

THE COIN AS BLAZON OR TALISMAN: PARAMONETARY FUNCTIONS OF MONEY

Magic and religion are at the origin of the concept of money as a unit for measuring value. Actually, they determined the first forms money took: precious objects, engraved stones, amulets and talismans which conferred a special power, within a social group, on the one who possessed them. In time, this power came to include the power of acquisition in commercial terms, but its original ties with magic were never lost. Aristotle clearly saw the relationship between a certain concept of money (in *Politica*) and a new ethical concept as a corrective for the imbalances within a social community (in *Ethica Nicomachea*).¹ If we look closely, we see that this ethical concept is not in opposition to the former but emphasizes the double aspect of the idea of money in antiquity, an idea which has survived, with some modifications, in Christianity and the modern era.

We shall not dwell here on the economic function of money, which is obvious. Rather, we shall consider its paramonetary function as an ideation of monetary units and types serving as examples

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson.

¹ Will, Ed., "Fonctions de la monnaie dans les cités grecques de l'époque classique," in *Numismatique antique, problèmes et méthodes*, Nancy-Louvain, 1975.

of ethico-religious values. We shall also exclude the role played by money in socio-economic organisms in order to consider more fully those which are socio-religious and more pertinent to our theory. In fact, since its first appearance the coin has been a means of social communication, the raw material of individual and collective life. It is also the earliest manifestation of socio-economic reality: it expresses the original form of possession, of having "power." Faith and magic are interwoven in its collective idea through which it contemporaneously participates in the physical world and in the supra-physical world. It modifies the behavior of the individual, as it does the social group, and finds its habitual employment in the manifestations of the sociality of daily life. The sociological concept of the manifestations of sociality has been defined by Georges Gurvitch: "The manifestations of sociality put into relief the spontaneous levels of social life... They constitute nonstructured and non-structurable social cadres... They are not limited to being only a nuance of psychic life; they virtually involve all levels of social life... They involve virtual collective intuitions of a wealth and of a variety which is richer than any structured forms of a social group."² Now, money is a manifestation of sociality in the measure in which the behavior of the individual expresses a tendency to join the group: this tendency lends itself to being observed in a privileged way in the paramonetary manifestations of money, that is, when the talismanic functions of the coin are particularly evident. As in tribal language the element brought to the attention of the social collective is not the intellectual significance of the discourse but its verbal expression, its vocal rhythm, its tonality, its articulation—such as occurs in magical and exorcising formulas—so with money the sign or seal reveals itself to be a means, not of verbal, but of conceptual communication, with all the symbolic charge the sign manifests.

The image and inscription which appear on a coin are the fundamental expression through which men comprehend and acquire trust. The images are, in fact, imprinted on the metal of the coin as they were on Assyrian and Babylonian seals before coins were invented. The impression of a stylus on a clay tablet must certainly have led the first possessors of metal to countersign the little

² G. Gurvitch, *La vocation actuelle de la sociologie*, Paris, 1963, Vol. I.

The Coin as Blazon or Talisman

metal rounds with a symbol or seal, probably private, but later civic, indicating the issuing authority, the state.

The use of such civic seals, diffused from Ionia from the second half of the seventh century B.C. on, is evidence of the collective influence at the level of the Greek *poleis*, while in Republican Rome such influence was tied to the *Gens* to whom the coin maker, in charge of issuing money, belonged. In these coin issues, the emblematic and heraldic meaning is recovered as the expression of a collective sociality, unfolded in a variety and wealth of manifestations which go from the animal and vegetable kingdoms to one that is more imaginative and mythico-religious. This suggestion may also merely evoke linguistic assonances between the name of the issuing community and a representative image (the seal at Phocaea, the rose at Rhodes, the celery leaf at Selinunte, the scythe at Zankle). Coins thus came to be called by the name of the image which appeared on them (the fillies of Corinth, the owls of Athens, the tortoises of Aegina). The blazon did not have a semantic meaning; it had the backing of the citizens. As for the choice of what heraldic symbols or civic device to put on the coins, collective influences linked to religious myths and to the exigencies of the constituted political power were at work, especially in the tyrannic and oligarchic regimens under which—often for reasons of prestige—money had its beginning as a civic emblem, vehicle of the confirmation of a public *sema* which crossed the restricted boundaries of the polis to make itself valid in the markets of the entire Greek world.

