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FROM DOMESTIC APOTROPAIC MAGIC TO STATE RELIGION IN THE ROMAN WORLD: WAYS THERE AND BACK

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Abstract: There are two main methodological approaches in relation to the study of apotropaic magic in the Graeco-Roman world. An historicist one, focused on the formal description of the data and on tracing their possible origins; and a psychologist-functionalist one, which interprets the data as a psychological relief to the anxieties produced by the misfortunes of daily-life. I propose to explore here an aspect of apotropaic magic frequently overlooked: its mutual relation with the religion of the State, which creates a common syntactic framework but also tensions and conflicts.

Keywords: Apotropaic Magic, Domestic Religion, State Religion, god Fascinus, Dog Sacrifice.

1. Introduction

There is a particular passage in Pliny's account on the special properties of saliva which I would like to begin with:

> If we hold these beliefs, we should also believe that the right course, on the arrival of a stranger, or if a sleeping baby is looked at, is for the nurse to spit three times at her charge. And yet the baby is further under the divine protection of Fascinus, guardian not only of babies but of generals, a deity whose worship, part of the Roman religion, is entrusted to the Vestals.
> Plin. *Nat.* XXVIII 39 (trans. by W. H. S. Jones, Loeb, 1975).

Here Pliny establishes a direct link between a folk magical practice – protecting the child against the evil eye –, a public ceremony with a pronounced political content – the Triumph –, and a civic cult – the rites conducted by the Vestal Virgins. Spitting on someone was considered a way to avert curses and misfortune, although literary sources frequently refer to this practice as a typical superstition of old women and ignoramuses. As Pliny states, there is no need to resort to this kind of practices when there is a Roman god in charge of averting mystic evils. This is the only text where the god Fascinus is mentioned, but it is generally accepted that Fascinus was an itiphallic god whose iconographic rep-

resentation was limited to his exaggerated genitals.[1] During the 1st and 2nd Centuries A.D., phallic iconography employed as apotropaic devices against the evil eye is frequent in personal amulets, in the household – wall reliefs, mosaics, *tintinnabula* –, and in the public sphere – wall reliefs including some suggesting that there were small shrines unpreserved –,[2] as Pliny's reference to the triumphal ceremony and the cult of the Vestal Virgins suggests. Pliny's account is an interesting example of both the complementarity between public religion and personal attitudes towards the divine world and the conflicting relationships between them.

[1] See Kuhnert, *RE* VI 1909, s. v. "Fascinum", cols. 2009-2014. According to Zonar., *Epit.* 7,21, what hangs from the cart are bells but he makes no reference to the god Fascinus, or to phallic amulets. For Reid 1916, 181, n. 3, the Byzantine lawyer's comment about the bells is not credible. Champlin 2003, 214 considers that both Pliny and Zonaras could be plausible since most of the known *tintinnabula* are phallic. Beard 2007, 84 warns that the symbology and dramatization of the Triumph ceremony are unlikely to have become fossilized and remained unaltered over time. The earliest phallic relief I have found on record is dated at the end of the 2nd century or beginning of the 1st century B.C. and is found on the jamb of the southern gate of the Roman wall at Ampurias: Balil 1983, 115 and 116. The first arch of the Roman bridge at Merida has a phallus engraved on a stone block dated at the end of the 1st century B.C.: Álvarez Martínez 1983, 35, plate XV. Varone 2000, 17 gives evidence of a phallus carved in a street of Pompey (on a cobblestone of the *via dell'Abbondanza*) dating from the 1st century B.C. The thesis of Kellum 1996, 170-183 interpreting the forum of Augustus as a giant phallus seems exaggerated to me.

