Finding "Herais" - On The Trail of Women's Correspondential Magick and The Charm of Hekate-Ereshkigal

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To the unnamed pharmakides whose names were never written,

Whose hands knew the weight of roots and the texture of leaves,

Whose voices shaped incantations that never reached the page,

Whose bodies became the first altar, the first correspondence,

Whose knowledge passed from palm to palm, from breath to breath,

Who brewed healing in kitchen vessels and cursed with kitchen ingredients,

Who were erased from history but never memory.

We call you forward.

We remember you.

We speak your language still.

Introduction: Language, Lexicon, Memory

This summary centers ancient pharmakides' – practitioners of wholistic magic – through a discussion of the historical context and then connecting with these largely unknown women, creating a spiritual composite as our ally, and reexamining a spell from an ancient magical text, along with exercises to take your experience deeper, centering yourself. I examine how correspondences function as a *language* - a systematic vocabulary through which practitioners communicate with spiritual forces, encode magical knowledge, and transmit wisdom across generations. This language is based on our *lexicon* – our existing vocabulary of correspondences. Without speaking the language of correspondences in our spells, the lexicon can grow stagnant, the difference between "book knowledge," and living practice. Note that I use "magic," when referring to historical practice, and "magick," for living modern witchcraft.

Correspondences are not arbitrary associations, but a coherent symbolic language developed through observation, practice, and transmission. We develop our personal lexicons based on existing information and personal gnosis. The latter part of that is especially important: like the ancient pharmakides,' our practice reflects who we are and what we have, so much more than blind adherence to the experts. However, understanding their historical development reveals the logic behind correspondence systems and empowers us to work with them consciously rather than mechanically.

Almost all of the existing records of correspondences, dating back thousands of year, was written privileged men. While literary witches like Circe, Medea, and Simaetha provide feminine narratives, they do show through the words of such men. Yet, we remember, in our blood and bones, these women, from folk healers to the ones who scratched on lead tablets. This is a call to awaken, to shift focus to the countless unnamed *pharmakides* — female magical practitioners whose first-voice accounts are lost to us, but whose material practices, botanical knowledge, and embodied magick abides in our souls.

Unsilencing The Witches: Whose Magic Was Written Down?

When we study ancient magic, we confront an uncomfortable truth: **we have almost no first-person accounts from female magical practitioners.** The women who brewed potions, sang incantations, performed rituals, and transmitted magical knowledge across generations left no written treatises, no signed papyri, no autobiographical accounts of their practice. This absence is not accidental. It reflects:

- **Literacy barriers:** Most women in the ancient Mediterranean world could not read or write
- **Economic barriers:** Writing materials were expensive; women rarely controlled resources
- **Institutional barriers:** Temple libraries and scribal schools excluded women
- **Social barriers:** Women's knowledge was deemed unworthy of preservation
- **Gendered violence:** Women's magical practice was more likely to be prosecuted than documented

What We Lost: Imagine if we had a *pharmakis*' own account of her training, her recipes, her understanding of plant spirits, her relationship with Hekate. Imagine if we could read her instructions to her daughter, her reflections on failed spells and successful healings, her prayers and invocations in her own words. **We will never have this.** The archive is silent, yet we KNOW it. In our hearts, souls, voice.

The History of Magic: The Male Scribal Monopoly

The written sources we do have come almost exclusively from privileged men:

Greek Magical Papyri	Compiled by male temple scribes with access to sacred libraries. All signed texts are male-authored. Represent elite, learned magical tradition.
Literary Sources	Written by male poets, playwrights, and novelists (Theocritus, Ovid, Apuleius, Lucian). Female magical practitioners appear as characters filtered through male imagination and male anxieties about female power.
Medical Texts	Authored by male physicians (Pliny, Galen, Dioscorides) who sometimes cite female practitioners but always as external sources, never as colleagues or equals.
Philosophical Texts	Written by male philosophers (Plato, Plutarch) who discuss magic as a theoretical problem, not a lived practice.

The Implications

This means that **everything we "know" about ancient female magical practitioners has been mediated through male perspectives.** The literary witches — Circe, Medea, Simaetha — are not women's self-representations but male fantasies and fears projected onto female bodies, while they likely reflect women's magical practices at the time.

While these literary witches, to me, are living spirits who I center into their own stories, we need to consider that these literary portraits tell us more about:

- Male anxieties about female sexuality and autonomy
- Cultural stereotypes linking women with dangerous knowledge
- The "othering" of female power as monstrous or transgressive

- The eroticization and demonization of women who operated outside patriarchal control

Unsilencing The Witches: we must read these sources *critically* — not accepting them at face value, but interrogating what they reveal about the material conditions of women's magical practice despite (and sometimes because of) their patriarchal framing. We can give them voice by centering them in their own stories, and connecting with their enduring spirits as guides and teachers.

