

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

P LEID J 395 (PGM XIII) AND ITS CREATION LEGEND

[491] Since Prof. Nikiprowetzky, in the tragically short time allotted him, contributed so much to our understanding of hellenized Judaism, it seems appropriate to dedicate to his memory this study of a document of Judaized hellenism—the opposite effluent from that mysterious swamp produced by the juncture of the two traditions.

Our document, P. Leid J 395 (PGM XIII),¹ has been famous since Dieterich devoted to it his pioneer study *Abraxas* in the *Festschrift* for Usener,² a great tribute to a great teacher. Unfortunately, Dieterich wrote at the height of the nineteenth century's faith in source criticism so he began by trying to reconstruct exactly the source of the two versions of the creation legend given in the papyrus. Consequently his reconstruction was attacked in the next generation by Reitzenstein,³ who went to the opposite extreme and maintained that the basic text had been completely fluid, a revelation every magician made over to suit himself.

For this, and for his description of Dieterich's attempt as "volkommen verfehlt," Reitzenstein tried to make amends in his own work on the text, *Die Göttin Psyche*,⁴ where he praised *Abraxas* for its "great and enduring service" (p. 29) and himself tried to recover the original text of the creation legend, using conjectures far more hazardous than any Dieterich had dared.

His work was a brilliant disaster. Half a dozen points papyrologically preposterous were promptly indicated by Preisendanz,⁵ but with prudent politeness to his distinguished senior colleague Preisendanz insisted that such errors did not in the least affect the main argument—that the chief [492] elements of the creation legend were derived from ancient Persian cosmology (unfortunately unknown). In *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*³ (1927) Reitzenstein withdrew one or two of his worst howlers (e.g. p. 216, n. 3), but reasserted his basic position. Consequently his work has

¹ *Papyri graecae magicae*², edd. K. Preisendanz and A. Henrichs, Stuttgart. 2 v., 1973-4, vol. 2, pp. 86-131.

² A. Dieterich, *Abraxas, Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des spätern Altertums ... Festschrift Hermann Usener zur Feier seiner 25jährigen Lehrthätigkeit an der Bonner Universität*, Leipzig, 1891.

³ R. Reitzenstein, "Die Areopagrede des Paulus," *Neue Jahrbücher* 31 (1913) 393-422, esp. 421.

⁴ *Sitzungsberichte*, Heidelberg, 1917.10, pp. 23-44.

⁵ K. Preisendanz, "Zur Göttin Psyche," *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 1917.1427-33, esp. cols. 1432-3.

remained the chief obstacle for further study—a body of enormous learning, brilliant observations, astonishing conjectures and incredible conclusions. To refute it point by point would take forever. To ignore it is to beg the question. Let me beg the question.

Simply by looking at the text (more accurately, at Preisendanz' edition of the text)⁶ it can be seen that *PGM XIII* is a clean copy of a papyrus put together by somebody much interested in supposed powers of divine names, and in magical works attributed to Moses. The compiler not only collected such texts, but compared them, cited variants from one when he copied another, and even went to the trouble of copying different versions entire. We should therefore not suspect him of harmonization. In *PGM XIII*, lines 1-734, he copied two complete versions of *The Eighth Book of Moses*, and added an abridgment of a third (lines 646-731).

All versions (in his structure) served the same purpose—to make a great god appear, foretell the magician's fate, and eliminate from it anything evil.⁷ They all told the magician to secure this service by writing an invocation on natron (hydrogenated sodium carbonate) then ingesting it (by licking it off or washing it off and drinking the water), and then reciting a different form of it. This would bring the god.⁸ The doubling of the invocation is odd, and was probably not original, since the second version seems originally to have lacked it. However, the doubling results from the notion that magical knowledge or power can be acquired by [493] eating or drinking, and this notion is widespread and ancient.⁹ More surprising is the fact that all three versions were altered for the same purpose—the doubling of the invocation—but not in the same ways. Why three similar texts should

⁶ Far from the same thing. A new edition is needed. For what follows see M. Smith, "The Eighth Book of Moses and How it Grew," chapter thirty-seven above.

⁷ The directions to make him tell his true name are lacking in one version and probably secondary, but may have been added early, since they got into two of the three.

⁸ The uniformity of structure is somewhat concealed by the fact that the second version does not have the first invocation at the place where its writing and drinking are ordered (lines 433-42), but puts it at the end, as an appendix (lines 567-608). The third version, too, is somewhat muddled, but it unquestionably required the use of at least two invocations. "Ἀρξαι λέγειν τὴν στήλην in 684 must mean "Begin (the rite for) recitation of the (text on the) stela"; otherwise there are too many recitations. The rite begins with writing, licking, and washing (688-92), then the recitation of "this entreaty" (695), which must be the one written on the stela—it has the same beginning (cp. 62f., 568ff., 689f.). This is to be said before drinking the washwater. Then, presumably after drinking, follows the second invocation (139ff. = 443ff. = 698ff.), here called τὴν κοσμοποιῶσαν: evidently it had the creation legend attached to it, as it does in the other two versions.

