

Korshi Dosoo

**MAGICAL DISCOURSES, RITUAL COLLECTIONS:
CULTURAL TRENDS AND PRIVATE INTERESTS
IN EGYPTIAN HANDBOOKS AND ARCHIVES**

A RECURRING QUESTION in the study of magical texts from Roman Egypt concerns their place in the broader history of Egyptian magico-religious practices – whether the rituals they contain represent new phenomena and interests peculiar to the social and religious conditions of the late Roman period, or are in some sense a continuation of older, Pharaonic practices. This discussion does not aim to provide a conclusive answer to this problem, but instead attempts to sketch out a methodology by which the range of magical practices attested in Roman Egypt can be characterised, allowing clearer comparison with earlier and later periods, and a more precise contextualisation of individual texts and archives within the period.

As with any aspect of ancient Mediterranean life, the magical papyri must be understood as partial and fragmentary witnesses to the phenomena they attest; not only must we take into account the vicissitudes of survival, discovery, and publication, but also the fact that written magical texts cannot provide evidence for the unwritten traditions which certainly existed alongside them. Among the pieces of evidence suggestive of magical practices unknown in surviving written sources are a petition

from late second century AD Karanis, describing what David Frankfurter colourfully describes as ‘fetus magic’,¹ as well as an assemblage of painted bones from the same village, described by Andrew Wilburn.²

Despite these caveats, it is common, and perhaps unavoidable, for scholars to attempt to characterise periods of Egyptian history according to the surviving evidence. Thus Jan Assmann comments that in the shift from Pharaonic to Graeco-Roman magical practice:

We are now no longer dealing not only with preventive medicine and protection, but with all kinds of sanctification ceremonies, mantics, shamanistic visions and so forth.³

More specifically, Jacco Dieleman observed in a recent study that:

In the Graeco-Egyptian formularies, attention has shifted to rites to conjure up a deity for private oracular consultation and rites to influence other people’s behaviour or even to harm them. Recipes for healing and protection occur in small numbers only. The Graeco-Egyptian manuals are thus more concerned with social and spiritual than with physical well-being. This reflects changes in social structure and religious sensibilities in contemporary society.⁴

Similar observations on the shift from a Pharaonic magical practice focused on spells of healing and protection, to a focus on aggressive curse and erotic spells, and private revelatory rituals in the Roman period, are made with varying degrees of stress by Joris Borghouts,⁵ Geraldine Pinch,⁶ and others. While characterisations of Coptic magic are less frequent, due perhaps to fact that such texts have been published less sys-

¹ *P. Mich.* VI 423–424, discussed in D. FRANKFURTER, ‘Fetus magic and sorcery fears in Roman Egypt’, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 46 (2006), pp. 37–62; see also A. T. WILBURN, *Materia Magica: The Archaeology of Magic in Roman Egypt, Cyprus, and Spain*, PhD diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 2005, pp. 88–90.

² WILBURN, *Materia Magica* (cit. n. 1), pp. 101–112.

³ J. ASSMANN, ‘Magic and theology in Ancient Egypt’, [in:] P. SCHÄFER and H. G. KIPPENBERG (eds), *Envisioning Magic. A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, Leiden 1997, p. 17.

⁴ J. DIELEMAN, ‘Coping with a difficult life: magic, healing, and sacred knowledge’, [in:] C. RIGGS (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, Oxford 2012, p. 342.

tematically, William M. Brashear comments on the prominence in Coptic magic of healing, exorcistic, erotic and curse practices, while noting the paucity of mantic procedures.⁷

By contrast, authors such as François Lexa,⁸ Robert Ritner,⁹ and David Frankfurter¹⁰ have emphasised continuity in practice from the Pharaonic and into the Graeco-Roman and even Coptic periods, while writers on more recent Egyptian magical practices – Edward Lane in the 19th century,¹¹ and Winifred Blackman,¹² and Gérard Viaud¹³ in the 20th – describe a range of practices which seem to most closely approach the Roman period in their interests and variety. Indeed, it might seem reasonable to assume that many of the underlying determinants of magical practice would have remained relatively constant until quite recently. In particular, we might think here of the social pressures of urban or rural life, and the range of medical complaints which appear to be represented more or less consistently in all periods. Therefore if these two best documented periods – the modern and the late Roman – appear so similar, perhaps we should be suspicious of the idea that their practices are aberrant, compared to the less documented Pharaonic and Coptic periods.

To further explore this question, I have classified the contents of magical material from the Pharaonic to early Islamic periods according to the

⁵ J. F. BORGHOUTS, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*, Leiden 1978, p. vii.

⁶ Geraldine PINCH, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, London 1994, p. 163.

⁷ W. M. BRASHEAR, 'The Greek magical papyri: An introduction and survey. Annotated bibliography (1928–1994)', [in:] W. HAASE (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.18.5, Berlin 1995, pp. 3380–3684.

⁸ F. LEXA, *La magie dans l'Égypte antique*, Paris 1925, I, pp. 147, 166.

