Chapter Fifteen

AGENTS AND VICTIMS:
CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AND DESIRE IN ANCIENT GREEK LOVE MAGIC

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Classical literature, from the “deception of Zeus” episode in the Iliad to the scenes of witchcraft in Apuleius’s Golden Ass, is replete with allusions to and parodies and detailed descriptions of love magic, and in recent years, beginning with a pathbreaking essay by Jack Winkler, scholars have shown how the veracity of these literary accounts can be affirmed by the growing archaeological, epigraphical, and papyrological evidence for the actual use of love spells in the Greco-Roman world. Given the celebrated polarization of male and female in Greek thought and social practices, it will come as no surprise that these popular love spells generally fall into two very distinct categories: those rituals used mainly by men to instill eros (erotic passion) in women and those used mainly by women to maintain or increase philia (affection or friendship) in men. We shall see, however, how this taxonomy forces us to think about the small number of exceptions where the general pattern is violated: for example, when socially inferior men seem to use the same types of facial ointments, amulets, and love potions that women use to ensure the affection of a male superior—a parallelism that confirms traditional feminist and Foucauldian readings of the ancient Greek construction of the female as a weak or otherwise inferior male. On the other hand, the fact that courtesans, prostitutes, and other autonomous women occasionally seem to co-opt traditional male spells for producing eros suggests that these women were understood to be anomalous “males,” a reading that confronts traditional interpretations of courtesans as an abused and despised group and suggests that they could in fact be admired (somewhat like Spartan women) for their “masculine” vigor and independence. My first goal, then, is to show in detail what the evidence for ancient Greek love spells can tell us about the social construction of gender of those who performed such spells in classical antiquity.

Second, I will discuss how the expected effects of the two types of love magic on males and females allow us to delve a little deeper into the Greek understanding of men and women as different kinds of desiring subjects. My conclusions here will call into question the existence of a monolithic “misogynist” model according to which ancient Greek males saw female sexuality as a source of great fear and imagined that women were a weak link in patriarchal schemes for the orderly transference of property down through the generations by means of betrothal marriage and property exchange. According to this view, if left to their own devices (Greek men feared) their women would mate indiscriminately with whatever males might cross their paths. In my conclusion I shall argue to the contrary that the evidence for Greek love magic suggests the existence of another, competing set of cultural assumptions that I follow Winkler in dubbing the “misandrist” model, according to which autonomous men are the “naturally” lascivious, passionate, and hypersexed gender, while women—on the other hand—are “naturally” resistant to sexual adventures and more inclined to be loyal to their fathers and husbands. My second goal, then, is to see how the intended male or female victims of a love charm are constructed as desiring subjects.

Before I begin, however, it will be helpful to offer a very brief survey of ancient Greek love magic and a taxonomy that separates the field of “love magic” into two distinct categories: those rituals used generally by men to instill erotic passion in women and those used generally by women to maintain or increase affection in men. I summarize these categories of use in table 1. The first column shows the types of spells that women traditionally use to induce philia and similar affections in men, while the second column shows those magic rituals that men usually employ to throw eros into women. Note how each group of rituals is deployed in a very different social context. The former were generally used within a household or at least within an existing relationship to increase a man’s affection and esteem for his partner or associates. The Greeks generally describe such feelings with words connected etymologically with the nouns philia and agapē, both of which in their root meaning refer to “affection” and “love” in a wide range of relationships, including but not limited to family members, friends, and spouses. In the last case (marriage), these terms can be used to signal bodily
Table 1: A Taxonomy of Ancient Greek Love Spells

- **TYPE OF SPELL OR DEVICE**
  - Spells for Inducing *Philia*
    - Amulets, rings, love potions, or ointments
  - Spells for Inducing *Eros*
    - Apple-spells or spells that lead the victim to the agent
- **EXPECTED ACTION**
  - Burns, tortures, or maddens its victims, thereby emboldening them to leave their homes and come to the practitioner
  - Burns, tortures, or maddens its victims, thereby emboldening them to leave their homes and come to the practitioner
- **EXPECTED EFFECT**
  - Love or affection
  - *(philia, agapé, storgé)*
  - Uncontrollable lust
  - *(erōs, pothos, himeros, oistros)*
- **SOCIAL CONTEXT**
  - Used by an insider within a marriage or an existing relationship to repair or heal it
  - Used by an outsider in courtship or seduction to destroy existing loyalties to natal family, spouse, or community
- **TYPICAL USERS**
  - Wives or social inferiors
  - Men, courtesans, or whores
- **TYPICAL VICTIMS**
  - Husbands, kings, and other male “heads of households”
  - Young women and men, usually living in their natal home
- **MYTHIC EXAMPLES**
  - Hera against Zeus; Delaneira against Hippomenes against Atalanta; Hades against Persephone; Jason against Medea

...passions as well, which is precisely what we see in the *Iliad*, where Hera clearly uses an amulet to arouse sexual desire in Zeus. The charms that arouse *erōs*, on the other hand, are almost always used to begin a new relationship by forcing the victims (usually but not always women) from their homes and into the arms of the people who perform the spell. In this case the spell is designed explicitly to arouse the victim’s sexual desire for the practitioner, as is abundantly clear from the repeated use of the Greek nouns *erōs* and *pothos* and related verbs and adjectives.

I should pause for a moment to make the linguistic distinctions between the categories “*erōs* magic” (= “spells that induce passion”) and “*philia* magic” (= “spells that induce affection”) as clear as possible, since modern notions of the meanings of “erotic” may cause problems here. In archaic and classical Greek discourse there is a clear difference between the invasive and dangerous onset of *erōs* and the more benign feelings of *philia*, a term which generally describes a reciprocal relationship based on mutual affection. Thus, from the earliest periods Greeks either describe the onset of *erōs* as an invasive, demonic attack or use a ballistic model whereby Aphrodite is said to throw at or hit someone with *erōs* or *pothos*. On the other hand, Greeks never personify or demonize *philia* or *agapē*, nor do they ever picture a deity hurling *philia* or *agapē* at mortals in a hostile way. This distinction should not, as I have noted, be overdrawn in a way that denies a sexual component to “*philia* magic.” Indeed, here I am careful to avoid the polar opposition of “erotic magic” to “nongeneric magic” and insist that the real emphasis lies on the term *erōs*, which for the Greeks was clearly and narrowly defined as a dangerous, unwholesome, and irresistible lust that aims squarely and explicitly at sexual intercourse.

