INTRODUCTION

Ancient magic had more facets than just the harm done through spells and curses. Magical rites not only helped to harm enemies and rivals but also gave access to a higher spirituality. These rites could open the way to the supreme god, or at least to an intimate dinner with Helios or an encounter with Seth. Magicians had a direct link to the divine world, and magic was seen as a gift from the gods […]. But magic is a bit like a black hole, to many people, it seems invisible […]. For a long time the science of antiquity ignored the phenomenon. Despite the revival of interest in ancient religion, interest in ancient magic remains marginal – curse tablets, papyrus books, and voodoo dolls are less appealing than are mythological scenes on Attic vases or the papyrus fragments of Sapho. This situation is understandable and, to a certain degree, perfectly justified; nevertheless, scholarly interest in ancient societies should not be fastidious.[1]

While presenting the above brief and concise characterization of magic and diagnosing the state of research or, more broadly, the level of interest in the phenomenon of modern academic investigations, Fritz Graf had in mind only classical antiquity, as this is his main field of research, so without much doubt we may acknowledge this statement to be true for other ancient cultures and societies. The image of ancient magic we have today is still very fragmented, incomplete. Of course, the reason is, as Fritz Graf pointed out, the relatively insignificant interest in the subject among researchers of the ancient world, but this is not the only motive. An equally important, if not more, reason for the situation lies in the very phenomenon of ancient magic, namely in its diversity, in the plethora of forms and shapes which ancient magic took over the centuries in different cultures and in the diversity of functions performed in the life of an individual and specific social groups. The variety of associations between the world of magic and religion, philosophy, politics, science or medicine makes the situation even more complicated.

Today, more so than ever, the deficient knowledge about the magic of the ancient world, and the fact that it, or rather some of its motives and themes are experiencing a kind of rebirth and, as a result, are practiced by various groups of people seeking ways to come into contact with supernatural and variously comprehended forces, brings about the urgent need for reliable and in-depth research on this phenomenon, a study that will not only com-

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[1] F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, Cambridge MA 2000, p. 2–3.

plement and expand our knowledge about the magic of ancient times, but will also serve as a kind of antidote to the emerging modern distortions and misinterpretations. The volume which we present to our readers may serve such a function: by discovering new, yet unexamined aspects of the magic of the ancient world and showing various methodological strategies that can be used for the research, the superficiality of the everyday recognition of this phenomenon may be exposed.

The volume covers 15 papers which explore three aspects of ancient magic studies – magical texts, magical themes and ways and means of magic interpretations. It must be noted, however, that in fact all three elements are to some extent present in the consideration of all the authors who contributed to our volume. The character of the whole article and the precise line of the analysis were determined by placing the emphasis on one of the aforementioned elements and its in-depth and comprehensive analysis.

TEXTS. The authors who concentrated on this element posed several important questions: what is a magical text and what are its specific features; in other words, what constitutes the *differentia specifica* of a magical text? What is and where is the essence of a magical text? Where does the magical power of a text known as a "magical" lie? Is it preserved in a letter? In a word? Or perhaps in a whole line of magical expression? Where is the source of this power? Answers to these and similar questions appearing in the papers collected here have created a kind of "ontology of magical texts," understood both materially (as a record of a specific content on a specific medium such as paper, parchment, stone, metal panels, etc.) and more broadly – as a specific expression – "specific" in terms of both content and form. The problem of the origin of magical texts and speculations on their functions and usage are also important issues arising in the articles collected in this volume.

The papers collected in this part of the volume cover the following issues:
• Łukasz Byrski in his paper entitled *Identifying the Magical Function of Script in Ancient Cultures – a Comparative Perspective* grasps the topic of the magical dimension of script in some selected ancient cultures (Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Mayas, Daoist China, Germanic people) posing the question to what extent the individual elements of the various systems of notation were (or could be) equipped with magical power and what kind of implications (if any) could such a vision of script bring.
• Bożena Gierek in her paper entitled *Variety of Celtic Magical Texts* shows selected examples of Celtic texts which can be described as magical, presents their characteristics by pointing to those elements which determine the magical

character of the texts and suggests ways in which they were used in different periods of time.

• Mateusz Kłagisz in his paper entitled *Middle Persian* Mādīgān ī Yōšt ī Fr(i)yān *as a Magical Text?* focuses on a detailed analysis of an extremely interesting religious Zoroastrian text, which – as indicated by the author – was probably originally a magical text, later deprived of its magical features, due to the fact that the Zoroastrian orthodox clergymen used to associate magic with sin. The author shows the strategies that had been used to insert the pre-Zoroastrian folk magic themes into Zoroastrianism in a "safe" religious, not-magical, way.

• Wojciech Kosior in his paper entitled *The Mezuzah as an Apotropaic Device According to Biblical and Rabbinic Sources* shows how the mezuzah originally intended, as the author writes himself, "to remind the owner about the exclusive covenant with God and to distinguish the Jewish house among the gentile ones" gains a magical interpretation and how it becomes, in fact, a magical text.

• Artur Przybysławski in his paper entitled *Realization Song of Mahasiddha Nāropa* presents the translation (along with the edition of original Tibetan texts) of the "Concise Māhamudrā" song by one of the greatest saints and miracle makers of Tybet – Naropa. Przybysławski notes "All Buddhist practice is in the end about transforming one's mind, that in turn amounts to a total transformation of everything […]. This is the highest miracle and highest Buddhist magic." In his song Naropa, teaches how to achieve this transformation.

• Julia Alexandrovna Shabanova and Anatoliy Alexandrovich Osipov in their paper entitled *Theoretical and Practical Aspects of a Magic Text's Being* distinguishing between these two aspects of a magical text try to find an answer to the fundamental question about the nature of the magical text, namely where its magical power is embedded and how it can be used.

