



”STOP, O POISON, THAT I MAY FIND YOUR NAME ACCORDING TO YOUR ASPECT”: A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE AMBIVALENT NOTION OF POISON AND THE DEMONIZATION OF THE SCORPION’S STING IN ANCIENT EGYPT AND ABROAD

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Abstract

The scope of this paper is to present a novel exposition of the ambivalent notion of poison and venomous agents, especially scorpions, in ancient Egyptian magical literature, seeking contemporary variants in Greek mythos and praxis. Emphasis is given to the notion of change and ambiguity in the usage of the relevant terminology (mtwt, mw-mr, ἰός and φάρμακον, venenum), and the employment of certain intertextual motifs that show the lack of any firm background behind the personification of scorpions and venom as distinct/demonic individuals in the texts under examination. On the contrary, their realization is closely dependent upon the contextual framework and verbal methodology (word play in context and formulae) applied in each case, an issue which parallels the ambiguity of the “demonic” conception in the Egyptian belief system.¹

“M agical texts intended to repel such venomous agents as snakes and scorpions with a combination of words and actions are the oldest in Egyptian magical practice, beginning with the funerary corpus inscribed on the pyramid walls of the Old Kingdom.² The first attestation of the scorpion occurs in such an incantation from the Unas’ burial chamber: “Sky will entwine (*šn pt*), earth will entwine (*šn t3*), the Male (*scil.* the sun or the deceased king) who turns around the subjects will entwine (*imy-dr-b3h h3 rhyt*), the blind god will entwine his face (*šn.ti ntr šp tp=f*), and you yourself will be entwined (*šn.ti ds=t*), o scorpion (*sqrt*)!”³ It is usually seen as a close companion to snakes that have to be repelled by the goddess Mafdet.⁴ By the time of the Middle Kingdom, anti-scorpion spells appeared in both royal and private apotropaic contexts⁵ and predominated in the magico-medical corpora of the New Kingdom (chiefly from Deir el Medina due to the natural environment),⁶ the Late Period *cippi*-stelae of Horus⁷ and the healing statues.⁸ The main medical papyri are remarkably silent on the subject of scorpion stings although Ebers papyrus (case 200) compares stomach pain with that might be felt by “one who has been bitten (*hry dmt*)”.⁹ References to

poison and venomous stings can also be found in papyri British Museum 10059, Turin 54003, Hearst, Berlin 3038 and Brooklyn 47.218.48 and 47.218.85.¹⁰

Although the anti-snake spells have been the focus of several studies in the past, most notably among them those of J.F. Borghouts,¹¹ Ch. Leitz¹² and H. Fischer-Elfert,¹³ the harmful effects of the scorpion’s sting only recently attracted some attention.¹⁴ However, no attempt has been made to clearly define the ambivalent notion of the poison in these spells. There is a certain degree of ambiguity and change in both the nature and usage of the poison, that is also reflected in the diverse applications used for its coercion out from the patient’s body. The effects of the scorpion’s stings and the mobilization of venom within the victim’s body are closely interwoven with a certain intertextuality within the context of the anti-venomous spells, which is built upon a fusion of positive versus negative names/epithets on the one hand and upon multiple references of spells within the context of other spells on the other. Both aspects of this intertextuality will be touched upon in this paper by pointing out some specific cases from the magical genre. An attempt will be made to approach the subject of venomous stings

and potions in a comparative way, seeking contemporary examples in Greek mythos and *praxis*. It will be shown that the agentive nature of the poison is directly exploited in magical spells and rites to coerce the poison out of the body or to bar its progress from the site of the sting; nonetheless, the poison is not fully personified as a distinct/demonic individual, but its realization is closely dependent upon the contextual framework and verbal methodology applied in each case.¹⁵ This indistinctness will ultimately bring us back to the ambivalent issue of the demonic idiosyncrasy in the Egyptian belief system.¹⁶ The lack of any generic term that could be clearly specified as demonic in the Egyptian belief system facilitates to a great extent equivocal usages and perceptions of such harmful substances as the poison and its agents. Since this paper is just a preliminary study of an ongoing project on poison and venomous bites, I confine myself to a few representative examples for the points to be made.

THE AMBIGUITY OF SCORPION'S POISON IN EGYPT AND GREECE: SOME CASE STUDIES

The levels of intoxication and side effects from a scorpion's sting are well reflected in the various terms used in Egyptian and Greek magicomedical texts to describe the poison ejected out from a venomous creature. The references could be direct as in the case of the Egyptian words *mtwt* ("poison")¹⁷ and *mw mr* ("painful fluid"),¹⁸ the Greek *ῥόζι*¹⁹ and *τόξικόν*,²⁰ plus the Latin *venenum*,²¹ or indirect as in the case of the Egyptian *nbyt*, *hh*, *ht*, *sdt* or *t3/t3w*,²² which literally mean "fire/heat" and are related to the heat effect of a poisonous bite,²³ and the Greek *φάρμακον*²⁴ and *φάρμακον*,²⁵ the diverse nature of which ranges from dangerous poison to medical drug and magical enchantment. These terms are presented below within different textual environments, in an effort to identify possible meeting points of mobilization and usage within different cultural frameworks. I do not attempt here a comprehensive linguistic analysis, but rather a survey of ways in which the terms were employed in order to demonstrate the wide range of possible meanings and their inherent ambiguity that governed the medico-magical sources.

a. Egypt

The first case study comes from Egypt and the well-known spell from the Metternich stela for "conjuring a cat" which is stung by a scorpion.²⁶ A variant of the text has been recorded on the contemporary prophylactic statue of Djed-her:²⁷

"Spell for conjuring (*šnt*) a cat (*miw*). Recitation: "O Re, come to your daughter²⁸ which a scorpion (*srqt*) has stung (*psḥ*) in the lonely road (*w3t wʿ*). Her cry (*sbḥw*) reaches to heaven, it being heard on your ways. The poison has entered her body and gone round (*pḥr*) in her flesh (*iwf*). She put her mouth to it."²⁹

See, the poison (*mtwt*) is in her body.³⁰ Come with your power (*šḥm*), with your anger (*dndn=dndn*) (and) with your wrath (*dšr*). See, it is hidden (*imn*) from you. Now, it has entered into all of the body of this cat under my fingers. Do not be afraid — twice— O my glorious daughter!³¹ See, I am behind you.³² It is I who has defeated (*šḥr*) the poison, which was in all the limbs of this cat".³³

The spell continues with the enumeration of the cat's bodily members that have been affected by the scorpion's sting³⁴ and concludes with the ejection of the poison:

"They throw down and they drive off the poison of every snake (*ḥf3w*), every female snake (*ddft*), every scorpion (*srqt*), every reptile (*ddft*), which is in every limb of this cat, which is under the knife. They overthrow and they drive off the poison of every snake, every female snake, every scorpion and every reptile, which is (in) every limb of this man who is under <the knife> like this cat. It is Re who says it. See, Isis has spun (*sšn*) and Nephthys has woven (*msy*) against the poison. This excellent strip of cloth (*mrwt*) drives out (*dr*) this magic (*ḥk3*) at the words of Re-Horakhti, great god, who is in front of the two sanctuaries. O evil poison (*mtwt*) which is in all the limbs of this cat, which is under the knife, come you, go out upon the earth!"³⁵

The poison is characterized as malicious and evil, but the ejection procedure follows a more scientific method: the cat is treated as a proper victim, the use of a knife for excision of the poison and bandages for the wound bears more similarities to a medical operation/surgery rather than to a magical procedure. The ritualist practices here the directions of treatment being proposed in the P. Brooklyn 47.218.48 and 47.218.85:³⁶ local treatment of the bite by the use of a knife for incision or excision of the wound in order to remove necrotic tissues or to confine the absorption of the venom,³⁷ and the application of bandages for retaining specific local medication,³⁸ treatment with drugs³⁹ and magical incantations.⁴⁰ Thus, in similar cases the phrase *ir.k n.f dw3* "you should use the knife treatment for him," or the equivalent *tšš.f m ds* "he operates (him) with a knife", is used when simply surgery is required. The words *ds* stand for the special knife that is used in such operations, while the verb *dw3* indicates the action.⁴¹ While the use of drugs is virtually omitted from our spell, the use of the other two scientific methods—knife surgery and bandage application—is similar in both sources, despite its laconic and allegoric appearance in the Metternich stela. Yet, the symbolic interference of the goddesses Isis and Nephthys through the application of divine bandages on the wound (*ssn* and *msy*) indicates the practice of a medical treatment with drugs, after the excision of the poison, which the bandages are used to keep in place. Similar phraseology occurs in case 72a (4/20-21) from P. Brooklyn: "Another <remedy> for

driving out the swelling: operate (*tštš*) his wound with a knife (*ds*) many times—twice, in the first day. One should give him salt (*hm̄<t>*) and 1/8 of natron (*hsmn*). Keep <them> with a bandage (*rpw*) on the knife (*šht*).⁴² The multiple use of knife for the surgery operation is a common *topos* in spells from P. Brooklyn, which does not weaken the medical character of the treatment but strengthens the successful excision of the poison, a successful method which is followed, albeit not in such explicit way, in the spell III from the Metternich stela.

