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Love beyond time: Exploring the link between love spells from *The Greek Magical Papyri* and the 19th-century Pomeranian folktales and proverbs

Abstract. Love can be considered from various scientific perspectives; regarding historical experiences, it is much easier to do so from the perspective of material history. As for the study of spiritual manifestations, many important materials are provided by preserved beliefs, practices, and magical rituals. In the following article, the author decided to compare material concerning The Greek Magical Papyri found in Egypt, which have a much more syncretic character than just Egyptian or Greek, with material concerning 19th-century spells, love procedures, and folk wisdom from Christian Pomerania. This comparison, which at first glance seems difficult to carry out, within the framework of meticulously conducted analysis, leads step by step to many significant insights regarding both love magic and the issue of love itself.

Keywords: love spells, proverbs, folktales, Pomeranian, Greek, parallel.

When love is a guide, the path is never too long.
(a 19th-century proverb from Pomerania)

*Love is not something we invented, it is observable, powerful... Love is the one thing we are
capable of perceiving that transcends dimensions of time and space*
(*Interstellar*, movie 2014, dir. Ch. Nolan)

It would be preaching to the choir to try and convince anyone that love is a feeling that, for centuries, has had a strong impact on the history of the human species in all inhabited corners of the world. There is no doubt that, depending on the time, place, culture and civilisation, love has come in different shapes and forms. Feelings themselves are mainly the domain of psychologists, but the study of magical and

medicinal manifestations of love falls within the area explored by anthropologists, historians, and sociologists.

The first part focuses on the love magic in late antiquity and the specific fusion of Egyptian and Greek beliefs, as preserved in the so-called Greek magic papyri. A substantial collection of Greek magical texts has been preserved, encompassing a vast array of knowledge on love magic. These texts are found in seven substantial papyrus scrolls filled with magical incantations, likely belonging to the personal collection of a professional magician active in Upper Egypt in the late antiquity (specifically the papyrus from the years 236 and 372 BC). Approximately one-fourth of these writings focus on matters of love and sexuality (Faraone, 2001, p. 15). The subject matter also requires a number of references to earlier periods and the magical beliefs, particularly Egyptian and Greek. The papyri, mentioned above, include references to magic originating from almost all the near and more distant civilisations of that period. Such interplay between East and West is also evident in the earliest Greek references to magic. Interestingly, in the *Odyssey*, Helen claims to have learned about magical *pharmaka* (cunning drugs) originating in Egypt (*Od.* 4.220–230). Accordingly, in her furious rant against Andromache, Hermione accuses the former of casting spells against her, noting that “The minds of Asian women are clever at such things” (*Eur. Andr.* 159–160).

The materials from Greco-Roman Egypt showcase a remarkable breadth of religious and cultural pluralism. It is not surprising to find a pronounced influence of Egyptian religion within the Greek magical papyri, yet the texts display a wide variety of forms. Written in Greek, Demotic, or Coptic, some focus exclusively on Egyptian religious practices. However, in other instances it is clear, that the Egyptian components have been significantly shaped by Hellenistic religious ideas. Most of the texts are eclectic mixtures of several religious traditions—primarily Egyptian, Greek, and even Jewish.¹

The ancient Greeks did not have a single word equivalent to the modern concept of “love magic”. For this reason, there is often a problem with appropriate translation. The term – magical, often treated with a pinch of salt in recent decades as an unacceptable subject of scientific considerations, often replaces the words religious, ritual or medicinal in the discussed papyri (Faraone & Tovar, 2022, XX). However, this is a topic for another discussion and in his article the author tried to use the term – magical, with appropriate caution.

The second area of research includes the nineteenth-century Christian Pomerania (and, to a lesser extent, Masuria), from which there are an unexpectedly large number of extant records of the so-called magic-medicinal procedures, of which a considerable group relates to winning the love of a desired person.²

¹ One particularly fascinating example is the inclusion of a curative incantation from the second millennium BC, originating in Mesopotamia, in a magical handbook written in Greek, discovered in Egypt, and titled “The [incantation] of... the Syrian woman from Gadara”. This is a striking example of the interconnectivity of various magical traditions. It underscores the complex web of cultural and religious exchanges that characterized the ancient world (Faraone, 2001, p. 37).

² Obviously, the magical procedures themselves and literature that expounds them are much older; for example, Wieniawski, a burgher from Cracow, wrote a comedy in eight scenes, titled *A Miraculous Wedding. Or Magical*

Comparing love-related matters in two different contemporary cultures is far from a straightforward exercise, which becomes far more complex when the comparison involves completely different cultures, having entirely different temporal and civilisational backgrounds. Such research is always extremely interesting, but often critiqued for inconclusiveness of its outcomes. However, the author is convinced that in the case of love it is justified to make such a comparison, since it allows us to look at this phenomenon, which is extremely difficult to grasp within science, from a broader perspective, to observe its extraordinary durability in relation to, for example, material history.