Now, the coin was not a manifestation of sociality except in the measure in which it expressed the collective potentiality of political, economic, and in our case, religious life. This adapting to a world of religious and magical relationships, in fact, brought the concept of money to the meaning of the blazon as an integrating factor. There are three characteristics of the coin as heraldic device or talisman. First, the conventional nature of the object, personage or myth represented; second, the sentiment the symbol or emblem evoked in the individual and the group; and third, the metamorphic capacity of the represented types, especially in a psychological and magical key.

The development of monetization through the centuries gives a strict account of these three characteristics—which until now

have not been connected or borne in mind in the various theories on the functions of money—in order to reconduct the paramonetary functions of money to expressions of a social conduct which is consistent with the socio-religious and psychological structures with which they interacted.

The conventional nature poses no problems. Images of personages or of real or imaginary animals have always denoted something, have always meant something, in all civilizations. The most common symbols were those of power, strength, elegance, harmony, terror. At times it is very difficult to understand the meaning of the message. For example, that of the *triskele* (three legs emanating from a central point) which originated as a fertility symbol in Lycia; appeared on the backs of Derronian coins (end of the sixth century B.C.); later symbolized the island of Sicily and in the late Middle Ages the Isle of Man; and was imitated and stylistically disintegrated on many pseudo-coins issued in Scandinavia in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. It is in cases like these that difficulty arises in establishing the second characteristic: the origin of the individual and collective sentiment at the sight of real or imaginary, elegant or monstrous animals, or of divinities with unknown but obligating powers. It is still more difficult when the object which causes the sentiment is inanimate (the barley ear at Metapontos, the tripod at Croton, the *silphion* at Cyrene, the *kantharos* at Naxos). In these cases, the object was the *sema* of the divinity and represented its epiphany. As such it compelled respect and itself invoked magic and thaumaturgical powers. A similar reaction might also occur when we are confronted with the absence of figuration on Arab coins, where all the power of suggestion lies in the inscription. It is certain, however, that the presence of an image on a coin created a universal level of understanding which influenced every culture, especially the primitive ones, as has been shown by modern cultural anthropology. The reality of the figured message and the strength it released are one of the most complex aspects of human spirituality, especially the Greek, Roman, Medieval and Arab, but it is also well known how strongly such an influence may act in the very complex figurative and iconographic Oriental world, where real and imaginary animals play a primary role in the physical universe of magical beliefs in the Oriental mind. This

is also true for India and the natives of Australasia, where the power of the animal as *totem* is very much alive. This second aspect, aside from acting suggestively, also defined how money should be employed and deterred its possessor from putting it to a use which was not proper to its nature. We may thus explain the presence of the Gorgon's head on Etruscan didrams; the griffon at Theos and Adbera in Greece; the inscriptions on Arab dirhams: "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet;" of the inscription on Venetian *zecchini* (13th and 14th centuries): "*Sit tibi Christe datus quem tu regis iste ducatus,*" as well as the inscription on English and Scottish nobles, "*Ihs autem transiens per medium illorum ibat.*" The meaning and the value of the coins were integrated, so to speak, by the supernatural powers with which they were believed to be endowed and which the image or the inscription made known. A good example is that of Thessalonian coins which take us into the sphere of the divine, of the *Gaieochos* which manifested itself in the form of a horse and a bull: horse and bull, full face or in profile. The trident and the double axe—the latter going back to the Aegean age—figure on the front and the back of Thessalonian coins. Thus the coin which was originally none other than a symbol, together with the ritual celebrations and religious festivals, became a means of salvation and divine protection. In fact, the Greek *nómisma* is related to *nómos*: the coin united sacred power and social prestige in a single symbol. Its very circulation through giving and exchanging created a bond of interdependence between those who were constrained to make the loans required, and the bond also involved the evoked divinity because his figure was on the coin. When metamorphosis occurs within these relationships, in a talismanic key, we have the third characteristic of the coin as blazon.

