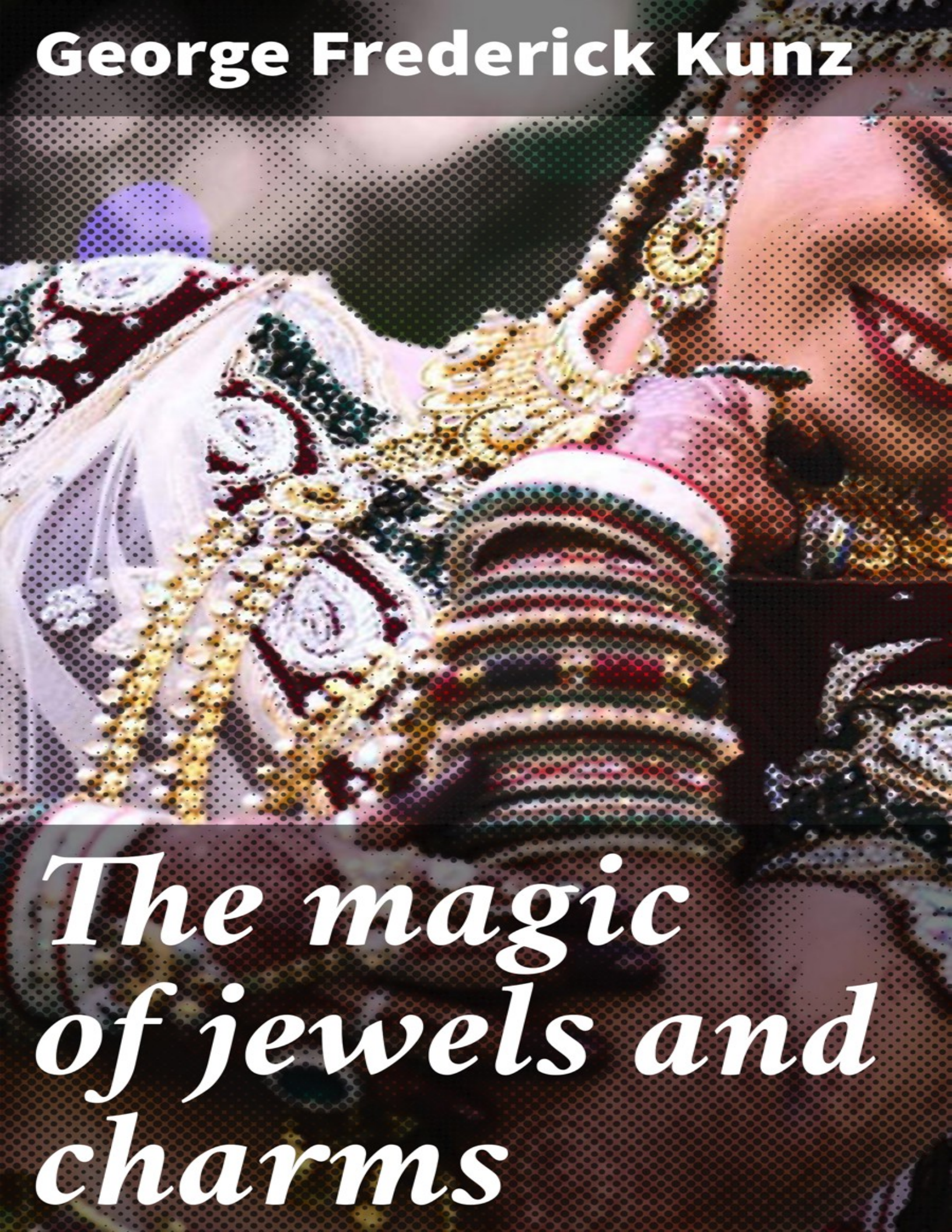


George Frederick Kunz



*The magic
of jewels and
charms*

George Frederick Kunz

The magic of jewels and charms



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Preface

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Jewels, gems, stones, superstitions and astrological lore are all so interwoven in history that to treat of either of them alone would mean to break the chain of association linking them one with the other.

Beauty of color or lustre in a stone or some quaint form attracts the eye of the savage, and his choice of material for ornament or adornment is also conditioned by the toughness of some stones as compared with the facility with which others can be chipped or polished.

