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## Ritual Healing in Arbëreshë Albanian and Italian Communities of Lucania, Southern Italy

HEALERS ARE KNOWN throughout the world by many names: shaman, sorcerer, witch, witch-doctor, faith-healer, and *quelli che aiutano* (“those who help”). In the Monte Vulture region, an inland area of southern Italy, the construct of healing is one in which a person “helps” the patient pass through a period of illness, often through magical means. The literature on this type of healing, however, is scarce. Studies of ritual-based medicine in Europe have been rare during the past twenty years, especially in the Alpine or Mediterranean regions (Chmielewski-Hagius 1996; Galt 1982; Inauen et al. 1995; Kerewski-Halpern 1985; Lussi 2002). Moreover, studies of ethnomedicine in southern Europe have often concentrated only on plant-based healing (phytotherapy) and its use in widespread practices of primary health care in the home (Pieroni 2000).

Our three-year study of the Monte Vulture area of Lucania (Basilicata) documents magical health beliefs and treatments that persist in this predominantly rural part of Italy.<sup>1</sup> Although the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of the illnesses we describe below may be dismissed by biomedicine, the system incorporates elements that could improve dominant modes of healthcare in the twenty-first century. These beneficial aspects include prolonged personal contact between patient and healer and strong belief in the treatment regimen. Furthermore, psychotherapeutic measures often achieve success, and we believe a thorough quantitative analysis of cases treated in this manner should be undertaken to determine actual efficacy. We offer the following data as a step toward the greater acknowledgment and understanding of these traditional practices.

## Context

The Monte Vulture region is home to both Arbëreshë and Italian villages, a circumstance that allows for comparison of traditional medical practices. The Arbëreshë are descendants of south Albanian immigrants who migrated to southern Italy between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries (Dessart 1982) and arrived in the Vulture region in the latter 1600s. Within the last century, changing work patterns and frequent intermarriage have contributed to a mixing of Arbëreshë and Italian cultures and a diminishing of cultural and language differences. UNESCO has classified the Arbëreshë language as “endangered” (Salminen 1999), and in 1999 the Italian Parliament declared its Arbëreshë citizens an historical ethnic minority. We selected the Monte Vulture area for our study in part because the Arbëreshë populations of Vulture are culturally isolated from other Arbëreshë groups in southern Italy and distinct from nearby Italian communities.

During initial semi-structured interviews in three Arbëreshë and three Italian communities, we identified eighteen local healers who then participated in extensive discussions about the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of illness.<sup>2</sup> Helpers may specialize as “bone healers” (those who treat muscular problems and minor sports-related injuries), “evil eye healers” (who help only those afflicted with *malocchio* [evil eye]), and “sibling healers” (who specialize in treating *nervi accavallati* [crossed nerves]). “Master healers” help patients with a larger variety of ailments and often maintain a small notebook that details the oral formulas and specific procedures required for healing diverse illnesses.<sup>3</sup> All helpers work strictly in the realm of ritual and are not normally sought for the non-ritualistic application of ethnomedicinals such as plant or animal products. Healers normally receive a small gift for their services—a handmade household item or some sort of specially prepared food such as baked sweets, bottled marmalades, or vegetables. Most of the healers in the region are women over the age of sixty.<sup>4</sup> We refer to these women as “healers” or “helpers” in our text, but in the community they are known as *quelli che aiutano*: “those who help.”

Traditionally, women healers—and gifted master healers, in particular—have held a respected and authoritative place in these communities.<sup>5</sup> Healers are especially sought out by other women, who desire advice regarding pregnancy and childbirth, as well as the ailments we

describe below. In part, healers gain authority by drawing on religious symbols and ideologies. Medicinal plants are often important in regional healing ceremonies, but the invocation of holy entities plays a central role. The helper alone is unable to heal the patient, even when botanicals or animal products are employed during the procedure. Often, saints and religious figures are invoked (see also Galt 1982), though these entities may also be natural (e.g., light, water, or plants) rather than supernatural. As she bargains or pleads for help by voicing oral formulas, the healer mediates between the perceived or mythic universe and the patient's experiential reality, helping her client in the transition from illness to health. Because the Roman Catholic Church and its laws, rites, and saints have played a powerful role in the social and psychological life of Monte Vulture communities, respect accrues to such a mediator. Further, religious terms and symbols obscure the magical or mystical basis of this psychotherapeutic tradition, making the practice more acceptable. Finally, mobilizing a patient's strong beliefs regarding the power of saints, icons, and mythic entities is physically efficacious, especially in cases of psychosomatic illness. In essence, it is a patient's belief that heals.

Though women seem to predominate among those seeking traditional healing, the age and sex of patients vary depending on the illness presented. For example, patients with *vermi* (worms) or *orecchioni* (mumps) are normally young children brought to the healer by a mother or grandmother, while *nervi accavalati* is treated primarily in older patients who have undertaken some sort of heavy physical labor, most often involving agricultural work in the countryside. In all cases, however, a special relationship is developed and maintained between patient and healer. In contrast to most current medical treatments in the West, patient–healer sessions in Monte Vulture generally last an hour or more. Every step in the process is personal. The ceremony is often carried out in the privacy of the healer's home, where the diagnostic process involves some questioning by the healer but is based on listening to the patient's concerns and description of symptoms. If the illness has a physical expression, such as dermatitis, the healer will inspect the affected region carefully, noting location and presentation of symptoms. Indeed, identification of illness is primarily reliant on the presence of physical signs.

There is a strict division between illnesses that can be healed with prayer and those that necessitate a purely pharmacotherapeutic inter-

vention in the form of medicinal plants or pharmaceuticals (Quave and Pieroni 2002). Illnesses with a magical or spiritual cause or transmission may be helped by means of a) oral formulas (often accompanied by light massage), b) oral formulas and biological materials (wild or cultivated botanicals or animal products) applied as ritual objects, c) oral formulas and non-biological materials used as ritual objects, d) oral formulas and biological materials applied as medicinals, and e) oral formulas and Western pharmaceuticals applied as medicinals. Not all illnesses of naturalistic etiology can be healed through ceremony and oral formulas. Illnesses of a strictly natural origin may require pharmaceuticals or other medical procedures applied within a Western biomedical framework under the instruction of a physician, or non-ritualistic application of biological or industrial materials.

If an illness is deemed to have a magico-spiritual etiology rather than a natural origin, the patient and healer must retrace the patient's recent passage through space to determine where, when, and how the illness was acquired. For supernatural illness, identifying the probable culpable entity and thus the means of transmission is imperative since many magico-spiritual ailments involve a circular mode of transmission and cure. Many of these illnesses stem from passage through a crossroads (see Hand 1980) or other spiritually dangerous space (such as the vicinity of a murder). Just as illnesses can be magically disposed of in the space where two roads cross, they can also be acquired in the same space (Quave and Pieroni 2002). Consequently, people in the region often make the sign of the cross on their bodies when walking or driving through a crossroads. Some also touch or squeeze a protective amulet when passing through this magically charged space. Once a causative agent is deemed culpable for the illness, treatment can be modified to target that entity precisely.

In addition, an ailment's cause can determine temporal aspects of treatment. Certain ailments with a magico-spiritual etiology must be treated only at night. Curing these ailments involves dealing directly with a malevolent entity and includes more complex ritual gestures, some of which must be performed outside of the home (e.g., at a communal fountain or a crossroads). Because the concept of malevolent entities does not fall clearly within the lines of the Catholic tradition, rituals performed secretly, under cover of night, may help the healer and patient avoid the stigma of being associated with "witchcraft."

Both helpers and community members affirm that patient belief

in an illness and its cure is imperative for successful treatment: the statement “*chi non crede non può essere aiutato*” (“one who does not believe cannot be helped”) is common. Those who lack devout belief in this traditional healing system—for instance, those who turn more frequently to biomedicine—can cause a substantial amount of distress among the older generation, who fear that younger people without respect for traditional medical advice leave themselves vulnerable to illness. For example, *malocchio* is an illness of psychological and social influence without an identifiable natural cause and cannot be healed solely through biomedical means. If a younger, non-believing relative is thought to have acquired the affliction, his elders may fear that the possibility of recovery is hopeless.