Finally, note that these two types of love spells accord well with the two larger categories of Greek magical technology: beneficial charms (i.e., “white magic”) which usually aim at warding off or curing an illness, and harmful “black magic,” which generally seeks to harm or destroy its victim. Thus, although some of the *philia* charms traditionally deployed by women against men—ointments and amulets—dovetail in obvious ways with the adornment of Greek women, who use jewelry and ointments to increase their personal attractiveness, such devices—especially when we include love potions in the group—are also part of the Greek corpus of healing and prophylactic lore, a fact which suggests that this whole branch of *philia* magic may aim (at least conceptually) at protecting an existing relationship or curing a sick one. The various types of *erōs* spells, on the other hand, are clearly related to the large arsenal of rituals used in the more masculine world of curses and other invasive techniques: for example, the binding, burning, melting, and torture of effigies of the victim. These commonalities suggest that the general category of “love magic”—which appears in the title of this article—may not, in fact, have been recognizable to the Greeks themselves, who may have seen *erōs* magic as a specialized extension of cursing rituals and *philia* spells as a subcategory of healing and protective rites.

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**The Socially Constructed Gender of the Agent**

In the fourteenth book of the *Iliad*, Hera asks Aphrodite to lend her the magical *kestos himas*, mendaciously asserting that she wishes to stop the bickering of her parents, Oceanus and Tethys (14.197–210): “since now for a long time they have stayed apart from each other and from their marriage...
bed, since bitter anger has fallen upon their hearts." Hera, however, goes on, to use the *kestos himas* against her own husband, and parallels from contemporary Mesopotamian magic and later Greek love spells suggest that there existed in the Near East and the Mediterranean basin a long tradition of women using knotted cords and other amulets to calm angry husbands and to make them more affectionate, in part by increasing their own attractiveness.8 And although we are accustomed to think of an amulet as self-induced "protective" magic and an aphrodisiac as invasie magic aimed at another, passages from Theophrastus, Pliny the Elder, the *Cynanides*, and the Greek magical papyri reveal a continuous tradition of belief that some amulets could be used to affect the way other people perceive and interact with the person who wears or carries the amulet. Thus, instead of simply asking that some evil be turned away, the invocations inscribed on these amulets often request that some abstract benefit be granted. For instance, a second- or third-century-c.e. silver amulet from Oxyrhynchus reads: "Grant charm, friendship, success, and sexiness to the man wearing this amulet [phylacterion]."9 Here the charm in a self-referential manner uses the Greek word *phylacterion* (literally "a thing that protects") to describe a device that is primarily concerned with increasing the beauty of the owner and affection of others. It is also significant that amulets designed to increase a man's affection and those that work as general "good luck charms" are often combined and blurred with still another genre, the "charm to restrain anger." A good example is the following recipe from a Greek magical handbook:10 "A charm to restrain anger and a charm to secure favor and the best charm for gaining victory in the law courts — it even works against kings; no charm is greater! Take a silver tablet and inscribe with a bronze stylus the following . . . and wear it under your garment and you will be victorious." The prayer to be inscribed on the tablet reads: "Give to me, Mr. So-and-So, to whom Ms. So-and-So bore, victory, charm, reputation, advantage over all men and women, especially over Mr. So-and-So, whom Ms. So-and-So bore, forever and all time." This is a recipe for a general charm that will bring success over all men and women, but the mention in the advertisement of kings and law courts and the place to insert the name of a single man as the primary target ("especially over Mr. So-and-So") suggests that we have a spell aimed originally at a king, a judge, or some other male at the apex of some social group. A second-century-c.e. gold amulet from Thessalonika includes a similar stipulation: "Grant favor, success with all men and women, but especially with him, whomever she herself wishes."11 Indeed, these spells are often designed for political situations such as an appearance in a royal audience or a court of law, where the petitioner finds himself in "the presence of a king or magistrate."12 An elaborately inscribed Greek amulet from Arabia gives us some sense of how such charms worked in the practical world of a Roman provincial capital: "Give charm, glory, and victory to Proclus, whom Salvina bore, before Diogenianus, the military governor of Bosra in Arabia and before Pelagius the assessor, and before all men small and great . . . in order that he might win, justly or unjustly, every law suit before every judge and adjudicator."13

There is, then, good evidence for the use of a special kind of amulet that people might place upon their own bodies in hopes of increasing their own personal charm and beauty in the eyes of a husband or a male superior. We see a similar pattern in the abundant testimony that wives regularly prepared love potions and ointments for their husbands.14 The evidence ranges from the myth about Deianeira's gift to Heracles of a garment smeared with a putative love potion and a complicated legal trial in classical Athens of two women accused of killing their husbands with love potions to the repeated anecdotes about Greek tyrants and Roman emperors similarly attacked by their spouses or concubines. Plutarch tells us, for example, the story of Aretaphila, who was accused of poisoning her husband, the hated tyrant of Cyrene during the first century c.e. (Mor. 256c): "But when she was apprehended by the proofs, and saw that her preparations for the poisoning admitted no denial, she confessed but said that she had prepared no fatal poisoning: 'No, my dear' she said 'my striving is for very important things: your goodwill [emphos] for me, and the repute and influence which I enjoy because of you. . . . It was foolish and feminine, perhaps, but not deserving of death, unless you as judge decide to put to death because of love spells and sorcery a woman who yearns for more affection [pleon . . . philoteithai] than you are willing to grant her.'" Plutarch, Juvenal, and Greco-Roman marriage contracts attest, moreover, to a persistent male fear that their wives might ply them with *pharmaka* as a means of controlling them. This broad background of wifely love potions, however, considerably raises our interest in the case of the Roman general Lucullus, whose demise was reported by the first-century-b.c.e. Roman biographer Nepos:15 "Cornelius Nepos says that Lucullus was affected neither by old age or sickness, but rather that he was crippled by drugs [pharmaka] given to him by Callisthenes, his freedman. The drugs were given in order that Callisthenes might be loved more [hos agoipito mallon] by him — they were supposed to have that sort of power — but they diverted and overwhelmed Lucullus's mind to such a degree that while he was still alive his brother took charge of his affairs." One might in this case assume that Lucullus's Greek freedman was motivated by jealousy arising out of an erotic relationship; this may be true, al-
though the verb used here (agapasthai) is an impediment to such an argument, as it almost never connotes sexual love. It is perhaps more important to note that there is here a clearly discernible political dimension to the act: like the wife of a tyrant or king, Callisthenes, a socially inferior freedman, may have feared for his powerful position in the general's retinue—in other words, he had a concern about his personal prestige much like those which underlie many other narratives about wives who attack their spouses with love potions. Thus, although the great preponderance of evidence from Sophocles to Plutarch suggests that wives were the traditional users of love potions and husbands were invariably their victims, we can see how Callisthenes, Lysias's Greek freedman, apparently used the same kind of "widely" magic when he found himself in a similar social situation. This exception to the rule that love potions and ointments are usually given by women to their husbands dovetails neatly with the crossovers discussed earlier between amulets used by women to control their husbands and those worn by men to gain the esteem, friendship, and goodwill of other men in positions of authority, such as kings or Roman governors. In the case of philtre-producing magic, then, it is fairly obvious that the female gender of the user is constructed in such a way as to include socially inferior males as well, a common feature of ancient Greek culture that feminist scholars and others have noted for some time now.

