

Talismans against Tsunamis: Apollonius of Tyana and the *stelai* of the Herakleion in Gades (VA 5.5)

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THE HERAKLEION IN GADES was a religious centre famous throughout the ancient world.¹ According to the local accounts collected by Posidonius of Apamea and transmitted by Strabo (3.5.5–6), the origin of the sanctuary dated back to the time of the city’s foundation by colonists from Tyre, which is currently dated to the ninth century B.C.² The sanctuary was dedicated to Melqart, the most important god of the metropolis and the new colony, who is identified in

¹ Among the extensive bibliography, the most notable are A. García y Bellido, “Hércules Gaditanus,” *ArchEsp* 36 (1963) 70–153; D. van Berchem, “Sanctuaires d’Hercule-Melqart. Contribution à l’étude de l’expansion phénicienne en Méditerranée,” *Syria* 44 (1967) 80–87; J. M. Blázquez, “El Herakleion Gaditano, un templo semita en Occidente,” in *Imagen y mito. Estudios sobre religiones mediterráneas e ibéricas* (Madrid 1977) 17–28; C. Bonnet, *Melqart. Cultes et mythes de l’Héraclès tyrien en Méditerranée* (Leuven/Namur 1988) 203–229; A. T. Fear, “A Journey to the End of the World,” in J. Elsner and I. Rutherford (eds.), *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity* (Oxford 2005) 319–331; M. C. Marín, “Les contacts entre Phéniciens et Grecs dans le territoire de Gadir et leur formulation religieuse,” in S. Ribichini et al. (eds.), *La questione delle influenze vicino-orientali sulla religione greca* (Rome 2001) 315–331; M. C. Marín and A. M. Jiménez, “Los santuarios fenicio-púnicos como centros de sabiduría: el templo de Melqart en Gadir,” *Huelva Arqueológica* 20 (2004) 215–239; and, particularly for the subject of this paper, W. E. Mierse, “The Architecture of the Lost Temple of Hercules Gaditanus and its Levantine Associations,” *AJA* 108 (2004) 545–575.

² J. M. Gener et al., “Arquitectura y urbanismo de la Gadir fenicia: el yacimiento del ‘Teatro Cómico’ de Cádiz,” in M. Botto (ed.), *Los Fenicios en la Bahía de Cádiz* (Pisa/Rome 2014) 14–50.

the Greek and Roman sources with Herakles/Hercules.³ From the Hellenistic period on, the sanctuary became famous for its position at the far end of the known world, for its oracle, and as a suitable place to observe the phenomenon of the ocean tides, and was reportedly visited by such figures as Hannibal, Caesar, Posidonius, and Apollonius of Tyana. Its fame contrasts with the lack of structural archaeological remains of the sanctuary, even the location of which is not reliably identified, although from literary sources⁴ it is usually believed to have been in the area of the Sancti Petri islet, some 12 km. south of Gades.

A considerable body of information survives about diverse aspects of the sanctuary and its elements, although this does not permit a detailed reconstruction of the sacred site and its cult buildings.⁵ One of the richest descriptions is in the *Vita Apollonii*, Philostratus' biography of Apollonius of Tyana, written at the start of the third century A.D.⁶ According to Philostratus, upon Nero's departure to Greece and prohibition of the teaching of philosophy in Rome—at the end of 66—Apollonius and his companions travelled westwards, “to see the Ocean tides and Gadeira” (*VA* 4.47). After descriptions of various *sacra* in the sanctuary, including the altars to Egyptian and Theban Herakles, the golden olive tree of Pygmalion, and the golden belt of Teucer (5.4–5), an account unfolds of the most unusual objects in the temple, the pillars:

³ In Gades he was referred to as the “Tyrian” (Arr. *Anab.* 2.16.4) or “Egyptian” Herakles (Mela *Chor.* 3.46, Philostr. *VA* 5.4–5), differentiating him from the “Theban” Herakles (*VA* 5.3). See Bonnet, *Melqart* 209–210; Marín, in *La questione* 315–331.

⁴ Strab. 3.5.5, Mela *Chor.* 3.46.

⁵ Especially Strab. 3.5.5; Diod. 5.20.1–3; Sil. *Pun.* 3.1–60; Mela *Chor.* 3.46; Philostr. *VA* 5.4–5; Porph. *Abst.* 1.25; Suet. *Iul.* 7.1–2; Cass. Dio 37.52.

⁶ On Apollonius in Gades see especially F. Gascó, “Un pitagórico en Gades (Philostr. *VA*, IV 47-V 10). Uso, abuso y comentario de una tradición,” *Gallaecia* 12 (1990) 331–350; A. Billault, “Apollonios de Tyane en Espagne d'après le récit de Philostrate,” in *Héros et voyageurs grecs dans l'Occident romain* (Paris 1997) 131–146; Mierse, *AJA* 108 (2004) 545–576.

But he [Damis] says that the pillars (*stelai*) in the temple were made of gold and silver smelted together so as to be of one colour, and they were over a cubit high, of square form, resembling anvils; and their capitals were inscribed with letters which were neither Egyptian nor Indian nor of any kind which he could decipher. But Apollonius, since the priests would tell him nothing, remarked: “Heracles of Egypt does not permit me not to tell all I know. These pillars are ties (ξύνδεσμοί) between earth and ocean, and they were inscribed by Heracles in the house of the Fates, to prevent any discord arising between the elements, and to save their mutual affection for one another from violation.” (transl. Conybeare)

There are two other references to the *stelai* in the sanctuary. The oldest, from around 100 B.C., comes from Posidonius, via Strabo (3.5.5–6), who describes them as being of bronze, eight cubits high, and with an inscription recording the sanctuary’s construction costs. According to Strabo’s account, those who had completed their journey to Gades made sacrifices there in honour of Herakles. Another reference to certain *stelai* in the Herakleion is in Porphyry’s *De abstinentia* (1.25), written at the end of the third century A.D. The *stelai* appear, although without description, in the account of a prodigy that occurred during Bogos of Mauretania’s siege of the sanctuary in 38 B.C., when a bird voluntarily offered itself as a sacrifice after the oracular dream of a priest.

