
On donkeys' negativity. Research on its perception in ancient Egyptian religion

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Résumé

The use of donkeys was essential in ancient Egyptian trade and agriculture, but its role was nuanced by its function in religion. Its association to Seth is well known and is regularly reminded in the modern literature. As such, the donkey appears in funerary, magical or ritual sources, belonging to all periods, where it often reflects a sethian ambivalent nature. This paper will present examples of the donkey's perception and its evolution throughout Egyptian history. It will show that, if it can be associated to Seth, the animal's function also evolved independently from the god. In fact, many documents do not link them together and show that the animal often followed its own path, until it is more tightly assimilated to Seth in the later periods. The donkey's strengths and distinctive features could therefore be played with; the animal could be feared and revered at the same time and be associated to various other divine and animal beings, its role being sometimes influenced by foreigner concepts. Either benevolent or evil, donkeys are ambiguous entities, which sometimes converge towards a combination of both natures, in which they can be recognised as dreadful beings possessing powers praised for their protective efficiency.

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