SUPERNATURAL ASSISTANCE IN THE GREEK MAGICAL PAPYRI

THE FIGURE OF THE PARHEDROS

Anna Scibilia

Ignota tantum pietate rnerentur, an tacitis valuere minis?
(Lucan VI, 495-96)
For Giulia Sfameni Gasparro

The Greek magical papyri are important not only for increasing our knowledge of Graeco-Roman civilisation, but also because they provide interesting points of departure for studying the religious climate of the Hellenistic period. It was Karl Preisendanz, who made the large collection of magical spells, formulas and hymns available to scholars. In this way he also gave them the chance of intensifying the search for interrelationships between those magical texts and contemporary religious currents, such as Judaism, Christianity, Neoplatonic philosophy, pagan mysteries, and the Gnosis.

The term ‘Greek magical papyri’ refers to a corpus of documents with a well defined autonomy and a specific subject. Although the aims of these documents vary, their character is relatively uniform. They establish a relationship between magician and divinity, a preferential link that both

---


I use the authoritative edition of Preisendanz, *Papyri graecae magicae*, whose numbers are quoted as PGM; all translations are from Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, who on pp. xxvii-xxviii lists the more recent papyri that are not in Preisendanz; see also Daniel and Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum*. For a comprehensive analysis and bibliography, see the studies by Brashear: ‘The Greek Magical Papyri’, ‘Out of the Closet’, and ‘Botokudenphilologie’. For the chronological evaluation of these documents, see Festugière, *L’ide’al*, pp. 281-282, note 2.

3 About the interrelationships, see Nock, *Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 176-189.

4 Here I refer to the uniformity of the formal aspects. Although diverse from the point of view of period, composition, length, and thematics, the documents nevertheless share a similar structure: operation, ritual, and a spell or a specific formula, cf. Festugière, *L’ide’al*, p. 283.
gives and takes,' and they show a similarity with forms of applied magic that are typical of other contexts of the ancient world: medical recipes, spells for picking plants,6 devotiones,7 defixiones,8 and the superstitions and enticements of magical gems. This literature illuminatingly shows the mechanisms of magical practices in the ancient world and illustrates a three-fold relationship – between magician, customer and divinity – that aims at obtaining any sort of benefit.9 Yet in the papyri these mechanisms of the magical actio, although identical on a formal level, sometimes betray an intent that is not exclusively inner-worldly but also has otherworldly aims.10 In other words, is it possible to speak of a soteriology in Greek magical papyri and, if so, how do we qualify this soteriology?11 In order to resolve this question, we will study a few texts from this rich literature not only to verify the formalities of the magical actio and its corresponding formulas, but also to clarify its aims.

The magos between coercion and otherworldliness

The magician acts on several levels,12 gives advice to the customer for curative purposes or guarantees beforehand the favour of a god or goddess.

---

6 PGM IV. 286-295, 2967-3006.
7 Cf. Gager, Curse Tablets, p. 30; Graf, Magic, p. 128.
8 Cf. PGM IV. 3030ff.; PGM VII.396ff.
9 It should be pointed out that this threefold relationship can be simplified, since customer and magician are sometimes the same person.
10 I follow a formulation by Bianchi (Bianchi / Vermaseren, La Soteriologia, p. 4).
12 Some of the longest texts of the corpus of the Greek magical papyri can also be considered handbooks of magic. Some of these take the form of repertories: recipes, letters, series of formulae with variations. Others hand down a summa of magical traditions in the form of different codes: protection, divination and vision. See, for example, PGM LXX, where the text contains the incantamentum of Hecate Ereschigal, a long recipe with five formulas and prescriptions that combines the ideas of protective and aggressive magic. Another example is contained in PGM XII.96-107, where a protective amulet can be found in 100-104. Furthermore, there are rites of self-promotion that deserve special mention. These are the rites, containing a truly utilitarian perspective that aims at improving several aspects of everyday life, such as the acquisition of power over others, of wealth, or knowledge. For these last, see PGM [II.494-6]11, IV.2289 (in which the term sótēr [2279] appears in the address of Isis-Moon), XII.397-400 (a general claim for victory [nikētikon], analysed by Festugière, L'idéal, p. 231). For anthropological aspects linked with the concept of self-promotion, see Faraone, 'Agonistic Context'.
These are extraordinary and complicated procedures that imply the use of all kinds of materia magica. He often uses long series of words or associations of vowels that are apparently incomprehensible. The first author stressing this curious phenomenon is Euripides who in his Iphigeneia in Tauris (lines 1337-38) calls these words barbarika melê, 'barbarian words'. These peculiar words, if we want to consider them as words, draw their strength from the power of analogy or from the simple fact that they are pronounced in a series. In magical texts, the word, like the name of the divinity, is the true active instrument to obtain certain effects. In fact, knowledge of the divine name sets off a dynamics of appropriating power that is guaranteed by the knowledge of the identity of the superior entities invoked. The need to use a language that is 'other' in comparison to daily use, is required in magical practices that have supernatural interlocutors. From this language the hymnical genre appears the most adequate modus in rebus to the magician, although these papyri pose a true problem regarding the definition of the magical hymns. Yet it is perhaps in the structure and nature of the hymns, sometimes defined as logoi in the text, that the dialectical relationship between magic and religion, or between coercion and prayer, most often surfaces.

