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Magic in Pliny the Elder revisited

Аннотация. Статья посвящена критической ревизии сведений о сущности, истории и содержании античной магии, которые Плиний Старший излагает в 28-й и 30-й книгах своей «Естественной истории», а также анализу ряда теоретических и источниковедческих подходов к этим сведениям, каковые сложились к настоящему моменту в современной науке. Общий пересмотр концепции магии у Плиния Старшего обусловлен, во-первых, тем, что наши знания о магии и ее теоретическом понимании у древних невероятно расширились за эти полвека, а с другой стороны, тем, что за последние десятилетия сильно изменился научный подход к «Естественной истории»: не переставая (как и для средневекового читателя) быть чудесным бабушкиным сундуком, из которого достают самые разные вещи для самых разных исследовательских целей, «Naturalis Historia» стала интересна и сама по себе, как opus sui generis. Магия у Плиния Старшего рассматривается в статье, исходя в первую очередь из философских и идеологических предпосылок самой книги. Автор кратко излагает содержание сведений Плиния о магии и приходит к следующему выводу: все, что говорит Плиний о магии (к которой относится с нескрываемым презрением, см. его риторические выпады против магии в 28-й книге и в очерке истории магии в 30-й книге), упирается по сути в две прочные и взаимосвязанные идеи. Во-первых, это очевидное первенство и главенство Рима над всем «земным кругом», а во-вторых, идея humanitas, которая, подобно платоническому благу, эманирует из Рима на весь подвластный ему мир, вплоть до мест, где истинно человеческое фактически отсутствует.

Ключевые слова: Плиний Старший, римская религия, греческая религия, античная магия, иатромагия, история магии, humanitas

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Magic in Pliny the Elder revisited

Abstract. The article is devoted to a critical revision of information about the essence, history and content of ancient magic, which Pliny the Elder presents in Books 28 and 30 of his *Natural History*, as well as to analyzing a number of theoretical and source-study approaches to this information, which have developed to date in modern scholarship. The general reconsideration of Pliny the Elder's concept of magic is caused, firstly, by the fact that our knowledge of magic and its theoretical underpinnings among the ancients has greatly expanded over the past half century, and, on the other hand, by the fact that in the past few decades the scientific approach to *Natural History* has greatly changed. Without ceasing to be, as it was for the medieval reader, a wonderful grandmother's chest from which a variety of things can be obtained for various research purposes, *Naturalis Historia* became interesting in and of itself, as an *opus sui generis*. In the article, discussion of magic in Pliny the Elder derives primarily from the philosophical and ideological premises of *Natural History* itself. The author briefly summarizes Pliny's information about magic and comes to the conclusion that all that Pliny says about magic (which he treats with undisguised contempt, see his rhetorical attacks on magic in Book 28 and in the essay on the history of magic in Book 30) in essence rests on two firm and interrelated ideas. The first — the obvious primacy and supremacy of Rome over the whole *orbis terrarum*, and the second — the idea of *humanitas*, which, like the Platonic Good, emanates from Rome to the whole world subject to it, even to those places where the truly human is practically absent.

Keywords: Pliny the Elder, Roman religion, Greek religion, ancient magic, iatromagia, history of magic, humanitas

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It goes without saying that Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* is one of our most important sources of ancient magic. One way or another, Pliny must be taken into account by a historian of ancient magic proper, by a western medievalist, and, not least, even by an expert in Slavic magical practices. Furthermore, it is true that in the *Natural History* we find a great variety of magical recipes, to which one might find parallels in the history of almost any culture. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Pliny's text is indisputably the magical reference text *par excellence* of the ancient and early modern world, it turns out that, in the end, it is only used uncritically for some information, as if we have forgotten that *Naturalis Historia* is yet not an "encyclopedia" in our sense of the word, but a unique author's work written by a man named Caius Plinius Secundus at a certain time, in accordance with a certain technique and certain strategy of writing and narration chosen by this person, determined by the communicative goals specific to the author, and presented to specific readers.

I did not title my paper "Magic in Pliny the Elder Revisited" merely on account of its terse academical sonority. On the one hand, I should like to pay tribute to the memory of the great French philologist and publisher of Pliny's "magical" books, Alfred Ernout, whose article "La magie chez Pline L'Ancien" was published fifty-four years ago, in 1964, in the *Festschrift* dedicated to Jean Bayet, and which is still the only work attempting to summarize and conceptualize the contents of Pliny the Elder's ideas about magic [Ernout 1964]. On the other hand, I dare to use this title in order to clarify and, to an extent, overcome A. Ernout's views on Pliny's magic. The general revision of our concepts of the idea of magic in Pliny the Elder is due, firstly, to the fact that our knowledge of ancient magic, its theoretical understanding, has incredibly expanded over this half a century; and, secondly, to the fact that in the last few decades the scholarly approach to *Natural History* has greatly changed: without ceasing to be a 'grandmother's chest' full of wonders, as for a medieval reader (cf. [Bodson 1997: 327: *on lit peu Pline l'Ancien pour lui-même*]), from which the most diverse things are obtained for a variety of research purposes, *Naturalis Historia* became interesting in itself, as an *opus sui generis* (ex. gr., [König, Winkler 1979; Serbat 1973; 1986; Beagon 1992; Murphy 2004; Naas 2002; Doody 2010; Laenh 2013]). Proceeding from these premises, I undertook my own consideration of magic in Pliny the Elder, which I should like to present to you, trying to keep in this phrase a worthy balance between "magic" and "Pliny".

