Techniques of Graeco-Egyptian Magic

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Techniques of Graeco-Egyptian Magic

[Introduction and Contents]

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Contents

1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is Magic

This book looks at very specific identifiable techniques, consumables, *nomina magica* and implements found in the Greek Magical Papyri, and how they were used, and not just at generalized themes.

These papyri are the source of many of the magical techniques and equipment found in later European magic. The mediaeval Solomonic grimoires, and indeed most of the Solomonic magical tradition in both the Latin and Greek worlds, owe their earliest origins to the Graeco-Egyptian papyri (the *PGM*), not to some unknown Hebrew antecedents, not just in a general or thematic sense, but in the transmission of specific techniques, words and implements from one culture to another.

This book utilises the handbooks written by or used practically by the magicians themselves and approaches this magic as another form of technology. The sources are therefore primarily the ancient papyri written by the practitioners of magic themselves rather than those written by their later (predominantly Christian) adversaries. My approach is very similar to Ritner's when he wrote of Egyptian magic:

> To date, no treatment of Egyptian magic has concentrated upon the actual practice of the magician. Both general studies and textual publications have emphasized instead the religious elements in the contents of recited spell, while the accompanying instructions with their vignettes and lists of materials, instruments, and ritual actions remained uninvestigated. This study represents the first critical examination of such "magical techniques," revealing their widespread appearance and pivotal significance for all Egyptian "religious" practices from the earliest periods through the Coptic era, influencing as well the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri.[1]

While Ritner's book was amongst the first to investigate the actual practices of Dynastic Egyptian magic,[2] this book is the first to examine in detail the practices used in the first five centuries of the common era with its mixture of Greek and Egyptian magic.

By using the term 'magician' there is no implied or overt claim for special powers on the part of the practitioner, simply an assertion that the people so designated were practitioners of magical techniques. Just as the terms 'carpenter' or 'priest' define a trade or a profession, rather than a claim to special skill or special sanctity.

The fact that such techniques have been utilized consistently over long periods of time often by learned people suggests that some apparent consistency of results was obtained. Otherwise if no such consistency of results had been obtained, then one might expect to find a wide and random diversity of fantasy techniques being independently invented and speculatively tried out at different times and in different cultures: but this is not the case. There is instead a systematic development of techniques with a few being dropped (such as *defixiones*) and some being added (such as the circle of protection) to the repertoire, but with the core techniques remaining the same. As William Brashear once remarked:

> These two papyri, the Philinna papyrus and the Oxyrhynchus parallel, written as they

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[1] Ritner (2008), p.2.
[2] See also Budge (1971), Pinch (2006) and Rankine (2006).

were five to six centuries apart from each other, provide remarkable testimony to the conservatism of magic and magicians in antiquity.[3]

Mankind has a long history of discarding machines and methods that do not work, yet many detailed magical techniques survived literally for thousands of years. As Betz puts it:

> It is one of the puzzles of all magic that from time immemorial it has survived throughout history, through the coming and going of entire religions, the scientific and technological revolutions, and the triumphs of modern medicine. Despite all these changes, there has always been an unbroken tradition of magic. Why is magic so irrepressible and ineradicable, if it is also true that its claims and promises never come true? Or *do* they?[4]

A Working Definition of Magic

Before proceeding, it is necessary to define the term 'magic' as it is the subject of this book. The most fundamental problem for modern academics in defining 'magic' is that any accurate definition of magic *must* involved the concepts of another world of spirits, daimones and gods, because this was the premise from which most magicians worked. For an atheist, for whom these entities simply do not exist, the problem of defining the art or science that deals with them is insoluble. This is not meant as a condescending statement, just one which suggests that analysis of any subject cannot be satisfactorily begun if the basic premises of that subject (be they true or false) are overlooked or completely omitted. This situation is what lies at the root of modern academic difficulties with the definition of magic. Such attempts at defining magic are on a par with the scientist who does not believe in the existence of radio waves, yet tries to explain the functioning of a radio: it cannot be done without making a complete nonsense of the definition.

Maybe the procedure of physicists is an appropriate way of proceeding. They define a theoretical particle which nobody has seen (such as a *quark, lepton or boson*), and then proceed to see if its behaviour fits their mathematical models. In the present context, the equivalent of this procedure is to accept the theoretical existence of gods, angels, daimones and spirits, and then to move on from there to define magic in terms of their manipulation. In the ancient world the existence of daimones, spirits and gods was a given. Any definition recognizable by, and welcomed by, its ancient practitioners would have to include mention of daimones, gods, spirits, etc. And, more importantly, it would then be a definition which allows for reasonable discourse about the subject.

