

Bryn Mawr College

## Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College

---

Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies Faculty  
Research and Scholarship

Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies

---

2013

### The Ephesia Grammata: Logos Orphaikos or Apolline Alexima pharmaka?

Radcliffe G. Edmonds III  
Bryn Mawr College, redmonds@brynmawr.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.brynmawr.edu/classics\\_pubs](https://repository.brynmawr.edu/classics_pubs)



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

---

#### Citation

R. G. Edmonds III, "The Ephesia Grammata: Logos Orphaikos or Apolline Alexima pharmaka?" in *The Getty Hexameters: Poetry, Magic, and Mysteries in Ancient Selinous*, ed. Christopher Faraone & Dirk Obbink. Oxford University Press (2013), pp. 97-106

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College.  
[https://repository.brynmawr.edu/classics\\_pubs/102](https://repository.brynmawr.edu/classics_pubs/102)

For more information, please contact [repository@brynmawr.edu](mailto:repository@brynmawr.edu).

The *Ephesia Grammata*: *Logos Orphaïkos*  
or Apolline *Alexima Pharmaka*?

Radcliffe G. Edmonds III

The tablet from Selinus at the Getty Villa provides an opportunity to reconsider the nature of the formula, which appears in a number of epigraphic sources and literary testimonia, known as the *Ephesia Grammata* and to analyse the reception of the formula over a range of places and times. Scholars have often focused on the question of the origins of the formula, trying to determine whether a mystery cult might have produced the hexameters and, if so, which cult. The label of the formula in one late example as a *logos Orphaïkos* has tempted some to look to Orphism, while the presence of Hecate has inclined others towards a chthonic cult.

However, the examples of the text that have survived to the present day, whether or not they came originally from a mystery cult, do not appear in a mystery cult setting. The hexameter verses of the *Ephesia Grammata* are used in the epigraphic texts as warding magics, as *alexikaka*, *alexipharmaka*, or, as the Getty tablet has it, *alexima pharmaka*.<sup>1</sup> The earliest versions seem to deploy the formula against harmful creatures or magical attacks, whereas, in the later versions and in most of the testimonia, the hexameter verses that begin with *aske kata skieron oreon* or the collection of six words, *aski*, *kataski*, *aix*, *tetrax*, *damnameneus*, and *aision*, have become a more general

<sup>1</sup> Getty text ἀλέξιμα φάρμακα l. 6, 23, 47, cf. Photius s.v. *Ephesia Grammata*: 'also *Ephesia alexipharmaka*; some names and phrases having an innate remedy for suffering.'

protective spell, good especially against daimonic attack.<sup>2</sup> Some later examples, such as the *defixio* in Cologne and the recipe in the Greek magical papyri that refers to the formula as a *logos Orphaiikos*, use the *Ephesia Grammata* to protect another spell against interference that might undo its effect. Over time, the connection with Paean and warding magic is lost, and the formula is connected with prestigious figures of magic, such as the Idaean Dactyls and Orpheus. The uses of the formula within the context of the later texts, however, show that the protective function of this warding magic still persists in all the versions.

The Getty tablet provides explicit information about the origin and function of the mysterious hexameter verses that become in the later tradition the *Ephesia Grammata*. While it is not clear who the narrating voice of the tablet itself might be, the *Ephesia Grammata* verses are labelled the immortal verses of Paean Apollo himself:

Παιήων σὺ δὲ πάντοσ' ἀλέξιμα φάρμακα πέμπεις  
καὶ τὰδ' ἐφώνησας ἔπε' ἀθάνατα θνητοῖσιν. (6-7)

Paean, for in every direction you send averting charms,  
And you spoke these immortal verses to mortal men.

The deictic *τὰδε* leaves no doubt that the verses that follow are thought to be Paean's own words, rather than simply further description of the narrative situation. The originating voice is just as clear in these lines:

Παιήων] σὺ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἀλεξιμὰ φάρμακα πέμπεις]  
[c. 6-7] γου κατὰκουε φ[ρ]ασὶν γλυκὸν ὕ[μνον] (23-4)

Paean, for you yourself [do send] averting charms!  
Give ear in your mind to sweet h[ymnic song]

[Πα]ι[ή]ων· ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἀλεξιμὰ φάρμακα πέ[μ]πεις]  
[σὺ]κ ἂν δ(η)λήσαιτ' οὐδεὶς {ουδαι} πολυφάρ[μακ-] (49-50)

[Pa]e[a]n, for in every direction you [send] averting charms,  
Nor would anyone harm (us?) with much-cur[ing]...

