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BYZANZ
UND DAS ABENDLAND III.
Studia
Byzantino-Occidentalia



EÖTVÖS-JÓZSEF-COLLEGIUM
ELTE

BYZANZ UND DAS ABENDLAND III.
STUDIA BYZANTINO-OCCIDENTALIA

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Herausgegeben von

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Ágnes T. Mihálykó

Christ and Charon: PGM P13 in Context*

PGM P13 is a prayer for protection inscribed on a papyrus sheet, which can be dated to around the first half of the fifth century on the basis of palaeography.¹ It is kept in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo under inventory No. 10263. It was first edited by Adolf Jacoby in 1900 with extensive commentary.² Subsequently it was included in the corpus of Greek magical papyri by Karl Preisendanz as No. 13 in the Christian collection.³ An English translation of the text was published in Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith's collection of Christian ritual texts from Egypt.⁴

The text presented here is from these editions, modified with my corrections based on a low-quality image found on the Trismegistos webpage.⁵ The translation which follows is my own.

→

1. Ἐπικαλοῦμαί σε, θεὸν τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ θεὸν τῆς γῆς καὶ θεὸν τῶν
διὰ τοῦ .. ἰ[.].. ἰ[.....] ἀγίων, τὸ πλήρωμα τ[ο]ῦ αἵματος
2. ἡμῶν χωρούμενο<v>, ὃ ἐλθὼν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ κατακλάσας τὸν ὄνυχον
τοῦ Χάρωντος, ὃ ἐλθὼν διὰ τοῦ Γαβριὴλ ἐν τῇ

* A longer version of this paper, with reedition and detailed commentary of the papyrus, has been accepted to *Symbolae Oslonienses*. I am grateful to Anastasia Maravela and Silvio Bär for improving this version through their valuable comments, and Lance Jenott for checking my English.

¹ The forms of the letters, in particular α, ε, η, κ, μ, ν, υ, φ, and the presence of the ace of pick ligature (l. 8), together with the general impression of the writing support this date; compare *PKöln III 151* (AD 423).

² JACOBY, A., *Ein neues Evangelienfragment*. Strassburg 1900. 31–49.

³ PREISENDANZ, K., *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri. Vol. II*. Stuttgart 1931. No. 13 pp. 200–202, second edition PREISENDANZ, K. – HENRICH, A., *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri. Zweite, verbesserte Auflage. Vol. II*. Stuttgart 1974. No. 13 pp. 220–222.

⁴ MEYER, M. – SMITH, R. (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*. Princeton, N.J. 1994. No. 10 pp. 35–36.

⁵ www.trismegistos.org/ldab, Trismegistos No. 64558. The link to the image is <http://ipap.csad.ox.ac.uk/4DLink4/4DACTION/IPAPwebquery?vPub=Pap.Graec.Mag.&vVol=2&vNum=13> (last accessed 15/07/2015).

