

# STUDIA ANTIQUA

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A STUDENT JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY  
OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 1  
SUMMER 2021

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY  
PROVO, UTAH

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A STUDENT JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY  
OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

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# STUDIA ANTIQUA

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## ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations are taken from *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed., 8.4.2.

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
<i>ClAnt</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>ClQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
GR	<i>Greece &amp; Rome</i>
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>Hesperia</i>	<i>Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens</i>
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
ICAANE	International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JANER</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
<i>NumC</i>	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i>

PW	Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft
<i>ScrTh</i>	<i>Scripta Theologica</i>
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

This issue marks twenty years since the founding of *Studia Antiqua*. The two-decade jaunt has seen both triumphs and turbulence. The journal was launched in 2001 by the burgeoning BYU Student Society for Ancient Studies as a venue where students could publish their scholarship and gain valuable experience in academic publishing. For several years, each issue was assembled, edited, and typeset by a dedicated team of unpaid volunteers. Then, in 2005, the journal faced a crisis. The old Near Eastern Studies major was being discontinued, membership in the associated society was declining, and then, midway through the production process, the editor-in-chief was knocked out of commission in an accident! Due to these challenges, the production process ground to a halt, and soon all that remained of the journal was a stack of half-edited papers gathering dust in an obscure closet on campus.

In 2007, two students (Breanna White and Daniel McClellan) swooped in to save *Studia Antiqua* from the literal dustbin of history.<sup>1</sup> The journal was revived under the leadership of the new Students of the Ancient Near East (SANE) organization and also gained status—and funding—as an official publication of the BYU Religious Studies Center. This arrangement continued for more than a decade, until in the last two years the journal has migrated from the Religious Studies Center to the Ancient Near Eastern Studies program. As part of that transition, staff at the Religious Studies Center generously rebuilt the journal's website ([studiaantiqua.byu.edu](http://studiaantiqua.byu.edu)) and trained its editorial staff in the website's upkeep.

In the last twenty years, the journal has provided immeasurable experience to dozens of student editors and authors. But it has also had an impact on the general academic community. Thanks to BYU's ScholarsArchive system, articles published in *Studia Antiqua* are available to a worldwide readership through library catalogs and academic databases. Data collected by this system reveal the wide reach our journal has had:

- With this 27th issue, the journal will have published 156 articles and book reviews.

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1. For the full details of this dramatic revival, see Breanne White, "Reviving *Studia Antiqua*: Bringing the Journal Back to Life in 2007," *Studia Antiqua* 10 (2011), xix–xxii.

- Since January 2016, *Studia Antiqua* has received 194,644 downloads.
- The journal currently averages 5,330 downloads a month.
- Twenty-eight articles have surpassed 2,000 downloads. Seven of those have surpassed 5,000 downloads, and our most popular article (“Crucifixion in the Roman World: The Use of Nails at the Time of Christ,” published by John C. Robison in 2002) has received a staggering 12,013 downloads since 2016, or six downloads per day!

This issue continues the high standard of excellence set by the past. The following pages contain an excellent roster of papers: an artistic study of a Greek kylix drinking cup by Alexandra Carlile, a rhetorical and lexical analysis of a Latin Christian apologetical text by Alexander Christensen, an exploration of the use of hedgehogs and hyenas in Egyptian art and religion by Elliotte Thurtle, a comparison of the Israelite high priest’s crown with apotropaic (evil-warding) amulets of Israel’s neighbors by Abby Booth, and a description of the changing role of Nike in Greek religion by Megan Sloane Mayfield. Each paper has gone through extensive revisions and edits, and I congratulate each of these authors on their accomplishments. I also acknowledge and thank the six other authors who submitted papers for this issue, each of whom received faculty feedback that I hope will help them advance in their academic pursuits.

I thank Dr. Peek for overseeing the journal’s management, Dr. Seely for so excellently executing the faculty review process, and Marshall Morrisse for building the journal’s new website. I also thank the many faculty reviewers whose detailed feedback proved invaluable in raising the quality of the papers, as well as many others in the Religious Studies Center, Classics, Hebrew, History, Anthropology, and Religious Education who make this journal possible each year. Truly this is a multidisciplinary effort! Finally, I thank our assistant editor (and soon-to-be editor-in-chief), Helaman Bennion, for stepping so willingly and competently into his role and for finishing the journal after my graduation. *Studia Antiqua*’s future is in excellent hands!

I echo the words that Matthew Grey, the journal’s first editor-in-chief, wrote in its ten-year anniversary: *Studia Antiqua* “continues to fulfill its original intent by serving as a valuable academic resource for BYU students involved in the study of antiquity.”<sup>2</sup> Here’s to another two decades of stupendous student scholarship!

Jeremy Madsen  
Editor-in-Chief

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2. Matthew J. Grey, “Reflections on the Beginnings of *Studia Antiqua* on Its Tenth Anniversary,” *Studia Antiqua* 10 (2011), xi–xvii.

# MIGRAINES, MEN, AND MYTHOLOGY

## GENDERED IMAGERY IN THE BIRTH OF ATHENA

ALEXANDRA CARLILE

*Alexandra Carlile is a senior at Brigham Young University majoring in art history. Alexandra's research interests center around depictions of childbirth and pregnancy in art. She will be attending graduate school in the fall in the hopes of eventually becoming an art history professor.*

**Abstract:** Based around a classical Greek kylix held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, this essay discusses artistic portrayal of the Birth of Athena. Images of Athena's birth represent Zeus in a way consistent with childbirth imagery, so Zeus can be understood as repurposing female imagery for a patriarchal narrative. Comparing this kylix to other childbirth images reveals Greek gender roles and stereotypes, as well as the politics associated with the rise of Athens. Understanding the gender politics in the Birth of Athena image is therefore helpful in understanding Greek society and concepts of gender roles.

One of Greece's most important deities was born as the result of a headache. According to the mythology, Zeus impregnated the goddess Metis and then swallowed her after it was prophesied that her second child, a son, would overthrow him.<sup>1</sup> Later, Zeus suffered from a headache. Another male god, often Hephaestus but sometimes Hermes, broke Zeus's head open with an ax, and out sprang Athena, fully clothed for war.<sup>2</sup> Consistent with other images of the Birth of Athena, the terracotta kylix attributed to the Painter of the Nicosia Olpe (ca. 550 BC, Fig. 1) modifies the image of a childbirth scene to subvert feminine reproductive roles. The drinking cup's combination of gender roles is a reminder of the ambivalent gender roles played by Athena, as well as her patriarchally-based power over life and death and her important role in Athenian society.

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1. Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Kimberly Johnson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), lines 886–924.

2. Norman O. Brown, "The Birth of Athena," *TAPA* 83 (1952): 130–143, here 135.





Figure 1: Terracotta kylix (drinking cup), ca. 550 BC, attributed to the Painter of the Nicosia Olpe. Public domain, courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Painter of Nicosia Olpe's terracotta kylix, a black-figure drinking cup, was created by the Painter of Nicosia Olpe, a nameless but prolific artist from Athens.<sup>3</sup> Zeus dominates the center of the cup. Athena has just emerged from his head and now stands on his lap. She is in full war regalia and holds a spear and shield. On either side of Zeus is an Eileithyia, goddesses of childbirth. The two Eileithyia raise their hands in the traditional ritual gesture of assistance; according to scholar Maurizio Bettini, this may also be interpreted as an act of supplication, a good omen for the birth, a blessing offered by the goddesses, or potentially their surprise at the unusual nature of the birth.<sup>4</sup> The white skin of the Eileithyia and Athena, as well as the patterning on their and Zeus's clothing, emphasize them compared to the other all-black figures on the vase. This contrast essentially reduces the composition to the four figures in the center. While the figures on either side could be considered important, given that different Birth of

3. Terracotta Kylix (drinking cup), ca. 550 BC, attributed to the Painter of the Nicosia Olpe (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gallery 155, digital image accessed 19 September 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247515>).

4. Maurizio Bettini, *Women and Weasels: Mythologies of Birth in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 84–87.

Athena images purposefully include different figures and that spectatorship has been previously argued as an important aspect of Greek art,<sup>5</sup> the most important aspects of the scene for this discussion are the two Eileithyia, Athena, and Zeus.

## CHILDBIRTH AND MATERNITY IMAGERY

The image of Zeus giving birth to Athena significantly imitates traditional childbirth scenes in art. Childbirth is often depicted in Greek art on grave stelae and lekythos vases. The woman in labor is shown seated from the side. She is normally depicted as emotionally distressed, her hair and clothing have been loosened, and she is often physically supported by those around her.<sup>6</sup> In this kylix, Zeus is similarly portrayed from the side, with loose hair and robes. His physical body from the waist down is ambiguous in shape, not clearly marked by either gender. Zeus therefore takes on the role of a childbearing woman, imitating the actual way that most ancient Greek women gave birth in a seated position on a birthing chair.<sup>7</sup> This portrayal allows Zeus to assume the power of a woman giving birth while still maintaining his male attributes, giving him power derived from both gender roles. This changes the narrative from a simple childbirth scene to politically significant propaganda.

By swallowing his wife Metis, Zeus assimilated the female element of birth. Accordingly, this kylix depicts him as both male and female. Other female elements work alongside Zeus, demonstrating the completeness of his gender role assumption. In particular, the female Eileithyia figures on either side of Zeus mark him as a childbearing woman as they assist him in giving birth, blessing him as mother with their gestures.<sup>8</sup> The scholarship of Shann Kennedy-Quigley claims that all active intervention in the mythological accounts of Athena's birth is male; she argues that the Eileithyia midwives portrayed in Birth of Athena images are ineffectual because they do not physically touch Zeus, meaning that only the male figures of Hephaestus, who appears in other Birth of Athena scenes, and Zeus impact the birth's outcome.<sup>9</sup> However, this kylix's depiction of the Birth of Athena noticeably excludes Hephaestus or any other intervening male figure, placing a focus instead on the Eileithyia. While the dual goddesses of childbirth do not touch Zeus (as Kennedy-Quigley notes), they do make their traditional gestures, which

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5. Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell, *Vase Painting, Gender, and Social Identity in Archaic Athens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

6. Nancy Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 122, 157–166.

7. Bettini, *Women and Weasels*, 55.

8. *Ibid.*, 84–87.

9. Shanna Kennedy-Quigley, "Visual Representations of the Birth of Athena/Minerva: A Comparative Study," *Etruscan Studies* 8, no. 1 (2001): 66–68.

act as both a blessing and an impetus for the birth to move forward.<sup>10</sup> For example, according to Greek mythology, the Eileithyia raising their hands is the catalyst for baby Heracles to be born.<sup>11</sup> As indicated in the story of Artemis's birth, the very presence of the childbirth goddesses is enough to cause birth, so physical touch is not necessary.<sup>12</sup> Thus, while Kennedy-Quigley argues that the lack of physical touch between Zeus and the Eileithyia is a sign of their stripped power, the Eileithyia's raised arms can instead be read as the Eileithyia giving the blessing of their female power to Zeus, thereby giving him female as well as male authority.

In assuming the female role, Zeus becomes both male and female, mother and father, active and passive, essentially all-powerful.<sup>13</sup> He usurps the function of birth to exercise control over women, turning a female mystery into something that a man can also do.<sup>14</sup> The Eileithyia on the vase give Zeus their female blessing, accepting him as a childbearing woman, which role he fulfills visually. However, the distinctions between common depictions of childbirth in artwork and this Birth of Athena image indicate that Zeus is, in essence, upstaging childbearing women by fulfilling both female and male roles.

## MALE ADAPTATION OF FEMALE ROLES

Despite being portrayed as a childbearing woman, Zeus is still undoubtedly male. His birthing chair is throne-like, and he appears in a position of power. He is still king of the gods. His beard also marks him as a man. Furthermore, this kylix shows Zeus as completely calm and collected, as is consistent with other classical depictions of Zeus at the Birth of Athena.<sup>15</sup> This is in direct and clear contrast with funerary depictions of childbirth, which visually depict mothers in labor as highly emotional and distressed because the labor process killed them.<sup>16</sup> This lack of emotion identifies Zeus as male, less emotional than his female counterparts in labor. It also marks him as powerful and in control of the events around him—attributes that were associated strongly with men in the Greek culture of the time.<sup>17</sup> Returning to the lack of physical touch in the work of art, Zeus does not need the physical support of other figures, even though he is empowered by

10. Bettini, *Women and Weasels*, 84–87.

11. *Ibid.*, 38.

12. "Homeric Hymn 3 to Delian Apollo," in *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica with an English Translation*, trans. and ed. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 89–115.

13. Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood*, 127.

14. *Ibid.*, 134.

15. Karim W. Arafat, *Classical Zeus: A Study in Art and Literature* (New York: Clarendon, 1990), 38.

16. Kennedy-Quigley, "Visual Representations," 66.

17. Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood*, 147.

their blessing. He channels the feminine power of the midwife goddesses, but on this particular kylix, he does not physically rely on any other figures for help in giving birth. Other scenes of the Birth of Athena include Hephaestus and his ax, but this scene depicts Zeus as separate and in control of his own labor narrative. The supernatural elements of the birth scene thus divorce it from the actual pain and gore of childbirth by emphasizing Zeus's masculine power and control.<sup>18</sup>

Besides the changed birth narrative evident in the lack of emotion on Zeus's face, Zeus giving birth from his head is a narrative choice that allows for a hygienic, orderly birth. Greek culture saw childbirth as polluting because of the bodily fluids involved.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, a woman's womb was considered a point of weakness and a source of illness.<sup>20</sup> The use of Zeus's head as a womb allows him to give birth without any bodily fluids and without a uterus. This substitution of the male head for the female womb allows Zeus to adopt a procreative feminine role without any of the associated aspects of femininity that would be culturally considered weaknesses. Because the Greeks believed that a father contributed all of the genetic material to a child and a mother's sole contribution was as an incubating womb,<sup>21</sup> Zeus has become the sole creator of Athena.

Ultimately, the biggest difference between the grave stelae and the Birth of Athena kylix is the outcome of the labor, emphasized by the lack of emotion that Zeus shows. He does not need to be emotional because he has the birth under control, and it has already been successful. The grave stelae of childbirth scenes were carved to honor women who died giving birth, so there is a natural element of tragedy in the depictions.<sup>22</sup> This is in direct contrast to Zeus, who lives—despite, in some accounts, being struck in the head by an ax. Perhaps this is the ultimate sign of the male ability to supplant female power: Zeus is able to enact a successful birth that is clean, unpolluted, and calm. He therefore performs and even improves the innate ability of women to give birth.

The visual representation of Athena in the kylix illustrates her complicated mixing of gender roles. Athena is caught between the male figure of Zeus and the female figure of the Eileithyia. Her white skin echoes the white skin of the

18. Sian Lewis, *The Athenian Woman* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 14–15.

19. Angela Taraskiewicz, "Motherhood as Teleia: Rituals of Incorporation at the Kouroutrophic Shrine," in *Mothering and Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Lauren Hackworth Petersen and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 43–69, here 53.

20. Yuri Hong, "Collaboration and Conflict: Discourses of Maternity in Hippocratic Gynecology and Embryology," in *Mothering and Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Lauren Hackworth Petersen and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 71–96, here 82.

21. Hong, "Collaboration and Conflict," 75.

22. Lewis, *The Athenian Woman*, 14–15.

Eileithyia, and the two face each other as if in a mirror. This idea of a mirror reflection is emphasized by their matching outfits and the similar bend of their arms. However, Athena faces the same way as her father Zeus, her spear matches his, and her military bearing distinguishes her from the Eileithyia, whom she seems to challenge with her spear raised, as if ready for battle. Similarly, in the wider Greek culture, the goddess Athena challenged gender roles of both men and women. While a normally-born Athena would have been a threat to Zeus's power, this unusually-born Athena becomes his subordinate, who assists him in maintaining his power.<sup>23</sup> She is a female goddess, but she is also a soldier, which traditionally is a male role. Throughout Greek history, Athena's cult eventually came to replace that of other palace-citadel goddesses, so she fulfilled the role of female deity for a large geographical area.<sup>24</sup> In mythological tales, Athena resists the sexual advances of Hephaestus, defeats her male rival Poseidon, and is capable of wielding Zeus's lightning bolts.<sup>25</sup> She seems to shun femininity to adopt a more masculine role, but she is still intimately connected to female rites of passage like childbirth. Thus, Athena is a figure that is both male and female, appropriately represented as such in both this work of art and the story of her birth.

The repurposed gender roles in this work of art find their parallel in the literature of the ancient Greeks, and the message of the kylix supports the patriarchal system that Athens maintained. As noted by Greek historian Nancy Demand, one of the best ways to control the female arena of birth was for men to usurp the function.<sup>26</sup> Socrates, Plato, and a widespread group of other scholars discussed men as being the midwives for ideas in their students.<sup>27</sup> The male narrative of being midwives of the head allowed them to participate in a female-exclusive life ritual while remaining clean from the emotion and bodily fluid normally accompanied by birth. Such narratives would have empowered men while demeaning female reproductive contributions to society.

