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# The Iconography of Magic

## Images of Power and the Power of Images in Ancient and Late Antique Magic

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I. THE “VIGNETTES”  
OF THE GREEK MAGICAL PAPYRI.  
VISUAL ELEMENTS OF THE PHARAONIC  
MAGICAL TRADITION AND THE USE  
OF *BILDZAUBER* IN THE *PGM*

*Rita Lucarelli*

In magical compositions of the Pharaonic period – in particular in the *Book of the Dead* – copied especially on papyrus but also attested on tomb walls and in other mortuary contexts, the texts are very often accompanied by “vignettes”, namely depictions functioning as magical complement of the written incantations and as a sort of visual summary of each text’s topic and title; in certain cases, the vignettes may even replace the text of a spell.<sup>1</sup> These images, an expression of the so-called *Bildzauber*, “figurative magic” or “magic with images”, enhanced the amuletic function of the magical papyri or objects where the incantations were copied on.<sup>2</sup> The custom of adding iconic elements to texts on papyrus continued in the magical books of the Graeco and Roman Periods and throughout Late Antiquity in the Greek magical papyri (*PGM*). The study of the visual elements of the *PGM* has only recently been focused on,<sup>3</sup> after having been neglected for a long time due to the generally unclear or complex relationship of these drawings to the texts copied in their vicinity, as well as because of their poor esthetic quality.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a general overview on the vignettes in the *Book of the Dead*, see H. Milde, ‘Reading vignettes: an approach to illustrations in the Book of the Dead’, *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux* 43 (2011) 43-56.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive study of *Bildzauber* in ancient Egypt and with particular focus on the interplay of text and image, see P. Eschweiler, *Bildzauber im alten Ägypten: die Verwendung von Bildern und Gegenständen in magischen Handlungen nach den Texten des Mittleren und Neuen Reiches* (Göttingen, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> See R. Martín Hernández, ‘Reading magical drawings in the Greek Magical Papyri’, in P. Schubert (ed.), *Actes du 26e Congrès international de papyrologie* (Genève, 2012) 491-98.

<sup>4</sup> Weitzmann’s central study on the relationship between texts and images in antiquity also mentions the sketches of the *PGM*, defining them “of extreme crudeness”

Some of these images are, however, of clear ancient Egyptian origin and seem to derive from models taken from the *Book of the Dead* and other pharaonic funerary compositions. Such an iconic transmission shows that the ancient Egyptian *Bildzauber* was still considered effective in the new socio-cultural context where the *PGM* were composed and used.

In order to define an “illustration” or an iconographic element within the ancient Egyptian manuscripts production at large, one has to analyze the relationship between image and text. The entry “Illustration” in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*,<sup>5</sup> lists three main types of illustrations; only the first type is an “image without a text” (*Bilder ohne Text*), while the other two are connected to a text, either because the latter describes and explains the illustration or because the illustration is dependent and secondary to the text.<sup>6</sup> All these three types of illustration, as described in the *Lexikon*’s entry, do occur in magical manuscripts and therefore they need to be interpreted according to their interplay with the text.

When looking instead to the ancient Egyptian language, in order to establish an emic view on images as mentioned in magical and religious contexts, we can note different terms employed in sacred writings, such as *twt*, “image, statue” employed in magical instructions of spells when referring to statuettes and figurines; *jr.w.w*, “creation, form,” used in funerary books for cultic communication; *hpr.w*, “form, mode of being, transformation”, referring to periodic transformations of the sun god, of Osiris as well as of the deceased assimilated to them and, “statue, image, likeness”, which refers to potential epiphanies of the gods.<sup>7</sup> This rich semantic spectrum of terms referring to religious images shows how important the latter were considered within the ancient Egyptian ritual and magical practices.

In the funerary papyri of the Pharaonic Period and in particular of those of the *Book of the Dead* “genre”, the pictographic elements are called “vignettes” by egyptologists.<sup>8</sup> This is a Middle French word (*vignette*)

(K. Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex: A study of the origin and method of text illustration* (Princeton, 1947) 51).

