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Magic and Memory

Dido's Ritual for Inducing Forgetfulness in Aeneid 4

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Abstract

In this article, I examine the nature of Dido's magic ritual in *Aeneid 4*, reading it as a magic ritual aimed at inducing forgetfulness. I argue that in burning his belongings, Dido intends to forget Aeneas and not to destroy him; for this purpose, I study this episode in the light of non-literary sources and of the poetic tradition concerning love magic and the obliteration of memory.

Keywords

Magic – memory – forgetfulness – Dido – Vergil

1 Introduction

In Vergil's *Aeneid 4*, Dido, who has fallen passionately in love with Aeneas, is unable to accept the prospect of his imminent departure from Carthage and is overcome by an impious *furor* that drives her almost to madness. In a moment when she has already decided to die (4.475), the queen confesses to her sister that she has found a solution to her problem. Dido pretends that a sorceress from a distant land has taught her a magical way either to bind Aeneas or to get rid of her love for him. As scholars state, this ritual concerning the use of

magical practices is a way to deceive her sister and mask Dido's real intention.¹ Since the ritual must look real, Dido orders her sister Anna to build a pyre, which will in reality be her funeral pyre, in order to perform the disguised ritual. Anna does not imagine that Dido is planning her own death (4.500). Dido's words are ambiguous, since the goal of her magic remains unclear: *inueni, germana, uiam (gratare sorori) | quae mihi reddat eum uel eo me soluat amantem* ('Sister mine, I have found a way—wish to your sister joy—to return him to me or release me from my love for him').² Does she perform this magic to win Aeneas' affection or to get rid of him and thus forget? An examination of Dido's practices with reference to non-literary sources (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* and *tabellae defixionum*) and the poetic tradition of magic in antiquity concerning the obliteration of memory will aid both in answering this question and revealing the extent to which Dido's ritual is intended as sympathetic magic to induce forgetfulness of Aeneas by burning his personal belongings as opposed to simply destroying these objects in order to destroy him.

2 Scholarship Concerning Dido's Ritual as Destructive Magic

'tu secreta pyram tecto interiore sub auras
 erige, et arma uiri thalamo quae fixa reliquit 495
 impius exuuiasque omnis lectumque iugalem,
 quo perii, super imponas: abolere nefandi
 cuncta uiri monimenta iuuat monstratque sacerdos.'
 haec effata silet, pallor simul occupat ora.
 non tamen Anna nouis praetexere funera sacris 500
 germanam credit, nec tantos mente furores
 concipit aut grauiora timet quam morte Sychaei.
 ergo iussa parat.
 At regina pyra penetrali in sede sub auras
 erecta ingenti taedis atque ilice secta, 505
 intenditque locum sertis et fronde coronat
 funerea; super exuuias ensemque relictum
 effigiemque toro locat haud ignara futuri.³

1 For example, Luck 2006, 115.

2 A. 4.478-479. All translations of the *Aeneid* are from Fairclough 2006.

3 Verg. A. 4.494-508.

'Secretly raise up a pyre in the inner court under the sky, and heap up on it the arms that impious one left hanging in my bower, and all his attire and the bridal bed that was my undoing. I want to destroy all memorials of the abhorred wretch, and the priestess so directs.' Thus she speaks and is silent; pallor the while overspreads her face. Yet Anna thinks not that her sister veils her death under these strange rites; her mind dreams not of such frenzy nor does she fear anything worse than when Sychaeus died. So she makes ready as bidden. But the queen, when in the heart of her home the pyre rose heavenward, piled high with pine logs and hewn ilex, hangs the place with garlands and crowns it with funeral boughs. On top, upon the couch, she lays the dress he wore, the sword he left, and an image of him, knowing what was to come.⁴

Some scholars, focusing on this excerpt, support the thesis that Dido is about to perform a ritual destruction of Aeneas based upon the use of the verb *abolere*, which they interpret as meaning 'to destroy'. The first entry for *abolere* in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* does indeed concern destruction: "consumere, tollere, delere aliquid".⁵ Tupet suggests that the destruction of Aeneas' *exuviae* and effigy is the key to interpreting this scene as destructive.⁶ Goud and Yardley support the thesis that modern commentators are wrong when they interpret the use of the effigy "as having connections with sympathetic magic".⁷ Martínez, in the wake of Tupet's analysis, also defends the idea that this scene is a ritual that involves destructive magic, citing two *tabellae defixionum* concerning the silencing of enemies.⁸

The question of the nature of Dido's ritual, whether it concerns destructive magic or love magic, does not have a single answer. As Samson Eitrem states, "magie d'amour et magie destructive ... s'entrelacent—Didon elle-même fait entrevoir les deux possibilités".⁹ There are some arguments, however, that may support the thesis that Dido's ritual is intended to induce forgetfulness rather than destruction.