3. γαστρί τῆς Μαρία[ς] τῆς παρθένου, ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐν Βηθλέμ καὶ τραφεὶς ἐ<v> Ναζαρέτ, ὁ σταυρωθεὶς
4. διὰ Ποντοῦ Πυλ[ά]δου, διὸ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐ<ρ>ράγη δι' αὐτόν, ὁ ἀναστὰς ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐν τῷ τάφῳ
5. τῇ τρίτῃ τοῦ θανάτου, ἐφάνη ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ καὶ ἀνελθὼν ἐπὶ τὸ ὕψος τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὁ ἔχων
6. ἐξ εὐωνύμων μυρίους μυριάδας ἀγγέλων, ὁμοίως ἐκ δεξιῶν μυρίους μυριάδας ἀγγέλων βοῶντες
7. μιᾶ φωνῇ τρι[τ]ῶν ἅγιος ἅγιος ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ αἰῶνος, διὸ οἱ οὐρ[αν]οὶ ἐκορέσθησαν τῆς θειότητος αὐτοῦ,
8. ὁ ἐ<λ>άσας ὁδὸν ἐν τοῖς πτεροῖς τῶν ἀνέμων. ἔλεθε, ἔλε`ε`θ, ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος, ὁ ἀνελθὼν εἰς τὸν
9. ἔβδομον οὐρανόν, ὁ ἐλθὼν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ πατρός, τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ εὐλογημένον, διὸ αἱ ψυχαὶ ἔλευθε-
10. ρώθησαν δι[ὰ] τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, οἱ ἀνυγήσαντες δι' ἑαυτῶν αἱ πύλαι χαλκῆ δι' αὐτόν, ὁ κατακλάσας
11. τοὺς μοχλοῦ[ς] σιδηροῦς, ὁ λύσας τοὺς δεδημένους ἐν τῷ σκότῃ, ὁ ποιήσας τὸν Χάροντα ἄσπορον,
12. ὁ καταδήσα[ς] τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἀ[πο]στάτην, ὁ βληθεὶς εἰς τοὺς ἰδίους τόπους. οἱ οὐρανοὶ ἠυλογήθησαν,
13. καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐχ[άρ]η, ὅτι ἀπέστη ἀπὸ αὐτῶν ὁ ἐχθρὸς, καὶ δέδωκας ἔλευθερίαν τῷ κτίσματι αἰτουμένῳ
14. δεσπότην, Ἰησοῦς, ἡ φωνὴ ἡ παραφίησασα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, ὅσα ἐπικαλούμε`θα` τὸ ἅγιόν σου ὄνομα.
15. αἱ ἀρχα[ὶ] καὶ ἐξ[ου]σίαι καὶ κοσμ[ο]κράτορες τοῦ σκότους, ἡ καὶ ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα ἡ καὶ πτώσις δαίμονες
16. μεσημβρ[ιναῖ]ς ὥραις, εἶδε ῥίγος, εἶδε πυρέττιον, εἶδε ῥιγοπύρρεττιον, εἶδε κάκωσις ἀπ' ἀνθρώπ(ων),
17. εἶδε ἐξου[σία]ι τοῦ ἀντικειμένου· μὴ ἰσχύσῃσι κατὰ τῆς ἰκόνος, διὸ ἐπλάσθη ἐκ χειρὸς τῆς σῆς
18. θειότητος, [ὅτι] σῆ ἐστὶ δύναμι[ς] κ[α]τὰ τὸ ἔλαιος τοῦ αἰῶνος, ἡ κρατήσασα τοὺς αἰῶνας.

1. [αἵματός σου] Jacoby, διὰ τοῦ ἀγ[ι]οῦ αἱ[μα]τος ἁγίων? 2. ἡμῖν: Preisendanz, χωρούμενο<v>: Preisendanz, χωρουμενο Jacoby; τοῦ corr. ex. τὸν 3. 1. Βηθλέεμ; 1. Ναζαρέθ 4. 1. Ποντίου Πυλ[ά]του: [...] εἶτο [ca. 10]ου Jacoby; ἱεροῦ pap. 5. ὕψος pap. 6. 1. βοῶντας 8. ἐ<λ>άσας; Preisendanz, εἶσας Jacoby;

1. περοῖς, πῖφνοις 1. περοῖς; Preisendanz, 1. στίβοις Reitzenstein; ἔλθ[έ], ὁ ἔλ'ε'ο[ς] Jacoby 9–10. 1. ἠλευθερώθησαν 10. 1. καὶ ἠνοίγησαν: Preisendanz; 1. χαλκαῖ 11. 1. δεδεμένους; 1. σκότει 12. 1. τὸν βληθέντα Preisendanz 14. Jacoby: [π]αραφήκασα?; 1. ὄσοι; corr. ex. ἐπικαλοῦμεν 15. 1. δαίμονος 16. 1. εἴτε: Preisendanz, εἴ δὲ: Jacoby; 1. πυρέτιον: corr. ex. πυρρέτιον; 1. εἴτε: Preisendanz, εἴ δὲ Jacoby; 1. ῥιγοπυρέτιον; 1. εἴτε: Preisendanz, εἴ δὲ Jacoby 17. 1. εἴτε: Preisendanz, εἴ δὲ Jacoby; ἴσχυσσοσι pap.; ἴκονος pap.: 1. εἰκόνας 18. [ὄτι σ]ῆ ἔστι δύναμι[ς πάσα]: Preisendanz; 1. ἔλεο[ς]

