

# News & Notes

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LOVE IN EGYPT



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ON THE COVER is a drawing of a tomb painting from the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Menna (TT 146). It comes from Nina de Garis Davies's lavishly illustrated OI publication *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*. A three-volume set, it consists of two volumes of 104 illustrations of tomb paintings and one volume of explanatory text. Most of the paintings included in this book had already been made, but a few were done specifically for the publication. Nina de Garis Davies (1881-1965) is famous for the many copies that she made of ancient Egyptian paintings, and she worked closely with her husband Norman de Garis Davies (1865-1941) in this endeavor. The tomb of Menna pictured here is located in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna in the Theban necropolis on the west bank. It is well known for its lavishly painted interior, and between 2007 and 2009, the American Research Center in Egypt worked to conserve and document the tomb's decoration.



# EROTICA FROM ROMAN EGYPT

# A DEMOTIC MAGICAL SPELL TO INDUCE LOVESICKNESS

by Robert K. Ritner and Foy D. Scalf

*Hadst thou the wicked skill,  
By pictures made and mard, to kill,  
How many ways mightst thou perform thy will?*  
— John Donne

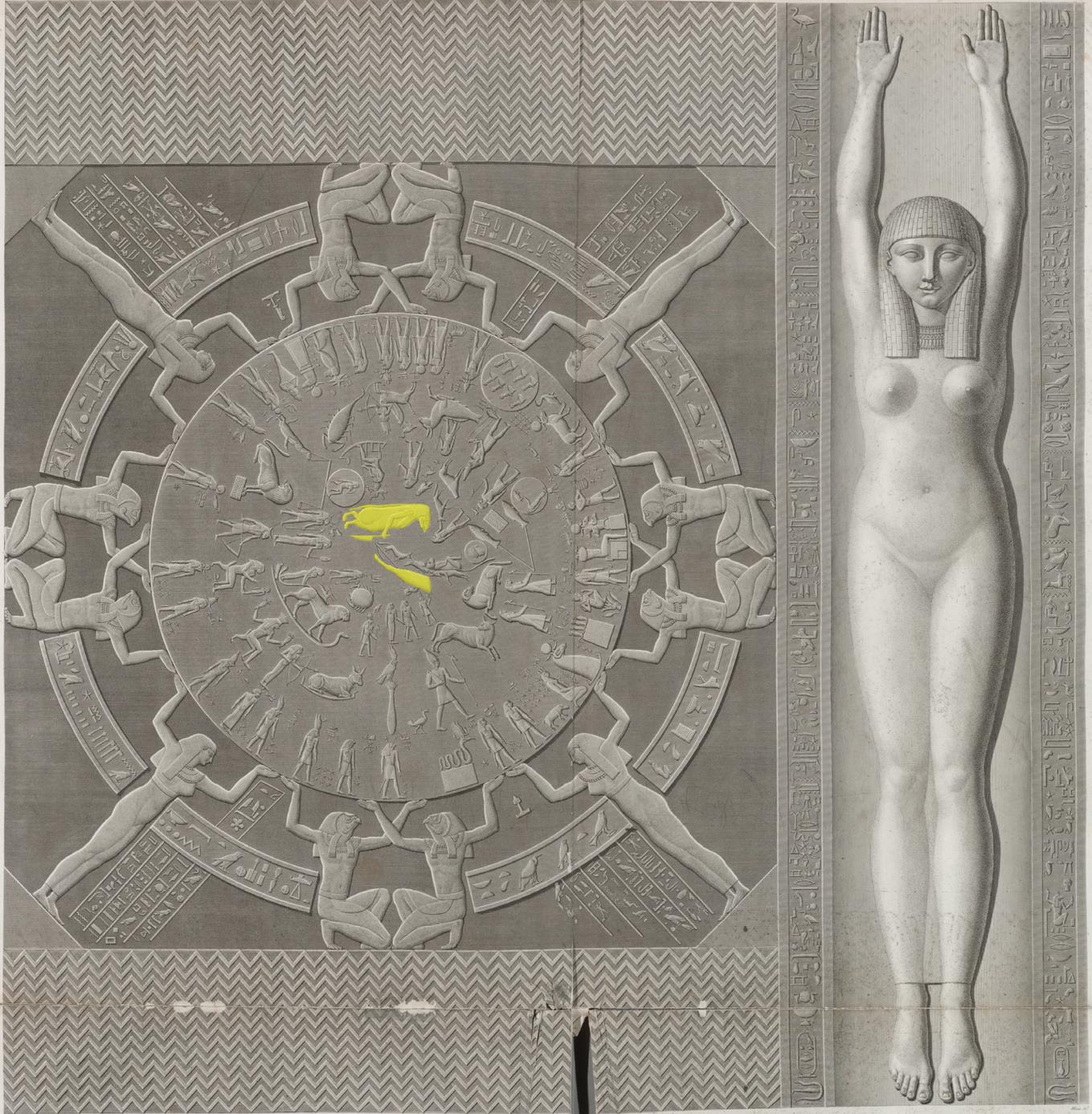
“Awaken yourself, O noble spirit of the man of the necropolis!” So begins a fragmentary papyrus (see page 6) currently kept in the University of Michigan library, where it bears the inventory number 1444. The library had acquired it in 1924 along with groups of other papyri, largely from the Fayum region. Robert Ritner identified the nature of the papyrus while he was a graduate student before 1988 and invited Foy Scalf to collaborate on its study and publication in 2016. The papyrus was written at some point in the first few centuries of the Common Era, when Egypt was under the control of Roman emperors. The text is written in Demotic, reflecting the native language and village practices of the Egyptians at a time when Greek was the official administrative and legal language throughout the country. The papyrus has been badly damaged, but enough of its thirty-five lines survive to provide a clear picture: a spell designed to procure sexual favors from a woman’s perspective. Typically, such lust spells, often referred to as “erotic binding spells” (*philtrokatadesmos*), were written on behalf of a man seeking the affection of a woman; this papyrus, therefore, is an unusual and spectacular example of the opposite phenomenon of a woman seeking out a man.

