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## A PROTECTING CURSE

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*Abstract:* The *maskelli maskello* spell was mostly used to increase the effectiveness of curses on curse tablets and in recipes of magic papyri. Curiously, the incantation appears in the texts of three amulets, one of them on a magic gem preserved in Leiden.

*Keywords:* maskelli logos, magic gem, Budapest papyrus, Silver phylactery

The Rijksmuseum in Leiden has a haematite gem depicting Aphrodite and Eros. Next to and below the figure of the gods is a ten-line incantation in Greek letters, which includes the *maskelli* logos familiar from the curse tablets and papyri: *μασκελλι μασκελλω φνουκενταβαωθ ορεοβαζαγρα ρηζιχθων ιπποχθων πυριπηγανυξ*.<sup>2</sup> Description of the gemstone based on CBd: Winged Eros on the right, in his left hand a burning torch. On the left, Aphrodite stands to right, nude, wringing her hair. Inscription around the figure of Eros: *δαμναμενευε*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jordan 1994, 329. I will not discuss the interpretation of the *maskelli* logos in this paper, as it is discussed in detail by other authors in the cited literature, in particular Preisendanz 1928, 2120, Ritoók 1978, 437–438, Daniel–Maltomini 1990, 34, Brashear 1995, 3592, Heintz 1996, 298, Michel 2004, 193–194.

<sup>3</sup> CBd-3150. NL\_Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden: GS-01107. Michel 2004, no. 4.1.c\_2. Haematite (black), dimensions 23 x 16.5 x 3.5 mm.

The Greek inscription in ten lines:

δαμναμενευε|  
μασκελλει|  
μασκελλωφν|  
ουκενταξαξι|  
αωραωω|  
δαμασατεμ|  
ασανφνυχνι|  
μιτηνδ|  
φιν|  
ια



The Leiden gemstone

Campbell Bonner interprets the Δαμναμενεύς mentioned on the inscription as "typical of a group of magical names that are more often used in connection with the sun than elsewhere, but also appear in various other associations. Damnameneus is one of the Idaean Dactyloi... The variety of the amuletic designs with which the word is found give reason to think that in the period with which

we are concerned the name was not confined to a particular god or to a special purpose, but was merely a word of power applicable to any situation".<sup>4</sup>

It is also noteworthy that Aphrodite and Eros the torchbearer appear together only on this gem, while on other gems they appear together as members of a larger group of gods. In the British Museum, there is a yellow jasper gem depicting Eros holding a burning torch. The gem bears the inscription Δαμναμενεύς, and a part of ακτιωφι-logos.<sup>5</sup>

Neither the Eros gem nor the inscriptions on the two Aphrodite-Eros gems indicate what kind of misfortune or illness the wearer was seeking to protect himself from. A particular feature of the inscription of Leiden is that the Maskelli logos appear here on an amulet rather than on a curse inscription.<sup>6</sup>

The inscription on a Greek-language magical papyrus preserved in Budapest also contains the Maskelli logos, although the inscription is clearly an amulet, intended to protect the wearer from fever and chills.<sup>7</sup> The text of the papyrus was first published by Zsigmond Ritoók, here quoted from the Daniel-Maltomini edition.<sup>8</sup>

φηγ γη βαλοχρα θαμρα Ζαραχθω  
ἐξορκίδω ὑμᾶς κατὰ τῆς πικρᾶς Ἀνά<γ>κης  
Μασκελι Μασκελω Φνουκενταβαωθ  
ορεοβαζαγαρ ῥηζίχθω ἰππόχθων  
πυριπηγανυξ· ἀπάλ<λ>αζον Ἄμμων τοῦ ἔ-  
χον< τος > αὐτὸν πυρετὸν καὶ ῥίγους, ἦδη ἦδη,  
ταχύ, ταχύ, ἐν τῇ σήμερον.

PHĒG GĒ ... BALOCHRA THAMRA ZARACHTHŌ, I conjure you all by the bitter compulsion: MASKELI MASKELŌ PHNOUKENTABAŌTH OREOBAZAGAR RHĒZICHTHŌN HIPPICHTHŌN PYRIPĒGANYX. Deliver Ammon from the fever and shivering fit that restrains him, immediately, immediately; quickly, quickly; today!"<sup>9</sup>

The text of the amulet tells us not only what disease it protected against, but also who it protected – Ammon.