Whereas a gem might be prized for its beauty by a single individual owner, a stone of curious and suggestive form sometimes claimed the reverence of an entire tribe, since it was thought to be the abode or the chosen instrument of some spirit or genius.

Just as the appeal to higher powers for present help in pressing emergencies preceded the development of a formal religious faith, so this never-failing need of protectors or healers eventually led to the attribution of powers of protection to the spirits of men and women who had led holy lives and about whose history legend had woven a web of pious imaginations at a time when poetic fancy reigned instead of historic record. The writer still holds that true sentiment, the antithesis of superstitious dread, is good for

all mankind—sentiment meaning optimism as truly as superstition stands for pessimism—and that even the fancies generated by sentiment are helpful to us and make us happier; and surely happiness often means health, and happiness and health combined aid to evolve that other member of the triumvirate, wealth. Do we not often wish for the union of these three supreme blessings?

At all times and in all periods there have been optimists and pessimists, the former animated by the life-bringing sentiment of hope, and the latter oppressed by the death-dealing sense of fear. Let us always choose a happy medium between a foolish excess of hope and an unreasonable apprehension of future troubles. The world's history and our own experience show us that it is the optimist who has caused the world to progress, and we should trust and believe that the sentiment of hope and faith will always animate humanity.

We know that for centuries it has been believed that amber necklaces protect children from cold. May we not also now add that to pearls the same qualities are attributed? There must be a reason for this. May not this belief be ascribed to the circumstance that in the wearing of either of these gems their virtue consists in the fact that the necklaces do not cover the neck? In other words, they are worn on the bare throat and the opinion prevails that an exposed neck means less liability to cold. For, where the neck is never overheated and then suddenly chilled, a normal temperature being maintained, there should be protection from colds and from the many ills resulting from them. As to pearls, this might serve to illustrate the poetic

fancy that these sea-gems are tears by angels shed to bring mortals joy.

Having collected a large mass of material, ethnological, historical and legendary, in the course of personal observations and study, it was decided that the companion volume, the twin sister of "The Curious Lore of Precious Stones," need not treat of gems *alone*.

For courtesies, information and illustrations I am indebted to the following to whom my sincere thanks are due: Prof. T. Wada, of Tokyo, Japan; Dr. G. O. Clerc, President of the Societe Curalienne des Amis des Sciences Naturelles, Ekaterineburg, Russia; Dr. Charles Braddock, late Medical Inspector to the King of Siam; Sir Charles Hercules Reed, Curator of Archæology, British Museum, London; A. W. Feavearyear, London; Dr. Peter Jessen, Librarian of the Kunstgewerbe Museum of Berlin; Miss Belle DaCosta Green; Dr. Berthold Laufer, Oriental Archæologist, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago; Dr. Oliver P. Farrington, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago; Hereward Carrington, Psychist, New York; Dr. W. Hayes Ward, Archæologist and Babylonian Scholar; Mrs. Henry Draper, New York; W. W. Blake, Mexico City, who has done so much to encourage Mexican archæological investigation; Dr. Edward Forrester Sutton, New York; Dr. W. H. Holmes of the United States Bureau of Ethnology, Washington; Mr. McNeil M. Judd, Archæologist, United States National Museum; Dr. Arthur Fairbanks, Director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; Tan Sien Ko, Government Archæologist of Burma; Dr. Charles C. Abbott, Archæologist, Trenton, N.J.; Edgar T. Willson, of the Jewelers' Circular Publishing Co.; Dr. Edward

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The Magic of Jewels and Charms

I

Magic Stones and Electric Gems

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While the precious and semi-precious stones were often worn as amulets or talismans, the belief in the magic quality of mineral substances was not confined to them, but was also held in regard to large stone masses of peculiar form, or having strange markings or indentations; moreover, many small stones, possessing neither worth nor beauty, were thought to exert a certain magical influence upon natural phenomena. An occult power of this sort was also attributed by tradition to some mythical stones, the origin of this fancy being frequently explicable by the quality really inherent in some known mineral bearing a designation closely similar to that bestowed upon the imaginary stone.