We find a similar set of anomalies when we turn to the gender of those who deploy eros-producing spells, the great majority of which are aimed by men at women. These spells are notorious for their focus on the torture of the female victim with fire and pain until she comes to the male practitioner, as, for example, in this Roman-era spell: "attract, inflame, destroy, burn, cause her to swoon from love as she is being burnt... goad the tortured psyche, the heart of Karosa, whom Thelo bore, until she leaps forth and comes to Apalos, whom Theonilla bore, out of passion and love, in this very hour, immediately, immediately; quickly, quickly." These spells are at least as old as the classical period, and the great majority of them are deployed by men against women in the hopes of driving them out of their homes and into the arms of the man who uses the spell. Thus, of the eighty or more extant eros spells, only seven are used by women to attract men. We are unable to say, of course, precisely who these women were, but literary evidence beginning in the classical period suggests that one special group of females regularly co-opted these traditionally male forms of magic: courtesans and prostitutes. Socrates' banter with the famous courtesan Theodote, for example, hints quite openly that courtesans learned and used such spells on their clients, and the speech of Just Argument in Aristophanes' Clouds likewise informs us that another type of eros spell used traditionally by men against women—the charmed apple—was also deployed by prostitutes in hopes of gaining new customers.

In fact, courtesans and prostitutes appear regularly in our literary evidence as users of eros spells. Lucian, for example, depicts two Athenian courtesans, Melitta and Bacchis, swapping tales and recipes. He begins with Melitta's plea for some help in retrieving a lost boyfriend (Dialogues of the Courtesans 4.1): "Do you know of any old women of the kind called 'Thessalians'?... They sing incantations and they make women desirable [erasmious] even if they are entirely despised." Contrast Melitta's goal here of being sexually desirable (erasmious) with that of the Greek wives and queens, who give their husbands love potions so that they will be more loved or esteemed. It turns out that Bacchis does not know any "Thessalians," but she recalls how a Syrian sorceress living near the Ceramicus once performed a ritual for her that (she claims) successfully led back Pharias, a boyfriend who had apparently gone off to live with another woman: "She hangs these [i.e., the clothes or hairs of the man] from a peg and heats them up with burning sulfur, sprinkling salt over the fire, and says in addition the names of both people, his and yours. Then she brings out from her bosom a rhombos and whirs it round while speaking with a rapid tongue some incantation of barbaric and frightening names... And not long afterwards... he came to me led by the incantation, despite the fact that his buddies had told him off and Phoebus, the girl with whom he was living, kept pleading with him." Lucian clearly depicts the typically destructive eros spell: it uses fire and the whirling device known as a rhombos, similar to many of the later spells in which a man tortures a woman and forces her to come to him. Here, however, there is an inversion of the usual gender of the participants: a woman uses an eros spell to penetrate the "house" of her boyfriend and force him to return to her.

The logistical problem faced by Bacchis—"leading" or "drawing" a lover out of the house of a rival—is, in fact, precisely the one faced in Theocritus's second Idyll by Simaetha, who performs an elaborate erotic spell designed to get her boyfriend Delphos away from his new lover. Here, too, the ritual has all the hallmarks of a violent eros spell. Simaetha and her servant use a rhombos, like the one employed by Lucian's Syrian sorceress, and they burn various household items such as barley, bay leaves, and wax in hopes of similarly burning the victim. The following lines illustrate the technique:
Delphis brought me trouble, and I for Delphis burn this bay. And as
these bay leaves crackle loud in the fire . . . so too may the flesh of Del-
phis waste in the flame!

Iunx, draw [elle] to my house the man I love!

As with the goddess's aid I melt this wax, so straightway may Delphis of
Myndus waste with love. And as by Aphrodite's power turns this brazen
rhombos, so may he turn about my door.

Iunx, draw to my house the man I love.

Commentators have long noted that nearly all of these magical actions find
direct parallels in the Greek magical papyri, but they have often failed to
realize that the forms of magic used by Sinaetha are those traditionally
used by males to get females out of their homes.

As it turns out, Sinaetha's apparent appropriation of traditionally male
forms of erotic magic fits very well with recent analyses of the poem which
stress her aggressive, masculine role throughout the poem, especially in the
detailed description of her first encounter with Delphis, where she puts her-
self in the role of the male viewer and makes Delphis the object of her own
erotic gaze—a startling co-optation of the traditional male role in homosex-
ual courtship. This equation of Sinaetha with an erōs is helpful in show-
ning how in her behavior Sinaetha inverts traditional Greek expecta-
tions of the female as the passive partner in an erotic encounter. In the past,
this peculiar independence of Sinaetha has also been interpreted as a sign
of the increased mobility and power of all women in Hellenistic cities like
Alexandria, but I would argue that the character of Sinaetha in the sec-
ond Idyll is—like the whore in Aristophanes' Clouds or Lucian's Athen-
courtesans—most probably drawn from a traditional literary stereotype of
the courtesan, who could often be especially forthright in her pursuit of
men and thus was liable to perform the sort of aggressive erotic magic that
was otherwise typical of men. In short, Theocritus seems to present Sinaetha
in a situation that would have been instantly recognizable to his ancient audi-
ence as typical of a courtesan who was trying to get a former lover to re-
turn to her.

