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**Publication Date**

2012

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Writing Gems: Ekphrastic Description and Precious Stones  
in Hellenistic Epigrams and Later Greek Prose

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Classics

by

Emily Michelle Rush

2012



ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Writing Gems: Ekphrastic Description and Precious Stones  
in Hellenistic Epigrams and Later Greek Prose

by

Emily Michelle Rush

Doctor of Philosophy in Classics

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor John Papadopoulos, Co-Chair

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This study investigates how inscribed gems and precious stones serve as a particularly useful model for discussing a variety of concerns of the Hellenistic world. These widely circulated objects, typically made from valuable materials and ranging in type from uncarved gems to decorative cameos and seal stones, were anything but inert objects. Rather, as I argue, precious stones were not only treasured for their economic value, but were also charged with social, political, and cultural significance. Such stones functioned as more than ornamentation, frequently serving as markers of personal authority and social identity, thus possessing significant semiotic power despite their typically small size. Due to their highly symbolic and multifaceted nature, gemstones seem to have deeply engraved themselves upon the literary imagination of a number of

writers of Greek poetry and prose from the third century B.C.E. to the third century C.E. who wrote detailed descriptions of such stones. Although the art of gem carving had been well established by the Hellenistic period, literary treatment of precious stones is rather limited up to that point. It is only after the eastward expansion of Alexander the Great and an influx of new materials and gems types, that a select number of Greek epigrammatists began to engage with the themes of the production of gemstones and their materials in response to an increasingly available category of luxury goods and perhaps also as a self-conscious nod to the genre's own lithic origins. Through their ekphrastic descriptions of gemstones, therefore, Hellenistic epigrammatists initiated a literary discourse on precious stones, whose influence would extend not only across temporal, spatial, and generic boundaries, but well beyond the classical world.

In the first half of my dissertation, I probe the metapoetic significance of the relationship between ekphrastic epigrams and Greco-Roman gemstones by focusing on the production and materials of gemstones. My second chapter argues that a close link exists between the poems and the objects described and concludes that the minute attention to detail displayed by the glyptic artist becomes simultaneously a source of delight and wonder as well as a metapoetic device for the exacting art of ekphrastic poetry. In the third chapter, I discuss the manner in which later Greek authors, much like glyptic artists, drew upon technological and intellectual knowledge of precious stones, their properties and symbolic values in order to explore issues of adaptation, authority and originality in literary texts. I contend that engraved seal stones and their impressions can be seen as a metaphor for later prose adaptations of the poetic discourse and conclude that such imitations ought not to be viewed as imprecise copies of an original, but rather as adaptations whose mimetic qualities allow for creative originality.

In the second half of my dissertation, I analyze the social and literary implications of

the ekphrastic description of gems. The fourth chapter treats one of the most pervasive forms of magic in antiquity: magic stones and amulets. I show how the literary descriptions of magical stones are noteworthy, not only for their representations of the magical stones themselves, but also for the way in which they imitate magical practices through the careful combination of the written with the visual. The fifth chapter explores the social reception of gems and their ability to illuminate ancient ideas about gender. Although precious stones were used by both men and women, their use was largely divided along gender lines. Both sexes utilized precious stones, however, in their literary treatment during the Hellenistic and Imperial periods gems are predominately associated with women. By means of a detailed study of the gendered treatment of gems in ekphrastic texts, I argue that women become assimilated with precious stones and on account of the gendered conceptualization of stones in literary texts, women become eroticized, objectified and commodified in a manner similar to gemstones by means of this association. The final chapter traces Greek authors' utilization of precious stones as a means of treating identity and character and suggests that gems become metonymic representations. In these instances, visual impact becomes not an end goal for ekphrasis, but rather a means for exploring the didactic nature of stones' properties and of the images graven upon them. Through the examination of portraits carved on gemstones, a connection may be forged between an ekphrastic character sketch and the representation of types found on inscribed gemstones.

The dissertation of Emily Michelle Rush is approved.

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2012

## DEDICATION

To My Parents



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the course of this project, I was supported financially, intellectually, and emotionally by a number of people and institutions.

The research for this work was carried out at the University of California Los Angeles and in various museum collections in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, and Berlin. The departments of Classics and Art History at UCLA provided me with fellowships over the course of my research, and without them my dissertation would not have been completed. Mrs. Harry Lenart, by whose generosity the Lenart Travel Fellowship was established, funded my travel to Europe in the early stages of my research.

Particular thanks are owed to the members of my committee, especially my co-chairs. Mario Telò first encouraged me to investigate further the topic of precious stones and ekphrastic description and has contributed many provocative ideas, observations, and insights. John Papadopoulos not only has generously guided me in my study of material culture throughout my time at UCLA, but also provided invaluable assistance in the writing of this dissertation. The two remaining members of my committee, David Blank and James Porter, deserve special mention, as well, for their thoughtful comments and critiques which saved me from all sorts of errors.

In addition, I would like to thank the faculty members of the department of Classics at UCLA, and my teachers in the departments of Art History and Classical Languages at the University of St. Thomas for their continued assistance, guidance, and encouragement over the years. For the same reason, I also extend my appreciation to my friends and colleagues at these institutions and elsewhere.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Nathanael Andrade and Kelly Tuttle for their willingness to read and comment upon my research in its nascent stages as well as for their unstinting support.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **An Introduction to Gems and Precious Stones in Greek Culture and Literary Thought**

To many persons, doubtless, a treatise upon the subject of Precious Stones may appear an unworthy, if not an idle task; but when the immense amount of capital, which lies dormant in the Imperial and Royal Treasuries, and in private hands, is considered, and when the fact is remembered that there is scarcely a home where jewels of one sort or another—all representing a money value—are not to be found, the subject assumes an importance, which it lacks at first sight.<sup>1</sup>

Inscribed gemstones serve as a particularly useful model for discussing a variety of issues of the Hellenistic world. These widely circulated objects, which often traveled great distances from their original sources, ranged in type from uncarved gemstones to engraved cameos. Gems and precious stones were desired by many but possessed by few. So great was their value and desirability that imitations were made in less expensive materials such as paste and colored glass. Whether material or literary, a gemstone is an economic commodity which carries not only aesthetic significance, but also cultural and economic value. As such, gems are luxury items “whose principal use is *rhetorical* and *social*, goods that are *incarnated* signs.”<sup>2</sup> Such stones, therefore, functioned as more than ornamentation, frequently serving as markers of personal authority and social identity, thus possessing significant semiotic power despite their (typically) small size.

Due to their highly symbolic and multifaceted nature, gemstones seem to have deeply engraved themselves upon the literary imagination of a number of writers of Greek poetry and prose from the third century B.C.E. to the third century C.E. who wrote detailed descriptions of them. These descriptions, or ekphraseis, engaged with their lithic counterparts as models but also attempted to surpass the material objects by expressing, in literary form, aspects that mute

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuel 1867, xi.

<sup>2</sup> Appadurai 1986, 38



objects cannot. Through the use of literary and material evidence, this study will show how gems function as conveyors of meaning utilized by writers of Hellenistic poetry and Later Greek literature.

### 1.1 Greco-Roman Gemstones

Although Pliny states that the practice of wearing precious stones began on the rocks of the Caucasus where Prometheus was bound, the ancient Greek glyptic arts, in fact originated in the Bronze Age. As surviving examples of engraved seal stones and precious gems from both Minoan Crete and from the Late Bronze Age burials at Mycenae indicate, gem carving was amongst the most prized crafts in antiquity.<sup>3</sup> After the collapse of the Bronze Age civilizations, however, there was a decline in the engraving of hard gemstones. In the 9<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. artisans predominately used softer stone and ivories, with the carving of hard stones resuming only in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> In the late Archaic period an ever expanding range of images including individuals, both human and divine, as well as plant motifs came to be depicted on precious stones. It is from gems carved during this period that individual artists first began to be identified;<sup>5</sup> precious stones also began to bear inscriptions indicating the craftsmen who made them and in some cases their owners. During the Archaic and Classical periods, intaglios, or incised gems, were primarily set into rings as seal stones.<sup>6</sup> At this same time, there was also an expansion of types and shapes of stones which included scarabs or scaraboids, thus reflecting the growth of

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<sup>3</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.1; Boardman 1975, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Boardman and Vollenweider 1978.

<sup>5</sup> According to Boardman (2001, 148), two of the best known are Epimenes and the Semon Master.

<sup>6</sup> Plantzos 1999.

personal use as ornamentation rather than the purely bureaucratic use of precious stones.<sup>7</sup>

By the Hellenistic period, inscribed gemstones and their use had undergone a number of changes. Gem engravers increasingly adopted novel techniques and enjoyed increasing access to new, exotic materials from the East.<sup>8</sup> In particular, “the hyacinth, garnet, beryl, topaz, amethyst [were] now eagerly sought after and skillfully used to gain the maximum effect of their brilliant coloring.”<sup>9</sup> Stones, bright red in color, derived from chalcedonies and carnelians continued in popularity, yet semi-precious stones and glass, sometimes colored to imitate stone, were increasingly sought after as well.<sup>10</sup> A variety of new shapes such as ring-stones, scaraboids, and cameos were also introduced during this period.<sup>11</sup> In addition to being mounted on rings, precious stones also began to be set in necklaces, bracelets, diadems, and cups.<sup>12</sup> Gems, in the Hellenistic period, as earlier, were not solely for personal consumption. Beginning in the late fifth century, a number of temple inventories from the Athenian Acropolis, Delos, and Eleusis reveal the frequent dedication of gems as gifts.<sup>13</sup> Other engraved stones, such as a sard currently in Berlin, were likely never intended to be worn, but may have been funerary offerings.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Platt 2006, 235.

<sup>8</sup> Plantzos 1999, 36. Theophrastus notes that stones from Greece were generally considered to be of lower quality than those from the east.

<sup>9</sup> Richter 1968, 134.

<sup>10</sup> Boardman and Vollenweider 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Plantzos 1999, 36; Richter 1920, 60.

<sup>12</sup> Plantzos 1999, 106.

<sup>13</sup> Plantzos 1999, 12-17.

<sup>14</sup> Gertrude Platz (*privatim*) has suggested that the ring, based on the state of the original ring setting whose edges were still rough, was not intended to be worn.

Just as the royal courts at Pella and Alexandria became flourishing centers for the visual and literary arts, so too did the glyptic arts thrive under royal patronage. A handful of gem workers received recognition for their work and were considered alongside prominent sculptors and painters. For example, according to Pliny, Pyrgoteles was given the sole right to fashion images of Alexander in emerald.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the work of certain gem engravers was held in high regard perhaps led to greater interest in portraiture on gemstones, not only of Alexander himself, but also of numerous other royal patrons, especially after the development of the cameo technique.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2 Precious Stones in Literature and Ekphrastic Description

Much as the use of precious stones was limited prior to the Hellenistic period, so too were detailed references to precious and inscribed gemstones and jewelry in Greek literature. Of the literary references to precious stones that pre-date the Hellenistic period, most focus on the use of gems as seal stones.<sup>17</sup> In drama, for example, much emphasis is made of seal stones, which were owned by men alone,<sup>18</sup> and functioned as symbols of power, tokens of identity,<sup>19</sup> or symbols of legal authority,<sup>20</sup> though few of these dramatic descriptions would be called ekphraseis.

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<sup>15</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.8.

<sup>16</sup> As has been discussed by Boardman and Plantzos, there existed a close relationship between portraiture on engraved gemstones and that on coins.

<sup>17</sup> There is some debate, however, whether engraved stones were actually used as seal stones. Plantzos (1999, 22), for example, argues that sealings and impressions found in Hellenistic hoards were made from all-metal rings rather than intaglios. As Platt (2006, 235-37) notes, this early usage may reflect Near Eastern influence.

<sup>18</sup> *E.g.* Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 606-10, Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* 414-425, *Lysistrata* 1198.

<sup>19</sup> Sophocles *Elektra* 1222-4, *Trachiniai* 614; Aristophanes *Knights* 951-9; Menander *Epitrepontes* 388-90.

<sup>20</sup> Aristophanes *Wasps* 583-7; Demosthenes 33.36. Seals could also function as symbols of state authority as in Aristotle *Ath. Pol.* 44.1.

The significance of gems, and especially seal stones, was not lost on writers of philosophical texts either. In Plato and Aristotle, as well as in later Stoic writings, the use of seal stones and the act of creating an impression or *tuposis* was drawn upon as a metaphor for the acquisition of knowledge in order to “explain the ‘impressions’ made by perceived objects upon the sense organs, and therefore the psyche, or ‘soul’.”<sup>21</sup> In his *Meteorologica*, Aristotle offers what is perhaps the first scientific treatment of stones in his discussion of their physical properties.<sup>22</sup>

Despite references to stones and analogies using them, few literary texts provided detailed descriptions of precious stones. With the advent of the Hellenistic period, however, we see an increased treatment of gemstones in Greek prose and poetry. In the late fourth century B.C.E. technical writers began to take an interest in gemstones and minerals. Theophrastus, for example, in his *Lithika (de Lapidibus)* dating to ca. 315-305 B.C.E. wrote on the properties of both precious and semi-precious stones. Sotacus, one of Pliny’s sources, is also reputed to have written about gems at this time.<sup>23</sup> The third century epigrammatist Posidippus of Pella also seems to have been influenced by and participated in the same discussion of ancient gemstones and jewelry as the technical writers. A collection of poems about stones in his small corpus of one hundred and twelve epigrams, which also treats descriptions of omens, dedications, epitaphs, statues, horse-racing, shipwrecks, cures, and characters make this evident. It is significant to note that his poems on stones, or *Lithika*, a collection of twenty short epigrams and fragments

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<sup>21</sup> Platt 2006, 245. See Aristotle *De Anima* 424a19, Plato *Theaetetus* 191C. On the stoic model of *tuposis* see Diogenes Laertius 7.46, 7.177, Sextus Empiricus 7.247, 252, and Athenaeus 354e. See also chapter three of this study.

<sup>22</sup> See *Meteorologica* 378a 20-25 in which he calls them fossils “*orukta*”, 380b25, 383b5, 11, 20, 384a18, b2, 385a9, b29, 386a10, a27\*, b10, b15, b19, 387a18, b17, 388a15, b25, 389a8, 18, b22.

<sup>23</sup> Sotacus is referenced by Pliny at *NH* 36.146, 37.135, though little information is given about him.

containing descriptions of stones, were placed first in the bookroll, and thus as Hunter notes must have created “a brilliant and programmatic opening to the collection” to his book of poetry.<sup>24</sup> More significantly, these poems on stones form the basis for a discussion of ancient gemstones that was drawn upon by later Greek authors.

Following Posidippus, there are approximately twenty-five epigrams on stones in the *Palatine Anthology* dating from the third century B.C.E. to the late antique period. These poems, like Posidippus’ *Lithika*, partake in a discussion of ancient gemstones that was eagerly appropriated by later Greek and Roman writers, up to the fourth century C.E., into both poetic and prose works. Through detailed epigrammatic descriptions of stones, usually no longer than twenty lines, Hellenistic poets often emphasized the value of attention to detail, intricacy, rarity, and brilliance among other prized qualities. In many cases it is evident that the literary form of the epigram—small and carefully constructed—mirrors its subject matter.

In the Roman Imperial period, descriptions of stones, such as those written by earlier epigrammatists, begin to figure in the works of several prose authors including Lucian, Philostratus, Achilles Tatius, and especially Heliodorus. These ekphraseis, much like the description of Odysseus’ brooch from book nineteen of the *Odyssey*, provide significant clues for understanding narrative and characterization. In various dialogues, the second century Lucian of Samosata makes reference to gemstones for a variety of effects, for example, in his *de Domo* (15.5) precious stones and adornment are used as metaphors for excessive embellishment in speech.<sup>25</sup> In Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* the magical properties of gemstones are repeatedly described. In Heliodorus’ *Aethiopika*, the novel’s heroine is frequently described

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<sup>24</sup>Hunter 2004, 95.

<sup>25</sup> See also Lucian *Alex.* 21.3, *Gall.* 22.8, *Icar.* 20.2, *Ind.* 8.17.

alongside gemstones, and in the course of the novel receives her freedom in exchange for a precious stone.

### 1.3 Prior Scholarship

Although some of the earliest scholarship on Hellenistic gemstones has demonstrated an engagement with the relationship between precious stones and literary sources, this relationship has primarily been a unidirectional one, in which literary citations are used as evidence for the use of precious stones. Furtwängler, in his *Antike Gemmen*, for example, showed an interest in ancient sources on gemstones.<sup>26</sup> Plantzos, in his detailed study of Hellenistic engraved gemstones, frequently cites literary references to Greco-Roman gemstones, yet does not develop the relationship between the two media.<sup>27</sup> Gutzwiller's treatment of *AP* 9.752, as well as Kuttner's discussion of Posidippus' *Lithika* are among the few recent articles which examine closely ancient precious stones in conjunction with literary texts in order to show the influence of ancient stones on literary texts.<sup>28</sup> Roberts' *The Jeweled Style*, which focuses on Latin literature of the fourth and fifth centuries C.E., discusses literary text in conjunction with material culture and is the only book-length treatment of gems and jewels as a literary metaphor in antiquity.<sup>29</sup>

Scholarship on ekphrastic description of gemstones, with few exceptions, has revealed the tendency of scholars to focus on the literary aspects of ekphraseis as a separate and privileged mode that was distinct from their lapidary counterparts, which is perhaps due in part to the

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<sup>26</sup> Furtwängler 1900.

<sup>27</sup> Plantzos 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Gutzwiller 1995; Kuttner 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Roberts 1989.

dominant trends in scholarship on ekphrasis in which the role of the object described is often subordinate to that of the viewer.<sup>30</sup> Goldhill, for example, has treated ekphrastic descriptions as a vehicle for the formation of the elite viewing subject and a locus for the development of the discipline of art history.<sup>31</sup> Critical studies by scholars such as Elsner have, in turn, looked at ekphrasis in Greco-Roman literature in order to understand better ancient concepts of vision, optics, and modes of seeing.<sup>32</sup>

Even in scholarship on ekphrastic epigrams of works of art, the role of the described object is often uncertain, perhaps because our understanding and categorization of descriptions of works of art is still under contention. As several scholars admit, even those who focus their scholarship on such descriptions of art, this type of ekphrasis represents a narrow view of the field based on a modern definition of the term.<sup>33</sup> Many have been quick to point out that the term ekphrasis was not applied to many such descriptions and moreover that the genre was not clearly defined. There exists a great deal of slippage between this type and those called epideictic or dedicatory. In discussing ekphrasis of works of art, therefore, some scholars have used literary ekphrasis as a model for reconstructing now lost works.<sup>34</sup> Yet still others, pointing to the animated nature of many ekphrasis of works of art, cite the impossibility of the object described. The dominant message, as seen in Zanker's recent treatment of viewing and Hellenistic art, is that literary and visual materials ought to be seen as independent entities.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Exceptions include Gutzwiller 1995 and Kuttner 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Goldhill 1994, 2001, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Elsner 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Gutzwiller 2002, Männlein-Robert 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Murray 1890; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1989, 1990.

<sup>35</sup> Zanker 2004.

Gems provide a useful means for approaching the relationship between verbal and visual media, a discussion that has been of much interest to art historians and classicists alike for over a century.<sup>36</sup> As Squire has recently discussed, the text-image debate has tended to center on issues of illustration or ekphrasis.<sup>37</sup> The central question regarding illustration has been, of course, did artists represent stories from literary texts or not? Early scholarship, for example, has tended to emphasize similarities between text and image in order to argue that artists were representing texts, while others have stressed differences in order to suggest that craftsmen were exercising freedom of artistic expression.<sup>38</sup> Recent scholarship, however, has considered the debate not so much in terms of “illustration” as of textual authority.<sup>39</sup> Studies on ekphrasis have tended to privilege literary texts, even more so, over their material counterparts. It is my goal to reconsider the role of material objects in the relationship between text and image in order to close the “gap between the seeable and the sayable for exploring [the] literary, social and cultural manifestations.”<sup>40</sup>

In this dissertation, I focus on the issue of ekphrastic description, one that has garnered particular interest in the last twenty years. In the field of classics alone, numerous valuable studies have been put forth regarding ekphrasis and its various uses. One such approach has been the role of ekphrasis in narrative as exemplified by Fowler’s seminal article discussion of ekphrasis’ ability to transgress the boundaries of narrative and description in order to bring

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<sup>36</sup> For a brief summary of the history of the text-image debate see especially Squire 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Squire 2009, 120.

<sup>38</sup> One of the earliest comparisons of text and image is Roberts 1881.

<sup>39</sup> Snodgrass 1998; Small 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Squire 2009, 140.



into focus elements from which we, the readers, ought to derive meaning.<sup>41</sup> Two years earlier, Bartsch's *Decoding the Ancient Novel* showed how ekphrastic descriptions in the ancient novel reveal that the plots were carefully planned and that ekphraseis provided the readers with narrative clues for 'decoding' the novel, both proleptically and in hindsight.<sup>42</sup> Others, such as Becker, have argued that descriptions provide clues not only for unraveling narrative development, but also serve as a model for better understanding poetry itself and, like Bartsch, a tool for guiding reader response.<sup>43</sup> In the last decade, a few scholars, such as Morales, have focused on select aspects of ekphrasis, such as the importance of vision and the description of aspects of the visual in Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, particularly as it relates to gender and subjectivity in the novel as well as the erotics of narrative.<sup>44</sup>

Outside of the field of narratology, scholars recently have tended to emphasize the role of ekphrastic description and other such literary exercises in elite education and the manner in which ekphrasis is perhaps closely related to rhetorical theory and practice. Several scholars, in particular Goldhill and Webb, have stressed the need to consider ekphrasis in a wider and more complex set of cultural ideas.<sup>45</sup> While advocating for a broader examination of ekphrasis, Goldhill has repeatedly focused on Hellenistic epigrams as a means for discussing ancient concepts of vision, reading, and the production of meaning.<sup>46</sup> Webb, similarly, calls for a broader

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<sup>41</sup> Fowler 1991.

<sup>42</sup> Bartsch 1989.

<sup>43</sup> Becker 1995.

<sup>44</sup> Morales 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Goldhill 1994, 2001, 2007; Webb 2009.

<sup>46</sup> See especially Goldhill 1994.

treatment of the term ekphrasis, recalling that in antiquity it referred not only to the description of a work of art, but could also be applied to the detailed treatment of a person, space, time, etc., and that, at least in treatises of the Roman Empire and later, it was used in reference to a specific style of emotional writing.<sup>47</sup> Elsner also points to the multiplicity of purpose and effect of ekphraseis. Yet, whereas Webb repeatedly returns to a rhetorical model, Elsner postulates the theory that there is no single genre or type for this sort of description but rather, that there are several, having different types of literary force.<sup>48</sup> According to Männlein-Robert “Ekphrasis... or ekphrastic epigrams take as their subject works of art, such as paintings, portraits, gems, and statues which yet, as is often the case, fail to describe them in a detailed, objective, and analytical fashion. So the concern here is not poetic imitations of art imbued with a stirring *enargeia* (clarity), but rather the poetic identification of a work of art and the poetic *mise en scene* of an important interpretative pronouncement on it.”<sup>49</sup>

#### 1.4 Medium, Value and Meaning of Precious Stones

In order to understand better any discussion of Greco-Roman precious stones, it is first necessary to have an idea about how gems were valued. Like Greco-Roman precious and engraved stones, the gems contained in Posidippus’ *Lithika* (as well as those of the *Greek Anthology*) were esteemed for a number of reasons, both material and ideological. The material properties of gems, for example how they affect the senses, and the origins of their production (often coming from “exotic” places), determine, in large part, the semantic value with which poets like Posidippus endow them. As I hope to show through a brief examination of materials

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<sup>47</sup> Webb 2009; see also Zanker 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Elsner 2002.

<sup>49</sup> Männlein-Robert 2007, 252.

and production of gemstones, the shared qualities of the stones and ekphrastic poetry make gems a unique and perhaps privileged subject within Hellenistic ekphrastic discourse.

As today, precious stones and carved gems were prized in antiquity for various aspects such as their luminosity, color, size and origin. The most exceptional gems, according to Pliny were “regarded as beyond all price, or at least at a higher price than any other of the world’s goods.”<sup>50</sup> The primary factors for determining value were: beauty (which encompassed both color and luster), rarity, size, craftsmanship, and fashion.<sup>51</sup> Many of these characteristics are shared as well by poems within the *Lithika*.

Out of the many qualities for which gems were valued and distinguished, color is listed by Theophrastus as the first and primary characteristic.<sup>52</sup> Gems in antiquity, unlike today, were classified according to color rather than by mineral composition, so that gems that are in actuality distinct in their make-up were seen as closely related.<sup>53</sup> Some colors, however, were seen as preferable to others. During the Hellenistic period there was a fondness for red stones such as sards, rubies, and carnelians.<sup>54</sup> Transparent stones were seen as more valuable than semi-

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<sup>50</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.1. Later in the same book (37.77), Pliny states: “of objects that lie upon the surface of the earth, it is crystal that is most highly esteemed, of those derived from the interior, diamond, emerald, precious stones and *murrha* are the things upon which the highest value is placed” (trans. Ball 1950). By Pliny’s day, at least, there seems to have been some standardization of the price of gems; a diamond, for example, was seen to be significantly more valuable than other less precious stones.

<sup>51</sup> Ball 1950. Ball does not include craftsmanship as a criterion for which gems were valued, but Boardman 1975 does. See also see Petrain 2005; Plantzos, 1999. On the historical and sociological value of precious stones see: Kuttner 2005. For the various categories of value, see several papers in Papadopoulos and Urton 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Theophrastus *de Lap.* 6.

<sup>53</sup> Pliny, for example, in book thirty-seven of the *Natural Histories* lists gemstones according color. He did seem, however, to have had a rudimentary understanding of the beginnings of mineral classification (Ball 1950, 13).

<sup>54</sup> Boardman 2001. Theophrastus (18) notes that certain red stones, such as the anthrax, were also high in value and that even a small one costs forty pieces of gold (μικρὸν γὰρ σφόδρα τετταράκοντα χρυσῶν).

transparent or opaque stones.<sup>55</sup> Yet other stones, such as amethyst and emerald, were popular as well. Some gems were of such beauty and rarity (especially emeralds, rubies, and sapphires) that it was not seen fit by many to engrave them.<sup>56</sup> Equally important to color was luster and clarity. For both Pliny and Theophrastus, fine stones ought to be radiant and free of blemishes, clouds, or inclusions. However, if the color of a gemstone was dull or flawed, a skilled craftsman could embellish its color by a variety of methods: by faceting the stone, by engraving it, or by means of a metallic foil placed in the back of the setting.<sup>57</sup>

Posidippus places great emphasis on the color, clarity and luminosity of the stones described in the *Lithika*. Although other sensory elements, such as touch, may be alluded to in the *Lithika*, it is above all the sense of sight and properties of vision that are emphasized in the poems, reminding the reader/viewer of the role of the visual in ekphrastic poetry. In the opening lines of many of the poems, as exemplified by AB 3, the color of the stone and its radiant properties are emphasized:<sup>58</sup>

ἄνθραξ] ἀυγάζων ὄδ', ἐν ᾧ φιά[λην ὁ λιθουργὸς  
 ἔγλυφε]ν, ἀρπάζει βλέμματος ὑγρά φιά  
 χάλκα]νθ' εἰς τριέλικτα φυήν· σὺ δὲ καί[ν' ἀγαπῶσα  
 εὐφρω]ν ἐν δαίτη, πότνια, τ[όνδε] δέ[χου].

The shining [ruby], on which [the engraver carved] a bowl,  
 seizes the eye's swimming glance, directing it  
 towards [the golden flowers] with their triple tendrils. And you, lady, [lover of  
 novelties], [kindly receive it] in the banquet.

<sup>55</sup> Ball 1950, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.1, 16. Cf. Theophrastus *de Lap.* 8. Pliny states that the color of some varieties of *smaragdi* could be improved by being washed in wine and oil (37.19), while the *carbunculus* might be steeped in vinegar.

<sup>57</sup> Ball 1950, 42.

<sup>58</sup> The numerical references to the poems will follow the edition of C. Austin and G. Bastianini, *Posidippi Pellaei Quae Supersunt Omnia* (Milan, 2002), hereafter referred to as AB. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

Throughout the *Lithika*, it is the dazzling color of gems that most strikingly emerges. It is additionally noteworthy that, even though there are multiple red stones (AB 3, 8), a wide spectrum of colors and stones are described. We find paler shades such as grey (AB 4, 16) and light colored shells (AB 11-12), stones streaked with white (AB 15), yellow (AB 7), blues (AB 5, 14), and perhaps even a rainbow colored gem (AB 6).<sup>59</sup> Not only is a full range of colors described by Posidippus, but great emphasis is placed upon the stones' luminescent qualities (AB 3...αὐγαζῶν, AB 4 ἀντισέληνον, AB ἀστερόεντο, AB 6 μαρμαῖρον...σέλας, AB 7 φλέγει...συλλάμπει...φαή, etc.) and lack of blemishes and occlusions (AB 8.7-8: ὁ καὶ τέρας, εἰ πλατὺν ὄγκον/ ἔνδοθεν ὑδρηλὴ μὴ διαθεῖ νεφέλη; AB 15.6: κατὰ πλάτεος δ' οὐκ ἂν ἴδοις προβόλους).

Such an emphasis on color and luminosity in the *Lithika* is consistent not only with the technical writers' descriptions of stones as evidenced by Theophrastus and Pliny, but is also commensurate with other Hellenistic poetic ekphraseis.<sup>60</sup> In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, both people and objects are described in much the same way as are gems. For example, when Jason picks up the golden fleece, its gleam glows so brightly that it casts radiance upon him as well (4.163-173):

ἔνθα δ' ὁ μὲν χρύσειον ἀπὸ δρυὸς αἴνυτο κῶας,  
 κούρης κεκλομένης, ἣ δ' ἔμπεδον ἔστηυῖα  
 φαρμάκῳ ἔψηχεν θηρὸς κάρη, εἰσόκε δὴ μιν  
 αὐτὸς ἔην ἐπὶ νῆα παλιντροπάασθαι Ἰήσων  
 ἦνωγεν· λείπεν δὲ πολύσκιον ἄλσος Ἄρηος.  
 ὥς δὲ σεληναίης διχομήνιδα παρθένος αἴγλην  
 ὑψόθεν ἐξανέχουσαν ὑπωροφίου θαλάμοιο

<sup>59</sup> Gutzwiller (2003) has argued that Iris in AB 6 refers not to an image of a deity but to a multi-colored rock crystal.

<sup>60</sup> As Becker 1995 suggests, emphasis on color may, in fact, be a defining characteristic of ekphrasis.

λεπταλέω̄ ἐανῶ̄ ὑποίσχεται, ἐν δέ οἱ ἦτορ  
χαίρει δερκομένης καλὸν σέλας· ὥς τὸτ' Ἰήσων  
γηθόσυνος μέγα κῶας ἑαῖς ἀναείρετο χερσίν,  
καί οἱ ἐπὶ ξανθῆσι παρηίσι ἤδη μετώπῳ  
μαρμαρυγῆ̄ ληνέων φλογὶ εἴκελον ἴζεν ἔρευος.<sup>61</sup>

Then, at the girl's command, while she stood fast and kept rubbing the head of the beast with the drug, until Jason himself told her to turn back toward their ship, and she left the shade-filled grove of Ares. And as a young girl catches on her delicate gown the beam of the full moon as it shines forth high above her upper room, and her heart within her rejoices as she beholds the beautiful gleam, so joyfully then did Jason lift up the great fleece in his hands, and upon his golden cheeks and forehead there settled a red glow like a flame from the shimmering of the wool.<sup>62</sup>

Color and properties of light appear to be crucial elements of Hellenistic ekphraseis of works of art. In the case of the *Lithika*, it may be that the “visual evocation of the stone's color (though not its precise form) is crucial to the poem, but it is still subordinated to a point, an exploration between nature and culture, life and art.”<sup>63</sup> In other words, the heightened emphasis on color may help bring what is described before the reader's eyes, which is, after all, the goal of ekphrasis, at least according to Theon.<sup>64</sup> This focus on properties of vision, both color and luminosity, perhaps helped to create a vivid impression without rendering an exact image.

In addition to the color of gems, their size, in part, determined their worth. Although the monetary value of a stone would be determined by weight, the size of precious stones is much more frequently commented upon by ancient technical writers. Unlike today, however, gems that were larger were not necessarily esteemed more highly. Most ancient gems, in fact,

<sup>61</sup> See also Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* 4.1143-48, 1.774-81. For a recent discussion see Zanker 2004, 62-63.

<sup>62</sup> Trans. Race.

<sup>63</sup> Livingstone and Nisbet 2010, 66. See also Zanker 2004, 55-66.

<sup>64</sup> In Theon's *Progymnasmata* ekphrasis is: “Ἐκφρασίς ἐστι λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον. “a descriptive speech which vividly brings the subject shown before the eyes.” See Webb 2009.

were generally quite small,<sup>65</sup> though some of the royal portraits in stone measured as much as 50 mm.<sup>66</sup> Exceptionally large stones, such as the remarkable sard from AB 8, whose engraving alone is said to be the length of a span (ἄρμα δ' ὑπ' αὐτον/ γλυφὲν ἐπὶ σπιθαμὴν μήκειος ἐκτέταται), seem to have been desirable as well, but only if the stone happened to be large and unblemished.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, in epigrams, as in the prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia*, the preference was for vividness, clarity, and overall effect as opposed to length. Nearly all of Posidippus' epigrams in the *Lithika*, for example, are shorter than eight lines. In glyptic art as well as in epigrammatic literature, particular delight was taken not so much in the size of precious stones themselves as in objects in which the scale of the gem and the image depicted stood in contrast.<sup>68</sup> This can be seen, for example, on a first-century C.E. carnelian from the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (**Figure 1.1**) depicting an entire landscape including boats, fishermen, and a seaside



**Fig. 1.1**

Carnelian depicting a landscape scene. First century C.E.

<sup>65</sup> Pliny (*NH* 37.15) states that, in his day, the largest attested diamond was about the size of a hazelnut (perhaps a five to ten carat stone).

<sup>66</sup> Plantzos 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Ball 1950, 71. In some types of rocks value increased with size. Cf. also the wondrous stones at the closing of the *Lithika*, for example AB 18, 19. Pliny mentions a few rare specimens of large stones, such as a topaz image of Arsinoe II four cubits in height (*NH* 37.108).

<sup>68</sup> On the aesthetic of “contrastive scales” in Hellenistic thought see Porter 2011.

villa on an object that is approximately 1.8 x 1.4 cm.

As both ancient technical writers and modern scholars have discussed, a stone's value was affected, in large part, by its origin. The implications of different gems' provenance have been well discussed in scholarship as marking the boundaries of Alexander's conquests and the Ptolemaic world.<sup>69</sup> Yet I suggest that the exotic nature of a number of the gems in the *Lithika*, as indicated by specific mention of place names, further contributes to the sense of novelty that pervades the poems. It may also be seen as an index of the influx of the new types of goods that were available during the Hellenistic period and perhaps as a reflection of Hellenistic luxury items. Just as today, stones that were considered to be rare had greater value.<sup>70</sup> Both Theophrastus and Pliny indicate that stones from particular regions, especially the east, were of greater value than those more readily accessible: αἱ δὲ δὴ ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος εὐτελέστεραι, οἷον τὸ ἀνθράκιον τὸ ἐξ Ὀρχομενοῦ τῆς Ἀρκαδίας "(but) those (stones) that come from Greece are of less value, such as the *anthrakion* from Orchomenos in Arcadia."<sup>71</sup> Diamonds from the east, pearls from India and Arabia, and emeralds from Cyprus and Ethiopia were especially valuable and costly.<sup>72</sup> Stones that were more difficult to acquire, such as the *draconites*, which was harvested from a snake's head or the inaccessible turquoise, which was shot down with slings, were also highly prized.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See especially Bing 2009, 253-71; Fuqua 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Petrain (2005) offers an insightful discussion of the rarity of stones, commented upon in Posidippus' AB 16. In this poem, Posidippus appears to acknowledge the discrepancy between a stone's source and its beauty; for its beauty, the rock crystal ought to be held in high esteem, but it is not because it comes from a common source. Cf. *AP* 6.329.

<sup>71</sup> Theophrastus *de Lap.* 33.

<sup>72</sup> Ball 1950, 74; Theophrastus *de Lap.* 34.

<sup>73</sup> Ball 1950, 71.



In Posidippus' *Lithika*, the increased circulation of gems, brought about by Alexander the Great's eastern conquests, and the subsequent interest in novelty that they engendered, provides a material context that emphasizes innovation in poetic craft as well as innovative ways of conceptualizing it. The majority of the stones described in these poems held exotic, eastern origins, yet as the poems imply some stones were simply more valuable than others (AB 8):

οὐτ' ἀυχὴν ἐφόρησε τὸ σάρδιον οὔτε γυναικῶν  
 δάκτυλος, ἠρτήθη δ' εἰς χρυσέην ἄλυσιν  
 Δαρειῶν φορέων ὁ καλὸς λίθος—ἄρμα δ' ὑπ' αὐτὸν  
 γλυφθὲν ἐπὶ σπιθαμὴν μήκεος ἐκτέταται—  
 [φ]έγγος ἔνερθεν ἄγων· κα[ῖ] ἀμύνεται ἀνθρ[α]κας Ἰνδοῦς  
 αὐγαῖς ἐξ ὀμαλοῦ φωτὸς ἐλεγχόμενος·  
 [τρισ]πίθαμον περίμετρον· ὁ καὶ τέρας, εἰ πλατὺν ὄγκον  
 [ ἔνδοθε]ν ὑδροη[ῆ] μὴ διαθεῖ νεφέλη.

No woman's throat or finger ever wore  
 this carnelian, but it was suspended on a golden chain,  
 a lovely gem with Darius on it, and under him  
 his chariot is engraved, stretching out to the length of a span, shining  
 as if lit from within. And with rays of uniform radiance  
 it defeats the rubies of India, when put to the test.  
 The circumference measures [three] spans. And it is quite a wonder that  
 no cloudy discoloration dulls the stone from within.

This carnelian, likely also of exotic origins, is shown to surpass even the fine rubies of India.<sup>74</sup>

Several other stones in the *Lithika* are indicated as novelties due to their unique origins, many of which come from various regions of Alexander's expanded empire. Poems 4, a grey stone (4.5), and 5, lapis lazuli (5.2), both state that the gems given as gifts are Persian stones (Πέρσης/Περσικός). The origin of the stone in AB 7, also a gift for a woman, is marked as Arabian (ἐξ Ἀράβων). Place names are additionally listed in AB 11.1-2, which is again Persian, and 16,

<sup>74</sup> According to Pliny (*NH* 37.31) sards came from Sardis, Babylonia, Persia, and India.

which is Arabian.<sup>75</sup>

The value of less exotic stones, however, could be manipulated or embellished by the skilled craftsman. The nomenclature of semi-precious stones might be changed to resemble more closely the names of precious stones. Rock crystal, for example, was often referred to as a form of as *adamas* (or diamond) to heighten its worth.<sup>76</sup> As Posidippus writes, a semi-precious stone, or pearl artistically embellished, could have beauty and value of its own, AB 12:

ἔστι θαλάσσιος, ἔστι, καὶ ὅσ[τρακον, ἀ]λλ' ὑπὸ τέχνης  
χρυσίτ[αι]ς σφιγχθεῖς κρίν[εται ἡμίλι]ος  
.....]..δεπ[.]..φ[.]..λ[.....].ε σμαράγδου  
.....]ατα κολλήσας εἰς [.....]ε κύτους  
σφενδόνη ἐν χρυσεῖη κατ[ενήρμο]σεν ὄφρα φοροίη  
...]ς λιτὴν γλύμμα ν[έον βλέ]πεται.

[It comes] from the sea, yes, and it is a shell, but artistically  
gilded with [gold] pieces it is judged to be a semi-precious stone  
[... ..] of emerald  
[...] joined to - [...] – from the hollow  
he [set it] in a golden [bezel] to wear  
[where a new] engraving [is visible].

Such shells (as in AB 11 as well), when embellished by craftsmen, would become prized luxury objects, often used as containers for luxury goods such as perfumes and unguents.<sup>77</sup>

As Pliny discusses, although some criteria for evaluating gemstones remained fixed, such as clarity and luminosity, other elements such as color varied according to what was fashionable at the time.<sup>78</sup> By the first century C.E. yellow stones, such as that mentioned in Posidippus AB 7,

<sup>75</sup> The origin of AB 8 is not given, yet it is noted that it “defeats the rubies of India when put to the test.” The origin of AB 12 is also given as the sea (θαλάσσιος). Only in AB 16 does the stone’s origin appear not to contribute to its value, due to the fact that the stone itself is commonplace.

<sup>76</sup> Ball 1950, 247; Pliny *NH* 37.15.

<sup>77</sup> Kuttner 2005, 151.

<sup>78</sup> Theophrastus (44-45), for example, states that a Babylonian sent a σμάραγδος (emerald) four cubits long and

had essentially gone out of use in jewelry.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, a stone's value might be increased if it was worn by an individual of note.<sup>80</sup> This aesthetic, and desire for novelty, is reflected not only in the subject matter of the *Lithika*, but also in the vocabulary of a select number of poems. In AB 3, which I have discussed above, the speaker of the poem offers a carved bowl to a female recipient:

[χάλκα]νθ' εἰς τριέλικτα φυήν· σὺ δὲ καί[ν] ἀγαπῶσα  
[εὐφρω]ν ἐν δαίτη, πότνια, τ[ρόνδε] δέ[χου].]

towards [the golden flowers] with their triple tendrils. And you, lady, [lover of novelties], [kindly receive it] in the banquet.

