TWO PAPYRI WITH FORMULAE FOR DIVINATION

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Here I discuss two papyri, each with a formula for divination, whose published texts, in my view, admit of improvements.¹

1. “Great Isis the Lady”
(Pl. 1)


H. 0.213, W. 0.125 m. (↔). Virtually intact, with unusually wide margins, back blank. The hand (IIIP or IVp) is practiced and confident, with attention to conventions of book production: line 1 in ecthesis, the marks // at the left of 2 and 24.

Ed.pr.:

1 Μεγάλη Ἰσις ἡ κυρία. 14 θήναι. λαβῶν φύνι-
2 ἀντίγραφον ἱερᾶς βί-
3 βλόη τῆς εὐρέτισσης ἐν 15 κος ἀρσενος φύλλα κβ̣'
4 τοις τοῦ Ἐρμοῦ ταμίῳς. 16 ἐπίγρα(αγον) ἐν ἕκαστρ τῶν
5 ὁ δὲ τρόπος ἑστὶν τὰ περ[ι] 17 φύλλων τὰ τῶν θεῶν
6 τὰ γράμματα κβ̣' 18 ὀνόματα κὲ ἐπευξά-
7 δι' ὅν ὃ Ἐρμῆς κὲ ἦ Ἰσις 19 μενος ἐρε κατὰ δύο
8 ζητούσα ἐκάτερθης τὸν ἀ- 20 δῷ, τὸ δὲ ὑπολιπό[μ]ε-
9 δελφὸν κὲ ἄνδρα "Ο- 21 νον ἔχατον ἀναγνώ-
10 συρειν. ἐπικαλῶµε[ν (?)] 22 τι κὲ εὕρησις σου τὴν κλη-
11 τὸν (ἡλιον) κὲ τούς ἐν βυ- 23 δόνα ἐν οἷς μέτεστεν
12 θὸ θεοῦς πάντας πε- 24 καὶ χρημαθισθῆση τῃ-
13 ρί ὃν θέλεις κληδονισ- 25 λαυγώς.

¹ I am grateful to the Trustees of Woodbrooke College, Birmingham, for their permission to publish the photograph of P.Harris 55.
“Great is the Lady Isis. Copy of a sacred book found in the archives of Hermes. The method is concerned with the 29 letters used by Hermes and Isis when searching for her brother and husband Osiris. Invoke the sun and all the gods in the deep concerning those things about which you wish to receive an omen. Take 29 leaves of a male palm, and inscribe on each of the leaves the names of the gods; then after a prayer lift them up two by two, and read that which is left at the last, and you will find wherein your omen consists, and you will obtain an illuminating answer.”

The text invites a few comments.

1. “Great is the Lady Isis.” All translators but Hopfner (“Die große Isis, die Herrscherin”), follow the ed.pr., which had no comment here. Milligan cited as a parallel “a stock phrase of Artemis-worship” at Acts 19.28, μεγάλη ἡ (om. ἡ D*pr.) “Ἀρτέμις Ἑφεσίων, and Preisen-danz referred to this phrase and to a discussion by Peterson, who, after several not particularly relevant examples of acclamations of the type Ἑνυχάς τοῖς νυμφίοις, states, without argumentation, that “wenn das Zauberbüchlein P. Oxyrh. VI 886 ... also anhebt: μεγάλη Ἰσίς ἡ κυρία, so haben wir hier eine akklamatorische ... Eingangsformel vor uns.” In the majority text of the New Testament, however, we may note that the position of μεγάλη is predicative position, while in the papyrus it is attributive; the New Testament phrase is not a perfectly useful parallel. One should understand the line as Hopfner does: “Great Isis the Lady.” The papyrus phrase occurs elsewhere, though, in a graffito on the Monte della Giustizia in Rome (Brizio, Anon. 1873:36), εἷς Ζεὺς Σάραπις / μεγάλη Ἰσίς ἡ κυρία. Its “One Zeus Sarapis” does seem to be an acclamation: at the end of an invocation of the Sun at PGM IV 1596-715, the operant, if successful, is to utter the phrase (cf. the obscure Πουβλικιανέ, εἷς Ζεὺς Σάραπις, ἔληπον, IG XIV 2413.3, on a gold amulet from Rome). Whether or not, properly speaking, the second line of the graffito is also an acclamation, “Great Isis the Lady,” at least in the papyrus, is certainly the title of the recipe: it is set off from the rest of the text by a blank area, and it stands in ecthesis. It may be compared with the title Γραῦς Ἀπολλωνίου Τυανέως ὑπηρετίς of the spell that makes up PGM XIa: like the old assistant of Apollonios of Tyana, Isis was a magician, and below in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus (7-10) we learn that the magical operation is one from which she actually benefitted.