Evidence for the Pharmakides: What the Archive Does Reveal

While we lack women's first-voice accounts, we have **material evidence** that women practiced magic extensively in the ancient Greco-Roman world:

1. Curse Tablets (Defixiones) Commissioned by Women

Lead curse tablets reveal that women were active clients of magical services:

- **First-person female curses:** Some tablets are written in first person by women (e.g., the curse tablet of Varia, 3rd century CE Rome: "I bind… I consign…")
- **Domestic contexts:** Tablets found in wells, thresholds, and household spaces — domains where women held authority
- **Targeting patterns:** Women cursed unfaithful lovers, romantic rivals, and those who threatened their households

2. Female Magico-Medical Authors

A handful of women's names survive as authors of botanical and magical texts:

Salpe of Lemnos	(1st century BCE) Wrote *Paignia* on magical and medicinal properties of plants and animals. Cited by Pliny the Elder.
Lais and Elephantis	Midwives and practitioners who documented botanical recipes, erotic magic, and cosmic timing for conception and childbirth.
Cleopatra the Alchemist	(3rd century CE) Wrote *The Chrysopoeia*, foundational alchemical text featuring the Ouroboros symbol. One of the few female voices in Greco-Egyptian esoteric tradition.

3. Physical Artifacts: The Materiality of Women's Magic

- **House of the Sorceress (Pompeii):** Ivory box containing amulets, beads, bronze figurines, and magical implements — a domestic magical toolkit
- **Spindle Whorl Amulets:** Stone spindles inscribed with magical characters and Hekate's name — weaving spells into fabric with every rotation, embedding magic in textile production
- **Domestic Vessels:** Cooking pots, grinding stones, and storage jars with residues of botanical preparations — evidence of kitchen-based pharmaceutical and magical work

4. Indirect Textual Evidence

Even in male-authored texts, we find traces of women's magical practice:

- **Theoris of Lemnos:** Executed in Athens (4th century BCE) for her magical practices. Her servant girl knew her mistress's spells and taught them to her husband — evidence of knowledge transmission through domestic relationships
- **The "Daughter" in PGM IV.478-482:** A marginal note addresses a female apprentice (θυγάτηρ), proving that women could access elite magical training (see detailed analysis below)

- **Ovid's Old Woman:** *Fasti* 2.571-581 depicts an *anus* teaching magical rites to a circle of young women — a rare glimpse of female-to-female transmission

What This Evidence Tells Us: Women were not passive consumers of magic but active practitioners, teachers, and innovators. Their knowledge circulated through oral tradition, domestic practice, and embodied transmission — systems that left fewer written traces but were no less sophisticated than male scribal magic.

Summoning the Spirit of the Pharmakides: From Literary Witches to Historical Practitioners

Traditional scholarship has focused on **literary witches** — mythological and fictional characters whose magical powers serve narrative and symbolic functions:

- **Circe:** The divine sorceress who transforms men into beasts — a figure of dangerous female sexuality and autonomy
- **Medea:** The foreign princess who murders her children — a figure of maternal monstrosity and ethnic otherness
- **Simaetha:** The lovesick girl performing erotic magic — a figure of female desire and desperation
- **Agamede:** Homer's herbalist who "knew all the drugs that are nourished by the wide earth" — a figure of comprehensive botanical knowledge

These characters are **archetypes**, not historical women. They tell us about cultural anxieties and fantasies, not about the lived experience of female magical practitioners.

We shift our lens to the unnamed pharmakides:

- The midwife who knew which herbs would ease labor and which would end pregnancy
- The healer who treated fevers with botanical preparations and incantations
- The domestic worker who protected her household with threshold rituals and apotropaic gestures
- The prostitute who used love magic to attract clients and binding spells to protect herself from violence

- The elderly woman who taught younger women the correspondences of plants, stones, and timing
- The servant who learned her mistress's spells by observation and transmitted them to her own daughter

The Pharmakis as Composite Ancestor: We cannot name her individually, but we can recognize her collectively. She is the spirit of all the women who worked with *pharmaka* — drugs, potions, poisons, medicines, magical substances. Her hands knew the texture of roots. Her voice shaped incantations. Her body was the first correspondence, the first magical tool.

Herais: A Case Study in Recovering Women's Practice

Who Was Herais?