Much like τὰδ' ἔργα in poem AB 62 from the *Andriantopoiika*, perhaps καινὰ, if we are to accept the editors' supplementation, may be read not only as a reference to the gems as seen in the *Lithika*, but also generically in terms of the poems, which are remarkable in themselves.

Emphasis on novelty as a desirable quality for a stone (and thus poem) is seen again in AB 6, in which another female recipient is presented with an engraved gem:

τῶδε λίθῳ πᾶσιν δ[οκίμῳ μεγαλύν]εται Ἥρωσ,  
ἔλκει δὲ γραπτὴν Ἴριν [ὑπὸ Κρονίου  
τοῦτο τὸ μαρμαῖρον β[ηρύλλιον· εὖ] δ' ἐπεδήθη  
Νικονόης ὁ κύβος χρύσε[ον εἰς κάθε]μα,  
καὶ δωρητὸς ὑπῆλθε[ε, χάρις καιν]ή, κατὰ μαστὸν  
κλίνεσθαι στηθέων π[αρθένου ἦ]δυ σέλας.

Heros [delights] in this gem [admired] by all;  
it has on it a representation of Iris engraved [by Cronius]

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three wide to an Egyptian king.

<sup>79</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.19.

<sup>80</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.85. This was the case of Scipio Africanus who increased the popularity of sardonyx. The term *sarda* includes both carnelian (clear, red chalcedony) and sard (reddish brown, brown and yellow chalcedony). Sardonyx is strictly a banded chalcedony containing at least one layer of carnelian. (Eicholz 1962, 232).

this sparkling little [beryl]. The cubic stone was [beautifully] set  
into Nikonoe's golden [necklace],  
and came as a gift, [a new delight] to lie on the maiden's  
breast as a pleasant brightness.

Here, the engraved gem is called a new delight (χάρις καινή), a novelty in the form of an offering as an erotic gift given to Nikonoe.<sup>81</sup> *Charis* here can be seen as a simultaneous reference to the beauty and appearance of the recipient as well as the visible grace of the engraved gem. The uniqueness of the engraved stone is also reflected in the innovative poem, which integrates ekphrastic as well as dedicatory traditions, and is novel as well in subject matter. Further, the term might be used to describe the nature of the poetry describing the gem. In Dionysus of Halicarnassus' *Isoc.* 3 we see an association between *charis* and *leptotes*,<sup>82</sup> the latter being a term often used in connection with Hellenistic poetics meaning a delicateness or fineness of style. As subject matter, precious stones inspire a new type of poetic treatment and aesthetic. The fact that gems are novelties (that is, rare and stimulating to the senses in new ways) therefore could be understood as stimulating the poetic fixation on novelty.

### 1.5 Scope and Plan of the Study

In the first half of my dissertation, I examine the relationship between ekphrastic epigrams and Greco-Roman gemstones by focusing on the production and materials of gemstones. In chapter two, I argue that a close link exists between the poems and the objects described, which will help to elucidate our understanding of the poems. As Becker (1995) has

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<sup>81</sup> Here I follow AB in their use of χάρις καινή as opposed to Austin's suggestion of ὄψις τερπινή.

<sup>82</sup> In a passage by Dionysus of Halicarnassus, the author uses the terms *leptotes* and *charis* to describe the orator Lysias' style in relation to the sculpture of Callimachus and Calamis: τὴν τέχνην δὲ Λύσιου τῆ Καλάμιδος καὶ Καλλιμάχου τῆς λεπτότητος ἕνεκα καὶ τῆς χάριτος [one might liken] the art of Lysias to that of Calamis and Callimachus for its lightness and grace.

posited, ekphrasis serves as a metaphor for writing poetry. As such, the objects described within ekphrastic literature must be read as significant, not only in terms of their visual and aesthetic elements but may also be mined as a source of information regarding poetic construction and authorial self-positioning. I show how both the language and imagery of gemstones and particularly gem-working is drawn upon at length, as demonstrated by an emphasis on craftsmanship and the labor of production (both artistic and literary). The link between writing and engraving, already implicit in the Greek verb γράφω, which meant both to write and to engrave, becomes further evident through the repeated terms for “making” and “toil”, applied to both crafts. In addition to a lexical connection between writing and gem carving, poets show specific concern with the techniques involved in gem carving and even with the engravers who inscribed the stones. The minute attention to detail displayed by the glyptic artist becomes simultaneously a source of delight and wonder as well as a metapoetic device for the exacting art of ekphrastic poetry. Furthermore, the frequent mention by ekphrastic poets of the names of glyptic artists (some of whom were actual artists attested in technical manuals) appears to imitate artists’ signatures on engraved gems and seal stones. I argue that the inclusion of the names of craftsmen may have served to authenticate the objects described and also to create a parallel with actual engraved gemstones, which were frequently inscribed with the artisan’s name. Through the use of such descriptive strategies, I explore how poets drew attention to the materiality of their poems and cast themselves in the role of visual artists not only by means of vivid description but also with reference to known artists and their works.

I will discuss, in chapter three, the manner in which later Greek authors, much like glyptic artists, drew upon technological and intellectual knowledge of precious stones, their properties, and symbolic values in order to explore issues of adaptation, and authority in the

literary discourse on precious stones. Much like works of art in relation to texts, precious stones and their descriptions, as well as engraved gems and their impressions, provide a meaningful corpus with which to discuss issues of replication, imitation, and adaptation. But, like an impression from a seal, the likeness drawn from the original is not an exact duplicate. I will argue that the literary text may consciously seek to imitate a work of art, but does not directly replicate it. A discussion of gems and their copies (whether plaster or literary) may be read as a potentially limitless replaying of the artistic process and of the artist himself, who, unlike other artisans, did not need to be trained in the glyptic arts to make an impression from an original. In addition to being replicated in wax, impression seals and other precious stones could also be copied in less expensive media, such as glass or paste, causing anxiety in antiquity, as now, concerning fakes and forgeries.

As I argue in chapter four, gems and precious stones were highly valued in antiquity not only for their aesthetic and decorative uses, but also for a variety of magical and mystical purposes. Stones and amulets were among the most pervasive forms of magic in antiquity, and as such, an examination of this function may help to shed light on different aspects of the use of precious stones. Following a brief discussion of magical gems and amulets in Greco-Roman antiquity, I show how the literary descriptions of magical stones may be seen as a reflection of human agency. Additionally, I discuss the manner in which ekphrastic descriptions of magical stones are noteworthy, not only for their representations of magical stones themselves, but also for the way in which they imitate magical practices through the careful combination of the written with the visual.

In chapter five I analyze the ways in which Greek authors utilized precious stones as a means for treating issues such as gender, identity, and character by means of descriptions

of the gems' materials, origins, and properties. Many of the poetic and prose descriptions of gemstones linger over details that are not only aesthetically pleasing but are also instructive in the depiction of character and ethics. In these instances, visual impact becomes not an end goal for ekphrasis, but rather a means for better rendering identity. The examination of portraits carved on gemstones helps to posit a connection between an ekphrastic character sketch and the representation of types on inscribed gemstones.

The significance of the proposed study is twofold. First, it will provide new insight into the relationship between ancient gemstones in visual and literary media by systematically analyzing Greco-Roman precious stones and their treatment in ancient mineralogical treatises alongside descriptions of stones from literary texts in order to understand the ancient use of engraved gems and precious stones, their powers, and symbolic value. Second, it will bring to light an understudied aspect of the appropriation of the discourse on precious stones by Hellenistic epigrammatists, which was then drawn upon by later Greek prose authors. In this way, I will trace the nexus of imagery surrounding certain aspects of the production and use of gems in the Hellenistic period, incomplete through the study of material culture alone. In so doing, I will outline a cultural biography of Greco-Roman precious stones.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Artistic Strategies in Posidippus' *Lithika***



It has been commonly acknowledged that Posidippus of Pella's *Lithika* utilizes gems to explore a variety of concerns of the Hellenistic world. By means of vivid description, the poems offer the reader a dazzling glimpse of a multitude of decorative objects from the farthest reaches of the Ptolemaic Empire. In their subject matter, style, and textual arrangement, the *Lithika* provides a hitherto unparalleled collection of poems describing precious and semi-precious stones.<sup>1</sup> Widely circulated objects, depicting subjects that ranged from the figural to the symbolic, these stones served as more than personal ornamentation, frequently functioning as political propaganda.<sup>2</sup> The richness of the poems, and the multivalency of precious stones as objects of tremendous value and semiotic weight, lend to the objects described multiple interpretations. Although several critics have viewed Posidippus' use of precious stones as symbols of the poet's Ptolemaic association,<sup>3</sup> I argue that the poems may also be read as commentary on his literary concerns. This chapter will illustrate and analyze the importance of Posidippus' self-reflexive strategies within the *Lithika*.<sup>4</sup>

The poems, as ekphrastic descriptions, provide clues which help us to understand them. In many cases we see that the literary form of the texts, which are short, well-wrought poems, mirrors their content. For, as Becker has posited, ekphrasis serves as a metaphor for writing poetry.<sup>5</sup> As such, the objects described within ekphrastic literature must be read as significant, not

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<sup>1</sup> There is only one other poem (A.P. 9.752) describing a gem that may date to the third century B.C.E., which is attributed to Asclepiades or Antipater of Thessalonica. The discovery of the *Lithika* has permitted us to reconsider the dating of such books on stones. Boardman (1970, 373), writing nearly forty years ago stated: "books about gemstones probably only became popular with the new Roman patronage in the first century B.C.E."

<sup>2</sup> On the circulation of gems in the Hellenistic period see Plantzos 1999; Kuttner 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Bing 2005, Kuttner 2005, Fuqua 2007.

<sup>4</sup> The title of the opening section of the papyrus is a conjecture as only the first three letters are extant.

<sup>5</sup> Becker 1995, 6 ff 6.

only in terms of their visual and aesthetic elements but also as a source of information regarding poetic construction and authorial self-positioning. I will explore how the epigrams play upon both the language and imagery of gemstones and gem-working at length. By utilizing elements of both inscribed and literary epigrammatic traditions, Posidippus emphasizes the materiality of his works and casts himself in the role of visual artist.<sup>6</sup> Further, he manipulates the boundaries of the genre of epigram through his use of ekphrasis. In the *Lithika*, Posidippus also plays with the distinction between literary description and the images it evokes through vivid descriptive strategies which linger over details of material, technique, and artistry.

This chapter comprises three parts. In the first section, I will outline the connections between ekphrastic literature and the genre of epigram and sketch out the ways in which Posidippus manipulates the unique qualities of the media with which he engages. I focus on Posidippus' poems on works of art outside of the *Lithika* that have been described as "programmatic" in order to frame my reading of the *Lithika*. In the second section I will discuss the manner in which the content of Posidippus' poems on stones, and in particular AB 15, serve as a reflection of his poetic program. Finally, in the third section, I will analyze the manner in which Posidippus makes particular reference to artists and craftsmen in order to locate himself within the sphere of Alexandrian artistic production.

## 2.1 Faceting a Connection Between Ekphrasis and Epigram

Posidippus' poems on stones represent a convergence of multiple unique and distinctive artistic traditions through which the poet is able to engage playfully with issues of genre and ekphrastic description. Although epigrams inscribed on stones can be said to date to the late

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<sup>6</sup> The trope of the poet as visual artist is, by no means, new; typically, however, epigrammatists praise older artists. On this trope see: Männlein-Robert 2007, 153; Goldhill 1994, 197-223; Zanker 2004, 72-102; Sens 2005, 209-16.

Geometric period it is not until the late fourth century B.C.E. that a distinctly literary form of epigram fully emerges.<sup>7</sup> This development, however, was by no means linear, and as some scholars have argued, may have evolved from two distinct epigraphic traditions, on the one hand, graffiti on objects such as cups and vases and, on the other, engraved texts on monuments, usually of a dedicatory or epitaphic nature.<sup>8</sup> The link between writing and engraving, which I will develop further in this chapter, is implicit already in the Greek verb γράφειν, which meant, of course, both to write and to engrave and was used in reference to writing, painting, and actual engraving. Numerous poets of the Hellenistic period, but especially writers of ekphrastic epigram, were well aware of the dual significance of both γράφω and γράμμα and happily exploited these multiple meanings in their works. In a poem by Erinna (*A.P.* 6.352), likely one of the earliest examples of ekphrastic epigram, the artist's representation, τὰ γράμματα are praised as the work of delicate hands:<sup>9</sup>

ἔξ ἀπλᾶν χειρῶν τάδε γράμματα· λῶστέ Προμαθεῦ,  
 ἔντι καὶ ἄνθρωποι τὴν ὀμαλοὶ σοφίαν.  
 ταύταν γοῦν ἐτύμως τὸν παρθένον ὅστις ἔγραψεν,  
 αἰ καὺδ' ἂν ποτέθῃκ', ἦς κ' Ἀγαθαρχίς ὄλα.

This picture is the work of delicate hands; my good Prometheus,  
 there are even humans whose skill is equal to yours.  
 At least, if whoever painted this girl so truly  
 had added speech, Agatharchis would be complete.

The ambiguous forms of τὰ γράμματα, as well as the verb ἔγραψεν, could be used in reference either to work of the artist or the poet. Further, the use of τάδε in conjunction with γράμματα in the opening line imitates the convention of many epigrams that attempt to capture the attention

<sup>7</sup> Livingstone and Nisbet 2010, 22; Bing and Bruss 2007b, 5; Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 283.

<sup>8</sup> Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 283.

<sup>9</sup> Goldhill 2007, 11.

of the passerby/reader.<sup>10</sup> Writing and image making become linked further through the direct address to Prometheus, who, of course, was associated with the invention of human beings and the creation of writing.<sup>11</sup> Given the fact that many works of art of the period were accompanied by an inscription, we also link writing and painting, by imagining the epigram inscribed below or adjacent to the image. Ekphrastic epigrams, therefore, like that above, may be seen as containing elements of both epigraphic traditions; they are figuratively poems on objects yet they frequently imitate inscriptional epigrams.<sup>12</sup>

Within this framework, the poet is also able to comment upon the object described and by extension his or her own work. In the above poem, for example, by praising the delicate hands which rendered the object, the poet praises the artist and by transference the production of her own hands as well. As such, art and poetry are shown to be analogous processes.<sup>13</sup> The cleverness and skill (σοφίαν) of the artist is highlighted, serving as a self-reflexive commentary on the poet's craft, which is reinforced further by the emphasis on accuracy (ἐτύμως) and life-likeness; the image is so veristic that it need only have a voice to be truly alive. Like many other ekphrastic descriptions in this study, the painting is described only vaguely—no real details are given. Rather, we are presented with the narrator's evaluation and learned interpretation of the object.

I argue that by turning his trained eye to gems, Posidippus similarly adopts the persona and voice of the interpreter, not only by means of vivid description, but also with reference to

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<sup>10</sup> Murray and Rowland 2007, 223-26.

<sup>11</sup> Murray and Rowland 2007, 223-26.

<sup>12</sup> Männlein-Robert 2007. Many ekphrastic epigrams, however, contain characteristics of epideictic epigrams as well.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Murray and Rowland 2007, 223-26.

known artists and their works.<sup>14</sup> The expertise of the poetic persona within the *Lithika* has also been noted by other critics. Smith, for example, has argued that the language and treatment of particular stones within the *Lithika* suggest a knowledge and familiarity with technical manuals on stones.<sup>15</sup> Kuttner suggestively argues that we ought to consider Posidippus as a collector of curiosities.<sup>16</sup> What these arguments as well as my own have in common is the emphasis on the role of the individual whom Goldhill calls the “professional viewer.”<sup>17</sup> I maintain however, that, in their instructive interpretations, Smith and Kuttner have neglected to consider fully the numerous specific references to craft, materials, and artistic production in the *Lithika*.

Before turning to the *Lithika*, however, we must first study Posidippus’ *Andriantopoiika* (or poems on sculptures) to which greater scholarly attention has been given regarding the relationship between visual, literary and authorial strategies in order to establish general characteristics of ekphrastic and epigrammatic literature. Through a brief discussion of these works, we may see the poet’s ekphrastic tendencies and engagement with the visual arts. In AB 63 Posidippus locates himself within the world of Hellenistic artistic production by uniting artistic and literary output in a poem that offers praise for a sculpted image of the poet Philitas of Cos:

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<sup>14</sup> The poet as artist is by no means unprecedented, and may be seen as early as *Odyssey* 17.382-5.

<sup>15</sup> Smith 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Kuttner 2005. Kuttner’s interpretation of Posidippus as collector, while intriguing, appears to be based on the reading and retrojection of Roman material into the early Hellenistic period. While it is true that elite displays or *dactyliothecae* (ring display spaces) existed in antiquity, there is little secure evidence for such collections before the first century B.C.E. Pliny states that Sulla’s stepson, Marcus Aurelius Scaurus, was the first Roman to have a cabinet of gems (Pliny *NH* 37.5). According to Stewart (2007, 180) however, the first securely dated art collector was Aratos of Sikyon (271-213 B.C.E.) who was known as a collector of paintings (Plut. *Aratos* 12-13). The earliest documentation of sculpture collecting is a letter by Plato to Dionysos II of Syracuse (Plato Epistle 13.361A) recounting purchase of two Apollos by Leochares. Stewart concedes that: “Ptolemy I, II, Pyrrhos and other Hellenistic rulers *may* have anticipated him,” yet there is no secure evidence for this. See also Platt 2006, 253 n. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Goldhill 2007, 2.

τόνδε Φιλίται χ[αλ]κόν [ἴ]σον κατὰ πάνθ' Ἐκ[α]ταῖος  
 [ἀ]κ[ρ]ιβῆς ἄκρους [ἔ]πλασεν εἰς ὄνυχας,  
 [καὶ με]γέθει κα[ὶ] σα[ρ]κὶ τὸν ἀνθρωπιστὶ διώξας  
 [γνώμο]ν', ἀφ' ἠρώων δ' οὐδὲν ἔμειξ' ἰδέης,  
 ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀκρομέριμον ὄλ[η κ]ατεμάξατο τέχνη  
 [πρ]έσβυν, ἀληθείης ὀρθὸν [ἔ]χων κανόνα·  
 [αὐδῆ]σονται δ' ἔοικεν, ὅσῳ ποικίλλεται ἦθει,  
 [ἔ]μψυχος, καίπερ χάλκεος ἔων ὁ γέρων·  
 [ἐκ Πτολε]μαίου δ' ὦδε θεοῦ θ' ἅμα καὶ βασιλῆος  
 [ ἄ]γκειται Μουσέων εἴνεκα Κῶιος ἀνὴρ.

Hecataeus accurately sculpted this bronze, similar to Philitas  
 in every way, with precision,  
 following a human standard in height and body  
 and without blending anything from the image of heroes,  
 but he portrayed the old perfectionist with all his skill  
 by holding fast to the canon of truth.  
 He seems about to speak, embellished with such character,  
 [alive], although the old man is made of bronze.  
 And here [by order of Ptole]my, god and king at the same time,  
 for the sake of the Muses the man from Cos [has been set up].

Through his praise of the sculpture's realism and liveliness, so lifelike in fact that it seems to be at the point of speech (αὐδῆσονται δ' ἔοικεν... ἔμψυχος, καίπερ χάλκεος ἔων ὁ γέρων) the poet's image is rendered, not according to a heroic model, but realistically. By the explicit mention of embellishment (ποικίλλεται), and emphasis on precision both on the part of the artist (ἀκ[ρ]ιβῆς) and the poet (ἀκρομέριμον), Posidippus outlines some of the defining qualities of ekphrastic poetry, such as precision and attention to detail, while also recalling one of the characteristics for which his poetic forerunner was known. Posidippus imitates and praises his artistic predecessors while he also creatively displaces the original by means of innovative embellishment. We are presented not with an exact description of the original, but rather Posidippus' interpretive manipulation of it.

Another poem from the *Andriantopoiika*, AB 62, echoes some of the same sentiments as AB 63, yet is worth considering briefly. Out of the collection of poems on sculptures, AB 62,

may be especially important for considering Posidippus' presentation of the relationship between art and poetry: "perhaps more than any other section of the papyrus, the epigrams grouped under the generic label *Andriantopoiika* invite a programmatic reading, since the opening of the first poem (AB 62) is explicitly cast as a set of instructions for artists."<sup>18</sup> The poem's instructions to artists are indeed significant, but I would add further that the crucial aspect of the poem is not just its emphasis on elegant refinement but its recognition of the importance of innovation:

μιμ[ή]σασθε τάδ' ἔργα, πολυχρονίους δὲ κολοσσῶν,  
 ὧ ζ[ω]οπλάσται, ν[αί,] παραθεῖτε νόμους·  
 εἴ γε μὲν ἀρχαῖαι [...] πα χέρες, ἢ Ἀγελαίδης  
 ὁ πρὸ Πολυκλείτου [πά]γχυ παλαιοτέχνης,  
 ἢ οἱ †Διδυμιδοῦ† σκληροῖ τυ]ποι εἰς πέδον ἦλθον,  
 Λυσίππου νεάρ' ἦν οὐδ[ε]μία πρόφασις  
 δεῦρο παρεκτεῖναι βασάνου χάριν· εἴ[τα] δ' ἔαν χρῆ  
 καὶ πίπτῃ ὠθλος καινοτεχνέων πέρας ἦν.

Imitate these works, O creators of living shapes,  
 and, yes, run past old fashioned rules for statues.  
 If the ancient works of (?) or Hagelaides  
 the craftsman of the very old style before Polyclitus  
 or the severe sculptures of Didymides (?) had come into the field,  
 there would be no reason to exhibit here the novelties of Lysippus  
 as our touchstone. Then if it were necessary  
 and a contest of craftsmen of the new style took place, he would be best.

If read as a programmatic poem, the work can be taken as an injunction to put aside the tenets of former artistic production, as seen in the opening lines, urging the listener to go beyond the style of the archaic ancients.<sup>19</sup> In this way, the display of novelty or new things (*νεαρά*), as mentioned by the speaker, takes on particular importance. This is further supported by the weight placed upon the contest of new artists (*καινοτεχνέων*). Although the poem appears to

<sup>18</sup> Sens 2005, 207. See also Stewart 2005.

<sup>19</sup> On the use of μιμ[ή]σασθε and Aristotelian theories of aesthetics in AB 62, see Williams 2005.

be discussing a new set of Hellenistic visual aesthetics, the mention of these works (τάδ' ἔργα) in the opening lines most certainly can be read not only as a reference to plastic arts, but also to literary production.<sup>20</sup>

So far we have seen how the *Andriantopoiika* underscores the poet's attention to aspects of precision, detail, and novelty in ekphrastic epigrams. In poem AB 67 we see an explicit link between the aesthetics and poetics of the *Andriantopoiika* and the *Lithika* through Posidippus' reference to the well-known sculptor and miniaturist Theodorus:

± 14                   ]....[ἀντυγος ἐγγύθεν ἄθρει  
τῆς Θεοδωρείης χειρὸς ὅσος κάματος·  
γὰρ ζυγόδεσμα καὶ ἠνία καὶ τροχὸν ἵππων  
ἄξονά θ' [ἠνιο]χου τ' ὄμμα καὶ ἄκρα χερῶν  
ὄψει εὖ [ῥυμόν τρίχα μήκ]εος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῷδε  
ἐξομέν[ην ἀν ἴσην ἄρματι] μυῖαν ἴδοις.

...of the chariot, observe up close  
how great is the labor of Theodorus' hand.  
For you will see the yoke-band and the reins and the bridle ring  
and the axle, as well as the [driver's] eye and the tips of his fingers.  
And you will see full well [the pole, as thin as hair], and sitting on it  
you might see a fly [the size of a chariot].

Here Posidippus praises the miniaturist qualities of Theodorus' handiwork while describing the artist's self-portrait and thus, indirectly, the ekphrastic poet's craft.<sup>21</sup> Theodorus, was a well-known sculptor, like Lysippus, and also an engraver; he was active during the Archaic period and his works ranged from the monumental to small-scale objects.<sup>22</sup> It is for the latter that he appears to have been praised in later antiquity. Pliny, for example, marvels when recounting his self-

<sup>20</sup> Sens 2005, 209.

<sup>21</sup> This self-portrait at the Samian Heraion in which Theodorus held a miniature quadriga and a file is mentioned by Pliny (*NH* 34). The portrait was gone by Pausanias' time (10.38.6-7). See further Kuttner 2005, 156 n. 58.

<sup>22</sup> Herodotus 1.51, 3.40-43; Pliny *NH* 37.1.



portrait for its minute workmanship (*magna subtilitate*), portions of which were removed from their original context and taken to Palestrina as a marvel of smallness (*parvitatit miraculum*).<sup>23</sup> The image created by the poem emerges as a wonder of craftsmanship, precision, miniaturism, and perhaps, following Porter’s persuasive suggestion, contrastive scales.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the visual elements that might be indicative of a particular style or aesthetic, Posidippus’ use of an adjectival form, “Theodorean” rather than the genitive “of Theodorus” is noteworthy, also, as a comment on a particular “Theodorean” style rather than a specific evaluation of the artist’s work.<sup>25</sup> The repetition of this same adjectival form in six of the *Tabulae Iliacae* suggests that Theodorean style seems to have been recognized as a style which later artists strove to attain.<sup>26</sup> In light of this fact, it is perhaps unremarkable that Theodorus is the only artist to whom Posidippus alludes in both the *Andriantopoiika* and the *Lithika*. According to Herodotus, not only was Theodorus a sculptor, but also the earliest gem engraver and the craftsman who made Polycrates’ most prized possession, his ring.<sup>27</sup> In the lamentably fragmentary AB 9, Posidippus turns again to the work of Theodorus:

<sup>23</sup> Pliny *NH* 34.83.

<sup>24</sup> Porter 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Porter 2011, 292-3, 300 n. 60, 303 n. 96.

<sup>26</sup> The *Tabulae Iliacae* are twenty-two small-scale marble tablets dating from the late first century B.C.E. to the early first century C.E. primarily depicting scenes from Homer and the epic cycle. In several of the tablets, Theodorean artistry is noted, for example as in 2NY: [Ἰλι]ᾶς Ὀμήρου Θεοδώρηος ἡ {ι} τέχνη and 5O: [ἄσπις] Ἀχιλλεῖος Θεοδώρηος ἡ τ[έχνη]. On the *Tabulae Iliacae* see especially Petrain’s unpublished dissertation: Petrain 2006; also Squire 2010; Squire 2012; Horsfall 1979; Horsfall 1990; Sadurska 1964; Valenzuela-Montenegro 2004; Porter 2011, 300 n. 60.

<sup>27</sup> Herodotus 3.41: ἦν οἱ σφραγίς τὴν ἐφόρει χρυσόδετος, σμαράγδου μὲν λίθου ἐοῦσα, ἔργον δὲ ἦν Θεοδώρου τοῦ Τηλεκλέος Σαμίου. See also Ball 1950, 41; Kuttner 2005.

ἠιρήσ]ω σφρηγ[ῖδα], Πολύκρατες, ἀνδρὸς ἀοιδοῦ  
τοῦ φο]ρμίζ[οντος σοῖς] παρὰ π[οσσ]ῖ λύρην  
φωτὸς μ]εν κρ[ατέει χρυ]σαυγ[έος· ἔσ]χε δὲ σὴ χεῖρ  
τόνδ]ε κρ[ύσταλλον, κλε]ιν[ότατο]ν κτέανον.

[You chose] as seal, Polycrates, the lyre of the man  
who used to sing at [your feet].  
[It has a light with gold] rays; and yours was the hand that held  
[this gemstone, a most famous] possession.

Here the poet directly addresses Polycrates, mentioning not the well-known artist of Polycrates' famous gem, but the bard who used to sing for the king.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the reference to the Theodorean aesthetic which may have served as a model for Posidippus, and certainly pervades the poems, the address to Polycrates in AB 9 may also serve to create a connection between literary and artistic production on multiple levels. Polycrates not only had at least one valuable gem in his possession, but he was also one of the first individuals to possess a book collection, a fact that presents a noteworthy parallel to the Ptolemies as collectors of books.<sup>29</sup> Yet, it was Polycrates' ring that was his most prized possession. Furthermore, Posidippus use of the bard's lyre as the device upon Polycrates' seal creates an unmistakable connection between glyptic art and poetry, a relationship that is not so tenuous as it might first seem, for, as Krevans states of the poems in the *Lithika*: "most of the gemstones are incised, an activity which is the pictorial equivalent of inscription."<sup>30</sup>

Aside from similar technologies used for engraving, particularly for epigrams on stones,

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<sup>28</sup> As Bing (2005, 121) notes, this bard may well be Anacreon, who was said by Herodotus (3.41) to perform in Polycrates' dining hall.

<sup>29</sup> It is perhaps unusual that the Ptolemies might be compared to Polycrates, though, perhaps this (somewhat unfavorable) comparison was meant as a warning to the Ptolemies.

<sup>30</sup> Krevans 2005, 143. Cf Kuttner (2005, 155) who argues that the ring was, as were most emeralds in antiquity, likely blank, yet still served as a "badge in its own right." Gutzwiller (2005c, 314) similarly notes the seeming impossibility of the image, particularly within the confines of small-scale engraving.

as well as an inherent concern with issues of marking and permanence, epigrammatic stones and engraved gemstones might be seen as two parallel strands of a lithic tradition. Although epigrams inscribed on stones can be dated to the Late Geometric period, it is not until the late fourth century B.C.E. that a distinctly literary form of epigram, emancipated from its lithic progenitor, fully emerges.<sup>31</sup> At this same time, the art of gem carving undergoes a period of significant revival. It was only after the eastward expansion of Alexander the Great and an influx of new materials, however, that a select number of Greek writers truly began to take an interest in gemstones and minerals in both prose works and poetry. Since the (re)emergence of gem cutting techniques in the late Archaic period, inscriptions have frequently figured on gems. From this period onward, we find a number of examples of gems with inscriptions on them, ranging from artists' signatures and the owner's name, to brief messages, such as an invitation to the wearer or reader to "remember me" (**Figure 2.1**). In a few instances, representations of the act of writing are present on gems, as seen, for example, in the image of a woman sitting on a rock writing on a



**Fig. 2.1** Onyx bearing the Greek inscription "remember." Third century C.E.



**Fig. 2.2** Woman seated on a rock while writing. Classical.

tablet, from the Classical period (**Figure 2.2**). A few examples date to the Hellenistic period as well, as found in an image of Mnemosyne, or Memory, writing (**Figure 2.3**) and a first century

<sup>31</sup> Livingstone and Nisbet 2010, 22; Bing and Bruss 2007a; Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 283.

B.C.E sard depicting the Spartan hero Othryades writing VICI—“I conquered” —on his shield in blood (Figure 2.4).



Fig. 2.3

Mnemosyne writing on a tablet.  
Hellenistic.



Fig. 2.4

Sard depicting Othryades writing  
“VICI” on his shield. 1st century B.C.E.

Around the same time that Hellenistic glyptic arts began to flourish, a handful of epigrammatists started to engage with the themes of the production of gemstones and their materials in response to an increasingly available category of luxury goods.<sup>32</sup> Posidippus’ poems “on stones” move beyond playful references, however, to present thorough engagement with the innate and symbolic value of stones.

As critics have discussed, it is clear that Posidippus was familiar with epigrammatic conventions,<sup>33</sup> chief among them the first-person voice of the object, frequently found in both earlier inscribed epigrams and later ekphrastic poems, as in *A.P.* 9.752:

<sup>32</sup> As Porter (2011) and Krevans (2005) have discussed, even though scientific texts on precious stones existed, these poems on gems, and in particular Posidippus’ *Lithika*, are an anomaly. Posidippus’ treatment of the topics is especially unusual, as he discusses topics that would typically go under the heading of epideictic or amatory and shifts the emphasis from ‘girl to jewel’ while creating unparalleled section headings (Krevans 2005, 84).

<sup>33</sup> Bing 2009, 185-186, 189.

εἰμὶ Μέθη, τὸ γλύμμα σοφῆς χερός, ἐν δ' ἀμεθύστῳ  
γέγλυμμαι· τέχνης δ' ἡ λίθος ἀλλοτρίη.  
ἀλλὰ Κλεοπάτρης ἱερὸν κτέαρ, ἐν γὰρ ἀνάσσης  
χειρὶ θεὸν νήφειν καὶ μεθύουσαν ἔδει.

I am Drunkenness, the engraving of a skilled hand, but I've been  
engraved in amethyst. The stone is in opposition to its emblem.  
Yet the holy object belongs to Cleopatra, for on the queen's hand,  
even a drunken goddess should be sober.<sup>34</sup>

Here, the poet, likely Asclepiades of Samos, writes about an engraved gem, described in the first-person voice from the perspective of the figure of Methe, or drunkenness. The image stands in contrast to the amethyst on which it has been engraved since, in antiquity, amethyst was believed to have been a remedy for intoxication. I will say more about the content of the poem in a later chapter, but what I would like to highlight here is the poet's use of first person narration which imitates the conventions of epigrams inscribed on stone, especially dedicatory poems. Frequently, epigrammatic poems, both literary but especially inscribed, were written in the first person voice. As Svenbro and others have argued, epigrams or inscriptions written in the first person lend themselves to reading and thus performance by the passerby. The object and the individual for whom the inscription or epigram is carved do not have a voice, therefore the reader of the inscription gives his voice to the object.<sup>35</sup> First person narration was by no means the only way of enacting this dramatization; in engraved epigrams as well as their literary counterparts, we find also that the dialogue form, as seen in Posidippus' *kairos* epigram (AB 142=19 GP=API 275), was an alternative venue for this interpretative performance. In Posidippus' *Lithika*,

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<sup>34</sup> This poem, attributed to Asclepiades or Antipater of Thessalonica, is the only other poetic description of a gem that might be contemporaneous with Posidippus' *Lithika*. See Gutzwiller 1995; Petrain 2005; Sens 2011, 300-308. For poems from the *Palatine Anthology*, I use Paton 1939 and Beckby 1965.

<sup>35</sup> Svenbro 1993; Livingstone and Nisbet 2010, 24-27.

however, this first person convention is lost. The performative aspect and interpretive lens that was formerly ventriloquized by an object or inscription (described in the first person), whether real or fictitious, is shifted to Posidippus' third person narration and description. In his poems, therefore, Posidippus uses ekphrasis to assert himself within a material context (one that is characterized, as critics have shown, by vast socio-political transformation) by emphasizing his role as sculptor or, as I argue, engraver.

Furthermore, if we are to accept Bing's suggestive argument that Posidippus was a writer of epigrammatic poetry (*epigrammatopoiος*), both on the page and on stone, this interplay between media and Posidippus' engagement with this relationship in the poems takes on heightened significance.<sup>36</sup> Bing, following Weinreich, argues that the use of the term *epigrammatopoiος* (Ποσ[σ]ειδίππῳ τῷ ἐπιγραμματοποιῷ Πελλάίῳ), in association with Posidippus in a proxeny decree from Thermon dating to 263/2 B.C.E. [*IG IX I*²i], implies that "he was being honored specifically in his capacity as *epigrammatopoiος*, that is, as a poet of epigrams to be inscribed on monuments."<sup>37</sup> If this is the case, then Posidippus was a poet, who "worked in two different tracks, that is in two different media, though in a single genre—the first such poet that we know of with certainty."<sup>38</sup> He was by no means the only epigrammatist whose works appeared in stone; Plutarch's *Moralia* makes mention of an epigram by Posidippus' contemporary, Asclepiades, which had been included on a base for a sculpture by Lysippus.<sup>39</sup> However, as Bing argues, at this time in the early third century B.C.E., the term

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<sup>36</sup> Bing 2009, 180-83; Bing and Bruss 2007b, 14-15.

<sup>37</sup> Bing and Bruss 2007b, 15. Posidippus was mentioned in another proxeny decree at Delphi dating to ca. 276/5 or 273/2 along with Asclepiades of Samos, however no title such as *epigrammatopoiος* was used in this instance. On the Delphi decree see: Bing and Bruss 2007a, 6 n. 24, 139; Bing 2005, 139.

<sup>38</sup> Bing 2009, 183.

<sup>39</sup> Plutarch *Moralia* 331a, 335 b.

*epigrammatopoiios*, would have been used specifically in reference to an engraver of stone rather than generically for a writer of epigrams. According to several critics, the designation of *epigramma* had specific inscriptional connotations.<sup>40</sup> That Posidippus was honored in this capacity may be all the more remarkable since poets of inscribed epigram were usually anonymous.<sup>41</sup> It is certainly possible that Posidippus did not actually engrave epigrams on stone, but like Asclepiades, wrote epigrams both to be inscribed in stone and those entirely confined to the page.

If Posidippus was indeed, as Bing argues, a poet of the marble and the scroll,<sup>42</sup> then *Lithika* might hold particular significance within the poet's oeuvre and like other poems, such as those from the *Andriantopoiika*, may be seen as programmatic. If the beginning of the Milan papyrus was the actual beginning of the collection, then it seems necessary to accord significance to the position of the *Lithika*, since typically the beginning and the end of a collection are especially important. The length of the *Lithika* is also suggestive of its importance. At 126 lines, this section is nearly the same length as four of the shortest sections taken together.<sup>43</sup> Just as the sculptures of the *Andriantopoiika* are valued for their innovative and mimetic qualities and viewed as programmatic works, so too, I argue, should the *Lithika*.

## 2.2 Precious Stones and Artistic Production

Throughout the *Lithika*, Posidippus places particular emphasis on gemstones' materials

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<sup>40</sup> Puelma (1996, 125) argues that no poet referred to his work as epigram before imperial times. Cf. Bing and Bruss 2007b, 1. Petrovic (2007, 55) has added that *epigramma* is used for inscribed works, while *elegeion* is used in reference to epigrams separated from physical context.

<sup>41</sup> Bing and Buss 2007, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Bing 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Krevans 2007, 142.

and craftsmanship, both in terms of the artistry and the individual completing the work. Although not all of the gems are inscribed, in poems AB 3-15 aspects of their workmanship and artistry are highlighted. For some scholars this serves as a marker of Posidippus' "refined aesthetic" and an indication of the "delicacy of the engraver's art...of [the sort that] is a result of τέχνη and μόχθος.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, as I will suggest in this chapter, Posidippus' poems on stones are the result of craft and toil.<sup>45</sup> As I will show through my examination, however, delicacy is only a small part of what constitutes Posidippian aesthetics. While Posidippus may display elements that appear commensurate with the notion of stylistic refinement and *leptotes*, to reduce his stylistic program to that of delicacy is to ignore the complexity and nuances displayed within the poems. In order to understand better some of these elements within Posidippus' work, I will analyze the enigmatic poem AB 15 which describes a stone harvested from a snake's head, rather than offering an overview of various aspects of poems 3-15.<sup>46</sup> I suggest that this poem, in which the poet touches upon a number of issues central to the collection as a whole, could be described as programmatic and I conclude that the figure of the serpent, as multi-formed and "slippery signifier,"<sup>47</sup> provides an instructive parallel for precious stones.

The stone, engraved with a small-scale image of a chariot, has garnered various interpretations.<sup>48</sup> The snake's significance, however, remains to be fully developed. I suggest that

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<sup>44</sup> Bing 2005, 120-1. Cf. Sens (2005, 207): "critics have pointed out that the poems on stones, in as much as they emphasize the refinement of the small, highly wrought objects in a 'minor' artistic genre, may be read as programmatic statements on the author's own small and elegant poetry."

<sup>45</sup> According to Bing (2005, 121 n. 6) the emphasis on craft in AB 137.3 is most fitting of a poet who describes his soul as having labored in books (ψυχὴ ... ἐν βύβλοις πεπνημένη).

<sup>46</sup> This epigram (GP 20) along with AB 65 (GP 18) was one of only two poems found in the Milan papyrus to be preserved outside of it as well (Gutzwiller 2005b, 2).

<sup>47</sup> Hardie 1998, 35.

<sup>48</sup> See especially Gutzwiller 1995; Bing 2005, 120-1; Kuttner 2005, 144, 157; Porter 2011.



the serpent in AB 15 not only enhances our understanding of the poem, but more importantly Posidippus' strategies within the collection. In the ancient Greek world serpents appear frequently in literary description, recurring often in similes and ekphraseis, so often, in fact, that the narrative representation of snakes, particularly those on armor and body ornamentation, is parodied by Lucian.<sup>49</sup> The *Iliad* alone contains three epic similes bearing snake imagery.<sup>50</sup> At least two well-known ekphraseis from the Archaic period, Agamemnon's arms from the *Iliad* (11.16-46) and the Hesiodic Shield of Herakles (ll. 161-67), involve the depiction of serpents as well. Snakes, in fact, appear twice in the account of Agamemnon's arms (19-20, 24-28, 38-40):<sup>51</sup>

δεύτερον αὖ θώρηκα περὶ στήθεσσιν ἔνδυσε,  
 τὸν ποτέ οἱ Κινύρης δῶκε ξεινήϊον εἶναι...  
 τοῦ δ' ἦτοι δέκα οἴμοι ἔσαν μέλανος κυάνοιο,  
 δώδεκα δὲ χρυσοῖο καὶ εἴκοσι κασσιτέροιο·  
 κυάνεοι δὲ δράκοντες ὀρωρέχαστο προτὶ δειρὴν  
 τρεῖς ἑκάτερθ' ἴρισις ἐοικότες, ἃς τε Κρονίων  
 ἐν νέφει" στήριξε, τέρας μερόπων ἀνθρώπων  
 ...τῆς δ' ἐξ ἀργύρεος τελαμῶν ἦν· αὐτὰρ ἐπ' αὐτοῦ  
 κυάνεος ἐλέλικτο δράκων, κεφαλαὶ δέ οἱ ἦσαν  
 τρεῖς ἀμφιστρεφῆες ἐνὸς ἀυχένος ἐκπεφυῦται.