Thus, the demonization of the poison in the Metternich spell is formed through a certain intertextuality that makes use of an initial mythological parallelization/*historiola* (the cat as the daughter of Re),⁴³ a certain method of classified theology (the listing of cat's bodily parts, which are assigned to specific deities), and a medical procedure (surgery operation with a knife).⁴⁴ Nevertheless, such a demonization is only partial and it does not lead to the complete transformation of the poison with a distinct demonic identity. Besides its malign interference that has to be repelled, the actual method for its ejection from the cat's body remains scientific in its conception and execution, which on the one hand accentuates the performative medicomagical unity of the incantation and, on the other, underlines the notion of *change* in the employment of the poison.

In the second case that involves a series of spells against scorpions from the Chester Beatty collection, the *change* attitude of the scorpions' sting and poison is mobilized through a certain *historiola* that exploits the mythological affiliation of Horus with scorpions, embodying divine qualities in the latter.⁴⁵ This relationship goes back to the Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom and it is developed into the so-called "female circle of Horus", which is attested in magical texts on papyri, ostraca, graffiti and healing statues dating from the fourteenth century BC till the end of the Dynastic Period.⁴⁶ Myth and magic were completely entwined in Egyptian thought, and allusions to Isis as healer are abundant in magicomedical spells.⁴⁷ What is particularly intriguing in this specific literary genre is the employment of the Isis-Horus myth for the identification of the scorpion's sting and the harmful effects of its poison on both the mundane/physical and mythic/cosmic level (bringing the solar boat to a standstill and thus threatening the renewal of creation). The myth is conceived in two different versions. The first says that Horus weds a scorpion wife, who stings him during intercourse and puts him in flames from the pain. Although in nature infliction and cannibalism between the male and female scorpions during the mating act are infrequent, they are the basis for the myth of Horus and his wife. Over a protracted period, the wife reveals to Horus her names of power, healing him by fluids, so that he acquires medical skills as "Horus the saviour" and returns cured to his mother Isis.

The second version of the myth speaks of Isis and her seven scorpions that cure a youth injured by the collective poison of

seven arachnids and is related to the mythological adventures of Isis and Horus during their exile in the Delta.⁴⁸ The circle comprises of seven scorpion-wives of Horus, whose names are revealed in the wordings of the broken hymn from papyrus Chester Beatty VII, rt. 1/4-2/5:

"Another. Flow forth, O scorpion [...] you whose back is long and whose joints are many [...] (5) [...] whom Sepertuen[es] has [repelled ?] [...] as I say: I am the god who came into being of himself, [...] (6) [...] Isis. The poison [...] Re. Nut, who bore [the gods?] said (7) [... NN born of] NN.

Come, [go forth at the statement of ..., wife of] Horus. [Behold, I am] Horus the doctor, who soothes the god. [Flow forth] (8) [from the limbs!

Come, go forth at the statement of ..., wife of] Horus. Behold, [I am Horus the doctor, who soothes the god.] Flow forth [from the limbs!]

Come, go forth at the statement of (2/1) Ifde[t, wife of Horus.] Behold, I am Horus the doctor, [who soothes the god. Flow] forth from the limbs!

Come, go forth at the statement of Wepetsepu, wife of Horus. Behold, (2/2) I am H[orus the doctor, who soothes the god.] Flow forth [from the limbs!

Come, go forth at] the statement of Sefedsepu, the wife of Horus. Behold, I am Horus the doctor, (2/3) [who soothes] the god. [Flow forth from the limbs!

Come,] go forth [at the statement of Metemet]neferetiyes, the wife of Horus. Behold, I am Horus the doctor, (2/4) [who soothes] the god. Flow from the limbs!

Come, [go forth at the statement of..., the wife of Horus.] Behold, I am Horus the doctor, who soothes the god. Flow forth from the limbs!

(2/5) [...] Horus [...] ... herbs [...] Flow forth from the limbs!"⁴⁹

Five of the seven names are intact in the above text. These are *Špr.tw-n=s* ("she to whom one petitions"), *Ifdt* ("she who runs"), *Wpt-spw* ("she who judges misdeeds"), *Sfd-spw* ("she who executes misdeeds") and *[Mtmt]-nfrt-iy=s* ("..., beautiful upon coming"). The missing names in the lacunae must be those of *ḫ-Bitt* ("the daughter") and *Bth*. The former is attested elsewhere in the same papyrus (rt. 3/4) and, also, in O. Brussels E 3209 (l.2), as "the daughter of Pre",⁵⁰ while the latter is described in papyrus Leiden I 343+345 (vo. 25/3-4), as "the wife of Horus, the uraeus who bore the gods".⁵¹ The poison produces a raging fire with no water to extinguish it until the goddess compels her emissaries to withdraw their poisons.

"Come [recite, recite (?)] by the words of Sepertueres, to whom the earth remains, the first body of (4/3) Pre, when she tells her name to Horus for three years, with blood hidden in her

thighs since Horus opened her. Come to me, extract (4/4) this painful fluid (of the scorpion) (*mwt mr*) which is in the body of NN, born of NN, just as Horus went to his mother Isis on the night when he was bitten" (Chester Beatty VII, rt. 4/5-6).⁵²

The divine control is manifested as a double action that alters scorpions' agentive behaviour: at first, Sepertuers commanded the scorpions to be her assistants, powerless and subsumed under her will, until they had reached the patient's house. Then, she turns them into stinging animals that attacked the son of the noble lady of the house, before she commands the poison to be withdrawn from the body of the young patient. This swift change of the scorpions' character from beneficial to destructive and then to beneficial again, due to the influence of the magician's will, is an indication of the manageability of their nature and mission. In other words, scorpions should not be regarded *a priori* as negative and evil but as part of a wide network of both divine and negative forces that lay behind such stinging dangers and the powers they obey. A depiction of the scorpions, the child and Isis appears in the 18th register on the right edge of the Metternich Stele.⁵³ The names of the seven scorpions do not possess any ontological meanings but they have been magically created, following patterns of germane labial lexemes: *tfn*, *bfn*, *mstt*, *msttf*, *ptt*, *ttt* and *m3tt*.⁵⁴ They do not convey any specific meaning, but the fact that Isis knew the names, which in themselves suggest an incantation, gave her power over them. Moreover, the employment of poison in these *historiolae* expresses the same encrypted and diverse identity as the scorpions. This is better exemplified in a variant of the myth, recorded in the Geneva Papyrus MAH 15274 (rt. III/9-VI/8), where in the magician's imagination the venom (*mtwt*) injected by the scorpion becomes a mysterious being whose name must be discovered and who, whatever its nature, will be vanquished: "Stop, o poison, that I may find your name according to your aspect!"⁵⁵

b. Greek and Roman antiquity

Turning now to the Greek and Roman antiquity, this idea of *change* that encompasses the Egyptian notion of poison and the actions undertaken against its harmful effects of the scorpion's sting is also present —explicitly or implicitly— in the magical and drug lore from the Homeric epics onward.⁵⁶ As in the Egyptian material cited above, the main way in which the topic was addressed was an acute medical condition from ingestion of a deleterious substance, or the bite or sting from a venomous animal. In providing advice for such a condition, ancient writers focused on the identification of poisonous plants and animals, and on recipes for general remedies, but not on the material substance of poison.

