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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

PROTECTIVE AMULETS FOR CHILDREN: VULNERABILITY AND CARE IN ROMAN HISPANIA

Abstract: While scholarship on ancient childhood has advanced significantly in recent decades, the specific role of apotropaic objects to protect children within the provincial context of Roman Hispania remains insufficiently explored. This paper addresses this lacuna by examining the use of protective amulets, framing their deployment as a strategic cultural response to the inherent vulnerability characteristic of infancy. Drawing upon contemporary theories of vulnerability and agency, the study examines the material record—specifically items recovered from non-adult funerary assemblages—to elucidate how these objects functioned as instrumental tools for risk mitigation. The analysis focuses on the symbolic and prophylactic dimensions of diverse typologies, such as *bullae*, bells, and phallic pendants, exploring their capacity to confront both biological threats and supernatural forces like the evil eye (*fascinum*). By synthesising archaeological data with domestic religious practices, this inquiry provides the first comprehensive survey of childhood protection within the **Hispanic provinces**. Ultimately, the evidence reveals a sophisticated ritual landscape in which the care of the *immaturi* was intrinsically linked to a complex nexus of social and magical-religious dynamics, thereby laying the groundwork for future cross-provincial comparative research.

Keywords: *Childhood, Amulets, **Hispania**, Vulnerability, Childcare.*

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The historiography of childhood has followed a well-defined trajectory, originating with the seminal works of Ariès (1960) and, with specific regard to the Roman sphere, Néraudau (1984). In recent decades, the field has witnessed exponential growth, underpinned by methodological sophistication and increasingly interdisciplinary frameworks. This intellectual momentum is manifest in the consolidation of specialised platforms, such as the journal *Childhood in the Past* and a burgeoning corpus of multifaceted scholarship.¹

Within Spanish ancient history and archaeological discourse, interest in age-defined social groups has similarly intensified.² These inquiries encompass a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from domestic organisation and caregiving to the socio-economic integration of children. Notably, the work of Sánchez Romero has been instrumental in embedding the Archaeology of Childhood within broader **Hispanic** research agendas.³

¹ A thorough compilation with a total of 5,810 bibliographic entries is found in PANIDIS 2023.

² ÁLVARO BERNAL 2023; JUSTEL VICENTE 2012; MARTÍN MINGUIJÓN/VILACOBIA RAMOS/SAIZ LÓPEZ 2023; RUBIERA CANCELAS 2018; Notable contributions focusing on other age groups, such as the elderly, include the works of CASAMAYOR MANCISIDOR 2019 or RUBIERA CANCELAS/GARCÍA-VENTURA/MÉNDEZ SANTIAGO 2023.

³ SÁNCHEZ ROMERO 2008; SÁNCHEZ ROMERO 2010; SÁNCHEZ ROMERO/ALARCÓN/

Notwithstanding these advances, the specific study of protective magic and its material manifestations—namely amulets and ritual practices—remains comparatively peripheral within the **Hispanic** context. While the pioneering research of Dasen has fundamentally illuminated these practices, her extensive work has primarily focused on the Gallic provinces; consequently, the Hispanic corpus still lacks a dedicated synthesis of comparable analytical depth.⁴ In Spain, protective devices are frequently subsumed within broader funerary analyses or addressed tangentially in studies of Roman jewellery, which often prioritise adult female spheres or specific raw materials such as amber and jet.⁵ Moreover, existing literature on phallic amulets remains predominantly focused on establishing regional typological corpora, rather than exploring their socio-cultural resonance or the ways in which these objects mediated the protection and identity of children in daily life.⁶

While these studies provide a foundational basis for identifying symbolic and apotropaic adornment, a more nuanced understanding necessitates the integration of sociological frameworks and a rigorous comparative analysis of literary and iconographic evidence. Only through such an interdisciplinary approach can these artefacts be situated within their broader socio-cultural milieu. To date, the paucity of targeted research has resulted in a double historiographical invisibility: these indicators are insufficiently recognised within Spanish scholarship and, consequently, marginalised in international discourse, where significant Hispanic examples are frequently omitted from general works on Roman childhood.

VULNERABILITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND CARE

Scholarship on amulets and apotropaic objects frequently underscores their ubiquity among social groups perceived as particularly vulnerable.⁷ However, these studies seldom interrogate the interpretative potential of vulnerability as a robust analytical category for generating a multidimensional understanding of such practices.

The concept of vulnerability—extensively debated in contemporary social theory, ethics, and feminist thought—offers a potent heuristic framework for examining the lived experiences of children in antiquity. Far from being a static biological condition, vulnerability is increasingly conceptualised as both ontological (inherent to the

human condition) and situational, emerging from specific legal, economic, and cultural configurations.⁸ This dual conceptualisation is particularly germane to the Roman world, where limited autonomy, legal dependency, and physical immaturity rendered children acutely susceptible to illness, exploitation, and high rates of premature mortality.⁹

Applying vulnerability theory to historical contexts necessitates a departure from the idealised notion of the autonomous individual, directing attention instead toward structural dependency, embodied experience, and the social distribution of care. This analytical lens necessitates a reconceptualisation of how the past is represented: by challenging traditional narratives that privilege individualism, it highlights human interdependence as a core dimension of social life. A perspective synthesising ontological and situational vulnerability situates individuals within environments where exposure to forces beyond human control was inescapable. The scholarly reluctance to foreground such reliance often stems from a conceptualisation of dependency as inherently pejorative; it is frequently conflated with an incapacitated passivity rather than being recognised as an intrinsic, and indeed inescapable, dimension of human existence.¹⁰

Conversely, Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay argue that vulnerability is not synonymous with victimisation; instead, an awareness of one's exposure can serve as a catalyst for action. As they aptly note, 'vulnerability can be a way of being exposed and agentic at the same time'.¹¹ In the specific context of apotropaic practices during early childhood, this agency is primarily mediated by caregivers and kinship networks intimately involved in infant care.¹² In the Roman world, in the absence of institutional frameworks equivalent to the modern 'responsive state', the mitigation of childhood vulnerability fell to familial and communal strategies.¹³ These strategies encompassed not only nourishment but also the deployment of symbolic mechanisms—such as amulets—designed to negotiate natural and supernatural risks. Consequently, these objects should be interpreted as integral to a repertoire of care practices that materialised the emotional and symbolic dimensions of protection.

This apotropaic response arises from a pervasive Roman awareness of the physical and psychological fragility

ARANDA 2015; SÁNCHEZ ROMERO/CID LÓPEZ 2018.

⁴ DASEN 2003; DASEN 2015a, 281-318; DASEN 2015b; DASEN 2018; DASEN 2019. Other important contributions include BEL 2012; HERMARY/DUBOIS 2012; PFÄFFLI 2013; COULON/DASEN forthcoming.

⁵ See ALCÁZAR GODOY/SUÁREZ LÓPEZ/ALARCÓN CASTELLANO 1994; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2021; RUBIO VALVERDE 2021; SEVILLA CONDE 2010/2011; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010. For discussions within the context of Roman jewellery and specific materials, see also ANDREU PINTADO 2024; BARREIRO ESPINAL 2011; BARREIRO MARTÍN/MORCILLO LEÓN 2016/2017; BARRERO MARTÍN 2021; BUSTAMANTE-ÁLVAREZ/MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ/BEJARANO OSORIO 2024; BUSTAMANTE-ÁLVAREZ/MURILLO-BARROSO/SABIO GONZÁLEZ 2021; MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023; VALLEJO-CASAS *et alii* 2024.

⁶ ANDREU PINTADO/URRIZBURU JÁUREGUI 2019; DEL HOYO CALLEJA/VÁZQUEZ HOYS 1996; DOMÍNGUEZ VICENTE 2015; GÓMEZ PEÑA/BRAVO HIDALGO/RODRÍGUEZ MELLADO 2021.

⁷ DASEN 2015a, 13.

⁸ LIEDO 2021. For an interdisciplinary reflection on the theoretical dimensions of vulnerability, see GIOLO/PASTORE 2018. GONZÁLEZ ESTRADA/RUBIERA CANCELAS forthcoming provide a critical application of these frameworks to Ancient History.

⁹ Demographic estimates for Roman childhood suggest a high mortality rate, with approximately 20–30% of infants not surviving their first year and nearly 50% failing to reach age ten, although these figures remain contested (CARROLL 2018, 147–151, with her references to earlier research and the scholarly debate).

¹⁰ BUTLER/GAMBETTI/SABSAY 2016; HERNANDO 2018.

¹¹ BUTLER 2016, 24.

¹² In ancient societies, the life cycle was structured into distinct phases, which conditioned the level of autonomy and protection required for the individual. These divisions are reflected in systems such as the Hippocratic hebdomads (seven-year cycles) and Varro's five-year stages. Generally, Roman childhood was categorised into three periods: *infantia* (roughly up to age seven), *puertia* (around fourteen years old), followed by *adulescentia* (extending until approximately twenty-one to twenty-five for males, and until marriage for females). On these age categories and their social implications, see DASEN 2021, 106; LAES 2011, 86-97; RAWSON 2003, 134-145.

¹³ The concept of the 'responsive state' is developed in FINEMAN 2008.

(*infirmetas*) of the young.¹⁴ Contemporary medical discourse frequently utilised the metaphor of wax to describe infant bodies, emphasising their extreme malleability in the face of external stressors. Given their susceptibility to both pathological threats and malevolent forces—whether arising from envy (*invidia*) or supernatural entities—protective measures were deemed indispensable.¹⁵ The archaeological record of childhood amulets in Roman Hispania provides an opportunity to treat vulnerability not as an abstraction, but as a tangible reality embedded in material culture. An intersectional analysis of these artefacts—accounting for age, gender, status, and regional traditions—highlights the uneven distribution of social vulnerability. The material quality and craftsmanship of amulets reflected the socio-economic position of the household, consequently influencing both perceived efficacy and symbolic capital.

INTERPRETIVE AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

One of the primary challenges encountered in this study is the ambiguity of typological and functional identification. An amulet may be broadly defined as an object or substance worn in direct physical contact with the body, purported to transmit protective or healing properties.¹⁶ As Dasen has noted, both Greek and Latin terminology emphasise this principle of physical attachment; terms such as *periammon*, *periapton*, *ligatura*, *alligatura*, or *amuletum* all reflect this material connection. Their primary role was to avert harm and the evil eye—as implied by terms like *probaskania* or *fascinum*—while also serving prophylactic or therapeutic purposes (*prophylaktika*, *phusika*, or *remedia*). At their core, these items were intended to safeguard the wearer, a function encapsulated in *phulaktêrion*, derived from the verb *phulassein* ('to guard').¹⁷

Varro offers an etymological explanation that reinforces this protective dimension: *praebia*, he explains, derives from *praebere* ('to provide'), in the sense of offering a means of defence.¹⁸ He also links such items to favourable omens and closely associates them with childhood, suggesting they may derive from the custom of hanging objects with obscene shapes around children's necks to prevent misfortune. These objects, known as *scaevolae*, were believed to attract good fortune (*scaeva*, 'left'), referencing the Roman belief that omens from the left side were auspicious.¹⁹

Even so, identifying this protective function presents significant challenges. The object's morphological characteristics and material composition can occasionally offer clues regarding its intended purpose, especially in

the case of inscribed amulets, where the apotropaic intent is made explicit. Conversely, a combination of visual, textual, and paratextual elements may support such an interpretation. Yet, the majority of the Hispanic record consists of anepigraphic artefacts, which can be broadly classified into crafted items and natural materials. For the former, comparative research and well-established traditions across the Mediterranean provide a useful framework for assessing their possible protective function, as in the case of *bullae* or *lunulae*. Nevertheless, the boundary between ritual protection and purely aesthetic adornment remains permeable, making it difficult to draw a clear line between items used for prophylactic purposes and those worn as decorative accessories.

Natural substances—such as shells, animal teeth, or lithic specimens—pose an even greater challenge, particularly when they exhibit no signs of anthropic modification (e.g., perforation or polishing). In such cases, interpretative frameworks rely heavily on ancient textual sources that attribute therapeutic or apotropaic properties to these materials. This, in turn, may guide interpretations of similar finds in the archaeological record, though inevitably with a significant degree of uncertainty.

These ambiguities further complicate efforts to associate specific amulet types with particular demographic groups. When recovered from funerary contexts, such objects offer valuable clues, yet questions of intentionality persist: were they designed to protect the individual during life, or were they deposited to ensure safe passage into the afterlife? The difficulty of identifying individuals based solely on grave goods—particularly in the absence of osteological remains—further impedes interpretation; this is compounded by the lack of systematic bioarchaeological analysis in older excavations, which precludes accurate determination of age and sex.

Beyond interpretive issues, significant challenges stem from the available documentation. A significant number of excavations remain unpublished, while others provide but partial descriptions, often omitting the precise stratigraphic or funerary contexts. Reconstructing grave assemblages or connecting unprovenanced objects in museum collections to their original contexts is therefore problematic. This uncertainty is compounded by the vast number of objects that enter the antiquities market without secure provenance or provenience.²⁰

Taking these considerations into account, this study will include as amulets various typologies documented elsewhere in the Empire—such as *bullae*, *crepundia*, *ficae*, and other phallic-shaped items—as well as natural materials showing evidence of modification. Additionally, this study incorporates repurposed items, such as perforated coins used as pendants. Finally, the analysis prioritises materials recovered from securely identified non-adult burials, while also exploring cases where amulet types typically associated with children appear in assemblages attributed to other groups—especially female burials of indeterminate age—to establish a comparative framework.

¹⁴ CIC. *Fin.* 5.15.42; LUCR. *Rer. nat.* 5.222–227; PLUT. *Quaes. Conv.* 5.7.1 = 680D; SOR. *Gyn.* 2.12–13. See DASEN 2021, 106–107, with further references.

¹⁵ Regarding magical practices against *invidia* and malevolent entities such as the Greek demons *Lamia* and *Gello*, see BJÖRKLUND 2017; MARCO SIMÓN 2023, 289–293.

¹⁶ DASEN 2015a, 281.

¹⁷ DASEN 2015a, 281–282. *Phulaktêrion* is also used to refer to a specific type of amulet: a hollow tubular object designed to contain protective spells written on papyrus or small metal sheets (*lamellae*).

¹⁸ VARRO, *Ling.* 7.107.

¹⁹ VARRO, *Ling.* 7.97.9

²⁰ On these interpretative challenges, see BOHAK 2015, 83–87.

TYOLOGIES OF AMULETS FOUND IN HISPANIA

This inquiry has brought to light a notable repertoire of amulets within **Hispanic** child burials. To ensure analytical clarity, this study adopts a typological classification system rather than a categorisation predicated strictly on materiality (e.g., differentiating between crafted metallic artefacts and naturally derived substances). This approach facilitates a more nuanced discussion of symbolic function and iconographic tradition. The categories established for this analysis include *bullae*, *ficae* and other phallic pendants, bells, repurposed coins, perforated teeth, anthropomorphic grotesque figurines, and zoomorphic figurines.

