

Malcolm Choat and Iain Gardner, *The Macquarie Papyri I: A Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power (P. Macq. I 1)*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013. xiv + 146 pages and CD-ROM. ISBN 978-2-503-53170-0.

In *A Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power* Malcolm Choat and Iain Gardner provide an edition of a lengthy invocation that is accompanied by drawings and twenty-seven different prescriptions or spells. In total, these (Sahidic) Coptic texts comprise sixteen pages and are preserved in a twenty-page parchment codex that was acquired by the Museum of Ancient Cultures at Macquarie University (Sydney) in 1981.

The edition begins with forty some pages of introduction. They first thoroughly describe the parchment codex itself. After briefly detailing the acquisition of the codex, Choat and Gardner provide an insightful discussion of the codicological features of the object that includes a diagram of how the codex was assembled as well as a discussion of the binding. This is followed by a detailed assessment of the paleography, date, and provenance of the codex as well as its dialect and orthography. Recognizing some of the inherent problems with Coptic paleography, Choat and Gardner judiciously date the codex to the seventh or eighth century CE and cautiously propose that the dialect suggests an origin in Upper Egypt in the vicinity of Hermopolis.

The introduction next seeks to explain and situate the different texts preserved in the codex. The principal ritual text of the codex, which forms a distinct unit and occupies the first twelve pages, is generically identified as the “Invocations Text” by Choat and Gardner. It begins with an invocation to the mysterious Baktiotha, but also invokes a host of diverse figures that include Abrasax, Jesus, Abraham, Moses, and David as well as various angels and archangels and *nomina barbara*. To help elucidate this rather enigmatic invocation Choat and Gardner compare it to ms. British Library Or. 5987 (= *P.Lond.Copt.* 1.1008) and P.Berol. inv. 5527 (= *BKU* 1.23) because they include a number of distinct parallels. Even though these two texts are considerably shorter, it is clear that they emanated from a similar milieu as they share distinct terminology and phraseology and also begin with an invocation to Baktiotha.

As part of this analysis Choat and Gardner further note that portions of the “Invocations Text” manifest distinct Christian elements, which lead them to cautiously speculate that a monastic context is a logical candidate for the production of the text. Yet they are quick to point out that the text appears to have undergone various recensions and that Christian elements appear to overlay earlier elements. Therefore, they postulate that

underneath the later Christian accretions is an earlier “‘more gnostic’ original” (p. 31), but admit that there are terminological and theoretical problems with such a categorization. Consequently, they identify some of the latent features of the text as Sethian and proceed to point out various parallels that the text shares with Sethianism in terms of its general cosmology. This is of course quite significant as it is thought that Sethianism had effectively died out centuries earlier.

From here, the discussion and analysis shifts from the “Invocations Text” to the twenty-seven numbered prescriptions that follow and stretch from the end of page twelve through page sixteen in the codex. According to Choat and Gardner the “Invocations Text” was at some point combined with a set of ritual prescriptions and a new product was brought about, that is, the ritual handbook. Thus, by combining the “Invocations Text” with the prescriptions the handbook became, “a more complete instrument of ritual power.” The twenty-seven spells at the end of the handbook are generally quite pithy and cover a wide range of purposes. A number of the spells deal with cures for maladies, and include demonic possession, sickness, warts, spleen problems, or the staunching of blood. While some of these prescriptions are strictly material as they instruct the practitioner to apply or ingest a particular substance (oil, wine, water, rose oil, and so on), others stipulate that some ritual act is to be performed or some verbal invocation is to be uttered.

The edition of the text that follows the lengthy introduction is skillfully presented and there is a facing English translation on the opposite page. On page twelve of the codex there are a series of drawings that take up most of the page and in the transcription these are skillfully reproduced with the Coptic carefully inserted at various places so as to reproduce as well as possible the appearance of the actual codex page; the same is done for the English translation. Following the transcription and translation Choat and Gardner provide a “Continuous Translation” of the text followed by a line-by-line commentary. This is followed by two appendices where a new transcription (and translation) is given for ms. British Library Or. 5987 and P.Berol. inv. 5527 and then a series of comprehensive indices. The book concludes with photographic plates of the parchment codex in color and there is also a CD-ROM in the back cover that includes high-resolution digital images.

Choat and Gardner have produced an exemplary edition, and this volume has much to offer beyond the presentation of a previously unpublished text. The depth and breadth of the scholarship found in this volume will surely make it attractive to many working on texts of “ritual power”

(that is, magic) because it synthesizes such a wide range of scholarship and advances the discussion in various ways. Power words, esoteric terms and phrases, and enigmatic figures are treated with proficiency and depth, and previous scholarship is succinctly presented and treated. This is certainly the case with the discussion of the mysterious figure Baktiotha, who is invoked at the start of the text; while the conclusions reached by Choat and Gardner might not appear convincing to everyone, every effort was made to elucidate this figure. On this latter point it may be noted that when suggestions are put forward regarding some aspect of the text that is not entirely certain or is open to alternative points of view, Choat and Gardner, to their credit, advance such suggestions with caution and restraint.

Another strength of this volume that will certainly appeal to many is the number of parallels from other texts that are constantly invoked throughout to help elucidate a reading or some feature of the text. Choat and Gardner are to be commended for the thorough treatment of this text and the copious parallels they provide. On this front their new editions of ms. British Library Or. 5987 and P.Berol. inv. 5527 in the appendices are certainly welcome as they improve upon previous editions. Additionally, having access to high-resolution digital images of the codex via the enclosed CD-ROM will be beneficial to many who want to take a closer look at the text.

Despite the many exemplary features of the overall edition, there are a couple of places where some improvement could still be made. For example, the series of drawings on page twelve of the codex could probably have been given a little more explanation and analysis in the commentary and the reference to "Antioch" in the "Invocations Text," the only toponym mentioned in the entire treatise, could have benefitted from more discussion. Nevertheless, these are fairly minor points and overall this is an exemplary edition both in terms of its contents and overall aesthetic presentation. Because of the way Choat and Gardner examine and clearly present these texts both scholar and student will certainly be able to glean much from this useful volume.

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