⁹ Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 2 ed., Bloomington, 6 vols., 1966, Sections B 161-5, 217; D 980-1046, 1240-1248, 1301, 1310, 1357-8, 1793, 1811; M 312; V 132; Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 2:9-3:4; John 6:53-58; Apoc 10:8-11.

independently have been altered in different ways but in all instances to make the same unnecessary change, is a mystery.

In the first and second versions we can be sure of the passages assigned to be written and recited, and can see that they had much the same basic structure. Those to be written on the stelai (lines 61ff. and 567ff.) can be outlined as follows:

I invoke you greatest of all, creator of all, etc.
(attributes, culminating with invisibility and metamorphoses).

I invoke you, Lord, that you may appear to me in your true form, for I serve ... your angel, *voces*,¹⁰ Helios (attributes).

I invoke you, Lord, as do the gods who appeared by your order, that they may have power, *voces*.

I invoke you Lord, in birdglyphic, *voces*, in hieroglyphic, *voces*, in Hebrew, *voces*, etc. (Egyptian, baboonic, hawkic, hieratic).

Then clap three times, make many popping sounds, give a long whistle/hiss.

Come to me Lord, perfect, etc. (attributes).

The invocations to be recited in 138ff., 443ff., show a variant of this form. The initial aretology is shorter, the request for an epiphany (redundant after “invoke”) is omitted, the prayer is interrupted by a note about the first angels and begins to attribute the different languages to different “angels,” but soon drops this practice to specify instead the different speakers appropriate in Egyptian thought to the different languages.¹¹

That the differences between the pairs of forms can be listed so briefly confirms the observation above, that all are variants of a single type. [494] Consequently their difference is a further reason for thinking the doubling secondary; had it been original, the first form given and its double would have been identical. The doubling was probably effected by conflation of texts originally close, but separated long enough to have developed peculiarities preserved when they were put together.¹²

Nevertheless, the forms are still so close that the second pair should end, as the first does, with directions for making inarticulate noises and

¹⁰ *Voces*, sc. *magicae*; I shall use this term for all combinations of letters that do not form recognized words or names, unless their conjectured content (e.g. “sun of the world” or “eternal sun” for *semesilam*) seems to justify specification.

¹¹ Helios—hieroglyphic; (name omitted?)—Hebrew; “the sun disc, saying, I precede you” (etc. and uttering) “your magical name in Egyptian”; the baboon “in his own dialect” (= “baboonic” in the preceding text); the hawk (likewise = “hawkic”); the ennead—hieratic. This reconstruction proposes transposition of ὁ δῖσκος, which now stands without grammatical connexion in lines 152 and 461, to precede and serve as subject of λέγων, which now has no adjacent subject, in lines 151 and 460. The utterance is exactly appropriate for the sun disc.

¹² The note on Jewish angels in the second form probably indicates that a Jewish copyist worked on it before its inclusion in the source of both the versions used for the manuscript copied by our present text.

then calling in the god: εἶτα κρότησον γ' etc. However, the second pair are broken off, at lines 161 and 471, by an insertion perhaps due to homoeoarchy: εἰπὼν ἐκρότησε γ' etc. This insertion was easier because the participle could be read as continuing the account of what the ennead ("the nine-formed") did. But the invocation had been addressed to the creator god in the second person; the text now goes on in the third person: καὶ ἐγέλασεν ὁ θεὸς ζ' etc. The break is apparent and the appearance is confirmed by the unsuitability (for an invocation) of the long account of creation which now follows in both fully preserved versions and seems to have done so in the third, to judge from the reference to τὴν κοσμοποιίαν in 697.

The beginning of this creation legend has evidently been lost. If the loss was due, as we conjectured, to homoeoarchy, the preserved beginning, εἰπὼν ἐκρότησεν γ', must have stood near the similar phrase in the end of the invocation. But the proximity may have been either in the next few lines, or in an adjacent column, so either a small or a large initial loss may be supposed. The change of subject and style argues in favor of a large loss, and therefore of the conclusion that we cannot reconstruct what is missing.

