

## Does the money spell work? Women's Conversation via an Estonian Online Forum

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The story that led to my current research includes two examples of performing everyday magic.

On January 1st, 2011, Estonia joined the Euro-zone and switched currencies. The occasion was widely covered in the media. One of the articles from that time described what kind of debris could be found in the trash collector of the coin counting machine: jewelry, buttons, paperclips, etc., but surprisingly also fish scales. While buttons and the like are easily explained in the small change compartment, the fish scales were a surprise. However, it does seem to testify the liveliness of the belief that keeping fish scale among money helps money multiply. Pouring the coins into the coin-change devices, fish scale from the bottom of the wallet could have floated on top. A small check-up query in the Estonian-speaking web confirmed the suspicion: workplace folklore from a local municipality had a lake-side dwelling worker who at every New Year's party gave fish scales to co-workers. In her home region it was a widespread custom to pour fish scales into the wallet at the beginning of the year in order to ensure sufficient funds in the coming year (description 2009/2010).

Another episode comes from personal experience years ago as I started working as an assistant at a research institute. An older colleague remarked that I should not keep my handbag open. Money will go out, was the reasoning behind her warning. Until that time, I had not encountered this belief, but acknowledged this and started to notice reactualization of this belief in various situations. If someone had placed a handbag with a wallet on the floor, the bag mouth open, they were suggested to never do that again but to put it higher and close. These examples indicate that people make use of small magic more than we would think by simply looking around us or at survey results.

Since I am working at an institution where one of the research areas is the appearance of phenomena of the folklore process online, I have kept an eye on the message boards of Estonia's most popular news and entertainment portal [www.delfi.ee](http://www.delfi.ee). The site includes a women-oriented subsection with topical forums. For those interested in magic, there is a "mystic corner". Not all the users who come to the women's section do not open that mystic section, its range of users is made up of a marginal group, probably including a number of repeat posters interested in mystical topics like explanations for dreams, omens, witches and wisemen, visions and messages from the beyond. Perhaps surprisingly, perhaps not, love magic is an often revisited topic. Although the question has been repeatedly discussed, it keeps coming up. It was another love magic discussion that spawned a discussion of money magic and which is the subject of my following presentation.

Here is the post that originally started the discussion going:

kyynal, September 19, 2010, time 22.12

Generally, love spells are the most popular of all spells. But I am interested in a money spell. And NO, I do not dream of winning the lottery and becoming a millionaire or something, but I would like to make my fiscal standing a bit better, to lure money to me. (Well, for example I have a job where my wages depend SOLELY on my results, that would be a good way.)

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been presented at the Conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research in Göttingen, June 5-9 2012, and supported by the Estonian Science Foundation, No. ETF8137; SF0030181s08

I also have the book "Earth, air, fire, water " - Scott Cunningham, that also includes descriptions of money spells. I wonder if they work?  
Whoever has real experience with money spells, please tell.

A short overview of the forum. It is a classical example of text-based computer mediated communication in the course of which users become both the producers and consumers of information. Actively commenting the forum users collaborate in interpretation of questions they are interested in. People contact others anonymously, the nicknames taken for discussion hardly reveal their identities. Sometimes the usernames do hint to the gender of the poster, sometimes to their ethnic background. It seemed that the somewhat separate-standing discussion of money magic made users choose random pseudonyms, not their usual aliases used in other discussions. However, it was also participated by some of the "regular residents" of the mystic corner who have pretensions for authority in questions concerning magic, as revealed by a cursory search of other topics of the subforum. Since the forum lacks any access restrictions, I did not feel the need to reveal my own presence. According to internet users' terminology, I am one of the lurkers, meaning I am a forum follower who never posts. In a sense, this kind of forum discussion resembles an ordinary conversation where the participants utter arguments for and against, give examples from life, present questions to their companions, express themselves. A bystander is witness to a conversation he might otherwise never be involved in. As is usual in an internet discussion, so also in my subject area the data exchanged in the conversation allow receivers of the information to continue individual work on the topic, to open suggested links, try provided recipes, return to a post at some later time. Principally, participants enact online their freedom to equal expression of opinion. But just as in a face-to-face conversation, some remarks induce more comebacks, find followers or even start to shape the opinions of the involved discussants.

