

A NOTE ON A HEMATITE FALCON IN THE LOUVRE¹

A hematite statuette of Horus in the form of a falcon now in the Louvre, was made in the Pharaonic era, but during the Roman period re-used by a priest for a new purpose and inscribed with an apotropaic spell in Greek with *voces magicae* that contain some Coptic.²

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ⲛⲛⲓⲧⲁⲩⲓⲛⲁⲧⲉ 9 r. ⲛⲛⲓⲧⲁⲩⲓⲛⲁⲧⲉ, in i-stem declension, cf. epic ⲛⲛⲓⲧⲁⲩⲓⲛⲁⲧⲉ and Gignac, *A Grammar* II 75 and 52 r. ⲛⲛⲓⲧⲁⲩⲓⲛⲁⲧⲉ

"I am he upon the lotus, having the power, the holy god--as follows²--[*voces magicae*] protecting [partially effaced name], true priest, for the time of life he has, from all evil, and wrath of the gods and daimones and from all sorcerers."

In addition, the statuette is engraved with an Harpocrates cartouche characteristic of the Imperial period. The falcon is the oldest form of iconographic representation of Horus,³ and, according to Egyptian beliefs, present in the stone (ⲛⲛⲓ). The statue's obvious antiquity validated its magical power in the understanding of the priest who made use of it in the Roman period. He nevertheless reinforced this inherent power with a typically modern (to him) apotropaic image of Harpocrates.⁴ In a Hellenistic fashion he combined old and

¹ I gratefully acknowledge the material assistance of S. Cullen and G. M. Brown.

²This translation follows Daniel and Maltomini, however the restoration *j_! (suggested by C. Bonner) would represent a mistake by the engraver: this word was probably part of an instruction in a formulary rather than part of the intended text.

³ Horus as a falcon is a cosmic symbol, as well as a symbol of the soul's flight to resurrection, H. Bonnet, *Realexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, s.v. "Falke", 178-80. This oldest form of Horus is exemplified in the earliest known pre-dynastic Egyptian cult states, D. Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt", in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, M. B. Dick, ed. (Winnona Lake, Ind., 1999) 123-210, at 126-27.

⁴ Harpocrates, originally a symbol of resurrection on the model of creation, took on an apotropaic function in Hellenistic times and became more closely associated with magical power (*heka*): R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago 1993) 27. S. Morenz and J. Schubert, *Der Gott auf der Blume: Eine ägyptische Kosmogonie und ihre weltweite Wirkung*, *Artibus Asiae Suppl.* 12 (Ascona 1954) 60-82, discuss the Harpocrates type in Egyptian religion, as well as its diffusion and cross-cultural parallels. For the Hellenistic popularity of Harpocrates, see: Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 358 E, 377B, 378B-D, with the comments, *ad loc.*, of Th. Hopfner, *Plutarch über Isis und Osiris*, 2 vols. (Prag 1940-41; repr. Hildesheim 1974), and J. G. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (Cardiff 1970); Iambl. *De Myst.* 7.2 (252). C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets* (Ann

new symbols of power.⁵ At the same time he transformed what was originally an object of an official or public cult into an amulet for his personal use. Several features of this falcon statue, then, combine in a way that is representative of some important trends in late antique religion.

It should be noted that the three types of threat against which the amulet invoked protection represent a familiar Hellenistic conception of the causation of evil. Protection "from all evil" answers to misfortunes that result from "the wrath of the gods and daimones", including the vicissitudes of Tyche, and "from all sorcerers", namely misfortunes caused by magical attacks occasioned by human jealousy, desire, or spite. This typology is exemplified in the Greek magical papyri and in astrological handbooks. Protective magic was often sought against all three sources of potential danger. "You who are lord over all angels; shield me against all excesses of magical power, of aerial daimon, and fate."⁶

This amulet's most recent editors, Daniel and Maltomini, speculate that the effaced name (-MON preceded by the space for six letters is all that remain), "was deleted so that the amulet could be used again" (*Suppl. Mag.* I, 19). But they give no evidence. It is true that Graeco-Egyptian spells commonly used a fill-in-the-blank format in which the magician would read or copy out a set-text of a spell and insert the customer's (or victim's) and his mother's names at the appropriate point, but it is hard to judge even in these texts whether erasure and re-use was practicable. In most cases the spells would have been personalized either when spoken or copied out onto fresh sheets of papyrus, lead, or precious metal, and would often be buried, either to effect a curse, or with the client to continue their apotropaic power after death, and so be lost. Reuse of inscribed *materia magica* seems not to have been very common. In the case of the falcon-amulet, there are additional case-specific difficulties. Why was the name only partially effaced, and why was no new name actually added? The work was not finished, as is clearly visible on the photograph (in *Suppl. Mag.*). Where part of the name was chiseled off, the surface was not smoothed so that a new name could be inscribed, and it is not even clear if this would have been easily possible. Moreover, the deletion of part of the name was done carelessly and probably hastily: the lower parts of some letters above the deleted part of the letter (line 6) have also been damaged. Thus, the manner in which the deletion was executed does not indicate any intention of recycling the stone.