[2] The number of testimonies is overwhelming, although most of them are out of context. The bibliography I set out below is not a systematic compilation but a few references for guidance. Small phallic amulets on the Italian peninsula: Fiorelli 1866, 10-12; Galliazzo 1979, 124-125; Bolla 1997, 114-119 and 146; Tomei 2006, 262. Small phallic amulets on the Iberian peninsula: Del Hoyo Calleja-Vázquez Hoys 1994, 235-257; Del Hoyo Calleja-Vázquez Hoys 1996, 441-466; da Ponte 2002, 269-272; Pozo 2002, 69-121; Rey Seara 2003, 151-164. Small phallic amulets in Gaul: Faider-Feytmans 1957, 104-105; Lebel 1959-1961, 53-54, 65, 85; Rolland 1965, 176-178. Reliefs, mosaics and *tintinnabula* in temples, *negotia* and homes on the Italian peninsula: Blake 1936, 158-159 = *CCCA* III 42 n° 210; *Scavi di Ostia* IV 185, n° 344 and 191, n° 361; de Caro 2000, 69, 71; Pozzi et al. 1989, 192; Varone 2000, 18-21. Reliefs, mosaics and *tintinnabula* in temples, *negotia* and homes in the north of Africa: Foucher 1957, 178; Foucher 1958, 17, 19; Gauckler 1901, CLXXXIX = Perdrizet 1922, 31 = Bernand 1991, 85; Gsell 1965, n° 864; Ghalia 1990, tab. IV. Reliefs, mosaics and *tintinnabula* in temples, *negotia* and homes in Hispania: Blázquez 1984-85, 331-335; Alarcão and Ponte 1984, 123 y 134 = da Ponte 2002, 269-272; Mínguez Morales 1996, 305-319. Reliefs, mosaics and *tintinnabula* in temples, *negotia* and homes in Gaul: Faider-Feytmans 1952, 146-147; Rolland 1965, 106; Oggiano-Bitar 1984, 121. Parietal reliefs in streets and public places on the Italian peninsula: Varone 2000, 16-17; *PPM* II 1081; Varone 2000, 16 = *PPM* VI 343 (in this case the relief is on the façade of a *taberna* but the motif is represented inside a shrine). Parietal reliefs in streets and public places in the north of Africa: Ballu 1911, 150; Carcopino 1919, 170-171; Leschi 1950, 21; Picard 1954, 238; Morel 1968, 40.

I find the topic of apotropaic magic in the household a suitable model for the study of the feedback between the religion of the State and what has been labelled unfortunately as "private religion",[3] as the house is a middle stage between the public and the private, the State and the citizen.

In terms of theoretical models, the outlook for apotropaic magic in the Ancient World leaves much to desire.[4] According to the methodologies in use, these studies can be divided into two groups. On the one hand, those which are of a historical nature, focusing on the formal description of artefacts or rites, or on the identification of the cultural influences at play in the formation of these.[5] Simultaneously, the mainstream interpretative explanations have often relied on examining their psychological and functional character. Indeed, whether they be charms, sculptures, mosaics or reliefs, apotropaic amulets are considered as instruments for the individual to unburden him or herself from the anxieties which daily life produces, such as illnesses, unforeseen economic problems, or misfortune.[6] Both interpretations are valid, but the shifting influence between public cults and personal religious attitudes is usually overlooked, thus giving the impression that they are not part of civic religion but something alien or at least, alternative. The State legitimizes the use of particular religious practices –whether they be a by-product of folk traditions, foreign imports, continuities, reinterpretations or remodelations– either by using these or by being permissive. A well-known example with regard to the reciprocal relationship between institutional practices and personal practices is that of certain *defixiones* belonging to the sub-category of "prayers for justice".[7] In this type of invocation, cases are known in which the user employs a terminology typical of legislative and bureaucratic language or syntactic constructions typical of religious formulae. There are examples in which the curse begins with a general clause, *quis-quis*, followed by the crime that the user has suffered and for which he asks for

[3] de Marchi 1896-1903; Turchi 1939, "Il culto privato", 11-34; Marquardt 1879.

