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A NOTE ON P.KELLIS I 82

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P.Kellis I 82 is a wooden board containing a calendar of good and bad days which was to be consulted before making use of an oracle or practising other kinds of magic. It is dated to the fourth century AD. The text of the edition is the following:

1   Τῶν ἡμερῶν· τῆς Κυριακῆ[ς day numeral betw. 1-4, quality]
2   ε̄ κακή, ζ σαπρά, ῑβ παρατηρ(ήσεως) [·]
3   Σελήνη⟨ς⟩ β̄ σαπρά, δ̄ κακή, θ̄ κ[ακή,]
4   ῑβ παρατηρ(ήσεως)· ῎Αρεως ᾱ παρατ[ηρ(ήσεως),]
5   η̄ {η} ἀνεπιτήδειος· Ἑρμοῦ [day numeral betw. 1-5]
6   σαπρά, ς̄ κακή, ῑ σαπρά, ῑβ σα[πρά·]
7   Διὸς β̄ σαπρά, ζ̄ παρατηρ(ήσεως), θ̄ παρα[τηρ(ήσεως)]
8   ᾽Αφροδίτης δ̄ κακή, ς̄ σαπρά, ῑα κακή· [...]
9   Κρόνουᾱ σαπρά, γ̄ παρατηρ(ήσεως), θ̄ κακή, ῑ [σα-]
10   πρά.

11   Σεληνοδρόμιον·
12   ᾱ καλή
13   β̄ καλή
14   γ̄ κακή
15   δ̄ καλή
       – – and so on until: ῑθ̄ καλή, λ̄ κακή.

Lines 1-10 of the text are explained as a calendar of bad weekdays, according to the editor to be understood as: *Sunday, if falling on the 5th day of a month: bad, if falling on the 7th day of a month: evil* etc. The question why only days 1 to 12 of a month would have been paid attention to had to remain unanswered.

Lines 11-33, starting with the interesting *addendum lexicis* σεληνοδρόμιον for 'moon orbit', are taken to be 'a calendar of good and bad days within an unspecified month'.

To the parallel texts mentioned in the commentary to P.Kellis I 82, one close parallel could be added that appears to be very helpful in understanding the text on this tablet. It leads to a slightly different interpretation thereof, at the same time offering a solution to the unsolved problem why only weekdays numbered from 1 to 12 would occur. This parallel can be found in the Introduction to the so-called 'Second Edition' of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (a Greek oracle-book, composed before the middle of the third century AD in, probably, Egypt[1]). This 'Second Edition' is still only available in the edition by R. Hercher of 1863.[2] At the end of its Introduction, after the directions for use of the oracle, and after citing the prescribed prayer to be said before consulting the oracle, follows this advice (Hercher p. 3):

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[1] See G. M. Browne, *The Origin and Date of the Sortes Astrampsychi*, Illinois Classical Studies 1 (1976) 53-58 with P.L.Bat. XXV 8, intro. p. 17.

[2] R. Hercher, *Astrampsychi Oraculorum Decades CIII*, Jahresbericht über das Königl. Joachimsthalsche Gymnasium, Berlin 1863. The Greek text of this Introduction is also cited in F. A. J. Hoogendijk - W. Clarysse, *De Sortes van Astrampsychus. Een orakelboek uit de Oudheid bewerkt voor het Middelbaar Onderwijs*, Kleio 11/2 (1981)76-79. On the two different 'editions' of the Sortes see G. M. Browne, *The Papyri of the Sortes Astrampsychi* (Beiträge zur klass. Philologie 58, Meisenheim am Glan 1974), 3-14.