Herais appears in PGM XXXII.1-19, performing an erotic binding spell. The Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) is a vast collection of magical spells, rituals and knowledge, dating from the 1st century BCE – 5th century CE. Unlike Circe or Medea, Herais was likely a **real woman** — not a mythological figure but a historical practitioner whose name was preserved in a magical text.

We know almost nothing about her except:

- She commissioned or performed a binding spell to attract a ***woman*** named Sarapias
- Her mother's name was Thermoutharin (Egyptian, suggesting she was from Egypt or had Egyptian heritage)
- She invoked Anubis, Hermes, and "all the rest down below" — a syncretic blend of Greek and Egyptian deities

Why Herais Matters

Herais represents the **composite ancestor** — the countless unnamed female practitioners whose magical practice was:

- **Domestic:** Rooted in household materials (kitchen ingredients, hearth tools)

- **Syncretic:** Blending Greek, Egyptian, and Near Eastern traditions
- **Practical:** Focused on immediate needs (love, protection, justice, healing)
- **Embodied:** Using physical gestures, voice, and bodily presence as primary magical technology
- **Oral:** Transmitted through observation, apprenticeship, and lived experience rather than written texts

When we invoke Herais, we invoke **all the pharmakides** — the women whose names were never written, whose spells were never recorded, whose knowledge was never deemed worthy of preservation by the male scribal elite.

I'm asking you to call upon Herais, and to center her in her own story.

Women's Magical Knowledge: Oral, Embodied, Domestic

R. Gordon's framework (1999) identifies four levels of magical practice in the ancient world, arranged hierarchically by cultural prestige and access to literacy:

Level	**Practitioners**	**Characteristics**
(a) Folk Magic	Village healers, midwives, domestic practitioners	Oral tradition, accessible knowledge, rooted in popular belief and practice. **Women predominate here.**
(b) Specialized Practitioners	Root-cutters, herbalists, ritual experts	Systematic botanical knowledge, influenced by medical and philosophical doctrines. Mixed gender participation.
(c) Goetic Magic	Necromancers, spirit workers	Specialized mediation between underworld and living. Predominantly male in written sources.

(d) Temple Scribal Magic	Authors of Greek Magical Papyri	Elite, learned tradition with access to sacred libraries. **Exclusively male in surviving texts.**

Reclaiming Women's Magical Epistemology

This hierarchy reflects **patriarchal values** that privilege:

- Written over oral knowledge
- Institutional over domestic practice
- Male over female authority
- Elite over popular tradition

But **oral knowledge is not inferior to written knowledge** — it is simply transmitted differently. The pharmakides' correspondence systems were:

- **Experiential:** Learned through direct observation of plant properties, ritual outcomes, and bodily responses
- **Mnemonic:** Encoded in rhythmic chants, physical gestures, and visual symbols that aided memory
- **Adaptive:** Fluid and responsive to local materials, cultural context, and individual innovation
- **Accessible:** Not restricted by literacy or institutional gatekeeping
- **Embodied:** The practitioner's body was the first correspondence — gesture, voice, breath, touch

The pharmakides' knowledge was not "lesser" because it was oral and domestic. It was a **different way of knowing** — one that valued direct experience, bodily wisdom, and relational transmission over textual authority and institutional control.

The Body as Primary Correspondence

Somatic Magic: Women's Bodies as Magical Technology

In the absence of access to temple libraries and expensive writing materials, women's bodies became their primary magical tool:

- **Gesture:** Holding thumbs, grasping heels, counterclockwise turning — physical actions that grounded cosmic invocations into flesh
- **Voice:** Chanting, singing, whispering — sonic correspondences that shifted consciousness and opened channels to divine forces
- **Breath:** Blowing on herbs, breathing incantations into potions — animating substances with life force
- **Touch:** Kneading dough, grinding herbs, anointing bodies — tactile knowledge transmitted through hands
- **Blood:** Menstrual blood as powerful magical substance — women's bodies as sources of transformative power

The body was not merely a *tool* for magic but the **first correspondence** — the most intimate sympathetic link between practitioner and cosmos.

Embodied Transmission: When a mother taught her daughter to hold her thumbs for protection, to grasp her heel for grounding, to turn counterclockwise to banish — she was transmitting a **somatic lexicon** that required no literacy, no institutional access, no male permission. This was women's magic: written in the body, spoken through the body, transmitted body to body.