<sup>5</sup> K. Zibelius, s.v. ‘Illustration’, in W. Helk et al. (eds.), *Lexikon Der Ägyptologie III* (Wiesbaden, 1980) 137-40.

<sup>6</sup> On the vignettes in the *Book of the Dead* in comparison with the *Lexikon*’s entry, see also R. Lucarelli, *The Book of the Dead of Gatseshen: ancient Egyptian funerary religion in the 10th century BC*, Egyptologische Uitgaven 21 (Leiden, 2006) 231-32.

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of these terms in the *Book of the Dead* and *Amduat*, see Eschweiler, *Bildzauber im alten Ägypten*, 73-196. More recently, R. Nyord has been discussing the function of different kind of images in ancient Egypt: R. Nyord, *Seeing Perfection. Ancient Egyptian Images Beyond Representation* (Cambridge, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> M. Heerma van Voss, s.v. ‘Vignette’, in W. Helk et al. (eds.), *Lexikon Der Ägyptologie VI* (Wiesbaden, 1986) 1043-44.

describing: “a running ornament or small decorative design or picture put on or just before a title page or at the beginning or end of a chapter”.<sup>9</sup> Such an association originated by the fact that the first scholars of the *Book of the Dead* were looking at the papyri produced during the Ptolemaic period, many of which are indeed characterized by displaying small illustrations on the top or bottom register of the scroll, as if they were a sort of decorative element.

Instead, when looking at different variants of vignettes in the papyri of the early New Kingdom, it is clear that the illustrations of the *Book of the Dead* cannot just be indicated as “running ornament or small decorative design”; their dimension varies and large-scale vignettes can even occupy a full “page” of a papyrus, such as the vignettes of Spell 110, with the depiction of the Field of Offerings, and of Spell 125, with the scene of the final judgment of the deceased in the Hall of the Two Truths. Moreover, they can be defined as visual magical elements complementing the text and they are not inserted merely to embellish the scroll as ornamental “vignettes” do. Therefore, the vignettes of the *Book of the Dead* can and need to be compared to other images occurring in magical texts and books according to a broader perspective, which would consider their fluid symbolism and patterns of adaptation to the specific context of the spell or part of the text (such as the magical instructions), which they accompany.

Similarly to the vignette of the *Book of the Dead*, the sketches of the Greek magical papyri fully interact with the texts that they accompany thanks to a common mental code of religious knowledge, which was probably meant to be shared by both the manuscript’s producer and user.

Among the scattered sketches of the *PGM*, it is possible to individuate the ancient Egyptian origin of some of them. These new, much more stylized images are not used randomly as mere pictorial decorations of the manuscripts but they also relate to the new charms in proximity of which they have been copied. What follows are three significant examples of *Book of the Dead* motives re-used in the *PGM*.

### 1. *The Scarab*

A very explicative example of magical drawings of Pharaonic origin, which have been transported into the Greek magical papyri, is the figure of

<sup>9</sup> Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vignette> (09/06/2021). See also R. Lucarelli, *The Book of the Dead of Gatseshen: Ancient Egyptian Funerary Religion in the 10th Century BC* (Leiden, 2006) 230.

a scarab occurring in *PGM II* (Fig. 1). Scarabs are amuletic images par excellence, widely spread in the ancient Egyptian religious imagery as well as in the whole ancient Mediterranean. They occur on magical objects such as the so-called “scarabs of the heart” amulets, or as decorative elements of jewellery and as protective symbols alluding to the concept of rebirth on a wide series of funerary objects, from papyri to coffins.<sup>10</sup>

When occurring in the papyri of the *Book of the Dead*, the scarab mainly appears in variants of the so-called Spell 30B, on the protection of the heart. This popular incantation was also engraved or painted on the already mentioned heart-scarab amulets produced from the New Kingdom onwards. In the heart-scarabs, text and image are embedded into each other and can be considered as complementary parts of the same medium for amuletic magic and as an example of the “materiality” of magic.<sup>11</sup>

The scarab in question occurs in *PGM II* (P.Berlin inv. 5026), which is a magical handbook dated recently to the second/third century,<sup>12</sup> with spells and instructions for receiving direct oracular visions and including *charaktēres* and a very popular sketch of the *akephalos*, a figure that has been discussed widely by scholars.<sup>13</sup> The drawing of the scarab is part of an inscription for a doorpost of the bedchamber: “Below the door, [inscribe] the scarab, as it stands/here, having anointed it with the blood of a goat, outside your bedchamber”.<sup>14</sup>

Here the scarab is part of the instructions for the rite and we know that actually images as illustrative representations for the ritual and magical

<sup>10</sup> On the amuletic function of scarabs, see C. Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (Austin, 1994) 50-60.

