The ring, the gown, and the apple: the role of magical objects in the Byzantine vernacular romance *Kallimachos and Chrysorroi*

Rui Carlos Fonseca

*Universidade de Lisboa*

*rui@campus.ul.pt*

Magical objects play an important role in the fourteenth-century Byzantine vernacular romance *Kallimachos and Chrysorroi*, not due to their supernatural powers, but rather in order to make the chivalric status of the romance hero stand out, inasmuch as he does not resort to any of them to achieve his goals.

**Keywords:** Byzantine vernacular romance; Palaeologan fiction; magical objects; supernatural; heroic behaviour

In Greek literary fiction, the hero is often to be found resorting to, or being granted, magical help in order to overcome difficult tasks in a quest or to slay supernatural creatures that the ordinary man cannot face. We see this in the epic warrior in his pursuit for glory and valiant deeds, in the holy man and his fight against evil, as well as in the romance hero during his chivalric adventures and wanderings in search of his beloved princess. Although magic in general, and magical objects in particular, are not recurring motifs in ancient Greek novels,¹ the topic becomes prominent in Byzantine love fiction of the Palaeologan period. The two verse romances *Livistros and Rodamni* (mid-thirteenth century) and *Kallimachos and Chrysorroi* (fourteenth century) are of great importance in this respect.

Palaeologan romances cover a time range from the mid-thirteenth century up to the late fifteenth, and were recited as literary entertainment in front of an elite audience from

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¹ Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica* is the exception, being the only extant ancient Greek novel where magic is to be found. On this subject, see M. Jones, ‘The wisdom of Egypt: Base and heavenly magic in Heliodoros’ *Aithiopika*, *Ancient Narrative* 4 (2005) 79–98, at 79; C. Cupane, ‘Other worlds, other voices: Form and function of the marvelous in Late Byzantine fiction’, in P. Roilos (ed.), *Medieval Greek Storytelling: Fictionality and Narrative in Byzantium* (Wiesbaden 2014) 183–202, at 185–6.

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Constantinopolitan high society. These Byzantine vernacular romances (whose authorship is commonly unknown) are deeply engaged with different literary traditions, such as the Hellenistic and Late Antique novel, the twelfth-century Komnenian novel, the fairy-tale tradition, and the chivalric medieval romance from both western and eastern backgrounds. Byzantine writers mimic the standard features of the Hellenistic model, but modify them in order to suit the rhetorical conventions of their own time, thus reviving and reinventing the genre. Due to their heterogeneous influences, the Palaeologan romances present stories of love and adventure set in unknown and exotic lands, far beyond the Mediterranean geography, where the fantastic and the supernatural prevail, the characters finding themselves at strange and marvellous castles, and often being endangered by frightening beasts, magical objects, and deadly witchcraft.

Magic was often perceived in Classical Antiquity as being a derogatory practice, frequently connected with marginalized groups such as barbarian peoples and unregulated domestic rites, mainly performed by women. In Late Antique and Medieval Byzantium, magic was linked to every kind of unorthodox religious belief and behaviour beyond the authority of Christianity, usually associated with demonic powers and occult sciences. Magical rituals and incantations required the use of certain special talismanic objects and amulets in specific sacred spaces for different purposes. There are records from the late Byzantine period of a variety of amulets designed for protection, among them circular objects such as rings, stones, and other everyday engraved items. Clothing could also be manufactured in order to ensure someone’s safety. Furthermore, a range of tokens, incantations, food, natural elements, and reflective objects could be used for medical care or necromantic activities, or to bring disease, reveal the future, and uncover divine knowledge. Manifestations of these beliefs, rituals, and their practitioners may be found in various forms throughout

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3 On the supernatural atmosphere of Kallimachos and Chrysorroi and the Palaeologan romances in general, see C. Cupane, ‘In the realm of Eros: The Late Byzantine vernacular romance – original texts’, in Fictional Storytelling, 95–126, esp. 96.


literary history, from ancient to late medieval times, for instance in epic, drama, hagiography, historiography, and romance.7

The Byzantine vernacular romance Kallimachos and Chrysorroi presents three magical objects: a golden ring (which gives its owner the ability to fly), a gown covered in pearls (which heals all wounds), and a witch’s apple (which has the power to kill and to bring back to life). Scholars have underplayed the importance of these magical items, considering them as props or lost motifs, as they are mentioned only to be soon forgotten.8 As is pointed out by Castillo Ramírez, the hero of this romance, prince Kallimachos, uses none of the magical objects he comes across. Castillo Ramírez argues that the role of magical objects had completely vanished from the romance genre, that they are a stock motif to be employed in literary fiction but serve no purpose in the course of the action being narrated.9 Seeking a different approach, I will attempt to show that magical objects do indeed play an essential role within the framework of this Byzantine romance, and that within this same framework they are actually required.

