CHAPTER VII

UNSEEN PERILS

This heading is used more for convenience than because it is required for logical arrangement. Under it are assembled a number of amulets intended to protect against evil influences that affect the mind rather than the body, and also against vague, undefined dangers that are beyond the control of medicine, and yet cause wasting, incapacity, or death.

First, we may notice evidence that some superstitious people, aware of the distracting, nerve-racking effect of fear, sought to ward it off along with the sinister beings that caused it.

IG, XIV, 2413, 8, from Lovatti’s report, Bull. dell’Inst., 1862, p. 51. An oblong black stone, with an obverse design, enclosed by an ouroboros, of Anubis, with dog’s head, holding a kerykeion in his right hand. Below, a coffin containing a mummy, above which are the letters αμελ, which have not been explained. Lovatti thought they referred to Amenthes (Amentet), the Egyptian Hades. On the reverse are three lines of magical characters; on the edge, πρὸς δὲμονα καὶ φόβους (read δαίμονα καὶ, though δαίμονας may have been intended). This inscription may have been an afterthought, for Anubis often appears on amulets whose purpose seems to have been merely to protect in a general way. The situation is similar in IG, XIV, 2413, 11, a carnelian seen in private possession by Mommsen and described by him. On the obverse it has a lion with star and crescent, on the reverse Harpocrates and the inscription Γαύκος νεμεϊαςανθρώπου. Kaibel plausibly suggests that the latter part should be read μηθέν φοβεῖτο με, and shows how a combination of bad cutting and misreading resulted in the reported text. Glaukos was doubtless the owner. Here again the types used have no relation to the petition.

Du Molinet published a stone, then in the library of Sainte Geneviève, which bears no design, but is inscribed on both sides with the prayer Ιαω Λαμασας λόγοις, ἄγιον ὅμοι, δεξιά δυνάμις (l. δυνάμεις), φυλάξετε Οὐβίλαν Πολεῖον ἀπὸ πεντάς κακοῦ δαίμονος.1 The impossible Οὐβίλαν is probably a misreading of Οὐβίλαν, i.e. Οὐβίλαν. δεξιά δυνάμεις, “favorable powers,” is noteworthy.

Here belongs also a gem amulet of veined sardonyx published by Lazari.2 Inscriptions cover both sides. On the obverse there are, first, three lines of letters which are not even grouped in such a manner as to be pronounceable,

1 Le Cabinet de la bibliothèque de Sainte Genève, p. 127, Pl. 30, 7-8. The reading was amended by Spone, who may have been more successful than Du Molinet in making out the damaged fourth line, or may have been guided by a similar formula that he saw elsewhere. See Moret-Faucon, II, 2, 508.

2 V. Lazari, Notizie delle opere d’arte . . . della Raccolta Correr (Venezia, 1859), p. 128, No. 578.
then a formula of which the normal form, known from other specimens, is 

\[ \text{ονοςαμαςιβιαμεραχευεπαλεμαςιβαμερα} \]  

Finally, the word φελαζον, which begins a prayer continued on the bevel, \( \text{εκ παντος δεμονοις Σαβίναν ήν έτεκε Καλποπονια} \). “Protect Sabina, daughter of Calpurnia, from every demon.” The reverse has only meaningless combinations of the vowels, with a very few consonants. Some of the letters are upside down, some are written from left to right.

Huebner found in Madrid a small gold lamella which he published with notes by Kirchhoff; it was taken over later into IG X1V, 2413, 13. There are four lines, of which the first two and the greater part of the third can be read thus: \( \text{πτων εραυν} (\text{l. μερον γοτ μιαρον}) \text{ πνευμα και κακοποιον και φθοροποιον} \text{ απαλασων} (\text{l. απ’αλλαζων}) \text{ απ’ηις} \). The following letters must be meant for the name of the wearer, but they are evidently wrongly incised, as no recognizable name can be made from them. The fourth line probably consisted (after the first four letters, λιας, part of the name) of magical words. The form απαλασων, like τασον on a stone previously discussed (p. 82), seems to represent a softened pronunciation of ξ; or else an aeris imperfect ending has been wrongly attached to a present stem. Since the wearer was a woman, it is possible that φθοροποιον meant not merely destructive, but specifically, causing miscarriage.