Ancient Foundations (1st Century BCE – 5th Century CE) - Before Herais: The Oral Tradition

The Pre-Literate Matrix

Before the Greek Magical Papyri codified elite magical practice, correspondence knowledge circulated through oral tradition, domestic practice, and embodied transmission. This knowledge was:

- **Experiential:** Learned through direct observation of natural cycles, plant properties, and ritual outcomes
- **Mnemonic:** Encoded in rhythmic chants, visual symbols, and physical gestures that aided memory
- **Accessible:** Not restricted by literacy or institutional gatekeeping
- **Adaptive:** Fluid and responsive to local materials, cultural context, and individual innovation

Evidence of Early Correspondence Systems:

Homer (8th c. BCE)	References Perimede/Agamede who *"knew all the drugs that are nourished by the wide earth"* (Iliad 11.740) — suggests systematic botanical knowledge held by women
Theophrastus (4th c. BCE)	*Enquiry into Plants* documents root-cutters (*rhizotomoi*) who harvested plants according to lunar phases, planetary hours, and ritual protocols — early temporal correspondences. Both men and women practiced this craft.
Pliny the Elder (1st c. CE)	Cites female practitioners like Salpe of Lemnos who documented botanical-magical properties — women as knowledge transmitters, though their original texts are lost

Women in The Greek Magical Papyri

I first read Miram Blanco Cesteros' chapter about women in The PGM quite a few years ago. It resonated so deeply with me. By that time, I'd been studying the Hans Dieter Betz translation for some time. My experience of the PGM has been quite mystical, and it's influenced my personal practice, teaching and writing. Some of the spells light up, and I connect to the ancient practitioners. Others do nothing for me. Blanco Cesteros' academic research reflected my personal gnosis: there were women in the PGM. Of course, for the most part, we'll never have scholarly evidence of it, but I know it to be true. I hear their whispers, I see through their eyes, and their work inspires my own.

Herais' spell: *"I adjure you, Evangelos, by Anubis and Hermes and all the rest down below, attract and bind Sarapias whom Helen bore, to this Herais, whom Thermoutharin bore, now, now; quickly, quickly."* This holds special meaning to me because it is from one woman to another. While I may not agree with erotic binding spells, I can certainly appreciate her experience of desire.

In addition to this spell, from woman to woman, there is another passage that invokes the "daughter," of an eminent magical practitioner:

"Be gracious to me, O Providence and Psyche, as I write these mysteries handed down [not] for gain but for instruction; and for an only child I request immortality, O initiates of this our power (furthermore, it is necessary for you, ***O daughter****, to take the juices of herbs and spices, which will [be made known] to you at the end of my holy treatise)..."*

— Mithras Liturgy, PGM IV.475–829

Significance:

- Only instance of *θυγάτηρ* (daughter) as addressee in PGM
- Proves women accessed elite magical training
- Transmission typically father-to-daughter in family lineages

I know the Mithras Liturgy is probably the most famous passage from the PGM, but it has never done a thing for me. It feels like it was written by a man.

Part II: Case Study – The Charm of Hekate-Ereshkigal

While there is no evidence that this spell was written by a woman, and the spell of Herais is remarkably devoid of correspondences, I've selected what is probably my favorite spell from the PGM for this case study in correspondences. You'll find the entire brief text at the end of this document. I'm referring to the author of the spell as "Herais," in the spirit of centering the ancient pharmakides.

PGM LXX.4-25: Against Fear of Punishment

The Spell (Reconstructed):

"I adjure you by the virgin, bitch, serpent, wreath, key, herald's wand, golden sandal of the Lady of Tartaros. ASKEI KATASKEI ERON OREON OMEGA SAMNI BAUI. I have been initiated, and I went down into the underground chamber of the Dactyls."

Actions: Hold thumbs. Grasp right heel. Bake cake of sesame, bran, sandalwood, and vinegar.

Lexicon vs. Language: From Static Words to Living Syntax

The distinction between **lexicon** and **language** is fundamental to understanding how correspondences function as a complete magical system. This is not merely semantic—it represents the difference between passive knowledge and active power, between memorization and mastery.

The Lexicon: The Word-Hoard

The **lexicon** is the inventory of correspondences—the raw vocabulary of magical practice. It consists of individual, static elements that carry potential meaning but remain inert until activated through intentional use.

The Lexicon as Static Data: Correspondences in their dormant state—ingredients on a shelf, epithets in a grimoire, gestures described in a text. They are nouns and adjectives waiting to become verbs.

