

IV.—A Magical Inscription on a Chalcedony

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Almost twenty years ago M. Adrien Blanchet published a curious inscription on a gem (chalcedony) in the Bibliothèque Nationale.¹ In his diplomatic transcription the text reads as follows:

ΕΠΕΙΠΩΜΕΣΟΤΤΟΔΩΔΕ
 ΚΑΦΤΤ
 ΛΟΝΟΝ
 ΟΜΑΤΗ
 5 ΠΕΡΙΟΧ
 ΗΙΑΩ

Line 1 runs round the face of the stone, quite close to the edge, and lines 2–6 occupy the middle area circumscribed by line 1. The author did not provide a text with words separated and accented because he found no consecutive meaning in the words of the inscription. From the hints supplied by *μεσον*, “middle,” in line 1 and *περιοχη*, “circumference,” in lines 5–6, he inferred that the inscription included, strangely enough, certain instructions for engraving the stone; but the rest remained for him an unintelligible jumble of Gnostic words of power.

In view of the phrase *τῇ περιουχῇ*, “the circumference,” which is easily recognized in lines 4–6, we suggest as a counterpart in line 1 *ἐπὶ τῷ μέσῳ*, “on the middle.” This correction of *επει πω μεσον* presents nothing unusual. The diphthong *ει* and the vowel *ι* are interchangeable in the Roman period, and nothing is simpler than miswriting pi for tau,² if indeed the stone has pi. The right leg of the letter is not visible on the photograph of the gem as reproduced by the editor, and the correct reading might well be tau.

N.B. The following abbreviations are used frequently throughout this article:

PGM = K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, 2 vols., Leipzig-Berlin 1928–31.

SMA = Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (“Univ. Mich. Studies,” Hum. Ser. 49) Ann Arbor 1950.

¹ A. Blanchet, “Une pierre gnostique, apparentée peut-être à la ‘Pistis Sophia,’ ” *Mélanges Maspero* 2 (1935–37) 283 ff.

² Cf. *PGM* 12.203, where tau is written for pi: *ιαστην* for *ἱασπιν*.

When the engraver, or the papyrus copy from which he worked, combined $\tau\hat{\omega}$ with $\acute{\mu}\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\upsilon\upsilon$, this blunder could have rested on the common confusion of the sounds represented by ω and $\sigma\upsilon$,³ or on the prevalent lack of feeling for the traditional distinction of the genitive and dative cases.⁴ We incline to prefer the dative to the genitive because the weight of evidence — $\tau\hat{\omega}$ and $\tau\eta\ \pi\epsilon\rho\iota\omega\chi\eta$ — seems to point in that direction, although $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \acute{\mu}\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\upsilon\upsilon$ cannot be definitely excluded. Similarly, the use of $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ in line 1 suggests that this preposition, rather than $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$, was carelessly omitted before $\tau\eta\ \pi\epsilon\rho\iota\omega\chi\eta$. The dative calls for a preposition since the locative use of this case in classic prose style is already confined to proper names, and its use in papyri is severely restricted.⁵

These phrases, then, may be taken as sufficiently certain — $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\ \tau\hat{\omega}\ \acute{\mu}\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\omega$, “on the middle,” and $\langle\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\rangle\ \tau\eta\ \pi\epsilon\rho\iota\omega\chi\eta$, “on the circumference.” The latter is immediately followed on the stone by Ἰάω , and it is this name, one of the most common in all magical texts,⁶ which is, or is to be, placed “on the circumference.” And so, after $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\ \tau\hat{\omega}\ \acute{\mu}\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\omega$, we expect to find an indication of something which is, or is to be, “on the middle.” What we have is the phrase $\tau\omicron\ \delta\omega\delta\epsilon\kappa\acute{\alpha}\phi\upsilon\tau\lambda\omicron\nu\ \delta\upsilon\omicron\mu\alpha$. The reference is clearly to one of the numerous demonic names which are the most noticeable feature of magical papyri and amulets. The word $\delta\omega\delta\epsilon\kappa\acute{\alpha}\phi\upsilon\tau\lambda\omicron\nu$ is unknown,⁷ and we propose therefore to alter it to $\delta\omega\delta\epsilon\kappa\acute{\alpha}\phi\upsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\nu$, which is found elsewhere as part of an elaborate magical procedure.⁸

In the lesser magical papyrus of Berlin (*PGM* 2.67,72) the word is applied to a laurel branch with twelve leaves, on which the operator is instructed to inscribe a magical name; but since the name

³ E. Mayser, *Grammatik d. griech. Papyri* 1 (Berlin-Leipzig 1906) 99 f.

