

Close Reading of the Praxis *Ritual of the Cat* (PGM III 1-164/GEMF 55)

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Abstract This article examines the *Ritual of the Cat* on Papyrus Mimaout, a complex curse centred on the ritual use of a cat. I argue that the extant version preserves clear traces of editorial reworking, especially in the illustration and invocation to Seth-Typhon on the third *lamella* and in the second solar prayer. These passages show that the text developed in layers, as a more general curse ritual against enemies was reshaped for a specific anti-charioteer purpose. A close reading of the layout, scribal signs, and the relation between text and image helps to reconstruct this process of recomposition.

Keywords Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri. Charioteers. Curse ritual. Solar cat. Seth-figure. Scribal signs. Compositional layers.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Overview of the Ritual. – 3 Instructions for the *Lamellae*. – 3.1 Illustrations. – 3.2 Identity of the Figures. – 3.3 The Invocation Below the Figures. – 4 The Two Solar Prayers. – 5 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

The *Ritual of the Cat*, preserved on Papyrus Mimaut (PGM III¹/GEMF 55;² Louvre inv. 2391), is a Greek-language curse of the third-fourth century AD,³ written on the *recto*, coll. 1-5, ll. 1-164.⁴ It is presented primarily as a curse against charioteers,⁵ but is also said to work for dream-sending, erotic attraction, separation, and enmity. These applications belong to the broader sphere of aggressive magic and show that the same ritual could be adapted to different purposes. While the exact provenance and archaeological context of the papyrus within Egypt are unknown, its content shows a strong familiarity with Egyptian religious concepts, suggesting a priestly background. At the same time, its main aim against charioteers reflects the influence of Roman-style chariot races, which became increasingly popular in North Africa from the second century AD onward, especially in Hadrumetum and Carthage, where numerous curses against charioteers have been found.⁶

The recipe can be divided into six parts, though not in the actual order of execution: (1) the drowning of the cat and the first invocation; (2) the preparation of the burial and of the ritual tools; (3) the burial of the animal and the invocation of its spirit; (4) the sprinkling of

This article develops and substantially revises arguments first presented in a longer Hungarian study, which also included a Hungarian translation of the ritual text (Takács 2025).

1 PGM stands for *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, the title given to the first edition of the Greek-language portion of the corpus of magical papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt (Preisendanz, Henrichs 1973-74).

2 GEMF is the abbreviation of *Greek and Egyptian Magical Formularies: Text and Translation*, a new edition of the magical papyri. So far, only the first volume has been published, containing texts up to number 54.

3 The dating is based on the most recent examination of the papyrus, see Dosoo, Torallas Tovar 2022, 58.

4 The line and column numbering follows Preisendanz, Henrichs 1973-74. A new arrangement of the papyrus fragments has been proposed by Martín Hernández and Torallas Tovar (2025), which reassigns the columns of the recipe to 5-10. The precise new line numbering will be published in GEMF vol. 2, which will no doubt refine the papyrus's textual and visual elements. My argument, however, rests chiefly on features visible at the level of layout, spacing, repetition, and scribal marking. Even where future editorial work improves the text, the basic claim advanced here should remain secure: the extant version of the recipe is layered and bears signs of purposeful recomposition.

5 On agonistic curses, as a starting point, see Gager 1992, 42-77 and Tremel 2004; for the latest study, see Sánchez Natalías 2022, 56-8. On agonistic magic in general, see Heintz 1999. On circus curses with a special focus on their archaeological contexts, see Heintz 1998.

6 On curse tablets from North-Africa, see Sichet 2000. R. Gordon and C. Sánchez Natalías both assert that the curse tablets of imperial North Africa were produced by professional practitioners who adapted Egyptian rituals to meet the demands of a new clientele (Gordon 2012; Sánchez Natalías 2022, 67).

the water with further invocation; (5) the inscription of the *lamellae* (metal sheets) with *voces magicae* and drawings; (6) and the two solar prayers, each describing the use of the cat's whiskers as a phylactery.

This study focuses on the parts of the text that preserve the clearest signs of editorial intervention: the illustrated third *lamella* (§ 3.1), the invocation to Seth-Typhon beneath the figures (§ 3.3), and the second solar prayer (§ 4). I argue that these are secondary additions to an earlier version of the ritual. They show how a ritual expert could reshape the basic material, combine elements from different sources, and adapt an older aggressive ritual for a more specific purpose.

The following sections briefly survey the individual parts of the ritual, with particular attention to the drawing and to the compositional choices visible in the text.

