MAGIC IN THE INTERNET:
INVESTIGATION BY GENRE IN TRISMEGISTOS

Franziska NAETHER

(Universität zu Köln / Universität Leipzig)

Outline of the Project

Since February 2008, *TM-Magic*, a database collecting religious, ritual, magical and divinatory texts is accessible on-line. This is the first thematic search engine within Trismegistos, an interdisciplinary portal of papyrological and epigraphical resources dealing with Egypt and the Nile valley between roughly 800 BC and AD 800[1]. The purpose of this contribution is to explain the concept of the project and to present guidelines on how to use this tool[2].

With its aim to present metadata of sources of a somewhat "dubious" nature and difficult contextualization in ancient societies, *TM-Magic* tries to fill a gap between other partner projects gathering texts according to their language or genre (documentary, literary or funerary). The *Leuven Database of Ancient Books* (LDAB, http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab) for instance lists literary texts of all languages, while the database of *Demotic and Abnormal Hieratic Texts* (DAHT, http://www.trismegistos.org/daht) is devoted to all texts in these scripts, and the *Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten* (HGV, http://www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~gv0/gvz.html, accessible via Trismegistos) focuses on Greek documentary material.

Religious, ritual, divinatory and magical sources, however, could not be assigned to just one of these categories exclusively. Many of these texts share features of documentary and literary material and are composed in more than one language, e.g. the great magical handbook of the Papyrus of London and Leiden[3] with spells mainly in Greek and Demotic, but including passages and glosses in Old Coptic and Hieratic.

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[1] This database is the outcome of the project "Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in Graeco-Roman Egypt" sponsored by a Sofia-Kovalevskaja-Award from the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation granted to the project coordinator Mark Depauw (University of Cologne / Catholic University Leuven, 2005-2008). The present author was collaborator in Cologne and Leipzig. It goes without saying that this paper presents work in progress. All quoted URLs of on-line resources have been checked to be accessible on August 31, 2008.

[2] More thorough quantitative research and interpretation of special search parameters will be examined by myself in a paper of the collective volume of the Trismegistos project in preparation under auspices of Mark Depauw.

[3] Trismegistos identification number (henceforth abbreviated "TM") 55955.

This even does not take the magical words, the *voces magicae*, in account, which are sometimes said to be written in "Nubian" in order to "prove" the effectiveness of a spell by referring to the language of some powerful magicians from the South.

A separation into different languages therefore might be misleading in a genre-based investigation. Apart from bilingual or multilingual documents, there are also text types such as the "ticket oracles" (oracle questions) in Hieratic, Demotic, Greek and Coptic. These concern identical rituals and ought to be researched in their multilingual social context, just like sources from bilingual archives.

To sum up, language or literary / documentary / funerary features are not distinctive criteria for *TM-Magic*, but this database as genre-based collection of material fills up a long-awaited *desideratum*.

Before the issue of documentary and literary features of the texts in *TM-Magic* is addressed, a short note should be made on the relationship between "religion" and "magic" as it is understood here.

"Religion" versus "Magic"?

TM-Magic includes texts that have been assigned to the somewhat ill-defined areas of "religion", "magic" and "divination" (or its Greek counterpart "mantike"). Many texts are connected to rituals inside and outside the temple.

At this point, no exclusive definition of one of these terms should be expected. Since centuries, historians of religions, anthropologists, ethnologists and scholars with other scientific backgrounds have tried to find answers to this problem. In many cases, their approaches reflected more on their (Western, European, Christian etc.) own cultural contexts or (pre)supposed models of "civilization" than examining ancient phenomena in their respective realms. Especially a separation of "magic" and "religion" does not prove to be useful because we gain only little information whether this distinction was actually perceived while performing the rites. Additionally, a further division of "white magic" (positive magic, μαγεία) and "black magic" ("evil magic", γοητεία) does not help, nor does imagining "magic" as "practical religion" or the "dark side" of "religion". This leaves us with another issue: defining "religion" – which seems a task as arduous as solving the mystery of the nature of "magic". A term that should be avoided in this discussion, too, is "superstition" (as the Latin *terminus technicus* "superstitio") because it has too many negative connotations from the beginning[4].

