

Ancient Magic  
*Then and Now*

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Edited by  
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# “PURE MAGIC” AND ITS TAXONOMIC VALUE

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## 1. FROM MAGIC TO “MAGIC”

The intense debate that took place from the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s in regard to the taxonomic category of “magic” in Classical Studies is widely known.<sup>1</sup> This debate culminated in a paradigm shift that began with the deconstruction of the concept of magic – as it had been used since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – and ended with its subsequent semantic reconceptualization.<sup>2</sup> Until this paradigm shift, magic as a category had been defined from opposing binomials. In contrast with the concept of religion, magic was coercive and unholy; it pursued selfish, individualistic goals; it was antisocial, feminine, and practiced in the dark of night. It invoked the infernal chthonic deities rather than the august, uranic gods. It was fraudulent and irrational.<sup>3</sup> The model that was imposed on classical studies during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is indebted primarily to two schools of thought. First, the psychological connotations associated with the concept of magic – understood to be a form of religiosity inferior to religion and science, primitive, irrational, and common among the ignorant, illiterate and brutish – had its foundations in British evolutionism, and, more concretely, in the school of the Cambridge Ritualists, whose principal and most influential exponent was Sir James G. Frazer.<sup>4</sup> Second, the view of magic as a system

- 1 The collection edited by Faraone and Obbink 1991 is frequently considered to be the work that established a paradigm shift. To be sure, there were previous, equally relevant works, specifically the sociological approach to phenomenon of Brown 1970 and the structuralist analysis of Annequin 1973. Versnel 1991 provides a comprehensive review of the debate through that time.
- 2 The process included philological revisions of the terms γόης, μάγος, magus (e.g., Bremmer 2002 or Graf 1995). Among the new, redefining essays, the following are worth highlighting: Alvar Nuño 2017a; Eidinow 2011; Gordon and Marco Simón 2010, 43–47; and Frankfurter 2001.
- 3 Regarding the historiography of women and magic, see Stratton 2014, 1–37. Dickie 2001, 124–141 presents magic in the Roman era as essentially subversive. Velázquez 2001 conceptualizes it as a series of primitive and irrational beliefs entrenched in western culture. Otto 2011 and Styers 2004 are detailed studies of the conceptual history of the term “magic” and how it has been used in the West in contrast to the concepts of “religion” and “science.” The collective work by Turpin and Moreau 2000 demonstrates how the vast majority of participants conceive of magic as the antithesis of religion and communal values.
- 4 See the definition of magic in Frazer 1920, 53. It should be pointed out that his theories were out of date in anthropology by the time his work was published. In this respect, L. Wittgenstein’s “Bemerkungen über Frazers The Golden Bough,” edited on a number of occasions and finally published in book form in Wittgenstein 1979, is famous. On Frazer’s influence on classical studies, see Fowler in ThesCRA vol. 3 (2005), 6.i, “Magische Rituale”: 284: “The evolutionism has long been discarded, and Frazer’s understanding of religion is consistent with only the most

removed from the collective values of the social body, individualistic and reprobate, was rooted in the sociological postulates of the French Sociological School and the related works of Emile Durkheim and his nephew, Marcel Mauss.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, the golden age of social history studies, the idea of magic inherited from early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropological theories was not questioned, but rather reformulated in order to be applied to the new historiographic trends. Academic interest in popular resistance movements that questioned and challenged authority saw the traditional notion of magic – specifically as defined by the French Sociological School – as a reflection of confrontation with the established order, in particular the religious superstructure. Magic was not merely counter culture, but rather a total Bakhtin-like world – view parallel to the cultural forms of expression of oligarchies.<sup>6</sup> Magic, thus conceived, became a form of religiosity situated on the margin of the system, and therefore susceptible to persecution when circumstances warranted. However, as J. Z. Smith highlighted even a decade ago, magic’s *Begriffsgeschichte* has spanned such a long trajectory and is so commonly used in the West that before the paradigm shift it functioned more as an evaluative principle than an interpretive category.