<sup>11</sup> On the materiality of magic see D. Boschung and J.N. Bremmer (eds.), *The Materiality of Magic* (Paderborn, 2015) and C. Houlbrook and N. Armitage (eds.), *The Materiality of Magic: An Artifactual Investigation into Ritual Practices and Popular Beliefs* (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> See E. Chronopoulou, ‘Edition of the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) I and VI+II: Introduction, text and commentary’, Doctoral Dissertation, University Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona, 2017) 27, available in <http://hdl.handle.net/10803/460896> (13/03/2021). A new edition of all the Graeco-Egyptian magical formularies with English translation and a full revision of their material features (including new datings) is being carried out by the project “Transmission of magical knowledge: The papyrus magical handbooks”: <https://papyrusmagical-handbook.wordpress.com/> (13/03/2021).

<sup>13</sup> See Martín Hernández, ‘Reading Magical Drawings’, 492 with bibliography.

<sup>14</sup> The translations of the texts of the corpus of *PGM* are from *GMPT*. The mention of anointing the place with the blood of a goat in these instructions brings up an interesting comparison with the Israelite Passover protection ritual originated in Exodus 12, which has been compared to ancient Egyptian rituals implying the anointing of unguents by T. Schneider, ‘Modern Scholarship Versus the Demon of Passover: An Outlook on Exodus Research and Egyptology through the Lens of Exodus 12’, in T. Levy *et al.* (eds.), *Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective* (Cham, 2015) 537-53, in particular p. 547. I wish to thank Thomas Schneider for pointing out such intriguing comparative evidence to me.

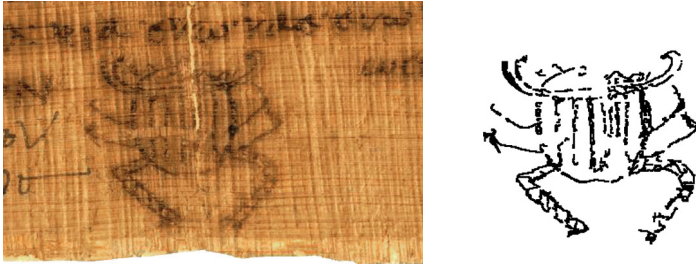


Figure 1. Right, detail of the scarab in *PGM II*

© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung,

Foto: Berliner Papyrusdatenbank, P 5026

Left, a B&W design made from the photo (R. Martín Hernández)

instructions, to be sketched by the user of the charm, were very common in the *PGM*. In general, this kind of sketches are rather simple and schematic and do not require artistic skills, differently from the highly elaborated vignettes of the illustrated funerary papyri of the Pharaonic Period.

It is interesting to note that, if comparing the scarab of the *PGM* to those occurring in the magical papyri of the Pharaonic period, in particular in the scrolls of the *Book of the Dead* containing the already mentioned Spell 30B on the protection of the heart, a similar use of the motive of the scarab occurs as the central and only element of the vignette. Spell 30B contains ritual instructions as well, as we can read in the version from the papyrus of Nu, which is one of the longest and best preserved papyri of the Eighteenth Dynasty: “See, a scarab of *nemehef*-stone is made, outlined and purified with gold, placed within the heart of a man, and the Opening of the Mouth (ritual) is performed for him, anointed with scented oil.”<sup>15</sup> A caption follows: *ḏdt ḥr=f m ḥkꜣw*, “Spoken over him as magic.”<sup>16</sup> In these instructions, the scarab is strictly related to the ritual of the so-called “Opening of the mouth”, which serves to vivify the deceased’s physical powers. Therefore, the illustration of the scarab, similar to its later occurrence in *PGM II*, functions at the same time as an amulet and as a complementary object for the ritual.

