



Focus on Miniatures: The Wishing Well

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When you were little, do you remember throwing a coin into a wishing well to make a wish? Do you remember your wish? Of course, we could ask for more wishes, or could we?

Coins have long been thrown into wishing wells in exchange for wishes. Germans and Celts thought water inside wells helped the Gods who were inside. The coins were a symbol of thanks to the Gods (Leffler, 2018).

A bronze aged wooden well filled with gifts was unearthed in Bavaria in the small town of Gemering in 2021. The archaeologists found not coins at the bottom of the fountain but instead special items, including a bracelet, two metal spirals, a mounted animal tooth, amber beads, more than 70 ceramic vessels, and 26 bronze clothing pins. (Altuntas, 2023). This was evidence that those that have come before us did place more than just coins in wells in hopes that their wishes would come true.

Dundes (1962) believed that one could consider coin throwing as a modern example of superstition based on the belief that good luck comes to the person who throws the coin into the wishing well. Whether this practice is superstitious, fun, or just hopeful, it is clear that wishing wells are viewed by people of many generations as a space where good things can come to us with the flip of a coin.

Therapists from Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States commented on the use of wishing wells in their sandtray practice. Their responses indicated that sandtray builders used wishing wells in a variety of ways. Some to communicate disappointment vs hope, and some to share life transitions and opportunities.

The themes of wishes, nurture, and survival also showed up. This relates to the concept of a votive promise or an offering. "If (a) I *give* this object to the deity (or the fairies or Lady Luck), then in return, I hope that (b) they will *grant* me my wish. A vow reverses the order: *if* my prayer is answered, I *promise* such-and-such a gift. The combination of prayer and gift represents the





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transaction or bargain struck by the mortal with the immortal (Lovegrove, 2022, par.8)". Could this, too be superstition?

Wishing wells can be used as a special place that holds dreams and good luck. Sometimes, in the sandtray process, it was reported that builders held hidden secrets in the wishing well. Others used the well to contain hope for their future. One therapist shared that, for one child, a wishing well was used as a place to hold onto secrets not yet ready to be shared. The child shared that the bucket going up and down the well was so heavy and it would take a lot of work to get it out of the well. This miniature was used as a wish to get the heaviness out.

Another child under the age of ten placed three witches into the well and lowered them down into the well to cleanse them all of their wicked powers. They then emerged as good witches and were helpful to people. This theme of baptism or cleansing seems to relate more to what is held by the well (water) versus the well itself. Now you get to ask yourself, what would your wish be with the flip of a coin, and as you hold space for builders, what is your wish for them?

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