The Binding Layout? On Graphic Strategies in Greek Magical Texts[*]

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1. The Performative Nature of Writing

As a form of symbolic production in human societies, writing is a tool intrinsically powered by its own efficacy, as well as being a means of representing the world and language.[1] In the magical tradition, the "performativity" of writing is founded on the belief that there is an indissoluble relation between traced signs and actions in the world. Thus, a spell produces changes in the world by the sole reason of having been written (performative power),[2] and manipulations of the text are employed as a magical device.

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[1] See Cardona 1981, 120 and Graf 2015 for a more general overview of the relationship between writing, magic, and religion. On this subject see also Frankfurter 2019b, who underlines how the magical value of writing has as its basis "an ambiguity in the *letter* between image and semantic sign, and an ambiguity in the *material inscribed*, between vehicle of communication and vehicle impregnated with the power of the written (or spoken) word". For a discussion of the performativity of writing in a magical context, see Sánchez Natalías 2020, 103–104 and Kropp 2015, 95–96, Cardona 1986, 74, and Poccetti 1995.

[2] Therefore, within the magical rite, writing participates both in the linguistic component of recitation of the spell (as a form of symbolic representation of the language), and in the material component of preparation and manipulation of the medium, since specific operations such as the tracing of letters materialise the magical *logos*. The magical handbooks contain references to the inclusion of the physical act of writing in magical practices. See, for instance, Pap.Graec.Mag. IV 330, giving specific instructions to perform the rite: the magician must simultaneously recite and write the magical spell: "And take a lead tablet and write the same spell and recite it" (trad. Betz 1986; λαβὼν πλάτυμμα μολυβοῦν γράψον τὸν λόγον τὸν αὐτὸν καὶ δίωκε); and again, at l. 335: "The spell to be written and recited is: 'I entrust this binding spell to you'…" (transl. Betz 1992; Λόγος ὁ γραφόμενος καὶ διωκόμενος· 'παρακατατίθεμαι ὑμῖν τοῦτον τὸν κατάδεσμον' etc.). On linguistic and pragmatic aspects, see Tambiah 1968 and Poccetti 1991. More specifically, for aggressive magic see Poccetti 1995; Frankfurter 1995 and Frankfurter 2019a;

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The performative nature of writing is the ideology that explains, for example, how texts consisting only of personal names can be effective. In magical texts, materialising a person's name by writing it makes it possible to bind or bless him/her, since the name *is* the person,[3] on a principle of persuasive analogy[4] or a concept of "object agency".[5] In magical thinking, the referential nature of the proper name is transformed, and the name is reinterpreted as the linguistic counterpart of a person's representation.[6] The performativity of writing occurs also through purely graphic elements such as drawings and magical symbols. These elements are not simply accompanying "illustrations", but actual magical elements: the demon depicted *is* the invoked demon, and the magical symbol *is* the magical power. As Cardona points out, the writing itself is the propositional content of the magical illocutionary act.[7]

In this framework, our paper aims to observe the relationship between content and layout in magical texts, in order to assess how the graphic arrangement of the spells has been conceived and treated. In parallel, we will check for the presence of layout strategies comparable to those pertaining to other textual typologies.

The available documentation consists of two different dossiers: magical handbooks and texts of applied magic.

The magical handbooks contain recipes and procedures for performing the rites and producing several "activated" objects, some of which are written texts. Preserved exclusively on papyrus, they cover a relatively short period of time (ranging – with a very uneven distribution – from the 2nd c. BCE to the 5th c. CE),

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Gordon 2002; Murano 2020. For protective magic, see Gordon 1995. On the pragmatic-manipulative aspects, based on the principle of persuasive analogy between victim and manipulated object, see Ogden 1999; Boschung and Bremmer 2015; Suárez de la Torre *et al.* 2017; Frankfurter 2019c; Martin Hernández and Torallas Tovar 2022.

[3] See Cardona 1981, 123; Petersmann 2002. Furthermore, writing creates a communicative circuit not limited to the moment of the enunciation but lasting for eternity: the materiality and permanence provided by writing enhance the power of the magical *logos*. As Cardona observes, the magical evocative force of the spoken spell is extinguished when the last sound has been uttered, whereas the power of the written spell remains intact over time and is extinguished only when established by the spell itself or if its medium is destroyed or displaced. On the other hand, materiality and permanence are the basis of the cultural choice to write – at least for permanent writings, designed to remain over time – and allow information to be passed on in an organised way and as an alternative to social memory.

[4] See Frazer 1922, 14–63. See also Tambiah 1973.

[5] See Frankfurter 2019c.

[6] Often the unambiguous identification of the referent is ensured by adding other data, such as matronymics and nicknames.

[7] See Cardona 1981, 140. This seems to be confirmed by some Latin texts for which it can be assumed that "writing was at all times so substantial for ancient magic that it was thought of being effective even if it lacked contents" (Blänsdorf 2010, 159), especially since the rite also consisted of an oral part (see Graf 2015, 228, and Frankfurter 2019a, 621–623).

and mostly stem from the so-called Graeco-Egyptian magical tradition, featuring specific, authoritative magical practices.[8] They were in all likelihood the main means of disseminating a veritable magical *koine* throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond.[9]

The texts of applied magic are the written product of the rite, the activated objects through which the spell is performed, and they allow us to observe the magical practice in its actual realisation. They cover a wide geographical and chronological span (from the 6th c. BCE to the 5th c. CE) and are written in several languages and on several media. This documentation can be subdivided into two groups: the first one, consisting only of epigraphic evidence (mostly texts written on lead tablets), begins in the Archaic period and covers the entire timespan of the ancient magical documentation; the second, more limited, emerges only during the Roman age and is mostly connected to the Graeco-Egyptian magical tradition attested by the handbooks.[10]

In this article we will analyse the documentation in Greek (with some glimpses of other traditions), starting from the most ancient phase of documentation, covered only by texts of applied magic, and continuing with the material pertaining to the Graeco-Egyptian tradition, consisting of both handbooks and texts of applied magic.

2. The Earliest Documentation

The earliest activated texts show performative graphic mechanisms of a basic semiotic nature.

A clear example is the so-called *aversus*-formulas, spells containing words that belong to the semantic sphere of "turning, inverting" – e.g., ἐπαρίστερος, ἐναντίος, (ἀν)έμπαλιν, (ἀπο)στρέφω – with the additional metaphorical sense of "being hostile, contrary" (Fig. 41).[11] The aspect most relevant to our investigation is that the *aversus*-formulas often occur with an irregular direction of the script: the manipulation of the *ductus* is supposed to have an actual effect on the target, a means of reinforc-

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[8] Only four handbooks date from the 2nd c. BCE to the 1st c. CE, while the larger (and best preserved) number of them is concentrated between the end of the 2nd and the 5th c. CE.

[9] For the magical *koine* see Jordan 1994, 125 and Jordan 1996, 234. On the authoritative tradition in Roman Egypt, see Frankfurter 1998, 198-237 and Dieleman 2005, 185-284.

[10] With reference in particular to the Latin world, Gordon (among other works, 2012b; 2015a, 166-169 and 2015b, 165-172) divides the material of the Roman period into texts that belong to the Graeco-Egyptian tradition, and "vernacular" texts, written outside this tradition.