The suspicion that prostitutes and mistresses used aggressive types of
erōs magic is, moreover, a very popular one in later Mediterranean history.
The church father John Chrysostom warns married men to stay away from
such women because they use magic to alienate men from their wives, an
accusation that recurs in Byzantine and medieval sources, in Renaissance
Florence and Venice, in sixteenth-century Modena, and in modern Alge-
ria. Such accusations, however, are undoubtedly exaggerated and some-
times even manufactured by the understandable desire to save face: how
else might a family explain such unseemly behavior by an errant husband
or son? The prosecution of such women for erotic magic is further compi-
lcated by issues of social class; there is evidence from premodern Italy and
Spain, for example, that lower-class prostitutes who captivated upper-class
youths were much more frequently and more severely punished by the au-
thorities than upper-class courtesans who used the same devices. The
detailed testimony and court records of the Italian and Spanish show, however,
that these accusations were not simply invented out of whole cloth, but were
in fact based on a core of historically documented practices. In short: most
courtesans and prostitutes seem to know and use erotic magic, although
not all of them were prosecuted or (if they were prosecuted) punished.

In fact, it makes good sense that courtesans in the ancient Greek world
would also use these types of aggressive "male" magic, once we realize that
as a group they were in many ways quite similar to autonomous Greek men,
especially in their economic independence and their education. The suc-
cessful ones, at least, lived in their own houses, provided for their own in-
come, fell in love at first sight, aggressively hunted out their lovers, and
employed other types of public stance and gestures that were traditionally
limited to males. Even the notorious fact that they were mentioned by name
in Athenian oratorical and comedy—usually interpreted as contempt for their
low status—can be taken as a backhanded compliment, for such treat-
ment was usually reserved for the notable men of the city. Indeed, they were
evertheless popular on the comic stage. Athenaeus cites dozens of lost fifth-
and fourth-century Attic comedies which reveal how well educated these
women were and how they excelled in the games and at the sym-
poumion, another exclusively male domain. This peculiar "maleness" of pros-
titutes and courtesans has, in fact, been noted by ethnographers working on
circum-Mediterranean cultures. Prostitutes in Morocco and Algeria, for in-
stance, regularly co-opt aspects of male dress and behavior, as well as certain
types of body language that are culturally defined as male—for instance, sit-
ting or standing with legs spread apart or leaning on doorposts.

This regular equation of courtesan and autonomous male has obvious
parallels in the popular suspicions that powerful queens like Cleopatra used
love magic to attract and then control men; such accusations, of course, have
great explanatory value, for how else might a Roman understand why a
soldier's soldier like Mark Antony would flee ignominiously at the battle of
Actium? Aristophanes slyly alludes to this exchange of “natural” roles when the chorus praises Lysistrata for her skillful use of erotic magic: “Hail, O most manly (andresioiato) of all women, since the most powerful of the Greeks have been seized by your iunx spell and have come to you en masse.” This is figurative language, of course, but quite appropriate for a stage full of Greek men with painful erections. I am, however, most interested in the fact that Lysistrata, in her putative role as expert handler of a iunx spell, is called “most manly.” This odd understanding of the maleness of women who use eros magic also shows up in the stereotypical representations of witches in later Roman literature. Horace alludes to the “masculine passion” of Canidia—perhaps a prostitute herself—who performs an erotic spell that employs one dominant female effigy abusing and threatening a smaller male doll. In Apuleius’s Metamorphoses, the protagonist Lucius is warned about a sexually ravenous woman named Pamphile, who like a typical male erastes falls in love at first sight and uses erotic magic to have her way: “No sooner does she catch sight of some young man of attractive appearance than she is consumed by his charm and immediately directs both her gaze and her desire at him. She... [i.e., using magic] attacks his soul and binds him with everlasting shackles of passionate love... I advise you to beware of her, for she is always burning and you are young and handsome enough to suit her.” Widows, especially in the Roman period, when they seem to have an autonomy similar to that of a courtesan, were also prone to erotic behavior, as in the scandalous case of Ismenodora, a young widow who “though previously blameless” was influenced by “the divine force of Eros” and began to pursue a younger man of lower social status, eventually kidnapping and marrying him. In doing so, too, appropriated a traditionally male act of aggression, bridal theft, which is similar in important ways to the genre of eros spells, which also aim at “kidnapping” their victims by violent means. Ismenodora, it would seem, accomplished with her own hands and slaves what other independent women of means attempted with erotic spells.

It would seem, then, that the notions of gender that emerge from this material are social constructions based either on Greek hierarchical notions of the “effeminacy” of subordinates or the “masculinity” of the socially autonomous. Thus, in the case of philia-inducing magic the female gender of the user is constructed vertically according to Greek ideas of social rank and therefore includes males in subservient positions like the freedman Callisthenes and those men who use amulets to charm kings, judges, governors, and other males in positions of authority. In the eros-charms, however, the male gender of the user is constructed according to the relative positions of a protected, ideally chaste victim on the outside and an independent agent on the outside, who tries to force his or her victims from their homes. As such, eros spells are useful both to males—who try to force the daughters and wives of other men out of their homes—and to courtesans and prostitutes, who face similar problems when they need to flush rich young men out of the houses of their parents or girlfriends.