“I call upon you, God of heavens and God of earth and God of the saints through the holy blood (?), the fullness of the time, who was sent for us (?), who came to the world and broke the claw of Charon, who came through Gabriel in the womb of Mary, the virgin, who was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, who was crucified by Pontius Pilate, therefore the veil of the Temple was torn because of him, who rose from the dead in the grave on the third day following his death, who showed himself in Galilee and ascended to the top of the heavens, who has on his left ten thousand times ten thousand angels, likewise on his right ten thousand times ten thousand angels crying with a single voice thrice: ‘Holy, holy is the king of eternity’, wherefore the heavens are full of his divinity, he who drives his way on the wings of the winds. Eleeth, Eleeth, the God of the eternal world, who ascended to the seventh heaven and came from the right hand of the father, the blessed lamb, wherefore the souls were set free through his blood, and to whom the gates of brass opened by themselves, who broke in pieces the bars of iron, who released those who were bound in darkness, who made Charon without offspring, and bound the apostate enemy, who was thrown into his own places. The heavens blessed him, and the earth rejoiced, because the enemy turned away from them, and you granted freedom to the creature who petitions the master, Jesus, the voice that discharged us all from sin, those who invoke your holy name. The principalities and powers and cosmic rulers of darkness, or an unclean spirit, or fall of a demon at noontide, or chill, or fever, or ague, or harm from people or our powers of the adversary, shall not prevail against the image, as it was created by the hand of your divinity, for yours is the power and the mercy of the eternal world, which rules eternity.”

The text’s most curious feature, and the one this article will focus on, is the inclusion of the name of Charon, the ferryman of the classical Greek underworld,

in a Christian invocation of Jesus. It could be conveniently explained with the popular term “pagan survival”. “Pagan survivals”, or rather, with David Frankfurter,⁶ resistant elements of the traditional religion, are frequent in texts of Coptic Christianity. They include continuing practices of divination, healing and protection, and also the invocation of such Egyptian gods as Hor, Isis or Petbe alongside God Almighty, Christ and the angels. But Charon is not invoked alongside Jesus in PGM P13. Quite the contrary, he is presented already in l. 2 as defeated by Jesus. Indeed, his name seems to stand simply for death. But then why did the author pick the name of this figure from Classical mythology to represent death?

To answer this question, the text has to be observed from a wider perspective. First and foremost, let us look at the object itself. What was the papyrus used for? The photo shows that it was once folded, six times vertically and five times horizontally. In a folded state, the object would have been around 4 cm wide and 2.5 cm high. According to *PCair* p. 34 it was “[a]pparently buried with a mummy”. These features indicate that the papyrus was used as an amulet, an inscribed artefact carried around in order to protect its wearer from the perils that are listed in ll. 15–17. But was the text itself also conceived as an amulet? Texts composed for other purposes, such as psalms and liturgies, were sometimes used as amulets as well. One of the most widespread Christian apotropaic texts was Ps. 90 (91).⁷ Texts used in the liturgy of the Church, such as baptismal formulas (*PRyl* III 471⁸) and Eucharistic prayers (*PRyl* III 465), were also employed as amulets. Such secondary usage may also be the case with PGM P13. It is a continuous prayer text, which starts with an invocative verb ἐπικαλοῦμαι, “I call upon you”, goes on with the invocation, and finishes with a request and a doxology. It is likely to have been used in a private rite, as the presence of the singular in the opening word and the singular of “image” as the object of protection indicate. Subsequently it was copied on an amulet to perpetuate its power.

We are fortunate to have a very close parallel, which reinforces this interpretation. In a fourth-century miscellaneous codex kept in the abbey of Montserrat

⁶ FRANKFURTER, D., *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*. Princeton, N. J. 1998. 30.

⁷ On Ps. 90 used as amulet, see KRAUS, T. J., Psalm 90 der Septuaginta in apotropäischer Verwendung – Erste Anmerkungen und Datenmaterial. In: FRÖSÉN, J. – PUROLA, T. – SALMENKIVI, E. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 24th Congress of Papyrology, Helsinki, 1st–7th August 2004*. Helsinki 2007. 497–514.