The golden ring

The story of Kallimachos and Chrysorroi starts with the journey of three royal brothers at their father’s demand. After they climb a mountain, rest in a meadow, and pass by a deserted region of cliffs, Kallimachos and his two older brothers finally arrive at a wondrous castle, the golden Dragon’s Castle.10 Frightened by the terrifying beasts protecting the gates, the older brothers decide to turn away and look for another way forward, but Kallimachos decides to face the unknown dangers of the place. Before the farewell scene, the oldest brother offers Kallimachos, the youngest, a ring with magical properties:

Eis δὲ μικρὸν ἀνασασμὸν, εἰς παρηγόρημα σου ἰδοὺ τὸ δακτυλίδιν μου τοῦτο χαρίζομαι σοι ἅν εἰς ἀνάγκην, μνήσθητι καὶ παρηγορηθήσῃ.

Ἀν γὰρ εἰς μέσον στόιμα σου τὸ δακτυλίδιν βάλῃς, ἐργάσεται σε πτερωτὸν καὶ τοῦ κινδύνου φύγῃς.  

‘But as some small relief and comfort, I give you this ring of mine. If you are in peril remember it and you will find solace. If you put it into your mouth it will give you wings and you will escape the danger.’

This offering scene takes place in front of the mighty Dragon’s Castle, whose walls are said to be so high that they reach the heavens. References to the boundless height of this wondrous castle are recurrent throughout the narrative. All the male characters who stand before it – beyond the three brothers, these include the foreign king, his lords, and armies – are frightened by its striking dimensions and strength. The lords gathered at the king’s council ‘All considered the castle to be impregnable in battle when they saw its supernatural walls and battlements; it could not be taken; its strength and its size rendered it completely invulnerable to ruses and impossible to conquer’ (957–60 Πάντες τὸ κάστρον ἐκρίναι ἄδούλωτον εἰς μάχην, / τοὺς τοίχους καὶ τὸ πύργωμα ἰδόντες παρὰ φύσιν, / τὸ κάστρον ἀπαράδοτον, πανόχυρον καὶ μέγα, / ἵππος ἀνεπισούλευτον, ἀνέλλιπτον εἰς νίκην); the king’s armies, ‘faced with the Dragon’s Castle, serpents for adversaries, and walls of boundless height which were not of stone, all shrank from battle in despair’ (1053–5 πρὸς δρακοντόκαστρον, πρὸς ἀντιδόκοις ὁψις / καὶ τείχους ὑψος ἀμετρον, μηδ’ ἀπὸ πέτρας τείχος, / πάντες ἀπαγορεύουσιν, τὸν πόλεμον ὀκνοῦσιν); and the foreign king himself, reporting his pangs of love to the old woman, tells her ‘why he went to the Dragon’s Castle; how he saw the shining gold, the gleaming precious stones, the silver and pearls, the castle wall and its extent and size, the height of the towers’ (1140–3 ὁς πρὸς τὸ δρακοντόκαστρον καὶ τότε πῶς, ὡς εἶδεν / τὴν τοῦ χρυσοῦ λαμπρότηταν, στελβότηταν τῶν λίθων, / τὸν ἄγγελον, τὸν μάργαρον, τὸ τείχος τὸ τοῦ κάστρου, / τὸ μῆκος καὶ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τὸ τῶν πύργων ὄψις).

Kallimachos could make use of the magical power of the ring if he wanted, because wings are clearly a useful resource in order to pass over walls that reach to the heavens. Herbert Hunger states that in a typical fairy-tale scenario the hero would be expected to resort to wings or an invisible helmet in order to enter a castle guarded by frightful
gatekeepers. Against all expectations, the narrator refuses to grant Kallimachos use of these supernatural powers. Instead, the young man proves his heroic valour with his spear. He uses it to jump manfully over the walls and enter the castle, in the same way Achilles does in The Tale of Achilles.