This characteristic is expressed by means of the coin, in which the image of the divine resides, legitimized by the issuing authority, and to which the power of the owner is transferred. This aspect, certainly the most interesting and the least studied, draws our attention to the idea of the coin as talisman. It is a concept which really cannot be called irrational, as Mauss has suggested, but is highly consistent with the social collectivity in which the idea is present and active, in the sphere of magical and religious rites, in which the divine, prophylactic and talismanic

power of the coin is prayed for and, as a consequence, endows its possessor with such power. For that reason the metamorphic nature involves the coin in its globality and unity. A significant example is given us by coins issued at Epirus, in which the front and back images belong to one ideological sphere, which we may schematize as follows:

Front	Back
a) Head of Zeus crowned with oak leaves Head of Dione crowned with laurel	Bull crowned with oak leaves
b) Head of Zeus crowned with laurel	Thunderbolt crowned with laurel
c) Bull	Thunderbolt crowned with laurel

The close correlation of monetal symbolism is clear in this schema, which lends itself to a metamorphic interpretation inasmuch as the symbols appearing on the coins, in addition to having a conventional meaning and suggestivity, are also transformed (metamorphosed) into manifestations of a collective sociality of a religious order. But how can we trace the talismanic among the various paramonetary functions of the coins? By analyzing the structural characteristics of the coin itself. If in fact coins, as is true of language, are shown in all their activity in the world of reality, the talisman, like certain words, belonged to a supraphysical reality. Its ultimate end was its use, whether it were social or spiritual. In effect, it is a matter of always conferring a behavior on the coin, a meaning which adapts to the collective sociality. Finally, it is clear that the piece of money as a talisman, expressed in certain typology, caused no change in reality but radiated a gratuitous benevolent message.

This concept of its use is fundamental to the idea of the coin as talisman. In fact, the phenomenon may only be understood if we keep in mind the components of ancient thought and part of that which followed it, where we always find, alongside the rational component, a religious or (better for our purposes) superstitious or fetishist one, which found its *raison d'être* in the person of the "philosopher" or the "magus." However, without

disregarding the concept of use by the individual or the collective, we see how such collective social use determined certain symbolic choices, sometimes at an unconscious level, but often determined by the official categories of public or state consciousness. As an attribute of their power, the political and economic leaders of the ruling classes imposed choices in the religious and magical fields, with a symbolism which was identical to their own. Thus was cemented the bond between the political, economic and religious, but a certain space always remained for the consciousness of the individual, operating in the solitude of his limited universe, with personal and individual choices which at times were concealed from the hegemonic powers (the Greek mysteries and the Orphic rites, for example). We thus understand certain ancient and primitive rituals for the payment of the voyage to the infernal regions; the putting of a coin on the eyes of the dead to pay for an eventual beneficial drink; or the sacred disfigurement of the coins offered to the divinities in Greek and Roman sanctuaries. The conviction that a coin with a particular sign, image or inscription had the exceptional property of transforming the power of its owner and enabling him to participate in an extrasensorial world was fundamental. Religion and magic superseded the sociality of the group, and the talisman or amulet, since that was what the coin had become, preserved from all evil: it was *alexikakos*, to use the Greek term.

Here we come to another phase in the talismanic idea of the coin as a means for healing the ills which beset mankind. The coin acted on direct contact; thus it was worn around the neck or ankle. A good example is the *bullae aureae* Roman boys wore around their necks until they reached manhood. Anthropology is rich in examples of necklaces of seashells, nutshells, bone, worn around the neck, ankles and arms of indigenous peoples. The phenomenon found its maximum use in third-century Rome (A.D.). In fact, the image of Alexander the Great had magical and prophylactic powers for the Romans, so that a cult of the Macedonian sovereign was organized under Caracalla and Septimius Severus. The *niketeria*, a sort of gold medallion struck under Gordius III for the Olympic games of Beroia, was one of the most apparent manifestations of the cult. Alexander was considered a protector-hero who banished ills and evil influences. From this came the true and proper cult