Due to limited space, in this article the author cannot fully address the definition of magic, the concept which has had many definitions, depending on time and place. Nevertheless, in the introduction, the originator finds it useful to contextualize the issue within relevant times and regions, and to define magic within this specific perspective.³ In the period of antiquity under discussion here, magic is nothing but the art of making people believe that something is being done about those things in life about which we all know that we ourselves can do nothing. Magic serves as an art form that, for its practitioners, transforms discomfort into comfort, offering a semblance of security to those who feel vulnerable, a sense of aid to those who feel powerless, and a touch of hope to those who find themselves in despair. It turns the chaos of an unmanageable life into something bearable for believers, and for those who master its practice, it becomes quite a lucrative profession (Betz, 1986, XLVIII). Magic encompassed a collection of practical techniques and rituals applied in everyday life to manipulate or influence the supernatural forces of nature, animals, or other humans through supernatural means (Faraone, 2001, p. 16). The clear distinctions we draw today between religion and magic were virtually nonexistent in ancient times.⁴

From the perspective of a nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Moszyński characterised magic as follows – as influence exerted over real or fictitious objects in order to produce their desired effect (Moszyński, 1934, p. 8 and 231).

Binding (love) spells. Fire magic

The most popular way of love incantations in Papyri are binding spells. It was a specific way to force another person to love or have sex with a petitioner (PGM IV. 1390–1495

Hymeneus, in featuring both devils and a witch. An old hag seduces a young man using magic and he falls in love with her (A. Wieniawski, *Cudowne wesele czyli Hymeneusz czarodziejski*. Kraków 1628–1641, see Kolberg, 1965, p. 267).

³ Traditionally, magic has been regarded in both scholarly and popular discourse as questionable, obscure, and potentially subversive. Scientific opinion has often deemed magical beliefs as stemming from a misunderstanding of the causal laws of nature, while religious perspectives have classified magic as fundamentally opposed to religion (Nikki & Valkama, 2021, p. 9). The negative perception of magic since the beginnings of Greek civilization is associated with the pejorative perception of the term *magos* (Lincoln, 2024).

⁴ The ancient indifference towards distinguishing magic from science finds notable expression in Pindar's depiction of medical practices from the early 5th BC. These practices encompassed a multifaceted approach, integrating "gentle incantations, soothing potions, or by wrapping remedies", and the use of protective amulets. P. Pyth. 3.52–54. Amulets and talismans were a common phenomenon and were found throughout the entire Mediterranean basin, see the recently published text of Kotansky (Kotansky, 2024). As for the differences between divination and magic, see the text of Ulanowski (Ulanowski, 2022).

in Betz, 1986, p. 64). It was possible to arrange this using the help of some gods/goddesses or heroes/heroines who died a violent death.

The objective of “burning” a female victim is likely one of the most prevalent themes found within the surviving Greek magical spells (*agōgē*) of later periods. As we have observed, practitioners often engage in burning spells (*empura*), where they burn assorted herbs, spices, and domestic items with the intention of igniting passion within the woman targeted by the enchantment (Faraone, 2001, p. 58). It is notable that nearly every verbal curse or imprecatory ceremony employed by the Greeks against their adversaries is also found in the realm of their love spells. Within both domains of curses and erotic enchantments, the Greeks engaged in rituals involving the destruction of wax effigies or other specific materials through fire, aiming to inflict the agony and discomfort of flames upon the intended target. This tradition dates back as far as the seventh century BC. Numerous such burning spells are documented in the Greek magical papyri. In one such example, the practitioner places myrrh on a heated surface in a steam bath and addresses it thus: “Do not infiltrate through her eyes, side, nails, or even her navel or physique, but penetrate through her soul. Reside within her heart and scorch her insides, her chest, liver, breath, bones, and marrow until she yields to me, Mr. So-and-so...”. In this manner, the practitioner employs fire to symbolically consume or melt various aspects of his female target’s body or psyche (Faraone, 2001, p. 50–51).

They all seem to have a very similar structure:

This night and from her eyes remove sweet sleep,

[...]

So, bring her wracked with torment – and in haste!⁵

(Betz, 1986, pp. 64–66; PGM VII. 593–619 in Betz, 1986, p. 135)

When she drinks, when she eats, when she has intercourse with someone else, I will bewitch her heart, I will bewitch the heart of her, I will bewitch her breath, I will bewitch her 365 members... (PGMIV. 94–153 in Betz, 1986, p. 40; Faraone, 2001, pp. 55–56)⁶

The text on a first century CE lead tablet announces:

[...] take away the sleep of that woman until she comes to me and pleases my soul [...] lead [blank space] loving, burning on account of her love and desire for me [...] force her to have sex with me [blank space] [...] impel, force her to come to me loving, burning with love and desire for me [blank space] [...] drive [blank space] from her parents, from her bedroom [...] and force her to love me and give me what I want. (DT 230, see Faraone, 2001, p. 4)

Such demands go hand in hand with seemingly boundless possessiveness:

⁵ In this version: “Fetch her for me, her inflamed with passion, submissive. Let her not find sleep until she comes to me” (PGM VII. 593–619 in Betz, 1986, p. 135).

⁶ “Seize Euphemia and lead her to me, Theon, loving me with crazy desire, and bind her with inescapable bonds, strong ones of adamant, for the love of me, Theon, and do not allow her to eat, drink, obtain sleep, jest, or laugh, but make her leap out [...] and leave behind her father, mother, brothers, sisters, until she comes to me” (see Faraone, 2001, p. 62).

