

Relics, Remnants, and Religion: An Undergraduate Journal in Religious Studies

Volume 1 | Issue 1

Article 2

5-13-2016

Erotic Magic in Ancient Greece

Emily Beth Santor

University of Puget Sound, esantor@pugetsound.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/relics>

Recommended Citation

Santor, Emily Beth (2016) "Erotic Magic in Ancient Greece," *Relics, Remnants, and Religion: An Undergraduate Journal in Religious Studies*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/relics/vol1/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Sound Ideas. It has been accepted for inclusion in Relics, Remnants, and Religion: An Undergraduate Journal in Religious Studies by an authorized editor of Sound Ideas. For more information, please contact soundideas@pugetsound.edu.

Erotic Magic in Ancient Greece

By Emily Beth Santor

INTRODUCTION

Curse tablets in ancient Greek culture were an occult practice exercised outside the boundaries of proper society. These tablets were generally engraved blocks of lead pierced with an iron nail. The action of hammering the nail through the tablet was meant to bind the curse, hence the Latin term for curse tablets, *defixiones*, which roughly translates to ‘binding spell.’ *Defixiones* were employed for various purposes – revenge, love, financial gain, social advancement etc. Erotic magic encompassed the use of *defixiones* for attracting lovers, corrupting chaste women, and any other purpose having to do with love.

SPELL TO FIX MISOGYNISTIC *SALAUDS*

Misogynistic *salauds* are heretofore defined as idiots who assume that due to the fact that they happen to have penises, they are therefore entitled to treat anyone and everyone however they choose – especially (unfortunately) women (who are awesome). The spell outlined here would serve to remind these kinds of men that they are not the center of the universe and that if they choose to act in a way that reflects an attitude of arrogance, they then must suffer the consequences.

Esprits de l'univers, écoutez-moi! Je demande à Aphrodite. Protegez-moi, guidez-moi, et benissez mon travail. Je demande à Hecate. Aidez-moi être forte, lucide, et impitoyable avec mes buts. Je me fait le champion des femmes du monde. Je voudrais humilier tous les hommes qui sont tricheurs, menteurs, mechants, et brutals. Les hommes qui croient qu'ils sont des dieus sur la terre devrait comprendre les horruers qu'ils avaient effectués sur des femmes.

Pour faire cette magi, prends des cheveux de l'homme specifique. Attache-les autour deux pommes de pin. La premiere nuit du mois, sous la lumiere de la lune, dans un jardin des roses, construit un grand feu. En disant ces mos suivants, laisse tomber les pommes de pin dans

*le feu; “Comme les pommes de pin enflammé, les testicules de l’homme vont devrient
extremement chaud et puis, desintegrent comme des cendres.”*

Finalemnt, on chant:

*“Enseignez cet homme à comprendre/ pourquoi je les femmes defends/ C’est à cause du roi/ que
je fais ca – assure que l’egalité reprends.”*

English Translation:

*Spirits of the universe, listen to me. I call on Aphrodite. Protect me, guide me, and bless
my work. I call on Hecate. Help me be strong, clear-headed, and merciless in my goals. I
champion the women of the world. I aim to humble any man who cheats on, lies to, brutalizes,
or in any other way harms a woman. Men who believe that they are gods walking the earth
without reproach or repercussion must be made to understand the horrors suffered by women at
their hands.*

*To do this, take the hair of the man guilty of arrogance or other wrongdoing. Tie his hair
around two pine cones. On the first night of the month, under the light of the moon, in a garden
of roses, build a large fire. While speaking the following words, let the pinecones fall into the
flames; “like the burning pinecones, let the balls of this man become extremely and painfully hot
before disintegrating like ashes.”*

To complete the ritual, sing or chant:

*“Teach this man to understand/ exactly why I reprimand. Because the law of this old king/ must
I do this nasty thing – ensure equality forever stands.*

This spell is displayed as a recipe in order that the component parts can be clearly examined and discussed. The context of such a spell can be easily imagined: in a patriarchal society, a man has been a misogynistic *salaud* through either word or action. The woman affected decides to take action to prevent further harm and punish him for treating her less well than she deserves as a human living here on Earth. The agent in this case could either be the woman herself or a female compatriot acting on her behalf. The victim is, obviously, the man responsible for causing her anguish.

The magic operates by securing Aphrodite’s approval and through Hecate’s power. Aphrodite represents female agency as symbolized through female sexuality. Hecate represents the power and will to transcend patriarchal boundaries to achieve autonomy and justice. The

pinecones act as a totem to bind the man physically to the magic via his hair. What happens to the pinecones happens to the man, as directed through the words of the spell. The offended woman could very well choose to exact other punishments on the man with the pinecone totem, rather than the default (burning his balls until they are nothing but ash). This spell's only restrictions are the limits of the enactor's imagination. This allowance permits the offended woman to tailor the punishment to fit the man's crime, or rather to satisfy her personal visualization of justice. The magic thus operates not only as a function of divine power, but also through the raw emotional energy of the scorned woman.

An example of similar erotic magic can be found in the Greek Magical Papyri:

“Take a mussel shell from the sea and paint the figure of Typhon...with myrrh ink, together with his names, in a circle, and cast it into the furnace of a bathhouse. When you cast the shell, recite these names written in a circle and add ‘Bring me (insert her name), whom (insert her name) bore, today, from this hour, burning in her soul and her heart, quickly, quickly, now, now.’ ...on reciting the spell, preface it with this: ‘Thus is the god of compulsion ÔKÊSÊ EÊRINAREMIN DNTÊNTAIN PHOOU TÔNKTÔ MNÊ SIETHÔN OSIRI ENABÔTH PHANOU LAMPSOUÔR IEOU IÔ IÔ AI EI AÔ, bring (insert her name), the daughter of (insert her mother's name), to me, and so on.’ This recipe exploits the heat of the bathhouse to instill the heat of desire.”¹

The magical words in this example can be clearly found in the ambiguous Greek preface. The magical aspect of the words in my spell is that they are in a language other than English – the primary language of the Western world today. I choose French due to the fact that I can understand their meaning, but not necessarily everyone reading or hearing the spell would comprehend their purpose – much like the nonsense words employed in Graeco-Roman magic. This choice is meant to showcase the esoteric nature of spell work. Similar to my spell's invocation of Aphrodite and Hecate to accomplish its goals, the mussel shell example calls upon

¹ Betz, Hans Dieter. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 130.

“the god of compulsion” and appears to reference Osiris in the preface. The choice of god reflects the purpose of each spell. Typhon is meant to ‘encourage’ a woman to fall in love with a man whereas Aphrodite and Hecate are meant to protect and support an enraged woman in her quest for justice (perhaps this woman is vengeful because some coward used this mussel shell spell on her). Both rituals involve binding the victim to the power source: the victim’s name is spoken over a painted mussel shell in one instance, and the victim’s DNA in the form of human hair is physically attached to a symbol of goddess power. Here, it is important to note for non-French speakers that the word for pinecone, *pomme de pin*, literally translates as “apple of pine.” Hence, in the original French, Aphrodite’s symbol – the apple – is directly represented. Finally, the rituals share a similarity in the use of heat as a conduit through which the victim receives the desires of the agent. For the man, he desires love, and the heat is intended to create the fire of love in the woman. For the woman, she desires retribution, so in this case, the heat acts as a punishing mechanism that burns away the root of male sin. By removing the source of the offending man’s testosterone, the avenging woman not only achieves justice for herself but also ensures that the man will be less likely to commit similar atrocities in the future.

Bibliography

Betz, Hans Dieter. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.