



GOODBYE WIKO
SOFÍA TORALLAS TOVAR

Sofía Torallas Tovar, Ph.D. (1995), is Professor of Classics and Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. Since 2002, she is the curator of the papyrus collection at the Abbey of Montserrat, where she has not only catalogued and restored, but also published the texts of many of the papyri in Greek, Latin, and Coptic stored there. Editing papyrus texts requires additional skills, including the languages and knowledge of the historical context of the texts analyzed. In this line, triggered by the study of the texts, she has published on the sociolinguistic environment in Greco-Roman Egypt, the administration of the Roman province of Egypt, early monastic developments, and the circulation of books and documents in Antiquity. The world of ancient magic was always one of her interests. As co-PI of the project “Transmission of Magical Knowledge: Magical handbooks on papyrus,” funded since 2015 by the Neubauer Collegium at the University of Chicago, she has spearheaded with her colleague Christopher Faraone the re-edition and analysis of 88 magical handbooks from Greco-Roman Egypt. Her favorite place on earth is the Nile at sunset and having tea while basking in the sun and the blinking of its waters as they pass by Aswan. – Address: Classics and Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago, 1115 E. 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, USA. E-mail: sofiat@uchicago.edu.

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“Whaaat? Is it already June 30th!!? Help! can time be reversed? Can we go back to the blessed day in September when we arrived in Grunewald?”

I flipped frantically through my Greek and Egyptian magical handbooks on papyrus, the most powerful of all:

– “procedure to reverse time..., procedure to reverse time..., procedure to reverse time..., here!”

“*Êdê êdê tachy tachy!*” “now, now, quickly, quickly!”

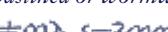
Oh no! this is not a procedure to reverse time. Did I activate the spell to speed up time instead? That is the only explanation! Now I must apologize to all the Fellows, who are in tears, packing their property, and booking flights to get back home, who have been mourning since May the end of their term here. I hear all this boeing and weeping on the courtyard of Villa Walther. And I feel responsible.

I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg with a project on ancient magical papyri. It is a project in which my main purpose is to understand the authors, scribes, users, and customers of

magical procedures encoded in ancient papyrus books, their language, their involvement, their traditions. These books are preserved thanks to the arid and hot climate of the Egyptian desert, ideal for organic material to survive. Amazingly well preserved, the 88 Greek and Egyptian magical handbooks provide a window into ancient rituals and beliefs. During these ten months, I have read through many magical procedures, in Greek, in Coptic, in Demotic. Arcane languages, unknown people, cultures long lost, but some procedures seem very close and familiar. And I decided to activate some of the procedures to make the best of our stay together at Wiko.

I began my strategy for success during our stay with a procedure for charm and endless friendship, to promote good relationships among the Fellows, all strangers to each other in September and facing a period of intense interaction in the following months. I chose a simple one, easy to perform:

GEMF 15, 445–447:

For everlasting charm and friendship. Take a root of pasithea or wormwood and write upon it this name (keeping yourself) pure:  Wear (it), and you will be charming and pleasing and amazing to those who see you.

We all wore the talisman of friendship, day after day, in the colloquia, in the lunches and dinners, at the parties at the Villa Walther, in the walks in the forest and by the lakes. And we said goodbye with tears in our eyes and the firm promise of meeting again. The procedure undoubtedly worked. A fourth-century codex provided us with a procedure to keep it working:

GEMF 60, 305:

For fire to continue: “I conjure you, fire, daimon of holy love, the invisible and manifold, the one and everywhere, to remain in this lamp at this time, shining and not dying out, by the command of Sofia.”

As for serious work, what we all came to Berlin to do, I activated early on a mighty procedure for business and success, able to cover all fields of research, arts, and professions. I chose one from a powerful bilingual – Greek/Egyptian – second-century CE papyrus roll:

GEMF 15, 148–155:

For a workshop to do well: Inscribe the egg of a male bird and then bury (the egg) near the threshold of the Wissenschaftskolleg with the following text: “You are the egg CHPHURIS, (the) egg, that is CHORBAISANACHARSŌ AMOUN (say thrice) SPHĒ (twice) GAKNEPHĒ SIETHŌ (thrice) NOUSI (twice). You are the egg that is sacred from birth, that is SELBIOUS BATHINI PHNIĒI APO AŌE AŌE AŌ[I] AŌI APHIAEA THŌU[TH?] IAŌ SELETĒA THEŌĒPH OXUMBRĒĒ ŪĒ III.” And then pronounce the prayer of the egg: “O great god, give favor, business, and success to me and to this place, where the egg lies, in the house where I (myself) conduct my business, the Wissenschaftskolleg. (You are) SELEPĒL THEŌĒPH and Agathos Daimon. Send to the Wissenschaftskolleg all business and daily prosperity. You are my labor, you are the great Amân, who (dwells) in heaven. [Aye, Lord,] help me.”