As so many scholars have laboured unsuccessfully to create a 'modern' definition of the term magic, I intend to cut the Gordian knot by utilising a definition which is much closer to the sense the ancients gave it, by returning to the original meaning of *magia*, with a meaning that would have been understood by its practitioners in Late Antiquity.

If this involves a nod in the direction of the existence of gods, daimones and spirits, then so be it. Without such a nod, the effort resembles that of the man who would describe chess without acknowledging the existence of the invisible rules which govern the movement of the individual pieces. Such rules have no real existence, but without them the game of chess is impossible to play, or even to write sensible

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[3] Brashear (1998), p. 374.
[4] Betz (1996), p. xlvii-xlviii.

commentary upon. Likewise it is very difficult to examine or comment upon magic without acknowledging the 'spiritual creatures' which are part of its basic premises, as understood by its practitioners.

I would therefore like to offer a working definition of magic that is based on how it was practised in the Greek speaking Mediterranean, and which avoids modernisation, social theory, or the moral challenges of theological definition:

> Magic is the art of causing change through the agency of spiritual creatures rather than via directly observable physical means: such spiritual creatures being compelled or persuaded to assist, by the use of sacred words or names, talismans, symbols, incense, sacrifices and *materia magica*.

Here 'spiritual' is defined to mean non-physical, with no ethical connotation, and 'spiritual creature' to mean a non-physical entity, ranging in definition or substance from elementals, spirits, demons, daimones, angels, archangels, gods and goddesses, to discarnate humans (both saintly and prematurely dead).[5] The use of this terminology which was in widespread use in Europe up to the mid-17th century[6] might be hard for modern readers to digest, particularly those who come from a Judaeo-Christian background where the notion of 'spirituality' is totally opposed to the very existence of spirits. In modern times the word 'spiritual' does surface in the practices of 'spiritualism' or 'spiritism' where the medium deals with the dead, but the term is still not understood in its wider meaning.

So for the purposes of this book 'spiritual creature,'[7] will be understood in exactly the same way that Dr John Dee understood it in the late 16th century when he wrote:[8]

> Suddenly, there seemed to come out of my Oratory a Spirituall creature, like a pretty girle of 7 or 9 yeares of age…[9]

Dee then began to converse with this girl via his skryer Edward Kelley, certain that she was an angel, a real spiritual creature. Such behaviour was not unique to Dr Dee. Other precedents for this usage exist, and at least one manuscript of the *Key of Solomon* refers in a similar fashion to angels as 'Créatures célestes.'[10] According to Zambelli:

> Ficino and his followers admitted the existence of spiritual beings (demons, angels and devils, anthropomorphic movers of astral bodies etc.) to whom it was possible to

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[5] The term 'spiritual creature' also saves the tiresome need to write out "gods, goddesses, spirits, demons, daimones, angels, archangels and elementals" every time they all need to be mentioned.

[6] This definition obviously does not cover 'natural magic' which was a category mentioned by Agrippa, and in current use by the Renaissance, probably devised specifically to avoid opposition from the Church, by eliminating mention of spirits and demons from its definition.

[7] A better term might have been *creaturum incorporalis*.

[8] Dr. John Dee was an Elizabethan polymath (1527-1608) who wrote books on geometry, navigation, alchemy, rectification of the calendar, and who promoted the idea of the British Empire. His interest in angelic invocation lead him to employ a succession of skryers, such as Edward Kelley, who provided Dee with a large amount of dictated messages and instruction from entities claiming to be angels or spirits. See Casaubon & Skinner (2011) for transcripts of these sessions which ran to many hundreds of manuscript pages.

[9] This description refers to the angel Madimi as described in BL Cotton Appendix MS XLVI, f. 1. See also BL Sloane MS 3188, fol. 8, and Clulee (1988), p. 179.

[10] BL Lansdowne MS 1203, ff. 7-8.

