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Roman Witchcraft: ‘Contaminations’ between Literature and Reality

Narrating Witchcraft – Erfurt, 30th June – 1st July 2016

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Introduction

When attempting to reconstruct a concept such as ancient witchcraft we are bound to ask ourselves whether this really existed beyond the fictional dimension of the sources which handed down to us the vivid portraits of many witches and of their frightful powers.¹ It is the purpose of this study to observe how elements of real witchcraft were employed to dramatize fictional characterisations in Latin literature, and how these characterisations deeply influenced and shaped popular ideas about the existence of the witches. Firstly, I shall provide an overview of the witches from Latin literature, showing that the description of their practices bear comparison with the information from non-literary evidence, and that in some case we might even argue for the historical existence of some of these witches. Secondly, I will focus on the figure of the metamorphic witch, and propose that this type of witch, inherited from Greek literature, impacted on the collective imagination of the Romans to the extent that they Latinised and transformed the word *strix* into *striga* and actually believed in the existence of these metamorphic witches. This study will, therefore, enable us to ascertain the ‘contaminations’ – to borrow a philological expression – between fictional and real witchcraft in a time span which ranges from Plautus to Late Antiquity.

¹ Since aiming to a philological understanding of the texts here discussed, I shall adopt an emic methodology, the purpose of which is to reconstruct a concept according to the viewpoint of the culture examined. According to this methodology – developed by Pike 1967², p.37-72 and applied by Bremmer, 1999=2008, p.348 to ancient ‘magic’ – nothing allows us to infer that the contemporary idea of ‘witch’, stemming from the Old English *wicce* (“diviner”, cf. Chambers, 2010, s.v. *witch*, p.1240-1), overlap with how the Romans imagined these women. Bearing in mind this methodological consideration, for the sake of simplicity I will still employ ‘witch’ and ‘witchcraft’ and focus on what the Romans called *veneficae*, *sagae*, *magae*, and especially *strigae*.

Reality in literature: witches and love-magic

The appearance of the first witches in Roman literature dates back the early second century BC: Plautus briefly mentions the witches, whom he calls *veneficae* (“poisoners”),² and represents them as involved in what we could regard as love-magic.³ Plautus would have certainly looked at literary models such as Theocritus’ Second Idyll, in which we find the young Simaetha attempting a ritual to bring her lover back into her arms.⁴ Theocritus’ influence notwithstanding, we know that people in Rome really employed *venena*, a semantically broad term which could indicate both healing remedies and poisons,⁵ and that these were often specifically used to win a victim over, even though they could be lethal.⁶ It was also the fear of the harmful effects of these *venena* that led Sulla to promulgate in 81 BC the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis*, which prosecuted poisoners, assassins, and later from those practising magic,⁷ as well as people selling or concocting *venena* and those who administered *amatoria pocula* (“love potions”).⁸ As we shall discuss below, material evidence – namely inscriptions, curse tablets – confirms that the practitioners of these rituals were often women.

Theocritus’ Simaetha and other Greek authorities now lost became models as influential as to inspire a number of poems concerning witchcraft, such as Vergil’s Eight Eclogue – where we find not a

² Plaut. *Epid.* 221; *Mos.* 218, on this cf. Dickie, 2001, p.164-5. Translations from Latin and Greek, unless otherwise specified, are mine.

³ For modern studies on Greco-Roman love-magic, cf. Tupet, 1976, p.56-91; 1986, p.2626-47; Fauth, 1980, p.265-82; Murgatroyd, 1983, p.68-77; Winkler in Faraone, Obbink, 1991, p.214-43; Faraone, 1999. For a useful analysis on the concept of magic, cf. Gordon in Flint et al. 1999, p.160-243.

