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DIDO SPELLBOUND: LOVE MAGIC IN VERGIL, AENEID 1

Abstract: This article aims to cast light on the magical colour in the description of Cupid causing Dido to fall in love with Aeneas in *Aeneid* 1. It is proposed that Cupid's actions are represented in a way that recalls a ritual for erotic magic, mirroring the dynamics of Eros seducing Medea in *Argonautica* 3. Dido's subsequent frenzy in *Aeneid* 4 may thus be seen as the consequence of this "love-charm".

Keywords: Vergil, Aeneid 1, Dido, Magic

Dido's frenzy, culminating in her tragic suicide, as dramatically depicted in Vergil's *Aeneid* 4 has elicited intertextual comparisons with various figures such as Clytemnestra and Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and especially Medea in Euripides' eponymous play or in Apollonius' *Argonautica*.¹ In particular, Dido's request to her sister Anna to prepare for a magical ritual in Aen. 4.492–498 likely refers to a ritual to induce forgetfulness, so that she could free herself from the memory of Aeneas, as recently proposed by Silva.² The events that lead to Dido's fatal frenzy are, however, set up in *Aeneid* 1. This study aims to afford a better understanding of the magical undertone of the description of how Venus, through Cupid, causes Dido to fall in love with Aeneas in Book 1.

The most significant model after which Vergil could fashion this description comes no doubt from Apollonius' *Argonautica*.³ In order to help the Argonauts, at the beginning of book 3 Hera and Athena decide to consult with Aphrodite and ask if she could persuade her son Eros to enchant Medea, making her smitten with Jason (A.R. 3.7–89). Aphrodite agrees and manages to convince Eros (A.R. 3.90–166), who then stealthily shoots Medea with his darts (A.R. 3.275–298). As Campbell and Schaaf aptly put it,⁴ this is the case of a witch being bewitched due to the direct intervention of the Olympians

¹ The idea that Dido's characterisation in *Aeneid* 4 may be fashioned after Apollonius' Medea is already attested in Serv. Aen. 4.1; Macr. Sat. 5.17.4–6; on this see e.g. A.S. Pease, *Publi Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quartus*, Cambridge, Mass. 1935, 13–14; 32–36; C. Collard, *Medea and Dido*, Prometheus 1, 1975, 131–151, who also discusses the possible connection with Euripides' Medea. For a comparison with the latter see more recently A. Schiesaro, *Furthest Voices in Virgil's Dido I and II*, SIFC 6 (4th series), 2008, 60–109 and 194–245; B. Simons, *Dido, Medea, Jason und Aeneas: drei Antihelden, ein Held?*, AU 60, 2017, 14–22. For a possible connection between Dido and Aeschylus' Clytemnestra and Cassandra, see V. Panoussi, *Greek Tragedy in Vergil's Aeneid*, Cambridge 2009, 53–56. For a comparison between Dido and Phaedra in Euripides, see J. Foster, *Some Devices of Drama used in Aeneid 1–4*, PVS 13, 1973–74, 30–31; P. Hardie, *Virgil and tragedy*, in: C. Martindale (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, Cambridge 1997, 322.

² See G. Silva, *Magic and Memory. Dido's Ritual for Inducing Forgetfulness in Aeneid 4*, *Mnemosyne* (forthcoming). I would like to express my gratitude to Gabriel Silva for his advice and for sharing with me a copy of his article ahead of its publication. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers, the editor, and Stephen Harrison for their helpful suggestions and comments.

³ On Apollonius' influence on Vergil's epos, see especially D. Nelis, *Vergil's Aeneid and the Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius*, Leeds 2001, 93–96, who points out the close correspondence between the two scenes but does not discuss the similar allusions to magic in the seduction of Dido and Medea, respectively.

⁴ See M. Campbell, *A Commentary on Apollonius Rhodius Argonautica III 1–471*, Leiden / Boston / Köln 1994, 39; I. Schaaf, *Magie und Ritual bei Apollonios Rhodios*, Berlin / Boston 2014, 141.

in the mortals' affairs:⁵ the use of the magical term *θέλω* to designate Eros' charms⁶ as well as the fire metaphor of Medea set ablaze with love contribute realism and dramatic tension to the scene.⁷ Analogous dynamics can be detected in the description of Cupid's winning Dido over at *Aeneid* 1.673–675; 1.685–688; 1.719–722, in which magic features even more prominently.

