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Βαινχωωχ = 3663 — NO PALINDROME

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In 1921 Theodor Hopfner writing about the isopsephistic value of the *vox magica* Βαιυχωωωχ in his *Offenbarungszauber I*, p. 181 § 705, first noted "die Zahl ,γχξγ 3663, die auch anagrammatisch ist". Franz Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*, Leipzig-Berlin 1925, 184, citing Hopfner, also jumped on the bandwagon by declaring that 3663 the "Palindromzahl heißt Βαιυχωωωχ".¹ Campbell Bonner, *JEA* 16 (1930) 8, divagating about various isopsephisms in Greek magical contexts showed that "βαυυχωωωχ gives the palindromic number 3663".² Coming from such eminent authorities on Greek magic as these the matter would seem to be unassailably clinched. And, in fact, for over half a century it has gone unquestioned and unchallenged and become a cliché in the literature on late Greek magic, e.g. H. Philipp, *Mira et Magica*, Mainz 1986, Nr. 164: "βαυυχωωωχ = palindrome Zahl 3663". More recently, C. Faraone and R. Kotansky, *ZPE* 75 (1988) 262, in a — to first appearances — admirable bit of numerological sleuthing uncovered a similar isopsephistic *vox magica*, Ιαω Αρβαρβαφραραφραξαθραθαξ "the numerical sum of [which] is a palindrome 2662". They duly compared it with the long-standing equations αβιμωχωσσωσ = 3663 and βαυυχωωωχ = 3663.³

However, we have been the victims of a popular delusion perpetrated by our predecessors. We have unwittingly continued to propagate and perpetuate it ever since. A very simple and obvious fact seems to have escaped our attention: 3663 and 2662 may present tidy little numerical palindromes in the modern European system of numeration; expressed in their original alphabetic Greek numerical system, however, neither 'Γχξγ nor 'Βχξβ are palindromes.⁴ The palindromes exist only when the ancient Greek numbers are converted into their modern equivalents. The fact that these numbers are palindromes in modern notation is entirely irrelevant to and of no consequence whatsoever for their use in ancient magical texts. The modern palindromic numbers, artificial productions of our present-day numbering system — mere flukes and red herrings — should

¹ β = 2, α = 1, ι = 10, υ = 50, χ = 600, ω = 800.

Both Dornseiff and Michl, "Engel", *RAC* 5 (1962) 207-208 s.v. Βαιυχωωωχ, (noting the "Zahlwert 3663", with no mention of a palindrome) spell the word with only two omegas; hence its gematric value will be 800 short of the necessary 3663.

² Hopfner writing later (*AO* 3, 1930, 330) noted the numerical value of Βαιυχωωωχ but did not insist upon its being a palindrome: "der Zahlenwert seines Namens 3663 (γχξγ)". Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, Ann Arbor 1950, discussed the word in several places without mentioning any numerical value at all. Had they by then realized the error of their palindrome without making any formal palinode about it?

³ General bibliography on Bainchooch (Egyptian *b3 n kkw* "spirit of Darkness): A. Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter*, Berlin-Leipzig 1934, 405; W. Crum, *Coptic Dictionary* s.v. *bai*; Th. Hopfner, *OZ* I § 739; A. Kropp, *Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte III*, Brussels 1930, p. 124; C. Harrauer, *Meliouchos* 80-81.

⁴ As a matter of fact, given the peculiarities of the ancient Greek alphabetical numbering system quadriliteral thousand-numbers can never be palindromic, because the hundreds and tens are represented by entirely different letters of the alphabet. Therefore such a configuration as *XYXX* is an impossibility. Triliteral thousand-numbers, however, may be palindromes in Greek, e.g. 'Αμα, 'Αρα — but then in our system of ciphers they are not: 1041 and 1101.

have never been singled out or brought to attention in the first place. They have deluded modern scholars into thinking that because they are palindromes in our modern numerical system the same numbers must consequently be inherently significant in their ancient context. However, there they were never palindromes.

