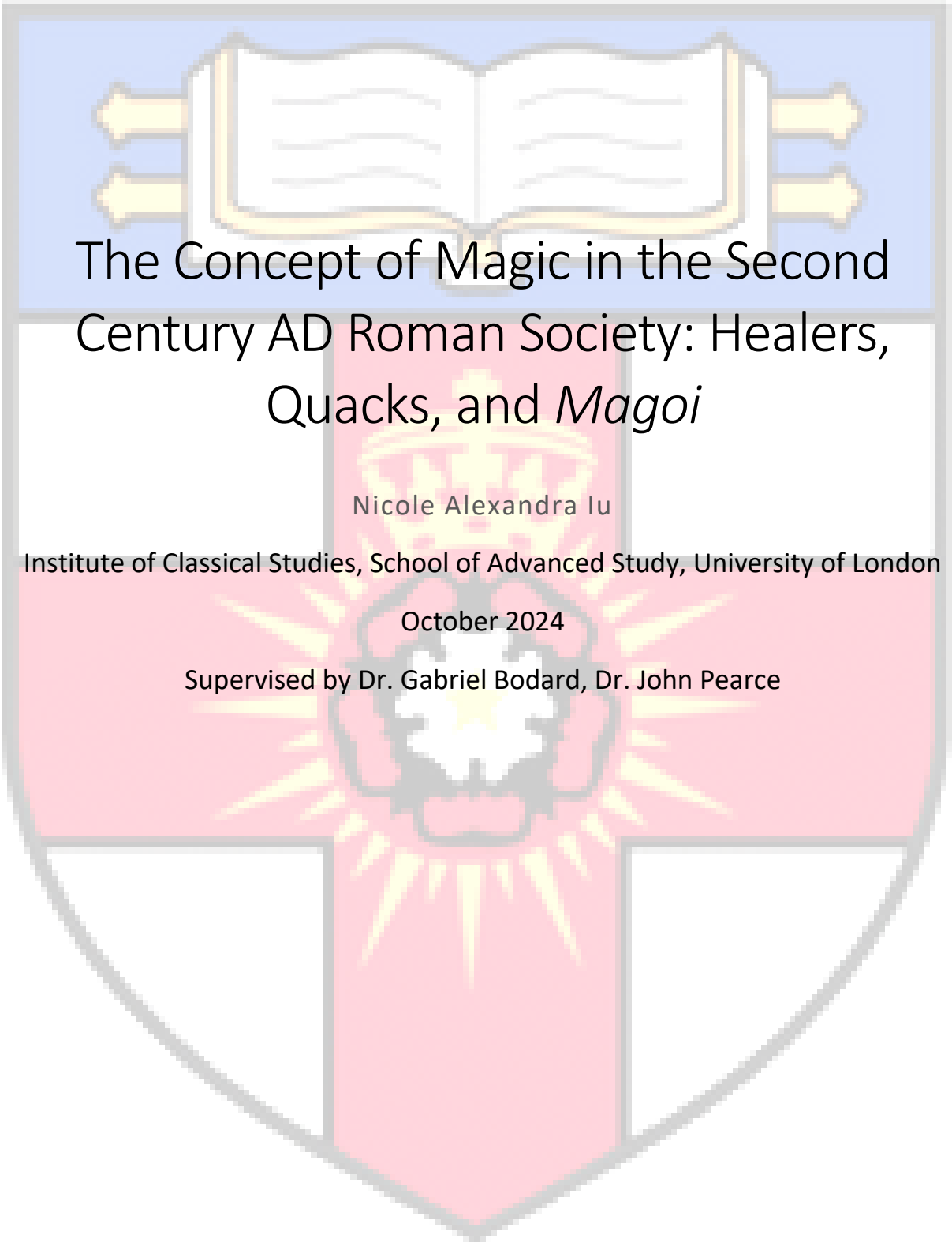




The Concept of Magic in the Second Century AD Roman Society: Healers, Quacks, and *Magoi*

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the understanding of how the concept of magic was perceived in Roman society in the second century AD, a period of multi-textured dramatic social change, and how the concept evolved as a result of these changes. This second half of this century is also marked by an empire-wide pandemic, the Antonine Plague. The study on the concept of magic is done by drawing on surveys on previous scholarship on Roman magic, Roman legislation, literature, and archaeology which interact with magic in the second century AD. From these surveys, it was possible to derive a framework consisting of seven characteristics which represent recurring themes found in magic-associated material. These characteristics are: 1) subversive behaviour, or legal and social acceptability, 2) exoticism and foreignness, 3) femininity, 4) privateness, 5) manipulative in nature, 6) supernatural associations, and 7) secret or arcane knowledge. This framework is not intended as a diagnostic test to define Roman magic, but to explore several important questions: 1) Why were certain figures, practices, and objects associated with magic? 2) How did this association change over time, e.g. new laws, societal changes, and times of crisis, including in relation to the Antonine Plague?

The new framework is then used to investigate three sets of case studies. The first case study covers the legal accusations of magic against Apuleius to explore how the concept of magic was arbitrated between legal authorities and those accused during ‘non-crisis’ times, earlier in the second century AD, and prior to the Antonine Plague. Therefore, this case study investigates the social, and even legal tensions which could ensue from marginal figures in Roman society, and how these figures’ actions were perceived as magical.

The second selection of case studies examines the intersection of medicine with magic with the aim to understand how and why medicine and magic were delineated, despite their

traditional interconnection. This section also includes an analysis of Apollonius of Tyana, a first century alleged healer and miracle-worker to some sources, while a magic practitioner to others. Philostratus, the ancient author who wrote the most comprehensive source of Apollonius's life, was writing in the late second century–early third century AD. Therefore, this chapter provides a foundation for the understanding of Roman medicine in the second century AD which is important for the final case study within the context of the Antonine Plague. The study of Philostratus's text on the life of Apollonius also represents the perspective of magic in the early third century AD and after the Antonine Plague.

The final set of case studies focusses on several phenomena which would have been coincidental to, and possibly even connected to, the Antonine Plague, in the second half of the second century AD. These case studies provide a unique opportunity to study magic during a time of crisis and heightened anxiety in the Roman Empire. This includes the analysis of the widespread fame of Alexander of Abonoteichus and the increased popularity of the cult of Bona Dea during this period, and how each cult was perceived (or not) as magical. Similar to texts chronicling the lives of Apuleius and Apollonius, Alexander's life is described by Lucian who was writing in the late second century AD and during the plague.

Therefore, through these case studies, it is possible to study the evolution of the concept of magic and its relationship to the framework's seven characteristics, based on the perspectives given by Apuleius, Lucian, and Philostratus when they are each describing the lives of various magic-associated practitioners. Ideas which came about in the second half of the second century AD and from the Antonine Plague and its resulting social tensions clearly affected how the concept of magic was perceived. Some of these changes in perceptions include how the magic practitioner became increasingly associated with the fraudulent medical practitioner and 'quack',

as the importance of medical competency came to the forefront of the concerns of Roman society, as a deadly plague spread across the Empire.

Abbreviations

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CNG</i>	<i>Classical Numismatic Group</i>
Ditt. Syll.	<i>Dittenberger's Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
<i>IDR</i>	<i>Inscriptiile Daciei Romane</i>
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
<i>MAMA</i>	<i>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</i>
<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
<i>SNG</i>	<i>Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum</i>
<i>TAM</i>	<i>Tituli Asiae Minori</i>

1. Thesis introduction

[REDACTED]

[Eight lines of the poem]

[“Magic” by Shel Silverstein]

[ending with the claim that]

[the most tangible form of magic]

[must be created by an individual]

[themselves].]¹

The term ‘magic’ can evoke a plethora of ideas, like the mythical beings and supernatural which Silverstein mentions, but also things like sleight-of-hand tricks and spiritual practices reputed to grant someone superhuman powers. The final two lines of the poem reminds us of two fundamental questions relating to magic: 1) what really qualifies as magic to any given individual? 2) Can anyone be a practitioner of magic? Although this poem was originally published in the 70s as a children’s poem, it nevertheless embodies the complexity of the concept of magic, a concept which has been in existence since time immemorial.

In recent scholarship, ancient magic has garnered greater attention as a result of novel, interdisciplinary approaches and methodologies to better understand the concept of magic and explore examples in the ancient world, including in Roman society.² However, there are still many debates and divisions amongst modern scholars about how to explore or define magic,

¹ Silverstein 2002, 11; for access to the full poem:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20250417162549/https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/magic-57/>.

² Some examples of novel approaches include those of Stein and Stein 2011; Stratton and Kalleres 2014, 20–28; Versnel 1991; Eidinow 2016.

despite its prevalent use in the studies of almost every culture and society. For example, several modern scholars, such as Versnel and Graf, argue that magic represents a collection of socially subversive behaviours, yet certain figures and practices who were associated with magic were not always considered subversive.³ For instance, ancient Persian priests or *Magoi*, plural of *μάγος/magus*, one of the most closely translatable terms to ‘magic practitioner’ in Ancient Greek and Latin, were not considered subversive within ancient Persian society, although they gained an increasingly subversive connotation in Ancient Greece and later in Rome. This was partly as a result of the term evolving and gaining other associations beyond its use for describing Persian priests.⁴ Rather, the concept of magic is not about an objective description of practices, but a subjective, contextual, and socially derived observation and potentially contested combination of attitudes, prejudices, and accusations.⁵ Although modern scholars have contributed to the discussion surrounding the study of ancient magic, there is still a potential for gaining a more holistic perspective of Roman magic within certain contexts and at a given point in time.

For the scope of this thesis, the following study aims to understand how magic was negotiated in Roman society in the second century AD. As discussed, the concept of magic, and in particular, Roman magic, can refer to a number of ideas, and is thus fluid depending on the context in which it occurs and is therefore difficult to define simply.⁶ For example, a magic practitioner could be someone who was believed to have broken the law, such as the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*, a law which referred to the prosecution of individuals who harmed another individual through ritual practice, such as through the use of a love spell which

³ Versnel 1991, 178–179; Graf 1997b, 198; see sections 2.2.3 and 3.1 below for the greater discussion on magic and subversion.

⁴ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 41–42; Bremmer 2002a, ix, 2–4; 2015, 247–249.

⁵ Durdin 2016’s thesis has discussed the nuances of ancient magic/*magia* from various aspects, similar to this thesis’s Chapter 2.

⁶ For greater discussion, see Eidinow 2017a, 34–35; Stanley Spaeth 2014, 41; Stein and Stein 2011.

could have adverse effects on the target.⁷ Alternatively, an individual could also be perceived as a magic practitioner by the followers of a school of philosophical thought because the individual's practices were in contention with their strand of philosophy. Such was the case between Empiricist and Dogmatist medical practitioners who held different ethical standards and approaches to medicine.⁸ Ancient texts do not have a single term which connote precisely what we mean by 'magic', and key vocabulary such as *magus* has a range of religious, philosophical, and sometimes pejorative connotations.⁹ Specifically, investigating Roman magic is a complicated task as magic was an ill-defined concept owing to the complexities of its legal, social, and moral components.

The Roman Empire in the second half of the second century AD is also marked by several major calamities which destabilised many aspects of Roman society, including by a pandemic, commonly referred to as the Antonine Plague, which brought about considerable changes to many communities within the Empire.¹⁰ Because the concept of magic was a social construct based on a number of factors, the concept inevitably evolved alongside other societal changes brought about by this widespread outbreak. This thesis aims to elucidate how the concept of magic was recognised in and leading to the second century AD in the Roman Empire, but also how it was perceived and evolved before, during, and after a time of globalised crisis. The plague during this time would have further led to a greater preoccupation with health; thus, the context of the Antonine Plague also allows for the observation of the complex interrelationship between magic and medicine or healing.

⁷ See section 2.3 and Chapter 4 below.

⁸ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 396–397; section 5.9.1 below further describes this.

⁹ See Footnote 4; examples of the different connotations of *magus* and related terms in Janowitz 2001, 9; Bremmer 2002a, ix, 2–4, see further in Chapter 4 below.

¹⁰ Duncan-Jones 1996, 116–117; for discussion on these changes, see Chapter 6.

In order to study the concept of magic in the second century AD, Chapter 2 of this thesis surveys both ancient sources and strands in modern scholarship. It is possible to extrapolate common characteristics of discourse around magic in Roman society by examining practices and sources from c. second century AD commonly associated with magic. This introductory survey reviews existing approaches and identifies general categories of magic-related material, such as Roman legislation, literature, and archaeology.

From this survey, Chapter 3 will then extrapolate seven common characteristics into a framework for exploring magic. Many, but not all, of the examples of material mentioned in Chapter 2 are legally or socially subversive, especially as certain laws delineate (un)acceptable behaviour on which magic borders. Thus, subversion is a recurring theme in magic-associated material. Additionally, there are many examples of magical practices and materials investigated in Chapter 2 which also have a perceived exotic or foreign origin or association, or because of their exotic or foreign association, they are then associated with magic. Accordingly, the seven common characteristics of magic for my framework are: 1) subversive behaviour, or legal and social acceptability, 2) exoticism and foreignness, 3) femininity, 4) privateness, 5) manipulative in nature, 6) supernatural associations, and 7) secret or arcane knowledge. The characteristics are things that help to identify areas around the boundaries of magic and areas of transition.

The purpose of developing this framework is to provide a new lens to examine ancient magic, in particular how its perception changed in the mid-imperial period. Chapters 4–6 use the new framework to investigate three case studies, and these three case studies will also help to further nuance the framework through the concrete analysis of text and material.

The first case study (Chapter 4) investigates Apuleius's legal defence against an accusation of magic. Apuleius was a well-known philosopher and writer in the second century AD, and his

own work, *Apologia*, describes how the concept of magic was negotiated between the prosecution and himself during this trial.¹¹ This chapter draws on the survey of magic in Roman legislation from Chapter 2, where it is clear that the concept of ‘magic’ could be weaponised against certain individuals and groups. Individuals could be targeted because of their role in patrician rivalries, while certain groups were persecuted for their ‘non-Roman’ practices.¹² Therefore, this chapter further examines the legal implications of magic in the Roman Empire.

The second case study (Chapter 5) examines the intersection of medicine with magic to understand how and why medicine and magic were delineated, despite their traditional interconnection. The examples investigated demonstrate the spectrum of magico-medical practices, within the nexus of traditional and rational healing techniques. Additionally, it will analyse Philostratus’s text, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*, which glorifies the life and deeds of Apollonius of Tyana, a first-century AD philosopher and healer.¹³ Although Philostratus depicts Apollonius positively, Apollonius was also arrested under suspicion of practising magic; thus, his case study presents an interesting combination of the concepts of magic, healing, philosophy, and spiritual practice and the intersections between them.

The final set of case studies is relevant to the Antonine Plague, which provides a unique opportunity to study magic from texts and material culture originating from a time of crisis and heightened anxiety in the Roman Empire. These case studies examine healing cults which were prevalent in the second century AD and coincidental to the plague, those of Alexander of Abonoteichus and of Bona Dea.¹⁴ Despite the latter’s use of magical-associated practices, the

¹¹ Apuleius, *Apologia*.

¹² For greater discussion, see section 2.4.7 below.

¹³ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*; M. Smith 1978, 84–93; Reimer 1999, 19.

¹⁴ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Πευδόμαντις*; Ambasciano 2016.

former's legacy is more closely tied to magic. These case studies will investigate the perceptions of these cults and their association with magic during a period of globalised crisis. The texts chronicling the lives of Apuleius, Apollonius, and Alexander provide perspectives of magic before, after, and during the Antonine Plague, respectively, and can thus demonstrate how the concept of magic evolved, partly as a result of the pandemic.

This framework is not intended as a diagnostic test to define Roman magic, but as an analysis to explore how certain figures, practices, and objects could be associated with magic around the second-century AD and during the Antonine Plague. While it is not possible to come up with a ubiquitous explanation of Roman magic that is valid in all contexts and time periods, it is possible to gain a more nuanced sense of Roman perceptions of magic during this period. This new framework will aid to answer several questions regarding the Roman concept of magic. This includes determining the purpose of labelling a practice or material as 'magical' and the effect of such an association. These purposes could have comprised of aspersion, self-promotion, or establishing power, and the effects of the association with magic could vary between positive and negative. For example, prestigious, 'exotic' materials such as amber were sought after for ritualistic purposes, while divination practised by the Chaldeans was banned as a way of marginalising 'non-Roman' practices.¹⁵ Therefore, this study will reveal the range with which the concept of magic could be applied. Moreover, this thesis also determines how the concept of magic changed in the second century AD, and was affected by social, political, and religious factors. For instance, the concept of the magic practitioner eventually becomes more closely associated with the fraudulent medical practitioner or 'quack', as the importance of medical

¹⁵ For the prestige associated and uses of amber, see section 2.5.3 below and for the banning of Chaldeans, see section 2.3.3 below.

competency came to the forefront of the concerns of Roman society, as a deadly plague spread across the Empire. Hence, this thesis also presents a method for understanding how the concept of magic evolved.

2. Surveys

2.1 Chapter introduction

The Roman concept of magic can be studied from different types of material: legal, literary, and archaeological. This chapter examines existing scholarship and some of the most commonly associated Roman ‘magical’ material. Using surveys of legislature, literature, and material culture, this chapter aims to identify the recurring features of this material, in order to understand what features connected a practice or object with magic.

There is a vast amount of material which is associated with Roman magic, and contemporary scholars have each employed their own approach to studying ancient magic, delineating the material, and even creating their own definitions. Section 2.2 (‘Trends in magical scholarship’) reviews this existing scholarship to determine (1) which interpretive lenses are commonly used by scholars, and (2) what they have contributed to the study of ancient magic. While I do not address every scholar’s methodology, I outline some of the most prevalent approaches which I use to inform my framework and analysis (sub-sections 2.2.2–2.2.4). This section also includes a sub-section (2.2.1) outlining a brief historiography on the study of magic, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century when social scientists began to take an interest in the concept of magic. Their social theories have influenced the work of many subsequent scholars including those studying ancient magic. Overall, this section aims to highlight what scholars have contributed to the study of magic which in turn, assists me in developing my framework to study ancient magic.

Section 2.3 (‘Legislations and persecutions’) investigates legislation which has been traditionally interpreted as the prosecution against magical practices. Building on sub-section 2.2.3 (‘Magic as a subversive practice’), this section further explores how magic could be used as

the language of the authority to police ‘unwanted’ behaviours. Consequently, magic could be used as a label given to behaviours that were subversive/anti-social/immoral, and subsequently codified and made illegal.

Section 2.4 (‘Greek and Roman literary witches’) investigates the representations of magic-practising figures in literature, namely that of the ‘witch’. There is a disproportionate amount of female magic-practising figures in Greek and Latin literature. This section identifies the characteristics of the literary witch, evolutions of her description, and the reception of such a figure. This allows for an in-depth investigation as to why these characteristics were associated with magic in Roman literature, and with women specifically.

Section 2.5 (‘Archaeological materials and approaches’) introduces several types of material culture which have been commonly identified as magical objects. The aim of this section is to identify common traits of this material, and how these objects were used in a ritualistic setting. Studying magical material culture provides the perspective of common practitioners whose voices are absent from the surviving textual record, as these authors often represented the views of the educated elite.

Overall, sections 2.3–2.5 serve to collate recurring features of material that were commonly associated with magic. These features will then be used as the basis for my characteristics of magic in Chapter 3, thus allowing me to create a new interpretative lens to explore the case studies of Chapters 4–6.

2.2 Trends in magical scholarship

Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, scholarship of magic garnered significant academic attention from various scholars of the social sciences and humanities.¹⁶ In particular, the emergence of novel, interdisciplinary approaches and methodologies renewed interest in studying ancient magic with contributions from anthropologists, classicists, and archaeologists. The following survey highlights the definitions and opinions concerning magic in antiquity according to leading scholars, including those of Richard Gordon, Jan Bremmer, Esther Eidinow, Christopher Faraone, Henk Versnel, Fritz Graf, and Sarah Iles Johnston. There is also a brief overview of the scholars of the social sciences who initiated the widespread interest of research into magic.¹⁷ Some of the following debates include their contrasting opinions surrounding the accuracy of the magic/religion/science trichotomy, and to what degree was Roman magic subversive. These debates are frequently referred to within their own works with regard to the method they have used to investigate, and in some cases, to define, ancient magic. These debates have also helped influence the creation of my seven characteristics of Roman magic (Chapter 3 below).

2.2.1 Historiography of the study of magic

One of the first anthropologists to study magic was Frazer who attempted to define magic in contrast to science and religion in his famous work, *The Golden Bough*.¹⁸ While Frazer's definitions of magic/science/religion are no longer accepted by contemporary scholars, it is nevertheless one of the first anthropological attempts to define magic as a social phenomenon. Furthermore, Frazer's distinction of magic/religion/science remains a method for studying

¹⁶ Stein and Stein 2011; Greenwood 2020.

¹⁷ Frazer 1922; Malinowski 1974; Evans-Pritchard 1937; Mead 1943.

¹⁸ Frazer 1922; Versnel 1991, 177–178.

magic, despite the rejection of his nuanced definitions as he viewed these categories as stages of an evolution, thus implying the evolved superiority of one civilization over another.¹⁹

In the nineteenth century, anthropologists began studying other societies by means of fieldwork; fieldwork allowed anthropologists to ‘observe’ magic in a given culture. Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard are two examples of such anthropologists. Each discovered that a society can have its own unique definition of magic, but both concluded that magic provides various social functions, such as relieving individuals’ anxiety and acting as an outlet for social tensions.²⁰

This century also saw the study of religious practice from both anthropological and sociological perspectives. Sociologist Émile Durkheim argues that religious rituals by their definition are an expression of the collective values and beliefs of a community, or what he refers to as ‘collective effervescence’.²¹ Another common term which is frequently used in the anthropological study of religion is *communitas*, a term first coined by anthropologist Victor Turner as ‘a non-structural or spontaneous relationship which develops among individuals in passage between social statuses such as those undergoing initiation ritual...’.²² This concept is also similar to that of ‘participation’ which has been defined by anthropologist Stanley Tambiah as taking place when ‘persons, groups, animals, places, and natural phenomena are in a relation of contiguity; this is a place of existential immediacy where there are “shared affinities”’.²³ In other words, several anthropologists and sociologists have described religious practice as a manifestation of shared values and beliefs of a society which created greater unity amongst its

¹⁹ Frazer 1922; Otto 2011, 52.

²⁰ Evans-Pritchard 1937; Malinowski 1974; Otto 2011, 78–79.

²¹ Durkheim in Bell 1987, 97–98.

²² Turner in Greenwood 2020, 106–107.

²³ Tambiah 1990, 107–109.

participants. While ancient magic should not be automatically equated with ancient religion, both concepts represent the collective elements of Roman society.

Many religious practitioners, including those in Ancient Rome, established a reciprocal relationship between themselves and their gods through the act of sacrifice. One lens through which to study the concept of sacrifice is through reciprocity, or Marcel Mauss's concept of the 'gift', a phenomenon which he applied to civilizations where there was an ongoing exchange of goods between individuals and groups, or even the divine.²⁴ As will be seen in the later analysis, one method of distinguishing Roman religion from magic is by analysing the relationship through the 'gift', or reciprocity through sacrifice.

Overall, while many of these scholars have based their own theories on the study of more contemporary societies, their framework for studying magic is nevertheless helpful for the study of ancient magic. As these anthropologists and sociologists have frequently aimed to determine the function of magic within society, these approaches will hopefully assist in investigating magic's role in Roman society.

2.2.2 Magic/Religion/Science trichotomy

Magic has often been defined in opposition to religion and science because of Frazer's introduction of this trichotomy. However, several modern authors have argued that these categories were not as distinct in Roman times, and have questioned the use of this model. An example of the lack of boundaries between these categories is the collaboration between Hippocratic, 'rational' medical practices and traditional, 'religious' healing methods at Asclepeia.²⁵

²⁴ Mauss 2011; Stowers 2011, 39–40.

²⁵ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 29.2; Strabo, *Geographica* 14.19; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 388; Petridou 2016, 435–436.

Bremmer and Versnel maintain that the delineation between magic and religion is still a valid method of study, albeit the distinction between these two is not as clear in the study of ancient magic.²⁶ Gordon and Simón have created their own updated definition of ‘magic’ which they define as ‘unsanctioned religious activity’ which overcomes this dichotomy. However, Bremmer disagrees with the validity of their definition, as it presents the challenge of defining how something is (un)sanctioned and by whom.²⁷ While most of the examples in the following surveys refer to items and practices ‘sanctioned-ness’ from the perspective of Roman State authority, later case studies in Chapters 4–6 below demonstrate that even the endorsement or condemnation of the Roman State was not always clear with regard to magic-associated activity. Hence, Bremmer and Versnel argue that the abandonment of the term ‘magic’ is not a practical approach, and that the only way to distinguish that which is magical or not is only possible if the magic versus religion comparison is still made.²⁸ Bremmer further argues that the prevalent and public use of apotropaic amulets, contradicts Gordon and Simón’s definition of magic as ‘unsanctioned’.²⁹ This last argument, however, depends on the consideration of all amulets as ‘magical’. Despite Bremmer’s support of the magic vs religion approach, he states that it is nevertheless important to account for the lack of this distinction during ancient times. He lists several examples from the accounts of ancient authors such as Justin Martyr’s commentary of Jewish and pagan exorcisms where Justin describes them as using several methods that would not have been used in Christian exorcisms. Although Justin has disdain for such practices from

²⁶ Versnel 1991, 177, 187; Bremmer 2015, 8; 1999, 9.

²⁷ Gordon and Simón 2010, vii, 1–4; Bremmer 2015, 11–16.

²⁸ Versnel 1991, 177, 187; 1997, 92; Bremmer 1999, 9–10; although not with regard to distinguishing magic and religion, Sanzo 2020 argues that magic is still a useful category as there is still no better alternative term, echoing Otto 2013, 318 who argues that the abandonment of the category does not further our understanding of ancients’ perception of the concept.

²⁹ Parker 2007, 116–135 in Bremmer 2015, 13.

another religion, he does not refer to them as magical.³⁰ This again reflects the differences in perception between the members of different religious groups. Rather, Bremmer advocates that ancients viewed magic more as a contrast to normative religious practice.³¹ I agree with Bremmer's adjustment of this approach: rather than understanding magic as purely oppositional to religion, it should be seen as in negotiation with mainstream religious and social practices, in order to best suit an individual's specific goals. Thus, there is an ongoing dialogue between the rituals of the individual within the greater Roman societal framework.

Eidinow makes several distinctions between ancient magic and religion. She states that binding spell curses did not 'enter[ed] the public realm' like religious prayers, likely because of the social unacceptability associated with them.³² She additionally attempts to distinguish magic and religion based on how practitioners would process their interactions with the divine: magic, she argues is inductive, and religion is deductive. The inductive method refers to how an individual would have to assemble their own knowledge and experience, in order to decide how to best undertake magical rituals and gain favour with the divine for their own specific purpose. This contrasts with the deductive method of religious behaviour whereby religious traditions had already been long established for common societal goals.³³ While this thesis is more aligned with Bremmer's approach of understanding the dynamic relationship between magic and religion, Eidinow's distinctions are nevertheless useful for establishing a foundation for exploring their relationship. Elements of Eidinow's inductive/deductive distinction will also be further

³⁰ Justin Martyr, *Apologia* 2.6; Bremmer 1999, 9–10.

³¹ Bremmer 1999, 9–10; Vernsel 1991, 177, 187.

³² Eidinow 2017a, 140.

³³ Eidinow 2019b, 80–84.

investigated in characteristics 3.4 ('Privateness'), 3.5 ('Manipulative in nature'), and 3.6 ('Supernatural associations').

In relation to the various discussions of how Romans would have defined magic or religious impiety, there is a frequent correlation with an individual's intervention in the natural order or supernatural realm. For example, Graf hypothesises that the development of magic was a form of religious practice by which the practitioner had a more individual relationship with the gods. Meanwhile, Eidinow suggests that such debates took place during the development of medical techniques in terms of what was deemed as acceptable intervention.³⁴ This will be investigated further in Chapter 5 below. Overall, the magic vs. religion discourse is still a useful approach to study ancient magic, despite its limitations and required readjustments.

2.2.3 Magic as a subversive practice

Building on magic as divergent from mainstream religious practice, ancient magic could also be characterised as subversive to Roman society. Several scholars have argued that magic was intrinsically subversive in contrast to Roman religion. Others have argued that the concept of magic was gradually formed and used as a term to label behaviours that became directly in conflict with Roman authority. The latter argument is also reflective upon the changing political ethos between the Roman Republic and Early Empire.

Versnel's fourth criterion of his definition of magic implies that magic is intrinsically subversive. He also forms this criterion using the Durkheimian concept of collective effervescence:

Social/moral evaluation: Since the goals of magic often run counter to the interests of other members of the society, magic easily acquires the connotation of an anti-social or at least a-

³⁴ Graf 1997a in Eidinow 2019b, 70.

social activity, thus leading to the Durkheimian dichotomy: magic is immoral, anti-social, deviant, whereas religion has positive social functions, is cohesive and solidarizing.³⁵

However, Versnel's approach has its limitations rooted in a scholar's own personal morals and ethical standpoint under specific circumstances. Otto additionally refers to magic as a collection of 'deviant ritual practices'.³⁶ In contrast, Graf argues that a specific behaviour was not intrinsically magical or 'anti-social', but instead assigned as 'magical' based on the individual in question and how they were perceived or marginalised in society. He cites the accusations of the use of magic against Apuleius as an example (section 4.3 below).³⁷ Therefore, the morality of practising magic cannot be used reliably to define magic. To overcome this limitation of Versnel's approach, the equivalent characteristics in this thesis's framework focus on how Roman society deemed magic as 'subversive behaviour, or legal[ly] and social[ly] (un)acceptable' (section 3.1 below) or as 'anti-social' because of the perceived 'privateness' (section 3.4 below) that was required to undertake magic, rather than intrinsically 'immoral'.

Several scholars have argued that there is a tendency for the concept of magic to become more solidified over time, and for certain practices to become increasingly associated with magic. Bremmer argues that this can be observed in the evolving and decreasingly-complimentary descriptions of magical, literary figures.³⁸ In early Greek literature, the term *magos* simply referred to a Persian priest, and *magia* was used to designate religious practices 'whereby man seeks to gain control over his fate and fortune by supernatural means... Stemming from an earlier, alien or indigenous culture'.³⁹ He states that the transformation of magic into a more ubiquitous and 'horrid' concept resulted from and reflected the greater political instability

³⁵ Versnel 1991, 178–179.

³⁶ Otto in Sanzo 2020, 27–48.

³⁷ Graf 1997b, 198.

³⁸ Bremmer 2002b, 78.

³⁹ Bremmer 2002a, ix; 2002b 78.

and violence during late Republican and Imperial times: ‘the morbid atmosphere of the time can hardly be separated from its morbid literature’.⁴⁰ Further, in the mid-first century AD, the emergence of the role of the emperor as the sole sacrificer meant that he had a ‘religious monopoly’. Alongside this development was the creation of the antithesis of the sole sacrificer, and thus the creation of the Roman literary witch ‘whose pleasure lay in the perversion of sacrifice for unholy ends’.⁴¹ Using the concept of binary oppositions, Gordon states that there was the creation of the ‘Foucauldian Other’ of Roman State-controlled values in the form of the night-witch.⁴² This literary construction was also combined with the longstanding Greco-Roman gender-based norms and what he refers to as male sexual frustration and dominance.⁴³ Hence, Gordon argues that the concept of magic arose from a ‘political rather than a theological discussion’.⁴⁴ In the analysis of the literary witch (2.4 below), I reach similar conclusions as Bremmer and Gordon with regard to the evolution of the concept of magic as reflected in literature. However, I also explore how Roman gender values inversely influenced the creation of the Roman witch. Therefore, the literary witch was a manifestation of subversive behaviour in Roman society.

Bremmer and Eidinow both state that the greater instability and ensuing anxiety of death would have made divinatory practices more popular, including necromancy.⁴⁵ Additionally, the creation of newer rituals was a means for ritual practitioners to innovate their services during periods of instability, in order to remain competitive on the market.⁴⁶ Eidinow’s analysis of the

⁴⁰ Bremmer 2002b, 78.

⁴¹ Gordon in Bremmer 2002b, 78.

⁴² Gordon 1999, 194, 204–210.

⁴³ Gordon 1999, 173, 196–197, 266.

⁴⁴ Gordon 1999, 162; Bremmer 2002b, 78.

⁴⁵ Bremmer 2002b, 78; Eidinow 2017a, 2017c, 2019a, 2019b.

⁴⁶ Bremmer 2002b, 78.

Greek term *agurtes* or ‘beggar-priest’ is a concept which continued to be perpetuated in Roman society. She argues that such a figure was reliant on others economically and was thus criticised for not possessing any special skill or knowledge, but rather their ability to market any service, including necromantic rituals. The connotation surrounding the term was generally negative and implied that the individual was unreliable. She states that the term was even used to discredit any politician that falsely claimed to have any ritual knowledge.⁴⁷ Similarly, Wendt has argued that the concept of magic resulted from the increase in itinerant-specialists or ‘freelance experts’ in the first century AD who diversified and combined their typically stand-alone skills, in order to more successfully market themselves.⁴⁸ Johnston even goes as far as to distinguish the magic-practitioner from the mainstream priest whereby the magician would have been more ‘business-oriented’, in order to successfully promote their services to prospective clients.⁴⁹ Gordon states that in late Republican and Imperial times, even aristocrats might have introduced foreign cults purposefully for their own benefit, and some foreign cults were successfully introduced on the basis that they provided a beneficial healing technique or technological advancement.⁵⁰ However, foreign cults which practised divination and necromancy were also occasionally banned when it began to undermine the authority of the emperor.⁵¹ Similarly, certain ‘foreign’ cults, such as the Bacchanalia (2.3.2 below) and that of Apollonius of Tyana (Chapter 5 below) also found themselves at odds with Roman authority. Therefore, such practices were not intrinsically ‘immoral’ but became subversive when they conflicted with the central authority. As a result, there were often legal sanctions against them.

⁴⁷ Eidinow 2017b, 269.

⁴⁸ Wendt 2016, 40, 115–116.

⁴⁹ Johnston 2008, 146–152.

⁵⁰ Gordon 1972, 92: for example, the cult of Magna Mater allowed for some elites to become priests of the cult.

⁵¹ Bremmer 2002b, 78.

Overall, I agree with Bremmer/Eidinow/Wendt/Gordon's approach to the study of magic where the concept should be studied in relation to changing political and social values. The following surveys and case studies highlight several of examples of this 'evolution' of magic. Most practices were not intrinsically immoral; but when they clashed with promoted ideals and values, they became associated with anti-social and subversive behaviour. It was then that the concept of magic was used to 'blanket' many of these behaviours. Building on this argument, this thesis further investigates the frequent association between magic and exoticism and its foreign aspects, once again opposing Roman ideals (3.2).

2.2.4 Conclusion

Scholars of ancient magic have differing opinions about the various methodologies of the study of magic. These trends will be revisited through this thesis. Regarding the magic/religion/science trichotomy, the magic and religion dichotomy will be addressed through the use of the characteristics (Chapter 3). The contrast with science and medicine will be addressed in the second and third set of case studies (Chapters 5–6), when investigating the relationship of magic with medicine and the application of healing practices during the Antonine Plague. The subversion of magic will be addressed from several different aspects in the surveys and case studies, including when accusations of magic enter the legal sphere (Chapter 4).

2.3 Legislation and persecutions

This section investigates commonly associated 'magical', Roman laws, and how contemporary sources describe these laws and the people accused of breaking them. These laws do not explicitly ban magic, but several activities that became associated with magic. Analysing legislation against magic can determine which practices were persecuted and for what reason at the time that these laws were created. Because subsequent sources also cite these laws, they also provide an opportunity to understand how these laws were interpreted in later centuries. Some of

the laws which have been commonly referred to as Roman legislation against magic up to and in the second century AD include the *Lex XII Tabularum*, *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*, the Expulsion of Jews and Chaldeans in 139 BC, and *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*. Furthermore, the Augustan Family Laws or *Leges Iuliae* codified the idealisation of certain Roman values concerning women and sexual activity which in turn influenced the conceptualisation of magic in later Roman centuries.

2.3.1 *Lex XII Tabularum*

The first example of Roman legislation which has been argued as sanctions against magic would be from *Lex XII Tabularum* or the ‘Twelve Tables’.⁵² They were originally written in the fifth century BC, although the original tablet with the laws of the Twelve Tables does not survive as it was said to have been destroyed by the Gauls in 390 BC. The content of the whole Twelve Tables is preserved, thanks to several sources which reiterate them. However, the wording of the original laws is sometimes fragmentary as many of these sources paraphrase them.⁵³ According to Cicero, writing in the middle of the first century BC, boys were still taught portions of the original Twelve Tables and were trained to recite them aloud.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is likely that these laws were then transmitted orally for some time before being rewritten or mentioned in later sources. In 198 BC, Sextus Aelius Paetus rewrote the Twelve Tables as the *tripertita*, where he included additional information about each law in the form of the *interpretatio* and the *legis actio*. This could have affected the order in which laws and clauses of the Twelve Tables were presented.⁵⁵ Ambiguities also arise as the laws can only be cited via others’ much later work

⁵² Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 3.34; Dickie 2003, 141–142.

⁵³ Jolowicz 1954, 5, 106.

⁵⁴ Cicero, *De legibus* 2.59.

⁵⁵ Digest of Justinian 1.2.2.7 in Jolowicz 1954, 89, 106–111.

which means the original law was not copied verbatim from the original text, and later biases and concepts surrounding magic could have been imposed onto these laws.

The sections of the Twelve Tables that have traditionally been interpreted as legislation against magic have been translated as a call for capital punishment against those who sang evil songs, 1a–b, (*Si quis occentavisset sive carmen condidisset, quod infamiam faceret flagitiumve alteri... qui malum carmen incantassit*), or stole harvests from others with incantations, 8a–b, (*Qui fruges excantassit . . . neve alienam segetem pellexeris*).⁵⁶ Several scholars have suggested that this law emphasises how agrarian early Roman society was, where it was important to establish the ownership of citizens' land.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Livy states that there were fourteen notable food shortages within the two years prior to the creation of the Twelve Tables, and the laws could have addressed some of the tensions that arose during this period of instability.⁵⁸

The interpretation of 1a–b is not unproblematic. While the term *carmen* (or ἐπὶ δόξ in Greek) was a common and neutral term, the addition of *malum*, makes it unclear if *malum carmen* could be referring to a magical incantation or to slander and gossip.⁵⁹ This issue is further perpetuated when comparing how Pliny, Cicero, and Horace refer to the Twelve Tables. Pliny is the only author that describes these laws as legislation against magic and *malum carmen* as incantations.⁶⁰ In contrast, Cicero and Horace describe the law as sanctions against slander.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Lex XII Tabularum* VIII.1a–b, 8a–b; my own translation.

⁵⁷ Bailliot 2019, 179; Rives 2002.

⁵⁸ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 3.31.1, 3.32.2; Rives 2002, 278.

⁵⁹ Bailliot 2019, 176–179; Dickie 2003, 140; Rives 2002, 279.

⁶⁰ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 28.1.18.

⁶¹ Cicero, *De re publica* 4.12; Horace, *Epistularum liber secundus* 1.152–155.

Additionally, it is difficult to decipher the meaning of the compound verb of *excantare* in 8 a–b which also contains the neutral *cantare*.⁶²

Beyond the 1a–b laws, there are two other laws in the Twelve Tables which are similar both in terms of their construction and content. The first law states that if an animal from one farm came to another farm and destroyed crops or property, the owner of the animal could either compensate the wronged party for their damaged property, or else would surrender the animal to them. The second states that if a tree from one property leaned onto another's, the latter could charge the former with cutting down the tree. Moreover, if the acorns or fruit from a tree from one's farm dropped into the neighbouring farm or property, the owner of the tree was allowed to collect fruit from their neighbour's property.⁶³ When taking into account these other laws, it would seem as though the Twelve Tables were intended to mitigate any strife between neighbouring landowners.

There are no surviving accounts of someone who was found guilty of this charge making it even more difficult to determine how this law was administered.⁶⁴ The only known case of someone being tried under this law is described by Pliny: C. Furius Chresimus was accused on that grounds that he was enticing away other people's crops by using spells (*Ceu fruges alienas perliceret veneficiis*). His neighbours became suspicious and jealous of him, because his smaller plot of land produced greater crops than his neighbours' larger plots of land.⁶⁵ Chresimus was tried by the curule aedile before the *comitia tributa*. At the trial, the defendant brought along his well-made farming tools, the healthy members of the household, his robust oxen, and stated:

⁶² Rives 2002, 273–274.

⁶³ *Lex XII Tabularum* VII 9b, VIII 7 in Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 16 Chapter 6 (5); Forsythe 2019, 220.

⁶⁴ Dickie 2003, 140.

⁶⁵ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 18.41–43; Dickie 2003, 140.

Veneficia mea, Quirites, haec sunt. nec possum vobis ostendere aut in forum adducere lucubrationes meas vigiliasque et sudores ('These are my magic spells, citizens, and I am not able to exhibit to you or to produce in court my midnight labours and early risings and my sweat and toil'). Consequently, Chresimus was acquitted unanimously.⁶⁶ However, Pliny's account is written like a fable rather than a historic account, with the moral that success comes from hard work rather than from material wealth. Additionally, Pliny further includes the detail that Chresimus was accused of having performed these incantations at night.⁶⁷ Performing magic at night is a recurring theme in descriptions of magical literary figures (section 2.4 below), and because of Pliny's interpretation of the law as referring to the magical incantations, his description further links this law to magic.

Overall, while it is difficult to determine if the original Twelve Tables intended to prosecute magic, the law nevertheless presents the use of *carmen* and *cantare* in a malicious way, a concept that would become associated with magic.⁶⁸ Pliny's subsequent interpretation in the first century AD of the law as 'magical' suggests a potential evolution in the perception of magic in later centuries. This supports the view where magic evolved and became a more recognised concept through time.

2.3.2 *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*

The next known law which banned magic-associated practices was the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*, a decree passed in 186 BC by the consuls, Quintus Marcius and Spurius Postumius, outlawing the celebration of the Bacchic festivals. The Bacchanalia originated from Greek Dionysian festivals and became a mystery cult in Roman times.⁶⁹ Many of the Bacchic

⁶⁶ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 18.41–43.

⁶⁷ Dickie 2003, 139.

⁶⁸ For example, in Pliny's account and in Section 2.4.

⁶⁹ *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* in Ernout 1957, 58–60; Ogden 2002, 278–279.

rituals took place at night which additionally incurred suspicion as was previously alluded to in the case against Chresimus (2.3.1).⁷⁰ Furthermore, Livy's account emphasises certain negative features of the cult, namely, to prove that the cult was a conspiracy against the Republic, by undermining Roman Republican values. Some details include the participation of 'a great number' of women, and a number of associated crimes including the use of fatal *venena* or 'poison'.⁷¹ He claims that the amount of accusations and convictions of those who had participated in the Bacchanalia totalled approximately 7000 people and that a *iustitium* had to be declared.⁷² This decree can be seen as an early conceptualisation of Roman magic, whereby activities subverting Roman ideals would become associated with magic.

2.3.3 Expulsions of Chaldeans and Jews in 139 BC

There is not enough evidence to support the idea that laws that expelled certain religious groups were enforced consistently throughout the Roman Republic and Empire. Rather, there were several instances when those practising rituals became associated with magic were expelled from Rome.⁷³ Many groups were targeted for practising 'non-Roman' rituals for profit, such as divinatory practices.⁷⁴ Divinatory practices were wide-ranging from those undertaken by a *haruspex* to dream divination and had been practised widely throughout Ancient Greece and Rome. However, by Roman imperial times, many divinatory practices were regulated, and there were several examples of independent practitioners of divination who found themselves in contention with the Julio-Claudian Roman emperors.⁷⁵ Additionally, Wendt argues that such

⁷⁰ For the Bacchanalia: Golden 2005, 85; for Chresimus: Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 18.41–43; Ogden 2002, 278–279.

⁷¹ A more detailed explanation of the interpretation of *venenum* is explored in the following section 2.3.4.

⁷² Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 39.8–14; Golden 2005, 88–98.

⁷³ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 39.41.5, 40.43.2f; Gordon 1999, 261; Dickie 2003, 153.

⁷⁴ Dickie 2003, 153.

⁷⁵ Suetonius, *Domitian* 15.3; Barton 1994, 48–49.

legislation along with the banning of the Bacchanalia (see section 2.3.2 above) was a systemic attempt at eliminating or regulating the practices of itinerant-specialists.⁷⁶

The Chaldeans were such a group who were expelled from Italy for practising ‘foreign’ divinatory rituals for profit in 139 BC by *praetor peregrinus* Cn. Cornelius Hispalis.⁷⁷ The sources describing this expulsion, Valerius Maximus and Livy, state that this was done as a way of getting rid of foreign religious cults which threatened Roman tradition.⁷⁸ Similarly, the Jews were exiled because of their alleged worship of Jupiter Sabazius which was deemed a foreign cult.⁷⁹ The reference to those practising ‘non-Roman’ rituals for profit is equivalent to the ‘beggar-priest’ literary figure (2.2.3 above).⁸⁰ Therefore, foreign practices that were in conflict and considered harmful to Roman values, were reflected both in contemporary laws and literature (see next section 2.4).

2.3.4 *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*

The ‘magical’ legislation that follows in 81 BC was Sulla’s *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*.

It has been traditionally interpreted as the law against ‘common murder’ or those who caused ‘unnatural death’. The term *veneficium* is a compound word of *venenum*, and its relative suffix which has been taken to mean *venenum* along with all the activities associated.⁸¹ The *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* comprises six sections, three of which have been preserved with one which has garnered a particular magical association.⁸² Many have cited Cicero’s reconstruction of this one specific law: *de eius capite quaerito qui hominis necandi causa*

⁷⁶ Wendt 2016, 48–49.

⁷⁷ Valerius Maximus, 1.3.3; Dickie 2003, 155.

⁷⁸ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 4.30.9, 25.1.8, 39.8.4; Valerius Maximus, 1.3.3.

⁷⁹ Valerius Maximus 1.3.3: the Jews were mistakenly believed to worship Jupiter Sabazius; Ogden 2002, 279.

⁸⁰ Janssen 2025, 61–63, 318.

⁸¹ Rives 2003, 321; Bailliot 2019, 180; based on Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 8.18.

⁸² Rives 2003, 317–320.

venenum malum fecit fecerit vendidit vendiderit emit emerit habuit habuerit dedit dederit (capital punishment to whomever shall have made the poison, sold it, bought it, possessed it, or administered it which has resulted in another's death).⁸³

Similar to the use of the neutral terms of *carmen* and *cantare* in the Twelve Tables, *venenum* and its Greek counterpart *φάρμακον* are neutral terms and can be translated as both 'medicine' and 'poison', and in some cases, as 'magic potion'.⁸⁴ The ambiguity of this term is remarked upon by Gaius, a second century AD jurist:

Qui venenum dicit, adicere debet utrum malum an bonum; nam et medicamenta venena sunt: quia eo nomine omne continetur, quod adhibitum naturam eius, cui adhibitum esset, mutat. Cum id quod nos venenum appellamus, Graeci φάρμακον dicunt, apud illos quoque tam medicamenta, quam quae nocent hoc nomine continentur.

Those who speak of poison, should add whether it is good or bad, for medicines are poisons, and they are so called because they change the natural disposition of those to whom they are administered. What we call poison the Greeks style *φάρμακον*; and among them noxious drugs as well as medicinal remedies are included under this term, for which reason they distinguish them by another name.⁸⁵

Regardless of how the term was interpreted, Gaius explains that this law overcomes this distinction as it was primarily concerned with the potentially deadly result of the *venenum*, as well as the intention behind its creation or administration. Cicero additionally explains that substances that were commonly sold by merchants as medications or as dye that resulted in the death of their client would have also been prosecuted under this law.⁸⁶ However, those who administered an accidental fatal dose were punished less severely than those who were proven to have intentionally poisoned someone.⁸⁷

⁸³ Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 54–55, 147–148 from Crawford 1996, 752; my own translation.

⁸⁴ Bailliot 2019, 185–186; Gaius (ad XII Tab.), ap. Dig., L, 16, 236 in Rives 2002, p. 275, n. 30.

⁸⁵ Gaius, *Digest* 50.16.236 in *The Twelve Tables* 8.25 in Rives 2002, p. 275, n. 30; translated by Scott.

⁸⁶ Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 148.

⁸⁷ Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 148; Gaius, *Digest* 50.16.236; Macrianus, *Digest* 48.8.3.3.

The other two surviving sections are roughly translated as ‘armed with a weapon for the purpose of killing a person or perpetrating a theft’, and ‘caused someone to be wrongfully condemned on a capital charge’. Thus, the three surviving sections of the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* all describe sanctions against someone who caused the death of another.⁸⁸ When taking into account the other two surviving laws, it appears the specific law in question intended to prosecute murder instead of outlawing magical practices. However, through subsequent interpretations, including by other ancient authors, this law, alongside the term *venenum*, gained a magical association.

There are only thirteen attested cases of people being tried under the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*, and only four of these cases involved poisoning. Three of these known trials involve A. Cluentius Habitus between 74 BC–66 BC whom Cicero defended in 66 BC, and the other is the case against Apuleius (Chapter 4 below).⁸⁹ However, Livy describes the trials of several Roman patrician women for poisoning many Roman men in 331 BC (section 2.4.6 below). Although this event precedes the creation of this law, Livy’s account of a poisoning trial is nevertheless revealing. In Livy’s account, he uses *venenum* as the term used by the prosecution, likely more closely referring to ‘poison’. Meanwhile, *medicamentum* is used by the defendants, in order to make it seem as though their intention was not to kill the men.⁹⁰ Known cases of people being tried under the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* do not appear again until the 3rd century AD where it seems that the law would then encompass making *mala sacrificia*.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Rives 2003, 317–320.

⁸⁹ Cicero, *Pro Cluentio*; Dickie 2003, 145–147; Rives 2003, p. 319, n. 18.

⁹⁰ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 8.18.4–7; Hoffman 2002, 91–96.

⁹¹ Rives 2003, p. 321, n. 23.

Despite Livy's passage preceding Gaius's, and seemingly contradicting the argument that there was a greater association of certain practices with magic, it is nevertheless important to consider the purpose of each author's works. Gaius's account is a legal text intended to clarify any ambiguities in the law, and he thus emphasises that *venenum* was an intrinsically neutral term. However, Gaius could have felt particularly compelled to elucidate the meaning of this term because there was a negative connotation attached to *venenum* by the time he was writing. While Livy's account is at least partially fictional, his writing nevertheless reflects the nuances of *venenum* which were apparent even in the first century BC. As will be seen in 2.4.7 and Chapter 4 below, the term *venenum* gained a stronger connection with magic as described by Tacitus and Apuleius. Furthermore, its eventual amalgamation with *mala sacrificia* suggests that the term evolved beyond its 'neutral' meaning and had gained a supernatural connotation.

2.3.5 *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*

In 18/17 BC, Augustus introduced several laws which rewarded and punished certain behaviours relating to marriage and the family. Couples who produced three sons were rewarded, while adultery was punishable. One law introduced *stuprum*, or 'defilement'/'dishonour' which referred to sex with an unmarried freewoman. Augustus made adultery and *stuprum* a State crime rather than a domestic one, previously only to be judged by the *paterfamilias*.⁹² Alongside these Augustan laws, Roman women's sexual purity and chastity became synonymous with Roman socio-political stability and power, while opposing values and behaviours became decidedly 'un-Roman'.⁹³ While this law does not have an obvious connection to magic, I believe that these laws and their promoted values resulted in opposing behaviours of Roman women to

⁹² Stratton 2014, 164.

⁹³ Stratton 2014, 164.

become ‘anti-social’, and therefore associated with magic. This will be further explored in the next section, 2.4 and in characteristic 3 (section 3.3 below).

2.3.6 Conclusion

While these laws do not obviously condemn magic *per se*, their subsequent interpretations by ancient authors suggest certain practices became more polarising, and thus some became associated with magic. This would indicate that a more recognised concept of magic had been forming progressively, and that it was used as a social concept to designate this range of subversive behaviour rather than a purely legal one. Additionally, drawing on this survey, several concepts, like *carmen*, *venenum*, and divination had forms that would have been considered as mundane and socially acceptable. However, forms of these concepts that found themselves in contention with Roman authority were ultimately the practices that became associated with magic. Hence, there is a feedback loop between the concept of magic with Roman law.

2.4 Greek and Roman literary witches

Many common perceptions of magic in Roman society are reflected in literature, particularly through the figure of the witch, a concept which originated in Ancient Greece. This survey briefly outlines the descriptions of some of the best-known Greek and Roman literary witches, and the evolution of literary witches between the Greek and Roman periods. Beyond the Roman perceptions of magic, the literary witch also reveals contemporary values surrounding gender roles and sexuality; behaviours that conflicted with these values also became associated with magic. Drawing on these depictions are the semi-fictional accounts by Livy and Tacitus where they describe the alleged magical activities which groups of patrician women undertook. Despite the supposed reality of the events which they describe, Livy and Tacitus draw on many tropes of the literary witch to describe the women in their accounts.

The term ‘witch’ as we understand it refers to a woman who practises magic-related activities, although there is no precise Latin equivalent term for ‘witch’ or ‘witchcraft’.⁹⁴ Stanley Spaeth has collected terms that were used to describe witches, mainly with regard to the method they use. Examples include the *pharmakis* or *venefica* who uses magical potions, the *cantatrix* who uses incantations, the *goēteia* or ‘sorcerer’ (*goes* for the masculine), and the ‘*maga* for the female magical practitioner’ from the aforementioned *magus*.⁹⁵ It is clear that these terms were derived from several concepts that were previously discussed in the survey on legislation, such as *venenum* (section 2.3.4 above), *cantare* (section 2.3.1 above), and *pharmaka* which will be further examined (section 2.5.3 below). Despite the mundane etymology of these practices, their use by the literary witch presents versions which would have been considered subversive, and thus associated with magic.

2.4.1 Greek versus Roman ‘witches’

Understanding how Greek-originated witches and Roman-originated witches were perceived in Greek and Roman times can help isolate qualities associated with magic during a given period of time. Specifically, the changing descriptions of Greek-originated witches by Greek scholars (complimentary) to Roman scholars (uncomplimentary) can be observed. Understanding this evolution of the Greek-originated witch provides an important comparison to the Roman-originated witch, whose reception as being anti-Roman remains unchanged in Roman scholarship. Some of the best-known witches who are studied in this section include Circe, Medea, Erichtho, and Canidia, and Pamphile.⁹⁶ In this analysis, Circe and Medea are described as Greek witches even when described by Roman authors unless otherwise mentioned (ex.:

⁹⁴ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 41.

⁹⁵ Stanley Spaeth 2014, p. 41–42, including n. 3; Burriss 1936.

⁹⁶ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 41–42.

Homer's 'Greek' Circe vs. Roman Ovid's 'Greek' Medea'), and Canidia, Erichtho, and Pamphile are described as Roman witches as they were invented by Roman writers.⁹⁷

A similarity between Greek and Latin literary witches is their connection with nature. For example, Circe and Medea are both described as living in the woods, away from cities. The ingredients for their potions include herbs for which they scavenge in the woods or on mountain tops, and body parts of wild animals. Animals are also sometimes described as the companions or guardians of the witches, and witches are often described as being able to transform themselves or others into animals. The witches' own mannerisms can be described as animalistic.⁹⁸ This emphasises the general perception of women as being associated with nature and 'transgressive behaviour', in contrast to men who are more closely associated with civilisation and culture.⁹⁹

This connection to nature is amplified in the descriptions of witches' behaviour in Roman literature as culturally repulsive, even bestial, violating the boundaries of normative sexual behaviour. This complements another Roman literary trope where witches are associated with the dysfunctions of the body. They are described as abnormally sexually driven and are sometimes able to make men impotent. As a result, female witches are frequently characterised as the active sexual partners: a subversion of normative Roman gender roles.¹⁰⁰

A divergence between Greek and Roman descriptions of witches is that Greek descriptions of witches are usually more complimentary than Roman ones. Greek witches, Circe

⁹⁷ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 41–42.

⁹⁸ Stratton 2014, 160–161.

⁹⁹ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Stratton 2014, 160–161.

and Medea, are both described as physically beautiful and well-dressed.¹⁰¹ Conversely, Roman writers consistently describe Roman-originated witches as old, ugly, and repugnant.¹⁰² Greek witches' actions are also described as more benevolent than that of Roman ones, with Greek witches typically aiding their romantic interest. Circe, for example, eventually helps Odysseus on his journey home while Medea protects Jason until he betrays her for a Corinthian princess. On the other hand, Roman witches are seen as self-motivated and lacking any remorse or consideration for others.¹⁰³

The magical methods which Greek and Roman witches employ differ. Little detail is given about how Greek witches prepare their spells or potions, and there is no mention of incantations being used. Homer's Circe, and Pindar and Euripides's Medea are described as having already acquired a potion or making it but with no description of how. By the Hellenistic period, writers included greater detail regarding the methods of witches, including naming specific tools and chanting prayers to deities. However, these deities are all considered mainstream, such as Artemis, Aphrodite, Hecate, and the Moirai. Roman writers, on the other hand, especially when describing Roman witches performing magic, give hideous descriptions of their actions, including singing incantations to lesser-known underworld deities.¹⁰⁴ The greater detail of Roman witches' methods serves to emphasise how repulsive their actions are.

Greek and Roman witches are also distinguished by their abilities and the contexts in which they use them. Greek witches are able to 'turn humans into animals, prophesy, cure

¹⁰¹ Homer, *Odyssey* 10.136, 220–221, 310, 543–545; Theocritus, *Εἰδύλλια* 2.73–74, 110, 126; Apollonius, *Argonautica* 3.828–35; Stratton 2014, 160–161.

¹⁰² For example: Horace, *Epodes* 5. 15–16, 47–48, 98, *Satirae* 1.8.23; Stratton 2014, 160–161.

¹⁰³ Stratton 2014.

¹⁰⁴ For example: Horace, *Epodes* 5.51; Horace, *Satirae* 1.8.34–35; Stanley Spaeth 2014, 49–50.

childlessness, cast the evil eye, bewitch a lover, and poison an enemy'.¹⁰⁵ These witches are often described as using their powers in mythical contexts.¹⁰⁶ Circe is described as a goddess by Greek authors, and in certain accounts, Medea is a priestess of Hecate or even a goddess.¹⁰⁷ For this reason, some scholars such as Gordon have argued that magical literature only began during the Hellenistic period, and that any figures prior to this time should be referred to as 'pre-magical'.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, Roman witches were not described as divine, but instead rooted in reality, suggesting that such figures could have existed within society and amplifying the fear they inspired. Generally, Roman witches have the same abilities of the more benevolent Greek witches, but other characteristics of Roman witches include their association with Thessaly, their abilities to constrain the gods, control the weather and the night and day, 'draw down of the moon', and their uses of necromancy and of poisonous plants and human bones for spells.¹⁰⁹ Gordon argues that Greek women possessed legitimate religious power, but not political power, and thus witches possessing divine powers did not seem as alarming. He states that this distinction is why Greek witches seem much less threatening. Roman women, in contrast, were not powerful in the religious sphere, and their possession of magic or 'illegitimate religious power' was both jarring and threatening.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 51.

¹⁰⁶ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Euripides, *Medea*; Apollonius, *Argonautica*; Stanley Spaeth 2014, 41–42.

¹⁰⁸ Gordon 1999, 180; J. Z. Smith 1978, 179.

¹⁰⁹ Ogden 2002, 125: These are some example passages which highlight these characteristics: for the connection to Thessaly, Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.413–587; ability to control the weather, Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* 28–29; the ability of drawing down the moon, Aristophanes, *Clouds* 746–757; evocation of the dead, Plutarch, *Moralia* 109b–d; references to Circe, Medea, and Hecate, Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 4.45–46, 48, 50–52, 54–56 and Lucian, *Philopseudes* 17, 22–24; use of plants and human bones, Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 3.15–25; ability to shape-shift, Pausanias, *Ἑλλάδος Περιήγησις* 6.6.7–11.

¹¹⁰ Gordon 1999, 178–180; Stanley Spaeth 2014, 53.

Overall, while there are clear differences between Greek-originated and Roman-originated witches, the traditional comparison of Greek witches with Roman witches fails to demonstrate the nuance of the evolution of the literary witch. Hellenistic writers such as Apollonius Rhodius and even later Roman writers would have also written about Greek witches and imposed contemporary values onto their descriptions by presenting witches as the anti-theses to the acceptable behaviour of women. These authors demonstrate a gradual evolution of how Greek witches were perceived from more to less complimentary. This evolution cannot be observed in Roman witches, as Roman witches emerged as the opposite to Roman values. Therefore, the distinction between Greek-originated and Roman-originated witches is not sufficient for the analysis of understanding the perceptions of witches and magic. Rather, the changes in the descriptions of witches into Roman times reflect the changing attitudes surrounding the behaviour of women and of magic. This once again supports the argument that the concept of magic solidified into the second century AD.

2.4.2 Circe, the Homeric 'witch'

Circe is widely cited as the first literary witch from antiquity.¹¹¹ Homer's description of Circe in the *Odyssey* is commonly accepted as the canonical version of events relating to her. She is first introduced when Odysseus and his men are stranded on the island of Aeaea that she inhabits. While Odysseus and his crew are stranded, she uses a potion to transform his men into pigs, but then reverts them back: 'The first is achieved by a drugged potion, wand, and command/spell. The second is achieved by ointment'.¹¹² Homer also describes Circe as having bewitched and tamed the lions and wolves surrounding her house.¹¹³ Additionally, she is able to make herself

¹¹¹ Ogden 2002, 94.

¹¹² Homer, *Odyssey* 10.229–243, 388–399; Ogden 2002, 98.

¹¹³ Homer, *Odyssey* 10.203–225.

invisible and to fly, practises necromancy and uses erotic magic: ‘Odysseus must make her swear not to make him “cowardly and unmanly” once he has taken his clothes off’.¹¹⁴

However, later accounts of Circe are more horrifying in description. Apollonius of Rhodes describes Aeaea as being filled with creatures that have been reconstituted from various body parts of different animals.¹¹⁵ Apollodorus, writing in the circa first century AD seems to have conflated these two elements by describing Circe as having transformed Odysseus’s men into pigs, lions, and wolves.¹¹⁶ Overall, there are fewer examples of Circe’s depictions in literature in comparison to Medea, but there are nevertheless several details which evoke a more repulsive image when she is represented in writing in later centuries. Despite the origins of Medea and Circe as ‘Greek witches’, they nevertheless follow the same pattern as other literary witches whose depictions become gradually more scathing.

2.4.3 Medea and female duality

The earliest reference to Medea is in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, although she is only mentioned briefly. The tragic play named after her by Euripides was written c. 431 BC and is considered one of the best-known sources describing her story. However, depictions of Medea continued to be written into the second century AD, and there is a clear evolution of her descriptions.¹¹⁷

Consistent elements in Medea’s descriptions include an emphasis on her connection with nature and knowledge of plants. Sophocles describes Medea as a *rhizotoma*, ‘root-cutter’, who has extensive knowledge in identifying and cutting plants, while also being described as howling like a wolf.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* 10.281–301, 325–35, 569–74; Ogden 2002, 99.

¹¹⁵ Apollonius, *Argonautica* 4.659–72; Ogden 2002, 98; *LIMC*, Circe, nos. 5–26.

¹¹⁶ Apollodorus, *Epitome* 7.14–18; Stanley Spaeth 2014, 42.

¹¹⁷ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 41–58; Ogden 2002, 78–93.

¹¹⁸ Sophocles, *Rhizotomoi* F534–6.

Later descriptions of Medea by Hellenistic and Roman writers not only describe her preparation of potions in greater and increasingly less-complimentary detail, but also have her using incantations. Hellenistic author Apollonius Rhodius describes Medea as using multiple potions and gives greater detail about their preparation, especially the plant ingredients of the *pharmakon* for Jason. During the preparation, she is also described as saying an incantation to Brimo, an epithet of Hecate. When she prepares another potion for Talos, she uses *aoidas* (incantations) to invoke Keres, the death-spirits, and the ‘evil eye’ *echthodoposin ommasi*.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Ovid describes her incantations to Night, Hecate, Earth, Moon, and Youth in order to create her *venenum*.¹²⁰ Ovid additionally describes Medea as able to control the weather and the elements, and to draw down the moon.¹²¹ Meanwhile, Seneca describes Medea as saying incantations to a wide range of minor deities during her preparation of poisoned gifts for the Corinthian princess, her romantic rival to Jason.¹²²

In these later depictions of Medea, namely those of Apollonius Rhodius, Ovid, and Seneca, there are several features which are commonly associated with the ‘Roman witch’, such as her salutations to minor or more obscure deities, references to Hecate, the malicious intent behind her actions, and more vivid description of her creation of potions.¹²³ Therefore, despite Medea’s origins as a Greek literary figure, her later descriptions, particularly in Latin literature, are overall much less flattering and more in keeping with descriptions of Roman, horrific witches.

¹¹⁹ Apollonius, *Argonautica* 3.844–868, 4.1631–77.

¹²⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.179–293.

¹²¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.199–209.

¹²² Seneca, *Medea* 675–843.

¹²³ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 42.

2.4.4 Erichtho and abjection

Erichtho is one of the best-known Roman-originated witches, and Lucan writes about her at length in *Pharsalia*. Besides her extremely uncomplimentary appearance, Lucan also describes her as using various human body parts for her spell-work and singing incantations to the Eumenides, Poenae, Chaos, Hades, Styx, Elysium, Persephone, Hecate, the Fates, and Charon.¹²⁴ Moreover, he seems to include several details from various *PGM* spells including the use of animal sounds when preparing a spell and threats to the Furies.¹²⁵

The repulsive nature of Erichtho as the archetypical Roman witch is emphasised by the number of Roman social boundaries which she crosses. Stratton has done an in-depth analysis of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, including the episode on Erichtho.¹²⁶ For her analysis, Stratton uses the psychological concept of 'abjection' as a way of describing the horror associated with Erichtho during the Roman period. This concept was formulated by Kristeva, a Bulgarian philosopher, who defines abjection as something that 'disturbs identity, system, order'.¹²⁷ Stratton thus extends Kristeva's concept in an attempt to explain Lucan's Erichtho: 'The social function of abjection, which defines communal boundaries by repelling unwanted behaviors and projecting them onto vilified others, illuminates what is at stake in many ancient depictions of magic, especially those that highlight socially transgressive behavior'.¹²⁸ Therefore, there are several forms of abjection that can be identified in Roman literature about witchcraft, and specifically about Erichtho: (1) the violation of the bodily boundary such as violating corpses, (2) the

¹²⁴ Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.538–549, 695–705.

¹²⁵ *PGM* XIII.139ff (animal sounds), II.50–55; IV 1035–1046 (Furies); Stratton 2014, 159. Horace, *Satirae* 1.8; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.30: There are several other examples of literary witches which similar to Erichtho, are described as violating corpses, in order to use body parts for spells. Other examples include the two witches in Horace's *Satirae* 1.8, and Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* where the witch Pamphile uses body parts from both the dead and the living.

¹²⁶ Stratton 2014, 152; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.538–546, 6.516–518, 6.518–520, 6.554–59.

¹²⁷ Kristeva 1993.

¹²⁸ Stratton 2014, 155.

crossover of the boundary of man and animal, and (3) the subversion of traditional Roman female gender roles whereby Erichtho murders and mutilates children for her spell-craft.¹²⁹

While there is a transformation in the descriptions of Circe and Medea, the Roman creation of Erichtho embodies and isolates Roman anti-social behaviours and equates them with magic.

2.4.5 Canidia, Pamphile and Roman sexuality

Like Erichtho, Canidia and Pamphile engage in a range of abject behaviours. Literary representations of Erichtho, Canidia, and Pamphile extend from the first century BC until the mid-first century AD and coincide with the social and political unrest from the late Republic to early Empire. During this period, women had greater economic and political power, although often ‘unofficial and highly contested’ and not usually in the religious sphere.¹³⁰ Examples of this include the wives of emperors and other female members of the Julio-Claudian family who were perceived as yielding greater, yet illegitimate political power, and thus were highly scrutinised.¹³¹ This also coincides with the Augustan Family Laws (2.3.5 above) which codified Roman gender, sexual, and marital ideals.¹³² Descriptions of Canidia and Pamphile clearly violate these laws, aligning their subversive behaviours with magic.

Canidia and other Roman witches are depicted as ‘old’ and ‘haggard’ and ultimately past their perceived sexual prime in Roman society. It was expected for Roman men to seek relations with younger women, thus making an older figure like Canidia who lusts after younger men, an inversion of traditional roles.¹³³ Moreover, Horace mocks and negatively portrays the features of the bodies of these aging women, once again intending to disgust the audience.¹³⁴ As Richlin

¹²⁹ Stratton 2014, 158.

¹³⁰ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 53; Gordon 1999, 178.

¹³¹ Juvenal, *Satirae* 6.115–32.

¹³² Stratton 2014, 164.

¹³³ Horace, *Epode* 5; Stratton 2014, 162.

¹³⁴ Horace, *Epode* 8, 12.

astutely states, ‘Old women themselves are repeatedly addressed as corpses; one woman is imagined as lusting in her grave. . . In fact old women evoke the most intense expressions of fear and disgust, along with a sense that they constitute a sort of uncanny other’.¹³⁵ Horace additionally characterises Canidia as of *masculae libidinis* (of masculine lust), identifying her as masculine for taking an active sexual role.¹³⁶

Pamphile, a married witch, is depicted as engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage, directly breaching the Augustan Family Law which criminalised adultery.¹³⁷ There are also several examples of alleged real-life accounts where contemporary authors describe the use of magic by women, in order to deceive their husbands and have extra-marital affairs. Propertius describes how a female lover relied on her ‘procuress, which she uses to deceive watchful husband’.¹³⁸ Additionally, Tibullus states that a man casts a spell that ‘will enable his lover to deceive her husband and commit adultery with [him]’.¹³⁹ Consequently, magic became associated with women’s infidelity, as reflected in the literary witch. By extension, contraception/abortion were also viewed as a method for committing adultery or engaging generally in sexual indecency, and thus violated the ideas concerning Roman women’s behaviour (section 5.5.1 below).¹⁴⁰ As a result, contraception and abortion were linked to magic, and this is demonstrated through the metaphorical depiction of abortion in descriptions of Roman witches: Lucan describes Erichtho as cutting a uterus from a woman’s womb to use as a sacrifice.¹⁴¹ While literary witches are not described as using contraception or abortifacients, there is

¹³⁵ Richlin 1984, 71.

¹³⁶ Horace, *Epodes* 5.41.

¹³⁷ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.5–11, 3.17–24.