⁹ R. K. RITNER, 'Egyptian magical practice under the Roman Empire: the Demotic spells and their religious context', [in:] W. HAASE (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.18.5, Berlin 1995, pp. 3333–3379.

¹⁰ For example in D. FRANKFURTER, 'Ritual expertise in Roman Egypt and the problem of the category "magician"', [in:] P. SCHÄFER & H. G. KIPPENBERG (eds), *Envisioning Magic. A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, Leiden 1997, pp. 115–135.

¹¹ E. W. LANE, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, London 1837.

¹² W. BLACKMAN, *The Fellāhīn of Upper Egypt. Their Religious, Social and Industrial Life with Special Reference to Survivals from Ancient Times*, London 1968 [1927].

¹³ G. VIAUD, *Magie et coutumes populaires chez les Coptes d'Égypte*, Saint-Vincent-sur-Jabron 1978.

purposes of the individual spells and recipes. The first corpora analysed according to this method were the most commonly consulted modern collections of magical texts, Borghouts' *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts* for the Pharaonic period; for the Roman period the two editions of the *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM),¹⁴ the original editions and German translations edited by Karl Preisendanz and Albert Heinrichs,¹⁵ and the later English translations edited by Hans Dieter Betz, which included a broader range of Greek, and several Demotic, texts. For the Coptic period Meyer and Smith's *Ancient Christian Magic* (ACM) was used.¹⁶

Classifications of spells were not based solely on the titles of the spells, since semantic shifts could result in terms generally used for one type of ritual being transferred to rituals for different purposes;¹⁷ instead

¹⁴ I exclude from consideration here the principal Spanish (J. L. CALVO MARTÍNEZ & Dolores SÁNCHEZ ROMERO, *Textos de magia en papiros griegos* [Biblioteca Clásica Gredos] Madrid 1987) and French (M. MARTIN, *Les papyrus grecs magiques*, 2002) translations, since their content closely follows the selection of Preisendanz; the former excludes a few papyri whose contents are unclear (for example PGM XXVa, LX), and the latter consists of selections from the longer formularies (PGM I, II, III, IV, V, VII, XII & XXXVI). An analysis carried out at an earlier stage of this project showed that the make-up of the Spanish collection was essentially identical to that of Preisendanz.

¹⁵ K. PREISENDANZ & A. HENRICHs, *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, Stuttgart 1973–74 [1928–31], 2 volumes.

¹⁶ M. MEYER & R. SMITH, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, San Francisco 1994. A fuller survey would also consider the collections produced by Angelicus Kropp (*Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte*, Brussels 1931) and Sergio Pernigotti (*Testi della magia copta*, Imola 2000).

¹⁷ Two obvious examples are τελετή and ἀγωγή, which the LSJ suggests are usually translatable as 'initiation in the mysteries' and 'love-charm'. The former is used in magical papyri to refer to rituals in general, in particular the consecration of amulets, and in *P. Kell.* I 86 it seems to refer, by extension, to the amulet itself. The latter is used in PGM IV.2006 to refer to a necromantic procedure for acquiring a familiar *daimon*, while in PGM IV.2441 it refers to a slander spell (διαβολή) whose uses include cursing, dream sending and dream revelation. A lack of sensitivity to semantic shift in the technical vocabulary of ancient Mediterranean magic can easily lead to misunderstandings, as in PGM XXXVI.102 where the term ἐμπύρον ('[ritual] using fire (i.e., a burnt-offering)') is translated as 'fire divination' by E. O'Neil in the Betz's PGM edition, despite being an erotic ritual.

the classifications were based on the spell's purpose(s) as described in the body of the text, where such descriptions were given, or inferred from the ritual instructions where possible. Where spells were described as having multiple uses, these were each tallied separately. Where the purpose was not explicit, and could not be securely inferred, it was simply classified as 'unclear.' My classification scheme initially made use of 57 categories of spell-types, or better, spell-purposes, which were then consolidated into 14 headings. Listed in order of prominence, they can be briefly described as follows:

1. **Healing.** Consists of rituals intended to treat pre-existing medical problems and diseases; practices intended to avert future illness are classified as 'protection'. I include contraceptives, abortifacients, and recipes which purport to increase sexual pleasure, stamina and potency in this category.

2. **Divination.** Includes not only revelatory spells, but also sortition oracles determined through chance, and omina – instructions for inferring the answer to questions based on observations of physical phenomena. In this category I also subsume other sub-categories of spell for acquiring knowledge or increased cognitive abilities: rituals intended to improve intelligence or memory, as well as those for gaining knowledge of closed letters or the thoughts of others.

3. **Erotic.** Includes rituals intended to attract a new sexual partner, or ensure the fidelity of an existing one. Despite its clear relationship to the next category, the large quantity of spells of this type, as well as their distinctive features, merited its inclusion as its own category.

4. **Control of others.** Includes a broad range of related rituals, most prominently those intended to restrain the anger of others, separate or reconcile couples, or gain the favour of social superiors.