The magic spell on this papyrus was written in Demotic and commissioned on behalf of a woman, who likely approached and paid a local priest to prepare the document for her. Through this magical talisman, the woman hoped to rouse a ghost—the noble spirit of the man of the necropolis—who would haunt the target of the spell, a man whose affection she longed for, until he was compelled to seek her out. Controlling this ghost would have been Anubis, the master of the necropolis, who is invoked in the spell and who is shown in an accompanying illustration at the bottom of the papyrus. In a scene resembling cupid with his bow and arrow, the vignette depicts Anubis firing an arrow into the heart of a man with exaggerated genitalia; the arrow transmits love sickness, infecting the man with unceasing lust for the woman, whose object of desire is emphasized graphically.

The woman is referred to throughout the papyrus as Taromeway, whom Tasib bore. In the Egyptian Demotic, tarome-way means “the woman of woe.” As such, it seems unlikely that Taromeway is the woman’s actual name and the appellation appears to be a euphemism referring to her sad longing. For the purpose of the spell, “the woman of woe” is filled with the sorrow of unrequited love pangs. The target of her spell is a man named Kephalas, whom Apollonia bore. We have no idea what Kephalas looked like, but the illustration on the papyrus depicts a bearded man. To help us visualize these individuals, we can perhaps imagine Kephalas looking something like the man in the Fayum portrait on display in the Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery at the OI (below), bearded and well dressed. It is intriguing that the woman and her mother both bear Egyptian names, while the man and his mother bear Greek names. Could this be an explicit example of a cross-cultural relationship? It is impossible to be certain, but such relationships were not uncommon at this time, for Egypt had been a multicultural melting pot for most of its history and faced a particularly large influx of Greek immigrants since before the Ptolemaic Period (306–30 BCE).