In both introductions, moreover, the nature of the verses is specified: they are *alexima pharmaka*, warding magics. The verses themselves

<sup>2</sup> Hesychius s.v. *Ephesia Grammata* (ε 7401) 'Ephesia Grammata: Formerly there were 6, but afterwards some deceivers added others. They say that these are the names of the first ones: askion, kataskion, lix, tetrax, damnameneus, aision. It is clear that askion is darkness, kataskion is light, lix is earth, tetrax is the year, damnameneus is the sun, and aision is truth. Therefore these things are holy and sacred.'

must be classified as *pharmaka*, but not the kind of *pharmaka* that are baneful poisons; rather, they serve as protection against harm.

What kind of harm is difficult to see from the tablet fragments, but references on the second fragment provide some clues. Lines 26-8 set up a situation of impending crisis: whenever some thing (the supplement *kêr* is tempting) comes to threaten men or flocks or even the ships and other things produced by mortals' craft, then these verses will protect them. Lines 4-5 extend the protective power more generally: 'As many things as the broad Earth nourishes shall not harm him nor as many things as much-groaning Amphitrite rears in the sea.' Nothing that lives on land or sea can harm the one who has activated the power of Paean's verses.

The same protective function appears in later examples of the *Ephesia Grammata* verses. Bernabé shows the similarities between the texts that appear in a number of places from Egypt to Sicily, ranging in date from the fourth century BC to the fourth century AD.<sup>3</sup> While the examples from Himera, Selinus, and Locri (cp. Bernabé texts E, F, G, and H) have no framing language that provides context, the fourth century BC lead tablet from Phalasarna invokes protective deities. 'I call on Zeus Averter of evil (*Alexikakos*) and on Heracles Sacker of cities and on the Healer and on Victory and on Apollo.'<sup>4</sup> This invocation of the protective deities is followed by a variant of the verses, and the tablet's end again brings in the idea of protection from harm. 'He shall not destroy me with ointment or application or with drink or with spell', where the subject is probably the 'whoever' (*hos ke*) mentioned a few lines earlier, who is attempting to harm and perhaps even cast a spell upon (if that is what may be construed from *kollobalouisi*) the speaker. While McCown thinks that this ending *alexipharmakon* is an error that the writer 'allows to creep in by mistake as he unintelligently copies from his book of recipes', it fits perfectly with the beginning and frames the *Ephesia Grammata* verses in the middle as the efficacious verses that provide the warding magics.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bernabé in this volume excerpts only the parts of the text that include the *Ephesia Grammata* formula. For the entirety of the texts, see Jordan (2000a) 100, for text E from Locri Epizephyrioi; Rocca (2009) for texts F, G, and H from Himera and Selinus.

<sup>4</sup> Phalasarna Tablet: National Museum, Athens, Inv. X.9355. Text from Jordan (1992). Bernabé in this volume excerpts the formula in his text C (= OF 830c), but he omits the framing language and the remainder of the spell. For the full text and translation see the Appendix to this volume.

<sup>5</sup> McCown (1923) 134, n. 25.

PGM LXX, a papyrus formulary from the third or fourth century AD, contains a series of protective spells, among which appears the *Ephesia Grammata* formula, although only the first line, 'askei kataski erôn oreôn', is cited.<sup>6</sup> The charm is to be recited at the approach of some unnamed entity, whom Betz suggests is an underworld daimon bent on inflicting chastisement, since the charm is directed *pros phobon kolasios*, against fear of chastisement. The aim of the protective spells is to avert this entity, whatever it is—*kai paraitêsêi*, and you will avert it. Here again, the *Ephesia Grammata* formula is used to ward off some threat of harm.

In the third or fourth century AD *defixio* from Oxyrhynchus now in Cologne, the *Ephesia Grammata* verses appear at the end of a lengthy erotic spell.<sup>7</sup> The beginning of the spell (lines 1–56) invokes the powers of the dead and the underworld deities to inflict eros upon the target woman, and the various erotic prohibitions and compulsions are elaborated in characteristically graphic detail. The spirit of the dead is then adjured repeatedly by the threat of Hecate, who is herself requested to activate the spell (*epitelousai moi ton katadesmon touton*, lines 61–2). The aim of the spell ('Drive, bind Matrona . . .') is repeated once more, then the spell is finished off by a recitation of the *aski kataski* verses (lines 64–8), capped with an injunction to 'preserve this spell unbroken for eternity' (*phulaxon aluton ton katadesmon eis aiôna*, lines 73–4). The verses, although they too invoke Hecate, are specifically aimed at preserving the spell from outside influence that might dissolve it, any countercharm that Matrona or another might make. This prophylactic action is not quite the same as the warding function in the Phalasarna and Getty tablets, but it is still the single protective element in an otherwise entirely offensive spell.