for Alexander the Great which elicited the reprimands of St. John Chrysostom (*Homilies*, II, 5), who sharply rebuked the Christians because they wore the Alexandrine medals at head and foot, as amulets. And so an object originally bestowed on the winners in the games continued its life with the new function of preventing evil, a value which it had then and which is conserved to this day, if we can believe a report according to which one of these *Niketeria* had been handed down from century to century. It seems that a Turkish official gave it, along with some other jewels, to a female slave at the beginning of the twentieth century, saying it had been in his family from time immemorial and admonishing her never to part from it. The woman followed his advice and at her death, in Greece, she donated the *niketeria* to the National Museum in Athens, where it may be seen today. There are ancient texts confirming the power of the Alexandrine medals: Trebellius Pollionis wrote, "*Dicuntur juvari in omni actu suo, qui Alexandrum expressum vel auro gestitant vel argento.*" ("It is claimed that those who wear Alexander's effigy in gold or silver are protected in all they do." *Trig. Tyr. XIV*). The Fathers of the Church fought against the custom: St. Augustine in Sermon 163 of *De Tempore* wrote, "*Phylacteria et characteres diabolicos nec sibi nec suis suspendant.*" Medals to ward off the evil eye are well known. On one side appears the effigy of Maximinian, on the other a hippotamus, an elephant, a serpent, a lizard, a baboon, fighting against the evil eye in the center of the coin. This usage continued into the Byzantine era, Gnostic customs being carried on with prophylactic coins alongside magic stones and rituals, which found their major diffusion in the Middle Ages.

The man of antiquity inserted into a social group felt the need for something near and tangible to give him reassurance; he found it in these coin-shaped objects that did not function as money and that he felt were an integrating factor in his physical universe, full of seductions, fears and illusions. Such an idea again appeared in a class of circular objects, the contorniates, from the Italian *contorno*, contour. The medal has a deep furrow around the disk within a raised edge, on both sides. They are of bronze and their function is unknown to us. Chronologically, they may be placed at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries, A. D., and it would seem that they can be interpreted

as pagan talismanic medals to which Christians had added the linked letters PE, indicating the first Roman Catholic pope, *Petrus*. However, even if the true significance of these objects eludes us, they should certainly be located in the world of belief and magic of the ancient Romans, who had endowed the medal and the coin with a salutary and eugenic value which finds its maximum explosion exactly at a time when bewilderment of the spirit is at its greatest, that is, in the moments of moral crisis of traditional values which are open to collective beliefs, superstitions and influences.

When money appeared it created a revolution, in every aspect. However, if on one hand it hastened the development of economy by making possible a new kind of wealth, radically different from that based on land and flocks, on the other it caused a psychological and moral shock whose dramatic echo we hear in the poetry of Solon and Theognis. Money became a sign of social prestige for the individual and probably also for the polis that issued it, interpreting the archaic Greek collective consciousness recognized in a symbol, the *parasemon* that also appears on Proxenian hospitality decrees and the small tablets of Heraclea and Locri. Social prestige, therefore, but also the expression of a belief in the divine, as we have seen; this seems to be the significance of the archaic coinage of several Ionian cities: Lampsacos, Phocaea, Miletus; or those of Magna Grecia: Sybaris, Croton, Metapontus, Poseidonia. The possession of money itself generated power and respect through which its possessor commanded fear and strength, help and defense against ills and adversity. We thus pass from a genuinely ethico-social meaning to that of magico-thaumaturgical. In fact, money easily helped overcome adversity, and the popular belief that one can do anything if he has money is well known. Money, therefore, became the means for attaining happiness, that is, a talisman, an amulet, a good luck piece, and when it was increased by interest and usury, other tangible benefits were produced against bodily and spiritual ills. It healed and regenerated, soothed and defended, comforted and protected its possessor. This benefit for the individual was often obtained by means of the *image* on the coin, the *sphraghis*, the imprint, which conferred an apotropaic religious significance. Thus once more the two levels of the Greek idea of the coin emerge: conventional,

the coin as a means to acquire concrete goods; and metamorphic (but just as concrete for the ancient Greek), the coin as talismanic power. The well-being of the soul is happiness, eternal bliss, the *agápe* of the Christians, and the coin as talisman helped to achieve happiness; it was the instrument whose emblematic charge was linked with magic and mysterious ritual which protected and aided in the ills which beset humanity. In order to comprehend this particular idea, we must remember that—alongside a dialectical rationalism—a current of Dionysiac, mystero-sophic spiritualism existed, and since all antiquity is rich in beliefs and myths the current was felt as a real and active force in the physical universe. Coins were also a part of that universe with their apotropaic significance.

In the final analysis, we could say that the common belief of the Greeks applied a form of supra-physical, mysterious and religious and thaumaturgical expression to the idea of money as it was inherited from rationalist and mercantile thought. That is, the monetal sign in its concreteness as a measure of things and an instrument for possessing real goods was transposed into the field of supra-physical and religious abstraction (belief). Such a meaning and value were acquired even with the figured presence of more than one object, so that two symbols, instead of canceling each other, increased the efficacy and potential for salvation of the subject to be protected. This is the case with some complex figurations, such as those on the tetradrams of Selinunte having a bull at the base, a cock in front of an altar, a celery leaf, and the fluvial god Selinos in the center.