4 Fairclough's translation adapted.

5 *TLL* s.v. *aboleo* vol. 1, 116.46-47.

6 Tupet 1970, 237-238: "[I]ci, elles [*exuviae*] sont destinées à être détruites, ce qu'exprime le verbe *abolere*.... Ici, au contraire, le tableau, ou le buste, que Didon ne laisse à personne le soin de placer sur le bûcher, voué à la destruction, non pas l'amour d'Énée, mais sa personne".

7 Goud and Yardley 1988, 386.

8 Martínez 2003, 241-245. See also Seider 2013, 119-120.

9 Eitrem 1941, 62.

3 Dido's Spell as a Ritual for Inducing Forgetfulness

The topic of forgetfulness plays an important role in the magic ritual performed by Dido in *Aeneid* 4. When the ritual is already in motion, the queen, following the teachings of a Massylian sorceress, gives instructions to her sister about how to proceed (*A.* 4.497-498). Dido does not indicate that she wants to destroy Aeneas, but rather that she wants to free herself from the memories of him, which are represented by his sword, clothes, and other belongings. Even if it is assumed that *cuncta monimenta* ('all souvenirs')¹⁰ refers also to the effigy mentioned at *A.* 4.508, the verb *abolere* does not completely resolve this issue since it means not only 'to destroy', but also 'to forget'. Servius, commenting on this episode, states that *abolere* here means *a memoria tollere* ('to remove from memory', *ad A.* 4.508). This verb appears only four times in the *Aeneid* and is always linked to the idea of forgetfulness. In *A.* 1.719-722, Cupid, disguised as Ascanius, makes Dido start to forget her former husband so that she will fall in love with Aeneas instead (*at memor ille | matris Acidaliae paulatim abolere Sychaeum | incipit*, 'but he, mindful of his Acidalian mother, little by little begins to efface Sychaeus');¹¹ in *A.* 11.789, Arruns asks Apollo to blot out the memory of the dishonor he has suffered (*da, pater, hoc nostris aboleri dedecus armis*, 'grant that this disgrace be effaced by our arms, Father Almighty!').¹² In using this verb a very limited number of times, Vergil is probably calling his readers' attention to the coherence of his work, connecting particularly the episode of 1.719-722 with that of 4.494-498, in a kind of ring composition, linking the beginning and the end of Dido's love for Aeneas. Glenn Most notes that Vergil often seems to make use of textual memory and thus creates a dense

10 See *TLL* s.v. *monumentum* vol. 8, 1465.34-40. In the *Aeneid*, the term *monimentum* is used of objects that act as reminders. See, for example, *A.* 3.486, *accipe et haec, manuum tibi quae monimenta mearum* (Andromache gives a cloak to Ascanius); 5.572, *esse sui dederat monumentum et pignus amoris* (Dido gives a horse to Ascanius); and 12.945, *ille, oculis postquam saevi monimenta doloris | exuuiasque hausit* (Aeneas sees Turnus with Pallas' belt). Fedeli 2015, 830 notes, "monumentum è tutto ciò che perpetua—con la forza della testimonianza o del documento—il ricordo di qualcosa".

11 It is worth noting the possible connection of Venus' speech to Cupid (*A.* 1.673-688) with a ritual of love magic, especially 1.675 (*sed magno Aeneae mecum teneatur amore*, 'but on my side she may be held fast in strong love for Aeneas') and 1.688 (*occultum inspire ignem fallasque ueneno*, 'you may breathe into her a hidden fire and beguile her with your poison'). If such a connection is justified, it may support the argument that Dido was under a love spell until she realized Aeneas was planning an imminent departure from Carthage and, in response, she uses the rituals to forge an erotic spell of separation and thereby rid herself of the love she feels for Aeneas. Also, it is noteworthy that *teneatur* or *teneatur* are very common in the language of the *tabellae defixionum*.