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[4] I refrain from naming different schools, artificial models or works of individual scholars through the ages here. For a brief history of these traditions, see W. BURKERT, A. MAGGIANI, J.M. ROESSLI *et al*., *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum* (ThesCRA), Vol. 5 (Los Angeles, 2005), s.v. Divination/Mantik gr., etr., rom., 1-104, and the excellent contribution by R.L. FOWLER on this matter in ThesCRA, Vol. 3 (Los Angeles, 2005), s.v. magic, esp. 283-301. On p. 285-6, he states convincingly concerning the relationship of "magic" and "religion": "The intellectualist refusal to accept the possibility that magic and religion

The Egyptian concept of magic, "Heka" (ḥḳ3), is a much more complex and overall phenomenon touching many more aspects of political ideology and daily life than just individual inquiries to a divinity or actions of a mantic specialist. Besides, a separation of ritual actions executed inside or outside a temple does not automatically qualify these as (institutionally) "religious" or (free-lance) "magical"[5]. The ticket oracles thus clearly have a juridical aspect if people asked the divinities to identify thieves and then went on to present the returned oracle papyrus (the "ticket") as answer in front of local authorities.

Parallel to modern traditions and studies, no "definitions" of "religion" or "magic" in antiquity can be discerned. We know e.g. of opinions of individuals such as Cicero in his work *De divinatione* or Plato in *Phaedrus* serving a certain intention of the author, or law texts such as the *Codex Theodosianus* unsystematically criminalizing special practices for a specific period – only to be changed with the accession of a new emperor[6]. Their terminology cannot be borrowed.

The dichotomy between religion and magic is thus in general non-productive. As a way out of the dilemma, social sciences such as sociology or sociolinguistics have put a much more convenient methodology and terminology at our disposal. The investigation by genre (*Gattungsanalyse*[7]), the form of communication (e.g. the language used), the cultural context of the persons involved (mantic professionals, petitioners), local and temporal settings, use of artefacts and the direction of the ritual action are just a few aspects that need to be taken into account to determine what sort or type of text is dealt with. This information can be derived from text-internal or -external features. An analysis of the tradition of a genre, and its reception and development might facilitate our understanding, as may awareness of possible bias from concentration on well-known find-spots and specific historical periods.

could be rooted in reality might recommend itself to many people in our secular age, but it contradicts the lived religious experience of millions of others. The fear of greater, unknown power will always be with us; indeed, many enlightened moderns would hesitate long before defying a magician to do his worst. Magic is and always has been dangerous precisely because it might actually work: if it were all nonsense there would be no debate. By definition, this is a question to which there is no answer".

[5] For more information, see R.K. RITNER, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 54 (Chicago, 1993).

[6] An introduction on imperial campaigns provides M.T. FÖGEN, *Die Enteignung der Wahrsager. Studien zum kaiserlichen Wissensmonopol in der Spätantike* (Frankfurt/Main, 1993) and the additional theses by A. LOTZ, *Der Magiekonflikt in der Spätantike*, Habelts Dissertationsdrucke, Reihe Alte Geschichte 48 (Bonn, 2005).

[7] See T. LUCKMANN, 'Grundformen der gesellschaftlichen Vermittlung des Wissens: kommunikative Gattungen', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 27 (1986) = F. NEIDHARDT, M.R. LEPSIUS, J. WEISS (eds.), *Festschrift René König zum 80. Geburtstag gewidmet* (Opladen, 1986), 191-211. For the use of these models in the studies of ancient religions, see J. RÜPKE, 'Antike Religionen als Kommunikationssysteme', in: K. BRODERSEN (ed.), *Gebet und Fluch, Zeichen und Traum: Aspekte religiöser Kommunikation in der Antike* (Münster, 2001), 13-30.

Because of all these obstacles, one could suggest to refrain from any methodology at all and in particular to avoid the term "magic" completely and treat single genres by help of a working definition only. But research of texts embedded in ancient societies needs classification, be it arbitrary or flexible. This is what *TM-Magic* is based on. After all, users should know what to look for in the search field "type".

Finally, we mainly deal with small ancient communities where apart from a few full-time priests, nearly everyone involved in temple businesses was recruited from the villagers. Because of these flat hierarchies, information and gossip made its way around the inhabitants easily. Therefore, it seems highly speculative to distinguish different realms of practices, inside and outside the temple, which may point to different appreciations of the applied ritual methods.

