

# The Use of the *Ostrakon* in Magical Practice in Late antique Egypt Magical handbooks vs. Material Evidence\*

## 1. *The ostrakon*

The term ὄστρακον was applied in Greek (*LSJ* s.v.), among other uses, to any kind of earthen vessel, or a fragment of it, a “potsherd” (*IG* 4<sup>2</sup>(1).121.82 [Epid., 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE], *LXX Ps.* 21.16, O.Wilck. 2.1152, etc.)<sup>1</sup>. Yet one more meaning of the term, relevant to our study, is applied to the hard shell of snails and mussels (*h.Merc.* 33, S.Ichn. 303, *Hp. Steril.* 245, Theoc. 9.25, Arist. *HA* 528a4)<sup>2</sup>. In Coptic (so Crum 38b), one often finds the term **ΒΛΧΕ** (variants **ΒΕΛΧΕ**, **ΒΗΛΧΙ**) to mean “earthenware”, “pottery”, “clay”, or also «document written on a shard», as well as, like in Greek, “shell” or “seashell”, but we find in our texts also **ΕΥΧΕΚ ΝΟΜΕ/ΝΑΜΕ**, lit. «on a valve (of a shell) made of clay»<sup>3</sup> or **ΕΠΒΙΤ ΟΥΘΑΛΕΖΤ**, «on the shard of a pot».

As a writing medium, the *ostrakon* appears early in Antiquity and its use extended in Egypt at least to the Arabic period, when the use declined<sup>4</sup>. It was deployed for all kinds of documents, administrative or

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. especially the potsherd used in voting (v. ὄστρακίζω): hence τοῦστρακον παροίχεται, «the danger of ostracism is past», Cratin. 71; τὰ ὄστρακα, = ὄστρακισμός, Pl. *Com.* 187; τὸ ὄ. ἐπιφέρειν τινί, «to vote for any one’s banishment», Plu. *Alc.* 13, cf. *Per.* 14.

<sup>2</sup> An ancient Greek game, which according to the instructions, attested by Suetonius *On Greek Games* 9.2, could use both potsherds and seashells, is a parallel to this ambivalent use of the objects (for the text, see J. Taillardat, *Suetonius. Peri Blasphemion, Peri paidion (Extrahs Byzantins). Nouvelle collection de textes et documents*, Belles Lettres, Paris 1967. On the materials used in games, see D.W. Thompson, *Games and playthings*, in «Greece & Rome» 2, 5 (1933), pp. 71-79, esp. p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> P.Bad. v 137, Bilabel translates “Meermuschel”.

<sup>4</sup> On the use of the *ostrakon* see A. Bülow-Jacobsen, *Writing Materials in the Ancient World*, in R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, Oxford University Press,

private, be it tax receipts, accounts, letters, school texts, memoranda. It apparently served as a cheap substitute for papyrus<sup>5</sup>.

The aim of our study is to explore the use of *ostraca* in magical practice. We will describe their use as explicitly prescribed in magical handbooks, which assigned to medium a precise ritual significance. And we will compare this prescription to the extant evidence, i.e. the *ostraca* which have been classified by scholars as magical evidence. We will use this comparison in order to distinguish when their use was due to opportunity, rather than the fulfilment of instructions, and when it could be replaced by any other material without affecting in any way the efficacy of the magical act.

Magical handbooks often describe the materials needed in order to perform correctly a magical spell, charm, amulet, *vel sim*. It seems that the specificity of the materials required often had a relevant role in the type of charm performed. Among the prescribed materials one finds papyrus, *ostracon*, wood, linen, bone, and different kinds of metal *lamellae*, as well as more specific materials, like a strip of a shroud or a chip of the bone of a dead person, or even the skull. Often enough, there are further instructions about how to use or deposit the final “magical product” in tombs, baths, or at the gate of the targeted victim’s house. The prescribed use of *ostraca* as *materia scriptoria* for magical purposes is rare in the preserved Greek and Coptic magic handbooks, but since there are a few references and an important number of preserved pieces, our survey will attempt at clarifying the specific use of the *ostracon* in magic by comparing these two sources<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. The use of the *ostracon* in Greek and Coptic magical handbooks

### 2.1. Greek handbooks

#### a) Pottery *ostraca* in the PGM

As it will be surveyed in this section, the use of pottery *ostraca* is prescribed in the magical handbooks for aggressive magic<sup>7</sup>. It is interest-

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Oxford 2009, pp. 3-29, esp. pp. 14-16; H. Cuvigny *et al.*, *La route de Myos Hormos: L'armée romaine dans le désert oriental d'Égypte. Praesidia du désert de Bérénice*, in «Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale» 48, 2 (2003), pp. 470-473.

<sup>5</sup> D.L. 7.173-174 speaks about Cleantes, who used *ostraca* and cow scapula when he had no money to buy papyrus, and the same about Apollonius Dyscolus in Philemon the Grammarian, p. 307 Ossan (ed.). See also O.Crum 129, where a woman apologizes for writing on an *ostracon* saying «excuse me that I cannot find papyrus, as I am in the country».

<sup>6</sup> There is hardly any discussion or survey of this material related to magic. The only mention, though not a thorough study in H. Leclercq, *Amulettes*, in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie* 1.1, Librairie Letouzey et Ané, Paris 1907, cols. 1805-1807. After this, there is, to our knowledge, no treatment of this question.

<sup>7</sup> For “aggressive magic” we understand every charm that intends to manipulate and

ing to note that it appears in instructions related to the god Seth-Typhon and in love magic, both for causing separation and for causing unions. The instructions often indicate where to pick the *ostrakon*, where to place it, what to write or draw on it and even which type of ink to use. We will survey now the precise instructions, providing a background for each of the cases.

*PGM XII* is a bilingual magical handbook (Greek-Demotic) preserved at Leiden<sup>8</sup>. This roll has been dated to the fourth century CE, and it belonged to the so-called Theban Library<sup>9</sup>. Among the various prescriptions compiled in this book we find the instructions for a charm for causing separation, ἀηδίαν, ἔχθραν, ὡς εἶχον Τυφῶν καὶ Ὅσιρις, εἰ δὲ ἀνήρ ἐστιν καὶ γυνή· “ὡς εἶχον Τυφῶν καὶ Ἴσις”, «odiousness, enmity, just as Typhon and Osiris had, but if it is a husband and wife, “just as Typhon and Isis had”» (lines 366-375), which requires the use of an *ostrakon* of pottery, specifically from a pot of salted fish (ταρίχου ὄστρακον) and a bronze stylus to write it (χαλκῷ γραφεῖω). The spell shall be recited after having been written. It closes with an invocation to the powerful Typhon: ἰσχυρὸν Τυφῶν, μεγαλοδύναμε, τὰς σὰς δυνάμεις ἀποτέλει, «Strong Typhon, very powerful one, perform your mighty acts». The specification of the type of pottery, that of a jar of salted fish, τὰρίχου, can be perhaps an intended pun related to a part of the spell, the invocation of the god who «loves disturbances», ὁ φιλῶν ταραχὰς<sup>10</sup>.

*PGM XXXVI* is an opistograph Greek magical handbook. This roll is preserved at the University Library in Oslo<sup>11</sup> and, like the previous one, has been dated to the fourth century CE. The papyrus comes from Theadelphia, in the Fayum. Among the prescriptions there are instructions for a love spell, ἀγωγή (189-203), which requires an unbaked *ostrakon*, εἰς <ὄ>στρακον ὠμὸν, on which an invocation to Hekate has to be written using a bronze stylus. We wonder what is meant exactly by «unbaked *ostrakon*». It may be understood that the text was written on the fresh clay with a chisel, and then fired, with the result that the text became fixed. We find a remarkable parallel for this method in the Aramaic use

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control someone, his/her belongings, and his/her feelings, usually by inflicting damage to him or her in every sense. With this large definition, the prescriptions that are going to be taken into account are, mainly, binding spells, love charms, and instructions for sending evil sleep.

<sup>8</sup> P.Lugd.Bat. J 384 (v). A study of this papyrus can be found in J. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual (100-300 CE)* (“Religions in the Graeco-Roman World”, 153), Brill, Leiden 2005.

<sup>9</sup> On the Theban Library see W.J. Tait, *Theban magic*, in S.P. Vleeming (ed.), *Hundred-gated Thebes: Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban area in the Graeco-Roman Period*, Brill, Leiden 1995, pp. 169-182, and J. Dieleman, *Priest, Tongues, and Rites*, cit., pp. 11-21.