The spell begins with a necromantic invocation to arouse a deceased spirit on behalf of Taromeway with the intention of the spirit haunting Kephalas and placing in him an unceasing desire for her. Until he finally desires Taromeway, Kephalas is cursed with an incessant wandering likened to his chasing constellations that never set below the horizon, constantly circling the celestial pole (opposite):



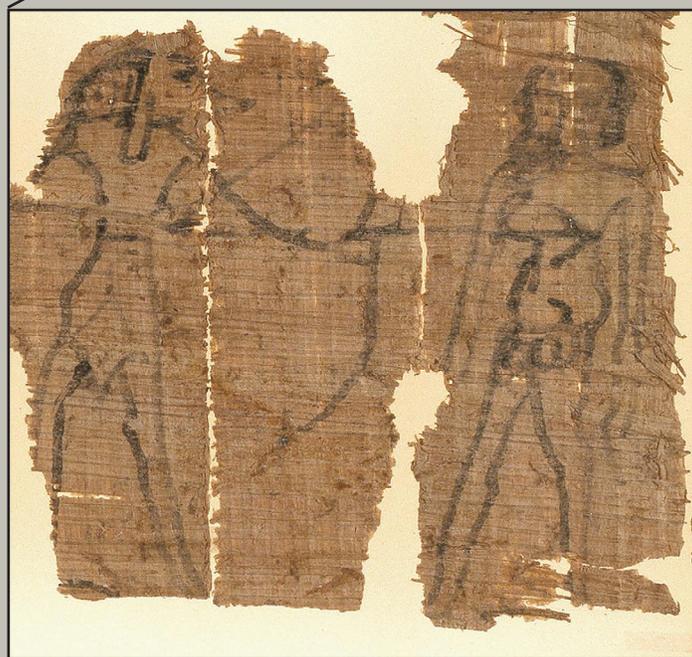
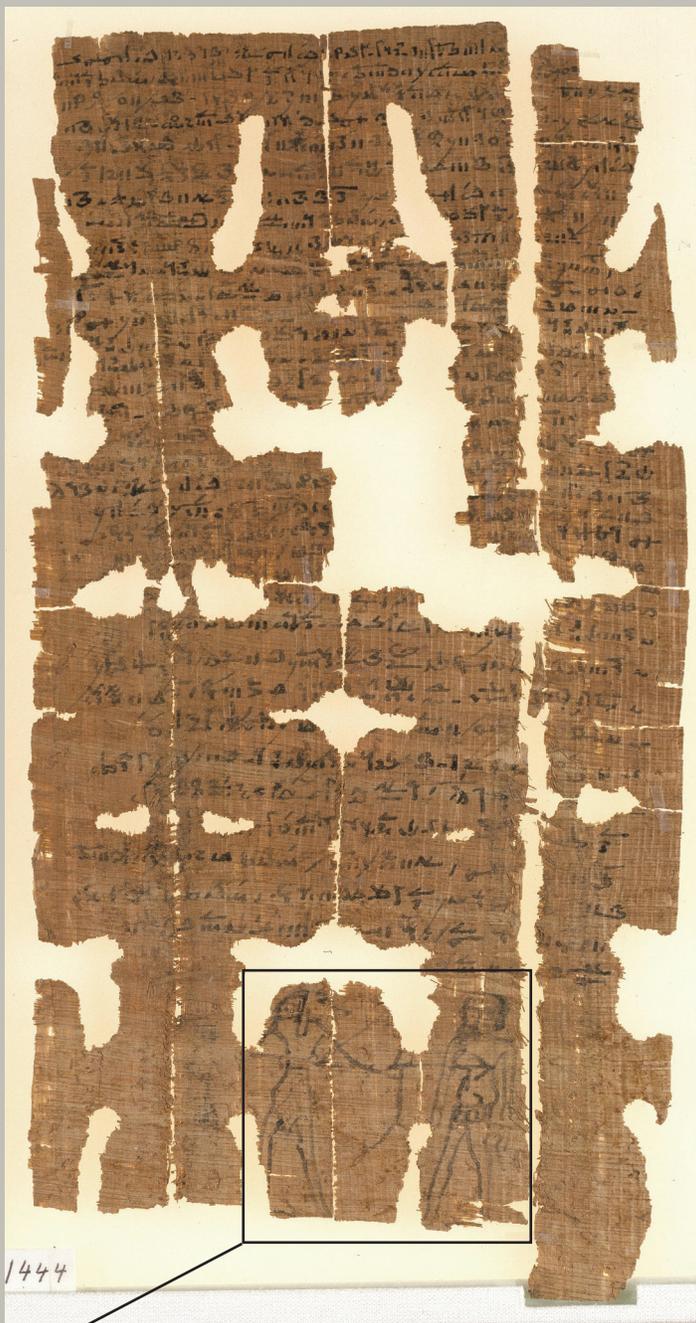