⁴ J. Humbert, *La disparition du datif en grec* (“Collection Linguistique” 23 [Paris 1930]) 164 ff.

⁵ Mayser (above, note 3) 2.2 (1933) 147.

⁶ *RE* 9.710 ff. [Ganschinietz].

⁷ $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\tau\lambda\omicron\nu$, “plant,” is cited by *LSJ* only from Kaibel, *Epigr. Gr.* 1036.4 (Nicomedia).

⁸ *LSJ* cites only one example of this compound from non-magical literature: Theophr. *Hist. Plant.* 6.6.4, where it is used of roses with 12 petals. The substitution of tau for lambda on the gem might be explained as resulting from the confusion of two like-sounding botanical terms, but with greater probability as a misreading of the papyrus copy furnished to the engraver. If the hand was cursive and rapid, $\lambda\lambda$ could have looked just like $\tau\lambda$. In *PCairoBoak* 10 (*Études de Papyrologie* 3 [1936] 12 ff.) 10, the editor hesitates between $\kappa\tau\eta[\dots]\mu\omega\nu$ and $\kappa\lambda\eta[\dots]\mu\omega\nu$ in a passage where $\kappa\lambda\eta[\rho\omicron\nu\acute{o}]\mu\omega\nu$ would be most suitable. We have more recently had experience of this phenomenon in an unpublished papyrus of the early 4th cent. A.D. What was originally read as $\epsilon\tau\lambda\eta\gamma\omega\nu$ was revised after study of the context to Ἑλλήνων .

has been accidentally omitted from the papyrus, the bearing of the word will be better understood from an earlier passage in which a similar but more complex procedure is described at length (*ibid.* 28-34).⁹ The passage directs the operator to offer prayer while wearing a garland of laurel which is to be made in a special manner. Taking twelve laurel branches, the operator is to make seven of them into a garland, and binding the other five together, he is to hold them in his right hand. This equipment he is to retain even in sleep, i.e. the garland on his head and the five branches in his right hand. Further, each branch is to be taken separately, and with a special ink a sequence of twelve magical names is to be written on each of the leaves. In number the leaves on each branch are presumably twelve, though this is not stated. The magical names are the following: *υεσσεμμιγαδων ορθω βαυβω νοηρε σοιρε σοιρη σαγκαθαρα ερεσχιγαλ σανκιστη δωδεκακιστη ακρουροβορε κοθηρε.*

Taken together, these names constitute the "twelve-leaf name" of the Paris chalcedony. Preisendanz calls it appropriately the *zwölftelilige Zauberwort*,¹⁰ and the papyrus states specifically that the formula consists of twelve names. Most of them are of unknown meaning. Among them, however, are also Hyessemmigadon, who is elsewhere called a chthonic deity;¹¹ Baubo, a minor personage of the Orphic mythology; the Babylonian goddess Ereshkigal; the tail-devouring serpent Akrouroboros, usually called simply Ouroboros; the word *δωδεκακιστη*, which is not in ordinary use, although its derivation from *δώδεκα* is obvious; and *ορθω*, which may have been meant to suggest Artemis, since she was sometimes called Orthia and Orthosia.

Such as it is, this sequence of names, which may be called from its first unit the Hyessemmigadon formula, is also found elsewhere as a powerful charm; so in the demotic magical papyrus of London and Leyden,¹² with slight variations in *PGM* 5.424 and 7.680, and in an imperfect form in *PGM* 12.922. There can be no doubt that the formula was well known to magical writers and practitioners, and because of its use in so striking and peculiar a ceremony as that

⁹ The relation of these passages has been noted by Preisendanz in his comment on *PGM* 2.69.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ W. H. Roscher, *Ausführl. Lexicon d. griech. u. röm. Mythologie* 1.2.2313,2771 [Drexler].

¹² F. L. Griffith and H. Thompson, *The Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden* (London 1904) 7.25.

described in *PGM* 2.28, it is probable that any expert magician would know at once that the "twelve-leaf name" meant the twelve names of the Hyessemmigadon formula. The designation τὸ δωδεκάφυλλον ὄνομα would be as intelligible to him as the alternative indication νεσσεμμιγαδων λόγος.¹³

Thus far, then, the words on Blanchet's gem, as we have emended them, sound like a direction for inscribing an amulet: "Put the twelve-leaf name in the center and Iao round the edge." But on the chalcedony which bears the inscription, neither part of the instruction is carried out. The word Iao is not round the edge, and not one of the twelve components of the Hyessemmigadon formula appears on the stone.