Before looking at these passages it is worth reminding that Vergil himself was fully conversant with the literary and non-literary representations of magic. This is revealed above all by *Eclogue* 8.64–109, an inventive reworking of Simaetha's incantation for love magic in Theocritus' well-known *Pharmakeutria* (*Idyll* 2).⁸ In addition to the literary level, Reif considers the differences between the two accounts (e.g. the sympathetic analogy between Daphnis and clay and wax at ecl. 8.80–81, as well as that between Daphnis and the heifer at ecl. 8.85–89) and compares these Vergilian verses with the evidence from the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. This points to the fact that Vergil shows an awareness of real magical rituals, on which he draws in an attempt to outshine Theocritus in realism.⁹ Thus, it comes as no surprise that Vergil would have been able to originally refashion the scene of Medea being seduced by Eros in *Argonautica* 3 by enriching the texture of *Aeneid* 1 with references to magic – as he does later in book 4.

Once Aeneas and the Trojan refugees have reached Carthage, Venus suspects that this may be due to Juno's plotting against Aeneas (*Aen.* 1.671–672). For Venus is afraid that Dido, a protégée of Juno, is delaying Aeneas' journey to Rome (*Aen.* 1.657–662). Thus, Venus bids her son Cupid take the shape of Ascanius, whom she will make fall asleep and conceal (1.680–682), and get control over Dido:¹⁰

*quocirca capere ante dolis et cingere flamma
reginam meditor, ne quo se numine mutet,
sed magno Aeneae mecum teneatur amore.*

Take the queen by a ruse, with encircling fences of fire, so she will not change course through
divine interference, bind her to me, then, with bonds of a mighty love for Aeneas.

(*Aen.* 1.673–675)¹¹

⁵ For the anthropomorphic behaviour of these deities in *A.R.* 3.7–166, see Campbell (n. 4 above) 18–20.

⁶ On this term and its cognates in the context of magic, see H. Parry, *Thelxis. Magic and Imagination in Greek Myth and Poetry*, Lanham 1992, 24–25; 29; 34.

⁷ See Schaaf (n. 4 above) 141–144; M. Fantuzzi, *Medea's Magic and Eros*, in: T. Papanghelis / A. Rengakos (eds), *Brill's Companion to Apollonius Rhodius*, Leiden / Boston ²2008, 287–310. An earlier version of the myth of Medea's seduction in which both magic and Aphrodite play a key role is found in Pindar, *P.* 4.213–222: there Aphrodite teaches Jason how to seduce Medea through incantations (*ἐπαιοδάς*). C.A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, Cambridge, Mass. 1999, 57–69 convincingly proposes that Pindar's account reflects real love-charms.

⁸ See e.g. W. Clausen, *A Commentary on Virgil, Eclogues*, Oxford 1994, 237–238; K. Sallmann, *Poesie und Magie: Vergils 8. Ekloge*, *ZAnt* 45, 1995, 287–302.

⁹ See M. Reif, *De arte magorum*, Göttingen 2016, 109–122.

¹⁰ For the anthropomorphic depiction of gods in the *Aeneid*, see R. Coleman, *The Gods in the Aeneid*, *G&R* 29, 1982, 143–168, especially 153–157 on Venus and her interventions.

¹¹ Here and below, for the text of the *Aeneid* I follow G.B. Conte, P. Vergilius Maro. *Aeneis*, Berlin / Boston ²2019. English trans. adapted from F. Ahl, *Virgil. Aeneid*, Oxford 2007.

The metaphor of love as fire also recurs in the following lines and features prominently in the parallel description of Medea enchanted by Eros in A.R. 3.286–287 and 3.291–298. This metaphor dates back at least to Sappho and the Lyric poets and becomes an established trope in erotic binding spells.¹² Likewise, both Cupid/Eros and Venus/Aphrodite themselves were commonly invoked in ἀγωγαί (spells for attracting a lover) as attested in the so-called *Greek Magical Papyri*.¹³

Another allusion to magic can be observed in Venus' concluding words to Cupid:

*ut, cum te gremio accipiet laetissima Dido
regalis inter mensas laticemque Lyaeum,
cum dabit amplexus atque oscula dulcia figet,
occultum inspiret ignem fallasque ueneno.*

So that, during the banquet, when Dido takes you in her lap, oh so blissful, hugs you and cuddles you, plants on your forehead a few tender kisses, you can rouse unseen fire and deceive her with a love-drug.

(Aen. 1.685–688)

The use of *uenenum* makes the magical tone of this passage quite explicit.¹⁴ The term typically indicates a magical substance or a love-philtre, a connotation which Vergil himself uses in the context of love magic at *Eclogue* 8.95. While retaining its original connotation as a *uox media*, which could either refer to a healing or a noxious drug similarly to its Greek counterpart φάρμακον, *uenenum* becomes so commonly connected with magic to the extent that, a few decades later, Pliny the Elder criticises magic but acknowledges that its efficacy derives from *ueneficae artes* (nat. 30.17).¹⁵ Indeed, the use of love-philtres was considered dangerous: Ovid warns the readers of his *Ars Amatoria* against resorting to such

¹² On this trope, see G. Spatafora, Il fuoco d'amore. Storia di un "topos" dalla poesia greca arcaica al romanzo bizantino. 1: l'immagine del fuoco nella poesia di età arcaica e classica, *Myrtia* 22, 2007, 19–33. This metaphor recurs then at Aen. 1.688 (see the main text above); 1.713–714 *expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo / Phoenissa*. For this metaphor in love magic, see the discussions of E. Tavenner, The Use of Fire in Greek and Roman Love Magic, in: *Studies in Honor of Frederick W. Shipley*, St. Louis 1942, 17–37; A.-M. Tupet, La magie dans la poésie latine, Paris 1976, 30–34; Faraone (n. 7 above) 58–60; 150–153.