Fortunately, the preserved conclusions, if not of the legend, at least of the section here quoted from it, enable us to recognize the purpose for which it was quoted. It not only tells us, as does the *Sefer haRazim*, which god is in control of what, and so provides a handy guide for effective petitions, but it also leads to the appearance of *Iao* and to his establishment, together with *Phobos* (Fear), as the final resort in every need or necessity (ἀνάγκη), see lines 196-206, 536-563.¹³ Recitation of [495] the story was probably intended to produce the god's epiphany (the purpose of the entire rite) as well as to secure his attention. Telling a story to produce a desired effect is a common magical practice, familiar, e.g., in the canon of the mass, which is roughly contemporary with this text and, like it, begins with prayers and invocations before going on rather abruptly, to the narrative expected to produce what it describes.

This purpose of the quotation, however, can hardly have been that of the original legend—it is considerably too complex. The fragment we have begins with the inarticulate end of a conversation. Someone, who had just said something, clapped, or struck something three times. Thereupon "the god" laughed seven times and a series of gods who encompass/control the cosmos came into being. They were:¹⁴

¹³ The association of *Iao* with Fear may have seemed, to the editor who produced it, justified by such verses as Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10 (LXX 110:10); etc. ("The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Yahweh.")

¹⁴ Henceforth the first text, lines 1-230 = "A"; the second, 343-618 = "B," the third, 646-734 = "C."

First laugh: *Phos, Auge* (Light, Radiance), illuminated all, became god of the cosmos and of fire.

Second: An unnamed god, set over the abyss, controls increase and decrease of fluids.

Third (the laugh merely desired or intended?): *Nous, Phrenes* (Mind, Intelligence), called *Hermes* and *Semesilam*.

Fourth: *Genna* (Generation), controls *Spora* (Seed) and sowing.

Fifth: *Moirai* (Fate) holding a scale. Contends with *Hermes* for control of justice. The contest is settled by "the god": Justice is to be determined by both, but all things in the cosmos are subject to *Moirai*.

Sixth: *Kairos* (Time) holding a sceptre which he gave to "the first-created god." In return for the gift he is clothed with the glory of *Phos* and is to be with the first-created god (cp. 1 Cor 15:24-28). Here B has a long passage not in A: *Kairos* is given control over all things past and future. "When he put on the glory of *Phos*, the disc that turns towards *Phos* showed a certain effluence. The god said to the Queen, 'You, putting on the effluence of *Phos*, will be with him ... You will increase with *Phos*, receiving (light) from him, and again you will wane.'" etc., 510-521.

We now come to the only major transpositions and contradictions in the creation legend. These are far too small to justify Reitzenstein's original theory of a wholly fluid basic text.

Seventh: *Psyche* (Soul). A, 192-206: When *Psyche* came into being, while laughing, the god wept. Then he hissed, whereupon Earth humped itself and begot the Pythian serpent who foreknew everything. The god called him *voces 1*. But, seeing him, the god was also terrified and made a popping noise, at which there appeared an armed man called *voces 2*. Seeing him, the god was again terrified, (fearing) lest Earth had cast up a god, (so) looking down at Earth he [496] said, "*Iao*." From the noise (*echos*) was born a god who is lord of all. The former (the armed god) contended with him, saying, "I am more powerful." The god said to the strong one, "You come from a popping noise, this (god, *Iao*,) from a sound (of speech? *echos*). You shall both be in control of every necessity." So he (which?) was thenceforth called *voces 2*.

B. 522-59: When *Psyche* appeared all things were moved/began to move. The god said, "You will move/animate all things, and all will be gladdened, so long as *Hermes* guides you." Thereon everything was uncontrollably filled with spirit. Seeing this the god made a popping noise and everything was frightened and *Phobos* (Fear) appeared armed and was called *voces 2*. Then, bending towards Earth, the god whistled and Earth opened to receive the noise and begot "its own creature," the Pythian serpent, who foreknew everything. His name is great and holy, *voces 1*. When he appeared, Earth rose up and was greatly exalted ... but the god said, "*Iao*," and everything stood still and a greatest great god appeared, who fixed in place the things past in the world and those yet to be, so that none of the aerial beings was thenceforth disorderly. *Phobos*, seeing one more powerful than himself, opposed him, saying, "I am before you." He, however, said, "But I fixed everything in place." The god said, "You (*Phobos*) arose from a sound (*echos*), but this one (*Iao*) from an utterance (*phthoggos*) (?). Now an utterance is better than a sound, and (therefore) the power of both will belong to you who appeared later (*Iao*), so that all things may be fixed in place. And he

(*Iao?*) was thenceforth called by the great and marvelous name, *voces 2* (cp. Phil 2:9). Wishing, however, to give honor also to him (*Phobos?*) who had arisen together with him (*Iao?*), the god gave him (*Phobos?*) precedence of the ennead and power and glory equal to theirs, and he was called *voces*, etc.

This summary has of course omitted many significant details, not only because there was no space for them in this article, but also because I think the significance of details usually uncertain until that of the structure in which they stand is determined. What can we learn from the structure here?