5. **Amulets and protection.** This category consists of practices intended to avert future harm to people, their goods, animals, and physical spaces, either through the rituals themselves, or the creation of physical objects (amulets) to protect the individual for whom the ritual is performed.

6. **Curse.** Practices intended to cause physical harm to others or their possessions, up to and including death.

7. **Favour.** The category of favour rituals is unusual, in that the genre is readily recognisable, but their goals are usually poorly defined. These practices are typically intended to grant an individual favour from both deities and humans, as well as general good fortune – health, wealth, and happiness.

8. **Thief-catching.** These practices are intended to identify, and occasionally directly punish, criminals, usually specified as thieves.

9. **Exorcism, purification, and counter-magic.** This category covers three related practices. Exorcism rituals free individuals from hostile spirits by whom they are being troubled or possessed; purification rituals appear to be intended to purify objects in an analogous manner. ‘Counter-magic’ describes procedures intended to remove magical effects from people, animals, and physical objects cursed or enchanted by (presumably) other practitioners.

10. **Dream-sending.** Dream-sending rituals are intended to cause a vision to appear to individuals in their sleep; these differ from revelatory dream oracles in that the summoned deity is to take a message from the ritualist to the victim rather than reveal hidden information to the ritualist. Often it is implied that the purpose of these rituals is erotic in nature; that is, the deity who appears to the victim is to instruct them to be favourable to the advances of the ritualist or their client.

In addition to these ten categories, four more were created to cover non-specific practices:

11. **Unclear.** This category covered the large number of rituals for which the purpose was unclear, due usually to either ambiguous content and lack of parallels, or to damage to the papyrus.

12. **Invocations.** This category consisted of spoken invocations whose purpose was not explicit – there was nothing in the title, body of the invocation, or accompanying instructions (where such existed) which would make it clear what purpose the ritual was intended to fulfil.¹⁸

¹⁸ While we might assume that invocations necessarily imply revelational spells where no other purpose is specified, the evidence of Coptic texts in which invocations are followed by lists of multiple, different rituals in which the invocations could be used implies that indi-

13. **Miscellaneous (magical).** This category was used to contain the remaining magical ritual purposes which were scantily attested in the surviving evidence. In practice, these were the 14 categories out of the initial 57 which were least attested, and which could not obviously be grouped into other categories. These included rituals to acquire a good singing voice, to control ships, animals, or fire, gather plants, carry out initiations, procedures for ritual ascent, to find a dwelling place, perform tricks for parties, acquire a *paredros* (familiar spirit), control animals, acquire good business, become invisible, and open doors or loose bonds.

14. **Reference.** This category consisted of works which served as reference guides rather than specifying ritual practices. This includes zodiacal calendars, as well as discussions of plant, animal, and mineral materia.

Two further categories were added to capture non-magical material contained in papyri with otherwise magical content:

15. **Miscellaneous (non-magical).** Included in this heading are a range of literary and documentary text types which occur in magical collections, but are not themselves magical, including letters, oracle questions, horoscopes, and so on.

16. **Alchemical.** In the context of the manuscripts described here, 'alchemical' material is that which provides instructions for procedures relating to metals, fabrics, and precious stones. Primarily these include the production and duplication of metals and stones, as well as instructions for altering their colour, and producing dyes for cloth.

The results of applying this analysis to the four modern collections are shown in the lowest four bars of figure 1 on the following page. We can see that these results broadly confirm the impressions sketched out for the three bodies of practice: the Pharaonic spells are almost entirely concerned with healing (48.7%), and the closely related practices of exorcism (14.2%) and protection (16.2%). The Coptic material, though more

vidual formulae were seen as being suitable for multiple applications; instances of this format include P. Mich. 593 (4th–7th cent. AD), London Hay 10391 (6th–7th cent. AD), *P. Mac. I* 1 (7th–8th cent. AD), P. Leiden F 1964/4, 14 (10th–11th cent. AD), and Cairo 45060 (undated).