The operator regularly identifies himself with the divinity. He tries to take possession of the god's true name with the purpose of approaching a superior power that will guarantee his ability to act in an inner-worldly context, by means of knowledge originating from a communio with the

---

13 See McCown, 'The Ephesia Grammata', p. 129: 'as to the origin and meaning of the mysterious formula, ancients and moderns have made their guesses, all alike unconvincing'. About voces mysticae and other forms of unintelligible writing, see Gager, Curse Tablets, pp. 6ff.
14 On the voces magicae, see Brashear, 'The Greek Magical Papyri', pp. 3429-3438; Versnel, 'The Poetics of the Magical Charm'.
15 On the power of the word, see Frankfurter, 'The Magic of Writing'.
16 Cf. PGM III.500: during a prayer to establish a relationship with Helios, the magician invokes the god and says in conclusion: 'I know your signs, [symbols and] forms, who you are each hour and what your name is'.
17 On the magical hymns, see Poccetti, 'Forma e tradizioni'. Preisendanz, Papyri graecae magicae, vol. 2, contains a selection of 'hymns', but in his 'Vorrede' he argues for a strict metrical order in his selection. Yet such an approach on purely technical grounds leaves many problems unresolved, since according to his criterion even metrical spells are part of the hymns. However, since they are part of the practice, they cannot be considered as strictly poetical forms. In addition, a certain number of papyri that are not in verse should be considered as prose hymns according to their literary character. On the dialectic relationship between prayer and spells, see also Kippenberg, 'Magic', p. 156.
18 About this topic, see Vermaseren, 'La sotériologie', p. 18: 'Le magicien à pre-
divinity. In some texts the hymn is set in the ambiance of a ritual that shows how magic, profoundly receptive, is hence susceptible to external influences. The magical actio regularly uses those elements that official religion rejects as dangerous. But it is the magician's way of performing a rite vertically that puts him out of the ordinary, in opposition to the common religious rituals, and that isolates him from his fellow citizens.20

In the hymns, especially in the Greek-Coptic versions, the demonological formulae are enriched by contributions from the pantheons of different religions. This should not be taken as a sign of syncretism, but the combination of divinities is yet another demonstration of magic's natural receptiveness. Although the typology of the magical hymn is substantially different from that of the real religious hymn, they share two elements at the level of the pars epica, namely invocation and claim. The magical operator does not try to effect a dynamics of gift-exchange, nor does he want to evoke his own merits. He often identifies himself with the supernatural entity and this operation underlines his own pretention of appropriating the power of the character in question.

In general, the sphere of magic is qualified by power, the power to equally attract, manipulate and use for its own ends spells and recipes – in short, substances that would remain inactive if deprived of supernatural activation. The magician wishes to achieve knowledge and in order to obtain it, he often has to persuade divinities to assist him in reaching his own ends. The fact that in the corpus of papyri magic operates through 'coercion' can be considered as a unifying element. The presence of 'coercive' elements needs no other justification than the real needs of the operator.21

In analysing these texts, we should therefore distinguish between complex hymns and hymns of simple coercion, activated in the context of a precise magical actio and often animated by destructive aims. Complex hymns share the formal characteristics of the 'simple' ones, but on the level

mitre vue appartiendrait à la classe de ceux qui espèrent d'obtenir une faveur en général très matérielle pour soi-même ou pour son client, une faveur qui n'a rien à faire avec les conceptions de redemption'.