Many amulets inscribed φέλαζον, φέλαζον, διαφέλαζον, etc., were probably intended for defense against demonic enemies. Among unseen dangers the most dreaded was undoubtedly the evil eye, the blighting glance of envy, which is still feared in all the countries bordering on the Mediterranean and has scarcely been forgotten in northern Europe; a special meaning of the word “overlook,” formerly current among ignorant people in England, is a relic of this superstition. The ancient texts and monuments relating to the evil eye were treated by Otto Jahn in a monograph which, after ninety years, is still indispensable, and folklorists and anthropologists have collected evidence of the superstition from many countries. Here we are concerned with a few amulets that show how the evil eye was feared, and what means were used to ward off its destructive glance.

A green jasper in the British Museum has on the obverse a goddess standing, facing right, a modius on her head, the right hand holding a tall scepter (or a torch), the left a fold of drapery. On the reverse is the inscription \( \text{πουδ Σεραπει των Φολον} \). “Serapis overcomes envy.” Here “envy” is
treated not as an abstract idea, but as a personification of the envious glance that works harm. The inscription, with its praise of Sarapis, has nothing to do with the obverse type, which probably represents Isis; but these divinities are so closely linked that one suggests the other. The same inscription was associated with a Sarapis type on an onyx which Gori reported in 1726; its present location is unknown.7

Like this in purpose, but with a different formula, is a black stone in private possession at Susa in Tunis. The obverse design is the sun-god drawing a bow. An inscription on the reverse seems to have been intended for μη θέγγε μου, βασικοῦνη, διώκει σε Ἡλίως; but the reading is uncertain, and the word βασικοῦνη is abbreviated in a most unusual manner (βκον).8

Phthonos (Envy) is definitely personified on a remarkable stone in Mr. Seyrig’s collection (D. 148). I know nothing exactly comparable to it, but it seems to be a genuine work of the late imperial period. It is a smoky-gray agate showing a naked male figure, the body turned to the front, the head to the spectator’s left, the hands held high on the chest. A large snake is coiled round the whole body of the man, its head just behind his. The man is assailed by various creatures; a bird pecks at his eyes, a small scorpion attacks the crown of his head, another his phallic, a third his left knee, and there is a centipede at each elbow. His feet rest on a bar which has a ring or knot attached to it—perhaps a suggestion of shackles. In the field at left is the word Φθονε, at right ἄτυχος, “Envy, bad luck to you!”

The commonest of all amulets to ward off the evil eye consists of an apotropaic design which has been found on numerous monuments, and which, though subject to slight variations, remains the same through several centuries. It represents the eye, wide open, subjected to various injuries and assailed by a variety of animals, birds, and reptiles. The technical name of this design, which has not been noted by previous writers, is to be found in a curious passage of the Testament of Solomon.9 The king has before him the thirty-six stoicheia or decans of the zodiac, each of whom is made to tell his name and the nature of his hurtful work, and also the means by which he may be driven away or defeated. The thirty-fifth says: έγώ καί Ρύξ Φθονεωθ καλούμαι. βασικοῦνη πάντα ἐπιρρωπών. καταργήσε με ὁ πολυπτοθής ὁδηγός έγχωραττόμερος; “My name is Rhux Phtheneoth. I cast the glance of evil at every man. My power is annulled by the graven image of the much-suffering eye.”