⁸ See DE BRUYN, T. S., P. Ryl. III 471: A Baptismal Anointing Formula Used as an Amulet. *Journal of Theological Studies* 57 (2006) 94–109.

near Barcelona, there is a prayer of exorcism of the oil for the sick (P.Monts.Roca inv. 156a,6–156b,3),⁹ which has striking parallels with our text. The structure is very close: a long invocation of Jesus citing the events of his life with a focus on his victory over demonic powers, then a request with a catalogue of evils, and finally a doxology. The parallel structure is accompanied by similarities in formulation, such as ἀτεκνώσαντος τὴν ἀδικίαν (P.Monts.Roca inv. 156a,11) and ὁ ποιήσας τὸν Χάροντα ἄσπορον (PGM P13,11). The exorcism in P.Monts.Roca inv. 156a,6–156b,3 belongs to a rite involving a prayer of laying on of hands of the sick, which precedes it in the book of prayers. PGM P13 seems to have drawn its structure, and partly its phrasing, from a similar exorcism. Our text is, however, not an exorcism. The loosely attached request¹⁰ asks for protection against a multitude of evil powers for a certain “image”. By this expression one has to understand a person as the “image of God”, a phrase from Gen. 1:27 that frequently recurs in theological, liturgical¹¹ and magical¹² texts of the period. It appears that the author of PGM P13 modified an exorcism proper, and applied it to his own protective and apotropaic purposes.

To provide protection against the perils of evil, effective strategies of empowering the text are required. The main guarantor of success is of course Jesus, to whom the invocation is addressed. The mention of his powerful name is emphatically postponed to the end of the invocation, just before the request (the exorcism in P.Monts.Roca inv. 156a,6–156b,3 places it in the beginning). The invocation recapitulates the events of his life in a series of participles, in a form well known from the second article of the creeds.¹³ Such a recapitulation looks back on a long tradition in exorcistic texts, starting with a passage from Justin Martyr (*dial* 85,2), and was apparently thought effective against demons. PGM P13, however, together with the Barcelona exorcism, adds to this powerful enumeration a particular emphasis on the victory of Jesus over the powers of the adversary, thereby creating a more solid basis for the request.¹⁴

⁹ ROCA-PUIG, R., *Anàfora de Barcelona i altres pregàries. (Missa del segle IV)*. Barcelona 1994. 103–111.

¹⁰ Cf. JACOBY (n. 2) 47.

¹¹ E.g. the liturgy of St. Mark, SWAINSON, C. A., *The Greek Liturgies Chiefly from Original Authorities*. Cambridge 1884. 30.

¹² E.g. MEYER – SMITH (n. 4) No. 135 (10th cent.) and PBaden V 123 (10–11th cent.)

¹³ On the recapitulation of Christ's life in the creeds, known as the Christological kerygma, cf. KELLY, J. N. D., *Early Christian Creeds*. London 1979³. 17–18.

¹⁴ Cf. BAUCKHAM, R., *The Fate of the Dead. Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*. Leiden 1998.

PGM P13 declares this victory already in the second line, as it states that Christ “broke the claws of Charon”. Moreover, our text inverts the natural order of events (earthly life, descent to the underworld and glory in heaven) in order to place the descent and victory over demons at the end (ll. 10–13), thereby adding even more emphasis to Jesus’ victory. The catalogue of potential evils in ll. 15–17, a usual device in both magical and liturgical prayers,¹⁵ ensures that the protection is total.