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address prayers, hymns or innocent spells.[11]

There was no doubt in the minds of most magicians of Late Antiquity, that the effects of magic were attributable to external 'spiritual creatures' be they gods, angels, daimones, or spirits, rather than to either the innate powers of the magician himself, or to some nebulous undefined pseudo-scientific 'force' or 'vibration.' In the Jewish world angels and demons were clearly seen as the driving forces behind the operation of magic, as confirmed by Trachtenberg:

> Demons and angels, to be counted only in myriads, populated that world; through their intermediacy the powers of magic were brought into operation. The most frequently employed [Hebrew] terms for magic were *hashba'at malachim* and *hashba'at shedim*, invocation and conjuration of angels and demons [respectively].[12]

It was considered, in the ancient world, that the main skill of a magician was to constrain these entities using the spoken and written word, sigils, talismans, suffumigations and sacrifices. The centrality of spiritual creatures to the operation of Mediterranean magic is again confirmed by Johnston:

> In short, it seems that many Mediterranean magicians considered the control of ghostly or demonic entities to be *essential* to the completion of their work: the better one was at controlling demons, the greater a magician one was.[13]

This definition therefore, leads naturally to the subject of this book: the examination of the technology of these words, sigils, talismans, suffumigations and sacrifices that the magicians used.

Magic divides this universe into a specific hierarchy of spiritual creatures in order to deal with it more effectively. Like any science, one of the first steps is analysis, where the constituent parts of the method need to be identified and labelled.[14] If magic is looked at in historical terms, as a practice, something people actually did, then magic can be examined and documented in the same way that one could research and document the production of parchment for writing, without condemning the process as primitive, or judging the morals or efficacy of the method. Nobody who owns a computer would now ever go to the trouble of pulling the skin off a sheep, soaking, stretching, scraping, liming and processing it for several weeks, before writing on it with ink made of soot and oak galls, but nobody can deny that this procedure produced a very durable writing surface that can last more than a thousand years.[15]

My point is that it is not necessary to take a psychological or even a social anthropological approach to magic. It is sufficient to examine what was done by magicians, on their own terms, and for their own reasons, as documented by its practitioners, in their own handbooks.

Delimiting the Definition

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[11] Zambelli (2007), p. 3.

[12] Trachtenberg (2004), p. 25.

[13] Johnston (2002), pp. 42-43, my italics.

[14] These labels are particularly important in magic, because of one of the primary axioms of magic is that all spiritual creatures can only be addressed and controlled when their true name is known.

[15] I am still surprised that I can easily read the contents of a manuscript from the Middle Ages, but can no longer access digital work written by myself on an obsolete computer just thirty years ago. Parchment may well prove more durable in the long run that easily deleted digital documents.

Before proceeding I would like to clarify the scope of this book by eliminating from it a number of subjects and techniques often associated with magic in popular literature, but which are not in fact parts of Graeco-Egyptian magic.

Although divination is often seen as part of magic, divination is essentially a passive method, whereas magic is nothing if not proactive. Divination seeks to foretell the future, while magic seeks to change the future. Three exceptions to this generalisation will be made, the first in the case of electional astrology. Electional and katarchic astrology have been used from time immemorial by magicians to determine the best time to conduct a rite. A second exception will be made in the case of techniques like *lychnomanteia*, *lekanomanteia* and *hygromanteia*, where skrying is supplemented by the active ritual evocation of daimones or spirits. The third exception is a divinatory method based on random lines from the works of Homer (*PGM* VII. 1-148). This will be explored in chapter 6.3 because it was used by the magician who owned that papyrus.

Oracles, although a few are present in the *PGM*, are not part of magic. In most cases these 'oracles' are not oracles in the same sense as the oracle at Delphi, but invocations of a god in order to receive answers or advice. The later procedure is part of magic. Emilie Savage-Smith makes the distinction:

> That magic seeks to alter the course of events, usually by calling upon a superhuman force…while divination attempts to predict future events (or gain information about things unseen) but not necessarily to alter them.[16]

As Fritz Graf rightly concludes, the confusion between magic and divination only dates from the early Christian era:

> Only when divination is read in terms of demonology, as in mainstream Christian discourse, do [the definitions of] divination and magic converge.[17]

Otherwise these two fields of endeavour are not really connected. Instead of referring to one of the practices of Graeco-Egyptian magicians as 'bowl divination,' I will instead refer to it rather more aptly as 'evocationary bowl skrying.' The same applies to 'lamp divination' which I will in future refer to as 'evocationary lamp skrying.'