ZODIAQUE SCULPTÉ AU PLAFOND DE L'UNE DES SALLES SUPÉRIEURES DU GRAND TEMPLE.

Awaken yourself, O noble spirit of the man of the necropolis, and may you go to every place, and may you cause Kephalas, whom Apollonia bore, to desire Taromeway, whom Tasib bore, so that he be twisted from his front to his back. Give to him anxiety at midday, evening, and at all time, while he desires her . . . until he seeks after her, while he desires her, while his male parts are after her female parts. Cause that he make the circuits of the foreleg-constellation (Ursa Major) opposite the Hippopotamus-constellation until you cause that he make the movements [of] the nighttime, until he looks for Taromeway, whom Tasib bore, there being no other woman at all whom he desires, while he [is] mad about her, before [I] cast the compulsion upon you today . . .

LEFT: Fayum portrait with the painting of an Egyptian man on a wooden board (E2053; D. 15898).

ABOVE: The foreleg and hippopotamus constellations highlighted on the zodiac from Dendera (Image: *Déscription de l'Égypte*, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-1048-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>).



Taromeway was looking to control, compel, and force Kephalas into romance with her. The spell, therefore, less resembles what we tend to think of as romantic love and reflects more the binding or bending of Kephalas's will to her own. In the Greco-Demotic magical handbooks, there is a famous section written in Greek (PGM IV, 296–466) called the “wondrous spell for binding a lover.” It details how to produce a magical figure similar to popular conceptions of the so-called voodoo doll to control and compel a woman's lust:

Take wax from a potter's wheel and make two figures, a male and a female. Make the male in the form of Ares fully armed, holding a sword in his left hand and threatening to plunge it into the right side of her neck. And make her with her arms behind her back and down on her knees. . . . And take thirteen copper needles and stick one in the brain while saying, “I am piercing your brain, N”; and stick two in the ears, and two in the eyes and one in the mouth and two in the midriff and one in the hands and two in the pudenda and two in the soles, saying each time, “I am piercing such and such a member of her, N, so that she may remember no one but me, N, alone.” (Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 1992, 44)

Remarkably, a lead *lamella* curse tablet and clay figurine matching precisely these instructions were discovered in the Egyptian city of Antinoopolis (opposite). Looking at the figure, one gets the impression that the spell-caster wanted a sex slave more than a spouse.

Women often needed their own magic to counteract such lust spells of men. A Coptic manuscript in the OI (see page 8) is inscribed with a spell intended to make a man named Pharaouo impotent. The spell was commissioned by a woman named Touaien, who sought to repel the lust of an unwanted suitor. After invoking the binding of the cosmos, Jesus Christ, and a series of magical names, the spell shifts those bindings to the target of the spell, Pharaouo:

May that binding be upon the male organ of Pharaouo and his flesh. May you dry it up like wood and make it like a rag upon the manure pile. His penis must not become hard. It must not have an erection. It must not ejaculate. He must not have intercourse with Touaaien, daughter of Kamar or any woman, man, or animal until I myself call out, but may it dry up the male organ of Pharaouo, son

UPPER LEFT: A papyrus inscribed with an illustrated magical spell in Demotic, with detail of illustration (Papyrus Michigan Inv. 1444; University of Michigan Library Digital Collections).

of Kiranpales. He must not have intercourse with Touaien, daughter of Kamar, he being like a corpse lying in a tomb. Pharaouo, son of Kamar, must not be able to have intercourse with Touaien, daughter of Kamar. Yea, yea, at once, at once! (after Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, eds., *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, 1999, 178–79)