### General Structure of Ritual Treatment

All ritual therapies involve a general structure that is modified slightly to suit the specific illness and healer involved. A healer begins each ceremony by blessing the patient with the sign of the cross and reciting three Catholic prayers: *Ave Maria*, *Padre Nostro*, and *Gloria al Padre*. Each prayer is repeated three times (although *Gloria al Padre* often is excluded entirely). Next, an illness-specific prayer is repeated either three or nine times, depending upon the preference of the healer. These illness-specific prayers also have a common structure. First, the malady at hand is presented to a higher entity (often the Trinity, or sometimes a feminine deity or natural symbol, such as the Madonna or the rainbow). Next, Christ, saints, or other male spirits are invoked as part of an abbreviated narrative. Finally, the male spirit suggests a cure for the illness. This is sometimes followed by a rhetorical question directed at the illness entity itself, and a healer may also choose to end the ceremony with another blessing and sign of the cross accompanied by *Il Credo*.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the soft chanting of these prayers, the ritual practitioner is also involved in other healing activities, such as massaging the patient lightly or waving herbs over the affected area. By means of this rhythmic chanting and constant repetitive movement (much of which involves patient contact), the healer helps the patient achieve a relaxed, trance-like state. Such a state is essential to this form of ritual healing.

If therapy is unsuccessful after a period of nine days, especially in the case of spiritual illnesses, the patient might seek out another

helper to identify a different culpable entity. Success after nine days of adjusted therapy is considered proof that the first healer misidentified the cause of illness. However, if the second round of treatment yields no relief, most patients will turn to biomedical means.

## Illnesses

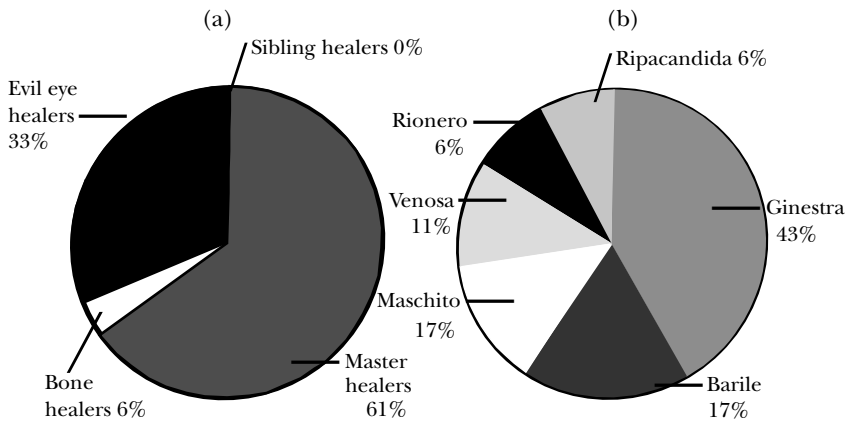
Healers identified twenty-one illnesses that can be cured through ritual means; these include such conditions as mastitis, nosebleed, parasitic infection, headache, migraine, stomachache, abdominal pain, dermatitis, hepatitis, mumps, fallen fontanelle, sore throat, erysipelas, and toothache (table 1). Healers most frequently identified *malocchio*, or “evil eye”—the only illness, in fact, that can be healed by someone in all of the communities reviewed in our study (fig. 1). The prevalence of evil eye was greatest in the Arbëreshë villages, which also reported the most cases of folk illness in general and the most healers who could treat them.<sup>7</sup>

### *Malocchio*

Evil eye is perhaps the most complex illness identified in the study area. The name “refers to the ability of the human eye to cause, or at least project, harm when it is directed by certain individuals towards others and their possessions” (Migliore 1997:13).<sup>8</sup> If one is complimented on a possession (such as a large home) or condition (such as physical beauty) and this compliment is not followed by a benediction (*abbenedica*) of “God bless you,” *malocchio* will afflict the possessor of the admired object or condition. In Monte Vulture, evil eye presents as a strong headache concentrated in the forehead and behind the eyes.<sup>9</sup>

In both Arbëreshë and Italian villages in the region, a dangerous compliment may be intentional, indirect, or accidental. Voluntary transmission, or intentionally speaking of enviable things without a benediction, clearly occurs within the study area and borders on placing a *fattura* or “curse” on someone (Pazzini 1980). The person who contracts *malocchio* may not have heard the compliment directly; it may have been said to another or thought but never said aloud. Thus, part of the prayer for helping *malocchio* affirms that the patient has been “offended by the glance, the heart, and the mind of another.”

Transmission may also be involuntary. In central Italy, animals can



**Fig. 1.** Distribution of the 18 healers identified in Vulture by (a) area of specialization and (b) community of residence.

give *malocchio* to humans and vice versa (Maria Elena Giusti, personal communication, 2002), but this mode of transmission does not exist in the Vulture area. However, involuntary transfer between people and certain foods is possible. For example, protective amulets (scissors) are hung in the kitchen when making and drying homemade *salsiccia* (sausage). It is believed that the scissors will protect the sausage from spoiling due to the envious glance of an admirer. Accidental transmission between humans is perhaps more common. For example, one young woman from Ginestra who does not believe in the evil eye recalled a time that she complimented a new mother on her beautiful newborn, but forgot to say “God bless you.” Her compliment was met with great resentment by the mother and her entire family, who believed that the child had been made susceptible to any number of illnesses (especially fever). Due to fear of future social rejection, this young woman now refrains from giving compliments. Galt (1982) labels such a refusal to give compliments “gazer prophylaxis”; it is a protective device used commonly among southern Europeans.

An immediate means of prevention and protection from *malocchio* is to give the envied item to the admiring person directly after a compliment without benediction is spoken. Yet, for items of great importance such as a home or child, or for a physical condition of

**Table 1.** Folk illnesses identified in the Monte Vulture area

<b>Illness</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>	<b>Causation/ Transmission</b> Magico- Spiritual Natural	<b>Protection/ Prevention</b>	<b>Treatment/ of Ritual Objects</b> Industrial Biological	<b>Invocation of a Holy Entity</b>	<b>Specific Timing: Treatment at Night</b>	<b>Restrictions</b>	<b>Presence in Communities</b> Aberëshë Italian
<b>Malocchio</b>	"Evil eye"; frontal headache with pain behind the eyes	x	Black cloth amulet; repeat oral formula at church on Christmas Eve		Padre, Figlio, e Spirito Santo (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)			x
<b>Mal di testa</b>	Headache; posterior pain at the base of skull	x			Padre, Figlio, e Spirito Santo			x
<b>Cigli alla testa</b>	Headache/migraine; sharp pain like pain runs from the front to back down the top of head	x			San on Cumpa' Savuco ( <i>Sambucus nigra</i> )			x
<b>Orecchioni</b>	"Mumps"; enlarged lymph nodes of the neck	x		Clay roof tiles; ink pen	San Biagio, San Giorgio			x
<b>Vermi</b>	"Worms"; helminthiasis; larvae & worms found in fecal material	x		Scissors	San Salvatore			x
<b>Mal di pancia</b>	Abdominal pain & gas; constipation	x		Black-handled knife	Santo Mucco della Spagna; Sant' Avaso			x
<b>Mal vint</b>	"Wind illness"; dermatitis; pronounced red inflammations of the skin	x	"Strong" blood; some people have natural low affinity; Friday & Sunday are protective days	Pistol or axe or knife	Red wine, Cesù Cristo; bundle of Padre, Figlio, e donkey Spirito Santo hair ( <i>lasra</i> )	x	Patient cannot enter church during treatment period	x
<b>Fuoco morto</b>	"Dead fire illness"; dermatitis; pronounced, red, round inflammations with fluid on the skin (eruptions)	x	"Strong" blood; some people have natural low affinity	Lit candle or oil lamp	Sant' Antonio Light from far away	x	Patient cannot enter church . . .	x



