

## VII.—Claudian's Neglect of Magic as a Motif

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In Eitrem's article on magic in Graeco-Roman literature, Claudian is not discussed. The omission is justified, for the poet neglects magic almost completely. Yet because of his period, his Alexandrian origin, his models, and his style, one would expect an ample treatment of magic. Perhaps the explanation for the neglect of that motif lies in a combination of (1) Claudian's personal connection with Eastern culture, with which magic was largely associated, and (2) his striving to be, and to be considered, a true Roman. Demonstrated familiarity with magic ritual, which might clash with Claudian's pretensions to *Romanitas*, must be avoided.

In an article written in 1941, which has only recently reached this country, Eitrem discusses the use of magic as a motif in Greek and Latin literature.<sup>1</sup> He begins his discussion of Greek writings with the Homeric poems, and ends with the authors of the Hellenistic novel. On the Latin side, his chronological range extends from Vergil to Apuleius. Those interested in later Latin literature may wonder at the absence of Claudian, who usually brings up the rear in any procession of Roman authors. Though Eitrem assigns no reason for his failure to include the "last of the Roman poets," justification for this omission is not far to seek.<sup>2</sup> Claudian, whose poems reflect virtually every other aspect of classical culture, passes over the magic arts in almost complete silence. In a corpus of nearly ten thousand verses, we find devoted to magic one connected passage of nineteen lines, and three brief references amounting in the aggregate to seven verses.<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of this note, first, to show that Claudian's comparative neglect of the motif in question is worthy of attention, second, to discuss briefly the few verses which the poet does devote to the subject, and third, to suggest a possible reason for their paucity.

<sup>1</sup> S. Eitrem, "La Magie comme Motif Littéraire chez les Grecs et les Romains," *Symbolae Osloenses*, 21 (1941) 39-83.

<sup>2</sup> Claudian is also omitted in L. Fahz, *De Poetarum Romanorum Doctrina Magica* (= *Religionsgesch. Versuche u. Vorarbeiten* 2.3, Giessen, 1904).

<sup>3</sup> In *Ruf.* 1.145-61, *De Bell. Goth.* 235-38, *6 Cons. Hon.* 348 f., *Carm. Min.* 43.3. P. Fargues, *Claudian* (Paris, 1933) 178, note 2, lists *6 Cons. Hon.* 324-30, together with *In Ruf.* 1.145-61, as Claudian's "développements sur la magie"; but the former passage refers rather to religious than to magical rites; cf. the distinction which Claudian himself makes in *6 Cons. Hon.* 348-50.

I. On *a priori* grounds, one would expect to find in Claudian a considerable amount of space devoted to magic. (1) The Fourth Century, within which most of the poet's life falls (c. 370–c. 404 A.D.),<sup>4</sup> was a high point in the history of magic; the magical papyri which we have belong mostly to this period.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the numerous fourth-century Imperial edicts against the employment of magic arts are in themselves the best proof that those arts were widely practised at the time.<sup>6</sup> (2) Claudian was of Egyptian origin, almost certainly a native of Alexandria;<sup>7</sup> the inhabitants of Egypt in general, and of Alexandria in particular, were noted for their interest in the magic arts.<sup>8</sup> (3) Claudian's models in the writing of Latin verse, whom he imitates not only in form but in content (Vergil, Lucan, Statius, Silius Italicus, Seneca),<sup>9</sup> afford numerous examples of passages devoted to minute descriptions of magical rites.<sup>10</sup> (4) Such descriptions, as Eitrem points out, were most appropriate to the rhetorical style of later Latin literature, with its straining for surprising effects. Indeed, the rhetorical schools themselves are known to have used magical ceremonies as a theme.<sup>11</sup> Both the rhetorical nature of Claudian's style, and his devotion to the precepts of the rhetoricians, have been amply demonstrated.<sup>12</sup>

For all these reasons, then — Claudian's period, his nationality, his models, and his style — it should have occasioned no surprise had his poems been embellished with numerous and elaborate developments of themes drawn from magic; the comparative scarcity of such themes, conversely, seems worthy of attention. Before attempting to explain this scarcity, let us examine the few references which Claudian does make to the magic arts.

<sup>4</sup> Fargues (1933) 7–30.

<sup>5</sup> S. Eitrem, "Aus 'Papyrologie und Religionsgeschichte': Die Magischen Papyri," *Münch. Beitr. z. Papyrusforsch. u. Ant. Rechtsgesch.* 19 (1934) 249; A. D. Nock, "Greek Magical Papyri," *JEA* 15 (1929) 219, 222.