It was precisely the work undertaken in the 1990s to transcend the ideological and evaluative connotations related to the concept of magic, sustained in a diachronic fashion, and to analyze it from an *emic* point of view – that is to say, to observe the phenomenon of magic by using inside information from direct sources (curse tablets, spell books, amulets, *epodai*, *historiolae*) in the face of the construction of a literary stereotype that reinforces the concept over the *longue durée* – which provoked uncertainty about its usefulness as a valid heuristic category. The result has not been the expulsion of the term from the regular lexicon of the study of the history of religions; rather, discreet quotation marks are used to distinguish “magic” from magic. In the debate that advanced the paradigm shift, different options were explored. One, which was defended primarily by Henk Versnel in a memorable article published in 1991, chose to maintain magic as a heuristic category distinct from the heuristic category religion; ultimately, “magic does not exist, nor does religion. What do exist are our definitions of these concepts.”<sup>7</sup>

On the other side of the spectrum, there are authors such as Jonathan Z. Smith, Marvin Meyer, David Frankfurter, Paul Mirecki, and Richard Smith, who, faced with

extreme positivism. Nonetheless, his list of characteristics is still widely applied in discussions of magic, though in completely different explanatory frameworks.” See also Graf 1994, 14f.

5 Mauss and Hubert 1902–1903.

6 Bakhtin’s most influential work in Europe was his doctoral thesis (defended in 1940), which was first published in Russian in 1967. It was translated into the principle European languages in the 1970s. The English version is Bakhtin 1968. The studies of Kristeva 1967 and Burke 1988 significantly contributed to his popularization. His theories were introduced into classical studies by Rösler 1986. Jiménez Sánchez 2013, Hidalgo de la Vega 2008, and Stratton 2007 demonstrate the strong relationship between magic and representations of religious alterity. For his part, Carastro 2006 shows us that, although Greek terminology for magic was used to denominate religious imports from the East to such an extent that it became a pejorative term, its praxis was embedded in Greek culture.

7 Versnel 1991, 177.

an overwhelming number of testimonials that put into question the traditional assumption that marginal warlock ritual practices exist or are situated on the periphery of religious norms, have explored the possibility – at least on occasion – to employ the periphrasis “ritual power” as a substitute for “magic,” and “ritual expert” as a substitute for “sorcerer.”<sup>8</sup> In the words of J. Z. Smith, “substantive definitions of ‘magic’ have proven empty in concrete instances and worthless when generalized to characterize entire peoples, whole systems of thought or world-views.”<sup>9</sup>

With the intention to invalidate the prejudices accumulated from using the term magic as a differentiator to delineate legitimate religion-like a broken mirror that reflects the ideological conflicts of the present in the interpretation of the past – some researchers have spotted an escape route in Greco-Roman terminology. Resorting to external taxonomic constructs is not required when an inductive approach to the sources provides an enormous variety of specific categories: *magoi*, *goēteis*, *pharmakeis*, *epōdoi*, *thaumatopoiōi*, *rizotomoi*, *manteis*, *magi*, *sagae*, *ueneficii*, *herbarii*, *cantatrices*... This approach, however, is not error-free given that researchers cannot discard their own systems of values, beliefs, and motivations. Like a chameleon, a researcher must embrace the subtleties and ambiguities of a culture that, for the most part, reaches us in fragments.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, since the linguistic turn underscored the fact that sources reciprocate the exclusionary discourses of different competing groups attempting to protect their investments in the religious system, we should assume that we do not have access to transparent and unadulterated historic realities.<sup>11</sup>

The debate that has taken place over the course of the last twenty years has not been in vain. The concept of magic continues to be a valid category as shown, in fact, by the title of this very congress. But, unlike the semantic content of the term coined by Frazer and Mauss, the connotations that its use implies today are very different. One of the most successful re-definitions is to orient it around the participants’ perspective, instead of as a function of the *polis*’ religious system.<sup>12</sup> From this position, magic is defined as a pragmatic and instrumental subsystem of religion meant to alleviate situations perceived to be crises by the individual, who decides to resort to an intermediary or other type of semi-institutionalized pragmatic solution (as in the case of the writing of *defixiones*, many of which were written by the very parties involved). This is the general approach that we assume. Be that as it may, we would like to use this opportunity to highlight a topic that has been on the margin of the debate surrounding the concept of magic in the classical world: it deals with a body of mani-

8 The relevant reference works are Meyer and Smith 1994; Meyer and Mirecki 1995; and Meyer and Mirecki 2001. In these volumes, the editors have compiled articles from investigators, such as those mentioned here, who are critical of the use of the concept of magic.

