidence of *palladia* being placed at gateways, but because Athena was worshipped widely as a goddess who protected cities, the scholiast may, indeed, have had some reliable information about an otherwise unknown use of her images as gateway amulets.

The earliest attested civic apotropaia were not, in fact, images of gods, but rather frontal depictions of human body parts, especially eyes and faces.¹⁴ In the

6th century BC, someone carved a pair of frontal eyes on the city wall of Thasos, an image called a 'panther mask' by art historians because of the cat-like aspect of the eyes. The position of this panther mask on an exterior wall of the city near an important city gate is indeed precisely where one would expect to find such an apotropaic image. Its large size, moreover — roughly two and a half metres wide — shows us that it was not a casual graffito, but rather a civic enterprise. The image also appears occasionally on the outer surface of military shields. Eyes also appear as a common apotropaic device on ships. Recent discoveries of underwater archaeology have revealed that the irises of these eyes were sometimes painted with concentric circles, much like the frontal eyes of the Gorgon's head.

A frontal face was also used as a protective amulet to ward off the plague. In Hellenistic times, we hear how a 'wonderworker' named Laios successfully protected the city of Antioch by commanding the city to carve a giant face of Charon into the side of the mountain that overlooks the city. After Laios inscribed some special words on this face 'for the salvation of the city,' the plague came to an end.¹⁵ This amulet, therefore, had two parts: an image of a frontal face and an incantatory text inscribed alongside it, much like the terracotta disk from Gela, which combined the gorgoneion and the boast about the presence of Heracles Kallinikos in the house. The face carved high above Antioch was in fact called the *charônion* or, in later Greek, *charôneion* (formed like *gorgoneion*).¹⁶ It represented either the face of Charon (the ferryman of Hades), or a death-demon named Charos whom vase painters depicted, like the Gorgon's head, with a frontal face with glaring eyes emphasized with added red paint.¹⁷ Here the aim was probably to repel or avert death from the city by the process of like banning like.¹⁸ Parts of this monumental carving survive and, although archaeologists originally dated them to the Roman period, the most recent excavators assign them firmly to the Hellenistic.

Another rich source of information about protective amulets for cities comes from Roman Anatolia: inscribed oracles and statue bases that allow us to identify plague amulets in the form of statues of Apollo aiming his bow outwards from various city-thresholds.¹⁹ These oracles

¹¹ Faraone 2019a.

¹² Eustathius 1646.8-11, quoted by Cook 1940: 107 along with Eust. 1645.59-60 and the scholiast ad Od. 10.2, who seems to refer to written recipes.

¹³ *Geoponica* 2.42.2. For an apotropaic toad in a pot buried in the centre of a field, see Pliny *NH* 18.158 (protecting millet from disease) and 294 (protecting grain from storms).

¹⁴ Faraone (2018: 68-70) provides a full discussion (with bibliography) of the material discussed in this paragraph and the next.

¹⁵ Malalas 205.8-13; cf. J. Tzetzes *Chil.* 2.59.920-24.

¹⁶ Earlier archaeologists dated the mask to the Roman period, but subsequent excavation places it squarely in the Hellenistic period and connects it with the monument created by Laios; see Downey 1961: 103-104.

¹⁷ The Antioch mask does survive intact, although its present battered condition makes it impossible to identify any distinguishing features that might mark it out as a dangerous or death-dealing divinity, for example, the glaring or extraordinary eyes associated with Greek names, ancient and modern, containing the stem *char-*. The carved image at Antioch is called a *charônion*, an adjectival form that can simply mean 'the one who glares.'

¹⁸ Weinreich 1909: 152.

¹⁹ Faraone (1992: 57-60) has a full discussion (with bibliography) of

emanated from Apollo's sanctuary at Claros during the devastating Antonine plague of the late 160s AD. One oracle, for example, directed the people of Callipolis to 'set up before the gate Phoebus bearing his bow, who is the driver away of the epidemic,' and another for Hierapolis gave similar advice: 'Around all your city-gates install precincts for a holy statue of Clarian Apollo equipped with his bow, which destroys diseases, as though he were shooting at the unfertile plague from afar with his arrows.'²⁰ These images, of course, also worked by the process of like-banning-like, because Apollo was the pre-eminent plague god in Anatolia, as is most famously described in the first book of the *Iliad*.²¹ I should note, however, that although this oracle refers to the 'installation' of the gateway statues, the sacrifices that the oracle goes on to prescribe are not to Apollo, but to the Earth and to other chthonic gods, presumably to ensure that the foundation of the statues will be secure. In short, Apollo is not to be worshipped at the city gate, and these images are not cult statues but rather *apotropaia* designed to frighten away the plague, once again according to the idea that like bans like.