Next he put a cuirass around his chest, which Cinyras  
 had given him once as a gift of friendship...  
 It had on it ten bands of dark blue enamel, and twelve of gold, and  
 twenty of tin: and enamel serpents reached up to the neck,  
 three on each side, like rainbows which the son of Cronos  
 has fixed in the clouds as a portent for humankind.  
 ...The shield-strap was made of silver, and on it  
 coiled an enamel snake, with three heads growing out of  
 a single neck and twisting in different directions.

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<sup>49</sup> Lucian *How to Write History* 19.

<sup>50</sup> *Il.* 2.308, 3.33-37, and 22.93. Cf. also Heracles' baldric in Book eleven of the *Odyssey*.

<sup>51</sup> On Agamemnon's arms see Becker 1995, 67-77.

The serpents, jewel-like in their appearance, as well as the other metals with which they are described, direct the reader's attention to aspects of color and visibility.<sup>52</sup> Despite the vividness with which the snakes are rendered and their similetic comparison to rainbows, they, above all, appear to be images intended to evoke fear. The manner in which the serpents writhe over the surfaces of the breast plate and baldric is surely intended to inspire terror and wonder in the viewer. The snakes on the cuirass are compared to a portent. Those on the shield strap are many headed, twisting and turning this way and that. The inclusion of the head of the Gorgon as the centerpiece of the shield only further highlights the dread with which the viewer ought to behold the image. The manner in which serpents are described on the Hesiodic shield is remarkably similar, they too move across the surface bringing terror to those who see them (ταὶ φοβέεσκον ἐπὶ χθονὶ φύλ' ἀνθρώπων, / οἳ τινες ἀντιβίην πόλεμον Διὸς ὑἱ φέροιεν).<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in Euripides' *Ion*, two recognition tokens adorned with snakes, a piece of cloth with serpents on it and a necklace of snakes serve as apotropaic devices, due to their frightful nature.<sup>54</sup>

While at the hands of some authors, such as Apollonius Rhodius, the serpent continued to be a figure that was both terrifying and awe-inspiring, as in the *Argonautica*, in the Hellenistic period, serpents began to appear in a variety of other contexts as well. Although many of the snakes described in Nicander's *Theriaca* are malicious and frightening, others are described as wondrous and even harmless creatures, such as the *drakon* whose bite was likened to the nibble of a field mouse despite his numerous fangs.<sup>55</sup> In the visual arts as well, especially in

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<sup>52</sup> The blue enamel or paste on the cuirass and shield strap was perhaps meant to imitate lapis lazuli. A serpent of a similar hue is described in Nicander's *Theriaca* 438-39 and Theocritus *Idyll* 24.14-15. On Nicander, see Gow and Scholfield 1953.

<sup>53</sup> Hesiod *Shield of Heracles* 162-3.

<sup>54</sup> Euripides *Ion* 1417-36; Hilton 1998, 120.

<sup>55</sup> Nicander *Theriaca* 441-47: ἦτοι ὄγ' ἄγλαυρος μὲν εἶδεται, ἐν δὲ γενεΐω/ τρίστοιχοι ἑκάτερθε

Greco-Roman glyptic, serpents appeared frequently on gemstones, carved alone, or in the form of hybrid and solar deities, or in conjunction with the healing god Asclepius. Moreover, in Ptolemaic Egypt, the serpent also held social and political significance as it recalled Alexandria's guardian spirit, the *Agathos Daimon*.<sup>56</sup> To say that snakes and serpentine creatures figured prominently in the literary and cultural fabric of the Hellenistic period would be an understatement.

With this context in mind, I will illustrate the manner in which the snake in AB 15 serves to highlight important themes and features of literary production within the *Lithika*, as well as aspects characteristic of ekphrastic literature, such as the evocation of visual detail by means of vivid color and intricacy. In this section I offer a brief examination of the representation of snakes and serpentine figures in select literary texts in order to draw attention to ophidian characteristics and their functions implicit in Posidippus' poem. I propose that this epigram, in which the poet touches upon a number of issues central to the collection as a whole, could be described as programmatic and conclude that the figure of the serpent, as a "slippery signifier,"<sup>57</sup> provides an instructive parallel for the poet's use of precious stones.

The *dracontias* described in poem AB 15 was a gem believed to come from the head of a snake, the harvesting of which is detailed in Book 37 of Pliny's *Natural History*, as well as in Book 3 of *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.<sup>58</sup> Characteristic of both accounts is the fact that the

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περιστιχώωσιν ὀδόντες· / πίονα δ' ἐν σκυνίοισιν ὑπ' ὄθματα, νέρθε δὲ πώγων/ αἰὲν ὑπ' ἀνθερεῶνι χολοί βαφος. οὐ μὲν ὄγ' αὐτῶς/ ἐγχριμψας ἤλγυνε καὶ ἦν ἔκπαγλα χαλεφθῆ·/ βληχρὸν γὰρ μῦος οἶα μυληβόρου ἐν χροῖ νύχμα/εἶδεταί αἰμαχθέντος ὑπὸ κραντῆρος ἀραιου.

<sup>56</sup> Thompson 2005, 281.

<sup>57</sup> Hardie 1998, 35. Here Hardie is discussing the serpents depicted on Charikleia's breast band in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*. I will say more on this below.

<sup>58</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.158: Draconitis sive dracontias e cerebro fit draconum, sed nisi viventibus absciso capite non gemmescit invidia animalis mori se sentientis. igitur dormientibus amputant. Sotacus, qui visam eam gemmam

stone must come from the head of a live serpent, usually captured while the snake is sleeping, or by means of magic, as in Philostratus' account. Posidippus' poem places little emphasis on the acquisition of the stone but more so on the serpent and especially the stone itself. The gem was not only remarkable in its appearance but was also believed to possess magical properties:<sup>59</sup>

οὐ ποταμῶς κελάδων ἐπὶ χεῖλεσιν, ἀλλὰ δράκοντος  
 εἶχέ ποτ' εὐπώγων τόνδε λίθον κεφαλῇ  
 πυκνὰ φαληριόωντα· τὸ δὲ γλυφὲν ἄρμα κατ' αὐτ[οῦ]  
 τοῦθ' ὑπὸ Λυγκείου βλέμματος ἐγλύφετο  
 ψεύδει χεῖρὸς ὅμοιον· ἀποπλασθὲν γὰρ ὀράται  
 ἄρμα, κατὰ πλάτεος δ' οὐκ ἂν ἴδοις προβόλους·  
 ἦ καὶ θαῦμα πέλει μόχθου μέγα, πῶς ὁ λιθουργὸς  
 τὰς] ἀτεινούσας οὐκ ἐμογήσε κόρας.

It wasn't a river resounding on its banks but the head  
 of a well-bearded serpent that once kept this stone,  
 thickly streaked in white. And the chariot engraved on it  
 was carved by the eye of a Lynceus,  
 like the mark on a fingernail: the chariot is seen  
 impressed but you would not see any protrusions on  
 the surface. And this is the great marvel of the work:  
 how its engraver did not strain his eyes as he stared so intently.

Let us consider the opening couplet in which the snake is clearly mentioned before proceeding with my analysis of the serpentine implications of the remainder of the poem. The explicit denial of the river as a source for the gem, and thus poem, marks a transition from the river and sea topoi seen in several poems of the *Lithika*, including AB 7 and 16, indicating the movement from

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sibi apud regem scripsit, bigis vehi quaerentes tradit et viso dracone spargere somni medicamenta atque ita sopitis praecidere. esse candore tralucido, nec postea poliri aut artem admittere. Cf. Phil. *Vit. Ap.* III.7.2. Nicander's *Theriaca* 438-457 describes a serpent resembling that in AB 15.

<sup>59</sup> This poem (AB 15, 20 *HE*), one of Posidippus' works known before the discovery of the Milan papyrus, is especially well published. See: Gutzwiller 1995; Kuttner 2005; Thompsen 2005; Petrain 2005; Porter 2011. A description of a stone harvested from a snake's head can be found in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* III.7.2. Nicander's *Theriaca* 438-457 describes a serpent resembling that in AB 15. Pliny (*N.H.*37.158) and also describes the harvesting of the *draconitis*, also called *dracontias*.

“actual” gems to those in the realm of the fantastical.<sup>60</sup> The emphasis on the source of the stone, the snake’s head, also recalls the violence and force with which many of the gems found in the *Lithika* are attained. A yellow stone in AB 7 is carried quickly downstream, grey rock crystal in AB 16 is repeatedly torn from the mountains, and, in AB 19, Poseidon violently breaks off a piece of large rock and hurls it out to sea.<sup>61</sup>

Further, the figure of the serpent in Posidippus’ poem is noteworthy for the resemblances that it bears to the *drakon*, a constellation detailed in the *Phaenomena*, a didactic poem by Aratus of Soli, a contemporary of Posidippus. Aratus writes (45-47, 54-57):

Τὰς δὲ δι’ ἀμφοτέρας οἷη ποταμοῖο ἀπορρῶξ  
εἰλείται, μέγα θαῦμα, Δράκων, περί τ’ ἀμφί τ’ ἐαγῶς  
μυρίας...

...Οὐ μὲν ἐκείνω  
οἴοθεν, οὐδ’ οἶος κεφαλῇ ἐπιλάμπεται ἀστήρ,  
ἀλλὰ δύο κροτάφοις, δύο δ’ ὄμμασιν· εἷς δ’ ὑπένερθεν  
ἐσχατιὴν ἐπέχει γένυος δεινοῖο πελώρου.

Between them (the two poles), just as the branch of a  
river, circles the *Drakon*, a great marvel  
winding infinite around and about...

....Not one  
star shines on his head, but on his brows are  
two stars, and two in his eyes, and one is set beneath  
upon the tip of the terrible monster’s chin.

I will return to a discussion of the dragon’s eyes shortly. Here I would like to focus on the opening of Aratus’ passage with its emphasis on the river and the serpent, described as *mega thauma*, which is highly evocative of Posidippus’ snakestone.<sup>62</sup> In light of the Aratean allusion, it

<sup>60</sup> See Petrain 2005, 334 on river topoi in Posidippus. On the negative opening to the poem in relation to other in the *Lithika*, see Gutzwiller 2005c, 302.

<sup>61</sup> Porter 2011, 283.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* (II.8.84), which recounts the belief that astrological phenomena and in particular cold weather and snowstorms produced snakes (ἐρπετῶν).

is tempting to look to Aratus as a source for Posidippus' epigram. After all, the two authors were contemporaries, Aratus was even commissioned to write the *Phaenomena* for King Antigonus of Pella, Posidippus' home town.<sup>63</sup> Following Sider, however, it may be safer to say that we ought not to imagine Aratus as Posidippus' source, but rather as "a source to be supplemented." More generally, the possible connection between the two passages lends further support to the argument that Posidippus was familiar with a wide variety of technical manuals, such as Theophrastus' *Lithika (de Lapidibus)*, as well as texts on constellations and weather signs.<sup>64</sup>

If we turn to the remaining six lines of Posidippus' poem, we note that the epigram draws attention to artistic skill while simultaneously highlighting the materiality and artistry of the object described, as well as the text. In accordance with these strategies, the poem places great weight on the nature of artistic production (lines 7-8), described as toil (μόχθος) and as μογέω in the final line, echoing a similar sentiment to AB 67.2: ἐγγύθεν ἄθρει τῆς Θεοδωρείης χειρὸς ὅσος κάματος, which could indicate both poetic craftsmanship and the 'product of toil.' Although Posidippus' emphasis on labor used in reference to literary production in Hellenistic epigrams is by no means remarkable, I suggest that the manner in which he expresses it is. Several Hellenistic poets referred to their literary endeavors in terms of toil, or were celebrated for the fruits of their labor.<sup>65</sup> One of Posidippus' contemporaries in particular, Aratus, was praised twice by other poets for the learnedness and labor of his book, the *Phaenomena*, a poetic reworking of a prose treatise on astronomy. Callimachus (*Epig.* 27), for example, praises Aratus for his "wakefulness" (ἀγρυπνίη), which could either refer to the poet's

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<sup>63</sup> See Sider 2004, 170 on the possible relationship between Posidippus and Aratus.

<sup>64</sup> Smith 2004, 108.

<sup>65</sup> See for example Asclepiades 7.11.1; Callimachus *Epig.* 6.1; Theocritus 7.51, 7.139; Philetas fr. 10.3.

assumed role as stargazer or the sleeplessness that attends nighttime literary pursuits and ‘burning the midnight oil’.<sup>66</sup> Leonidas of Tarentum lauds more explicitly the toil involved in Aratus’ poetic production (*A.P.* 9.25):

Γράμμα τόδε Ἀρήτοιο δαήμονος, ὅς ποτε λεπτῇ  
φροντίδι δηναίους ἀστέρας ἐφράσατο,  
ἀπλανέας τ’ ἄμφω καὶ ἀλήμονας, οἷσι τ’ ἐναργῆς  
ἰλλόμενος κύκλοις οὐρανὸς ἐνδέδεται.  
αἰνεῖσθω δὲ καμῶν ἔργων μέγα, καὶ Διὸς εἶναι  
δεύτερος, ὅστις ἔθηκ’ ἄστρα φαινότερα.

This is the work of learned Aratus, who once  
pondered the eternal stars with his subtle mind,  
both the stars unmoving and the planets with which  
the bright revolving heaven is fixed.  
Let the man who toiled greatly be praised  
second to Zeus in that he made the stars brighter.

Several critics have taken this poem in conjunction with Aratus’ ΛΕΠΤΗ acrostic (*Ph.* 783-87) as a indication of the λεπτότης of Aratus’ poem (λεπτῇ φροντίδι... ἐφράσατο).<sup>67</sup> Yet as the poem emphasizes, Aratus’ literary endeavor is a ἔργων μέγα not only in the effort entailed in adapting a prose piece into poetic form, but also, as Porter reminds us, the poem in length (at 1150 lines), but especially in content, as a work on the subject of the heavens, a vast topic, is “remarkable for its general grandeur.”<sup>68</sup>

A comparison with a later poem may help to elucidate further another facet of the literary significance of the serpent in AB 15. In a poem by Meleager, *AP* 12.257, the act of writing poetry is described similarly as toil by means of the personification of the κορωνίς.

<sup>66</sup> Henkel 2009, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Henkel 2009, 12 n. 9; Bing 2005, 120. Cf. Porter (2011, 303 n. 90) who points out that the occurrences of meg- words in the *Phaenomena* by far surpass the frequency with which lept- words appear.

<sup>68</sup> Porter 2011, 291.

The poem states:

Ἄ πύματον καμτῆρα καταγγέλλουσα κορωνίς,  
ἐρκούρος γραπταῖς πιστοτάτα σελίσιν,  
φαμί τὸν ἐκ πάντων ἠθροισμένον εἰς ἓνα μόχθον  
ὑμνοθετᾶν βύβλω τᾶδ' ἐνελιζάμενον  
ἐκτελέσαι Μελέαγρον, αἰίμνηστον δὲ Διοκλει  
ἄνθεσι συμπλέξαι μουσοπόλον στέφανον.  
οὔλα δ' ἐγὼ καμφθεῖσα δρακοντείοις ἴσα νώτοις,  
σύνθρονος ἴδρυμαι τέρμασιν εὐμαθίας.

I, the *coronis*, announcing the final lap, the most  
trustworthy guardian of the enclosure of written sheets,  
proclaim that Meleager has brought his labor to an end,  
having gathered all the works from all lyric poets into  
one collection and having wrapped them into this roll.  
And from flowers he has twined together one poetic wreath worthy of  
remembrance for Diocles.  
And, curled in coils like the back of a snake, I am sitting  
here enthroned beside the conclusion of his learned work.

The κορωνίς, which could mean a crown, was a curved or S-shaped flourish that frequently served as a diacritical mark, notating, for example, the conclusion of a book, chapter, or scene of a play or the end of a section of papyrus in prose works.<sup>69</sup> Just as the snake is a liminal figure, straddling the world above and that below, as Barchiesi has discussed, its appearance in literature may serve as a marker of boundaries.<sup>70</sup> Since *A.P.* 12.257 originally denoted the end of Meleager's *Garland*, the poem on the κορωνίς provides a fitting end to a collection of poems.<sup>71</sup> In Posidippus' *Lithika*, the use of the serpent may serve not as an indication that a section has come to an end, but as a thematic boundary. Within the *Lithika*, AB 15 straddles poems primarily about engraved gems, precious stones, and valuable objects, often used as gifts (AB 2-14), and the final

<sup>69</sup> McNamee 2007, 157.

<sup>70</sup> Barchiesi 1997, 190. See also Butler (2011, 45-54) for a discussion of the literary implications of snakes in Latin literature.

<sup>71</sup> Gow and Page 1965, 678.



four poems, which seem to be less thematically connected to the collection, are all about stones that are uncarved (AB 16-20). The snake, as a liminal figure, perhaps could also be emblematic of Posidippus' poems, which mediate the boundaries of inscriptional and ekphrastic epigram. Further, the S-shaped κορωνίς also recalls both the twisting and turning of the serpent's body (as seen in line seven: οὐλα δ' ἐγὼ καμφοθεῖσα δρακοντείοις ἴσα νότοις), as well as the turning motion of rolling or unrolling a papyrus, Posidippus AB 118.117-18:<sup>72</sup>

...ἔοιμι δὲ βίβλον ἐλίσσω  
ἄφνω λαοφόρῳ κείμενος εἰν ἀγορῇ.

...May I find myself unrolling a book,  
standing all at once in the crowded market-place

Later still, the figure of the serpent has been used to draw attention to the complexities of the organization of literary works, as in Michael Psellus' discussion of Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*.

Psellus, describes the plot of the *Aethiopika*, which begins *in medias res* like a serpent:

καὶ αὐτὴ δὲ ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ συγγράμματος ἔοικε τοῖς ἐλικτοῖς ὄφει· οὗτοι  
τε γὰρ τὴν κεφαλὴν εἴσω τῆς σπεύρας κατακαλύψαντες, τὸ λοιπὸν σῶμα  
προβέβληνται, καὶ τὸ βιβλίον τὴν τῆς ὑποθέσεως εἰσβολὴν ἐν μέσῳ  
διολισθήσασαν ὥσπερ κληρωσάμενον ἀρχὴν πεποίηται τὴν μεσότητά.

The beginning of the work itself resembles coiled snakes: the snakes conceal their heads inside the coils and project the rest of their bodies forward; so the book makes a beginning *in medias res*, and the start of the story, which it has inherited, slips through (to end up) in the middle.

According to Psellus, the *Aethiopika*'s complicated plot is like a twisted snake whose beginning, middle and end are difficult to discern. The figure of the snake, therefore, is shown to imitate complexly rendered subject matter.<sup>73</sup>

The serpent in AB 15, however, may also highlight aspects particular to ekphrastic

<sup>72</sup> On the twisting of serpents' bodies see also *Il.* 11.39; Theocritus *Id.* 24, 29-30.

<sup>73</sup> See further Dyck 1986; Agapitos 1998.

literature such as the evocation of visual detail by means of vivid color and intricacy. Like Posidippus' gemstones, the snake described in AB 15, according to Nicander was radiant and multicolored, being green and dark blue with a yellow beard.<sup>74</sup> An artist's rendering of a snake in book three of Heliodorus' *Aethiopika* also shows the intricacy of the two serpents' bodies entwined and the play of light and color over their shifting scales:

Ἦγετο μὲν γὰρ ἔφ' ἀρμαμάξης ἀπὸ συνωρίδος λευκῆς βοῶν ἠνιοχουμέ  
νη, χιτῶνα δὲ ἀλουργὸν ποδήρη χρυσαῖς ἀκτίσι κατάπαστον ἠμφίεστο,  
ζώνην δὲ ἐπεβέβλητο τοῖς στέρνοις· καὶ ὁ τεχνησάμενος εἰς ἐκείνην τὸ  
πᾶν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ τέχνης κατέκλεισεν, οὔτε πρότερόν τι τοιοῦτον χαλκευσά  
μενος οὔτε αὐθις δυνησόμενος. δυοῖν γὰρ δρακόντοιιν τὰ μὲν οὐράια κατὰ  
τῶν μεταφρένων ἐδέσμευε τοὺς δὲ αὐχένας ὑπὸ τοὺς μαζοὺς παραμείψας  
καὶ εἰς βρόχον σκολιὸν διαπλέξας καὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς διολισθῆσαι τοῦ βρό  
χου συγχωρήσας, ὡς περίττωμα τοῦ δεσμοῦ κατὰ πλευρὰν ἑκατέραν  
ἀπηώρησεν. εἶπες ἂν τοὺς ὄφεις οὐ δοκεῖν ἔρπειν ἀλλ' ἔρπειν, οὐχ ὑπὸ  
βλοσυρῶ καὶ ἀπηνεῖ τῶ βλέμματι φοβεροὺς ἀλλ' ὑγρῶ κώματι διαρρομέ  
νους ὥσπερ ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ τὰ στέρνα τῆς κόρης ἡμέρου κατευναζομένου.  
οἱ δὲ ἦσαν τὴν ὕλην χρυσοῖ τὴν χροιάν δὲ κυανοῖ, ὁ γὰρ χρῦσος ὑπὸ τῆς τέ  
χνης ἐμελαίνετο ἵνα τὸ τραχὺ καὶ μεταβάλλον τῆς φολίδος τῶ ξανθῶ τὸ  
μελανθὲς κραθὲν ἐπιδείξηται. τοιαύτη μὲν ἡ ζώνη τῆς κόρης.

She [Charikleia] rode in a carriage drawn by a pair of yoked white oxen was dressed in a long purple gown embroidered with golden rays. Under her bosom she wore a cincture of gold; the man who had crafted it had bestowed all of his skill into it—never before had he wrought anything so fine, and he would never would he be able to do it again. He entwined the tales of two serpents behind her back, while he crossed their necks under her breasts forming a convoluted knot and then letting their heads slip through, he let the remainder drape down along both sides of her body. You would not have said that the serpents seemed to be moving, but that they actually were moving. Nor did they have a rigid or frightening appearance, but rather they floated in a sensuous languor as if subdued by the loveliness of Charikleia's bosom. Their material was gold but they were dark in color, for the craftsman had darkened them so that he might represent the roughness and the alternating colors of their scales. Such was the maiden's girdle.

<sup>74</sup> Nicander, *Theriaca* 438-44. Cf. for example, the serpent in book two of the *Iliad* (2.308), which is vividly described as blood-red (δαφοινός). Here, of course, the color is likely intended to foreshadow the serpent's murderous act to follow.

The breast band worn by the heroine, Charikleia, is shown to be elaborately wrought, with its flashing scales rendered in varying colors so that the artist was able to express both texture and movement.<sup>75</sup> Such attention to description recall the intricacy and delicacy of ekphrastic epigrams with their great attention to minutely rendered details. Charikleia's breast band clearly stands in relation to, and simultaneously in opposition against, the earlier descriptions of arms found in Homer and Hesiod. While the Archaic authors stress the frightful nature of the images, Heliodorus takes great pains to relate that serpents on Charikleia's breast band are anything but. Above all, it is a sense of the erotic that is manifested in the ekphrasis of the snakes "lulled by the delights that dwelt in the maiden's bosom".<sup>76</sup> The erotic, as I will discuss in chapter four, permeates numerous poems in the *Lithika*. The description also highlights the ability of ekphrasis to animate inanimate objects and by doing so create a level of mimesis that visual representation is unable to achieve.<sup>77</sup>

Like the one in AB 15 and those on Charikleia's breast band in Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, serpents are wild creatures of the earth that must be subdued or overcome by subterfuge. Pliny, for example, writes that the stone harvested from the dragon's head is best gathered while the creature is sleeping, otherwise, out of spite, the beast will not permit the substance to transform into a gem.<sup>78</sup> In Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, the snake is lured from hiding by means of a crimson cloth and spells which lull the creature into a trance.<sup>79</sup> Although the bulk of

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<sup>75</sup> I will return to the details of this passage in a later chapter. For a thorough analysis of the passage, as well as a discussion of earlier models of this type of artistry, see Hardie 1998; Hilton 1998.

<sup>76</sup> According to Hilton (1998, 12), Eros is frequently associated with serpentine imagery. See, for example, Sappho (fr. 130), in which Eros is described as 'creeping' (ὄρπετον) and Apuleius (4.33.1), in which the deity is *vipereum*.

<sup>77</sup> As Hardie (1998) has shown, it also has metaliterary implications.

<sup>78</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.158.

<sup>79</sup> Philostratus *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* III.8.2. Κοκκοβαφεῖ πέπλω χρυσᾶ ἐνείραντες γράμματα τίθενται πρὸ τῆς χειᾶς ὕπνον ἐγγοητεύσαντες τοῖς γράμμασιν, ὕφ' οὗ νικάται τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὁ δράκων ἀτρέπους ὄντας, καὶ πολλὰ τῆς ἀπορρήτου σοφίας ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἄδουσιν, οἷς ἄγεται τε καὶ τὸν αὐχένα

the stones described in the *Lithika* are gathered in less dramatic ways, the snakestone in AB 15, like many others in the *Lithika*, offers a contrast between the “wild” stone and the precious gem that has been worked and refined by the expert, thus setting up an opposition between art and nature.<sup>80</sup> In other poems in the *Lithika*, such as AB 7, the process of transformation is described, moving from the streams of the Arabian mountains to an inlaid necklace on the throat of a beautiful woman. In poem AB 15, it should be noted that Posidippus as ekphrastic poet is able to accomplish what the gem engraver could not, the transformation of an unworkable substance; for according to Pliny, “the stone is colorless and transparent, and cannot subsequently be polished or submitted to any other skillful process.”<sup>81</sup>

As intimated above in the passages by Pliny and Philostratus, the themes of deception and seduction are deeply entwined with the figure of the serpent, two themes central to Posidippus’ *Lithika*. In addition to the stories recounted above, one might recall a story of some importance to the early Hellenistic period involving the parentage of Alexander the Great. According to Lucian, Olympias, Alexander’s mother, was beguiled and seduced by a serpent, who, according to some stories, was Alexander’s father.<sup>82</sup> The gems in Posidippus’ *Lithika*, like the snakes in

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ὑπεκβαλὼν τῆς χειρὸς ἐπικαθεύδει τοῖς γράμμασι. προσπεσόντες οὖν οἱ Ἰνδοὶ κειμένῳ πελέκει ἐναρά ττουσι, καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποτεμόντες λήζονται τὰς ἐν αὐτῇ λίθους. ἀποκεῖσθαι δὲ φασιν ἐν ταῖς τῶν ὀρέων δρακόντων κεφαλῆς λίθους τὸ μὲν εἶδος ἀνθηρὰς καὶ πάντα ἀπαυγαζούσας χρώματα, τὴν δὲ ἰσχὺν ἄρρητους καὶ κατὰ τὸν δακτύλιον, ὃν γενέσθαι φασὶ τῷ Γύγῃ. I will return to this passage in greater detail in chapter four.

<sup>80</sup> As critics have noted, however, some stones in the *Lithika* mediate these boundaries. A stone in AB 7, for example, is described as honey-like in appearance. Livingstone and Nisbet (2010, 66) have noted the importance of this description, as honey is a liminal substance located in between nature and culture.

<sup>81</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.158: esse candore tralucido, nec postea poliri aut artem admittere.

<sup>82</sup> Lucian *Alexander* 8. Cf. Plut. *Life of Alex.* 2.4. The use of the snake as a figure of deception is seen again in this same text in which the false prophet Alexander allegedly deceived his followers in to believing that he was consulting a snake god named Lykon. Cf. The Old Testament account of Eve’s seduction and deception by the serpent.

the stories above, are seductive. Many of them sparkle and glisten. Often placed against the fair skin of a woman to whom they were given, they entice the viewer to look closer. These mythical serpents, however, are not only seductive, but also deceptive. In this same way Posidippus' works deceive. Rock crystal, in AB 16 for example, has the gleam of a precious stone, but is common, and therefore less valuable. Similarly, in AB 13, the stone is said to be deceptive when it is dipped in oil:

κ[ερδα]λέη λίθος ἦδε· λιπα[ινομένη]ς γε μὲν αὐτῆς,  
 φέγγο]ς ὅλους ὄγκους, θαῦ[μ' ἀπάτη]ς, περιθεῖ·  
 ὄ[γκων] δ' ἀσκελέων, ὡκὺ γ[λυπτὸς λ]ῖς ὁ Πέρσης  
 τε]ίνων ἀστράπτει πρὸς καλὸν ἥλιον.

This stone is [deceptive]: when it is anointed,  
 a light] spreads over the whole surface, [a beguiling] marvel.  
 But when [the surface] is dry, all at once an [engraved] Persian [lion]  
 flashes as it reaches for the beautiful sun.

This stone is shown to be a wonder due to the nature of its material and luminosity—the most prized characteristics of a gem—as well as the optical illusion created when the wet stone becomes dry.<sup>83</sup> Poems themselves are therefore gems offering the sparkling lure of tangible objects, but in the end they are objects that are not “there;” it is rather the reader who is left with the poem which assumes the object's vacant position.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, in Posidippus' poem on the snakestone, there emerges a heightened emphasis on the eye and thus privileging of the sense of sight fitting for an ekphrastic poem. In descriptions

<sup>83</sup> Few scholars have ventured to speculate on the use of oil in gem engraving other than as a means of highlighting the stone's radiant properties. The poet's mention of oil, however, may not only be a reference to the mutable optical qualities of this particular stone, but may also refer to the process by which some stones are engraved. Gems and precious stones were typically engraved with sharp tools, but engravers frequently made use of a slurry, or a combination of oil and an abrasive substance, in finishing gems. While engraving a stone the craftsman would, in a sense, have to engrave blindly, only getting a glimpse of the image on the stone through the slurry or through the occasional impression.

<sup>84</sup> Kutter 2005 suggests that the poems are a form of “gem magic”—an intriguing idea to which I will return in a later chapter.

of the snake by Philostratus and Nicander, great stress is placed on the serpent's eyes which are described much like jewels. In Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, the serpent's eyes are, in fact, described as stones (3.8.2):

αἱ δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν κόραι λίθος ἐστὶ διάπυρος, ἰσχὺν δ' αὐτῶν ἀμήχανον  
εἶναί φασιν ἐς πολλὰ τῶν ἀποθέτων.

Their eyeballs are flashing stones that are said to have an irresistible power to do many mysterious things.<sup>85</sup>

Like the eyes of Aratus' celestial *drakon*, those of Philostratus' serpent become a special focus of the ekphrastic gaze.

Through the detail of the poem itself, vision is further developed as a locus of ekphrastic poetry. The minute attention to detail displayed by the glyptic artist provides simultaneously a source of delight and wonder. The chariot carved on the snake stone is so tiny that it is barely perceptible to the human eye (ψεῦδεϊ χειρὸς ὄμοιον)<sup>86</sup> and displays such great attention to detail, so as to be potentially damaging to the craftsman's eyesight. The emphasis on sharp-sightedness is developed further by the reference to Lyncaeus, one of the Argonauts, who was noted for his keen eyesight. Here Posidippus may have been referring to lore indicating that gem makers were frequently myopic,<sup>87</sup> as well as the widespread belief that stones held healing properties.<sup>88</sup> The keen attention to vision, thus, serves as a metapoetic device for the exacting art of ekphrastic poetry.

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. Nicander *Theriaca* 443.

<sup>86</sup> Pliny (*NH* 37.158) mentions that the *dracontias* was hunted from a chariot, which the carving on this gem might reflect.

<sup>87</sup> Plantzos 1999, 40-41.

<sup>88</sup> Other stones, such as emeralds, also had soothing properties for the eye (Theophrastus *de Lap.* 24). This also serves as a reminder that the particular type of serpent described in AB 15, the *drakon*, was, according to Nicander, fostered by Asclepius, the god of healing, and despite its menacing countenance, was benign to humans.

While the focus of Posidippus AB 15 is, ostensibly, on the gem itself, I have argued here that the serpent in the opening couplet merits consideration alongside the stone described in the remainder of the poem. Seeing as there were a variety of animals in antiquity from which stones were thought to originate,<sup>89</sup> it can hardly be an accident that Posidippus' stone derives from the head of a δράκων whose homophone, δρακῶν, comes from the aorist participle of δέρομαι.<sup>90</sup> The serpent, therefore, like the gems of the *Lithika*, becomes a locus for visual description and, when read against the above examples, functions as a complex signifier for Posidippus' literary and visual strategies.

### 2.3 Glyptics and the *Lithika*

In addition to an expressed interest in the labors of gem production in the *Lithika*, there is also a specific concern with the engravers who inscribe the stones. Workers of stone, according to several ancient sources, were highly esteemed as artisans, and by the late Hellenistic period intaglios, or engraved stones, were sold at a price considerably greater than that of the stone alone.<sup>91</sup> Particular gem workers received recognition for their work and were esteemed alongside prominent sculptors and painters. As we have seen, Pyrgoteles, according to Pliny, was given the sole right to fashion Alexander the Great's image in emerald, just as Lysippus alone was permitted to sculpt the young ruler.<sup>92</sup> Like craftsmen in other fields, various gem workers, especially

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<sup>89</sup> Pliny (*NH*) tells of numerous other types of stones that were thought to originate from animals, such as the *chelonia*, which was a tortoise's eye (37.155), or *cinaediae* which form in the brain of fish (37.153).

<sup>90</sup> Macrobius (*Sat.* 1.20.1) notes the association between serpents and sharp sightedness.

<sup>91</sup> Plantzos 1999. Pliny, however, seems to contradict this and apparently held a rather low opinion of gem engravers.

<sup>92</sup> Discounting modern forgeries, no gems bearing Pyrgoteles' signature survive today.

those active in the Hellenistic royal courts and later under Roman imperial patronage, included their signatures on their works in various forms. For example, an oval garnet bearing a portrait image of Berenike II is inscribed ΝΙΚΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΕΤΟΙΕΙ (**Figure 2.5**). A glyptic artist to the Ptolemies signed his image of Isis, likely intended for Kleopatra I, with only his name, Lykomedes, in the nominative.<sup>93</sup> Later still, the signature of the Greek craftsman, Solon, who worked under the patronage of Mithradates and later Augustus is found in the genitive (**Figure 2.6**).<sup>94</sup>



**Fig. 2.5**

Portrait of Berenike II signed by Nikandros. Hellenistic.



**Fig. 2.6**

Medusa signed by Solon. Hellenistic or Imperial.

As a poet who was active both in Pella and Alexandria, and thus an individual who was familiar with royal patronage, it is perhaps noteworthy that in several of his epigrams, Posidippus takes great pains to mention the artist who fashioned the images he describes, sometimes placing greater weight on the artist than the imagery inscribed on the object. We have seen this, for example, in poem AB 7:

<sup>93</sup> Plantzos 1999, 63.

<sup>94</sup> The signature's authenticity has been called into question (Plantzos 1999, 129).



ἐξ Ἀράβων τὰ ξάνθ' ὄ[ρῳεν κατέρ]υτα κυλίων  
 εἰς ἄλα χειμάρρους ὡκ' [ἐφόρει ποτα]μὸς  
 τὸν μέλιτι χροίην λίθον εἴκελον, ὃν Κρονίου[υ] χεῖρ  
 ἔγλυψε· χρυσῶ σφιγκτὸς ὄδε γλυκερῆ  
 Νικονόη κάθεμα τρη[τὸν φλέγει, ἦ]ς ἐπὶ μαστῶ  
 συλλάμπει λευκῶ χρωτὶ μελιχρὰ φάη.

Rolling the yellow [rubble] from the Arabian  
 [mountains] to the sea, the winter-flowing [river]  
 swiftly [carried] the honey-colored gem which the hand of Cronius  
 engraved. Now set in gold [it makes sweet]  
 Nikonoe's inlaid necklace shine, as the honey-colored light  
 glows on her white skin.

Cronius, mentioned again in poem two (AB 2.2 χειρὸς ὑ]πὸ Κρονίου), and whose name is conjectured in AB 6 also in the genitive (ὑπὸ Κρονίου), was the name of a craftsman, who, Pliny tells us, was a famous gem engraver after Pyrgoteles.<sup>95</sup> In other poems as well, craftsmen, such as Darius and Timanthes (AB 4 Δαρείου δακτυλο[...], AB 5 Τιμάνθης ἔγλυψε) of whom we have no knowledge today, are mentioned. As we have already seen, Posidippus mentions by name works by the noted Hellenistic sculptor, Lysippus and the miniaturist Theodorus in other parts of the papyrus in which the *Lithika* are contained. By so doing, Posidippus, insinuates his own work into the works of other noted artists and as such invites the reader to make comparisons between the artistic creations of master sculptors and gem carvers and his own. Whether or not the artisans named were actual gem workers, the inclusion of craftsmen's names creates a parallel with actual signed intaglios and may have served to authenticate the objects described. Moreover, even though some of the glyptic artists mentioned by Posidippus may be unknown to us or even fictitious, their very mention is significant and their reference continues to serve a literary or rhetorical function. For, as Männlein-Robert argues, "if our eye is directed toward the

<sup>95</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.4.

abilities of the artist (even anonymous) we are dealing with masters who have become the object of poetic *imitation* and *aemulatio*.”<sup>96</sup>

## 2.4 Conclusion

In offering a sketch of Posidippian aesthetics and self-reflexiveness, I have focused on three aspects of the poems: the author’s ekphrastic strategies within the genre of epigram, the materiality of precious stones as subject on which the poems were written, and the discussion of artistry and production within the poems. I have argued that in Posidippus’ *Lithika*, gems, like poems, are valued for a number of qualities, including the labor involved in craftsmanship, attention to detail, as well as the fame of the artist/poet. I have attempted to show how Posidippus draws not upon the subject of a constructed poetic world, but rather on a topic that has a material and sensory context which determines the possibilities for symbolic function. Through their treatment of the technical aspects of gem preparation, the poems inspire reflection by the poet about his own craft and genre. Posidippus, by means of his subject matter, frames our reading of the poems as well as his poetic persona as artist or craftsman, thus asserting his mastery as a writer of poems on stones.

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<sup>96</sup> Männlein-Robert 2007, 254.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Fictive Spaces: Ekphrastic Landscapes in Hellenistic Epigram and the Novel**

In the previous chapter I developed a connection between precious stones and ekphrastic epigram by discussing the manner in which Greek authors drew upon technological and intellectual knowledge of precious stones, their innate properties and especially aspects of their manufacture. By examining epigrams and precious stones in relation to one another, I illustrated the manner in which the verbal and visual arts are analogous processes. As such, the materials and practices involved in gem production functioned as a guide for understanding the literary and metapoetic significance of precious stones in ekphrastic poetry. Further, I postulated that poets, such as Posidippus were placed in the role of the knowledgeable critic and talented craftsman through their mineralogical expertise and skill in carving stones. Building upon the analogical relationship between literature and the visual arts established earlier, this chapter will continue to examine the use and dissemination of engraved gems and intaglios as a metaphor for the development of a literary discourse on precious stones.<sup>1</sup> Although such items often had numerous functions, some of which I will discuss in a later chapter, here I will concentrate primarily on the aesthetic and literary implications of seal stones. As objects that were both inscribed with pictorial representations and also easily reproduced in the form of impressions in plaster (or other malleable materials), I will show how seal stones, signet rings, and intaglios serve as a useful paradigm for exploring issues associated with representation, but also, for analyzing the development and diffusion of a collection of closely related images. While a series of patterns and similarities emerge throughout this discussion, I propose that the mutable, and, what Platt refers to as, the “unstable nature” of the relationship between a seal and its impression may serve as a

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<sup>1</sup> Petrain (2005) has already traced the development of a discourse on precious stones originating in Posidippus’ *Lithika* and continuing into Latin poetry of the Augustan era. Borrowing Petrain’s terminology on a “discourse of precious stones,” I trace a similar development through ekphrasis found in assorted poems in the *Palatine Anthology* as well as later Greek prose works.

metaphor for the literary appropriations and distortions that take place throughout this discourse.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1 The Representational and Replicative Functions of Engraved Seal Stones

Two linked episodes from Chariton's *Chaireas and Callirhoe* involving an intaglio portrait ring bearing the likeness of Chaireas exemplify several of the complex issues surrounding seal stones and the images produced from them. The intaglio first figures prominently in book one when Chaireas, suspecting that his beloved Callirhoe has been engaging in an extramarital affair, kicks her so violently that the unfortunate heroine falls into a coma. Falsely believed to be dead, Callirhoe is lavishly buried, rescued by a grave robber and eventually sold to Dionysos, the wealthiest man in Miletus. Upon being freed from the tomb and subsequently handed over to Dionysos, Callirhoe laments her ill treatment at the hands of her mistrusting husband Chaireas, yet upon seeing his portrait on her seal ring, she kisses it and proceeds to address the image in the absence of her beloved. In this instance the portrait ring's value resides largely in its pictorial function. The image stands as a visual reminder of her absent beloved. Through Callirhoe's address and physical contact with the ring, therefore, it also serves as a proxy, of sorts, for the absent Chaireas, recalling the seal stone's ability, as well as that of the impression, to represent an individual.<sup>3</sup>

Later in the course of the novel, Callirhoe, mistakenly believing Chaireas to be dead, uses this same portrait ring as the model for an image to be included in his funerary procession (4.1.10-12):

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<sup>2</sup> Platt 2006, 234.

<sup>3</sup> On "image-love" compare, for example, Bettini 1999; Steiner 2001, 185-207; Platt 2002.