<sup>15</sup> Translation from S. Quirke, BD, *Going Out in Daylight – prt m hrw the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead translation, sources, meanings* (London, 2013) 99.

<sup>16</sup> In Quirke’s translation, *ḥkꜣw* is translated as “word power”; I opt here for the more comprehensive term “magic” since the instructions refer also to the ritual power of the performance and to the scarab amulet, not only to the words of the spell.



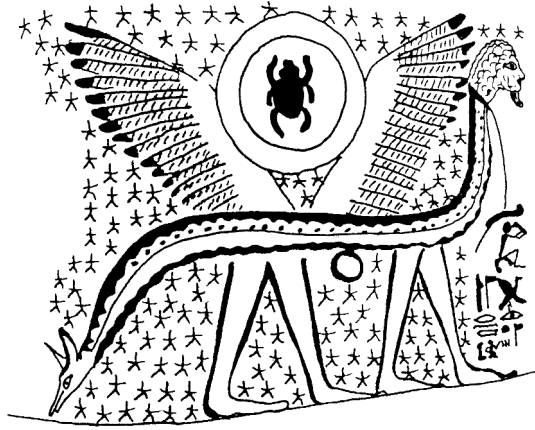


Figure 2. Scarab within the sun disk in Atum scene  
from Niwinski, 2015

In other magical papyri of the Pharaonic period, where images outnumber the text, the same iconographic element can actually be used within a much more intricate web of symbols in pictorial compositions symbolising the triumph of the deceased over death, where the scarab gains an additional function as cosmological symbol of the process of transformation and syncretism of the sun god between night and day. A good example is the image occurring in a funerary papyrus of the twenty-first Dynasty where Atum, in the form of a winged snake, has been depicted with a scarab in a sun disk in between the wings (Fig. 2).<sup>17</sup> One cannot find this level of complexity in the sketches of the *PGM* but we can assume that the authors of some of these images knew them and found inspiration in it. And probably they were also still aware of the complex magical symbology imbedded in the figure of the scarab; from a lexical point of view, the scarab trilateral sign  $\text{𐀀}$  *hpr*, has a double meaning, indicating the verb for “to become” and the substantive “scarab” as well. The scarab is also a substitute symbol of the heart in magic and as such is placed very often on the chest of the mummy as an amulet. Finally, a principle of *materia magica* is

<sup>17</sup> A. Niwinski, ‘Magic in the iconography of twenty-first Dynasty coffins and papyri’, in G. Bakowska-Czerner *et al.* (eds.), *The Wisdom of Thot. Magical Texts in Ancient Mediterranean Civilizations* (Oxford, 2015) 63 and fig. 6, p. 65. In the papyrus under discussion (BM EA 10018), the short and peculiar caption to the image runs as following: “Death, the great god who made the gods and the people”.

involved as well in the magical instructions of the spells mentioning the scarab, when it is said that the amulet has to be made of a certain stone and colour.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. *The Embalming Scene*

An example of a composite *Book of the Dead* vignette transmitted into the Greek magical papyri is the sketch of the embalming scene occurring on the *verso* of a demotic papyrus, *PDM* xii, namely Papyrus Leiden I 384, which is part of the so-called “Leiden-London magical papyrus” (Fig. 3).<sup>19</sup>



Figure 3. *PDM* xii, col. I. Drawing of the embalming scene by R. Martín Hernández.

This scene, which is also attested on magical gems in Late Antiquity,<sup>20</sup> occurs widely in the Pharaonic mortuary papyri as a vignette of Spell 151

<sup>18</sup> Eschweiler, *Bildzauber*, 76 ff.

