

Languages, Objects, and the Transmission of Rituals

An Interdisciplinary Analysis on Ritual Practices
in the Graeco-Egyptian Papyri (*PGM*)

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The Donkey in the Graeco-Egyptian Papyri

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Abstract In ancient Egyptian religion, the donkey is generally associated to Seth and to its manifestation as a donkey and in the Graeco-Egyptian papyri Seth and the donkey are also commonly identified with Typhon. However, in a few spells the donkey occurs as a ritual and sacrificial animal, not necessarily in relation to the god Seth but just as an example of *materia magica*. In this article, on the basis of Betz's English translation of the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri, those spells of the *PGM* corpus, where the mention of the donkey or of parts of its body and fluids occurs, are listed and discussed in relation to the magical and ritual meaning of the donkey/ass within the *PGM*. In particular, two thematic groups of spells will be distinguished: those where the donkey is clearly associated to the Egyptian god Seth and the Greek Typhon, and those where the animal seems to be only an example of "material magica".

Summary 1 Spells where the Donkey is Associated to Seth/Typhon. – 1.1 *PGM* IV 1331-89 (Betz 1992, 63-4). – 1.2 *PGM* IV 3255-74 (Betz 1992, 100-1). – 1.3 *PGM* VII 652-60 (Betz 1992, 136). – 1.4 *PGM* XIa 1-40 (Betz 1992, 150-1). – 1.5 *PDM* XIV 675-94 (papyrus London-Leiden 23/1-20) (Betz 1992, 232-3). – 1.6 *PDM* XII 50-61 [*PGM* XII 445-48] (Betz 1992, 169). – 1.7 *PDM* XII 62-75 [*PGM* XII 449-52]. – 1.8 *PDM* XII 76-107 [*PGM* XII 453-65] (Betz 1992, 170). 2 Spells with no clear Association between the Donkey and Seth/Typhon – 2.1 *PGM* IV 2006-2015 (Betz 1992, 73-5). – 2.2 *PGM* IV 2891-2942 (Betz 1992, 92-4). – 2.3 *PGM* VII 300a-310 (Betz 1992, 125). – 2.4 *PDM* XIV 772-804 (Betz 1992, 235-6). – 2.5 *PGM* XXXVI 134-60 (Betz 1992, 272-3). – 2.6 *PDM* Suppl. 40-60 (Betz 1992, 324-5). – 2.7 *PGM* IV 1596-1715 (Betz 1992, 68-9). – 2.8 *PGM* XXXVIII 1-26 (Betz 1992, 278-9). – 2.9 *PGM* IV 2373-2440 (Betz 1992, 81-9). – 2.10 *PGM* XIb. 1-5 (Betz 1992, 151). – 2.11 *PDM* LXI 106-111 (Betz 1992, 289). – 2.12 *PDM* LXI 43-48 [*PGM* LXI i-v] (Betz 1992, 287).

Keywords Ancient Egyptian Magic. Donkey. Seth. Typhon. Materia Magica. Graeco Egyptian Papyri.

When mentioned in relation to ancient Egypt, the donkey brings up a fast and direct association to the god Seth and to its demonic theriomorphic manifestations. As a matter of fact, the ancient Egyptian word used for 'ass' or 'donkey', Ⲙ , is determined from the Middle Kingdom with the Seth animal (Stricker 1965, in particular 65) and it appears as a manifestation of Seth in animal form or as a hybrid with human body and donkey head until the Graeco-Roman period, in the decoration of the Ptolemaic temples and later in the Graeco-Egyptian papyri; from the fifth century BCE or even earlier, the association of Seth with Typhon becomes more than evident in the sources.

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The issue of the identity or similarity of the Seth animal with the donkey has been largely discussed among scholars of ancient Egyptian religion and is still not completely solved (Pleyte 1862; Stricker 1965; Donadoni 1981; te Velde 1977, 13 ff.). Less attention has been given, instead, to the (mainly textual) evidence on the donkey in the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri as a ritual and sacrificial animal and not necessarily in relation to the god Seth. Such an analysis is also relevant to what is often called by scholars as ‘*materia magica*’, namely ritual objects on which to base an “archaeology of magic” (Wilburn 2012, in particular 254 ff.). Given the difficulty to relate and rightly interpret the evidence of the texts with the material found in situ, such a *materia magica* is not easy to be studied. Nevertheless, we shall not overlook the importance of ritual materials (from animals to plants or other objects) when studying incantations both from Pharaonic and Greco-Roman Egypt, since magical texts “play a role in rituals and in practices”, namely they are “grounded in both the incantation and physical actions” (Wilburn 2012, 254).