Bullae

The *bullula* was a bubble-shaped pendant, typically fashioned from metal, consisting of two rounded or teardrop-shaped plates joined by soldering, hammering, or a hinge that also functioned as a suspension system for attachment to a necklace. In the Roman world, this object functioned as a distinctive badge of childhood. Juvenal, for instance, addresses an elderly man as ‘most worthy of the *bullula*’ (*senior bullula dignissime*), emphasising the object’s intrinsic link to boyhood by way of contrast.²¹ Macrobius informs us that these pendants were believed to contain remedies (*remedia*) offering protection against envy and the evil eye.²² While the author initially alludes to the *bullae* worn by victorious generals during triumphs, he also confirms their use alongside the *toga praetexta* for ‘noble boys’ (*pueri nobiles*).²³

Beyond its prophylactic role, the *bullula*—particularly the gold specimen—served as a potent marker of *ingenuitas* (freeborn status). This symbolic **role** acted as a marker of both gender and social standing, visually constructing the identity of a specific group. Roman tradition ascribes the introduction of the *bullula* to King Tarquinius Priscus, who reportedly awarded one to his son **as a** recognition of bravery in battle.²⁴ Other sources confirm that the golden *bullula* functioned as an insignia of *ingenuitas*, initially reserved for a restricted social elite, though its use progressively disseminated throughout the Republic and Empire.²⁵ Macrobius recounts a concession made to the children of freedmen during the Second Punic War: they were permitted to wear the *toga praetexta* and a *lorum* (a leather strap) around their necks, but were explicitly denied the gold *bullula*. This distinction underscores the object’s role as a **potent** signifier of privilege and illustrates the symbolic struggle of freedmen to access such markers of status.²⁶

The strong association of this object with childhood is further supported by the documented custom—dating back at least to the Augustan period—of dedicating the *bullula* to

the *Lares* during the festival of *Liberalia*. This act occurred when a boy assumed the *toga virilis*, symbolising the formal abandonment of boyhood.²⁷ The extent to which this practice was consistently observed across different social strata remains a subject of scholarly inquiry. For instance, during the funeral rites of Julius Caesar, several children’s *bullae* were reportedly placed upon his pyre as offerings.²⁸ This symbolic value, coupled with the considerable economic worth of these objects, likely contributed to their preservation within families and may have facilitated their transmission across generations. The legend concerning Tarquinius Priscus characterises the *bullula* as a paternal gift; similarly, Cicero’s oration against Verres underscores the citizens’ indignation at the theft of a child’s *bullula*, explicitly identifying it as a bestowal from the father (*quod ornamentum pueritiae pater dederat*).²⁹ This dynamic exemplifies the exercise of mediated agency, through which parental figures—recognising the inherent vulnerability of their offspring—actively negotiated both the physical protection and the social status of the child. Livy recounts that in 210 BCE, during the Second Punic War, a consular proposal urged senators to contribute their gold and silver to the war effort while notably permitting them to retain a *bullula* for their sons.³⁰ Moreover, the scarcity of gold *bullae* in funerary contexts suggests they were rarely interred, reinforcing the hypothesis that these objects were often curated and retained within the domestic sphere.³¹ Nevertheless, questions remain as to whether the *bullula* was exclusively regarded as a paternal gift. Suetonius records that Pompeia, sister of Sextus, bestowed upon the infant Tiberius Claudius Nero a cloak, a *fibula*, and several *bullae aureae*, which were reportedly still on display in Baiae during the author’s lifetime.³²

However, the close association between the *bullula* and **free** citizenship is rarely explored in terms of its implications for provincial Roman identity. In this regard, Plutarch offers a particularly revealing account: he describes how Sertorius, in a notable divergence from Roman custom, bestowed *bullae* upon the sons of captured **Hispanic** leaders. This was not merely **an educational gesture**, but a symbolic act granting them premature access to Roman privileges.³³ This account suggests a possible mechanism for the introduction of the *bullula* into the Iberian Peninsula.³⁴ Other evidence, such as bronze examples **discovered in the aftermath of** the Battle of Baecula, points to an early presence of the object in the region.³⁵ The material composition of these early *bullae*

²¹ JUV. *Sat.* 13.33.

²² MACRB. *Sat.* 1.6.9.

²³ MACRB. *Sat.* 1.6.10.

²⁴ PLIN. *HN* 33.10; MACRB. *Sat.* 1.6.8–14; Anon. *Vir. Ill.* 6.9, see PALMER 1989, 16–21. This antiquarian tradition diverges into accounts that attribute the *bullula* to Romulus as a deliberate means of humbling the defeated King of Veii, who was paraded wearing this insignia (PALMER 1989, 6–12).

²⁵ CIC. *Verr.* 1.112–113; 1.129–131 (*indiciu atque insigne fortunae*); VAL. MAX. 5.6.8; LIVY 26.36.5, among other. See PALMER 1989.

²⁶ MACRB. *Sat.* 1.6.12–14.

²⁷ CIC. *Att.* 6.1.12; PERS. 5.30–31; PETRON. 60.8; PROP. 4.1.131–132; PS.-ACRO on HOR. *Sat.* 1.5.65–66. A fragment of a Roman compital altar, held in the Vatican Museums, features two *bullae* suspended from carved straps within an oak-leaf wreath. (Mus. Cap. inv. no. 127).

²⁸ SUET. *Jul.* 84.4.

²⁹ CIC. *Verr.* 1.153.

³⁰ LIVY 26.36.5.

³¹ DASEN 2015, 294.

³² SUET. *Tib.* 6.

³³ PLUT. *Sert.* 14.

³⁴ Nonetheless, Mediterranean influence is manifest in the goldsmithing traditions of pre-Roman cultures across the northern and central Iberian Peninsula, where specific specimens exhibit morphological affinities with *bullae*. A representative case is examined by GARCÍA-VUELTA 2023, 537.

³⁵ BELLÓN *et alii* 2015, 597. Another *bullula* from the context of a Late Republican military fortlet is published in BAYO FUENTES/MORATALLA JÁVEGA/MORILLO CERDÁN/SALA SELLES 2021, 19, Fig. 26, no. 11.



Fig. 1. Funerary plaque of the child Quintus Articuleius (Mérida, first century CE), inv. no. CE00130. © Museo Nacional de Arte Romano. Photograph: Archivo MNAR / Lorenzo Plana Torres.

suggests they were likely worn more for their perceived prophylactic power than as indicators of rank, having been introduced primarily by Roman military personnel during the Second Punic War.

In Roman Hispania, the *bulla* is well documented in both the archaeological record and iconography. A salient exemplar is the funerary plaque of Quintus Articuleius, a five-year-old child depicted wearing the pendant, dated to the first century CE and discovered in Augusta Emerita (Fig. 1).³⁶ Furthermore, supplementary iconographic representations from across the peninsula further attest to the prevalence of *bullae* among children and young boys.³⁷ Within the material record, bronze is the predominant medium, although silver and copper specimens are also represented. Notably, burial A-28 in the *via sepulcralis* of Plaza Vila de Madrid (Barcelona)—belonging to a child of approximately three years—yielded a silver *bulla* dated to the early Imperial period.³⁸ Similarly, two silver *bullae* were recovered from the ‘Tomb of the Great Stela’ in Baelo Claudia,³⁹ while a copper

example was identified in an inhumation in Cádiz.⁴⁰ An exceptional late specimen, dated to the fourth to fifth century CE and fashioned from jet (*gagates*), was recovered from the Villa of Veranes (Gijón, Asturias), although it comes from a non-funerary context.⁴¹ Another possible jet *bulla*, though more tentative in its identification, was recovered from the northern necropolis of the Roman city of Balsa (Portugal).⁴²

Moreover, bronze *bullae* are frequently encountered within child and juvenile funerary contexts across Hispania, including sites such as Valencia⁴³, Seville⁴⁴, Écija⁴⁵, Baelo Claudia⁴⁶, Córdoba⁴⁷, or Cádiz⁴⁸, spanning from the early to late imperial periods. Moreover, a significant number of specimens are housed in provincial and national museums; however, their provenience is often difficult to trace, and the available information is frequently limited to a generic association with a funerary context, without specifying the exact burial or associated grave goods.

The use of *bullae* in Hispania appears to follow broader Imperial patterns, combining apotropaic and symbolic

³⁶ *EE* VIII 34. Mérida, Cerro del Calvario. National Museum of Roman Art, inv. no. CE00130.

³⁷ Tossal de Manises, second half of the first century BCE (Alicante Museum, inv. no. 6322); Córdoba, first century BCE (Córdoba Archaeological and Ethnological Museum, inv. no. CE005101); Cástulo, Flavian period (Linares Archaeological Museum, inv. no. CE01185). Iponuba, Baena, first century CE (Córdoba Archaeological and Ethnological Museum, inv. no. 20333); Almuñécar, first-second centuries CE (Granada Archaeological and Ethnological Museum, inv. no. CE03001); Segóbriga, first-second centuries CE (Cuenca Museum, inv. no. AA74/1/13).

³⁸ BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 36, 42, pl. 10 and 27.2 (grave A-8). Another *bulla*-type object is also found in Burial 25 of the same necropolis (BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 42, 44, pl. 17).

³⁹ PARIS *et alii* 1926, 34 ff., Fig. 21, pl. IV; DE MERGELINA 1927, 10 ff., Fig. 4; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 182.

⁴⁰ PERDIGONES/MUÑOZ/TROYA 1987, 44 (burial 14).

⁴¹ MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2019, 165-166; MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 576.

⁴² MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2019, 141-142; MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 384-385, 575-576.

⁴³ GARCÍA-PRÓSPER/POLO CERDÀ/MELCHOR/BENEDITO 2005, 538; GARCÍA-PRÓSPER 2016, 289, no. 149 (C/ Quart de Valencia, tumba nº 149).

⁴⁴ CARRASCO GÓMEZ/DORESTE FRANCO 2005, 237; CARRASCO GÓMEZ/MARTÍN PRADAS 2014, 71.

⁴⁵ TINOCO MUÑOZ 2001, 912 (R1.A2, burial 18) and 916 (R2.A2, burial 22).

⁴⁶ GARCÍA MATAMALA/LIÉBANA MÁRMOL 2006, 102 (burial I-16).

⁴⁷ VAQUERIZO GIL/RUIZ OSUNA/RUBIO VALVERDE 2019, 94 and 100 (Llanos del Pretorio, Area P, burial 47); VARGAS CANTOS 2002, 12 (La Constancia, burial 5, second phase IAU);

⁴⁸ QUINTERO ATAURI 1932, 24; LAMO SALINAS 1983-1984, 68.

functions. A particularly significant case is the silver *bulla* associated with the three-year-old individual from Plaza Vila de Madrid, which contained a vine leaf (*Vitis vinifera*) within its hollow structure.⁴⁹ Although the specific significance of this vegetal inclusion remains uncertain, comparable *bullae* containing organic substances are known from other regions of the Empire, including Italy, Gaul, and Pannonia. These examples frequently enclose dried grapes, rose thorns, medicinal herbs, coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), or anise (*Pimpinella anisum*), strongly suggesting a prophylactic or therapeutic purpose.⁵⁰ Significantly, the presence of a leaf within the specimen from Plaza Vila de Madrid finds an interesting parallel at Keszthely-Dobogó, where a *bulla* was found to contain coriander seeds encased in foliage.⁵¹ These findings collectively suggest a shared tradition of utilising vegetal matter as part of the protective ‘filling’ of the amulet. Such practices may imply that the sensory or aromatic qualities of these organic components were considered relevant to the object’s perceived efficacy.

Complementary evidence from non-funerary contexts further enriches this picture, as seen in the Celtiberian–Roman settlement of La Caridad (Caminreal, Teruel). Within the so-called ‘House of the Amulets’ (*insula* I, house 4, room 2), a bronze *bulla* (h. 5.35 cm; diam. 4.18 cm) was recovered as part of a complex necklace found in a domestic setting. The analytical examination of this specimen’s interior revealed traces of linen, preserved despite the fire that destroyed the structure.⁵² Collectively, the botanical remains from Barcelona and the textile traces from La Caridad demonstrate that the *bulla* often functioned as a receptacle for active agents, whose protective power was derived from the specific combination of materials encased within. However, its efficacy was likely not contingent solely on its role as a container. The formal qualities of the *bulla*—its characteristic globular shape—could, in and of themselves, constitute a protective symbol, regardless of whether the object was hollow or solid. This is exemplified by the jet specimen from the Villa of Veranes; while it carefully imitates the morphology of a *bulla*, its solid construction precludes it being used as a container. In such cases, the intrinsic prophylactic properties attributed to the material, combined with the established apotropaic value of the form, rendered the inclusion of additional substances unnecessary. Thus, the *bulla* should be understood as a versatile amulet whose power could reside either in the ‘remedies’ it housed or in the very materiality and symbolism of its outward appearance.

Materiality also reinforces the dual symbolic and social role of the *bulla*. The selection of precious materials, such as jet, may have additionally signified social standing, a practice previously noted in connection with the *bulla aurea*. Significantly, despite their relative rarity, at least one unpublished gold *bulla* has been identified in a funerary

context in Mérida (Fig. 2). Although the museum catalogue lists the object’s provenance as unknown, a recent study associates it with an unpublished cremation uncovered in 1992 at the intersection of Avenida de Cataluña and Calle Adelardo Covarsí.⁵³

The burial, dated to the late second–early third century



Fig. 2. Gold *bulla*, inv. no. DO2015/3/19 (first–fourth century CE). © Consorcio Ciudad Monumental de Mérida. Photograph: Archivo MNAR / Lorenzo Plana Torres.

CE, contained rich grave goods, including the gold *bulla* (measuring 2.1 cm in length, 1.40 cm in width, and weighing 1.15 g), alongside other valuable items likely intended to serve apotropaic functions.⁵⁴ Among them was a gold ring inscribed with the phrase *VTF, utere felix* (‘Use, happily’), with an internal diameter of 11.26 mm. The small size of both the ring and the *bulla* strongly suggests that they belonged to a freeborn child of high social status.⁵⁵ Moreover, a comparable ring was found at Mérida, still *in situ* on the left hand of an infant only a few months old. In this instance, the inscription presents a variant of the aforementioned abbreviated formula, *VF*; the ring measures 11.9 mm in diameter.⁵⁶

Another gold pendant from the same city provides a salient comparative focus, though its typological identification remains problematic. Measuring 1.70 cm in height and 2.40 cm in width, the item comprises two gold sheets joined to form an oval structure, characterised by five parallel hemispherical protrusions on each face. A flattened strip extends from the junction of the sheets, folding back to create a suspension loop (Fig. 3). This specimen was recovered from a double cremation burial containing a remarkably diverse assemblage of nineteen items—including amber, mother-of-pearl, and glass—dated to the first to second

⁴⁹ BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 42.

⁵⁰ DASEN 2015, 311.

⁵¹ SZILÁGYI 2004, 18.

⁵² For examples of *bullae* containing magical formulae, see DASEN 2015a, 311, with references. In these instances, however, the text was inscribed on silver *lamellae*. At Intercisa and Aquincum, bronze *bullae* contained various vegetal products wrapped in textile remains (SZILÁGYI 2004, 17–18).

⁵³ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 66, 92, 97, 99, 101, 149–150.

⁵⁴ National Museum of Roman Art (inv. no. DO2015/3/19). MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 92.

⁵⁵ BARRERO MARTÍN 2021, 70–71; MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 66 and 92.

⁵⁶ MÉNDEZ GRANDE 2006, 341. An additional ring bearing the same abbreviation was acquired by the museum’s collections prior to 1910, allegedly sourced from the vicinity of the Los Milagros Aqueduct; its internal diameter (11.45 mm) is similarly consistent with childhood use (BARRERO MARTÍN 2021, 70).



Fig. 3. Gold pendant, inv. no. DO2015/3/32 (first–second centuries CE). © Consorcio Ciudad Monumental de Mérida. Photograph: Archivo MNAR / Lorenzo Plana Torres.

centuries CE. While its hollow construction could, in theory, have functioned as a receptacle for apotropaic substances, its pronounced stylistic divergence from documented *bullae* precludes a definitive classification.⁵⁷ The specimen defies standard classification by merging the elongated, tubular form of a *phylaktêrion* with the hermetic seal characteristic of a *bulla*. Its unique design, marked by five unusual hemispherical protrusions, suggests a formal hybrid that shares the functional logic of both amulets, presenting a singular morphology that remains difficult to categorise within established typologies.

A similar interpretative caution applies to a small globular gold object (inv. no. DO2015/3/94), also from Mérida. Although previously suggested to be a *bulla*, its morphology lacks the diagnostic features of the type, appearing instead to be a globular-oval ornament.