[May she remain] fully satisfied, loving, desiring me, NN, and may she be unable to have intercourse with another man, except with me alone. (PGM VII. 862–918 in Betz, 1986, p. 142)⁷

The fact that the person who is the target of the ritual is supposed to burn with desire in relation to the one ordering the ritual is expressed not only in symbolic, but also in bodily terms:

Inflame her that she fulfills the nightly desires of NN, whom NN bore. Aye, lord NE-THMOMAO [Helios, enter] into the [soul] of her, NN, whom NN bore, and [burn her heart], her guts, [her liver, her spirit, her bones. Perform] successfully for me [this] charm, immediately, immediately; [quickly, quickly]. (Divination by fire PGM VII. 981–93 in Betz, 1986, p. 144; PGM XXXVI. 69–101 in Betz, 1986, p. 270; PGM XXXVI. 333–60 in Betz, 1986, pp. 277–278)

In their efforts to compel the victim of the spell to return, practitioners burn a variety of household items such as barley, bay leaves, and wax. The intention is to subject the victim to a symbolic burning until they relent and come back. This technique mirrors the methods seen in previous examples:

As Delphis hath brought me pain, so I burn the bay against Delphis. And as it crackles and then lo! is burnt suddenly to nought and we see not so much as the ash of it, e'en so be Delphis' body whelmed in another flame.

You, iunx, drag him to my house, my man!

As this puppet melts for me before Hecate, so melt with love, e'en so speedily, Delphis of Myndus. And as this wheel of brass turns by grace of Aphrodite, so turn he and turn again before my threshold.

You, iunx, drag him to my house, my man!⁸

In Roman-era Egypt, the ancient Greek tradition of binding spells evolved into a unique amalgamation, known as the binding love spells (*philtrokatadesmoi*). These spells were crafted to achieve a dual purpose: firstly, to inhibit the victim from engaging in sexual relations with anyone else, and to stimulate a desire for sexual intimacy with the individual casting the spell (PGM IV. 296–466 in Betz, 1986, pp. 44–46, Faraone, 2001, p. 14).

As a result of binding spells, a woman should “feel crazy” about the petitioner (PGM IV. 1716–1870 in Betz, 1986, p. 70). She should be “forgetting children and her life with parents” (PGM IV. 2756–64 in Betz, 1986, p. 90; Faraone, 2001, pp. 86 and

⁷ Sometimes in such cases the translation uses an even stronger language: “so that she should not be fucked, bugged or should not give any pleasure to another man (ὅπως μὴ βινηθῇ μὴ πυγισθῇ μὴδὲν πρὸς ἡδονὴν ποιήσῃ ἑταίρω ἀνδρὶ), except to me alone” (Beard, North, Price, 1998, p. 266).

⁸ Theoc. *Idyll* 2.23–32. The word *rhombos* is some kind of spinning device. The word *iunx* can at this period refer to a bird, a wheel, or more generally to an incantation (Faraone, 2001, p. 152). Pindar's *Pythian* 4.213–219 presents Aphrodite as the inventor of the *iunx* spell (the indissoluble wheel), who “brought the maddening bird to men for the first time” and taught them how to use it. In ancient *iunx* spells, a man would bind a small, lustful bird onto a wheel, a familiar apparatus for torture in the Greek world. He would then subject the bird to whipping and fire in an attempt to coerce his female target to leave her family. The intention was to transfer to her body, through a persuasive analogy, the bird's innate lubriciousness and frenzy, along with the agony and scorching sensation inflicted by the torture (Faraone, 2001, pp. 57–58).

88). The woman under such spell should become amenable to the man-petitioner, with no right to exercise her own will for even one hour of her life.

Urgent demands end with and exhortation that the woman falls under the spell and comes to the petitioner's house "quickly, quickly; immediately, immediately" (PGM VII. 467–77 in Betz, 1986, pp. 130–131; PGM VII. 981–93 in Betz, 1986, p. 144; PDM XIV. 636–69 in Betz, 1986, pp. 230–231; PGM XXXVI. 69–101 in Betz, 1986, p. 270). The spell should have an immediate effect: "Irresistible love spell of attraction, which works on the same day" (PGMXXXVI. 361–71 in Betz, 1986, pp. 277–278).

Fire as an aspect of desire also appears in Pomerania, although its representation is much more modest, and – in this case – symbolic. In one of the incantations, the petitioner had to turn their face to the warm southern wind and say:

Wind, kindle passion in me, send me the grace of love,
Wind, light a fire in me, send me the power of passion.
(Moszyński, 1934, p. 287; Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 106)

The practical dimension of rituals: Love touch

Archaeological findings confirm that the use of the word "binding" in reference to the above magical procedures was, indeed, apt. In Egypt, a small clay effigy of a woman was unearthed, meticulously sealed within a clay pot alongside a folded lead tablet inscribed with a Greek magic spell dating back to the third or the fourth century CE.⁹ The effigy portrays a kneeling woman with her feet bound together and arms secured behind her back. It bears thirteen pins meticulously inserted: one in the crown of her head, one in her mouth, eyes, and ears respectively, and one each in her solar plexus, vagina, and anus. Additionally, pins puncture the palms of her hands and soles of her feet. At first glance, one might assume the apparatus was intended for torturing and harming a lifelong adversary. However, the accompanying text reveals an altogether different intention. It discloses that a man named Sarapammon crafted or commissioned this effigy with the hope of compelling a woman named Ptolemais to forsake her perceived arrogance and instead engage in a romantic liaison with him: "Rouse yourself for me and go to each place, to each neighbourhood, to each house and bring me Ptolemais, whom Aias bore, the daughter of Horigenes; prevent her from eating, from drinking, until she comes to me, Sarapammon, whom Area bore, and do not allow her to accept the advances of any man other than me alone Sarapammon. Drag her by the hair, the guts, until she does not reject me, Sarapammon, whom Area bore, and I have her, Ptolemais, whom Aias bore, the daughter of Horigenes, subject to me for the entire extent of my life, loving me, desiring me, telling me what she thinks" (Beard et al., 1998, pp. 266–267; Faraone, 2001, pp. 41–42).

