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MAGIC IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIVES OF THE ANCIENT ROMANS

The Romans practiced magic in their private and public life. Besides magical practices against the property and lives of people, the Romans also used generally known and used protective and healing magic. Sometimes magical practices were used in official religious ceremonies for the safety of the civil and sacral community of the Romans.

Keywords: ancient magic practice, homeopathic magic, black magic, ancient Roman religion, Roman religious festivals

MAGIE IM PRIVATEN UND ÖFFENTLICHEN LEBEN DER ALTEN RÖMER

Die Römer praktizierten Magie in ihrem privaten und öffentlichen Leben. Neben magische Praktiken gegen das Eigentum und das Leben von Menschen, verwendeten die Römer auch allgemein bekannte und verwendete Schutz- und Heilmagie. Manchmal wurden magische Praktiken in offiziellen religiösen Zeremonien zur Sicherheit der bürgerlichen und sakralen Gemeinschaft der Römer angewendet.

Schlüsselwörter: alte magische Praxis, homöopathische Magie, schwarze Magie, alte römische Religion, Römische religiöse Feste

Magic, despite our sustained efforts at defining this term, remains a slippery and obscure concept. It is uncertain how magic has been understood and practised in different cultural contexts and what the difference is (if any) between magical and religious praxis. Similarly, no satisfactory and all-encompassing definition of ‘magic’ exists. It appears that no singular concept of ‘magic’ has ever existed: instead, this polyvalent notion emerged at the crossroads of local custom, religious praxis, superstition, and politics of the day. Individual scholars of magic, positioning themselves as ostensibly objective observers (an etic perspective), mostly defined magic in opposition to religion and overemphasised intercultural parallels over differences¹. Others futilely

¹ My presentation of prevalent trends in studies on magic follows Jacek Sieradzan’s article “O względności pojęć ‘magii’ i ‘religii’” (Sieradzan 2005: *passim*).

sought to explain magic through its etymology: English ‘magic’, deriving from ancient Greek μαγεία², appeared as *māgīa*³ in texts by Roman writers⁴, subsequently adopted by modern scholars as an inclusive umbrella term for similar practices. The erroneous scholarly assumption that magic always stands in direct opposition to religion induced many to construe elaborate classificatory criteria for distinguishing between these two modes of praxis⁵. In time, another opinion prevailed: no ancient society drew a clear distinction between magic and religion—and neither should we: “[...] magic and religion constitute a complex tangle of beliefs and practices, all endeavouring to shape the material reality by practical means”⁶. The modern scholarly consensus discourages attempts at providing universal definitions of ‘magic’, noting that, by nature, it is a constellation of practices that evade straightforward categorisations⁷.

Arguably, many traditional cultures do not functionally distinguish between magic and religion due to their worldview: humans live their days as mere playthings of ineffable and transcendent cosmic forces that can equally easily sustain and vanquish mortals. “Modern theories of magic stress that humans are animists at heart: they perceive the world as a dynamic system of symbols, awash with sig-

² The Greek term μαγεία denotes ‘magic’ or ‘theology of the mages,’ while its derivative verb, μαγεύω, means ‘to use magic arts, bewitch or call forth by magic arts’ (Abramowicz 1962: 61–62).

³ The Latin term *māgīa* denotes ‘the science of the Persian Magi, magic, sorcery’ (Plezia 1998 [3]: 415).

⁴ The word *māgīa*, derived from *māgus* (‘a learned man, a practitioner of magical arts among the Persians,’ Warrior 2006: 94) appears in the Roman literature only in the 1st c. BCE (Dickie 2005: 131), introduced by Catullus, (*Carm.* 90, 1, 3), a follower of a new poetic trend inspired by the Hellenistic Alexandrine tradition. The first prose writer to employ the word *māgus*, Cicero, linked it to activities of Persian diviners (Cic. *Div.* I 90–91: “Nor is the practice of divination disregarded even among uncivilized tribes. [...] Among the Persians the augurs and diviners are the magi, who assemble regularly in a sacred place for practice. [...] Indeed, no one can become king of the Persians until he has learned the theory and the practice of the magi” (transl. Falconer 1959)).

⁵ Bremmer (2015: 11) succinctly juxtaposes traits which—in his view—characterise and distinguish magic and religion. The former, practiced in secret and by night, is in essence a negative hierophany: a magician works with verbal incantations and formulae to manipulate and compel supernatural (and often malicious) forces in order to achieve selfish ends. The latter, practiced publicly and in broad daylight, involves an entire community and works for its common good: the religious praxis employs well-known liturgical texts to entreat and appease benevolent (or ambiguous) divine powers. Nonetheless, many rites do not easily fit into Bremmer’s classification. Certain communal rites took place at night (e.g. Roman rites performed in the dark included the *Lemuria*, the *sacrum Bonae Dae*, the *Saturnalia* and the *ludi Saeculares*), whereas other rituals meant to command malevolent forces and turn them against the common enemy (e.g. Roman rites of *devotio* and *evocatio* aimed to deprive Rome’s enemies of divine protection).

⁶ Szyjewski 2008: 90. Cf. Wypustek 2001: 30: “[...] no visible gap yawns between magic and religion”. Cf. Wypustek 2001: 31: “No single criterion exists that would neatly and universally cleave magic from religion”.

⁷ Musiał 1998: 57. Cf. Szyjewski 2008: 90: “The noun itself (*scil.* magic) remains decidedly ambiguous [...]”.

nificance and power. In such a system, ‘magic’ represents an attempt at rewriting causality [...]. Its power stems from the perceived solidarity of all life forms [...]. To commune with nature and become one with reality, human beings must form an emotional and spiritual bond with their environment [...]: to practice magic, they must draw upon these bonds to effect change in the reality”⁸. Metaphysically, magic and religion serve the same function: to work, pragmatically, desired changes into the fabric of existence.

It appears that the sole functional division between magic and religion concerns their acceptance (or lack thereof) by the civic and sacral community: many traditional cultures compelled magical practitioners to follow the moral, legal and religious rules of conduct that bound communities together and ensured their survival⁹. Experiencing constant uncertainty and helplessness in the face of vicissitudes of fortune, people wished to rig the game of fate in their favour, to cajole or appease in any manner the powers that be upon whom their survival depended. Humans used all available means to manipulate the universe to their benefit, be them magic, science or religion.

In archaic religious systems, *homines religiosi* developed numerous strategies to appease the gods and tie them and their worshippers in bonds of reciprocity so that they would foster and support the entire religious community¹⁰. The ancient Romans, arguably the most ingenious and pragmatic Mediterranean people in their religious approach, clung to a deep-seated belief that they could rely on their gods to favour Rome in all her endeavours as long as their religious community fastidiously aligned its aims and actions with the divine will. To do so established a lasting and ever-sustained peace between gods and their worshippers, *pax deorum*¹¹. To keep the peace between the Romans and their gods, the entire sacral community had to follow the so-called *cultus deorum*, a set of rules prescribing official rites and sacrifices¹². In the Roman civic milieu, the religious and the political went hand in hand: the set of religious guidelines became the law, and the politicians ensured that law would be obeyed¹³. Accordingly, any

⁸ Szyjewski 2008: 90–91.