19 Vermaseren, 'La soteriologie', p. 20.
20 See Graf, Magic, p. 213.
21 On the problem of 'coercion', see Festugiére, L'idéal, pp. 284-285: 'Quel que soit le but vise, il importe d'établir d'abord qu'une action magique, laquelle comprend toujours à la fois une invocation et une série de pratiques, est d'essence magique, c'est-à-dire qu'elle commande une attitude particulière à l'égard de la divinité. On ne la prie point pour lui exprimer de la révérence ou de l'amour, ni même pour lui demander quelque bienfait. A vrai dire, ce n'est pas une prière, une demande, mais une sommation. On force la divinité à agir, on la contraint par son nom'; Graf, Magic, pp. 222-229.
of content they participate in the search for the divine and hence they can be considered as **testifying** to one of the chief aspects of the culture, spirituality and religiosity of the Hellenistic period, *viz.* the aspiration to establish a contact with the transcendent world of the supernatural beings: Apuleius’s *communio loquendi cum deis* or Iamblichus’s *methousia tén theón*.22

**The divine parhedros: acquisition and functionality**

A certain number of magical hymns seem to express the relationship between the magical operator and the divinity in different terms. In such documents, the magical operator does not resort to *epanankoi logoi,* ‘spells of coercion’,23 but shows reverence for the divine, which is perhaps animated by what Nock has defined as mystical piety.24 As Vermaseren observes:

> Ainsi en faisant usage des forces magiques, comme les néoplatoniciens tardif depuis Iamblique, le magicien devient dans sa propre manière un suppliant qui exprime dans sa propre langue ce qu’il voudrait réellement obtenir; extérieurement ses phrases sont des commandements augustes, mais en réalité ils sont des prières, des cris du cœur qui expriment son désir de devenir l’égal de la divinité.25

The god is **defined** as ruler: ‘Hail, absolute ruler, hail, hail’.26 In order to suggest the idea of a hierarchy, the *magos* often calls the god ‘Lord’ and qualifies himself as ‘servant’: ‘Lords, gods, reveal to me concerning the NN matter tonight, in the coming hours. Emphatically I beg, I supplicate, I your servant and enthroned by you’.27 Some passages from the long papyrus Mirnaut of the Louvre seem to allude to the same theme: the *magos* being ordered to enjoy the food *stoma pros stoma,* ‘[coming] face to face’, as companion to the god, in a place chosen by the god.28

---


23 For example, *PGM* IV.2520-67,2708-84.


26 Cf. *PGM* III.443.

27 *PGM* VII.742-747, transl, by Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, p. 139. Here there is a close reference to the rite of the *thronismos*. In order to establish an intimate relationship with the divinity, the magician defines himself as *mystēs* (*PGM* I.126).

28 *PGM* I.40.
We should perhaps underline the wish of the magician to become like the divinity, to accede to a higher level that puts him into contact with the supernatural entity of which he wants to assume the formal characteristics. In the magical papyri a whole series of rituals results in the transformation of the condition of an individual who is already a magician or who has already passed the previous ritual ‘examination’ by his promotion to a superior level. Through the execution of these rites the magician participates in the divine sphere. They belong to two fundamental but differing types:

a) the initiatory ritual that allows magicians to procure a parhedros, a divine assistant;
b) the initiatory ritual of systasis, a ritual of presenting the magos to the divinity.

Both rituals make the magos participate in the divine sphere. From a methodological point of view it is interesting to investigate the relations between the will of the magos to become égal à la divinité, his aims and the instruments with which he tries to achieve his purpose.

The parheds: rites and forms

Let us first look at the parheds himself. Before starting a more complex investigation and historical evaluation, it seems opportune to present a preliminary definition. A careful analysis allows us to identify ten passages about the parheds in the corpus of magical papyri: PGM I.1-42, 42-195; JY.1331-89, 1716-1870, 1928-2005, 2006-2125, 2145-2240; W.862-928; XIa.1-40; XII.14-95. The adjective parheds commonly means ‘he who is/sits nearby or near’, and in the magical papyri this meaning remains substantially unchanged, despite the numerous contexts. Indeed, parheds always refers to the figure of a supernatural assistant who collaborates with the magician. Yet, he appears in many different forms and his attributes greatly vary, depending on the contexts.