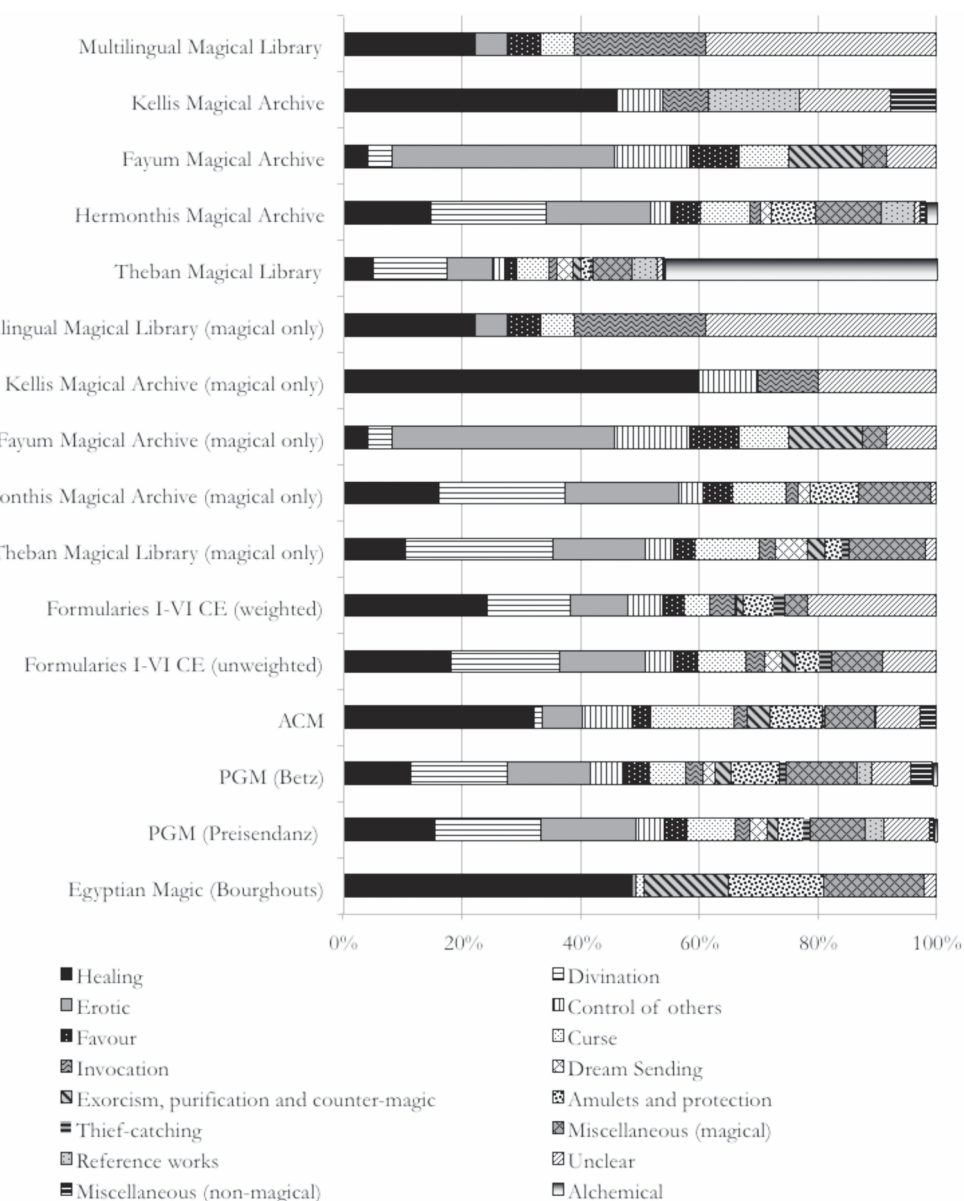


Fig. 1. Proportions of spell types in groups of magical texts

diverse, is likewise dominated by healing practices (32.2%), with curses (14%), erotic (6.6%), protective (8.7%) and control (8.4%) spells well represented, along with a smattering of less common practices. By contrast, the Greek and Demotic collections are even more diverse than the Coptic, with an important place given to divination (16.2%).¹⁹

It should be noted, however, that we can already see that our picture of the Roman period has been somewhat exaggerated. Divinatory (16.2%) and erotic (13.9%) practices, though prominent, are each only slightly more common than healing (11.4%), while curses are significantly less common (6.2%). I would suggest that the impression of the prominence of these and other, more aggressive spell types in the Roman period, is exaggerated by the fact that divination, curse and erotic rituals are often long and complex, in comparison to the numerous but far shorter healing spells. As a result a very different impression is gained when we reduce each ritual to a single point of data. There is no reason to think that longer or more complex rituals were performed more often, and were thus a more significant part of a ritualist's repertoire, than simple ones; indeed, the opposite is likely to be true.

At this point, it is worth noting the nature of these collections. The *PGM* was intended, at its conception, to be a list of all known magical texts in Greek; from its original edition under Preisendanz, to the later edition under Heinrichs, and the still later translation under Betz, it has aimed at, though never quite achieved, a complete coverage of published materials.²⁰ By contrast, the collections of both Borghouts and Meyer are

¹⁹ The numbers given here are for the *PGM* edition of Betz.

²⁰ In his foreword in the second volume of *PGM*, Preisendanz (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* [cit. n. 15], pp. v–vi) noted that the collection as it then stood should contain all of the significant published pagan documents, although they had not striven for completeness of coverage of texts on ostraca, or of the 'Christian' papyri. Similarly, Betz's preface to the second edition of his translation (H. D. BETZ, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago 1992 [1986]) notes that the original edition expanded as widely as was then possible upon the collection of Preisendanz, although by the time of the second edition the idea of adding new texts, while considered, was rejected. The survey I have carried out here strives to include, as far as possible, both 'pagan' and 'Christian' papyri.

intended to be merely illustrative selections.²¹ Thus, we should be somewhat suspicious of the overall picture they provide, since these collections both reflect, and play a role in shaping, our common impressions of these periods.