## THE POWER OF ATHENA'S CULT

The Birth of Athena narrative depicted on this kylix strengthens the authority of Zeus, Athena, and the patriarchal structure as a whole. First, this depiction creates a strong association between Zeus and the concepts of birth and war. Previous scholars have suggested that classical Greek culture viewed the death of a woman

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23. Brown, "The Birth of Athena," 134.

24. R. J. Hopper, "Athena and the Early Acropolis," *GR* 10 (1963): 1–16, here 5.

25. Hopper, "Athena and the Early Acropolis," 5.

26. Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood*, 134.

27. *Ibid.*, 134–6.

in childbirth as comparable to the death of a man on the battlefield.<sup>28</sup> While Nancy Demand has challenged this assertion, arguing that the Greeks preferred the active deaths of soldiers over the more passive deaths of childbirth, even she admits that there is some similarity, since both war and childbirth were ways that Greeks could die in service of their community.<sup>29</sup> The pro-comparison scholarship may still hold merit, however, particularly given that gynecological texts used a war-like narrative to describe birth: fetuses were described as fighting their way out of the womb.<sup>30</sup> Comparing childbirth to battle seems to honor women and their reproductive role. This makes Zeus's assumption of the role of childbearing woman even more powerful, since it allows him to fulfill the role of soldier in both the male and female spheres.

Furthermore, images like the Birth of Athena were a reminder of Zeus's supreme might. Not only do they show the supremacy of his calm, cool, collected male demeanor, but they also indicate Zeus's superiority over the other gods and the previous regimes. There are strong comparisons between the story of Athena's birth and Zeus's own. In both instances, the reigning monarchs, Zeus and Kronos, attempt to eliminate threats to their throne by swallowing their children. Kronos swallows his children after they are born. He is subsequently tricked by his wife to not eat Zeus, resulting in Zeus's ultimate rise to power and Kronos's defeat. Zeus, on the other hand, swallows his wife. By assimilating the female element into himself, he increases his power and prevents his rival-challenger son from even being born. In contrast to Kronos's story, Zeus is successful in mitigating the threat to his throne because of his assimilation of the feminine. The Birth of Athena is a reminder that Zeus's challenger will never be born, so Zeus will rule forever.

Depicting the Birth of Athena as male-centric created an important father-daughter link between Athena and Zeus that helped solidify the power of the Athenians. As seen in this kylix, the Birth of Athena removes a female mother figure from the narrative of Athena. Instead of father impregnating mother who births child, father births child, thus eliminating the middleman (or, rather, the middle-woman). Athena herself says, "There is no mother anywhere who gave me birth."<sup>31</sup> Zeus swallows up the role of mother to become both parents, but he maintains a patriarchal role of kingship and control. Athena therefore has a close-knit relationship with Zeus as her singular parent, and she becomes a

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28. Scholars who take this position include Nicole Loraux and Ursula Vedder: see Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood*, ix.

29. Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood*, 129.

30. Hong, "Collaboration and Conflict," 82.

31. Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 736–738, trans. Richmond Lattimore, in *Aeschylus I / Oresteia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).



strong defender of the patriarchy.<sup>32</sup> This close tie between Athena and Zeus was also beneficial for Athens, as it associated their patron goddess directly with the king of the gods. This political advantage has been identified as a likely reason that Birth of Athena scenes became popular in Athens in the sixth century BC.<sup>33</sup>

Athenians framed Athena as powerful because she had control over life and death, both of which are alluded to in this kylix. Scholar Robert Luyster, professor of philosophy of religion at the University of Connecticut, has discussed Athena's role as a weaver of fate, a goddess with control over both birth and death—with birth and death being closely intertwined.<sup>34</sup> This conception of Athena makes her an incredibly powerful goddess, as is indicated by her key role in Athenian society and her detailed birth story. By emphasizing this story about Athena, the Athenians emphasized her role in birth and death. Just as her birth was accomplished without death, so too could she save Greek women from death in childbirth in her midwife role.<sup>35</sup> Even in emerging from Zeus's head-womb, she is ready for the battle against death in favor of life. Furthermore, the inclusion of the two Eileithyia on either side of Zeus act as subtle reminders that the gods could progress or retard birth, so it was important that Greeks call upon Athena for assistance.<sup>36</sup> The frequent depiction of Athena's birth and this kylix's emphasis on the Eileithyia therefore indicate to viewers the uncertainty of their lives and the necessity of the gods to ameliorate uncertain outcomes.

The Birth of Athena scene depicted on this kylix thus mixes gender roles to frame a powerful narrative for Athena and Zeus. Zeus is depicted with both female and male aspects as he gives birth to the goddess Athena. Zeus is blessed by female embodiments of birth even as he completes birth in his own male way. This reflects patriarchal ideas in Greek society about the superiority of men and the male body. It expresses the omnipotence of Zeus. It also closely connects Athena with the might of the king of the gods because it removes any middle-woman mother figure that might separate Athena and Zeus in the narrative. Thus, Greek men could establish the supremacy and stability of their gender, their religion, and their goddess.

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32. Susan Deacy, *Athena* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 31.

33. Evelyn B. Harrison, "Athena and Athens in the East Pediment of the Parthenon," *AJA* 71, no. 1 (1967): 27–58, here 27; C. John Herington, "Athena in Athenian Literature and Cult," *GR* 10 (1963): 61–73, here 63.

34. Robert Luyster, "Symbolic Elements in the Cult of Athena," *HR* 5, no. 1 (1965): 133–163, here 143 and 161–162.

35. Luyster, "Symbolic Elements in the Cult of Athena," 137–138.

36. "Eileithyia: Greek Mythology," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eileithyia>.

# MENDACIA IN MINUCIUS FELIX

## THE CHARGED RHETORIC OF A LATIN APOLOGIST

ALEXANDER CHRISTENSEN

*Alexander Christensen is earning a BA in English Language (Linguistics) with a minor in Classical Latin from Brigham Young University. He will be pursuing an MA and then a PhD in Classics after he graduates in April 2022.*

**Abstract:** Most scholars agree that Minucius Felix's Latin Christian *Octavius* offers a sympathetic view toward Greco-Roman tradition. This consensus has been reached largely from work on the setting, date, and sources of the text, but no one has substantially investigated its rhetorical features and what they might reveal about Minucius's view of Greco-Roman tradition. This paper sets out to do this work. After pointing out why previous conclusions are unsatisfactory, I look at rhetorically charged words and phrases from the text and how they behave elsewhere in the corpus of Latin literature. When investigated, these expressions give a clearer picture of Minucius's rather negative view of Greco-Roman tradition. Such investigation is helpful for understanding Minucius in his historical context, but it also deepens our understanding of how the minority Christian culture attempted to define itself against an unmarked majority and develop a unique identity.

Marcus Minucius Felix probably wrote the *Octavius* either just before or just after Tertullian's *Apology*, near the end of the second century or in the beginning of the third.<sup>1</sup> The narrator of the story, Minucius, presents himself as a well-educated Roman lawyer, displaying his education through his conversance with classical literature. He and his two colleagues, Octavius and Caecilius, take a

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1. It remains undecided whether Minucius wrote before Tertullian and the latter drew on the former, or whether Minucius wrote after Tertullian. The connection between the two has been clearly established either way. Cyprian is also thought to have been involved either as dependent on the *Octavius* or as source for it. Clarke asserts that Tertullian's *Ad Nationes* (c. 197 CE) was composed first, followed by the *Octavius*, followed by Cyprian's works (248 CE ff.). See G. W. Clarke, "The Historical Setting of the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix," in *Literature of the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, Studies in Early Christianity 2 (New York: Garland, 1993), 145–64, here 147–8. This conclusion has been generally followed by subsequent scholars.



vacation to Ostia, the bathing resort not far from Rome, where Minucius listens to the other two discuss religion and tradition by the waves of the Mediterranean. The text survives in only one manuscript, which was transcribed by “a very illiterate copyist” and rediscovered in 1543;<sup>2</sup> consequently, a large majority of the existing scholarship has had to do with editorial emendations.<sup>3</sup>

*Octavius* has most often been seen as an apologetic text. That is, Minucius presents the reader with his now-passed friend, Octavius, who defends Christianity against the Roman position laid out by Caecilius. However, it is important to remember that categories of genre are often more fluid than we want them to be. “Genre should not be seen as a mechanical recipe-book for the production of texts.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, not all apologies are the same, and not all apologists have the same motivations or rhetorical strategies. Where one apology may address a ruler and plea for redress of wrongs,<sup>5</sup> another might be written to a specific or general intellectual opponent of Christianity,<sup>6</sup> and yet another might be written by Christians for Christians as a way of building community and structuring their own belief system.<sup>7</sup> “Genre is thus best seen as a way of talking about the strategies of writers . . . in different cultural traditions.”<sup>8</sup> Setting aside for a moment the question of motivation and rhetorical strategy, two distinct and more obvious elements distinguish *Octavius* (and by extension, Minucius’s motives) from most other

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2. Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, trans. Gerald H. Rendall, LCL 250 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 304–439, here 313.

3. As Rendall put it, the *Octavius* text “has been a favourite playground for editorial corrections and emendations.” See Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, trans. Gerald H. Rendall, LCL 250 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 304–439, here 313. All translations of *Octavius* in this essay are from this Loeb translation unless otherwise noted. Translations of other Latin primary sources are done by the author. For further introduction to the text of *Octavius* and its setting, see the Introduction in G. W. Clarke, *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix*, ACW 39 (New York: Newman, 1974), 5–48.

4. Mark Edwards et al., “Introduction: Apologetics in the Roman World,” in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, eds. Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 1–14, here 2.

5. Aristides, *Apol.*; Justin, *1 Apol.* and *2 Apol.*; Melito, *Apol. to Marcus Aurelius*; and Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* all could fit into this category.

6. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*; Origen, *Contra Celsum*; and Tertullian, *Ad nationes* and *Apologeticus* all could fit into this category.

7. It is the contention of this paper that *Octavius* is such a text. In addition, some apologies from the above categories could also fit this description. In fact, it is not uncommon for scholars to assert that many apologies were intended as much, or more, for Christians as for non-Christians. For example, in his notes on Justin’s *First Apology*, Barnard writes, “No doubt, *1 Apol.* was also intended for Christian converts and would serve as a kind of shorter Bible. It is likely that apologies such as Justin’s were read more by Christians than by those to whom they were addressed.” *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, trans. Leslie William Barnard, ACW 56 (New York: Newman, 1966), 45 nt. 223.

8. Edwards, et al., “Introduction,” 2.

Christian apologies. First, it is written in a classical structure. As Albrecht points out, referring not only to the structure but also to the style of *Octavius*, “Christian apologetic writing in a dignified literary form was something new, and it made its appearance in Latin literature first.”<sup>9</sup> Second, many other early apologies are alike in that “each begins with the plea that it is unjust to persecute Christians, and proceeds to describe the beliefs of Christians in order to show their value”; however, “in Minucius Felix’s *Octavius*, neither of these things is done.”<sup>10</sup> Instead, scholars have found that Minucius draws heavily on classical sources—Plato, Cicero, and other Greek and Roman authors—while his text “contains nothing about the Bible, the Trinity, or redemption, and hardly anything about Jesus himself.”<sup>11</sup> These two details—classical structure and style and Greco-Roman source material in place of Christian doctrine and sources—have led scholars to the conclusion that Minucius is attempting to reach, appease, and convert an educated Roman audience, “address[ing] only those issues of interest to a pagan readership”<sup>12</sup> while “avoid[ing] those matters which might be offensive to his pagan reader.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, the broad

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9. Michael von. Albrecht, “M. Minucius Felix as a Christian Humanist,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 12 (1987): 157–68, here 159. This might seem to be a curious comment, considering the fact that Justin had already used the classical form of the dialogue in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. I think Albrecht uses “apology” here to refer specifically to encounters with Greco-Roman culture, rather than encounters with Judaism. While Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* is in a classical structure, his *1 Apol.* and *2. Apol.* (addressed to Roman rulers) are somewhat formless. Additionally, as Clarke points out, the Latin west generally placed a higher emphasis on rhetorical and stylistic sophistication, whereas “in the East Christianity spoke and wrote in largely contemporary idiom.” While Greek apologists consistently traced their own conversions to their readings of the Bible, the Latin apologists and writers consistently expressed self-consciousness over the lack of sophistication in the Latin Bible. G. W. Clarke, “The Literary Setting of the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix,” in *Literature of the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, Studies in Early Christianity 2 (New York: Garland, 1993): 127–143, here 133–5. Drobner agrees with Albrecht in that there is something unique and special about the literary sophistication of *Octavius*: “*Octavius*, perfectly worked out rhetorically and stylistically to the last detail, presents perhaps the finest witness of early Christian apologetics by establishing Christianity exclusively on the basis of reason (neither citing the Bible nor mentioning the name of Christ) and by defending it against the untenable rumors about the crimes committed by Christians.” Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 165.

10. Francis Firth, “Octavius, an Apologia in Classical Style,” *The Canadian Catholic Review* 10 (1992): 34–36, here 34.

11. Firth, “Octavius,” 34. Obviously, Minucius Felix is not unique in using classical sources. Clement of Alexandria in his *Protrepticus* uses many more classical sources than Minucius does in *Octavius*. The important point here is that Minucius does not balance those classical sources with Christian sources, or even with much Christian doctrine.

12. Simon Price, “Latin Christian Apologetics: Minucius Felix, Tertullian, and Cyprian,” in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, eds. Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, and Simon Price (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 105–29, here 123.

13. Firth, “Octavius,” 34. See also, Albrecht, “Minucius Felix,” 159. He points out that the *Octavius* achieves status as a “classical” work of art, and, as he puts it, “Anyone who knows the

consensus of scholarship on the *Octavius* is that its author, like Justin Martyr and unlike Tertullian, Cyprian, and other Latin apologists, was attempting a synthesis of Christian and Roman tradition.

These conclusions are traceable, at least in Anglophone scholarship, to Clarke's important essay for Minucius studies, "The Literary Setting of the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix," in which Clarke first argued that Minucius was targeting educated pagan readers as his audience, and for this reason only mentions topics that would be of interest to them.<sup>14</sup> In that essay, Clarke mentions, as a given premise, that "the tone of the *Octavius* is noticeably non-belligerent."<sup>15</sup> Some version of this unproven premise is repeated again and again by subsequent scholars in making similar conclusions about Minucius's audience being educated Romans. For example, Rizzi argues that Minucius used the prologue of his dialogue to establish common ground between Christians and Romans, and then writes in passing, much as Clarke had, that "Likewise, the climate of particular *urbanitas*, cordiality, which emerges from the foreword (as, more generally, from the entire dialogue) has generally been noted."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Abad, in passing, describes its tone as "eirenic."<sup>17</sup> Most scholars thus take it for granted that Minucius has a favorable tone and attitude toward Greco-Roman culture,<sup>18</sup> despite the fact that the assertion of this favorable tone was never formally proven or explored in the first place. One of Clarke's more forceful assertions in this regard is the idea that Minucius's writing came early enough in Christianity that he could be respectful toward Roman tradition in a way impossible (or at least uncommon) for later Latin Christians. In a note on a passage analyzed later in this paper, he writes:

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innate sensitivity of the Latin race in matters of language and their idolatry of formal perfection will understand that there were only very few educated Romans who voluntarily submitted themselves to the linguistic torture of reading the Bible in the raw Latin of Jerome's forerunners. It is obvious, consequently, that a book like the *Octavius* was in great demand *as a means for converting the educated*" (emphasis mine). Neither Firth nor Price (in the previous note) are original in these assertions. This strand of interpretation of Minucius goes all the way back to Clarke, "Literary Setting," 138.

14. See Clarke, "The Literary Setting," 137–8, for his concluding thoughts to this effect.

15. Clarke, "The Literary Setting," 135.

16. "Si è in genere rilevato, a questo proposito, il clima di particolare *urbanitas*, cordialità, che traspare dal proemio (come, pili in generale, dall'intero dialogo)." Marco Rizzi, "*Amicitia e veritas*: il prologo dell'*Octavius* di Minucio Felice," *Aevum Antiquum* 3 (1990): 245–68, here 251. The translation of the Italian is mine.

17. John Abad, "The Octavius of Minucius Felix: Apologetics and Dialogue," Academia.edu, 4, [https://www.academia.edu/9636318/The\\_Octavius\\_of\\_Minucius\\_Felix\\_Apologetics\\_and\\_Dialogue](https://www.academia.edu/9636318/The_Octavius_of_Minucius_Felix_Apologetics_and_Dialogue).

18. Another example is Wiesen, who takes Clarke's argument for granted and uses it as his starting point that Minucius is attempting to speak to educated Romans: "*Addressing his work to a cultivated, pagan, Roman audience*, Minucius, it will be argued, employs Virgil as a proof-text" (emphasis mine). David S. Wiesen, "Virgil, Minucius Felix and the Bible," *Hermes* 99 (1971): 70–91, here 72.

