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REVIEW FOR THE HABILITATION THESIS ENTITLED *SOLOMONICA MAGICA. GREEK-
INSCRIBED 'SOLOMONIC' AMULETS FROM LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY BYZANTIUM*,
WRITTEN BY DR. JURAJ FRANEK

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CONTENT

How relevant is the topic within the academic field?

The subject of the thesis is, in my opinion, very relevant within its academic context. One of the most groundbreaking research fields on ancient societies is the study of magical-religious practices, which is fortunately overcoming the great dichotomy between 'magic' and 'religion' that has characterised most traditional approaches. From the perspective of considering 'magic' as a pragmatic or instrumental subsystem of religion to deal with situations of crisis or uncertainty (thus R. Gordon, F. Marco Simón & M. Piranomonte (eds.) (2020). *Choosing Magic. Contexts, Objects, Meanings. The Archaeology of Instrumental Religion in the Latin West*. Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte), the study of protective amulets is of great interest. And among these, the 'Solomonic' amulets studied by the Author are of capital importance due to their presence in very diverse cultural spaces. This raises the question of the circulation of these performative images and texts: to the bibliography cited by the A., one could add C. Faraone (forthcoming), "The Late-Antique Transfer of Circular Gem-Designs to Papyri and Foil: The Ouroboros and Solomon's Seal" in R. Hernandez Martín (ed.), *Drawing Magic. Images of Power and the Power of Images in Ancient and Late-Antique Magic*. Leuven, 69-84. These

images and texts circulate within a context of religious globalization, in which elements of a diverse authoritative literary traditions going back to biblical texts and Hellenistic Judaism (what the A. calls the "prototypes") are adapted in ritual practice (in "variations" and "additions") according to specific contexts or circumstances, with the Syro-Palestinian workshops operating as the "unity of origin" of elements that spread over wider spaces and times.

The magnitude of the research carried out is underlined by the extreme dispersion of the documentation, which consists of very small, easily transportable and mobile objects. This difficulty is accompanied, consequently, by the lack of archaeological context for most of the objects studied, which makes dating difficult in many cases. This is particularly notable in the case of the gems (only one of the 80 studied items was found in an archaeological excavation). Fortunately, the contextual information is more complete in the case of earrings, medallions or armbands, very often found in tombs. The Author has been able to counteract these difficulties thanks to a profound cultural contextualisation of the documents, and also to his fine ability to relate iconic or textual elements that allow him to organise the materials of the large corpus studied (some 400 objects), to interpret them convincingly and to reformulate traditional dating.

How precisely , clearly and understandably is the topic formulated?

The subject of study, although apparently very specific, presents multiple levels of analysis that make research difficult, due to two essential features: on the one hand, the diversity of existing documentation. On the other hand, its appearance in very diverse temporal and geographical contexts, which raises the need to explore multiple fields of analysis. The fact that Solomon appears associated in the textual invocations of the amulets with other divinities or demons both complicates and multiplies the interest of the work, which is actually a "network" research issuing more general and questions from a cultural point of view. In spite of these difficulties, the Author has precisely delimited the topic, specifying from the beginning of the work the structure to be followed, which is presented in a clear way. In addition, each chapter and its paragraphs systematically recall what has already been dealt with and what will be developed in the following chapters.

What contribution does the thesis make to the field and how does it compare to other works, both foreign and domestic, in the field?

The thesis is the first comprehensive investigation of a topic only partially addressed to date, and its very positive results will undoubtedly lead to an advancement of knowledge. The publication of this research will be of benefit to many colleagues working on related topics. The author rightly points out that, just as it is not possible to distinguish between literary ("outsider") and practical ("insider") sources, neither is it possible to do so between the two types of artefacts that materialise Solomon, Sisinnius or the Holy Rider, for amulets on papyrus or lamellae may contain visual elements, while various gems, earrings or medallions are purely textual.

It is important in my opinion to have introduced into the study, in addition to the materials forming part of the corpus itself, a selection of rings, armbands, pilgrim tokens and other miscellanea, since they not only include significant visual elements, but also constitute largely unpublished items.

The text contains many different novel interpretations: this is the case (p. 96) of the Greek text of the *defixio* from Carnuntum (in which, paradoxically, the expression "infra dies novem vasum reponat" is translated as "he has a week to return the base", instead of "he has less than nine days to return the base": see F. Marco Simón (2010), "Ante dies novem: sobre un cómputo temporal mencionado en algunos textos mágico-religiosos". In *Serta Palaeohispanica in honorem Javier de Hoz*, *Palaeohispanica* 10 (2010), Zaragoza, 579-590). Another example that reflects a brilliant interpretative novelty is to consider the Royal Ontario Museum's four-medallion silver arm-band image (SoMa 338, p. 107) as an *Adventus* scene (depicting Jesus entering Jerusalem), and not as a representation of the Holy Rider. The examples could be multiplied many times over.