<sup>10</sup> This was suggested in a personal communication by Prof. Christopher A. Faraone.

<sup>11</sup> P.Osl. 1 1.

of «new» or «uncooked» *ostraca*: Naveh-Shaked Amulet 10<sup>12</sup> is a fifth-sixth century CE Aramaic love charm on an *ostracon* from Horvat Rimmon, Israel. The text was incised on the *ostracon* while the clay was still fresh. This comparison brings us to Aramaic magical instructions. In the Aramaic handbooks this practice appears as using a «new potsherd»<sup>13</sup>. In the Genizah fragments of magic books (*Genizah* 5, p. 3:12; 6, p. 1:3, 4:4 and 6, p. 1:15) the phenomenon appears with a more specific instruction, as «unbaked piece of pottery»<sup>14</sup>. Apparently the firing of the object is part of the ritual, a *similia similibus* procedure<sup>15</sup> («as this shard burns, so shall his/her heart burn»)<sup>16</sup>. Though we do not find it in our text in the *PGM*, this was probably behind the intended use of unbaked *ostraca*. It is also remarkable that there is a coincidence in the ink used to dip the *ostracon* in the Aramaic handbooks, «black myrrh», with that in our texts (ζυμυρομέλαν).

In the same papyrus, the instructions for a counter-spell given in 256-263 seem to be more specific. A three cornered shard picked up from a fork in the road (<ὄστρακον> ἀπὸ τριόδου τρίγωνον) is required, and even has to be picked with the left hand (τῇ ἀριστερῇ χειρὶ ἄρας), written with myrrhed ink, ζυμυρομελανίῳ, and be hidden.

In the *Supplementum Magicum*<sup>17</sup> we find other examples of prescriptions or magical instructions. *Suppl. Mag.* II 82<sup>18</sup> is a very fragmentary papyrus, dated to the third century CE, featuring short prescriptions for different magical charms. In lines 4-6 there is a prescription which uses a potsherd<sup>19</sup> for a charm ἀγώγ(ιμον), «to lead the beloved», an erotic spell.

<sup>12</sup> J. Naveh - S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Magnes Press - Brill, Jerusalem - Leiden 1985, pp. 84-89, and G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 156-158.

<sup>13</sup> M. Gaster (ed.), *The Sword of Moses. An Ancient Book of Magic*, D. Nutt, London 1896, spell nos. 55, 56, 57, 69 and 85.

<sup>14</sup> See J. Naveh - S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, cit., pp. 88-89.

<sup>15</sup> On the so-called *similia-similibus* procedure and persuasive analogy see, e.g. J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough. The magic art*, vols. I-II, Criterion Books, New York 1935<sup>3</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> ed.: 1890), pp. 33-63; S.J. Tambiah, *Form and meaning of magical acts: A point of view*, in R. Horton - R. Finnegan (eds.), *Modes of Thought*, Longman, London 1973, pp. 199-229, and C.A. Faraone - A. Kropp, *Inversion, adversion and perversion as strategies in Latin curse-tablets*, in R.L. Gordon - F. Marco (eds.), *Magical Practice in the Latin West. Papers from the International Conference held at the University of Zaragoza 30 Sept.-1 Oct. 2005*, Brill, Leiden 2010, pp. 381-398; L. Gil, *Therapeia. La Medicina Popular en el Mundo Clásico*, Guadarrama, Madrid 1969 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.: 2004), pp. 168-180.

<sup>16</sup> On this in love magic in Classical Literature, see C.A. Faraone, *Clay hardens and wax melts: Magical role-reversal in Vergil's Eighth Eclogue*, in «Classical Philology» 84,4 (1989), pp. 294-300.

<sup>17</sup> Hereafter abbreviated as *Suppl. Mag.* Cf. R. Daniel - F. Maltomini (eds.), *Supplementum Magicum*, vols. I-II, («Papyrologica Coloniensia» XVI.1), Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen 1990.

<sup>18</sup> *PGM* XLVI, P.Laur. III 57.

<sup>19</sup> Although difficult to read, the traces have been interpreted by the editors as ὄστράκιον or ὄστράκινος.

*Suppl.Mag.* II 96<sup>20</sup> preserves the instructions for several magical charms in a much abbreviated and misspelled Greek. The papyrus has been dated to the fifth-sixth century CE and its origin is unknown. In lines 48-51 the use of a potsherd is recommended for a woman in labor, πρὸς γενουῖσαν. The *ostrakon* should be placed on the right thigh during labor (?). It is not clear if the words: ἤξερθε ἡκ τοῦ μνεμίου σου· Χριστός σε καλῖ, «Come out of your tomb, Christ is calling you» have to be pronounced while holding the *ostrakon* on the thigh, or written on the *ostrakon*.

*Suppl.Mag.* II 97<sup>21</sup> is again a magical handbook with very brief magical prescriptions. The papyrus preserves the lower part of an opisthograph roll dated to the fifth-sixth century CE. It seems to have belonged to the same magical workshop as the previous one. Its origin is unknown too. It is a spell for calling in customers that has to be written on a triangular *ostrakon*<sup>22</sup>, τρήγονον ὄστρακον, and be buried in the house. The title of the spell, κατακλητικόν, appears also in *PGM* IV 2373, and it has been translated as «invocatory spell» in *LSJ*. Eitrem translates it in the apparatus of the edition of *PGM* IV as «Kundschaft ladend», i.e. «charm for calling in customers»<sup>23</sup>. If it is taken as a misspelling of κατακλιτικόν<sup>24</sup>, it becomes a spell for causing illness, bringing it to the sphere of aggressive magic we have been describing. The ritual of using blood of an animal to write magical signs on an *ostrakon* that has to be buried is easily related to the other prescriptions for such a purpose.

## b) Ostraca “from the sea”

Apart from the usual pottery shards, we have included in our survey the *ostraca* from the sea, i.e. seashells, called in Greek ὄστρακον ἀπὸ θαλάσσης. Most of the magical handbooks that we will mention were produced in Thebes, where seashells were probably not an ordinary commodity (they are hardly mentioned in the papyri<sup>25</sup>), and it would not be strange to use a more common kind of *ostrakon*, a pottery shard, as a sub-

<sup>20</sup> *PGM* CXXIII, P.Mil.Vogl. inv. 1245, 1246, 1247-1248, 1249, 1250, 1252-1253. Compare perhaps with TM 64128 = *Suppl.Mag.* II 68.

<sup>21</sup> *PGM* CXXIV, P.Mil.Vogl. inv. 1251.

<sup>22</sup> Compare above the triangular sherd in *PGM* XXXVI.

<sup>23</sup> This interpretation of the word was preferred by R. Daniel - F. Maltomini, *Suppl.Mag.* II 97, cit., p. 257. Cf. below, the instructions in P.Macq. 1.

<sup>24</sup> The word occurs in *PGM* VII 430 in the context of «a restraining rite for anything». κατακλίνω occurs in *PGM* IV 2076, 2450, 2497, 2624; *PGM* LXIV 1 f.; O 2, 31 f. See also D.R. Jordan, *A Survey of Greek Defixiones not Included in the Special Corpora*, in «Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies» 26 (1985), pp. 151-197, nos. 16 and 163.

<sup>25</sup> For example, as an ornament, κόχλον ναυτικόν, in P.Cair.Zen. IV 59665, 10 (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE).

stitute. In fact, as far as we know, there are no known seashells inscribed from Egypt. Moreover, the seashells are prescribed for similar purposes as the above mentioned pottery shards.

We find four cases of seashells as prescribed material in the magical handbooks. One of them comes from *PGM IV* 2220-2227. *PGM IV*, also called «Paris Magical Codex»<sup>26</sup>, a codex composed of 36 folios. It has been dated to the fourth century CE and it probably comes from Thebes. As in the case of *PGM XII*, *PGM IV* has been connected to the Theban Library. These lines feature the instructions for «spells that restrain», and recommend the use of an ὄστρακον ἀπὸ θαλάσσης, a seashell, to write on with a special kind of ink to which Typhon's blood (μιλτάριον Τυφῶνος) should be added. The object then is to be buried in a grave of someone who died untimely, εἰς ἄωρου μνήμα. It also has an invocation which can be compared to the one in our first example (*PGM XII*)<sup>27</sup>: Ἴὼ Βολχουσίη, Ἴακούβ ιαι Ἴὼ Παταθναξ Ἐρβηθ Ἴὼ Πακερβηθ used in aggressive magic.