Examples from PGM LXX.4-25:

- **Material correspondences:** Sesame seeds, first-quality bran, sandalwood, sharp vinegar
- **Somatic correspondences:** The right heel, the tucked thumbs
- **Linguistic correspondences:** The *Ephesia Grammata* (ASKEI KATASKEI ERON OREON)
- **Divine correspondences:** Epithets like *Parthenos* (Virgin), *Kyon* (Bitch), *Kleis* (Key)

On their own, these elements are simply *things*. A jar of sesame seeds is food. A gesture of grasping the heel is a physical position. An epithet written on papyrus is ink and fiber. They contain potential meaning, but they aren't *doing* anything yet. It is the incantation and somatic movements that are the language.

Lexicon and Language: A Visual Comparison

The Lexicon (The Correspondences)	**The Language (The Enchantment)**
Bran & Vinegar (Ingredients)	**Kneading the cake into shape** (The domestic action that transforms ingredients into offering)
"Virgin" & "Bitch" (Epithets)	**Chanting them rhythmically** to shift personal frequency and invoke specific aspects of Hekate's power
The Right Heel (Anatomy)	**Physically gripping it** to anchor protection in the body and ground cosmic invocation in flesh
Hekate's Wheel / Strophalos (Symbol/Tool)	**Spinning the disc** to create vibrational correspondence with celestial spheres and send intention through the cosmos
Ephesia Grammata (Voces magicae)	**Speaking the words aloud** in rhythmic cadence to open channels through sonic vibration
Crossroads (Location)	**Standing at the threshold** where worlds meet, becoming the axis point between realms

Deconstructing the Correspondence Layers

Layer 1: Somatic Language — The Body as Key

Gestures:

- **Holding thumbs:** Protective posture, sealing personal power
- **Grasping right heel:** Grounding gesture, connecting to earth/underworld

Magical Logic:

The body itself becomes the primary correspondence. Physical gesture grounds cosmic invocation into flesh. The practitioner's body is the first "material" in the spell — the most intimate sympathetic link.

Dactyls Connection:

The spell references the Dactyls (Daktyloi) — mythical "fingers" born from Rhea's hands who invented magic and metalworking. The structural symmetry is profound:

- Physical fingers holding thumbs ↔ Cosmic Fingers (Dactyls) who forged magic itself
- Micro-cosmic action grants access to macro-cosmic vault

Layer 2: Epithet Litany — A Syntax of Paradox

Invocation: *"virgin, bitch, serpent, wreath, key, herald's wand, golden sandal of the Lady of Tartaros"*

Epithet	**Correspondence Meaning**
Virgin (Parthenos)	Total independence, self-sovereignty, untouchable autonomy
Bitch (Kyon)	Ferocious threshold protection, loyal guardian, fierce defender
Serpent (Ophis)	Transformation, shedding old skins, chthonic wisdom
Wreath (Stephanos)	Victory, honor, cyclical completion
Key (Kleis)	Access to hidden spaces, unlocking mysteries, opening/closing portals
Herald's Wand (Kerykeion)	Mediation between worlds, psychopomp function, safe passage
Golden Sandal (Chrysosandalos)	Divine contact with earth, walking between worlds, grounded divinity

Correspondence Logic:

Each epithet functions as a *linguistic correspondence* — a word that activates a specific aspect of Hekate's power. The practitioner strings them together like beads on a necklace, creating a composite invocation that addresses the goddess's full spectrum of abilities.

Layer 3: Ephesia Grammata — Oral Verse vs. Textual Control

Words: *"ASKEI KATASKEI ERON OREON OMEGA SAMNI BAUI"*

Nature: Pre-literate, rhythmically chanted incantations (Ephesian Letters)

Historical Context:

The Ephesia Grammata were famous magical words from Ephesus, so powerful that merely speaking them could avert danger. They appear in multiple ancient sources and were worn as amulets. Their power resided in:

- **Sound:** Rhythmic cadence that induces trance states
- **Orality:** Passed mother-to-daughter, relying on human voice
- **Accessibility:** Didn't require literacy to transmit or use

Correspondence Logic:

These words function as *sonic correspondences* — vibrational keys that shift consciousness and open channels to divine forces. Unlike written spells that require literacy and access to texts, the Ephesia Grammata could be memorized and transmitted orally, making them accessible to practitioners regardless of education or social status.

Layer 4: Botanical Grammar — Domestic Materials

Ingredients: Sesame seeds, first-quality bran, sandalwood, sharp vinegar

Context: Contents of Hellenistic kitchen and domestic workspace

- *Sesame:* Offerings to the dead, seeds of underworld passage
- *Bran:* Grain residue from household milling — humble, accessible
- *Sandalwood:* Aromatic wood for incense and offerings
- *Vinegar:* Preservative and purifying agent in domestic use

Magical Logic:

The cake (*popanon*) transforms domestic labor into spiritual defense. The hand that kneads bread for the family also kneads protection into being. Kitchen ingredients become magical materia — not because they are exotic or expensive, but because they are *available* and *known*.

