

Review of Faroane, Christopher A. 2018. The Transformation of Greek Amulets in Roman Imperial Times. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

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and the authors reminds us of the importance of studying artifacts and situating them within the complex interplay of ideas, culture, and society. Throughout the articles, the authors unpack and untangle the “complex biography of things” (92). Indeed, these authors show that “war matters” continue to resonate over time and can tell us much about under explored histories, and the human experience of war as revealed through material culture.

CANDICE R. MACINTOSH

Review of

Faroane, Christopher A. 2018. *The Transformation of Greek Amulets in Roman Imperial Times*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Pp. 512, 23 colour and 104 b&w illustrations. ISBN 9780812249354 (hardcover).

Christopher Faroane’s *The Transformation of Greek Amulets in Roman Imperial Times* is a valuable contribution to the library of any student or scholar of classical archaeology, classics, Mediterranean religions, magic, or even medical studies. The impressive collection of images, sources, and the translations available in the appendices alone, make this text indispensable. Faroane argues several points concerning amulets during the Roman Imperial period: that there was no sudden rise in the use of amulets, nor was there a loss of Greek rationalism, nor was there a severe case of “Egyptomania” occurring in the eastern Mediterranean during Greek times (2-3). Rather, the use of amulets was a pre-existing occurrence that was modified during the Imperial period with the inclusion of epigraphic inscriptions—a popular Roman trend at the time (2).

The monograph integrates much of the author’s earlier works, such as those on amuletic designs, thunderstones as house and body amulets, and magical texts and incantations. Faroane’s study continues and builds on work by scholars of Mediterranean amulets (such as

Campbell Bonner) who developed theories of an international trend of amulet manufacturing across the Mediterranean which were regionally variable, but often inspired by, the proliferation of Greek recipe books and itinerant scribes and magicians during the Roman Imperial period (9, 10). Faroane recognizes the limitations of these types of attributions to amulets. He illustrates in his chapters on heroic images, prayers, and incantations that many of the recipes for amulets were developed over a long period of time and influenced by cultural exchanges across the eastern Mediterranean, often emphasizing issues that were important on a local level (e.g. scorpion stings), long before and well into the Roman Imperial period.

Furthermore, with a clear understanding of other anthropological theories, such as Stanley Tambiah’s, on amuletic functions, Faroane highlights how amulets had a rational, purpose-based use via visual analogies (106). Faroane illustrates that Greek “irrationalism” was not a contributing factor to the rise in evidence of amulets during the Roman Imperial period, as amulets were used in

many medical practices during the Classical and Hellenistic periods as stated by Pindar, Galen, and Soranus. They were also often reserved for when other forms of medicine were proven useless (6, 23). Therefore, it is only because many of the Greek amulets from the pre-Roman period lacked inscriptions, or because previous scholarship had focused on Upper Egyptian evidence and ignored pre-Roman cultural exchanges from the bronze-age and throughout the Hellenistic period (10), that it appeared to previous scholars as though Greek use of amulets was on the rise during the Roman Imperial period.

The monograph is broken into three distinct, yet connected, parts: Archaeology (I), Images (II), and Texts (III). Each section is further divided into three chapters and bookended by an introduction and a conclusion. The evidence Faroane presents is well notated with sources from Classical to Hellenic Greek, then Imperial Roman evidence, often followed by a later Roman-Christian complaint on the particular amuletic practice. In presenting his research in this way, Faroane is able to demonstrate a comprehensive argument for the use of amulets as a continuing practice prior to and throughout the Imperial period, along with noting any potential changes and adaptations made over time.

The first section explores distribution, shapes, and media in the archaeological record. The section attempts to focus on the earliest evidence of where amulets are typically found and who likely used them, as well as which shapes appeared to be most widely distributed: circles, moons, and the faces known as *gorgoneia* (40-46). The strongest part of this section is the emphasis on how amulets were often used by the most vulnerable members of society, such as women and children. Amulets are evident in burial finds and in depictions of women and children on potteries (47). It is thus logical that depictions of men would not have featured amulet-wearers, and that young men often cast off such amulets in adulthood (48-50). This lends further evidence to Faroane's theory as to why depictions of male amulet wearers are invisible in the archaeological record. The chapter on media is a great addition to general shapes, as each type of stone or potential material is highlighted by direct evidence or textual sources. The most problematic issue in Faroane's search for earliest uses of amulets

is visibility—whether due to decomposition of natural substances or lack of direct inscriptions. The reader is thus reliant on the author's knowledge of textual sources referring to similar trends during the time as well as sources spanning well into early antiquity. Nevertheless, this evidence makes for a compelling argument for the use of amulets prior to the Imperial period.