Let me begin by recalling what Pliny the Elder says about magic in *Natural History*. It should be noted that information about magic and magicians is scattered throughout the *Natural History*, but the central books in which Pliny offers, on the one hand, the theory of magic, and on the other — its history, are Books 28 and 30. The information relating to the history of magic contained in Book 30 (*NH* 30.1–7) has always been viewed as the most important. The author immediately calls magic *magicas uanitates* (fraudulent lies of the Magi), thereby immediately setting the tone for his story. In Book 37 (*NH* 37.14.1) he talks about magic in similar terms: *magorum infandam uanitatem*. A person who resorts to magical means of treatment is considered to be *obscenus et nefandus* (immoral and wicked) by Pliny (*NH* 28.2.9). It is worth noting that history of magic is firmly connected by Pliny with theory of magic and is set out as follows[1]:

[1] All translations are cited after H. Rackham (*NH*, Book 1) and W. H. S. Jones (*NH*, Books 28–30) from Loeb Classical Library, except for specified instances.

I — *De origine magices* (Origin of magic);

II — *Quando et a quo coeperit. A quibus colebrata sit* (Date and place of its commencement, by whom practiced);

III — *An exercuerit eam Italia. Quando primum senatus uetuerit hominem immolari* (Whether carried on in Italy. Human sacrifice, when first prohibited by the Senate);

IV — *De Galliarum druidis* (The Druids of the Gauls);

V — *De generibus magices* (Kinds of magic);

VI — *Magorum perfugia* (Evasions of Mages);

VII — *Opinio Magorum de talpis* (Magicians' view as to Moles).

As you can see from this content of the beginning of Book 30, most probably written by Pliny himself, we have before us a historical exposition, at the center of which is Italy, as is almost always the case in Pliny, but this exposition (as is already clear from the content itself!) is presented in a certain (tendentious) way due to the negative evaluation of magic by Pliny. As always in Pliny, the very exposition is much richer than the dry, but tendentious index. Pliny says that magic — the most deceptive of all the arts (*fraudelentissima artium*), flourished and flourishes throughout the oecumene at all times (*plurimum in toto terrarum orbe plurimisque saeculis ualuit*). The reason for such flowering, as Pliny maintains (*auctoritas maxima!*), is that magic absorbed into itself the most powerful *artes* in men's eyes (*imperiosissimas humanae mentis complexa in unam se redegit*), namely: medicine, *uires religionis* (whose exact significance has long puzzled philologists) and astrology (*artes mathematicas*). Holding men's emotions by such a three-fold bond (*triplici uinculo*), magic continues to exist in the time of Pliny, and in the East even commands the kings of kings (*ut hodieque etiam in magna parte gentium praeualeat et et Oriente regum regibus imperet*).

The history of magic follows here the theory according to which magic is the sum of three things: astrology, *religio* and medicine, the last of which will occupy Pliny further and about which he says that this "magical" medicine is pretending (*inrepsisse*!) to be "the highest and the holiest" (*altior sanctiorque medicina*). This last point will constitute one of the axes of my further presentation. According to Pliny, referring to the *auctores*, the history of magic originates in Persia from Zoroaster (*in Perside a Zoroastre*), he does not neglect to note however, that it is unclear whether Zoroaster refers to only one person. Here Pliny refers to Eudoxus of Cnidus, who asserts that, if, again, we are to believe Pliny's text, this same Zoroaster lived some six thousand years before Plato's death, and this information is supposedly confirmed by Aristotle. On the other hand, Hermippus of Smyrna, who *de tota ea arte diligentissime scripsit*, claims that Zoroaster himself learned magic from a certain Azonacus who lived five millennia before the Trojan War. This information surprises Pliny, first of all, because from those times (of Azonacus) no magical works have survived. This last statement makes it clear that for Pliny the magic of his time is already clearly and inextricably linked with books and book culture. Further, he names the names of famous magicians whose works were not preserved until his time: Apusorus, Zaratus, the Babylonians Marmarus and the Arabantiphocus, and also the Assyrian Tarmoenda. Pliny's surprise is also caused by the fact that there is no mention of magic in Homer, unless, according to him, we count Homer's story of Proteus, the singing of the Sirens, the Circe, and the

calling of the dead (*inferum euocatione*). Pliny also does not find in his sources any information whatever about how magic appeared in the Carian Telmessos, which he calls *religiosissima urbs* (the most superstitious city); when the magic appeared among the *Thessalae matres*, who, according to Pliny (and a number of other ancient authors), were mostly associated with magic, although, again according to Pliny, the Thessalians, a people originally completely alien to magical pursuits, "were content, at any rate in the Trojan period, with the medicines of Chiron, and with Ares as the only wielder of the thunderbolt" (*Troianis utique temporibus Chironis medicinis contenta et solo Marte fulminante*). Pliny is surprised that the people of Achilles acquired such a strong magical reputation, so that even Menander, a poet of incomparable literary taste (*litterarum subtilitati sine aemulo genitus*), wrote the comedy "Thessala", which described magical rituals of drawing the Moon to the Earth (*fabulam complexam ambages feminarum detrahentium lunam*). Furthermore, Pliny notes that he would readily admit that Orpheus brought magic to Thrace, if the whole of Thrace had not been considered home of magic before 'this Orpheus' (*expers sedes eius tota Thrace magices fuisset*). Here Pliny ends the pre-written history of magic and proceeds to the authors and books.