This ambiguity is facilitated by the broad meaning of the relevant words such as *φάρμακον* and *ἰός*, which encompass a

broad range of meanings, from drug, poison, to magical spell or enchantment.⁵⁷ The word *φάρμακον* is used in the Homeric epics already with a meaning ranging from the extremely harmful (a poison), to very beneficial (a remedy). In the *Odyssey*, Helen uses an Egyptian *φάρμακον* to ease the melancholy of Menelaus and Telemachus,⁵⁸ while Circe employed a *φάρμακον ἄλλο* ("the other drug/spell") to change Odysseus' men to pigs, while she used *φάρμακον οὐλόμενον* ("evil drug/spell") to change them into swine.⁵⁹ Homer is not speaking of the actual substances that might be part of either *φάρμακον* but only about their effects.⁶⁰ In his *Laws*, Plato illustrates the notions of both change and harm when he defines two kinds of poison among men: those that injure the body according to natural law, and those that work through sorceries, incantations and magic:

"There is also another kind that persuades reckless persons that they can do injury by sorceries (*μαγανεία*), and incantations (*ἐπωδαί*) and binding spells (*κατάδεσις*), as they are called, and makes others believe that they are likely to be injured by the powers of the magician . . . Let the law about poisoning or witchcraft (*φάρμακα*) run as follows. He whoever is suspected of injuring others by binding spells, enchantments or incantations, or other similar practices, if they are soothsayers or diviners, let them die. But if he is not a soothsayer and is convicted of witchcraft, let the court fix what he ought to pay or suffer".⁶¹

The diverse meaning of *φάρμακον* here, as spell and poisonous potion (*δηλητήριον*), communicates the notion of general harm, rather than any specific kind of substance. Bringing harm to the body, especially through processes that were not fully understood, encouraged an affinity between magic (as part of nature) and drugs, as Plato's two types of *φάρμακον* suggest.

This is best exemplified in certain magical texts, which were inscribed on thin sheets of lead, ostraka, pieces of stone, papyrus or wax, the so-called *defixiones* or *κατάδεσμοι*, intended to invoke supernatural power to bring other persons or animals under the control of the person who ordered or inscribed the object.⁶²

"I call upon and beseech the highest god, Lord of the spirits and of all flesh, against those who by deceit murdered or cast a spell on/poisoned (*φαρμακεῖν*) miserable Heraklea, untimely dead, causing her to spill her innocent blood in unjust fashion, so that the same happen to those who murdered or cast a spell on/poisoned (*φαρμακεῖν*) her and also to their children. Lord who oversees all things and angels of God, before whom on this day every soul humbles itself, may you avenge this innocent blood and seek (justice) speedily".⁶³

The use of word *φαρμακεῖν* makes uncertain the precise cause of Heraklea's death and that of her children. It could have been

poison or binding spell. Similarly, in another lead tablet from the temple precinct of Demeter in Cnidus (southwestern Asia Minor), an anonymous woman is accused of preparing *φάρμακα* (poisons or spells) against her husband. In order to resolve the accusation, she "dedicates" (*ἀνιερώ, ἀνατίθημι*) through a ritual transfer her prosecutors to Demeter, her daughter Kore, and the "gods with them", for the purpose of subjecting her enemies to divine punishment and suffer afflictions by fever or illness (*πεπρημένος*):⁶⁴

"I hand over to Demeter and Kore the person who has accused me of preparing poisons/spells (*φάρμακα*) against my husband. Having been struck by a fever, let him go up to Demeter with all of his family, and confess (his guilt). And let him not find Demeter, Kore, or the gods with Demeter (to be) merciful. As for me, let it be permissible and acceptable for me to be under the same roof or involved with him in any way. And I hand over also the person who has written (charges) against me or commanded others to do so. And let him not benefit from the mercy of Demeter, Kore, or the gods with Demeter, but instead suffer afflictions with all of his family".⁶⁵

The word itself suggests that there was no conceptual boundary between substances that could help the body and those that could harm it, with the particular meaning determined by context. This ambiguity parallels the Greek legislation on *φάρμακα*. Concocting *φάρμακα* as magical potions was actionable under *ἀσέβεια*, the action for impiety in Greek law, as observed by Hopfner long ago,⁶⁶ but denied by Phillips.⁶⁷ That was the case of Theoris, a foreign woman from Lemnos, who was condemned to death for impiety. She was recorded in 338 BC trial documents as a *φαρμακίς* (a woman who works with drugs) and a member of "a recognized group of women who have specialized in providing magical services".⁶⁸ Demosthenes calls her "the filthy sorceress" who made "drugs and charms".⁶⁹ We do not know for certain whether she was convicted of impiety for using magic or for employing her "magical" talents toward some particularly impious purpose.⁷⁰ Demosthenes, also, obliquely refers to Ninon, a priestess of Sabazios, who was sentenced to death.⁷¹ She is also said to have made *φίλτρα*, but may have been executed for some other reason— such as attempting to propagate rites that were seen as mocking the Mysteries or initiating Athenians into foreign cults.⁷²

Linguistically, the spectrum embodied by *φάρμακον* transferred to the Latin *venenum* and despite etymological temptation, it is not always best translated as poison.⁷³ *Venenum* (uenes-nom) is derived from the same root as *Venus*, the name of the goddess of love, a neutral word originally meant "charm, attractiveness, appeal, sensuality"—again, emphasis on change—but the myriad uses in literature defy the identification of

venenum with any clear origin.⁷⁴ The word originally meant a love potion, thus equated with *φίλτρον*, a magical potion to make the recipient fall in love,⁷⁵ and *φάρμακον*. The overlap between poison and a drug persisted well into the later Roman world, where the sixth-century *Digest* declares (in an entry on the significance of words) that since the word *venenum* is similar to the Greek *φάρμακον*, *qui venenum dicit, adicere debet utrum malum an bonum* "the user of the word *venenum* must add whether it is beneficial or harmful".⁷⁶ Moreover, the fifth section of the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis*, passed in 81 BC under L. Cornelius Sulla, deals with those "who for the purpose of killing a person" prepared, sold, bought, possessed, or administered a dangerous drug (*venenum malum*).⁷⁷ Here, the law concerns with the use of *venena mala* "for the purpose of killing a person", not with the use of *venena* as a general category of deleterious substance.⁷⁸ In other words, it makes a clear differentiation not by substance but by application and malign usage. *Venenum* could be poison, as in the case of Locusta, the prisoner of Claudius,⁷⁹ or it could be defined as unsanctioned religious activity: someone who murdered by poison could be conceived as being outside the secular norms of socioreligious ethics.

