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## MAGICAL TEXTS IN TRISMEGISTOS

AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS ON ORACLES IN ROMAN EGYPT – OR: WHAT IMPACT HAD CHRISTIANITY ON PAGAN EGYPTIAN DIVINATION?<sup>1</sup>

From September 2008

**German Abstract:** Ammianus Marcellinus Bemerkungen über Orakelpraktiken im Bes-Tempel von Abydos werden als Ausgang für diese Studie gewählt. In RG 19, 12, 3-16 erfahren wir, dass das nicht beschiedene Exemplar eines Ticket-Orakels im Tempelarchiv verblieb, um anschließend auf mögliche kaiser- und „staats“-feindliche Inhalte kontrolliert zu werden. Darunter fällt u.a. die seit 11. n. Chr. verbotene Frage nach dem Todeszeitpunkt des Kaisers. Diese Aussage soll anhand der vorhandenen Orakelfragen aus Ägypten überprüft und das in der Datenbank vorhandene Quellenmaterial zu Religion, Ritualtexten, Magie und Divination / Mantik vorgestellt werden. Besondere Berücksichtigung erfährt hierbei die Frage, ob genuin pagane Rituale in frühchristlicher Zeit statistisch gesehen eine Wandlung erfahren.

## 1. AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS AND THE “EVIL” TICKETS

„3 *Materiam autem in infinitum quaestionibus extendendis dedit occasio vilis et parva. Oppidum est Abydum in Thebaidis partis situm extremo. Hic Besae dei localiter appellati, oraculum quondam futura pandebat, priscis circumiacentium regionum caerimoniis solitum coli.* 4 *Et quoniam quidam praesentes, pars per alios desideriorum indice missa scriptura, supplicationibus expresse conceptis, consulta numinum scitabantur, chartulae sive membranae, continentes, quae petebantur, post data quoque responsa interdum remanebant in fano.* 5 *Ex his aliqua ad imperatorem maligne sunt missa, qui (ut erat angusti pectoris)*

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my sincere thanks to M. DEPAUW, W. CLARYSSE and all the others from the team for their valuable critics on an earlier version of this paper. All quotations of editions can be found in John F. OATES, Roger S. BAGNALL, Sarah J. CLACKSON, Alexandra A. O'BRIEN, Joshua D. SOSIN, Terry G. WILFONG, and Klaas A. Worp, *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>, January, 2007. Abbreviations of ancient historiographers can be found in the New Pauli / Der Neue Pauly (DNP).

*obsurdescens in aliis etiam nimium seriis, in hoc titulo ima (quod aiunt) auricula mollior, et suspicax et minutus, acri felle concaluit.”*

- “**3** Moreover, a slight and trivial occasion gave opportunity to extend his inquisitions indefinitely. There is a town called Abydum, situated in the remotest part of the Thebaïs; here the oracle of a god called in that place Besa in days of old revealed the future and was wont to be honoured in the ancient ceremonials of the adjacent regions. **4** And since some in person, a part through others, by sending a written list of their desires, inquired the will of the deities after definitely stating their request, the papers or parchments containing their petitions sometimes remained in the shrine even after the replies had been given. **5** Some of these were with malicious intent sent to the emperor [Constantius II, F. N.] who (being narrow-minded), although deaf to other very serious matters, on this point was softer than an earlobe, as the proverb has it; and being suspicious and petty, he grew furiously angry.”<sup>2</sup>

The Latin historiographer Ammianus Marcellinus wrote in his *Res Gestae* 19, 12, 3-6 (or alternatively called *History of the Roman Empire*) that the content of all oracle questions has been archived in the temple *scriptorium* and was controlled in order to detect harassing circumstances like question after the fate, health or even the death day of the emperor. This question was forbidden by an imperial decree from 11 AD – still in the reign of Augustus who conquered Egypt in 30 BC.<sup>3</sup> Could this possibly mean that the emperor initiated a major

<sup>2</sup> Amm. Marc. 19, 12, 3-6 (edition and translation by J. C. ROLFE, The Loeb Classical Library Vol. I). Mentions of this passage can be found in FRANKFURTER (1998), 169-74 and (2005), 240-4; KÁKOSY (1995), 2981-2; DUNAND (1997), 75-6; SANTOS YANGUAS (1979), 43-4; TASSI (1967), 176-9; RIPAT (2006), 322-3. For the text cf. also Th. HOPFNER: *Fontes historiae religionis Aegyptiacae* pars 4, Bonn 1924, 550-1; VIANIMO (2001) and his commentary p. 154-5; DE JONGE (1982), 242-9 (who draws false conclusions about the oracular technique on p. 244 by saying no one dreamt of taking away answers that were stored in the temple archives because they were belongings of the shrine of the deity. The person who sent Constantius II those little papyri must have done it for money and/or “in order to dispose of private enemies”). I consider this as highly speculative and tend to explain this by the control of the temple by Roman authorities. For investigations of this matter (*crimen maiestas*) from Constantius side and further commentary cf. MATTHEWS (1989), 217-8.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PHARR (1932), 280. This must be seen in the light of some Roman governors who wrote their own eulogies beforehand. Augustus issued his own horoscope as a decree and forbade all similar practices: “... the seers were forbidden to prophesy to any person alone or to prophesy regarding death even if others should be present.” (τοῖς μάντεσιν ἀπηγορεύθη μήτε κατὰ μόνας τιλὶ μήτε περὶ θανάτου, μηδ’ ἂν ἄλλοι συμπαρῶσιν οἱ, χρᾶν; Cass. Dio 56, 25, 5-7). The motives of Tiberius to ban private *haruspices* without witnesses were explained by his biographer Suetonius differently: “Daß er bei einem solchen Leben nicht nur verhaßt und verabscheut, sondern auch beständig in Angst schwebend und allen Schmähungen ausgesetzt war, dafür sind zahlreiche Beweise vorhanden.” (Suet. Tib. 63, 1; cf. also Tac. ann. 1, 72; Iust. apol. 1, 44; Iust. Paul. sent. 5, 21, 3, Cass. Dio 57, 15, 8). Tiberius even tried to close the popular oracle temple of Fortuna in Praeneste, but drew back only because he was fearful of the power of the lots. He shipped them in a sealed box to Rome and must have hidden them so well that they could only be brought back on his own command. As it has been shown clearly in the commentary by VOGT, Suetonius follows antique rhetoric techniques and devices to characterise “good emperors” and “evil tyrants” that must be punished by psychological terrors: fear, uncertainty, dilatoriness, inability to make decisions (cf. VOGT (1975), 285-91; ROSEN (1982), 118). Other

campaign in order to weaken the local (religious) Egyptian influences? It is important to note that the Demotic language experienced a conspicuous regression in several documentary and literary genres beginning from the Roman period till its last attestation in a dated visitor's inscription in Philae 452 AD.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1. A SECRET DIVINATORY TECHNIQUE?

The divinatory method applied here is only one of many and attested especially in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt – the so-called “ticket oracles”. They contain a question written in a positive and a negative version, each on a slip of papyrus. The inquiries comprise nearly all fields of human concerns like marriage, health, property, career, business transactions etc. After formulating and executing of the writing (knowingly in the temple *scriptorium* for the illiterate part of the population), the question was submitted in her two versions to the statue of the divinity (divinities) by the oracle priest(s) in the sanctuary of the temple.<sup>5</sup> This ritual was not open for public.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, we have no knowledge about duration and detailed sequences of these priestly actions.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the slip with the question chosen by the god(s) has been handed back to the petitioner; the remaining ticket went into the clerical archives for storage. These collections of unapproved decisions form the majority of the evidence of ticket oracles preserved until today.

Ammianus Marcellinus' statement about the control of these questions by a possible secret-service-like authority delivers a first-rate explanation of this matter. Nevertheless, it must be taken into consideration that individual documents or official *acta* like registers have been

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emperors before Constantine II who issued prominent campaigns against “magic” and “divination” were Domitian, Vitellius and Caracalla.

<sup>4</sup> For documentary texts in Roman times, cf. the contribution of Aikaterini GEORGILA in this Volume.

<sup>5</sup> FRANKFURTER (1998), 146 in fact reasons in his chapter about the “*rise of oracles*” in Graeco-Roman Egypt that the priests invented in the *scriptorium* new forms of oracles in order to spread out the Greek language. Be that as it may, this cannot count for the ticket oracle. He brings on the same argument as an explanation for the prompt Christianisation in Egypt.

<sup>6</sup> F. DUNAND (1997), 83 also mentions Ammianus' narration in connection to the ticket oracles: „... *on peut bien penser que les questions posées à Bès étaient identiques à celles que, à la même époque, on posait à Sarapis ou à Socnopaios...*“. SCHUBART (1931), 114 noted *mutatis mutandis* the similarity to the procedure in Abydos, too. Forerunners on papyrus can be found in the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty in el-Hiba and on ostrakon from the processional oracle vastly attested in the worker's town Deir el-Medina in the New Kingdom. An overview of these sources is compiled in my upcoming article Ticket-Orakel und Sortes Astrampsychi – Divinationsmethoden im griechisch-römischen Ägypten: ein Vorbericht – in: CHAUVEAU, M.; DEVAUCHELLE, D.; WIDMER, G. (edd.): Actes du IX<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des Études Démotiques. IFAO, Le Caire.

<sup>7</sup> Hints might be included in the oracle given to Alexander the Great in the temple of Zeus-Ammon in the Siwa Oasis. Descriptions could be found i.e. in Plut. Alex. 27; cf. the studies of KUHLMANN (1988), 141-59 and HEERMA VAN VOSS (1997) among many others.

stored for decades before they were destroyed or reused. Why not the oracle questions, too?<sup>8</sup> To my knowledge, there is no other contemporary instance of the whereabouts of the ruled-out questions known. Even though the ticket with the failed answer found its way in the archives, the content of the question was preserved, anyway.

In the ongoing plot, a secretary named Paulus submitted by Constantius from Rome denounced several individuals of having used the Bes-oracle to inquire about the emperor's death.<sup>9</sup> He reported to Rome and the people he named were sentenced to capital punishment (Amm. Marc. 19, 12, 6-12). Location of the deaths was a theatre in Skythopolis in Palestine, halfway between Antiochia and Alexandria. FUNKE (1967), 152 reasons those accusations could have been invented by minor officials flattering Constantius II. with their wilful assistance or were retrieved by special agents. We might suspect that Egypt as one of the main importers of grain to Rome and otherwise rich province could still be a land from which a runaway official might start a rebellion against the ruling class.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is only logical that some instances of the local religion and culture were under supervision and control in order to condemn hostile actions from the beginning. But also an all-too-common practice that were the ticket oracles?

## 1.2. THE CRIMINAL TOWN: ABYDOS AND ITS ORACLE TEMPLE

The oracle of Bes seemed to enjoy its glorious phase from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC-4<sup>th</sup> century AD for the majority of the approximately 650 visitor inscriptions on the walls of Sethi 1<sup>st</sup>'s temple date in this period.<sup>11</sup> These are no touristy scribblings of individual presence, but could contain information like name, filiation and seldom profession, panegyric obeisance like the *proskynesis*-formula to the god and the plea brought before Bes (mostly an appeal to spare the

<sup>8</sup> I can also imagine a use of the determined questions as a talisman for the petitioner, maybe worn in locket (*bulla*) on a necklace as an amulet.

<sup>9</sup> For the special representative Paulus, cf. TASSI (1967) 162-3. Important to note is that this matter was not settled by the *praefectus Aegypti*. It is, however, to be explained with the fact that Paulus took over some lawsuits from Syria as well. The usual procedure with *crimen maiestas* involved an investigation by the Praetorian Guard and their prefects being the first responsible for the personal safety of the emperor [communication by Corina Winkler, unpublished Magisterarbeit „Die ‚Augen und Ohren‘ des Staates“ – organisatorische und funktionelle Gestaltung eines Geheimdienstes beziehungsweise einer Geheimpolizei in der römischen Kaiserzeit, Leipzig 2006].

<sup>10</sup> Cf. this view also expressed in RIPAT (2006), 314-8 and extended to priests as conservers of arcane knowledge.

<sup>11</sup> For a rough categorisation of the inscriptions and quotation of the more detailed ones, cf. DUNAND (1997), 68-70; 74-80; BOYVAL, B.: Graffiti grec de l'Osireion d'Abydos. – in: CdÉ 44 (1969), 353-9. BERNAND (1988), 55-6 categorizes the honorary inscriptions on the temple walls into three periods: the time before the Macedonian conquest, the Ptolemaic and the Roman epoch. However, the majority is of Ptolemaic date. He also reflects on the importance of the site in Christian and Muslim interpretation.

petitioner from life-threatening events like military expeditions or diseases). Already in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the graffiti were initiated mostly by Ionic, Crete and Cypriote merchants, later by local Greek colonists and mercenary soldiers.<sup>12</sup> DUNAND utters the idea that this oracle could have preceded a similar institution of Sarapis and further predecessors in pre-Ptolemaic times.<sup>13</sup> The majority of the people seeking assistance with Bes as it appears from the inscriptions were male, came in company of relatives and/or slaves and deposited votive offerings for a positive fate of the family.

Unfortunately, to my knowledge, not one preserved published ticket oracle originates from Abydos and/or is directed to Bes.<sup>14</sup>

With his shape which has been compared to the head of Medusa in her apothropaic and prophylactic function, Bes is predisposed to be a divinity of protection and salvation chiefly for women and children and has been considered as the patron of music.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.3. BANNING THE “EVIL”: ROMAN CAMPAIGNS AGAINST MAGEIA (ET AL.)

Ammianus Marcellinus wrote his *Res Gestae* in the 390s after his settling in Rome. Born around 330 into a wealthy Greek pagan family of Antiochia he served under Julian Apostata (331-363), but declined 363 from the Roman army in order to travel to Greece and Egypt

<sup>12</sup> Some 350 graffiti have been entered into the database. Cf. i.e. TM 6184 and cf. PEDRIZET, P., LEFEBVRE, G.: *Inscriptiones Graecae Aegypti. Inscriptiones “Memnonii” Besae Oraculi ad Abydenum Thebaidis*. Vol. III, Nancy/Paris/Strasbourg 1919 [Reprint 1978]; PEDRIZET, P.; LEFEBVRE, G.: *Les graffites grecs du Memnonion d’Abydos*. Nancy/Paris/Strasbourg 1919 and the study of RUTHERFORD, I.: *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman Egypt: New Perspectives on Graffiti from the Memnonia at Abydos*. – in: MATTHEWS, R.; RÖMER, C. (edd.): *Ancient Perspectives on Egypt. Encounters with Ancient Egypt*, London 2003, 171-89. Also VOLOKHINE (1998), 92-3 mentions the Bes oracle as a well-known place of „*déplacements pieux*” (as he puts “pilgrimage”) in Roman antiquity for incubation.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. DUNAND (1997), 66-70. Against others like VOLOKHINE (1998) and FRANKFURTER (2005), 238; 242, she assumes the relationship Osiris-Sarapis-Bes as too constructed and speculates that priestly engagement could have been the reason for Bes being the divinity in Abydos. His major cult location was the Bahariya oasis.