⁴ Cf. *Theoc.* 2, on which Luck in Flint et al. 1999, p. 120. Ogden, 2008, p.50 suggests that Herodas’ *Gyllis* – although not dabbling in witchcraft – could have been a source of inspiration (*Herod.* 1). A model for Theocritus would have certainly been the witches of Thessaly, mentioned by Aristophanes (*Nu.* 749-755), and in later lost Greek plays (e.g. *Sosiphanes’ Meleager* = *TrGR* Snell, Kannicht, 1986², p.261; *Menander’s Thessalae* = Kassel and Austin, *PCG*, 1998, v.6,2, p.127 = *Plin. Nat.* 30,2,7). On the Thessalian witches, cf. Phillips in Mirecki, Meyer, 2002, p.378-86.

⁵ Cf. the discussion by Gaius, who comments on the Laws of the Twelve Tables, and Marcianus reported in *Dig.* 50.16.236 and 48.8.3.2 respectively. Cf. also *Hor. Epod.* 5.87.

⁶ *Plin. Nat.* 25.25

⁷ Cf. *Paul. Sent.* 5.23.15-8.

⁸ *Paul. Sent.* 5.23.1; 5.23.14 = *Dig.* 48.19.38.5. On the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis*, cf. Rives, 2003, p.313-39; 2006, p.47-67.

female but a male character dabbling in love-magic –⁹ Catullus,¹⁰ and the witches that we find in Horace,¹¹ Propertius,¹² Tibullus,¹³ Ovid,¹⁴ and Juvenal.¹⁵ Horace in particular provides us with the portrait of a witch named Canidia that will enable us to glimpse further connections between fictional and real witchcraft. As in Theocritus, Canidia too is interested in love-magic; Horace, however, enriches the characterisation of Canidia and her witchcraft with macabre details: in the Fifth Epode Canidia, assisted by the witches Sagana,¹⁶ Veia, and Folia,¹⁷ aims to obtain the liver and marrow of a boy, who will be buried up to his neck and left to starve, in order to prepare an irresistible charm.¹⁸

Behind the dramatic and fictional elements of this description, we can attempt to identify historical figures who could have inspired Horace's Canidia and Sagana. Evidence comes from the commentary by the grammarian Pomponius Porphyrio, dating to the early third century AD,¹⁹ in which Porphyrio reports an information, which – as Dickie argues –²⁰ he probably found in the earlier commentary by Helenius Acron.²¹ The character of Canidia was indeed a real woman from Naples – says Porphyrio – by the name of Gratidia, an unguentaria (“producer and/or seller of cosmetics”), whom Horace insultingly described as a *venefica* (“witch”).²² A person trading this type of merchandise would have

⁹ Verg. Ecl. 8.64-109 on which Abt, 1908, p.70-84; Tupet, 1976, p.223-32; Clausen, 1994, p.233-9; p.255-65; Luck in Flint et al. 1999, p.121; Ogden, 2008, p.43.

¹⁰ In Plin. Nat.28.19 it is said that Catullus wrote about love-magic, like Theocritus and Vergil. While Ernout, 1962, p.124 explains the reference to Catullus as a lapse, Jones, 1968, p.14, n.b and Wiseman, 1985, p.193 suggest that this is a reference to a non-extant poem. I owe my gratitude to Dániel Kiss for his advice on Catullan issues.

¹¹ Hor. Epod. 3.8; 5; 17; Serm. 1.8; cf. the discussion in Tupet, 1976, p.284-337, and Watson, 2003, p.174-91.

¹² Prop. 4.5.1-18; 63-78; cf. Tupet, 1976, p.; La Penna, 1977, p.192-5; Ogden, 2009, p. 127.

¹³ Tib. 1.2.42-66; cf. Tupet, 1976, p.337-48; Maltby, 2002, p.165-6; Ogden, 2009, p.125.

¹⁴ Ov. Am. 3.7.27-36; 73-84. Cf. Ogden, 2009, p.126.

¹⁵ Juv. 6.610, on which Courtney, 2013, p.298.

¹⁶ Sagana also accompanies Canidia in Serm. 1.8.25.

¹⁷ On these two figures, cf. the discussions in Mankin, 1995, p.119; 122; Watson, 2003, p.217; 218.