2 The Overview of the Ritual

The ritual begins with the drowning of a cat – thereby elevating the animal to a deified state (*hesiēs*)⁷ – and with an accusation directed against the practitioner's enemies. In the accompanying prayer, the cat is associated with the solar god in cat form,⁸ and the enemies are accused of killing the god's sacred animal.⁹

Although the cat-faced deity in this ritual is often identified with Bastet,¹⁰ the text itself does not support this interpretation,

⁷ On the word, see Leitz 2002, 474-7. A comprehensive analysis of possible meanings of *hesiēs* across different periods and contexts, including the magical papyri, see Dosoo 2022, esp. 377 (for a list of texts mentioning deified animals in the magical papyri and in the *Kyranides*, see 342-4). On 'deified humans', see von Lieven 2010b. The most famous of these individuals, worshipped as a god after his death in the Nile, is Antinous. See Dosoo 2022, 397-400 with further literature.

⁸ It is invoked with the phrase [ὁ ἐ]πὶ τῆς μορφῆς[ς] τῆς τοῦ ἡλίου, ὁ αἰ[λουρ]ο[πρ] ὁσώπος θεός (the form of the Sun, cat-faced god, ll. 4-5). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the Author. The term ἡλίος (*helios*, sun) is usually translated as Helios, the Greek sun god, but this is not always appropriate. At the beginning of PGM III 1-164/GEMF 55, it clearly refers to the Egyptian sun god Re. By the end of the text, however, the solar deity incorporates elements from multiple cultures. Since this kind of blending is a fundamental feature of the magical papyri, distinguishing between different sun gods in each recipe is neither practical nor necessary. For this reason, I refer to the deity simply as the Sun wherever possible.

⁹ Although the killing of sacred animals was generally not accepted in Egypt (and was sanctioned to varying degrees across different regions), examination of animal mummies reveals that many were intentionally and prematurely killed, likely for religious purposes by priests. For the mass scale production of animal mummies, see Koenig 2017, 81; Dosoo 2022, 382-95 with further literature. On the animal cult in Egypt, see Fitzenreiter 2013.

¹⁰ Scholars who identify the cat-faced god as the Egyptian goddess Bastet, mainly do so on the basis of a footnote in the English translation (Betz 1986, 18 fn. 1).

since it refers to the figure consistently in the masculine. The cat is better understood as a form of Re, since the sun god could appear in different forms at different hours, one of them being the cat.¹¹ This is well attested both in earlier Egyptian sources¹² and in the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri.¹³ The cat's role as defender of the solar barque against the serpent Apep (Apophis) also belongs to Egyptian tradition and is explicitly mentioned in our recipe (ll. 83).¹⁴

The next stage instructs the practitioner to prepare three *lamellae* and a papyrus written in cinnabar. The papyrus, bearing drawings and names connected with chariots, charioteers, chariot boards, and racehorses, is wrapped around the cat's body.¹⁵ The three *lamellae*, whose detailed instructions are given later in the recipe, are also placed inside the animal. The body is then buried in a grave or in the stadium while an invocation to the rising sun is recited. This invocation calls upon an *angelos*, and may also refer to "the *daimōn* of the place", an expression that appears again later in the recipe; it also mentions the running of horses. The *angelos* most likely refers to the spirit of the cat, whose names were inscribed on one of the *lamellae* and invoked to act against the enemies (ll. 71-6).

By this point, the cat has already been described as *hesiēs* (deified), the *morphē* (form) of the Sun, *theos* (god), *hieron pneuma* (sacred spirit), *angelos*, and later *daimōn*. The text thus presents the animal in a series of overlapping divine and intermediary roles.¹⁶

The water used for drowning the cat is then sprinkled in the stadium or in a ritual space, again with an accompanying invocation. This prayer mentions several deities, including Meliouchos,¹⁷ the "*daimōn* of the place", and "the *daimōn* of the spirit-endowed

¹¹ See von Lieven 2010a, 33-4 and Quack 2007, with many examples.

¹² *Litany of Re* § 56 (Piankoff 1964, 10-43; Hornung 1975-76); *Book of the Dead*, Spell 17a (Allen 1974, 30, § S 15).

¹³ PGM III 507-8/GEMF 55; PGM IV 1649-50/GEMF 57; PGM XXXVIII 18/GEMF 69.

¹⁴ [αἰλ]ουροπ[ρόσω]πος μέγας, οἷα κα κρατῶν [θεοῦ] (great cat-faced one, who holds control over the tiller [of the god]). Cf. ll. 81-2, also ll. 98-9 and 102-3, which are parts of the oral invocation to the Sun.

¹⁵ Wrapping the body in papyrus is reminiscent of animal mummification. See Ikram 2005 and Dosoo 2022.