¹³⁸ Propertius 4.5.5–18; Stratton 2014, 163–164.

¹³⁹ Tibullus 1.2.41–58; Stratton 2014, 163–164.

¹⁴⁰ Descriptions of women committing adultery: Tibullus 1.2.41–58; Propertius 4.5.5–18; discussions regarding ancient contraception: King 1998, 23, 105; Scarborough 1997; Stratton 2014, 163–164.

¹⁴¹ Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.558–559; Felton 2017, 190.

nevertheless a connection between these forms of birth control and erotic spells which witches are described as using to commit adultery. As these practices transgressed from Augustan Family Laws, they both represent subversive female behaviour and were associated with magic. Moreover, this presents an intersection between magic and medicine which will be further explored in Chapter 5 below.

Although not a reference to magic, Stanley Spaeth argues that the anxiety surrounding Roman women's newfound ambition was prevalent. She bases this on the accounts of several contemporary authors. In Juvenal's account from the c. second century AD, he criticises women from the period who went against their traditional gender roles and instead sought out political power and pursued their own sexual desires.¹⁴² Stanley Spaeth states:

This discourse, which dates back to the third century BCE, was tied to magic in the Augustan period, heightening the demonizing power of the representation of the 'wicked' independent and powerful woman. As we have seen, the witch represented the polar opposite of all that the 'proper' Roman matron was supposed to be: the witch was ugly, lustful, castrating, power-mad, and evil rather than beautiful, chaste, fertile, submissive, and good. The loathsome figure of the Roman witch therefore could serve to reassert traditional social mores through reaffirming by contrast the traditional roles held by women in Roman society.¹⁴³

Alongside these Augustan Family Laws, Roman women's sexual purity and chastity became symbolic with the *Pax Romana*.¹⁴⁴ Anything that conflicted with these values, represented a danger to Roman society. Hence, depictions of Canidia, Erichtho, and Pamphile were abject because of the real threat they posed to Roman society, and were thus 'cautionary tales' to further police Roman women's behaviour.

¹⁴² Juvenal, *Satirae* 6.115–32.

¹⁴³ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 54.

¹⁴⁴ Stratton 2014, 164.

2.4.6 Livy's account of the use of poison by patrician women

These next two sections discuss cases as recounted by Livy and Tacitus where a large number of patrician women were accused of poisoning patrician men and engaging in other subversive or illegal behaviours which were adjacent to magic, several of which were discussed in the survey of 'magical' legislation (section 2.3 above). Because both authors are the only surviving sources for both series of events, respectively, caution must be taken regarding the veracity of the following events. However, regardless of their historical accuracy, these semi-fictional accounts provide many of the same literary allegories as seen in the previous examples of literary witches for describing these patrician women and their actions. Therefore, it is not the reality of the accounts themselves, but how Livy and Tacitus choose to frame these stories and the women involved which reveal how magic was perceived in Roman times, and the common association between women, poison, and magic.

Livy gives the only account of what he claims to be the first trial of poisoning in Rome in 331 BC. In that same year, Livy states that a plague had ravaged Rome, and that many patrician men died as a result. However, a female slave was said to have approached the curule aedile, Quintus Fabius Maximus, that her mistress and many other patrician women were the ones responsible for the deaths of the men, and not the plague. Quintus Fabius Maximus brought the slave woman's accusations to the attention of the consuls and the Senate who also took an interest. The slave led them to two patrician women, Cornelia and Sergia, who insisted that the *medicamenta* in their possession were health tonics which they had procured and administered to their husbands to cure them from the plague. However, when challenged to consume the tonic themselves, the patrician women were reluctant. When the women finally conceded, they swallowed their tonics and died instantly. Subsequently, other friends and associates to Cornelia and Sergia fell under suspicion, leading to a total conviction of 170 Roman women from the

upper classes.¹⁴⁵ Despite the many women being found guilty of administering lethal substances, Livy never confirms if their intention was to kill the men, or if they had accidentally done so by naively concocting what they thought were health tonics.¹⁴⁶ Ultimately, modern scholars have stated that Livy's episode was meant to demonstrate the social tension that would ensue during times of crisis, such as a plague during the Roman Republic.

Livy refers to the poison administered by the patrician women as *venenum* or *medicamentum*, but does not use any other term to explicitly refer to magic. As seen, *venenum* is a word that can be used to refer to 'poison', 'medicine', or 'magical potion', and Livy thus perpetuates the ambiguity of this term in this episode. To add to the lack of clarity, Livy does not explain the intentions of the women, but simply ends the episode stating that the patrician women had suffered a collective fit of madness and killed the patrician men, which Golden characterises as the women 'perverting their natural instincts'.¹⁴⁷ As such, this 'perversion' of the traditional role of women adds to the social tension of this period. This characterisation is prevalent and more clearly illustrated in the following account of Tacitus, whereby he illustrates how Roman patrician women subvert their roles as good *matronae*, and are presented as masculine and power-hungry, similar to the descriptions of Roman literary witches (sections 2.4.4–2.4.5 above). This manifests itself in their use of poison to kill certain political rivals and sometimes their own husbands.

2.4.7 Tacitus's account of patrician women engaging in magical behaviour

Tacitus's *Annales* describe the trials against several noteworthy patrician Roman women, many of whom were accused of using poison, often with the intention of murdering someone of

¹⁴⁵ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 8.18.

¹⁴⁶ Golden 2005, 90.

¹⁴⁷ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 8.18; Golden 2005, 83.

political significance and taking part in other magical-associated activities. These charges were usually accompanied with accusations of sexual impropriety. It is believed that many of these accusations manifested from political intrigue, as closer investigation into these cases reveals the complicated network of rivalling families and factions where such accusations were weaponised as a way to eliminate political rivals.¹⁴⁸ However, female members of such families seem to have been targeted specifically for having committed these crimes, even if it was their male counterparts who possessed legitimate political status. Therefore, the significant aspect to this account is how Tacitus chooses to characterise the women whom he describes, where he draws on elements of the Roman literary witch. Regardless of their guilt or innocence, Tacitus chooses to draw parallels between most of these patrician women and literary witches, thus more closely associating them with being magic practitioners, and poison with magic.

Tacitus describes thirty-nine trials of patrician women in the first century AD where nine of these trials refer to crimes relating to magic. Unlike the accounts of Apuleius (Chapter 4 below) and Livy, these trials as described by Tacitus likely took place, thanks to other evidence which corroborate details of the lives of those involved. However, Tacitus's account of the alleged public opinion for and against certain women is presented, although it does not always align with the results of the trial. For example, while Tacitus describes the public's opinion of Aemilia Lepida as favourable, she is ultimately charged for her crimes, while Munatia Plancina, whom Tacitus describes as widely disliked, is acquitted.¹⁴⁹

The first case involves Plancina, a noblewoman and a close personal friend of Empress Livia. The charges against Plancina were to do with her and her husband, Piso's, alleged

¹⁴⁸ Janssen 2025, 86–89; Pollard 2014, 187–198.

¹⁴⁹ Pollard 2014, 186–187.

involvement in the death of Germanicus. Piso, specifically, was accused of using magic to curse Germanicus to death: this includes the use of ‘remains of human bodies, spells, curses, leaden tablets inscribed with Germanicus’s name, charred and blood-smeared ashes, and other magical instruments’.¹⁵⁰ However, it is Plancina’s friend, Martina, a Syrian peasant-woman who procured the necessary spells and tools for Piso and Plancina. Martina is referred to as *infamem veneficiis* (infamous for poisoning), thus had a particular expertise in poison. She was subsequently summoned to Rome as a witness, but died under mysterious circumstances in Brundisium before she could testify at the trial. She died from ingesting poison, but it is suspect if she had been the one to self-administer it, or if someone else had poisoned her, in order to silence her.¹⁵¹ Piso was ultimately found guilty of these crimes and begged for leniency for his children. He was said to have committed suicide, but Tacitus implies that because Plancina was the last to see her husband alive, she might have been involved in his death.¹⁵² Furthermore, it seems as though Plancina might have received an acquittal through her friendship with Livia.¹⁵³ By revealing such details, Tacitus implies that Plancina was the mastermind of the whole conspiracy as it was her friend, Martina, who supplied them with the magical knowledge and items.¹⁵⁴ When reviewing the *Senatus Consultum*, the case against Piso does not mention anything regarding the *artes magicae* or even Martina’s involvement. Pollard concludes that this might have been because the magical charges were against Plancina alone and not against Piso who was indicted on purely

¹⁵⁰ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.69: *humanorum corporum reliquae, carmina et devotiones et nomen Germanici plumbeis tabulis insculptum, semusti cineres ac tabo obliti aliaque malefica*; 3.10–18, 6.26.4. Also, Pollard 2014, end note 37: ‘Dio Cass. 57.18.9–10, attributes the murder plot to both Piso and Plancina, writing that bones of men (ὅστ’ ἀνθρώπων), lead curse tablets (ἐλασμοὶ μολίβδινοι ἄρας τίνας μετὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ) and poison (φαρμάκῳ) were used to kill Germanicus’.

¹⁵¹ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.74, 3.7; Pollard 2014, 187–188.

¹⁵² Tacitus, *Annales* 3.15–16; Pollard 2014, 188.

¹⁵³ Pollard 2014, 188.

¹⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.74; Pollard 2014, 188–189.

political-conspiracy-treason charges.¹⁵⁵ Tacitus also states that Plancina was known as an *interfectorix* (murderess, assassin) amongst the elite, and that when Germanicus died, despite claiming that both Piso and Plancina were responsible, Tacitus states that Germanicus had *muliebri fraude cecidisse* (perished by a woman's treachery).¹⁵⁶ Thirteen years later, and after the death of Livia, Plancina is tried once again for *petitaque criminibus haud ignotis* (pursued by charges well-known to the all) and is found guilty, resulting in her death by suicide.¹⁵⁷ Throughout his account, Tacitus frequently characterises Plancina as masculine and subverting normal behaviour for the respected Roman *matrona*, by being overly involved in her husband's political and military affairs.¹⁵⁸

Plancina was a woman of considerable power who threatened the position of Agrippina. Her husband, Piso, was governor of Syria, a highly-militarised province owing to its shared border with Parthia. For this reason, Piso, and by extension, Plancina, were responsible for ensuring diplomacy with the Parthian Empire or else defending the province. Tacitus further states that Plancina had also received gifts from Vonones, the Parthian ruler who was an ally to Rome, thus emphasising her own influence in the region.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, one of the senators defending Piso and likely Plancina, was a member of the Aemilii Lepidi—this individual would have been in the line of succession as the Emperor of Rome in the case of Tiberius's death. Overall, Piso and Plancina were a highly influential couple with connections to various other powerful individuals and families, and posed a threat to the imperial family.¹⁶⁰ As Piso, and

¹⁵⁵ Pollard 2014, 188–189.

¹⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.71, 3.17; Pollard 2014, 189.

¹⁵⁷ Tacitus, *Annales* 6.26.3; Pollard 2014, 189.

¹⁵⁸ For example: Tacitus, *Annales* 2.55: *nec Plancina se intra decora feminis tenebat* (Nor could Plancina contain herself within the limits of female decorum).

¹⁵⁹ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.58, 3.11; Pollard 2014, 191.

¹⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Annales* 3.11; Pollard 2014, 191.

allegedly Plancina, were seen as responsible for the death of Germanicus, there was likely an ongoing tension between Plancina and Agrippina, the widow to Germanicus.¹⁶¹ Tacitus additionally describes Agrippina as similarly over-involved in her husband's politics and even refers to her as *atrox* (heinous).¹⁶² Tacitus subsequently implies that the death of Germanicus abruptly ended Agrippina's once powerful position, and that later, when Tiberius denied her request for remarriage, he told her she was *non ideo laedi, quia non regnaret* (not a woman harmed, if she lacked a throne).¹⁶³ Therefore, despite the 'illegitimacy' of the political power of patrician women, several, such as Plancina and Agrippina, nevertheless held forms of political and social influence, thus straying from their traditional roles as submissive wives.

Tacitus includes another interesting detail concerning the accounts of magical practice by patrician women. Like Plancina and Martina, Tacitus claims that Agrippina Minor, the daughter of Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder, had a slave named Locusta whom she employed to poison her husband, Claudius (*nuper veneficii damnata et diu inter instrumenta regni habita* 'lately sentenced on a poisoning charge, and long retained as part of the stock-in-trade of absolutism').¹⁶⁴ Additionally, Pollard states, 'Locusta seems to be in the long-term service of Nero and his mother, as the poisoner of Claudius, his son Britannicus by Messalina, and supplier of the poison Nero intended to take while fleeing Rome in 68 CE'.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, Tacitus also includes the involvement of a foreign, lower-class associate who provided expertise on poison and magical activities to a patrician woman within this episode of political intrigue.

¹⁶¹ Pollard 2014, 191.

¹⁶² Tacitus, *Annales* 4.52; Kaplan 1979.

¹⁶³ Tacitus, *Annales* 4.52; Pollard 2014, 190–191.

¹⁶⁴ Tacitus, *Annales* 12.66, 13.15.

¹⁶⁵ Suetonius, *Nero* 47; Pollard 2014, 197.

Aemilia Lepida, another member of the Aemilii Lepidi, was tried in AD 20 for having used *venena* to attempt to kill her husband, Quirinius, a former governor of Syria. At this time, the marriage between them had been dissolved, and Quirinius had additionally accused her of ‘of feigning to be a mother (*defertur simulavisse partum*), adulteries (*adulteria*), poisoning (*venenum*), and inquiries made through the Chaldeans (*quaesitum per Chaldaeos*) with reference to the Caesarian house’.¹⁶⁶ Like Plancina, Aemilia Lepida also had highly influential connections which she summoned to her defence at her trial. She also came from a well-known family and referred to much of her ancestry throughout her defence in the trial, including to Pompey and Sulla, the latter of whom codified the *Lex Cornelia*, thus associating her plea of innocence with her ancestry. This seems to have persuaded the audience who began to show sympathy for her. She also reproached Quirinius for having rejected her, referring to her previous betrothal to Lucius Caesar, implying that she could have been Empress of Rome.¹⁶⁷ The family rivalry between the Aemili Lepidii and the Julio-Claudians is further supported by the accusation of her consulting the Chaldeans into the fate of the rivalling family.¹⁶⁸

In AD 23/4, a woman named Numantina was accused of using *carminibus et veneficiis* as described by Tacitus to drive her former husband, Plautius Silvanus insane. However, it is unclear what her intention was in doing so: if it was to drive him insane, or if she was attempting to re-enchant him back to her. Tacitus describes how Silvanus was a prominent praetor and had previously divorced Numantina and since remarried a woman named Apronia. It is said that he had killed Apronia by defenestration or by throwing her down the stairs. Apronia’s father had attested to the Emperor that upon confronting Silvanus, Silvanus appeared to be under a trance

¹⁶⁶ Tacitus, *Annales* 3.22; Pollard 2014, 191–192.

¹⁶⁷ Tacitus, *Annales* 3.22–23; Pollard 2014, 192.

¹⁶⁸ Pollard 2014, 192–193.

and did not even realise that he had killed his wife. When asked, Silvanus, apparently unaware of his own involvement, claimed that his wife had committed suicide. Upon investigation into their home, there were clear signs that Silvanus had in fact murdered his wife. The Emperor subsequently called upon the Senate to arrange for his trial, but Silvanus committed suicide before it could take place.¹⁶⁹ Numantina was ultimately acquitted of these charges, but if it is assumed that she was tried under the *Lex Cornelia*, then it is possible that she was acquitted because she was only indirectly involved in the death of Apronia.¹⁷⁰

To summarise some of the other cases involving patrician women and the use of *venenum*: in AD 26, Claudia Pulchra, the widow of Varus and cousin to Agrippina Maior, was tried for adultery and ‘for practices by poison and spell against the life of the sovereign (*veneficia in principem et devotiones obiectabat*)’.¹⁷¹ In AD 49, Tacitus states that Agrippina Minor conspired to have her rival, Lollia Paulina charged with ‘consorting with Chaldeans (*obiceret Chaldeos*) and questioning magi (*magos interrogatum*), as well as seeking information from the image of Clarian Apollo about Claudius’s marriage to Agrippina’. Agrippina and Lollia had been rivals for becoming Emperor Claudius’s next wife after his divorce from Messalina. Additionally, Lollia was the wealthy ex-wife of Caligula and posed a threat to the Julio-Claudian family.¹⁷² In AD 52, Vibia and her son Scribonius were tried for having consulted the Chaldeans into the death of Claudius. Her late husband, L. Arruntius Camillus Scribonianus had instigated a revolt amongst the Dalmatian legions which failed and resulted in his exile and suicide. The subsequent disgrace tarnished Vibia’s reputation and social position. Tacitus also suggests that

¹⁶⁹ Tacitus, *Annales* 4.22.

¹⁷⁰ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.44; Dickie 2003, 141.

¹⁷¹ Tacitus, *Annales* 4.52; Dio Cassius 59.19; Pollard 2014, 194–195.

¹⁷² Tacitus, *Annales* 12.22; Pollard 2014, 195.

Camillus died by *venenum*, but does not state by whom it was allegedly administered.¹⁷³ In AD 54, Agrippina Minor attempted to eliminate another rival, this time, Domitia Lepida, ‘the mother of Messalina (the late wife of Claudius) and sister-in-law of Agrippina by the latter’s earlier marriage to Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 32 CE) and sister-in-law of Claudia Pulchra (sister of her husband M. Valerius Messala Barbatus)’.¹⁷⁴ While Tacitus suggests that they were rivals over the influence they exerted over Nero, Suetonius claims that Domitia was also having an affair with her own brother. Ultimately, she was found guilty of using *devotiones* against Agrippina and for failing to keep her slaves in Calabria under control, and was sentenced to death.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, Nero is said to have instigated charges against Junia Lepida in AD 65 as a way of impeding his rival, M. Junius Silanus. Junia Lepida was Junius’s daughter with Aemilia Lepida, the latter of whom was from the already discussed rivalling family to the Julio-Claudians. Tacitus implies that the charges against Junia, namely incest with her nephew and engaging in ‘magical ceremonies’ (*diros sacrorum ritus fignerent*) were fabricated by Nero.¹⁷⁶ The final case that Tacitus describes is the case against Marcia Servilia in AD 66. She was accused of paying lavishly for astrologers (*pecuniam magis dilargita esset*) on her father’s behalf, in order to perform *magicos sacros* to predict the future of her father who was being tried for *maiestas*, and the security of her family. Tacitus’s account of Servilia is meant to be a sympathetic one. She had become a widow at the age of twenty, and her father was old and suffering during his trial. While Tacitus describes her as having likely resorted to magical

¹⁷³ Tacitus, *Annales* 12.52–53; Pollard 2014, 195–196.

¹⁷⁴ Pollard 2014, 196.

¹⁷⁵ Tacitus, *Annales* 12.64–65; Suetonius, *Nero* 7.1 and 34.5; Pollard 2014, 196.

¹⁷⁶ Tacitus, *Annales* 16.8–9; Pollard 2014, 197.

activities, he nevertheless describes her as noble in having done so, in order to protect her father.¹⁷⁷

As can be seen, the complicated interrelationships and tensions between various individuals and families were likely the cause for such accusations and trials.¹⁷⁸ Some similarities of these accounts of these various cases of magic accusations include each of these women's involvement in various conspiracies against the emperor and imperial family, and their lack of acceptable behaviour fitting a Roman *matrona*. This could include sexual misconduct or their characterisation of being power hungry and in turn, masculine.¹⁷⁹ Many of these qualities reflect the stereotypes seen in accounts of literary witches. The association of accusations of magic and sexual impropriety in this account are also reflected in many literary stereotypes, such as those of Canidia and Erichtho (sections 2.4.4–5 above). Regardless of the veracity of these women's alleged magical practices, it is clear that accusations of magic were weaponised in a way that ongoing social tensions amongst patrician families resulted in the women of these families receiving particular scrutiny over their behaviour.

Overall, magic accusations, especially against women, were often manifestations of underlying social tensions including amongst competing families as seen in the cases of Tacitus. Women were often targeted by the accusations, or in some cases, such as with Agrippina Minor, women sometimes weaponised these magical accusations against other rivals. This is likely to do with the lack of legitimate power which patrician women possessed. Poison as a weapon, including in the form of love spells, was often associated with women as it was linked with their sexuality and domesticity. Additionally, as women did not often participate in war, they were not

¹⁷⁷ Tacitus, *Annales* 16.30–33; Pollard 2014, 197–198.

¹⁷⁸ Pollard 2014, 194.

¹⁷⁹ Pollard 2014, 198.

associated with committing violent murders, but the furtive nature of poison was both accessible to them and plausible to have been used by them.

2.4.7 Conclusion

To summarise, there is an evolution of descriptions of literary witches which reflect the changes in women's socio-political status into the second century AD in the Roman Empire. Anything that violated Roman promoted values including with regard to the conduct of Roman women, became perceived as magical. Overall, subversive gender and sexual behaviours were equated with magic by means of the literary witch, highlighting the correlation between femininity and magic (section 3.4 below).

2.5 Archaeological materials and approaches

There is a vast amount of material culture which has been associated with magic. However, unlike in the previous two surveys of legislation and literature, archaeological material presents unique challenges as such material was rarely accompanied by the practitioner's account.¹⁸⁰ Accompanying inscriptions usually express the desired outcome of the practitioner, but not their own perception or admission of their participating in a potentially subversive practice or 'magic'. For this reason, the context in which these artefacts were found can assist with their interpretation as magical: if an assemblage was found sealed and deposited in a hidden place like in the floor of a house or the bottom of the well, there is a strong indication that it was hidden on purpose, so as to not be disturbed or scrutinised. Some 'magical' material culture also had a medical or religious purpose, making it additionally problematic to definitively label an object as 'magical'. Moreover, there are several types, namely prayers for justice curse tablets and phallic amulets, which scholars have debated as being 'magical' or 'mundane'. This section explores

¹⁸⁰ Frankfurter 2021, 527 discusses the issue with referring to any material culture as 'magical'.

why some material was more ‘magical’ than others, and under which circumstances an object which had a mainstream use, gained a ‘magical’ use.

2.5.1 Defixiones

Curse tablets or *defixiones*/κατάδεσμοι are one of the most commonly associated ‘magical’ artefacts from the classical world: ‘Some 1,600, the majority in Greek, survive from all periods of antiquity from ca. 500 B.C. onward’ and have been found across the entire Greco-Roman world.¹⁸¹ Lead was the most common medium for *defixiones*. Aristotle and Pliny refer to the density of lead which they metaphorically equate with the anger of the gods against the victim.¹⁸² On rarer occasions, cinerary lamps and ‘binding dolls’/*kolossoi* were also used as media for curse tablets.¹⁸³ Many *defixiones* were found in ‘out of the way’ places, such as hidden in sanctuaries or deposited in bodies of water, likely to remain undiscovered and undisturbed and to permanently bind the target to the spell.¹⁸⁴

Certain spells also required additional ‘ingredients’ to be added to *defixiones*. The *PGM* refer to several symbolic ingredients for spells. Objects associated with Venus such as seashells are frequently mentioned in erotic spells. Items taken from the target could also be added into the *defixio* to strengthen the connection between the spell and the target.¹⁸⁵ However, some spells required abject ingredients, such as body parts of dead animals or people.¹⁸⁶ Types of spells inscribed on curse tablets include legal, competitive, erotic, and ‘prayers for justice’ or spells that cursed someone who had wronged the practitioner. As these spells were often used in a competitive context, to eliminate or impede a rival, many of the spells are ‘binding spells’ which

¹⁸¹ Ogden 2002, 210.

¹⁸² Aristotle in Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 11.114.275.

¹⁸³ Mastrocinque 2010, 88–89; Ogden 2002, 210, 245; McKie 2018, 120; Sánchez Natalías 2018, 12–13.

¹⁸⁴ Ogden 2002, 210; Sánchez Natalías 2018, 10.

¹⁸⁵ Sánchez Natalías 2018, 12–13; For example, *PGM* XII.376–377, VII.467.

¹⁸⁶ Stratton 2014, 168–169; For example, *PGM* IV.296–466.

‘bind’ the rival.¹⁸⁷ There are also stylistic differences throughout the centuries: ‘the earlier tablets tend to be concise. The later ones are usually more prolix and enhanced with various paraphernalia: *voces magicae*, vowel patterns, palindromes, appeals to protracted lists of syncretized gods or demons and images’.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, the oral portion of later *defixiones* or, *voces mysticae*, would not have been articulate speech, but rather a string of sounds, which Stratton describes as a ‘breakdown of civilized human communication’.¹⁸⁹ These ‘abject’ qualities of curse tablets were reflected in descriptions of literary witches who use body parts of animals and humans and make ‘inhuman’ noises (section 2.4 above). Additionally, the elaboration of these spells including the greater number of deities reflects the evolution of descriptions of literary witches.

Most scholars argue that the creators of erotic *defixiones* were predominantly male. Despite the similarities between spells and literary witches, Faraone estimates that up to 86% of erotic *defixiones*-authors were male. He bases his argument on love spells’ particularly violent and domineering construction which was more consistent with male authorship and male sexual dominance in Roman society.¹⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Graf suggests that many of these male practitioners might have been from lower classes, and seducing women of a higher social status might have helped their own status.¹⁹¹ Building on this, Stratton argues that there was a social inversion of how an individual from a lower class could use such spells to overpower someone of a higher social standing.¹⁹² Contrastingly, erotic love spells might have been used as an excuse by noble families whose female members engaged in relations with men from a lower class, in order for

¹⁸⁷ Ogden 2002, 210.

¹⁸⁸ Ogden 2002, 210.

¹⁸⁹ Stratton 2014, 168–169; For example, *PGM* IV.296–330.

¹⁹⁰ Faraone 1999, p.43, n. 9 in Stratton 2014, 167.

¹⁹¹ Graf 1997a, 186.

¹⁹² Stratton 2014, 168.

female members to avoid suspicion of breaking the Augustan Family Laws.¹⁹³ This last argument is supported by the ancient sources who criticise women during the Early Empire of pursuing extramarital relations, similar to descriptions of literary witches (section 2.4.5 above). There is nevertheless a divergence between fictional stereotypes of female magic practitioners and the likelihood that most erotic spell practitioners were male. Despite the discrepancy in fiction versus the reality of erotic spells, there was nevertheless a scrutiny of women in particular, either as the practitioners or the targets because of the anxiety surrounding Roman women's sexuality (section 3.3 below). This is also likely why authors such as Horace equated female literary witches who are sexually dominant as masculine (section 2.4.5 above).¹⁹⁴

A controversial category of *defixiones* is the 'prayers for justice' curse tablets, spells which call upon divine retribution for a crime, which several scholars have argued were not considered as 'magical'. These can include curses placed upon someone who had robbed the practitioner, and thus the spell had a target who was possibly unknown to the practitioner. Graf has studied several examples of funerary *defixiones* that call upon a deity to avenge the death of the individual who has had an untimely death, usually by a *veneficus* or *sicarius*. These types of funerary prayers started in the Hellenistic period, but grew in prominence in the first century AD. He argues that these spells are not entirely magical because they invoke the mainstream gods.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, Versnel argues that because justice spells often invoke the more mainstream gods, do not require a binding formula, and do not target a specific person, they should not be referred

¹⁹³ Graf 1997a, 186–187; Stratton 2014, 167–168.

¹⁹⁴ Horace, *Epodes* 5.51.

¹⁹⁵ Graf 2008.

to as exclusively ‘magical’ rather than ‘religious’. He thus states that this type of *defixio* is a prayer tablet, not unlike any other socially acceptable prayer or dedicatory inscription.¹⁹⁶

In contrast, in Bodard’s study on the grammatical constructions of κατάδεσμοι, he found that both Ancient Greek κατάδεσμοι and Roman *defixiones*’ inscriptions are usually written unconditionally, including justice spells. In contrast, curses that were displayed publicly such as on gravestones and at the entrances of temples often have conditional clauses. These publicly-displayed conditional curses condemn those who broke an oath or disturbed a grave and removed offerings. Hence, these curses functioned as a ‘preventative measure’. However, while the author of the justice curse tablet might not have known the identity of the person who had committed an injustice to them, they would nevertheless want to curse whomever it was specifically. For this reason, the spell would not have been written unconditionally, and the ‘preventative element’ would have been removed. Moreover, Bodard demonstrates that when curses appear in Greek tragedies, they also lack the conditional mood which usually leads to the wrong person being cursed.¹⁹⁷

Overall, several elements of *defixiones* are exhibited in descriptions of literary witches, linking *defixiones* with magic (section 2.4 above). As Roman descriptions of witches were intended to embody subversive behaviour, it is likely that the creation and use of *defixiones* would have also held such a stigma. There are valid arguments on either side of the debate regarding justice spells as magical, for justice spells contain fewer of these ‘abject’ elements. While this does not mean that they should not be regarded as magical, it is nevertheless

¹⁹⁶ Versnel 1997; 61, 92, 68: the example listed above is shown to have been rolled/folded up, while another justice tablet from the fourth century BC found at the Serapeum of Memphis had an additional curse to curse any individual who removed or disturbed the tablet; Ogden 2002, 219: An example includes a third century AD pewter tablet from Bath with a Latin spell, *Tabula Sulis* no. 62.

¹⁹⁷ Bodard 2004, 160–199.

remarkable that possessing certain subversive characteristics could have made a practice or object perceived as more or less magical.

2.5.2 Amulets

This category of material culture is one of the most diverse, as there are many different objects which could be categorised as amulets. Pliny's *Naturalis historia* defines the amulet as an object which can protect an individual from a whole range of maladies.¹⁹⁸ The Greek term for them is *periamma* or 'tied around', as many amulets were typically worn on the body.¹⁹⁹ Diodorus claims that amulets have a mythological origin with connections to Heracles, Hephaistos, and even *goeteia*.²⁰⁰ Despite these associations with the origin of amulets, it is difficult task to determine if all amulets were considered magical or subversive, or if certain types that were considered more magical than others and why. Additional distinctions of amulet types, be it the medium of the amulet or its purpose, further complicate the study of this category.

There is also an evolution in the prevalence of amulets recovered from different centuries. Faraone states that there were two main developments in the creation of amulets between Greek and Roman times: '(i) the rise of epigraphic habit of the eastern Roman Empire, which encouraged the inscription of incantations or prayers that had previously been recited over the stones; and (ii) the adaptation and miniaturisation of powerful images like Pantheos, the gigantomachy, or Mithras stabbing the bull'.²⁰¹ There is also an evolution in the style of apotropaic amulets. In the Roman period, apotropaic amulets were made for 'like to ban like' or what is referred to as 'sympathetic magic', by representing the thing that the practitioner would

¹⁹⁸ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 25.67, 29.19, 30.10.24, 37.8.37.

¹⁹⁹ Ogden 2002, 261.

²⁰⁰ Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 5.64; Ogden 2002, 25.

²⁰¹ Faraone 2018, 4.

like to avoid.²⁰² The use of incantations has been an ongoing theme through this chapter, and their greater prevalence in Roman times reflects the consolidation of practices such as the use of amulets and incantations with magic.

Scholars are divided about whether apotropaic amulets would have been considered as magical. Ogden definitively refers to all amulets as the most common magical items in antiquity.²⁰³ Faraone chooses to limit his labelling of amulets as ‘magical’ by the presence of ‘magical names’ or with ‘weird’ and ‘nonsense’ texts and names.²⁰⁴ Whitmore argues that amulets were not magical because ‘they worked publicly, not privately’.²⁰⁵ Some of the most common forms of Roman apotropaic amulets are phallic amulets which protect against the evil eye.²⁰⁶ The use of phallic symbols was particularly prevalent in Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic Egypt and were displayed quite prominently on reliefs and on lamps.²⁰⁷ Pliny the Elder refers to the god Fascinus, as the personification of the divine phallus who would protect children and generals.²⁰⁸ Letters to military men also suggest that horses were believed to be particularly vulnerable to curses and the evil eye, and phallic charms designed to be attached to horse bridles have been found.²⁰⁹ Whitmore concludes that the use of phallic symbols was purely apotropaic rather than ‘aggressive magic’, but she nevertheless considers this a unique form of ‘magical practice’.²¹⁰ Therefore, similar to the previous discussion surrounding ‘prayers for justice’ curse tablets, some amulets had more magical characteristics than others, thus associating some

²⁰² Faraone 2018, 238–241.

²⁰³ Ogden 2002, 25, 261.

²⁰⁴ Faraone 2018, 4–10.

²⁰⁵ Whitmore 2018, 17.

²⁰⁶ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 28.39; Varro, *Lingua Latina* 7.96–97.

²⁰⁷ Whitmore 2018, 24, 26; For example, the fresco of Priapus at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, from the Pompeii, Casa dei Vettii, Fresco, Imperial Roman IV Style.

²⁰⁸ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 28.39.

²⁰⁹ Whitmore 2018, 24.

²¹⁰ Whitmore 2018, 28.

amulets more closely with magic. However, magic and mundane amulets should not be seen as isolated categories, but rather a spectrum of qualities between the two.

Apotropaic amulets like phallic symbols were used in public contexts, thus suggesting that their use was less ‘subversive’. This would imply that they were less magical than other amulets, such as a *lamella*, a rolled up *defixio* which was worn as an amulet.²¹¹ Healing amulets could additionally be considered as apotropaic for their protection against disease. Medical authors such as Galen attest to their use, suggesting that healing amulets were used for medical reasons, and practitioners did not view their use as anti-social behaviour.²¹² Additionally, there was another category of amulets in the form of gemstones which were often used for medical purposes. This category and its association with both medicine and magic is further investigated in section 5.8.1 below. However, many amulets possess various characteristics associated with magic, such as *voces magicae* and the requirement of activation by use of incantations, as reflected in legislation and literature, particularly in the Roman period.²¹³ Some amulets could also be used for contraception which could be linked with magic (sections 2.4.6 above, 5.5.1 below).²¹⁴ Faraone’s remarks about the evolution in prevalence of amulet types is noteworthy as it is in keeping with the recurring theme of magic becoming a more concrete concept into the second century AD. Therefore, while most amulets have magical characteristics, not all amulets, such as healing amulets of phallic symbols, would have been widely perceived as magical by either the user or even the rest of Roman society. However, it is nevertheless possible that other characteristics beyond the subversion of an item could associate it with magic.

²¹¹ Kotansky 1994, xv–xvi.

²¹² Galen, *On the Mixtures and Powers of Simple Drugs* 9.2.19 Kühn 207.

²¹³ Sagiv 2018, 45.

²¹⁴ King 1998, 133; *PGM* XXII.a.11–14; Scarborough 1997: 158–9

While Chapter 5 below discusses the magico-medical uses of gemstones in greater detail, it should be noted that certain types of gemstones, such as amber were likely sought out for their perceived exoticness, and thus prestige and possible power associated.²¹⁵ Amber was only available in the Roman Empire through long-distance trade linking its primary source to the Baltic coast. Because of the difficulty in acquiring amber, it was expensive to purchase.²¹⁶ Pliny states that amber figurines could be even more expensive than the purchase of several slaves.²¹⁷ Meanwhile, Diodorus Siculus states that amber was usually associated with death and the mourning of children which has been further corroborated in the archaeological record where amber has often been found in the burials of children and of women.²¹⁸ The prestige of amber because of its foreign origin gave it a more ritualistically powerful association. While this cannot be directly linked to magic, it is nevertheless similar to literary witches' use of exotic ingredients (section 2.4 above).

2.5.3 Archaeobotany, *pharmaka*, and *rhizotomai*

Plants had many medical uses, particularly in the creation of *pharmaka*. As previously discussed, the term *pharmaka* can refer to 'magical potion', 'poison', or 'medicine', depending on its context. While some of the distinctions of *pharmaka* in legal cases have been outlined (section 2.3 above), it is also important to study the term from the medical perspective (section 5.1.4 below).²¹⁹

Archaeobotanical remains are variably preserved in archaeological contexts, making it very difficult to determine their presence. One particular type of archaeobotanical material which has

²¹⁵ Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 5.23; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.11–12; Davis 2018.

²¹⁶ Davis 2018.

²¹⁷ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.11–12.

²¹⁸ Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 5.23; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.11–12; Davis 2018.

²¹⁹ Scarborough 1997, 140.

been found in multiple contexts is pine, thanks to the durability of its seeds and conifers.²²⁰ Thus, pine can be used a model to study the use of plants in ritualistic and magical contexts. Pinecones and other parts of the pine appear in a number of religious contexts.²²¹ Examples where pine was found include in Bulgaria, in funerary contexts, particularly of Thracian noblemen, from the third century BC to the beginning of the Early Byzantine period; at the Sanctuary of Asclepius in Messene from the first century BC; and at a temple complex dedicated to Isis and Magna Mater in Mainz from the first half of the first century-/fourth-century AD.²²² A Roman shipwreck near Toulon, France, was also found to have been transporting a large quantity of pinecones, suggesting that the pinecones were imported, likely for ritualistic purposes.²²³ However, pine is also found prevalently in the archaeological assemblage in the Fountain of Anna Perenna. The fountain was dedicated to the cult of Anna Perenna and is located in the present-day Piazza Euclide and was used as a place of worship during the fourth century BC–sixth century AD.²²⁴ Piranomonte has argued that this location is one of the densest concentrations of ‘magical’ items in one area, owing to the seventy-four cinerary lamps, three of which were turned into *defixiones*, a *caccabus*, and several binding dolls.²²⁵ There were also seven pinecones which were found to have been placed in the fountain. Upon greater investigation into the surrounding wooden fragments, the trees growing nearby were holly, oaks, ash, helms, hornbeams, linden, chestnut, and possibly wild apple trees. Therefore, it is improbable that pine trees grew nearby the fountain and the pinecones were brought imported in and deposited into the fountain purposefully.²²⁶ Similar to other materials,

²²⁰ Mégaloudi 2005, 330–332.

²²¹ Mégaloudi 2005; Popova and Hristova 2018; Zach 2002; Piranomonte 2015.

²²² Popova and Hristova 2018, 988–990; Mégaloudi 2005, 329–332.

²²³ Zach 2002, 101–104.

²²⁴ Piranomonte 2015, 73.

²²⁵ Piranomonte 2015, 71–82.

²²⁶ Piranomonte 2015, 75–81.

such as amber (3.2), pinecones were sought after because of their ‘exoticness’. Although pine had many mainstream religious uses, its perceived power made it useful in all ritualistic contexts, including magical ones.

As in the case of the ‘witch’, medical practitioners were referred to by a number of terms beyond the *medicus* or *iatros*. Some of the terms which referred to medical practitioners and healers in Latin, although often borrowed from Greek, include *plus scia* or ‘wise-man or wise-woman’, *rhizotomoi/ai* or ‘root-cutters’, *pharmakopolai*, *pigmentarii*, and *goes/γόνης* and *magus*.²²⁷ This list includes the *rhizotomoi*, *goes*, and *magus* which are the male equivalents to some of the terms given to the literary witch (section 2.4 above), thus linking the knowledge of plants and medicine with magic. The *rhizotomoi* referred to the cutting of roots, as these figures were considered experts in the use of plants (section 5.1.4 below). Several texts give detailed descriptions about how these individuals also knew how to best prepare plants, so as to protect themselves from whatever adverse effects the plant might have.²²⁸ Root cutters and *plus scia*, were described in literature as acting for good and for evil, since the plants they used could be both beneficial or poisonous.²²⁹

Earlier understandings of the use of plants in the creation of *pharmaka* was mainly the domain of the *rhizotomoi*, although later centuries saw the ‘intellectualisation’ of the study of *pharmaka*.²³⁰ This discussion surrounding the intersection of magic and medicine within the concept of *pharmaka* is further investigated in section 5.1.4 below. Distinctions between

²²⁷ Horace, *Satirae*, 1.9.30–32: describes a Sabine woman who is particularly adept with *venena*; Gordon 1999, 182: Gordon argues that a good example of the *plus scia* from Roman literature is the ‘Egyptian woman’ in Achilles Tatius’s *Leucippe and Clitophon* from the late second century AD who provides Leucippe with two charms against wasp and bee stings.

²²⁸ Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum* 9; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 24–27; Gordon 1999, 183; Scarborough 1997, 138.

²²⁹ Horace, *Satirae* 1.9.30–32; Dioscorides, *De materia medica* preface 6–9.; Gordon 1999, 182–184.

²³⁰ Scarborough 1997, 138.

medicine and poison became even more ambiguous, as medicine could easily act as a poison if administered incorrectly.²³¹ This convergence of ‘magical’ and ‘rational’ explanations of *pharmaka* also demonstrates the lack of distinction between magic and science based on Frazer’s trichotomy (section 2.2.2 above).

Overall, there is a convergence between magic and medicine owing to the number of shared practices, including *pharmaka*. However, nuances within these practices associated them more closely with either magic or medicine within certain contexts. Examples of these nuances are shown in the legal implications surrounding a practice such as the use of contraception and abortifacients (section 2.4.6 above). Case studies examining the distinction between magic and medicine are further investigated in ‘Magico-medical crossovers’ (Chapter 5 below), in order to build a foundation to analyse the case studies during the Antonine Plague (Chapter 6 below).

2.5.4 Conclusion

Archaeological material represents the perspectives of other Romans, beyond the educated elite who are often represented in the textual record. Thus, material culture helps to diversify the number of perspectives of magic. However, as much archaeological material did not have an accompanying account from the practitioner, this material often requires interpretation from the modern-day scholar’s perspective. Some interpretations of this material can include that when an object which was in direct violation of the law was used, such as contraceptive amulets and erotic spells, I suggest that the practitioner was knowingly engaging in anti-social behaviour, and by extension, magic.

In contrast, there is much material culture which has elements that were commonly associated with magic, although not directly in violation of the law. The motivations of the

²³¹ Jones-Lewis 2016b, 403.

practitioners who used these types of material culture must be judged on the context in which the material was found. *Defixiones* which were commonly deposited in ‘out of the way’ places were done so likely because the practitioner wanted to avoid scrutiny (section 3.1 below) or keep their spells as purely private (section 3.4). This would imply a certain self-awareness of the practitioner of partaking in socially-unacceptable behaviour, and to a degree with magic.

Alternatively, regardless of their own perception of their use of magic, they might have done so to avoid the scrutiny of others. However, there are types of material culture which I would argue were not perceived as magical by either the practitioner or non-practitioner, such as the use of phallic amulets. Their prevalence, public display, lack of legal sanctions against them, and lack of criticism against them from ancient sources suggest that these practices were considered quite mundane, and thus, not as magical. In summary, in the case of most items, the object itself which was not intrinsically magical, but the method for which it was used and the social position of the practitioner would also factor into its association with magic.

2.6 Chapter conclusion

The concept of ancient magic is multifaceted and therefore challenging to define. This is reflected in the vast array of magical scholarship across the fields of legislation, literature, and archaeology. Furthermore, the concept of magic can differ between the practitioner and non-practitioner perspectives, and the motivations for labelling a practice as ‘magical’ can include political persecution, entrepreneurial promotion, or the ‘Other-ing’ of another group. Hence, I propose a novel framework to further grasp how the concept of magic was negotiated in Roman society c. second century AD, without the aim of reaching a universal definition of magic.

There is no single approach that sufficiently encapsulates why a practice or material was associated with magic. For example, while scholarship considers the Roman witch or magical

practice to be subversive or anti-Roman, if using this definition alone then *rhizotomoi* would not be considered magical by other ancient sources, such as Dioscorides (section 5.1.4 below). Many scholars have also labelled magic as ‘bad religion’. However, not all subversive or ‘bad’ behaviour (section 3.1 below), such as murder by a *sicarius*, and not all supernatural practices (Characteristic 6, section 3.6 below), such as mainstream religious worship, would have been associated with magic. Therefore, Roman magical material usually possesses an intersection of multiple characteristics. While women’s subversive behaviour has thus far been linked with magic, the case study on the Cult of Bona Dea (section 6.5 below) highlights an example of women practising magic-associated rituals in a legally and socially acceptable manner. Overall, the characteristics of Roman magic extended beyond magic simply being subversive.

3. A novel framework to study ancient magic

This chapter explains a methodology consisting of seven characteristics to investigate ancient magic. These characteristics are built upon existing scholarship which is described in detail in Chapter 2. The following characteristics are not intended to be used as a diagnostic test to determine what was magical in Roman times. Instead, they provide an alternative framework to complement existing scholarship and better explore under what circumstances practices became associated with magic. This chapter also examines potential intersections of these characteristics. As previously stated in the conclusion of Chapter 2, although a practice might have adhered to at least one of these characteristics, it was not automatically associated with magic. Therefore, magical practices and materials typically observe multiple characteristics. In other words, these characteristics can be seen as necessary conditions for Roman magic, but not sufficient individually. A ‘magical’ practice could adhere to any number of these characteristics, but it is important to note that the possession of a given characteristic was often subjective. This could depend on the intention behind the labeling of ‘magic’, whether it might derive from legal accusations or from self-promotion. These characteristics will then be used to provide a holistic analysis of case studies in Chapters 4–6.

3.1 Characteristic 1: Subversive behaviour, or legal and social acceptability

Much of the material investigated in Chapter 2 was equated to magic because of its subversive nature, relating to its lack of legal and social acceptability under given circumstances. Beyond participating in illegal or socially subversive behaviour, this can refer to practitioners deliberately challenging social norms.

Previous scholarship

As this characteristic has been discussed in-depth (section 2.2.3 above), it is clearly a prevalent aspect of Roman magic. Bremmer, Eidinow, and Gordon state that magic was a label given to

behaviours that were subversive to Roman society. They argue that the evolution of magic and consolidation with several practices could be observed by viewing it in relation to changing socio-political circumstances. These circumstances can include times of instability, changing political administrations, transforming religious beliefs, amendments of laws, and newly promoted values.²³² As these factors changed, so did the conception of magic. Examples which illustrate some of these changes from Chapter 2 include the subsequent perceptions by ancient authors of practices like *malum carmen* and *venenum* when codified in legislation (sections 2.3.1, 2.3.4 above); the evolving and increasingly disparaging depictions of literary witches (section 2.4 above); and the changes in amulet types (section 2.5.2 above). Furthermore, while there was a synthesis of the Roman identity, particularly during the *Pax Romana*, magic emerged as the antithesis of Roman ideals.²³³

Evidence

From Roman legislation, there are a number of practices, such as the use of incantations and *veneficium*, that would become associated with magic, especially when the legislation is described through subsequent authors' interpretations (sections 2.3.1, 2.3.4 above). However, because these practices were made illegal even prior to being associated with the more conceptualised idea of magic, they already had a negative and subversive association. Regarding literary figures, specifically Roman witches, there is a full list of descriptions of the witches' appearances, actions, and urges which would have been considered as legally and socially deviant in Roman society, especially for women (sections 2.4 above, 3.3 below).²³⁴ With regard to material culture, the privacy required to undertake magical rituals was potentially owing in

²³² Gordon in Bremmer 2002b, 78; Eidinow 2017a, 2017c, 2019a, 2019b.

²³³ Bremmer 2002b, 78; Gordon 1999, 162, 176, 233–266; Ogden 2002, 210.

²³⁴ Stratton 2014, 152, 163–164; Kristeva 1993; some examples of ancient passages which illustrate this: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.5–11, 3.17–24; Tibullus 1.2.41–58; Propertius 4.5.5–18.

part to the social unacceptability of the ritual (sections 2.5 above, 3.4 below). Moreover, some spells from the *PGM* call for ‘abject’ ingredients, such as body parts of exotic animals and materials found near graveyards or battlefields. By extension, desecrating a cemetery for materials would not have been considered a socially acceptable behaviour, nor a legal one.²³⁵ Overall, there are examples throughout Chapter 2 which demonstrate the association of legally and socially unacceptable behaviour with magic.

Significance

As the collective society determines what is socially subversive, this characteristic aligns with Durkheim’s ‘collective effervescence’ (section 2.2.1 above), whereby a magical practice derived meaning from the subversive values of a society. However, many of the concepts associated with magic such as incantations, *pharmaka*, *defixiones*, and amulets had forms that were considered more ‘mundane’ or mainstream than subversive or magical. This poses the question as to how, why, and under what circumstances a practice was considered subversive. Circumstances could include the intention behind a practice, like the use of incantations to commit crimes, such as ‘to steal another’s crops away’ (section 2.3.1 above), or the use of a contraceptive amulet (section 2.4.6 above, 3.3 below). Moreover, upon having culturally abject features, a practice or an object could also become subversive. This could include the possession of exotic features (section 3.2 below), the ‘unnaturally’ manipulative intention behind a practice (section 3.5), or a particular or abnormal relationship with the supernatural (section 3.6).

With regard to the non-practitioner perspectives of this characteristic, depending on the legal status of the practice, a practitioner could be consciously engaging in subversive behaviour or at least avoiding the scrutiny of non-practitioners/collective society (section 2.5.4 above). With

²³⁵ Stratton 2014, 168–169; for example, *PGM* IV.296–466; Ogden 2002, 98.

regard to the social unacceptability of a practice, this could vary from both the practitioner and non-practitioner perspectives, as the intention behind a magical practice or the labelling of something as magical could be for a number of reasons, including aspersion, self-promotion, or perceptions by different social classes.

While some instances of magic might have had a subversive element, using this characteristic alone fails to encompass all the material associated with magic. This thesis has focused thus far on Romano-centric perspectives of magic. However, in Roman provinces like Egypt who had their own long-established tradition of magic, magic was not considered a subversive practice.²³⁶ Upon the annexation of Egypt, there was likely a ‘blending’ of these perspectives.

3.2 Characteristic 2: Exoticism and foreignness

Exoticism is another element consistently observed in Roman magical material. This characteristic can intersect with Characteristic 1, as ‘exoticism’ or ‘foreignness’ can be seen as the opposite of ‘Roman’. Alternatively, exoticism can also add to the prestige or perceived power of a practice or item.

Previous scholarship

Several scholars have included this characteristic in their own definitions of magic or have alluded to it in their works. This is the equivalent to Wilburn’s second criterion of his definition of magic: ‘Magic may draw on religious traditions for both efficacy and exoticism’.²³⁷ Eidinow similarly alludes to this when she states that the *agurtes* would market their services as ‘novel’, potentially incorporating rituals from outside of Roman society or promoting them as so (section

²³⁶ Bremmer 2002b, 78; 2015, 254.

²³⁷ Wilburn 2019, 15.

2.2.3 above).²³⁸ As a result, the fetishisation of non-Roman rituals and items could be over-exaggerated as a way of marketing their efficacy.

The origin of the concept of ancient magic referred to non-Greco-Roman practices. In its etymology, the term *magus/magos* and its derivatives like *magica* and *magia*, the most closely translatable words to ‘magic’, originally referred to a Persian priest-caste.²³⁹ The term *magos* and its cognates first appear in Ancient Greek works such as *Oedipus Rex*, Aeschylus’s *Persians*, Euripides’s *Suppliants*, and Euripides’s *Iphigenia*. Because of its early prominence in these tragedies, Bremmer goes as far as to state that the concept of magic arose from Greek tragedy.²⁴⁰ He states,

The term ‘magic’ is commonly used to designate a whole range of religious beliefs and ritual practices, whereby man seeks to gain control over his fate and fortune by supernatural means... Beliefs and practices cherished and commonly accepted in one cultural or religious context are liable to incur derision and condemnation with a modification of the context or a change of culture... Stemming from an earlier, alien or indigenous culture, elements of magic were reinterpreted, rivalled, absorbed, usurped and condemned to fit new contexts and new religious settings.²⁴¹

Within these works, it is clear that the term *magos* had negative connotations attached based on the figure in question, but it did not necessarily have the same subversive or illegal quality that magic in Rome possessed.²⁴²

Furthermore, Wendt argues that beginning in the first century AD, as the Empire expanded and trade amongst provinces and with other lands increased, non-Roman customs and rites were introduced, and itinerant-specialists adopted aspects of them, in order to further develop and market their skills. Pre-Ptolemaic and traditional Egyptian religion was a prevalent

²³⁸ Eidinow 2017b, 269.

²³⁹ Stanley Spaeth 2014, 41–42; Bremmer 2002a, ix, 2–4; 2015, 247–249.

²⁴⁰ Bremmer 2002a, 2–4.

²⁴¹ Bremmer 2002a, ix.

²⁴² Bremmer 2002a, ix, 2–4.

example of inspiration for ritual practice in Rome, resulting in Egyptianised representations throughout Italy and within the city of Rome. However, these Egyptianised rituals were often reimagined versions of Egyptian practices for a Roman context, rather than an accurate reflection of contemporary practices in Egypt.²⁴³ Therefore, practices were sometimes marketed as being more exotic or foreign than they were in reality, or a foreign custom was reinvented for Roman audiences.

Finally, Otto describes magic as a category which manifests as a result of the discourse of exclusion and inclusion. He explains this as a way of describing which groups and practices were ‘in’ or ‘out’ at a current point in time within a dominant society.²⁴⁴ His explanation can also be applied to this characteristic as groups or practices who were considered as ‘out’ groups were more likely to be linked to magic. Often, such ‘out’ groups were determined as such as a result of their ‘non-Romanness’ or ‘Otherness’.

As the concept of magic evolved into the second century AD, magic became increasingly associated with subversion, despite its earlier associations with this characteristic alone.²⁴⁵ However, the implications of the exoticism of a magical practice could vary between efficacious or marginal.

Evidence

There are examples throughout Chapter 2 that highlight exoticism and foreignness. Certain non-Roman groups were occasionally targeted and expelled for their unique practices (sections 2.3.2–2.3.3 above). Roman xenophobic attitudes towards foreigners would often result in such

²⁴³ Wendt 2016, 12–13, 77–78.

²⁴⁴ Otto 2013, 325–327.

²⁴⁵ Bremmer 2002a.

groups being marginalised within Roman society, with their cultural practices being considered as socially and even legally unacceptable (section 3.1 above).²⁴⁶

In literature, there are many associations made between magic and witchcraft and ‘foreignness’ (section 2.4 above). Some examples include witches’ living outside of civilization, their use of exotic ingredients, and their origin or connection to Thessaly.²⁴⁷ Moreover, in Tacitus’s semi-fictional accounts (section 2.4.7 above), he states that some of the Roman elite women obtained poison or learned magical rites from an associate, usually a woman of foreign origin and from the lower class.²⁴⁸ Therefore, the emphasis of foreignness with the literary witch not only highlights the connection between exoticism and magic, but also the subversive nature of foreignness.

However, in the archaeological record, the exoticism of certain materials did not always possess such a negative or subversive nature. There is evidence that materials from foreign places were sought after and imported into the Empire for ritualistic purposes, such as amber and pine (sections 2.5.2.1, 2.5.3 above).²⁴⁹ While not all of these ritualistic contexts are associated with magic, there is nevertheless a correlation between the exoticism of a material and its perceived prestige and efficacy, and thus did not always possess the first characteristic (section 3.1 above). Several ancient authors, such as Galen and Dio Cassius recommend the consultation of non-Roman poison-specialists (sections 2.5.3 above, 5.1.4 below), demonstrating that certain foreign and magical-associated figures were not legally or socially unacceptable.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Janssen 2025, 61–63, 318.

²⁴⁷ Mili 2014, 259–262.

²⁴⁸ Pollard 2014; ex.: Tacitus, *Annales* 2.74, 3.7, 12.66.

²⁴⁹ For amber, see: Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.11–12; Davis 2018; and for pine, see: Zach 2002, 101–104; Popova and Hristova 2018, 988–990

²⁵⁰ See Footnote 317.

Overall, there are examples of magical material in Chapter 2 which possess exotic features, and by extension, were seen as abject and subversive within Roman society. However, the possession of exotic features did not automatically make a practice or item as subversive. To reiterate, there are examples of magical material which intersect with this characteristic, but do not fall under the first characteristic of subversive behaviour (section 3.1 above).

Significance

This characteristic relates to the perception of a practice or material's 'Otherness' within Roman society. From either the practitioner or the non-practitioner perspective, this 'Otherness' could be seen as a negative attribute, and thus subversive, but could instead give greater power and prestige to a practice or item.²⁵¹ In other words, Exoticism could be suspicion-arousing and power-accruing simultaneously, to different or even the same eyes. When this characteristic intersects with Characteristic 1, subversive behaviour, it can make practices more suspect without actually being illegal in their own right. Regardless of its adherence to section 3.1 above, there was often a collective belief or even 'participation' (section 2.2.1 above) amongst both practitioners and non-practitioners that materials labelled as 'exotic' yielded greater power, both to undertake rituals, or in terms of how dangerous or powerful they could be.

This characteristic like many others is often also a result of a feedback loop between perceptions of magic and magic's association to this characteristic. Certain practices and materials might have had a foreign origin, but were nevertheless widely used in Roman culture, or perhaps foreign elements were sometimes adopted into Roman practices. However, the

²⁵¹ Gordon 1999, 171: explains how 'foreign people' often serve as inspiration for ancient authors who write about magic, while in 236: explains how an 'Eastern' origin might also be associated with a certain level of knowledge or expertise.

‘Otherness’ of such material was sometimes emphasised as a way of elevating its prestige or power. Therefore, even the foreignness of certain practices and materials was often constructed.

This thesis limits its scope to the definition of magic from the general Roman perspective in the c. second century AD. As a result, the perception of the concept would be representative of the values and ideas based on a Roman hegemonic system. It has been argued that from the perspective of certain magic practitioners, particularly those from minority or marginalised groups within the Empire, that they did not view themselves as practising magic at all. For example, Bremmer states that several Christian practices were associated with magic prior to the Edict of Milan by Roman authorities. However, from the perspective of practising Christians, they would not have perceived their own practices as magical or subversive, despite their practices being in contention with Roman values.²⁵² Yet, because this thesis can only study ancient magic from the Roman perspective of magic, it can be said that even this example still represents a collective belief within Roman society amongst practitioners and non-practitioners, as Christians were still consciously engaging in a subversive activity as deemed so by the dominant culture. Therefore, unless one takes into account the perceptions from marginalised groups within the Roman Empire, there is a limit of diverging perspectives regarding the exoticism and related subversion of magic-associated practices.

In conclusion, there was a close relationship between the subversion of Roman values and exoticism, foreignness, and ‘Other-ing’, and by extension, with magic. In terms of subversive forms of exotic, magical material, such as in the case of the literary witch, this characteristic could intersect with ‘Femininity’ (section 3.4 below). In contrast, prestigious associations of

²⁵² Bremmer 2015, 264–270.

exoticism were linked with ‘Secret or arcane knowledge’, suggesting a hierarchical element to magic (section 3.7 below). Furthermore, exotic material could be perceived as possessing greater ritualistic power to obtain an objective (section 3.5 below), or to interact with the supernatural (section 3.6 below). Importantly, despite the close link between subversion and exoticism, not all forms of exoticism are associated with subversive behaviour and as such, this distinction expands the definition of magic beyond exclusively being subversive.

3.3 Characteristic 3: Femininity

There are many examples in Ancient Rome where magic was associated with the behaviour of Roman women, particularly elite women who were often scrutinised in the public eye. This is potentially a consequence of the Augustan Family Laws which were restrictive of the sexual and reproductive rights of Roman women. These restrictions combined with idealised qualities of the Roman *matrona* during the *Pax Romana* led to increasing anxiety and criticism of Roman women’s behaviours (section 2.3.5 above).²⁵³ Hence, this characteristic intersects with section 3.1 above as behaviours that were deemed legally and socially unacceptable for Roman women by law became increasingly associated with magic.

Previous scholarship

Magical material from up to and including the second century AD Roman society that was associated with women’s behaviours was also considered as subversive (section 3.1 above). However, prior to this period, there were examples of magic which were associated with femininity that were not legally or socially subversive. This can be observed in the pre-Roman descriptions of Circe and Medea (sections 2.4.2–2.4.3 above). While both of these figures are female magic practitioners, they did not possess as many subversive qualities. This is likely

²⁵³ Stratton 2014, 164.

because the concept magic in Ancient Greece was not as clearly conceptualised or considered as subversive as in the Roman period. Therefore, in section 2.4 above, it is not only possible to observe the evolution of the concept of magic, but also the increasing consolidation of magic with subversion and by extension, with the changing perception of women's behaviours.

Evidence

Literature (section 2.4 above) emphasises the prevalence of the magic-practising woman through descriptions of the literary witch, which further convey legally and socially unacceptable behaviours of women. Roman sexuality has been discussed previously in the analysis of Canidia (section 2.4.5 above), but it is nevertheless important to investigate other 'feminine' implications of Roman magic. A common feature of the literary witch, especially in Roman times, is their description as 'masculine', and for their effeminising effect on their male victims, or what Parker describes as *muliebria pati*, 'to have a woman's experience'.²⁵⁴ There is not only a feminine aspect of magic with regard to the prevalence of the female magic-practitioner in literature, but also a stereotype that their victims were emasculated. From the Roman perspective, emasculation represented a grave and general threat to society.²⁵⁵ As a result, particularly in the Roman era, this characteristic and subversion were strongly interconnected.

Beyond the phenomenon of the Roman literary witch, there are several other examples of this characteristic in Chapter 2. In the discussion surrounding the gender of the authorship of erotic curse tablets, men make up the larger proportion of the authorship, and female targets are described in a demeaning way by the author (section 2.5.1 above). Other archaeological material which demonstrates this characteristic includes contraceptive amulets and abortifacient potions. These examples were not only associated with magic, but also subversive behaviour (section

²⁵⁴ Juvenal, *Satirae* 6.115–32; for example, Horace, *Epodes* 5.41; Parker 1997.

²⁵⁵ Parker 1997.

2.4.6 above).²⁵⁶ There is also a disproportionate number of women accused of using *pharmaka* by ancient sources, such as in the accounts of Livy and Tacitus (sections 2.4.6–7 above).²⁵⁷

Significance

Roman women's behaviour that was associated with magic had an overlap with subversive, anti-social, and illegal behaviour (section 3.1 above). For example, Livy and Tacitus's accounts of mass poisonings by women (sections 2.4.6–7 above) perpetuate the interconnection of magic, women, and subversion. Similar to Characteristic 1, perspectives can vary depending on whether a magical practice was in direct violation of the law where the practitioner might have been consciously engaging in subversive behaviour, and how subversive a practice was perceived by other non-practitioners. There was an additional 'collective' belief about the acceptable behaviour of Roman women as reflected in literature, both pertaining to fictional/mythical and alleged real-life accounts. However, ancient perspectives might diverge amongst female and male perspectives, as the lived experiences of Roman women who had to adhere to such social expectations were different than those of their male counterparts. For this reason, there might have been specific motivations for women to participate in magic-associated behaviour, which could have been different from the perceptions of male-author perspectives, such as those of Livy and Tacitus.

It is nevertheless important to analyse accounts of Roman women's behaviour and their association with magic to capture instances where this association was not subversive, anti-social, or illegal. For example, the cult of Bona Dea (section 6.4 below) provides evidence of women engaging in magic-associated behaviour in a legally and socially acceptable manner.

²⁵⁶ Tibullus 1.2.41–58; Propertius 4.5.5–18; Stratton 2014, 163–164; King 1998, 23, 105; Scarborough 1997, 158–159; Felton 2017.

²⁵⁷ Tacitus, *Annales*; Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 8.18; Juvenal, *Satirae* 329–34, 558–605, 610–14.

3.4 Characteristic 4: Privateness

The following characteristic explores the ‘privateness’ of Roman magic. There are two different aspects of this characteristic, (1) magic taking place in a private context, or (2) the magic practitioner having a personal or individualistic intention. Scholars’ approaches are generally underpinned in one of these two aspects. Moreover, materials from Chapter 2 display either of these aspects or both.

Previous scholarship

Several scholars have referred to the ‘privateness’ of ancient magic, especially to distinguish it from religion. However, their descriptions of this characteristic vary. Wilburn in his third criterion for defining magic emphasises that magic would take place in a private setting, as opposed to a public one where religious rituals would take place.²⁵⁸ Johnston has studied the spatial relationship within ancient religion, particularly with regard to liminality and crossroads. She states that starting in the Archaic period, ancient Greeks became more concerned with delineating space whether it was within the physical city, religious areas’ boundaries, or even between the living and the dead. As a result, the development of the goddess Hecate as the guardian of the crossroads and the liminality between the living and the dead ensued. This would further develop into practices involving necromancy, and religious sanctions against trespassing into certain physical boundaries.²⁵⁹ Johnston states that the ‘magician’ often performed many of the same practices as mainstream priests, but would perform rituals in private areas rather than in temples. Hence, the magician’s power came from their own skill rather than tied to a particular place or temple.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Wilburn 2019, 15.

²⁵⁹ Johnston 1999, 88, 94, 97–99, 246–247.

²⁶⁰ Johnston 2008, 146–148.

In contrast, Versnel's characteristic for defining magic emphasises the practitioner's personal intent and goal.²⁶¹ This contrasts with the view that religion consisted of the worship of mainstream gods and goddesses which were given public celebrations and sacrifices with the hope of their bestowing more beneficial things for the greater society.²⁶² Similarly, Gordon states that magic is the umbrella term of 'religious practices related to individual crisis'.²⁶³ While Versnel and Gordon make some astute points, this does not eliminate individual Romans asking mainstream gods and goddesses for their own personal gain, as can be seen in various inscriptions of spells. Rüpke's work on the 'Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome' investigates the religious experience from the individual's perspective and practice. He claims that individuals in Roman society 'select' the practices and deities that they require not only for larger issues, such as salvation, but also for everyday life.²⁶⁴ Furthermore, he states that as a result, religion is 'as much a traditional system of symbols as it is a strategic option for an individual', thus there is an ongoing dynamism between overarching religion and the individual experience.²⁶⁵

Wendt has also argued for this second aspect of self-motivation and individuality as a prevalent characteristic of magic: she states that ritual specialists, even when described in positive terms (see for example Apollonius of Tyana in Chapter 5), by definition subvert community structures by acting independently or as 'freelance experts'.²⁶⁶ The individualistic nature of such figures in the form of personal ambition can be seen as an aspect of this

²⁶¹ Versnel 1991, 178–179.

²⁶² For examples of figures making offerings to less mainstream deities, see Horace, *Epodes* 5.51; *Satirae* 1.8.34–35; Eidinow 2019b, 80–84; Stanley Spaeth 2014, 51.

²⁶³ Pace Gordon in Waldner, Gordon, and Spickermann 2016, 7.

²⁶⁴ Rüpke 2016, 8–9.

²⁶⁵ Rüpke 2016, 24–25.

²⁶⁶ Wendt 2016, 34–35.

characteristic, as well as an intersection of Characteristic 1, subversion. In later case studies, particularly in Chapters 5 and 6, this can also be seen by how certain figures are self-authorising in their abilities rather than qualified through state-established institutions, such as the cult of Bona Dea (Chapter 6 below too).

In support of both aspects, the privacy required to undertake magical rituals and the individualistic intention behind magical practice, Otto has proposed a system of conceptualising magic and/or religious individualisation through the use of a ‘semantic matrix’. This includes a list of four different categories and sub-categories which he argues can map a practice as a form of religious individualisation. Amongst his categories, he includes ‘notions focusing on an enhanced range of individual options or choices’ and ‘notions focusing on self and creativity’. Within these categories, he describes the equivalent of both of these aspects of ‘privateness’: the practice of religion in private, and the focus of the self in terms of the individual’s creativity and goals.²⁶⁷ Although Otto argues that his matrix model has not yet been fully developed, it nevertheless reinforces that such aspects are recurring characteristics within religious individualisation and magic.²⁶⁸

Overall, the ‘privateness’ of Roman magic can relate to either how a magical practice took place in private, or if there was a private or individual intention behind a spell. Both of these aspects have additional implications about magic.

Evidence

Several tropes of literary witches emphasise ‘privateness’ from both aspects. The aspect of magic being practised privately is shown by witches residing in more remote locations, away from

²⁶⁷ Otto 2017, 33–35.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 37–40.

civilisation (section 2.4.1 above). By extension, Roman witches were also described as engaging in a series of abject behaviours, which by its definition would have separated the witch from the rest of society. The aspect of private or individualistic intent is emphasised in descriptions of Roman literary witches who are completely self-motivated (sections 2.4.4–2.4.5 above).²⁶⁹

As discussed in the characteristic on ‘femininity’ (section 3.3 above), women who engaged in behaviours that breached the Augustan Family Laws and went against Roman gender ideals would have likely been discreet with their actions. This poses a particular challenge when attempting to determine who was consciously engaging in magical behaviour, as they might not have self-identified as practising magic, should they fall under such scrutiny. By extension, this makes it more difficult to obtain the perspective of practitioners. Investigation into women’s use of contraception and abortifacients will provide greater information surrounding women’s own perspectives when engaging with such a subversive and magic-adjacent practice (section 5.5.1 below).

Some material culture also demonstrates one or both of these aspects of ‘privateness’. Curse tablets, including *lamellae*, were often rolled or folded up and deposited in out-of-the-way places (section 2.5.1 above). Not only are these curse tablets sealed and deposited in remote places to maintain privacy, but the spells themselves were for the practitioner’s individual purpose. This could be indicative of the subversive aspect of the curse or spell (section 3.1 above), or the individualistic nature of the curse tablet where the practitioner attempted to gain power over people, places, and circumstances by means of the spell (section 3.5 below). Regarding the distinction of justice spells as ‘magical’ or ‘mainstream/religious’ (section 2.5.1

²⁶⁹ Stratton 2014.

above), when these spells were sealed and deposited like other curse tablets, despite their evocation of the mainstream gods, they display both aspects of ‘privateness’, and thus arguably are not completely void of magical characteristics.²⁷⁰

While ‘privateness’ cannot be observed as explicitly in legislation (section 2.3 above), the laws outlined in the section generally refer to the banning of practices which would have been undertaken in secret and for one’s own purpose. Some of these laws, namely the Twelve Tables (section 2.3.1 above) and the *Lex Cornelia* (section 2.3.4 above), banned acts undertaken by an individual to harm another. The Augustan family laws (section 2.3.5 above) arguably impeded Roman women from pursuing their individual desires which was seen as a threat to Roman society. In other words, magical legislation forbade the individual from committing certain acts for their own objectives.

Significance

Each of these two aspects of ‘privateness’ have their own implications of Roman magic and intersections with the other characteristics. With regard to the first aspect, there was likely a cause-and-effect reciprocal relationship: if magic had to be undertaken in private by the practitioner, it might have been because the practice had subversive elements (section 3.1 above). However, the privateness of magical practice could also lead to accruing further suspicion from other non-practitioners. Furthermore, this aspect also reflects 3.1, as the magic practitioner corrupts several social boundaries, including the practise of rituals outside of a designated sacred area and their summoning of the dead from the underworld.²⁷¹ This will be further explored in case studies of groups of people who engage in magical-related activities together (Chapter 6).

²⁷⁰ Ogden 2002, 219.

²⁷¹ Johnston 2008, 146–148.