[11] E.g., the curse tablet *SEG* LIV 876 (Akragas, late 6th/early 5th c. BCE), reading "I write and backwards I write" (ἐγ[γρά]φō κα(ὶ) ἔνπαλι(ν) γρ[άφō]), according to the interpretation of Poccetti 2004, 640-666. Similarly, the Latin curse tablet *SD* 492 (Mainz, Sanctuary of *Magna Mater*, 1st/2nd c. CE): "I write this backwards" (*hoc ego averse scribo*). On the *aversus*-formulas and the semiotic meaning of inversion in magical thinking, see Faraone and Kropp 2010, in relation to the Latin world, and Urbanová and Franek 2020, in a comparative Latin / Greek perspective. See also Gordon 2015.

ing the power of the spell.[12] In a curse tablet from Selinous (Fig. 42),[13] for example, the magical spell runs left-to-right, while the names of the victims are spelled right-to-left, though the letters themselves face right. This principle of similarity is often made explicit through *similia similibus* formulas, explicitly stating that the unusual direction of writing will be mirrored on the victims:[14] an example is a curse tablet from Attica reading "as these words are written backwards, may everything be backwards for him"; the text of the curse has the usual left-to-right orientation, but the spelling of the names has been intentionally jumbled.[15] From an anthropological point of view, modifying or removing something from a written word means preventing it from acting correctly.[16]

The use of such graphic strategies is thought to be related to a growing familiarity with writing, starting from the 6th c. BCE: this familiarity would allow a creative experimentation, aimed at making the texts more effective.[17]

Other texts provide examples of strategies more specifically related to layout. Some of them contain more than one spell, written with different orientations: in an Attic curse tablet, for example, two different texts are written on the same side, the second one upside-down (by rotating the tablet 180°) to keep it somehow separate from the first one (Fig. 43).[18] In all probability, the same tablet was used for different customers in order to save writing material,[19] and an intensive

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[12] The technique of reversing a name or the lines of a spell is meant "not to encrypt it but to render the words more efficacious through their anti-semantic arrangement" (Frankfurter 2019b, 628): the deliberate graphic modifications of the texts work as a "metonym for the intention of the curse" (Gordon 2015, 166). See also Faraone and Kropp 2010, 383, pointing out that the attribution of new semiotic functions to writing establishes "a symmetrical relationship between the ritual manipulation of the text and the intended effects on the victim". Other interesting examples are the curse tablets from Mytilene *SEG* XLVIII 1055, 1056 and 1057 (late 4th/early 3rd c. BCE): nos. 1055 and 1056 are written retrograde, but in no. 1056 the letters face right; no. 1057 contains syllables and letters with jumbled spellings.

[13] Bettarini, *Defixiones* 24, Sanctuary of *Malophoros*, mid-5th c. BCE.

[14] See Kropp 2015, 95-96. On the *similia similibus* formulas, see Franek and Urbanová 2019a and 2019b.

[15] Jordan, *SGD* 40 (Dekeleia, Attica, 5th/4th c. BCE). The tablet contains three curses, each addressed to a separate person, with similar spells. For example, the second spell says: Κάλλιαν (spelling jumbled) καταδῶ. ὥσπερ ταῦτ' ἀνένπαλιν, οὕτως γένοιτο Καλλίαι ἀνένπαλιν {ἀνένπαλι[ν]} πάντα καὶ ἔργα καὶ [ἔπ]η καὶ χεῖρας καὶ πόδας καὶ [γ]όνα[τ]α καὶ ψυχήν.

[16] See Cardona 1981, 123. The perceived efficacy of a "distorted" orientation of the script is demonstrated by its use well beyond the first documentation. We find this technique also in later texts of the Imperial Age belonging to the group of so-called "vernacular" texts. An example is the Latin prayer for justice *SD* 479 (Rottweil, *Germania Superior*, 1st-3rd c. CE), with lines running right-to-left but with letters mainly facing right (except some facing left or written upside-down). The text contains an *aversus*-formula with a *similia similibus*: "may the gods render him/her reversed, just as this text is reversed" (*ut illum aut illam aversum faciant dii sicut hoc est aversum*). See Urbanová and Franek 2020, 383.

[17] See Lamont 2022, 40.

[18] *DTA* 102, Attica, 4th c. BCE.

[19] See Curbera 2015, 108-109.

exploitation of the available surface was more important than aesthetic considerations or graphic clarity.[20]

As we have seen above, especially in the earliest documentation, magical texts often consist only of numerous personal names, frequently arranged as lists. Listing single units of meaning responds to a need for graphic topicalisation: each name occupies a line of writing, to highlight the informationally more important element of the text (i.e., who is to be cursed or protected).

In investigating the meaning of the lists within the magical texts from 6th to 4th c. BCE Athens, Gordon suggested that they were modelled on those used in civic spheres, such as the lists of public debtors or of murderers:[21] this imitation would stem from the desire to capture symbols of civic authority, and to ensure the authority of the magical text by adopting features pertaining to public inscriptions.[22] However, it has to be noted that, from the point of view of the textual organisation of the content, listing is a "basic" notational process, i.e., a visual tool with a purely referential function indicating objects of the external world, and with the purely practical purpose of facilitating reading and promoting comprehension.[23]

Such "practical" lists in the earliest documentation belong essentially to aggressive magic, and consist of the simple enumeration of body's parts of the target and related matters to be cursed.[24] Indeed, as Gordon points out, the spread of literacy caused the decrease in the use of simple lists of opponents, since in the vernacular curses of the Imperial Age, simple lists "become […] a sign of low literacy and absence of discursive fluency";[25] however, lists of targets' names continued to be used longer in the Latin West than in the eastern Mediterranean.[26]

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[20] The back of this tablet contains a further curse set in a single column, where regularly written lines alternate with lines written upside-down. As in the examples seen above, it is a deliberate layout choice meant to make the text confused and inaccessible, and at the same time more efficacious because of the semiotic re-functionalisation of the writing process, following the principle of performativity.

[21] See Gordon 1999, 250-257, following the work of Thomas 1992 on literacy and orality in ancient Greece. See also Gordon 2021.

[22] See Curbera 1999, 166-167; Centrone 2010, 95; Rocca 2012, 210-211. The curse tablets from Sicily also present other relevant "public" elements of layout, such as the heading τύχα and θεά and the use of non-alphabetic signs, such as the *paragraphos* (see Curbera 1999, 163-164, and Rocca 2012, 211-212). For the use of *paragraphoi* in epigraphic texts see the chapter by D. Amendola in this volume.

[23] See Eco 2009. On lists and enumerations in ancient texts, see Laemmle *et al.* 2021. As Gordon 2021, 138 himself assumes, in the Imperial period lists, both in aggressive and protective magic, aim "to compensate for the loss of immediacy inherent in the oral curse": the loss of the narrative, of enunciation or proclamation, and the use of a list "served to concentrate the mind of the addressee(s) wonderfully on the task implied by the act of writing such a text or explicitly envisaged in it".

[24] On lists of anatomical parts in aggressive magic see Versnel 1998. On later uses of lists, see § 3.2 below.

[25] Gordon 2021, 114.

[26] Gordon 2021, 121. See the Greek curse tablet against athletes *SEG* LXIV 875 (Rome, early 2nd c. CE). The list of targets is preceded by a complex binding formula: "I bury, I bestow, I bind down in a cold tomb, in a burning fire, in the sea, I hurl into the river, into the (cold pool of a) bath-house, into

Generally, the texts displaying a list are arranged in a single column, though lists in multiple columns are also documented.[27] A curse tablet from Athens[28] (Fig. 44) is an interesting example: it contains the names of about a hundred victims arranged in three columns. The columns are preceded by the cursing spell, written (as a sort of title) in a single line running along the entire tablet and in larger letters: "I bind, I bury, I obliterate from the human race" (καταδῶ κατορύττω ἀφανίζω ἐξ ἀνθρώπων). In this text, information on the content is conveyed graphically through different formatting of the letters. Sometimes lists are marked out graphically, as in an inscription from Selinous in which the text is organised in columns outlined by vertical lines.[29] Columns are not always well planned or well designed: the presence of a second column could be due to lack of space in the first one, requiring the writer to re-work the layout.[30] There are also examples of texts in which additional columns are placed perpendicularly to the first one: in these cases, the main column is written "normally", and a second, shorter column is positioned by rotating the tablet by 90°. This kind of layout is intended to emphasise specific information, i.e., one or more particular components of the list.[31]

Elsewhere, there is no such concern at all for a layout aimed at subdividing the content; on the contrary, it seems that the only interest of the writers is to maximise the writing surface. A good example of this (no) layout strategy is a *defixio* from Sicily[32] (Fig. 47) containing the same formula repeated twenty-eight times and addressed to several people: "I write down NN and himself and (his) unsuccessfulness" (καταγράφō NN καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ τὰν ἀτέλειαν).[33] The formulas are arranged one after the other, continuously, and without regard for clarity.[34]

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a subterranean chamber" (trad. Gordon; κ]ατορύσσω καὶ δέδεκα καὶ καταδεσμεύω εἰς ψυχρὸν τάφον, εἰς πυρὰν καιομένην, εἰς θάλασσαν, βάλλω εἰς ποταμόν, εἰ[ς λο]υτρῶνα, εἰς μέγαρο[ν]). According to Gordon 2021, 122, the spell "displays no evidence of Graeco-Egyptian cursing-style and is really just a transposition into Greek of the simple type of list". The use of synonyms of the binding verb and the enumeration are meant to increase the power of the spell.

