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# Eros mágico. Recetas eróticas mágicas del mundo antiguo

Emilio Suárez de la Torre, *Eros mágico. Recetas eróticas mágicas del mundo antiguo*. *Monografías de Filología Griega*, 31. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2021. Pp. 346. ISBN 9788413402772 €21,15.

## Review by

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## Preview

Magical practices have been a persistent element in cultures, from ancient civilizations until our present moment. Love is one of the most frequent motivations for the practitioners of such rituals, appearing in the rudimentary curses found in the oldest lead tablets of the Greco-Roman world and the huge and complex rituals in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (*Papyri Graecae Magicae*, *PGM*). Love in non-literary magical sources is the main theme of the present book. Emilio Suárez de la Torre, an authority in the field of ancient magic, and especially regarding the *Greek Magical Papyri*, has been responsible for many research projects hosted by Spanish universities (Universidad de Valladolid and Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona) focusing on ancient magical practices. Suárez de la Torre has also produced a wide range of publications devoted especially to ancient love magic in non-literary sources, and some of the chapters in *Eros mágico* are, as is noted, reprinted versions of previously published work with some changes.

The book is divided into two major parts: Part 1 (pp. 27-126) deals with theoretical questions regarding magic in Antiquity, namely the edition of the papyri, the figure of the mage, and the presence and role of Aphrodite and Eros in the papyri containing erotic spells. Part 2 (pp. 127-285) focuses firstly on the magical recipes in papyri with erotic formulas, and summarizes and analyzes examples cast by both men and women. Before starting, Suárez de la Torre offers a brief overview of the theme of love in Greek and Roman literature (although discussion of literary sources is virtually absent from the rest of this work) and in non-literary documents that convey an erotic message: papyri, *defixiones*, amulets, gems, and *ostraka* (pp. 19-26).

The book opens by addressing the complex questions of what magic is and its relationship with religion. Suárez de la Torre then offers a brief summary of the preservation and edition of the magical papyri, and he also discusses the purposes of the

spells contained therein. After dealing with the figure of the mage (pp. 40-50), Suárez de la Torre analyzes the content and structure of main papyri (pp. 51-75): *PGM* I, VI + II, III, IV, XII, and XIII. He notes, for example, the transmission of the magical knowledge conveyed in some papyri, specifically the use of an epistle to teach how a spell should be performed, found in *PGM* I and IV.

The largest section of the first part (pp. 76-126) is dedicated to the divinities present in the rituals described in the papyri, where Suárez de la Torre stresses the presence of gods from the Greco-Roman-Egyptian pantheons. Special attention is given, naturally, to the figures of Aphrodite and Eros. The author analyzes minor erotic spells where Aphrodite is mentioned, and he pays close attention to an *agōgē* spell in *PGM* IV 2891-2942, highlighting and interpreting its main characteristics, namely the use of *uoces magicae* and the hymn dedicated to the goddess. Further attention is paid to *PGM* IV 3209-3254, a spell with a divinatory goal. As far as Eros is concerned, Suárez de la Torre highlights two recipes (*PGM* IV 1715-1867 and XII 14-95). Here the relation between Eros and Psyche has a central role, and Suárez de la Torre notes the strong presence of the soul in erotic spells, where it appears almost like a human organ, as well as the assimilation of Eros to Egyptian deities.

The second major part of the book deals particularly with the practitioners of erotic spells and curses in the papyri. Suárez de la Torre presents a study of the most ancient formularies with erotic spells, in chronological order, from 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE (*PGM* CXVII) to 5<sup>th</sup> cent. CE, highlighting the main characteristics of practices, in particular the divinities invoked, the practitioner's expressed desire to be loved, and the physical effects on the person who is the target of the spell (for example, the inability to eat, or sleep until the effect is accomplished). A more detailed study is devoted to *PGM* LXI, especially concerning the use of a gecko as a persuasive analogy in an *agōgē* spell. After discussing some short spells, the author focuses on three particular papyri: *PGM* IV (pp. 174-184), *PGM* VII (pp. 184-191), and *PGM* XXXVI (pp. 191-198), examining the main features of the *philtrokatadesmoi* and *agōgē* spells.

The last section (pp. 200-285) is devoted to brief chronological reviews of curses whose practitioners are identified, and special attention is given to erotic *defixiones*, starting from 6/5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This section is divided into two parts, with curses performed by women treated separately from those performed by men, although their main goal and characteristics turn out to be mostly the same. Of the almost eighty curses analyzed here, around sixty relate to male practitioners, and twenty to female. Here I call attention to the very complete analysis of *Supplementum Magicum* (*SM*) I 49-51 (pp. 219-237), which Suárez de la Torre calls 'an exceptional example' of spells, written from the same formula and with the same erotic goal (p. 219). Also noteworthy is the extensive analysis of *SM* 42 (pp. 269-285), a case of homoerotic love, which uses versified curses. Suárez de la Torre made the good decision to present an exhaustive list of erotic spells and curse tablets by both men and women, providing readers with an important collection of information that is not always easy to find, facilitating a comparative study between curses practiced by both sexes.

Lastly, a word about the bibliography (pp. 297-325). I find it complete, rich, and up to date. I would say that this is probably one of the most complete bibliographical lists concerning (erotic) magic in non-literary sources, and it provides an essential reference for anyone studying these topics. Concerning curse tablets, I only missed the citation of the essential study by Daniel Ogden, 'Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds', in B. Ankarloo and C. Bengt (eds), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, pp. 3-90.

To sum up, this is an invaluable study for anyone working in the field of ancient magic, since it offers a comprehensive approach to the history, structure, and content of erotic and magical papyri, and curse tablets. Besides a rich and original analysis of the sources, readers will also find an important guide to further reading and discussion of these texts. Although it does not deal with Greco-Roman literary accounts of the practice of magic, this study facilitates a deeper comparative analysis of both literary and non-literary sources. Finally, I hope this book receives a translation into English soon, so it may be accessible to a wider number of readers, since, in addition to its value for the academic, a generalist audience will also find it interesting and enlightening.