Based on the legal and social acceptability of these groups, it may be possible to evaluate how much privacy these groups had to maintain with regard to location. Moreover, as Johnston states, the ability for the magic practitioner to undertake a ritual in a non-religious location suggests that practitioners relied on their own skills rather than a particular location.²⁷² This implies a possible intersection between this characteristic and (section 3.7 below) ‘Secret or arcane knowledge’.

Despite scholars’ arguments that magic can be differentiated from religion through the second aspect of this characteristic, private intention, I would argue that this is not consistent. There are many examples of mainstream, religious prayers for an individual’s personal intention. However, the manner by which a practitioner would take to achieve a personal goal might help to distinguish magic from religion. This can be with regard to which deities the practitioner chooses to invoke (3.6 ‘Supernatural association’) or the relationship between the practitioner with the divine (3.5 ‘Manipulative in nature’).

3.5 Characteristic 5: Manipulative in nature

All forms of Roman magic are undertaken with the intent of wanting to coerce or influence people, the divine, circumstances, things, etc. Yet, the extent of ‘manipulation’ by the magic practitioner upon the divine or other circumstances is potentially one aspect which differentiates magic from religion or accepted medical practice. For example, erotic curse tablets were generally considered as a socially unacceptable method of coercion of another for sexual purposes. Meanwhile, prayers for justice would have been perceived as less magical as they often simply asked for retribution and possessed fewer abject features. While this can be seen as the equivalent of the previous characteristic (section 3.4 above) with regard to private and

²⁷² Johnston 2008, 146–148.

individual goals, there are some additional nuances of this characteristic, such as the ‘manipulative’ relationship of the practitioner over the divine.

Previous scholarship

Several scholars have referred to this characteristic in their own definitions of ancient magic and as a way to distinguish magic from religion, while ancient perspectives are divided on how much the practitioner could influence the divine.

Some scholars like Wilburn and Versnel have both included this characteristic in their own definitions of ancient magic. Building on Frazer’s magic/religion distinction, Wilburn and Versnel believe that the influence that ancient magic practitioners exerted over the divine differentiated magic from religion.²⁷³ Versnel states in his second criterion of magic:

Attitude: Magic is essentially manipulative. Man is both the initiator and the executor of processes he controls with the aid of knowledge which he has, or which is put, at his disposal. Religion views man as dependent upon powers outside his sphere of influence. This entails an attitude of submission and supplication. The opposition is thus one between ‘instrumental, coercive manipulation’ and ‘personal, supplicative negotiation’.²⁷⁴

To further the likely importance of this characteristic, Otto and Stausberg in their reader on magic name ‘manipulative’ and ‘coercive’ as prevalent terms in a list of descriptions of magic which they draw from surveys of both ancient and modern scholarship.²⁷⁵ Similarly, Plato perceives those who are irreligious and those practising *magia*, or who are involved excessively with the supernatural for their own benefit, as equally dangerous:

Thus for Plato, these religious practices performed by marginal itinerant priests and outside the framework of the polis constitute so many punishable crimes. The reason is clear: the sorcerer constitutes a danger, just like the man who does not believe in the

²⁷³ Wilburn 2019, 15; Versnel 1991, 178–179; Frazer in Graf 1997b, 188.

²⁷⁴ Versnel 1991, 178–179.

²⁷⁵ Otto and Stausberg 2013, 9.

gods; like the latter, the sorcerer threatens the just relationship that normally unites humans and the gods.²⁷⁶

Therefore, several scholars, both ancient and modern, argue that ancient magic could be distinguished from religion because there was an abnormal and even juxtaposed relationship between the magic practitioner and the divine.

However, Plato additionally states that the gods cannot be persuaded by the magic practitioner and intrinsically know ‘to make the right decision’.²⁷⁷ Graf further challenges Frazer’s distinction between magic and religion, by highlighting some spells in the *PGM* and comparing them with other prayers that he believes were ‘non-magical’. He concludes that most of the spells in the *PGM* were quite similar to many mundane prayers and not obviously coercive and domineering over the gods, especially as several end the prayer with ‘I ask you, lord, be gracious’. Because of this, he states that practitioners understood that the gods could not easily be persuaded.²⁷⁸

Graf provides sufficient examples to demonstrate that the magic practitioner was not always dominant or coercive over the divine. Yet, this characteristic’s interactions with other characteristics may provide greater insights into other complexities in the magic practitioner’s relationship with the divine.

Evidence

In Chapter 2, there are examples where behaviours that were considered legally and socially unacceptable (section 3.1 above) involved the manipulation of people, places, and things that ‘should not’ be manipulated. In the Twelve Tables, there is a condemnation of those who used

²⁷⁶ Graf 1997a, 25–26.

²⁷⁷ Plato, *Leges* 10, 909 B.

²⁷⁸ Graf 1997b.

incantations to manipulate another's crops (section 2.3.1 above). Similarly, literary witches are frequently described as being able to control nature or the weather (section 2.4 above).²⁷⁹

Additionally, I would argue that the use of contraception and abortifacients within a Roman context would have been viewed as a way for women to control their own reproductive health (sections 2.4.6, 3.3 above).²⁸⁰

There is another aspect of the 'manipulative' relationship between the magic practitioner and the divine. This can be observed in the form of the *daimon*, a deity frequently invoked in many spells to do a practitioner's bidding.²⁸¹ There was a greater preoccupation with death during the Archaic Period and into the early classical period which coincides with the introduction of literary *daimones*. There was no religious institution at this time until the spread of Christianity that had complete authority over the concept of salvation; this lack of security over the understanding of the afterlife led to an increase of anxiety surrounding death.²⁸² Gordon and Bremmer state, that at this time was there not only 'the process of moralizing the gods', but also the creation of the *daimon* who was morally neutral and could be involved in mortals' everyday life in ways that the gods could not be.²⁸³ Literary *daimones* were originally capable of being both benevolent and malign, but by the end of second century AD, were almost exclusively described in negative terms.²⁸⁴ Moreover, Smith notes that even as early in Homeric epics, there is a distinction between *theos* and *daimon*. He says *theos* is 'more individualistic (personal)... most usually occurs with the definite article, is conceived anthropomorphically and receives cultic attention', while *daimon* is 'more impersonal (collective)... occurs more

²⁷⁹ Gordon 1999, 180.

²⁸⁰ Felton 2017; Stratton 2014, 163–164.

²⁸¹ Graf 2002, 97; Pachoumi 2017, 11–13, 35–61.

²⁸² Gordon 1999, 162, 168, 185.

²⁸³ Gordon 1999, 162, 176; Bremmer 2002b, 78.

²⁸⁴ Gordon 1999, 226.

frequently without the definite article, is of indeterminate form and lacks cult... that this impersonality of the *daimon* led “naturally” to its association with fate, destiny, and fortune’.²⁸⁵ Therefore, there was a gradual, increasingly negative association with the *daimon*, in keeping with other magical material that gained a more negative association alongside the consolidation of the definition of magic (section 3.1 above). Because many spells call upon an individual’s ‘personal *daimon*’ to execute a spell, there was a sense of manipulation not only with regard to the outcome of the spell, but also how the practitioner ‘manipulated’ the *daimon*. This once again emphasises the individualistic and private nature of magic (section 3.4 above).²⁸⁶ Similarly, in literature and spells such as from the *PGM*, minor or ‘less important’ deities are invoked, potentially because minor deities can be more easily manipulated (sections 2.4, 2.5.1 above).²⁸⁷ Overall, the magic practitioner’s ability to coerce the gods could depend on which god, either mainstream or minor/*daimon*, that they were attempting to manipulate.

With regard to healing practices, there was an ongoing philosophical debate amongst ancient authors between the appropriate amount of medical intervention (section 5.7.1 below). Additionally, one of the main innovative concepts from the Hippocratic Corpus was the concept of *prognosis*. The concept refers to a protective measure whereby patients would not have to suffer unnecessary medical intervention if it was determined that the course of their illness was terminal or did not require further medical treatment. By extension, *prognosis* also prevented unnecessary interference with ‘natural processes’. King explains that there were two words in Ancient Greek which could be translated as ‘pain’, *πόνος/ponos* and *ὀδύνη/odyne*. She explains that there were nuances with both terms where the former referred to a necessary pain or battle,

²⁸⁵ J. Z. Smith 1978, 432–433.

²⁸⁶ Pachoumi 2017, 11–61.

²⁸⁷ Horace, *Epodes* 5.51; Horace, *Satirae* 1.8.34–35; Stanley Spaeth 2014, 51.

such as war for men and childbirth for women. Meanwhile the latter often referred to ‘excessive’ pain which required further treatment.²⁸⁸ However, the Hippocratic Corpus states that if a doctor intervenes in a woman’s labour or childbirth, and it results in her death, the doctor should be held accountable for having intervened unnecessarily. Therefore, there was a belief that there was a certain natural course of an illness which should not be impeded.²⁸⁹ Chapter 5 will further explore this characteristic alongside the interrelationship of magic and medicine.

Significance

In Roman mainstream religion, there was a reciprocal relationship between Romans and the gods, reflecting Mauss’s ‘Gift’ (section 2.2.1 above). This is in the form of Romans giving sacrifices to the gods, in hopes that the gods would fulfil their prayers. These sacrifices were usually regulated, public, and scheduled, alongside the recurring needs of Roman society, such as fertile seasonal crops.²⁹⁰ Despite the reciprocity of this relationship, Romans were still submissive to their gods. However, with regard to spells, there was often no long-term reciprocity between practitioners and the divine—spells were often undertaken once, and practitioners were not always submissive to the divine.²⁹¹ Therefore, these are two aspects of magic which can differentiate it from religion.

With regard to the tripartite relationship of magic, science, and religion, there was an intersection between magic and medicine which find themselves at odds with religion. Certain practices employed by *iatroi* could also be condemned by religious experts as similarly unacceptable just like magic, or could even be conflated with magical practice because of their perceived over-involvement in nature: ‘Though from very different perspectives: the

²⁸⁸ King 1998, 125–126.

²⁸⁹ *Corpus Hippocraticum, On Diseases* 1.8.116–118.; King 1998, 125–126.

²⁹⁰ Versnel 1991, 178–179; Rüpke 2016, 87.

²⁹¹ Mauss 2011; Stowers 2011, 39–40; Pachoumi 2017, 11–13; 35–61.

philosophers, because the religious experts treated the gods as corruptible by bribes; the doctors, mainly because the healing techniques employed by the religious experts assumed the intervention of the divine in natural processes'.²⁹²

All of the material discussed, from both the practitioner and non-practitioner perspectives has a manipulative intent. The case studies in Chapters 4–6 will further explore this characteristic, and the aspects highlighted above and the reception from the non-practitioner perspective. However, from a case-to-case basis, there was likely a divergence between these perspectives whereby some believed that magic practitioners were attempting to manipulate the divine, whereas others believed that the gods could not be manipulated into granting something against their will, making their attempts redundant.

Overall, this characteristic and its aspects will be further tested against case studies in Chapters 4–6. In doing so, it may be possible to explore how this characteristic intersects with 3.1 (section 3.1 above) with regard to the amount of 'acceptable' intervention, and with 3.4, 'private' intent. Furthermore, there are unique aspects of the relationship between the practitioner and the divine which will be further explored in section 3.6 below. There is also a possibility that the ability to manipulate was a skill (section 3.7 below) which could additionally complicate the amount of acceptable intervention if it depended on how reputable the practitioner was. These possible intersections can further illuminate the concept and perception of magic in Roman times.

²⁹² Graf (1996, 331–336) in Dickie 2003, 21.

3.6 Characteristic 6: Supernatural associations

Magic has obvious supernatural or divine associations, and the previous characteristic (section 3.5 above) explored the different types of relationships between magic practitioners with varying forms of the divine. Several of the characteristics described so far have overlapped with subversive behaviour from various aspects. However, not all subversive behaviour was associated with magic, such as murder with a knife or by a *sicarius*. In fact, it was often subversive, ritualistic behaviour which became associated with magic. In other words, magic required an interaction between the practitioner and the supernatural. Because magic often took place in ritualistic settings, not unlike mainstream religion, it can be difficult to distinguish which practices would have been perceived as more ‘magical’ or ‘religious’.

Another aspect of magic’s supernatural associations is its association with the chthonic and the use of necromancy. Necromancy has its own origins and evolutionary trajectory, yet by the second century AD, was associated with magic. Necromancy could be used for multiple purposes, including divination and for cursing.²⁹³

Previous scholarship

All forms of magical material have a supernatural aspect, and the previous characteristic (section 3.5 above) studied the intricacies of the relationship between the practitioner and the supernatural. Therefore, I will not go into great detail about all the possible supernatural associations in the magical material studied in Chapter 2. However, this section examines the relationship between magic and the chthonic, as it is a unique supernatural association.

As previously argued, there were two major socio-political aspects which contributed to the evolution of magic: (1) the increase in political instability and violence in the Archaic Period

²⁹³ Johnston 2008, 172–177; *PGM* IV.154 –285, I.262–347.

and then the Roman Republic (section 3.5 above), and (2) the spread of the propaganda of the *Pax Romana* and its associated morals (section 3.1 above). These two factors might have also contributed to the development of necromancy and consolidated magic with the chthonic.²⁹⁴

In section 3.5 above, the creation of the *daimon* was discussed. In addition to the functions that were outlined, the *daimon* also provided a chthonic function. Gordon states that *daimones* had

...the double advantage of which was to separate the good gods of the civic cult from the morally ambivalent divine power active at folk-level while at the same time opening up a new realm, of the 'dark' marvellous, based on the older view of *daimones*, as connected with the souls of the dead.²⁹⁵

In other words, the *daimon* was a unique form of a deity because it was able to crossover the boundary between the living and the dead. Johnston further argues that alongside the delineation between the living and the dead, necromantic practices using the *daimon* also developed.²⁹⁶ Hence, the magic practitioner by means of invoking the *daimon* or with other necromantic rites, is able to interact with the dead and the underworld. If it is accepted that by the second century AD, the civic gods were perceived as moralised and less involved with practitioners' everyday life, then magic can be differentiated from mainstream religion as magic practitioners used practices involving the chthonic for their own personal goals.

Evidence

Beyond the *daimon*, the crossover of the boundary between the living and the dead is a recurring theme throughout the material examined in Chapter 2.²⁹⁷ The literary witch is often described as

²⁹⁴ Bremmer 2002b, 78; Eidinow 2017a, 2017c, 2019a, 2019b; Gordon 1999, 162, 176, 233–266; Ogden 2002, 210; Stratton 2014, 164.

²⁹⁵ Gordon 1999, 176.

²⁹⁶ Johnston 1999, 10, 97–98, 246–247.

²⁹⁷ Gordon 1999, 168, 185.

engaging with necromancy or has a chthonic function. Circe (section 2.4.2 above) advises Odysseus on his journey to the Underworld, while Erichtho is described as using necromancy.²⁹⁸ Additionally, Roman witches frequently loot and desecrate cemeteries. Furthermore, some binding dolls were created for the purpose of ‘laying ghosts’, whereby a ghost was able to physically inhabit the doll. It has been hypothesised that the practitioner could then ask the ghost to take elements of the living target with them to the dead, thus cursing the target to death.²⁹⁹ Although not exclusive to magic, some exotic materials like amber and pine were often deposited into graves, thus linking certain ritualistic materials with the chthonic (sections 2.5.2.1, 2.5.3 above).

Necromantic elements appear in several spells, particularly those used as a form of divination. Several spells (*PGM* IV.154–285) ‘insert’ necromantic features in what would have seemed like a regular spell. In *PGM* I.262–347, there is a lengthy prayer to Apollo for his prophetic powers combined with necromancy.³⁰⁰ Faraone has stated that this spell is a ‘a collapsing together of two realms that were typically treated separately in Greek religious practice – the celestial and the chthonic (or what I would prefer to call the realm of the dead)’. Alongside Faraone’s analysis, this was also likely a form of ritualistic innovation created by entrepreneurial magicians: in these spells, the dead could be compelled not only to undertake a practitioner’s will, but also to provide divinatory information.³⁰¹

The development of the *goes* and *magus* followed the same trajectory of many other magical concepts where their role became gradually more defined. The *goes* and *magus* were

²⁹⁸ Homer, *Odyssey* 229–243, 388–399; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.413–587.

²⁹⁹ Ogden 2002, 163; Inscription from Cyrene c. 300 BC: Solmsen 1966, no. 39 B 27–39; SEG 9. no.72 lines 110–21.

³⁰⁰ Johnston 2008, 172–177; *PGM* IV.154–285, I.262–347.

³⁰¹ Faraone 2004 in Johnston 2008, 172–177.

individuals who could initiate communication between the living and the dead and invoked deities with equivalent powers, such as Hecate and Hermes. Hence, the *goes* or *magus* helped quell some of the anxieties surrounding death during the period of violence in the late Archaic-early classical period. Overall, chthonic and necromantic elements feature frequently in magical-associated practices and material.

Significance

As previously stated, when taking into account chthonic and necromantic elements of magic, it is possible to distinguish it from mainstream religious practice. When attempting to grasp the perspective of magic-practitioners who engaged with necromancy, Johnston has assessed whether or not magicians themselves believed in the efficacy of such spells. She challenges Graf's argument that the summoning of the dead would have seemed incredible, and she argues that many other spells in the *PGM* are no more incredible than the necromantic ones. She concludes that it would have ultimately depended on the magician's own perception of the dead, and if their motivations were driven more for profit rather than their own personal belief.³⁰² Therefore, as discussed in section 2.5.4 above, the perspectives of practitioners and non-practitioners on necromancy could vary, based on an individuals' own beliefs surrounding the practice. Beyond the occasional first-hand account, such as those of Pliny and Suetonius which discuss their views on necromancy, it is difficult to determine a practitioner's own perception of the practice.³⁰³

Forms of necromantic divination were banned under Tiberius and were denounced by Pliny and Suetonius.³⁰⁴ Thus, this characteristic could intersect with section 3.1 above, with

³⁰² Graf in Johnston 2008, 172–177.

³⁰³ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 30.6, 14; Suetonius, *Nero* 34.4; Bremmer 2002b, 78.

³⁰⁴ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 30.6, 14; Suetonius, *Nero* 34.4; Bremmer 2002b, 78.

regard to its legal and social unacceptability, and the abject descriptions of literary witches desecrating cemeteries echo this sentiment. The magic practitioner also corrupted several other boundaries including their practise of rituals outside of a designated sacred area and their summoning of the dead from the underworld.

The invocation of the *daimon* in spells allowed for the magic practitioner to use the *daimon*'s ability to crossover between the living and the dead for their own private goals (sections 3.4, 3.5 above). The use of necromancy could also be seen as an ability of a skilled practitioner, such as the *goes* and *magus* (section 3.7 below). This will be further explored in Chapter 5 in the case study of Apollonius of Tyana who was allegedly compelled to undertake certain actions, such as healing others thanks to a *daimon*. Therefore, while magic and religion both had elements of interaction with the divine, magical practice could sometimes invoke a broader range of supernatural exchange, such as with the dead or underworld.

3.7 Characteristic 7: Secret or arcane knowledge

This final characteristic refers to the potential skill and knowledge a magic practitioner had to possess, in order to undertake a magical practice. This knowledge could have been passed in secret and implies there was a hierarchy amongst magic practitioners. This characteristic is not supported by as much material from Chapter 2 as the other characteristics are. Even so, in Chapter 2, there are several figures who are described in literature, as having greater magical knowledge.³⁰⁵ An example of this is the case of Apuleius, whose scholarly activities were said to be a form of magical practice, as argued by his prosecutors (section 4.3 below).³⁰⁶ However, the extent to which this was accurate in reality is still undetermined, but figures with intellectual

³⁰⁵ Such as the *argurtes* and *goes* (section 2.2.3 above) and *rhizotomoi* (sections 2.4.3, 2.5.3 above)

³⁰⁶ Graf 1997b, 198.

pursuits might have fallen under suspicion of having obtained clandestine skills. Alternatively, the perception of a magic practitioner's skill could vary depending on the practitioner's perceived legitimacy and their reputation. This dissertation has not yet examined mystery cults and their intersection with magic, but case studies on the cult and following of Apollonius of Tyana (Chapter 5) and Alexander of Abonoteichous (Chapter 6) will further explore the possibility of hierarchical magical knowledge within each cult.

Previous scholarship

Scholars' opinions of this characteristic of magic vary. In Versnel's third criterion of his definition of magic, he argues that magic requires 'professional experience' with 'attention paid to the technical side of the manipulation, precision of formula and *modus operandi*'. In contrast, he argues that in mainstream religion, religious training was not necessary, as it was up to the gods to bestow favour on a practitioner.³⁰⁷ Furthermore, Johnston has previously stated that the efficacy of magic depended on the practitioner rather than on a location (section 3.4 above).³⁰⁸ Therefore, Versnel and Johnston both argue that skill was required by the magic practitioner, and that this differentiated magic from religion. Although this differentiation of magic and religion is useful, it is inaccurate to assume that religious practitioners did not require additional training. I propose that instead of viewing magic and religion as purely oppositional in this respect that the types of skills acquired by magic and religious practitioners varied.

Bremmer, contrastingly, argues that there was no 'magical' hierarchy in Roman times, or if there was a social hierarchy amongst magic practitioners, then it would have reflected the same social hierarchy already in place in Roman society. He cites Dasen's study of the social and

³⁰⁷ *Pace* Versnel 1991, 178–179.

³⁰⁸ Johnston 2008, 146–148.

gender distribution of amulet types whereby she concluded that men and women wore different types of amulets, and that some amulets could only be worn by the upper class. Bremmer states, ‘Clearly, in the hierarchical society of antiquity even magic did not always transcend social differences’.³⁰⁹ Hence, Bremmer denies Turner’s *communitas* amongst ancient magic practitioners, as Turner believed that religion would make the overarching social hierarchy redundant. However, his argument also requires that all amulets were considered as equally magical, something which has been shown to not be the case (section 2.5.2 above). Furthermore, in Tacitus’s accounts (section 2.4.7 above), women of lower social standing, Locusta and Martina, are described as the informed magical specialists to upper class women, thus juxtaposing the social hierarchy.³¹⁰ Case studies will further evaluate how this characteristic was perceived in relation to magic.

Evidence

In Chapter 2, there have been some allusions to the ‘skilled’ magic practitioner, such as the Chaldeans who were sought out for divinatory purposes (section 2.3.3 above). Experts in handling various plants including poisonous ones were held in high regard by respected physicians, such as Galen, and several accounts describe *rhizotomoi* as literate and ‘well-educated’ (sections 2.5.3 above, 5.1.4 below).³¹¹ Gordon states that *rhizotomoi* also studied other subjects, such as astronomy, astrology, mathematics, and other studies of the natural world which he collectively refers to as ‘the learned magic ritual of the Principate’.³¹²

³⁰⁹ Bremmer 2015, 15–16; Dasen 2015.

³¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.74, 12.66, 13.15.

³¹¹ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, preface 6–9: he describes the care required to harvest and use certain plants; see Footnote 317; Gordon 1999, 183–184; Jones-Lewis 2016b, 411; Harris 2024, 115.

³¹² Gordon 1999, 184–185.

Meanwhile, the transmission and creation of curse tablets is unclear, and sources and evidence are conflicting. Plato states there were practitioners who were specifically commissioned to create curse tablets.³¹³ Yet, Faraone demonstrates that there was also a high possibility that some practitioners attempted to copy their own spells which resulted in several syntax errors.³¹⁴ Therefore, it is unclear why some practitioners sought out specialists, and others attempted to create curse tablets on their own. Case studies in Chapters 4–6 will further explore the use and consultation of magic specialists.

With regard to medicine, there were different schools of practice amongst Roman physicians.³¹⁵ Galen's work describes the competitive nature of physicians where competing doctors would often try to win over wealthy patients (5.1.3). They would sometimes perform procedures publicly, in order to attract an audience. Galen even describes his own rival, Martianus, who attempted to slander him by claiming he would use divination rather than medical expertise to try and diagnose the patient.³¹⁶ Although Galen is describing divination, a magical-associated practice, as a method to discredit him as a reputable physician, his account demonstrates that an individual's expertise, either in magic or medicine, could be subjective. The case study on Alexander of Abonoteichous (Chapter 6) will explore such a case where Alexander had been held in high regard as a spiritual healer, but contemporary accounts such as that of Lucian denounce him as a 'quack'. This challenges the notion that any practitioner had perceived 'genuine', ubiquitous expertise. Overall, the case studies in Chapters 4–6 will continue to explore and illuminate these aspects of this characteristic.

³¹³ Plato, *Leges* 10, 909b.

³¹⁴ Faraone and Kropp 2010, 395–397.

³¹⁵ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 395–396.

³¹⁶ Galen, *On Prognosis* 1.9–10; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393.

Significance

Aspects of this characteristic might help to differentiate ancient magic from religion as Versnel and Johnston argue. The perspectives surrounding this characteristic will be further explored in the following case studies where each chapter presents a specialist figure: Apuleius, Apollonius of Tyana, and Alexander of Abonoteichus. As will be seen, the perceptions regarding the competency and qualifications of each of these individuals could also vary for numerous reasons.

Based on material already studied, the case study involving the accounts of poisoning from Tacitus describe Martina and Locusta as trusted magical experts (sections 2.4.6–7 above). The case studies of Chapter 5 will explore the intersection of those who had expertise in both medicine and magic. Finally, the case studies of Chapter 6 will further explore the intersection of magic and healing cults. Through these case studies, it will also be possible to determine if Turner's *communitas* existed amongst ancient magic practitioners whereby their hierarchy existed separately from the greater Roman social hierarchy.

Because a magic practitioner's skill often depended on their reputation, this characteristic can intersect with section 3.1 above. This could have had either positive or negative implications on an individual's reputation. For example, several ancient authors describe 'the Italian Marsi and the North-African Psylloi' as skilled practitioners for reversing the effects of poison.³¹⁷ This simultaneously intersects with section 3.2 above whereby a non-Roman or 'exotic' group could also be regarded as more skilled in a particular field. On the other hand, as described in Galen's

³¹⁷ Galen in Nutton 1985, 138–140: Galen sought out the advice of a *marsus* on poison; Jones-Lewis 2016b, 411; Cassius Dio 51.14: Augustus supposedly sought out the aid of a member of the Psylloi to reverse the effects of the snake venom which bit Cleopatra; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 7.2.2 : describes how both groups also had developed an immunity to snake poison; other passages from *Naturalis historia* which describe how the Marsi were adept at handling poisons include 7.15, 21.78, 28.30, 25.11, 25.86, 28.19, and the Psylloi at 7.14, 8.93, 11.89, 21.78, and 28.30, and 25.123, as collated by Jones-Lewis 2012.

account, accusations of the use of magic could also be used to ‘negatively’ discredit an individual’s skill in another field.

It can be argued that this characteristic is dependent on section 3.3 above, where women magic-practitioners were not held in as high regard as male magic-practitioners. Despite the less negative depictions of witches in Greek times, there is nevertheless a focus in both Greek and Roman literature on magic-practising women who exhibit multiple negative qualities. However, magic-practising men who are depicted in literature are often depicted as philosophers, or as men seeking knowledge by means of magic. For example, Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome is described by Varro whom he admires, as having studied material which would later be banned by the Senate: ‘However, it was by these arts that Pompilius learned those sacred rites whose action he revealed, while at the same time he buried the explanations, such was even his fear of what he had learned. And when the books containing these causes were produced, the Senate burned them’ (*His tamen artibus didicit sacra illa Pompilius, quorum sacrorum facta prodidit, causas obruit (ita timuit et ipse quod didicit), quarum causarum proditos libros senatus incendit.*)³¹⁸ Additionally, Cicero describes Vatinius and Claudius, both highly-regarded Roman politicians, as practising forms of necromancy.³¹⁹ Despite this, he describes them as learned men, and in the case of Vatinius, as an avid scholar of Pythagoreanism.³²⁰ Hence, magic-practising men were often described more complementarily than their female counterparts, and their interest of magic was equated to an intellectual pursuit. However, there are exceptions to this, such as in the case of Alexander of Abonoteichous (Chapter 6).

³¹⁸ Varro, cited in Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 7.35; Stanley Spaeth 2014, 52.

³¹⁹ Cicero, *In Vatinius* 14; Dickie 2003, 168–169.

³²⁰ Dickie 2003, 169–170; Cicero, *In Vatinius* 14.

This characteristic can intersect with section 3.5 above, based on Versnel's claims that magic practitioners required training, unlike religious practitioners. If this is accepted, then the magic practitioner would need to acquire skills, in order to obtain a 'manipulative' and dominant relationship over the divine to practise magic. This characteristic can also intersect with section 3.6 above, particularly when practitioners, such as *argurtes* were accused of practising magic, including necromancy for profit. Thus, the magic practitioner's skill was their ability to innovate and market new magic practices.

Finally, with regard to the intersection between this characteristic and section 3.4 above, this will be investigated in the case studies involving cults (Chapter 6). While magic has thus far been investigated as a 'private' practice, there is a possibility that magic could have been practised within a group. By extension, there might have been a hierarchy within the group where those of 'higher' standing acquired greater magical knowledge. This also challenges the belief that magic was practised purely for an individual's goal and in complete isolation. Overall, this characteristic has yet to be supported by the material investigated so far. However, the aspects associated with this characteristic raise important lines of inquiry to further study ancient magic.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has listed seven characteristics relevant to Roman magic-associated material, based on repetitive qualities of magical material surveyed thus far. These characteristics can be used to explore a potentially magical practice or material, whereby it is possible to observe which of these characteristics it possessed, and where it was situated along the spectra of these characteristics. I will use these characteristics to explore case studies in Chapters 4–6. These characteristics will not be used to determine what is magic in Roman times, but will serve to

provide new aspects for the study of ancient magic and how the concept was perceived, including during the time of the Antonine Plague. Exploring these case studies with these characteristics can demonstrate how these characteristics intersect and interact. While it is not possible to obtain a ubiquitous definition of ancient magic, this methodology will aid in obtaining a more accurate understanding of the concept.

4. Persecutions and expulsions: Apuleius

This chapter investigates the legal accusations of magic against Apuleius as described in his own work, the *Apologia*. Having presented a new framework for the study of ancient magic in Chapter 3, this chapter examines the magic which Apuleius is accused of using in relation to the seven characteristics previously outlined. This chapter will further the understanding of the concept of ancient magic, and how it was perceived by a second century AD audience by applying this framework to a case study, as well as gaining greater insight into the *Apologia*. This analysis also provides insight into the Roman legal system and its enforcement of magic-associated laws, as Apuleius is recounting the events of his own trial. Notably, as the primary accusation of magic against Apuleius is his alleged use of a *veneficium* to enchant a wealthy widow, Pudentilla, there is a particular emphasis on the intersection of poison, love potions, and magic.³²¹

While this thesis aims to investigate the potential evolution of the concept of magic and its perception during times of crisis, such as the Antonine Plague (Chapter 6), this chapter's case study is meant to provide an example of magic in Roman society in the second century AD and prior to the Antonine Plague. Because there was an absence of an Empire-wide crisis during this text, it is easier to isolate the social tensions contributing to the concept of magic at this time, and how they manifested in the *Apologia*. This case study will provide a baseline for the concept of Roman magic outside of times of crisis, in order to compare it to the later perception of magic in the second half of the century AD. This comparison can then aid in determining how the evolution of the concept of magic transpired in times of globalised crisis.

³²¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 2.

Additionally, Apuleius's *Apologia* presents a unique opportunity as it provides a first-hand account from an accused magic-practitioner in the second century AD. This thesis has avoided defining magic, and by extension cannot define or determine whether Apuleius was a magic practitioner. However, the text nevertheless provides insight into the shared perceptions of magic from the worldview of the author, Apuleius, and his audience. The proceedings of the trial are told exclusively from Apuleius's perspective, but the text presents the negotiation of the definition of magic between himself and the prosecution.

This chapter is organised in the following sections and sub-sections: section 4.1 briefly outlines the historical context of the *Apologia* and provides some key biographical details about Apuleius. Section 4.2 provides a brief overview of scholarship on Apuleius and the *Apologia*. Section 4.3 studies the *Apologia* through the lens of the first characteristic, 'subversive and legal and social acceptability'. Not all of the accusations brought forward by the prosecution against Apuleius are of a legal nature, but simply present Apuleius as engaging in socially unacceptable behaviour.³²² Taken together, they aid the prosecution in portraying Apuleius as a dangerous deviant, and thus more likely to be perceived as an individual who would participate in magical activity.³²³ Furthermore, Apuleius's position as outsider to Oea, the city of origin of his wife's family, makes him a marginal figure, and thus intrinsically subversive to the norms of greater society.³²⁴ Section 4.4 uses the lens of 'exoticism and foreignness' to study (1) the dynamic relationship between Apuleius's identities as both 'African' and 'Roman', and (2) the perceived exoticism of the materials and rituals mentioned by Apuleius. In order to study the former, this section also provides a sub-section (4.4.1) which investigates the concept of race, ethnicity, and

³²² Apuleius, *Apologia* 4: for example, his vanity and his perceived effeminate preoccupation with his hair.

³²³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4–16; Ovid, *Ars amatoria* 2.99, 3.433–3.438; Costantini 2019, 48.

³²⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 24.

identity in the Roman Empire, and how it might have affected the wider perceptions of Apuleius as an individual. Section 4.5 will draw on the characteristic of ‘femininity’ with regard to how the prosecution chooses to attack Apuleius’s character by effeminising him, thus further associating magic with femininity.³²⁵ It will also investigate the role of Pudentilla or lack thereof throughout the trial.

Section 4.6 investigates the concept of magic in the *Apology* in terms of its ‘privateness’, relating to Apuleius having acted in private and for his own individual benefit. Specifically, some of the accusations against Apuleius refer to his committing acts in private, thus leading to perceptions that he acted surreptitiously and maliciously.³²⁶ Additionally, the prosecutors argue that Apuleius undertook several magical acts for his own benefit, thus presenting the other aspect of this characteristic.³²⁷ Therefore, this characteristic in both of its aspects is present in the *Apologia* and used as a method for defining magic by Apuleius and the prosecution. Section 4.7 discusses several of the methods by which the prosecution argues that Apuleius allegedly attempted to gain control over people through ritual in a way that the prosecution argues was unacceptable, and thus magical.³²⁸ Section 4.8 analyses perceptions of Apuleius’s alleged overly familiar and inappropriate relationship with the supernatural to perform certain rituals which would have exceeded what was allowed by contemporary religious norms.³²⁹ Finally, Section 4.9. provides an example of the ‘secret or arcane’ by demonstrating how the concept of magic could be interpreted differently based on the perceived education and position in society of a practitioner. This final characteristic has not yet been discussed in such depth, and this chapter

³²⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4, 6–16.

³²⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 57–60, 87–88.

³²⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 29–47.

³²⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 29–47.

³²⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 53–57, 61–65.

will aid in further refining it. Overall, these characteristics are used to study magic in the *Apologia* and demonstrate the many other fields of inquiry of ancient magic which they bring.

4.1 Context and history of Apuleius and the *Apologia*

The *Apologia* or *Pro se de magia* is a text written by Apuleius which recounts the trial where he defends himself against various accusations, especially the use of magic. It is unclear as to the origin of either title, with some speculation that the latter title might have been added in by later medieval manuscripts, while the former title might have been chosen to mirror the Socratic *Apologia*, and by extension, the Platonic nature of Apuleius's rhetoric.³³⁰ This text is considered one of the most informative contemporary sources for ancient magic as it contains the greatest number of mentions of the word *magia* and its derivatives found in a single text from antiquity.³³¹ Based on a textual analysis performed with Voyant Tools, *magia* appear 40 times, *magus* appears 43 times, and *magicus* appears 22 times, making a total of 105 mentions. Additionally, *maleficium* appears 17 times, *venenum* appears 6 times, and *veneficium* appears 7 times.³³²

Apuleius's trial took place in Sabratha, a city in Roman Tripolitania in AD 158/159, although most of Apuleius's alleged crimes would have taken place in Oea, another city in the same province.³³³ It is the only text which refers to this trial; therefore, the accuracy of the trial and its details cannot be confirmed beyond Apuleius's own statement, putting into question if the trial actually took place.³³⁴ According to the *Apologia*, Apuleius was able to successfully defend

³³⁰ Costantini 2019, 2–4.

³³¹ Costantini, 2019, 21.

³³² These figures have been determined by inputting the Latin text of the *Apologia* from the Scaife viewer (<https://scaife.perseus.org/reader/urn:cts:latinLit:phi1212.phi001.perseus-lat1:1-104>) into the Voyant Textual Analysis Tool (<https://voyant-tools.org/>). Key words and their derivatives were subsequently searched, highlighted, and counted throughout the text.

³³³ Bradley 1997, 206; Hunink 2016, 12.

³³⁴ Costantini 2019, 15.

himself, and other sources are able to confirm that he had a notable and celebrated career as a priest and healer in Africa subsequently, lending credence to this detail.³³⁵ As previously mentioned, Apuleius is accused of various things, some of a legal nature, while others are used mainly to negatively affect the image of his character. Correspondingly, the *Apologia* begins with Apuleius's defence of himself from more minor accusations, such as his appearance and possession of a mirror. He then continues by addressing the increasingly more serious charges. He ends his account by addressing the most serious charge of having used a magic love potion to seduce a wealthy widow named Pudentilla from Oea, in order to gain access to her vast inheritance.³³⁶ Rives suggests that the reason Apuleius saves his strongest defence for the end of the trial is that he wanted to force the prosecutors to expose their own greed and intention of controlling Pudentilla's wealth.³³⁷ Apuleius states that the crux of the trial lay not within the prosecution's concern that he was a magic practitioner, but rather that he would gain control over Pudentilla's wealth. He then posits that the accusations against him of practising magic might have been intended to eliminate him as a potential inheritor.³³⁸

Based on Apuleius's account, the accusations brought against him, instigated by Pudentilla's extended family, were primarily motivated by a fear of being excluded from the widow's fortune, rather than a purely philosophical or ethical issue regarding magico-religious practice.³³⁹ Pudentilla had been previously married to Sicinius Amicus with whom she had two sons, Sicinius Pontianus and Sicinius Pudens.³⁴⁰ Pudentilla was likely only in her mid-twenties or close to thirty when she became a widow, and thus was still of an age suitable for remarriage

³³⁵ Hunink 2016, 23–24; Costantini 2019, 4, 7.

³³⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 68–93; Taylor 2011; Rives 2008.

³³⁷ Rives 2008, 25; Apuleius, *Apologia* 67, 77.

³³⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 67, 77, 100.

³³⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 67.

³⁴⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 68; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 621.

and childbearing.³⁴¹ Upon her husband's death, she would have, along with the inherited wealth of the Sicinii, fallen under the control of her late father-in-law or *paterfamilias*. Her father-in-law strongly encouraged her to remarry with the brother of her late husband, Sicinius Clarus, likely to try and keep the family's wealth within the family. Neither Pudentilla nor her eldest son, Pontianus, were said to be in favour of this arrangement, prompting Pudentilla to declare that she would never remarry.³⁴² Eventually, the *paterfamilias* threatened to disown her unless she married Clarus, but his subsequent timely death allowed her to cancel the impending nuptials. As a result, her late husband's wealth was under her control, albeit under the supervision of a *tutela*, likely her own father.³⁴³

Prior to the events outlined in the trial, Apuleius and Pontianus were good friends, having met when they both studied in Athens. While Apuleius was travelling to Alexandria, he had fallen ill and stopped mid-journey to stay in Oea with Pontianus, where he first met Pudentilla.³⁴⁴ Pudentilla had been a widow for fourteen years by the time she married Apuleius.³⁴⁵ Her reasons for finally remarrying, magic excluded, range from encouragement from Pontianus for Pudentilla to marry someone he could trust, to claims that Pudentilla's doctor had encouraged her to engage in sexual relations again for her own health.³⁴⁶ In order to engage in sexual relations in a socially acceptable way, Apuleius claims that it was decided that Pudentilla should remarry, and that Pontianus even initially encouraged the union. It can be speculated whether Pontianus had encouraged this union for his mother's own well-being, or if this was simply a method of

³⁴¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 68, 89; given that Apuleius proves that Pudentilla was approximately forty years old at the time of the trial, if she had been a widow for fourteen years since the death of her first husband, then she would have only been about twenty-six years old at the time of his death.

³⁴² Apuleius, *Apologia* 68, 70; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 623.

³⁴³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 70; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 621.

³⁴⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 72; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 625.

³⁴⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 68.

³⁴⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 70; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 625; Israelowich 2016, 635, 642–643.

ensuring that his mother would not be forced to into marrying Clarus, thus endangering Pontianus's own claim to his inheritance.³⁴⁷ However, sometime after this, once Pontianus himself had married, it would seem as though the friendship between Apuleius and Pontianus soured, possibly under the influence of Pontianus's new father-in-law, Herennius Rufinus.³⁴⁸

Apuleius states that the charges were brought forward by Sicinius Aemilianus, another brother of the late Sicinius Amicus, but that they were registered under the name of Pudentilla's youngest son, Sicinius Pudens, a minor at the time, so as to avoid any repercussions of the *Lex Remmia de calumniatoribus*, or the charge of bringing forward false accusations.³⁴⁹ Additionally, on the side of the prosecutors was Herennius Rufinus, the father-in-law to Pontianus who died before the trial. Pontianus's cause of death was also presented by the prosecution as having been related to Apuleius and magic.³⁵⁰ Finally, there was a Tannonius Pudens, unrelated to the family, who also attended as part of the prosecution.³⁵¹ Asztalos argues that based on Apuleius's characterisations of each of the members of the prosecution, namely the senility and foolishness of Aemilianus and the blind corruption of Pudens, that the real mastermind behind the accusations was, in fact, Herennius Rufinus. During the trial, Apuleius even acknowledges and forgives Pontianus for having turned on him, as he claims that Pontianus was simply misdirected by his unscrupulous father-in-law.³⁵² The trial was overseen by Claudius Maximus, proconsul of Africa. He is the only other individual amongst the *personae dramatis* of the *Apologia* whose existence can be corroborated by other sources.³⁵³ There would have also been a tribunal of

³⁴⁷ Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 625; Israelowich 2016, 635–636.

³⁴⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 73–74; Asztalos 2005, 266.

³⁴⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 2; Asztalos 2005, 271.

³⁵⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 1, 53–57; Asztalos 2005, 271.

³⁵¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4.

³⁵² Apuleius, *Apologia* 73–74; Asztalos 2005, 273, 275–276.

³⁵³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 85; Costantini 2019, 7–10.

approximately eight others, overseen by Maximus.³⁵⁴ Additionally, locals in Sabratha were allowed to attend the trial, evidenced by Apuleius's occasional addresses to a wider audience.³⁵⁵ Because Apuleius's supposed magic use was alleged to cause harm to many inhabitants of Oea, which in turn, generated considerable gossip, it was likely that the trial needed to take place outside Oea to ensure an unbiased tribunal and audience.³⁵⁶

Throughout the *Apologia*, there are several methods which Apuleius employs to defend himself. He uses a Platonic style of rhetoric, in order to showcase his own intellectual superiority over the prosecution, while also employing invective towards his opponents.³⁵⁷ In doing so, Apuleius is also able to consistently appeal to Maximus by flattering his education and sophistication which is used to set himself and Maximus apart from the prosecution which he frequently refers to as uncouth and uneducated. Hence, he argues that many of his actions are not suspect or criminal like the prosecution argues—but were simply incomprehensible to them because of their own lack of understanding and knowledge.³⁵⁸ Section 4.9 below further investigates this aspect of the trial in terms of the 'secret or arcane' nature of magic as the *Apologia* presents the prevalent theme of one's education in relation to the perception of magical practice. Furthermore, Apuleius employs a Platonic technique of referring to the dichotomous nature of various things, such as the concept of the *magus*, the holy versus the subversive version of various deities, and the variety of uses of various substances for both mundane and magical purposes.³⁵⁹ By referring to these dichotomies, Apuleius is able to once again showcase his vast

³⁵⁴ Bradley 2014, 25.

³⁵⁵ For example, Apuleius, *Apologia* 28: Apuleius refers to all those present as *ut omnis ista multitudo, quae plurima undique ad audiendum convenit* (all this crowd, which has come streaming from all sides to listen); Bradley 2014, 26.

³⁵⁶ Bradley 1997, 206.

³⁵⁷ Hunink 2016, 11–12.

³⁵⁸ Bradley 2014, 28.

³⁵⁹ For example, Apuleius, *Apologia* 12, 25–27, 32; Baker 2017, 360–361; Costantini 2019, 52, 108.

knowledge, while also defending himself from the nefarious use of several substances which were commonly associated with magic.

The main charge against which Apuleius defends himself is his alleged enchantment of Pudentilla by using a love potion which the prosecution argues he did in malice, in order to obtain her fortune.³⁶⁰ Evidence and details provided by the prosecutors include a letter, supposedly written by Pudentilla, where she claims that she had been enchanted by Apuleius.³⁶¹ Additionally, the prosecution argues that Apuleius contrived to have them marry in the countryside, away from Oea and Pudentilla's relatives.³⁶² Further, Apuleius is accused of enchanting and causing harm to a slave boy and woman in Oea, both of whom he insists he was intending to heal from whatever illness had been inflicting them.³⁶³ He was also accused of sabotaging and contaminating Pontianus's *Lares* which resulted in his subsequent death, and of performing a magic ritual in Crassus's house, resulting in Crassus's illness.³⁶⁴ Moreover, the prosecutors state that Apuleius worshipped an obscene ebony statue in an inappropriate way, further demonstrating that Apuleius was a *magus*.³⁶⁵ In order to further taint Apuleius's character, the prosecution draws attention to his handsome appearance and vanity which are at odds with the typical philosophical figure with whom Apuleius attempts to align himself and more consistent with a vulgar seducer.³⁶⁶ This depiction by the prosecution is also meant to effeminise Apuleius, something that is further explored in section 2.5 above on 'femininity'.

³⁶⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 1–2, 68–93.

³⁶¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 78–87.

³⁶² Apuleius, *Apologia* 17–23, 87–88.

³⁶³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–52.

³⁶⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 53–60; Rives 2008, 22.

³⁶⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 61–65; Rives 2008, 22.

³⁶⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4, 6–8, 13–16, 68–71.

The *Apologia* provides a unique opportunity to study the concept of magic from the perspective of an accused magic-practitioner, Apuleius. However, the text is purportedly a defence whereby Apuleius is able to successfully have himself acquitted from the charges of magic. Therefore, arguably, the *Apologia* can only be taken as the perspective of a practitioner of magic if he had, indeed, been found guilty of magic use. This issue can be further complicated by the fact that a later Christian author, Augustine, refers derogatorily to Apuleius as a *magus*.³⁶⁷ In other words, Apuleius might not have been perceived as a magic practitioner in second century AD by Roman legal standards, but was considered a magic practitioner by others in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. In other words, depending on which source a scholar might be consulting, Apuleius may or may not be referred to as a magic practitioner. There are also several perspectives that are presented in the *Apologia*, although all described in Apuleius's own words. These include Apuleius's own self-representation and association with magic, as opposed to how he claims the prosecution represents him and perceives the concept of magic. As the *Apologia* presents Apuleius's self-defence, Apuleius tries to remove himself as far as possible from the image of the magic-practitioner or *magus* which violated legal boundaries at the time.³⁶⁸ Yet, even if Apuleius did not self-identify as a magic practitioner in his own text, many contemporary and later sources perceived him as such.

4.2 Previous scholarship

Interest in the study of the *Apologia* and of Apuleius as a magic practitioner began at the beginning of the twentieth century with the works of two authors, Vallette and Abt.³⁶⁹ The former emphasises the Platonic rhetoric of Apuleius throughout the trial, while the latter focuses

³⁶⁷ Augustine, *Epistle* 138.19; Costantini 2019, 11.

³⁶⁸ Rives 2008, 24; Costantini 2019, 16–17.

³⁶⁹ Vallette 1908; Abt 1908.

on the magical details of the trial, particularly elements which are also seen in the *PGM*. Some other ‘earlier’ scholarship on the *Apologia* include a legal analysis by Norden.³⁷⁰ Following this, Butler and Owen published newer translations of the text with greater analysis into the linguistic style.³⁷¹

More recent secondary sources include a volume edited by Finkelpearl, Graverini, and Lee which provides an analysis of Apuleius’s identity as an African provincial within the Roman Empire. While Apuleius is not a native of either Sabratha where the trial in the *Apologia* takes place, or of Oea where he allegedly committed his crimes, he nevertheless self-identifies as an African.³⁷² Section 4.4 below further investigates Apuleius’s African identity in relation to the ‘exoticism and foreignness’ of magic. Within Finkelpearl, Graverini, and Lee’s volume and in his several of his other works, Bradley has further assessed Apuleius, the *Apologia*, and Apuleius’s other works. He often attempts to understand how Apuleius’s works reflect the context of the Roman annexation of Africa and frequently draws on the comparison between Apuleius and Jesus with regard to magic and miracle-working.³⁷³

Regarding a more updated analysis on the legal proceedings of the *Apologia*, Rives has published multiple papers on the legal aspects of Apuleius’s *Apologia*.³⁷⁴ Hunink has also published a recently translated edition of the text which many modern scholars have used in their own analyses.³⁷⁵ For a very well-rounded analysis of the text, Costantini has provided a recent examination of the entire *Apologia* with a particular emphasis on the rhetoric which Apuleius

³⁷⁰ Norden 1912.

³⁷¹ Butler and Owen 1914.

³⁷² Apuleius, *Apologia* 24; Finkelpearl, Graverini, and Lee 2014.

³⁷³ Bradley 2000, 2012, 2014.

³⁷⁴ Rives 2003, 2008.

³⁷⁵ Hunink 2016.

uses during his defence. In this work, Costantini contributes a useful distinction between the different definitions of *magus* to which Apuleius refers throughout the trial: (1) the *magus* which was associated with the educated, travelling philosopher; (2) the literary *magus*, not unlike the Roman literary witch (sections 2.4.1–5 above); and (3) what he refers to as the ‘goetic’ *magus* or the illicit and insidious practitioner. He argues that part of the reason why Apuleius is successful in receiving his acquittal is because he is careful to associate himself only with the first type of *magus*, while being careful to distance himself from the latter two.³⁷⁶ Hence, he argues that Apuleius exhibits his rhetorical skill throughout the text whereby he does not fully deny that he is a *magus*, but is still able to successfully defend himself by removing himself from the literary and goetic *magus*.³⁷⁷ This argument supports the idea that the *Apologia* helps to support the characteristic of ‘secret or arcane knowledge’.

4.3 Subversive and legal and social acceptability of magic in the *Apologia*

This section investigates the legal and social acceptability of the concept of magic which is presented in Apuleius’s *Apologia*. As seen in Chapters 2 and 3, much of what was considered magical in the Roman Empire bordered on what was perceived as legally or socially acceptable. Moreover, there was often a feedback loop between magic and subversive behaviour. As the *Apologia* recounts the legal trial against Apuleius, magic as described by the prosecution is tied closely with legal unacceptability. However, while Apuleius defends himself successfully against the accusations of the prosecution, he does not fully deny having taken part in magical activities, nor does he even fully deny being a *magus*. Rather, he is careful to dissociate himself from Costantini’s goetic *magus* or with having crossed any legal boundaries. Hence, there are several

³⁷⁶ Costantini 2019, 23–24.

³⁷⁷ Costantini 2019, 41.

nuances regarding magic presented in the *Apologia* which hinge on their legal acceptability.³⁷⁸

As mentioned above, Costantini characterises these as the philosophical *magus*, the goetic *magus*, and the literary *magus*. I argue, on the other hand, that there is a meaningful distinction between the learned, philosophical *magus* and the subversive, illicit *magus* which combines the other two categories. Apuleius very strongly associates himself with the philosophical *magus*, while he simultaneously tries to distance himself from the illegal and subversive one. Further, the prosecution slanders Apuleius's character by assigning him other socially subversive qualities, in order to represent him as a devious character capable of committing illegal acts.

4.3.1 Under which law?

When considering the primary charge against Apuleius, his use of a love potion on Pudentilla, it is unclear under which law Apuleius would have been tried, and scholars are split about whether he would have been charged under the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* or under a *Cognitio extra ordinem*.³⁷⁹

There are two ancient accounts which support the argument that Apuleius was tried under the *Lex Cornelia* in spite of his not having murdered anyone with poison. Quintilian writing in the first century AD states that the use of *veneficium* in the form of *amatorium* (amorous potion), even if it did not result in death, would have been added as an offence to this law.³⁸⁰

Additionally, Jurist Julius Paulus, writing in the early third century AD, explains the *Lex Cornelia* in his own work, *Sententiae Pauli*. In his explanation of the law, he claims that the use

³⁷⁸ Costantini 2019, 23–24, 41.

³⁷⁹ Rives 2003, 328–335; Ogden 2002, 279–280; both Vallette 1908 xxii and Abt 1908, 85–88 argue that he was tried under the *Lex Cornelia*.

³⁸⁰ Quintilian, *Institutes* 7, 3, 7 in Bailliot 2019, 186.

of potions for abortions or love spells should be punished even if it is not used with malicious intent, and should anyone die in the process, the user/procurer of the potion should be executed:

Qui abortionis aut amatorium poculum dant, etsi id dolo non faciant, tamen quia mali exempli res est, humiliores in metallum, honestiores in insulam amissa parte bonorum relegantur: quod si ex hoc mulier aut homo perierit, summo supplicio adficiuntur.

Persons who administer potions for the purpose of causing abortion, or love philtres, even if they do not do so maliciously, still, because the act affords a bad example, shall if of inferior rank, be sentenced to the mines; if of superior rank, they shall be relegated to an island, after having been deprived of their property. Where, however, the man or the woman loses his or her life in consequence of their act they shall undergo the extreme penalty.³⁸¹

However, Paulus's account was written two centuries later after the law's codification when social contexts had changed and ideas surrounding magic had evolved.³⁸² Furthermore, under Diocletian, crimes concerning magic and divination fell under a different law and were separated from the other issues also mentioned in the *Lex Cornelia*, thus putting into question whether Apuleius would have been tried under this law.³⁸³

Some scholars have argued that because of the irregularities in the court proceedings, that Apuleius was probably tried under extraordinary circumstances or the *Cognitio extra ordinem* or as described by Rives, a 'trial outside the system'. The presence of Maximus suggests that the case was important and significant enough for the proconsul of Africa to preside over the trial.³⁸⁴ However, even if Apuleius was tried under a *Cognitio extra ordinem*, interpreting the *Lex Cornelia* is helpful, as trials under the *Cognitio extra ordinem* could each have their own unique circumstances and implications. Therefore, while the parameters of the *Cognitio extra ordinem*

³⁸¹ *Pauli sententiae* 5.23.14, 5.29.15–19 in Ogden 2002, 279–280 and Edmonds 2019, p 387, n. 17.

³⁸² Rives 2003, 328–329.

³⁸³ *De maleficis et Manichaeis*; *Codex Gregorianus* in Rives 2003, 334–335.

³⁸⁴ Rives 2008, 21, 48; Janssen 2025, 25–26 also claims that these trials became more popular after the Republican period.

are not specified, in Apuleius's case, its charges and punishments were likely influenced by the preceding magical law, the *Lex Cornelia*.

Paulus also states that various forms of capital punishment were instated for those found guilty of being 'conscious of the magical arts' and of undertaking abnormal nocturnal sacrifices. However, the two-tiered system in place at the time meant that those who qualified as *honestiores* or 'of higher social status' would have received less severe sentences.³⁸⁵ Apuleius was the son of a *duumvir*, a member of the local senate in his hometown of Madauros, qualifying him for the reduced *honestior* punishment. Thus, had he been found guilty, he would have received a lighter charge than the capital charge that Apuleius himself claims was the typical punishment for the crimes of which he was accused. In other words, if he was found guilty, he was more likely to have been exiled or had his property confiscated than executed.³⁸⁶ While less severe than execution, exile and *infamia* would have been ruinous to his career as a respected philosopher.³⁸⁷ For this reason, Apuleius would have still been motivated to clear his name of such accusations and charges.³⁸⁸ Apuleius even refers to his defence against the accusations of the prosecution as the honourable (*pudor*) thing to do.³⁸⁹

In spite of the lack of corroborating sources on the trial and confirmation of which law Apuleius was accused of breaking, certain conclusions can be drawn about the legal acceptability of his magic-associated activities during this time. It is clear that the use of substances to seduce an individual, even if it did not result in their death, was still a punishable crime. This would in turn suggest that activities commonly associated with magic involving the manipulation of

³⁸⁵ *Pauli Sententiae* 5.23.14–17 in Taylor 2011, 153–154.

³⁸⁶ Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 614–616, 622.

³⁸⁷ Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 614–616.

³⁸⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 26; Taylor 2011, 153.

³⁸⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 3.

people and things (section 4.7 below) would have been both socially subversive and legally unacceptable. Despite his juggling the different definitions of *magus*, Apuleius specifically and explicitly denies his use of a love potion, a by extension, that he had committed a crime.³⁹⁰

Apuleius is additionally accused of breaking the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *Lex Papia Poppaea nuptialis* for marrying a woman who was beyond an accepted age for marriage and engaging in sexual relations with her.³⁹¹ While the prosecution states that Pudentilla was nearly sixty years old, Apuleius demonstrates at the end of the trial that she was closer to forty years old, and thus, he was not in breach of these laws. Pudentilla's actual age and dowry were preserved on a *tabula* which Apuleius presents in court.³⁹² With regard to the other crimes that Apuleius allegedly committed, such as the magical ritual he performed at Crassus's house, there is an additional accusation of Apuleius having performed a *nocturna sacra* which he vehemently denies.³⁹³ The notion of having performed a magical ritual at night has been explored in section 2.3.1 above, its criminality having been established by the Twelve Tables. Apuleius even cites a particular law from the Twelve Tables, thus demonstrating that he was well-informed of magical legislation and of the charges which he needed to disprove.³⁹⁴

Taylor's analysis of the contemporary Augustan marriage laws and its implications on spousal inheritance explains what Apuleius would in theory receive from Pudentilla's estate upon her death. In summary, Apuleius's inheritance would have been severely limited as most of the estate would still have gone to Pudentilla's only surviving son, Pudens. However, Apuleius could have increased his inheritance if he and Pudentilla had their own child, as this child would

³⁹⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 71.

³⁹¹ Costantini 2019, 226.

³⁹² Apuleius, *Apologia* 67–68, 85, 89; see further Vallette 1908, p. xxi, no. 1.

³⁹³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 57.

³⁹⁴ *Lex XII Tabularum* in Apuleius, *Apologia* 47.

also receive a significant percentage of his mother's estate upon her death. Therefore, Taylor argues that it was in the members of the prosecution's best interests to eliminate Apuleius prior to their conception of any children.³⁹⁵ He further concludes that beyond Pudens, it was not likely that any of the other members of the prosecution could have inherited a significant amount, even with Apuleius's removal. This suggests that the prosecutors might have, in fact, believed that Pudentilla was under Apuleius's spell, and that maybe once he was removed, she would be freed from him and would look upon Aemilianus and Rufinus more favourably when it came to allocation of her wealth.³⁹⁶

Interestingly, Apuleius also counteracts the accusations of indirectly causing Pontianus's death by launching his own accusation at Rufinus, stating Rufinus consulted the Chaldeans to inquire into his daughter's inheritance in the event of Pontianus's death. Apuleius further accuses him of preventing the dying Pontianus from executing his final will.³⁹⁷ As seen in section 2.3.3 above and in the cases described in Tacitus's *Annales* (section 2.4.7 above), consulting the Chaldeans was also considered a criminal offence, especially when it regarded inquiring into someone's death.

Overall, the concept of magic as presented in the *Apologia* treads on several legal boundaries. This includes the use of a magical potion to seduce or exert control over another individual and performing illicit rituals under the cover of darkness. While not explicitly magical, there is nevertheless an associated charge of sexual misconduct with a senior woman. As seen in section 2.4.7, there is a history of magical and sexual offenses being linked, such as with the cases outlined in Tacitus's *Annales*. Moreover, the concept of a woman beyond a certain

³⁹⁵ Taylor 2011, 157–158.

³⁹⁶ Taylor 2011, 164–165.

³⁹⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 97.

age engaging in sexual relations or having sexual desires is reminiscent of literary depictions of witches (section 2.4.5 above). While Pudentilla is not being tried or slandered for her own part in the marriage, this law nevertheless illustrates a Roman taboo of older women engaging in sexual activity, and by extension, Apuleius's involvement with an older woman is still perceived as subversive. Thus, the concept of magic in the *Apologia* is defined by the legality of certain practices; however, legality is not the only parameter used to define magic within this text.

4.3.2 Socially unacceptable

Beyond the legal implications of Apuleius's actions, the prosecution also accuses Apuleius of having certain qualities and engaging in behaviours which were socially unacceptable. By the time of his trial, Apuleius is already in a unique and marginal position in society as a learned philosopher, something which would typically garner a level of reverence.³⁹⁸ However, the prosecution argues that in reality, Apuleius diverges from the traditional image of the philosopher and resembles more closely that of an unscrupulous womaniser, a person more likely to partake in love magic.³⁹⁹ This attempt at defamation is evidenced by a negotiation between Apuleius and the prosecution over the meaning of Apuleius's appearance and behaviour, and thus how closely his character is associated with that of a magic practitioner.

Apuleius's social position as a dedicated and learned philosopher even before the trial planted him outside of accepted Roman social norms.⁴⁰⁰ Apuleius refers to himself as the most eloquent man of his time, and that he had studied from his youth so much that his health sometimes suffered as a result.⁴⁰¹ Graf has argued that it is the social acceptability of the practitioner rather than the practice intrinsically which determines if something was magical. He

³⁹⁸ Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 625.

³⁹⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4, 15; Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 3.433–438; Costantini 2019, 48.

⁴⁰⁰ Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 625.

⁴⁰¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 45.

uses Apuleius as an example to support his argument, as he states that Apuleius was already a marginal, philosophical figure in Roman society before he was accused of performing magic.⁴⁰² However, according to Apuleius, the prosecutors attempt to slander his character by insisting that he does not fit the typical image of the wise and respectable philosopher. They draw attention to his well-maintained looks which they argue contradict the traditional image of the respected, yet unkempt, Socratic philosopher with which Apuleius so closely associates himself. To further emphasise this image, they state that Apuleius knew how to create and use cosmetics, such as toothpaste, and that he was an admirer of erotic poetry.⁴⁰³ This was intended to characterise Apuleius as a gigolo-type figure, capable of manipulating an elderly widow for her money through love-magic. This was a common contemporary characterisation which appears in the works of Ovid; and this representation of Apuleius is also an attempt by the prosecution to effeminise him, which only makes him appear even more deviant from the norm of Roman masculinity.⁴⁰⁴ Aspects such as the effeminisation of Apuleius and discussions of his race and ethnicity are more closely examined in sections 4.4 and 4.5 below.

Apuleius defends himself from this characterisation by denying all of the prosecution's claims including that he is good-looking, and that he benefitted financially from his marriage to Pudentilla.⁴⁰⁵ Apuleius argues that he is not exceptionally good-looking or youthful and names several other philosophers such as Pythagoras and Zeno who were also known to be physically

⁴⁰² Graf 1997a, 88.

⁴⁰³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4, 6–13.

⁴⁰⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4, 15; Costantini 2019, 48; the passage in question: Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 3.433–438: *Sed vitate viros cultum formamque professos, Quique suas ponunt in statione comas. Quae vobis dicunt, dixerunt mille puellis: Errat et in nulla sede moratur amor. Femina quid faciat, cum sit vir levior ipsa, Forsitan et plures possit habere viros?* (But avoid men who profess elegance and good looks, and who arrange their hair in its proper place. What they tell you they have told a thousand women; their fancy wanders, and has no fixed abode. What can a woman do when her lover is smoother than herself, and may perhaps have more lovers than she?)

⁴⁰⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4, 67.4, 102–103; Rives 2008, 25; Taylor 2011, 155–156: Apuleius refers to a *pactum dotale* which means that his dowry would be returned to her remaining son upon her death.

beautiful.⁴⁰⁶ Beyond Taylor's argument that he would not have inherited substantially from his marriage to Pudentilla, there does not seem to be an additional suggestion that Apuleius was in breach of any laws concerning his handling of Pudentilla's estate.⁴⁰⁷ In fact, Apuleius argues that he even dissuaded Pudentilla from disinheriting Pudens for his unseemly behaviour in favour of himself, and thus he did not profit from his marriage even upon Pudentilla's death.⁴⁰⁸ Furthermore, he demonstrates that her dowry was relatively small and that upon her death, it would revert to her sons.⁴⁰⁹ Therefore, Apuleius is able to realign himself with the figure of a philosopher, despite the prosecution's attempt to dismantle his characterisation as such.

While Apuleius is able to defend himself against accusations of being a greedy womaniser, his rebuttal of the charge of love magic, specifically his procurement and dissection of the sea creatures to use in the love potion, is more complicated.⁴¹⁰ Through his strategic argument, he is able to re-establish himself as a learned, Socratic philosopher, and thus dissociates himself with the figure of the love magic practitioner.

To create this love potion, the prosecution claims that Apuleius used three types of fish and molluscs. It was confirmed by several witnesses in Oea that Apuleius had purchased several fish from the local fishmonger in Oea, and subsequently dissected one of the molluscs in public.⁴¹¹ The prosecutors list a *lepus marinarus* and two other molluscs with obscene names, meant to suggest that these would have been ingredients used for the purposes of seduction or to invoke a sexual frenzy in the aged widow.⁴¹² Apuleius begins his rebuttal by stating that love

⁴⁰⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4; Baker 2017, 360–361.

⁴⁰⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 17.

⁴⁰⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 102–103; Asztalos 2005, 267.

⁴⁰⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 67.4; Taylor 2011, 155–156.

⁴¹⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 29–42.

⁴¹¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 33, 40; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 626.

⁴¹² Apuleius, *Apologia* 33; Hunink 2016, 16; Rives 2003, 323.

burns like a fire, and that using a marine ingredient such as fish or other marine animals would be counterintuitive.⁴¹³ He continues by demonstrating his literary knowledge, in order to expose the ignorance of the prosecution and his own intellectual superiority. He quotes Vergil's recipe for love magic in *Eclogae* and other Greek plays which mention love magic, none of which include fish as an ingredient. He specifically chides Tannonius for not having read Vergil, thus exposing Tannonius's lack of education.⁴¹⁴ He further cites certain Homeric verses pertaining to magic, none of which include fish as an ingredient, and mentions an anecdote of when Pythagoras decided to return some fish back to the sea because they could not be used for magic.⁴¹⁵ Apuleius additionally lists various well-known magical deities mentioned in Ovid's works, such as Selene, Hecate, and Trivia. In doing so, he demonstrates that he does have some knowledge of magic, but ultimately emphasises that love potions and magic practitioners described by great works never use ingredients from the sea, favouring instead those from the earth, such as stones and minerals.⁴¹⁶ He thus argues that ingredients from the 'earth' were more likely to be used for magical purposes; therefore, his purchase of marine animals was unrelated to the charges laid against him.⁴¹⁷

In further defence of his purchases of the two other molluscs which were referred to by vulgar names, one for its resemblance to male genitalia, while the other to female; Apuleius argues that he did not seek out such 'gross-named' molluscs to which Tannonius refers. Moreover, he states that if he did, he could have just found them washed up on the beach rather than commissioning them from the local fisherman.⁴¹⁸ He further explains with examples how

⁴¹³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 30.

⁴¹⁴ Vergil, *Eclogae* 8.64f in Apuleius, *Apologia* 30.

⁴¹⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 31; Rives 2008, 45.

⁴¹⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 31.

⁴¹⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 31; Rives 2008, 45.

⁴¹⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 5–8, 33–35.

ridiculous it is to assume a connection between things that are unrelated based solely on their names; for example, confusing a kidney stone for a physical stone, rather than a blockage of the bladder. Using this rhetoric, he argues that although the molluscs are said to resemble genitalia, it does not mean that the molluscs would have a literal effect on an individual's genitalia, or by extension, their libido.⁴¹⁹

Many of Apuleius's arguments surrounding the lack of evidence for use of ingredients from the sea for love magic are not corroborated by other contemporary sources. As can be seen, in many *PGM* spells, objects from the sea, like seashells, were often used in love magic, as they were associated with Aphrodite.⁴²⁰ Furthermore, through Apuleius's lengthy rebuttal, he reveals his knowledge of magical practices, deities, and sources, despite his denial of having used love magic. Costantini remarks on the thin line that Apuleius treads: on the one hand, he demonstrates that he is well-versed in magical practice and thus could have the knowledge to carry out the actions of which he is accused. On the other hand, he attempts to impose his superiority on the prosecutors by demonstrating his knowledge of these sources from an intellectual aspect.⁴²¹ Therefore, through his lengthy argument, he is able to solidify his own identity as a learned scholar who is intellectually superior to his opponents.

Apuleius further defends himself from the accusations of using molluscs for a love potion by emphasising his zeal for philosophical pursuits. As Apuleius cannot deny that he had purchased the fish from the fishmonger, he proposes to the court that the purchase of such fish or molluscs was for his own study in the natural world, and attempts to emulate the studies of

⁴¹⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 34–35.

⁴²⁰ For example, *PGM* XII.376–377, VII.467; Costantini 2019, 8.

⁴²¹ Costantini 2019, 104.

Aristotle would not be a crime.⁴²² While Apuleius's rhetoric proves successful in having himself acquitted of this specific charge, this argument nevertheless draws attention to a common association between philosophers and magic practitioners: philosophers frequently drew suspicion because of their greater interest and involvement in the processes of the natural world.⁴²³ This notion of over-involvement in the natural world is further investigated under the characteristic of 'manipulative in nature' (section 4.7 below). Apuleius argues that because he is a devout philosopher whose scientific experiments and ritual activity frequently bordered several social norms, many of his actions are frequently misinterpreted as his engaging in magical or suspect activity.⁴²⁴ Perceptions of Apuleius and philosophers are also coloured by the contemporaneous conflation of magic with science, where the limited understanding of the natural world was often explained by supernatural events.

Collectively, there are several social boundaries negotiated throughout the *Apologia* through the figures of the Socratic philosopher and the immoral seducer. While the prosecution attempted to argue that Apuleius is more closely aligned with the latter, and thus more closely associated with a love-magic practitioner; Apuleius argues that he is such a devout philosopher that his actions are sometimes misinterpreted, especially by the more ignorant, as magical. However, with regard to both of these characterisations, there is an underlying trope that any violations of social norms risked becoming more closely associated with magic.

4.3.3 Different perspectives

When considering the different perspectives under this characteristic, it is necessary to consider the legal versus social implications of the concept of magic in the *Apologia* separately. Because

⁴²² Apuleius, *Apologia* 36, 40–41; Hunink 2016, 17; Otto 2011, 246–248.

