In the early Byzantine period sources we often see repetitions of famous religious contests of the past, concerning miracles and magic. Other times religious confrontations between Christians and gentiles are blended with accusations about exercising magic. Sometimes, in early Christian hagiography, this confrontation turns to be only accusations about exercising magic from the one or the other side. In these cases, the dogmatic confrontations between Christian and infidel priests turn into contests where they demonstrate their supernatural powers. These confrontations often take place in front of kings. The basic elements are that the infidel priests work always with the power of the demons and that the “canonically religious” men always win.

The repetition of the ancient contests of miracles and magic helps also the Christians to identify their holy men with the ancient miracle-workers, and in this way, to present them as the successors of the ancient holy men. Thus they can strengthen the angle that Christianism is the only acceptable religion and endowed with the power to create miracles, whereas the others are motivated by the evil demons and consequently their achievements can be explained as black magic, sorcery, and illusion.

Finally, through these contests we can have an idea of how much the religious syncretism, the admixture of religions that had started at the Hellenistic age and came to its utmost point at the second and third centuries AD, had shaped the eastern religions and how much magical beliefs had dominated this world.

In the first place the Christians wanted to prove that the power of the Jewish God (Father of Christ) was the only true and miraculous power in

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* The subject has been presented in a paper at the XIV Hellenic Historical Congress of the Hellenic Historical Association (Thessaloniki, 30, 31 May and 1 June 2003).


Influences of the religious syncretism in the early Byzantine society

comparison with the one of the pagan gods that were still powerful and influential at the early Byzantine period. An effective way of achieving this was to repeat the most known religious magic contest, the one between the powerful Egyptian magicians Iannes – Iambres and the Hebrew Moses (attested not in the Old Testament but in the Jewish apocrypha from the second c. B.C.)

They contested in front of the Pharaoh in miracle-working, which is always the area of the magicians and the holy men; to these contests belong the subjugation of poisonous snakes and the domination on earth, water, air and fire. People believed that the adepts of the laws of the universe could dominate the elements that the sublunary or cosmic area consisted of. These elements were earth, water, air, fire; they were made of mindless nature and subjected to vitiation. Based on this contingency, those who operated in the area of magic or miracle could work out σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (signs and wonders). Signs were called all the miracles that took place on the air. Wonders were called all the miracles that took place on the earth as supernatural phenomena.

If one takes in mind, a) that some gentiles accused Moses as a magician and thought of his teachings to his fellow countrymen, a theory about the angels and their similar cult, as magic,

b) the Hebraic teachings, that the angels are responsible for every element in nature such as crystal, hail, frost, cool, winds, clouds, snow, ice,

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9 John Lydus, Liber de mensibus, 2, 171.

sounds, clap, shaft, cold, heat, every season of the year, but also the ani-
mals, the plants, the humans and anything else that exists on earth¹¹, then
one can track down the unchallengeable belief that some men, called either
magicians or miracle workers, had the acquiescence of these spirits (and
through them of God himself)¹² to control their corresponding cosmic ele-
ments as they wished.

According to a conception which had its roots in the Hellenistic age and
had been developed during the Christian centuries, these powerful “Phi-
losopher-magicians” were studying the supernatural forces and because of
this knowledge they managed to control them¹³. The Christian writers
developed this perception from their own point of view. At first they
wanted to point that the ancient pious and virtuous Jews, the ones that
God had chosen for a holy mission, were endowed with the miraculous
power to contact the spirits and be able to control them or to be clairvoy-
ants. The Jew Joseph for example, the son of Jacob, who had lived in Egypt
and could explain the dreams -which means to contact the good intermediate
supernatural forces <angels> and learn the will of God, an idea that Plato
adopted too with his daemonia, demons¹⁴- had proved himself wiser than the
astrologists, the diviners, the magicians, the philosophers. The Jew prophet
Daniel who had also the ability to explain the dreams, had overpassed the
Babylonian sages, astrologists, diviners, magicians, philosophers¹⁵.

The explaining of dreams was a characteristic of the all-powerful Per-
sian and the Babylonian Magi¹⁶ but also of the Egyptian magician-priests¹⁷.
However, the Christians wanted to prove that only the ancient holy Jews,

¹² Cf. John Chrysostom, In Epistolam ad Ephesios commentarius, cap. IV, Homilia VIII, PG 62, 63.
¹⁷ Hérodote, Histoires, ed. Ph.-E. Le Grand, Livre II, Euterpe. Paris 1944, 83, n. 1, p. 120.
the ancestors of Christianism, were using the powers of the good spirits and so they always won, while the others were using the evil spirits, the demons, and so they were unable to overcome them. Consequently the Egyptian priests were making περίεργα καὶ γοώδη which means black magic and deceiving illusions but the same acts performed by Moses and Aaron were real miracles worked by God. This privilege was claimed afterwards by the Christians while the gentiles and the heretics, like Jews or Gnostics, were being accused of turning to the demons instead of the good spirits.

According to the tradition, many times the Jewish philosopher-magicians – like the famous demons’ persecutor Solomon – had the ability of using angels against the demons. In astrology and in theories about spirits the archangels – who sometimes are called gods – and the angels are connected with the stars and the celestial bodies which are their residences. There were special angels who had as a duty to chase the demons to the infernal places (hell). These were the orders of the Angels, the Archangels, the Cheroubim and the Seraphim. Therefore, if someone wished to fight the demons, he had to call these spirits for help.