Placing such important details as the name of Jesus or the description of his victory at the end of the prayer can be understood as rhetorical devices. And these are not the only ones. Goodspeed, in his review of the first edition, observed that the prayer “is little more than a patchwork of biblical quotations, though these are sometimes very freely handled”.¹⁶ Citations from the Bible could by themselves lend authority and power to a text. However, if one looks at the text closely, it appears that “freely handled” means that the Bible verses (and other sources) are constantly and, presumably, deliberately changed. These changes go well beyond the transformations necessary to insert the verse into the sequence, as is customary in liturgical or literary citations of the Bible, in which case the vocabulary is usually kept, even if the structure is accommodated to the new text, and in this process a few words change. Here on the contrary words are regularly and constantly exchanged and verses are fused, so that no citation remains intact except for Eph. 6:12 in l. 15. Sometimes the word employed has a more classical tone, as *περὸν* for *πτέρυξ* (l. 8). Sometimes it can have Gnostic connotations, as *τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ αἰῶνος* (l. 2) used instead of the Pauline *χρόνος* or *καιρός* (Gal. 4:4, Eph. 1:10). But most often the variation does not follow any straightforward logic. In many cases it is either ungrammatical Greek, as *οἱ ἀνυγήσαντες δι’ ἑαυτῶν*

¹⁵ Such a catalogue is common in “magical” prayers, e.g. MEYER – SMITH (n. 4) No. 62–64, 132, 134, or PGM P3, P9, and P21. For liturgical examples, see a short version in the prayer for the laying on of hands in the Barcelona codex (P.Monts.Roca inv. 155 b.23–24, RÖMER, C. – DANIEL, R. W. – WORP, K. A., *Das Gebet zur Handauflegung bei Kranken* in PBarc. 155,19–156,5 and P.Kellis I 88. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 119 (1997) 131, in the consecration of the oil for the sick in the euchologium of Sarapion (JOHNSON, M. E., *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis. A Literary, Liturgical, and Theological Analysis*. Rome 1995. 66); also in a number of consecratory prayers (KHS-BURMESTER, O. H. E., *The Egyptian or Coptic Church. A Detailed Description of Her Liturgical Services and the Rites and Ceremonies Observed in the Administration of Her Sacraments*. Le Caire 1967. 115 (exorcism and consecration of the baptismal oil), 233 (of the *kallieliaion*)), and in the first prayer of the morning offering of incense (BUTE, J. P., *The Coptic Morning Service for the Lord’s Day*. London 1882. 5).

¹⁶ GOODSPEED, E. J., *An Early Christian Prayer*. *The Biblical World* 17 (1901) 310–311.

αἱ πύλαι χαλκῆ, which combines Ps. 106 (107):10 and Job 38:17, but ends up in a mess with the participle and the masculine article; or it is just clumsy, such as the ἀναστὰς ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐν τῷ τάφῳ “he rose up from the dead in the grave” (l. 4), which combines two creedal statements concerning the resurrection and the burial of Christ. The most manifest example of this variation is in l. 7: ἅγιος ἅγιος ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ αἰῶνος, διὸ οἱ οὐρανοὶ ἐκορέσθησαν τῆς θειότητος αὐτοῦ. This expression rephrases a well-known verse from Isaiah: ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος Σαβαῶθ πλήρης ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ τῆς ἀγίας σου δόξης, which is recited in the anaphora as the *Sanctus* (or Biblical Trisagion). The author of PGM P13 changes the text completely. Instead of κύριος Σαβαῶθ, he inserts ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῦ αἰῶνος; δόξης is substituted with θειότητος, and, most stunningly, the simple πλήρης “full” with the complex and awkward ἐκορέσθησαν “were saturated”.

As I mentioned, there seems to be no evident principle behind the variation, apart from variation itself. And variation brings us to the paraphrase. Paraphrase in late antiquity was a form of rhetorical exercise, “a literary game suitable for all ages”¹⁷. Its application encompassed a wide range of texts from school compositions on Homeric topics to the highly erudite Paraphrase of the Gospel of John in epic style by the fifth-century Egyptian poet, Nonnos of Panopolis. According to the *Progymnasmata* of Theon, a first-century schoolbook, “the paraphrase consists of changing the form of expression while keeping the thoughts.”¹⁸ Changing the form could be achieved by varying the syntax, by adding or dropping elements, by substituting a word for another, and by a combination of these techniques. Although PGM P13 probably cannot be interpreted as a paraphrase itself (unless it is a paraphrase of another prayer now lost to us), the principle is the same: variation. It can be understood as the application of a rhetorical device learnt at school in composing a ritual text.