Turning now to the classical medical works and toxicological manuals, we can ascertain that, although they are much more substantial in Greek and Roman world than in Egypt, little theoretical attention was paid to how poison operated inside the body, or the status of poison as a separate category of substance.⁸⁰ Medical sources and manuals include Nicander's of Colophon *Theriaka* and *Alexipharmaka*,⁸¹ Celse's *De Medicina*,⁸² Scribonius Largus,⁸³ Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*,⁸⁴ Pliny's *Natural History* (especially books XX-XXIII and XXIX),⁸⁵ Pseudo-Dioscorides,⁸⁶ Galien's *De Antidotis*, *De Theriaca ad Pisonem* and *De Theracia ad Pamphilanum*,⁸⁷ Oribase,⁸⁸ Aetios' *Iatrika* (book XIII)⁸⁹ and Paul of Aegina.⁹⁰ A few examples will suffice here for the points to be made. In general, classical toxicology differentiates between two types of poison: one received via bites and stings from poisonous animals and the other via ingestion of poisonous plants and minerals in food or drink. The first category is of special interest to our discussion here. The venom from a poisonous animal was invariably recognized as what we would call "poisonous", but without limitations as regards to healing or destructive use. This much is clear from how physicians differentiated between *alexipharmaka* (generally prophylactics, substances or charms for persons or places to prevent harm) and *theriaka* (remedies for venom). This approach is followed by the earliest extant work on poison from Nicander of Colophon in the form of two poems, whose titles are the above mentioned categories of poison mobilization.⁹¹ The scorpion is mentioned together with other dangerous reptiles (vipers, snakes, lizards) and insects (flies, bees,

wasps, hornets and beetles). At the beginning of his treatise, Nicander claims a divine origin of the scorpion,⁹² but his following description lacks any pragmatic and naturalistic detail.⁹³ His approach is focused more on foregrounding the danger and variety of scorpions, rather than on engaging any discussion about scorpion's venomous qualities or poison itself. Scorpions are discussed separately from other animals because of their different bites, although they do not seem to have other unique characteristics with respect to how their poison enters and interacts with the body. Although Nicander makes use of extensive lists of symptoms for particular poisons, his suggested treatments follow a more generalised approach, without any effort to systematize or differentiate specific remedies for each case:

"(One) must give the patient his fill of oil of unmixed wine until he vomits up the evil, painful poison, or prepare and insert a clyster; or else give his draughts of unmixed wine..."⁹⁴

This generalization is much more obvious at the concluding section of his treatise, where Nicander presents instructions for what he calls "a general panacea", but it, too, does not appear to be particularly different from any of the other remedies.⁹⁵ Such an approach may regard the cases of being poisoned as merely a unilateral condition and, at the same time, poison as something not to be discussed in terms of its qualities and various effects. This indicates that the source of poison was viewed as more important than the poison itself.⁹⁶ Along a similar phenomenological line is Pliny's method in *Natural History*. He discusses poison in books XX-XXIII and XXIX not as a separate category of substance but as a deleterious substance that has to be expelled from the body.⁹⁷ He offers nearly 280 remedies for snake bites and scorpion stings, but he does not go into an analysis of how poison operates inside the body or its distinct qualities.

The influence of this ambiguity and implicit meaning of *φάρμακον* as poison in the toxicological treatments is made clear in the Hippocratic Oath, where the physician pledges that: "I will apply dietic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice. I will neither give a deadly *φάρμακον* to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect; and likewise I will not give a woman a pessary to produce an abortion".⁹⁸ Does the employment of *φάρμακον* here implies the physician's denial from providing poisons in general to patients that wish to use them on third parties, or does it instead seek to prevent doctors from performing euthanasia and assisting suicide? It appears euthanasia was regarded as justified in cases of serious illness, and Athenian culture and religion attached no disgrace to the act of suicide if it was carried out for a good reason. It is also possible that the two clauses were linked, and the *φάρμακον* referred to itself an abortifacient. That would imply poisons were

distributed for purposes of suicide and euthanasia, just not for abortions.

Another Greek word that stands mainly for an animal poison, especially snake or scorpion venom, is *ιός*. According to *LSJ*, *ιός* as poison is attested only in works of poetry,⁹⁹ but this does not mean that it was a purely poetic word and it was never used in a technical sense. With this meaning and characteristics the word is recorded in the well-known episode of Achilles' fatal wound in his lower leg by a poisonous arrow, which consists one of the most exemplified cases for the ambiguous nature of poison in ancient Greek myth and magic. This version of Achilles' death has been recorded by Quintus of Smyrna, a Greek epic poet of the later part of the 4th century. I am not concerned here with the reliability behind Quintus' account of Achilles' death,¹⁰⁰ but only with the special involvement of the term *ιός* in his version of the story. In Book III of his "Fall of Troy" we read:

"...(Achilles') strength ebbed through the god-venomed wound (*θεοῦ δέ μιν ιός ἐδάμνα*)."¹⁰¹

According to the story, Thetis makes Achilles invulnerable by dipping him in the Styx, but he is fatally wounded in the ankle, either because the latter is covered by the hand of Thetis, or she does not place her hand in the river at all and thus the ankle and all the foot became vulnerable. Although the complete story is first attested in the Roman times, some tantalizing details of the myth, such as the placing of the newborn Achilles in boiling water or fire, or the wounding of Achilles near the heel, were already known in the Archaic age (early 1st millennium BC) and perhaps originated in pre-Homeric tradition.¹⁰² I would like to pay special attention to the word *ιός* in this case, since its meaning and attributes here are quite intriguing. The text implies a divine origin of the substance and the action involved.

Although *ιός* is generally conceived as poison issued by a venomous creature, the word is also met in Quintus' text with the meaning of "arrow": "Then in indignant wrath he hurled from him The arrow: a sudden gust of wind swept by, And caught it up, and, even as he trod Zeus' threshold, to Apollo gave it back".¹⁰³ It is conceivable that Achilles used poison arrows, since he was educated in the use of special plants and animal poisons for healing or destruction by his mentor, Chiron.¹⁰⁴ We could argue that he would also know how to manufacture and manipulate poison taken from such venomous agents as scorpions or snakes. In fact, this is the case in a relevant story, that of Telephus, where Achilles plays a double role: he is the one who wounds Telephus with a poisoned arrow (*ιός*) and, at the same time, the one who heals him by scraping off rust (*ιός*) from his spear into the wound of Telephus.¹⁰⁵ As Burgess states: "the fact that only *ιός* the (rust) of Achilles' spear could cure the *ιός* (poison) of Achilles' spear would make a fitting paradox".¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the recording of poison in both cases is that of a divine

descedance and of a fluxionary identity and role, where the involvement of a peculiar word-play (*ίός* = rust = poison) accentuates the symbolic employment of myth and reality.

There is thus no word which means simply "poison". Each of these terms is a *vox media*, which may have a positive, negative or neutral meaning depending on the context. Beyond the possible meanings of drug and poison, *φάρμακον* (and the later Latin equivalent, *venenum*) focus on element of change, which is in fact lies at the heart of the meaning of many literary examples. Creating change could, of course, mean bringing injury as well, as was the case when *φάρμακον* referred to something into which arrows might be dipped with the aim of poisoning the enemy, as it was the case with the poisonous fatal injury death of Achilles. In most cases of poisonous arrows, the word *φάρμακον* is often accompanied by the adjective, *τοξικόν*, in order to emphatically state the deadly effect of the poisonous arrow's spear. The latter could also stand as "poison", as it was the case with *ίός* too, which is later related to the Latin *virus*, as a clear designation of vegetable poison.¹⁰⁷

POISON AND THE DEMONIC IN ANCIENT EGYPT: *VITAE PARALLELAE*?

To sum up this preliminary study, the poison issued by scorpions and other venomous agents has certain harmful effects. All scorpion species possess venom. In general, scorpion venom is described as neurotoxic in nature. The neurotoxins consist of a variety of small proteins as well as sodium and potassium cations, which serve to interfere with neurotransmission in the victim. Scorpions use their venom to kill or paralyze their prey so that it can be eaten. They are apparently able to regulate the delivery of the venom in scale to the size of their target. Some scorpions are known to produce a transparent pre-venom in addition to the more potent opaque venom which is loaded with additional toxin. The use of the pre-venom occurs at the initiation of the threat or opportunity. If the action persists, the opaque venom is released. These abilities enable the scorpion to conserve the venom for use when it is needed most, for larger predators or prey. Scorpion venoms are optimized for action upon other

arthropods and therefore most scorpions are relatively harmless to humans; stings produce only local effects, such as pain, numbness or swelling. Yet, a general feeling of instant heat and inflammation are the first and most acute side effects of a scorpion's sting, immediately after the release of its poison.¹⁰⁸

This unequivocal behavior of the scorpion and the ejected poison in nature do not seem to have direct correspondence in Egyptian or Greek literature, as in the cases discussed above. Although the malevolent attributes of scorpions and the subsequent harmful effects of their poison could not be denied, their exact materialization is variably defined in each case, depending on certain verbal methods of mobilization within a well specified performative environment (magical or medical). The notion of change in the formation and application of poison in the magicomedical corpora is constantly present and it is thoroughly exemplified according to the applicant's inducement and performative act in a highly contextualized way. In this view, anything can act as poison, and this is a quite different position from considering poison to be a substance that is harmful under all circumstances. In other words, many substances could be described as a poison depending on how they were used, but poison was not a kind or category of substance that had its own set of properties. The category of poison had more to do with the ends to which it was put, rather than its means.