The first who wrote about magic was, according to Pliny (*ut equidem inuenio*), Osthanes, who accompanied the Persian king Xerxes in his campaign against the Greeks, and along the way sowed the seeds of this "monstrous craft" (*semina artis portentosae*). In passing, Pliny notes that some *diligentiores* authors put before Osthanes some second Zoroaster from Proconnesus, but, in our writer's opinion, it is quite certain that it was that Osthanes who instilled in the Greeks not just a greedy taste, but with a frantic passion for magic (*quod certum est, hic maxime Ostanes ad rabiem, non auiditatem modo scientiae eius, Graecorum populos egit*). Pliny further enumerates the names of Greek philosophers who, according to him, are famous for magical interests and magical writings: Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, and even Plato, who according to Pliny undertook whole journeys, which to him rather seem to be "exiles", to learn magic, in order to teach it then to their fellow countrymen in the guise of a real mystery (*ad hanc discendam nauigauere exiliis uerius quam peregrinationibus susceptis, hanc reuersi praedicauere, hanc in arcanis habuere*). According to Pliny, Democritus was distinguished by a special passion for magic: he allegedly climbed into the grave of Dardanus the Phoenician in search of his works.

It should be noted here that one of Pliny's main sources on magic was the work Χειρόμηκτα by Bolos of Mendes, which presented a theory, ascribed to Democritus, of universal sympathy and antipathy, as well as numerous magical recipes (ex. gr. [Wellman 1928; Boulin 1996; Dickie 1999; Gaillard-Seux 2003; 2004; 2009; 2014]). Pliny is absolutely sure, probably under the influence of Nigidius Figulus and Anaxilaus of Larissa, that this book really was written by Democritus, so he even claims that some deny Democritus the authorship of magical books, "but it is all to no purpose, for it is certain, that it was he who especially instilled into men's minds the sweets of magic" (*sed frustra: hunc enim maxime adfixisse animis eam dulcedinem constat*).

Pliny notes a fact that, from his point of view, is amazing. Both *artes* (magic and medicine), the first under the leadership of Democritus, and the second — under Hippocrates, blossomed at the same time: during the Peloponnesian War. Here Pliny

makes a pause to report that there is another, Jewish branch of magic (*alia magices factio*), whose ancestors are Moses, Jannes and Lotapes, and which appeared many thousands of years after Zoroaster. And here he adds that a considerable part of the popularity of magic is due to the campaigns of Alexander the Great, accompanied by a second Osthanes, who traveled with the Macedonian king around the whole earth (*planeque, quod nemo dubitet, orbem terrarum peragrauit*).

Having described the history of magic outside Rome, Pliny finally turns to the Romans, and says that traces of magic are also visible among Italians. So, for example, he refers to the laws of the XII Tables, the magical content of which he already pointed out earlier in Book 28. Without going into other details of the history of magic in Italy, he immediately notes that in the 657th year of the City, (94 BC), in the consulship of Cnaeus Cornelius Lentulus and Publius Licinius Crassus, human sacrifice was banned here; this, according to our author, is proof of the existence of magic in Rome. Despite the fact that this chapter is very short and takes only seven lines in A. Ernout's edition, it is one of the most important ones for understanding both Pliny's notions of magic and Pliny's work as a whole. Therefore, this connection between magic and human sacrifice should be kept in mind.

Pliny then goes on to the Gauls, in whose territories magic, according to Pliny, was practiced by the Druids, whom the emperor Tiberius exterminated "within our memory" (*ad nostram memoriam*), and to Britain, which is so passionately engulfed in magic that one might think, says Pliny, as if Britannia had taught Persia magic, and not the other way around (*Britannia hodieque eam attonita celebrat tantis caerimoniis ut dedisse Persis uideri possit*). The whole world, Pliny argues further, despite internal disagreements among the peoples, admits that it was to Rome that it owed the destruction of the monstrous rites in which to sacrifice a person was considered the supreme piety and to eat him also extremely beneficial to health (*adeo ista toto mundo consensere, quamquam discordi et sibi ignoto, nec satisem aestimari potest quantum Romanis debeatur qui susutulere monstra in quibus hominem occidere religiosissimum erat, mandi uero etiam saluberrimum*). (Please pay attention to the human sacrifice and eating of human flesh and the role of Rome in eradicating them!)

Here the general history of magic ends and Pliny moves on to its kinds (*species*), of which, with reference to Osthanes, are very many. But the discussion here focuses, rather, on the variety of substances and objects used by the mages. So, magicians use "spheres, air, stars, lamps, basins, axes and many others for divination"; in addition, magic employs "conversations with the shadows of the dead" (*umbrarum inferorumque colloquia*). Here, if we recall the constant anti-Neronic tendency in the *Natural History*, Pliny refers to the example of Nero, who utilized all the listed magical means (*Nero uana falsaque comperit*), and Pliny says that "no other of the arts ever had a more enthusiastic patron" (*nemo umquam ulli artium ualidius fauit*). For Pliny, Nero is an excellent example of this false science (*inmensum, indubitatum exemplum falsae artis*), if only because he, in the end, abandoned magic. It would have been 'better if he had continued to consult the dead and the gods about his suspicions, rather than entrusting his investigations to brothels and prostitutes' — notes Pliny, because there is not a single sacrament, or a barbarous and wild ritual, which would not be tamer than his thoughts! Indeed, says our author, Nero, through his unbridled cruelty, filled Rome with the shadows of dead people. Mages, justifying themselves and explaining the fact that Nero

failed, despite all his efforts to succeed in this craft, say, according to Pliny, that their "gods do not listen and do not even notice people with freckles" (*lentiginem habentibus non obsequi numina aut cerni*). However, Pliny continues, Nero did not have physical deficiencies, the absence of which was supplemented by his freedom to choose any day and any livestock for magical rituals, and performing human sacrifices was for him in general the most enjoyable occupation (*homines immolare etiam gratissimum*). Nero was initiated into magical mysteries by the Armenian king Tiridates, who came to Rome in order for Nero to celebrate his Armenian triumph, and brought with him magicians[2].