In order to gain an unbiased picture of the practices of any period, the ideal solution would be to collect and classify the practices recorded in every available artefact of ancient magic, and use this data as a basis for comparison. This would include not only the magical papyri, but also written material on ostraca, metal and wooden tablets, and magical gems. Even this, however, would not be sufficient. Many lapidary texts describe magical gems whose iconography is not unambiguously 'magical',²² and many Christian amulets are brief copies of Biblical texts, whose amuletic function is not necessarily transparent in any particular instance.²³ Still more problematic is the fact that relying upon this evidence would produce a bias in favour of those rituals most likely to produce physical artefacts on durable supports, excluding those which produced artefacts using metals other than lead, and which might therefore have been destroyed by corrosion or by recasting,²⁴ and obscuring practices, like revelatory divination, which might produce no artefacts at all.²⁵ For this reason I restricted the next stage of the survey to the magical handbooks, or formularies, written in Greek, Demotic and Coptic from 1st–6th cent. AD.²⁶ In distinction to

²¹ BORGHOUTS, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts* (cit. n. 5), p. vii; MEYER & SMITH, *Ancient Christian Magic* (cit. n. 16), pp. 6–7.

²² C. BONNER, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, 1950, pp. 6–7.

²³ I thank Magali DE HARO SANCHEZ for making this point clear to me.

²⁴ BONNER, *Studies in Magical Amulets* (cit. n. 21), p. 9.

²⁵ The only two instances of applied artefacts of Roman-era Egyptian divination known to me are numbers 65 and 66 in R. W. DANIEL & F. MALTOMINI, *Supplementum Magicum* [= *Papyrologica Coloniae*] Opladen 1989–1991 (SM), vol. 2. The former is a terracotta bowl sherd apparently used for vessel-divination, the latter is a lead tablet inscribed with a spell for mediumistic divination.

²⁶ These texts include all formularies from the PGM and *Supplementum Magicum* (SM) collections, as well as the early papyri from Meyer/Smith (ACM) not already included in the PGM or SM. Alongside these, the following texts were included: O. Strassburg D 1338, P. BM 10808, *P. Kell.* I 85 a + b, P. Berl. inv. 11734, P. Berl. inv. 21227, P. Berl. inv. 17202, P. Berl. inv. 21149, P. Duk. inv. 729, *P. Kell.* I 82, *P. Kell.* I 88, *P. Kell. Copt.* 35, *P. Mil. Vogl. Copt.* 16,

the applied artefacts – for example, binding tablets and amulets – produced in the course of rituals, formularies contain instructions for carrying out these practices, and can be expected to reflect, to some degree, the range of practices which interested the individual or communities which produced them.

This survey took into account 96 formularies, broken down by language and date as follows:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of Texts</i> ²⁷	<i>Language</i>	<i>Number of Texts</i> ²⁸
Unknown	2	Demotic	10 ²⁹
1st cent. AD	2	Greek	83
1st–2nd cent. AD	1	Coptic	6
2nd cent. AD	9		
2nd–3rd cent. AD	8		
3rd cent. AD	26		
3rd–4th cent. AD	8		
4th cent. AD	19		
4th–5th cent. AD	6		
5th cent. AD	5		
5th–6th cent. AD	6		
6th cent. AD	1	Total number of formularies: 96	
6th–7th cent. AD	1	Total number of magical recipes: 548	

P. Oxy. LVIII 3931, *P. Princ. Dem.* 2, *P. Rain. Cent.* 39, *P. Tebt. Tait* 18, *P. Tebt. Tait* 19, *P. Vindob.* D 6321. Since Coptic magical texts have not been the subject of a definitive collection along the lines of the *PGM* it is likely that they are under-represented here. A checklist of all Coptic magical texts in preparation by Kirsten DZWIZA of Heidelberg University, which I hope will allow me to remedy this omission.

The question of precisely what constitutes a ‘magical text’ is a difficult one which I do not take up here, in part because the assumptions to which I am responding already have a particular type of text in mind. I think that we can understand here a textual genre to which most of the texts of the *PGM* and *SM* belong. I have therefore included texts from outside the collections which seem to display similar genre markers (*voces magicæ*, magical characters, and so on), and excluded those – such as the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (*PGM* XXVI) – which consist entirely of material which does not seem to display these markers.

²⁷ Magical texts are often difficult to date with precision, with editors at times disagreeing by a matter of centuries. Here I rely on the dates provided either by BETZ, *The Greek Magical Papyri* (cit. n. 19), pp. xxiii–xxviii, or their principal publications, corrected where necessary by reference to more recent works. Nonetheless, the difficulties of dating, along

The data for these formularies was not treated in the same way as that for the collections, where each spell was given equal weight. Rather, each manuscript – sheet, roll, codex, ostrakon or tablet – was treated as a single data point, with the make-up of spell types it contained expressed as fractions; these were then summed and converted into percentages of the total to find the overall mixture of spell purposes. This meant that the longest texts, containing over a hundred spells, were given equal weighting with the shortest texts, containing only one or two spells, so that the larger manuscripts would not dominate the evidence; each text is equally an attestation of the practices of the individual(s) who produced it. This process can be summarised as follows:

representation of spell type x in each text = total instances of spell type x in text
 ÷ total instances of all spell types in text

representation of spell type x in overall period (unweighted) = sum of *representation of spell type x in each text* for all texts ÷ total number of texts

