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The 'smr' Animal of the Ebers Papyrus.

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THE '*SMR*' ANIMAL OF THE EBERS PAPYRUS

BY

P. GHALIOUNGUI

A good example of ' sympathetic ' magic is prescription XCVIII = 850-851 of the Ebers papyrus, where a reciprocal relation is assumed between lizards and a *smr* animal [1] :

«Another, what is done to kill *smr* animals : a lizard is placed over the fire until they die (Eb. 850).

What is done to kill a lizard : *smr* animals are placed over the fire until it dies» (Eb. 851).

Neither Ebbell nor Grapow could identify this animal.

An interesting parallel is found in ' The Book of Animals ' of El-Demiry, a 14th century compiler who lived in Cairo (742-808 H.). In his description of the *sammour* (sable? beaver?), he says : «The *sammour* is a terrestrial animal that resembles the *sinnawr* [2]. Some claim that it is identical with the *nims* (ichneumon) but that it is its habitat that caused its colour to change. Abdullatif El-Boghdady said that it is a courageous animal, that none among animals is more courageous against man, and that it cannot be captured except by cunning... Strangely, El-Nawawy said it was a bird, and this might have been a slip of his pen. Stranger yet is what Ibn Hisham wrote in (Sharh El-Fasih), that it is a kind of djinn. Eating it is allowed by analogy with the fox» (5 a).

Regarding the *sinnawr* that the *sammour* is said to resemble, he later says : «It is a humble domesticated animal that God created to drive away rats. It is so inimical to them that if it defecates, it hides its excreta to prevent rats from smelling them

[1] The transcription *smt* by Wreszinski (1) accepted by Grapow (2) was later re-read *smr* by Ebbell (3) and by Grapow himself (4).

[2] A word designing the cat and, in general felidae.

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and running away. If domesticated in a house, it prevents other *sinnawr* from entering it, and fights them the bitterest fight» (5 b).

There are other even closer parallels to be drawn between El-Demiry's book and the Egyptian papyri, and to these we hope to draw attention in the future. This particular one illustrates a resemblance between two animals, both in their names (smr/smt and sammour/sinnawr) and in their antipathy towards another small animal, the lizard in the Ebers papyrus, and the rat in El-Demiry.

El-Demiry copied freely El-Qazwiny (6), another compiler who lived a century earlier (600-682 H.), and the above descriptions of the *sammour* and the *sinnawr,* seem to be copied from him.

We hope that this note might help in the identification of the hitherto unknown *smr* or *smt* animal.

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