* * *

The talismanic value of the coin is noticed in the first phases of premonetal forms, both in ancient civilizations and in modern primitive cultures, as ethnology and anthropology have shown in their studies on the meaning and function of premonetal, or better, paramonetal, forms. Dogs' teeth, fish teeth, the small tablets of pressed tea in Siam, cowry shells, coins themselves in the shape of an ax or a dagger as found in China and Siam in the 17th and 18th centuries, the brass "crosses" of Katanga, lagoon snail shells, while they have value as money, that is, buying power, are objects which "give strength" and magic power to

The Coin as Blazon or Talisman

the one who possesses them and who often wears them ostentatiously. This is why we find small holes in these objects and in Indian and Arab coins, so that they may be easily transported. Even today in African countries coins may be pierced at the time of issue. Naturally, the charismatic and apotropaic power which was conferred on these paramonetal forms is seen in the first coins as true and proper money. In fact, the power to free from debt and misfortune was conferred on money, while it carried abroad the message of an authority that had issued it and guaranteed not only the genuineness of the metal and its weight but also the talismanic force, whose greatness depended on the power of the issuing authority. This was the case with tetradrams and the staters of Philip of Macedonia which were spread all over Europe, from the Danube to Gaul, and copied by the barbarian peoples who saw in the emblems on the coins a guarantee of their talismanic value. In fact, the presence of heraldic devices representing images of the local pantheon of the polis or taken from the real or imaginary animal and vegetable kingdoms at times deterred the owner of the coin from using it in a way not proper to the religious and moral principles presiding over the life associated with Greek communities. Thus we can explain the typology of the two serpents on coins from Peramum or the complex typologies with Aesculapius, Mithras and an infinite number of other divinities which appear on colonial Greek bronze coins, especially in Ionia, Psidia, Mysia and Caria; the Gorgon's head on Etruscan coins; the owl on those of Athens; the rear view of a bull on those of Sybaris; and so on. However, the true meaning of this complex typology, differing from mint to mint, is often lost to us, even though it has the common denominator of representing civic cults and their symbols. Thus in archaic Magna Grecia were minted only coins having the same figure on both sides, one *in rilievo* and the other *incavo*. The figure served as the civic seal of the polis and could easily be used to make an impression on clay. A good example is that of an Athenian tetradram imprinted in clay, and in fact, the method was more commonly adapted in the eastern Greek world than it was in the West. Naturally the usage arrived in Magna Grecia from the metal-working shops of Asia Minor, which served as mother country to many of the colonies in Magna Grecia.

Another widespread use of the coin in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, reported by various authors, including Pausanias, and testified to by modern excavations which have brought these findings to light, was that of making an offering to a divinity, especially a healing divinity, in large and small sanctuaries, from Olympia, Delphi and Dodona to the small rural oratories or sacred areas around springs, lakes and woods which abounded in antiquity. Actual, current money was often used, but often coins that had no monetary value, that were pierced, disfigured or even coined for the occasion, lighter in weight and probably acquired directly at the enclosure of the sanctuary, were offered. Clement of Alexandria (second century A. D.) accused his contemporaries of paying Aphrodite like a courtesan. Still today the custom of making a money offering for the intercession of God or in recompense for a divine favor received is prevalent in the most famous Christian, Moslem and Buddhist sanctuaries. This concept of money as a good omen is also present in much simpler gestures, such as that of throwing a coin into a fountain or into the *bocche della verità*. These actions have been perpetuated to our day, especially in Mediterranean villages, the most devoted to earth rites and religious and rural festivals. Often this different use of a coin is suggested by a disfiguring, a countermark made on the inscription indicating its dedication to a divinity: AN, ANA⊙, or simply A, or ⊙EOY (for God). There may be other votive expressions, such as those on the coins of Sybaris, Croton and Metapontus, found in Magna Grecia and along the Adriatic. From the Roman era are the well-known votive sticks issued in Nîmes terminating in a wild boar's hoof, datable in the first years of the Christian era. They were found in the fountain of the French city and probably attest to an oriental use (Egyptian?) later transferred to the Roman world, already acquainted with the boar typology, which appears on several quadrilateral bronze coins from the Roman Republic, with clear symbolic and religious meaning.