At both the ‘Tomb of the Great Stele’ in Baelo Claudia and two graves from the necropolis of La Algodonera in Écija, *bullae* have been recovered in contexts that are likely female, based on the associated grave goods—spindle whorls, *acus crinales*, needles, mirrors, and other items typically linked to female grooming and adornment.⁵⁸ The presence of *bullae* in these contexts attributed to women indicates that their use transcended strict gender boundaries, conforming to patterns observed in the Danubian provinces. A detailed study of 32 *bullae* from Aquincum and Intercisa, all recovered from secure archaeological contexts, identified 14 as belonging to female individuals (predominantly young girls), 13 to children of indeterminate sex, and only three to male children.⁵⁹ The Iberian examples, dated to the late first to early second century CE, suggest the possibility that in certain areas of *Baetica*, the use of *bullae* by girls may have occurred, drawing a notable parallel with provincial trends observed in the Pannonian context. While these cases remain

limited, they provide a valuable counterpoint to traditional interpretations.

A literary parallel, albeit from a much earlier period, appears in Plautus’s *Rudens*, where the character Palaestra, a lost girl, is identified by her father through several personal objects, including a gold *bulla* said to have been given to her on the anniversary of her birth.⁶⁰ This reference offers a rare literary glimpse into the possible occasions on which *bullae* were conferred upon children. However, the comedic tone of the play should be considered: Plautus may be deliberately subverting social norms for humorous effect, perhaps satirising the notion of a girl receiving a *bulla aurea* in so early a context as the final third–early second century BCE.⁶¹ Indeed, it is worth noting that while this literary example links gold with a female character, the archaeological record in both Pannonia and Hispania predominantly associates female burials with *bullae* made of silver or bronze, suggesting that the *bulla aurea* remained more strictly tied to specific elite male status.

Taken together, these cases highlight the importance of refraining from categorical assumptions about the age or gender of the individuals to whom such objects may have belonged, especially when osteological evidence or associated grave goods are lacking. While these examples do not necessarily represent a general trend, the Hispanic evidence—viewed alongside the Pannonian data—invites a reconsideration of the *bulla* as an object whose protective function could, in specific instances, transcend the strict gender boundaries traditionally described in literary sources.

A final aspect deserves attention in relation to *bullae*. While Roman iconography, both within and beyond the Iberian Peninsula, predominantly depicts the *bulla* as a single pendant, the archaeological record reveals more complex assemblages, where *bullae* often formed part of composite sets. This is exemplified by a necklace recovered from child Inhumation no. 15 in the necropolis of Calle Brunete 2–8 (Cádiz). The assemblage consisted of a Roman Republican *denarius*, four spherical glass-paste beads, a phallic bone amulet, and a bronze *bulla*. In addition, a suid tooth and a bone pin were found in close proximity to the necklace.⁶² Two further *bullae* recovered from Burial 47 in the *sepulcretum* of Llanos del Pretorio were found alongside thirty-six glass-paste beads.⁶³ These beads likely formed part of a necklace that also included the globular amulets. Similarly, the two *bullae* discovered in the so-called ‘Tomb of the Great Stele’ were found in association with glass or rock-crystal beads.⁶⁴ In both cases, the contexts correspond to cremation burials, making it impossible to attribute them to a non-adult individual; in the latter case, as previously

⁶⁰ PLAUT. *Rud.* 1171.

⁶¹ As noted by FARAONE (2018, 60), the play in question is an adaptation of a third-century comedy by the Greek dramatist Diphilus—a factor that inherently complicates the cultural attribution of the practices and references interwoven throughout the passage.

⁶² BLANCO JIMÉNEZ 1996, 10–11; ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 151; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 97, Table no. 62.

⁶³ VAQUERIZO GIL/RUIZ OSUNA/RUBIO VALVERDE 2019, 94 and 100.

⁶⁴ PARIS *et alii* 1926, 34 ff., Fig. 21, pl. IV; DE MERGELINA 1927, 10 ff., Fig. 4; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 182.

⁵⁷ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2007, 427 (burial A6); MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 90. Note the discrepancy in the number of grave goods recorded in both sources, likely due to a typographical error in the latter.

⁵⁸ TINOCO MUÑOZ 2001, 912 and 916; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 182.

⁵⁹ SZILÁGYI 2005, 21, Table 4.



Fig. 4a. Bronze *bulla*, inv. no. IG20943 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 113854); **Fig. 4b.** Figurine of Harpocrates, inv. no. IG20938 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 37176). **Fig. 4c.** Figurine of Bes, inv. no. IG20939 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 37190); **Fig. 4d.** Copper alloy bead, inv. no. IG22267 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 40358); **Fig. 4e.** Copper alloy bead, inv. no. IG22266 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 40359); **Fig. 4f.** Glass bead, inv. no. IG22271 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 180850); **Fig. 4g.** Glass bead, inv. no. IG22272 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 180839); **Fig. 4h.** Glass bead, inv. no. IG22273 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 180841); **Fig. 4i.** Glass bead, inv. no. IG22274 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 180842); **Fig. 4j.** Spindle whorl, inv. no. IG29994 © Museo de Teruel. Photo archive (C. Id. no. 156349). First century BCE.

noted, the assemblage may have accompanied the remains of a young woman.

Comparable associations are attested elsewhere. The silver *bulla* from the Plaza Vila de Madrid necropolis was recovered together with a ‘silver pendant bead’.⁶⁵ Likewise, the gold *bulla* from Augusta Emerita, found alongside a ring of the *utere felix* type, was associated with coins prepared for suspension, although it remains uncertain whether these elements formed part of the same assemblage.⁶⁶ The bronze *bulla* from the domestic context of La Caridad (Teruel) constitutes perhaps the most complex assemblage,

associated with a small figurine of Bes (height: 2.76 cm; width: 1.09 cm), a figurine of Harpocrates (height: 2.99 cm; width: 0.92 cm), and five beads. In close proximity, a small bell (height: 3.4 cm; Ø: 2.9 cm) and a small spindle whorl (height: 1.5 cm; Ø: 1.89 cm) were also recovered, which may have belonged to the same apotropaic necklace (Fig. 4). The assemblage is dated to the destruction of the site around 80–79 BCE.⁶⁷

A divergence between idealised portraiture and the lived reality of ritual practice may explain the discrepancy between iconographic representations— in which the *bulla* typically appears in isolation—and the archaeological record—where

⁶⁵ BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 36, 42, pl. 10, pl. 27.2.

⁶⁶ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 66, 92, 97, 99, 101 and 149–150.

⁶⁷ FABRE MURILLO 2026, 285–288, 439–440.

it is frequently integrated into a complex assemblage. In statuary, the *bullā* operates primarily as a semiotic marker of childhood and status, emphasising the legal and social identity of the wearer. Conversely, in funerary and domestic contexts, the accumulation of diverse protective elements reflects a ritual strategy aimed at synergistically enhancing their perceived efficacy. Ultimately, this shift from the simple, iconic *bullā* of statuary to the complex, multi-item assemblages found in the ground underscores a transition from public representation to a private, intensified response to the uncertainties and vulnerabilities of infant life.

FICAE AND OTHER PHALLIC AMULETS

The use of phallic objects—often referred to as *fascinum*—as apotropaic devices against the evil eye is well attested in literary sources as a response to the inherent fragility of infants. As previously noted, Varro refers to the custom of hanging grotesque items (*turpicula res*) on children to ward off harm.⁶⁸ Similarly, in *Miles Gloriosus*, Plautus writes: ‘Why, it’s long been eager to remove this lecher’s vital parts (*abdomen*), and to hang’em like a child’s *crepundia* around his neck’.⁶⁹ In this context, *abdomen* functions as a euphemism for male genitalia, placing the passage within a broader tradition of phallic amulets used for protection.⁷⁰ Plutarch further reinforces this link between childhood and vulnerability by noting that children are particularly susceptible to the evil eye. He explains that their bodies possess a constitutional humidity and malleability that renders them more permeable to envious or malevolent gazes, whereas the drier and firmer constitutions of adults offer greater resistance.⁷¹ Although phallic imagery served a widespread apotropaic function in the Roman world, the literary evidence suggests that its application to infancy was specifically intended to compensate for the child’s lack of physical and spiritual firmness during the earliest and most exposed stages of life.

Phallic amulets and the so-called *ficae*—objects depicting a hand gesture in which the thumb protrudes between the index and middle fingers—are particularly well documented for their apotropaic value, especially as protection against the evil eye.⁷² This gesture, also known as the *digitus infamis*, appears in several ancient literary sources. Ovid, for instance, describes it in the *Fasti* as a means of repelling unsubstantial shades,⁷³ while Persius documents the gesture in intimate domestic contexts, where it was combined with the application of saliva to protect young children from harm.⁷⁴

Amulets depicting the phallus, the *fica*, or both are frequently found in Hispania. Despite the presence of numerous examples in public and private collections, the lack of primary archaeological contexts for the majority significantly constrains interpretive potential.⁷⁵ By way of

illustration, the Museo Municipal de Baena houses 35 phallic amulets, only one of which has a known archaeological provenance.⁷⁶ The notable morphological diversity of these items has prompted the development of various typological frameworks, such as the classification proposed by Del Hoyo and Vázquez Hoys. Their catalogue identifies the ‘triple’ variant—a central non-erect phallus flanked by an erect phallus and a *fica*—as the most prevalent regional type.⁷⁷

The variety of materials employed in the production of these ornaments further reflects the intersection of social standing and protective needs. The use of substances such as gold carried strong social connotations as a marker of wealth, yet it was also selected for its inherent apotropaic properties. Pliny the Elder records the use of gold in remedies for injuries and the protection of children, attesting to its perceived capacity to neutralise malevolent influences (*veneficia*).⁷⁸ Consequently, the selection of precious materials may have stratified access to personal protection, as the ontological power attributed to the medium enhanced the amulet’s efficacy. While the majority of phallic ornaments were cast in bronze, examples also exist in a wide range of other media, including gold, glass, bone, amber, and mother-of-pearl.⁷⁹

Archaeological discoveries from across Hispania attest to the presence of these objects in funerary contexts, where they served as permanent guardians for children. Bronze examples have been discovered in Cádiz⁸⁰ and Mérida⁸¹, while vitreous paste specimens have been identified in Córdoba⁸² and again in Mérida⁸³ (Fig. 5). The use of bone is also documented, as seen in the phallic/*fica* amulet recovered from the burial of an infant under one year old in Cádiz,⁸⁴ and the *fica* found placed over the chest of a child in an inhumation at Augusta Emerita.⁸⁵ These finds, generally dating to the first or early second century CE, illustrate a consistent ritual practice of placing apotropaic devices in close proximity to the deceased child, likely intended to extend their protection into the funerary sphere.

In Hispania, phallic pendants generally range from 2 to 8 cm in width and 2 to 6 cm in height, with weights typically

NUÑO 2012, 175-176. These can be complemented by more recent finds, briefly referenced in note 6.

⁷⁶ MORENA LÓPEZ/ROMERO CONDE 2015.

⁷⁷ DEL HOYO/VÁZQUEZ HOYS 1996, 455; ALVAR NUÑO 2012, 175-176. Henceforth, references to specific phallic typologies will adhere to the classification system established by Del Hoyo and Vázquez Hoys.

⁷⁸ PLIN. *HN* 33.84.

⁷⁹ DEL HOYO/VÁZQUEZ HOYS 1996, 452, with references; GÓMEZ PEÑA/RODRÍGUEZ MELLADO 2014, 119-120, 131-132. Cf., for example, a gold phallic amulet found in the excavations of the Roman city of Bilbilis (Museo de Calatayud, inv. no. 00462).

⁸⁰ PERDIGONES/TROYA/MUÑOZ 1987, 72-73.

⁸¹ PÉREZ MAESTRO 2007, 165; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 308-309 (*Puticulum*, burial 109, containing the burial of a fetus or newborn).

⁸² VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 127 records an example from burial 64 on Avenida del Corregidor. He also notes a similar specimen from cremation Burial 35 in the *sepulcretum* of Llanos del Pretorio; for this example, see VAQUERIZO GIL/RUIZ OSUNA/RUBIO VALVERDE 2019, 94 y 100.

⁸³ ALONSO/MATEOS 2015, 24-25; BARRERO MARTÍN 2021, 169-170. Cremation burial interpreted as likely belonging to a female child or adolescent.

⁸⁴ SIBÓN/GÓMEZ/NIVEAU 2004, 151; VALLEJO 2009, 52-53; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 165, 314.

⁸⁵ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2005, 7. At Augusta Emerita, a bone pendant in the form of an extended hand was also recovered from the burial of an infant aged less than five months (CORTESÃO SILVA 2018/2019, 193, 195).

⁶⁸ VARRO, *Ling.* 7.97.

⁶⁹ PLAUT. *Mil.* 1398, translation adapted from SEGAL 2008, 72.

⁷⁰ ADAMS 1982, 49.

⁷¹ PLUT. *Quaes. Conv.* 5.7.1.

⁷² ALVAR NUÑO 2012, 212-214.

⁷³ OVID. *Fast.* 5.433.

⁷⁴ PERS. 2.30-34.

⁷⁵ See the compilations by DEL HOYO/VÁZQUEZ HOYS 1996, and ALVAR



Fig. 5. Opaque green glass pendant. Inv. no. DO2015/1/2 (late first century – early second century CE). © Consorcio Ciudad Monumental de Mérida. Photograph: Archivo MNAR/Lorenzo Plana Torres.

falling between 5 and 30 grams.⁸⁶ While these dimensions are consistent with the practical requirements of small, easily worn objects, they also align with the physical scale of children, who are identified in literary sources as the primary users of such devices. However, the use of small-scale amulets was not determined solely by the age of the wearer; factors such as production costs—particularly for precious materials—and their integration into larger, composite assemblages also played a role.

A significant example of such an assemblage is a group of pendants, likely forming a single necklace, recovered from a cremation grave in Mérida dated to the first to second centuries CE. Although the associated grave goods, linked to the *mundus muliebris*, suggest the burial of an adult or young woman, the composition of the set reflects the same apotropaic logic applied to childhood.⁸⁷ The group includes two phallic pendants of the ‘simple profile’ type (A.2), a truncated-cone-shaped pendant representing the club of Hercules, an acorn-shaped pendant, and two others in the form of oil lamps (*lucernae*) (Fig. 6a-d).

The inclusion of these diverse forms within a single necklace suggests a strategy multiplied protection, wherein each element contributes to a synergistic apotropaic effect. The association between phallic pendants and the club of Hercules is particularly telling, as both were conceptualised as aggressive apotropaia against the evil eye. This connection is epitomised by the Greek term *skutalê* (‘club’), which functioned as a linguistic metaphor for the phallus.⁸⁸

The phallic motif is not confined to pendants but also appears in other forms of personal adornment, such as earrings. Two gold examples from Augusta Emerita illustrate this integration: both consist of hoops from which phallic figures are suspended. The first earring, featuring a type A.2 phallus and dated to the late first or early second century CE, was recovered from an inhumation burial likely belonging to

a female individual.⁸⁹ The second specimen, incorporating a type A.3.2 pendant, is notable for its relatively small diameter (11.56 mm) compared to the average for similar earrings in the colony (13.65 mm).⁹⁰

Although this size difference alone is not conclusive, the find context—a pit cremation burial documented in a recent catalogue by the excavating institution—points toward a juvenile or sub-adult burial. The earring was recovered alongside several glass and rock crystal beads, a bone bracelet, a glass *unguentarium*, and a bronze rattle.⁹¹ It is also noteworthy that only a single earring was found in this context, a circumstance that finds parallels in juvenile burials at sites such as Olynthus and Apollonia Pontica, where children were frequently interred with a single ornament of this type.⁹²

While rings featuring phallic imagery and diminutive diameters have been documented elsewhere in the Empire, no definitive parallels are currently known from Hispania.⁹³ It remains crucial to note that small dimensions do not exclusively signify use by children; both literary and iconographic sources confirm that adults frequently wore rings on the fourth finger or the distal phalanges.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the prevalence of phallic imagery across such a diverse repertoire of personal adornments underscores its role as a versatile apotropaic device. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that in Roman Hispania, phallic elements intended for the protection of children are well attested archaeologically, particularly during the High Imperial period. Ultimately, the evidence points towards a broader usage encompassing both women and children, consistent with the widespread apotropaic traditions documented elsewhere in the Empire. Such a distribution underscores a ritual vocabulary that addressed shared vulnerabilities, rather than being tethered to rigid, age-based identities.

