

### **Robert K. Ritner**

**Robert K. Ritner** was the annual Invited Professor in “Sciences Religieuses,” for the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. In the month of May, he delivered eight hours of lectures at the Sorbonne and (due to university strikes) at the private Institut Khéops. His topics included “Heka: The Origin and Nature of Magic,” “Curses and Love Charms,” “Implements of Magic,” “New Approaches to Magical Literature,” and a final discussion of “Medicine and Demons.” The first lecture treated issues of varying creation myths, the significance of the term “god” in ancient Egypt, trinities and the issues of polytheism, monotheism, and pantheism, the appearance of Heka, god of Magic, as well as the role of magic in theology, iconography, architecture, and script. The significance of domination magic served as the basis of the talk on curses, execration magic, and “love” and separation rites. Implements of magic included serpent wands and snake charming, magical knives used to draw defensive perimeters, Bes images and Horus stelae against animal and reptile bites, and the Egyptian origin of the “Hermes” caduceus symbol in modern American medicine. New magical literature surveyed Ritner’s forthcoming publications

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on the topic, including an unrecognized serpent ritual in the Pyramid Texts (with critical passages in Semitic, to be published by Richard Steiner), Pyramid Text influence on the Demotic “Romance of Setna and the Mummies,” overlooked theological insights from the mummy case of Meresamun in the Oriental Institute, Demotic graffiti at the Theban tomb of Nespakashuty and at Medinet Habu, funerary texts of Third Intermediate Period chantessees and the conscious omission of male relatives (husbands and fathers), and a forthcoming, complete edition of the papyri once acquired (and partially “translated”) by Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The final lecture surveyed the practice and theory of Egyptian medicine, a contrast with Greek practices, associated magical spells and iconography, gynecology, his new edition of the Bentresh tale preserved in blocks at Luxor, and the nature of demonic possession as described in Egyptian texts.

Earlier in the year Ritner presented “An Evening with Akhenaton” at the home of David and Mari Terman in Wilmette on behalf of the Oriental Institute Presents Series, Research Endowment Campaign (October 17). Ritner’s study of “Fragmentation and Re-integration in the Third Intermediate Period” appeared in *The Libyan Period in Egypt: Historical and Cultural Studies into the 21st–24th Dynasties; Proceedings of a Conference at Leiden University, 25–27 October 2007*, edited by G. P. F. Broekman, R. J. Demarée, and O. E. Kaper (Leiden); and his 1998 translations of “Practical Egyptian Magical Spells” — created for the re-opening of the Egyptian Gallery — were reprinted for the *North Texas ARCE Newsletter* 16/5 (Dallas).

During the year he completed manuscripts for “The Possession of Bentresh: A Parallel Text from the Luxor Blockyard,” to be included in a future publication of The Epigraphic Survey’s Luxor Project. Two festschrift articles (for a German and an American scholar) comprise “Setna’s Spell of Taking Security (Setna I, col. IV/31–34),” and “Two Third Intermediate Period Books of the Dead: P. Houston 31.72 and P. Brooklyn 37.1801E.” Ritner’s “Forward: An Egyptological Perspective,” will open Richard C. Steiner’s volume *Proto-Canaanite Serpent Spells in the Pyramid Texts: A First Look at the Ancestor of Phoenician and Hebrew in the Third Millennium B.C.E.*, to be published in Harvard Semitic Studies. Ritner has also completed an article for the Persepolis Fortification Tablet publications: “Egyptian Elements in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (and other Achaemenid Seals and Sealings),” and a review and addition to the Meresamun publications, “Reading the Coffin of Meresamun.” Dr. Ritner’s publication “Cultural Exchanges between Egyptian and Greek Medicine” appeared in *Moving Across Borders: Foreign Relations, Religion and Cultural Interactions in the Ancient Mediterranean*, edited by P. Kousoulis and K. Magliveras in the series *Orientalia Lovaniensa Analecta*, number 159.

When otherwise unclaimed, he served on multiple committees and taught courses on “An Introduction to Middle Egyptian Hieroglyphs” I–II, “Animal Cults in a Wider Context: Social, Political and Economic Ramifications,” and “The Religion of Graeco-Roman Egypt.”