Los papiros mágicos griegos: entre lo sublime y lo cotidiano

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PALEOGRAPHY OF MAGICAL HANDBOOKS:
AN ATTEMPT?*

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Resumen: Esta contribución explora las posibilidades de un estudio paleográfico de dos papiros mágicos griegos (PGM VII y PGM XXXVI) no solo con la intención de fijar una datación de los mismos, sino también (y quizás sea más importante) con la intención de entender el entorno en el que las copias se llevan a cabo y por tanto su propósito, mediante una comparación con manos similares en diferentes formatos de libro tanto con contenido literario como documental.

Summary: This contribution aims at exploring the possibilities of the paleographical study of two Greek magical papyri (namely PGM VII and PGM XXXVI) not only in terms of determining an approximate date of the documents but also, and perhaps more importantly, with a view to understanding the scribal environment in which they were produced, and therefore what purpose they were intended for, in comparison to similar hands in different book formats and literary and documentary content.

Key Words: paleography; book production; scribal practice.

Though the vagueness of paleographical dating is a problem which affects in general the study of ancient books, it is in itself a question that has never been raised properly in the case of the Greek Magical books on papyri preserved from Antiquity. There is hardly any more than a brief description and superficial dating in the general studies on each of these pieces. Being the content of the handbooks what was in the focus of all research, the material dimension of the magical books has often been overlooked. “The texts of the

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PGM are usually read simply as sources, but they may also be seen as documents in their own right\(^1\). In recent times, these are again an object of study: scribal practice, paleography, page layout, book production. The question of the paleographical dating we want to address in this paper naturally concerns the relationship of the hands found in these magical books when compared to their contemporary literary and documentary hands. We have chosen two magical handbooks, PGM VII and PGM XXXVI, to explore their origin and their parallels, in order to provide a possible scribal environment for the books.

PGM VII (TM 60204) is a magical handbook written on an opistographic roll. It is preserved at the British Library (P.Lond. inv. n. 121)\(^2\). Its origin is not clear, but some scholars link the papyrus to the so-called Theban Library. The hoard of magical texts known as the Theban Library is composed by a number of papyrus codices and rolls, mostly presenting the text of magical handbooks in Greek, Demotic and Coptic. These have been considered as originating from the same find since they were allegedly bought and sold by Anastasi to different European institutions. This belief is open to question and probably needs to be researched fully with the aid of the few archives available to us today. Recently, for example, K. Dosoo proved that PGM VII does not belong to the Anastasi lot\(^3\). Although it is not necessarily basic to our question, it is true that a ‘library’ can be composed of books produced in different periods, and that the fact that they belong to a single hoard does not help much with dating the piece\(^4\).

The papyrus presents nineteen columns on the recto and thirteen on the verso, three of them having been written by a second hand at a later moment. The scribe is an experienced one; in the words of Raquel Martín a “professional compiler of books”\(^5\), to judge from the use he makes of lectional signs such as the paragraphos, forked paragraphos, asteriscus with forked paragraphos, dashes and other graphic devices, such as indentation, ekthesis, use of inter-punctuation and blank spaces to separate magical words, and even ornamentation, present in titles and ends of sections.

The date of the papyrus has been object of controversy; Kenyon and Wessely\(^6\), its first editors, assigned it to the third and third-fourth centuries CE,

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\(^1\) Gordon (1997) 81.
\(^2\) The papyrus was edited for the first time by Kenyon (1893) 83-115 and afterwards by Wessely (1893) 16-55. It was afterwards edited by Preisendanz in 1931 as PGM VII; see Preisendanz-Henrichs (1973\(^2\)-1974\(^2\)). On discussion and bibliography see Martín Hernández (forthcoming).
\(^3\) Dosoo (unpublished paper).
\(^5\) Martín Hernández (forthcoming).
\(^6\) Kenyon (1893), Wessely (1893).
respectively. Preisendanz\(^7\) to the third century, and Maltomini\(^8\) to the fourth-fifth century CE. Finally, Bagnall\(^9\) assigns it to the early third century.