The *stelai* in Philostratus’ account have generated as much interest as scepticism, owing to their striking features, the indecipherable nature of their inscriptions, and, above all, Apollonius’ enigmatic explanation of their function. In his classic work on the sanctuary, García y Bellido held that, despite the differences in the descriptions in Strabo and Philostratus, both must have referred to the same objects. He also queried Philostratus’ evidence, because of the diminutive size attributed to the *stelai* and the reference to electrum alloy, the use of which he considered improbable. He believed instead that the description must refer to bronze altars or baetyls, and that their enigmatic inscriptions would have been written in ancient

Phoenician characters, difficult to understand even for the priests of the temple themselves in the first century A.D.⁷

For her part, Bonnet believes that, given the omnipresence of the Tyrian model in the Gades sanctuary, the *stelai* could be replicas of the “Ambrosial Rocks” mentioned in Tyre’s foundation myth, reported in Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* and represented on the city’s coins in the Imperial period.⁸ Marín proposes that the *stelai* could have been *anathemata*, offerings by important figures, which would account for their richness and explain the inscriptions, perhaps of a votive or commemorative nature.⁹ In his well-informed examination of the literary evidence, Mierse emphasises the magical quality that Apollonius attributes to the *stelai*, and concludes that the Gades episode has overtones of authenticity precisely because it does not fit well with Philostratus’ agenda,¹⁰ a point to which this article will return below.

In summary, the meaning of the *stelai* in Philostratus’ account is far from clear. The objective of this paper is to explain the description of the *stelai* and Apollonius’ words, identifying the nature and function attributed to the objects and their inscriptions. The investigation will examine the tradition about Apollonius of Tyana and talismans, and propose to identify an ancient model that represented tsunamis in cosmological terms, which will lead to the conclusion that Apollonius attributed to the *stelai* talismanic powers relating to the prevention of marine flooding.

1. *Apollonius and talismans*

The starting-point should be the protagonist of the story, the famous Apollonius of Tyana.¹¹ Although the *Life of Apollonius* is

⁷ García y Bellido, *ArchEsp* 36 (1963) 114–120.

⁸ Bonnet, *Melqart* 219–220.

⁹ Marín, in *La questione* 320.

¹⁰ Mierse, *AJA* 108 (2004) 553.

¹¹ Among works on the traditions surrounding the figure of Apollonius, the following may be highlighted: E. L. Bowie, “Apollonius of Tyana, Tradition and Reality,” *ANRW* II.16.2 (1978) 1652–1699; M. Dzielska, *Apol-*

our main source of information, it is useful to explore the varied material on Apollonius over time, to produce a properly contextualised impression of the man and his relationship with talismanic magic.

The first reports on Apollonius, in the second century, characterise him as a kind of magician. He is mentioned as such, with obvious scorn, by Lucian of Samosata, when he describes Alexander of Abonoteichus as a charlatan: Alexander was a pupil of one of Apollonius' followers, and in stigmatising him, Lucian dismisses the entire school (*Alex.* 5). Dio Cassius refers to Apollonius as γόης καὶ μάγος (78.18), and, according to Origen, Moeragenes of Athens described him as μάγος καὶ φιλόσοφος in his lost biography of Apollonius.¹²

Philostratus of Athens wrote the *Life* at the request of the empress Julia Domna, around the 220s. It narrates the life and travels of a figure whose fame had been increasing since the first century A.D., considered by some as a Neopythagorean philosopher and by others as a wizard and charlatan.¹³ The biography by Philostratus falls into the former category, representing a clear attempt to improve Apollonius' image as a sage

lonius of Tyana in *Legend and History* (Rome 1986); P. Robiano, "Apollonios de Tyane," *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* I (Paris 1989) 289–294; C. P. Jones, "Introduction," in *Philostratus. Life of Apollonius of Tyana* I (Cambridge [Mass.] 2005) 1–30, and "Apollonius of Tyana in Late Antiquity," in S. F. Johnson (ed.), *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot 2006) 49–64.

¹² *C.Cels.* 6.41; see D. H. Raynor, "Moeragenes and Philostratus: Two Views of Apollonius of Tyana," *CQ* 34 (1984) 222–226.

¹³ Among the extensive bibliography on Philostratus and the *Vita*, see G. W. Bowersock, "Introduction," in C. P. Jones, *Philostratus, Life of Apollonius* (Harmondsworth 1970) 9–22; G. Anderson, *Philostratus: Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century A.D.* (London 1986); A. Bernabé, "Introducción," in *Filóstrato, Vida de Apolonio de Tiana* (Madrid 1992) 7–57; J. J. Flinterman, *Power, Paideia and Pythagoreanism* (Amsterdam 1995); A. Billault, *L'univers de Philostrate* (Bruxelles 2000); T. Hägg, "Apollonios of Tyana – Magician, Philosopher, Counter-Christ," in T. Hägg et al. (eds.), *Parthenope: Selected Studies in Ancient Greek Fiction* (Copenhagen 2004) 379–404; E. Bowie and J. Elsner (eds.), *Philostratus* (Cambridge 2009); K. Demoen and D. Praet (eds.), *Theios Sophistes: Essays on Flavius Philostratus' Vita Apollonii* (Leiden 2009).

and philosopher, avoiding details that may link him with magic and *goeteia*.

After Philostratus, the tradition on Apollonius continues and combines the sources which present him as a magician with those who characterise him as a θεῖος ἄνθρωπος.¹⁴ For example, Hierocles Sosianus, governor of Bithynia under Diocletian, emphasised Apollonius' miracles, and compared him to the figure of Christ. This type of imagery awoke the hostility of Christian authors, and it is in Eusebius' response, his *Contra Hieroclem* (40), that we find the first mention of the feature that goes on to characterise Apollonius in the Byzantine and Islamic worlds, his association with talismans:

There are still among our contemporaries those who say that they have found superstitious devices (περιέργους μηχανάς) dedicated in the name of this man; though I admit I have no wish to pay attention to them. (transl. Conybeare)

This tradition associating Apollonius with talismans is reinforced by Pseudo-Justin's *Quaestiones et Responsiones ad Orthodoxos*, a work dated to the first half of the fifth century, which features a debate between a theologian and a Christian on, among other subjects, Apollonius' talismans.¹⁵ *Questio* 24 is of particular interest:

If God is the maker and master of creation, how do the consecrated objects (τελέσματα) of Apollonius have power in the [various] orders of that creation? For, as we see, they check the fury of the waves and the power of the winds and the inroads of vermin and attacks of wild beasts. (transl. Mead)

¹⁴ See W. L. Dulière, "Protection permanente contre des animaux nuisibles assurée par Apollonius de Tyane dans Byzance et Antioche. Évolution de son mythe," *BZ* 63 (1970) 247–277; W. Speyer, "Zum Bild des Apollonius von Tyana bei Heiden und Christen," *JAC* 17 (1974) 47–63; C. P. Jones, "An Epigram on Apollonius of Tyana," *JHS* 100 (1980) 190–194; C. Burnett, "Apollonius of Tyana," in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy* (Dordrecht 2011) 82–83.

