

(p. 142 n. 57). And in relation to the *PGM*, she argues, against the older nineteenth- and twentieth-century view, that ritual handbooks, amulets, curse tablets, oracular and divinatory apparatuses, and healing formulas are not representative of illicit, marginal practices performed by marginal ‘magicians’ (p. 114) but should rather be seen, with a growing number of contemporary scholars, as an invaluable resource for understanding the ways in which a majority of people ‘both viewed and approached their interactions with divinity and the realm of spirits’ (p. 114). M.-W. associates these texts with hereditary Egyptian priests disenfranchised in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and she argues that all the rituals practiced by theurgic experts are represented in the *PGM* artefacts; and so priestly competition in the third century probably arose from its appropriation of Greek philosophical patrimony and its ‘self-fashioning as experts in small-scale ritualizing ... that may have brought these priests to the attention of ... Porphyry and Iamblichus’ (p. 119).

In her conclusion, M.-W. proposes that the efforts of third-century figures to establish themselves not only as philosophers but as ritual experts with theoretical and practical knowledge in daily life make comprehensible the efforts of Christian bishops in the fourth and fifth centuries to fashion their own clerical authority as a similar form of expertise (p. 127). If we want to stress the difference between the former as magical and the latter as involved in imperial politics, we should nonetheless recognise, on M.-W.’s account, ‘interesting continuities’ in both traditions in the political connections of a shadowy figure like Pythagoras, but more concrete in the cases of Plotinus and Origen, and also attested for Porphyry (p. 130). Third-century Platonists were not important political actors like many later bishops, but they did act in advisory capacities to politically active persons, and their spiritual, cosmological and demonological expertise ‘was also the basis of their ability to deliberate on social order’ (p. 131).

I might make three minor points: (1) ‘Cosmic Soul’ (p. 52) is not identical to Plotinus’ third hypostasis. (2) The section on hereditary Egyptian priests (Chapter 4) needs development to be more convincing. (3) The question of a Platonist ‘political’ commitment from Pythagoras to Plotinus and Origen, broached in the conclusion, would have been strengthened by mention of Plato’s *Republic*, *Laws* and Aristotle’s *Politics*, but I can understand M.-W. not wishing to introduce another galactic commitment at this point. Overall, this is a refreshing and compelling work that makes us read Late Antiquity in a new, down-to-earth and yet more open-ended way.

Emory University

KEVIN CORRIGAN  
kcorrigan@emory.edu

## TEXTS OF GREEK MAGICAL HYMNS

BORTOLANI (L.M.) *Magical Hymns from Roman Egypt. A Study of Greek and Egyptian Traditions of Divinity*. Pp. xxii + 467. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Cased, £104, US\$130. ISBN: 978-1-107-10838-7.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X17001901

This book sheds light on unexplored and under-estimated poetical relics disseminated in the corpus of *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, the so-called magical hymns. The misfortune of magical papyri, Greek (*PGM*) as well as Demotic (*PDM*), in the scholarship tradition is due to misleading conceptions on ‘magic’, as B. correctly underlines in her introduction:

regarded as outputs of syncretistic folk superstition, these papyri have long been neglected. These magical handbooks, originating from an Egyptian priestly milieu (probably from temple libraries), aimed at preserving a specific religious heritage by adapting it to a Hellenised culture.

B.'s study intends neither to provide a new theory on 'magic' nor to study the complex compilation process of these papyri, but rather to explore the nature of divinity in the magical hymns on the basis of their Greek and Egyptian cultural background. Through the analysis of the divine features in the magical hymns, this work contributes to the investigation on a central question: should we speak of a fusion/amalgam or better of a juxtaposition/coexistence of these two cultures?

After a short preliminary sketch, B. illustrates the methodology she adopts for a new edition of the magical hymns. First, she rightly criticises the attempts of most editors at reconstructing an original archetype (*Urfassung*) for these compositions, as we should consider them working copies, subject to adaptation and re-adaptation in different contexts. Second, she takes into account the *voces magicae* included in these compositions as examples of reworking in a magical milieu; third, she is particularly careful in adjusting unmetrical sections. Furthermore, B. argues that the scarcity of Greek parallels and the difficulty in isolating Egyptian influences raise problems with an approach based uniquely on textual transmission.

The core of the study consists of a line-by-line commentary of fifteen magical hymns, associated with solar (male) and chthonic (female) deities: one may remark that the omission of other hymns without references to these groups of 'complementary' deities renders the title of the work slightly misleading. The rich commentary, based on a stylistic-conceptual approach, focuses on religion and the magical tradition, considering both Greek and Egyptian backgrounds as well as Judaeo-Christian influences. Each hymn is introduced by a short description – including its textual context and ritual *praxis*, a metrical scheme and the references in Preisendanz and Merkelbach-Totti's editions – and followed by some considerations about its origins.