*PGM VII* is a magical handbook written on an opisthographic roll. It is preserved at the British Library<sup>28</sup> and has been dated to the third and fourth centuries CE<sup>29</sup>. Its origin is not clear, but some scholars link the papyrus to the so-called Theban Library<sup>30</sup>. Among different prescriptions this papyrus preserves the instructions for three love spells which require the use of a seashell, normally written on with a special kind of ink, the blood of a black ass, and instructions on how to deposit the pieces in graves or in the heating chamber of a bath. The first one, *PGM VII* 300a-310, is a love charm of immediate effect, ἀγγώμιον αὔθωρον, to be written on a sea-*ostrakon*, ὄστρακον θαλάσσιον, with the blood of a black ass, διὰ αἵματος ὀνίου μελάνου (to be connected to Typhon?) with and invocation to Necessity, the *Maskelli logos*<sup>31</sup> and a series of magical words of power (?).

*PGM VII* 374-384 contains two different charms to induce insomnia, ἀγρυπνητικόν, one of them using an *ostrakon* from the sea and writing the spell on it.

<sup>26</sup> P.Bibl.Nat. Supp. gr. n. 574.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 781. On these invocations and their use in aggressive magic, see *PGM*, vol. III (Index), pp. 240-241; T. Hopfner, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber* ("Studien zu Paläographie und Papyruskunde" 21 und 23), H. Haessel, Leipzig, 1921-1924 [reimpr. Amsterdam 1974], vol. II, secs. 142-143; *Suppl.Mag.* II 95 commentary to lines 8-12; R. Martín Hernández - S. Torallas Tovar, *A magical spell on an ostrakon at the Abbey of Montserrat*, in «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 189 (2014), pp. 175-184.

<sup>28</sup> P.Lond. inv. n. 121.

<sup>29</sup> The magical papyrus preserves spells written by two different hands.

<sup>30</sup> On discussion and bibliography see R. Martín Hernández, *Two requests for a dream oracle, two different kinds of magical handbook*, in M. de Haro (ed.), *Actes du colloque international «Écrire la magie dans l'Antiquité – Scrivere la magia nell'Antichità (Liège, 13-15 octobre 2011)»*, Liège, forthcoming.

<sup>31</sup> On the *Maskelli logos*, see D.R. Jordan, *Magica Graeca Parvula*, in «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 100 (1994), pp. 321-336, esp. 328-329.

And finally *PGM VII 467-477* is a spell of attraction, to be written on an *ostrakon* from the sea with myrrh ink, ζμυρνομέλανι. A figure of Typhon, ζῳδιον Τυφωνακόν, has to be copied from a model given below, his names must be written all around, and then it has to be thrown to the hypocaustum of a bathhouse (καὶ κύκλω αὐτοῦ τὰ ὀνόματα καὶ βάλε εἰς ὑποκαυστήριον βαλανείου), and the spell uttered at the same time.

According to the sources discussed, seashells were used for charms for restraining and for erotic purposes, three of them on the same magical handbook – perhaps a sign that the book or its source came from a marine area? In any case, as with pottery *ostraca*, the seashells are prescribed for aggressive uses, rather than protective. It is also important to note that there is a link with “Typhonic magic”<sup>32</sup> in this case. It is our impression that the use of both pottery *ostraca* and seashells is parallel and possibly interchangeable in Antiquity. One may even argue that the use of the seashell, only possible in marine areas, was soon substituted by the use of the pottery *ostrakon* in areas where shells could not be found. The fact that the name used for both was the same made this exchange easier.

## 2.2. Coptic handbooks

In line with what has been claimed about Greek magic, Coptic handbooks of ritual power also recommend the use of *ostraca* for magical purposes only in cases of aggressive magic. There are a few examples that we will survey here. P.Bad. v 137.1-8 (Meyer-Smith 86)<sup>33</sup> contains the instructions for the performance of a sexual curse to leave a man impotent and protect a woman from his sexual advances. It states at the beginning that the curse should be written on a sherd.

**ϸΖΑΙ ΝΕΝΡΑΝ ΕΥΧΕΚ ΝΟΥΝ ΕΝΑΜΕ - ΝΑΛΜΙΤΕ ΝΑΛΧΩΒΙΑ - ΕΟΟΥ  
ΕΒΑΛ·ΝΤΑΖΑ ΠΕΖΑ**

«Draw our names on a shard of clay: Nalmite, Nalchobia. Wash them off with genuine (olive) oil»<sup>34</sup>.

The text of P.Bad. v 122.272 (Meyer-Smith 73)<sup>35</sup>, though damaged, clearly refers to the ritual act of writing the prayer on an *ostrakon*. A drawing of «three humanoids» filled with *charakteres*, *voces magicae*, and the name of archangels, follows the instructions. The purpose of the text is sexual.

<sup>32</sup> We say “Typhonic magic” in the sense of aggressive magic related to the god Seth-Typhon.

<sup>33</sup> P.Heid.Kopt. 1682.

<sup>34</sup> Translation by M. Meyer, in M. Meyer - R. Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic. Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999, p. 179.

<sup>35</sup> P.Heid.Kopt. inv. 1684.

**ΝΖΕΝΖΑΙΤ ΨΑ · ΛΗΒ ΕΥΒΗΛΑΧΙ ΝΑΜΙ ΕΝΒΩ ΤΠ[ΡΟC]ΕΥΧΗ ..**

«(Write) on a potsherd with hair (brush?) the prayer...»<sup>36</sup>.

P.Bad. v 139.48 (Meyer-Smith 105)<sup>37</sup> presents the instructions for a cursing ritual aimed at a woman and her business. It involves the “persuasive” burning of a spell written on an *ostracon*. An image was meant to be drawn onto the *ostracon* with menstrual blood.

**CΖΑΙ ΠΩΡΩ ΕΠΒΙΤ ΟΥΒΑΛΕΖΤ. ΝΚΩΤ CΑΠΕΖΟΥ. ΟΥΑΖ ΖΙΧΕΝ Γ̄ΝΤ  
ΩΒΙ. ΝΑΜΙ CΑΖΤ ΖΑΡΑΥ. ΤΑΜC ΖΙ ΟΥΖΙΡ ΕCΤ̄ΟC. ΘΥ ΚΑCΧΛΕΙΤ  
ΟΥΩΦΕ ΠΚΩΖΤ. ΑCΧΟΚ ΕΒΑΛ**

«Write (it with) menstrual blood on a potsherd; sleep behind (it). Set (it) upon three bricks; set fire under them. Bury (it) at a crossroad. Off(ering): olive pit; consume (it in) the fire. It is done».

There are three more examples in a recently edited eighth century Coptic magical handbook, P.Macq. 1<sup>38</sup>. In this handbook the use of *ostraca* is prescribed for three different spells: one for a business spell, one for a binding spell, and one for a binding spell specific for a ship.

**Ε ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΟΝ ΓΡ/ ΕΡΕΜΙΗΛ ΜΝΕΤΕΝΟΥΒ ΝΕΕC Δ ΒΕΛΧΕ ΤΟΜC  
ΟΥΕΙ ΚΑΤΕ ΚΟΟΖ ΠΒΟΛ ΜΠΡΟ ΓΡ/ ΟΝ Δ ΠΙΤΑΚΙΟΝ ΚΑΥΙ ΚΑΤΕ  
ΚΟΖ ΦΟΥΝ ΠΡΟ Λ ΕΥΜΟΟΥ C̄C Γ̄ΝΟΥΧ ΖΙΖΟΥΝ ΑΥΩ ΖΙΒΟΛ ΑΥΩ  
ΝΖΙΡΕΤΖΗ ΡΟΚ**

«5. A business (spell): Write Eremiel and those belonging to him. Do (?) four potsherds. Bury one at each corner outside the door. Write again four slips (and) place one at each corner inside the door. Say the formula on water, mix the pot three times; throw (it) inside and outside and in front of you».

**Η ΚΑΤΟΧΟC Λ ΕΧΝΟΥΒΛΧΕ ΒΕΡΕ ΤΟΜΕC Ζ̄ΡΜ ΡΟ**

«8. A binding (spell): Say the formula over a new potsherd (and) bury it at the door».

**Κ ΟΥΚΑΤΟΧΟC ΧΟΕΙ Λ ΕΧΝΟΥΒΕΛΧΕ ΚΑΑC ΖΙΖΗ ΜΟC**

«20. A binding (for a) ship: Say the formula over a potsherd. Put it on its front».