Finally, turning to personal experience, Pliny concludes that magic is detestable (*intestabilis*), ineffective (*inrita*) and useless (*inanis*), and in it there are only "certain shadows of truth" (*quasdam umbras ueritatis*), and even then only in the area dealing with poisons, and not sorcery (*in his ueneficas artes pollere, non magicas*). "One might well ask," says Pliny, "what were the ancient lies of the old Magi, when as a youth I saw Apion the grammarian, who told me that the herb *cynocephalia*, called in Egypt *osiritis*, was an instrument of divination and a protection from all kinds of sorcery, but if it were uprooted altogether the digger would die at once, and that he had called up ghosts to inquire from Homer his native country and the name of his parents, but did not dare to repeat the answers which he said were given" (*NH* 30.6.18). Turning to the actual magical use of animals, Pliny notes that the outstanding evidence of fraud (*peculiare uanitatis argumentum*) is found in magicians' views on moles, which, in their opinion, are animals most suitable for their activities (in this case, he refers to divination and iatromagia) (*nullum religionum capacius animal*).

This is, in short, the beginning of the 30th Book of *Natural History*, which describes the history of magic, Pliny's theory of its three components, the connection between magic and human sacrifice, and which brings up the Emperor Nero as an example of uselessness of magical hopes: he achieved nothing in magic, and only serves as an example of a brutal murderer with occult interests, contrary to all truly Roman views and laws. Further in Book 30 there follows a list of iatromagical recipes according to the principle of *a capite ad calcem*[3]. But this information is closely related to the information on magic that Pliny gives a little earlier in Book 28, in connection with questions about the medical properties of the human body and the effectiveness of the human word in religious (and medical) practice.

Note that Pliny attacks magic and magicians as soon as he approaches the section *Ex homine remedia* (Medicines from the human body). Justifying the description of the not very appetizing details of such "preparations", Pliny paraphrases what he tells the future Emperor Titus in the *epistula* that serves as a preface to the *Natural History*, in which he writes:

> I personally believe that among scientific works the most significant are those that, disregarding difficulties, have set a desire to bring an effective benefit ahead of the pleasure of being liked (*Equidem ita sentio, peculiarem in studiis causam eorum esse qui difficultatibus victis utilitatem iuvandi praetulerunt gratiae placendi*)[4].

[2] On this topic see also [Méthy 2000].

[3] On iatromagical recepies by Pliny see [Önnerfors 1985; 1993; Stannard 1987; Gaillard-Seux 2004; Méthy 2015].

[4] Trans. by A. V. Belousov.

Here Pliny also says:

> So what? We will talk about herbs and types of flowers, about the numerous and hard-to-reach rarities, and at the same time we will bypass the things that in the person can be useful to a person, and about the other types of medicines found among us, especially when only life for a person exempt from pain and illness does not become a punishment? Assuredly not; we will we apply our diligence to the contrary, even if our exposition will be in danger of arousing disgust; after all. from the very beginning we decided to cater to what beneficial to life, rather than to pleasantness (*Quid ergo? Dixerimus herbas et florum imagines ac pleraque inuentu rara ac difficilia, idem tacebimus quid in ipso homine prosit homini ceteraque genere remediorum inter nos uiuentia, cum praesertim nisi carenti doloribus morbisque uita ipsa poena fiat? Minime uero, omnemque insumemus operam, licet fastidii periculum urgeat, quando ita decretum est minorem gratiae quam utilitatium uitae respectum habere*)[5].

That is why Pliny does not exclude from his work a story about "external and barbaric rites" (*externa quoque et barbari ritus*), among which, first of all, he includes the drinking of human blood, citing the example of epileptics who rush to drink the gushing blood of a gladiator struck dead in the arena. To this he adds that some authors recommend the bone marrow of a man and the brains of newborn babies as a medicine, noting that many Greeks discuss in their books the taste of human intestines and body parts. Here his story takes on a pathetic rhetorical tone when he says that these authors detail the medicinal properties of each part of the human body right up to the nails, so that "just as though it could be thought health for a man to become a beast, and to deserve disease as punishment in the very process of healaing" (*quasi uero sanitas uideri possit feram ex homine fieri morboque dignum in ipsa medicina*).

> To look at human entrails is considered sin; what must it be to eat them? Who was the first, Osthanes, to think up such devices? For it is you who must bear the blame, you destroyer of human rights and worker of horrors; you were their first founder, in order, I suppose, to perpetuate your memory. Who first thought of chewing one by one human limbs? What soothsaying guided him? What origin could your medical practices have had? Who made magic potions more innocent than their remedies? Granted that foreigners and barbarians had discovered the rites, did the Greeks also make these arts their own? (*aspici humana exta nefas habetur: quid mandi? Quis ista inuenit, Ostane? Tecum enim res erit, euersor iuris humani monstrorumque artifex, qui primus ea condidisti, credo, ne* <tui> *uita obliuisceretur. Quis inuenit singula membra humana mandere? qua coniectura inductus? quam potest medicina ista originem habuisse? quis ueneficia innocentiora fecit quam remedia? Esto, barbari externique ritus inuenerant: etiamne Graeci suas fecere has artes*).

[5] Trans. by A. V. Belousov.