<b>Fuoco di Sant'Antonio</b>	"Saint Anthony's fire; same as above but eruptions are more pronounced"	x	"Strong" blood; some people have natural low affinity	Black-handled knife	Sant' Antonio Gesù Cristo Light from far away	x	Patient cannot enter church . . .	x	x
<b>Mal di gola</b>	"Sore throat"; red inflamed throat	x		Decoction of <i>Malva sylvestris</i>	San Biagio			x	x
<b>Mal di denti</b>	Toothache	x		9 pieces of giant reed ( <i>Arundo donax</i> )	San Simone			x	
<b>Risibola</b>	Region of isolated dark, hardened, withdrawn skin	x		Silver & gold items—coins, rings	San Giacomo San Gaetano		Patient cannot enter church . . .	x	
<b>Sangue dal naso</b>	Nosebleed	x			Gesù Cristo			x	
<b>Pelo alla menna</b>	"Hair in the Breast"; masitis; red, inflamed breast with fever, unable to give milk	x		Small hairbrush	San Miserano			x	
<b>La serra</b>	Fallen fontanelle	x			Gesù Cristo		Healer cannot greet anyone	x	
<b>Occhi secchi</b>	Dry, red, inflamed eyes	x			raw grated potato/juice	Padre, Figlio, e Spirito Santo		x	
<b>Acqua nel pipi</b>	"Water in the penis"; inflammation of	x			Fountain	Fountain water		x	
<b>Acqua dalla bocca</b>	"Water in the mouth"; dry, cracked corners of mouth from excessive drooling of saliva	x			San Sebastiano, Gesù Cristo, Madonna, Giuseppe		Healer cannot greet anyone	x	
<b>La zilla</b>	Head lice; scabies				San Pietro, Gesù Cristo, Madonna			x	
<b>Mal d'arco</b>	"Rainbow illness"; jaundice, hepatic symptoms	x		Temacotapot & white ashes ( <i>calce</i> )	<i>Ruta</i> San' Arco			x	
<b>Nervi accavallati</b>	"Crossed nerves," nerve/muscular pain	x		2 wooden sewing hooks				x	

beauty, this means of prevention cannot be used. An alternative means of protection, most commonly reported by women, is to carry a protective amulet in one's brassiere or wallet (Masseti 1993:25). The amulet is usually a small sack made of black cloth and filled with an aromatic herb mixture often including rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis* L. [Lamiaceae]) leaves and religious tokens (such as a small cross or picture of Padre Pio, a friar from the nearby region of Apulia who was sanctified in 2002 by the Roman Catholic Church). The amulet is prepared and prayed over by an evil eye healer or a master healer (fig. 2).<sup>10</sup>

A primary means of preventing and protecting oneself from *malocchio* is reading aloud the healing words obtained from a local helper. These prayers vary by healer and are the same formulas used in healing ceremonies. The readings, which are meant to provide protection for the entire year, must be performed in church on Christmas Eve and are also part of the initiation process for would-be *malocchio* helpers. *Malocchio* was the only illness in our study area for which means of prevention were regularly employed.

To "help" a patient with this affliction, the healer chants the three prayers common to Catholic tradition three times while making crosses on the patient's forehead with her thumb. Then she recites her ver-



**Fig. 2.** A cloth sack amulet worn in women's brassieres or carried in men's wallets to protect against *malocchio*.

sion of the illness-specific oral formula. Variations on the malocchio prayer include:

*Uno mi ha ferito,  
Tre mi hanno salvato.  
Mi hanno guarito le tre persone della Santissima Trinità:  
Padre, Figlio e Spirito Santo.*

One has hurt me,  
Three have saved me.  
The three of the Holy Trinity have healed me:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*In nome del Padre, del Figlio, e dello Spirito Santo.  
Tre sono gli affascinati  
Con gli occhi, con il cuore, e con la mente.  
Tre sono quelli che crescono:  
Il Padre, il Figlio, e lo Spirito Santo.  
Sopra la montagna c'era una vacca e un vitello,  
La vacca pascendo,  
Il vitello crescendo.  
Tu cresci il tuo e io cresco il mio.*

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Three have cursed me  
With their eyes, with the heart, and with the mind.  
Three are those who grow:  
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
On top of a mountain were a cow and a calf,  
The cow grazing,  
The calf growing.  
You grow yours and I grow mine.<sup>11</sup>

*In nome del Padre, del Figlio, e dello Spirito Santo  
Sono tre che ti aiutano:  
Il Padre, il Figlio, e lo Spirito Santo.  
Tre che ti hanno offeso  
Con l'occhio con cuore e con la mente.*

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
There are three who help you:  
The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Three that have offended you  
With the eye, with the heart, and with the mind.

*L'occhio che t'ha offeso,  
 Il padre la mente il viso—  
 Scaccia l'occhio malocchio,  
 Caccia il malocchio dalla vita mia.*

The eye that has offended you,  
 The Father, the mind he sees—  
 Remove the eye, evil eye,  
 Remove the evil eye from my life.

*Mi hanno affascinato—  
 Scaccia l'ucchà a chi è stato.  
 Mi hanno affascinato—  
 Scaccia l'ucchà a chi è stato.*

I have been cursed—  
 Remove the eye of the one who was there  
     [who transmitted the malocchio].  
 I have been cursed—  
 Remove the eye of the one who was there.

*La Santissima Trinità—il Padre, il Figlio, e lo Spirito Santo:  
 Fai passare questo mal di testa a questa ragazza[o].  
 Fuori malocchio! [3x]  
 Dio ti benedica.*

The Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit:  
 Make this headache pass from this girl [boy].  
 Get out, evil eye! [repeated three times total]  
 God bless you.

At the end of the procedure, the illness is presented to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Treatment can be performed during the day or night, whenever the headache is present. For most cases, only one treatment is necessary, but if the ailment persists, treatment may continue for periods of three, six, or nine days.<sup>12</sup>

The evil eye is the only folk illness identified in the region in which spirits causing illness may be transferred to the healer. If the patient yawns during the healing ceremony, malevolent entities are believed to be present. When the healer also begins to yawn, the presence of such spirits is reconfirmed (cf. Gallini 1973:133 for similarities in Sardinia). In some cases, the evil entity may then enter the healer's body. In this sense, the helper serves as a medium between the magico-spiritual realm



**Fig. 3.** Master healer Zia Elena Musto of Maschito displays her protective amulet: a picture of the recently sanctified Padre Pio. She keeps this amulet in her brassiere.

and the physical present. In light of the risk involved, healers begin a process of self-healing immediately after the patient's prayer ceremony; a protective amulet assures the success of this process (fig. 3).

#### *Mal di testa*

Two other divisions of headaches, both of naturalistic (non-spiritual) origin, exist in this medical construct: *mal di testa* and *cigli alla testa*.<sup>13</sup> The former is believed to be caused naturally and is associated with exposure to sudden changes in the weather, including temperature and humidity. The location of the pain is normally at the posterior base of the skull and it is this difference in location (as compared with the forehead-centered pain of evil eye) that aids in the diagnostic process. Although the headache is often diagnosed as unrelated to evil eye, the treatment regimen usually involves the same ceremonial practices and oral formulas detailed for malocchio, but with mal di testa substituted as the name of the illness. As in the treatment for malocchio, no special ritual objects or plants are used. The helper uses her thumb to make

crosses along the base of the skull and neck while chanting the prayer, and again the Trinity is invoked for aid in the healing process.

*Cigli alla testa*

This headache, positioned at the top of the skull, also has a natural etiology; like *mal di testa*, its onset is sometimes associated with sudden changes in the weather. While chanting the prayer formula, the helper runs her thumb down the center of the skull, from the center of the forehead to the posterior base, and returns to make the sign of the cross on the areas of acute pain. After several repetitions, small strands of hair at the base of the head are lightly tugged. Then the helper does the same to strands of hair along the forehead (beginning in the center, then pulling hairs on the left and then right). The following prayer for healing *cigli alla testa* is used by a helper from Ginestra:

*Buon giorno cumpa' Savuchə,  
Ciglia aggə e ciglia t'adduchə,  
Ti giuro e ti prometto,  
Che 'ndu fuchə nu ti mettə.*

Good morning *cumpa'* Savuchə,  
I have the headache and I give it to you,  
I tell you the truth and I promise you,  
In the fire I'll not place you.

In the procedure, the illness is presented either to *cumpa'* (close family member, *padrino* or godfather) or *San* (Saint) Savuchə/Sambuco. The latter is not a Catholic saint, but this does not alter his power in the minds of helpers and patients. Savuchə is a local name for *Sambucus nigra* L. (Adoxaceae), the elderberry tree; inhalation of smoke from a burning elderberry tree is said to cause such headaches. This same plant is considered in the Germanic world to have mythic and protective power (De Cleene and Lejeune 1999:383–90; Bächtold-Stäubli and Hoffmann-Krayer 1987:261–76). The prayer acknowledges the tree's ability to inflict pain, and in order to placate the entity the sufferer vows never to burn the tree for firewood. Some helpers reported that the healing ceremony for *cigli alla testa* may be conducted under an elderberry tree, which serves as an altar for accessing the mythic entity of San Savuchə. Normally only one treatment is necessary, but the patient can return for treatment if the symptoms persist.

