

The Chnoubis Gem from Tel Dor

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A RECENT ISSUE of this journal has published the preliminary reports of the 1993 season at Tel Dor in which an important green jasper amulet of the Greco-Egyptian or 'Gnostic' variety has been unearthed.¹ Its importance lies not so much in its type — a Chnoubis amulet of a relatively common genus² — but in the controlled archaeological context in which it was found: Roman period structural remains that contained "a large industrial installation with several large kilns (or vats?) and many small drainage channels" (Area D3).³ Has the installation anything to do with the manufacture of such gemstones, or is the amulet simply a chance find, such as a discarded personal item?⁴

The authors date the gem to the second century C.E. and properly represent the find in all respects except for its inscription on the reverse, which they suggest is "unintelligible pseudo-Phoenician."⁵ Indeed, such magic gemstones of the Roman period have been known to carry pseudo-Phoenician inscriptions,⁶ but in this instance we appear rather to have only Greek: reading counter-clockwise from the top, surrounding the famous three-bar emblem, appear the letters XNOTMIC — the very Egyptian deity with which the authors correctly

1 Ephraim Stern and Ilan Sharon: Tel Dor, 1993: Preliminary Report *IEJ* 45 (1995), p. 32. Properly speaking, the mineral is green prase — the 'apple-green' variety of the quartz chalcedony characteristically used of the Chnoubis type. See Josef Riederer, "Mineralogische Bestimmungen," in: Hanna Philipp, *Mira et Magica* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1986), p. 130; cf. Roy Kotansky and Jeffrey Spier, The 'Horned Hunter' on a Lost Gnostic Gem: *HTR* 83 (1995), pp. 315-337, esp. p. 317.

2 As correctly identified by the authors, who also rightly observe that "these amulets were worn as a remedy against indigestion" (Stern and Sharon, p. 32). For the type, a nimbated lion-head serpent, see in general, Adolf Jacoby, Ein Berliner Chnubisamulett: *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 28 (1930), pp. 269-285; Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series 49; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan / London: Geoffrey Cumberlege/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 54-60, 266-269, nos. 81-101; A. Delatte & Ph. Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1964), pp. 54-73, nos. 62-89; Frances M. & James H. Schwartz, Engraved Gems in the Collection of the American Numismatic Society: 1. Ancient Magical Gems: *The American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 24 (1979), pp. 149-197 (pls. 34-40), esp. pp. 163-166; Hanna Philipp (above, note 1), pp. 87-92, nos. 125-136.

3 Stern and Sharon (above, note 1), with further mention of the Eshmun-Asklepios cult.

4 I am reminded of the gold sheet amulet (of second century C.E. date) found in an ancient workshop in Dierna (Orșova, Banatul), Rumania: R. Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets. The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae*, I: Published Texts of Known Provenance (Abhandlungen der Nordrhein-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften; Sonderreihe, Papyrologica Coloniensia 22/1: Opladen, 1994), no. 24, p. 97.

5 Stern and Sharon, p. 32.

6 Roy Kotansky: A Magic Gem Inscribed in Greek and Artificial Phoenician *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 85 (1991), pp. 237-238.

associate the gem.⁷ The engraver's difficulty in writing, evident by the square, angular shape of the letters, has not facilitated any potential reading of the text.

Gemstone amulets of this kind are regularly obtained by collectors from the antiquities market as contraband and have been so for hundreds of years.⁸ Those found in controlled archaeological contexts are relatively rare, so the Tel Dor example provides a welcome addition. The most important group of such pieces from the Syro-Palestinian basin that I am aware of are those from Amman,⁹ Caesarea Maritima,¹⁰ Emesa (Homs),¹¹ Gadara (Umm Qeis),¹² Nahariyeh,¹³ and possibly elsewhere.¹⁴ Other magic gems of various stated provenances are claimed for the following representative locales: Asia Minor,¹⁵ Cyprus,¹⁶

7 Written XNOTBIC, XNOTMIC, or XNOTΦIC, who is often homophonically identified with the ram-headed (!) god Chnum (*Hnm(w)*) and the lion-decan Kneph / Kematef (*Km 3t.f*); see Delatte & Derchain (above, note 2), p. 56f.; Schwartz & Schwartz, pp. 163-165. The former identification, at least, is questioned in the study of Howard M. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man. The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition* (SBL Dissertation Series 81; Atlanta, GA.: 1985), pp. 74-108 (esp. 101-103, on the name), who suggests an amalgamation of the Egyptian god with the supreme Jewish creator-god Yahweh / Ialdabaoth at Elephantine (p. 104).