¹³ See e.g. PGM IV.1265–1274; IV.1716–1870 (in which both Aphrodite and Eros are mentioned); XII.14–95.

¹⁴ The expression *fallere ueneno* is considered a reference to a magic already in T. Ladewig / C. Schaper / P. Deuticke / P. Jahn, *Vergils Gedichte. Aeneide Buch I–VI*, Berlin 1912, 50, and R.S. Conway, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus*, Cambridge 1935, 116.

¹⁵ See Hom. Od. 4.230: φάρμακα, πολλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ μεμιγμένα, πολλὰ δὲ λυγρά. The concept is reprised in Hor. epod. 5.87: *uenena magnum fas nefasque*, and expanded upon in Gaius, dig. 50.16.236; Marcian. dig. 48.8.3.2. On the meaning on *uenenum* and its association with magic, see L. Costantini, *Magic in Apuleius' Apologia*, Berlin / Boston 2019, 126–127; 230–233 (specifically on love magic). On the use of φάρμακον to indicate an incantation, see C.A. Faraone, Magic, Medicine and Eros in the Prologue to Theocritus' Id. 11, in: M. Fantuzzi / T. Papanghelis (eds), *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Pastoral*, Leiden / Boston 2006, 75–90.

charms (ars 2.106: *philtrā nocent animis, uimque furoris habent*), as they could induce madness and even lead to death.¹⁶

The imagery of the love-philtre administered to Dido is reprised shortly after at *Aeneid* 1.749. During the actual banquet, Dido becomes progressively smitten with Aeneas, and this is depicted with the following metaphor: *infelix Dido longumque bibebat amorem* (“wretched Dido drank deeply of love’s heady vintage”). According to Servius, *bibebat amorem* is modelled on Anacreon’s expression ἔρωτα πίνων (PMG 450). At the same time, the magical terminology throughout this section of Book 1 and the earlier reference to *uenenum* point to the fact that Dido might have been “drinking love” as though it were a *uenenum*.

During the banquet in honour of the Trojan guests the crippling effects of Cupid’s love magic start to affect Dido’s mind, and the reference to the queen as *pesti deuota futurae* (Aen. 1.712) might perhaps allude to her enchantment.¹⁷ Finally Cupid, disguised as Ascanius, gives heed to his mother’s request:

... *at memor ille*
matris Acidaliae paulatim abolere Sychaeum
incipit et uiuo temptat praeuertere amore
iam pridem resides animos desuetaque corda.

Cupid, recalling his Acidalian mother, now slowly starts to erase Sychaeus and tries to surprise, with a living passion, a heart where the fire has died and where love is a memory.

(Aen. 1.719–722)

As Silva discusses,¹⁸ the idea that charms and love-spells were meant to make the victims forget about their homeland and loved ones goes back at least to Calypso and Circe in the *Odyssey*, a poem retrospectively associated with magic in classical times.¹⁹ Evidence of spells aiming at inducing forgetfulness in the context of love magic comes from the ἀγωγαί in the *Greek Magical Papyri* and the curse-tablets,²⁰ and are well observable in the following love-spell:

... μαινομένη ἢ δεῖνα) ἦ-

¹⁶ For φάρμακα inducing madness, see e.g. Ach. Tat. 4.15, on which see A.M.G. McLeod, *Physiology and Medicine in a Greek Novel: Achilles Tatius’ Leucippe and Clitophon*, JHS 89, 1969, 97–105. For the deadly effect of *uenena*, see e.g. Plin. nat. 25.25, with further discussion in M.W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, Oxford 2001, 133.

¹⁷ This is noted by R.G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus*, Oxford 1971, 214. For *deuouere* meaning ‘to enchant’, ‘to bewitch’, see OLD s.v. 3b; TLL s.v. 5.882.5–40.

¹⁸ See Silva (n. 2 above) with a detailed examination of magical rituals to induce forgetfulness.