The doors of the house

Lucian, in his diatribe against *Alexander the False Prophet*, tells us that one of Alexander's oracles was used in similar fashion during this same plague, but to protect a house rather than a town or city; it consisted of a single hexametrical verse,²² 'Unshorn Phoebus keeps away the cloud of pestilence!' Lucian goes on to describe the power of this verse as follows:

This verse was to be seen everywhere written over doorways as a charm (ἀλεξιφάρμακον) against the plague; but in most cases it had the contrary result. By some chance it was especially the houses on which the verse was inscribed (αἷς τὸ ἔπος ἐπεγέγραπτο) that were depopulated.... [P]erhaps people neglected precautions ... on the grounds that they had the syllables (sc., of the verse) defending them (προμαχομένας αὐτῶν τὰς συλλαβὰς).

Scholars have suggested that despite its satirical tone, Lucian's account is probably accurate, because the same inscription seems to have been inscribed on a small circular statue base from Roman Antioch: ... (ν)εφέλην ἀπέλαυνε Α Ε Η Ι Ο Υ Ω. Perdrizet argued rightly that the presence of the seven vowels (a powerful protective

incantation in and of itself) pointed to the apotropaic power of the preceding letters, and also suggested that this inscribed base supported a statuette of Apollo, presumably with his bow drawn in the act of "driving away the cloud of plague."

House-amulets loom even larger in our sources. They often take the form of the same images or texts deployed at the city gates, as we have just seen in the case of Apollo the archer in Anatolia and earlier in the suggestion of Diogenes that the people of Cyzicus should move the verses of the Kallinikos inscription from their house doors to the entrance of their city. As it turns out, in addition to invoking Heracles as Kallinikos or as the killer of the Nemean lion, the Greeks placed an image of him as an infant at the entrances of private residences for protection. The best evidence comes from a Roman house near Antioch, whose owner once placed in the vestibule a mosaic of the all-suffering eye, presumably to protect his household from envy or the evil eye.²³ This evil-eye mosaic was, however, discovered lying squarely on top of a pair of earlier mosaics (Figure 1). In the left panel we see another kind of apotropaic image and text, a hunchbacked dwarf with a large phallus and behind him a depiction of a frontal eye being attacked from all sides. Both the all-suffering eye and ithyphallic grotesques were used widely in ancient Greece and Rome to ward off envy or danger.²⁴ In the right panel, however, we see a kneeling baby grasping a large snake in each hand. The child in the mosaic is not labeled, but many years ago Doro Levi suggested rightly that it was indeed Heracles and argued that its position in the vestibule, next to the apotropaic dwarf and the all-suffering eye, clearly showed that the scene of Heracles and the snakes must have also had some kind of protective purpose, presumably to protect the inhabitants against snakes.²⁵

As was mentioned earlier, a much more popular house-door amulet was the herm,²⁶ which combined — in a somewhat improbable and abstract manner — two of the most common apotropaic images in the Greek tradition: a frontal head and a phallus. Because examples carved in stone survive much more often, we are prone to think that the phalluses and testicles were usually depicted in relief, but some Attic vase paintings suggest that herms with projecting phalli could also be carved from wood on a smaller scale.²⁷ Regarding the herm,

the material discussed in this paragraph and the next.

²⁰ Faraone 1992: 62.

²¹ Coins and literary references suggest that in this same period similar statues of Apollo, some with the epithet Propylaios ("before the gate"), were placed at the entrances of another half-dozen Anatolian cities.

²² Lucian, *Alexander* 36. For Apollo the bowman as a threat in other hexametrical verses, see *PGM* XXIIa, which, as a cure for "bloody flux" directs us to recite to the blood a section of a Homeric verse (*Iliad* 1.75): "The wrath of Achilles far-darting lord."

²³ Levi 1941: 220-21.

²⁴ For ithyphallic or macrophallic grotesques, see Faraone 2018: Section 3.3.

²⁵ Levi 1941: 220-21.