8 Cf., for example, Kotansky and Spier (above, note 1), pp. 315-337.

9 J. H. Iliffe, Note on Objects of Pseudo-jet and a Gnostic Gem from Roman Tomb at 'Amman: *QDAP* 14 (1950), pp. 95-96; pl. XXXII; cf. G. Lankester Harding: A Roman Family Vault on Jebel Jofeh, 'Amman: *idem*, pp. 81-94 (pls. xxiv-xxxi).

10 Found among the sand-dunes: Anit Hamburger, Gems from Caesarea Maritima: *'Atiqot* 8 (1968), pp. 1-38; pls. I-VIII, p. 24, nos. 124-125 (English series); *idem*, A Greco-Samaritan Amulet from Caesarea: *IEJ* 9 (1959), pp. 43-45; cf. B. Lifschitz, Einige Amulette aus Caesarea Palaestinae: *ZDPV* 80 (1964), pp. 80-84.

11 F. Cumont, Une intaille provenant d'Emèse: *Syria* 7 (1926), pp. 347-352 (as the stated provenance only).

12 Martin Henig & Mary Whiting, *Engraved Gems from Gadara in Jordan. The Sa'd Collection of Intaglios and Cameos* (Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph No. 6; Oxford, 1978), pp. 39f.; nos. 423-427.

13 L. Y. Rahmani, A Magic Amulet from Nahariyya: *HTR* 74 (1981), pp. 387-390.

14 Cf. Frédéric Manns: Gemmes de l'époque gréco-romaine provenant de Palestine: *Liber Annuus* 289 (1978), pp. 147-170. Examples stated from elsewhere in Syria are of very uncertain origin: L. Jalabert & R. Mouterde, *IGLS*, I (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 12; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1929), nos. 221-226 (around Aleppo); *idem*, III/ii (BAH 51; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1953) nos. 1093-1105 (Antioch, with no. 1098 a Chnoubis type); *idem*, IV (BAH 61; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1955); nos. 1286-1310 (Latakia / Laodicea ad Mare); *idem*, V (BAH 66; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1959) nos. 2054-2061 (Hama); 2496-2497 (Homs); cf. R. Mouterde, Le Glaive de Dardanos. Objets et Inscriptions magiques de Syrie: *MUSJ* 15 (1930), pp. 53-136; *idem*, Objets magiques. Recueil S. Ayvaz: *MUSJ* 25 (1942-1943), pp. 105-128 (both, Beirut and Aleppo); cf. *idem*, Cultes antiques de la Coelé Syrie et de l'Herman: *MUSJ* 36 (1959), pp. 1-37; no. 5, 12f.

This list is meant to be representational only; a more thorough search would be sure to turn up additional sites.

15 Ephesus: J. H. Iliffe, A Neolithic Celt with Gnostic Inscriptions at Toronto, *AJA* 35 (1931), pp. 304-309; Josef Keil, Ein rätselhaftes Amulett: *Wiener Jahreshefte* 32 (1940), pp. 79-84 (Greek and Hebrew text); Gerhard Langmann, Ein Zauberamulett aus Ephesos: *JÖB* 22 (1973), pp. 281-284. In fact, most illegal gems today come from Asia Minor or Syria.

16 Salamis: Marie-José Chavane, Une intaille magique: *Salamine de Chypre IV: Anthologie Salaminienne* (par l'Institut F. Courby; Université Lyon: E. de Boccard, 1973) pp. 125-131. Found among the ruins of an early Christian basilica.

Egypt,¹⁷ England,¹⁸ Greece,¹⁹ North Africa,²⁰ the Rhineland,²¹ the Thraco-Moesia area,²² and the Ukraine and Crimea.²³ A careful study of the types, designs, and method of manufacture of magic gems from excavated contexts might teach us something about the export business of these popular commodities.