Could then scorpions and poisonous attacks be classified together with the demonized entities of the Egyptian modality? At the end, all presuppositions come down to the crucial question: how could we characterize a demonic agent or attestation as such, since a generic term for demon is completely lacking in the Egyptian conceptual and ritual world?¹⁰⁹ A certain methodology that takes into consideration the formation and manipulation of venomous agents and poison through oral or performative modes of approach is the key to unlock the multifarious character and role of the demonic, either in human or animal form, in the Egyptian belief system. Thorough investigation of the contextual materialization and results of poison is crucial in classifying (= analysis) and interpreting (= synthesis) its demonic nature and diverse properties in Egypt and abroad.

Notes

- ¹ A version of this paper was presented at the international conference *Ancient Egyptian Demonology: a Comparative Perspective*, which was organized by Rita Lucarelli and Ludwig Morenz (Universität Bonn, Totenbuch-Projekt) from 28 February to 1 March 2011. I would like to thank the anonymous referees for their very useful comments and suggested bibliography.
- ² Anti-snake spells in the Pyramid Texts: K. Sethe, *Die Altegyptischen Pyramiden Texte nach den Papierabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums*, vol. I (Leipzig, 1908), spells 226-244, 276-299, 314, 375-401, 499, 502 and 727-733; for an analysis of these spells, see Ch. Leitz, "Die Schlangensprüche in den Pyramidentexten", *Orientalia* 65/4 (1996), 381-427. These pyramid incantations may reflect an earlier oral practice, as argued by J. Baines, "Society, morality, and religious practice" in B.E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt* (London: Routledge, 1991), 165-66.
- ³ Sethe 1908, spell 230 (§233-234); translation after J.P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Writings from the Ancient World 23 (Atlanta, 2005), 17; cf. R.O. Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969), 55; Leitz 1996, 400-1. Although, the appearance of scorpions is relatively rare in the pyramid corpus, its threatening presence could not be doubt, contra J.F. Borghouts, "Lexicographical aspects of magical texts", in S Grunert and I. Hafemann (eds.), *Textcorpus und Wörterbuch: Aspekte zur ägyptischen Lexikographie* (Leiden/Boston/Köln, 1999), 157, who argues in favor of a Middle Kingdom origin of the anti-scorpion spells.
- ⁴ Sethe 1908, spells 295 (§438), 297 (§440-441), 298 (§442-443), 384 (§672), 385 (§677-678), 390 (§685-686) and 519 (§1212); Faulkner 1969, 88-9, 127-29 and 193 respectively; cf. also, Altenmüller, *Die Texte zum Begräbnisritual in dem Pyramiden des Alten Reiches*, *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen* 24 (Wiesbaden, 1972), 92 and 242ff. Mafdet's first appearance is recorded on a stone vase from a royal tomb at Abydos dated between c. 2950-2800 BC (W.M. Flinders Petrie, *The royal tombs of the First Dynasty*, vol. 2 [London, 1900-1901], pl. VII, 4 = H. Kees, *Der Götterglauben im alten Ägypten* [Berlin, 1980; reprint of Leipzig, 1941], 35), and continuous till the Late Period; see, E. Graefe, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* III (1978), cols. 1132-1133, s.v. "Mafdet"; H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1952), 434-35, s.v. "Mafdet"; B. Altenmüller, *Synkretismus in den Sargtexten*, *Göttinger Orientforschungen* 7 (Wiesbaden, 1975), 73-4; J. Malek, *The Cat in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 77; S. Aufrère, "La loutre, le chat, la genette et l'ichneumon, hôtes du fourré de papyrus. Présages, prédateurs des marécages et croyances funéraires", *Discussions in Egyptology* 41 (1998), 10-11; for Late Period attestations of the name, see Ch. Seeber, *Untersuchungen zur Darstellung des Totengerichts im alten Ägypten*, *Müchener Ägyptologische Studien* 35 (Berlin, 1976), 186 (21st dynasty); H. Junker, *Das Onurislegende* (Wien: A. Hölder, 1917), 164; J.-C. Goyon, *Confirmation du Pouvoir royal au Nouvel An [Brooklyn Museum Papyrus 47.218.50]*, *Bibliothèque d'Étude* 52 (Cairo, 1972), 70-107 (Late and Greco-Roman periods).
- ⁵ Those include certain spells from the Coffin Texts, a few spells preserved on a single sheet in Turin (papyrus Turin CG 54003) and papyrus VII from the Ramesseum collection. See A. de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 5, Oriental Institute Publications 73 (Chicago, 1954), spells 369-372 and 378-382; *idem.*, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 7, Oriental Institute Publications (Chicago, 1961), spell 885; A. Roccati, *Papiro ieratico n. 54003. Estratti magici e rituali del Primo Medio Regno* (Turin, 1970); A.H. Gardiner, *The Ramesseum Papyri* (Oxford, 1955); Pierre Meyrat is preparing a thesis on the Ramesseum papyri of the magical genre.
- ⁶ See collection of such spells in J.F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts*, Nisaba 9 (Leiden, 1978), no. 87 (for this spell, see analysis below in this paper), 90-94, 96, 100-101, 106-108, 111-114, 121; cf. *idem.* 1999, 163-67, Appendices A and B; A. Massart, "The Egyptian Geneva Papyrus MAH 15274", *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 15 (1957), 172-85, pls. XXIV-XXXVIII; for a list of workdays records some absentees who had been bitten by a scorpion in Deir el Medina, see J. Černý and A.H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca* (Oxford, 1957), pl. 83-84 (oBM 5634); cf. also J.F. Borghouts, "Magical practices among the villagers" in L.H. Lesko (ed.), *Pharaoh's Workers: the Villagers of Deir el Medina* (Ithaca and London, 1994), 121-24.
- ⁷ On past literature on Horus *cippi*, see D. Frankfurter, "The binding of antelopes: a Coptic frieze and its Egyptian religious context", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 63/2 (2004), 99-101, n. 12. To the references cited there add H. Sternberg-el-Hotabi, "Die götterdarstellungen der Metternichstele. Ein neuansatz zu ihrer interpretation als elemente eines kontinuieritätsmodells", *Göttinger Miszellen* 97 (1987), 25-70; A. Kamyar, "An Egyptian cippus of Horus in the Iran National