Bells

Small bells, most commonly made of bronze, represent a distinct category of objects attested in Hispania among the grave goods of non-adult individuals. Their presence in funerary contexts likely reflects a range of symbolic meanings. They often accompany the deceased as part of personal adornment, such as bracelets (Fig. 7) or necklaces, these objects served an apotropaic function by generating a continuous auditory defense—a ‘sonic shield’—intended to mitigate the infant’s inherent vulnerability. In other cases, bells were deposited as part of the burial’s closure or

⁸⁶ DEL HOYO/VÁZQUEZ HOYS 1996, 453.

⁸⁷ BARRERO MARTÍN 2021, 600-601; BEJARANO OSORIO 1996, 37-58; BEJARANO OSORIO 2000, 305-332; BEJARANO OSORIO 2012, 106-107.

⁸⁸ DASEN 2015, 100, 306. FARAONE (2018, 63) interprets this as a metonymic representation of Heracles himself. However, considering the use of the *fica* as a metonym for the phallus and the prevalence of euphemisms in literary sources (e.g., *turpicula res*, *abdomen*), Dasen’s interpretation is especially persuasive.

⁸⁹ BARRERO MARTÍN 2021, 212; BEJARANO OSORIO 2002, 228 (burial A 31, Antigua Campsa site).

⁹⁰ BARRERO MARTÍN 2021, 211-212 and 501, Fig. 198.

⁹¹ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 34.

⁹² CHACHEVA 2015, 2-4.

⁹³ JOHNS 1982, 63.

⁹⁴ For a discussion regarding the differentiation of ring diameters by gender, see BARRERO MARTÍN 2021, 425-426, with references. Literary evidence for rings worn on the upper phalanges or across various fingers is well-attested (MACR. *Sat.* 7.13.6; 5.61.5; 11.59.1; PETRON. 32.3-4; PLIN. *HN* 33.24-25; SEN. *QNat.* 7.31.2). Iconographic evidence is provided, for instance, by a Palmyrene funerary portrait depicting a woman wearing two gem-set rings on her left pinky finger—or *auricularis*—and two smaller bands on the middle phalanx of the fourth finger (CUSSINI 2018, 209).



Fig. 6a. Gold pendant in the form of a *lucerna*. Inv. no. DO2012/3/52. **Fig. 6b.** Gold phallic pendant. Inv. no. DO2012/3/53. **Fig. 6c.** Gold pendant in the form of Hercules' club. Inv. no. DO2012/3/55. **Fig. 6d.** Gold phallic pendant. Inv. no. DO2012/3/67 (first–second century CE). © Consorcio Ciudad Monumental de Mérida. Photographs: Archivo MNAR/José Luis Sánchez Rodríguez.

placed near the feet of the interred, where they may have acted as active protective elements intended to safeguard the individual during the final journey into the afterlife.⁹⁵ Beyond this ritual role, bells fulfilled practical functions within the domestic sphere; their incorporation into rattles, for instance, assisted in the monitoring and entertainment of children, a utility that likely reinforced their perception as beneficial and protective devices.⁹⁶

Their frequent occurrence alongside objects of more explicit apotropaic value supports their classification as amulets, often forming part of the *crepundia*—sets of pendants named from the Latin *crepare* ('to rattle' or 'jingle'). Literary sources further underscore the protective role of these objects through their acoustic properties, which were believed to exert a direct influence over the supernatural.⁹⁷ Lucan and Ovid, for instance, report the Roman belief that the clash of bronze and iron could repel malevolent ghosts.⁹⁸ Macrobius highlights the widespread use of bronze in various religious contexts, noting its efficacy in expelling disease (*exigere morbos volebant*). In doing so, he references

passages from Plautus and Virgil that, when examined, appear to place specific emphasis on the metal's resonant and sonorous qualities.⁹⁹ This suggests that the metal's acoustic affordances 'activated' an apotropaic efficacy that transcended the material properties of the bronze. As suggested by Alvar Nuño, bells and other sound-producing objects were likely employed as broad-spectrum apotropaia, particularly against the evil eye.¹⁰⁰ This is evidenced by *tintinnabula* featuring grotesque or phallic imagery, and by bells from Rome, Velletri, and Aquileia inscribed with protective formulas.¹⁰¹ A notable gold specimen from Rome even bears a Greek inscription explicitly stating: 'I am marshaled against the (i.e., evil) eyes'.¹⁰² This specific association with amulets intended to protect young children is explicitly attested in John Chrysostom, who condemns women in the late fourth century for tying bells to children's hands instead of relying on the sign of the cross for protection.¹⁰³ Beyond this literary testimony, the presence of bells among the grave goods of children (as well as of nubile and adult women) is documented across a wide range of

⁹⁵ NUZZO 2000, 252–253; BEVILACQUA 2014, 518.

⁹⁶ FLINDERS PETRIE 1914, 28, no. 124; 1927, 24; PARKER (2018, 62) suggests that a child ringing the bells might signal vitality, while the rattle's sound served to soothe or divert the infant—a practical efficacy that likely reinforced its perceived apotropaic value.

⁹⁷ MARCOS CASQUERO 1999.

⁹⁸ OVID. *Fast.* 5.442; LUC. *Philops.* 15.

⁹⁹ MACROB. *Sat.* 5.19.11–12.

¹⁰⁰ ALVAR NUÑO 2012, 255.

¹⁰¹ For a compilation, see NAGY 1992, 24–25.

¹⁰² BRUZZA 1975; COOK 1902, 18–19; PEASE 1904, 44; ROSSIGNOL (1883) considers the piece to be a forgery. The English translation is taken from FARAONE 2018, 87. Present location: Unidentified.

¹⁰³ CHRYSOSTOM, *Hom.* 12 in 1 Corinthians 13.

circum-Mediterranean cultures, from Pharaonic and Greco-Roman Egypt to Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greece, extending to Judea, Nabataea, and the Black Sea area.¹⁰⁴

In the Roman period, this association between bells and children was further reinforced in Roman Greece and is also well attested in Gaul and Britain.¹⁰⁵ In Hispania, however, this pattern is already evident prior to the Roman conquest. Bells occur frequently among grave goods and amuletic assemblages associated with infants in Punic-influenced areas such as Ibiza, as well as within the funerary practices of pre-Roman groups like the Iberians.¹⁰⁶ The apotropaic use of these objects in the Roman period can therefore be understood as part of a long-standing tradition, rooted in earlier practices established across the different cultures of the Iberian Peninsula and the surrounding islands.

Several funerary contexts in Roman Hispania illustrate this continuity. At *Andelos* (Vasconian territory), a perinatal infant burial uncovered during the 1985 campaign—dated to the mid-first to second century CE—contained a black ceramic bowl, a bronze bracelet on the left arm, a small incised bell, and an iron ring, with an Iberian-type ceramic handle positioned above the inhumation.¹⁰⁷ The bracelet, which is open at two points, was likely part of the same functional set as the bell; given their shared material, it is probable that the bell was originally attached to or suspended from the bracelet, even if the open ends of the hoop led to their separation post-deposition. This practice of integrating bells



Fig. 7. Roman bronze bell used as part of a bracelet, inv. no. 89.4.1614. (first century CE). Metropolitan Museum of Art. © Public domain.

¹⁰⁴ GRIGOROPOULOS 2024, 170, with further bibliography.

¹⁰⁵ GRIGOROPOULOS 2024, 169; ECKARDT/WILLIAMS 2018, 197-207.

¹⁰⁶ For Punic attestations of bells in infant and female burials, see LÓPEZ-BERTRAN/GARCÍA-VENTURA 2008; FARISELLI 2012-2013; For Ibiza, see CAMPO/COSTA/FERNÁNDEZ/MEZQUIDA 2016, 37, 56, 58, 64, 66; For Iberian contexts, see GUÉRIN/ GRAU ALMERO/GUILLÉN CALATAYUD/CALVO GÁLVEZ 1989, 64; CHAPA-BRUNET 2003, 124-125; CHAPA-BRUNET 2008, 623-624.

¹⁰⁷ MEZQUÍRIZ/TABAR 2007, 165-166; MEZQUÍRIZ 2011, 61-62, 68-70; FERNÁNDEZ CRESPO 2008, 203.

into bracelets is a pattern also observed in contemporary funerary contexts in Gaul.¹⁰⁸

In Hispania, similar adjustable bracelets are documented in Burial 75 of the Plaza Vila de Madrid necropolis, where a bell and a bracelet were found together, still encircling the arm of a child.¹⁰⁹ At the same site, another bell accompanied a child inhumation (Burial 25), alongside a metal disc that may have functioned as a *bullula*.¹¹⁰ At Augusta Emerita, a cremation burial—probably belonging to a juvenile individual—included a small bronze bell (1.2 cm) as part of an assemblage that featured amber and carnelian objects, dating from the late first to the second century CE.¹¹¹ Finally, in Burial 237 at Calle Victoria (Málaga), a bell accompanied the inhumation of a child approximately two to four years old (Fig. 8). This specimen, which unusually preserves its iron clapper, was found positioned above the skull at the northeastern end of the grave.¹¹² Its small size (1.6 cm in height and diameter) suggests the item was part of a personal ornament; given its proximity to the head, it may have been suspended from the neck by a cord of perishable material that has not survived, although this **remains a cautious interpretation.**

From the Late Roman period (late fourth to early fifth century CE), an inhumation necropolis has been documented in Zone 5 of the *ager Tarraconensis*. The site contained thirty individuals, of whom only two were adults; the remainder comprised an adolescent, five children, eleven **fetuses**, and two infants. The associated grave goods included bronze bracelets worn on the upper arm, a small bone pin, several jugs, and a small bell used as a pendant. Given the overwhelming demographic composition of the cemetery, where the vast majority of the deceased were non-adults, it is highly probable that these objects—specifically the bell—were intentional depositions belonging to sub-adult individuals, further reinforcing the ritual connection between sound-producing devices and the protection of the youngest members of society.¹¹³



Fig. 8. Bronze bell with iron clapper from Burial 237, Calle Victoria 22-24, Málaga (late second century CE). Photograph courtesy of Juan M. Piñero Palacios.

¹⁰⁸ DASEN 2003, 287.

¹⁰⁹ BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 42, 44, Pl. 17, Fig. 26.

¹¹⁰ BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 42, 44, Pl. 17.

¹¹¹ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 101, 149-150; BARRERO MARTÍN 2023, 608.

¹¹² PIÑERO PALACIOS 2019, 147-148.

¹¹³ RISCH/CARBONELL 1983-1985, 20; CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 562.

It is worth noting that, although they cannot be formally classified as amulets, sound-producing objects with a probable apotropaic function are attested in child burials dated to the early Imperial period. These include a group of hollow terracotta figurines whose bodies could function as resonating chambers. They are perforated at the top for suspension and at both sides of the lower part to attach a pair of movable legs, which would have acted as clappers. Notwithstanding their potential ludic function, their structural capacity for sound production suggests an apotropaic logic analogous to that of bells. Their interpretation as a type of *tintinnabulum*, rather than as mere articulated dolls, has recently been proposed for examples displaying *cucullatus* iconography.¹¹⁴ These hooded figures may be linked to the Celtic *genii cucullati* or to Telesphoros, a deity associated with the funerary sphere. Some specimens, particularly a well-known example from Augusta Emerita, display grotesque features and even phallic elements suspended beside the head. The piece also preserves the inscription *Tydidēs*, possibly referring to its owner or to the persona depicted (Fig. 9a-b).¹¹⁵ Coupled with their acoustic capacity, these traits reinforce a protective character that likely interdigitated with their recreational value, reflecting the porous boundary between the ludic and ritual domains.

Most of the documented pieces appear to derive from domestic or commercial contexts, although two examples from Augusta Emerita come from poorly defined funerary settings.¹¹⁶ In Valencia, a *cucullatus* figurine was discovered

alongside the body of a woman aged 55–60 in Burial 10 of the Calle Palomar necropolis.¹¹⁷ Of particular relevance to the present study, however, is an example recovered from Burial 35 at the Calle General García Escámez excavation in Cádiz, which was directly associated with a child.¹¹⁸

Within the same geographical context, similar terracotta figurines depicting gladiators have also been identified. These pieces have often been interpreted as articulated toys or puppets; however, they may also be understood, as in the previous cases, as a kind of *tintinnabula*, without precluding a recreational function. At least one such object was reportedly recovered during the 1931 excavations at the Fábrica Nacional de Torpedos in Cádiz (Fig. 10). According to the excavation report, it was recovered from a burial containing two thin-walled vessels and a bronze *bulla*, dated to the last third of the first century CE. Nevertheless, some uncertainty remains regarding the precise location of the excavation and the contextual details provided.¹¹⁹ Another terracotta figurine representing a gladiator was recovered from the Roman necropolis at Calle Acacias 25 in Cádiz, although the excavation report does not specify the burial context to which it belonged (Fig. 11a-b).¹²⁰ While the figure does not preserve its legs, it retains the same hollow, conical shape and perforations. Indeed, it is precisely the hollow, bell-shaped form of these figurines and the limited mobility of their elements—none of which have articulated arms or additional perforations on the legs that would allow manipulation—that supports an emphasis on their acoustic properties and their functional alignment with *tintinnabula*.¹²¹

The presence of these Gaditanian figurines in funerary contexts is noteworthy.¹²² Although their association with non-adult individuals is secure in only one case and probable in another, their inclusion among the grave goods suggests a meaningful role within funerary practice. When incorporated into burial assemblages, they may have been valued for their safeguarding capacity rather than being deposited simply as toys. This function acquires particular significance in the case of child burials, given the perceived vulnerability of young



Fig. 9a-b. Grotesque figurine with articulated legs, inv. no. CE28630. © Museo Nacional de Arte Romano. Photographs: Archivo MNAR / José Luis Sánchez Rodríguez.

¹¹⁴ SALIDO DOMÍNGUEZ/RODRÍGUEZ CEBALLOS 2015.

¹¹⁵ BLÁZQUEZ 1984-1985, 331-335; GIJÓN 1988, Fig. 6; GIJÓN 2004, 48, 206-207, no. 354; SALIDO DOMÍNGUEZ/RODRÍGUEZ CEBALLOS 2015, 113-114, Fig. 11. On the alternative identifications of the character portrayed, see FRANCO GARCÍA 2025.

¹¹⁶ SALIDO DOMÍNGUEZ/RODRÍGUEZ CEBALLOS 2015, 109, Fig. 2.

¹¹⁷ MARTÍN MARTÍNEZ/ PORTILLO SOTELO/ HUGUET ENGUITA 2020, 60-63.

¹¹⁸ SALIDO DOMÍNGUEZ/RODRÍGUEZ CEBALLOS 2015, 113, Fig. 10.

¹¹⁹ QUINTERO ATAURI (1932, 24), who directed the excavation, identified the burial as adult. LAMO SALINAS (1983-1984, 68), however, questions this identification based on the original reports and argues that the presence of the *bulla* points to a young boy. While not conclusive, the co-occurrence of the *bulla* and the articulated figurine lends significant weight to a sub-adult attribution.

¹²⁰ BUENO SERRANO/LEGUPÍN TUBÍO 2005, 325-326.

¹²¹ Terracotta figurines displaying comparable morphological characteristics, depicting both gladiators and *gladiatrices*, have also been documented in Eastern Thrace. In these instances, they have been formally categorised as puppets (ŞAHİN/GÜÇLÜ 2015). For further examples of warrior figurines, see LAMBRUGO 2013, 138-139 and 2019, 48-49.

¹²² Another figurine representing a soldier or gladiator, discovered in 1912 within a funerary context and now held at the Museo de Cádiz (inv. no. CE05088), evidently functioned as a puppet or doll. In contrast to the hollow, bell-shaped bodies of the aforementioned examples, its torso was designed to accommodate threads, and its movable limbs retain their original suspension holes. For further details, see LAMO SALINAS (1983-1984, 69; 72, Pl. 2; 73, Fig. 1). A compelling parallel may be found in an ivory torso from Lyon, which CLIVAZ (2013, 13) notes was previously misidentified as belonging to the burial of a ten-year-old girl. For further examples of gladiator figurines in Hispania, see VAQUERIZO GIL 2002-2003, *passim* and VAQUERIZO GIL 2004, 135-138.

individuals.¹²³ A second, more tentative possibility is that they were originally placed in domestic spaces frequented by children, serving both practical purposes (stimulation or entertainment) and apotropaic ones, before being redeployed after death to continue this protective function within the funerary sphere.