We see then that when the talisman or the coin considered as such assumes a useful function it tends to become a custom, a juridical norm, responding to determined rules, in spite of the fact that its manifestations are among the most free in that its rules are dictated by the most flexible of the laws, one that origi-

The Coin as Blazon or Talisman

nates in the conventions and influence of the group in which such a notion unfolds. This adaptation superior to the social corresponds to the superior ideals of the group; however, the coin as talisman has a nature we could define as peripheral or external, going beyond the ethico-social function or the simple religious or magic requirements of the individual, to assume a function that is valid for the totality of the social group in which it is structured. So structured, it has multiple uses, expresses a total experience, especially in primitive peoples, archaic Greece and the Roman world of the third century A. D. It is evidence of a psychological world that surpasses the structures of social reality themselves; it is a form of original social and religious perception; it proposes in a psycho-social field an experience that is new for the understanding of antiquity and the Medieval world but that permits the discovery of the most intimate vibrations of group consciousness and the psychological reasons for certain choices within the magical typology. A relationship of correspondence between magic and socio-political ideas is always found in the idea of the coin as blazon or talisman. That is, the insecurity of the particular political moment is reflected in the safeguarding aspect and in the use of the amulet to ward off evil to which all the collective hopes and illusions are confided, again as happened in archaic Greek society with the *Wappenmünzen*, the heraldic coins of Athens, or in Rome in the third century A. D. with coins inspired by the cult of Alexander the Great.

The employment of coins as talismans offers the individual the privilege of expressing himself in his singularity. It also serves to support the conventional attitudes and rituals which are often the expression of collective sociality. Therefore, it now remains to consider the nature of the social challenges which originate with the coin used as talisman and as the expression of collective gain. Individual consciousness, an infinite source of projects because of its experience of nature, ceaselessly chooses from among the demands of utility and the magical solicitations of life. When the pursued end is that of warding off evil and the production of a good needed for preservation and safety, the end is well defined. The spontaneous gesture becomes ritual through repetition. It acquires meaning, as in the custom of wearing a medal around the neck or ankle, of throwing a coin into water, or of disfiguring

it. The invention of a "magic" usefulness and the introduction of processes to obtain such usefulness create functions within the social orders that are prevalently economic; certain forms of present belief are the last link in the chain which binds us to the past. Thus in antiquity we find the production of a useful good through spontaneous gestures that later became fixtures in magic ritual, from which come the strange numerations of the Roman *tabulae defixionis*. However, the individual consciousness permitted such paramonetal functions in coins, so that this function was not neglected but participated in the two components of time and space, imaginary speculative products, and did not exercise the powers of manifestation, as we see, for example, in Hungarian medals from the Kremnitz mint featuring St. George and the dragon (18th century) or in the 17th century Venetian devotional medals. Object and end of the use of a coin as blazon or talisman was therefore that of inducing belief in the magical and the prodigious, which the presence or the influence, the *baskania* of the Greeks or the *fascinum* of the Romans, seemed to produce.

In the first place, the idea of a talismanic function of a coin did not normally present itself as a simple fact in such magic actions. The use of things endowed with *fascinum* was usually conditioned by ritual. Inscriptions, holes or hammermarks are found on the coins. Rules existed for their use which prescribed the conditions of observance relative to the time, place, means, intention and possibly other concomitant factors. The coin had to be of *that* particular type, turned to the right or the left with *that* particular hand, and so on. Then there were rules for its use relative to time, place and quality, without taking into account all the corollary, often unknown to us, of magical rites that were necessary accompaniments to the utilization of the coin as a talisman and permitted the externalizing of the beneficent qualities that were released by it. For example, there are ceremonies in India which demand the anointing of all objects serving in the magic ritual, including amulets.