The Revolutionary Act: Herais didn't need access to temple libraries or rare imported substances. She weaponized her kitchen. The same skills that fed her household also defended it. This is the genius of women's magical practice — it was **embedded in daily life**, not separated from it.

Layer 5: The System — How Correspondences Create Meaning

When we examine all five layers together, we see how correspondences function as a **complete language system**:

Layer	Type	Function in Spell
1. Somatic	Body gestures	Grounds cosmic invocation in flesh; creates physical anchor
2. Linguistic	Epithets	Activates specific aspects of Hekate's power; builds composite portrait
3. Sonic	Voces magicae	Shifts consciousness; opens channels through vibration
4. Material	Botanical ingredients	Physical offering; transforms domestic labor into magical act
5. Mythic	Dactyls reference	Links practitioner to cosmic origins of magic; claims initiation

Layer 6: The Synthesis - The Whirring Wheel of Correspondences

The Iynx and Strophalos: Kinetic Correspondences in Action

While PGM LXX doesn't explicitly involve the *iynx* or *strophalos*, these ritual tools appear throughout the PGM and in literary accounts like Theocritus' *Idyll II*, where Simaetha employs one in her binding spell. They represent the ultimate ancient symbols of **harmonic, sympathetic, and kinetic correspondences** — physical instruments that translate human action into cosmic communication.

The Physics of Sympathy:

In ancient Neoplatonic theurgy, the *iynx* and *strophalos* were not crude tools to "force" a deity's compliance. Rather, they functioned as **physical transmitters** designed to match the *frequency* of the cosmic soul. Theurgists believed the cosmos was held together by invisible, sympathetic lines of energy called *seirai* (cords/chains). By creating specific vibrations, practitioners could "tune" themselves to these cosmic frequencies.

The Correspondence Engine:

If plants and minerals are the *nouns* of the correspondence lexicon, and epithets are the *modifiers*, then the *strophalos* is the **sound wave** or **vibration** that carries the sentence to the heavens.

By spinning a gold or leather disc (the *strophalos*) on a string, the practitioner created a distinct whirring, humming, or whistling sound. This precise acoustic vibration was believed to mirror the sound of the turning celestial spheres. It was a purely **kinetic correspondence**: matching human movement to cosmic rotation to attune the ritual space to Hekate's frequency.

The Mythic Origin of the Iynx:

The etymology and mythology of the *iynx* (from which we derive the modern word "jinx") perfectly demonstrates how correspondences function as chains of meaning:

- **The Bird:** The *iynx* was originally a wryneck bird — famous for twisting its neck in a serpentine, spiral motion, mimicking a snake's movements
- **The Correspondence Shift:** Because of its physical, twisting behavior, ancient Greeks associated this bird with erotic and binding magic. The bird's spiral motion corresponded to the binding, twisting nature of desire

- **The Mechanical Substitution:** Eventually, the physical bird was replaced by a mechanical tool — a wheel or disc bound to a cord that, when spun, mimicked the bird's high-pitched cry and serpentine spiral
- **The Chain of Correspondences:** Desire → bird's movement → sound → spinning wheel → goddess. Each link reinforces the others, creating an unbroken transmission of energy through form, sound, and action

Hekate's Wheel: Concentric Realities

The *strophalos* or Hekate's Wheel is drawn with concentric circles, spirals, or a central maze. This visual representation embodies a crucial magical principle: **different realms of reality are nested together** — the underworld, the physical world, the celestial spheres — all connected through sympathetic correspondence.

The Practitioner as Axis Mundi:

When the practitioner in PGM LXX invokes *"I went down into the underground chamber of the Dactyls"* while standing at a physical, earthly crossroads late at night, she acts as the **center pin of the wheel**. She is spinning the layers of correspondence together, aligning:

- Physical materials (sesame, bran, vinegar) from her kitchen
- Somatic gestures (holding thumbs, grasping heel)
- Sonic vibrations (Ephesia Grammata)
- Spatial location (crossroads threshold)
- Mythic realm (Tartaros, chamber of the Dactyls)

Through her voice, her body, and her materials, she becomes the living axis connecting all realms — spinning the correspondence wheel to create change across multiple dimensions of reality simultaneously.