Before dealing with this anomaly, it is well to establish beyond doubt that the phrases ἐπὶ τῷ μέσῳ and (ἐπὶ) τῇ περιοχῇ are in fact directions to an engraver of amuletic inscriptions. This can be done by citing similar prescriptions from magical papyri. Preisendanz's corpus contains several passages which tell a practitioner how to make and inscribe an amulet, e.g. *PGM* 5.446–450, which prescribes for the face of a stone a seated Sarapis holding a royal scepter topped by an ibis, and for the reverse side an appropriate inscription (τὸ ὄνομα); but the best illustration is to be found in one of the Leyden magical books, *PGM* 12.203–210, a passage which must be cited in full:

λαβὼν ἱασπιν ἀερίζοντα ἐπίγραφον δρά[κοντα κυ]κλωτερώς τὴν οὐρὰν ἔχοντα ἐν τῷ στόματι, καὶ ἔτι μέσον τοῦ δρ[άκ]οντος[ς Σελήνην] δύο ἀστέρας ἔχουσιν ἐπὶ τῶν δύο κεράτων καὶ ἐπάνω τούτων ἥλιον, ᾧ [ἐγγεγλυφθ]ω Ἀβραάξ, καὶ ὀπισθεν τῆς γλυφῆς τοῦ λίθου τὸ αὐτὸ ὄνομα Ἀβραάξ, καὶ κατὰ τοῦ περικυλίσματος¹⁴ ἐπιγράψαι τὸ μέγα καὶ ἄγιον καὶ κατὰ πάντων τῶν¹⁵ ὄνομα Ἰάω Σαβαώθ.

This prescription may be paraphrased as follows: Round the face of a gray-blue jasper¹⁶ engrave a serpent with its tail in its

¹³ This manner of abbreviating long formulas is widely attested in the magical handbooks. See K. Preisendanz, "Zum Schluss d. grossen Pariser Zauberpapyrus," *WKP* 29 (1913) 990, note 2; "Eine Abkürzungsweise d. griech. Zauberpapyri," *BPW* 33 (1913) 510 ff.; "Miscellen zu d. Zauberpapyri," *WS* 41 (1919) 9 ff.

¹⁴ So Dieterich, who noted the use of this word in *PGM* 4.2383. There, however, and in general, it means "girdle" or "apron," and the restoration remains insecure in *PGM* 12. Whatever the word may have been, a very large number of magical gems are available to show that it must mean the outer edge of the face of a circular or oval stone.

¹⁵ Om. Kroll.

¹⁶ Cf. Plin. *N.H.* 37.37; *SMA* 59 f.

mouth, and in the middle a figure of Selene with two stars over her horns; then, above Selene, Helios (or simply "a sun") inscribed with the word Abrasax; finally, on the reverse of the design the same name, Abrasax, and along the edge "the great and all-powerful holy name, Iao Sabaoth."

The jasper is thus to have magical figures and names on obverse and reverse, and these are to be engraved round the face of the stone (*κυκλοτερῶς, κατὰ τοῦ περιζώματος*) and in the middle (*μέσση*). These positions are described on the chalcedony as *ἐπὶ τῇ περιοχῇ* and *ἐπὶ τῷ μέσῳ*. The resemblance in technique is unmistakable. The coincidence, however, in the sacred name (Iao) to be engraved round the face of the chalcedony and in the same position on the reverse of the jasper, is not highly significant, since it is in very common use as a name of power. Much the same may be said of the frequently attested Akrouroboros, the serpent with its tail in its mouth. It is to be engraved as a figure on the jasper, and its name is part of the "twelve-leaf name," which is an important element in the inscription on the chalcedony; but it is in no way unusual.

When we face at last the question why an amulet on which some labor has been expended should exhibit, in place of a potent design or inscription, merely some directions about the proper placing of magical names, there seem to be only two explanations from which to choose. First, it may be thought possible — no matter how improbable — that the chalcedony of the Bibliothèque Nationale is nothing but a memorandum, on a permanent and portable medium, of a prescription which some practitioner wished always to have at his command, wearing it perhaps in a ring on his finger. But it is well-nigh incredible that a stone should be specially engraved for that purpose, when a brief entry in a recipe-book or even on a separate slip of papyrus would serve the purpose as well.