The testimonia regarding the *Ephesia Grammata* words seem to reinforce the essentially defensive nature of the *Ephesia Grammata* verses. Many of these testimonia are collected by Bernabé in his contribution to this volume, but he is examining the origin rather than the function of the magical words. It is worth noting, however, that whatever the process of evolution that links the hexameter verses beginning with *aske kata skieron oreon* to the collection of words *aski*,

<sup>6</sup> Text in Preisendanz/Henrichs (1973–4), with a translation in Betz (1986). Bernabé in this volume excerpts parts of lines 10–12 as his text B (= OF 830b).

<sup>7</sup> The full text (SEG 38:1837) appears, with translation, in Jordan (1988), but Bernabé in this volume excerpts lines 64–8 as his text A (= OF 830a).

*kataski, aix, tetrax, damnameneus, and aision*, the same idea that the magical words serve to ward off harm persists.<sup>8</sup> The second century AD lexicographer Pausanias described them as 'encompassing in themselves the natural sense of warding off evil', and they are attested early as a protective amulet. The fourth century BC comic poet Anaxilas mocks a dandy who wears the *Ephesia Grammata* stitched on leather, while the late lexicographers relate the story of a boxer who was invincible until his knucklebone amulet with the *Ephesia Grammata* was removed.<sup>9</sup> The boxer's amulet was perhaps like an inscribed gem in the Southesk collection that bears all six names.<sup>10</sup> Menander describes the *Ephesia Grammata* used as *alexipharmaka* to protect either those getting married (*gamousin*) or, if we accept the emendation of McCown, those who are afflicted by demons (*daimosin*).<sup>11</sup> The received text would make these preventative magic at a crucial transition time, but the emendation fits with other attestations of the *Ephesia Grammata* in which they are used to protect against daimonic attack. In explaining how the philosopher should protect himself against the corrupting influence of bad music, Plutarch advises,

For just as sorcerers advise those afflicted by demons to recite and name over to themselves the *Ephesia Grammata*, so we, in the midst of such warblings and caperings, 'Stirred by frenzies and whoops to the tumult of tossing heads,' if we bethink ourselves of those hallowed and venerable writings and set up for comparison songs and poems and tales of true nobility, shall not be altogether dazed by these performances . . .<sup>12</sup>

Plutarch mentions the same parallel between this use of the *Ephesia Grammata* as warding magic and the recollection of stories of ancient virtue in another context, where he compares the reciting of the names of the Idaean Dactyls to the recollection of the deeds of virtuous men.

True it is that those who have got by heart the names of the Idaean Dactyls use them as charms against terrors, repeating each name with

<sup>8</sup> I agree with Bernabé and others who see the hexameter incantation as the primary form, later transformed into a series of *voces magicae*, just as the meaningful phrase 'hoc est corpus' was transformed into the chiming, unintelligible 'hocus pocus'.

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Eustathius on *Odyssey* XIX.247 (2.201–2); Anaxilas, *The Harp-Maker* (II 268 K) = Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* XII.14.12–18 548C.

<sup>10</sup> Carnegie (1908) 141–2; Plate XIII N5.

<sup>11</sup> Menander *Paidia* fr. 313 Kock, from Photius s.v. *alexipharmaka*, cp. McCown (1923) 131 n. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales* 706e.

calm assurance; but it is also true that the thought and recollection of good men almost instantly comes to mind and gives support to those who are making progress towards virtue, and in every onset of the emotions and in all difficulties keeps them upright and saves them from falling.<sup>13</sup>

Marcus Aurelius makes a similar statement, 'In the *Ephesia Grammata* there was this message, to remember some one of the ancients who practised virtue.'<sup>14</sup> By the time of Marcus Aurelius, it is the philosophical substitute, the recollection of virtuous men that is recommended in place of the magic of the *Ephesia Grammata*, but the association between the *Ephesia Grammata*, the names of the Dactyls, and the protection from fear and harm remains. So efficacious are the *Ephesia Grammata*, the late testimonia tell us, that rather than just praying to Apollo, as in Herodotus, Croesus recited these words on the pyre to save himself. These magical words, derived perhaps from Paeon's immortal verses, create the miracle that wards off harm from the Lydian king. Ultimately, they become symbols to be interpreted allegorically.<sup>15</sup>

The ascription to Orpheus comes only through the reference in the papyrus formulary, dating to the third or fourth century AD, which instructs the magician to use the 'Orphic spell' (*logos Orphaiikos*) to ensure that the binding spell in the recipe remains unbroken.