⁹ The famous Louvre "A Cursed Figurine" E27145 (9 cm high) together with *defixio* (a lead curse tablet), originally found inside a ceramic jar (Riggs, 2012, pp. 350–351).

In practice, usually there were two figurines that were made: a male, representing Ares and a female, associated with the goddess Aphrodite, or the woman targeted by the above ritual:

Take wax [or clay] from a potter's wheel and make two figures, a male and a female. Make the male in the form of Ares fully armed, holding a sword in his left hand and threatening to plunge it into the right side of her neck. And make her with her arms behind her back and down on her knees.

Then, the female one had to be pierced several times, so that the target person should feel burning pain until she arrives at the abode (i.e., in the bed) of the petitioner. Alongside the figurine, there should be a tablet bearing and incantation, to be tied to the figurine,

[using] 365 knots while saying 'ABRASAX, hold her fast!'. (PGM IV. 296–466 in Betz, 1986, pp. 44–46; Faraone, 2001, p. 52)¹⁰

Juxtaposed with such sophisticated and often perfidiously erudite methods, what did the love magic of Pomerania and Masuria have to offer?

We know quite a few magical procedures, albeit displaying a considerable degree of simplification, when compared to those of late ancient Egypt. However, the creation of figurines in order to cast a spell on a person they represented was practised there as well.

A girl in love had to get sand from under her chosen man's feet, a piece of his clothing or a strand of this hair, which she would bring to the witch (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 104). Witches made wax puppets, and then the petitioners crushed these puppets – representations of the person they desired – into powder, sprinkling it on themselves and the object of their desire, which was supposed to ensure love and swift marriage (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 107). If it was not possible to make a magical figurine, the focus was at least on touching the clothes or the body of the desired person in order to transfer desire onto that person and magically possess it (Moszyński, 1934, p. 296).

When one wished to make a girl love him, he had to catch a live frog, bury it in an anthill and quickly run away to avoid hearing the frog scream, for should he hear it, the spell would not work. After about eight days, he was to collect the little bones cleaned by the ants, among which there was one similar to a hook and another that resembled a spatula. If he touched the girl's dress or body with the hook, she would love him. And when he had had enough of her love, all he had to do was to touch her with the spatula and the love was supposed to evaporate (Knorrn, Gbr. no. 36

¹⁰ Notably, a similar tale is recounted originating in Babylon and documented by Geller. According to his account, one is instructed to gather clay from both sides of the river and sculpt a figurine representing the desired woman, with her name inscribed upon it. The "nice woman" Sumerian incantation (KAR 61: 1–6) is then recited over the figurine three times to imbue it with the necessary magical potency. Subsequently, the figurine is to be buried at the main gate of the city, ensuring that the woman, as the target of affection, will walk over it daily. Supposedly, this method will yield results, provided that the "nice woman" Sumerian incantation (KAR 61: 1–6) is recited three times more. If these remedies fail to produce the desired effect, an alternative ritual involves combining precious and costly woods with partridge-tongue. These materials are then wrapped with fleece and placed at the head of the man's bed, with the intention of ensuring that the woman "will not hold back from her being made to talk," in other words, to engage in sexual intercourse (see Geller, 2002).

in Jahn, 1886, no. 650).¹¹ Also, if the one seeking love came upon two mating frogs, he should pierce them with a needle during the act. With the needle, the boy was to approach the girl with whom he was in love (or the girl should approach the boy) and for a moment pin their clothes to theirs. From then on, they were bound to belong to each other (Dąbrówno Top in Toeppen, 2014, p. 107; Biegelsein, 1928, p. 128).

There was also something we might consider to be the equivalent of the ancient lead tablets. During Easter, between sunset on Good Friday until sunrise on Easter Saturday one could fashion amulets and talismans. Among the most popular ones there were small silver plates on which one would make the image of the moon. These were intended exclusively for women. Special rings were also made at that time, which, when blessed on Easter Sunday, were supposed to ensure the couple would love each other until death (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 101).

As we can see, love could be “inflicted” by projecting, or touching in all magically available ways. In Pomerania, there have been countless such physical or more symbolic actions.

If one could not find love among women, on a Friday evening he should not speak and dress in a girl’s shirt and only take it off next Sunday, and then love must have awakened (Konow, Kammin district in Jahn, 1886, no. 547). It was also possible to make a love drink, for which the girl had to cut her left finger, so that a few drops of blood were spilled into a jug of beer, add a little of her saliva to the elixir and say:

With God’s and all the saints’ help, as much as my blood hurts me,
God grant that the heart may ache until you take me as your wife.
(Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 104)

The world of nature and its magical symbolic meanings

Both in antiquity and later, in Pomerania, other clues related to magical rituals are no less interesting. Many magical procedures involved the natural world, mainly animals and plants. One method to make the heart of a woman longing for a man was to bring together a live swallow and a live hoopoe. One could also make an ointment using the blood of a male donkey and the blood of a tick from a black cow.