A fairly typical example of this “much-suffering eye” might show it wound from above by a spear, a trident, or by one or more daggers; while from the sides and below a dog or a lion tears at it, cranes and ibises peck at it, scorpions, snakes, creep up to bite and sting it. In some examples there are no weapons, the eye being surrounded on all sides by ferocious and

7 Gori, Inter. Etrusca, 1, biv.
9 McCoa’s edition (1922), 18, 39.
noxious creatures, but among these there are many differences — owls, lizards, tortoises, crabs are sometimes added to the animals previously mentioned, or substituted for them, and there are occasional examples of elephants, swans, bees, thunderbolts among the forces assailing the hateful eye. Efforts to find a religious or a symbolic meaning in the choice of these animals seem to me futile. "The only common characteristic is that each creature is capable of doing harm with its natural weapons, and while some of them are associated with certain gods or serve as signs of the zodiac, they are used in this design merely as dangerous or potentially dangerous to an eye.

Though this work is concerned only with amulets of a kind that can be worn, it should be said that larger, fixed representations of the "much-suffering eye" were used to protect dwellings. The marble relief published by Jahn was doubtless set in the wall of a house near the entrance. An even more interesting fixed design is the mosaic found on the Caelian hill in the vestibule of a sanctuary of Cybele. Here the eye is pierced by a spear and attacked by a goat, a bear, a scorpion, a bull, a lioness, a stag, a snake, and two birds, perhaps crows. An owl is perched upon the eye, but Bienkowski may be right in his view that the bird of night is here the ally of the eye; certainly it is not attacking it like the other creatures.

A similar use of the owl seems to indicate a close relationship between a gem in the Metropolitan Museum and the mosaic just described. In the New York stone the position of the owl is the same, and the list of creatures attacking the eye is somewhat similar, though there are more in the mosaic. On the gem we find a thunderbolt, a lion, a dog, a scorpion, a stag, and a snake.

Jahn has listed several other gems and lamellae with similar designs, and illustrations of some of them may be seen on his Plate III. He did not know a specimen in the Borgia collection described by Zoega as follows: Gold lamella, circular, a small circle in the middle of the reverse. In the center an open eye surrounded by eight small figures directed towards it. A crescent above, outside the ring of the other figures. Beginning after the crescent, a lizard, a flying swan, a snake, a dog, a lion, a winged phallus, a scorpion, a thunderbolt. The inclusion of a crescent moon among the apotropaic figures is interesting because it is not found on other published speci-
mens, although the value of the crescent in warding off evil is attested from ancient times down to the present day. 16

A discovery of recent years testifies to the great popularity of this design. 17 At Koenigshoffen in Alsace there was found a terra-cotta medallion, fastened to an urn. It had been cast in a mould, which shows that there was a demand for many similar specimens, doubtless attached to various articles of value to protect them. The Koenigshoffen medallion has lost a large segment of its circle, but several animals are to be seen, their heads all directed towards a central point, now broken away, which must have been the evil eye. A curious feature of the design is that at the bottom of the circle, between two of the animals, a youthful human figure seems to be emerging from something like a wellhead. A. Blanchet has suggested that this person is really Harpocrates in the familiar posture, kneeling or sitting on a lotus flower. 18 Since the only available illustration does not inspire complete confidence, the question would have to be settled by examining the original object. If the figure is Harpocrates, the designer of the plaque must have been somewhat influenced by the well-known type in which the youthful god on the lotus is surrounded by adoring animals.

One of the strangest uses of the "much-suffering eye" is to protect a sepulchral monument. A funerary stele discovered on the site of the ancient Auzia in Algeria was erected, during his lifetime, by a beneficiarius who had served nineteen years. 19 It represents himself and his wife standing, and their two children, a boy and a girl, also standing, on a level slightly below their parents. A small oblong space beneath the feet of the adults and between the two children is filled with the familiar design. A cock at the right and a snake at the left seem about to attack the eye from above, while below are a scorpion, a snail, and a lizard (?). The scorpion is striking the eye with the barb in his tail, not approaching as if to attack it with his pincers, as the creature is usually shown. An uncertain object directly over the eye may be a bird with extended wings.