The Construction of the Desiring Victim

In addition to giving us special insights into how the ancient Greeks constructed gender, the forms of ancient Greek love magic and the context of their use also give us some interesting new vantage points for seeing how males and females were constructed as desiring subjects. For instance, the burning, madness, and bodily torture demanded for the (usually) female victim in the eros spells finds parallels in Hippocratic and hagiographic descriptions of female adolescent hysteria and mythographic accounts of the daughters of Proetus, raising the distinct possibility that perhaps these are consistent features of a Greek understanding of female erotic desire. In fact, we find a very similar description of this kind of female desire—also incited by an erotic spell—in a most unlikely source and pertaining to a most unlikely population. Aelian, an early-third-century-c.e. natural historian, reports that a species of land tortoise employs a special herb to facilitate sexual intercourse, an act which—according to the source he cites, a Roman senator named Demostratus—was normally a difficult one, for although the male was by nature a “most lustful creature,” the female was coy and fearful of mating (NA 15.19):

This then is what the females dread... and since they are chaste [sophronousai] and prefer personal safety to pleasure, the males are unable to coax them to the act. And so by some mysterious instinct the males hold out to them an erotic iunx spell and a “banisher of all fear.” But it turns out that the iunx spells of an amorous male tortoise are not songs, by Zeus, such as those which Theocritus, the composer of playful herding songs, sings, but a strange herb of which Demostratus admits that neither he nor anyone else knows the name. Apparently the males adorn themselves with this herb [corruption in the text]. At any rate, if they hold this herb in their mouths, there ensues the exact oppo-
site to what I have described above, for the male becomes enervated, while the female, who hitherto was fleeing, now is burning [phlegomenē]; she is made wild with frenzy [zeôstratav] and desires intercourse.

I suspect that this passage tells us far more about the popular understanding of the expected effects of contemporary love spells on humans than it does about the actual habits of tortoises, but since both Aristotle and Theophrastus tell us quite explicitly that people learn about the healing properties of herbs by watching the behavior of wild animals, we should perhaps keep an open mind on the subject.

In any event, the usually moderate character of the female tortoise (sophronousa: "chaste" or "self-controlled"), who is then "burning" and made "wild with frenzy," accords well with anticipated effects of the erôs spells discussed earlier. The famous orator Polemo, writing about a century earlier than Aelian, reflects a similar understanding about the changes that erotic magic brings about in the female victim. In a thinly veiled diatribe, he accuses his rival Favorinus of fraudulently claiming knowledge of magic: "On top of this, he was a churl in the magic arts.... He made men believe that he could compel women to pursue men the way men pursue women." Here we have one side of the equation given by Aelian: erotic magic forces women to pursue the male practitioner in the same manner as men are (i.e., "naturally") predisposed to pursue women. This idea of "turning tables" or "trading places" is, of course, implicit in other instances of love magic, most famously in Sappho's Hymn to Aphrodite ("for if she flees, quickly she will pursue"), and reminds us that the images of "pursuing" and "fleeing" that we find in both Aelian and Polemo are indeed more commonly applied to homoerotic relationships. In fact, Aelian's tortoises provide a very suggestive model for understanding the wider ramifications of the use of love magic in ancient Greek society, for it seems—broadly speaking—that the technologies of erôs magic and philia magic do aim in similar ways at reversing the "natural" roles of men and women as desiring subjects. Indeed, it would appear from the evidence for love spells that Greek women were thought to be moderate and self-controlled "by nature" like Aelian's female tortoises and that erotic magic somehow manages to reverse their traditional antipathy or coolness to sexual intercourse, whereas conversely it was thought that although men were "naturally" passionate and sexually aggressive, they could be cooled and calmed by the philia spells of women, who seek more permanent and satisfying relations with them. As we shall see below, both of these assumptions are potentially controversial, since they fly in the face of much scholarly work which sees male fear of the "natural" wildness and promiscuity of women as a primary cause of ancient Greek misogyny. In other words, the construction of the victims in ancient Greek love magic as desiring subjects seems to presuppose an inverted model, according to which it is rampant male sexuality that needs to be controlled by chaste and thoughtful women.

This construct of the "naturally" chaste female is by no means limited to the arcana of ancient Greek magical practices or to the later beliefs of Roman authors such as Polemo or Aelian. Indeed, the image of aggressive male pursuit of a reluctant young woman is a staple of Greek myth and is often depicted on vase paintings. Hesiod and Alcaeus, however, give us the first evidence that this normative female chastity can in fact be altered by noxious environmental effects—in this case the rising of the Dog Star (Sirius):

then... women are most lustful and men most weak, since Sirius dries out their head and knees and their skin is withered by the heat. (Hesiod Op. 585-88)

Soak your lungs in wine, for the star is on the rise and the season is harsh and all things are thirsty in the heat... and now women are most polluted and men are weak, since the Dog Star dries out their head and knees. (Alcaeus fr. 347a)

The textual relation between these two passages is controversial but need not detain us, as they are both obviously drawn from the same stratum of folk belief. Indeed, it can hardly be a coincidence that the Adonia—a festival of Aphrodite devoted to female sexuality and a traditional lightning rod for male suspicions about female licentiousness—was also held at the rising of the Dog Star. Later authors certainly understand that both passages refer explicitly to the Dog Star's effect on the sexual desire of females and males. Thus, Pliny the Elder paraphrases: "They (sc. Hesiod and Alcaeus) have written that when the song of the cicada is most piercing, women are most keen for lust and men are most sluggish for sexual intercourse." The author of the Aristotelian Problems explains the rationale behind this belief:

**QUESTION:** Why is it that in summer, men are less able to make love but women more able, just as the poet says of the time when the thistle blooms: "Women are most wanton and men most weak"?

**ANSWER:** Because hot natures collapse in summer by excess of heat.
while cold ones flourish. Now a man is hot and dry but a woman is cold and moist. So the power of a man is diminished at that time, but a woman's power flourishes.

Although this discussion somewhat obscures the Hesiodic emphasis on female lust, it does point up the fact that this early understanding of the seasonal effects of hot summer weather is closely related to traditional Greek beliefs about the bodily humors, whereby males are generally believed to be "naturally" dry and hot, and females cool and wet. Thus, the Dog Star, said to "dry out" and "wither" the heads and knees in a period when "all things are thirsty," would logically have the effect of changing normally moist and cool women into dry and hot men, that is, into "naturally" lascivious beings. This belief, moreover, fits well with the advice of animal herders that one must artificially heat up and dry out the females of the herd in order to encourage them to mate, and may explain the great popularity of those ἐρῶς spells which aim mainly at burning the female victim.