In the second place, for talismanic coins as well as for precious stones, plants, animal hair, essences and other items of magic ritual, the magical property is not conceived of as naturally or specifically inherent in the act to which it is connected, but always as relatively extrinsic and attributed. This was the case with papal

coins bearing the coat of arms of the Pope which were carried by pilgrims as amulets against the hardships of the pilgrimage or the difficulties of the homeward journey. Something similar occurred with the Venetian coins figuring St. Justine after the battle of Lepanto (1571). The battle was believed to have been won with the collaboration of the Padovan saint. But the conferring on the coin of protective qualities took place during a ritual, consecration, benediction or by direct contact with holy or blessed objects. Often in the ancient world, but also in Christendom, such thaumaturgical actions were created by a myth or a legend. This is the case with the so-called Judas coins, a sort of apocryphal coin with Hebrew inscriptions that circulated in Europe in the 16th century; they were believed to be those paid to Judas for betraying Christ. The same applies to other medal-coins with the image of Christ and Hebrew inscriptions, probably a German issue of the 17th century, and also to the analogous coins with the images of Attila or Buda, the mythical king of Hungary.

At times the magical property was linked to secondary qualities such as an "accidental" shape. This may be applied to the hammered Roman bronzes of the second and third centuries A. D., as well as to the forms of coins in China and Siam—spades, shields or knives. However, in the case of normal, round coins the paramonetary function is often bestowed through a lack of comprehension of the figure appearing on it. We know that in Rome in the 18th century the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme conserved a Greek coin from Rhodes with a head emitting rays, and it was venerated as a Christian relic. Another such coin was adored by the Capuchins at Enghien in Belgium. Finally, the medal by Pisanello bearing the portrait of John Paleologue became the Oriental iconographic type *tout court*, that is, of Aristotle, Averroes and others, in many illustrations of the late 15th century. The magical quality of the coin was thus derived from a sort of convention (Mauss)³ that seems to have had the role of myth or incomplete rite. This is the case referred to by Pliny of the members of the *Gens Servilia* who, having consecrated a trident to their household gods took special care of it, and according to legend the coin increased or diminished in size de-

³ M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, with introduction by Lévi-Strauss, Paris, 1966.

pending on the growth or diminishing of the fortunes of the house.

In the third place, the idea of a coin's talismanic property was often confused with a very general idea of strength and power, that only the possession of the coin could give. And so we pass from possession as accumulation of wealth to possession as magic power. The owner of the coin was a fortunate man, a *thèos anèr*, blessed by divine grace. He not only owned the coin but was in the restricted circle of the fortunate, of those who "could," in the broader sense, and it was exactly in this that the paramonetary function of the coin as talisman consisted. The Greek absorbed into a social group felt the need to reassure himself with something near and tangible; this he found in a coin which he felt as an integrating part of his world of seductions, illusions and fears. The same is true for the primitive man of today. However, though the effect to be achieved was always very clear, the idea of the special qualities and immediate actions of the talisman was obscure. The force delivered by these objects, like that of precious stones, sacred plants, healing waters, and so on, was always generic, a good omen, protection against the evil eye, but it also provided specific remedies against lovesickness, conjugal sterility and various ills. Archaeological traces of this "cure-all" force are found in the clay or bronze *ex votos* ornamenting the major and minor sanctuaries of antiquity, but they are also present in modern ones, since the faith in the curative powers of coins, or money, is so widespread in all cultures, primitive, ancient and modern, for those who possess them and use them in the correct way, following the ritual. In fact, there is a complete ritual that often accompanied and propitiated the appearance of evil or good influences. Though the eugenic concept is prevalent, negative aspects are not lacking, and are also valid, vital and desired, especially against an enemy, a rival in love or an antagonist. So in antiquity terrifying monsters were figured on shields to arouse dread in the enemy; imprecations and epithets were inscribed on the lead balls (*missili*) aimed at the opponent; or sometimes warnings against theft were scratched on coins. We know that in the Middle Ages there was a medallion from Syracuse, surrounded by a gold circle on which was written in Gothic characters *quia pretium sanguinis est*.