9 Smith 1995, 16.

10 Segal 1981, for example, refuses to define the concept of magic because it is culturally determined. Against those who have proposed the use of emic categories instead of the generic use of “magic” and “sorcerer,” see Hoffman 2001 and Versnel 1991.

11 This clearly appears in works like Gordon 2009; Carastro 2006; and Marco Simón 2001.

12 The most recent redefining works are those of Albrecht, Degelmann, Gasparini et al. 2018, 4–5 and 8–13; Eidinow 2011 and Kindt 2012, 90–122. Hammond 1970 and Thomassen 1999 previously explored this possibility.

festations of supernatural powers distinctly labeled in anthropology as “witchcraft” or “pure magic.”

The debate over the concept of magic in the Classical World has been strongly influenced by the nature of the testimonials. The paradigm shift is substantiated through a detailed analysis of a corpus of materials that has substantially improved since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its early editions. The corpus of curse tablets (*defixiones*, *katadesmoi*), the well-known *Greek Magical Papyri*, and those from amulets and magical engraved gemstones, are undoubtedly leading sources for the study of magic as pertaining to the supply and demand in the civic religion’s market. This corpus has made possible the analysis of aspects of social activity, such as individual motives, the perception and management of risk, exemption of liability, interpersonal conflicts, authority strategies, collective negotiation of meanings from different narrative levels, empowerment and many more. But the picture is incomplete if we cling exclusively to the “materiality” of magic, to use a recent term.<sup>13</sup> How do we account for those ethnographic reports that allude to beliefs that leave no material vestiges? What about those that do not even have a ritual dimension? Despite the absence of such qualities, these beliefs are nonetheless pivotal for explaining daily misfortunes. In addition, their characteristics empirically validate the existence of harmful magic.<sup>14</sup> These are precisely the cases that lend significant value to the idea of pure magic.

## 2. MANGU, KOYB...

Since the publication of Edward Evans-Pritchard’s *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* in 1937, anthropologists, especially those with experience in colonial Africa, have distinguished between two forms of magic: “witchcraft” and “sorcery.”<sup>15</sup> According to Evans-Pritchard, the Azande – an ethnic group distributed across the north of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the southwest of South Sudan and the southeast of the Central African Republic – designated a specific form of magic called *mangu*. This term describes the capacity of some individuals to cause harm through psychic emanations caused by an inherent, biologically transmitted physiological condition. In the case of the Zande *mangu*, demonstrable verification of an individual’s supernatural abilities was seen in the liver; therefore, witches could only be identified after death. The Azande distinguished *mangu* from *’ngua*, a type of magic that was invoked through rituals.

Based on his formalist point of view, Evans-Pritchard decided to use the term “witchcraft” for *mangu* and “sorcery” for *’ngua*. Subsequently, Marwick used the same distinction as Evans-Pritchard in his study of the Ceŵa in Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia), adding more detail to the distinctions between these types of

13 Boschung and Bremmer 2014.

14 Note, for example, the striking omission of Heim’s 1893 compilation work of enchantments in *ThesCRA* vol. 3 (2005) 6.g (Die magische Defixio) and 6.i (Magische Rituale).

15 Evans-Pritchard 1937. In regard to the general consensus of this distinction, see Stewart and Strathern 2004, 1–9.



magic. The most important for our purposes are: (1) that sorcery is a conscious act whereas witchcraft is unconscious; (2) that sorcery is induced by a momentary bout of rage, whereas witchcraft is a compulsive behavior not necessarily accompanied by motive; and (3) that sorcery is perceived to be a more plausible practice and less disturbing than witchcraft since it uses material substances (drugs) or specific magical incantations.<sup>16</sup> Mary Douglas, however, criticized the terminology proposed by Marwick because she claimed that it framed the concepts of witchcraft and sorcery too restrictively. Instead, she proposed a more general use of these terms, in the style of Edmund Leach, who limited the distinction to controlled, conscious mystical powers in contrast to uncontrolled, unconscious mystical powers.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately Douglas wanted to carry out a transcultural sociological analysis of the accusatory environments and social control strategies that witchcraft brought to light.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Marwick was redefining concepts whose semantic histories had spanned a long period of time. From his perspective, framing witchcraft and sorcery in dialogue with the African ethnographic reality in particular distanced them from the vernacular meanings.