¹⁶ While these terms may at first seem to denote distinct positions within the divine hierarchy, they are often used interchangeably in the magical papyri to describe the same entity. It has been suggested that the lack of clear differentiation among intermediate beings, especially in the role of a messenger, may stem from the absence of distinct lexical terms within Egyptian terminology. This implies that a clearly defined concept for these beings did not exist. The magical papyri also reflect a range of religious ideas, which could further explain the inconsistencies. See Schipper 2007.

¹⁷ So far, the precise meaning of the word has not been determined. On the term, see Brashear 1995, 3592 and Pachoumi 2017, 186. For a comprehensive analysis, see Harrauer 1987.

cat” (ll. 43-51). Whether the “*daimōn* of the place” is understood as a dead competitor, a chthonic power attached to the site, or a spirit of the burial place,¹⁸ the ritual logic remains the same: the dead and violently transformed cat serves as a medium through which further underworld powers can be invoked. The ritual use of water rests on the idea that an animal sacred to a god shares in the deity’s potency, which can be transmitted to another medium at the moment of death. In our recipe, the power of the solar god, embodied in the cat, passes into the water through the animal’s death, allowing the liquid to become an instrument of conjuration.¹⁹

Up to this point, the structure of the recipe is coherent: the cat is killed, transformed, equipped with ritual tools, buried, and activated as an agent of curse. The following sections, however, show signs of editorial layering, most clearly in the detailed instructions for the *lamellae* and the two concluding solar prayers.

3 Instructions for the *Lamellae*

This section first considers the visual and textual instructions connected with the three *lamellae*, before turning to the identity of the figures and to the invocation written beneath them.

3.1 Illustrations

The section²⁰ on the three *lamellae* provides the clearest evidence that the extant version of the recipe has undergone editorial reworking. Earlier in the text the *lamellae* are mentioned only briefly; here, they are described in detail. Two of them are to be inscribed with magical words (ιαεω *logos* and αβλαναθαααλβα), while the third combines *logoi*, arrangement signs, a drawing of figures, and an invocation beneath the image. This is the point where the papyrus most clearly exposes the gap between the written template (*Vorlage*) of the recipe and its execution in our copy.

The instructions for the two *lamellae* are located at the end of col. 2, where two signs indicate the intended layout of the writing.

18 The most common places to hide curses were underground water sources (wells, drains) and burial sites, due to their believed proximity to the underworld and its creatures (Ogden 1999, 15-23). For an overview of deposition sites, see Sánchez Nataliás 2022, 37-52. Circus curses were mostly buried within the circus itself or in nearby cemeteries (Heintz 1998).

19 For more on this concept, see Dosoo, Galoppin 2022, 233-4 and 241-2.

20 Drawings of coll. 2 and 3 can be found in Eitrem 1923, 54 and 56: <https://www.archive.org/details/lespapyrusmagiqu00eitruoft/page/n53/mode/2up>.

The sign on the right marks the required ‘grape formation’ (V), while the damaged sign on the left seems to indicate a square (*plinthion*)²¹ arrangement. The sign for the grape formation reappears in col. 3 in the description of the third *lamella*, together with an instruction within the centre of the formation sign, approximately two lines below the αβεραμενθω palindrome: καρδιακῶς, ὡς βότρυς (heart-shaped, like a bunch of grapes; l. 69).

These annotations clearly unveil the authors’ intentions, who were well-versed in the techniques associated with Graeco-Egyptian ritual practices and saw no need to waste space or time by meticulously documenting every detail. The editor of the recipe likely noted these instructions for himself or for another experienced practitioner, who would have understood from these markings how the engraving on the *lamella* was meant to look.

Following the instruction, three figures are depicted with magical words and a longer invocation beneath them [fig. 1]. On the right, there is an animal-headed figure, wearing a chiton and a mantle hung over the left shoulder. It holds a whip in its right hand and a long staff in its left, the top of which is not preserved on the papyrus. The figure is significantly larger than the other two. On the left stands a fully human figure, while the central figure has a human body but lacks its head because of damage to the papyrus. Both also hold whips in their right hands, mirroring that of the animal-headed figure. The whip of the left figure touches an unidentified square object.²² Above this figure, a writing reads in two lines: σκελετὸς | δεξιός (right skeleton). Similarly, there is a fragmented text above the central figure in two lines: ζ | ερος which is understood as [σκελετὸς] | [ἀριστ]ερός (left skeleton). Below the left figure appears the ιωερβηθ *logos*,²³ written in noticeably smaller letters than the rest of the recipe, alongside the ‘skeleton’ labels.