⁹ Sieradzian 2005: 34: “As in ancient times, so nowadays magic and religion meld; those who are viciously bent on separating one from another are politicians and legalists, not scholars”.

¹⁰ Scholars of religion highlight that the Romans have developed the most consistent religious system within which all religious rites were directly responsible for ensuring the well-being of the entire religious and civic community. Cf. Scheid 1981: 168.

¹¹ Cf. Bartnik 2010: 31: “*Pax deorum* as a concept was a part of the public law, shaping the relationship between the community and its citizens”.

¹² Cic. *N. D.* II 7: [...] *religio, id est cultus deorum*. “Religion, the worship of the gods” (I translated all texts not accompanied by another translator’s name).

¹³ Liv. *Urb. cond.* IV 30: “And not only were men’s bodies smitten by the plague, but a horde of superstitions, mostly foreign, took possession of their minds, as the class of men who find their profit in superstition-ridden souls introduced strange sacrificial rites into their homes, pretending to be seers; until the public shame finally reached the leading citizens, as they beheld in every street

private or communal acts that went against the religious custom constituted both sacrilege and a crime¹⁴. Upsetting the pact between gods and the Romans, such acts disturbed the social contract and were thought to put Rome's continued survival into jeopardy¹⁵, since the offended gods could deprive their people of their support. Hence, sacrilegious deeds by a Roman citizen were punished by law as immoral acts against the entire community¹⁶. Was magic occasionally perceived as an antisocial and sacrilegious act in ancient Rome? The surviving literary testimonies and artefacts indicate that it had been so.

The oldest known Roman legislation (dated to the 5th c. BCE)¹⁷ that penalised magical practice is the Law of the Twelve Tables (*Leges XII Tabularum*), sur-

and chapel outlandish and unfamiliar sacrifices being offered up to appease Heaven's anger. The aediles were then commissioned to see to it that none but Roman gods should be worshipped, nor in any but the ancestral way" (transl. Foster [1] 1960). Cf. Liv. *Urb. cond.* XXV 1: "Now that the disorder appeared to be too strong to be quelled by the lower magistrates, the senate assigned to Marcus Aemilius, the city praetor, the task of freeing the people from such superstitions. He read the decree of the senate in an assembly, and also issued an edict that whoever had books of prophecies or prayers or a ritual of sacrifice set down in writing should bring all such books and writings to him before the first of April, and that no one should sacrifice in a public or consecrated place according to a strange or foreign rite" (transl. Moore 1958).

¹⁴ Such despicable acts included *e.g.* worshipping foreign deities whose cult has not been officially permitted by the Roman religious authorities. Cf. Cic. *Leg.* II 19: "No one shall have gods to himself, either new gods or alien gods, unless recognized by the State. Privately they shall worship those gods whose worship they have duly received from their ancestors" (transl. Keyes [1] 1959). Cf. Liv. *Urb. cond.* II 10: "The worship of private gods, whether new or alien, brings confusion into religion [...]" (transl. Keyes [1] 1959). The worship of foreign gods not officially inducted into the Roman pantheon was customarily known as superstition (*superstitio*) (Bragova 2017: 310). Authorities swiftly and brutally dealt with all practices qualified as *superstitio*, with a representative example found in the suppression of Rome's first illegal Bacchanals (Liv. *Urb. cond.* XXXIX 9-19).

¹⁵ The pragmatic Roman communal approach naturally led to a belief that all members of the socio-religious community bear responsibility for preserving its customs and ensuring its survival. Appropriately, scholars of religion noted that "the communities of purpose and practice, including entire societies, often share religious and social aims" (Widengren 2008: 591). Cf. Cic. *Rep.* I 39: "Well, then, a commonwealth is the property of a people. But a people is not any collection of human beings brought together in any sort of way, but an assemblage of people in large numbers associated in an agreement with respect to justice and a partnership for the common good" (transl. Keyes [2] 1959).

¹⁶ Festus, p. 389L: "Pious and respectful people are those who follow the [accepted] custom of the [Roman] community, performing prescribed rites and shunning other cults and superstitions." Another author to juxtapose piety with superstition was Aulus Gellius (*Noc. Att.* IX 1). Festus stated (p. 382L) that a truly pious person must serve not only the gods but the entire religious community, since the ties forged by *pax deorum* benefit all and one. Hence, a Roman *homo religiosus* was tasked with both religious and civic duties; to shirk one's duties automatically excluded one from the Roman community and deprived one of civic privileges, as such an expulsion was the surest way to avert divine anger from the community that once hosted the offender.

¹⁷ Graf 2008: 29. Other laws against magical practices were enacted only in the 1st c. BCE. *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* (1st century BCE) penalised assassinations and poisonings, often

viving only as fragments quoted in texts of Roman authors. Two passages known to us declare that, [...] *in duodecim tabulis verba sunt: qui fruges excantassit*¹⁸, *et alibi: qui malum carmen incantassit?*¹⁹ and [...] *est in xii. tabulis neve alienam segetem pellexeris [...]*²⁰. Those who were proven to have magically drawn away the fruits from another's land to their own were slain²¹. The language of abovementioned laws refers to magical practice. The Latin verb *incantare*—"to bewitch; to ensorcel; to chant a magic formula against someone"—is a composite verb, fusing an *in-* prefix and the root *-cantare*, etymologically related to *carmen* (noun), 'a magic song, prayer, prophecy'. Scholars of archaic prayer texts assert that *carmen* initially denoted a forceful magical compulsion rather than a humble plea to the gods²². Two passages drawn from the Law of the Twelve Tables demonstrate that the Romans knew and commonly practised magic, but they proscribed magical acts against another's property²³, the said property in this case being grain, the livelihood and sustenance of the Roman *familia* and the Roman community. A magical theft of grain not only violated the Roman social contract and custom but also endangered food security of the entire community. The law against magical theft of grain probably stood behind numerous accusations of

linked to brewing magical potions and plant decoctions (Lat. *venenum* denotes 'any liquid substance that powerfully affects or changes the condition of the body, potion, charm, love philtre' (Plezia 1999 [5]: 555)). Numerous charges of practicing magic, often politically motivated, appear in sources dated to the Imperial period. By the Late Imperial period, Christianity rose in status and magicians fell out of favour: any type of magic practice was forbidden and those caught casting spells or charms were severely punished (Bartnik 2010: 28–30).