In this way, Kallimachos overcomes the immeasurable height of the walls and escapes the close surveillance of the dragons at the gates. Kallimachos is the only character to accomplish this impossible task of finding a breach in the walls of the castle and getting inside. In not allowing his hero to use the magical ring, the narrator illustrates Kallimachos’ heroic excellence, as he accomplishes an unparalleled achievement which others find impossible. Afterwards, Kallimachos slays the lord of the castle, a man-eating dragon, and also slays the magic dragon summoned by the old witch. However, in his very first chivalric deed in the face of danger, he overcomes the ever-watchful dragons at the gates by himself, with no need of his brothers’ assistance and without resorting to any supernatural power. In his first victory, Kallimachos acts alone, manifesting a truly heroic temperament.

The magic golden ring might have been used at another moment in this romance. After slaying the lord of the castle and saving the princess, Kallimachos enjoys an anticipated happy ending, living in the Dragon’s Castle with his much-beloved Chrysorroi. Later, however, the girl is kidnapped by a foreign king, and the hero, after being killed and revived by the magic power of the golden apple, departs in search of her. When Kallimachos finally learns her whereabouts, he curses nature for not providing him with wings that would enable him to reach his destination faster. During his wanderings, we are told that Kallimachos had lost his magic ring around the time Chrysorroi was taken from the Dragon’s Castle and he himself had died. Thus, unable to use the magic ring for his own benefit, the young man complies with the rules set out for the hero of Greek novels: he must endure the hardships of Fortune during his search. Kallimachos reaches the palace of the foreign king only after much effort and wandering. In this way, he shows his endurance and the strength of his love for Chrysorroi by facing hard situations.

According to the generic requirements of the Greek novel, Fortune strikes the young lovers with many sorrows. Before they may live happily ever after, the couple must face a set of perils, hardships, and temptations which put their love to the test. Only after much
sorrow and distress may they enjoy full happiness. Kallimachos is thus prevented from resorting to the supernatural powers of the golden ring, so that his heroic value (as an epic and romance hero) may stand out. As Lars Nørgaard states regarding the epic character of the Byzantine romances, ‘it is the test that reveals the true character of the protagonists.’

The golden ring has a non-magical counterpart: the ring of Chrysorroi’s mother, which is used as a recognition token between the young lovers. This family ring is first mentioned at the palace of the foreign king (K&C, 1719–24) when Kallimachos, disguised as the gardener’s helper, wishes to reveal his identity to his beloved, who is once again imprisoned, although this time she holds the status of queen. Only in this second half of the romance, at the palace of the foreign king, do we learn that Kallimachos had received this ring from Chrysorroi in the bath scene at the Dragon’s Castle, even though at that moment there was no mention of this second ring. The late revelation of the origins of this second ring raises some interesting issues, if we bear in mind the novelistic tradition in both the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods.

In Chariton’s novel, Callirhoe has a ring bearing Chaereas’ portrait (I, 13–14). This ‘little ring’ (δακτυλίδιον μικρόν) is only mentioned during Callirhoe’s captivity by the pirates. No other information is provided regarding the circumstances in which she had received it: whether it is a courtship present, a wedding gift, or a funeral offering. On the other hand, in Digenis Akritis (IV, 364), the hero receives a ring (τὸ δακτυλίδιν) as a token of love from his beloved, but it is never mentioned again in this ‘epic’ or ‘proto-romance’, according to Beaton’s classification. Neither of these non-magical rings plays an important role in its narrative, but instead merely an incidental one. In both cases, the background story of each ring is only partially told: in Chariton’s romance, we are told that the ring is in the possession of Callirhoe, and in Digenis Akritis we witness the moment when the hero receives the ring.

The exchange of rings between lovers is also a common motif in Byzantine vernacular romance. In Livistros and Rodamni, the hero offers the girl his ring with a love letter, and in return the girl offers him her ring with a love letter of her own.

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20 Chariton, De Callirhoe narrationes amatoriae, ed. B. P. Reardon (Munich and Leipzig 2004).
24 L&R, 1963–75 and 1989–2014. Livistros’ ring has ‘a pure ruby. On the side was iron and, on the outside, lodestone. Between, to bind the iron and lodestone, was pure gold, refined to the utmost’ (καθάριον λυχνιτάριν, ἐδέχθη ἄνδρα σίδηρον καὶ ἀπέκει τόν μαγνήτην καὶ μέσα ἄντι τοῦ δέματος τοῦ σίδηρομαγνήτου ἐδέχθη χρυσάφιν ἄδολον, μυριολαγαρισμένον). Rodamni’s ring was ‘one hand of iron and
Rodamni later gives the ring she received from Livistros to Klitovon, as a recognition token for Livistros (L&R, 3834–7). If we follow the pattern of this Byzantine model, we may ask: if Kallimachos receives Chrysorroi’s family ring, why doesn’t he give her his own in return, the one he had previously received from his older brother? In the bath scene in the Dragon’s Castle, the hero has not yet lost it. If Chrysorroi had the magical ring in her possession, with the power of flight she could easily escape her captivity in her kidnapper’s palace, and Kallimachos would not have the opportunity to save her.