The monograph's second section, on images, has chapters focusing on action figures, domestic gods, and pharaonic and Ptolemaic gods. In breaking down images into these three types, Faroane covers a broad range of evidence, each illustrating how people in the Roman Imperial period used traditional amulets of the Classical period and transformed them from ambiguous objects into clearly stated functional pieces (105). The strongest discussion is on the Heracles Kallinikos, which ties together many of the other sections. The subject was often redacted into pure image such as a club or knot, could be applied to any space that the user wanted to protect, and had an associated common phrase (each element could work in tandem or apart in order to achieve the same purpose) to draw on the characteristics of Heracles (115-17). Faroane's example for domestic amulets highlights a connection between civic, domestic, and personal body. He draws on the example of the Triple Hecate which was allegedly built by Alcámenes in the 5th-century BCE Athenian acropolis, placed in front of Greek houses, and eventually hung around an individual's neck (136-37). The final section on Egyptian deities directs the focus to Hellenic and Romanesque gods, such as Harpocrates, Isis, and Sarapis, all of which were more captivating to Roman audiences rather than Pharaonic deities. This compels the reader to agree that Romans were not Egyptian focused, but were, in fact, continuing the pre-existing Classical and Hellenic Greek forms and functions in amuletic practices.

The third section is the strongest part of the monograph, likely due to the author's skill in textual sources. The chapter on prayers compiles evidence for common phrases invoking a deities' assistance, and illustrates primarily the need for safety, or to extinguish or stop a harmful element (187-90). One of the most compelling points in the section on prayers discusses how earlier Homeric evidence argues that prayers ought to be recited, not inscribed, whereas later Roman

evidence states the opposite (191-92). The section on incantations similarly illustrates how certain commands, including the Kallinikos inscription, could invoke larger stories (*historiolae*)—often directly translated into Latin by Imperial writers themselves—which could also be depicted by simple shapes such as moons or snakes (236). The section clearly reinforces Faroane’s main theory: that amulet wearing was a pre-existent trend that was not on the rise, but rather became more visible in the material record after Roman inscription trends became tied to amuletic practices.

The conclusion considers all three chapters together, reiterating the strength of the main thesis. By emphasizing the long period of use and subsequent transformations, Faroane finally comes to readdress the stereotype of the itinerant sorcerer as a highly skilled ritual worker and craftsman, not a con-artist (257). His evaluation calls into question how classicists and historians have often thought of the eastern Roman empire as exceedingly superstitious under Roman rule,

however this evaluation sheds new light by showing how sorcerers were skilled tradesmen who held a craft long in practice and one that continued well into the Byzantine period (262).

Faroane’s text is a comprehensive survey of a broad range of visual, epigraphic, and material evidence with over 120 images and eight appendices. It is a valuable reference text for anyone with an interest in Mediterranean amuletic practices from the Classical period and into antiquity. More advanced language scholars may focus on the main text but find translations to be less valuable as there are no original language sources present. However, those not well versed in ancient languages will find the text to be a wonderfully helpful primer. Faroane’s monograph is a helpful contribution to the study of the development and use of amulets in the eastern Roman empire and offers a valuable anthropological approach for a functional reading of the material record of bodily adornment.

SARA SPIKE

Review of

Brownlee, Peter John. 2019. *The Commerce of Vision: Optical Culture and Perception in Antebellum America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Pp. 264, 8 colour and 93 b&w illustrations. ISBN 9780812250428 (hardcover).

The expansive and often apparently overwhelming visual spectacle of the early 19th-century city was a subject of interest for critics, authors, and artists of the period, and it has continued to draw the attention of scholars who have written extensively about its many expressions. With *The Commerce of Vision*, Peter John Brownlee contributes to this literature, focusing on various forms of typographical matter that emerged or expanded in importance within the antebellum period in some of America’s largest cities. The book explores the proliferation of old and new printed forms, including advertising catalogues, outdoor display typography on broadsides and

business signage, newspapers, printed money, and land deeds. In all cases, Brownlee emphasizes that these are cultural artifacts that were enmeshed in the commercial culture and market economy of the period while also exemplifying the ocular preoccupations of the time.

The book introduces fascinating topics and offers strong visual analysis of a range of compelling images. But it is also uneven and its three divergent sections never quite cohere, perhaps owing to a relatively slight engagement with the economic history of Jacksonian America that is ostensibly the shared backdrop of the entire study. The final section, in particular, which