Finally, there is a later example, P.Bad. v 123. This is a Coptic-Arabic love spell, which starts (ll. 1-2) in Arabic with the words «Write these words on a shell from Aswan with menstrual blood and water from leeks». It is a love spell to be placed under the door of the targeted victim.

<sup>36</sup> Translation by H.M. Jackson in M. Meyer - R. Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic*, cit., p. 158.

<sup>37</sup> P.Heid.Kopt. inv. 1681.

<sup>38</sup> M. Choat - I. Gardner, *A Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power (P. Macq. 1 I)*, Brepols, Turnhout 2014, pp. 68-69. We are grateful to Malcolm Choat for letting us read the unpublished manuscript of this book, which will soon be out.

As shown above, the prescribed use of *ostraca* in magic, both in the Greek and in the Coptic manuals, is related mostly to aggressive practices, in all their varieties: curses of every kind and love magic. There are also two examples for business spells, possibly designed to summon clients, which could be related to the mentioned «attraction spells», and one example of an *ostrakon* used for healing, in this case to help a woman in labor. However, we have to refer to a literary exception, that of the *Geoponica* (2.42.2)<sup>39</sup>: «If you wish that this plant (=«lion-pulse») in no way appears (i.e. in your fields), take five potsherds and draw on them in chalk or in another kind of white (a picture of) Heracles strangling the lion. Place these in the four corners (of the field) and in the middle».

### 3. Material evidence of *ostraca*<sup>40</sup>

Now that we have surveyed the testimony from the handbooks, we turn to the evidence for applied magic, i.e. the actual *ostraca* which belonged to the ritual and which can be the product in some way of the instructions described above. As we have seen, the magical handbooks recommend the use of *ostraca* mainly for aggressive purposes, and hardly, and often doubtfully, for protective magic. Many of the pieces in our survey<sup>41</sup> present a difficult interpretation and cannot be related to magic

<sup>39</sup> The *Geoponica* is a Byzantine tenth century compilation of earlier Greek agricultural knowledge. We thank Christopher A. Faraone for pointing at this text as an example of the use of *ostraca* in protective uses. There is no further evidence of this practice, unless we take O.Kellis 153, a “school text” which features the name of Herakles written three times. However, the fact that it appears together with other school texts and objects confirms that it has nothing to do with an amulet. For *Geoponica*, see A. Dalby, *Geoponika. Farm Work*, Prospect Books, Devon 2011, although it is just a translation into English with hardly any notes. The translation into Spanish by M.J. Meana - J.I. Cubero - P. Sáez, *Geopónica o extractos de agricultura de Casiano Baso*, Instituto nacional de investigación y tecnología agraria y alimentaria, Madrid 1998, has however plenty of notes on the text, though not precisely on this topic. For it see a brief reference in H.J. Rose, *The Folklore of the Geoponica*, in «Folklore» 44,1 (1933), pp. 57-90, esp. p. 69.

<sup>40</sup> We consider in this article all materials which have been classified as “magical” in catalogues and editions, since one of our purposes is to discuss this classification and too lightly characterizations of objects as “magical”. For the discussion between magic and religion we refer to e.g. R. Gordon, *Imagining Greek and Roman Magic*, in V. Flint - R. Gordon - G. Luck - D. Ogden (eds.), *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, II (“Ancient Greece and Rome”), The Athlone Press, London 1999, pp. 159-275; H.S. Versnel, *Some reflections on the relationship magic-religion*, in «Numen» 38,2 (1999), pp. 177-197; F. Marco-Simón, *La magia como sistema de alteridad en la Roma augustea y julio-claudia*, in «MHNH. Revista Internacional de Investigación sobre Magia y Astrología Antiguas» 1 (2001), pp. 105-131; G. Sfameni, *Magia e potere delle immagini: il caso dei soggetti egiziani*, in A. Mastrocinque (ed.), *Atti dell'incontro di studio Gemme gnostiche e cultura ellenistica, 22-23 ottobre 1999*, Patrón, Bologna 2002, pp. 225-242; D. Collins, *Magic: What is it and how it works?*, in Id., *Magic in the Ancient Greek World*, Blackwell, Malden (MA) - Oxford 2008, pp. 1-26.

<sup>41</sup> We have prepared a survey of “magical” *ostraca* with the help of the *Leuven Database of Ancient Books* (LDAB), *Trismegistos Portal* (TM), *Religious, Ritual, Magical and Divinatory*

with entire certainty. Some of them, as we will argue, are indeed difficult to interpret, since the few words, *charakteres* or drawings they feature are common not only in magic, but in other textual genres.

### 3.1. *Dubious material*

We will start with the case of those *ostraca* which can be interpreted both as magical texts and as school exercises. There are plenty of examples, but we will mention some representative of those that have been characterised as magical in their editions.

1. TM 82586 = *KSB* III 37<sup>42</sup> is a limestone *ostrakon* with roughly scrawled text and sketches of animals, and it cannot be asserted whether the text is magical or a school text.
2. TM 82612 = *KSB* III 38<sup>43</sup> presents a very similar text, letters and the drawing of a face, which might be interpreted as the face of a teacher or an apotropaic figure (cf. the case of Bes or Humbaba)<sup>44</sup>.
3. TM 65328 = O.Crum 520<sup>45</sup> presents a complicated case. It contains a doxology, but also alternatively considered pen trials by Crum, followed by the alphabet.

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*Database* (TM Magic) and the checklist by Th.S. de Bruyn - J.H.F. Dijkstra, *Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablet*, in «Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists» 48 (2011), pp. 163-216 (abbreviated hereon as B-D). The different *ostraca* are quoted in our text, with a few exceptions, by *Trismegistos* number (abbreviated TM) and its edition. Further information in footnotes.

<sup>42</sup> O.Brit.Mus.Copt. 1 (O.Hall), p. 32, pl. 24, 3 (British Museum EA21291).

<sup>43</sup> O.Brit.Mus.Copt. 1 (O.Hall), p. 37, pl. 30, 5 (British Museum EA21295).

<sup>44</sup> Other examples: TM 81827 (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum P. 924), an *ostrakon* edited by W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere und Zauberostraka der Papyrus-Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin*, in «Archiv für Papyrusforschung» 31 (1985), pp. 31-42, esp. pp. 36-37, has been listed as a magical amulet in TM Magic, but as a possible school exercise in the *Banque de données des textes coptes documentaires* (= henceforth BDC) by Alain Delattre. Also TM 66750 = O.Mon.Phoibammon 40, is listed as “school text or magical: amulet” in TM Magic, and in the BDC: «jeu de lettres. Pangramme. Grec. Exercice scolaire?». See also TM 74686 = O.Kellis 157r, school text, alphabet, in verso personal names. It has been connected with the school environment by the editor, K.A. Worp, but it is also listed in TM Magic. See also dubious cases as in TM 66064, edited by H. Verreth - H. Goldfus, *A Greek magical (?) Ostrakon from Elousa (Halusa)*, in «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 128 (1999), pp. 150-152 (Beer-Sheeva, Ben Gurion University number unknown), and TM 69132, another *ostrakon* with an alphabet edited by G. Nachtergaele - R. Pintaudi, *Documents de fouilles en provenance du nome Arsinoïte et d’Antinoë*, in «Analecta Papyrologica» 14-15 (2002-2003) [2005], pp. 285-298, esp. pp. 286-287, n. 2 (Egypt, El-Sheikh Ibada, excavations Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli”, northern necropolis, N 89); or TM 87095 = O.Mon.Epiph. 559 (Coptic Museum 4330.90), *L’art copte en Égypte. 2000 ans de christianisme*, Gallimard, Paris 2000, p. 121, n. 93 descr.; see J.L. Fournet, *Nouveaux textes scolaires grecs et coptes*, in «Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale» 101 (2001), pp. 159-181, esp. 171, n. 23, against its characterisation as magical, defending its nature as a school text; TM 108487 = Cairo, Coptic Museum 4746, *L’art copte*, cit., p. 121, n. 94.

<sup>45</sup> British Library EEF 216.

TM Magic database and the checklist by de Bruyn - Dijkstra (B-D 151) list it as an amulet, but it can of course be a school text.

4. No TM nr.<sup>46</sup> Edited by Wessely, this is an *ostrakon* from Elephantine dated to the second century CE, which features parts of verses from the *Iliad* (12, 442-444). Wessely suggests that the *ostrakon* should be interpreted as a magical amulet, based on the idea that verses of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were used in magic<sup>47</sup>, although he admits that it could also be a school exercise.