In Egypt, a love spell for attracting a woman who has been wronged by her husband involves the following steps: retrieve a spotted lizard from the vicinity of a place where bodies are mummified. Place the lizard into an iron vessel and add coals from the forge whenever a fire is kindled. Ignite the lizard and coals within the vessel, and as you do so, recite the prescribed incantation:

Lizard, lizard, as Helios and all the gods have hated you, so let her, NN, hate her husband for all time and her husband hate her. (PGM LXI. 39–71 in Betz, 1986, pp. 291–292, similar one PGM LXIII. 7–12 in Betz, 1986, p. 295)

The world of animals and plants is particularly well represented in the Pomeranian tradition, where most references were made to wild and domestic fowl and

¹¹ The same belief only with bat (see Biegeleisen, 1928, pp. 315–316).

selected herbs. Thus, to inspire love in another person, one had to take three sage leaves and write on the first one:

Adam Eve, on the second: Jesus Mary,
On the third your name and hers.
Burn the leaves to ash and add it to the person's food or drink.
(Rackow, Neustettin district in Jahn, 1886, no. 453)

To be loved by everyone one had to wear on your chest the head of a bird called dürrer (Egypt. *Geheimn.* II, p. 41 in Jahn, 1886, no. 608) or carry the blood of a bat (Świnoujście, Kuhn u. Schwarz, Nordd. Gebr. no. 448 in Jahn, 1886, no. 612). To make a girl love you:

Take feathers from a cock's tail and squeeze three times in your hand. (Egypt. *Geheimn.* II, p. 9 in Jahn, 1886, no. 621)

The cock regularly appeared in fertility cults as a gift to newlyweds and warded off the powers of chaos (Kowalski, 1998, pp. 220–223). In another version:

Take the tongue of a turtledove in your mouth, speak to her lovingly, kiss her on the lips afterwards, and she will love you so much that she will never leave you. (Egypt *Geheimn.* II, p. 9 in Jahn, 1886, no. 690)

Generally, to make women love you, you had to carry a swallow's heart (Świnoujście, Kuhn u. Schwarz, Nordd. *Gebr.* no. 448 in Jahn, 1886, no. 679; Kowalski, 1998, p. 185). In order to attract boys, one had to pick fern leaves (Nasizral or *Ophioglossum* – adder's-tongue ferns) while walking backwards towards them naked, and then rub oneself with them while reciting the incantation:

Nasizrale, nasizrale, I pluck you boldly, with five fingers, with sixth hand, let the boys chase after me (help me, oh Lord). (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 105; Moszyński, 1934, p. 339).

Some of the phenomena pertaining to the natural world, triggered a much broader perspective of elemental and even cosmic forces. The *agōgē* ritual may illustrate this – it comprises a sole hexametrical hymn to be sung by a man to “the star of Aphrodite” (the Morning Star – the planet Venus) while burning a special incense concocted from the blood of a white dove (a bird traditionally associated with the goddess), untreated myrrh, and parched wormwood.

In the Pomeranian magic, the phases of the moon were also significant. When looking for the beloved, one had to buy a rose and leave it in the bedroom overnight. The ritual had to be performed on a Friday with a waxing moon. At night, one had to stand in front of an open window and, holding the rose, imagine one's beloved. Then, tearing off the petals of the rose and blowing them into the wind, one was to pronounce the qualities one expected from that person. Finally, one had to utter, “May it be so” (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 105).

If herbs were to be effective for love, they had to be collected in May during the new moon – they would then arouse passion even in the most indifferent person (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 101).

The element of water also played its part, which usually involved flowing water and sometimes a well. One called out to the water:

Water, water, guardian of all secrets,
Tell me the name of the one who will be with me soon. (Biegelesein, 1929,
p. 366; Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 161; Kowalski, 1998, pp. 614–615)

On St John's Day, girls would look into a well or flowing water to see the face of their fated husband, while on Christmas Day they would do it looking into the water in a hole dug in ice (Moszyński, 1934, pp. 375–376).

Food – Feed them well and win their... sex

Consumption of specific foodstuffs (aphrodisiacs), though very unusual ones, was an important factor in the magical procedures focusing on love.

The ancient authors of the comedies frequently make fleeting references to erotic enhancers, such as love potions and specific foods and specialized magical gear like an earlier mentioned the iunx or the rhombos (Faraone, 2001, p. 30; see Athen. 62e–64b and 356e–f; Menander, frag. 397). Pliny the Elder offered plentiful evidence, often drawn from earlier Greek texts, indicating that men believed that their sexual potency or stamina could be enhanced by consuming or wearing parts of certain special plants or exotic animals, including a crane and a skink (Faraone, 2001, p. 89).¹²

The Pomeranian ideas from the nineteenth century were no less ingenious: To arouse reciprocity of feeling in the person one loves,

[To arouse reciprocity of feeling in the person one loves], one should take a couple of straws from one's shoe, burn it to ashes and give it to the person to drink or eat, and then this person would have to come to the person who did it, even if they lived a mile away. But there is also a countermeasure to such forced love – one must turn the bunch of straw in one shoe, and when one has gone to the other person, take out the straw and strike them in the face to draw at least one drop of blood, and then the love will cease. (Łęgowski, 1892, pp. 57–58; Lorenz, 1934, p. 101)

The proverb said: "Wherever a bat flies in, a girl will get married" (Biegeleisen, 1928, p. 319). A boy wishing to win a girl's heart should give her a bat's heart burnt to ashes to eat (Fischer, 1934, p. 176). A bat¹³ had much significance in the folk love magic – if one liked a beautiful girl, but she was unwilling, one needed to catch a bat,

¹² Pliny offers many other examples: terebinth (24.28); donax (24.87); clematis (24.140); xiphium and ormenos agrios (26.94); orchis (27.65); phyteuma (27.65); radish (20.28); staphylinus (20.32); leeks (20.47–49); garlic with fresh coriander in wine (20.56–57); Megarian onions (20.105); wild asparagus mixed with dill (20.110); hebrotonum placed under the pillow (21.162); sea holly (22.20); asphodel (22.71); buprestis (22.78); chervil (22.80); and the pith of a tithymallus branch (22.99).