¹⁵ See Dulière, *BZ* 63 (1970) 248–49; Dzielska *Apollonius* 101–102; Jones, in *Greek Literature* 54.

The theologian responds to the question (which implies that some Christians believed Apollonius' talismans worked) by explaining that the *telesmata* were not evil objects, since their creation was founded in Apollonius' understanding of the "forces of nature" (τῶν φυσικῶν δυνάμεων), their "sympathies and antipathies" (τῶν ἐν αὐταῖς συμπαθειῶν τε καὶ ἀντιπαθειῶν), and through the use of appropriate materials. In short, they lacked supernatural powers and, as such, did not contradict the laws of God.

After Eusebius, reports about Apollonius usually include references to his fame as a creator of talismans, as much among his detractors as among his advocates.¹⁶ For example, Nilus of Ancyra (died ca. 430), indicates in a letter:¹⁷

I have often told you, and I say again, that the talismans (τελέσματα) performed through magic by Apollonius of Tyana contain absolutely no heavenly benefit, nor do they bring any profit to the soul.

A similar comment is in the *Life and Miracles of St. Thecla*, traditionally attributed to Basil of Seleuceia (died after 468), in which Apollonius' talismans are condemned as a product of sorcery and dark arts:¹⁸

Anyone who knows Apollonius of Tyana from those who have written his life ... knows the disgusting and accursed talismans (τελέσματα) of the man's art of sorcery, his calling up of gods and souls, his summoning of demons and secret abominations.

In contrast, Isidore of Pelusium, at the start of the fifth century, offers a vindication of both Philostratus and Apollonius himself, in which he denies that Apollonius created talismans, but from whom it may be inferred that traditions existed that made such claims:¹⁹

¹⁶ Summarised well by Jones, in *Greek Literature* 53–56; see also Dzielska, *Apollonius* 99–127.

¹⁷ *Ep.* 148, *PG* 79, 269; transl. Jones.

¹⁸ *V. Thecl.* 22; transl. Jones.

¹⁹ *Ep.* 348, *PG* 78, 406; transl. Jones.

Some people have deceived mankind with empty words, bringing in Apollonius of Tyana, who has produced many talismans in many places (πολλαχόσε πολλά τελεσάμενον), for the protection of dwellings, so they say. But they can show nothing of which he is the source.

Apollonius' fame as a creator of talismans was perpetuated in the Byzantine world. Hesychius of Miletus reports a statue of three storks, created by Apollonius in Constantinople as a talisman to prevent birds dropping snakes into the wells, poisoning them.²⁰ Malalas notes that Apollonius lived during Domitian's reign and travelled "making talismans (τελέσματα) everywhere," visiting Constantinople where he made numerous talismans (10.51, transl. Jeffreys et al.):

one for the storks, one for the river Lykos which runs through the middle of the city, one for the tortoise, one for the horses, as well as other miraculous things.

Malalas continues that after producing talismans in other cities, Apollonius visited Antioch where he created several at the request of its inhabitants: one "against the north wind, putting this talisman at the east gate," another "against scorpions, so that they should not dare to approach the region," and another against mosquitos, the production of which was very laborious. The city's inhabitants asked him to repair a talisman made by one Debborios after the earthquake that took place in Caligula's reign,²¹ which had been destroyed by lightning. Apollonius not only refused to repair Debborios' talisman, but also predicted future earthquakes and fires in the city.

This tradition of Apollonius' connection to talismans continued in the genre of *patria*, which attribute various talismans in Constantinople to Apollonius;²² it also persisted in the Ara-

²⁰ *Patr. Const.* 25; Dulière, *BZ* 63 (1970) 253.

²¹ 23 March 37: E. Guidoboni, *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area* (Rome 1994) 187.

²² C. Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *DOP* 17 (1963) 53–75; Dulière, *BZ* 63 (1970) 247–277; F. B. Flood, "Image against

bic literary tradition, embodied in the character of Balinus.²³ An especially unusual example in the Byzantine tradition is in *The Book of Wisdom and Understanding ... of the astrological effects (apotelesmata) of Apollonius of Tyana*, which Jones dates between the ninth and eleventh centuries.²⁴ According to Dzielska, “the text presents Apollonius as an expert in secret cosmic relations, in secret powers of nature, and in the structure of the universe,”²⁵ as Pseudo-Justin did.

Thus from the very first stories about Apollonius, he was associated with magic, and, from Eusebius’ time on, specifically with the creation of talismans. In the context of this tradition, Philostratus is a clear exception,²⁶ but nevertheless even the *VA* preserves stories about Apollonius’ expertise in preventing the same misfortunes as those against which talismans like Deborios’ defended, such as earthquakes. Philostratus narrates how Apollonius helped the cities on the left shore of the Hellespont, which had suffered as series of earthquakes, and from whom certain Egyptian and Chaldaean experts were demanding large sums of money to perform the propitiating rituals to placate the gods (6.41):²⁷

Inferring the reasons for the gods’ wrath, he made the sacrifice appropriate to each city, and averted the disaster at a small cost, so that the earth stopped shaking.

The depiction of Apollonius as a specialist in investigating the

Nature: Spolia as Apotropaia in Byzantium and the Dār al-Islām,” *Medieval History Journal* 9 (2006) 143–166.

²³ Burnett, *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy* 82–83.

²⁴ Dzielska, *Apollonius* 103–104; Jones, in *Greek Literature* 57–58; P. Magdalino, “Occult Science and Imperial Power in Byzantine History and Historiography,” in P. Magdalino and M. Mavroudi (eds.), *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium* (Geneva 2006) 119–162, at 130–135.

²⁵ Dzielska, *Apollonius* 104. The text includes a mention of a “golden pillar” which Apollonius himself erected in his sanctuary at Tyana: Jones, in *Greek Literature* 55.

²⁶ Dzielska, *Apollonius* 100.

²⁷ *VA* 6.41, transl. Jones.

reasons for the wrath of Earth and Poseidon, and in the rites needed to appease that wrath, to a large extent connects with the story of the Herakleion in Gades, as we shall see.