In the ancient world magic was considered to be very real, and not a random assemblage of nonsense actions and words, and the insiders who practised it:

> …were far from illiterate, and some of these magical texts even display the scribal hands, writing styles, and modes of textual production which come only with many years of scribal learning and practice. Moreover, when we do find evidence outside the actual magical texts as to who practiced such magical rituals, that evidence repeatedly demonstrates the acceptance, and even practice, of magic by members of the Jewish elite, including the religious establishment itself… Most of these sources were not the product of Jewish "folk magic," but of "intellectual magic," produced by learned experts who mastered a specialized body of knowledge and consulted many different sources, sometimes in more than one language.[18]

Although these comments were applied to Jewish magic, they are equally applicable to other forms of European or Mediterranean littoral learned magic. Egyptian magicians, especially, were mostly of the priestly class.

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[16] Savage-Smith (2004), p. xiii.
[17] Graf (2011), p. 133.
[18] Bohak (2008), p. 36.

Greek Categorisation of Magic

The Greeks made a clear distinction between *goetia* (γοητεία) the magic of the *goes* (γόης), and that of *theurgia* (θεουργία). It is difficult to be sure of what was exactly meant by the ancient Greeks when they used the term γοητεία, as it was associated with rites for the dead. *Goetia* (γοητεία) and *goes* (γόης) were later used in the sense they acquired in the Latin grimoires of 'dealing with spirits,' rather than in the sense outlined in Johnston of 'dealing with the dead.'[19] Chapter 6.7 deals with the interface between Graeco-Egyptian magic and the dead.

Theurgia is a quite separate category, and is a descendant, via Porphyry and Iamblichus of Chalcis,[20] of the ancient Mysteries.[21] This usage has persisted through to 13th century (and later) grimoires.[22] It has been suggested that *theurgia,* meaning "divine work," was a term that might even have been invented by the group of Neoplatonically inclined magicians, including luminaries like Iamblichus, probably based in Alexandria around the 2nd century CE.[23] The theurgists were concerned with purifying and raising the consciousness of individual practitioners to the point where they could have direct communion with the gods. The theurgists were in a sense the inheritors of the ancient Greek Mysteries which aimed to introduce the candidate directly to the gods. There are four sections in the *PGM* which give instructions in these procedures, and these are categorised as rite type 'M,' and examined in chapter 7.0.

The *goes* (γόης), the practitioner of *goetia* (γοητεία), on the other hand, attempts to bring daimones/demons onto the physical plane and to manifest them, or their effects. The relationship of the practitioners of *theurgia* to practitioners of the *goetia* is that both attempt to invoke/evoke a spiritual creature (be it god, daimon, angel or demon). The *teletai* (τελεταί) priest does it for the benefit of the client's immortal soul while the *goes* does it to benefit the client's material desires. Dickie is of the opinion that:

> …although there are indications that *goetes, epodoi, magoi* and *pharmakeis* originally pursued quite different callings, there is no indication when the terms are first encountered in the fifth century that they refer to specialised forms of magic.[24]

Although it may well be true that there is too little evidence available from their earliest mentions to separate their specialised forms of magic, but these terms definitely identified different practices, and later usage of the terms *goetes* and *magoi* confirms this by being quite distinct. Rather than wrestling with the theoretical identification of these terms, for which there is on the whole too little evidence, I have instead divided these methods according to the type of spiritual creature being used.

Accordingly chapter 6 on Magical Techniques has been divided up according to the type of spiritual creature the magician wished to deal with, ranging from the gods (chapter 6.5) through daimones (chapter 6.6) to the dead (chapter 6.7). Chapter 6.4 deals with visions, dreams and skrying, while chapter 6.1 deals with techniques

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[19] Johnston (1999), pp. 102-103.

[20] Apart from Iamblichus, the other main source for theurgy is Proclus, a 5th century Neoplatonist. See also Johnston (2008) and Struck (2004), chapters 6-7 on Proclus.

[21] See chapter 1.2 for a fuller explanation of the relationship between the Mysteries and magic.

[22] The author of the *Juratus* defines 'theurgy' as a "sacramental rite, [or] 'mystery.'"

[23] Johnston (2008), p. 150.

[24] Dickie (2001), pp. 14-15.

relying on magical statues, rings and gemstones. Chapter 6.2 deals with inscribed magical devices ranging from simple amulets for paying clients, through talismans designed to achieve a particular magical end to phylacteries which were for the personal protection of the magician from the spiritual creatures he called (but only during the rite). Having made this division it became very obvious that the methods used divided along exactly the same lines.