The Coin as Blazon or Talisman

In primitive and in some ancient societies, as Mauss has observed, two elements of the *potlach* have been ascertained: that of honor, prestige, the *mana* which conferred wealth; and that of the absolute obligation to repay gifts, with the penalty of losing the *mana*, the authority, of the talisman and source of wealth which is itself authority. Often such wealth was based on money and on a particular type of money, generally gold or silver, but cases were not rare in which the money was in bronze and believed to have belonged to ancient princes or mythological personages. This belief that the previous owners of the coins were of great importance endowed them with a greater charismatic power, rendering them precious and desirable. We find some of them today conserved in the reliquaries in the treasury of many Christian churches. While in the Greek world the coin was still linked with the clan and the individual, it re-entered the idea of collective religion and magic when it was charged with a paramonetary function. According to Mauss, "In magic as in religion and linguistics, it is the unconscious ideas which act." In fact, he affirmed as early as 1902 that when we arrive at the representation of magic properties, we find ourselves faced with phenomena which are similar to those of language. Since that time, it has been linguistics, structural linguistics in particular, that have familiarized us with the notion that the basic phenomena of the life of the spirit, as is true with magical phenomena, are found at the level of unconscious thought. Now, this psychological key appears to be very useful for the comprehension of the phenomenon that was widely extended in antiquity, in the Middle Ages and in the Orient. Examples of such rituals and their "interpretation" in the key of the talismanic coin can be given elsewhere. We shall limit ourselves to considering "monetal" magic during its appearance on the meta-historical horizon as a force which fascinated and killed, and of the complete lack of a historicity through ritual repetition. We realize that such a prophylactic-protective system has nothing in it that can be individualized historically. In one measure or another, with a greater or lesser degree of diffusion, with a variety of rituals and formulas, magic of the type we have described still shows itself in primitive peoples and in the folklore of cultural areas that are little influenced by hegemonic cultural forms. Naturally, a talismanic idea of money in antiquity was in a form more

easily integrated with the rest of the forms of cultural life. In fact, Greek, Roman, Medieval and Oriental cultures were the ones in which the magical motif was most vital. The magic strength of the coin was felt as an obscure demonic force, money was "cursed," so that phenomenological data of the paramonetary function are found in the most diverse epochs and civilizations of history as one of its components, almost visceral. Even those which the anthropologists define as "possessed states" with their corresponding exorcisms and "therapeutic" ceremonies find a place not only in the magic of the primitives but in all the religions on the globe. Now, such an idea does not seem confined within a particular historical situation, and for that very reason it does not lend itself to a valid explanation if we do not accept that the reasons for the idea connected to the first function of money, that of a means of exchange and a measure of the value of things, do not have their roots in the cultural life that related to the possibility itself of being a presence in human history. Magic repeats itself in history⁴ and seems to be more natural fact than human action, because its roots are sunk into a risk that bears with it the naturalization of psychic life in its extreme form.

At this point, it is well to ask what the causes of the apparent non-historicity of money as talisman are. Among the most probable reasons may be that of an error in methodology. We forget the historico-environmental context in which magic is a social fact. The paramonetary phenomena or function in antiquity must be analyzed as a moment in the Greek and Roman cultural dynamic and as the expression of a social collective with which they interacted. Without a global consideration of money as a manifestation of a collective sociality we lose sight of the real historical meaning, of the values and techniques that such an idea seeks to externalize. Today a very interesting connection may also be made with psychiatry, with schizophrenia in particular, for certain forms of "possession" or exorcisms have money as one of their basic elements. But in this case, while new perspectives are opening in the anthropological analysis of antiquity we observe that we are faced with a phenomenon that embraces all the cultural reality and values of antiquity, so that only in a renewed vision of the social

⁴ E. De Martino, *Magia e civiltà*, Milan, 1962.

totality of this world can the idea of the coin as blazon or talisman be inserted. In fact, in historical treatments of the subject up until now, edited with positivist and analytical scruples, we have at the most only a literary or archaeological syllogism or collection of uses or evidence of rites and beliefs, which proves that magical techniques, whether ancient or modern, are not subject to historization and elude periodization. However, the final significance of a new type of analysis would perhaps lie in a thorough study of the cultural dynamics of a determined social group in a determined moment in history. In fact, perhaps only a reconstruction of the probable structures of development of collective ideas within an archaic Greek polis could furnish us with the key to a possible interpretation of the physical and supraphysical universe of the Greeks. Without a doubt the idea of a coin as talisman has its roots in the forces themselves that govern and determine the actions of man. Indeed, it is one of the most vital and active constants in money itself, whereby man passed beyond the level of pantheistic animism and went forward, clinging to the idea of money as a means to achieve a superior cultural level. But the idea still remains linked to a level of collective unconsciousness that is difficult to analyze and explain.

The global, "panic" sense of religion remains in the idea, the "presence" of the divine that was a true and proper testimony of religious experience for these men. The ritual itself, with its gestures, its repetitions, its rules and the idea of the coin as talisman are the best proof of the belief in the presence of the divine, which cannot but make us reflect.