[4] The study of apotropaic magic and cults started to become popular after Harrison 1908, 187f. It should be taken into account that the British researcher used the term apotropaic to refer both to amulets and icons used to prevent the effects of harmful magic and to the chthonic cults of an expiatory nature. Cf. *DGE* vol. 3 (1991) s.v. ἀποτρόπαιος. In this case the chthonic cults of an apotropaic nature are excluded.

[5] Lévi 1941, 220-232 with regard to mosaic motifs against the evil eye. Cf. in general, Faraone 1992. The catalogues of Bonner 1950, Delatte-Derchain 1964, Kotansky 1994 and Mastrocinque 2003-2007 are of obligatory reference.

[6] Gager 1992, 218-222; Russell 1993, 35-50; Mitchell 2007, 273-312 consider that the political, economic, social and religious changes in late antiquity caused individual anxieties leading to a greater use of apotropaic amulets than in earlier periods. The numerous testimonies dating from between the end of the republican period and the 2nd century show that there is no such increase in the use of spiritual protection systems.

[7] See in general, Versnel 1991, 60-106; Id. 2002, 37-76; Id. 2010, 275-354.

divine justice.[8] Other *defixiones* include the term *dolus malus* or *reprindere* (= *reprehendere*), more typical of Roman law than of curses.[9] In other cases, the religious formula, *sive deus sive dea,* is copied to be used with variants in the *defixiones*.[10]

Meanwhile, although Roman religion did not institutionalize or try to control the use of curses, it did appear to be permissive, at least in some cases in which the *defixiones* were exhibited in public places. The most striking example is that of the *defixio* of Emerita,[11] carved in marble, but there are other cases, above all from the eastern Mediterranean, which suggest that they were displayed in shrines.[12] This link between individual religious practices and state institutions, both civil and religious, suggests that the concept of civic religion should include both state ceremonies and personal offerings. Although one or the other can respond to different interests in particular situations, both constitute a common syntactic framework. Similarly, the tensions and conflicts perceived horizontally in the integration, reinterpretation or persecution of new cults, also exist vertically in the permeable relationship between public worship and domestic worship.

2. The apotropaic nature of the god fascinus

To consider the household as a microcosm which epitomizes social order and, in a more general manner, the order of the Universe according to the taxonomic models of a given society, is a classical theme of anthropology since the works of P. Bourdieu on the Kabyle house.[13] Bourdieu's dense description would have resulted incomplete had he not established comparisons with the systems of signs and social organization which make up the public and religious life of the community, and had he not evidenced the symbiotic relation between the public and the private sphere.

[8] Blänsdorf 2010, 155f. with texts n. 9 (175-176) and 16 (180-181); *CIL* II 462 = *DTAud* 122 = Tomlin 2010, 247f. with further bibliography regarding this text in p. 271; Corell 1994, 280-286 = *AE* 1994: 1072 = Tomlin 2010, 268f. and 271 for bibliography.

[9] Blänsdorf 2010, 155f.

[10] Tomlin 2010, 257.

[11] *CIL* II 462 = *DTAud* 122 = Tomlin 2010, 247f.

[12] Cf. Chaniotis 2004, 1-43; Faraone-Garnand, et al. 2005, 171; Versnel 2010, 281, n. 22.

[13] Bourdieu 1970, 133-154 = Bourdieu 1972, 45-59. Douglas 2009 [1973], 71-112 makes a compilation of influential anthropological studies in relation to the concepts of space and time. These include the work of the French anthropologist.