2. *Harmony and discord between the elements*

Given Apollonius' relationship to talismans, his visit to the Herakleion in Gades should be contextualised in relation to an episode a few years beforehand during his stay in Crete. Philostratus relates that after returning from India, Apollonius visited various places in Greece and at last came to Crete. During his visit to the sanctuary of Asclepius in Leben on the south coast, an earthquake took place, which in turn prompted fear among those present that a cataclysm might occur (4.34.4, transl. Conybeare):

Here Apollonius was haranguing on one occasion about mid-day, and was addressing quite a number of people who were worshipping at the shrine, when an earthquake shook the whole of Crete at once, and a roar of thunder was heard to issue not from the clouds but from the earth, and the sea receded about seven stadia. And most of them were afraid that the sea by receding in this way would drag the temple after it, so that they would be carried away. But Apollonius said: "Be of good courage, for the sea has given birth and brought forth land." And they thought that he was alluding to the harmony of the elements, and was arguing that the sea would never wreak any violence upon the land; but after a few days some travellers arrived from Cydoniatis and announced that on the very day on which this portent occurred and just at the same hour of midday, an island rose out of the sea in the firth between Thera and Crete.

The narrative of this episode, which is dated between 62 and 66,²⁸ is structured in four parts. The first part presents the sequence of the earthquake, the thundering, and the retreat of the sea, a phenomenon that precedes the arrival of tsunamis. It only describes the waters retreating and the fear of the visitors that whatever force caused the sea to draw back might drag the

²⁸ Cf. Guidoboni, *Catalogue* 193–194.

temple after it, carrying them all away (μὴ τὸ πέλαγος ὑποχωρήσαν ἐπισπάσῃται τὸ ἱερόν καὶ ἀπενεχθῶσιν).²⁹ Apollonius' intervention constitutes the second component of the story: faced with the terror of the multitude, he speaks some enigmatic words whose significance is understood only later, when, in the fourth part, it is revealed that he had disclosed the emergence of an island between Thera and Crete, employing the metaphor of a birth: θάλαττα γῆν ἔτεκε.

The third element in the narrative is the reaction of those present in the sanctuary to Apollonius' words. They do not understand Apollonius' revelation and believe instead that his enigmatic words refer to the threatening retreat of the sea. In their confusion, they believe that Apollonius alluded to "the harmony of the elements," and they seem to hope that his intervention will restore that ὁμόνοια and prevent the aggression of the sea towards the land, i.e. a flood. The expression ὁμόνοια τῶν στοιχείων is of particular interest because it reveals the cosmological order with which those present in the sanctuary apprehend the relationship between the sea and the land. From this phrase it may be deduced that sea and land are perceived as cosmic elements whose relationship is governed by concord, but that this harmonious bond may be broken by the aggression of one element against the other.

The sea's underlying capacity for aggression against land also appears in another episode of the *VA*, set in Smyrna during the celebration of the Panionia, where Apollonius poured a libation to protect the city from earthquakes and marine floods, accompanied by the following words (*VA* 4.5, transl. Jones):

You gods that guide Ionia, let this beautiful colony enjoy safety
from the sea. Let no disaster burst from the sea on to the land.
Do not let Aegaeon the Earth Shaker ever shatter the cities.

In these episodes, tsunamis are represented in cosmological

²⁹ The same verb, ἐπισπάω, is employed by Thucydides (3.89.5) in his description of the earthquake and tsunami in the Malian Gulf in 426. There the verb is used passively (LSJ: "returning with a rush after having retired").

terms as a rupture of the “harmony of the elements,” the state that would characterise the usual relationship between the land and the sea. This harmony, in turn, seems to be perceived as a situation of uneasy equilibrium, beneath which lies the constant risk of rupture and aggression. The same rationale about tsunamis as a manifestation of the rupture of the cosmic harmony between land and sea is found in the most complete description of a tsunami in antiquity: that by Ammianus Marcellinus, of the disaster that befell Alexandria in 365.³⁰ The text is well known, so only the passage that develops a variation on this concept is reproduced here. After describing the sea’s surprising retreat, Ammianus relates how (26.10.17, transl. Rolfe):

the roaring sea, resenting, as it were, this forced retreat, rose in its turn; and over the boiling shoals it dashed mightily upon islands and broad stretches of the mainland, and levelled innumerable buildings in the cities and wherever else they were found; so that amid *the mad discord of the elements* the altered face of the earth revealed marvellous sights

If those in the sanctuary in Leben fear the disruption of the ὁμόνοια τῶν στοιχείων, in Alexandria the tsunami is framed as the *elementorum furens discordia*. The similarity and complementarity of the depictions by Philostratus and Ammianus are clear and, furthermore, are not isolated cases. It is possible to discern very similar beliefs on the relationship between land and sea in that reference text about cosmological order, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.³¹ The poem begins with a scene of cosmogenesis: “be-

³⁰ Amm. Marc. 26.10.15–19. See F. Jacques and B. Bousquet, “Le raz de marée du 21 juillet 365,” *MEFRA* 96 (1984) 423–461; G. Kelly, “Ammianus and the Great Tsunami,” *JRS* 94 (2004) 141–167; J. Den Boeft et al., *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXV* (Leiden/Boston 2008) 301–302.

³¹ See R. Tarrant, “Chaos in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and its Neronian Influence,” *Arethusa* 35 (2002) 349–360; K. Sonik, “From Hesiod’s Abyss to Ovid’s *rudis indigestaque moles*: Chaos and Cosmos in the Babylonian ‘Epic of Creation’,” in J. A. Scurlock and R. H. Beal (eds.), *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel’s Chaokampf Hypothesis* (Winona Lake 2013) 1–25.

fore the sea was, and the lands, and the sky,” only chaos existed, characterised by the disconnection of the cosmic elements at its heart, and by the state of discord between earth, water, and air.³² The act of creation is triggered by the intervention of God, “or kindlier nature,” who settled the strife that characterised chaos by separating the elements: land from sky, sea from land, and the ethereal heavens from the dense atmosphere. After the elements were separated, the second part of the act of creation consists of binding the disentangled elements in harmony (1.24–25):

When thus he had released these elements and freed them from the blind heap of things, he set them each in its own place and bound them fast in harmony.