Since Jahn's time the "much-suffering eye" has been brought to the attention of archaeologists and collectors chiefly through the means of a curious, but now quite common, kind of amulet represented by numerous specimens brought from Syria and Palestine, and apparently originating in those regions. These amulets are of bronze, oval or oblong, and they have a suspension loop made as a part of the plaque itself, but perpendicular to its plane. The evil eye is found, as far as I have observed, only as a reverse type, the obverse being regularly a figure on horseback marked as saintly or divine by a halo. These Syrian bronzes seem to date from about the third century down into Byzantine times, and some may be classed as medieval.

17 Forrer, L'Alsace romaine, p. 122, fig. 80 f.
18 Rev. arch., Ser. 6, 8 (1935), 106.
19 The monument, originally published in Revue africaine, 1862, pp. 81 ff. (not accessible to me), is reproduced also in Rev. arch., 1863, 1, Pl. 8; cf. pp. 295–298.
Their characteristics are so clearly marked, and the type is so often repeated, with slight variations, that it seems best to treat them as a special group and discuss them separately in Chapter XV.

The imagination suggested so many kinds of unseen, mysterious dangers that the superstitious sometimes tried to meet and defeat them all by using long formulas of exorcism, mentioning many of the dreaded perils by name, besides using inclusive phrases such as “from every demon” or “from every evil thing.” Such countercharms might develop into texts of considerable length. Phylacteries of this kind were often written on papyrus and worn on the person, and there are some noteworthy examples engraved on thin plates of silver and even of gold. These petala or lamellae were folded over and over until they made a small, compact mass and were then enclosed in a bulla or locket, or else they were rolled up tightly and inserted into a small tubular case. Receptacles of both these kinds were provided with suspension loops and hung from a cord passing round the neck. In this form they may certainly be called amulets, and they might well be included in a study such as the present work. The longer texts, however, require comment at length, which cannot well be undertaken here, especially since successful elucidation of them would be impossible without examining the original objects. For this reason they will not be considered in detail; a brief account of two remarkable specimens must suffice.

One of these was published by Froehner in 1867 as a “Basilidian amulet.” Even now, after the lapse of many years, its text is not free from doubt. Froehner rightly emphasizes the difficulty of reading lightly incised letters on a leaf of tarnished silver which has been folded in such a manner that the creases can be easily mistaken for parts of letters; and although a new reading of the tablet might bring improvements, it is remarkable that he was able to present a text that is in the main convincing. The amulet was prepared for the protection of a woman or a child named Syntyche, daughter of a mother of the same name (Συντύχις Συντυχίς). As usual, the owner of the amulet is supposed to say the charm, which, in the names of certain divine and angelic powers, adjures various evils not to harm her. She mentions in particular “the spirit of fever, all epilepsy, all hydrophobia, every evil eye, every violent sending of spirits, all poisoning.”

Some elements that seem to be Jewish appear in the adjuration by the holy name of the living Lord God, “Damnamanaios and Adonais and Sabaoth”; but Damnamanaios is a variant of Damnameneus, one of the Idaean Dactylos, and Sabaoth is treated as a name in itself, not in connection with Iao. Such things may be found in magical papyri of no known Jewish

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20 An excellent illustration of a small silver petalon with its case will be found in the plate accompanying D. M. Robinson's article, “A Magical Text from Berœa in Macedonia,” Studies in Honor of E. K. Rand, pp. 245-253. Robinson gives useful references to previous publications of similar objects.


22 One of Froehner's errors is that he treats this name as a common noun. It is a proper name in the Epistle to the Philippian, 4, 2.
connection. There are, however, some other indications that the composer of the formula had a good knowledge of Jewish legend and Hebrew turns of expression. In lines 11–13 all evil spirits are bidden to remember the covenant that they made in fear of Solomon and the angel Meches (Michael?); this is clearly an allusion to the belief that Solomon controlled the demons, a tradition that is still accepted in the Moslem world. Further, the expression ἐπαστοστολήν βιαίαν πνευματικόν (ll. 7–8), “violent sending (visitation) of spirits,” is much like the language of Psalm 78, 49, ἑξαπεστέελεν εἰς αὐτοῖς... ἐπαστοστολήν διὰ ἄγγελον τονημάτων, where Symmachus rendered the last words ἐπαστοστολήν ἄγγελον κακούντων. The fact that noon is mentioned, along with day and night, as a time when protection is needed, reminds one of the midday demon in the Septuagint version of Psalm 91, 6; but the Greeks also regarded Pan and the nymphs as dangerous at noontide. On the whole, Jewish influence is beyond doubt, but, as usual, Jewish authorship is not proved.

