THE MAGICAL ROTULI FROM THE CAIRO GENIZAH

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Introduction

In spite of much progress in recent decades, the magical texts found in the Cairo Genizah have yet to receive the attention they deserve.¹ In the present paper, I shall focus on a previously unnoted type of Genizah magical fragments—namely those written on vertical parchment scrolls (rotuli).² Such scrolls are extremely interesting not only because of their format, but because of their contents as well, and especially the aggressive magical recipes they contain, some of which clearly stem from late-antique Palestine. But as these fragments are quite long, and the task of reconstructing them is in no way finished, no attempt will be made here to offer a full edition of any single rotulus; instead, I shall limit myself to a description of their codicological and scribal features, a brief analysis of their contents, and a selective edition of some of their magical recipes. In the future, I hope to provide a full edition of

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these fragments, as of many other Genizah magical recipes and recipe-collections which deserve a more detailed analysis.³

**The Magical Rotuli—A Broad Survey**

The presence of rotuli—that is, vertical scrolls made of relatively narrow pieces of parchment sewn together one below the other—in the Cairo Genizah has occasionally been noted, and a few such rotuli have already been published.⁴ However, the number of unpublished Genizah rotuli known to me already amounts to many dozens, and as these fragments seem to belong to the earlier strata of the Cairo Genizah, and some of them clearly were in use even before Genizah times, they certainly deserve a close codicological analysis of their different forms and contents and of their place within the history of the Jewish book.⁵

My own interest in these fragments began when, during a short visit to Cambridge to study some magical fragments, I noticed that one or two fragments had a row of tiny holes at their top or at their bottom. This surprised me, as I could not see why anyone would bother to pin-prick his or her magical texts in this manner, but a few days later I was checking some of the Genizah fragments in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and discovered a most unusual magic scroll (Bodleian MS Heb. a3.31), which is made up of four unequal pieces of parchment stitched together vertically and then inscribed horizontally. I then realized that the pin-pricked fragments I had seen in Cambridge had once been parts of such vertical rotuli, but the threads of the stitches that

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⁵ Judith Olszowy-Schlanger and I have recently begun to map out the Genizah rotuli, but the results of this survey will have to be published elsewhere.