12 *TLL* s.v. *abolere* vol. 1, 117.35-36, 77-78.

web of self-references that “binds together each of his public works internally and further links each one to all the other parts of his oeuvre”.¹³

Further to the idea of forgetfulness that this episode conveys, it is important to consider the expression that is employed by Dido to refer to Aeneas, *nefandus uir* (‘abhorred wretch’, *A.* 4.497-498), which implies a moral purpose and has a strong religious overtone that suggests that Aeneas has violated the precepts of the gods.¹⁴ Thus *nefandus* may be connected to the silencing of the name of Aeneas in the sense that it will not be specifically mentioned, but rather placed under a veil of silence, and, eventually, forgotten.¹⁵ His name must also be thrown on the pyre. Martínez argues that, according to the belief that a name contains the existence of the individual, destroying or silencing it implies the termination of the individual’s life.¹⁶ In her last speech (*A.* 4.651-662), Dido wishes that the Trojan boats had never come to Carthaginian shores, and that she had never met Aeneas. In this sense, not using his name may be an attempt at self-purification before death.¹⁷ Quint mentions “the therapeutic effects of forgetting” in connection with the necessary oblivion of Troy so that the Trojans could pursue their destiny; Dido may also have felt the need to forget Aeneas to die cleansed of all the bad memories he left her with.¹⁸

If it is considered that this episode constitutes a magic ritual, the omission of the name may also be a point against the thesis that Dido aims only at destructive magic. The victims of destructive spells had to be clearly named so that the powers of the underworld could act against them.¹⁹ The *tabellae defixionum* show the invoker of the curse, the *defigens*, naming their victim.²⁰ Let us take the example of Audollent (*DT*) 222, a lead curse tablet from Carthage, dated to the second/third century CE:

13 Most 2001, 156.

14 In reference to *nefas*, Cipriano 1978, 82 remarks: “Nefas si adatta a esprimere tutto ciò per la sua stessa patina sacrale, dalle risonanze arcane e profonde, per il valore emozionale che l’uso sempre più gli attribuisce”.

15 Also, in *A.* 4.613 Dido refers to Aeneas with *infandum caput*.

16 Martínez 2003, 246. According to Martínez, the silencing of the name is connected to religious and moral perspectives.

17 I am thankful to the anonymous referee for this idea.

18 Quint 1982, 36. Herzog 1993, 110 notes that the souls in the underworld must drink from the River Lethe, free from memories of their former life if they wish to live again (*A.* 6.713-748). See also Quint 1982, 37 and Horsfall 2013 *ad loc.*

19 As Pease 1935, 488 notes, using another expression in place of the victim’s name is “the opposite of magic rites, in which the victim must be very accurately designated”.

20 Literally ‘the one who binds’, from the verb *defigere*. For the terminology concerning curse tablets, see Ogden 1999, 5.

Claudia Helenae, Clodia Successi, Clodia Steretia, Clodius Fortunatus, Clodius Romanus, Murcius Crimenius, Seruilius Faustus, Valerius Extricatus. Quomodo haec nomina ad inferos dedi, sic omnes aduersus me obmutescant neque loqui possint. Quomodo huic gallo uiuo extorsi et defixi, sic inimicorum meorum linguae aduersus me obmutescant.

Claudia, daughter of Helena, Clodia, daughter of Successus, Clodia Steretia, Clodius Fortunatus, Clodius Romanus, Murcius Crimenius, Servilius Faustus, Valerius Extricatus. In the same way I gave these names to the underworld, so may all of them be silenced against me, and be unable to speak. In the same way I wrenched the tongue from this rooster and nailed it down, so may my enemies' tongues be silenced against me.²¹

