

# Magic use in Roman Sexuality

By Anne Chenchar

# Background

- Roman society progressively became more diverse, allowing the integration for many different religions, and other cultural ideas with them.
- Some Romans faced fertility and/or romance problems.
  - To be a good Roman one must marry and produce offspring.
  - Those unable to sought medical or magical practice
- Magic was a vital piece of Roman society
- Romans used magic to increase changes of Romance and/or fertility

# Roman View on Sexuality

**“Who is ignorant to the Joys of Sex?...The Father of truth, Epicurus said all you need it love”**

–Petronius, *Satyricon*.

- Fertility being a main focal point.
- A second point was to be an adequate sexual partner
- Pressure on men and woman lead to the use of erotic magic

# Roman View of Sexuality

**“The recipes in the magic formularies take it for granted that it will be men who perform erotic magic...the motives of the men...are either to enjoy the sexual favors...or to better themselves by securing a good marriage.”**

-Matthew Dickie

- Women too faced pressure: unable to produce and marry left them as a burden.
  - Women’s primary goal was to produce offspring.
  - Not uncommon to be asked about fertility

# Roman Magic use

- **Magic: an extra ordinary practice, which one turns to when ordinary solutions are insufficient for handling one's problem.**
- Erotic-magic included: religious ceremonies, concoctions, and spells.
- Homeopathic magic: person imitated the action they wished to be affected
- Contagious magic: uses an object that was once apart of, or in contact with an individual.
- Sympathetic magic: “sympathy” existed between influenced object and original object it was in contact with.

# Magic in Religious Festivals

- **Fordicidia:** *suffimen* was created by the Vestal Virgins as a fertility charm.
  - Made from calf ashes, horse blood, and sulfur or corn ash.
- **Lupercalia:** Luperci: young men dressed in goat skins and used goat skin whips.
  - Women were whipped, stir up reproductive powers.
  - Thought the fertility of the goat was transferred into the women.

# Magical Concoctions

- **Erectile dysfunction:** create and use a smear of honey and pepper.
  - Also herbal use was recommended
- **Women infertility:** food with anise to cure fertility damaged by witchcraft.

# Erotic-Magic use in Art

- **Petronius's *Satyricon***
  - Shows importance of sexuality and fertility in Roman society.
  - Also includes erotic scenes.
  - Petronius recommends naturalness through the use of satire.
- Roman literature: mostly focuses on women using erotic-magic, however in reality it was mostly men.
- Witch-like characteristics were associated with erotic influence and magic use.



# Conclusion

- Roman society stressed a married couple's ability to produce viable offspring.
- Those who didn't were seen as a burden and lost respect.
- The distress of infertile men and woman lead them to turn to magical practices.
- Magical practices used: spells, concoctions, and religious ceremonies.
- Magic use to cure infidelity was so prominent roman art and literature was created around it.

# References

- Burriss, Eli Edward. "Some Survivals of Magic in Roman Religion." *The Classical Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1928, pp. 112–123., [www.jstor.org/stable/3289524](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3289524).
- Dickie, Matthew W. "Who Practised Love-Magic in Classical Antiquity and in the Late Roman World?" *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2000, pp. 563–583., [www.jstor.org/stable/1558912](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1558912).
- Edmonds, R. "Bewitched, bothered, and bewildered: erotic magic in the Greco-Roman world." *A companion to Greek and Roman sexualities*. 2014, pp. 282-296.
- Gill, Christopher. "The Sexual Episodes in the Satyricon." *Classical Philology*, vol. 68, no. 3, 1973, pp. 172–185., [www.jstor.org/stable/267748](http://www.jstor.org/stable/267748).
- O'Neill, Kerill. "Symbolism and Sympathetic Magic in Propertius 4.5." *The Classical Journal*, vol. 94, no. 1, 1998, pp. 49–80., [www.jstor.org/stable/3298266](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3298266).
- Sandy, Gerald. "Satire in the Satyricon." *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. 90, no. 3, 1969, pp. 293–303., [www.jstor.org/stable/293180](http://www.jstor.org/stable/293180).
- Shelton, Jo-Ann. *As the Romans Did*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1998. Print.
- Petronius, Seneca. *Satyricon. Apocolocyntosis*. Translated by Michael Heseltine, W. H. D. Rouse. Revised by E. H. Warmington. Loeb Classical Library 15. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913.