ἐπόμπευε δ' εἶδωλον Χαιρέου πρὸς τὴν ἐν τῷ δακτυλίῳ σφραγίδα  
διατυπωθέν· καλλίστην δὲ οὔσαν τὴν εἰκόνα προσέβλεψεν οὐδεὶς  
Καλλιρόης παρουσίας, ἀλλ' ἐκείνη μόνη τοὺς ἀπάντων ἐδημαγώγησεν  
ὀφθαλμούς...οἱ μὲν κομίζοντες τὴν κλίνην ἔθηκαν, ἀναβᾶσα δὲ ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἡ  
Καλλιρόη Χαιρέα περιεχύθη καὶ καταφιλοῦσα τὴν εἰκόνα “σὺ μὲν ἔθαψας  
ἐμὲ πρῶτος ἐν Συρακούσαις, ἐγὼ δὲ ἐν Μιλήτῳ πάλιν σέ. μὴ γὰρ μεγάλα  
μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ παράδοξα δυστυχοῦμεν· ἀλλήλους ἐθάψαμεν. οὐκ ἔχει δ'  
ἡμῶν οὐδέτερος οὐδὲ τὸν νεκρόν. Τύχη βάσκανε, καὶ ἀποθανοῦσιν ἡμῖν  
ἐφθόνησας κοινῇ γῆν ἐπιέσασθαι καὶ φυγάδας ἡμῶν ἐποίησας καὶ τοὺς  
νεκρούς.

Leading the procession was an image of Chaireas, formed from the seal of Callirhoe's ring, but becoming as it was no one looked at it because Callirhoe was present, she alone drew all eyes to her... When they reached the tomb, those who were carrying the bier set it down. Callirhoe climbing up to it, held Chaireas close, kissing his image. 'First you buried me in Syracuse, and now I am burying you in Miletus. Our misfortunes are not only great, but they are also difficult to believe- we have buried one another! Yet neither of us even has the other's dead body! Wretched fortune! You refuse even to let us share a tomb in death! You have made our dead bodies exiles!

What appears in this passage is a striking series of images replicating and seeking to stand in for an original model (Chaireas). The notion of replacement, evident in the earlier episode described above, becomes more apparent still in the event of Chaireas' funeral procession. Callirhoe's signet ring, like most intaglios from the Greco-Roman world, reflects the seal stone's ability to represent an individual *in absentia*. In this brief passage we have a succession of images, originating with Chaireas as the referent, whose likeness is first copied in a portrait ring, and then in the form of a death portrait. When we recall that death images and funerary busts were occasionally created from pliant materials such as clay, the connection between Callirhoe's portrait ring and the funerary *eidolon* becomes more evocative of the relationship between an intaglio and its impression.<sup>4</sup> In both instances, by kissing the image (the ring itself and then the

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<sup>4</sup> Steiner 2001, 6; see also Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 259.

*eidolon*), Callirhoe imitates the act of sealing, which would often be done by placing a signet ring to one's mouth.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Chariton's use of the aorist passive participle of διατυπώω in reference to the death image or εἶδωλον is noteworthy. While the verb διατυπώω can, of course, be used in reference to image making, it has particular associations with the act of making coins, gems, or their impressions.<sup>6</sup> The initial use of the term εἶδωλον in reference to the image based upon the portrait ring, perhaps is also evocative of the relationship between a seal and its impression. For according to Steiner: "to the realm of *eidola*, imperfect, even deceptive versions of the truth, belong figures that depend on a purely visible resemblance, that limit themselves to external contours."<sup>7</sup> It is only through Callirhoe's proximity to and interaction with the image that it takes on a more "eiconic" function, thus providing access to a latent or inaccessible version of Chaireas.<sup>8</sup> It is especially noteworthy that the author does not mention explicitly the realistic nature of the images, either that of the portrait ring or the death image produced from it. Whether or not the image was exact or could be confused for Chaireas was not, in fact, an issue. The crucial point is that the image could call to mind an impression of Chaireas' physical appearance. Yet, even though the images did not resemble Chaireas exactly, Callirhoe uses the objects in such a way that they function as a stand-in for the absent Chaireas. It is perhaps also important that an imperfect or imprecise image such as that from a signet

<sup>5</sup> Platt 2006, 250. This was usually done, however, by licking the seal. Cf Ovid *Amores* 2.15.

<sup>6</sup> LSJ sv 1, see: The verb is used both in the creation of seals, as in Aristotle *De audibilibus* 801b5 and Soranus *Gynaeciorum* 4.1.59, and in the representation of images, as Plutarch *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus* 2.83a. In addition to its definition used in connection with artistic (re)production, in works as early as Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1411b24-5), *diatupōsis* took on a rhetorical significance and often was understood as being synonymous with ekphrasis and other terms for description including *enargeia* and *diagraphē*. See further Webb 2009 on *diatupōsis*. See also footnote 9 below.

<sup>7</sup> Steiner 2001, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Here I refer to Steiner's (2001, 5) definition of *eikon* as: "a stepping stone pointing to the original that gives the viewer access to a hidden or absent reality." Yet, as Steiner states, the sculptural images created by craftsmen and described in literary texts tended to vacillate between the 'eiconic' and 'eidolic' spheres.

ring would serve as a model for Chaireas' funerary image rather than a description based on Callirhoe's memory of his appearance. The image is also problematic, however, because as the reader discovers in the next section (4.2) the signet ring image, and especially its sculptural copy, serve as false signifiers because Chaireas is not, in fact, dead but rather in servitude in Caria. In the above passages, Callirhoe's portrait ring is valuable for the following reasons: first, due to the fact that it bears the likeness of Chaireas engraved upon it, but also because the images on the ring may serve as a model for the production of additional representations of a similar nature.

It is for some of the characteristics discussed above and exemplified by the passage in Chariton's *Chaireas and Callirhoe* that I suggest that the model of the seal stone and its impression(s) is useful to the discussion of representation, imitation, and replication that lies at the heart of this chapter.<sup>9</sup> Since I will return to the social functions of seal stones in a later chapter, I will focus here on the representational nature of engraved stones and then their replicative possibilities. Though the types of images represented upon engraved seal stones might vary according to different factors including personal preference and one's social status, common images on engraved seal stones included mythological scenes, genre types, and occasionally portraits, both of rulers and generic images. During the Hellenistic period, as well as earlier, standing figures, especially deities were quite popular.<sup>10</sup> A large number of intaglios were also based on animal imagery or single objects.<sup>11</sup> Devices frequently seem to have been chosen from

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<sup>9</sup> The model of the seal stone and the language of *tuposis* was in fact so widely recognized for its utility that it was repeatedly used in philosophical discourse to explain a variety of phenomena ranging from sense perception and memory, the acquisition of knowledge, and theories of judgment. See, for example: Platt 2006, 245-51; Webb 2009, 52, 112, 206.

<sup>10</sup> Plantzos 1999, 66.

<sup>11</sup> Plantzos 1999, 98.



decorative themes or inspired by sister arts such as sculpture.<sup>12</sup> As a whole, the iconography of Hellenistic gemstones, though broader than that of the Archaic and Classical periods, appears to be easily grouped into types. Plantzos, for example, in his monograph, divides his discussion of Hellenistic glyptic into three primary categories: “Royal Portraits,” “Gods and Humans,” and “Objects and Animals.”<sup>13</sup> Through his system of organization, Plantzos, as other scholars of ancient glyptic, has tended to privilege portrait images, especially a small number of remarkable gems bearing images of Ptolemaic rulers, the signatures of master craftsman or other recognizable portraits. Yet, the types of images on intaglios that fascinate art historians and classicists today stand in marked contrast to the types of imagery in which writers of ekphrasis appeared to take pleasure.

In many ways, therefore, Chariton’s treatment of Chaireas’ glyptic portrait image appears to be much more in line with our own art historical interests today than those of other ancient authors. While the above passage by Chariton demonstrates many of the issues that I will address in this chapter including representation, replication, and the concept of originality, in its subject matter it can be said to be an anomaly as far as literary descriptions of engraved gems are concerned. Unlike the royal iconography and portrait images that fascinate us today, the most popular types of images in ancient literary descriptions were not scenes indicative of power and prestige, but rather representations that were reminiscent of daily life, frequently depicting animals and nature. In the poems of many ekphrastic poets, some of whom remain anonymous, and later in the work of at least one writer of prose, authors more often than not chose as their

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<sup>12</sup> Boardman 2001, 236.

<sup>13</sup> Plantzos 1999. Other more general works on the material culture and visual aesthetics of the Hellenistic period such as Onians (1979), Pollitt (1986), and Fowler (1999), similarly tend to prioritize royal iconography on gems to the exclusion of other types of glyptic imagery.

subject matter images imbued with a sense of naturalism and realism, which were frequently described in a playful manner. In the early Hellenistic period, at least, this can perhaps be attributed to a more general trend reflected in the arts of sculpture and especially painting. In Hellenistic literature it is mirrored in the development of new literary genres, such as bucolic poetry, which, like epigram, chose as its subject matter a wider array of topics not just those belonging to the worlds of epic and tragedy. Popular subjects began to include individuals of lower social status such as fisherman, shepherds, goatherds, as well as the animals they tend. These images appeared as engravings on precious stones, but also in the ekphrastic descriptions that sought to imitate them. Through their treatment of themes that resonated in Hellenistic poetry and the arts, such as the depiction of the fisherman known to us from the poems of Callimachus and Theocritus, echoed in a gem currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (**Figure 3.1**), or a portrait of a shepherd and a goat out to pasture (**Figure 3.2**). Poets and artists alike interacted with themes from everyday life seeking to portray scenes drawn from the natural world.



**Fig. 3.1**

Agate depicting a fisherman.  
3rd-2nd century B.C.E. or 1st  
century C.E.



**Fig. 3.2**

Carnelian depicting goat and  
goatherd.

Though the reason for the popularity of such imagery is unclear, the frequency with which such scenes are represented is undeniable. Onians, for example, has suggested that their popularity can perhaps be attributed to the belief that when represented visually, the images with which we are familiar are the most striking.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the aesthetic interests in nature and its representation, a fascination with the outdoors and animals may also be reflective of social and cultural currents; according to Fowler “there was probably in the time of the Ptolemies a zoo in Alexandria, and Ptolemy II Philadelphus himself was responsible for the Grand Procession, which included a great variety of exotic animals.”<sup>15</sup> According to Kuttner, Ptolemy II not only used a variety of exotic animals for processions and display but he also collected them hunting.<sup>16</sup> Whether evocative of public spectacle or artistic tastes, these literary and inscribed representations are significant in that they are among the earliest surviving images containing landscape, predating many of the large scale images found in paintings and mosaics.<sup>17</sup> Through their descriptive style and subject matter, many poems, like their elaborately carved glyptic counterparts, opened up a vista into a remarkable poetic landscape. Indeed, Platt’s assessment of a gem bearing a representation of a landscape with a seaside villa and boats (discussed in a previous chapter) could just as easily apply to the ekphrastic description of a precious stone:

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<sup>14</sup> Onians 1979, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Fowler 1989, 121. There were not just “exotic” animals included in this procession, however, as Fowler continues: “the text of Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists*, Book V, quoting from a longer work, *About Alexandria* by Callixeinos of Rhodes, lists elephants, saiga antelopes, oryxes, hartebeest, ostriches, onelaphoi, onagers, camels, and Indian, Hyrcanian, and Molossian hounds, as well as one hundred and thirty Ethiopian, three hundred Arabian, and 20 Euboean sheep, 26 all-white Indian cows plus 20 Ethiopian ones, one large white bear, 14 leopards, 16 cheetahs, four caracals, three cheetah cubs, one giraffe, and one Ethiopian rhinoceros.” See also Thompson 2000; Huss 2001, 292; Kuttner 2005, 157.

<sup>16</sup> Kuttner 2005, 157, n. 67. See also Diodorus Siculus 3.36.2-4.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Fowler’s (1989, 114) statement “the pastoral mode does not, however, appear in the visual arts until late in the Hellenistic period, and then in Roman painting.” See also Kuttner 2005, 157 n. 65, 65.

Like miniature landscapes within domestic decorative schemes, the image defies nature by reducing it to the tiny vignette depicted on the gem and framing it within the cultivated domestic realm of the seal's owner (and privileged viewers); the seal is a virtuoso performance of the elaborate game between nature and culture which characterizes much Hellenized Roman art, delightfully testing the limits of representation.<sup>18</sup>

The game played between nature and culture, which Platt observes in the carved gem, also figures prominently in Hellenistic epigram and later ekphraeseis. Verbal depictions of scenes drawn from the natural world present opportunities to play up the rivalry between image and text, especially the opposing themes of art and nature that frequently recur within this discourse. As a passage from Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* illustrates, the relationship between artistic and literary production can be not only complementary, but also competitive. In Longus' prologue, for example, the narrator tells of being inspired to write a response (ἀντιγράψαι) to the painting that he has just seen in the Nymph's grove on which a visual summary of the novel's plot is depicted:

Πολλὰ ἄλλα καὶ πάντα ἐρωτικά ἰδόντα με καὶ θαυμάσαντα πόθος ἔσχευ ἀντιγράψαι τῇ γραφῇ· καὶ ἀναζητησάμενος ἐξηγητὴν τῆς εἰκόνος τέτταρας βίβλους ἐξεπονησάμην, ἀνάθημα μὲν Ἔρωτι καὶ Νύμφαις καὶ Πανί, κτῆμα δὲ τερπνὸν πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, ὃ καὶ νοσοῦντα ἰάσεται, καὶ λυπούμενον παραμυθήσεται, τὸν ἐρασθέντα ἀναμνήσει, τὸν οὐκ ἐρασθέντα προπαιδεύσει.

Seeing and wondering over many other things and all of it romantic, a desire seized me to respond to the painting in writing. And having found someone to interpret the picture, I labored hard to create four books, an offering to Eros, the Nymphs and Pan, a possession to delight all humankind, which will heal the sick and comfort the distressed, stir the memory of those who have loved, and educate those who have not.

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<sup>18</sup> Platt 2006, 237.

The passage from Longus illustrates a number of the issues important to ekphrastic literature. First of all, it addresses the sense of emulation and rivalry embedded in ekphrastic literature. The writer, on the one hand, strives to imitate and capture the sense of the visual within his work, but on the other hand also endeavors to surpass visual representation by means of literary depiction. Through the use of κτῆμα the author implies that the literary work itself has a monumentality and sense of permanence akin or even superior to that of the painting. The ekphrasis is a permanent κτῆμα because it entirely displaces an actual image, which is never actually seen by the viewer/reader. Ekphrasis operates under the illusion that it gives the reader access to an image, while, in fact, it masks the absence of the original work and prompts the reader not to look beyond the word description to its prototype. In a sense, ekphrasis is always the superior rival, for in the same way that a painting displaces the object represented, ekphrasis displaces the painting. In the end *logos* replaces (or even becomes) *ergon*.

Closely related to the ekphrastic notion of rivalry is that of desire (πόθος). In the passage above, for example, simply viewing the image brings about longing in the viewer to rival the image through words, although the viewer could do so only after receiving the assistance of an interpreter to aid in understanding the image. The original image, however, not only engenders desire but also suspends it.<sup>19</sup> For, according to Elsner, central to the psychodynamics of ekphrasis is the fact that “it deals with the deliberate manipulation of both the speaker’s and the listener’s imagination and desire.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, inasmuch as the image promises access to the original, in actuality it separates the reader from it since the ekphrasis stands in for the original image. Through its attempt to rival the original image, ekphrasis causes the desired “original” to be lost

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<sup>19</sup> See Elsner (2004, 176-77) on the trope of the viewer who is unable to interpret the image before him without the aid of an exegete.

<sup>20</sup> Elsner 2004, 158.

to the reader.

A similar interplay between “original,” replication, and imitation can be seen in the development of a discourse on precious stones, particularly as it progresses. Before continuing with this line of argumentation, however, it may be of some benefit to pause briefly to consider the nature of seal stones and their impressions. Seal stones, signet rings, and intaglios were reproduced in many forms in the ancient world. While the images carved upon them might be ornamental, it was their ability to produce like images that differentiated them from merely decorative items such as cameos.<sup>21</sup> The stones themselves, especially those carved from expensive materials, could, and often were imitated in less expensive materials including glass and paste, such as a gem imitating a banded agate in paste (**Figure 3.3**).<sup>22</sup> In this way, according



**Fig. 3.3**

Glass paste imitating a banded agate depicting a lioness attacking a boar. Hellenistic.

to Plantzos, signet rings were more readily available to the “masses” who could not afford to purchase engraved precious stones. Of the numerous surviving examples of ‘imitation’ seal stones, Plantzos criticizes them as mass produced items, often indistinguishable from one

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<sup>21</sup> Platt 2006, 238.

<sup>22</sup> Plantzos 1999, 73.

another, stating: “their main feature is their repetitive subject-matter, devoid of any individuality or innovative spirit, but obviously reproduced from mould to mould and, it would seem, through whole generations of craftsmen.”<sup>23</sup> Though such items were perhaps not as opulent in terms of artistry and material as the stones worked by well-known craftsmen and owned by the Ptolemies, I suggest that they are not without worth and perhaps have been unduly criticized by scholars such as Plantzos. While in one sense the value of such an imitation, or less expensive version, might reside primarily in its ability to replicate successfully the original object constructed out of more expensive materials, the very existence of such a class of goods gives us a glimpse into the realm of mass produced items and perhaps the aesthetic values of those who consumed such commodities.<sup>24</sup>

Engraved intaglios were, of course, not only reproduced in the form of other rings, or what Platt calls a “secondary” form of replication, but also especially through the use of impressions, or “primary” replication, which “constitutes the seal’s actual function and gives it semiological authority.”<sup>25</sup> The hard stone would therefore be pressed into a soft material such as wax, clay, plaster or even dirt.<sup>26</sup> This is, of course, the primary characteristic endowing seal stones with their great social, cultural, and semiotic value. Unlike other works of art, seal stones

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<sup>23</sup> Plantzos 1999, 73. According to Plantzos a large number of this category of goods bore the generic motif of a standing figure leaning on a pillar.

<sup>24</sup> Plantzos (1999, 73) suggests that these “gems for the masses” primarily served a decorative function and were likely not used as seal stones. His argument appears somewhat biased and the supporting evidence questionable as he relies primarily on the iconography found in hordes of seal impressions, which accounts for only a small portion of the actual seal stones used in antiquity and, therefore, is unlikely to be representative of the broader types of seals used for official purposes.

<sup>25</sup> Platt 2006, 238.

<sup>26</sup> Bonner 1908, 399 n. 1; Boardman 2001, 447. The fact that the stone must not be so hard that it could not be engraved was of an importance, and an issue to which Theophrastus devotes considerable attention in his treatise *Lithika (de Lapidibus)*.

are both unusual and remarkable in that they have limitless potential for replication and could be created by anyone with access to a signet ring. Thus, as Platt eloquently states: “because of its potential to make multiple and repeated impressions, a force field of potential *dunamis* thus radiates from each seal.”<sup>27</sup> While an impression lacks the economic value of the seal stone from which it originated, the impression’s value is primarily symbolic. Though lacking in monetary value, due to their symbolic importance, some impressions, especially those attached to a document, may have been secured by a protective covering to preserve the integrity of the impression.<sup>28</sup> The significance with which impressions were endowed, combined with a fear regarding this ease with which they might be replicated, led to the passage of a law by Solon which prohibited gem makers from keeping the impressions made from original seals.<sup>29</sup>

Due to the facility with which stones could be replicated in malleable materials, seals hold the potential to produce a sequence of copied images which were intrinsically related to the original intaglio through their “isomorphic properties.”<sup>30</sup> Although the relationship between a seal and its impression may be “isomorphic,” as Platt states, it is not identical. Most obviously the two images, the stone and its impression, become mirror images of one another. This becomes even more noticeable in the instances in which inscriptions have been carved on the original gem. Additionally, the image which would appear in negative on the stone, having been carved out in a reductive technique, appears in positive on the soft impression. The difference in

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<sup>27</sup> Platt 2006, 239.

<sup>28</sup> Boardman 2001, 447. See also: Aristophanes *Wasps* 585, 589.

<sup>29</sup> Bonner 1908, 400. In an amusing anecdote in Lucian’s *Life of Alexander*; the eponymous holy man, prophet, and charlatan devises a clever means of opening sealed letters without disturbing the seal by using a heated needle to separate impression from the material to which it adhered.

<sup>30</sup> Platt 2006, 238.



medium, as well, creates a noteworthy contrast between the engraved stone and its impression. Further, as many experts in glyptic know well, it is frequently much easier to discern in the impression (or an enlarged photograph) details that are not visible to the naked eye. Though subtle, one could argue, in fact, that by means of the small degrees of difference between the two, the impression is no longer an exact imitation or replica, but rather becomes an adaptation. An impression may retain the essential properties of its seal, but through its creation and circulation it takes on an aura of its own.

### 3.2 “Making an Impression”<sup>31</sup>: The Shield of Achilles and Myron’s Cow

#### 3.2A The Shield of Achilles

In this section I will examine briefly two important exempla of ekphraseis, Homer’s description of the Shield of Achilles, and the famous Myron’s cow poems, suggesting that they operate within a literary framework much like a seal in relation to its impression. Although the two may seem like an unusual pairing due to differences in genre, tone, and style, they are linked in the sense that they have been understood as key models in the development of a discourse of seeing and interpreting.<sup>32</sup> When speaking of ekphrasis and the development of a literary and visual discourse, it is difficult to deny the presence of the Homeric Shield of Achilles. As Becker states of the Shield: “this description is at the head of a long tradition of ekphraseis.”<sup>33</sup> Unlike the ekphrastic epigrams to which I turn shortly, that of the Shield, by comparison, is massive

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<sup>31</sup> Here I quote the title of Platt’s (2006) article “Making an Impression: Replication and the Ontology of the Greco-Roman Seal Stone.”

<sup>32</sup> The vast bibliography is too great to cite in full here. I will mention three that have been formative in this analysis, namely Becker 1995; Goldhill 2007; Squire 2009, 141 n. 196. On the importance of Homer within the *Progymnasmata* see Webb 2009, 19, 29, 40 n. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Becker 1995, 2.

in scope and scale. In one hundred and forty lines of detailed description, the narrator creates a vivid account of the shield made by Hephaestus for Achilles at Thetis' request. Included on the Shield are: a variety of heavenly bodies, a city at peace juxtaposed with a city at war, followed by agricultural scenes, and finally an image of young dancers, all encircled by the river Ocean. While a discussion of the entire Shield and its imagery is well beyond the scope of the present chapter, I would like to turn instead to one of the agricultural scenes represented upon it

(*Iliad* 18.573-89):

Ἐν δ' ἀγέλην ποίησε βοῶν ὀρθοκραϊράων·  
αἱ δὲ βόες χρυσοῖο τετεύχματο κασσιτέρου τε,  
μυκηθμῶ δ' ἀπὸ κόπρου ἐπεσσεύοντο νομὸν δὲ  
πὰρ ποταμὸν κελάδοντα, παρὰ ῥοδανὸν δονακῆα.  
χρῦσειοι δὲ νομῆες ἄμ' ἐστιχόωντο βόεσσι  
τέσσαρες, ἐννέα δὲ σφι κύνες πόδας ἄργοι ἔποντο.  
σμερδαλέω δὲ λέοντε δύ' ἐν πρώτῃσι βόεσσι  
ταῦρον ἐρύγμηλον ἐχέτην· ὃ δὲ μακρὰ μεμυκῶς  
ἔλκετο· τὸν δὲ κύνες μετεκίαθον ἠδ' αἰζηοί.  
τῶ μὲν ἀναρρήξαντε βοὸς μέγαλοιο βοείην  
ἔγκατα καὶ μέλαν αἶμα λαφύσσετον· οἱ δὲ νομῆες  
αὐτῶς ἐνδίσαν ταχέας κύνας ὀτρύνοντες.  
οἱ δ' ἦτοι δακέειν μὲν ἀπετρωπῶντο λεόντων,  
ἰστάμενοι δὲ μάλ' ἐγγύς ὑλάκτεον ἔκ τ' ἀλέοντο.  
Ἐν δὲ νομὸν ποίησε περικλυτὸς ἀμφιγυήεις  
ἐν καλῇ βήσση μέγαν οἴων ἀργεννάων,  
σταθμούς τε κλισίας τε κατηρεφέας ἰδὲ σηκούς.

And he made on it a herd of straight-horned cattle. The cows were fashioned from gold and tin, and were mooing as they hurried from the farmyard to their pasture by a roaring river, beside swaying reeds. Four herdsmen in gold walked along with the cattle, and and nine quick-footed dogs followed along. But at the front of the herd two terrifying lions had caught a bellowing bull, and he was dragged away roaring loud. The dogs and the young men went after him. The lions had ripped open the great ox's hide and were gulping its innards and black blood. The herdsmen could only set their quick dogs at them and urge them on.

But the dogs were fearful of biting the lions, and  
standing close they barked at them, while keeping clear.  
And on it the famous lame god made a great pasture  
for the white-woolled sheep in a beautiful valley, with stables  
and covered huts and sheepfolds.

The above scene is reflective in many ways of the Shield as a whole. Above all, there emerges an emphasis on artistry and materials, made explicit by the reference to the Shield itself in the opening line of this section through the use of the preposition ἐν.<sup>34</sup> The materiality of the Shield is referenced still further in the scene through the explicit mention of the metals from which the Shield and the figures upon it have been made (cows fashioned from gold and tin, herdsmen from silver, etc.). The use of verbs of manufacture ποίησε (twice repeated) and τετεύχαστο in the first lines of the passage similarly bring to mind elements of the Shield's fabrication. The explicit and unusual reference to Hephaestus at the end of the selection, one of the few in the Shield, serves only to intensify further the stress placed upon artistry.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, there exists a jarring contrast between the fictive, metal images and their capacity for movement as the passage continues. The figures, therefore, both lifelike and animated, but simultaneously unfamiliar on account of the fact their bodies are constructed from metal, which suggests immobility. As both Becker and Squire have remarked upon, this sense of liveliness is reinforced by the fact that the animals not only move, but have the ability of speech, or at least, in the case of the cows, to low.<sup>36</sup> The combination of elements of sight and sound that appear, at first glance, to represent a peaceful pastoral scene and thus a respite from the tense action of the primary narrative, shift

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<sup>34</sup> Becker 1995, 138.

<sup>35</sup> Becker 1995, 141.

<sup>36</sup> Becker 1995; Squire 2010, 610-11.

however, into a scene that is largely one of violence, of lions attacking a bull, being dragged away, violent imagery and the cacophony of dogs barking, thus reflecting the martial nature of the narrative. Like other poems that I will examine shortly, the images elicit wonder through their “vivification,” yet unlike works of the Hellenistic poetry, they do so without forgetting that they are works of art.<sup>37</sup>

### 3.2B Myron’s Cow

Significantly later than Homer, the earliest by at least four centuries, though no less important in the development of ekphrastic discourse, is one of the most famous series of poems on a single work of art in the *Greek Anthology*—the Myron’s cow poems. This sequence of thirty-six poems found in book nine of the *Palatine Anthology* all take as their subject a bronze sculpture of a cow fashioned by the fifth-century sculptor Myron. The image itself was well known in antiquity due to the fact that it was originally on view on the Athenian Acropolis and later moved to Rome.<sup>38</sup> As Pliny remarks, somewhat snidely, Myron’s fame as well as that of the image itself were further embellished through the dissemination of several epigrams on the sculpture.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the sculpture became well known even to those who had not actually seen it; the image became more famous simply because it was already renowned. In the modern era, however, the Myron’s cow poems have not fared so well, having been criticized by numerous modern critics for their tedious and repetitive characteristics.<sup>40</sup> Many a scholar has been quick

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<sup>37</sup> Becker 1995, 139.

<sup>38</sup> Gutzwiller 1998, 246.

<sup>39</sup> Pliny *HN* 34.57. Myronem Eleutheris natum, Hageladae et ipsum discipulum, bucula maxime nobilitavit celebratis versibus laudata, quando alieno plerique ingenio magis quam suo commendantur.

<sup>40</sup> Squire 2010, 589-91.

to point out that while the epigrams propagated the image's fame, they do very little to describe accurately the "original" sculpted image, which no longer survives.<sup>41</sup>

Despite their seemingly monotonous nature (a characteristic for which imitation gems were criticized as well!), a small number of scholars have begun to reconsider the poems, not in light of their artistic or aesthetic merits, but in order to understand better the function of such a multitude of epigrams of similar style on the same topic.<sup>42</sup> What has emerged in the reconsideration of these epigrams is perhaps a reevaluation of the poems as a remarkable 'replica series' written by numerous poets spanning nearly six centuries, whose works were not anthologized for at least another four centuries after the latest epigrams in the series in the form in which we have them today in the *Palatine Anthology*.<sup>43</sup> Individually, it has been argued that the epigrams engage with the language of art history and visual criticism and that as a collection they serve as a manual of sorts for instructing the reader or viewer to respond to the poem/object in a learned fashion.<sup>44</sup> Squire not only sees the poems as a useful tool for discussing ancient art historical discourse and the process of articulating vision, but as a pointed metaphor "for the ekphrastic project of replicating images in words."<sup>45</sup> While both readings of the poems are highly informative and persuasive, in my examination I intend to focus on the replicative possibilities and implications of the individual epigrams and the collection as a whole.

Though it is not possible in the present chapter to examine all 36 poems, I propose a brief

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<sup>41</sup> As Goldhill (2007, 15) points out it would be impossible to "make a reconstruction of the sculpture from the poems," or, as I would add further, to even get a full sense of the sculpture's appearance at all.

<sup>42</sup> See especially Gutzwiller 1998; Goldhill 2007; Squire 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Squire 2010, 595.

<sup>44</sup> Goldhill 2007, 15-18.

<sup>45</sup> Squire 2010, 593.

examination of a selection of epigrams from the Myron's cow corpus. While the dating of the poems and their chronological sequencing is somewhat problematic, recent scholarship suggests that Posidippus' poem (AB 66) is likely the earliest on the topic.<sup>46</sup> The poem states:

ἐδό]κησε τὸ βοίδιον ἄξιον ὀλκῆς  
] καὶ τρισεπαργύριον  
] χεῖρα, σοφὸν χρέος εἶδ' ἐπ' ἀδόξου  
ἀλλ]ὰ Μύρων ἐπόει.

The little cow [seemed] worthy to drag the plough  
[ . . . ] and thrice-covered in silver.  
...his hand, he unexpectedly saw a clever thing  
[ . . . . ] but Myron made it.

Here, as above in the description of the Homeric shield, both material and artistry are emphasized. Like Homer's cow, that of Myron, is constructed out of metal, though instead of being fabricated in relief, this image presumably stands as a three-dimensional sculpture. The artist's name and a verb of manufacture are also provided, although at the end of the passage rather than the beginning as we saw in the Homeric Shield. The scope and scale of the passage itself has changed, rather than confronting a large herd of cattle involved in a violent scene, we instead have a brief description of a small cow (βοίδιον) so that the content of the poem mirrors its form. The apparent liveliness of the image is not described in detail, but merely implied though the narrator's insistence that the cow is "fit for the plow."

Unlike Homer's detailed description of the cows in a herd, the shepherds, and the animals that attack them, we learn very little about the appearance of the sculpture, as we will see upon further examination of a selection of the Myron's cow poems. Although elements of their visual appearance are implied, their primary purpose, according to Goldhill is to interrogate "tropes

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<sup>46</sup> Squire 2010, 598. Although as Squire suggests, it is likely futile to attempt to uncover the "original" poem within the series.

of verisimilitude.<sup>47</sup> In a poem likely postdating that of Posidippus, attributed to Leonidas (*AP* 9.719), we see the continuation of themes outlined in Posidippus' epigram:

Οὐκ ἐπλάσέν με Μύρων· ἐψεύσατο· βοσκομέναν δὲ  
ἐξ ἀγέλας ἐλάσας, δῆσε βάσει λιθίνῳ.

Myron did not sculpt me; he lied; but driving  
me from the herd where I was grazing, he set me on a stone base.

Even more so than Homer's description of the Shield, the Myron's cow poems play with notions of realism. In a mere two lines, *A.P.* 9.719, the cow, in its own voice, states that, while it was grazing with the rest of the herd, it was driven away from its pasture, and instead fixed upon a pedestal. What we see here, therefore, is a reversal of the trends seen in Homer and Posidippus, and rather than an assertion of Myron's artistry, we find the poet/narrator not only denying the artist this, but stating further that he lied (ἐψεύσατο). The implication as such, is that nature has been turned into art, rather than the usual trope of fabricating art that is imitative of nature.

The remaining poems in the series, though by no means unworthy of full consideration (which is beyond the scope of the present study), display more similarities than differences. Although the language varies somewhat, as Goldhill has remarked, the essential meaning of each poem is, "this cow is so real that..."<sup>48</sup> In several epigrams, like that of Leonidas, the cow is endowed with speech, and in some cases directly addresses the reader.<sup>49</sup> In others, an unsuspecting herdsman, bull, or fly approaches the calf, thinking it to be real. As a series, the epigrams serve as a game of one-upmanship, with each successive poem attempting to interact

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<sup>47</sup> Goldhill 2007, 16.

<sup>48</sup> Goldhill 2007, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Squire 2010, 610.

with and surpass the earlier epigram, although the degree to which they were in dialog with one another is uncertain. At the heart of the poems, however, as Squire observes, is replication, in which the epigrams may be read as “copies of copies ad infinitum.”<sup>50</sup>

### 3.3 Art and Illusion in Glyptic Landscapes

Following the first section of the Myron’s cow poems in the *Palatine Anthology*, though not necessarily later in date, is a shorter series of epigrams, reminiscent of those in the Myron’s cow section, but describing scenes on precious stones. In one epigram by Archias (*A.P.* 9.750), for example, the poet depicts before our eyes a bucolic setting, populated by grazing cattle:

Τὰς βοῦς καὶ τὸν ἴασπιν ἰδὼν περὶ χειρὶ δοκήσεις  
τὰς μὲν ἀναπνείειν, τὸν δὲ χλοηκομέειν.

Looking at the cows and the jasper on my hand you will think that  
the cows are breathing and stone puts forth grass.

Offering only a brief sketch in single couplet, the poet is able to render a vivid image within an image. Using the second person singular form, the poet creates a sense of intimacy with the reader/viewer and invites her to envision her role in the scene as the spectator of a detailed work of artistry in close proximity to the speaker. The poet simultaneously plays with the viewer’s idea of space, distance, and proximity by opening up the contrast between a small object seen close up and the expansive panorama depicted within the gem’s small confines. Further, through the explicit mention of the color of the stone, the poet is able to invoke playfully the vividness and polychromy of many of the gems of the era while alluding to the artistic convention of aligning subject matter and stone when possible.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the poet’s reference to the stone’s green

<sup>50</sup> Squire 2010, 617, 619.

<sup>51</sup> On image/color matching see further Kuttner 2005, 157 n. 64.



color also suggests the appearance of grass, and thus the placement of his subjects, the cows, in a “realistic” landscape or at least an approximation thereof.<sup>52</sup> The poet’s attempt to vie with nature in depicting a vibrant and verdant setting for his cattle is further aided by the stone’s natural banded appearance or stripes of color common to many types of jasper, of which green was the most common, and would have added further to the sense of tonal variation, shading, and depth within the poet’s fictive landscape. The poet’s failure to describe the setting and length could be immediately attributed to the poem’s brevity, but is also consistent with many artistic conventions of the day. Artistic representations involving setting and landscape prior to the Hellenistic period were largely impressionistic. Numerous vase paintings of the Archaic and Classical periods, for example, use a simple ground line, and the occasional tree or schematic architectural element to indicate place or space. Since the collapse of the Mycenaean palatial society, it was not until the mid fifth century BCE that painters like Polygnotos and the Niobid Painter first began to experiment with different methods of representing landscape in ways other than by simply painting a solid ground line. In the Hellenistic period, however, interest in landscape often combined with continuous narrative, such as the Telephus frieze from the Great Alter of Pergamon, which represented a new perspective on the visible world and its depiction. This interest, perhaps developed from contemporary trends in painting, was well exemplified by the famous Odyssey frescoes from the Esquiline hill in Rome, which were likely based on earlier Greek originals. In the Odyssey frescoes, depicting scenes from Books X and XI of Homer’s text, the artist captures not only crucial narrative elements but also attempted to render space through the use of a naturalistic scale in which the figures were depicted in a scale appropriate to their surroundings. Moreover, the artist also attempted to create a sense of depth through the use

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<sup>52</sup> According to Theophrastus *de Lap.* 27 and Pliny *NH* 37.118, the most common color for jasper was green.

of atmospheric perspective, using cooler colors that would appear to recede into the background and contrast with a warmer foreground.

Not only does Archias play with the artistic conventions of background and color, but he makes clear reference to the concept of realism in terms of subject matter. His assertion that the cattle are so realistic that they appear to be breathing (τὰς μὲν ἀναπνεΐειν) is evocative of a discourse on naturalism in art dating back at least as far as the fifth century. As Steiner has noted, it was not uncommon for critics of art, particularly of sculpture, to contend that works appeared to be so realistic that they seemed to breathe.<sup>53</sup> In the Archaic and Classical periods, for example, in addition to having detailed musculature and veins, numerous statues of the time were portrayed as if they were drawing breath, indicated by an “open mouth, blood veins visible on the surface of the body, a swelling abdomen, or iliac-inguinal line.”<sup>54</sup> In so doing, the artist or poet thus suggests the presence of a soul, or at the very least animation, thus testifying to the craftsman’s superior technical skills.<sup>55</sup>

In other poems similar to that of Archias, the poet grants not only life or animation to the cows depicted, but in many cases also the capacity for movement. In a poem allegedly by Plato *A.P.* 9.747 and thus predating Archias, we see several similarities to the above poem:

Ἐικόνα πέντε βοῶν μικρὰ λίθος εἶχεν ἴασπις,  
ὡς ἦδη πάσας ἔμπνοα βοσκομένας.  
καὶ τάχα κἄν ἀπέφευγε τὰ βοΐδια· νῦν δὲ κρατεῖται  
τῇ χρυσῇ μάνδρᾳ τὸ βραχὺ βουκόλιον.

This little jasper stone bears the image of five cows  
all looking alive as they graze.

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<sup>53</sup> Steiner 2001, 30-31.

<sup>54</sup> Steiner 2001, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *A.P.* 16.54.

Perhaps they would run away, but now  
the little herd is confined by the golden fence.

The same type of stone, jasper, which we might imagine to be green, is used here as well, as the background for a bucolic scene. Once again the cattle's liveliness is indicated by the fact that they appear to be breathing. More so than the cows of Archias' poem, those of Plato are so active that they might even run away, were they not restrained by the stone's collet which serves as a "golden pen." In contrast to earlier ekphraseis, the boundary of Plato's poem displays a sense of self-consciousness. Rather than the natural boundaries found in earlier Greek ekphraseis, such as the Ocean which serves to circumscribe the Shield of Achilles, what we find in Plato's epigram is a man-made border. Through the invocation of the pen or border as well as the explicit mention that the cattle are merely an image (εἰκόνα), the poet makes a distinction between the work of art and the "real" scene that it strives to represent. Not only do the poems utilize a mode of description that privileges the visual, but they also engage with a discussion on the nature of realism in art and the limits of visual and verbal media. One such example of an ekphrastic poem seen in *AP* 9.746 by King Polemo:

Ἐπτὰ βοῶν σφραγίδα βραχὺς λίθος εἶχεν ἴασπις,  
ὡς μίαν, ὡς πάσας ἔμπνοα δερκομένας.  
καὶ τάχα κἄν ἀπέρεψε τὰ βοΐδια· νῦν δὲ κέκλειται  
τῇ χρυσῇ μάνδρᾳ τὸ βραχὺ βουκόλιον.

This little jasper has a seal of seven cows  
Looking like one, and all looking as if they were alive.  
Perhaps the cows would have run away, but now the  
Little herd is confined in the golden enclosure.

This poem bears striking affinities to the above poems by Archias and Plato, once again we have the poet painting an image of cattle in pasture, again represented on the same type of

stone, again appearing to be alive (πάσας ἔμπνοα δερκομένας). What is remarkable about this particular poem and perhaps distinctive from the others is the poet's assertion that the seal holds seven cows looking like one (ὡς μίαν). On the one hand this may be a reference to the artistic conventions of the day and the manner in which artists attempted to portray three dimensional space on a two dimensional surface such as a painting or relief sculpture. Through his description the poet is portraying the same kind of overlaying of figures that were depicted by numerous visual artists in the ancient world. The same type of overlapping figures appear in the Parthenon frieze, on numerous Attic vases of the Archaic and Classical periods, and even in the Pella mosaic.

### 3.4 Additional Ekphrastic Epigrams

The description of art in concert with nature on precious stones appears in a variety of other epigrammatic landscapes as well. In the *Lithika*, poem AB 14, the engraver creates a remarkable image according to his skill and intelligence (χειρά τε καὶ κατὰ νοῦν) through the correlation of the stone's color and subject matter:<sup>56</sup>

εὖ τὸν Πήγασον ἵππον ἐπ' ἠερόεσσαν ἴασπιν  
 χεῖρά τε καὶ κατὰ νοῦν ἔγλυφ' ὁ χειροτέχνης·  
 Βελλε[ρ]οφόντης μὲν γὰρ Ἀλήιον εἰς Κιλικῶν γῆν  
 ἤριφ', ὁ δ' εἰς κυανῆν ἠέρα πῶλος ἔβη,  
 [ο]ὔνεκ' ἀνιόχητον ἔτι τρομέοντα χαλινοῖς  
 [ί]ππ[ον ἐν] αἰθερίῳ τῶδε ἐτύπωσε λίθῳ.

The craftsman using all his skill and intelligence  
 engraved well the horse Pegasus on the dark *iaspis*.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See Mannlein-Robert 2007, 270 on the topos of the artist's hand.

<sup>57</sup> Austin and Bastianini translate *iaspis* as jasper, but *iaspis* does not correspond to our modern day jasper. As Caley and Richards (1956, 234) state “*iaspis* is a generic name applied to various transparent or translucent stones.” Our jasper today is frequently green whereas the *iaspis* mentioned by Posidippus was likely blue and may have been of the variety cited by Pliny which was acquired from the Persians (*NH* 37.37), which was specifically called *aeriuza*. Cf Theophrastus *de Lap.* 23, 27. See Caley and Richards 1956, 50-52, 107-8; Smith2004.