To certain stones has been attributed the power to produce musical tones, the most famous example being the so-called "Vocal Memnon" of Thebes. This colossal statue was said to emit a melodious sound when the sun rose, and according to Greek legend this sound was a greeting given by Memnon to his mother, the Dawn. It appears, however, that the statue was a respecter of persons, for when the Emperor Hadrian presented himself before it, he is said to

have heard the sound three times, whereas common mortals heard it but once, or at most twice, while occasionally the statue withheld its greeting altogether. A modern traveller relates a personal experience that may cast a side-light upon this matter. His visit to Thebes was made in the evening, but a fellah who was standing near the statue asked him whether he wished to hear the musical sound. Of course the reply was in the affirmative. Thereupon the man climbed up the side of the colossal figure and hid himself behind the elbow. In a moment sharp metallic sounds became audible; not a single sound, but several in succession. Knowing from their quality that they could not proceed from the stone, the traveller asked his donkey-boy for an explanation and was told that the man was striking an iron bar. In ancient times the priests probably performed this or a similar trick in a much more skilful way than did the poor fellah, so that the mystery of the statue was carefully guarded.^[1]

The river Hydaspes was said to furnish a “musical stone.” When the moon was waxing, this stone gave forth a melodious sound.^[2] This should be understood in the sense that when the stone was struck at that season the sound was different from what it was at other times—a fanciful idea based on some supposed sympathy between the stone and the moon. As moonstones are rarely larger than a silver dollar, they would not emit a sound upon being struck, and it is probably a rock known as “chinkstone” (phonolite) that is referred to, an igneous rock, very hard and resonant, that has been found in elongated and flat pebbles of large size; they ring with the resonance of bells when struck. A

sonorous stone at Megara is reported by Pausanias^[3]; when struck, it emitted the sound of the chord of a lyre. This was explained by the tale that, while helping Alcathous to build the walls of his city, the god Apollo had rested his lyre on the stone.

The term sarcophagus is to us so clear and precise in its significance, that we do not stop to think that its etymology reveals it as literally meaning body-devourer. Tradition taught that a stone of this type was to be found near Assos in Lycia, Asia Minor, and also in some parts of the Orient. If attached to the body of a living person it would eat away the flesh. Another type, already noted by Theophrastus in the third century B.C., had the power of petrifying any object placed within receptacles made from it. If a dead person were buried in a “sarcophagus” of this material the body would not be consumed, but would, on the contrary, be turned to stone, even the shoes of the corpse and any utensils buried with it, would undergo a like wonderful change. Possibly actual observations of changes in the bodies of those long buried, their partial disintegration in some cases, and their hardening in others, may have given rise to the fancy that the stone receptacle in which they had reposed was directly the cause of this, whether it implied destruction or petrification.^[4]

Of the substance named galactite, Pliny gives some details. He states that it came from the Nile, was of the color and had the odor of milk, and when moistened and scraped produced a juice resembling milk. The liquid derived from the galactite when taken as a potion by nurses was said to increase the flow of milk. If a galactite were

bound to a child's arm the effect was to promote the secretion of saliva. To these favorable effects must be added an unfavorable one, namely, loss of memory, which was said to befall occasionally those who wore the stone. A kind of "emerald with white veinings" was sometimes called galactite, and another variety had alternate red and white stripes or veins.^[5] Perhaps this "emerald" was a variety of jade, or a banded jasper.

This so-called galactite, which enjoyed such an extraordinary reputation in ancient and medieval times, is not, properly speaking, a stone, but a nitrate of lime. The strange and famous relics of the Virgin preserved in many old churches and called "the Virgin's milk," were merely solutions of this nitrate. Possibly pieces of this so-called galactite were sometimes found by pilgrims in the grotto of Bethlehem, and were supposed to be petrified milk.^[6] As everything in this sacred spot was regarded as connected in some way with the miraculous birth of Christ, it is easy to understand why the devout pilgrims came to believe that the milky-hued substance represented the milk of the Virgin, which had been preserved for future ages in this extraordinary way.