In this essay I have used Betz’s English translation of the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri (Betz [1986] 1992) for gathering the occurrences of the donkey or of parts of his body and fluids in the spells; in this edition, the terms ‘ass’ and ‘donkey’ have been used alternatively as synonyms to translate the Egyptian Ⲙ and the Greek *onos* and *onágrion*. More in particular, it seems that in the Greek texts *onágrion* is mostly translated as ‘ass’ (wild donkey) while in the Demotic texts the term ‘donkey’ occurs always to render Ⲙ, except than for a short spell where Ⲙ is translated ‘male ass’,¹ maybe influenced by the earliest translation of this papyrus made by Bell, Nock, and Thompson (1933).

In the following paragraphs I will list both the occurrences of ‘asses’ and ‘donkeys’ in the texts collected by Betz, by distinguishing two thematic groups of spells; in the first one, the ass is clearly associated to the Egyptian god Seth and the Greek Typhon, while in the second group the animal seems to be only an example of *materia magica*.

1 PDM LXI, 43-48, 287, corresponding to PGM LXI i-v.

1 Spells where the Donkey is Associated to Seth/Typhon

1.1 PGM IV 1331-89 (Betz 1992, 63-4)²

Powerful spell of the Bear which accomplishes anything: take the *fat of a black ass*, the fat of a dappled she-goat, the fat of a black bull, and Ethiopian cumin, mix all together and make an offering to the Bear, having as a phylactery *hairs* from the same animals which you have plaited into a cord and are wearing as a diadem around your head. Anoint your lips with the fats... I call upon you, holy, very powerful, very glorious, very strong, holy, autochthons, assistants of the great god, the powerful chief-*daimons*, you who are inhabitants of Chaos... Then write on a piece of papyrus *the hundred-lettered name of Typhon*, curved as a star, and bind it in the middle of the core with the letters showing. This is the name: (list of *voces magicae*).

In this spell Typhon is associated to the constellation of the Great Bear, which in ancient Egyptian is called *mshtyw*, 'adze', or *hps*, 'foreleg'; it represents Seth in the Northern Sky and Plutarch associates it to Typhon (Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, c. 13; te Velde 1977, 86 ff.). The fat and the hair of a black ass which are listed in the text together with those of other animals (goat and bull) are therefore generally intended as Sethian symbols. However, there is evidence of other spells of the same collection mentioning the constellation of the Great Bear, where there is no mention of Seth, Typhon or of the donkey;³ therefore, perhaps we shall interpret such a mention of donkey parts as a ritual material, which is not playing any more specific role when compared to the other animal or plant ingredients mentioned in the spell.

1.2 PGM IV 3255-74 (Betz 1992, 100-1)

Take an unbaked [brick] and with a bronze stylus draw an [ass] running, and on its face *IAŌ IŌ*,⁴ and on its neck in the shape of a little bell

2 This as well as the following spells are not reported entirely, but only its relevant passages are quoted.

3 See for instance PGM IV 1275-1322 (Betz 1992, 62-3); PGM VII 686-702 (Betz 1992, 137-8).

4 *Iao* became an epithet of Seth in Gnostic texts, also influenced by the Egyptian/Coptic *io*, 'ass'; magic contamination of epithets and forms of Seth/Typhon is especially evident on papyri and magical gems; the Gnostic demonic figures of Onoel, Eloaios and Sabaoth take form of an ass because of the same association. See Procopé-Walter 1933, 64-5, whose theories are summarized and discussed in the more recent: Fossum, Glazer 1994, 86-92; Michailides 1952, in particular 51; Martínez 1991, 79 ff. (in particular on *Iao Sabaoth*).