*Orecchioni*

Healers cannot point to an exact cause for *orecchioni* (mumps), but the illness is thought to be related to weather changes or exposure to cold or wet conditions. Diagnosis is based on the presentation of large, swollen lymph glands in the neck. Ritual healing of mumps was recorded only in the Arbëreshë villages, and the ritual procedure varies among them. In Maschito and Ginestra, treatments utilize broken clay roof tiles, which are held over the swollen lymph nodes while the healer chants:

*Eravamo nove fratelli,  
Da nove siamo rimasti otto,  
Da otto siamo rimasti sette,  
Da sette siamo rimasti sei,  
Da sei siamo rimasti cinque,  
Da cinque siamo rimasti quattro,  
Da quattro siamo rimasti tre,  
Da tre siamo rimasti due,  
Da due siamo rimasti uno,  
Via! Via!*

We were nine brothers,  
From nine we remain eight,  
From eight we remain seven,  
From seven we remain six,  
From six we remain five,  
From five we remain four,  
From four we remain three,  
From three we remain two,  
From two we remain one.  
[to illness] Out! Out!

During this countdown, the patient is soothed and the pain from the swollen glands is eased with the combination of cool tiles and mental relaxation. A light massage of the neck and the gentle outward tugging of the patient's earlobes complements the therapy.

In Barile, however, another method is used, which normally lasts for six or nine consecutive days. First, the illness is presented to Saint Biagio (protector of the throat in Catholic tradition [Cronin 1963]), to Saint Giorgio, or to both:

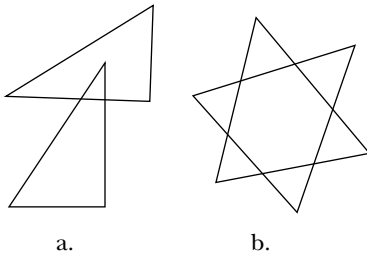
*San Giorgio glorioso,  
 Dentro un bosco è stato chiuso—  
 La testa gli hanno tagliato.  
 Avanti Iddio si è presentato.  
 Quel sangue che gli è uscito lo mise nella mano.  
 San Biagio mio fammi passare questo male dal corpo,  
 In nome del Padre, del Figlio e dello Spirito Santo.*

Glorious Saint Giorgio,  
 He was trapped inside a forest—  
 They have cut off his head.  
 In front of God he presented himself.  
 [God] took the blood from Saint Giorgio in his hand.  
 My Saint Biagio, make this pain of my body pass,  
 In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When the repetition of prayers is complete, the healer draws two interlocking triangles on the swollen region (fig. 4). Arbëreshë healers offered no interpretation of these triangles. However, a different arrangement of triangles has been reported in Sicily. The name of this pentacle is *gruppu di Salumuni* (Solomon's knot) (Pitrè 1993:313–14), and it has a long history in magical symbolism and pagan religious rites (Wirt 1982). In Sicily, the symbol is drawn with a piece of coal on a baked piece of hot terracotta tile. Once cooled, this tile is applied to the swollen lymph glands.

### *Vermi*

Worms (helminthiasis) is most commonly treated in children; the condition is diagnosed when whole parasites are found in fecal material. It is believed that these worms can quite literally invade the body,



**Fig. 4.** (a) Healers from Barile draw this symbol on the swollen lymph nodes of the neck during treatment for *orecchioni* (mumps). (b) Solomon's knot (*gruppu di Salumuni*), reported in Sicily for the treatment of *orecchioni* (Pitrè 1993:313–14).



traveling from the intestines to the heart and throat of the patient.<sup>14</sup> To treat vermi, a healer uses scissors to make symbolic cuts in the shape of a cross above the abdomen. Simultaneously, she chants one of the following prayers:

*Papulo uno, papulo due, papulo tre, papulo quattro, papulo cinque, papulo sei, papulo sette, papulo otto, papulo nove, Papulo togli da questo cuore.*

[or: *San Salvatore, prendi i vermi e mettili fuori.*]

Worm one, worm two, worm three, worm four, worm five, worm six, worm seven, worm eight, worm nine, Worms, tear out of this heart.

[or: *Saint Salvatore, take these worms and put them out.*]

*In nome della Santissima Trinità,  
Il Padre, il Figlio e lo Spirito Santo.*

*Taglia uno, taglia due, taglia quattro, taglia cinque, taglia sei, taglia sette, taglia otto, taglia nove*

*Fuori i vermi!* [3x]

In the name of the Holy Trinity,  
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Cut one, cut two, cut three, cut four, cut five, cut six, cut seven, cut eight, cut nine

Get out, worms! [repeated three times]

During each prayer nine symbolic cuts are made, and the entire procedure is repeated three times. At the end of the procedure, the illness is often presented to San Salvatore.

The repetitive use of *papulo* (worm) in the oral formula for vermi is also reported in Vitalba (Palestina 1990:332), and in northern Italy healers cut a piece of string that has touched the body rather than making symbolic cuts with the scissors (Sironi 1998:72–77). The string is said to represent the invasive worms. There, as in Monte Vulture, a repetitive counting oral formula is used as an effective meditative tool in psychotherapeutic treatments.

In addition to the ceremonial treatment, some healers in our study reported giving the affected child a necklace of garlic cloves to wear during the three-day therapeutic period. Other female informants (non-healers) said they gave their children a small spoonful of ground coffee in the morning on the days of ritual treatment for vermi.

*Mal di pancia*

Abdominal pain is considered a naturalistic ailment and is sometimes associated with constipation or the presence of intestinal gas. It is healed with the use of a spiritual object: a black-handled knife. During each of three prayer cycles, nine symbolic crosses are made with the knife in the air above the abdomen. Depending upon the preference of the healer, the illness is presented to Sant'Avraso or Santo Mucco:

*Santo Mucco della Spagna  
Era un uomo santo e giusto.  
La moglie troppo triste.  
Ha messo il pesce alla finestra,  
Mnato l'acqua in da la paglia,  
Che 'sto mal di panza squaglia.*

Saint Mucco of Spain,  
He was a saintly and just man.  
The wife was so very sad.  
She put the fish on the windowsill,  
She poured the water on the straw,  
So that this stomachache will go away.

*Mal vint*

This “wind illness,” though presently uncommon in the study population, is a form of dermatitis already well described in other studies carried out in Central Lucania (De Martino 2000:29–30). The illness presents as small, round inflammations of the skin; the location of these eruptions can vary. People with “weaker blood” are considered more susceptible to mal vint, though even they are less likely to contract the disease on certain days, including Friday and Sunday. Transmission is spiritual and happens when a person walks near places in which a person has been murdered. The illness is cured through the ceremonial use of the weapon that figured in the original crime.

Once the malevolent entity and the means used to kill have been identified, a similar murder weapon (usually a knife, pistol, or small axe) is used to make the sign of the cross over a glass of local red wine (*Vitis vinifera* L., var. Aglianico [Vitaceae]) mixed with gunpowder. Next, the healer dips a *lascò* (small braided bundle of donkey hair) into the wine and gunpowder mixture and paints crosses on each of the round inflammations on the patient's body (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup> Three painted crosses are used for each boil, and the healer is careful never to touch



**Fig. 5.** Ritual objects used to heal *mal vint* (wind illness): axe, *lasca*, pistol, and black-handled knife.

the patient directly. Throughout these ceremonial actions, she chants an illness-specific prayer such as one of the following:

*Mal vento,  
Va alla casa di buon vento.  
Mal vento tristà,  
Va dove ti ha destinato Cristà.*

Bad wind,  
Go to the house of the good wind.  
Sad bad wind,  
Go where Christ has destined you.

*Spustà 'stu vindà tristà,  
Si t'aiutà Gesù Cristà.  
Spustà 'stu vindà tristà,  
I t'aiutà Gesù Cristà.  
La Santissima Trinità:  
Lu Padrà, lu Figliuolà e lu Spirito Santo.*

Expell this sad wind,  
If Jesus Christ helps you.  
Expell this sad wind,  
And Jesus Christ helps you.  
The Holy Trinity:  
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

*Fuscà fuscà, vindà tristà  
Na vota i', na vota Cristà.*

*Meglia quirà che hai lassatà  
No quirà che hai pigliatà.*

Go away, go away, sad wind,  
One time me, one time Christ.  
Better that which you have left  
Than that which you have taken.