<sup>14</sup> However, Bes (or Besa) gained a reputation as a donor of dreams (ὄνειροδότης; χρησμοδότες). In a proskynema, one can read about Bes as [τὸ]ν πανταλη[θ]ῆ [καὶ] | [ὄνειρο]δ[ό]τ[η]ν καὶ χρησμο[δότ]ην | [καὶ] ἄψευστον καὶ δι’ ὅλης | [οἴκου]μέ[ν]ης [μ]α[ρ]τυροῦ[μενον] | [οὐ]ρανί[ο]ν κτλ (cf. PEDRIZET/LEFEBVRE 1978, no. 492, l. 1-5 from above). Instances for such rituals could be found under TM 59324 (PGM 2, 8: request for a dream oracle of Besas); TM 60204 (references in a magical handbook of PGM 7) and a love spell that features a drawing of Bes: TM 64481 (PGM 8, 64-110); another drawing can be found in TM 105658. The Beinecke Library of the Yale University hosts an unpublished papyrus with a mythological story about Bes (P. Yale CtYBR 4403, cf. TM 102233).

<sup>15</sup> He was specifically implored to prevent miscarriage; cf. basically MEEKS, D.: *Le nom du dieu Bès et ses implications mythologiques*. – in: LUFT, U. (ed.): *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt. Studies presented to László Kákossy by friends and colleagues on the occasion of his 60th birthday*. Stud. Aeg. 14, Budapest 1992, 423-36.

instead. He died around the year 395. Judging from the quotation above, emperor Constantius II (reigned ca. 337–361) seemed to be his prototype for stupidity and superstition.<sup>16</sup>

In his reign, pagan shrines and temples of the capital were maintained despite or according to the *Edict of Milan* of Constantine the Great in 313. Therefore, it is not intriguing that Ammianus' way of historical narration is determined by the usage of *omina* and *prodigia* i.e. before military campaigns of Julian who tried to reinforce the pagan cults. Being a pagan, Ammianus adopted this Roman tradition of storytelling. It was in 380 when Theodosius issued a prohibition of animal cults, animal *omina* and the profession of *haruspices* – soothsayers predicting on behalf of the livers of sacrificed animals.<sup>17</sup>

In the same year, he established Christianity in his decree *Cunctos populos* as one religion and theology throughout the Roman Empire.<sup>18</sup> V. NERI states in his study on Ammianus' religious attitude, that “*the pagan and Christian superstitio are [...] of a different nature, but in both cases the norm is coincident with tradition, in the dogmatic field for the Christians, in the cultural field for the pagans. Ammianus' aim could have been on the one hand to help creating a mutual understanding between pagans and Christians, on the other to stress the equality between the two public religions, thereby throwing out a political suggestion to the emperor: a correct religious policy should recognise and protect the tradition in both cases, condemning the derivation from it, the superstitio*”.<sup>19</sup>

The evidence and NERI's observations lead us to further questions: are Ammianus' remarks qualified arguments that could be treated as universal for Roman Egypt or, in stark contrast to

<sup>16</sup> For general information, cf. *DNP* s.v. Constantius II, Sp. 145-6. On his portrayed character, cf. the elaborated and often speculative conclusions in FUNKE (1967), *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. also LIEBESCHUETZ W.: Ammianus, Julian and divination. Wissemann, M. (ed.): *Roma renascens. Beiträge zur Spätantike und Rezeptionsgeschichte*. Ilona Opelt von ihren Freunden und Schülern zum 9.7.1988 in Verehrung gewidmet. Frankfurt/M./Bern/New York/Paris 1988, 198-213. PHARR (1932), 269-70 already concludes that a separation of “religion” and “magic”, “official” and “unofficial” practices makes no sense because of its unsystematic use in the prohibitions. Moreover, the aim has been to abolish certain circles with all their practices which was supposedly the case with *haruspices*, too.

<sup>18</sup> About Ammianus and his opinion on Christianity, cf. NERI (1992), V.: Ammianus' Definition of Christianity as absolute et simplex religio. – in: den BOEFT, J.; den HENGST, D.; TEITLER, H. C. (edd.): *Cognitio Gestorum. The Historiographic Art of Ammianus Marcellinus. Proceedings of the Colloquium, Amsterdam 26-28 August 1991*. Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen. Verhandelingen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, deel 148. Amsterdam/Oxford/New York/Tokyo 1992, p. 59-65. SANTOS YANGUAS (1979) deals with several phenomena such as *numen*, *fortuna*, *fatum* and *prodigium* in Ammianus' oeuvre.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. NERI (1992), 64-5. Subject of Ammianus' critics is emperor Constantius who tries to establish his own Christian religion via councils and synods – in contrary to the author's depiction of the pious, open-minded Theodosius (or at least sarcasm/irony in that case). FUNKE (1967), 145, n. 2 points to the circumstance that Ammianus, though being a pagan, had resentments against “superstitious” cults such as the Bes oracle and classifies them as “*lächerliche Fälle von privatem Hokuspokus, über die man hätte zur Tagesordnung übergehen sollen*.” This limited view cannot be consented to in this article. For a more balanced view on the term “*superstitio*”, cf. SALZMAN (1987).

this, as ideas, clichés, assumptions of something he heard about the Bes cult at Abydos and could not at all be considered as a somewhat “standard”-view of Later Roman Egypt? Was he present there when he travelled through Egypt or had he had informants? How could this be brought in unison with e.g. Coptic legends of Holy Men and (later) martyrs who exorcised churches from a spooking demon, being nothing else than pagan gods, the former inhabitants of the place?<sup>20</sup>

Of course, one saying from an author cannot stand *pars pro toto* for the whole work and religious attitude of Ammianus.

The aim of this contribution is to discuss Ammianus’ descriptions in regard to the papyrological sources of the Roman Imperial Age (and beyond) with records from the database by the help of a quantitative analysis.

However, it has not been my task to undertake a complete study of his overall religious beliefs shining through in his *historia*. I leave this wide field to others more competent in this area and hope to contribute to one aspect of Late Antique Religion.<sup>21</sup>

Another instance of the prohibition of oracles and other religious actions towards pagan gods in Judaea is an edict of emperor Constantine retold by Eusebios.<sup>22</sup>

Prohibitions and trials against *crimen maiestas*, *mageia* and the like are attested occasionally in Roman history.<sup>23</sup> One recalls Octavian’s expulsion of Egyptian soothsayers from Rome in

<sup>20</sup> This is reported in the life of Apa Moses who “exorcised” Abydos from Bes in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (cf. FRANKFURTER (1998), 169-74; DUNAND (1997), 80-1.).

<sup>21</sup> A second Egypt-related occurrence in Ammianus is the prophecy of death for Germanicus by the Egyptian ram god Apis (22, 14, 6-8, a copy of Plin. n. h. 29, 29-30, 93-5; as well mentioned by Solinus 32, 19-20). For further commentary on Ammianus’ view of this episode cf. VIANINO (2001), 476; DEN BOEFT / DRIVERS / DEN HENGST / TEITLER (1995), 247-52. For further studies about Ammianus Marcellinus, cf. the excellently prepared website of the Ammianus Marcellinus Online Project of the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen: <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~drijvers/ammianus/index.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Eus. 2, 43-46. A discussion can be found in BARNES (1984), 69-70. However, as stated above, a diligent exertion of those decrees seems doubtful or at least should leave one sceptical for papyrological evidence is missing. BAINES (1990), 16 points out that no bannings were recorded in Egypt before the Roman period.

<sup>23</sup> About *crimen maiestas* / *maleficium* in the light of the application of torture (e.g. on noble men), cf. MATTHEWS, J.: Ammianus on Roman Law and Lawyers. – in: den BOEFT, J.; DEN HENGST, D.; TEITLER, H. C. (edd.): *Cognitio Gestorum. The Historiographic Art of Ammianus Marcellinus. Proceedings of the Colloquium, Amsterdam 26-28 August 1991*. Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen. Verhandelingen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, deel 148. Amsterdam / Oxford / New York / Tokyo 1992, p. 50. Cf. further MASSONEAU, E.: *Le crimen de la magie et le droit romain*. Paris 1936 (non video) and HARMENING, D.: *Superstitio. Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters*. Berlin 1979, 218-9 being an example for the ancient deficiency or arbitrariness in putting *maleficium* in words intermingled with improper modern theories on ancient religion.

the pre-Actium-propaganda campaign with the argument of their being Cleopatra's secret agents or the Senate's decisions against the Bacchanalia and the worshippers of Isis.<sup>24</sup>

Relevant for Egypt is P. Yale CtYBR 299 from 198 or 199 AD, when the prefect Q. Aemilius Saturninus ordered that all "*means of divination*", that "*hazardous superstition*", "*oracles, that is, by means of written documents supposedly granted under divine influence*", "*the procession of cult images or suchlike charlatanry*" and foretelling of the future must be abandoned – no matter being practiser or petitioner.<sup>25</sup> As our passage of Ammianus clearly demonstrates, these decrees seemed to prove not very successful, even though found delinquents should have been sentenced to death.

Even remoter sounds Cassius Dio's remark that the emperor of this time, Septimius Severus, gave command that all "secret" books he came across during his trip to Egypt should have been shut into the Sema, the tomb of Alexander the Great in Alexandria, to abandon its use (βιβλία πάντα τὰ ἀπόρρητόν τι ἔχοντα, ὅσα γε καὶ εὐρεῖν ἡδυνήθη κτλ).<sup>26</sup>

According to the Codex Theodosianus, in the years 312 and 319 Constantine forbade all kinds of magic directed against human live and violence against the "good morals" (*superstitio maleficorum* is the applied term). Still allowed were practices to heal diseases and to repel evil spirits.<sup>27</sup> This separation seems to look very clear and in unison from first sight, but the

<sup>24</sup> For Octavian's prohibition, cf. Cass. Dio 49, 43, 4 (exerted by Agrippa in 33 BC), or Suet. Aug. 31 on the later Augustus' burning of books in AD 13 – prominently among those the Sibyllinic oracles. More detailed information can be found in BARTON (1994), 36-44; 64. Especially foreign philosophers and rhetors were suspected (or wilfully accused) to be soothsayers and charlatans tantalizing the Roman mob. According to Tacitus, in the turbulent year 69, such people tried to compete in capturing the attendance of the public with their predictions who is going to be the next emperor (Tac. hist. 1, 22; 2, 78). Barton counts some 13 attested expulsions. Therefore, some emperors considered it to be the only option to authorize *the* horoscope or *the* prediction in order to fulfil an existent need of the public for imperial gossip and sort of guidance. This, however, classifies all other accounts like ticket oracles as products of sheer gazetteers. See some ideas of RIPAT (2006), 313 on this subject. Augustus' example also served as a model for succeeding rulers like Tiberius having a Thrasyllus as chief astrologer in his court with contradicting senatorial actions against them (Tac. Ann. 6, 21 – though we should beware of Tacitus being an overtly critic of the emperor, cf. also Suet. Aug. 98; Iuv. Sat. 10, 94 and in Sueton's work Galba 4, Gaius 19 [= Caligula], Tiberius 64). Other mentions of bannings of *magoi* include Tac. Ann. 2, 27, 2; 2, 32, 3; Ulp. Coll. Mos. et Rom. Leg. 15, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. TM 18193 and Ritner (1992), 196-7. The papyrus is edited in P. Coll. Youtie 30 by A. E. Hanson and has been presented in a new version by REA (1977). With the "oracles, that is, ...", there is little doubt on my side the ticket oracles must have been meant.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Cass. Dio 75, 13, 2 and KÁKOSY (1995), 2924-5; PIANKHOFF (1958-60), 127-8.

<sup>27</sup> CTh 9, 16, 3-4: "*Quicumque pro curiositate futurorum vel invocatore[m] daemonum vel divinos, quos hariolos appellant, vel haruspices, qui auguria colligit, consuluerit, capite punitatur.*" Cf. FUNKE (1967), 146-51. For Roman law and processes against magical actions, cf. FÖGEN, M. T.: Die Enteignung der Wahrsager. Studien zum kaiserlichen Wissensmonopol in der Spätantike. Frankfurt/M. 1993 and the additional theses by LOTZ, A.: Der Magiekonflikt in der Spätantike. Habelts Dissertationsdrucke. Reihe Alte Geschichte 48, Bonn 2005.



abolition of *haruspices* and oracles as part of the institutionalized religion does not fit into the picture.<sup>28</sup> Valentinian I temporally legalised some religious practices in 371.

Before looking at the textual evidence, we must make sure which genres present in the database belong to religious texts in Graeco-Roman time.

## 2. FACTS AND FIGURES: “MAGIC” IN THE DATABASE

### 2.1. THE RELIGIOUS GENRES IN THE DATABASE AND THEIR CATEGORISATION

Up to this point, not all the published religious, ritual, magical and divinatory texts could have been taken into consideration for especially the Coptic part of it still awaits addition into Trismegistos or modification of an existing entry. Therefore, not for all queries the full body of some 3100 records could have been regarded. Generally, the major publications with evidence concerning this little survey are for instance the *Papyri Graecae et Demoticae (et Copticae) Magicae*:<sup>29</sup>

- PREISENDANZ, K.: *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*. Stuttgart 1974<sup>2</sup>.
- DANIEL, R. W.; MALTOMINI, F.: *Supplementum Magicum*. Papyrologica Coloniensia 16, Köln 1990-92.
- BETZ, H. D. (ed.): *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation including the Demotic Spells*. Chicago/London 1992<sup>2</sup>.
- MEYER, M.; SMITH, R. (edd.): *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*. New York 1994.
- STEGEMANN, V.: *Die koptischen Zaubertexte der Sammlung Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer in Wien*. Sitzungsberichte d. Heidelb. Akad. d. Wiss., phil.-hist. Kl. 1 (1933/34), Heidelberg 1934.
- PERNIGOTTI, S.: *Testi della magia copti*. Imola 2000.
- KROPP, A. et al.: *Ausgewählte Koptische Zaubertexte*. Édition de la Fondation Égyptologique Reine Elisabeth, Vol. 1-3, Bruxelles 1929-31.

A contentious issue is always the decision whether a religious, ritual, magical or divinatory text should be assigned the criterion to be “literary” or “documentary” belonging to the hard-to-define branch of so called religious, ritual, magical, para-, semi- or sub-literary sources.<sup>30</sup> Those texts are not defined by their function to be neither narrative, poetic or dramatic

<sup>28</sup> Later, *haruspices* were allowed to read the liver of sacrificed animal only in temples and other “public” buildings (CTh 9, 16, 1-2; 16, 10, 1). The common interdiction of magic and offering was repeated by Constantius in 342 (CTh 16, 10, 2ff., beginning with “*cesset superstitio, sacrificorum aboleatur insania*”). Manuscripts with passages of the CTh are included in Trismegistos, cf. e.g. TM 66142.

<sup>29</sup> Except from the publications listed on the Checklist which have all been entered. It has been undertaken to outsource the relevant material into an extra database of Trismegistos in order to develop a handier browsing. “TM-Magic” can be reached under [www.trismegistos.org/magic](http://www.trismegistos.org/magic). However, the body of entries there differs slightly from the ones treated in this paper.