We should recall at this point that in Aelian’s report on the effects of a love charm on land tortoises and in the Hesiodic description of the effects of the rising Dog Star on humans, both sexes were adversely affected, albeit in very different ways: naturally chaste and cool females were made hot and lustful, while normally passionate men were rendered cool and listless. In my discussion above, I focused primarily on the female victim of ἐρῶς magic as a desiring subject, but it is also true that φιλία magic was thought to fundamentally alter the naturally aggressive and passionate males who were its typical victims. This is most clearly spelled out by Plutarch in his advice to young brides (Mor. 139a): "In the same way, women who use love potions [φιλίτρα] and sorcery [γεωτεία] against their husbands, and who gain mastery over them through pleasure, end up living with stunned, senseless, crippled men. The men bewitched by Circe were of no service to her, nor did she have any 'use' at all for them after they had become swine and asses. But Odysseus, who kept his senses and behaved prudently, she loved in excess." Plutarch claims here that by controlling your husband with spells or potions, you weaken his manliness. This is why he mentions the Circe episode in the Odyssey, where the ship’s crew (once they have been "domesticated" by her magic potions) are no longer of any "use" to Circe, a veiled reference to sexual intercourse. The bottom line of the argument is that using drugs or magic to increase your husband's affection is counterproductive, since it leads paradoxically to a loss in his virility.

Although space does not allow a full discussion of the generally enervating and desire-dampening effect of love potions and other forms of φιλία magic, I summarize in table 2 how ancient Greek love spells construct the genders of both agent and victim (see the first two columns) and then in the third column I describe how the victim was thought to change as the result of the spell. This table gives us, I think, some valuable new insights into the theme of "table turning" that frequently turns up in love spells and confirms my suspicions that such spells are often thought like Aelian's unnamed herb to invert the "natural" gender of their victims. Thus, males and other ἀρασταί, such as courtiers and widows, use erotic magic to project the burning desires and mad behaviors typical of an ἀραστὴς onto their female (or feminized) victims, while in the case of φιλία charms, chaste women and other subordinates seek to calm and subordinate their angry and passionate male superiors.

This startling flexibility in the victim's constructed gender seems to presuppose a belief that men and women are essentially of the same species and have the same "nature" (φύσις), a belief associated with Aristotle and with later medical writers such as Hierophilus, Soranus, and Galen, who with the help of human dissection in the Hellenistic period were able to contest the alternate and earlier Hippocratic theory that men and women were essentially two separate species, with different flesh, organs, and diseases. Soranus, for example, noted that excessively active women, like professional acrobats and dancers—that is, those who most closely approximated living a physically demanding male lifestyle—often stopped menstruating, while men who adopted a sedentary lifestyle were thought to grow soft and effeminate. Likewise, we can explain why the rising Dog Star or an erotic magic spell can, for a time at least, turn "naturally" chaste females into ἀραστή, since according to this popular Aristotelian model, at least, environment played an important role in the gendering of an individual. In the light of this cultural background, it is not surprising that (as we saw above) Greek ideas about the effects of the environment and magic on human sexuality also presuppose Aristotelian, not Hippocratic, ideas about the bodily humors.
CONCLUSION

It would seem, then, that the evidence of ancient Greek love magic reflects both a flexible understanding of the gender of the agents of these spells and a model of the desiring subject, according to which females are “naturally” chaste and males “naturally” lascivious. This second model is equally flexible, however, in that it allows for seasonal and other environmental effects, which like love magic can change the “natural” desire in both males and females. This model of the desiring subject, however, runs counter to a large body of scholarship on a popular misogynist vein of Greek thought from Hesiod to Aristotle and beyond that sees women as physically, intellectually, and morally inferior to men. This negative view of women, moreover, is thought to be connected in various ways with a deep-felt male fear that females were “naturally” wild and promiscuous and that it was incumbent upon moderate and self-controlled males—in their roles as fathers, brothers, and husbands—to imprison their womenfolk in the house and control their sexuality so that it was deployed only in the context of a betrothal marriage. The evidence for love magic surveyed in this essay argues, however, for the existence of an alternative to this misogynist model—we might call it a “misandrist model”—according to which men must torture and burn women, because like Aelian’s female tortoises women are by nature self-controlled and sedate, and reluctant to have intercourse. Conversely, women use soporific potions and knotted cords to control the anger and the passion of their “naturally” wild husbands, because like Aelian’s male tortoises they are otherwise naturally wild, passionate, and difficult to control.

The idea that erotic magic attacks a woman’s “natural” loyalty and chastity is, in fact, also manifest in earlier Greek texts that describe the erotic seizure of women. In Euripides’ Hippolytus, Phaedra appears as a paragon of female virtues and an embodiment of the ideals of shame (aidōs) and modesty (sphrosyne), whose “natural” state is completely perverted by the attacks of Aphrodite and Eros. Occasionally the extant erotic spells also mention the goal of attacking the woman’s moral character, for instance, “Make her cease from her arrogance, her thoughtfulness [logismou], and her sense of shame [aischunē].” The attack on the female victim’s “natural” sense of shame is, moreover, often accompanied by an attempt to alienate her from her community. Thus, Jason is said to deploy an eros spell in order to strip Medea of the respect (aidōs) that she (i.e., “naturally”) feels for her parents, and many of the extant eros spells specifically aim at making the woman forget her parents, children, husband, siblings, friends, and neighbors, that is, all those people that make up her moral community. In short, it appears that concerns about female infidelity and impurity were the purview of the women of the family and of the neighborhood themselves, who stress ideals of loyalty to family (both natal and marital) above all else. This dependence on very local emotional ties and female fidelity shows up, in fact, in the eros spells themselves, for although they do imagine success in terms of physically forcing the woman out of her house, these spells never aim to remove the physical barriers to the female victim’s escape, such as one might expect in a culture that assumed the “natural” infidelity of its women. Thus, it is striking that with all of our evidence for the use of eros magic against women, we have absolutely no hint that erotic charms were needed to unbar a locked door or to cast sleep on the eyes of a vigilant father or husband—situations that we might expect in a culture that actively secluded its womenfolk. In short, it would appear that the main obstacles to the users of these spells is not the locked door or the males who guard it, but rather the “natural” modesty of young women and the reverence and loyalty they feel towards their parents, their husbands, or their community.