ĒOĒOĒ, and on its back LERTHEMINŌ, and on its breast [S]ABAŌTH, and under its hooves ABRASAX. Smear it with the *blood of Typhon* and a pig and with juice of an onion.⁵

In this spell the blood of Typhon is traditionally interpreted as the blood of an ass because of the association with Seth.⁶ Here Typhon is also the main god summoned up by the magician.

1.3 PGM VII 652-60 (Betz 1992, 136)

Spell to induce insomnia by means of a bat: take *blood of a black ox or of a goat or of Typhon* – but preferably of a goat – and write on its right wing: (*voces magicae*)... And on the left wing write this in the same pattern: (*voces magicae*).

This is one of the many curious spells belonging to the so-called PGM VII,⁷ describing the peculiar case of the blood of an ass (here named Typhon) used to write on a bat; in this spell, as in many others of the PGM collection, the blood of an ass seems however to be interchangeable with that of an ox or goat, which do not have precise divine associations but seem to have been employed as merely ritual animals.

1.4 PGM XIa 1-40 (Betz 1992, 150-1)

Apollonius of Tyana's⁸ old serving woman: Take *Typhon's skull* and write the following characters on it with the blood of a black dog: "(*Charaktêres*) SABERRA". Then, going to a suitable place, by a river, the sea, or at the fork of a road, in the middle of the night put the skull | on the ground, place it [under] your left foot, and speak as follows.

For *Io* and the so-called 'Typhonic logos' see Martín Hernández, Torallas Tovar 2014, in particular 176 ff.

5 The spell continues with a list of *voces magicae* and the summoning up of Typhon.

6 The «blood of Typhon» is mentioned in other few PGM spells beside those selected in this essay, such as PGM IV 2015, 2100, 2220.

7 PGM VII corresponds to *P. London* 121, which has received particular scholarly attention for its initial section, the so-called *Homeromanteion*; see Raquel Martín Hernández's contribution in this volume.

8 On Apollonius of Tyana, see Dzielska 1986.

The formula: (*voces magicae*). Come, appear, o goddess called Mistress of the House.⁹

After you say this, you will behold *sitting on an ass* a woman of extraordinary loveliness...

The spell continues with instructions to create, from the beautiful woman/goddess, an old man who will serve him; a tooth of the ass is used as ritual material to bind the servant to his owner, and the same tooth should be burned to let that servant disappear. Instructions are given also to release the goddess by reciting *voces magicae* and in the end she leaves while *mounting an ass*. Finally, the spell is closed by describing “the phylactery to be used throughout the rite”, namely the skull of the ass. An instruction again mentioning the ass’s tooth follows: “fasten the ass’s tooth with silver and the old lady’s tooth with gold, and wear them always; for if you do this, it will be impossible for the old woman to leave you. The rite has been tested”.

This is a case of binding magic where Typhon is used again as synonym for ass and the ass’s tooth and skull as ritual elements, at the same time the ass being the transportation animal of a goddess, reminding of the iconography of goddesses riding donkeys, which is common in Hinduism (for instance in the case of Shital, the goddess curing fever and illnesses), in Mesopotamian religion (Lamashtu) and in the Jewish world. In the latter, asses are mentioned quite often in the book of Judges as animals symbolizing political power; the sons of certain judges are mentioned as riding on asses and the image of Moses on his donkey occurs very often in the Bible.¹⁰

1.5 PDM XIV 675-94 (*Papyrus London-Leiden 23/1-20*) (Betz 1992, 232-3)¹¹

A spell to cause “evil sleep”¹² to fall. Formula: you bring a *donkey’s head*; you place it between your feet opposite the sun at dawn when it is about to rise, opposite it again in the evening when it is going to set; you anoint your right foot with yellow ocher of Syria, your left foot with clay, the soles of your feet also; you place your right hand in front and your left hand behind, the head being between them; you anoint one

9 As noted also in Betz 1992, 150, n. 3, “Mistress of the House” refers to Nephtys, here identified as wife of Seth; a few epithets of Nephtys occur also among the *voces magicae* of this spell.

10 See Borgeaud 2007.

11 The spell has been studied and commented by Dieleman 2005, 130-8.

12 As mentioned also in Betz 1992, 232 n. 473, the suggested reading ntkt bin could refer to ‘catalepsy’.

of your two hands with *donkey's blood*, and the two corners (?) of your mouth and you recite these writings before the sun at dawn and in the evening for four days. He sleeps.