<sup>30</sup> Therefore, I would like to refer the reader to the outstanding new article on this matter by R. L. FOWLER in the new lexicon *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum*, Vol. 3 (2005), s.v. magic, esp. 283-301.

compositions (though they can bear elements of all three) nor will they be read aloud or staged in a manner as literary pieces could be.<sup>31</sup> Otherwise, texts of this sort have not been archived or treated like “classical” documentary evidence such as contracts or juridical *acta*.

Another dimension of contrasting “literary” from “documentary” sources is the distinction of their grade of reception. Was it a reference for a group like a priestly community or was it solely of use for a single individual? According to my opinion, this definition groups magical handbooks<sup>32</sup> that could have been consulted by more than one person into the category of literary texts and defixion tablets into documentary because those curses from certain individuals against others often had to be stored or buried in a special place and must be kept in secret. They could have been used only once (apart from a reuse of the material). Also, ticket oracles should be treated after this definition as documentary texts for the questions to the divinities were posed by individuals on things that concern themselves only. However, no further distinction is made between the usage of texts in mobile and immobile cults, meaning i.e. an application by priests in temples, stationary or wandering mantic specialists or even “do-it-yourself”-techniques.<sup>33</sup>

Other problematic discussions which I hope to avoid here with the before said categorization are the strict separation of “religion” and “magic” or the division of the latter in “black” and “white”. To my mind, this leads to unbalanced conclusions being sometimes more significant about the cultural background of the modern publisher than referring to ancient practices. Many more aspects have to be taken into consideration than the contents of a spell. Unfortunately, in most cases we simply lack of more precise information about setting, performance, participants, social impact, juridical implications and cultural context of such

<sup>31</sup> Tough a performative component is installed in i.e. 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.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. in this context the „Theban magical library“ or „Bibliothek der Zauberpapyri von Theben“, Trismegistos Archives Database arch\_ID 363. The compilation has been treated by TAIT (1995); BRESCIANI (1987); DIELEMAN (2005), 11-23. 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*. R. K. RITNER (1995), 3361-2 thought of the temple *scriptorium* as main location of the PGM/PDM/PCM which has been opposed by QUACK (1998), 83, n. 39 with a hint of a more complex approach in compilation of the texts. Subsequently, D. FRANKFURTER (2005), 246-8 and (1998), 182-3 thinks of both contexts of use: inside and outside the institutional religion, but always by a mantic professional.

<sup>33</sup> This definition benefits greatly from discussions with M. DEPAUW and especially W. CLARYSSE’s approach of classifying literary texts for inclusion in the *Leuven Database of Ancient books (LDAB)* as a side project of *Trismegistos*. For a discussion of the modern term “do-it-yourself” applied to the lot oracle Sortes Astrampsychi, cf. CLARYSSE, W.: Doe-het-zelforakels. Van Astrampsychus tot Napoleon, – in: VANDORPE, K.; VERRETH, H. (edd.): *Grieken en Romainen bewegen hemel en aarde. Vorspellen in de Oudheid*. Leuven 1996, 65-9.

methods. Also, foreign traditions might have been adopted. I like to emphasize the point that methods of communicative theories are much more useful than plain categorizations.<sup>34</sup>

Scientists dealing with the (for Egyptologists) “late” religion of the post-Persian periods eventually found a excoriating judgement about divinatory practices: Adolf Erman in his edition of a Coptic spell for immobilizing a watchdog mentioning Isis among other divinities should serve as one of many examples here: “Es ist doch ein klägliches Ende, das die ägyptischen Götter genommen haben, und man kann sich als Ägyptologe eines gewissen Mitgeföhls nicht erwehren, wenn man sieht, wie *die große Isis*, die allgefeierte Göttin, als Genossin christlicher Quacksalber und Spitzbuben geendet hat.”<sup>35</sup>

Evidence from Late Egyptian sources prove that those quacks and rogues existed earlier in Egyptian history, presumably in all areas and times and most probably those two terms are the last we should call them. “Mantic professionals” or even “priests” seem more acceptable.

The following genres are belonging in my area of expertise:<sup>36</sup>

## 2.2. WHAT BELONGS TO “RELIGION”, “MAGIC”, “RITUAL”, AND “DIVINATION”?

Fields marked in grey are not included into TM-Magic, but searchable trough the main Trismegistos database.

### “RELIGION”/“RITUAL”

- DEALINGS OF/WITH THE TEMPLE (“documentary”, “literary”, “funerary”)
  - o “individual”<sup>37</sup>
    - ORACLES
      - processional oracles, including

<sup>34</sup> Cf. e.g. GÜNTNER, S.; KNOBLAUCH, H. A.: Gattungsanalyse. – in: HITZLER, R.; HONER, A. (edd.): Sozialwissenschaftliche Hermeneutik. Eine Einführung. Opladen 1997 and SAMARIN, W. F.: The language of religion. – in: AMMON, U.; DITTMAR, N.; MATTHEIER, K. J. (edd.): Sociolinguistics-Soziolinguistik. 1. Halbband, Berlin/New York 1989, 85-91 – to cite only a few examples. For a model of religious communication, cf. RÜPKE, J.: Antike Religionen als Kommunikationssysteme. – in: BRODERSEN, K. (ed.): Gebet und Fluch, Zeichen und Traum: Aspekte religiöser Kommunikation in der Antike. Münster 2001, 13-30.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. ZÄS 33 (1895), 135; with the italic formatting originally by Erman. For the spell cf. TM 100012 [http://www.trismegistos.org/tris\\_text\\_detail.php?quick=100012](http://www.trismegistos.org/tris_text_detail.php?quick=100012).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. also under the relevant genres in DEPAUW (1997).

<sup>37</sup> The assignations “individual” and “official” are only used here for a broad categorization in order to structure the recipients: has there been just one petitioner using an oracle or were there many recipients following a church service. I am aware of the fact that the definition of “the public” in antiquity is a tricky matter especially when it comes to religion. The majority of the methods listed here were seemingly part of the official religious life; nevertheless, the setting of the practices from the magical papyri remains somewhat unclear.

- oracular accounts (i.e. on stelae)
    - oracular ostraca
    - divine ordeals
  - ticket-oracles
    - oracle questions
    - oracular answers
  - oracle books, including
    - Sortes Astrampsychi
    - Sortes Sangallenses
    - Sortes Sanctorum
    - Sortes Vergilianae
    - Sortes Biblicae
    - Sortes Homericae
    - Sortes XII Patriarcharum
    - Sortes of the Tabula Aristobuli (decans, iatromancy)
    - Sortes Monacenses
    - Sortes Alearum, other *astragalos* oracles and texts relating to those dice oracles
    - divination by lot
  - letters reporting oracular consultations
  - juristic material recurring / referring to oracular consultation
- **LETTERS TO GODS**, including
    - “letters for the afterlife”<sup>38</sup>
  - **LETTERS TO THE DEAD**, and other sources of ancestor cult and necromantic practices
  - **DREAM ORACLES**, including
    - accounts of spontaneous dreams
    - accounts of incubated dreams
    - accounts of professional dreamers (like Katochoi from Saqqara or Hor of Sebennytos)
    - texts like letters relating to the Katochoi or Hor
    - dream books for analysis of motives seen in dreams
    - requests for dreams, epiphanies (*ph-ntr*)
    - The Dream of Nectanebos
  - **PROSKYNEMATA** (epigraphic evidence only, not in letters), including
    - similar epigraphical evidence (votive inscriptions, dedications)
    - offering tables
  - **TEMPLE OATHS** <sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> cf. DEPAUW, M.: The Demotic Letter. A Study of Epistolographic Scribal Traditions against their intra- and intercultural background. Stud. Dem. 14, Sommerhausen 2006, 313-4.

<sup>39</sup> The inclusion of this genre seems somewhat tricky because an oath is always a confirmation of one's testimony *sub aegide* a religious or religiously connotated authority (sanctified king and sometimes with gods; basically, the law and its institutions have been considered as sanctified). In order to avoid discussion about the cultural input, we decided to leave the temple oaths out of TM-Magic. Cf. DEPAUW (1997), 138-9 for details.

- **SELF-DEDICATIONS / CONTRACTS OF HIERODULY**
- **PLEAS** (implorations of the gods for help)
- **HOROSCOPES**, including
  - horoscopic evidence on temple walls
  - astronomical calculations resulting in a horoscope
- divination with days (**HEMEROLOGY**)
  - calendars of lucky and unlucky days (“Tagewählerei”)
  - calendars for oracular consultation
  - calendars of omina
  - parapegmata (calendars of weather signs)
  - lunar omina (lunaria, selenodromia)
  - festivals (calendars)
- **ASTRONOMY/ASTROLOGY**
  - decania (list of decans)
  - calculations
  - ephemerides (positions i.e. of the zodiac); almanacs
  - tables and their instructions (incl. Ptolemaeus’ works)
  - templates for single celestial bodies
  - syzygies (position of celestial bodies along a straight line)
- “official”
  - **DECREES**
  - **LITURGY**
    - songs / music; sanctus- / angelus-parts, canticum
    - troparia
    - doxologies
    - anaphora
    - chairetismoι
    - heirmologioι
    - acrostic texts, hymns
    - intercessiones
    - mesonyktikonoi
    - trishagioι
    - homilies (with and without authors)
    - benedictiones
    - litanies
    - euchologia
    - prayers, i.e. symbolum, Pater noster et al.
  - administrative decisions
  - documents concerning cult guilds
  - imperial cult, including
    - doxologies
    - panegyrics
  - documents concerning mysteria (i.e. Orphic)
  - lists, inventories, accounts

- **PROSTAGMA / HORISMOI** / royal ordinances / law-texts
- descriptions of (temple) rituals
  - Apis Embalming Ritual
  - Book of the Dead<sup>40</sup>
  - Mummy Labels<sup>41</sup>
  - Book / Document of Breathing etc.
  - Daily Temple Ritual
  - Book of the Temple
  - Book of Fayum
  - Book of Thoth

## “MAGIC”/“RELIGION”/“RITUAL”

- **HANDBOOKS** with
  - **CATALOGUES OF OMINA/PRODIGIA**
  - **COLLECTIONS** of several genres named in this list (i.e. spells)
  - **MEDICAL DESCRIPTIONS** (iatromagic / iatromancy)
  - **ALCHEMICAL RECIPES**, including
    - The Mithras Liturgy
    - Hermetic / Gnostic / Alchemic treatises
    - potion-making
- **SPELLS / CHARMS** for various purposes
  - binding spells, silencing spells, defixiones
  - love spells
  - sexual spells
  - separation spells
  - business spells
  - favour spells
  - victory spells
  - medical spells, healing spells
  - disease spells
  - revelation spells, spells for direct vision, divine encounter, epiphany, *ph-ntr*
  - foreknowledge spells
  - shadow control spells
  - fetching spells
  - spells to catch a thief
  - spells for sending a dream (“evil sleep”)
  - curses, including
    - exorcisms
    - curse tablets
    - “Schadenszauber”
    - “judicial prayers”<sup>42</sup>
    - rituals involving “Götterzwang” (menacing of the gods)<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. the contribution of Svenja A. GÜLDEN in this volume.

<sup>41</sup> Carolin ARLT has dealt with this genre here.

<sup>42</sup> A distinction of those is somewhat woolly for they could be subsumed under the damaging spells (*Schadenszauber*) or simply as prayers or pleas as I favour the matter. However, the explanation can be found in VERSNEL, H. S.: Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers. – in: Faraone, C. A.; Obbink, D. (ed.): *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*. Oxford 1991, 60-106.

- **INCANTATIONS**, including
  - names of power (voces magicae, SATOR-formula, 42 martyrs of Sebaste, beginnings of the four gospels, Paternoster, words in winged formation / “Schwindschema” et al.)
  - letters of power (7 vowels, alphabet)
  - magical signs (*figurae magicae*)
  - magical drawings
  - magical words (*voces magicae*)
- **AMULETS** for several purposes, including
  - phylactery (= amulets, talismans and the like)
  - amuletic decrees
  - instructions for the manufacture of amulets
  - papyri used as amulets (i.e. Book of the Dead vignettes, Bible quotations)
- **INSPIRATIONAL MANTIC**, including
  - accounts of (po)sessions (P. Dodgson)
  - documents relating to the *wise women, holy man*
- **PROPHECY**, including
  - ex-eventu-prophecy
    - Demotic Chronicle
    - Lamb of Bokchoris
    - Oracle of the Potter
    - Sibyllinic oracles
    - Manichaeian texts
    - Chaldaean texts
- all **OTHER** methods, accounts, judgements of divination / mantic

## 2.3. GENERAL STATISTICS

Currently<sup>44</sup>, there are 3076 entries with the general labels “religion”, “divination”, “magic”, “ritual” in Trismegistos containing genres of texts mentioned above.

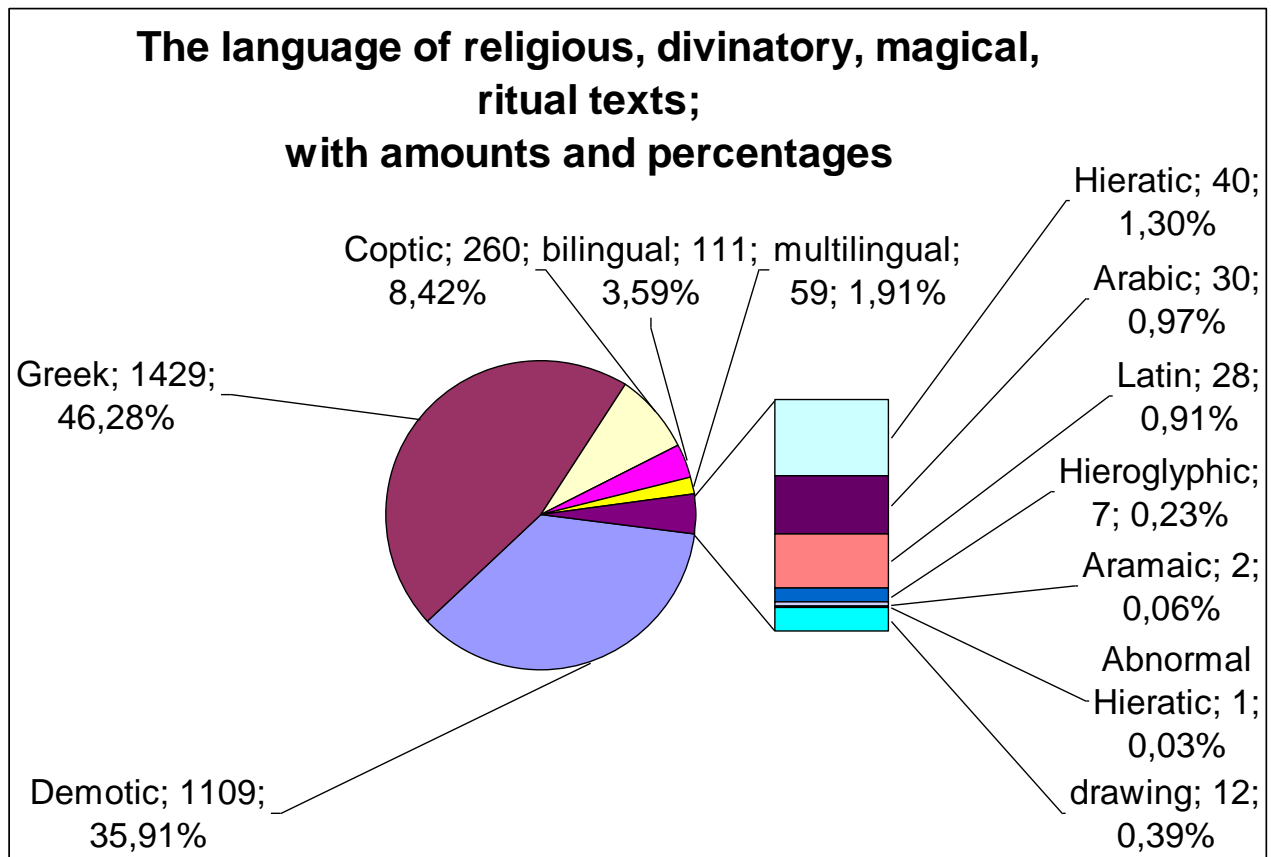
### 2.3.1. Language: Multilingual Genres

Among those, 1429 are solely in Greek, 1109 in Demotic, 260 in Coptic, 40 in Hieratic, 30 in Arabic, 28 in Latin, seven in Hieroglyphs and one letter to a dead person in Abnormal Hieratic (TM 51144). There are twelve bilingual text in Greek / Demotic, 23 in Demotic / Hieratic, 62 in Greek / Coptic, eight in Coptic / Arabic, two in Greek / Arabic, six in Greek /

<sup>43</sup> ALTENMÜLLER, H.: - in: Helck, W.; Westendorf, W. (edd.): LÄ Bd. II (1977), Sp. 664-9, s.v. Götterbedrohung.