Just as this Coptic spell calls on the “binding” of powerful forces, the Demotic spell from Papyrus Michigan 1444 invokes the “compulsion” of a number of divine entities down upon Kephalas, as found at the end of the passage translated earlier: “. . . before I cast this compulsion upon you today . . .” Unfortunately, the central section of the papyrus is badly damaged. Much of this damage is the result of the papyrus being folded up—evidence from the vertical and horizontal creases in the papyrus—in preparation for being placed in the tomb to arouse an angry ghost whose funerary offerings had long been abandoned. In fact, several contemporary spells instruct that the manuscript be placed in the mouth of the mummy itself! After the lacunose middle section invoking their compulsion, these spirits are beckoned to hurry against Kephalas, at the end of the papyrus: “Raise yourself against Kephalas, whom Apollonia bore. Give his heart to Taromeway, whom Tasib bore. Hasten, hasten! Hurry, hurry, before I have said the words or repeated them!”

The Demotic spell in the Michigan papyrus shares direct parallels with Demotic magical handbooks from the second to fourth centuries CE, previously studied by Janet H. Johnson and Robert K. Ritner. As Egypt moved into the Late Antique era after 400 CE, practices of the type reflected in Papyrus Michigan 1444 spread throughout the Mediterranean world and onward to Europe. The multicultural appeal of these texts and rituals can now be found in countless manuscripts written in a wide variety of languages—Greek, Latin, Arabic, Hebrew, French, English, and many others—held in collections throughout the world. For example, the *Sepher ha-Razim* (“Book of Mysteries”), a Jewish esoteric manual from around the fourth century CE identified through Genizah manuscripts, contains the following:

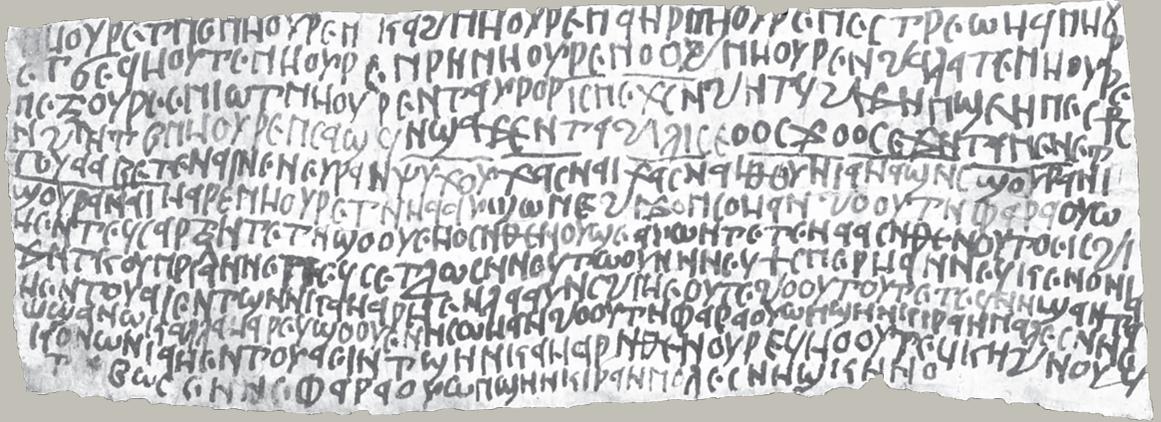
If you wish to bind yourself to the heart of a great or wealthy woman take some perspiration from your face (and put it) in a new glass vessel; then write on it, (i.e.) on a tin *lamella*, the name of the overseer and the names of the angels, and throw (the tin *lamella*) in the midst (of the flask) and say thus over the perspiration of your face: “I adjure you angels of favor and knowledge, that you will turn (to me) the