*Mal vinda  
Sotto acqua e sotto vinda  
'Stu mal vinda  
Portalo sotto lo noce del buon vinda.*

Bad wind  
Under water and under wind  
This bad wind  
Bring it under the walnut tree of the good wind.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of the ceremony, the illness is presented to the *Padre, Figlio, e Spirito Santo*, and the patient is advised to wash the clothes he is wearing immediately.

Mal vint must be treated at night for periods of three consecutive nights until cured, or up to nine nights total. During this time, the patient may not enter the church. If he or she were to do so and be blessed by a priest, the malevolent spirit of the illness would linger and the patient would never be cured.

In a recent case reported in Rionero, a man in his mid-thirties rested for five minutes in the shade of tree after returning from work in the countryside, where he experienced a “strange” chilly wind. The next day he awoke with his body covered in small boils. Because of the particular “strength” of his illness, the man was instructed by the healer to locate a weapon used to kill someone in the past (he selected an old army bayonet owned by a member of his family) and return to her at 10 P.M. for nine consecutive nights of treatment. She also told him to leave her home by a different street than the one he used to arrive and to avoid greeting anyone during travel to and from treatment. Nine days later, the boils were gone.

#### *Fuoco morto*

The “dead fire” illness is a painful form of dermatitis that is expressed as flat, red, round, fluid-filled eruptions. The location of these boils varies, but they most often afflict the arms, legs, chest, and sometimes

the back. Transmission is spiritual: the illness is contracted by walking near an area where someone has been murdered by fire. As in “wind illness,” patients are differentially susceptible depending on the “strength” of their blood, and transmission and healing are likewise circular. That is, as the original tragedy involved fire, so the healing ceremony uses fire in the form of an oil lamp or wax candle (fig. 6). Again, the healer never actually touches the patient, but instead holds the flame above the eruptions, making crosses over each inflammation during the ritual prayers. At the end of each treatment, the illness is usually presented to Saint Antonio.

The prayer for this illness is sometimes the same as that for *fuoco di Sant’ Antonio* (see below), but with the term *fuoco morto* substituted. The treatment period generally lasts six to nine days and must be done at night, usually within two hours before midnight. The patient is also advised not to enter the church during this treatment period in order to avoid a holy blessing, which would prevent the illness from leaving.

Variations of the ceremony for this illness involve the patient and healer looking at a distant light, such as that from a neighboring village (villages in the region are often located on hilltops, which makes such late-night viewing possible). In this case, the ceremony might take place on the healer’s balcony, and the prayer generally conforms to this pattern:



**Fig. 6.** An oil lamp used in the ritual healing procedure for *fuoco morto* (dead fire illness).

*Luce, luce della lontana via  
Guariscà 'stu fuchà murtà alla vita di [nome del paziente].*

Light, light of the faraway street  
Heal this dead fire illness in the life of [name of patient].

In this case, the illness is not presented to a specific saint, but instead to a light that can heal. Like the sanctification of the elderberry tree in the treatment of *cigli alla testa*, this magical healing treatment blends environment and religion.

### *Fuoco di Sant' Antonio*

The “fire of Saint Antonio” is a form of dermatitis similar to *fuoco morto*, but its fluid-filled eruptions are more pronounced. Although in other parts of Italy *fuoco di Sant' Antonio* is the popular term for shingles, the symptoms described in Monte Vulture suggest that this name refers to a different illness in our study area. Its painful fluid-filled eruptions are normally presented on the arms, back, and chest of the patient. Prevention, transmission, and susceptibility are similar to that described for *fuoco morto*. Some healers will also take the patient out onto a balcony or viewpoint to watch a faraway light during treatment, and a healing light may be invoked:

*Luce caccia questo fuoco a questo[a] signore[a] mio[a].  
In nome del Padre, del Figlio, e dello Spirito Santo.*

Light, remove this fire of this man [woman] of mine.  
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Despite many similarities between presentation and treatment of *fuoco morto* and *fuoco di Sant' Antonio*, the ritual gestures or objects employed in the treatment procedure may differ; for instance, a black-handled knife is sometimes used instead of an oil lamp, though generally a circular mode of transmission and cure obtains here as well. The use of a fire element is also reported in northern Italy for the treatment of shingles, in which the ritual object (an herb bundle) is burned at the end of the healing ceremony (Venzano 1999:53–54).

The following chant strangely portrays Saint Antonio in a malevolent role—as one who initiates, rather than heals, illness. In the end, Jesus Christ must effect the cure:

*C'era un aratore che arava.  
Acqua e fuoco seminava,*

*Sant'Antonio l'accendeva,  
E Gesù Cristo lo spegneva.  
Non c'è più valente che Dio onnipotente.*

There was a tiller who tilled the soil.  
He seeded water and fire,  
Saint Antonio set it on fire,  
Jesus Christ put out the fire.  
There is nothing of greater valor than God Almighty.

### *Mal di gola*

Sore throat has a natural cause; it is believed to stem from exposure to cold, wet weather. Treatment can involve prayers, a decoction of mallow leaves (*Malva sylvestris* L. [Malvaceae]), or both. When healed ceremonially, light massage of the neck is combined with prayers and crosses made with the thumb over the painful area. At the end of the procedure, the illness is presented to San Biagio (San Vlasə, in south Italian dialect), protector of the throat:

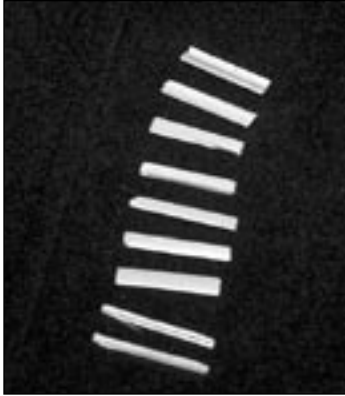
*San Vlasə glorioso,  
'Ndu voschə stai 'nghiusə,  
'Ndu voschə də castagnə.  
Fammə passa' 'stu mal də gola.*

Glorious Saint Vlasə,  
Inside the forest you are trapped,  
Inside the forest of chestnut trees.  
Make this sore throat pass [go away].

This mention of the chestnut tree is of interest because in areas of Tuscany, chestnut leaves and polenta made of chestnut flour are used to soothe sore throat (Uncini Manganelli and Tomei 1999:82; Pieroni 2000). However, this use was not reported in Monte Vulture.

### *Mal di denti*

Toothache is recognized as a natural problem, caused by dental decay. Treatment aims to manage pain, and the ceremony occurs in cycles of nines, rather than threes. Nine rectangular pieces of the external stem of *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae), a giant reed, resemble large teeth, and they are used as ritual objects in this procedure (fig. 7). During prayer, the healer moves each piece of reed horizontally across all of the patient's teeth. Then signs of the cross are made with this cane in the areas of acute pain. Once all nine pieces have been used (one per



**Fig. 7.** Nine reed pieces used to heal *mal di denti* (toothache).

prayer cycle), they are bundled together and moved once again across the teeth, followed by crossing motions. One of the healers interviewed commonly uses this method to heal her own toothaches:

*San Simone mio,  
 Che hai maestro mio che vai piagendo?  
 Che voglio avere maestro mio?  
 C'ho il male ai denti miei  
 Cala un deserto  
 Cala una canna verde  
 Canna verde facendo  
 Van' crescendo e guarendo.*

My Saint Simone,  
 What do you have, my teacher, that you go on crying?  
 What do you want to have, my teacher?  
 I have a toothache  
 The desert is set down  
 A green cane [giant reed] is set down  
 Green cane working  
 [Teeth] are growing and healing.

Treatment is performed in periods of three days and is sought as needed for pain. We are not aware of any similar descriptions of toothache treatment in the literature on Mediterranean ethnomedicine.