²⁶ The following discussion of the herm is based on Faraone 2018: 132-36

²⁷ *LIMC* nos. 92-186 *passim*. Jameson (1990: 112 n. 21) questions the ubiquity of the stone herm with phallus carved in relief, which he would limit (because of the expense) to the richer families; he suggests the herm with protruding member that appears frequently on vase paintings was probably wooden, which would explain their disappearance from the archaeological record.

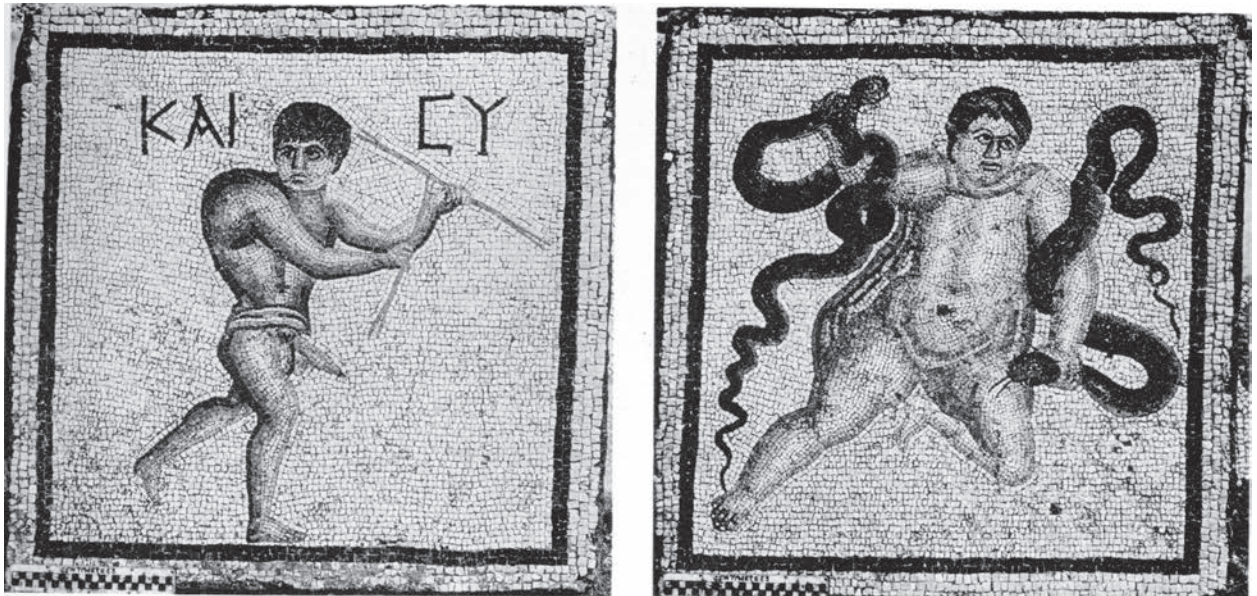


Figure 1. Pair of mosaics, including one of Heracles strangling the snakes. After Levi 1941: no. 120.

the scholiast to Aristophanes' *Wealth* (quoted above) said that *Strophaios* was an epithet of the Hermes who was placed beside the doors. Modern commentators suggest that this epithet refers to the position of the herm statue near the hinge of the house door and thus translate 'Hermes Strophaios' as 'Hermes at the door hinge.' This translation is certainly plausible, because the word *strophaiion* can mean the 'turning point' of a door. *Strophaios*, however, is a cognate of the verb *strephein*, 'to turn,' which has another meaning that modern commentators have missed: it can also mean 'to turn something away or aside from someone.' In other words, Hermes' epithet here may be rendered more accurately as the equivalent of *Apotropaios*, 'he who turns away (sc. thieves from the door).'

The verb *hidruein* that Hermes uses to describe his new position (ἰδρύσασθέ με) refers, as we saw in the oracles about the statues of Apollo in city gates, to the act of 'installing' an altar or a temple, an inference made clear by a passage in *Peace*, another play of Aristophanes, where after the statue of Peace has been rescued, the comic hero Trygaeus and his slave discuss what to do next: (*Peace* 923-25):

ΟΙΚΕΤΗΣ: ἄγε δῆ, τί νῶν ἐντευθενὶ ποιητέον;

ΤΡΥΓΑΙΟΣ: τί δ' ἄλλο ἢ ἡ ταύτην χύτραις ἰδρυτέον;

ΟΙΚΕΤΗΣ: χύτραισιν, ὥσπερ μεμφόμενον Ἐρμήδιον;

House Slave: Ok, what has to be done next?