A kind of galactite, evidently a finely deposited form of carbonate of lime and perhaps absorbent, is mentioned by Conrad Gesner.^[7] This was found on the Pilatus Mountain, Lake Lucerne, and is described by Gesner as being a "fungous and friable" substance, white and exceedingly light in weight. The natives called it *Mondmilch* (moonmilk) and it was sold in the pharmacies of Lucerne. The powder was used by physicians in the treatment of ulcers, and, like

all the other galactites, it was supposed to increase the flow of milk and to develop the breasts. Besides this it was credited with somniferous virtues.

An old Mohammedan tradition, cited by Ibn Kadho Shobah in his *Tarik al-Jafthi*, relates that Noah, after the deluge, on setting out with the members of his family to settle and populate the regions to the eastward and northward of Mt. Ararat, confided to their care a miraculous stone known to the Turks as *jiude-tash*, to the Persians as *senkideh* and to the Arabs as *hajer al-mathar*, or the “rain-stone.” On it was impressed the word Aadhem or Aazem, the great name of God, by virtue of which whosoever possessed this stone could cause rain to fall whenever he pleased. In the long lapse of time this particular “precious” stone was lost, but some of the Turks were said to have certain stones endowed with a like power, and the more superstitious among these Turks solemnly asseverated that their “rain-stones” could beget progeny by a mysterious kind of generation.^[8]

Among the many stones or concretions endowed by medieval belief with wonderful powers, may be reckoned the “rain-making” stones. Some of these were to be found in Karmania, south of Khorassan. The miraculous effect was produced by rubbing one against another. The Arabic author who reports this declares that this rain-making power was a well-known fact. He adds that similar stones might be secured from near Toledo in Spain and also in the “land of Kimar,” inhabited by Turkish tribes.^[9]

The Oriental rain-stones noted by pseudo-Aristotle and by many other Arabic writers of medieval times, can be

paralleled by similar rain-making or rain-inducing stones in many other parts of the world and among many primitive peoples even in modern times. The rain-makers of the African tribe of Wahumas, dwelling in the region bordering on the great Albert Nyanza Lake in Central Africa, use a black stone in the course of their magic rites. This is put into a vessel and water poured over it; the pulverized roots of certain herbs and some blood drawn from the veins of a black goat are then mixed with the water, and the resulting liquid mixture is thrown up into the air by the rain-maker.^[10] The sorcerers among the Dieri in Central Australia place such trust in the efficacy of these conjurations as to believe that all rainfalls are produced thereby, generally through the intermediate action of ancestral spirits. If rain falls in a locality where no proceedings of the kind have taken place, then it is supposed that they have been initiated in some contiguous territory, a merely spontaneous and natural rainfall being out of the question. The clouds indeed generate the rain, but it will not be brought to the earth except by magic art. In the complicated magic ceremonies of these Dieri rain-makers, two large stones are employed; after a ceremonial, in the course of which the blood drawn from the two chief sorcerers is smeared over the bodies of the others, the stones are borne away by these two sorcerers for a distance of about twenty miles, and there put far up on the highest tree that can be found, the object evidently being to bring them as near to the clouds as possible.^[11]

Rock-crystal as a rain-compeller finds honor among the wizards of the Ta-ta-thi tribe in New South Wales, Australia.

To bring down rain from the sky one of them will break off a fragment from a crystal and cast it heavenward, enwrapping the rest of the crystal in feathers. After immersing these with their enclosure in water, and leaving them to soak for a while, the whole is removed and buried in the earth, or hidden away in some safe place.^[12] The widely spread fancy that rock-crystal is simply congealed water may have something to do with the choosing of this stone as a rain-maker.

Sumatrans of Kota Gadanz use a stone whose form roughly resembles that of a cat in their invocations of rain, a live black cat being supposed in some parts of this island to have certain rain-producing virtues.^[13] Perhaps the electric fur of the animal may have suggested a connection with thunder-storms. Stones of this type, indeed a great many of those to which magic properties are attributed, are in many cases smeared with the blood of fowls, or have incense offered to them, this treatment of such stones being observed by the peasants in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe as well as in the Far East.