The expression with which Ovid culminates his creation scene, *concordi pace ligavit*, recalls the same cosmological order that underlies the allusion to the “harmony of the elements” by those present in the temple of Leben, in Philostratus. This order is equivalent to that found also in certain passages of Manilius’ *Astronomica*, where all the parts of the universe are connected by a mutual bond, represented in the expression *mutua foedera*.³³

This fabric which forms the body of the boundless universe, together with its members composed of nature’s diverse elements, air and fire, earth and level sea, is ruled by the force of a divine spirit; by sacred dispensation the deity brings harmony and governs with hidden purpose, arranging mutual bonds between all parts, so that each may furnish and receive another’s strength and that the whole may stand fast in kinship despite its variety of forms.

Echoes of this model are found, in marked resemblance, in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* (2.8, transl. Stewart):

³² “Chaos ... a rough, unordered mass of things, nothing at all save lifeless bulk and warring seeds of ill-matched elements heaped in one”: *Met.* 1.7–10 (transl. Miller).

³³ *Astron.* 1.247–254, transl. Goold; see B. Gladhill, *Rethinking Roman Alliance: A Study in Poetics and Society* (Cambridge 2016) 97–106.

That this fair world in settled course her several forms should vary,
 That a perpetual law should tame the fighting seeds of things, (...)
 That to the floods of greedy seas are certain bounds assigned,
Which them, lest they usurp too much upon the earth, debar,
 Love ruling heaven, and earth, and seas binds them in this course.
 And if it once let loose their reins, their friendship turns to war,
 Tearing the world whose ordered form their quiet motions bear.

In Boethius, the orders of the two episodes from *Leben* in Philostratus and Alexandria in Ammianus seem to be combined. A *foedus perpetuum* restrains the invasive tendency of the *avidum mare* against the earth, in an uneasy equilibrium maintained by *amor*, which binds (*ligat*) the cosmic elements. This equilibrium, nonetheless, may be ruptured, leading to conflict.

Taken together, these passages are crucial for understanding Apollonius' words in Gades, which we can now see as conceiving marine flooding in cosmological terms. It is therefore necessary to examine the seismic history of the Gulf of Cádiz before Apollonius' visit.

3. *Palaeotsunamis in the Gulf of Cádiz*

Seismic activity in the Gulf of Cádiz is caused by the Azores-Gibraltar transform fault, which over time has generated strong earthquakes, the best known of which is the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, whose associated tsunami severely affected the southwest coast of the Iberian peninsula, including Cádiz. In their revision of the holocene palaeotsunami catalogue of southwest Iberia, Lario et al. identified two horizons of "extreme wave events" in the first millennium B.C., which can be detected in the region's geomorphological record, one ca. 2700–2200 cal BP (ca. 750–250 B.C.) and the other ca. 2000 cal BP (ca. 50 B.C.).³⁴

Some researchers have attributed a narrow date of 218–209

³⁴ J. Lario et al., "Holocene Palaeotsunami Catalogue of SW Iberia," *Quaternary International* 242 (2011) 196–200; see also C. Alonso et al., "El registro de eventos energéticos marinos en la bahía de Cádiz durante épocas históricas," *Cuaternario y Geomorfología* 29 (2015) 95–117.

B.C. to the first of these events,³⁵ a date which is not supported by contemporary literary sources and which depends on the reference of a single author, Florián de Ocampo, official chronicler of the emperor Charles V, who wrote in the middle of the sixteenth century.³⁶ The reliability of the date must therefore be dismissed,³⁷ but not the magnitude of the event, which is believed to have been very severe.

Despite the deep geomorphological footprints of this catastrophic event, it has yet to be identified clearly in the archaeology. Gómez et al., taking the date stated by Florián de Ocampo as a reference point, have associated the destruction documented in some coastal settlements on the south-western coast of Iberia at the end of the third century B.C. with a possible extreme wave event, and not with the consequences of the Second Punic War.³⁸ In contrast, Celestino and López-Ruiz have suggested dating the great cataclysm of the first millennium B.C. in the south-west peninsula to the sixth century B.C. According to these authors, the event would have affected the coasts of Huelva and the lower Guadalquivir river, triggering subsidence processes and a tsunami that would have had a significant effect in the area, damaging the infrastructures that sustained the local commercial economy and, in short, contributing to the crisis of Tartessos.³⁹ In any case, the ideological

³⁵ J. Rodríguez-Vidal et al., “Geomarkers of the 218–209 BC Atlantic Tsunami in the Roman *Lacus Ligustinus* (SW Spain): A Palaeogeographical Approach,” *Quaternary International* 242 (2011) 201–212; P. G. Silva et al., “Seismic Palaeogeography of Coastal Zones in the Iberian Peninsula: Understanding Ancient and Historic Earthquakes in Spain,” *Cuaternario y Geomorfología* 29 (2015) 31–56, at 35–39.

³⁶ F. de Ocampo, *Los cinco libros primeros de la Cronica general de España* (Medina del Campo 1553).

³⁷ A. Udías, “Critical Revision of Earthquakes in the Iberian Peninsula before Year 1000,” *Seismological Research Letters* 86.3 (2015) 2–23, at 8–9.

³⁸ F. Gómez et al., “Eventos marinos de alta energía y cambios traumáticos en los asentamientos costeros del Suroeste de la Península Ibérica,” *Cuaternario y Geomorfología* 29 (2015) 57–74.

³⁹ S. Celestino and C. López-Ruiz, *Tartessos and the Phoenicians in Iberia*

impact that this disaster (or disasters) must have had upon the communities concerned has yet to be studied, but must no doubt have been very profound. The Herakleion in Gades, as the region's most important coastal sanctuary, is an obvious candidate for receiving religious expressions associated with the symbolic management of the catastrophe, including possible apotropaic practices.

There is geological and archaeological evidence for another "extreme wave event" on the coasts of the Gulf of Cádiz, very shortly before the visit of Apollonius and his pupils to the region. In the Roman town of Baelo Claudia, some 60 km east of Cádiz, a seismic event is recorded which caused the destruction of large areas of the city between A.D. 40 and 60.⁴⁰ The seismic source was probably marine, suggesting an associated tsunami, which is confirmed by the existence of a high-energy marine deposit, dated between 2150–1825 cal BP (ca. A.D. 75–200), in the mouth of a stream near Baelo.⁴¹ The possible tsunami has been associated with certain features of Baelo Claudia's eastern necropolis.⁴² This funerary space has a confusion of burials of varying wealth, and a remarkable series of anthropomorphic *cippi* at the feet of the tombs, facing the sea, in whose grotesque expressions, such as "panic" or "lament," Prados has seen a possible apotropaic intent.⁴³ Everything seems to indicate that this same tsunami is also

(Oxford 2016) 206, who depart from the state of affairs established by A. Rodríguez-Ramírez et al., "Atlantic Extreme Wave Events during the Last Four Millennia in the Guadalquivir Estuary," *Quaternary Research* 83 (2015) 24–40, with bibliography. On the sixth-century crisis in Iberia see M. E. Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies and Trade* (Cambridge 2001) 341–346.