21 On the formations, see Faraone 2012; 2023.

22 Faraone proposes that the object may be an “oversized crown(?)” (2024, 276). I found that the object’s shape and placement in the arrangement are similar to the ‘Osiris in sarcophagus’ motif that appears on curse tablets (e.g., DTAud 155, 159, 167 = Wunsch 1898, nos 16, 20, 29). On the other hand, the object also resembles the structure of the turning point (*meta*) for charioteers in circus races (e.g., on a third-century mosaic from Carthage, now housed in the Bardo Museum in Tunis, inv. A 341, see Aounallah, Ayachi, Baratte 2016, 282-3).

23 Also known as Sethian/Typhonic *logos*. It is typically associated with the god Seth and is used in aggressive magic. For more on the *logos*, see Martín Hernández (2019), who observed that the *logos* almost always appears in Greek, even in the bilingual Greek-Demotic recipes, where the rest of the text is written in Demotic (190-1).

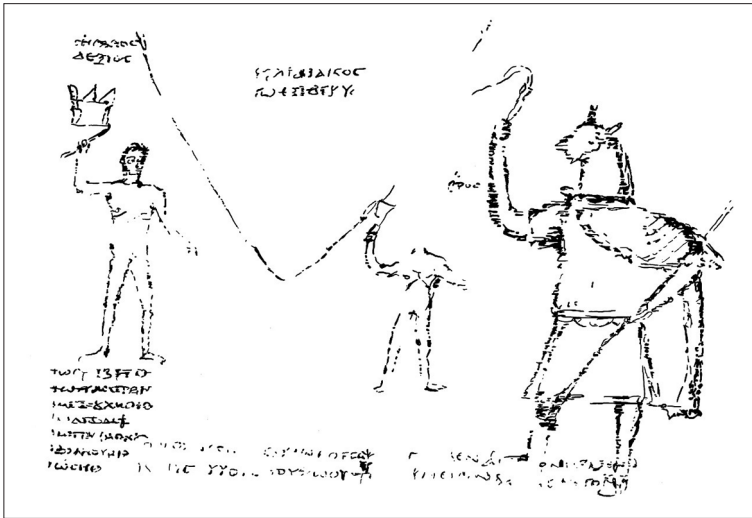


Figure 1 Figures on the third *lamella*. 2025. Digital drawing after Papyrus Mimaout, PGM III 1-164/GEMF 55, Louvre, Paris, inv. E 2391. © Krisztina Hevesi, reproduced with permission

K. Preisendanz interpreted the writing above the figures (“right skeleton” above the left figure and presumably “left skeleton” above the central figure) as instructions to interchange the figures when creating the *lamella* (1973-74, 37). However, since the left and middle figures are drawn in a similar style, this interchanging does not seem particularly meaningful to me. In my view, a more plausible interpretation is that the inscriptions indicate the intended positions of the figures relative to the larger animal-headed figure. In this case, the central figure, labelled as “left skeleton”, would already be in the correct position to the left of the animal-headed figure. Meanwhile, the left figure, labelled as “right skeleton”, should be positioned on the right side of the animal-headed figure.

The execution of the three figures raises a compositional problem. While the arrangement signs and magical words above them are carefully designed, the drawing below does not show the same structural coherence. The figures and accompanying textual elements do not fit into the surrounding context with the same degree of planning as the other visual instructions in the recipe. This discrepancy suggests that the image was not conceived as an integral part of the recipe, but introduced at a later stage of transmission. The third *lamella* therefore offers the clearest material evidence in the papyrus for editorial reworking.

Several arguments suggest that the drawing was added later.²⁴ The large animal-headed figure does not fit the available space, since its legs extend into the invocation below and partly into the right margin. The figure on the left, together with the ἰωερβηθ *logos* beneath it, is completely relegated to the left margin, with the *logos* reaching into the invocation. This is the only place in the recipe where the compositional elements overlap with the surrounding text. By contrast, the visual guides for arranging the ἀβεραμενθω palindrome and two other *logoi* remain within the boundaries of the column and reflect deliberate planning. In the case of the figures, the execution looks improvised. The scribe of the main text did not leave enough room between the notation for the arrangement of the palindrome and the invocation below, forcing the illustrator to adapt. The two outer figures were then fitted into whatever space remained. The right figure's leg is shortened, and the foot is incompletely drawn, likely to preserve the readability of the invocation. The ἰωερβηθ *logos* and the 'labels' above the left and middle figures are written in the same noticeably smaller script. The lines of the ἰωερβηθ *logos* are also misaligned with those of the invocation; some lines of the *logos* fall between the much larger lines of the invocation.