The Jews had the fame of being excellent exorcists; according to the testimony of Joseph they carried out successful magical ceremonies by which they averted the demons that caused illnesses, pain and grief to the humans. In these ceremonies they combined herbal medicines with the recitation of magical prayers. These prayers were said to be the prayers that Solomon had written by the inspiration of God himself. With them and by the help of Michael, the most powerful angel, he had dominated and imprisoned the demons.

Nevertheless, the Christians couldn’t allow this reputation of the Jews to be continued. This nation had become the most hateful for Christianism and so the Jewish exorcists had to be proven as despicable magicians. A way of doing this successfully was to mention a relative “indirect” contest, the one that took place between this kind of Jewish magicians and the Apostle Paul, at the time that he was teaching in Ephesos (AD. 54–57). The Jewish exorcists of that time were well informed of Christ’s miracles and they were also eyewitnesses of the miracles that Paul had performed in His name in Ephesos. So they dared to add Christ’s and Paul’s names, among the powerful magic names which they used in their prayers in order to avert a demon from a possessed man\(^{24}\). But it seems that at this time the Jews didn’t have the help of the angels they called; the moment they pronounced Christ’s and Paul’s names, the demon had attacked them, bit them wildly and chased them wounded\(^{25}\).

Another aim of the Christian writers was to show that the Christian miracle-workers were the only true successors of the Hebrew prophets, the most respectful and miraculous men in the Jewish religion, who were blessed to speak directly with God and his angels. The Christian holy men had to be shown as the heirs of this divine power and its miraculous emanations. The best way of proving this, was to ascribe to the Christian holy men all the miraculous characteristics of the prophets.

Flying was one of the supernatural powers that the Hebrew prophets had. Elias flew in the sky in a vehicle of fire\(^{26}\). However, it must be mentioned that flying was also a characteristic of the ancient pagan Υπερβόρειοι (Hyperboreans lived north from Scythes) miracle-workers and holy men.

\(^{24}\) For similar exorcisms, see A. D. VAKALOUDI, Μυστισμός, Θαυματοποιία και Ιατρική της Θεουργίας. Οι Συνεχιστές του Πυθαγόρα και του Πλάτωνα στη Χριστιανική Εποχή, Θαυματουργοί Ιερείς ή Μάγοι; Athens 2000, pp. 219–222 and especially pp. 221–222.


the priests of the god Apollo, like Abaris, the student of Pythagoras, or of the ancient Greek miracle-workers and seers, priests of the god Dionysus, like Musaeus. At the early Byzantine period also the Neoplatonic writers attached the ability of flying to their holy men, like Isidorus. According to the Christians, all the idolaters who had this characteristic, were magicians helped in their action by the evil demons. This was proven by a contest about flying, cited in the Byzantine sources, which was held between Christian holy men and a magician. It was the one between the Apostles Paul and Peter and Simon the Magus in Rome, in front of the emperor Nero. Simon, the founder of Gnosticism, who professed to be the Holy Spirit, wanted to be the very opposite of Christ, and was proclaimed by his followers as god, announced that he could fly up to the sky in a vehicle of the demons. The Apostles Peter and Paul had blasted him on the earth with an arrow by praying to their God.

Because of the influence, which the magicians exercised upon people, the Christian writers’ main interest was to expose them and to show that their intention was to deceive people in any way; one way that the magicians were using, in order to deceive people, was to impress them with “monstrous” illusions and, by this means, to take advantage of them as much as they could. However, the Christian holy men appeared with their superior powers as peoples’ saviors and helped them to free themselves from the magicians’ deception and exploitation. In this way, by exposing the magicians’ illusional arts, they showed people where to turn and ask for help during moments of crisis. Accordingly, at the age of Constantine the

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28 VAKALOUDI, Μυστικισμός, Θαυματοποιία και Ιατρική της Θεουργίας, 108.


Great a magician appeared to the army in Cappadocia, presented a flying
dragon and persuaded the crowd to sacrifice to it. Agapetos, the Christian
bishop of Synaos, appeared, antagonized the magician and proved himself
superior to the magician. In a public contest between them, the magician
showed the dragon’s apparition while the Christian bishop began to recite
prayers. As a result, lightning and thunder began to fall, which dissolved
the magician’s illusion. This incident confirmed the superiority of Chris-
tianism and a lot of people was persuaded by it to be baptised.\footnote{33}

Another means that the Christian men of the Church were using, in
order to present their miraculous men as the successors of the famous holy
Jewish men and ancestors of Christ, was to ascribe to them the power of
creating fire. This was a tactic that they had adopted from the Jews. The
Jewish writers were also ascribing this miraculous characteristic to their
holy men. Accordingly, Moses, the one who was allowed to see God in per-
son, had the ability to create fire with the recitation of a prayer. This
power was ascribed to him by the Hebrew writer of the first century AD.
Artapanos. Moses said a prayer to his God and suddenly a fire was created
without any wood or other material.\footnote{34}

Then the prophets were endowed with this miraculous power, which they
used in order to fight against gods and priests of every polytheistic religion.
For example this miracle working was the basic element in the contest be-
tween the prophet Elias and the priests of the god Baal\footnote{35} or Beelphegor,
Phegor, Bel, or (in Greek) Kronos.\footnote{36} Elias managed, with his prayer to his
God, to create fire which fell from the sky and fired the altar with his
fatling, while the gentile priests – who cut themselves and spilled their
blood according to their custom as an offering to their god\footnote{38} – had failed\footnote{39}.