<sup>44</sup> Data taken from Juli 9, 2007.

Latin and more combinations of three or even more languages. Such special cases are e.g. the two entries containing Aramaic: one spell is carved in stone probably in Demotic letters (TM 54613) while the other one is a multilingual magical handbook with recipes for different purposes with Greek and Coptic passages (TM 92262).



Twelve papyri and one parchment comprise drawings only, i.e. of scorpions in order to protect from their stings (TM 68884). There are not yet all Aramaic and Carian texts entered into the database, others of Demotic, Greek and especially Coptic evidence await their inclusion, too. Therefore, the data which is referred to and discussed here must be considered as preliminary, but with the addition of new material no major displacements of the proportions are to be expected. The relatively high number of Demotic documents results from an inclusion of the more than 700 temple oaths.

Only twelve instances for Greek / Demotic bilingual texts came somewhat unexpected – especially in relation to the 57 texts in Greek and Coptic. But we must take into consideration that e.g. the Great Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden does not appear in this number because in Trismegistos, every text is regarded according to all applied included languages. In



this case, Coptic and Hieratic sections are included in the magical handbook, too. Furthermore, this papyrus (TM 55955) counts as one entry only as well as a small slip of paper does that is e.g. TM72456, a Greek-Demotic list of decans.

Multilingualism, the use of more than two languages, is a common feature of religious and magical handbooks. The scriptures are employed next to each other in the very same sentence. In the case of a Greek implement in a Demotic spell, suddenly the reading direction changes within the line. Another common feature is the application of glosses in (Old) Coptic i.e. with Coptic spellings of names in upper script or small summaries of contents.

Another tricky feature is the intermingling of scripture and language as used in TM 54613 as described above for a Demotic-Aramaic text. Uncommon writings like “alphabetical” Demotic spellings to express “foreign” names of demons additionally contribute to a multifaceted picture.

Recently in magical texts, words of power, seemingly incomprehensible series of letters and “Abracadabra” has been written down in spells. These *voces magicae*, sometimes executed in elaborated style, have not been considered as “special” language. Nevertheless, they often represent formulae, names and *epitheta* or other things.<sup>45</sup> I also do not count passages in texts that declare themselves as “Nubian” or in any otherwise language because these intertextual allocations are *topoi* and do not correspond in the majority of the cases to actual languages.

It must be taken into consideration that the percentages of the provision of an ancient language reflect more precisely the current state of publication than a true dissemination of the old texts from our field. While this might not affect Demotic and especially Greek sources that greatly, this conclusion is unavoidable for the Coptic material. Here, a lot of evidence still remains unpublished in collections and archives worldwide. The present writer does not feel comfortable enough doing an estimated guess on the situation of unpublished texts in Aramaic, Arabic and other languages present in Trismegistos being records gained by extern or other contributors such as in the *ATE* (Aramaic Texts from Egypt) and *APD* (Arabic Papyrology Database).

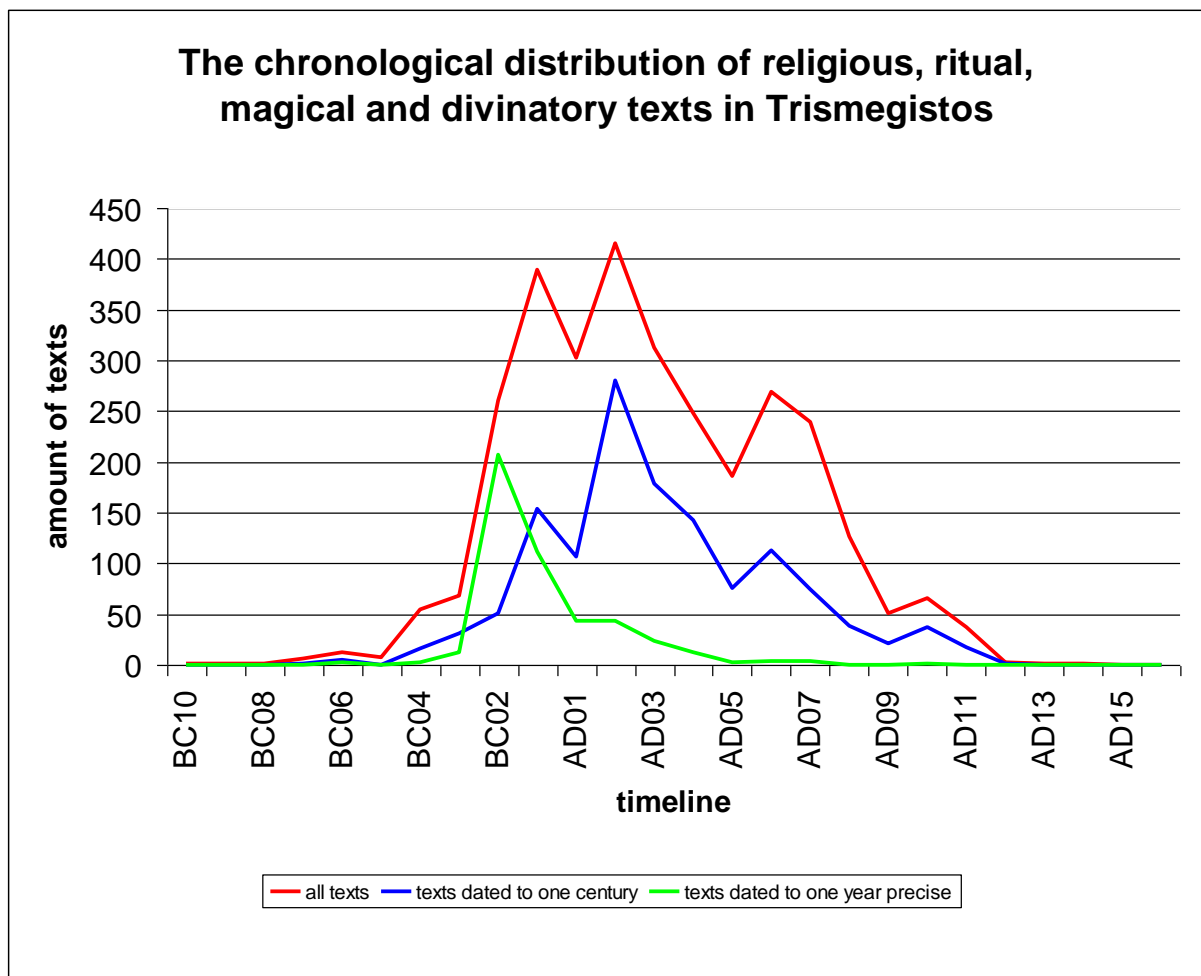
There is, however, a bunch of texts preserved in Latin.

<sup>45</sup> For a deeper analysis, cf. the study of W. BRASHEAR (1995), 3576-3602 but cf. also the criticism of QUACK (1998), 90, n. 79 on the encryption of Egyptian etymologies.

What has not been incorporated at this point are the manifold curse tablets. On those small reusable plates made of lead and other “chthonian” metals, the petitioner wrote a spell or invocation to a divinity in order to exorcise / provoke the failure of someone’s prospects and projects or personal harm ranging from temporary illness over disabling till death of an opponent. The classification of those tablets intermingled with amulets is flowing.

### 2.3.2. Ritual without a Day or How the Material can be dated

Texts from our genres are attested throughout Egyptian history. In this section, the chronology of religious, ritual, magical and divinatory sources are to be explored and commented. The first chart shows how all entries (red graph), the ones dated to one century (blue graph) and the precisely dated (green graph) are distributed along the timeline of the 10th century BC till the 16th century AD – a span of over 2500 years.



In relation to the Trismegistos database as a whole, we can deduce that the peaks and low points detected here reflect the same developments as observed in the great statistic: the high amounts of texts in the 2nd centuries BC and AD and the descents in the 1st century BC and the 5th century AD as well as a smaller peak in the 5-7th centuries AD.<sup>46</sup> Except for the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, this graph is mimicked by the curve indicating the texts dated to one century. By the way, this affects 44 % of the evidence.

In the opposite, there are quite some differences to be noticed. To proceed with the timeline, as a start, the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC gains attention. The amount of religious texts is distinctly higher than in the whole database. Subsequently, Trismegistos presents a tremendously higher peak in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Responsible for this increase are the more than 1700 documents derived from the Zenon archive. The biggest climax of the religious texts happening in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD is not paralleled by the statistic of all texts.

As a sort of fatal irony to all researchers of Graeco-Roman antiquity, the fascinating time of the last Ptolemies and the first Roman emperors is only scarcely provided with evidence. However, for our genres the decrease is not that aggravating as in the general chart. Worthy of mention I found the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD for not showing a small pinnacle but clearly a decline in opposing the overall result. Therefore, the amount of religious texts rises again the two centuries after 400 AD and yet again in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

For over 470 texts (or about 15 %), the given date names a certain year. Alone 236, more than the half, are Demotic temple oaths from the first centuries BC and AD. Another ten are the same on epigraphical sources. If horoscopes and contracts of self-dedication are subtracted from this sum, too, there are not much dated texts left. The remaining 58 entries are dated dream accounts mostly from Hor of Sebennytos and letters to gods and notations of the scribe who copied a religious handbook.

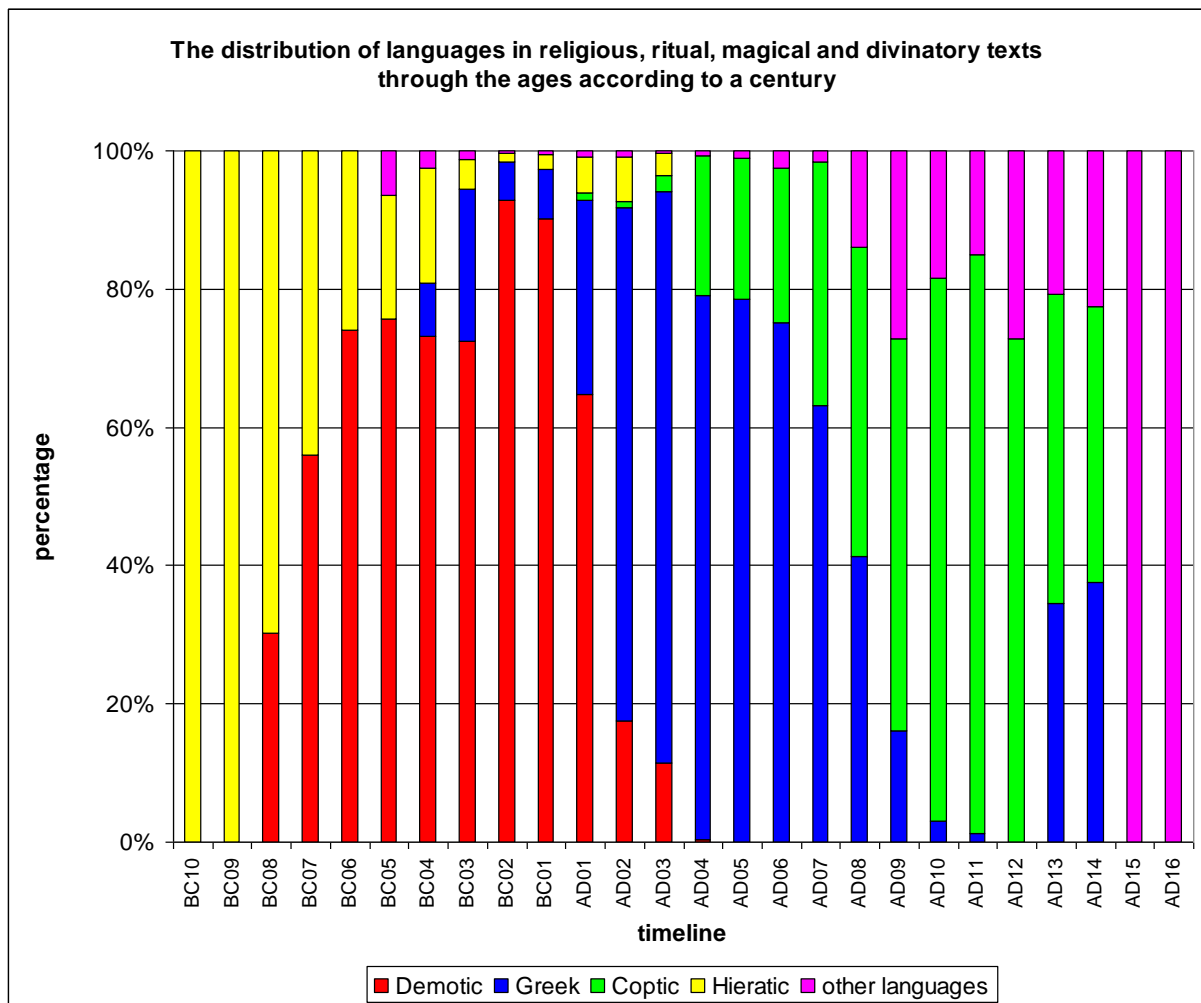
Consequently, that means that the majority of texts has to be dated by palaeographical means only. While spans from two to five centuries are still quite the average, there are especially tricky cases involving magical signs to be read as a spell or something else. Instead of the palaeography, a rough date could be gained by the spread of a material (e.g. parchment), the

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<sup>46</sup> It should be stated that these diagrams reflect the papyrological evidence only while in this article, all sources are considered and therefore, the chronological span is somewhat longer.

form of a document (e.g. a codex) or a sign pointing to a religion (e.g. Christianity) that we know of being generally allotted to a certain period.