Trygaeus: What else, but to install her (i.e. the statue) with clay pots

House Slave: With clay pots, like a contemptible little herm?

Here the scholiast explains that clay pots, probably filled with offerings, were deposited or perhaps buried as an inexpensive form of foundation ritual when a household herm was 'installed' for the first time.

The rectilinear form of the herm was thought to be the invention of the Athenian tyrant Hipparchus, who in the 6th century BC set up a series of inscribed herms as milestones, marking the halfway point between each of the demes and the Athenian Agora.²⁸ The discovery of stone herms at Rhamnous that predate Hipparchus' reign show, however, that when he erected his herm-milestones, he was simply adapting an older Athenian practice. And the fact that one of the Rhamnous herms is inscribed, 'Laches set me up as an overseer (*episkopos*) of the herds,' suggests that they were thought to protect the animals in the place where they were erected.²⁹ These earliest herms, then, seem to serve as protectors of domesticated animals, a designation that fits well with Hermes' important role in animal husbandry. If we return for a third time to the scholion to Aristophanes' *Wealth*, we note how it stressed how the herm was placed beside the door 'to protect the house against *other* thieves,' with the emphasis here on the word 'other' naturally alluding to Hermes' frequent role as a thief himself.

The herms of Rhamnous consequently encourage us to understand that images of Hermes, the accomplished cattle thief of the *Homeric Hymn*, were set up in Rhamnous as guardians of domestic animals, just as in the urban

²⁸ Older theories suggest that they were originally milestones and good luck charms for travellers or fertility symbols dear to passing farmers, and that when Hipparchus set up his famous herm-milestones with wise maxims carved on their sides, he was adapting this older, perhaps rural tradition.

²⁹ Parker 1996: 82 n. 61.

Like the herm, these images have a strange form, depicting Hecate as three maidens in the round who stand on a triangular base facing outwards while resting their backs collectively against a central column and holding a variety of implements associated with the goddess, especially torches and libation bowls, in their hands. By the end of the Hellenistic period, we find these triple images throughout the Mediterranean, including several Attic examples that seem to shed light on a reference in Aristophanes' *Wasps* to such statuettes 'everywhere in front of doorways.'³⁵ A scholiast explains that the image is placed there 'as an overseer (*ephoros*) of all things and as someone who nourishes children (*kourotrophos*),'³⁶ using in the first place a term similar to the title 'overseer' (*episkopos*) carved into one of the herms found at Rhamnous. The survival of two wooden Hecates of this type in Alexandria in Egypt suggests moreover that, like the household herm, these domestic figurines of the triple goddesses could have been carved from wood and were therefore much more popular than the archaeological record suggests.³⁷

The innermost sanctuary of the ancient Greek home – the bedroom where children were born – was the last line of defence in the architectural sense. For example, the 2nd-century BC writer Apollodorus of Athens apparently mentioned that the feet or extremities of Athenian beds were crafted in the form of miniature herms that were designed to keep away nightmares.³⁸ And another, rather striking example of a room amulet is a terracotta perfume jar (Figure 4), which was molded in the shape of a phallus, topped with the head of Priapus or Silenus and inscribed with the word *Sosioikos* ('Saviour of the house'), an epithet attested elsewhere for the god Hermes.³⁹ The jar preserves the two most important features of the rectilinear herm: a frontal face and an erect phallus. Another example from Corinth was used to ban the harmful effects of *invidia* or the evil eye: it shows the frontal figure of Envy (*Phthonos*) strangling himself, an image that appears quite frequently on small gold foil images worn on



Figure 4. Terracotta phallic vase with the frontal satyr face. CVA Cracow, Musée Czartoryski [Poland 2], pl. 14, inv. 1239.

necklaces. In both cases we may presume that these phallic jars, when hung up in a private room, served a twofold purpose: as a container for valuable perfume and as an image to ward off evil.

Protecting human bodies

Regarding amulets, the innermost circle of defense was not, of course, the bedroom or the bed, but the individual human body. Here, once again, we see considerable overlap between amulets used to protect houses and those used to protect human bodies. It turns out, for example, that the image of Heracles strangling the Nemean lion used in the fields to deter 'lion's grass' was also a popular amulet for keeping colic and intestinal pain at bay, as represented here by a red jasper amulet now in Paris (Figure 5), which commands colic to withdraw in the presence of Heracles.⁴⁰ The triple image of Hecate also served as a protective amulet (Figure 6), although this later version differs somewhat from the

³⁵ A comic oracle quoted in Aristophanic comedy (*Wasps* 804). The term *hekateion* can refer to either statues or miniature shrines; see Parker 2005: 18-19.

