

As clearly stated on several occasions, collections of magical spells claim to preserve texts backed by the authorship of well-known figures and, more frequently, spells proven to be highly effective. This would seem enough to prevent anyone from changing them in any way. Rather, this could seem a reason sufficient to impose the exact transcription of a spell and the consequent repetition of the exact words and gestures connected with its performance without the possibility of introducing the slightest variation. Yet, the very spells, formulae, and hymns crucial to the successful outcome of magical practice seem to have undergone a continuous re-elaboration.

To better understand the dynamics behind the use of language in magic, I will consider two hymns, Preisendanz 1 and 15/16, and the spells in which they are preserved. The first hymn, *An den Allschöpfer* appears in PGM XII.201-69, a spell dealing with the creation of a ring for magical use. Sections of this spell appear in two other papyri PGM XIII.734-1077 and PGM XXI.1-29 where the hymn is missing. The spells in PGM XIII and XII presents strong similarities but also interesting differences: despite the occasional word by word correspondence, they considerably differ in the way they are phrased, as well as for isolated sentences to be found only in one of them. The hymn appears only in PGM XII within a series of sentences clearly intended to follow each other without interruptions. The hymn thus appears like an insertion within a pre-existing text: this last was not only complete without hymn but it remained unchanged even after the hymn was added.

The hymn to Hermes, Preisendanz 15/16, is preserved in three papyri differing for the amount of hymn they preserve and for the context in which they preserve it. In PGM XVIIb the hymn does not seem to have been introduced into a spell, but copied on its own. In the other texts, PGM V.370-421, a spell for revelation and PGM VII, only a small section of the hymn is preserved, this time within the spells, and although only a few verses of the hymn are included, the spell seems to follow the rest of it in its main lines, sometimes even in its vocabulary. Both the numerous variants and the different contexts of the tradition of this hymn raise important questions: PGM XVIIb, containing only the hymn, seems to suggest that the text could be copied for itself, without any context, a conclusion that sheds new light on the appearance of this hymn in the other two spells.

The form of a spell, as well as the presence or absence of hymns, seems to have been the result of continuous reshaping. Although the hymns considered preexisted the spells in which they are preserved, the connection between spell and hymn seems to have had consequences for the spell: while the hymn is cut and reshaped to better accommodate its new context, its words and sentences become part of the spell. This intense re-elaboration undergone by magical language is an element to take in consideration in the study of isolated spells and collections of spells alike: the notion of simple textual transmission may have to be abandoned to leave place to a more complex definition of the dynamics behind magical language.