In any event, it is certain that the ethnographic reports – be they African, European, American or Asian – collect local interpretations of supernatural powers that correspond to the conventional notions of witchcraft in British social anthropology, or as we prefer, “pure magic.” These notions have contributed to a general acceptance of the formulation of two distinct, yet related taxons among anthropologists. Compared to ritual magic – a performative activity, which is developed through training; requires the use of material substances (believed to possess specific powers); employs incantations or other types of verbal commands; and tends to involve divine intercession – pure magic is considered to be an internal, biological, mystical power. In some instances, there is a specific organ or physical characteristic – hereditary, and generally involuntary and uncontrollable – used as empirical evidence of its existence. Additionally, pure magic, unlike the impersonal nature of ritual magic, tends either to be provoked immediately upon an intense, unrestrained emotional episode (envy, hate, rage) or it signals pure malice.<sup>19</sup>

It is unnecessary to turn to the exoticism of the central African ethnography to find examples of this kind. In the judicial proceedings against witchcraft in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, for instance, physical traits were commonly used to describe a witch’s body and were thought to reveal her inherent wickedness. Apart from the prevalent stereotype of witches as old, ugly, poor women, it was thought that their wickedness and impurity was naturally transmitted to their descendants. In addition, a witch generally had an adopted animal that acted as her familiar spirit and

16 Marwick 1965, 81–82.

17 Leach 1961, 22–23.

18 Douglas 1967, 72. The British anthropologist’s resolve to contrast different cultural realities and find room for shared debate for anthropologists and historians alike is apparent in the colloquium she organized and published in Douglas 1970.

19 Here we have adhered to the definition from Stewart and Strathern 2004, 1–28. Nutini and Roberts 1993 is another excellent example of the differentiation between witchcraft and sorcery applied to ethnographic testimonials outside Africa.

acted out the witch's desires. In exchange, she allowed the animal to drink her blood from an unnatural teat that grew from her body.<sup>20</sup>

Both pure magic and ritual magic provide elements that facilitate the construction of plausible accusations or evident explanations of arbitrary misfortunes. The possibilities can range from the identification of circumstances, which have made the victim susceptible to the aggressor's involuntary or accidental mystical attack, to the cataloging of a systematic source of malice that puts the social order at risk.<sup>21</sup> For example, in some areas of Papua New Guinea, it is acknowledged that if a person who is expecting a gift does not receive it, his frustrated desire can be channeled in the form of a sickness and directed against the individual that did not fulfill the remunerative duty.<sup>22</sup> The disgruntled person provokes the curse merely by involuntarily swallowing saliva upon receiving the bad news. This type of explanatory model for illness is especially relevant in societies organized around the principle of gift-giving; an unanticipated affliction can be interpreted as a punishment, which results from a moral infraction for failing to comply with the socioeconomic standard that revolves around the exchange of gifts.

In other cases, the accusations of witchcraft (using the connotation derived from African anthropology as "witchcraft/pure magic") reflect more complex situations of social tension. Again in Papua New Guinea, the escalation of accounts of witchcraft produced from the 19<sup>th</sup> century among the ethnic Karam people in the highlands of the Madang province proves to be an illustrative case. According to the ethnographic reports collected by Inge Riebe,<sup>23</sup> the Karam explain supernatural, harm-causing innate abilities through the idea that a parasite in the form of a snake (the *koyb*) is lodged in a person's abdomen. From the symbiosis with the *koyb*, the individual acquires the ability to kill people using mystical power. Movements of populations, which occurred in the area during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, led to the arrival of new ethnic groups, specifically the Melpa and Ramu, whose belief systems contributed to the development of a more elaborate portrait of *koyb* witches. Influenced by the new ethnic group's more sophisticated conceptualization of pure magic, the Karam began to claim that the *koyb* endowed its host with several abilities: to transform into animals or other humans; to become invisible; to move at a great speed; to be able to be at two places at the same time; to kill without physical contact; and even to resuscitate people who had been murdered with conventional weapons. The parasite, however, also caused its host to have an insatiable appetite for human flesh. Furthermore, they began to believe that the person, in whom the *koyb* was lodged, not only acted out of

20 Rosen 1991, 29–32. In continental Europe, witches were also often identified by bodily marks that revealed their pact with the devil (e.g., a white mole or a birthmark in the shape of a goat's hoof). On this point, see Tausiet 2004, 47.