Finally, the choice of gladiatorial iconography on some of these objects may itself have carried symbolic protective value. In this regard, it is worth recalling a bell preserved in Budapest, engraved with the confrontation of four gladiators and accompanied by a good-luck formula.¹²⁴ Several small pendants shaped like gladiator helmets have also been recovered in London and Ptuj, likely serving an apotropaic function.¹²⁵ A relief of unknown provenance shows a gladiator, accompanied by other figures and animals, attacking a large eye, a motif commonly associated with protection against the evil eye.¹²⁶ More broadly, legendary combats, such as Heracles versus the Nemean lion, as well as



Fig. 10. Gladiator figurine with articulated legs. Inv. no. CE05087. © Museo de Cádiz. Photograph courtesy of the Museo de Cádiz.

¹²³ At Perinthos (Eastern Thrace), two female gladiator figurines featuring four separate limbs were recovered from the burial of a young individual. This age assessment is inferred from the dimensions of the sarcophagus (1.36 m in length, 0.69 m in width, and 0.57 m in height), as well as the accompanying grave goods, which included a glass *unguentarium* and, significantly, a bronze bell. For further details, see ŞAHİN/GÜÇLÜ 2015, 109–110, 114, Figs. 7 and 8.

¹²⁴ NAGY 1992.

¹²⁵ MOLA 2017, 93 (London); ISTENIČ 2000, 256–257 (Ptuj).

¹²⁶ ALVAR NUÑO 2012, 216–217, with further bibliography.



Fig. 11a-b. Gladiator figurine. Inv. no. DJ28377 © Museo de Cádiz. Photograph courtesy of the Museo de Cádiz.

representations of deities like Mars/Ares, frequently appear on magical gems, symbolising the hero or deity confronting malign forces or disease and thereby ensuring the protection of the wearer.¹²⁷

These objects not only illuminate the material dimension of childhood and the archaeological traces of care for the youngest members of society, but they also recover a critical, yet elusive dimension: the sensory and auditory landscape of ancient apotropaic practices.¹²⁸ As noted above, the sound of these amulets and apotropaic objects may have served not only to locate, entertain, or soothe the child, but also as a persistent auditory signal that supernatural forces had been mobilised to safeguard them against the hazards confronting their fragile bodies. Moreover, as they were made from materials such as bronze, iron, or terracotta, the examples discussed in this section would have been accessible to a relatively broad segment of the population, even though some were found alongside objects crafted from higher-value materials, such as amber.

Coins

The acoustic dimension discussed previously is equally applicable to coinage. However, the presence of coins in funerary contexts may have fulfilled diverse functions, contingent upon their depositional placement and whether they were perforated or integrated into personal adornments. While coins in burials are traditionally interpreted as the *viaticum*—the payment required by Charon to secure passage to the underworld¹²⁹—the aforementioned factors necessitate a more nuanced approach that accounts for the wide range of contexts in which numismatic evidence appears.

In their study of coinage within sub-adult funerary contexts across the Western Empire, Andújar and Blázquez identify several potential roles for these deposits: as *viaticum*; as an indicator of socioeconomic status; as a marker of

¹²⁷ FARAONE 2018, 115–128; DASEN/NAGY 2019, 438.

¹²⁸ On this topic, see BETTS 2017.

¹²⁹ This interpretation has been subject to significant reappraisal; see, for example, STEVENS 1991 and GORECKI 1975, 179–467.

social or ethnic identity; and as an amulet.¹³⁰ This latter interpretation is of particular relevance here, though these meanings were not necessarily mutually exclusive and likely operated concurrently.¹³¹

Several factors underpin the protective value attributed to coins: their iconography, the intrinsic properties of the metal, and beliefs invested in the numinous or thaumaturgical potency of the imperial portrait. In certain instances, these apotropaic qualities were further reinforced by the inclusion of magical formulae.¹³² Moreover, their capacity to generate sound—striking against other coins or elements of the *crepundia*—aligns with the prophylactic rationale of the aforementioned bells.¹³³ Consequently, the frequent association of coins with such objects is hardly unexpected, as it reinforces a shared prophylactic logic.¹³⁴

This section examines coins bearing clear traces of intentional modification for use as personal adornment with a probable prophylactic function in Roman Hispania. This practice is well-attested in earlier periods; in the Punic sectors of the necropoleis of Ibiza, perforated coins were frequently integrated into complex assemblages. For instance, the burial of a child (aged two to three years) at Puig des Molins yielded two silver fractions from Emporion, minted between the late fifth and early fourth century BCE. These likely formed part of a necklace comprising a bronze bell, a silver *udjat*, glass-paste beads, and various apotropaic pendants.¹³⁵ Similarly, an infant burial (aged under six months) contained a necklace of dark-blue glass beads and two perforated Carthaginian coins, with the original suspension cord being remarkably extant.¹³⁶ Further child inhumations from the second to the first century BCE on Ibiza confirm the persistence of these protective ornaments.¹³⁷

A comparable phenomenon is documented in the Greek colony of Emporion. Burial Martí 96 yielded a child's assemblage including two bone figurines—a stylised monkey and an apotropaic hand—alongside perforated silver fractions from Emporion and Massalia.¹³⁸

During the Roman period, evidence confirms the use of coins in contexts consistent with amuletic functions. Typically, one to three perforated specimens were incorporated into necklaces alongside glass-paste or bone beads, phallic pendants, and bells—assemblages

conventionally identified as *crepundia*. Although the illegibility of many specimens often precludes a definitive analysis of their iconographic selection, several significant examples are attested in Navarra, Tarragona, and Cádiz. At the Villa de las Musas (Arellano), a perinatal burial included a perforated coin associated with glass and bone beads.¹³⁹ In the western necropolis of Tarraco, a child's grave contained a diverse assemblage—a wooden *gladius*, a bronze bracelet, and an anthropomorphic knife handle—associated with a feline figurine, a bone pendant shaped like a fang, and three perforated coins, likely suspended as a single set.¹⁴⁰

A further isolated deposit from the same area, dated to the second century CE, contained four perforated coins (including a *sestertius* of Nero and an *as* of Claudius) alongside a phallic amulet and two bells. Notably, the perforations appear strategically placed: on one *sestertius*, the hole was positioned to ensure the reverse type remained upright when suspended, despite the resulting damage to the obverse portrait.¹⁴¹

In Cádiz, two cases are particularly noteworthy. The first is the previously mentioned necklace from Calle Brunete 2–8, which featured a perforated Republican *denarius*.¹⁴² The second, found in the right hand of a child, consisted of a pierced *denarius* of Trajan, a glass bead, a cowrie shell, and a silver pendant. Its position suggests a dual role, wherein the objects may have functioned as protective jewellery during life and subsequently as *viaticum* in death.¹⁴³

Where contextual evidence is ambiguous, an amuletic interpretation becomes more difficult to sustain. In Inhumation 10 at Ciudad de la Justicia (Cádiz), a perforated coin and glass-paste hoops were found at the feet of a child. This placement led the excavators to discount an apotropaic function, interpreting the coin as *viaticum* and the hoops as simple ornaments.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Arévalo González and Moreno Pulido observe that the central perforation of the coin renders suspension impractical, suggesting it may have been 'demonetised' or 'ritually cancelled' to deter tomb robbery.¹⁴⁵ While not conclusive, such a placement points towards a funerary rather than a prophylactic purpose.¹⁴⁶

A significant, though unpublished, cremation deposit from Mérida—containing the *bulla aurea* and VTF ring—was reportedly associated with further amulets. Comparison of available data suggests the presence of three perforated coins (one silver, two bronze) and a silver coin set within

¹³⁰ ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 96–98.

¹³¹ PERASSI 2011, 258.

¹³² PERASSI 2011, 225–253; PERASSI 2021, 57–58. FARAONE 2018 43–44.

¹³³ MANSON 1970, 486–490; JELSKI 1984, 269; DASEN 2003, 287, 289; BRIVES, 2008, 161–171; DASEN 2015a, 309, 311; FARAONE 2018, 44; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 96–97; PERASSI 2021, 48–49.

¹³⁴ ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 96. This is exemplified at Aquincum, where a bronze *bulla* from a child's grave contained a silver *lamella* bearing an illegible Greek inscription together with a coin of Trajan, which would likely have produced sound when the child moved. For discussion, see KOTANSKY 1994, 91–92; no. 20; SZILÁGYI 2004, no. 5; DASEN 2015a, 311.

¹³⁵ CAMPO/COSTA/FERNÁNDEZ/MEZQUIDA 2016, 64, no. 17.1.1.1; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 117.

¹³⁶ CAMPO/COSTA/FERNÁNDEZ/MEZQUIDA 2016, 64, no. 17.1.1.2; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 117.

¹³⁷ CAMPO/COSTA/FERNÁNDEZ/MEZQUIDA 2016, 66, no. 19.1.1.3; 66–67, no. 19.1.1.9; 72, no. 25.1.1.1; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 117–118.

¹³⁸ CAMPO 2011, 78.

¹³⁹ MEZQUIRIZ/TABAR 2007, 166–167; FERNÁNDEZ CRESPO 2008, 203; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2021, 419–420.

¹⁴⁰ CIURANA I PRAST 2009–2011, 210; CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 341.

¹⁴¹ CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 147, 151–152, 169.

¹⁴² BLANCO JIMÉNEZ 1996, 10–11; ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 151; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 97, no. 62.

¹⁴³ ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 151, no. 31.1.1.2; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 97, no. 62.

¹⁴⁴ SIBÓN 2007, 5; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 374; ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 98, Fig. 65; 158, no. 35.1.1.10.

¹⁴⁵ ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 98, 270. The authors themselves note, however, that the coin was of very low value and heavily worn, which may have rendered a central perforation unnecessary if the intention had been to withdraw it from circulation.

¹⁴⁶ Centrally perforated discoidal beads are well-attested; a comparable example originates from Burial 34000–42 in the Late Antique necropolis of Cartagena (MADRID BALANZA/ VIZCAÍNO SÁNCHEZ 2007, 60–61).

a gold mount with a ribbed suspension loop.¹⁴⁷ While their exact stratigraphic relationship to the *bullā* remains unclear, their iconography points towards a deliberate and coherent selection.

The two silver specimens, which retain legible types on both faces, date to the Republican period. The earlier coin, minted in 134 BCE, features a helmeted head of Roma on the obverse, while the reverse depicts Victory driving a *biga*, holding a whip and reins.¹⁴⁸ The second silver piece, distinguished by its gold mount, presents a laureate head of Apollo; its reverse displays the Dioscuri watering their horses at the *Lacus Iuturnae*, positioned beneath a lunar crescent.¹⁴⁹ The setting was specifically designed to ensure this latter scene remained visible when the piece was worn.

The two remaining bronze coins are heavily worn, hindering precise identification, although they date to the second half of the second century CE. According to the *Consortio de la Ciudad Monumental de Mérida*, the first features a bust of Faustina on the obverse and a lunar crescent with seven stars on the reverse; while the crescent remains visible, the remaining details are almost imperceptible. The second coin is identified by the same institution as depicting Marcus Aurelius, with an equestrian figure on the reverse. Although this figure can be discerned, most other elements are now obscured.¹⁵⁰ This iconographic repertoire—linking martial success and civic triumph with the lunar crescent—aligns with the symbolism of the *lunula*, a well-attested protective amulet throughout the Empire.¹⁵¹ On this basis, it is plausible to interpret these coins as part of a coherent apotropaic assemblage.

Although the cremation likely dates to the late second or early third century CE, the inclusion of significantly older coinage—namely the Republican silver pieces—is particularly striking. These items reflect the long-term preservation of objects, inviting reflection upon their cultural biographies. Were they adapted as amulets specifically for deposition, or had they been worn as protective ornaments and passed down through generations? The exceptional value of certain pieces, such as the specimen set in a gold mount, lends weight to the possibility of a long history of use prior to burial. Moreover, the deliberate selection of these antique coins may have amplified their symbolic efficacy, conflating ancestral prestige, the display of wealth, and apotropaic power within a single assemblage.

Finally, coins may have been converted into protective ornaments by means of amulet holders or textile wraps rather than perforation. In an infant burial at Villaricos (Almería), a bronze *as* was recovered wrapped in cloth, providing evidence for one such method of adaptation.¹⁵² Similarly, in Cádiz, an *as* of Domitian was located on the chest of a child aged one to two years, whereas in Ibiza, a juvenile burial (aged approximately 15–16) yielded an illegible *as* placed beside

the head. In both instances, the preservation of fabric traces offers two distinct interpretative possibilities: they may indicate the enclosure of the coin within a textile amulet-holder suspended as a pectoral pendant, or alternatively, they could result from taphonomic processes whereby the coin remained in prolonged contact with the shroud during the decomposition of the body.¹⁵³ The placement of these coins is similarly ambiguous. Their location near the head or on the chest could be attributed to post-depositional processes, whereby a coin originally placed in the mouth as ‘Charon’s obol’ displaced over time. Alternatively, it could reflect their primary use as apotropaic pendants, where the perishable textile holder has since decayed, leaving the coin in situ. While the evidence remains inconclusive, these cases point to a potential method for transforming coinage into protective objects through non-permanent means—a criterion that warrants further exploration within the broader study of numismatic amulets.

Whether through their acoustic properties, iconography, or inherent materiality, these coins appear to have been conceptualised as effective mechanisms for warding off malevolent forces and securing favourable fortune for children. Their ubiquitous circulation rendered them uniquely accessible across the socio-economic spectrum; while many specimens were of modest value, suitable for the modest assemblages found in sites such as Navarra, exceptional high-status pieces were integrated into the lavish funerary deposits of the elite, as exemplified by the Mérida find. Taken together, these instances demonstrate the remarkable versatility of coinage as polysemous artefacts highlighting their nuanced role within personal and funerary contexts across the diverse provinces of Roman Hispania.

Teeth

The heterogeneity observed in the use of coins is mirrored in amulets fashioned from animal teeth or bone substitutes carved to resemble them (Fig. 12). In Hispania, these objects frequently appear in association with child burials, often as components of the broader amuletic assemblages discussed above. However, their presence invites a multifaceted interpretation.

Ancient literary sources frequently attest to the use of animal fangs or similar elements to safeguard children during periods of heightened vulnerability, most notably during teething. This phase, commencing around six or seven months of age, overlapped with weaning—a transition regarded as a significant biological threshold. Bioarchaeological analyses from Roman-period sites reveal a recurrent presence of stress markers in the skeletal record, such as *porotic hyperostosis* and *cribra orbitalia*—indicators of malnutrition and anaemia linked to this dietary shift. If mismanaged, weaning could prove precarious or even fatal.¹⁵⁴ Beyond dietary shifts, the eruption of the primary dentition

¹⁴⁷ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 66, 92, 97, 99, 101, 149–150.

¹⁴⁸ RRC 245/1.

¹⁴⁹ RRC 335/10a; BARRERO MARTIN 2021, 165–166.

¹⁵⁰ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 96–101.

¹⁵¹ On the *lunula* see, for example, DASEN 2003, 286–287; DASEN 2015a, 304–305; CARROLL 2018, 99–100; FARAONE 2018, 44–61.

¹⁵² ALFARO ASINS 1993, 275; ALFARO ASINS 2001, 48; CAMPO 2011, 82.

¹⁵³ Cádiz: ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 130, no.13.1.1.17. Ibiza: CAMPO/COSTA/FERNÁNDEZ/MEZQUIDA 2016, 43, 73, no. 28.1.1.5.