[27] See, e.g., the curse tablet from Pydna (4th c. BCE) *SEG* LII 617, II. However, it must be noted that the use of column(s) does not necessarily involve the use of lists: see, e.g., the tablet from Pydna *SEG* LII 617, V (4th c. BCE).

[28] Jordan, *SGD* 48, Athens, c. 325 BCE. See Jordan and Curbera 2008.

[29] Bettarini, *Defixiones* 14, Selinous, first half of 4th c. BCE. See Curbera 1999, 166, with drawing.

[30] See, e.g., *NGCT* 5, Athens Kerameikos, 4th c. BCE.

[31] See the curse tablets Bettarini, *Defixiones* 12 and *SEG* LIX 1121 (Selinous, first half of 5th c. BCE), and *DTA* 29 (Athens, 3rd c. BCE). An interesting parallel from a "minor" tradition, namely the Oscan one, is the curse tablet Murano 2013, no. 8, side A (Laos necropolis, Marcellina, Cosenza, end of the 4th c. BCE).

[32] *SEG* LIV 941 (Selinous (?), ca. 450 BCE). See Kotansky and Curbera 2004, 684-691.

[33] The actual meaning of ἀτέλεια in this text type is controversial; a different proposal is "freedom or exemption from judicial process". See a discussion in Kotansky and Curbera 2004, 688-689.

[34] The Oscan curse tablet Murano 2013, no. 8 from Marcellina (see n. 31 above) is a parallel also for this aspect, its face A containing only names of men and side B only of women.

The layout of the texts written on roundish tablets deserves specific discussion, since it sometimes involves a spiral-shaped direction of the writing,[35] as in the curse-tablet against the moneylender Philargyros from the Athenian Agora.[36] While, on the one hand, circular direction may be an adaptation to the shape of the tablet,[37] in some cases it cannot be excluded that the layout corresponds to a sympathetic purpose, linking content and external form. An example is the curse from Selinous against Selinontios, wishing him and his tongue to turn back and become useless.[38]

3. The Documentation of the Roman Era

Since, as already mentioned, documentation from the Roman era consists of both handbooks and texts of applied magic, our enquiry into layout strategies will first focus on each of these two categories of texts in turn, and will then offer a comparison between them.

But first it is important to point out a phenomenon typical of this era that is closely linked to matters of layout: Graeco-Egyptian magical texts are characterised by a massive presence of elements such as *voces magicae*, vowel sequences, and *charakteres*, devoid of any actual linguistic value, but provided with magical power.[39] It has been argued that, by this period, writing had lost some of its esoteric character and was reinterpreted as a semiotic medium.[40] Therefore, the semantically-specific elements needed to be strengthened by introducing semantically-non-specific el-

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[35] Other examples come also from the Latin corpus, e.g., the inscription from Barchín del Hoyo (*SD* 145; 1st c. CE), displaying a concentric direction of writing. According to a recent proposal (Scholz 2019), in the Roman Empire round curse tablets may have been a regional variety adopted in some northern areas to carry especially, but not exclusively, love spells.

[36] See, e.g., *NGCT* 18, Athens, mid-3rd c. CE. See Jordan 2022.

[37] It should be noted that there are texts on roundish tablets written in a linear layout. Outside the Greek corpus, an example is the curse-tablet in Oscan language and Latin script from Cumae (see Murano 2013, no. 4, mid-1st c. BCE). The curse tablet *SEG* LXII 687 from Selinous (5th c. BCE) uses both directions to mark off the central part of the text, exhibiting a very peculiar arrangement of the text: slightly circular on the right side, the text continues on the upper side with script inverted, and then in the centre of the tablet with seven horizontal lines in a right-to-left direction. The state of conservation does not allow us to know whether it is a complete text or not, nor to advance reasonable hypotheses on the layout.

[38] Bettarini, *Defixiones* 20, Selinous, Sanctuary of *Malophoros*, 5th c. BCE. The text begins: "I inscribe Selinontios and the tongue of Selinontios, twisted to uselessness for them" (Σελιν<ό>ντιος [κ]αὶ ha Σελινοντίō γλōσ(σ)α ἀπεστραμ(μ)έν' ἐπ' ἀτ<ε>λείαι τᾶι τένōν | ἐν|γράφō). See Lamont 2022, 37 for drawing and picture of the tablet. On later uses of roundish tablets, see § 3.2 below.

[39] The term *voces magicae* is used for unintelligible, meaningless words considered by the practitioners as endowed with a strong magical power. Sequences of vowels or consonants are also included in this category. *Charakteres* are magical signs without a linguistic value and drawn to be immediately recognizable. See n. 42 for bibliography.

[40] Cf. Poccetti 1995, 270.

ements[41] with striking phonetic and graphic features.[42] The use of these elements aims basically to obtain an effect of estrangement by creating a different language which, precisely because it is not comprehensible, is capable of achieving otherwise unattainable objectives. It shows visually the encoding of a magical knowledge that lies outside "normal", human, non-magical communication.

3.1 Magical Handbooks as a Source of Information about Attention to Layout Strategies

Since they record and transmit instructions for the correct and successful execution of a spell, magical handbooks can be considered a normative source. Sequences of actions, words to be pronounced and/or written, and material to be used are generally specified in the recipes. For the production of "activated" texts during the rite, in particular, indications are often given about the tools to be used: type of material, type of ink, type of pen. But what about their layout? The presence of instructions on this aspect would qualify it as an element functional to the efficacy of the spell; conversely, silence on the matter would indicate its irrelevance in terms of "magical power". As already noted, most handbooks are from the 2nd/3rd-5th c. CE, and the evidence they provide therefore relates to the fully established and substantially stable late-antique magical *koine*.

From an overall inquiry, the following picture seems to emerge.

1. Layout instructions are provided for some specific, and quite frequent, geometric textual arrangements, indicated with a specific nomenclature recalling their

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[41] We will use the expression "semantically-specific element" to refer to textual parts endowed with a lexical (and semantic) meaning and structured through a language. We will use the expression "semantically-non-specific element" to refer to magical expressions such as *voces magicae*, sequences of vowels and *charakteres*, which, although lacking a linguistic and a properly semantic meaning, are nevertheless bearers of a pragmatic meaning.

[42] As Versnel 2002, 142-243 has pointed out, these elements respond to the need for creativity: the magical *logos* forms a *trait d'union* between the "normal" world and the "other" world, the one in which magic operates. See also Gordon 2002, 76-81, Gordon 2011, Tardieu *et al.* 2013, and Gordon 1995, 372-374. With reference to the seven Greek vowels, Frankfurter 2019b, 637 points out that they "appear in a form that suggests that special significance has been attributed to their *visual representation*, as if the inscription of the vowel symbols extended or transcended their vocalic pronunciation". Although the earliest documentation of *voces magicae* dates back to the 4th c. BCE (*ephesia grammata*), their use dramatically increases in later magical texts. In the Imperial period these "words" became more complex, being created with ever more prevalent foreign linguistic influences (see Versnel 2002, 113-117). Such magical words, incomprehensible to speakers, have their origin in different sociolinguistic levels (as marked or obsolete registers) or in foreign linguistic traditions (see Poccetti 2002, 35). On the relationship between magic and plurilingualism, see Marco Simón 2012, and Marchese and Murano 2022. Concerning vowel sequences and *charakteres*, see Németh 2020, 137 and Richter 2015, 88, arguing that *charakteres* are on a graphic level the functional equivalent to the *voces magicae* on the phonic level: incomprehensible to humans but perfectly understandable for the divinities. See also Gordon 2011 and 2014.

shape.[43] Texts shaped as an isosceles triangle pointing downwards or upwards (obtained by the progressive subtraction/addition of letters at the beginning *and* at the end of a magical word or sequence of vowels) are mostly described with expressions referring to a heart or a bunch of grapes;[44] those shaped as a right-angled triangle (obtained by subtraction of letters at the beginning *or* at the end of a word) are usually indicated by reference to a wing.[45] There is also some trace of a specific name attributed to words or vowel sequences arranged one below the other, "in layers", to form a column or a "block" (i.e., a square or rectangular shape).[46] The existence of such nomenclatures is significant in itself, as it demonstrates the full codification at a regulatory level of these geometrically shaped texts. The other aspect to highlight is that, without exception, the text involved consists of magical words: the formations in question are never prescribed for the semantically-specific elements of the spell. The magical words can vary, with heart-formations consisting mostly in palindromes (progressively reduced to, or starting from, their central letter), and wing-formations used for a wider range of sequences, not being bound to symmetry on the vertical axis.