The Complete System: A spell operates on multiple frequencies at once — body, voice, matter, myth, sound, space, time. Each correspondence reinforces the others, creating a **layered syntax** that speaks to different aspects of reality simultaneously. This is the genius of ancient magical practice: not single-channel communication, but polyphonic invocation across all dimensions of existence.

Practice: Somatic Correspondence Mapping

Continue with the spirit of this ancient spell through somatic correspondence work. Get ready to grab your right heel.

Purpose: Develop your body as a primary magickal tool

Process:

1. Choose a magickal intention (protection, grounding, opening, banishing, attracting)
2. Experiment with different gestures and postures. I've written about different techniques in my books, including the Hekate's Breath Chant in the Keeping Her Keys book, and the movements we do in the Triformis Ritual are somatic correspondences. Maybe take hold of your right heel like in the spell. I've tried it. These days, I prop it up on a chair to do so. It definitely has some magick in it. Beyond these tips, do what feels right for your intention. Notice:
    - Hand positions and movements
    - Stance and weight distribution
    - Breath patterns
    - Direction of movement (clockwise, counterclockwise, linear)
    - Speed and rhythm
3. Practice the gesture repeatedly until it becomes embodied knowledge
4. Combine the gesture with words, creating a complete somatic-linguistic correspondence
5. Document your discoveries in your grimoire

Reflection: How does your body know what gesture fits an intention? What happens when you perform a gesture without understanding it versus when you've discovered it through your own exploration?

Herais' Awakening: The Pharmakides Lineage Meditation

Purpose: Connect with the spirit of the ancient pharmakides

Process:

1. Create sacred space. Do a Triformis Ritual.
2. Speak the invocation:

"To Herais and all the unnamed pharmakides,

Whose hands knew the language of roots and stones,

Whose voices shaped the syntax of incantation,

Whose bodies were the first correspondence, the first altar—

I call you forward. I remember you. I honor you.

Teach me your language. Guide my hands. Speak through my voice.

I am your inheritor. I am your continuation.

May I speak your lexicon with wisdom and power."

1. Sit in receptive silence. Notice what arises—images, sensations, words, knowing.
2. When ready, thank the pharmakides and close your space.
3. Record your experience immediately.

Reflection: What did you receive? How does connecting with this lineage change your relationship to your own practice?

Tipsheet: Reverse-Engineering Historical Spells

Purpose: Learn to read correspondences as language by analyzing historical magical workings

Materials: Choose a spell from the PGM, a historical grimoire, or a traditional folk practice

Process:

1. Read the spell carefully. Identify all correspondence layers present:
    - Somatic (gestures, postures)
    - Linguistic (words, names, chants)
    - Material (herbs, stones, objects)
    - Temporal (timing, moon phase, planetary hour)
    - Spatial (location, direction)
    - Sympathetic (personal links, representations)
2. For each correspondence, ask: "Why this choice? What logic connects this element to the intention?"
3. Map how the correspondences reinforce each other. Create a visual diagram if helpful.
4. Consider: What could be substituted? What is essential? What is culturally specific?
5. Adapt the spell for your own context, maintaining the correspondence logic while using available materials

Reflection: What did you learn about the practitioner's thinking? How does understanding the logic behind correspondences change your ability to create your own workings?

Reflection Questions for Deeper Integration

On Women's Magical Knowledge

- What does it mean to you that women's magical knowledge was primarily oral, embodied, and domestic rather than written and institutional?
- How does recognizing the erasure of women's voices from the historical record change your relationship to magickal practice?
- In what ways do you see the pharmakides' tradition continuing in contemporary practice? In your own practice?
- What would it mean to honor the unnamed practitioners whose wisdom we inherit but whose names we'll never know?

On Transmission and Lineage

- Who taught you magick? How was that knowledge transmitted—through books, mentorship, direct experience, spirit contact?
- What magickal knowledge do you carry that you want to transmit? To whom? How?
- How do you honor the lineages you've inherited while also claiming your own authority as a practitioner?
- What does it mean to be part of a living tradition that stretches back thousands of years?

Conclusion: Speaking the Witches' Lexicon

Through the lens of the ancient pharmakides—the unnamed female magical practitioners whose voices were erased from the written record, but whose practices left indelible traces—we've seen how magical knowledge circulated through oral tradition, embodied transmission, and domestic practice. We've learned that the body itself is the first correspondence, the most intimate sympathetic link between practitioner and cosmos.

