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THE MAGICAL FORMULA ON A LOST UTERINE AMULET

BY EDINA GRADVOHL

Abstract: The article tries to reconstruct the inscription of a magical gem found in 1883 in Torontál which went lost by now. For this reconstructive work I used other gem inscriptions and also other magical papyri and lead tablets in order to compare the two types of texts. The inscription contains the Soroor-logos and the Gigantorekta barophita-logos as well. The gem and the inscription together were used for the protection of the uterus.

Key-words: magic gems, Soroor-logos, Gigantorekta barophita-logos, Greek inscriptions, Torontál, Chnubis, uterus.

In the Corpus of the Pannonian Greek Inscriptions an inscription of a gem can be found that went lost by now.¹ It was dedicated in 1883 to the Hungarian National Museum. On the one side of the opal gem, which was found in Torontál (i.e. in the Barbaricum of the Roman era/period), there is a lion-headed and snake-bodied god, whose name was Chnum or Chnubis, while on the other side the following inscription can be read:

XNOYBIS
ΣΟΡΟΡΜΕΡ
ΦΕΝΑΡΒΑΡ
ΜΑΦΡΙΟΝΙΡ
5 ΙΓΞ ΓΙΓΑΝΤ
ΦΙΤΑΒΑΡ
ΦΙΤΑ [- - -]

Péter Kovács, who published the lost gem, correctly recognized on the inscription the Soroor-logos formula. The original inscription read as follows: ΣΟΡΟΟΡΜΕΡΦΕΡΓΑΡΒΑΡΜΑΦΡΙΟΥΡΙΓΞ.² The text of the gem is

¹ Kovács Péter, *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum Pannonicarum*. Debrecen 2007³, Nr. 192.

² The formula can be found in *W. M. Brashear's* word-list (*Voces Magicae*) on p. 3599. (The Greek Magical Papyri. ANRW. II. 18, 5, Berlin–New York 1995). *R. K. Ritner* wrote a detailed paper on the question of the „Soroor formula”: *A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection*, JNES 43 (1984) 209–221.

somewhat different, it can be traced back to two mistakes, namely one made by the gem cutter and that of the 19th century letter-writer. It should also be noted that this complicated charm's formula survived in several, different versions.³ However, the inscription of the gem had a continuation in the fifth line. The second charm is a well-known formula, that can be found on the other Chnubis gems as well:

ΓΙΓΑΝΤΟΡΗΚΤΑ ΒΑΡΟΦΙΤΑ⁴

Although it was used for charm, both words can be interpreted perfectly in Greek: „he who shatters giants”⁵ and „crusher of snakes”⁶ (the word „barophita” comes from „ophis”, which means snake).⁷ Maybe it is surprising, that both words appear very often on the amulets of the snake-bodied Chnubis which served as a protection. The connections between the snake and the lower body is pointed out by Simone Michel.⁸ However it is certain, that the end of the formula was ΒΑΡΟΦΙΤΑ in most cases, thus it is unnecessary to mark it with three hyphens as if it was a lost text of uncertain length and content.

The Soroor-logos and the Gigantorekta-logos appeared together on several gems depicting Chnubis. Simone Michel's monograph mentions five gems the text of which show close connection to the charms of the lost stone of Torontál.

1. Michel 11.3.b.3 (p. 258.): ΝΝΝ ΓΙΓΑΝΤΟΡΗΚΤΑ ΒΑΡΒΑΡΩΦΟΝΤΑ ΧΝΟΥΒΙΣ ΝΑΒΙΣ ΒΙΕΝΥΘ

2. Michel 11.3.b.8 (p. 258.): ΧΝΟΥΜΙΣ ΝΑΑΒΙΣ ΣΟΡΟΟΡ ΜΑΡΒΑΡΟΥΔΕΑΡΟΥ ΑΣΑΛΩΩΝ ΑΡΡΙΕΣΟΥ ΡΑΟΥΣΜΙΣΥΕΗΥΘ ΓΙΓΑΝΤΟΡΗΚΤΑ ΒΑΡΟΦΕΙΤΑ

3. Michel 11.3.b.18 (p. 259.): ΓΙΓΑΝΤΟΡΗΚΤΑ ΒΑΡΟΦΙΤΑΦΕΝΓΑΡΒΑ

4. Michel 11.5.15 (p. 262.): ΧΝΟΥΒΙΝ ΕΛΑΒΙ ΒΑΡΟΦΙΤΑ ΓΕΙΓΑΝΤΟΠΛΗΚΤΑ ΒΙΕΝΥΘ

³ S. Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen*. Berlin 2004, 257–258. On p. 487. there is a short entry on the magical charm by Michel.

⁴ S. Michel op. cit. (note 3) 258–259. Several more or less different versions are known of this formula.

⁵ LSJ s. v.

⁶ LSJ s. v.

⁷ S. Michel op. cit. (note 3), 169, n. 865.

⁸ S. Michel op. cit. (note 3), 169, p. 188.