The most remarkable pentalon phylactery published up to this time was found in a grave at Beirut, and is now in the Louvre Museum. It is a thin ribbon of silver (375 by 50 mm.), which was rolled up and kept in a bronze cylinder, of which some fragments have been preserved. There are 120 lines of writing, the latter part hastily and carelessly executed, with the result that some readings remain doubtful. The owner and supposed reciter of the spell is Alexandra, daughter of Zoe. She begins by adjuring him who is above the heaven, Sabaoth, to protect her “from every demon and every compulsion (ἀνάγκη — more probably ‘torture’ here) of demons, from δαιμόνια, from poisons and enchantments (κατάδεσμοι).” Then, in the name of him who created all things, she invokes the spirits or angels of the seven heavens, each by his special name; next, the spirits or angels of the lightning, the thunders, the rains, the snows, the forests, the earthquakes, the sea, the dragons, the rivers, the roads, the cities, the plains, wandering (πλάνη), the mountains, the firmament, and him who sits between the two cherubim. Then the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is called upon to protect Alexandra from δαιμόνια, poisons, dizziness, and every kind of suffering and

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26 The astrologer Hephestoion of Thebes uses the expression δαιμόνιον ἐπαστοστολήν, 1, 21 (p. 94, 23, ed. Engelbrecht).
28 The writer mentions δαιμόνια and δαιμόνια separately here, but in other passages the words are used without distinction.
29 This word, placed where a noun of place might be expected, is a little puzzling. Each demon in this series is invoked as δὲν καθίσσειν ἐκ, with a noun of the place or the activity controlled; it is interesting to see that in this passage ἐκ governs genitive, dative, and accusative without distinction of meaning. The word πλάνη could mean deceit in general, or heresy (the writer is a nominal Christian); but perhaps it refers to the mischief of demons who mislead travelers in wild places and lead them astray. It is also possible that the word was sometimes employed in a medical sense. δαιμόνια (nominaless) may mean an irregular type of fever (LSJ, s.v. δαιμόνια, 5); but there is no direct evidence that δαιμόνια was so used.
30 The editor read συντοξία and interpreted it as συντοξιανεία, probably taking it to mean “appearance of phantoms in the dark”; the word is not otherwise known. But συντοξία, “dizziness,” is more likely. A delta with a vertical crease passing through it would look much like phi.
madness. A few other divine or demonic names are invoked, and in a section where the text is somewhat uncertain, Alexandra seems to seek their protection against pollution or poisoning that may come through a kiss, a greeting, a glance of the eye, through eating or drinking, in any one of the actions that make up her daily life. At the end, she calls upon these “holy and mighty and powerful names” to protect her from every demon, male or female, and from all troubling by demons in the night or the day. After the common interjection “Now, now, quickly, quickly,” she concludes piously, after all this demonic medley, with the prayer, “The One God and his Christ, help Alexandra.”

The text is an important monument of superstitious syncretism: the demonic names alone offer the curious much material for study. The length of the document puts it on the same footing as many of the phylacteries that are preserved on papyrus. Compared with it, the inscriptions of the gem amulets, the chief material of this study, are the merest compendia of protective formulas. To say that this amulet and that published by Froehner would repay further examination in no way reflects upon the scholarship of the two editors, who have performed difficult tasks with great success. But experience shows that the most skilful reader may go astray if he is not prepared for what he sees in his document; and our knowledge of magical idiom and the peculiarities of late Greek has been so greatly enlarged in recent years that there are few older publications of magical material that do not need correction here and there.