⁴⁰ Silva et al., *Cuaternario y Geomorfología* 29 (2015) 39–43.

⁴¹ Alonso et al., *Cuaternario y Geomorfología* 29 (2015) 95–117.

⁴² Silva et al., *Cuaternario y Geomorfología* 29 (2015) 43.

⁴³ F. Prados, "La necrópolis oriental de Baelo Claudia (Tarifa, Cádiz) en el contexto de la religiosidad púnico-mauritana," *Zephyrus* 68 (2011) 191–210, at 202.

responsible for the destruction, in the second half of the first century A.D., of an area of ceramics workshops near the Roman city of Carteia, in the Bay of Gibraltar.⁴⁴

At least two tsunamis hit the coasts of the Gulf of Cádiz in the historical period preceding Apollonius' visit to the region. The first of these occurred long before, but it possessed a destructive power sufficient to have generated an enduring memory in the region. The second occurred a few years before Apollonius' visit to Gades, and it is reasonable to think it could have registered in the sanctuary. It may be concluded, therefore, that Apollonius' explanation of the significance of the Herakleion *stelai* in *VA* 5.5 unfolded in a context of anxiety about the threat of invasion by the sea, both among the visitors as well as among the people of the Gaditan coast.

4. *Cosmic talismans*

It is now time to examine the crux of the passage on the *stelai* at the Herakleion in light of what has been discussed (*VA* 5.5):

Γῆς καὶ Ὠκεανοῦ ξύνδεσμοι αἶδε αἱ στήλαί εἰσιν, ἐπεγράψατο
δὲ αὐτὰς ἐκεῖνος ἐν Μοιρῶν οἴκῳ, ὡς μήτε νεῖκος τοῖς στοιχείοις
ἐγγένοιτο μήτε ἀτιμάσειαν τὴν φιλότητα, ἣν ἀλλήλων ἴσχουσιν.

Apollonius' words can be explained via the model of perception that framed tsunamis in cosmological terms, as seen in the passages of Philostratus himself and of Ammianus. The term φιλότης, "friendship," used to define the relationship between the στοιχεῖα, Earth and Ocean, connects with the expression ὁμόνοια τῶν στοιχείων referring to the Sea and the Earth in the *Leben* episode. In turn, the reference to avoiding νεῖκος, "strife," arising between the elements evokes the *discordia elementorum* of Ammianus' description of the tsunami of 365.

In Apollonius' opinion, the *stelai* would constitute a sort of 'cosmic bond' between the Earth and the Ocean. The cosmo-

⁴⁴ C. Arteaga and J. A. González, "Presencia de materiales marinos y du-
nares sobre un alfar romano en la Bahía de Algeciras (Cádiz, España)," in
G. Benito and A. Díez Herrero (eds.), *Contribuciones recientes sobre geomorfología*
(Madrid 2004) 393–400.

genesis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* shows that the concept of 'bond' is associated with the maintenance of harmony between the cosmic elements, once they are separated from each other and placed in their respective positions in the universe. The verb *ligo*, in *concordi pace ligauit*, is thus related to Apollonius' *syndesmoi*, as in Boethius, where Love binds (*ligat*) heaven, earth, and seas.

The concepts employed by Apollonius—*syndesmos*, *philotes*, *neikos*—therefore evoke an enduring narrative in the ancient tradition that characterises the relationship between land and sea in terms of unstable concord, in which the tsunami is a manifestation *par excellence* of discord between the two elements, with catastrophic results. The articulation of the concepts at play rests upon an essentially apotropaic logic: according to Apollonius, by operating as divinely-imposed bonds, the *stelai* prevent episodes of conflict between Earth and Sea.

It is possible, furthermore, to interpret Apollonius' explanation of the function of the *stelai* as a transposition of key elements in the lexicon and narrative of treaties and covenants, in both the ancient Near East and the Graeco-Roman world.⁴⁵ The meaning of *syndesmos* corresponds to the terms used in the Near East to set out treaties and covenants: *riksu/rikiltu* in Akkadian, *ishiul* in Hittite, *bryt* in Hebrew.⁴⁶ Equally, *philotes* and *neikos* are characteristic terms in covenants in the Greek world, along with the act that establishes them, the oath-taking.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ On the notion and structure of covenants and treaties in the Near East see M. Weinfeld, "Covenant Terminology in the Ancient Near East and its Influence on the West," *JAOs* 93 (1973) 190–199; G. M. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*² (Atlanta 1999), and "Hittite Treaties and the Development of the Cuneiform Treaty Tradition," in M. Witte et al. (eds.), *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke* (Berlin/New York 2006) 279–301; L. G. Freire, "Covenant and International Relations in the Ancient Near East: A Preliminary Exploration," *Antiguo Oriente* 11 (2013) 129–154.

⁴⁶ Weinfeld, *JAOs* 93 (1973) 190–191; Beckman, in *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke* 283.

⁴⁷ P. Karavites, "Philotes, Homer and the Near East," *Athenaeum* 64 (1986) 474–481, and *Promise-giving and Treaty-making: Homer and the Near East* (Leiden 1992); V. Alonso, "War, Peace, and International Law in Ancient Greece,"

Homer often uses the formula *philoteta kai horkia pista* to express the establishment of a ‘bond of friendship’ after decisive battles, and the *Odyssey* ends with exactly this type of pact.⁴⁸

It is also possible to relate the reference to Egyptian Herakles inscribing the text in the “house of the Fates” (Μοιρῶν οἶκος) to the logic of treaties and covenants. Two factors point in this direction: the eternal nature of this type of bond, and the existence of divine witnesses in these kinds of pacts. The Moirai are, in Greek tradition, the goddesses of fate and the guarantors, alongside the Erinyes, of their enduring fulfilment.⁴⁹ In the wide array of references to the Moirai in the classical tradition, a very close parallel to the concept of the “house of the Fates” is in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* on the deification of Caesar (15.807–815): Jupiter intervenes against Venus, warning her that she should not try to change fate’s decrees for the *gens* Iulia, and invites her to enter “the abode of the three sisters” (*sororum tecta trium*), where she may contemplate the “tablets of brass and solid iron” upon which are registered the unalterable destinies of humanity, “eternal and secure.” That Apollonius places Herakles’ inscription “in the house of the Fates” suggests that in his opinion, the text of the *stelai* connotes an unalterable and eternal destiny, which helps establish a connection with the narrative of covenants in the ancient world.

