PSEUDEPIGRAPHY AND MAGIC

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1. THE “GREEK AND DEMOTIC MAGICAL PAPYRI” AS REPRESENTATIVE OF CONTEMPORARY TRENDS, INCLUDING LITERARY FORMS

In the following pages I will focus on the presence of pseudepigraphy in the magical papyri of Roman Imperial Egypt. However, I want to underline that this is but one among many features which connect these texts to cultural trends of diverse origin, belonging not only to this period, but also to the time of the original composition of the recipes, many of which come from Hellenistic Alexandria. The archives of the Egyptian House of Live accumulated not only the old Egyptian religious, medical and – generally speaking – literary works inherited since ancestral times, but also other texts of disparate origin and content, used by the scribes for different aims, according to their interests. Several of these volumes were of “pseudepigraphical” origin, that is, books falsely attributed to a wide range of authors, some of them very famous, some other less known, but likewise reinforcing the authority of the recipe, spell, or treatise. This trend is not exclusive of the magical papyri; on the contrary, it is a well-known trend shared by ancient literary corpora, particularly well-attested in Greece since the fourth century BC onwards, with a large variety of possibilities, as the chapters of the present volume show. In this aspect, the magical papyri follow a common tendency that must be added to other features aiming to endow the magical texts with instruments of appeal for a wide, Greek-speaking audience. Thus, to the use of the Greek language should be added the recourse to literary forms usual in religious contexts – for example, the Hymns – or in the transmission of wisdom. In this case, it is important to note that several magical texts are conceived as didactic, including also characteristic features of the initiation of the magician.

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2 Betz (1990) has brilliantly described this feature.
3 See Moyer (2003a).
Thus, we find *epistolary* forms filtering even into small treatises in which the author addresses the recipient in terms that correspond to a master-disciple relationship.

Some of the names attested in the papyri were part of the catalogue of experimented magicians and authors of specialized works circulating since an early date. This list underwent additions and modifications through the centuries. Thus, for instance, Pliny mentions an impressive series of medical and magical authors who coincide in good measure with the names used as authorities in the magical papyri: *certe Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, Plato ad hanc discendam navigavere exiliis verius quam peregrinationibus susceptis, hanc reversi praedicavere, hanc in arcanis habuere. Democritus Apollobechen Coptiten et Dardanum e phoenice inlustravit voluminibus Dardani in sepulchrum eius petitis, suis vero ex disciplina eorum editis*. The witness of Apuleius, as Abt observed, is of great importance, as much for the coincidence in many aspects of magical practice as for his mentions of authors and treatises. The most cited passage is found in chapter 90 of his *Apologia*: *si una causa uel minima fuerit inuenta, cur ego debuerim Pudentillae nubtias ob aliquod meum commodum appetere, si quamlibet modicum emolumentum probaueritis, ego ille sim Carmendas uel Damigeron uel † his Moses uel Johannes uel Apollobex uel ipse Dardanus uel quicumque alius post Zoroastren et Hostanen inter magos celebratus est.*

These two Roman authors give witness to the normal circulation of books on magic falsely attributed to a series of authors partially coincident with the names appearing in the papyri. It must be stressed that in some cases these names are only that, i.e., mere names – or “empty names” –, with no real work circulating as such, but there were actually magical texts, with a traceable tradition, very often attributed to them.

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4 *PGM* I 42, IV 152, 2006. For the peculiarities of “magical” Greek letters and their deviations from the epistolary normative of antiquity, as well as for their differences with the “malediction” letters, see López Jimeno (1990).

5 *PGM* XIII 342.

6 *NH* 30, 2.