⁴²³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 27; Rives 2008, 26; Dickie 2003, 200.

⁴²⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 27.

the *Apologia* recounts the events of a legal trial, both the perspective of Apuleius and perspective of the prosecution must abide by the parameters of magic as defined by the Roman law.

Moreover, Maximus was represented as the ultimate authority over the trial, thus neither Apuleius, nor the prosecution represented the most dominant position. Hence, the opposing perspectives converge with regard to the legal definition of magic.

However, concerning the social acceptability of magic, there is a divergence between the perspectives regarding the figure who represents the magic practitioner. There is even a negotiation over the socially acceptable philosophical figure. This is shown by the prosecution arguing that Apuleius does not adhere to the image of the Socratic philosopher, but rather more closely resembles a nefarious seducer, and thus a practitioner of love magic.⁴²⁵ Apuleius, on the other hand, insists that his appearance and behaviour is, in fact, in keeping with various revered philosophers, and by extension, is not representative of a goetic or subversive magic practitioner.⁴²⁶ As a result, he argues that many of his philosophical pursuits are often misunderstood by the less educated, such as many of the people comprising the prosecution.⁴²⁷ Therefore, the concept of magic as presented in the *Apologia* with regard to its social acceptability and the type of figure who is associated with practising magic is divergent between the self-representation of Apuleius and the perception of him by the prosecution.

While legal and social boundaries often coincide, in this case study, the different perspectives surrounding the social acceptability of magic are contrasting. This likely owing to the lack of strict parameters surrounding social boundaries of magic, unlike in the case of the legal boundaries which are more clearly outlined. As a result, the likely pre-existing tension

⁴²⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4, 15; Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 3.433–438; Costantini 2019, 48.

⁴²⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4; Baker 2017, 360–361.

⁴²⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 27.

between Apuleius and the prosecution also manifests in a negotiation over the social acceptability and tendencies of the concept of the magic practitioner, and how closely Apuleius is aligned with this figure. As it is in the best interest of the prosecution to discredit Apuleius, they would obviously attempt to characterise Apuleius closely to the figure which they argue is in keeping with the concept of the magic practitioner, regardless of the direct association with his having broken the law. There is nevertheless a convergence with these perspectives as it seems as though the magic practitioner and womanising-seducer figure could be linked. However, this presents a distinction between Apuleius's self-representation where he denies exhibiting the qualities of such a figure, while the prosecution allegedly perceives him as so. Overall, the social acceptability of magic in this text is varied from the different perspectives, especially with regard to self-representation versus others' perceptions.

4.3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Apologia* presents various aspects of the legal and social boundaries tied to magic, the latter of which are vehemently debated by Apuleius and the prosecution. Apuleius is very careful to describe his actions, so as to not breach any obvious legal boundaries. Such magico-legal boundaries include the use of a love potion to gain control over another individual and *nocturna sacra*. However, Costantini's argument that Apuleius picks with which version of the *magus* he chooses to associate himself, illustrates how Apuleius is able to tread the social boundary carefully.⁴²⁸ Despite the prestige that Apuleius would have acquired through his education and works, his lifestyle and activities would have nevertheless been considered unique and even 'marginal' as Graf states, thus making it futile for him to deny outright any association

⁴²⁸ Costantini 2019, 23–24.

whatsoever with magic practitioners.⁴²⁹ Overall, while Apuleius is ultimately acquitted, he straddles several social boundaries which are prone to association with magical practice.

4.4 Exoticism and foreignness

This section investigates the exotic elements of magic which are presented in the *Apologia*. In Roman contexts, ‘exoticism’ and ‘foreignness’ are subjective terms to describe ‘Otherness’.

While many practices or materials which were often labelled as the ‘Other’ were not as unfamiliar to Roman society as suggested, these labels were often given to subversive, or undesirable individuals and practices by Roman authorities to substantiate claims laid against them. This concept of ‘Otherness’ as presented in the *Apologia* can be studied from different aspects: (1) Apuleius’s ethnic identity as African in contrast with his adherence to Roman social norms within Roman-African society; (2) the perceived ‘foreign’ origin of several of the materials allegedly used by Apuleius in magical rituals. In the case of the former, with the exception of Maximus, all of the other named actors in the *Apologia* are also African. Thus, the *Apologia* provides insight into the social tensions amongst African groups within the Roman Empire and the ensuing power struggles relating to their adherence to Roman hegemonic cultural practices. In contrast, within the text, those who were perceived as diverging from Roman ideals were also referred to as *barbaros* ‘barbaric’ or *rusticanus* ‘rustic’ or ‘uncouth’. With regard to the exoticism of rituals or materials, whether they were truly of foreign origin, they attain these labels simply by being associated with magic. Overall, aspects of foreignness and ‘Otherness’ of magic are seen throughout the *Apologia*.

⁴²⁹ Graf 1997a, 88.

4.4.1 Race and ethnicity in the Roman Empire

In recent scholarship, there has been greater attention drawn to discussions surrounding the concepts of race and ethnicity in antiquity, and several scholars have additionally reflected on the influence of Apuleius's identity as an African on his works. While Apuleius's racial or ethnic identity cannot be ascertained, nor if his appearance visibly contrasts with the inhabitants of Oea, it is nevertheless necessary to grasp the social framework surrounding different groups within Roman Africa. This is particularly relevant as both Apuleius and the prosecution mock each other's place of origin. Furthermore, although not strictly an issue of race or even ethnicity, there is nevertheless an attempt made by the prosecution to categorise Apuleius as a dangerous foreigner to Oea's society and representation of the 'Other'. An additional social power dynamic is presented during the trial through the form of Romanness whereby adhering to Roman ideals demonstrates cultural superiority. Therefore, while the *Apologia* does not present an obviously racialised conflict, the framework of study for race in antiquity is relevant to grasping issues related to cultural identity and hierarchies.

Methodologies for this area of study have been presented in the works of Isaac, McCoskey, Haley and Ndiaye. Isaac presents the concept of 'proto-racism' in antiquity, or the hostile, patterned sentiments of prejudice against individuals because of their race.⁴³⁰ While he somewhat controversially defines race as something innate to an individual which cannot be changed, while ethnicity can be altered, such as one's religion or citizenship; he nevertheless draws attention to the possibility of changing one's identity or status through factors such as religion and citizenship. This is particularly relevant to the *Apologia* where Apuleius declares pride in his ethnic origin, but equally emphasises his alignment with Roman values. This reflects

⁴³⁰ Isaac 2004, 15, 24.

McCoskey's argument that one's level of Roman citizenship was ultimately more indicative of one's identity within the Roman Empire than any other factors such as race or innate ethnicity.⁴³¹ For example, Juba II of Mauretania was praised within the Roman Empire because of his upbringing in Rome and was thus considered 'Roman' enough, despite his potential race or ethnicity as Berber or African.⁴³²

Rather than attempting to create a ubiquitous definition for race and ethnicity, Ndiaye has modelled race as 'a flexible and canny conceptual continuum: it bends, moves, and changes with the times, as best serves its purpose of hierarchizing difference in the service of power in whichever context it operates'.⁴³³ Ndiaye's approach is particularly useful for analysing power dynamics within the *Apologia*, as she makes an important distinction within her model which is that relationships relating to race and ethnicity are affected and altered by overarching power dynamics. For this reason, within the Roman Empire, there were other factors aside from race, such as one's citizenship and education which could have been more indicative of an individual's social standing and acceptability. This is also illustrated throughout the *Apologia* where Apuleius establishes his superiority over the prosecution because of his prestigious education and culture within a Roman context, rather than with his race or ethnicity.⁴³⁴ Hence, the terms exotic or foreign are aspects of 'Othering', especially within a Roman-hegemonic system.

4.4.2 Apuleius's identity within a Roman context

There are several layers of complexity that are presented in the *Apologia* when evaluating the 'foreignness' and 'Otherness' of Apuleius. Despite both Apuleius and the prosecution sharing the identity of African, attempts are still made by the prosecution to emphasise how Apuleius

⁴³¹ McCoskey 2012, 70.

⁴³² Domínguez Monedero 2017.

⁴³³ Ndiaye 2022, 8.

⁴³⁴ For example, Apuleius, *Apologia* 51.

represents an outsider to the community of Oea. Apuleius is able to overcome these attacks by demonstrating that his superior education and knowledge aligns him more closely with Roman intellectualism and ideals. As a result, he is able to separate himself from members of the prosecution whom he characterises as ignorant and uncultured, while aligning himself with Maximus, the Roman judge.⁴³⁵ In this way, power dynamics, including between various ethnic groups and class-intellectual statuses, are negotiated throughout the *Apologia* by Apuleius and the prosecution. In the case of Apuleius's position as an outsider, this leads to additional perceptions of him as a magic practitioner.

Apuleius self-identifies in the *Apologia* as 'half-Numidian, and half-Gaetulian' (*Seminumidum et Semigaetulum*), making him presumably half-Berber. He was born in Madauros to a wealthy family with full Roman citizenship, and his father was a *duumvir*.⁴³⁶ Finkelpearl, Graverini, and Lee speculate that in addition to Apuleius's fluency in Latin and Ancient Greek, that he might have been a native Punic speaker.⁴³⁷

Apuleius's hometown, Madauros, was under the control of Carthage from the fifth century BC and became a Roman colony within the province of Numidia by the end of the first century AD. While Madauros was originally a Punic city, Oea was traditionally a Phoenician one, and was then later colonised by the neighbouring Greeks and Carthaginians.⁴³⁸ Oea and Sabratha were located in Roman Tripolitania and had a diverse cultural demography which was constantly evolving, with Greek, Latin, and other languages present. Bradley states that the presence of multiple languages is shown in religious inscriptions even after Roman annexation:

⁴³⁵ For example, Apuleius, *Apologia* 36.

⁴³⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 24; Costantini 2019, 10.

⁴³⁷ Finkelpearl, Graverini, and Lee 2014, 2.

⁴³⁸ Finkelpearl, Graverini, and Lee 2014, 2–14; Bradley 1997, 204, 207; Bradley 2014.

‘there are inscriptions in Punic and Libyan as well as in Greek and Latin, and inscriptions where Latin names and titles of magistrates are transcribed into Punic script’.⁴³⁹ This is further supported by archaeological evidence which demonstrates the presence of Greek, Roman, Punic, Egyptian, and other neighbouring cultures’ deities which were worshipped in Oea and Sabratha. Inscriptions of worship found in neighbouring Lepcis Magna were also written in multiple languages.⁴⁴⁰ Sabratha, Oea, and Lepcis Magna were all port cities which would have also functioned as trade centres for products such as olive oil; olive presses were mentioned as part of Pudentilla’s vast fortune.⁴⁴¹ Bradley theorises that while the trial itself took place in Latin, most everyday business in Sabratha, as well as the accounts of witnesses from Oea would have been in local languages, possibly Punic.⁴⁴² As a result, it can be said that Latin was the more formal language in Roman Tripolitania, while Punic was the more colloquial one. With regard to attitudes towards Carthaginians and Phoenicians, ancient Greco-Roman sources are consistently hostile through the centuries, frequently referring to Phoenicians and Carthaginians as untrustworthy and greedy, as well as irreligious and inhumane. Isaac argues that this was likely owing to the longstanding conflict between Rome and Carthage, and that hostile sentiments towards Carthaginians and Phoenicians originated from the Ancient Greeks and were perpetuated into Roman times.⁴⁴³ He also mentions that even Roman aristocrats from the African provinces did not garner the same respect as other Roman aristocrats; for example, Statius felt the need to emphasise Septimius Severus’s adherence to Roman customs, because of his origins in Lepcis Magna.⁴⁴⁴ In order to possibly combat this disadvantage, Apuleius compares himself to

⁴³⁹ Bradley 2012, 14–15.

⁴⁴⁰ Bradley 2000, 222.

⁴⁴¹ Bradley 2012, 7.

⁴⁴² Bradley 2012, 4.

⁴⁴³ Isaac 2004, 324–351.

⁴⁴⁴ Statius, *Silvae* 4.5.29–48 : *tene in remotis Syrtibus avia/Leptis creavit? iam feret Indicas/messes odoratisque rara/cinnama praeripiet Sabaeis./quis non in omni vertice Romuli/reptasse dulcem Septimium putet?/quis fonte*

Cyrus the Great whom he describes as ‘*Semimedes ac Semipersa*’ and claims is an example of someone who embodies the notion that it is ‘not the *regio* where a man was born or lives but the *ratio* that inspires his behavior’.⁴⁴⁵

Although Apuleius and the prosecution share cultural and ethnic similarities, there are nevertheless attempts at disparaging each other based on their town of origin. The prosecution mocks Apuleius for having come from Madauros and refer to the town as *barbaros*.⁴⁴⁶ Additionally, the prosecution argues that because Madauros was so small and uncivilized, that it was unusual for Apuleius to be fluent in both Latin and Greek, and that his ability to do so was suspect.⁴⁴⁷ As a counter attack, Apuleius also insults the birthplace of Aemilianus, Zarath, for its rusticity.⁴⁴⁸

While race and ethnicity might not have been the primary method of disparagement amongst the actors in the *Apologia*, factors like education and sophistication were more present in establishing the power relations amongst them. Beyond the negotiation of identities between Apuleius and the prosecution with regard to ignorance versus intellect, there is an additional power dynamic which presents itself in the form of Romanness. Maximus is the only known

*Iuturnae relictis/uberibus neget esse pastum?/nec mira virtus: protinus Ausonum/portus vadosae nescius
Africae/intras adoptatusque Tuscis/gurgitibus puer innatasti./hinc parvus inter pignora curiae/contentus artae
lumine purpurae/crescis, sed immensos labores/indole patricia secutus./non sermo Poenus, non habitus tibi,/externa
non mens: Italus, Italus,/sunt Urbe Romanisque turmis,/qui Libyam deceant alumni*

(Did Lepcis, remote in the distant Syrtes, give you birth? Soon she will be bearing Indian harvests and forestall the perfumed Sabaeans with rare cinnamon. Who but would think that sweet Septimius had crawled on every hill of Romulus? Who deny that when he left the breast he drank from Juturna's fountain? No wonder you excel. Straightaway, knowing nothing of Africa's shallows, you entered an Ausonian harbor and, child of adoption, swam in Tuscan waters. Then in boyhood you grew up among sons of the Senate House, content with the brilliance of narrow purple, but by nature a patrician seeking unmeasured toils. Your speech was not Punic, nor foreign your dress or your mind: Italian, Italian! In the City and Rome's squadrons there are some worthy to be fosterlings of Libya.)

⁴⁴⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 25; Mattiacci 2014, 94.

⁴⁴⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 24–25.

⁴⁴⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 5.

⁴⁴⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 23–24.

non-African Roman actor in the text, and he represents the highest authority throughout the proceedings. Therefore, to bolster his reputation further by emphasising his own intellect, Apuleius attempts to align himself with Maximus and Roman ideals generally, thus overcoming this association as an outsider and a magic practitioner.

In recent times, the concept ‘Romanisation’ has fallen under greater scrutiny, and certain scholars have advocated the abandonment of the term entirely. Traditionally, the term has been entwined with models of colonisation through the notion that Rome ‘civilised’ the inhabitants and geography of its conquered provinces. Thus, it is a concept which has been used as a justification for Eurocentrism. Beyond the ethical and decolonial reasons for foregoing this term, scholars such as Woolf have demonstrated that the transformation of Roman provinces socially, geographically, or infrastructurally was not uniform, nor were such changes brought about directly through Roman annexation.⁴⁴⁹ Several scholars have advocated for replacement terms: Webster, has used the terms of ‘hybridisation’ and ‘creolisation’ to describe the interaction between the ‘dominant’ Roman culture with other cultures; meanwhile, Versluys argues that the term ‘globalisation’ is the most accurate for describing the changing culture within the Roman Empire.⁴⁵⁰ These arguments for the replacement of the term are all valid; however, within the context of the particular case presented by the *Apologia*, the power dynamic of Roman over indigenous culture and law is present, as Maximus represents the dominant authority. As a result, Apuleius and the persecution both attempt to align themselves with Roman qualities, while also disparaging the opposition by emphasising their lack of civility and divergence from Roman ideals. In order to avoid the connotations of ‘Romanisation’, while also illustrating this power

⁴⁴⁹ Woolf 1997.

⁴⁵⁰ Webster 2001; Woolf 1997; Versluys 2014, 7; Finkelpearl, Graverini, and Lee 2014, 2–3.

dynamic in the *Apologia*, I will use the term ‘Romanness’ and ‘Romanised’ sparingly to refer to the process of accepting and incorporating Roman elements.

In spite of Apuleius’s African identity and ethnicity, Apuleius was nevertheless born a wealthy Roman citizen and was considered even more educated than most Romans with a prestigious intellectual background, having studied in both Rome and Athens.⁴⁵¹ When he declares his pride in his hometown of Madauros, he also praises its status as a Roman colony (*splendissima colonia summa*), and his own father’s contributions in making it so.⁴⁵² Therefore, while Apuleius states that the prosecution attempts to disparage him because of his ethnicity and place of origin, Apuleius’s text gives the impression that he was able to overcome these attacks, mainly through other factors such as the honours he earned through merit and his status within the Roman Empire.⁴⁵³ For this reason, it can be argued that Apuleius already had a clear advantage of being able to not only appeal to Maximus through their similar education and zeal for philosophy, but also because he is able to code switch between African and Roman cultural norms. Moreover, the types of intellectual pursuits to which Apuleius refers were mainly deemed as prestigious in a Roman context, thus implying that his intellectual superiority is also indicative of his higher level of Romanness.

In some ways, it can be said that the Sicinii family were a Romanised, African elite family. Owing to the fact that Pudentilla was given a *tutela* upon her first husband’s death, and was under the care of her father-in-law or *paterfamilias*, suggests that they had adopted a Roman family system.⁴⁵⁴ All issues raised regarding Pudentilla’s age of widowhood, qualification for

⁴⁵¹ Bradley 2000, 228.

⁴⁵² Apuleius, *Apologia* 25; Mattiacci 2014, 94.

⁴⁵³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 24–25.

⁴⁵⁴ Bradley 2000, 219.

remarriage, and ability to produce more children is additionally in keeping with Roman tendencies.⁴⁵⁵ Furthermore, Pudens is described as wearing a *toga* at the trial, and Pontianus is referred to as *splendidissimus eques*.⁴⁵⁶ While the majority of the practices adopted and displayed by the Sicinii family fall in line with Roman traditions, the suggestion that Pudentilla would have to marry her late husband's brother would have been considered barbaric in elite Roman society, thus suggesting that the Sicinii maintained some of their own local African practices. This is also reflected by the fact that Rufinus desired for his daughter to remarry with Pudens after the death of Pontianus.⁴⁵⁷ Bradley argues that both the Sicinii and Pudentilla's own family, the Aemilii, were probably of Punic origin, but who had an ancestor who received Roman citizenship, and as a result, had a family of blended culture and did not abandon all of their own longstanding local traditions in favour of Roman ones.⁴⁵⁸

Regarding the issue of language, based on Apuleius's account, the competency of Africans in Latin was considered a demonstration of adequate Romanness, while the additional knowledge of Greek indicated that an individual was well-educated. Apuleius and Pudentilla were competent in both languages, and Apuleius additionally praises his wife's intelligence in this respect.⁴⁵⁹ In contrast, Apuleius draws attention to the fact that Pudens can only speak Punic, thus insinuating Pudens's intellectual inferiority.⁴⁶⁰

The *Apologia*'s actors' knowledge of languages is particularly relevant when Apuleius addresses a particular piece of evidence presented by the prosecution. This evidence, an

⁴⁵⁵ Bradley 2000, 227.

⁴⁵⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 62, 87.

⁴⁵⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 98; Bradley 2000, 227–228.

⁴⁵⁸ Bradley 2000, 220–221.

⁴⁵⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 30, 36–38; Bradley 2000, 223; 2014, 26.

⁴⁶⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 98; Hunink 1996, 166.

incriminating letter, was supposedly written by Pudentilla in Greek and refers to Apuleius as a *magus* who had enchanted her: *Απολέϊος μάγος, καὶ ἐγὼ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ μεμάγευμαι καὶ ἐρῶ· ἐλθε τοίνυν πρὸς ἐμέ, ἕως ἔτι σωφρονῶ*. (Apuleius is a magician; he has bewitched me and I am in love. So come to me while I am still in my right mind).⁴⁶¹ Apuleius argues that this statement was taken out of context, and thus the prosecutors had misinterpreted the letter.⁴⁶² Additionally, Apuleius points out that Pudentilla, in another correspondence, expresses her desire to remarry a suitable man as she was lonely, and that she has prayed to the gods for such a suitor, and for Pudens to see reason to allow her to do so.⁴⁶³ However, what ultimately leads to Apuleius’s victory over the damning letter is that he is able to prove that Aemilianus cannot read Greek, and thus could not accurately understand the contents of any of Pudentilla’s Greek letters.⁴⁶⁴ Therefore, the prosecution’s lack of knowledge in Greek not only disproves this evidence against Apuleius, but also aids in establishing Apuleius’s intellectual superiority over his opponents. Apuleius is also able to use this opportunity to demonstrate his wife’s own cultural superiority and Romanness over the prosecution for her skills in both Latin and Greek. In doing so, Apuleius is able to overcome the accusations of being a *magus* by exposing the prosecution’s linguistic, and by extension intellectual, incompetency. Hence, he does not need to address the accusation of having enchanted Pudentilla directly, but simply attacks the prosecution.

In summary, Apuleius, aside from Maximus, is the only actor in the *Apologia* not from Oea and is a marginal figure owing to his unique education and philosophical background.⁴⁶⁵ For this combination of reasons, he represents the ‘Other’, or an ‘out’ individual as described by Otto

⁴⁶¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 82; Asztalos 2005, 273.

⁴⁶² Apuleius, *Apologia* 78–83; Rives 2008, 24.

⁴⁶³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 70–71; Hunink 1996, 163–164; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 623.

⁴⁶⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 87; Asztalos 2005, 273; Noreña 2014, 37–38.

⁴⁶⁵ Bradley 2000, 228.

(section 3.2 above) despite his shared ethnicity with the prosecution as African provincials. Because he is seen as an outsider who possibly poses a threat to the community of Oea, he is perceived as a possible magic practitioner. While this does not necessarily exoticise Apuleius, his adjacency to foreignness nevertheless associates him with magic. Therefore, while Apuleius is mindful of not being perceived as suspect foreigner, he is able to overcome this offence with his education and merit within the Roman system. This further indicates the greater disparity in the treatment between foreign women and their male counterparts accused of practising magic, as women are not able to overcome such debasement through intellectual honours, such as in the case of Locusta and Martina (section 2.4.7 above). This also relates to the characteristic of ‘secret and arcane knowledge’ whereby one’s education and status can differentiate how one’s actions were perceived.

4.4.3 Exoticism of magical rituals undertaken and materials procured by Apuleius

The accusations of rituals undertaken and materials procured that are launched against Apuleius are heavily associated with exotic or foreign elements, and by extension with magical associations. Some of the materials which Apuleius is accused of or implied of having used include linen, frankincense, and myrrh, each of which have their own associations to foreign rituals.⁴⁶⁶

One of the ‘exotic’ materials which Apuleius is accused of using are herbs for toothpaste. The prosecutors present a witness named Calpurnianus at the trial who attests to having Apuleius create a toothpaste for him.⁴⁶⁷ The specific ingredients used to make the toothpaste are not clarified either by the prosecution or Apuleius, but are simply referred to as *ex Arabicis fructes*

⁴⁶⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 6–8, 53–57.

⁴⁶⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 6–8.

by Apuleius in his letter to Calpurnianus along with the aforementioned toothpaste.⁴⁶⁸ Some ingredients that were commonly associated with having an Arabic origin and could be referred to as *Arabici fructes* were frankincense and myrrh; these ingredients traditionally had magical associations and might have been one reason why Apuleius chooses not to reveal the specific ingredients, as it would have strengthened his connection to magic. Frankincense and myrrh could be used for incense used in both religious and magical ritual, and the *PGM* includes several recipes that require frankincense.⁴⁶⁹ Additionally, Pliny mentions types of hygiene practices of the *Magoi* including the use of frankincense and myrrh.⁴⁷⁰ While the use of these products may have been benign, the creation and administration of cosmetic substances, such as toothpaste, could also be connected to those prosecuted under the *Lex Cornelia* where sellers could be charged if they poisoned someone by accident or on purpose.⁴⁷¹

There is an ongoing theme throughout the *Apologia* of Apuleius's philosophical and scientific inquiries into certain substances which have magical uses. However, he is able to successfully distance himself from such associations by emphasising that many substances, including frankincense and myrrh, which traditionally had magical associations also had other mundane uses. Two such passages highlight Apuleius's knowledge of the different uses of various substances, including frankincense and myrrh: *ut si tus et casiam et myrram ceterosque id genus odores funeri tantum emptos arbitreris, cum et medicamento parentur et sacrificio* 'as if you were to think that people buy frankincense, cassia, myrrh and other such perfumes only for a funeral, when they obtain them both as medicines and as offerings'.⁴⁷² Apuleius insists that the

⁴⁶⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 6.

⁴⁶⁹ Costantini 2019, 52–53; Apuleius, *Apologia* 32, 47; for example, *PGM* XXXVI.276.

⁴⁷⁰ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 30.21–7.

⁴⁷¹ See section 2.3.4 above.

⁴⁷² Apuleius, *Apologia* 32; the second passage from the same section: *Ut si elleborum vel cicutam vel sucum papaveris emissem, item alia eiusdem modi quorum moderatus usus salutaris, sed commixtio vel quantitas noxia est,*

prosecution, particularly Aemilianus, is too closed-minded to appreciate Apuleius's scientific and philosophical interest into discovering the various uses of such substances. Thus, his lack of understanding leads him to accusations of magic.⁴⁷³ As a result, Apuleius is once again able to associate himself with the philosophical *magus* rather than the goetic one by demonstrating his superior knowledge in the diverse uses of certain materials. Therefore, Apuleius argues that certain substances should not be intrinsically associated with magic, but that it depended on the context in which they are used. This is similar to the defence he employs when denying the use of fish and molluscs for a love spell.

Moreover, Apuleius is accused of contaminating Pontianus's *Lares* by placing an object that was wrapped in linen near it.⁴⁷⁴ Linen traditionally had magical associations and was associated with originating from Egypt and is often referred to in the *PGM*.⁴⁷⁵ When Apollonius of Tyana, a first century AD philosopher and religious leader, is tried for magic-related crimes, one of the accusations refers to his wearing a single cloak of linen.⁴⁷⁶ Linen cloths were additionally used in Mithraic spells.⁴⁷⁷ In order to remove himself from this association, Apuleius specifically uses the term *sudariolum*, 'indicating a napkin or a cloth used to wipe one's face, which is not necessarily made out of linen' rather than *linteolum* or 'small linen cloth'.⁴⁷⁸ Furthermore, Costantini states, 'In order to deny this common connection between

quis aequo animo pateretur, si me per haec veneficii arcesseres, quod ex illis potest homo occidi? (Suppose for example I had bought hellebore, hemlock, or poppy juice and other such items as well, medicinal when used moderately but harmful when mixed or excessive, who would put up with listening to you if you charged me with poisoning because of them, just because they can be used to kill someone?)

⁴⁷³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 32; Costantini 2019, 108.

⁴⁷⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 53–57; Hunink 2016, 17–18.

⁴⁷⁵ For example: *PGM* I.277; I.293; I.332; III.294–5; III.706; III.712; IV.80–81; IV.88; IV.171–2; IV.174–5; IV.663; IV.674–6; IV.768–9; IV.1073–4; VII.208; VII.338; VII.359; VII.664; VIII.85–6; XII.122; XII.145; XII.179; XIII.96; XIII.650–1; XIII.1012; XXXVI.269; Costantini 2019, 167.

⁴⁷⁶ Philostratus, *Tà ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.8, 1.32, 4.35, 7.15, 7.20, 8.5.; Costantini 2019, 167.

⁴⁷⁷ Bradley 2014, 30.

⁴⁷⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 53; Costantini 2019, 167.

linen and magic, Apuleius claims its purity and holiness, by opposing it to the impurity of wool, and argues that it was used by the sages Orpheus, Pythagoras, and by the *sanctissimi* priests of Egypt. Linen would have, therefore, been the most suitable material to cover the sacred symbols of his initiations'.⁴⁷⁹ Once again, Apuleius refers to the dual uses of materials, such as frankincense and linen, in order to remove himself from goetic magical associations.

Overall, the prosecution emphasises Apuleius's alleged use of several materials which have magical associations. Apuleius is aware of these associations, and in order to combat this, he draws on his literary knowledge to list some of the other, non-magical uses of these materials. This, again, allows Apuleius to display his academic giftedness over the prosecution. Throughout the debates surrounding Apuleius's origin and the source of the materials he allegedly accessed, the *Apologia* demonstrates that the concept of magic is connected to the themes of exoticness and foreignness.

4.4.4. Different perspectives

The perspectives regarding this characteristic of 'Otherness' refer to how closely each actor represents themselves as adhering to Roman ideals and their opponent as not. However, each of their own claims of adherence to Roman values is not usually given as a direct rebuttal of the accusations of magic, but rather a way for Apuleius to belittle the prosecution, and for the prosecution to emphasise Apuleius's 'Otherness'. Ultimately, Apuleius is able to overcome accusations of magic by representing himself as culturally superior to the prosecution because he is aligned with many Roman values. As discussed at length, Apuleius is not established as racially or ethnically separate from the prosecution, but his position as an outsider to Oea and his marginal position in society generally as a philosopher marks him as an outsider to the

⁴⁷⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 56; Costantini 2019, 167.

prosecution, and thus suspicious. As a result of his ‘Otherness’, they argue that he is in keeping with the traits and behaviours associated with a magic practitioner. Therefore, the prosecution’s perspective and perception of Apuleius in the *Apologia* forms a connection between the concept of magic with the ‘Other’, an adjacent concept of exoticism and foreignness.

On the other hand, there seems to be a shared set of perceptions amongst Apuleius and the prosecution regarding several materials such as frankincense and linen and their association with magic by virtue of their exotic and foreign origins. As shown, Apuleius, who is clearly aware of some of these common perceptions of these materials, argues that these materials have other common and mundane uses. Therefore, there are some shared ideas concerning magic and specifically, exotic materials, by Apuleius and the prosecution.

Therefore, the labels of magic and the ‘Othering’ of individuals and practices are often used individually or together, as a method of defamation. This can often occur as a result of power struggles between groups or individuals, but can also reflect overarching cultural dominance. In this text, it is clear that despite the African origins of the actors and the African context that Roman culture is still the dominant culture. As a result, the actors in this text purposefully self-represent as more Roman, while representing their opponents as the ‘Other’ or as barbaric. Both concepts of ‘magic’ and the ‘Other’ are rooted in their lack of Romanness. It is for this reason that several substances of foreign origin or from a perceived exotic source such as frankincense are more closely associated with magic, despite their sometimes mundane or even common uses within Roman society. Hence, there is a feedback loop which can ensue between the perception of something as foreign and exotic and its association with magic.

4.4.5 Conclusion

There are several examples of the exoticism and foreignness of magic demonstrated in the *Apologia*, although Apuleius's own identity and association with being a magic practitioner is more reflective of aspects of his identity that are foreign to or 'Othered' within the community of Oea. Apuleius represents a marginal figure because of his unique position in society as an educated, philosophical figure, thus further contributing to perceptions of him as a suspicious foreigner. There are additional exotic connections regarding the materials that Apuleius was accused of using in the magic he allegedly practised, once again emphasising his marginality to the local community. Therefore, the *Apologia* highlights this characteristic of magic as defined by Apuleius and the prosecution, while also demonstrating how the 'Other' is negotiated when the prosecution accuses Apuleius of such crimes.

Additionally, this text presents a context where Roman ideals are presented as the dominant culture, especially as the court proceedings were overseen by Maximus, a revered Roman politician. Thus, Apuleius and the prosecution attempt to gain favour by aligning themselves with Roman ideals, while accusing their opposition of diverging from such qualities. In Apuleius's case, he is able to overcome the accusations of magic by aligning himself more closely with Maximus and Roman culture and demonstrating his prestigious, Roman education to his opponents. In doing so, he is able to both emphasise the prosecution's incompetency and associate himself more closely with the Socratic philosophical figure rather than the goetic *magus*.

4.5 Femininity

This section investigates the aspects of 'Femininity' in the concept of magic presented in the *Apologia*. This thesis has reviewed other case studies of accusations of magical potions and poisons, normally against women. While Apuleius is not a woman, there are nevertheless

elements of femininity which are imposed onto Apuleius by the prosecution, thus associating him with love magic and the use of poison. Furthermore, this section will explore the role and agency, or lack thereof, of Pudentilla, in the *Apologia*. Through the following analysis, it may be possible to gain a greater understanding of the role of poison in Roman society its close association with magic and female practitioners. Additionally, this section aids in further developing the magical ‘characteristic’ of femininity and its association with certain magic-associated practices.

4.5.1 Effeminisation of Apuleius in the *Apologia*

Part of the prosecution’s strategy to incriminate Apuleius is to make him seem like a vulgar seducer, capable of using love magic to seduce an older woman, as discussed in section 4.3.2 above. The prosecution tries to effeminise Apuleius, in order to align him with this type of figure, and associate him with the trope of female magic practitioner who uses poison. Thus, feminine qualities and magic are further linked.⁴⁸⁰

The prosecution argues that because Apuleius is good looking and maintains his appearance, specifically his hair, that he does not fit within the image of the stereotypical Socratic philosopher with which he so adamantly associates himself. Rather, they state that he is an effeminate and unscrupulous seducer.⁴⁸¹ Their argument was likely drawing from ideas from contemporary sources, such as Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* which warns women about men who pay too much attention to their hair, as it is one indication that they are womanisers. Ovid also connects such men to individuals who would use love-magic, thus potentially connecting their characterisation of Apuleius as vain with the likelihood that he would also use love spells.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4–16.

⁴⁸¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 4–16.

⁴⁸² Ovid, *Ars amatoria* 2.99, 3.433–3.438; Costantini 2019, 48.

There are also several spells in the *PGM* for a practitioner to become more beautiful, thus Costantini has argued that the prosecution was also implying that he had used magic, in order to improve his appearance.⁴⁸³ Similarly, according to Philostratus, Apollonius of Tyana was tried with *formositas* ‘beauty’ because of his long, beautiful hair which Apuleius is also described as having.⁴⁸⁴

To further support the prosecution’s claim that Apuleius was vain and frivolous, they argue that he knows how to create cosmetics, such as toothpaste, and possesses a mirror.⁴⁸⁵ By extension, they argue that Apuleius is an expert in working with botanicals, a common attribute of magic practitioners.⁴⁸⁶ His possession of a mirror supports the prosecution’s characterisation of him as vain. Mirrors were also used in some magical spells, including ‘catoptric’ magic.⁴⁸⁷ Additionally, because various spells including in the *PGM* require a reflective surface like water, these spells can also be associated with the use of a mirror.⁴⁸⁸ In order to combat these accusations, Apuleius insists that just because he has a mirror in his possession, does not mean that he uses it, including to maintain his appearance. He also insists that he has a mirror strictly for a scientific study, just as many other well-known philosophers, such as Socrates.⁴⁸⁹

Another factor used by the prosecution in their effeminisation of Apuleius is their argument that Apuleius chose to marry a significantly older woman than himself—something which would have subverted the norm of Roman gender and marriage customs. Because he defies the expectation of a respectable Roman man, as a result, he is within the realm of the

⁴⁸³ *PGM* IV.2175–8; Costantini 2019, 47–48.

⁴⁸⁴ Philostratus, *Tà ês τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 132; Costantini 2019, 48.

⁴⁸⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 6–8, 13–16.

⁴⁸⁶ Costantini 2019, 51.

⁴⁸⁷ Hunink 2016, 16.

⁴⁸⁸ *PGM* IV.2297, XIII.752; Costantini 2019, 56–57.

⁴⁸⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 15.

feminine. Overall, there are several ways by which the prosecution attempts to effeminise Apuleius, in order for him to seem more likely to be a magic practitioner and user of poisons and love spells. Thus, it would seem that men who did not fit ideals of Roman masculinity, in addition to women who subverted their own gender norms, were more likely to be associated with being magic practitioners, or were characterised as such alongside accusations of magical practice.

4.5.2 Pudentilla, the elusive lady

Despite most of the legal proceedings revolving around her, Pudentilla does not appear at the trial, because as a woman, she was not allowed to participate in lawsuits.⁴⁹⁰ Therefore, whatever is known about her is presented through Apuleius and the prosecution. While Pudentilla is considered the victim of magic rather than a practitioner, her characterisation, namely by Apuleius, is nevertheless an important baseline for understanding how virtuous Roman *matronae* were expected to behave. This provides a helpful comparison with other case studies involving magic-practising women in legal trials. Furthermore, through this analysis, several other conclusions about Pudentilla can be drawn based on what is implied by Apuleius and the prosecution.

Pudentilla's age and sexuality are an ongoing theme throughout the trial. The prosecution argues that Apuleius is a particularly powerful seducer and enchanter as he is able to evoke feelings of desire in Pudentilla whom they argue was sixty years old, clearly beyond her sexual prime.⁴⁹¹ Although Apuleius is able to disprove this claim of her age later in the trial, the prosecution purposefully exaggerates her age to emphasise the abnormality of an older woman feeling sexual desire. While Pudentilla is not blamed for her sexual urges, it is clear that Roman

⁴⁹⁰ Ulpianus, *Digest* 50.17.2; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 622–623.

⁴⁹¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 67, 85, 89.

societal expectations were that women beyond a certain age should not engage in any romantic or sexual unions. Additionally, there was a letter supposedly written by Pudens to Pontianus that reflects this common attitude. When discussing the possibility of their mother's remarriage, Pudens describes their mother using 'shameful terms' because of her desire to remarry.⁴⁹² Moreover, Apuleius also claims that Rufinus referred to Pudentilla as an *amatrix*.⁴⁹³

However, because Pudentilla was in reality, only a woman in her late thirties by the time of her second marriage to Apuleius, she was still able to produce more heirs, and thus was expected to engage in relations with her husband. Regarding her health, Apuleius describes how Pudentilla wrote to Pontianus explaining that the years of celibacy had caused her great pain and suffering.⁴⁹⁴ This was a common contemporaneous belief whereby the extended celibacy of a woman of a reproductive age could cause health issues, including hysteria. This is supported by Galen who describes how women who had been widowed at a young age could suffer from issues related to their wombs because they were still in child-bearing years, yet had been forced into celibacy.⁴⁹⁵ Therefore, the appropriateness of Pudentilla's sexuality is debated throughout the trial, and her age would have played a significant factor in the acceptability of her relations according to Roman contemporary attitudes.

Within the *Apologia*, there is also the opportunity to compare descriptions of Pudentilla with another female actor, Herennia, the wife of the late Pontianus. Apuleius states that her father, Rufinus, had acquired a long list of debts, and planned to marry his daughter to a string of wealthy suitors, in order to procure money, similar to a pimp with a prostitute.⁴⁹⁶ Apuleius's

⁴⁹² Apuleius, *Apologia* 86; Noreña 2014, 39.

⁴⁹³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 78.

⁴⁹⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 69.

⁴⁹⁵ Galen, *On the Affected Parts*, IV.498-9 in Kühn; see also Israelowich 2016, p. 643, n. 67.

⁴⁹⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 75-77.

descriptions of Pudentilla and Herennia are contrasting. Apuleius makes sure to praise Pudentilla within the framework of Roman societal values of women, namely her *pudicitia*, while he refers to Herennia as *immodica*:

Venit igitur ad eum nova nupta secure et intrepida, pudore dispoliato, flore exsoleto, flammeo obsoleto, virgo rursum post recens repudium, nomen potius adferens puellae quam integritatem. Vectabatur octaphoro; vidistis profecto qui adfuistis, quam improba iuvenum circumspectatrix, quam inmodica sui ostentatrix. Quis non disciplinam matris agnovit, cum in puella videret immedicatum os et purpurissatas genas et illices oculos? Dos erat a creditore omnis ad teruncium pridie sumpta et quidem grandior quam domus exhausta et plena liberis postulabat.

(And so she came to him as a new bride, brazen and fearless, with her ruined honor, faded bloom, threadbare veil, a virgin again after her recent divorce, a girl in name rather than in purity. She was carried in an eight-man litter; all of you who were there must have seen how boldly she surveyed the men, how shamelessly she paraded herself. Who failed to recognize the mother's training when they saw the daughter with painted face, rouged cheeks, seductive eyes? Her whole dowry down to the last penny had been got from a creditor the day before, and indeed was larger than necessary for a bankrupt household full of children.)⁴⁹⁷

Apuleius then states that upon Pontianus's own revelation about his wife and father-in-law, that Pontianus rewrote his will, so that Herennia would only be left with a 'linen' valued at only 200 *denarii*. Hunink has argued that this was not only an insult because he left his wife something of measly value; but also because linen was associated with prostitution, further strengthening the connection between Herennia and prostitution.⁴⁹⁸ Therefore, a woman's chastity in Roman society was under scrutiny, and Apuleius uses it as a method for elevating the status of Pudentilla, while lowering that of Herennia.

The previous section has discussed how Apuleius promotes his wife's intelligence and competency in both Latin and Greek. Throughout the trial, Apuleius frequently describes

⁴⁹⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 76; his full description of Herennia: 76–78; praise of Pudentilla's virtue 69; Benke 2005, 22.

⁴⁹⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 97; Hunink 2016, 115 in Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 632–633.

Pudentilla as dutifully and responsibly managing her own vast estate and affairs without his interference. Apuleius's intention in describing her as such was likely to demonstrate that he did not benefit in any significant way financially through this union. Benke's in-depth analysis reveals Pudentilla's land ownership and her active role in the duties in running such a large agricultural estate. Because of the *Lex Voconia*, it would seem unlikely that she was legally able to control such a large agricultural area as a woman without a *tutela* to manage her affairs until she such time that she remarried.⁴⁹⁹ Therefore, Fantham has proposed that because Pudentilla did not have full control of her affairs, she might have specifically chosen to marry Apuleius, a younger, and possibly more naïve husband, in order to maintain control over her own estate while no longer needing a *tutela*.⁵⁰⁰ This is an interesting theory, and one that suggests that Pudentilla was not as submissive or innocuous as she is framed in the *Apologia*, but in reality, quite shrewd. This can also be seen in Apuleius's account where he claims that Pudentilla herself was reportedly infuriated with Pontianus once he had a sudden change of heart about Pudentilla and Apuleius's marriage. He also states that she was the one who astutely saw through Rufinus's plot to turn Pontianus against them.⁵⁰¹ Hence, Apuleius also promotes Pudentilla's intelligence.

Overall, while Pudentilla is not present at the trial, it can be deduced that she was a woman of great competence and intelligence whose chastity is praised as a virtue within a Roman context. This is a contrasting description to many other contemporary depictions of female magic practitioners who are often accused of both magic and sexual misconduct. As a result, through Apuleius's characterisation of his wife as a model Roman *matrona*, he is able to distance himself from the association of the love-magic user, by making his wife seem of sound

⁴⁹⁹ Benke 2005, 10–13.

⁵⁰⁰ Fantham in Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 623.

⁵⁰¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 77; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 629.

mind and of possessing many respectable qualities, and not under the influence of some enchantment. Furthermore, her own competency in both Latin and Ancient Greek supports Apuleius's image of Romanness, as his wife possesses many of these qualities herself.

4.5.3 Different perspectives

When identifying the perspectives concerning the concept of magic in the *Apologia* through the characteristic of femininity, much of the discussion once again revolves around the characterisation of Apuleius by the prosecution as an unscrupulous womaniser, and thus a love-magic practitioner. This characterisation has already been addressed in section 4.3.2 above. However, along with this characteristic, the prosecution additionally effeminises Apuleius, in order to further represent him as a seducer. In response, Apuleius denies the prosecution's effeminate characterisation of him, and by extension, denies that he is a love-magic user.

There is a unique idea concerning this characteristic that is brought forward which demonstrates that individuals who behaved in contrast to their gender social norms were more likely to be perceived as suspicious and having an association with magic. Alternatively, individuals who were accused of magic were also often characterised as acting against their gender norms. Previous examples of this characteristic in this thesis have mainly focused on prejudices against women who were accused of practising magic, but the *Apologia* demonstrates that this characteristic extends to individuals who subverted gender norms generally. Apuleius does not clarify his own perspective as to whether he believes that magic users were often also individuals who subverted gender norms, and only defends himself against the prosecution's accusations of his vanity and womanising.

4.5.4 Conclusion

As seen in section 2.4.7 above, many women in the second century AD and in the centuries prior were associated with magic and their use of poison and love potions. However, in this particular case study, this characteristic not only encompasses women, but also of individuals who behave in ways which are subversive to their gender roles, such as the ‘effeminate’ man. This can also be seen in the descriptions of accused magic-practising women as masculine, while Apuleius is effeminised by the prosecution. Therefore, this characteristic refers to how individuals who were perceived as engaging in magical practices were also characterised as subverting their gender norms in Roman society.

4.6 Privateness

As discussed in section 3.4 above, ‘privateness’ in magic can refer to the privacy required to perform magic, as well as the individualistic benefit from a spell. Both of these aspects are present in the concept of magic presented in the *Apologia*: some of the accusations of magic against Apuleius refer to his having undertaken certain activities in private, thus drawing greater suspicion to his already strange philosophical tendencies.⁵⁰² Apuleius is able to defend himself by occasionally pointing out that he undertook certain actions in public or in front of witnesses, and thus was not doing anything nefarious.⁵⁰³ This aspect of privateness is highly associated with magic throughout the trial through a nuanced mix of causation and correlation: magic has subversive elements which would make the practitioner more likely to practice privately and away from public scrutiny, yet the privacy that the practitioner would require leads to other assumptions about their activities. Additionally, Apuleius is accused of undertaking certain spiritual practices for his own personal and nefarious goals, such as the seduction of Pudentilla.

⁵⁰² Apuleius, *Apologia* 29–42, 57–60, 87–88; Hunink 2016, 17–18.

⁵⁰³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 40, 45, 47.

Apuleius is able to combat this by insisting that he had not used love magic, did not benefit financially from his marriage to Pudentilla, and only undertook certain suspect rituals, in order to expand his knowledge.⁵⁰⁴ Therefore, both aspects of this characteristic are used as a way of conceptualising magic in the trial.

4.6.1 Examples in the *Apologia*

Apuleius is accused of undertaking several rituals in private. For example, one of the magical crimes of which Apuleius is accused is having performed is a nocturnal ritual at Crassus's house which involved the sacrifice of a rooster.⁵⁰⁵ Upon Crassus's return home from Alexandria, it was said that Crassus found some feathers that were assumed to have been used during the ritual, and the walls of his home were reportedly covered by smoke.⁵⁰⁶ Both smoke and feathers appear in papyrological sources of goetic magic and in various spells in the *PGM*.⁵⁰⁷ It is further implied by the prosecution that Crassus had fallen ill as a result of whatever ritual Apuleius performed, and thus was unable to attend to the trial.⁵⁰⁸ Furthermore, there is an implication that this ritual was, in fact, a harmful *nocturna sacra*.⁵⁰⁹ Apuleius vehemently denies all of these details and insists that this was largely a fabrication created by the prosecution.

While not directly related to magic, Apuleius is additionally accused of contriving to have his and Pudentilla's wedding in the countryside or 'in private', so that it would not be attended by Pudentilla's family members or any other close associates from Oea. The prosecution argues that this further proved that Apuleius had enchanted Pudentilla and planned

⁵⁰⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 40, 67, 102–103.

⁵⁰⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 57–60; Hunink 2016, 17–18.

⁵⁰⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 57–58.

⁵⁰⁷ For example, *PGM* III.612–32, III.619–20, IV.45–7; Costantini 2019, 187–188.

⁵⁰⁸ Costantini 2019, 183.

⁵⁰⁹ Bradley 2014, 30.

to take possession of her estate. Apuleius, on the other hand, insists that he had done so, in order to get away from Pudentilla's various scheming family members and to save money.⁵¹⁰

To combat some of these arguments, Apuleius states that because he undertook several other practices in public, he was clearly not trying to hide his actions, and thus was not practising magic. This includes his public dissection of the mollusc that he allegedly used in the love potion which was witnessed by several passersby in Oea.⁵¹¹ Additionally, he refers to the Asclepian healing ritual which he performed on the slave-boy, Thallus.⁵¹² This particular incident is further explored in section 4.7.1 below, as the prosecutors accuse him of having used Thallus as a medium for a magical divinatory ritual.⁵¹³ However, Apuleius argues that because he had fifteen other slaves present at the ritual, that he was not trying to hide what he was doing because it was not a nefarious ritual.⁵¹⁴ Through this discussion, both Apuleius and the prosecution establish magical practice as something which takes place privately.

With regard to the individualistic motivation of Apuleius's actions, he denies having enchanted Pudentilla and even having benefitted financially from their marriage. Therefore, he argues that could not have acted out of greed or for his own selfish purposes.⁵¹⁵ Additionally, while the prosecution argues that he used Thallus for a divinatory ritual, Apuleius insists that it was an Asclepian ritual that was intended to treat Thallus for his ailment.⁵¹⁶ Hence, Apuleius is able to deny having practised magic because he did not undertake these rituals for his own selfish purposes. On the other hand, Apuleius's zeal for knowledge which he uses to explain the reason

⁵¹⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 87–88; Hunink 2016, 106 in Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 631.

⁵¹¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 39–40.

⁵¹² Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–47.

⁵¹³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–47.

⁵¹⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 45, 47.

⁵¹⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 90–93.

⁵¹⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 47.

why he undertook certain practices, such as the dissection of the mollusc, can be seen as an individualistic endeavour. However, intellectual pursuits were arguably more respectable than undertaking private rituals, and thus were perceived as a more socially acceptable practice. This aspect is further investigated in the next section, 4.7 ‘Manipulative in nature’ and in 4.9 ‘Secret and arcane knowledge’ below.

4.6.2 Different perspectives

Regarding the privateness of magic, in terms of both of its aspects, the privacy required to undertake magic and its individualistic motivation, it is clear that the perspectives of magic are unified in the *Apologia*. This is shown by how the prosecution argues that Apuleius undertook several practices in private, and thus was likely practising magic, while Apuleius rebuts these accusations by insisting many of his acts took place in public. This suggests that both perspectives consider magic as something that took place in private.

With regard to the aspect of the individualistic motivation of magic, this is another characterisation of magic that is accepted by both Apuleius and the prosecution. This is seen by how the prosecution argues that Apuleius used magic, in order to achieve some of his self-interests, while Apuleius argues that he did not act selfishly. However, as will be discussed in section 4.9 below, the pursuits of philosophical figures, such as Apuleius, could still be perceived as a selfish act, albeit one that has a unique intention. Overall, the different perspectives regarding magic and this characteristic in both of its aspects are consistent, but how Apuleius chooses to represent himself and how the prosecution represents him are divergent.

Similar to other characteristics, there is a feedback loop between the aspect of privacy required to undertake a practice and its association with perceived subversive behaviour and

magic. On the other hand, the individualistically-motivated aspect of magic is not always clear, as there are many factors that can affect the perception of a practitioner as acting overly selfishly.

4.6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, magical activity and privateness are closely tied together throughout the *Apologia*, and this association is formed by both by Apuleius and the purported prosecution. Part of what makes Apuleius's activities even more suspect was that they were done in private, thus leaving space for more speculation for his having committed a nefarious act. As discussed in section 3.4 above, there is often a feedback loop between the privacy required to undertake magic and the greater suspicion that acts in private can arouse. This shows that the private and secretive aspects of this characteristic are present in the *Apologia*. Moreover, the various magical activities which Apuleius was accused of performing were allegedly for his own benefit. This is seen in the accusation regarding his performing a divinatory ritual on Thallus. Therefore, both elements of this characteristic are present throughout the *Apologia* and are used as ways of defining magic by both Apuleius and the prosecution. Moreover, even though Apuleius defended his actions by highlighting his intellectual motivations, undertaking magic-associated practices in the pursuit of higher knowledge could have still been perceived as individualistic, thus leading to accusations of magic against philosophical figures (section 4.9 below).

4.7 Manipulative in nature

The next characteristic centres on the perceived unnatural manipulation of people, places, and circumstances, that a magic practitioner is said to accomplish through magical practice. Previous sections discussed this aspect with regard to the love potion Apuleius allegedly administered to Pudentilla. However, there remains other pertinent examples of the intersection between magic and manipulation which are presented in the *Apologia* as seen through further accusations launched against Apuleius. Therefore, Apuleius must defend himself against accusations of

magic-based manipulation, in order to further separate himself from involvement in magical activity.

4.7.1 Examples in the *Apologia*

One example of magic-based manipulation beyond the seduction of Pudentilla, is the accusation facing Apuleius of performing a divinatory ritual using Thallus as a medium, alongside Apuleius's possession of other magic-associated paraphernalia, such as an altar and lamp.⁵¹⁷ According to Apuleius, Thallus suffered from epilepsy and had been removed from his household and sent to the countryside, in order to not affect the rest of the household. Apuleius claims that he performed an Asclepian ritual on Thallus to treat him.⁵¹⁸ However, during the ritual, it seems as though Thallus might have suffered another seizure which the prosecution claim was Thallus going into a trance-like state where he spoke several prophecies, as witnessed by the fifteen other slaves present.⁵¹⁹ When he awoke, he was delirious and could not recall what had happened during the ritual.⁵²⁰ Thallus himself was not present at the trial, as the prosecution argues that he couldn't remember the incident, so there was no need for him to be present.⁵²¹

Based on this evidence, the prosecution argues that Apuleius used the boy as a medium for a divination ritual, drawing on several divinatory spells that required another individual as a medium for communicating between the divine and the practitioner.⁵²² Children were considered a good medium as they represented liminality, making them ideal for magical rituals involving necromantic elements. They were also associated with innocence, believed to only be able to tell

⁵¹⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42.

⁵¹⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–47; Bradley 2012, 182.

⁵¹⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–47; Bradley 2012, 181; Graf 1997a, 88.

⁵²⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–43.

⁵²¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 44–45.

⁵²² Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–47; Bradley 2012, 199–200.

the truth, and could act as a mouthpiece for prophecies.⁵²³ Examples of children being used as mediums for prophecies can be seen in literature: Philostratus writing in the early third century AD describes how a sixteen-year-old boy was possessed for two years by a demon who spoke with the voice of his late father, and who was scolded the mother of the child for having remarried only days after his death.⁵²⁴ Although it was widely believed that children could be used as mediums for divinatory purposes, their use in this way was not considered legally or socially acceptable in Roman society.⁵²⁵

Apuleius acknowledges that children could be used as a medium for divinatory purposes, but states that Thallus would have been an unfit medium because of his pre-existing illness. He further argues that the prosecution purposefully omitted the fact that Thallus had suffered from epileptic seizures even before Apuleius arrived to Oea, to make it seem as though Apuleius had caused his episode.⁵²⁶ To further argue that he could not have used Thallus as a medium for such a ritual, he claims that in addition to Thallus's pre-existing condition, Thallus was also physically ugly, and that a beautiful boy was required for such a ritual.⁵²⁷ Thus, Apuleius acknowledges the existence of divinatory rituals which require a young boy as a medium, and he draws upon Plato to describe what was specifically required for the rituals, such as a beautiful and healthy boy.⁵²⁸ Although Apuleius denies having used Thallus in this way, he demonstrates his knowledge of such practices.

⁵²³ Bradley 2012, 199–200.

⁵²⁴ Bradley 2012, 199; Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τριανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 3.38–9.

⁵²⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–43; see sections 2.2.3 and 2.3.3 above which discuss the banning of divinatory practices generally.

⁵²⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–44.

⁵²⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–43; for example, *PGM* VII.540–78; Socrates 15–16 in Plato, *Apologia*; Costantini 2019, 148–149.

⁵²⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 43; Socrates 15–16 in Plato, *Apologia*; Costantini 2019, 148–149.

Apuleius is able to defend himself against multiple charges by insisting that he was a scholar and undertook certain practices for his own intellectual benefit. While this is clearly perceived as a more honourable intention behind his having undertaken certain suspect experiments, Apuleius's general *curiositas* or philosophical 'inquisitiveness' could also be perceived as a selfish pursuit and one that violated the boundaries of social and religious acceptability.⁵²⁹ Individuals who attempt to manipulate nature occasionally, even for philosophical purposes, opened themselves up to accusations of magical practice, though they were still perceived differently than other, less educated magic practitioners. This perception can also be seen in the Twelve Tables, where the manipulation of a neighbour's crops was a crime.⁵³⁰ The uniting factor amongst all accused magic practitioners, both of higher and lower status, was their attempt at manipulating people and nature beyond what was perceived as normal. This is particularly relevant in the intersection of magic and medicine which is further investigated in Chapter 5 where the action of practitioners intervening in their clients' health unnecessarily could be scrutinised.

4.7.2 Different perspectives

It is clear that both Apuleius and the prosecution centre on the concept of magic as a practice which allows the practitioner to gain control over others. However, a divergence between perspectives, as presented in the *Apologia*, occur when determining whether all rituals which involve another party are considered magical. When Apuleius describes his own theological ideas surrounding prophetic rituals which use young boys, it suggests that he considers such rituals a philosophical ritual and not magical. It is also possible that Apuleius astutely refrains from calling it a magical ritual, as labelling it a philosophical one, so as to not seem guilty of

⁵²⁹ Graf 2002; Dickie 2003, 197–200.

⁵³⁰ See section 2.3.1 above; Dickie 2003, 200.

practising magic in a court of law. However, because he only describes such rituals in a hypothetical context, and thus denies having used Thallus for any such divinatory ritual, he self-represents as not having practised magic, and his opinion surrounding which divinatory rituals he considers magical is not further clarified. As a result, the prosecution's perspective on the boundaries of magical versus philosophical divinatory rituals is also not explored further, despite their earlier representation of Apuleius as having used Thallus for such a divinatory ritual. While both perspectives include manipulation of individuals as a characteristic of magic, to what extent and in which context they consider it magical is often negotiable.

4.7.3 Conclusion

Overall, accusations against Apuleius are based on his having practised certain rituals which were viewed as giving him the power to manipulate people which was often one of the goals of magical practice. By denying having taken part in such manipulative practices, Apuleius argued that he was not, in fact, an illicit magic practitioner.

4.8 Supernatural associations

Magic has obvious supernatural associations like mainstream religious practice, but the specific nature of the relationship between magic practitioners and the divine is frequently what is perceived as the distinction between them. Apuleius was accused of crimes that included several implications of his having an overly intimate relationship with the divine, which the prosecution argues is clearly of a magical nature. During the trial, Apuleius is accused of possessing two different magical objects, the linen-covered object that contaminated Pontianus's *Lares* and another separate statuette. Both of these have supernatural associations, yet the prosecution

argues that their unique qualities and how Apuleius uses them imply that they have connections to magical activities.⁵³¹

4.8.1 Examples in the *Apologia*

Apuleius is accused of placing a secret object near Pontianus's household altar which the prosecutors argue subsequently contaminated the *Lares*, resulting in Pontianus's death. However, Apuleius insists that it was merely a token that he had received from an initiation into a mystery cult which was intended to symbolise: *studio veri et officio erga deos didici* '[the] pursuit of truth and my reverence for the gods'.⁵³² Additionally, there is some debate over if it was placed next to Pontianus's *Lares*, or that of the family, thus if it was the family's collective *Lares*, then the entire family would have been affected and not just Pontianus. There are additional questions about whether the altar was even dedicated to the *Lares* at all, and if these minor deities had the power to affect Pontianus's health.⁵³³

The statuette in question is characterised as an obscene, skeletal ebony-wood figure which the prosecution argues Apuleius had commissioned in secret and would worship and refer to as *βασιλεύς*. The level of intimacy which the prosecutors describe Apuleius of having with this statuette and with other cultic objects led to the perceptions that he might have overstepped the boundary of normal religious worship, thus making him guilty of *communitas loquendi cum deis*.⁵³⁴ Moreover, the skeletal appearance of the statuette led to further implications that Apuleius was performing a necromantic ritual.⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 53–57, 61–65.

⁵³² Apuleius, *Apologia* 55; Rives 2008, 27.

⁵³³ Costantini 2019, 171.

⁵³⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 61–65; Graf 1997a, 88.

⁵³⁵ Costantini 2019, 197.

To combat this accusation, Apuleius had the maker of the statue testify in court that the statue was not made in secret but was a gift from Pontianus and meant to be a representation of Mercury.⁵³⁶ In summary, he states, ‘...he [Apuleius] commissioned the carpenter “a statuette of any deity he wanted” (*aliquod simulacrum cuiuscumque vellet dei*) to be made of any type of wood. What happened next – says Apuleius – is that he went to the countryside and Pontianus, willing to bestow a gift on his stepfather and friend, obtained from a lady called Capitolina a box made of large ebony boards, which he brought to Saturninus and ordered to shape into a little statuette of Mercury (Mercuriolus)’.⁵³⁷ Furthermore, Apuleius argues that he would only worship the statue and call it βασιλεύς on certain days that were relevant to the cult into which he was initiated.⁵³⁸ Therefore, Apuleius argues that he was simply worshipping a figure of Mercury, something which was a common enough practice in greater society, and not magical.

Finally, as mentioned, there is an association between Venus and the fish and molluscs that Apuleius allegedly used in the love spell to enchant Pudentilla (sections 2.5.1, 4.3.2 above). Interestingly, Apuleius alludes to a Platonic dichotomy regarding the dual nature of Venus, thus demonstrating the duality of most deities within the Roman pantheon: the vulgar and sexual version of the deity, and the divine and higher version.⁵³⁹ Apuleius employs rhetorical strategies centred on these types of dichotomies in his speech, whether it is the distinction of the philosophical or goetic *magus*, the magical or mundane uses of frankincense and linen, or the duality of the goddess Venus. This dichotomy can thus also be applied to the worship of deities: whether it was normal, religious worship, or abnormal, magical worship. Therefore, Apuleius is

⁵³⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 61; Kehoe and Vervaeke 2015, 627; Bradley 2014, 30.

⁵³⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 61; Costantini 2019, 210.

⁵³⁸ Apuleius, *Apologia* 63–64; Rives 2008, 27.

⁵³⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 12.

able to draw on this ambiguity, and claims that he was simply worshipping the mainstream gods and not in any particular nefarious or goetic-magic way.

4.8.2 Different perspectives

Both Apuleius and the prosecutors' perspectives as presented in the *Apologia* concerning the concept of magic believe that it has supernatural associations. However, the nature of the relationship between the practitioner with the divine is often used to distinguish magic from mainstream, religious practice and is negotiated in the trial. It can be concluded that from the prosecution's perception and representation of Apuleius that magic often involved overly intimate or inappropriate relationship between the practitioner and the divine, such as his worship of the ebony statuette. While the prosecution argues that Apuleius's possession and worship of his ebony statuette is a clear sign of this inappropriate relationship with the divine, Apuleius denies this and even states that the statuette is meant to represent Mercury, a commonly worshipped god.⁵⁴⁰ Therefore, Apuleius and the prosecution are both shown to perceive magic as having supernatural associations, but they are not necessarily in agreement over the type of relationship that is inappropriate. Furthermore, the manner by which Apuleius self-represents his relationship with the divine and his use of his cultic objects, and the manner by which the prosecution represents him are contrasting.

Similar to the previous characteristic of 'manipulation', the nature of supernatural relationships was often negotiated, and magical accusations of this nature were often manifestations of other ongoing social tensions between various individuals and groups. In other words, accusations of improper relations with the divine were a useful tool of aspersion against an enemy.

⁵⁴⁰ Apuleius, *Apologia* 61.

4.8.3 Conclusion

The nature of Apuleius's relationship with the divine, as shown through his possession and worship of several cultic objects, was thought to be something that could be used by the prosecutors to cast aspersion of magical practice. Apuleius states that these items were merely harmless cultic objects, representations of mainstream gods. However, the distinctive relationship Apuleius has with these objects and divinities gives rise to suspicions of magic and abnormal divine worship. Defining what is abnormal religious worship, and therefore magic, is difficult, and frequently hinges on the dichotomous nature of deities. Regardless of the abnormality or magical nature of Apuleius's objects, magic as defined in the *Apologia* had supernatural associations.

4.9 Secret or arcane knowledge

The *Apologia* provides an example of the 'secret or arcane knowledge' aspect of magic, a characteristic which has not yet been represented in the previous chapters. This refers to the distinctions that are made in the perception of practices based on the education or status of the practitioner. As previously stated, philosophical figures and spiritual leaders are often accused of being magical practitioners because of their unique practices or marginal position, and Apuleius represents an example of this.⁵⁴¹ Because of the philosophical pursuits of figures such as Apuleius, especially with regard to their *curiositas*, these figures were often perceived as surpassing their innate ability to gain knowledge and control of nature and the divine.⁵⁴² As a result, such figures were perceived as engaging in magical behaviour as discussed in section 4.7 above. Figures who were said to be religious leaders could also fall under suspicion because of their intimacy with the divine.⁵⁴³ This will be investigated further in Chapters 5 and 6, through an

⁵⁴¹ Graf 1997a, 88; Reimer 1999.

⁵⁴² Graf 2002; Dickie 2003, 195–200; Gourevitch 1993, 128.

⁵⁴³ Graf 1997a, 88.

exploration of the magic accusations against Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abonoteichus. Therefore, while such unique figures might have gained reverence in certain contexts for their unique skills, their behaviour was often perceived as that of a magic practitioner. They were, at times, prone to incurring greater suspicion because of their marginal positions, while at other times, they were perceived more favourably despite their similar practices to the common magic practitioner. Regardless, the learned, philosophical figure like Apuleius could be perceived in contrasting ways, despite their more elite position in Roman society compared to the average more marginalised figure.

Throughout the trial, Apuleius makes key distinctions between the different types of *magi*, and how he self-identifies with the philosophical *magus*, despite his acknowledgement that their studies are frequently confused with that of the goetic *magus*. In doing so, Apuleius consistently separates himself from the prosecution by appealing to Maximus and his own learned background: ‘He contrasts, in fact, his self-professed piety with the irreligiousness of Aemilianus, supposedly known in Oea with the nickname of Mezentius, the Vergilian villain notorious for his impiety. According to this reasoning, Aemilianus – because of his supposed impiety – would never have been able to understand Apuleius’s devoutness or the importance of his mystery symbols’.⁵⁴⁴ Hence, Apuleius is able to overcome the accusation of magic by aligning himself with a ‘higher’ form of spiritual practice underpinned by his philosophical training. As a result, while his practices might seem associated with magic, through his ideology and status, he is able to dissociate himself from this label.

⁵⁴⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 56; Costantini 2019, 180.

4.9.1 'Higher' magic in the *Apologia*

Examining Greenwood's modern-day anthropological study into medieval magic suggest that it is possible that Roman magic could be categorised as either 'higher' and 'lower'. The higher form of magic referred to the guarded knowledge that was confined to the intellectual elite and was often associated with a greater level of spiritual enlightenment and required skill, in order to obtain. Greenwood studied the concept of magic as it appeared in the Renaissance, specifically in a Christian context. This research explores how high magic was 'concerned with drawing down forces and energies from the heavens...The aim of high magic is wholeness and unity with divinity'.⁵⁴⁵ This is similar to Apuleius's definition of the philosophical *magus*. While Greenwood makes this distinction within Christian framework, and thus is not referring to magic in the same context of Apuleius's *Apologia*, this medieval concept was inspired by classical philosophy, and his differentiation between the different types of magic is still useful for the study of magic in antiquity.⁵⁴⁶

As stated earlier in this chapter, Apuleius does not outrightly deny being a *magus*, but rather, aligns himself with a specific definition of *magus* or what Costantini refers to as the philosophical *magus*. However, based on Greenwood's description of high and low magical practice, it can also be said that Apuleius represents himself as a figure who practises high magic exclusively. Throughout the trial, Apuleius also refers to the dichotomous nature of many things, and this extends to his making distinctions between the types of *magi*. Section 3.2 above examined the etymology of *magus*, including its etymology and connection to the Persian priest-caste. From this early association, there has been an evolution of this concept in the philosophical contexts to which Apuleius frequently refers and attempts to associate himself.

⁵⁴⁵ Greenwood 2020, 6.

⁵⁴⁶ Greenwood 2020, 6.

Philosophical writers throughout the centuries also attribute the origin of much philosophical thought to the Persian *Magoi*, noting that Greek philosophers would often travel to learn from them.⁵⁴⁷ For example, Diogenes refers to the religious and philosophical origins of the *magicus*, and Dinon states that the Persian *Magus* did not practice ‘τὴν γοητικὴν μαγείαν’ (“the goetic type of magic”).⁵⁴⁸ Therefore, Apuleius perpetuates his association with the tradition of the learned *magus*.⁵⁴⁹ This interpretation of the *magus* is meant to contrast with the goetic *magus* which is more closely associated with the magic practitioner that violated magical laws and played into stereotypes described in literary depictions.⁵⁵⁰

Apuleius frequently addresses Maximus’s own philosophical interests, such as his study of Plato and Aristotle, and his previous role as one of the teachers of Stoic philosophy to Marcus Aurelius.⁵⁵¹ This is likely another reason for Apuleius’s application of Platonic dichotomies to appeal to Maximus, and his attempt to make Maximus empathise with his own philosophical interests and ritualistic undertakings. He makes use of the following dichotomy while addressing Maximus. He focuses on how everything in nature contains both positive and negative qualities, to defend his own interest in the natural world, including the dissection of the mollusc:

Nihil in rebus omnibus tam innoxium dices, quin id possit aliquid aliqua obesse, nec tam laetum, quin possit ad tristitudinem intellegi. Nec tamen omnia idcirco ad nequiores suspicionem trahuntur

In all of nature you can name nothing so harmless that it cannot somehow do harm, nor so cheerful that it can escape a sinister construction. And yet a sinister suspicion cannot be forced on everything.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁷ Herodotus, *Ἱστορίαι* 7.114, 7.191; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 1.96–8; Cleemphorus and Bolus in Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 24.159–160; Apuleius, *Apologia* 27.2–4; Baker 2017, 360–361.

⁵⁴⁸ Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 1 prologue 8; Constantini 2019, 26.

⁵⁴⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 25–27.

⁵⁵⁰ Costantini 2019, 33–37.

⁵⁵¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 25, 36, 41, 51, 64; Rives 2008, 28.

⁵⁵² Apuleius, *Apologia* 32.