Finally, although I argue that this “misandrist” model of the chaste female and the wild, passionate male is widely reflected in the practices of ancient Greek love magic, I do not wish to imply that this model is more pervasive or important than the “misogynist,” which is also widely attested in literary texts, albeit primarily in those that survive from Athens. I would argue instead for the existence of at least two competing constructions of and discourses about gender and desire among the Greeks, some which privilege the male and others which privilege the female. We might characterize these competing ideologies as “opposed” or “complementary” or suggest a hierarchy with the terms “dominant” and “muted,” but such fixed and neat schemata run the risk of missing the fluidity in the conceptions of gender that we find regarding love magic. I have pointed out elsewhere, for example, how indications of what we might call “situational gender” surface in those Greek myths in which “naturally” chaste and obedient girls are driven from their homes precisely because it is “unnatural” for them to remain forever modest and devoted to their parents. Thus, in some sense it is correct to say that the misandrist model describes and prescribes a “natural” modest state for prepubescent girls and married women, while the misogynist model does the same for adolescent girls, whose brief period of “naturally” wild and lascivious behavior is sanctioned in myth and explained as the result of divine anger or human magic.

Confusion arises, then, when scholars wrongly argue for a misogynist
model that sees all women as wild and lascivious all the time, when in fact such behavior seems to the ancient Greeks to be a kind of developmental pathology limited to the period of adolescence, when according to patriarchal expectations they must make the transition from their roles as daughters in their fathers’ homes to their new roles as wives and then mothers in the homes of their husbands. Such a flexible and situational model of desire allows Greek women to be chaste daughters and wives but also desirable and desiring brides, a split that appears elsewhere in our sources—for example, in the treatment of women in Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, in which the older women are portrayed in very positive roles as self-disciplined soldiers of a comic sort, while the younger women appear as slaves to their desires for wine and sex who must to be locked in the Acropolis by Lysistrata. This notion of rabid female passion as a transitional or developmental phase is implicit in the mythological pattern, in which female adolescent hysteria (often eroticized) is to be cured by marriage and childbirth, and explicit in the testimony of the cuckold in Ibyssias 1, who says that after his first child was born he relaxed his scrutiny of his young wife’s behavior and gave her the keys to the house. Many years ago Jack Winkler suggested that the imagined effects of erotic magic might in fact give us a faint and rare glimpse of ancient Greek women as desiring subjects. I would in fact agree, but I suggest that the Greeks might limit the time period of such a snapshot, as it were, to the brief years of optimum marriageability or to a few weeks each year when the Dog Star rises and brings its own brief period of female lust.

Notes

3. Kieckhefer 1991, 31–36, suggests a similar taxonomy of medieval European love spells, which he divides into three categories: (i) “sex-inducing magic” which was used “to induce a person to become a sexual partner” (= my ἐρωτική magic); (ii) “love magic,” which was used “to encourage an intimate and lasting amorous relationship” (roughly = my philia magic); and (iii) “sex-enhancing magic,” used “to enhance the sexual experience of partners who were already willing,” a category that corresponds to “self-help” magic, which is irrelevant here; see Faraone 1999, 18–22.
5. The Greeks understood that ἐρωτική was basically incompatible with φιλία; see Konstan 1997, 38–39.

7. Kieckhefer (1991, 34–35) points out how in medieval formulae recipes for increasing marital affection are “often explicitly remedial” and aimed at healing angry rifts or recovering love lost. He also notes that women who use magic to improve their own marriage were much less likely to be persecuted for magic than those women (e.g., courtesans) who used magic to facilitate adultery.
10. SM 64 = GMA 60. (Abbreviations for magical corpora are given at the head of the reference list.)
11. PGM XXXVI.35–68. For similar combinations of these three types of spells, see PGM XX.270–273 (all three); XXXVI.161–177 (an anger-binding spell and a victory spell) and 211–30 (all three).
12. GMA 40.
15. For a much more detailed analysis of what follows, see Faraone 1999, 110–19.
17. See LSI, s.v. ἀγαπέ, 1.1, where the basic meanings are “to hold in great affection”, “to love” and “to be content with.” Joly 1968, 36–41, surveys the various uses of this verb from the classical to the imperial period, stressing how it gradually ousts the verb φιλέω as the most popular word for love.
19. See Richlin 1991 for a survey of the early feminist contributions of Keuls, Halley, Skinner, and others. Dover 1978, 100–110; Foucault 1985, 1986; Winkler 1990, 17–44 passim; and Halperin 1990 passim, but esp. 266, have discussed in detail how such hierarchical notions play out in classical Athenian homoerotic love as the distinctions between the masculine éρως (the "lover" who penetrates) and the "feminized" ἐρωμένος (the "beloved" or who is penetrated). Geeson 1990 probably extends this type of analysis to the culture of the late antique orators, and Loizos 1994, 71–74, discusses similar modern Greek notions.
20. Pindar gave us a charter myth for their invention in his version of Jason’s seduction of Medea (Pythian 4.213–19), and Aristophanes parodied this type of spell in his lost play Amphitauras; see Faraone 1999, 55–69.
21. Four are used in a homoerotic context; see Faraone 1999, 147–49.
23. When apprehended in such situations, wives (as early as the law case to which Antiphan 1 belongs) repeatedly use φιλία, ἀγαπέ, or related verbs (never ἐρωτική) to describe what they seek from their apparently disaffected husbands; see Faraone 1999, 114–19 for discussion.
24. The rhombus was a device that was apparently whirled about during the ritual; see Faraone 1999, 150–51.
Idyl 2.23–32, as translated by Gow (1952) with minor revisions.

26. E.g., Gow 1952, ad loc.; and Dover 1971, ad loc.

27. See, e.g., Griffiths 1981, 266–67, who notes perceptively: (i) how she pursues a pickled but beautiful object of desire, (ii) how she is attracted by Delphis’ well oiled and athletic body, and (iii) how her lament in the second half of the poem is similar to those of the aging pederasts in Idylls 29 and 30. More recently Burton 1995, 43–44, stresses how Simaetha assumes the male initiative in courtship and how she falls in love at first sight, another topos of pederastic infatuation.


