

**Seventh International Conference of
Manichaean Studies
Dublin 2009**

Abstracts

Manichaean Magus: Letter-writing Rhetoric in P. Kellis 35 and the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*

Paul Mirecki (Lawrence)

As Vales writes to Psais in the letter section of P. Kell. 35, his discussion of the accompanying amulet text demonstrates rhetorical devices that are standard fare in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (*PGM*). In such cases, a writer uses the form of the personal letter (actual or not) as the literary frame for a ritual text and demonstrates high reverence for the transmitted text as well as his own knowledge of – and access to – such texts. Vales' letter also demonstrates such reverence and knowledge, suggesting a guarantee of efficacy through a tested chain of tradition. The Kellis letter seems to indicate that actual letters containing ritual texts could have been used as sources edited into later synthetic anthologies like the *PGM*, where the letter genre is obvious in well-known examples. This does not preclude the possibility that such texts were later edited in a variety of ways during the process of scribal transmission, leading to the "canonical" versions we now have in the *PGM*. The possibility that actual letters, like P. Kell. 35, were used as sources in anthologies further suggests the use of postal couriers in the physical delivery of such response letters – sent back from holy man to client. In some *PGM* texts, part of the ritual even includes instructions to the client for the delivery of an amulet – although apparently not a letter with a ritual text – to a certain location. There are also rhetorical similarities between P. Kell. 35 and the testament genre – ultimately deriving from wisdom texts in Egyptian and Hebrew – in which a holy man passes on his virtue for posterity's sake to his personal or professional beneficiaries. The testament, also popular with early Christian writers, is by this time an established genre and thus might not reflect the actual relationship between Vales the writer and Psais the reader. Because Vales holds the pen, he also holds the rhetorical upper hand. We cannot verify that Psais honored Vales' claim to authority, except to say that since Psais apparently made the request at the first, he probably did view Vales as an authoritative source in these ritual matters (how to instigate a divorce in a love triangle).