¹⁸ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII 17–18: "[...] in the laws themselves of the Twelve Tables, [...] we [...] read the following words—'Whosoever shall have enchanted the harvest to move from one field to another.' I believe this line refers to situations when someone moved boundary stones to seize a part of a neighbour's field. If correct, this interpretation explains the sacrilegious nature of such an act. A Roman field was delimited with logs or stones that represented the liminal god *Terminus*, one of Jupiter's hypostases: to move such a marker was to directly challenge the god's authority over his land and arouse his wrath".

¹⁹ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII 18: "[...] whosoever shall intone an evil song"—that is, speaks a magic incantation, or, more precisely, utters a curse against another.

²⁰ Serv. *B.* VIII 99: "[...] or to draw away the fruits of another's land to one's own [by incantations and magical arts]".

²¹ ROL (1): 474. This capital punishment might have had a religious significance, since, as some scholars of the Roman religion have noted, grain was thought to personify the harvest goddess, Ceres: to steal grain was to gravely offend the goddess, who could wreak her revenge upon the entire community (Musiał 1998: 61).

²² Nilsson 1955: 159; Cf. Zieliński 1991: 96; Addabbo 1991: 12; Zalewska-Jura 2008: 54.

²³ The Romans saw any deliberate individual magical action against another individual or the community as a grave offense against the ancestral custom (*mos maiorum*) and the ritual practice (*cultus deorum*)—and, first and foremost, as an antisocial act against the common good of the community. Cf. Musiał 1998: 71: "[...] if one practiced magic to harm or kill another, an entire community would rise against the offender in solidarity with its injured member". Cf. Glay 1976: 540.

magic²⁴, with the belief in such practices still detectable in works of poets of the late 1st century BCE²⁵.

The pragmatic Romans employed magic in all human endeavours, judging its nature by its means and ends. Accordingly, they opposed and banned magic against another's health or property, with modern scholars anachronistically classifying such actions as "black magic"²⁶. Notably, every ill-turn of fortune in a Roman's life could be interpreted as a result of someone's deliberate and malevolent action, such actions including sorcery²⁷. All accusations of harmful magic presented to a Roman official had to be investigated, prosecuted and punished²⁸. Malicious spells could include the use of poison: Livy recounts a 334 BCE investigation concerning poisoning:

Cum primores civitatis similibus morbis eodemque ferme omnes eventu morerentur, ancilla quaedam ad Q. Fabium Maximum aedilem curulem indicaturam se causam publicae pestis

²⁴ Pliny the Elder (*Hist. Nat.* XVIII 41) tells the story of a freedman Furius Cresimus, whose neighbours accused him of magically stealing their produce, since Furius' small field customarily bore extraordinarily bountiful harvests. Furius was found to be innocent, since he demonstrated that his bounty came from his laborious effort and not from magic.

²⁵ Verg. *Buc.* VIII 99. Vergil describes a girl who casts magic spells to ensure safe return of shepherd Daphnis. Her efficacious spells were taught to her by a magician who was supposedly able to steal another's harvest. The Roman literature of that period provides further examples of such characters: predominantly, enchantresses from faraway lands (Verg. *Aen.* IV 483–493: "Thence a priestess of Massylian race has been shown me, warden of the fane of the Hesperides, who gave dainties to the dragon and guarded the sacred boughs on the tree, sprinkling dewy honey and slumberous poppies. With her spells she professes to set free the hearts of whom she wills, but on others to bring cruel love-pains: to stay the flow of rivers and turn back the stars: she awakes the ghosts of night: and thou shalt mark earth rumbling under thy feet and ash-trees coming down from mountains. I call heaven to witness and thee, dear sister mine, and thy dear life, that against my will I arm myself with magic arts!" (transl. Fairclough 1960)). Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (VII 159–293) relates the story of Medea, a Colchian witch capable of rejuvenating Jason's father. In turn, Horace's seventh epode narrates the story of sorceress Canidia, who used magic perfumes to rekindle the affection of her former lover. To obtain the necessary ingredients, Canidia had to slay a boy and drain his blood. The allure and enduring appeal of such narratives probably results from the Hellenic substratum in the Roman culture: stories of magic and transformation, well-beloved by the Greeks, were consciously emulated by Roman poets.

²⁶ The ancient literature does not colour-code ethical designations: for the Romans, harmful magic was simply called 'an evil song', *carmen malum* (Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII 18), 'magical arts', *artes magicae* (Serv. *B.* VIII 89; 99), or 'imprecations', *devotiones* (Tac. *Ann.* II 69; IV 52). Swoboda (1979: 36–38) enumerates and discusses earliest *devotiones* in the Roman poetry. Cf. Addabbo 1991: 14–17.

²⁷ Inexplicable happenings and omens affecting the entire community were not interpreted as sorcery but rather as signs of divine anger. The Romans took certain precautionary measures to recognise such omens and appease their gods (most frequently through divination). Cicero (*N. D.* III 5) saw divination as an integral part of the Roman religious and ritual practice.

²⁸ Cf. Bartnik 2010: 34: "Practice of black magic endangered the well-being of the state and its citizens and had to be swiftly counteracted". Cf. Bartnik 2010: 35: "The Romans abhorred black magic because its practice went against the very core of *cultus deorum*, the ancestral custom of worship passed from generation to generation".

professa est, si ab eo fides sibi data esset haud futurum noxae indicium. Fabius confestim rem ad consules, consules ad senatum referunt consensusque ordinis fides indici data. Tum patefactum muliebri fraude civitatem premi matronasque ea venena coquere²⁹ et, si sequi extemplo velint, manifesto deprehendi posse. Secuti indicem et coquentes quasdam medicamenta et recondita alia invenerunt; quibus in forum delatis et ad viginti matronis, apud quas deprehensa erant, per viatorem accitis duae ex eis, Cornelia ac Sergia, patriciae utraque gentis, cum ea medicamenta salubria esse contenderent, ab confutante indice bibere iussae ut se falsum commentam arguerent, spatio ad conloquendum sumpto, cum submoto populo [in conspectu omnium] rem ad ceteras rettulissent, haud abnuentibus et illis bibere, epoto <in conspectu omnium> medicamento suamet ipsae fraude omnes interierunt. Comprehensae extemplo earum comites magnum numerum matronarum indicaverunt; ex quibus ad centum septuaginta damnatae; neque de veneficiis ante eam diem Romae quaesitum est³⁰.

One of the most famous ancient court cases concerning lethal magic involved Piso (the governor of Syria) and his wife Plaucina, who were accused of cursing and sickening Germanicus, Emperor Tiberius' relative. Although Piso and Plaucina came to trial, they were never sentenced, as Piso committed suicide. Tacitus vividly relates the context of Germanicus' misfortunes:

Saevam vim morbi augebat persuasio veneni a Pisone accepti; et reperiebantur solo ac parietibus erutae humanorum corporum reliquiae, carmina et devotiones³¹ et nomen Germanici plumbeis tabulis insculptum, semusti cineres ac tabo obliti aliaque malefica quis creditur animas numinibus infernis sacrari³².