Instructions regarding the geometric formations are provided in three different ways:

(a) by using the standard nomenclature.[47]

(b) by direct demonstration of how the text should be arranged. See, for example, Pap.Graec.Mag. VII 940–968, a charm to restrain anger starting with "on a clean

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[43] The function and origin of these particular formations have been repeatedly investigated; their original connection with oral procedures of protective magic (*deletio morbi*), aimed at obtaining the progressive "disappearance" of the evil (and therefore of the word that represented it) is a plausible theory (preferable, in our opinion, to that connecting these textual shapes to literary "fashions" of the Hellenistic-Roman age such as *carmina figurata*), and has recently been embraced and developed by Faraone 2012, with previous bibliography on the subject.

[44] "Heart-shaped": καρδία, καρδιακόν ὄνομα, καρδιακῶς, καρδιοειδῶς; "grape-cluster-shaped": ὡς βότρυς, βοτρυδόν, βοτρυειδές. In Pap.Graec.Mag. XXXVI 247 (see below, n. 50), the isosceles triangular shape is described as βάθρον ("ladder"). And in GEMF 31 [= Pap.Graec.Mag. I] 12, two isosceles triangles (one pointing upwards and the other pointing downwards) are called *klimata*, again with a reference to a sloping form: see the translations in GEMF I, at p. 385 ("inclined slopes") and Pap.Graec.Mag. I, at p. 3 ("Leitern Bildest"); E.N. O'Neil apud Betz 1992, 3 (with n. 5) preferred a vaguer "figures", stating that the Greek term is unclear.

[45] "Wing-shaped": πτερυγοειδῶς, πτερύγιον, πτερυγώματα.

[46] This shape is called πλινθίον: see Pap.Graec.Mag. VII 652–660 (a recipe for a charm to induce insomnia) where some magical words are to be written on the right wing of a bat "one under the other, like bricks" (or: "as to form a square/a rectangle"): ἓν ὑπὸ τὸ ἓν [τ]ι[θεὶς ὡς] πλινθίον); see also Pap.Graec. Mag. V 349 (a recipe for a *defixio*), where some words must be written below a circle ὡς πλινθίον (and that block of text is referred to as πλινθίον later on, at l. 360); in Pap.Graec.Mag. IV 1305 the indication πλινθίον is written beside the seven vowels, possibly meaning – as K. Preisendanz suggested (Pap.Graec. Mag. I, at p. 116) – that the series of vowels has to be written several times, in layers one under the other, to form a square. On *plinthia*, see Faraone 2023.

[47] See nn. 44–46.

papyrus write with pure myrrh ink these names together with the stele" (εἰς χάρτην καθαρὸν διὰ ζμυρνομέλανος καθαροῦ γράφε τὰ ὀνόματα ταῦτα σὺν τῇ στήλῃ); directly below these instructions, four wing-formations surround a drawing (the "stele").

(c) by using the standard nomenclature, followed by demonstration. An interesting example is the recipe for an erotic spell, to which we will also return later, preserved in Pap.Graec.Mag. IV (first half of the 4th c. CE). This elaborated recipe (ll. 296-466) prescribes, among other things, that a long spell be written on a lead tablet (ll. 335-433) and, after giving the text of the main body of the spell, it says that a "heart-shaped formation" and some *charakteres* must be drawn "in another part of the tablet, as follows" (ll. 406-408: γράψον εἰς ἔτερον μέρος τοῦ πλατύματος τὴν καρδίαν καὶ τοὺς χαρακτῆρας, ὡς ὑπόκειται·); then, on a page of the codex written parallel to its long side,[48] the triangle-shaped text (consisting in the so-called "ιαω *logos*", a quite frequent palindrome) is set up without writing it completely (the scribe stops at its seventh line, whereas the complete "heart" would require 30 lines), but clearly showing how it should be continued. The other magical elements (*charakteres* and two columns of magical words) are fully drawn, showing their placement at the two sides of the triangle (Fig. 45).

Another interesting passage is to be found in a complex ritual explained in Pap. Graec.Mag. III (4th c. CE).[49] The ritual (ll. 1-164) includes, among other things, the production of three tablets containing magical formulas (*logoi*), magical words, and drawings, which are to be inserted into different cavities of a sacrificed cat. The text to be written on the second tablet, and to be placed in the cat's ears, consists of a long formula (ll. 67-68). Below the formula, two lines converging downwards seem to delimit the triangular layout prescribed for it, and inside this area the indications "in the shape of a heart, as a bunch of grapes" (καρδιακῶς | ὡς βότρυς) are set one under the other. As in the example in Pap.Graec.Mag. IV described above, here too the geometric formation is not reproduced in its entirety, but textual and graphic indications are given for its arrangement.[50]

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[48] The text is therefore rotated 90° with respect to the other pages. A cancelled line containing a part of the palindrome shows that the scribe started using the page "normally", but then realised that he was going to need more space in width.

[49] See the image at <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010001517>. The passages discussed are in cols. II and III. A new edition, with substantial improvements in the disposition of the fragments will be published as GEMF 55; however, these important novelties will not affect the part of the spell discussed here.

[50] Some inconsistencies are nonetheless present in Pap.Graec.Mag. III: the text runs τρεβαα[βεραμενθωω[υθ]λερα | εξ[αν]αξε[θρ]ελθυοωεθνε[μαρεβα], but the initial τρεβα is not part of the palindrome, as the space in the final lacuna would not allow the presence of its reverse (αβερτ); and indeed Preisendanz separates it from what follows. Moreover, the disposition of the formula on two lines does not set up a correct start for the triangle. Another triangular shape is drawn at the end of the previous column, where an even longer palindrome is written out in full just one time (occupying three lines) and without any further indication.

It must be stressed that there is no constant correspondence between the use of palindromes or magical words and their arrangement in triangular shapes: in most cases, in fact, handbooks do not indicate that palindromes are to be written in a special layout, and the same magical word may or may not be arranged in a certain way. The "ιαω *logos*", for example, is sometimes used for "heart-shaped" formations (as in the case of Pap.Graec.Mag. IV 408-433 mentioned above), while sometimes the recipes just say to write it, without further indications, or show how to write it a different layout (as in GEMF 9 [= Suppl.Mag. II 74], 10-16, where it is displayed in a rectangular shape).[51] The geometrical shapes we are discussing, then, appear to be somehow optional or variable.