As pointed out by Cavallo\(^10\), one of the main factors in the formation of the byzantine cursive and semi-cursive hands is the apparition of the so-called graphic Graeco-Roman \textit{koiné} in IV CE: as a consequence of the administrative changes in Diocletian’s time, Latin started to be more widely used in Egypt, and thus the number of scribes using both Greek and Latin scripts increased. This brought about the use of the same graphemes with different values in each language, and ultimately accelerated the establishment of the minuscule system in the Greek script. Now, if we observe the hand of \textit{PGM VII} we will be able to detect this phenomenon: the shape of \(\delta\) is the same as that of Latin \(d\) (though not always), and that of \(\eta\) is many times similar to that of Latin \(h\), for instance. On account of this fact, therefore, we should not be inclined to think of a date earlier for our papyrus than IV CE\(^{11}\).

Despite the use of ligatures (between \(\varepsilon\) and \(\iota\), above all, but also \(\alpha\), \(\delta\) and \(\lambda\) appear frequently ligatured with the following letter) and the enlargement of some letters, both typical of the documentary hands of the Byzantine period\(^{12}\), our hand presents traits of the traditional majuscule system: thus \(\mu\), \(\nu\), \(\pi\) are definitely majuscule, and, as said before, majuscule forms of \(\delta\) and \(\eta\) are to be found together with their corresponding minuscule forms. A brief look at some examples of administrative hands from the fourth and fifth centuries typically showing the entrance of minuscule elements deriving from the Graeco-Roman \textit{koiné} will clearly show the differences with our papyrus: thus \textit{P.Oxy. 63}, 4370\(^{13}\), as early as 354 CE; \textit{PSI XII 1239}\(^{14}\), from 430 CE; and \textit{PSI X 1114}\(^{15}\), also in the fifth century, 454 CE. In all three cases the profusion of ligatures provides a general appearance of cursiveness, and some strokes, such as those of \(\lambda\), the upper parts of ligatured \(\varepsilon\), and sometimes those of \(\upsilon\) and \(\varsigma\), reveal the tendency to flaring so typical of later Byzantine cursive hands, but absent from the script in \textit{PGM VII}. Our papyrus seems to present the kind of hands which incorporate traits from the Graeco-Roman \textit{koiné} and some minuscule elements, but keep alongside capital detached letters, and that are, in the words

\(^7\) Preisendanz-Henrichs (1973\(^2\)-1974\(^2\)).

\(^8\) Maltomini (1995).

\(^9\) Bagnall (2009).

\(^10\) Cavallo (2008) 121.

\(^11\) We thus coincide with Martín Hernández (forthcoming).

\(^12\) Cavallo (2008) 119.

\(^13\) TM 22133, reproduced in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri website (http://163.1.169.40/cgi-bin/library?aq&tr=1&hs=1&ep=0-000-00---0POxy--00-0-0--0prompt-10---4------0-1l--1-en-50---20-about---00031-001-1-0utfZz-8-00&h=ded&tt=1&q=4370).


of Cavallo, “adoperate sia nell’uso documentario sia nell’uso librario per testi profani e cristiani”\textsuperscript{16}. It is in this sense that we should understand the use of lectional signs we have alluded to above, and the awareness of the scribe as to how to use them to structure his text\textsuperscript{17}. We are therefore in front of a semi-cursive Byzantine hand that has already incorporated some traits originating from the scribal administrative practice, expert and quickly executed, as the ligatures and the use of abbreviations show, but well acquainted with the writing of literary texts.

PGM XXXVI (TM 64479) is another opistograph Greek magical hand-book\textsuperscript{18}. This roll is preserved at the University Library in Oslo (P. Oslo 1) and, like the previous one, has been dated to the fourth century CE. The papyrus comes from Theadelphia, in the Fayum, and although it is similar in some aspects to other documents grouped within the Anastasi collection, as de Haro and Zago suggest\textsuperscript{19}, in principle it should be excluded from the group by reason of its provenance\textsuperscript{20}.