For a useful analysis, it is therefore necessary to consider the various forms of the parheds in relation to the specific contexts in which this figure develops a well defined function and to consider the corresponding

---

29 Mauss, A General Theory of Magic, pp. 40-44. The promotion to a superior level could also be understood as social promotion inside a community of non-initiates.
31 Ciralo, ‘Supernatural Assistants’, p. 292: ‘the variations between similar parhedros texts seem to be different versions of the same tale, rather than completely different stories’.
attributes. As a starting point it may be useful to apply the taxonomy of Leda Ciraolo, who distinguishes four general categories: the divine, the celestial, the spiritual and the material.\footnote{Ibidem, Table I.}

The parhedros in a human shape

In two texts the parhedros is considered as a divine being in human form. First, there is the term angelos, 'holy angel, guardian'.\footnote{PGM IV.1939.} Secondly, in PGM XIa the supernatural entity is called 'Mistress of the House', a direct translation of the Egyptian name Nephthys. She acquires a human form and aims at accomplishing the claims of the magical operator who, according to the text, must say: 'I have need [of you] for domestic service'. After having assumed the appearance of an elderly woman, the supernatural entity asks to be restored to her divine beauty. This underlines the transitory character of her materialisation, which is not a permanent change. The status of parhedreia and, therefore, the terrestrial shape of the goddess will remain active as long as the magician follows the prescription that he must wear two amulets, an ass's tooth and the old lady's tooth jointly and forever. Evidently, the subordination of the parhedros to the magician is not without certain conditions and marks the discrepancy, in whatever way, between the human and the superior level.

The parhedros assimilated to a deity

Sometimes the entity seems to be identified directly with a deity of which he assumes the name: 'Eros as assistant', 'a ritual of Eros'. The text specifies that, during this ritual with a divinatory purpose, Eros will be introduced in the form of an evil spirit, kakodaimôn, and it adds that this latter figure will send the requested information, 'if you use him in a proper and holy manner'.\footnote{PGMXII.15-17.} In the text of PGM IV (1841ff.), for instance, the magos addresses his invocation both to Eros and to a statuette of the god.\footnote{For suggestions on how to make the statuette, see PGMXII.14-95.}

The parhedros as physical object

The parhedros can also be identified with an (unlikely) object: 'Divine assistance from three Homeric verses', a thin iron lamella\footnote{PGM IV.2145-2240.} with a protec-
tive character, inscribed with Homeric verses. Such a procedure is relatively common in the magical papyri. In the course of the text, during the recitation of the ritual, we typically find a reference to the chthonian world: 'I conjure you by the gods of the underworld'. In fact, this text is so powerful that through it one can invoke 'all supernatural powers'. In other passages, this entity, considered as a physical object, is invoked with: 'Come! Submit to this service and be my assistant'. To activate its hidden potential the magician has to perform a number of operations, namely reciting the magical spell, preparing and attending to the ritual meal, and making the sacrificial offering.

The parhedros as daimon

The parhedros can also be defined as daimon. It is interesting to remark that Socrates used to define his famous daimonion as the 'voice of the god', as a kind of private oracle; in fact, one of the peculiarities of the parhedros was the ability to send divinatory dreams, to produce a trance and to favour possessions.

The association of the parhedros with the Agathos Daimon is, perhaps, even more marked. Apuleius considers the highest degree of priesthood as stemming from the joint favour of three different divinities, Isis, Osiris and the Agathos Daimon: 'Rejoice and be happy instead, because the deities continually deem you worthy. Exult, rather, in the fact that you will experience three times what is scarcely permitted to others even once, and from that number you should rightly consider yourself to be forever blessed'.

Admittedly, the term 'parhedros' in the magical documents is not always used in a simple manner, for in every text different nomina are used to express its specific nature. In general, the parhedroi are identified especially with the daimones of the dead. Yet it is opportune to stress that, as appears

37 For other examples of this common use, see PGM IV.467-474, 821-824, 830-834; VII.1-148.
38 PGMXII.95.
39 Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 215-216.
40 Xenophon, Apology, in: Luck, Arcana Mundi, vol. 2, p.12; ibidem, p. 186: 'to call it daimonion would, indeed, arouse the suspicion that Socrates was worshipping a secret, nameless deity. If this deity or daemon or spirit worked for him, it gave him special powers that were inaccessible to others – hence the accusation of atheism and the implication of witchcraft'.
41 It appears in PGML26; IV.1609, 1712; XII.244.
from the texts, it is not the normal spirit of the dead, but a being of a different and changeable status."