³⁶ Quoted and discussed by Johnston (1999: 212), who rightly stresses the importance of the epithet 'she who nourishes children,' and Zografou (2010: 98).

³⁷ LIMC no. 124 and Alexander 1939 – the latter, which was carved from juniper wood and originally painted, is 23.4cm tall.

³⁸ Apollodorus *FGrHist* 244 F 129, with the interpretation by Burkert (1979: 161 n. 4). The passage begins by identifying Hermes as the conductor of dreams and mentioning that people prayed to him while falling asleep and thought of him as a guardian of their sleep. Apollodorus then says that they decorated the extremities of their beds with the visage of the god 'in order that they would not fear fearful things' (i.e., at night), because they had 'protectors' (literally 'those who warded off things' [*alexêtores*]). Here, of course, only the face is mentioned, but we have no other evidence that Hermes' face (without the phallus) was used as an *apotropaion* and can easily imagine wooden bedposts carved in relief as herms facing outwards in four directions.

³⁹ Detailed discussion and bibliography in Faraone 2018: 76-78.

⁴⁰ D&D no. 280. See Faraone 2018: Section 9.3 for full discussion of this type of expulsive incantation.



Figure 5. Obverse of a red-jasper gem in the Cabinet des Médailles showing Heracles strangling the lion; inscribed above: 'Flee colic, the divine one pursues you!' Photograph by A. Mastrocinque, used with his permission.



Figure 6. Red jasper gem engraved with triple-faced Hecate (BM 69). Photograph by author, used by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

earlier images, which are three-dimensional and hold torches or libation vessels. Her images on gems are necessarily rendered in two dimensions and continue to hold torches, but are also armed with two kinds of weapons: the whip and the knife. This parallel use of house and body amulets was recently confirmed when a version of the hexametrical verse placed at the doors during the Antonine plague — the one that describes Apollo warding off the 'cloud of plague' — turned up on a pewter amulet found in London, suggesting the verse circulated in different versions and around places as far-flung as London and Anatolia.⁴¹

Some 800 years earlier, the famous statesman Pericles also wore a plague amulet around his neck. Plutarch quotes the anecdote from Aristotle's student Theophrastus (*Life of Pericles* 38): 'Certainly Theophrastus in his *Ethics*, while discussing whether men's character may be changed with their fortune... relates that Pericles showed to one of his friends, who had come to visit him in his illness, an amulet which had been hung around his neck by his women...' Theophrastus uses a common Greek word for a body amulet, *peripton* (literally 'a thing tied around'), to designate this object but gives

us no clue as to the amulet's shape or material. The Greeks did in fact hang amulets from all of their limbs, but clearly preferred to suspend protective amulets at the front of the body, as shown in the string of amulets draped diagonally across the chest of a naked boy (Figure 7).⁴² This type of diagonal cord is usually limited to children, and any parent can tell you why — it is nearly impossible for a child to choke itself on such a cord, whereas an amulet around the neck would present a much greater danger. That such amulets were fairly typical for male children rather than simply the custom of a few superstitious families is suggested by a relevant series of small ritual vases called *choes*, on which male children wear the same diagonal cord.⁴³ Because these miniature jugs date rather narrowly to the late 5th and early 4th centuries BC, they give us a broad view of childhood in Classical Athens, leaving no doubt about the importance of the amulets in these scenes: the boys wear amulet cords on roughly 250 of the 400 extant miniature vases. These childhood amulets were moreover not limited to Athens. Indeed, similar diagonal cords can be observed on a number of

⁴¹ London amulet: Φοῖβε ἀκερσεκόμα, λοιμοῦ νεφέλη(ν) ἀπέλαυνε ('Phoebus of the unshorn hair, archer, drive away the cloud of plague!') and Lucian, *Alexander* 36: Φοῖβος ἀκειρεκόμης λοιμοῦ νεφέλην ἀπερύκει ('Phoebus of the unshorn hair, archer, drives away the cloud of plague').

⁴² For the discussion of childhood amulets in this paragraph and the next, see Faraone 2019b: 12-15.

⁴³ Hamilton (1992: 98-99) reports that on 253 of the 384 extant *choes*-jugs known to him (72% of the total) the child wears an amulet cord. Amulets show up in a similarly high percentage on 22 vases of a different style (squat *lekythoi*) that Hamilton lists earlier on (1992: 93-94).