The use of some specific literary or biblical texts in magic allows the interpretation of certain pieces as magical. It is well known that Homeric verses played an important role in magic, as much as those from the Bible, especially the Psalms did. Our conclusion in general is that whenever a document features only a given text, generally related to magic, at least one more sign of being magical should be required in order to characterize the item safely. This would be for example the case of amulets featuring a sacred text (the beginning of the Gospels, the Psalms, the Letter of Abgar to Jesus): that they also show signs of having been folded originally (i.e. they were carried as amulets, folded and placed in a capsule), or that they also feature *charakteres*, or magical drawings, or any expression which can point to a magical use. In the case of *ostraca*, this is difficult to find, they do not normally present any drawing or character, and of course they cannot be folded.

We will now analyse some *ostraca* which contain the text of the Psalms<sup>48</sup> and that have been interpreted as amulets. It seems that some of the Psalms were used in magic, especially Ps. 90<sup>49</sup>. As we will see, there is no indication in the text or in their material features in any of these texts to prove that they are amulets. They do not preserve formulas like «protect So an So against whatever», or any sign of being worn by the user, which could help us interpret them as *phylacteria*. On the other hand, as Bucking<sup>50</sup> has proposed, the *ostraca* containing Psalms at the Monastery of Epiphanius may be related to the fact that while working, monks recited Psalms, and in this monastery such fragments have been found

<sup>46</sup> K. Wessely, *Neue griechische Ostraca*, in «Wiener Studien: Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie, Patristik und lateinische Tradition» 8 (1886), pp. 116-124, esp. 116-118.

<sup>47</sup> See D. Collins, *Homeric incantations*, in Id., *Magic in the Ancient Greek World*, cit., pp. 104-131; and Id., *The magic of Homeric verses*, in «Classical Philology» 103,3 (2008), pp. 211-236.

<sup>48</sup> On the importance of Psalms in the spiritual life of the monk, see T. Derda, *Psalms in the Lives of the Anchorites*, in Id. (ed.), *Deir el Naqlun: The Greek Papyri (P.Naqlun 1)*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw 1995, pp. 50-53.

<sup>49</sup> See T.J. Kraus, *Fragmente eines Amulett-Armbands im British Museum (London) mit Septuaginta-Psalms 90 und der Huldigung der Magier*, in «Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum» 48-49 (2005-2006), pp. 114-127, esp. pp. 120-127.

<sup>50</sup> See S. Bucking, *Scribes and Schoolmasters? On contextualizing Coptic and Greek ostraca excavated at the Monastery of Epiphanius*, in «Journal of Coptic Studies» 9 (2007), pp. 21-47, esp. p. 33.

in spaces devoted to weaving and basket-making, where the texts act as memoranda, rather than as amulets. This fact adds yet one more element of doubt in the interpretation of the use of *ostraca*. Our examples of *ostraca* featuring a text from the Psalms might be interpreted as an amulet but also as something else. The absence of supplementary characteristics makes it very difficult to affirm conclusively their use.

Here are some examples:

1. TM 62028 = *SB* III 196 (B-D 100) contains Psalms 117 in Greek and 118 in Coptic. The fact that these are two subsequent Psalms is probably a sign that this is rather a memorandum or a copy, than any kind of magical or ritual use of the *ostraca*<sup>51</sup>.
2. TM 62207 = O.Petrie Mus. 2 = O.Crum VC 1 (B-D 137) preserves Psalm 30: 2-8<sup>52</sup>.
3. TM 61973 = *JNES* 5 (1946) 181-182 (B-D 145) preserves Psalm 20: 1-5 in Greek<sup>53</sup>.
4. TM 62101 = O.Eleph. DAIK 165 Ro (B-D 152) preserves the text of Psalm 91:14-16 in Greek<sup>54</sup>.
5. TM 108552 = O.Vind.Copt. 5 = Crum *ST* 409, features Psalm 144.12-13 in Coptic<sup>55</sup>.
6. TM 109073 = P.Sijp. 9a<sup>56</sup>, features Psalm 5.7-8.
7. TM 107318, featuring Psalm 95, 4-5<sup>57</sup>.

None of these *ostraca* has any indication of a magical use, so we insist on taking extra precautions in characterising the specific use of these pieces. There is a similar situation when it comes to the list of the martyrs of Sebaste<sup>58</sup>, often found on papyri and parchment with amuletic use, but even some examples are inscribed on *ostraca*:

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<sup>51</sup> Present location unknown. See H. Kortenbeutel - A. Bühlig, *Ostrakon mit griechischkoptischem Psalmentext*, in «Aegyptus» 15 (1935), pp. 415-418.

<sup>52</sup> Chicago, Haskell Oriental Institute MH 1175 + MH 935 + London, University College, Petrie Museum UC 62851. See C.E. Römer - M. Hasitzka, *Psalm 30, 2-8 in Greek and Coptic. Joined ostraca in London and Chicago*, in «Archiv für Papyrusforschung» 53 (2007), pp. 201-203.

<sup>53</sup> Chicago, Haskell Oriental Institute MH 1269. See A. Wikgren, *Two Ostraca Fragments of the Septuagint Psalter*, in «Journal of Near Eastern Studies» 5 (1946), pp. 181-184, esp. pp. 181-182.

<sup>54</sup> Aswan, Elephantine Museum number unknown. See F. Winter, *Zum Psalmenzitat auf O. Eleph.* 165, in «Tyche» 13 (1998), pp. 249-252; and G. Nachtergaeel, *À propos d'un papyrus documentaire et d'un ostracon biblique d'Éléphantine*, in «Chronique d'Égypte» 73 (1998), pp. 116-120, esp. pp. 119-120, n. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Vienna, Nationalbibliothek K. O. 645.

<sup>56</sup> Amsterdam University Library O.174.

<sup>57</sup> Ägyptisches Museum P. 1019. See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., p. 38.

<sup>58</sup> See D. Hagedorn, *PUG 141 und die Namen der vierzig Märtyrer von Sebaste*, in «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 55 (1984), pp. 146-153. Other texts (on papyrus) with the list of martyrs of Sebaste are: TM 63026 (a papyrus from Berlin, classified as "catalogue"), TM 63027 (a papyrus from Berlin classified as magical: prayer for a good singing voice with

1. TM 65420 = P.Lugd.Bat. XXV 12<sup>59</sup>, (B-D 129). According to LDAB database, it is «no doubt amulet».
2. TM 68822 = «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 146 (2004), n. 6<sup>60</sup> (B-D 133) is listed as an amulet in B-D.
3. TM 65450 = «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 75 (1988), 147-149<sup>61</sup> (B-D 132) is described in TM Magic as catalogue hagiography + magic, amulet
4. TM 34326 = O.Eleph. DAIK 322<sup>62</sup> is characterized by the editor as magical.

As above, regarding the Psalms, an example of a different use of the same text, unrelated to magic, proves the uncertainty of the task of characterization. We present a school text as a means of comparison. If these *ostraca* are compared to TM 61737 = O.Brit.Mus. XXXII 1<sup>63</sup> an *ostrakon* dated to the seventh-eighth century, the characterization as amulets may raise some doubts: this BM *ostrakon* contains a list of Greek words, which can be partially grouped, some taken from the *Acta Apostolorum*, chapters 1-4 (recto cols. 2 and 3) and 20.4-10 (col. 1, 10-11); some are names of instruments of surgery or torture (verso col. 1, 1-5); all of it followed by the list of the 40 martyrs of Sebaste (verso col. 1, 9 - col. 2). This text has been interpreted as a school text.

Both the *ostraca* containing Psalms or the lists of the martyrs of Sebaste have been related to magic mainly because these texts appear in magical handbooks among other Christian texts, as for example the list of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, the beginning of the four gospels, and

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blessing of wine and honey; with *voces magicae*; after the spell a list of the 42 martyrs of Sebaste); TM 64676 (a papyrus from Berlin classified as catalogue, magic, invocation, with the list of the 42 martyrs of Sebaste); TM 65412 (a papyrus from Geneva described as magical: amulet with list of the 40 martyrs of Sebaste); TM 108452 (a papyrus from Manchester described as magical: spell with beginning of the gospel of Mark and 40 martyrs of Sebaste). But see A. Delattre, *Noms rares et noms fantômes dans trois ostraca grecs d'Éléphantine*, in «Chronique d'Égypte» 85 (2010), pp. 363-373, esp. p. 365, who suggests that the magical use of the list of the martyrs of Sebaste is assured in the case of his numbers 1-3, and 10-13, since they present other features, like foldings, other magical texts or drawings. In fact, the *ostrakon* from Elephantine he edits does not present any of these supplementary characteristics.