These details suggest that at least part of the illustration – especially the two outer figures and the accompanying labels – was added after the main text had already been copied. The limited space, uneven composition, and displacement of several elements into the margins do not suggest the careful execution of a template. Rather, they indicate that the scribe did not yet have the final pattern of the illustration before him and that the drawing was added only at a later stage.

It was common practice in the production of magical handbooks to leave space for drawings to be completed later, often by a different individual. Such practices sometimes resulted in illustrations that were incorrect or poorly positioned, and in some cases, images were never inserted at all.²⁵

24 Scholars had already questioned the unity of text and image in this section. C. Harrauer (1987, 24) suggested that the right-hand figure and the ἰωερβηθ *logos* were later additions, judging from their differing pen-strokes. K. Preisendanz (1973-74, 36) likewise considered the left-hand figure to be by another hand. More recently, R. Martín Hernández and S. Torallas Tovar (2025, 20 fn. 19) have also argued that the drawings were inserted afterwards to fill space left blank by the first scribe, noting in particular the incomplete feet of the animal-headed figure.

25 See, e.g., PGM VII 467-77, 862-918/GEMF 74 (missing figure); PGM VII 579-90/GEMF 74 and PGM XXXVI 178-87/GEMF 68 (image differs from the description). R. Gordon and R. Martín Hernández offer an example where two papyri, PGM VIII/GEMF 72 and PGM IX/GEMF 73, were copied by the same scribe, yet the illustrations on each belong to two different hands (2022, 307-8).

3.2 Identity of the Figures

The interpretation of the three figures is particularly challenging and has given rise to diverse scholarly opinions. The left figure has been identified as the sun god, Isis-Hekate-Ereschigal; or a contestant;²⁶ the middle figure as Isis-Hekate-Ereschigal, the headless Osiris, the sun god, or the cat-faced *daimōn*.²⁷

The animal-headed figure has been interpreted as the cat,²⁸ a horse-headed entity, or the god Seth.²⁹ It falls into the category of ‘Sethian figures’, a term coined by R. Wünsch for representations with horse or donkey heads, often linked to Seth (1898). These figures commonly appear in curses and are typically seen as either a horse-headed demon or Seth.³⁰ They are usually accompanied by the $\omega\epsilon\rho\beta\eta\theta$ *logos*, associated with Seth, along with words linked to Osiris (Eulamo, Osiris, Mnevi) and the depiction of the mummy-Osiris.³¹ The argument for identifying the Sethian figure as a horse-headed entity rather than Seth was largely based on the shape of its ears³² and a presumed connection to racehorses (Gager 1992, 68; Tremel 2004, 46-7). This interpretation, however, is contradicted by its appearance in other forms of aggressive magic.

26 For the left figure as the sun god, see Preisendanz, Henrichs 1973-74, 37 (with question mark); Harrauer 1987, 25 (Helios-Re); as Isis-Hekate-Ereschigal, see Delatte 1914, 232; as a contestant, see Nowitzki 2021, 153 fn. 124.

27 For the middle figure as Isis-Hekate-Ereschigal, see Preisendanz, Henrichs 1973-74, 37 (with question mark); as the headless Osiris, see Delatte 1914, 232: “Ce personnage est évidemment le dieu solaire acéphale que nous connaissons, Osiris, que Seth menace du fouet”; as the sun god, see Nowitzki 2021, 153 fn. 124; as the cat-faced *daimōn*, see Harrauer 1987, 25.

28 Martín Hernández 2012, 493; Nowitzki 2021, 153 fn. 124. According to C. Faraone, the animal-headed figure represents the cat, whose identity has merged with that of the *daimōn* of the place: “The whip in the hand of this larger figure suggests that he is the ghost of the charioteer ‘in this place’, who is assimilated with the cat-faced *daimōn* as the agent of the curse” (2024, 277).

29 Wünsch 1898 (Gnostic Seth); Audollent 1904; Delatte 1914, 231; Hopfner 1921, 107-8; Preisendanz, Henrichs 1973-74, 36; Harrauer 1987, 23-4 (who identifies the figure as Seth but with a horse-head); Koenig 2017, 81; Martín Hernández 2019, 197; 2022, 43-5; Love 2022 (a detailed analysis of an animal-headed figure that shares morphological features with the donkey-headed Seth and its development over 900 years, from Egyptian to Coptic sources).

30 For the interpretation as a horse-headed demon, see Preisendanz 1927, 35-7; 1972, 17-18; Gager 1992, 68 fn. 85; Németh 2013; for the identification with Seth, see Wünsch 1898, 86-114 (Gnostic Seth); Martín Hernández 2022.