Bellerophon has fallen to the Aleian plain of the Cilicians  
while his colt climbed up to the deep-blue sky.  
And so he carved [the horse on] this airy stone,  
free from the reigns, trembling, still, at the bit.

Here, the artist is revealed to be clever in his depiction of Pegasus, the winged horse in flight, on *iaspis*, a blue stone,<sup>58</sup> thus playing with the material of the object and the realm in which we would imagine the horse to be flying. Similarly, in a poem by Plato the Younger (*A.P.* 9.751) the poet cleverly entwines the stone upon which his image is engraved with the mythological story of Apollo's lovers:

Ἄ σφραγίς ὑάκινθος· Ἀπόλλων δ' ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῇ  
καὶ Δάφνη. ποτέρου μᾶλλον ὁ Λητοΐδας;

The stone is Hyacinthus, and on it are Apollo and  
Daphne. Of which was Apollo the lover?

The very material of the gem and the imagery inscribed upon it offer up a riddle of sorts that mirrors the question posed in the poem. The answer is of course both. Thus through the choice of gem type and subject matter the god Apollo, is therefore associated with his two well known lovers.<sup>59</sup> Further, the two ill-fated lovers are linked by comparison.

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<sup>58</sup> Smith (2004, 105) points to the use of the adjective ἠερόεσσον as evidence for the complementarity of stone and subject and as proof of Posidippus' knowledge of technical manuals.

<sup>59</sup> On the literary and visual representation of Hyacinth as Apollo's lover see: Homer *Il.* 2.595-600; Palaephatus, *On Unbelievable Tales* 46; Apollodorus, *Library* 1.3.3; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10. 162-219; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 3.1.3, 3.19.4; Philostratus the Elder, *Images* 1.24; Philostratus the Younger, *Images* 14; Lucian, *Dialogues of the Gods* 14, as well as representations in Greek vase painting. See also *A.P.* 9.753 and Achilles Tatius 2.3 as examples of the interplay between art and nature in ekphrastic description.

### 3.5 Heliodorus' Amethyst

Though separated by temporal, spatial, and generic boundaries, a description of a remarkable stone in Heliodorus' *Aethiopika* shows striking affinities with the epigrammatic works discussed above. In a central passage midway through the novel, an amethyst, one of the heroine Charikleia's birth tokens, is given in exchange for her freedom. Within the novel the amethyst serves several roles, as a mover of plot and a symbol of Charikleia's character, in addition to its decorative function.<sup>60</sup> I will return to other aspects of the stone later, here I will focus on the imagery inscribed upon the stone, which consists of a representation of a pastoral scene including a young shepherd tending his flock (5.14):

Τοιαύτη μὲν καὶ πᾶσα ἐξ Ἰνδῶν τε καὶ Αἰθιοπῶν ἀμέθυσος· ἦν δὲ τότε τῷ Ναυσικλεῖ προσεκόμιζεν ὁ Καλάσιρις μακρῶ καὶ ταύτας ἐπλεονέκτει, γραφῆ γὰρ ἔξεστο καὶ εἰς μίμημα ζώων ἐκεκοίλαντο. Καὶ ἦν ἡ γραφή, παιδαρίσκος ἐποίμαине πρόβατα χαμαιζήλω μὲν πέτρα πρὸς περιωπὴν ἐφεστῶς τὴν δὲ νομὴν τῇ ἀγέλῃ πλαγίοις αὐλήμασι διατάττων, τὰ δὲ ἐπέιθετο ὡς ἐδόκει καὶ ἠνείχετο πρὸς τὰ ἐνδόσιμα τῆς σύριγγος ποιμαίνόμενα. Εἶπεν ἄν τις αὐτὰ καὶ χρυσοῖς βεβριθῆναι τοῖς μαλλοῖς, οὐ τῆς τέχνης τοῦτο χαριζομένης ἀλλ' οἰκείον ἐρύθημα τῆς ἀμεθύσου τοῖς νῶτοις ἐπανθούσης. Γέγραπτο καὶ ἀρνίων ἀπαλὰ σκιρτήματα καὶ οἱ μὲν ἀγεληδὸν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν ἀνατρέχοντες οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν νομέα κύκλους ἀγερῶχους ἐξελίττοντες ποιμενικὸν θέατρον ἐπεδείκνυσαν τὸν κρημνόν, ἄλλοι δὲ ὡσπερ ἠλίω τῇ φλογὶ τῆς ἀμεθύσου γανύμενοι ἄλμασιν ἀκρωνύχισ τὴν πέτραν ἐπέξεον. Ὅσοι δὲ αὐτῶν πρωτόγονοί τε καὶ θρασύτεροι, καὶ ὑπεράλλεσθαι βουλομένοις τὸν κύκλον ἐώκεσαν εἰργομένοις δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς τέχνης ὡσπερ εἰ μάνδραν χρυσῆν τὴν σφενδόνην αὐτοῖς τε καὶ τῇ πέτρᾳ περιβαλλούσης· ἡ δὲ ἦν πέτρα τῷ ὄντι καὶ οὐχὶ μίμημα, τῶν γὰρ ἀκρων τῆς λίθου μέρος εἰς τοῦτο περιγράψας ὁ τεχνίτης ἔδειξεν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ ἐβούλετο, περίεργον ἠγησάμενος λίθον ἐν λίθῳ σοφίζεσθαι· τοιοῦτος μὲν ὁ δακτύλιος. Ὁ δὲ Ναυσικλῆς ἐκπλαγείς τε ἅμα πρὸς τὸ παράδοξον καὶ πλέον ἤσθεις πρὸς τὸ πολύτιμον, οὐσίας ὅλης τὴν λίθον ἰσοστάσιον κρίνων.

Such is every amethyst from India or Ethiopia, but the stone that Calasiris gave now to Nausicles was superior to all others by far, for it had been deeply carved

<sup>60</sup> Bartsch 1989, 149-50.

and incised into a representation of living creatures. The scene was as follows: a young shepherd was pasturing his sheep, standing on a slightly elevated rock, directing his flock with a transverse flute while they grazed. The sheep seemed to obey and pasture in time to the pipe's tune. One might have said that their heavy fleeces were made of gold, this was not art's devising, but rather the native ruddiness of the amethyst that tinted their backs. The light gamboling of lambs was also represented on it, some clamored up the rock in a troop, while others frolicked in a ring around the shepherd giving the rock the appearance of a bucolic theater; others delighting in the amethyst's brilliance, as in the light of the sun, barely touching the rock's surface. The oldest and boldest appeared to want to leap out through the stone's setting but of being hindered from doing so by the craftsman's art, which had made the ring's setting into a golden enclosure both for them and the rock. The rock was no imitation, but real; for the craftsman had left a portion of the stone unworked, using reality to display the effect he desired, thinking it superfluous to represent a stone in stone. Such was the ring. Nausicles' astonishment at the wonder was only surpassed by his delight at the gem's value, which he reckoned to be equal to all that he possessed.

When read within and against the epigrammatic descriptions discussed above, I suggest that the discourse of precious stones resonates in Heliodorus' description. Heliodorus both plays up and inverts elements of this discourse. While on the surface, Heliodorus' description shows some strong similarities to the images described by Plato and Archias, for example, as well as the description of a pastoral scene from Homer, closer examination reveals important departures from this type. A notable difference from Homer is, of course, Heliodorus' focus upon an accessory or item of apparel as the basis for the ekphrasis. Achilles' shield is above all an item to be used in combat, while the amethyst has a primarily decorative function, though it could theoretically be used as a seal stone and also for apotropaic purposes since the stone was seen as a remedy against drunkenness.<sup>61</sup> For both Homer and Heliodorus the inclusion of pastoral imagery serves as a stark juxtaposition to the primary action of their respective texts, likely serving, as many have argued, as a respite from the narrative tension of battle or, as in the case

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<sup>61</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.121, 124.

of Heliodorus, Charikleia's ransom.<sup>62</sup> An additional contrast arises in the relationship between the pastoral imagery on the shield and stone, both showing noteworthy similarities to bucolic poetry, while simultaneously drawing attention to the differences in materials, metal and stone, as opposed to the everyday rustic materials popular in bucolic poems.<sup>63</sup> Homer's miniature pastoral scene is only one small part of a more panoramic image, bordered only by the natural boundaries of the ocean, while Heliodorus' representation is self-contained and is constrained by the fictive borders of the golden fence/collet, as well as the demonstrative pronouns that open and close the gem's description (Τοιαύτη μὲν καὶ πᾶσα ἐξ' Ἰνδῶν τε καὶ Αἰθιοπῶν ἀμέθυσος... τοιοῦτος μὲν ὁ δακτύλιος).

One of the most apparent differences between Heliodorus and the epigrammatists discussed above is the use of a different type of stone, for Heliodorus this is an amethyst rather than the jasper described by the earlier poets.<sup>64</sup> Instead of describing a stone whose color was commensurate with the scene depicted, Heliodorus chooses a gem whose symbolic meaning adds to the novel's plot. The stone is perhaps more fitting in a Heliodoran context, as amethyst was in fact native to Ethiopia. The characteristics associated with amethyst, particularly moderation, are especially appropriate to the heroine, Charikleia, with whom the amethyst is associated, as well as with the tone of the novel itself. A second important difference is the size of the stone itself, said to be the size of a maiden's eye and length and scope of the description. Less confined by space and generic constraints, Heliodorus is free to describe his engraved stone at greater length and in greater detail. Heliodorus, therefore, expands upon the pastoral scenes found in the

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<sup>62</sup> Bowie 1995, 279.

<sup>63</sup> Dubel 1990, 107.

<sup>64</sup> Caley and Richards 1956, 234.



epigrams above, including in his description not only sheep (instead of cattle) and landscape but also a flute-playing shepherd.

Heliodorus is not only influenced by the epic and epigrammatic traditions, but as Bowie suggests, the description of the amethyst is in fact a reference to his own novelistic tradition, specifically Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*.<sup>65</sup> The pastoral imagery on the stone, according to Bowie, may be construed as representative of the bucolic elements contained within Longus' pastoral novel. The size of the gem and the scale of Heliodorus' work invite comparison with Longus' composition, for as Bowie states:

We are invited to contrast the huge Aida-like set across which Heliodorus has his characters process with the miniature and enclosed world of Longus. Such a comparison may cause us to reflect that, despite the virtuosity displayed by Longus in his mimesis of his confined pastoral universe, only the grand operatic stage created by Heliodorus really deserves comparison with the theater. The narrative setting allows us to see the gem as standing for a literary work.<sup>66</sup>

The amethyst can be both contained within the confines of Heliodorus' massive novel and exchanged for the heroine's life by Calasiris, an authorial figure, suggesting the superiority of Heliodorus' work over that of Longus.<sup>67</sup>

In Heliodorus' description of the stone, numerous themes emerge, but perhaps none so clearly as that of the competition between the verbal and visual arts. The opening and closing of the passage, thus underscore the contest that underlies that between the verbal and visual, namely the rivalry between art and nature. As we have seen in many of the above epigrams,

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<sup>65</sup> Bowie 1995, 279.

<sup>66</sup> Bowie 1995, 280.

<sup>67</sup> Bowie 1995, 280.

as well in the Homeric shield, the two concepts are frequently at odds. Occasionally, as in the Myron's cow poems, the work of one is compared to or confused with the other. The light and color of the amethyst, for example is compared to the radiance of the sun, a trope found in several of Posidippus' epigrams.<sup>68</sup> The competitive element described above, in reference to the dialog between the verbal and visual as well as between art and nature can be seen in the passage in terms of possible intertexts and textual rivalry. Not only does the amethyst surpass (*epleonektai*) other gems produced elsewhere, but while replicating aspects of other texts, it simultaneously attempts to surpass them. Similarities between the Homeric Shield as well as some of the ekphrastic epigrams are evident, yet it is clear that Heliodorus' description is no mere imitation of these earlier ekphraseis.<sup>69</sup> Although it is tempting to draw a connection between earlier ekphrastic descriptions of gems and that of Heliodorus, in order to posit an unbroken chain within a discourse of precious stones, to say that it would be difficult to do so would be an understatement.

Like the earlier poets, Heliodorus describes the imagery and artistry of the stone in great detail, and freed from the constraints of the epigrammatic genre, he is able to create a verbal representation of the amethyst at length. The emphasis on artistry is apparent throughout the description through the repetition of the words *graphie* and *techne*. The remarkable qualities of this stone and its workmanship are made particularly evident through the terms used to indicate the fact that the stone was deeply engraved and perhaps even hollowed out. This could serve as a reflection on the quality of the stone, which one might imagine to be of superior quality

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<sup>68</sup> Posidippus AB 16, AB 4 and 5 compare the radiance of a gem to other celestial bodies.

<sup>69</sup> Additionally, it would be particularly difficult to posit any clear relationship between the epigrams of Posidippus or the *Palatine Anthology*. The fact that Heliodorus drew upon and perhaps was even influenced by Homer, however, is much easier to demonstrate as Elmer (2008), among others, has argued.

to permit such intricate artistry within its small confines, but it could also serve as an indicator of the artist's skill. Bartsch goes so far as to suggest that although the stone is clearly shown to be valuable in its own right, "the very intricacy of design gives the ring its value."<sup>70</sup> Indeed when reading the passage one cannot but notice the complexity with which the precious stone is described. The intricacy is reinforced not only by the level of detail with which the object is described but also through various terms indicating detailed artistry. The fact that the stone is deeply engraved (ἐξέστο) and nearly hollowed out (ἐκεκοίλαντο) throws the image inscribed upon it into even greater relief and makes the impression left from the stone even deeper. One of the particular terms in use for carving, ἐπιξέω, however, not only implies a stone that is deeply engraved and smoothed down, but also suggests a literary effort that is well worked and highly polished.<sup>71</sup> The lambs circling around the shepherd playing his pipe not only add to the liveliness of the scene, but the term ἐξελίσσω also reminds the reader of the imagery discussed in the previous chapter, involving the notion of twisting, turning, and interweaving as an indicator of literary complexity and refinement. At the same time, however, we see explicit denial of *techné* at times, as in the case of the golden color of the sheep's fleece, which was not due to craft but natural hue of the stone. Such an authorial assertion creates a stark juxtaposition with Homer's description of the cattle on the shield, which derive the color entirely from the metals out of which they were constructed.

The degree to which the verbal and visual are both intertwined and simultaneously at odds is further evoked in the manner in which the description evokes the notion of spectacle. The very context of the passage summons up a sense of the theatrical.<sup>72</sup> Although the amethyst is

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<sup>70</sup> Bartsch 1989, 149-50.

<sup>71</sup> Vit. Apollon. Rhod.

<sup>72</sup> This, too, is evocative of Homer, for as Webb (2009, 54) states of the shield: "theatrical imagery is frequently

purportedly one of Charikleia's birth tokens, it does not appear in great detail until it is offered to Nausikles, in ransom for Charikleia's freedom.<sup>73</sup> The exchange, however, is no mere commercial transaction, but occurs under the auspices of a feigned magical rite performed by Calasiris who pretends to pull the ring from a fire.<sup>74</sup> The aesthetics of theatricality resonate in the ekphrasis as well, most explicitly in Heliodorus' reference to the fictive space of the amethyst as a "bucolic theater."<sup>75</sup> The association of amethyst with Dionysos and thus theater further supports the performative nature of the description. As do other ekphrasis in the text, this description mirrors the concern with vision seen throughout the novel through the repeated description of elements of color and light. The spectacular nature of the scene, however, is brought to life by means of the emphasis of motion, in the gamboling and the whirling of the lambs especially. The implied element of sound, supplied by the young boy playing his transverse flute, contributes to the sense of verisimilitude. Although the sense of sound is not described explicitly in the text as it is the Homeric shield or some of the Myron's cow poems, its very mention contributes to the theatrical nature of the scene, particularly when we recall the role of music in ancient theatrical productions.<sup>76</sup> By means of their dancing about in time to the music and obedience to the syrinx

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used elsewhere in vivid language, as in the scholia to the shield episode in *Iliad* 18 where Homer is said to 'roll out (*ekkukleo*) the maker [Hephaistos] as if onto a stage and show us his workshop in the open.'

<sup>73</sup> As Dubel (1990, 109) points out, the amethyst is just one of many gems that were found among Charikleia's birth tokens, yet unlike the others, especially the pantarbe, which recurs frequently, but is never described, the amethyst appears in detail only once in the novel and then is never seen again.

<sup>74</sup> The theatrical nature of the amethyst is anticipated in another ekphrasis in Book three, Charikleia's breast band, which is described in the context of a religious procession, in which Calasiris also plays a significant role; see Dubel 1990, 102.

<sup>75</sup> See especially Walden (1894) and Telò forthcoming. As Telò notes, the passage recalls the opening of the novel as well in which the band of brigands are placed in the role of spectators to the aftermath of a scene of slaughter that is incomprehensible to the internal viewer, as well as the external reader.

<sup>76</sup> Walden 1894.

player, the lambs take on the role of a chorus, but perhaps also that of audience. The shepherd who is placed in the center of the bucolic spectacle, is not only likened to a choral master, but given the close connection between literary production and music in pastoral, he may also be emblematic of the author himself. It is largely through Nausikles and his programmatic response that we are reminded that the scene is merely a description: (‘Ο δὲ Ναυσικλῆς ἐκπλαγείς τε ἅμα πρὸς τὸ παράδοξον καὶ πλέον ἤσθεις πρὸς τὸ πολύτιμον, οὐσίας ὅλης τὴν λίθον ἰσοστάσιον κρίνων). Nausikles’ reaction to the gem shows that it does just what it ought to do, it has the power to astonish (*ekplēssein*).<sup>77</sup>

In short, through the combination of elements of artistry, material, color, sound, and light, Heliodorus creates the illusion of life. Throughout the passage the stark contrast between appearance and reality emerges through the repetition of phrases such as “it seems” (ὡς ἔδοκει) and “someone might say” (εἴ πειν ἄν τις), particularly when juxtaposed with additional statements testifying to the true nature of the stone, such as the affirmation that a portion of the stone was shown unworked, as it was (ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας), and that the rock really (τῶ ὄντι) was a rock.<sup>78</sup> The notion of imitation as opposed to reality is further referenced in the passage through the repeated use of the term *mimema*. In the opening lines of the description the ring is said to be a *mimema* of living creatures. This, of course, contrasts with the rock described at the end of the passage which is no *mimema*, but an actual rock left unworked. It is this element especially, that differentiates Heliodorus from Homer and marks an aesthetic similar to that of the Myron’s cow poems; rather than an assertion of artistry, its repeated denial (in the statement that the hue of the animals’ coats was due not to *techne* but rather the natural ruddiness of the stone). Heliodorus’

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Goldhill (2007, 5) on the power of ekphrasis to astonish.

<sup>78</sup> The statement ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας recalls Posidippus’ poems on sculpture and his claim that his portraiture adheres to the “canon of truth.” See, for example, AB 63 line 5.

reference to the rock takes this concept one step further through the recognition that it would be unnecessary and perhaps even foolish to subject nature to artistry only to make it appear naturalistic. Like the stone that he describes, therefore, Heliodorus exercises moderation.

### 3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I endeavored to chart the development of a discourse of precious stones by outlining similarities in approach and thematic choices in their ekphrastic description. Using the model of the engraved seal stone and its impression, which possesses both decorative and functional characteristics in its replicative possibilities, I attempted to illustrate the use and diffusion of literary descriptions of engraved gems and intaglios. In doing so, I analyzed a series of ekphraseis, beginning with an excerpt from Homer's description of the Shield of Achilles and a selection of Myron's cow poems and their treatment of scenes drawn from the natural world in order to illustrate the manner in which these earlier descriptions influenced later ekphraseis of gems and precious stones in their use of similar subject matter. While these earlier examples may have been influential in the formation of the later poems and subsequent discourse, I contend that the earlier works of Homer and the Myron's cow corpus ought not to be compared to the later poems in the manner of originals and copies, but rather like an impression to a seal, to which the former possesses only an aura of similarity. Most importantly, however, I strove to emphasize the fact that these later works are in no way inferior to or simply derivative of their earlier exemplars, but rather in their flexibility, and the ease with which they were created, adapted, and appropriated, they served to continue the development of the discourse on precious stones.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Magical Gems**

Much like the secret decoder rings one used to be able to procure from the bottom of an obliging cereal box, magic rings and amulets of ancient Greece may or may not have been able to help their bearers in any real way. That does not, however, mean they were not magical or that their manufacture and use were an extended form of self-delusion. The question, when dealing with ancient magic, is not a simple “did it work” or even the slightly more nuanced “did practitioners and buyers believe it worked,” but rather what did practitioners and believers expect magic to accomplish? <sup>1</sup> Magic provided the believer with what amounts to an insurance policy and a form of communication with the larger natural world—the seen and the unseen. That is, an amulet, especially if worn by one who understood the natural forces from which it drew its power, could manipulate those forces in his or her favor. Via a magical stone or other artifact, one could exert a modicum of perceived control over the whims and vicissitudes of life.

Whereas this perceived control could let an individual interact with the natural world, it also dictated a vocabulary for describing that world. The more marvelous elements in the natural world, even when discussed in technical manuals, such as Theophrastus’ *Lithika (de Lapidibus)*, Book 37 of Pliny’s *Natural History*, or early forms of lapidaries such as the *Orphic Lithika* and the first century BC *Cyranides*, frequently employ a vocabulary of magic. The scientific and the magical are therefore not opposite, but rather contiguous points on a spectrum. The use of magical terminology to discuss commonplace stones—magnets to give but one example—means that for communication purposes, not only beyond the human scale, but also within that scale, magical terminology was the most understandable to the widest audience. That means, of course, that there were practitioners and users of magic at all levels of society.

Thus, the discussion of magic, which can mean in this context an incantation or a

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<sup>1</sup> Collins 2008, 1-8.



talisman, or simply a marvelous naturally occurring substance, such as hematite, was couched in a vocabulary which reflected social concerns of the time.<sup>2</sup> The scientific descriptions of the marvelous, how one explained the inexplicable or the magical, gives us an insight into how one interacted with the supernatural or wondrous. And finally, it yields, because of the number of detailed descriptions, or ekphraseis, of these stones, a further insight into these latter discussions and their social implications.

This chapter will revolve around magical gems and their descriptions, phenomena and their explanations, or incantations and their images. As such, it makes sense to begin with an overview of what actually makes a gemstone or amulet magical, including who used them and when. We will see how a stone can be endowed with certain magical properties, as well as which stones are naturally “magical” (in the way herbs, for example, are). I will follow this with a more detailed investigation into one kind of marvelous stone in particular, the magnet. In this second section, we will see the way in which marvelous stones are anthropomorphized, and how this agency given over to inanimate objects fills in the gap between cause and effect. Finally, we will look closely at the relationship of the word and image in another context, that of fictional, rather than scientific, literature. In Heliodorus’ *Aethiopika*, the heroine, Charikleia, is naturally imbued with magic, though she does not recognize it or know how to exploit it. The novel exemplifies the appearance and use of magic and particularly magical gems in a remarkable way. The manner in which Charikleia discovers her amulets and their powers is not only magical in itself—being brought to her in a dream—but also evocative of the hierarchy in which image, word, and incantation stand. The relationship of those three elements within the discussion of magical gems is one which recurs. Images, words (or nonsense characters), and incantations are all intrinsically

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<sup>2</sup> As a starting point on the social implications of ancient magic, see, for example, Skouteri-Didaskalou 2008.

tied to the function of magic—to its believability. Charikleia, who embodies all three aspects of magic, gives us an insight into the role of magic and magical gems in society and in social belief.

#### 4.1 Magic Gemstones and Amulets

A general discussion of ancient magic is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it will be of some avail to contextualize briefly the use of magical stones, amulets, and rings, and their powers, as such objects were among the most pervasive forms of magic in Greco-Roman antiquity.<sup>3</sup> The numerous types of gems found in the archaeological and literary records attest to their widespread and varied use, though they were called upon most especially for medicinal and curative purposes. In Pindar's *Pythian* 3, one of the earliest literary references to amulets (περάπτων), they are synonymous with healing drugs (φάρμακα).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the line between medicinal and magical stones is, at times, difficult to discern. Gems and amulets, however, were also used for their lucky, protective, or apotropaic powers, and/or for their erotic potency as love charms.

The ubiquity of this particular form of magic is undoubtedly due to a number of reasons, not least of which, is that magical stones and amulets were simply more accessible than other forms of ancient magic. Moreover, unlike other types of ancient magic and ritual, one needed little or no training to utilize such objects. Instructional manuals survive from antiquity detailing how to make a magical stone or what incantation to use in conjunction with a particular gem.<sup>5</sup> One could even purchase ready-made amulets from specialists who might instruct the buyer on

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<sup>3</sup> Ogden 2009, 261.

<sup>4</sup> Pindar *Pyth.* 3.51-54: τοὺς μὲν μαλακᾶις ἐπαισιδᾶις ἀμφέπτων, / τοὺς δὲ προσανέα πίνοντας, ἢ γυίοις περάπτων πάντοθεν/ φάρμακα, τοὺς δὲ τομαῖς ἔστασεν ὄρθούς.

<sup>5</sup> *PGM* (i.e. V.213-313, V.447-58) and the first book of the first to second century CE *Cyranides*.

how properly to use such goods.<sup>6</sup>

Although readily available, the use of magical gems and amulets, it seems, was widely criticized by the ancient Greeks. Aristophanes' *Wealth*, for example, makes light of the use of magical stones with a reference to a ring that protects against the bite of a sycophant.<sup>7</sup> Lucian of Samosata further satirizes their use in *The Ship* by means of a character, Timolaus, who, when asked what he desires, states, that he wishes for not one, but several magical rings (42-3):

ἐγὼ δὲ βούλομαι τὸν Ἑρμῆν ἐντυχόντα μοι δοῦναι δακτυλίους τινὰς τοιούτους τὴν δύναμιν, ἓνα μὲν ὥστε αἰεὶ ἔρρωσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἄτρωτον εἶναι καὶ ἀπαθῆ, ἕτερον δὲ ὡς μὴ ὄρασθαι τὸν περιθέμενον, οἷος ἦν ὁ τοῦ Γύγου, τὸν δὲ τινὰ ὡς ἰσχύειν ὑπὲρ ἄνδρας μυρίους καὶ ὅ τι ἂν ἄχθος ἅμα μυριοὶ κινήσῃ μόνον δύναιντο, τοῦτο ἐμὲ ῥαδίως μόνον ἀνατίθεσθαι, ἔτι δὲ καὶ πέτεσθαι πολὺ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀρθέντα, καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο εἶναί μοι δακτύλιόν τινα. καὶ μὴν καὶ ἐς ὕπνον κατασπᾶν ὁπόσους ἂν ἐθέλω καὶ ἅπασαν θύραν προσιόντι μοι ἀνοίγεσθαι χαλωμένου τοῦ κλείθρου καὶ τοῦ μοχλοῦ ἀφαιρουμένου, ταῦτα ἀμφοτέρω εἰς δακτύλιος δυνάσθω. τὸ δὲ μέγιστον ἄλλος τις ἔστω ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ὁ ἡδιστος, τὸ δὲ μέγιστον ἄλλος τις ἔστω ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ὁ ἡδιστος, ὡς ἐράσμιον εἶναί με περιθέμενον παισὶ τοῖς ὠραίοις καὶ γυναίξιν καὶ δήμοις ὅλοις καὶ μηδένα εἶναι ἀνέραστον καὶ ὅτω μὴ ποθεινότητος ἐγὼ καὶ ἀνὰ στόμα, ὥστε πολλὰς γυναῖκας οὐ φερούσας τὸν ἔρωτα καὶ ἀναρτᾶν ἑαυτὰς καὶ τὰ μειράκια ἐπιμεμνημένα μοι καὶ εὐδαίμονα εἶναι δοκεῖν, εἴ τινα καὶ μόνον προσβλέψαιμι αὐτῶν, εἰ δ' ὑπερορώην, κάκεινα ὑπὸ λύπης ἀπολλύσθω.

I wish that Hermes would meet me and give me some rings with the following sorts of powers: one so that I will always be robust and healthy in body, unconquerable and free of suffering; a second to make me invisible when I wear it, such as the ring of Gyges, and another to give me strength greater than that of 10,000 men and give me the power to move with ease a weight that 10,000 men all together could scarcely budge. And furthermore as to flying, aloft far above the earth, I desire a ring for that too. And I want a ring for putting all the people I want to sleep, and for opening every door that I come near, unlatching the bolt and removing the bar—let one ring have the power to do both these of things. Most importantly, let me have another one, the sweetest of all, to make me desirable when I put it on, to youths in their prime and women and entire peoples. No one will be able to resist me and everyone talk of me in my desirability, with the result

<sup>6</sup> Brashear 2008, 28-30.

<sup>7</sup> Aristophanes *Pl.*, 883-5.

that many women, unable to bear their longing for me, will hang themselves and the young men will fall madly in love with me and think themselves blessed, if I look at one of them even fleetingly, but if I ignore them, let them waste away with grief....

Timolaus' companion, Lycinus, perhaps reflecting an authorial persona, censures him for his silliness and replies that if blessed with such an array of rings the only thing that Timolaus would require further is another ring to put an end to his foolishness.<sup>8</sup> While the tone of the text is mocking and the passage itself is likely intended to be humorous, the passage is useful, because it touches upon the myriad powers ascribed to ancient rings, gems, and amulets in antiquity while simultaneously highlighting the contempt in which they were held by many. There are myriad reasons for criticizing the use of magical gems and amulets. Some found fault with the practice because it was seen to be in opposition to science and medicine.<sup>9</sup> Others thought it represented a base form of ritual which too closely resembled black magic. Additionally, according to some scholars, magic and especially amulets belonged to the domain of women and the lower classes.<sup>10</sup> These theories point to the notion that magic is a practice both marginal and marginalizing in terms of those who use it.<sup>11</sup> While this is certainly true to some extent, as many anecdotes from antiquity suggest, the use of magical amulets and stones may also be seen as a last resort. As Plutarch relates in the *Life of Pericles*, at his death, the statesman turned to magical stones in order to seek relief from the plague, though he, too, was criticized for this.<sup>12</sup> Whether largely

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<sup>8</sup> Lucian *The Ship* 45.

<sup>9</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.54.

<sup>10</sup> Graf 2002, 10.

<sup>11</sup> On magic as a marginal practice see especially Skouteri-Didaskalou 2008, 150-60.

<sup>12</sup> Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 38; Theophrastus *Frag.* L21.

sanctioned or censured, however, there is little doubt that magical amulets were in fact used.<sup>13</sup>

Reference is made to magical gemstones and amulets as early as the Homeric texts, however, their earliest archaeological attestation is uncertain.<sup>14</sup> In its most basic definition, an amulet (περίαμμα or περίαπτου) was simply an “object tied around,” though such objects could be either worn or carried by an individual.<sup>15</sup> The first of such objects were probably made from perishable materials, such as papyrus, leather, or even string.<sup>16</sup> Later, magical accoutrements were made out of thin sheets of metal, or *lamellae*, precious and semi-precious stones which were not only used in rings, but also bound or tied to the body as amulets or attached to a garment.<sup>17</sup> In addition to metal amulets, which were typically bronze, semi-precious stones and glass were formed in molds to imitate more precious stones. Although they likely represent only a small number of amulets used in antiquity, a fair number of precious stones or so-called “Gnostic” gems survive from antiquity, estimated by some to number near 5,000.<sup>18</sup> In terms of materials, however, it is important to stress that even though certain types of objects were, of course, more valuable than others, in the strictest sense, the material of an amulet was, in some ways, irrelevant. Papyrus with writing on it or even a mere string could serve as the basis for a powerful amulet.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dickie 2001, 25. In the *Republic* (426b1-2), for example, little distinction is made between the use of amulets, incantations, surgery, and drugs.

<sup>14</sup> Odysseus’ wound is staunches by an amulet in *Odyssey* 19.457-59.

<sup>15</sup> Ogden 2009, 261.

<sup>16</sup> Kotansky 1991, 110.

<sup>17</sup> Nagy 2008, 35; Ogden 2009, 261.

<sup>18</sup> Nagy 2008, 35

<sup>19</sup> Kotansky 1991.

Magical gems in settings can be dated earlier than other amulets, perhaps as early as the Archaic period. Early magical gems were primarily set in rings, which, likely resembled *intaglios* that were used as seal stones. Such rings might be differentiated by the stone type, but more likely (though not always) would be discernible through their iconography or inscription. Whereas the inscriptions on most seal stones are written in reverse so as to make their impressions legible, magic inscriptions are not reversed suggesting that they were not intended to be used as signet rings.<sup>20</sup> These rings, though in settings to be worn on the finger, could also be bound to the body like any other amulet.

Much like other examples of glyptic examined thus far, magical gemstones and amulets, which had their antecedents in the earlier periods, grew in interest and popularity during the Hellenistic period.<sup>21</sup> In Egypt especially, interest in the occult combined with a heightened fascination with the laws of nature and the physical world perhaps contributed to the proliferation of the practice of magic and the use of magical paraphernalia. The ancient understanding of stones and minerals represented a rudimentary understanding of the scientific properties of stones combined with a belief in a cosmos “suffused with divine forces.”<sup>22</sup> For the ancients, among the primary sources of power were cosmological forces, namely, the sun and the stars, which could bring about both life and death.<sup>23</sup> These forces, therefore, permeated nature in a variety of ways. Amulets and magical stones, in particular, functioned in accord with these forces through their harmony with other species which symbolized the four elements of nature: air, earth, water, and

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<sup>20</sup> Nagy 2008, 34.

<sup>21</sup> Waegeman 1987, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Nagy 2008, 36

<sup>23</sup> Nagy 2008, 36.

fire.<sup>24</sup> This practice may be seen in the first Book of the *Cyranides* (1st-2nd century C.E.), which provides instructions on how to create a magical stone combining the different forces of nature using a gem, plant, bird, and fish all beginning with the same letter, as for example, in the entry for gamma:

Ἐὰν δέ τις εἰς γνάθιον λίθον γλύψῃ γλαῦκα τὸ ὄρνεον καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦς πόδας αὐτοῦ γλαῦκον τὸν ἰχθύν, τούτου δὲ τοῦς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑποκατακλείσας φορέσῃ ἀπεχόμενος χοιρείσου κρεάτος καὶ πάσης ῥυπαρίας, σκοτίας δὲ γενομένης φανήσεται γεναῖος τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. δόξουσι γὰρ οἱ ὀρώωντες ἔνθεόν σε εἶναι. εἰς δὲ τὴν ἡμέραν ὃ ἂν εἴπῃ πιστευθήσεται. εἰς κοίτην δὲ φορούμενον ὀρμάτα ἀληθῆ δείκνυσιν.

If one engraves an owl and under its feet the fish glaucus onto a gnathios stone, enclose the latter's eyes and wear it abstaining from pork and any kind of filth, s/he will seem noble to the people when darkness has come. For those who see you will think that you are inspired by the god. When daylight comes they will trust everything you say. If it is worn in bed it will show unerring dreams.<sup>25</sup>

Many stones were also associated with the planets or particular deities or heroes.<sup>26</sup> Such forces might be used to promote health, wealth and prosperity.<sup>27</sup> The individual who understood the machinations of such forces, such as the magician, therefore, could change them.<sup>28</sup>

Because of their innate connection to the cosmos and the forces with which they were endowed, precious stones and minerals were not only thought to possess significant power in tandem with other elements, but were also seen as potent on their own. Theophrastus in his *Lithika (de Lapidibus)* does not focus on the magical aspects of stones in terms of their benefit

<sup>24</sup> Waegeman 1987, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Trans. Waegeman.

<sup>26</sup> Brashear 2008, 33; coral, for example, is associated with the hero Perseus, in the *Orphic Lithika*, ll. 510-609.

<sup>27</sup> Waegeman 1987, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Nagy 2008, 37.

to their users, but instead writes at length, in a manner akin to later alchemical treatises, about their mysterious and mutable properties. Pliny, though frequently separating himself from those who believed in magical uses of stones, such as the Magi whom he repudiates (*Magorum invandem vanitatem*), does not fail to acknowledge some of the healing and medicinal properties of particular gems.<sup>29</sup> Much later, in the so-called *Orphic Lithika*, dating between the second and fourth centuries CE, though derived from the Alexandrine tradition, the narrator, in recounting the power of several gems, relates the significance of several types of unadorned gemstones. In the *Orphic Lithika*, Theodamus says that of all the remedies that the earth provides, stones outstrip even herbs in their potency and utility (ll. 405-18):

Αὐτὴ γαῖα μέλαινα πολυκλαῦτοισι βροτοῖσι  
τίκτει καὶ κακότητα καὶ ἄλγεος ἄλκαρ ἐκάστου·  
γαῖα μὲν ἔρπετὰ τίκτε, τέκεν δ' ἐπὶ τοῖσιν ἀρωγὴν·  
ἐκ γαίης δὲ λίθων πάντων γένος, ἐν δ' ἄρα τοῖσιν  
κάρτος ἀπειρέσιον καὶ ποικίλον· ὅσσα δύνανται  
ρίζαι, τόσσα λίθοι· μέγα μὲν σθένος ἔπλετο ρίζης,  
ἀλλὰ λίθου πολὺ μείζον· ἐπεὶ μένος ἀφθιτον αἰεὶ  
γεινομένῳ μήτηρ καὶ ἀγήραον ἐγγυάλιξεν·  
ἢ δὲ καταθνήσκει τε, μινυρθάδιον θαλέθουσα,  
καὶ τόσον αὐτῆς καρπὸς, ἐφ' ὅπποσον ἔμπνοός ἐστιν·  
εἰ δέ κ' ἀποπνεύσῃ, τίς ἔτ' ἐλπωρὴ παρὰ νεκρῆς;  
Ἐν μὲν δὴ βοτάναις ἄγυριν λυγρῶν τε καὶ ἐσθλῶν  
δήεις, ἐν δὲ λίθοις ἄτην οὐ ρεῖά κεν εὐροῖς.  
Ἦτοι ὅσαι βοτάναι, τόσσοι λίθοι.

For much lamenting mortals the black earth herself  
provides both evils and a remedy for every pain,  
While the earth bore serpents, in addition she offers a cure,  
Every type of stone is from the earth, and among them  
is a boundless and diverse force. As great is the power of herbs,  
so much is that of stones. The herb's strength is great,  
but the stone's is greater, since mother earth implanted

<sup>29</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.54: Nunc gemmarum confessa genera dicemus ab laudatissimis orsi, nec vero id solum agemus, sed etiam maiore utilitate vitae obiter coarguimus Magorum invandem vanitatem, quando vel plurima illi prodidere de gemmis ab medicinae blandissima specie ad prodigia transgressi.



ever eternal and unfading force in it at its birth.  
But the herb dies, flourishing a short time,  
And it bears fruit only as long as it lives.  
But if it should die, what succor from death is there? Indeed in plants  
you will find a source of misery and health, but not easily could you  
find mischief in stones.  
As numerous are herbs, so many are gems.

According, to the author of the *Orphic Lithika*, therefore, gems are valuable, among other reasons, because they are more enduring than other natural remedies.

In addition to their connection with various cosmological forces, many precious stones were thought to derive their power from their color which might reflect the stone's role within the cosmos or bear a close relationship with its magical powers.<sup>30</sup> One such stone that seemed to derive strength from its color was the emerald (*smaragdus*). In fact, as Pliny's entry on the stone suggests, the singular source of the stone's power appears to be its color (*NH* 37.63-64):

nam herbas quoque silentes frondesque auide spectamus, smaragdus vero tanto libentius, quoniam nihil omnino viridius comparatum illis viret. praeterea soli gemmarum contuitu inplent oculos nec satiant. quin et ab intentione alia aspect smaragdi recreatur acies, scalpentibusque gemmas non alia gratior oculorum refectio est: ita viridi lenitate lassitudinem mulcent...quam ob rem decreto hominum iis parcutur scalpi vetitis.

For although we eagerly look upon young plants and leaves, we gaze at *smaragdi* with still more pleasure since, compared with them, there is nothing that is so intensely green. Moreover, they alone of gems, when we behold them intently, please the eye without overwhelming it. Indeed, even after straining our eyesight by staring at another object, our eyes are refreshed by looking at a *smaragdus*; and engravers of gemstones find that this is the best way of soothing their eyes: the mellow green stone is so calming to their feeling of fatigue... for which reason, humankind has decreed that *smaragdi* must be preserved in their natural state and has forbidden them to be engraved.

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<sup>30</sup> The primary evidence for this is found in Book 37 of Pliny's *Natural History*, the *Orphic Lithika*, and the *Cyranides*. Modern scholarship on color theory in antiquity, namely Irwin (1974) and Bradley (2009), has largely neglected the issue of color and supernatural powers and associations. Bradley (2009, 101-6), however, does discuss Pliny's approach and the problematic issues that result in the categorization of gems by color in the *Natural History*.

Due to the implicit connection with and comparison to plants, the stone's description recalls the above passage from the *Orphic Lithika*. Here Pliny, like Theodamus, suggests that stones are more useful but also more beautiful than plants and herbs. A number of other stones also had powers and functions closely associated with their colors. For example, galactite, a white stone, was believed to aid lactating women and animals, whereas red stones such as jasper, haematite, and carnelian, might be used to prevent menstrual bleeding.<sup>31</sup>

Not all stones, however, held powers that show a direct correlation to the type of stone or color and for a good number, the source of their efficacy is unclear. Several stones, as exemplified by Pliny's lengthy entry on amber, had a variety of uses (*NH* 37.50-51):

Usus tamen aliquis sucinorum invenitur in medicina, sed non ob hoc feminis placent. infantibus adaligiari amulet ratione prodest. Calistratus prodesse etiam cuique aetati contra lymphationes tradit et urinae difficultatibus potum adalligatum...hoc collo adalligatum mederi febribus et morbis, tritum vero cum melle ac rosaceo aurium vitiis et, si cum melle Attico teratur, oculorum quoque obscurati, stomachi etiam vitiis vel per se farina eius sumpta vel cum mastiche pota ex aqua.