The Charm of Hekate-Ereshkigal revealed how correspondences layer and reinforce each other, creating a multi-dimensional magical statement that operates simultaneously on somatic, linguistic, material, temporal, spatial, and sympathetic levels. We've seen how a simple kitchen cake, a handful of seeds, a physical gesture, and

a rhythmic chant combine to create a working of profound power—not because the materials are exotic or expensive, but because they are known, available, and wielded with understanding.

Most importantly, we've learned that understanding the logic behind correspondences—sympathetic magic, doctrine of signatures, and experiential observation—empowers us to work consciously rather than mechanically. When we understand *why* a correspondence works, we can create our own, substitute intelligently, adapt to our contexts, and speak the witches' lexicon with confidence and authority.

The pharmakides worked with what was available to them. They embedded their magic in daily life—in the kitchen, at the threshold, in the gestures of domestic labor. They transmitted their wisdom body to body, voice to voice, hand to hand. They adapted to their contexts while maintaining the core principles of correspondence consciousness.

We honor them by doing the same.

When you choose your materials based on understanding rather than rote memorization, when you layer your workings with intention, when you adapt ancient wisdom to contemporary practice, when you document your innovations for future practitioners—you are speaking the language of the pharmakides. You are continuing a tradition that stretches back thousands of years.

Their spirit lives on, transmitted through our living practice, in your hands as you grind herbs, in your voice as you speak invocations, in your body as you move through ritual space. It lives in the correspondences you discover through direct experience, in the wisdom you transmit to those who come after you, in the magick you weave into the fabric of your daily life.

You are the inheritor of this wisdom.

You are the continuation of this lineage.

You speak the witches' lexicon.

Charm of Hekate-Ereskigal Against Fear of Punishment

From the Greek Magical Papyri (LXX. 4-25)

The Greek Magical is a compilation of magic spells and rituals. Dated between the last century BCE and the 4th CE. The exact origins and authors are unknown. This collection of fragments reflects the syncretization that was common in Egypt during this time. Hekate is referenced in many places, including these three short spells. By this time, Ereskigal had become subsumed by Hekate as the Greek influence over Egypt had grown.

This is one of the primary sources of the Ephesian letters so often used to evoke Hekate. Excellent for daily devotional work.

1. *“If he comes forth, say to him: "I am Ereskigal, the one holding her thumbs,' and not even one evil can befall her." If, however, he comes close to you, take hold of your right heel and recite the following:*

   "Ereskigal, virgin, bitch, serpent, wreath, key, herald's wand, golden sandal of the Lady of Tartaros." And you will avert him.

2. *Speak: "ASKEI KATASKEI ERON OREON OMEGA SAMNI BAUI (3 times) PHOBANTIA SEMNE, I have been initiated, and I went down into the Underworld, chamber of the Dactyls, and I saw the other things down below, virgin, bitch, and all the rest."*
3. *"ASKEI KATASKEI ERON OREON OMEGA SAMNI BAUI (3 times) PHOBANTIA SEMNE," I have been initiated, and I went down into the [underground] chamber of the Dactyls, and I saw / the other things down below, virgin, bitch, and all the rest." Say it at the crossroad,' and turn around and flee, because it is at those places that she appears. Saying it late at night, about what you wish, it will reveal it in your sleep; and if you are led away to death, say it while scattering seeds of sesame, and it will save you.*

   Say it at the crossroad, and turn around and flee, because it is at those places that she appears. Saying it late at night, about what you wish, it will reveal it in your sleep; and if you are led away to death, say it while scattering seeds of sesame, and it will save you.

4. *"PHORBA PHORBA BRIMO AZZIEBYA.” Take bran of first quality and sandalwood and vinegar of the sharpest sort and mold a cake. And write the name of so- and-so upon it and inscribe it in such a way that you speak over it into the light the name of Hekate, and this: 'Take away his sleep from such-and-such a person," and he will be sleepless and worried.*

Suggested Further Reading

Blanco Cesteros, Miriam. "Women and the Transmission of Magical Knowledge in the Greco-Roman World: Rediscovering Ancient Witches (II)." *Magikê Technê: Formación y consideración social del mago en el Mundo Antiguo*, edited by Emilio Suárez de la Torre et al., Clásicos Dykinson, 2017, pp. 95-110.

Betz, Hans Dieter (ed.). *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (1986) - Introduction discusses social context of practitioners

Faraone, Christopher A. *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (1999) - Analyzes gender dynamics in erotic spells

Gager, John G. *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (1992) - Documents women's use of written magic

Graf, Fritz. *Magic in the Ancient World* (1997) - Discusses social status and gender of magical practitioners