- Museum, Tehran", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 61/3 (2002), 203-10.
- ⁸ P. Lacau, "Les statues 'guerisseuses' dans l'ancienne Egypte", *Academie des inscriptions et belleslettres, Commission de la fondation Piot, monuments et memoires* 25 (1921-22), 189-209; É. Drioton, "Une Statue Prophylactique de Ramsès III", *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 39 (1939), 57-89; A. Klasens, *A Magical Statue Base (Socle Behague) in the Museum of Antiquities at Leiden* (Leiden, 1952); E. Jelinkova-Reymond, *Les Inscriptions de la Statue Guerisseuse de Djed-Her-le-Sauveur*, Bibliothèque d'Étude 23 (Cairo, 1956); E. Sherman, "Djed-Hor the Saviour statue base OI 10589", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 67 (1981), 82-102, pls., XIII-XIV; K.A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Historical and Biographical*, vol. V (Oxford, 1983), 261-68; L. Kákosy, "Some Problems of the Magical Healing Statues" in A. Roccati and A. Silotti (eds.), *La Magia in Egitto ai Tempi dei Faraoni* (Milan, 1987), 171-86; *idem.*, *Egyptian Healing Statues in Three Museums in Italy (Turin, Florence, Naples)*, Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, Serie Prima – Monumenti e Testi IX (Torino, 1999).
- ⁹ H. Grapow, *Grundriss der Medizin der Alten Ägypter V. Die medizinischen Texte in hieroglyphischer Umschreibung autographiert* (Berlin, 1958), suggests that this might refer to a scorpion, although the word for scorpion does not appear in the text and xry dmt could also be used to describe snake bite; cf. J.F. Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (London, 1996), 189. For Ebers papyrus, see W. Wreszinski, *Der Papyrus Ebers* (Leipzig, 1913).
- ¹⁰ See cases in Grapow 1958. For Brooklyn papyrus, see S. Sauneron, *Un Traité Égyptien d'Ophiologie* (Cairo, 1989). The Brooklyn papyrus specifically states in paragraph 39 that it will include remedies for bites of scorpions, but sadly they are not to be found in that part of the papyrus which has survived.
- ¹¹ Borghouts 1978, 51-82.
- ¹² Leitz 1996; *idem.*, *Magical and Medical Papyri of the New Kingdom, Hieratic Papyri of the British Museum VII* (London: British Museum Press, 1999); cf. *idem.*, *Die Schlangennamen in den ägyptischen und griechischen Giftbüchern* (Mainz, 1997).
- ¹³ See collection of such spells in his *Altägyptische Zaubersprüche* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005).
- ¹⁴ See M. Stoof, *Skorpion und Skorpiongöttin im Alten Ägypten*, Schriftenreihe Antiquitates 33 (Hamburg: Kovač, 2002).
- ¹⁵ According to Borghouts "the explicit formulation in certain spells indicates that scorpions are not clearly defined as physical existed demonic agents, but as outgrowths from a wide network of ill-willing forces" (1999, 158).
- ¹⁶ For most recent treatments on the diverse nature of the demonic, see P. Kousoulis (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Demonology. Studies on the Boundaries between the Demonic and the Divine in Egyptian Magic*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 175 (Leuven, 2011); R. Lucarelli, "Demons (benevolent and malevolent)" in J. Dieleman and W. Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, open version: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1r72q9vv> (Los Angeles, 2010), 1-10; K. Szpakowska, "Demons in ancient Egypt", *Religion Compass* 3/5 (2009), 799-805; D. Frankfurter, "Demons invocations in the Coptic spells" in N. Bosson and A. Boud'hors (eds.), *Du Huitième Congrès International d'Études Coptes, Paris, 28 juin - 3 juillet 2004*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 163 (Leuven, 2007), 453-66; Ch. Leitz, "Deities and demons" in S. Johnston (ed.), *Religions of the Ancient World: a Guide* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 392-96; D. Meeks, "Demons" in D. Redford (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 1 (Oxford/New York, 2001), 375-78. The ambivalent notion of demons and the demonic in ancient Egypt is the focus of a collaborative international project organized by Egyptologists from Swansea University (K. Szpakowska), Bonn University (R. Lucarelli and L. Morenz), Leipzig University (H. Fischer-Elfert) and the University of the Aegean (P. Kousoulis). This project attempts to dilute past misconceptions regarding the nature, role and behaviour of the demonic idiosyncrasy, caused by and rooted deep within our modern western conception, which strives to classify and explain the unseen according to the Christian morality and ethics. The fallen angels, the legions of the uncanny or the followers of Satan, as demons are usually described in modern treatises on the subject, have hued severely contemporary approaches of ancient demonology, especially in such cases as the Egyptian exemplar, where the lack of a generic terminology for demon or the demonic in the Egyptian language precludes our efforts for a clear classification and description of the demonic cosmos of the Egyptians.
- ¹⁷ *Mtwt* can refer to any liquid which is forcibly injected and ejected and, thus, to the poison of snakes or scorpions. In origin may come from the same root as *mtwt* "vessels" (*Wb.* II, 167/9-14). It also means "semen" (*Wb.* II, 169/1-3), underlying the life giving potential inherent in Maat and cosmic order, or used metaphorically of the Nile flood, paralleling the watering of the fields by the flood with the impregnation of women by semen.
- ¹⁸ *Mw mr*, which literary means "painful fluid" is an alternative word for poison in the magical repertoire of the Ramesside papyri from Deir el-Medineh, as e.g. in P. Chester Beatty VII, recto 4/5-6: "the painful fluid (of the scorpion), which is in the limbs of N, born of M is moved" (A.H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, 3rd Series: Chester Beatty Gift* [London, 1935], vol. I, 58 and vol. II, pl. 34). On this spell, see further below in this paper.

- ¹⁹ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented throughout by H.S. Jones with the assistance of R. McKenzie (Oxford, 1940), s.v. "ἰός" (= *LSJ*). The word could mean "poison", "arrow" or "rust".
- ²⁰ *LSJ*, s.v. "τοξικόν", cites Dioscorides, *De material medica*, 2.79.
- ²¹ *Venenum* could be poison, as in the case of Locusta, the prisoner of Claudius (Tac. Ann. 12.66, 13.15 = C.R. Phillips III, "Nullum Crimen sine Lege: socioreligious sanctions on magic", in C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink [eds.], *Magica Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* [Oxford, 1991], 264), or it could be defined as unsanctioned religious activity. See further below in this paper.
- ²² *Wb.* II 244, 11-13 (*nbyt*), 500/27-501/4 (*hh*); III, 217/1010-218/13 (*xt*); IV, 375/12-377/7 (*sdt*); V, 229/18-230/14 (*t3*) and 231/4 (*t3w*).
- ²³ For the association of these and other related terms with a snake/scorpion-type behavior and poisonous effects, see Borghouts 1999, Appendix B.
- ²⁴ *LSJ*, s.v. "φάρμακον"; L.M. Delgado, *Léxico de Magia y Religión en los Papiros Mágicos Griegos* (Madrid, 2001), s.v. "φάρμακον" (= *LMPG*). See further analysis of the term below in the text and the references in n. 57.
- ²⁵ *LSJ* and *LMPG*, s.v. "φίλτρον", cite the word only as love-charm or spell.
- ²⁶ See C. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstele*, *Analecta Aegyptiaca* 7 (Copenhagen, 1956), 20-7 (§9-35), 27-8 (translation) and 29 (commentary); cf. J.P. Allen, *The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt* (New Heaven/London, 2006), 53-4; P. Kousoulis, "Spell III of the Metternich Stela: magic, science and religion as a unity", *Göttinger Miszellen* 190 (2002), 53-63; Borghouts 1978, 56-8.
- ²⁷ Jelínková-Reymond 1956, 78-84; for parallel texts, see Sherman 1981, 82-102, pls., XIII-XIV, and Kákosy 1999.
- ²⁸ The recognition of the cat as the "daughter of Re" is a very well-known theme in Egyptian mythology and it has been developed explicitly among the relevant literature to need further exegesis here. See L. Störk, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* III (1978), cols. 367-70, s.v. 'Katze', and the references cited there; Malek 1993, 73-111; G. Pinch, *Votive Offerings to Hathor* (Oxford, 1993), 190-96; H. te Velde, "The Cat as Sacred Animal of the Goddess Mut", in M. Heerma van Voss *et al.* (eds.), *Studies in Egyptian Religion Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee* (Leiden, 1982), 127-37. Yet, the male cat was regarded as another hypostasis of Re; cf. Coffin Spell 335 (= Book of Dead, chapter 17), where the "great cat", who attacks the rebels under the *ished*-tree in Heliopolis, is the Sun god himself; in the Litany of Re, the "great cat" is the 55th and 66th forms of Ra (A. Piankoff, *Litany of Re* [New York, 1954], pls. 5 and 6, fig. b); for discussion, see te Velde 1982.
- ²⁹ Djed-her statue (D): "She put her mouth to the ground".
- ³⁰ D: "See, the poison (*mtwt*) has entered her body".
- ³¹ D: "Do not ignore (*hn*) your glorious daughter".
- ³² D: "See, I am behind you in life (*n nh*) everyday".
- ³³ Metternich stela, §9-15.
- ³⁴ See Kousoulis 2002, 57-63, nn. 25-6; to the references cited there add N. Guilhou, "Les parties du corps dans les textes de la pyramide d'Ounas", in C. Berger and B. Mathieu (eds.), *Études sur l'Ancien Empire et la nécropole e Saqqâra dédiées à Jean-Philippe Lauer*, vol. I (Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier III, 1997), 221-31; J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, translated by D. Lorton (Ithaca/London, 2001), 34-5.
- ³⁵ Metternich stela, §33-35.
- ³⁶ Sauneron 1989; until its publication, little was known of the rational treatment of those who suffered from poisonous bites. All the other medical texts mention nothing, apart from a small passage in P. Ebers, nos. 842-844 (97/17-20) (= Wreszinski 1913, 202-3) where advises and methods are proposed for preventing a snake leaving its hole.
- ³⁷ See cases §31 (2/7-8), addressed against a male snake, §32 (2/8-9), against *hf-rr*-snake, §72a (4/20-21), for driving out the swelling (*št*) from the poisonous bite, and case §81 (5/13-14), which is directed again against a male snake (*hf*), in Sauneron 1989, 27-9, 97-8 and 110-11 respectively.
- ³⁸ See cases §44c (3/8-9), §62c (4/9-10), §63a (4/10), §63b (4/10-11), and §64a (4/11), in Sauneron 1989, 66 and 86-9.
- ³⁹ As, for example, in the cases §72a (4/20-21) and §73 (4/13) in Sauneron 1989, 97-9.
- ⁴⁰ This pragmatic papyrus is not free from magic; see, for example, case §27 (2/2-4), where scientific methods (medicine) and magical incantations are combined for a successful outcome: "[One] shall (*nhm*) him with magical spells (*hk3w*) and drugs (*rrwt*) ... One should recite (*šd*) <a spell> for him, so that he may live, because it (*scil.* the snake) is exorcised (*Sd*) by magic (*HkAw*)" (Sauneron 1989, 23-4).
- ⁴¹ The same sometimes holds true for the first word *ds*, if it accompanies by the preposition *hr* or *m*; see Sauneron 1989, 28, n. 5; cf. Nunn 1996, 188.
- ⁴² Sauneron 1989, 79-8.
- ⁴³ For *historiolae* and mythical themes applied in Egyptian magic, see D. Frankfurter, "Narrating Power: the theory and practice of the magical *historiola* in ritual spells", in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden, 1995), 457-76; *idem.*, "The magic of writing and the writing of magic: the power of the word in Egyptian and Greek traditions", *Helios* 21 (1994) 189-221; cf. J. Podemann Sørensen, "The argument in ancient Egyptian magical formulae", *Acta Orientalia* 45 (1984), 5-19; H.S. Versnell, "The poetics of the magical charm: an essay in the power of words", in P. Mirecki and M. Meyer (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in*