<sup>19</sup> See J. Dieleman, *Priests, tongues, and rites: the London-Leiden magical manuscripts and translation in Egyptian ritual (100-300 CE)* (Leiden, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> A. Mastrocinque, *Sylloge Gemmarum Gnosticarum*, vol. I (Rome, 2003) nos. 109-10, figure of N. 110; see also C. Sfamini, ‘Magicians’ instruments in PGM and the archaeological evidence: some examples’, in Bakowska-Czerner, *The Wisdom of Thot*, 101. On the occurrence on the embalming scene with Anubis on gems and its comparison with Seth-figures, see N. West, ‘Gods on small things: Egyptian monumental iconography on late antique magical gems and the Greek and Demotic magical papyri’, *Pallas* 86 (2011) 135-66 at 141 ff. See also the similar iconography on certain mummy labels, which have been recently compared with the faience amulets: R. Martín Hernández, ‘Fayence Mummy Labels Written in Greek’, *ZPE* 208 (2018) 193-202 at 198-200.

of the *Book of the Dead* (Fig. 4)<sup>21</sup> but also on the walls of tomb-chapels of the New Kingdom.<sup>22</sup> In Graeco-Roman Egypt the same image occurs on sarcophagi, mummy masks and wrappings as well; one of the last examples is in the tomb of Petosiris in Qarat el Muzzawaqa in the Dakhlah Oasis (second century BCE) and in the burial chamber of the Kom el-Shuqafa catacomb in Alexandria.<sup>23</sup>

The sketch in *PDM* xii proposes again the motive of Anubis and the mummy lying on a lion couch and, similar to the scarab of *PGM* II, seems to illustrate the instructions for a ritual; the attached text is a love spell of attraction written in Greek and Demotic, which has unfortunately numerous *lacunae* but seems to describe the same scene:<sup>24</sup>

“...you bring a sealed...of copper...this lion, this mummy (?), and this Anubis...while they seek...black scarab(?)...put...: ...AIDIO ORICH THAMBITO, Abraham who at...PLANOIEGCHIBIOTH MOU ROU and the whole sould for her, HH [whom NN bore]...the female body of her, NN [whom NN bore], I conjure by the...[and] to inflame her, NN whom [NN bore]”. [Write these] words together with this picture on a new papyrus”.

It is interesting that the text instructs to sketch this picture on a “new” papyrus; similar formulations occur also in the funerary instructions of many incantations with amuletic function of the Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt, including those of the *Book of the Dead*, according to which it seems that the power of the magical texts and images would work better when the writing material is “fresh, new papyrus”.<sup>25</sup> We may assume therefore that we are facing, in the instructions of the demotic papyrus, another example of the inheritance of Pharaonic magical practices into Late Antiquity. Similarly to the case of the motive of the scarab, the quality of the sketch of the *PGM* is much inferior to that of the vignettes of the *Book of the Dead* with Anubis and the mummy on the funerary bed. However, simple sketches were not uncommon also in the papyri of the Pharaonic period used for daily magic, so that we can’t just assume that the quality of the drawings

<sup>21</sup> See B. Luescher, *Untersuchungen zu Totenbuch Spruch 151*, Studien zum Altägyptischen Totenbuch 2 (Wiesbaden, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> See references in Quirke, *Going Out in Daylight*, 375.

<sup>23</sup> For the occurrences of Pharaonic motives in the Graeco-Roman tombs, including the Anubis scene, see M.S. Venit, *Visualizing the afterlife in the tombs of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Maryland, 2016) 173, in particular for the tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhla Oasis.

<sup>24</sup> *PDM* xii, 135-46 in *GMPT* 171, also *PGM* XII 474-79.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance the so-called Spell 167 (Pleyte number) of the *Book of the Dead*: Quirke, *Going out in Daylight*, 535: “...and write it out on a new papyrus sheet, to be made as a book and place at his neck”.

would have been influencing the efficacy of the spell. Moreover, the sketch in the demotic papyrus seems to be a mirror-image of the earlier representations, since Anubis and the mummy head are facing left instead of right.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. The “stele”

A very intriguing composite image occurs in *PGM VII* 940-68 (*P.Lond.* I 121, dated to the fourth century, Fig. 5). The sketch is attached to “a charm to restrain anger and a charm to subject,”<sup>27</sup> where it is said:

“On clean papyrus write with pure myrrh ink these names together with the ‘stele’”.

