

GRECO-ROMAN CONCEPTIONS OF MOTHER AND CHILD PROTECTION AGAINST EVIL FORCES

This article is devoted to ancient Greco-Roman beliefs concerning the protection of mothers and children from evil influences, such as demons, witchcraft and the evil eye. Drawing on Greek and Roman sources, the article highlights the main ways of protecting children: magical incantations, general measures to protect space, gestures and actions, amulets, objects emitting noise. The author concludes that ancient magical means of mother and child protection did not differ from those used in general apotropaic practices, but in relation to children and their mothers they are used in larger quantities. For instance, amulets with common protective symbols in the case of children become a full-fledged set of protective means, designed to enhance the effectiveness of measures by combining them: children usually wore whole chains of amulets, while women — one or two, and men in general neglected this kind of protection. This can be explained by the ancient world's perception of the special vulnerability of young children and women in labour, whose premature deaths were usually attributed to the actions of evil forces. There are specific features associated with the protection of children: amulets such as the Greek ribbon with amulets tied on the child and the Roman bulla not only had protective properties, but also reflected the social status of the owner. Some objects intended for apotropaic protection also had a domestic function — for example, they could be used as toys and rattles.

Keywords: ancient mythology, child-killing demons, Gello, strix, apotropaic magic, amulets, history of childhood

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