Another hypothesis can be entertained: the two rings of this Byzantine romance could easily be one, used at different stages, if the narrator so wished. The stories of Kallimachos’ magical ring and Chrysorroi’s family ring complement each other: regarding the first, we are told of it being offered by a family member but not of its actual use; regarding the second, we are only told of its function as a recognition token, but not of its initial offering by a family member. In Heliodorus’ Aethiopica we find a significant precedent. Charikleia’s ring was inherited from her mother (IV, 8) and plays the double function of recognition token (V, 5) and magical object in times of great danger: it repels fire and bestows upon its wearer invulnerability to fire; more importantly, the ring saves Charikleia from certain death (VIII, 9 and 11).  

The narrator of Kallimachos and Chrysorroi could easily have used just one ring both in order to help the hero fulfil his difficult tasks and for the subsequent recognition between the two young lovers. However, the narrator prevents the couple from resorting to supernatural powers. Instead, he prefers that they suffer Fortune’s ordeals and overcome their obstacles without magic. That is the reason why Kallimachos must necessarily lose his brother’s ring: because he has to endure the hardships of his wanderings. In making his hero lose the magic ring, the narrator is obliged to announce a second ring for the recognition scene that will lead to the couple’s reunion.

The gown covered in pearls

During Kallimachos’ wanderings in search of Chrysorroi, we learn that the hero had previously found a shining gown covered in pearls that has healing properties. From the moment Kallimachos enters the Dragon’s Castle to the moment he departs to look for Chrysorroi, we find no mention of the healing gown. Its appearance is delayed for a subsequent scene of the narrative:

another of lodestone, clasping each other so tightly as to be never wrenched apart’ (ἔναν χέριν ἀπὸ σιδήρου καὶ ἄλλον ἀπὸ μαγνήτου, ἴσοι δὲ ὁ τοιοῦτος, καθὼς ἐν ταῖς ἀποσπάσεις).


26 On Charikleia’s ring as being an amuletic recognition token, see Jones, ‘The wisdom of Egypt’, 91–3.
καὶ τὸ καρκάλλιν τὸ λαμπρὸν, τὸ μεμαργαρωμένον, ὅπερ ἐντὸς εὐφρέθηκεν τοῦ δράκοντος τοῖς οἴκοις, τὸ χάριν ἔχον, ἃν τιμηθῇ σάρκα καὶ παρὰ φύσιν, ἀν μῶλωπας καὶ τραύματα ἀνθρώπου παρὰ φύσιν, ὡσ παρὰ τὴν δύναμιν ἐπίς, ἃν τὸ φορέσῃ, τούτῳ τὸ λαμπροκάρκαλλον εὖρη τὴν θεραπείαν.27

… the shining gown covered with pearls which was inside the dragon’s abode and which had the virtue of curing its wearer of even supernatural cuts, of supernatural bruises and wounds, everything that one would think beyond the power <of medicine> …

When the hero finds Chrysorroi imprisoned in the wondrous golden castle by a man-eating dragon, she is first presented as having been tortured and whipped. Her weak and malnourished body is entirely covered in wounds and bruises. After slaying the sleeping dragon, following the girl’s instructions, the young hero takes care of the princess. In this first encounter, when they tell their stories to each other, there is no mention of any healing gown. However, the clothes of Chrysorroi’s parents (kept by the dragon inside his chamber) stand out. Among these clothes the hero finds a ‘remarkable, finely woven garment’ (643 λεπτὸν χιτῶνα ξένον) which the princess puts on after being rescued. After Chrysorroi has been kidnapped and Kallimachos’ older brothers save him from his temporary death, Kallimachos tells them what has happened in the Dragon’s Castle since his arrival, and in his summary he mentions Chrysorroi’s dress (1430 τὸ καρκάλλιν), with no information regarding any marvelous features or magic properties.

