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MATERIALITY, ORAL INCANTATIONS AND SUPERNATURAL AGENCY IN ANCIENT HEALING MAGIC

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Abstract: In the Ancient World illness was thought to be the effect not of accidental or natural causes, but rather the result of a negative agency, an external attack on the victim’s body. This paper focuses on the diverse strategies used in healing magic attested in the material and textual records from the ancient Near East to Late Antiquity, with special attention paid to how the cultural status of objects and substances was changed through ritual, a process that, along with the invocations of demons and gods, allowed objects to acquire agency to counterattack the harm inflicted on the victim’s body.

Keywords: healing magic, medicine, amulets, oral charms, Greco-Latin physicians, Greco-Egyptian papyri, gemstones, materiality, agency

The belief in the effectiveness of malicious spells and incantations has long been used as a compelling explanation for misfortune. Why a particular individual and not another was affected by a given illness constituted a pressing question in Antiquity that was often answered in terms of actions taken by witches or wizards[1]. In other words, illness and misfortune were understood to be caused not by accident or bad luck, but rather by a malevolent and negative agency. Where visible causes of specific misfortunes were lacking, the role of unseen agents, divine or human, were assumed. This tendency to attribute a demonic origin to human illness can already be detected in the episode of from the *Odyssey* (5, 394–398) in which Odysseus, having been shipwrecked and floating for three days, finally glimpses land, which appears to his eyes “as pleasant as to children the health of a father prostrated by illness (*nous*) and prey to severe pain, consuming himself because of the persecution of a hostile demon (*daimon*) if the gods deliver him from evil (*kakótes*).” Anthropologists have documented in a diverse range of cultures such “spirit aggression theories” according to which behind every illness or misfortune there lurks an extraordinary power that must be countered with an equally potent counteraction.

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[1] Gluckman 1970.

At times, as is the case in some African societies, disease as well as misfortune or a bad harvest can be interpreted as a punishment sent by the ancestors for whoever commits a crime, since it is these ancestors who are ultimately responsible for maintaining the traditions and standards that they themselves once performed. In so far as disease can be attributed to improper religious behavior, so too are healing rituals seen as modes of initiation and admission into a group, which is considered to have great therapeutic effectiveness[2]. In these terms, health is understood as the essential expression of an intact relationship with the natural, social and spiritual universe, while illness and misfortune are associated with a disruption of that same relationship[3].

Disease is considered an external attack on a victim's body; an attack that, unlike a gunshot wound, is invisible[4]. As shown by the famous "purification" of Athens carried out by Epimenides of Crete at the end of the 7th century BCE, the punitive contamination of human and cosmic reality by an invisible *miasma* – whether conceived of as a *daimon*, or sometimes as an identifiable god – remains a constant possibility[5]. An example of the punitive nature of disease is the plague that Apollo rains down by means of his arrows on the Achaeans as a punishment for the abduction of Chryses' daughter by Agamemnon (*Il.* I 8 ff.). Likewise, the Bergdama of West Africa also compare a serious internal disease to arrows shot by the god Gamab[6].

In the following pages I will give a series of examples to emphasize the importance of materiality and words, as well as the supernatural agency in the healing of a victim; by so doing, I will cast light on the intimate relationship between magic and medicinal practices found throughout Antiquity. This alone is a tall order and so I must omit a full discussion of the numerous anatomical votive offerings found in shrines[7]. That said, the materials found in Asclepius' shrine in Corinth, which can be dated back to the 2nd century, can give an idea of the offerings made, probably in gratitude for the healing of afflicted limbs (*sanationes, iamata*): arms, legs, hands, sexual organs, matrix with cysts, varicose testicles and penises[8]. Also of note are the ocular votive offerings found in the sanctuaries of Demeter and Koré, of which not much can be said conclusively and in connection to which there is a persisting ambiguity: do they represent the desire for being healed or do they show gratitude for healing that has already occurred?[9]

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[2] Müller / Ritz-Müller 2000, 210–212.
[3] Müller / Ritz-Müller 2000, 222.
[4] McDonough 1997.
[5] LaínEntralgo 1958, 57, 64.
[6] LaínEntralgo 1958, 24, n. 19.
[7] Draycott / Graham 2017.
[8] Perea 2007, 138; Persano 2019.

1. *Akpallu* and spells and ritual actions against ailments in Mesopotamia

To begin this discussion of materiality and the agency of objects, I turn to the small monstrous figurines (*akpallu*) found in Mesopotamia during the Neo-Assyrian period (858–612 BCE), whose purpose was to protect domestic spaces from malignant influences[10]. These monstrous human-animal hybrids have been found in brick containers buried in thresholds, corners or in the centre of rooms in neo-Assyrian palatial complexes. We are familiar with two long texts containing the extraordinarily precise ritual instructions for how to bury these wooden or clay figures in order to block evil, in any of its guises (including disease) from entering a house. According to the first text, some of the names of these figures correspond to the names of monsters that appear in the *EnumaElish*, the Babylonian poem on the creation of the world. The second text was found in the house of the "exorcists" and mentions the manufacture of a series of figurines; the first seven figurines have the following inscriptions[11]:

> Being of life, descendant of Ur / Being of abundance, good son of Nippur / Being of joy, educated in Eridu, / Good being, famous in Kullab / Wonderful being, favorite of Kish / Good being, high judge in Lagash / Being who gives life to the slaughter, guardian of Shuruppak.

These figurines are designated as "sages" and are connected to the main religious centers of southern Mesopotamia (this is likely an antecedent of the myth of the "Seven Sages," a narrative tradition mentioned by Beroso, a priest of the temple of Marduk in Babylon during the Hellenistic period). The reason why these statuettes were placed under the floor of houses or palaces would be that the ground constituted the essential limit of the house through which evil demons could penetrate. In such a position they were also hidden from human sight or could not be tampered with. These would be modes of ritualization of what Frankfurter (2019) calls “charismatic craftsmanship" oriented towards pragmatic ends, specifically the rejection of malignant demons that cause disease[12].

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[9] Petridou 2017.

[10] Feldt 2015.

[11] Feldt 2015, 80.

The threat of disease or misfortune is conjured up in Mesopotamia through a series of rituals carried out in the second and first millennia BCE by the *ashu* and the *ashipu*. The first term, usually translated as “physician,” was related to the healing of wounds, skin diseases, the treatment of broken bones, coughs, congestion, eye inflammation or heart attacks; in this case, the recital of oral incantations was prescribed while other remedies were applied to various ailments. The second term, *ashipu*, is usually translated as “exorcist,” and refers to an individual who by various means removed evil from the body of an ill person. Other illegal rituals were conceptualized in terms such as *kishpu*, and took specific forms such as *ruhu* (“inseminating” the victim’s body as semen would inseminate the female body) or *rusû* (“tying”), which was related to the concept of illness as a type of binding or subjection[13].

Within the famous Sumerian-Acadian incantation texts (*UtukkuLemnutu*), a healing ritual prescribes placing parts of a tragacanth tree, a leguminous resin known for its healing properties, next to the patient’s head to exorcise evil spirits[14]:

> May the evil phantom, evil demon, evil wraith, evil sprite, evil god, evil lurker, / Be conjured by heaven, be conjured up by the Netherworld! / Th(is) man, son of his (personal) god, may the evil phantom who has seized him stay outside, / May the favorable protective spirit stand at his head, / May the favorable guardian spirit stand at his side.