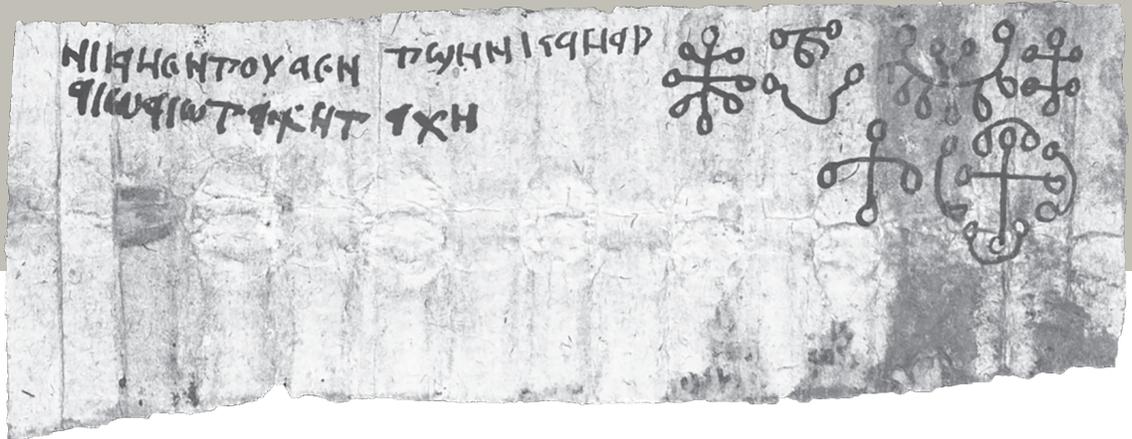
Take wax from a potter’s wheel and make two figures, a male and a female. Make the male in the form of Ares fully armed, holding a sword in his left hand and threatening to plunge it into the right side of her neck. And make her with her arms behind her back and down on her knees. . . . And take thirteen copper needles and stick one in the brain while saying, “I am piercing your brain, N”; and stick two in the ears, and two in the eyes and one in the mouth and two in the midriff and one in the hands and two in the pudenda and two in the soles, saying each time, “I am piercing such and such a member of her, N, so that she may remember no one but me, N, alone.”

RIGHT: Magical figurine pierced with needles (Louvre inv. E 27145; photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons).

THIS PAGE: Coptic magical text to cause impotence toward an unwanted male suitor (E13767; P. 30281/N. 17193 and P. 30280/N. 17192).



OPPOSITE: Spell for obtaining a woman's love from a fifteenth century necromancer's handbook (Liber incantationum, BSB Clm 849; photo: Creative Commons).



heart of N, daughter of N, and let her do nothing without me, and let her heart be (joined) with my heart in love." Take the new flask and bury it under her doorstep and say: "Just as a woman will return to the infant of her womb, so this N will return to me to love me from this day and forever." (Michael A. Morgan. *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of Mysteries*, 1983, 35)

If these ritual practices seem foreign and "pagan" to a modern "Western" observer, we can turn to the grimoires of medieval Europe, where "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" are invoked in an exceptionally similar spell to those quoted above, but this from a fifteenth-century CE Christian context. It is attested in a necromancer's manual written in Latin now in Munich Clm 849 (opposite):

Take virgin wax . . . And the master should begin this operation, making an image of the woman for whom you perform it. . . . And when the image has thus been made, the master should have nine needles made by an experienced craftsman. . . . Then the master should fix the needles in the image, plac-

ing one in the head, another in the right shoulder, the third in the left, the fourth where people are accustomed to locate the heart, saying, "Just as this needle is fixed in the heart of this image, so may the love of N be fixed to the love of N, so that she cannot sleep, wake, lie down, sleep, [or] walk until she burns with love of me." He should fix the fifth in the navel, the sixth in the thigh, the seventh in the right side, the eighth in the left, the ninth in the anus. . . . Then make this conjuration . . . , "O N, I conjure your entire substance, that you may not sleep or sit or lie down or perform any work of craft until you have satisfied my libidinous desire. I conjure you by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . . I conjure you and exorcise you and command you, that as the deer yearns for a fountain of water [Ps. 41:2 Vulg.], so you, N, should desire my love." (Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*, 1997, 87–88)

At the end of the spell there is a note made by the compiler of the manuscript that "And in this all the Spanish, Arabic, He-