\footnote{33} Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀγαπητοῦ ἐπισκόπου Συναοῦ [BHG 35], ed. A.
Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Varia Graeca Sacra (Studia Byzantina Lucis ope iterata VI).
\footnote{34} Eusèbe de Césarée, La préparation évangélique, ed. G. Schroeder – E. des Places,
\footnote{35} John Chrysostom, In Psalmum CV , PG 55, 663–664.
\footnote{36} John Chrysostom informs us about the contact of the Hebrews with Moabites and their
cult of the god Βεελφεγώρ or Φεγώρ or Βάαλ or Βήλ or (in Greek) Κρόνος. Apotropaic
magic ceremonies and χοαί (funeral offerings of water) were being offered to this god
by eastern peoples and the Greeks. The Father concludes by saying that if someone
thought of these gods as dead humans, he wouldn’t be wrong; see John Chrysostom,
In Psalmum CV, 663–664.
\footnote{37} Jean Chrysostome, Sur le sacerdoce, ed. A.-M. Malinlrey (SC 272). Paris 1980, III, 4
(146,34–45).
\footnote{38} Eustathius von Antiochien, Über die Hexe von Endor, 8, 26, 6–7.
\footnote{39} Jean Chrysostom, Sur le psaume II, sur les Actes: “Or le lendemain leurs chefs se
réunirent”, et sur le boîteux de la Belle Porte, ed. J. Liebaert, Jean Chrysostome, Deux
In order to accomplish his aim, Elias built an altar with twelve stones – as many as the tribes of Israel (or the Apostles) – and placed a fatling on it, then he made a triple circle with water around it, and after he had said his prayer, fire fell from the sky and burned the fatling. In his prayer to God he had said: Ἐπάκουσόν με, Κύριε, ἐν πυρὶ σήμερον· ἐπήκουσάς μου ἐν ύδατι, ἐπάκουσόν μου καὶ ἐν πυρί. Καὶ ἵδοΥ, καλέσαντος αὐτοῦ ἐν τάχει πῦρ κατέβη ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ...40.

However, it must be mentioned that the magic circle, the purgative ceremonies with water, the magical number three, the use of stones, the sacrifice, were elements which were used by religious men and magicians. The use of these elements had its roots in the eastern belief of the occultism, an attempt to approach and affect the supernatural forces with material agents, such as sacrifices of animals, use of plants and stones which had a direct connection (“sympathy”) with the spirits41. The Christians were aware of the danger that their religious men could give the impression that they were conducting a magical ceremony, and furthermore that they were magicians who were helped by the demons, instead of miracle-workers acting by the help of God. Thus John Chrysostom – wanting to make the distinction between religious men and magicians – referred to the powers of the prophet to dominate the rain, to command the winds, to throw fire on fatlings, but he made clear that all these happened by the effect of God’s grace and permission42.

The work of Elias was transferred by the Christian writers to the hands of their holy men. The Christian miracle-workers were using their similar power in order to prove that Christianism was the only true faith against

42 John Chrysostom, In Petrum Apostolum, 734, 736.
all pagan religions. For example, during the Christian era, Saint Alexander, in a confrontation with a defender of the local gods’ cult, turned to the east, extended his hands and prayed in such a way ὡς κινηθῆναι καὶ αὐτήν τὴν κτίσιν. This expression reflects the unlimited power of his εὐχή. After he had said his prayer, fire came from the sky and burnt everything around him.\footnote{E. de Stoop, Vie d’ Alexandre l’Acémète [\textit{BHG} 47], \textit{Patrologia Orientalis}, t. 6. Turnhout 1971 (Impr. 1st ed. Paris 1909), 13. [27]. p. 667, 9 – [28]. p. 668, 10.}

However, it must be mentioned that during the Christian age there were also pagan holy men, who lived exactly like the Christians, with prayers, asceticism, and constant contact with the gods, the famous Neoplatonic theurgists, to whom the pagan writers ascribed the same miraculous power of creating fire. For example, exactly the same demonstration of power on fire as the above, was ascribed by Damascius (sixth century AD) to a gentile “religious man”. Aselepiades, the brother of Heraiscus, Neoplatonic philosopher who taught in Alexandria and had studied deeper than his brother the \textit{Egyptian mystic knowledge},\footnote{The \textit{Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire}, v. II (AD 395–527), ed. J. R. Martindale. Cambridge, London 1980, p. 158.} climbed once the Libanus mountain and from there he threw fire on the soil all over the valley, turning everything into ashes.\footnote{Damascius, \textit{Vitae Isidori reliquiae}, ed. C. Zintzen, Hildesheim 1967, (fr.) 166. 10–11.}