### *Risibola*

The exact cause of erysipelas is unknown in the Monte Vulture medical framework, but the ailment is generally considered a spiritual illness. Its symptoms include an area of hard, dark, withdrawn skin, often located on the face. *Risibola* must be treated at night, and in order





**Fig. 8.** Master healer Anita Carlucci of Barile shows a gold ring and silver coin used in the ritual treatment of *risibola* (erysipelas).

to prevent a holy blessing on the illness, the patient should not enter the church while being treated. During the prayer ceremony, a gold object (e.g., a wedding ring) and a silver item (e.g., a coin) are used to make crosses over the affected area (fig. 8); these metals are also used elsewhere to “absorb” magical illness (Massetti 1993:105; De Martino 2000:33–34).<sup>17</sup> A healer from Barile performs the following prayer:

*Risibilla, risibilla,  
Argento e oro io ti vedo.  
Risibilla può volare—  
In mezzo al mare si va a menare.*

Risibilla, risibilla,  
Silver and gold I see.  
Risibilla can fly—  
In the middle of the sea, it will move about.

A different prayer was provided by a healer from Maschito:

*Risibola, risibella,  
Oro e argento ti vuol bene.  
San Giacomo e San Gaetano:  
Tu la liberi e io la salvo.*

Risibola, beautiful risibola,  
 Gold and silver want the best for you.  
 Saint Giacomo and Saint Gaetano:  
 You release her [the patient], and I save her.

Risibola treatment normally lasts six or nine days.

*Sangue dal naso*

Some healers report that nosebleed has an unknown natural origin, while others assert that it is a secondary effect of malocchio. Other than the sign of the cross that begins the rite, no ritual objects or gestures are used in the healing procedure for *sangue del naso*, and no spiritual restrictions are enforced. However, Jesus Christ is invoked to heal the ailment:

*Stagna sangue dal corpo e dalle vene  
 Come Gesù ha preso la morte.*

Stop the blood from the body and the veins  
 Like Jesus has seized death.

*Pelo alla menna*

Treatment of mastitis is based on the belief that a nursing infant can suck a hair from its mother's head into the interior region of her breast, blocking milk flow (hence the term *pelo alla menna* [hair in the breast]). A hairbrush is placed inside the brassiere throughout the treatment period (olive oil is applied to avoid irritation of the skin under the breast). In addition, healers recite the following prayer while making crosses over the affected area:

*“Buon giorno [o buona sera], San Miserano.”  
 C’era una donna che lavava.  
 “Che hai madre mia che sempre piangi?”  
 “I capelli sopra il mio petto.”  
 Se non dici San Sini’ San Sena’  
 Tre commà də vocchə e tre də na’.*

“Good morning [or good evening], Saint Miserano.”  
 There was a woman who washed.  
 “What do you have, my mother, that you are always crying?”  
 “The hairs above my breasts.”  
 If you don’t say San Sini’ San Sena’  
 Three from the mouth and three from the nose.

Causative theories of mastitis differ around Italy. According to an explanatory narrative told in Lucania, a bearded man once passed by a group of women who laughed at him. In response, he plucked a hair from his beard and put it on the breast of one of these women. Thus, lactating women are at risk when an old man with a beard passes by (De Martino 2000:60–61). In Sicily, the cause of mastitis is also detailed in a story: San Giuseppe was going house to house begging for money. When he came to the house of a mother and her nursing child, she refused him. San Giuseppe then plucked a hair from his beard and let it fall down on the woman's breast. As a result, the breast became clogged. When he returned the next day, the woman said that she would give him money only if he healed her. He then repeated an oral formula and cured her illness (Pitrè 1993:415–16). In Sardinia, however, mastitis occurs when a lactating woman drinks something with a hair in it. The ailment is treated in this context by having a dog suckle the ailing breast (Cossu 1996:266–67).

*La serra* or *Plignə*

Fallen fontanelle, a condition in which an infant's skull is higher in back and soft in the center top of the head, is called *la serra* in Barile and *plignə* in Ginestra. Considered an illness of natural cause, fallen fontanelle calls for a one-month treatment regimen. During this time, healers pray while they make the sign of the cross with their thumb over the top of the child's head. This prayer is used in Barile:

*Per la Santissima Trinità  
Spacca questa serra  
Spacca questo mondo  
Che Gesù Cristo ti ha dato in fronte.*

For the Holy Trinity  
Break this illness  
Break this world  
That Jesus Christ has given you on the forehead.

Another, recited in the local dialect, is as follows:

*Spacca 'stu montə,  
Come Gesù 'u purtava 'nbrontə.*

Break this mountain,  
Since Jesus has brought it to the forehead.

Treatment variations involve banding the child's head with a tight red cloth or taking its clothes to a stream or river for ritual washing after nine days of treatment. The helper or parent who takes responsibility for treating the child must not greet anyone during the treatment period. If leaving the house is necessary and someone attempts to initiate a conversation, that person must be ignored. When washing the child's clothes, the parent or healer must leave and re-enter the house through different doors.<sup>18</sup>

### *Occhi Secchi*

Symptoms of "dry eyes" include red, puffy, dry eyes; the condition is a natural one, thought to be due to lack of sleep. Traditional treatment involves the application of fresh potato juice and shavings (*Solanum tuberosum* L. [Solanaceae]) to the eyes, accompanied by the following oral formula:

*Occhi secchi [nome del paziente],  
L'ha preso in nome della Santissima Trinità—  
In nome del Padre, del Figlio e dello Spirito Santo  
Mandalo dentro al mare e non farlo più tornare.*

Dry eyes of [patient's name]  
I have taken you in the name of the Holy Trinity—  
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit  
Send you to the sea and may you return no more.

### *Acqua nel pipì*

Penile inflammation ("water in the penis") is most commonly treated in young boys and is believed to be of natural, though unknown, cause. A child's mother may perform the treatment after being trained by a master healer. Every night for one month, she must take a little water from a shared village fountain, reciting an oral formula in the process. At the end of the ceremony, the water is poured back into the fountain. It is of utmost importance that she not speak to or look at anyone as she goes to or leaves the fountain; otherwise, she must begin the month-long ritual over again. The prayer invokes the assistance of the fountain water rather than a religious saint:

*Tieni l'acqua tua e dammi l'acqua mia,  
Caccia l'acqua dal figlio mio.*

Take this water of yours and give me my water,  
Remove the water of my son.

*Acqua dalla bocca or male di bocca*

Symptoms of “water of the mouth” or “illness of the mouth” include excess salivation and dried, chapped lips. Causation is believed to be natural. While no ceremonial gestures were reported for healing this illness, we did record two distinct prayers. In the healing ceremony, a story of Saint Sebastian is recounted and Jesus, Joseph, and Mary are invoked for help:

*San Sebastiano andava piangendo,  
Incontrava Gesù Cristo e la Madonna.  
“Che hai Sebastiano che piangi sempre?”  
“Ho un male di lingua che mi inganna.”*

Saint Sebastian went crying,  
He encountered Jesus Christ and Mary.  
“What do you have, Sebastian, that you always cry?”  
“I have a tongue pain that disturbs me.”

Another version of the prayer is given in the local dialect:

*San Vestian seduto sia;  
Sopra una sedia di marmo stava.  
Passa Gesù, Giuseppe, e Maria:  
“Che hai San Vestian?”  
“Gesù, ho un male alla bocca.”*

Saint Vestian was sitting down;  
He sat on a seat of marble.  
Jesus, Joseph, and Mary passed by:  
“What do you have Saint Vestian?”  
“Jesus, I have a pain in my mouth.”

*La zilla*

*La zilla* is most likely head lice or scabies; symptoms include a very itchy, irritated scalp. Only one healer from Barile reported a treatment for this ailment, and it was the longest treatment period described for any folk illness reported in the study area. Patients themselves conduct the healing ceremony once a day for one entire year, after being instructed by a healer. The afflicted person anoints the top of his or her head, using olive oil placed in the palm. In the illness-specific prayer, which is repeated nine times in the daily sequence, Jesus and Mary provide assistance:

*Nel nome della Santissima Trinità:  
 San Pietro andava piangendo.  
 Incontra Gesù Cristo e la Madonna:  
 "Pietro, che hai che vai piangendo?"  
 "Tengo la rogna, la tigna, e la zilla alla testa;  
 Tutti mi scacciano via."  
 Prendi l'olio, mettilo nella pianta della mano,  
 E mettila alla testa.  
 A capo di un anno sei sanato.*

In the name of the Holy Trinity:  
 Saint Pietro went crying.  
 He encountered Jesus Christ and Mary:  
 "Pietro, what do you have that you go crying?"  
 "I have scabies, ringworm, and lice on my head;  
 Everyone chases me away."  
 "Take oil, put it in the palm of the hand,  
 And put it on your head.  
 By the end of one year you will be healed."