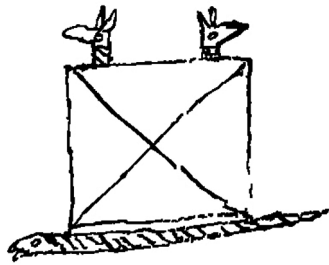


Figure 5. Drawing of the “stele” in *PGM VII* by R. Martín Hernández

The probable image of what is indicated as a “stele” in the spell looks like a square with two crossed lines in the inside and two dog- or donkey/Seth-like heads coming out from the “stele”; a snake lies underneath the square. This is not the image of a traditional Egyptian stele but we do know that

<sup>26</sup> In the Pharaonic period, only in the tomb of Sennedjem (TT 1) we can find a similar layout of this scene, as noted by Dielemann, *Priests, Tongues and Rites*, 34, n. 38. The scene of Anubis and the mummy, with the same orientation towards left as in the *PGM*, occurs also at least on the obverse of one gem kept at the University College in London and on a amulet found on mummy and dated to the Ptolemaic Period, where however only the mummy on the funerary bed is depicted, facing left as well, but not Anubis; see West, ‘Gods on small things’, figs. 3a and 8a. Tomb scenes, mummy cartonnages and shrouds of the Graeco-Roman period follow instead the Pharaonic tradition, with Anubis facing right. I wish to thank Lorelei Corcoran for discussing the scene orientation and providing examples from portrait mummies of Roman Egypt.

<sup>27</sup> Translation by H.D. Betz in *GMPT* 143.

“stele”, in the magical papyri, means either “inscribed charm” or “drawing with or without text”.<sup>28</sup> The latter – a drawing without text – is clearly the case for the sketch under discussion.<sup>29</sup>

The text copied below the sketch recites:

“Come to me, you who are in the everlasting air, you who are invisible, almighty, creator of the gods. Come to me, you who are the unconquerable *daimon*. Come to me, you who are never grieved for your own brother, Seth. Come to me, you fire-bright spirit. Come to me, you god who are not to be despised, you *daimon*, and put to silence, subordinate, enslave him, NN, to him, NN, and cause him to come under my feet.”

The main interpretation, according to the text, is to see the squared box or “stele” as a representation of the coffin of Osiris while the two (donkey?-) heads on its top would represent Seth – who according to a different myth was protecting the solar boat from Apopis; the latter would have inspired the snake under the stele, as a symbol of the subjugation of the enemies as in the earlier Pharaonic rituals.<sup>30</sup>

According to a different interpretation, which also seeks inspiration from Pharaonic mythological motives,<sup>31</sup> this sketch would resemble one scene occurring in the so-called *Amduat*, a funerary composition from the New Kingdom, used to decorate royal tombs and later on also copied on papyrus, describing the journey of the sun in the underworld, in order to unite with Osiris, during the twelfth hours of the night.<sup>32</sup> In the depiction of the seventh hour in particular, four coffins are represented, each of them

<sup>28</sup> See J. Dijkstra, ‘The Interplay between Image and Text. On Greek Amulets Containing Christian Elements from Late Antique Egypt’, in Boschung and Bremmer, *The Materiality of Magic*, 271-93 at 278. On the use of the Greek term *στήλη* in the PGM as “text” or “magical instructions”, which is derived from the inscribed magical stone stelae of the Pharaonic Period, see R. Gordon, ‘Memory and Authority in the Magical Papyri’, in B. Dignas and R.R. Smith (eds.), *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 2012) 145-80 at 163-64. See also the entry *στήλη* in the *Léxico de magia y religión en los papiros mágicos griegos* available on-line: <http://dge.cchs.csic.es/lmpg> (14/03/2021).

<sup>29</sup> In the same papyrus, on ll. 215-17, a stele with a text inscribed inside occurs instead.

<sup>30</sup> See R. Gordon, ‘Shaping the Text: Innovation and Authority in Graeco-Egyptian Malign Magic’, in: H.F.J. Horstmanshoff *et al.* (eds.), *Kykeon. Studies in Honour of H.S. Versnel* (Leiden, 2015) 69-111 at 101. See also R. Martín Hernández, ‘More than a logos. The *ωερβηθ* logos in context’, in C. Sánchez Natalias (ed.), *Litterae Magicae. Studies in Honour of Roger Tomlin* (Zaragoza, 2019) 187-209 and Chapter III in this volume.