¹⁹ See Hom. Od. 1.56–57: αἰεὶ δὲ μαλακοῖσι καὶ αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισι / θέλγει, ὅπως Ἰθάκης ἐπιλήσεται· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεύς (Calypso); 10.235–236: ἀνέμισγε δὲ σίτω / φάρμακα λύγρ’, ἵνα πάγχυ λαθοῖατο πατρίδος αἴης (Circe). The concept of magic is unknown in the Homeric period, as remarked by Dickie (n. 16 above) 5, and Costantini (n. 15 above) 92–93.

²⁰ See e.g. PGM XV.1–21; LXI.1–38; CI.1–53; Tab. devot. 68a.9–11; 68b.9–11; 266.15–17; 268.3. On this see also J.J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Eros*, in: C.A. Faraone / D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera*, Oxford 1991, 233; J.G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, Oxford 1992, 78–81; Faraone (n. 7 above) 87–89; 142–146; 168–169; E. Pachoumi, *The Erotic and Separation Spells of the Magical Papyri and Defixiones*, GRBS 53, 2013, 294–325.

κοι ἐπ' ἐμαῖσι θύραισι τάχιστα, λη-
θομένη τέκνων συνηθείης τε το-
κήων καὶ στυγέουσα τὸ πᾶν ἀνδρῶν
γένος ἠδὲ γυναικῶν ἐκτὸς ἐμοῦ,
τοῦ δεῖνα, μόνον με δ' ἔχουσα παρέστω,
ἐν φρεσὶ δαμνομένη κρατερῆς
ὑπ' ἔρωτος ἀνάγκης. ...

In frenzy may she (NN) come fast to my doors, forgetting children and her life with her parents, and loathing all the race of men and women except me (NN), but may she hold me alone and come subdued in heart by love's great compulsion.

(PGM IV.2756–2763)²¹

Commenting on this spell, Faraone argues that its composition is much earlier than the fourth-century CE papyrus which preserves it, and similar ἀγωγαί could have influenced literary sources such as Theocritus' *Second Idyll*, in which Simaetha analogously asks Hecate that her beloved Delphis may forget whomever he is attracted to just as Theseus once forgot Ariadne in Dia (Theoc. 2.44–46).²² A comparable allusion to forgetfulness features at *Eclogue* 8.85–89, where Vergil uses the pastoral simile of the heifer pursuing a bullock and forgetting to return to her herd at night (*nec serae meminit nocti*). This idea is more clearly in play in *Aeneid* 4: as Silva observes, the use of *aboleo* to indicate forgetfulness in Aen. 1.720 (*paulatim abolere Sychaeum*) is comparable to that in Aen. 4.497–498 (*abolere nefandi / cuncta uiri monumenta*).²³ Although Dido's use of magic is made overt at Aen. 4.493 (*magicas inuitam accingier artis*), the passages from Book 1 examined so far show how Vergil presents Cupid's seduction of Dido with a terminology that alludes to actual magical practices, making this account more impressive. Expanding on this comparison between Books 1 and 4, I would like to suggest that the magical ritual performed by Dido in *Aeneid* 4 could serve to counteract the love-charm previously cast on her by Cupid: Dido would thereby unknowingly seek to fight magic with magic. An influential predecessor is again Apollonius' Medea: Eros/Cupid's love-charms cannot be undone by Dido, nor by the πολυφάρμακος Medea.²⁴ As Nelis observes, both these lovelorn figures consider committing suicide, but while Hera induces Medea to change her mind and desist from taking her life with her φάρμακα (A.R. 3.817–818), Juno does not come to Dido's rescue in the *Aeneid*. The goddess' intervention comes only at the last stage and serves only to put an end to Dido's painful death, by sending Iris to release the queen's soul from her limbs (Verg. Aen. 4.693–705), thus making Vergil's depiction darker and more tragic in tone.²⁵

In conclusion, the analysis of a series of passages from *Aeneid* 1 makes it possible to cast more light on the magical colour underlying the depiction of how Dido unnaturally loses her heart to Aeneas.

²¹ Greek text after K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. Vol. 1, Stuttgart ²1973; trans. adapted from H.-D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation. Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago / London ²1992.

²² See C.A. Faraone, *Hymn to Selene-Hecate-Artemis from a Greek Magical Handbook* (PGM IV 2714–83), in: M. Kiley (ed.), *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine*, London 1997, 195–199.

²³ See Silva (n. 2 above), who notes that the same meaning of *aboleo* recurs in Aen. 7.232; 11.789.

²⁴ This is Medea's epithet in A.R. 3.27; 4.1677 (on which see Campbell [n. 4 above] 39 ad loc.), and is already applied to Circe in Hom. *Od.* 10.276.

²⁵ See Nelis (n. 3 above) 166–172.

In its turn, this may allow a deeper appreciation of Vergil's portrait of Dido in *Aeneid* 4 as an innocent victim whose frenzy, similarly to that of Apollonius' Medea, is the tragic outcome of Venus' schemes and Cupid's love magic.

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