The knowledge, which Aselepiades had obtained through his thorough study of the Egyptian mysticism, gave him the power to perform this miracle. If one compares Aselepiades’ miracle-working with a fragment from the \textit{“Chaldaean Oracles”}, one will notice an interesting similarity. This fragment reveals to the initiates that, in case they want to invoke Hekate, the goddess will appear in front of them either as a shapeless fire, from which a voice will come out addressing them, or as a huge mass of light, which will explode like a coil around the field, where they stand.\footnote{The \textit{Chaldean Oracles}, ed. R. Majercik, Leiden 1989, fr. 146 (p. 104).} As it seems, the miracle-working of Aselepiades focused on the conduction of a magic-mantic rite in the open air, aiming at invoking Hekate and at speaking with her.\footnote{Vakaloudi, Μυστικισμός, Θαυματουργία και Ιατρική της θεουργίας, 97. Cf. H. Lewy, Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy. Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire. Cairo 1956, 2nd ed. Paris 1978, pp. 245–246.}

Still we can trace a difference here, between a Christian and a gentile miracle-worker. The first worked his miracles for the sake of Christ whereas the other one worked them for his own benefit. This attitude went along with the religious attitude. The Christians asked the supernatural forces...
for help. The gentile priests and the magicians believed that they could dominate the supernatural forces, because of their mystic (Egyptian) knowledge, and they commanded them to do as they wished.

Yet the problem of the pagan and the Jewish miracle-workers who created fire remained. Consequently, the Christian holy men had to be proven as their superiors, that is, to have the power to extinguish miraculously the fire that the magicians were creating. An example was traced at the time of Constantine the Great, when another indirect contest took place, which showed the power of the magicians or miracle workers on fire but also on water. The Jewish magicians were tried with μαγγανείας, μαγείας, περιεργίας, which means magic methods, to quench the fire that some workers were using, in order to build a Christian church in Tiberias. But the Christian priest Joseph ordered to bring to him a basin full of water on which he made the sign of the cross. Then he uttered Christ’s name (μεγάλῃ τῇ φωνῇ) – in order to frighten the demons – and he asked that the water would obtain magical powers and nullify the Jewish magic. The recitation of the godly names with a loud voice was a practice held also by magicians, as a method to impose themselves to the demons and frighten them. After he had thrown the water into every kiln, ἀνελύετο τὰ φάρμακα, he resolved the magic and the fire appeared again.

During the Christian age, the Persian court had become a “battlefield” of magic contests between the Christian bishops and the Magi-priests. The cause was, naturally, the influence, which they wanted to exercise upon the Persian king as his counselors, in favour of their religion. Accordingly, a contest of magic, cited by Anastasius I. Sinaita (sixth century AD.), took place in front of the Persian king Arrinatus. Obviously it concerned the exercise of authority at the royal court; this was proven by the aim of the Persian Magus Oricatus at overcoming the glorious Aphroditianus (θαυμασίου Ἀφροδιτιανοῦ), as the king himself had called the Christian bishop, and his wish to take up his place. This contest is also very important from another point of view. It constitutes a valuable source about the arts of the famous Chaldaeo-Iranian magic, as it resulted after centuries, when the Chaldaeo-Persians, by the name of Magousaioi, were travelling towards Asia Minor, establishing colonies in the process, after the admixtures and the combinations with different religions, beliefs in angels and demons,

49 Epiphanius of Salamis, Panarion, I, 12. 347. 27 – 348. 23.
superstitious customs, magical practices. Finally, it shows how the Christians were influenced by all these practices and how they used them in their own religion\textsuperscript{51}.

As already Iamblich (the introducer of theurgy in Neoplatonism, who lived in the fourth century) had written, the chaldaeo-iranian philosophy, which Oricatus represented, was working on magic about changing the weather phenomena, necromancy, and other kinds of demonic magic or divination\textsuperscript{52}. Iamblich assimilated this μαγικὴ παιδεία with the Greek education\textsuperscript{53}. Disposing of both, he himself had became a very prominent orator\textsuperscript{54}. The popular faith in the powers of the Chaldaeo-Babylonian magicians was unchallengeable. People believed that these magicians – by using invocations of gods’ secret names, all-powerful magical prayers, and magic rites – could work miracles, even resurrections\textsuperscript{55}.

In a doctrinal session the πρῶτος τῶν ἐπαοιδῶν Ὀρίκατος (Oricatus, the head of Magi) asked for the headmost position because of his ascendancy in miracle working. They all agreed that he should give a real proof of his allegation with signs and wonders\textsuperscript{56}. At the beginning he created a hawk of clay and made it fly. The head of the Christians S. Casteleus and the other bishops prayed, and immediately the bird became once again clay and crushed to the ground\textsuperscript{57}. Maybe this incident explains very well the fact

\textsuperscript{51} Βακαλούδη, Μυστικισμός, Θαυματουργία και Ιατρική της Θεοτουργίας, 13, 60ff.
\textsuperscript{53} This is the reason why, in the sources, the pagans are mentioned as “Greeks”. The religious/magic syncretism at the hellenistic age had brought a high estimation about these eastern practices to the Greeks and so they adopted them; see Βακαλούδη, Μυστικισμός, Θαυματουργία και Ιατρική της Θεοτουργίας, 59ff. – 120ff. For further similar information about the antiquity, see also Α. D. Βακαλούδη, Η Γένεση του Θεϊκού Ανθρώπου στις Αρχαίες Θρησκείες. Athens 2002.
\textsuperscript{56} Anastasius I. Sinaita, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch am Hof der Sasaniden, p. 22, 4–12. – p. 23, 8–21.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibidem, p. 24.
that the magicians were based on their illusionistic powers, aiming at tricking people. The bishops revealed the illusion that Oricatus had created, and they showed that his magic was a fraud.