Ἐπιτήρει δὲ καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ ὥραν, ἐν ᾗ συγκροτεύται μάλιστα ὁ ψρησμός. Ὀφείλεις
οὖν ἐρωτᾶν ἐν ἡμέραις μὲν τῆς ἐβδομάδος τῇ τε τρίτῃ, ἥτις ἐστὶ τοῦ (Ἑρμοῦ)· τῇ πέμπτῃ,
ἥτις ἐστὶ τοῦ (l. τῆς) (Ἀφροδίτης)· τῷ Σαββάτῳ, ἥτις ἐστὶ τοῦ (Κρόνου)· καὶ τῇ
Κυριακῇ, ἥτις ἐστὶ τοῦ (Ἡλίου)· ἐν δὲ ταῖς λοιπαῖς οὐδαμῶς.
Καὶ ἐν ταῖς ὥραις δὲ τὴν μὲν Κυριακὴν ἐν ὥρᾳ τρίτῃ, τὸ δὲ Σάββατον ἐν ὥρᾳ ἕκτῃ, τὴν
δὲ πέμπτην ἐν ὥρᾳ πέμπτῃ, τὴν δὲ τρίτην ἐν ὥρᾳ τρίτῃ· ἐν γὰρ ταῖς τοιαύταις ἡμέραις
καὶ ὥραις βεβαιότεραι δίδονται αἱ ἀποκρίσεις. [– – –]
Σκοπεῖν δὲ δεῖ καὶ τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς σελήνης καθὼς ἐνταῦθα ἔκκεινται·

ἡμέρας	α	πρωΐας
	β	δείλης
	γ	μὴ χρῶ
	δ	δι᾽ ὅλης τῆς ἡμέρας
	ε	μὴ χρῶ
	ς	δι᾽ ὅλης τῆς ἡμέρας
	ζ	πρωΐας
	– – –	
	κθ	δείλης
	λ	δείλης

*Watch also for day and hour on which the oracle works best. You should ask the questions on the
following days of the week: on the third, which is the day of Hermes, on the fifth, which is the day of
Aphrodite, on Sabbath, which is the day of Kronos, and on Sunday, which is the day of Helios; on the
other days absolutely not.*

*And (you should ask the questions) at the following hours: on Sunday at the third hour, on Sabbath at
the sixth hour, on the fifth day at the fifth hour, and on the third day at the third hour; for on these days
and hours the surer answers are given. (.....)*

And you also have to consider the days of the moon as they are set forth here:
day   1   in the morning
*   2   in the afternoon*
*   3   do not question the oracle*
*   4   the whole day long*
*   5   do not question the oracle*
*   6   the whole day long*
*   7   in the morning*
etc. until *29 in the afternoon, 30 in the afternoon.*

In short: whoever wanted to make use of these Sortes first had to choose one of the right weekdays,
and on that day one of the right hours. Then he would have to check with the help of the given list if his
chosen day was one of the right days of the moon.

'Days of the moon', ἡμέρας τῆς σελήνης, must point to the use of a lunar calendar,[3] which is not
surprising in a magical context. Magical prescriptions show the use of lunar days in everyday's magical

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[3] In the Roman and Byzantine period the Egyptians normally used the 'Alexandrian' calendar based on the solar year of
365 1/4 day, whereas for special occasions (often related to magic or religion) the older Egyptian 'Wandeljahr' of 365 days
(cf. D. Hagedorn - K. A. Worp, *Das Wandeljahr im römischen Ägypten*, ZPE 104, 1994, 243-255) was still in use. Both are
solar years with fixed months of 30 days, at the end of the year followed by intercalary days. For the use of a lunar calendar
in Egypt see R. A. Parker, *The Calendars of Ancient Egypt*, Chicago 1950; A. E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*,
München 1972, 11-12, 145-146.

practice.[4] The way these moon days were counted may have been very easy: *not* by using a difficult written lunar calendar[5], but just by observing the then mostly clear Egyptian night sky (day 1 probably being the first day of the invisibility of the crescent at the time of new moon[6]).

I would suggest that this lunar system was *only in use for counting the days*, i.e. for giving the days a 'lunar' number, as a remnant of the ancient use of the lunar calendar for religious and magical purposes.[7]

Now back to the wooden board Kellis 82: The close resemblance of the above part of the Introduction to the Sortes Astrampsychi with P.Kellis 82 makes it clear that

1) the numbers in lines 1-10 do not denote *days*, but *hours*;[8] referring only to the *12 hours of the day* (the night being normally too evil for practising magic);

2) in lines 11-33, the σεληνοδρόμιον, being a list of thirty days, does not refer to the days of an 'unspecified month', but to the *days as numbered according to the moon* (30 days being the maximum length of the moon's orbit).