The magical operator often seems to be ignorant of the forms in which the daimon will be revealed to him but what he desires is simply an assistant of the god, answering to the proposed claims. He therefore invokes: 'I call upon you, holy, very powerful, very strong [...] autochthons, assistants of the great god, the powerful chief daimons [...]. In the course of the spell, the entity is invoked as powerful and glorious, and characterised by two other terms: holy and autochthon. This entity is specifically defined as 'assistant of the great god' and therefore subordinated to a powerful deity, with whom he has to accomplish the tasks assigned to him. The text proceeds with another adjective, archidaimones, 'chief daimons', individualising perhaps a hierarchy among the entities and characterising it, finally, by a series of nomina, that refer to the chthonian world.

The exception of the Berlin Papyrus: elements of ignotapietas?

After having considered the connotations of the parhedros in some exemplary documents from the corpus of the Greek magical papyri, we can concentrate our search on a specific magical text that we have already used several times. In the course of this text the difference between two qualities and levels of communication of the ritual becomes apparent. In addition to the horizontal level of communication from man to man, there exists another level that we can consider as vertical: from man to god. The magical text that we are going to investigate is PGM 1.42-195, extant in the long Berlin Papyrus 5025 of the late fourth century. It reveals the power of the word and the communion with supernatural interlocutors effected by that power. It also considers the nature of the divine assistant, describes the variety of his functions and furnishes important clues to establish the nature of the relationship between the divine entity and the magical operator who is qualified as: 'blessed initiate of the sacred magic' (line 127). The document clearly demonstrates the spasmodic desire of the magical operator to acquire a kind of omnipotence that allows him to act on all cosmic levels.

---

43 For example, in PGM IV.1367 the adjective that qualifies the parhedroi is tartarophourous, 'guarding Tartaros'.
44 PGMI.1-42; IV.1331-89.
46 PGM IV.1345-1355.
47 About the value of verbal and non-verbal communication, see Key, The Relationship.
48 See the clever analysis of Graf, Magic, pp. 214ff.
49 The spell, which is spoken to Helios, provides a kind of dyadic systasis: the
Yet the passage also enables us to study a complex and problematic aspect of this text, namely its soteriological dimension. However surprising this may seem, it is in fact possible to speak of a proper soteriology in this text, since a power beyond life seems to be attributed to the divine assistant. This is exceptional, because in the majority of the magical papyri the benefits towards which the operator directs his attention are usually of a material order.

During the ritual of the systasis it is possible to observe the dynamic nature of the magical performance of the operators, which distinguishes them from adherents to non-theurgical mysteries. Despite an analogous demand for an exclusive and personal relationship with the deity and a participation in his nature, a demand for an isoteos physis, the magical operators try to command and constrain the divine being in order to achieve this communio salutaris. The deity to which the magician addresses the invocation for obtaining the parhedros, is Helios, the solar deity who, in this and many other documents, assumes a cosmic character by being identified with Aion, ‘Eternity’. The text distinguishes two phases: first there is a preparatory rite, which is then followed by the actual execution of the ritual. These phases contain certain elements typical of religious practice: purification, the obligation of preliminary abstentions, and sacrifice.

Let us now look at the incipit of the papyrus: 'a [daimon comes] as an assistant' (1). The text continues by clarifying the function of that daimon 'who will reveal everything to you clearly and will be your [companion and] will eat and sleep with you' (2-3). In these words there is a remarkable repetition of the element syn- in order to stress the moments and levels of sharing. Then follows the prescription of the recipe, given in a winged form, in which the daimon is invoked as 'Agathos Daimon' as well as 'holy Orion' (4) and qualified as good and holy. The incorporeal nature of this entity seems to be confirmed by the document which acknowledges that he is 'a god; he is an aerial spirit' (98). In turn, the magical operator is

blessed initiate will perform the ritual towards the solar god Helios and at the same time towards the lunar goddess Selene in order to maintain contact with the supernatural world, day and night.

50 Vermaseren, 'La sotetriologie', p. 20: ‘Le fait que les auteurs des textes magiques aient ressenti le même sentiment d’angoisse à l’idée de ne pas être sauvés résulte clairement de leur affirmation répétée qu’ils sont unis avec leur dieu’.