These facts lead to another interpretation that can be paralleled within the statuette's Egyptian context. The name on the amulet may have been damaged on purpose by a rival or enemy in order to deactivate its magical protection and, by this very action, to expose its owner to the various kinds of misfortune named. For this purpose it was sufficient to make the name of the priest unrecognizable rather than completely erased. The apotropaic power would no longer have been able to protect him.

The value of such a defacement of a name in a spell within the symbolic language of Egyptian magic is readily understandable. In Egyptian belief the name is an integral part of the whole person. In the Pyramid Texts the Pharaoh includes his name in his assessment of his personal integrity: "I am hale and also my flesh, it goes well with me and also with my name; I live and also my double."⁷ The significance of defacing a name may be seen as early as in a spell from the Book of the Dead which describes Seth overcoming the chaos serpent Apophis through spells and erasure of his name: "I have [enchanted] the sky, while you are

Arbor, 1950), pl. IX, nrs. 189-192, and M. Lurker, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*, transl. by B. Cummings, (London 1980) 66-67, give illustration of the Harpocrates image.

⁵ The practice is not dissimilar to the reuse of Neolithic hand-axes or celts, believed in antiquity to be the cinders of thunderbolts, and which were sometimes inscribed with apotropaic spells: Pliny, *HN*, 37.135; cf. A. B. Cook, *Zeus* (Cambridge 1925).vol II, 505-14; Bonner, *Studies* (n. 4, above), 238, and pl. XXV, fig. 8 (J.H. Iliffe, *AJA* 35 [1931] 304-09); R. Turner and J. S. Wymer, *Antiquaries Journal* 67 (1987) 43-60.

⁶ *PGM* 1.214ff. The same idea is found in *PGM* XII.709ff.; Manilius, 2.887-888, 938; Firm. Matern. *Math.* 3.4.11; cf. F. E. Brenk, *CJ* 69 (1973) 1-11, at 9-10, further evidence is collected at *Suppl. Mag.* 19, n. to ll. 8-9.

⁷ Utterance 469, § 908, trans. R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts Translated into English* (Oxford 1969) 158.

rubbed out."⁸ Blotting out the written name is the same as destroying the person or deity named. Certain hieroglyphic signs in especially potent funerary spells were written in an abbreviated manner—symbolizing men or animals, they were drawn to show the figures dissected or dismembered—to make them less powerful and therefore less dangerous as living entities to the dead.⁹

Further parallels are provided by such other Egyptian funerary rituals as the rite of the "Breaking of the Red Pots" which is attested as early as the Pyramid Texts as well as in abundant archaeological remains of pots destroyed in the ceremony as late as in the Ptolemaic Period.¹⁰ In the ritual the names of the deceased's enemies (human or mythological) were inscribed on red (because symbolizing the hostile god Seth) vessels that were smashed so as to destroy their names, and hence them, at least temporarily, so that they could do nothing to interfere with the after-life journey of the one for whom the rite was performed.¹¹ Acting on the same principle, the Pharaoh would decree *damnatio memoriae* for his enemies, causing their names to be struck off all inscriptions, cursing them through the destruction of their names and denying them the magical protection of many kinds of inscriptions vital in the after-life.¹² Akhenaton (who wished to disestablish traditional Egyptian religion) went so far as to systematically destroy all cult statues of Amon to symbolically, and, by the logic of sympathetic magic thereby actually, eliminate a rival to his new god (Ritner, *Mechanics* [n. 4, above], 246, n. 1129). Since the magical power is in the name or in the statue, destroying the representation attacks the divinity concerned. In the same way the destruction of the priest's name on the falcon statuette would not only break the apotropaic spell but also constitute an aggressive magical attack against him.

The falcon amulet, once inscribed, was probably hidden or at least kept among the personal effects of its owner. Therefore the person who effaced it must have sought it out to destroy its apotropaic effect and attack his rival.¹³ While I know of no exact parallel for such an operation from antiquity, the opposite procedure, searching for a curse tablet to neutralize its power when someone believes himself to be under its effect, was common enough that several accounts of such a search survive. According to the sixth century

⁸ Translation of Ritner, *Mechanics* (n. 4, above), 66. Cf. D. Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions", *Helios* 21 (1994) 189-221, esp. at 192.

⁹ P. Lacau, "Suppression et modifications de signes dans les textes funéraires", *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 51 (1913) 1-64.

¹⁰ Ritner, *Mechanics* (n. 4, above), 144-148; Frankfurter, *Helios* 21 (1994) 209.

¹¹ In the introductory story of the *Oracle of the Potter* (P. Graf; Vienna, inv. G. 29787) an assembled crowd pulls the pottery that the Potter of the story is baking out of a kiln on an island of religious importance. The people presumably destroy the pottery. In his subsequent prophecy, the Potter refers to this action and interprets it as a prophetic sign for the destruction of Alexandria and the Typhonians, the followers of Seth. In the discussion of an unpublished paper by L. Koenen on the "Narrative Structure of the Oracle of the Potter" in a 1998 conference at Chicago, R. K. Ritner pointed to the similarity of the Potter's prophetic action to the ideas of the ritual of "Breaking the Red Pots", even though the pottery in the *Oracle of the Potter* is not said to be inscribed with the names of the enemies and its color is not mentioned. For the text of the *Oracle of the Potter* see L. Koenen, *ZPE* 2 (1968) 178-209; 3 (1968) 137; 13 (1974) 313-319; 54 (1984) 9-13. This note is based on a communication by L. Koenen to the author.