Apuleius acknowledges that some of his philosophical inquiries might draw suspicion, from the lowly and uneducated members of the prosecution, and could only be appreciated by learned men like himself and Maximus.⁵⁵³ To strengthen his argument, he refers to several other famous philosophers that have been similarly accused of being magic practitioners for having undertaken similar inquiries into nature:

Verum haec ferme communi quodam errore imperitorum philosophis obiectantur, ut partim eorum qui corporum causas meras et simplicis rimantur irreligiosos putent eoque aiant deos abnuere, ut Anaxagoram et Leucippum et Democritum et Epicurum ceterosque rerum naturae patronos, partim autem, qui providentiam mundi curiosius vestigant et impensius deos celebrant, eos vero vulgo magos nominent, quasi facere etiam sciant quae sciant fieri, ut olim fuere Epimenides et Orpheus et Pythagoras et Ostanes, ac dein similiter suspectata Empedocli catharmoe, Socrati daemonion, Platonis τὸ ἀγαθόν. Gratulor igitur mihi, cum et ego tot ac tantis viris adnumeror.

But thanks to an almost universal error of the ignorant, philosophers are often faced with this kind of reproach. They think those who investigate the basic, unitary causes of matter to be irreligious, and hence they accuse them of denying the gods' existence, as they did Anaxagoras, Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus and other champions of the natural order. As for that branch, however, which devotes particular study to universal providence and greatly honors the gods, people commonly label them 'magicians,' as if convinced that they can cause things to occur which they know do occur; ancient examples are Epimenides, Orpheus, Pythagoras and Ostanes; and thereafter Empedocles' Purifications, Socrates' Guiding Spirit, Plato's The Good came under similar suspicion. I congratulate myself, then, on being included in such a large and distinguished company.⁵⁵⁴

Later in the trial, he refers to Pythagoras as *magiae peritus* and Ostanes as a *magus*.⁵⁵⁵ Therefore, by associating himself with a number of other well-respected philosophers and religious leaders who were also accused of practising magic, or whom Apuleius himself refers to as magic practitioners, he is able to neutralise the term *magus*.

⁵⁵³ Apuleius, *Apologia* 27, 36; Vallette 1908, xxi.

⁵⁵⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia* 27.

⁵⁵⁵ Apuleius, *Apologia* 31, 90; Rives 2008, p. 34, n. 51.

Apuleius was a follower of the Neoplatonic philosophical movement which rose in popularity in the second century AD. The followers of the movement were particularly prevalent in the Late Republic and Early Empire and were influenced by the Neopythagorean movement. Men who ascribed to Neoplatonism or Neopythagoreanism often fell under suspicion of being magic practitioners. Physicians who ascribed to Neoplatonic philosophy were also seen as particularly suspect with regard to magical practices because of their experimentation on natural bodily processes.⁵⁵⁶ As Dickie states, ‘From the late second century AD, it becomes harder to distinguish between philosophy in some of its manifestations and magic. To effect union with the divine and to heighten their perceptual powers Platonist philosophers adopt techniques and rituals that have in fact been borrowed from the repertoire of the magician’.⁵⁵⁷ Additionally, Neoplatonist thought brought forth the concept of ‘theurgy’ which has been defined as ‘the ritualistic and mechanical procedures used by these philosophers for gaining intimacy with the divine’.⁵⁵⁸ This draws on section 4.8 below where the nature of the relationship between the practitioner and the divine is what is often used to distinguish magic from mainstream religion. Graf even refers to Neoplatonism as unique form of magical practice, as it is not motivated by greed, lust, or power, but rather by *curiositas*.⁵⁵⁹ It is clear that despite the perceived different motivation of Neoplatonic philosophy from magical practice by means of *curiositas* into the natural world or the divine, there were many overlapping characteristics between this philosophical movement and magic. For this reason, by virtue of Apuleius’s ascription to Neoplatonic philosophy, he would have drawn suspicion of practising magic. However, whether

⁵⁵⁶ Dickie 2003, 195–196.

⁵⁵⁷ Dickie 2003, 195.

⁵⁵⁸ Dickie 2003, 195–196.

⁵⁵⁹ Graf 2002.

Neoplatonism would have been perceived outrightly as a form of magic is unclear and was clearly vehemently debated during the trial depicted in the *Apologia*.

Later perceptions of Neoplatonists and Neopythagoreans are revealed in Augustine's writings. Although Augustine is writing in the late fourth century–early fifth century AD and from a Christian perspective, his works describing these philosophical schools reveal why some of their practices could have been regarded as magical. Augustine describes how these philosophers thought they could achieve unity with the divine through purification rituals which he does not outrightly condemn. However, he believes that those who rely on the mediation from another source such as through *daimones* or from consulting other 'unholy' sources, such as the Chaldeans were sinful through their *vana curiositate* (vain curiosity).⁵⁶⁰ He thus claims that practitioners who used such means could be corrupted by the devil and were magic practitioners. At this time and in Augustine's writings, magic or *goetia* was a decidedly negative term. Moreover, he claims that theurgy was simply an 'honorific name' for *goetia*.⁵⁶¹ Although Augustine does not outrightly condemn the Neoplatonic school, Apuleius's school of thought, his works nevertheless interpret how Neoplatonic practices and beliefs could surpass those of even the average pagan worshippers of the time which would make him a marginal figure and more likely to incur suspicion.

4.9.2 Different perspectives

There is complexity presented when attempting to identify the different perspectives of magic and the perceived intellectualism of the practitioner. This is because Apuleius presents several definitions of *magus*. Given the fact that Apuleius associates himself with the traditional, philosophical type of *magus*, it can be said that he self-identifies with Roman magic practitioner.

⁵⁶⁰ Graf 2002, 98–100.

⁵⁶¹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.9: Graf 2002, 100.

However, Apuleius only self-identifies with the version of the *magus* which is tied to the philosophical tradition rather than the common or goetic magic practitioner.⁵⁶² In spite of his denial of being the latter, Apuleius feels the need to make such distinctions in the definition of the term. Thus, it can be argued that, at the time, *magus* was perceived under all of these definitions, making Apuleius a *magus* in contemporaneous Roman society.

Through Apuleius's definition of the philosophical *magus*, another motivation for magical practice is presented, which some sources refer to as *curiositas* or the unity with the divine. This is frequently framed as a pursuit of a higher calling, and thus more virtuous than other motivations for undertaking magical practices, such as the seduction of another individual.⁵⁶³ Apuleius is accused of seduction and manipulation, yet he insists that if he were to be identified as a *magus*, it was because of his desire to learn about the nature of things, and not to seduce a wealthy widow. Evidently, there is a perceived distinction between Roman magic practitioners regarding their motivation and methods. Despite Apuleius's framing of this motivation as more virtuous, this can arguably still be perceived as an individualistically-motivated pursuit as described in section 4.6 above. Therefore, the perceived spiritual and intellectual reputation of a practitioner is a characteristic that unites both higher and lower magic practitioners.

Despite the fact that Apuleius even self-identifies as a *magus*, albeit a certain type of *magus*, the prosecution represents Apuleius as an illicit type of *magus*. Apuleius acknowledges that accusations of magical practice could be weaponised as a way to discredit an individual such as himself, in this case, to eliminate him as a rival for the Sicinii inheritance. This is further

⁵⁶² Baker 2017, 360–361.

⁵⁶³ Plato, *Timaeus* 29e, 30c–d, 35a–a1, 41d–42d in Abraham 2009, 124–125.

supported by the investigation into Tacitus's accounts. While Tacitus's accounts are not told from the perspective of the accused, it is nevertheless clear that legal accusations of magic were often used for the purposes of slandering opponents rather than simply a way of policing ritual practice and morality.⁵⁶⁴ Therefore, it is unclear if, from the different perspectives, all definitions of *magus* as presented in the *Apologia* by Apuleius would have been accepted or equally acknowledged by the prosecutors. However, it is clear that self-identifying philosophical *magi* like Apuleius were perceived to have the unique motivation of *curiositas* for undertaking magic, a still somewhat individualistic pursuit.

4.9.3 Conclusion

While Apuleius might have successfully convinced Maximus that he was, in fact, innocent of all crimes, and that he was simply a modest philosopher, Apuleius still exhibits many of the characteristics that were commonly associated with the magic practitioner. This recalls Rives's statement about the distinction between a philosopher and charlatan was 'not fixed or absolute, but instead existed to a large extent in the eye of the beholder'.⁵⁶⁵ Therefore, while Apuleius was not found guilty of practising magic, he can still be identified as a *magus* or a magic practitioner, although one that reflects an elite philosophical theology within Roman framework. This contrasts with many other accused magic practitioners who were often associated with marginalised groups in Roman society. The next two chapters will investigate similar figures, Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abonoteichous, whose labels as magic practitioners are equally influenced by different sources. By extension, there will be a brief discussion of Jesus, another charismatic spiritual figure who, depending on the source's view point, might have been viewed as either a magic practitioner or a miracle worker.

⁵⁶⁴ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.58–74, 3.11–22, 4.52.

⁵⁶⁵ Rives 2008, 31.

4.10 Overall conclusion

In conclusion, investigating the *Apologia* through the framework that was developed in Chapter 3, reveals the various perceptions of the concept of magic, from the practitioner's self-representation to others' representation and perceptions. Furthermore, investigating this case study of magic has allowed for these characteristics to be further refined.

With regard to the legal and social acceptability aspect of magic, the *Apologia* defines magic through law. The prosecution not only accuses Apuleius of being an illegal practitioner of magic, but also attributes to him several other subversive characteristics which were not necessarily illegal, but socially unacceptable. This was likely to further associate him with a malicious figure who was capable of using a love potion to seduce and manipulate an aged widow. Therefore, the social boundaries defining magic are negotiated throughout the trial. Some of the socially subversive aspects of magic are additionally presented through the characteristic of femininity or individuals who subvert gender norms.

Regarding the characteristic of exoticism, foreignness, and 'Otherness', this case study brings an interesting example of social and cultural dynamics within an African-Roman province. This is presented by Apuleius's attempts to establish his superiority over the prosecution by emphasising his Romanness and education. Moreover, the linguistic competency of the various actors also seems to indicate the level of education, Romanness, and social standing of each individual. Therefore, within the context of the *Apologia* and its predominantly African actors, other social dynamics besides race and ethnicity were at play. Regardless, it is clear that Apuleius is cast as the 'Other' or the outsider to the Sicinii and to Oea, causing him to be scrutinised for magical activity.

The discussion of femininity has led to a greater examination of the rigidity of gender roles in Roman society. An individual who subverted the norms of their own gender was intrinsically marginalised, and accusations of gender non-conforming behaviour could be weaponised to damage an individual's reputation. By extension, this negative characterisation is often associated with being a magic practitioner. This is illustrated in the *Apologia* where the prosecution attempts to effeminise Apuleius, while simultaneously arguing that he is a dangerous magic practitioner. In Tacitus's account, the patrician women who are accused of practising magic are also characterised as masculine for being power-hungry, disloyal, and unchaste. Whether the accusations of magic use or the subversion of Roman gender norms act as the initial cause for the marginalisation of the individual is sometimes unclear, as these accusations are often paired. While I do not feel the need to rename this characteristic from 'femininity' as it implies that social gender constructions are included within, this category also pertains to behaviours that challenge accepted Roman views of gender and sexuality.

The aspect of 'privateness' in magic is present in the *Apologia* and is used as a behaviour or feature that can be used to distinguish magic versus non-magical behaviour, with regard to how Apuleius allegedly undertakes certain practices in private and is individually motivated. By denying that he undertook his experiments or rituals in private, Apuleius is able to argue that these actions could not have been magical. Furthermore, he emphasises that he was not selfishly motivated, at least for the sake of money, but was motivated by his zeal for learning and helping others. Both ways, this characteristic is present and used as a method for defining magic during the trial. The 'manipulative' aspect of magic is also seen throughout the *Apologia*, especially as it was considered a legal offence if a practitioner had practised magic to gain control over another individual. This is illustrated by the alleged exorcism of Thallus, when Apuleius was

said to have used Thallus as a medium for divination. Furthermore, the definition of magic as presented in the *Apologia* has supernatural associations, but the overly-intimate relationship that the practitioner has with the divine is what is often considered nefarious or magical. This boundary between accepted and unsavoury worship, is negotiable, and its parameters are not clarified by the end of the trial.

Finally, the ‘secret or arcane’ element of magic is illustrated in the *Apologia* through the method used by Apuleius to establish the different definitions of *magus* where he only aligns himself with that of the philosophical *magus*. Furthermore, after studying magic in this text in relation to this characteristic, we can see that practitioners of higher magic, or intellectual practitioners who underwent a specialised education, were motivated by an innate curiosity and affinity for greater knowledge, which is divergent from the perceived motivations of lower magic practitioners. Therefore, there are different perceptions regarding magic practitioners based on their education and position within Romans society.

In conclusion, the *Apologia* is a text which can be used as a perspective of an accused magic practitioner, even though Apuleius is ultimately not convicted of practising magic. As seen through the seven characteristics of magic, Apuleius nevertheless ascribes to several of these magical characteristics, and thus was still perceived as a magic practitioner to some, even self-identifying as a philosophical *magus*. Although the different perspectives, that of Apuleius and the prosecution, are both recounted by Apuleius, the text nevertheless reveals how magic was perceived by various actors in a Roman context in the early second century AD.

5. Medicine, magic, and Apollonius of Tyana

The previous chapters have often alluded to the close association between magic and medicine within Roman society. This chapter investigates the relationship between magic and medicine more closely, especially in the context of the seven characteristics defined in Chapter 3. This chapter cannot cover all Roman medical material but will investigate some examples of Roman medicine which illustrate the magical characteristics that have been discussed. In addition, this chapter aims to analyse aspects of the life and deeds of Apollonius of Tyana, a well-known healing figure in the Roman Empire in the first century AD, who similar to Apuleius, was put on trial for accusations of practising magic.⁵⁶⁶ Philostratus, writing at the beginning of the third century AD, chronicled his life and deeds.⁵⁶⁷ The texts describing magic-associated figures such as Apuleius's *Apologia* and Philostratus's *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*, and in the next chapter, Lucian's *Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Ἀβωνοτειχίτης*, provide insight into contemporary perspectives surrounding magic, as each author is careful to explicitly align or distance each figure with common associations of magic. Thus, this chapter aims to balance examples of common medical practices, learned textual medical sources, and the account of the works of a celebrated practitioner, Apollonius, all of which were relevant to the context of second century AD Rome. The combination of these perspectives allows for a holistic investigation of the interrelationship between magic and medicine. Understanding this interrelationship is essential for establishing some background for the following chapter which will focus on examples of cultic healing practices during the Antonine Plague.

Section 5.1 provides a brief history on the development of medicine and its practice in antiquity. This includes the practice of medicine preceding the Roman Empire, including in

⁵⁶⁶ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.30.

⁵⁶⁷ Reimer 1999, 21–22.

Classical Greece and in the Hellenistic Kingdoms, as many of their practices and innovations continued into the Roman era. It also briefly discusses the contributions of Galen and Dioscorides, two esteemed Roman physicians.

Section 5.2 provides a brief overview of the historical background of Apollonius of Tyana and the context of the primary text by Philostratus which describes his life. Subsequently, there will then be an analysis of Roman medicine through the framework of the characteristics described in Chapter 3. Section 5.3 highlights the aspects of Roman medical practices generally (5.3.1) and of the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* (5.3.2) from the perspective of ‘subversive behaviour, or legal and social acceptability’. Although Philostratus depicts Apollonius as a purely virtuous and innocent figure, Apollonius is accused of being a nefarious magical practitioner and is even brought to trial.⁵⁶⁸ This section explores some of the reasons for Apollonius’s arrest, and how Philostratus attempts to downplay Apollonius’s seeming legal and social unacceptability. Section 5.4 examines some examples of medical practices for their ‘exotic’ and ‘foreign’ elements, and if their presence contributed to the prestige of a practice and/or of its perception as magical (5.4.1). Moreover, Philostratus provides great detail of Apollonius’s philosophical pursuits in foreign lands (5.4.2).⁵⁶⁹ Section 5.5 studies the ‘feminine’ aspects of Roman medicine, with regard to the information available about female medical practitioners, and women’s health issues, including fertility and birth control (5.5.1). Additionally, in this section, there is a noted absence of women in Philostratus’s text, despite the text itself having been commissioned by Empress Julia Domna.⁵⁷⁰ This section will further explore why women are omitted from this text (5.5.2).

⁵⁶⁸ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.30.

⁵⁶⁹ For example: Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.18–20, 28.

⁵⁷⁰ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.3.

Section 5.6 explores both aspects of ‘privateness’, the privacy required to undertake a practice, and the individualistic motivation of a practitioner, or lack thereof of in Roman medical practices. The presence and absence of this quality might have distinguished medicine from magic and ‘quackery’ in contemporary perceptions, and this section will also analyse the overlap between the perception of a magical practitioner with that of the ‘quack’. Moreover, Apollonius’s asceticism can be seen as a form of privateness, albeit is framed in a positive light by Philostratus, unlike the marginalised figure from society who tends to derive greater suspicion (5.6.2).⁵⁷¹ Therefore, this section attempts to compare perceptions of privateness in ritual practice within a healing and miracle-working context. Section 5.7 addresses the philosophical debate concerning the characteristic of ‘manipulative in nature’ in medical practice. The actions taken by medical practitioners which interfere with the course of a patient’s disease could sometimes be perceived as magical owing to their intervention in natural processes (5.7.1).⁵⁷² Sub-section 5.7.2 investigates Philostratus’s attempts to distance Apollonius from this characteristic and instead emphasises that Apollonius was divinely blessed (5.7.2).⁵⁷³ Section 5.8 examines the ‘supernatural associations’ of Roman medicine (5.8.1) and the miracles performed by Apollonius (5.8.2). For example, with regard to material culture, healing gems and their iconography present an interesting overlap of this characteristic alongside magic and medicine.⁵⁷⁴ This section additionally investigates how Philostratus frames Apollonius’s relationship with the divine, so as to separate him from the association of magical practice.⁵⁷⁵ Finally, section 5.9 explores the notion of ‘secret or arcane knowledge’ and the factors that determined if a medical practitioner

⁵⁷¹ Passages regarding Apollonius’s observation of the Pythagorean lifestyle: Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.7, 6.11.5; Reimer 1999, 22–23.

⁵⁷² See section 3.5 above; Graf (1996, 331–336) in Dickie 2003, 21.

⁵⁷³ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.43–44.

⁵⁷⁴ Sagiv 2018; Dasen 2014.

⁵⁷⁵ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.43–44, 5.24.

or practice was considered reputable, legitimate, or effective. This can refer to the reputation of Roman medical practitioners which could be based on their prestigious training (5.9.1) or in the case of Apollonius, his unique position in society (5.9.2).⁵⁷⁶ Bad reputations even amongst the educated elite could also result in unwanted associations including magical ones or perceptions of quackery.⁵⁷⁷ Therefore, sub-section 5.9.1 will also analyse the factors which led some medical practitioners to be perceived as magical, despite their higher education and training. These themes are all relevant to the next chapter as it will analyse Lucian's account of the life of Alexander of Abonoteichus, a healer and spiritual practitioner who rose in prominence in the second half of the second century AD, but whom Lucian refers to as a *μάγος* or *γόης* which has both been translated as 'magician' or 'quack' within the context of his work.

5.1 History of medicine preceding the 2nd century AD

This section gives a brief overview of the history of medicine starting in Classical Greece into the Hellenistic kingdoms, and finally into second century AD Rome. The centuries preceding the Roman Period are important to take into account, as there is a continuity of these practices throughout these time periods.

5.1.1 Ancient Greek medicine, Asclepius, and Hippocrates

Medicine in Ancient Greece was considered a trade rather than an intellectual or philosophical pursuit. Owing to the necessity of dealing with 'dirty' activities and bodily fluids, it was also considered work suited for those beneath the wealthy and elite classes. Some intellectuals nevertheless took an interest in medicine and justified their curiosity as a form of philosophical

⁵⁷⁶ Examples of the cults into which Apollonius was initiated: Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τριανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 3.44, 4.18; on different schools of medicine: Jones-Lewis 2016a, 390–391.

⁵⁷⁷ Ex.: Galen, *On Prognosis* 1.9–10; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393. See section 5.6.1 for the definition of 'quackery'.

inquiry. In turn, the educated physician or *ἰατρός* (*iatros*) would apply philosophical concepts to their medical methods.⁵⁷⁸

Asclepius was the Ancient Greek god of medicine, son of Apollo, and archaeological evidence reveals that institutionalised worship of the god began in the c. fifth century BC in Ancient Greece.⁵⁷⁹ Asclepeia were not only places of worship but also temples where practitioners could seek treatment for various maladies and could be located in both in urban and rural areas.⁵⁸⁰ Treatments at the temple would often include the dream incubation of worshippers at the temple. Additionally, archaeological and textual evidence attest to performative rituals and dances taking place. Dream interpretations by the priests at the Asclepeia would then reveal the unique course of treatment to each patient. Some courses of treatment could have included the avoidance of certain foods and abstinence from sexual intercourse.⁵⁸¹ Knowledge amongst these priests or healing specialists was often transmitted only orally.⁵⁸²

Hippocrates, a physician and writer known as ‘the father of medicine’, was born in the mid-5th century BC in Kos. The Hippocratic Corpus, or at least its origins, are attributed to him, although its contents were likely written by a collection of different authors.⁵⁸³ Hippocrates’s work brought forward the notion that there could be a rational cause for disease, and thus could be cured, rather than simply a divinely imposed punishment upon an individual.⁵⁸⁴ Much of the material discussed in the Corpus and its practices focussed on the human body as a microcosm of the world, thus different bodily fluids and organs represented different elements or humours.

⁵⁷⁸ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 386, 389.

⁵⁷⁹ For Asclepius’s parentage: Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 5.74.6; for his worship starting in the fifth century BC, Wickkiser 2008, 106.

⁵⁸⁰ Baker 2013, 134.

⁵⁸¹ Petridou 2016, 437–438.

⁵⁸² Jones-Lewis 2016a, 390.

⁵⁸³ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 387–388.

⁵⁸⁴ Petridou 2016, 435.

Certain diseases were believed to have been caused by an imbalance of humours, and treatments usually referred to ‘adding’ the elements of which there was a lack.⁵⁸⁵ Humours were thought to be manipulated by controlling a patient’s diet or having them exposed to more heat or cold.⁵⁸⁶

Despite later distinctions between such traditional, temple-healing methods and newer, rational, Hippocratic methods, it is likely that even Hippocratic physicians still employed some of these traditional methods and gave offerings to Asclepius, in order to gain his favour.⁵⁸⁷ Furthermore, traditional methods of medicine such as through the Asclepeia also allowed for a greater involvement of the patient in their own healing, something which would have also appealed to many patients.⁵⁸⁸ Asclepeia could also function as training grounds for physicians including Hippocratic ones.⁵⁸⁹ Furthermore, two of the sections of the Hippocratic Corpus, *On Dreams* and *Epidemics IV*, even refer to dream interpretation as a method for determining the course of action and treatment.⁵⁹⁰ Divination and prophecy were additionally used by Hippocratic doctors for healing purposes.⁵⁹¹ As a result, the treatment of patients at Asclepeia and through Hippocratic methods continued to be prevalent into Roman times, and even a Temple of Jupiter on an island in the Tiber River was said to have been transformed into an Asclepeion during a plague in 298 BC.⁵⁹²

5.1.2 Hellenistic medicine

In many Hellenistic kingdoms, medical research was funded and encouraged as a form of intellectual innovation and competition. Ptolemaic Alexandria, for instance, grew to be an

⁵⁸⁵ *Corpus Hippocraticum, On regimen* 1.10; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 396; Baker 2013, 112.

⁵⁸⁶ Baker 2013, 112.

⁵⁸⁷ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 390.

⁵⁸⁸ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 396.

⁵⁸⁹ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 388.

⁵⁹⁰ *Corpus Hippocraticum, On Dreams, Epidemics IV*; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 388.

⁵⁹¹ Gregory 2016, 428.

⁵⁹² For evidence of the plague, see Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 10.47.7; for evidence of the creation of an Asclepeion, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.626–87; Baker 2013, 71.

intellectual centre, especially for medical research. The Ptolemies were considered liberal in their attitudes regarding research practices and ethics, and the environment of Alexandria allowed for physicians to undertake greater research into anatomy by studying corpses—something which would have been considered socially, if not legally unacceptable in most parts of the Roman Republic and Empire. Furthermore, the library at Alexandria allowed for the publishing and record-keeping of such findings, as well as a place for intellectual minds to meet and share ideas. Patients would often choose to come to Alexandria to seek medical treatments if they could afford to do so which allowed for trained physicians to stay in Alexandria, in order to simultaneously practice medicine and continue their research.⁵⁹³ While Alexandria was considered a centre for rationalised medicine and scientific inquiry, there was also a stereotypical connection between Egypt and magic, thus Egypt provided a space of intersection between traditional temple-religion, medicine, and magic.⁵⁹⁴ As reflected in the discussion on ‘secret or arcane knowledge’ (section 5.9.1 below) and in the Apuleius case study (section 4.9 above), there was often a tendency for alleged scientific experiments to be perceived as magical rituals by wider Roman society. Moreover, the exoticism of Egypt would have been another factor in associating practices which originated there with magic. These aspects will be further explored in upcoming sections 5.4 on ‘exoticism and foreignness’ and 5.9 on ‘secret or arcane knowledge’.

5.1.3 Roman medicine and Galen

The traditional Roman system of treating illnesses was the responsibility of the Roman *paterfamilias* regarding the care of their own household. Cato the Elder’s *De agri cultura* from the second century BC describes the duties of running a Roman farm sufficiently and advice for

⁵⁹³ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 390–391: some examples of well-known physicians from this time include Herophilus and Erasistratus.

⁵⁹⁴ Bremmer 2002b, 78; 2015, 254.

common issues, including the treatment of illnesses of one's household. He also discourages the consultation of a Greek-trained physician whom he describes as conspiring to kill Roman patients.⁵⁹⁵ However, Jones-Lewis argues that there was still likely contact between Greek physicians and Romans: 'Indeed, the fact that Alcmaon of Croton pursued his research in Magna Graecia (Southern Italy) suggests that Greek philosophical ideas about the nature and functioning of the human body were known to the Romans very early on...The Romans, however, had a narrative that sharply distinguished an older and, to their minds, more purely Roman kind of medicine from the sort of medicine practiced by the Greeks who lived among them'.⁵⁹⁶

By the first century BC, Hellenistic-trained physicians were common, and many practised 'under Greek names'. Based on Pliny, it would seem as though very few Romans practised medicine professionally, offering their services to the greater public, in comparison to their Greek-speaking counterparts.⁵⁹⁷ The traditional Roman patriarchal system nevertheless remained in place whereby the *paterfamilias* would sometimes employ a slave-physician into their household to treat their slaves.⁵⁹⁸ Additionally, the *paterfamilias* was expected to provide legal protection for both the patients and physicians under his patronage.⁵⁹⁹ Roman patrons would often educate themselves with Greek sources of medicine, in order to be better-informed consumers.⁶⁰⁰ Within these arrangements, it was likely that the slave did not have a say in which patients they would treat.⁶⁰¹ An example of this includes the slave-physicians of Nero whom he

⁵⁹⁵ Cato the Elder, *De agricultura* 3, 6, 8, 157–159; Cato's disdain for Greek doctors is quoted in Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 29.14.

⁵⁹⁶ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 391.

⁵⁹⁷ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 29.17; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 391–392.

⁵⁹⁸ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 391–392.

⁵⁹⁹ *Digest of Justinian* 38.1.26.

⁶⁰⁰ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 29.17.

⁶⁰¹ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 394 drawing on *Digest of Justinian* 38.1.26.

would order to assist with the poisoning or staged suicides of his rivals.⁶⁰² Therefore, slave-physicians, while highly skilled, unfortunately encountered various restrictions given that they were still subservient to their masters.

In contrast, not all freeborn doctors (*medici*) were wealthy enough to travel and work in Alexandria like the more educated and reputable physicians. In order to undergo greater training and experience, Roman doctors could also practise while travelling with the legions where there was a consistent demand for the treatment of injuries from battle or of contagious illnesses which could quickly spread amongst military camps. The Roman government would pay for the *medicus*'s living costs, supplies, and resources. This contrasted with other freeborn *medici* who would need to rely on paid contracts.⁶⁰³

Galen is the most recognisable Roman authority on rationalised medicine, with his works having been cited as late as the Renaissance period. In his early life, Galen was able to receive a Hellenistic and rational form of medical training and education first at his local Asclepeion in Pergamum and later in Alexandria: 'He then returned to Pergamon to fulfill a public appointment as physician to the Pergamene gladiators, and he proceeded from there to Rome'.⁶⁰⁴ His written works provide insight into Roman medical institutions and systems, as well as the competitive nature of physicians in the Roman Empire where such philosopher-physicians would employ various rhetorical techniques to win over wealthy patients. Strategies for attracting patients could have included performing procedures publicly, in order to attract an audience.⁶⁰⁵ Meanwhile, rivalling physicians would sometimes accuse each other of using divination rather than medical

⁶⁰² Tacitus, *Annales* 6.38.4, 16.35.2.

⁶⁰³ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393–394 drawing on Dioscorides, *De materia medica* preface 4.

⁶⁰⁴ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 392.

⁶⁰⁵ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393.

expertise to try and diagnose the patient.⁶⁰⁶ The importance of being hired by a wealthy and elite Roman patron was thus even more crucial for a physician's success, as the patron could recommend the physician amongst their social circles and even bestow public honours and awards onto them.⁶⁰⁷ At this time, some physicians would also mentor other aspiring physicians, and reputations of students' mentors could help the students in obtaining more lucrative employment.⁶⁰⁸ Galen, refers to his own mentor, Quintus, in several of his works.⁶⁰⁹ The majority of Roman medical practitioners who were not formally trained, yet there is a disproportionate amount of material describing the methodologies of the learned medical practitioner. This is likely owing to Galen's perceived dominance as the ultimate authority on medicine whereby his rivals' works or other sources that Galen dismissed were not copied into later manuscripts. An exception to this is the Hippocratic Corpus.⁶¹⁰ While these works are invaluable for understanding medical practices in antiquity, these sources do not follow the practices of less-educated practitioners, many of whom treated a large portion of the population. Furthermore, owing to the potential taboo or associations with magical practices of certain medical treatments, only certain practices were unlikely to be recorded.⁶¹¹

Despite these Roman contributions to rationalised medicine, the co-existence of such methods with traditional ones such as the worship at Asclepeia in Roman times persisted. This was advantageous in the case that should a rationalised physician ever refuse to treat a patient, the patient could always seek treatment at a temple or sanctuary. Additionally, Asclepius was

⁶⁰⁶ Galen, *On Prognosis* 1.9–10; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393; Harris 2024, 30.

⁶⁰⁷ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393; Harris 2024, 18.

⁶⁰⁸ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393.

⁶⁰⁹ For example, Galen, *On Prognosis* 1.9–10; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393.

⁶¹⁰ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 387; Some examples of learned medical sources: the Galenic Corpus; Dioscorides of Anazarbus, *De materia medica*; Scribonius Largus, *Compositiones*; Celsus, *De medicina*.

⁶¹¹ For example, abortive techniques, see 5.5.1 below.

still regarded as the ‘divine healer’ even in Roman times.⁶¹² Beyond incubation treatments, Pindar also lists a number of other techniques that were used in Asclepeia: ‘(1) gentle incantations (*epaoidai*); (2) soothing potions; (3) the wrapping (*periaptein*) of antidotes (*pharmaka*) about limbs’. These methods are also mentioned as legitimate healing practices in later sources, by Plato and Galen.⁶¹³ As can be seen, some of these techniques are also associated with magic, such as the use of incantations, potions, amulets, and *pharmaka*, thus drawing further convergences between magical and medical practice. Overall, there was a great variety of practices and medical systems within the Roman Empire. As will be seen, a number of Roman healing practices often intersected with the seven characteristics mentioned in this methodology, thus more closely connecting certain medical practitioners with practitioners with magic.

5.1.4 Dioscorides and medical *pharmaka*

Up to this chapter, *pharmaka* have been studied in the context of its translation or association with magical potions and poisons. However, the term can also be translated as ‘medicine’ or ‘drugs’.⁶¹⁴ Yet, as previously discussed, poison and medicine tend to still be related to one another on a spectrum rather than as completely dissociated terms, especially as an incorrect administration of a medication could still have the effects of a poison.⁶¹⁵ Therefore, *pharmaka* is a multi-layered term which presents a complicated interrelationship between the trichotomy of magic, medicine/science, and religion.

⁶¹² Pachis 2014, 54.

⁶¹³ Pindar, *Pythian Odes* III 47–53 in Dickie 2003, 25; for example, Plato, *Charmides*. 155e5– 8: discusses the creation of a charm to help with a headache; Galen, *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis et facultatibus* 9.2.19 = Kühn XII 207, 2–12; recommends the use of green jasper to cure stomach and esophageal issues; Dasen 2014, 182.

⁶¹⁴ Gaius, *Digest* 16.23.6 (4.468); Bailliot 2019, 185–186.

⁶¹⁵ Jones-Lewis 2016b, 403.

More comprehensive scholarship on medical *pharmaka* arose during the *Pax Romana*, such as the through the works of Dioscorides. Born in the first century AD, Dioscorides is another well-known, Roman physician, also of Greek origin. He was trained in botany in Tarsus and experimented with various herbs and plants throughout his career, in order to create a catalogue of botanicals and their medical properties. He is survived by his work, *Materia Medica*, which describes his findings as a physician and botanist where he recorded the effects of each plant on patients and categorised plants based on their physiological effect.⁶¹⁶ He also consulted with indigenous sources who attested to the properties of plants in their specific regions. His empiric approach made him averse to purely philosophical approaches.⁶¹⁷ Therefore, Dioscorides presents an early form of pharmacology in the ancient world.

Dioscorides additionally highlights the importance of correctly identifying certain plants and harvesting them safely, or else the practitioner risks exposing themselves to potentially harmful effects of the plant in question.⁶¹⁸ Hence, there was an understanding that a level of competency was required, in order to be a *rhizotomos* ‘root-cutter’ or *pharmakolopes* ‘drug seller’.⁶¹⁹ Many physicians would often employ *pharmakolopes* or *rhizotomoi* to collect and process plants for consumption, and some of the most reputable were characterised as coming from non-Roman ethnic groups (section 3.2 above): ‘some groups used ethnicity and ritualistic showmanship along with a medical specialization to succeed in a competitive medical marketplace. Two such groups stand out in particular: the Italian Marsi, and the North-African

⁶¹⁶ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*; Jones-Lewis 2016b, 406.

⁶¹⁷ Dioscorides of Anazarbus, *De materia medica*; Scarborough 1997, 153.

⁶¹⁸ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*, preface 6–9.

⁶¹⁹ Jones-Lewis 2016b, 410–411; Harris 2024, 115.

Psyloi. Both tribes... seem to have enjoyed a reasonably good reputation, even among rationalizing physicians'.⁶²⁰

Certain plants had longstanding ritualistic and mythical associations, originating as far back as Archaic Greece.⁶²¹ Whether ancients had discovered some of the pharmacological effects of certain plants which they then associated with several myths, or through initial mythical associations, plants could also gain other perceived functions and powers. An example of this is squill which has been used as early as the sixth century BC during scapegoat rituals where an individual was exiled from their community and was beaten with rods of squill.⁶²² The connection of squill with the purification of a community gave squill a perceived ability of purification in general, and was thus used in other contexts, such as to purify ritual paraphernalia.⁶²³ In *The Odyssey*, Homer refers to a *φάρμακον* from Egypt which Helen, the daughter of Zeus adds to wine 'to quiet all pain and strife, and bring forgetfulness of every ill' (νηπενθές τ' ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἀπάντων).⁶²⁴ He does not refer directly to the plant in question, but based on the origin and its effects, Scarborough astutely argues that the drug in question is extracted from the opium poppy, *papaver somniferum* which was widely regarded for its anaesthetic properties including in various medical treatments.⁶²⁵ Therefore, several plants

⁶²⁰ Jones-Lewis 2016b, 410–411; see section 3.7 above.

⁶²¹ Scarborough 1997, 146–163: Scarborough presents several examples of different plants and their mythical and religious lore.

⁶²² Scarborough 1997, 146.

⁶²³ Some examples of the mentions of the uses of squill by ancient authors include Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum* 7.13.4: he lists the use of squill in various purifications rituals in the fourth and third centuries BC; Hipponax fragment 48 in *Herodes, Cercidas, and the Greek Choliambic Poets* in Scarborough 1997, 146–147: describes beating the scapegoat with squill; Lucian, *Menippus*, or *Descent into Hades* 1.7: describes how the Chaldeans used squill to purify their torches.

⁶²⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* 4.220–30.

⁶²⁵ Scarborough 1997, 140; ancient sources which attest to opium as a pain-killing drug for medical purposes: Dioscordies, *De materia medica* IV, 64.6 and Pliny, *Naturalis historia* XX.198–209; Ciaraldi 2000, 95.

were associated with having certain medicinal properties and health benefits, sometimes originating from or associated with their mythical connections.

This thesis has thus far discussed the various translations and concepts associated with *pharmaka* including medicine, magical potion, and poison. This term even brings forth an additional nuance which represents an overlap between several of these concepts in the form of antidotal *pharmaka*, or sometimes referred to as theriac, a substance or medication which could counteract the effects of poison.⁶²⁶ The research and development of such forms of *pharmaka* were considered a priority to political figures who were especially at risk of being poisoned by rivals or enemies; hence, the investment into the field of toxicology by Ptolemaic rulers.⁶²⁷ This form of *pharmakon* represents an overlap of magic and medicine, as it was adjacent to the development of *pharmaka* relating to poison. Chapter 2 has discussed the interrelationship between poison and magic, but this nuance extends into the medical field, as it was meant to prevent or cure the effects of poison.

There is an example of an archaeological assemblage which suggests the private preparation of *pharmaka*, possibly an antidotal one. This is believed to be connected to *pharmaka* because of the composition of the assemblage, such as the exact species of plants which have been identified, and the type of *dolium* which contained the assemblage. The plant assemblage in question was found in Pompeii, at the Villa Vesuvio, thus in a private context. The assemblage includes willow, beech, whole walnuts, whole peaches, strawberries, and opium poppy, amongst many other species of plants.⁶²⁸ Ciaraldi has made a comparison of all the

⁶²⁶ Ciaraldi 2000, 95: theriac is used specifically to counteract the effects of poison or venom from animals; some examples of sources describing *mithridatium* and *theriac*: Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 29.24, 23.149, 20.264; Galen, *Anthidotes* 1.10–15, *Theriaca* 13–14.

⁶²⁷ Jones-Lewis 2016b, 404–405.

⁶²⁸ Ciaraldi 2000, 91.

species identified and when they are mentioned in ancient sources, particularly by Pliny and Dioscorides and states: ‘58% of the plants identified at species level are medicinal plants. Of these 77% are mentioned in ancient sources as being effective against poisons, on their own or in combination with other ingredients’.⁶²⁹ The type of *dolium* which contained the mixture has been found in other contexts, such as in neighbouring buildings in Pompeii, including one which had other medical instruments presents, thus suggesting that it could be used to prepare a medical *pharmakon*. These *dolia* were also found in other contexts such as dye and soap factories.⁶³⁰ Based on Cicero’s interpretation of the *Lex Cornelia*, dye and cosmetic sellers whose products resulted in the death of their clients, just like in the case of the administration of any poisonous or harmful substance, could also be charged.⁶³¹ Thus, I would argue that this presents another layer of overlap between all substances which could be referred to as *pharmaka* as they might have been prepared in the similar fashion and could have equally devastating effects if administered incorrectly. Although it cannot be ascertained if it was, in fact, meant to create antidotal *pharmaka*, there is nevertheless a strong possibility that the assemblage was created at least for medicinal purposes based on its context, combination of species found together, and the type of *dolium* used.

In its simplest form, *pharmaka* could be any substance derived from plants which could have any number of functions. There were obviously certain *pharmaka* created for certain purposes such as medicinal, cosmetic, or poisonous, etc., but the boundaries between these categories cannot always be rigorously established. Therefore, I argue that the concept of the antidotal *pharmaka* presents another nuance of *pharmaka* which connects the concepts of poison,

⁶²⁹ Ciaraldi 2000, 93–98; see full explanation of each plant and its mention in ancient sources with regard to antidotal *pharmaka* starting on p. 95.

⁶³⁰ Ciaraldi 2000, 93–94.

⁶³¹ Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 148.

ancient magic, and medicine. Beyond the various nuances of *pharmaka* which could link magic and medicine, the expertise in plants was also a perceived common factor in both practices.

5.2 Context of the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* and overview of the life of Apollonius of Tyana

Texts such as Apuleius's *Apologia* and Philostratus's *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* provide perspectives from the shared worldview of the author and audience surrounding magic. There is one figure in particular, Apollonius of Tyana, who embodies the intersection of medical and magical knowledge, as he was known as a 'miracle-worker' in the first century AD who often healed those he encountered along his travels, while also having been accused of performing magic.⁶³² While Apollonius is highly regarded by Philostratus, a second and third century AD author who is the main source for Apollonius's life, Apollonius was arrested for his alleged magical crimes.⁶³³ Additionally, later sources condemn him as a magic-practitioner.⁶³⁴ Moreover, Apuleius praises Apollonius, while Lucian has clear disdain for him.⁶³⁵ This chapter will thus investigate how Philostratus attempts to dissociate Apollonius from contemporary perceptions of magic, and represents him as a magnanimous healer and miracle-worker. Drawing on this, it is possible to identify some ancient perceptions of magic. Therefore, this section will give a brief overview of the historical figure of Apollonius, and the context in which Philostratus wrote the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*.

Apollonius of Tyana rose to prominence in the first century AD for his miracle-working, yet his existence, or at least the veracity of all of the details of his life as recounted by

⁶³² Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.1: describes how Asclepius encouraged those in need of healing to seek out Apollonius; 8.30: describes his arrest for being a magic practitioner.

⁶³³ Reimer 1999; Groves Campbell 1968; Abraham 2009.

⁶³⁴ Some examples include Lucian *Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Ἀβωνοτειχίτης* 5; and some Christian sources include Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 5.3; Eusebius, *Reply to Hierocles*; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.41.

⁶³⁵ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις*, 5; Groves Campbell 1968, 17.

Philostratus cannot be confirmed. Furthermore, Philostratus often frames Apollonius's deeds within a mythical context, thus the elements of Apollonius's life which he describes are not rooted purely in reality.⁶³⁶ Apollonius was a Neopythagorean philosopher who gained popularity as a mystic healer.⁶³⁷ His legacy is thanks to Philostratus's account of his life which was commissioned by Empress Julia Domna at the beginning of the third century, in order to counteract the rising popularity of Jesus and Christianity.⁶³⁸ Hence, Apollonius's miracle-working was thus meant to mirror Jesus's.⁶³⁹ With regard to Philostratus's own sources for writing Apollonius's biography, he refers to two previous biographers for their information on Apollonius: Maximus of Aegae and Moiragenes. Maximus represents Apollonius in a more positive light, as opposed to Moiragenes's more scathing account.⁶⁴⁰

As reflected in his sobriquet, Apollonius originally came from Tyana, Cappadocia and from an illustrious local family whose ancestors founded the city. According to Philostratus's account, he was well-educated and spoke Attic Greek perfectly.⁶⁴¹ Prior to period of his life which Philostratus describes in his account, he was likely a local Sophist in Tyana, and Philostratus would later describe him as a representative of his hometown along his travels. By extension, Philostratus even frames him as a bearer of Greek culture and values to other societies along his travels.⁶⁴² At the age of fourteen, he moved to Tarsus to study rhetoric, and then chose

⁶³⁶ Reimer 1999, 20–22.

⁶³⁷ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.7–9.

⁶³⁸ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.3; the idea that the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* was written to counteract the rise of Christianity is thanks to the following texts: Hierocles in his pamphlet, to which Eusebius in *Reply to Hierocles* 1 replies, draws many comparisons between Jesus and Apollonius based on the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* (Reimer 1999, 19); Porphyry also draws these parallels in *Against the Christians*, 'Attacks on the characters and intelligence of the Evangelists and Apostle as a pretext to attack Christianity', 4. Jerome, Tract on Psalm 81; 'III. Attacks on the works and sayings of Jesus', 60. Macarius, *Apocriticus* IV: 5, and 63. Macarius, *Apocriticus* III: 1.

⁶³⁹ Reimer 1999, p. 20–22, 224, n. 98, 99; Abraham 2009, 1.

⁶⁴⁰ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.3; Abraham 2009, 13; Reimer 1999, 21.

⁶⁴¹ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.4, 1.7.

⁶⁴² Abraham 2009, 31–33; Groves Campbell 1968, 29; see also section 5.4 below.

to move to Aegae to be close to the shrine of Asclepius, where he was able to sample different philosophical schools. Aegae and Tarsus had a historical rivalry, thus his willingness to study in both cities further emphasises his zeal for diverse knowledge. At the age of sixteen, he committed to the Pythagorean way of life and lived within the precinct of Asclepius.⁶⁴³ However, he returned to Tyana at the age of twenty upon his father's death, in order to settle his father's affairs. He helped his one known brother with his wayward behaviour, divided his father's assets amongst his other relatives, and only kept a modest portion of the large inheritance for himself. He then spent the next five years travelling around Pamphylia and Cilicia, finally culminating in his decision to travel to Babylon and India.⁶⁴⁴ Amongst his many travels, Apollonius also made sure to encounter and study philosophy with several groups, such as the *Magoi* of Babylon, the Brahmins of India, and the Gymnosophists of Egypt.⁶⁴⁵

Philostratus's description of Apollonius is reminiscent of the literary trope of the 'beggar-priest' figure discussed above (section 2.2.3 above).⁶⁴⁶ Additionally, as can be seen from the previous chapter, Apollonius and Apuleius share some common characteristics, namely their unique positions in society. Yet, despite Philostratus's testament to Apollonius's virtues and powers, Apollonius is nevertheless brought to trial and arrested for practising magic and even referred to as a magic practitioner by other sources, including other contemporaries to Philostratus or later authors.⁶⁴⁷ Therefore, this chapter will explore Philostratus's shared worldview with his audience, as Philostratus draws on this perspective in order to remove Apollonius from the associations of magic, as investigated through these seven characteristics.

⁶⁴³ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.7.

⁶⁴⁴ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.13, 1.15.

⁶⁴⁵ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.27, 3.19–20, 5.24, 6.8, 6.11.

⁶⁴⁶ Dickie 2003, 204.

⁶⁴⁷ See Footnote 634.

5.3 Subversive behaviour, or legal and social acceptability

This section relies on textual evidence, as the legality or social acceptability of a practice requires the voices and interpretations of contemporary sources. Because of the lack of standardisation of Roman medical practices, it was not always clear as to what would have been considered as legally and socially acceptable. As a result, the reputation of the practitioner rather than the practice itself often determined the acceptability or efficacy of a particular practice. Additionally, accusations of magical practice were also tied with the reputations of medical practitioners.⁶⁴⁸

This section investigates the legal and social acceptability of Roman medical practices, as seen through texts, iconography, and in the *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*. This characteristic can be used as a method of grasping why a practice, material, or practitioner was more closely associated with magic by identifying if it had qualities which subverted societal expectations. The acceptability of a practice often depended on the perspective of a source or social narrative which was dominant at the time; therefore, a given practice was not ubiquitously ‘acceptable’, ‘magical’, nor ‘medical’ to all groups within the Roman Empire in the second century AD. For example, despite his many accolades and positive testaments of his powers from Philostratus, Apollonius is perceived by other sources as a magic practitioner. Therefore, the differentiation between acceptable and unacceptable, medicine and magic, could be unclear and variable.

5.3.1 Perceptions of legal and social acceptability in Roman medical practice

Sources describe how the Roman physician could appear respectable, and several laws touch on the legality of certain medical practices and interventions. Regarding the acceptability of the physician, there are several texts within the Hippocratic Corpus, namely those titled *On the*

⁶⁴⁸ Jouanna 1984 in King 1998, 67; Harris 2024, 19–28.

Physician and *On Decorum* (or *On Honourable Conduct*) which outline acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and presentation of the physician. These texts state that a physician should wear clean and simple clothes, have an overall clean appearance, and should avoid wearing bright clothing or cloying fragrances.⁶⁴⁹ The Corpus further states that bad *iatroi* tend to treat their patients in an extravagant way, such as using ‘elegant and theatrical’ bandages which are ‘thoroughly tasteless (*phortikos*) and pretentious (*alazonikos*)’.⁶⁵⁰ Therefore, the Hippocratic Corpus emphasises that the reputable physician does not require any form of extravagant clothes or methods, as their abilities to practice medicine sufficiently should be evident. Generally, the Hippocratic Corpus states that an *alazonikos* or ‘charlatan’ would present themselves in an ostentatious manner.⁶⁵¹ This is further supported by iconographic representations of physicians where there were no obvious signifiers to determine that someone was a practitioner. Practitioners in iconography are usually identified based on their context within the scene rather than on their individual details.⁶⁵² As discussed in section 5.9 below, there are certain characteristics that are attributed to well-known mystic figures, or even those deemed as reputable physicians. However, medical texts such as the Hippocratic Corpus were mainly relevant to a learned audience, and it was likely that many healing practitioners were not of such a background.⁶⁵³ Therefore, despite the Hippocratic Corpus’s guidelines regarding reputable medical practice, many medical practitioners likely did not consult such material.

The longstanding reputation of a practitioner, rather than their appearance or sophistication of practices alone, would often determine the acceptability of the practitioner. As

⁶⁴⁹ *Corpus Hippocraticum*, *On the Physician* 1, *On Decorum* 2 in King 1998, 42.

⁶⁵⁰ *Corpus Hippocraticum*, *On the Sacred Disease* 2; King 1998, 42.

⁶⁵¹ *Corpus Hippocraticum*, *On the Physician* 4; King 1998, 42.

⁶⁵² Baker 2013, 72–76.

⁶⁵³ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 387.

there was no system in place that standardised the practices of medical practitioners in the Roman Empire, practitioners would have to market their abilities, often through the use of rhetoric, to new clients who would hopefully recommend them to other wealthy associates.⁶⁵⁴ Therefore, the social acceptability of the practitioner was more likely determined by their reputation amongst their clientele, rather than any obvious physical qualities like dress or appearance, or even their use of specific practices.⁶⁵⁵

The *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* states that administrators of substances that resulted in the death of another individual was prosecutable (see section 2.3.4 above). However, accusations of malpractice might not have been easily proven, especially if a patient was already ill prior to receiving treatment. For example, there is a discrepancy between Apuleius's account that Thallus was already ill as opposed to the prosecution's claim that Apuleius had made him ill through a nefarious ritual.⁶⁵⁶ Similarly, it is likely that there would have been disagreements between plaintiffs and medical practitioners as to whether a patient was already so ill that no intervention could treat their ailment, and if their subsequent death was caused by the illness or course of treatment. Additionally, as stated in section 5.1.4 above, most physicians did not prepare their own remedies, but acquired substances from their suppliers which could result in possible mix-ups or harmful substances from untrustworthy sources.⁶⁵⁷ As a result, the legal boundary of such medical care was not clear. This is also presented in Livy's account where patrician women were accused of purposefully poisoning their husbands, while they insisted that they merely tried to prescribe them a 'health tonic' (section 2.4.7 above).

⁶⁵⁴ Galen, *On Prognosis* 1.9–10 in Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393; Jouanna 1984 in King 1998, 67; Harris 2024, 19–28.

⁶⁵⁵ On the discussion of different schools, see section 5.9.1 below.

⁶⁵⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia* 42–44.

⁶⁵⁷ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 29.5; Horstmanoff 1999, 47.

The amount of intervention undertaken by a medical practitioner might have had legal implications, such as the example of *πόνος/ponos* and *όδύνη/odyne* where physicians were supposed to discern between normal and excessive pain and how to treat it. If action was taken which resulted in the death of the patient and the action was ruled as unnecessary, then the practitioner could be charged.⁶⁵⁸ Despite this, the prevalence of deaths resulting from childbirth would have been high; it is doubtful if many of these cases could have been proven as a form of practitioner malpractice.⁶⁵⁹ The discussion under the characteristic of ‘manipulative in nature’ (section 5.7 below) further investigates the acceptability of Roman medical practices in relation to the appropriateness of intervention. There is also a tendency for a practice to be perceived as acceptable based on the reputation of the practitioner, rather than the type of practice itself. This notion is further explored in section 5.9 below which explores the ‘secret or arcane’ expertise of medical specialists who were perceived as qualified and reputable.

5.3.2 Legal and social acceptability in the *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*

Based on Philostratus’s account of Apollonius’s life, there are several ideas which can be extrapolated regarding the legal and social acceptability of healing practices in the Roman Empire. Apollonius was arrested and brought to trial as a magic practitioner in the first century AD, but at the bequest of Julia Domna in the late second century AD, Philostratus was commissioned to write about the life of Apollonius and to reframe him as a miracle-worker.⁶⁶⁰ Philostratus thus attempts to distance Apollonius from other common contemporary perceptions of magic, in order to try and convince his audience of Apollonius’s virtue. This section

⁶⁵⁸ *Corpus Hippocraticum, On Diseases* 1.8.116–118; King 1998, 125–126; see section 3.5 above.

⁶⁵⁹ King 1998, 142.

⁶⁶⁰ See section 5.2 above.

specifically will deduce some of the common perceptions of magic practitioners within legal and social contexts as described in Philostratus's text.

The primary legal charge brought forward by Domitian against Apollonius was his alleged sacrifice of an Arcadian boy in the countryside at nighttime, on behalf of Nerva who was conspiring against Domitian, which he used to predict the plague of Rome.⁶⁶¹ Furthermore, Apollonius was already known by this time to have predicted several major events, including the fates of several Julio-Claudian emperors and the short reigns of Vitellius, Otho, and Galba.⁶⁶² He had even been previously exiled from Rome under Nero's ban of philosophers from the city, as he had predicted Nero's death through a vision he had had of a thunderbolt in the cup of the emperor.⁶⁶³ As seen in previous chapters, the inquiry into the fate of the imperial family was often a prosecutable offence as it was thought to involve conspiracies against the imperial family (sections 2.3.3; 2.4.7 above). Finally, because Apollonius had predicted the arrival of a plague to Ephesus, he was additionally accused of having actually caused the plague.⁶⁶⁴ Just as in the case of Apuleius, there were also several details that while not in direct violation of the law, were used as a way to further implicate Apollonius as a magic user. For example, it was argued that his choice of ascetic, mainly linen clothes was in violation of the law, as Nero decreed that all who wore such garments were under suspicion of being diviners.⁶⁶⁵

In order to defend himself, Apollonius responds that he had not used divination but simply possessed wisdom with which the Gods had blessed him or what is referred to as

⁶⁶¹ Philostratus, *Tà ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Απολλώνιον* 7.20, 8.7.30; Abraham 2009, 138.

⁶⁶² Philostratus, *Tà ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Απολλώνιον* 5.11.

⁶⁶³ Philostratus, *Tà ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Απολλώνιον* 4.44; Abraham 2009, 132.

⁶⁶⁴ Philostratus, *Tà ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Απολλώνιον* 7.20, 8.5.

⁶⁶⁵ Philostratus, *Tà ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Απολλώνιον* 4.35, 7.20, 8.5.

prognosis or ‘foreknowledge’.⁶⁶⁶ An important distinction is made by Philostratus: Apollonius denies using magic repeatedly because his foreknowledge occurs without the need of a sacrifice, something which magic users would need to do, in order to properly execute a divinatory ritual.⁶⁶⁷ Additionally, he argues that he simply predicted certain events, such as the plague in Ephesus, but that he did not prevent them from occurring.⁶⁶⁸ This detail is important as there is a distinction made between magic practitioners who attempt to control and intervene in natural processes, as opposed to those who simply predict and observe them.⁶⁶⁹ This will be further examined in section 5.7 below. This is further emphasised when Apollonius is able to free himself from the chains once he is imprisoned by Domitian. Philostratus describes this ability as something which Apollonius is only able to execute because he is divinely blessed rather than guilty of the crimes of which he is accused. Moreover, Philostratus emphasises that Apollonius is able to free himself without the need to make a sacrifice, and that the ‘less intelligent’ would attribute this power to that of a *goes* (*Οἱ δὲ εὐηθέστεροι τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐς τοὺς γόητας ἀναφέρουσι*). He goes on to qualify ‘simplified-minded people’ as merchants, lovers, and athletes, individuals who were more likely to have consulted *goetes*.⁶⁷⁰ With regard to the sacrifice of the Arcadian boy, Philostratus emphasises Apollonius’s vegetarianism throughout the text, and thus, he is against all forms of blood sacrifices, in keeping with Pythagorean tradition.⁶⁷¹

To further support his defence, he also calls upon the support and defence of Vespasian. He argues to Domitian that Vespasian never took issue with his appearance, nor did Vespasian ever ask him to call upon the Fates or Zeus to help him with gaining favour from the divine.

⁶⁶⁶ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.2, 3.42, 4.43–44, 6.11; Abraham 2009, 88–89.

⁶⁶⁷ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 5.12, 7.38; Reimer 1999, 276–278.

⁶⁶⁸ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.7.8–9.

⁶⁶⁹ Graf (1996, 331–336) in Dickie 2003, 21.

⁶⁷⁰ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 7.38–39; Abraham 2009, 133–134.

⁶⁷¹ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.5, 8.7.10–15; Reimer 1999, 287.

Furthermore, he explains that he and Vespasian only ever had conversations publicly in a temple, and that he had sent Vespasian a letter which he still possessed foregoing all wealth and honours for a life of modesty and asceticism.⁶⁷² In doing so, he is also able to demonstrate that he had not acted furtively, benefitted materially from the use of his powers, and was actually highly regarded by a past emperor.⁶⁷³ However, it is arguably his devotion to the ascetic lifestyle which also places him outside of societal expectations and is thus a marginal figure, like in the case of Apuleius.⁶⁷⁴

In his analysis and comparison between the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* and the Acts of the Apostles, Reimer states that there is a compounding effect both in the case of Apollonius and the Apostles where the consistent number of successful acts leads to a larger number of followers. Their reputations eventually precede them, despite their positions as outsiders to normative society.⁶⁷⁵ Thus, by Philostratus illustrating Apollonius as having gained a significant following for his miracles, he is able to overcome the negative perceptions surrounding Apollonius's marginality. Additionally, Reimer astutely argues that if Apollonius was real and his trial took place as Philostratus recounts, he was likely targeted by the imperial family as they perceived him as a threat to their authority because of his substantial following and his operation outside of state-sanctioned institutions.⁶⁷⁶

In *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*, an act undertaken by any practitioner, whether it is described as a positive and altruistic one or as a negative, magical one, ultimately depends on the

⁶⁷² Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.7.1–3.

⁶⁷³ Reimer 1999, 281–28; for further evidence of these points see: Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.7.4–6, 8.7.7, 8.7.8–9, 8.7.10–15, 8.7.16.

⁶⁷⁴ Graf 1997b, 198.

⁶⁷⁵ Reimer 1999, 159.

⁶⁷⁶ Reimer 1999, 159–160, 182–183; examples of ‘crowd-gathering’ around Apollonius include: Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.13, 5.24, 8.15 where he is said to gain an even greater following once the crowd hears of the events of his legal trial and how he was able to escape his chains.

intention of the practitioner. If an act is executed for the benefit of society, rather than for personal gain, whether the outcome is positive or negative, it is still presented as miracle-working or as a positive act by Philostratus. On the other hand, any act committed for personal gain is considered magical.⁶⁷⁷ In keeping with this, Philostratus describes Apollonius as consistently avoiding receiving honours.⁶⁷⁸ Furthermore, Apollonius is described as having a group of followers who attempt to dissuade him from undertaking dangerous deeds. In the instances when they are unsuccessful at dissuading him, his execution of the dangerous deed further emphasises his magnanimity.⁶⁷⁹ Moreover, his followers take it upon themselves to argue for Apollonius's treatment and reception at the various communities to which he travels, thus allowing Apollonius to remain selfless by not promoting himself.⁶⁸⁰ Therefore, Philostratus makes the distinction in the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* that it was the intention behind an act which determined if it was a miracle or magical practice. Because Philostratus repeatedly highlights Apollonius's altruism, he is able to dissociate him from being a magic practitioner.

There are several similarities both in terms of the types of accusations and the arguments in their defence between Apollonius's trial and Apuleius's. The two men are described through a variety of sources as both virtuous philosophers, but also as nefarious magic practitioners. In both texts, the defendants equate themselves to other celebrated philosophers who were also accused of magic or other crimes. In the case of the Apollonius, Apollonius equates the accusations against him with those against Socrates and Anaxagoras.⁶⁸¹ Similar to Apuleius's

⁶⁷⁷ Reimer 1999, 124, 163–164.

⁶⁷⁸ For example, Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.15 where Apollonius downplays his escape from the chains to the crowd who are ready to worship him, and 8.31 where Philostratus refers to him as having a legacy 'with unearthly accounts everywhere' (λόγοις δὲ πανταχοῦ δαιμονίοις); Reimer 1999, 169.

⁶⁷⁹ For example, Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.11; Reimer 1999, 238.

⁶⁸⁰ For example, Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.33, 1.35, 1.40, 2.40; Reimer 1999, 237.

⁶⁸¹ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.7.1, 8.7.9 in Abraham 2009, 91.

trial, Apollonius can also be seen as aligning himself with a particular definition of *magus*, or that of the illustrious philosopher, rather than of the criminal *goes*. Additionally, they both claim that their experiments and miracle-working, respectively, are misunderstood by the ignorant.

While Apuleius is acquitted, Philostratus implies that Emperor Domitian begrudgingly acquitted Apollonius, on the condition that they have a private interview, but Apollonius vanishes before this can take place.⁶⁸² Although it is unclear from these accounts as to the exact reason why Apuleius was seemingly more unanimously successful in receiving his acquittal under Roman law than Apollonius, it is clear that both of these men border on Roman legal and social acceptability, namely for their operation outside of Roman institutions. However, to diminish the importance of Apollonius's verdict, Philostratus dismisses Apollonius's association with several other common legal and social perceptions of magic users. This includes the magic practitioner's requirement of a sacrifice and his motivation for personal gain. While in reality, Apollonius is legally accused of violating several Roman legal boundaries, Philostratus nevertheless draws on the perspective of his audience, and that through the absence of the other characteristics, Apollonius should not be perceived as a magic user by his audience.

5.3.3 Conclusion

Medical practitioners and practices were not universally regulated in the Roman Empire, resulting in different approaches to treating illnesses and attracting patients. Therefore, beyond some of the laws that have been outlined, there were not many legal restrictions which could be upheld to standardise Roman healthcare.⁶⁸³ For this reason, assessing what was perceived as legally or socially acceptable, or magical and/or medical is neither clear nor universal. Rather, the reputation of a practitioner especially amongst the elite was likely the only principal system

⁶⁸² Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 8.5.

⁶⁸³ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393.

for determining the legitimacy or efficacy of a practitioner. The importance of a practitioner's reputation is also echoed in Philostratus's depiction of Apollonius where his consecutive miracles led to his amassing a large following.⁶⁸⁴ Philostratus further removes Apollonius from other associations surrounding magic-users, in order to reduce the implication of his arrest.

5.4 Exoticism, foreignness, and 'the Other'

Similar to Chapter 3's description of this characteristic, 'exoticism' and 'foreignness' can lend prestige and/or precariousness to a practice, practitioner, or material. This is also tendency with regard to Roman medicine. Certain medical practices, practitioners, and materials were considered suspicious owing to their perceived exoticism, as demonstrated in Cato the Elder's disdain for Greek doctors.⁶⁸⁵ However, throughout the discussion of the development of Hippocratic medicine, practitioners who trained in Alexandria, on the other hand, were often considered more prestigious and legitimate in their knowledge. As a result, there were different perspectives regarding medical practices and their associated exoticism and foreignness, and by extension their association with magic or with their prestige. Philostratus is aware of this and is careful to frame Apollonius's travels to foreign lands in a particular light, lending him only a greater status in his philosophical undertakings, rather than with nefarious and magical practice.

5.4.1 Exoticism, foreignness, and 'the Other' in Roman medical practice

There is an overlap rooted in the 'Othering' between the perceived exoticism of individuals and materials in the medical field and those commonly perceived as magical. Similar to the previously discussed interconnectedness between the perception of 'the Other', the perception of magic, and the efficacy of certain practices and materials, the same connections can occur within Roman medicine. For example, the possible association between the *rhizotomoi* and magic might

⁶⁸⁴ Reimer 1999, 159.

⁶⁸⁵ See Footnote 595.

have arisen from the association of foreign groups and their expertise, such as the Psylloi and Marsi.⁶⁸⁶ This association is reflected in literary representations of witches who are also skilful *rhizotomai* and who live on the fringes of society. Many origins of plant-lore and *pharmaka* also had perceived foreign origins. In section 2.5.3 above, the use of pine in ritualistic contexts was discussed, such as in the Fountain of Anna Perenna. Because pine was often found in various ritualistic context from one part of the Empire to another, there was likely a sense of efficacy that was associated with the pine for rituals, including magical ones. While the use of exotic ingredients in the descriptions of literary witches suggest that there was a nefarious potency to such plants, in practice, it would seem as though certain plants were sought after because they were believed to be highly effective for religious, medical, and magical uses.⁶⁸⁷ For example, in Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, there is a tendency to refer to specific plants as having come from foreign places, such as the presumed *papaver somniferum*, potentially to emphasise the exoticness and efficacy of these plants.⁶⁸⁸ However, as discussed, *papaver somniferum* was widely used for various medical uses. Because of their close association with plants that were also considered exotic to Roman society, the liminality of the *rhizotomoi* might have further contributed to their perception as magical. Overall, there are several ways by which *pharmaka* and the plants use in its creation could have been perceived as magical, even when it was produced for a medical purpose.

In contrast, the cultural syncretism between Roman and provincial healing practices demonstrates that exoticism and foreignness were not always perceived negatively within Roman society or as magical. The introduction of Roman culture in indigenous cultures often led to new

⁶⁸⁶ See section 3.7 above.

⁶⁸⁷ See section 5.1.4 above.

⁶⁸⁸ Homer, *Odyssey* 10.391–394; Scarborough 1997, 140.

forms of ritual practice including medical practices which had a lasting influence on the healthcare of communities. Examples of syncretism between Roman and provincial practices can be seen through the iconography of deities, possibly those meant to provide a healing function, particularly in the regions of present-day France, Germany, and Britain. In this region, it was common for a Roman god and local goddess to be paired and represented together, such as Rosmerta and Mercury.⁶⁸⁹ Moreover, some iconographic syncretism is quite apparent, as certain indigenous deities weren't visually represented until after Roman consolidation.⁶⁹⁰

An example of syncretised healing iconography was found at a sanctuary near a local spring located in present-day Hochscheid, Germany and was dedicated to both Apollo Grannius and Sirona, a local goddess.⁶⁹¹ The proximity of the sanctuary to a spring has been widely interpreted as the sanctuary having a healing function. There are fragments of reliefs within the sanctuary with representations of these two deities:

Apollo Grannius survives in fragmentary form, and he holds a cithara and has his hand on a griffin. The griffin is commonly associated with the god in the Mosel valley and the Rhineland down to Baden Baden. The image of Sirona, on the other hand, is almost complete. As a goddess, she was not well known outside of the region, but she is depicted similarly to the goddess Hygieia, shown with a snake coiled around her left arm. Her other attributes include a bowl of eggs (or so they have been identified as such), and she wears a diadem with a star, supposedly associated with her name, which is thought to have meant 'star' It is only the inscribed name that lets us know who she is.⁶⁹²

Although Sirona has certain attributes, namely the snake coiled around her arm, which would associate her with Hygieia, the daughter of Asclepius and granddaughter to Apollo; the additional attributes, such as the bowl of eggs and her pairing with Apollo suggest that she should not be

⁶⁸⁹ Woolf 2003, 146–147 in Baker 2013, 81–82; Ferlut 2016, 5.

⁶⁹⁰ Baker 2013, 81.

⁶⁹¹ 'Sirona' in MacKillop 2004.

⁶⁹² Statue of Sirona in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier; *AE* 1941, 00089; Baker 2013, 81–82; Woolf 2003, 146–147.

seen as the equivalent to Hygeia.⁶⁹³ Rather, Woolf rationally explains that she should be seen as an indigenous goddess reimagined through Roman attributes.⁶⁹⁴ Therefore, I argue that this is an example of healing ritual syncretism where Roman divine imagery was combined with local practices and beliefs, and the image of Sirona was meant to draw on elements of Apollo and Hygeia, both of which were deities associated with health and well-being.

In certain cases, some provincial healing practices were endorsed by the centralised Roman government and spread in popularity across the Empire. An obvious example already discussed in section 5.1.1 above is the cult of Asclepius which originated in Archaic Greece. Additionally, certain Egyptian deities were highly regarded even within the Roman Empire for their healing powers. Such was the case of the cults of Isis and Serapis which spread across the Roman Empire in the first century AD and rivalled the cult of Asclepius.⁶⁹⁵ Ancient Greek writer Diodorus Siculus attests to Isis as a great healer and as visiting patients in their sleep.⁶⁹⁶ Strabo attributes similar qualities to Serapis.⁶⁹⁷ Aside from the cult of Asclepius, incubation at temples as religious healing methods in Egypt were in practice since the Pharaonic period where priests would often be the ones to administer treatments and assist patients.⁶⁹⁸ Prior to the Ptolemaic era, it was believed that the gods who would appear in patients' dreams would usually communicate to the patients in riddles which would be interpreted by the priests or specialists once the patients awoke and recalled their dreams to them. However, later in the Greco-Roman period, the gods would allegedly communicate very specific medical treatments for ailments which would not

⁶⁹³ Woolf 2003, 146–147.

⁶⁹⁴ Woolf 2003, 147–148.

⁶⁹⁵ Petridou 2016, 439–440.

⁶⁹⁶ Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 1.25.2–5.

⁶⁹⁷ Strabo, *Geographica* 17.1.

⁶⁹⁸ Pachis 2014, 54.

require as much interpretation.⁶⁹⁹ Testimonies of those who visited the temples that have been preserved on papyri further support the notion that temple incubation at Temples of Isis and Serapis and Egypt were still popular during the Roman Imperial period.⁷⁰⁰ Pausanias also attests to how two the cults of Isis and one of Serapis were established in Corinth and were still operating in the second century AD.⁷⁰¹ Thus, healing practices could sometimes be adopted into the Roman Empire from the provinces, and would subsequently undergo a process of syncretism. Although these ideas and practices were associated with a foreign origin, these practices could still be highly regarded as legitimate methods of treatment to the greater Roman public. Therefore, exotic and foreign elements were not always perceived as subversive, but rather efficacious and sought-after.