Then Oricatus tried to show his power on water. In order to whiten some Indians and Ethiopians, he took some water from a spring, put it in a silver basin, invoked the spirits, in whom he believed, with a magic prayer (ἐπαοιδίαν) and poured the water on these persons. At once their body was filled with wounds and they screamed in pain, while he threatened the spirits, which he had summoned, showing his terrible anger against them. The Christian bishops exorcised the victims, they baptized them with an invocation to the Holy Spirit (in order to consecrate the water) and they healed them by converting them to Christianism.

The water had a damaging effect because of the invocation of the gentile gods, as long as they represented the evil spirits, which desired to afflict the humans. On the other hand, it obtained a beneficial virtue after the invocation of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s name. Over and above the magician dared to address the spirits menacingly. He believed that he was superior to them and he could control them by force. Therefore he addressed the powers of darkness because, as Iamblich had said, the humans can threaten only the demons; none has the power to threaten the spirits of good. Moreover only the Egyptians were invoking the demons. The Chaldeans exercised theurgy, that is the contact with the good spirits. Thus, what we observe here is an attestation of the religious syncretism.

One of the most characteristic demonstrations of a Persian Magus (and also a man who was engaged in the arts of black magic) was to be able to summon the spirits of the dead. Accordingly, the magician Oricatus went beyond any limit in his attempt to show his powers, and dared to call a

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dead priest from netherworld. The method that he used by lighting up a big fire, offering veals, holding ῥάβδους καρυίνας and calling the supernatural forces, corresponds to the description of the Persian magic fire-worship that Persians pretended to have inherited from Zoroaster. It is described as a mystic cult that was based on the principle of the decans with avestic hymns, with the existence of fire and sacrifice, and sacred fascicles of sticks with which the faithful "bewitched".

In my opinion, the element of the sticks was bacchic. The faithfuls of Bacchus — a god who had died, went to the underworld and then was resurrected — held torches and sticks crowned with ivy and leaves of the vineyard, that had a pinecone on the top, the so-called θύρσοι. This element was also Egyptian. Obviously the Magousaioi (the admixture of Chaldeans/Babylonians/Medoi/Persians) colonists of Lydia, Anatolia and Near East had transferred and developed sorcery in their colonies, along with the fire-worship and the figure of Zoroaster as an astrologist and a prophet. As it seems, they had also combined the fire-worship ceremonies with the local cults of Dionysus-Sabasius and other deities. This religious syncretism is attested also by Oricatus himself, when he refers to Hera as one of the deities whom he worships.

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62 Anastasius I. Sinaïta, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch am Hof der Sasaniden, p. 25.
63 Basic astrological deities that lived in the stars and were attached to the Zodiac, see VAKALOUDI, Μυστικισμός, Θαυματουργία και Ιατρική της Θεουργίας, 165. Eadem, Η Μαγεία ως Κοινωνικό Φαινόμενο στο Πρώιμο Βυζάντιο, 271–272.
64 Coming from Avesta, the sacred book of the Persians; see VAKALOUDI, Μυστικισμός, Θαυματουργία και Ιατρική της Θεουργίας, 165.
68 BIDEZ – CUMONT, Les Mages hellénisés, v. I, pp. 5–6; Dionysus-Sabasius, an old thraco-phrygian mystic god, who was born by Jupiter and Persephone or Jupiter and Gaia, had been identified during the hellenistic age (by a bold etymological combination) with “Jahwe Zebaoth” the god of the heavenly army in the Bible. Sabaoth = Sabasius was worshiped as the all-powerful and holy Master of the Universe; see John Lydus, Liber de mensibus, IV. 51, 52. CUMONT, Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain, pp. 59–62. For further information see also A. D. VAKALOUDI, Η Εξέλιξη της Μαγείας από την Αρχαιότητα έως τους Πρώτους Χριστιανικούς Αιώνες. Athens 2001, pp. 37–51, 83ff.
69 Anastasius I. Sinaïta, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch am Hof der Sasaniden, pp. 26, 29.
Cyril of Alexandria describes the Chaldean ῥαβδομαντεία as an art of the Χαλδαίων περιεργίας (black magic) in which the priests recited magical prayers in front of two standing sticks. With the invocation of the demons, the sticks bowed and then they turned back to their place. According to the declination that they had during their fall, the magicians could guess the future. During the process they were in a state of "enthusiasm", of madness, as if the deity had entered into them.

Perhaps in the case of Oricatus, the magician adapts the ceremony of the manticemonic gathering to his purpose, which is to bring a dead from the netherworld. In addition, what Oricatus was conducting, was a kind of necromancy. So there is a connection between his aim and the demonic kind of divination, which justifies the adopting of this practice. The ghost that came from the netherworld confessed being a demon and not the spirit of the dead priest. He said that he was forced by the magical ceremonies of Oricatus to appear on the earth and to deceive the session. The Christians annihilated the demon with the exorcism of blowing.