¹⁸ Hor. Epod. 5.15-82.

¹⁹ The terminus post quem for dating Porphyrio's commentary is a reference (serm. 2.5.92) to an earlier commentary on Horace by Terentius Scaurus, “the most illustrious grammarian under Hadrian” (cf. Gel. 11.15.3), i.e. AD 117-138. The terminus ante quem is a quotation from Iulius Romanus – who presumably lived in the third century (cf. Gatti, 2005 in *Brill's New Pauly*, vol. 6, col. 1087) – in the *Ars Grammatica* by Charisius (ed. Barwick², 1964, p.285, 12): in this fragment we find, in fact, a reference to Porphyrio's commentary, which can be consequently dated to the third century. Cf. the discussion in Diederich, 1999, p.3.

²⁰ Cf. Dickie, 2001, p.180. This hypothesis is not implausible since Porphyrio acknowledges that evidence about the historical existence of Sagana comes from Helenius Acron (cf. Porph. serm. 1.8.25).

²¹ According to Schmidt, 2005 in *Brill's New Pauly*, vol.6, s.v. Helenius Acron, col.65-6, since Gellius does not seem to know this scholar, we should date Acron's commentary to the late second century AD.

²² Porph. epod. 3.7-8. On this passage, cf. the detailed discussion in Mankin, 1995, p.299-301.

been easily deemed as a practitioner of magic: it is worth remembering that people dealing in cosmetics would often handle poisonous substances,²³ and that the Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis interdicted the production and the selling of venena and love philtres.²⁴ These legal measures notwithstanding, the production and circulation of these philtres was so widespread to the extent that Ovid addresses this issue seriously in his poems and admonishes against resorting to love-charms and love-magic.²⁵ Funerary inscriptions prove that people were believed to have died because of the effect of venena.²⁶

But Porphyrio does not only give us interesting evidence to assess the historical existence of a person behind Canidia, but also behind Sagana: memini me legere apud Helenum Acronem Saganam nomine fuisse Horati temporibus Pompei sagam senatoris, qui a triumviris proscriptus est; “I remember that I have read in Helenius Acron that a witch called Sagana belonged to the entourage of Pompeius the senator, who was proscribed by the Triumvirs, in Horace’s time”.²⁷ Whilst scholars have considered the evidence about Canidia and Sagana with scepticism,²⁸ we must bear in mind the fact that witches were really believed to exist in the Roman world, and that some women even believed themselves able to perform magical practices. In addition to the evidence already discussed, more data can be added to show the belief in the existence of witches: in a funerary inscription from the Esquiline dating to early first century AD, two parents mourn the loss of a three years-old boy killed by a saga.²⁹ Likewise, an inscription from Rome – dating to the end of the first century AD – reads that a man was killed by his freedwoman, who was a venefica.³⁰ Another epigraph from Dalmatia tells us that a woman called Attia Ampliata suffered from a slow death by the hand of a

²³ Marcianus in Dig.48.8.3.3-4 says that the pigmentarii (“dealers in cosmetics”) can be prosecuted if they sell poisonous ingredients such as hemlock, salamander, monkshood, pine grubs, the venomous beetle, and the Spanish fly.

²⁴ Cf. Paul. Sent. 5.23.1; 5.23.14.

²⁵ Ov. Ars 2.99-106; 2.683-4; 3.433-8; Her. 83-94.

²⁶ CIL I 3358a; IX 3030. Cf. Graf, 2007, p.140-1.

²⁷ Porph. serm. 1.8.25; in the rest of the passage, Porphyrio speculates on the reason why Acron calls her Sagana maior. The senator Pompeius here alluded is hitherto unidentified. A discussion in Dickie, 2001, p.167-8.

²⁸ Cf. Mankin, 1995, p.300; Watson, 2003, p.198; Ogden, 2008, p.50; 2009, p.121; to a lesser degree Dickie, 2001, p.168.

²⁹ CIL VI 3, 19747; cf. Graf, 2007, p.140.