31 For a comprehensive analysis of the Sethian figure and its associated elements, including Osiris and the $\omega\epsilon\rho\beta\eta\theta$ *logos*, see Martín Hernández 2022. For the development and variations of an animal-headed figure with similar morphological features to the Sethian figure, see Love 2022.

32 See Bonner 1950, 114; Harrauer 1987, 25; Németh 2013; Martín Hernández 2012, 493 (but contra in 2022, 43-4).

In my view, the left and middle figures are best considered together rather than identified separately. Their common label, “skeleton”, suggests that they were conceived as belonging to the same category, regardless of their exact identity. Two main interpretations have been proposed. R. Martín Hernández cautiously suggests that they are the two *paredroi*³³ who accompany the Sethian figure on curse tablets (2022, 44), whereas C. Faraone understands them as the targets of the spell (2024, 277). I do not attempt to resolve the question here. It is worth noting, however, that both figures wear straps across their chests, also mentioned by Martín Hernández (2022, 44), which correspond to the usual iconography of charioteers (Grosser 2021). This detail fits well if the figures are understood either as the targeted charioteers³⁴ themselves or as the spirits of dead charioteers invoked to carry out the curse. The designation “skeleton” perhaps speaks more strongly for the former, since the victims of curses are often depicted in corpse-like or mummy-like form.³⁵ In any case, the two smaller figures were clearly conceived as a subordinate pair in relation to the animal-headed figure.

The large figure is best understood as Seth. Martín Hernández (2022, 43-5) also argues for this identification and shows that the evidence points in this direction despite certain iconographic difficulties. In particular, the presence of the $\iota\omega\epsilon\rho\beta\eta\theta$ /Sethian *logos*,³⁶ on the third *lamella*, together with the $\alpha\beta\epsilon\rho\alpha\mu\epsilon\nu\theta\omega$ palindrome, and their repetition in the first solar hymn (ll. 116-19), strongly supports this reading. To this may be added the invocation below the figures, which places the animal-headed figure in close relation to the spirit of the cat. The link between the two is best explained by their shared mythological role in Egyptian tradition, where both Seth and the cat can appear as defenders of the solar barque against Apophis.³⁷

33 For the pairing of two smaller figures with a larger one in curse tablets, see, e.g., DTAud 151, 155A, 159B, 167A = Wünsch 1898, nos 12, 16A, 20B, 29A.

34 On DTAud 238 and 239, two target-charioteers are depicted holding whips in their right hands, with their names inscribed above them, closely resembling the design of the present image.

35 E.g., DTAud 155, 156, 159 = Wünsch 1898, nos 16, 17, 20. A subjugating spell in PGM IX/GEMF 73 may also depict the curse’s target as a skeletal figure.

36 These are typically curses and love spells invoking Seth. More on the *logos*, see Suppl.Mag. II 95, commentary to ll. 8-12; Martín Hernández 2019. For a complete list of occurrences of the *logos*, see Martín Hernández, Torallas Tovar 2014. On Seth in the magical papyri, see Dieleman 2005, 130-8.

37 On Seth as the protector of the solar barque, see Dieleman 2005, 134; te Velde 1967, 99-108. The idea of the fusion is also mentioned in Koenig 2017, 81 and Dosoo 2022, 359 fn. 89 (who highlights two articles exploring the possible connection between the cat and Seth, partly based on the depiction of the Apophis-slaying cat with prominent donkey ears).

3.3 The Invocation Below the Figures

The invocation below the figures preserves another clear sign of editorial reworking. In its present form, the passage consists of an invocation to the cat-faced being (1/a), an inserted invocation to Seth-Typhon (2), and a resumed command to the cat (1/b). The structure is significant, because the Seth section interrupts an already complete invocation and is followed by wording that restores the earlier flow of the passage.

The sequence can be described briefly as follows: in ll. 82-6, the first invocation addresses the cat-faced god and ends with the expected request formula (“fulfil such-and-such deed for me”) together with a closing mark. The next line begins a new invocation to Seth-Typhon, introduced by a *coronis*, although much of the previous line remains empty.³⁸ After this, the text returns to the cat-faced god and repeats the request that it should accomplish the petitioner’s aim (ll. 90-3).

