
In Das Anzünden der Fackel, Daniela Luft proposes a study of Chapter 137 of the Book of the Dead. The book is a reworking of her master’s thesis, which she completed in 2006 at the University of Heidelberg. It appears now in the collection Studien zum Altägyptischen Totenbuch, which publishes works on the Book of the Dead. More precisely, this work belongs to the category of specific analyses of spells from this corpus. This kind of text generally presents numerous problems of translation due essentially to our limited understanding of the lexicon and the myths related to it. There are at the present time several translations of the Book of the Dead, some of which are already old. If they are indispensable for a first approach to this corpus, they all nonetheless clash with the same question: which papyrus should be chosen to represent the ensemble of these texts, which are attested on more than three thousand manuscripts and over a time span of almost fifteen hundred years? Also, the main translations of the Book of the Dead are often based on one single manuscript or merge several papyri without however clearly pointing out the variants and without really considering the period of redaction.

The kind of study conducted by Luft is thus quite essential, since she has regrouped a significant sample of forty papyri and other sources spanning the whole period of existence of the texts. This allows not only for a better understanding of their subtleties, but also for the observation of their linguistic, stylistic and conceptual evolution during the whole period of their use.

Luft’s book consists of three main parts: 1. The analysis of the text and vignettes1 (6–124); 2. The transcription with philological commentaries, critical apparatus, as well as variants, and the parallel translation of the idealised version of each text (161–230); 3. The synoptic edition of the text (231–342).

It is quite remarkable, though, to find the analytical part before the translation, and sometimes the reading of the analyses is rendered more difficult by the absence of a continuous translation. Also to be regretted is the lack of figures that would have helped the comprehension of the analysis of the vignettes.

1) To complete the study of the vignettes of these three texts, see M. Müller-Roth, “‘Mehr Licht’: Anmerkungen zu den Vignetten von Tb 137,” forthcoming in Chronique d’Égypte.
The author points out from the start that in reality there is not one single text, but rather three texts grouped artificially under the name “Chapter 137.” These three texts concern the same theme, the lighting of torches, but, according to Luft, they must be analysed independently, despite the fact that the comparison between the three formulas provides some interesting insights. Luft thus distinguishes Chapters 137A, 137B, and 137spät (late); for the third one, however, I would rather opt for the designation 137C.² The first two spells are essentially attested during the first part of the New Kingdom on papyrus, and on other media³ during a period spanning from the New Kingdom to the 26th dynasty. According to Luft, beside this chronological and thematic proximity, the two texts are not really connected, and chapter 137B should never be considered an abbreviated version of 137A, as is frequently stated in the literature devoted to this text.

The third spell is known from the 26th dynasty until the Ptolemaic Period⁴ and seems to replace the first two texts in the Book of the Dead. The author insists on the fact that this version cannot be considered as a late version of chapters 137A and 137B, but rather as an independent text concerning a related topic. Chapter 137C is therefore inserted in the papyri of the “Saite Recension,” that is, the manuscripts containing more or less the standardised version of chapters 1 to 165 of the Book of the Dead. This text does not appear in the other types of papyri of this period, i.e. “abridged” Books of the Dead which contain only an individual choice of Book of the Dead spells, and other funerary papyri where these chapters are combined with texts from other corpora.

²) This designation not only allows the avoidance of the problems of translation in other languages, but also the obstacles of the temporal qualification.
³) Chapter 137A is attested in several tombs of private individuals in Thebes, and in Tuna el Gebel in the tomb of Petosiris dating from the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period. Chapter 137B is also inscribed in several tombs from the New Kingdom, as well as partially in the 26th dynasty in the tomb of Pabasa (I thank Silvia Einaudi for this information), and on false-door steles. It is also inscribed on a certain number of ostraca dating mostly from the second part of the New Kingdom (A. Gasse. 2009. “Le chapitre 137B du Livre des Morts à la lumière de quelques ostraca de Deir el Medina.” In: Ausgestattet mit den Schriften des Thot, Festschrift für Irmtraut Munro zu ihrem 65. Geburtstag, SAT 14, ed. B. Backes, M. Müller-Roth, S. Stöhr (éd.), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 69–78).
⁴) As addition to the catalogue of Luft: pLouvre N3128, pLouvre N3129, pLouvre N3144, pLouvre N3149, pLouvre N3151, pLouvre N3248, pLouvre N5450, pLiverpool 1978.291.264, pToronto ROM 978x43.1. Most of them are unpublished.