2. Magical handbooks also prescribe other complex layouts consisting of diagrams or actual drawings surrounding (or including) the text or a part of it. The one that recurs most frequently is the *ouroboros*, the snake biting its tail and forming a circle which may contain words.[52] Being well-known, the *ouroboros* can be prescribed in the same three ways seen above for the geometric textual formations: it may be just mentioned (as in GEMF 31 [= Pap.Graec.Mag. I], 145-146),[53] or directly drawn (as in Suppl.Mag. II 96 F), or mentioned and drawn (as in Pap.Graec.Mag. VII 579-590).[54]

To frame or graphically divide parts of a text is an operation prescribed in several recipes, which either describe and show, or simply show, how to do it. In Pap. Graec.Mag. V 304-369, instructions are given for the words to be written in an area surrounded by the shape of a ring and within the outline of the ring itself; then the figure is shown (although it does not match the instructions given). For a direct demonstration, see for example Pap.Graec.Mag. VII 215-218, a recipe to produce a "stele" to obtain favour and success.[55] Below the instructions "Take a tin tablet and engrave it with a bronze stylus, and be sure of being pure while carry-

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Similar cases are Pap.Graec.Mag. XXXVI 242-245, where the heart-shape is only begun, and under it the word βάθρον ("ladder") is noted to explain how to proceed; Pap.Graec.Mag. VII 218-221, where the first three lines of a heart (or wing: the papyrus is broken on the right side) are written and the instruction καθυφαιρῶν ("subtracting down") is given; GEMF 34 (= Pap.Graec.Mag. LXII) 77-80, where the first two lines of a geometrical formation are written in full and in the third line only the first letter is traced; from this letter and from the last letter of the previous line two oblique and converging strokes start, showing how the triangular shape must be continued, and at the end of the strokes the two letters εν are written; below (l. 81), the instruction "this way, shaped like a heart" is given (οὕτως καρδιοειδῶς); note, however, that the letters εν do not form the central part of the magical word.

[51] On this part of GEMF 9 see Faraone 2023, 164-166.

[52] On the *ouroboros* see Faraone 2022a; Maltomini 1980, 92; Betz 1992, 337, s.v.; Brashear 1995, 3478 and passim.

[53] Elsewhere, as in GEMF 15, 323-324 (= Pap.Graec.Mag. XII 274-275), the word *ouroboros* is not used, but a clear description of it is provided.

[54] In this recipe, the drawing of the *ouroboros* does not correspond exactly with the indications provided. On a possible explanation of this discrepancy see Faraone 2022a, 83-84.

[55] See Jordan 1994, 116-125 and Jordan 2004.

ing it" (λαβὼν πέταλον κασσιτερινὸν χ[ά]ραξον χαλκῷ γραφ[είῳ], κ[αὶ] φορουμένη καθαρῶς [ἔστω]), the tablet and its contents are drawn. Pap.Graec.Mag. VII 925-939 and Pap.Graec.Mag. X 36-50 are two recipes for ὑποτακτικά (spells to force submission) that provide near-identical procedures based on an analogical mechanism: both cases require placing under one's foot a tablet obtained from the metal part of a yoke and engraved with (different) magical *onomata* (and, in Pap.Graec.Mag. VII, also *charakteres*). The arrangement of these magical elements is shown in both recipes: in Pap.Graec.Mag. VII they are inserted in a rectangle that reproduces the shape of the tablet; in Pap.Graec.Mag. X the *onomata*, arranged in four columns of about equal height, likewise occupy a rectangular area, but only the first column is framed.

The framing of a text within a specific shape is possibly prescribed in the erotic spell Pap.Graec.Mag. IV 1715-1871, entitled "Sword of Dardanus". The recipe equates the spell with a sword: see the very beginning at l. 1715 (πρᾶξις ἡ καλουμένη ξίφος, ἧς οὐδέν ἐστιν ἴσον διὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν: "Rite called 'sword', which has no equal because of its power"), and ll. 1809-1811 (εἰς δὲ πέταλον χρυσοῦν τὸ ξίφος τοῦτο γράφε: "and on a golden leaf inscribe this sword", followed by the text to be engraved); it may therefore be that ξίφος is the "codified name" for the form in which the spell must be written.[56] It should in any case be highlighted that the text of this spell opens with a magical name but continues with a proper linguistic part referring to the summoning of the god and of the strength deriving from it: this is an exception in the overall documentation.

Finally, a single case of spiral-shaped writing is found in Pap.Graec.Mag. VII 300, where the drawing of an ibis is surrounded by magical words and other (semantically-specific) adjectives referring to a god.[57] References to orbits and planets in the text around the ibis may be the reason for the choice of this particular ("analogical") layout. The presence of the adjectives falls outside the usual correspondence between special (magical) words and special (figurative) layout; nonetheless, by describing the god and invoking him, they are very close in function to the magical *onomata* proper.

A further case of interpenetration between text and figures is that of magical drawings that reproduce the supernatural entities invoked in the spells or the targets of the spells themselves. As already mentioned above (§ 1), these are not illus-

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[56] See Betz 1992, 70 n. 231, Faraone 2022b, 381-383. For a text of applied magic framed by a sword see below § 3.2.

[57] The final part of the text should be considered extraneous to it: the scribe, deciding to directly show the drawing and the words around it, included in the spiral also the instructions that were placed at the end of the recipe: "Write on your left hand with myrrh ink these words around the ibis" (γράφε εἰς τὴν εὐώνυμόν σου χεῖρα διὰ ζμυρνομέλανος ἀκόλουθα τοῦ ἴβεως).

tration but the actual performative representation of a magical power.[58] Quite often, the drawings are not only surrounded by words and *charakteres*, but even include names and *voces magicae*, written on various parts of them.[59] Images and magical words, then, add up to achieve a particularly high "magic quotient". These figures (referred to as ζῴδια in the handbooks) are sometimes briefly described in the text of the recipe (and then drawn, usually with more details), while in some other cases the text introduces the image without describing it but mentioning words to be written together with it.[60] The same process, but applied to three-dimensional outputs of the rite rather than to drawings, is attested by the recipe, mentioned above, for an erotic spell in Pap.Graec.Mag. IV 296–466: besides the writing of the long spell on a lead–tablet, it prescribes the production of two figurines (one male and one female), and instructions are given for the magical words to be written on seventeen different parts of the female one (ll. 304–321).

3. There are just a few cases in which layout instructions are given for portions of text that do not correspond to complex or "figurative" formations. They invariably concern the placement of magical words on objects used (or produced) during the rite. An example is Pap.Graec.Mag. IV 3210–3218, a spell for divination that gives indications for how to arrange a series of magical words on different parts of a bowl (on the base, beneath the base, on the outside, on the outside of the rim at the top): γράψας εἰς τὸν πυθμένα ζμυρνομέλανι· 'ηιοχ χιφα· ελαμψηρ ζηλ αεηϊουω' (γράμματα κε), ὑπὸ τὸν πυθμένα δὲ ἔξωθεν· 'Ταχιήλ, χθονίη, δραξω' (γράμματα ιη), καὶ κήρωσον λευκῷ κηρῷ. εἰς δὲ τὸν κύκλον ἔξωθεν τὸν ἄνω· 'ϊερμι, φιλω ϛ ερικωμα δερκ[ω]μαλωκ γαυλη Ἀφρϊήλ'.

Sometimes the instructions are only partial, leaving the performer of the rite some room for interpretation (and therefore some freedom of execution). For example in Pap.Graec.Mag. IV 1320–1322 the instructions for a phylactery prescribe the writing of a magical word on a censer: γράψον μέσον τοῦ θυμιατηρίου τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο· 'θερμουθερεψιφιριφιπισαλι'; the expression used ("write in the middle of the censer") does not clarify the actual arrangement of the text.

Finally, it should be noted that no special instruction is given for particular semantically–specific sections such as lists (of names, epithets, actions, parts of the

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[58] On magical drawings see Martín Hernández 2012 and Dosoo 2018, 23 n. 34, with previous bibliography.

[59] Two particularly striking examples are those of the image of Seth in col. 1 of Pap.Graec.Mag. XXXVI, while the best examples are those in GEMF 30 (Pap.Graec.Mag. VI + II), where the bodies of depicted entities are entirely covered with magical words and vowels, some of them repeated several times (as the name of Seth, identifying the figure itself, in Pap.Graec.Mag. XXXVI).

[60] The image is shown directly, for example, in the first four spells in Pap.Graec.Mag. XXXVI, and the set of magical words and image is introduced by expressions like "write the following names and figure" (γράφε τὰ ὑποκίμενα ὀνόματα καὶ τὸ ζῴδιον).

body): their presence is an important, recurring feature in magical spells of the Roman era, but the handbooks do not prescribe or show any specific arrangement. Some attention to the articulation of the list is, however, sometimes provided by separating the listed items (generally written one after the other) by dots or slashes; the users of the recipe, then, would have chosen how to treat the list graphically in the text of applied magic.