The question we may then ask becomes obvious: are the garment of Chrysorroi’s parents and the healing gown one and the same? The garment was the first piece of clothing Chrysorroi put on after she was rescued, and it was from that moment that her body started healing and regained its former beauty. The narrator does not actually clarify whether it is the same dress or two different dresses.28 What we see is, in fact, a strong emphasis upon the role that Kallimachos plays in Chrysorroi’s recovery: ‘Kallimachos replied, “What are you saying? I alone shall clean your wounds. Today I shall serve your lovely body.”’ (612–13 Ο δέ «τι λέγεις; τὰς πληγὰς ἐγὼ σπογγίσω μόνος, / ἐγὼ δουλεύσω σήμερον εἰς τηλικοῦτον σῶμα»); ‘In his great happiness he embraced the maiden and when he had covered her bruises with kisses …’ (730–1 Καὶ μετὰ πάσης ἡδονῆς περιπλακεῖς τὴν κόρην, / καταφιλεῖ τοὺς μῶλοπας …); ‘how Kallimachos caressed the maiden’s wounds and from touching her bruises he


28 The Greek word employed for the magic gown in line 1556 is καρκάλλιν, the same as for Chrysorroi’s dress, previously referred to by Kallimachos in line 1430. The garment belonging to Chrysorroi’s parents found by the hero in the dragon’s chamber is first presented in line 643 as χιτῶνα.
received an inexpressible freshness and from her kisses a dewy sweetness’ (775–8 ὅπως τῆς κόρης τῆς πληγῆς ἐμάλασσεν ἔκεινος / καὶ δροσισμὸν ἀπόρρητον ἐκ τῶν μυλόπων εἴχεν / καὶ γλυκασμὸν καὶ δροσισμὸν ἐκ φυλημάτων εἴχεν / καὶ κόρον οὐκ ἐλάμβανε τῶν ἱδονῶν τῆς κόρης).29 ‘I who once cleaned her wounds, her bruises, her injuries, I who once inspected and treated them’ (1661–2 ἐγὼ ποτε τὰ τραύματα, τοὺς μώλοπας, τὰ πάθη / ἀνεμασσόμην, ἐβλεπα, ἔδιδα θεραπείαν).

The narrator does not make any connection between the two dresses; instead each one is mentioned separately. He rather emphasizes the idea that Kallimachos was the main force responsible for Chrysorroi’s recovery, with his kisses, caresses, and devotion. In this Byzantine vernacular romance, we read about the healing power of first love. Like the golden ring, the magical gown also has a non-magical counterpart, and this common item plays a more prominent role in the narrative, as it marks the birth of passion between the hero and the princess. It is only after Chrysorroi puts on the garment that she speaks of herself, and the two engage in a more intimate relationship. As we have already seen regarding the magical ring, the healing gown’s importance is diminished, less than that of the common dress and the romantic behaviour of the hero. Once again, it is through Kallimachos’ own actions (entirely free of any magical help) that he accomplished this new task, rescuing the princess from the physical torture inflicted by the dragon.

The golden apple

The golden apple is the third magical object of this Byzantine vernacular romance and is a product of the witch’s magic. The witch in Kallimachos and Chrysorroi is first presented as being an evil old woman, crafty and of a demonic nature, learned in astrology, and able to master spirits by magical arts (K&C, 1065–7). Hearing about the foreign king’s illness, the witch goes to his palace where, despite her miserable appearance and wretched clothes, she makes herself known at the gates as having an exceptional talent for healing like no other in the whole world. Once in the king’s chamber, the witch performs her first enchantment, saving the foreign king from a heart attack by whispering magic words (ὁ κάτι ψιθυρίσματα λαλεῖ καθ ἑαυτῆς τῆς) and making magic gestures (σφακέλωμαν ἐποίηκεν) in order to frighten the demons and cast them out (K&C, 1160–8). After the king’s recovery, she puts herself at his service, promising to get the lady from the Dragon’s Castle for him. She then enchants a golden apple with a double spell:

29 On the erotic bath described in 754–806, Agapitos states that ‘the bath is invested with magical powers as it transforms Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe and makes them more beautiful than they were before (792–6).’ P. A. Agapitos, ‘The erotic bath in the Byzantine vernacular romance Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe’, Classica et Mediaevalia 41 (1990) 257–73, at 267. The bath scene is also discussed by Garland, who emphasizes Kallimachos’ priority of personally doctoring Chrysorroi’s injuries and kissing her wounds. L. Garland, “‘Be amorous, but be chaste...’: Sexual morality in Byzantine learned and vernacular romance’, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 14 (1990) 62–120, esp. 113–15.
Using letters of evil magic, and incantations, the old woman placed the charm she desired on a beautifully made apple of pure gold. She wrote a double spell upon it: ‘If anyone puts this apple into his bosom he will straightway fall dead; his breath will fail immediately. But if this golden apple is held to the nose of the dead person, he will come to life, go, walk, and traverse the world with the living.’