<sup>6</sup> J. Maurice, "La Terreur de la Magie au IV<sup>e</sup> Siècle," *Comptes Rendus de L'Académie des Inscriptions* (1926) 182–88.

<sup>7</sup> Fargues (1933) 6.

<sup>8</sup> L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York, 1923–41) 1.7–14, and 1.783 s.v. "Alexandria"; Nock (1929) 228 f.; Eitrem (1941) 59; H. Hubert in *DS* s.v. "Magia," 1501, 1504 f.

<sup>9</sup> Fargues (1933) 51.

<sup>10</sup> Eitrem (1941) 59–63, 69–72, 74–76; Fahz (1904) *passim*; S. Eitrem, "Das Ende Didos in Vergils Aeneis," *Festschrift til Halvdan Koht* (Oslo, 1933) 29–41.

<sup>11</sup> Eitrem (1941) 70, 76.

<sup>12</sup> Fargues (1933) 46–55; H. L. Levy, "Claudian's *In Rufinum* and the Rhetorical *Ψόγος*," *TAPhA* 77 (1946) 57–65.

II. The longest and most significant is a passage from the *In Rufinum* (1.145–61) obviously modelled upon Vergil's Allecto-Turnus episode (*Aeneid* 7.415–55). Here the Fury Megaera, who has assumed the guise of an old sorcerer, is striving to impress Rufinus with the greatness of her magic powers. She boasts of knowing the Thessalian incantation for drawing down the moon; she understands Egyptian symbols, Chaldaean spells, the potency of magic herbs and juices. She is a necromancer, a devotee of Hecate and the *Manes*; she has both brought corpses to life and killed men by spells before their time. She has made oak trees walk, the lightning-bolt stand still, and rivers stop and reverse their flow.<sup>13</sup> All these skills she merely enumerates; she now proceeds to give actual proof of her powers. Here if anywhere Claudian had the opportunity to include the description of some horrible, unnatural act of magic. This might then have been shown to have the same intimidating effect upon Rufinus that Allecto's re-assumption of her Fury-shape had upon Turnus (*Aeneid* 7.446–66). Instead, the pseudo-magician, using neither thaumaturgic apparatus nor magic ritual, but merely uttering the words “. . . mutatos cerne Penates!” (*In Ruf.* 1.161), transforms the columns of Rufinus' mansion from stone to gold. Thus Claudian seems deliberately to have sacrificed the chance for a striking rhetorical description in favor of a rather mild thrust at Rufinus' avarice.<sup>14</sup> To sum up the one considerable passage in which Claudian treats of magic: his magician is not a real one, but a Fury in disguise; she — or he —, though boasting of prowess in black magic, performs an act of the whitest variety.

<sup>13</sup> The list closely parallels the traditional recital of thaumaturgic feats: cf. Ovid *Met.* 7.199–209, Lucan 6.461–84, Seneca *Med.* 754–70; cf. also A. S. Pease on Verg. *Aen.* 4.489 *vertere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935) 403 f.; H. Hubert in *DS* s.v. “*Magia*,” 1495. For parallels in the papyri, cf. K. Preisendanz and others, *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (Leipzig, 1928–31; reference is to sections and lines of the text) 34.1 f.; 4.1326 (drawing down the moon); 7.434; 4.1309–12, 2460, 2642–49, 2872; 8.72 (magic herbs and juices); 4.1418–20, 1454–95, 1949, 2039–56 (necromancy); 4.2751–53; 36.185–90 (Hecate); 13.277–82; 19.14 f. (resuscitation of the dead); 4.2450–2500; 12.378–80; 12.6–11; 36.245–50 (death spells); 4.3052–54 (reversal of river). The walking forest and the halted thunderbolt, though found in the poets (Verg. *Aen.* 4.491, Ovid *Met.* 7.205, Stat. *Theb.* 7.115, Seneca *Herc. Oet.* 454 f., 469 f., Lucan 6.519 f.), seem not to be paralleled in the magical papyri. On the correspondence between the papyri and the literary tradition, cf. Nock, *op. cit.* (above, note 5) 225–27.

<sup>14</sup> On Rufinus' greed, cf. H. L. Levy, *The Invective In Rufinum of Claudius Claudianus* (Geneva, N. Y., 1935) 15, notes 82 (cf. also *In Ruf.* 1.296, 305) and 83.

The three remaining passages mentioned above<sup>15</sup> might be passed over in silence, were it not pertinent to remark that in each one of them Claudian is at pains to repudiate a popular belief in the efficacy of magic arts. The poet's attitude toward magic, then, may be described not merely as apathetic, but as actively negative. Let us now inquire into the possible source of this attitude.