The denizens of Hellenistic Egypt already had at their disposal three numbering systems: alphabetic Greek⁵, Roman and, of course, the native Egyptian one. The configuration of Arabic ciphers 3663, had the ancients been confronted with it, would have meant absolutely nothing to them at all. They might have noticed its esthetically pleasing symmetry, but its intrinsic arithmetical value would have escaped them entirely. (Even to their contemporaries in Europe it would have been equally meaningless, the Arabic ciphers becoming standard on the European continent only in the 11th century A.D.)

The tacit assumption of scholars (always *sous-entendu*, nowhere stated *expressis verbis*) that $\Upsilon\chi\xi\gamma = 3663$ and $\text{Β}\chi\xi\beta = 2662$ are somehow significant in ancient superstition because the modern numerical configurations happen to be palindromic, is just as irrelevant as to suggest that the numbers 19 or 190 are imbued with magical power because they are palindromes: XIX and CXC, respectively — in Roman numerals!

While numerology and isopsephisms admittedly play a large role in the mysticism and magic of the late Hellenistic period as represented by the Greek magical texts from Egypt — indeed, certain deities are invoked or indicated solely by isopsephistic equations some of which have yet to this day to be elucidated⁶ — the value of indiscriminately calculating the gematric value of any and every *vox magica* must be called into question. The presence of certain ciphers in the Greek magical texts induced Hopfner, Dornseiff and Bonner at trying their hand at divining the names of the deities which were thus concealed. Thus they were able to suggest for the name of the deity in PGM II 126f. whose name is equal to 9999 (ὁ μέγιστος καὶ ἰσχυρὸς θεὸς ... οὗ ἡ ψῆφος θλϞθ) the probable solution $\chi\alpha\beta\rho\alpha\chi\phi\nu\epsilon\sigma\chi\eta\rho\phi\iota\chi\rho\phi\nu\rho\omega\phi\omega\chi\omega\beta\omega\chi$ and for the one identified by the number 3663 in PGM IV 938 $\text{Β}\alpha\iota\nu\chi\omega\omega\omega\chi$. To my knowledge, however, nowhere does the number $\text{Β}\chi\xi\beta$ (2662) make an appearance in the Greek magical texts so that one might be inspired or constrained to seek its gematric equivalence. Hence, in the final analysis the calculations and computations based on $\text{I}\alpha\omega \text{ Α}\rho\beta\alpha\rho\beta\alpha\phi\rho\rho\alpha\phi\rho\alpha\phi\rho\alpha\xi\rho\alpha\theta\rho\alpha\theta\alpha\xi$ serve no immediate or useful purpose. The fact that the isopsephistic value of $\text{I}\alpha\omega \text{ Α}\rho\beta\alpha\rho\beta\alpha\phi\rho\rho\alpha\phi\rho\alpha\phi\rho\alpha\xi\rho\alpha\theta\rho\alpha\theta\alpha\xi$ rendered in modern numeration happens to result in the palindromic number 2662 is immaterial for our understanding of this *vox magica* in particular and of later Greek magic in general.⁷

In the end, the only palindromes in the Greek magical papyri from Egypt are the longer or shorter *voces magicae* where only the letters and no computations are involved. The fallacy that $\text{Β}\alpha\iota\nu\chi\omega\omega\omega\chi$ is *avox magica* whose isopsephistic value results in a palindromic number, propagated and perpetuated now for over half a century, best be laid to rest.

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⁵ Cf. M. Tod, *Annual of the British School at Athens* 45 (1950) 126-139.

⁶ PGM 3.3: σκορπίε Ἀρτεμίσιε τιε' (= 315) and PGM XXVIII a.4: σκορπίε Ἀρτεμισίας τριακόσια δεκάπεντε (=315), is probably an isopsephism as yet undeciphered.

⁷ R. Merkelbach, *ZPE* 63 (1986) 308, sees the sole significance of such palindromic numbers as 3663 in the mirror-image patterns the hands produce in the *computus digitorum* procedure of counting: "Das Wort $\text{Β}\alpha\iota\nu\chi\omega\omega\omega\chi$ ist also geradezu für den *Computus digitorum* gebildet und erst von da aus in die "Magie" übergegangen".