51 PGM IV.220, which corresponds with PGM I.78.

52 For the complicated history of this god, see Festugière, La Révelation, pp. 297-299.

53 For the technopaignion, see Lenz, ‘Carmina figurata’. For other examples, such as a recipe in the shape of a grape, see Maltomini and Daniel, ‘Una gemma magica’.

54 On the immaterial perception of these daimons, see Iamblichus, De mysteriis.
called ‘friend of aerial spirits’, stressing a relationship with a personal touch.\textsuperscript{55} The nature of this relationship becomes perhaps even clearer in the following verses, where the term is used not for the entity but for the magical operator after his death in order to stress the implications of his change in status. Subsequently, a progressive amplification of the aerial character of the supernatural entity becomes evident: he is now called ‘the only lord of the air’ (129-130).

The acquisition of a supernatural or divine assistant is a preferential objective of the magician. Through the activity of this supernatural or divine being, the \textit{magos} can obtain a conspicuous number of \textit{beneficia}, above all of a material order. The \textit{magos} even apostrophises his future \textit{parhedros}: ‘I shall have you as a friendly assistant, a beneficent god who serves me whenever I say “Quickly, by your power now appear on earth to me, yea verily, god!”’ (89-91).

It is the presence of the demoniac being, or \textit{parhedros}, which guarantees the magician the positive result of what he desires. The \textit{parhedros} sets in being what the \textit{magos}, if deprived of his collaboration, cannot realise by himself: ‘[...] for without him nothing happens’ (130). The formula quoted presents itself in a letter sent by a character named Pnouthis, defined as a \textit{hierogrammateus}, to somebody called Keryx (45-47). This Keryx is, perhaps, a priest, whose piety has already been underlined and to whom, in the following verses, the prescriptions are directed for the preliminary attainment of purity (54-95). These prescriptions are the \textit{conditio sine qua non} for the realisation of the epiphany of the entity:

‘As one who knows, I have prescribed for you [this spell for acquiring an assistant] to prevent your failing as you carry out [this rite]... After detaching all the prescriptions[bequeathed to us in] countless books’ (42-45).

Accordingly, Richard Gordon rightly observes that Pnouthis’s \textit{parhedros} represents a practical ‘theorisation’ of how magic might \textit{work}.\textsuperscript{57} But we can add something more. The verses seem to introduce two important elements. The first one concerns the correctness in the execution of the procedure. The descent of the \textit{parhedros} is meant to protect against any possible error during the administration of the ritual procedure. The second element concerns the legitimacy of the procedure. Its \textit{dignitas} is attested by the fact

\textit{Aegyptiorum} 1.20, in: Merlan, ‘Plotinus and Magic’.

\textsuperscript{55} See also PGM 1.55 and 180-181.

\textsuperscript{56} Compare Porphyry, \textit{Life of Plotinus} 56-60: ‘blessed are you who has a god as a friend and not a spirit of an inferior class’ (in: Luck, \textit{Arcana Mundi}, vol. 1, p. 22).

\textsuperscript{57} Gordon, ‘Reporting the Marvellous’, p. 75.
that Pnouthis, in drawing up his formulas, stands in a long and time-honoured tradition. Still, with an air of self-confidence, he wants to present his spell as both synthetic and progressive:

'I have shown you this spell for acquiring an assistant [as one that is serviceable] to you [...] For the spell of Pnouthis [has the power] to persuade the gods and all [the goddesses]. And [I shall write] you from it about [acquiring] an assistant' (49-53).

When we consider 'the traditional rite [for acquiring an assistant]' (54-55) in its entirety, there appear two other elements, which can be looked upon as traditional. The first one is a note about the need for a preliminary condition of purity. The second prescription concerns the ritual abstention from impure food; subsequently, this abstention is specified as a prohibition to eat pork and fish (105-106). To complete the operations, the magician must reach an elevated space, a *limen*, as if by crossing this threshold he can more easily establish a direct contact with the celestial spheres:58 'on whatever [night] you want to, go [up] onto a lofty roof ... [and say] the first spell of encounter as the sun's orb is disappearing'. The text continues: 'with a [wholly] black *Isis* band on [your eyes], and in your right hand grasp a falcon's head [...] And as you recite the spell there will be this sign for you: a falcon [will fly down]' (56-65).