In this *tabella* concerning a judicial curse, the *defigens* lists the names of people whom he/she intends to curse and silence, offering them to the underworld gods. The curser does not merely write the names of the victims, but also their patronyms so that no error may occur during the performance of the curse.²² While the use of animals is intended to create an analogy with the persons to be bound through an effect of *similia similibus*, the characteristics of the cursed object are transferred to the person whom the *defigens* intends to curse.²³ The *defigens* uses the analogy of a rooster whose tongue is cut off to make sympathetic magic with the cursed person; the suffering of the animal is thus supposed to be transferred to the body of the victim of the curse.²⁴ In this sense, as concerns the accomplishment of magical practices and curses, Dido's omission of Aeneas' name can redirect the reading of this episode towards a ritual for inducing forgetfulness rather than destroying Aeneas, as was thought by some previous scholars.²⁵

21 My translation.

22 See also *DT* 215. This tablet from Carthage, contemporary to *DT* 222, is not clear about the goal of the curse, but the *defigens* provided a relatively large group of names, probably of slaves, to curse.

23 *Similia similibus* is the name given to the magic formula whose intent is to transfer the characteristics of one thing/person to another. Through a process of analogy (with a doll, a corpse, etc.), the cursed assumed the same physical or psychological aspect as the object used in the spell. See, for example, *DT* 68b.1-4: [καὶ ὡς] οὗτος [ὁ νεκρὸς] ἀ[τ]ε[λ]ή[ς] κ[ε]ῖται οὕτως ἀτέλεστα εἶ[ν]αι Θεοδώραι πάντ[α καὶ] ἔπη καὶ ἔργα τὰ πρὸς Χαρίαν καὶ πρὸς [το(ὺ)ς ἄ]λλο(υ)ς ἀνθρώ[π]ο(υ)ς ('[And just as] this corpse lies useless, [so] may all the words and deeds of Theodora be useless with regard to Charias and to the other people'). Translation by Gager 1992, 90. Cf. also Faraone 1991, 3-29, esp. 6-10.

24 For the use of animals in magic rituals, see Tupet 1976, 64-91; Ogden 2014, 294-309; Salayová 2017, 192-206; Watson 2019, 127-165.

25 Cf. Tupet's reading of this episode, mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Regarding the topic of keeping silent about people's names in order to bring forgetfulness, it seems that Dido's intention is more related to a *lusipharmakon*, a ritual performed to efface love. According to Dido, the sorceress she has consulted is an expert in *soluere mentes | quas uelit* ('to set free the hearts of whom she wills').²⁶ This kind of spell, which has a long literary tradition, always focusses on being released from someone's spell.²⁷ Therefore it seems apt to see here an attempt by Dido to perform a spell on herself to free herself of her love for Aeneas. She appears to be trying to erase her memories of him. Even if silencing his name at this stage may not be the same as forgetting Aeneas, it can be regarded as a step towards forgetting him. Later, when Aeneas meets Dido at the *Lugentes campi* of the underworld (6.450-476), he is the only one who speaks; Dido's silence may be connected with the silencing she intended to impose upon his name/him.

On the literary field, another example related to Dido's spell may be called upon. Years after the composition of the *Aeneid*, Ovid, working on remedies to cure the disease of love, gives instructions about how to proceed in order to forget the beloved:

scripta caue relegas blandae seruata puellae:
 constantes animos scripta relecta mouent.
 omnia pone feros (pones inuitus) in ignes,
 et dic 'ardoris sit rogas iste mei'.
 Thestias absentem succendit stipite natum:
 tu timide flammae perfida uerba dabis?
 si potes, et ceras remoue: quid imagine muta
 carperis? hoc perit Laodamia modo.
 et loca saepe nocent; fugito loca conscia uestri
 concubitus; causas illa doloris habent.
 'hic fuit, hic cubuit; thalamo dormiuimus illo:
 hic mihi lasciua gaudia nocte dedit'.²⁸

Beware of reading again the treasured letters of an alluring mistress; letters read over again move even constant minds. Consign them all, though unwillingly, to the fierce flames, and say, 'Let that be my passion's funeral pyre'. Thestias burnt in the brand her absent son: will you be cowardly in burning treacherous words? If you can, get rid of her pictures also: why does a mute image affect you? In this way Laodamia perished. Places too

26 A. 4.487-488.

27 For these spells, see Silva 2018, 381-382.

28 Ov. Rem. 717-728. Translation by Mozley 1979, 227.

are often harmful; avoid places that know the secret of your unions; they hold the seeds of sorrow. 'Here was she, here she lay; in that chamber did we sleep; here did she give me wanton joys at night'.