Another possible reason for the Fates in Apollonius’ claim is related to an essential element in the establishment of covenants and treaties: the oath before divine witnesses, which implies a permanent commitment whose fulfilment is overseen by the gods. There is some evidence from the classical tradition in which the Moirai figure as witnesses to the oaths of the gods

in K. A. Raaflaub (ed.), *War and Peace in the Ancient World* (Oxford 2007) 206–225, at 211.

⁴⁸ Hom. *Od.* 24.543–549; see Alonso, in *War and Peace* 211.

⁴⁹ G. M. Müller, “Moirae,” *Brill’s New Pauly* Suppl. 4 *The Reception of Myth and Mythology* (Leiden/Boston 2010) 399–403. In the *VA* itself there are many references to the Moirai which, taken together, point to the idea of the immutability of the destiny that they have determined, e.g. 8.7.16.

themselves. For example, in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* Aphrodite promotes a covenant before a battle between Poseidon and Dionysus for the hand of Beroe (42.526–529, transl. Rouse):

The wooers agreed to this proposal. Both took a binding oath,
by Cronides and Earth, by Sky and the floods of Styx; and the
Fates (Μοῖραι) formally witnessed the bargain.

It can be concluded that, like *syndesmos*, *philotes*, and *neikos*, the presence of the Moirai in Apollonius' explanation also evokes the logic of covenants. Two narratives with complementary connotations thus co-exist in Apollonius' words: one of cosmological content and the other related to the logic of treaties.

Both narratives can form a third level of meaning, in the context of talismanic magic. Indeed, there are strong magical connotations to the words that Philostratus puts in Apollonius' mouth.⁵⁰ The term *syndesmos* evokes the concept of "binding" (δέω, καταδέω) which is at the heart of ancient magic and particularly, of "binding spells" (*katadesmoi* or *defixiones*).⁵¹ As Kim has pointed out in relation to the use of "bind" and "loose" in Mt 16:19, given the great popularity of binding

⁵⁰ On the 'magic' component of Apollonius' words see G. Miles, "Re-forming the Eyes: Interpreters and Interpretation in the *Vita Apollonii*," in K. Demoen and D. Praet (eds.), *Theios Sophistes: Essays on Flavius Philostratus' Vita Apollonii* (Leiden 2009) 129–160, at 142. Mierse, *AJA* 108 (2004) 552, points out how later Arab belief continued this tradition of the magical role of the site.

⁵¹ On the concept of binding in ancient magic see C. A. Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," in *Magika Hiera* (New York/Oxford 1991) 3–32; "Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of 'Voodoo Dolls' in Ancient Greece," *CLAnt* 10 (1991) 165–205, 207–220; and *Talismans and Trojan Horses: Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual* (New York/Oxford 1992) 74–93; J. G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York/Oxford 1992) 3–41; F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 1997) 118–174; D. Ogden, "Binding-spells: Curse-tablets and Voodoo-dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds," in B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (London 1999) 1–90; D. Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Malden/ Oxford 2008) 64–103.

magic in the Graeco-Roman world, the allusion to the theme of binding in a religious context must have evoked some notion of magical and ritual binding in the minds of many.⁵² Something similar may be said of the Empedoclean concepts of *philotes* and *neikos*,⁵³ which specifically evoke “Empedocles the magician,” to quote Kingsley, for whom “these forces of love and attraction and strife or repulsion are the fundamental governing principles of magical operations both in the ancient Greek world and elsewhere.”⁵⁴

The magical background of the whole scene is reinforced, finally, by the information about the inscriptions on the *stelai*. The passage emphasises the inability of those present to identify the script, describing it as “neither Egyptian nor Indian nor of any kind which he [Damis] could decipher,”⁵⁵ as well as the seemingly voluntary silence of the local priest on the matter.⁵⁶ The attribution of indecipherability to the script has usually been explained as the inability of those present to identify an ancient Phoenician script.⁵⁷ In this case, however, the indecipherable nature of the inscriptions and the belief that they were inscribed by the god himself, Egyptian Herakles, also evoke magical connotations, “suggesting perhaps a language of the gods, or at any rate a language of power to which the physical world is forced to respond.”⁵⁸ The incomprehensible

⁵² S. Y. Kim, “Ancient Binding Spells, Amulets and Matt 16.18–19,” *NTS* 62 (2016) 378–397, at 384, 388.

⁵³ V. Mumprecht, *Philostratos: Das Leben des Apollonios von Tyana* (Munich 1983) 1079 n.17; Miles, in *Theios Sophistes* 142 n.42.

⁵⁴ P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford 1995) 298.

⁵⁵ The exact meaning of *σὺμβάλλω* in this context is problematic, as it causes doubt whether the script could not be identified or could not be deciphered. In contrast to Conybeare’s translation, Jones opts for “nor such as could be guessed,” and Phillimore for “nor at all decipherable.”

⁵⁶ Miles, in *Theios Sophistes* 142.

⁵⁷ García y Bellido, *ArchEsp* 36 (1963) 115.

⁵⁸ Miles, in *Theios Sophistes* 142. On the role of certain gods as creators of

script on the *stelai* may even be linked to the signs known as *charaktêres*, found in various contexts in ancient magic, which were destined to be comprehensible only to “deities, angels or the enlightened.”⁵⁹

Finally, the main character of the scene, “Herakles the Egyptian,” must undoubtedly be identified with the Phoenician god Melqart, to whom the temple of Gades was originally dedicated. Only Pomponius Mela (*Chor.* 3.6.46), a native of the Gaditan area, and Philostratus himself (*VA* 2.33, 5.4–5) refer to the god of Gades in this manner, differentiating him, in the case of Philostratus, from the “Theban” Herakles, to whom there were also altars dedicated in the sanctuary (5.3). The Egyptian character of the Gaditan Herakles is unclear,⁶⁰ but in any case, the magical connotations that surround many of the cultural expressions coming from Egypt, the place of origin of *heka* in the eyes of Greeks and Romans, might be included in the nuances of this divine figure in Gades during the Late Republic and early Empire.