The last diagram for this section presents the lingual evidence assigned to a single century. The four important languages are Hieratic (yellow), Demotic (red), Greek (blue) and Coptic (green), while all other languages such as Aramaic, Latin, Arabic or Hieroglyphical fonts are represented in pink. Papyri with drawings only have not been considered here.<sup>47</sup>



According to this chart, Hieratic has been used for over 1300 while being dominant for only the 10<sup>th</sup> until the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>48</sup> But this depicts nicely how the “old” and thereby sanctified language never faded away or ceased to exist but was constantly applied in religious texts.

<sup>47</sup> For an overall picture of all ca. 102.000 texts in Trismegistos, cf. Mark DEPAUW’s article here.

<sup>48</sup> Trismegistos currently starts to enter texts from BC12. Hieratic has of course been for a much longer period in use.

Prominently among those might be counted the great magical papyri with passages and / or keywords such as ingredients or names of gods written in the elder language.

What is not evaluated here but proves the same fact are the Book of the Dead scrolls. With these, the percentage of Hieratic in Roman times would have been even higher. In conclusion, we can deduce that Hieratic is an ongoing story of success till Late Antiquity.

As expected, the following stage of Egyptian takes over the leading position. Demotic became upfront from the 7<sup>th</sup> till the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and as well in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Only from then, the majority of the texts which have been attested were Greek. With some exceptions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and span between ca. 900-1200, Greek remains an important language for religious genres for more than 18 centuries, beating even Coptic in its later phases. It will be exciting to see these numbers change if especially more Bohairic and Arabic material might find its way to publication and into Trismegistos.

With a balance of 14 centuries, Coptic displays a comparable distribution as Demotic. As we know, this is a language used in liturgy even today along with Arabic or other modern idioms. In this light Coptic features one of the longest active lingual traditions in the world analogical to Latin.

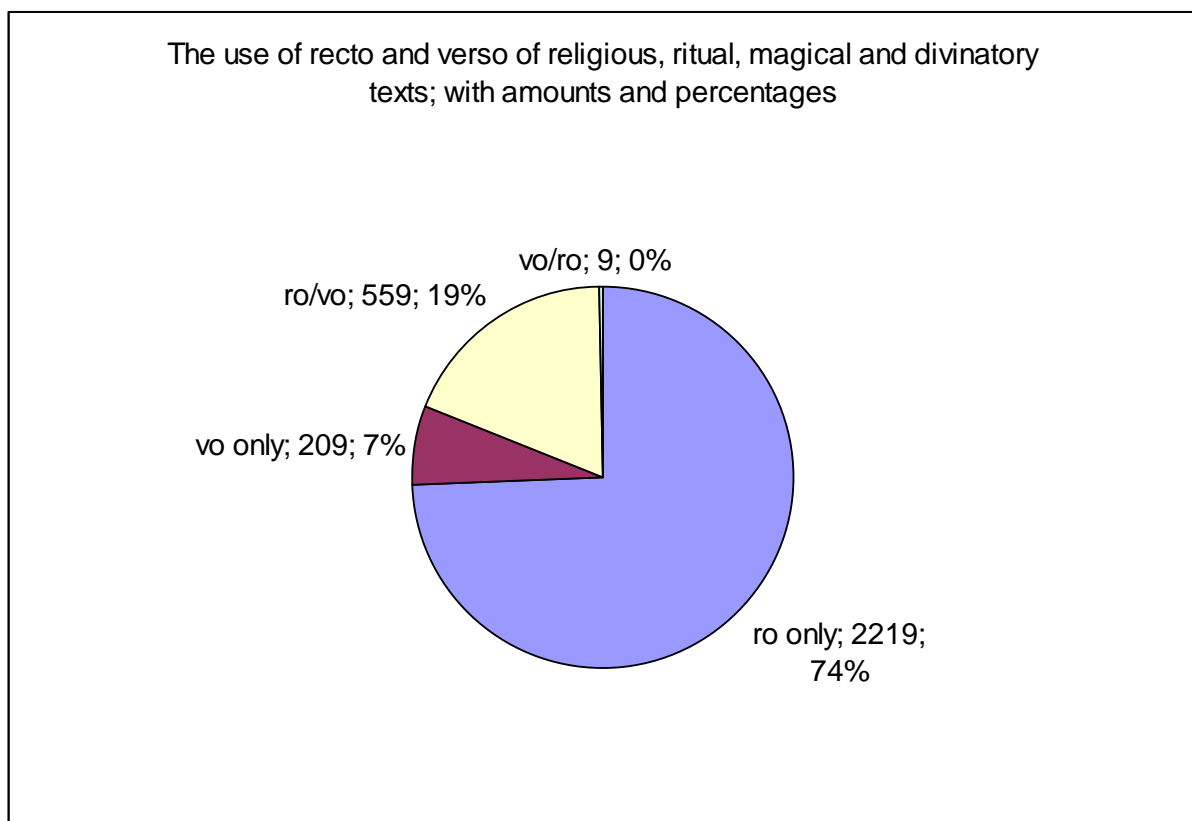
Only about 4 % of all entries are written in two or more languages. Their statistic evidence is incorporated in the chart above. The most frequent combination are bilingual texts in Greek and Coptic standing for 46 %. With Demotic / Hieratic, Greek / Demotic and Coptic / Arabic, the other well-represented combinations can be added. Many pairings are attested only once.

As a summary, it proves that except for magical spells and handbooks, religious, ritual, magical and divinatory genres had “their” specific language used in their characteristic contexts. If another language was needed, a text had been simply written in that idiom as we will see later in this paper it has been the case with the ticket oracles.

### **2.3.3. The Oracle on Scribbling Paper: Recto, Verso, and Reuse**

While entering texts into Trismegistos, especially magical spells and oracle questions, it became evident that in quite a few cases the papyrological verso beard the scripture instead of

the recto. In comparison to the whole data, the amount is nearly as double as high: 7 % instead of 4 %. As well, we can count more records with texts starting on the recto and continuing on the verso (19 %) than in comparison to the data in total (12 %). This might be explained with the various handbooks and codices in TM-Magic covering more than one page. What is still puzzling is the beginning on a verso. For example amulets as small slips of papyrus contribute vastly to this relatively high amount of blank rectos, but text-containing versos.<sup>49</sup> On one hand, we might suspect that the scribe had a staple of neatly cut papyrus slips for writing and did not care for such a short text to use the “right” side, and on the other hand a context between the “magical” content and the “evil other side” could be speculated about.<sup>50</sup>



In 17 % of the texts discussed here, the back remains blank. Nearly half a percent impinges on entries with the content on the verso only.

<sup>49</sup> Oracle questions as another genre written on small strips are not to be counted as amulets. Cf. *infra*. Otherwise, one could assume an earlier scripture on the recto that became invisible during the centuries in Egypt's soil.

<sup>50</sup> I wonder if the use of the verso instead of the recto might in fact have something to do with letting evil spirits unfold. Could the recto (= “good”) versus verso (= “evil”)-dichotomy be paralleled with right – left, white – black, lucky numbers – numbers of the beast?

For some texts this article is concerned with, papyri, ostraca etc. have been reused. I count currently 208 entries (or 6, 52 % of all religious, ritual and magical texts) bearing a palimpsest or a later scripture on a formerly blank space or side.<sup>51</sup> Those sources include several text identification numbers in Trismegistos due to their different genres. The following table enumerates the results for a reuse (54 instances, 25, 96 % of the 208 entries):

<b>paradigm</b>	<b>amount</b>	<b>percentage in relation to reuse</b>
reuse of blank space, old text	3	5, 56 %
reuse of blank space, new text	4	7, 41 %
blank side reused, old text	21	38, 89 %
blank side reused, new text	26	48, 15 %

Within this amount, no specified genre or location can be made out as being prominently represented. For an example of a reused papyrus, the verso of a fragment of the lot oracle Sortes Astrampsychi served as writing ground for a private letter.<sup>52</sup> I only noted a certain affinity of astrological-astronomical material that I consider as incidental. The same goes for the 22 palimpsests (10, 58 % of the 208 entries) which are depicted in the next table.

<b>paradigm</b>	<b>amount</b>	<b>percentage in relation to palimpsests</b>
palimpsest new on an old text	15	68, 18 %
palimpsest new on an old text with other texts	2	9, 09 %
old text, with new palimpsest	5	22, 73 %

The genre of text being replaced or erased by religious, ritual and magical texts and vice versa is diverse. Mostly, documentary genres such as contracts and lists are the predecessor or the antecedent of those genres.

As for the palimpsests, in many cases only tracks and marks of scripture can be identified so that it is even tricky to determine the language. Another possibility is the replacement with a text of the same genre or milieu such as a hymn for Palm Sunday (TM 64806) substituting 1 Corinthians, 11-12 from the New Testament (TM 88394). As examples might count TM

<sup>51</sup> I only took in account entries where a reuse or palimpsest is explicitly stated. More than 250 other records bear scripture on the other side, too – those lines might refer to an address (letters) or summaries (contracts) et al. as some genres reflect those documentary layouts

<sup>52</sup> Cf. also the conclusions regarding literary texts Hermann KNUF has drawn in this volume.

65450, an amulet with the names of the 40 martyrs of Sebaste being written over the two accounts of TM 109225.

The quality of the material is as far as I can see no indicator for a reuse: from the finest handbook to the wooden tablet many sorts of manuscripts are represented.

Due to the current lack of metal tablets and *lamellae* such as the *tabulae defixiones* in Trismegistos, no satisfying analysis can be prepared for that type yet.

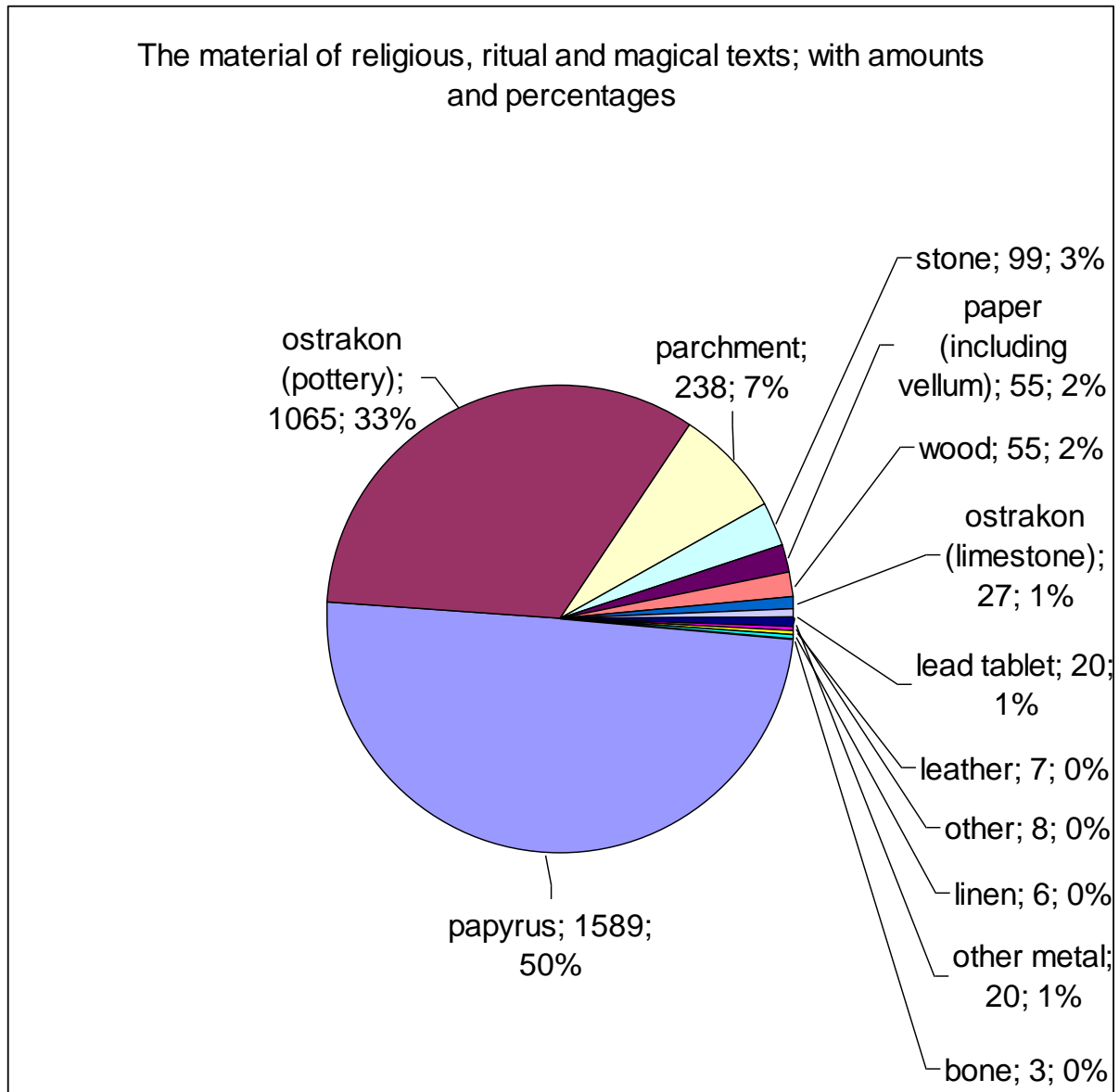
The third and major group of this paragraph comprises of documents with more than one text on its surface (133 entries, 62, 5 % of the 208 mentioned above). Nearly all have one, 13, 53 % more than one additional text. More recently, this occurred on a verso (54, 15 %).

A more detailed study of these diplomatic features seems to be a desideratum.

#### **2.3.4. The “Colour of Magic”: Material**

By far, the majority of ancient material gathered in Egypt is made of papyrus. That counts for the section of Trismegistos observed here as well as for the database as a whole: nearly 50 % of the texts are written on papyrus, followed by ostraca of potsherds (23, 48 %) – a quite smaller amount compared with the number given in the diagram below.





The variety of material applied on sources of TM Magic reflects the manifold genres housed under this label. Hence, all the lead tablets are of magical content (curses). Due to the great number of amulets dating into periods after the fourth century AD, the share of parchments and papers is higher than the average in Trismegistos which counts 3, 53 % and 0, 16 %. But again, one must insist on the fact that especially for the Coptic and Arabic material the numbers are about to change in the future. Nevertheless, it is presumably to expect that those two writing grounds will remain their relatively high percentage.