The flow of discussion my paper is based on was active from the autumn of 2010 until early April, 2011. Recently, in April-May 2012, the money-spell topic was raised for a second time. So we have material from two discussions to study the rhetoric, nature of arguments and ways of presenting them as well as what kind of subject matter is involved in the discussion. The earlier discussion had been accessed for 343 times with 68 posts, including repeat posts from the same user – of these 10 from the initiator of the topic and 7 from participants who had assumed the role of experts. The re-raised topic had by May 20 attracted 33 posts and already been viewed 654 times.

The first topic was initiated by questioning the wicca-spiritual book by Scott Cunningham "Earth, Air, Fire, and Water: More Techniques of Natural Magic" (1991, translated into Estonian as "Maa, õhk, tuli ja vesi: veel loodusmaagia tehnikaid. Llewellyn'i praktilise maagia seeria", translator Eve Rütel) and its suggestions for attracting money.

The poster was looking for, as we can read, experiential confirmation for ways of attaining fiscal success my means described in the book. However, this found no inspiration from other users. Only one responder claimed to have tried witchcraft with a magnet and candle, but this ended badly. (S)he had taken a big loan and, according to his/her own words had come to serious monetary trouble ('now I am groaning under the weight of the burden of debt'). Another user suggested to throw Cunningham's book away, arguing that in principle, spells that work can not be freely accessible as the published word and what is available always misses an important piece. Thus the allegation was made that a real spell is only known by and able to perform a real specialist, and better yet if it is a foreign witch. This was a

predominating trend developed throughout the discussion. While Cunningham's book received a negative rating, references to Hinduism and the mantra for richness (which included the Youtube.com link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJH3i5S-dGk>) elicited no responses and had no influence on the flow of discussion.

The main question that they sought to answer was the evocation of a local Estonian 'rahaloits', literally: *money spell*, the deduction of an own, homely and certain formula. This was expected to conform to several important qualities: anyone must be able to carry out the spell and there should be no harsh consequences.

Synchronously, while following the dialogue, I asked myself the same question: whether and how was a money spell used, was it possible to magic monetary success? But I did not recall having met any money spells in the Estonian folklore tradition. The manuscript "witch books" in the Estonian Folklore Archives included words to heal various illnesses, also veterinary formulae, words to keep the wolf out of the herd, to ward fire hazard, court of justice words, words against the master's anger, words to discover theft, snake words, but no money spells. I was getting the feeling that a money spell is something that is urgently needed only now in the contemporary setting. I became rather intrigued what kind of spell the internet forum would come up with or what kind of cultural context will be introduced. It is interesting to note that several forum users also claimed to have never heard of money magic in the Estonian language.

It is true that beliefs related to the young moon include some marginal words that were said in the hopes of attaining monetary growth. The words were guaranteed to work only at the beginning of the moon cycle, they brought no lasting luck in money. In the wider traditional context, it was more common that the motif for addressing the moon was to retain one's youth and vitality. Indeed, this was what counted in getting on with life. They hoped to influence the processes of growing older and younger: that the moon should grow old while the moon-watcher remains young.

[näide slaidile] When the young moon was shining for the first day, people sang:

Hello, hello, little moon,

You grow old, me grow young!

Power to work,

Continuation to bread! (E 85981 (5) < Audru, 1934).

Only in rare instances, the addressing formula included a verbalized wish for wealth. The young moon was believed to have influence on wealth, however. When you first sighted to young moon, you just had to touch and jingle money in your pocket or pat your pocket. Another method was to show the wallet to the heavenly body so that the moon would grow the number of banknotes.

An atypical description of a rite with verbal components follows:

When you catch sight of the young moon for the first time, you must say three times money, money, money, then during that mooncycle you will have much money, either as a gift, found somewhere or you get paid well for a job. ERA II 200, 148 (2); 170 (10) < Tallinn G. Kallus (1938))

Coming back to the flow of comments, it turns out that the many of the participants were familiar with the traditional connection between the young moon and increasing one's money supplies. The one who drew attention to the corresponding belief ('mmeti', Sept 20, 2010, 22.24) offered, however, a modified version, an individual charm formula that does not coincide with the tradition. According to this, when the moon is young one should talk to it, saying: take my poverty, give your wealth. The saying is a construction based on the belief that the young moon brings and the old moon takes away.