The weekly colloquia gave testimony of the high efficacy of this procedure. Gathered around a speaker, in the bright and elegant conference room of the central building, our brains were activated in a large number of different topics. The proof of the effective power of the spell was the interaction between scholars of extremely different and distant professional fields in discussions to which not even hunger could put an end, with hands still rising for questions at lunchtime.

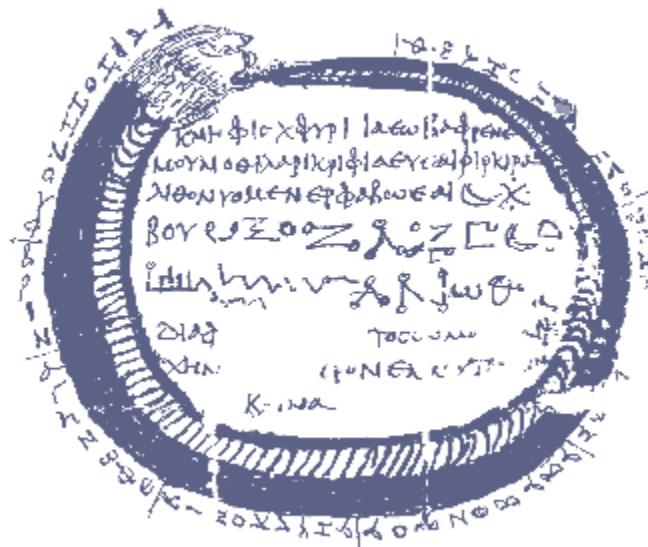
The third procedure did not have the expected results. It is a fourth-century protection against disease and suffering. I have two explanations for its failure: on the one hand, I might have not performed it correctly, though I have extensive experience in the activities of ancient *magoi*. On the other, perhaps I did perform it correctly, but too early on, and the effect of the spell wore out by February, when we all of us fell ill with COVID. At a similarly late date in our time together, other Fellows suffered from other serious ailments, and even had to visit the operating theater. I had chosen it from a Greek papyrus roll containing multiple recipes. It seemed indicated for our condition and protection, but now I know its effectiveness is not what it should be. I will write a note in the margin of my handbook. This was the procedure:

PGM VII 579–590:

A phylactery, a bodyguard against daimons, against phantasms, against every sickness and suffering, to be written on a leaf of gold or silver or tin or on

hieratic papyrus. When worn, it works mightily for it is the name of the power of the great god and [his] seal, and it is as follows: "KNOUPHIS CHPHYKIS IAEAO IAO AEE IAO IAEOBAPHRENE MOUNOTHILARIKRIPHLE Y EAIPHIRKIRALITHANY OMENERPHABOEAI." These [are] the names; the figure is like this: let the Snake be biting its tail, the names being written inside [the circle made by] the snake. The whole figure is [drawn] thus, as given below, with [the spell], "Protect my body, [and] the entire soul of me, and all the other Fellows." And when you have consecrated [it], wear [it].

It also requires the drawing of a powerful sketch.



Only the gods know what happened. Perhaps I am not a good draftsman.

I did not activate the final procedures I had planned. This task was instead taken up by the Wiko staff, who in the meantime had developed incredible ability and skill in magical crafts, a skill as great as the one they brought to helping us in all manner of matters during our stay. There were in fact two separate procedures. The first, used in the final days, is a formidable one, which apparently effectively worked in less than a week. From the Hay

“cookbook,” a powerful Coptic eighth-century leather magical handbook preserved at the British Museum:

When you wish a person to leave his/her house: Recite the following prayer over wild mustard. Cast it before the door of his/her house. He/She will flee. “I beg, I invoke you today, MARMARIOOTH, the one who is seated over all the authorities; I invoke you today, and your form, which is a flame of fire; I invoke you.”

The second procedure, used at the end, is well known, its use amply attested throughout history. It is the one for “safe travels” that was generally used by traders, travelers, soldiers, even pirates since antiquity. I provided the staff with an iteration of this one found in the Nautical Lapidary. An adaptation needed to be applied, of course, since transportation means have changed through the centuries, but as far as I know, everyone is back home and safe.

Astrampychos, Nautical Lapidary 3:

The translucent and shiny beryl, the aquamarine green: if Poseidon is engraved on it mounted on a double-drawn chariot, those who sail the sea – or fly across the skies – wearing it will come out of the difficulties unscathed.

To complete the good wishes for our travel, this short (culinary?) procedure provided comfort and ease.

PGM VII 182:

To be able to travel [a long way] home and not get thirsty: Gulp down an egg beaten in wine.

I cannot close this report without wishing as much friendship, health, and good work to the incoming cohort of Fellows. I hope they will enjoy this wonderful place as much as we have done, even in difficult times. To them I dedicate my last spell, wishing them also lots of joyful discovery at the Wissenschaftskolleg. They might need this spell specially on Thursday nights, when conversation goes on beyond midnight:

PGM VII 181:

To be able to drink a lot and not get drunk: Eat a baked pig's lung.