<sup>59</sup> Leiden, Papyrological Institute O. 1.

<sup>60</sup> K.A. Worp - D. Hagedorn, *Einige griechische Ostraka der Sammlung Kaufmann in Beuron*, in «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 146 (2004), pp. 159-164.

<sup>61</sup> C. Gallazzi, *O. Mil. Vogl. Inv. Provv. CE 2: amuleto coi nomi dei Martiri di Sebastia*, in «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 75 (1988), pp. 147-149.

<sup>62</sup> A. Delattre, *Noms rares et noms fantômes*, cit., n. 1.

<sup>63</sup> London, British Library ostr. 26210 + 26211 + 26215 was first edited by H.R. Hall, *Coptic and Greek texts of the Christian period from ostraka, stelae, etc. in the British museum*, Harrison and sons, London 1905, pl. 32, and reedited by Hasitzka, *KSB* III 248. Recently S. Torallas Tovar, *What is Greek and what is Coptic? School Texts as a window into the perception of Greek loanwords in Coptic*, in F. Feder - A. Lohwasser (eds.), *Ägypten und sein Umfeld in der Spätantike. Vom Regierungsantritt Diokletians 284/285 bis zur arabischen Eroberung der Vorderen Orients um 635-646*, Harrasowitz, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 109-119.

the letter of Jesus to Abgar<sup>64</sup>. Precisely the latter text, the letter of Jesus to Abgar, is a common text appearing in amulets, typically written on parchment or papyrus, but also in a few cases on *ostraca*<sup>65</sup>. The checklist of amulets by de Bruyn - Dijkstra shows three examples made from papyrus (TM 58909 = B-D 183, TM 58906 = B-D 48, and TM 58907 = B-D 115), but we may add to this list, which collects only Greek texts, three more examples in Coptic on *ostraca* and one example on wood<sup>66</sup>. The examples on *ostraca* are: TM 111175 = Crum *ST* 36; TM 108824 = *KSB* III 182; and TM 110390 = O.Crum 22.

Finally, other texts have an even more difficult relation to magic. We speak about *ostraca* containing prayers and hymns whose use and purpose can be magical as much as religious<sup>67</sup>. We find a number of examples for the Trishagios hymn:

1. TM 64872 = P.Lugd.Bat. xvii 5 = O.Zucker 36. This is a fourth century Trishagios.
2. TM 65457 = *PGM* O3<sup>68</sup>. According to Meyer-Smith 6, the *ostrakon* apparently was used as an amulet for healing because it preserves a Greek text referring, in a very general way, to John 9.1-12, the passage of the healing of the blind, and the probatic pool. Koenen does not agree with Preisendanz in including this piece in the *PGM*. We do not consider it magical either.
3. TM 65213 = O.Mon.Epiph. 598, which also contains Ps. 95, 11-12<sup>69</sup>.
4. TM 65343 = O.Bodl. II 2165<sup>70</sup>.

Prayers on *ostraca* could have been used for a variety of purposes, from the memorandum to the protective use. As we stated above, refer-

<sup>64</sup> As an example of a Coptic magical handbook prescribing the different quoted texts for magical rituals, see TM 100023 = M. Meyer - R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, cit., n. 134.

<sup>65</sup> See Th.S. de Bruyn - J.H.F. Dijkstra, *Greek Amulets and Formularies*, cit., p. 180, n. 95.

<sup>66</sup> The text in wood is TM 111687 and was published by S. Giversen, *Ab Abgarum. The Sahidic version of the letter to Abgar on a wooden tablet*, in «Acta Orientalia» 24 (1959), pp. 71-82.

<sup>67</sup> In fact TM Magic lists other *ostraca* featuring hymns, which are classified as “literary text”. See TM 64670 = O.Camb. 118 (Cambridge, University Library O. 118), a hymn to the Virgin Mary; TM 65437 = O.Brit.Mus.Copt. 1, p. 22, pl. 17, 1 (H.R. Hall, *Coptic and Greek Texts*, cit.), a hymn with Ode 8,57 (= Daniel 3), followed by a Coptic letter; TM 65205, edited by H.Ch. Youtie, *Greek Ostraca from Egypt*, in «Transactions of the American Philological Association» 81 (1950), pp. 99-116, esp. 115-116, n. 15, a hymn to Johannes the Baptist; TM 65206 edited by H.Ch. Youtie, *Greek Ostraca*, cit., p. 116, n. 16, a hymn to Christ; TM 65221 = P.Mon.Epiph. 607, a hymn, *troparion*; TM 65224 = P.Mon.Epiph. 594, a hymn to an ascete or martyr; TM 65295 (edited by H.G.E. White, *A Liturgical Fragment from Thebes*, in «Journal of Theological Studies» 17 [1916], pp. 171-173) features a list of incipits of evening hymns; TM 65322 = O.Brit.Mus.Copt. 1, p. 17, pl. 13, 3 (H.R. Hall, *Coptic and Greek Texts*, cit.) preserves a hymn to a martyr; TM 61710 = O.Crum 515 preserves Lc. 1 and a hymn to the Virgin.

<sup>68</sup> See L. Koenen, *Ein Christlicher Prosahymnus des 4. Jhdts*, in «Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava» 17, 5 (1968), pp. 31-52, esp. pp. 39-40 n. a, and M. Meyer - R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, cit., 6.

<sup>69</sup> See L. Koenen, *Ein Christlicher*, cit., pp. 40-41, n. b.

<sup>70</sup> See *ibi*, pp. 41-42 n. d.

ring to the Psalms on *ostraca*, we think that there must be some other indication of the use as an amulet in order to characterise safely these texts as magical. Here we list *ostraca* with hymns that have been catalogued as magical in TM Magic.

1. TM 64372 = PGM O4<sup>71</sup>, which contains the Lord's prayer
2. TM 64675 = P.Mon.Epiph. 610<sup>72</sup>, an invocation to Cherubim, Seraphim, Michael, Gabriel and all of the undefiled.
3. TM 64877 = O.Leiden Gr. 335 preserves a fragment of a Greek prayer or hymn («help me, we sing hymns»), and it is difficult to assert that the *ostrakon* is an amulet based only on the fact that it is a request for help, but it has been labelled as such in LDAB 6116.
4. TM 65236 and 65237 = O.Bodl. II 2161 and II 2162 present the same problem. Both *ostraca* preserve a prayer, and both are listed – with doubt – in databases as magical texts.
5. TM 102262 has been described as «amulet with prayer, maybe votive *ostrakon* from a man»<sup>73</sup>.

*Ostraca* with invocations have been also classified as magical amulets in some studies and in TM Magic. From our point of view, however, it is even more difficult to establish a relation with magic than in the cases we have revised above.

1. TM 102261<sup>74</sup> has a Coptic invocation to the Holy Trinity.
2. TM 107311<sup>75</sup> «magical: amulet of unclear purpose with holy names and drawing of a cross».
3. TM 107320<sup>76</sup> features an invocation. It has been classified as «magical amulet».
4. TM 107322<sup>77</sup> is an «amulet with invocation with ornament».
5. TM 107327<sup>78</sup> is a votive *ostrakon* to God with invocation from a woman.
6. TM 107336<sup>79</sup> is a votive *ostrakon* to God with invocation.
7. TM 108412<sup>80</sup> features a homily and *figuræ magicæ*.

<sup>71</sup> Athens, National Museum 12227.

<sup>72</sup> New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art Accession no. 14.1.172.

<sup>73</sup> See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., p. 40 [11217] and S. Pernigotti, *La Magia Copta. I testi*, in «Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt» II 18.5 (1995), pp. 3685-3730, esp. p. 3727, n. 36.

<sup>74</sup> Ägyptisches Museum ÄM 747. See S. Pernigotti, *La Magia*, cit., p. 3727, n. 35.

<sup>75</sup> Ägyptisches Museum ÄM 368. See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., p. 36, n. 368.

<sup>76</sup> Ägyptisches Museum P. 1082. See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., pp. 38-39, n. 1082.

<sup>77</sup> Ägyptisches Museum ÄM 1768. See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., p. 39, n. 1786.

<sup>78</sup> Ägyptisches Museum P. 5162. See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., p. 39, n. 5162.