### *Mal d'arco*

"Illness of the rainbow," a description of hepatitis, has already been reported in other parts of southern Italy (Amalfi 1980; De Martino 2000:37–38; Di Nola 1976; Massetti 1993:131–33; Palestina 1990:325), but is not an illness commonly treated today. It is believed that a person can contract *mal d'arco* by urinating outdoors in the direction of a rainbow or by walking near an area in a crossroads where urine has been dumped during a previous healing procedure.

In some cases, diagnosis of *mal d'arco* may involve physical measurement of the patient's body. Some healers reported that diagnosis does not depend solely on the presence of jaundice, but also on weakness in the knees and arms, accompanied by nonsymmetrical measures of the body. The diagnostic process involves measuring the patient's length from the forehead over the skull to the back and down to the right heel. A second measurement requires the patient's arms to be outstretched horizontally; a measurement is then taken from middle fingertip to middle fingertip. If the patient has *mal d'arco*, the two measurements will not correspond. (This measurement process is also described in the Vitalba Valley; a black string must be used for the procedure [Palestina 1990:325].)

Treatment for this illness is quite complex. For three days, patients drink a decoction of rue (*Ruta graveolens* L. [Rutaceae]) and collect their first urine of the day in a *pignatta* (terracotta pot).<sup>19</sup> Prayers are said while the tea is being prepared, and after boiling, the rue leaves must be arranged in the shape of a cross. Patients must be careful about the order in which they perform ritual actions: each morning prior to urinating, the *pignatta* is filled with one handful of *calce* (white ashes). After urine has been collected, the rue tea is taken. At the end of three days, the pot of urine and ashes is broken in a crossroads late at night. This gesture is accompanied by repetition of the prayers used in preparing the rue tea:

*Arco e Sant'Arco,  
Sei pulito e sei bello fatto.  
Chi passa e non ti saluta,  
Il colore non lo tramuta.*

Arc and Saint Arc  
You are clean and made beautiful.  
Who passes and does not salute you,  
The color will not transform him.

*La Santissima Trinità,  
Il Padre, il Figlio e lo Spirito Santo.  
Fuori mal d'arco. [3x]*

The Holy Trinity  
The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Get out, illness of the rainbow. [repeated three times]

*Fuscà, fuscà, vint tristà:  
Ciu pràsintà a Gesù Cristà.  
Fuscà fuscà vint vòndrastà:  
Ciu pràsintà au pasciacchià.*

Run, run, sad wind:  
I present it to Jesus Christ.  
Run, run, bad wind:  
I present it to the urine [or urine collector].

*Carmela sotto l'arco e passata,  
Lo male dell'arco ha pigliato.  
Santissima Trinità portalo lontano al mare*

*E non lo fare piú tornare.  
 In nome del Padre, del Figlio e dello Spirito Santo,  
 Non lo fare piú tornare.  
 Santissima Trinità, caccia sangue trista, e metti quello che bolista.*

Carmela has passed under the rainbow,  
 She has taken the illness of the rainbow.  
 Holy Trinity take it [the illness] far to the sea  
 And do not let it come back.  
 In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
 Do not let it come back.  
 Holy Trinity, remove the sad blood, and bring in that which you have  
 boiled.

When the patient returns home from the crossroads, she must reenter the house through a different entrance. Likewise, the next morning, a patient must not exit the bed from the side he entered it. Similar elements of this healing ritual can be identified in the procedure for treating malaria in Abruzzo (Masseti 1993:123–24).

#### *Nervi accavalati*

“Crossed nerves” is treatable only by the prayers and ritual gestures of two unmarried siblings (most commonly sisters) without a father. Symptoms of the ailment include sharp pains in the arms or legs believed to be caused by tangled nerves. During the healing ceremony, the siblings link and unlink two *fusi* (sewing/knitting hooks; fig. 9) over the painful area. As siblings cross and uncross these symbolic nerves, they repeat the following prayer again and again (in this case, the oral formula is from Ginestra):

*Due sorelle siamo,  
 A sposare ci vuleamo.  
 Stu' nerva calvacata  
 Scalvacata lo vuleamo.*

Two sisters are we,  
 We want to marry.  
 This tangled nerve  
 We want untangled.

At the end of the procedure, which has occurred on three consecutive days, the *fusi* are permanently disentangled when each sibling takes his or her hook and pulls it away (cf. Massetti 1993:138–39 and Palestina 1990:327).





**Fig. 9.** A wooden sewing hook (*fuso*) used as a ritual object in the healing ceremony for *nervi accavallati* (crossed nerves).

## Conclusion

While the folk-medical construct is not now widely prevalent in the communities we studied,<sup>20</sup> there is a degree of dissatisfaction among both Arbëreshë and Italian populations in regard to more “modern” medical care. The traditional holistic system described here tends to encourage ongoing ties of exchange and advice, embedding individuals in larger community networks and maintaining a sense of cultural authority, especially for older women. Today’s biomedical construct often lacks this element of reciprocal involvement and empowerment. Further, collaborative patient-healer interaction during diagnosis and determination of a treatment regimen is less likely, and actual care is not as intimate and personalized. Patient isolation in these circumstances may in fact hinder recovery from the psychosocial ailments—such as headaches—described so prominently in the Monte Vulture nosology.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the increasing portion of the global population currently exploring alternative medical practices seeks to restore the human element to contemporary healthcare. Or perhaps, as we suspect is the case in Arbëreshë villages, major sociocultural transitions increase the very confusion and psychosomatic illness addressed by traditional psychotherapeutic means, thereby increasing

the number of individuals interested in this type of care.<sup>22</sup> Further evaluation of traditional health systems could offer insight into how health belief models impact society and also highlight elements of holistic systems that could be integrated into modern complementary and biomedical systems.

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## Acknowledgments

Funding for this study was provided by National Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation, The Foundation for Science and Disability, and Mars Nutritional Research Council (Urbana, Ill.). Special thanks are extended to Dr. Brad Bennett of Florida International University and to the people of the Vulture region. In particular, Zia Elena Musto, Silvia Perrotta, Fiorina Larossa, Irma Petagine, Carmen Di Pace, Giulia Stozza, Fiorina Summa, Anita Carlucci, Maria Granolla, and Lucia Pace graciously shared their knowledge of traditional medicine and have contributed to the concept of holistic medicine.

## Notes

1. Over the past forty years, the economic base in southern Italy has shifted dramatically. Once a largely agrarian and pastoral region, the area now relies heavily on factory labor by both men and women and is increasingly part of the global marketplace. Lucania (Basilicata), however, has perhaps been less affected by these economic and lifestyle changes; the region is the most rural in Italy. Only seventeen percent of inhabitants live in urban areas (ISTAT 2000), and the region is still highly dependent on an agricultural and pastoral economy. No detailed work has described ritual healing in Vulture (a smaller area in Lucania), with the exception of a few anthropological studies focused mainly on religious ceremony and on connections between power and magic in the area (Hauschild 1994, 2002).

2. Our work was conducted in the Arbëreshë communities of Ginestra (in Arberëshë Zhurë), Barile (Barilli), and Maschito (Mashqiti), with ca. 900, 3,000 and 1,800 inhabitants, respectively; and the Italian communities of Venosa, Ripacandida, and Rionero, with ca. 12,500, 2,100 and 13,200 inhabitants, respectively (ISTAT 2000; Comune di Ginestra 2001).

Approximately sixty hours of video-recorded interviews are stored at the authors' addresses. Transcriptions of prayers recorded in healing ceremonies are reported as quoted by the informants, who often mixed south Italian dialect and standard Italian forms. Prayers are transcribed following the rules of Italian phonology. In the case of dialect recordings, the centralized neutral vowel ("schwa") is written as *a*. The use of this vowel is very common in both the south Italian dialect and in Albanian (where it is generally transcribed as *ë*). Rhyme is an important part of many prayer texts, but this feature has not been retained in the English transla-

tions. Readers unfamiliar with Italian can get a sense of the rhyme in the original texts by noting similarities in the spelling of word endings.

3. Many patients self-diagnose or seek diagnostic advice from an elder female relative and then procure help from a known specialist. However, they will often turn to master healers for diagnostic help, particularly when symptoms are difficult to distinguish.

