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INSCRIBED TOE-NAILS AND A DELENDUM LEXICIS: PGM VII 390–393

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PGM VII 390-393: νικητικὸν δρομέως. γράψον ἐπὶ τοὺς μεγάλους | ὄνυχας αὐτοῦ
γράφων χαλκῷ γραφείῳ τοὺς χαρακτῆρας | τούτους (2 magical signs) γράφε· "δός
μοι ἐπιτυχίαν, ἐπαφρο(δι)σίαν, | δόξαν, χάριν ἐν τῷ σταδίῳ." καὶ τὰ κοινά, ὅσα
θέλεις.

Preisendanz translates: "Siegesmittel für ein Rennpferd. Schreib auf seine Hornhufe, indem du mit Erzgriffel diese Zauberzeichen schreibst (Zauberzeichen), schreib auch: 'Gib mir Gelingen, Beliebtheit, Ruhm, Gunst im Stadion.' Und nach Belieben was du willst." The translation by R.F.Hock in Betz, Translation, p. 128 is similar: "Victory charm for the races: Write on the wide part of its hoofs these characters - - - ."

But a horse or any other animal wishing for "success, sex-appeal, glory and grace" is hardly characteristic of the magical papyri, naive as they sometimes can be. Furthermore, what are the 'large' (as opposed to the 'small' ?) hooves of a horse?

One should rather understand δρομέυς in its normal sense of foot-racer (LSJ s.v. 1) and ὄνυξ in another of its normal meanings: "Victory charm for a runner. Write on his large toe-nails these signs with a bronze stylus - - - ." The two magical signs, the short formula, and whatever else may occur to one, are to be inscribed on the surface of the athlete's two large toe-nails.

In LSJ, δρομέυς 3 "*race-horse* (?)", which refers to the present passage only, should be deleted.

The inscribed toe-nails are unique in PGM and, to my knowledge, also elsewhere without a parallel, but for writing and drawing on the hand, cf. PGM VII 300 γράφε (the preceding revelatory formula) εἰς τὴν εὐώνομόν σου χεῖρα and VIII 64-65 ζωγράφησον εἰς τὴν εὐώνομόν σου χεῖρα τὸν Βῆσαν (to obtain a revelatory dream from Bes).

Suppl. Mag. II 53 is a spell directed against ἀθληταὶ δρομεῖς; cf. the intr. with note 2 for parallels.