³⁰ CIL VI 3, 20905; cf. Graf, 2007, p.141.

venefica.³¹ Interestingly enough, we do not only have evidence of the existence of people regarded as witches, but that some women believed to be able to perform witchcraft: curse tablets from Raetia and Northern Africa demonstrate that the practitioners could also be women.³² Thus, it is far from being improbable that Horace provided a dramatic – and also quite amusing in the case of the Satires – description of the historical figures of Gratidia and Sagana, in the same way in which other literary depictions of witches were inspired by real-life.

Before concluding this overview on the presence of real witchcraft in Latin literature, we must acknowledge the witch Erictho in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. She seems to embody an all-powerful type of witch,³³ and – unlike the aforementioned witches – Erictho is not concerned with love-magic but with necromancy:³⁴ it is, in fact, her duty to reanimate the corpse of a Roman soldier to deliver a prophecy about the outcome of the Civil War.³⁵ Even though it is not implausible that lost models could have inspired Lucan,³⁶ the existence of real divinatory practices with human remains could have influenced Lucan's description: in the Greek Magical Papyri we find, in fact, references to human skulls (σκηνοῖ or σκύφοι) used in divination.³⁷

As we have observed, witchcraft in Latin literature, and especially the literary typos of the witch inherited from Theocritus, is not entirely fictional: it grounds on commonplace ideas about the existence and the harmful powers of these women. The kind of witch involved in love-magic characterises most of the portraits of witches in Latin literature from the second century BC onwards:

³¹ CIL III 2197; cf. Graf, 2007, p.141.

³² Cf. Audollent, 1904, DT 93; 212; 219; 220; 270; 271. The fact that women could perform goetic magic is confirmed by PGM XIII.24-26; LXVIII.1-20. Cf. the discussion by Dickie, 2000, p.563-82.

³³ Cf. the attribute 'super-witch' used in Luck in Flint, 1999, p.137-8, and recently Stamatopoulos, 2015, p. 97-102.

³⁴ For an emic examination of 'necromancy', cf. Bremmer, 2015, p.119-41.

³⁵ Luc. 6.507-830.

³⁶ Cf. Ogden, 2009, p.197.

³⁷ PGM IV.2128-9; IV.1924; 1946; 1965; 1991; 2003; 2119; 2122; 2134. For accurate terminological remarks, cf. Faraone in Johnston, Struck, 2005, p.278-81. Ogden, 2008, p.53-4 stresses this parallel with the PGM.

in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, an ancient 'novel',³⁸ we find the witches Meroe, Panthia,³⁹ and Pamphile in particular,⁴⁰ depicted as libidinous women using their supernatural powers to seduce their victims. Apuleius' Pamphile, however, embodies not only the traditional 'love witch', but also the witch able to divine,⁴¹ and the metamorphic witch.⁴² This latter kind of witch, who also plays an important role in the tale of Thelyphron in the *Metamorphoses*,⁴³ must now be explored. This will allow us to cast new light on the development of the 'contaminations' between literary models and the beliefs about the real witches in the Roman society between the beginning of first, and the fifth and sixth century AD.

From literature to reality: the metamorphic witch

We first meet the word *strix* in Plautus, who uses it to indicate not a witch but a screech-owl that divours human beings while still being alive.⁴⁴ Amongst the later occurrences of *strix*, the most memorable is that in Ovid's *Fasti*, where these ill-omened birds are said to constitute a threat to children since feeding on their blood.⁴⁵ But the beliefs surrounding these screech-owls changed during the first century AD, and the *striges* became, in fact, human witches: women able to transform themselves into owls. Fundamental evidence comes from Petronius' *Satyricon*, a novel now in fragments probably written in AD 66.⁴⁶ At Petr. 63.3-10 we find a tale that concerns the abduction of a youth's corpse by some evil witches (*mulieres plussciae* "wise women") who can transform themselves into screech-owls. The story is retold during a banquet by Trimalchio, attempting to outshine the previous tale concerning the werewolf, narrated by his friend Niceros. In order to render

³⁸ The concept of 'novel' is unknown in Greco-Roman times; on this designation to indicate various ancient writings, cf. Berger, Fusillo, Hofmann 2006, 837-850.