Among the instructions given by the poet, readers learn that they must throw into the flames the letters of their beloved and destroy their images. Laodamia is given as an *exemplum* to illustrate what happens to those who cannot detach themselves from such representations. Finally, the poet advises to avoid the places associated with one's lost love.

Leafing through the *Remedia amoris*, readers can remark many common traces between this work and the *Aeneid*,²⁹ and I would say that the *Remedia* and Dido's magic ritual may have more in common concerning the subject of forgetfulness than it might seem. It is true that in *Rem.* 289-290, Ovid concludes that witchcraft is not a solution for the disease of love: *ergo quisquis opem nostra tibi poscis ab arte, | deme ueneficiis carminibusque fidem* ('Therefore, whoever you are that seek aid in my skill, have no faith in spells and witchcraft'). However, while Ovid neglects the use of magic in his didactic *opera*, he seems very interested in it.³⁰

Ovid may have been inspired by the Vergilian episode since the *Remedia* shares the same theme and presents similarities of vocabulary. Both Dido and Ovid's poetic *persona* assume the role of teacher and both order the placing of objects on a pyre (*super imponas*, *A.* 4.497; *pone/pones*, *Rem.* 719) so that they may be burned and bring forgetfulness.³¹ Among the objects that must be thrown on the pyre of oblivion are the bridal beds shared by Dido and Aeneas and by Ovid's anonymous lovers, and it seems that Ovid may be echoing Vergil since this specific term occupies the same metric position in both texts:³²

erige et arma uiri, *thalamo* quae fixa reliquit (*A.* 4.495)
hic fuit, hic cubuit; *thalamo* dormiuimus illo (*Rem.* 727)

29 Hardie 2006, 178 notes that "the *Remedia* has its own erotic agenda when it comes to memory and forgetting, but this intersects in important ways with the Virgilian agenda". See also *ibid.*, 181-184 for connections between the *Remedia* and the *Aeneid*.

30 In *Ars* 2.99-107 Ovid had already made this statement in the role of *praeceptor amoris* against the practice of sorcery to induce love. However, as Sharrock 1994, 68 points out, this speech against magic "is couched in incantatory language which subverts the simple message of condemnation of incantation. The style (incantatory) is in tension with the overt sense (rational). The text does and does the opposite of (and so inverts) what it says".

31 The verb *ponere* and its derivatives (like *deponere*) are often used in curse tablets. Pinotti 1988, 305 also notes this Vergilian echo, although she does not develop the connection.

32 I also would like to note the similarities of speech/instruction between *Rem.* 719-720 and Verg. *Ecl.* 8.77-78.

Thus, I suggest that an analogy may be established between the two episodes since the common topics and similarities are numerous: besides the lexical connections that may allow us to put them together, both appeal to an idea of forgetfulness by burning “erotic memories”³³ that inflict pain to the lovers. These objects lead us to practices of *materia magica*.

4 The Use of *materia magica* in Greco-Roman Magic

In giving instructions to Anna about how to proceed, Dido makes reference to the *exuivae* of Aeneas that must be placed upon the pyre (*A.* 4.495-496). As Ogden notes, the curse tablets’ effect was thought to be more effective if they were accompanied by personal objects belonging to the victim or even a sample of their hair (οὐσία), and this is especially a feature of love spells, both of attraction and separation.³⁴

The literary examples of use of personal objects for magic goes back at least to the classical Attic tragedy. In the Euripidean *Hippolytus*, the Nurse reveals to Phaedra her plan to give her a love charm to conquer her stepson (*Hipp.* 507-515), but to perform the spell properly they will need a token of the beloved: hair or another object belonging to him. Ogden, commenting on this episode, states that if the Nurse needs a token of Hippolytus, this is probably an attraction spell.³⁵ There are many other examples of the use of *materia magica*: Lucian in the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* (4.4) says that a Syrian sorceress can perform a very powerful erotic spell, but she needs some personal objects of the intended victim; Theocritus 2.53-54, similarly to *A.* 4.495-496, notes that Simaetha casts a piece of Delphis’ cloak into the flames: τοῦτ’ ἀπὸ τὰς χλαίνας τὸ κράσπεδον ὤλεσε Δέλφης, | ὡγὼ νῦν τίλλοισα κατ’ ἀγρίῳ ἐν πυρὶ βάλλω (‘this fringe from his cloak Delphis lost, which now I shred and cast into the cruel flames’);³⁶ also in Verg. *Ecl.* 8.91-93 readers are made aware that Daphnis’ *exuivae* are given to the Earth. In Apul. *Met.* 3.16, Photis says that her mistress, in love with a Boeotian boy, ordered her to obtain some of his hair.³⁷