The configuration of the Roman house does not differ from that of the Kabyle house: the *domus* is the nerve centre of the Roman patronage system.[14] It is the setting where the social network is woven and where economic activities take place. Both its distribution and decoration, and the activities that are carried out in it contribute to the imaginary reproduction of the relations of dependency between the family and its clients. Having said that, the *domus* is structured in two areas: a public area, opened to anyone and formed by the atrium and the entrance hall, and a private area accessible only to guests –bedrooms, dining-room and bathroom–; between these poles, a gradual line can be traced according to the kind of relation between the visitors and the family. The decoration of each room matches this assumption; this is the reason why the entrance, the atrium and the triclinium are the rooms with by far the greatest concentration of apotropaic devices and where they are most explicit. Admittedly, there is a great number of decontextualized materials that are not part of the building's face (reliefs or mosaics), but furniture that could have been placed anywhere. The *tintinnabula* are one of the commonest objects in this respect: even if examples from a precise archaeological context are unknown, their very nature suggests that they should be placed next to draughts in order to sound, such as in the atrium, the entrance or the windows.[15] Something similar occurs with apotropaic images included in dishes and dinner services: it is common sense to think that they were used in banquets with guests.[16]

The ubiquity of examples related to phallic imagery of an apotropaic nature, the lack of censorship against this type of belief and the officialization trials by Roman intellectuals show a continuity between the interests of the ruling class personalized in the State and those of the individual in relation to semantics of apotropaic imagery.

Although it is true that Pliny the Elder is the only author to refer to the god Fascinus and his presence in the Triumph ceremony, there is an etiological myth that relates the protection of the home with the image of a virile member. In his narration about the future king, Servius Tullius, Pliny the Elder tells us how a virile member arose from the flames of the home of king Tarquinius Priscus and impregnated one of queen Tanaquil's maidservants.[17] Pliny explains that these genitals were the god that protected the home and that, in their honour, Servius Tullius founded the festival of the *Compitalia*. It is not possible to

[14] Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 43-97.

[15] Cf. Ov., *Fast.* V 441; Luc., *Philops.* 15. For other religious contexts in which the sound of bronze is used, Macr., *Sat.* V 19,7.

[16] Cf. Deonna and Renard 1961.

[17] Plin., *Nat.* XXXVI 204. Cf. D. H. IV 2,1 and Plut., *Mor.* 323b ff., which includes this and other traditions regarding the birth of Servius Tullius.

affirm that this archaic phallic deity charged with protecting the home, Mutinus Titinus, is a homologue of the god Fascinus, but it does appear to be the case that in archaic Rome the phallus was considered an apotropaic image in homes.[18]

The earliest archaeological evidence of phallic phylacteries in public places referring to the god Fascinus, date from around the end of the 2nd century B.C., although throughout the 1st century B.C. their frequency is somewhat higher.[19] It would not be surprising for this same period to have been the time at which phallic amulets were included in the triumphal pomp: it is enough to remember that it is at the end of the Republic when the episodes of personal exaltation reach their climax, and it is probable that at that time, when the interests of the State are confused with individual interests, advantage was taken to integrate the apotropes against the evil eye, characteristic of home protection, in the victory ceremony.[20] The reason why the victorious generals should resort to phallic phylacteries to protect themselves from the evil eye must be related to what anthropologists have called *political ethos*, i.e. the development of a state ethical model that affects the feelings and emotions of the individuals living in that framework.[21] The traditional Roman *ethos*, the *mos maiorum*, insisted upon austerity as a virtue while criticizing public opulence and ostentation.[22] However, the victorious generals could not resist the opportunity offered by the victory ceremony to stand out over their political rivals. The case most remembered by classical sources is, undoubtedly, Pompeius' triumphal ceremony.[23] Pliny the Elder, for example, relates how Pompeius, in the celebration he organized after his victory over the pirates in the Mediterranean, included in the procession a portrait of himself made from pearls, whereupon the Roman naturalist is shocked and exclaims, "Austerity was defeated here and luxury is what really celebrated the victory!".[24] For Pliny, the public exhibition of something so opulent could only bring misfortune and divine wrath, which turned out to

[18] And that, also, it was of Etruscan origin. Cf. Palmer 1974, 187-206, "On Mutinus Titinus: A Study in Etrusco-Roman Religion and Topography".

[19] Vid. supra n. 1.