<sup>31</sup> I. Grumach, ‘On the History of a Coptic *Figura Magica*’, in D.H. Samuel and A.M. Hakkert (eds.), *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology, Ann Arbor, 13-17 August 1968* (Toronto, 1970) 169-81, at 170-71.

<sup>32</sup> On the *Amduat* see E. Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife* (Ithaca, 1999) (trans. David Lorton); J. Darnell and C. Darnell, *Ancient Egyptian Netherworld Books* (Atlanta, 2018).

presenting two human heads on the corners of the lid. As noted already by West however,<sup>33</sup> the heads in the *Amduat* scene are human and they face each other, while the animal heads of the magical sketch in *PGM VII* face outwards. Moreover, the burial places of the *Amduat* present knives on their top and the serpent Apopis does not lie under them but it is depicted in a different area of the register.<sup>34</sup>

When looking instead for parallels into the earlier vignettes of the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the peculiar design of the squared box, with the two crossed lines in the interior recall a couple of images occurring on papyrus too. One of them is a scene from the so-called Spell 149 of the corpus.<sup>35</sup> The spell describes, in images and texts, the 14 *j3w.t*, namely the “mounds” of the netherworld, together with its inhabitants. In particular, the tenth mound is depicted as a rectangular or oval shape with crossing diagonals in his interior (Fig. 6).<sup>36</sup> The rectangular shape suggests the ancient Egyptian way to represent certain doorways and gates of the netherworld, as we can see in the vignettes of Spell 145 of the *Book of the Dead*, which often presents one or two diagonal lines within the rectangular shape of the door guarded by a demonic guardian (Fig. 7).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> West, ‘Gods on Small Things’, 143, n. 45.

<sup>34</sup> West also proposes a comparison with vaguely similar sketches occurring on a few magical gems, which show either a mummiform deity with two jackal heads or a jackal’s head coming out from a rectangular and oval object: West, ‘Gods on Small Things’, 143 and figs. 13. Such a parallel is certainly interesting since the gems are produced in the same period as the *PGM*; however, I would not consider the gems as a source of inspiration for the sketch on papyrus but rather consider this kind of iconographic motives – on papyrus and on gems – as similar re-interpretations of magical illustrations and “vignettes” of the Pharaonic period. An extensive comparison among the iconography of the magical gems and the Greek magical papyri, on the model of that one proposed by West but also extended to the magical papyri of the Pharaonic Period, would certainly be useful for a better understanding of the ancient Egyptian *Bildzauber* and of its transmission through Late Antiquity.

<sup>35</sup> For a translation of Spell 149 and facsimiles of its vignette, see Quirke, *Going Out in Daylight*, 357-64.

<sup>36</sup> Quirke, *Going Out in Daylight*, 357. I wish to thank Malcom Mosher for having discussed with me the occurrence of the crossed lines in this peculiar vignette in the Theban pre-Ptolemaic and Ptolemaic traditions and for pointing out that the later versions present many more variants of the rectangular/oval shape. In particular, a Theban early Ptolemaic papyrus depicts such a shape as a gate, similar to those of Spell 145; on this papyrus and its Theban *Book of the Dead* tradition, see M. Mosher JR, ‘An intriguing Theban *Book of the Dead* Tradition in the Late Period’, *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 15 (2010) 123-72.


<sup>37</sup> Cf. the Ptolemaic papyrus published by I. Munro, *Der Totenbuch-Papyrus des Hor aus der frühen Ptolemäerzeit* (pCologne Bodmer-Stiftung CV + pCincinnati Art Museum 1947.369 + pDenver Art Museum 1954.61) (Wiesbaden, 2006) Pl. 20. It is interesting to note how in this papyrus, the rectangular shape of the tenth hill contains only one instead of two