Once the magic procedure is complete, the witch takes three months to reach the Dragon’s Castle in the company of the foreign king and an army of hundred men. After setting up camp, she hides herself on the island, where she stays alone among demons, and takes another three days to prepare a third and final spell (K&C, 1196–201 and 1215–50). Finally, the day comes when the young Kallimachos and his beloved Chrysorroi hear a strange voice that fills them with anguish, and a fearsome dragon emerges from the forest. The hero immediately leaves the castle, runs towards the dragon, attacks, and beheads it. However, the creature is not a real dragon, but rather another magic scheme concocted by the evil witch (K&C, 1292), whose main goal was simply to draw the hero outside of the castle’s walls. The old woman,

30 K&C, 1206–14. The double spell engraved upon the witch’s golden apple is again mentioned only partially in Kallimachos’ resurrection scene (1405–11), very briefly during Kallimachos’ search for the abducted Chrysorroi (1562–3), and again in full when Kallimachos makes his final speech at the trial (2551–9).

31 See Greenfield, Traditions of Belief, Part II, Chap. 6, esp. 250 (on Kallimachos’ witch and her demonic nature), 250–1 (on Livistros’ witch), 253 (on the relationship of reciprocity between demons and those who summon them), 257–60 (on the most favorable time and place to summon demons and secure their co-operation).

32 The three dragons in Kallimachos and Chrysorroi differ in terms of their physical features. The gatekeeper-dragons stand out for their constant surveillance: they never sleep, and are always watching, but they do not notice Kallimachos entering the castle. The dragon who keeps Chrysorroi captive stands out for his stomach, his devouring of large portions of food and drink; nonetheless he is slain in his sleep after eating too much, and his body is cut in two. The dragon conjured by the witch makes himself known at first by roaring, and thereafter he is beheaded by Kallimachos. On this subject, see R. C. Fonseca, ‘A excelência heróica na luta contra o dragão: um motivo épico no romance bizantino Calimaco e Crisóroo’, eClassica 1 (2015) 82–90, esp. 88–9.
presenting herself as a victim of the newly beheaded dragon, gives Kallimachos the golden apple as a reward for his heroic behaviour. He holds it in his hand, admires its beauty and, ignorant of the true identity of the old woman and the magic nature of the apple, slips it inside his shirt, and falls dead on the spot. This is how the foreign king manages to abduct the princess, with whom he has fallen in love, and take her to his palace.33

The witch’s apple receives a much more developed story than the ring and the gown, and it actually fulfils its magical role. We learn about this apple at the moment of its creation by the old witch; we are told of its double power, the offering to Kallimachos, and finally we see its effects at work: the golden apple causes the hero’s death and brings him back to life. Only its final destiny is not revealed. We assume that the last characters to have taken possession of the apple (Kallimachos’ older brothers) kept it for themselves. Kallimachos suffers the harmful effects of accepting a magical item, even though he had no idea of its true, magical nature. Be that as it may, the fact is that the golden apple’s purpose is achieved: it causes Kallimachos’ death, Chrysorroi’s abduction, and is therefore the main cause for the young couple’s separation.34

Kallimachos is not the only character to fall victim to magic. In fact, all characters involved in the episode of the apple are punished in one way or another. The foreign king engages the services of the old witch and, at first, the enchanted apple grants him what he desires most, the fair lady of the Dragon’s Castle, but then it deprives him of his prize, since at the end of the narrative the young lovers are inevitably reunited. Kallimachos is the prime target of the apple. It was made for him: first it brings him death, but then it brings him back to life. The effects of the golden apple are equally balanced both for the hero and his antagonist, but in opposite directions: Kallimachos loses his life and regains it with the help of his older brothers; the foreign king succeeds in capturing the fair lady with the help of the old witch, but later loses her.35

Finally, the old witch, who summons ‘letters of evil magic, and incantations’ in order to create the apple with the twofold power of life and death, suffers its double effects

33 The scene of the enchanted golden apple’s offering includes a superb description of the witch’s wicked demonic nature (K&C, 1304–8).


as well: she wins royal thanks with Kallimachos’ death and Chrysorroi’s abduction, but is thrown into the fire by royal decree when the king loses his queen. This only happens because of the magical resurrection of Kallimachos.