²⁹ Perhaps the text alludes to a brew employed in a healing or erotic magic. Errors in the brewing process or selecting wrong ingredients could produce a drink that poisoned its imbibers.

³⁰ *Urb. cond.* VIII 18: "When the leading citizens were falling ill with the same kind of malady, which had, in almost every case the same fatal termination, a certain serving-woman came to Quintus Fabius Maximus, the curule aedile, and declared that she would reveal the cause of the general calamity, if he would give her a pledge that she should not suffer for her testimony. Fabius at once referred the matter to the consuls, and the consuls to the senate, and a pledge was given to the witness with the unanimous approval of that body. She then disclosed the fact that the City was afflicted by the criminal practices of the women; that they who prepared these poisons were matrons, whom, if they would instantly attend her, they might take in the very act. They followed the informer and found certain women brewing poisons, and other poisons stored away. These concoctions were brought into the Forum, and some twenty matrons, in whose houses they had been discovered, were summoned thither by an apparitor. Two of their number, Cornelia and Sergia, of patrician houses both, asserted that these drugs were salutary. On the informer giving them the lie, and bidding them drink and prove her charges false in the sight of all, they took time to confer, and after the crowd had been dismissed they referred the question to the rest, and finding that they, like themselves, would not refuse the draught, they all drank off the poison and perished by their own wicked practices. Their attendants being instantly arrested informed against a large number of matrons, of whom one hundred and seventy were found guilty; yet until that day there had never been a trial for poisoning in Rome" (transl. Foster [2] 1957).

³¹ Tacitus calls them '*carmina et devotiones*', magic spells that consecrated intended victims to the infernal gods.

³² *Ann.* II 69: "The cruel virulence of the disease was intensified by the patient's belief that Piso had given him poison; and it is a fact that explorations in the floor and walls brought to light

Tacitus' lead tablets superscribed with Tacitus' name resemble *defixiones*³³, magical paraphernalia found all over the Mediterranean: most frequently used in erotic magic³⁴, *defixiones* served to curse erotic rivals or those who dared to spurn one's affection. A lead tablet, uncovered in Rome and dated to the mid-1st century BCE, records a spell against one Plotius. It appears that Plotius and the author of the tablet wooed the same woman, with the latter intending to neutralise his competition. This *defixio* curses Plotius and calls upon powers of infernal gods—Proserpine and her husband³⁵—to whom the Romans did not customarily pray, since infernal deities were thought to be inherently dangerous to humans and should not be disturbed.

Bona pulchra Proserpina, [P]lut[o]nis uxor, | seiva me Salviam deicere oportet, | eripias salutem, c[or]pus, co[lor]em, vires, virtutes | Ploti. Tradas [Plutoni] viro tuo. Ni possit cogitationibus | suis hoc vita[re]. Tradas | illunc | febrī quartan[a]e, t[ertian]ae, cotidia[n]ae, | quas [cum illo l]uct[ent, deluctent; illunc | ev[in]cant, [vincant,] usq[ue dum animam | eiu] s eripia[nt. Quare ha]nc victimam | tibi trad[o Prose]rpi[na, seiv]e me, | Proserpin[a, sei]ve m[e Ach]eruosiam dicere | oportet. M[e mittas a]recessitum canem | tricepitem, qui [Ploti] cor eripiat. Polliciarus | illi te daturum t[r]jes victimas, | palma[s, ca]rica[s], por[c]um nigrum, | hoc siq[ue] p[er]fer[er]it [ante mensem] | Martium. Haec, P[ro]serpina Salvia, tibi dabo | cum compote fe[cer]is. Do tibi cap[ut] Ploti Avon[iae]. P[ro]serpina S[alvia] | do tibi fron[tem] Plo[ti]. Proserpina Salvia, | do [tibi] su[percilia] Ploti. Proserpin[a] Salvia, do [tibi] palpetra[s] Plo[ti]. | Proserpina Sa[lvia, do tibi pupillas] Ploti. | Proserpina Salvia, do tibi nare[s, | labra, or]iculas, nasu[m, lin]g[u]am, | dentes P[loti] ni dicere possit | Plotius quid [sibi dele]at; collum, umeros, | braccia, d[i]git[os, ni possit]t aliquid | se adiutare; [pe]c[tus, io]cinera, cor, | pulmones, n[isi] possit sentire quit | sibi doleat, [intes]tina, venter, um[b]licu[s], | latera, [n]i p[ossit]t dormire; scapulas, | ni poss[it] s[a]nus dormire; viscum | sacrum, nei possit urinam facere; | natis, anum, [fem]lina, genua, | [crura], tibiae, pe[des, talos, plantas, | digito]s, unguis,

the remains of human bodies, spells, curses, leaden tablets engraved with the name *Germanicus*, charred and blood-smearred ashes, and others of the implements of witchcraft by which it is believed the living soul can be devoted to the powers of the grave” (transl. Jackson 1962).

³³ In the scholarly discourse, a *defixio* most commonly refers to a lead tablet inscribed with a spell (Wypustek 2001: 109). *Defixio* comes from the Latin verb *defigere*, ‘drive, strike, fasten’, and showcases the mode of action intended for the inscribed spell. Magical tablets were bound and pierced with a spike, symbolically binding and harming the person against whom the spell was directed. A *defixio* from the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE found in Nomentum (*Latium*) (Wypustek 2001: 246) vividly illustrates the thought process behind such a curse. A spurned lover curses both the man who abandoned her, Malcius son of Niconia, and the woman he abandoned her for, Rufa. The author of the tablet enumerates and thoroughly curses several body parts of Malcius and Rufa in order to sicken them. To strengthen the magical power of the tablet, the author states that she literally ‘binds to the tablet’ the aforementioned body parts (*deico in as tabelas* [defico in has tabellas]) of two lovers, subjecting them to powers of death and decay (Luciani & Urbanová 2019: 426–428). Cf. Wypustek 2001: 246.

³⁴ Aggressive *defixiones* were employed against enemies in a court, sport, and business, with such tablets being once called *devotiones* by the scholars (Wypustek 2001: 129). A particular type of *defixiones* comprised poppets, pierced and deposited in graves (Bailliot 2010: 166–168).

³⁵ A precise naming of the prayer addressee expresses a widespread belief that one needs to know the name of the summoned entity before one can bind it to one's will (Bremer 1981: 195).

ni po[ssit s]tare [sua | vi]rt[u]te. Seive [plu]s, seive parvum | scrip[tum fuerit,] quomodo quicqu[it] | legitim[e scripsit], mandavit, seicl ego Ploti ti[bi tr]ado, mando, | ut tradas, [mandes me]nse Februari[o | e]cillunc. Ma[le perdat, mal]e exse(a)t, | [mal]e disper[at. Mandes, tra]das, ni possit | [ampli]us ullum [mensem aspi]ere, | [videre, contempla]re³⁶.