The Christian miracle-workers had adopted many of the superstitious methods that the ancient Hebrews used in order to fight against demons. Blowing on the face of someone was also an old traditional Jewish practice. Whoever wanted to exorcise the evil spirits which brought sicknesses, sorrow and every disaster to the humans, exercised this practice along with the recitation of magical prayers. I think that the blowing was based on the creation of man by God. God had blown and His Spirit had entered into the humans. Thenceforth the blowing had the same function as the spittle; it controlled the demons and at the same time it reflected the

72 Luck, Arcana Mundi. Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds, p. 34.
75 John Chrysostom, Commentarius in sanctum Ioannem Apostolum et Evangelistam, Homilia LVII, 311. Basilii aliorumque scholia in s. Gregorii orationes, PG 36, 907B–C.
power of life. Therefore it obtained creative power and also gave out something of the holy person that practiced it.

The most powerful demonstration of a Persian Magus, but also of a man who was involved in the arts of black magic or of a holy man and a miracle-worker, either Christian or pagan (as the famous pagan “saint and god” Apollonius of Tyana, who lived in the first century AD.), was the resurrection of the dead. This was also an inheritance from the famous ancient magicians or miracle-workers, as the Egyptians and the Jews, of whom the Persian Magi and the Christian holy men alleged to be the successors. The Egyptian magician-priests, who possessed magical formulae, chests full of magical books (the well known magical papyri) and herbs for charming the humans, were capable of doing very much harm; to bewitch people by spitting them on the face and make them live only during the night while during the day they would lie like dead; to send human souls to netherworld and imprison them there while their bodies would lie on the earth like dead. But for all these bad magic consequences the Egyptians had also antidotes which reversed the situation back to normal.

On the other hand the fame of the Hebrews as powerful magicians is well known and for this reason the magical papyri often recommend the magicians to use the Hebraic language when they call the spirits. The greatest contribution of Judaism into magic is the name of the one God. Its interpretations IA, IAO, ADONAI and JAHWEH are very much in use in magical formulae. Thanks to the knowledge of this name and the teaching of Moses who ἐπαιδεύθη πάσῃ σοφίᾳ Αἰγυπτίων ἦν δὲ δυνατὸς ἐν λόγοις καὶ ἔργοις (was trained in all the wisdome of the Egyptians, and became all-powerful both in words and actions) but also the names of the famous demons’ persecutor Solomon, of the Chaldean astrologist Abraham and the

76 John Chrysostom, Commentarius in sanctum Ioannem Apostolum et Evangelistam, Homilia LVII, 311.
77 VAKALOUDI, Μυστικισμός, Θαυματοποιία και Ιατρική της Θεουργίας, 36ff.; 217ff.
other patriarchs and prophets, Hebrews were thought of as excellent exorcists and magicians\textsuperscript{83}. At one with the above is the attestation of Artapanus that when Moses whispered to the Pharaoh’s ear the name of God, he fell dead until Moses brought him back to life\textsuperscript{84}. The resurrection of the dead was also a characteristic of the Hebrew prophets\textsuperscript{85} and then of Christ and the Apostles\textsuperscript{86}.

The men of the Church were aiming at presenting the Christian holy men as the successors of Moses and the prophets, also in the area of the resurrection of the dead. They claimed that the Christian miracle-workers had received this supernatural power from God himself. On the other hand, all the representatives of the pagan religions and the Jews, who held the same characteristic, were the heirs of the ancient servants of evil and were helped to their work by the demons of darkness. Accordingly, in S. Constantine’s life is reported the carrying on of a contest, in front of the Emperor Constantine, between a Christian bishop and a Jew magician. The Jews were for the Christians the most despiteful human nation, faithfults and descendants of the devil\textsuperscript{87}, because they had accused Christ of being γόης, φαρμακός, βιαιοθάνατος, that is magician or demon\textsuperscript{88}. The accusation


\textsuperscript{84} Eusèbe de Césarée, La préparation évangélique, IX. 27, 24–25.


\textsuperscript{88} Μαρτύριον τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀρέθα καὶ τῆς συνοδείας αὐτοῦ ἐν Νεγρᾷ τῇ πόλει, pp. 14, 16, 18, 24. Βιαιοθάνατοι were those, who had died in a violent way; according to the theories of the Chaldeans, the souls of these humans became demons, who played a very important role in magic; see Porphyre, De l’abstinence, t. II (Livres II–III), ed. J. Bouffartigue – M. Patillon, Paris 1979, 47. John Chrysostom, De Lazaro Concio Secunda, PG 48, 984. Th. Hoppener, Mageia, RE XIV, (1928), 301–393, 330, 332. Vakaloudi, Η Μαγεία ως Κοινωνικό Φαινόμενο στο Πρώιμο Βυζάντιο, 62, 166. Cf. Homer, Odyssey XI 50ff.
of being a magician was transferred later to the most important representative of his teachings Paul\textsuperscript{89}.