Furthermore, just like in Book 30, Pliny again turns to Democritus as if he were the main Greek sorcerer, for it is he, according to Pliny, who affirmed, that in certain cases the bones of the criminals' skulls are supposedly helpful, and in other cases the bones of a friend or a guest. A certain Apollonius (probably Apollonius of Pitana) writes that a very effective remedy for pain in the gums is the scarification of them with the help of the tooth of a murdered person. A certain Meletus talks about the use of human bile; Artemon writes about the skull of an innocent murdered and burnt person; while drinks served in the skull of a hanged man help, according to Anteus, with the bite of a rabid dog. Finally, the human body is used even in veterinary medicine. Here Pliny again breaks into a pathos filled rhetoric and exclaims: "Far from me and my writings be such horrors!" (*procul a nobis nostrisque litteris absint ista!*), and at the end of the presentation of these medicines, adds:

> I do not indeed hold that life ought to be so prized that by any and every means it should be prolonged. You holding this view, whoever you are, will none the less die, even though you may have lived longer through foulness or sin. Wherefore let every man consider that first among the remedies for his soul is this: that of all the blessings given to man by Nature none is greater than a timely death, and herein the brightest feature is that each man can have the power to bestow it on himself (*uitam quidem non adeo expetendam censemus, ut quoquo modo trahenda sit. quisquis es, talis aeque moriere, etiam quom obscenus uixeris aut nefandus. quapropter hoc primum quisque in remediis animi habeat, ex omnibus bonis quae homini tribuit natura nullum melius esse tempestiua morte, idque in ea optimum, quod illam sibi quisque praestare possit*).

Having pronounced his verdict regarding magic, Pliny poses what is in fact a philosophical question, but which, nevertheless, is closely related to our theme. The first medicine with which he starts the enumeration of medicines that have a source in the person himself, is the word. Pliny's question is whether words and magical spells have any force to them (*ex homine remediorum primum maximae quaestionis et semper incertae est, polleantne aliquid uerba et incantamenta carminum*). Here he notes that although philosophers do not believe in such a power, faith in the magical (and religious) power of words is widespread everywhere, even if unconsciously (*sed uiritim sapientissimi cuiusque respuit fides, in uniuersum uero omnibus horis credit uita nec sentit*). In developing this topic, Pliny says that without uttering words one cannot perform a sacrifice and correctly ask advice from the gods (*quippe uictimas caedi sine precatione non uidetur referre aut deos rite consuli*). This is followed by the Pliny's classification of prayers: prayers for favorable auspices (*precationes inpetritae*), prayers for averting evil (*depulsoriae*), and prayers for commendation (*commendatoriae*) (see: [Köves-Zulauf 1972; 1978; Thérasse 1980; Dumont 1987; Guittard 1987]). Pliny clearly believes that these *precationes* exist both in the religion approved by the Roman State and in magic, in which, following his terminology, they become *incantamenta*, *carmina* or *incantamenta carminum*. Our author brings up examples from Roman practice, which are interesting and important for my further exposition.

So, he speaks about prayer formulas, which must be spoken in clear order, and without any elision, in official religious rites by the higher magistrates. He cites the prayer of Decius as an example of *precatio inpetrita* the (cf. *Liv.* 8.9.6–8), and as

an example of *precatio depulsoria* — the prayer of the Vestal Tuccia (cf. *Val. Max.* 8.1.5). Probably, as an example of *precatio commendatoria*, he gives, oddly enough given the context described above, the ritual sacrifice of a Greek man and a Greek woman in the Forum Boarium (cf. *Liv.* 22.57.7)[6]. It is interesting to note here that this human sacrifice, carried out within the framework of the official Roman religion, is not criticized by Pliny, and is not even declared to be "magic." Here, in his opinion, everything is fine. He does not condemn and declared as "magic" when the Vestals keep escaped slaves within the city with the help of a special *precatio* (*nondum egressa urbe mancipia*). Faith in the power of the prayer's word is confirmed for Pliny by the ancients (*prisci quidem nostri perpetuo talia credidere*).

I shall omit Pliny's remarks on oracles and the fact that they can be interpreted differently, in accordance with human will (*haec satis sint exemplis ut appareat ostentorum uires et in nostra potestate esse ac, prout quaeque accepta sint, ita ualere*), and shall turn to magic. Pliny here refers to two well-known laws from the XII Tables: *Qui fruges excantassit, et alibi: Qui malum carmen incantassit*. As we can see, this is about the *mala carmina*, which Pliny considered "magic" when it sprang from a private initiative, and not when it involved the official Roman cult. For instance, a spell-prayer to the enemy gods, calling on them to change sides and support the Romans, abandoning their former worshippers, is not regarded as something bad by Pliny. However, almost immediately thereafter he observes: "Everyone is terribly afraid of being immobilized by spells" (*defigi quidem diris precationibus nemo non metuit*). Further, Pliny also speaks of love incantations (*incantamenta amatoria*), of spells of serpents and the tribe of Marsi, of the spells against fire on the walls of houses, and finally of prayers with incomprehensible words (*externa uerba atque ineffabilia*) to which he refers, rather, with a laugh. Finally, he gives examples of magical incantations from Cato and Varro, then proceeds to magical gestures, and after that he gives healing prescriptions based on the human body (for example, saliva, earwax, etc.).