[20] Cf. Zanker 1987.

[21] Delvecchio Good-B. J. Good, et al. 1988, 43-63; Jenkins 1991, 139-165. In relation to the Graeco-Roman world, Morgan 2007 has demonstrated how the postulates of high philosophy infiltrate popular thought, thus influencing the latter. On the other hand, Chaniotis 2006, 211-238 analyses cases that suggest how in the Greek world, the authorities try to control the emotional outbursts of people in processions and public festivities.

[22] Cf. Linke-Stemmler 2000; Bettini 2006, 191-206; Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 23-59.

[23] Regarding the prudence with which the case of the Victory of Pompeius must be approached, Beard 2007, 7-41.

[24] Plin., *Nat.* XXXVII 14-15.

be the case when Pompeius was assassinated in Egypt.[25] The use of apotropaic instruments may reflect this mismatch between the fulfilment of the *mos maiorum* and the desire to enjoy glory in a showy way. Once the use of apotropaic amulets had become institutionalized, the theodicy of good fortune would create a suitable environment for the copying of this practice by the rest of the citizens, even in the provinces; in turn, the creativity of social practice would enrich iconographic models, and the full range of phallic amulets known would be generated by the early imperial period: from the characteristic phallic *tintinnabula* with feline hindquarters found in Pompey to the terracotta sculpture of unknown origin featuring two phallus-headed figures sawing an eye.[26]

3. Apotropaic sacrifices

The sacrifice of dogs is similar to the case of the god Fascinus, and the phallic amulets, and a continuity in the Roman religious structure can be drawn. There were several celebrations in Rome where dogs were sacrificed at the gates or next to the walls.[27] Every year, during the anniversary of the plundering of Rome by the Gauls, dogs were crucified in the area between the Juventas and Summanus temples. According to Pliny (*Nat.* XXIX 57-58):

> I have spoken of the fame won by the geese which detected the ascent of the Capitoline Hill by the Gauls. For the same reason dogs are punished with death every year, being crucified alive on a cross of elder between the temple of Juventas and that of Summanus. But the customs of the ancients compel me to say several other things about the dog. Sucking puppies were thought to be such pure food that they even took the place of sacrificial victims to placate the divinities. Genita Mana is worshipped with the sacrifice of a puppy, and at dinners in honour of the gods even now puppy flesh is put on the table.
> (Trans. by W. H. S. Jones, Loeb, 1975).

Aelian interprets this sacrifice as a punishment to the dogs for not having achieved their task as guardians during the looting of the Gauls,[28] but a detailed study on this kind of sacrifices has suggested that Pliny's account would be referring to a periodical apotropaic sacrifice that began to be performed during the Gauls' invasions at the beginning of the IV Century B.C. This type of sacri-

[25] Id. 37,16. Cf. Lucr. V 1126, who says that envy is a lightning bolt that strikes those who stand out and immerses them in shame, so that it is better to obey than to want to rule.

[26] For the terracotta sculpture cf. Johns 1982, 67-68.

[27] Robert 1993, 119-142.

[28] Ael. *N. A.* 12.33. Cf. Robert 1993, 135.

fices, that start to be carried out in public as a result of a specific situation of danger and insecurity, are likely to have had a previous substrate of a folk nature, although there are no specific references to confirm this.

The place where the dogs were crucified coincides with the limits of the primitive Rome, the setting of other apotropaic sacrifices like that of *Porta Catularia*:[29]

> In Rome, it was called the "Catularian" Gate because, not far from it, red she-dogs were sacrificed to soothe the star of Canicule (Sirius), enemy of harvests, in order to assure the ripening of the sprouting fruits.[30]

The limits of the *Roma Quadrata* were also the setting of dog sacrifices during the *Lupercalia*. Plutarch provides several etiologic explanations for this custom: the dogs were sacrificed because they are the natural enemy of the wolf, which was the honoured animal during this festival; the dogs were sacrificed because they disturbed the *luperci* when they ran; or because it was an expiatory animal:

> If the sacrifice is a purification, one might say that the dog is sacrificed for being a suitable victim for such rites, since the Greeks, in their rites of purification, carry forth puppies for burial, and in many places make use of the rites called "periskulakismoi".
> Plut., *Vit. Rom.* XXI 8 (Trans. by B. Perrin, Loeb, 1967)

On the other hand, the archaeological context of skeletal remains found on some sites corresponding to Roman colonies indicates that foundational and/or expiatory sacrifices at the walled perimeter of the new city were common. The fact that both in the walls of *Paestum* and in those of *Ariminum* (Rimini) canine skeletal remains have been found dating from 273 and 268 B.C. respectively cannot be interpreted as a coincidence.[31] There is consensus among specialists regarding the existence of standardized urban schemes for the establishment of

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[29] Ov., *Fast.* V 133-144 indicates that the *Lares Praestites* had the function of protecting the city walls and were accompanied by a dog in their representations. Cf. Plut., *Quaest. Rom.* 51 (276f-277a) and Tac., *Ann.* XII 24. The worship of the Lares can be situated in the sector of the temple of Vesta and of the *Regia* in accordance with the inscription, *CIL* VI 30960, found in this place.

[30] Fest. p. 39 L: *Catularia porta Romae dicta est, qui non longe ab ea ad placandum caniculae sidus frugibus inimicum rufae canes immolabantur, ut fruges flavescentes ad maturitatem perducerentur.* There is no agreement regarding the location of this gate. Whereas Gilbert 1883, 90, nn. 1-3 proposes that it would be in the southwest corner of the Palatinus, Coarelli 1988, 368-369 believes it to be a gate in the Servian Wall located between the *porta Carmentalis* and the *porta Fortinalis*.

[31] Regarding the archaeological context and interpretation of the skeletal remains of Paestum: Robert 1993, 119-142. Regarding Rimini, Ortalli 1990, 103-118 and Giusberti 1990, 119-130.

colonies in the early 3rd century B.C.[32] Just as the urban patterns were homogeneous and copied the *Vrbs* model to some extent, the foundational rites may also have been so.[33]

Apotropaic sacrifices in the household during the Roman Principate can be considered, in a way, a miniaturization of public rituals of purification and expiation,[34] although the individuals were not necessarily limited to the series of fixed rules and procedures organized by the ruling ideology. If we consider Pliny's accounts plausible, there was a whole range of variants. In *Nat* XXX 82 he states:

> The Magi say that the gall of a black male dog, if a house is fumigated or purified with it, acts as a talisman protecting all of it from sorcerers' potions; it is the same if the inner walls are sprinkled with the dog's blood or his genital organ is buried under the threshold of the front door.
> (trans. by W. H. S. Jones, Loeb, 1975)

And in *Nat.* XXVIII 142:

> Masurius tells us that the men of old gave the palm to wolf's fat; that, he said, was why new brides were wont to smear with it the door-posts to keep out all evil drugs.
> (trans. by W. H. S. Jones, Loeb, 1975)

In other cases, a dog's blood is not used as an apotropaic barrier, but a woman's menstrual blood (*Nat.* XXVIII 85):

> This also is agreed, and there is nothing I would more willingly believe, that if door-posts are merely touched by the menstrual discharge, the tricks are rendered vain of the Magi, a lying crowd, as is easily ascertained.
> (trans. by W. H. S. Jones, Loeb, 1975)

Pliny lists a whole series of practices which seem to range from typically Roman folk customs to oriental imports and elaborate rituals which base their principle of authority on their theatrical staging rather than on the weight of tradition. Particularly exotic examples are *Nat.* XXIX 83 and XXXII 44:[35]

> Of much the same kind would seem to be also their stories about the bat: that if carried round them three times round the house and then fastened head downwards through the window, it acts as a talisman, and is specifically such to sheepfolds if carried round them three times and hung up by the feet over the threshold.