First, it appears as a continuation of the preceding invocations of the god. Those invocations are directed to Horus-Harpocrates. His appearance rising on the sky-boat, with the solar disc above (i.e. preceding) him, the adoring baboon on the boat in front of him, his hawk perched on the stern, and all creatures, in groups, each group worshipping him in its own language, is familiar from many magical gems¹⁵ (and was perhaps a model for Luke's miracle of pentecost, Acts 2:1-16). Since the cosmology was at least a close sequel to the invocations, there is some probability, but nothing approaching certainty, that its supreme god was also Harpocrates. On the other hand, the cosmology in its present form leads to [497] *Iao*, so the compiler may have thought the invocations directed to him. He was often conceived as a solar god; his appearance on the sky boat would not, in Egypt, be surprising.¹⁶

Since the evidence from the invocations is uncertain what of the cosmology? It is of the magical type—production by utterance rather than by physical means (operations on external objects, bodily emissions, childbirth). At first it resembles the Genesis story, which is also of this type: creation begins with light,¹⁷ earth and water are not created but are there from the beginning, etc. Since it celebrates *Iao*, influence of Genesis is not unlikely, but the differences are so great that it is not likely to have gone far.

First, this is a theogony rather than a cosmology; it rarely reports the origins of elements of the physical world, usually of rulers controlling some aspect of life. Second these divine rulers appear so often in male-female (or female-male) pairs that it is easy to suppose an original list of the following syzygies:

Phos-Auge

Earth-Water (masculine in semitic)

Nous-Phrenes

¹⁵ C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, Ann Arbor, 1950 (*U. of Michigan Humanistic Series* 49) Plate 10, nos. 203-210; Pl. 21, no. 391.

¹⁶ See M. Smith, "Helios In Palestine," volume one, chapter eighteen.

¹⁷ As it does if the first verb of Genesis be read as an infinitive which it can be.

Genna-Spora (masculine in semitic)

Moirā-Hermes

Kairos-the Queen (= Helios-Selene)

Psyche-the Pythian serpent.

Phobos and *Iao* cannot make a masculine-feminine pair, so they are probably to be seen as a supplement to the seven syzygies, although, like those, their powers, if not their persons, are finally united. Similarly, in the Valentinian system, after the paired aeons had appeared the Father sent forth their boundary, Horus, as a final, single emanation, Irenaeus 1.1.3. The similarity is increased by the fact that *Phobos* was probably at first alone. The function of fear is to freeze, to fix everything in its place. This being *Phobos*' proper function, there was no need to introduce *Iao* to perform it; the introduction of *Iao* leaves *Phobos* with nothing to do; *Iao* does nothing but what *Phobos* should have done; and the final union of their powers is bungled albeit differently, in both texts—a sign that the original was satisfactory to neither redactor. Moreover, *Iao* is the only semitic deity in the whole series; otherwise the above series is [498] wholly Greek, though the genders show that it was compiled in semitic. Finally, *Phobos* is introduced without any mention of the law. He is not the Old Testament giver of moral law, but the Hesiodic power of the god who maintains the order of the physical cosmos. In sum, we find a hellenistic theogony that issues in a world ruled by Fear. It shows no trace of Jewish influence,¹⁸ but was composed in some semitic environment, very likely Egypt where such lists of pairs of primaeval gods were prominent, where notions of creation as beginning with the appearance of light and the separation of earth from water were widely accepted,¹⁹ and where the papyrus was found. This looks like the sort of stock to which Old Testament material was later grafted by Valentinus, Basilides, and others in the second century, as it was perhaps earlier, in the text behind our document, by the addition of *Iao*. If the structure was originally hellenistic Egyptian, the secret divine names, which we have left aside (following Reitzenstein, who dismissed them with contempt as late, “magical” additions to a primarily “religious” text) will have to be reconsidered as potentially primitive elements, since such names of the doorkeepers of the invisible world were of great importance in Egyptian religion from pharaonic times on. This does not prove that the particular ones found in the present text are ancient, for in the present text the original

¹⁸ The seven syzygies, with none designated for rest, reflect the influence of the pagan, astrological week, not of the Jewish one. E. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, 2 ed., London, 1980, p. 61.

¹⁹ H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin, 1952, p. 864 (“Weltbeginn”).

theogony has been forgotten and mutilated—translation into Greek has obscured the sexual relations, Hermes has been attached to Nous-Phrenes, the Queen has been dropped (from one version), and so on.

Nevertheless, enough of the original structure remains, like the stylobate of an Egyptian temple used as the foundation for a string of village houses, to tell something of the Greco-Egyptian religion that tried to appropriate the power of the great god of Jerusalem.