In Constantine’s time a verbal confrontation between Jews and Christians about the doctrines of the two religions, in Rome, turned out to be a contest of magic between the archbishop Silvestrus and Zambrias, one of the twelve dignitaries of the Jewish community who called themselves patriarchs or ὀρφεῖα, θαρσοῦντες δὲ μάλιστα γοητείας (who were masters of magic)\textsuperscript{90}.

Based on his magic knowledge the Jew alleged that he knew the name of God. He had learned it by exercising lecanomancy λεκάνην ὕδατος πληρώσας, ... ἐπειτα ἡμέρας προσευχάμενος, ἐκεῖ τούτον ἐντυπωμένον εἶδον ἀμυδρῶς ὡς ἐν ὕδατι\textsuperscript{91}. In this kind of demonic divination the magician summons the spirits with magical ceremonies over a basin filled with water, and in the reflections on the surface of the water he sees the answers to the questions that he asks\textsuperscript{92}. Then the Jew whispered this name to the ear of a bull and τοῖς ἐπᾴσμασι (with his powerful epodes <magical prayers>) he killed it immediately\textsuperscript{93}.

There is a similar magical formula cited in the book Βίβλος ἱερὰ ἐπικαλομένη Μονὰς ἢ ὀγδόη Μωυσέως\textsuperscript{94}. This book belonged to the Gnostic circles of Egypt – who had developed an admixture of Egyptian, Jewish and other mystic elements – in the first Christian centuries. Its purpose was

\textsuperscript{89} John Chrysostom, In Epistolam ad Ephesios commentarius, cap. IV. Homilia VIII, PG 62, 60. Oecumenius of Trikki, Argumentum in Acta Apostolorum, PG 118, 272A.


to reveal the true, holy, and powerful name of God and to give directions about the magical ceremonies of its use by the magicians\textsuperscript{95}. The adept of these ceremonies, by uttering the real name of God, could dominate the demons\textsuperscript{96}, could learn the secrets of the universe\textsuperscript{97} and thus obtained complete power over it\textsuperscript{98}. The name of Moses gave authenticity to these magical formulae\textsuperscript{99}. This book includes a formula in which it is written: “If someone wants to kill every bird, he must whisper to its ear the true, all-powerful name of God, which reveals this papyrus”\textsuperscript{100}.

However the Jewish magician didn’t possess God’s but the devil’s name. His knowledge concerned the demons and the invocations of them. The proof of this was given when the Emperor asked him to bring the animal round. This was impossible because the demons wished and aimed at the destruction and death. But when the Christian archbishop Silvestrus invoked the name of Christ, the bull was brought round immediately. That, pointed out the archbishop, was due to the fact that only God can take and give back life\textsuperscript{101}.

In the case of Oricatus, he wanted to bring round a woman. The procedure that he followed was: incensing, sprinkling with goat’s blood, sacrifice of veals. Then ῥινοκτυπῶν (by hitting his nose) he addressed menacingly (τῷ παρεστηκότι αὐτῷ παρέδρῳ) the demon, who was forced by his ceremonies to be present and to help him with his work, asking him to resurrect the dead woman\textsuperscript{102}. The act of sprinkling with the blood was a symbolic action aiming at giving life to the corps, because blood is the symbol and the power of life.

The fact that he performed the ceremony while hitting his nose very strongly, reminds us of the Greeks’ custom to sacrifice to the idols ῥινοκτυπεῖν ἐντονώτατα and offering with this sound a prayer to the gods who lived

\textsuperscript{95} DIETERICH, Βίβλος ἱερά ἐπικαλουμένη Μονάς ἢ ὀγδόη Μωυσέως περὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ ἀγίου in above, p. 169, 1ff.

\textsuperscript{96} PREISENDANZ, PGM. 2: XIII. 795ff.

\textsuperscript{97} PREISENDANZ, PGM. 2: XIII. 216.

\textsuperscript{98} DIETERICH, Βίβλος ἱερά ἐπικαλουμένη Μονάς ἢ ὀγδόη Μωυσέως περὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ ἀγίου, 187, 9–13.

\textsuperscript{99} HULL, Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{100} DIETERICH, Βίβλος ἱερά ἐπικαλουμένη Μονάς ἢ ὀγδόη Μωυσέως περὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ ἀγίου, 188, 13–14.

\textsuperscript{101} Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τῶν ἁγίων θεοστέπτων μεγάλων βασιλέων καὶ ἰσαποστόλων Κωνσταντίνου καὶ Ἑλένης, 30, 193. Georgius Monachus, Chronicon. 498–499.

\textsuperscript{102} Anastasius I. Sinaiita, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch am Hof der Sasaniden, p. 26, 9–15.
in their statues or icons. Thus, a religious element was used for the magical communication with the δαίμονα-πάρεδρον, not anymore as a prayer, but as an agent of compelling the demon to obey. Of course the magician had failed once again and the Christian bishops, by invoking the name of God, accomplished to bring the woman round.

John Chrysostom gives a very interesting information about resurrection of the dead. The magicians had the ability of the apparent death, that is to pretend a fictitious death, to be buried and to give the impression that they have been resurrected. In fact, said Chrysostom, with some magical ceremonies they achieved to deceive people’s vision, to pretend that they were dead and with their false resurrection to mislead people toward the doctrines of Satan. These were the false prophets, the false Apostles, the false “Christ” who were sent to compete the real ones.