[32] E.g. Torelli 1988, 33-115; Brown 1980, 22f.; Mertens 1988, 87-104.
[33] Regarding foundational rituals, see V. Lambrinoudakis et al., *ThesCRA* vol. 3, "Foundation rites", 337-346.
[34] Smith 1995, 13-28.
[35] Cf. Gordon 2010, 249-270.

They say that noxious charms cannot enter, or at least cannot harm, homes where a star-fish, smeared with the blood of a fox, has been fastened to the upper lintel or to the door with a bronze nail.
(Trans. by W. H. S. Jones, Loeb, 1975)

4. The limits of apotropaic practices

The state ritual practice, probably institutionalizing archaic ritual customs, recognized the need to defend the city and community from all types of supernatural threat; this involved the implicit consent for each citizen to copy this type of practices in smaller spheres (the domestic and even the personal sphere) and to reinterpret them. However, the structure of social practice is open and dynamic. The subject, according to his cognitive patterns, that is, within the structured system of symbolic significances where he copes – i.e. the concept of *habitus* developed by Bourdieu–, can generate a series of infinite practices limited only by the unconscious recognition of the meaning of these practices.[36] In the rich religious market of early imperial Rome, the individual had access to numerous options to satisfy his spiritual needs, many of which were nourished by the state religious terrain to their own benefit. The tensions typical of the symbolic relations between the State and the individual are also reproduced in the religious sphere and in magic.

Pliny's rhetoric regarding domestic apotropaic practices is a clear example of the social negotiation regarding their legitimate uses and, above all, of the efforts of the ruling class to maintain its religious authority. Both in the passage with which we opened the article and in those referring to domestic sacrifices and the sprinkling of blood for apotropaic purposes, the Roman naturalist presents certain standards regarding correct religious conduct which are very much in line with the ideological agenda of the ruling class. In the passage referring to the god Fascinus, Pliny criticizes the fact that midwives should have the authority to conduct a religious service, in this case, the lustration of the child with *saliva* to avoid curses. On the other hand, in *Nat* XXX 82 and XXXII 44 he mocks the *magi*, who he considers charlatans of oriental origin that base their principle of authority on an exotic ritual display which, in Pliny's opinion, has no foundation.[37] Both criticisms belong to a well-established discourse among Roman intellectuals, who deny any possibility of truth on religious mat-

[36] Bourdieu 1972, 147-188.

[37] Cf. Gordon 2008, 87f.: "The stereotypical carriers of «empty» religious knowledge were the classificatory marginals, first women, then strangers."

ters to groups not belonging to the upper echelons of their hierarchy, represented by the *pater familias* in the domestic sphere.[38]

The criticism of the effectiveness of the religious beliefs of midwives is a common topic in Latin literature beginning with Cicero, where the phrase *anilis superstitio* is first coined to refer to certain beliefs and practices that were beyond the state sanction, or *obscena anus*, as the archetype of a witch.[39] The first reference to the apotropaic powers of *saliva* in Latin literature revolves around precisely this idea: it is a scene recreated by the poet Tibullus, in which he addresses his lover to convince her that she need not fear her husband discovering her unfaithfulness since, he confesses, he has resorted to the charms of a witch to ensure the love between them is protected and may endure. After describing the extraordinary skills of the enchantress Tibullus concludes, "she composed verses for me with which you can lie: / sing them thrice; spit thrice on finishing the verses".[40] But the place in which the contempt for this type of belief is seen with most intensity is in Persius (2, 30-32):

> See how a granny, or an auntie who fears the gods, takes baby out of his cradle: skilled in averting the evil eye, she first, with her rebuking middle finger, applies the charm of lustrous spittle to his forehead and slobbering lips.[41]
> (Trans. by G. G. Ramsay, Loeb, [1918] 1993).