If you wish to make him die, you should do it for seven days. If you do its magic, you should bind a thread of palm fiber to your hand, a piece of male palm fiber to your phallus and your head. It is very good.

This spell which you should recite before the sun:

"I call upon you who are in the empty air, you who are terrible, invisible, almighty, a god of gods, you who cause destruction and desolation, you who hate a stable/household, you who were driven out of Egypt and have roamed foreign lands, you who shatter everything and are not defeated. I call upon you, *Typhon Seth*; I command your prophetic powers because I call upon your authoritative name to which you cannot refuse to listen, *IŌ ERBĒTH IŌ PAKERBĒTH IŌ BOLCHŌSĒTH IŌ PATATHNAX IŌ SŌRŌ IŌ NEBOUTOSOUALĒTH AKTIŌPHI ERESCHIGAL NEBOUTOSOALĒTH ABERAMENTHŌOULERTHEXANAXETHRELUŌT HENEMAREBA AEMINA* (the whole formula).

Come to me and go and strike down him, NN (or her, NN) with chills and fever. That very person has wronged me and he (or she) has spilled the *blood of Typhon* in his own (or her own) house. For this reason I am doing this" (add the usual).

In this spell the donkey's head and blood are used in order to send a nightmare, which is represented as falling on the sleeper, similar to what we find described in magical spells against nightmares from Ramesside Egypt.¹³ As noted by Dielemann,¹⁴ according to Herodotus (II, 39) Egyptian priests never used an animal head as sacrifice to the god; such an animal body part was rather an object of curse and therefore could not be placed in the temple; therefore, we are not dealing here with a regular temple ritual but rather with a spell of aggressive magic centered on the ritual use of blood. According to the temple ethical rules, blood was considered impure: the practitioner is instead described as smearing it on his hand.

In a few spells for causing separation between people, the donkey plays a role in relation to Seth again:

13 For nightmares in ancient Egypt, see Szpakowska 2003.

14 Dielemann 2005, 131 ff.

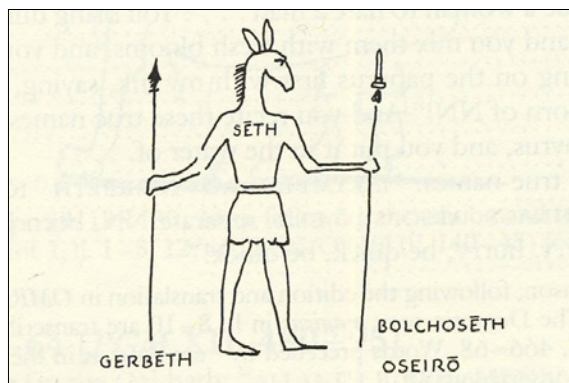


Figure 1. From Betz 1992, 169

1.6 PDM XII 50-61 [PGM XII 445-48] (Betz 1992, 169)

A spell for separating one person from another: Dung of... and you put it [in] a document, and you write on a document of papyrus these great names | together with the name of the man, and you bury it under the doorsill of the house.

Here are the names for (?) it and you recite them over it also, 7 times: *voces magicae*,¹⁵ separate NN, born of NN, from NN, born of NN! It is...: "separate Isis from..." (formula: 7 times).

Although this short spell does not mention donkeys or donkey parts, we may consider its relation to the following one, where Seth is also depicted with a donkey face (fig. 1).

1.7 PDM XII 62-75 [PGM XII 449-52]

Another. You bring a... and you write the names on it, and you bury [it] in the road of...

Formula: (*voces magicae*), separate NN born of NN, from NN born of NN! Two [times]... you bring a sherd... of beer of... which is burnt, and you write [on] it a donkey | in this manner:...

¹⁵ Among the *voces magicae* listed in the spell *IO-SĒTH* occurs, and the sketch occurring on the same document (Betz 1992, 169) depicts a human body with donkey head and the name *SĒTH*.