1.2 The Relationship between Magic, the Mysteries and Religion

It is useful to first enter into a brief discussion of the relationships between magic, the Mysteries and religion for three very specific reasons:

i)   to further refine the definition of magic, in order to successfully avoid any confusion with religion;

ii) to isolate the four passages in the *PGM,* which are in fact Mystery and initiation rites, and not either magic or religion; and

iii) to further appreciate the distinction between the various types of magic.

The dichotomy between magic and religion has caused so much scholarly controversy over the last century or so, that it has even been categorised as an unsolvable dilemma by some scholars.[25] I would like to make some observations which may lead to such a solution, or at least to a very different viewpoint from which to perceive such a solution.

It is still often argued that religion deals with God or the gods, angels and saints, but only to implore their help, not to constrain it. This view, which is now somewhat superseded, dates back to the work of James Frazer in 1890.[26] There is some truth in this contention, but some techniques of magic overlap with the techniques of religion. Techniques such as prayer or consecration span both practices. On the other hand, religion also sometimes uses compulsion, when, for example, it indulges in exorcism. Even techniques such as animal sacrifice, as distasteful to the modern reader as it may be, were originally used by both magicians and priests in the service of their art or religion. One only has to look at the huge quantities of animals sacrificed by King Solomon at the inauguration of his temple in Jerusalem in order to appease Yahweh/El, to see that sacrifice is not the exclusive province of the magician or polytheist. Christ's New Testament miracles have much more in common with magic than they do with religion as currently conceived of by any mainstream church.[27]

The question of the relationship between magic and religion has, I feel, been inappropriately phrased, and the discussion should not centre around *two* opposing terms, but on the consideration of *three* terms. To solve this one needs to look at the whole spectrum of how mankind has attempted to relate to the unseen, to the gods and to other spiritual creatures.

Often the same act will produce different responses according to which side of the religion/magic divide the commentator sits upon. Brashear,[28] commenting on Kazhdan,[29] writes:

> The difference between holy and unholy miracles, he suggests, is in the miracle's aim and result: the saint rescues, feeds and comforts, creating good and exemplifying the Christian ideal. Unholy magic causes death, confusion, sexual misbehaviour and the like. Yet, in the final analysis, ambivalence is the order of the day, and the Byzantines

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[25] Betz (1991), pp. 244-247.
[26] For Frazer, and many other scholars since, religion was equated with Christianity.
[27] See Conner (2006) and Conner (2010).
[28] Brashear (1998), p. 253.
[29] Kazhdan (1995), pp. 73-82.

seem to have had no real criterion for distinguishing between a holy and an unholy miracle.

There is in fact no clear distinction because miracles are based on magic. To a large extent, this problem has been created by the Christian doctrinal view of magic. The early Church Fathers were in no doubt that magic was a real and internally consistent body of knowledge. For example, Origen wrote:

> …magic is not, as the followers of Epicurus and Aristotle think, utterly incoherent, but, as the experts in these things prove, is a consistent system, which has principles known to very few.[30]

Christian doctrine attempted to suppress magic because it viewed it as a very real force. The basic problem is that the question has been treated as a simple dichotomy of magic versus religion, whereas the missing 'middle term' is the Mystery religions, which is part of a *spectrum* of three modalities: religion – the Mysteries – magic. However, the problem remains a difficult one because the Mystery religions are missing from our 21st century experience, and do not exist any more in any form in any Western culture.

In the ancient world these were the three main ways that man sought to approach the unseen. The differences between these three can be defined by a number of criteria, each of which by itself is not sufficient to make the distinction, but taken together clearly demarcate these three modalities:

1. *Audience*. The first category, religion, deals with the gods on behalf of the congregation. The second, the Mysteries, takes a select few of the congregation and exposes them to experiences which (by all accounts) change their view of the world and their life for ever after. The significance of this change can be measured by the very small number of initiates who have ever broken their vows and written down an account of their experiences. The third category will often be performed for just one client, or just for the benefit of the magician himself.

2. *Degree of Secrecy*. Religion embraces all-comers and in many cases seeks to convert the non-believer or adherent of a rival religion to join its services. The Mysteries selected or accepted only a few individuals from the congregation who looked for (or paid for) a specific spiritual experience. Magic was even more secretive, and in most cases, actively discouraged new postulants or practitioners.[31] Clients were only included in the practice on a need-to-know or disciple basis.