Thus, from the abundance of information with which Pliny provides us in this section, we can draw a number of important conclusions regarding his understanding of magic. F i r s t l y, that magic, because it sees in a person a means and, therefore, calmly refers to killing them and using in its practice the parts of a human dead body, is a nasty occupation. S e c o n d l y, magic actively uses the same speech practices as the official Roman cult, but since it is a private and occult thing, it is an antisocial activity. T h i r d l y, magical spells, divorced from the official and civil cult, are used in a variety of ways: *dirae deprectiones*, *incantamenta amatoria*, *incantamenta agraria*, *incantamenta contra incendia* etc.

Attempts to reconcile theoretical reflections on magic in the 30th and 28th Books with what follows, i. e. the composition of magical recipes themselves, which Pliny diligently and systematically describes, and also in the content of the magic formulas scattered throughout his work, the number of which reaches to twenty-seven, and most of which Pliny quotes from his Greek sources [Gaillard-Seux 2014], lead us to a feeling of perplexity and confusion. On the one hand, we have vivid rhetorical statements with addresses to Osthanes himself, an historical essay on magic, and, on the other hand, an interesting but nevertheless much less incendiary lists of medical prescriptions, the material of which is man and the animal world.

[6] To this kind of *precationes commendatoriae*, it is obviously possible to refer also *defixionum tabellae* (see, for example: [Guittard 1987: 480]).

Previously, researchers into Pliny's magic chose one of the two paths in interpreting his information about magic: some focused on a separate description and contextualization of Pliny's information against the background of data from the literary tradition and within the historical realm of 1st century BC. — 1st c. AD, while forgetting about the author of this information [Garosi 1976; Le Glay 1976; Graf 1994: 61–68 (= Graf 1997: 49–56)], while others [Ernout 1964] tried to find a suitable philosophical "shortcut" for Pliny. So, for example, Alfred Ernout, emphasizing the fact that Pliny talks about the theory of universal sympathy and antipathy (*concordia* and *discordia*)[7], hastens to explain this idea by the influence of Stoic philosophy, which, in fact, explains little, since we know that here Pliny, who does not fully believe in astrology (ex. gr.: *NH* 7.162: *primum ergo ipsius artis incontantia declarat quam incerta res est*; cf. [Ector 1985, Le Boeuffle 1987]) and refers with skepticism to superstition (*superstitio, religio*), just picks up one of the basic ideas of his source, Bolos of Mendes (III century BC), whose work was probably called Περὶ φυσικῶν συμπαθειῶν καὶ ἀντιπαθειῶν (*Geoponica* 15.1.25, see [Gaillard-Seux 2004; 2014]). In addition, this idea of sympathy in magic of Pliny's time became an absolute common place and, it can be even said, had no direct relation to the Stoics. Thus, to call Pliny the Elder a Stoic here absolutely does not make sense, since this does not render the discourse map of his narrative more understandable. On the other hand, a detailed analysis of what Pliny tells us here certainly enhances our understanding of ancient magic in general, but in this analysis, *Natural History* remains what it was most of the time for the European Middle Ages and New Times, namely, just a "dump" of various kinds of information. In both cases, Pliny and his *Natural History* remain on the sidelines of the information extracted from them, which becomes the object of study. Is it, however, possible to adequately assess Pliny's information, in this case about magic, if one neglects the question: Why does Pliny talk about magic just this way?

If we want to understand why Pliny writes about magic exactly what he writes, it is necessary to keep at the forefront of our interest all the time, f i r s t l y, how his work is arranged, s e c o n d l y, for whom it is written, and, in t h i r d l y, what, so to speak, 'ideological' tendencies pass through the fabric of Pliny's entire work like a gold thread.

Let me remind you that the Pliny's project is concentrated on the description of *rerum natura, hoc est uita* (*praef.* 13). This "life" is described by a high official of the Roman state — Caius Plinius Secundus, born in the year 23 or 24, who began his career with the troops on the Rhine, where he rose to the rank of commander of a cavalry *ala.* In the year 59 his career was interrupted for a long time, and he does not seem to serve until the end of Nero's reign, indulging in composing literary works. With the ascension of Vespasian, Pliny returns to the service and serves in Germany with the son of Vespasian, Titus, with whom he is then linked by a bond of friendship. He serves four times as procurator between 70 and 76 in Gallia Narbonnensis, in Africa, in Hispania and in Belgicum, where he commands two Rhine armies. Finally, death caused by the eruption of Vesuvius overtakes him as acting commander of the Fleet at Misenum on the 24th of August in the year 79. *Natural History*, on which he apparently worked for quite a longtime, beginning its compila-

[7] *NH* 20.1; 20.28; 24.1; 28.84; 28.147; 31.1; 37.59. See [Boulin 1996; Conte 1991; Capitani 1972].

tion in the fifties, is published in 77 with a dedication to Vespasian's son, the future emperor Titus. In the prefatory *epistula* for Titus, Pliny, after lavish compliments to the future emperor, talks about the main motivations that prompted him to write this work and the principles according to which *Natural History* is composed.

I do not intend to retell the well-known message of Pliny to Titus. I should only like to draw attention, first, to the fact that in spite of saying: "When I took up this work, your name was not yet on this list. I knew that your situation is too elevated for me to hope that you would condescend to my work" (*praef.* 6)[8], throughout his work in thirty-seven books Pliny has in mind a reader just like Titus and indeed Titus himself. And secondly, to the fact that this preface already contains anti-Neronian rhetoric, which researchers have already discussed (ex. gr. [Naas 2002: 88–89]), and which permeates the whole of *Natural History*. Pliny was not simply an unsystematic amateur collector of "twenty thousand facts", he was already an experienced and accurate writer who managed to give these "facts" a clear structure, making the whole work sound as he needed by introducing transitions from one topic to another with the help of introductions and conclusions to the corresponding books, thereby turning the *Natural History* into a well-harmonized composition with clearly distinguishable themes of a moral nature.