To sum up: in magical handbooks, indications about the layout of the texts to be produced during the rite are connected to specific "figurative arrangements" that have a performative value and function as "containers" of magical words. In the few cases in which layout indications do not concern geometrical arrangements, the text involved consists of magical words or words closely assimilable to them. Only the most "marked" portions of the text, immediately identifiable as such and endowed with performative value, then, are involved in layout strategies, while the semantically-specific parts are not normed. The writers of texts of applied magic who used handbooks were therefore left free to choose, idiosyncratically and perhaps also by analogy with other text typologies, how to treat some sections of the spell.

3.2 Layout Strategies in Texts of Applied Magic

The prescriptions given by magical handbooks are reflected in the contemporary "activated" texts, found also outside Egypt, where various types of figurative arrangements are used, such as geometrical shapes of semantically-non-specific elements,[61] diagrams[62] or shaped frames,[63] and the *ouroboros*.[64] Other types of arrange-

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[61] Among many examples see, within aggressive magic, the curse tablets Suppl.Mag. II 55 from Oxyrhynchus (3rd c. CE), on papyrus, and Audollent, *Defixiones* 155 and 159 from Rome, Porta S. Sebastiano (end of 4th c. CE), on lead (see also n. 65 below). Within protective magic, see the gold tablet from Ephesus Kotansky, *Magical Amulets* 37 (2nd-3rd c. CE), showing a triangular formation of 153 vowels; more examples, and a list, in Faraone 2012.

[62] This design, comparable with what is prescribed and shown in Pap.Graec.Mag. VII 215-218 (see § 3.1 above), is documented on the back of the *defixio* from the Isthmus of Corinth *NGCT* 26 (= 44-308; see also n. 70 below) and on the fragment from Hadrumetum Jordan, *SGD* 148.

[63] For example, the love charm on a gold tablet Kotansky, *Magical Amulets* 62 (Zian, Tunisia, 2nd/3rd c. CE) displays a sword surrounding part of the text. The rectangular tablet exhibits a complex layout. It is divided in two sections by a line running along the short side. The upper section contains vowels and *charakteres*. The lower section, written by rotating the tablet 90° anticlockwise, displays three areas: the upper one contains letters and *charakteres*, the lower one contains *nomina magica*, and the central area contains the sword. The handle of the sword shows the Greek formula μ⌈α⌉ίνοιτο "let him/ her go mad", which often occurs in erotic charms aiming to lead a woman to sexual frenzy. On the blade, *charakteres* and letters are engraved. On this text see Faraone 2022b.

[64] E.g., the amulet on papyrus Suppl.Mag. I 10 (Egypt, Fayum ?, 3rd-4th c. CE) and the silver phylactery against epilepsy *SEG* XLIX 1387 (Rome, 4th-early 5th cent. CE); see <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103TT9>. Within aggressive magic, see, e.g., the Latin curse tablet against the judge Sura from the fountain of Anna Perenna in Rome (*SD* 22, 4th c. CE).

ments are also attested, such as the representation of *tabulae ansatae*[65] containing the magical text.[66]

An important element to highlight is the use of graphic strategies meant to clearly distinguish the different magical and semantic contributions of the various portions of the text, by isolating the actual linguistic expressions from the non-linguistic elements such as *charakteres* and vowel sequences. An example within protective magic is provided by the house amulet of Ioannis and Georgia from Thessaly: in the bottom half of the tablet, a catalogue of angel-names is delineated by a line ruled at its top and its right and left margins; at ll. 27-34 a vertical line separates the list into two columns. Names and magical signs are marked off by an etched box near the bottom of the tablet.[67] Within aggressive magic, interesting layout configurations

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[65] E.g., the silver phylactery for pain *SEG* XXXIII 1547 (unknown provenance, 3rd c. CE), where the *tabula ansata* marks off a pair of magical names (Σαβαώθ, Ἰαώθ) or, within aggressive magic, the curse tablets Audollent, *Defixiones* 145 (Rome, Porta S. Sebastiano, end of 4th c. CE) and *NGCT* 94 (Egypt, 4th c. CE). In these curses the *tabula* is part of a more complex figure: in Audollent, *Defixiones* 145, a *defixio* against charioteers, the *tabula* is held in the hands of the evoked demon (Typhon?) and contains magical signs (also placed around the demon); in *NGCT* 94, an erotic curse, the *tabula* is placed beneath the feet of Seth-Typhon and contains an imperfect series of vowels (*voces magicae* in columns are placed on either side of the demon). There is also evidence of tablets written on a metal sheet cut in the shape of a *tabula ansata*. Concerning aggressive magic, there is a small group of texts from the western part of the Roman Empire. The majority of these tablets belong to the class of prayers for justice found in sacred areas and mostly date back to the 2nd c. CE (for a list see Arias de Haro *et al.* 2021 and Kropp 2008). It seems that this shape appeared between the 1st and the 3rd c. CE (see Arias de Haro *et al.* 2021, 345). Also to be added to these documents is the silver votive plaque with a judicial prayer against slander (Asia Minor or Thrace ?, 2nd c. CE) edited by Kotansky 2020. A group of judicial curse tablets are also shaped as a *tabula ansata*: *SD* 160 I (diptychon) and II from Chagnon (*Gallia*, mid 2nd c. CE), and *SD* 475 (diptychon) from Kreuznach (*Germania Superior*, first half of 2nd c. CE); unlike the prayers for justice, these curse tablets have been found in a funerary context. Outside this area, a lead *tabula ansata* from North Africa, documented in the archive of A. Audollent, "could equally contain the text of a curse, a prayer or an amulet" (Németh 2012, 429-430). The *tabulae ansatae* in aggressive magic seem to be a western and Latin phenomenon; the use of the Greek language is documented by amulets (see Arias de Haro *et al.* 2021, 344-345); see the two bronze phylacteries Kotansky, *Magical Amulets* 11 (from France, 2nd c. CE). The use of the *tabula ansata* shape is well established in a funerary context, while it is not clear in the magic one (see Kotansky 1983, 175-176 with the relevant bibliography and other examples).

[66] Other attested shapes are: triangles (e.g., *SD* 106; Verona, 2nd-3rd c. CE), the *tabula cum capitulo* (*SD* 128, Bolonia, *Hispania Baetica*, 1st half of 2nd c. BCE), the *tabula cerata* (*SD* 71, Pompei, 2nd c. BCE), the silhouette of a foot (*SD* 140, Sagunto, 1st c. CE). According to Curbera 2015, 101 tablets cut as long strips (up to 40 cm; e.g., Audollent, *Defixiones* 86) are "representations of the δεσμοί or κατάδεσμοι ("bands") that were supposed to immobilize or bind their victims". According to Siebourg 1898, 131 the complex configuration of lines shown by the Greek amulet with *nomina sacra* Kotansky, *Magical Amulets* 4 from Gelduba (Krefeld-Gellep, *Germania inferior*, 3rd c. CE) is to be identified as a stylised *naiskos*, with the columns of letters representing pillars. See *SD*, 10-11, Curbera 2015.