Stone crosses have sometimes been utilized as rain-bringers, as in the case of one belonging to St. Mary's Church in the Island of Uist, one of the outer Hebrides, off the Scottish coast. When drought prevailed here the peasants would set up this cross which usually lay flat on the ground, in the confident belief that rain would ensue. Of course, sooner or later, it was sure to come, and then the cross, having done its duty, was quietly replaced in its former horizontal position.^[14]

A mysterious stone mentioned in Rabbinical legend is called the *shamir*. This word occurs three times in the Old Testament (Jer. xvii, 1; Ezek. iii, 9; Zech. vii, 12), and in each signifies a material noted for its hardness. In the first of these passages there is express indication that the *shamir* was a pointed object used for engraving, and the word is translated "diamond" in our Bible; in the two other cases it is rendered "adamant" and "adamantine stone," respectively, thus leaving the determination of the substance an open question. However, as it is almost certain that the Hebrews were not familiar with the diamond, *shamir* most probably signifies one of the varieties of corundum, the next hardest mineral to the diamond, and extensively used in classic times for engraving on softer stones.

In the luxuriant growth of legend that sprang up in Rabbinical times, the *shamir* is not forgotten. It is said to have been the seventh of the ten marvels created at the end of the sixth day of creation. In size, it is described as being not larger than a barley-corn, but it had the power to split up the hardest substances, if brought in contact with them, or even in their neighborhood. Some of the legends ascribe to it even more wonderful magic powers, so that, like Aladdin's lamp, great buildings could be constructed by its help, Solomon having used it in the erection of the temple and other buildings. The etymology of the word indicates a pointed object, similar to our diamond-point, but in legend it is almost invariably described as a small worm, probably because of a fancied connection between this word and another designating a species of worm. Many have

associated the Hebrew *shamir* with the Greek σμίρις, or emery.

The Hebrew *shamir* and the Greek ἀδάμας were both used metaphorically of hardness of heart and implacability. The Hebrew prophet Zechariah (vii, 12) says of the disobedient Jews that “they made their hearts as an adamant stone” (*shamir*), and the Greek poet Theocritus (fl. 228 B.C.) calls Pluto, the god of the infernal regions, “the *adamas* in Hades.” This clearly shows that invincible hardness was the common characteristic of the material designated by these words. However, it appears probable that while *shamir* signifies a form of corundum, the word *adamas*, as used by the early Greek writers, denoted a hard, metallic substance. Possibly, when iron first became known to the Greeks, the adjective ἀδαμάντινος, “indomitable,” was applied to it, and later the noun *adamas* was formed from this adjective and was used by the poets to signify an imaginary substance even harder than iron; hence, when the diamond became known in Greek lands, its extreme hardness suggested the application to it of this name.^[15]

An Arab legend concerning the fabled *shamir* stone is related by Cazwini in his cosmography. When King Solomon set about building the temple in Jerusalem, he commanded Satan to dress the stones that were to be used, but the work was performed with such demoniac energy that the people round about complained bitterly of the dreadful noise. To remedy this trouble, Solomon sought the council of the leading scribes and also that of the evil spirits known as Ifrites and Jinns. None of them, however, was able to help him in this difficulty, but one of them advised him to

question an apostate named Sahr, who sometimes had special knowledge of such things. When called upon for his opinion, Sahr declared that he knew of a stone that would do the work required, but did not know where it could be found; nevertheless he believed that, by a stratagem, he could secure possession of it. He thereupon ordered that an eagle's nest with its eggs should be brought to him, and also a bottle-shaped vessel made of very strong glass. Into this he slipped the eggs, put them back into the nest, and had nest and eggs replaced where they had been found. When the eagle returned to the nest it encountered this obstacle. In vain it struck at the vessel with claws and beak; after repeated efforts it flew away, but came back on the second day holding a piece of stone in its beak, which it let fall upon the vessel, breaking the latter into two halves without producing any sound. Upon this, Solomon, who knew the language of beasts and birds, asked the eagle where it had secured the stone. The bird answered: "O Prophet of God, in a mountain in the West called the Samur Mountain." This was indication enough to the wise king who, summoning the Jinns to his aid, soon had in Jerusalem a plentiful supply of these *samûr*, or *shamir* stones, with which the work of shaping and polishing the blocks for the temple was noiselessly performed.^[16]

Full and precise directions are given by the old authorities as to the proper way to secure possession of the stone called *corvia*. On the Calends, or first day of April, eggs are to be taken out of a crow's nest and boiled until they are quite hard; they are then to be allowed to cool off and are replaced in the nest. The female bird notes that the

eggs have been tampered with and flies away in search of the corvia-stone. When she has found it, she bears it to the nest, and as soon as it touches the eggs they become fresh and fertile again. This is the auspicious moment for securing the stone, which must be quickly taken from the nest else it would lose its virtue.^[17] The lucky owner of the stone is promised increase of wealth and honors, and the power to read the future.

