Tardieu, M., Van den Kerchove, A., Zago, M. (eds.)


This book is the first book containing results of the project, “Corpus des énoncés de noms barbares”, funded by the Agence Nationale pour la Recherche in the years 2008-2011. It gathers some papers presented in different conferences from 2006 to 2009.

Βάρβαρα ὀνόματα (barbaric names = foreign names) are the Greek equivalents of what we usually call ‘magical words’ in ancient spells or magic prayers, words that often come from scarcely known languages. Some late antique philosophers, such as Iamblichus (*Myst.* 7.4), Porphyry (*Aneb.* 260.1-2), or the author of the *Corpus Hermeticum* 16.2, discuss these powerful Egyptian divine names and their Greek equivalents.

The 20 articles presented here are of different value and are sometimes scarcely interrelated to each other. Several of them are excellent indeed. In some cases the relevance with the pertinent topic in question is scarcely recognizable.

Michel Tardieu, “Nommer la matière”, pp. 21-35, deals in a very unconventional way with the origin and contexts of magical words. He focuses on divine rocks that utter oracular sounds, on various magical objects, and on the art of knowing and uttering secret divine names.1

Jean Yoyotte, “La parole et l’objet, et vice-versa”, pp. 37-49, is a posthumously published article in which the famous French Egyptologist describes the nature of what is currently supposed to correspond to, in ancient Egypt, the modern European concept of ‘magic’, i.e., *heka*, or, more probably, *hike*, a concept that represents one of Ra’s pre-eminent powers. The major contribution of this article is that it is devoted to the discussion of how Egyptian priests preserved the tradition of the magic arts. Among them, the *kheri-hebet heri-tep* (bearers of the ritual papyrus and leaders) were the most learned priests-magicians, who are called *hartumim* in the so-called *Novel of Joseph*. The *kherep Serket* were specialists in the treatment of snake or scorpion bites, and the *wâb* of Sekhmet were medics. Some scribes worked in a *per-ânkh*, “House of Life”, where a library and a scriptorium were housed, and many medical recipes were written. Yoyotte also deals briefly with the topic of the relationship between things and words, by focusing especially on hieroglyphs, which were

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1 P. 33: in *Pgm* VII the invocation is not to Anubis, but to Osiris.
called ‘writings of the words of god’. Objects and related names shared the substance of the creator god. This is the reason why the *Corpus Hermeticum* (16.2) despised the Greek language as a simple utterance of words, which could be helpful in explaining or demonstrating something, whereas Egyptian words were rich in meaning and efficacy.

Alica Mouton, “Torche et encens en Anatolie et Mésopotamie ancienne”, pp. 51-66, focuses on the act of burning as a means of preventing, removing, or destroying evil. For example, figurines were burned in Mesopotamia to cause the death of one’s enemies. Similarities are underscored between the ancient Anatolian and Mesopotamian treatment of dangers and evils that originated from demons or from one’s enemies. In these cultures a torch could represent a symbol of life, and the extinguishing of a torch could be seen as an act that could produce death. Some magical substances are also discussed, such as incense, deemed useful against gossip-mongers and for mantic practices; and tamarind, thought to be useful in a variety of spells; or thorny branches and mice, which were believed to be capable of averting demons and epilepsy from a window.2

A brilliant article by Tardieu follows next: “Les lamelles d’or montanistes et orphiques”, pp. 67-76. He starts from the well known tradition (in Eusebius of Caesarea) according to which Montanus and his followers Priscilla and Maximilla uttered some unintelligible prophetic words. Tertullian reports that these religious leaders experienced some terrifying dreams. Justilian ordered, in 556 CE, the holy place of Montanism, at Pepouza, to be destroyed, and Michael the Syrian *(Chron. 9.33)* reports that the tombs of Montanus and his female followers were discovered, and that their mouths were found to be covered with gold lamellae. Tardieu connects these lamellae with prophecy and with the belief according to which Montanus represented the Spirit *(pneuma)* and the Paraclete, but he also connects them with the Orphic custom of placing similar lamellae on the mouth of deceased believers, and with the “Empedocles of Strasbourg” papyrus—a document that was found wrapped around the head of a buried man. Interesting thoughts are proposed by Tardieu concerning the containers of some prophetic, religious, or magical texts. One Orphic lamella from Thurioi, for example, was written with directions for the deification of the deceased and was then folded into a second lamella, whose writings are totally obscure. On the other hand, obscure and unintelligible words make up several of the recipes in the Greek magical papyri, and they

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2 A discussion within the team of the project would probably have led to notice similarities with the Greek and Roman custom of protecting windows and doors from demons thanks to hawthorn branches (Ov. *Fast.* 6.129 and 165; Phot., s.v. μισάρα ἡμέρα and ῥάμνος).