The Nature of "Religion" and "Magic": literary or documentary?[8]

As mentioned above, it is a rather contentious issue whether a religious, ritual, magical or divinatory text can be designated as "literary" or "documentary". In editions, they are sometimes classified as "religious", "ritual", "magical", "para-", "semi-" or "sub-literary". By their functions these texts cannot be called narrative, poetic or dramatic compositions (although they can bear elements of all three), nor will they be read aloud or staged as literary pieces could be[9]. On the other hand texts of this sort have not been archived or treated like "classical" documentary evidence such as contracts or juridical *acta*. A common *modus operandi* is to separate documents from literature by contrasting specific features. Since literature cannot be limited to "Belles Lettres" such as narratives, novels or poems, more features have to be taken into consideration.

Another dimension of parting literary from documentary sources is the distinction of their grade of reception. Basically, the possibility of a text carrying a wider audience such as a group of inhabitants of a town or a priestly community qualifies it as literature, whereas a single individual or parties of a contract as recipients of a text confirms it most likely to be of documentary nature. In this way, all texts reflecting rituals and mysteries to be staged and performed are literature. Handbooks, liturgies and scientific treatises (iatromancy, iatroastrology, alchemy etc.) belong here as well.

This classification reflects the principles Willy Clarysse laid out for the *Leuven Database of Ancient Books* which is devoted to the transmission of works[10]. This has

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[8] The funerary or mortuary aspect will be left out here.

[9] Though a performative component is incorporated in e.g. magical spells, just the audience being of divine nature. I would only like to refer to the elaborated hymns to gods that occur in magical texts.

[10] See http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/about.php. According to this definition, school texts are literature, too, because students copied exercises which have been practiced by whole classes. A more problematic case is the one of letters that due to the grade of literacy of the population have been read out aloud as well, but are purely documentary of nature.

been adopted for *TM-Magic* as well. The following criteria are important as well for the definition of texts as literary or not (always illustrated by an example from the database):

– **Use** (and reuse; extensive copying, interpolation from pagan to Christian religions, manuscript tradition in Medieval Ages as in the lot oracle Sortes Astrampsychi[11])
– **Storage** (specific archaeological context, e.g. texts found in a temple precinct or a priestly tomb such as the "Theban Magical Library"[12])
– **Formulaic parts** (such as the NN-formulae in spells of magical handbooks to fill in the names of certain persons[13])
– **Quotations of literary texts** (Bible, Quran, Homer e.g. in amulets[14])

And further

– **Specific traditions of motifs** (rhetorical and stylistic devices; archaism in vocabulary and grammar)
– **Layout** (fine hands, wide margins, application of "ancient" scripture etc.)
– Knowledge about **title** and "**author**" (real or pseudepigraphical[15])

Examples of documentary texts being drawn up for individual purposes only are e.g. temple oaths, ticket oracles, amulets without quotations, curses, and spells with distinguished names.

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[11] See e.g. TM 59322 for a large Roman Papyrus codex in Greek of this oracle (edited by R.A. STEWART, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Vol. 67 [London, 2001], number 4581).

[12] Or "Bibliothek der Zauberpapyri von Theben", Trismegistos Archives Database number 363. The compilation has been treated by K. PREISENDANZ, *Papyrusfunde und Papyrusforschung* (Leipzig, 1933), 91-5; W.J. TAIT, 'Theban Magic', in: S.P. VLEEMING (ed.), *Hundred-gated Thebes*, *Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban Area during the Graeco-Roman Period*, Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 27 (Leiden, 1995), 169-82; J. DIELEMAN, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual (100-300 CE)*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 153 (Leiden / Boston, 2005), 11-23; E. BRESCIANI, 'I grandi testi magici demotici', in: A. ROCCATI, A. SILIOTTI (eds.), *La magia in Egitto al tempi dei faraoni* (Modena, 1987), 313-29. Due to its archaeological setting inside a priestly tomb, the former use of the papyri is probably, but by no means restricted to a use inside the *temenos*.

[13] See TM 108914 for a Hieratic-Demotic Roman priestly handbook with spells of different sorts and instructions to prepare amulets for individuals from the Vienna Collection (edited by N. FLESSA, *"(Gott) schütze das Fleisch des Pharao": Untersuchungen zum magischen Handbuch pWien AEG 8426*, Corpus Papyrorum Raineri 27 (München / Leipzig, 2006)).

[14] See TM 62207 for a Greek-Coptic amulet from the 7th-8th century AD in Chicago and London citing Psalm 30, 2-8 (re-edited by C. RÖMER, M. HASITZKA, 'Psalm 30,2-8 in Greek and Coptic. Jointed ostraca in London and Chicago', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 53 (2007), 201-3).