On the recto side the text is arranged in 12 columns, whereas the other side has been written transversa charta; that is, after having turned the roll 45º, so as to write in the same direction of the fibres. That cols. 1 to 12 have been written before the ones on the other side is also clear from the disposition of the text and the lavishness of the production: cols. 1 to 10 present just one recipe per column, which is in some cases accompanied by an illustrative drawing. Column 11, however, contains two recipes, and, the same as col. 12 and the text on the other side, is not provided with any drawings. It seems as if the scribe realised that he was running out of space at the same time he progressed in the writing\textsuperscript{21}.

As is the case for PGM VII, PGM XXXVI shows a fairly quick execution and has been written by an experienced scribe. However, letters are here capital and, even if they touch each other, they are rarely ligatured. In fact, the

\textsuperscript{16} Cavallo (2008) 131.
\textsuperscript{17} See Martín Hernández (forthcoming) for an organization of the text according to the use of the lectional signs in PGM. She also points out parallels in the use of the decorative devices in literary texts produced contemporaneously to ours.
\textsuperscript{18} It was first published by Eitrem (1925), and then subsequently edited by Preisendanz as PGM XXXVI; Preisendanz-Henrichs (1973\textsuperscript{2}-1974\textsuperscript{2}). See infra in this same volume Suárez de la Torre pp. 69
\textsuperscript{20} See, however, Bagnall (2009) 85, for the possibility of books produced at different times being kept together by a single individual. The same might perhaps be said of books coming from different places.
\textsuperscript{21} See Suárez de la Torre in this volume for a detailed description of the arrangement of text and images in the papyrus, and for an interpretation of this peculiar disposition.
hand resembles exemplars of the Sloping Pointed Majuscule quickly executed, such as P.Herm. 4 and 5\textsuperscript{22}, from the first quarter of the fourth century, and P.Bodm. IV\textsuperscript{23}, assigned to the third-fourth centuries CE. Now, the Sloping Pointed Majuscule is one of the four types identified by Cavallo and Maehler\textsuperscript{24} as bookhands in the early Byzantine period. According to Cavallo it derives from the slanting type of the Formal Mixed or Severe style, a typical bookhand from the third century CE: “Lo stile severo ad asse diritto si evolve in quella scrittura che in età bizantina viene chiamata maiuscola ogivale diritta ... ma a quest'epoca [IV-V AD] gli esempi restano rari, mentre la vera fioritura di questa scrittura si ha in età mediobizantina, e quindi in epoca assai più tarda. Enorme diffusione hanno invece dal secolo IV in poi le scritture originate o ispirate dallo stile severo ad asse inclinato, tra cui si enuclea la maiuscola ogivale inclinata...”\textsuperscript{25}.

As is the case with other bookhands, the Sloping Pointed Majuscule is not restricted to literary texts, and we can find instances of documentary papyri written in this script: in fact, both P.Herm. 4 and 5, cited above, are private letters belonging to the Theophanes’ archive\textsuperscript{26}. We have also seen that the hand used to write PGM VII can be found in both documentary and literary hands, and both papyri feature signs of book production, such as the use of lectional signs and the presence of titles and ornamentation in PGM VII, or the generous use of space for at least the first columns of PGM XXXVI, with drawings and magical words arranged around or inside them, but the difference remains that whereas PGM VII was written in a documentary semi-cursive hand\textsuperscript{27}, PGM XXXVI was written by someone who mastered a graphic style.

\textsuperscript{22} TM 21122, reproduced in Cavallo-Maehler (1987) [2a], and TM 21123, reproduced in Turner - Parsons (1987) [70], respectively.

\textsuperscript{23} TM 61594, reproduced in Cavallo (2008) [88]; for the fragments of the same codex in Cologne, see http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/ifa/NRWakademie/papyrologie/Karte/VIII_331.html

\textsuperscript{24} Cavallo-Maehler (1987). The others are the Upright Pointed Majuscule, a variant of the sloping pointed type with a vertical axis, the Alexandrian Majuscule and the Biblical Majuscule.\textsuperscript{25} Cavallo (2008) 111. It should be said that there is also continuity in the other two types of bookhands of the Byzantine period; the Alexandrian majuscule is related to the Coptic uncial of the Roman period, just as the Biblical majuscule is a development of the Biblical uncial of the Roman period. For a detailed study of the pointed majuscule see Crisci (1985).

