

Pazuzu: The Frightening Face Worn for Protection

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The snarling face of Pazuzu could be worn to turn danger outward. Assyrian amulets reveal a protective role for a feared wind demon very different from his later horror-film reputation.

STATUS	Archaeologically attested protective amulets; religious and magical functions documented
CLASSIFICATION	STR
MATERIAL	Assyria and Mesopotamia
DISPOSITION	PUBLIC / SOURCED STORY
CATEGORY	Strange Files
RECORD TYPE	Ancient stories
STORY HISTORY	Surviving imagery from the late 8th century BCE onward

THE ACCOUNT

The face is small enough to wear but designed to confront whatever approaches: bulging eyes, a snarling mouth and a thin neck beneath the head. A bronze Pazuzu pendant in the Met's collection hangs so that its gaze points away from the wearer. The creature associated with dangerous winds could also repel a different threat, Lamashtu. Protection came through directing one frightening power against another, with the demon's features carried into daily life.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

The Metropolitan Museum dates this pendant to approximately the eighth or seventh century BCE and places the earliest known Pazuzu imagery in the late eighth century. Its catalogue explains the outward-facing suspension and protective association. These objects belong to first-millennium Assyrian and Mesopotamian traditions; calling every example 'Sumerian' would blur important differences in time and culture. The surviving amulets show what people made and used, without verifying the supernatural powers they sought.

WHY IT STAYS WITH US

Appearance alone can mislead a modern viewer. A face that seems to announce danger may have been intended to stand between danger and a vulnerable person. Holding that double role in mind changes the object from a simple monster image into something more human: a portable answer to fear, worn close to the body.

WHERE THIS TELLING COMES FROM

Pendant with the head of Pazuzu

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327485>

Mesopotamian Magic in the First Millennium B.C.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

<https://www.metmuseum.org/es/essays/mesopotamian-magic-in-the-first-millennium-bc>

RETURN TO THE STORY

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