The death of the witch is already an expected motif in later Greek literary fiction. In Aethiopica and Livistros and Rodamni, witches engage with supernatural forces and die: in the former, an old woman of Bessa in Egypt who reanimates the corpse of her dead son, killed in battle, runs through a field of dead bodies, accidentally falls on a broken spear and dies (VI, 14–15), while in the latter story a witch who controls demons is slain by the hero at his beloved’s command (L&R, 4060–8). In both these love narratives the witch’s death is required as punishment for her use of black magic. The witch dies because she deals with forces that are beyond the human world, transgressing the boundaries separating the realm of the living from the realm of the dead. In Livistros and Rodamni, as well, the hero suffers a temporary death caused by the magic arts of a witch, who commands a demon to take the shape of a ring. This object is first presented as a precious stone ‘in the form of a ring, uncut, natural, red as fire’ (ὡς δακτυλίδιν, ἀυτόφυον, ἀυτοκάματον, κόκκινον ὡς ἡ φλόγα). Livistros dies instantly upon putting the enchanted ring on his finger (L&R, 2667–82).

According to the dead soldier’s prophecy in Aethiopica, the wicked woman dies because, in performing necromantic rituals, she contravenes the laws of man’s nature, affronts the ordinances of destiny, and uses the black arts to move the immovable (VI, 15). It is for these same reasons that the old witch of Kallimachos and Chrysorroi must die. The king who first requested her services later orders her death because she gave the apple the double power of death and life (K&C, 2578–84).

36 The enchanted ring of the witch in Livistros plays the same exact role as the magic golden apple produced by the witch in Kallimachos. Both are specifically designed to tear the lovers apart, by killing the male characters and abducting the princesses. When the ring is removed from his finger, Livistros immediately returns to life, as does Kallimachos when the apple is taken away from him.


38 Goldwyn sees the witch’s death by the king’s decree at the end of Kallimachos and Chrysorroi as ‘inexplicably strange and cruel,’ as it seems unlikely that the foreign king would want to condemn the old woman only because she gave the apple a double power. See Goldwyn, ‘Towards a Byzantine ecocriticism’, 82; and Goldwyn, Byzantine Ecocriticism, 152–3. García Gual argues that the witch’s death compensates the couple’s sufferings throughout the story, and notes that it is actually expected in the fairy-tale tradition; nevertheless, he finds it odd that the witch has no magic trick with which to escape fire. García Gual, ‘Introducción’, 38–9. On Kallimachos’ witch portrayed as a fairy-tale character, see Hunger, ‘Un roman byzantin et son atmosphère’, 408.
Dealing with magic, namely with magic that transgresses unnatural boundaries, is an unacceptable act that must be punished with death.

If we bear in mind the mythological and the literary Greek traditions, we note the same belief regarding the natural order designed for the living and the dead. Asclepius, the hero and god of medicine, healed the sick and found a way to revive the dead; Zeus struck him with a thunderbolt, fearing that, if he continued his miraculous healing, Asclepius could reverse the order of the world. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Helios Hyperion demands vengeance on Odysseus’ comrades for killing his sacred cattle, and threatens to shine over the dead down in Hades, thus causing a disaster of catastrophic proportions, if Zeus does not bring immediate justice against the insolent men (Od. 12.377–83). These two stories, among many others that could be drawn from the ancient traditions, show that the dwelling place of the living and that of the dead are two opposed worlds, each playing a specific role within a balanced cosmic order. The descent from one to the other is a one-way trip, and a return is not expected, and would therefore be an act magically accomplished against Nature’s control.

In Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*, Charikleia hears the prophecy told by the reanimated corpse of the dead soldier about her glorious royal future (VI, 15). In *Livistros and Rodamni*, the hero accepts the witch’s magical help in order to recover his beloved from his rival’s domain. Livistros and his friend Klitovon cross the sea all the way to Egypt, riding flying horses provided by the old woman (*L&R*, 3101–86). By contrast, in *Kallimachos and Chrysorroi*, the young couple rejects the use of magical objects, because magic always comes with a deadly price, as the enchanted apple shows. Instead of magical objects, the hero and his princess choose to use ordinary, non-magical items. The witch’s evil apple also has a counterpart: an orange (τὸ νεράντζι). When Kallimachos finds Chrysorroi in the palace of the foreign king, he ties the princess’ family ring to the fruit of the orange tree, using it as a recognition token (*K&C*, 1739–46, 1759–63). Thus, while the enchanted apple tears them apart, the orange tree in the royal garden brings them back together. Therefore, the young couple has no need of any supernatural power for their reunion, just an element provided by Nature.


40 For an analysis of Livistros and Klitovon’s journey across the sea on flying horses, see C. Cupane, ‘Itinerari magici: il viaggio del cavallo volante’, in M. Cassarino (ed.), *Sulle orme di Sharazàd*: Le «Mille e una notte» fra Oriente e Occidente. Medioevo Romanzo e Orientale (Soveria Mannelli 2009) 61–79. On the magical contexts in which Livistros and Rodamni’s separation and reunion are set, see Cupane, ‘In the realm of eros’, 109. On the voyage motif, on both real and magic levels, in Palaeologan romances, see F. R. Nervo, ‘Il motivo del viaggio e il cronòtopo del romanzo cavalleresco bizantino’, in *Temi e motivi epico-cavallereschi fra Oriente e Occidente*, 261–73.
The ‘phenomenon of triplication’

In *Kallimachos and Chrysorroi*, two of the three magical objects do not fulfil their role. That does not mean that their presence in the romance is pointless. The presence of these unused magical items is calculated and has a very important role within the overall structure of the narrative. Castillo Ramírez has already noted that the number three is purely conventional within the fairy-tale tradition.\(^1\) She also refers to the phenomenon of triplication. In fact, if we look closely, we notice that the three magical objects in *Kallimachos and Chrysorroi* fit an overall narrative structure that, in many aspects, is organized into triads:

**Characters**
Three brothers: Nikokles, Xanthippos, Kallimachos.
Three suitors: the man-eating dragon, Kallimachos, the foreign king.
Three horsemen circle the Dragon’s Castle with the foreign king.
Three eunuchs are in the service of the foreign king.

**Time**
Three months (approximately): the three brothers travel to the summit of the mountain.
Three months: the old witch and the king and his troops travel to the Dragon’s Castle.
Three days: the old witch prepares her magic against the young couple.
Three days: the eunuchs’ ruse deceives the fair lady.

**Space**
Three places the brothers come across: the mountain, the meadow, the region of the cliffs.
Three castles: the castle of Kallimachos’ father, the Dragon’s Castle, the king’s palace.
Three gardens of the Dragon’s Castle: the large courtyard garden, the flower garden hanging over the side of the pool, the fair island outside the castle’s walls.
Three main spaces in the king’s palace: the king’s bedroom, the garden, the pavilion.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Castillo Ramírez, ‘El Calímaco y Crisórroe’, 89.

In the same way, it is also possible to organize the magical elements into triads:

Three dragons: the gatekeepers, the man-eating dragon, the dragon’s witch.
Three enchantments of the witch: the king’s recovery, the dragon, the apple.
Three magical objects: the ring, the gown, the apple.
Three recitations (full or partial) of the apple’s spell by three different characters.

The magical objects are mentioned in this romance, but are not meant to be used, but instead to be put aside. Their main function lies in the absence of their use qua magic by the young couple. As we have seen, magic only brings them misfortune. Furthermore, the non-use of magical items enhances the epic status of the main characters, especially the heroic behaviour of Kallimachos. He manages without help to jump over inaccessible walls, to heal Chrysorroi’s wounds and the bruises inflicted by the dragon, to endure the hardships of his wanderings, and to find a recognition token in Nature. The narrator provides magical items that could allow the hero to achieve these same deeds more easily, but does not let him use them, so the hero must adopt non-magical procedures and rely upon his own resources. In this way, the magical objects, apparently forgotten within the narrative, bring out Kallimachos’ heroic performance.43

Rui Carlos Fonseca holds a Ph.D. in ancient Greek literature, awarded in 2013. His research interests focus on Homeric poetry, epic parodies, the Palaiologan romance and reception studies. Among other publications, he is the author of Epopeia e Paródia na Literatura Grega Antiga (2018). Currently he is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Classical Studies, University of Lisbon, working on Byzantine vernacular romance.

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