¹³ A bat was also part of the lore in antiquity. In a straightforward erotic spell known as the "insomnia spell," the following incantation is inscribed on the wings of a live bat: "May Ms. So-and-so, whom Ms. So-and-so bore, lie awake until she consents (i.e., to sex)". Subsequently, the animal is set free to fly into the night as the same incantation is spoken aloud. This ritual seemingly aims to transfer the natural nocturnal restlessness of the animal to the victim through the process of persuasive analogy, thereby preventing her from sleeping (PGM XII. 376–379 in Betz, 1986, p. 166). In another ritual called "Love-spell of attraction though wakefulness", the eyes of a live bat are extracted and then positioned into the eye sockets of a clay dog, where they are subsequently pierced with needles:

burn its heart and add the ashes to the girl's food, upon which she would never want to leave that person (Knoop, Gbr. nr 131 in Jahn, 1886, no. 613; Moszyński, 1934, p. 338).

The bat symbolizes blindness and darkness. In ancient Greece, it was associated with Hades and his realm (Kopaliński, 1990, p. 255).

Similarly, to win a man's love, the girl had to cook the heart of a mole in bread and thus enchant him. There is an interesting explanation as to why was mole considered effective. Blindness of mole like a bat, was supposed to affect the enchanted one, which was deemed to lead to love, or more exactly, to infatuation (Moszyński, 1934, p. 281).

A spider, or rather its eggs, were also part of the love menu. When a woman wanted to make a man love her, she had to secretly add the eggs of a cross orbweaver (*Araneus diadematus*) to his food (Meesow, Regenwalde in Jahn, 1886, no. 647).

Sexual potency – The physical dimension of love

As I mentioned above, eating and drinking had not only a symbolic meaning, but was also used to enhance the libido. From the physical point of view, a whole range of treatments focused exclusively on sexual potency. Faraone's research listed an impressive number of aphrodisiacs and doping agents mentioned in ancient texts.

From the classical era onward, there are numerous mentions of penis ointments believed to facilitate erections or prolong their duration. The Greek tradition of sexual enhancement persists in later magical formulas, which suggest rubbing the penis with a variety of herbs, oils, and substances to sustain an erection. Aristotle delves into the topic of the renowned aphrodisiac known as *hippomanes* (A. HA 577a10–15). Theophrastus, Aristotle's pupil in his *History of Plants* references an herb, known among drug-sellers (*pharmakopolai*) of the time, that when applied to a man's penis, reportedly causes twelve consecutive erections. In some cases, these concoctions are also said to increase female desire (see Faraone, 2001, p. 10).¹⁴ The herb called *saturnion* can lead to a condition called satyriasis if consumed in excessive quantities or over prolonged periods. Satyriasis entails an extremely uncomfortable state of persistent erection that even hinders sleep (Faraone, 2001, p. 125).

Texts from antiquity provide a plethora of practical advice to achieve erection: "To be able to copulate a lot: 'Grind up fifty tiny pinecones with 2 ozs. of sweet wine and two pepper grains and drink it' (see Athen. 1. 18d–c)," to get an erection when you want: "Grind up a pepper with some honey and coat your 'thing'" (PGM VII. 167–86 in Betz, 1986, p. 120).

In this way, by rubbing "some gall of a wild boar, some rock salt, some Attic honey and smear the head of your penis was possible" one could also bind their lover (PGM VII. 191–192 in Betz, 1986, p. 120; PDM XIV. 930–32 in Betz, 1986, p. 241). A procedure to make a woman love that one was copulating with her was: "Foam

¹⁴ "that Ms. So-and-so may . . . be unable to sleep, holding no one in her mind except me alone, Mr. So-and-so" and that she "may lie awake for me through all time" (PGM IV. 2943–66 in Betz, 1986, p. 94).

¹⁴ Theophrastus mentions at least three plants which were used as aphrodisiacs: oleander, cyclamen, and mandrake (see Faraone, 2001, p. 126, ref. 99, 100).

of a stallion's mouth. Anoint your phallus with it and lie with the woman" (PDM XIV. 1047–48 in Betz, 1986, p. 245). A prescription to cause a woman to love her husband stated: "Acacia, fruit. Pound with honey, anoint your phallus with it, and lie with the woman" (PDM XIV. 1046–47 in Betz, 1986, p. 245; PDM XIV. 1190–93 in Betz, 1986, p. 250; PDM XIV. 1155–62 in Betz, 1986, 248). In order to "play" with a woman, one had to "anoint the phallus with the juice of the deadly carrot" (PGM CXXVII. 1–12 in Betz, 1986, p. 322).