1.8 PDM XII 76-107 [PGM XII 453-65] (Betz 1992, 170)

Another... of a *black donkey*, and you put a... which is... and you leave [it] in it for three days... it. You should cook it for one night... and you should bring a | strip of... and you should write... the names on it with *donkey blood*, and you should gather outside... saying: Separate NN, born of NN, from NN, born of NN! And you should... and you should... the urine...

Here is the name which you should write it: | “*THALAMAXI*, separate NN, born of NN, from NN, born of NN”.

... again on the day of separating (another [manuscript] says: “beating” [?],... of a *donkey* and a... | urine (?), and you put them in a new ladle (?) and you... until they come..., and you put... and you... in the above-mentioned house.

Here are the names: I call upon you, you who are in the [empty air], you who are terrible, you who are an invisible god, you who cause destruction and desolation, you who hate a stable household and you who do mischief. I call upon your great name; cause him, NN, to be separated from him, NN, (*voces magicae*)...

In this figurative papyrus, used for separating probably two lovers, the instructions say to depict a donkey but what is in the figure is the hybrid figure of Seth with human body and donkey head, holding sceptres and with his name written on the breast (fig. 1).¹⁶

The use of donkey meat in magical spells for separating two lovers is also attested in Jewish aggressive magic, almost certainly a borrowing from the Egyptian-Greco magical papyri.¹⁷

16 On line 70 of PGM III (Betz 1992, 20) there is another image of a hybrid god with animal head, which has been previously interpreted as donkey head and associated to Seth because of the invocation to the god in the text. However, in a recent essay on magical drawings in the PGM, Raquel Martín Hernández (2012) has convincingly shown that the figure is cat-headed.

17 Bohak 2008, 288-9.

2 Spells with no clear Association Between the Donkey and Seth/Typhon

A second group of texts included in the *PGM* mentions the donkey but does not explicitly associate the animal to Seth/Typhon; it mostly consists of spells of love magic.

2.1 *PGM* IV 2006-2015 (Betz 1992, 73-5)

Pitys' spell of attraction....

Take *the hide of an ass* and, after drying it in shade, inscribe on it the figure which will be revealed and inscribe this spell in a circle: (*voces magicae*).

I adjure you, dead spirit, by the powerful and inexorable god and by his holy names, to stand beside me in the coming night in whatever form you used to have, and inform me whether you have the power to perform the NN deed; immediately, immediately; quickly, quickly!

Then go quickly to where [someone] lies buried or where something has been discarded, if you do [not] have a buried body; spread the hide under him at about sunset. Return [home], and he will actually be present and will stand beside you on that night. And he describes to you how he died, but first he tells you if | he has the power to do anything or to perform any service...¹⁸

The black ink of the procedure is this: *the hide is inscribed with blood of an ass* from the heart of a sacrificial victim... the leaf of flax is inscribed with falcon's blood... the leaf of the hieratic papyrus is inscribed with eel's blood...

The incantation ends with the description of the figure on the hide, which is a lion-faced man holding a staff and a serpent, with fire coming out from his mouth, which recalls a Bes-demon-like figure, and the description of Hekate, double headed (cow and dog) represented on the leaf of flax.

In this spell the blood and hide of an ass are used as ritual instruments for summoning up a dead, although Seth or Typhon are not mentioned in relation to the ass's body parts; the ritual procedure makes clear that we are dealing with a case of necromantic practices.¹⁹

¹⁸ The spell continues with instructions and recitations to the daimon summoned up by the magician.

¹⁹ On necromancy in ancient Egypt, see Ritner 2002.

2.2 PGM IV 2891-2942 (Betz 1992, 92-4)

Love spell of attraction.

Offering to the star of Aphrodite...

(After mentioning a series of other animal and vegetal materials (including the brains of a vulture!), the spell says):

... and also have as a protective charm *a tooth from the upper right jawbone of a female ass* or of a tawny sacrificial heifer, tied to your left arm with Anubian thread.²⁰

To be noted how in this spell, as in a few others of the PGM collection, also the gender of the animal has been specified; the association of a female ass with Seth or Typhon does not seem to have been taken into consideration in this spell.

2.3 PGM VII 300a-310 (Betz 1992, 125)

Love charm, which acts in the same hour: Take a seashell and write the holy names with *the blood of a black ass*...