3. *Degree of Specificity in Objectives*. Religion dealt with the general good, and assisted in various rites of passage such as birth, death and marriage, but the objectives will be general in nature such as blessing (baptism for birth, blessing for marriage, last rites for death). The Mysteries focused on the initiation or introduction to the god(s) of a few candidates, at a personal experiential level, and usually dealt just with one god, such as Dionysus or Demeter, with the single objective of initiation or immortalisation. The

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[30] Origen, *Contra Celsus* in Chadwick (1965), pp. 23-24.

[31] The degree of privacy was also used as a distinguishing factor between magic and religion by Emile Durkheim. Michael Bailey (2006), p. 3, pointed out that Marcel Mauss (Durkheim's nephew and pupil) defined magic as "private, secret, mysterious, and above all prohibited, while religion consisted of rites publicly acknowledged and approved."

prime objective of the immortality offered by the Mysteries should not be confused with "a place in heaven" offered by religion. Magic operates with a very specific end or single objective, but drawn from a very wide field of very concrete possibilities: love, lust, money, power, etc.

4. *Range of Entities encountered.* Religion deals with the gods, angels and saints. The Mysteries dealt with one specific god or goddess. Magic deals with the whole range of spiritual creatures: gods, angels, daimones, demons, elementals, spirits and even the dead.

5. *Privacy.* The nature of these three practices can also be summed up in terms of degree of privacy.

   a) Religion is practised in public in temples in front of all adherents by priests.

   b) The Mysteries (or holy *teletai*),[32] were celebrated in private by the *teletai*-priests only for the benefit of one or a very small number of initiates. It is very clearly different from religion which was practised openly in temples.[33]

   c) Magic is celebrated in private and/or secretly.[34] It was sometimes practised by the priests of a religion, but also by lay persons with the right training.

6. *Subject and Object.* Another possible way of looking at these three categories is in terms of subject and object.

   a) Religion: the Priest presents the god(s) to the people.

   b) Mysteries: the *teletai* priest presents a specific candidate to a specific god.

   c) Magic: the magician presents himself to, and adjures, the god or other spiritual creature.

If these definitions are applied, it becomes a lot easier to identify when a particular practice pertains to religion, Mystery or magic. To understand the magic of the *PGM*, it is useful to remember that all three modes of communication with the spiritual existed side by side, at that time when magic was considered a worthy and workable practice, and the Mysteries were still highly valued and flourishing.

It is my belief that it is precisely because of the monotheistic Judeo-Christian bias, and because of the missing modern experience of the Mystery religions, that the discussion of the relationship between magic and religion has not, in modern times, ever reached a satisfactory conclusion. By cutting out the middle term, the Mysteries, Christianity forever polarised magic and religion, instead of seeing it as part of a natural continuum in man's efforts to relate to the gods and other spiritual creatures.

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[32] *Teletai,* which is often translated as 'initiation,' derives from the Greek root *tele-* which means 'completion' or 'perfection.' 'Initiation' is a word which has been somewhat devalued in the last century. To the ancient Greeks it meant approaching the perfection of a god, or at the very least receiving a purification which enabled a mortal to meet with and converse with a god, in some form of fellowship, which was indeed the objective of the Mysteries. *PGM* IV contains several such Mystery rituals, for example lines 26-51 or 475-820.

[33] In the Dervani papyrus the practitioners were referred to as *mystai.*

[34] In the Dervani papyrus these practitioners were referred to as *magoi.* See Edmonds (2008), p.17.

Anthropological Interpretations

It is also now popular to embrace the idea that religion and magic can be understood through the work of anthropologists on the customs of primitive tribes in Africa or Australia, and from that to fallaciously deduce that religion and magic cannot be separated. MacMullen puts it:

> Now, the lessons of anthropology grown familiar, it is common to accept the impossibility of separating magic from religion...[35]

This idea may be common, but that does not ensure its truth. The anthropological analysis of the customs of primitive peoples is a world away from the discourse and understanding of pagan and Christian intellectuals living under the Roman or Byzantine Empires. Attempting to draw parallels between these two cultural groups is like suggesting that the architecture of an Azande village can in some way explain the glories of the Hagia Sophia. Reliance upon the conclusions of anthropologists based on completely different cultures to declare religion and magic inseparable is likewise a complete *non sequitur*.[36] It certainly would not have been difficult for the highly cultured occupants of the ancient world to draw this distinction.