One of the most important elements of the poetics of the *Natural History* are the Introductions and Conclusions to specific books, which in addition to helping the author maintain the balance of the whole work and create a sense of smoothness and logical character of the transitions from one topic to another, following the general direction of Pliny's description of life — cosmology-geography-anthropology-zoology-botany-medicine-mineralogy — contain constant references to the ensemble of moral strategies contained in the epistle to Titus. An important feature in these transitional elements of Pliny's text was discovered by Valérie Naas, who, following a detailed study of their content came to the conclusion that rhetorical digressions in the Introductions and Conclusions are particularly densely concentrated in the last part of his work, namely from Book 27 to Book 37 [Naas 2002: 224]. She notes that "their concentration in this place may indicate the increasing desire of Pliny to repeat his beliefs and protect his enterprise" (*leurs concentrations à cette place pourrait témoigner de la volonté croissante de Pline de répéter ses convictions et de défendre son entreprise*). A similar phenomenon, by the way, is also found in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* (ex. gr. [Janson 1964: 57]).

What are the main moral and ideological "staples" that Pliny uses persistently in his narrative to give to his composition, and not least to the discourse on magic, exactly the form that it adopted? *Natural History* is a description of nature (*natura*), which is life (*uita*), and which is inextricably linked with man and is oriented toward man. It, being a *parens melior* (*NH* 2.154-157, 7.1, 22.1, 24.1), and sometimes even a *tristior nouerca* (*NH* 2.236; 7.1), entirely exists only for the sake of man, who should use its gifts with gratitude (cf. [Sallmann 1987; Naas 2002: 225]). This description of nature is given by Pliny, as if from a bird's eye view, making ever smaller circles over the orbis terrarum, and finally landing in Rome (*NH* 37.201), which was always in its field of vision. Pliny seeks to describe "nature" with the height of Roman power and using traditional Roman *grauitas* (cf. *NH* 23.32: *nos*

[8] Trans. by A. V. Belousov.

ista Romana grauitate artiumque liberalium adpetentia non ut medici, sed ut indices salutis humanae diligenter distinguamus). And finally, it is Rome and Italy in general, according to Pliny, that is *rectrix parensque mundi altera* (*NH* 37.201), which, moreover, is the "country-breadwinner of all (other) countries, and she is the mother chosen by the will of the gods" (*NH* 3.39: *terra omnium terrarum alumna eadem et parens, numine deum electa*). Pliny observes that the gods made Rome "as a second light for the human race" (*NH* 27.3: *adeo Romanus uelut alteram lucem dedisse rebus humanis uidentur*). Hence arises the constant need for Pliny to commensurate almost everything he talks about, with Rome, its customs and its history[9].

In accordance with this initial and final point of Pliny's discourse, the author also establishes the hierarchy of sources which he presents in the index to the *Natural History*, where these sources are strictly ranked as "authoritative" (*auctores*) and, mainly, Roman, and "external" (*externi*), mainly Greek, cf. [Naas 2002: 183–184]. Thus, even here Pliny emphasizes Roman superiority in everything. For example, Pliny never forgets to say that the Greeks are gullible and deceitful (ex gr. *NH* 2.248: *exemplum uanitatis Graecae maximum*; *NH* 8.82: *mirum est quo procedat Graeca credulitas*). Nevertheless, Pliny extensively uses these "external" sources, but always from his "Roman" distance (cf. [Serbat 1973]).

Turning back to the story of Pliny and magic, we can note that magic for him is something doubly a l i e n. On the one hand, Pliny immediately speaks of the "barbaric" source of magic: about Zoroaster and Osthanes, on the other — he does not miss any opportunity to note that the fascination with magic by the Greeks is not just a hobby, but "rage" (*rabies — NH* 2.8). Magic for Pliny is, in fact, *externa quoque et barbari ritus*, which he still considers necessary to describe, since, f i r s t l y, his "encyclopedic" project is based on not disdaining even the *sordidissima pars* (*praef.* 13) of "nature," and s e c o n d l y, since the *Natural History* for us today (and not only if we recall the impression of Aulus Gellius [Naas 2002: 271–274], rather, is a completely "unnatural" story, which initially requires preliminary ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία and is concentrated almost exclusively on miracles [Naas 2002; Doody 2010]. And magic, from his point of view, in spite of all its *uanitates*, is one of the most amazing and strange of miracles (cf. *NH* 24.156: *in promisso herbarum mirabilium occurit aliqua dicere et de magicis. Quae enim mirabiliores?*). It is no accident, therefore, that Pliny unhesitatingly starts to report on magic recipes and magic formulae [Gaillard-Seux 2014] long before the 30th and even 28th Books. Only starting with Book 28 does he feel the need to explain himself, and angrily pontificates about magic's Iranian founders, Greek admirers, and goes on to disdainfully discuss magical recipes, the substance of which is the human body and animals.