The discussion became lively and brought up another local belief related to accumulating money. True, this is not a pure money spell, either. Here we see a contemporary belief that should influence the contents of the wallet and also work on money on plastic cards. One needs to keep a banknote of 50 in the wallet. The active principle is that money attracts money. Before the Euro was adopted, the Estonian 50 Kroon note (worth a little over 3 Euros) was a suitable candidate. Indirect proof that people has special feelings towards the 50-Kroon note was the fact that they were seldom received in change and compared to other banknotes, this denomination was quite rare. Once, when I was giving a talk on a related topic in Estonia, one of the audience shared her experience where her birthday gifts included a 50 Kroon banknote with the comment that this was meant to be kept in the wallet and "lucky money".

In autumn 2010, the internet discussion is soon directed by self-proclaimed expert under the alias nik, who has proven to be an active advice-dispenser later as well. (S)He adds links pertaining to the topic, all to Russian language sites. (S)he also comments her/his posts quite verbosely and engages in discussions with posters questioning his claims. At the same time, his/her posts find support from those who claim to have tried something with positive results. Example.

riho [Estonian male name] September 28, 2010, time 14.14

For me, life became better after I practiced magic. Of course, I did not get an inheritance, but loans were returned, even those I had already forgotten. I found a new and better job, etc. The magic does give you something. I think that if you want to make your life better, you have to try every way.

Soon, the posts feature an Estonian translation of a Russian rite with charming and candles.

There are fairly few posts ridiculing the whole discussion or calling upon common sense. In comparison, in the ghost experience discussions on the same server (but different subforum) the principally disagreeing are the predominant voice.

Ambivalent reactions are caused by a post in Russian by the user Zoja. [example: see the text below] Studying the materials of contemporary legend, it quite often has happened that some piece may be presented for ridicule or as a joke, but nevertheless someone finds it to be a magical trick worth trying. Taken in the context of this discussion, it is difficult to gauge the intent behind Zoja's post. Her second sentence does seem to indicate passionate sympathy with the topic.

Zoja 09. oktoober 2010, kl 23.43

rahakoti täitmiseks sobib veel see meetod

И ещё один способ, который, возможно, вызовет у вас недоумение, но зато вам непременно будет весело.

Попробуйте подзарядить ваш кошелек зарядным устройством от мобильного телефона. Спросите, как? Отвечаю: просто берёте зарядку, вставляете в кошелек и заряжаете. Результат обязательно не заставит долго себя ждать.

<http://shkolazhizni.ru/archive/0/n-4321/>

„There is another method, which may seem baffling to you but will certainly give you a good mood.

Try to load your wallet with a mobile charger. How, you ask? I reply: simply take the charger, put the charging end into the wallet and charge. The result will be revealed soon.“

Warnings appear already in the ninth post, emphasizing the likelihood of unwelcome consequences when monetary success is magicked or called forth by witchcraft, especially if the aid of a witch-specialist is used. The supplicant may, indeed, gain sounder financial standing, but at the cost of losing family happiness or health. Both discussions explicitly point out the threatening consequences either as general sayings or by retelling examples from personal experience stories, nearly-cautionary-legends. For example, the user reesi emphasized that the result may be different from what is hoped for, money will come, but for example in the form of an inheritance, i.e. through the loss of a close person or as insurance payment after an accident.

Such warning are rebuffed by the forum user 'nik' with claims that sufficient self-protection is gained by simply lighting a candle and this will cancel the evil influence. Money paid to the witch will calm the energies or unidentified powers that have influence of the further development of matters. In principle (in my opinion), the magic rite is here reduced to a deal, a buying-selling act habitual of the monetary society. Participants of the discussion avoid the rhetoric of a deal, for example they do not use terminology used in talking about buying-selling or dispensing a service, or they attempt to portray the magic ritual as exempt from the relations of buying and selling (cf. comment by 'maa' late on Sept. 19, where he clearly states that 'everything should not be for sale'). Forum users instead write about getting help, making magic. An interesting rhetoric is introduced to the discussion by the idea of a talisman, an object that needs to be – have a close look at the word usage – programmed or coded so it would start generating money for its user. The motif of talisman derails the search for a spell, satisfying those who consider money dangerous or dysfunctional in conjunction with witchcraft. Yet, when the question arises where does one get an amulet or talisman, we once again run into the commercialized relations as such things are on sale in esoteric boutiques and one has to pay for the so-called programming, as well.

