

The hieratic 18th dynasty Book of the Dead of the Lady Hatnofer from the Egyptian Museum Cairo.

Preliminary overview

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Abstract

A few examples of Book of the Dead manuscripts in the hieratic handwriting from the beginning of the 18th dynasty were discovered. One of these early examples is the Book of the Dead that belongs to the lady Hatnofer, the mother of the renowned official Senenmut. This Book of the Dead comprises four manuscripts, i. e. two hieratic papyri, one leather roll, and one linen shroud. They are preserved in the Egyptian Museum Cairo. This paper will give a general overview of the two hieratic papyri and also will stress on some aspects and peculiarities of the hieratic handwriting, whereas the details of the script will be displayed in the study of these manuscripts. The other early examples and the reasons for using and abandoning the hieratic script at that time will be discussed in short. The scribes of the two papyri, based on palaeographic comparisons, will be displayed as well.

Fundamentally, the importance of the hereafter and the believing in a second life after death were hallmarks in the beliefs of the Ancient Egyptians, thus the Book of the Dead (BD) was not the output of the New Kingdom itself. This means that the corpus of the BD spells is not a completely new aggregation of religious texts, and some of its spells protrude from an earlier collection such as Pyramid and Coffin Texts.² Nevertheless, the New Kingdom era represents the real starting point for this long-lasting religious composition, which was recorded on the majority of the available writing mediums at that time. During the 17th and 18th dynasties, large linen shrouds were used on a wide range as a surface for writing the Books of the Dead spells.³ A few of these shrouds contain spells in hieratic script arranged in vertical

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² Dorman 2018, 29.

³ Dorman 2018, 36.