

Derek COLLINS

Some Magical Uses of Homeric Verses: PGM IV.2146-50

In PGM IV three Homeric verses are distinguished because of their usage and frequency. *Iliad* 10.564, 521, and 572, all from the *Doloneia*, appear in PGM IV.469-74 (a spell for quelling anger and gaining friends) with three other verses (*Iliad* 8.424, 10.193, 5.385); rather oddly at the end of the ÆMithras Liturgy in PGM IV.821-24 with one other verse (*Iliad* 8.424); most strikingly in PGM IV.2146-50, a spell that has an unusually wide range of uses, where they are written in larger letters than the rest of the text. Their recurrence alone suggests that they were found especially useful, yet the varying and seemingly unconnected ends to which they are aimed at PGM IV.2146-50 have defied explanation. This paper argues that the magical employment of these verses depends to varying degrees on an analogical relationship between the action contained within each verse, or within verse segments, and the problem to be solved.

It has not been fully appreciated that lines 2150-60 of PGM IV correlate respectively with each of the Homeric verses cited, and that they give initial clues as to the basic action in each verse on which a magical analogy is built. So for example the first verse, *hôs eipôn taphroio diêlase mônukhas hippos* (*Iliad* 10.564), can be paired with 2151-55, where we are told that if a runaway carries these verses on an iron tablet he will never be found. The analogy is contained in the Homeric context of the verse, in which Odysseus has just boasted of these Thracian horses commandeered by Diomedes, and in the perceived swiftness of *mônukhes hippoi* generally. For this expression is also found independently in the ÆPhilinna Papyrus (*Suppl. Hell.* no. 900=PGM XX.16) where *mônukhes hippoi* are said to flee as quickly as the spell will make a headache flee. Thus the runaway will be too fast to be caught. In the same way the next verse, *andras tí aspairontas en argaleoisi phonoisin* (10.521), corresponds with 2155-56, where it is said that by hanging the same iron tablet around a man on the verge of death an answer will be given for any question asked. The analogy inheres in the view that the moribund are prophetic. Finally the third verse, *autoi dí hidrô pollon apenizonto thalassêi* (10.572) corresponds to what is said at 2159-60, that if anyone believes they are magically bound, let them speak the verses while sprinkling sea water. The action in the verse mimics purificatory ritual, and we know from elsewhere that off-scourings from such rituals were deposited in the sea (*On the Sacred Disease* 1.42).

This process of analogy can be extended to account for the remaining uses noted in 2160-2241 of PGM IV, but it also shows that by the fourth century narrative context could be less important than the action contained within the verses, which had achieved an independent agency.

I will close by arguing that while earlier instances of Homeric verses used in magic relied on narrative context, by the fourth century context was less important than the action contained within the verses, which could be generalized through metaphor to address a wider array of problems.