These are examples of spells of attraction, but in Dido’s ritual the *exuivae* are used to perform a separation spell. As in Theocritus, Dido orders Aeneas’ belongings to be placed upon the pyre so that the magic’s effect may be

33 Hardie 2006, 189.

34 Ogden 1999, 14-15. See *TLL* s.v. *exuivae* vol. 5, 2132.16-23, 65-67. *Exuivae* may be regarded as a possible Latin translation for the Greek οὐσία.

35 Ogden 2009, 112.

36 All translations of Theocritus are from Gow 1952.

37 See Costantini 2019, 75-88 for an in-depth study on the use of *materia magica* in Apul. *Met.* 3.

accomplished. *Exuuiæ* are also found in some papyri containing love spells of attraction, but where a sense of separation is also desired. According to Jordan, “auburn hair was found inside *PGM XIXa*”.³⁸ This papyrus from Hermopolis Magna, dating from the fourth or fifth century CE, contains a spell for inducing passion in which a certain Apalos asks *daimones* that a Karosa may fall in love with him. At the end of the spell, he begs her not to think about her husband or child; Apalos thus also performs a spell of separation: [ἐφ’] ὅσον κείται παρὰ σοι τὸ θεῖον μυστήριον, μὴ ἐάσης αὐτήν τὴν Κάρωσα, ἣν ἔτεκεν Θελώ, μὴ [ιδίω] ἀνδρὶ μνημονεύειν, μὴ τέκνου (‘as long as the divine mystery remains within you do not allow Karosa herself, whom Thelo bore, to think of her [own] husband, her child’, *PGM 19a.53-55*).³⁹

5 Rituals for Inducing Forgetfulness in Greco-Roman Magic

The act of forcing someone to forget someone or something is present in many texts concerning love magic. In most of the rituals, the person performing the spell wants the target to forget their closest relatives and to think only of him or her. This is the most common feature of the so-called *agoge* spells, which are typically used for inducing passion.⁴⁰

The *Odyssey* might be considered the first classical text in which forgetfulness is of great importance. Among the many obstacles Odysseus must overcome is that represented by Calypso, as described in *Od.* 1.56-57: αἰεὶ δὲ μαλακοῖσι καὶ αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισιν | θέλγει, ὅπως Ἰθάκης ἐπιλήσεται (‘and continually with soft and wheedling words she beguiles him that he may forget Ithaca’).⁴¹ This is not a love spell in the traditional sense, but the main goal is similar to that of love magic rituals. Calypso wants Odysseus to forget his homeland and his family so that he will stay in Ogygia with her. Petropoulos mentions two fragments that indicate the belief that love has an influence on memory: Sappho fr. 16 Lobel-Page and Alcaeus fr. 283 Lobel-Page.⁴² Both poets refer to Helen who, because of love, forgets her husband, children, and family. Although there is no reference to the fact that Helen has been the victim of any

38 Jordan 1985, 251.

39 All translations of the *PGM* are from Betz 1996.

40 For a thorough explanation of this kind of spell, see Faraone 1999, 41-95.

41 Translation by Murray 1995, 17. As Heubeck 1990, 55 *ad Od.* 10.213 observes, “(κατα-)θέλγειν always means an activity producing the alteration (usually temporary) of normal thought and consciousness, not magical transformation of the outward form or appearance”.

