

The Graeco-Egyptian Magical Papyri

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One of the expressed indirect goals of the Demotic Dictionary Project is to make avail-

able the raw materials necessary for a thorough study of cultural interaction between Egyptians and Greeks in the Hellenistic period, when

both cultures and languages shared the Nile Valley. The nature and degree of such interaction has long been discussed by scholars familiar with Greek but unable to consult relevant Demotic evidence. One of the most curious products of this selective blindness regarding Hellenistic Egypt has been in the study of the period's magico-religious practices, in which the standard publication of the Greek sources neglects to include Demotic parallels even where they appear on the same papyrus and are written by the same scribe. Greek sections within Demotic spells are lifted from their contexts and presented in isolation—a technique which completely obscures the sociological and religious significance of these bilingual texts.

The importance of these magical spells for insights into Hellenistic religion and early Christianity has been recognized by H. D. Betz of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, whose Corpus Hellenisticum Project on the Greek Magical Papyri has prepared new English translations of all relevant materials including the

Demotic spells as translated by Janet H. Johnson of the Oriental Institute. For the entire corpus of Greek and Egyptian texts I have made extensive annotations on Egyptian elements and influences common to both. The combined study of these documents by Greek and Demotic scholars and historians of religion has been especially fruitful. Perhaps the most striking result of this examination is the recognition of pervasive Egyptian influence. The so-called "Greek" magical texts are frequently Greek only in language, with the gods invoked and the practices described being thoroughly Egyptian with Greek, Mesopotamian, and Hebrew deities and angels in frequent but secondary appearance. Even in spells of seemingly pure Greek character where no Egyptian deity is invoked by name, the construction of the spell may be borrowed from Egyptian prototypes. Thus in a 'slander-spell' to Selene, the moon goddess, a series of blasphemous statements are uttered and then attributed to another in an attempt to bring forth the wrath of the gods. This technique ("It is

not I who said it; it is X who said it.") may be traced to the Pyramid Texts in Egypt, almost three millennia before this fourth century spell. The presentation and analysis of

these spells in their complete context allows for the first time a careful investigation of this facet of religious continuity and confrontation in Hellenistic Egypt.