

Tales of Magic and Wonder from Ancient Egypt



Dates

April 24 — June 26, 2020

Location

Meeting Room: [Zoom link](#)

Overview

Have you ever wondered how the ancient Egyptians understood their own world? The folktales recorded in Egyptian texts reveal rich imaginations filled with magic and mystery. These stories provide vital insight into the worldview of the ancient Egyptians (*Khufu and the Magicians*), their understanding of the cosmos (*The Shipwrecked Sailor*), and their expectations for the hereafter (*Setne and Naneferkaptah*). In these ancient stories we find many common parallels with modern ideas about magic and storytelling. For this reading group, we will study ancient Egyptian stories through their English translations. By reading and discussing these fascinating tales, we will attempt to understand what they reveal about the ancient understanding of the supernatural, and what they tell us about our common humanity.

Structure

In each week's meeting we will discuss the readings given in the previous week. The group is entirely discussion based, so you are expected to do the reading and be prepared to discuss any aspect of it in the meeting. (Of course, things sometimes come up. Meetings are laid back and you are free to discuss as much or as little as you want)

The readings are organized roughly chronologically, because this is the most straightforward way of planning the group, but we are not solely interested in developments over time. Often, we will be more interested in the things that don't change. Long-running themes and recurrent motifs will be the major products of our survey, and each participant will be asked to develop a study of at least one longitudinal feature of Egyptian storytelling. On the final day, we will discuss our observations and analyze them together in light of what we have learned.

Schedule

Meeting 1 (April 24): The Most Ancient of Magics

Central myths:

- [Allen, *The Pyramid Texts* \(PDF\)](#)
- [Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, §§11–19](#)
 - Update: [PDF Link](#)
 - NB: [Original is in Greek](#), not Latin. The title is Latin. Mea maxima culpa.
- [Pinch, *Egyptian Myth* \(Optional\)](#)

Discussion Questions:

- How do the rituals in the Pyramid Texts work?
- How was the cosmos created?
- What is the story of Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Seth about?
- What sort of creatures are the gods?
- From these things, what can we distill about the nature of the Egyptian worldview?

Followup Points of Interest:

- [The Ennead](#)
- [Unas Pyramid](#)
- [Pyramid Texts Concordance](#)
- [Hieratic Script](#)
- [Pesesh-Kef Knife](#)
- [Magic Systems – 2-axis analysis](#)



Meeting 2 (May 1): The Flowering of Egyptian Storytelling

Middle Egyptian Stories:

- [Khufu and the Magicians](#)
- [The Shipwrecked Sailor](#)

Original Texts (for you to look at only if you are curious):

- [Khufu and the Magicians](#)
- [Shipwrecked Sailor \(my undergrad thesis lol\)](#)

Followup Points of Interest:

- [Ka Statue](#)
- Eaten by crocodile?
 - □□□□□□□□□□□□ = “Then he grabbed the commoner”
 - There’s a hint of the word □□□□ “head” when it describes the commoner being there for seven days, so maybe he’s in the crocodile’s head the whole time? This part of the text is unfortunately very fragmentary.
- Fearful?
 - Written: □□□, perhaps a typo for □□□□ “frightening”
- Why 110 years?
 - Linguistic consideration didn’t yield anything obvious. 110 (ⲙⲉ ⲛⲏⲧ) might work as a pun for “leaven” (ⲙⲉⲛⲏⲣ), but that’s all I could come up with. It’s a later borrowing from Semitic anyway, so it wouldn’t work at this time.
 - [This source](#) cites this same text, P. Westcar.
 - [This source](#) claims that there “27 mentions” of the figure in Egyptian texts. How they arrived at that count I really don’t know.
- There was a question about a deified scribe but I don’t remember it. Please comment here if that was your question.



Meeting 3 (May 8): The Folk Tradition at the Height of Civilization


Late Egyptian Folktales:

- [The Tale of the Two Brothers](#)
- [The Contendings of Horus and Seth](#)

Original Texts (for you to look at only if you are *very* curious):

- [Gardiner, *Late Egyptian Stories*](#)

“Once upon a time...”