Another recipe prescribes the placement of a wooden figurine next to the body of the sick person, with a band of red rope tied around his head. The spirits that cause headache, toothache, heart pain, etc., are banished with the use of ritual, incantation and a kind of ‘proto-form’ of the ‘lettered’ amulet: the binding of the head with a bandage while the incantation is uttered[15].

Although the Assyro-Babylonians had no understanding of our modern concepts or neurological and psychiatric disorders, some signs and symptoms described in diverse medical sources dating to the second and first millennium BCE could be interpreted as descriptions of typical signs of depression (the Greek term *melancholia*). Since these particular disorders were caused by supernatural powers (as punishment of a sin or transgression) or by the evil actions of a warlock or witch, there were diverse kinds of therapies, from prayers or incantations, to amulets, ritual bathing or fumigations to purify the patient's body, or even "substitution rites" making figurines representing the evil-doers, to remove the illness from the victim's body, sending it back to them.[16]

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[12] Feldt 2015, 61. A parallel would be the statues of the triple Hecate that guarded the entrances of houses in Athens and in the Hellenistic-Roman world (Proph. *De philo*. 134; Faraone 2019, 182–183).

[13] Schwemmer 2019, 40–42.

[14] Kotansky 2019, 518.

[15] Kotansky 2019, 519.

2. Medicinal magic in Egypt.

While in the formularies from Pharaonic Egypt healing was the most important category together with protection rites and the production of amulets, attention shifted in Greco-Egyptian formularies to other kinds of magical practices; as a result, recipes for healing and protection became less common[17]. In Egypt many spells that could be used to counter usual afflictions, such as plague, the evil eye, evil demonic influences, bleeding, eye diseases, burns, swelling and fever, have been preserved on ostraca, papyrus, wood, but also on stelae. The oldest example of instructions serving themselves as amulets dates from the 12th century BCE and comes from Deir-el-Medina. It is an incantation on papyrus in hieratic writing to protect the bearer, by the royal decree of Osiris, from the *nsy* (male and female spirits), the spirits of the dead (both male and female), enemies (both male and female), as well as burns, bites; it does so by expelling all to the *Yalu* fields of the underworld of Geb. The amulet, which was joined to a linen band and depicts various gods (Ra, Osiris, Horus, Seth, Isis and Nephthys), represents the 365 days of the solar year. A remarkable feature is that even instructions for writing the amulet are included: "Words of God to be pronounced on two divine boats and two *udjat e*yes, two scarabs, drawn on a new piece of papyrus. To be applied to your throat, so that you can quickly pull it out"[18].

Various images were used in Egypt in rituals to foster health, fertility or protection[19]. This is the case with clay, wood, stone, ivory or faience figurines found in sanctuaries of the goddess Hathor, or of images of Horus/Harpocrates on crocodiles that appear on stelai or *cippi* from the 18th century BCE to the Roman era, in which the healing of the patient is sought by associating or identifying him or her with the divinity through a process of persuasive analogy. An important detail is that a good part of these monuments have a small hollowed out opening at the base where water poured over the stelai would have been collected. This implies that the image of Horus triumphing over reptiles (or the mythological narrative contained in hieroglyphic inscriptions) could be "washed" and then transfer its efficacy to water that would be ingested or used as a protective amulet against the stings or bites of certain kinds of animals. A parallel could be the biblical "poison test" (*Num.* 521–28), in which an adulterous woman was made to drink water that had been cursed in writing[20]. These cases reflect the importance of materiality as a means of action, and the story of Setne-Khamwas, preserved in Ptolemaic times in Demotic, is very interesting in this regard: a scribe copies a book onto a new papyrus, places the copy in beer and "when he knew that it had dissolved, he drank it and knew what had been in it." Since the incantations inscribed on the Horus stelai correspond to incantations recorded in ritual papyri, it is likely that they were also uttered aloud in healing rituals by priests who would have read the texts. In this way, the stelai would make the power of the incantations accessible to illiterate people in the healing chapels of temples[21].

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[16] Salin 2020, 93.

[17] Dielemenn 2012, 342.

[18] Kotansky 2019, 529–530.

[19] Wilburn 2019, 470–472.

3. The "Binding Spell" and other examples of healing magic in the Hittite world.

As is well known, the actions of binding and loosening are characteristic of magical-religious practices. In the same way that a bound man cannot act and is neutralized, a "bound" disease cannot inflict harm; conversely, a sick person is considered "bound" by an illness and unless magically unleashed, healing remains impossible. The so-called "Binding Spell" consisted of tying a sick person and untying him/her little by little to promote healing. The ritual increased its effectiveness through its association with a mythical story (*historiola)*, which was supposed to serve as an actualizing reflection[22]:

> The Great River tied its flow, tied the fish in the water (…), tied the high mountains and tied the deep valleys. The god of the Tempest tied the prairies and tied them to a pure bondage (…) The god of the Tempest released the meadows, released the pure bondage (…)
> His son is young. He had tied his pure hair underneath, he had tied his skull, he had tied his nose, he had tied his ears, he had tied his mouth, he had tied his tongue, he had tied his throat, he had tied his esophagus.
> Underneath he had tied his chest, he had tied his diaphragm, he had tied his liver, he had tied his pubis, he had tied his stomach, he had tied his anus, he had tied his knees. And on top of that he had tied his dress.
> This was the message to the goddess Nintu: 'How do we do, how do we do?'
> Thus said the goddess Nintu: 'Go, bring the wise woman. Conjure the skull, conjure the pure hair, conjure his ears, conjure his nose, conjure his mouth, conjures his tongue, conjures his throat, conjure his esophagus, and the chest, the same, and the diaphragm, the same, and the liver, the same, and the heart, the same, and the pubis, the same, and the stomach, the same, and the anus, the same, and the knee, the same. Also his dress, the same.'

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[20] Frankfurter 2019, 634.

[21] Frankfurter 2019, 534–535.

[22] *CTH* 390; Bernabé Pajares 2020, 27–28.

> *(Says the wise woman.)*
> 'From above I have released the skull, and I have released the pure hair, and I have released the ears, and I have released his nose, and his mouth, the same, and his tongue, the same, and his esophagus, the same, and his breast, equal, and his diaphragm, the same, and his pubis, the same, and his thigh, the same, and his anus, the same. I released his knee and also his dresses, anyway. This is the powerful word. The wise woman, let her come, and recite it as a good spell against bondage. The name of its author is not known.

Another type of ritual attempts to return evil or disease to its place of origin. This is the case with the following text against plague[23]:

> A ram is driven and blue wool, red wool, yellow wool, black wool and white wool are intertwined and with it a crown is formed and the ram is crowned; the ram is pushed out, towards the path of the enemy, and meanwhile is spoken to him thus: 'The god of the enemy land who caused this plague. Look, we have sent this crowned ram to pacify you, oh god! As the knot is strong and achieves peace, face this ram, so you, God who caused the plague, make peace in front of the land of Hatti; turn back propitious to the land of Hatti again!' The crowned ram is sent out to the enemy land.

