

November 2014

'Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth By Day of the priestess Ta-er-pet (the Papyrus MacGregor)'

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Recommended Citation

"'Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth By Day of the priestess Ta-er-pet (the Papyrus MacGregor)'" (2014). *Commentaries on the Exhibit's Works*. 43.

http://ecommons.udayton.edu/rosebk_commentary/43

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Reflections on the various works in the exhibit

Imprints and Impressions: Milestones in Human Progress

Highlights from the Rose Rare Book Collection, Sept. 29-Nov. 9, 2014

Roesch Library, University of Dayton

*Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth By Day
of the priestess Ta-er-pet (the Papyrus MacGregor)*

- Late 1st century BC
- 23 feet, 6 inches long, divided into nine sections; includes a unique chart of images depicting 75 protective amulets

What happens after death? Human societies have always been fascinated by this question and none more so than the ancient Egyptians. They developed a vision of the afterlife that greatly resembled their own lives, but required a journey through various trials and dangers to achieve.

The Egyptians produced an elaborate funerary literature of prayers, hymns, and magical spells to assist the deceased in the transition and ensure a good afterlife. These included, in succession, the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, and the *Book of Going Forth by Day*, which is now commonly called the *Book of the Dead*. The Pyramid Texts, which were carved on the wall of burial chambers, first appeared under the Old Kingdom in the twenty-fourth century BC and were restricted to the royal family. The Coffin Texts replaced them during the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2160-2055 BC) and the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055-1650 BC); these were typically painted on

the sides of wooden coffins and appeared in the tombs of high-ranking court officials as well as of royalty.

The Book of Going Forth by Day came into use early in the New Kingdom (ca. 1650–1069 BC). It was normally written on papyrus in hieroglyphic or hieratic script. This was available to anyone who could afford a copy and copies have been found in the tombs of court officials and wealthy individuals. Egyptians continued to use it well into the Greco-Roman era; the latest known examples date to the late first century BC.

Rather than there being one canonical text of the *Book of Going Forth by Day*, each copy was a selection, larger or smaller, from roughly 200 chapters or spells found in the various versions. Nor was there a set sequence for them, although standard sequences developed over time. Most books were personalized to some extent, with the name of the deceased inserted at various points. The chapters described funerary

rites, offered litanies, and instructed the deceased on such topics as how to access funerary offerings, repel dangerous animals, and appease angry gods. One famous spell enabled the deceased to use *shabtis* (small human figurines placed in the tomb) to perform manual labor on his or her behalf in the afterlife. The text was frequently accompanied by drawings (“vignettes”); one of the most common and most famous is that of Anubis, the jackal-headed god of the dead, weighing heart of the deceased against an ostrich feather to determine his or her fate.

The example on display is part of a *Book of Going Forth by Day* prepared for a woman named Ta-er-pet at Akhmim in the first century BC. The Reverend William MacGregor (1848–1947), a social reformer

and philanthropist, acquired the papyrus in Egypt in the late nineteenth century. It is still commonly called the Papyrus MacGregor. When Sotheby’s sold MacGregor’s extensive collection of antiquities in 1922, William Randolph Hearst acquired it. In 1941 Manly P. Hall, another well-known collector, purchased it. He later gave it to the Philosophical Research Society of Los Angeles, which he founded; it remained there for more than a half century. Papyrus MacGregor is noteworthy for a unique illustrated list of 75 amulets on the reverse of its second sheet, a feature found in no other extant version.

— *Fred W. Jenkins, PhD, Professor and Associate Dean for Collections and Operations, University Libraries*