THE PERSISTENCE OF RITUAL IN THE MAGICAL BOOK OF MARY AND THE ANGELS:

P. HEID. INV. KOPT. 685

Marvin Meyer

In this essay, the focus of attention is upon a parchment codex that is part of the significant manuscript collection of the Institut für Papyrologie in Heidelberg, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685. This text, to which I have given an appropriate title in the light of its contents, “The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels,” is one of a number of magical manuscripts, or manuscripts of ritual power, in the collection. P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 consists of twenty parchment pages (ten leaves, or five sheets) assembled into a single-quire book. The five sheets were derived from the hide of an animal, and when prepared for the codex, the sheets were folded in half and bound together with parchment thongs tied on the outside at the “spine” of the book—the twenty-page book.

This Heidelberg book, “The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels,” may be compared, with its present contents, to other magical texts in the Heidelberg collection. According to the report of Richard Seider in “Aus der Arbeit der Universitätsinstitute: Die Universitäts-Papyrussammlung,” this text and others were acquired for the Heidelberg collection in 1930 by Carl Schmidt. Heidelberg papyrologist Friedrich Bibabel, in Griechische, koptische und arabische Texte zur Religion und religiösen Literatur in Ägyptens Spätzeit, classifies P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 with a number of these texts as all being part of the acquisition. These texts are the following, here listed with new inventory numbers:

- P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 678 (curse to harm a man and leave him impotent)
- P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 679 (curse to harm a person through the use of wax dolls)

* I dedicate this essay to Birger A. Pearson, a scholar and friend whose work on ancient texts has spanned many a year. [Professor Marvin Meyer died on August 16, 2012. Before his death, he gave the editors of this book permission to publish his contribution, in celebration of the career of his friend and colleague, Birger A. Pearson.]

2 Seider 1964, 163.
3 Bilabel-Grohmann. 1934.
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 680 (spell to help with power of speech)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 681 (curse against a woman’s face and work)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 682 (sexual curse to leave a man impotent)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 683 (spells to protect a woman, to attract a woman)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 684 (erotic spell of Cyprian of Antioch)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685 (“The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels”)
P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686 (“The Praise of Michael the Archangel”)

Several of these texts are published in the volume of Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power.*

Two of these texts, in addition to P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685, are particularly noteworthy. First, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 684 reproduces an erotic spell of Cyprian of Antioch. As the story goes, Cyprian attempted to seduce a Christian virgin, Justina, through the use of magic and ritual power, but when he was unsuccessful he converted to Christianity, threw his magical books away—and proceeded to become St. Cyprian, Bishop of Antioch. The story further suggests that Cyprian and Justina were martyred together at the time of the Emperor Diocletian, at the very beginning of the fourth century. P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 684 is a rag-paper booklet that presents what is alleged to be the magical spell once employed by Cyprian of Antioch.

Second, P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686 is a ritual handbook entitled, in the manuscript itself, “The Praise of Michael the Archangel.” This parchment codex contains a hymn of greeting and praise, offered by Michael, who is described in the text as a winged angel wielding a wand of power. Following a series of invocations, and a final adjuration for the empowerment of water and oil to be used in a ritual ceremony, twenty-one numbered prescriptions are listed for such problems as demon possession, domestic violence, male impotence, a wife’s unfaithfulness, infant death, insomnia, and the like. Initially published by Angelicus Kropp under the title *Der Lobpreis des Erzengels Michael,* P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686 went missing at the time of World War II, but in 1998 colleagues at the British Museum contacted me and asked for help with the identification of an obscure Coptic manuscript brought to their attention. It turned out to be P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 686, previously lost but now found.

Bibabel suggests that these several texts not only belong to the same acquisition, but also may come from a single “library,” “portfolio,” or “hoard” of texts and spells of ritual power. In his estimation they constitute “eine

---

4 Meyer-Smith 1999.
5 Kropp, 1966.