The fabled gem-bearing dragons of India were said to have sometimes fallen victims to the enchanter's art. Certain mystic characters were woven in thread of gold upon a scarlet cloth, and this cloth was spread by the hunters before the dragon's den. When the creature emerged, his eyes were fascinated by the strange letters in which the enchanter had infused a wonderful soporific power. Hypnotized by the sight, the dragon would fall into a deep slumber and the hunters would rush upon him and sever his head from his body. Within the head were found gems of brilliant hue, some of these possessing the power of rendering the wearer invisible.^[18]

The "Gem of Sovranty," or the "Gem of the King of Kings," may have been a purely poetic Hindu fancy, or possibly may have been the diamond. Its surpassing quality is emphasized by the declaration that though the earth produced the sapphire, the cat's-eye, the topaz, the ruby, and the two mystic gems, the favorite of the sun, and the favorite of the moon, the Gem of the King of Kings was acknowledged to be the chief of all "for the sheen of that jewel spreads round about for a league on every side." To King Milinda the following question was put: "Suppose that

on the disappearance of a sovran overlord, the mystic Gem of Sovranty lay concealed in a cleft on the mountain peak, and that on another sovran overlord arriving at the supreme dignity it should appear to him, would you say, O King, that the gem was produced by him?" "Certainly not, sir," replied the monarch, "the gem would be in its original condition. But it had received, as it were, a new birth through him."^[19]

The Arabian author, Ibn Al-Beithar (b. ca. 1197 A.D.), describes a stone called in Arabic *hajer al-kelb*, or "dog-stone." These stones had such attraction for dogs of a certain breed that when cast before them they would snap them up, bite them, and hold them in their jaws. The magicians saw in this a proof that the stones would produce enmity and ill-will among men. Having selected seven such stones they marked them with the names of any persons between whom they wished to stir up strife. The seven stones were then thrown one by one before a dog of the requisite species, and, after he had bitten them, two were chosen and were placed in water of which the persons who were to be set at variance were sure to drink. We are assured that the experiment had the desired evil result.^[20]

In ancient times there was found in the river Meander a stone satirically named *sophron*, "temperate." If it were placed upon the breast of any one, he immediately became enraged and killed one of his parents; however, after having appeased the Mother of the Gods, he was cured of his temporary madness.^[21]

A most singular stone is described by Thomas de Cantimpré under the name of "piropholos." This substance, according to Konrad von Megenberg's version, was taken

from the heart of a man who had been poisoned, “because the heart of such a man cannot be burned in fire.” If the heart were kept for nine years in fire this wonderful stone was produced. It gave protection from lightning, but its principal virtue was to guard the wearer from sudden death; indeed, we are told that a man could not die so long as he held this stone in his hand. However, it did not preserve him from disease, but only prolonged his life. The stone was said to be of a light and bright red color.^[22]

After enumerating all the well-known precious stones, Volmar, in his “Steinbuch,” proceeds to relate that there is one which produces blindness, another that enables the wearer to understand the language of birds, still another that saves people from drowning, and, finally, one of such sovereign power that it brings back the dead to life. However, we are told that because of the miraculous virtues of these stones God hides them so well that no man can obtain them.^[23] About a century earlier Saint Hildegard of Bingen wrote that “just as a poisonous herb placed on a man’s skin will produce ulceration,” by an analogous though contrary effect “certain precious stones will, if placed on the skin, confer health and sanity by their virtue.”^[24]

Persian records tell of a “royal stone” found in the head of the *ouren bad*, a kind of eagle; this preserved the wearer from the attacks of venomous reptiles. If a deadly poison had been administered to a person, he would be immediately cured by taking one drachm’s weight of the stone. It thus appears that its virtues were those of the far-famed bezoar.^[25] Persia evidently had good store of “wonderworkers” of this kind, for the Persian romance