

Ancient Magic through Association

The golden age of magic, as it was called, was the time in our history where humans lived in societies that were very close to nature and the rhythms of life. In the world that these people lived in, every force of nature took on a simple and yet very symbolic meaning that allowed these early peoples to develop an understanding of the world around them by using a logic and reality that revolved around the use of magic.

They had no use for scientific methods or technology to understand their world, they only knew nature. It was known as *animism*, the idea that a spirit embodied all things living and non-living, like rocks, trees, water, fire and wind.

The gods that they worshiped embodied the very forces of nature that controlled their lives in sometimes very uncertain ways through the divine forces of fate. They believed that every aspect of their lives had been influenced by these forces, from birth, life, death, sexuality, war, and for everyday living.

Perhaps, when humans discovered that they could call out to these forces and that these forces would respond, the use of magic came into creation. When early peoples prayed and pleased the spirits of the hunt, and the hunt was successful, even if it was only a case of being in the right place at the right time through synchronization, it became understood that humans could effect the world around them by talking to these spirits and making offerings.

The shaman or priest of the people would lead the ritual dance, dressed in the skins of animals, to essentially become the god figure of the hunt. Through these rituals the people would be aligned with the gods and the forces of nature. It secured their relationship with the gods to sacrifice the animal for the hunt. Prey of the hunt became a gift of the gods through life-sustaining food. Magic and rituals to the gods was a matter of life and death.

This symbolic act would create a bond between the man and the gods allowing for communication and interaction. Perhaps an offering to this god or goddess of the hunt would allow for a good hunt in return. Or, a reenactment of a hunt that was successful allowed these people to recreate this success in real life. What they wanted to create, came into being.

Rituals performed were affirmations to the power of nature, as the ancient peoples worshiped the sun and the moon. The rituals also served a social purpose to bring the community together under the same ideals. This was the age when magic and religion were inseparable.

Under the glow of moonlight, the women participated in these ritual dances as well. They danced in erotic poses while wearing animal fur costumes. These rituals were intended to



Illustration 1: "Diana of Versailles".
After the Marble Roman artwork

celebrate sexuality and the mother goddess of the era, and to increase fertility, and to represent the hunt - both the hunt for animals, and the hunt for a sexual partner. During these dances, the costumes would be removed by the women, to induce states of ecstasy both for the dancers and for the participants who watched.

In neolithic Europe near the Black sea, near Romania and Bulgaria, dancer statues have been found by archaeologists. They estimate their date to be over nine thousand years old. Some of these statues, called *kouretes* were miniature figures of erotic dancers that would serve the gods in banquets with ecstatic dancing.¹

Erotic dancing that pleased the gods was also used in Egypt, in the temples of Hathor.² These types of sexual dance were also popular in the temples of Bast, Isis and Nuit, goddesses who represented beauty, fertility and the power of sexuality.

These dances were a magical gateway into the spiritual realm; the priestess would become ecstatic during the performance, invoking the spirit of the Goddess. Some of these dancers claimed that their dances lead them to ecstasy and orgasm while performing, leading to spiritual visions and the act of becoming the goddess.

These types of dances were created in the paleolithic era. Their use lasted throughout time, into the Greek and Roman era where erotic dance was performed by priestesses of Diana and Artemis in their sacred temples. These goddesses represented the Moon, and the hunt. These women were chosen to dance for their beauty and vitality.

In the Roman era, dancers would dance in honor of the god of wine, Bacchus and Dionysus. Women dancers were uninhibited and they would remove their clothing during the revelry; the ancient Greeks and Romans had no moral issues with nudity as their art so clearly shows.

Associative magic illustrates the simple but necessary idea, that in magic, like is alike. If their depiction of the hunt, or the power of sexuality and fertility through ritual or artwork was successful, then so were they.

If their offering to their god, appeased their spirits then this spirit would give back to them in return, and their arrows would fly straight and they would be provided with what they needed. These gods or spirits were the source of all that they knew. They tried to capture and harness these natural forces and make it work in their favor, because they had a deep respect for their experience of life.