Another kind of magic, commonly called ‘white’ by modern scholars³⁷, encompassed arts and practices employed to aid, protect and bless another; as such, it included many healing charms and cantrips used by the Romans. Notably, Cato includes a charm against dislocations in his farming manual:

Luxum siquod est, hac cantione sanum fiet. Harundinem prende tibi viridem p. IIII aut quinque longam, mediam diffinde, et duo homines teneant ad coxendices. Incipe cantare: “motas uaeta daries dardares astataries dissunapiter”³⁸, usque dum coeant. Ferrum insuper iactato. Ubi coerint et altera alteram tetigerint, id manu prehende et dextera sinistra praecide, ad luxum aut ad fracturam alliga, sanum fiet. Et tamen cotidie cantato et luxato vel hoc modo: “huat huat huat istasis tarsis ardannabou dannaustra”³⁹.

³⁶ ROL (2): 280–285: “O wife of Pluto, good and beautiful Proserpina (unless I ought to call thee Salvia), pray tear away from Plotius health, body, complexion, strength, faculties. Consign him to Pluto thy husband. May he be unable to avoid this by devices of his. Consign that man to the fourth-day, the third-day, the every-day fever. May they wrestle and wrestle it out with him, overcome and overwhelm him unceasingly until they tear away his life. So I consign him as victim to thee, Proserpina, unless o Proserpina, unless I ought to call thee Goddess of the Lower World. Send, I pray, someone to call up the three-headed dog with request that he may tear out Plotius’ heart. Promise Cerberus that thou wilt give him three offerings—dates, dried figs, and a black pig—if he has fulfilled his task before the month of March. All these, Proserpina Salvia, will I give thee when thou hast made me master of my wish. I give thee the head of Plotius, slave of Avonia. O Proserpina Salvia, I give thee Plotius’ forehead. Proserpina Salvia, I give thee Plotius’ eyebrows, Proserpina Salvia, I give thee Plotius’ eyelids. Proserpina Salvia, I give thee Plotius’ eye-pupils. Proserpina Salvia, I give thee Plotius’ nostrils, lips, ears, nose, and his tongue and teeth so that Plotius may not be able to utter what it is that gives him pain; his neck, shoulders, arms, fingers, so that he may not be able to help himself at all; his chest, liver, heart, lungs, so that he may not be able to feel what gives him pain; his abdomen, belly, navel, sides so that he may not be able to sleep: his shoulder-blades, so that he may not be able to sleep well; his sacred part, so that he may not be able to make water; his buttocks, vent, thighs, knees, legs, shins, feet, ankles, soles, toes, nails, that he may not be able to stand by his own aid. Should there so exist any written Curse, great or small—in what manner Plotius has, according to laws of magic, composed any curse and entrusted it to writing, in such manner I consign and hand him over to thee, so that thou mayest consign and hand over that fellow, in the month of February. Blast him! Damn him! Blast him utterly! Hand him over, consign him, that he may not be able to behold, see and contemplate any month further!” (transl. Warmington 1959). The tablet was found in Rome and was dated to the mid-1st century BCE (Wypustek 2001: 203–204).

³⁷ The Romans called a beneficial spell a *carmen* or a *remedium* (Cat. Agr. 157, 158).

³⁸ These words are gibberish.

³⁹ Cat. Agr. 160: “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: “motas uaeta daries dardares astataries dissunapiter” 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 piece are applied to the dislocation or the fracture, it will heal. And none the

The beneficial magic of the Romans commonly employed apotropaic amulets and countermeasures against ill-fortune. One such amulet worn by young boys, *bulla*, consisted of a neckchain and round pouch, either made of leather covered in gold foil or of gold; contained within were protective amulets (possibly phallic symbols)⁴⁰. In Latin, a related term *fascinus* denoted both an amulet worn by children and a phallus. Similarly, phallic imagery was also found under the chassis of a chariot driven by a triumphant commander, protecting him from jealous glares of the crowd, since one or two among the throng could have the power of the evil eye⁴¹. Before starting risky ventures, the Romans could employ charms to ensure success and protect themselves against bad luck. Pliny the Elder relates that Julius Caesar used to recite a triplicate protective charm before embarking on a journey⁴². Similarly, to protect a house against fires, the Romans could inscribe its walls with apotropaic verses⁴³. Such magical practices, protecting one's health and property from harm, were never prosecuted under Roman law.

Apart from dividing magic into harmful ('black') and beneficial ('white'), scholars have also distinguished between imitative/homoeopathic magic and contact/contagion magic. The former, as defined by Geo Widengren (2008: 17), "relies on the assumption that 'like attracts like': imitating an act or an event will effect a similar action", whereas the latter "draws its efficacy from the universal belief that one can influence a far-removed person if one performs specified acts on an object that used to belong to or touch the influenced person" (*ibid.*). Both homoeopathic and contagion magic can harm and help⁴⁴; it is up to a practitioner to decide how these techniques should be used.

The Roman ritual praxis has occasionally included acts and rites that one could classify as 'magical'. However, we must note that, as long as sanctioned by custom, every rite and official festival celebrated in Rome was seen as proper and pious, since it reinforced and kept the beneficial peace between Rome and her gods, *pax deorum*. In other words, Roman rites and cults that resembled magical praxis (either benevolent or malevolent) were socially accepted and included under the umbrella term of religion, as long as they served the community.

less chant every day, and, in the case of a dislocation, in this manner, if you wish: "huat haut haut istasis tarsis ardannabou dannaustra" (transl. Hooper 1960). The author also recommends a charm against chafing (*Agr.* 159: "To prevent chafing: When you set out on a journey, keep a small branch of Pontic wormwood under the anus" (transl. Hooper 1960)).

⁴⁰ Wypustek 2001: 177.

⁴¹ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII 39. Cf. Macr. *Sat.* I 6, 9.

⁴² *Nat. Hist.* XVIII 21. Pliny the Elder uses the word *carmen* to describe magic spells, in direct contrast to curses, known as *dirae precatones* (Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII 19).

⁴³ Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII 20. The modern scholarship on magic knows such inscriptions and formulae as *vores magicae* (Wypustek 2001: 205).

⁴⁴ In his discussion of magic, James G. Frazer joined these two types of magic and classified them as 'sympathetic magic' (Frazer 1996: 38–39).

The Romans employed what we could call homoeopathic magic when they symbolically associated a sacrificial animal with a divinity to whom it was being sacrificed. Such beliefs prominently feature in agrarian celebrations and rites, performed to ensure a bountiful harvest and animal fertility. In April, Rome celebrated the *Robigalia*,⁴⁵ a festival dedicated to its eponymous deity, *Robigo*, the Red Goddess⁴⁶. ‘Robigo’, a common Latin noun, denoted cereal rust, a crop-affecting disease characterised by the presence of brick-red, elongated, blister-like pustules on ripening leaves and stems. The goddess *Robigo*, the personification of the disease, manifested as a harmful hierophany: accordingly, the Romans appeased her wrath by offering her a purificatory apotropaic sacrifice, a red-haired dog: *Rutilae canes [...] immolantur [...]*⁴⁷. To sacrifice an animal whose coat colour resembled the colour of rust pustules was supposed to weaken and possibly substitute the manifestation of Robigo’s power, suppress her anger and protect growing plants from harm.