The initiator of the topic and probably the lurkers following the topic were probably rather looking for advice for how to influence the powers that guarantee success. But what kind of deals should be made with whom in order to influence luck in money, remains unclear, there is no unified conclusion to the discussion. However, we can see the glimmers of the basic concept of a universal reciprocity, according to which one always needs to give something in order to gain something, and if nothing is given, it will be taken nevertheless. Queries in the light and innocent love magic revealed that people do consider alternatives and try them out. People also emphasize their own agency, i.e. reasonably actions in arranging money matters, so-called positive thinking as suggested in many self-help handbooks. This kind of shaping or internalization of a “right” attitude can also be classified as a magic act, at least from the perspective of the userdom of the mystic corner.

The conclusions of my paper have to do with, first of all, acknowledgement of the people and the flood of information concerning the topic. Secondly, I would like to attempt to position the discussion about a money spell and magical methods of influencing money matters in the context of human practices.

I found proof to the fact that although the internet abounds with all kinds of financial advice on the academic as well as the everyday-economization level, people need more personal

advice and to talk matters over. This means that people still want to share other people's experiences, in this case in the question of a working money spell. They found no clear solution to the search for a local money spell. Nevertheless, united efforts of several posters enlivened a selection of money-related traditional beliefs, in the present case those related to money and the young moon, and the idea that money attracts money. Depending on how informed and active the participants of the discussion are, we can follow the process of introducing new material, in this topic from Russian magic sites by referral to personal favorites. Polarization of positions happens to a smaller degree than in the average online discussion. We can, instead, see how different claims and concepts of possible and impossible means of improving money matters are laid out side by side, following different trajectories.

It may seem irrational to seek help in monetary matters from magic, including spells. Nevertheless, this behavior is highly characteristic of homo economicus, 'the economical man'. The early political economist John Stuart Mill characterized (already in the context of modern times) man as a being who desires to possess wealth, but whose actions work partly counter to his main desire. He meant aversion to labor, and desire of the present enjoyment of costly indulgences. Economist Joseph Persky claims that making economic choices is a rational decision. Although Persky does not touch upon practicing magic, it seems that the decision to improve one's financial situation/condition in this manner, or at least contemplation of the possibility, can be classified as a rational decision, as yet another attempt by homo economicus to possess wealth. And this even when following through with the decision is no longer rational or when the economic man (as Persky translated homo economicus) turns out to be the economic woman.

## References

Cunningham, Scott 1992. *Earth, Air, Fire and Water. More Techniques of Natural Magic.* Llewellyn Publication.

Kõiva, Mare 2010. *Eesti loitsud [Estonian Spells].* Tallinn: Pegasus.

Persky, Joseph 1995. The Ethology of *Homo Economicus*. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 221-231.

## Additional example

kopisin, September 26, 2010, time 21.55

I copied the spell for money that Amita and Sergei came up with.

For this, you need 6 green candles (preferably made of wax but if those can not be found, also ordinary ones will do, but attention must be paid that they be colored throughout not only on the surface, but also inside). Before the rite, the candles must be smeared with cinnamon and patchuoli oils (sold in apothecaries). Smearing is done rubbing bottom to top. Then, a runic formula related to money must be drawn onto the candles. I am adding a picture of this formula to the present letter. The drawing can be made with a needle, toothpick or something sharp. This rite must be performed when the moon is waxing.

The rite can be performed during the day, but a better time is when it is dark outside the windows.

5 candles form a circle on the table, the sixth has to be held in hand. The candles are lighted clockwise not with a lighter but with matches. The last to be lit is the sixth candle that is held in hand. When the candles have been lit, you have to say:

"As much as mud in a bog,  
As many as there are fish in the water,  
As much as there is sand by the sea,

The same much money must come to me,  
Higher powers, give me a chance, I will use and take as much as needed.  
Thus has been said,  
Thus has been done,  
Thus it must be."