However, amber is found to have some use in medicine, although it is not for that reason that women like it. It is of assistance to infants when it is bound to them as an amulet. Callistratus says that it is good also for people of any age as a treatment for fits of madness and for strangury, both ingested in liquid form and when worn as an amulet...According to Callistratus this kind of amber cures fevers and diseases when worn as an amulet on a necklace, when powdered and mixed with honey and rose oil, afflictions of the ears, as well as poor eyesight if it is ground and blended with Attic honey, and even stomach ailments if it is either taken as a fine powder by itself or by drinking it in water with mastic.

Others, by various accounts, held powers that would seem contradictory, such as rock crystal which recalled the characteristics of water but was said by others to start fire while remaining

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<sup>31</sup> Brashear 2008, 33.

cool to the touch.<sup>32</sup> Many minerals and precious stones were used for the same purpose; according to the *Orphic Lithika*, at least seven different stones and minerals could be used for curing snake bites.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.2 The Magnesian Stone as Exemplum of Marvel, Magic, and Anthropomorphic Agency

While some stones had soothing, or healing powers, others were of interest for their marvelous and scientific properties. Several authors, such as Theophrastus, for example, prioritized the scientific, pseudo-scientific and wondrous aspects of such gems, precious stones and minerals in their literary treatises. For the ancients, many of the “scientific” properties for which gems were valued and analyzed were difficult to distinguish from those of magical stones. Although the concepts of magic and science have traditionally been seen at odds, particularly by anthropologists of the twentieth century, who placed “sacred” activities such as magic and religion on the opposite end of the spectrum as “profane” pursuits like science and technology,<sup>34</sup> the ancient Greeks did not appear to differentiate the former from the latter. In fact, as I suggest, the two areas of magic/religion and science/technology, were, at times, closely related. In many instances, as I will touch upon, these intersecting concepts were addressed in the same texts. And frequently, they were contiguous through their emphasis on the concept of the wondrous or marvelous.

As early as the fifth century B.C.E. creators of magic, or conjurors, were called both

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<sup>32</sup> *Orphic Lithika* ll.171-190.

<sup>33</sup> According to the *Orphic Lithika* serpentine, ophite, jet, coral, hematite, neprite, and chalalzas all had properties that could heal the pain of snake bites.

<sup>34</sup> Collins 2008, 5.

*goetes* or *thaumatoποιοι* implying, perhaps, that their deeds be considered *thaumata*.<sup>35</sup> The same language that permeates discussions of magic also appears in scientific and mineralogical treatises. One such stone that was well discussed by a number of ancient authors and exemplifies this line of thought was the magnesian stone or magnet.<sup>36</sup> The stone, also called the Loadstone (or Lodestone), “iron stone” or the “stone of Heracles,” was admired by early observers not only for its resemblance to silver and its usefulness in testing metals, but especially for its powers of attraction and repulsion.<sup>37</sup> Theophrastus, in his treatment of the stone, not only uses the term *marvel*, to refer to its power, but in fact uses the superlative form of the adjective: θαυμασιωτάτη.<sup>38</sup> Pliny, too, in his treatment of the stone similarly emphasizes its unique and wondrous qualities, asking at the outset of his inquiry: *Quid enim mirabilius* (what is more marvelous (than this stone)? The reference to the concept of the marvelous, and the use of the comparative form *mirabilius*, explicitly echoes Theophrastus’ treatment of the stone above. Of interest in the present study, is the manner in which this discourse exemplified by the texts of Theophrastus and Pliny also manifests itself in poetic texts. Posidippus’ poem AB 17, in fact, shows many resemblances to the “scientific” texts discussed above:

σκέψαι ὁ Μύσιος οἶον ἀνερρίζωσεν Ὀλυμπος  
 τόνδε λίθον διπλῆ θαυμάσιον δυνάμει·  
 τῆδε μὲν ἔλκει ῥεῖα τὸν ἀντήεντα σίδηρον  
 μάγνης οἷα λίθος, τῆδε δ’ ἄπωθεν ἔλα,  
 πλευρῆ ἔναντιοεργός· ὃ καὶ τέρας ἐξ ἑνὸς αὐτοῦ,  
 πῶς δύο μιμεῖται χερμάδας εἰς προβολάς.

<sup>35</sup> Dickie 2001, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Theophrastus *de Lap.* 4, 41; Pliny *NH* 36.126-30, 148; *Orphic Lithika* ll.306-43; Eicholz 1979, 115. According to Theophrastus *de Lap.* (29) and Pliny (*NH* 37.48, 53) other stones, such as amber and lyngurium (if they are believed to be stones), as well as hematite, may have also held powers of attraction.

<sup>37</sup> Theophrastus *de. Lap.* 41; Pliny *NH* 36.126.

<sup>38</sup> Theophrastus *de Lap.* 5.

Consider the nature of this stone, such a one as Mt. Olympus grew  
marvelous for its double power.  
On the one hand it attracts with ease the iron set before it,  
just like a magnet. On the other hand it drives it far off,  
in the opposite direction from itself. And the wondrous thing is how on its own  
it can imitate two stones in their movements.

Posidippus draws attention to the marvelous nature of the stone by using the same terminology as the technical writers, calling it a *thauma* (or marvel) which possesses a double power (διπλῆ δυνάμει) due to its ability both to attract and repel. The wondrous nature of the stone is further emphasized through the repetition of a similar concept through the term τέρας.<sup>39</sup> The context of the poem further supports its description as a marvel. In the two poems proceeding AB 17, Posidippus describes the snakestone (AB 15), here also called a marvel (line 7), and a deceptive rock-crystal (AB 16) which is as beautiful as a diamond, but too common to be considered a precious stone. Further, both the rock crystal and the magnet are unworked. As I will discuss below, this scientific oddity as described by Posidippus was also a locus for discussions of magic for many of the same reasons for which it was understood to be a technological marvel.<sup>40</sup>

Returning to my original example of Pliny's magnet, I suggest that the above passage encapsulates the notion postulated by later academic discussion, namely that the concept of magic was used as one way to designate misunderstood forms of science and technology. (Another possible approach was, of course, to relegate such activities to the realm of the irrational). As Collins has argued, whether or not the ancient Greeks held a faulty understanding of the relationship of cause and effect is irrelevant. To focus on whether or not ancient magic

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<sup>39</sup> See Krevans (2005, 92) on the phrase ὃ καὶ τέρας as a conventional statement in ancient wonder books.

<sup>40</sup> According to Kuttner (2005, 158) the stones described in AB 16 and 17 are also “natural portents on which to philosophize about art and aesthetics, eros, and authorship.”

“worked” is to miss the point:

Such a view neglects to observe that magic is “causal” within a social framework whose effects are very real. The problem is that an incomplete grasp of physical causes is embedded within a broader social framework for the understanding of the cause- and the key is that the social framework is the more salient of the two.<sup>41</sup>

Unable to comprehend fully and scientifically account for how such activities worked, ancient authors turned to the vocabulary of the marvelous, one that I suggest is contiguous with magic, as a means for filling in the gap between cause and effect.

This understanding of causality was not only used to explain what was believed to be unexplainable, as seen above, but also to extend the powers of agency. In effect, objects, such as magical stones or figurines, are treated like humans to a small extent in that they possess agency or “personhood.”<sup>42</sup> This concept is seen more clearly in anthropomorphic statues, figurines, and idols that were cleaned, arrayed in clothing, and worshipped. In essence, they were conceived of as possessing human characteristics.<sup>43</sup> Such objects are treated, therefore, as if they had the same or similar abilities as human beings. To say that a cult image of Athena nodded in assent or turned her head away (i.e. *Iliad* 6.311) was, for the Greeks, the same as saying that the goddess herself lent or denied her approval.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, stories abound of mortals falling in love and even having sexual relations with sculpted images. In short, for the ancient Greeks and Romans, the divide between animate and inanimate objects oftentimes did not exist or was broken down. If we consider Pliny’s treatment of the magnesian stone more fully, we will see that the view

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<sup>41</sup> Collins 2008, 8.

<sup>42</sup> See especially Gell 1998, 137-43.

<sup>43</sup> Collins 2008, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Steiner 2001, 136.

existed that some stones—those which seemed to possess magical powers—in part reflect human agency. Indeed, Pliny observed that the stone seemed so endowed with human characteristics as to be lifelike (*NH* 36.126):

Quid enim mirabilius aut qua in parte naturae maior improbitas? dederat vocem saxi, ut diximus, respondentem homini, immo vero et obloquentem. quid lapidis rigore pigrius? ecce sensus manusque tribuit illi. quid ferri duritia pugnacious? pedes ei inperitvit et mores.

For what is more marvelous (than this stone)? In what field has Nature displayed a greater want of principle? She has given to rocks a voice which, as I have explained, responds to that of humankind, or rather interrupts it as well. What is more inert than the stiffness of stone? Behold! We see that she has bestowed the magnet with senses and hands. What is more inflexible than the hardness of iron? We see that she has granted it feet and instincts.<sup>45</sup>

In this case, the stone's magnetic pull, its ability to draw objects toward it, and its ability to express sympathy or antipathy, suffuses it with human-like traits. For Pliny not only endows the stone with human qualities including a voice (*vocem*), as well as touch (*manus*), movement, and locomotion (*pedes*), but also states that the stone has the ability to “echo” or even “reply to humankind” (*respondentem homini*) or conversely to disrupt it. Remarkably, through reference to the stone's *sensus* and *mores* and its seeming verisimilitude to humans, the magnet is granted further the capacities for intellect, emotion, and character, characteristics typically reserved for humans. This view was by no means Pliny's innovation, as Thales of Miletus (seventh-sixth century B.C.E) argued that stones possessing magnetic properties were believed to have souls.<sup>46</sup> The magnet even had gendered and ethnic distinctions, which were said to affect their color and thus quality.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Pliny *NH* 36.126. Cf. Lucretius *de Rerum Natura* VI.910-916, 1042-47.

<sup>46</sup> Collins 2008, 8. See 11A 22 D-K=Arist. *de. An.* 1.2.405-19-21. Cf. also Plato's *Ion* 533d.

<sup>47</sup> Pliny *NH* 36.128-30.

Moreover, the stone was also closely connected to both the medical and magical traditions. The stone could be used for curative purposes. As Pliny mentions in his entry on magnets, the stone could be used as a remedy for certain eye disorders as well as for burns.<sup>48</sup> The *Orphic Lithika*, however, situates the stone within a magical context as well. The magnet, it is said, could heighten one's influence among the gods and soften their minds.<sup>49</sup> In the same text, Theodamus also states that Circe brewed her love philtres with magnet so as to increase their potency.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, one of the recipes in the *Greek Magical Papyri* describes necessary steps to make an erotic charm for attraction (called the "Sword of Dardanus") on a magnetic intaglio (PGM IV.1716-1870):<sup>51</sup>

λαβὼν λίθον μάγνητα τὸν πνέοντα γλύψον Ἀφροδίτην ἰππιστὶ καθημένην ἐπὶ Ψυχῆς, τῇ ἀριστερᾷ χειρὶ κρατοῦσαν, τοὺς βοστρύχους ἀναδεσμευομένην, καὶ ἐπάνω τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς· ΑΧΜΑΓΕ ΡΑΡΠΕΡΣΕΙ· ὑποκάτω δὲ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης καὶ τῆς Ψυχῆς Ἔρωτα ἐπὶ πόλου ἐστῶτα, λαμπάδα κρατοῦντα καομένην, πάδα κρατοῦντα καομένην, φλέγοντα τὴν Ψυχὴν. ὑποκάτω δὲ τοῦ Ἔρωτος τὰ ὀνόματα ταῦτα· ΑΧΑΠΑ ΑΔΩΝΑΙΕ ΒΑΣΜΑ ΧΑΡΑΚΩ ΙΑΚΩΒ ΙΑΩ ΕΦΑΡΦΑΡΗ· εἰς δὲ τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ λίθου Ψυχὴν καὶ Ἔρωτα περιπελεγμένους ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Ἔρωτος ταῦτα· Σ Σ Σ Σ Σ Σ Σ Σ Σ, ὑποκάτω δὲ τῆς Ψυχῆς· ΗΗΗΗΗΗΗΗ· γλυφέν— τι δὲ τῷ λίθῳ καὶ τελεσθέντι χρῶ οὕτως· λαβὼν αὐτὸ ὑπὸ τὴν γλῶσσαν σου στρέφε, εἰς ὃ θέλεις, λέγε τὸν λόγον τοῦτον·

“Take a magnetic stone which is breathing and engrave Aphrodite sitting astride Psyche and with her left hand holding on her hair bound in curls. And above her head: ‘ACHMAGE RARPERSEI’ and below Aphrodite and Psyche engrave Eros standing on the vault of heaven, holding a blazing torch and burning Psyche. And below Eros these names: ‘ACHAPA ADONAIE BASMA CHARAKO IAKOB IAO EPHARPHAREI.’ On the other side of the stone engrave Psyche and Eros

<sup>48</sup> Pliny *NH* 36.130.

<sup>49</sup> *Orphic Lithika* 325. See further Halleux and Schamp 1985.

<sup>50</sup> *Orphic Lithika*, 308-9. According to the same text, the magnet could also be used to detect the fidelity of one's spouse and might prevent strife between brothers if both wore the stone (310-24).

<sup>51</sup> *PGM IV.1716-1870*. Cf. also an engraved green jasper intaglio depicting images of a copulating couple on the obverse and reverse which bears resemblance to the “Sword of Dardanus” spell (Delatte and Derchain 1964, no. 329).



embracing one another and beneath Eros' feet these letters: 'SSSSSSSS' and beneath Psyche's feet: 'EEEEEEEE.' Use the stone, when it has been engraved and consecrated, like this: put it under your tongue and turn it to what you wish and say this spell..."<sup>52</sup>

Although the spell continues at length, the excerpt included above, as well as the imagery engraved upon the stone indicate that the magnet was used for amatory magic. On an engraved gemstone from the Bibliothèque nationale, we find a representation that appears to correspond closely to the "Sword of Dardanus" spell (**Figure 4.1**). The stone, a green jasper carved on both



Fig. 4.1

Engraved jasper depicting a man and woman copulating. Imperial.

sides, is highly evocative of the spell shown above. On the obverse is depicted a woman straddling the man in "riding position," while on the reverse the man is on top, holding the woman's leg behind the knee. Inscribed on each side as well, the text on the obverse translates to "grace" and "desires," while that on the reverse states "reciprocated love of my soul."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Trans. Betz.

<sup>53</sup> Ogden 2009, 262-3.

Represented on the gem, as well as in the “Sword of Dardanus” spell, therefore, is the “power of the individual to act on the soul of his beloved through the power of Eros,” and on the reverse “the intended outcome.”<sup>54</sup>

Such erotic associations by no means went unnoticed by later writers such as Achilles Tatius in Book one of *Leucippe and Clitophon*. In the context of a discussion of the courtship rituals of remarkable plants, animals, and geographical features, including the peacock, palm, and snakes, Clitophon tells Leucippe of the magnesian stone and its properties in an effort to seduce the young woman (1.17.2):

ἐρᾶ γοῦν ἡ Μαγνησία λίθος τοῦ σιδήρου· κἂν μόνον ἴδῃ καὶ θίγῃ, πρὸς αὐτὴν εἴλκυσεν, ὥσπερ ἐρωτικὸν ἔνδον ἔχουσα πῦρ. καὶ μή τι τοῦτό ἐστιν ἐρώσεως λίθου καὶ ἐρωμένου σιδήρου φίλημα;

At least the magnesian stone loves iron, and if she may but see it and touch it, she draws it towards herself, as if possessing an erotic fire within. May this not be the kiss of loving stone and beloved metal?

The description of the Magnesian stone while alluding to Clitophon’s erotic attraction to Leucippe may also refer to magical tradition. Leucippe’s characterization as the magnet is perhaps ironic, as it is Clitophon, not Leucippe who is the clearly the active erotic partner. The play of opposites, between the magnet and iron is echoed shortly in the tale of two other opposites (1.18), the viperous land snake and the lamprey, a water snake, serpents that are drawn to one another and eventually mate despite their (initially fatal) differences. The magnet’s association with magic and the nature of its kiss with iron also proleptically allude to Leucippe and Clitophon’s first embrace (Achilles Tatius 2.7), brought about when Clitophon feigns a bee sting in order to have Leucippe utter a magical charm over his “stung” lip.

Like Pliny’s description of the magnet, that of Clitophon is endowed with human

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<sup>54</sup> Platt 2007, 95.

characteristics; it has the ability to touch and even kiss its desired object as well as the faculties of perception. Its pull is so great that it is represented through the word ἔλκειν, a verb commonly used to describe the action of a magnet, but also one that bears the implication of dragging an individual or object against its will.<sup>55</sup> Although initially such a word choice hardly seems remarkable, the same verb frequently appears in the context of incantations, and especially erotic spells. For example, Simaitha's refrain in Theocritus' *Idyll* 2 entreats the moon to bring her beloved to her, using repeatedly the imperative form of ἔλκειν: ἰυγξ, ἔλκε τύ τῆνον ἐμὸν ποτὶ δῶμα τὸν ἄνδρα (Magic wheel, draw my lover home to me).<sup>56</sup> The same play upon scientific/ technological and magical traditions is expressed in a brief epigram from the *Palatine Anthology* (*A.P.* 12.152): Μάγνης Ἡράκλειτος, ἐμοὶ πόθος, οὐτι σίδηρον/ πέτρῳ, πνεῦμα δ' ἐμὸν κάλλει ἐφελκόμενος (Heraclitus, my beloved is a Magnet, not attracting iron/ by stone, but my spirit with his beauty"). The subject of the poem, Herakleitos, may have been a native of Magnesia and, like Leucippe, he is also a magnet to his lover. Aside from the metaphorical use of the magnet as a means for exploring erotic desire and agency, the passage also displays verbal echoes of magical spells.<sup>57</sup>

Although not on the same type of stone, one further example from the *Greek Anthology* is worth considering for its resemblances to magnetic stones. In an anonymous epigram from Meleager's *Garland* (*AP* 5.205), we find an unusual poem about a gem that not only belonged to a woman, but also served as an amulet that was offered to Aphrodite as a gift:

ἰυγξ ἢ Νικουῶς, ἢ καὶ διαπόντιον ἔλκειν

<sup>55</sup> LSJ sv. 1, for ἔλκειν used of magnets see, for example, Euripides frag. 567.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Xenophon *Mem.* 3.11.18, Plot. 4.4.40, Pindar *Nem.* 4.35 for a similar use of ἔλκειν.

<sup>57</sup> The use of πνεῦμα instead of ψυχή is perhaps unusual and may also suggest a medical connotation. On the use of ψυχή in magical spells and contexts see also Bonner 1950, 118-119.

ἄνδρα καὶ ἐκ θαλάμων παῖδας ἐπισταμένη,  
χρυσῶ ποικιλθεῖσα, διαυγέος ἔξ ἀμεθύστου  
γλυπτῆ, σοὶ κεῖται, Κύπρι, φίλον κτέανον,  
πορφυρέης ἄμνου μαλακῆ τριχὶ μέσσα δεθειῖσα,  
τῆς Λαρισσαίης ξείνια φαρμακίδος.

Nico's love charm, that can draw a man  
across the sea and boys from their chambers,  
embellished with gold and  
engraved on transparent amethyst,  
hung upon a soft thread of purple wool, a dear possession,  
Cypris, she the witch of Larissa presents to you.

Here the amethyst, like the magnet, has a potent erotic force and reflects notions about amulets and magical agency. Although the stone is said by Pliny to have certain magical properties, it was not believed to be an erotic charm in particular. Pliny does note however that “many call it the ‘eyelid’ of Venus because of its beauty and the modest loveliness of its color.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the gem described in the poem is explicitly called a love-charm or *iunx*. This object was originally a nymph who acquired Zeus’ affection by means of magic, but due to her transgression, the nymph was changed by Hera into a bird, or wryneck, which made strange contortions in order to produce a sound to call to its mate. Initially conjurors of magic would attach the bird to a wheel that they would whirl around, later, however, it seems that the bird was omitted from such spells and that the wheel was used alone.<sup>59</sup> The similarity to the above passages is apparent through the use of ἔλκειν and the stone’s figurative, if not literal powers of attraction. Although it is not as explicit as the magnet, the *iunx* also held human qualities. Above all it was the sound of the *iunx*, produced by the wheel’s whirling motion, which made it a powerful charm.<sup>60</sup> Like Pliny’s

<sup>58</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.123.

<sup>59</sup> Hopkinson 1988, 158.

<sup>60</sup> Johnston 1995.

magnet, therefore, the *iunx* had a voice, so to speak, which both replicated and extended human agency so that they might achieve their desires.

#### 4.3 The Verbal and Visual Powers of Magic and its Ekphrastic Treatment

Although some stones and minerals were invested with magical and medicinal powers in and of themselves, it is important to note that for the ancient Greeks, especially in the Hellenistic period and later, their power was substantially heightened through the inclusion of inscribed images and texts. As the above examples indicate, stones were valued for their inherent properties, however most of the so-called magical stones that survive today were engraved. After all, written and pictorial evidence indicate to us today that stones may have held uses other than as ornamentation or seals. These magic stones were engraved using the same techniques, materials and types of stones found in signet rings, although certain stone types were preferred above others. According to some magical texts, such as the first Book of the *Cyranides* and the *Greek Magical Papyri*, the actual preparation of magic stones may have been carried out according to formulae and “recipe books,” which instructed individuals on how to make such stones. Although magical gems might be inscribed by the same craftsmen who inscribed non-magical gems, frequently the former required a rite, in which the gems would be consecrated by means of prayer and ritual practices performed by a magician in order to imbue the stones with supernatural forces.<sup>61</sup> Whereas magic intaglios bear some resemblances to their non-magical counterparts, upon closer examination significant differences emerge. Unlike inscriptions on seal stones, those on magical gems were written so as to be “read” directly by the viewer rather than primarily on the seal’s impression. Oftentimes, amulets and magical gems would bear

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<sup>61</sup> Nagy 2008, 35. Some argue, however, that as early as the Classical period, amulets belonged primarily in the domain of old women (Dickie 2001, 108-9).

inscriptions alongside images or occasionally on the obverse.

Similarly, magical gems could be inscribed with pictorial representations. While the types of depictions found in the later Hellenistic period display a greater sense of Egyptianizing influence, they are at times not easily distinguished from their non-magical counterparts. In addition to typical anthropomorphic Greek gods and goddesses such as Aphrodite, and Hekate, numerous Egyptian deities such as Isis, Osiris, Bes, and Harpokrates figured prominently on magical stones.<sup>62</sup> Solar deities such as the Greek Helios and Egyptian Horus were also quite common.<sup>63</sup> Further attesting to the widespread Egyptian influence on magical stones is the large number of gems depicting hybrid creatures and animal deities. The most popular of these therianthropomorphic deities was Chnoubis, a lion with a snake head wearing a radiate crown.<sup>64</sup> Serpents and serpent hybrid creatures, such as the *alectrocephalos* (a cock-headed beast), *ouroboros* (a serpent with its tail in its mouth), and various anguipedes (snake-footed creatures), appear to have been particularly common iconographic themes.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, images of anthropomorphic deities holding snakes, such as the Aphrodite *Anadyomene*, were not uncommon.<sup>66</sup> According to Platt, therefore, it is through the combination of alien and more familiar imagery from which such magical stones derived their potency:

While the magical gems ostentatiously proclaim their supernatural power through the use of identifiably ‘exotic’ symbols and incantations, like many examples in the Greek papyri, they draw much of their visual iconography from the common

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<sup>62</sup> Marino 2009, 119; Nagy 2008; Daniel 2003; Bonner 1951, 1954.

<sup>63</sup> Nagy 2008, 35; Bonner 1954.

<sup>64</sup> Marino 2009, 131. Chnoubis, sometimes known as the “good spirit” was also thought to have associations with digestion.

<sup>65</sup> Nagy 2008, 35-6; Bonner 1954, 149-150; Bonner 1951, 320.

<sup>66</sup> Bonner 1954, 147.

repertoire of images found in Greco-Roman art.<sup>67</sup>

After all, for the illiterate viewer of magical stones, a recognizable image of a deity or magical symbol would have been esteemed as a powerful sign, perhaps even more so than inscribed text.<sup>68</sup>

The degree to which such magical images were deeply embedded in Greco-Roman culture is perhaps most discernible in the figure of Eros, both a prominent deity, personifying the basic human values of love and desire, and thus also a figure inextricably bound to the magical tradition. Images of Eros abound in art and literature, and though not all of them have magical associations, a large number allude to the god's role in erotic magic as a mighty conqueror of beasts and humans. A late ekphrastic epigram by Marcus Argentarius captures the dual nature the figure of Eros in ancient culture, at once a charming, cherub-like figure, yet one bearing an inescapable and subduing power (*A.P.* 9.221):

Αὐγάζω τὸν ἄφυκτον ἐπὶ σφραγίδος Ἔρωτα  
    χερσὶ λεοντείαν ἀνιοχεῦντα βίαν,  
ὡς τᾶ μὲν μάστιγα κατ' αὐχένος, ἧ δὲ χαλινούς  
    εὐθύνει· πολλὰ δ' ἀμφιτέθηλε χάρις.  
φρίσσω τὸν βροτολογόν· ὁ γὰρ καὶ θῆρα δαμάζων  
    ἄργιον, οὐδ' ὀλίγον φείσεται ἀμερίων.

I see upon the signet ring inescapable Eros,  
    driving a chariot drawn by mighty lions,  
Wielding the whip on their necks with one hand, and guiding  
    the reins with the other. Much grace blossoms about him.  
I shudder to behold the bane of humankind, for he who can even tame  
    wild beasts, will not spare mortals in the least.

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<sup>67</sup> Platt 2007, 96.

<sup>68</sup> Marino 2009, 118. Further, as Marino notes, even those who were literate may not have been able to read the inscriptions in any case, due to the small size and/or epigraphic style of the text.

Although the poem does not explicitly refer to Eros' supernatural abilities, it makes clear the power that he wields over humankind. A sard from the second century C.E. (**Figure 4.2**), depicting Eros shooting an arrow at a youth, recalls his ability to make mortals fall in love.<sup>69</sup> The god's power and connection to magic is shown even more vividly on a green jasper depicting Psyche tied to a tree, with her feet being burnt by Eros (**Figure 4.3**). The stone not only alludes to the turbulent relationship between Eros and Psyche, but also *eros*' ability to torment one's



Fig. 4.2

Sard depicting Eros shooting an arrow. 2nd century C.E.



Fig. 4.3

Engraved green jasper depicting Eros burning the feet of Psyche. Hellenistic or Imperial.

*psyche*, or soul.<sup>70</sup> The same focus on torment and burning is evident in a number of extant spells found in the Greek Greek Magical papyri, PMG IV.2486-94:

Βάδισον πρὸς τὴν δεῖνα καὶ βάσταξον αὐτῆς τὸν ὕπνον καὶ δὸς αὐτῇ καύσιν ψυχῆς, κόλασιν φρενῶν καὶ παροίστησιν, καὶ ἐκδιώξασα αὐτὴν ἀπὸ παντὸς τόπου καὶ πάσης οἰκίας ἄξον αὐτὴν ὧδε, πρὸς ἐμέ, τὸν δεῖνα.

Go to her and take away her sleep and put a burning heat in her soul, punishment and frenzied passion in her thoughts, and banish her from every place and from every house, and attract her here to me.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> The stone is also inscribed "Hierocles, son of Jason" which could be a reference to the craftsman himself or perhaps the name of the owner or recipient.

<sup>70</sup> Platt 2007, 95-96.

<sup>71</sup> Trans. Betz. Cf. *PGM* IV.1496-1595.



On Figure 4.3 is also an inscription which states: "Ἔρωσ ὡς σὺ ἔμε κάγω σε (Eros, as you have treated me, so I treat you)." The inscription, though puzzling at first, recalls numerous representations in which the tables have been turned, so to speak, and Eros is depicted as being bound, an image not uncommon to Hellenistic poetry as well.<sup>72</sup> While such imagery may well give the viewer the pleasure of momentarily checking the destructive power of Eros, as Platt suggests, it also recalls further the numerous binding spells with which the deity was associated.<sup>73</sup>

The inscription on Figure 4.3 also reminds us that, while the iconography of magical stones was important, for many scholars of Greco-Roman and Egyptian magical gems and amulets the gems' inscriptions appear to be a primary source of their power. As further evidence on the connection between magical stone and inscribed text, we may consider Pliny's entry on the amethyst, for example, a stone powerful in its own right and believed by many to be a remedy against drunkenness, could be rendered more potent still by means of an inscription (Pliny *NH* 37. 124):

Magorum vanitas ebrietati eas resistere promittit et inde appllatas, praeterea, si lunae nomen ac solis inscribatur in iis atque ita suspendatur e collo cum pilis cynocephali et plumis hirundinis resistere veneficiis, iam vero quoquo modo adesse reges adituris, grandinem quoque avertere ac locustas precatione addita quam demonstrant. nec non in smaragdis quoque similia promiserunt, si aquilae scalperentur aut scarabaei...

The Magi foolishly claim that the amethyst serves as a remedy against drunkenness, and it is from this property that it has taken its name. Moreover, they say that if they are inscribed with the names of the sun and the moon and are hung about the neck with baboons' hairs and swallows feathers, they will serve as

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<sup>72</sup> Compare, for example, *A.P.* 16.196: Τίς σε τὸν οὐχ ὀσίως ἠγρευμένον ᾧδε πεδήσας/ θήκατο; τίς πλέγδην σὰς ἐνέδησε χέρας/καὶ πιναρὰν ὄψιν τεκτῆνατο; ποῦ θαὸ τόξα, / νήπιε, ποῦ πικρὴ πυρφόρος ἰοδόκη; / ἦ ῥα μάτην ἐπόνησε λιθοξόος, ὅς σε, τὸν οἶστρω / κυμήναντα θεοῦς, τῆδ' ἐνέδησε πάγη.

<sup>73</sup> Platt 2007, 92.

a remedy against magical spells. In addition, however they are used, they claim that amethysts will be of avail to those who approach kings as suppliants, and that they ward off hail and locusts if they are used with an incantation, which they describe. They have made similar claims regarding the emerald, when it is engraved with an eagle or scarab beetle.

Although Pliny states that inscribed images, such as the scarab or eagle, hold some power, he suggests that inscribed text, even in the form of names, are more potent still.

Inscription constituted the last stage in the creation of magical stones and it was often viewed as a crucial ingredient to the potency of stones in Greco-Roman magic.<sup>74</sup> As Pliny suggests above, and as we have seen elsewhere, the power of words was greatly valued in magical practice. Magic and its performance placed tremendous weight on the vocalization of spells, thus it was the verbal and aural component of magical spells that was emphasized. Socrates, for example, speaks of an amulet for a headache, but states that without an incantation, it is ineffective.<sup>75</sup> The written word was also of particular significance when it came to magical rituals and rites. Several formularies from the *Greek Magical Papyri*, for example, include specific instructions along with the text(s) inscriptions and incantations.

Many of these magical texts on stone imitated typical inscriptions on stone, but in fact were engraved with cryptographic symbols or *characters*.<sup>76</sup> Several bore corrupt forms of Greek or even unintelligible forms in Greek script. Others contained magical names, such as Abrasax, combined with nonsense inscriptions, for example, ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞΕ, ΞΥΞ, ΒΑΚΑΞΥΧΥΞ, ΒΑΙΝΧΩΩΩΧ.<sup>77</sup> In later periods especially, “incantations featuring prayers for health,

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<sup>74</sup> Nagy 2008, 35.

<sup>75</sup> Plato *Charmides* 155e5-8.

<sup>76</sup> Collins 2008, 73-78.

<sup>77</sup> Nagy 2008, 34. According to Betz (1986, 331), Abrasax or Abraxas was a popular magical deity associated with many other gods. The god was believed to be a solar deity and was often depicted in magical iconography as an *anguipede*.

luck, long life and good will were carved into the gems in Greek, pseudo-Greek, corruptions from Egyptian, Hebrew, Aramaic, or plain gibberish.”<sup>78</sup> Whether or not the inscriptions were in decipherable Greek or merely gibberish, however, their words, letters, or even symbols were thought to be endowed with significant power. Gems and magical stones inscribed with unintelligible words, phrases, and sometimes nonsense inscriptions were not the work of illiterate or foreign craftsmen, but rather, were indeed meant to be undecipherable. Many such inscriptions consisted of repeating vowel sounds and patterns, such as ΙΑΩ, ΙΑΩ. Such utterances, have been considered by many to be a form of *magicae voces*, a type of supernatural speech drawing upon special signs, characters, and names with which to commune with the gods.<sup>79</sup> The scripts were often composed of cryptographic symbols which held special correspondences to particular deities and signs of the zodiac.<sup>80</sup>

There were also a large number of inscriptions on gems that were written in comprehensible Greek. Some of these magical inscriptions contained text or even incantations in Greek, such as the amulet bearing the text: “Flee, Podagra (Gout), Perseus is chasing you away.”<sup>81</sup> Love charms and medical amulets represent the main categories of objects inscribed with comprehensible Greek text.<sup>82</sup> While some of these inscriptions were surprisingly lengthy given the area to be inscribed, others were briefer, such as that bearing the text “Digest!”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Brashear 2008, 33.

<sup>79</sup> Collins 2008, 75.

<sup>80</sup> Nagy, 2008, 34; Collins 2008, 74.

<sup>81</sup> Nagy 2008, 35.

<sup>82</sup> Bonner 1950, 167.

<sup>83</sup> Bonner 1950, no. 264 Rev.: Inscip.: *iaeō baphrenemoun othilarikriphiae u eaiphrikiralitho nuomenerphab ôeai phrikira. Digest! Digest! (Chnoubis-sign) Chnoubis.* Cf. Bonner 1950, no. 185.

Names and epithets, often in the vocative, were also common types of short inscriptions.<sup>84</sup> The purpose of such inscriptions, as can reasonably be deduced based upon their contents, was likely to confer comfort, aid, luck, health or other blessings upon the owner of inscribed magical objects.

A number of Greek authors, especially of later prose works, possibly acquainted with such practices, emphasized the role of writing, inscription, and the performance of spells and incantations in connection with magical stones. For example, Philostratus' biography *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* provides one of several such instances in his account of the eponymous first century philosopher and magician's travels amongst the Indian sages. When describing the harvesting of a magical stone drawn from a serpent's head as part of a snake hunt on the plain of Ganges, the narrator makes special emphasis of the power of the written word (3.8.2):

Κοκκοβαφεῖ πέπλω χρυσᾶ ἐνείραντες γράμματα τίθενται πρὸ τῆς χειᾶς ὕπνον ἐγγοητεύσαντες τοῖς γράμμασιν, ὅφ' οὐ νικάται τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὁ δράκων ἀτρέπους ὄντας, καὶ πολλὰ τῆς ἀπορρήτου σοφίας ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἄδουσιν, οἷς ἄγεται τε καὶ τὸν αὐχένα ὑπεκβαλὼν τῆς χειᾶς ἐπικαθεύδει τοῖς γράμμασι. προσπεσόντες οὖν οἱ Ἰνδοὶ κειμένῳ πελέκεις ἐναράττουσι, καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποτεμόντες λήζονται τὰς ἐν αὐτῇ λίθους. ἀποκείσθαι δέ φασιν ἐν ταῖς τῶν ὀρείων δρακόντων κεφαλαῖς λίθους τὸ μὲν εἶδος ἀνθηρᾶς καὶ πάντα ἀπαυγαζούσας χρώματα, τὴν δὲ ἰσχὺν ἀρρήτους καὶ κατὰ τὸν δακτύλιον, ὃν γενέσθαι φασὶ τῷ Γύγῃ.

The Indians, having woven golden letters into a scarlet cloth, place it in front of the snake's hole, after casting a sleeping spell on the letters, by which the snake's unwavering eyes are entranced, and much mystical lore is sung in overcoming him. The snake is thus charmed into sticking its head out of the hole and falls asleep over the letters. The Indians, attacking it where it lies, cut off the head and steal the stones enclosed within it. They said that in the heads of mountain snakes are hidden brilliant stones of flowery colors, which give off every kind of hue, and possess a mysterious power such as that which resided in the ring that they say Gyges once owned.

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<sup>84</sup> Bonner 1950, 167.

The passage is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, it points out the supernatural themes of the text and the eponymous character, a charismatic teacher, miracle worker and Pythagorean, and at the same time alludes to the long standing tradition of stones having magical properties. Second, it indicates how the process of acquiring the stone, as well as the stone itself are both endowed with magic. In order to “harvest” the stone, the Indians must charm the snake in order to lull it into emerging from its lair. Through the focus of the passage on the eye of the snake, the knowing reader is reminded that this particular serpent and the stones harvested from its head held properties beneficial to eyesight, much like the snakestone described in Posidippus’ AB 15.<sup>85</sup> This emphasis on the eye, fitting, after all, for an ekphrasis, is heightened by the repeated mention of color and light, key properties of eyesight. Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter 2, serpents were also believed to be vividly colorful. In addition to having properties soothing to eyesight, however, this stone, like Gyges’ ring, also has the ability to frustrate vision, by rendering its user invisible.<sup>86</sup>

Although the stone itself is not, and perhaps cannot, be inscribed (at least according to Pliny), writing and magical letters are central to its capture.<sup>87</sup> The golden letters woven into the crimson cloth, when combined with an incantation, clearly hold power over the serpent, capturing its attention, and enabling the Indian men to overcome the creature. Such a combination of the visual and the verbal makes implicit the connection between writing as magic and stones with supernatural powers.

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<sup>85</sup> See chapter 2 for a discussion of AB 15.

<sup>86</sup> Going back at least as far as Herodotus’ tale of Gyges, invisibility and the desire for it seems to be a common theme that is well reflected in the ancient magical tradition. See for example: Lucian *Nav.* supra; *PGM* I.232-47, *Cyranides* I.15.33-7.

<sup>87</sup> Pliny NH 37.158 tells us that according to Sotacus: “the stone is colorless and transparent, and cannot subsequently be polished or submitted to any other skillful process.”

In a still later prose work, one likely indebted to Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, magic in general, and especially stones, also play an important role.<sup>88</sup> As we have already seen, in Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, the heroine, Charikleia, is repeatedly associated with magical stones. At a point in the narrative of the *Aethiopika* in which Charikleia has been taken hostage by Nausikles, Calasiris, using a bit of feigned magic, pretends to pull a magic stone, an amethyst, out of a fire and then offers it in exchange for Charikleia's freedom (5.13-15). This stone, which is set in a ring, however is no ordinary stone. First of all, its size is immense, it is said to be the size of a maiden's eye, and thus a rarity for that alone. It is not only large, but it is also a stone of exceptional beauty, coming from Ethiopia. The stone is of such high quality, in fact, that it even surpasses those from India, which is where the best amethysts are mined according to Heliodorus. In addition, the gem was elaborately carved with a pastoral scene depicting a shepherd and his flock.<sup>89</sup>

In various ways the stone described in Heliodorus plays with different aspects of the ancient concept of stones and magic. First, it makes use of the tradition of the amethyst as a remedy for drunkenness as a means for illustrating the character of the heroine, one frequently described in terms of restraint and moderation.<sup>90</sup> The manner in which the stone is first introduced to the scene, being drawn out of a fire, has the pretense of magic. Further, the representation carved on the gem (described in greater detail in chapter three), as an ekphrasis, could be said to be a form of image magic, a type of detailed animation that can only appear in literary descriptions of works of art rather than the works of art themselves. Through the

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<sup>88</sup> See M. Jones 2005 for a discussion of magic in the *Aethiopika*. On the influence of *Vit. Ap.* for Heliodorus see Whitmarsh 2011, 120 ff. 68.

<sup>89</sup> For further discussion of the stone see Chapters 2 and 5.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. *A.P.* 9.752 discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

description of the pastoral scene, the iconography becomes animated and even life-like, a shepherd watches over his flock that leaps and gambles about trying to break free of the confines of their pen. It is only the bezel of the ring and the author's sense of moderation and propriety that keeps the animals contained.

Not only is Charikleia associated with the amethyst which has magical properties, but more importantly, throughout the text she is linked to a second stone—the pantarbe. This gemstone was given to the infant Charikleia when she was exposed by her mother to spare the child from death and her mother from shame, due to the fact that Charikleia was the white daughter of a (black) Ethiopian king and Queen. Although Charikleia apparently possessed the stone for most of her life, it was not until Calasiris translated the script on her *tainia* and explained her birth tokens, that she became aware of the stone's mystical abilities. In Persinna's message to her daughter, embroidered on Charikleia's *tainia*, the former emphasizes the pantarbe's significance by stating that among all her birth tokens Charikleia must be sure to hold it especially dear (4.8):

μεμνήση δὲ πρὸ πάντων τῶν συνεκτεθέντων σοι κειμηλίων δακτύλιόν τινα ἐπιζητεῖν καὶ σεαυτῇ περιποιεῖν, ὃν πατὴρ ὁ σὸς ἐμοὶ παρὰ τὴν μνηστείαν ἔδωρῆσατο βασιλείῳ μὲν συμβόλῳ τὸν κύκλον ἀνάγραπτον λίθῳ δὲ παντάρβῃ καὶ ἀπορρήτῳ δυνάμει τὴν σφενδόνην καθιερωμένον.