And in a ritual meant to address male impotence, a magical space (a reed door) is created to symbolize the passage from femininity to masculinity, and substituting the corresponding symbols (the spindle and the spinning wheel for the bow and arrows), furnishes the virility that the subject had previously lacked[24]:

> I make reed doors. Also, I link them with red wool and white wool; I put a spindle and a spinning wheel in the hand of the lord of the sacrifice and he goes under the doors; when he comes out of the gates, I take away his spindle and the spinning wheel and give him a bow and arrows and meanwhile he spoke like this: Look! I have taken away femininity and in return I have given you masculinity! They have detached you from the ways of women and you have taken over the ways of men!

4. Greek healing substances and words.

The first form of what Laín Entralgo (1958) has called "the therapy of the word" in the Greek world is the *epoidé,* a "song" (*oidé*) directed towards (*epi*) a specific purpose. This magical verbal formula was recited or sung in front of the patient to encourage healing. While hunting with the sons of Autolycus, Odysseus' leg was wounded by a wild boar; his companions skillfully bandaged the wound and used a spell (*epaoidé*) to stop the flow of blackish blood (*Od*. XIX 456–8). Drawing a distinction between a purely medical treatment (i.e. the bandage) and a second magical one (i.e. the recitation of the spell) would not reflect the Greek understanding of the episode, since the Greek verb *déo*, "to bind, to tie," like the Latin *ligare*, often is connected to the song of enchanting by tying or binding; every magical practice tries to "force" Nature, and the verb *obligare* itself has a magical character[25].

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[23] *CTH* 410 A Ro. II 20–33; García Trabazo 2002, 471; Bernabé Pajares 2020, 25–26.

[24] *CTH* 406 Ro. I 18-2; García Trabazo 2002, 453 ff.; Bernabé Pajares 2020, 24.

The use of the magical *epoidé,* a verbal formula chanted or sung (*in-cantamentum*), would continue in the Greek world, as can be seen, for example, in the Orphic incantations. Orpheus, according to Pausanias (IX 30, 4), was not only far superior to his predecessors in terms of the beauty of his song, but he also came to have so much power that he was believed to have invented the remedies for diseases, in addition to the initiation of the goddesses, the purifications of sacrileges, and the means to deflect the anger of the gods. The therapeutic procedure of Pythagoras and his disciples was based on an attempt to expel daemons from the body and soul of the sick person (Diog. Laert. VIII 32) and relied on the use of music (especially the lyre) and a cathartic conception of diet[26]. Iamblichus (*VP* 163–64) also mentions the coexistence of magic and medicine: "The Pythagoreans used more ointments and poultices than their predecessors; treatment with drugs was not very popular; they almost always used it on ulcers; even less resorted to incisions and cautery; in some diseases they also used magic songs." The "healing words" of the *kátharmoi* (purifications) of Empedocles (frg. 112 Diels) must also have had a magical character.

In reality, magic and medicine were connected in their very origins. According to Pindar (*Pyth*. III 47–54), Asclepius cured both with "incantations" (*malakaisepaoidais*), *phármaka* (potions, drugs) and the application of ointments or surgery:

> Now all that came to him afflicted with natural sores or with limbs wounded by gray bronze or by a far-flung Stone, or with bodies wracked by summer fever or Winter chill, he relieved of their various ills and restored them; some he tended with calming incantations, while others drank soothing potions, or he applied remedies to all parts of their bodies; still others he raised up with surgery.

Likewise, Plato (*Resp.* 426 AB) includes drugs, cauterization, surgery, incantations and amulets as components of Asclepius' medicine. On the contrary, Sophocles (*Trach.* 1001–1003) seems to contrast the magician who tries to cure with charms from the physician who uses his hands (*kheirotéknes*) to treat the sick. The same author (*Aj*. 581–583) makes Ajax utter shortly before his death the following: "It is not proper for wise physicians to recite charms (*epodás*) in the face of ailments that require the knife." A fragment of Aristotle (frg. 454; *FHG* II, 188) tells that on a certain occasion the following psalm was used against the plague: "Go to the crows," which would have left the plague "in a state of calm"[27].

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[25] Laín Entralgo 1958, 39 and 46.

[26] Laín Entralgo 1958, 112.

In Cato's treatise *De agricultura* (160), the following recipe is given for restoring a broken bone[28]:

> Any kind of dislocation may be cured by the following charm: Take a green reed four or five feet long and split it down the middle, and let two men hold it to your hips. Begin to chant*: motasuaetadariesdardaresastatariesdissunapiter* and continue until they meet. Brandish a knife over them, and when the reeds meet so that one touches the other, grasp with the hand and cut right and left. If the pieces are applied to the dislocation or the fracture, it will heal. And none the less chant every day, and, in the case of a dislocation, in this manner, if you wish: *huat haut hautistasistarsisardannaboudannanaustra*.

As in the previous examples taken from the Greek world, this passage combines a medically effective practice for treating a fracture (the use of a splint) together with the recitation of a series of magical words.

Various authors have analyzed the collections of medicinal herbariums of Theophrastus, Dioscorides or Pliny, which are based on the ancestral experience of the *rhizotomoi* "root cutters," and the *pharmakopôlai*, "herb-dealers" (*herbaria*, *medicamentarii* in Latin), who used plant materials in healing practices. These natural substances would correspond to what Lévi-Strauss called "la science du concret," which gives rise to prodigious and selective indigenous classifications for pragmatic purposes based on observation[29]. And the same is true of the powers inherent in certain animal body parts, as Pliny documents in relation to the treatment of the Quartan fevers, information that he claims to have culled from books attached to the "Magi" (Plin. *Nat.* XXX 98–99)[30]:

> The dust in which a hawk has rolled himself, tied in a linen cloth by a red thread. The longest tooth of a black dog; the solitary wasp named Pseudosphex, caught with the left hand, and suspended under the chin; or: the first (such) wasp seen in the spring. The severed head of a viper (*vipera)* wrapped in a linen cloth; (or) a viper's heart extracted while it is alive. (Cut off) the snout and ear-tips of a mouse and let it go free, and wrap them in a red cloth. Gouge the right eye out of a lizard while it is alive. Cut the head off a fly and place it in a piece of goat skin.

PGM IV, 23 contains precise instructions for collecting plants for magical purposes. Different studies have concluded, from an etic approach, that these plants do indeed contain chemical components that can produce the desired healing effects. For example, cyclamen, which Theophrastus recommended for wound treatment, contains "cyclamin [triacetyloleandromycin] employed in modern medicine as an antibacterial, emetic, purgative, and hemolytic agent [...] with the mild antibiotic character of honey added to the cyclamen, this dressing would be quite beneficial"[31]. This etic assessment of the pharmacological properties of various prescriptions is often complemented by reference to the "placebo effect," since modern scientific study has demonstrated that patients' conditions can improve even when they are given remedies that have no pharmacological effect as long as they believe that it will help them to be cured[32]. From a similar perspective, the efficacy of amulets could be viewed from their power to make the wearer overcome potentially paralyzing fears of danger and harm: "a counter strategy of individual action, undergirded by feelings of self confidence, optimism, and the ability to formulate and achieve goals"[33]. Similarly, Tambiah emphasizes ritual as a performative act: by merely wearing a ring or performing a healing ritual the individual assures himself that he will be protected[34].