[67] Kotansky, *Magical Amulets* 41, Phthiotis, Thessaly, 4th/5th c. CE. Another example is the silver amulet Kotansky, *Magical Amulets* 49 from Emesa, Syria, 4th/5th c. CE, divided into separate sections by ruling lines or boxes and containing, besides *charakteres*, pseudo-Greek words and (largely unattested) *voces magicae* (perhaps interpretable as ciphers).

appear in Latin texts from North Africa, which, as well as being part of the Grae-co-Egyptian tradition, also exhibit specific strategies.[68]

A specific aspect of layout is the relation of the text to iconographic elements, and in particular to anthropomorphic figures, which may represent deities invoked or persons involved in the spells.[69] In some aggressive texts, the names of the victims, besides being mentioned in the spell, are also placed as a sort of caption to the drawings, in order to mark out the main element of the curse. Two curse tablets from Rome (Fig. 48) and the Isthmus of Corinth (Fig. 46) provide remarkable examples of this feature.[70] The example from Rome is addressed against two groups of charioteers belonging to two different factions. The charioteers are sketched (four on side A, three on side B) with some elements of individual physiognomy; they are wearing their racing costume and are bound. The sketches are positioned perpendicular to a representation of Seth.[71] Their names are placed above their portrait, along with nicknames and maternal filiation: e.g., "Euthymios also known as Maximos also known as Gidas the son of Paschasia" (Εὐθύμις ὁ καὶ Μάξιμος ὁ καὶ Γίδας ὁ υἱὸς Πασχασείας). Layout, content, and physiognomy clearly show the intent to individualise the victims as far as possible.[72] The Corinthian tablet is struc-

[68] The documentation consists of a group of twenty *defixiones* dating back to late 2nd-3rd c. CE and mostly discovered in Carthage and Hadrumetum (see Gordon 2005, Gordon 2021, 124-128 and *SD*, 18-19). These "fence"-curses are arranged with a part of the text running around as a frame. According to Gordon 2005, 78-79 this layout would be derived "from the praxis of magical-amulet design, where divine images are regularly enclosed by a text". Sánchez Natalías (*SD*, 19) proposes to interpret the frame as a representation of the circus (or of the race itself), pointing out that it should also be "understood in terms of a persuasive analogy", with the fence symbolically representing the restriction of the victims, "who are accordingly trapped and cannot escape the text's powerful sway". The text written as a frame is in most cases the cursing spell, while sometimes it consists of *voces magicae* or names of the invoked entities. In Audollent, *Defixiones* 284 (Hadrumetum, 2nd/3rd c. CE) the *voces magicae* of the frame, written with deformed letters, enclose the names of charioteers and horses grouped into textual blocks ending with a simple wish formula (*cadant, frangant, vertant*, …). Audollent, *Defixiones* 275 (Hadrumetum, 2nd/3rd c. CE) presents a more complex layout consisting of "a double paratextual cage" (Gordon 2021, 125, including a schematic reconstruction): the frame, written with multiple orientation and containing the main binding spell, encloses the central portion of the text showing blocks of names and wish formulas (e.g., *cadat, male girat*) interspersed with sequences of 25 *charakteres*. In both texts a more elaborate binding spell is placed in the last block, at the end of the list of names.

[69] On the coexistence of images, symbols, and texts in curse tablets, see Sánchez Natalías 2020 and Blänsdorf 2015 (with special attention to the material from the fountain of Anna Perenna). On the iconography of bound victims in magical texts, see Marco Simón and Sánchez Natalías 2022.

[70] Respectively, Audollent, *Defixiones* 159 (Rome, Porta S. Sebastiano, end of the 4th c. CE), for which see Bevilacqua 2012, 603-606, and *NGCT* 26 (Isthmus of Corinth, Sanctuary of Poseidon, 3rd c. CE), for which see Jordan 1994, 116-125.

[71] The identification of the figures on the so-called *Sethianorum tabellae* is disputed. For a discussion of this matter and a more detailed description of the figurative apparatus, see Bevilacqua 2012, 602 and Martín Hernández 2022.

[72] A different interpretation is provided by Viglione 2010, 119-121, according to which the names are written in that position due to lack of space.

tured more "geometrically": matching its content, it is divided in six parts consisting of the sketches of the four victims and of two sections containing the main spells. On each sketch, the curser engraved a spell including the name of the victim, e.g., "control Seleucus" (Σέλευκον κάτεχε). The main spell section consists of an upper part, formed by the magical name Ευλαμω written in a wing-formation, and a lower part containing the actual spell.[73] Both tablets reveal the coexistence of different semiotic codes (linguistic and visual) to convey the same content, the same illocutionary act. Therefore, we observe a semiotic completion between text and images, with the spatial and textual arrangement working together.[74]

In the documentation of this period the use of lists also continues, but their function undergoes some changes. Lists appear, for instance, also in protective magic and phylacteries.[75] And, in aggressive magic, they are no longer mere lists of victims but involve all the magical elements: the texts pertaining to the Graeco-Egyptian tradition present (sometimes very long) lists of the desired effects of the spell, or of the entities to be invoked.

Concerning the shape of the tablets, roundish media are attested, and in this case too it is possible to glimpse traces of an attribution of new functions to the graphic elements: in an amulet from Sicily dating to Late Antiquity,[76] the circularity of the writing could refer to uterine suffering and to the shape of the uterus, for which the inscribed prayer seeks protection.[77]

3.3 "Measuring" the Stability of Layout in Different Witnesses of the Same Magical Texts

A further way to establish the "weight" of the layout in the drafting of magical texts is to compare different witnesses of the same spell. We have only a few cases of (partially) overlapping texts – and some of them do not exhibit distinctive layouts. Still, the available evidence allows us to approach the matter by analysing: (a) how

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[73] "May they not prevail in running Friday but (?) indeed [" (trad. Jordan; Μ[ὴ] ἰσχύσοισαν {ἰσχύσωσιν} δραμεῖν προσάββατον ἀ<λ>λὰ (?) καὶ [), probably referring to a footrace in the Isthmian Games. See Jordan 1994, 117.

[74] An analogous Latin example is offered by the curse tablet against *Antonius* (*SD* 19; Rome, fountain of Anna Perenna, end of 4th c. CE) displaying on side A the sketch of a man, whose name is written twice on the image and once, in bigger characters, above it; on side B the name of the victim is repeated in jumbled form. Also in texts not pertaining to the Graeco-Egyptian tradition, the identification of the victims is a constant concern for the curser, who uses other identifying elements together with the name, such as nicknames, matronymics, patronymics.

[75] See Bevilacqua 2010, 83. A list of diseases to be removed is found in the phylactery against epilepsy *SEG* LII 948 (Arco, Italy, late 2nd - early 3rd c. CE). Lists of spirits are less usual; an example is the phylactery for Syntyche (*SEG* LIII 1110, Rome?, late Roman period) containing an invocation of demons against evil forces. See Gordon 2021, 135-137.

[76] See Mastrocinque 2005.

[77] See Centrone 2010, 102.

different practitioners using the same ritual transposed in the "applied" texts the instructions about layout given in the handbooks, and (b) how the same practitioner (or practitioners working in the same context) acts when producing multiple copies of the same text involving layout features.

A well-known group of witnesses of the same spell provides information about both these aspects. As already mentioned,[78] the recipe for an erotic spell recorded in Pap.Graec.Mag. IV 296–466 requires that a magical palindrome (*logos*) be inscribed in a "heart shape" on a lead tablet, placing it "in another part of the tablet" than the rest of the spell. Five lead tablets and a clay pot from different parts of Egypt (Suppl. Mag. I 46–51) are inscribed with a text deriving from this recipe or from close variants of it;[79] moreover, Suppl.Mag. 49, 50 and 51 were written by the same scribe and for the same person. Only two of the six documents (Suppl.Mag. 48 and 49) actually include the prescribed *logos*. Suppl.Mag. 48 presents it in a heart formation, as required by the recipe, and in the upper part of the tablet (the writer possibly interpreted thus the instruction to write it "in another part of the tablet"); in Suppl.Mag. 49, on the other hand, the *logos* is only written once (without the progressively reduced repetition that forms the triangular shape), and is inserted (divided into two uneven parts and followed by other magical words) above and below the first line of the spell. Although it cannot be completely ruled out that the recipe that was followed for this text lacked the indication to write the *logos* in a heart-shape, Suppl. Mag. 49 is possibly evidence of a deviation from the prescribed layout due to "force majeure": the scribe had used up all the available space both on the front and on the back of the tablet to write the previous part of the spell[80] and did not know where to insert the heart-shaped formation. In the other two exemplars written by the same scribe (Suppl.Mag. 50 and 51) the *logos* is completely omitted, and the reason may be the same: lack of space. In any case, it must be noted that the three texts differ also in other respects: the writer probably relied on one recipe, but, when producing three specimens for the same person, he chose to modify and mix it with other material.[81] A certain freedom towards the prescriptions given by the handbooks seems to exist, then, as regards both the text of the spell and the *layout*.