Application of the Categorisation of Magic, Mysteries and Religion

One simple example, taken from the *PGM* helps to illustrate the usefulness of this three-fold categorization. One section of the papyri was designated by its early German translator, Albrecht Dieterich, as *Eine Mithrasliturgie*.[37] Dieterich, working in the Frazerian atmosphere of 1903, wanted to see this ritual as a part of religion, allowing him to characterise it as worthy, so seizing upon one of the few god names present, he called it the *Mithras Liturgy*.[38] Despite Dieterich's undoubted fame as a scholar, the text was neither Mithraic nor was it a liturgy.[39] Franz Cumont was quick to point this out,[40] but Dieterich was not to be moved, and the argument continued for the next quarter century. An appreciation that the text was not either religion or magic, but a Mystery rite, might have solved this confrontation.[41]

Even a cursory reading will confirm that 'Mithra' appears once, but only as part of a clear backward reference to a previous event, rather than as the addressee of the current rite.[42] In addition, not one of the known theological or symbolic themes of Mithraic 'ascent of the soul via the seven planetary spheres' appears in this text. Therefore, it is clearly not a Mithraic religious text. But Dieterich refused to be convinced, thinking that its complex and elegant structure must be part of some formal religion, not a piece of *volkskunde.* German scholars of that period, like

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[35] MacMullen (1997), pp. 143-144. Much of the main thrust of MacMullen's book is concerned with the identity or similarity of pagan religious and Christian religious practice, which while it may well be true, has little direct bearing on the relationship between religion (pagan or Christian) and magic.

[36] The fact that religion sometimes used magic, or that priests were often magicians also does not invalidate the basic distinction.

[37] Dieterich (1966). *PGM* IV, 475-829.

[38] A title which does not appear in the text itself in any form.

[39] Liturgy refers to religious services, more specifically where the worshippers' responses are complementary to the priest's work. This text contains neither priests nor worshippers.

[40] Cumont (1904), pp. 1-10.

[41] See chapter 7.2 for confirmation of this.

[42] *PGM* VI, 482.

Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, felt that classical scholars should only translate poetry, literature, hymns and religious rites, and not sully their hands with what he called *botokudenphilologie,* hence Dieterich's desire to see this text as a mainstream religious text.

In fact this particular passage, despite appearing in the *PGM* collection, is not in the strict sense magic either.

Applying the definition of the three modalities proposed above in terms of audience, degree of secrecy, specificity of objectives, range of entities addressed and privacy, we can clearly see the true nature of this passage:

1. *Audience.* The '*Mithras Liturgy*' is not a religious rite as it is not one designed to be performed in public.

2. *Secrecy.* The degree of secrecy is clear. The ritual is either a solitary one, or one "for an only child," and therefore it is not a religious ritual.

3. *Objectives.* The objective specified in the first line clearly marks it out as a Mystery rite, it being for the benefit of the writer's daughter, that she may become immortal (the most common objective of the Mysteries) and/or for the benefit of the writer.

   > I write these mysteries handed down… for an only child I request immortality, O initiates of this our power… so that I alone may ascend into heaven as an enquirer and behold the universe.[43]

   As Betz writes, "immortality is of course the primary benefit derived from the Mysteries (μυστήρια)."[44] The objectives are not love, wealth, power, sex, and so it is not a magic ritual, even though it is embedded in a papyrus amongst magic rituals. The objective is the immortalization of the initiate rather than the worship of a divinity (religion) or the constraining of other spiritual creatures for material benefits (magic).[45]

4. *Range of Entities.* The number of spiritual entities invoked is very limited, but it mentions Helios, Aiōn and Mithras (as a backward looking reference) and some other lesser daimones, but does not constrain them or threaten them, as would be typical of a magical text.

5. *Privacy.* In fact it is the procedure for a solitary Mystery rite, addressed directly to the greatest god, designed to confer immortality upon just one initiate. It is obviously practiced alone or simply between father and his only daughter.

Unsurprisingly, the Mystery rites are not found in later European forms of magic such as the *Hygromanteia* or the *Clavicula Salomonis,* precisely because they are not magic

The obvious conclusion is that it is a Mystery ritual imbedded in a magical papyrus, but not itself either magic, or religion. The point of this excursus is simply to show an example usage of the criterion set out above to practically distinguish between religion, the Mysteries and magic.

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[43] *PGM* IV, 475-485.
[44] Betz (2005), p. 94.
[45] Also the Mystery rites are more than four times longer than the longest magical rite in the *PGM,* marking it out as quite different from the other sections.

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