42 Petropoulos 1988, 219.

kind of witchcraft, according to Sappho and Alcaeus, she was possessed by the same kinds of powers that hold the victims of love spells.⁴³

Theocritus gives us probably the first poetic contribution dedicated entirely to love magic in antiquity in which forgetfulness plays an important role. The young sorceress Simaetha makes a libation three times so that Delphis may forget whoever is sleeping with him:

εἴτε γυνὰ τήνῳ παρακέκλιται εἴτε καὶ ἀνὴρ,
τόσσον ἔχοι λάθας ὄσσον ποκά Θησέα φαντί
ἐν Δίᾳ λασθήμεν εὐπλοκάμῳ Ἀριάδνας.⁴⁴

Whether it be woman that lies by him now, or whether man, may he as clean forget them as once, men say, Theseus forgot in Dia the fair-tressed Ariadne.

Later Horace returns to the topic presented by Theocritus. In *Epod.* 5.69-70, Canidia remarks that her beloved sleeps in a bed anointed with forgetfulness: *indormit unctis omnium cubilibus | obliuione paelicum?* ('The bed he sleeps in has been smeared with a substance designed to make him forget all his other lady loves').⁴⁵ The practices described in these poems are similar to those attested by non-literary sources. In the *defixiones* and *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, parents and friends are also among the main targets of spells of forgetfulness. Three *defixiones amatoriae* from Sousse, dating from the third century CE, give us examples. The creator of *DT* 68A prays to Persephone and to unmarried people that a certain Theodora may be bound to remain unmarried and also prays that Charias, her beloved, will forget her.⁴⁶ In *DT* 266, the *defigens* Felix wishes that Vettia may forget not only her father and mother but also all her friends and lovers. A similar *defixio*, *DT* 268, expresses the same kind of wish of forgetfulness aimed at a certain Bonosa. Likewise, the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* are a source for memory loss in love magic, as can be observed in *PGM* 4.2756. The following excerpt combines the *furor* typical of erotic rituals and *agoge* spells and the forgetfulness that inevitably afflicts the cursed one:⁴⁷

43 Petropoulos 1988, 200 mentions that "it is possible to establish first the ancient commonplace that passion might obliterate one's memory of his or her intimates and second, the ancient practice of magically instilling 'forgetfulness' in furtherance of an amatory design".

44 Theoc. 2.44-46.

45 Translation by Rudd 2004, 285.

46 Petropoulos 1988, 220.

47 Faraone 1999, 86.

μαινομένη ἢ δ(εῖνα) ἦκοι ἐπ' ἐμαῖσι θύραισι τάχιστα, ληθομένη τέκνων συνηθεί-
 ης τε τοκῆων καὶ στυγέουσα τὸ πᾶν ἀνδρῶν γένος ἠδὲ γυναικῶν ἐκτὸς ἐμοῦ, τοῦ
 δεῖνα, μόνον με δ' ἔχουσα παρέστω, ἐν φρεσὶ δαμνομένη κρατερῆς ὑπ' ἔρωτος
 ἀνάγκης.⁴⁸

In frenzy may she (NN)⁴⁹ come fast to my doors,
Forgetting children and her life with 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 force.

As the above examples suggest, one of the main goals of these spells related to memory and love was to unsettle the victims, not to destroy them or their relatives. A possible connection may be established between these sources and the episode of Dido's ritual in *Aeneid* 4, since she too could be under the influence of some magic force that compelled her to forget Sychaeus and fall in love with Aeneas, unmindful of her duties.

6 Conclusion

The issue of how to interpret Dido's ritual is complex. It seems incorrect, however, to characterize it solely as a destructive ritual and in the process to neglect other factors, such as the tradition of the significance of forgetfulness in erotic magic rituals. Furthermore, the phrase *abolere cuncta uiri monimenta* (A. 4.497-498) can be read as meaning the forgetting of all memories, which may ultimately lead to the forgetting of Aeneas himself. Vergil shows a deep knowledge of the extensive tradition that precedes him and this should not be ignored in attempting to understand the implications of Dido's practices. Dido's ritual should be regarded as a ritual designed to induce forgetfulness instead of merely destruction, as reflected in the practice mentioned in both the poetic tradition concerning magic and non-literary sources.⁵⁰

48 *PGM* 4.2756-2765; my emphasis. For other spells that appeal to the selective amnesia of the cursed, see also *PGM* 15.1-5 and 19a.53-55.

49 NN represents *nomen nescio*. As Betz 1996, xxxiii says, "in the magical formularies, this abbreviation stands for a name or names to be inserted by the reader, the names of the persons against or for whom the magic is to be carried out".

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