Above all, be sure to seek among the treasures that I placed beside you a certain ring and keep it with you always: it was a gift that your father gave me during our courtship, engraved all around with the royal crest and set with a pantarbe, a jewel endowed with mysterious powers.

Persinna, in her description of the object, places stress on the pantarbe's function as amatory gift and token of familial allegiance as indicated by her emphasis of inscribed royal crest. For the knowing reader, the explicit mention of the crest, of course, signals, the recognition scene that will come at the end of the book. As Persinna alludes, however, the stone is not limited merely to

the status of recognition token, it also possesses magical powers.

While Charikleia received the pantarbe along with a handful of other birth tokens at the time of her exposure, it is not until her seventeenth year (three quarters of the way through the narrative) that she has need for it. It was only when she is about to be killed by the Persian queen Arsace that the stone's magical powers became manifest. The night before her scheduled execution, Charikleia had a dream in which Calasiris told her that she would be protected only if she wore the pantarbe, a stone that was among her birth tokens (8.11):

παντάρβην φορέουσα πυρὸς μὴ τάρβει ἔρωήν,  
ῥήιδι' ὡς μοίραις χά' τ' ἀδόκητα πέλει

If you wear the pantarbe fear-all, do not fear the power of flame:  
Miracles may come to pass: For Fate 'tis easy game."<sup>91</sup>

As Persinna foretold, the stone, whose name means “fearing all things,” does turn out to have magical properties, specifically talismanic or apotropaic powers that save her.<sup>92</sup> As Charikleia later relates to Theagenes, the stone appears to have protected her from the fires of Arsace's pyre; she even calls it her “salvation” (σωτηρίαν) (8.11):

... σωτηρίαν ἑμαυτῆς ἐπαγομένη τότε μὲν ἠγνούμουνίμι δὲ τὸ παρὸν ὡς ἔοικε. Τὰ γὰρ συνεκτεθέντα μοι γνωρίσματα καὶ παρὰ τοὺς ἔμπροσθεν ἂ εἰ χρόνους ἐπιφέρεσθαι προνοούμενη, τότε καὶ πλέον, τῆς κρίσεως μοι γενησομένης καὶ τῆς τελευταίας προσδοκωμένης, περὶ τῆ γαστρὶ ζωσαμένη κρύφα ἐτύγχανον, εἰ μὲν σωζοίμην εὐπορίαν βίου καὶ τῶν ἀναγκαίων, εἰ δὲ τι πάσχοιμι καλλωπίσματα ἔσχατα καὶ ἐντάφια γενησόμενα. Ἐν δὴ τούτοις, ὦ Θεάγενες, οὖσιν ὄρμοις πολυτελέσι καὶ λίθοις ἐριτίμοις Ἰνδικοῖς τε καὶ Αἰθιοπικοῖς ἔστι καὶ δακτύλιος δῶρον μὲν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦμοῦ τῆ μητρὶ παρὰ τὴν μνηστείαν δοθείς, λίθω δὲ τῆ καλουμένη παντάρβη τὴν σφενδόνην διάδετος γράμμασι δὲ ἱεροῖς τισιν ἀνάγραπτος καὶ τελετῆς, ὡς ἔοικε, θειοτέρας ἀνάμεστος παρ' ἧς εἰκάζω δύναμιν τινα ἢ κειν τῆ λίθω πυρὸς φυγαδευτικὴν, ἀπάθειαν τοῖς ἔχουσιν ἐν ταῖς φλογώσεσι δωρουμένην, ἢ κάμὲ τυχὸν συμβουλήσει θεῶν περὶ

<sup>91</sup> Translation adapted from Reardon 1989.

<sup>92</sup> Man. 2.168; Rhetor in Cat. Cod. Astr. 1.145.



σωσε. Ταῦτα δ' ἔχω καὶ συμβάλλειν καὶ γινώσκειν ἐξ ὧν ὁ θεϊότητός μοι Καλάσιρις ὑπετίθετο, πολλάκις ταῦτα καὶ φράζεσθαι καὶ ἐκδεδιδάχθαι πρὸς τῶν ἐνεστιγμένων τῇ συνεκτεθείσῃ μοι ταινία (νυνὶ δὲ κατὰ γαστέρα τὴν ἐμὴν εἰλημένην) διηγούμενος.

I carried my salvation with me, though I was not aware of it at the time; but now I think I understand. Even in the past, I have made certain to carry on me the tokens of recognition that were exposed with me, but yesterday I was particularly careful to do so, since I was about to stand trial, and I thought that I would surely die. So I bound them around my waist, out of site: if I survived, they would assure me the necessities of life; and if anything happened to me, they would serve as my funerary adornment in death. They consist of precious necklaces and priceless gems from India and Ethiopia, and among them, Theagenes, is a ring that my father gave my mother during their courtship. It is set with a stone called the pantarbe and inscribed with certain sacred characters; it is full, it seems, of supernatural and mystic power, which I think must have endowed the stone with fire retardant properties and causes its wearer to be impervious to the flames. Doubtless it was this stone that saved my life by the gods' grace. I also understood and learned these things from what Calasiris, that most blessed of men often related to me, that this is all described and explained by the writing embroidered on the band that was placed beside me—and which is now girt around my waist.

Although Charikleia follows the advice of others regarding the need to wear the gem, it seems evident that she did not fully comprehend the need to do so; it is only after the fact that she is able to piece together the significance of the dream combined with her deliverance from harm. After coming to understand the admonitions of Persinna and Calasiris through the benefit of hindsight, Charikleia tells Theagenes of how, on this day especially, she made certain to wear the stone. Not only does she merely carry the stone with her or wear it as a ring, but, in fact, she binds it around her middle. In doing so, Charikleia wears the stone, in essence, as a magical amulet. Charikleia's speech and actions in wearing the stone additionally play up the pantarbe's magical and supernatural significance. The fact that Charikleia, when approaching the pyre toward her intended execution, utters a prayer that bears resemblances to ancient magical spells invoking the sun and earth is hardly insignificant, particularly in a book replete with other

instances of magic and its performance (Heliiodorus 8.9).<sup>93</sup>

Before continuing with further discussion of the passage in terms of the symbolic and narratological significance of the stone, let us consider briefly the stone itself, particularly as it plays such an important and recurring role in the novel. The pantarbe does not actually appear to have been a type of stone recognized by writers of ancient mineralogical treatises, such as Theophrastus and Pliny. Apart from Heliiodorus, the stone is mentioned in only two other sources.<sup>94</sup> Although we have little testimony about this particular type of stone, it has been surmised that the stone was reddish in color, a judgment likely based upon a description from Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.<sup>95</sup> In his brief description of the stone, Philostratus highlights the fact that it holds magnetic qualities and emits a fiery glow from within.<sup>96</sup> Due to the fact that the pantarbe does not correspond with categories used by modern mineralogists the stone has been associated with other minerals that might lend a richer meaning to the text. It has been suggested that the stone was perhaps a ruby, due to the presumed color of the pantarbe. Despite the difference in color, Jones has suggestively argued the pantarbe was perhaps *adamas*, a mineral whose name meant “unyielding”, which had not only flame resistant properties but also had royal associations.<sup>97</sup> Waegeman proposes that the stone might be associated with hematite, which would also be red in color, like the pantarbe.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, hematite shares many similarities

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. *PGM* VII.528-39 a “victory charm” addressed to Helios.

<sup>94</sup> Ctes. Fr. 57.2; Philostr. *V.A.* 3.46.

<sup>95</sup> Philostr. *V.A.* 3.4.6.

<sup>96</sup> An intriguing comparison could be developed between the stone and Charikleia's gaze, repeatedly described as piercing, see Heliiodorus 2.31.1.

<sup>97</sup> M. Jones 2005, 93; Pliny *NH* 37. 57.

<sup>98</sup> Waegeman 1987, 207.

with the pantarbe. Hematite, like the pantarbe, has magnetic qualities, and the best specimens of it come from Ethiopia.<sup>99</sup> As a local stone from a land rich in minerals, the hematite would have particular significance in an Ethiopian context.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, according to Pliny, hematite, in addition to having magnetic qualities, is also good for treating burns. In addition to treating various diseases and ailments, hematite was thought to be beneficial to petitioners to the king as well as in court.<sup>101</sup>

In light of the ancient mineralogical tradition, it is evident that Charikleia's pantarbe is not only inherently endowed with magical powers, but further, the descriptions of Persinna and Charikleia perhaps attribute some of the magical ability of the ring to the image and text inscribed upon it. It is not clear in what language the stone has been inscribed, though presumably it is in Ethiopian, or perhaps imitating Egyptian hieroglyphic (of which we have a great deal of evidence regarding the use of magic in antiquity and even books containing spells).<sup>102</sup> Although the text does not implicitly indicate as much, it is tempting to imagine that the pantarbe, like other magical stones and amulets in antiquity, may have been inscribed with a magical spell. The name of the stone itself, the pantarbe, or fear-all, if taken literally, appears to be somewhat of a misnomer, as the heroine with which it is associated is anything but fearful. From the outset of the novel Charikleia is shown to be brave and clever in the face of danger,

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<sup>99</sup> Pliny *NH* 36.129.

<sup>100</sup> Aside from hematite, many stones did originate in Ethiopia, a fact that Heliodorus does not fail to mention. Indeed precious stones and minerals play an important role in the novel's plot. In addition to the various gems specifically associated with Charikleia, it should be noted that: in Book two (2.31), the purpose of Sisimithres' visit to Egypt is, in part, to discuss the satrap's use of the Ethiopian's emerald mines. Cf. Heliodorus 9.24.

<sup>101</sup> Pliny *NH* 37.169: *Zachalias Babylonius in iis libris quos scripsit ad regem Mithridatem gemmis humana fata adtribuens hanc, non contentus oculorum et iocineris medicina decorasse, a rege etiam aliquid petituris dedit, eandem litibus iudicisque interposuit, in proeliis etiam ex ea unqui salutare pronuntiavit.*

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Faraone 2007.

often more so than her beloved Theagenes. The stone's name, if it is significant, perhaps may refer to its apotropaic powers and Charikleia's ability to instill awe and sometimes fear in those she encounters. The nature of the stone, however, is closer to that of the magnet, in its ability to draw others toward it, just as Charikleia does repeatedly. In this way, like many of the magnetic stones seen above, the pantarbe perhaps ought to read as a "metaphor for desire" and thus the heroine's desirability.<sup>103</sup>

The pantarbe's inscription and magical significance also create a link to another object potentially of magical significance—Charikleia's *tainia*. Both objects, left as birth tokens from Persinna to Charikleia are linked through their use of writing. The script, likely Ethiopic, though incomprehensible to Charikleia was not without power or significance, resembling magical *characters* in its function. The band, in fact, could only be translated by Calasiris, a man learned in numerous areas including magic. Moreover, the band, like the pantarbe, wrapped around Charikleia's waist, appears to function as a sort of amulet.<sup>104</sup> Both the pantarbe and the *tainia* could be said to hold a talismanic or apotropaic function. Whereas the pantarbe literally saves Charikleia from death on multiple occasions, the *tainia* perhaps serves as a more general talisman, or even, as Jones has suggested, a chastity belt.<sup>105</sup> The pantarbe, too, bears connections with chastity and feminine virtue as a gift from the Hydapses to Persinna, as well as the circumstances due to which Persinna then left the stone for Charikleia.<sup>106</sup>

In terms of the novel's plot and characterization, the pantarbe holds multiple functions. Charikleia's use of the stone, and immunity to the flames in Arsace's failed attempt to execute

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<sup>103</sup> Hilton 1998, 255.

<sup>104</sup> M. Jones 2005, 78.

<sup>105</sup> M. Jones 2005, 93-95.

<sup>106</sup> Ormand (forthcoming) goes as far as to say that the pantarbe is a symbol of Charikleia's virginity.

her, foreshadows her future trials and tribulations including her virginity test on the gridiron (Heliodorus 10.9) and her subsequent efforts to prove her identity to her parents (Heliodorus 10.13-14) in order to save herself and her beloved from death.

Magic in general, and in particular magical gems and amulets, have much to add to the author's use of characterization in the novel. Throughout the novel, magic and its practice is used repeatedly as a means for delineating character. As Jones has argued, it is possible to discern two different types of magic present in the *Aethiopika*, which she labels as "earthly" and "heavenly".<sup>107</sup> "Earthly" magic can be exemplified by the women who pelt Theagenes with apples while uttering love charms (Heliodorus 3.3.8), whereas "heavenly" magic, according to this dichotomy, is seen most explicitly through Charikleia's use and association with gemstones.<sup>108</sup> The temperament and moral qualities of individuals such as Arsace's servant, Cybele, a practitioner of erotic magic, and the necromancer in book six are revealed through their belief in and use of "base" forms of magic, which ultimately results in their deaths. However, characters who are more enlightened and, according to Jones, morally superior, also engage in magic in the *Aethiopika*. Calasiris, for example, though he appears to eschew magic, uses it at various points throughout the novel, or at least pretends to do so, as in the example above, involving Nausikles and the amethyst ring, and earlier (4.5.3), when he stages a feigned exorcism of the evil eye with which Charikleia has allegedly been afflicted. Yet even Charikleia, whom many scholars, including Jones, have portrayed as the epitome of moral and chaste heroines,

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<sup>107</sup> M. Jones 2005.

<sup>108</sup> According to Jones' dichotomy, gems and precious stones, though from the earth, are associated almost exclusively with astrology and "heavenly" forms of magic. Although I noted the cosmological implications of some stones, I suggest that her argumentation rests upon a false dichotomy, which Jones takes great pains to support by developing possible connections between Charikleia's character and numerology, astrology, and religion. Despite the possible cosmological associations of gems, as the above passage from the *Orphic Lithika* indicates, gems, as their very nature would suggest, are closely connected with the earth and "earthly" magic, such as the use of herbs.

uses magic in a time of crisis.<sup>109</sup> If Charikleia is distinguished in any way, from other characters in the *Aethiopika* in her use of magic, it is arguably not through a display of moral superiority, as Jones has argued, but rather, as I contend, in that it serves as a reflection of her wisdom and a sign that she is divinely (or supernaturally favored). According to Philostratus, not just anyone could possess the stone; in fact, the Indian sages state that they alone are able to get hold of the pantarbe through enactment of special rites and the use of certain words.<sup>110</sup> Further, Charikleia's connection with and use of stones can be read as an indication of her own innate magic. For Jones this inherent magic is symbolized by the numerological significance of her name, and her associations with Artemis, Isis, as well as the sun, and moon.<sup>111</sup> As I would add further, the unique circumstances surrounding Charikleia's birth and her remarkable physical appearance as a white, Ethiopian princess suggest, from the moment of her conception, the heroine of the novel is associated with elements of magic and the supernatural. Yet through her use of objects, and especially the pantarbe, Charikleia's own magical agency is heightened. In sum, the gems with which Charikleia is associated, namely the amethyst and especially the pantarbe, reflect her own inherent magical and supernatural qualities.

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<sup>109</sup> Charikleia is also falsely accused of magic by Arsace.

<sup>110</sup> Phil. *Ap. Vit.* 3.46: μαστεῦσαι δὲ αὐτὴν οὐδενὶ ἔξεστιν, ἀποδιδράσκει γάρ, εἰ μὴ μετὰ λόγου ἀνασπῶτο· ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς μόνοι τὰ μὲν δράσαντες, τὰ δὲ εἰπόντες ἀναιρούμεθα τὴν πατάρβην.

<sup>111</sup> M. Jones 2005. When converted numerically, Charikleia's name totals 777. The number seven as well as the number ten, both associated with Charikleia, primarily ages seven and seventeen throughout the novel, held religious implications in antiquity (M. Jones 2005, 88-89).

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The pantarbe therefore signifies much of what was bound up in the understanding of ancient magic. The gem is naturally imbued with some kind of fire retardant ability, but it is more than that. It is marvelous; a naturally occurring stone which, for lack of another way to talk about it, is described as though it has human characteristics. Since Charikleia is the one to be able to use the stone, but only after someone has read over it the ‘incantation’ embroidered into her belt, it tells us something more about the place and nature of magic within society, or social constructions surrounding the use of magic. Charikleia can almost be seen as a magical being herself, but kept as she is on the plane of normal humans, her use of magic indicates that although there may have been some kind of stigma attached to the willful use of magic, there is nothing inherently wrong with instinctual magic. The magic she practices is a natural magic. She does seem to invoke the protection of the stone before her execution, it is nothing out of the ordinary. What her story, as well as descriptions of other stones, reveal is that ekphraseis of marvelous stones, their wondrous abilities, their anthropomorphosis, and indeed, the discussion of magic gems and amulets themselves all employ the vocabulary of magic. That is, they strive to make the fantastic understandable, and not only that, but attainable.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Gender, Identity, and Characterization**



In his account of how Charikles came to be the surrogate father of Charikleia, the narrator of Heliiodorus' *Aethiopika* describes how the former was approached in the marketplace in Egypt by an individual by the name of Sisimithres while purchasing various exotic goods to take with him on his return to Greece (2.30):

Καὶ ὅς ὑπὸ μάλης βαλαντίδιον ἔχων προκομίσσας ἐπεδείκνυε λίθων  
πολυτίμων ὑπερφυῆς τι χρῆμα· μαργαρίδες τε γὰρ ἐνήσαν εἰς καρύου  
μικροῦ μέγεθος εἰς κύκλον τε ἀκριβῶς ἀπαρτιζόμεναι καὶ λευκότητι  
πλείστον ἀγλαίζόμεναι σμάραγδοί τε καὶ ὑάκινθοι αἱ μὲν οἶα λήιον ἤρινόν  
χλοάζουσαι ἐλαιώδους τινὸς αὐτὰς λειότητος ὑπαυγαζούσης αἱ δὲ ἄ  
πεμιμούντο χροιάν † ἀκτῆς θαλαττίας † ὑπ' ἀγχιβαθεῖ σκοπέλω μικρὸν  
ὑποφριττούσης καὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον ἰαζούσης, καὶ ἀπλῶς συμμιγῆς τις ἦν  
πάντων καὶ ποικίλη μαρμαρυγὴ τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν εὐφραίνουσα.

Drawing out a small pouch that he carried beneath his arm he opened it to reveal an extraordinary array of precious stones: pearls the size of small nuts, perfectly round and gleaming with the purist white; emeralds and sapphires, the former as green as grass in springtime, glowing softly like olive oil, the later imitating the color of the sea in the shadow of a tall cliff, sparkling on the surface and exuding a deep violet from within. All of these gems, with their assortment of colors, were a vision to gladden the eye. But one glance was enough.

After drawing Charikles aside Sisimithres offers him wares that are “unadulterated” and “free of sharp dealing,” if only Charikles will not quibble over their price. Much to Charikles' chagrin, Sisimithres proffers an array of the most extraordinary gems varying in size, color and texture. Even more surprising to Charikles is that the stranger soon offers the gems to him at no cost, as a payment, in fact, for something far greater, the heroine Charikleia.

This episode, involving one of several ekphrastic descriptions of gems in the *Aethiopika*, is significant for several reasons.<sup>1</sup> The story, though it appears at the boundaries of this study, due to its imperial date, underscores an association between women and precious stones running throughout the ekphrastic discourse of gems that is apparent in Hellenistic epigrams nearly six

<sup>1</sup> On the role of ekphrasis in Heliiodorus see especially Bartsch 1989; Whitmarsh 2002; Hardie 1998.

centuries earlier. By carefully unraveling such descriptions, it becomes apparent that there exists a gendered distinction in the use of gems in the genres of epigram and the novel.

Within this paradigm three dominant trends emerge. First, by means of their description, women, such as Charikleia become assimilated with precious stones through the use of similar descriptive techniques, authorial focus on visual and tactile qualities, and occasionally through the emphasis of shared characteristics. In the case of Charikleia, as we soon discover, a direct correlation exists between her and the stones described at 2.30 due to the fact that the objects are her birth tokens and function as a marker of her identity. As the tale continues, Charikleia's assimilation to the gems is heightened by the author's continued praising of her radiant beauty and extraordinary purity (2.30, 31), qualities for which precious stones were also valued. In these descriptions, we also see attention drawn to the color and texture of the stones (i.e. λευκότητι, λειότητος) in a manner which underscores their optical and tactile qualities. A second trait of this gendered discourse of gems, is the continued eroticization and objectification of the women described. The narrator's treatment of the beauty of the gems as well as Charikleia's, draws our gaze to the heroine in a way that both eroticizes her (even in prepubescent state!) and frequently reduces her to the status of object. Through the author's overt objectification and reductivist manner of description, women like Charikleia become passive, "lithified" objects of a desiring and typically masculine gaze.<sup>2</sup> Finally, once women have been reduced to the status of objects by means of description, the tendency emerges to commodify them in the same manner as precious stones. As we will see, in the epigrammatic tradition, a gem is usually given in exchange for a glance or a kiss. In other cases, as in the *Aethiopika* (5.13-14), for example, the heroine, having

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<sup>2</sup> Here I refer to Steiner's (2001, 198) discussion of women described as artifacts. Of this phenomenon she states: "within the realm of verbal and visual representations, depicting a body in a manner that emphasizes its 'to-be-looked-at-ness,' which codes its appearance for strong visual and erotic impact, turns that body from autonomous subject into spectacle and signals its position as the passive 'lithified' object of the viewer's gaze."

been divested of her autonomy, is actually reduced to an object of exchange.

The use of precious stones in daily life and literary texts may be read as indicative of myriad social relationships. Some ekphraseis tend to draw attention to hyper-feminine characteristics of gems and their female owners by focusing on elements of beauty, sensuality, and eroticism. Such descriptions privilege the use of precious stones in the intimacy of a sympotic setting and thus provide a voyeuristic glimpse of gem use in a (semi-) private context. Other descriptions offer an alternate view of women and feminine personifications as models of modesty, chaste affection, and moderation in a public context. While there are definite contrasts between the two categories of representations of women and gem usage in literature, both can be reduced to types. In the former, women are presented as desirable objects for male visual consumption, akin to precious stones. The latter category, in contrast, projects an image of women that is simultaneously eroticized and masculine through its emphasis on autonomy, and virtues such as moderation and restraint.

I divide my discussion into five sections. In the first, I present an overview of the gendered use and conception of gems. Next, I offer a discussion of the treatment of gems and precious stones in Hellenistic and later Greek literature and show that there is a gendered distinction in the way in which gems belonging to women are described. In most cases ekphraseis of gemstones owned by women focus on the qualities of the gemstones and the manner in which the stone(s) came to be possessed, generally as gifts which held erotic significance. In contrast, the emphasis for stones belonging to men is on the imagery inscribed upon the stone and the significance of the iconography in relation to the owner. Finally, I will discuss how literary authors not only employ descriptions of gems worn by women to treat erotic or amatory themes, but also of stones bearing their images to offer a discussion of characterization.

## 5.1 Precious Stones and Seals as Markers of Identity

In Hellenistic epigrams and the Greek novel, the use and depiction of gemstones is sharply divided along gender lines. It appears that men and women might use the same types of precious stones, but for different purposes and often contained in different types of settings. Both genders, for example, might wear inscribed stones and intaglios, yet men appear to use them as seal rings for public functions whereas women wear them primarily as ornamentation. Outside of the literary tradition, however, limited evidence exists for the gendered use of gems and precious stones in the daily lives of ancient Greeks. The use of “feminine” devices on intaglios, as well as a few inscriptions that name women as owners, show that at least some women owned precious stones, though it is generally believed that “if gems and rings were worn by women it would probably be for their value as jewelry rather than for their use as signets.”<sup>3</sup>

From the period of their earliest use in ancient Greece, engraved gems and seal stones have served not only a decorative function as I have discussed in Chapter 3, but have also been used as symbols of identity and markers of authority.<sup>4</sup> The concept of sealing a space, place, object, letter or legal document with a seal, or *sphragis*, in lieu of a handwritten signature predates the use of writing in ancient Greece.<sup>5</sup> Such markers were often used to protect property, including the contents of one’s pantry as well as financial transactions.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, seals were

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<sup>3</sup> Boardman 2001, 236.

<sup>4</sup> Boardman 1970, 62-3. There is some debate, however, whether engraved stones were actually used as seal stones. Plantzos, for example, argues that sealings and impressions found in Hellenistic hoards were made from all-metal rings rather than intaglios (1999, 22). As Platt (2006) notes, this early usage may reflect Near Eastern influence. See also Bonner 1908. Others have suggested that the earliest rings were made of out worm-eaten wood (Boardman 1970, 428-30; Plantzos 1999, 18); Theoph. *Hist. of Plants* 6.1, Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusa* 426-8.

<sup>5</sup> Plantzos 1999, 18; Bonner 1908, 399. Numerous impressions dating to the Bronze Age have been found in Zakro. See, for example, Papadopoulos 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Bonner 1908, 399. Xen. *Resp. Laced.* vi.4, Aristoph. *Thesm.* 415. It has also been suggested that signet rings could

used to prove the authenticity of documents by verifying the identity of their writer in absentia and the fact that their contents remained confidential.<sup>7</sup> Such seals could also identify and even safeguard those who wore them.<sup>8</sup> Even when used by a proxy, a *sphragis* retained its sense of authority.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, seals could serve as markers of social relationships and personal obligations or affiliations. One might adopt the *sphragis* of his city-state, family, or political ally in order to signify his loyalty and in some cases shared authority.<sup>10</sup> The popularity of divine figures on engraved gemstones shows the extent to which individuals might use seals to express their affiliation with a particular deity. The bestowal of engraved stones as gifts or the exchange of intaglios could “bind people to each other.”<sup>11</sup> Breaking or forging a seal, therefore, not only carried legal consequences, but also moral implications.<sup>12</sup>

Due to their social and political importance, in the Archaic and Classical periods at

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be used officially as lots in a ballot (Plut. *Tim.* 31; *Iliad* 3.316, 7.175). Theognis’ *sphragis* serves as a useful literary example of the seal stone as a marker of property, see Pratt 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Letters, wills, contracts, and other official documents were often sealed. Thucydides 1.132; Sophocles *Trachinae* 614; Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis* 321; Lucian *Timon* 22.

<sup>8</sup> Platt 2006, 234. See: Aristophanes *Birds* 1210-1213; Aristophanes *Knights* 951-9; Sophocles *Electra* 1222-4; Menander *Epit.* 388-90; Plautus *Captivi* ii.3.90; Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 10.24.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch *Artax.* 18; Plautus, *Pseudolus* i.58.

<sup>10</sup> This could indicate the authority of an individual for whom the wearer might serve as a proxy, or in some instances it appears that the same seal was shared amongst family members as indicated in the elephantine island papyri, papyrus II, two brothers appeared to share the same seal (Plantzos 1993, 65). Seals could also function as symbols of state authority as in Aristotle *Ath. Pol.* 44.1.

<sup>11</sup> Plantzos 1993, 320; Platt 2006, 234. *The Song of Songs* 8.6, Pliny (*NH* 37.1.2), Diodorus Siculus (4.10.6), and Apollodorus (2.4.11) all tell of how Prometheus, after being freed from the Caucasian rock by Herakles, had to wear a ring as a marker of his punishment. Cf. Shakespeare *The Merchant of Venice* iv.i, v.i

<sup>12</sup> Platt 2006, 234. The concern for this is evident in the fact that Solon decreed that impressions of seals must be destroyed or incur a steep fine (Diogenes Laertius 1. 57; Diodorus Siculus 1.78; Bonner 1908, 400).

least, literary evidence suggests that seal stones seem to have been generally owned solely by men. Clytemnestra, for example, does not have a seal in the *Agamemnon*<sup>13</sup> and Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusa* (l. 425) suggests that women could only acquire seals by means of imitations or forgeries.<sup>14</sup> If women did possess *intaglios* at this time, as some inscriptions on rings suggest, it is believed that they were used primarily for decorative purposes.<sup>15</sup> It is unclear, however, if the ownership and use of signets was common among men. In Book one of Herodotus, the narrator appears to marvel that every Babylonian possessed a seal, implying perhaps that this was less common amongst the Greeks (1.195.2). In Aristophanes, jibes are made regarding wearers of seal rings, which might again suggest that this was an uncommon mark of luxury.<sup>16</sup> The exclusivity of seals, particularly those in expensive materials, may be further indicated by the large number of imitations in glass and glass paste that survive.

By the Hellenistic period, however, we have more evidence about seal usage and even indications that a few women possessed seals. In addition to information provided by *intaglios* from the Hellenistic world, a small number of hoards containing seal impressions from various archives throughout the Hellenistic world provide invaluable information.<sup>17</sup> One of the smallest hoards, the Elephantine Island papyri, from which only 35 sealings have been found, is of

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<sup>13</sup> Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 606-10, Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusa* 414-425, *Lysistrata* 1198.

<sup>14</sup> Phaedra, however, in Euripides' *Hippolytus* 864-5, had her own ring with which she sealed her letter to Hippolytus.

<sup>15</sup> Boardman 2001, 231, 236. Boardman also suggests that the use of "feminine devices" indicates that gems were at least worn as jewelry by some women.

<sup>16</sup> Aristophanes *Clouds* 331, *Assembly Women* 632. Cf. Xenophon's *Anabasis* 4.7.27, in which the Greek leader requests the rings (δακτυλίους) of his soldiers and receives several.

<sup>17</sup> Hoards of clay sealings have been found in Carthage, Selinus, Elephantine Island, Edfu, Cyrene, Nea Paphos, Doliche, Nikopolis, Palmyra, Alexandria at Issos, Orchoi, Seleucia on the Tigris, Kallipolis, Delos, and Titani. For an overview of Hellenistic archives see Plantzos 1999, 22-32.

particular use due to the fact that both seals and their documents have survived.<sup>18</sup> Little is known about the individuals whose signatures and seals are preserved in the Elephantine Island papyri. It is evident, however, that the names of at least two women appear accompanied by seals in the papyri. In a will dating ca. 285/4 B.C.E, a Greek woman from Temnos, by the name of Callista, is indicated as the heir to the property of her husband, Dionysos.<sup>19</sup> Her seal is included in the document along with 11 others, including those of her sons.<sup>20</sup> It is the other woman whose signature and seal are found in the Elephantine Island papyri, however, who has garnered more attention. This woman, by the name of Elaphaion, was likely a Syrian prostitute.<sup>21</sup> In two separate transactions (dating ca. 284/3 B.C.E.) with different *kyrioi*, the woman is recorded to have made *tropheia* or maintenance payments to two different men. Although a *kyrios* is listed in each case, it has been argued that the woman is surely not a slave and seemed to be her own master. While the two above examples provide compelling evidence for the use of seal stones by women, at least in the Hellenistic period, it is hardly representative. Both women are shown to be in positions in which their autonomy might be greater than that of other women at that time. In particular, the Syrian prostitute Elephaion, due to her profession and social standing, may have held greater freedom than other women of her time and therefore may not be representative of the use of seals by women in the Hellenistic period.<sup>22</sup>

The bulk of information regarding ancient Greek glyptic and particular seal usage,

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<sup>18</sup> On the Elephantine Island Papyri see: Rubensohn 1907, Porten 1996, Plantzos 1999, 24-26, Platt 2006 252 ff 12.

<sup>19</sup> Plantzos 1999, 24; Porten 1996, 412-13. For Dionysos' will see Rubensohn 1907, no. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Plantzos 1999, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Rubensohn 1907, 29; Porten 1996, 414-15.

<sup>22</sup> Hetaerae perhaps had greater access to gems and seal stones as suggested by Athenaius' *Deip.* 12.585.

however, comes not from hoardes or even burials but from the iconographical study of surviving gemstones and signet devices.<sup>23</sup> As I have discussed in Chapter 2, seal types, for the most part, include a limited variety of stock representations. In fact, the lack of variation in the types of imagery on seal stones has led Plantzos to call them “trivial and repetitive...hardly individual.”<sup>24</sup> In his assessment he continues to state that “excluding portraiture, the bulk of Hellenistic glyptic comes as a barely structured, anonymous, and often disparate mass of material.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, there appears to be a proliferation of stock types and generic images represented on intaglios which provides little information about their possible owner. This may be seen, for example, in the seal device of the Syrian prostitute, mentioned above, whose signet ring depicted an “elegant” female head with a popular “melon” hairstyle, seen frequently in representations of queens, especially Berenike I, although Plantzos has suggested earlier that the representation perhaps conveyed the ideal of the elegant woman that Elephaion desired to be.<sup>26</sup> Within the same hoarde of sealings, however, another individual, a man, appears to have had the same signet device suggesting that the engraving did not have personal significance.<sup>27</sup>

The seal devices of individuals of greater wealth, power, and fame, however, seem to indicate a more discernible relationship between iconography and owner. For example, the signet devices of some Hellenistic and Roman rulers are known. Seleukos’ seal bore an anchor, while

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<sup>23</sup> Even in such rich burials such as the royal tombs at Aegae, in which an abundance of jewelry was found, no intaglios or signet rings were found (Henig 1994, x). Boardman (2001, 236) additionally notes the dearth of comparative evidence for the examination of ancient Greek glyptic.

<sup>24</sup> Plantzos 1999, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Plantzos 1999, 66.

<sup>26</sup> Plantzos 1993, 119-20.

<sup>27</sup> Plantzos 1999, 26.



Augustus' at first bore an image of a phoenix, later the head of Alexander, and finally his own image.<sup>28</sup> The implications of Augustus' use of the figure of Alexander, as well as his own image, are quite clear, as are the possible connotations of an anchor or phoenix as symbols of stability and renewal. Hoards of sealings from Hellenistic archives further indicate that rulers and/or those acting on their behalf used royal portraits as their signet devices.<sup>29</sup> The correlation between signet device and the identity of Hellenistic and Roman rulers, however, is certainly the exception rather than the rule. Certainly more is known about these men and woman than the average individual.

I contend that, in most cases, for the average individual the possession and use of a seal, was just as important as the device carved upon it. As Platt discusses, an image on an engraved gemstone, even if not highly individualized, helps to mark out the relationship between the private individual and his or her public identity, though the connection to the owner may not be entirely explicit.<sup>30</sup> Thus, there was a certain power in signet rings and if the seal had personal significance, so much the better. The very names by which seals were called indicate the semantic value with which intaglios were endowed. In addition to the designation of *sphragis*, which could refer to both the seal and its impression,<sup>31</sup> seal stones could also be referred to as *sphragidia*, *sama/sema*, *semeia*, *semantra*, *semantria*, *symbola* and *tupia*.<sup>32</sup> The power of such inscribed stones is seen explicitly in a few images that self-reflexively play upon the ability of

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<sup>28</sup> Plantzos 1999, 22; Appian *Syr.* 285, Pliny *NH* 37.8, Suetonius *Oct.* 1.

<sup>29</sup> Plantzos 1993, 55.

<sup>30</sup> Platt 2006, 241.

<sup>31</sup> Plantzos 1999, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Platt 2006, 241; Kosmetatou 2003, 40.

the signet ring and its impression to represent the self. A scarab from the Archaic period, for example, states “I am the seal (sama) of Thersis, do not open me” (**Figure 5.1**).<sup>33</sup> Another stone, an engraved seal signed by Dexamenos, is shown to be a reflection of its owner. Depicted on it, is an image of a woman looking into a mirror which is held by a serving girl (**Figure 5.2**).<sup>34</sup> The gem is also inscribed with the owner’s name, *Mikē* in the genitive.<sup>35</sup> This image is by no means a portrait of the type used by ancient rulers, but it may indeed be said to be a reflection of its owner.



Fig. 5.1

Agate Scarab from Aegina. Late Archaic.



Fig. 5.2

Chalcedony scaraboid. “The Seal of Mikē.”  
Mid fifth century B.C.E.

<sup>33</sup> Boardman 1968, pl. 176; Plantzos 1999, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Platt 2006, 241; Boardman 2001, pl. 467. As critics, such as Bartch 2006, have shown, the mirror, like an engraved gem, can be a powerful symbol of identity and self-knowledge.

<sup>35</sup> Further, if we follow Henig’s argument, the form *Mikē* could be interpreted as the Doric form of *micros* thus serving as a pun on the size of the girl, as well as that of the gem (Henig 1994, 33).

What is clear regarding the usage of seal stones is that they had significant power in the public sphere and were generally used in an official capacity only by men. Although women might own intaglios and even be represented on them, as in Figure 5.2 above, they used them for public purposes only infrequently. As such, seal rings and their devices, which could in essence stand in for an individual, serve as potent symbols of a complex set of social relationships.<sup>36</sup>

## 5.2 The Gendered Use and Conception of Gems in Antiquity

In the ancient Greek world, gems and precious stones appear to have held significant gendered connotations in the way in which they were used and understood. Given the fact that the majority of ancient texts are written by men, it is perhaps not surprising that most sources prior to the Hellenistic period focus on the use of intaglios, pictorial gems, and rings by men. It should be noted, however, that such discussions represent a disproportionate treatment of the precious stones used in antiquity.<sup>37</sup> A large number of gems from antiquity in fact remained uncarved. With the wider availability of gems types from the furthest reaches of Alexander's empire in the Hellenistic period, precious stones were soon used to adorn a wider array of objects than before, such as necklaces, bracelets, and anklets. Women as well as men increasingly used such objects for personal embellishment as well as functionally as seal stones. If we are to believe ancient sources such as Pliny, it was preferable to have some stones, such as emeralds, uncarved, so that one could appreciate the stone's natural beauty.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Platt (2006, 250) has noted the personal and even physical relationship between a seal stone and its owner who not only wore the ring, but also had to lick the intaglio to make a clear impression. See also Plantzos 1999, 21. Cf. Ovid *Amores* 2.15, Lucian *Alexander*.

<sup>37</sup> Kuttner 2005, 142 ff 2.

<sup>38</sup> *NH* 37.1.

Moreover, in the very manner of their conception, it was believed by writers of ancient scientific treatises and technical manuals that some stones possessed gender. Thus masculine stones were thought to be harder, more vibrant and generally superior, whereas the feminine variety was believed to be softer, less lustrous in color and inferior.<sup>39</sup> According to some technical manuals and the works of early natural scientists, especially Theophrastus' *Lithika (de Lapidibus)*, the innate splendor of certain gems was due to the gender of the stone.<sup>40</sup> Building upon theories from the plant and animal kingdoms, as well as a system that posited that "maleness" was superior to "femaleness," it was held that the physical appearance of certain stones could indicate the gender of a stone. On the red stone called the *carbunculus*, for example, Pliny (37.93) states that:

praterea in omni genere masculi appellantur acriores et feminae languidius refulgentes. in masculis quoque observant liquidiores aut flammae nigrioris et quosdam ex alto lucidos at magis ceteris in sole flagrantes, optimos vero amethystizontas, hoc est quorum extremus igniculus in amethysti violam exeat

In each variety those are called "masculine," which are more brilliant in color, while those that have a weaker luster are called "feminine." Among the "masculine" it has been noted that some are clearer than usual or of a deep red hue, and some that reflect light from deep within and shine in the sun. The very best are the 'amethyst colored stones' namely those in which fiery red melds into amethyst-violet.

In the case of other stones, such as the *lynxurium* or lynx urine stone it was held that the best stones were made by wild lynxes, preferably male, as the male constitution was heartier, less moist, and overall preferable to that of the female.<sup>41</sup> Some stones of the same general type were

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<sup>39</sup> It was even believed that some "female" stones might give birth (Walton 2001, 265).

<sup>40</sup> Theophrastus *de Lap.* 28, 30-31; Pliny *NH* 37.33-34. See further Walton 2001, 264-66. A much later source, the *Cyranides*, suggests that this dichotomy can be extended to all stones (Walton 2001, 265).

<sup>41</sup> Theophrastus *de Lap.* 28.

divided by gender and given different names, such as the “sard,” of which the more transparent and “ruddier” stone is called a carnelian, while the darker stone is designated as a sard.<sup>42</sup> What the gendered distinction of gems highlights is the fact that they were distinguished largely by color and textures and thus for the ancient individual it was in large part the sensory experiences of sight and touch that dictated one’s experience with and understanding of gems.

### 5.3 Gender and Description of Gems

While women used engraved gems in an official capacity only infrequently, it is hardly surprising that in the ancient literary texts precious stones are frequently associated with women, both as gifts and forms of adornment. In literature ranging from Latin poetry to works of the modern period, gemstones and jewelry have been described almost exclusively as the concern of women.<sup>43</sup> In the few instances in which there are descriptions of gemstones belonging to men in antiquity, it is typically the imagery inscribed on the stone rather than the owner himself who is described. Additionally, when gemstones are described in connection with men, they often bring with them the charge of excess or effeminacy.<sup>44</sup> However, as has been well attested by Plantzos among others, gems and jewelry were worn by both men and women in ancient daily life. The frequent association of gems with women in ekphrastic literature is therefore noteworthy as a departure from reality. As I will discuss, there exists a gendered distinction in the manner in which gems and semi-precious stones are described in ekphrastic literature.

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<sup>42</sup> Theophrastus *de Lap.* 30; Eicholz 1979, 109.

<sup>43</sup> Athenaios *Deip.* 12.585, Juvenal *Satire* 2.83-4, *Satire* 6.563-6, Propertius 2.16.15-18, Tibullus I.6.25-6, Shakespeare *Two Gentlemen from Verona* iii.i (Dumb jewels often in their silent kind,/More than quick words do move a woman’s mind.).

<sup>44</sup> On gems as symbols of excess see Aristophanes *Clouds* 331; Lucian. *Gall, Nigr.* 1; Lucian *Ind.* 8-9. On gems and possible effeminate connotations see a homoerotic epigram by Asclepiades (*A.P.* 12.163). See further Sens 2011, 155-60.