Why is it that only here, in Books 28 and 30, does Pliny speak so angrily about magicians and magic? After all, before, in botanical and other books, he almost calmly talks about magical recipes, only indicating that their source is *magi*. This is probably the case because medicine based on herbs is, in his opinion, the *maximum opus naturae* (*NH* 20.1–2) and *rerum naturae ipsius munificentia*, and the therapeutic effects resulting from such healing for him are *nullo uitae miraculo maiore* (*NH* 27.1–2). And despite the fact that Pliny admits that medicine based on the flesh of animals is *summa naturae exemplorumque per rerum ordinem* (*NH* 27.146), he

[9] Cf. [Naas 2002: 251]: "Il ne s'agit pas seulement pour lui de rapporter l'inconnu au connu, mais de le situer par rapport à Rome".

clearly feels distrust for such medicine, starting the 28th book, which begins right after this statement, with the section *Contra magos*. I believe that the issue here is that Pliny refers to animals as natural beings of the second order after man, and which have many properties that bring them closer to man. In order not to take the time for a detailed retelling of what Pliny writes about animals in Books 8-9, I would like to give the sum up of his views on this subject by Liliane Bodson, based on a careful study of the two books:

> **ANIMAL** être doté du principe vital (*anima*), qui s'incarne dans une multitude d'organismes complexes et remarquable (*mira*) **(1)** par leurs caractères physiques et comportementaux, lesquelles présentent des analogies avec ceux de l'homme, et **(2)** par les produits et services qu'ils procurent à celui-ci. En conséquence de la relation (*societas*) qu'instaurent et les affinités biologiques et les fonctions tant psychologiques que matérielles remplis par les animaux (sauvages, apprivoisés ou domestiques) auprès de l'homme, ils doivent être traités par lui d'une manière digne de la raison (*ratio*) qui fait la spécifité humaine [Bodson 1997: 30].

Thus, a decent person, according to Pliny, is associated with people who are his equals through *humanitas*, and with the animal world — through *societas*. If indeed, we accept the previously proposed interpretation of *humanitas* as recognition and nurturing, based on the *ratio* and provided by *sermo*, the eternal linkage of all people worthy of such a name (ex. gr. [Schadewaldt 1973; Novara 1982; Kaster 1986; Ferrary 1988: 493–516; Naas 2002: 27–34]), examples of which are given by Pliny himself in the descriptions of remarkable people in Book 7, the *societas* of man with the animal suggests, taking into account the relationship of the person and animal noted by Pliny, a relationship to the animal that derives its essence from the relation of men to men. I would note that the main thing with which Pliny associates magic is murder not consecrated by a rite of the official cult, a human sacrifice. Therefore, killing an animal that goes beyond the bounds of recognized norms (for use as food and as sacrifice) Pliny regards as wicked, even if it may restore a patient to health. But this kind of medicine becomes more poisonous than poison, and if there is nothing "normal" medicine that may help you, it's better to die than to live unworthily, through the use of such means.

Thus, all that Pliny says about magic in his rhetorical attacks against magic in Book 28 and in his outline of the history of magic in Book 30 essentially rests on two strong and interconnected tendencies. Firstly, the obvious primacy of Rome over the whole *orbis terrarum*, and secondly, with the idea of *humanitas*, which, like the platonic Good, emanates from Rome to the whole world under its control, even to the point where the truly human is practically absent (*NH* 30.4: *naturae inane*). In one place Pliny directly says that Italy is destined by the gods "to unite scattered empires, to make manners gentle, to draw together in converse by community of language the jarring and uncouth tongues of so many nations, to give mankind civilization, and in a word to become throughout the world the single fatherland of all the races." (*NH* 3.39: *tot populorum discordes ferasque linguas sermonis commercio contraheret ad conloquia et humanitatem homini daret breuiterque una cunctarum gentium in toto orbe patria fieret*). This, in fact, is the

basis for his story about magic, and, among others, examples from Roman history, especially the example of the emperor-murderer Nero, who even without the aid of magic filled Rome with the shades of the dead.

I would like to finish my paper with a question rather than conclusions, which are obvious in any case: If both Pliny's stories about magic are so rhetorical in nature, sharpening and making more negative the attitude towards magic in general, how then ought one to treat what on the surface appears to be the most detached and theoretical moment of his narrative, namely, the assertion that magic absorbed into itself the most powerful *artes* in the eyes of man (*imperiosissimas humanae mentis complexa in unam se redegit*), specifically: medicine, *uires religionis* and astrology (*artes mathematicas*). Is it possible to take at face value the "theory" proposed here, which certainly finds its confirmation when compared with other sources, but which itself was originally probably created by Pliny in the heat of rhetorical and antimagical inspiration? Pliny – if I dare to speak in his name – would likely have wished us to smirk contemptuously at this point. After all, despite the fact that he devoted several books to medicine, he says that "there is no science more contradictory" (*NH* 29.1: *nullam artium inconstantiorem fuisse*). Despite the fact that he speaks a great deal about astrology, he accuses this science of the same vice (*NH* 7.162: *primum ergo ipsius artis inconstantia declarat quam incerta res sit*) as medicine, and most likely does not believe in the influence of stars on human beings and on events in the human world (cf. *NH* 2.97; 2.23; 2.28, see also: [Le Boeuffle 1987]). Finally, the expression *uires religionis*, most likely, speaks of the "forces of superstition", rather than, in fact, about religion, which can exist in Rome only openly and be carried out by state magistrates. In the same sense, Pliny discusses in the same book the Carian city of Telmessus, calling it *religiosissima urbs* (*NH* 30.2.6). So, is it not more appropriate to interpret these words of Pliny with greater caution, drawing parallels from other literary and epigraphic sources and carefully filling out the cards for each of these three titles. Will we get then the magic of Pliny the Elder's time by mixing these three elements in one magic flask? I do not think so, although I can not dispute the positive data obtained from this Plinian rhetoric. Undoubtedly, these data can help us reconstruct what Pliny himself had in his head on the subject of magic, but only if we consider this information primarily from the viewpoint of the *Natural History* itself.

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