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THE DONKEY KING

*Asinine Symbolology in Ancient
and Medieval Magic*

Emily Selove

University of Exeter



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Emily Selove

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The Donkey King

Asinine Symbolism in Ancient and Medieval Magic

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Abstract: The thirteenth-century Arabic grimoire, al-Sakkākī's *Kitāb al-Shāmīl* (*Book of the Complete*), provides numerous methods of contacting jinn. The first such jinn described, Abū Isrā'īl Būzayn ibn Sulaymān, arrives with a donkey. In the course of offering an explanation for his ritual, this Element reveals the double-sided nature of asinine symbolism and explains why this animal has served as the companion of both demons and prophets. Focusing on two nodes of donkey symbolism – the phallus and the bray – it reveals a *coincidentia oppositorum* in a deceptively humble and comic animal form. Thus the donkey, bearer of a demonic voice and of a phallus symbolic of base materiality, also represents transcendence of the material and protection from the demonic. In addition to Arabic literature and occult rituals, the Element refers to evidence from the ancient Near East, Egypt, and Greece, as well as to medieval Jewish and Christian texts.

Keywords: Arabic, donkey, magic, microcosm, occult, phallus

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