The text runs as follows:

Invocation 1/a:

[ἐγέ]ι[ρ]όν μοι σεαυτόν
αἰλ]ουροπ[ρόσω]πος μέγας, οἶακα κρατῶν [θεοῦ], ποιή-
σ[ο]ν τὸ δεῖνα [π]ρᾶγμα κοινά ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερο[ν] ἡμέρας
ἤδη ἤδη, τ]αχὺ συντέλῃς μοι τὸ δεῖνα πρᾶγμα,
κοινά ὅσα θέλεις. [closing mark]

Invocation 2:

[*coronis*] [κρ]αταῖ Σ[η]θ Τυφῶν, καὶ ἀνόμησον τῷ σθέν-
[ει σ]ου καὶ [κα]τάστρεψον τὸ δεῖνα πρᾶγμα ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τοῦ[τῳ]
[...] τιῶρι, ὥς ἂν κελεύσω τῷ εἰδῶλῳ σου,
ὅτι ὁρ[κί]ζω σε Μασκελλί Μασκελλῶ λόγος. [συν-

Invocation 1/b:

τ]έλῃς[ο]ν μοι τοῦτο τὸ δεῖνα πρᾶγμα ἐπὶ τῇ μορφῇ σου,
[αἰ]λουρ[οπ]ρόσωπος ἄγγελος, συντέλῃς μοι τὸ
δεῖνα πρᾶγμα, κοινά καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς γραφόμενα εἰς ἄλ-
[λα]ς χρεῖα[ς].

Invocation 1/a:

Rouse yourself for me,
great cat-faced one, who holds control over the tiller [of the god]. Do
such-and-such deed (usual) from today
immediately, immediately, quickly, quickly. Fulfil such-and-such
[deed for me
(usual, as what you wish). [closing mark]

38 The presence of the *spatium* was also noted by Love 2017, 181 fn. 49.

Invocation 2:

[*coronis*] Mighty Seth Typhon, act unlawfully with your power
and subvert such-and-such deed in this place
[...], however I command your image (τῷ εἰδώλῳ σου)
because I conjure you Maskelli Maskellō *logos*.

Invocation 1/b:

Fulfil
such-and-such deed for me in your form,
cat-faced *angelos*, fulfil
such-and-such deed for me (usual), and the following written
things for other purposes.
(ll. 82-93)

The layout strongly suggests that the Seth invocation is secondary. The end of 1/a is marked not only by the standard closing formula, but also by the scribal signs and by the beginning of a new textual unit on the following line.³⁹ This formatting choice always signifies a distinct separation in the text, suggesting either a shift to a new process within the ritual or the beginning of a new ritual altogether. In our case, this indicates that a section has been inserted that does not appear in the text from which it was copied.

This conclusion also helps explain the relation between text and image. The Seth invocation refers to Seth's *eidōlon* (l. 89), which likely understood as the animal-headed figure on the *lamella*. The insertion therefore seems to belong to the same phase of reworking as the illustration: the text invokes the figure that the *lamella* presents visually.

The placement of the three *lamellae* inside the cat, inscribed with the invocation and request, recalls ritual practices in which magical objects are deposited in the mouth or grave of the dead in order to get help from their spirit. In the *Ritual of the Cat*, however, the dead body is not simply used, but produced for this purpose. It is also not a typical corpse: the cat is identified as the form of the Sun, and it was therefore likely understood as more powerful than that of an ordinary *nekydaimōn* (spirit of the dead). The curse is thus deposited in a violently killed sacred animal whose efficacy rests on both its death and its solar-divine character. The cat's body also serves as a medium through which further assistance from the netherworld can be invoked.

39 The same signs appear in the next section, in col. 5, ll. 9-10, separating the two solar hymns.

4 The Two Solar Prayers

The end of the recipe provides another clear case of layering. Two prayers to the Sun appear in succession, each preceded by instructions to hold cat's whiskers as a phylactery. Their wording is almost identical, with one key difference: the first prayer is to be recited at sunset, while the second at sunrise:

ἐλθὼν πρὸς κατὰδυσιν τοῦ ἡλίου λέγε [κρ]ατῶν τὰς τρίχας τοῦ αἰλούρου τὰς ἐκ δεξιῶν [κ]αὶ ἐξ εὐωνύμων τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ὥσει φυλακτήριον. διάνυσσον τῷ ἡλίῳ λέγων τὸν λόγον. λόγος.

Turn toward the sunset and recite the following while holding the whiskers of the cat from the right and left sides of its mouth as a phylactery. Finish by saying this prayer to the Sun. The prayer. (ll. 94-8)

ἐλθὼν δὲ ἐν τῷ τόπῳ, ἐν ᾧ πράσσεις, ἔχων τὰς μεγάλας τρίχας τοῦ [αἰλο]ύρου τὰς ἐκ δεξιῶν [κ]αὶ ἐξ εὐωνύμων τοῦ [στό]ματος αὐτοῦ ὥσει φυλακτήριον. διάνυσσον [τῷ ἡλίῳ] ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ λέγων τὸν λόγον. λόγος.