³⁹ They appear in Aristomenes' tale in *Apul. Met.* 1.5-19. It is also worth acknowledging the saga in *Met.* 9.29. That Apuleius was well-acquainted with Theocritus and love-magic in literary sources can be observed by his own remarks in *Apol.* 30.5-13; 31.5-7.

⁴⁰ *Apul. Met.* 3.15-8,

⁴¹ Cf. *Met.* 2.11.6-2.12.2; cf. van Mal-Maeder, 2001, p.203-4. On lamp-divination, cf. Zografou, 2010, p.276-94

⁴² *Met.* 3.21-2. This skills seems also to characterise Meroe and Panthia, who are called *Lamiae* (*Met.* 1.17.5); cf. Keulen, 2007, p.322; May, 2013, p.176-7. On Pamphile, cf. Stamatopoulos, 2015, p.250-84.

⁴³ *Met.* 2.21-30. Cf. van Mal-Maeder, 2001, p.417-22.

⁴⁴ *Plaut. Ps.* 820-1.

⁴⁵ *Ov. Fast.* 6.131-68; cf. Bömer, 1958, p.344-5.

⁴⁶ Cf. the overview in Schmeling, 2011, p.xiii-xvii.

the spoken language of these freedmen for comic purposes,⁴⁷ Petronius draws upon Vulgar Latin and puts in Trimalchio's mouth the popular form *striga*, not *strix*.⁴⁸ As we shall see, a number of passages shows that the term *striga* does not indicate any longer the screech owl, but the metamorphic witch. But was this due to a Roman innovation or to an imitation of a Greek literary model now lost? The latter hypothesis is not implausible and I shall provide evidence to substantiate it. In a very corrupted passage of the epitome of the *De verborum significatu*,⁴⁹ Festus comments on the popular form *striga*, and he provides us with a curious citation in Greek:

strig<am>⁵⁰ ..(5 litt).. ius,⁵¹ Graeci στρίγγα ap<pellant, und>e maleficis mulieribus nomen inditum est, quas volaticas etiam vocant. Itaque solent his verbis eas veluti avertere Graeci: στρίγγ' ἀπο<πέ>μπεί[ε]ν νυκτικόμεαν, στρίγγ' ἀπό λαῶν ὄρνιν ἀωνομίαν ὠκυπόρους ἐπὶ νῆας.⁵²

“Witch [...], the Greeks call στρίγγα, from which this name has been given to the wicked women, whom they also call ‘flying beings’. Thus, the Greeks are used to keep them away by using, for example, these words: avoid the metamorphic witch (whose) hair is as pitch-dark as night, (avoid) the metamorphic witch, unnamed bird, from the people on the swift-moving ships”.

The evidence from Festus suggests that, in the collective imagination, the witch (*striga*) was considered a fearsome metamorphic witch, and not a fictional character: Festus takes, in fact, what is

⁴⁷ The readership of the *Satyrical* would have been amused by such realism and by the vulgar expressions of these semi-literate characters, cf. Boyce, 1991, p.8-9; 13-4. Panayotakis, 1995, p.xv.

⁴⁸ Petr. 63.4; 63.8. Cf. the discussion in Väänänen, 1981³, p.83; 107.

⁴⁹ Fest. p. 315 M. The manuscript which preserves the Festus' *De verborum significatu* (the so-called Codex Farnesianus or Codex Neapolitanus IV A 3), is burnt on one side, and the column containing this passage is damaged. As to Festus' life, internal elements allows us to date it to the second half of the second century AD, cf. Schmidt, 2004, in *Brill's New Pauly*, vol.5, s.v. Festus, col.407-8.

