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Between sexual enhancement and control: Aphrodisiac recipes and their adaptations in the Demotic and Greek Magical Papyri

A vast corpus of Demotic and Greek magical handbooks with collections of recipes as well as activated texts and objects produced in the course of magical rituals is preserved from Graeco-Roman Egypt. Spells concerned with the field of sexuality and love form a major part of the categories represented in these sources. Apart from complex techniques for attracting a target person by compulsion, for separating existing relationships, or for boosting the user's own charm and attractiveness, more basic recipes for preparations to enhance sexual pleasure (aphrodisiacs) and/or control physical functions related to sexuality are also attested. This paper is based on research conducted within the collaborative DFG project "Sexual dynamics and Dynamics of Magical Practice in Graeco-Roman Egypt: Erotic Spells in the Greek and Demotic Magical Papyri (PGM and PDM) and their Cultural Traditions", and will present an analysis of the subcategory of aphrodisiac recipes. In particular, it will focus on recipes targeted at women, which are attested mainly in Egyptian language. First, an overview of the individual texts, their contents and ingredients, but also their format, terminology and organisation within larger handbooks will be provided. In the second part, I will discuss the underlying cultural traditions, such as the relationship to traditional Egyptian medical texts, and finally turn to the transformation this subcategory underwent when it became adapted to Greek language formularies as well as to other subcategories of erotic magic, especially those featuring strong compulsive elements.