the Ancient World (London/Boston/New York, 2002), 105-58; for a general theory on the nature of "parallelization" see T. Todorov, *Les Genres du Discours* (Paris, 1978).

⁴⁴ I will disagree here with Nunn (1996, 189), who finds no pragmatic treatment of the sting on the Metternic stela and interprets the "opening of the wound" by the magician for the purpose of detecting the poison by its smell rather than for giving some form of artificial respiration. In the following sentence, however, the author admits the "medical" character of the treatment in line 193 of the stela, where Isis clasps Horus and "leaps with him fishes thrown on fire", which may indicate a form of stimulation to avert coma and respiratory depression.

⁴⁵ Gardiner 1935, vol. 1, 54-8 (recto 1-4) and vol. 2, pl. 33-4; see analysis in R.K. Ritner, "The Wives of Horus and the Philinna Papyrus (PGM XX)" in W. Clarysse, A. Schoors and H. Willems (eds.), *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years. Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur, Part II*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 85 (Leuven, 1998), 1027-41.

⁴⁶ See Ritner 1998, n. 31 for primary and secondary literature.

⁴⁷ See Klasens 1952; Leitz 1999, 8-9, 12-18, 28-30, 47-48, 85-86; cf. R.K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practices*, *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 54 (Chicago, 1993), *passim*.

⁴⁸ For Isis as scorpion, see J.-C. Goyon, "Hededyt: Isis-scorpion et Isis au scorpion. En marge du papyrus de Brooklyn 47.218.50 - III", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 78 (1978), 439-57; also, n. 50 below.

⁴⁹ Gardiner 1935, vol. 1, 55-6 and vol. 2, pl. 33; cf. Ritner 1998, 1035-36.

⁵⁰ B. van de Walle, "L'ostracon E 3209 des Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire mentionnant la déesse scorpion Ta-Bithet", *Chronique d'Égypte* 42 (1967), 13-19; cf. Borghouts 1978, 72. For Ta-Bithet, see also B. van de Walle, "Une base de statue-guerisseuse avec une nouvelle mention de la déesse-scorpion Ta-Bithet", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 31 (1972), 67-82.

⁵¹ A. Massart, *The Leiden Magical Papyrus I 343 + I 345* (Leiden, 1954), 46 and 116.

⁵² Gardiner 1935, vol. 1, 58 and vol. II, pl. 33.

⁵³ Allen 2006, 52, detail of right side (top); cf. Sternberg-el-Hotabi 1987.

⁵⁴ Ritner 1998.

⁵⁵ Massart 1957, 177, pl. XXVII.

⁵⁶ For a general survey see, *inter alia*, J. Scarborough, *Pharmacy and Drug Lore in Antiquity: Greece, Rome, Byzantium* (Ashgate, 2010); *idem.*, *Medical and Biological Terminologies: Classical Origins* (Norman and London, 1998); *idem.*, "The Pharmacology of sacred plants, herbs, and roots", in C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford and New York, 1991), 138-74;

idem., "Texts and sources in ancient pharmacy, pt. 1: ancient Near Eastern and Greek texts", *Pharmacy in History* 29 (1987), 81-4; *idem.*, "Texts and sources in ancient pharmacy, pt. 2: Hellenistic pharmacy, toxicology, and medical entomology", *Pharmacy in History* 29 (1987), 133-39; F.W. Gibbs, *Medical Understandings of Poison circa 1250-1600*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin (Madison, 2009), 13-52; A. Touwaide, "Les poisons dans le monde antique et byzantin: introduction à une analyse systémique", *Revue d'Histoire de la Pharmacie* 290 (1991), 265-81.

⁵⁷ For most recent treatments of *φάρμακον* in the Greek literature, see M.A. Rinella, *Pharmakon: Plato, Drug Culture, and Identity in Ancient Athens* (Lanham, Md., 2010); unfortunately, this book was not available to me by the time of this paper's submission. Cf. A. Mayor, *Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, and Scorpion Bombs: Biological and Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World* (Woodstock, NY, 2003); Scarborough 1991, 135-54; F. Graff, *Magic in the Ancient World*, translated by F. Philip (Cambridge, MA., 1997), 28-9; W. Artelt, *Studien zur Geschichte der Begriffe Heilmittel und Gift*. *Studien zur Geschichte der Medizin* 23 (Leipzig, 1937), 38-96; M. Horstmannshoff, "Ancient medicine between hope and fear: medicament, magic and poison in the Roman Empire", *European Review* 7/1 (1999), 37-51; also n. 56 above. *Φάρμακον* is often mentioned with the meaning of both "poison" and "magic" in epigraphic texts concerning magic; see, for example, A.-Ph. Christidis, S. Dakaris and I. Vokotopoulou, "Magic in the oracular tablets from Dodona", in D.R. Jordan, H. Montgomery and E. Thomassen (eds.), *The World of Ancient Magic. Papers from the First International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4-8 May 1997* (Bergen, 1999), 67-72; F. Graf, "An oracle against pestilence from a western Anatolian town", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 92 (1992), 267-79.

⁵⁸ *Od.* I.252ff. and II.325-30.

⁵⁹ *Od.* X.392 and 394 respectively.

⁶⁰ See further uses of *φάρμακον* in Homer and discussion about its nature in Scarborough 1991, 139-42.

⁶¹ Plato, *Laws*, XI.933A; translation after J.G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York/Oxford, 1992), 250.