[15] Such as TM 64078 with Pseudo-Pythagoras as the "author" of a philosophical treatise in form of a letter from the 3rd century AD (edited by A. BÜLOW-JACOBSEN, *Papyri Graecae Haunienses* 2 (Bonn, 1981), number 13).

With this short excursus, I hope to have demonstrated again that religious, ritual, magical and divinatory texts cannot be assigned to just one category (literature or documents).

How to find Magic in the Internet?

Under its URL http://www.trismegistos.org/magic, a corpus of currently ca. 3500 texts can be accessed[16].

As usual in Trismegistos, metadata of published sources are presented on-line without transliterations, transcriptions, translations or images. For those, the interested scholar should consult the individual collection databases (if available[17]) or the actual publication(s). Metadata include basic information such as the most important publications including the *editio princeps*[18], inventory numbers in collections worldwide, provenance (location of composition, find-spot; for letters: destination), date, material, relation of recto and verso, and as a new feature the type and genre to characterize the text sort. More search parameters will be available in the future. All records of texts are embedded in the relational database structure of Trismegistos, with partner databases providing information about collections of documents worldwide, ancient archives, people named in the texts, places of provenance, and bibliography[19].

The following steps shall provide a short introduction to the search-fields of *TM-Magic*.

1. Publication and Editor

The main identification of a text is effected by referring to where it has been published. For papyri and ostraca, the above mentioned *Checklist of Editions* offers the main bibliographical tool. Except for a few changes, this system was incorporated into Trismegistos. It can be accessed easily with the help of the lookup-tool implemented on the search page: While typing in an abbreviation, the list reduces itself to what might be intended by the user and shows different citations.

One can also look for names of the authors of the various editions.

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[16] Just for comparison: there are currently [accessed August 31, 2008] more than 107.000 published texts in Trismegistos. One caveat must be given concerning these statistics: it remains to be seen whether less than 3,5% (what *TM-Magic* stands for) of the whole edited material will be representative enough for ancient writing traditions or whether there is much interference of scholarly processes and idiosyncratic circumstances of excavation. After all, one huge papyrus such as the magical handbook of London and Leiden does only count as a single text, as does a small amulet with a drawn Scorpion.

[17] It is planned to establish links from Trismegistos to other on-line accessible material in the future.

[18] E.g. after the Checklist of editions; see J.F. OATES, R.S. BAGNALL, S.J. CLACKSON, A. O'BRIEN, J.D. SOSIN, T.G. WILFONG and K.A. WORP, *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets,* http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html [accessed August 31, 2008].

[19] In case of the demotistic literature, the information concerning books is taken from the 'Demotistische Literaturübersicht' appearing in the journal *Enchoria*.

2. Inventory

Within this field, the user may enter a query concerning collections worldwide or specific inventory numbers. Through a link with the "Collections" database, more facts and practical information on specific collections can be obtained.

Some pieces do not bear an inventory number yet. They can only be identified by numbers assigned during the excavation or after registration. These numbers are searchable as well.

3. Provenance

At the top of the page, the search can be limited to Egypt, to regions outside Egypt or to Egypt and abroad. As default setting, the search is refrained to Egypt. In *TM-Magic*, the vast majority of 96% of the texts originates from there.

Under "Provenance", the user is enabled to look for a certain town or village – either by its ancient or modern name: many variant spellings and writings are listed. Alternatively, one can search for entire regions in the field "Nome / Region" by means of a lookup-tool which lists all nomes.

4. Type

Many different genres are represented in *TM-Magic*: of course the Greek, Demotic and Coptic magical papyri (*Papyri Graecae et Demoticae et Copticae Magicae*) with their manifold spells, charms and recipes, but the user can also explore oracles of all kinds, prophecies, letters to gods, to the dead, or for the afterlife, as well as temple oaths, dream texts, prayers, pleas, incantations, amulets, horoscopes and hemerologies, texts concerning astrology, astronomy, alchemy, or medicine – just to name a few. Due to organizational issues of Trismegistos, not all "religious" and "ritual" texts have found their way into *TM-Magic*. For the Book of the Dead papyri the *Database of Hieroglyphic and Hieratic Papyri* (HHP, http://www.trismegistos.org/hhp) should be consulted; religious votive inscriptions (proskynemata) will be found in the general Trismegistos website as well as in an upcoming database on epigraphic material. Not implemented here either are liturgical texts (doxologies, trishagioi, litanies), the big ritual handbooks (Book of the Fayum, Book of the Temple, Book of Thoth, Documents of Breathing, The Daily Temple Ritual, The Apis Embalming Ritual), mummy labels, and prostagmata as well as secondary documents concerning mysteries, cult guilds, and temple management. However, access to these texts in the general Trismegistos website is provided.