29. I am not, of course, the first to suggest that Simaetha is a courtesan: see Gow 1952, ad loc.; and Dover 1971, 95–96. Arnott 1996, 60, notes that Simaetha is associated by various details with the lifestyle of a courtesan.

30. Mign. PG 51.216. I thank M. Dickie for this reference.


32. Brucker 1963, 9–10, discusses the case of a Florentine merchant who in 1375 accused a prostitute of using a doll stuck with iron pins to cause his brother to desert his wife, children, and business. Ruggiero 1993, 28–31, mentions other accusations in Florence. For Venice, see Ruggiero 1985, 35. Brucker 1963, 11 and 18, mentions a brother and sister accused of using magic to attract customers to their brothel.


34. Janson 1987, 188.


37. Fantham 1986, 47–48, notes how the courtesans in New Comedy seem to exhibit the violent emotions and actions of the traditional male erastes.


39. Deipnosophistae book 13 passim. Cooper 1995, 317 n. 39, aptly describes how in these comic fragments “courtesans are characterized as witty, sophisticated, quick at repartee, and associating with philosophers, poets and politicians.” Henry 1985; and Keuls 1985, 187–203, are generally skeptical of this image, the latter (pp. 199–200) pointing out that the dirty jokes they tell are not refined. Perhaps not, but such jokes only strengthen my argument that courtesans co-opted male practices and performance norms.


42. Iphigeneia 1108–11.

43. Epistle 5.41: machaera libido. See Faraone 1999, 158. Scholiast at Epeide 3.7–8 identifies her as Gratidia, a Neapolitan perfume seller (uguentaria), and Dedo 1904, 42–44, suggests that the character is based on a real woman: such ugentariae apparently worked prostitutes as well; see Cameron 1981, 286–87.

44. Metamorphoses 2.5, in the Loeb translation of J. A. Hanson, with minor changes.

45. Ismenodora’s story provides the dramatic frame for Plutarch’s Erotikes; for an engaging recent discussion see Goldhill 1995, 146–61. On the financial power of widows during the Roman period, see Fantham 1995. Pitt-Rivers 1977, 80–84, and Brandes 1981, 226–27, note the popular Andalusian belief that widows take on “the predatory male attitude toward sexual promiscuity,” and they point out that their image is often blurred with that of the witch.


48. An allusion (quoting half of Od. 4.221) to the pharmakon of Helen that makes people forget their fear.


50. Polerno, De physiognomia in Scripores physiognomonici Graeci 1.160–64. See Gleason 1995, 7–8, for this translation and a detailed discussion.

51. See, e.g., Giaconelli 1980, for the general pattern.

52. For a good summary, see Cantarella 1987, 24–51 and 66–69, who mainly uses literary evidence.


54. See Carson 1990, 139–41, for discussion. For the danger of the star’s rising, see, especially the simile of the Dog Star rising at II. 22.25–26 ("it brings great fear to mortals").

55. Traditionally philologists have argued that Alcaeus is copying Hesiod, but the important variants in vocabulary suggest that they reflect different versions of the same folk tradition. See Nagy 1990, 462–63; and Petropoulos 1994, 17.


57. Pliny NH 22.86 and [Aristotle] 879 a26–28, both referring explicitly to this poetic tradition.

58. Carson 1990, 139–41, misses the point, I think, when she cites these passages as proof for beliefs in the general promiscuity of women.

59. There is some difference of opinion about the relative temperatures of males and females. The Hippocratics generally thought that women were moist and hot, whereas Aristotle and the Hippocratic author of Regimen 1 thought women were moist and cold, a theory that won out in the end. See Dean-Jones 1991, 134 n. 31.

60. Aristotle reports that “the warmer the weather,” the more eagerly cows and males desire to mate (HA 572a30–b4). Virgil notes that horse breeders deny mares water and food to increase their ardor for mating, since this makes them “thirsty for seed” (Georgica 2.130ff.). Pliny (NH 10.83.181) tells us that male horses, dogs, and swine prefer mating in the morning (i.e., when it is cooler and wetter), while the females prefer the afternoon (i.e., when it is hotter and drier). Similar beliefs may underlie Aelian’s advice concerning the breeding of asse, goats, and horses: mub salt and sodium carbonate on the genitals of the females to produce a greater appetite for sexual intercourse (it makes the females “go mad for” the males: On Animals 9.48).


63. It is important to stress the fact that Circe turns the men into donasticated farm animals, not noble, wild animals. The expression Plutarch uses, “did not have any use
even though this woman (as Lucian tells us with a grin) was a "lusty and forward lady" who would have come to him for a fraction of the sum (Lucian Philopseudes 13–15); see Winkler 1991, 88, for discussion.


78. See Foxhall 1994, 134–35 for a general discussion, and Cornwall 1994 for the astonishing fluidity in the gender roles adopted by Brazilian sex workers.


81. See note 75 above.


Abbreviations of Magical Corpora


References


Appendix

Major Historical Figures Discussed

Because the chapters are aimed at an interdisciplinary audience and because they treat many figures who are not well known, we offer a brief guide to the main dramatis personae, asking scholars' indulgence for including, as well, the obvious. No attempt is made to give full biographies, especially for well-known figures.

Achilles Tatius (active c. 150 C.E.). Greek novelist who lived at Alexandria, author of Leucippe and Clitophon.

Aeschines (c. 397 – c. 322 B.C.E.). Athenian orator, whose speech “ Against Timarchus” provides important evidence for sexual norms and practices of the period.


Aristophanes (probably b. between 460 and 450, d. c. 386 B.C.E.). Athenian comic poet.

Aristotle (384/3 – 322 B.C.E.). Philosopher, born in Stagira, active both in Athens and in Asia Minor.

Catullus, Gaius Valerius (c. 84 – c. 54 B.C.E.). Roman lyric poet.

Chrysippus of Soli (c. 280 – 207 B.C.E.). Third head of the Stoa, after Zeno and Cleanthes; he succeeded Cleanthes in 232. Evidently one of the greatest philosophers of antiquity, he more or less invented propositional logic and the philosophy of language, and he made important contributions in every area of the subject. Only fragments of his works survive.