Figure 6. Vignette of Spell 149. Sketch by Quirke 2013, p. 358

In the vignette of the tenth mound, the caption occurring near the rectangular or oval shape says: *ntt hr r w'r.t*, “which is at the entrance of the district”, suggesting again that we are probably dealing with a gate. The vignette also shows a human figure holding knives and a snake facing the mound. Part of the spell also mentions a snake: *ḏsr.tw n=j w3.t n'w pw, k3 Nwt Nhb-k3w*, “may be cleared for me the path of the *naw*-snake, the bull of Nut, Nehebkau”. We may therefore assume that the human figure with knives is the guardian demon protecting the mound while the snake depicted is Nehebkau, which according also to other magical and religious texts, was considered a benevolent and protective divine snake.<sup>38</sup>

The vignette of Spell 149 was very popular in the Ptolemaic Period and attested as much as its text since, as all the other illustrations of the *Book of*

diagonal lines (Pl. 24), similar to other versions of the portals of Spell 145 (see for instance T. Allen, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago* [Chicago, 1960]). The rectangular shape with diagonal lines is occasionally used also to depict the Lake of Fire of Spell 125c, like for instance in pGatseshen: see R. Lucarelli, *The Book of the Dead of Gatseshen*, 221. The design of the portal with one diagonal slash across represents the 'h hieroglyph representing a palace or shrine . The latter appears already in the Old Kingdom and the diagonal slash represents maybe a curtain for the shrines brought on processional barques; I wish to thank Ogden Goelet for pointing to me the similarity of the rectangular figures with diagonal lines with the 'h buildings.

<sup>38</sup> On Nehebkau, see the seminal study of A. Shorter, ‘The god Nehebkau’, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 21.1 (1935) 41-48. More recently, see M. Massiera, ‘The so-called statue of Nehebkau: a comparative study’, *Journal of Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Archaeology* 2 (2015) 25-33, where the numerous occurrences of Nehebkau as a snake more than as an anthropomorphic god are discussed.



Figure 7. Vignette of Spell 145 from Munro 2006, pl. 20

*the Dead*, had a magical and ritual value on its own. The guardian-demons depicted in the spell, for instance, also occur in the second Osirian chapel of the temple of Hathor at Dendera, where an abridged version of the spell occurs in relation to the mysteries of death and rebirth of Osiris and where the mounds become part of Osiris' domain.<sup>39</sup>

Although there is no clear evidence of a direct relationship of the vignette of the tenth mound of the netherworld from Spell 149 of the *Book of the Dead* with the sketch of the Greek magical papyrus, we cannot deny, at the same time, a certain stylistic similarity among the two. Such a similarity is certainly not less convincing than the one found in the previously mentioned comparisons with the gems' sketches or with the mythological motives connected to Osiris, Seth and Apopis.

In conclusion, I think that these kind of sketches deserve more attention and need to be compared with earlier Egyptian motives from magical objects. Besides the evidence given by the magical papyri such as those of the *Book of the Dead* genre discussed in this study, a comparison with the iconographic elements occurring on other kind of magical sources and

<sup>39</sup> See S. Cauville, *Le temple de Dendara: les chapelles osiriennes*, (3 vols.) (Le Caire, 1997) at vol. 1, 363-64 and 372-73; commentary in vol. 2, 175.



monuments (from tombs to statues and statuettes, coffins, amuletic objects as well as graffiti) produced during the Pharaonic Period would help to disclose the essential role that the sketches of the *PGM* play as text-illustrations.

Similarly to when studying a richly illustrated papyrus of the *Book of the Dead* of the Pharaonic period, also in our study of the *PGM*, one needs to pay more attention to the images and to their interplay with the text, rather than considering the texts as the principal vehicle of that magical knowledge, for which the illustrations would be only a complement.

In the autobiographical pages of his book *The Torch in My Ear*, the Nobel Prize for Literature Elias Canetti wrote: "Pictures are nets; what appears in them is the holdable catch. Some things slip through the meshes and some go rotten. But you keep on, you carry the nets around with you, cast them out, and they grow stronger from their catches."<sup>40</sup>

If one attempts to transport this idea from the introspective, autobiographic experience of Canetti to our scholarly study of the ancient Egyptian magical text-illustrations on papyrus, one may experience something similar. We could attempt to interpret these images as nets of earlier motives and symbols in need to be caught and hold in order to keep their magical power intact and stronger.

<sup>40</sup> E. Canetti, *The Torch in my Ear* (New York, 1982) 113 (translated from German by F. Strauss).