Hence the rite outlined in the text also points to a third meaningful element, namely the sacrifice of an animal, which takes the form of a mimetic evocation of the celestial falcon. This sacrifice occurs in the second part of the text and provides the operator with a magical stone that he will wear, perhaps, to protect himself after having treated it in the proper way. Somewhat further on, the *systasis* becomes more complicated and the operator must continue the procedure in the evening facing the light of the moon:

'[A blazing star] will descend and come to a stop in the middle of the housetop, and when the star has dissolved before your eyes, you will behold the angel whom you have summoned and who has been sent [to you] and you will quickly learn about the decision of the gods' (74-77).

The passage concerns the first appearance of the celestial entity defined as *angelos*, who qualifies himself as the one who has responded to the invocation and also as the medium through which the operator will know the decisions of the gods.

58 On this fixed literary scheme, see Couliano, *Expériences*, pp. 91ff.
After the description of the first arrival of the assistant, the text immediately adds the prescription for the future behaviour of the magician:

'But do not be afraid: approach the god: [approach] the god and, taking his right hand, kiss him and say these word to the angel for he will quickly respond to you about whatever you want' (78-79).

It is remarkable that in these two verses the supernatural assistant 'becomes true' in a divine presence, 'the god', whom the magician approaches with familiarity. At this point, the assistant shows his subordination to the will of the magician who, however, recognises his superior nature, as the text states: 'But do not be afraid' (76).

The document continues by quoting the ritual relating to the oath that will bind the parhedros to the magician:

'but you adjure him with this [oath] that he meet you and remain inseparable and that he not [keep silent or] disobey in any way. But when he has with certainty accepted this oath of yours, take the god by the hand and leap down, [and] after bringing him [into] the narrow room where you reside, [sit him] down[...]' (80-83).

The ritual is now coming to its end and the magos has acquired an assistant, since he has shared food and drink with his parhedros. These meaningful elements are propaedeutic to the assimilation to the divine, as also appears from other magical texts.\(^{59}\) Yet the permanency of this state of parhedeia results from the oath, which assumes the characteristics of a real pact.\(^{60}\) The text focusses therefore on the quality of the collaboration that is established between the operator and the supernatural entity by listing all his spheres of influence:

' [...] It is acknowledged that he is a god; he is an aerial spirit which you have seen. If you give him a command, straightway he performs the task: he sends dreams, he brings women, men without the use of magical material' (96-99).

The document also enables us to register some spheres of influence pertinent to the activity of the divine assistant which he can share with the

\(^{59}\) Cf. PGM 11.59: [...] 'if you feel a blow, chew up the cumin and drink it down with some unmixed wine'; note also PGM XIII.434-440; Jacobson, 'Papyri Graecae Magicae'.

\(^{60}\) On the idea of the foedus, see Vernant, Mythe, pp. 69ff. Incidentally, note that the ritual also includes a practice of releasing the divine being (95).
operator. The *parhedros* provides benefits and divinatory dreams, produces erotic spells attracting men and women, causes deaths, stops demons and fierce beasts, and, finally, raises storms and causes destructions. The power of the *parhedros* has therefore positive, negative and ambivalent characteristics, which radically affect the life of the operator whom he serves:

'And he will tell you about the illness of a man, whether he will live or die, even on what day at what hour of night. And he will also give [you both] wild herbs and the power to cure, and you will be [worshipped] as a god since you have a god as a friend' (188-191).

The *parhedros* can kill and destroy, but, contextually, also furnish medicines for recovery and, therefore, salvation. One notes the utilitarian character of the actions, of which the main directions have been listed. The sphere of action of the *parhedros*, articulated as it is, constitutes a summa of the magical operator's desiderata. The main theme that underlies the various procedures can be reduced to the desire of the magical operator to obtain power and therefore to dominate others through a preferential knowledge of the deity, and this is also the intent of many other texts in which the *parhedros* appears.\(^6^1\)

At this point, after having proceeded to a detailed description of a different way in which the *magos* can obtain benefits, the text significantly concludes:

'he will serve you suitably for whatever you have in mind, O [blessed] initiate (mysta) of the sacred magic (*hieras mageias*), and will accomplish it for you, this most powerful assistant [...] Share this mystery (mystérion) with no one [else], but conceal it, by Helios, since you have been deemed worthy by the lord [god]' (125-133).

In these concluding lines the operator is defined as a *mystēs*, who manages the *hieras mageias*. The magician is therefore conscious of being the principal actor in a procedure that is both magical and sacred. Such a practice must be kept hidden because of the exceptional powers that it assures. To these operations are added a conjuring spell and directions for the figure that is to be engraved on an amulet:\(^6^2\) Helios. Then follows a final formula to be recited to that important goddess of magic: Selene.