To attack the fables of antiquity was an accepted procedure. But to attack the value of tradition generally was less in favor, and accordingly (unlike many other Apologists in their attacks on traditional errors) Minucius Felix carefully invokes the testimony of pagan philosophical tradition itself for this refutation of the “ignorant generations of the past” . . . the retention of respect for the past is typical of the general attitude of the *Octavius*.<sup>19</sup>

It is of note that, in this statement about tone and attitude, Clarke still only references Minucius’s choice of sources, rather than his word choice or rhetoric, which are probably better measures of tone. This paper explores the problems of this common approach to the tone of the *Octavius*, and then focuses on understanding Minucius’s attitude towards Greco-Roman tradition, not through analyses of structure, content, or source material, but through philological analysis. After all, attitude is established more through how an author deploys certain words than through how he or she handles structure, selects content, or draws on sources. Minucius’s rather negative view of Greco-Roman tradition emerges more clearly in philological analysis than it has in previous studies of other features of the text.

## STRUCTURE

As mentioned above, Minucius’s organization of his text in a classical dialogue draws most scholars toward seeing the text as sympathetic with philosophical tradition and Greco-Roman tradition in general.<sup>20</sup> The style of debate hearkens to Cicero’s dialogues, well known in the Roman world, and Plato’s dialogues before him.<sup>21</sup> However, viewing this cultural appropriation as *cultural appreciation* is a misunderstanding of the classical structure. The classical structure is itself defined by a dichotomy of “their position” vs. “our position,” the two debaters fundamentally at odds with one another—unless one should be converted by the other.

In the tradition of dialogue that Minucius draws on, such conversion is extremely rare. As Jonathan Powell points out, “In the majority of Cicero’s extant dialogues, although it is usual to imply that the arguments on one side are stronger than those on the other, the integrity of the interlocutors’ positions is generally

19. Clarke, *Octavius*, 273. Clarke refers here to Minucius’s phrase, *antiquitas imperitorum*, at *Octavius*, 20.3.

20. An additional (and especially respected) source to those we have already mentioned in this vein is Clarke, “Literary Setting,” 138. He asserts that Minucius “will discuss only those aspects which are also of current interest for his pagan audience, which are also in the Roman philosophical tradition. And he wants to show a Christian can deal with them in an elegant and refined way, with scholarly dignity and grace. Christians are true philosophers.”

21. It is widely accepted by scholars that Minucius Felix’s *Octavius* is in fact closely based on the structure and content of Cicero’s dialogue *De natura deorum*. For an introduction to the use of classical dialogues by early Christians, see Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 82–83.

respected and conversion is a rare event.”<sup>22</sup> Yet Minucius’s dialogue ends with the conversion of Caecilius and the “impartial” arbiter (Minucius himself) rejoices at the triumph of Octavius. This points to an important qualifier on Minucius’s use of tradition: while he is tapping into the classical and philosophical traditions for his structure, he is (1) using the structure to set Greco-Roman tradition up against Christianity, the two as opposing forces, and (2) using the structure in a different way than previously used, emphasizing discussion *as a means for conversion* instead of discussion for discussion’s sake.

Furthermore, as Powell hints in the above quote, it is hard to see Minucius’s construction of the two arguments as fair-minded. In his essay on the subject, Powell investigates Minucius’s lack of fairness toward the Roman position on the rhetorical level by comparing the text to Cicero’s techniques in *Hortensius*. In this and one or two other dialogues, Cicero gives an impression of impartiality, but actually maintains strong bias for one side of the argument, instead of a fair representation of both sides as is usually the case in the genre. Powell concludes that the classical style and structure of the *Octavius* has been largely misread. While conceding that they may work towards an appeal “to a presumed audience of pagan *litterati* . . . these literary techniques are also a way of giving an impression of fairness and impartiality in philosophical debate which, when one examines the actual positions . . . turns out to be quite unjustified.”<sup>23</sup> This lack of fairness pointed out by Powell begins to overturn the conclusion made by so many scholars that Minucius’s use of a classical dialogue is itself evidence of his appreciation and respect for Roman tradition. In fact, an author’s use of structure or form does not necessarily determine that author’s views toward his or her subject matter. For example, only a couple centuries prior to Minucius’s composition, the Roman poet Lucretius could follow Livius and other Latin poets in appropriating the Homeric structure of epic poetry, even as the content of Lucretius’s poem repudiated many of the stories of the gods put forth by Homer and other users of the structure. An author’s views and attitudes are communicated through words and rhetoric more than through structure.

## A CHRISTIAN TEXT, OR A ROMAN ONE?

As mentioned in the introduction, another claim supports the idea that Minucius maintains a “respectful” or “eirenic” tone toward Roman tradition: he does not avail himself of the exposition of Christian doctrine in his defense of

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22. Jonathan G. F. Powell, “Unfair to Caecilius?: Ciceronian dialogue techniques in Minucius Felix,” in *Severan Culture*, eds. Simon C. R. Swain, Stephen J. Harrison, and J. Elsner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 177–89, here 182.

23. Powell, “Unfair to Caecilius,” 180.

Christianity but instead continuously references Greco-Roman tradition. Setting aside for a moment the same problem of *non sequitur* that was seen in the discussion of structure, these claims themselves are not without their problems.

But Victor Santacruz in his analysis of the text finds more theology than most scholars. After conceding the lack of explicit mention of Christian elements—like biblical texts, Christ, or the Holy Ghost—he points out that Minucius still does seem to have a theological project focusing on two emerging elements in Christianity that would become increasingly important: truth and grace.<sup>24</sup> Truth is mentioned throughout the text, referring to a lack of it in Caecilius and Roman tradition generally and an abundance of it in Octavius and Christianity. Santacruz argues that Minucius's use of the philosophical tradition is channeled into this message about truth: "The link that [Minucius] establishes between Christianity and truth is the reason for which he has made sure, more than anything, that the dialogue takes a philosophical pathway."<sup>25</sup> Additionally, grace, or the need of the Christian for God's help, forms part of what Santacruz calls Minucius's "implicit" theology: "There is no doubt that one can recognize in it [the text] an implicit theology of grace, or, more precisely, the profound conviction that the Christian has a need for God's help."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Octavius's speech begins with a lengthy discussion of the existence and character of the single true God of Christianity and ends with a discussion of the Christian apocalypse and resurrection.<sup>27</sup> In other words, while the text may lack specific reference to Christian doctrine compared to other early Christian texts, it is not devoid of Christianity, no more so than Tertullian's or Cyprian's apologetic writings, neither of which could be claimed to be respectful or appreciative of Roman tradition. It is in reference to *all three* of these writers that Price makes the observation that "in all these works there is little on the Bible, little Christology, nothing about the Holy Spirit or the emerging doctrine of the Trinity; little on the Redemption (only Judgement); nothing about the Church, its ministry, sacraments, and other practices."<sup>28</sup> With these consid-

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24. Victor Sanz Santacruz, "Filosofía y Teología En El Octavius de Minucio Félix," *ScrTh* 31 (1999): 345–65. Subsequent translations of this article are mine. The original Spanish will appear in the footnotes.

25. "El vínculo que establece entre el cristianismo y la verdad es la razón de que haya buscado por encima de todo que el diálogo discurra por derroteros filosóficos." Santacruz, "Filosofía y Teología," 358.

26. "No cabe duda de que se puede reconocer en él [the text] una teología implícita de la gracia, o, más exactamente, el profundo convencimiento de que el cristiano tiene necesidad de la ayuda de Dios." Santacruz, "Filosofía y Teología," 363–4.

27. For Minucius's discussion of God, see *Octavius* 17–19, 32; for his discussion of apocalypse and resurrection, see *Octavius* 34–35.

28. Price, "Latin Christian Apologetics," 123.

erations in mind, Minucius's levels of interaction with Christian doctrine and Greco-Roman philosophy in the text do not seem altogether out of place.

But even if they were, choice of sources or content—like choice of structure—are a poor indication of an author's attitude or tone toward a set of ideas. A useful comparison can perhaps be made with other early Christian texts. No scholar would deny the presence of anti-Judaism in many early Christian texts.<sup>29</sup> Yet these early Christian writers quoted the translation of the Hebrew Bible available to them extensively throughout their writings. Could Clarke's argument about Minucius then also be applied to the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*? Could we conclude that the author "carefully invokes the testimony of [Hebrew prophetic] tradition itself" in order to refute his predecessors, and thus, "the retention of respect for the past is typical of the general attitude of the [*Epistle of Barnabas*]"?<sup>30</sup> Not necessarily. And likewise, a better measurement of tone is needed to properly determine Minucius's attitude toward Roman tradition.

## MENDACIUM ET FABULAS

In the second half of the text, when Octavius responds to Caecilius, he presents the Roman position as flawed in strong language.<sup>31</sup> Earlier scholars, like Rendall in his introduction to the Loeb edition, have seen this freedom to attack paganism, along with the somewhat weak arguments and subsequent conversion of Caecilius, as representing "current Paganism in its impotent decline."<sup>32</sup> Though "paganism" was probably not actually in an "impotent decline" by the beginning of the third century, as Powell points out, the description is certainly true of Minucius's *presentation* of the situation.<sup>33</sup> Another possibility presents itself. One would assume that if the use of philosophical dialogue and the presence or absence of Christian doctrine in the text are insufficient for determining Minucius's tone, then the words Minucius uses at rhetorically charged moments might shed more light on his actual feelings about Roman tradition. Instead of investigating structure, content, and sources to try to determine something definite about his views of Greco-Roman tradition, one must turn to Minucius's words themselves and their rhetorical habitats.

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29. *Epistle of Barnabas* and Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* are but two examples of early Christian texts with overt anti-Judaic sentiments.

30. Clarke, *Octavius*, 273.

31. In section 20 alone, he uses words like *mendacia*, *aniles fabulas*, *inperitus* ("lies," "old wives' tales," "ignorant"), and others to describe Roman belief and tradition, the first two of which we analyze further, below.

32. Rendall, Introduction to *Octavius*, 305–7.

33. Powell, "Unfair to Caecilius," 188.



For this purpose, we turn to Octavius's speech as presented by Minucius. After pointing out the need to discover the divine and asserting the natural evidences of God's existence (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 16–18), he surveys important philosophers from Greek and Roman antiquity in order to show that they all agreed on one point: monotheism (*Octavius* 19). At this point in the argument, we might expect the author to assert the universality of truth, to survey pieces of Greek and Roman tradition, and then to assert that these were the very same truths believed in by Christianity. For example, in his *First Apology*, Justin emphasizes common ground with Greek tradition in order to show that those who follow Christ (consciously or not) have always been persecuted:

We have been taught that Christ is the First-born of God, and we have suggested above that He is the logos of whom every race of men and women were partakers. And they who lived with the logos are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and people like them.<sup>34</sup>

As Octavius puts it, “One might suppose, either that Christians of today are philosophers, or that philosophers of old were already Christians” (*Octavius* 20.1). Out of context, this sounds in line with Justin's argument and favorable toward Greco-Roman tradition. Indeed, Albrecht and many other scholars have taken this sentence *out of context*. Albrecht notes, “Minucius explicitly states that the terms ‘Christians’ and ‘philosophers’ are equivalent . . . in the spirit of Justin or Athenagoras,” and calls Minucius's rhetorical move an “alliance with philosophy.”<sup>35</sup>

This analysis overstates the assertion of equivalence and ignores the adversative *quod si* immediately following the statement (*Octavius* 20.2). Minucius *explicitly* calls such an agreement with philosophy an error (*ad errorem mutui consensus*; *Octavius* 20.2). Rather than Abad's typical statement that “Minucius Felix's familiarity with various philosophical schools and using them to defend Christianity show that the author subscribes to the continuity between Christianity and classical tradition rather than mutual opposition,”<sup>36</sup> a close look at his use of language shows that Octavius allows neither for Christians to be seen as philosophers, nor for philosophers of old to be thought of as Christian. As mentioned, his generic statement in chiasmic form is followed by the adversative *quod si*. Together with a second generic statement in chiasm at 20.4, this section is marked off as

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34. Justin, *1 Apol.*, 46. *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, trans. Leslie William Barnard, ACW 56 (New York: Newman, 1966), 55.

35. Albrecht, “Minucius Felix,” 166.

36. Abad, “The Octavius,” 4.



a pivotal rhetorical moment.<sup>37</sup> It is within this *inclusio* framed by chiasms that Octavius begins to speak of Greco-Roman tradition in earnest and does so less than favorably. Here, he refers to Greco-Roman tradition as *mendacia* (20.3) and *aniles fabulas* (20.4).

*Mendacium* has a simpler semantic range than *fabula*. It is the common word in Latin for “lie,” sharing a root with the common verb *mentior*, “to lie,” and the adjective for “deceitful,” *mendax*, from which comes the modern English “mendacious.” When Caesar uses it in his *De Bello Gallico*, it refers to the simple lie that Litavicus tells his 10,000 soldiers—namely that the Romans had slaughtered two of their nobles for no reason and with no chance of pleading their case. In reality, these two men were still alive and cooperating with Caesar (Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* 7.38.10). Likewise, Plautus uses the word in *Mercator*, in this case to refer to the lie a son tells his father—that he had purchased a certain slave woman as a maid for his mother, when in fact she was his mistress (Plautus, *Mercator* 1.2.209). Cicero in his *Epistulae ad Familiares* refers to a bunch of lies (*quibus mendaciis*) that were spread about his interference in the distribution of money to ambassadors, which he corrects by telling what actually happened (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares* 3.10.7.1). In these examples and others, the sense and usage of *mendacium* is the same: it is used to refer to simple untruths occurring more or less in day-to-day life. The translation of the word in *Octavius* as “fictions” or even “falsehoods” seems to blunt some of the force of what is being said.<sup>38</sup> Minucius, in saying that *maioribus enim nostris tam facilis in mendaciis fides fuit* (“our ancestors were so ready to believe in *mendaciis*”; *Octavius* 20.3), describes the stories of Greco-Roman tradition not as a fiction—which might include the sense of a figurative description of reality *that is truthful*—but as a lie. Contrary to Clarke’s words, this is clearly an “attack” on

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37. Additionally, the first chiasm invokes Plato’s Republic: “Either the philosophers of the past were kings or present-day kings are philosophers”; and the second invokes Cicero: *si enim esset factitatum, non esset desitum*. See Clarke, *The Octavius*, 272, 274. Interestingly, Abad and Albrecht are both willing to suggest ties between the *Octavius* and Justin Martyr. If Justin is another source for Minucius, the first of these two chiasms could be parodying Justin’s statement already quoted above.

38. “Fictions” is from the Loeb and “Falsehood” is from the Roberts-Donaldson translation. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/octavius.html>. The entry for *mendacium* in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* lists two senses: (1) “a false statement, falsehood, lie” and (2) “a false impression or appearance, illusion, counterfeit.” The Loeb “fictions” does not fit well with either sense. “Falsehood” is of course listed as a possibility in sense (1), but I argue that even this obscures some of the force of *mendacium* simply because “falsehood” is nearly an archaism in present-day English. A quick search of the word in the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) shows that use of “falsehood” in 2000 had decreased by 98% since 1810. <https://www.english-corpora.org/coha/>.

“the value of tradition generally.”<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the better Latin equivalent to “fiction,” *fabula*, is regularly used by Latin authors to describe the tradition.

When Sallust uses *fabula*, he does so in a neutral way. In Book 4 of his *Histories*, he describes a protruding rock in Sicily which the inhabitants have given the name “Scylla,” and thus, Sallust writes, *monstruosam speciem fabulae illi dederunt* (“they gave to that thing the monstrous appearance of the story”; Sallust, *Historiae* 4, 18\* 27M, 23Mc, 21D, 36K). Sallust, in his use of *fabula*, questions neither the truth nor the value of the story referenced. Cicero at least once uses the same word in a context of doubting veracity: *nolite enim id putare accidere posse quod in fabulis saepe videtis fieri* (“do not wish even to think that what you see happen often in plays can happen”; Cicero, *Oratio in Haruspicum* 28.62). Here Cicero is urging the senate to pay attention to the omens and prodigies recently given to them through earthquakes, and not to wait for a messenger from the gods, as occurs in mythological stories. While he is doubting one aspect of the plays—that of trusting the prognostications of divine messengers—the term *fabula* itself does not carry any prosodic commentary of value. Further, it is not used to refer to the entirety of Roman tradition.

Later in the Roman period, Quintilian, in his well-known textbook on rhetoric, uses the word *fabula* in conjunction with *anilis*, as Minucius does; this example is particularly important for reconstructing how Minucius charges his words with meaning. Quintilian discusses the usefulness of continuous reading for a teacher of rhetoric, specifically so they are able to explain any historical allusions in any given text that is being studied with a pupil. But, he cautions, it is important when doing this to stay within the bounds of the well-received or traditional (*receptas*) or that which is remembered by good authorities (*claris auctoribus memoratas*) and to not delve into everything ever written by unknown and rejected writers. One who forces themselves to read such things might as well also apply their work to old wives’ tales (*anilibus fabulis*; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 1.8.18–20). Still closer to the date of our text, Apuleius in his *Apologia* uses *aniles fabulas* in like manner (Apuleius, *Apologia* 25.5–6). In his novel *The Golden Ass*, a character (an old woman) uses the phrase to refer to the story of Cupid and Psyche that she is about to narrate (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 4.27.27). Since the story of Cupid and Psyche is such a well-known story today, this final example might seem contradictory; however, the story is not attested anywhere in the Roman tradition besides Apuleius’s work, so it seems that he may have been doing just the kind of work Quintilian cautioned against—digging around in what might be called “noncanonical” stories.