Go to the place where you are performing the ritual, while holding the whiskers of the cat from the right and left sides of its mouth as a phylactery. Finish by saying this prayer [to the Sun] at sunrise. The prayer. (ll. 124-8)

The two prayers are clearly separated. Although the second begins on the same line on which the first ends (col. 5, l. 9), a distinct *spatium* separates them, accompanied by the same closing mark and *coronis* that earlier in the recipe indicate textual division (col. 4, ll. 4-5). The closing signs suggest that the distinction is not merely a division of ritual phases but pointing to an editorial modification to an earlier recipe. It is likely that the second prayer was inserted from a different source, and the editor intended to mark this distinction.

Their content supports this conclusion. The first prayer remains closely tied to the rest of the recipe: it recalls the enemy's offence against the god, includes the idea of halting the solar barque, and repeats *voces magicæ* already used earlier in the text. The second prayer, however, is entirely different: its focus is on various creation myths from Egyptian cosmology, such as the birth of the sun god from an egg or as a child, as well as his self-creation from the primordial ocean. It also incorporates elements from other cultures, including expressions familiar from Greek descriptions of Apollo-Helios ("you who love divination", "golden-faced", "golden-rayed") and names

associated with Jewish tradition, such as Iaō and the names of archangels.⁴⁰

In both cases, the prayer is accompanied by the same temporary protective device: whiskers taken from the right and left sides of the cat's mouth and held as a phylactery.⁴¹ This shared ritual gesture places both prayers within the same ritual framework, even though the second seems to be a later addition.

5 Conclusion

The *Ritual of the Cat* draws on traditional Egyptian religious concepts and techniques, such as *hesiēs*, the various forms of Re, and animal mummification, while adapting them to a new cultural setting and a different audience. The spread of Roman chariot racing created a new context for curses of this kind, and the recipe shows how an older ritual could be reshaped for that purpose. At the same time, the text contains surprisingly few direct references to charioteers. Apart from the illustration on the third *lamella*, only the papyrus wrapped around the cat includes drawings and inscriptions connected with them, whereas the prayers themselves usually speak more generally of enemies. I therefore argue that the recipe preserves a more general curse ritual that was adapted for competition-related purposes while retaining its basic structure. The central elements of the rite – the use of the cat, the accusation against the enemies, and the prayers – remain unchanged, while only certain sections, referred to as “such-and-such deed”, were adjusted to fit the intended aim. This structure also allows for the substitution of other targets or purposes, making the curse easily adaptable for other harmful magical acts, a list of which is provided at the end of the recipe.

My analysis also suggests that the extant form of the recipe is the result of editorial reworking. The arrangement of the figures on the third *lamella* – with two of them pushed into the margins and overlapping with the text – together with the added notes concerning the skeletal figures, strongly suggests that the illustration did not belong to the version of the recipe from which the text was copied. It is better understood as a newly created composition assembled from different source(s) by a ritual expert. The same applies to the inserted invocation to Seth-Typhon and to the second solar prayer,

40 The incorporation of hymns inspired by various cultures, often with distinct tones compared to the rest of the recipe, is a common feature of the magical papyri. On the ‘religious plurality’ of the hymns in the magical papyri, see Bortolani 2016.

41 For an analysis of the object type, see Takács 2024 with further literature. For a shorter list of recipes possibly describing such amulets, see Dosoo 2015, 390-2 and Faraone 2018, Appendix A: 263-5.

both of which preserve visible signs of secondary addition. The origin of the editorial markings, such as the closing sign and the *coronis*, remains uncertain: they may have been introduced by the scribe of the present manuscript, but they may also go back to a previous stage of transmission. In either case, the papyrus preserves clear traces of a process in which earlier material was supplemented, rearranged, and adapted.

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Abbreviations

DTAud = Audollent, A. (1904). *Defixionum tabellae quotquot innotuerunt tam in Graecis Orientis, quam in totius Occidentis partibus praeter Atticas, in Corpore Inscriptionum Atticarum editas*. Paris: A. Fontemoing.

GEMF = Faraone, C.A.; Torallas Tovar, S. (eds) (2022). *Greek and Egyptian Magical Formularies: Text and Translation*, vol. 1. Berkeley: California Classical Studies. California Classical Studies 9. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9650x69r>.

PGM = Preisendanz, K.; Henrichs, A. (Hrsgg) (1973-74). *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. 2 Bde. Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner.

Suppl.Mag. = Daniel, R.W.; Maltomini, F. (Hrsgg) (1990-92). *Supplementum Magicum*. 2 Bde. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag. Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westphälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 16. Sonderreihe Papyrologica Coloniensis.

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