CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MAGIC AT SEA: AMULETS FOR NAVIGATION

Sabino Perea Yébenes

Introduction

The ancient Greek and Roman Lapidaries (i.e. books dealing with amuletic stones) are significant in the context of the subject of the Zaragoza conference in exemplifying the complex relationships between Greek and Latin texts (and indeed Babylonian and Arabic texts) on magical themes. For these pseudonymous or anonymous works were ‘living texts’, constantly borrowing from one another in search of authority and materials. The most familiar extant source for the ancient post-Theophrastan literature of stones and their properties is of course Pliny’s Historia Naturalis Books 36–37, referring to numerous earlier writers in Greek and one or two in Latin, but important additional information is supplied by the 774 hexameters of the Greek Orphic Lapidary, and a number of related texts of uncertain but relatively late date which were first published as a group by Eugen Abel in 1881 (Abel 1881), followed by de Mély in 1898 (de Mély 1898), as part of his great joint work with C.E. Ruelle, Les lapidaires de l’Antiquité et du Moyen Âge (Paris 1898–1902). This paper provides an introduction to

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1 I use the term Lapidaries to refer to the group of texts edited and translated in Halleux and Schamp 1985. The following special abbreviations have been used: Damigeron-Evax = Damigeron, De Lapidibus as transl. into Latin by ‘Evax’, in Halleux and Schamp 1985, 230–90.
Lithika = Orphei Lithica = Orphic Lapidary in Halleux and Schamp 1985, 79–123.
Socr. et Dion. = Σωκράτους καὶ Διονυσίου περὶ λίθων in Halleux and Schamp 1985, 166–77.
2 The textual tradition of Damigeron-Evax in particular is extremely complex.
4 See Halleux and Schamp 1985, vii–ix; on the Lithika in general, see still Rossbach 1910, 1101–15; Hopfner 1926; Wellmann 1935.
this diverse lore by taking a single short text about stones connected with the sea, the so-called *Nautical Lapidary*, of Byzantine date, which clearly borrows from some of the other known texts, especially Damigeron-Evax and the materials that lie behind Pliny’s information and that of the *Orphic Lapidary*.

The *Nautical Lapidary* is an anonymous text preserved in three manuscript versions, all in Paris.\(^5\) The only important one, *Paris. Gr. 2424*, also contains several writings on astrology and divination, including one by ‘Astrampsychus’.\(^6\) The *Lapidary* is found on f.190, in a column that also contains citations from the Pythagoreans and Posidonius on the formation of comets, a citation from ‘Demostratus’ on the magical properties of seal-fat, and extracts from Timothy of Gaza’s bulky work on zoological curiosities.\(^7\)

The text lists just seven or eight stones said to benefit navigation, and the amulets to be made to achieve this purpose. Almost all these stones have external physical properties that connect them metonymically with the sea: they may be transparent or green, or blue, or their fiery red colour connotes storms and lightning. This and other lapidaries ascribe to such amulets the property of warding off misfortunes at sea, or of allowing the victims to survive them. Ships are tacitly understood to be exposed to the negative influence of natural phenomena that originate in the depths and affect the surface (e.g. tsunamis); and to atmospheric phenomena that may harm or sink them, such as lightning, hailstorms, typhoons and hurricanes. In addition, there are dan-