There is also a well-documented Neo-Assyrian love incantation published by Biggs aimed at enticing a woman to lie with a man. It is part of a series of "potency incantations" written in cuneiform, which were meticulously copied up until the seventh century BC, designed to "get and maintain an erection sufficient for sexual intercourse" (Biggs, 1967; see Leick, 1994, pp. 204–210). We may also note another one: "The penis of the unfaithful (husband) is no better than (lit., 'is alike unto') the vulva of the unfaithful (wife)!" (Gordon, 1959, p. 469).

In Pomerania, the magic of attraction worked through the use of the tricolour violet. A girl had to rub it on her eyebrows: "Let my gaze acquire such brightness, so that you [here the name of the chosen one] would pine for me tormented by love" (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 105). Horseradish, on the other hand, was supposed to enhance sexual potency in men (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 103).

Inflicting infertility. Forced fidelity

If being virile and potency was so desirable and necessary to obtain one's goal, i.e., having sex, the fear of losing it must also have been an extremely important factor in magical procedures, such as:

Engrave onto the obsidian stone the image of a castrated man, his severed genitals lying beside his feet, with his hands extended downward as he gazes at the detached organs. Behind him, inscribe Aphrodite, her face turned towards him as she observes the scene. Place beneath this depiction the "stone" of the *kinaidios* fish. If the specific stone from its head is unavailable, substitute it with a small root from the *kinaidios* plant and the left top wing of the *kinaidios* bird, enclosed within a flat golden box. This box should then be concealed within a soft strap made of sinew from a falcon's body cavity, stitched along its middle to ensure the box remains unseen. This strap, resembling the diadem seen in paintings and statues adorning the head of Aphrodite, is known as the *kestos*. Any male who encounters this strap will remain incapable of achieving an erection. If inadvertently carried, he will adopt effeminate traits. Consuming a portion of the *kinaidios* fish "stone" will render him a complete *kinaidos*, permanently foregoing natural intercourse. If a woman possesses this strap, no man will engage in sexual intercourse with her, as they will be unable to become erect. The strap should measure two fingers wide and five palms long. (Faraone, 2001, p. 121)

Three binding spells from the fourth century BC, originating from Greece, seem to have been authored by women seeking to thwart their husbands or lovers from engaging in relationships with other individuals. In these spells, the term "marrying" encompasses both formal marriage and casual sexual encounters. For instance, a

tablet discovered in Athens utilizes a straightforward wish-formula: “Let him not ‘marry’ another woman or boy”. Similarly, another magical tablet depicts a woman endeavoring to obstruct a relationship between her husband(?) and another woman, likely his mistress:

I consign (i.e., for purposes of binding) the sexual fulfillment (telos) and marriage (gamos) of [Theti]ma and Dionysophon and also (the marriage) of all other women, both widows and maidens, but especially Thetima [...] May he (Dionysophon) indeed not take another woman other than myself but let me alone grow old by the side of Dionysophon and no other woman. (see Faraone, 2001, p. 13)

More broadly, such procedures were to ensure that the beloved remained faithful, e.g., to make sure your wife remains faithful to you alone,

create a mixture of earth, ink, and myrrh. Shape this concoction into the form of a crocodile and place it inside a lead coffin. On the coffin, inscribe the great Name, along with the name of your wife, and the following command: Let NN not cohabit with any other man except me, NN. (PGM XIII. 324–325 in Betz, 1986, p. 181)

Some nineteenth-century procedures served the same goal – to strip a man’s virile power one had to make the following incantation:

I NN blow on you,
and take your drops of blood:
first from your heart,
second from your liver,
and third from your vital force,
by which I take your strength and virile force.
(Hbbi Massa danti Lantien. J.J.J. Rackow, Neustettin district in Jahn, 1886, no. 452)

In an even more sophisticated form, another idea was to deprive the woman of her fertility. In such cases, one had to wait for a young couple to go to church, to “take the lock (padlock); drop a few drops of the young woman’s blood on it, and then throw it with the keyhole open into a well. As soon as the blood dissolved and the lock started to rust in the specific place, the woman would become sick and eventually die. If one left the key in the lock and turned it, the young woman was never to become a mother” (Liepe on Usedom in Jahn, 1886, no. 521; see Moszyński, 1934, p. 285).

As stated by the Newton’s third principle of dynamics, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and there must also have been magical procedures which, if necessary, restored lost or deprived male strength. To this end, the genitals had to be fumigated using a tooth of a dead man (Rackow, Neustettin in Jahn, 1886, no. 586). If a man’s virility was lost and it was suspected that a woman had bewitched him to make sure he had nothing to do with any other woman, the man’s testicles were to be smeared with the blood of a billy goat to counteract the effect (Egypt. *Geheimn.* II, p. 24 in Jahn, 1886, no. 604).

The herb called valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) was an excellent anti-aphrodisiac. Just rubbing it on an object belonging to someone caused its owner to be loathed (Moszyński, 1934, p. 339). Myrtle (in German – *der Myrte*) was said to have a similar effect.

Making the beloved person stay or come back

First, the lover had to be won over, then bound to stay, and finally, if need be, made to return. Among the most cherished literary depictions of love spells there are those presented in Theocritus' *Idyll* 2. In the poem, a lovelorn woman performs a complex incantation with the aim of compelling her wandering lover to reunite with her (See Faraone, 2001, p. 9).