⁵⁰ Lindsay integrates the lacuna with an accusative of the third declension in his first edition (1913, p.414: strig), but in his second edition (1930, p.410) indicates the possibility of the reading strig<am> in the critical apparatus.

⁵¹ Lindsay, 1930, p.410 proposes to integrate these missing letters either with <ait Verr>ius (“Verrius says”), or with <genus a>vis (“a type of bird”). If the former interpretation is correct, and Verrius Flaccus acknowledged the popular form *striga* in his *De verborum significatu*, this term would have already been well-attested in the first century BC.

⁵² I follow here some integrations and emendations proposed by Lindsay (1930, p.410) in apparatus. Diehl, 1925, vol.2, p.205 inserts these verses amongst the *Carmina Popularia* (emending the transmitted νυκτικόμεαν with νυκτιβόαν, and ἀωνόμιον with ἀωνομίαν, which I print above). However, the dactylic structure of the passage, the presence of the hapax νυκτικόμεαν, the use of the elegant use of the infinitive as an imperative, as well epic forms such as λαῶν and νῆας, might induce us to think that this was a quotation from a lost Greek play, perhaps a comedy given the compresence of lofty language and magic. My gratitude goes to Dr Giulio Iovine for his valuable suggestions.

likely to be a quotation from a lost Greek literary source⁵³ – in which the στρίξ seems to have been already a metamorphic witch – as a popular formula to repel these witches.

Thus, striga – a popular form deriving from the loanword strix – transcends its Greek literary origins and becomes a word to label not a monstrous and bloodthirsty bird, but a fearsome metamorphic witch. The commentary on Horace by Pomponius Porphyrio constitutes another significant source to assess how what once was the Greek fictional screech-owl influenced the beliefs about witches in the Roman world. Focusing on line twenty of Horace's Fifth Epode, this is: plumamque nocturnae strigis (“and the feather of a nocturnal screech-owl”),⁵⁴ Porphyrio expands upon the word strix and explains: sic dicitur, non ut vulgo ‘strigae’, quia venit a nominativo, ‘strix’, non ‘striga’. “This is the correct reading, not strigae (witch) as people say, because it derives from the nominative strix (screech-owl), not from striga (witch)”.⁵⁵ With this comment Porphyrio acknowledges the general confusion in distinguishing between the bird (strix) and the metamorphic witch (striga), which induced people to replace the correct reading strigis with strigae in the Fifth Epode. But already in the second century this the popular form was becoming increasingly predominant in the spoken language, as attested by the grammarian Flavius Caper,⁵⁶ who comments in his *De Verbiis Dubiis* that one should say striges not strigae.⁵⁷

So far we have discussed how the loanword strix was ‘Latinised’ and transformed into striga and widely employed to indicate the metamorphic witches from the first century AD onwards, in both fictional and non-fictional sources. This process continues in Late Antiquity, as we can observe from the *Lapidarium* attributed to the magician Damigeron and the Arabian king Evax,⁵⁸ a Latin translation

⁵³ One could bear in mind the connection with between the strix and the popular figure of the Lamia, believed to devour children, which already feature in Aristophanes (V. 1035; 1177; Pa. 758). On the Lamia, cf. Johnston, 2005 in *Brill's New Pauli*, vol.7, s.v. Lamia, col.181-2.

⁵⁴ The passage alludes not to witches but to the ill-omened screech-owl, the feather of which is employed in Canidia's macabre sacrifice.

⁵⁵ Cf. Porph. epod. 5.20. The quotations from Porphyrio's commentary are taken from the edition by Holder, 1894.

⁵⁶ Cf. PIR² F 271.

⁵⁷ Cf. Keil, GL VII, p.111, l.12-3.

⁵⁸ While we have no external information about Evax, who is said to be an Arabian king in the second prefatory epistle of the *Lapidarium* (Damig. epist. secund. 1), Damigeron is mentioned as a practitioner of magic in Apul. Apol.90.6;

of a lost Greek original, which can be dated to the fifth or the sixth century AD.⁵⁹ Significant evidence comes from description of the lapis lychnites:⁶⁰ *lychnites lapis speciosus, colore subuitreo mundo, adversus nyctalopas, id est adversus nocturnas aves hoc est strigas siue cavanas.*⁶¹ “The stone lychnites is brilliant, with a colour similar to pure glass, (it is useful) against nyctalopas, this is against nocturnal birds, specifically metamorphic witches and owls”.