Another agrarian festival preceded the *Robigalia*: the *Fordicidia*, dedicated to the goddess Tellus, a manifestation of fertile arable soil (CIL I², s. 315). Celebrated on April 15, it involved a sacrifice that gave the feast its name: *Fordicidia a fordis bubus; bos forda quae fert in ventre [...]*⁴⁸. Ovid verbalises the intent behind this sacrifice: [...] *nunc gravidum pecus est, gravidae quoque semine terrae: / Telluri plenae victima plena datur*⁴⁹. A pregnant animal is sacrificed to *Tellus Mater*, since its gravidity directly mirrors the state of the soil, pregnant with seeds sown during the January sowing festival⁵⁰, ready to bless the Romans with its bounty.

Another Roman festival featuring practices conceptually related to homoeopathic magic was the feast of the goddess *Carna*, protectress of human life force and internal organs (Macr. *Sat.* I 12, 31–32). Ovid depicts a rite during which *Carna* heals an infant attacked by malevolent forces, often identified with striges. The goddess offers the striges another victim in the infant’s stead, an animal of similar size, its intestines substituting for the child’s innards: “[...] *noctis aves, extis puerilibus... / parcite: pro parvo victima parva cadit. / Cor pro corde, precor;*

⁴⁵ The Roman festival calendar celebrated *Robigalia* on April 25 (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* [henceforth referred to as CIL] CIL I², pp. 316–317). Cf. Varr. *L. L.* VI 16.

⁴⁶ In Latin, words such as *rōbus*, *-a*, *-um*; *rūber*, *rūfus*, and *russus* all denote ‘red’ or ‘reddish’ (Ernout & Meillet 1967: 575).

⁴⁷ Festus, p. 386L: “Dogs of reddish-golden coats are sacrificed”. Cf. Col., *R. R.* X 340–341: “To prevent evil *Robigo* from harming the green shoots, one appeases [her wrath] with a sacrifice of a puppy’s entrails and blood”.

⁴⁸ Varr. *L. L.* VI 15: “*Fordicidia*, from cows in calf; a cow in calf (*bos forda*) will bear her young soon [...]”. Cf. Varr. *R. R.* II 5, 6; P. Festus, p. 200 L.

⁴⁹ *Fast.* IV 634–635: “Now animals are gravid, and so is the soil full of seed / a pregnant Tellus demands a pregnant sacrifice”.

⁵⁰ *Feriae Sementivae*: During this festival Ceres, a manifestation of germinating seeds, received a sacrifice of a pregnant sow.

*pro fibris sumite fibras. / Hanc animam vobis pro meliore damus*⁵¹. Thrice touching the doorposts and thresholds with a hawthorn bough, *Carna* hangs the spiny branch near the child's bedroom window: the bough was through to manifest the goddess' presence and bar evil forces from entry.

References to principles of homoeopathic magic also appear in the circumstantial rainmaking rite of *Aquaelicium*, performed whenever drought struck Rome. The Roman religion dedicated all atmospheric phenomena to Jupiter, the most significant heavenly deity; his power expressed itself most visibly in thunder and lightning, epiphanies and cratophanies of his power over the heavens. The surviving literary testimonies provide several references to *Aquaelicium*⁵²: *Aquaelicium dicitur, cum aqua pluvialis remediis quibusdam elicitur [...] manali lapide in Urbem ducto*⁵³. During the ritual, a great stone known as *lapis manalis* was brought by the pontifices from its usual resting place, a temple of Mars near the Porta Capena, into the Senate and doused with water⁵⁴. The celebrants in the procession made a raucous and constant din: emulating sounds of the thunderstorm, they hoped to induce the heavens to send another thunderstorm in its place.

A similar adoption of principles of homoeopathic magic is observable in Roman rites accompanying festivals honouring infernal gods and spirits of the dead. The *Compitalia*, celebrated at the end of December or at the beginning of January, were devoted to *Lares Compitales*⁵⁵, household deities of the crossroads, identified with deceased household ancestors, and to the underworld goddess *Mania*⁵⁶, worshipped during the same festival. The literary evidence implies that the early Roman celebrations of the *Compitalia* involved human sacrifice⁵⁷; subsequently,

⁵¹ Ovid. *Fast.* VI 159–162: “Ye birds of night, spare the child’s inwards: a small victim falls for a small child. Take, I pray ye, a heart for a heart, entrails for entrails. This life we give you for a better life” (trans. Frazer 1959). Walter Burkert (2006: 80) categorises this rite as a healing spell.

⁵² Also known as *Aquagium* (Festus, p. 94): *Quasi ‘aquae-agium’, id est aquae ductus, appellatur*; “The name *Aquagium* is a composite of *aquae* and *agium*, ‘rainmaking’”.

⁵³ P. Festus, p. 94L: “*Aquaelicium*, a rainmaking rite, by means [such as] drawing a stone known as *lapis manalis* into Rome’s borders”. Paulus Festus connects the use of the verb *elicere* in the rite’s name to one of Jupiter’s epithets (*Elicius*).

⁵⁴ Festus, p. 255L. Cf. Non. Marc. *Comp. Doctr.* p. 877; Serv. *Aen.* III 175.

⁵⁵ Lat. *compitalis*: ‘belonging to the crossroads, worshipped at the crossroads’ (Plezia 1998 [1]: 628).

⁵⁶ Macr. *Sat.* I 7, 34–35. Linguists confirm that the goddess’ name has etymological links with the *Manes*, ‘spirits of the dead’ (Radke 1965: 195–198).

⁵⁷ Macr. *Sat.* I 7, 34–35: “[...] at the rites of the *Compitalia*, when games used to be held at crossroads throughout the city, [...] in honour of the *Lares* and of *Mania*, [their mother], in accordance with an oracle of Apollo. For that oracle ordained that offering should be made ‘for heads with heads’ [praying for the living to the dead], and for some time the ritual required the sacrifice of boys to the goddess *Mania*, to ensure the safety of the family. [...] [Later] it became the practice to avert any evil that threatened a particular family by hanging up woollen images before the door of the house” (transl. Davies 1969).

the celebrants symbolically replaced actual human bodies with woollen effigies hung at the doorposts and crossroads, believing that the homoeopathic similarity between humans and woollen figures would suffice to appease the wrath of these dangerous deities:

Pilae et effigies viriles et muliebres ex lana Compitalibus suspenduntur in conpitis quod hunc diem festum esse deorum inferorum quos vocant Lares putarent, quibus tot pilae quot capita servorum, tot effigies quot essent liberi ponebantur ut vivis parcerent et essent his pilis et simulacris contenti⁵⁸.