This conceit is markedly present in the poems of Posidippus. Within the twenty poems of the *Lithika*, many of which are fragmentary, Poems three through seven explicitly refer to gems as gifts to be given to women. Additionally, several other poems in the corpus describe precious objects and shells (AB 11-12) that typically belonged to women and were perhaps used as toiletry items. Although such shells and marine ornaments are not always represented as adorning women, their descriptions are often evocative of the women who used such objects.<sup>45</sup> Although both men and women wore jewelry and inscribed gemstones in antiquity, in the ekphrastic tradition, when the gender of the wearer is mentioned, in most cases the wearers or recipients of gemstones were women. The settings used for stones by men and women also show a contrast. By and large, stones said to be owned by men in the literary tradition are generally either set in signet rings or cameos, both of which typically contain engravings. Women, on the other hand, seemed primarily to possess stones set in necklaces and bracelets, objects that were decorative rather than functional.

In Hellenistic epigram, in particular, women and precious stones become assimilated by means of description. This is illustrated, for example, in Posidippus' poem AB 7, which we have already encountered in an earlier chapter. Here we see that the female recipient of a gem, Nikonoe, is described in the same value-laden terms as those established for gems in Chapter 1:

ἐξ Ἀράβων τὰ ξάνθ' ὄ[ρωεν κατέρ]υτα κυλίων  
 εἰς ἄλα χειμάρρους ὦκ' [ἐφόρει ποτα]μὸς  
 τὸν μέλιτι χροίην λίθον εἴκελον, ὃν Κρονίο[υ] χεῖρ  
 ἔγλυψε· χρυσῶ σφιγκτ[ὸς ὄδε γλυκερῆ]  
 Νικονόη κάθεμα τρη[τὸν φλέγει, ἦ]ς ἐπὶ μαστῶ  
 συλλάμπει λευκῶ χρωτὶ μελιχρὰ φάη.

Rolling the yellow [rubble] from the Arabian  
 [mountains] to the sea, the winter-flowing [river]

<sup>45</sup> Kuttner 2005, 149-51.

swiftly [carried] the honey-colored gem which the hand of Cronius  
engraved. Now set in gold [it makes sweet]  
Nikonoe's inlaid necklace shine, as the honey-colored light  
glows on her white skin.

First of all, this epigram is significant in that it shows how the description of gems in many cases becomes closely related to, and inseparable from, the description of women. Like the river from which the gem, which Kuttner suggests is likely chrysoberyl or topaz, originates, there is a fluid continuation between the description of the gem and the woman who wears it.<sup>46</sup> Synaesthetic, haptic, and visual associations are combined through the close association of color and texture. The stone's repeated comparison to texture suggests not a hard stone, but rather an object of soft, malleable texture. By means of their contiguity the boundary between the hard stone and soft body is diminished. If we accept the supplement in line four of γλυκερῆ, the term may also refer to the recipient's sweet nature.<sup>47</sup> Just as the gems that we have encountered so far which have sensuous and visually stimulating properties, so too do the women who own them. The honey colored gem which has a radiance of its own also lights up the delicate skin of its wearer and contrasts with the whiteness of her flesh as the colors meld into one another.

Furthermore, just as many of the gems described in epigrams are shown to have exotic origins, many of the women to whom gems are given are shown to be exotic as well. In poem AB 5, for example, a lapis lazuli is given to Nicaia of Cos and in poem AB 4 a grey stone is given to Mandene, a woman who was likely Persian.<sup>48</sup> Women, like gems, are shown to be from the various regions of Alexander's empire.

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<sup>46</sup> Kuttner 2005, 159.

<sup>47</sup> Bing 2005, 126.

<sup>48</sup> Bastianini and Gallazi 2001, 113.

The women described in such poems, like the gems themselves, are frequently objectified, becoming the passive focus of the viewer's/reader's voyeuristic gaze. Just as in ekphrastic descriptions of gems, the description of the woman is often incomplete, we may have the details of her name, just as we sometimes are presented with the name of a particular type of gem, and we receive a few details of her appearance. She is reduced from a whole to merely a selection of her parts. In poem AB 7 the gem as well as its recipient, Nikonoe, is described with a languorous sensuality which perhaps imitates the manner in which the viewer's gaze might linger over the luminous gem resting delicately on its female owner, all of which stands in contrast to the rushing movement of the river described at the beginning of the poem.

Two other poems from the collection (AB 10-11) do not explicitly represent women using gems, yet through the description of the semi-precious stones and seashells which were typically part of women's cosmetics and bathing accoutrements, the women that used them cannot help but be recalled. As Kuttner states:

Women would dream of holding these exotic new 'Indian' versions of a now standard possession, male readers of seeing (and smelling) naked women at toilette—a favored Hellenistic image in the visual arts. Pale curved bodies begemmed, their nacreous, suggestively exposed interiors (for moist things, and to moisten), are metonymic for users' damp jeweled flesh: spreading (warm, white) impressed wax that develops that sensuality.<sup>49</sup>

Such descriptions are commensurate with a number of surviving Classical and Hellenistic gems depicting nude or partially clad women. Scenes of women at the bath, (dis)robing (**Figure 5.3**), and reclining while partially nude (**Figure 5.4**) seem to have been extremely popular.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kutter 2005, 150-1.

<sup>50</sup> At least 22 such representations dating to the fifth and fourth centuries are documented in Boardman 2001: pl. 482, 483, 547, 549-551, 584-5, 592-95, 609, 634, 684, 689, 706, 710-12, 725, and 1043. A smaller number of gems more boldly depict amorous pursuits by showing men and women coupling, as on Boardman 2001, pl. 552, 1065. As Henig (1994) states it is unclear whether or not such representations would have also functioned as signet rings.



The context of several of the poems supplies an element of eroticism. Aside from descriptions that recall women's toilettes, many of the poems describing gems that belong to women have a sympotic setting (AB 4-7), a frequent locus of amatory exchange.<sup>51</sup> This sense of



**Fig. 5.3**

Scaraboid. Woman (un)dressing.  
Classical



**Fig. 5.4**

Scaraboid. Woman reclining.  
Classical

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<sup>51</sup> The sympotic context becomes more apparent when poems AB 4-7 are compared to descriptions of cups in AB 2 and 3.

intimacy, is evoked further when we recall that many of these precious stones were quite small and thus their viewing would require some degree of intimacy.<sup>52</sup> In this way, the circle of viewers who have access to a gem is frequently limited to the owner and those privileged enough to be his or her intimates. This sense of familiarity and eroticism may be seen more explicitly in Posidippus' AB 5:

Τιμάνθης ἔγλυψε τὸν ἀστερόεντα σάπειρον  
τόνδε χρυσίτην Περσικὸν ἡμίλιθον  
Δημύλω· ἀνθ' ἀπαλοῦ δὲ φιλήματος ἡ κυανόθριξ  
δῶρον Ν[ι]καίῃ Κώια ἔδ[εκτ' ἐρατόν.]

Timanthes engraved this sparkling lapis lazuli,  
this Persian semi-precious stone flecked with gold,  
for Demylus, and for a tender kiss the dark-haired  
Nicaea of Cos [accepted it as a desirable] gift.

Whereas erotic elements are implied in many descriptions of gems in AB 3-7 through the attention to women's appearance, here the amatory element is explicit through the reference that the object, a lapis lazuli, given to Nicaia is in exchange for a kiss.<sup>53</sup> The implication is twofold. Either the object was given as a lover's gift, suggested by the fact that the kiss is tender (ἀπαλοῦ), or there is a possibility, supported by the sympotic context of many such epigrams as AB 5, that the woman to whom the gem is given is a hetaera. Kisses or "erotic possession of a slave or hetaera" were frequent prizes for the sympotic game of kottabos.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, in

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<sup>52</sup> Platt 2006, 237.

<sup>53</sup> This is perhaps not surprising. As Plantzos (1999, 109) has noted, even in antiquity rings and gems were common gifts "for lovers." Platt (2006, 2007) has noted this association and its visual manifestation as evidenced by the popularity of images of *Eros* depicted on engraved gemstones.

<sup>54</sup> Csapo and Miller 1991, 379. As Rosen (1989, 357) notes, cakes, too, were frequent prizes in the sympotic game as well. The assimilation between gems and kisses is intriguing, especially given the ephemeral nature of kisses in contrast to permanent, durable nature of stones.

later literature, both Greek and Latin, gems are favorite gifts for courtesans.<sup>55</sup> Yet in parts of the Hellenistic world, such as Macedon, there was not such a social distinction between courtesans, concubines, and wives.<sup>56</sup> In Alexandria, too, noble women frequently held amatory associations; “in art, cult, and poetry, Ptolemaic ideology offered queens to public (eroticized) fantasy.”<sup>57</sup> Several Ptolemaic queens, for example, associated themselves with Aphrodite/Isis.<sup>58</sup>

Another important point that AB 5 raises, which is central to the study of gems and gender in epigrams as well as later prose, is their dedicatory nature. In most instances in which gemstones are described, they are gifts given to women. In poems AB 4, 5, and 6 precious and semi-precious stones are explicitly gifts (δῶρον, δωρητός). Several poems mark the performative act of gift exchange through their imitation of the conventions of dedicatory epigrams. In poem AB 3 a direct address is given to the recipient to “graciously receive it [a shining ruby] in the banquet” (ἐν δαίτη, πότνια, τόνδε δέχου). If we accept δέχου in conjunction with the direct address πότνια, we can see aspects of the text that are similar to countless dedicatory epigrams and inscriptions. Dedicatory elements are marked in other poems as well, such as in AB 5 in which we find the artist’s name given in the nominative followed by a form of the verb γλύπτειν, and the patron given in the dative (Δημύλω). The dedicatory act is further marked by the verb ἔδεκτε, again imitating dedicatory inscriptions. The poem, much like a commemorative inscription, gives all the relevant information needed to mark the event: engraver, patron, and recipient. As we saw in Chapter 1, similar information was frequently

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<sup>55</sup> See for example Atheneus 13.585; Lucian *Dialogues of Courtesans*; Gilhuly 2009; Davidson 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Kuttner 2005, 162; Ogden 2011, 221.

<sup>57</sup> Kuttner 2005, 162.

<sup>58</sup> Kuttner 2005, 162.

carved on gems as well. Such an ideology is reinforced through the use of gems as love gifts, many of which were inscribed “remember (me).”<sup>59</sup>

In contrast, instances in which gems are described in poetry as belonging exclusively to men are exceedingly rare. When they are represented in ekphrastic literature, the elements that are emphasized show important variations. One example from Hellenistic epigrams is to be found in Posidippus’ poem AB 8. Although this poem has already been addressed in an earlier chapter it is worth reconsidering due to its parallels with later prose material.<sup>60</sup> In addition to the other reasons for which this gem and its description have been said to be remarkable, it is noteworthy due to its opening lines, which state explicitly that the gem never adorned a woman:

οὐτ’ ἀυχὴν ἐφόρησε τὸ σάρδιον οὔτε γυναικῶν  
 δάκτυλος, ἠρτήθη δ’ εἰς χρυσέην ἄλυσιν  
 Δαρεῖον φορέων ὁ καλὸς λίθος—ἄρμα δ’ ὑπ’ αὐτὸν  
 γλυφθὲν ἐπὶ σπιθαμῆν μήκεος ἐκτέταται—  
 [φ]έγγος ἔνερθεν ἄγων· κα[ι] ἀμύνεται ἄνθρ[α]κας Ἰνδοῦς  
 αὐγαῖς ἐξ ὀμαλοῦ φωτὸς ἐλεγχόμενος·  
 [τρις]πίθαμον περίμετρον· ὁ καὶ τέρας, εἰ πλατὺν ὄγκον  
 [ ἔνδοθε]ν ὑδρηλ[ῆ] μὴ διαθεῖ νεφέλη.

No woman’s throat or finger ever wore  
 this carnelian, but it was suspended on a golden chain,  
 a lovely gem with Darius on it, and under him  
 his chariot is engraved, stretching out to the length of a span, shining  
 as if lit from within. And with rays of uniform radiance  
 it defeats the rubies of India, when put to the test.  
 The circumference measures [three] spans. And it’s quite a wonder that  
 no cloudy discoloration dulls the stone from within.

Unlike the previous gemstones described by Posidippus, this carnelian stands alone in its decidedly masculine iconography and use. First of all, its size distances it from other gems used

<sup>59</sup> Cf. AP 9.221 in which a depiction of Eros on a signet ring is described.

<sup>60</sup> See further Kosmetatou 2003; Kuttner 2005.

by women. It is no small or delicate object, but rather it is enormous—the image on it alone is said to be the length of a span, the type of which would likely have been attached to a chain and worn as a pectoral or perhaps suspended from a wall.<sup>61</sup> The image depicted on the stone, Darius III on an engraved chariot, is more closely associated with typical Hellenistic masculine iconography and brings to mind especially the well known Alexander mosaic found at Pompeii dating ca. 100 B.C.E. In contrast to the stones described in AB 3-7, the carnelian represented in AB 8 is described in terms that are more agonistic than amatory. For as the poet makes clear, the gem “defeats” (l. 5) those of similar types for other regions. The use of ἀμύνεται and ἐλεγχόμενος is significant as they have the connotation of defense and confrontation, not only in terms of the superiority of stone that they describe, but also the poem in which these terms are contained.<sup>62</sup> Through the poet’s description of the artistic representation, the image is frozen in time and serves as a monument to Alexander’s victory.<sup>63</sup> AB 9, perhaps also a carnelian, further illustrates this masculine paradigm. Although fragmentary, AB 9 clearly depicts Polycrates’ engraved stone with particular reference to its signet device, a lyre.<sup>64</sup>

#### 5.4 Gender and Ekphrastic Description in Heliodorus

Later authors also participated in the type of ekphrastic discourse illustrated above. Well beyond the Hellenistic period, both epigrammatists and a small number of prose writers incorporated treatment of gemstones into their works, not the least of whom was Heliodorus,

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<sup>61</sup> Kuttner 2005, 153.

<sup>62</sup> Kosmetatou 2003, 38.

<sup>63</sup> Kosmetatou 2003, 37; Kuttner 2005, 152-6.

<sup>64</sup> Kuttner 2005, 155. See further Chapter 2.

author of the *Aethiopika*, who picks up on this gendered treatment of gems through his use of description in his novel. As we have already seen, ekphrasis is a repeated device utilized by the author throughout the work,<sup>65</sup> yet it is his descriptions of gems that become particularly significant to the interpretation of the novel's heroine, Charikleia, as well as to our understanding of the novel itself. Some of the most important events and ekphraseis throughout the novel involve the representations of gems and ornamentation, which are described with specific reference to Charikleia.

Not only was the novel's heroine offered to Charikles alongside a dazzling array of precious stones but, as we have seen, as a young woman, the heroine receives her birth tokens which included a band embroidered in Ethiopian royal script as well as a ring: "engraved all around with the royal crest and set with a pantarbe." It is noteworthy that the stone is set in a ring and bears a signet device. Thus, it would have functioned in the same way as many of the signet rings discussed above. In 8.11, this same ring, which possesses magical powers, saves Charikleia's life by protecting her from being burnt alive at the hands of the Persians. Finally, in 10.14, when the heroine and her companions have finally reached Ethiopia, the same ring, once again, along with the embroidered band, serve as symbols of her identity.

Perhaps the most elaborate description of a precious stone in the *Aethiopika* is that of an amethyst centrally located in Book five. I have discussed earlier the imagery inscribed upon the stone, but here I would like to elaborate upon other aspects of the stone's appearance that are pertinent to the understanding of Charikleia's character (5.13):

Ταῦτά σοι ἔφη λύτρα Χαρικλείας, ὧ Νουσίκλεις, οἱ θεοὶ δι' ἡμῶν προσάγουσι. καὶ ἅμα ἐνεχείριζε δακτύλιόν τινα τῶν βασιλικῶν ὑπερφύεσ τι χρῆμα καὶ θεσπέσιον, τὸν μὲν κύκλον ἠλέκτρῳ διάδετον ἀμεθύσῳ δὲ

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<sup>65</sup> See especially Bartsch 1989, Hardie 1998, and Whitmarsh 2002 on the role of ekphrasis in Heliodorus.

Αἰθιοπικῆ τὴν σφενδόνην φλεγόμενον, μέγεθος μὲν ὅσον ὄμμα παρθενικὸν περιγραφῆ κάλλος δὲ μακρῶ τῆς Ἰβηρίδος τε καὶ Βρεττανίδος ὑπερφερούση· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀδρανεῖ τῶ ἄνθει φοινίσσεται καὶ ῥόδῳ προσέοικεν ἐκ καλύκων ἄρτι πρὸς πέταλα σχιζομένῳ καὶ πρῶτον ἠλιακαῖς ἀκτῖσιν ἐρευθομένῳ. ἀμεθύσου δὲ Αἰθιοπίδος ἀκραιφνῆς μὲν καὶ ἐκ βάθους ἐαρινή τις ὥρα πυρσύεται· εἰ δὲ κατέχων περιτρέποις ἀκτῖνα προσβάλλει χρυσὴν οὐκ ἀμαυροῦσαν τραχύτητι τὴν ὄψιν ἀλλὰ φαιδρότητι περιλάμπουσαν· οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ δύναμις αὐτῆ γνησιωτέρα τῶν ἐκ δύσεων ἐγκαθίδρυται, οὐ γὰρ ἐπιψεύδεται τὴν προσηγορίαν ἀλλ’ ἀληθῶς ἀμέθυσος τῶ φέρωντι γίνεται, νηφάλιον ἐν τοῖς συμποσίοις διαφυλάττουσα.

“Nausikles, this is the price of Charikleia’s ransom,” he said, “which the gods grant to you through me.” Speaking, he placed in Nauskles’ hands one of the royal rings. It was extraordinary and awe inspiring, with its hoop inlaid with amber and its bezel aglow with an Ethiopian amethyst the size of a maiden’s eye, and surpassing in beauty the amethysts of Spain and Britain, in which the purple bloom is pale and dilute like buds just beginning to flower and show its color for the first time in the sunlight, but from the very core of the amethyst a certain spring-like radiance shines forth. If you hold one, turning it in your hands, it sends forth a golden ray that does not overwhelm the eye with harshness, but rather illuminates it with brilliance. Furthermore it possesses a power more genuine than in the stones of the west: its name does not belie its nature, it is truly *amethystus* “proof against intoxication,” warding off drunkenness at drinking parties.

The object that is described is not only traded in exchange for the heroine’s freedom, but in many ways is emblematic not only of the heroine herself but also of the novel.<sup>66</sup> This is an exchange which mimics the deal made between Cnemon and Calasiris for the story of Charikleia and Theagenes.<sup>67</sup> As the passage demonstrates, the stone, which is described at length, is shown to be valuable due to its unique (Ethiopian) origins, and beauty, which surpasses even the best amethysts, which typically came from Britain or Spain.<sup>68</sup> As any reader of the novel

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<sup>66</sup> Hardie (1998, 28) discusses this amongst other examples of “ekphrastic surrogacy,” instances in which the text fails to differentiate art and reality. Whitmarsh (1998, 2) notes that Charikleia is a figure who is intimately tied up with works of art, reminding us that from the moment of her conception her identity is related to that of a painting.

<sup>67</sup> Winkler 1982, 110 n. 22. The scene is also comparable to 2.30.2 in which Sisimithres offers a range of precious stones and eventually Charikleia to Calasiris.

<sup>68</sup> Heliodorus may also be attempting to assert the superiority of his Ethiopian novel.

can recognize, Charikleia is repeatedly praised throughout the novel for many of these same qualities. Like Charikleia, the gem is a victor in “a beauty contest.”<sup>69</sup> The gem is also noted for its remarkable scale: it is said to be the size of a maiden’s eye, thus making the gem an appropriate counterpart to the novel, which is also grand in scale, consisting of ten books. The intricacy of the ring similarly imitates the novel’s plot with its beginning *in medias res* and complex movements through time and space.<sup>70</sup> As has already been discussed in a previous chapter, the gem is also elaborately engraved, a fact which would appear to stand in juxtaposition to other precious stones owned by women. The iconography of the amethyst in *Aethiopika* 5.13-14, however, is of a different nature than inscribed gems used by men, such as AB 8.

By means of this complex description I suggest that Heliodorus is drawing upon a discourse of ekphrastic descriptions of gems and playing with conventions of gender. The ekphrasis is meant to reflect Charikleia’s character and physical appearance. She, like the ring, is exceedingly beautiful, and of Ethiopian origins. Yet, the ring itself is similar to those typically described as belonging to men (cf. Posidippus AB 8). Its description is unusual in that it refers directly only to the object, rather than the woman who owns/ed it, yet the relationship between the gem and owner is implicit. Unlike Posidippus’ Poems 3 through 7, Charikleia, rather than receiving a gemstone as a gift, is offered in exchange for the gem as the price for her freedom.

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<sup>69</sup> Hardie (1993, 28). As Hardie states, Charikleia is judged to be even more beautiful than Theagenes (3.4.1). Further, as Hardie notes, the same term is used for the beauty of the gem as well as for Charikleia (ἀκραίφνης / ἀκραίφνης 3.4)

<sup>70</sup> Bartsch 1989 says relatively little about the stone, yet argues that it is due to its intricacy that it receives its value (149); see also Bowie 1995.



## 5.5 Portraiture and Characterization on Engraved Stones

In contrast to the private (or semi-private) representations of women on and in association with precious stones as seen above, in this section I offer a discussion of images of women on gemstones intended for public consumption which were found primarily on portrait intaglios and, later, cameos. Unlike the precious stones described in the previous section, portrait intaglios, especially those of rulers, were often meant for wide distribution.<sup>71</sup> In many cases the emphasis of such glyptic and literary portraits was not always to praise the physical appearance of individual portrayed, but rather her character. Although initially this might seem at odds with certain ideals of portraiture and much the ekphrastic literature discussed so far, artists and writers appeared to use such strategies to particular advantage in creating public imagery.

In the Hellenistic period, as Zanker has discussed, ekphraseis of character were perhaps just as popular as those of works of art.<sup>72</sup> In some cases the two types were difficult to distinguish. Although writers of rhetorical handbooks from the first century C.E. onward placed ekphrasis and description of character (*ethopoiia*) in different categories within the *Progymnasmata*, critics have recognized the fact that these distinctions were often blurred.<sup>73</sup> Zanker suggests that an interest in characterization as defined by a consideration of character (*ethos*) and intellect (*dianoia*) is apparent in epigrammatic poetry from the high Hellenistic period.<sup>74</sup> The two elements were not only blurred, but often combined to great effect. Ekphrasis,

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<sup>71</sup> Plantzos 1999, 62.

<sup>72</sup> Zanker 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Hermogenes, a 2nd century C.E. writer of rhetorical handbooks, places *ethopoiia* in a separate category from ekphrasis. See further Webb 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Zanker 2007. Zanker notes that the majority of epigrammatic poems that display an interest in character come from Meleager's *Garland*. See also Webb 2009.

according to Theon, is a descriptive speech that brings the thing shown vividly before the eyes (ἔκφρασις ἐστὶ λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον).<sup>75</sup> What is brought before the eyes can be anything: time, space, objects, people, and I would argue, also character. In these instances, I suggest that visual impact is not so much an end itself, but rather serves to heighten the representation of character. In the post-Classical era there were collections such as Theophrastus' *Characters* and Posidippus' *Tropoi*, which provided detailed character sketches of types of individuals. Prior to Theophrastus, declaimers of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. in Athens frequently choose women from epic and tragedy as their topics. This occurs in Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* as well.<sup>76</sup> This practice continued well into the fifth century C.E. with texts by Hermogenes treating similar topics. As I will show, descriptions of works of art, and in particular precious stones, presented authors with a similar opportunity to describe aspects of women's character and perhaps could have been instructive.

Ancient Greek portraiture did not appear in the glyptic arts prior to the Hellenistic period.<sup>77</sup> Fortunately, ancient Greek portraits, primarily in the form of royal likenesses, have survived in large numbers, especially those bearing representations of Ptolemaic kings and queens.<sup>78</sup> Second only to depictions on coins, images engraved on seal stones provide some of the best examples of royal imagery intended for widespread circulation.<sup>79</sup> Unlike other art forms, surviving intaglios bear more images of Ptolemaic queens than kings and thus provide a rare

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<sup>75</sup> Theon *Progymnasmata*.

<sup>76</sup> On female characterization in Greek declamation see Hawley 1995.

<sup>77</sup> Plantzos 1999, 42.

<sup>78</sup> As Smith (1988, 14) notes there are some images from this period of high-ranking Macedonian officials.

<sup>79</sup> Smith 1988, 14.

opportunity to examine public images of women at this time.<sup>80</sup> Royal portraits of this period frequently demonstrated a combination of realistic and idealized modes of representation.<sup>81</sup> The goal, in such instances, was not necessarily verisimilitude but rather to present recognizable images of power and continuity.<sup>82</sup> For example, several images of Berenike II from the mid-third century B.C.E. depict the queen in a life-like manner (**Figure 5.5**). In these portraits, the queen is shown in profile wearing a characteristic “melon” hairstyle and with a strong nose and fleshy chin in order to promote ideas of dynastic continuity by focusing on family traits.<sup>83</sup> Other images,



**Fig. 5.5**

Portrait of Berenike II signed by Nikandros. Hellenistic.

however, might be more idealized in order to remind the viewer that Hellenistic monarchs were often worshipped as a part of ruler cult, some of whom were even deified during their lifetimes. Arsinoe II, for example, was associated with Hera and Aphrodite during her life. Whether

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<sup>80</sup> Plantzos 1999, 42.

<sup>81</sup> Plantzos 1999, 42.

<sup>82</sup> Plantzos 1999, 49.

<sup>83</sup> It may have also been imitating the official imagery of Berenike I and Arsinoe II.

unflattering or idealized, both schema tended to reduce female portraits to types which focused on the representation of particular attributes.

Ekphraseis of women or female personifications on engraved gemstones appear to focus on characteristics such as moderation and restraint.<sup>84</sup> One of the earliest such descriptions of character may be seen in an epigram by Asclepiades, a contemporary of Posidippus.<sup>85</sup> In this epigram describing an amethyst, which nicely dovetails with Heliodorus' choice of the amethyst as a chaste, and sober stone as seen above, the material of the stone itself is meaningful and reflects positively upon its patron (*AP* 9.752):

εἰμὶ Μέθη, τὸ γλύμμα σοφῆς χερὸς, ἐν δ' ἀμεθύστῳ  
γέγλυμμαι· τέχνης δ' ἢ λίθος ἀλλοτρίη.  
ἀλλὰ Κλεοπάτρης ἱερὸν κτέαρ, ἐν γὰρ ἀνάσσης  
χειρὶ θεὸν νήφειν καὶ μεθύουσαν ἔδει.

I am Drunkenness, the engraving of a skilled hand, but I've been  
engraved in amethyst. The stone is contradictory to its ornamentation.  
But the sacred object belongs to Cleopatra, for on the queen's hand,  
even a drunken goddess must be sober.

This poem describes an amethyst ring that belonged to Queen Cleopatra, sister of Alexander the Great (if the poem was written by Asclepiades),<sup>86</sup> engraved with a personification of the figure Methe, or drunkenness.<sup>87</sup> As Gutzwiller notes, the object described is of interest due to

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<sup>84</sup> I have found few images of a female figure on a gem that treat women lacking control or restraint. The closest example may be the figure of a woman wearing excessive jeweled ornamentation in Lucian's *de Domo*. In this case over abundant personal adornment is equated with excessive verbal embellishment in speech.

<sup>85</sup> It is debated whether this epigram was written by Asclepiades of Samos or Antipater of Thessalonica. Gutzwiller 1995 and Sens 2011 favor the former.

<sup>86</sup> If, however, the poem was written by Antipater of Thessalonica, the woman described in the epigram is likely Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Cleopatra VII and Antony.

<sup>87</sup> As both Gutzwiller 1995 and Sens 2001 point out, the figure of Methe may have also had particular significance for the Alexandrian royal family, which, following Alexander the Great, displayed an interest in Dionysiac cult.

the seeming conflict between the gemstone itself, whose color resembles wine, and the figure inscribed on it, which is “resolved in favor of sobriety when the ring is placed upon the hand of the queen. The epigram thus functions as a compliment to a royal patron.”<sup>88</sup> In this way, the poem sets in stone one of the desirable traits of a noble woman and recalls the use of the amethyst as a stone representative of Charikleia in the *Aethiopica*. Unlike the poems above by Posidippus (AB 3-7), which provide descriptions that focus on the sensual details of the gem and the woman to whom it has been given, here we have an ekphrasis that lingers over the nature of the object described and its relation to the owner’s character. Of interest are the contradictions between the stone itself, amethyst, the artist, and the image inscribed upon it, all of which stand in contrast to Posidippus’ poems, which focus instead on the similarities between stones and poetry. As Gutzwiller discusses, only on the hand of the temperate Queen Cleopatra, does Methé yield to moderate behavior.<sup>89</sup> In this way, the poem both praises the queen and briefly treats an aspect of her character. As Sens argues, the combination of medium and subject matter may also serve as a testament to the craftsman’s skill.<sup>90</sup> “Cleopatra’s decision to commission and wear an image of Drunkenness on a stone that presents inebriation implicitly illustrates her self-control, and the poem thus subtly equates sobriety with σοφία.”<sup>91</sup>

A similar association between a female figure and the representation of character may be seen in an epigram by Addaios. In this poem the figure of Galene, a popular image on Hellenistic engraved gems (**Figure 5.6**), is described.<sup>92</sup> Throughout the course of the poem, the goddess of

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<sup>88</sup> Gutzwiller 1995.

<sup>89</sup> Gutzwiller 1995.

<sup>90</sup> Sens 2011, 300.

<sup>91</sup> Sens 2011, 301.

<sup>92</sup> See Furtwängler 1900, pl. XXXV.13, Plantzos 1999, 89-90. On the figure of Galene in literature see Hesiod

calm tells how she came to be inscribed on a gem by means of first-person narration similar to that above by Asclepiades (*A.P.* 9.544):



**Fig. 5.6**

Engraved gem depicting Galene (or Selene?). Hellenistic.

Ἴνδῆν βήρυλλον με Τρύφων ἀνέπεισε Γαλήνην  
εἶναι, καὶ μαλακαῖς χερσὶν ἀνῆκε κόμας·  
ἦνίδε καὶ χεῖλη νοτερὴν λειοῦντα θάλασσαν,  
καὶ μαστοὺς, τοῖσιν θέλγω ἀνηνεμίην.  
ἦν δέ μοι ἢ φθονερὴ νεύση λίθος, ὡς ἐν ἐτοίμῳ  
ᾠρημαί, γνώση καὶ τάχα νηχομένεν.

Tryphon persuaded me, the Indian beryl, to be Galene,  
the goddess of Calm, and with his soft hands he  
unbound my hair. Look at my lips smoothing the watery  
sea, and my breasts with which I charm the calm  
waves. If the envious stone would but consent, you would  
soon see me swimming, as I am eager to do.

Like the amethyst in Asclepiades' poem (*A.P.* 9.752), Addaeus plays on the nature of the stone's material, its iconography as well as artistry.<sup>93</sup> According to Pliny (*NH* 37.20) "berylli...are most

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*Theogony* 244; Euripides *Helen* 1457-64; Athenaius *Deipn.* 7.301d; *A.P.* 5.156; Lucian *D. Mar.* 5.

<sup>93</sup> The gem is said to be inscribed by Tryphon. A cameo from the imperial period is ascribed to a Tryphon as artist, but it is unclear whether the maker of the cameo is the same artist of Addaius' poem; see Plantzos 1999, 89 n. 182.

esteemed which are the color of a sea green (likely aquamarine), the color of the sea when it is calm.” Galene’s description combines elements from epigrams by Posidippus and writers from the *Greek Anthology* through its focus on physical characteristics such as hair, breasts, and lips, all of which lend an aura of sensuality to the description and evoke erotic and amatory associations similar to those found in Posidippus’ AB 3-7. The tactile and sensory elements of the artist’s soft hands (μαλακάϊς χερσὶν) and Galene’s lips “smoothing” (λειοῦντα) the sea, emphasize further the sensual nature of the description. The medium for the image helps to convey the sense of restraint shown by the goddess of calm, for, were it not for the gem’s bezel, the goddess would swim free of her setting.

This same type of description can be similarly seen in the prose narratives of the novelists. We find a key example of such a description in Book 3 of the *Aethiopika* by Heliodorus (3.4.1-5), in which the heroine’s breast band is described. Here we are presented with a detailed treatment of Charikleia’s elaborate breast band depicting two snakes intertwining under her bosom and draping down her side (3.4). In this description, discussed also in Chapter 2, much like the gems treated by Posidippus, the attention to sensuous detail ought to be noted:

Ἦγετο μὲν γὰρ ἐφ’ ἀρμαμάξης ἀπὸ συνωρίδος λευκῆς βοῶν ἠνιοχουμένη, χιτῶνα δὲ ἀλουργὸν ποδήρη χρυσαῖς ἀκτίσι κατάπαστον ἠμφίεστο, ζώνην δὲ ἐπεβέβλητο τοῖς στέρνοις· καὶ ὁ τεχνησάμενος εἰς ἐκείνην τὸ πᾶν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ τέχνης κατέκλεισεν, οὔτε πρότερόν τι τοιοῦτον χαλκευσάμενος οὔτε αὐθις δυνησόμενος. δυοῖν γὰρ δρακόντων τὰ μὲν οὐραῖα κατὰ τῶν μεταφρένων ἐδέσμευε τοὺς δὲ αὐχένας ὑπὸ τοὺς μαζοὺς παραμείψας καὶ εἰς βρόχον σκολιὸν διαπλέξας καὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς διολισθήσαι τοῦ βρόχου συγχωρήσας, ὡς περίπτωμα τοῦ δεσμοῦ κατὰ πλευρὰν ἑκατέραν ἀπηώρησεν. εἶπες ἂν τοὺς ὄφεις οὐ δοκεῖν ἔρπειν ἀλλ’ ἔρπειν, οὐχ ὑπὸ βλοσυρῶ καὶ ἀπηνεῖ τῶ βλέμματι φοβερούς ἀλλ’ ὑγρῶ κώματι διαρροέμενους ὥσπερ ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ τὰ στέρνα τῆς κόρης ἡμέρου κατευναζομένου. οἱ δὲ ἦσαν τὴν ὕλην χρυσοῖ τὴν χροῖαν δὲ κυανοῖ, ὁ γὰρ χρῦσος ὑπὸ τῆς τέχνης ἐμελαίνετο ἵνα τὸ τραχὺ καὶ μεταβάλλον τῆς φολίδος τῶ ξανθῶ τὸ μελανθές κραθὲν ἐπιδείξηται. τοιαύτη μὲν ἡ ζώνη τῆς κόρης.

She [Charikleia] rode in a carriage drawn by a pair of yoked white oxen was dressed in a long purple gown embroidered with golden rays. Under her bosom she wore a cincture of gold; the man who had crafted it had bestowed all of his skill into it—never before had he wrought anything so fine, and he would never would he be able to do it again. He entwined the tales of two serpents behind her back, while he crossed their necks under her breasts forming a convoluted knot and then letting their heads slip through, he let the remainder drape down along both sides of her body. You would not have said that the serpents seemed to be moving, but that they actually were moving. Nor did they have a rigid or frightening appearance, but rather they floated in a sensuous languor as if subdued by the loveliness of Charikleia’s bosom. Their material was gold but they were dark in color, for the craftsman had darkened them so that he might represent the roughness and the alternating colors of their scales. Such was the maiden’s girdle.

Like the figure of Galene in the epigram above from the *Greek Anthology*, much emphasis is placed on Charikleia’s hair and breasts, again potent symbols of feminine sexuality. Through this representation, Charikleia is shown to be a type of mistress of the beasts, whose power is so great that she is able to tame fearsome serpents, described in such animate terms that they appear to be moving, yet the heroine is able to lure them into a stupor, just as the worker of gems is able to transform rough nature into something civilized.<sup>94</sup> This account along with that which follows on the subject of the maiden’s hair has been interpreted as a clue to understanding Charikleia’s character as one who embodies the qualities of controlled chaos or, as Hardie states, an Artemis-like sense of control that is dazzling in its effect, yet has the ability to be both awe-inspiring and terrifying.<sup>95</sup> As with many of the gems described above, this passage by Heliodorus presents an image of moderation, yet one that is barely contained.<sup>96</sup> At times Charikleia’s character struggles

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<sup>94</sup> See Hardie 1998, on Charikleia as *potnia theron*.

<sup>95</sup> Hardie 1998, 34-35. Hardie argues further that “they hint at the dangers that threaten Charikleia’s self-control, and ultimately her *sophrosyne*. This further recalls other scenes in which she is likened to Artemis at the beginning of the novel, 1.2.5-6, just prior to the description of the breast band, in which Charikleia is said to be an acolyte of Artemis and again at 3.33 (Hilton 1998, 88).

<sup>96</sup> As Hardie (1998, 36) has discussed, this passage also presents several intertextual references including *Iliad* 18.546-9 and the Hesiodic *Aspis* 216-37. To these I would add also *Odyssey* 19.225-31.



to maintain her autonomy, like many of the women described in ekphrastic epigrams above, and she too frequently becomes the object of the male gaze. Yet just as the serpents she overcomes on her breast band, Charikleia resists and returns this gaze with one that is direct, bold, and emanates light.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show the manner in which ekphrastic descriptions of gems illustrate the gendered use of precious stones in ancient Greece. As I discussed in the first section, engraved gems and seal stones were used in antiquity as markers of identity. Yet, as the evidence suggests, prior to the Hellenistic period most women in the Greek world probably did not have access to such tokens of power and authority. In certain epigrammatic contexts in which women are described as owners of gems, I have argued that little emphasis was placed on stones' engravings or signficatory power; rather, stress is placed upon characteristics shared by women and gems, oftentimes equating women with the elaborately described objects. A small number of epigrams, however, as well as key passages from Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, illustrate the manner in which such descriptions can be instructive not only in terms of visual representation but also concerning aspects of feminine characterization. What is unique about this last category of ekphraseis is the fact that these authors (ranging from the third century B.C.E. to the third-fourth century C.E.) use gemstones as a means for discussing aspects of feminine restraint and moderation.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the course of this study, engraved gems and precious stones, and in particular their conceptualization in the Greek literary imagination, have emerged as extremely complex objects that were embedded in Hellenistic and early imperial culture on several levels. It is for their wide range of semantic meanings, therefore, that gemstones are among the most alluring and elusive items of study for scholars of the Hellenistic period.<sup>1</sup> On the perhaps overlooked significance of ancient glyptic, Plantzos states:

Intaglios and finger rings form, or ought to form, an integral part of classical studies where they contribute significantly to Greek and Roman culture. Engraved gems in antiquity were more numerous than sculpture, more valuable than vases, and of a more individual significance than either. Their pragmatic applications, or at least their inherent functional disposition, made them meaningful particulars of everyday life. At the same time, the emblematic character of their iconography resulted in their being conveyors of common or personal persuasion.<sup>2</sup>

These objects were not only highly valued for their materials, therefore, but also for their ability to reflect a variety of social, cultural, literary, artistic, and aesthetic concerns. It is precisely this malleability, or as I have said elsewhere, their multivalency, that makes gems and precious stones “good to think with.”<sup>3</sup> By means of the use of literary and material evidence, this study has attempted to show how gems function as conveyors of social and cultural meaning when utilized by ancient authors. In order to understand better the ancient use of engraved gems and precious stones, their powers, and symbolic value, this study probed the relationship between ancient gemstones in visual and literary media by analyzing Greco-Roman precious stones and their treatment in ancient mineralogical treatises alongside descriptions of stones from literary

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<sup>1</sup> One need only look at the vast scholarship on Posidippus’ *Lithika* for evidence of the appeal of such items.

<sup>2</sup> Plantzos 1999, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Steiner (2001, xi) uses this phrase in reference to statues in the Archaic and Classical periods, viewed as “cognitive and hermeneutic devices.”

texts. Rather than providing an exhaustive treatment of the subject matter, this dissertation offered instead a selective discussion of some of the issues that the objects themselves and their literary treatment engendered. While this dissertation focused largely on the literary evidence for precious stones, it did so in order to illustrate the manner in which texts may be instrumental in creating a richer picture of the material evidence. Due to the fact that so little is known about the archaeological context and provenance of many of these valuable objects, their literary treatment, thus, provides a unique glimpse into the ways in which gemstones, as daily objects, were used and valued in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>4</sup>

By focusing my discussion on ekphraseis of works of art, I have tried, as have others before me, to interrogate the use and significance of these types of descriptions as literary and rhetorical devices. As I hope to have shown, however, these ekphraseis, though ostensibly about works of art, also serve as descriptions of time, space, character and identity, and as such, demonstrate a blurring of the traditional modern definition of ekphrasis as a “description of a work of art.”<sup>5</sup> Further, it is has been my intention, not only to treat questions of the literary and aesthetic significance of such descriptions, but also to investigate their social and cultural implications. In addition, this study sought to bring to light an understudied aspect of the appropriation of the discourse on precious stones by later Greek prose authors, especially writers of the novel. In tracing the nexus of imagery surrounding certain aspects of the production and use of gems in the Hellenistic period, incomplete through the study of material culture alone, I endeavored to provide a sketch of the conceptualization of precious stones in Greco-Roman

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<sup>4</sup> As Plantzos (1999, 2) notes : “the vast majority of these objects come without any recorded provenance; hundreds of them are not known or accessible to scholars, since they belong to private or public collections that have never been published. And those published, in a wide selection of older and more recent catalogues, are usually assigned a date by author, based on no more than educated speculation.” The fact that it is often quite difficult to distinguish ancient gems and modern imitations only increases the challenges of studying this particular art form.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Webb 2009.

thought. Finally, I began to trace the manner in which ancient epigrammatists, through their ekphrastic descriptions of gemstones, initiated a literary discourse on precious stones, one whose influence would extend not only across temporal, spatial, and generic boundaries, but well beyond the Classical world.

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