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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.

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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