The other possibility, which can be taken more seriously, is that we have to do with a piece of gross stupidity on the part of an engraver, who, receiving an order in writing, simply copied the order onto the stone instead of following its directions. Blanchet saw that something of the sort had happened, and gives a valuable illustration of a similar confusion elsewhere of the directions for making an amulet and the words which were to be inscribed.¹⁷ An

¹⁷ Blanchet (above, note 1) 286 f.

amulet in the Louvre published by M. Delaporte¹⁸ has on the obverse the well known palindrome beginning *ιαεωβαφρενεμουν*, and on the reverse the words *ὀπίσω δὲ τοῦ λίθου κύκλῳ πολιν*¹⁹ τὰ ὀνόματα ταῦτα· *χυχ βαχυχ κτλ.*²⁰ It is obvious that everything down to *χυχ* is a direction from the master magician, and the artisan has wrongly incorporated his words into the magical text.²¹

The preceding discussion has been made somewhat full in order to provide a sound basis for the corrections which must be applied to the inscription published by Blanchet. We are now prepared to offer the following emended text, which clarifies and interprets his diplomatic transcription:

ἐπὶ τῷ μέσῳ τὸ δωδεκάφυλλον ὄνομα <καὶ ἐπὶ> τῇ περιοχῇ Ἰάω.

For this fragment of a sentence we may safely supply *ἐπίγραφον* as verb, and paraphrase thus: "Engrave on the middle of the stone the twelve-leaf name and on the circumference the name Iao."

Finally, we must add a word about the title which M. Blanchet has given his paper: *A Gnostic Stone, Perhaps Related to the "Pistis Sophia."* It is now generally recognized that the great majority of the amulets formerly called Gnostic have nothing whatever to do with the religious systems that are so designated (*SMA* 1f., 45). Exceptions are so rare as to deserve particular attention, e.g. the

¹⁸ L. Delaporte, *Musée du Louvre: Catalogue des cylindres orientaux, etc.* 2 ("Acquisitions" 1923) 218.A1259; Pl. 108, fig. 12a,b.

¹⁹ *πολιν* has no meaning in this context. It is perhaps miswritten for *πάλιν*, but this is pure conjecture since we do not have the instructions for the obverse.

²⁰ This is a common sequence of magical words. See Youtie and Bonner, "Two Curse Tablets From Beisan," *TAPA* 68 (1937) 57.

²¹ We have found no other illustration of such blunders that is equally pertinent. Yet there is at least a suspicion of similar misunderstanding in two inscriptions which should be mentioned. One of these, described in *SMA* 373, No. 131, belongs to the class of uterine amulets. The reverse bears the words *ορωριουθ σουερουθ καὶ εισχυραιναν*. The first two are magical, and *ορωριουθ* is probably a secret name of a demon supposed to control the maladies of women. The last word is apparently the personal name Ἰσχυρίανα (cf. Campbell Bonner, *HTHR* 37 [1944] 337). If the engraver received a direction like the following: *ὀπίσω δὲ τοῦ λίθου ἐπιγράψεις "ορωριουθ σουερουθ" καὶ "Ἰσχυρίανα,"* a misunderstanding would account for the retention of *καὶ* on the stone and might also explain the accusative in the proper name. The other example is an amulet from Syria (*SMA* 59); it belongs to a class highly esteemed as a remedy for stomach troubles. The reverse has the inscription *στομάχου ἡ Χνοῦνις*, which needs correction to *στομάχου ἡ Χνοῦμις*. The editor, R. Mouterde (*Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 15.3 [1930] 74), suspects just such a blunder as we are considering: "Il est fort possible que le graveur ait copié servilement une recette où l'on indiquait, à côté de l'image à graver, deux textes à choisir: *Chnouphis* [i.e. Chnoumis] ou *στομάχου*."

remarkable stone described and illustrated in *SMA* 135–137, Pl. 9.188. The connection which M. Blanchet supposes to exist between the *Pistis Sophia* and the chalcedony of the Bibliothèque Nationale, seems to depend entirely on viewing δώδεκα in the light of numerous passages in the Gnostic work where twelve is a significant number. But the power inherent in twelve is mainly, if not entirely, magical, as is evident from the passages previously cited from *PGM* 2.28 ff., 67,72, where the directions require the use of twelve branches or twelve leaves of laurel. In the perspective which we now have of these matters, the reasoning employed by Blanchet should be reversed. The *Pistis Sophia* has been strongly influenced by magical methods. This is clearly indicated by the large number of magical formulas, meaningless or of unknown meaning, which are incorporated in the treatise (*SMA* 139, 203). There is, on the other hand, no reason to think that the inscription on the chalcedony owes anything to any Gnostic work.