- Egyptian: $\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square$... (“As for it, so one was...”)
- Egyptian Arabic: “Kan ya makan...”, (“It was, oh, place...”)
- Spanish: Érase una vez... (It was once ...)
- German: Es war einmal (It was once ...)
- Turkish: Bir varmış bir yokmuş... (“Once there was, once there wasn’t...”)
- Korean: 옛날 옛적에 (literal meaning: long ago and long ago)
- Irish: “Fadó, fadó” (lit. meaning “long ago, long ago”)
- Japanese: 昔々 (mukashi, mukashi = long, long ago); 々 is a repetition sign, like || in Egyptian :-)

[Egyptian Keyboard](#)



Meeting 4 (May 15): The Blessed Dead

Introduction

[UChicago – Book of the Dead Introduction](#)

Text

[The Papyrus of Ani](#)

List of sources for funerary texts

- [OI Book of the Dead edited volume \(full pdf download\)](#)
- [Hornung The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife \(worldcat link only 😞\)](#)
 - [Folder of other interesting books on Egyptian religion](#)
- [Assmann *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* \(full pdf\)](#)
- [Hornung *The Egyptian Amduat* \(worldcat link only ☺\)](#)
- [Hornung *The Book of Gates* \(worldcat link only ☺\)](#)
- [West *The Tekenu and Ancient Egyptian Funerary Ritual* \(publisher link\)](#)
- [Grain Brick STL for 3d printing \(□□□\)](#)
- [Hoeller *The Gnostic Jung*](#)
- [Jung *Seven Sermons to the Dead*](#)
- [All about □□□ \(kheker friezes\)](#)



Meeting 5 (May 22): Demonic Demotic

Introduction

[Gaming in the Tale of Setna](#)

Text

[The First Tale of Setne Khamwas](#)

Interlinear Demotic Text (for you to look at if you are curious to a fault):

[Setne I](#)



Meeting 6 (May 29): Less-Ancient Tales of More-Ancient Magic

Introduction

[Brief Bio of Shenoute](#)

Text

[Besa *The Life of Shenoute*](#)

Original Text in Bohairic Coptic

[ⲃⲏⲕⲁ ⲡⲃⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲩⲉⲛⲟⲩⲧ](#)

New, Better Text (thanks Miku39): [Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita et Opera](#)



Meeting 7 (June 5): Hik

Announcement

If you would like to draw out a theme or motif and discuss it on the last day, [please send me an email](#) to discuss your idea. I need to have some sense of how many people want to participate in order to plan. Feel free to contact me for help with choosing an idea.

FAQS:

- How long do we have to talk about it? — As long as you want.
- Does it have to appear in every text? — Nope.
- Do I have to do this? — Yes, but actually no.
- Will you choose a topic for me? — Maybe, if you email me and fail to come up with something before I get impatient.

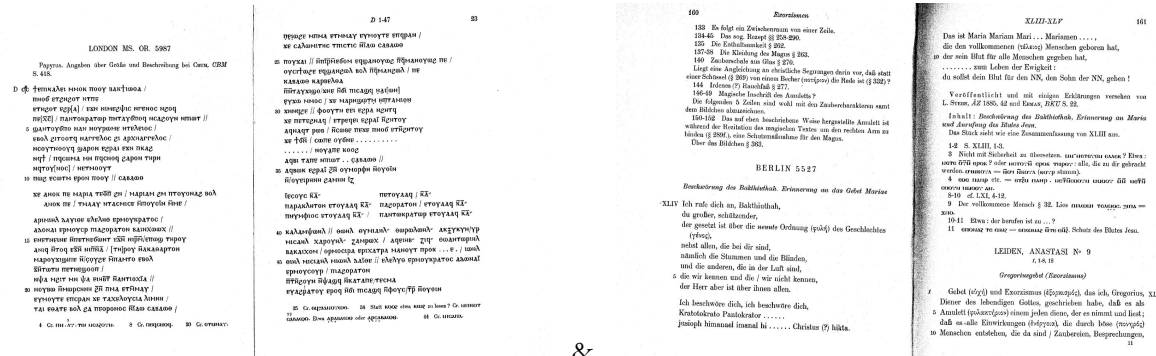
Grimoires

- [A Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power](#) ([Original Text](#))
- [A Coptic Wizard's Hoard](#) (pp. 440-450) ([Original Text](#))
 - Begin at my first comment
 - Read the rest only if it especially interests you.