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39. Clarke, *The Octavius*, 273.

It is clear that when these authors use this phrase, they are not referring to the entirety of Roman tradition, the stories surrounding the gods of the Roman Pantheon, or any of the well-known stories found in Ovid, Vergil, or others. Instead, they use *aniles fabulas* more as we might use “old wives’ tales,” to refer to the obscure and kooky stories on the periphery of culture and tradition. They do not use the phrase to refer to the myths that make up the foundation of their culture, even if they believe them to be untrue. This is an important distinction because Minucius, in a way apparently unprecedented (or at least uncommon), *does* use the phrase exactly in this latter fashion, to refer to the foundational myths of Greco-Roman tradition.

*Quid illas aniles fabulas, de hominibus aves et feras?* (“Why recall old wives’ tales of human beings changed into birds and beasts”; *Octavius* 20.4). This sentence in *Octavius* comes just before the second of the two generic chiasmic statements mentioned above. It must be due to Minucius’s masterful use of rhetoric that scholars have generally failed to recognize Minucius’s unfairness to the Roman position, as pointed out by Powell, and likewise to recognize the full force of this phrase, as with *mendacia* above.<sup>40</sup> Based on other authors’ usage of *aniles fabulas*, it is difficult to cast the passage as respectful. When Minucius refers to the stories in Ovid and elsewhere as *aniles fabulas*, he is taking a new semantic step in the application and extension of the phrase. As Clarke points out above, he does make careful rhetorical moves in citing the tradition itself to attack the tradition, but it does not follow that he is being altogether respectful of tradition, or that he is not also attacking “the value of tradition generally” through his diction and tone. Based on the evidence, his reference to antiquity as *aniles fabulas* is comparable to someone in antebellum America calling the biblical stories at the basis of Christianity “old wives’ tales”—while one might not believe the stories, the severest skeptic would still be considered rude to refer to fundamental cultural stories with the phrase. Likewise with Minucius. He deliberately uses a phrase that has previously referred to outlandish and obscure stories on the periphery of tradition to refer to the central and foundational stories of the *antiquitas inperitorum*. This goes against the assertion that “the general attitude of the *Octavius*” is one of “respect for the past.”<sup>41</sup>

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40. Powell points precisely to this as the reason for misunderstanding Minucius. Why have scholars missed this? “Perhaps because Minucius seems such a nice man that he could not possibly do anything dishonest in presenting his opponent’s case; perhaps because a Christian scholar might be unwilling to attribute such a tactic to a fellow Christian. But the niceness, I have suggested, is deliberate *captatio benevolentiae*, an illusion of fairness (and a successful one, to judge from some modern readers’ reactions). There is no reason to assume that Minucius has any interest whatever in genuinely giving the pagans a fair hearing.” Powell, “Unfair to Caecilius,” 181.

41. Clarke, *Octavius*, 273.

As with the examination of *mendacium*, understanding the philological nuance of the phrase also sheds new light on the construal of the sentence. Lacking a main verb, translators generally supply one: Rendall maintains the interrogative form but renders it, “Why recall old wives’ tales of human beings changed into birds and beasts,”<sup>42</sup> while Clarke translates the passage somewhat more light-heartedly, “Let us not forget those old wives’ tales of men transformed into birds and beasts.”<sup>43</sup> Given Minucius’s earlier use of *mendacium* and this use of *aniles fabulas*, and since it is commonplace in Latin to leave out the existential *esse*, it may be that Minucius is asking a more forceful question: “Why *are there* old wives’ tales of human beings changed into birds and beasts,” or “Why do these old wives’ tales *exist* in the first place?” Minucius is conversant with tradition and knows how to use its techniques effectively, but in light of his use of *mendacium* and *aniles fabulas*, it would be difficult to go so far as to say that he is respectful of the past.

## CONCLUSION

Papias (c. 60–c. 130 CE) lived just a few generations before Minucius Felix. Those fragments that survive of his work, *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, seem to show the work to be a historical (rather than theological or scriptural) approach to the Christian tradition.<sup>44</sup> Papias thus represents the growing need felt by Christians in the second and third centuries to historicize Christianity. In light of the evidence presented in this paper, Minucius’s text could be considered a complimentary effort begun by him and Tertullian and carried on by virtually every subsequent Latin apologist to *de*-historicize or delegitimize Greco-Roman tradition. Rendall, in his introduction to the Loeb series, points out that Minucius was writing at a time when apologists were no longer pleading for hearing; instead, they could be on the offensive, and “the attack on divine origins [of paganism] is carried into the field of history.”<sup>45</sup> Minucius shows us one method by which that attack was carried out, and he does this so well that modern readers have tended to miss the fact that he is attacking at all. The tone is anything but non-belligerent. He is not being peaceful; he is using Roman oratory as his weapon. Besides the fact that Minucius’s perceived lack of normalcy for apologetics has been challenged by

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42. Rendall, *Octavius*, 371–373.

43. Clarke, *Octavius*, 86.

44. Drobner quotes Vielhauer as writing, “Apparently the book . . . was intended to examine the authenticity of the Jesus tradition and to ensure its correct understanding.” Drobner, *Father of the Church*, 55. Not much can be established with certainty regarding Papias since so few fragments of his work remain, but the fragments that are extant do tend to focus on what Papias regarded as eye-witness accounts of the establishment of Christianity and the apostolic tradition, as if Papias was trying to establish the legitimacy of the tradition.

45. Rendall, Introduction to *Octavius*, 310.

scholars as surveyed in this paper, considering Price's assertion that "there was not . . . a clear genre of apologetic," it should not be a surprise that many aspects of the *Octavius* differ from what seems normal for Christian apologetics.<sup>46</sup> According to the considerations of this paper, it may be appropriate to see the *Octavius* as less of an apologetic in the style of plea or defense, and more of an in-group boast in the style of "anything they can do, we can do better."

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46. Price, "Latin Christian Apologetics," 113.

# SACRED WRITING AND MAGICAL METAL

## THE HIGH PRIEST'S HOLY CROWN AS A PROTECTIVE AMULET

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**Abstract:** What forces, practices, rituals, or objects worked to safeguard the ancient Israelite sanctuary against evil and harm? Archaeological and textual evidence suggests that the high priest's golden crown may have been an apotropaic amulet worn to protect the high priest and the holy space. Magical practices described in the Bible are illuminated by the presence of apotropaic ritual and amulets in wider Near Eastern society. Metallic amulets such as those found at Ketef Hinnom were utilized to protect the wearer in the name of the deity. In inscriptions, sacred writing invoked the name of YHWH to guard a sanctuary. The high priest's headplate contained precious metals, sacred writing, and an appeal to YHWH reminiscent of its neighbor apotropaic amulets. These sacred elements as prescribed by YHWH in his holiest sanctuary strongly suggest that the high priest's crown was intended to protect the high priest and the community he represented.

The various writings of the Pentateuch called for ancient Israel's separation from the profane practices of its surrounding cultures in the Near East through the observance of kosher laws, monotheism, and other "peculiar" practices of holiness.<sup>1</sup> However, modern archaeological finds and textual evidence suggest that, in many ways, the Israelite footprint may not have been as distinct from its ancient Near Eastern neighbors as Pentateuchal texts would suggest.

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1. For examples of peculiar dietary laws, warnings against foreign influence, and other separating practices, see Exod 22:30, 23:19, 34:26; Lev 11:1–47, 17:7, 19:1–37, 23:1–3; Deut 12:15–16, 12:30–31, 14:1, 14:3–21. Exod 23:33 warns against allowing foreigners to live in the land, for "they will make you sin against me; for if you worship their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

Particularly intriguing is the Israelite use of apotropaic (evil-warding) amulets, despite being a culture wary of magical practice. These amulets came in a variety of forms and functions throughout the Levant. Iron Age Palestinian cities such as Megiddo, Beth-Shean, Lachish, and Gezer yielded amulets that likely appealed to the Egyptian deity Mut for protection.<sup>2</sup> One scholar used the proliferation of the Mut amulets in the Levant as evidence of the goddess's protective role in the eyes of some Israelites.<sup>3</sup> Another scholar's study of naturalistic mask-amulets from Tel Dor in Israel led him to conclude that the masks were primarily intended to ward off evil.<sup>4</sup> The most significant example of amulets seeking YHWH in ancient Israel are the scrolls discovered at the Ketef Hinnom tombs in Jerusalem. These famous silver amulets are some of the most clearly apotropaic metallic Hebrew artifacts.<sup>5</sup> They also share significant features with the high priest's crown, the ramifications of which will be discussed later in this study.

Despite the resemblance of wider Near Eastern magical practices, the archaeological record demonstrates that Israelites utilized amulets in their yearning for YHWH. This suggests that amulets were more present in formalized Israelite religion than is usually acknowledged. A recent article by Spoelstra claimed that the Israelite people's tassels and the high priest's crown were apotropaic objects.<sup>6</sup> He argued that the crown's rosette, signet-like inscription, and resemblance of other Near Eastern protective headpieces pointed to its apotropaic potential.<sup>7</sup> This article will seek to build upon these conclusions. Rather than focusing on the headplate's connection to the people's tassels, it will situate the Israelite headplate within a cultic context and provide further examples of the name of God being used to protect holy establishments. For the purposes of this study, it will be accepted that the Priestly strand of the Pentateuch was compiled during the Iron Age.<sup>8</sup>

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2. Christopher B. Hays, "The Egyptian Goddess Mut in Iron Age Palestine: Further Data from Amulets and Onomastics," *JNES* 71 (2012): 299–313, here 304.

3. *Ibid.*, 299.

4. Ephraim Stern, "Iron Age-Persian Masks and Protonomes from Tel Dor," in *The Physicality of the Other: Masks From the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. by Angelika Berlejung and Judith E. Filitz, *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike* 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 169–89, here 177.

5. Jeremy D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

6. Joshua Joel Spoelstra, "Apotropaic Accessories," in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: For All Her Household Are Clothed in Crimson*, ed. Antonios Finitis, *LHBOTS* 679 (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 63–86.

7. *Ibid.*

8. For scholars who propose a possible pre-exilic origin for the priestly writings or traditions, see Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 132–48 and Jonathan S. Greer,

This article will focus on the use of the high priest's inscribed "holy diadem" of Exodus 39:30<sup>9</sup> as an apotropaic amulet through a study of the ancient function of metal and metallic amulets, the ritual significance of writing, and the purposes of the high priest's clothing within the tabernacle.<sup>10</sup>

## THE USE OF MAGIC AND AMULETS

Magic was clearly present in Israelite society, as biblical writings contain words such as "magician" or "sorcerer" (מכשף), "charmer" (חובר), "enchanter" (מלחש), "expert in magic" (חכם חרשים), and "divination" (מקס).<sup>11</sup> While prophets and biblical writers often used these terms to warn against magic in principle, Römer asserted that in practice the link between prophets and magical acts in ancient Israel was substantial.<sup>12</sup> Examples include prophets purifying waters (2 Kgs 2:18–22), retrieving an iron axe from water (2 Kgs 6:1–7), bringing the dead back to life (1 Kgs 17:17–24 and 2 Kgs 4:32–37), and reverencing deceased ancestors.<sup>13</sup> While magic was often condemned, especially by Deuteronomistic writers, the Priestly strand seemed to adopt and adapt the rituals of Israel's neighbors.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the Priestly source depicted Aaron as a magician who gained power against Egypt's sorcerers from YHWH's word.<sup>15</sup> Protective, purifying, or evil-warding practices similar to those listed above were also displayed anciently through the use of amulets.

A review of the form, function, and significance of amulets proves useful in understanding the amuletic potential of the high priest's crown. Ancient Near Eastern amulets were often apotropaic devices. While archaeologists have uncovered a limited number of amulets from ancient Israel, wider regional examples are plentiful and may be used to show probable influences on Israelite culture from the time.

Ancient Near Eastern amulets came in a variety of uses and structures. Petrie, a 19th-century archaeologist, asserted that "we must define amulets broadly as

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"The 'Priestly Portion' in the Hebrew Bible: Its Ancient Near Eastern Context and Its Implications for the Composition of P" *JBL* 138 (2019): 263–284.

9. All biblical references come from the NRSV.

10. The "holy diadem" is sometimes referred to in scholarship as the "holy crown" or "headplate." These names will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.

11. Thomas C. Römer, "Competing Magicians in Exodus 7–9: Interpreting Magic in the Priestly Theology," in *Magic in the Biblical World: from the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, ed. Todd Klutz (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 12–22, here 13–14.

12. Although Römer prefers a Persian dating for much of the biblical text, the presence of Iron Age apotropaic objects such as the Ketef Hinnom amulets suggest that what is often deemed "magic" did have some hold on Israelite society of the time.

13. Römer, "Competing Magicians in Exodus 7–9," 14–15.

14. For the condemnation of magic, see Exod 22:18 and Deut 18:11–12.

15. Römer, "Competing Magicians in Exodus 7–9," 20.



objects worn by the living, without any physical use but for magical benefits, or placed with the dead, or set up in the house for its magical properties, apart from deities for household worship.”<sup>16</sup> He explained that amulets could be worn by a human, buried with a deceased person, or placed in a home.<sup>17</sup> When used as jewelry, amulets contained holes so that they could be strung through with wire or gold.<sup>18</sup> The Egyptian Oracular Amuletic Decrees were papyri writings in which deities guaranteed protection for specific people. Wilfong proposed that these papyri were formed to a length proportional to the height of their owners and then rolled up and worn as amulets.<sup>19</sup> If this is true, then each amulet may have served to guard the owner’s entire body length, from head to toe.<sup>20</sup> Middle Kingdom Egyptian amulets in the shape of scarabs warded off evil and also may have been passed down between generations as heirlooms.<sup>21</sup> They were often made of semi-precious stones.<sup>22</sup> Ben-Tor observed that Palestinian settlers appropriated these scarabs for their own purposes, often utilizing them as funerary amulets.<sup>23</sup> Limmer validated another scholar’s claim that biblical amulets may have emerged as “plaques or bands” on the forehead.<sup>24</sup> Götting likewise claimed that amulets could be worn on the neck, around extremities such as hands and feet, or kept at the bed of a person who was afflicted by demons. She also proposed that amulets could be placed as protectors in the doorways of ancient houses.<sup>25</sup> Limmer noted that the efficacy of an amulet could derive from its written contents or the material that formed it.<sup>26</sup> Some amulets took form in metal; this phenomenon will be discussed later in the paper.

The main function of Near Eastern amulets was to ward off evil on behalf of an owner. Hays explained that amulets were often associated with guardianship and protection.<sup>27</sup> Harris cited Carol Andrews’s translation of “amulet” in conjunction

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16. W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Amulets*, (London: Constable & Co, 1914), 6.

17. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

18. Abigail Limmer, “The Social Functions and Ritual Significance of Jewelry” (PhD diss., The University of Arizona, 2007), 372.

19. T. G. Wilfong, “The Oracular Amuletic Decrees: A Question of Length.” *JEA* 99 (2013): 295–300, here 295.

20. *Ibid.*, 298.

21. Daphna Ben-Tor, “The Relations between Egypt and Palestine in the Middle Kingdom as Reflected by Contemporary Canaanite Scarabs,” *IEJ* 47 (1997): 162–89, here 165.

22. Ben-Tor, “The Relations between Egypt and Palestine,” 185.

23. *Ibid.*, 188.

24. Limmer, “The Social Functions,” 30.

25. Eva Götting, “Arcane Art: Some Thoughts on the Perception of the Magico-Religious Imagery of Lamaštu-Amulets,” *IO ICAANE* 1 (2018): 455–66, here 456.

26. Limmer, “The Social Functions,” 25.

27. Hays, “The Egyptian Goddess Mut in Iron Age Palestine,” 306.

with the Egyptian meanings “guard,” “protect,” and “well-being.”<sup>28</sup> Limmer also referenced these translations in her dissertation on Levantine and Egyptian jewelry.<sup>29</sup> Limmer added that Hebrew words that translate as “amulet” could literally mean “rock of grace/favor/charm,” “precious stone,” or “stone with positive power.”<sup>30</sup> Harris explored the social, cultic, and apotropaic features of Egyptian diadems and other jewelry. She explained that jewelry was positioned on specific parts of the body that would need special protection due to their susceptibility.<sup>31</sup> Several of the above examples make it clear that amulets were usually worn and often were created as jewelry. The Israelite high priest’s crown as a piece of jewelry with apotropaic qualities will be explored later in this paper.