This application of school learning and rhetoric takes us to the cultural milieu of the third- to sixth-century Egyptian countryside, where similar influence of school-practice and rhetorical exercises has been tracked down and analysed by Laura Miguélez Cavero in the poetry of a group traditionally called the “school of Nonnos”.¹⁹ Similar tendencies may be observed in the writings of their sixth-century successor, Dioscorus of Aphrodito, whose

¹⁷ MIGUÉLEZ CAVERO, L., *Poems in Context: Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200–600 AD*. Berlin 2008. 309.

¹⁸ *Progymnasmata* of Theon 15, PATILLON, M. – BOLOGNESI, G., *Aelius Théon, Progymnasmata*. Paris 1997. 107.

¹⁹ MIGUÉLEZ CAVERO (n. 17).

poetry is preserved on autograph papyri. Dioscorus laid great emphasis on rhetoric in his predominantly occasional and laudatory poetry, but also in the petitions and contracts he drafted.²⁰ For Dioscorus, rhetorical techniques and Hellenic culture he learnt at school secured success, such as requests granted by the duke of the Thebaid, or a job in the duke's capital. For the author of PGM P13, the same principles of creating a text could mean success in the communication with the supernatural. Rhetoric and a display of learning was part of his strategy of empowering the prayer, just as the Homeric-flavoured coinages served to empower an amulet Dioscorus copied (PGM P13a).

Let us now return to our initial question. Can Charon be seen as a “pagan survival” or a “resistant element of traditional religion” in PGM P13? First of all, the name Charon does not seem to be present in the traditional piety of Egypt, not even in its Hellenized form. Although there was a tendency in Egypt to Hellenize the names of local gods, and thereby to introduce names as Nemesis or Typhon to the pantheon,²¹ there is no evidence that Charon was included in this practice. He appears only in a few texts from Egypt. The closest witness in time is a fourth-century magical papyrus, PGM IV l. 1452. There he comes across in the company of a host of figures from the classical Greek underworld, including Erebus, the eponym Ariste for Artemis, and Aiakos, the judge of the underworld. The text gives the impression of trying to provide a list as complete as possible of the chthonic powers of the Greek underworld, while showing off Hellen(ist)ic learning. Moreover, an unedited Greek funeral inscription addressed to Isis and Osiris, from a private collection in Germany,²² contains the name Charon with the adjective ἄπιστος. In this text, Charon is a being to whom the unduly dead were prescribed unjustly by Helios (ἀδίκως προστέταχες). Thus he is essentially a substitute for death. Further attestations of Charon from late antique Egypt come from the sixth-century poet Julian the Egyptian, who belonged to the learned Constantinople circle of Agathias. He mentions Charon in three of his epigrams preserved in the *Antologia Palatina* (AP VII 585, 600 and 603), and in two of these, his occupation as a ferryman is explicitly mentioned.

However, there is no allusion in PGM P13 to Charon's role as the ferryman. His name is a simple substitute for death in a phrase that finds a very close

²⁰ FOURNET, J.-L., *Hellénisme dans l'Égypte du VI^e siècle. La bibliothèque et l'oeuvre de Dioscore d'Aphrodité*. Cairo 1999. 683–687.

²¹ FRANKFURTER (n. 6) 112 and 117.

²² I thank Lajos Berkes for sharing the draft edition of the inscription with me.

parallel in a prayer from the mass in the Great Euchologium of the White Monastery fol. 181 r3–4: ΠΕΝΤΑΨΩΡΒ ΜΠΕΙΒ ΜΠΜΟΥ, “he who broke the sting of death”.²³ The phrase ΠΕΙΒ ΜΠΜΟΥ, which translates κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου, derives from Hosea 13:14 (cited in 1 Cor. 15:55): ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ κέντρον; This verse is frequently quoted by early Christian authors discussing the descent of Christ to the underworld.²⁴ In the Sahidic version of the verses, ΙΕΙΒ translates κέντρον.²⁵ The expression ΠΕΙΒ ΜΠΜΟΥ is used also in the fragmentary gospel edited by Jacoby.²⁶ However, ΙΕΙΒ can also mean “claw” or “hoof”, the equivalent of the Greek ὄνυξ.²⁷ This semantic overlap in Coptic can account for the Greek expression in PGM P13 and shows that the mother tongue of its author was Coptic. Thus, the expression κατακλάσας τὸν ὄνυχα τοῦ Χάροντος can be an idiosyncratic rephrasing of κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου, based on a semantic extension in Greek stimulated by Coptic, which squares well with the numerous other instances of rephrasing Bible verses in the text.