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[27] LaínEntralgo 1958, 91, n. 40.

[28] Graf 1997, 43; Luck 2006 ad loc. 5; Edmonds III 2019, 134.

[29] Gordon 2015, 142.

[30] Gordon 2015, 147.

In an emic context, there is a form of basic symbolism corresponding to an elaborate system of connections and analogies. At its most basic level, this includes the idea that the visual form of a substance – animal, vegetable or mineral – corresponds in some way to its power: the whitish stone known as galactite (from the Greek *galaktos*, "milk") is believed to favour lactation in human or animal mothers, while amethyst (*a-methys*, "not drunk") protects against the overindulgence of wine; haematite (*haima*, "blood"), for its part, helps with problems related to blood effusion. Similar correspondences could be established in more complex symbolic connections in the name of plants or animals, in metaphorical or metonymic relationships. Theophrastus and other Hellenistic authors theorized that certain substances were more suitable than others for certain functions and prescribed the use of protective amulets accordingly. Later authors (e.g. Stoics and Neoplatonists) developed more detailed theories concerning cosmic sympathy: the correspondence in varying degrees between the different components of the cosmos and the possibility of manipulating those relationships to achieve certain outcomes[35]. Indeed, sympathy and antipathy among the cosmic elements is described by Pliny (*Nat.* XXII 106) in terms of *concordiae naturae et repugnantia.*

A clear difference in the explanation of the agency that causes disease and illness between Hippocratic medicine and "magical" practices is that the former vehemently rejects the idea that the gods cause disease. If this is the manifestation of impurity and contamination of the human condition, it cannot come from the gods, who are pure and holy to a superlative degree. This idea, shared by academic and peripatetic philosophers as well as by the Stoics, provided ammunition for ridiculing certain charlatans (Hippoc., *Morb.sacr.* IV).

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[31] Scarborough 1979, 365.

[32] Edmonds III, 2019, 135; Chronopoulou forthcoming.

[33] Gager 1992, 221–222.

[34] Tambiah 1979.

[35] Edmonds III 2019, 137.

> [Men put] the blame on each form of the affliction on a particular god. If the patient imitate a goat, if he roar, or suffer convulsions on the right side, they say that the Mother of the Gods is to blame. If he utter a loud and piercing cry, they liken him to a horse and blame Poseidon.

However, the belief in personal agency behind the abnormal conditions or situations seems to have enjoyed a greater predicament than the Hippocratic theories of bodily humours (phlegm, blood, black bile and yellow bile, in relation to Empedocles' four cosmic elements), from whose imbalance the states of illness were derived[36].

5. Greco-Latin physicians and magical remedies.

Galen, writing at the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century CE, criticizes Pamphilos, a grammarian who wrote about plants in the 1st century, for his credulity towards old wives' tales and Egyptian magic, pulling out plants with incantations and resorting to amulets and other magical procedures (*De simpl.* VI, pr. = Kühn XI 792, 11–15) and accuses him of being a magician for talking so much about incantations, metamorphosis and sacred plants of the decans and demons, based on a hermetic book written about them (*De simpl.* XI = Kuhn XI 797. 8–798, 8). He indicates that another author, Xenocrates of Aphrodisias, also flirts with magic since he uses the Egyptian and Babylonian names for plants (Kühn XI 793, 13–15), and that it is typical of magical practice to use amulets with barbaric names (*De simpl.* X 2, 21 = Kühn XII 297, 5–6). And in the early 5th century CE, another Latin physician, Caelius Aurelianus, also stigmatized the use of magic in healing[37]. Through these testimonies it seems clear that from a medical perspective the use of amulets, incomprehensible formulas, the ritualistic collecting plants, astrology and hermeticism, as well as the use of many human and animal substances, were regulated to the field of magic.

However, there is a very important current, in which the profane Pliny the Elder is implicated: no less than 42 sections of his *Naturalis Historia* provide the names of magicians[38]. Although in his words magic is the most fraudulent of all arts, arising from the *ars medica* ("herbal" medicine in particular), magico-religious ritual (*vires religionis*) and astrology (*artes mathematicas*) (Plin. *Nat.* XXX. 1–2), and stresses the difference between *ars magica* and *religio*,[39] he recognizes the efficacy of certain remedies based on sympathy and, especially, antipathy between diseases and the remedies (plants or animals) used to fight them; this information is based on a series of apocryphal writings invoking Pythagoras and Democritus attributed to Bolus of Mendes, which can be dated between 260 and 100 BCE. Soranus of Ephesus (*Gyn.* I 20; III 12) mentions various "antipathetic" remedies for abortion or the treatment of uterine bleeding, and regarding to amulets against headache he refers to Archigenes, the famous Trajanic physician, according to Galen. This character, like the later Theodorus Priscianus (ca. 400 CE), shows that some physicians did indeed adhere to this doctrine of "natural remedies" (*physica*).

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[36] Edmonds III 2019, 138–39.
[37] Gaillard-Seux 2015, 203.

Marcellus of Bordeaux's *(Med.* 14) distinction between natural remedies and rational ones based on medical experimentation (*remedia physica et rationabilia diuersa de experimentis*), which Galen or Alexander of Tralles clearly opposed, does not appear in authors such as Pliny, who does not draw a clear distinction between those remedies and those of the physicians, as authors of more recent pharmacopoeia manuals have done. It was a non-medical and Christian source, Augustine of Hippo (*De doct. chr*. II 20, 30), that explicitly relates physics and magic in a comprehensive passage dealing with the diverse variants of magical practices. In another passage from the same work, Augustine points to intentionality as the key in determining the meaning of certain ambiguous symbolic acts and in distinguishing, in this case, magical acts from those performed by Christian saints *(De doct.chr*. II 29, 45). It is one thing to say "if you drink this herb your belly will not hurt," and quite another to claim "if you hang this herb from your neck your belly will not hurt," since the latter falls under the heading of superstition.

Nevertheless, Augustine, like Pliny, Theodorus Priscianus or Alexander of Tralles, does not fail to recognize implicitly the existence of antipathy as an unnatural power, which explains why certain doctors would prescribe magical remedies under the name of *physica*[40]. Ultimately, it is the medicinal virtues of the substance used that determine the effectiveness of the amulet even for physicians like Galen, who objects to the use of *onómata bárbara* as typical of certain magicians (*Simpl.* X 2, 21 = Kühn XII 297, 3–8). The physicians of the Roman imperial period were mostly aware of the specificity and rationality of their art in the face of magic and its effects, and the blurring of magic and medicine seems more characteristic of non-physicians like Pliny. In any case, doctors' acceptance of certain magic practices into their own discipline was carried out only on the basis of the qualities, real or supposed, of a given substance or of its similarity to magic practices, without the acceptance of the magical rite itself[41].

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[38] Gaillard-Seux 2015, 203, n. 16.

[39] Cordovana 2020, 73–74.

[40] Gaillerd-Seux 2015, 217.

6. Recipes of the magical Greco-Egyptian papyri

As Suárez de la Torre has pointed out, the ritual specialists whom we call *magi* carried out "underground work of intercultural communication" as a result of which all borders (regional, cultural, religious and linguistic) disappeared and gave rise to a surprising cultural community (*koiné*), in which the Egyptian cultural background harmonized with a universal knowledge that had practical applications[42]. A series of recipes contained in the magical Greek-Egyptian papyri, which can be dated between the 2nd and 6th centuries within an "ecumenical religious system"[43], have to do with the healing of physical ailments.