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<sup>4</sup> Bonner 1950, 100.

<sup>5</sup> CBd-649. GB-BM-MMEu\_G 293, EA 56293. GB\_London, The British Museum. Inventory: G 293 (EA 56293).

<sup>6</sup> The Maskelli logos of the curse inscriptions were first collected by Ritoók in 1978. This list is based on Jordan 1994. There are 14 examples in papyri: *PGM* III 456, IV 2753, 3175, IX 10, XIc 6, XII 290, XIXa 9, 10, XXXVI 154, 342, LVIII 9, *DMP* 15<sup>v</sup>2, *SupplMag* 12, 45.

Lead curse tablets: Attica: Ziebarth 1934:1046, no. 25 B 12, Carthage *DTAud* 234.28, 242.46, 250 B 1, 251 II 4, Alexandria: *SupplMag* 54.27, Egypt?: *SupplMag* 57.3, Beisan: 1937:52–72, fr. 1, obv. 13, fr. 1. rev. 5, Damascus: *SEG* 7.234.9, Beirut *SEG* 7.213.

<sup>7</sup> CBd-9. HU-SzM-Ant\_86.3.A. Museum of Fine Arts, Classical Collection. Inventory: 86.3.A. Dimensions: 56 x 130 mm.

<sup>8</sup> Ritoók 1978, Daniel and Maltomini 1990, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Translation by Roy Kotansky, Betz 1992, 314.

In 1996 Florent Heintz published a narrow, oblong silver sheet with an amulet inscription. The origin of the silver sheet is unknown (perhaps Syria), and its current location is the MacDaniel collection, Classics Department, Harvard.<sup>10</sup> As Heintz says of the inscription, which also includes the incantation "Maskelli": "The introductory sequence of onomata (1–36) is definitely not one that would normally be expected from a talisman. It contains several elements typical of aggressive, chthonic, magic."<sup>11</sup> What also makes this amulet special is that the first 36 lines of the amulet are literally identical to lines 6–9 of *PGM XIXa*.<sup>12</sup> Written on Egyptian papyrus in the 4th or 5th century, the love charm was folded and placed in the mouth of a mummy. The Maskelli spell is found on line 31 of the silver sheet.

31 Μασκελλι  
32 Φνουκενταβα  
32 ωθ Ιαω ουια ...

The amulet text following the incantations reads like this in Heintz's translation:

"(magical words) holy, mighty and powerful names of the great Necessity, preserve and protect from all witchcraft and sorcery, from curse tablets, from those who died an untimely death, from those who died violently and from every evil thing, the body, the soul and every limb of the body of Thomas, whom Maxima bore, from this day forth through his entire time to come."<sup>13</sup>

The author of the silver plate and the magician who wrote the papyrus must have had a magical recipe book as a common source.

We don't know the original purpose of the two charms, but we do know that they were meant to protect their wearers from danger. The magic papyrus already mentions by name the person to be protected, Ammon, and the diseases from which it is intended to protect him. The silver plate protects Thomas from all evil spells. We can agree with Heintz, who explains what the spells of evil curses were doing in an amulet text: "This chthonic formula, typical of defixiones and aggressive magic in general, is quite unusual in an apotropaic context and shows how the author of the phylactery tends to choose his weapons from the same arsenal as his (potential) opponents."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Heintz 1996, 295–300. *SEG* 46-2246: "Long, narrow silver tablet, probably mass-produced as part of a whole set of lamellae which were first inscribed side by side on a silver sheet, then cut and individually packaged."

<sup>11</sup> Heintz 1996, 295.

<sup>12</sup> Berlin, Staatliche Museen, P.Berol. inv. 9909.

<sup>13</sup> Heintz 1996, 297.

<sup>14</sup> Heintz 1996, 298.

## Special abbreviations:

CBD = The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database (<http://cbd.mfab.hu>).  
DMP = Griffith and Thompson 1904.  
DTAud = Audollent 1904.  
GMA = Kotansky 1994.  
PGM = Preisendanz 1928–41.  
SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*.  
SMA = Bonner 1950.  
SupplMag = Daniel and Maltomini 1992.

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