At this point I would like to remind of the sceptic of all the mystic religions at this age. The sources described their cults by citing that the faithfule who attended their ceremonies and especially those who conducted them, managed to separate their soul from their body and, with the psychopomp Hermes as a guide, descended to Hades, where they subdued its demons. Then they learned the secrets of the seven cosmic zones and thus they were able to rule the universe. Therefore, maybe the false death of these people, to whom Chrysostom refers, is just the practice of these cults.

If one studies the similar practices of the ancient Jews, then one can trace the influence, which these practices had exercised on the corresponding Byzantine magical rituals.

Another contest between Christian and pagan priests consisted in remaining in a flaming kiln or a big fire. Probably we can trace here, once again, a connection with the ancient Jewish miracle-workers and parti-

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105 John Chrysostom, De divite et Lazaro Concio Quarta, PG 48, 1010.

106 Präsendanz, PGM. 2: XIII. 523–525.

107 Präsendanz, PGM. 2: XIII. 795ff.

108 Präsendanz, PGM. 2: XIII. 216.


carily with the miraculous saving τῶν παίδων ἐν καμίνῳ, οἵτινες τὸ πῦρ ὁμίσος ἀποστάζειν ἐδίδαξαν, because τὸ πῦρ ἢδέσῃ τὴν φόδην τὴν θαυμαστὴν ἑκείνην καὶ τοὺς ὕμνους. There is also a formula in the magical book Όγδόη τοῦ Μωυσέως that promises the same result. Entering the fire, the magician must recite: "to quench the fire; 'listen to me fire, work of God’s will, glory of the honest leading light, quench, become snow, because this is the Aion that gets upon the immaculate fire, to be disbanded from me every flame, every power of the essence with the command of the one that always exists, don’t harm me fire, don’t eat my flesh because I am — say the name." Oricatus made this attempt, but he failed and was almost burnt alive, whereas his Christian opponent walked out without any harm. Oricatus came out between life and death, but the Christian bishops cured him with the invocation of Christ’s name. The king ordered his crucifixion, but the bishop Aphrodisianus saved him, showing to everyone that the Christian motives were unselfish.

Another similar contest is related with a confrontation between a Christian monk and a Manichean. Saint Copres, who lived during the reign of

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113 A very common god of the Gnostics.

114 He means the name of God.

115 DIETERICH, Βίβλος ἱερὰ ἐπικαλουμένη Μονὰς ἢ ὀγδόη Μωυσέως περὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ ἁγίου, 191, 3–9.

116 Anastasius I. Sinaita, Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch am Hof der Sasaniden, p. 27, 4–11.

117 Ibidem, p. 27, 15–23.

118 Manichaeism was a gnostic sect which had adopted the Persian magical religion that was attributed to Zoroaster. The Christians hated the Manicheans because they had converted many people to their beliefs; see Epistulae Pseudo-Ignatii, (Ad Philippienses, De baptismo), ed. F. X. FUNK, Patres Apostolici, v. II. Tubingae 1901, 110. IV, 3. Théodore de Mopsueste, Homélies II sur le baptême (= Hom. XIII). Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste, reproduction phototypique du MS. Mingana Syr. 561 (Selly Oak Colleges’ Library, Birmingham), ed. R. TONNEAU – R. DEVERESSE (817 145). Città del Vaticano 1949. II. § 10, p. 385. For some further information about Manichaeism, see P. BROWN, The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire. Journal of Roman Studies 59 (1969) 92–103. VAKALOUDI, Η Μαγεία ως Κοινωνικό Φαινόμενο στο Πρώιμο
Julian, challenged the heretic to get into a big fire at the center of the town’s square. The one who would not be burnt, would prove also the credibility of his belief. The saint got first into the fire, making the mark of the cross, and remained in the flames for half an hour without having any problem. Then the people dragged violently the Manichean into the fire, while he resisted, and there he was burnt as a deceiver.\footnote{Copres (BHG 2083), Timotheus, Historia monachorum in Aegypto, ed. A. J. Festugière, Edition critique du texte et traduction annotée (Subsidia Hagiographica 53). Bruxelles 1971, 30. 87. 190 – 32. 88. 207.}

By everything that was written, it was pointed that the Christian hagiography was bent on proving that the Christian saints were the successors of the ancient Jewish holy miracle-workers, who were endowed with miraculous power directly from God. Then the Christian writers tried to prove that their holy men used this miraculous power exactly as the ancient Jews had used it against their greatest pagan enemies, in order to prove their God superior to any other. Practically, all these miraculous achievements were based on a perception which had its roots in the Hellenistic age and had been developed during the Christian centuries. This perception alleged that powerful “Philosopher-magicians” existed, who were studying the supernatural forces and because of this knowledge achieved to control them. By this means, these men, called either magicians or miracle workers, had the acquiescence of the spirits, and through them of God himself, to control their corresponding cosmic elements as they wished. This perception has been developed by the Christian writers in order to show their saints as holy miracle-workers, blessed by God and his angels to be able to do wonders, while their pagan opponents were impious magicians (followers of the black arts) who were acting with the help of the evil demons.