⁶² The earliest *κατάδεσμοι* from the Classical period were simple, but in Roman period the tablets include rich language with mystical words and formulas. See Gager 1992, 3-24; Graf 1997, 118-74; *idem.*, "6.g. Fluch und Verwünschung", in V. Lambrinouidakis et al. (eds.), *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum III, Divination, Prayer, Veneration, Hikesia,*

- Asyilia, Oath, Malediction, Profanation, Magic Rituals* (Los Angeles, 2005), 247-70; A. Karivieri, "Magic and syncretic religious culture in the East", in D.M. Gwyn and S. Bangert (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston, 2010), 405-13.
- ⁶³ Gager 1992, 185-88.
- ⁶⁴ For this meaning of the term *πεπρημένος*, see H.S. Versnel, "Beyond cursing: the appeal to justice in judicial prayers", in C.H. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford and New York, 1991), 72-3.
- ⁶⁵ Translation after Gager 1992, 190; text in C.T. Newton, *A History of Discoveries at Halicarnassus, Cnidus, and Branchidae*, vol. 2 (London, 1863), nos. 81ff.; cf. also, Versnel 1991, 72-3.
- ⁶⁶ "Mageia", in A. Pauly and G. Wissowa (eds.), *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 14 (1930), 385, lines 2-4.
- ⁶⁷ 1991, 262-64.
- ⁶⁸ See D. Collins, "The trial of Theoris of Lemnos: a 4th century witch or folk healer?", *Western Folklore* 59 (2000), 251-78. The word was probably once limited to a woman who collected herbs for magic (as Helen in *Od.* IV.220, Kirke in *Od.* X.213, Medea in *Soph.* fr. 534, or Danaids in *Papyri Graecae Magicae* 757), but gradually it must absorbed qualities from the male sorcerers; cf. J. Bremmer, *The Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible, and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden/Boston, 2008), 240-41.
- ⁶⁹ Demossthenes 25.79 (Harvard, A.T. Murray translation, 1939).
- ⁷⁰ Her real crime may have been threatening the established order in the city by promoting religious rights that were considered dangerous to the elite of Athens.
- ⁷¹ Demossthenes 19.281 (Harvard, A.T. Murray translation, 1939).
- ⁷² H.S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion, I: Ter Unus: Isis, Dionysus, Hermes: Three Studies in Henotheism*. Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 6 (Leiden/New York/Copenhagen/Cologne, 1990), 115-16.
- ⁷³ Horstmanshoff 1999.
- ⁷⁴ See L. Cilliers and F.P. Retief, "Poisons, poisoning and the drug trade in ancient Rome", *Akroterion* 45 (2000), 88-100, for the different material and herbs associated with *venenum* and the various drugs derived from it.
- ⁷⁵ See A.A. Barb, "Gift" in Th. Klauser *et al.* (eds.), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 10 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1978), 1209-47.
- ⁷⁶ *Digesta* 50.16.236; Horstmanshoff 1999, 43-4.
- ⁷⁷ See J.-J. Ferrary, "Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis", *Athenaeum* 79 (1991), 417-34; J.B. Rives, "Magic in Roman law: the reconstruction of a crime", *Antiquity* 22/2 (2003), 317-22.
- ⁷⁸ Marcian (D. 48.8.3.2): "only this [kind of *venenum*] is specified in the law, that which is possessed for the purpose of killing a person" (after Rives 2003, 319, n. 17).
- ⁷⁹ Tac. Ann. 12.66, 13.15; cf. Phillips III 1991, 264
- ⁸⁰ See n. 56 *supra*.
- ⁸¹ *Nicander. The poems and Poetical Fragments, edited with a translation and notes by A.S.F. Gow and A.F. Scholfield* (Cambridge, 1953). See analysis and discussion in J. Scarborough, "Nicander's toxicology, I: snakes", *Pharmacy in History* 19 (1977), 3-23, and "Nicander's toxicology, II: spiders, scorpions, insects, and myriapods", *Pharmacy in History* 21 (1979), 3-34 and 73-92. A study of Nicander's toxicology lighting the Egyptian material is in preparation by the author.
- ⁸² *De medicina, with an English translation by W.G. Spencer*, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library, vol. 292, 304, 336 (Cambridge, MA./London, 1938).
- ⁸³ S. Sconocchia (ed.), *Scribonii Largi Compositiones* (Leipzig, 1983).
- ⁸⁴ M. Wellmann (ed.), *Traité de matière médicale. Texte grec: Pedanii Dioscuridis Anazarbei De materia medica Ubri quinque*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1906-1914; second edition 1958); see J.M. Riddle, *Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine* (Austin, 1985).
- ⁸⁵ See R.K. French and F. Greenaway, *Science in the early Roman Empire: Pliny the Elder, his Sources and his Influence* (London/New York, 1986), esp 196-225 and J. Scarborough's contribution: "Pharmacy in Pliny's Natural History: Some observations on substances and sources", 59-85.
- ⁸⁶ See A. Touwaide, "L'authenticité et l'origine des deux traités de toxicologie attribués à Dioscoride", *Janus* 70 (1983), 1-53.
- ⁸⁷ K. G. Kühn (ed.), *Galen Opera*, vol. 14, 1-209, 210-94 and 295-310.
- ⁸⁸ J. Raeder (ed.), *Oribassi collectionum medicorum reliquiae*, 4 vols. Corpus Medicorum Graecorum VI (Berlin/Liepzig, 1928-1933; second edition: Amsterdam, 1964).
- ⁸⁹ S. Zervos (ed.), *Aetiou Amidénou Logos dekatos tritos étoi Péri daknontôn zôôn kai iobolôn*, Editio Graeca Scriptorum Medicorum Veterum Graecorum (Syros, 1908), 69-97.
- ⁹⁰ J.-L. Heiberg (ed.), *Pauli Aeginetae Epitomae Medicae*, 2 vols., Corpus Medicorum Graecorum LX (Berlin/Leipzig, 1921-1924).
- ⁹¹ See n. 81 *supra*.
- ⁹² Nicander, *Theriaka*, lines 13-19.
- ⁹³ See, for instance, lines 210-13, where he describes viper's qualities according to the geographic region they appear.
- ⁹⁴ *Alexipharmaka*, lines 195-97; see discussion in Scarborough 1977 and Gibbs 2009, 28-30.
- ⁹⁵ *Theriaka*, lines 934-59.

⁹⁶ Gibbs 2009, 29.

⁹⁷ See n. 85 supra.

⁹⁸ See L. Edelstein, *Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation, Interpretation* (Baltimore, 1943); O. Temkin and C.L. Temkin (eds.), *Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein* (Baltimore, 1967), 208-226; also, more recently, S.H. Miles, *The Hippocratic Oath and the Ethics of Medicine* (Oxford, 2005); cf. J. Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, translated by M.B. DeBevoise (Baltimore, 1999), 128-29; D.W. Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Baltimore, 1996), 30-49.

⁹⁹ See n. 19 supra.

¹⁰⁰ See J. Burgess, "Achilles' heel: the death of Achilles in ancient myth", *Classical Antiquity* 14/2 (1995), 217-44, who argues in favour of a more complicated picture for Achilles' death than the one which involves the use of a poisonous arrow.

¹⁰¹ III.148-50 (A.S. Way's translation); cf. Burgess 1995, 233.

¹⁰² In literature the Styx-dipping tradition is not attested until Statius in the late first century AD (*Achil.* 1.133-34, 1.268-70, 1.480-81), but the story must have originated earlier; see Burgess 1995, 222-25 and n. 31.

¹⁰³ III.88 (Way's translation). The two meanings stem from different roots; see H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1 (Heidelberg, 1960), 730-71.

¹⁰⁴ As in *Iliad*, XI.831-32; cf. E.I. Robbins, "The education of Achilles", *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 45 (1993), 7-20.

¹⁰⁵ Burgess 1995, 233, n. 69.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰⁸ A few scorpion species, however, can be dangerous to humans. Among the most dangerous is the so-called deathstalker, which has the most potent venom in the family. Scorpions are generally unable to deliver enough venom to kill healthy adults; deaths normally occur in the young, elderly or infirm.

¹⁰⁹ See Kousoulis 2011, iv-vi; also, n. 16 supra.