\textsuperscript{26} The Heroninus archive, a century earlie, similarly shows documentary texts written in Formal Mixed of the slanting type, such as P.Flор. 2.259 (TM 11146); see Roberts (1956) pl. 22d; P.Flор. 2.108 (TM 11117), pl. 22a; and P.Ryl. 1.57, pl. 22c, all dating shortly before or shortly after 260 CE. See also Cavallo (2008) 109, who points out that this type of slanting hand may result in a semi-cursive hand when executed with a quick ductus.

\textsuperscript{27} Of course there are many examples of literary texts written in very informal, semi-cursive and even cursive hands, similar to those used to write documentary texts: Cf. Turner-Parsons (1987) 1, where, to cite some famous examples, they mention P. Lond. Lit. 108 (TM 59294), Aristotle, Athenai on Politeia (reproduced at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref= Papyrus_131) late first century CE, and P. Musée du Louvre inv. 3320 (TM 59084) also from the first century CE, reproduced there in p. 45 (no. 16).
The style of writing mainly used for book production. This raises several questions: in the first place, why should someone decide to write this kind of text according to book production standards? In the second place, and related to the previous question, who was the recipient of this copy? For it is unlikely that it was meant for the scribe’s own use, to judge from the lavish layout originally planned for the document. And lastly, which kind of environment would have produced such a book?

The new circumstances that opened the Byzantine period, chiefly the consequences of the economic crisis in the third century CE and the advent of Christianity as the official religion, substantially altered the way books were produced and circulated in Antiquity: the decline of urban life progressively reduced literacy and education in general to the boundaries of more or less private environments, such as wealthy estates or monastic communities, where classical texts were copied alongside with Christian texts, many times for the purposes of education, but sometimes for private libraries catering for the taste of the period. Rather than scriptoria with professional scribes in the style of those in thriving cities of the first centuries of the empire, when considering book production in the Byzantine period we should think of a minority of cultured population who mastered formal styles of writing to a higher or lesser degree and who wrote basically for themselves or their close circle. It is no coincidence that the hand in \textit{PGM} XXXVI resembles that of the Bodmer Menander, part of the so-called “Dishna papers”, about which there is still debate as to whether they belonged to a private or a monastic library with educational purposes. The name “Dishna papers” identifies a hoard of codices and other papyrus documents found in the Thebaid in 1952, very close to Atripe (White Monastery) and the supposed site where Pbow, the headquarters of the Pachomian monastic order, was placed. Found by local inhabitants in an earthen vessel, the codices were first bought by a gold dealer in Dishna, who sold most of what he had to Phocion J. Tano, a well known antiquarian in Cairo. The greatest part was purchased by Martin Bodmer and Sir Chester Beatty.

The Montserrat Codex, very probably belonging to these “Dishna papers” and showing a hand similar to the one discussed for \textit{PGM} XXXVI in the Greek

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28 See \textit{infra} the proposal of Suárez de la Torre, pp.69
29 Very representative of this phenomenon is the house found in Amheida, in the Dakhleh Oasis, with a school annexed to it, see Cribiore-Davoli (2013).
sections, features the miscellaneous character we have alluded to above: both Christian and pagan, even Latin and Greek texts. Among the codices from the hoard, besides the Biblical and Christian material (liturgical and homiletical) to be expected in a monastic library, there is an important presence of Classical literature: Homer (including scholia), Menander, Thucydides, Achilles Tatius. There is also documentary material and school texts including exercises in grammar, lexicography and mathematics. There are texts in three different languages: Latin, Greek and Coptic (in several dialects). And there is more than one miscellaneous codex.

Now, is it possible to think of a magical handbook produced in such an environment? Magic would certainly not fit in the context of a monastic library, but there is no reason to think that it would be excluded from that of a well off citizen or estate owner that might have commissioned a copy of the recipes he was interested in the pleasant form of a book as the ones he owned.

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32 Where he might also hold books for educational purposes, as it probably happened in the house of Ahmeida mentioned above.


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