4. One male healer in his late fifties lives in Ginestra; in addition, one male *stregone*, or witch, was identified in Maschito. Because the latter relies on “black magic” for his income, he was unwilling to speak about his practice.

A generational difference is also evident in healers and in patients. The youngest female healer is a woman in her early fifties who has recently learned many formulas and gestures from her mother. Only the older members of the community were familiar with folk illnesses other than the evil eye. In a study on magical symbolism in an Apulian village, A. H. Galt has suggested that “some magical beliefs have begun to disappear amongst all but the elderly” (1991). Though many of the healers we interviewed began healing when they were unmarried women in their twenties, few young women or men express interest in apprenticing as healers today.

5. Janice Boddy has documented the empowerment of women who utilize peripheral (spirit) possession in order to maintain kin ties, restore family health (through ritual healing), and establish social identity in the community (1994:415–17). Her work reinforces the importance of women’s roles in small transitional communities, such as those included in our study.

6. This basic structure to the oral formula was also reported for the treatment of *thiarmos* (evil eye) in Greece (Herzfeld 1986). Though the story or message of the prayer is not always clear, we propose that patient recognition of familiar words and sounds, continuously repeated in a soft, rhythmic manner, aids in the psychotherapeutic treatment.

7. Although healers are more prevalent in Arbëreshë villages, this ethnomedical system is probably not of Albanian origin. Similarities in the oral formulas and gestures employed in the Italian and Arbëreshë villages in our study region, as well as the traditional therapies described in the literature on other regions of Italy (Coltro 1983; Cossu 1996; Gatto-Trocchi 1982; Massetti 1993; Palestina 1990; Pitrè 1993), point to an Italian origin for these rituals. In addition, no healers in the region know of or use oral formulas in the Arbëreshë language, but instead speak in Italian or the common south Italian dialect, even when fluent in Arbëreshë. When asked why, most healers replied that they had originally learned the oral formulas in Italian, or that the majority of their patients did not understand or speak Arbëreshë and preferred to be treated in Italian.

While patients generally try to seek treatment in their own community, sometimes they travel to another locale. For example, many patients from the Italian villages of Ripacandida, Venosa, and Rionero, which currently maintain few healers, seek help from healers in Ginestra, Barile, or Maschito. Some healers from these small Arbëreshë villages are, in fact, renowned for their specific areas of expertise and thus serve a wide client population not only from their own respective villages, but also from the neighboring Italian communities and, at times, from the more distant regions of Lucania and Puglia.

8. Some scholars have described malocchio as a personality disorder rather than an illness (Habimana and Massé 2000); perhaps this envy-generated affliction can best be understood as a psychological manifestation of cultural control, one which borders on a condition of general paranoia amongst its believers (Di Stasi 1981; Domash 1983; Elworthy 1958; Machovek 1976; Madianos 1999; Stephenson 1979). The relationship between envy and the possession of valuable items in terms of the evil eye has been well discussed in previous work by Gallini (1973:127).

The evil eye has had a long history within the circum-Mediterranean regions, and similar Latin American traditions may have originated there (Dundes 1981). This phenomenon has also been studied in Near Eastern cultural contexts (Tripp-Reimer 1983).

9. While these symptoms were also reported by De Martino in Lucania (2000:29), malocchio manifests differently in other central and northern Italian regions. In these areas, the illness is recognized by a generalized continued sequence of banal troubles and unfortunate accidents. Exceptions include infants, who are said to cry continuously, and animals, which seem to become asthenic (Cossu 1996:60–67). Diagnosis in other regions of Italy may be confirmed by observing the separation of a drop of olive oil in a bowl of water (Masseti 1993:28; Pieroni and Giusti 2002). This method was not observed or reported during our study in the Vulture area.

10. The use of the *cornetto* (horn) as a protective amulet was not commonly reported in Monte Vulture, but it is common in other regions of southern Italy (Pazzini 1980).

11. Several healers mentioned a calf and cow at pasture during diverse healing ceremonies; the words seem to represent the very idea of envy and ownership. Oral formulas that mention calves have also been recorded in Sardinia (Gallini 1973:132) and at the end of the nineteenth century among Jewish healers in Bosnia. The latter would say, “As the cow ‘cleans’ the calf, so I ‘clean’ you from the evil eye and all other bad things” (Glück 1891:403). Similarly, Serbian women healers have used oral formulas involving the cow to cast out curses: “Out of there comes the red cow, she bore a red calf, she provided red milk” (in Kerewski-Halpern and Foley 1978:46).

“You grow yours and I grow mine” is also a significant phrase, given the illness being treated in this prayer. It stresses a healthy mother and child, eating well and growing, yet warns others to tend to their own health or fortune instead of minding that of others.

12. There are exceptions to this rule. For instance, one woman in Maschito who suffers from chronic headaches believed to be caused by the evil eye is treated every day, except on Sundays.

13. It should be noted that one healer identified all three types of headache as malocchio.

14. Elsewhere, worms are also associated with illnesses affecting various parts of the body. In Austria, for example, Grabner described four kinds of “worms,” one of which was thought to affect the heart and was considered particularly dangerous for the general health of the person afflicted (1962).

15. In Maschito, healers substitute a bundle of three herbs for the ritual objects used in curing mal vint in Vulture. One of the herbs must be elderberry, and the other two are generally black horehound (*Ballota nigra* L. [Lamiaceae]) and pellitory of the wall (*Parietaria judaica* L. [Urticaceae]). This herb bundle is waved over the body of the patient, at times touching the patient's body, as the healer repeats an oral formula. At the end of the ceremony, the herb bundle is burned. Two of these herbs have been described in the ritual healing of bruises among Kossova-Albanians (Kemp 1935:257).

16. These oral formulas are similar to those reported in the nearby Vitalba Valley, which also instruct the wind to go away and be replaced with a "good" wind. The ideas of magically acquiring mal vint and being able to leave the illness at a crossroads are also described in Vitalba (Palestina 1990:324).

17. These were reported in Abruzzo and Lucania, respectively. In Liguria, however, only silver items are believed to have this function, along with olive leaves and the rough wool of sheep (Venzano 1999:49–50). In Sicily elderberry branches are reported to absorb magical ailments (Pitrè 1993:228).

18. Illnesses reported in the Vitalba Valley that are likely related to rickets and fallen fontanelle include *pistacane*, in which the child has a deformation of the sacral region which resembles the indentation of a dog's paw in the flesh, and *serchia*, in which young infants have an irregularly elongated head. The oral formulas for these illnesses are very similar to those used to treat fallen fontanelle in Monte Vulture (Palestina 1990:326, 329).

19. Again, this case demonstrates a circular trend from causation to cure: the object believed to be associated with the onset of illness (here, urine) is used in the healing ceremony.

20. We believe several factors are involved in the decline of traditional health practices: (1) A diminished presence of religion and strong religious believers in these communities has reduced the psychotherapeutic effectiveness of traditional gestures and oral formulas; (2) Changing economic opportunities, including factory work, mean that fewer women are apprenticed as healers; (3) The younger generation's desire to become "modernized" has led many to disrespect traditional cultural and ecological practices; (4) Better public health services have helped eradicate many illnesses, including hepatitis, malaria, intestinal parasites, and nutritional deficit; (5) Easily acquirable pharmaceuticals, such as ibuprofen, have undermined the need for many traditional therapies; and (6) Biomedical institutions, including hospitals and clinics, have become accessible and now serve most people in the region.

21. This term refers to systems of disease classification and understanding; Hahn defines nosology as "an element of a broader medical system and still a broader total culture—a society's system of ideas, values, and ways of doing things" (1995:15).

22. As noted earlier, Arbëreshë villages retain the highest percentage of people who suffer from malocchio, and the greatest number of people who can heal them. During the 1960s and 1970s, these villages became increasingly integrated into broader Italian culture; though they had been Catholicized in 1627 by the Bishop of Melfi (Lamattina 1987:44–45), Arbëreshë was still the primary

language at that time, and some fifteenth-century Albanian customs were still practiced. Extensive interviews with people who experienced this cultural shift revealed a concomitant increase in the expression of complex psychosomatic ailments in the Arbëreshë communities. There was a greater belief in illness and traditional means of therapy, and thus there was also a greater need for healers to treat the population during this period.

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