Then again, objects made of stone or inscriptions play a minor role for religion, ritual and magic. The 4 % enumerating stony entries and ostraca on limestone form less than a quarter

compared to the whole material (16, 16 %). A further addition of religiously motivated visitor's inscriptions on temple walls and proskynemata promise this category to increase greatly.<sup>53</sup>

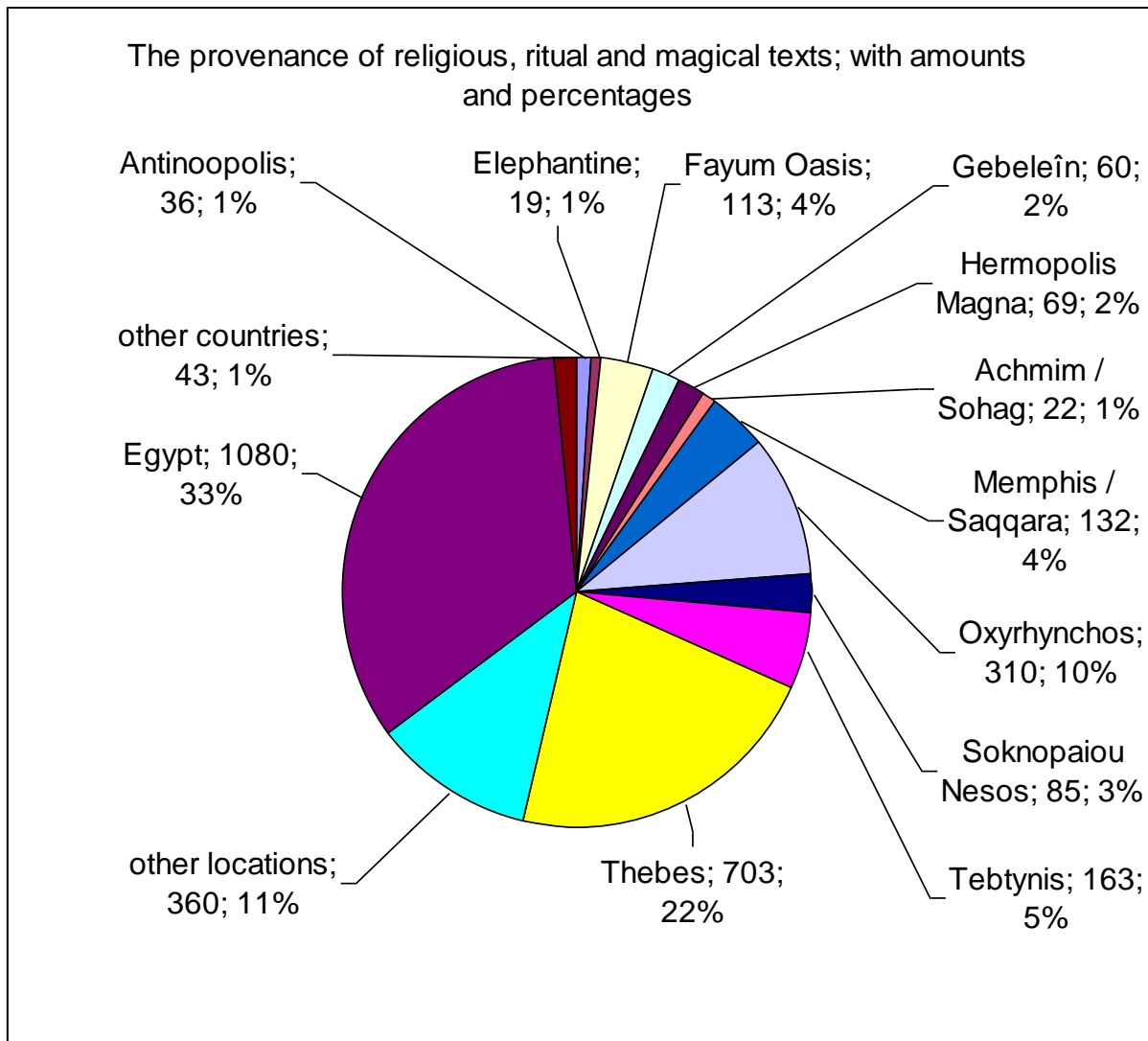
Also for wood, the total in Trismegistos is more than double as high as for the material depicted above.

### **2.3.5. Where does the “Magic” come from? The Provenance of the Documents**

For an analysis of the locations our texts originate from, I refrained my research to a few well-attested towns, prominently among those Soknopaiou Nesos and Tebtynis in the Fayum Oasis standing for 8 % of the evidence. 1080 (or one third) are plainly assigned to “Egypt” without knowing where they might have been found, written or destined for, whereas 11 % come from countries other than Egypt such as Britannia, Germania or Palaestina.

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<sup>53</sup> This work has been undertaken in the beginning by Marlies ELEBAUT. For stelae and other epigraphic material, cf. the paper of Jan MOJE here.



Apart from the mentioned Fayum villages, the metropolis Oxyrhynchos is strongly represented. The high percentage of Thebes (and the Theban area) results especially from the more than 700 temple oaths found there.

As conclusion remains that the majority of religious, ritual and magical texts from Egypt is deprived of their find spot and it cannot be deduced what their local context might have been.

### 2.3.6. Archives

Only few texts can be grouped into an archive. With the “Theban magical library” mentioned above, there is still the “Magical workshop” and the “magic library” of interest, the first

comprising 15 text from a 499 / 500 AD's scriptorium in Beni Suef in different languages and the latter bearing seven late Coptic sources housed now in Heidelberg.

Without doubt, there are more archives (i.e. the first texts of BKU I) that will be added systematically at a later stage of the project.

### 2.3.7. Authors of religious, ritual and magical works

When it comes to authorship of ancient books, the Bible plays a prominent role: In the *LDAB*, over 63 % of the entries name an author. From those, 25 % (or 16 % of the *LDAB*) are biblical texts or bear references to the Bible. For TM-Magic, the numbers draw a different picture: 9, 5 % are explicitly authored, more than the half (or less than 5 % of all TM-Magic) is “biblical”.

To summarize the overlap between the *LDAB* and the texts analyzed here, 10, 7 % of the records belong into the *LDAB*, too.

Finally, it should be stated that the majority of religious, ritual and magical texts bear no author at all or must be considered to be of a documentary nature. Furthermore, the possibility of a fictive authorship (pseudepigraphy) must be taken into consideration whose “works” reflect a certain state of redaction in progress.<sup>54</sup>

The “documentary” part of TM-Magic comprises of 1560 texts or 48 %. Sometimes, a text is assigned the label “documentary” and “literary” because of the difficulty to classify these texts.

To give an outline of the authored text being not assigned to a biblical content, one can say that astrologers such as Aratus or theologists like Shenoute dominate the field. Homer or citations of him are attested as well.

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<sup>54</sup> As examples might count the Persian magician Astrampsychos of the lot oracle *Sortes Astrampsychi* (cf. i.e. TM 59322) or an author of a magical spell (TM 59342). Other examples are the famous Greek mathematician Pythagoras or the “alchemist” Bolos of Mendes and “Pseudo-Callisthenes” who invented the *Alexander Romance* featured in TM 62667.

### 2.3.8. State of preservation

For the small amount of 830 texts only, a designation has been made whether a source has been preserved in a complete or incomplete condition or as a tiny fragment only. The statistics for this inquiry show that more than half of the evidence (53 %) lacks some parts or exists only in minor parts (20 %). The remaining 27 % determine material that came to us in their presupposed full length.

### 2.3.9. Form

As the numbers of some 1500 analyzed database-entries clearly show, the majority of religious, ritual and magical genres is written on cut-to-size pieces of papyrus, parchment or paper.<sup>55</sup> This can be derived from the many small genres such as “ticket” oracles, amulets bearing various kinds of spells, or letters to gods that appeared only in slips or tiny snippets.

In contrary, the rolls bear longer tractates. The vast majority constitute handbooks with magical spells and charms for divination or recipes for iatromedical purposes. Others include astronomical, astrological and alchemical content or manuals for dream interpretation. Additionally, one should not forget to mention the great ritual works such as the *Book of the Temple*, the *Book of Fayum*, the *Book of Thoth* or the *Apis Embalming Ritual*.

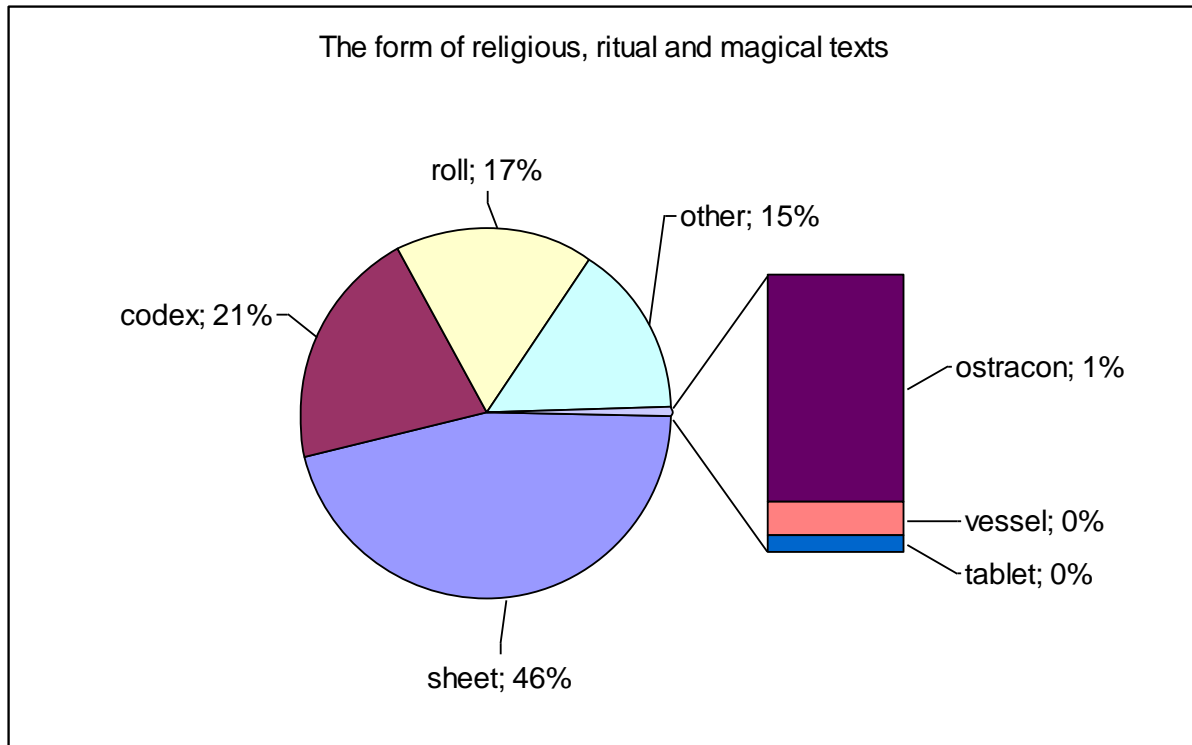
Those books have been destined for a longer life and / or to sustain a frequent use, i.e. in liturgy or while being consulted by a mantic specialist.

In course of the third to the fourth century, codices took over to be the book form used most frequently. This counts for the entries of TM-Magic as well and explains the ratings below. With the spread of early Christianity and its biblical, theological and liturgical writings, the codex became connotated by the development of this religious movement.

But also works of historiographers, authors, anthologies such as TM 59453 featuring Cicero and other sources have been written on codices.

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<sup>55</sup> Currently, this information is available for the specific records of the Leuven Database of Ancient Books and only parts of TM-Magic. However, the amount is about to increase in due time.

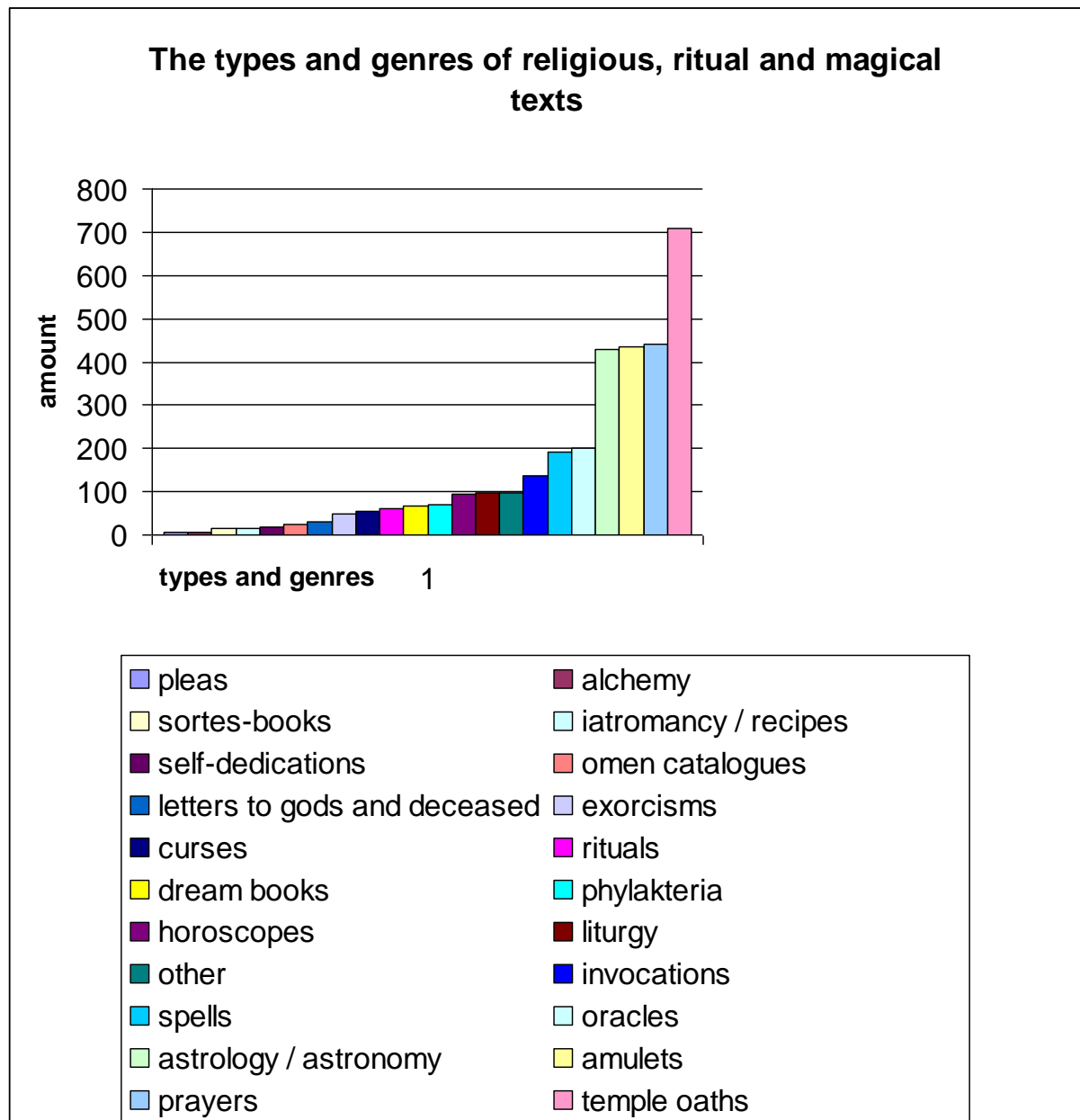


Ostraca, vessels and tablets play nearly no role in this distribution. Once again, I would like to remind the reader that the information on the form of the evidence has been provided for “literary” genres rather than for “documentary” and “funeral” for a start.