In the conclusions of the volume, B. distinguishes three groups of composition on the basis of their style, structure and content: solar, Apollonian and chthonic-lunar hymns. The first category (1–5, 9) mirrors Egyptian theology and is influenced by a Judaeo-Christian language readapted for a magical context: overall, these hymns seem to have been originally compiled in an Egyptian cultural environment. The Apollonian hymns (6, 7, 8) are the closest to Greek tradition and may be derived from the cultic sphere of oracular consultation, possibly from the Apollonian oracles and Paeans circulating in Greco-Roman Egypt. Finally, the lunar hymns (10–15), aimed at erotic magic and cursing, are connected not only with Greek chthonic deities, but also with the Anatolian worship of Mother Goddesses. At least in three cases (10, 11, 13) the hymns could have been composed *ex novo* in a magical milieu. Moreover, both in Apollonian and in lunar hymns, we find a reworked and readapted take on Homeric language, with the intention of fitting these compositions in the Greek literary tradition; similarly, Orphic language is intensively used.

B.'s book provides a precious tool to investigate these fascinating compositions. Nevertheless, some points of her analysis still give cause for criticism. First, B. does not explain the epistemological criteria she employs to define and select the magical hymns. It is true that the metrical criterion advanced by Preisendanz in the introduction of the third volume of the *PGM* showed some conceptual discrepancies, as the editor himself admitted. However, it is hard to understand the criteria followed by B.: while she admits the scarcity of extant Greek cultic/ritual hymns, she does not examine whether this typology can be somehow traced in ancient literature (for example in the Latin *carmina*) or

derives from a modern categorisation. Nor does B. account for the way these compositions are labelled in the *PGM*.

Some remarks may be directed towards specific philological issues, like the awkward choice of a critical apparatus in English, with long and sometimes misleading formulations such as the one at *h.* 11.84 (p. 246); one may also note that the attempt at reconstructing an archetype in the case of *Hymn* 2, a text attested in three different versions in the *PGM* (the fourth version is edited as a composite hymn by B. as *Hymn* 1) is incoherent with the critical remarks advanced on this approach in the introduction (p. 67). Moreover, B. often insists in preserving the unmetrical readings of the papyrus even in cases where a light intervention could restore a metrical sequence: the most notable example of this conservative approach is to be found at *h.* 4.7, where Preisendanz's ὑσγῖνοιδῆ is an economic emendation of the sequence εἰσγῖνοιδῆ, which B. admits is corrupt. In at least one case B. misunderstands an emendation found in Preisendanz' apparatus: at *h.* 11.2 the conjecture ἐννημένη refers to the meaning of 'kindle/set on fire' (see *LSJ* II, with e.g. Aristophanes, *Peace* 1032), and not of 'to clad in' as B. understands it (p. 250). In conclusion, one cannot but remark that a synoptic table with Preisendanz numbers would have been a most useful instrument for the reader.

As for the general analysis, it would have been interesting to investigate further the connection between magical and oracular texts, a theme barely sketched by B. What could be the relation between late-antique oracles in verses and magical compositions? Could we speak of a form of theological *koiné*? To cite one example, at *h.* 7.19 we find one verse recurring with small variations in a late oracular collection (*Theos. min.* π<sub>8</sub> 64 Erbse = *Theos.* I 5.20 Beatrice); in general, the case of *Hymn* 7 shows that these texts respond to compositional strategies akin to oracular patchworks.

In spite of these *desiderata*, one must credit B.'s work with the strong merit of contesting the syncretistic interpretation of the *PGM*, demonstrating that the compilers of these handbooks had no intention of creating new divinities: they drew their texts from different sources, Greek and/or Egyptian, and adapted them to a new magical context. This book represents a most welcome addition to the scarce bibliography on the subject and should be considered a starting point for future investigations focusing on the problematic topics addressed by B.

*LabEx RESMED, Paris*

LUCIA MADDALENA TISSI  
[luciamaddalenatissi@gmail.com](mailto:luciamaddalenatissi@gmail.com)

## ON MONKS IN EGYPT

CAIN (A.) *The Greek Historia Monachorum in Aegypto. Monastic Hagiography in the Late Fourth Century.* Pp. xii + 329. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Cased, £85, US\$135. ISBN: 978-0-19-875825-9. doi:10.1017/S0009840X1700141X

In the late fourth century seven monks ventured forth into the Egyptian desert in pursuit of piety, learning and inspiration. Their adventures are preserved in the *Historia Monachorum*, a text that survives in both Greek and Latin. The Greek version is the subject of C.'s monograph, the first thorough treatment of it in any language. And thorough C. is, systematically considering questions of text, translation, provenance, date, authorship, genre, literary influence and style, before turning to thematic issues around pilgrimage,