<sup>79</sup> Ägyptisches Museum P. 5176. See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., pp. 39-40, n. 5176.

<sup>80</sup> Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum number unknown. See W. Kosack, *Zwei koptische Texte aus der Bonner Universitätsbibliothek*, in «Le Muséon» 85 (1972), pp. 419-424.

### 3.2. *Magical ostraca*

So far, we have surveyed *ostraca* which were edited or catalogued as magic, but which in our opinion, present a basic problem of characterization<sup>81</sup>. As explained above, whenever a parallel use, unrelated to magic, of a precise Biblical text *vel sim*, can be presented, the characterization is unsure. The mere presence of a Psalm on an *ostracon*, for example, without any supplementary features (magical figures, magical words) cannot be interpreted as the piece being an “amulet”, nor can it be excluded either. There are, however, other *ostraca* with texts that can be more clearly interpreted as magical texts. We survey below the *ostraca* that we consider should be characterised with more certainty as magical and, in case the text itself is not obviously magical, we indicate the criteria we have followed in each case:

1. TM 64315 = *PGM* O1 = O.Crum 522 (B-D 138) is a fourth century Greek binding incantation, or perhaps a spell of separation of two male lovers<sup>82</sup>. It has the invocation of the «finger of God», associated with the angel Orphamiel (see *infra*), it could be related to a Christian environment.
2. TM 63587 = *PGM* O2, an *ostracon* dated to the second century, is an aggressive love spell against Alous<sup>83</sup>.
3. TM 92330 = *Suppl. Mag.* II 67<sup>84</sup> has both a medical prescription on side B and the word αβλαναθαναλβα in a wing formation on side A. The *ostracon* is written on both sides by the same hand, but one cannot be certain that the two texts are related to each other. The use of the wing formation in amulets with a medical use is frequent<sup>85</sup>.
4. TM 92334 = *Suppl. Mag.* II 58<sup>86</sup> is an *ostracon* dated to the fourth century CE, and it contains a curse to turn the opponents of the practitioner speechless.
5. TM 102068 = Meyer-Smith 113<sup>87</sup>, an *ostracon* from Cairo that preserves a text consisting on a liturgy for healing and adjuring a series of heavenly powers. Be-

<sup>81</sup> This is a problem not only referred to *ostraca*, but to magical texts in general, as noted by T.S. de Bruyn - J.H.F. Dijkstra, *Greek Amulets and Formularies*, cit., p. 168.

<sup>82</sup> See interpretation in C.A. Faraone, *Thumos as Masculine Ideal and Social Pathology in Ancient Greek Magical Spells*, in S. Braund - G. Most (eds.), *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen* (“Yale Classical Studies”, 32), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, MA 2003, pp. 144-62, esp. pp. 150-151.

<sup>83</sup> TM 65796 = *PGM* O5 is another curse, this one against Sitira, but much earlier, dated to the fourth century BCE. See C.A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 86.

<sup>84</sup> Milan, Università Statale O. 85.

<sup>85</sup> See R. Martín Hernández, *Reading magical drawings in Greek magical papyri*, in P. Schubert (ed.), *Actes du 26<sup>e</sup> Congrès international de Papyrologie Genève, 16-21 août 2010*, Librairie Droz, Genève 2011, pp. 491-498, esp. pp. 495-496; C.A. Faraone, *Vanishing Acts. On Ancient Greek Amulets: From Oral Performance to Visual Design*, Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, London 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Oxford, Ashmolean Museum Bodl. Gr. Inscr. 1129 Ro.

<sup>87</sup> Cairo, Egyptian Museum JdE 49547. Edited by L.S.P. Girard, *Un fragment de liturgie*

sides the invocations there are two personal requests to sanctify and presumably to empower containers. «Send me your breath of life into this vessel» and «Fill your hands. (Cast your) blessings downwards upon this chalice. Spell».

6. TM 102264 = Meyer-Smith 114<sup>88</sup> is an *ostrakon* that has been listed in the TM Magic as «amulet with invocation of the angel Orphamiel». The angel is well known from other Coptic texts of ritual power and he is associated with the «finger of God» (esp. the index finger of the God's right hand). The text is as follows: «(cross) You are Orphamiel, the meaning of which is: the great finger of the father». It is difficult to assert that this *ostrakon* is an amulet because nothing in the text indicates it and because the angel Orphamiel, as the «finger of God», is related rather to aggressive magic, as we have seen in the case of O.Crum 522<sup>89</sup>. But as Clarysse points out, the style and the expression of the text are those of magic.

7. An unpublished *ostrakon* housed at the Petrie Museum (UC62838) features a figure in black outline, schematically drawn, holding an ankh with the right hand, and a sceptre with inverted ankh at the top with the other: it can be compared to other late Roman illustrations on magical papyri: e.g. *PGM IX* 14, and *PGM XXXVI* 45, both instructions for aggressive spells.

8. TM 107312<sup>90</sup> is a Coptic *ostrakon* with an exorcism featuring Abael and snakes.

9. TM 107313<sup>91</sup> is an *ostrakon* with the Sator formula.

10. A Coptic *ostrakon* from Los Angeles<sup>92</sup> features *voces magicae* and the drawing of a winged figure with the right arm upraised and holding a cross-shaped staff. The magical nature of the *ostrakon* is clear, although it is difficult to identify its specific purpose. Some of the *voces magicae* have been related to aggressive spells by the *editor princeps*.

11. TM 108488<sup>93</sup> is an unpublished Coptic *ostrakon* featuring probably a magical text with *charakteres* and drawings. The meaning of the text and its purpose is difficult to elucidate, but is undoubtedly magical.

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*magique en copte sur ostrakon*, in «Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte» 27 (1927), pp. 62-68. See A.M. Kropp, *Ausgewählte Koptische Zaubertexte*, 3 vols., Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, Brussels 1930-1931, II p. 31 and S. Pernigotti, *La Magia*, cit., pp. 3711-3712, n. 15. Translation by D. Frankfurter, in M. Meyer - R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, cit., pp. 228-230, n. 113.

<sup>88</sup> Present location unknown. Formerly Baarn, Private collection Moen 34 and 207. *Editio princeps* by W. Clarysse, *A Coptic Invocation to the Angel Orphamiel*, in «Enchoria» 14 (1986), p. 155. See P.J. Sijpesteijn, *Two Coptic Ostraca from the Moen Collection*, in «Bulletin de la Societé d'Archéologie Copte» 26 (1984), pp. 95-97, esp. p. 96 n. 2; M.W. Meyer, *O. Moen 34: A Second Look*, in «Bulletin de la Societé d'Archéologie Copte» 27 (1985), pp. 71-72 and S. Pernigotti, *La Magia*, cit., p. 3728, n. 41.

<sup>89</sup> See above § 3.2.

<sup>90</sup> Ägyptisches Museum P. 936 + Ägyptisches Museum P. 971. See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., p. 37, n. 936 and 971.

<sup>91</sup> Ägyptisches Museum P. 982. See W. Beltz, *Die koptischen Zauberpapiere*, cit., pp. 37-38, n. 982.

<sup>92</sup> Los Angeles Country Museum of Art MA 80.202.214. Edited by J. Dieleman, *A Coptic Magical Text From Los Angeles Country Museum of Art (LACMA) Ostrakon LACMA MA 80.202.214*, in «Coptica» 5 (2006), pp. 20-31.

<sup>93</sup> Cairo, Coptic Museum 5517. See *L'art copte*, cit., p. 121, n. 95.

12. TM 92864<sup>94</sup> = *Suppl. Mag.* I 51, is a third-fourth century pottery vessel from Oxyrhynchus, carrying a love spell. In this case, it is not a sherd, but rather a whole small pot written all around its surface. While the use of pots is largely connected to divination, this one undoubtedly contains a magical spell.

13. TM 99593 = O.CrumST 399; Meyer-Smith 99. Contrary to the identification in Meyer-Smith, the object is an *ostrakon*, not a papyrus<sup>95</sup>. Crum dated it to the sixth- or seventh-century. The text is a spell to cause a corpse to «bring forth blood» for an unknown purpose.

Three more *ostraca* have clearly a magical use, but we have chosen to treat them separately, since they contain magical instructions, and thus, the use of the *ostrakon* is not prescriptive, but rather a medium – any other could have served – for writing down instructions. Another interpretation is that the instructions were copied mechanically, without really paying attention, and this copy was used as an amulet or charm itself.