Finally, we can state that the genre and its length determined the form of a text.

### 2.3.10. Genre

In Trismegistos, currently 1016 texts bear the label “magic” – either in genre or in type. In this section, I collected the types and genres applied for our evidence and transferred them into a loose diagram. The results are presented here – and not only the aforementioned “magic” – in narrower sense as texts involving “witchcraft” and “wizardry”:



Actually, this chart with a “Top 22” should not be overestimated. Though it depicts a general distribution of various types and genres, it does not represent relative percentages because for one text more than one genre could have been attributed, especially when an entry consists of a handbook bearing more than one type and therefore encompassing several genres. This might be explained with the example of TM 109540: in “type”, we can read “magical: calendar of lucky and unlucky days used for divination (oracle; hemerology)”, in “genre” has been added “magic, oracle, calendar, hemerology, astrology, astronomy, divination”.

The reason for those numerous assignations is the idea to provide as many keywords as possible to make it easier for a user to find a group certain evidence and not to miss out some data.

A clear determination of genres becomes helpful when researchers try to follow a multilingual tradition of procedures through the ages.

For that reason, I would like to introduce the universal use of amulets as means of protection (phylactery) of single individuals keeping them save from all evil. Amulets are attested in Trismegistos from all periods – from Hieratic to Arabic, from the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C to the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD. The keywords help to find the evidence and offer assistance in a later classification. An amulet could be of advice when an “evil thing” has already happened (reactive) or in order to prevent malevolent actions (preventive).

But there are other examples of an ongoing tradition of manuscripts like alchemical recipes reaching at least from Greek to Coptic and Arabic rolls, often with loan words from both languages, and codices.<sup>56</sup>

### 2.3.11. The Religions in Trismegistos<sup>57</sup>

To say what makes a text Christian, what of an Egyptian text is pointing to classical Greek religion or which traces point to a Jewish influence e.g. in magical texts is sometimes hard to discern and to be put under discussion. One time it is simply the date in combination with its language making a religious manuscript Christian (e.g. after AD 08, and in Coptic), another time it is the IAO as abbreviation of the JAHWE recalling the God of the Jews in the Papyri Graecae et Copticae Magicae.

An inevitable question at this point is what these designations lead us to and where they might be helpful. For the magical papyri being full of various religious influences and grapho-lingual designs – the *voces et figurae magicae* in special arrangements – I would like to doubt that a clear statement on the (obvious) religion of the addressee, the specialists and the recipients can be made. Regardless of that, it goes without saying that modern (secularized

<sup>56</sup> Cf. for all seven entries TM 61300, 63248, 63300, 63473, 64429, 65816, 101351.

<sup>57</sup> The following statistics refer to a limited set of data because not for all religious, ritual and magical texts this information has been made available to this point. However, this is about to change in the future.



Christian) categories of “belief” and the like have no authority to be implemented in treating ancient religions.

Be this as it may, the bare amounts picture as follows: From 1600 entries, 961 received the label “Christian” and 627 “Classical” and / or “Egyptian” indicating the pagan tradition. With more than a hundred mentions each, “Jewish” and “Gnostic / Hermetic” influence can be accounted. Muslim and Manichaean impacts are still very far behind the others.

To conclude, the pagan amount of texts currently nearly matches its Christian counterparts.

### 2.3.12. Closing Remarks

Only few points I would like to address here which have not been said in the relevant chapters above. Of course, all these data remain state-of-the-art until more data is added in already existing records in Trismegistos respectively new texts are published and inserted, too.

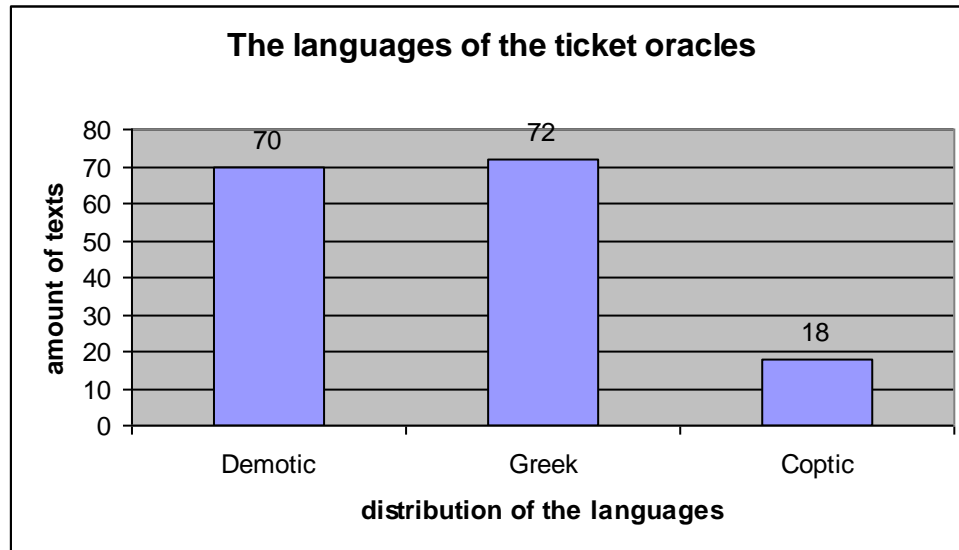
The results have shown that epoch, find spot and language determine the statistics a great deal, meaning that younger texts from younger layers are excavated first, certain locations are preferred, and various languages are treated differently by editors. These commonplaces count as well for religious, ritual, magical and divinatorial texts.

A final word I would like to return to the ranges of dating these documents. It lies in the nature of most genres treated here that there is no date written because chronological information was simply not required, not right at this place there. There was no sense in dating a magical handbook or an amulet.

The problems of dating a text after its palaeography are quite evident in the chart with the dated texts and in the one under the next paragraph showing the chronological range for the ticket oracles: centuries with a broad evidence of dated texts (and their respective palaeography) do much more often attract further material due to the experience with material from that time. This counts e.g. for sources written in Greek in the second centuries BC and AD or the Demotic of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC as well. In contrast to this, we detect a descent in the poorly attested 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and for several reasons the somewhat neglected 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

## 2.4. WAS AMMIANUS RIGHT? THE TICKET ORACLES AS A CASE STUDY

To return to the ticket oracles mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus, there are at present 160 entries available in the database.<sup>58</sup>



As the following diagram clearly points out, the amounts of the Demotic and Greek tickets are nearly the same: 43, 75 % versus 45 %. As for the Coptic material, 11, 25 % can be stated. Bilingualism is not taking place – the petitioner decided for one language. These percentages do not reflect the main distribution of languages in Trismegistos. Here, the relation of Demotic : Greek : Coptic is at about 10, 7 % : 68, 6 % : 1, 1 %.<sup>59</sup>

In Demotic, only pagan gods are implored. In Coptic, the addressees of oracles are God, Jesus Christ and some Holy martyrs. For Greek, the picture is twofold: while in tickets from BC04-AD04, the beseeched divinities match the ones of the Demotic texts, but after AD05, the

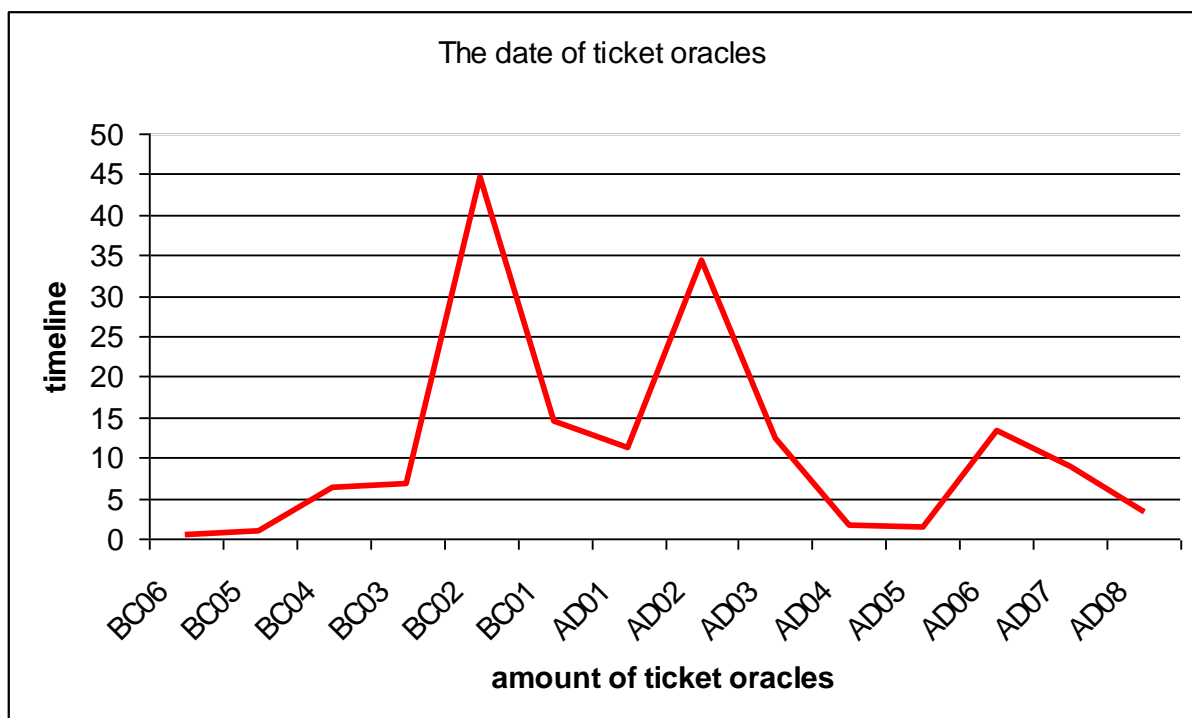
<sup>58</sup> This number encompasses all published texts in Demotic, Greek and Coptic. There are some new texts that await publication by various scholars: ca. 200 Coptic from Antinoë (A. Delattre), one Roman Demotic from Soknopaiou Nesos (M. A. Stadler), some Roman Greek from the same site (M. Capasso), 180 from Tebtynis excavated *sub aegide* C. Gallazi (the tickets in Ptolemaic Demotic by C. di Cerbo, the Ptolemaic Greek by P. Gallo and Ph. Collombert). Among the Demotic examples from Tebtynis are two pairs of a question, one duplicate of another and one papyrus with more than 20 questions which is not a lot oracle like a *sortes*-book. All those texts are treated as single examples. Letters with reference to ticket oracles have been taken into consideration as well. For a more thorough analysis, I would like to refer to my dissertation project „Analyse von Kulturen in der Oase Fayum im römischen Ägypten mit dem Schwerpunkt demotischer, griechischer und koptischer Ticket-Orakel und den Sortes Astrampsychi.“ (University of Leipzig).

<sup>59</sup> The remaining 19, 6 % contain all multilingual records and those in other languages such as Hieratic, Aramaic or Arabic.

Christian alterations took place. Nine questions, that are 12, 5 % of the Greek tickets and 5, 63 % of the whole material in question, refer to God and the martyrs.

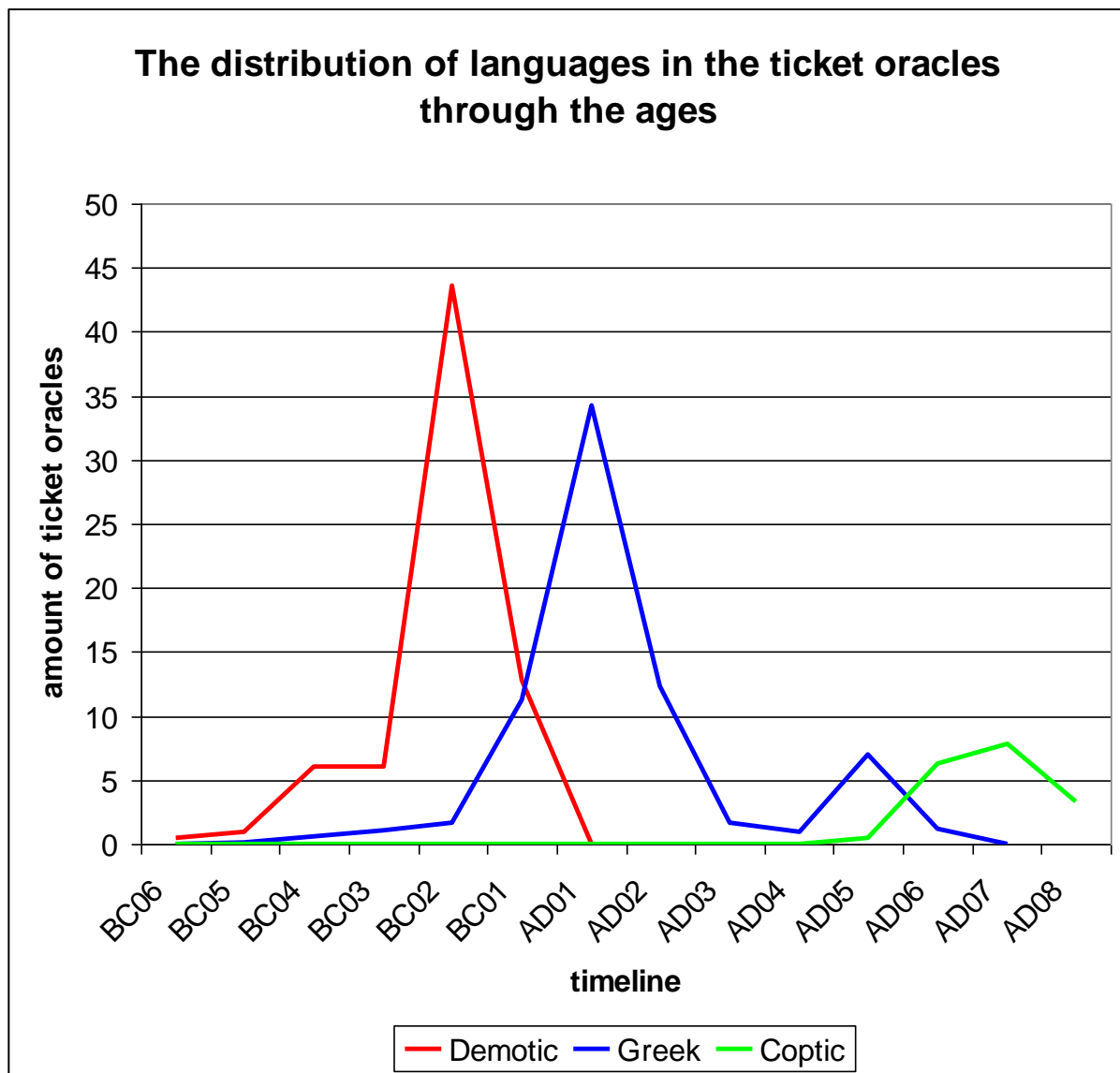
It never occurred that pagan and Christian gods are implored together as it is sometimes the case in spells of the magical papyri. Other religions like Judaism, Gnosticism or names of foreign cults are not attested. The range of pagan and Christian evidence does not match with the general picture presented above. In total, 83, 13 % of the inquiries are directed to pagan divinities while in the remaining the petitioners turned to the Christian entities. However, further studies are necessary taking into consideration the upcoming publications.

