The *Pharmakeutria* of Theokritos
*a Charming Story*

So far little has been said about the function of laurels in Theokritos's *Pharmakeutria*. It is widely held that the laurels at vv. 1 and 23 are apotropaic.\(^1\) Gow et al. are not explicit in their explanation, but the idea seems to be that if Simaitha is going to invoke terrible gods she will need some protection to counteract any hostile forces. It is the belief of the present commentator\(^2\) that this reading is incorrect. The objections put forward here are based on three factors: (i) the syntax of key passages in the idyll, (ii) the overall sense of the idyll, and (iii) a study of comparative sources. The idyll opens *in medias res* with Simaitha’s demand:

Πῷ μοι ταὶ δάφναι; φέρε, Θεστυλ. πᾷ δὲ τὰ φίλτρα; στέψον τὰν κελέβαν φοινικέῳ οἰὸς ἀώτῳ, ὡς τὸν ἐμὸν βαρὺν εὖντα φίλον καταδήσομαι ἄνδρα

*Where are my laurels? Come on Thestylis, and where are my love-charms? Garland the bowl with the purple bloom of a sheep, so that I can enchant*\(^3\) *(that) man, being my grievous love.*

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\(^1\) Ogden 2002, 112; Hordern (2002, 169) is more skeptical; Gow (1950, *ad loc.*) is hesitant. This is not to say that the laurel cannot be apotropaic (cf. note 9 *infra*), only that such a function is unlikely here.

\(^2\) Theokritos’s *Pharmakeutria*, (forthcoming). Griffiths (1972, 82) is also doubtful suggesting that the main aim of the ritual is a kind of ‘binding’ love spell.

\(^3\) The verb probably does not have its literal meaning here: words of tying and bonds often have the secondary sense of enchantment, as is the case here with καταδεῖν. For example, in biblical Hebrew נבָּר ‘to bind’ at Dt. 18.11 its noun and participle form, i.e. נבר נבָר (cog. acc.) means ‘the charmer charming’. Cf. Psalm 58.6, Is. 47.9, 11; cf. Latin *fascis* (i.e. *bhasko*)
The construction at line three is a purpose clause, i.e. ὡς + future. Simaitha is calling Thestylis to bring all the things she needs in order to enchant her estranged lover, Delphis. This is the theme of the idyll. Given this context and the construction of the clause, the above translation is the most likely and natural rendition. The logic is thus: ‘O Thestylis bring me my magical paraphernalia, because I want it to charm Delphis back to my bed.’ V. 3 supplies the purpose of the action described on vv. 1-2, and this purpose is quite explicit, i.e. to enchant Delphis, indicating that the laurels are to be used as some sort of charm, and not as Gow et al. seem to think as an apotropaic device.

4 It may also be functioning as a causal clause, this, however, does not alter terribly the overall interpretation of the passage. These constructions are confined mostly to poetry vid. Goodwin 1929, § 324, Dover 1971 ad loc.

5 This kind of opening is very common in magical formulae where there is a sort of ‘tag’ to indicate the purpose of the rite e.g. PGM 4.350-361 ἄξον τὴν δεῖνα, ἢν δεῖνα, ἢς ἔχεις τὴν οὐσίαν, φιλοῦσαν με τὸν δεῖνα, ὅτι έτεκεν ἢ δεῖνα, τὸν δεῖνα, ὅτι σε ἔχεις, μὴ βινηθῇ μὴ γυνηθῇ, μη δεῖνα, ἢς ἔχεις τὴν οὐσίαν, φιλοῦσαν με τὸν δεῖνα, τὸν δεῖνα, νᾶ μή τῇ ἰατὴ πρὸς ἡδονὴν ποιήσῃ, μὴ δεῖνα, ἤν δεῖνα, ἢς ἔχεις τὴν οὐσίαν, φιλοῦσα, μὴ δεῖνα, ἤν δεῖνα, μὴ δεῖνα, ἢς ἔχεις τὴν οὐσίαν, φιλοῦσα. For a similar incantation in modern Greek folklore vid. Lawson 1910, 19.