• Jacek Trzebuniak in his paper entitled *Magic in the Nine Ways of Bon* makes a systematic attempt to identify the magical themes in the Tibetan religion Bon and finally shows a general understanding of magic emerging from the analysed texts which, and this is worth noticing, are essentially of a religious character.

THEMES. The contributors to the volume focus on the presentation and detailed analysis of selected magical themes, speculating about their origin, symbolical meaning and interpretation. Of particular interest are those accounts which situate a chosen magical theme within a comparative, cultural

context. These kind of analyses reveal a previously unnoticed similarity of symbolic and imaginary forms.

There are two papers in this part of the volume exploring the themes of magical weapons and magical healing herbs.

• Agnieszka Staszczyk in her paper entitled *Magic Weapon – Its Appearance, Acquisition and Application as Described in Texts of the Hindu Tradition* focuses on a detailed analysis of the theme of the magic weapon which in the Hindu tradition was used by gods, demons and human beings alike. The author, deriving from diverse Hindu texts and iconography shows not only the appearance, acquisition and application of magical weapons but – of particular note – attempts a symbolic interpretation of them.

• Hanna Urbańska in her paper entitled *Atharvavedic* Kuṣṭha *Herb, Ṛgvedic Soma and Their Equivalent in Taoist Texts* makes a comparative analysis of the theme of a divine / healing herb in Vedic and Chinese Daoists texts. The author shows the similar mythological structures in which this mysterious herb is situated and operates and, with reference to them, looks for an explanation of the miraculous magical properties assigned to it by both Vedic and Daoist traditions.

INTERPRETATIONS. It seems that papers which focus mainly on the possible ways of interpreting the phenomenon of magic with the highest possible clarity show its complexity and the diversity of methodological approaches as well as solutions that can be used in its analysis. Researchers who follow this line struggle with the fundamental issues relating to the very mechanisms of symbolical thinking lying at the basis of magical thought as well as indicating the problem of the untranslatability and superficial interpretation of the thoughts and concepts (in our case mainly Oriental) alien to the Western cultural mileu while last but not least proposing specific methodological solutions that allow for their better understanding. Here we introduce the following:

• Robert Czyżykowski in his paper entitled *The Issue of Magic in the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas. Mantra as a Magical Tool Exemplified by Nārāyaṇakavaca Mantra of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa* deriving from Frits Staal's methodological concepts analyses the sequence of ritual actions as a fusion of ritual and mantra involving bodily, verbal and mental activity. The author shows the human body as a field where ritual and magical formulas meet to produce a protective effect – magical armour for a warrior.

• Cezary Galewicz in his paper entitled *The Triple Leak by the Gandharvas: How to Read the Magic Formulae of Immortality* ponders upon the question

of the multidimensionality of formulas which may be described as magical and underlines the necessity of placing their reading and later interpretations in a very broad, cultural, social and historical, context.

• Joanna Jurewicz in her paper entitled *Ancient Indian Ritual as a Multimodal Metaphor* examines the possibility of understanding the rituals of Vedic India by referring to – as a research tool – a conceptual metaphor (a concept derived from cognitive linguistics), allowing the expression of the often complex and abstract ideas by reference to phenomena, facts and concepts drawn from everyday life. According to Jurewicz, the cosmogonical Vedic ritual, in all its complexity, can be seen just as a conceptual metaphor which explains the cosmogonical act itself as well as the need for the regular performance of the ritual. Deriving from a number of examples taken from an excerpt from the *Śapathabrāhman*a (6.1.3.) the author shows the very mental mechanisms underpinning a symbolic thought.

• Piotr Kalicki in his paper *Culture as a Magic Text: Symbol Use in Magic Cultures* assumes that if – as the interpretivists claim – culture can be considered and interpreted as a literary source, the phenomenon of magic itself may be understood as an interpretation of culture; hence it may be studied semantically as a *sui generis* magic text. The symbol and its understanding (symbol-reference or symbol-link approach) is the crucial issue for the analysis of magic in this methodological paradigm; it opens or closes the door to the magical interpretation of reality.

• Małgorzata Ruchel in her paper entitled *From a Magical Formula to a Universal Being – an Outline of the History of the Sanskrit Term* Bráhman, picks up the difficult task of outlining the changes in understanding and interpretation of the term *brahman* – pivotal for Indian philosophy and religion. In her article the author shows how its misunderstanding affected the interpretation of the entire classical Indian metaphysics and also, or perhaps above all, the reconstruction of the Vedic vision of reality.

• Tomasz Sikora in his paper entitled *The Genealogy of Shem According to Oskar Goldberg* addresses the problem of interpretation, or rather finding the right tool which would allow the reading and deciphering of highly symbolic content of magic and/or religious sources. The issue illustrates the hermeneutical concept proposed at the beginning of the 20th century by the Jewish scholar Oscar Goldberg, who applied it to the analysis of a fragment of the Book of Genesis 10: 21–32 (the genealogy of Shem).

The major advantage of this volume is the fact that our contributors represent not only various academic disciplines (Indology, cultural studies, compara-

tive studies of religion, Iranian studies, psychology, philosophy, archeology), but also, and this would seem to be the most important, their fields of interests and scientific investigations cover different cultures and civilisations of the world (India, Tibet, Persia, China, Ancient near East, Europe). With this combination – interdisciplinarity and multiculturalism – this collection of articles will allow the reader to see and appreciate the huge wealth of ancient magic and the variety of forms in which it manifested in different time spans and in various parts of the world. It will also help to understand (at least to some extent, as the complete explanation of the issue does not seem to be possible) the specificity of ancient magic and to explore the possibilities of interpretation and different research paradigms which, if applied correctly, may allow us to go far beyond the superficial and too often erroneous opinions about ancient magic.

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