The establishment of absolute and relative chronology for the amulets studied (defending a somewhat synchronic process as opposed to the "progressive Christianisation" of the amulets defended by traditional historiography), or the demonstration of the variety of cultural precedents in the image of the Holy Rider (which disappears after the 7th century) are other examples of the originality and novelty of the study.

METHODOLOGY AND FORMAL STANDARDS

How appropriate and relevant is the chosen methodological approach to the topic?

The methodological assumptions on which the thesis is based are impeccable. Although it is essentially a Classical Philology study, the richness of the approaches to the problems posed by the different types of documentation and, above all, the Author's balanced interpretation based on an exhaustive knowledge of the state-of-the-art in the different registers analysed, have been possible thanks to the application of an appropriate methodology, which starts from the analysis of the literary sources to contrast them with the "material magica" in its different media and uses.

What is the level of analysis?

The panoptic view that characterises this work does not exclude attention to detail, and the depth of the treatment of the various questions raised throughout the study reveals Dr. Franek's mastery in the field of Classical Philology and the Sciences of Antiquity in general. The analytical level is, therefore, the ideal that can be expected in a habilitation thesis of this kind. There are no elements in the materials studied on which an essential and up-to-date bibliography is not included, even if they are secondary or excessively specific (e.g. *charâkteres*, *uroboros*, etc.).

A key feature of the study is the Author's direct, in-person examination of many materials, as reflected in his excellent photographs of unpublished materials taken in private collections or in museums

(Benaki in Athens, Rockefeller, Bible Lands or Israel Museums in Jerusalem, Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

Are the formal criteria (language, citations, etc.) of sufficiently high standard?

The work is excellently written, even from the point of view of academic English, and reflects not only a very solid background, but also a great culture and sensitivity (Frost's poem that culminates the conclusions of the text is a secondary but not minor example). The system of textual and bibliographical citations follows the most demanding scientific parameters, so the conclusion of this reviewer is that the formal criteria present a high level of quality. The exhaustive catalogue of the almost four hundred pieces studied is impeccably presented, with images reproduced with a high quality.

Specific aspects of the thesis and scholarly level of the research

The Author has significantly clarified an important nebula in the documentation that has come down to us from antiquity (that of "Solomonic magic"), specifying its elements, relationships and evolution. One of the successes of the thesis is to explain the key to the enormous success of Solomonic magic (in Antiquity -and not only the later one, given the systematic analysis of the antecedents- and early Byzantium): its "intercultural understandability", with a fascinating cohabitation of "pagan", Jewish and Christian elements.

While the heading of 3.1.3 ("Greek Magical Papyri") is questionable, it is true that the Author admits the bilingualism of the Great Papyrus of Paris (*PGM IV*) as "a precious source of Graeco-Egyptian Magic", a term (Graeco-Egyptian) that is fortunately increasingly visible in recent historiography. To the existing bibliography on *PGM IV* can be added an essential study by M. Zago (ed.) (2010). *Anonimo. La ritetta di immortalità*, Milan, 2010).

Thanks to this study, which it would be desirable to publish as soon as possible, the academic community will be able to access such novel aspects as the origin or evolution of the key elements of Solomonic magic, its adaptations and local associations, in all its geographical or temporal variants. It seems important to me, for example, the singularity of the "South Italian Group", defined by the appearance of Solomon as judge (with the Anguiped iconography on the reverse of the pieces).

Another aspect that seems key to is the fresh approach to these objects of protective "Solomonic magic" as a specific type of commodity. Crucial questions such as the religious identity of the bearers, the manufacturers or the sellers, who do not necessarily belong to the same religious tradition, are raised from this perspective, based on the observation that 90% of the objects are not personalised. The Author convincingly poses the tension between an authoritative tradition that condemns the use of these amulets (and makes them characteristic of a feminine or infantile otherness) and the users of these objects, in which sometimes bilingualism or the addition of elements apparently foreign to the dominant Christian religious system (from *charaktêres* to magical voices or representations of the Evil Eye) seek to increase the efficacy and power of these amulets. In this sense, the contribution of this study is essential, and the book will be warmly welcomed by the scientific community.

CONCLUSION

The habilitation thesis more than meets the standard requirements placed on habilitation thesis in the field of Classical Philology.

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