Figure 7. Amulet string across the chest and back of a Roman-period marble copy of a Hellenistic statuette in the Vatican. After Dölger 1932.

limestone and terracotta votives of roughly similar date from other parts of the Greek world, for example on the chests of small votive statuettes from Cyprus and Sicily.

Single amulets like the one Pericles wore appear elsewhere, on the chests and throats of adults, where we can again see parallels between the types of threshold amulets placed on house facades and doors and those worn on the throat. Stylized versions of the club of Heracles become popular, for example, in the Roman period as a form of women's jewelry, as we can tell from many examples of earrings and pendants⁴⁴ and their power as amulets is suggested by their appearance on amulet-strings of the late-Classical period, for example, in Cyme and along the coast of the Black Sea. Some are of high artistic quality: one late-Classical club was carved entirely from chalcedony, while another Hellenistic one had a garnet mounted at the tip, and a third, undated, example from the Crimea that was attached to a child's bracelet held an amethyst in the tip. Phalli were also

used to protect the bodies of women and children.⁴⁵ Pliny tells us that babies wore them to guard against the evil eye,⁴⁶ an idea that is corroborated when texts begin to appear on these phalli that tell us precisely what they were used for: on a Roman-era terracotta of a boy with an oversized phallus we read in Greek, 'I have given the envious one a thorough drilling.'

These parallels between gateway amulets and those worn on the human neck or chest raise one final question. Did the Greeks understand the throat as an entranceway into the body, like a house door or a city gate, or was it simply a convenient spot on the body where they might place a protective amulet? In Roman times, at least, some Greeks apparently thought that the mouth and/or throat could be a point of superhuman attack, because it was the primary gateway for air, food, and drink.⁴⁷ From the Roman period onwards there are stories about how exorcists forced demons out of the mouth or nose of a possessed person, or of individuals suffering from epilepsy or mental illness. So it stands to reason that the demons used the mouth and nose to gain entry as well. In the Classical and Hellenistic periods, however, the Greeks seem to have thought that demons, ghosts, and angry gods could strike and damage the body or the mind from the outside, but not by entering into the body itself. Thus it makes sense that the Greeks placed amulets on the doorways to their cities and homes, because these were the entrances through which superhuman predators could indeed physically attack them. This practice suggests to me that at least for the Classical period we should abandon the model of a body amulet as gatekeeper and replace it with the idea of a body amulet as a shield or baldric, both in fact popular spots for affixing frontal eyes or frontal faces, like the *gorgoneion*. Two passages in the *Iliad* suggest that this idea emerged very early on. We are told, for example, that the Gorgon's head was depicted in the center of Agamemnon's shield (*Iliad* 11.35-36) as well as in the centre of Athena's aegis (*Iliad* 5.738-42).

Conclusions

We have seen, then, that *phylacteria* and *apotropaia* were used by the Greeks to defend a series of peripheries, at least three in number, which may be imagined as one concentric ring of defence within another. The first was at the city gate, a second at the house door, and a third on the front of the human body, on the chest or

⁴⁵ Faraone 2018: 75-76.

⁴⁶ Plautus *Miles Gloriosus* 1398-99 (a character threatens to castrate a man to make *crepundia* for a boy to wear around his neck); Pliny *NH* 28.39.

⁴⁷ *Testament* 10.3 describes a canine demon called Rhabdos who subdues the hearts of men through their throats. Raven (1997: 280), discussing Pharaonic amulets, proposes that the throat was a favorite spot, because 'it constitutes one of the most vulnerable parts of the human body' — in other words, where the important arteries and nerve ganglia were.

⁴⁴ Faraone 2018: Section 5.3.

throat. We have also received hints that such amulets could be placed even further outside the city walls, for example an image of Ares set up in the fields, or deeper within the house, like the herms carved into the feet of Athenian beds or the phallic perfume jars suspended on nearby walls. Perhaps most surprising was the idea that verses of poetry that describe Heracles residing in the home or Apollo driving away the plague could be just as effective as an image or a statue of the same deity. This raises, of course, another interesting question. What role did increasing literacy play in the production of amulets? As more and more Greeks learned to write, they began to place inscriptions on their city gates, house doors and accessories for their bodies, perhaps suggesting that evil forces such as disease, poverty, and death were slowly but surely learning how to read.

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