21 The body of scientific literature about the witch trials in modern Europe is enormous. In fact, the volume edited by Douglas 1970 was directly inspired by the work of McFarlane 1970 on the witch trials during the Tudor and Stuart periods in England. A relatively recent compilation on the state of the question can be found in Ankarloo, Clark and Monter 2002.

22 Stewart and Strathern 2004, 18.

23 Riebe 1987; Ead. 1991. Stewart and Strathern 2004, 114–125.

physiological needs created by the parasite, but could also control his power and kill on demand.

As is often the case in these situations, the Karam began to identify *koyb* witches from among the members of the new, colonizing ethnic groups. This identification not only reflected the tensions and conflicts that resulted from the new division of territory and the rupture in the dynamics of reciprocity imbedded in the gift-exchanging organization of the Karam (the *koyb* witches are greedy and sell their services). But it also, as Riebe explains, provided an explanation for the increase in deaths with no apparent cause, which resulted from new illnesses (in particular dysentery and malaria) that originated from the low valleys.

### 3. ...*BASKANIA, PTHONOS, FASCINUM, INVIDIA*

In the Greco-Roman world various types of magic existed that could be considered “pure.” In his description of the voice *fascinum* in the monumental *Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines* of Daremberg and Saglio in 1896, the French philologist George Lafaye was the first to recognize differences between mystical aggressions provoked by a natural power and ritualized curses.<sup>24</sup> What we now, out of convention, call the evil eye is probably the most commonly known form of pure magic in the Greco-Roman world. It is this topic on which we will focus the rest of this paper.<sup>25</sup> Even so, other forms of power certainly existed that could be included in the category of pure magic, such as the “natural” abilities of the Ophiogenes, who cured poisonous snakebites with a mere touch, or the Psylli, whose bodies generated a deadly venom, or the Marsi, whose saliva and sweat had similar properties, or the Pharmaces, whose sweat was able to cure diseased bodies. The compilation of paradoxographical stories in which the attributed powers are of a biological nature rather than ritual, *homines monstrificas naturas et ueneficos aspectus*, is vast.<sup>26</sup>

- 24 See also Clerc 1995: 88f., who uses Evans-Pritchard’s categories witchcraft/sorcery for the classical world.
- 25 Although there is a tendency to think that the Greco-Latin expressions *baskania*, *phthonos*, *fascinum*, *invidia* and *livor* make reference to a harmful power that emanates from the eyes – and, in fact, that was the preferred option of the classical authors – it is true that other possibilities can fit into this conceptualization: e. g., Catull. 7: [...] *quae nec pernumerare curiosi / possint nec mala fascinare lingua*, or Philarcus in Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 680D: *καὶ γὰρ τὸ βλέμμα καὶ τὴν ἀναπνοὴν καὶ τὴν διάλεκτον αὐτῶν παραδεχομένουσ τέκεσθαι καὶ νοσεῖν* (“and those affected by the look, breath or voice of these people, felt sick and went limp”). Regarding the heuristic value of the term evil eye in modern anthropology, see Herzfeld 1981: 560–574. On the other hand, the Greco-Roman conceptualization of the evil eye was diverse and not limited to beliefs in the existence of supernatural, mystical powers. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 680–683 and Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.7–8 are intellectual essays that try to explain the evil eye from a purely physical standpoint. In regard to this belief and its articulation of the Roman world’s religious superstructure, see Alvar Nuño 2012b.
- 26 The quotation is from Plin. *nat. hist.* 28.30. Both in this passage and in 7.13–21, Pliny compiles many references to authors, such as Isigonus, Nymphodorus, Apollinides, Damon, Agatharchides, Varro and Cicero. Regarding the influence of paradoxographical authors on the creation of a witch archetype in Latin literature, see Alvar Nuño 2012a. Other ethnic groups had alleged innate

