

Ancient Egyptian codex finally deciphered

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All Giza Pyramids in one shot. Credit: Ricardo Liberato/Wikipedia

(Phys.org) —A pair of Australian researchers, Malcolm Choat with Macquarie University and Iain Gardner with the University of Sydney, has after many decades of effort by others, succeeded in deciphering an ancient Egyptian codex. In meeting with members of the press, they revealed that the codex is actually a handbook of a practitioner of rituals and for that reason have published the converted text as "Egyptian Handbook of Ritual Power."

No one knows where the codex was found, but most scholars who have studied it believe it was written by someone in pre-Islamic Upper Egypt approximately 1,300 years ago. An antiques dealer came across it in the late 70's or early 80's who subsequently sold it to Macquarie University in 1981. Since that time, various researchers have attempted to read the [text](#) but none were successful until now. The 20 parchment pages of text were written in Coptic, the researchers note, and offer 27 spells and multiple invocations and drawings. It appears likely, the team reports, that the two types of subjects meant that they were once separate documents that were later combined in the codex.

The researchers found love spells, a means for casting out evil spirits and even ideas on how to treat ailments, such as one known as black jaundice. They also found multiple references to Jesus and Sethians—religious groups that identified with Adam and Eve's third son, and others that identified with a previously unknown character referred to as Baktiotha—a god-like figure. Because of the mix of subjects in the invocations, the two researchers suggest the document was likely a representative of a transition period for the people of that time. They also suggest that the person who wrote or used the text was likely not a priest or monk (there was a large number of Christians living in the area during that time) but more likely was a scholarly type, using the codex as a means of helping people achieve desires or goals. Some examples, included spells to help a person do better in business, or to help them get along with others. One spell could be used to assist one person in subjugating another.

More information: A Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power,
[www.brepols.net/Pages/ShowProd ... d=IS-9782503531700-1](http://www.brepols.net/Pages/ShowProd...d=IS-9782503531700-1)

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