Individual scholars of Roman religion believe that some historical rites and feasts that involved the use of human-shaped stone figurines⁵⁹ or straw effigies⁶⁰ once demanded human sacrifices.

The Roman religious system, build around the idea of communal good and joint worship of patron deities, expressed its nature most fully through cycles of festivals meant to ensure biological livelihood, because the Romans needed reliable food supply to thrive and expand their borders. Into the number of such festivals one could include agrarian-chthonic festivals and festivals marking the turn of the year. Since the Romans believed in the cosmic equivalence between the actions of humans and the cycles of nature, certain feasts demanded their celebrants engage in lascivious behaviour. The spring festival of Flora⁶¹, the goddess of blossoms, was attended by Roman prostitutes, who shocked the assembled crowds with coarse language and suggestive gestures:

Nam praeter verborum licentiam, quibus obscenitas omnis effunditur, exuuntur etiam vestibus populo flagitante meretrices, quae tunc mimarum funguntur officio et in conspectu populi usque ad satietatem inpidicorum luminum cum pudendis motibus detinetur⁶².

The prostitute's actions were meant to evoke the surging of libido and vital force, mirroring and enhancing the spring growth, flowering, and fertility of plants.

⁵⁸ P. Festus, p. 344L: "During the rites of the *Compitalia*, people hang woollen balls and effigies of men and women at the crossroads. The day is dedicated to the infernal gods called *Lares*: the celebrants hang the balls, representing slaves, and the effigies, representing free men and women, in hope the gods will spare the living and accept these offerings in their place".

⁵⁹ Stone figurines were sent to friends and next-of-kin during the *Saturnalia*, a winter solstice festival, with the *Compitalia* to follow afterwards. Another type of a suitable gift were small wax candles.

⁶⁰ Straw effigies shaped to resemble humans were deposited in local shrines in March and thrown into Tiber in May, during the feast of *sacra Argeorum*.

⁶¹ *Sacrum Florae*, a feast spanning several days (April 28–May 3), included *ludi Florales*. It was the ultimate festival in the spring agrarian cycle.

⁶² Lact. *Div. Inst.* I 20, 10: "For besides licentiousness of their words, in which all lewdness is poured forth, women are also stripped of their garments at the demand of the people, and then perform like mime players, and are detained in the sight of the people with indecent gestures, satiating unchaste eyes".

Erotic and promiscuous acts were expected and celebrated during yet another Roman holiday, *sacrum Annae Perennae*⁶³ held in March, the feast celebrated the personified beginning of the new sacral year, the goddess *Anna Perenna*⁶⁴. Her festival uncharacteristically did not take place within the city but was held in the countryside, in meadows near the Tiber, where couples came to copulate in hastily erected shacks⁶⁵. It appears that sexual unions of the celebrants constituted a vital part of the celebration, their aim being to stimulate the creative powers of nature and provide the sacral community with a bountiful harvest⁶⁶.

Traces of healing magic surface in rites accompanying the celebration of the *Meditrinalia*⁶⁷. A feast of vintners and grape pickers, the *Meditrinalia* were celebrated in autumn, with surviving testimonies relying that the farmers on that day used to open the barrels and taste of this year's vintage. It stands to reason that the celebration had a sacral significance since any light-bodied *vin de primeur* has not had a chance to develop a pleasing taste. Varro explains the cultic significance of this festival in the following words:

Octobri mense Meditrinalia dies dictus a medendo, quod Flaccus flamen Martialis dicebat hoc die solitum vinum <novum> et vetus libari et degustari medicamenti causa; quod facere solent etiam nunc multi cum dicunt: novum vetus vinum bibo: novo veteri morbo medeor⁶⁸.

The utterance of the celebrant bears a more remarkable similarity to a spell rather than to a prayer, implying that a drink of mixed new and old wines was believed to possess special curative and prophylactic powers.

⁶³ This feast was celebrated on March 15.

⁶⁴ Benoist 1999: 150.

⁶⁵ Ovid. *Fast.* III 523–524: *Plebs venit ac virides passim disiecta per herbas / potat, et accumbit cum pare quisque sua*. “The common folk come, and scattered here and there over the green grass they drink, every lad reclining beside his lass” (transl. Frazer 1959). It is not impossible that the celebration entailed a *hieros gamos* rite in the goddess' sacred grove (Mart. *Epigr.* IV 64, 16–17: [...] *virgineo cruore gaudet / Annae pomiferum nemus Perennae*. “The fruit-bearing grove of *Anna Perenna* is blessed with a virgin's blood.”)

⁶⁶ “The majority of collective orgies find a ritual justification in fostering the forces of vegetation: they take place at certain critical periods of the year, e.g., when the seed sprouts or the harvests ripen, and always have a hierogamy as their mythical model” (Eliade 1954: 26). Cf. Eliade (1993: 342): “The meaning of orgy for the vegetal drama and agrarian rites is clear: the soil is to be rejuvenated, [...] to induce the growth of grain, the fruiting of trees, the female fertility and the multiplication of the flocks”.

⁶⁷ CIL I², pp. 331–332. Cf. Festus, p. 250L. Linguists derive the name of the *Meditrinalia* from the Latin verb *medēri*, ‘to heal, prevent a disease’ (Ernout & Meillet 1967: 392).

⁶⁸ Varr. *L. L.* VI 21: “In the month of October, the *Meditrinalia* ‘Festival of Medittrina’ was named from *mederi* ‘to be healed’, because Flaccus the special priest of Mars used to say that on this day it was the practice to pour an offering of new and old wine to the god, and to taste of the same, for the purpose of being healed; which many are accustomed to do even now, when they say: Wine new and old I drink, of illness new and old I'm cured” (transl. Kent 1958).

Actions invoking prophylactic and apotropaic magic rites also appear in rites performed during the May feast of the *Lemuria*⁶⁹, dedicated to the deceased ancestors, who were believed to return to the world of the living for three days of the festival. During the final night of the *Lemuria*, a paterfamilias initiated a rite to appease and banish the spirits of the dead lingering around his household. Before commencing the final sacrifice, the paterfamilias had to join his fingers in a specific apotropaic gesture⁷⁰, protecting him against the potentially malevolent influence of the marauding spirits. After offering the spirits some black beans, the celebrant struck a brass pot to ritually conclude the ritual and exorcise the spirits to the underworld.

Certain Roman solemnities involved rites that alluded to selfish and malicious magical practices. Ovid describes a rite devoted to the goddess *Tacita*⁷¹, performed by Roman girls against those who spread salacious gossip. An older woman seated amongst the girls placed three pieces of incense next to the threshold and began to recite incantations; meanwhile, she tied a copper object with a thread, pierced a small fish's head with a needle and burned the head in the fire. The words of the incantation clarified the rite was meant to seal up hostile mouths: *hostiles linguas inimicaque vinximus ora*⁷².