A considerable number of textual references attest to congruencies between the Greco-Roman idea of the evil eye and the defining characteristics of pure magic.<sup>27</sup> As is the case with the vernacular ideas, which fall under the general category of “witchcraft/pure magic,” *phthonos*, *baskania*, *invidia*, *livor* and *fascinum* have elements that distinguish them from ritual magic – although on occasion they may appear interrelated.<sup>28</sup> First of all, the evil eye is not initiated by means of a performative action, invocation, or stereotypical formula. The only known example of the evil eye invoked through a ritual action is in Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* in the passage that describes Medea invoking the Ceres and the Hounds of Hades three times with incantations and prayers and channeling her power through her gaze to attack the giant bronze Talos.<sup>29</sup> However, this episode is not adopted in later versions of *Argonautica*. Valerius Flaccus does not include it in his Latin version; therefore, it is probable that Varro Atacinus’s first Latin translation of *Argonautica* (the first century B.C.E.) did not include it either.<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, as we have seen with the different narrative strategies deployed by the peoples of Papua New Guinea to explain random misfortune or advocate accusations, the conceptualization of the evil eye in the Greco-Roman world oscillates on a *continuum* between involuntary activation by means of an emotional incident to rhetorical use in literature to portrayals of an individual’s inherent malevolence.

As a mystical expression of envy, the belief in the evil eye justifies the flaws in the theodicy of good fortune and allows for the evasion of individual responsibility in the face of random misfortune. Unlike the Aristotelian view, according to which envy can only occur among equals or in social environments where inequalities are minimal,<sup>31</sup> the Roman world viewed it in other terms. In various passages of his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian indicates that envy is a natural part of the *humiliores*, and people of a higher status suffer from its wrath more frequently (given their privileged situation).<sup>32</sup> In other words, envy is an emotion that is structurally related to poverty. Seneca the Younger expresses it in similar terms when he suggests that one should not

supernatural abilities, specifically, prophetic power. These families, such as the Melampodidae, the Iamidae, the Clytidae, the Telliadae, the Galeotae or the Branchidae, were typically considered the descendants of mythic seers who were usually blind and received the gift of prophetic vision as a form of divine compensation. Unlike the monstrous families described by Pliny, these gifted seers did not have physical deformities that indicated their mystic powers, but prestigious eponymous ancestors such as Teiresias, Phineus or Euenius. On this matter, cf. Flower 2008, 37–50.

27 In fact, Eidinow 2016, 102–163, inspired by the works of the previously mentioned Mary Douglas, recently analyzed the use of *phthonos* in the processes of building accusatory environments in the Greek world.

28 E.g., Ov. *Am.* 1.8.16; Plin. *nat. hist.* 7.15–18; Polemon, *Phgn.* 1.18r Förster. As we point out later, the evil eye in these cases is used with the moralistic intention to construct an archetypal profile.

29 Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1638–1688, with Dickie 1990.

30 Cf. Morel 1927, 93–96.

31 Arist. *Rh.* 2.10. See also Ben-Ze’ev 1992, 551–581, whose analysis of envy in contemporary societies brings him to conclusions similar to the Greek philosopher.

32 Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.17: *inde invident humiliores (hoc vitium est eorum, qui nec cedere uolunt nec possunt contendere)*; *ibid.* 12.8.14: *Nam plurimum refert inuidia reus an odio an contemptu laboret, quorum fere pars prima superiores, proxima pares, tertia humiliores premit.*

envy those of higher rank (*Nec inuideamus altius stantibus*).<sup>33</sup> Although envy is the implicit acknowledgment of the existence of marked imbalances of power, it is the responsibility of the envier who, unable to contain himself, allows his bitterness to pollute his body. This pollution manifests itself as a negative emanation that affects the happiness of the individual who is envied. “In general, the emotions of the mind increase the violence and energy of the body’s powers.”<sup>34</sup>

In its moral dimension, the evil eye is a measure of systemic malevolence. This idea can be found in the Ovidian narrative of the witch Dipsas, whose *pupula duplex* epitomized the vicious character of a drunk, lascivious, and cruel old woman who lives in the dark of night.<sup>35</sup> One might also point to the Gallic warlock, whom Polemon describes in his treatise on physiognomy as having the worst sort of eyes, deceitful and scamming.<sup>36</sup>

The evil eye also has physically identifying features that provide empirical evidence of the existence of harmful magic, frequently appearing in association with specific ocular disorders. Typical abnormalities that are associated with the evil eye in Greco-Latin literature are the already referenced *pupula duplex* or *gemina pupilla* and the *obliquo oculo*. Some time ago these expressions were identified with the ocular deformities classified in ophthalmology as *heterochromia* (the condition of having two different colored irises) and *coloboma iridis* (a hole or mark on the iris that gives the impression that there are two pupils in one eye).<sup>37</sup> Pliny the Elder provides the most complete literary description:

Isigonus and Nymphodorus report that there are families in the same part of Africa that practice sorcery... Isigonus adds that there are people of the same kind among the Triballi and the Illyrians, who also bewitch with a glance and who kill those they stare at for a longer time, especially with a look of anger, and that their evil eye is most felt by adults; and that what is more remarkable is that they have two pupils in each eye. Apollonides also reports women of this kind in Scythia, who are called the Bitiae, and Phylarchus also the Thibii tribe and many others of the same nature in Pontus, whose distinguishing marks he records as being a double pupil in one eye and the likeness of a horse in the other... Also among ourselves Cicero states that the glance of all women who have double pupils is injurious everywhere.<sup>38</sup>

33 Sen. *Dial.* 9.10.5. Cf. *ibid.* 10.20.1.

34 This text deals with the application of the theory of pores and effluvia to the case of the evil eye as done by Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 681D–682A: καὶ ὄλωσ τὰ πάθη τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιρρώννυσι καὶ ποιεῖ σφοδρότερας τὰς τοῦ σώματος δυνάμεις. (Trans. By Clement and Hoffleit, Loeb 1969).

35 *Ov. Am.* 1.8.1–16.

36 Polemon, *Phgn.* 1.18r Förster.

37 Cf. Smith 1902 and McDaniel 1918.

38 Plin. *nat. hist.* 7.16–18: in eadem Africa familias quasdam effascinantium Isigonus et Nymphodorus, [...] notabilis esse quod pupillas binas in oculis singulis habeant. huius generis et feminas in Scythia, quae Bitiae vocantur, prodit Apollonides. Phylarchus et in Ponto Thibiorum genus multosque alios eiusdem naturae, quorum notas tradit in altero oculo geminam pupillam, in altero equi effigiem; [...]. feminas quidem omnes ubique visu nocere quae duplices pupillas habeant, Cicero quoque apud nos auctor est. (Trans. by Rackham, Loeb 1969 [1942]).

Pliny's account clearly contains ideological significance.<sup>39</sup> His ethnographic description – a mix of a recovered Greco-Hellenistic paradoxographical tradition and its modernization with materials produced by Latin authors – merges the institutional level of the theodicy of good fortune by placing the structural misfortune of entire nations, who suffer the consequences of *pupula duplex* in the most remote corners of the Empire or among peoples who are reluctant to integrate, with the individual level; he includes the Ciceronian passage with his referencing of impacted peoples, a passage that recognizes the ubiquitous and arbitrary nature of the evil eye.

Interpreted as such, the evil eye is not only a strategy used to minimize individual responsibility in the face of daily, random misfortunes, but it also deflects this responsibility onto individuals occupying a less favorable social position. Their diminished living conditions – a product of the structural violence that surrounds them (e.g., sickness, poverty, marginalization, inequality) – are trivialized by being interpreted as a mystical expression of their bitterness. Social injustice is as ubiquitous as pure magic. Ritual specialists can find themselves in a condition of social exclusion or dependency, but thanks to their knowledge of rituals, they can empower themselves against their peers or even those who enjoy a more privileged position. Unlike ritual magic, which is capable of building persuasive authoritarian messages and reproducing the system of collective values,<sup>40</sup> the cultural indicators that make up the generic category of pure magic frequently operate as narrative strategies to justify rejection, exclusion, and marginalization. And this is even more dramatic when those who are themselves marginalized assume the blame for their precarious social condition by also using pure magic as an explanatory model for their living conditions. When warnings about the spread of AIDS broke out in Haiti in the 1980s, the local populations interpreted it as a new and extreme form of witchcraft. Paul Farmer, a North American anthropologist, was doing fieldwork at the time. One of his informants concluded in an interview: “Haiti will never change as long as poor people keep sending sickness on other poor people.”<sup>41</sup>

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39 For a detailed study of the subject, see Alvar Nuño 2012a.

40 On this point, see e.g., Gordon 2013; Wendt 2016: 40–73; Eidinow 2017; Alvar Nuño 2020.

41 Farmer 1990: 22. Quotation from Dieudonné, one of Farmer's informants.

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