### *Metallic Function in Ancient Near Eastern and Israelite Society*

Textual and archaeological evidence suggests that metal was both useful and meaningful to ancient societies. Scholarly investigations suggest that ancient cultures utilized metal for magical rituals with reverence, and at times, caution. Biblical passages portrayed YHWH as the Divine Smith who shapes, purifies, and transforms Israel.<sup>32</sup> McNutt explained that the location of Timna in the Levant shows evidence of metalworking in conjunction with Hathor’s Egyptian Temple and other shrines, such as a Midianite shrine.<sup>33</sup> Amzallag and Yona believed that Timna was the site of a sanctuary specified in the book of Numbers.<sup>34</sup> Similar to McNutt’s Midianite hypothesis, Amzallag and Yona emphasized Timna’s ties with the YHWH-devoted Kenites.<sup>35</sup> This suggests that worship may have played a role in Israelite metalworking.<sup>36</sup>

A curious Israelite ritual that may have utilized metal for magical purposes is described in the book of Numbers’ *Sotah* prescription (Num 5:11–31). Performed in times of suspected adultery, the *Sotah* prescription involved a priest writing a curse and giving a potion to the accused woman. Amzallag and Yonah suggested that an ingredient of the concoction was “finely crushed copper ore” that would

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28. Stephanie J. Harris, “From River Weeds to Regal Fabulous: Iconography and Symbolism of a 12th Dynasty Egyptian Diadem,” *Journal for Semitics* (2016): 253–83, here 259.

29. Limmer, “The Social Functions,” 372.

30. *Ibid.*, 97.

31. Harris, “From River Weeds,” 255.

32. Paula M. McNutt, *The Forging of Israel: Iron Technology, Symbolism and Tradition in Ancient Society* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 239.

33. *Ibid.*, 208.

34. See Num 5:11–31.

35. Gérard Nissim Amzallag and Shamir Yonah, “The Kenite Origin of the Sotah Prescription (Numbers 5.11–31),” *JSOT* 41 (2016–2017): 383–412, here 391.

36. McNutt, *The Forging of Israel*, 208.

have appeared if the sanctuary performed cultic metallurgy.<sup>37</sup> Some scholars cited this priestly response to the woman accused of adultery to be an ordeal or magical ritual, while others such as Amzallag and Yonah contested this conclusion.<sup>38</sup> Rather than causing future sterility as some scholars proposed,<sup>39</sup> Amzallag and Yonah claimed that these copper salts likely resulted in a miscarriage,<sup>40</sup> thereby describing a process that may have been practical rather than magical or mysterious. While scholars are divided over whether the *Sotah* account described a magical ritual, its literary and contextual proximity to the creation of the high priest's crown deems it relevant to this study. The *Sotah* ritual's possible utilization of metal, ritual writing, and tabernacle space provide compelling evidence that the Israelites used such things for a ritual within a cultic setting. The implications of this ritual for the high priest's crown will be further explored later in this study.

Many precious metals held ritual, decorative, and practical purposes in the ancient Near East. Schorsch explained that gold, silver, and electrum were used the most creatively beginning in the second half of Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty.<sup>41</sup> They began to be associated with some symbolic meanings. Silver was a mark of wealth and a strong economy, and silver jewelry could be apotropaic. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether silver jewelry was apotropaic due to its material or simply to its form.<sup>42</sup> Gold was similarly valued in ancient societies. Schorsch detailed the Egyptians' association of gold with the sun, rebirth, the gods' flesh, and solar deities.<sup>43</sup> Harris expressed that, to the Egyptians, gold contained "supernatural qualities" and symbolized eternal life. She added that gold was especially connected with deities such as Amun-Re, Hathor, and Isis.<sup>44</sup> According to Limmer, Israel estimated gold to be a precious object, mark of social status, symbol of permanence, and representative of the throne.<sup>45</sup> In the case of later Jewish amulets, Kotansky proposed that gold was symbolic of the sun, and silver of the moon.<sup>46</sup>

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37. Amzallag and Yonah, "The Kenite Origin of the Sotah Prescription," 390.

38. For discussions on the *Sotah* ritual as magical, see the writings of Morgenstern, Schäfer, Schmitt, Bohak, and Miller as cited by Amzallag and Yonah.

39. Amzallag and Yonah, "The Kenite Origin of the Sotah Prescription," 393.

40. *Ibid.*, 396.

41. Deborah Schorsch, "Precious-Metal Polychromy in Egypt in the Time of Tutankhamun," *JEA* 87 (2001): 55–71, here 55.

42. Limmer, "The Social Functions," 147.

43. Schorsch, "Precious-Metal Polychromy," 57.

44. Harris, "From River Weeds," 266.

45. Limmer, "The Social Functions," 145.

46. Roy Kotansky, "Two Inscribed Jewish Aramaic Amulets from Syria," *IEJ* 41 (1991): 267–81, here 270.

Despite these metals' positive characteristics, Israelites likely fretted over the role of gold and silver in the creation of idols.<sup>47</sup>

As has been previously discussed, the ancient Near East has yielded many varieties of amulets. The symbolic nature of metal and the ritual and personal significance of amulets are amplified as metallic amulets are discovered by archaeologists. One Egyptian temple sported poles with golden tips that served as apotropaic defenses.<sup>48</sup> Some scholars have found the head piece of the Ugarit Baal to be both apotropaic and possibly formed of gold.<sup>49</sup> The *atef*-crown of pharaoh housed an apotropaic uraeus that was likely decorated with gold leaf.<sup>50</sup> Harris analyzed the diadem of Egyptian Princess Khnumet-nefert-hezet, containing symbols of flowers or sky, which would have been seen as protective.<sup>51</sup> The gold from which it was made would have been viewed as symbolic of life, the sun, and the flesh of deity itself.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the Ketef Hinnom amulets are a prime example of metal used to fashion amulets.<sup>53</sup> The abundance of royal and religious metallic amulets in the ancient world suggest that a metallic object as ritually and societally significant as the high priest's crown may have been apotropaic as well.

### *Writing as a Conveyer of Apotropaic Power*

The Ketef Hinnom amulets are a pair of thin, silver scrolls that contain a text downplaying evil, praising YHWH's attributes, and calling for a blessing from YHWH.<sup>54</sup> The amulets have been set apart as an example of amulets in late Iron Age Israelite society.<sup>55</sup> Smoak claimed that beyond the oft-studied priestly blessing, the remainder of the Ketef Hinnom amulets' writings may have been used in warding off evil, and that such practices may have played a significant role in Israelite religion.<sup>56</sup> An intriguing concept is the idea that physically carving a blessing on an amulet grants the object power to ward off evil.<sup>57</sup> Through Smoak's study of the writing of the priestly blessing, he concluded that scholars must no longer hold

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47. Limmer, "The Social Functions," 146.

48. Miroslav Verner, *Temple of the World* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2013), 9.

49. Spoelstra, "Apotropaic Accessories," 68–69.

50. *Ibid.*, 74–75.

51. Harris, "From River Weeds," 264.

52. *Ibid.*, 266.

53. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 12–15.

54. Jeremy D. Smoak, "May YHWH Bless You and Keep You from Evil," *JANER* 12 (2012): 202–36, here 211.

55. *Ibid.*, 208.

56. *Ibid.*, 219.

57. *Ibid.*, 217.

to the “false dichotomy between text and ritual,”<sup>58</sup> and that the priestly blessing of Numbers seems to follow a “much broader West-Semitic tradition of inscribed short apotropaic or blessing formulae upon metal for protective purposes.”<sup>59</sup> This conclusion, when applied to the high priestly headplate, opens the possibility of viewing the writing of the metal crown’s inscription “Holy to YHWH” as a ritual act. While it is possible that any ritual act of writing could have granted power to an object, it seems especially likely to do so when containing a blessing or the name of YHWH. These sacred words, carved on the high priest’s headplate, will be reflected upon in the following section.

The Israelite priests were not only considered spiritual authorities, but also “ritual experts in the use of words, particularly in the use of the divine name.”<sup>60</sup> Those with the authority to curse, bless, and seek protection from harm would call upon God using carefully selected words in the writing of covenants or blessings.<sup>61</sup> The ancient act of writing blessings may have served several purposes, namely perpetuating words throughout time and transferring the efficacy of a text from its writer to its medium.<sup>62</sup> The *Sotah* prescription mentioned earlier required a priest to “put these curses in writing, and wash them off into the water of bitterness.”<sup>63</sup> This account makes it clear that in the tabernacle’s ritual setting, at least one step in bringing about a desired effect (the disclosure of the guilty) was physically writing a curse. As mentioned before, Smoak claimed that the very act of inscribing lends itself to actual power; the placement of those words in that location will cause the writer’s wish to come to pass.<sup>64</sup>

Other instances of sacred inscriptions and the installation of written blessings have been found in the Levant. An appeal to deity for safeguarding the community came in the form of words carved into limestone in the Philistine city of Ekron.<sup>65</sup> Inscriptions discovered at the Khirbet el-Qom tombs display apotropaic power as well. The site’s inscription #3 stands out for its duplication of letters and words that may reflect a Mesopotamian utilization of repetition when intensifying one’s appeal to deity for help.<sup>66</sup> It also invoked the names of YHWH and His Asherah for the

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58. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 129.

59. Ibid., 134.

60. Ibid., 138.

61. Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 246–47. For examples, see the *Sotah* curse in Num 5:19–27, Jacob’s blessing in Gen 48:14–15, or Isaac’s agreement with Abimelech in Gen 26:28–31.

62. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 143.

63. Num 5:23

64. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 119.

65. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 116.

66. Brian B. Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 158–9.

protection of Uriyahu.<sup>67</sup> Even more striking are the inscribed objects at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, which contains images on installed pithoi and walls as well as graffito. These writings and drawings reinforce the ritual efficacy of writing in ancient Israel due to their association of the written names of YHWH and Asherah with images of the Egyptian apotropaic deities Bes and Beset.<sup>68</sup> Schmidt claimed that the inscription of divine phrases and images elevated the pithoi from mundane objects into ones associated with ritual.<sup>69</sup> It is possible that certain rites were completed at the site of the installed pithos, such as water libations, offerings, incense burning, and sacred meals.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, the apotropaic power of these inscriptions was not likely contained within their direct vicinity; the passerby would receive YHWH and Asherah's guarding along their way.<sup>71</sup> The above inscriptions serve as examples of deliberately placed writings in ritual or mortuary contexts.

The inscriptions found at Ekron, Khirbet el-Qom, and Kuntillet 'Ajrud utilized the name of YHWH to bring about protection. Similarly, the inclusion of the name of YHWH in the priestly blessing and appeal to the glistening of His face reminds the worshipper of YHWH's sanctuary.<sup>72</sup> Smoak argued that the speaking of these references to the temple in the Ketef Hinnom amulets actuated YHWH's guarding force even for those who were away from Jerusalem.<sup>73</sup> Examples such as these from the ancient Levant make it clear that words were often seen as efficacious in warding off evil, especially in a ritual setting such as the tabernacle where the high priest's crown remained.

## THE HEADPIECE OF ISRAEL'S HIGH PRIEST AS AN APOTROPAIC AMULET

This section will seek to use the evidences explored above—namely, the purpose of protective amulets, the importance of metal, and the ritual use of writing—to prove that the high priest's crown may have been intended, in part, to ward off evil or harm. It will also explore the form of the ancient tabernacle and its association with apotropaic power.

In order to properly explore this claim, one must understand the biblical and scholarly insight regarding the nature of the high priest's crown. Exodus 28 describes the high priest's headplate thus:

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67. Ibid., 156.

68. Ibid., 89.

69. Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 24. This practice of animating an object through a formal act brings the Near Eastern mouth-washing ritual to mind.

70. Ibid., 36.

71. Ibid., 219.

72. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 62.

73. Ibid.

36 You shall make a rosette (רִצֵּי) of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, "Holy to the Lord." 37 You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban. 38 It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take on himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering that the Israelites consecrate as their sacred donations; it shall always be on his forehead, in order that they may find favor before the Lord.

Exodus 39 adds:

30 They made the rosette (רִצֵּי) of the holy diadem of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription, like the engraving of a signet, "Holy to the Lord." 31 They tied to it a blue cord, to fasten it on the turban above; as the Lord had commanded Moses.

The above text demonstrates several key features of the high priest's headpiece: namely, the golden diadem or rosette, the blue cord, and the words "Holy to the Lord." The text is difficult to interpret regarding the specific form of the high priest's רִצֵּי or rosette. Scholars have wrestled with the possibility of a golden flower rosette, a flat, glistening plaque, or a pendant-adornment cascading from the forehead.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of its form, it is likely that the rosette had a hole to accommodate a blue cord which was strung through it.<sup>75</sup>

Exodus 28:43 makes it clear that the priestly clothing was a means of bearing the people's burden of iniquity. Scholars have also suggested other possible purposes of the high priest's rosette. Propp theorized that the high priest's crown likened Aaron to a sacrifice, enhanced offerings, and appointed Aaron (and thereby the people) as YHWH's belongings.<sup>76</sup> The crown benefitted Aaron and the people by bringing YHWH's name to the community through the high priest.<sup>77</sup> Haran noted that the high priest's crown was to be worn "regularly," and that it called for God's grace.<sup>78</sup> He also cited Exodus 28:38 to assert that the diadem represented the people's offerings, to ensure that they were "acceptable for them" in front of YHWH.<sup>79</sup> Some scholars have hinted at possible apotropaic abilities of the high priest's crown. Propp noted that the creation and setting-apart of the high priest's

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74. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 447.

75. Ibid., 448.

76. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 524–525.

77. Ibid., 526.

78. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 214–5.

79. Ibid.



vestments protected the wearer against the danger that could arise from seeing the face of God. It also served as a reminder to the high priest of the sanctuary's "dangerous aura" that comes with approaching God.<sup>80</sup> As mentioned before, Spoelstra claimed that the high priest's crown served to ward off evil, due to its rosette.<sup>81</sup>

Imes noted that the general lack of clothing descriptions in the Hebrew Bible does not necessarily denote a lack of significance of clothing. She even suggested that the Hebrew Bible's relative silence regarding clothing renders the high priest's intricately-described regalia even more noteworthy.<sup>82</sup> In her interpretation of the appearance of tabernacle-related clothing items, Imes pointed out that the priests' white garments represented the sanctuary's purity, while the high priest's embellished garments signified the "majesty of YHWH."<sup>83</sup> The purity of the ordinary priest's clothing, worn also by the high priest, was to be safeguarded by both parties.<sup>84</sup> The consequence for not wearing the priestly undergarments was death.<sup>85</sup> Haran maintained that wearing the sacred vestments was not simply a requirement for the high priest before engaging in ritual; rather, the vestments were a substance and act of ritual of their own right.<sup>86</sup> Petrie's earlier definition of an amulet as something worn by the living for "magical benefits" sheds light on the apotropaic significance of this ritualic wearing of the high priest's crown.<sup>87</sup>

### *Similarities to Metallic Ancient Near Eastern Amulets*

The previous section of this paper provided examples of apotropaic headpieces utilized by wider Near Eastern societies. As mentioned before, Baal's evil-warding headpiece may have been fashioned from gold.<sup>88</sup> Also likely covered in gold was the pharaoh's protective *atef*-crown, which held some striking similarities to the crown donned by the Israelite high priest. Spoelstra pointed to both crowns' location (on the forehead), color, connection to flowers, and representation (through words or image) of a sacred deity.<sup>89</sup> The apotropaic flowers of the Egyptian Khnumet-nefethez's crown are significant because the Israelite high priest's crown also contained

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80. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 525.

81. Spoelstra, "Apotropaic Accessories," 63–86.

82. Carmen Joy Imes, "Between Two Worlds: The Functional and Symbolic Significance of the High Priestly Regalia," in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Antonios Finitis, (LHBOTS 679. London: T&T Clark, 2019), 29.

83. Imes, "Between Two Worlds," 37.

84. Ibid., 38.

85. Ibid., 36.

86. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 212.

87. Petrie, *Amulets*, 6.

88. Spoelstra, "Apotropaic Accessories," 68–69.

89. Ibid., 74–75.



some semblance of a flower or rosette.<sup>90</sup> The high priest's metallic crown may be seen as protective in the same way as Baal's golden rosette, the pharaoh's golden uraeus, or Khnumet-nefert-hezet's golden, floral diadem. Harris explained that the sensory experience of donning such a piece as Khnumet's diadem would also have affected its purpose and efficacy.<sup>91</sup> One can imagine that while the princess handled the delicate gold wiring and viewed the glinting of the flowery jewels, both familiar apotropaic symbols, her head and body would have felt ritually covered in the object's protective power. Harris's claim regarding the ritual efficacy of putting on the Egyptian crown could certainly hold for the high priest's crown. As each item of the high priest's regalia was dictated by YHWH, it is quite likely that the sacredness of donning the high priest's crown may have brought about its ritual and apotropaic effect. The high priest's unique role in preserving the purity of the sanctuary and the people of Israel was demonstrated by the physical objects he utilized. Exodus's instructions regarding the donning of sacred clothing by Aaron and his sons indicated that the Lord required such things so "that they bear not iniquity, and die."<sup>92</sup> This wording clearly presents a protective aspect to the priestly clothing. It is even possible that the high priest's wearing of the rosette (צִיץ) and the people's donning of tassels (צִיצִת) indicated protection and a reception of the priestly blessing.<sup>93</sup> This maintenance of the spiritual and societal order protected YHWH's people from the harm and evil that they could have encountered.

### *The Power of the Headplate's Writing*

Passages in the books of Proverbs and Deuteronomy required the faithful Israelite to write and "bind" YHWH's commandments to one's body.<sup>94</sup> Smoak cited the Ketef Hinnom amulets as an Iron Age example of such a practice.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, the inscription on the high priest's headplate placed words specifically chosen by YHWH on the body, including YHWH's name. The Ketef Hinnom amulets and the high priest's headplate were both jewelry items which shared YHWH's name, metal writing, and cultic connections to a tabernacle or temple. If the mere allusion to the Israelite temple (through the shining face of God) granted the Ketef Hinnom amulets such apotropaic power, then surely the high priest, as the one continually before the face of YHWH through sacred ritual and status, may also

90. Harris, "From River Weeds," 264.

91. Ibid., 278.

92. Exod 28:43.

93. Spoelstra, "Apotropaic Accessories," 80, 82, 84.

94. See Prov 3:3; 6:21–22 and Deut 6:6–9; 11:18–21 for the binding of YHWH's *commandments*. Furthermore, Num 6:27 promises blessings to those Israelites who have had the *name* of YHWH placed upon them.

95. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 136.

have been protected by the divinely appointed use of YHWH's name on his crown. Although the inscription on the high priest's crown is so brief that a set formula can be difficult to detect, the use of the name of YHWH still fits into a general pattern of words with apotropaic power.

Furthermore, the *Sotah* prescription, as described earlier in this paper, serves as a clear example of the ritual writing of words in a cultic setting.<sup>96</sup> Especially in a context as dictated by deity as the creation of the tabernacle sanctuary, it is not unreasonable to assume that the writing on the high priest's crown as prescribed by YHWH held ritual significance. Both the *Sotah* prescription and the Ketef Hinnom amulets are examples of scribal writing effectively bringing about action or protection through YHWH. One can conclude that the act of inscribing upon the high priest's crown might have also played such a ritual and apotropaic role.

### *The Tabernacle as a Place of Magical Ritual*

The tabernacle was a place of ritual. Jeffers observed that the ancient "tent of meeting"<sup>97</sup> held magical properties, in that it was either potentially harmful or potentially safeguarding for Israelites it served, depending on its location.<sup>98</sup> It also was a place of divination, wherein Moses or a priest would consult with the divine.<sup>99</sup> Scholars have proposed a link between the priestly or high priestly clothing and the material, structure, and function of the ancient tabernacle.<sup>100</sup> Upon following this analogy, one might associate the high priest's golden crown with the magical properties of the sanctuary. The crown may have also represented the precious furniture found within the sanctuary.<sup>101</sup> As the high priest's crown bore the name of YHWH upon it, it may be fitting to equate it with the holy of holies wherein YHWH dwelled.

The cultic installations mentioned at Ekron, Khirbet el-Qom, and Kuntillet 'Ajrud called upon YHWH for protection. Rather than the placement of a sacred blessing on a tomb, a wall<sup>102</sup> or in a religious record,<sup>103</sup> the high priest's sacred clothing and body served as the medium for YHWH's words. YHWH's command to place the inscribed golden crown on the forehead of the high priest may

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96. Amzallag and Yonah, "The Kenite Origin of the Sotah Prescription," 369.

97. The "tent of meeting" was the either the precursor to or substance of the ancient tabernacle.

98. Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 218.

99. Ibid., 219.

100. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 169.

101. Ibid.

102. See the above discussion on the inscriptions at Ekron, Khirbet el-Qom, and Kuntillet 'Ajrud.

103. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing*, 129.

be analogous to the installation of sacred blessings within the ancient Levantine sanctuary. Some scholars theorize that while community sanctuaries hosted the power of deities through permanent inscription installations, home shrines or tombs utilized portable markers of the deity's presence.<sup>104</sup> The Israelite high priest's crown, if viewed as an inscription, was certainly not permanent nor confined to one place. While this may appear to challenge the legitimacy of its function as an apotropaic inscription, a deeper look at the tabernacle's purpose may explain the transportability of the high priest's headplate. The tabernacle, the original setting for the Israelite high priest and his sacred clothing, was created to be moveable. As a sanctuary for a transient people, the tabernacle was unable to house a permanent inscription. If the high priest's clothing was a representation of the tabernacle itself, it follows that a temporary sanctuary might have found godly protection by means of a moving object in the form of a wearable amulet. The dynamic nature of the tabernacle was reflected in the high priest. Just as the protective sanctuary traveled throughout the desert to fulfill the will of YHWH, so moved the high priest with his amuletic wear around the sanctuary to perform his divinely appointed duties.<sup>105</sup>

The broader ancient Near Eastern customs regarding amulets, golden headpieces, and sacred writing suggest that the high priest's golden crown likely served an apotropaic purpose. Additionally, the figure of the high priest may have acted as a portable medium for YHWH's protection upon his sanctuary. These factors all suggest the presence of an evil-warding function of the holy crown.

## CONCLUSION

Evidence of magical amulets, apotropaic metals, sacred writing, and a tabernacle imbued with protective ritual demonstrates that the high priest's crown may be viewed as an amulet. This paper investigated the presence of such artifacts and rituals, first throughout the ancient Near East and then in Israelite society. Upon likening these evil-warding customs to the high priest's jewelry-like, golden, inscribed, cultic crown, it is probable that the donning of the sacred diadem granted the Israelites YHWH's favor. The high priest's central role to the religious community may have utilized protection that covered himself and his people. Accounts of similar phenomena in the form of sacred writings, wearable jewelry, or

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104. Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion*, 73, 454, 469, as cited in Schmidt, *The Materiality of Power*, 89.

105. With the transition from a portable tabernacle to a permanent Israelite temple, some may argue against the transient nature of the high priest's crown as a symbol of the tabernacle. The author would assert that this would not change the crown's use as a portable inscription and amulet. One may also consider the possibility that the constant moving of the high priest might remind the later Judahite worshipper of Israel's origin as a nation of wanderers who sought protection from God in a cloud. See Exod 13:21–22.

permanent installations make it clear that Iron Age Israel's charge to separate itself from other peoples did not result in the total abolition of magical practice. Scholars would be prudent to research whether other rituals associated with the tabernacle contain apotropaic qualities, thereby demonstrating that the Ketef Hinnom amulets, the *Sotah* prescription, and the high priest's crown were not isolated incidents. This fascinating response to the norms of ancient Near Eastern society hints at the varied religious and cultural motivations of the "set apart" Israelite society. Scholars' acceptance of this fact may allow for a deeper understanding of an Israelite theological and cultic system that was much more complex and nuanced than previously thought. While traditional emphasis on Israel's otherness may have caused the holy crown's amuletic function to be overlooked, the evidence is sufficient to suggest that magical ritual may not have been as foreign to Israel as previously supposed.

# HEDGEHOGS AND HYENAS

## PECULIAR ANIMALS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

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**Abstract:** This essay discusses archeological information gained from the study of Egyptian artifacts, specifically focused on hedgehogs and hyenas. The aim of this paper is to expand our understanding of these animals in the day-to-day lives of Egyptians from this period, and further clarify the symbolism that they hold. Understanding the importance of less common animals within ancient Egyptian religion and symbolism is vital to understanding how the average person lived and interacted with the world around them.

Animal symbolism is a well-known aspect of ancient Egyptian religious practice and art. Most people are acquainted with Egyptian artwork depicting human bodies with animal heads; Anubis the Jackal, Horus the Hawk, and Hathor the Cow are some examples. However, a general understanding of the symbolism behind this common practice, and more specifically the symbolism of lesser-known animals, is uncommon. Egypt has a varied range of ecosystems within its borders and is diverse in its flora and fauna. With high contact between humans and animals being a normal aspect of life, it is no surprise that the lesser-known animals of Egypt would play an important role in the lives of the ancient Egyptians. There are two animals that one would not readily associate with Egypt, but were present and important in their culture: the hedgehog and the hyena.

Both animals are found in modern and ancient Egypt. Depictions of hedgehogs and hyenas can be found as far back as the Predynastic Era in tomb artwork, as statues, and as carvings. Ancient Egyptians heavily used symbolism in their lives; thus, it is a simple conjecture to make that, for the Egyptians, an animal worth depicting carried an associated symbolism.

## HEDGEHOGS

Often seen as a modern-day house pet, hedgehogs are first and foremost wild animals. Hedgehogs can be found in the forests of Europe, the deserts of Africa, as well as many other diverse ecosystems. The subspecies of hedgehog endemic to the area of Africa that encompasses Egypt is the long-eared hedgehog (*Hemiechinus auritus*).<sup>1</sup> There are two specific habits of the hedgehog that Egyptian symbolism expounds upon: hibernation and rolling up into a ball as a defense mechanism. In relation to ancient Egypt, the hedgehog's cyclical hibernation pattern, or torpor pattern, would have lined up with the yearly flooding of the Nile. Torpor is a state of physical and/or mental lethargy common in mammals who are known to hibernate; it acts as a stand in for full hibernation when the animal may need to quickly or regularly wake up to protect itself or eat food.<sup>2</sup> Since hedgehogs "enter periods of torpor during the summer,"<sup>3</sup> this would have been in the same time frame as the Nile flooding, which takes place between May and August. The flooding of the Nile was a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation, and, following a similar annual schedule, the same symbolism could be applied to the sleeping and awakening of the hedgehogs. The ancient Egyptians were a people who relied on and believed in symbolism and representation of their religious mindset in their environment; seeing an animal effectively living out the rejuvenation process would have been important to them and been a further indicator that their religious beliefs of the cyclical nature of life bore merit.

Regarding hedgehogs rolling up into a ball as a defense mechanism, this also likely had symbolic meaning to the ancient Egyptian people. This act of self-defense would have been seen as a symbol of protection leading to the usage of imagery of hedgehogs in amulets and other protective symbols;<sup>4</sup> one clear example is that of a funerary boat found in Tell Ibrahim Awad, which will be touched on shortly.<sup>5</sup> Beyond the two commonly known habits of the hedgehogs, it is also important to note other of its abilities that would have symbolic importance to the ancient Egyptian people. Hedgehogs are considerably fast and can cover roughly eight to nine kilometers in a single day.<sup>6</sup> Along with their speed, they are nocturnal animals. Both of these abilities, along with their protective abilities and

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1. Erica M. Santana, Holly E. Jantz, Troy L. Best, "Atelerix Albiventris (Erinaceomorpha: Erinaceidae)," *Mammalian Species* 42 (2010): 99–110.

2. Webster's Online Dictionary: Torpor.

3. Erica M. Santana, Holly E. Jantz, Troy L. Best, "Atelerix Albiventris," 99–110.

4. Rachel Frame, "The Symbolism of Hedgehogs on Aryballoi in Ancient Egypt," *Ostraka* (2018).

5. Willem M. Haarlem, "A Remarkable 'Hedgehog-Ship' from Tell Ibrahim Awad," *JEA* 82 (1996): 197–98. Accessed June 30, 2021. doi:10.2307/3822123.

6. Santana, "Atelerix Albiventris," 108.

hibernation habits, would have probably endeared them to the ancient Egyptians as guides or protectors, specifically to those who had passed on. As a guide into the darkness of the afterlife, hedgehogs would have been a reassuring presence. This usage as a guide and protector in the afterlife can be seen by the artifact known as the “hedgehog-ship.”<sup>7</sup> This artifact was discovered in 1993 in Tell Ibrahim Awad, located in the north-eastern tip of modern-day Egypt, near the border with Israel. This artifact, found in a tomb, conveys a clear symbolic meaning: a protector taking the soul, or *ka*, of the departed on their journey to the afterlife. This symbolism can be construed from the usage of the hedgehog’s body as the boat, its back to the water, in the act of curling up to protect itself and whatever was carried on its stomach. This ship was not a full-size ship that could have carried a human body, but was instead a small symbol of its purpose, only around 10 centimeters in length.<sup>8</sup> This symbolic artifact would seem to indicate the usage of hedgehogs as sources of protection and guidance, at least during the Old Kingdom Period, for the deceased in the afterlife.

Beyond their possible symbolic connection to the afterlife, hedgehogs also served other purposes to the people of ancient Egypt; they were hunted for food and sport.<sup>9</sup> Their small size and speed would have made them a challenge to hunt and would have probably showcased the advanced ability of the hunters to capture a small and quick moving target. According to the Ebers Medical Papyrus from the 18th Dynasty, the quills could be ground up and mixed with fat to produce a cure for baldness.<sup>10</sup>

Hedgehogs were not associated with a deity until the discovery of the 26th Dynasty Tomb of Bannentiu in the Bahariya Oasis in 1938.<sup>11</sup> Within the tomb were two painted scenes depicting the hedgehog goddess Abaset (Fig. 1). In the scene, she is shown next to Ra-Horakhty with her arm up as a form of protection.<sup>12</sup> One of her roles within the pantheon of Egypt was that of protector, once again relating back to the concept of protection demonstrated by actual hedgehogs and their ability to curl up into themselves.

Hedgehogs, while not the most important of animals, played an important role in the life and religion of the ancient Egyptians. Its status as a protector and guide should not be dismissed and should in fact be studied more fully. The ability of the

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7. Haarlem, “A Remarkable ‘Hedgehog-Ship,’” 197–98.

8. Ibid., 197.

9. Hilary Wilson, “Hunting Hedgehogs,” *Ancient Egypt Magazine* 19, no. 6 (2019): 52–56.

10. Cyril P. Bryan, *The Papyrus Ebers*. (London Garden City Press, 1930), 151.

11. Hend Sherbiny, Hussein Bassir, “The Representation of the Hedgehog Goddess Abset at Bahariya Oasis,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 50 (2014): 171–190.

12. The more common spelling of this name is Ra-Horakhty, written as ‘Rehorakhty’ in the source.

ancient Egyptians to layer symbolism on symbolism, especially when related to the natural world around them, means that any usage of an animal in their artwork has more to it than just its perceived beauty. Knowing the status and symbolism the hedgehog held with ancient Egyptians will help modern-day Egyptologists and researchers understand more fully other facets of the day-to-day lives of ancient Egyptians.

## HYENAS

An animal known for its dog-like characteristics, laughing bark, and scavenging tendencies, the hyena was a common animal in ancient Egypt. Hyenas can be found in most parts of Africa, with the specific subspecies, the Striped Hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*), found more commonly in the geographical region of Egypt.<sup>13</sup> The hyena, while naturally a wild animal, could often be found on the outskirts of human settlements or in their ruins, as that was an easy place to scavenge for scraps of food with minimal effort on the part of the hyena. This means that hyenas were not an uncommon sight and would have been well-known to the ancient Egyptian citizens. While in modern culture hyenas have been villainized by popular media, in the culture of ancient Egypt they claimed much more importance and status.

The depictions of hyenas in many artifacts indicate some knowledge of and closeness to them. One intriguing interaction is documented in artwork from the Old Kingdom Period, in the Tomb of Mereruka (Fig. 2). The hyena is shown on its back with its four paws bound while a servant forces food into the hyena's mouth. It could be construed as a symbol of power. That a feral and wild animal could be controlled and domesticated in such a way would say a lot about the power, wealth, and resources an individual had available to them. Only the rich could have afforded to feed and care for a dangerous animal like the hyena. It is important to understand that not only was it expensive to feed hyenas, as they can consume around one third of their body weight in a single sitting, and they are incredibly strong and difficult to handle.<sup>14</sup> This meant that it took not only wealth, but time and people to handle them. A single servant could not care for a captured hyena; that task would easily require two or three servants, and that number would only increase with the addition of each hyena in a collection, hence why owning a hyena would have symbolized high status in society. Over time this status of wealth and power changed. By the Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom era, the value and importance of hyenas had changed as evidenced by the lack of hunting depictions and general art containing hyenas. The purpose of owning hyenas is not fully clear,

13. Dale J. Osborne, Ibrahim Helmy, *The Contemporary Land Mammals of Egypt (Including Sinai)* (United States of America, Field Museum of Natural History 1980), 422–440.

14. Ibid.



but two potential reasons stand out. Hyenas would have been an excellent choice to hunt, as their size, power, and ferocity would have made them a challenging trophy to capture. The other reason being the common desire of humanity to tame and domesticate animals around them to serve a greater purpose, as is seen by the worldwide practice of domesticating animals such as cows, dogs, cats, horses, and others. While a domestic purpose is not especially clear in regard to hyenas, it is plausible that their usage as trackers in hunts, or as pet like companions would have been a desirable outcome to citizens of ancient Egypt.

Hyenas were familiar to the average ancient Egyptian citizen. In a workman's village just outside of Tell el-Armana, located on the East bank of the Nile near the center of Egypt and dating from the time of Akhenaten, 1330 BCE, several bones from hyenas were found.<sup>15</sup> The bones all bore markings consistent with butchering practices of the time. The specific practice was that of muscle group stripping, where cuts are made on or near the insertion points of major muscles and then leveraged apart to separate joints and limbs from the main torso.<sup>16</sup> A left pelvic bone of a hyena is the best and clearest image of this butchering technique.<sup>17</sup> There are well defined cut marks along the bone, and clusters of them around where the joint of the leg would have met with the pelvis. The cuts demonstrate the butchering method used to separate the left leg from the torso of the body. All the hyena bones found at the Tell el-Armana location bear similar marks, the cuts being individual to each bone or body part.<sup>18</sup> This indicates that the butchering of a hyena was not an outlier event that occurred to a singular hyena, but was a wider-spread practice. As seen by the precision and cleanliness of the cuts, these were handled by professional butchers who knew how to butcher and prepare hyenas for consumption. Along with the marks of butchering on the bones, it is important to note the presence of trichinosis (a disease) in the meat of hyenas, which has also been found in mummified human remains.<sup>19</sup> Trichinosis can be found in many carnivorous and omnivorous animals. When consumed, the disease begins in the stomach and spreads to surrounding muscle groups, eventually leading to a general weakening of the host and fever and inflammation. While it can be contracted from eating various carnivores, it is interesting to note the relation between infected mummified remains and the butchered bones of hyenas. While the presence of trichinosis does not definitively prove the consumption of hyena meat in ancient

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15. A. J. Legge, "The Hyaena in Dynastic Egypt: Fancy Food or Fantasy Food," *International Journal of Osteoarcheology* 21, no. 5 (2011): 613–621.

16. Ibid., 617–618.

17. The image can be found in Legge's article. Unfortunately, permission to use the image here was not granted.

18. Legge, "The Hyena in Dynastic Egypt," 617–618.

19. Ibid., 620.



Figure 1: The Goddess Abaset, Tomb of Bannentiu 26th Dynasty. Public domain, courtesy of [www.meretsegerbooks.com](http://www.meretsegerbooks.com).

Egypt, it still adds a layer of credibility to the claim, especially considering the lack of other carnivorous animals available to the ancient Egyptians for consumption.

Based on the status of the workman's village, and the inherent risk of eating meat containing trichinosis, it seems that, while an acceptable food source, hyena meat was not considered to be a luxury item. It was eaten out of necessity, not raised or domesticated to serve as a reliable and constant food source. The cost of raising hyenas as a food source would have outweighed the quantity of food a single animal provided, as it would eat far more viable food than it produced, thus making it a non-viable food source. Previously in the Old Kingdom, it could have been a more high-status meal to indicate that a person or family had the wealth available to provide for and farm hyenas, but that has not been proven, and is simply a conjecture.

Beyond being a source of food and hunting entertainment, certain parts of hyenas were used as wearable items. Hyena teeth specifically were used as a protective amulet.<sup>20</sup> The hyena, despite attempted domestication and consumption, was still a wild animal, able to defend itself from harm, and this would have resonated with ancient Egyptians. Hyenas are excessively strong for their size, utilizing sharp claws and teeth to defend themselves. Their ability to protect and defend

20. Legge, "The Hyena in Dynastic Egypt," 617.



Figure 2: Servants feeding the hyenas, Tomb of Mereruka. Public domain, courtest of [www.meretsegerbooks.com](http://www.meretsegerbooks.com).

themselves likely led to the usage of those defensive body parts in protective amulets, as we see with hyena tooth protective amulets.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the desire of ancient Egyptians to protect themselves and finding protective symbolism in the animals around them is indicative of the world they lived in. Ancient Egypt was not a perfect utopia. Dangerous animals like hippopotamus, lions, and scorpions were all around. Invasions from foreign countries and armies was a constant worry. Droughts, famines, and massive storms were a natural part of life. Disease and injury were also a common occurrence. Ancient Egyptians lived in a world where there was a very real need for protection. This need for protection would have probably influenced the symbolism associated with animals around the people of ancient Egypt. Finding an animal that could roll up into a ball with sharp spines or an animal that had sharp teeth and extreme strength to defend itself would have stood out to ancient Egyptians trying to protect themselves and that would have translated over into their depictions of said animals. This is probably why there is a usage of hyena teeth in protective amulets and hedgehog shapes in burial boats.





Figure 3: Servants caring for the hyenas, Tomb of Mereruka. Public domain, courtesy of [www.meretsegerbooks.com](http://www.meretsegerbooks.com).

Beyond the protective assets of the hedgehog and hyena, these two animals also provided other benefits to ancient Egyptians: they were forms of entertainment and food. These two benefits say a great deal about the lives of ancient Egyptians. As forms of entertainment, specifically hunting, it demonstrates a joy for life that is well documented in painted and carved scenes in tombs and temples. This search for enjoyment impacted their understanding of life and the afterlife, hence it is logical that the animals around them played a key role in their philosophy.

As food, these animals provided the essential nutrients for survival. Neither animal would have been considered as a consistent source of food, but they were used when needed. The size of hedgehogs, especially the smaller-than-average breed found specifically in Egypt, would have provided very little meat. The hyenas would have provided significantly more food when eaten, but the risks of contracting disease and the fact that, if raised, the hyenas would eat more than they produced food-wise would not have made them a viable source of food long-term. This demonstrates a possible struggle that lower-class ancient Egyptians faced when finding food. That being said, it could have also been a result of famine, cultural practice, or simply out of necessity.

Hedgehogs and hyenas played an integral part in the day-to-day life of the average ancient Egyptian citizen. Their uses, both physical and symbolic, demonstrate

an awareness and respect that the people of ancient Egypt had for the world around them. To a people who saw layer upon layer of symbolism in their surroundings, the animals that they saw would not have been exempt. The protection of the hedgehogs and the power of the hyenas would have been important to the denizens of ancient Egypt and would have influenced how they interacted with each of the animals. Through sculptures, paintings, writings, and carvings, it is clear that even minor animals played an important role in Egypt and that they were an integral part of religion and life. Both animals became a part of the people's understanding of life and religion. Understanding the importance and usage of hedgehogs and hyenas in the lives of ancient Egyptians allows modern day researchers to understand more fully the intricate aspects of these people, now long gone.

# THE WINGED VICTORY

## NIKE IN ANCIENT GREECE

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**Abstract:** The Greek goddess Nike was a popular deity throughout the ancient Greek World. As a symbol of victory, Nike represented triumph within agonistic conflicts. Nike was an important figure in the Greek mind, and while comprehensive studies of who the goddess was and how she was represented through literature and iconography has been conducted, an overview of Nike's development has not yet been done in English. This paper will follow the development of Nike throughout Greek thought, from her earliest representations and mentions in the Archaic Period through the Hellenistic Era, by focusing on the primary objects and literature sources that speak of the goddess.

In the Ancient Greek world, the gods ruled the heavens. In the early Greek paradigm, the pantheon of gods was what inspired weather changes and gifted the philosophers their wit. Often represented as the goddess of victory, Nike was a small figure in the larger context of the Greek pantheon. Often seen in association with gods such as Zeus or Athena, or mistaken for Iris or Eros, Nike is an immensely important character in the story of Greek history, religion, and cultural thought.<sup>1</sup> While the development of Nike has been studiously outlined by scholars of the mid-20th century, an brief overview of Nike, her iconography, and her importance to the Ancient Greek people has not yet been conducted in this century.<sup>2</sup>

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1. A. Moustaka, "Nike," *LIMC* 6, no. 1 (1981): 850–904, here 850, 852.; A.W. Hands, "Common Greek Coins," *Spink and Sons Monthly Numismatic Circular* 16, no. 182 (1908): 10305–10306.

2. Some of the most notable writers who have contributed to the scholarship of Nike is A. Moustaka, Friedrich Wilhelm Hamdorf, Ira Mark, and Alfred R. Bellinger. Without their works, this overview would not be possible. To read more about Nike by scholars not mentioned above, see E. Bernert, "Nike," *PW* 17, no. 1 (1936): 285–307; H. Knell, *Die Nike von Samothrake*,

Through observing primary texts from major Greek scholars, as well as looking at major artifacts from the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods, this overview of Nike and her development can thus be mapped in the English language.

## THE ARCHAIC NIKE

The earliest known mention of Nike was during the Archaic Period (c. 800-480 BCE) in Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>3</sup> Published roughly around 700 BCE, the poem is all about the origins of the well-known gods and beasts in Greek mythology. On the birth of Nike, Hesiod states, "Styx, daughter of Okeanos, mingled with Pallas and bore Zelos and slender-ankled Nike in the halls and Kratos and Bia, conspicuous children."<sup>4</sup> Hesiod offers no other explanation for who Nike was other than the brief introduction mentioned above. Similarly, in the Homeric Hymns of the 7th-6th centuries BCE, Nike is described as the child of Ares:

Ares, exceeding in strength, chariot-rider, golden-helmed, doughty in heart, shield-bearer, Saviour of cities, harnessed in bronze, strong of arm, unwearying, mighty with the spear, O defence of Olympus, father of warlike Victory . . .<sup>5</sup>

However, it seems that Nike as the daughter of Pallas is the more popular mythology, as is later referenced by Bacchylides in Ode 11, as well as later Hellenistic and Roman scholars.

During this early Archaic Period, Nike only exists in writing, likely as nothing more than an abstract thought of admirable qualities like her sisters—Emulation, Strength, and Force. Nike, as victory incarnate, represented something to strive for.<sup>6</sup> As such, it is not until later in the 6th century that Nike begins to have her first appearances as a physical being. Her early iconography is nebulous at best—so much so that it can sometimes be hard distinguishing Nike from other

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1995; M. Treu, "Zur neuen Themistokles-Inschrift," *Historia* 12 (1963): 47–69; Rhys Carpenter, *The Sculpture of the Nike Temple Parapet* (Maryland: Mcgrath Publishing Company, 1971); Tonio Hölscher, "Die Nike der Messenier und Naupaktier in Olympia," *Jahrbucks des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 89 (1974): 70–111; C. Isler-Kerenyi, *Nike: Der Tyus der laufenden Flügelfrau in archaischer Zeit* (Germany: Eugen Rentsch Verlag, 1969); C. Isler-Kerenyi, "Nike mit dem Tropaion," *Antike Plastik* 10 (1970): 57–63; A. Spetsieri Choremi, "eine überlebensgroße Nike-statue in Athen," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung* 111 (1996): 363–390.

3. Mait Kõiv. "A Note on the Dating of Hesiod," *CIQ* 61, no. 2 (2011): 355–77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41301542>.

4. "Hesiod," *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, LCL 57 (London: Harvard University Press, 1914), 383–403.

5. Homeric Hymn VIII to Ares.

6. "Hesiod," 383–403.

gods and goddesses such as Iris and Eros.<sup>7</sup> By taking the base form of a winged individual in motion and adding specific symbols for Nike, the figural victory was born.

The first known sculpture of Nike was found on the island of Delos, originally crafted in 570 BCE–560 BCE. The statue itself stands roughly 0.9 meters tall and is made of marble. In traditional Archaic fashion, the pose of Nike is very stiff, even though she is supposed to be in the action of running. Nike is depicted wearing a peplos, and most reconstructions depict her with wings, as Archermos likely intended. The Delian Nike has been a heavily disputed artifact, with the main argument centered around whether or not the Nike sculpture was an acroterion or a ground sculpture.<sup>8</sup> Nike figures were popular acroteria types and have been found surrounding many temples on the Greek Mainland, especially in Delphi, on buildings such as a temple to Athena and a treasury.<sup>9</sup> However, there is also much argument for the Delian Nike as a ground sculpture, with many claiming a base on the ground near the temple that belongs to her.<sup>10</sup> If the Delian Nike did indeed stand on the ground, on the base that many ascribe to her, then the Nike was carved by Archermos and dedicated to the god Apollo.<sup>11</sup> Archermos is often credited for being the first person to depict Nike with wings, which became one of the main symbols of the goddess by later eras.<sup>12</sup>

A terracotta thymiaterion depicting Nike from the 6th century BCE illustrates Nike's early iconography in a more complete form (Fig. 1). Like the Delian Nike, this Nike figurine is depicted with archaic style hair and eyes in the pose of popular kourai figures from this era. Thymiateria, or incense-burners, were likely adopted from the Near East and were most often used in cult rituals, as offerings, and in burials.<sup>13</sup> The major identifying symbol on this Nike seems to be her wings—which

7. Moustaka, "Nike," 852; Hands, "Common Greek Coins," *Spink and Sons Monthly Numismatic Circular* 16, no. 181 (1907): 10246; Marilyn Y. Goldberg, "Archaic Greek Akroteria," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86, no. 2 (1982): 193–217, here 197–198, doi: 10.2307/504832; E.E. Sikes, "Nike and Athena Nike," *The Classical Review* 9, no. 5 (1895): 280–83, here 282–83, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/693294>; The iconography becomes the most muddled specifically when looking at how all three deities are often shown in motion with wings and with objects, such as staffs or a caduceus, held aloft in their hands. With the weathered state of many of these Archaic statues, it is hard to know with absolute certainty which deity is represented and at which times.

8. For more information about the debate see Kenneth Sheedy, "The Delian Nike and the Search for Chian Sculpture," *American Journal of Archaeology* 89, no. 4 (1985): 619–26. doi:10.2307/504203; and Goldberg, "Archaic Greek Akroteria," 197–198.

9. Goldberg, "Archaic Greek Akroteria," 197–198.

10. Sheedy, "The Delian Nike," 619.

11. *Ibid.*, 620.

12. *Ibid.*; Hands, "Common Greek Coins," 10247; Freidrich Wilhelm Hamdorf, *Griechische Kultpersonifikationen der vorhellenistischen Zeit* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1964), 59–60.

13. Maria Lucia Ferruzza, "Thymiaterion Supported by a Statuette of Nike," J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016, <https://www.getty.edu/publications/terracottas/catalogue/53/>.



is where complications arise with Nike being mistaken for other smaller female goddesses such as Iris. Though no statues of Iris remain, her likeness is popular on later Classical Period vases where she is depicted winged, wearing a peplos, and holding a caduceus (Fig. 2).<sup>14</sup> There is also evidence of some possible Nike figures wearing winged shoes and holding the caduceus like Hermes to denote that she was functioning as a messenger, likely for Zeus.<sup>15</sup> Though these Nike figures could be mistaken Iris statues, this confusion further illustrates how changeable Nike's early iconography was. Furthermore, Nike being shown in the iconography associated with Iris, the goddess of messages, and Hermes, the messenger god, could allude to Nike as a messenger of her specific personified trait—victory.<sup>16</sup>

From the end of the 6th century on, however, the image and iconography of Nike seems to become more systematized as she gains a greater role in Greek culture. Nike's appearance on a coin, possibly from Olympia, made in c. 510 BCE illustrates Nike's growing popularity in association with athletic competitions and games.<sup>17</sup> The obverse of the coin is stamped with the image of an eagle—a symbol of Zeus, who was important to the state of Olympia, and with whom Nike had close association.<sup>18</sup> The reverse of the coin depicts Nike in her running stance with a wreath in her hand.

The Olympic games started in Olympia around 776 BCE and became a fixture of Greek life and the concept of *agones* or the idea of struggle and victory often seen during wartime.<sup>19</sup> In the victory poems of the Archaic Period, Nike makes multiple appearances as the one who crowns the winners of athletic competitions. Some of the most notable writers of victory odes are Pindar, Bacchylides, and Simonides. Bacchylides's Ode 11 is one of the most illustrative writings about Nike and her role in athletic games during the Archaic period. Bacchylides writes:

Victory, giver of sweet gifts, great is the honour assigned to thee by the Father of the Heaven-born, throned on high: standing at the side of Zeus in golden Olympus thou judgest the issue of prowess for immortals and for men. // Be gracious to us, O daughter of Styx with the flowing tresses, who guards the right. 'Tis due to thee even now that Metapontion, city honoured

14. Moutaka, "Nike," 852; Hands, "Common Greek Coins," 10246.

15. Moustaka, "Nike," 852.

16. Ibid.

17. Alfred R. Bellinger and Marjorie A. Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," *Numismatic Notes and Monographs*, no. 149 (1962): 1–68, here 3, accessed March 25, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43607474>.

18. Hamdorf, *Griechische*, 59.

19. Andrea Rotstein, "Mousikoi Agones and the Conceptualization of Genre in Ancient Greece," *ClAnt* 31, no. 1 (2012): 92–127, here 94, accessed March 25, 2021, doi: 10.1525/ca.2012.31.1.92.; Thomas R. Martin, *Ancient Greece from Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996), 46.

by gods, is full of rejoicings, while festal bands of stalwart youths hymn the Pythian victor, the brilliant son of Phaiscus.<sup>20</sup>

In Ode 13, Bacchylides continues:

And now, for those who have been crowned with the flowers of glorious Victory at the altar of Zeus the peerless king, that toil nourishes a golden renown, conspicuous in their life-time evermore; few are they among men. And when the dark cloud of death enfolds them, there remains the undying fame of a deed bravely done, with a fortune that can fail no more.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 1: *Thymiaterion Supported by a Statue of Nike, c. 500–475 BCE. Public domain, courtesy of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles.*

In these two fragments, Nike is set apart as not only the one who judges victory but crowns it as well. In this it is thus understandable that Nike begins to be depicted holding a crown to bestow upon victors—as she is depicted on the Olympian coin mentioned above. Nike holding a crown, ready to bestow victory, becomes a symbol associated with the goddess for the rest of her tenure through the Hellenistic Period.