The resulting data is shown in figure 1 as ‘Formularies 1st–6th cent. AD (unweighted)’. We can note that this selection is broadly similar to the composition of Betz. At this point, however, we should recall that among the texts gathered here are several magical libraries or archives. The most famous of these is the Theban Magical Library,³⁰ consisting of ten manuscripts dating to 3rd–4th cent. AD, constituting nearly 60% of Betz’s edi-

with the uneven temporal distribution of papyri, has led me to avoid investigating more fine-grain temporal or diachronic trends.

²⁸ Texts containing multiple languages are counted once in each row.

²⁹ P BM 10808, a text written in both Demotic and Traditional Egyptian transliterated into Greek (supplemented by Demotic characters), is included in both the Demotic and Coptic categories.

³⁰ Consisting of PGM I, II, IV, V, P. Holm. + PGM Va, PDM/PDM XII, PGM XIII, PDM/PDM XIV, PDM Suppl., & P. Leid. I 397. I include here only those which are known to have derived from the collection of Jean d’Anastasy, and were assigned a Theban provenance in his catalogues. I hope to publish a full discussion of the contents of this archive at a later date; in the meantime the most useful discussions are those in K. PREISENDANZ, *Papyrusfunde und Papyrusforschung*, Leipzig 1933 pp. 91–95, and BRASHEAR, ‘The Greek magical papyri’ (cit. n. 7), pp. 3402–3404.

tion of the *PGM*,³¹ and 41% of the recipes in this survey.³² But we can also identify with some degree of certainty a further four archives from the period under consideration: the Fayum Magical Archive (4th cent. AD),³³ the Hermonthis Magical Archive (3rd–5th cent. AD),³⁴ the Kellis Magical Archive (4th cent. AD),³⁵ and the Multilingual Magical Workshop (5th–6th cent. AD).³⁶ These texts, among them the largest formularies known from

³¹ The 1996 edition of BETZ, *The Greek Magical Papyri* (cit. n. 19) consists of 327 pages of translation, of which 193, by my count, are devoted to texts from the Theban Magical Library, giving a rough total of 59.02%.

³² I count 223 recipes in the Theban Library (excluding the alchemical codices), out of 548 in the formularies examined for this paper, giving a total of 40.69%.

³³ Consisting of *PGM* XXXVI & XXXVIII, acquired for the University of Oslo by Samson Eitrem in 1920; both have been dated to the 4th cent. AD and probably originate from Theadelphia in the Fayum. Gee (J. GEE, 'Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob', *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7 (1995), p. 37, n. 76) suggests that *PGM* XXXVII & XXXIX may also belong, but the former is quite distinct palaeographically, and the latter was acquired separately by H. I. BELL in 1923. I am very grateful to Federico AURORA for information on the acquisition history of these papyri.

³⁴ Consisting of *PGM* VII, VIII & XIa. All of these papyri were acquired by the British Library from a native Egyptian in 1888, along with three older manuscripts. *PGM* VII is often assumed to be part of the Theban Magical Library due to its similarity in content and length, but there is no clear connection between this text and the more secure Theban Library texts, which all derive from the collection of Jean d'Anastasy. See the discussion in M. ZAGO, *Tebe magica e alchemica: L'idea di biblioteca nell'Egitto romano: la Collezione Anastasi*, Padova 2010, pp. 57–58, 69–70, who suggests, mistakenly in my view, that they all belong to the Theban Library. *PGM* XIa is written on the back of an account concerning a large estate centred on Hermonthis, from which I take as the name of this archive. Another document relating to this same estate (P. Lips. inv. 39 + P. Bonn inv. 147) contains a text of the Psalms on the verso, and may therefore belong to the same archive.

³⁵ I take this archive to consist of *P. Kell.* I 82, 83, 84. 85a+b, 86, 87, 88; *P. Kell. Copt.* 35. All of these texts date to the 4th cent. AD, and were found in House 3 of Area A in Kellis. For a discussion of the Greek texts see Magali DE HARO SANCHEZ, 'Les Papyrus iatromagiques grecs de Kellis', *Lucida Intervalla* 37 (2008), pp. 79–98. *P. Kell.* I 88 was originally treated as an amulet, but has been reinterpreted as a handbook of liturgical prayers, and is treated here as a formulary; see K. A. WÖRZ, R. W. DANIEL, & Cornelia E. RÖMER, 'Das Gebet zur Handauflegung bei Kranken in P. Barc. 155,9 – 156,5 und *P. Kellis* I 88.', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 119 (1997), pp. 128–131.