¹² Ritner, *Mechanics* (n. 3, above), 148-152. The same practice is attested in the Assyrian Empire. A tiny stone prism with a cuneiform inscription from Nimrud (BM 89159) forbids the erasure of the royal name and threatens any transgressor with the destruction of his own name and hence himself and his descendants. The text reads in part: "Property of Sennacherib, king of Assyria...Whoever...erases my written name, may Ashur and Ninlil, my masters, make his name and his scions disappear!" The exact context and function of this unique object is unknown: E. Sollberger, "A Bead for Sennacherib", in *Language, Literature, and History*, FS Reiner and F. Rochberg-Halton, ed. (New Haven, Conn. 1987) 379-381.

¹³ If it was then thrown away or hidden this might account for its preservation, although its exact provenance is unknown.

patristic author Sophronius,¹⁴ a certain Theophilus, after becoming paralyzed in his limbs, was informed in a dream how to find a cursing doll¹⁵ that had been made against him. Once he recovered it and deactivated the spell by removing the nails driven through its hands and feet, he was restored to health. In this story that verges on romance the victim of a curse seeks out the object that is the instrument of his binding and destroys it to cure himself, whereas in the case of the falcon statuette a protective charm was sought out and destroyed. Similarly, but with greater historical reliability, the rhetor Libanius in the fourth century lost his powers of concentration and blamed a curse; searching his classroom for a cursing instrument he found a mutilated chameleon and thereafter quickly recovered his mental repose.¹⁶ When Tiberius' step-son Germanicus came down with a fever his room was successfully searched for curse tablets; in this case their discovery did not end his illness or prevent his death.¹⁷

In such stories, the searches for hidden magical objects attest the beliefs in their power and the efforts to eliminate their negative power. I suggest that the idea behind the search for someone's protective amulet and the elimination of that person's name is not much different. It aims at eliminating its positive power and, thus, at exposing that person to the dangers against which he or she had been protected by the amulet. Such a story must lie behind the defaced condition of our falcon amulet.

There can, of course, be no means of knowing who damaged the amulet, or in what relation he stood to the priest who owned it, or what quarrel he may have had with him. No distinction between priest and magician makes sense of the Egyptian situation where the knowledge and techniques of religion and magic were identical. The only meaningful differentiation of ritual was between those performed for official cultic purposes and those performed for private ends such as both the creation and destruction of the charm on the falcon statue.¹⁸ Just as the priest who appropriated the amulet by inscribing it used his knowledge of ritual for his own ends, thus the person who effaced it could well have been a priest himself. On the other hand, the magic involved in defacing the name was quite intuitive in Egyptian culture and so could easily enough have been performed by anyone.

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¹⁴ Sophronius, *Narratio Miraculorum Sanctorum Cyri et Joannis*, PG, 87.3, col. 3541-48, printed in J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford 1992) 262-263, nr. 165. *Ibid.*, PG 87.3, col. 3625 (Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 263, nr. 166), gives a similar story. On Sophronius, see: H. Chadwick, *JTS* n.s. 25 (1974) 41-74, esp. 49-55.

¹⁵ C. A. Faraone, "Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of Voodoo Dolls in Ancient Greece", *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1991) 165-220 mentions the Sophronius text at 193 and defends the common use of the term 'voodoo doll' for this type of object (n.4). He admits that the term is misleading, since the dolls used in Afro-Caribbean religions are not especially connected with cursing. Rather they are miniature cult statues which were developed during slavery when full-sized statues were forbidden. Hence, it seems to me, this term ought to be abandoned. The dolls, used as the sympathetic equivalent of the victim of a curse, are entirely a product of Mediterranean culture. Rather than perpetuate this misleading terminology, English ought to join other modern languages and use some term such as 'cursing doll' for this kind of object (e.g.: *Rachepuppe* or *figurine d'encoûtement*).

¹⁶ Lib. *Or.* I.243-250. Cf. C. Bonner, *TAPA* 63 (1932) 34-44; C. A. Faraone, "An Accusation of Magic in Classical Athens (Ar. *Wasps* 946-948)", *TAPA* 119 (1989) 149-160, at 153-54.

¹⁷ Tacit. *Ann.* 2.69 (Gager, *Curse Tablets* [n. 14, above], 254, nr. 148. Cf. Suet. *V. Gaii*, 2; Dio, 57.8.9.

¹⁸ Ritner, *Mechanics* (n. 4, above), 220-233. Priests, and even philosophers, in other Mediterranean cultures, despite the presence there of an intensely perceived, if difficult to define, distinction between magic and religion, were also ready to make curses when it suited them, e.g.: *Lev. Rab.* 21.9; *Lk* 13:32; *Acts* 13:4-12; *Cic. In Cat.* 1.16; *Porphy. V. Plot.* 10.1-15 (Brisson).