Thus, interpreting the *stelai* as *syndesmoi*, as cosmic bonds between the forces of nature, is consistent with the tradition on talismanic magic attributed to Apollonius. In the context of this tradition, moreover, the main components of Apollonius’ explanation of the Gaditan *stelai* coincide with important aspects in the tradition which characterises him as a creator of talismans. The most direct reference is in Pseudo-Justin’s *quaestio* 24, in which Apollonius’ talismans are credited with the ability to protect from, among other dangers, the encroachment of the

magical and apotropaic devices see C. Faraone, “Hephaestus the Magician and Near Eastern Parallels for Alcinous’ Watchdogs,” *GRBS* 28 (1987) 257–280, and *Talismans* 18–35.

⁵⁹ D. Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions,” *Helios* 21 (1994) 189–221, at 207.

⁶⁰ See Bonnet, *Melqart* 209–210; Marín, in *La questione* 315–331; C. Jourdain-Annequin, “Cet Héraclès qu’on dit égyptien,” in F. Labrique (ed.), *Religions méditerranéennes et orientales de l’antiquité* (Cairo 2002) 121–136, at 131.

sea (θαλάττης ὄρμαί). The image of the relationship between Earth and Ocean in terms of *philotes* and *neikos* can also be associated with Pseudo-Justin's reference to Apollonius' knowledge of the "sympathies and antipathies" between the "forces of nature" which he used to make his talismans.

5. *Conclusions*

These final reflections are in two sections. The first can identify fairly confidently what Apollonius believed the *stelai* meant, according to Philostratus. The second proposes a theory, necessarily tentative, about the meaning of the objects in their local context, for the Gaditanians themselves.

One result of this study is the identification of a model of the relationship between the Sea and the Earth in the Graeco-Roman tradition, based on the concept of the "harmony of the elements," on the perception that both elements co-exist in a state of concord which, however, is essentially unstable and beneath which lies the constant threat of rupture. At the heart of this model we can see, in Philostratus and Ammianus, a way of representing tsunamis in cosmic terms: as the rupture of concord between the elements, the consequent emergence of discord, and, in short, the aggression of the Sea against the Earth. The Leben episode, moreover, suggests that this was a relatively widespread way of perceiving the phenomenon of a tsunami by the middle of the first century A.D., and not limited exclusively to the imagination of intellectuals and literary men.

This model of representing the relationship between Earth and Sea and, by extension, of the phenomenon of tsunamis, makes it possible to propose a new interpretation of Apollonius' words about the *stelai* in Gades: in his opinion, they functioned as cosmic bonds, preventing the outbreak of strife and guaranteeing the maintenance of affection between the Earth and the Ocean, in order to avoid the type of catastrophe—a marine cataclysm—feared by the Cretans after the Leben earthquake. For Apollonius, whom a rich literary tradition associated with expertise in talismans, the Herakleion's *stelai* seem to be exactly that: talismans against tsunamis.

It is known that Philostratus' work lacks one very characteristic feature of the tradition about Apollonius known from Eusebius' time on, his expertise in making talismans destined to protect communities from plagues and forces of nature.⁶¹ This article has argued that the narrative describing Apollonius' explanation of the *stelai* links to several themes in ancient magic: the concept of bond or binding in the term *syndesmos*; the Empedoclean connotations of *philotes* and *neikos*; and the character of the inscriptions, both divine and indecipherable, the work of Egyptian Herakles. The interpretation, furthermore, of the *stelai* as cosmic bonds between elements which operate in terms of love and strife has clear parallels with some of the most explicit evidence in the tradition about Apollonius' talismans, specifically with Pseudo-Justin's *quaestio* 24. All this supports the proposal that the story of the Herakleion may form part of the tradition which associated Apollonius with talismans,⁶² a point which could have passed unnoticed by Philostratus, and is thus the earliest record we have of this tradition, pre-dating Eusebius by almost a century.

Another level of analysis concerns the meaning that the *stelai* held for the Gaditanians themselves. In this case, it is necessary to take into account the seismological history of the Gulf of Cádiz and the tsunamis that occurred in the area in the Phoenician and Roman period. The tsunami that hit the southwest Iberian Peninsula between the eighth and third centuries B.C. seems to have been as large as or larger than the Lisbon tsunami of 1755,⁶³ and must therefore have made a significant impact upon the region's coastal communities in every sphere, but especially the religious. The tsunami that occurred in the Baelo Claudia and Carteia area between A.D. 40 and 60, which may also have affected Cádiz, seems to have been smaller. The

⁶¹ Dzielska, *Apollonius* 100.

⁶² E. Jones, *The Concept of the ΘΕΙΟΣ ἄΝΗΡ in the Greco-Roman World* (diss. Durham 1973; <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/7937/>) 184.

⁶³ Rodríguez-Vidal et al., *Quaternary International* 242 (2011) 210.

event, nevertheless, represents a distinctive prelude to the arrival of Apollonius, who would have witnessed a similar episode a few years previously in Crete. It may be hypothesised that in their local context, the *stelai* were also credited with an apotropaic character like the one Apollonius seems to have assigned them.

The sort of narrative underlying Apollonius' words suggests that if the *stelai* were indeed ancient dedications, as previous commentators have thought, and not purely a literary device of Philostratus', they were not the same *stelai* as the ones that Posidonius saw in the Herakleion containing inscribed building accounts (Strab. 3.5.5–6). Regarding Philostratus' *stelai*, one can speculate tentatively that they held some sort of inscribed treaty texts, to which Apollonius, and even the Gaditanians, may have attributed talismanic properties. It cannot be ruled out that copies of Gaditan treaties were preserved in the Herakleion, or that treaties from the east may have arrived at the sanctuary as *ex-votos*, once they had been transformed into *sacra* of ancient and distant origin, whose scripts and meanings had become incomprehensible. Building on the treaty narrative contained in the *stelai* inscriptions, Philostratus would have made Apollonius, who was familiar with a wide variety of temple *sacra* through his journeys, attribute to the texts a divine origin and a cosmic talismanic function. Whatever the truth, the indecipherable nature of the inscriptions and their unusual description counsel against straying too far into speculation about their original nature.

The possibility that at some time the *stelai* may have been credited with talismanic power related to the protection of the sanctuary against invasion by the sea should be seen in the context of religious responses after the massive event of the first millennium B.C. A disaster of that nature must have been perceived as truly cosmic, owing to its character, rarity, and severity, and the religious response of the region's communities, amongst which it is reasonable to expect instances of

apotropaic magic, must have remained deeply engraved in the grammar of the sanctuary of Melqart-Herakles in Gades.⁶⁴

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