- 17 Alexandria (?): Ursula Mandel-Elzinga: Eine Gemmensammlung aus Alexandria im Akademischen Kunstmuseum der Universität Bonn: *BonnJbb* 185 (1985), pp. 287f. no. 64. The Fayyûm: Thadée Smolenski, Une intaille gnostique provenant du Fayoum: *ASAE* 9 (1908), pp. 92-93. Benha in the Delta: Alphonse Dain, *Inscriptions grecques du Musée du Louvre. Les textes inédits* (Paris: Société d'édition des Belles Lettres, 1933), p. 178f., no. 204; cf. M. El-Khachab, A Collection of Gems from Egypt in Private Collections: *JEA* 49 (1963), pp. 147-156; R. Milburn Blakiston: A Gnostic Gem from Egypt: *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, ser. 2, v. 14 (1893), p. 368f.
- 18 Various sites: Martin Henig, *A Corpus of Roman engraved Gemstones from British Sites. Part i: Discussion; Part ii: Catalogue and Plates*. BAR 8(i)/8(ii) (Oxford, 1974), pp. 121-127, no. 366 Calleva (Silchester); no. 368 Camulodonum (Colchester); no. 367 Great Chesters; 369 (Dicket Mead, Hertfordshire); *idem*, in: C. Johns & T. Potter, *The Thetford Treasure. Roman Jewellery and Silver* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1983), no. 12, fig. 13; cf. R. P. Wright, A Graeco-Egyptian Amulet from a Romano-British Site at Welwyn, Herts: *The Antiquaries Journal* 44 (1964), pp. 143-146.
- 19 The Athenian Agora: G. W. Elderkin, A Gnostic Gem: *Hesperia* 2 (1933), pp. 475-479 (from an unstratified deposit). The Argolid: A. B. Cook, *Zeus. A Study in Ancient Religion*, vol. 2 (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1965), pp. 510-512 (fig. 390 = a large serpentine celt). The Cyclades: R. M. Dawkins, A Re-cut Gem from Melos: *Essays and Studies Presented to William Ridgway* (Cambridge, 1914), pp. 167-170.
- 20 Tunis: J. Renault, Quelques découvertes archéologiques et épigraphiques: *Revue Tunisienne* 13 (1906), p. 551; Carthage: E. Vassel, Intaille gnostique: *Revue Tunisienne* 14 (1907), n.p.; cf. Yann Le Bohec, Inscriptions juives et judaïques de l'Afrique romaine: *Antiquités africaines* 17 (1981), pp. 165-207.
- 21 Colonia Agrippinensis (Köln): G. Platz-Horster, *Die antiken Gemmen im Rheinischen Landesmuseum Bonn* (Köln: Rheinland-Verlag/Bonn: R. Habelt, 1984), p. 56, no. 43 (building excavation), with numerous other finds spots for non-magical gems; cf. A. Krug, Antike Gemmen im Römisch-Germanischen Museum Köln, *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission* 61 (1980), pp. 151-260; note also G. Grimm, *Die Zeugnisse Ägyptischer Religion und Kunstelemente im Römischen Deutschland* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), pp. 118-124 (nos. 1-7), p. 171 (no. 64 a-b), p. 173 (no. 67 a-b), p. 180 (no. 78) (Egyptianizing types).
- 22 Rumania: R. Ocheseanu, O gemă gnostica descoperita la Constanța: *Pontica* 4 (1971), p. 303 (Tomi, Congestiana); S. Sanie, Classica et Orientalia IV: *SCIV* 37 (1986), pp. 76-84 (Romula [?] and Serdica [Chnoubis gem]); cf. Alexandra Dimitrova, Magische Gemmen aus Thrakien und Mösien in der Römerzeit, *Zbornik Narodnog Muzeja* 8 (1975), pp. 121-129 (= *Recueil du Musée National, Beograd Tome VIII: Hommage à Djordje Mano-Zissi*), pp. 121-129 (esp. pp. 121-125 on Chnoubis); cf. I. Ionescu, Le problème des gemmes gnostiques découverte sur le territoire de la République Socialiste de Roumanie: *Actes de la XIIe Conférence Internationale d'Etudes Classiques 'Eirene'* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1975 / Bucarest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1975), pp. 539-540. Dacia: R. Teșosu-David, Un nou Abraxas de la Porolissum: *SCIV* 10 (1959), pp. 463-467 (Porolissum [Moigrad]); *idem*, O gemă de la Micia cu Reprezentarea lui Harpocrate: *SCIV* 15 (1964), pp. 257-264.
- 23 Various locations: O. Ya. Névérov, Gemmes, bagues et amulettes magiques du sud de l'URSS: *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren* (EPRO 68; Leiden: Brill, 1978) II, pp. 833-848; nos. 2, 35 (Tira); nos. 3, 20, 25 (Panticapaeum); no. 9 (Laze [Osetie], Georgia); no. 12 (Theodosia); no. 16 (Caucasus); nos. 17, 23, 27, 49 (Chersonesus); nos. 18-19, 24, 28 (Olbia); no. 21 (near Sympheropol); no. 29 (area of Volynsk); no. 33 (Santavro); no. 40 (Armasiskhevi); no. 43 (Sebastopol); no. 47 (Zilkani); no. 50 (Gorgippia [Anapa]). Many of these were found in tombs; cf. also Dimitrova (above, note 21), p. 124, note 20.