It was this associative act that allowed them to come into contact with these spirits of nature. Humans had created magic by seeking to know and understand nature. In time, it was discovered that a symbolic act such as a ritual or offering, could produce supernatural results.

This is the basic premise of magic that through its simplicity reveals one of the underlying successes in magical acts - by using associations and symbolic gestures or rituals, to cause an intended influence and change in the environment.

In that golden age of nature, humans were at one with nature. Many centuries later in another place and time, new religions like Christianity took hold after the 4th century, and the separation of magic and religion became more apparent. Now in our time the struggle is

1 Hellenistic relief molds from the Athenian Agora By Claireve Grandjouan, Eileen Markson, Susan I. Rotroff

2 Hathor and Thoth: two key figures of the ancient Egyptian religion By Claas Jouco Bleeker

between science and religion, making religion and magic no longer necessary.

Authors like Jung and Campbell suggested that the people who used these ancient rituals were participating in the *collective unconscious*, a universal spirit of humanity that allowed many cultures to have similar experiences with magic and ritual, because their myths were stories that related their understanding of nature to their experience of life.

This idea also suggested that all gods were representative of an archetypal ideal, meaning that all goddesses represented the feminine and motherhood, and so on. The idea of a collective unconscious is a very simplified, almost scientific explanation for the complex spiritual relationship between humans and nature. The theory of the collective unconscious disregards the fact that each culture was individual and unique, and their gods and rituals were a reflection of society, spirituality, and life.

Over time cultures developed their own beliefs and understanding of magic and nature. Gods were individual and unique to the culture that they came from. Humans have always wanted to control these forces, but we will always be subjected to their effects, and many cultures had their own way of expressing and experience that through magic and ritual. The reason why these cultures and their beliefs seem to be similar is because they were common practices and beliefs of the human experience.

In those ancient times when magic was unified with religion, ritual was a communication with nature, a simple relationship that allowed humans to exist and thrive in this world, and build their civilizations, while knowing in many ways that the power of nature was at their command. This is a force that we have tried to influence since the dawn of time.

Some authors, like Frazer claimed that “religion was the despair of magic”³, an evolution from magical ritual into religious ritual. Frazer believed that religion came after magic, when magic had failed these ancient peoples. His theory was that when magic no longer worked, these peoples had given up on magic and they turned to what they believed were higher forces at work, the gods, to ask for assistance and guidance.

Authors like Lang had suggested that this was not always the case, and that some cultures, being completely isolated from the ideas of religion, had used magic and religion as one form of expression.⁴ Some magic rituals in early civilizations were not religion, they were instead rituals that often invoked the powers of the gods or higher forces, while using symbolic associations to manifest what they wanted.

As we can see, ritual is used in magic and in religion. But, this does not mean that magic and religion are the same thing. The division between the two becomes even more apparent in later years, when the religion of monotheism took over the classical world, and magic was regarded as superstition, or evil, and no longer useful to society as it once had been.

The beliefs about how the world worked had shifted from natural associations into religious beliefs, which had been further explained through scientific research. But, it was magic that was the first science. Magic created theories about how things worked and through testing

³ Magic and Religion, Andrew Lang, ref. The Golden Bough, Frazer

⁴ *Ibid.*

Image Credits:

Image 1. Drawing of "Diana of Versailles". After the Marble Roman artwork, Imperial Era (1st-2nd centuries CE). Found in Italy.

those theories new discoveries were made or ideas were understood.

Science is the same way, if only because of method; it uses theories that attempt to explain ideas until those ideas are either proven or they are discarded for a new hypothesis. It is a means of discovery and observation, and magic is very much the same way. It's simple methods allow you to observe the world through the eyes of a magician, while you use traditional methods and also test new ideas so that you can discover for yourself the mysteries and meanings behind what we know as magic.

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