5.4.2 Exoticism, foreignness, and ‘the Other’ in the *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*

The case of Apollonius presents a unique and contrasting perspective to this characteristic which has not yet been observed in other examples in this thesis. This is through the promotion of Greek culture and philosophical ideas, even at the expense of Roman ones. Philostratus describes Apollonius as functioning as a representative for Tyana and even all of Greece upon his travels to India and Babylon. This is further supported by one of Apollonius’s own letters where he declares that he has taken on these travels in the name of his hometown of Tyana.⁷⁰² In India, he even praises the people there for not having been contaminated by Roman culture and

⁶⁹⁹ Pachis 2014, 56.

⁷⁰⁰ Pachis 2014, 60; Harris 2024, 321.

⁷⁰¹ Pausanias, *Ἑλλάδος Περιήγησις* 2.4.5, 9.24.1.

⁷⁰² Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.28–33 (in Babylon), 3.12 (in India); Apollonius, *Epistle* 47; Abraham 2009, 31.

authority.⁷⁰³ In contrast, he scorns some of the once-Hellenized cities, such as Antioch, for having begun to conform to Roman culture.⁷⁰⁴

Throughout Philostratus's narrative, Apollonius is described as being drawn to travel in the pursuit of greater knowledge. He even declines the opportunity to advise Vespasian in an official role because he had not yet travelled to commune with the Gymnosophists in Egypt.⁷⁰⁵ Early on in his travels, he initially travels to Babylon to seek out the philosophy of the *Magoi*, but he decides that ultimately, the *Magoi* are still lacking in wisdom and chooses to travel onwards to India to commune with the Brahmins.⁷⁰⁶ India does not have direct contact or influence from Rome, but Alexander the Great had previously conquered parts of India.⁷⁰⁷ Thus, Philostratus equates Apollonius's journey to India with that of Alexander, giving Apollonius's travels a sense of prestige. Moreover, in doing so, Philostratus is able to distance Apollonius from the association of the foreign 'East' with magical practice.⁷⁰⁸ Philostratus emphasises the philosophical affinity for travelling further east owing to the Ancient Greek philosophical tradition which often referred to the value of interacting with 'Eastern' cultures, in order to gain greater knowledge. Abraham explains that Philostratus does this through 'creating both desire and repulsion for the East in Greek thought... Philostratus exploits this ambivalence by using it as an opportunity to reconstruct the East to his own ends... Magic is the Siren song that these philosophers can avoid. Their superiority stems directly from their ability to make the journey to the East and learn from Eastern wise men without succumbing to magical practices'.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰³ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.20.

⁷⁰⁴ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.16; Abraham 2009, 34–35.

⁷⁰⁵ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 5.37; Abraham 2009, 46.

⁷⁰⁶ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.18, 1.26; Abraham 2009, 46.

⁷⁰⁷ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 2.8–9; Abraham 2009, 64.

⁷⁰⁸ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 2.9; Abraham 2009, 67; Reimer 1999, 139–140.

⁷⁰⁹ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.2.: Apollonius states that his accusers in Rome are weary of him as a magic practitioner because of his travels to foreign lands; Abraham 2009, 45.

Therefore, Philostratus is aware of the associations between foreign cultures with magic and is careful in his choice of framing of Apollonius's travels. Similarly to the case of Apuleius, there is an emphasis on Apollonius's zeal for philosophical enlightenment where Philostratus argues that some of his deeds, such as his journey to the East, are mistaken for magic.⁷¹⁰

Throughout these travels, Apollonius not only enriches his knowledge, but also acts as a representative of Greek culture.⁷¹¹ There is an interesting dichotomy that is drawn between the 'barbaric' ethnicity of such individuals which Apollonius encounters, yet who are able to overcome this disadvantage by bettering themselves through Greek philosophy.⁷¹² For example, King Paraca, a king he meets in India, is not affected by Rome's hegemony, resulting in Apollonius's ability to teach Paraca's people how to speak perfect Greek.⁷¹³ As a result, Apollonius is able to turn Paraca's kingdom into a 'Greek utopia'.⁷¹⁴ When he travels to Babylon, he meets the ruler, Vardanes, who admires the Greeks and even knows some Greek before Apollonius's arrival. The two bond over their affinity for Greek culture and philosophy. Additionally, a conversation between Apollonius and Damis, his follower, reveals that Apollonius feels that Vardanes is wiser than what is required of him as a 'a ruler of barbarians'.⁷¹⁵ This is further echoed within Apollonius's acquisition of Damis as a follower who originally came from Antioch, but whose acceptance of Greek philosophy, elevates him beyond

⁷¹⁰ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Ττανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.2, 7.39; Abraham 2009, 133–134.

⁷¹¹ Groves Campbell 1968, 29.

⁷¹² For example, the effect of Greek philosophy on Vardanes's soul: Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Ττανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.40; Abraham 2009, 56.

⁷¹³ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Ττανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 3.12; Abraham 2009, 34.

⁷¹⁴ Abraham 2009, 34 drawing on Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Ττανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.20, 3.12–16.

⁷¹⁵ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Ττανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1. 21.2, 1.38–40; Abraham 2009, 21, 56.

his place of origin.⁷¹⁶ This notion further reflects Apuleius's argument, drawn from the Second Sophistic belief that a man's *ratio* rather than his place of origin determined his wisdom.⁷¹⁷

Through the analysis of the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*, there is a distinction made between Roman and Greek culture with regard to civilisation and intellectual sophistication. Philostratus through Apollonius's voice elevates Greek culture over Roman culture; an interesting characteristic given that his work was commissioned by a Roman Empress. However, this is likely because of the Second Sophistic movement which gained popularity throughout the Roman Empire in the second century AD, at the time at which Philostratus was writing, which revered Greek culture.⁷¹⁸ This contrasts with previous examples where Roman culture was almost always framed as superior. While this can be said to be a movement away from negatively 'Other-ing' Greek culture, there is nevertheless a prestige attached to Greek and Hellenistic culture amongst more learned Roman circles, including those associated with medicine and healing. Additionally, Apollonius's travels to faraway places only further serve in emphasising his bravery and zeal for knowledge, something which aligns him with the virtuous and intellectual philosopher. Ultimately, through his journey to India, Apollonius gains his gift of *prognosis*.⁷¹⁹ Therefore, Philostratus is careful to frame Apollonius's journeys to foreign lands, so that he can align his depiction of Apollonius with that of the learned philosopher.

5.4.3 Conclusion

Overall, this section has provided a contrast in the perception of this particular characteristic from previous examples where Roman culture is usually elevated above others, and non-Roman cultures, including Greek culture is often regarded as nefarious and suspicious, and thus

⁷¹⁶ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 3.43.

⁷¹⁷ Apuleius, *Apologia* 25; Mattiacci 2014, 94; Abraham 2009, 70.

⁷¹⁸ Abraham 2009, 12.

⁷¹⁹ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 3.44; Abraham 2009, 142.

associated with magic. While previous chapters have provided many examples of negative connotations of ‘the Other’ and of exotic elements, or at least a balanced, dichotomous perspective between aspersion and prestige, this chapter has demonstrated that prestigious medical knowledge often originated in or had foreign elements which were not immediately associated with magic. There are nevertheless still some examples where ‘exotic’ elements of medicine could present a danger, such as the *rhizotomoi*; yet this section has also illustrated several examples of cultural syncretism that occurred between Roman and indigenous groups, or were even adopted by Romans from indigenous cultures. In certain cases, such as through the Hellenistic medical school system, non-Roman elements were sometimes considered even more sought after than local, Roman practices. In Philostratus’s text, there is an emphasis on the virtue that Apollonius exhibits for choosing to travel to faraway places which ultimately lead to his divine powers. Therefore, exoticism of practices and materials is common in both medical and magical practices, but there were fewer negative connotations in the medical field. Regardless, there was a broad spectrum of perspectives of exotic associated medical practices and their additional association with magic, or their associated efficacy.

5.5 Feminine aspects of Roman medicine and ancient gynaecology

Ideas concerning women’s health were highly influenced by Roman societal expectations of women, namely the ability to reproduce.⁷²⁰ Previous chapters have examined the resultant association of women who deviate from these expectations with magic.⁷²¹ This section studies the field of ancient gynaecology, as women’s health and medical practices were often unique to men’s practices and sometimes associated with magical practice. I use the term ‘gynaecology’ to refer to ancient medical and well-being practices specific to women and their anatomy, rather

⁷²⁰ King 1998, 56.

⁷²¹ See section 2.4 above.

than the modern term which refers to a standardised medical field emerging from the nineteenth century.⁷²² This section aims to understand the perspectives and perceptions of female medical practitioners and female patients who were often considered silent actors within the sphere of ancient medicine. To further emphasise this, despite the commissioning of the text by a woman, Julia Domna, women play a very small role in the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τρανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*. Women were clearly present in the medical sphere, but were not often recorded or represented.

5.5.1 Feminine aspects of Roman medicine and ancient gynaecology

There is a particular challenge when attempting to understand ancient women's health practices.

One issue regarding the study of ancient gynaecology was that direct interactions between male practitioners and female patients were rare, as women in ancient times were under the guardianship of a male *kyrios* in Ancient Greece and later a *paterfamilias* in Ancient Rome.

Thus, a physician's skills and assessment of the female patient needed to impress the *kyrios* or *paterfamilias* rather than the patient herself. In the Hippocratic Corpus, it is even discouraged to tell the female patient what her medical diagnoses are, especially if she is young, because it is assumed that she will be embarrassed. Moreover, women in antiquity were said to be reluctant to reveal their medical issues to male *iatroi*. Thus, the attending male *iatros* would need to rely on observing the woman's behaviour to try and determine the issue.⁷²³ Galen provides an example of this when he discusses his attendance of a female patient who was entirely silent, turned over in her bed, and refused to speak with him. However, from her physical symptoms, he is able to determine that she is love sick over the dancer Pylades.⁷²⁴

⁷²² King 1998, 1–7.

⁷²³ King 1998, 47 drawing on *Corpus Hippocraticum, On Diseases of Women* 1. 62; King 1998, 22; see section 5.1.3 above on the role of the *paterfamilias*; Harris 2024, 47–48.

⁷²⁴ Galen, *On Prognosis* 6 in King 1998, 47; Harris 2024, 47–48.

There is an additional significant challenge when attempting to learn about ancient gynaecology because of the lack of identifiable female voices of practitioners and patients from the textual record. There were *maiai* or *obstetrices* (commonly translated as ‘midwives’) in Ancient Greece and later in Rome who were specialists in obstetrics and gynaecology. However, as Hippocratic physicians increased in influence, they took more of an interest in women’s healthcare, although midwives still remained an important resource for women. Several sections in the Hippocratic Corpus discussing gynaecological health credit the *maiai* for the information, but there is always the risk that the male author of the corpus might not have understood the *maiai* or might not have copied down their instructions verbatim.⁷²⁵ Male authors, including those who contributed to the Hippocratic Corpus, admit to having consulted with women regarding some of their information, but would remain dubious in the details concerning to which women and how many they would speak: ‘Greek men both insist on the public silence of women while creating fictional women who are highly voluble’.⁷²⁶ Therefore, establishing the female voice in the medical record in antiquity is often difficult or unclear to identify. Because of the reluctant nature of relationships between female patients and their male physicians, women in antiquity might have relied more heavily on traditional and religious healing methods than men did, thus further reflecting their absence within most medical learned sources.⁷²⁷

In Roman society, there was a particular emphasis on a woman’s fertility, as the expected behaviour for a respectable woman was to marry young and to engage in sexual relations with her husband exclusively, in order to produce as many issue as possible.⁷²⁸ The term *gynaikeia*

⁷²⁵ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 388.

⁷²⁶ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 136.

⁷²⁷ King 1998, 23, 47, 105–107.

⁷²⁸ For example, Tacitus, *Germania* 19 states that it is a woman’s duty to be married and only sexually active with her husband and produce offspring and not limit the number of children.

appears in the Hippocratic Corpus, specifically *On Diseases of Women* 1 and 2, which refers to the care and treatment of ‘women’s sexual organs, menstruation, women’s diseases’, namely to address issues surrounding women’s fertility.⁷²⁹ In Ancient Greece, it was believed that women who remained unmarried and virgins throughout their lives were more likely to suffer from various other illnesses.⁷³⁰ This notion of a woman not marrying while still fertile seems to have been perpetuated into Roman times, as seen in the previous chapter (section 4.5.2 above), where longtime, still fertile widows might suffer from illnesses and pain from being celibate for so long.

Contrastingly, the use of contraception and abortifacients were frequently perceived as subversive behaviour, as reflected in the contempt with which ancient authors describe them and temple inscriptions (below). This is likely owing to the fact that birth control methods were perceived as counterintuitive to Roman expectations of women. While sanctioned ancient magical practices did not include birth control methods, I argue that they were nevertheless common and relevant issues relating to ancient women’s health. Therefore, such ancient women’s medical practices could have been perceived as magical, as it related to women’s sexual subversive behaviour.

Contraception and abortion could have been perceived as tools which could allow women to engage in sexually-subversive behaviour more readily, and by extension, could be associated with magic.⁷³¹ Therefore, *pharmaka* in the form of abortifacients, contraception, or even love

⁷²⁹ *Corpus Hippocraticum, On Diseases of Women* 1, 2; King 1998, 23.

⁷³⁰ *Diseases of Women* 2.127–8; King 1998, 291.

⁷³¹ Hopkins 2017, 71; Tacitus, *Germania* 19: condemns the practice of limiting the amount of children; Soranus *Gynaecia*, 1.60, T 63: condemns the use of abortifacients; Ovid, *Amores* 2.14: condemns women who abort their pregnancies and equates it to murder; also, Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.558–559 has been interpreted by some modern scholars such as Felton 2017, 190, as particularly violent representation of an abortion undertaken by Erichtho.

potions (*amatoria*) could also present an overlap of the various nuances of *pharmaka* and of magic and medicine. The general lack of female voices in the ancient literary medical field in tandem with contemporary negative attitudes surrounding the use of birth control make it very difficult to find surviving information regarding the methods used by women. It is also possible that contraceptive and abortive techniques were originally developed and shared by women, and transmitted orally, rather than being recorded in texts.⁷³² This is further reflected in Euripides's *Andromache* where women who were seen as sharing information together sometimes fell under suspicion as conspiring together to commit adultery.⁷³³ Based on textual evidence, including in medical texts, some herbs and plants which are mentioned frequently as part of a contraceptive or abortive recipe include 'pomegranate skin, pennyroyal, willow, and squirting cucumber'.⁷³⁴ There is also a *PGM* spell which uses a lodestone as a contraceptive amulet, further strengthening the overlap between contraception, gemstones, and magic.⁷³⁵

Some ancient authors and philosophers openly condemned the use of contraception and abortifacients. Tacitus condemns 'the limit of the number of...children', the promiscuity of women generally, and even criticises the lack of enforcement of the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*.⁷³⁶ Soranus, a Greek physician from Ephesus who trained in Alexandria until eventually settling and practising in Rome from the first century AD, also condemns the use of abortifacients under certain circumstances, such as for a woman to preserve her beauty or because she has committed adultery.⁷³⁷ However, he makes some philosophical distinctions

⁷³² King 1998, 135.

⁷³³ Euripides, *Andromache* 943–946; King 1998, 135.

⁷³⁴ King 1998, 135; for pomegranate skin: Soranus, *Gynaecology* 1.62; for pennyroyal: Aristophanes, *Peace* 712; for willow: Aelius (cited in Riddle 1992: 97; 1997: 61); *Corpus Hippocraticum*, *On Diseases of Women* 1.78, L 8.178 in King 1998, 132.

⁷³⁵ *PGM* XXII.a.11–14; King 1998, 133.

⁷³⁶ Tacitus, *Germania* 19; Hopkins 2017, 79.

⁷³⁷ Soranus *Gynaecia*, 1.60–61.

between contraception and abortifacients based on philosophical ideas. Soranus argues that: ‘A contraceptive differs from an abortive, for the first does not let the conception take place, while the latter destroys what has been conceived’.⁷³⁸ Because Soranus defines contraception as preventing conception, he argues that it is an acceptable practice. In contrast, he opposes abortion which he defines as the expulsion of what has been conceived.⁷³⁹ In these sections of his work, Soranus also draws attention to the Hippocratic contradiction regarding abortifacients whereby in the Hippocratic Oath, a physician must swear to not give a woman an abortifacient. On the other, in another section, he suggests to a girl who is believed to be several days pregnant, to jump in order to expel whatever has been conceived. The contradiction has been interpreted by Soranus and several modern as the Hippocratic Corpus’s permittance of the expulsion of a very early pregnancy.⁷⁴⁰

Abortion is frequently a debated topic amongst philosophers, as it concerns the discussion as to whether the fetus was ‘living’. Aristotle argues that a still ‘unformed’ fetus that does not yet have sensation, is still not living, and thus can be aborted ethically. He also makes the distinction between the sexual formation of the fetus to distinguish it between a ‘formed’ and ‘unformed’ fetus.⁷⁴¹ On the other hand, Stoics argue that life only begins upon the birth of a baby, thus abortion prior to birth was acceptable at any time.⁷⁴² There is an additional comparison made between abortion and magic using the literary witch, Erichtho, who takes a fetus from a woman’s womb to sacrifice as a purposefully horrendous depiction of abortion.⁷⁴³ Finally, an inscription from Philadelphia, Lydia from the 1st century BC banned those who

⁷³⁸ Soranus, *Gynaecia* 1.60.

⁷³⁹ Soranus, *Gynaecia* 1.60–61.

⁷⁴⁰ Soranus, *Gynaecia* 1.60; *Corpus Hippocraticum, On the Nature of the Child*; Temkin 1991, p. 63, n. 119.

⁷⁴¹ Aristotle, *De animalibus historiae* 7.3.2–4 in Dickison 1973, 165.

⁷⁴² Dickison 1973, 165.

⁷⁴³ Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.558–559.

engaged in magical activities, including those who had used abortifacients from entering the temple of Dionysus.⁷⁴⁴ Therefore, these sources illustrate ancient perceptions surrounding the use of contraceptives and abortifacients as subversive, while the inscription from Lydia further links their use with magic.

Formal legislation against abortion in the Roman Empire was not introduced until the end of the second century AD under the reign of Septimius Severus. However, these laws do not explicitly ban abortion itself, but rather its implications in relation to other laws. For example, a woman could be criminally charged with having an abortion after a divorce, presumably if she was pregnant with her ex-husband's child, as this would mean that she had violated his rights as *paterfamilias*.⁷⁴⁵ On the other hand, it was a common practice within Roman society to expose an unwanted child. However, this might have been a more normative practice owing to the fact that exposure was also the desire of the father of the child, thus it did not infringe on their paternal rights, unlike the potential choice of the mother to terminate a pregnancy.⁷⁴⁶ It was not until the fourth century AD where there was new legislation passed which equated abortion with murder.⁷⁴⁷

Overall, it would seem as though *pharmaka*, in all its nuances, had an association with female magic practitioners. Section 2.4 above has already outlined some examples of this, such as with the trope of the literary witch who had considerable botanical knowledge and was adept at creating *pharmaka*. The *pharmaka* which they create can be interpreted as magical potions, but in certain contexts, they can also be translated as poisons or medicine. Livy's account

⁷⁴⁴ Ditt. *Syll.* 3³ nr. 985; Dickison 1973, 161; Ogden 2002, 276, no. 279.

⁷⁴⁵ Justinian, *Digest* 48.19.39; 48.8.8; 47; Dickison 1973, 161.

⁷⁴⁶ Dickison 1973, 165.

⁷⁴⁷ Dickison 1973, 161.

(section 2.4.6 above) further emphasises the ambiguity of *pharmaka* as either a poison or medicine, as presented through the patrician women whom he describes. Finally, Tacitus's account (section 2.4.7 above) of patrician women who are accused of practising magic and of using *pharmaka*, draws attention to the association of *pharmaka* as the tool of the female magic practitioner. These women were additionally accused of sexual misconduct, and *pharmaka* could be perceived as a tool to help these women in undertaking such acts. The association of magic and female promiscuity were likely caused by a feedback loop where women who were perceived as acting against societal norms, were additionally perceived as magic practitioners, or vice versa. These characterisations were also linked to women being described as masculine, as Roman gender norms at the time often dictated that men were the active sexual partners. This is also a contributing factor as to why the persecutors characterise Apuleius as effeminate, in order to further associate him with a figure who would use an *amatorium* 'love spell/potion' (section 4.5.1 above). Hence, *pharmaka* could be associated with promiscuity directly or indirectly through their close connections to women and the scrutiny over women's sexualities in antiquity.

Birth control would not have been considered a primary concern in ancient gynaecology, as it conflicted with Roman accepted values for women who were expected to marry and produce issue as early and as frequently as possible.⁷⁴⁸ However, I argue that birth control was a concern of ancient women's own perceived well-being and health. Although birth control is often excluded as an area of medicine, according to more learned and philosophical male authors, birth control is nevertheless an issue of ancient women's healthcare, albeit often

⁷⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Germania* 19: this source in particular argues for how women should follow through on societal expectations; meanwhile, Soranus, *Gynaecia* 1.60; *Corpus Hippocraticum*, Hippocratic Oath condemn the use of birth control in the formal medical field.

unsanctioned. This is another way by which magic and medicine converge, and how the *pharmaka* used for birth control purposes further link these concepts with women.

5.5.2 Lack of women in the *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*

Although Julia Domna originally commissioned Philostratus to write about the life of Apollonius, there is a notable absence of women throughout the whole work.⁷⁴⁹ There are very few women to whom are referred specifically in the text, such as a dead bride whom Apollonius revives, and a female ‘vampire’.⁷⁵⁰

Aspects of Apollonius’s asceticism will be examined more closely in the next section of ‘privateness’, but this extends to his total abstinence from any sexual activity, and thus his life is virtually void of women.⁷⁵¹ This notion is in keeping with his devotion to Neopythagorean philosophical enlightenment.⁷⁵² During the period in which Philostratus was writing at the beginning of the third century AD, women were removed from the intellectual, philosophical sphere; this might have contributed as to why women do not play any significant role throughout the text.⁷⁵³ This also reflects the literary distinction between male and female accused magic-practitioners, where male practitioners could argue that their philosophical pursuits were mistaken for magical practice. Women accused magic-practitioners, on the other hand, did not have this same line of defence.⁷⁵⁴ Moreover, as Apollonius is described as a healing practitioner by Philostratus, I argue that the near absence of women from this work further perpetuates the textual absence of women generally from Roman medical practice.

⁷⁴⁹ Reimer 1999, p. 224, n. 98.

⁷⁵⁰ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.25, 4.45.

⁷⁵¹ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.13; Reimer 1999, 134.

⁷⁵² Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 6.11.5.

⁷⁵³ Groves Campbell 1968, 114.

⁷⁵⁴ Section 3.3 above.

5.5.3 Conclusion

Many women's healthcare practices, specifically abortive and contraceptive methods were considered as subversive and connected to magical practices as it was perceived as a method for women to act against their societal norms. I nevertheless argue that such methods were integrative in ancient women's health and well-being and allowed for women to have control over their natural processes; the intervention of a practitioner into nature is often philosophically debated and sometimes used as a way of distinguishing a magical practice. However, it is very likely that many women used such methods without perceiving their participation as a form of magical practice. Therefore, there was likely a division in perspectives amongst men and women in Roman society regarding if such practices were automatically associated with subversion, and by extension, with magic.

In the case of the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*, women are hardly mentioned throughout Apollonius's life and acts. This was likely reflective of the contemporary exclusion of women from intellectual and philosophical spheres, including in more learned medical ones. This further relates to privateness (section 5.6 below) whereby the exclusion of women from Apollonius's life demonstrates his devotion to wisdom through asceticism. Moreover, the characteristic of secret or arcane knowledge through the chapters has highlighted examples of how learned men were revered for their practices, while women who practised similar rituals were looked upon with greater suspicion.

5.6 Privateness

The previous section demonstrated the privateness that Roman women likely had to maintain when dealing with certain health concerns, such as birth control. However, when evaluating the presence of both aspects of this characteristic in Roman medicine, at first glance, it would seem as though the aspect of privacy in common Roman medical practice was not present. This is

likely owing to the fact that many practitioners would have wanted to demonstrate their skills, in order to gain more clients.⁷⁵⁵ In the case of the individualistic or selfish motivation behind a practice, the Roman medical market was often fraught with competition amongst practitioners without the need to adhere to a set of standardised practices. As a result, determining who was a reputable and skilled physician as opposed to an illegitimate charlatan was unclear, and patients often had to rely on the alleged reputations of practitioners. However, the archaeological example which discussed the possible antidotal *pharmaka* presents the aspect of required privacy. Regarding Apollonius of Tyana, the feature of his asceticism can be interpreted as a form of privateness, as Apollonius frequently withdraws from society and societal norms. Around the time in which Philostratus was writing, asceticism not only becomes a common feature of many ‘wandering’ holy men, but is also a concept which touches on the aspect of privacy of a practitioner, yet also distances the practitioner from the individualistic motivation for material gain.⁷⁵⁶ There is an overall a complicated absence and presence of these aspects, the privacy required to undertake a practice and the self-serving intention, of the characteristic of privateness in Roman medicine.

5.6.1 Privateness or lack thereof in Roman medical practice

With regard to the aspect of required privacy to undertake a practice, because of the competitive nature of the Roman medical market, medical procedures were sometimes performed publicly.⁷⁵⁷ Additionally, surgeries required good lighting and would have likely taken place outside and sometimes with the patient sitting up or even standing up.⁷⁵⁸ Therefore, many medical practitioners practised medicine in public either out of necessity, or to show off their skills to the

⁷⁵⁵ Galen, *On Prognosis* 1.9–10 in Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393.

⁷⁵⁶ Reimer 1999, 241.

⁷⁵⁷ Galen, *On Prognosis* 1.9–10 in Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393: Galen describes performing an animal vivisection in public to try and attract clientele.

⁷⁵⁸ Baker 2013, 78.

public. Meanwhile, practices that were undertaken in private frequently drew suspicion, such as in the case of the alleged charges against Apuleius.⁷⁵⁹ Because many ancient medical practitioners practised medicine in public and openly promoted their services, it can be assumed that they were able to do so because their methods were not perceived as nefarious. However, medical practitioners were also known to promote their own services by slandering their competitors, sometimes through accusations of magic.⁷⁶⁰ Therefore, in some cases, privateness in the form of privacy needed to undertake a practice could help to distinguish which practices were perceived as magical or medical. In other cases, this distinction would be difficult to make, owing to the amount of slander which took place amongst rivalling practitioners. However, as can be seen in the discussion of medical practitioners and medical schools in Alexandria, rather than strict ‘privateness’, there was a tendency for certain procedures to only take place in more liberal and accepted environments.⁷⁶¹ In other words, with regard to medical progress and experimentation, there was a boundary of social acceptability that could only be surpassed in certain learned spaces. Hence, the undertaking of Roman medical practices required a wide range of both practical and perceived privacy.

With regard to the individualistic nature of Roman medicine, because of the competitive nature of the field, there would have been many practitioners who would have marketed their services for profit, rather than for efficacy, and thus could also garner the reputation as ‘quacks’, or deceitful and swindling medical practitioners without any actual skill.⁷⁶² There is no specific term in Latin or Ancient Greek for ‘quack’, as the term is not an easily translatable term from

⁷⁵⁹ Apuleius, *Apologia* 27.

⁷⁶⁰ Galen, *On Prognosis* 1.9–10 in Jones-Lewis 2016a, 393; Harris 2024, 18.

⁷⁶¹ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 390–391.

⁷⁶² The Encyclopedia Britannica Online defines ‘quackery’ as ‘the characteristic practice of quacks or charlatans, who pretend to knowledge and skill that they do not possess, particularly in medicine’. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/quackery> Accessed September 12th, 2024.

modern times. However, the Hippocratic Corpus makes a distinction between the good versus bad *iatros* in section 5.1.1 above, mainly with regard to the latter's lack of *techne* and their main motivation for swindling patients.⁷⁶³ Practitioners who were deemed as acting selfishly could also be associated with magic. As will be seen in the next chapter, Lucian refers to Alexander of Abonoteichus both as a *magus* or *goes* which is often translated as 'quack', thus further conflating the notion of a 'bad' medical practitioner with a magic practitioner. However, the ambition of the deceitful medical practitioner did not automatically equate them with practising magic, but there was nevertheless an overlap in these concepts.

The case study of the possible antidotal *pharmaka* in section 5.1.4 above presents the aspect of required privacy, alongside an overlap between magic and medicine. The context itself was a private one, thus reflecting the first aspect of privacy, even without ascertaining if the assemblage was an antidote. If the interpretation of the assemblage as an antidote is accepted, then this aspect is further indicated, as the act of poisoning an individual was a furtive act, and by extension, its counteraction was likely also a private practice, so as for targets to stay ahead of their opponents.

The feedback loop of the privacy required to undertake a practice and its subversive elements is also seen in women's birth control practices. Despite the philosophical issues raised by male authors surrounding contraceptive and abortive methods, it was likely that many women still used them. Overall, there were examples where magic and medicine overlapped, and the presence of one of these two aspects of the characteristic of privateness was one indication of when a medicine practice could be perceived as additionally magical. However, determining who

⁷⁶³ For example, *Corpus Hippocraticum, Epidemics* 6.5.7; King 1998, 41–42.

was a reputable medical practitioner rather than an unskilled swindler was not always straightforward. Therefore, the perceptions of practices and practitioners and their connection to this aspect could vary.

5.6.2 Privateness in the *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*

Both aspects, the privacy required to undertake a ritual and the selfish motivation of this characteristic are evidenced in Philostratus's work. The first aspect of privacy can be seen in the form of Apollonius's asceticism, where Apollonius actively removes himself from society and its normative expectations. However, Philostratus uses this feature to further emphasise Apollonius's holiness rather than his liminal and suspect association with magic.⁷⁶⁴ Additionally, through the feature of asceticism, Philostratus is able to argue that Apollonius did not gain materially from his acts, unlike deceitful or quack practitioners, and thus Philostratus distances Apollonius from the aspect of individualistic intention, distinguishing Apollonius's miracle and healing work from magic.⁷⁶⁵

Apollonius's asceticism includes his abstinence from sexual relations, vegetarianism, abandonment of riches, and general withdrawal from society.⁷⁶⁶ Although the conceptualisation of asceticism did not begin until the third century AD, there was nevertheless an association between Ancient Greek philosophers and their withdrawal from society and material goods.⁷⁶⁷ Philostratus is able to equate Apollonius with being divine, and thus is beyond the desire or need for such mundane sources of pleasure.⁷⁶⁸ Philostratus praises Apollonius's withdrawal from

⁷⁶⁴ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.7, 6.11.5 7.20, 8.5; Reimer 1999, 76–78, 134–136.

⁷⁶⁵ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*: he passes up material gains: 1.33, 1.35, 1.40, 2.40; when he comes up against authority figures: 4.2, 4.44; 7.4–8, 32–35; Reimer 1999, 131–132.

⁷⁶⁶ Examples of these features include Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.8, 1.13, 8.7.13, 8.7.16; Reimer 1999, 136–137, 153.

⁷⁶⁷ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 6.11.6; Abraham 2009, 117; Reimer 1999, 75–78, 134–136.

⁷⁶⁸ See Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.8, 1.13 where he forgoes engaging in sexual activity for the sake of his philosophical and Pythagorean zeal; Reimer 1999, 136–137, 153.

society, even though there are many other examples including in the case of Apuleius where a marginal figure often drew accusations of magical practice. One manner by which Philostratus reframes his marginality is associating his ascetism with purity. Philostratus states that during Apollonius's time in Aegae, he argued with a Cilician that individuals who attempt to give sacrifices to the gods as retribution for past crimes were not 'pure' (*καθαρός*), and that an individual should only enter a temple in a state of purity.⁷⁶⁹ Ethical purification such as through ascetic practices was a common theme in Ancient Greek religious practice, and why philosophers during the Second Sophistic also adopted such lifestyle choices.⁷⁷⁰ Therefore, Philostratus is able to equate Apollonius's withdrawal from society as an indication of his purity and spiritual discipline and not with subversion. This also suggests a change in the perception of the learned philosopher at this time, where those who were considered gifted could live outside the regular expectations of society. This will be further analysed in section 5.9 below (secret or arcane knowledge). Therefore, Philostratus's characterisation of Apollonius aligns him with the first aspect of privateness of privacy or withdrawal from society.

Moreover, Philostratus emphasises that Apollonius was not individualistically-motivated, thus contrasting him with practitioners who were perceived as quacks.⁷⁷¹ Apollonius came from a wealthy family, and his abandonment of his family's wealth later in life is even more striking. He used his inherited wealth to help rehabilitate and reform his brother, distributed the rest of the inheritance to his poorer relatives, and left himself with only a small allowance.⁷⁷² Apollonius ultimately chooses to pursue a Pythagorean-philosophical, ascetic lifestyle, and is praised by

⁷⁶⁹ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.10, this sentiment is stated again in section 3.42 above.

⁷⁷⁰ Abraham 2009, 114–116.

⁷⁷¹ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*: he passes up material gains: 1.33, 1.35, 1.40, 2.40; when he comes up against authority figures: 4.2, 4.44; 7.4–8, 32–35.

⁷⁷² Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.4, 1.13; Reimer 1999, 134–135.

Philostratus for doing so, despite this socially-subversive choice.⁷⁷³ Additionally, Apollonius exhibits selfless courage when faced with conflict with figures of authority who threaten his life. Rather, he is presented as staying steadfast in his beliefs even when faced with possible danger.⁷⁷⁴ All of these details further emphasise Apollonius's privateness by his being an outlier to society who is selfless in his motivation. In separating Apollonius from the aspect of individualistic and selfish motivation, he pushes his hero away from perceptions that we have seen to be associated with magic practitioners and specialists who operate outside of state-sanctioned institutions. As discussed in section 5.3.1 above, because of the lack of standardisation of Roman medical and healing practices, the self-authorized healing expert would have been another option those seeking medical treatment. However, their operation outside of established institutions and lack of endorsement from central authorities often made them suspicious and associated with magic.⁷⁷⁵ Taking all these factors into account, Philostratus makes sure to frame Apollonius's marginality as a result of his being a philosophically virtuous figure, rather than as a nefarious practitioner. Philostratus further removes Apollonius from the association of the magic practitioner, by emphasising his selflessness. Hence, Philostratus uses the characteristic of privateness to portray Apollonius in a specific manner to his audience.

5.6.3 Conclusion

Overall, it is likely that ancient medicine was at least sometimes practised in a more public setting than we are used to in the modern world for practical reasons, including the promotion of practitioners' services to the greater public. However, the assemblage at the Villa Vesuvio might have been an example of the preparation of a medical practice that required privacy. Additionally, the previous discussion relating to contraception and abortion could also be seen as

⁷⁷³ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.7–8, 5.35, 6.11.5, 8.5, 8.7.10–15; Reimer 1999, 136–137.

⁷⁷⁴ For example, Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.2, 4.44; 7.4–8, 32–35; Reimer 1999, 140–141.

⁷⁷⁵ Wendt 2016, 34–35; see section 3.4 above.

a form of private medical practice. Because both of these activities would have been considered as either facilitating subversive behaviour or related to already magic-associated behaviour, these examples might have been further perceived as associated with magic. In contrast, the presence or absence of the aspect of selfish motivation of medical practitioners is not always clear, as all practitioners were attempting to attract a clientele, and competitors often accused each other of practising magic. However, perceptions of a particular practitioner as selfish might have led to their association as a magic practitioner. Furthermore, Apollonius demonstrates one aspect of this characteristic, the withdrawal from society, as it was likely a common trope for the philosophical, spiritual leader. In contrast, the aspect of this characteristic in the form of individualistic motivation is absent from Philostratus's description of Apollonius's deeds, as he describes Apollonius as totally selfless in his motivation for undertaking various practices. Philostratus likely highlights this because of the shared perception of the 'bad' medical practitioner who would swindle their clients. By separating Apollonius from the motivation of material gain, he is able to dissociate him from the magic practitioner or quack. The concept of the quack is further investigated in Chapter 6 in the discussion of Alexander of Abonoteichus.

5.7 Manipulative in nature

Throughout this thesis, there has been an ongoing discussion about how the magic practitioner is perceived as attempting to control other people and circumstances and to intervene in the natural processes. Hence, there was a common perception that the magic practitioner was overly involved in nature and the divine. This particular philosophical debate is also present in medical practice. As stated in section 3.5 above, the Hippocratic Corpus states that physicians should only intervene with their patients' care when absolutely necessary, such as in the case of the

distinction between *ponoi* and *odynai*.⁷⁷⁶ Therefore, this section investigates certain examples and perspectives regarding manipulation through healing techniques and the perceptions of such practices. Several sections in this chapter have already highlighted how Philostratus emphasises that Apollonius was divinely gifted with *prognosis*, rather than needing to undertake a divinatory practice. This section discusses how Philostratus further distances Apollonius from common perceptions of magic, by his lack of attempting to coerce the divine or manipulate others. Therefore, the perception that a medical practice or practitioner had surpassed a boundary of accepted intervention could have associated them with the bad *iatros*, and by extension, with the magical practitioner.

5.7.1 Manipulative in nature in Roman medical practice

The notion of acceptable medical intervention is illustrated in philosophical discussions, although the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable intervention could vary between authors and schools. Soranus, a Greek physician writing in the late-first and early-second centuries AD, states that, ‘it is the specific task of medicine to guard and preserve what has been engendered by nature’.⁷⁷⁷ Because Soranus states that he is opposed to abortion, the combination of these two quotes give an example of his distinction between acceptable and unacceptable medical intervention.⁷⁷⁸ As argued in section 5.5.1 above, birth control could also have been seen as a subversive practice because it allowed for women to take control of their reproductive health in a society which expected women to be submissive wives and sexual partners. Additionally, one of the main concepts in the Hippocratic Corpus is the concept of *prognosis*, separate from the *prognosis* which Philostratus describes Apollonius as possessing:

⁷⁷⁶ King 1998, 125–126; *Corpus Hippocraticum, On Diseases* 1.8.116–118.

⁷⁷⁷ Soranus, *Gynaecia* 1.60; Dickison 1973, 163.

⁷⁷⁸ Gourevitch 1993, 128 drawing on Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani* 11.14 = Kühn 3.899–906.

Prognosis, or the ability to predict the course of a disease, a key interest of these physicians, is a focal point in several treatises of the Corpus and the theme of the Hippocratic Prognostics. If a patient's disease followed the course predicted by the physician, then, regardless of the outcome, the physician would have proved his competence by showing his knowledge. Likewise, prognosis allowed physicians to choose whom they would and would not treat. This element of Hippocratic medicine—avoiding intervention in hopeless or difficult cases... served an important function in a world where medicine was still very much a developing discipline. It protected patients from a doctor's unnecessary experimentation and intervention, and it also protected the physician from losing his reputation owing to too many deaths.⁷⁷⁹

Thus, there were certain ethical ideas surrounding the appropriate amount of medical intervention as described by several philosophers and physician-authors. However, these sources were mainly addressed to the learned audience who were well-versed with other philosophical concepts, rather than the majority of the population. Additionally, determining who acted in accordance with the *prognosis* would have been a difficult task given that there were many factors which could have affected the outcome of the patient's health. As previously discussed, there are several difficulties in proving that a practitioner was at fault for the harm of a patient, or that a practitioner was not responsible in the case that a patient became unexpectedly more ill. Moreover, the knowledge regarding the outcomes of certain diseases might not have been known by practitioners. By extension, there was also an overlap between the perceived swindling quack and the magic practitioner where such a practitioner would intervene inappropriately in the case of a client for the purposes of material gain.

Overall, while there was clearly an ethical debate concerning the appropriate amount of intervention or manipulation by the medical practitioner, the enforcement of the law against those who violated such ethics was not consistent. The perception of overstepping ethical norms in the medical field could also lead to an additional association with magical practice. This is

⁷⁷⁹ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 387–388 drawing on *Corpus Hippocraticum, Prognostic*.

likely why Philostratus uses the term *prognosis* to describe Apollonius's ability: based on the term's relevance in defining the perceived integrity of a medical practitioner, Philostratus is able to use the term as a method for dissociating Apollonius from this perception of the magic practitioner and quack.

5.7.2 Manipulation in the *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*

The concept of *prognosis* is used to describe Apollonius's particular gift, thus further linking him with medicine. The term *prognosis* is used to refer to Apollonius's philosophical wisdom and foreknowledge, but is also a term used in Hippocratic medical texts. Therefore, this term had several complicated connotations, both philosophically, medically, and even magically when a practitioner had violated the principles of the medical concept. From this distinction, Philostratus is also able to frame Apollonius as a learned philosopher and even divine in his own right as opposed to a subversive and nefarious *goes*.

Beyond the charge of human sacrifice, Apollonius is also accused of associating with Eastern sages and using divination for malicious intentions.⁷⁸⁰ However, he attempts to defend himself against this charge by emphasising his philosophical virtue and his resultant gift of *prognosis*:

Philostratus's theory of *prognosis*, the backbone of his defense, is linked to an unmistakably Hellenistic pedigree. This concept relates Apollonius's foreknowledge to Middle Platonic philosophy, religious ritual and a soteriological ethic, allowing for the development of his character as a wise and pure man worthy of panoptic vision and dedicated to practicing divination for the benefit of mankind.⁷⁸¹

In other words, Philostratus presents Apollonius as the embodiment of Platonic philosophy, especially through his gift of *prognosis*. By framing him as such, Philostratus guides his

⁷⁸⁰ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.44, 5.11, 7.20, 8.5, 8.7.30; Abraham 2009, 138.

⁷⁸¹ Abraham 2009, 129–130 drawing on references to Apollonius's foreknowledge: Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.2, 3.42–43, 4.18, 6.3, 6.11.6, 7.20.

contemporary audience to more closely associate Apollonius with philosophy rather than with magic. Similar to Apuleius, Philostratus strengthens Apollonius's connection to the enlightened philosopher by associating him with Pythagoras, Socrates, and Anaxagoras, all of whom are referred to in some way as possessing foreknowledge.⁷⁸²

The terms *magos* and *goes* both appear in the text, but Philostratus uses the term *magos* only at the beginning of the text, and not beyond book 1. He uses the term in 1.2 to refer to how Apollonius was accused of being a magic-practitioner when introducing him. Subsequently, he uses the term to refer to the *Magoi*. Starting in book 5, Philostratus uses the term *goes*, mostly during the recounting of the trial.⁷⁸³ This is likely done by Philostratus as a way of distinguishing the two terms, especially once the philosophical *Magoi* are introduced in the text which he presents in a more positive light as opposed to the *goetes*.⁷⁸⁴ Philostratus through the voice of Apollonius condemns *goetes* and defines them as: 'Magicians (γόητες), who are in my opinion the greatest scoundrels on earth, resort to questioning ghosts or to barbaric sacrifices, or to forms of incantation or unction, and thus profess to alter fate. Many of them have been induced by accusations to admit their skill in such matters'.⁷⁸⁵ Additionally, Philostratus goes on to say that *goetes* attempt to alter events and manipulate fate whereas Apollonius embraces Fate.⁷⁸⁶ Therefore, Philostratus highlights two important, nefarious aspects of the *goes*: (1) their use of 'barbarian' sacrifices which implies rituals of foreign origin, beyond that of Rome or Greece, and (2) the violation of the boundary between the living and the dead, by attempting to violate spirits

⁷⁸² Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Απολλώνιον* 8.7.9; Abraham 2009, 90.

⁷⁸³ Abraham 2009, 131.

⁷⁸⁴ Otto 2011, 292.

⁷⁸⁵ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Απολλώνιον* 5.12: οἱ γόητες, ἡγοῦμαι δ' αὐτοὺς ἐγὼ κακοδαιμονεστάτους ἀνθρώπων, οἱ μὲν ἐς βασάνους εἰδώλων χωροῦντες, οἱ δ' ἐς θυσίας βαρβάρους, οἱ δὲ ἐς τὸ ἐπᾶσαι τι ἢ ἀλεῖψαι μεταποιεῖν φασὶ τὰ εἰμαρμένα, καὶ πολλοὶ τούτων κατηγορίαις ὑπαχθέντες τὰ τοιαῦτα ὁμολόγησαν σοφοὶ εἶναι.

⁷⁸⁶ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Απολλώνιον*.

and *daimones*.⁷⁸⁷ Hence, Philostratus's definition of the *goes* supports the notion that magic practitioners intersected with the second characteristic of 'exoticism and foreignness' and this characteristic of 'manipulative in nature' where there was a perceived inappropriate intervention into fate and the natural occurrence of events. Because Apollonius does not engage in unnecessary intervention, Philostratus is able to align him with the figure of the virtuous healer, rather than his definition of the nefarious *goes*.

5.7.3 Conclusion

Overall, there was a perceived level of accepted intervention and control that a medical practitioner could exert. Surpassing this boundary could result in an association with magic or *goeteia*. One way that that magic and medicine were distinguished was based on the accepted amount of intervention was the intention behind a ritual. However, the intention of a practitioner could not always be determined, nor was the acceptable amount of intervention in the care of an individual evident. Hence, there were likely diverging perspectives surrounding a given practice or practitioner and the acceptable amount of intervention. Philostratus takes the most cautious approach when representing Apollonius with regard to this characteristic, so as to have him perceived by the majority of the audience as an altruistic and gifted healer, rather than a manipulative *goes*.

5.8 Supernatural associations

Throughout the history of Greco-Roman medicine, the divine were believed to be the cause of illnesses as well as the providers of cures. This further reflects how the religion, science, and magic trichotomy cannot be applied in the ancient world. All three concepts clearly existed, but the distinction between them was neither clear-cut, nor one based on objective definitions.

⁷⁸⁷ Abraham 2009, 133.

However, with the introduction and development of rationalised medicine, not all medical practices involved supernatural associations. This is one way by which magic and medicine diverge where magic always had some connection to the supernatural or divine. The following section is not exhaustive in its description of supernatural associations in Roman medicine, but certain specific divine associations in medicine might have also had an overlap with perceptions of magic. Moreover, Apollonius of Tyana's divine connections are also highlighted to demonstrate how Philostratus emphasises that his healing abilities originated from the gods.

5.8.1 Supernatural associations in Roman medical practice

Illnesses often had divine associations or were said to be caused by supernatural forces. For example, Apollo was credited with causing and spreading the plague in Athens during the Peloponnesian War and even in the Greek camp in the *Iliad*.⁷⁸⁸ Pausanias provides several accounts of gods who supposedly helped cure entire cities of their endemics: in Troezen, Pan Lyterios was said to manifest 'himself to a sleeping magistrate' and told him the cure for the plague; and in Tanagra, Hermes averted a plague by 'appearing as a youth and carrying a ram on his shoulders around the city walls'.⁷⁸⁹ Inhabitants of Aigialeia appealed to Artemis and Apollo to save them from their deadly plague, and the gods were said to have come to them at their Acropolis.⁷⁹⁰ It was also a widespread belief in antiquity that the gods could grant health and well-being or take it away from a community as a reward or punishment (*theodicy*)⁷⁹¹. There are inscriptions from the second and third centuries AD in Phrygia and Lydia which attest to indigenous deities as having both brought and averted disease.⁷⁹² Therefore, there are a great

⁷⁸⁸ Homer, *Iliad* 1.1–100; Petridou 2016, 439–440.

⁷⁸⁹ Pausanias, *Ἑλλάδος Περιήγησις* 2.32.6, 9.22.1–2, 2.7.7–8 in Petridou 2016, 434–436.

⁷⁹⁰ Pausanias, *Ἑλλάδος Περιήγησις* 2.7.7–8; Petridou 2016, 434–436.

⁷⁹¹ Petridou 2016, 434–436.

⁷⁹² Petridou 2016, 434–436; Chaniotis 1995 describes these at-length, but some examples include *MAMA* IV. 287 and *TAM* V.1 179a.

number of mythological examples of how deities had medical associations and were seen as both the averters, but also the causes of disease.

Amulets were also used for healing purposes in antiquity, with authors such as Pindar attesting to their powers in as early as the Archaic Period.⁷⁹³ They continued to be used through the Roman period including by several rationalised and learned medical practitioners.⁷⁹⁴ Amulets and their magical qualities have been previously examined in section 2.5.1 above, but gemstones are often considered a sub-category of amulets.⁷⁹⁵ However, many gemstones also had medical functions.⁷⁹⁶ For example, Aristophanes's *Plutus* describes that magical rings with gems attached were used for healing purposes.⁷⁹⁷ Like amulets, gemstones could be worn in a number of ways, either displayed prominently to ward off the evil eye, but could also be worn 'privately' such as under clothing, or without the 'wearer' even being aware of the gemstone being on their body.⁷⁹⁸ Pliny in his descriptions of gemstones states that they have medicinal properties, especially when crushed up and drank or when worn.⁷⁹⁹ Additionally, Pliny describes several gemstones and their associated powers and properties, typically based on the gemstone's colour, engraving, and stone type.⁸⁰⁰ Based on his descriptions, gemstones could be simply apotropaic, but also could be curative.⁸⁰¹ Beyond healing, Pliny states that gemstones could also ensure victory, attract others, protect against poisons and evil, and had many other positive benefits.⁸⁰²

⁷⁹³ Some examples include Plato, *Charmides*. 155e5– 8; Pindar, *Pythian Odes* III 47–53; Galen, *On the Mixtures and Powers of Simple Drugs* 9.2.19; Theophrastus and Mucianus in Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.25, 39.

⁷⁹⁴ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.139–143; Dioscorides, *De materia medica*: no. 20, 5.126.I in Sagiv 2018, 45.

⁷⁹⁵ Sagiv 2018, 47.

⁷⁹⁶ Harris 2024, 406–410.

⁷⁹⁷ Aristophanes, *Plutus* 883–885 in Sagiv 2018, 47.

⁷⁹⁸ Plutarch, *Quaestiones* 5.7.681 in Sagiv 2018, 45.

⁷⁹⁹ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.12, 37, 39, 55.

⁸⁰⁰ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.139–143; Sagiv 2018, 45.

⁸⁰¹ Sagiv 2018, 45.

⁸⁰² Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.139–143.

Many gemstones had heroic and divine imagery inscribed on them, but certain image tropes were more common for the treatment of specific illnesses.⁸⁰³ For instance, gemstones which were used to help cure infertility typically had the image of a ‘cup’ to refer to both the Hippocratic treatment method of cupping, but also the metaphorical image of the womb as a cup. Examples of such imagery were produced in second and third centuries AD.⁸⁰⁴ Sometimes this image was more stylised as an *ouroboros*, an image from Ancient Egypt where the circling snake forms a protective barrier, in order to recreate the shape of the womb.⁸⁰⁵ Because stomachs were often thought as having their own bodily autonomy, gemstones related to stomach problems often had images which represented strength against another opponent, such as that of Hercules or of *Chnoubis*, the lion-headed snake.⁸⁰⁶ Magico-medical gemstones were often described as ‘containing’ a demon inside it which needed to be defeated and bound within the gemstone, the same way an ailment needed to be defeated.⁸⁰⁷ It is for this reason, that the image of Hercules is so prevalent in Roman medicine as the image of the great hero in battle was compared to the patient or doctor fighting an illness.⁸⁰⁸ Many other rational methods and tools like medications and surgical tools also had images of the divine or heroes inscribed on them, particularly the images of Hercules and Asclepius.⁸⁰⁹ Some types of images that were inscribed on gemstones

⁸⁰³ Dioscorides, *De materia medica*: no. 20, 5.126; Theophrastus, *De Lapidibus*; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 37.139–143; Baker 2013, 82–83; Sagiv 2018, 48–52: mythological scenes include depictions of Eros, Hercules slaying the Nemean Lion, etc.

⁸⁰⁴ Dasen 2011, 69 drawing on *Corpus Hippocraticum*, *Ancient Medicine* 22 which describes the use of cupping for treating the bladder and the uterus; Dasen 2014, 180–181.

⁸⁰⁵ Dasen 2014, 181–182, see examples in Figures 2–3, respectively from Getty collection (83.AN.437.59) and Cologne (Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database <<http://cbd.mfab.hu/>> -no. 1957. A keyword search on the Campbell Bonner Database for ‘ouroboros’ and ‘womb’ presents eighteen results, with half dated to the late second century AD or later.

⁸⁰⁶ Dasen 2014, 179–180, 182–184; Sagiv 2018, 46–47. A keyword search on the Campbell Bonner Database for ‘Chnoubis’ and ‘stomach’ presents eight results, with two definitively dated to the late second century AD or later.

⁸⁰⁷ Sagiv 2018, 45; Dasen 2014, 178.

⁸⁰⁸ Sagiv 2018, 46–47 drawing on Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 7.123 which equates Hippocrates’s actions as deserving of the same degree of honour as that of Hercules; Dasen 2014, 179.

⁸⁰⁹ Baker 2013, 83.

such as the *ouroboros* and *Chnoubis* are arguably more exotic (see section 5.4.1 above) than typical divine or heroic imagery found on other medical tools or ritualistic paraphernalia. These images were particularly common in Ancient Egypt, and beyond their depiction on gemstones, these images were not commonly found outside of Egypt in the Roman world.⁸¹⁰

Meanwhile, gemstones could also possess magical features which are evocative of other magical material that has been studied. Sagiv defines gemstones as magical if they possess any of the following characteristics: ‘magical names (*voces magicae, logoi*), magical signs (*characteres*), and unique iconographic schemes (e.g. Chnoubis, or the Anguipede scheme) which usually appear on both faces of gems, as well as... the use of specific stones, shapes and of engraving, not in the mirror writing as for seals’.⁸¹¹ However, even gemstones which had healing properties could also possess some of these magical features, such as the images of *Chnoubis* or *ouroboros*, making it difficult to categorise them as definitely as magical or medicinal.⁸¹² Rather, gemstones represent an example of a type of material culture which could have both medical and magical associations.

This nevertheless reflects the tendency for more minor and foreign deities, in comparison to the mainstream Roman Pantheon, to be more closely associated with magical practices. As a result, the type of supernatural association of a gemstone might have led to perceptions of the

⁸¹⁰ Dasen 2011, 69; there are several *PGM* entries which include the representation of the *ouroboros*: for example, *PGM* I.146, *PGM* VII 587, *PGM* XXXVI 184. The British Museum also refers to it as a typically Egyptian and Gnostic symbol <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG67180> Accessed September 16th, 2024.

⁸¹¹ Sagiv 2018, 45.

⁸¹² Sagiv 2018, 47; for example, Dasen 2014, 183, Figure 4: a haematite *intaglio* has an engraving of a Chnoubis but with an inscription that claims that it will remedy stomach pains; 186–187, Figure 9: Skoluda coll. M085 Michel 2001b, no. 145, pl. 24: a carnelian gemstone depicting an ear has the odd *characteres* ‘XIEXE ΖΑΣΕ’. This gem is dated to the late second century–early third century AD on the Campbell Bonner Database-1752.

gemstone as magical in comparison to the healing gemstones or medical equipment with more mainstream gods inscribed on them.

5.8.2 The divine in the *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*

The theme of the overlap between the divine and Apollonius's healing powers is demonstrated in several aspects. His knowledge of how to honour the gods is shown to be superior to that of local priests at their respected temples. In Athens, Apollonius comes up against the local priests when he disagrees with their ritualistic methods. Ultimately, he is able to convince them of the legitimacy of his thoughts, and gains approval from local authorities.⁸¹³ Further, Apollonius is shown to be blessed by the gods, particularly Asclepius, who grants him with the ability to heal, but even more, Apollonius is often equated with being divine in his own right.⁸¹⁴ Moreover, he was declared as possessing such miraculous healing abilities by the oracles at both Aegae and Delphi.⁸¹⁵

Apollonius is described as being closely associated with Asclepius, and Philostratus further states that Asclepius would send the ill to Apollonius for healing.⁸¹⁶ Apollonius began his career as a healer at the Asclepeion at Aegae when he would watch his mentor, Euxenus heal clients at the temple. He later assumed the responsibilities of the Asclepeian priests.⁸¹⁷ After his trip to India, he is even regarded as Asclepius himself, thanks to his gift of *prognosis*.⁸¹⁸ The combination of his Asclepian training and *prognosis* makes Apollonius the ultimate healer on earth: 'Medical knowledge also allowed Apollonius to become Asclepius's agent. Now he has

⁸¹³ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.18–19; Reimer 1999, 223.

⁸¹⁴ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.8–9, 1.12 in particular refers to Apollonius as his companion, 3.44; Reimer 1999, 222; Abraham 2009, 142, 144.

⁸¹⁵ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.8 at Aegae; 3.42 refers to how Iarchus equates the practitioner who has foreknowledge (such as Apollonius) to the Delphic oracle; 4.1: oracles at Colophon, Didyma, and Pergamon also attested to his powers; Groves Campbell 1968, 27.

⁸¹⁶ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 4.1; Abraham 2009, 144.

⁸¹⁷ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.8.

⁸¹⁸ Philostratus, *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 3.42–44; Abraham 2009, 140–142.

learned that purification, accomplished through Pythagorean askesis, brings the gift of *prognosis*, which is the source of man's medical knowledge. Moreover, through *prognosis*, Apollonius (a name which incidentally means belonging to Apollo) becomes equated with the Delphic Apollo. The equation of Apollonius and Apollo reverses the divine-mortal hierarchy and places Apollonius on par with if not above Asclepius.⁸¹⁹ Therefore, Apollonius is equated with Asclepius, making him a god in his own right.⁸²⁰ Many ideas concerning Apollonius's elevation to the status of a god stem from the Second Sophistic movement. Starting in the first century BC, Middle Platonic philosophy argued for the assimilation of man with God. This comes from Plato's *Timaeus* where he argues that god created the universe out of goodness, and that because god is good, he wishes for man to become as close to him as possible through the unity of man's soul with the universe.⁸²¹ This is echoed in Philostratus's characterisation of Apollonius who is unified with the divine.

A final supernatural presence in the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* which I wish to draw attention to are the references throughout the text to Apollonius's personal *daimon*. Interestingly, Philostratus uses the term *δαίμων*, and cognates such as *δαιμόνιος*, approximately thirty-six times throughout the account, but in both positive and negative terms. When they are mentioned in a negative context, they refer to demonic possession, and Philostratus usually uses the term *δαίμων*, although not exclusively.⁸²² However, when he uses the term in a positive sense, he refers to it typically as a 'guardian spirit' who guides Apollonius, such as to inspire him to travel

⁸¹⁹ Abraham 2009, 143.

⁸²⁰ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 5.24; Reimer 1999, 160.

⁸²¹ Abraham 2009, 124–125; Plato, *Timaeus* 29c, 30c–d, 35a–a1, 41d–42d.

⁸²² For example, in negative terms, see Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.2, 3.38, 4.18, 4.19, 4.20, 4.43, 4.44, 8.23; for positive example, see 1.4 and 1.19 where Damis refers to Apollonius as a *daimon* in the sense that he is a spiritual leader; Abraham 2009, 92.

to India.⁸²³ He also typically uses the term *δαιμόνιος* to describe these instances.⁸²⁴ Similar to the case of the ambiguity of *magus* presented in this text and in Apuleius's *Apologia*, there is a dichotomy of the connotations of these terms where there can be a positive or a negative nuance. Therefore, there are many supernatural and divine references throughout Philostratus's text which despite their ambiguity, nevertheless help to emphasise Apollonius's holiness and legitimacy as a gifted healer to his audience.

5.8.3 Conclusion

Overall, there are many supernatural connections in both magic and medicine. This is particularly clear in archaeological examples where divine and heroic imagery were common in medical paraphernalia including gemstones, but certain types of images and their analogies might have been perceived as more closely associated with magic, such as in the case of the *Chnoubis* and *ouroboros*. This echoes the notion that more exotic or minor deities were used more often in magical practices rather than in mundane, religious practice. Furthermore, thanks to more rational approaches to medicine, ancient medicine did not always have a divine association. Meanwhile, nearly all material associated with Roman magic was perceived to have a supernatural element. Despite rationalised approaches to medicine which made it possible for the field to be secular, divine associations nevertheless persisted alongside these new rationalised developments.

5.9 Secret or arcane knowledge

Identifying the reputable specialist in the field of ancient Roman medicine is a difficult task for several reasons: there was no standardisation of medical care; there was a lack of understanding

⁸²³ Philostratus, *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* 1.18; Abraham 2009, 92.

⁸²⁴ For positive examples, see 1.4 and 1.19 where Damis refers to Apollonius as a *daimon* in the sense that he is a spiritual leader; Abraham 2009, 92.

of the causes of certain diseases and their cures; and different methods of practice rooted in philosophical and religious ideologies co-existed. As discussed in section 5.3.1 above, beyond obtaining experience through Hellenistic medical schools, there was no method of policing practitioners, such as through obtaining licences through certain qualifications. Moreover, as the environment of the Roman healthcare system promoted a sense of competition amongst practitioners in order to gain patrons and patients, rivalling practitioners or ‘schools’ of practitioners would often slander and denounce the methods of others, including with accusations of magical practice.

Despite the lack of standardisation of medical practitioners in Ancient Rome, there were nevertheless certain individuals who gained longstanding reputations for their effective healing skills. This thesis has mentioned several of them including Galen, Dioscorides, and Soranus. This thesis has also studied Apollonius of Tyana, an individual who even prior to Philostratus’s text, was regarded as a healer and spiritual leader. However, despite Apollonius’s alleged positive reputation in the first century AD, he was nevertheless accused of being a magic practitioner, and many authors, writing after Philostratus’s completion of the text, regard him as such. Thus, the marginality of certain highly regarded and learned medical practitioners who were perceived as possessing secret or arcane knowledge could also give them the additional association of being magical practitioners.

5.9.1 Secret or arcane knowledge in Roman medical practice

Accusations of magical practice in the field of ancient medicine could arise from various sources. Part of the division amongst practitioners in Roman medicine was that physicians often adhered to different philosophical schools which often rivalled each other, leading to tensions between them and accusations of incompetency and even magic. Amongst ‘rationalised’ medical

practitioners, there was a subsequent distinction between two different schools of thought, as described by Celsus. This differentiation was often dependent on empirical versus ‘unseen’ symptoms and causes. The latter were often referred to as ‘Dogmatists’ or ‘Hippocratici’ who believed that there were underlying, unseen causes of illnesses, such as imbalances of humours and the presence of pneuma. Empiricists often rejected these explanations and would rely solely on explanations that were observable using the senses and which could be demonstrated through experimentation.⁸²⁵ It was likely that some physicians found themselves on the spectrum of being Empiricists and Dogmatists, but that there was a tension nonetheless amongst these two schools of thought. Dogmatic physicians were more likely to engage in performing surgeries, while Empiricists were quite practical in their approach and would have their students exposed to treating a large range of diseases affecting their patients. While Dogmatists ultimately made important anatomical and medical discoveries, Empiricists would have had an ethical upper hand for performing fewer controversial procedures.⁸²⁶ Therefore, the pursuit of scientific knowledge was not always perceived as superior by the wider public, and activities such as autopsies could also be perceived as indecent, necromantic, and associated with magic. Several depictions of literary, Roman witches echo this sentiment with regard to how they would frequently desecrate cemeteries for corpses to use in their spells. This also reflects some of Apuleius’s claims in the previous chapter where he insists that his accusers misunderstood some of his philosophical and scientific experiments, such as the dissection of a fish, for magic. While not in regards to medical experimentation or procedures, Apollonius is accused of being a *goes* because of his foreknowledge, a type of wisdom which he derives from his philosophical discipline. Therefore, it is possible that ancient authors, such as Apuleius and Philostratus, drew on such perceptions,

⁸²⁵ Celsus, *De medicina* preface; Jones-Lewis 2016a, 396.

⁸²⁶ Jones-Lewis 2016a, 396–397.

such as the suspicion of Dogmatists to perform autopsies, to defend their protagonists from accusations of magic: by framing their protagonists as learned and philosophical men, they are able to make them seem misunderstood and their accusers seem ignorant.

This thesis has already discussed how Hellenistic universities, such as at Alexandria, provided an environment where physicians and researchers could perform more controversial procedures, such as autopsies, without scrutiny or condemnation. While physicians who trained in such places were highly regarded for this type of training, the methods which they employed to gain such qualifications would be considered subversive outside of these learned environments. Therefore, there is a paradox which presents itself with regard to the learned physician: while many might have perceived such an individual as prestigious and reputable, they are also marginal figures, and their possession of greater secret and arcane knowledge could also give them additional magic associations.

It has been reflected in several sections how women were excluded from philosophical and learned circles, making it unlikely that women could be perceived as possessing the same intellectual knowledge that their male counterparts had, regardless of their competency. Overall, I argue that this characteristic of secret or arcane knowledge is mainly applicable to male figures in the Roman Empire in the second century AD, where such knowledge often had a philosophical origin to which only men were perceived as having access.

5.9.2 Apollonius as a healing specialist and holy man in the *Τὰ ἐς τὸν Τιανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*

This chapter has discussed at length how Philostratus characterises Apollonius as a virtuous healer and miracle-worker. This section, however, examines how Philostratus chooses to represent Apollonius in a positive light, given that Apollonius's marginal position would have put him at risk of gaining both positive and negative associations. Additionally, if one is to

believe that Philostratus wrote the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τθανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* to rival the rising popularity of Jesus Christ, Philostratus would have needed to make Apollonius appear as virtuous as possible. Therefore, the following section investigates how Philostratus further removes negative associations, such as those with magic, from Apollonius, and derives his characterisation from other contemporary literary figures which were perceived in a generally positive light. I also highlight how the marginality of Apollonius's position, despite Philostratus's best attempts, was nevertheless a contributing factor in what led to subsequent associations of Apollonius with magic.

This thesis has analysed extensively on how Philostratus highlights Apollonius's lifestyle and decisions as reflective of his devotion to Neopythagorean philosophy, and sections 5.3.2 and 5.6.2 above have discussed the importance of presenting Apollonius as selfless. Beyond these common tropes that have been discussed so far, there are also certain characteristics attributed to Apollonius by Philostratus that are typical of the second century AD. The Antonine Period was characterised by over-competitiveness and 'over-ambition' of material patronage. Brown has stated that Roman society followed a hierarchical 'pyramid' whereby those in higher positions, responded more to the centralised, Roman authority, rather than to local needs, such that the Roman imperial system became an overly-competitive and centralised meritocracy. However, smaller villages in the provinces like Egypt and Syria were still self-governed at a local level. Moreover, this period was also known to have an increase of imperial taxes, where economic struggles led to greater tensions in provincial communities. As a result, spiritual and charismatic leaders who could also be characterised as 'holy men' rose in popularity in late antiquity as the once landowning, local aristocracy became redundant under the competing local and imperial

interests. These holy men would thus function like patrons of such villages.⁸²⁷ Therefore, Philostratus's characterisation of Apollonius, as well as several of his other literary rivals, such as Jesus and the Apostles, are also representative of such a figure. Section 5.4.2 above has discussed how Apollonius functioned as a representative of his home city of Tyana throughout his travels, and it further emphasises Philostratus's attempt at associating him with a charismatic, spiritual leader.

Overall, the creation of the narrative regarding the figure of Apollonius is a combination of traits rivalling that of Christian, miracle-working leaders, elements of Second Sophistic philosophy, and this newly emerged figure of the holy patron figure who represented the needs at a local level. This allows for Philostratus to represent Apollonius as an intellectually superior and divinely skilled individual, while also separating him from the association of the nefarious *goes*. However, his marginal role in society was also a contributing factor to the accusations of magic against him, including by later authors. Although Philostratus is careful to only emphasise the positive aspects of Apollonius's marginality, the quality also makes Apollonius vulnerable to scrutiny.

5.9.3 Conclusion

This characteristic of secret or arcane knowledge relates to the varying perceptions of medical practitioners as skilled and reputable throughout the Roman Empire. Slandering amongst rivalling practitioners in the form of magical accusations has already been discussed, but this section has also seen that divergences in philosophical approaches amongst groups of practitioners could further perpetuate associations of magical practice based on the perceived acceptability of certain practices. Certain unique individuals', such as Apollonius and the

⁸²⁷ Brown 1971a, 1971b, 1978 in Reimer 1999, 64–66.

Apostles, works could be chronicled by other authors who drew on contemporary perspectives such that they were described as miracle-workers or virtuous healers, rather than as magic practitioners. Overall, the unique position of learned, philosophical men is a clear illustration of the ‘double-edged sword’ dilemma: their secret knowledge and training is what grants them their high-standing reputations, yet it is also what makes them subversive, and thus open to accusations of magic.

5.10 Chapter conclusion

Overall, there are new connections and connotations of the seven characteristics of Roman magic which appear when applied to Roman medicine. Some of these perpetuate some of the associations between a given characteristic and magic when applied to a medical context, but some characteristics have different implications. Philostratus’s text about the life of Apollonius of Tyana draws on contemporary perceptions of magic, but also of tendencies within the medical field, in order to present Apollonius as a magnanimous and skilled healer and remove him from perceptions of magic.

Because there was no standardisation in the quality of care delivered by the majority of Rome medical practitioners, certain characteristics such as ‘subversive behaviour, or legal and social acceptability’ and even with ‘secret or arcane knowledge’ were often very subjective and depended on the point of view of a specific author or rivalling school. This is also seen in varying ancient accounts, and their descriptions of Apollonius of Tyana in both positive and negative terms. Within these characteristics, there are certain factors which can be taken into account to justify the presence or absence of these characteristics, but these were not ubiquitous.

With regard to ‘exoticism and foreignness’, there are many examples of syncretic healing practices or adoptions of foreign elements and medical knowledge into mainstream Roman

society which reinforce that this characteristic was not always considered as a symbol of aspersion or subversion, as has been seen in other examples of magic-associated material. Additionally, Apollonius is described as an even greater and more enlightened healer through his travels and studies in foreign countries, just like many rationalised physicians who trained in Alexandria. Therefore, while examples of ‘exoticism and foreignness’ were prevalent in Roman medicine, this did not automatically associate a particular exotic practice or material with magic, nor would it have often even had a negative association.

The analysis of the characteristic of femininity reveals a form of Roman magic through practices of women’s wellness which often border on definitions of magic, even though these practices were likely very common. It is for this reason that the preservation bias of surviving texts must be acknowledged as learned philosophical texts frequently condemn these practices and generally position themselves as the authority for the standard of Roman medicine, when in reality, they did not reflect the practices of the vast majority of the population. Therefore, although many gynaecological practices such as contraception, abortion, and even some fertility practices might have been perceived as magical by certain male and intellectual sources, the same perception was likely not shared by a large portion of the population who engaged with them. The absence of voices of women in the professional and learned Roman medical field, both from practitioners and patients, is further echoed in the absence of women in Philostratus’s text.

‘Privateness’ with regard to the aspect of ‘privacy’ is a characteristic that is often not present in Roman medicine except in the case of antidotal *pharmaka* and birth control practices, both of which also had magical associations. Therefore, the aspect of required privacy within the characteristic of privateness is one way by which magic and mundane-medical practice were

sometimes perceived as distinguishable. Meanwhile, privateness with regard to the aspect of individual benefit is a commonly debated feature within the environment of the Roman medical market where practitioners had to compete to gain clients and patrons. As a result, it could be difficult to determine which practitioners were competent or which were simply self-interested swindlers and quacks. Meanwhile, Philostratus is careful to balance his presentation of these aspects of this characteristic drawing from these perceptions, in order to further distance Apollonius from perceptions of quackery. He describes Apollonius as privately withdrawn from society, although he is careful to describe this in positive terms, while he emphasises that Apollonius is completely selfless. The figure of the quack had an overlap in perception with the magical practitioner, as will also be seen in the next chapter which investigates Alexander of Abonoteichus.

