

# Divine Epiphanies of Paredroi in the *Greek Magical Papyri*

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**T**HIS PAPER examines the divine epiphanies of paredroi as described in the *Greek Magical Papyri* from Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The paredroi, “assistants,”<sup>2</sup> can fall into various categories, such as the daimones, the god Eros, or the assistance of some verses.<sup>3</sup> But the word can also refer to the spell itself, or to a deity who is manifested as different entity. In what follows I examine the epiphanies of this last category of paredroi, studied as part of a much more complex process in the magical operation, in order to discern how the divine assistance, or even the spell itself which activates that assistance, was conceptualised. Questions to be addressed are: How are the terms paredros and god being used in these spells? Are they interchangeable, or there is a distinction and consequently is the paredros conceived of as a separate entity? And what does this distinction imply in a religious sense for the two conceptions? I focus on the problematic interpretation of the Spell of

<sup>1</sup> K. Preisendanz and A. Henrichs, *Papyri Graecae Magicae I–II* (Stuttgart 1973–1974); H. D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago 1986).

<sup>2</sup> As an adjective, literally “sitting beside”; as a noun, one who “sits beside.” The English “assistant” is a good working translation.

<sup>3</sup> *πάρεδρος* may be applied to various types of daimones, such as the Good Daimon, the holy Orion, the powerful arch-daimons (e.g. *PMG* I.1–42, IV.1331–1389), and the daimon as the reanimated spirit and body of a person who died a violent death (e.g. IV.1928–2005, 2006–2125). It can also refer to a god, such as Eros identified with Osiris and Harpocrates (e.g. XII.14–95, IV.1716–1870). The term may also describe the divine assistance given by some verses, as in verses from Homer (e.g. IV.2145–2240).

Pnouthis, and will compare the divine epiphanies in that spell with the process of the divine epiphanies of paredroi in other texts.

The epiphanies of this category of paredroi can be best analyzed in five spells: “Spell of Pnouthis, the sacred scribe, for acquiring an assistant (*πάρεδρος*)” (*PMG* I.42–195, A.D. IV/V), “Spell to Selene” (I.147 ff.) included in the Spell of Pnouthis; untitled spell LVII.1–37 (A.D. I/II); “Lunar spell of Claudianus and ritual of heaven and the Bear constellation over lunar offerings” (VII.862–918, A.D. III/IV); and “The old serving woman of Apollonius of Tyana” (XIa.1–40, A.D. V).

*The πάρεδρος as the spell itself and as a god or goddess revealed as another entity*

The “Spell of Pnouthis, the sacred scribe, for acquiring an assistant” is sent by Pnouthis to Keryx, clearly another magician, and written in the form of a letter. It is a complex and difficult spell that repays detailed examination.

At the start, Pnouthis writes to Keryx: *εἰδὼς προσέταξά σοι [τό]νδε [τὸν πάρεδρον] πρὸς τὸ μὴ διαπίπτειν ἐπιτελ[οῦν]τα [τῆ]νδε [τὴν πράξ]ιν* (I.43–45), which O’Neil translates “as one who knows, I have prescribed for you this spell for acquiring an assistant to prevent you failing as you carry out this rite.”<sup>4</sup> In inserting the words “spell for acquiring an assistant” here and in the title of the spell, O’Neil is incorporating an interpretation that the *πάρεδρος* referred to is in fact the spell itself. But the sense requires this interpretation, and this is confirmed first by the next phrase, *παρελόμενος τὰ πάντα καταλει[πό]μενα ἡμῶν ἐν βίβλοις μυρίαῖς συντάγματα ... <ὑπηρετ>οὔντά σοι τόνδε τὸν πάρεδρον* (this spell for acquiring an assistant) *ἐπέδει[ξ]α* (45–48), and then by the parallel, a few lines later (51–52), *ἀπέπεμψα τήνδε τὴν βίβλον* (“this book”). Thus the term *πάρεδρος* can be used for a spell to acquire an assistant.

How, then, is the divine revealed to the magician in this spell and what are the stages of the divine epiphany of the paredros?

<sup>4</sup> O’Neil at Betz 4; Preisendanz translated *πάρεδρον* as “Beisitzer.”

First, Pnouthis refers in detail to the “sign” (σημείον) (65) of the divine presence. When the magician has completed the rituals, “a blazing star will come down and stand in the middle of the housetop and the star will be dissolved before your eyes” (75–78). Similarly, in “Mithras Liturgy” (IV.474–829), the god’s manifestation is signaled by lightning bolts and falling stars (702–704), and in the *Corpus Hermeticum* the gods in heaven are visible in the forms of stars with all their signs (*Corp.Herm.* 3.2). Again, in the *Gospel of Judas* the great invisible spirit as described by Jesus: “Let an angel come into being as my assistant/to stand by me,” and an angel emerged from a cloud of light.<sup>5</sup> In the *Testament of Solomon* also, which is dated to the third or fourth century and which contains elements of Jewish demonology and magic, the daimon whom the god sent to Solomon described himself as γόνος εἰμι τοῦ μεγάλου, and when Solomon asked him ἐν ποίῳ ἄστρῳ κείσαι, he showed where his star is in the heavens.<sup>6</sup>

The next stage of the epiphany is described: when this blazing star comes down as stated, “you will look at the angel whom you summoned and who has been sent to you and you will quickly learn the gods’ wishes” (75–77).<sup>7</sup> Then the magician should “approach the god and, taking his right hand, kiss it and say these words to the angel” (77–78). The magician should also prepare some food and Mendesian wine and “set these before the god with an uncorrupted boy serving and keeping silence, until the angel departs” (86–87).

A major interpretative problem arises at this point. How should we understand these formally different references to “the god” and “the angel”? Ciruolo states that “the term ἄγγελος is used interchangeably with θεός, essentially as

<sup>5</sup> The Greek translated as “assistant” is παράστασις, a noun with a similar meaning to πάρεδρος: R. Kasser, M. Meyer, and G. Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas: from Codex Tchacos* (Washington 2006) 34, also 6 n.39.

<sup>6</sup> *Test.Sol.* 7.5–6; see also C. C. McCown, “The Ephesia Grammata in Popular Belief,” *TAPA* 54 (1923) 128–140, at 136 ff.

<sup>7</sup> For the possible purposes of this spell see I.98–127.

synonyms, and the word does not appear to have any special connotations.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, according to O’Neil: “this angel or messenger (ἄγγελος) is also referred to as ‘the god’ throughout the spell.”<sup>9</sup> But could these words effectively be used as synonyms here?

It will be helpful first to look at the comparative material, a series of paredros spells that have their own interest and problems. We can consider these spells in their own right before returning to the Spell of Pnouthis.

(a) “Spell to Selene” (I.147 ff.), which is included in the Spell of Pnouthis. In this spell also there is a similar manifestation of the god as “some star from heaven setting itself gradually free and becoming divine/deified (θεοποι[ο]ύμ[ε]νον)” (154–155),<sup>10</sup> and there are again references both to “the god of gods” (162) and to “the angel” (173, 177).

(b) Spell LVII.1–37, a compulsive spell addressed to the goddess Isis. At the beginning the magician requests of Isis “give me a sign of the results (σημείον μοι τῶν ἀποτελεσμάτων δός)” (16–17), nicely anticipating the successful completion of the spell.<sup>11</sup> Isis’ sign is then described: “you will see a star ... that has hurled an image (χαρακτῆρα) and leapt into you yourself, so that you become stricken by god (θεόπληκτον)”

<sup>8</sup> L. J. Ciruolo, “Supernatural Assistants in the Greek Magical Papyri,” in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden 1995) 279–295, at 283.

<sup>9</sup> In Betz 5 n.16. For the Hellenistic background to “angels” and their role in the Chaldean system of divine entities as “ministering angels” see H. Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* (Paris 1978) 157–164; on Jewish angelology see E. Langton, *The Ministries of the Angelic* (London 1936), and R. Elior, “Mysticism, Magic and Angelology – The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature,” *JSQ* 1 (1993) 3–53; and for angels in the Christian tradition see J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London 1974) 87–96.

<sup>10</sup> Similarly see VII.799–801.

<sup>11</sup> “Results” is the normal meaning of ἀποτελέσματα. Hock, in Betz 285, prosaically renders it “things that are going to happen”; Preisendanz translates “Vollendung.”

(23–25).<sup>12</sup> It is also made clear to the magician that “the image (χ)αρα[κτῆρ] from the goddess (πρὸς θεᾶς) is that of Kronos, who encourages you” (27).<sup>13</sup> Here the conception of assistance involves Isis and her image Kronos.<sup>14</sup> So the magician is instructed, ἔχε [δὲ εἰς φυλακὴν πρ]οκείμενον τὸν χαρακτῆρα (25–26). Hock translates this “wear the above picture for protection,”<sup>15</sup> but that rendering of πρ]οκείμενον would require the word order τὸν πρ]οκείμενον χαρακτῆρα, and the notion of “wearing” a physical “picture” introduces a step into the sequence which does not seem to be there.<sup>16</sup> So the sentence should rather be translated “have as protection the [mental] image set before you,” with both εἰς φυλακὴν and πρ]οκείμενον having predicative force.

The goddess’ revelation to the magician in the Isis spell is similar to the god’s manifestation in the spell of Pnouthis (I.75–78, 154–155). In the Isis spell, as in the spell of Pnouthis, the goddess/god sends a sign to the magician. In both spells, the divine, initially, reveals itself through a natural phenomenon, the fall of a star. In the spell of Pnouthis, an angel is sent to the magician, in the present spell the image of Kronos. In both cases the god/goddess serves as a divine assistant to the magician through the angel or the image, which are the final

<sup>12</sup> On the thunderbolt associated with the star (ἀστεροβλής) presented as striking the initiate in the mysteries see R. Seaford, *Euripides’ Bacchae* (London 1997) 197; for ἀστροβολῆσαι in relation to magic see Porph. *V. Plot.* 10.4–5; on a mystic level compare Dionysus’ epiphany in Euripides’ *Bacchae* as Dionysus and the (his) *image*: ὁ Βρόμιος ... φάσμ’ ἐποίησεν κατ’ αὐλήν ... φαεινὸν <αἰθέρ’> (or φαεινήν <εἰκόν’>) (629–631).

<sup>13</sup> Hock translates πρὸς θεᾶς as “in the name of the goddess,” but the sense of the goddess as agent is what is required.

<sup>14</sup> The term paredros is not used here, but the phrase σοὶ συνεργήσει (31) indicates the assistant.

<sup>15</sup> Preisendanz also translates “Halt aber [zu deinem Schutz] das vorliegende Zauberzeichen bereit.”

<sup>16</sup> The explicitly mentioned physical images at XII.17–20, IV.1722–1740, and VII.869–870 are a different matter.

forms of the transformable signs of the divine epiphany. Nevertheless, there is one difference: in the Isis spell, the magician himself becomes stricken by the god.

(c) The erotic “Lunar spell of Claudianus and ritual of heaven and the Bear constellation over lunar offerings” (VII.862–918). The conception of *πάρεδρος* here involves the “Mistress Selene the Egyptian” (*κυρίαν Σελήνην Αἴγυπτίαν*, 871) and her “sacred angel or assistant” (*ἱερόν ἄγγελον ἢ πάρεδρον*, 883). Thus, when among her many epithets (881–883) Selene is described as “lady of the night, walking through the air” (*νυχία, ἡροδία*, 882)<sup>17</sup> these words help to anticipate the invocation to “send forth your angel from among those who assist you, the one who is the leader of the night” (*ἔκπεμψον ἄγγελόν σου ἐκ τῶν παρεδρευόντων σο[ι], καθηγούμενον τῆς νυκτός*, 891–892). This invocation also sketches a hierarchy among the assistants and a connection between Selene and the magician who summons her: the goddess Selene has “assistants”; their “leader” is to become the magician’s “assistant.”<sup>18</sup> The moment in which the goddess is magically efficient is associated with an allusion to the visual image of a physical phenomenon, that of fire: “but when you see the goddess becoming fiery red (*πυρρὰν*), know that she is, already, attracting (*ἄγει ἤδη*)” (889–890).<sup>19</sup>

The spell also involves a shrine of olive wood and the ritual of preparing a clay image of the goddess, *κυρίαν Σελήνην Αἴγυπτίαν ... σχηματιζομένην παντόμορφον* (871–872). O’Neil

<sup>17</sup> The epithet *ἡροδία* occurs only here and is not found in LSJ; but *εἰνοδία* is used to describe a deity in the *PGM*, see *PGM* ad loc.

<sup>18</sup> Note also a similar hierarchy in the address “assistants (*παρέδρους*) of the great god” (IV.1349), in which the arch-daimons are subordinate this time both to the magician and to the great god (spell IV.1331–1389, in which the “Bear constellation” is also mentioned).

<sup>19</sup> On the association of angels and fire, as their source, cf. the Jewish Book of Mysteries, *Sepher Ha-Razim*: M. A. Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries* (Chico 1983) 21.

translates “making her in the form of the Universe.”<sup>20</sup> The adjective *παντόμορφος* or *πάμμορφος* can certainly be used of the Universe (cf. LSJ), and this is relevant here, because of the subsequent descriptions of Selene as “mistress of the whole cosmos” (*δέσποινα τοῦ σύνπαντος κόσμου*) and “ruler of the entire cosmic system” (*καθηγουμέν<η> συστήματος τοῦ σύμπαντος*) (881–882), but it literally means “of all forms,” and the critical question is: who is doing the shaping (*σχηματίζω*)? On O’Neil’s interpretation, the verb is passive—“being shaped” by the magician.” But this is difficult and the verb is surely better taken as describing Selene in the middle voice, the one “assuming all forms.” Elsewhere, another god, Eros, is described as “the master of the forms” (*δεσπότης τῶν μορφῶν*, XII.50–51) in the spell called “Eros as an assistant” (XII.14–95). The various forms of Eros are emphasised when the magician asks Eros to serve him “assuming the likeness (*παρομοιούμενος*) of a god (or a goddess) such as men and women worship” (41–42). Similarly Eros is asked to accomplish his task as written on a piece of papyrus, “having assumed the likeness (*παρομοιωθείς*) of a god (or a goddess) whom he (or she) worships” (83).

(d) “The old serving woman of Apollonius of Tyana” (XIa.1–40).<sup>21</sup> The goddess invoked by the magician is described as “the goddess called *the mistress of the house* (*οἰκουρός*)”

<sup>20</sup> Preisendanz: “dargestellt als Allgestaltige.”

<sup>21</sup> The spell aptly trades on the reputation of Apollonius, the first-century wanderer, philosopher, and magician, even though the attribution to him of the spell is unique in the *PGM* and indeed in ancient magical literature generally. On Apollonius see E. L. Bowie, “Apollonius of Tyana: Fiction and Reality,” *ANRW* II 16.2 (1978) 1652–1699; J. Elsner, “Hagiographic Geography: Travel and Allegory in the Life of Apollonius of Tyana,” *JHS* 117 (1997) 22–37; G. Luck, “Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature,” in V. Flint et al. (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe II* (London 1999) 91–158. On this spell see L. J. Ciruolo, “Supernatural Assistants in the Greek Magical Papyri,” in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden 1995) 279–295, at 282–283 (though I do not agree with her assessment).

(10).<sup>22</sup> This phrase translates the name of the Egyptian goddess Nephthys, the wife of Seth.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in this spell there are elements of the goddess' association with Seth, such as the use of "Typhon's skull" in the ritual to be practised for the goddess' manifestation, her appearance "sitting on an ass," and the "tooth from the ass" (1–2, 11, 22).<sup>24</sup>

The description of the goddess' manifestation in two physically different forms needs close examination. She first appears in the form of a young woman of extraordinary beauty, and when the magician tells her, "I have a need of you with regard to the services of life (εἶ[ς τὰς τοῦ] βίου ὑπηρεσίας)," she will immediately strip off her beauty and be transformed into an old woman (16–18). In the form of the old woman she will tell the magician, "I will be your servant and assist you (ἐγώ σοι ὑπηρετήσω καὶ παρ[εδρ]εύσω)" (17). Then the goddess will again take on her beauty, which she had just taken off,<sup>25</sup> and will ask to be released (19). Once the magician ensures that the old woman will serve him, he must release the goddess (31–32). At this point the goddess and the old woman clearly become two different entities. The old woman is maintained inseparable from the magician, by her own molar tooth and by the tooth from the ass that the goddess gives him (21–22). When the magician wants to release the divinity in the old woman's form, he must make fire and throw the teeth into it,

<sup>22</sup> For οἰκουρός note also possible influence from Iamblichus' reference (*Myst.* 9.2) to οἰκοδεσπότης "master of the house," the planet that sends the personal daimon to the individuals, while *oikos* is the technical term for the region of the zodiac sign of one's birth.

<sup>23</sup> O'Neil in Betz 150 n.3; J. G. Griffiths *Plutarch: De Iside et Osiride* (Cambridge 1970) 447.

<sup>24</sup> On the reference to the fat of a black ass in the magician's offering to the Bear and its identification with Seth/Typhon see the spell IV.1331–1389, at 1332, 1334–1335.

<sup>25</sup> As to "clothing" and "unclothing" verbs describing the goddess' changes of appearance, such imagery is often used both to denote physical, psychological, or philosophical changes and in ritual contexts. This spell has clear folk-tale elements.



and the old woman will flee without a trace.<sup>26</sup>

Here, the motif of a god or goddess assuming various forms, already examined in the previous spells, is simplified, by ascribing to the goddess human forms.

In addition to these four comparanda, the relation to the various forms of the divine can be studied in the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John*, written in Coptic, from the Nag Hammadi library. Here John describes a similar epiphany of Jesus, upon which the world was shaken and the heavens opened and John saw “in the light [a youth who stood] by me. While I looked [at him he became] like an old man. And he [changed his] likeness (again) becoming like a servant. There was [not a plurality] before me, but there was a [likeness] with multiple forms in the light, and the [likenesses] appeared through each other, [and] the [likeness] had three forms.”<sup>27</sup>

The “many” forms of the god in magic and the Gnostic description of Jesus as a “[likeness] with multiple forms” may be compared to contemporary Neoplatonist thought. Plotinus, for example, argues that the “one” (ἓν) is at the same time also many (ἅμα καὶ πολλά) and that “a manifold one (τι ποικίλον ἓν) has the many in one” (*Enn.* 6.2.2.2 ff.).<sup>28</sup> Iamblichus refers to the “one” god Helios and his many forms and to his manifold powers reflecting his one power.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See also VII.914–916.

<sup>27</sup> 2.1.31–2.2.8; transl. F. Wisse in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden 1996) 105. On Jesus in the form of god, human, and servant cf. Phil. 2:6–8, ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφῇ δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὔρεθεις ὡς ἄνθρωπος. See also M. J. Edwards, “Gnostic Eros and Orphic Themes,” *ZPE* 88 (1991) 25–40, at 28.

<sup>28</sup> On the “one and many” and σύγκρασις in the Neoplatonists see Plot. *Enn.* 6.2.2.22, 6.3.25, 3.3.4; Porph. *V.Plot.* 31.9; Iamb. *Comm.Math.* p.29.1 Festa, *Theol.Ar.* p.5.18 de Falco; Procl. *In Tim.* II 268.1–3 Diehl.

<sup>29</sup> Iamb. *Myst.* 7.3.12–16: διὰ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν δοθέντων τὸν ἓνα θεὸν ἐμφαίνειν, καὶ διὰ τῶν πολυτρόπων δυνάμεων τὴν μίαν αὐτοῦ παριστάναι

We may now bring these five spells and their portrayed epiphanies together in tabular form:

The Spells	1 <sup>st</sup> stage	2 <sup>nd</sup> stage	3 <sup>rd</sup> stage	4 <sup>th</sup> stage
1. Pnouthis (I.42–195)	Spell to god God	Sign: Star	Angel	God-Angel: Two Entities
2. Selene (I.147ff)	Spell to Selene God	Sign: Star	Angel	God-Angel: Two Entities
3. Untitled (LVII.1–37)	Spell to Isis Isis	Sign: Star	Image of Kronos	Isis-Kronos: Two Entities
4. Claudianus (VII.862–918)	Spell to Selene Selene	(Sign): Selene, fiery-red	Angel	Selene-Angel: Two Entities
5. Apollonius (XIa.1–40)	Spell to goddess Goddess	(Sign): Beautiful woman	Old woman	The goddess-Old Woman: Two Entities

### *Conclusions*

Reviewing this phenomenological study of epiphanies of the paredroi, as the spell itself and as a god or goddess revealed as another entity, we can return to the initial question of how the terms paredros and god are being used in the Pnouthis spell and the comparative material: is it right to claim that “the god” and “the angel” are used interchangeably and are effectively synonyms? First, certainly at the beginning of the magic ritual,

*δύναμιν διὸ καὶ φησιν αὐτὸν ἓνα εἶναι καὶ τὸν αὐτόν, τὰς δὲ διαμείψεις τῆς μορφῆς καὶ τοὺς μετασχηματισμοὺς ἐν τοῖς δεχομένοις ὑποτίθεται.*

this is incorrect: the magician would never pray to an “angel” to send him a “god.” Rather, he prays to the “god” to send him an “angel.” A matter of divine hierarchy is involved.

Second, all these spells are based on the logic that the *πάρεδρος*, originating from/sent by a god or goddess, may be revealed to the magician as an angel, the image of Kronos, or in the form of an old woman, but the god or goddess remains one entity and the sign of his/her epiphany gradually becomes another entity—the angel, the image of Kronos, or the old woman.

Third, the distinction between the god or goddess on the one hand and the angel, image of Kronos, or old woman on the other as two physical or divine entities simplifies the concept of *πάρεδρος* and aids in its being understood. This distinction also means that these forms of the god/goddess’ manifestation to humans as angel, image of Kronos, or old woman could be easily conceptualised by the magician.

This distinction seems more difficult in the spell of Pnouthis, with the words “approach the god and, taking his right hand, kiss it and say these words to the angel” (I.77–78) and “set these before the god with an uncorrupted boy serving and keeping silence, until the angel departs” (86–87). But it is wrong to say that the terms angel and god are interchangeable here. Rather, they expose an intrinsic problem—the exact determination of divinity. The magicians here seem to be engaged in a deep theological sense with the religious and philosophical problem of the divine, referred to in these instances as god and its various transformable forms.<sup>30</sup>

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