As explained by Halleux and Schamp,⁶² the Latin translator misunderstood the meaning of the foreign word *νυκτάλωψ*,⁶³ which means “day-blindness”,⁶⁴ and considered it as a synonym for the harmful nocturnal birds (*nocturnae aves*) or, to be more precise, the witch who can transform herself into a screech-owl (*striga*). Since the scope of the *Lapidarium* is to provide its readership with useful information about the virtues of stones, we can conclude that the translator of the *Lapidarium* did not allude to fictional beings but to real, threatening creatures, to ward off with a phylactery.

We can, therefore, assert that the belief in the existence of witches able to transform themselves into screech-owl was still alive in Late Antiquity, to the extent that the translator of the *Lapidarium* immediately associated an unfamiliar word such as *νυκτάλωψ* with the clear and present reality of the metamorphic witches. Interestingly enough, the word *striga*, as well as the set of beliefs surrounding it, survived through the Middle Ages,⁶⁵ and the term itself evolved into the Old French *estrie*, in the Portuguese *estria*, in the Romanian *striga*, and the Italian *strega*.⁶⁶

Tertullian also considers him as a magus (TERT. Anim.57.1, cf. Waszink, 1947, p.576.) and so does Arnobius (Arn. Adv.nat. 1.52.1, cf. Le Bonniec, 1982, p.354-5).

⁵⁹ Cf. Halleux, Schamp, 1985, p.226-7, to whose edition I refer.

⁶⁰ Cf. Damig. 28.1.

⁶¹ The term *cavana* (owl) and the masculine form *cavanus* are Celtic forms – probably Gaulish – which entered the Latin language at a later stage, cf. ThLL, vol.3, s.v. *cavannus*, col.624, l. 4-19; Ernout, Meillet, 2001⁴, s.v. *cavannus*, p.106.

⁶² Cf. Halleux, Schamp, 1985, p.266.

⁶³ The passage mirrors Psell. Lap. 13, p.203.

⁶⁴ E.g. Hipp. Prorrh. 2.33; Gal. 19.43.

⁶⁵ On the witches in the Medieval word, cf. Ginzburg, 1989. p.36-55; Jolly, 2002 in Jolly et al., p.6-14.

⁶⁶ Väänänen, 1981³, p.58.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, we have been able to assess the presence of solid connections between literary and real practices ascribed to the witches in the Roman world, and to see how the Greek literary topos of the ‘love witch’ was enriched by references to real witchcraft in Latin literature. We have also discussed how the Greek fictional *strix* enjoyed such a fortune in the Roman popular imagination as to give origin to the Latinised word *striga*, employed to indicate a figure who was really believed to exist. We might now wonder about the reasons why such contaminations between fictional and real witches: was it only due to a direct contact between Greek and Roman cultures or to literary influence? Although to exhaustively address this question exhaustively goes beyond the scope of this study, I am inclined to believe that the process of osmosis between Greek and Romans, which heavily affected the popular ideas about witchcraft, would have been eased by a common Indo-European set of beliefs concerning people with preternatural powers, which we retrospectively understand as ‘magic’.⁶⁷ In conclusion, by reviewing literary, epigraphic, and papyrological evidence it has become possible to cast further light on how the imagery of the witches in Latin literature had been deeply influenced by the commonplace beliefs in real witchcraft. We have been also able to show how some of these beliefs, inherited from Greek literature, affected even the language of the Romans and survived in the Romance languages, and in even in some contemporary languages in Europe.

⁶⁷ On the idea of an Indo-European ‘magical’ background, cf. Watkins, 1995, p.541-4; West, 2007, p.326-35.

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