5. Michel 37.B.2.b.2 (p. 310.): ΝΑΑΒΙΣ ΒΙΕΝΝΥΘ ΓΙΓΑΝΤΟΡΗΚΤΑ ΒΑΡΒΑΡΟΦΙΛΑ

W. M. Brashear makes a concise statement about the application of the Soroor-logos: it is a „formula for opening the womb”. Simone Michel’s description is somewhat more informative: „Der Logos mit dem Wortlaut erscheint in den magischen Papyri als Name einer Macht, die für das Öffnen von Türen und lösen von Fesseln zuständig ist. Auch auf dem Gemmen hängt der Logos – vorrangig am Rand von Uterusamuletten umlaufend geschrieben – mit dem „Öffnen” und „Schließen” des Organs zur rechten Zeit zusammen.”⁹ Thus the „Soroor-logos” was used for opening doors and the removal of handcuffs and it was probably this opening-closing function that was carried over to the cervix. Since aside from the magic inscriptions often the uterus itself was depicted on the gems, with a key in front of the cervix which served for the opening and closing of the womb, it is obvious that these objects were used by women mainly for the protection of their uteri and the influencing of its operation.¹⁰ The description of the Torontál’s gem doesn’t allude to the depiction of the uterus. This doesn’t mean that the depiction of the uterus wouldn’t be on the gem since this type of representation was first identified by A. Delatte in 1914, 30 years after the Torontál’s gem has been found.¹¹ Thus the descriptor of the gem might have regarded the uterus as an unidentifiable magical sign. As the schedule below represents, on the gems which contain the formula of the Soroor-logos, Chnoubis and the uterus are represented together very often:

	Chnoubis	Uterus	Chnoubis+Uterus
Soroor-logos	17	13	40
Gigantorekta barophita	28	0	0
Soroor-logos + gigantorekta barophita	5	0	0

⁹ S. Michel op. cit. (note 3), 487. I have to note that there is a fictive Soroor-logos in Michel’s book. The fragmentary inscription around the Ouroboros on the uterus gem of Pusztaszabolcs published by László Kákósy, number 106 in Péter Kovács’s collection, is described with the comment: „wohl Soroor-logos” (Michel 336). However the letters that can be read on the stone (ΠΑΚΑΑΡ) are by no means part of the Soroor-logos, even if it appears most often around the Ouroboros snake. At best it can be a significant deformation of a part of the ΦΕΡΓΑΡΒΑΡΜΑΡ logos, since the row of letters ΠΑΚΑΑΡ cannot be matched to any known logoi.

¹⁰ The simplified uterus can also be seen on the gem published by Robert K. Ritner: there is a circle (the womb), under which a half-circle (the cervix) can be seen on its base, below this a key. The photo and the picture can be found in Ritner’s study on p. 211.

¹¹ A. Delatte, Études sur la magie grecque IV., Le Musée Belge 18 (1914) 21–96., esp. 77.

It should be noted that the formula of the Soroor-logos was used for other purposes as well. Two lead tablets, published by A. Audollent, contain curses, one of which is against a gladiator from Carthage, Sapautulus, while the other is against a *venator*, called Vincentius.¹² Both include the Soroor-logos formula written in three words, namely in lines 252. 24. and 253. 34: ΣΟΡΟΟΡΜΕΡ ΦΕΡΓΑΡΒΑΡΜΑΡ ΟΦΡΙΟΥΡΙΓΖ. In line 252. 26. the charmer wants to bind with an unreleasable tying the soul of Sapautulus similarly as in the case of Vincentius in line 253. 48. Thus the charm was used for loosening-binding function.

On the magical papyri the formula of the Soroor-logos appears three times: in PGM IV. 1567, XII. 172 and XIX. 10.¹³ In IV. 1567. the author of the papyrus wants to force a woman to love him with the help of love charm. On the papyrus the charm is divided into two words: ΣΟΡΟΟΡΜΕΡΦΕΡΓΑΡ ΜΑΡΒΑΦΡΙΟΥΡΙΓΖ. The formula was used for strengthening of the love spell of attraction. In line XII. 172. the formula is a „*Desmolyton*”, which means that it was used for loosening an iron fetter and also for opening doors: ΣΟΡΟΕΡΜΕΡ ΦΕΡΓΑΡ ΒΑΖ ΜΑΜΦΡΙ ΟΥΡΙΖΓ. Line XIX. 10. contains a love spell of attraction as well, although the most part of it consists of several magical words. The formula of the Soroor-logos survived fragmentary.

According to the above the formula of „Soroor-logos” is connected closely with the womb only on the amulets of the uterus, and its use renders it improbable that it was only applied for the opening-closing of the womb in order to facilitate or prevent conception.¹⁴ Robert K. Ritner’s assumption – which was formulated in his paper about Egyptian charms – is much more feasible. He assumes that these gems were generally used for the prevention of the womb, with the help of which the opening function did not only help the reception of the seed but also the flow of the menstruation, whereas the closing function could assist in the prevention of conception, in keeping the conceived embryo and in ending the menstruation. The function of opening-closing could be used with negative and positive aim.¹⁵ The second charm, ΓΙΓΑΝΤΟΡΗΚΤΑ ΒΑΡΟΦΙΤΑ is suitable for the prevention and the protection and it cannot be connected with the opening-closing function of the uterus.

Thus the gem, which was found in the Torontál, was used by women and it might have been a magical object in order to protection of the uterus.

¹² A. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*. Paris 1904, Nr. 252; 253.

¹³ K. Preisendanz: *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. Stuttgart 1973. Abbreviation: PGM. A XII. 172 Brashear 3599. Erroneously it is cited as VII. 172.

¹⁴ For this purpose rather the Ororiouth-logos was used. Cf. *Németh György – Isabel Canós i Vil-lena: ORORIOUTH in Vilabertran*, ZPE 130 (2000) 139–142.

¹⁵ Ritner op. cit. (note 2), 221.