With regard to manipulative in nature, the debate of acceptable intervention is prevalent in the discussion of Roman medical practice, like in the case of magical practice, but it is once again subjectively-determined, sometimes depending on an individual's adherence to a particular school of thought. Philostratus is careful of this association, and emphasises Apollonius's lack of force and control over the divine, so as to make his protagonist seem as virtuous as possible. In the case of the characteristic of supernatural associations, this chapter has studied an example in the form of the iconography of healing gemstones that demonstrate that certain lesser or more exotic deities could give the stone both a healing and magical association. This contrasts somewhat with more common medical tools which presented more mainstream gods. Returning to the characteristic of secret and arcane knowledge, although certain learned men could gain reputations as skilled medical practitioners, their marginality could also contribute to their association with magical practice. This is further reflected by how charismatic healing figures

who operated outside the accepted institutions tended to acquire greater suspicion such as Apollonius of Tyana.

Overall, many overlapping intersections could enable practitioners' medical work to be instead characterised as magical. However, there is an added complexity in Roman medicine, as the presence of any of these characteristics could easily be contested amongst various groups, ideologies, and individuals. While this is also the case for the concept of magic, the selective integration of medical and healing practices into mainstream Roman society, often made understanding the contemporary perceptions of the different elements of Roman medicine even more complicated and variable, including when they also overlapped with magic. Therefore, I reiterate that magic and medicine should not be seen as separate categories, but rather a spectrum of concepts which converge and diverge through various means.

6. The Antonine Plague

6.1 Introduction

This final set of case studies investigates the concept of magic during the second half of the second century AD, a century that is marked by several major socio-political upheavals, including a pandemic, the Antonine Plague. As can be seen in the previous chapter, even outside of globalised times of crisis, there were many examples which illustrated the interconnectedness between ancient magic and medicine. This chapter observes how practices evolved or new ones were introduced during a period which included the spread of an Empire-wide pandemic, the Antonine Plague, and if perceptions of practices that were previously associated with magic became more conventional. Alternatively, this chapter examines if the reverse could occur too where a once mundane practice gained a more magical perception. In order to do so, two case studies of healing cults which rose to prominence during the second century AD will be studied. While these two case studies do not represent all of the attitudes and perceptions of magic or healing during the Antonine Plague, they nevertheless provide significant insight into certain practices which grew in popularity during this period. This chapter aims to identify how individuals and groups within the Roman Empire coped with heightened tensions brought about during the second century AD, and how these practices intersected with magic in new ways.

Within this chapter, there are two specific examples which demonstrate cultic healing practices which would have held an importance in the second century AD. The first is how a charismatic leader named Alexander of Abonoteichus became influential in the Roman Empire in the later half of the second century AD, as he was supposedly able to help people protect themselves from plague and could heal those infected.⁸²⁸ Despite gaining a large number of

⁸²⁸ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἡ Ψευδόμαντις* 10, 24, 28.

followers, Alexander is denounced as a quack and magician by Lucian, the author of the most in-depth, surviving source for Alexander's life.⁸²⁹ In contrast, surviving archaeological evidence suggests that Alexander had a following in Asia Minor, his home region, and other parts of the Empire.⁸³⁰ This dissonance between textual and archaeological evidence regarding perceptions of Alexander provides a unique case study: Lucian must emphasise Alexander's magical characteristics in his text to convince his audience of Alexander's malignancy, notwithstanding Alexander's reputation as a skilled practitioner. Meanwhile, the cult of Bona Dea, based in Rome since the Republic, assumed an additional healing aspect in the second half of the second century AD, and as a result, likely grew in popularity and spread outside of Rome.⁸³¹ However, the cult traditionally held female-exclusive membership, had festivities and sacrifices which took place at night, and included the consumption of wine.⁸³² These features have been previously seen in magic-associated material, and this chapter investigates how the cult remained largely above scrutiny, despite possessing these features. Additionally, this chapter analyses why the cult of Bona Dea was not perceived as magical, and why Alexander of Abonoteichus, on the other hand, has a lasting textual legacy as a magic practitioner. Thus, these two examples will be investigated through this thesis's methodology of the seven characteristics, in order to establish how and why each cult was perceived as magical or not.

Section 6.2 below provides a brief overview of the history and context of the Antonine Plague. Section 6.3 gives an overview of the archaeological evidence of the plague in the Empire, including a summary of the work undertaken by modern scholars who have studied the plague extensively. Sub-section 6.3.1 briefly outlines the devastating impact of the plague on

⁸²⁹ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Πευδόμεντις*.

⁸³⁰ See Section 6.4.2 below.

⁸³¹ Ambasciano 2022, 184; 2016.

⁸³² Versnel 1996, 183–184; Ambasciano 2016, 3.

Egypt, as much evidence for the plague has been recovered from Egypt. Sub-section 6.3.2 mentions some hypothesised changes in religious practices as a result of the plague, including the increased worship of Asclepius during the plague. Section 6.4 investigates the case study of Alexander of Abonoteichus with sub-section 6.4.1 summarising the most pertinent details of Alexander's life in Lucian's account. Sub-section 6.4.2 analyses the archaeological evidence to support the presence and spread of Alexander's cult, while sub-section 6.4.3 discusses the role of Alexander and his cult in Roman society with regard to the Antonine Plague. Sub-section 6.4.4 then analyses Alexander through the seven characteristics of this thesis's framework.

Section 6.5 investigates the case study of the cult of Bona Dea, beginning with a brief historical and archaeological overview of the cult. Sub-section 6.5.1 discusses the significance of the cult during the Antonine Plague, and sub-section 6.5.2 explores the perceptions of the cult in relation to the seven characteristics. Section 6.6 compares the cults of Alexander of Abonoteichus and of Bona Dea, and analyses why the former is more closely associated with magic than the latter. Overall, this chapter aims to elucidate how the concept of magic was perceived in the second century AD and during the Antonine Plague through some of the contemporaneous practices.

6.2 Antonine Plague: history and context

The Antonine Plague was a widespread contagion which affected a large portion of the Roman Empire in the later half of the second century AD, approximately 165–190.⁸³³ The plague was named for the Antonine emperors, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, but has also been referred to as the Galenic Plague thanks to Galen's detailed description of the epidemic.⁸³⁴ There

⁸³³ Duncan-Jones 1996, 116–117.

⁸³⁴ Galen, *Methodus medendi* 5.12= Kühn 360–361, 367; Duncan-Jones 1996, 108, 115–120; Ferreira *et al.* 2023, 2.

is much discussion as to whether the pathogen in itself was as deadly as certain ancient sources and modern scholars claim, or if the plague coupled with other coincidental circumstances and ensuing consequences led to a general sense of ‘crisis’ within the Empire.⁸³⁵ Some modern scholars even go as far as to argue that the plague was the first of a series of events which ultimately led to the later ‘third century crisis’ and eventual fall of the Western Roman Empire.⁸³⁶

Based on contemporary accounts of the symptoms of the plague, along with a modern understanding of microbial pathology, it is believed that the plague was caused by the smallpox virus or measles: the infected were said to exhibit symptoms of fever, body rash, body sores which were dry if ulcerated, vomiting, diarrhoea, bad breath, and production of black excrement.⁸³⁷ The virus was also airborne, highly contagious, and could be lethal, especially to a population that had not yet acquired immunity.⁸³⁸ If the virus was, in fact, smallpox, then children would have been particularly susceptible.⁸³⁹

It is possible to study the introduction and spread of the virus both geographically and historiographically, as the plague was often used as a metaphor for the corruption which infested the Empire including as a result of the malicious acts of Emperor Lucius Verus. The virus was first introduced into Rome by the troops commanded by Lucius Verus upon their return from

⁸³⁵ See section 6.3 below which discusses these debates in greater length.

⁸³⁶ Ambasciano 2016, 14.

⁸³⁷ Galen, *Methodus medendi* 5.12 = Kühn 10.360–367, *De atra bile* 4 = Kühn 5.115, Comment. 1 in *Hippocratis Liber 6 Epidemiorum. Aph.* 29 = Kühn 17.1.885, Comment 3 in *Hippocratis Liber 3 Epidemiorum. Aph.* 57 = Kühn 17.1.709, Comment 4 in *Hippocratis Aphorismos, Aph.* 31 = Kühn 17.2.683, *De praesagitione ex pulsibus* 3.4 = Kühn 9.357; consult Littman and Littman 1973 for the summary and translations of each passage regarding the different symptoms. Additionally, for a further discussion regarding the virus as smallpox, see Ambasciano 2016, 12; Ferreira *et al.* 2023, 1–6: the authors are all modern-day medical healthcare professionals and researchers who drawing on Galen’s description of the symptoms of the plague have concluded that smallpox is likely the pathology in question. Battin 2020, 738 in a medical journal also corroborates this diagnosis of smallpox.

⁸³⁸ Ambasciano 2016, 20; Gourevitch 2005, 64; Mitrofan 2014, 10; Ferreira *et al.* 2023, 1–6.

⁸³⁹ Duncan-Jones 2018, 44.

campaigns in the East, in Parthia and Seleucia.⁸⁴⁰ Through cross-historical comparisons, it has been argued that a coincidental pandemic took place in China where those infected reportedly exhibited many of the same symptoms, thus suggesting that the pathogen could have been introduced from a common point of contact for both the Chinese and Roman Empires.⁸⁴¹ Aelius Aristides claims that the plague first arrived in the Empire in his native hometown of Smyrna in AD 165.⁸⁴² The plague was then said to have affected the Aegean coast, and was introduced to Rome the following year, where it had a devastating effect on the population as of AD 168.⁸⁴³ As is the case with many epidemics, it is likely that the rate of infection increased and decreased in ‘waves’ based on the rate of fatality in relation to the rate of immunity acquired.⁸⁴⁴ There is possible archaeological evidence to support this model with regard to the Antonine Plague. Duncan-Jones has calculated the rates of mortality in Lydia, based on dated tombstones found in the northeastern region of the late kingdom. After calculating the rates of mortality based on the number of tombstones dated to the years of AD 160–199, he has found that there were three significant spikes in mortality rates in the years, where the mortality rate more than doubled: ‘[there was] a major mortality peak in the late 160’s, followed by a short peak in the early 180’s, with a second main peak in the early 190’s’.⁸⁴⁵ Although the causes of death are not revealed on the tombstones and cannot be confirmed, these spikes in the increase of mortality during these years could be reflective of the plague and its ‘wave’ model. Dio Cassius further attests that the

⁸⁴⁰ *Historia Augusta*, *Verus* 8; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* XXIII.6.23–24; Ambasciano 2016, 10.

⁸⁴¹ *Hou Hanshu*, Chapter 7, page 3 in Hirth 1966, p, 185, including n. 1; Duncan-Jones 1996, 117–118, 2018, 44–45.

⁸⁴² Aelius Aristides, p. 230–232 in Behr, *Summer 165 AD* 37–45; Duncan-Jones 1996, 118; Duncan-Jones 2018, 43, 50.

⁸⁴³ Iulius Capitolinus, *Historia Augusta Verus* 8.2; Ambasciano 2016, 10–11.

⁸⁴⁴ Maragakis 2021 discussing the wave of infection of COVID-19 specifically.

⁸⁴⁵ Broux and Clarisse 2009, 29; Duncan-Jones 2018, 48–50.

plague was supposedly at its deadliest in AD 189, thus reflecting that there was a final recorded ‘wave’ of the pandemic.⁸⁴⁶

From a different perspective, several sources emphasise the religious consequences and social immorality as the causes for the plague descending upon the Empire. Ammianus Marcellinus equates the plague with divine retribution for the sacking of Seleucia, specifically the Temple of Apollo Komaïos where its main statue was taken and placed in the temple of Apollo at the Palatine Hill in Rome after the campaign. He claims that when the soldiers ransacked the temple, they accidentally opened a crevice containing an altar previously sealed by the Chaldeans which then brought forth the deadly disease.⁸⁴⁷ Moreover, the *Historia Augusta* is particularly scathing in its description of Lucius Verus, while extremely complimentary to his co-ruler, Marcus Aurelius, thus explicitly situating Lucius Verus’s corruption as a possible cause of the plague.⁸⁴⁸ The text further states that in response to the low morale, Marcus Aurelius and the Senate assembled all the religious officials and performed many rituals, including *peregrinos* ‘foreign’ ones, for seven days to try and purify the city.⁸⁴⁹ There was also a growing Christian population at the time, many of whom, including Justin Martyr, refused to take part in the sacred rites that Marcus Aurelius had organised to purify Rome from the plague.⁸⁵⁰ Thus, this period is marked with ongoing social and political tensions amongst various groups.

Additionally, it has been argued that the ‘great plague’ to which Galen refers in AD 168 in Aquileia was likely the Antonine Plague. The legions stationed there were attempting to fend off attacks by the Quadi and Marcomanni, while Rome struggled with the disease. He describes a

⁸⁴⁶ Dio Cassius 72.14: he further states that approximately 2000 people died per day in Rome.

⁸⁴⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* XXIII.6.23–24; Ambasciano 2016, 10.

⁸⁴⁸ For example, Iulius Capitolinus, *Historia Augusta Verus* 8.7–9.

⁸⁴⁹ *Historia Augustus, Marcus* 13.

⁸⁵⁰ Birley 2012, 164, 2000, 152–153 drawing on Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.16.1–9.

disease which infected the troops as perilous, made worse by the fact that it infected the troops during winter. This particular campaign ended with the death of Verus who had been taken ill in AD 169 and was forced to leave the campaign to return to Rome.⁸⁵¹ Verus's cause of death has not been confirmed with theories ranging from food poisoning to his having caught the plague himself.⁸⁵²

Several ancient sources report an overall shortage of soldiers reported throughout the Empire.⁸⁵³ Troops were particularly susceptible to the epidemics, as many soldiers on campaign were living in close proximity which provided a good vector for the virus to spread.⁸⁵⁴ To make up for the depleted number of soldiers, the *Historia Augusta* reports that Marcus Aurelius trained slaves for combat, hired mercenaries from Dalmatia and Dardania, and even enlisted those from rivalling Germanic tribes who were willing to fight against the Marcomanni.⁸⁵⁵ Based on army inscriptions, Duncan-Jones has noted that: 'In particular, a list of legionaries discharged from VII Claudia in Lower Moesia in 195 implies that the 169 intake was much larger than usual... A legionary inscription of 168 from Alexandria shows heavy reliance on men born in the camp, among soldiers recruited to II Traiana. Earlier lists indicate recruiting from named cities. The change suggests significant shortages of men from the normal recruitment zones at this time'.⁸⁵⁶ Overall, there were several factors during or that were prompted by the Antonine Plague which would have resulted in a society with heightened tension and conflict, including with regard to the Roman army and warfare.

⁸⁵¹ Galen, *De Libris Propriis* II, xix 18K in Ambasciano 2016, 11–12.

⁸⁵² Duncan-Jones 2018, p. 42 n. 9.

⁸⁵³ Eutropius 8.12; *Historia Augustus, Marcus* 17.2; Orosius 7.15.

⁸⁵⁴ Ferreira *et al.* 2023, 4; Duncan-Jones 2018, 51.

⁸⁵⁵ *Historia Augustus, Marcus* 21.6–10.

⁸⁵⁶ Duncan-Jones 2018, 52; Eck 2012, 68–71; Mirkowic 2004.

To add to the ongoing social tensions, there were reportedly so many deceased in Rome that Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus had to invoke several laws imposing restrictions on burials and graves including a ban on the construction of tombs on private property. Instead, the dead bodies, supposedly in the thousands per day, had to be collected and removed by wagons and carts and brought outside the city. Amongst the dead were many patrician men, thus demonstrating that the virus did not discriminate in terms of class.⁸⁵⁷ Kissing was a common practice amongst patrician men, but during outbreaks throughout the history of imperial Rome, there was also an occasional ban imposed on the practice. This suggests that Romans had an understanding that many infectious diseases could be transmitted through this practice.⁸⁵⁸ As will be discussed in section 6.4.3 below, Alexander of Abonoteichus also prohibited his followers from kissing him, possibly a reflection of his fear of becoming infected by the Antonine Plague.⁸⁵⁹ The *Historia Augusta* further emphasises Marcus Aurelius as a magnanimous and kind emperor by stating that he erected statues for the patrician men who died and who could not be laid to rest with proper funerary rites, and even held funerary ceremonies for the poorer deceased.⁸⁶⁰ Thus, this period of time also saw the abandonment of established rituals, such as typical burial practices in Rome. Such ritualistic changes are important for the study of the concept of magic, as the legal and social acceptability of certain practices often indicated if a practice was perceived as magical. Furthermore, because the cause of the plague is so closely

⁸⁵⁷ *Historia Augustus, Marcus* 13.3.

⁸⁵⁸ Jones 2016, 471–472. For example, Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 26.2–3 describes how a skin infection could be transmitted: *nec sensere id malum feminae aut servitia plebesque humilis aut media, sed procures veloci transitu osculi maxime, foediorum multorum qui perpeti medicinam toleraverant cicatrice quam morbo* (Women were not liable to the disease, or slaves and the lower and middle classes, but the nobles were very much infected through the momentary contact of a kiss); Suetonius, *Tiberius* 34 describes how Tiberius banned kissing for a period of time.

⁸⁵⁹ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 41; Jones 2016, 472.

⁸⁶⁰ *Historia Augustus, Marcus* 13.3.

tied with the contemporaneous social and religious disharmony of the Empire, perceptions of practices in relation to the plague often had other ethical implications.

Another piece of textual evidence which suggests the severity of the plague is Marcus Aurelius's own claim in a letter in which he states that there were too few Athenian-born men who met the standards to serve on the Areopagus in AD 174–175.⁸⁶¹ The reason for this shortage is not clarified, but in the same letter, Marcus Aurelius alludes to a disaster in the preceding years, thus suggesting that the plague might have been responsible for decreasing the Athenian population.⁸⁶² Therefore, it would seem that the plague also had significant consequences in Aegea. Textual evidence from other regions of the Empire corroborates the presence and the deadliness of the plague. For example, from the Germanic provinces, there is a surviving inscription from Bedaïum, close to present-day Salzburg from AD 182 which describes how an entire family perished from the plague.⁸⁶³ Additionally, an inscription from AD 184 states that 'A Mithraic college at Virunum in Noricum meets "*mortalitatis causa*"... After 5 out of 34 members had died, a meeting was held in June 184, apparently to mark the temple restoration completed the previous year'.⁸⁶⁴ Therefore, textual evidence supports the presence of the plague and its deadliness amongst the Roman provinces.

The percentage of the population of the entire Empire which was killed by the plague is hotly debated amongst scholars with theoretical ranges from anywhere between 1–35%.⁸⁶⁵ However, scholars such as Bruun and Gilliam argue that the mortality rate of the plague has been

⁸⁶¹ Marcus Aurelius in Oliver 1989, 366–388, no. 184.

⁸⁶² Duncan-Jones 1996, 134.

⁸⁶³ *CIL* III 5567.

⁸⁶⁴ *AE* 1994, 1334; Duncan-Jones 2018, p. 43, n. 15; 1996, p. 117 n.98, with Gordon 1996, 424–6.

⁸⁶⁵ Ferreira *et al.* 2023, 2–3 and Ambasciano 2016, 19 argue for a larger range of at least 20%. Ferreira *et al.* argue this range based on their modern understanding of the smallpox pathogen on an unvaccinated and unimmunised population. On the other hand, Bruun and Gilliam are in support of the minimal range of 1–2%; see the following footnotes for exact references.

overstated and feel that surviving textual evidence has been misinterpreted by other modern scholars.⁸⁶⁶ Gilliam states that many of the ancient sources which have been assumed as describing a negative consequence as a result of plague, are not describing challenges that were unique to this period in Rome's history. Additionally, outbreaks of infectious diseases in the Empire were not uncommon either.⁸⁶⁷ Bruun supports Gilliam's claims that in the 160s, only 1–2% of the population per year of the entire Empire died from plague.⁸⁶⁸

Even if the percentage of mortality was not as high as Bruun and Gilliam argue, the effects of the plague alongside ongoing rebellions and invasions, nevertheless weakened the Empire politically and created other social unrest throughout the Empire. Additionally, many of the survivors of the virus could have been affected by long-term complications of the infection, such as blindness.⁸⁶⁹ The plague's particular effect on eyes is likely one reason for the rise in popularity of the cult of Bona Dea, as the cult was tied to ocular health (section 6.5 below).⁸⁷⁰ Furthermore, as seen in the following analysis of the plague in Egypt, there were economic consequences to such a pandemic, regardless of its intrinsic lethality. As a result, despite certain valid arguments for the minimalistic approach regarding the severity of the plague, there were nevertheless many consequences of having such a widespread outbreak of disease. As Liebeschuetz states, regardless of the scope of severity of the plague and its lasting impact, '...nevertheless we can isolate a remarkably short span of time within which large areas of

⁸⁶⁶ Bruun 2007, 207–209; Gilliam 1961.

⁸⁶⁷ Gilliam 1961.

⁸⁶⁸ Gilliam 1961, 250; Bruun 2007, 208–209. This is based on Gilliam's calculation that only 500,000–million people died as a result of plague per year, thanks to Dio Cassius's account.

⁸⁶⁹ Ambasciano 2016, 20 drawing on Semba 2003, 716: 'Because of potential droplet transmission, eye health is easily affected by smallpox. Pustular rash on the eyelids, conjunctival pustules, photophobia, pain, intense lacrimation (the virus is secreted in tears), corneal ulceration and corneal leukoma, can be present. Indeed, some of the worst consequences for smallpox survivors are ocular complications, which occur in 5–9% of non-immunised patients. To give just an idea of its overall impact, we should consider that before the introduction of the smallpox vaccine, ocular complications due to smallpox caused one third of the total number of cases of blindness in Europe'.

⁸⁷⁰ Ambasciano 2016, 20.

traditional civic behaviour disappeared'.⁸⁷¹ The plague was likely a catalyst for many ensuing new social and religious tensions and consequences. It is from these tensions that the perception of the concept of magic and its associated practices might have been affected.

6.3 Archaeological evidence of the plague's devastation throughout the Empire

This section investigates the evidence regarding the devastation of the plague in the Empire.

While this section will not go into as much depth as certain modern-day scholars regarding their use of quantitative data relating to the decline of regional populations, it will nevertheless investigate how certain regions were seemingly affected by the plague. Therefore, this section will provide a brief overview of some of the surviving archaeological evidence for the existence of the plague.

There is archaeological evidence to support the notion that marble and metal mining stagnated substantially during the years of the plague. Duncan-Jones has studied two marble quarries, both of which were in Asia Minor, in Docimium and Teos. Based on the dated material found in the former, there is no material found dated from the years of AD 166–173, with only a slight presence resuming after these dates. The quarry of Docimium was also known as a source of marble for Rome and Latium, thus suggesting that major building projects in these regions ceased during this period, as will be discussed next.⁸⁷² Meanwhile at the quarry in Teos, 'fourteen of the 26 inscribed blocks left in the quarry and never shipped are dated: all the dates fall between 163 and 166'.⁸⁷³ In the case of metal mining, newer archaeological techniques such as the analysis of ice cores from Greenland has demonstrated that there was a steady decrease in lead-air pollution between the years of AD 160–200. Specifically, these ice core records support

⁸⁷¹ Liebeschuetz 2007, 18.

⁸⁷² Duncan-Jones 1996, 129–130 and Figure 14.

⁸⁷³ Duncan-Jones 1996, 129–130.

that silver mining and mining in general declined in the mid-second century AD, likely owing to the sudden lack of available labour-force caused by the plague.⁸⁷⁴

There is some evidence to suggest that there was a stagnation of building projects in Rome and Italy during the period of the plague, although the interpretation of this evidence is contested. Bricks were often stamped with the date and the name of the brickmaker. Duncan-Jones has graphed the dated bricks, and has found that there was a significant decrease in the number of dated bricks between the years of AD 160–190, with the number of bricks beginning to increase after AD 190.⁸⁷⁵ Bruun, however, states that bricks did not always have stamps of their makers, and the proportion of stamped to unstamped bricks cannot be determined.⁸⁷⁶

Additionally, Duncan-Jones argues that there was a cessation of monumental construction projects between AD 166–180, based on surviving monuments in Rome which can be dated.⁸⁷⁷ In contrast, Bruun points out that monuments were usually only given a dedicatory inscription with a date once it was completed, but any subsequent maintenance on an existing monument was not dated. Therefore, this does not rule out the possibility that monuments in Italy were still maintained during the period of the plague, although new monuments might not have been built. Furthermore, the list of identifiable inscriptions from this period has been updated, thus several inscriptions have been found dating to the period in which Duncan-Jones claims there was an absence. As a result, Bruun states that the hiatus in dated inscriptions should be narrowed to AD 171–176, thus a substantially shorter period of time than Duncan-Jones has argued.⁸⁷⁸ With regard to all of Italy, Duncan-Jones argues that inscriptions collected mainly

⁸⁷⁴ Duncan-Jones 2018, 59–60 and Figure 8; McConnell *et al.* 2018. Fig.8.

⁸⁷⁵ Duncan-Jones 1996, 129 and Figure 13.

⁸⁷⁶ Bruun 2007, 432.

⁸⁷⁷ Duncan-Jones 1996, 125–126 and Figure 8.

⁸⁷⁸ Bruun 2007, 427–429.

from statues, present an overall steady decrease between the years of AD 160–190, while the number imperial and non-imperial public buildings decreased by at least 50% than in the previous decades.⁸⁷⁹ Bruun argues that during a time of crisis like a plague, it would have been more likely for wealthy patrons and municipal governments to erect more monuments, such as to worship gods who could avert the plague.⁸⁸⁰ I argue that this final observation of Bruun does not rule out Duncan-Jones's explanation that although municipal governments and private institutions and patrons might have intended to erect more monuments, the labour and lack of production during this period could have made it challenging. Therefore, the alleged decrease in building projects in Rome and Italy as evidence of the plague is highly debated, but it does not rule out the possibility that the plague still had significant consequences on the region.

While larger-scale building projects seem to have slowed down in Rome and Italy, provinces such as Hispania and in inland Africa seem to have remained stable through the years of the plague based on surviving evidence. Duncan-Jones argues that this is likely because inland Africa was not as badly affected by the plague, as these regions were not as well connected to trade routes, and thus did not have as much contact with other populations.⁸⁸¹ However, I am reluctant to accept this explanation at this point. As will be discussed in section 6.7.1 below, there is evidence to suggest that the cult of Bona Dea was worshipped in Africa, including by inland communities as a consequence of the plague. While this is not sufficient evidence to disprove Duncan-Jones's hypothesis that inland Africa was not as badly affected as coastal Africa by plague, I am sceptical in assuming that the consistency of surviving monumental inscriptions in inland Africa is indicative of a direct correlation of infection rates.

⁸⁷⁹ Duncan-Jones 1996, 126–128 and Figures 9 and 10.

⁸⁸⁰ Bruun 2007, 429–430

⁸⁸¹ Duncan-Jones 2018, 63, 1996, 128–129.

Regarding numismatic evidence, the image of Salus, the goddess of safety, welfare, health, and prosperity, was often minted on coins especially at the beginning of an emperor's reign, in order to symbolise a prosperous new beginning. However, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Salus appears during two distinct periods: the first being soon after he came to power; and the second corresponds to the years, AD 168–171, when the plague would have affected the troops at Aquileia, thus suggesting that the image of Salus was used in response to a possible crisis.⁸⁸² Some of these years also correspond to years during and after the death of Verus, and as sole emperor, Marcus Aurelius would have had several major economic challenges to address, possibly as a result of the plague.⁸⁸³ Therefore, while the exact meaning of the repetition of the image of Salus cannot be ascertained, it is possible that the image was an visual representation of Marcus Aurelius's attempt to regain control over a struggling empire which was dealing with multiples challenges.

There is archaeological evidence to support that the plague reached as far as Britain. Recently, the stratigraphy of Londinium has been analysed and has revealed that development of the settlement halted abruptly in the second century AD and did not resume again until the third century. As a result, scholars such as Perring have argued that because this period of stagnation coincides with the Antonine Plague, that it was likely as a result of the plague. This includes an overall lack of increased building projects during this period; a high amount of animal bones which suggest the culling of animals at a vast rate; and a great number of dumped, unfinished pieces of pottery and glass, thus suggesting that entire workshops were cleared out. Moreover, there are substantially fewer items of metal-working and jewellery from the region which can be

⁸⁸² Duncan-Jones 1996, 130–131; for more information on Salus, see the entry under the same name in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* 4th Ed. 2012.

⁸⁸³ Birley 2012, 165.

dated back to the second century AD. Besides this stagnation being a direct result of the plague, Perring has suggested that because of other invasions that occurred in other parts of the Empire, that the centralised Roman government simply had fewer resources to devote to the development of Londinium, thus resulting in a temporary cut-off from resources.⁸⁸⁴ The explanation for all of these factors for ancient London's stratigraphy in the second century AD cannot yet be confirmed as a direct consequence of the plague. However, this possible explanation alongside evidence of the spread of Alexander's cult to London in section 6.4.2 below suggests that the plague did reach Roman Britain, and was possibly a significant concern to its population.

Beyond the reported inability for many in Rome to properly bury their loved ones, there were also general changes in burial practices in parts of the Empire which coincide with the years of the plague.⁸⁸⁵ Duncan-Jones notes that beginning in AD 160, tombstones in Palmyra were shared amongst families rather than exclusively newly-built for one family like in the decades prior.⁸⁸⁶ After 170, the tombstones are mostly shared, suggesting that inhabitants in the region were attempting to spend less on funerary costs.⁸⁸⁷

The purpose of this section has been to highlight several regions of the Roman Empire which the archaeological record suggests were affected by the plague. This provides context for the following case studies. As a major Empire-wide crisis came into fruition, the perceptions of practices might have had to be adjusted to encompass the range of new practices undertaken by local populations to try and cope with these drastic challenges. As a result, practices which would have normally been perceived as magical prior to the plague could have then been

⁸⁸⁴ Perring 2022.

⁸⁸⁵ Duncan-Jones 2018, 55–57.

⁸⁸⁶ Duncan-Jones 2018, 55–57; for example, Gawlikowski 1970, 205, no.2: 'in October 160, the two builders of a hypogaeum ceded part of it to Hadudan, son of Salman, son of Zabdibol, and his children and grandchildren'.

⁸⁸⁷ Duncan-Jones 2018, 57.

considered as more mundane. Therefore, this chapter aims to explore how the Antonine Plague affected the perception of magic and its associated practices.

6.3.1 Evidence of the plague from Egypt

Most archaeological evidence which has been used as proof for the presence of the plague and its near total-obliteration of a region has originated from Egypt, thanks to its arid climate which has preserved a number of record-keeping papyri. As a result, most documentary material that has been widely discussed in today's scholarship as proof of the consequences of the Antonine Plague has originated from Egypt. These papyri document prices of foodstuffs and rent and the collection of taxes from villages during this period. Scheidel's analysis of the changes of foodstuff-prices and rents in Egypt reflect that the Egyptian population steeply declined during the time of the Antonine Plague, and as a result, there was an increase in price inflation.⁸⁸⁸ Furthermore, the records of tax collection strongly indicate that entire villages depopulated.⁸⁸⁹ The particular severity of the plague in Egypt is likely partially owing to Egypt's vast amount of grain exportation to other parts of the Empire, thus the lack of isolation of the province allowed for the introduction and transmission of the disease.⁸⁹⁰ As Egypt was a wealthy province through its exports, the population grew accordingly, leading to densely populated settlements, another possible contributing factor to high infection rates.⁸⁹¹ In the height of the population density in Egypt, there were approximately three hundred people per square kilometre in the second century AD.⁸⁹² Additionally, about 20–30% of the Egyptian population lived in urban settlements by the second century AD.⁸⁹³ Elliot further argues that other factors, such as drought

⁸⁸⁸ Scheidel 2002.

⁸⁸⁹ Duncan-Jones 1996, 108–136; Bagnall 2000.

⁸⁹⁰ Ambasciano 2016, 11.

⁸⁹¹ Scheidel 2002, 98.

⁸⁹² Elliot 2016, 8–9.

⁸⁹³ Elliot 2016, 9–10.

and unsuccessful crop yields in Egypt led to greater devastation of the region especially as the plague arrived.⁸⁹⁴ Overall, there are numerous speculations as to why Egypt was significantly affected by the plague.

There have been arguments about the exact amount of devastation and subsequent consequences of the plague on the populations of Egypt. For example, it is debated as to whether entire populations perished, particularly in the case of villages along the Nile Delta, or if they simply abandoned these villages, such as to escape heavy taxes imposed on such villages in response to the diminished population.⁸⁹⁵ The Thmouis papyrus 1 describes the depopulation of approximately twenty villages in the Mendesian nome, partially as a result of the plague during the period of approximately AD 159–170.⁸⁹⁶ Additionally, the villages of the Fayum, including the village of Soknopaïou Nesos completely depopulated in AD 179–180.⁸⁹⁷ The Oxyrhynchus papyrus 4527, a fragmentary taxation document on wheat in the Fayum region, has been studied by Bagnall and demonstrates that the amount of production and tax collection is significantly lower than preceding years' figures, thus suggesting that production had declined in the second half of the second century AD.⁸⁹⁸ However, Bagnall argues that most inhabitants of the Fayum, just like those of the Nile Delta villages did not perish, but simply abandoned these villages.⁸⁹⁹ With regard to the local economy, Rathbone argues that based on evidence available from the Arsinoite nome, wheat and wine prices in Egypt rose during AD 165–190, probably because of the diminished workforce and resulting higher production cost.⁹⁰⁰ Additionally, Sharp who has

⁸⁹⁴ Elliot 2016.

⁸⁹⁵ Scheidel 2002, 107; Duncan-Jones 1996, 116–118, 120–125, 133–134; Bagnall 2000.

⁸⁹⁶ Kambitsis 1985, 26, 29; Bagnall 2000, 292; Aus den Amtsakten des Mendesischen Gaus SB 26 16676 <<https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.thmouis;1;1>>.

⁸⁹⁷ Bagnall 2000, 292; Duncan-Jones 1996, 120–121.

⁸⁹⁸ Bagnall 2000; Oxyrhynchus papyrus 66 45274527 in <<https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;66;4527>>.

⁸⁹⁹ Bagnall 2000, 291–292.

⁹⁰⁰ Rathbone 1997, 331.

studied the town of Theadelphia, states that much of its land had gone out of use during the period of the plague.⁹⁰¹ Despite the surviving evidence in papyri to suggest that the Antonine Plague was present and had many long-lasting consequences on Egyptian society, there is unfortunately a lack of evidence to elucidate what happened to these surviving Egyptian populations once they fled their villages.

While there is a lot of material to suggest that Egypt was affected by the plague based on quantitative data, qualitative data, such as healing and religious practices during this period have not yet been identified or studied. Although the following case studies will not be reflective of Egypt, the purpose of this section was to briefly give an example of how drastically populations could have been affected by the plague.

6.3.2 Evidence for the popularity of health cults during the plague

Changes in religious practices as a result of the plague have not yet been confirmed. However, there have been some speculations as to the possible increase in certain religious practices, aside from those which I will discuss in my case studies. These include the increase in the worship of Asclepius and increase in the popularity of Christianity.

Glomb *et al.* have studied Latin inscriptions and dedications to Asclepius, as well as to Apollo and Jupiter when worshipped alongside Asclepius, to test the hypothesis that the cult of Asclepius grew in popularity during the Antonine Plague.⁹⁰² This would make logical sense given that the god was responsible for health and medicine, themes which would have held a particular relevance during the plague. However, there were several logistical issues to take into account in the analysis, such as the inability to assign an exact date to all the inscriptions, but

⁹⁰¹ Sharp 1999.

⁹⁰² The 'hypothesis' in question was first brought forward by Renberg 2006.

rather, they sometimes could only be defined by their *terminus post quem* and their *terminus ante quem*. Furthermore, when these gods were worshipped in combination with other gods, it can be difficult to determine which inscriptions should be included in the analysis. Overall, based on datable inscriptions, they determine that there was a mild increase in dedications to Asclepius during the Antonine Plague, but there was no detectable sharp decline after the plague.⁹⁰³ This would support the notion that the population was increasingly preoccupied with their health, likely because of the plague, and thus took to worshipping Asclepius.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there was likely a rise in popularity in Christianity around the beginning in the third century AD, prompting Julia Domna to commission Philostratus to write the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*. This is further supported by Lucian's account where it would seem as though Christians were also present in Pontus.⁹⁰⁴ Additionally, Christian authors such as Augustine and Arnobius seem to suggest that Asclepius, a pagan god, had failed to provide a cure for the plague.⁹⁰⁵ This suggests that there was a social turbulence that arose from the plague, in the form of new religious movements. This is particularly relevant when discussing the rise of certain new healing cults.

While there has been a significant amount of research done on the Antonine Plague thanks to modern-day scholars' efforts, mainly on quantitative factors, such as the mortality rate and economic effects; there is still a lack of understanding regarding possible religious and healing practices during this period. Therefore, I acknowledge that the following case studies, the cults of Alexander of Abonoteichus and Bona Dea, are speculated to have grown in popularity as a result of the plague. While we cannot know for certain to what degree these cults arose or

⁹⁰³ Glomb *et al.* 2022.

⁹⁰⁴ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 25.

⁹⁰⁵ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 3.17; Arnobius, *Adversus Nationes* VII 47; Ambasciano 2016, 8.

gained popularity due to the Plague, or how much they overtly focussed on the plague in their promises and proselytising, they clearly played a major role during a period when many people must have experienced heightened health anxiety and insecurity. They therefore provide context for the relationships between rational medicine, state healing cult, and itinerant, unofficial, private and even magical offers of healing and protection.

6.4 Alexander of Abonoteichus

This case study focusses on Alexander of Abonoteichus, a charismatic, spiritual leader who gained a cult following during, and likely because of the Antonine Plague, as he was perceived as a healer and averter of plagues generally. However, Alexander is often associated with being a magic practitioner, thanks to Lucian's account as the main source for his life, where he denounces him as a *μάγος* or *γόης*. This is in spite of other surviving material which demonstrates Alexander's far-flung influence within the Empire.⁹⁰⁶ The terms *μάγος* or *γόης* and their derivatives which Lucian uses to describe Alexander and his actions are translated as 'quack' or 'quackery' alongside more typical translations, such as 'magic practitioner' and 'sorcery'.⁹⁰⁷ To be exact, *μάγος* and its derivatives appear three times in the text, *γόης* and its derivatives appear five times, and *μαγανεία* appears six times.⁹⁰⁸ *Μαγανεία* is often translated as a combination of 'trickery', 'cheating', 'fraud', but is also used for 'those who advertise enchantments' and 'sorcery' in the text, while Liddell-Scott, based on the verb *μαγανεύω* refers to it as 'to use charms or philtres'.⁹⁰⁹ Therefore, there is an ambiguity related to the term

⁹⁰⁶ Thonemann 2021, 21; However, even Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Πευδόμαντις* 30 describes Alexander's influence over Rutilianus, a Roman senator.

⁹⁰⁷ Casson 1962; Kent 2007; Loeb's edition translates these terms as a combination of 'quack/ery', 'fraud', 'trickery' in addition to 'sorcerer/y'.

⁹⁰⁸ These figures have been determined by inputting the text of *Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Ἀβωνοτειχίτης* from the Scaife viewer (<https://scaife.perseus.org/reader/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0062.tlg038.perseus-grc2:1-62>) into the Voyant Textual Analysis Tool (<https://voyant-tools.org/>). Key words and their derivatives were subsequently searched, highlighted, and counted throughout the text.

⁹⁰⁹ Liddell and Scott 1889, 'μαγανεύω'.

regarding more traditional ‘magical’ interpretations and those more closely associated with quackery. In contrast to the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* where Philostratus attempts to dissociate Apollonius from magic, Lucian attempts to align a respected figure with that of a magic practitioner or quack. Therefore, the following analysis will attempt to understand how Lucian, drawing on contemporary ideas of magic, attempts to characterise Alexander as a *μάγος*. Regardless of the exact nuance of the term which Lucian attempts to convey, as a quack or a magic practitioner, there is nevertheless a continuity of the features attributed to magic practitioners, as seen through the seven characteristics and in the analyses of Apuleius’s *Apologia* and Philostratus’s *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*. Therefore, this section, using this thesis’s methodology of the seven characteristics will attempt to identify some common perceptions of magic during the time of Alexander, Lucian, and the Antonine Plague.

6.4.1 Lucian’s account of the life of Alexander

The following section describes the life of Alexander of Abonoteichus, based mostly on Lucian’s account. This section includes details which are relevant to the following analysis of Lucian’s characterisation of Alexander as a *μάγος*. Similar to the previous chapter’s analysis of Philostratus’s depiction of Apollonius, Lucian’s account of Alexander should not be taken as a historically accurate account, but rather a source which reveals the contemporary worldview of Lucian’s audience surrounding magic practitioners and quacks. Additionally, in his works, Lucian is often critical of many different groups and denounces them in such an extreme or satirical way that it forces the reader to question how seriously his word should be regarded. On occasion, even those whom he criticises are not unlike himself.⁹¹⁰ Overall, the legacy of Alexander as an infamous quack and charlatan is owing to the bias presented through Lucian’s

⁹¹⁰ Goldhill 2024, 1–2.

account, the only surviving and extensive account of Alexander's life. However, the veracity of this account is doubtful, as Lucian is not a reliable narrator even beyond this particular work.

Alexander was born sometime between AD 105 to 115 in Paphlagonia.⁹¹¹ Lucian claims that when he was young, Alexander worked as a male prostitute and that one of his returning clients was a γόης who sold his services as a spell-worker, and who eventually became a mentor to Alexander, teaching him his various tricks.⁹¹² Lucian attests to Alexander's beauty and his pleasing voice which made it easy for him to manipulate others.⁹¹³ Once this client died, Alexander began travelling with another man whom Lucian describes as an even bigger scam artist than his first mentor. The pair would swindle many out of their riches through their travels.⁹¹⁴ Lucian describes an example of this when Alexander and his partner scammed a wealthy, middle-aged Macedonian woman whom Lucian implies they seduced, as she desired to still be perceived as young and beautiful. With their ill-gotten gains, they were able to purchase a large snake and some tablets from the Temple of Apollo at Chalcedon. They then used these tablets to create 'prophecies' from Apollo which they would stage for the public. These prophecies claimed that Glycon, their snake, was the earthly embodiment of the son of Apollo and that followers should travel to Abonoteichus to worship him.⁹¹⁵ Alexander's partner remained in Chalcedon until his death, but continued to create prophecies encouraging others to go to Abonoteichus.⁹¹⁶ Lucian proceeds to describe how Alexander had emptied out a duck egg, inside of which he placed a baby snake, and buried it in a puddle close to the construction site of a temple. The next morning, he went into the town of Abonoteichus and drew attention to

⁹¹¹ Jones 1986, p. 134, n. 6.

⁹¹² Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 5.

⁹¹³ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 3–4.

⁹¹⁴ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 6, 8.

⁹¹⁵ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 7–8, 10.

⁹¹⁶ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 11.

himself by acting mad with the only intelligible words of his ramblings being ‘Asclepius’ and ‘Apollo’. Once he had amassed a significant crowd, he then ran out of the village to the puddle where he pretended to discover the ‘unhatched’ egg and proclaimed that it held Asclepius. It then ‘hatched’, revealing the masked small snake, or what Alexander claimed was the physical entity of the god. The villagers then welcomed both Alexander and the snake as prophets of Apollo.⁹¹⁷ After the ‘hatching’ of Glycon, Alexander then returned to his home where he readied the large snake and awaited his followers to approach him.⁹¹⁸ Lucian describes the manner by which Alexander was able to make the snake resemble the snake-god Glycon:

Alexander was a man of mark and note, affecting as he did to have occasional fits of madness and causing his mouth to fill with foam. This he easily managed by chewing the root of soapwort, the plant that dyers use; but to his fellow-countrymen even the foam seemed supernatural and awe-inspiring. Then, too, they had long ago prepared and fitted up a serpent’s head of linen, which had something of a human look, was all painted up, and appeared very lifelike. It would open and close its mouth by means of horsehairs, and a forked black tongue like a snake’s, also controlled by horsehairs, would dart out.⁹¹⁹

Lucian’s description of Alexander’s Glycon is supported by a statue representing Glycon found at Tomis in the Black Sea which has similar features, such as a head-cap and human-like hair.⁹²⁰

Once he established himself in Abonoteichus, Alexander claimed to be not only the prophet of Glycon, the son of Apollo and Asclepius, but also a descendant of Perseus.⁹²¹

⁹¹⁷ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 14.

⁹¹⁸ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 18.

⁹¹⁹ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 12: ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος μετὰ τοιαύτης τραγωδίας διὰ πολλοῦ εἰς τὴν πατρίδα περίβλεπτός τε καὶ λαμπρός ἦν, μεμηνέναι προσποιούμενος ἐνίοτε καὶ ἄφροῦ ὑποπιμπλάμενος τὸ στόμα· ῥαδίως δὲ τοῦτο ὑπῆρχεν αὐτῷ, στρουθίου τῆς βαφικῆς βοτάνης τὴν ῥίζαν διαμασησάμενος· τοῖς δὲ θεῖόν τι καὶ φοβερόν ἐδόκει καὶ ὁ ἄφρός. ἐπεποιήτο δὲ αὐτοῖς πάλοι καὶ κατεσκεύαστο κεφαλὴ δράκοντος ὁθονίνῃ ἀνθρωπόμορφόν τι ἐπιφαίνουσα, κατάγραφος, πάνυ εἰκασμένη, ὑπὸ θριζὶν ἰππεῖαις ἀνοίγουσά τε καὶ αὖθις ἐπικλείουσα τὸ στόμα, καὶ γλῶττα οἷα δράκοντος διττὴ μέλαινα προέκυπτεν, ὑπὸ τριχῶν καὶ αὐτὴ ἐλκομένη.

⁹²⁰ Jones 1986, 137; more on archaeological evidence of Alexander and Glycon including about this statue in the next section 6.4.2.

⁹²¹ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 11.

Lucian describes how Alexander would elaborately scam his followers through several methods, such as Alexander's elaborate set-up of pipes adjoining the rooms of his house, so that an accomplice would listen to his visitors' questions and would reply through the pipes where their voice would travel out of a painted representation of Asclepius. Additionally, Alexander and his accomplices would furtively open and re-seal sealed packets with followers' questions, in order to deliver them relevant answers, without seemingly having opened their packets.⁹²² Alexander also hired other 'oracles' who operated as 'autophones', or who spoke as if Asclepius was using them as a mouthpiece.⁹²³ Lucian even alleges that Alexander had an entire network of spies and informants as far as Rome that could inform him ahead of time about his clients.⁹²⁴ Once Alexander became well-established, Roman officials would apparently seek him out to proclaim certain honours upon them through his prophecies—Alexander would often oblige, but would also make sure to keep sensitive information pertaining to these individuals to extort them in the future.⁹²⁵ An oracle cost one drachma and two obols, and there were approximately seventy-five thousand offered each year, thus turning a substantial prophet for Alexander and his staff.⁹²⁶

Lucian is the only surviving contemporary source to Alexander, yet he claims that Alexander had nevertheless accrued several other enemies against whom Alexander behaved cruelly and mercilessly: the Epicureans had become strong opponents to Alexander and his cult, and Alexander apparently ordered the death of an Epicurean who attempted to confront him for

⁹²² Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 21, 26.

⁹²³ Jones 2016, 469–470.

⁹²⁴ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 37.

⁹²⁵ For example, Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 26: Severianus consulted Alexander's autophones regarding his invasion of Armenia; 30–32, 37.

⁹²⁶ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 23; Jones 1986, 139.

fraud in public.⁹²⁷ Lucian claims that the philosopher barely survived as Alexander's mob followed and attempted to kill him. Luckily, an intervening group saved him.⁹²⁸ In the mid-second century AD, the Greek East still operated under the polis system where citizens were loyal to their poleis. However, this also meant that there were frequent inter-polis rivalries that could ensue such as between Abonoteichus and Amastris. Hence, Alexander reportedly never delivered an oracle to any citizen of Amastris.⁹²⁹ Therefore, Lepidus of Amastris, the fierce Epicurean opponent to Alexander, even joined Lucian in attempting to prevent the spread of Alexander's influence in Asia Minor.⁹³⁰ Additionally, Alexander also targeted the Christians in the region by claiming that Pontus was 'full of atheists and Christians' who were spreading rumours about him. He further claimed that the citizens of Pontus should 'drive [them] away with stones if they wanted to have the god gracious'.⁹³¹ In another instance, the crowd began to act on Alexander's order to stone one of his critics.⁹³² Overall, according to Lucian, although Alexander gained a large following, he also gained a significant number of enemies.

Lucian goes on to illustrate Alexander's general brashness whenever his incompetency was exposed. In one particular episode, Lucian claims Alexander falsely informed a father that his slaves had killed his son in a brutal fashion, while he was away in Alexandria. The father thus presented the slaves to the governor who then executed them. However, the son later returned and claimed that he had been held up elsewhere, meaning that the slaves were innocent after all. Whether Alexander had mistakenly made a prophecy, or he had accused the slaves out of his

⁹²⁷ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 25, 38, 44–45.

⁹²⁸ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 44–45.

⁹²⁹ Thonemann 2021, 29–32.

⁹³⁰ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 25; Jones 1986, 140.

⁹³¹ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 25: λέγων ἀθέων ἐμπεπλησθαι καὶ Χριστιανῶν τὸν Πόντον... οὓς ἐκέλευε λίθοις ἐλαύνειν, εἴ γε θέλουσιν ἴλεω ἔχειν τὸν θεόν.

⁹³² Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 45; Kent 2007, 77.

blood lust, Lucian does not specify.⁹³³ Alexander was reportedly humiliated by this and told the crowd that they should stone the father, and upon failing to do so, they would be cursed and labelled Epicureans. According to Lucian, the crowd nearly carried out his wishes, but luckily one brave citizen intervened to save the man.⁹³⁴

Lucian describes his own encounter with Alexander, although by his own description, he does not seem to do anything less than purposefully antagonise Alexander. Lucian begins his encounter by having only called him by his first name rather than ‘prophet’ and refusing to kiss Alexander’s hand. Instead, he bit it, and Alexander’s followers reportedly began to beat Lucian. Lucian insists that they would have killed him if it were not for Alexander’s intervention. After the incident, Alexander insists that the two are left alone, and Alexander attempts to convince him to become one of his followers. Lucian claims that he pretended to have succumbed to Alexander’s charms, so that he could be allowed to leave safely.⁹³⁵ Alexander then insisted on helping Lucian with his travels by providing him a ship and a crew. He also sent Lucian many parting gifts before his voyage, nearly convincing Lucian of his benevolence. However, once at sea, Lucian then learned from the crew which Alexander had hired that they were ordered to throw him overboard, and that the captain had ultimately betrayed Alexander’s orders by revealing his plan to Lucian. Lucian then attempted to report Alexander’s plot to the Roman governor, but the governor claims that Alexander’s influence over Rutilianus, a senator, and other high ranking Roman officials meant that he could not arrest him.⁹³⁶

⁹³³ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 44.

⁹³⁴ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 45.

⁹³⁵ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 55.

⁹³⁶ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 56–57.

There is an additional exchange that Lucian describes between himself and Alexander and his oracles which further demonstrated Alexander's incompetency and his disdain for Amastris. To try and expose the flaws in the methods of Alexander's oracles, Lucian asked Alexander if he knew from where Homer originated. Many at this time claimed that Amastris was Homer's hometown, but because of the hostility between Alexander and the city, Alexander and his oracles refused to provide this answer. Whether they misheard Lucian's question, or were attempting to avoid answering it, the oracles mistakenly answered Lucian as if they were replying to someone's question about a body pain, and instructed Lucian to put *cytmis* and the 'spume of a charger' on the affected region. Lucian was thus successful in demonstrating the lack of competency of the oracles, as they incorrectly replied to his question.⁹³⁷

Much of Lucian's argument for Alexander's fraud surrounds Alexander's false claims of his connections to the divine and other legendary figures.⁹³⁸ For example, Lucian reports that in order to explain the birth of a daughter whom Lucian claims was produced through Alexander's sexual impropriety, Alexander insisted that he had entered into relations with the moon goddess, Selene, who subsequently bore him his daughter. In order to silence any possible sceptics, Alexander apparently gave a flamboyant performance of this alleged union with Selene. The performance was said to be particularly lewd with Alexander kissing the woman on stage who was portraying Selene. The woman in question was apparently the wife of a local Roman official and allegedly Alexander's mistress.⁹³⁹ Because Rutilianus became such a devoted follower of Alexander, Alexander's daughter was then married to Rutilianus, thus giving Rutilianus the

⁹³⁷ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἡ Ψευδόμαντις* 53; Thonemann 2021, 26.

⁹³⁸ For example, Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἡ Ψευδόμαντις* 10: describes how Alexander spread a rumour in Chaledon that Asclepius and his father Apollo would come to Abonoteichus, foreshadowing himself; 58: claims that Asclepius was his grandfather and Perseus was an ancestor on his mother's side.

⁹³⁹ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἡ Ψευδόμαντις* 34, 38–40.

status of consorting with the divine.⁹⁴⁰ Moreover, Alexander supposedly claimed that he himself resembled Pythagoras, a claim which Lucian denounces and emphasises as Alexander's own vanity.⁹⁴¹ Lucian additionally describes that Alexander wore his hair in curly locks and a purple tunic with a white stripe down the middle and would often carry a hooked sword, similar to that of Perseus's, as he claimed to be related to Perseus through his mother's family. He likely chose to connect himself to Perseus because of the region's reverence of Perseus, a significant figure in both Hellenistic and Persian-Achaemenid history.⁹⁴² As can be seen, there are several examples of which Lucian claims Alexander falsely associated himself with the divine and other legendary figures.

Lucian also makes many claims about Alexander's sexual impropriety beyond his early years as a prostitute and his relations with the wife of a Roman official. Apparently, during his time as a prophet, Alexander had fathered many children by different women, many of whom were married and whose husbands had turned a blind eye to their wives' infidelity with Alexander.⁹⁴³ Moreover, Lucian describes Alexander as having purchased a number of young boys for his own sexual purposes, something for which Lucian expresses his clear disdain:

Although he cautioned all to abstain from intercourse with boys on the ground that it was impious, for his own part this pattern of propriety made a clever arrangement. He commanded the cities in Pontus and Paphlagonia to send choir-boys for three years' service, to sing hymns to the god in his household; they were required to examine, select, and send the noblest, youngest, and most handsome. These he kept under ward and treated like bought slaves, sleeping with them and affronting them in every way. He made it a rule, too, not to greet anyone over eighteen years with his lips, or to embrace and kiss

⁹⁴⁰ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 34.

⁹⁴¹ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 4.

⁹⁴² Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 10, 58; Thonemann 2021, 27.

⁹⁴³ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 42.

him; he kissed only the young, extending his hand to the others to be kissed by them. They were called ‘those within the kiss.’⁹⁴⁴

Therefore, it would seem as though Alexander also engages in forms of sexual misconduct, similarly to many other accused magic-practising figures.

Alexander dies around AD 175 when Lucian reports that he had a leg infection which eventually required his entire leg to be amputated. This extreme measure was taken to try and save him by some of the most revered physicians in Rome, but ultimately, Alexander succumbed to the infection and blood loss from the procedure. Lucian claims that after his death, he still had loyal followers who fought amongst themselves about who would be his successor.⁹⁴⁵

Overall, Lucian’s uncomplimentary depiction of Alexander clearly emphasises his qualities and actions which are in keeping with a *μάγος* and quack. In his account, Lucian provides clear details about how Alexander was able to convince many of his abilities deceitfully. Although Lucian argues that Alexander had no real divine powers, he nevertheless demonstrates that Alexander misrepresents the divine for his own selfish purposes. Therefore, while Lucian’s iteration of the *μάγος* includes his drawing on the quack, it nevertheless perpetuates several characteristics of magic that have been seen throughout this thesis. This will be further investigated in section 6.4.4 below.

6.4.2 Archaeological evidence

Beyond Lucian’s account on the life of Alexander, there are corroborating examples of material evidence of the worship of Alexander, his cult, but most commonly, of Glycon. The existence of these examples demonstrates that in contrast to Lucian’s scathing depiction of Alexander,

⁹⁴⁴ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 41.

⁹⁴⁵ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 59–60.

Alexander and his cult were highly regarded throughout the Empire, and even received official honours and recognition.

Glycon is referred to in several epigraphic sources and is represented in various forms of material culture.⁹⁴⁶ His name and iconography appear on coins from Abonoteichus alongside the portraits of several emperors including Antoninus Pius, Lucius Verus, Geta, Gordian III, and Trebonianus Gallus, giving a range of dates for the coins between AD 138–253. He is usually represented with multiple coils, and with a ‘cap’ on his head and a protruding snout, similar to Lucian’s description of how Alexander presented his snake as the god. However, there is a local variation that appears from Abonoteichus under Severus Alexander where a female deity, the personification of the city, is pictured feeding the snake, thus alluding to city’s nurturing of the snake-god.⁹⁴⁷ There have been other coins found with depictions of a snake, although they pre-date the cult of Glycon, and are thus doubtful. Thonemann argues that the only two examples that he feels confident are representations of Glycon other than from Abonoteichus are those from Gangra-Germanikopolis under Julia Domna and Bithynian Nikomedeia under Carcalla.⁹⁴⁸ The numismatic evidence supports the chronology of the establishment of Alexander’s cult and association with Glycon; based on the number of surviving coins, coins depicting Glycon were at the height of their popularity late in the reign of Antoninus Pius and dwindling during the reign of Severus.⁹⁴⁹

⁹⁴⁶ Thonemann 2021, 15; Ambasciano 2016, 14.

⁹⁴⁷ Thonemann 2021, 15; Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Πευδόμαντις* 58 further supports this where Lucian claims that Alexander petitioned the emperor, likely Antoninus Pius, to have a coin made of himself and Glycon; Dalaison, Delrieux, and Ferriès 2015, nos. 5–8, 11, 26–27, 31, 39, 41 and 34 is the one with the personification of the city.

⁹⁴⁸ Julia Domna-Gangra-Germanikopolis coin: *SNG* 6820 and Caracalla-Bithynian-Nikomedeia coin: *CNG* 103 (14/06/16), Lot 569

⁹⁴⁹ Thonemann 2021, 21.

Furthermore, there is evidence to support that Glycon was worshipped outside of Asia Minor. The aforementioned statue depicting Glycon from Tomis is of monumental-size of a snake, with dog ears, and human hair.⁹⁵⁰ There are several other similar representations of Glycon as bronze statues from Athens.⁹⁵¹ Additionally, there are two inscriptions which refer to Glycon from Apulum and Dacia, respectively, written in Latin but by authors of Greek origin: (*Glyconi M. Aur. Theodotus iusso dei p(osuit)* and *Glyconi M. Ant. Onesas iusso dei (ibens) p(osuit)*).⁹⁵²

Overall, beyond Lucian's account, there is sufficient evidence to support that Alexander and the cult of Glycon were popular in parts of the Roman Empire, and even spread outside of Asia Minor.⁹⁵³ The snake-god, and by extension, Alexander were worshipped even prior to the outbreak of the Antonine Plague, but likely grew in popularity thanks to his association with healing during the plague.

6.4.3 Alexander's influence during the Antonine Plague

Alexander's cult likely fulfilled a function during the Antonine Plague owing to its association with healing through its connection to Asclepius and Apollo. It is also likely that Alexander rose to prominence during this time of crisis as a local, charismatic leader amongst the communities of Asia Minor, similar to the figure described in the previous chapter, section 5.9.2 above. Additionally, thanks to Alexander's alleged abilities to avert and heal plague, he was able to become popular beyond the communities of Asia Minor, as seen in the previous section.

⁹⁵⁰ Thonemann 2021, 18–19, Figure 5; *LIMC* 1 Glykon 1.

⁹⁵¹ Thonemann 2021, 18–19; *LIMC* 1 Glykon 2 and 3.

⁹⁵² *CIL* III 1021 = *IDR* III 5, 85: *Glyconi M. Ant. Onesas iusso dei (ibens) p(osuit)*; *CIL* III 1022 = *IDR* III 5, 86: *Glyconi M. Aur. Theodotus iusso dei p(osuit)*; Thonemann 2021, 19–20.

⁹⁵³ Harris 2024, 329.

Despite Lucian's disparagement of Alexander's early life and mentors, several details of his account nevertheless suggest that Alexander had some knowledge of the healing arts, as his two mentors were a doctor and a student of Apollonius, respectively:

Alexander's first teacher had been a public doctor by profession, and an expert in drugs, all of which the pupil inherited. Armed with this knowledge, he was able to prescribe 'treatments and diets' (θεραπείας καὶ διαίτας) ... Alexander's medical expertise may therefore have taught him that disease could be transmitted by lip-kissing; that would explain his own refusal to be kissed and (if the present oracle originates with Glycon, like the 'autophone' on plague) the order 'to abstain from lips'.⁹⁵⁴

Lucian further reports that there were many who were ill who came to Alexander asking for assistance.⁹⁵⁵ Therefore, Alexander was believed by many to possess legitimate skills and divine powers of healing.

Lucian's account does not provide information on Alexander's role as a healer during the Antonine Plague, as this particular plague is not specifically named in his work.⁹⁵⁶ However, there is one allusion to plague, generally, in the text which could allude to the Antonine Plague.

Lucian describes how Alexander and his oracles created a verse that could avert plague:

'Phoebus the god unshorn, keeps off plague's cloudy onset' (Φοῖβος ἀκείρεκόμης λοιμοῦ νεφέλην ἀπερύκει), and many of his followers were said to inscribe it above their doorways and on amulets.⁹⁵⁷ However, Lucian claims that families who used Alexander's verse were often the first succumb to plague.⁹⁵⁸

Additionally, Tomlin has published the discovery of an amulet in present-day London with thirty lines of Greek inscribed, with invocations to Iao, Abrasax, and Phoebus to 'drive

⁹⁵⁴ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 5; Jones 2016, 472.

⁹⁵⁵ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 24, 28.

⁹⁵⁶ Duncan-Jones 2018, 57; Jones 2016, 469–470.

⁹⁵⁷ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 36.

⁹⁵⁸ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 36.

away the cloud of plague’, on behalf of the wearer, Demetrios, who originally came from Delphi. Lines 19 and 23 are taken directly from a prophecy given by Glycon during the time of Alexander (‘Phoebus the god unshorn, keeps off plague’s cloudy onset’).⁹⁵⁹ While this amulet cannot be definitively dated at this time, Tomlin and Duncan-Jones are confident that this amulet refers to the plague, and that the lines come directly from Alexander of Abonoteichus’s verse. This amulet, along with the stratigraphic evidence of the stagnation of the development of Londinium in the second century AD in section 6.3 above, suggests that the plague reached Britain, and that inhabitants like Demetrios might have used Alexander’s cult’s techniques to try and avert it.

Lucian recalls in his text that Alexander endorsed the Temples of Apollo at Claros and Didyma, thus forming a connection between Alexander’s cult and the cult of Apollo-Claros.⁹⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Duncan-Jones states that prayers which invoked Apollo and any associated cults were popular during the time of the plague.⁹⁶¹ This was likely because of Apollo’s association with causing and averting plagues, but also with the origin of the plague as of having come from the Temple of Apollo.⁹⁶² Appeals to the divine, including to Apollo-Claros, for protection from plague are found throughout the Empire and are dated during the time of the Antonine Plague:

Similar appeals for divine help were made all over the Empire. Greek inscriptions from Pergamum in Mysia, Caesarea Troketta in Lydia, Kallipolis in the Thracian Chersonese, and Hierapolis in Phrygia prescribe programs of sacrifice and invoke Clarian Apollo as the one who drives away the epidemic. And simple formulaic Latin inscriptions invoke the gods and goddesses ‘following the interpretation of Clarian Apollo’. These come

⁹⁵⁹ Tomlin 2014, 197–205; Jones 2016, 469–470.

⁹⁶⁰ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Πευδόμεαντις* 329.

⁹⁶¹ Duncan-Jones 2018, 57–58.

⁹⁶² Perring 2022, 291; Petridou 2016, 434–436 refers to how Apollo was referred to as the bringer and averter of illness.

from Britain (again), Sardinia, Dalmatia and Numidia. Another three are from Italy and two from Mauretania Tingitana.⁹⁶³

While the rising popularity of Apollo and his epithets during the plague cannot be attributed directly to Alexander's influence, the rise in popularity of such verses and invocations are possibly indicative of the preoccupation of many individuals with their health in response to the plague.⁹⁶⁴

Overall, there is evidence, including archaeological, which supports the notion that Alexander's cult was relevant during the Antonine Plague, as worshippers believed that he could avert the plague with his divine invocation. Historic evidence provided by Lucian also supports the notion that Alexander possessed healing skills and training.

6.4.4 Analysis

This section analyses Lucian's representation of Alexander as a magic practitioner. As discussed in previous sections, in contrast to Lucian's disparaging description of Alexander, it is clear through other surviving material, that Alexander was influential in Asia Minor, in upper class Roman circles, and even in other regions of the Empire. Therefore, this section investigates how Lucian attempts to align Alexander with the figure of a quack and magic practitioner by drawing on contemporary perceptions of such figures. This can be seen as the opposite situation to Chapter 5's case study of Philostratus's *Tà ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον* where Philostratus emphasises Apollonius's magnanimity, despite his arrest as a magic practitioner. This section thus explores how Lucian's depiction of Alexander intersects with the seven characteristics of ancient magic.

⁹⁶³ Duncan-Jones 2018, 57–58; Jones 2016 both argue that these appeals are all dated to the time of the Antonine Plague.

⁹⁶⁴ Duncan-Jones 2018, 58.

With regard to the first characteristic, ‘Legally and socially acceptable and subversive behaviour’, unlike in the previous cases of Apuleius and Apollonius, Alexander is never legally accused of practising magic. Lucian claims that he attempts to report Alexander to the governor of Pontus for his attempted murder, but is ultimately discouraged from doing so because of Alexander’s influence over other high-ranking Roman officials.⁹⁶⁵ However, Lucian nevertheless accuses Alexander of engaging in a number of quack-related and fraudulent schemes which by extension, can be associated with magic, as well as other crimes, such as adultery, attempted murder, and the acquisition of young boys for sexual purposes. Thus, this case study like those in previous chapters demonstrates that individuals who were often accused of magic-associated crimes were also accused of crimes relating to sexual misconduct or other socially-subversive behaviour. Therefore, because Alexander is not legally accused or arrested for any crimes, Lucian must present Alexander such that he would be perceived by his audience as a thoroughly socially-unacceptable individual.

While previous other case studies have referred to magic as a way of spiritually misusing the divine, Lucian’s depiction relies more on the notion of Alexander’s deception and misrepresentation of the divine, as Lucian insists that Alexander has no real ritualistic skill. This is clearly Lucian’s method of highlighting Lucian’s quackery, but there is nonetheless an overlap between the magic practitioner and the quack as presented in this text. The connection between the magic practitioner and the quack is further emphasised in the text through the translation of the terms *μάγος* or *γόης* which have traditionally been translated as ‘magician’ and ‘sorcerer’, but are often translated interchangeably as ‘quack’, a concept that was previously seen as a related to

⁹⁶⁵ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 57; Flinterman 1997.

the bad *iatros*.⁹⁶⁶ The association between Lucian's use of *μάγος* or *γόης* with the concept of magic is further emphasised in *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 5, where along with the term *γόης*, Lucian also includes the terms *μαγεία*, *ἐπωδαί* and the phrase *χάριτας ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐρωτικοῖς καὶ ἐπαγωγὰς τοῖς ἐχθροῖς* (typically translated as 'charms for your love-affairs, and "sendings" for your enemies'), all of which are concepts typically associated with magical practice.⁹⁶⁷ Hence, Lucian's depiction of Alexander draws on the concept of the quack, yet there is nevertheless an overlap between the magic practitioner and the quack, and the misuse and misrepresentation of the divine. Overall, Lucian represents Alexander as a subversive and socially unacceptable character.

Regarding 'exoticism and foreignness', Lucian does not draw on this characteristic significantly in his description of Alexander. As an aside, while this characteristic is not reflected in Lucian's representation of Alexander as a magic practitioner, the spread of Alexander and his cult is another example of a provincial healing cult which was adopted and endorsed by the centralised Roman imperial government and into the other provinces. Similar to section 5.4.1 above, there were several examples of provincial cults, particularly ones with healing aspects, that rose in prominence throughout the Empire. In fact, scholars have argued that Alexander and his cult's practices derive from various other well-established practices and cults in Asia Minor. The manner in which he and his oracles deliver prophecies is not unlike the descriptions of several other well-established cults in Asia Minor, such as the oracles of Amphilochos at Mallos and Apollo Koropaios at Demetria.⁹⁶⁸ Thonemann additionally suggests that the mysteries of

⁹⁶⁶ For example, the Loeb translation which has been consulted in this text translates the terms associated with magic (*μάγος*, *γόης* and *μαγανεία*) as a combination of 'imposter', 'quack', 'trickery', and 'cheating' 11/14 times that the terms appear; for the discussion of the bad *iatros*, see section 5.3.1 above.

⁹⁶⁷ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 5.

⁹⁶⁸ Thonemann 2021, 22–23; Jones 1986, 144.

Eleusis were a source of inspiration for the cult through their use of night-oracles, or oracles that were delivered to followers as they incubated at the temple.⁹⁶⁹ This is also reminiscent of various healing practices, such as at the temples of Asclepius, Isis, and Serapis. Therefore, this characteristic is not relevant to Lucian's representation of Alexander, but the text and archaeological evidence provide another example of the acceptance of a provincial healing cult in the Roman Empire.

Similar to the cases of women accused of engaging in magic-related behaviour, such as in the accounts of Tacitus and Livy, Lucian similarly describes Alexander as both promiscuous in his early days as a prostitute and later by continuing to engage in sexual misconduct once he is an established spiritual-leader. Lucian describes Alexander as engaging in sexual relations from a passive position, especially in his youth, and reluctantly admits that Alexander is good-looking with a pleasing-sounding voice. However, Lucian does not effeminise Alexander in the same way that other authors have described magic-accused individuals whom they frequently disparage for behaving against their gender norms. Rather, Lucian describes Alexander as a predatory and aggressive sexual deviant, or arguably, even dysfunctionally masculine and active sexually, who even begins preying on other boys and seducing married women in Asia Minor.⁹⁷⁰

Pederasty is a contentious topic in the Roman world, but there was generally less of a stigma associated around the active male partner, thus Alexander's taking of young boys as lovers, especially if they were not Roman citizens, might not have been considered as socially subversive.⁹⁷¹ Moreover, the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* has thus far reflected on its

⁹⁶⁹ Thonemann 2021, 120.