¹⁵⁴ CARROLL 2018, 66–67. Nevertheless, significant variation existed in weaning practices across different regions of the Empire; see, for example, COCOZZA *et alii* 2025.

was itself perceived as a perilous stage. Medical and scholarly traditions devoted considerable attention to this process, as ulcerated gums, spasms, fevers, and acute digestive disturbances jeopardised infant survival.¹⁵⁵ Pliny the Elder, for instance, records that a wolf's tooth could alleviate teething pains and ward off nightmares.¹⁵⁶ He further notes that the first shed teeth of horses were employed as amulets to facilitate the emergence of permanent dentition, while the ashes of dog teeth, prepared in wine and honey, served as medicinal remedies.¹⁵⁷

Archaeological evidence confirms that these practices extended beyond mere literary motifs. Amulets made from animal teeth constitute a notable component of the material record, and it is reasonable to link many of these finds to parental anxieties surrounding teething.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, other interpretations remain plausible. In accordance with the principles of sympathetic magic, certain attributes—such as the perceived strength or ferocity of the animal—may have been intended to transfer to the wearer through the tooth itself.¹⁵⁹

The examples recovered from infant burials in Hispania are significant, though relatively rare. It should be noted that dental amulets are often underrepresented in the archaeological literature, as they have frequently been misclassified as faunal remains or overlooked in older excavation reports. Nonetheless, specimens fashioned from suid and ursid teeth, bone imitations, and even human teeth are attested in both the High Imperial and Late Antique periods.

The suid tooth found near the necklace from Calle Brunete (Cádiz) may have formed part of that amuletic



Fig. 12. Bone pendant carved to resemble a fang, found in the columbarium area of Mérida, inv no. MF17081. © Museo Nacional de Arte Romano. Photograph: Archivo MNAR/Manuel Molina Bolaños.

¹⁵⁵ GAILLARD-SEUX (2012) has identified twenty-three remedies for infants' teething in Greek and Latin medical sources. See, for example, the treatise *On Dentition* (Hippocratic Corpus); cf. also HIPPOC. *Aph.* 25 or CELSUS, *Med.* 6.11.3. The dangers associated with the eruption of the teeth are attested in other cultures and historical periods as well; see DASEN 2015a, 313-318 and DASEN forthcoming.

¹⁵⁶ PLIN. *HN* 28.257.

¹⁵⁷ PLIN. *HN* 28.258 (horse); 30.22-23 (dog).

¹⁵⁸ DASEN 2015a, 313-318; 2015b, 191-194; forthcoming

¹⁵⁹ CARROLL 2018, 106-109, with further bibliography.

ensemble.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, in the eastern *suburbium* of Tarraco, a bone carved to imitate a fang was recovered from a richly furnished child burial alongside a comparable necklace.¹⁶¹ Particularly striking evidence comes from Burial 46 of the western necropolis of *Pompelo* (Navarra), dated to the fourth to fifth centuries CE. The assemblage associated with the child comprised a necklace of eleven glass-paste beads, a rock-crystal pendant, and a bear-fang pendant.¹⁶² The inclusion of a tooth from a wild predator invites consideration of the symbolic dynamics of ferocity and protection, while also suggesting an intention to signal social distinction through the selection of a rare and prestigious material.

The use of ferocious animals as amulets and items of personal adornment is well documented both before and after the Roman period.¹⁶³ Evidence from the Late Antique necropolis of Aldaieta (Basque Country), dating to the sixth and seventh centuries CE, reveals bear fangs incorporated into necklaces accompanying children, a juvenile (aged approximately 15-16), and adults.¹⁶⁴ This geographically and chronologically proximate instance indicates that, as with other categories discussed above, such elements were employed for the protection of children, though not exclusively so.

A further case from Mérida involves a modified animal tooth, provisionally identified as the molar of a large felid, such as a lion or tiger. A silver wire is wound around the neck of the tooth in at least three coils and passes between the roots to facilitate suspension (Fig. 13). Dated to the second half of the first century CE, it was recovered from Cremation 4 at the Solar de la Antigua Campsa site, though it was likely



Fig. 13. Molar of a lion (*Panthera leo*) or tiger (*Panthera tigris*) modified to allow suspension, inv. no. DO2015/4/61 (second half of the first century CE). © Consorcio Ciudad Monumental de Mérida. Photograph: Archivo MNAR / Lorenzo Plana Torres.

¹⁶⁰ BLANCO JIMÉNEZ 1996, 10-11; ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 151; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 97, Table no. 62.

¹⁶¹ CIURANA I PRAST 2009-2011, 210; CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 341.

¹⁶² GARCÍA-BARBERENA *et alii* 2015, 89-90, Figs. 23 and 24.

¹⁶³ PUTTOCK 2002, 97; CRUMMY 2010, 52-53; BEL 2012, 199, 202, Fig. 11. PFÄFFLI 2013, 46-47; PARKER 2023, 8-11.

¹⁶⁴ AZKARATE 1999, 117 (burial A-8); 307-308, (B-62); 378, (B-79-83) containing the skeletal remains of five individuals: two adults, one juvenile, and two children, alongside three pendants featuring animal teeth—two canine and one bear; 488 (B-102).

associated with a juvenile or an adult female.¹⁶⁵ Comparable lion and bear teeth adapted as pendants are also attested at Augusta Raurica (Switzerland).¹⁶⁶

Other noteworthy examples involve human milk teeth (deciduous dentition) placed in children's burials—a practice for which, to my knowledge, no parallels have been identified in adult contexts in Hispania. At the 'Casa de los Plintos' in Uxama Argaela (Soria), an infant skeleton was found beneath the pavement of a corridor within a stratigraphic layer dating to the late Julio-Claudian period. The child, aged approximately six to seven months, was accompanied by a **Hispanic sigillata** cup, a small glass vessel, and a human milk tooth.¹⁶⁷ This finding is particularly significant: given the infant's age, the tooth necessarily belonged to another individual, and therefore cannot be interpreted as a souvenir of the child's own development. Osteological analysis confirmed that the child's own dentition was only just developing, with at least one canine in the process of emerging.¹⁶⁸ This case strongly suggests the use of human teeth as sympathetic aids to the process of teething, where the perceived connection between the object and its intended biological effect was even more immediate than with animal remains.¹⁶⁹

A comparable situation is documented at Valencia, where a child aged between two and four years was buried with an abundant funerary assemblage and items of personal adornment. Among them was an object interpreted as an amulet: a folded rectangular lead sheet enclosing a deciduous tooth with small unidentified bronze elements, along with a gold suspension clasp and glass-paste beads.¹⁷⁰ Its function as an aid to tooth eruption is highly plausible given the child's age, although alternative interpretations cannot be excluded. It may, for example, have been included alongside other metal objects as part of a broader protective repertoire rather than as an implement specifically connected with dentition. Although the container was not a *bullā*, it finds a close functional parallel in an example from Hierapolis (Phrygia), where an amulet-case of that type likewise enclosed a small milk tooth (first–seventh century CE).¹⁷¹ Beyond the specific selection of internal substances for their inherent apotropaic properties, it is also possible that such composite objects were intended to produce a faint rattling sound when worn, thereby adding a deliberate acoustic dimension to their efficacy. A further parallel may be noted in the remarkable necklace recovered from the second-century burial of a one-year-old infant at Castel Malnome,

outside Ostia: composed of seventeen amulets in faience, amber, shell, and bone, it also included a boar's tooth and a human tooth, both pierced for suspension.¹⁷²

To conclude, the deployment of teeth within amuletic assemblages and personal adornments is well substantiated across the Roman world. Literary sources emphasise their protective function for children at particularly vulnerable developmental stages, such as teething, when biological survival could be at risk. Material evidence from other provinces of the Empire confirms these practices beyond textual accounts. In Hispania, the use of tooth-based amulets extended to adults as well as children, suggesting a broader concern with personal protection. Exotic and rare materials, such as teeth from wild animals, were likely selected for their symbolic power and social prestige, while more accessible alternatives—including bone imitations and human deciduous teeth—allowed families of varying status to participate in these protective strategies. The case of Uxama Argaela is particularly instructive, suggesting the targeted use of human deciduous teeth to safeguard infants at specific physiological milestones, a pattern that resonates with both literary traditions and material evidence throughout the Roman Empire.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC GROTESQUE FIGURINES

The apotropaic value of the grotesque has already been examined in relation to phallic imagery. However, less emphasis has been placed on prophylactic laughter as a pivotal mechanism underpinning the selection of grotesque figures to neutralise the evil eye and repel malevolent forces. Such figures, either in isolation or combined with other apotropaic elements, may provoke laughter as a defensive reflex intended to ward off harm.¹⁷³ Cicero noted that ugliness and physical deformity offer ample material for laughter, while other classical sources attest to the objectification of individuals with physical impairments, whose presence was sought after both as a form of symposiac entertainment and as a collection of 'human rarities'.¹⁷⁴ This interpretative framework has gradually displaced earlier views that strictly associated such figures—ithyphallic men, dwarfs, hunchbacks, or caricatured bodies—with the Alexandrian school.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, the protective value of grotesque imagery also resides in its capacity to arrest the gaze of the envious onlooker.¹⁷⁶ As Plutarch observed, this mechanism serves to divert the 'poisonous glance' from its intended victim toward the object itself.¹⁷⁷ Current scholarship thus emphasises that these figures operate through complementary mechanisms: the induction of laughter and the redirection of the malefic gaze.

¹⁶⁵ BEJARANO OSORIO 1996, 42–43, 56, no.11; BARRERO MARTÍN 2021, 174.

¹⁶⁶ PFÄFFLI 2013, 46, nos. 30–32; CARROLL 2018, 106–109.

¹⁶⁷ GARCÍA MERINO/SÁNCHEZ SIMÓN 1996; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2021, 419.

¹⁶⁸ GARCÍA MERINO/SÁNCHEZ SIMÓN 1996, 204.

¹⁶⁹ The child's own teeth could also be employed as amulets intended to exert a beneficial effect upon the mother. Aelius Promotus, for instance, records that the tooth of a firstborn child could serve as an *okytokion*—a charm specifically designed to facilitate and expedite childbirth (WELLMANN 1908, 775.4, cited in FREIDIN 2024, 191 n. 81).

¹⁷⁰ GARCÍA-PRÓSPER/POLO CERDÀ/MELCHOR/BENEDITO 2005; BENEDITO NÚEZ/MELCHOR MONSERRAT/SEGUÍ MARCO 2007, 634; CAMPO 2011, 96.

¹⁷¹ DASEN 2015b, 195.

¹⁷² CIANFRIGLIA/ DE CRISTOFARO 2012; CIANFRIGLIA/ DE CRISTOFARO/DI MENTO 2013, 420; CARROLL 2018, 101–102.

¹⁷³ ALVAR NUÑO 2012, 207–215, with references.

¹⁷⁴ CIC. *De Or.* 2.239; PLUT. *De cur.* 520c; QUINT. *Decl.* 298, QUINT. *Inst.* 2.5.11 and 6.3.7–8. On the apotropaic value of these figures, see DASEN 2013, 271–272; HUSQUIN 2020, esp. 24–27, or TRENTIN 2015, 51–72.

¹⁷⁵ ALVAR NUÑO 2012, 214–215; DUNBABIN/DICKIE 1983; NENOVA-MERDJANOVA 2000. On the value of figures with these traits in Egypt and Greece, see DASEN 1993.

¹⁷⁶ DASEN 2009, 226; BALLEST/JEAMMET 2011, 51.

¹⁷⁷ PLUT. *Quaest. conv.* 5.7.3 = 682A.

The dual function of these representations likely explains their prevalence across various media, including items of personal adornment.¹⁷⁸ The link between exaggerated physical features and apotropaic efficacy is explicitly articulated in the *Life of Aesop*. In this text, Aesop is described as strikingly unattractive: pot-bellied, misshapen, snub-nosed, and squint-eyed. When fellow slaves question his purchase, one remarks that their master bought him ‘To make him the evil-eye averter (προσβάσκανον) of the slave market’.¹⁷⁹

Throughout the Roman provinces, including Hispania, small grotesque figurines modified for suspension have been identified as amulets. For example, at Viminacium (Serbia), five such figurines dated to the third century CE were recovered from funerary contexts—three associated with children and two with adult females.¹⁸⁰ These were found alongside beads and other established apotropaia, such as *bullae*. Comparable examples crafted in jet or amber are known from Aquileia, Ptuj, Cologne, or Copenhagen, among others, attesting to a sparse but consistent distribution across the Empire.¹⁸¹

The protective significance of these objects is grounded not only in their iconography but also in their materiality. Jet and amber predominate, though gold specimens are also attested. Ancient observers were captivated by amber’s exotic origins and electrostatic properties, qualities which imbued it with a perceived magical value.¹⁸² Its prophylactic virtues are explicitly noted by Pliny,¹⁸³ and its use—particularly among children and women—is well-documented.¹⁸⁴ A comparable rationale applies to jet (*gagates*), to which Pliny and the Orphic Lapidary attribute therapeutic and protective qualities.¹⁸⁵ He likewise attributes apotropaic power against the evil eye to other dark-coloured substances like *antiphates*, linked to black coral.¹⁸⁶ As discussed in previous sections, similar qualities were also ascribed to gold. An extraordinary example of this precious metal preserved in the Thorvaldsens Museum (Copenhagen) further supports the interpretation of such pieces as amulets; being hollow and fitted with a base closure, it likely served as a container for further protective substances.¹⁸⁷

The corpus of these specimens displays several recurring features: a topknot hairstyle (*cirrus*), a prominent nose, and full lips. These traits have prompted interpretations of the objects as representations of ‘Otherness’, specifically depicting African or Near Eastern physiognomies, or

alternatively, as grotesque portraits of athletes. Crucially, the selection of materials—most notably jet (*gagates*)—served a dual purpose: while enhancing the object’s inherent efficacy through its perceived magical properties, its dark hue was intentionally chosen to accentuate the racialised and, within the Roman gaze, ‘exotic’ character of the figures. This deliberate convergence of material and motif suggests that the ‘Otherness’ of the subject was a primary component of its protective power. Emphasising the variability of the corpus, Milovanović and Danković question whether all examples reflect a single archetype, distinguishing instead at least five subtypes and arguing that the grotesque appearance itself was more significant than any specific identity.¹⁸⁸

Nevertheless, the material evidence permits the recognition of two broad groups: one defined by exaggerated facial features, such as hooked noses, pointed ears, and a topknot; and another characterised by pronounced musculature, prominent nipples, and, occasionally, a *cirrus*, which likely caricatures fighters. Menéndez Menéndez observes that several amulets exhibit ears resembling *haematoma auris* (‘cauliflower ear’), a lesion strongly associated with combat sports.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, caricatured and racialised depictions of boxers are well-attested in Roman figurative art.¹⁹⁰

In the Iberian Peninsula, at least three examples may be assigned to this corpus of figurines. All three are crafted from jet, although only one derives from a funerary context associated with a child. Two of these correspond to the first of the groups outlined above: a jet piece currently preserved in Lisbon—originating from a private donation and reportedly of Syrian provenance—and another recovered at Asturica Augusta (Astorga).¹⁹¹

The Astorga piece is a small anthropomorphic bust (1.9 cm) discovered during excavations at the Termas del Padre Blanco (León).¹⁹² Dated to the first and second centuries CE, it features a topknot, ‘cauliflower’ ears, an aquiline nose, and a mouth rendered in a twisted expression. Although a perforation for suspension was originally situated between the head and the topknot, this area is now damaged. Following the break, the object was repaired with a gold wire encircling the neck, permitting its continued utility as a pendant.

The only example directly linked to a child was recovered from Burial 9 at the site of Las Reliquias (Huelva), dated between the fourth and seventh centuries CE. The piece, found beneath the skull, is highly fragmentary, complicating a full reconstruction of its original appearance. It measures 1.2 cm in length, with both the upper and lower portions missing. Nevertheless, certain facial features remain discernible—specifically an aquiline nose and slightly prominent lips—which, combined with its manufacture in jet, allow for its

¹⁷⁸ MITCHELL 2013, 275–297; GALBOIS 2014, 199–207. The iconography of figures displaying deformities or pathologies in Roman glyptics has also been examined by Elisabetta Galletti in several conference papers, although these studies remain unpublished.