In his lost poem *Arae* (*Curses*), the Hellenistic poet Moero reportedly recounted a similar tale, featuring a Corinthian housewife named Alcinoe. In the narrative, Alcinoe unjustly mistreats and dismisses her servant, provoking the latter's ire. The enraged servant beseeches Athena for vengeance, prompting the goddess to enact a fitting punishment: she compels Alcinoe "to fall madly in love with a Samian stranger... and to abandon her home and children to sail away with him" (Faraone, 2001, p. 22).

Within the monotheistic religion, where a monogamous marriage was, at least officially, particularly precious, there is no shortage of evidence of procedures that guaranteed fidelity or allowed to win back the beloved by magic. In order for a woman to remain faithful to her husband for the rest of her life, the heart of a turtledove had to be captured and given to the wife to eat on the wedding day (Rackow, Neustettin in Jahn, 1886, no. 689). In order for the husband, who had left for another, to return, a scrap of cloth had to be cut from the semen-stained crotch of old trousers, thrown into a cauldron, under which a large fire had to be lit in an open field:

As soon as the water begins to boil, the man who has fled will know no peace; he must return to his native place as soon as may be. (Tempelburg, Neustettin in Jahn, 1886, no. 556)

A man wishing to bind his fiancée to himself should walk silently in her footsteps and then return using the same steps walking backwards – then she will surely stay with him (Konow, Kammin in Jahn, 1886, no. 558). Songs speak of picking the footprint of the beloved and wearing it on one's heart. Among the Southern Slavs, a girl would take soil from the footprint of the boy who was obliged to love her, and plant in it unfading flowers to make the feeling last (Moszyński, 1934, p. 294).

One could also cast a spell:

Two hearts joined together, and the key thrown into the sea.

No one will separate us, except Thou, o Lord. (Koprowska-Głowacka, 2016, p. 107)

Summary

The Nestor's Cup Inscription, dating back to the late eighth century BC, stands as one of the earliest documented instances of written Greek text. The inscription appears to be an incantation crafted to imbue a cup of wine with amorous potency, highlighting the ancient Greeks' early engagement with love magic and the mystical properties

attributed to certain objects: “Whoever drinks from this cup, desire for beautifully crowned Aphrodite will seize him instantly” (Faraone, 2001, p. 12).¹⁵

The similarities between love charms in antiquity stem from a shared understanding of human psychology and common cultural themes rather than direct literary connections. The ancient civilizations may have independently developed similar magical practices based on universal human experience. According to Geller: “the connections between Mesopotamia and Greece in this regard are effectively explained by Freudian concepts such as unconscious desires and universal symbols may offer insights into why certain magical practices emerged independently in different cultures with similar themes” (Geller, 2002).

From such a Freudian, or more broadly – psychological, anthropological and even sociological – perspective, a number of similarities should be noted and considered between the legacy of the Papyri and their equivalents in Egypt and Greece, and the nineteenth century folk beliefs in Pomerania and Masuria. Over the centuries, human nature and magical procedures relating to love are congenial, because essentially, their purpose was also the same. What differs, of course, is the entire range of geographical, historical, cultural context and customs. No one in Pomerania referred to mummification and crocodiles, and for geographical reasons, the herbs, plants and often animals involved in procedures and spells were also different – still, the practice of magic in both contexts displays considerable similarities.

However, it is impossible not to also point out the many differences between these two traditions. In antiquity, incantations were addressed to many gods, while in the monotheistic world of Pomerania, behind the scheming magical ploys there is more likely the devil and the witch who is at his service, although the spells also include numerous references to saints and to God (Moszyński, 1934, p. 193). The ancient gods backing magical rituals do not lose but gain their social appeal, while the witch and the devil, although universally despised, became attractive if the requests and their interventions proved successful.

In the ancient world, people using spells demanded sex from the enchanted women, but among Pomeranians this was most often not openly mentioned, and the magical procedures foregrounded marriage. Again, in the ancient world, the vast majority of demands for magic originated from men, while in the nineteenth century, despite the patriarchal social structure, the number of male and female requests was nearly equal. In such estimates, we need to remain cautious, especially in the case of the ancient legacy, since the reserved material is not necessarily quantitatively representative of the actual situation. There is also plenty of evidence of women seeking magical interventions, and my comment applies mainly to binding spells.

By closely studying magical papyri and 19th-century folk knowledge concerning love, we begin to realize that the idea of romantic love is a late invention, perhaps medieval, associated with wandering knights and troubadours, and most likely much later, concerning the post-World War II era (the Baby Boomers generation). Earlier, we can talk about individual cases that became famous due to their uniqueness,

¹⁵ The possible meaning of the cup's inscription related to magic and curses (Arrington, 2021, p. 181; Faraone, 1996) and other interpretations (Gaunt, 2017).

and thus some of them became the basis for artistic interpretations. The bare facts, however, show that from a magical perspective, love was enforced, obtained like a hunting object. The object of desire was not asked for consent, flowers were not sent, but everything was done to hypnotize and obtain the object of love; there is no place in this practice for tenderness and reciprocity. A good metaphor for love would be a mole or a bat as the embodiment of blindness. Love is blind; it must be obtained, maintained, and if problems arise, fidelity must be enforced. Most often, it is confused solely with desire. And such a synthesis concern both these very temporally, culturally, and geographically distant epochs. In the light of the presented material and analysis, the known adage *amor omnia vincit* can be usefully paraphrased as magic successfully binds everyone.

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