The spell continues with an adjuration of the shell to attract a woman and a list of *voces magicae*. Similar to the previous two spells mentioned above, also in this text the blood of a black ass functions as ritual material in love magic and it is not mentioned in explicit relation to Seth. It is also interesting to note that in this spell, differently from PGM IV 2891-2942 (see §2.2), the skin colour instead of the animal's gender is specified.

2.4 PDM XIV 772-804 (Betz 1992, 235-6)

A method to put the heart of a woman after a man: done in one moment (?) and it comes to pass instantly. You bring a live swallow and a live hoopoe. Ointment made for them: *blood of a male donkey*, blood of the tick of a black cow. You should anoint their heads with lotus ointment and cry out before the sun in his moment of rising. You should cut off the heads of the two; you should bring their hearts out from their right ribs [of the two] and anoint them *with the donkey's blood* and the blood of the tick of a black cow, above. You should put them into *donkey's skin* and leave them in the sun until they dry up in four days. When the four

20 The "Anubian thread" probably refers to mummy bandages; see also PGM I, 147, mentioning an "Anubian string"; see Betz 1992, 7, n. 33, 9,2 n. 361.

days have passed, you should pound them, put them into a box, and leave it in your house.

When you wish to make a woman love a man, you should take the piece of “pleasure woo”, recite these true names before them, put it in a cup of wine or beer, and give it to the woman so that she drinks it.²¹

This is another typical spell of love magic mentioning the ritual use of donkey’s blood and skin, which does not explicitly refer to the association of the animal with the deities Seth or Typhon. The donkey functions instead as a ritual animal similar to the black cow mentioned in the same spell.

2.5 PGM XXXVI 134-60 (Betz 1992, 272-3)

Marvelous love spell of attraction, than which none is greater...²² You, NN, have been bound by the fibers of the sacred palm tree, so that you may love NN forever. And may no barking dog release you, no *braying ass*, no cock, no priest who removes magic spells, no clash of cymbals, no whining of flute; indeed, no protective charm from heaven that works for anything; rather, let her be possessed by the spirit.

In this typical spell of love magic, an ass crying loud seems to have the potential to remove the magic effect of the spell; the ass is mentioned together with a barking dog and a cock, namely with animals producing noise; no association with Seth occurs in the spell.

2.6 PDM Suppl. 40-60 (Betz 1992, 324-5)

Another spell for sending a dream. Formula:

Listen to my voice, O noble mummy-spirit of a man of the necropolis who assumes [all his] forms; come to me and do for me such-and-such a thing today because I am calling you in your (?) name... in Abydos who rests in the house of the official whose name is great image of Nun is your true name...²³

21 The spell concludes with a list of divine identifications, *voces magicae* and ritual instructions.

22 What follows is an invocation of the “daimons in the dark”, Isis and Osiris, who make a woman turning in the bed, being sleepless, hungry, thirsty and then finally falling in love with the man reciting the spell.

23 Nun is mentioned repeatedly in the spell.

Its preparation: (lit. Gathering of things):... these names with blood of... read leaf; you put it... of a dead man; you leave... of clay under the head... on (?) it; and you recite them to him again. You do... lunar month and it is left in a place... If stubbornness occurs, you should [put] the hoof... *of a male donkey* and myrrh... on it and you should beat on the ground until it stops... If you [will act against a man | you should...] of a male. If you will act against a woman, you should [... of a] woman.

A male donkey's part (hoof) is used here as animal ingredient for aggressive magic together with plant's ingredients: there is no mention of Seth, Nun being the only Egyptian deity mentioned.

The donkey is mentioned also in a couple of spells concerning solar manifestations:

2.7 PGM IV 1596-1715 (Betz 1992, 68-9)

Spell to Helios: In the fifth hour *you have the form of a donkey*; your name is *ENPHANCHOUPH*. Give strength and courage and power to the god, NN. (lines 1664-65)

2.8 PGM XXXVIII 1-26 (Betz 1992, 278-9)

This is a fragmentary text where the manifestations of "Fate, the god of the gods (*PSOI PENOUTHININTHĒR*)" are listed according to the hours, and in the 5th hour the deity takes the form of an ass (the others are cat, snake, scarab, lion, goat, bull).