The following inquiry is about the temporal spread of ticket oracles. Yet again, it is of interest if the data shows significant turning points, i.e. after the Roman conquest of Egypt or Constantine's toleration of Christianity.

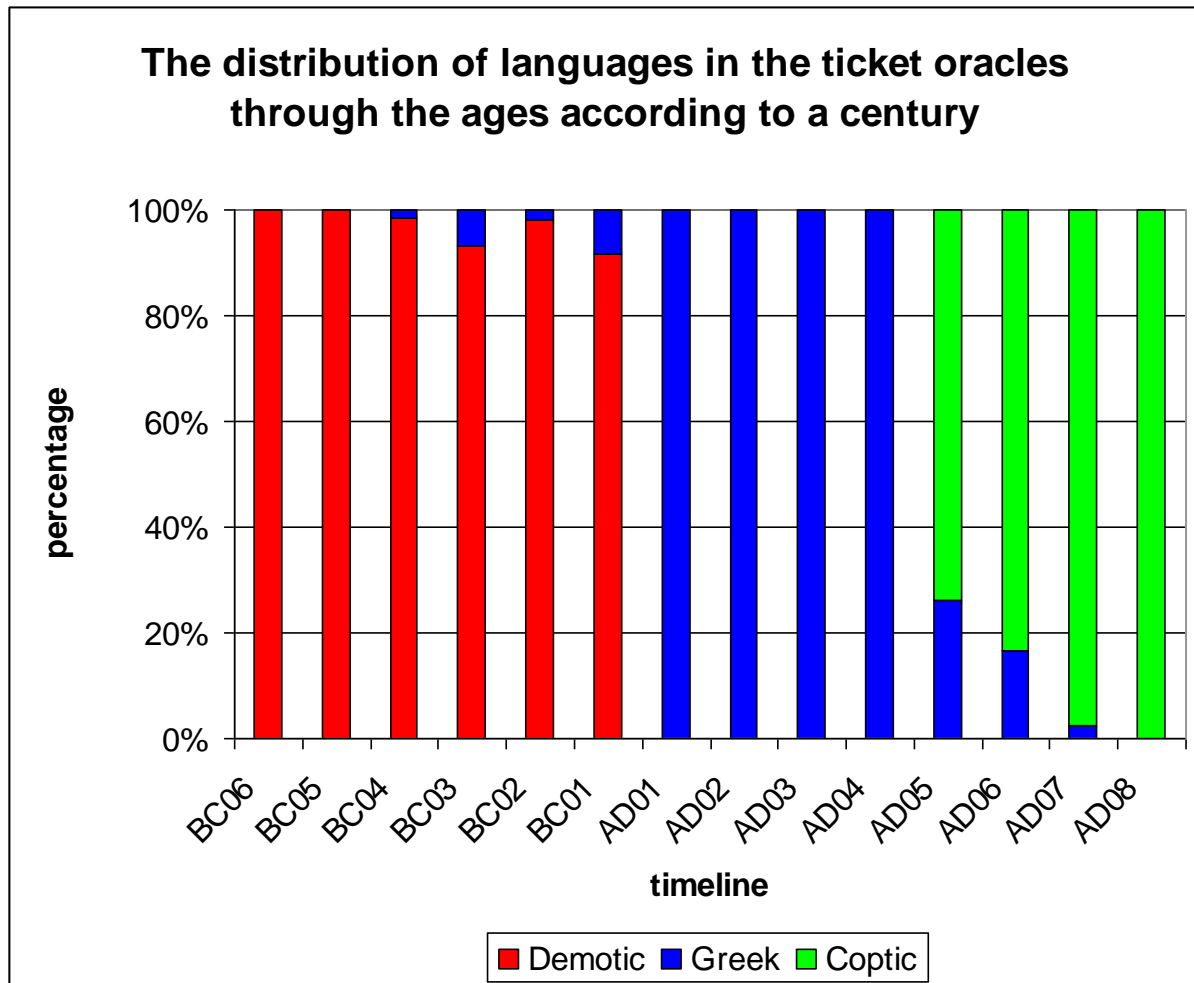


With two major peaks in the 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC and AD and a smaller climax for the Christian material in the general red line above, we can see those highs clearly reflected by the different languages in the next diagram. Unfortunately, the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC and AD are as generally somewhat underrepresented as is the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. Reasons for those are manifold and shall

not be perused here. There are only minor intersections of Demotic and Greek and of Greek and Coptic.



Setting the evidence in Trismegistos to 100 %, a chart regarding the language proportions for each century indicates even clearer the disappearance of Demotic after (the constructed) year zero:



The data shows that after the Ptolemaic regency, no ticket oracle has been submitted in Demotic. The dominating language till the seventh century is Greek. Mark DEPAUW once challenged me with the remark this might be result of a prohibition campaign. That could mean two things: the ticket oracles were treated separately or this reflects merely a circumstance of excavation-history. The lack of Demotic oracle questions after Augustus' conquest cannot be explained away that easily.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no other decree known which would prove a systematic restriction of the indigenous Egyptian language.

<sup>60</sup> This question and many different approaches have been treading in a fine manner by P. RIPAT (2006), esp. 304-12 and *passim* and will therefore not be repeated here. Her conclusion reads as follows: "*It is difficult, it not impossible, to discern any advantage for priests or inquirers that would result in the preference for Greek over Demotic in the inscription of every single oracular inquiry from the very onset of Roman rule. On the other hand, it is very easy to identify multiple reasons why the Roman administration would have desired such a change.*" Judging from the scientific methods and available sources which are partly cited here, too, I agree with her argumentations.

Then again, this hypothesis does not apply to other religious genres and to the whole material in Trismegistos. In the first century BC, approximately 900 Demotic and 2050 Greek texts are preserved. One century later, the relation is ca. 1100 to 5050. About 600 dated Demotic texts fall in the reign of Augustus. What surprises is that the dated Greek entries of the winner of Actium encompass only some 380 records. While the withdrawal of Demotic took place already at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, this could not be postulated for the time after the conquest or being in direct connection with a prohibition campaign. A direct comparison of the spread of the languages in the time of Cleopatra VII and her successor Augustus cannot be undertaken without caution because of the extreme lack of dated documents in Cleopatra's reign.

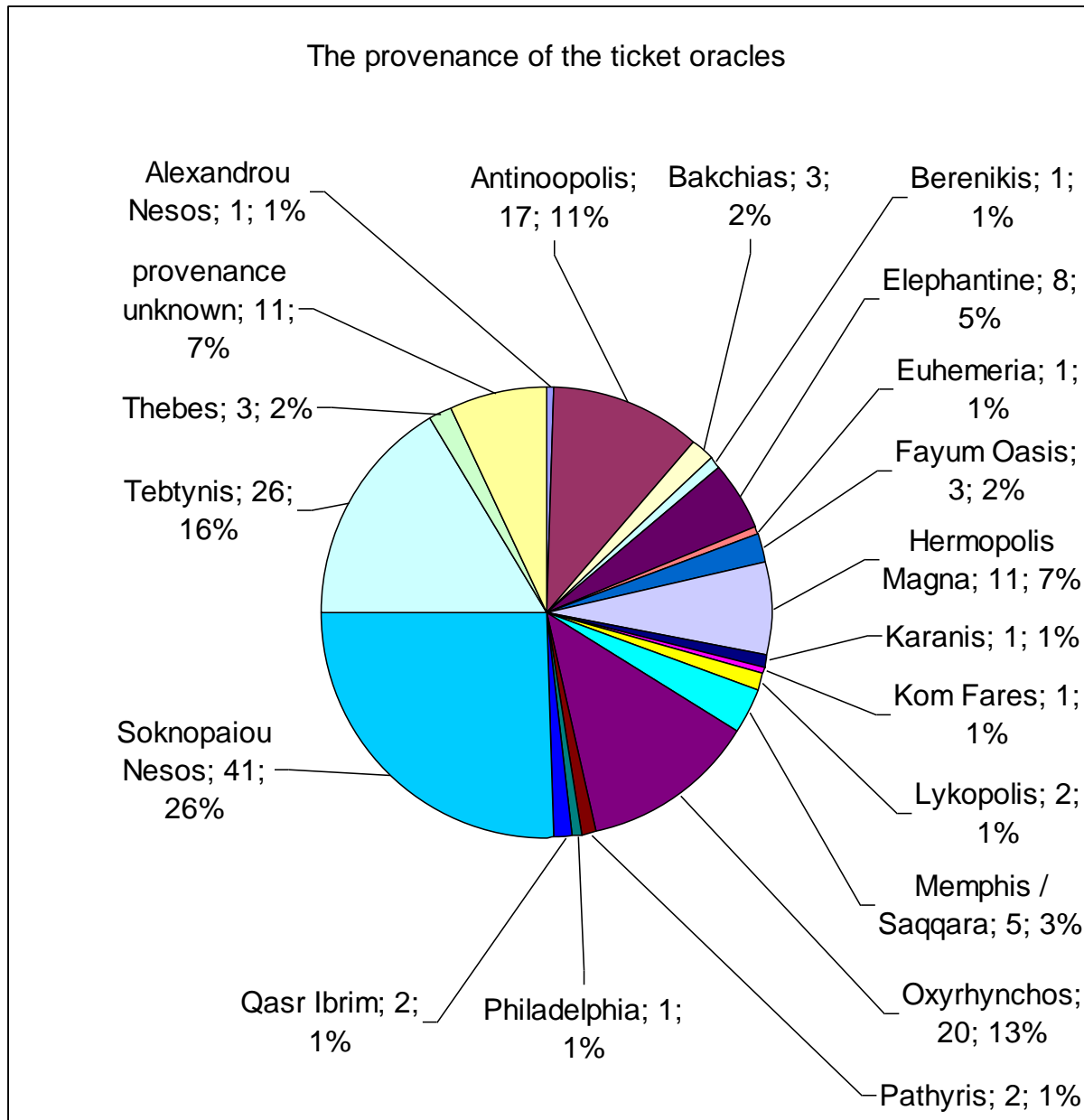
Nearly 97 % of the ticket oracles (all except five entries) were dated by palaeographic means. Ranges comprise mostly one or more centuries. It might be easy the case that some Demotic texts were written after year one AD.<sup>61</sup> The final reason why Demotic ceased so distinctly to be a language of the oracle questions might perhaps never be solved because this is a question without a solution or our evidence reflects many parameters, both modern and antique, and is an (un-institutional) combination thereof.

As commonly known, the body of texts preserved from ancient antiquity is chiefly limited to the location of their find spot, which is where excavations took place. For Graeco-Roman Egypt, in the towns and villages of the Fayum Oasis (namely Tebtynis and Soknopaiou Nesos) and around the former metropolis Oxyrhynchos, the majority of papyri and ostraca has been brought to daylight. The 160 examined ticket oracles do confirm the rule.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The one newly discovered ticket oracle from Soknopaiou Nesos will not change this picture tremendously.

<sup>62</sup> In the database sometimes a question mark is added to a location a papyrus. To simplify the research, I ignored them because of their small amount.



With nearly 45 %, the town Tebtynis and the village Soknopaïou Nesos are on top of the statistics. Together with the other fayumic locations Alexandrou Nesos, Bakchias, Berenikis, Karanis and Philadelphia, the Arsinoites reaches 48, 75 %. There, no distinction can be made for provenance and language. Nevertheless, is that true for Oxyrhynchos where nearly all found ticket oracles are Greek, and in Hermopolis Magna where a lot of the mainly Demotic questions have been handed in by a certain Teos.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Cf. TM 69678; 69679; 69680; 69681; 107427.

Papyrus is in the majority of the cases the material of the ticket oracles. Only five instances are made of different stuff (three ostraca, one parchment, one reed). As said before, religious, ritual, magical, divinatory texts are sometimes written on the papyrological verso of a papyrus sheet (across the fibres) while the recto remains blank. This occurs quite often that it cannot be counted as coincidence or neglect. The scribe had made his choice. For the oracles, the numbers speak the same language as for the Trismegistos database in total amount: nearly 86 % of the questions to a divinity stand on the recto, 3, 13 % of the scribes applied the verso only, in 11, 25 % of the material both sides have been used beginning with the recto.

It will be exciting to see how these results will be affected by the upcoming publications of the newly excavated ticket oracles.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

In order to come back to the thesis from the beginning, we can negate that there has happened a tremendous reduction of religious, ritual, magical texts beginning from the reign of Augustus. There is no reason to assume that a decrease of evidence from this field, especially in case of the oracle questions, should be interrelated with known imperial decrees against *maleficorum*, *mageia* and *maiestas* or *vice versa*, but rather part of a process of Demotic being detached as language of religious and later political life, apart from its usage in private matters.

As a second conclusion, we can say that there is no such thing as a concrete “change” of religious, ritual and magical practice, but ongoing use of techniques with filling in other divinities for the former pagan gods and entities. Now, God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Martyrs and others have replaced the former gods.<sup>64</sup> Prohibitions had not the impact their issuers wanted them to as was shown above for the case of the Bes oracle in Abydos. Though we might only be informed partially about persecutions of firstly Christians and later pagans, a general picture of even one region only cannot be drawn without sceptical remarks. Some imperial decrees are over exaggerated in reception, others not even known. Oracle questions reflect an ongoing tradition from the ostraca put in front of the bark in procession over

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<sup>64</sup> FRANKFURTER (2005), 265-72 reasons about the creation of a Christian pantheon with competing entities.



Hieratic, Demotic, Greek and Coptic influence. It will not come as a surprise might older attestations appear to the light in future campaigns.

In addition, one might think of religious genres that remain completely unknown to us because their practices were conducted in an exclusively oral way.

In Peter BROWN's masterly study „Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity. From Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages” one reads about some other prohibitions of pagan religious practices such as the oracle cult of Bes in Abydos.<sup>65</sup> He points out some interesting examples which persons other than the emperor could be in emotional turmoil fearing possible “magical” attacks: gladiators, chariot drivers in races, desired women and men... To sum up, nearly everyone is in danger of be “bewitched”. *“Taken all together, the purges that followed accusations of sorcery and illicit divination point, not to any increase in a ‘terror of magic’, but to a more precise, if more prosaic, development – to an increase in the zeal and efficacy of the emperor’s servants, and their greater ability to override the vested interests of the traditional aristocracies of the Empire, whether to collect taxes or to chastise the black arts.”*<sup>66</sup>

Authorities invented and executed measures to control religious spin-offs, and it was up to the people to continue, change or to revolt against an imperial command. The line between doing as one was told and condemning against a law was not always a sharp edge, but sometimes a wide muddy road.

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<sup>65</sup> Instances under Constantius II, Valentinian I and Valens are quoted in BROWN (1972), 124 n. 2.

<sup>66</sup> BROWN (1972), 122.

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