Authors such as De Haro Sánchez have recently written about iatromagical practices[44]: the prescriptions were usually short and direct, and the most frequent ailments dealt with were fevers (though this "is not an actual disease but rather one of the multifarious symptoms accompanying many maladies of varying origins," as Petropoulos explains[45], epilepsy, headache, eye diseases, scorpion stings and gynecological, respiratory, urinary or dermatological diseases. A frequent recommendation is to place an inscribed amulet on the affected body part. Two prescriptions from *PGM* IV (1227–64 and 3007–86) and several more from *PDM* XIV contain incantations for expelling demons from a patient's body, continuing the long tradition that understands internal, mental and chronic diseases as an effect of demonic intrusion[46].

Many rituals recommend the preparation of some mixture or compound of substances, which should be applied to certain parts of the body along with an enchantment that mythically transforms that compound: one thus moves from the use of a ritual specialist to the use or substance of a deity. Therein lies the power of "illocutionary performances." A papyrus containing a healing ritual from the

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[41] Gaillerd-Seux 2015, 223.

[42] Suárez de la Torre 2012, 305.

[43] Betz 1992.

[44] De Haro Sánchez 2015, 179–189.

[45] Petropoulos 2018, 31.

[46] Love 2016, 190–222; Dieleman 2019, 303–304.

British Museum explains the preparation of a compound of acacia resin, barley dough, cooked carob beans, colocynth and cooked feces, “to make a dough and mix it with the milk of a woman who has given birth to a child. To be applied on the burn, in order to obtain healing.” In connection with this mixture, the incantation tells the story of the child Horus, who fell into a fire, and the lamentations of his mother Isis upon finding him; it goes on to detail the remedy used to extinguish his burns with her breast milk. Thus, the material mixture applied to the burn transmits the agency of Isis, her will and capacity for action: the substance’s agency, in other words, is assimilated to that of the goddess[47].

Some of the iatromagical texts contain *historiolae* similar to the story of the child Horus, which are narrative prayers based on the principle of persuasive analogy[48] and the law of homeopathy (*similia similibus*). This is a magical technique used in the Mediterranean from the Bronze Age to Late Antiquity, which David Frankfurter has recognized not so much as the remains of old myths, but as authentic myths in and of themselves[49]. Relatively frequent in Christian texts, the Philinna papyrus (*PGM* XX) contains one of these *historiolae*, including an incantation for treating the inflammation of each body part: the story tells how seven girls extinguished fire with water jugs. Based on the relationship of the fire to the inflammation, each time water is poured over it the spell will cure the inflammation.

A well-known example of a *historiola* is that of Antaura, found on a silver plate that was inscribed in the 1st or 2nd century CE and later found in a military tomb in Carnuntum (Pannonia) dating to the 3rd century[50]. It indicates that the plate was transmitted by family members to combat a disease that had spread from one member to another:

> For the “Half-Head” [Migraine]. Antaura [the demon of the disease] came out from the sea. She shouted like a hind. She cried out like a cow. Artemis of Ephesos met her (saying): “Antaura, where are you going?” (Antaura): “Into the half-part of the head.” (Artemis): “No do not [go] into the [half-part of the head...].” (trans. R. Kotansky)

This magical procedure is also attested in the Middle Ages, judging by the following prayer against headache:

> Migraine came out from the sea rioting and roaring, and our Lord Jesus Christ came to meet it and said to it: “Where are you going, O headache and migraine and o pain in the skull and in the eyes and inflammation and tears and leukoma and dizziness?”

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[47] Frankfurter 2019, 674.

[48] Tambiah 1990.

[49] David Frankfurter 1995.

[50] Nagy 2015, 226.

> And the Headache answered our Lord Jesus Christ: “We are going to sit down in the head of the servant of God, NN”
> And our Lord Jesus Christ said to it: “Look here, do not go into my servant, but he be off altogether and go into the mountains and settle in a bull’s head. There you may eat flesh, there drink blood, there you ruin the eyes, there darken the head, seethe and wriggle. But if you do not obey me, I shall destroy you there on the mountain where no dog barks and cock does not crow.”
> You who have set a limit to the sea stop headache and migraine and the pain in the skull and between the eyes and on the lids and from the marrow from the servant of the Lord, NN.” (Kotansky 1994, no. 13)

Another type of magical oral ritual or narration within Greco-Roman healing magic is found in the Homeric verses. According to Iamblichus, Pythagoras and Empedocles would have used Homeric verses and music to carry out healings such as the one mentioned in relation to Odysseus’ wounded thigh. It seems that these verses were selected on analogy with the patient’s situation so as to link the present time with the mythological past. In such cases, Homer’s authority endowed the text with an extraordinary power[51].

What characterizes these magical texts is the freedom and plurality of the sources used: while the healing and prophylactic amulets are made of papyrus, ostraka and metal, the formulae were written on papyrus and were typically divided into two parts: one being practical, which would include the use of plant or animal substances or various compounds, and the other characterized by the oral recitation of *magikoilogoi*, prayers, exorcisms or invocations. In any case, the combination of natural and supernatural remedies is one of the most characteristic features of magic[52]. Magical healing rituals combine symbolic, mystical and authoritative power and ritualized performance that activates it in its material, social, emotional and cognitive dimensions. But the action of an expert is not required for the implementation of every ritual: the important thing is to follow the instructions in an exact way[53].

Another feature is the personification of an illness that was inflicting certain parts of the body (e.g. an externalization of the problem). In such cases, the agents would address, threaten or exorcize this personified ailment in order to achieve the desired cure or to force the illness to abandon the patient’s body[54].

Other resources also used in papyri or amulets to reinforce the magical power of spells are the recitation of the seven vowels, often forming geometric shapes with triangular forms (sometimes inverted, sometimes not) or the wing[55], and also *charaktêres* (signs lacking phonology, regular syntax or morphology or defined semantic content) as well as *voces magicae*, which could be recited.

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[51] Collins 2008; Suárez de la Torre 2011.
[52] Chronopoulou, forthcoming.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Chronopoulou, forthcoming, with references.

The combination of natural and supernatural remedies in the magical papyri embodies a sustained effort to reconcile all possible cosmic forces in favor of the patient's fragile health; hence the accumulation of different resources in some texts. The activated amulet of *Suppl. Mag*. 10, for instance, contains not only deities from diverse religious contexts, but also magical words, *charaktêres*, the 7 vowels, the *ouroboros*, the sign of Chnoubis, an imperative invocation, etc. In short, the advantage of magic compared to other forms of healing is the freedom to mix and match natural and supernatural cosmic powers, words and images, prayers and exorcisms, in addition to its low cost and the presumed long-lasting efficacy of the protective object. Amulets, for instance, would transmit a feeling of security to the user[56].