Write the Orphic formula, saying, 'Askei kai taskei' and, taking a black thread, make 365 knots, and bind [the thread] around the outside of the plate, saying the same formula again and, 'Maintain the restraining' (or 'the binding'), or whatever you do. And thus it is deposited. For Selene, when she goes through the underworld, breaks whatever spell she finds. But when this rite has been performed, the spell remains unbroken so long as you say over the formula daily at this spot.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Plutarch, *Quomodo quis* 85b.

<sup>14</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* XI, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.8.45.2–3. 'Androcydes the Pythagorean, indeed, says that the so-called Ephesian letters, which were well known among many, were of the order of symbols. And he said that Askion is darkness, for this has no shadow; and Kataskion is light, since it casts a shadow with its rays; and Lix is the earth, according to the ancient name; and Tetrax is the year, according to the seasons; and Damnameneus is the sun, the tamer; and Aisia is the true word. And truly the symbol signifies that the divine things have been set in order: darkness to light, the sun to the year, the earth to every kind of genesis of nature.'

<sup>16</sup> PGM VII 451–458.

As in the Cologne *defixio*, the *Ephesia Grammata* serves to prevent the spell from being broken. Once again, the formula has a defensive power, but, instead of being ascribed to Apollo Paeon or even to the Idaean Dactyls, it is labelled as Orphic. Nothing in the framing of the formula in any of the other examples or testimonies indicates an Orphic context—why should it be labelled Orphic here?

The question leads to the oft-trampled quagmire of defining Orphism, and I don't want to stray too far here. For my part, I would agree with West, that 'A poem becomes Orphic simply by being ascribed to Orpheus . . . There was no doctrinal criterion for ascription to Orpheus, and no copyright restriction. It was a device for conferring antiquity and authority upon a text that stood in need of them.'<sup>17</sup> However, Alberto Bernabé and his pupil Raquel Martín Hernández have recently argued for a close link between the *Ephesia Grammata* and Orphism, so I think it is worth addressing their arguments.<sup>18</sup> Beyond the basic similarity of being mysterious ritual inscriptions on thin sheets of metal, the lead tablets with the *Ephesia Grammata* formula and the so-called Orphic gold tablets show a number of similarities that strike these scholars as significant. Both sets of texts involve Persephone, a goat, and milk, and both sets have been found in the regions of southern Italy and Crete.

Martín moreover draws parallels between the imagery of the *Ephesia Grammata* verses and the descriptions of Crete (in, for example, Diodorus Siculus), arguing for a connection with the cult of the Idaean Dactyls of Crete.<sup>19</sup> Orpheus is numbered among the founders of the cult of the Dactyls, and Clement makes them the inventors of the *Ephesia Grammata*.<sup>20</sup> Not only are the *Ephesia Grammata* identified with the names of the Dactyls in Plutarch, but the name Damnameneus is among the names of the Dactyls on several of the varied lists. Moreover, the reference in PGM LXX to 'when under the shadowy mountains' is followed by a reference to the chamber of the Dactyls. Betz has argued that an initiatory rite for the Idaean Dactyls lies behind this reference,<sup>21</sup> while Jordan suggests that the

<sup>17</sup> West (1983) 3.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Martín (2010) 142–63; Bernabé (2003) and in this volume, §13.

<sup>19</sup> Martín (2010) 156–63.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Clement *Stromata* I.6, the scholiast to Apollonius Rhodius at I.1129, and Strabo, *Geography*, 10.3.22 for lists of the names of the Dactyls that include Damnameneus.