The ideological justification for women's inability to lead religious ceremonies is their spiritual weakness, ignorance and lack of self-control. Only on very limited occasions do women play a leading role in public ceremonies. In parallel, their presence in domestic religious ceremonies was conditional to the presence of the *pater familias*, so that in the few cases in which they led a particular ritual they were criticized.

With regard to the emptiness of the power of the *magi*, Pliny once again picks up an earlier rhetoric tradition which became programmatic after Hippocrates, *Morb. Sacr.* 1,2, which criticizes the mendicant priests and soothsayers who, for a small fee, can perform all types of magic spells from purifications to curses.[42] In fact, all the Graeco-Roman literature is full of references to magic

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[38] Cat. *Agr*. 143.

[39] See in general Wallinger 1994; Gordon 1999, 194-209; Stratton 2007; Hidalgo de la Vega 2008, 27-43.

[40] Tib., I 2, 55-56: *Haec mihi conposuit cantus, quis fallere posses: / Ter cane, ter dictis despue carminibus*. Cf. Id. I 2, 95-96.

[41] Cf. also Petron. 131.

[42] Cf. Edelstein 1937, 201-246 and Lanata 1967. Plat., *Rep*. 364d-365a also criticizes mendicant priests and travelling sorcerers. Regarding Plato's criticism of magic, Casadesús 2002, 191-201. Plin., *Nat. Pr.* 22 makes reference to Plato's *Republic* and in other passages, such as *Nat.* II 205, to Atlantis, so we assume he knew his work at first hand.

as a foreign practice, from the mythical Circe and Medea to the religion of the druids, who Pliny describes as a bunch of prophets, miracle workers and healers (*Nat.* XXX 13). The accentuation of the exotic nature of magic enabled Roman theology to overlook the unfortunate similarities it might have with other legitimate forms of religiosity; after all, the only difference between the sprinkling of the blood of a black dog on the walls of a house and the use of wolf fat or menstrual blood is in the principle of authority on which they are based: foreign magic in one case and Roman tradition in the others; the same could be said of the sacrifice of she-dogs at the *Porta Catularia* and the sacrifice of dogs at the door of any Roman home: State religion versus the ambiguous domestic religion.

5. Conclusion

Apotropaic magic is not alien to Roman religious structure. There are numerous examples showing how this has filtered from the folk customs perpetuated in the household to certain public ceremonies and vice versa.[43] Beliefs surrounding the evil eye and its prophylaxis are a clear example of the integration of religious practices of a personal or family nature in State religion. Once this type of practice has been institutionalized, the showiness of the public ceremonies and the theodicy of good fortune act as a sounding board that leads individuals to copy them and invigorate them, as seen in the number of iconographic variants arising on the same theme.

On the other hand, the public sacrifices for atonement and the protection of the city, which to begin with would also have been archetypal features of family and domestic religion, create a suitable environment for the individual to carry out similar practices. However, the number of options offered to citizens by a multicultural State such as Rome at the end of the Republic and Empire was not limited to the customs of the ruling class, but they were sensitive to a varied ritual offer which included anything from exotic options to small scale reformulations of state rituals.

Nevertheless, there were certain limits to the use of such practices which depended not so much on specific state sanctions as on the individual's recognition of the social significance of the use of these practices. There was an attempt to contain and channel the apparent anarchic freedom of options by means of ideological discourse defining the periphery of appropriate behaviour. In such discourse, there is a recurrent use of the image of the woman and the

[43] Cf. Cic., *Leg.* II 27; 40; 47-51.

foreigner as anti-models of Roman order, and they are put down by the mockery, incredulousness and contempt expressed by the literary sources. The lack of definition of Roman religious structure may eventually cause individuals to become confused about the legitimacy of their religious behaviour; this would be what led C. Furius Sedatus to hide his apotropaic panoply in a corner of his house in *Autricum*.[44]

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[44] Gordon-Joly, et al. 2010, 487-518.

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