1. TM 69046 = *Suppl.Mag.* II 89<sup>96</sup> is a fourth century Greek *ostrakon* preserving two charms against the scorpion sting. The two spells appear separated by a horizontal line. The first text presents the instructions to perform the charm, and features the typical abbreviation for δεῖναι that appears in the *PGM*.

2. TM 64128 = *Suppl.Mag.* II 68<sup>97</sup> is an *ostrakon* dated to the third century CE. It has been interpreted as instructions copied from a formulary for the preparation of an amulet, probably related to maternity.

3. TM 83376 = O.Crum 487<sup>98</sup> contains magical-medical prescriptions. Its magical nature is very debatable.

Finally, we consider two more late antique *ostraca*, both of which originate outside Egypt, as of interest to our survey, especially as a means of comparison:

1. A sixth cent. CE *ostrakon* from Reggio Calabria narrates a confrontation between Michael and a demon: «O god of Alexander, O god of Polydorus and the angel Michael. Help (βοήθει)! The angel intercepted the demon and said to the demon BARZÔN AYRM»<sup>99</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> O. Cologne inv. 409. Edited by D. Wortmann, *Neue magische Texte*, in «Bonner Jahrbücher des Rheinischen Landesmuseums in Bonn und des Rheinischen Amtes für Bodendenkmalpflege im Landschaftsverband Rheinland und des Vereins von Altertumsfreunden im Rheinlande» 168 (1968), pp. 56-111, esp. 80-84.

<sup>95</sup> We are grateful to Elisabeth O'Connell (British Museum), who called our attention to this piece.

<sup>96</sup> Oxford, Ashmolean Museum O. Gr. 217.

<sup>97</sup> Cairo, Egyptian Museum CP 25/8/37/1-2 (9883), formerly Ann Arbor, Michigan University, Library O. 9883. *Editio princeps* in H.C. Youtie, *Ostraca from Karanis*, in «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 16 (1975), pp. 272-274, esp. p. 274.

<sup>98</sup> London, British Library EEF 151, but uncertain whether in BM according to Delattre, *BDC*.

<sup>99</sup> See L. D'Amore, *Un filatterio greco da Lazzaro (Reggio Calabria)*, in «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik» 152 (2005), pp. 157-160.

2. Amulet 10 (Naveh-Shaked)<sup>100</sup> is a fifth-sixth century CE love charm on an Aramaic *ostrakon* from Horvat Rimmon, Israel. The text was incised on the *ostrakon* while the clay was still fresh.

#### 4. Conclusion

We have surveyed the magical handbooks produced in Egypt in Late Antiquity, both in Greek and Coptic, in search of the use of the *ostrakon* in magic. We are prone to think, from the examples found in these books (ranging from the fourth to the eighth centuries, with clear interdependence in some cases), that the *ostrakon* is used mainly for aggressive magic, rather than for amuletic or protective purposes. We find binding spells, for love and business purposes, charms for separation, and even counter-spells. Only one example speaks about a certain magical-medical use of *ostraca*, but we are not sure in this case whether the *ostrakon* used for labor was inscribed with spells and invocations or not.

After having a clear idea of the prescribed use of the *ostrakon*, we surveyed the extant examples of *ostraca* which have been catalogued or edited as «magical», in order to find out on the one hand, if the prescribed use in the handbooks has a reflection in reality, i.e. in the remains we have of the actual practice, and on the other hand, and more from a methodological point of view, how do we characterise magical objects and their texts, and how do we identify their ultimate use in Antiquity with the evidence, sometimes very thin, that they present.

A revision of this material brought us to reducing the evidence to a few pieces. Of the *ostraca* catalogued as magical, many of these are not even clearly magical, and this is our main point. These are often too close to school texts and *memoranda*. The use of sacred texts on *ostraca* (Psalms, the letter from Jesus to Abgar or the incipit of the Gospels) is one of the main problems we are faced with, being their use very spread not only in the liturgical use of the Church, but also in school and in monastic daily life. If we exclude all these doubtful pieces we get a short but representative number of documents that more or less coincide with the instructions in the magical handbooks, the expected instances of aggressive magic, in the definition we have provided above. Most of these *ostraca* present spells of different kinds: to bind, love spells, business spells, or spells to cause separation. We have three examples of possible amulets (3, 5 and 6), all of them, however, doubtful.

How does this fit into the general use of different materials in magic in Late Antiquity? In the text of the *PGM* we have found that 49 prescriptions require the specific use of papyrus, while we have only ten exam-

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<sup>100</sup> J. Naveh - S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*. cit., pp. 84-89.

ples of *ostrakon* (eleven if we take into account the demotic spell on *PDM* XII 62-75), of which four refer to seashells. This represents a ratio of ca. a fourth of the total on papyrus. It is interesting to point out that while papyrus could be substituted by other media<sup>101</sup>, the *ostrakon* apparently could not.

Attending to the texts on *PGM*, the use of papyrus, and other less used materials, does not seem to be specialized. Papyrus is used for both aggressive and beneficial magic, and even for divination. The use of a specific medium does not seem to depend on the nature of the magical spell, but rather on the way the practitioner locates the magical artefact on his/her body or in a given place. The material features of the different media used in magic made them more or less suitable for wearing or for placing in the prescribed place to perform the magical act. As materials which are “worn”, one finds written papyrus, inscribed metal lamellae, small stones, seeds or bundles of herbs, all used for curing or protecting against disease. While an *ostrakon* could be used for protection of a house or a field, rather than a person<sup>102</sup>, we have not found this specifically prescribed in the handbooks, except for a reference in the *Geoponica* 2.42.2, mentioned above.

In general we are inclined to think that the *ostrakon* was a most convenient writing medium, especially in Upper Egypt until the Arabic period, and as such, it was used whenever papyrus was lacking. In the case of the prescribed use of *ostraca*, it is clear that this material was adequate for being buried at a grave, the doorstep of a victim, or any place where a delicate material would easily disintegrate. At the same time, amulets which are worn by the user require a light material, which can be stored inside a capsule and worn around the neck.

But by no means do we think that it is completely excluded that an *ostrakon* would be used at some point as an amulet, but we do think that more often they were used for spells, an extreme that both the magical instructions in handbooks and the extant *ostraca* with clear magical use prove. The lack of other writing medium would bring a person to write an amulet on an *ostrakon*, and those *ostraca* mentioned above containing biblical quotes could in fact have an amuletic use, but this end is very hard to prove.

## ABSTRACT

*L'uso dell'ostrakon come supporto scrittoria nella magia greco-copta non è ancora stato dettagliatamente studiato, sebbene l'ostrakon sia*

<sup>101</sup> See *PGM* V 380-381 and VII 580-581.

<sup>102</sup> An exception, though doubtful, being the use of an *ostrakon* for *labor* (*Suppl. Mag.* II 96).

*senza dubbio uno dei materiali di scrittura più utilizzati nell'Alto Egitto durante l'epoca tardo antica. Le informazioni fornite dai manuali greci e copti di magia saranno confrontate in questo contributo con le testimonianze conservate, ossia gli ostraka interpretabili come testi magici appartenenti alla pratica rituale. Questa metodologia non è stata mai applicata e fornisce risultati molto interessanti. Come verrà discusso, i manuali di magia prescrivono l'uso dell'ostrakon principalmente per riti di «magia aggressiva», mentre molti ostraka trovati sono stati catalogati come il risultato di pratiche magiche che appartengono all'ambito della magia protettiva, cioè, amuleti. Abbiamo circoscritto una tipologia di ostraka che sono stati classificati come «magici», per i quali si dimostrerà che è difficile asserire che il materiale sia esclusivamente «magico».*

*The use of the ostrakon as a writing medium in Graeco-Coptic Magic has not been thoroughly studied, although it was a frequently deployed medium in Upper Egypt in Late Antiquity. The information we get from the magical instructions both in Greek and Coptic handbooks is compared in this paper to the extant evidence, i.e. the surviving ostraca that can be interpreted as magical texts utilized in ritual practice. This methodology has not ever been deployed and however it provides interesting results. As it will be discussed, the magical handbooks mention and prescribe the use of the ostrakon mainly for «aggressive magic», while the ostraca found related to magical practices might also belong to the realm of protective magic, i.e. for amulets. We have developed a typology of the ostraca labelled as «magical» and prove that most of this material is difficult to classify as «magical».*

## KEYWORDS

Magia greca, magia copta, Egitto greco-romano, mezzi di scrittura, *defixiones*, amuleti

Greek magic, Coptic magic, Graeco-Roman Egypt, writing media, *defixiones*, amulets