\(^{61}\) See *PDM* LXI.66; *PGM* III.699-700, and the role of the *parhedros* in the rite quoted by *PGM* IV.2441-2621.

\(^{62}\) For the description of the amulet presenting a lion-headed *Horus*, see Bonner, *Studies*, p. 120.
Yet the element of summa novitas comes in a brief explanation. When all the material benefits that the parhedros, subject to the magician, can produce and therefore share with him, are listed, the invocation begins: 'Hither to me King[...] firmly established Aion. Be inseparable from me from this day forth through all the time of my life' (164-167). Until this point the deity has been requested to develop a permanent assistance that will last the whole life span of the magos.

Subsequently, the document contains an important affirmation that endows this supernatural assistance with an eschatological perspective that in these magical texts is unique:

'When you are dead, he will wrap [up] your body as befits a god, but he will take your spirit and carry it into the air with him. For no aerial spirit which is joined with a mighty assistant will go into Hades, for to him all things are subject' (173-189).

In the incipit, the explicit reference to the procedure of the 'osirification' or mumification, a practice typical for the Egyptian context, must be noted; yet, the following verses establish a difference in comparison to the analogy quoted above. The dead person, furnished with a powerful parhedros of whom he does not share the substance, but to which he is united, will not go into Hades, to which man was originally directed. Instead, after having passed the process of 'osirification', he acquires an otherworldly, celestial and aerial perspective on the afterlife, to which the individual, who has in many ways participated in the divine and who has been considered worthy of the god, is conducted by an 'emanation' of the magical operator. This 'emanation', true to the alliance established between magician and parhedros, has first supplied him with an abundance of material benefits in the course of his terrestrial life, but now permits him to achieve an ulterior benefit. Such is the effect of the apothanatismos, the directions how one can become immortal and pass through the heavens. The magician thus acquires a special destiny with a different perspective, as the spell tells him: 'you will be [worshipped] as a god since you have a god as a friend' (190-191).

63 About the presence of the word 'King', see Graf, Magic, p. 115.
64 It is interesting to compare this statement with Apuleius, Metamorphoses 11.6, in: Annaratone, L’Asino d’Oro, p. 343.
65 On this theme, see Sourvinou-Inwood, ‘To die and to enter’; Verdier, ‘Le concept’.
66 It may be interesting to compare this topic with PGM IV.718-723, where the rebirth of the mystes liberates him from destiny.
However, the *magos* acquires this ulterior destiny only by applying a spell that forces the divinity to act. It is not an autonomous decision of the divinity, but, on the contrary, a surrender to the *epanankoi logos*, 'spells of coercion', of the person who has united his *nous*, 'mind', to the divine spirit. This ritual, then, can be considered as the most interesting example of a symbolic ritual of death and rebirth. The magical power that the *magos* acquires does not, in the end, effect his definitive transformation, since he continues to need his *parhedros*, without whom he would be no more than a common mortal.

**Conclusion**

Finally, from the perspective of 'cultural change', we should remember that the *parhedros* is a newcomer in magic, attested for the first time in the second century. Earlier generations of magicians could perform the tasks of their customers without his help. Apparently, his emergence has to be interpreted as a sign of the increasing need for divine assistance that becomes apparent in late Antiquity, not only in the case of magicians but also in that of philosophers, as the examples of Plotinus, and certainly the later Neoplatonists amply demonstrate.

This need went hand in hand with a different need, viz. for a deeper and more direct relationship with the divine world. Although in the imperial period magic turned into a kind of knowledge that enabled access to the highest god, it was also at this very point that the magician acquired, in accordance with this power, a *parhedros* that followed him. However, after the Christianisation of the Empire the Christian saints gradually became the favourite assistants and go-between figures in this field. The pagan *parhedros* had now met a divine opponent with a superior force who would eventually take his place.

---

67 It is a *logos theagōgos*, cf. *PGM IV.*976 which corresponds to *PGM I.*106.
68 Merlan, 'Plotinus and Magic'; for an opposing view, see Armstrong, 'Was Plotinus a Magician?'
70 Smith, *Jesus the Magician*. The *parhedros* did, however, survive into the early modern period; see the edition of the *Almandal* on pp. 217-226 in the present volume.