The Roman rites performed to ensure military success frequently involved practices resembling curses and imprecations against the enemies of Rome and their armies (Ogilvie 1965: 674–675). The literary testimonies tell us of two curses invoked against the enemies of Rome. The first one, *carmen devotionis*⁷³, is a sacrificial curse: a commander of a losing Roman army, anticipating his approaching death, sacrificed his life and lives of his soldiers to the gods of the underworld in exchange for Rome's future victory over her foes:

Iane, Iuppiter, Mars pater, Quirine, Bellona, Lares, Divi Novensiles, Di Indigetes, Divi, quorum est potestas nostrorum hostiumque, Dique Manes, vos precor veneror, veniam peto feroque, uti populo Romano Quiritium vim victoriam prosperetis hostesque populi Romani Quiritium terrore formidine morteque adficiatis. Sicut verbis nuncupavi, ita pro re publica populi Romani Quiritium, exercitu, legionibus, auxiliis populi Romani Quiritium, legiones auxiliaque hostium mecum Deis Manibus Tellurique devoveo⁷⁴.

⁶⁹ It is likely that Latin '*lemures*' may derive from a Greek verb denoting 'female blood-sucking demons' and an adjective denoting a 'voracious, greedy' entity (Carnoy 1957: 110).

⁷⁰ The gesture was to place one's thumb between fingers, the fig sign (*manu fica*) (Kocur 2005: 216). Similar gestures were depicted on apotropaic amulets (Wypustek 2001: 176).

⁷¹ The goddess' name derives from the Latin verb *tacēre* 'to be silent'; another name of the goddess was *Muta*, 'the mute one'. The Romans probably deemed her the personification of silence. Cf. Scullard 1981: 75.

⁷² Ovid. *Fast.* II 581: "We have bound fast hostile tongues and unfriendly mouths" (transl. Frazer 1959).

⁷³ The Latin verb *devovēre* means to (1) 'dedicate, sacrifice, offer'; (2) 'dedicate either the enemy, oneself or both to the gods of the Underworld'; (3) 'curse, destroy, offer someone's life to malevolent powers of the dead' (Plezia [2] 1998: 134–135).

⁷⁴ Liv. *Urb. cond.* VIII 9: "Janus, Jupiter, Father Mars, Quirinus, Bellona, Lares, divine Novensiles, divine Indigites, ye gods in whose power are both we and our enemies, and you, divine

The crucial element of this rite is to address the gods of the underworld since their powers manifest when humans come to a violent and gruesome end. A Roman commander striking Rome's foes thus becomes an envoy of the infernal powers, his actions symbolically sacrificing the enemy: as the Roman army dies at the enemy's hand, so the enemy will soon perish at another's hand, since the magical act sympathetically linked destinies of the Roman and enemy armies, one death demanding another (Schilling 1979: 199).

While besieging a foreign city, the Romans occasionally performed a rite called *evocatio*⁷⁵; its pivotal element, *carmen evocationis*, was directed by a Roman representative to the gods protecting the besieged city⁷⁶. Macrobius conveys a prayer uttered before the Romans razed Carthage (*Sat.* III 8, 7–8):

Est autem carmen huius modi quo di evocantur cum oppugnatione civitas cingitur: Si deus sive dea est, cui populus civitasque Carthaginiensis est in tutela, teque maxime, ille qui urbis huius populique tutelam recepisti, precor venerorque veniamque a vobis peto ut vos populum civitatemque Carthaginiensem deseratis, loca templa sacra urbemque eorum relinquatis, absque his abeatis eique populo civitati metum formidinem oblivionem iniciatis, proditique Romam ad me meosque veniatis, nostraque vobis loca templa sacra urbs acceptior probatiorque sit, mihi que populoque Romano militibusque meis praepositi sitis ut sciamus intellegamusque. si ita feceris, voveo vobis templa ludosque facturum⁷⁷.

Manes, – I invoke and worship you, I beseech and crave your favour, that you prosper the might and the victory of the Roman People of the Quirites with fear, shuddering, and death. As I have pronounced the words, even so in behalf of the republic of the Roman People of the Quirites, and of the army, the legions, the auxiliaries of the Roman People of the Quirites, do I devote the legions and auxiliaries of the enemy, together with myself, to the divine Manes and to Earth" (transl. Foster [2] 1957).

⁷⁵ The Latin verb *evocare* means: 'to call a deity out of a besieged city, to summon by magic' (Plezia [2] 1998: 377). At times, the rite was called an *exoratio* (Lat. *exorare* 'to persuade by entreaty with magic or sacrifice, to dissuade' (Plezia [2] 1998: 429). *Devotio* and *evocatio* belonged to rites directed against enemies of Rome in war (Gall 1976: 524).

⁷⁶ Carthage's tutelary deity was identified by the Romans with Juno *Caelestis*. Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Hist.* XXVIII 18) narrates that the Romans kept the name of Rome's patron deity secret so that the enemies would not call it out by a similar rite and deprive Rome of its protection. The bloody and protracted Carthaginian wars, marred by numerous consecutive defeats, induced the Romans to perform long-abandoned and gruesome propitiatory sacrifices, since Rome's defeats surely meant that the Romans must have offended their gods in some manner. After the catastrophic defeat of Cannae, the Romans resorted to human sacrifice, slaying two Gauls and two Greeks (*Liv. Urb. cond.* XXII 57). In the face of Carthaginian expansion, the Romans decided to sacrifice representatives of foreign unfriendly nations so that, by principle of magical equivalence, other enemies of Rome would also meet a terrible end. It was only in the 1st c. BCE when the Roman Senate outlawed human sacrifices (Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXX 12).

⁷⁷ "The formula to call forth the gods of a besieged city runs as follows: 'To any god, to any goddess, under whose protection are the people and state of Carthage, and chiefly to thee who art charged with the protection of this city and people, I make prayer and do reverence and ask grace of you all, that ye abandon the people and state of Carthage, forsake their places, temples, shrines, and city, and depart therefrom; and that upon that people and state ye bring fear and terror and oblivion; that once put forth ye come to Rome, to me and to mine; and that our places, temples, shrines, and

The Romans believed that this spell has drawn out Carthage's tutelary gods and hastened its defeat.

As I have demonstrated, the Romans practised magic in their private and public lives, frequently including such practices into their official religious rites. Healing and protective magic was widely practised and did not pose any controversies. Malevolent spells cast against another's health and property were outlawed and severely punished. References to these and similar practices surface in testimonies describing Roman religious festivals, employed to ensure Rome's good fortune (protective aspect) and to pester her enemies (malevolent aspect). In other words, magical praxis served to strengthen ties that glued the Roman community and linked it to the gods, sustaining the cordial and reciprocal relationship between the divine and the human.

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city may be more acceptable and pleasing to you; and that ye take me and the Roman people and my soldiers under your charge; that we may know and understand [that our song was granted]. If ye shall so have done, I vow to you temples and solemn games” (trans. Davies 1969).

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