III. An obvious answer to our inquiry might seem to be provided by a factor that has already been mentioned — the Imperial interdict against magic,<sup>16</sup> which might persumably have kept the loyal court poet from treating a forbidden topic more fully. But the Imperial disapproval of magic, though it would certainly have kept Claudian from praising the practitioners of the black arts, would not have prevented him from inveighing against them. He might have introduced a full description of awful rites into his narrative, and yet have avoided Imperial censure by attributing those rites to the enemies of mankind, of justice, and of Theodosius. For example, Claudian is not deterred by the Imperial legislation against pederasty<sup>17</sup> from alluding to that subject in some detail as part of his virulent attack upon Stilicho's enemy Eutropius.<sup>18</sup>

I suggest that the answer to our query may lie, not in Imperial legislation or in any other external factor, but rather in a personal attitude of the poet himself, and that this attitude may have stemmed from Claudian's peculiar relation to the *Romanitas* of which he was such an eloquent exponent. For Claudian, Alexandrian by birth, in migrating to Rome, had transferred not only his person and his possessions, but his loyalties as well. He came to regard himself, and sought to be regarded, as a Roman singer of Rome's imperial glory,<sup>19</sup> and as the mouthpiece of the old Roman aristocracy.<sup>20</sup> He so far put behind him his origin as a *Graius homo* that he joined with the Romans in deriding the Easterners as *Grai Quirites*.<sup>21</sup> This self-identification of an immigrant with the dominant group in his new land, an identification carried to the point of joining in the dominant group's contempt

<sup>15</sup> Cf. note 3. above.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. note 6. above.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. O. Seeck, *Gesch. d. Untergangs d. Ant. Welt* (Berlin, 1913) 5.229 f., 531 f.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *In Eutrop.* 1.66–77, 360–70.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. E. Stein, *Gesch. d. Spätrom. Reiches* (Vienna, 1928) 349; C. H. Moore, "Rome's Heroic Past in the Poems of Claudian," *CJ* 6 (1910–11) 108–15.

<sup>20</sup> Fargues (1933) 129–52.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *In Eutrop.* 2.136; Fargues (1933) 137 f.

towards the immigrant's original compatriots, is a not uncommon phenomenon in our large American cities. This attitude tends to carry with it a rejection of any trait which would associate the immigrant with his original culture. The phenomenon has been exhaustively studied by I. L. Child in a publication of the Yale University Institute of Human Relations.<sup>22</sup> Child cites the case of a second generation Italian immigrant who is very eager to be accepted as an American. Now the man is aware that the Italian language would be a great help to him in his business life; yet he feels strongly that any use of Italian would conflict with his desire to become known only as an American. He therefore rejects the potential asset.<sup>23</sup> I suggest that our present situation is, however remotely, analogous to that which Child describes, and that here we have the clue to Claudian's virtual rejection of magic as a motif. For whatever may have been the importance of indigenous Italian magic in early Roman days, surely throughout the Imperial period the magic arts at Rome were closely associated with the Greek-speaking East and with other Eastern lands.<sup>24</sup> It is evident that Claudian so associated them, for in the few verses which he does devote to magic, we find references to Thessaly, to Chaldaea, to the Caucasus, to Scythia, and — be it noted — to Egypt,<sup>25</sup> but no reference whatever to the Western lands. To Claudian, then, magic was part and parcel of the peculiarly Eastern culture with which he no longer wished to identify himself. His attitude may be conjecturally reconstructed as follows: He may mention magic, provided that he treat it with old-fashioned Roman contempt. But he must not adorn his verses with elaborate specimens of magic ritual. Such adornment might gain a Vergil, a Lucan, a Statius, or a Silius the reputation of being a *doctus poeta*, skilled in exotic lore — but the display of such expertness, unobjectionable in an Italian-born poet, would be most damaging to an Alexandrian immigrant's claim to *Romanitas*. Claudian must be more Roman than the Romans, or run the risk of not being Roman at all.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> I. L. Child, *Italian or American? The Second Generation in Conflict* (New Haven, 1943) esp. 49–117.

<sup>23</sup> Child (1943) 102; cf. also 101, 103–5.

<sup>24</sup> H. Hubert in *DS* s.v. "Magic," 1500–6; Thorndike (1923–41) 1.59.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. note 3, above.

<sup>26</sup> A similar attitude may possibly have been held by the Hellenized Syrian of whom A. D. Nock remarks (*CAH* 12.449), "Lucian of Samosata was probably a pure Semite — as much so as Elagabalus — and as a boy he did not talk Greek, and yet he clung to the old order at a time when many pure Hellenes had followed after other things."