Charon therefore stands simply as a substitute for death in this curious text. Such a meaning of the name is well attested in late antique and medieval sources. Charon was, from the first century AD on, frequently equated with death himself.²⁸ The Suda lexicon (X 135) explained the name simply as ὁ θάνατος. But the majority of these attestations come from outside Egypt. While in Greek popular religion Charon lived on as Charos, the terrible demon of death,²⁹ the only witnesses to this equation from Egypt are Julian the Egyptian (who however belonged to a Constantinople learned elite), the funeral inscription mentioned above, and this papyrus. While the name Charon for death seems to have been known in Egypt, it was not a commonplace.

²³ LANNE, E., *Le Grand Euchologe du Monastère Blanc. PO XXVIII/2*. Turnhout 1958. 368–369. Though the manuscript is datable to the turn of the 10–11th centuries (SUCIU, A., À propos de la datation du manuscrit contenant le Grand Euchologe du Monastère Blanc. *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011) 189–198), the text can be considerably earlier.

²⁴ Cf. GOUNELLE, R., *La descente du Christ aux enfers. Institutionnalisation d'une croyance*. Paris 2000. 444.

²⁵ THOMPSON, H., *The Coptic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Letters in Sahidic Dialect*. Cambridge 1932. 145, and also in the Achmimic version of Hosea, see CRUM, W. E. (ed.), *Coptic Dictionary*. Oxford 1939. 76.

²⁶ JACOBY (n. 2) 6. l. 18.

²⁷ CRUM (n. 25) 76.

²⁸ WASER, O., *Charon, Charun, Charos. Mythologisch-archäologische Monographie*. Berlin 1898. 88–90.

²⁹ WASER (n. 28) 91–103.

This calls for another explanation for this choice. Could the name of Charon, a prominent member of the classical underworld, be yet another element of a strategy to display the author's learning? The attestations of Charon in PGM IV and Julian's poetry refer us to a learned context as well. Figures of the classical mythology were at home within the learning of the Christian elite of Egypt. Nonnos of Panopolis, a contemporary of PGM P13, was author of a monumental epic, the *Dionysiaca* and the paraphrase of the Gospel of John. He moved in a confident and reflective way between the "pagan" world of classical literature and the Christian world of the Gospels.³⁰ For Dioscorus of Aphrodito, comparing the duke of the Thebaid to Apollon or Herakles was as natural as administering a monastery.³¹

The reference to Charon in PGM P13 is more comparable to these learned evocations of Greek gods than to other examples of "pagan survival" such as the invocations of Isis and Hor. The name Charon does not denote a powerful, even if demonic, being, as are Isis and Hor when they are invoked alongside Jesus to help in a Coptic charm for healing.³² Its role is confined to representing an unusual name for death, something Jesus has overthrown. The *historiola*, the "mythic" episode whose power is activated through the narrative,³³ does not rely on Charon's potential, but on that of the victorious Son of God. The inclusion of the name Charon is rather a harmless rhetorical element, which served to add an idiosyncratic touch to the text, and thereby enhance its efficacy in a world where rhetoric and sophisticated self-expression were conceived as the key to the success of a text and its author not only in front of the duke of the Thebaid, but also in front of God.³⁴

³⁰ Cf. SCHORROCK, R., *The Myth of Paganism. Nonnus, Dionysus and the World of Late Antiquity*. London 2011.

³¹ MACCOULL, L. S. B., *Dioscorus of Aphrodito. His Work and His World*. Berkeley 1988. 15.

³² P.Berol. 8313, No. 49 in MEYER-SMITH (n. 4).

³³ Cf. FRANKFURTER, D., Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical *Historiola* in Ritual Spells. In: MEYER, M. –MIRECKI, P. (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*. Boston 2001. 457.

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