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[78] See § 3.1 above.

[79] Suppl.Mag. I 46 = T.Cairo JdE 48217 (Arsinoïte, 4th c. CE; TM 8723); Suppl.Mag. I 47 = T.Louvre E 27145 (Middle Egypt? 2nd-3rd c. CE; TM 92866); Suppl.Mag. I 48 = T. Michigan 6925 (2nd-3rd c. CE; TM 92865; Suppl.Mag. I 49 = T.Köln 1 (Oxyrhynchus, 2nd-3rd c. CE; TM 64308); Suppl.Mag. I 50 = T.Köln 2 (Oxyrhynchus, 2nd-3rd c. CE; TM 105083); Suppl.Mag. I 51 = O.Köln 409 (Oxyrhynchus, 2nd-3rd c. CE; TM 92864). For a stemma of the five tablets, see Wortmann 1968, 59; Martinez 1991, 113-117 offers an attempt to reconstruct the original text that lies behind all the witnesses.

[80] See Suppl.Mag. I, at p. 193 (introduction to no. 49).

[81] See the analysis by Suárez de la Torre *et al.* 2019.

Another good example of several copies of the same text is in Suppl.Mag. II 96, a cache of magical texts (some written by the same hand) that can be plausibly ascribed to serial production in a workshop. The larger text (A) is a formulary written *transversa charta* on the recto of a roll, and is probably complete. The other, smaller fragments (B–F) include parts of A, with only F adding some new material (including the *ouroboros* mentioned above, 151). Useful for our inquiry is the comparison between A and E, a papyrus leaf incomplete at top and bottom, written on both sides by two different hands (the one that wrote side ↓ is possibly to be identified with the hand of A). The text in E – consisting of a list of poetic adjectives, a list of magical words, and two groups of magical words each of them enclosed in a circle – has the following correspondences in A: E ↓ 1–8 = A 25–32, and E → 1–13 = A 35–46. Some layout differences between the two copies are immediately evident: the lists, arranged with one word below the other in A 25–43, begin in the same way in E (E ↓ 1–8 - E → 1–3), but then become continuous, with the different words separated by a double oblique stroke (→ 4–7);[82] moreover, the two sections of text enclosed in a circle are placed side by side in A 44–47 (together with a third, empty circle), while in E → 8–13 they are written one below the other (and the empty circle is missing). Faraone plausibly argued that the scribe gave the precedence to leaving enough space for the circled parts, thus deciding to crowd the final words of the list.[83] Altogether, it seems that some layout features (such as the enclosing of groups of words in a circle) were considered, by the scribes here involved, a priority and therefore stay the same in the different copies, while others (such as the layout of lists or textual blocks) could vary in case of need.

Another interesting case is that of three Christian amulets for three different women, found in Oxyrhynchus and written by the same hand in the 4th c. CE: P.Oxy. VI 924,[84] LXXXII 5306, and 5307.[85] The texts of 5307 and 924 are almost identical, while that of 5306 is longer and seems to be the result of a patchwork combining the spell used in the other two amulets with some other formulas: we are clearly dealing with "serial production" by the same magician, who modulated the length of a

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[82] In A, the adjectives and the magical words are separated by a long horizontal stroke; its presence cannot be verified in E, where the end of the adjectives list is lost but in all probability coincided with the bottom of the page. The same lists are repeated also in papyrus F of Suppl.Mag. II 96, written by a different hand: in F fr. A, 4–8, the beginning and end of the list of adjectives are marked with a double oblique stroke, and the words are written one after the other without any mark of separation (except for one *dicolon* at l. 7); the arrangement of the list of magical words in the damaged fr. B is less clear. The circled groups of words are not present, while the already mentioned *ouroboros* is inserted after the adjectives list. On these three copies of the lists see Faraone 2022c, 231–237.

[83] Faraone 2022c, 237.

[84] See the re-edition in Maltomini 2015, with an image of the papyrus.

[85] Images of P.Oxy. LXXXII 5306 and 5307 are available at <https://portal.sds.ox.ac.uk/search?groups=35280>.

"basic" text, sometimes expanding it. All three amulets end with a cross surrounded by words and letters, framed at the bottom by three lines (two angular ones at the corners and one horizontal between them): evidently a figurative magical device capable of activating the amulet. Although the words around the cross are the same in the three amulets, their arrangement is somewhat different in P.Oxy. 5307.[86] Should we deduce that even a single practitioner could vary, in different copies of the same spell, these types of devices? Or is it a case of unintended inaccuracy relative to a model, which was followed more carefully in the other two amulets?

The possibility of a slip should certainly be considered (writers of texts of applied magic are often far from flawless), but what we have seen so far may suggest that even the textual parts that are most "regulated" in magical handbooks could be the object, by choice or necessity, of reworking in the actual practice or magic.

4. Conclusions

Our analysis has shown how the two different traditions of magical practice present significant differences at the level of the graphic strategies used by practitioners to enhance the magical character of the texts.

In the earliest tradition (and, for the Latin West, also in the "vernacular" tradition), no specific layout strategies could be identified, and graphic arrangements such as lists are not standardised and meet basic universal semiotic criteria rather than specifically magical ones. The layout of the texts is governed by the ideological assumption of a sympathetic relationship between text and target: distortions, inversions, substitutions, cancellations are intended to affect, *similia similibus*, the person to whom the spell refers. The use of these semiotically basic strategies (inasmuch as they are attested in many different cultural traditions all over the world) is related to an "informal, unsystematic, freely-circulating knowledge about 'how such [i.e., magical] things are done'".[87] This type of knowledge has not "invented" specific, culturally determined strategies, but uses graphic resources whose efficacy and validity are immediately identifiable and perceptible.

Different and more complex strategies are exhibited by later texts, which belong to the magical *koine* that matured in Graeco-Roman Egypt and spread throughout the Mediterranean basin. This tradition is strongly characterised by distinctive graphic strategies (prescribed by handbooks and applied in "activated" texts) in which textual elements are treated differently, at the level of layout, depending on their semantic meaning. Specific layouts are prescribed and deployed almost exclusively for the semantically-non-specific elements, i.e., those that lack a linguistic-semantic meaning

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[86] In 5307 the words Ἰ(ησο)ῦ and Χ(ριστο)ῦ are placed one beside the other above the sequence πατήρ, υἱός, μήτηρ, rather than before and after it as in the other two amulets.

[87] Gordon 2021, 110-111.

but bear a linguistic-pragmatic meaning, for instance magical *logoi* or vowel sequences; the exceptions consist of highly powerful words, such as epithets referring to gods.

On the other hand, the graphic arrangement of elements that have a proper linguistic meaning is left to the discretion of the practitioner, who may sporadically choose to arrange some of them in a particular way; however, these are entirely occasional phenomena, which do not seem to be clearly influenced by other textual typologies.

A "markedness" of the semantically-non-specific elements is therefore evident and defines them as bearers of magical power. Their special layout provides a greater illocutionary force, even in the case of absence of a true locutionary act associated with it, as for *charakteres*. The freedom granted in the arrangement of the semantically-specific portions of the text, on the other hand, suggests they have a different magical "weight" in the performativity of the ritual. The lack of layout rules for the semantically-specific textual portions goes hand in hand with the multiple possibilities available to human language to convey the same content through different linguistic forms without modifying the purposes, intentions, and interpretation of the statements.

Conversely, the instructions concerning the semantically-non-specific textual portions seem to show that their magical value relies (also) on their form. The absence, in the instructions given by magical handbooks, of a constant correspondence between the use of magical words and a special layout, as well as the decision of some practitioners not to fully respect (or to vary) these same instructions, may delineate the boundaries of the use of such graphic devices: they were not felt to be indispensable, but, rather, their presence was perceived as an additional source (or guarantee) of magical power; the practitioners thus might feel free to introduce some variation on them (just as they introduced variations into the texts of the spells), or to exclude them – especially in the presence of compelling practical factors like a lack of space on the writing surface.

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