<sup>21</sup> Betz (1980) 287–95. A passage from Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*, 17, provides a striking parallel to the descent into the chamber of the Dactyls in PGM LXX. 'When

unmetrical reference to the dactyls is merely a marginal note referring to dactylic verses that has crept into the text.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Bernabé and Martín cite the Derveni author's reference to the *epaoidai* that the *magoi* use against impeding daimons as an Orphic parallel to the use of the *Ephesia Grammata* for those afflicted with daimons.<sup>23</sup>

None of these arguments will bear much weight. Firstly, in the Derveni papyrus, whatever the context of the rituals described there, it is the *magoi* who perform spells against the daimons, not Orpheus, just as in Plutarch, the *Ephesia Grammata* of the *magoi* are contrasted with the remedies of the philosopher. Secondly, the roles of Persephone, the goat, and the milk are all significantly different in the gold tablets than in the *Ephesia Grammata* verses. Persephone appears in the tablets, not as the possessor of a garden that is the scene of the action, but as the enthroned Queen of the Underworld. The goat, whether the *eriphos* kid of the Thuri tablets or even the hypothetical *aix* of the Pelinna tablet, is rushing or falling into the milk, not producing milk endlessly. A resemblance between symbols does not indicate a shared meaning—a goat, milk, and even Persephone signify different things in different contexts.<sup>24</sup>

A goat with a ceaseless supply of milk is most reminiscent of the myths of the suckling of the infant Zeus on Mount Ida.<sup>25</sup> However, the connection of Orpheus with the Idaean Dactyls is not so strong as to make anything Dactylic Orphic as well. Orpheus is the ritual

he landed in Crete, he betook himself to the mystics of Morges, one of the Idaean Dactyls, by whom he was purified with the thunder-stone, at daybreak lying prone beside the sea and at night beside a river, his head wrapped in the fleece of a black ram. Moreover, he went down into the Idaean Cave, as it is called, wearing black wool, passed thrice nine days there in accordance with custom, and offered a funeral sacrifice to Zeus.' (text and translation from Cook, 1914, vol.I: 646)

<sup>22</sup> Jordan (1992) 258. *Dactulôn*, 'a cretic, cannot stand in a hexameter . . . probably an intrusion from a marginal or interlinear note meant to signal the reader that the lines are in verse and are to be intoned as such.'

<sup>23</sup> P.Derv. col. vi. ' . . . prayers and sacrifices appease the souls, and the enchanting song of the *magoi* is able to remove the *daimones* when they impede. Impeding *daimones* are revenging souls. This is why the *magoi* perform the sacrifice, as if they were paying a penalty.'

<sup>24</sup> Cf. A2 = OF 489B; D1.4 = OF 485, where several scholars have suggested that the lamella's clear text of AIPSA be emended to AIGA. For the importance of reading the familiar mythic elements in the gold tablets within the context of the tablets themselves, see Edmonds (2004) ch. 2 *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the version in Diodorus of Sicily, V. 70.2–3. See Johnston in this volume for other associations with milk.

founder supreme, and his name becomes attached to a wide variety of rites, from Demeter in Sparta, to Hecate at Aigina, to the Eleusinian Mysteries at Athens. Orpheus' name could add the lustre of antiquity or special sacrality to a rite, putting it among the class of the oldest and best rites founded by Orpheus himself. The Dactyls are connected with a variety of other figures (including Heracles, who appears in the Phalasarua tablet), and there is nothing in any of the testimonia or the examples of the texts to suggest that the connection with Orpheus was activated, that the potential link within the tradition was actualized.

However, just as the Orphic label could be used to enhance the prestige of a festival, so too, it was used to add glamour to enchantments such as the formula in PGM VII. Pausanias tells us that Orpheus is known to be terrific at enchantments (*mageusai deionon*), and the chorus in Euripides' *Cyclops* boast that they know a charm by Orpheus that can harm the monster.<sup>26</sup> The Orphic label for this charm to protect the spell is thus most likely another of the 'advertisements' so common in the magical papyri, adding importance to a recipe by associating it with a famous name. The association with the names of the Idaean Dactyls comes not through Orpheus, but through a process of evolution in which the sounds of the hexameter verses are distorted and altered, transforming a series of magically powerful dactylic hexameters into a list of the names of the inventors of dactylic hexameter.