While Nike stood as a goddess who granted victory in agonistic athletic competitions in the Archaic Period, the Battle of Marathon changed everything. As an important battle between the Athenians and the Persians, the Athenian concept of Nike shifted to include her as a goddess of wartime victory, closely allied with Athena. The mixture of Athena and Nike would become something special for the Athenian people during the Classical Period, though it had its start here at the very end of the Archaic Era.

After the Battle of Marathon in c. 490 BCE, a Nike statue was erected on the Archaic Acropolis. Offered on behalf of Kallimachos, the Nike stood atop a pillar in a running pose, akin to that of the Delian Nike, stands in the running pose. The sculpture on a whole is much more naturalistic, with the proportions of the goddess being more life-like. Nike's wings would have stretched out behind her and

20. *Bacchylides: The Poems and Fragments*, trans. Sir Richard C. Jebb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 321.

21. *Ibid.*, 339.

in reconstruction drawings she sports the archaic smile. This seems to typify stand-alone Nike figures from this Era through to the Hellenistic Period. Even though the sculpture is still definitely Archaic, the style has come a long way from earlier archaic Nikia figures in terms of movement and naturalism.

This Nike appears to be a personal war monument for Kallimachos's deeds in the Battle of Marathon. The base that is believed to bear the inscription for this statue reads:

Kallimachos of Aphidna dedicated me to Athena, the messenger of the immortals who have their homes on Olympus, since he was victorious as polemarch in the Athenian games. And at Marathon fighting bravely he won fairest fame, For the men of Athens, and a memorial of his own excellence.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 2: Oil Flask *Lekythos*, c. 480 BCE, attributed to Brygos Painter. Public domain, courtesy of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.

Although Kallimachos died in the Battle of Marathon, this statue stands as a memorial to him and his efforts in the war—as well as a symbol of the Greek victory over Persia. Though basic in form, Kallimachos's Nike employs the symbols used by previous representations of Nike—namely her wings and posing.

Interestingly, the Kallimachos Nike is one of the Nikai figures that could be confused with Iris. Based off the discovery of a bronze herald's staff on the acropolis and a reconstruction drawing, Kallimachos's Nike is depicted wearing winged shoes and holding the caduceus, but it is unclear if the herald staff was meant to be Nike's. However, if the reconstruction is correct, Kallimachos's victory monument could embody the earlier idea of Nike as the messenger of victory, rather than the specific bestower of it.<sup>23</sup>

22. Jeffrey M. Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 130.

23. Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis*, 130.

## THE CLASSICAL NIKE

In a now-lost speech from Lycurgus on the Priestess, Lycurgus illustrates the special bond that the Athenians shared with Nike, and her bond with their patron goddess Athena. Found in the *Suda*, a 10th century CE writing, Lycurgus is quoted as describing Nike “wingless, holding a pomegranate in her right hand and a helmet in her left.”<sup>24</sup> The wingless Nike seems to be an Athenian invention, and the pomegranate and helmet were typical symbols of Athena—the goddess of war and strategy.<sup>25</sup> The Archaic Acropolis likely held an Athena cult-statue with similar iconography—directly linking Athena and Nike together in Athens as early as the 6th century BCE.<sup>26</sup>

In 480 BCE, 10 years after the victorious Battle of Marathon, Athens was sacked by the Persians and the Archaic Acropolis complex was turned to rubble. Around 468 BCE, the Acropolis complex was reconstructed under Pericles and a small temple to Athena-Nike was constructed—possibly over an older altar to Nike.<sup>27</sup> This specific temple to Nike and Athena-Nike is one such illustration of the Athenian love of personified victory and shows evidence of her cult in Athens. Also, in the new Parthenon, a small Nike figure was held by the Athena Parthenos statue, though the statue on a whole is no longer extant.

With Athena carrying personified victory, Athena herself becomes Athena of Victory. Nike was depicted as wingless to denote that she would not fly away and leave Athens vulnerable to defeat; Athens and Athena would always hold victory as their own.<sup>28</sup> With Athena standing within the most important structure on the Acropolis, and with an entire temple dedicated to the combined Athena-Nike, the Acropolis succeeded in being both a religious center as well as a memorial to its destruction. Having features of Nike present on the new buildings and ingrained with Athena inside the Parthenon, Phidias and the other architects of the new Acropolis were able to successfully memorialize the Persian destruction and certify Athenian might.

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24. Suidas, *Suida Lexicon: Graece and Latine*, Vol. II (Cantabrigiae: Typis Academicis, 1705), 622; “Nu 384,” trans. William Hutton, *Suda On Line*, July 12, 2011, <https://www.cs.uky.edu/~raphael/sol/sol-entries/nu/384>.

25. Sikes, “Nike and Athena Nike,” 282–283.

26. Andrew F. Stewart, “History, Myth, and Allegory in the Program of the Temple of Athena-Nike, Athens,” *Studies in the History of Art* 16 (1985): 53–73, here 53, accessed March 25, 2021, <http://jstor.org/stable/693294>.

27. Ira S. Mark, Machteld J. Mellink, and James R. McCredie, “The Sanctuary of Athena Nike in Athens: Architectural Stages and Chronology,” *Hesperia Supplements* 26 (1993): I–185, here 12–17, 20–30, accessed March 25, 2021, doi: 10.2307/1354000.

28. Sikes, “Nike and Athena Nike,” 282; Hands, “Common Greek Coins,” 10247.

Though it has not been found, the interior of the Athena-Nike temple likely held a golden cult statue of Nike.<sup>29</sup> The rest of the temple is decorated with mythological scenes from the Gigantomachy as well as scenes from the Battle of Marathon and the Battle of the Greeks. The Gigantomachy was a beloved Greek myth that functioned as a representation of the victory of the gods over evil, but it also was a myth important to Nike.<sup>30</sup> A parapet surrounds the temple with more scenes of Nike in a processional manner.

The sculptural program of the temple parapet illustrates Nike in a number of her roles as a deity—such as awarding trophies and accompanying individuals in their endeavors. In almost all sculptures, she is shown in movement or flight, robed in the richly carved textiles that the Classical Greeks so loved. One of the most well-known parapet sculptures is of Nike tying her sandal. Even though the Nike Sandalbinder is a well-known image, it is the sculptures of the enthroned Athena-Nike and the enthroned Athena accompanied by Nike from the parapet that introduce an interesting iconographic program that was not specific to Athens alone.

In another coin from Olympia, this one dated from c. 452-432 BCE, the enthroned Nike is depicted.<sup>31</sup> This was apparently a popular image, as it was minted multiple times throughout the Classical Era.<sup>32</sup> Nike sits on a rock, her head in one hand and a crown of victory in her other.<sup>33</sup> In accordance with typical Nike iconography, her wings stretch out behind her, though because the goddess is sitting, the wings are functionally useless.<sup>34</sup> As such, it is likely the wings were included since they are an established symbol of the goddess, along with the laurels which she holds. Enthroning a deity places them in a spot of authority and divinity—a symbol extended to Nike in this coin type, which further alludes to her importance as a decider and bestower of victory, as well as how important the concept of victory and *agones* was to the Greeks in both athletic and wartime avenues.

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29. See Homer A. Thompson, "A Golden Nike from the Athenian Agora," *HSCP* 51 (1940): 183–210, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45134349> and Dorothy Burr Thompson, "The Golden Nikai Reconsidered," *Hesperia* 13, no. 3 (1944): 173–209, <http://jstor.org/stable/147012> for more information about the Nike cult statue from the Temple of Athena Nike.

30. See Euripides, "Ion," *The Complete Greek Drama*, ed. Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., trans. Robert Potter (New York: Random House, 1938).

31. Charles Theodore Seltman, *The Temple Coins of Olympia: reprinted from "Nomisma" VIII.IX.XI* (Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 1921), 30; Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 5; For more on the seated-Nike type see Hands, "Common Greek Coins," *Spink and Sons Monthly Numismatic Circular* 17, no. 193 (1908): 11049–11758, here 11062.

32. Seltman, *The Temple Coins of Olympia*, 34.

33. Ibid., 36; Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 5–7.

34. Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 6; Bellinger claims that the wings could still have been included as an aesthetic choice, however the wings of Nike were an important part of her iconography and could have been included to fulfil that purpose.

Olympia continued to be an important state for images of Nike with the erection of the Paionios Nike in 421 BCE. Much like the Kallimachos Nike, the Paionios Nike sits on the top of a pillar with an inscription that dedicates the statue to the victory of the Greeks in the Archidamian War.<sup>35</sup> Even though she is made from heavy stone, the goddess appears to still be very slightly airborne as she alights on the top of the pillar, memorialized as constantly bestowing victory.

## THE HELLENISTIC NIKE

When Philip of Macedonia and his son Alexander the Great entered the scene in Greece, Nike was the undoubted goddess that bestowed victory. The image of Nike was adopted by these Macedonian kings and made their own. With Nike already established in her role as victory goddess, Alexander's taking on the Nike symbolism was an interesting political move, especially because he had not yet achieved any major victories as ruler of Greece and had a tenuous relationship with the Greek natives at best.<sup>36</sup> The act of Nike granting victory would have been a powerful image for a would-be world conqueror to absorb. Alexander would later go on to have a multitude of successes in warfare and gain a massive amount of territory that would propel both Macedonia and Greece into its final stage as a Hellenistic empire during the last few centuries before its subsequent conquest by the Romans.

With the expansion of the Greek Empire during the Hellenistic Period, Nike was not only spread abroad, but she also gained a new fame at home. Nike began to be depicted with all the drama that Hellenistic artists could afford. Some of her most notable depictions from this period include the Nike depicted on the Gigantomachy scene on the Great Altar of Pergamon and the Nike of Samothrace.

The Gigantomachy Frieze on the Altar of Pergamon is one of the most incredible Hellenistic examples of sculpture. It has been claimed that Pergamon, a city near the coast in Asia Minor, went to great lengths to make itself appear equal to the great Greek city of Athens.<sup>37</sup> In the words of Jacob Burckhardt, a Swiss historian from the 19th century, as he wrote to a friend upon gazing at the Gigantomachy scene for the first time:

This discovery . . . has shattered the systems of the archaeologists and tumbled an entire pseudo-aesthetics to the ground. . . . Since we have

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35. Olympia Vikatou, "Pedestal of the Nike of Paionios," Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2012, accessed April 3, 2019. [http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/2/eh251.jsp?obj\\_id=5989](http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/2/eh251.jsp?obj_id=5989).

36. S. Perlman, "The Coins of Philip II and Alexander the Great and their Pan-Hellenic Propaganda," *NumC* 5 (1965): 57–67, here 64, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42662671>.

37. Richard Whitaker, "Art and Ideology: The Case of the Pergamon Gigantomachy," *Acta Classica* 48 (2005): 163–74, here 163. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24595401>.



come into possession of these terrifyingly glorious spectacles . . . everything that has been written about the emotional power of the Laocoön is for the wastebasket. Try to imagine a frieze . . . as of now, well over 200 feet long; 8-foot tall gods locked in struggle with giants and protruding so far out from their background that they practically constitute free-standing sculptures; a scene of biting, battering, chopping, crushing, involving also powerful dogs and lions, and with the snake-like tail-ends of many of the giants forming into heads that bite the gods in the back and leg—all this taking place . . . relentlessly and unforgivingly. The artistry and style . . . such as to make Phidias tremble on his throne.<sup>38</sup>

This glowing review of the Gigantomachy Frieze tells of the grandeur and the drama of the sculptures. The Gigantomachy is the story of the struggle of the gods versus the giants in the age before man. With all the gods depicted, Nike makes her appearance on the eastern frieze alongside Athena, an interesting mythological divergence since she was previously depicted as the charioteer of Zeus.<sup>39</sup> However, with Pergamon's wish to be equal to Athens, it is unsurprising that references to Athena and Nike together, as Athens loved, would be made.

The sculptures of the altar follow the style set by Skopos during the Late Classical Period on Mainland Greece. The few figures that still have faces express dramatic emotions, with deep-set eyes that are turned towards the heavens. Like Burckhardt mentioned, the sculptures are so deeply carved they are almost detached from the frieze. Nike is shown to the right of Athena. Though her head is missing, her wings extend out behind her, and her arm is reaching towards the top of Athena's head, as if she is bestowing a laurel wreath of victory in her typical iconography.

This newfound popularity of Athena-Nike does not seem to be contained to just Athens or Pergamon in the Hellenistic Era. The Lysimachus coin from c. 297 BCE illustrates this. The obverse of the coin depicts Alexander in a deified role, with the horns of Zeus Ammon.<sup>40</sup> The reverse of the coin depicts an enthroned Athena, with Nike standing on her outstretched arm. Nike's wings stretch behind her as she reaches out to crown the name of Lysimachus—one of Alexander the Great's successors. By using the image of Athena and Nike together, Lysimachus

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38. Lionel Gossman, "Imperial Icon: The Pergamon Altar in Wilhelminian Germany," *The Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 3 (2006): 551–87, here 551.

39. References to Nike as charioteer are plentiful in the Archaic Greek writings of Simonides, specifically fragment no. 79 and epigram XXVII. Nonnus in *Dionysiaca* II 205 also makes mention of Nike as charioteer. Bellinger also has discussions of Nike as charioteer appearing on coins. See Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 7–12; Thompson, "The Golden Nikai Reconsidered," 197.

40. Bellinger and Berlincourt, "Victory as a Coin Type," 30.

was able to tie himself not only to victory, but to the grandeur and might of Classical Athens during a period of relative political unrest.

The usage of Nike as propaganda only continues with the Nike of Samothrace from c. 220-160 BCE. The Samothrace Nike is most known for her “storm-tossed” drapery, mentioned repeatedly by scholars.<sup>41</sup> It is because of her drapery that many scholars believe that she stood on a base meant to look like the prow of a ship at sea or the shore of a particularly stormy island.<sup>42</sup> From as early as the Archaic Period, Nike was sometimes depicted with naval paraphernalia to denote a sea victory, so having this Nike in direct association with the sea is unsurprising and falls within her logical iconography.<sup>43</sup>

Like Athena, Nike also had important connections with Zeus which has been previously touched on during the discussions of the Olympia coins from the Archaic and Classical Eras. A. Moustaka, in his exploration of Nike in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, identifies a small Nike figure that would have been held by the chryselephantine statue of Zeus inside the Temple of Zeus in Olympia.<sup>44</sup> Herodotus speaks of a naval battle between the Greeks and the Persians Book VIII of his *History*, saying, “Bronze will come together with bronze, and Ares//Will redden the sea with blood. To Hellas the day of freedom//Far-seeing Zeus and august Victory will bring.”<sup>45</sup> Nonnus, though Roman, writing in the 5th century CE, also links Nike and Zeus together by claiming that Nike was the one to bring Zeus to war against the giants and encouraged him to use the might of his storm against the giant Typhon.<sup>46</sup>

It is thus logical to assume that when paired with Zeus, Nike could be the harbinger of the storm—once more fulfilling an early Archaic role of messenger to announce an absolutely crushing defeat that could mean nothing but victory for the Greeks, over whom she watched. Echoing once more the words of Bacchylides, it is through Nike’s grace that she chooses the victorious.<sup>47</sup> Those whom Nike denies could face the wrath of destruction. It is a punishment for those who even think that defeat of the Greeks is possible.

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41. Andrew Stewart, “The Nike of Samothrace: Another View,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 120, no. 3 (2016): 399–410, here 402–403; For descriptions of Nike as storm-tossed see Moustaka “Nike,” and Sikes, “Nike and Athena-Nike.”

42. Ibid., 400.

43. Thompson, “The Golden Nikai Reconsidered,” 202; To find more about the depiction of Nike with naval-based imagery see also “Winged Victory of Samothrace,” Musée Louvre, [http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/victoiredesamothrace\\_acc\\_en.html](http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/victoiredesamothrace_acc_en.html).

44. Moustaka, “Nike,” 868.

45. Herodotus, *Histories* VIII, 77.

46. Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* II, 205.

47. Bacchylides, Ode 11, 13.



## CONCLUSION

When asked to name the important gods of the Greek pantheon, Nike is not likely to be the first goddess selected. Her role in the great myths of Greece was subtle and she has often been overlooked today in favor of greater heroes and gods. However, the idea of a personified victory was a unique thought in the Greek mind. Nike's ability to bestow or take away victory was an important action for the Greeks who were consistently participating in hometown competitions, as well as battles within the Greek mainland and abroad. Nike's associations with the gods and athletic games shaped her into the goddess of victories in competition and war. By the fifth century BCE, and due to the Greek conflict with Persia, it appears her role in war was magnified and she claimed more power than ever through her association with Zeus. Nike was a popular subject to put on temple roofs as an acroteria and as a dedicated offering to the gods. Even though Nike may not have been an important goddess from a modern-day understanding, her role in Ancient Greece and abroad during the duration of the Greek civilization is vastly important and deserves more recognition.