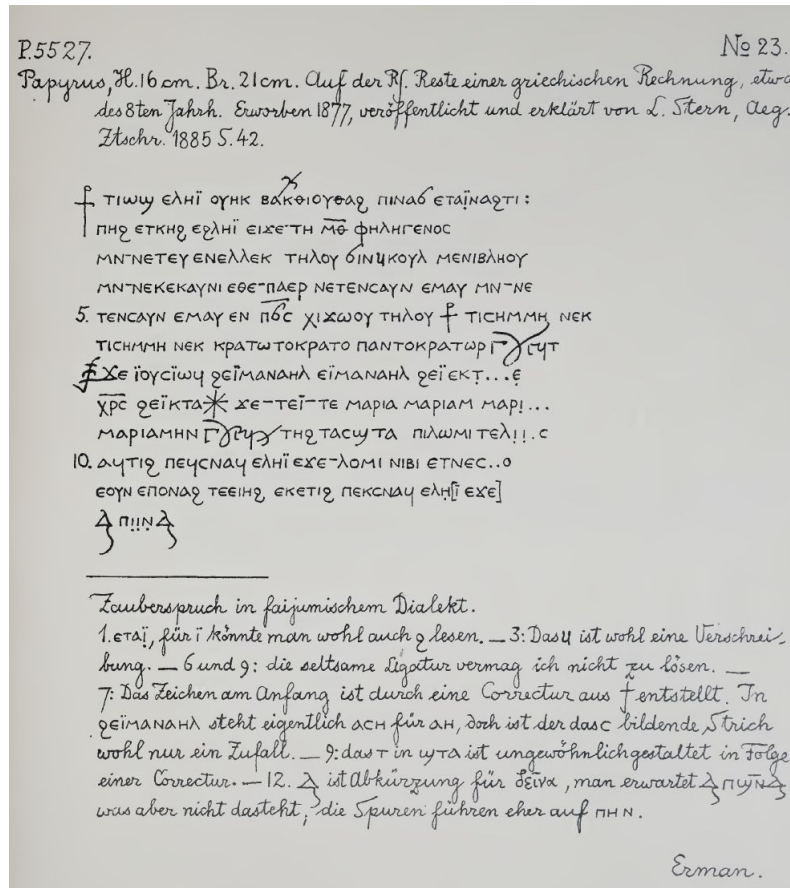


Some related sources, as the “Handbook” itself does not seem to be online

<http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/2012/02/kropps-ausgewahlte-koptische.html> has download links to Kropp's Zaubertexte (= magical texts) including MS Or 5987 (vol. 1 p. 22 ff.) & Berlin papyrus 5527 (vol. 2):



The Coptic text for the latter is at <https://archive.org/details/aegyptischeurkun01koni> (No. 23)



The above looks like the beginning of our English text, but only the first page. Where does the rest come from?

Meeting 8 (June 12): Modern Egyptian Folktales

Text

[El-Shamy \(1982\) *Folktales of Egypt*](#)



Meeting 9 (June 19): The Etic Perspective – Egypt from the outside looking in



From the Classical Period to today, Egypt has been a place of mystery. The ancient Greeks believed that it was the source of their (relatively new) civilization. Almost every culture in the world has some fictional representation of Egypt as an established trope. We will round off our survey with a quick look at the way Egypt has been portrayed in the fiction of other cultures, including our own, and ask how well the themes we find in stories outside of Egypt reflect its own native traditions.

- [Exodus](#)
- [Japanese YouTube Cartoon Series \(English subtitles\)](#)
- [Assassin's Creed Origins](#) (I updated this with a link to a document that you can comment on. It's an essay I wrote about the video game. You do not have to read it.)
- [Montu Roller Coaster at Busch Gardens](#)
- [Egyptian Revival Architecture](#)
- Add things to this list...
 - You don't necessarily have to put them here, but take note of Egyptian things in modern cultures where you find them and be ready to discuss

Meeting 10 (June 26): Review of themes, individual presentations

Presentation sign-up sheet (short \approx 5 minutes on a theme or motif)

- Christian Casey
- Casey – Women
- John Alberico – Holistic teaching
- Selina – Shapeshifting
- Grace – Games

Links

- [*The Egyptian Film*](#)
- [*Senet* at Board Game Arena](#)
- [*Games of No Change*](#)
- [*Easter & Ishtar \(Counterargument\)*](#)

Upcoming SASA Groups

[Register Here](#)

- Silicon Valleys of the Ancient World: Ancient Technology, Metals and Mining - Sara Quaggio, PhD Student (Mondays at noon EDT)
- Secret Knowledge of the Doctor: Health and Medicine in the Ancient World - Dr. Casey L. Kirkpatrick (Mondays @ 1pm EDT)
- Roots, Seeds, and Trees: The Genealogies of Modern Racism & Ethnocentrism in Ancient Greece & Rome - John Haberstroh, PhD Candidate (Tuesdays @ 4pm EDT)
- Long ago, in a galaxy called the Milky Way: Creation Stories from Around the World - Shane Thompson, PhD Candidate (Wednesdays @ 10am EDT)
- Gods, Ghosts, and Graves: Archaeology of Religions - Bruno Soltic, PhD Candidate (Wednesdays @ 1pm EDT)
- The Ancients Did It Too! Sex, Desire, and Seduction in Ancient India and Greece - Tuhin Bhattacharjee, PhD Candidate (Thursdays @ 1pm EDT)
- The Ancient Library of the Dead Sea Scrolls - Tine Rassalle, PhD Candidate (Thursdays @ 3pm EDT)
- Pharaoh Triumphant: Power Politics in Ancient Egypt - Luiza Silva, PhD Student (Fridays @ 3pm EDT)
- "In Their Proper Place:" Women in Ancient Egypt - Theresa Tiliakos, PhD Student (Fridays @ 5pm EDT)