A frequent feature of papyri is the invocation of demons or lower-ranking divinities, on the belief that diseases are caused by evil demons that penetrate the body. At times, this was not at their own initiative, but rather required by an aggressive spell cast by an unknown enemy of the victim. As has been stressed previously[57], Greco-Roman aggressive magic is anatomically very precise and lists one by one the parts of a victim's body that are intended to be damaged. And when the cause of an illness was not found in nature but rather in the metaphysical realm, medical treatments were condemned to failure and the only remedy to confront the threat was to use defensive magic. At times, an invocation would be performed through an exorcism, which involved the imprecation of the name of the demon (or the illness) through the verbalization of the name of the god or angel who would carry out the action demanded by the agent[58].

An excellent example of a fever amulet was discovered under a house in 1928 during the excavations of Karanis (Egypt). It is a small piece of papyrus (P. Mich. XVIII 768, plate 7) dating to the fourth century CE and was inscribed with the following text[59]:

> Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai! I beseech Anatiel, Raphael, Gabriel, Suriel, Azariel, Uriel, -aubrael, Ablanathanalba, Sesemgembarpharanges. These are the Potentates of God and (the) Powers of the cure. Cure Sarapion, whom Allous bore, from every three-day fever chill, every

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[55] Perhaps in a procedure that attempted to imitate Egyptian hieroglyphic writing by combining the audible with the visible; cf. Frankfurter 1994, 189–221; Graf 2015, 236–237.

[56] Chronopoulou, forthcoming.

[57] Versnel 1998; Gordon 1999; Collins 2008, 85.

[58] Faraone 2003, 190; Love 2016.

[59] Wilburn 2012, 109.

> other-day (fever chill), quotidian (fever chill), and from every sickness every day … (Now, now! Quickly, quickly!).

The papyrus, which was folded several times from right to left, mentions the three initial theonyms associated with the Hebrew god, so frequent in the assemblies of papyrus and magic gems. It then goes on to name the archangels and two magic words (like the *Ablanathanalba* palindrome) and mentions not only every kind of fever, but also any threatening disease. In his treatment of medical and magic remedies for fever, Pliny (*Nat.* XXX 30, 98) accepts that traditional medicine was hardly useful to fight the *quartanae* (malaria), which explains the frequency with which a great number of magical amulets tried to counter this fever: since pharaonic times, examples in Hieratic, Demotic, Greek, Coptic, Hebrew and Arabic have been collected in Egypt. The above mentioned text, which contains Gnostic influences, suggests the existence of a *Vorlage* or model contained in a manual adapted in a conceptualization of the cosmos that seems more Christian than pagan[60].

Mariangela Monaca has recently highlighted the cohabitation in papyrus, phylacteries and amulets of a whole series of practices and rites (Greek, Roman, Egyptian) around illness and its cure, based on the continuity of activities of iatromantic pagan sanctuaries in places of Christian worship where the relics of the holy *thaumata* operators were venerated. Alongside common illnesses such as fevers or bites from poisonous animals, the corruption of the soul that abandons the right faith also appears as an object of healing. The invocations of the Trinity, Mary and the holy intermediaries of divine power appear alongside theonyms such as Iao or Abrasax, magical *voces* and *logoi*. The Oxyrhynchus papyrus 1060, which can be dated between the 5th and 6th centuries, prescribes a phylactery to defend the door of the house from all evil, including the names of Aphrodite and Horus, Iao, Sabaot, Adonis or the Christian Saint Focas. Similarly, a Berlin papyrus dating from the 6th century contains, in the vision of the magician and his client Silvanus, the Lord's Prayer to be recited to ward off all sickness and curses by invoking Jesus.[61]

7. Protective and curative magical gems.

A series of treatises gathered information about the powers attributed to stones (*Lithika*), for which there is also evidence in several recipes preserved in papyri that show how the use of oral recitations continued to work in conjunction with inscribed amulets. The most complex of these date to the Roman imperial period, when the "epigraphic habit" had already spread all over the Mediterranean, so these artifacts provide important information concerning dynamics of cultural communication between the most distant corners of the Roman Empire. It is possible that the oldest recipes only contained a name or image, and it is precisely the contentious references in those collections and in the magical papyri that have allowed scholars to posit that they were used for magical purposes[62]. These are collections from the Hellenistic period which, with the exception of Theophrastus' work, have been lost, so most of what has survived dates to the imperial period (*Lithika* by Socrates and Dionysus, a letter by the magician Damigeron to Emperor Tiberius, medical materials written by Dioscorides or the work of Pliny the Elder). Though other texts, such as the *Kyranides* or the collection of recipes of Marcellus of Bordeaux, belong to Late Antiquity, they can nevertheless help us interpret materials or images from older amulets[63].

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[60] Wilburn 2012, 114–117.

[61] Monaca 2020, 104–106.

Numerous amulets on a yellow-brown stone bear the image of a scorpion, the poisonous animal that it is intended to repel, and a diminishing word triangle seems to model a decrease in inflammation, *delectio morbi* or the avoidance of death[64]. The same thing seems to be at play with amulets containing the word *Ablanathanalba*, a palindrome name for a solar power associated with the burning of fevers, that was written with progressively smaller letters. Indeed, the gradual disappearance of the letters is understood to provoke the steady decrease of a fever's strength[65]. A strategy of this sort could very well be the textualized embodiment of a previously oral tradition of incantations that has been preserved in later manuals; that said, we must not discard the idea that the repetition of this word does not seek to decrease the power that fuels the disease, but rather that *Ablanathanalba* is repeated to add the power of the solar deity to a curse to increase its effect[66].

In some iatromagical gems, various *voces magicae* have been interpreted as the result of a process of rewriting older oral formulas[67]. Thus, an invocation to the eternally thirsty Tantalus to drink blood in an amulet meant to stop bleeding takes the form of an inverted triangle made of apparently meaningless letters (*dipstnnalamepie*) would be the result of the transformation of the phrase "thirsty Tantalus, drink the blood" (*dipsas Tantale haima pie*)[68].

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[62] Faraone 2011, 57.
[63] Edmonds III 2019, 120–121.
[64] Edmonds III 2019, 142–43.
[65] Faraone 2012, 31–33.
[66] Faraone 2012, 67.
[67] Edmonds III 2019, 143.
[68] Faraone 2012, 35–49.

The best-known case is that of the *ephesia grammata*. These are nonsense words, which appear together as *aski, kataski, lix, tetrax, aision* and *damnameneus*. Their original meaning as "averting words" (from *ephiemi*, "to avert") would later be reinterpreted as "words from Ephesus." In fact, the late lexicon of Photius describes them as incomprehensible incantations that gave invincibility to Ephesian wrestlers, but also as warding magic (*alexipharmaka*) (Phot., *Lexikon*, s.v. *Ephesia Grammata*)[69]. The incomprehensibility of the *ephesia grammata* (their "coefficient of weirdness," in modern etic terms)[70] clearly mark the performance of these words as something that goes beyond the ordinary; indeed, this extraordinary effectiveness reinforces their status as magical agents. Other amulets invoke divine power through their materials, their texts, their images or a combination of these elements.

> The boundary, however, between magical incantations that harness the power of the gods and other forms of accessing divine power remain difficult to discern. Does calling on a god to ward off enchantments or cure a fever count as magic or religion, or is there no significant difference that can be drawn, either by the ancient Greek and Romans themselves or by us as modern scholars? (Edmonds III 2019, 144–45).