Searchable through the general Trismegistos database are the following parameters (follow the button named "Magic" in the result page afterwards):

5. Date

Some texts entered into *TM-Magic* exceed the general chronological boundaries of Trismegistos, some even by far, up to the medieval period. This is due to major

dating problems for religious, ritual, magical and divinatory material, which by nature is often undated. Therefore, our basic criterion remains palaeography.

Compared with Greek papyrology, the palaeographical research in the field of Coptic and Arabic studies is still at an early stage. As a result many texts can only be assigned to a wider range of centuries. Some texts prove to be simply "undatable": containing only magical words, figures and drawings, they can only be allotted to a long period of time.

It is possible to search for date ranges as well as individual years. Only in rare cases, a date is given or precise dating becomes possible with the help of another text on the document. Some genres, however, are precisely dated, e.g. temple oaths which were sworn before a divinity and have a clear juristic component.

Another aspect of time in the genres of *TM-Magic* is the day indication in hemerologies or texts recording the conditions when certain ritual practices such as the casting of love spells need to take place. They are not recorded in the database.

6. Material

As expected, papyrus is the material used for not less than 50% of the texts, a figure which is parallel to that for Trismegistos as a whole. The proportion of ostraca on potsherds, parchment, paper and wood is higher than average. Stone as writing grounds played only a minor role within our texts.

7. Language / Script

As put above, the main languages are Greek, Demotic, Coptic, Hieratic, Latin and Arabic. For bilingual texts, add i.e. "Greek" and "Demotic" into the relevant search field. The majority of the material in *TM-Magic* is Greek, which reflects the standard evidence from written sources from Egypt between 800 BC and 800 AD. In the future, this might change as more editions of Demotic, Coptic or Arabic are undertaken. Exceptional cases form rare languages such as Meroitic, Carian or Phoenician and instances when language and scripture are different, e.g. Aramaic in Demotic alphabetic letters.

Of course, the system allows searches that combine several parameters. For the first time, it is now possible to ask questions like "How many published Hieratic papyri from the Theban area date between 800 and 400 BC?" or "How many Greek-Demotic texts originate from Tebtynis under Roman rule?".

Apart from the seven presented searchable parameters, other information is displayed in *TM-Magic*. The database contains data on

– Usage of front and backside (i.e. the recto and verso of papyri or the hair and flesh side of parchments)
– Reuse and Palimpsests

– Bookform (sheet, roll, codex, fragment)
– Condition (complete, incomplete, small fragment)
– Religion (e.g. Egyptian, Christian, Jewish, Gnostic, Muslim)
– Information on formal structures (columns, pagination etc.).

For literary texts, the *Leuven Database of Ancient Books* provides even more data. But for the actual text, the individual collection (and their respective homepages, if available) and the editions are indispensable. For purposes of bibliography, statistics and analysis of text sorts, Trismegistos provides a helpful portal to start scholarly research.

Outlook

To conclude, I would like to remind the reader again this report focuses on work in progress. In the future, more search fields will become available and more partner projects will emerge. In addition, there are always corrections going to be entered within the development of scholarly research. Everyone is invited to help improving this tool by sending in commentaries and suggestions.

German abstract

Seit Ende 2006 ist die interdisziplinäre Suchplattform „*Trismegistos*" (Universität zu Köln / Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) unter http://www.trismegistos.org freigeschaltet, die alle Texte aus Ägypten zwischen der frühen 25. Dynastie und dem Verschwinden des Koptischen als Amtssprache im zweiten nachchristlichen Jahrtausend umfasst. Mit diesem Beitrag soll das neueste Teilprojekt, *TM-Magic*, vorgestellt werden – eine Zusammenstellung von Metadaten von religiösen, rituellen, magischen und divinatorischen Texten (http://www.trismegistos.org/magic). Dies beinhaltet u.a. Liturgien, Gebete, Orakel oder Amulette.