SCRIBAL PRACTICES IN THE PRODUCTION
OF MAGIC HANDBOOKS IN EGYPT

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Introduction*

This article is a diachronic examination of the means by which information is organized in recipes contained in the hieratic and Demotic magic formularies from Egypt. These scribal conventions concern visual reading aids, controlled vocabulary and fixed text formats. I argue first that these genre rules were clear-cut and remained unchanged for the entire period that hieratic formularies were produced, and second, that some recipes in the Demotic magic handbooks continue these rules, whereas others deviate from them. This second observation has a bearing on the ongoing debate about the cultural, intellectual and institutional roots of Greco-Egyptian magic in general and the Demotic magical papyri in particular. Given the overall application of the traditional scribal conventions in the Demotic recipes, it seems warranted to conclude that the Demotic formularies were written, edited and copied by scribes who had been trained and worked in an Egyptian temple scriptorium, the institution where hieratic formularies had been produced since at least as early as the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1975–1640 BCE). However, given the longevity and stability of these scribal conventions, the deviations in the Demotic recipes, no matter how small or irrelevant at first sight, are significant and beg to be addressed. Did they result from internal changes in the curriculum and practices in the temple schools and scriptoria? Or are they a reflection of new procedures and protocols developed outside the temple

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compound proper and adopted only secondarily into the Demotic formularies?

Before analyzing the Demotic recipes in detail, I first survey the formal features of hieratic formularies and discuss in detail the relation between a recipe’s function and its text format. This allows me to explicate the scribal conventions and genre rules of the formularies that were produced in Egyptian temple scriptoria between the Middle Kingdom and the early Roman period. The second half of the article offers a similar analysis of the Demotic recipes. In the concluding section, the results of the two analyses are compared.

The Demotic Magical Papyri

The Demotic Magical Papyri represent a fascinating collection of spells well suited to the study of aspects of continuity and change in ritual and scribal practices in Roman-period Egypt. The corpus forms a small, yet coherent group of texts comprising two manuscripts from Thebes in southern Egypt, one manuscript from Oxyrhynchus in Middle Egypt, and two of unknown provenance (one very likely also from Thebes). They are dated by paleography to the third, possibly even

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