According to the distinction made by Jonathan Smith between the religion of *here*, *there* or *anywhere*, most domestic rituals fall into the first two of these categories, since the devotee, when seeking interaction with the gods for their protection in normatively marked spaces (e.g. templates and sanctuaries), must go *there*, to the place of the gods[71]. On the contrary, amulets work *anywhere*, regardless of which divine powers are invoked: they protect their wearer anywhere so that he or she can face an infinite array of potential dangers. The healing that takes place because of a visit to a sanctuary, such as that of Asclepius, also has an extraordinary character[72]. Sometimes the expression of gratitude to the divinity for healing was expressed in a more symbolic way, for example through terracotta votive offerings that reproduce various body parts and have been found in many shrines throughout the Mediterranean; that said and as I mentioned above, it is often impossible to know whether such terracottas were offerings in gratitude for the cure of the represented limb or, alternatively, as part of a request to the divinity for future healing. While offerings are publicly displayed in a particular place (i.e. the temple or sanctuary of the god) to openly manifest his power, the power of the amulet lies entirely in its creation, whether or not others see it. And in contrast to the normative nature of performances in the first case, with amulets the non-normative social situation of the agent is emphasized[73].

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[69] Edmonds III 2019, 144.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Jonathan Smith 2003.

[72] LiDonnici 1995, B10; Edmonds III 2019, 145.

Although a distinction can be drawn between preventive and curative amulets, on most occasions it is not easy to distinguish one purpose from another. A fragment from Old Comedy alludes to a ring for which the wearer paid a drachma and which was meant to prevent possible stomach problems (Aristophanes, fr. 177 Koch; transl. Bonner 1959, 4):

> There is nothing wrong with me and I hope there won't be; but if after all I get a twist about the stomach or the navel, I have a ring, bought of Phertatus for a dracma.

In *Kyranides* (I, 11, 20–22) there is a preventive recipe for cataracts and other eye problems, which consists of engraving the likeness of a vulture onto a piece of amber. And in a papyrus (*PGM* XLIII) a series of angels (Michael, Sabaothlapapa, Gabriel, Souriel and Raphael) are invoked to protect Sophia from fevers. Another Greek-Egyptian papyrus contains similar content, with the particularity that all types of fever are specified in the inscription under a series of magic words arranged as a descending triangle, starting with ABLANATHANABLANAMACHARARAMARACHARAMARACH on the very top (*PGM* XXXIII, 1–25):

> O Tireless One, KOK KOUK KOUK, save Tais whom Taraus bore from every Shivering Fit, whether Tertian or Quartian or Quotidian Fever, or an Every-other-day Fever, or one by Night, or even a Mild Fever, because I am the ancestral, tireless God, KOUK KOUK-KOUK! Immediately, immediately! Quickly, quickly!

It is possible that the magic words KOK KOUK KOUK refer to the "secret name" of Hercules due to the appearance of the triple KKK in the gems that show him defeating the Nemean lion[74]. The systematic listing, which appears as an essential feature of many texts, is documented in an agate gem from the Greek colony of Gorgippa on the Black Sea, probably dating back to the 2nd or 3rd century CE, which contains a petition for the healing of various parts of the head; interestingly, the text's enumeration of portions of the head (brain, ears, uvula, throat, forehead, nostrils, polyps, teeth, mouth) corresponds to the list of the components of the head found in a Hippocratic medical treatise. On the gem, next to each of the parts there is a name or magic symbol, predictably alluding to the power invoked to protect and heal the corresponding body part[75].

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[73] Edmonds III 2019, 146.
[74] Faraone 2012, 20 n. 59.
[75] Faraone 2010, 94–104.

A recurring theme in intaglios is that of conflict, which corresponds to the ancient notion of disease as an active agent that penetrates the body (see above). This agonistic dimension of illness and its cure explains the iconographical choice of deities such as Ares-Mars, Solomon the Rider or Heracles[76]. In a series of gems Evil is personified as a woman lying on the ground, speared by a rider who is identified with the wise Solomon, in a characteristic gender distinction that unfortunately I cannot discuss here.

Dasen and Nagy have drawn attention to the absence of very frequent ailments such as toothache or bone fractures in magical gems[77]. Nor is there any allusion to affected limbs, while in the votive offerings of arms, legs, hands, or feet at shrines, these are exceedingly frequent. Most representations depict internal and hence somewhat mysterious processes (e.g. gout, bites or stings, bleeding), with attention focused mainly on the uterus and the stomach, both located in the abdomen which was conceived of as a mysterious and noisy part of the body. In accordance with a belief that persisted until Byzantine times, the wandering womb within the female body was considered a mechanically defective body part, a sentient and passionate animal and even a demon with malicious intent, who would bite and poison the female body[78].

In the uterine gems, the iconography mixes elements drawn from Greek medicine and Egyptian ritual traditions (Egyptian gods are the one that appear). Typical iconography includes an upside-down vessel representing the womb, surrounded by the ouroboros, creating a "magic space" that would protect the uterus and the embryo from evil forces.[79] Normally these gems are engraved on hematite (blood stone), an iron oxide that was believed to control bleeding, in accordance with the law of sympathy. A key with a variable number of teeth was used to symbolize the closure or opening of the belly, a central concept in ancient gynecology. The amulets against digestive disorders sometimes bear the inscription *pepte*, "digest," and against lumbago the amulets bear the figure of the reaper leaning over the harvest and the inscription on the back *Schiôn*: "To [protect] the hips." The motif of a bunch of grapes that appears on some gems (sometimes with the *staphyle* inscription on the back) is directed against infections of the uvula or uvula bell, which has a similar shape[80].

The appearance of Hercules on magical gems can largely be explained by his role as protector of the womb. This is suggested by the three engraved kappas, which are usually interpreted as the initial of *koliké* repeated three times[81], or as an abbreviation of the *KoukKouk* formula of a papyrus against fever (see above). Hercules' reputation as a voracious eater who would never get sick could also help to explain the choice of his likeness in this context. At the same time, his known sexual appetite and his ability to conceive children also makes him a reasonable guardian to protect the womb *(koilia, gaster*) and guard against any disorders, including childbirth. Likewise, gems containing the scene of Hercules defeating the Nemean lion were considered to possess a healing power: the divine hero had a special capacity to repel evil (*alexikakos*), and it was thought that Hippocrates of Cos was descended from Asclepius on his father's side and from Hercules on his mother's side. The connection is made apparent in an apocryphal letter to Abraxas that compares Hippocrates, who fought "wild" diseases, to Hercules, who fought dangerous animals[82].

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[76] Dasen / Nagy 2019, 437–438.

[77] Dasen / Nagy 2019, 438–442.

[78] Faraone 2003, 189–197; 2007, 154–164; Flemming 2017, 128.

[79] For hymns and incantations on conception, pregnancy and childbirth contained in the Sanskrit texts (*Rig Veda* and *Atharva Veda*), see Moncó 1999, 60–77.

[80] Faraone 2012, 9, fig. 1.3.

A similar logic explains gems that depict Omphale, the Hercules-loving queen of Lydia, while giving birth and holding a mace and that also depict an ithyphallic donkey on the back[83]: as Hercules fights the lion, Omphale fights the donkey, which in the Egyptian tradition symbolizes the demon that threatens health in general: in the late epoch the god Seth is represented by the malevolent donkey, and his sperm is compared to the venom of a scorpion, which was capable of inducing an abortion. Omphale appears in such contexts as a magician who actively controls her body, knows how to repel evil entities and watches over the health, sexuality and fertility of women[84].

