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Of signs, words, and phrases: Some remarks on the use of Egyptian writing systems in the so-called Papyri Demoticae Magicae

Although often noted by scholars working on magical-medical texts of the late Roman period from Egypt, the juxtaposition of demotic and hieratic script in the so-called Papyri Demoticae Magicae has received little attention. The lecture will give an overview of the use of hieratic and demotic script in the Demotic magical papyri in order to identify trends for the mixing practise of the two Egyptian writing systems in one single text. The analysis is based on over 100 individual texts preserved on P. Louvre E 3229, P. BM 10070 + I 383, and P. BM EA 10588. All three papyri are generally dated to the late second or early third century CE. To approach the problem of script-switching in the Papyri Demoticae Magicae, the focus of this lecture will be on the analysis of the individual texts. It also addresses the question of manuscript-specific observations concerning the use of demotic and hieratic script. In addition to the historic linguistic analysis of the different texts, the individual textual functional units (i.e. title, instructions for use, incantation, and, if present, further remarks within the texts) are examined. Special attention will be given to hybrid writings (e.g. a demotic word with a hieratic classifier), individual words that are almost exclusively written in hieratic in the texts of the Papyri Demoticae Magicae and some stereotypical phrases that appear several times in the texts.