In this way the wooden board Kellis 82 furnishes a complete[9] and perpetual calendar by which the owner would always be able to compute the right time to practise his magic.[10]

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[4] E.g. PGM III 426ff.: - - wenn der Mond sich nähert, und dann – – am 1. Tag der Göttin – – am dritten Tage des Monds – – am 4. Tage des Monds etc.; PGM IV 26-27: τῇ τρίτῃ [τ]ῆς σελήνης, am dritten des Mondes; PGM IV 52-53: Προαγνεύσας ζ´ ἡμέρας τοῦ τὴν σελήνην πα[ν]σέληνον γενέσθαι, Halt dich rein 7 Tage, bevor der Mond zum Vollmond wird; IV 57: σελήνης δὲ πληρωθε[ίσης], wenn es Vollmond geworden ist; PGM XII 351-352: γνῶθι, πρὸς τὴν σελήνην ἀνέπεσε νοσῶν, Bring in Kenntnis, auf welchen Mondtag (der Leidende) erkrankte; PGM XII 308: ἐπὶ ἡμέρας ιδ´, ἀρχάμενος ἀπὸ τῆς σελήνης γ´, where there seems to be no reason for translating 'vierzehn Tage lang, beginnend mit der dritten Mondphase' instead of 'during 14 days, starting from the 3rd day of the moon'.

[5] Cf. P.dem.Carlsberg 9, a mathematical astronomical text from AD 144 which attests the use of the 25-year cycle of lunar months, see Parker l.c. and Samuel l.c.

[6] See Parker, l.c. p. 23.

[7] If month and year would have to be added (for which there is no need in the magical context mentioned), they would be given according to the Alexandrian calendar, or even, considering the special uses of such dates, according to the ancient Egyptian 'Wandeljahr'. For such dating one may compare the double dates in a number of hieroglyphic and demotic texts (dating up to the early Roman period) assembled by Parker, in which cases the dates according to the Egyptian c.q. Alexandrian solar year are accompanied by a lunar day-number. See Parker, l.c. 17-22.

Allowing for this 'contamination' of calendars would also solve the problem obtaining in the religious calendar P.Hib. 1. 27. In this text (l. 41-43, and in the parallel passage in P.Par. 1, 71-73), χρῶντ[αι] | ταῖς κατὰ σελήνη[ν] | ἡμέραις κ.τ.λ. could not be explained by the editors of P.Hib. in relation to the surrounding text and was thus taken to be '*used loosely for "the days of the month" without any real reference to the moon*'. There would be no problem if this using 'the days according to the moon' would only refer to the *number* by which each *day* was counted (a reason for this being possibly the use of tables of good and bad days like the one above!)

[8] Cf. also the heading of a similar calendar PGM VII 155 Ἡμερομαντίαι κ[αὶ] ὧραι, where, however, the day-numbers are not followed by numbers of hours, but by parts of the day like morning and afternoon. Hours are also mentioned with days 2 and 3 in the calendar P.Kellis 83.

[9] There is no reason to believe that the text starts *mediis in rebus*, as the editor suggested in his introduction on p. 206, although, of course, the holes in the margin show that the tablet one time did form part of a larger tablet-book. Perhaps we may even compare the start of an invocation on the back of this tablet (l. 36-38) with the prayer which was prescribed to be said before consulting the Sortes Astrampsychi and with many similar prayers forming part of magical prescriptions in PGM passim.

[10] The resemblance between the Introduction to the Sortes Astrampsychi and P.Kellis 82 does not necessarily imply the possibility that P.Kellis itself would constitute an abbreviated part of this Introduction (although a number of texts from the Sortes Astrampsychi are attested on papyrus, see G. M. Browne, l.c. note 1 above and P.L.Bat. XXV 8 with further literature); the good and bad days and hours are too different.