³⁶ This consists of *PGM* CXXIII & CXXIV, *P. Mil. Vogl. Copt.* 16, as well as numerous fragments in Greek and Aramaic. For discussions and publications of these texts see Edda BRESCIANI, S. PERNIGOTTI, F. MALTOMINI and P. MARRASSINI, 'Nuovi papiri magici in

the period, dominate modern collections, and thus modern conceptions of Roman-era magical practice. Yet, while each of these archives gives us a great deal of information about the practices of the group that produced it, they cannot necessarily be considered representative of the period as a whole. Each collection of recipes – whether that collection has been gathered in a single manuscript, or is spread across several papyri from a single archive – is equally an attestation of a single practitioner, or group of practitioners, and can tell us directly only about the practice of the individual or group who owned it at the time of deposition.³⁷ Thus, in the same way that we need to equally weight the individual manuscripts to prevent longer formularies from dominating the evidence, we must give each archive only as much weight as the documents which do not belong to archives. Each of these non-archived manuscripts is equally the representative of the practitioner(s) which produced it, yet without this adjustment the evidence they give us is overshadowed by the larger archives with their multiple papyri. This process of weighting is then as follows:

representation of spell type x in archive = total instances of spell type x in archive ÷ total instances of all spell types in archive

representation of spell type x in overall period (weighted) = (sum of *representation of spell type x in each text* for all texts not part of an archive + sum of *representation of spell type x in archive* for all archives) ÷ (total number of texts not in archives + total number of archives)

The results of this final adjustment are represented in figure 1 as 'Formularies 1st–6th cent. AD (weighted)'. This somewhat abstract construction can be understood as approximating the attention paid to various practices by literate magical practitioners of the period: were we to possess every text produced in this period, or an ideal 'average' text we should expect the range of practices to approximate those given in this weighted average.

copto, greco e aramaico', *Studi classici e orientali* 29 (1973), pp. 16–130; DANIEL and MALTO-MINI, *Supplementum Magicum* (cit. n. 24), vol. II, pp. 231–268.

³⁷ Compare the comments of Lynn LIDONNICI, 'Compositional patterns in PGM IV (= P. Bibl. Nat. Suppl. gr. no. 574)', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 40 (2003), pp. 143–144, 145–146.

The picture that emerges of the practices of the period reverses the commonplace descriptions summarised at the beginning of this discussion. While the practices present are more diverse than in the selective pictures we have examined of the Pharaonic and Coptic periods, healing emerges as the most common single concern (24.3%), almost as prevalent as in the Coptic collection of Meyer and Smith (32.2%). Next in frequency are divination (13.9%) and erotic spells (9.9%). Control of others and amuletic/protection rituals are both represented in about 5% of spells, while curses, far from being the most common type, represent only 4.4% of material. There are some caveats to include here: the category of spells of unclear purpose constitutes 21.3% of material, while invocations – formulae for spells whose purpose is not stated – constitute a further 4.2%, but there is no obvious reason to think that these would change the distribution dramatically.

If this picture does meaningfully describe Roman-era Egyptian magic, it is worth asking why most authors have understood it so differently. I would argue that there are two main reasons – first, the presence of large modern collections, which bring together material for easy reference but tend to blur the divisions between manuscripts, and allow the longer spells, those concerned with divination and curses, to dominate the pages. The second reason is the existence of several large texts – specifically those of the Theban and Hermonthite archives – whose interests run counter to the general trend of the period.

The make-up of each of these archives is shown at the top of figure 1; since some of these archives contain non-magical material – a copy of the Psalms in the case of the Hermonthis Archive, and considerable alchemical material in the case of the Theban Library – a second version of each, containing only magical content is included above. It is immediately striking that each of these archives is quite different, not only from one other, but from the average picture of the Roman period, and I would argue that these tendencies reflect the particular interests of the individuals which produced them.³⁸ In the case of the Theban Library, we can in fact see

³⁸ Although there is not sufficient space to demonstrate the point here, these same tendencies are generally present in each of the texts within each of the archives.

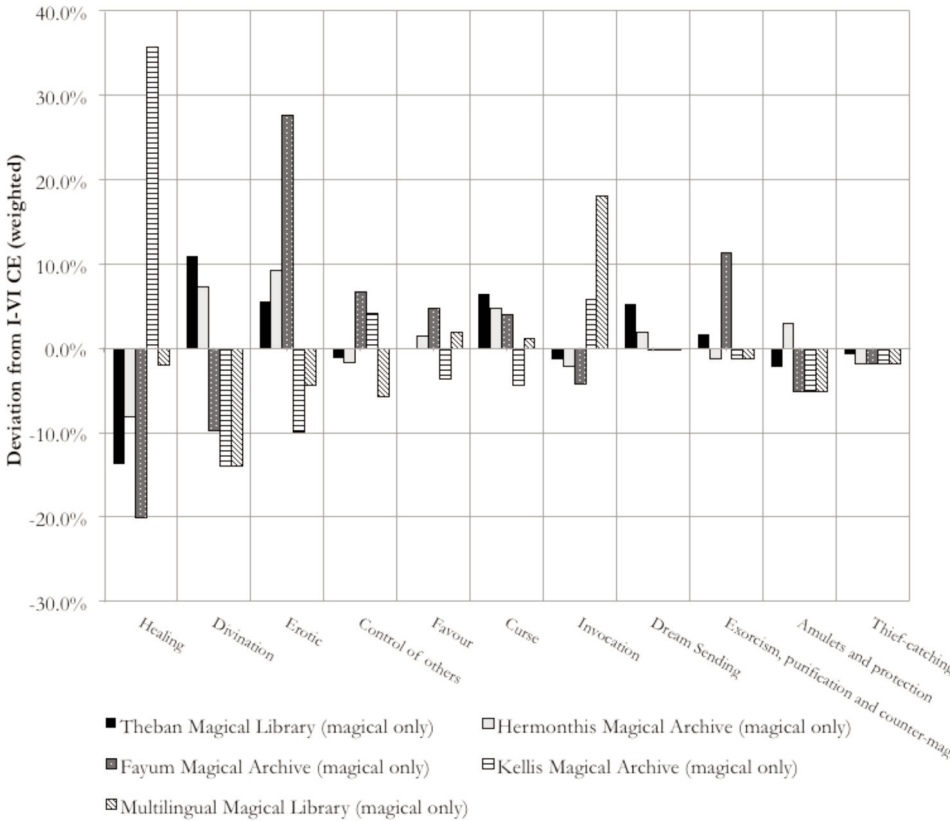


Fig. 2. Deviations of magical archives from the average of the 1st–6th cent. AD

that, by the time of its 4th cent. AD deposition, its predominant text-type was not magical, but alchemical (45.9%).

Figure 2 is intended to demonstrate the particular characteristics of each archive more clearly, by showing the deviations of each in percentage points from the ideal ‘average text’ of the Roman period.³⁹ The The-

³⁹ A graph providing the divergence from the average expressed as percentages might be considered more appropriate here, using the formula *% representation in archive x % representation in weighted average*. In practice this procedure exaggerates the importance of

ban Library and the Hermonthis Archive show similar tendencies – a pronounced interest in divinatory spells, and to a lesser extent in erotic and curse practices, and a correspondingly lower interest in healing.⁴⁰ The Fayum Archive shows a similarly low attestation of healing practices, but a very pronounced interest in erotic magic, while the Kellis Archive focuses on healing, to the almost complete exclusion of other practices. The Multilingual Workshop's interests are less easily characterised, given the high proportion of invocations and spells whose purposes are unclear; nonetheless, it contains a higher proportion of healing rituals than any of the other archives, with the exception of the Kellis material.

The magic of Roman period Egypt certainly displays important differences from older Pharaonic practice, not only in its predominant language – Greek rather than Egyptian – but also in the range of practices we find, and the deities invoked. As we have seen, it has also been characterised as quite different in the types of spells which predominate – aggressive curse and erotic spells, and revelational divination – and this is often linked to important social shifts associated with the Roman period. While this picture is broadly true for the corpora which the modern study of ancient magic has generated, a more thorough analysis of Roman-era texts suggests quite a different picture. By counting individual spells – giving the usually shorter healing spells the same consideration as the generally longer curses and divinatory spells – we find that it is in fact healing which predominates, while curses are rather marginal. By reducing the influence of individual archives, which reflect the interests of their particular collectors, the predominance of healing rituals becomes even more pronounced. This preliminary analysis has therefore suggested that, as in earlier and later periods,⁴¹ it is these healing practices which

the less common practices. The method of subtraction used here makes the divergences more easily visible in a graph format without affecting their direction.

⁴⁰ This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the group I refer to here as the Hermonthis Archive is dominated by *PGM VII*, a text which many have suggested may belong to the Theban Library. Its acquisition history does not provide any clear evidence for a connection, however; see n. 30.

⁴¹ Similar analyses of the Pharaonic and early Islamic periods would provide valuable comparative data, although each of these would pose its own challenges: in the Pharaonic

dominated the magical landscape of Roman Egypt. Particular manuscripts or archives might exhibit a greater proportion of particular practices, presumably reflecting the areas of special expertise or interest of the individual or communities which produced them. The fact that scholarly characterisations of the period are often at odds with this picture seems to be an artefact of the way in which magical texts are encountered – in modern, often selective collections, whose pages are dominated by long, and often uncharacteristic, texts from a few archives.

Korshi Dosoo

Labex RESMED

Postdoctoral Researcher

Paris

FRANCE

e-mail: *korshi.dosoo@paris-sorbonne.fr*

period the shortcomings of the category ‘magic’ seem to me more apparent, with the line between ‘magical’, ‘medical’, and ‘ritual’ texts difficult to draw. On the other hand, a full survey of the early Islamic period should include not only Coptic, but also Arabic and Hebrew material. In all of these cases we lack an aspirationally comprehensive body of texts, analogous to the *PGM*, to serve as the basis of such an analysis.



UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
FACULTY OF LAW AND ADMINISTRATION
CHAIR OF ROMAN AND ANTIQUE LAW



UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
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DEPARTMENT OF PAPYROLOGY



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