It is perhaps worth noting that another set of verses is found with the *Ephesia Grammata* verses in the two latest examples, the *defixio* in Cologne and PGM LXX. The iambic trimeters that list the *symbola* of Hecate, including the bronze, gold, and iron sandals, are used in both places to invoke the goddess to give power to the spell. The role of Hecate Einodia in the *Ephesia Grammata* hexameters may well have suggested that she was the power to be invoked for the repulsion of hostile forces, and so the trimeters, which were well known enough to be allegorically explained by Porphyry, were added to strengthen the magician's claim upon the power of Hecate.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Pausanias VI.20.18. Euripides *Cyclops* 645–8. 'But I know an entirely excellent incantation of Orpheus, so that on its own accord the burning brand moves towards his skull and sets afire the one-eyed child of earth.'

<sup>27</sup> Porphyry, *Peri Agalmatôn* 8.58–65. 'The moon again is Hecate, (the symbol) of the configurations about her and of the power of the configurations—wherefore her power is threefold: that of the new moon as she bears the white-robed and

The *Ephesia Grammata*, then, show no evidence of connection early on with a mystery cult, whether attributed to Orpheus, devoted to the Idaean Dactyls, or even connected with Demeter and Kore.<sup>28</sup> Rather, the successive uses of the formula suggest that the earliest connection of the formula is to Apollo Paeon, who prescribed the verses as *alexima pharmaka*.<sup>29</sup> Only later, as the formula is used more broadly, does it become attached to the Idaean Dactyls and ascribed to the magician and greatest founder of mysteries, Orpheus.<sup>30</sup> The immortal verses that Paeon chants to mortals in the fourth century BC end up in the fourth century AD as 'the Orphic spell', a supplementary charm to prevent a binding spell from being broken. The examples of testimonies to the *Ephesia Grammata*, both the hexameter verses and the set of words, show the transformation from explicitly labelled *alexima pharmaka* to the meaningless hocus-pocus words that nevertheless retain the sense of warding magic. This process illuminates the way the ritual power of the verses was received and transformed over centuries of the tradition.

golden-sandalled [ . . . ] and the torches alight. The kalathos, which she bears aloft, is the symbol of the production of crops, which she nurtures in the increase of her light. The bronze-sandalled goddess is, again (the symbol) of the full moon.' For a recent examination of the testimonies to these verses, see Martín (2010) 163–77.

<sup>28</sup> Jordan and Kotansky (2011) 54 suggest that the *Ephesia Grammata* were 'the traditional legomena of a rite of initiation into the worship of Demeter and Kore.' Cf. Jordan (1992) 245: 'The parallel verses, which we plan to present in detail elsewhere, go back, some of them, to at least the 5th century BC and seem to come from a chthonic cult.'

<sup>29</sup> See Rutherford in this volume for the suggestion that the text might best be classified as a 'paeon' or an 'incantation paeon' because of this connection with Paeon. Johnston in this volume, on the other hand, focuses on the narrative in the verses as a *historiola* with a magical function.

<sup>30</sup> See Faraone in this volume for the connections between these hexameters and other hexametrical charms for healing and protection.

## 6

### Magical Verses on a Lead Tablet: Composite Amulet or Anthology?

Christopher A. Faraone

#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

All the scholars, myself included, who discussed the Getty Hexameters at the seminar in November 2010 were in agreement, voiced or tacit, that the lead tablet upon which the verses are inscribed was used as an amulet, and not without good reasons: they begin with a reference to hiding the text 'in a house of stone', and they twice quote versions of the famous *Ephesia Grammata*, an incantation said, for example, to have protected Croesus from the flames of his funeral pyre or an unnamed boxer from defeat at the Olympic games.<sup>1</sup> The tablet was also found evenly folded six times, a feature that is common in the case of amulets.<sup>2</sup> Long after the 2010 seminar I was struck, however, by a curious afterthought: perhaps the lead tablet was actually an anthology of sorts that preserved a series of originally separate incantations. There are, in fact, some peculiarities about the Getty tablet that do not fit the model of a composite amulet. It is laid out, for instance, in two side-by-side columns, a very rare occurrence on amulets, and there are indications of the kind of scribal habits that one finds in handbooks: marks to the left of the first column, for example, seem to indicate a section break, as do the

<sup>1</sup> For the literary references to the *Ephesia Grammata*, see Bernabé, Ch. 4, section 2.

<sup>2</sup> Jordan and Kotansky (2011) 54. The Phalasarua tablet is also folded six times horizontally; see the drawing in Jordan (1992).

# The Getty Hexameters

*Poetry, Magic, and Mystery in Ancient  
Selinous*

Edited by

CHRISTOPHER A. FARAONE  
AND DIRK OBBINK

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS