SYNCRETISM AND JEWISH INFLUENCE IN THE GREEK MAGICAL PAPYRI: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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This article examines the presence of Jewish elements in selected texts from the *Greek Magical Papyri* (*PGM*), including the *Prayer of Jacob*, *Charm of Pibechis*, *Eighth book of Moses*, and *A love spell of attraction*. Through textual and comparative analysis, it argues that Jewish divine names, biblical figures, and ritual registers operate not as markers of Jewish authorship or confessional identity, but as adaptable sources of ritual authority within a broader syncretic repertoire. Hebrew-associated names such as *Iaō*, *Sabaōth*, and *Adōnai* are shown to circulate alongside Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and early Christian elements in efficacy-driven ritual collections shaped by performance, technical competence, and persuasive power. By situating these texts against both Greco-Egyptian magical traditions and materially attested Jewish magical corpora, the study demonstrates that syncretism in the *PGM* reflects pragmatic strategies of ritual authentication rather than the fusion of coherent belief systems. The article, therefore, contributes to ongoing debates on syncretism, authority, and religious interaction in Late Antiquity by foregrounding practice, transmission, and ritual expertise over rigid notions of religious identity.

Keywords: ancient magic; Greek Magical Papyri (PGM); religion; syncretism; Jewish.

Introduction

This article investigates Jewish elements within the texts collected in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (henceforth *PGM*),[1] asking how they work within a syncretic magical environment shaped by Egyptian and Greco-Roman traditions. Rather than treating Jewish influence as a marker of confessional identity or communal provenance, the study examines how Jewish divine names, biblical figures, and ritual registers are incorporated alongside other religious resources to construct ritual authority and perceived efficacy in late antique magical practice.[2]

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[1] The standard edition is that of Preisendanz and Henrichs (1973), with an English translation by Betz (1985).

[2] See also Khumalo 2024a for a more detailed discussion.

Syncretism, in the context of religious studies, is often defined as the combination of distinct religious traditions into a cohesive belief system. However, in the context of the *PGM*, syncretism does not denote the formation of a coherent or systematic belief system, but rather the pragmatic assemblage of ritual elements drawn from multiple religious repertoires. It refers instead to a situational and efficacy-driven process of selective incorporation, in which names, narratives, ritual actions, and symbolic registers are combined and used according to perceived effectiveness rather than doctrinal compatibility. More broadly, ‘magic’ itself is best treated as a historically contested category rather than a stable transhistorical essence, since ancient and modern theorisations of it vary considerably (Graf 2015:93–104).

The *PGM* comprise a heterogeneous collection of magical texts dating from the late Hellenistic and into the Roman period. Written primarily in Greek, these papyri preserve ritual instructions, invocations, and formulae intended for practical ends such as healing, protection, love, divination, and the acquisition of divine knowledge. As a corpus, the *PGM* reflects a complex fusion of religious and philosophical traditions, drawing on Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, and early Christian elements, and thereby offers valuable insight into the lived religious practices of the ancient Mediterranean world during this period.

Scholarship has long recognised the presence of Jewish elements within the *PGM* but cautioned against their straightforward classification as ‘Jewish magic’. Studies by Davila (1997:1–8), Frankfurter (1998), LiDonnici (2007:87–108), and Dieleman (2019:284–286) have emphasised that Jewish divine names, biblical figures, and ritual motifs appear within a broader magical repertoire that resists confessional boundaries. Recent synthetic and edited volumes further underscore the embeddedness of ancient magical practice in social, material, and ritual contexts, shifting analytical emphasis away from isolated belief systems toward questions of transmission, performance, and ritual expertise (Frankfurter 2001:159–178; Frankfurter 2017). Building on these approaches, the present study adopts a practice-oriented framework to examine how Jewish elements function within the syncretic logic of the *PGM*.

LiDonnici’s work (2007:87–108) offers a critical perspective on the presence of Jewish elements within these magical texts. Her primary question centres on whether the appearance of such elements suggests deliberate inclusion by the authors or users as markers of Jewish identity, or whether they reflect a broader cultural blending in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. She argues that, while certain *voces magicae* or divine names – such as *Iaō*, *Sabaōth*, and *Adōnai* – frequently appear in magical texts, their presence does not conclusively indicate Jewish authorship or intent (2007:87–90). Rather, these elements could stem from the syncretic nature of ancient magical practices, wherein various religious symbols were adopted and adapted to suit diverse needs and purposes.

While several *voces magicae* preserved in the *PGM* resemble Hebrew or Aramaic forms, their appearance should not be taken as straightforward evidence of Jewish linguistic origin or semantic transparency. As Bohak (2003:69–72) shows, the scholarly tendency to over-identify *voces magicae* as Hebrew reflects a broader 'pan-Judaic' interpretive bias, in which etymological speculation frequently substitutes for demonstrable patterns of transmission. In many cases, such names functioned primarily as powerful, foreign-sounding signifiers whose perceived efficacy did not depend on the practitioner's understanding of their original meaning or provenance (Bohak 2003:74–76). Once introduced into the international magical repertoire of Late Antiquity, Jewish divine names and formulae could be transformed, recombined, or abstracted in ways that no longer correspond to Jewish ritual or theological frameworks, but instead reflect the syncretic logic of the environments in which they were transmitted and redeployed (Bohak 2003:77–80). As Graf notes, so-called 'barbarian' or foreign names derive part of their force precisely from their foreignness and from their departure from ordinary linguistic prayer (Graf 1997:34–35).

To contextualise these dynamics, it is necessary to situate Jewish elements in the *PGM* against what can be identified – more cautiously – as characteristic features of ancient Jewish magical traditions. Jewish magical texts from late antiquity, including from Palestinian and Babylonian Aramaic incantation bowls, metal lamellae, and later Genizah materials, typically emphasise protection, healing, and the mitigation of affliction through direct imperatival address, invocation of divine and angelic names, and strategic appeals to scriptural authority (Bohak 2008:11–18; 2009:324–339). Later Genizah magical texts likewise combine formulaic invocations with highly practical ritual procedures and written media (Swartz 2006:305–318). These texts frequently combine liturgical language with practical concerns, foregrounding efficacy over systematic theology (Bohak 2008:19–22; see also Lesses 2001:185–206). This practical orientation should not be taken to imply a neat opposition between 'magic' and 'religion'; rather, the *PGM* repeatedly occupy the continuum between instrumental, technical procedures and devotional forms (Versnel 1991:177–181, 189). At the same time, scholarship has consistently warned against assuming a uniform or 'pure' Jewish magical system, since Jewish magical practices developed within the same pluralistic Mediterranean contexts that shaped Greco-Egyptian magic more broadly (Bohak 2003:69–72; 2008:3–6).

Compared to materially attested Jewish magical corpora, the Jewish-inflected materials of the *PGM* display a markedly different ritual style and rhetorical orientation. Comparable late antique ritual texts such as curse tablets likewise privilege direct practical intervention, formulaic language, specialist mediation, *voces magicae*, and increasingly international repertoires of divine names and signs (Gager 1999:19–23, 25–28). Jewish amulets and incantation bowls typically adopt juridical or adjurational registers grounded in scriptural language and relatively stable formulae (Bohak 2008:19–22; Kotansky and Tomlin 2021:13–18). By contrast, the *PGM* frequently foregrounds accumulation and experimentation, combining multilingual *voces magicae*, mythic construction, and technical manipulation of scripts, symbols, and ritual procedures (Brashear 1995:3426–3429; Bohak 2003:74–76). Within this environment, Jewish names and narratives are rarely deployed as components of a bounded ritual tradition, but are instead reframed alongside Egyptian, Greek, and Greco-Roman elements as part of an expansive and competitive ritual repertoire (Bohak 2003:77–80; Gordon and Yuen-Collingridge 2022:240–252).

This study expands on LiDonnici's (2007) framework by examining both explicit and implicit Jewish elements – those that allude to biblical figures or narratives without overt identification as 'Jewish'. The term 'Jewish elements' is therefore used in a deliberately operational and non-essentialist sense. This caution also aligns with broader methodological critiques of how "Jewish magic" is defined as a textual and analytical category (Harari 2005:91–124). It refers to identifiable indicators commonly associated with Jewish tradition, including divine names of Hebrew origin, biblical figures, self-labelling as 'Hebraic' or 'Hebrew', scriptural or adjurational registers, purity concerns, angelic name lists, and symbolic appeals to Jerusalem, the temple, or Mosaic authority. Such indicators are treated not as evidence of Jewish authorship or communal affiliation, but as rhetorical and ritual resources selectively mobilised within magical repertoires.

Through comparative textual analysis, this article examines how such Jewish elements function across a selected corpus of *PGM* texts: the *Prayer of Jacob* (*PGM* XXIIb.1–26), *Charm of Pibechis* (*PGM* IV.3007–3086), *Eighth book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.1–343), *Tenth hidden book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.734–1077), and *A love spell of attraction* (*PGM* XXXVI.295–311). By analysing the deployment of divine names, ritual actions, and claims of authority within these texts, the study seeks to illuminate the syncretic strategies through which ancient practitioners constructed efficacy and authority. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of religious interaction during this period and challenges assumptions about the rigidity of religious boundaries in the ancient world in general.

Discussions of texts with Jewish influence in the PGM

The presence and interpretation of Jewish elements within the *PGM* have long been the subject of scholarly debate. This debate has consistently turned on several overlapping axes, including questions of provenance and authorship versus reception and use, semantic interpretation versus performative efficacy, and the extent to which Jewish elements should be understood as markers of identity rather than as sources of ritual authority. Early discussions already noted the prominence of Jewish divine names and biblical figures in the corpus, while simultaneously questioning whether these elements warranted classification as 'Jewish magic' in any strict sense.[3] Subsequent scholarship has oscillated between cataloguing Jewish components within the *PGM* and emphasising the fundamentally composite and pragmatic character of the formularies, often cautioning against confessional or ethnic over-determination.[4]

More recent studies have further complicated the picture by highlighting the role of manuscript transmission, ritual authority, and theological abstraction in shaping invocations of the Jewish creator god, particularly in texts such as the *Prayer of Jacob* and the *Eighth book of Moses*.[5] Against this backdrop, the present study approaches Jewish influence in the *PGM* not as a marker of ethnic or confessional identity, but as one strand within a wider syncretic matrix, in which Jewish names and narratives function as sources of ritual authority alongside Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Christian elements.

LiDonnici (2007:107) characterises the formularies within the *PGM* – which she terms 'Greco-Egyptian magical formularies' – as inherently composite, embodying a blend of various cultural and religious influences. Rather than adhering to a single explanatory framework, these texts exhibit diverse perspectives, even within sections labelled as 'Jewish' or 'Hebrew'. She argues that some spells appear tailored to appeal to Jewish or Christian audiences with unconventional orientations, diverging from 'mainstream' religious boundaries – for example, the *Charm of Pibechis* (*PGM* IV.3007–3086) and the *Stele of Jeu the painter* (*PGM* V.96–172) (LiDonnici, 2007:97, 99). Other formularies, such as *A ring consecration* (*PGM* XII.201–269), invoke Jews among the 'enlightened' who recognise a universal God, suggesting a universalising perspective that does not depend on confessional exclusivity (LiDonnici 2007:104).

LiDonnici (2007:104, 106–107) further notes that certain passages – such as *PGM* V.459–489, XIII.81–86, and XIII.975–978 – appear to invoke 'Jewish magic' from an outsider's perspective, perhaps aiming to harness its perceived potency or cultural mystique rather than to reproduce Jewish ritual practice (Bohak 2008:42–45).[6] Each text reflects unique views and purposes based on its specific context, underscoring the range of perspectives throughout the *PGM* collection. This diversity challenges the assumption that the formularies were uniformly composed and used by a single class of 'practicing magicians'; it is more plausible that they emerged from complex social and cultural forces in which Jewish practitioners, non-Jewish ritual experts, and broader reputational economies all played a role (Nock 1929:219–235). Put differently, the heterogeneity of the corpus complicates any attempt to treat 'Jewish' material in the *PGM* as the direct residue of a coherent Jewish magical tradition.

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[3] Cf. Nock 1929:219–235; Brashear 1995:3426–3428.

[4] LiDonnici 2007:87–108; Klutz 2011:133–159.

[5] Gordon and Yuen-Collingridge 2022:232–285; Audureau and Galoppin 2024:641–666; Khumalo 2024b:65–93.

These interpretive problems are sharpened when the *PGM* is placed against the historically varied position of Judaism in Egypt and the wider Mediterranean. Judaism in Egypt evolved considerably over time, and multiple forms of the religion coexisted, often holding differing attitudes toward ritual, divinity, and cultural interaction (Bohak 2008:3–6, 11–18). Much scholarship has understandably focused on 'boundary keepers' who enforced norms and distinctions, yet this emphasis can obscure the diversity within Jewish communities themselves and the possibility that some practitioners valued distinctive divine names, narratives, or conceptions of divinity as resources within broader magical repertoires (LiDonnici 2007:91, 108).

Davila (1997) likewise notes that several PGM texts display clear indebtedness to Judaism, including the *Prayer of Jacob* (*PGM* XXIIb.1–26), *Eighth book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.1–343), *Tenth hidden book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.734–1077), and the *Charm of Pibechis* (*PGM* IV.3007–3086). LiDonnici's (2007:92) analysis of these spells further suggests that the degree and style of syncretism vary across the sample – particularly when compared with the *Prayer of Jacob*, which is distinctive for its minimal reference to non-Jewish deities or spirits and for its overtly Jewish-coded register.

Prayer of Jacob

The *Prayer of Jacob* (*PGM* XXIIb.1–26) is a fourth-century CE text preserved in the *PGM* (Papyrus XXIIb from Egypt).[7] Although the extant form is late, Van der Horst and Newman (2008:217–220) argue that it incorporates earlier Jewish

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[6] Cf. also *PGM* III.1–164; V.459–489; XII.201–269; XIII.975–978. On the composite ritual profile of such materials, see LiDonnici 2007:87–90.

[7] Published English translations of the *Prayer of Jacob* include Goodenough (1953:203), Charlesworth (1983:715), Betz (1985:261), Van der Horst and Newman (2008:217), and Khumalo (2024a:46).

'cosmological and angelological perspectives', aligning it with older Jewish materials even though it appears in a late antique magical context. This layered profile positions the prayer as both ritual performance and theological register, explaining its repeated appearance as a test case for Jewish influence within the *PGM*.

Despite being structured like a magical incantation, the *Prayer of Jacob* distinctly invokes the God of Israel and employs Hebrew phrases that foreground a Jewish-coded ritual register. Yet the presence of Hebrew or Hebrew-looking material should not be treated as automatic evidence of Jewish provenance, since magical names often circulated trans-culturally and were frequently redeployed without stable confessional anchoring (Bohak 2003:69–72; LiDonnici 2007:87–90). Terms such as *Iaō* (li. 13), *Sabaōth* (li. 15, 20), and *Adōnai* (li. 15) are well attested across diverse Hellenistic magical practices (Bohak 2003:73–78). Even with that caution in view, the prayer's explicit references to the 'tribe of Israel', the 'race of Israel' (li. 19), and the 'God of the Hebrews' (li. 18), together with its direct invocation of a single deity rather than multiple gods or spirits, render this text unusually overt in its Jewish self-identification. These features suggest a syncretic artefact integrating Jewish and Hellenistic ritual conventions while maintaining a distinctly Jewish rhetorical posture.

The question of authorship and intended audience remains debated. Van der Horst and Newman (2008:221) propose that the *Prayer of Jacob* may have been composed by a 'professional ritual expert' or *magos* with knowledge of both Jewish and Hellenistic traditions, making it plausible that the text appealed to a culturally diverse readership. While the use of explicitly Jewish designations implies the possibility of a Jewish author, it remains equally possible that non-Jewish practitioners familiar with Jewish customs adapted or redeployed the prayer for broader magical use (Van der Horst and Newman 2008:223–224).

The prayer claims authority through its attribution to the patriarch Jacob, linking it to Jewish pseudepigraphical strategies and with attempts to invoke biblical authority in ritual contexts. Charlesworth (1983:716) notes similarities with early Jewish writings and suggests that the prayer resonates with broader Jewish literary traditions. In addition to this pseudepigraphical appeal, the invocation of Jacob can be read through a second interpretive lens: certain post-exilic Jewish traditions, reflected for instance in Philo, portray Jacob as an angelic figure. Under this view, the prayer's appeal to Jacob may indicate his role as a spiritual intercessor in the syncretic magic of the *PGM* (Van der Horst and Newman 2008:224). The coexistence of these two Jacob traditions – pseudepigraphical patriarch and angelic intercessor – enriches the text's symbolic profile and complicates its positioning within the spectrum of Jewish and Greco-Egyptian ritual identities.

Ritual instructions further contribute to the prayer's character. The text directs the practitioner to repeat the prayer 'seven times while facing north and east' (li. 26), combining a numerical emphasis familiar from Jewish tradition with directional gestures that resonate with both Jewish prayer orientations and Hellenistic magical ritual. The combination of repetition and orientation underscores the formality of the practice and the practitioner's disciplined participation, reflecting a ritual framework in which precise adherence enhances efficacy (Van der Horst and Newman 2008:221).

Finally, the *Prayer of Jacob* asserts its authority through biblical language and imagery and by directly addressing the God of Israel. Its monotheistic focus distinguishes it from many other *PGM* compositions, which more commonly invoke multiple deities or spirits. Here, structured ritual actions, explicit appeals to Israel's God, and allusions to biblical narratives converge to present a prayer that simultaneously participates in the technologies of Greco-Egyptian magic and aligns itself with Jewish religious tradition. This combination exemplifies fluid boundaries between magic and religion, where prayer-like forms could function within magical handbooks while continuing to draw on established theological commitments.

Charm of Pibechis

The *Charm of Pibechis* (*PGM* IV.3007–3086) is a charm designed for individuals possessed by demons (Betz 1985:96–97). The conjuration detailed in the spell invokes *Abraōth* (Hebrew) and 'the god of the Hebrews, Jesus', and employs various divine names and attributes to command the demon. The names *Tannetis* (Egyptian), *Ammon* (Egyptian), and *Iaeobaphrenemoun* (apparently Egyptian) are utilised, along with descriptors that encompass different types of demons, including heavenly, aerial, terrestrial, subterranean, otherworldly, and the names of demons *Ebousaeus*, *Cherseus*, and *Pharisaeus* (Hebrew).[8] The conjuration draws upon Jewish biblical references, such as events during the exodus (li. 3035), the actions of Solomon (li. 3041), and the 'power of God'. The text emphasises the potency of the charm against demons, and instructs the patient to avoid consuming pork (li. 3080). The spell concludes with a purification ritual involving blowing air from the tips of the feet to the face (li. 3082). The practitioner is urged to maintain purity, as the charm is described as 'Hebraic' and preserved among 'pure individuals'. Taken together, the explicit labelling of the spell as Hebraic, the prohibition of pork, and the appeal to Exodus-era authority, function as recognisable authenticity markers, constructing a Jewish ritual persona designed to confer legitimacy and efficacy rather than to signal Jewish origin or communal transmission.

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[8] Derived from *LXX*, see *Gen.* 15:20–21 and *Ex.* 3:8,17 (Betz 1985:96).

Davila (1997:7–8) classifies the text as a spell of ‘potential Jewish origin’. He argues that the spell could have as much or even more merit than the *Prayer of Jacob* for inclusion among the Old Testament pseudepigrapha. One notable feature of the *Charm of Pibechis* is its invocation of the deity associated with the Hebrew and Christian tradition, referred to as Jesus[9] (Betz 1985:96). It further mentions:

> The One who appeared to Osrael [Israel] in a shining pillar and a cloud by day, who saved His people from the Pharoah [Pharaoh] and brought upon Pharoah [Pharaoh] the ten plagues because of his disobedience… because I conjure you by god, light-bearing, unconquerable, who knows what is in the heart of every living being, the one who formed of dust the race of humans…the one whom every heavenly power of angels and archangels praises. I conjure you by the great god Sabaōth, through whom the Jordan River drew back and the Red Sea, / which Israel crossed… I conjure you by the one in holy Jerusalem… the one who made all things which are not into that which is (ll. 3034–3036, 3046–3048, 3051, 3055–3056, 3069, 3078; tr. W.C. Grece in Betz 1985:96–97).

Apart from its invocation and scenes from Exodus (the ten plagues upon Pharaoh and the crossings of both the Red Sea and the Jordan), the charm refers to ‘the seal which Solomon placed on the tongue of Jeremiah’, a demon category termed ‘Pharisee’, ‘holy Jerusalem’, ‘the fiery Gehenna’, and various other themes inherent to Jewish tradition (Davila 1997:7). The mention of Jesus as ‘the god of the Hebrews’ might indicate non-Jewish authorship, but that the author was reasonably but incompletely informed on Jewish beliefs. Although ‘Jesus’ is a common name in Hellenistic Judaism, the association of the name with God is Christian. LiDonnici (2007:95–96), who argues for a significant familiarity with Jewish mythology in the text, suggests that the name Jesus might have been employed in later Jewish rituals. She notes correctly that the terms ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ are not always mutually exclusive in ancient literature.

The narratives woven into the spell serve a specific purpose: they are intended to be persuasive and, perhaps, comforting to a Jewish or Christian individual who had sought out what they perceived to be ‘authentic Jewish magic’ during a critical juncture such as dealing with illness or possession (LiDonnici 2007:97–98). The *Charm of Pibechis* was consciously constructed to project the image of ‘authentic Jewish magic’, rather than to express Jewish religious allegiance (LiDonnici 2007:98). Abstaining from pork should therefore be understood as reinforcing the spell’s efficacy, as should the reference to Pibechis, a legendary Egyptian magician. The charm’s deliberate design serves to appeal to a clientele identifying with Jewish (or Christian) cultural and religious backgrounds, who sought practices that aligned with their perceived notions of genuine Jewish magical tradition (Bohak 2008:212–214). Consequently, the text strongly signals authenticity and aims to resonate with the cultural and religious inclinations of its intended audience.

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[9] Κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν Ἑβραίων Ἰησοῦ (li. 3020), ‘by Jesus the God of the Hebrews’.

At the level of ritual procedure, the process of invoking the charm involves physical acts such as boiling oil of unripe olives with mastigia herb, lotus fruit pulp, and colourless marjoram (ll. 3007–3009). While the mixture boils, a specific incantation is recited, summoning the demon to leave the possessed person. A phylactery inscribed with a protective text is then prepared on a tin lamella and hung on the patient (ll. 3014–3015). The assertion of authority in the *Charm of Pibechis* is not contingent upon the magician's social status or religious affiliations; instead, it hinges on the magician's competence in performing the required actions and correctly employing the prescribed words and formulae (Betz 1985:96–97). Accordingly, the text imparts instructions to both the magician and the recipient of the conjuration, emphasising adherence to dietary restrictions (l. 3080) alongside other magical directives. Ritual actions involving water (l. 3009) are likewise outlined and serve as pivotal elements in activating the charm's magical efficacy. Through such procedures, the practitioner can exert control over spirits and demons. In this context, authority derives from the magician's proficiency in executing the requisite actions and employing the correct linguistic components, taking precedence over external factors such as societal standing or religious association.

Eighth book of Moses

The *Eighth book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.1–343), also known by alternative titles like the *Rite of the Monad* or *The Monad*,[10] constitutes a compilation of magical spells and rituals purportedly originating in the late 4th century CE (Dieleman 2019:299).[11] According to Betz (1985:172), the spells were ascribed to the name of Moses due to their content and Moses' fame as a magician. Pliny (*HN* 30.11) recognised Moses as the initiator of a magical school, and the tradition gained momentum as both Jews and Gentiles spread narratives about Moses and distributed magical texts attributed to him (Betz 1985:172).[12] The spells in the collection are each designed to achieve a distinct outcome, such as rendering oneself invisible, summoning a lover, diminishing someone's attractiveness, tempering anger, dispelling enchantments, invoking Helios, eliminating a snake threat, and more (Betz 1985:179–181).

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[10] The word μόνας could refer to a Greek philosophical concept for the supreme deity; see Betz 1985:172.

[11] *PGM* XIII is preserved in Leiden Papyrus I 395, a working manuscript written in a semi-cursive Greek hand (third-fourth century CE) associated with the 'Theban magical library'; cf. Dieleman 2019:292–293.

The prominence of Mosaic authority in *PGM* XIII gains additional nuance when viewed in light of recent editorial work on Greco-Egyptian magical formularies. Although the *Eighth book of Moses* itself is not included in the first volume of the new *Greco-Egyptian magical formularies*, its structure and rhetorical strategies closely parallel those of other handbook texts that use authoritative textual personae to legitimate and transmit ritual knowledge (Faraone and Torallas Tovar 2022:xix–xxv). As Gordon and Yuen-Collingridge (2022:252–270) show, the invocation of Mosaic authorship in *PGM* XIII does not presuppose a Jewish ritual context but instead mobilises Moses in the technical discourse of the formularies as a trans-cultural figure of divine access, lawgiving, and cosmic mediation. In this respect, Jewish elements in *PGM* XIII function less as indicators of Jewish practice than as components of a broader strategy of ritual authentication, adapted to the syncretic environment in which these texts circulated and were copied and re-contextualised. This perspective helps account for the composite structure, layered authority claims, and strategic deployment of Mosaic authorship in the text, clarifying how its Jewish elements operate as scribal and compositional devices within a technical handbook tradition rather than as reflections of a discrete Jewish ritual milieu.

Regarding the classification of these spells as inherently Jewish or not, LiDonnici (2007:106) argues that, while names like *Iaō, Sabaōth, Adōnai*, and others appear throughout the text, they are not utilised in any 'Hebrew' context (unlike the *Charm of Pibechis*). Instead, the text employs a prayer formula that might have been recognised as of Egyptian origin. Lines 61–137 and 138–153 present variations of an Egyptian hymn about the sun god, albeit with the inclusion of names of Jewish angels. Bortolani (2016:144–145) likewise situates *PGM* XIII.62–64 within a broader tradition of solar hymnic discourse in the magical papyri, which helps explain how Egyptian hymnic material can coexist with Jewish angelic and Mosaic elements in the same composition. This serves as evidence for the non-Jewish origin of at least some sections (Betz 1985:174). While the text does make references to the Hebrew language, features Hebrew names associated with God, angels, and Moses, briefly mentions the temple in Jerusalem (li. 179) and hints at the concept of a supreme god, it is predominantly rooted in Egyptian ritual and Greek religion. The Hebrew references instead contribute to the mystery and universality of the text rather than identifying it as distinctly Jewish (Bohak 2003:74–80; Bohak 2008:258–259).

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[12] 'The compiler of *PGM* XIII was both a compiler and a collector of 'Mosaic' texts'; see Betz 1985:172. See also Gager 1972:146–148.

The foundation of authority in the various versions of the *Eighth book of Moses* exhibits variations depending on the specific portion of the text and the traditions reflected in each section. Nevertheless, a general characterisation shows that the spells and rituals rely on a composite framework of divine and supernatural authority (Betz 1985:174–177). The spells and invocations draw upon the names of diverse entities – including Greek gods, angels, demons, and other supernatural beings – to solicit their power and cooperation in service of the magician's objectives (Betz 1985:174–177). These entities encompass a broad spectrum of names in both real and imagined languages. The first section (ll. 1–38) refers to Greek gods and other figures, but also to the 'key of Moses' and the Egyptian priest Manetho. Later (ll. 64–90), the text invokes 'the one who is greater than all, the all-creating one' who is placed above other gods and is given names in various languages and writing systems (Hebraic, Egyptian, hieroglyphic, and hieratic), including invented ones (bird-glyphic, falconic, and baboonic). Additional divine names appear throughout, including *Sabaōth*, *Adōnai*, and *Iaō* (Hebrew), *Lailam* (hieroglyphic), *Anoch* (Hebrew), *Aldabadaeim* (Egyptian), *Abrasax* (apparently baboonic), and *Menephōiphōth* (apparently Egyptian or related), as well as Greek entities such as *Eschakleō*, *Genna*, *Spora*, *Moira*, *Kairos*, *Phōs*, and *Psyche*. These beings are understood to transcend human limitations, possessing knowledge and capacities that exceed the ordinary (Pachoumi 2017:89–102). Through the invocation of their names, the magician seeks access to their formidable power and wisdom (Betz 1985:174–177).

In addition to invoking supernatural entities, the *Eighth book of Moses* includes complex ritual actions using talismans, holy water, and other sacred artefacts. These actions are believed to endow the magician with protection and empowerment, ultimately allowing them to become an initiate of one of seven Greek gods (Betz 1985:172). The given requirements are highly specific, demanding meticulous adherence to a forty-one day purification process that concludes during the dark phase of the moon in Aries (li. 5). These requirements extend to the choice of a westward-facing residence (li. 8), a condition that no deaths should have occurred within the home in the preceding year, and the arrangement of a precisely constructed altar containing specific elements (li. 9). Notably, various incense types corresponding to specific deities (li. 14–23), the grinding of seven flowers over twenty-one days before initiation (24–26), and a carefully timed initiation on a new moon (li. 30) further highlight the depth of detail. The initiation itself involves the presentation before gods using a key (li. 31), accompanied by specific talismans and incantations, ultimately conferring upon the magician the authority to serve a deity (Betz 1985:172–173). The foundation of authority embedded within the *Eighth book of Moses* rests upon the belief in the existence of supernatural beings and the conviction that magical rituals and incantations possess the capacity to command and govern these entities, thereby facilitating the achievement of desired outcomes (Betz 1985:174–177).

Tenth hidden book of Moses

The *Tenth hidden book of Moses*, found within the same papyrus (*PGM* XIII.734–1077), stands as a compilation of magical spells and rituals originating from the Hellenistic period in Egypt. The basis of authority in the *Tenth hidden book of Moses* closely mirrors that found in other texts within the *PGM* corpus. It revolves around the invocation of divine and supernatural entities, including the gods associated with days, hours, and weeks (li. 736), the *Ogdoas* (a collective group of eight Egyptian deities) (li. 742, 752), and Greek gods such as Zeus (li. 749, 1030), Helios (li. 751), Hades (li. 800), Aphrodite, Kronos, Ares, and Selene (li. 1064). The text outlines a ritual that necessitates calling upon a succession of celestial beings, demons, and other supernatural entities, comprising prominent figures like the archangels found in other Hebrew literature: Moses, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel, as well as heroes from Greek mythology and other mythic figures, such as Greek Orpheus, Persian Ophos, and Zoroaster (Betz 1985:189–195). Some direct Hebrew references are present, notably the divine names *Iaō*, *Sabaōth*, *Adōnai* (li. 924–925), and a later mention of concepts explained in the 'Hebrew Law' (ἐν τῷ νομῷ...ἀβραιστί) (li. 975), followed by the names Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (li. 978; cf. Bohak 2003:73–78; 2008:197–201). Through the invocation of these entities, the magician endeavours to harness their power and secure their cooperation in the pursuit of designated objectives (Pachoumi 2017:73–75). These goals may encompass safeguarding the magician from harm, amassing wealth or influence, or accessing concealed knowledge (Betz 1985:189–195). Evidently, the text conveys the potency of such invocations, which underscores the invincible nature of the magician, fortified by the presence of the invoked names within their very being.

Furthermore, the *Tenth hidden book of Moses* again incorporates an array of ritual actions into its practice. These encompass the utilisation of holy water, incense, and other sacred equipment, each serving to heighten the authority and potency of the magician (Betz 1985:189–195). Overall, the basis of authority in this text finds its space in the belief in the existence of formidable supernatural entities that can be summoned and directed through the application of magical rituals and incantations. It reflects the broader tradition of magical practices prevalent in the ancient world, whereby individuals sought to access the latent forces of the universe by manipulating divine and supernatural agents (Pachoumi 2017:95–100).

A love spell of attraction

A love spell of attraction (*PGM* XXXVI.295–311) involves fire divination over unburnt sulphur. As mentioned, LiDonnici did not include this text in her list because, like the *Prayer of Jacob* (in fact, more so), it does not explicitly label any part as 'Hebrew' or 'Jewish'. To her, this is likely because the references to Hebrew stories and names are so obvious that there is no need to label them as such. The purpose of this spell is to attract a specific person, identified with the placeholder *NN*,[13] to the magician or client (Betz 1985:276). The process of the spell requires the use of seven lumps of unburnt sulphur, which are consecutively thrown into an altar fire made from vine wood, while an incantation is recited (li. 296–297).

During the ritual of throwing the sulphur lumps into the fire, specific divine names are invoked, including *Pap Tapheiaoō*, *Sabaōth*, *Arbathiaō*, *Zagourē*, and *Pagourē* (li. 309) and the great archangels *Michael*, *Zouriēl*, *Gabriēl*, *Sesengenbarpharangēs*, *Istraēl*, and *Abraam* (li. 310). The magician adjures these divine entities to attract the desired person ('*NN'*), to the magician. The only non-Hebrew name used is Aphrodite (li. 306), but it is invoked within the context of the 'rite of Aphrodite' as a metaphor for sexual love, rather than as a direct appeal to the Greek goddess (Betz 1985:276).

In the spell, the magician invokes the divine by referencing the biblical narrative of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (li. 300), Admah, Zeboiim, and Segor, where sulphur played a significant role. The spell also refers to the Old Testament story (*Gen.* 19:26) of Lot's wife (li. 301). The magician addresses the sulphur as a force that served God in the past and requests it to now serve in the context of the magician's desire (Betz 1985:276). Therefore, the basis of the magician's authority lies in associating the sulphur with the divine intervention in those biblical events and invoking divine names and archangels to compel the desired person to fulfil the magician's intentions. Comparable strategies of erotic compulsion drawing on biblical examples and ritualised substances are also attested in Jewish love magic, where scriptural narratives function as sources of persuasive ritual authority rather than markers of confessional provenance (cf. Saar 2017:252–254).

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[13] It is a common convention in written Greek magical traditions to employ 'NN' as a symbolic representation, denoting the space where the practitioner later incorporates the pertinent name corresponding to the specific individual or individuals involved in the execution of their spell.

Comparative synthesis

The table on the next page summarises the Jewish and non-Jewish elements, the foundation of authority, and additional ritual requirements specifically discerned within these texts.

The following themes emerge as structuring features of how authority, ritual action, and divine agency are articulated across the texts.

Supernatural invocation:

Across the texts examined, ritual efficacy is consistently grounded in the invocation of divine and supra-human agents. These include Hebrew-associated divine names such as *Iaō*, *Sabaōth*, and *Adōnai*, alongside angels, archangels, and a wide range of celestial or mythic intermediaries. Such figures function less as objects of devotion than as operative agents whose names are activated to compel presence, protection, or assistance. The power of these invocations lies not in semantic transparency or theological coherence, but in their performative deployment within established ritual sequences. The density of *voces magicae*, divine-name sequences, and *characteres* in these texts is therefore not decorative but constitutive of efficacy, part of the poetics through which ritual speech creates authority and power (Versnel 2015:121, 126, 153–155).

Ritual action and technique

Each text prescribes concrete ritual actions that frame and legitimise the invocation of divine power. These include purification regimes, directional orientation, repetition, offerings, and the use of ritual media such as lamellae, water, incense, and talismanic objects. Such actions are presented as necessary conditions for successful divine engagement, reinforcing the view that ritual precision and technical competence – rather than belief or affiliation – constitute the basis of magical efficacy.

Pragmatic orientation and desired outcomes

The texts consistently prioritise practical outcomes, including healing, protection, erotic attraction, and access to power or knowledge. This pragmatic orientation aligns with broader late antique understandings of ritual as a means of effecting change through action rather than contemplation. As Struck's (2001:387) discussion of Porphyry and Iamblichus illustrates, ritual practice in this period increasingly emphasised concrete performance as a mode of divine access, a logic clearly reflected in the operational structure of the *PGM*.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis: Jewish Elements

Elements	*The Prayer of Jacob* (*PGM* XXIIb.1–26)	*The Charm of Pibechis* (*PGM* IV.3007–3086)	*The Eighth Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.1–343)	*The Tenth Hidden Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.734–1077)	*A Love Spell of Attraction* (*PGM* XXXVI.295–311)
Hebrew Names of God	Iaō (13), Abaōth, Abrathiaōth (15), Sabaōth (15, 20), Adōnai (15), God of the Hebrews (18).	Abraōth, Iaō, God of the Hebrews (3015), Jesus (3020), Sabaōth (3055).	Sabaōth (80, 146), Arbathiaō, Arathy Adōnaie (80, 147), Anoch/Anok (84, 149), Iaō (147, 201, 205, 206).	Iaō (816, 821, 880, 881, 886, 926, 1020, 1046), Sabaōth, Abratiaōth, Adōnai (926).	Sabaōth, Arbathiaō (309).
Other Hebrew Old Testament References	Father of the Patriarchs (2), Abraham (6), Sinai (10), the one seated on the sea (11), from the tribe of Israel (19).	Osrael (3034), Pharaoh (3035), Plagues (3036), Solomon, Jeremiah (3040), god, light-bearing, Pharisaos (3045), who formed of dust the race of humans (3046), Jordan, Red Sea, Israel (3055), cherubim (3060), Jerusalem (3068), for this charm is Hebraic (3085).	In the Temple of Jerusalem (233).	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (816, 975), Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel (930), Moses (1059).	Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, (300), Lot’s wife (301), Michael, Zouriēl, Gabriēl, Istraēl Abraam (310).

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Elements	*The Prayer of Jacob* (*PGM* XXIIb.1–26)	*The Charm of Pibechis* (*PGM* IV.3007–3086)	*The Eighth Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.1–343)	*The Tenth Hidden Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.734–1077)	*A Love Spell of Attraction* (*PGM* XXXVI. 295–311)
Non-Hebrew References	Dragon gods (12), Helios (13).	Tannētis (3025), Ammon (3039), Ebousacus, Cherseus (3045), and Iaeobaphrenemoun (3071).	Aries (7), Hermes (15, 174), Kronos (17), Zeus, Ares (19), Helios (19, 65, 79, 116, 141, 255), Aphrodite (19), Hermes (20), Selene, Apollo (103), Zagourē (80, 146), Rai, Lailam (81), Aldabaeim (85, 151), Abrasax (85, 156), Chi Chi Chi Chi Chi Chi Chi Tiph Tiph Tiph (85, 157), Menephoiphoth Cha Cha Cha Cha Cha Cha Cha (86, 160), Phos (166, 188, 190), Eschakleō (171), Nous or Phrenes (174), Genna (175), Spora (176), Moira (177), Kairos (186), Psyche (192, 193), Pythian serpent (194).	Ogdoas (742, 752), Zeus (749), Agathos Daimon, Helios (751, 771), Hades (800), Zagourē (926), Zeus (1030), Aphrodite, Kronos, Ares, Selene (1064).	Aphrodite (306), Pap Tapheiaoō (309), Zagourē, Pagourē, Sesengenbarpharangēs (310).

Table 1: Comparative Analysis: Jewish Elements

Elements	*The Prayer of Jacob* (*PGM* XXIIb.1–26)	*The Charm of Pibechis* (*PGM* IV.3007–3086)	*The Eighth Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.1–343)	*The Tenth Hidden Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.734–1077)	*A Love Spell of Attraction* (*PGM* XXXVI. 295–311)
Foundation of Authority .	Biblical phrases, names of God, and narratives. Invocation of 'the God of the Hebrews' (18). Reciting the prayer seven times while facing the North and East (26).	Purification Rites: Remain pure by not eating pork (3080). Ritual Actions: Blow once from the tips of the feet up to the face while conjuring (3084). Boil oil of unripe olives, mastigia herb, lotus, and marjoram together while reciting a specific incantation (3009). Write on a tin lamella and hang the lamella on the patient (3014). Biblical References: The Exodus, The actions of Solomon, The 'power of God'. Ritual Formulae: *Voces Magicae*	Purification Rites: Remain pure for 41 days. Align completion with the dark of the moon in Aries (5). Have a ground-level house with a west-facing door (7). Invoking Names of Diverse Entities: Angels, demons, and other supernatural beings. Ritual Actions: Set up an earthen altar in the middle of the house (9). Utilisation of talismans, holy water, and other sacred artefacts. Use incense related to specific deities (12).	Utilisation of Sacred Equipment. Ritual Formulae: *Voces Magicae.* Invocation of Divine and Supernatural Entities. Ritual expert's purity requirement: Wrist adorned with wreaths of seasonal flowers (1005). Offering of frankincense (1015). Ritual Actions: Facing the rising sun, stretch out your right hand to the left, saying 'A'. To the north, put forward only your right fist, saying 'E'.	Associating Sulphur with Divine Interventions: Biblical events. Invoking Divine Names and Archangels. Ritual Formulae: *Voces Magicae.* Ritual Actions: Construct an altar fire using vine wood. Take each of the seven lumps of sulphur. Say the spell over each lump individually. Throw each lump into the fire as part of the ritual (295).

Table 1: Comparative Analysis: Jewish Elements

Elements	*The Prayer of Jacob* (*PGM* XXIIb.1–26)	*The Charm of Pibechis* (*PGM* IV.3007–3086)	*The Eighth Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.1–343)	*The Tenth Hidden Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII.734–1077)	*A Love Spell of Attraction* (*PGM* XXXVI. 295–311)
Foundation of Authority (continued) .			Make three figures from fine flour representing bull-faced, goat-faced, and ram-faced deities (32). Cense the figures, eat them, and recite the spell for the gods of the hours (32). Write the great name with the seven vowels (39). Draw a falcon-faced crocodile and the nine-formed god (49). Draw a snake biting its tail (50). Ritual Formulae: *Voces Magicae*	To the west, extend both hands in front of you, saying ‘E’. To the south, hold both hands on your stomach, saying ‘I’. To the earth, bend over, touching the ends of your toes, saying ‘O’. Look into the air, hand on your heart, saying ‘Y’. Look into the sky, both hands on your head, saying ‘O’ (824). Invoke the winds and the dawn (855). Perform an initiation rite on the thirteenth day of the month (888). Lick off a gold lamella with associated chants and phrases (890).	

Jewish elements as ritual resources

While the texts deploy names, narratives, and symbols associated with Jewish tradition, these elements are rarely framed as exclusive or confessional. Instead, they appear as recognisable and potent resources within a wider ritual repertoire, often alongside Egyptian and Greek components. Their presence does not by itself establish Jewish authorship or provenance, but reflects patterns of trans-cultural circulation and selective appropriation characteristic of late antique magical practice.

Audience, persuasion and authenticity

Several texts appear strategically crafted to appeal to users who identified with Jewish or Jewish-Christian symbolic worlds, particularly in contexts of vulnerability such as illness or possession. Explicit labels such as 'Hebraic', dietary prohibitions, and biblical narratives function as cues of ritual authenticity rather than evidence of communal transmission. As Dieleman (2019:313) notes, such features operate as persuasive devices within a competitive ritual environment, enhancing credibility and perceived efficacy.

Syncretism as practice

The syncretism evident in these texts is best understood not as the fusion of belief systems, but as a repertoire-based practice in which elements from multiple traditions are assembled, adapted, and redeployed according to situational need. This form of syncretism reflects the broader Hellenistic and Roman magical landscape, where ritual technologies circulated across linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries without requiring doctrinal integration.

Authority and competence

Authority in these texts is constructed through a combination of factors that privilege ritual competence over social status. It is grounded in mastery of traditional language and formulae, the controlled invocation of divine and supernatural agents, and the precise execution of prescribed ritual actions. Such authority is best understood as a function of ritual voice and technical competence rather than institutional standing, a pattern Gordon (2012:152–153, 164–165) and Boustan, Dieleman, and Sanzo (2015:3–4) identify across late antique magical corpora. Such authority is rhetorical as well as technical: the formularies construct credibility by staging the practitioner as an authorised mediator whose speech, inherited names, and ritual precision together produce efficacy (Radcliffe 2020:29–49). Claims of initiation, special knowledge, or divine sanction serve to reinforce the practitioner's role as an effective intermediary between human and divine realms, but ritual efficacy ultimately depends on performance. This competence-based model of authority highlights the technical and procedural character of late antique magic, in which skill, precision, and experiential validation constitute the primary sources of ritual legitimacy.

Conclusion

The limited selection of texts dealt with in this article serves to enhance an understanding of the *PGM's* worldview, challenging as this task is.[14] Within this dynamic context, there exists a framework through which humans can engage with divine beings of various powers under specific conditions. The absence of any clear separation between distinct belief systems allows for the invocation of gods, names, or a supreme deity from diverse traditions – be they Greek, Egyptian, or Jewish – in the same context.

Within the present sample, the intention behind Jewish references remains open to interpretation. In some instances, Jewish-coded language appears designed to resonate with Jewish or Jewish-Christian audiences (as in the *Prayer of Jacob*, the *Charm of Pibechis*, and *A love spell of attraction*), while in other cases Jewish names and Mosaic personae contribute to a broader rhetoric of arcane authority, in which unfamiliar or trans-cultural divine names enhance the aura of potency rather than signal provenance (LiDonnici 2007:97–99). This distinction is methodologically important: as scholarship repeatedly cautions, the appearance of Hebrew-sounding *voces magicae* or Jewish-associated divine names does not by itself establish Jewish authorship, stable semantic transparency, or ritual continuity, since such elements could circulate, transform, and be redeployed across settings and users (Bohak 2003:69–78; LiDonnici 2007:87–90).

Read comparatively, the selected texts converge in several analytically significant respects. Across differing ritual contexts, they consistently foreground supernatural invocation, prescribed ritual action, and the pursuit of specific, practical outcomes. At the same time, they reveal a shared syncretic logic in which diverse religious elements are selectively combined to enhance efficacy. These convergences also extend to questions of audience and authority, with repeated emphasis on ritual competence – rather than confessional identity – as the primary basis of the practitioner's power.[15]

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[14] Any attempt to extract a single 'worldview' from the *PGM* must remain cautious, since the corpus is heterogeneous in content, structure, and compositional history, and preserves layers of transmission and compilation rather than a stable doctrinal system.

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