⁹⁷⁰ Kent 2007, 77; See also Section 3.3 above which discusses the ancient concepts surrounding masculine/feminine and active/passive partner in terms of sexual relations.

⁹⁷¹ Williams 2010, 63, 109, 125, consult Williams 2010 for a more in-depth discussion about Roman sexuality.

implications on the lives of women as opposed to men. Despite these points, Lucian nevertheless emphasises the malignity of Alexander's sexual activities. While the exact reason for this cannot be ascertained, I hypothesise that Lucian chooses to represent Alexander and his sexuality in a negative light for two reasons: 1) because the Antonine Plague was believed to be a by-product of the lack of morality in the Empire, there was a greater scrutiny over individuals' morality generally. Although male adulterers and male active partners in pederastic relationships were not as strongly persecuted as female adulterers or passive partners, they were nevertheless in violation of the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* for adultery and *stuprum*. While this might not have been as relevant to Alexander's reputation prior to the plague, the increased social tension brought about by plague might have meant that Alexander's sexual indiscretions would have been perceived as more subversive during this period. My second reason (2) for explaining Lucian's choice of portraying Alexander as a sexual predator draws from a comparison to the previous chapter's analysis on Apollonius of Tyana. Section 5.5.2 above discussed the lack of female representation in *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τθανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*, and sections 5.6.2 and 5.9.2 above further discussed Apollonius's asceticism and sexual abstinence in relation to his spiritual purity and philosophical zeal which is in keeping with the emergence of the contemporary figure of the holy man. As Philostratus was writing in the early third century AD, soon after Lucian's account, it is possible that these values had already emerged and were associated with the virtuous ritual practitioner.⁹⁷² Thus, I hypothesise that based on these associations, Lucian purposefully presents Alexander as a deviant from the figure of the abstinent holy man to emphasise his corruption and lack of competency. While this section has not discussed the characteristic of femininity or gender roles specifically, I propose that there is a cultural evolution in the perceptions of gender

⁹⁷² Goldhill 2024, 13.

and sexuality generally in relation to magic coincidentally to the period of the Antonine Plague. This will be further discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

With regard to privateness, Lucian draws mainly on the second aspect of this characteristic, the aspect of being individualistically-motivated. Lucian states throughout the text that Alexander is unscrupulously greedy. In fact, Lucian even goes as far as to illustrate how Alexander lacks any sympathy for his followers, and even promises to help them even when Lucian claims he is clearly unable. For example, Lucian states that if Alexander had wrongly predicted that a follower could possibly recover from an ailment, or if he even knew from the beginning that they were terminally ill, then he would still encourage them to return to him for his services as long as possible, so that he could receive the maximal amount of donations before their death. In the case of those who became severely ill while under his care, he would dismiss them unempathetically by stating, ‘No longer look for assistance in your bitter disease: Death stands before you and now there's no way to escape’.⁹⁷³ This presents a continuity from previous case studies where practitioners accused of practising magic were often additionally accused of acting maliciously for profit. Although Alexander is highly revered in parts of the Roman Empire, Lucian draws on the common perception of magic as a practice undertaken by those with a selfish and deceitful motivation, in order to associate Alexander with quack and magical practitioner. Additionally, Lucian frames Alexander’s self-authorising expertise and creation of a new cult as a fundamental danger to society.⁹⁷⁴ The previous chapter has shown that although Apollonius operates in the same way, Philostratus is careful to emphasise all of Apollonius’s more positive and altruistic qualities, in order to overcome his position as an outsider in society.

⁹⁷³ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 28; Kent 2007, 77.

⁹⁷⁴ Goldhill 2024, 11.

Meanwhile, Lucian reveals his, and likely many of his contemporaries', perceptions of such individuals: such individuals are greedy, self-motivated, and nefarious and lack any real skill or substantial qualification. While the first aspect of required privacy is not present in Lucian's text in relation to magic *per se*, it can be argued that Alexander requires privacy, in order to undertake his more deceitful activities, such as the workings of his fake autophone oracles and his acquisition of young boys for sexual purposes. Meanwhile, the second aspect of this characteristic, individual intention, is thoroughly emphasised in Lucian's account.

When examining the intersection of 'manipulative in nature', Alexander is described as manipulative, generally, in Lucian's account, although Lucian emphasises that Alexander has no real control over the divine. This contrasts slightly with previous examples where magic is often a form of manipulation or control over *daimones* or other lesser deities, or the control over other people and things but through the powers of the divine. Based on Lucian's account, Alexander does not require the real power of the divine, in order to gain control over his followers, but simply controls them through his own charisma and deviousness. Therefore, Lucian characterises Alexander as manipulative intrinsically, but with the added implications regarding quackery. While this is different than in previous presentations of this characteristic, as discussed earlier in this section, contemporary perspectives of magic could also encompass quackery.

There are certain modern interpretations of Lucian's representation of Alexander which attempt to draw comparisons between Alexander and other more modern religious cult leaders who have gained notoriety. These comparisons help to illustrate how Lucian's representation of Alexander exemplify the aspect of individualistically-motivated and the characteristic of manipulative. Sociologist Stephen Kent is one such scholar who has studied modern religious cults at length. In his analysis, Kent argues that Alexander's personality, namely his narcissism,

motivated him to have such a strong hold over many of his followers. Kent even concludes from Lucian's account that Alexander had thus created a sex and child trafficking ring around the Black Sea, and that his cult provided a distraction and a cover.⁹⁷⁵ While I am not intending to prove Kent's interpretation of Alexander's personality, Kent's comparison of Lucian's depiction of Alexander with other similar modern abusive cult leaders suggest some of Alexander's nefarious and selfish intentions of promoting himself as a spiritual leader. Admittedly, some of these modern cult leaders are relevant to my own perspective, demonstrating Lucian's efficacy in presenting Alexander as a depraved cult leader in a way that still resonates two thousand years later. Additionally, Kent argues that Alexander is narcissistic based on how he responds and attacks those who 'threaten either his public image or his fraudulent operation'.⁹⁷⁶ Kent further draws attention to Alexander's lack of empathy to the Macedonian woman whom he and his accomplice swindle, and to his followers, including those who are terminally ill. Lucian even states that Alexander refers to many of his followers as 'fatheads and simpletons' as often translated.⁹⁷⁷ Therefore, Lucian provides a number of examples in his text where he characterises Alexander as unempathetic, and even by Kent's definition, narcissistic, thus depicting him as selfishly-motivated and mal-intentioned.

With regard to supernatural associations, Lucian states that Alexander claims that he has been blessed by the gods, Glycon, Asclepius, and Apollo, is related to Perseus, and had relations with Selene. However, as discussed in the previous characteristic, according to Lucian, this was all fabricated, and Alexander did not, in fact, have any genuine connection to the divine or supernatural. Lucian further anecdotally recounts how families who inscribed Alexander's

⁹⁷⁵ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 41.

⁹⁷⁶ Kent 2007, 77.

⁹⁷⁷ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἢ Ψευδόμαντις* 6, 9; Kent 2007, 77.

blessing onto their house, in order to avert the plague were ultimately the ones who ended up succumbing to the plague. Lucian does not go as far as to refer to this as a form of divine retribution, but there is a consistent narrative that many of Alexander's endeavours result in tragedy for his followers because he is not a genuine spiritual practitioner. This once again highlights Lucian's attempt at depicting Alexander as a quack to his audience.

Finally, with regard to secret and arcane knowledge, Lucian's account presents an interesting divergence between his claims of Alexander's quackery and magical practice despite Alexander's popularity which is even attested to by Lucian. Clearly based on Lucian's account, Lucian does not believe that Alexander possessed any special spiritual knowledge beyond the ability to scam people. However, through his mentors, Alexander allegedly gained some knowledge on healing, as both of his mentors had previous training in the medical field. Additionally, there is a connection between Apollonius and Alexander, as Apollonius was the alleged teacher to his first mentor, and Lucian also refers to Apollonius as 'notorious'.⁹⁷⁸ Despite Lucian's defamatory account of Alexander, even Lucian admits that Alexander convinced many throughout the Empire of his gifts and gathered a considerable following. Therefore, in order to separate Alexander with any form of reputable competency or qualification, Lucian purposefully emphasises Alexander's quackery, and that the only forms of training or education which he received were from other unreputable sources. This recalls the same issue discussed in section 5.9.1 above where an individual's reputation and competency were often subjective, and perceptions of them could range from being a reputable practitioner to a magical one.

⁹⁷⁸ Lucian, *Ἀλέξανδρος ἡ Πευδόμεαντις* 5.

Overall, Lucian's representation of Alexander as a magic practitioner deviates somewhat from the case studies of Apuleius's representation of himself in the *Apologia* and Philostratus's depiction of Apollonius of Tyana, particularly with his emphasis of Alexander's quackery. This is owing to the fact that Lucian attempts to align Alexander more closely with the perception of a magic practitioner and quack, while Apuleius and Philostratus attempt to distance their subjects from the figure of the magic practitioner. This might also be indicative of some possible changes in the perception of the concept of magic in the second century and during the Antonine Plague. The previous chapter has reflected on the rise of the local charismatic leader in the second century, and Alexander is no exception to this type of figure. With the addition of the context of the Antonine Plague, such a figure would also provide a healing function to their community. Thus, the perception of the competent medical practitioner versus the quack which was discussed in Chapter 5 is particularly relevant to this particular context. Medical fraud could have become both especially common at this time, and also an unforgivable social evil. As a result, Lucian's depiction of Alexander can be seen as a synthesis of the concept of the ancient magic practitioner alongside the concept of the bad *iatros* and quack. It is also possible that with the increased pressure on Roman administration in the second half of the second century AD and during the Antonine Plague, that communities relied even more greatly on their local leaders for help in combatting the plague and its effects. This reason might have contributed to the rise of Alexander's popularity, even though he operated outside of Roman State and socially sanctioned institutions, such as Asclepeia (sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.3 above) and the cult of Bona Dea (section 6.5 below).⁹⁷⁹ Thus, the context of a globalised time of crisis, allowed for Alexander to grow in

⁹⁷⁹ Harris 2024, 329.

prominence, but also led to changes in perception of the magic practitioner, as the concept now also encompassed the concept of the quack.

6.5 Cult of Bona Dea

The previous chapter has already investigated examples of healing cults, both syncretic and of provincial-origin, within a medical context (section 5.4.1 above), but this chapter aims to investigate examples that rose in prominence the later half of the second century AD, and possibly in response to the Antonine Plague. One such example is the cult of Bona Dea, a cult that existed in Rome since Republican times, but provided an additional healing function in the second half of the second century AD.⁹⁸⁰ Additionally, during this period, it spread beyond Rome and also gained a new and diverse following.⁹⁸¹ I have chosen to include the cult of Bona Dea in this chapter and as a point of comparison to Alexander of Abonoteichus because both of the cults would have provided a healing function at the time of the Antonine Plague. Furthermore, the cult of Bona Dea shares many characteristics with other cults and practices who were frequently associated with magic, such as the Bacchanalia, rituals which took place at night, and the gathering of women to undertake a ritual. Despite these shared characteristics, the cult remained largely above scrutiny and is not associated with magic in any surviving source. This suggests that another aspect, particularly in the second century AD and during the Antonine Plague, affected perceptions of what was magical. The comparison between these two cults and their relationship to each of the characteristics in this thesis's framework will be discussed in section 6.5.2, in order to try and grasp why a cult, Bona Dea, with seemingly obvious magical qualities was exempt from such scrutiny.

⁹⁸⁰ Staples 1998, 32–36; Ambasciano 2016.

⁹⁸¹ Ambasciano 2016.

Bona Dea was the only institutionalised cult in the Roman Empire entirely reserved for women which began during the Roman Republic. The members were permitted to undertake a nocturnal sacrifice between the third and fourth of December, ‘on behalf’ or ‘for the benefit of the Roman people’ (*pro populo*) and/or (*pro salute populi Romani*).⁹⁸² Sacrifices were traditionally only undertaken by men or male officials, thus making this tradition even more unusual within Roman patriarchal society.⁹⁸³ Beyond this, there was only one other known festival held by the cult on the Aventine Hill in May.⁹⁸⁴ The cult of Bona Dea is unique as it is the only confirmed cult that included both Roman matrons and Vestal Virgins.⁹⁸⁵

With regard to the cult’s mythical origins, Plutarch claims that Bona Dea or Fauna was Faunus’s wife, and that upon discovering that she was drinking wine, he beat her with a branch of myrtle.⁹⁸⁶ Macrobius, on the other hand, insists that she was the daughter of Faunus and that her own father desired her. Upon rebuffing him, he beat her with a myrtle branch and then transformed himself into a serpent, in order to have sexual relations with her.⁹⁸⁷ While these are two divergent origin myths, there are some common elements including myrtle, wine, a serpent, and the violation of female chastity.⁹⁸⁸

The sacrifice and festival of December took place in the magistrate’s home, yet the magistrate did not participate whatsoever in the sacrifice and left his house, leaving his wife to

⁹⁸² Cicero refers to this multiple times including in *Ad Atticum* 1.12–13; Staples 1998, 14–15.

⁹⁸³ Ambasciano 2016, 3; Versnel 1996, 183.

⁹⁸⁴ Ovid, *Fasti* 5.148–158; Ambasciano 2016, 3; Versnel 1996, 183.

⁹⁸⁵ Plutarch, *Cicero* 19; Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 1.13; Versnel 1996, 196.

⁹⁸⁶ This myth is also reflective of the typical ban on Roman women drinking wine; for further information on this, see Cato, Gellius, *Atticus Nights* 10.23; for the myth of Bona Dea and wine, Plutarch, *Caesar* 9; *Quaestiones Romanae* 20; Versnel 1996, 196.

⁹⁸⁷ Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.12.20–29.

⁹⁸⁸ Versnel 1996, 196–197.

oversee the festivities.⁹⁸⁹ Patrician women were said to make up the majority of the membership of the cult of the Bona Dea and could include members of the imperial family. For example, Ovid states that Empress Livia was a patron for the sanctuary on the Aventine Hill, and the dates of the reconstruction of the sanctuary coincide with the years when she could have been a patron, further supporting this statement.⁹⁹⁰ The festival was also attended by the Vestal Virgins and possibly female slaves.⁹⁹¹ Additionally, images of all male animals, gods, or figures were removed from the magistrate's house or covered, and myrtle was specifically removed from the house, thus drawing a connection to the cult's mythical origins.⁹⁹² The statue of Bona Dea was transported from the temple to the hall of the house along with an image of a serpent.⁹⁹³ An altar was created to symbolise where the goddess would dine, and the offering was given 'on behalf of the Roman people'. The Vestal Virgins would then assist with giving a libation offering over the fire, and celebrations would continue throughout the night.⁹⁹⁴ Common offerings to Bona Dea were milk and honey, equating her with the 'Mother Earth Goddess' figure who was representative of both agricultural and female fertility.⁹⁹⁵ Women were allowed to drink wine during this festival, but the wine that was consumed on the evening of her festivities was also referred to as 'milk'.⁹⁹⁶ Any practitioners or other individuals who interrupted these festivities, or who violated these conditions were threatened by divine retribution of blindness.⁹⁹⁷ There are

⁹⁸⁹ Plutarch, *Cicero* 19; Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 1.13.

⁹⁹⁰ Ovid, *Fasti* 5.148–158; Arnhold 2015, 66–67.

⁹⁹¹ Ambasciano 2016, 3; Versnel 1996, 183.

⁹⁹² Regarding the removal of male representations, Juvenal, *Satirae* 6.340; for myrtle, Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae* 20; Versnel 1996, 183.

⁹⁹³ Juvenal, *Satirae* 6.340; Versnel 1996, 183.

⁹⁹⁴ Juvenal, *Satirae* 6.314–345; Cicero, *De haruspicum responsis* 17.37; Versnel 1996, 183.

⁹⁹⁵ Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.12.24–25; Staples 1998, 44–51; Versnel 1996, 183–184.

⁹⁹⁶ For wine, Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.12.24–26; Arnobius, *Adversus Nationes* 5.18; for the ban on women drinking wine normally, see Footnote 986; Versnel 1996, 194–195.

⁹⁹⁷ Propertius IV ix 53–58; Cicero, *De domo sua* XXXIX 104–XL 105; *De haruspicum responsis* XVII 37–XVIII 38; Tibullus, vi 21–24; Arnobius, *Adversus Nationes* 5.18; Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, 1.22.9–11.

many parallels that can be drawn between this festival of the cult of Bona Dea and the Ancient Greek festival of Thesmophoria, a three-day festival dedicated to Demeter and Kore in the fall just before the harvest season began. This further supports the notion that the festival also had an agricultural relevance.⁹⁹⁸

There are several ways of interpreting the activities of this elusive cult. In Macrobius's version of the myth, there is an absence of the *matrona*, or consort to Faunus and mother to Bona Dea, but instead, only the presence of the virgin, Bona Dea.⁹⁹⁹ Therefore, there is an ongoing worship of a figure who represents the Roman ideal surrounding women's chastity. In order to symbolise the sexual abstinence of the female worshippers, husbands and men needed to be removed from the house.¹⁰⁰⁰ It is also possible that the cult was meant to symbolise a negotiation of women's gender roles with Roman ideals, rather than simply promoting abstinence and modesty. Despite Roman idealism of female modesty, Roman women were still expected to engage in sexual relations with their husbands, in order to produce issue. Hence, this festival was meant to symbolise the reconciliation of these contrasting ideals.¹⁰⁰¹ Staples thus refers to the sexual exclusiveness of the cult as 'male avoidance' rather than a complete male absence.¹⁰⁰² There was also a festival that honoured Hercules and whose celebrations took place coincidentally with the festival of Bona Dea in which exclusively male practitioners would participate.¹⁰⁰³ Staples states that the coexistence of these two festivals...

represented the two extremes of male female relationships. On the one hand, the story of Bona Dea and Faunus, which was explicitly intended to account for the goddess' abhorrence of men, dealt with the theme of incest—a form of sexual intercourse that was

⁹⁹⁸ Versnel 1996, 183–184.

⁹⁹⁹ Versnel 1996, 196–197.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Versnel 1996, 194.

¹⁰⁰¹ Versnel 1996, 198.

¹⁰⁰² Staples 1998, 11–12.

¹⁰⁰³ Staples 1998

manifestly and unequivocally unlawful. On the other, the story of Bona Dea and Hercules explored the lawful way in which male and female could come together—marriage. These contradictory themes of union through marriage and sexual avoidance were also reflected in the ritual details of the cult. Thus despite the rhetoric of the cult, which appears to suggest that the boundary that the ritual established between male and female was a solid and uncrossable barrier, the myth and ritual itself explored ways in which that boundary might be negotiated.¹⁰⁰⁴

This explanation argues for a less extreme interpretation of the cult as a method of preserving female members' modesty, but rather a method for negotiating Roman ideals and gender expectations of women.

The consolidation of Roman gender expectations surrounding women is further reflected in the presence of the Vestal Virgins in the rites of the cult of Bona Dea. Despite having to take a chastity vow for most of their lives, Vestal Virgins were free from *patria potestas* and were exempt from most legal constraints that were placed on other Roman women.¹⁰⁰⁵ For example, the *Lex Voconia* which was codified in 169 BC restricted women from inheriting more than 100,000 asses, thus severely limiting the wealth which women could possess. Vestal Virgins, on the other hand, were exempt from such legal restrictions.¹⁰⁰⁶ For this reason, it has been argued that the Vestal Virgins were the only truly 'emancipated' Roman women who did not require a *paterfamilias*. However, over time, the Vestal Virgins fell under the supervision of the Pontifex Maximus, thus making them emancipated from their own fathers, but still under the control of another man. Additionally, if Vestal Virgins were found to have broken their chastity vows, they were often executed publicly in violent methods.¹⁰⁰⁷ Therefore, the cult of Bona Dea also united

¹⁰⁰⁴ Staples 1998, 12.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Dionysus of Halicarnassus *Ρωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία*, 1.76.3; Cantarella 1987, 154.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Gaius, *Institutiones* 2.274; Cantarella 1987, 127.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Dionysus of Halicarnassus *Ρωμαϊκή Αρχαιολογία*, 1.78; Cantarella 1987, 155.

different groups of women who represented both extremes of Roman sexual expectations, Roman *matronae* and Vestal Virgins.

A final interpretation of the festival was that it functioned as a ‘release valve’ for all the social pressures to which Roman women, especially patrician women, were expected to submit throughout the year. Similar arguments have been made regarding why the Bacchanalia became so popular including amongst women.¹⁰⁰⁸ The Bacchic cults were said to have allowed women to drink wine and participate in sexual relations with men and even other women under the premise that they were ‘possessed’ by Bacchus.¹⁰⁰⁹ However, the Bacchanalia was later banned on the grounds that it had become corrupt and intertwined with various conspiracies against the state.¹⁰¹⁰ With regard to the cult of Bona Dea’s December festival, all substances which played a role in Fauna’s mythical downfall such as wine, men, and myrtle were removed or were referred to under a different name, such as ‘milk’.¹⁰¹¹ Moreover, this festival also allowed for women to take part in various social taboos, such as nighttime sacrifice and the consumption of wine.¹⁰¹² Cato even goes as far as to say that married women should ideally not leave their own house often, including to visit other women.¹⁰¹³ Hence, this festival seemingly allowed for women to participate in activities normally prohibited to them, while safely removing them from items which were symbols for the mythical punishment for such behaviours.¹⁰¹⁴ Versnel argues that both the festival of Bona Dea and Thesmophoria were manifestations of a metaphorical warning

¹⁰⁰⁸ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 39.13.9; see section 2.3.2 above.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Cantarella 1987, 128.

¹⁰¹⁰ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 39.13.9; see section 2.3.2 above.

¹⁰¹¹ Ambasciano 2022.

¹⁰¹² Cicero, *De legibus* 2.9.21 states that women were banned from performing nighttime sacrifices; Cazanove 1987; Versnel 1996, 182.

¹⁰¹³ Cato, *De agricultura* 143.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ambasciano 2022.

for women's possible immodest behaviour. Therefore, if they were to drink wine, one must remove other erotic elements, such as myrtle and even the presence of any men completely.¹⁰¹⁵

There is one particular episode of a scandal taking place at the December festival of the cult of Bona Dea. In 62 BC, P. Clodius Pulcher, a quaestor, had allegedly attempted to seduce the wife at-the-time of Caesar, Pompeia, by disguising himself as a pan-flute girl, in order to be admitted into the magistrate's house for the Bona Dea festivities. Cicero emphasises the severity of the heresy committed by Clodius through his violation of these ancient rites.¹⁰¹⁶ The desecration of the rites of the cult of Bona Dea by Clodius ultimately resulted in Caesar divorcing Pompeia, in order to distance himself from the scandal.¹⁰¹⁷ Clodius was later tried for *incestum*, normally a charge that applied to incestual sexual relations or to relations with the Vestal Virgins, but was extended within the context of sacrilege in the cult of Bona Dea. Clodius was eventually acquitted which Cicero strongly argues was owing to his bribery of the jurors, although Clodius's reputation was tainted and affected his political aspirations.¹⁰¹⁸ Therefore, the infringement of the cult of Bona Dea's rituals with regard to the required absence of men was a critical aspect of the cult.

The cult-following of Alexander of Abonoteichus and the cult of Bona Dea represent two healing cults which grew in prominence in the second century AD, contemporaneously to the Antonine Plague. Although the cult of Bona Dea has qualities which are similar to a lot of other magic-associated practices, the cult's legacy has remained free of such implications. Meanwhile, the cult of Alexander is famously associated with magic and quackery, despite fulfilling a similar

¹⁰¹⁵ Versnel 1996, 196–197.

¹⁰¹⁶ Cicero, *De haruspicum responsis* 17; Arnhold 2015, 67.

¹⁰¹⁷ Suetonius, *Caesar* 74.2.

¹⁰¹⁸ Tatum 1999, 74–87.

function to the public of healing. The section 6.5.2 below compares these two cults through the seven characteristics to investigate why Alexander's cult-following was more closely associated with magic than the cult of Bona Dea was.

6.5.1 The cult of Bona Dea during the Antonine Plague

The cult of Bona Dea's significance during the Antonine Plague as a healing cult is not widely recognised, but the cult would have operated during the plague, and some archaeological evidence suggests that the cult of Bona Dea grew in popularity during the period of the plague and even included male members or worshippers. As the cult has a healing function, it is possible that it also provided services to its patrons and even to the public as a result the pandemic.

Ambasciano is the principal modern author who has put forward this hypothesis, and his explanation is rooted in the cult's mythology regarding eyes, and the lasting effects of smallpox on survivors' ocular health.¹⁰¹⁹ As previously stated, those who violated the rites of the cult of Bona Dea were believed to be divinely punished with blindness.¹⁰²⁰ Macrobius additionally attests to the cult as having produced medicine from botanicals which they would then distribute to the public.¹⁰²¹ Meanwhile, as stated in section 6.2 above, many survivors of smallpox frequently suffered permanent blindness.¹⁰²² Therefore, it is possible that the cult of Bona Dea expanded its role in the Roman Empire during the Antonine Plague as a healing cult, particularly with its ability to heal blindness and other ocular diseases.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ambasciano 2016.

¹⁰²⁰ Propertius IV ix 53–58; Cicero, *De domo sua* XXXIX 104–XL 105; *De haruspicum responsis* XVII 37–XVIII 38; Tibullus, I vi 21–24.

¹⁰²¹ Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1 xii 26: *quod in aede eius omne genus herbarum sit ex quibus antistites dant plerumque medicinas* (because her shrine contains all kinds of herbs from which her priests often make medicines).

¹⁰²² See Footnote 869.

With regard to evidence that supports the notion that the cult of Bona Dea had a healing function, there are several inscriptions beginning in the first century AD which allude directly to Bona Dea's healing aspect¹⁰²³:

An altar from *Cissa* (Časka, Isle of Pag) dating from the 1st century CE, is particularly interesting for the sequence of epithets, which comprises *Conservatrix* ('She who preserves') and *Potens mentium bonarum et remediorum* ('the Mistress of wisdom and medicine', which recalls Macrobius' description... an inscription *Pro salute* is known from *Picenum* (Falerone) and has been ascribed to a rather vague 'imperial age'...¹⁰²⁴

There is evidence that the cult of Bona Dea was also worshipped in the Africa, with inscriptions found in each of the provinces, with the exception of Mauretania Tingitana: 'half of the inscriptions were found in Numidia: one came from the city of Zarai, two from Lambaesis, and one from Sila. In Mauretania Caesariensis we count three epigraphic documents: one found in Auzia and two in Nouar. There is only one inscription recovered from Africa Proconsularis, from the city of Mactaris'. All of these inscriptions can be dated to the first half of the third century AD.¹⁰²⁵ Regarding the inscription from Lambaesis, the inscription was found in association with the local Asclepeion and was dedicated by a local legate who thanks the goddess for having recovered his health (*Bonae De/ae / Petroni/us Iustus, / leg(atus) Aug(usti) pr(o) / pr(aetore), recipera/ta salute*).¹⁰²⁶ Some of the other African inscriptions were also found in healing contexts and refer to Bona Dea in conjunction with some of the other healing goddesses : '*Deae Bonae Valetudini Sanctae* (a fragmentary dedication dating from 235 CE and recovered in Auzia-

¹⁰²³ This section discusses several examples, but is not an extensive list.

¹⁰²⁴ Ambasciano 2016, 5–6, drawing on *AE* 1964, 111, no. 270 = Brouwer 1989, p.127–129, no. 127–8, Brouwer p. 95–96, no. 90, respectively.

¹⁰²⁵ Gatto 2020, 68 (my own translation from French); *CIL* VIII 4509 = Brouwer 1989, p. 139, no. 137 (Zarai); *CIL* VIII 10765 = Brouwer 1989, p. 140–141, no. 139 (Lambaesis); *AE* 1906, 92 = Brouwer 1989, p. 140, no. 138 (Sila); *AE* 1960, 107 = Brouwer 1989, p. 140, no. 138 (Lambaesis); *CIL* VIII 20.747 = Brouwer 1989, p. 142–143, no. 141 (Auzia); *AE* 2010, 1842 (Novar); *AE* 2010, 1843 (Novar); *CIL* VIII 11.795 = Brouwer 1989, p. 141–142, no. 140 (Mactaris).

¹⁰²⁶ Gatto 2020, 68–72.

Aumale, Mauretania Caesarensis; now Ghorfa des Ouled Slama/Awlād Slāma/Uled Slama and to *Bona Dea Hygi[ei]a* (Rome, 2nd century CE).¹⁰²⁷

There are many surviving inscriptions which are dedicated to a combination of healing goddesses, such as Valetudo, Hygeia, Fortuna, and Bona Dea which are collectively meant to represent the protectress-goddess.¹⁰²⁸ The combination of these goddesses is also reflected in the iconography of Bona Dea. There is a statuette originally from Latium which has the accompanying inscription: ‘agent of our Rufina [. . .] because of a vision, by order (of the goddess, Bona Dea)’ *Ex visu iussu Bonae Deae / sacr(um) / Callistus Rufinae n(ostrae) act(or)*.¹⁰²⁹ The statue is likely from the second century AD, and was reworked in the third century AD, and represents Bona Dea with a combination of qualities recalling Hygeia and Fortuna through the presence of both the snake and the cornucopia.¹⁰³⁰ Additionally, a statue of Bona Dea has been found in Nîmes which has been identified based on comparative iconography, namely the presentation of her holding a cornucopia with her left arm and her seated, veiled position. The statue cannot be specifically dated, but is from sometime in the beginning of the first century AD to the third century.¹⁰³¹ Thus, there is the diffusion of Bona Dea to the provinces where she likely held an association with health and well-being. Although many of these inscriptions and statues which I have described above cannot be specifically dated, many could date to the second century AD, during the time of the Antonine Plague.

¹⁰²⁷ Ambasciano 2016, 5–6, *CIL* VIII 20.747 = Brouwer 1989, p. 142–143, no. 141; an example from the Germanic provinces is *CIL* VI 72 = Brouwer 1989, 33 which links Bona Dea to Hygeia.

¹⁰²⁸ For example, Brouwer, 1989, 236, 395; Ambasciano 2016, 6.

¹⁰²⁹ Brouwer 1989, p. 82–83, no. 73 = *CIL* XIV 2251; Ambasciano 2016, 6.

¹⁰³⁰ Ambasciano 2016, 6.

¹⁰³¹ Carrier 2017; « Statue de Bona Dea », *Musée de la Romanité*, Nîmes.

Despite the initial exclusion of men from festivities, there is still much surviving evidence to support that there were male devotees to the goddess and the cult.¹⁰³² In Ostia, there are many inscriptions by an M. Maecilius Furianus from the early first century AD, in which he refers to his patronage of a sanctuary outside of the Porta Marina, believed to be associated with the cult of Bona Dea.¹⁰³³ These inscriptions are found on a building in close proximity to a known sanctuary built for Bona Dea in the early first century BC which coincides with the time of the Furianus's donation inscriptions.¹⁰³⁴ Furianus was a consul and *duumvir*, and thus held an official position over civic affairs.¹⁰³⁵ Furthermore, inscriptions detailing his 'name, office, and beneficence' were prominently displayed on the side of the sanctuary that faced a busy road. Therefore, the choice of displaying this information in this way allowed for a great number of passers-by to read these inscriptions.¹⁰³⁶ The prominence of such a political donation demonstrates the civic ideals that were promoted through this cult.¹⁰³⁷

There is even more epigraphic evidence to support that men also became devotees to the cult, thanks to its healing aspect, aside from the inscription from Lambaesis. For example, there is an inscription found on the outside the Temple of Bona Dea which describes how a Felix Asinianus had his eyesight restored after the cult sacrificed a white bull to the goddess, after all other treatments had failed to recover his eyesight.¹⁰³⁸ The exact date of the inscription is unknown, but Brouwer gives an approximate date of sometime between the first century BC to the first century AD.¹⁰³⁹ Other evidence of male worshippers and of the medical implications of

¹⁰³² Arnhold 2015, 69.

¹⁰³³ Brouwer 1989, p. 63–67, no. 55–59.

¹⁰³⁴ Arnhold 2015, 65–66.

¹⁰³⁵ Arnhold 2015, 57–61.

¹⁰³⁶ Arnhold 2015, 65.

¹⁰³⁷ Arnhold 2015, 67.

¹⁰³⁸ *CIL* VI 68 = Brouwer 1989, p. 53–54, no. 44.

¹⁰³⁹ Brouwer 1989, 53.

Bona Dea consist of the Trastevere Inscriptions which consist of five different inscriptions in a small area. One inscription in particular refers to Bona Dea as *Oclata*, once again making a reference to ocular health.¹⁰⁴⁰ These inscriptions were found within the context of a small sanctuary which was dedicated to Bona Dea. These inscriptions also imply that these male patrons had sponsored the construction of the sanctuary, despite their exclusion from the actual rituals. One of these inscriptions is by a M. Vettius Bolanus who had ordered the restoration of the Trastevere cult site.¹⁰⁴¹ Therefore, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that men also became patrons and worshippers of the cult, thanks to its healing function. This function would have continued to have held an importance during the Antonine Plague when peoples' preoccupation with their health would have been intensified.

With regard to the chronology of the cult of Bona Dea and the evidence of its spread, there is still greater investigation needed, in order to prove that the cult expanded in popularity and membership during and as a result of the Antonine Plague. A large concentration of evidence of the worship of Bona Dea in the Roman provinces is found in Aquileia, which as mentioned before, was ravaged by a virus that Galen describes. The dated material in Aquileia begins as early as the second century BC, but with the highest concentration for the second century AD.¹⁰⁴² Ambasciano states that based on archaeological evidence, mainly in the form of inscriptions, that the cult of Bona Dea's popularity would seem to follow this pattern: 'a substantial peak in the 1st century CE seems unquestionable, and so does a decline between 2nd and 3rd century CE'.¹⁰⁴³

¹⁰⁴⁰ *CIL* 6.75 = Brouwer 1989, p. 27–28, no. 13 is the *oclata* inscription in question; Arnhold 2015, 57–62.

¹⁰⁴¹ *CIL* 6.66–67 = Brouwer 1989, p. 25–27, no. 11–12.; Arnhold 2015, 57–61. *CIL* 6.65 also refers to Bolanus's donation to the temple's restoration and *CIL* 6.66 = Brouwer 1989, p. 25, no. 11 is a dedication by Cladus, presumably Bolanus's slave, Brouwer 1989, 292. These inscriptions likely date to the mid-first century AD, as there was a consul named Bolanus in AD 66.

¹⁰⁴² Ambasciano 2016, 13.

¹⁰⁴³ Ambasciano 2016, 8.

However, there are two possible explanations for this which take into account the possible preservation bias: (1) much of this data cannot be attributed to a particular time period, and when this variable is removed, the cult seems to have existed consistently throughout its catchment area, but did not expand; or (2) if chronologically undetermined material is excluded, then there is steep decline of the cult after Antonine Plague. While this evidence is still being investigated, the latter interpretation suggests that the worship of cult of Bona Dea was largely abandoned after the plague, after growing in popularity as a result of the plague.¹⁰⁴⁴ Additionally, Gatto argues that Bona Dea was likely linked to Hygeia originally when she was introduced to Africa, but still maintained a separate identity. Therefore, it would seem as though Bona Dea was introduced into the African provinces and gained a following which included men thanks to her healing powers. However, her popularity based on surviving inscriptions in Africa was relatively late, mainly in the third century AD, compared to the peak of her dedications found in Italy, where the majority are dated to the first century BC to the second century AD. Hence, there seems to be a delay in her worship in the African provinces, possibly because the cult was diffused into the provinces later.¹⁰⁴⁵ Based on the material discovered and studied so far, there seems to be a possible increase in the popularity of the cult in the second century AD in Rome and Aquileia, while there is a delay of this peak in Africa. However, further assessment will yield more accurate results in the future.

Therefore, despite the original purpose of the cult of Bona Dea as a socially sanctioned method for Roman women to take part in social and gender taboos, the cult's significance likely grew and evolved alongside the rise in popularity of healing cults and other medical practices

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ambasciano 2016, 9.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Gatto 2020, 68–80; p. 75 explains how in Africa, there is a 5:4 ratio of male to female dedicants of Bona Dea, thus inverting the ratio in the rest of the Empire.

during the second century AD when there was a greater preoccupation with health and well-being. While investigation into the cult's relevance as a result of the Antonine Plague is still ongoing, the cult was worshipped extensively and provided a healing function in the Empire coincidentally of time of the plague. While it is too early to argue that male membership of the cult grew because of the plague, the number of male dedicants seems to have increased in the first century AD and continued into the third century AD, thus presenting an overlap with the Antonine Plague.

6.5.2 Why was the cult of Bona Dea not perceived as magical?

This section aims to compare the cults of Alexander of Abonoteichus and Bona Dea with regard to how closely they were perceived as magical, through an analysis of the seven characteristics. Moreover, it aims to explain why the cult of Bona Dea did not gain an overall magical connection, despite its many shared features with other magic-associated material. Therefore, I argue that at first glance, when comparing the cult following of Alexander of Abonoteichus and the cult of Bona Dea, there is a seeming paradox: the cult of Bona Dea, a woman-dominated, secretive cult who allowed its followers to engage in normally unacceptable behaviour, was not perceived as magical; meanwhile, the cult led by Alexander, a man who was like many other well-respected philosophical figures in the Roman Empire, eventually gained an association with magic. While Lucian's account is the primary and only contemporary source which describes Alexander and his cult in such a negative light, the legacy of Lucian's account on later perceptions of Alexander is undeniable. Therefore, this section analyses the factors which contributed to the discrepancy of the perceptions between these two cults and uses both positive and negative connotations in our sources to further examine the seven characteristics.

Upon comparing the cults of Alexander to that of Bona Dea, with regard to the first characteristic of 'legally and socially acceptable', there are a few factors which contribute to the perception of Alexander's cult as more magical than that of Bona Dea. However, it should be noted that despite Lucian's scathing account of Alexander, both cults were either state-sanctioned or endorsed by several high-ranking Roman officials. Additionally, notwithstanding Lucian's argument that Alexander was a criminal, Alexander is never formally accused of having broken any laws, magic-associated or otherwise. Meanwhile, the cult of Bona Dea possesses several features in common with other cults or practices that were outlawed, such as the undertaking of a nocturnal sacrifice, especially by a large group of women who were also drinking wine. However, unlike the Bacchanalia that was banned which also included these activities, the cult of Bona Dea remained a state-regulated cult and set of festivities. Further, the majority of the members of the cult of Bona Dea consisted of well-respected patrician women, including the magistrate's wife, and even Empress Livia. Thus, the presence of female members of the imperial family in the cult would have possibly eliminated any threat of a similar conspiracy against the imperial family forming, unlike in the case of the Bacchanalia. The previous section has speculated as to what function the cult of Bona Dea fulfilled for Roman society, and thus why it was preserved as a Roman institution and even expanded outside of Rome. Hence, neither of the cults of Bona Dea nor of Alexander of Abonoteichus were in breach of the law.

With regard to social acceptability, as discussed in section 6.4.4 above, much of Lucian's portrayal of Alexander as a socially unacceptable magic practitioner hinges on his characterisation of him as a 'quack'. Especially during a period of heightened anxiety surrounding health and well-being, such as the Antonine Plague, deceitful medical practitioners

would have been considered even more immoral and malignant, and Lucian draws on this contemporary perspective. Through this illustration, Lucian is thus able to provide the perception to his audience that Alexander is socially subversive. In contrast, while the festivities of the cult of Bona Dea consisted of several socially unacceptable activities, the fact that it was originally state-sanctioned overcame any perceptions that the cult was socially-subversive, and thus magical. Moreover, as seen in the case of the Bona Dea scandal involving Clodius, despite Clodius's obstruction in the court proceedings through bribery, there were laws in place that were also enforced to regulate the cult of Bona Dea and its activities.

With regard to foreignness and exoticism, in the previous analysis of Alexander in section 6.4.4 above, it has already been stated that this characteristic is not central to Lucian's characterisation of Alexander as a magic practitioner. By extension, this characteristic is not relevant in the comparison of these two cults and their perceptions as magical. As discussed in the analysis of Alexander, and in section 5.4.1 above on provincial healing cults and syncretism, provincial cults and practices which were relevant to healing were often adopted into Rome and spread throughout the Empire. Therefore, unlike a lot of material studied throughout this thesis where its perceived association with exoticism or foreignness could have connected it with magic, medical material was not perceived as subversive even with the presence of these elements. As both of these cults had healing functions, this once again reinforces that this characteristic is not relevant to their perceptions as magical.

Both cults have origins or similar elements to Ancient Greek cults. Alexander's cult can be seen as a provincial cult which spread to Rome and across the Empire. Meanwhile, the cult of Bona Dea, even with its possible origins from the Ancient Greek festival of Thesmophoria, was nevertheless a Roman cult which later spread to the provinces. These cults arguably had opposite

trajectories, yet the cult of Bona Dea might have been still perceived as less subversive by virtue that it was a state-sanctioned institution and was disseminated outwards from Rome.

Additionally, based on surviving evidence, the cult of Bona Dea was seemingly more popular and widespread than Alexander's cult, suggesting that it was considered a more mainstream and accepted cult. Therefore, despite the acceptance of Alexander's cult, and even his endorsement by several Roman officials, the dominance of Roman institutions over provincial ones would have still provided the cult of Bona Dea with the advantage of having an official status.

The characteristic which is the most obvious and applicable to the cult of Bona Dea is the characteristic of femininity, as it was a female-exclusive cult. Although women seemed more involved in an official religious position through the cult without the intervention of men, men were not wholly excluded from the cult. This is especially clear when studying the examples of male patrons and worshippers of the cult. Furthermore, while women were allowed to engage in obscene behaviour, particularly during the December festival, women were still expected to follow their cultural norms outside of the festival. The December festivities were also still carried out under very specific conditions, and laws and social sanctions reinforced these restrictions. In previous cases where women were accused of being magic practitioners, they were also characterised as acting against their gender norms, and were described as even masculine. However, the members of the cult of Bona Dea were still perceived as acting in accordance with their gender expectations, and thus did not gain a contemporary perception as magical.

In contrast, while not a direct reference to the violation of gender norms, Lucian emphasises the egregiousness of Alexander's sexuality. I have previously discussed in section 6.4.4 above the reasons why I believe Lucian emphasises this, namely to highlight Alexander's

corruption during a time where scrutiny of one's morality increased, and to distance Alexander from the figure of the abstinent and virtuous holy man. Overall, in doing so, Lucian highlights Alexander's depravity alongside his lack of duty to his followers. Besides one surviving account by Juvenal in the first century AD where he claims that the patrician women desecrated the altars of Bona Dea and Pudicitia with their immodesty and lavishness, there is no other suggestion that the cult of Bona Dea was undutiful or deceitful to its worshippers.¹⁰⁴⁶ In fact, the amount of dedicatory descriptions where dedicants claim that the cult even provided them with a sufficient treatment suggests that the cult had a reputation as an effective healing cult.

As for the privateness of the cults, regarding the first aspect of privacy, there is arguably considerable mystery shrouding the cult of Bona Dea and what might have taken place during the December celebrations beyond the reported details. The lack of official details surrounding the cult was likely to protect the reputations of the women, particularly the patrician ones, who engaged in certain obscene behaviours during the festival. However, as mentioned repeatedly, these obscene activities were carried out in a state-regulated manner. Therefore, although the aspect of privacy is prevalent in the cult of Bona Dea, there was a widely accepted longstanding, mythical origin of the festivities, and thus the cult did not incur suspicion or an association with magic. This contrasts with several other case studies seen throughout this thesis where practices undertaken in private could lead to their perception as subversive and magical.

Furthermore, as discussed in section 6.5.1 above, the cult of Bona Dea expanded outside of Rome in the second century AD, making it less exclusive over time with regard to the gender of members and patrons, and provided more of a civic healing function. Because of this, the

¹⁰⁴⁶ Juvenal 6.305–327.

second aspect of individualistic motivation is absent in the cult as members later provided remedies and healing practices to devotees, and symbolically protected Roman gender ideals in society (section 6.5 above). Conversely, Lucian emphasises that Alexander acts completely selfishly. The perception of magic practitioners and quacks as completely self-motivated is thus ascribed to Alexander in Lucian's account. Additionally, Alexander's operation outside the established institutions can be seen as another way in which he is self-interested and individually-motivated. The members of the cult of Bona Dea, on the other hand, whether they be their female members or later male patrons, were maintaining and participating in a state institution which played a civic role in society. I further hypothesise that Alexander's cult and external operation might have also been considered a threat to the Roman State at the time.¹⁰⁴⁷ As discussed in sections 6.2 and 6.3 above, the later half of the second century AD was marked by a number of social, political, and religious tensions which destabilised the power of the Romano-centric state. Even prior to this period, individuals and groups who operated outside of state-sanctioned institutions could be persecuted or perceived as a threat to the state and social harmony. It is thus likely that with the greater precariousness of Rome's hegemony over the Empire that such individuals and groups would have been considered even more menacing during this period, and local, external leaders such as Alexander posed a particular threat to the centralised government. Moreover, despite his own network of oracles which he employed, Alexander is still self-promoted as a spiritually-superior individual who possessed divine powers. Meanwhile, not one member of the cult of Bona Dea gained individual fame for their service through the cult. There is a clear individualistic motivation which can be perceived in the case of Alexander. Overall, the absence/presence of this aspect is yet another divergence between

¹⁰⁴⁷ Wendt 2016, 34–35; see section 3.4 above.

Lucian's characterisation of Alexander and the cult of Bona Dea which leads to the former's association with magic.

With regard to the next characteristics of manipulative in nature and supernatural associations, for the purposes of this comparison, these two characteristics are investigated together, as it is the type of relationship between the practitioner and the divine which often determines if a practice was perceived as more mundane or magical. As discussed in its mythological origins, the cult of Bona Dea was dedicated to Fauna, but later became associated with a number of other healing and wellness deities. None of these deities have a magical association, such as in the cases of Hecate or Selene. Moreover, as stated in the previous section, the cult of Bona Dea and its sacrifices provided a civic function, and based on the information available, the members and dedicants still undertook practices as a form of supplication to the goddess. As a result, the cult of Bona Dea's ritualistic practice was perceived as a form of mundane and mainstream religious practice. In the case of Alexander, Alexander proclaims himself as a prophet of Asclepius which Lucian insists is a false claim that Alexander uses to scam his followers. As discussed in section 6.4.4 above, because of Lucian's insistence that Alexander is simply a con-artist with no real divine power, by extension, Lucian argues that Alexander does not have control over the divine, but simply misrepresents the divine. While previous examples of perceived magical practice usually involve the practitioner's attempt to control the divine or others by means of the divine, the overlap of the concepts of the magic practitioner and the quack who misrepresents the divine to manipulate others, nevertheless associates Alexander with magic. Once again, based on Lucian's representation of Alexander, Alexander would have been perceived as magical in contrast to the cult of Bona Dea.

Finally, with regard to ‘secret and arcane knowledge’, both the members of the cult of Bona Dea and Alexander can be seen as possessing arcane or specialised knowledge. However, Lucian largely attributes Alexander’s skills as scam tricks. Beyond this, the cult of Bona Dea was a recognised, official Roman institution, while Alexander and his cult, despite their endorsement from several high-ranking Roman officials, still operated outside of Roman institutions, and thus lacked an official status. This reflects the tendency that charismatic leaders who operated outside the boundaries of state institutions were more likely to incur greater suspicion as magic practitioners.¹⁰⁴⁸ This is likely another reason why Lucian’s disparaging account of Alexander resonated with contemporary perceptions of magic. Meanwhile, the cult of Bona Dea was an official Roman institution, and despite some of its magic-associated features, its reputation remained untarnished by perceptions of magic.

Overall, the cult of Bona Dea’s lack of perception as magical is largely owing to its state-sanctionedness, even though it possessed features which would have normally associated the cult with magic. Meanwhile, thanks to Lucian’s characterisation of Alexander as a quack or magic practitioner alongside a few other factual features of the cult, such as its operation outside of state institutions, Alexander’s lasting legacy as a magical practitioner is resultant.

With regard to the transformation of the concept of magic during the Antonine Plague, the analysis and comparison of these two case studies demonstrate that the perception of magic was tied to a practitioner or cult’s perceived efficacy and benevolence with being able to heal devotees. The analysis of Alexander demonstrated how the concept of the quack also became associated with the magic practitioner. This perception is further perpetuated when comparing

¹⁰⁴⁸ Reimer 1999, 64–66.

these two case studies, as Lucian's characterisation of Alexander as a quack led to his cult as more closely perceived as magical than that of the cult of Bona Dea. Based on surviving archaeological evidence, there is more evidence to support that there were more followers of the cult of Bona Dea who worshipped the goddess for her healing abilities, and many of the recovered dedications demonstrate the dedicants' gratitude. Although there is some evidence of Alexander's influence including outside of Asia Minor, there have not yet been inscriptions found that thank Alexander or Glycon specifically for their having successfully healed or averted the plague by individual worshippers. This perhaps hints at the greater popularity and perceived efficacy of the cult of Bona Dea in comparison to Alexander's cult. Thus, hopefully in the future, greater archaeological evidence will yield more information about both of these cults, the perceptions surrounding them, and their roles during the Antonine Plague.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the Antonine Plague and its possible impact on the people within the Roman Empire and their perceptions of the concept of magic. This chapter has also investigated the information available regarding two healing cults which would have held a significant role at the time of the Antonine Plague, those of Alexander of Abonoteichus and the cult of Bona Dea. Finally, this chapter has analysed each of these cults by using this thesis's seven characteristics of magic. In the case of Alexander of Abonoteichus, this analysis specifically identifies how Lucian illustrates Alexander as a magic practitioner in his account. Meanwhile, the analysis of the cult of Bona Dea determines why the cult seemingly did not incur accusations of magical practice, despite sharing several features with other magic-associated material. The concept of magic as derived from the analysis of Alexander of Abonoteichus and Alexander's cult's subsequent comparison with the cult of Bona Dea through the seven characteristics has provided information for this thesis's conclusions. The conclusion will then

discuss the possible evolution of the concept of magic as a result of the multi-textured social changes in the second century AD, including those resulting from the Antonine Plague, and the relevance of each characteristic to the concept chronologically. I am looking forward to future discoveries regarding the Antonine Plague, Alexander of Abonoteichus, and the cult of Bona Dea. I began this project during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in October 2020, and during this time, I witnessed the evolution of many practices, both individual and societal in response to the pandemic, and even participated in some of these new behaviours myself. Even if future evidence were to support the notion that the Antonine Plague was not as deadly as some scholars have argued with regard to a smaller range of fatalities of only 1–2% of the population, anthropologically-speaking, I am sure many individuals in the Roman Empire were still greatly affected by the outbreak and would have at least temporarily altered their own behaviour either to avert or recover from the disease. It is these changes that fascinate me, and I look forward to future discoveries about all of the topics discussed in this chapter.

7. Thesis conclusion

This thesis concludes by making some final observations about the concept of Roman magic and its evolution as a result of multi-textured social changes in the second century AD, including greater concern with health and disease. In order to do so, this conclusion will directly compare the features of the texts of Apuleius, Apollonius, and Alexander. This thesis is not concerned with the historicity or otherwise of the accounts, nor with the guilt of the subjects, but with what we are able to learn about perceptions of magic and acceptable religio-medical behaviour from the accusations and defences in these texts. These authors draw on wider contemporary perceptions of magic which they infuse into the characterisations of their respective subjects. Moreover, the relationships between each author and his subject differ: the *Apologia* is autobiographical; Philostratus retrospectively describes Apollonius as a miracle-worker to counteract Apollonius's arrest as a magic practitioner; and Lucian defames his contemporary, Alexander, who is held in high regard by several high-status Roman officials, and his cult is honoured locally and even affirmed outside of Asia Minor. Therefore, these three case studies illustrate in different ways how each author associates or dissociates the figure from contemporary ideas of magic.

This thesis has attempted to identify if and how the concept of magic transformed over the course of the second century AD based on the three texts about Apuleius, Apollonius of Tyana, and Alexander of Abonoteichus. There are several chronological factors between these texts and the figures which they describe which must be taken into account. Apollonius was a first-century AD philosopher, while Apuleius and Alexander were both active in the second century. Apuleius and Alexander were both contemporaries to the Antonine Plague. However, the events outlined in the *Apologia* take place in AD 158/159 and pre-date the reported

introduction of the plague into the Roman Empire, and the text therefore does not provide any perspective on the pandemic itself.¹⁰⁴⁹ Therefore, Apuleius's text can be used as an account which provides a perspective of magic in the early second century AD, prior to the Antonine Plague. Meanwhile, although the events of Apollonius's life would have taken place an entire century before the period of which this thesis concerns itself, Philostratus wrote the account of his life in the early third century AD. The various tensions and crises in the second half of the second century AD are not mentioned specifically in the *Tὰ ἐς τὸν Τυανέα Ἀπολλώνιον*, but Philostratus's perspective must have been influenced by societal changes which resulted from this period. Although Lucian's account does not mention the Antonine Plague specifically, despite being written c. 180 AD, in the last phase of the outbreak, it is clear that Alexander's cult practice was contemporaneous to the height of the pandemic, and his rapid growth in popularity as a healer might have been in part thanks to the plague and the increased concern with health and wellness.¹⁰⁵⁰ As a result, this account will be taken as a reflection of the contemporary perceptions of magic in the late second century AD and during the Antonine Plague. Overall, based on the chronology in which each of these texts was written, they provide insight into the perspectives of magic early on, during, and after the second century AD, via Apuleius', Lucian's, and Philostratus's texts respectively.

7.1 Characteristic 1: Subversive behaviour, or legal and social acceptability

With regard to the first characteristic of 'subversive behaviour, or legal and social acceptability', all three men are represented as marginal figures, thus making them susceptible to accusations of magic. While Alexander's legacy is by far the most negative in comparison to Apuleius and Apollonius, Alexander was ultimately the one exception who was never put on trial or convicted

¹⁰⁴⁹ Costantini 2019, 10.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Thonemann 2021, 3.

of practising magic. When it comes to how each figure deals with law enforcement, Apuleius's *Apologia* can be seen as his boasting of having beaten his legal opposition. Apuleius's *Apologia* demonstrates a continuity of the legal acceptability of magic from the first-early second centuries AD, like many of the examples discussed in section 2.3 above, as the primary accusation against him of using a love spell, derives from the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*. This would also support the argument for evolution, as the *Apologia* is most likely written the earliest of the three texts.

Meanwhile, there is an interesting contradiction which seems to occur when studying Alexander from this characteristic, as Alexander is portrayed as by far the most reprehensible of the three figures, yet by Lucian's own account, is never actually arrested or charged. The accusations Lucian aims at Alexander are all distasteful, yet none of these crimes are based on laws traditionally associated with magic (also section 2.3 above). That being said, there have also been several examples where accusations of magic-related activities are also accompanied by other crimes, such as sexual misconduct, and Lucian also applies this to his characterisation of Alexander. I have mentioned twice in Chapter 6, in sections 6.4.4 and 6.5.2 above that because Alexander is never tried for any of his alleged crimes, Lucian must emphasise Alexander's social-subversiveness, in order to sway his audience to negatively perceive Alexander. Additionally, this time period also witnesses the conceptualisation of the quack, a sub-category or adjacent concept to magic which involves misrepresenting the divine, rather than misusing them, as understood in earlier decades. I hypothesise that this characterisation would have been effective at the time at which Lucian was writing, during the Antonine Plague, as there would have been many individuals and families who grew in desperation for medical aid during the

plague. The concept of a greedy quack who took advantage of such desperation would have been perceived as even more dangerous during this crisis.

In contrast, Philostratus praises Apollonius for bravely facing legal trials and tribulations, when he feels compelled to defy them for his philosophical or altruistic purposes. This can be seen as the early use of the trope of asceticism and by extension martyrdom, concepts which began to form in the third century AD. Therefore, even though Apollonius is arrested, brought to trial, and almost convicted of magical crimes relating to divination, Philostratus emphasises Apollonius's innocence and his magnanimity as a philosophically-pure individual who is divinely blessed. There is no single explanation for the changes in perceptions of magic's subversiveness and legal (un)acceptability throughout the second century AD and even subsequently in the early third century. However, the Antonine Plague brought about a general rise in political tension and social anxiety which would have led to the greater scrutiny of individuals' morality beyond the law, further supporting why Lucian makes Alexander seem completely immoral. Since Philostratus's text reveals contemporary attitudes towards magic after the second century AD, his characterisation of Apollonius demonstrates the antithesis of the magic practitioner, the altruistic wandering holy man who is willing to challenge legal authority, in order to uphold his beliefs. The legal unacceptability of an accused practitioner becomes less significant in the accounts during and after the second half of the second century AD, and the intention of a practitioner became increasingly important for associating or dissociating a subject from magic. This period also reflects other systemic tensions, including the rise of local leadership in communities that became disconnected from the centralised Roman government. Social acceptability and its relationship with the concept of magic will be further investigated in

the following characteristics, as they are closely tied with the concepts of exoticism, femininity, and intentionality.

7.2 Characteristic 2: Exoticism and foreignness

In terms of the ‘exoticism and ‘foreignness’ of the concept of magic as presented through these three texts, there is a continuity in the presentation of all three subjects as spiritual specialists who gain special knowledge or perform certain rituals during their travels. However, we have seen that this characteristic becomes less relevant over time with regard to the concept of magic, based on all of three accounts. Beginning with Apuleius, he travels from North Africa to Athens and later to Alexandria, because of his willingness to receive greater philosophical and spiritual training, something that would have aligned him with the practices of the learned and well-respected Second Sophistic community. However, it is clear even from his account that his position as an outsider to the community of Oea and his possession of ‘Other’ knowledge from foreign places opens him to accusations of magic. This reflects the earlier perceptions of the association of exoticism with magic as seen in examples in Chapter 2 and as discussed in section 3.2 above. Meanwhile, because Lucian’s account of Alexander is polemical, he obviously does not characterise him as a learned philosopher who seeks other opportunities for spiritual enlightenment, unlike in the cases of Apuleius and Apollonius. Alexander is still described by Lucian as travelling to different cities and even from Pontus to Rome, but Lucian emphasises that his doing so is exclusively motivated by his greed and desire to get closer to other high-ranking Roman officials. Moreover, Alexander is described as only travelling from his region of origin in Asia Minor to Rome, as opposed to Apuleius and Apollonius who are described as choosing to travel to more ‘exotic’ and ‘foreign’ lands to gain greater spiritual enlightenment. Finally, Philostratus is careful to frame Apollonius’s travels as an act of bravery and one that he undertakes to enhance his philosophical knowledge. Although there is still a possibility that

Philostratus's contemporary audience might have looked upon Apollonius's travels to foreign lands suspiciously, like in the case of Apuleius, Philostratus makes sure to draw on contemporary philosophical beliefs where Apollonius's travels would have seemed like an intellectual undertaking. Furthermore, Apollonius, as described by Philostratus, is granted the ultimate divine gift of *prognosis* from his travels, making his possession of foreign knowledge even more formidable.

Returning to why I argue that this characteristic becomes less relevant over time to the concept of magic, possibly as a consequence of the Antonine Plague: the pandemic would have led to a greater preoccupation with health, and as was discussed in section 5.4.1 above, healing practices which had a foreign origin were often not perceived as subversive, if they were deemed as efficacious. Because there is a particular emphasis on Alexander and Apollonius's ability (or inability) to avert plague or heal illness, and the authorship of these accounts correspond to the years of the plague and the period after, the foreignness of their knowledge would not have been considered as suspicious or magical from contemporary perspectives. This contrasts with earlier examples, such as Apuleius's account and the examples investigated in Chapters 2 and 3 where practices and materials which had a foreign association could lead to additional associations with magic, and vice versa.

7.3 Characteristic 3: Femininity

The characteristic of 'femininity' in the context of these three texts also extends to the notions of gender roles and sexuality with regard to magic. There is an evolution in the association of magic with the characteristic of femininity, gender, and sexuality, between these three accounts, early on, during, and after second century AD. Beginning with Apuleius's *Apologia*, there is an attempt by the prosecution at effeminising Apuleius while also accusing him of magical practice.

This demonstrates a continuity of earlier decades and even centuries where individuals who were perceived as acting against their gender norms were additionally associated with magic, or vice versa. An additional example of this includes the descriptions of literary witches and of the women in Tacitus's account who are described as both magic practitioners and also masculine. Alexander, on the other hand, is described by Lucian as sexually depraved. However, Lucian does not effeminise Alexander for his sexual relations, but rather once again highlights his lack of morality and his involvement in adultery. Meanwhile, earlier accounts of accused magic practitioners also often accused them of sexual misconduct, thus it can be argued that there is a continuity of such associations from earlier perceptions into the accounts of Apuleius and Alexander's lives. Finally, Philostratus's description of Apollonius is once again consistent with the emergence of the ascetic holy man in the early third century AD who forsakes all sexual relations. Therefore, over time, even men's sexuality and promiscuity, and not simply women's, also fell under greater scrutiny. This was possibly as a result of the multi-textured social change in the second century AD where society was more critical of behaviours which were deemed as immoral. Those who were perceived as acting unvirtuously could also be associated with magic from contemporary perspectives.

There is also a possibility that the increased absence of female actors with significant agency, especially in the accounts of Alexander and Apollonius's lives might reflect the lack of women in official and recognised positions in the medical and healing spheres. The spread of the Antonine Plague might have led to an increase in the perceived importance of medical and healing practitioners, thus resulting in men such as Apollonius and Alexander eclipsing literary representations of women healing-practitioners.

7.4 Characteristic 4: Privateness

With regard to ‘privateness’, this characteristic becomes more difficult to assess because through the case studies of this thesis, it is clear that privateness can refer to a range of things. In Chapter 3, when this characteristic was first introduced, the characteristic was described by the way in which magic practitioners would undertake rituals in private, possibly to avoid public scrutiny as many magic-related activities bordered on the legally or socially acceptable. Additionally, most magical spells had an aspect of self-interest to them. Apuleius’s account reflects both of these aspects and is in keeping with earlier examples discussed in Chapter 2 from which the characteristic in Chapter 3 was drawn. In Chapter 4, we discuss how Apuleius was accused of having performed several magical rituals in private, adding greater suspicion to his activities. However, Apuleius insists that these rituals were simply his own philosophical and scientific experiments and that some of them, such as the dissection of the fish, he even performed publicly in front of a number of witnesses. Therefore, he argues if he was willing to perform the ritual in public and in front of others, he was obviously not engaging with magic. Thus, there is a congruency between subversive behaviour and privateness. Apuleius further argues that some of the practices which he undertook were for the benefit of others, such as the healing ritual for Thallus, and so he was not selfishly motivated in his acts beyond occasionally wanting to undertake a scientific experiment.

In Chapter 5’s overview of medicine, the aspect of privacy was only required for practices which were deemed as subversive, such as in relation to poison and birth control methods. On the other hand, studying the concept of medicine also highlighted the perceptions of individualistic motivation, and introduced the concept of the quack. It is clear that Lucian refers to Alexander as a quack and thus selfishly-motivated. Contrastingly, the aspect of privacy is largely absent from Lucian’s account of Alexander. Rather, Lucian argues that Alexander is a

public figure who basks in public recognition. It can be said that the only acts which Lucian claims Alexander undertakes in private are to do with his methods of deception. In the case of Apollonius, the aspect of privateness is presented in the form of asceticism whereby Apollonius lives outside the expectations of normal Roman society. Put simply, Apollonius's divine powers represent an entire lifestyle, and the miracles he is able to perform are consequences of this.

Unlike Alexander, Apollonius is presented as completely selfless in all of his acts. I hypothesised in section 6.5.2 that the reason that Alexander and his cult might have been more closely associated with magic than the cult of Bona Dea was owing to the possible increased threat which Alexander posed to a centralised system which was under pressure in the later half of the second century AD. I further suggest that by the early third century, that as a result of the socio-political turbulence in the second century AD, that there was an increase in local charismatic leaders, possibly indicating a consequential form of Roman political decentralisation. If this is the case, this suggests that Alexander in the second century AD would have been considered as more menacing for his operation outside of state-sanctioned institutions, whereas Philostratus's representation of Apollonius's external operation might have been somewhat normalised by the third century AD. Overall, there is a difficulty in finding common ground for all three figures under this characteristic, and admittedly, I have expanded this characteristic throughout this thesis to include the aspect of individualistic intention. Based on these accounts, it would seem that the association of rituals taking place in private with magic become less relevant, possibly because of the increased integration of the healing practitioner/quack with the miracle-worker/magic-practitioner. On the other hand, the aspect of individualistic motivation becomes even more relevant in the discussion of magic during and after the Antonine Plague, as the medical quack was associated with magic.

7.5 Characteristic 5: Manipulative in nature

In the case of ‘Manipulative in nature’, earlier associations of magic, as described in Apuleius’s account, refer to the practitioner’s seeming control over the divine, or their hubristic attempt at attaining unity with the divine. Thus, Apuleius can be seen as an example of this characteristic as described in Chapter 3 and an extension of examples discussed in Chapter 2. Meanwhile, Lucian argues that Alexander has no real power over the divine, but that he misrepresents the divine, in order to manipulate and control others. This once again emphasises that the notion that quackery, either in the spiritual or medical sense, became associated with magic. Finally, Philostratus makes it clear that Apollonius does not obviously control or manipulate the divine, but rather, he is the recipient of divine blessings such as the gift of *prognosis* or the guidance of a *daimon* which leads him to travel great distances. The increase of literary representations of Philostratus’s Apollonius-type, miracle-working figure in the late second century–early third century AD alongside the development of the concept of the quack might have led to increasing associations between spiritual quackery with magic as a form of divine manipulation.

7.6 Characteristic 6: Supernatural associations

While the previous paragraph has discussed the divine power or lack thereof of these three figures as described in these accounts, the types of supernatural deities associated with these figures differs, possibly even chronologically. As stated in section 3.5 above, lesser deities and certain gods and goddesses, such as Hecate and Selene were more closely associated with magical practice. This is somewhat alluded to in Apuleius’s account when the prosecution accuses him of worshipping a bizarre and skeletal figurine-representation of some lesser deity and even using other nefarious cultic objects. In rebuttal, Apuleius claims that the former is simply a representation of Mercury and therefore, a mainstream god. On the other hand, both Alexander and Apollonius are presented or present themselves as the agents of Asclepius and/or

Apollo, mainstream gods associated with healing, rather than drawing on the power of a lesser deity. However, in the case of Alexander, he also draws on the power of another lesser deity, that of Glycon, but still connects his powers to that of Asclepius and Apollo. Unlike in the earlier case of Apuleius, the later case studies of Alexander and Apollonius demonstrate that magic associations were more dependent on the authenticity of a practitioner's association with a god. Again, this evolution of this characteristic demonstrates the inclusion of the quack within the concept of the magic. Additionally, the increased association of specialist practitioners with Asclepius and Apollo further reflects the increased overlap between magic and medicine, possibly as a result of the Antonine Plague and the ensuing general preoccupation with health.

7.7 Characteristic 7: Secret or arcane knowledge

The final characteristic of 'secret or arcane knowledge' as discussed throughout this chapter hinges on the perception of a figure as a legitimate spiritual specialist or a quack-magic practitioner. The earlier concept of magic with that of quackery became increasingly associated in the second century AD. The closer interrelationship between medical quackery and magic was a result of the Antonine Plague where the ability of a specialist to heal others successfully played a significant role in their perceived reputation. The perception of the legitimacy of an individual according to a given source could depend on multiple factors, such as if the practitioner in question was from a rivalling philosophical or medical school from the source describing them.¹⁰⁵¹ This is made especially clear in the cases of Lucian's depiction of Alexander and Philostratus's depiction of Apollonius where the authors' opinions of their subjects contrast significantly with other sources which describe them. Some types of qualifications or specialist training could grant an individual an improved reputation, as did Apuleius's education, yet this

¹⁰⁵¹ Such as in section 5.9.1 above regarding the Empiricists vs. Dogmatists and in 6.4.1. where Alexander is clearly at odds with the Epicureans.

did not guarantee that a figure was above any association with magic, and his intellectual elitism was used by his accusers to cast aspersions at him. Therefore, this characteristic in association with magic was all together a question of perception by a certain individual rather than directly correlated to an individual's knowledge or qualifications. Additionally, the ability to establish a practitioner's efficacy possibly became even more difficult after the plague, as the new pathogen would have likely evaded the abilities of the once well-respected and trained physician. As a result, it is understandable why 'miracle-working' became a new phenomenon, as traditional explanations for causes of diseases could no longer be upheld when faced with a new form of infectious disease. This once again supports the later emergence of the local, charismatic, spiritual leader who operated outside the boundaries of established institutions, but gained a reputation as a skilled practitioner within the communities they served.

Final thoughts

Overall, this thesis has refrained from empirically defining the term 'magic', but has instead created and presented a methodology for studying the margins of the concept of magic over the course of the second century AD. This methodology was presented in Chapter 3 with the introduction of seven characteristics which could be used as tools for studying magic-associated people, practices, and items. This is not a list of criteria that help to identify magic, but a selection of recurring features that I have observed to be recurrent in both ancient and secondary sources; the inclusion or exclusion of one or several of these characteristics is neither significant nor diagnostic. These characteristics have nevertheless been helpful when studying any of the case studies that were presented in this thesis. These characteristics often intersect with one another, and they can play in different, even contradictory ways around liminal practices and individuals. Moreover, they have allowed for a method of studying the possible evolution of the perception of the concept of magic into the second century AD. I am very aware that my list of

seven characteristics is not exhaustive for grasping the concept of ancient magic, and I am certainly open to further nuancing of each characteristic and to exploring other methods for studying margins of magical material. However, for the scope of this thesis, I feel that they have helped considerably in attempting to understand a multi-layered and intangible concept, such as ‘magic’. In mathematical terms, I argue that understanding of the concept of ancient magic is like an asymptote, where one is able to grasp an increasingly accurate understanding of the concept, but is never truly able to reach a fully-satisfying and all-encompassing definition. Therefore, this thesis has attempted to approach the concept of ancient magic as closely as possible, while acknowledging that a thorough definition can never be reached.

To return to my original questions at the beginning of this thesis relating to the Shel Silverstein poem: 1) what really qualifies as magic to any given individual? 2) Can anyone be a practitioner of magic? My answer to both of these questions is that anyone can be a magic practitioner, as long as someone, such as a textual or historical viewpoint refers to them as such.

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