The list of the manifestations of the hours in heaven recalls Egyptian religious astronomical motives; the ass is here a divine manifestation so probably related to Seth as part of the solar crew in the sky.

The donkey as sacrificial animal occurs in the following spells:

2.9 PGM IV 2373-2440 (Betz 1992, 81-9)

Charm for acquiring business and for calling in customers...²⁴ when you have set it up high on the place you have chosen, *sacrifice to it a wild*

24 This spells continues with instructions for being successful, mentioning Hermes and Isis as a coiled snake and the ritual writing on papyrus.

[*ass*]²⁵ with a white forehead and offer it whole and roast the inward parts over the wood of willow and thus eat it”.

If it is really an ass, which is mentioned in this spell, this is the only occurrence where the animal is clearly offered as sacrificial victim, recalling a Near Eastern custom, which is still somehow attested nowadays.²⁶

It is also known that in the fourth century CE the corporation of the ironworkers of Hermonthis sacrificed a donkey in the temple of Deir el Bahari (Bagnall 2004); although it is not clear for which god such a sacrifice was carried out, it seems that at least in the Theban region the donkey was still used as sacrificial animal in the post-Constantinian pagan ritual activities.

Moreover, burials including donkeys have been found at Avaris (Tell el-Dab’a), which date to the Hyksos period, like the tomb of the Asiatic *Aamu* who contained five to six donkey burials (Forsten-Müller 2010). At Tell el-Dab’a the animal remains are present in offering pits in front of the tombs and seem to recall the use of donkey burials, used as status symbol of the tomb owners, in the Near East and Mesopotamia (Forsten-Müller 2010, 132).

There are more spells of the *PGM* collection published in Betz, which mention donkeys not explicitly related to Seth/Typhon and are heterogeneous in function and contents. One of them is about the transformation of human faces in donkey-like masks, where the donkey’s blood is a magical ingredient for transformation:

2.10 *PGM* XIb 1-5 (Betz 1992, 151)

To make men who have [been] drinking at a symposium appear to have *donkey snouts* to outsiders, from afar: in the dark [take] a wick from a lamp and dip it in *donkey’s blood*; make a new lamp/with the new wick and touch the drinkers.

The donkey as an inimical animal to ward off and to paralyze, probably in order to harm the donkey’s owner, occurs in a prescription followed by a formula of clearly Egyptian origin and where probably, considering the mythological antecedent of Horus mentioned in the text, Seth is indirectly meant:

²⁵ As noted in Betz (1992, 82, n. 304), the translation ‘wild ass’ derives from the emendation of the Greek *αγριον* into *(ου)αγριον*.

²⁶ In the *Jerusalem Post* of March 21, 2014, there was a news about a rabbi and his student arrested for trying to slaughter a female donkey near the Tomb of Samuel the prophet, which is located in the West Bank, north of Jerusalem. Apparently the purpose was to use its skin for amulets.

2.11 *PDM LXI* 106-111 (Betz 1992, 289)

Prescription for a *donkey* not moving: rue, dung of falcon, dung of crocodile; you should apply it and you should anoint the ears or its nose or the nostril of its nose.

Formula: "He of the heart... Horus [is] behind you; Geb is pursuing you, Isis being with them (?)... many hours | The arrow of Horus will go into you in order to."

A body part of an ass is mentioned in a fragmentary medical prescription:

2.12 *PDM LXI* 43-48 [*PGM LXI* i-v] (Betz 1992, 287)

Remedy for [an] ulcer (?) of the head...: *of a male ass...*

The spells listed above are only a few representative examples of magical texts mentioning the role of the donkey/ass and its (not always explicit or clear) association with Seth in magical texts of Graeco-Roman Egypt.

The occurrences of donkeys in the spells of the *PGM* collection have been constantly used as examples of the association of this animal with Seth, Typhon and other Seth-related supernatural figures and symbols, without taking in account the role that the donkey played in Antiquity as an animal of ritual and sacrificial use in itself. As a matter of fact, even if the spells where the donkey is a clear Sethian symbol are numerous, it cannot be ignored a more 'material' and merely ritual function of the donkey as a sacrificial or ritual element, which does not necessarily involve the association to Sethian gods and demons.

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