Chnoubis/Chnoumis, the leontocephalus serpent, is one of the 36 Egyptian decans[85] and appears in a wide range of engravings, especially in emerald green stones, many of which were amulets used to prevent stomach diseases; sometimes these gems would include the *charâkter* of the triple S crusade that accompanies his image. This is made patent in several inscriptions ("Great God of the Stomach," or *Pesse*, "Digest!"). Sometimes his image appears, together with other Egyptian deities, around a womb. The power of all these gems was based on the belief that Chnoubis regulated the rise of the Nile and that he could also regulate menstruation, stimulate the flow of breast milk, stop bleeding, halt the bleeding of ulcers and regulate abnormal stomach liquids[86]. It is important to remember here that the instructions for making an amulet that are contained in a treatise on the power of stones (Orph. *Lith.* 35–36; cf. Edmonds III 2019, 131) reflect information found in medical authors such as Galen or Marcellus of Bordeaux (Gal., *De simpl.* X 19; Marcellus, *De medicamentis* XX 98).

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[81] Dasen / Nagy 2019: 429; illustration 17.7, p. 451.

[82] Parker / McKie 2018, 46–47.

[83] Dasen / Nagy 2019, 451, lam. 17. 6.

[84] Dasen / Nagy 2019, 430.

[85] Specifically, the third one of Cancer (Bonner 1950, 54).

[86] Mastrocinque 2005, 64.

Amulets against the evil eye were very common[87]. A series of amulets were related to teething, which occurs when a child is around 6 or 7 months old[88]. The appearance of the teeth not only implies a change in diet, but also in status, since the child began to share food with adults, in a process that lasts two or three years. A Hippocratic treatise devoted to dentition reflects the importance of these changes; furthermore, Pliny includes a dozen remedies for teething. The preferred teeth were those from wolves, dogs and dolphins, which were usually attached to the infant's body to facilitate the process (Plin., *Nat*. XXVIII 257–258; XXX 20–22; XXXII 48). In addition to the golden *bullae*, others made of bronze appear containing healing substances (such as grape berries) and in tombs of *Intercisa* or *Aquincum*, for example[89].

> Engrave on it a serpent coil with the upper part of head of a lion with rays. Worn thus it prevents pain in the stomach; you will easily digest every kind of food.

In a piece from St. Petersburg, the obverse shows Perseus flying with a curved sword in his right hand as well as the head of Medusa positioned to the left, while the reverse bears the Greek inscription *Phý[ge] podágra, [P]erseus se diochi (diokei)* ("Flee from here, Gout! Perseus is chasing you!")[90].

Faraone (2011) has argued that the inclusion of writing and images on gems is historically secondary to the uses of stones as powerful objects of protection or healing in themselves[91]. These properties of stones (or plants for that matter) are ascribed to the natural characteristics of certain elements. Ancient authors present an extensive list of stones related to bleeding, the powers of honey or vinegar for combatting various ailments, as well as various plants. These traditions about natural sympathies were not "folk" remedies or curiosities, but rather were recognized by authors (and presumably by most ancient peoples) as the sympathies and antipathies existing in nature, which had to be discovered and applied; furthermore, the effectiveness of these various powers (i.e. to cure or to repel the symptoms) constituted a kind of active agency in things in the world: that is, stones, plants or other substances could act on us[92]. Jasper, hematite, lapis lazuli, etc. had powers and sympathies with various parts and fluids of the body, and therefore were used in healing practices. And the cultural status of objects was changed through performance, ritual, craftsmanship or exchange. In these interactions, neutral objects became subjects that acquired agency as well as influenced and guided human behavior[93].

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[87] AlvarNuño 2012.
[88] Dasen 2015, 191–194.
[89] Dasen 2015, 194.
[90] Nagy 2015, 220–235.
[91] Faraone 2011.
[92] Gaillard-Seux 2015; cf. Frankfurter 2019, 662.

In various gems, Christian elements appear alongside traditional motifs. This is what happens in two pieces at the Cabinet des Médailles: one of them shows the monogram of Christ on an anchor next to the theonym Iao, with palindromes and *voces magicae*; in the other the Christian monogram is associated with an image of the god Pantheos, palindromes, *voces magicae* and the names of Adonai, Iao, Michael and Sabaoth.[94]

Let us look at one final example that does not seem inappropriate for bringing this discussion to a close. During the excavation of a pipe in Ticinum (Cisalpine Gaul), two inscribed bronzes came to light, constituting an epigraphic *unicum* and providing important information on Roman medicine, magic and religion[95]. They were inscribed by the same hand and date to the 3rd century CE. Both have an identical tripartite structure: an introductory formula invites the patient to honor a group of deities (Jupiter, Minerva and Salus in one case; Asclepius, Salus and Mars in the other), which is followed by a medical prescription and a final recommendation to carry physically remedy by binding it to the body with a bandage. The *stachys* mentioned would be *Betonica officinalis* and *styrax*, an aromatic resin. The magical character of the texts is found in the last three words: *fascia ligatum porta* ("wear fastened with a bandage"), which raises the possibility that the bronzes themselves would have been worn as amulets[96]. Soranus (*Gyn*. III 10, 42) did not attribute any therapeutic power to the amulets, but he did recognize at least the positive psychological effects on the wearer, especially women. The term *ligatum* is clearly related to the word normally used for amulets, *adalligata*, and this seems to be a good example of a practice that neatly combines medicine, religion and healing magic.

Conclusion

As is well known, Max Weber argued that rationalization is the key process for passing into modernity and would lead to the "disenchantment" (Entzauberung) of the world[97]. What was once seen as the result of mysterious and hidden powers, for example, now reaches an explanation through the application of more systematic scientific-technical knowledge. This etic and Weberian explanation corresponds to an emic one: as mentioned above, Sophocles (*Trach.* 1001–1003) seems to establish a contrast between the magician who tries to cure with charms and the physician who uses his hands (*kheirotéknes*) to treat illness. Many centuries later, Marcellus of Bordeaux contrasted "natural" and rational remedies based on experimentation (*remedia physica et rationabilia diuersa de experimentis*).

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[93] Brown 2001; Olsen 2010; Hodder, 2012.

[94] Monaca 2020, 106–107.

[95] D'Angelo 2017.

[96] On the literary sources to defend this hypothesis, D'Angelo 2017, 201–202.

[97] Max Weber 1971.

Given the varied evidence that has been analyzed in the previous pages, we must admit that reality is much messier. Magical practices were linked to medicine from Near Eastern Antiquity to Late Antiquity. When compared to other types of treatment, magic seems to have been the most economic solution accessible to the poorest members of society. Evidence from both the material and textual records indicates that many men and women, at all times and throughout the entire Mediterranean world, made use of protective and curative magic because it provided extra-ordinary solutions for the crises that life offers up. In magic, the cultural meaning and perceived effectiveness of amulets, objects and substances were transformed through ritual and illocutionary performance. This imbued them with agency through the invocations of demons and gods who could assist to counterattack external aggression on the victim's body. It is this combination of the natural and supernatural remedies that characterizes healing magic within the larger tradition of ancient medicine.

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