¹⁷⁹ Anonymous, *Life of Aesop* 16 (trans. by DALY 1961).

¹⁸⁰ MILOVANOVIĆ/ DANKOVIĆ 2020, 127–131.

¹⁸¹ MILOVANOVIĆ/ DANKOVIĆ 2020, 133–136. For a comprehensive compilation, see MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2019, 167–178, and MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 579–610, with the latter identifying over thirty comparable specimens.

¹⁸² CAUSEY 2012, 42.

¹⁸³ PLIN. *HN* 37.12.

¹⁸⁴ SWIFT 2003; GÁLL/MÁRGINEAN 2021, 212; DALCEGGIO 2022, 172–173; For Hispania, VALLEJO-CASAS *et alii* 2024, 208.

¹⁸⁵ PLIN. *HN* 36.34; MASTROCINQUE 2023.

¹⁸⁶ PLIN. *HN* 37.54; MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 89.

¹⁸⁷ MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 89.

¹⁸⁸ MILOVANOVIĆ/ DANKOVIĆ 2020, 136–39, with further bibliography.

¹⁸⁹ MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2019, 167–178, and MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 579–610, where she draws comparisons with examples in other media.

¹⁹⁰ Some examples are held in the British Museum: inv. no. 1852,0401.1 (African boxer) and inv no. 1814,0704.855 (dwarf boxer).

¹⁹¹ MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 581–582 (Lisbon); MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 579–580 (Astorga).

¹⁹² ASOCIACIÓN ASTURES 1995, 115, 277.

tentative inclusion in this corpus. Traces of a transverse perforation for suspension are still visible on the back of the head. Menéndez Menéndez notes that the fractures exhibit signs of wear, potentially indicating continued use after the suspension area was damaged. Although no repair in durable material survives—unlike the Astorga example—alternative solutions involving perishable materials cannot be excluded. The excavators attributed an apotropaic character to the object, an interpretation that remains highly plausible in light of the parallels discussed above.¹⁹³

Another category of amulets within the corpus of grotesque anthropomorphic figures represents the Egyptian deity Bes. This god enjoyed widespread popularity across the ancient Mediterranean, with his image being adopted in a variety of media. Iconographically, Bes is characterised by dwarfism, a fearsome facial expression, a protruding belly, a flexed posture, and a feathered headdress; he is also occasionally depicted as ithyphallic.

In the Iberian Peninsula and its surrounding islands, his presence in amuletic form is particularly notable in areas of Phoenician–Punic tradition. A significant concentration is found in the necropolis of Puig des Molins (Ibiza), where thirty-five examples have been documented.¹⁹⁴ Elsewhere on the peninsula, at least sixteen pieces have been identified by Gómez Peña and Rodríguez Mellado, to which the specimen from La Caridad (Teruel) should be added (Fig. 4).¹⁹⁵ These finds are primarily concentrated in southern and eastern regions linked to Punic traditions, with at least five examples dating securely to the Roman period.

Bes' role as a protective deity overseeing the liminal thresholds of human existence—sexuality, pregnancy, childbirth, and childhood—is well established in Egyptian tradition, and some of these attributes likely persisted the Roman era. His apotropaic function is documented not only in Hispania but throughout the Mediterranean basin.¹⁹⁶ While his presence in funerary contexts is often interpreted as safeguarding the deceased, examples from domestic settings, such as La Caridad, point to protective practices embedded in everyday life.¹⁹⁷ The necklace from the Teruel site offers a clear illustration: its components—including Bes, a *bullā*, and a figurine of Harpocrates—constitute a specialised amuletic assemblage specifically linked to children.¹⁹⁸ The association of these two deities stems from their shared connection to infancy; in some sources, Bes even acted as the guardian of the child-god Harpocrates, making them an appropriate choice for amulets intended to safeguard children.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ LÓPEZ DOMÍNGUEZ/CASTILLA REYES/DE HARO ORDÓÑEZ/QUINTERO CRISTÓBAL 2004, 1698–1699; MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 580–581.

¹⁹⁴ VELÁZQUEZ BRIEVA 2007, 129–151.

¹⁹⁵ GÓMEZ PEÑA/RODRÍGUEZ MELLADO 2014, 161, Table 1.

¹⁹⁶ BULTÉ 1991, 17–33, 95–99; MEEKS 1992; DASEN 1993, 55–83; DASEN 2004; MASTROCINQUE 2005; ALVAR NUÑO, 2012, 61, 215, 223; DASEN 2015 a, *passim*.

¹⁹⁷ DASEN 2015a, 210, 354; GÓMEZ PEÑA/RODRÍGUEZ MELLADO 2014, 156.

¹⁹⁸ Another silver Harpocrates figurine, configured for suspension and likely belonging to a necklace, was recovered from a mid-first-century CE cremation burial at Augusta Emerita. The figure performs the characteristic gesture of raising a finger to its lips, paralleling the example from La Caridad. See CHAMIZO 2012, 92–93, no. 21.

¹⁹⁹ MEEKS 1992, 431; DASEN 1993, 74; DASEN 2015a, 105, 133.

In the Iberian Peninsula, Bes has been identified in three Roman-period inhumations and one cremation, the latter likely belonging to a family group. In two instances, the figurine formed part of a necklace consisting of multiple amulets.²⁰⁰ This is evident in Tomb 49 at Calle García Escámez (excavated by the Museo de Cádiz), where Bes was recovered alongside at least three bone double-phallic amulets of the phallus/*fica* type, although anthropological data for the interred individual remain unavailable.²⁰¹

More detailed evidence derives from Burial 15 of the Avenida de Andalucía necropolis (Cádiz), an infant inhumation within an amphora. The grave goods included a complex necklace composed of: a glass-paste pendant depicting Bes; two perforated bone plaques in the form of a phallic figure; a winged bronze phallus with a suspension ring; a circular bone bead, another poorly preserved bone phallic pendant and seven glass-paste beads.²⁰²

The use of these grotesque figurines highlights several notable dynamics. They reveal the integration of the Iberian Peninsula into networks of exchange both before and after Roman hegemony. The figure of Bes, adopted by the Phoenician–Punic world and subsequently the Romans, travelled from Egypt to the Iberian coasts and hinterlands. The evidence points to Ibiza as having played a pivotal role in the dissemination of these 'Orientalising' amulets; the scale and craftsmanship of finds at Puig des Molins have led scholars to suggest the island functioned as a production centre, facilitating the spread of these types into the Roman era.²⁰³

From the second–third centuries CE onwards, interconnections across the Empire are reflected in the spread of grotesque figurines displaying racialised features. The selection of materials such as jet likely served a dual purpose, enhancing apotropaic efficacy while emphasising the racialised and, for Roman viewers, grotesque character of the figures. The association of these objects with the protection of children—and women—is apparent in securely documented archaeological contexts, including Hispania. The Iberian examples not only participate in Roman protective practices but also demonstrate creative adaptations. Even once damaged, grotesque figurines were reused, suggesting the continued symbolic and emotional significance of these objects and, potentially, their transmission within family groups.

ZOOMORPHIC FIGURINES

The use of grotesque anthropomorphic figures represents just one facet of a broader repertoire of protective imagery. Alongside these human-shaped apotropaia, a sparse but significant corpus of zoomorphic figurines and pendants also played a role in the safeguarding of infancy. In these instances, the protective efficacy was likely derived from

²⁰⁰ GÓMEZ PEÑA/RODRÍGUEZ MELLADO 2014, 161, nos. 9–12.

²⁰¹ Museo de Cádiz, inv. nos. CE12838–12855 (phallic amulets: CE12838, 12854 and 12855).

²⁰² PERDIGONES/TROYA/MUÑOZ 1987, 72–73.

²⁰³ FERNÁNDEZ GÓMEZ/ LÓPEZ GRANDE/MEZQUIDA/VELÁZQUEZ 2009; FABRE MURILLO 2026, 287.

the perceived virtues and biological characteristics of the animals depicted.

Noteworthy examples of these figurines have been recovered from both juvenile and infant burials. Beyond faunal remains, some contexts also yield animal-shaped pendants. A second-century CE infant burial in the eastern suburb of Tarraco, accompanied by a rich assemblage, included several suspension elements that likely formed part of a single necklace: three pierced coins, a bead, a bone pendant shaped like a canine tooth, and a carnelian feline pendant.²⁰⁴ Notably, the artificial bone canine may have been intended to symbolically evoke a tooth belonging to the feline represented in the same necklace, thereby amalgamating the predatory and protective potencies of the creature within the assemblage to safeguard the infant wearer.

The role of felines as guardians of the deceased is also attested elsewhere in Hispania. At Segóbriga (Cuenca), a secondary burial dated to c. 70 CE and belonging to a child aged five to seven years contained several objects of apotropaic and Orientalising character. These included faience beads widely distributed across the Empire during the later first century CE, one of which—shaped like a pinecone or grape cluster—stands out. These Egyptianising elements, otherwise rare at the site, were found together with a small bone feline figurine (3.5 cm in length, 1.5 cm in width, and 1.3 cm in height).²⁰⁵ Lions are well-attested within Punic symbolic repertoires as guardians of the deceased, and the Segóbriga figurine has been linked to this long-standing tradition. Crucially, unlike the other elements in the assemblage, the Segóbriga feline was not pierced for suspension, suggesting it may have functioned as a static ritual deposit intended specifically to safeguard the child's passage to the afterlife. However, the inclusion of a similar feline motif in the Tarraco necklace—which was clearly designed for suspension—opens the possibility that this imagery also served an active apotropaic role during the wearer's life.

A further zoomorphic pendant, carved in amber, derives from Augusta Emerita. It was recovered alongside other objects of the same material, including a ring with vegetal decoration, three spherical carnelian beads mounted on silver wire (possibly in imitation of amber), and a small bronze bell. The pendant, pierced for suspension, depicts a crouching animal with folded legs and backward-pointing ears, tentatively identified as a rabbit or hare.²⁰⁶ Although the cremation context remains unpublished and the internal diameter of the associated ring (1.68 cm) points towards a juvenile or female wearer rather than a child, parallels indicate that such animals frequently appear in association with infancy. A well-known example from Nîmes, for instance, involved the burial of a six-month-old infant accompanied by several amber animals, including the figure of a hare or rabbit. In that context, such pieces have been interpreted as protective devices linked to healing practices—such as easing the pain of teething—while also evoking notions of tenderness specifically associated with early childhood.²⁰⁷

Collectively, these finds support a broadly prophylactic interpretation of such objects. They could also illustrate the fluid boundary between childhood and youth in Roman society, particularly for girls, whose transition to adulthood was marked by marriage and could legally occur from the age of twelve.²⁰⁸ As scholarship frequently observes, social age and biological age—as determined by osteological data—do not necessarily align. This discrepancy manifests in two ways: individuals whom we would classify biologically as children might already have been regarded socially as adults, while others who were physiologically closer to adolescence or adulthood could still display objects and symbols associated with childhood. The evidence from Augusta Emerita may reflect precisely this intermediate stage, in which protective symbols linked to infancy continued to accompany a young individual approaching adult status. Finally, we should not exclude the possibility that personal attachment to such objects also contributed to their retention into later life; their users likely valued them as the physical expression of the care and affection they received, as well as the significant economic investment made by their families in pieces that, in some cases, held considerable material value.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this study identifies a significant disparity between the documented use of certain prophylactic devices in the wider Roman Empire and their representation in the archaeological record of the Iberian Peninsula. Most notably, there is a striking absence of the *lunula* within the funerary contexts of children in Hispania. While museum collections in Spain and Portugal house numerous crescent-shaped pendants (Fig. 14), none can be definitively associated with infant burials. Iconographic evidence and findspots in other provinces suggest that *lunulae* were predominantly worn by girls and women—perhaps as a feminine counterpart to the *bulla*—a distinction reinforced by later literary sources.²⁰⁹



Fig. 14. Bronze *lunula* from 'Casa del Mitreo' (Mérida), inv. no. CE17163 © Museo nacional de Arte Romano. Photograph: Archivo MNAR/Sergio González Gómez.

²⁰⁴ CIURANA I PRAST 2009–2011, 210; CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 341.

²⁰⁵ CEBRIÁN FERNÁNDEZ 2024

²⁰⁶ MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 101, 149–150; BARRERO MARTÍN 2023, 608.

²⁰⁷ DASEN forthcoming.

²⁰⁸ Dig. 24.1.65; 36.2.30.

²⁰⁹ See note 151.

Isidore of Seville, for instance, explicitly categorises the *lunula* as a female ornament.²¹⁰

Differential preservation or recovery bias may account for this lacuna, but it primarily underscores the provisional nature of the evidence assembled in this work. The investigation of *lunulae* in Hispania remains markedly underdeveloped; unlike the robust typological frameworks established for phallic amulets, these crescentic pendants currently lack a comprehensive regional classification. Consequently, this analysis serves as a critical call for a systematic re-evaluation of small finds across peninsular excavations.

Beyond these absences, the synthesis of the categories examined herein clarifies several fundamental aspects of magical-prophylactic practices. The diversity of amulets reflects a multiplicity of apotropaic strategies designed to safeguard the biological and social survival of the child. The inherent vulnerability of the infant body—perceived as highly susceptible to external threats—necessitated the use of these objects, which simultaneously functioned as active agents of social construction. As classical sources suggest, amulets articulated the wearer's identity in terms of age, gender, and status. This is epitomised by the character Praetexta in Plautus' *Rudens*, who is identified through her *crepundia*. For specific ornaments like the *bullae*, particularly the *bullae aureae*, the symbolic weight is even more pronounced, acting as a definitive marker of childhood, but also of status and, very likely, of gender, notwithstanding the exceptions noted above.

Recognition of children's susceptibility to danger did not result in detachment or resignation on the part of families and caregiving networks. Amulets themselves offer clear testimony to this concern. In the case of the *bullae*, we have seen the importance of paternal ties, their probable transmission across generations, and even occasions on which such objects may have been presented to children to mark meaningful moments, such as the celebration or anniversary of birth. Although comparable evidence is lacking for other amulet types, it is plausible that they too were given at symbolically charged stages in a child's life, including developmental milestones that might entail heightened risk, such as the eruption of teeth or the beginning of weaning.

In this protective framework, the agency of women was paramount. Infant care involved a specialised, predominantly female sphere (*nutrix*, *mamma*, *mammula*), although male figures (*nutritor*, *tata*) also participated. Pliny explicitly identifies the *nutrix* as an important agent in ritual acts, such as the use of saliva for protection.²¹¹ Furthermore, the involvement of grandmothers (*avitae*) and maternal aunts (*materterae*) in these practices suggests that accumulated female experience carried significant ritual authority.²¹² While elite households employed specialised attendants, for the majority of the population, the mother likely remained the principal guardian of the threshold between life and

death, responsible for diagnosing threats like the evil eye and implementing the necessary material or ritual defenses.

The very forms chosen to safeguard children embody beliefs surrounding protection: capsules containing vegetal substances, small bells, perforated teeth, grotesque figures, and other items credited with protective power in Roman thought. Many of these objects possessed a sensory dimension—such as the smell of botanical contents or the sound of bells—that was probably perceived as an essential part of their efficacy. Furthermore, the selection of types indicates a complex cultural landscape where Eastern traditions and enduring Phoenician-Punic substrates persisted within the Roman provincial framework in Hispania.

These practices transcended social boundaries. Alongside materials accessible only to a minority, such as gold or amber, more modest and adaptable items—including milk teeth or coins—predominate within the record. Regardless of their material value, these objects reflect a significant investment of time, resources, and ingenuity, resulting in items imbued with profound emotional significance. This likely reinforced deep-seated affective bonds, as evidenced by the continued use of certain amulets beyond childhood or following significant damage—a pattern which suggests they were preserved within the domestic sphere and transmitted intergenerationally.

Such transmission of beliefs, practices, and material culture exerted influence over the *longue durée*. From the Spanish Habsburg period onward, for example, elite families utilised assembled sets of protective items known as *cinturones de lactantes* ('nursing belts'), typically composed of coral beads, jet amulets, small bells, and other apotropaic devices.²¹³ Their presence indicates a deeply rooted cultural continuity in both the function and typology of these artefacts. A particularly illustrative case is the portrait of the Infanta Ana Mauricia of Austria, depicted wearing a collection of such protective elements—*ficulae*, teeth, bells, scented spheres—paralleling objects documented in Roman contexts (Fig. 15).

Ultimately, the study of amulets intended to protect children in Roman Hispania demonstrates how the perception of vulnerability associated with specific life stages generated concrete practices of care and a distinctive material culture. Only the integrated analysis of literary testimony and archaeological remains can fully contextualise these practices. This study, focused on Roman Hispania, situates these practices within their specific geographical framework while contributing to broader comparative discussions across the Roman world. Despite its preliminary character, this research advances the understanding of how ancient societies conceptualised childhood and mitigated inherent vulnerabilities through ritual action and material expression.

²¹⁰ ISID. *Ethym.* 19.31.17: *Lunula sunt ornamenta mulierum*.

²¹¹ PLIN. *HN.* 28.39.

²¹² PERS. 2.30-34.

²¹³ COBO DELGADO 2016, 94.



Fig. 15. Portrait of Infanta Ana Mauricia of Austria wearing a nursing-baby belt, painted by Juan Pantoja de la Cruz (1602). © Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Selected sub-adult burials (cremations and inhumations) with amulets in Hispania.

SITE	AGE	SEX	FR	GRAVE GOODS	CHRONOLOGY	REFERENCES
1 Casa de los Plintos, Uxama Argaela (Soria).	6-7 mo	ND	IN	Hispano-Roman <i>sigillata</i> cup; glass cup; deciduous tooth.	2nd half 1st c. CE	GARCÍA MERINO/SÁNCHEZ SIMÓN 1996; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2021, 419.
2 Andelo (Navarra).	Perinat.	ND	IN	Indigenous ceramic vessel; iron ring; bronze bracelet; bronze bell.	Mid 1st–2nd c. CE	MEZQUÍRIZ/TABAR 2007, 165–166; MEZQUÍRIZ 2011, 61–62, 68–70; FERNÁNDEZ CRESPO 2008, 203.
3 Villa de las Musas, Arellano (Navarra).	Perinat.	ND	IN	Bluish-green fluted glass bead; polished tubular bone bead; bronze coin, illegible, perforated.	1st–3rd c. CE	MEZQUÍRIZ/TABAR 2007, 166–67; FERNÁNDEZ CRESPO 2008, 203; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2021, 419–420.
4 Pompelo, Western Necropolis, Burial 46 (Pamplona, Navarra).	Child	ND	IN	Necklace: 11 glass beads (various sizes/shapes), quartz crystal pendant, bear tooth pendant.	4th–5th c. CE	GARCÍA-BARBERENA <i>et alii</i> 2015, 89–90, Figs. 23 and 24.
5 Plaza Vila de Madrid Necropolis, Burial A-8 (Barcino, Barcelona).	3 y	F	IN	Silver <i>bullula</i> with vine leaf (<i>Vitis vinifera</i>) inside; silver pendant bead.	Early Imperial	BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 36, 42, pl. 10, pl. 27.2.
6 Plaza Vila de Madrid Necropolis, Burial 25 (Barcino, Barcelona).	Child	ND	IN	Small bell; double metal disc (<i>bullula</i> type).	Early Imperial	BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 42, 44, Pl. 17.
7 Plaza Vila de Madrid Necropolis, Burial 75 (Barcino, Barcelona).	Child	ND	IN	Adjustable bracelet with bell; coin under chin.	Early Imperial	BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA 2007, 42, 44, Pl. 17, Fig. 26.
8 Eastern Suburb of Tarraco, Funerary Unit 4 (2009–2011), 15 (2011) (Tarraco, Tarragona).	Child	ND	IN	<i>Gladius</i> or small wooden sword; carnelian feline pendant; three perforated coins (undetermined); anthropomorphic knife handle; bone fang-shaped pendant; two bone belt fittings; necklace bead; bronze bracelet; glass <i>unguentarium</i> .	2nd c. CE	CIURANA I PRAST 2009–2011, 210; CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 341.
9 Eastern Suburb of Tarraco, Funerary Unit 18 (2009–2011), 401 (2011) (Tarraco, Tarragona).	5 yrs + Ad.	ND	IN	Bronze earring; perforated phallic bone pendant; small perforated bone semicylinder; small unperforated bone arrow.	ND	CIURANA I PRAST 2009–2011m 210; CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 162, 172.
10 Eastern Suburb of Tarraco, Funerary Unit 82 (Tarraco, Tarragona).	Child (?)	ND	IN	Glass fragments; possible <i>bullula</i> fragment.	ND	CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 169.
11 Eastern Suburb of Tarraco, Funerary Unit 85 (Tarraco, Tarragona).	Child (?)	ND	IN (?)	4 perforated coins: <i>sestertius</i> of Nero, silver coin (undeclassifiable), <i>as</i> of Claudius, <i>sestertius</i> ; 2 bone belt fittings; phallic pendant; 2 small bells; bronze handle.	2nd c. CE	CIURANA I PRAST 2011, 147, 151–152, 169.
12 Periurban Dump, Segóbriga (Cuenca).	5-7 y	ND	IN	Fibula; bracelet; 3 necklace beads; pinecone/grape cluster pendant; bone feline figurine.	ca. 70 CE	CEBRIÁN FERNÁNDEZ 2024.
13 Avenida de Andalucía 76-85, Burial 15, Gadir (Cádiz).	Child	ND	IN	2 bone plaques with prominent phallic motif; winged bronze phallus with suspension loop; glass paste pendant of god Bes; circular bone bead; poorly preserved phallic bone pendant; seven glass beads.	Roman period	PERDIGONES/TROYA/MUÑOZ 1987, 72–73.
14 Corner of C/ Ciudad de Santander and Avenida de Andalucía 86, Burial 14, Gadir (Cádiz).	ND	ND	IN	Copper <i>bullula</i> (?).	Roman period	PERDIGONES/MUÑOZ/TROYA 1987, 44.
15 Future City of Justice Site, Gadir (Cádiz).	> 1 y	ND	ND	2 bone necklace beads; bone phallus/ <i>fica</i> pendant.	1st c. CE	SIBÓN/GÓMEZ/NIVEAU 2004, 151; VALLEJO 2009, 52–53; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 165, 314.

SITE	AGE	SEX	FR	GRAVE GOODS	CHRONOLOGY	REFERENCES
16 Future City of Justice Site, Northwest sector, Unit 10-05, Inhumation 10, Gadir (Cádiz).	Child	ND	IN	Coin perforated at centre near feet; 2 glass paste hoops near feet.	ND	SIBÓN 2007: 5; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010: 374; ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 98, Fig. 65; 158, no. 35.1.1.10.
17 C/ Brunete 2-8, Burial 15, Unit 24 (Cádiz).	Child	ND	IN	Necklace: Roman Republican <i>denarius</i> (unclassifiable); 4 spherical glass beads; phallic bone pendant; bronze <i>bullā</i> . In proximity: suid tooth; bone needle.	3rd-1st c. BCE	BLANCO JIMÉNEZ 1996, 10-11; ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 151; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 97, Table no. 62.
18 Fernando Portillo Pavilion Site, Umit 441, Inhumation 88 (Cádiz).	Child	ND	IN	Perforated <i>denarius</i> of Trajan (unclassifiable); glass bead; cowrie shell; small silver pendant (all found in the right hand over the hip).	Imperial period	ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 151, no. 31.1.1.2; ANDÚJAR SUÁREZ/BLÁZQUEZ CERRATO 2019, 97, no. 62.
19 C/ Santa Cruz de Tenerife 1 corner with Calle Santa María del Mar Structure No. 52 (Cádiz).	1-2 y	ND	IN	As of Domitian with textile remains, placed on the chest.	1st c. CE	ARÉVALO GONZÁLEZ/MORENO PULIDO 2016, 130, no.13.1.1.17.
20 C/ San Vicente and Mesón de Teruel 26-32., Unit 1213, Valentia (Valencia).	2-4 y	F	IN	Bone pendant; 2 gold earrings; glass bottle; folded rectangular lead plaque (container) with deciduous tooth and unidentified bronze objects inside; glass beads; small gold decorative elements from a possible ring; Early Imperial <i>as</i> (heavily worn); small animal remains.	2nd c. CE	GARCÍA-PRÓSPER/POLO CERDÀ/MELCHOR/BENEDITO 2005; BENEDITO NUÉZ/MELCHOR MONSERRAT/SEGÚ MARCO 2007, 634; CAMPO 2011, 96.
21 C/ Quart de Valencia (Burial 149), Valentia (Valencia).	Child	ND	IN	Coin (unclassifiable); <i>bullā</i> ; faunal remains (<i>Canis familiaris</i>).	Early Imperial	GARCÍA-PRÓSPER/POLO CERDÀ/MELCHOR/BENEDITO 2005, 538; GARCÍA-PRÓSPER 2016, 289, no. 149.
22 C/ San Bartolomé Gallardo, Augusta Emerita (Mérida).	Child	ND	IN	Bone hand-shaped pendant (<i>fica</i>).	1st c. CE.	MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2005, 7.
23 "Los Bodegones" (5038/A26) Unit 122. Augusta Emerita (Mérida).	> 5 mo	ND	IN	Bone hand-shaped pendant.	Early Imperial	CORTESÃO SILVA 2018/2019, 193, 195.
24 <i>Puticulum</i> , C/ Cabo Verde s/n, Burial 109, Augusta Emerita (Mérida).	Perinat.	ND	IN	Small bronze phallic pendant.	Early Imperial	PÉREZ MAESTRO 2007, 165; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 308-309.
25 C/ Tomás Romero de Castilla and Antonio Hernández Gil, Burial A48, Augusta Emerita (Mérida).	> 1 y	ND	IN	Gold ring inscribed V F (" <i>vtvte felix</i> ").	From 3rd c. CE	MÉNDEZ GRANDE 2006, 341.
26 Avenida de Cataluña and C/ Adelardo Covarsí s/n, Augusta Emerita (Mérida).	Child	ND	C	Gold ring, VT F (" <i>vtvte felix</i> "); gold <i>bullā</i> ; silver Republican coin; silver coin with gold mount; 2 bronze Imperial coins.	Late 2nd-early 3rd c. CE	MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 66, 92, 97, 99, 101, 149-150.
27 Avenida de Cataluña and C/ Adelardo Covarsí s/n, Augusta Emerita (Mérida).	Juv. (?)	ND	C	Amber ring; amber zoomorphic pendant; 3 carnelian beads, strung on silver wire; bronze bell.	2nd half 1st-2nd c. CE	MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 101, 149-150; BARRERO MARTÍN 2023, 608.
28 Avenida de Cataluña and C/ Adelardo Covarsí s/n, Augusta Emerita (Mérida).	Child	ND	C (?)	Basket contents: amber fruits, 2 nuts and 1 egg; rock crystal amphora; bronze mirror; toys (?); green stone gem with male figure holding knife cutting grape cluster.	1st c. CE	MÁRQUEZ PÉREZ 2021, 138.
29 La Trinidad Necropolis, Hispalis (Seville).	Child	ND	IN	<i>Bullā</i> .	Late Imperial	CARRASCO GÓMEZ/DORESTE FRANCO 2005, 237; CARRASCO GÓMEZ/MARTÍN PRADAS 2014, 71.

	SITE	AGE	SEX	FR	GRAVE GOODS	CHRONOLOGY	REFERENCES
30	La Algodonera Necropolis, Plot R2.A3, Burial 22, Astigi (Écija).	Juv.	F(?)	C	Circular gaming piece; part of a needle; <i>acus crinalis</i> ; canteen; 4 common ceramic bowls; 2 oil lamps; 3 <i>unguentaria</i> ; <i>bulla</i> ; 5 nails; flint flake.	Late 1st–early 2nd c. CE	TINOCO MUÑOZ 2001, 916.
31	La Algodonera Necropolis, Plot R1.A2, Burial 18, Astigi (Écija).	Juv. (?)	F(?)	I	<i>Unguentarium</i> ; makeup spatula; <i>bulla</i> .	2nd half 1st c. CE	TINOCO MUÑOZ 2001, 912.
32	Southeast Necropolis, “Burial of the Great Stele”, Baelo Claudia (Bolonia, Cádiz).	ND	ND	C	Bronze mirror; silver stylus; glass/rock crystal necklace beads; spindle whorl; 2 silver <i>bullae</i> .	2nd c. CE	PARIS <i>et alii</i> 1926, 34 ff., Fig. 21, pl. IV; DE MERGELINA 1927, 10 ff., Fig. 4; VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 182.
33	Eastern necropolis, Burial I-16, Baelo Claudia (Bolonia, Cádiz).	Child	ND	-	<i>Bulla</i> .	4th c. CE	GARCÍA MATAMALA /LIÉBANA MÁRMOL 2006, 102.
34	Fábrica Nacional de Torpedos, Gadir (Cádiz).	Child (?)	ND	I	2 thin-walled vessels; bronze <i>bulla</i> ; gladiator figurine with articulated legs.	Late 1st c. CE	QUINTERO ATAURI 1932, 24; LAMO SALINAS 1983–1984, 68.
35	Sepulcretum of Llanos del Pretorio, Enclosure P, Burial 35 Corduba (Córdoba).	ND	ND	C	Glass <i>unguentarium</i> ; glass paste phallus pendant; glass paste flower pendant; 3 Peñaflor-type ceramic forms; poorly preserved copper object; miniature <i>scutum</i> on deer antler.	Early Imperial	VAQUERIZO GIL/RUIZ OSUNA/RUBIO VALVERDE 2019, 94 and 100.
36	Sepulcretum of Llanos del Pretorio, Enclosure P, Burial 47 Corduba (Córdoba).	ND	ND	C	36 glass beads; 2 bronze <i>bullae</i> ; bronze rod; worked bone sheet; poorly preserved bronze object.	Early Imperial	VAQUERIZO GIL/RUIZ OSUNA/RUBIO VALVERDE 2019, 94 and 100.
37	La Constancia Necropolis, Burial 5, Corduba (Córdoba).	ND	ND	ND	<i>Bulla</i> .	ND	VARGAS CANTOS 2002, 12.
38	Avenida del Corregidor, Burial 64, Corduba (Córdoba).	Child	ND	IN	Necklace: glass, bronze, worked bone, and shell beads; small glass phallus.	Augustan period	VAQUERIZO GIL 2010, 127.
39	Plaza de la Magdalena, Eastern Necropolis, Inhumation I-16 Corduba (Córdoba).	Child	ND	IN	Small pot, fire-exposed; <i>bulla</i> (authors write “ <i>bullae</i> ”), between the feet.	Late 3rd–4th c. CE	GARCÍA MATAMALA /LIÉBANA MÁRMOL 2006, 102.
40	Las Reliquias Necropolis (Cartaya, Huelva).	Child	ND	IN	Jet anthropomorphic pendant with grotesque features.	4th–7th c. CE	LÓPEZ DOMÍNGUEZ/CASTILLA REYES/DE HARO ORDÓÑEZ/QUINTERO CRISTÓBAL 2004, 1698–1699; MENÉNDEZ MENÉNDEZ 2023, 580–581.
41	C/ Victoria 22-24, Burial T-237, Malaga (Málaga).	2-4 y	ND	IN	3 iron nails; 2 coins (unclassifiable); small bell; <i>unguentarium</i> .	Late 2nd c. CE	PIÑERO PALACIOS 2019: 147–48.
42	Almanzora cave, Burial 887, Villaricos (Almería).	Child	ND	IN	Bronze <i>as</i> in cloth, beside body.	2nd–1st c. BCE	ALFARO ASINS 1993, 275; ALFARO ASINS 2001, 48; CAMPO 2011, 82.

FR: Funerary Rite; IN: Inhumation; C: Cremation/ mo: months; y: years/ Perinat: Perinatal; Juv: Juvenile/ F: Female / ND: Not determined