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### Original Research Article

## How the World Views Solar Deities

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### Abstract

Being given such a high position in Iran and India, Mitra (commonly known as Mehr), the god of the sun, friendship, and energy, attained an elevated position in Rome over the centuries after its journey from Persian Empire. Possessing a total of attributes, assisting real patriots and warriors in wars, fighting with the demon of evils, being the god of promise, holding vast lands, a symbol of grace in human, plants, and animals, this deity used to be dominant in the West and East over the centuries, being worshipped and sanctified. Solar deities existed in all world's nations and peoples and were glorified as the symbol and source of the continuing existence of the universe. These deities have often been superior to other gods in a variety of nations including Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Greeks and Romans, the Chinese and the Japanese, Indonesians, American indigenous tribes, aborigines of Australia, and African people who have been aware of their utmost importance. Aton and Rae in ancient Egypt, Apollo, Helios and Sol in Greece and Rome, Mitra and Surya in Iran and India as well as other deities of the sun in the West and East represent signs and symbols in different cultures and arts.

**Keywords:** *The sun, myth, the West and the East, religion and belief, Mitra (Mehr).*

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### Introduction

Attention to nature and its elements such as the sky, the moon, the sun and stars, rivers, springs, plants, mountains, and especially old trees, has long been deeply ingrained in people's life. To take advantage of such beneficial elements, the people revered them so much that some human-like and animal-like deities and other gods in the plant, stone, and other elements form with symbols and signs emerged in some cultures. The traditional rites such as vows and sacrifices were

performed to maintain these vital elements, enjoying their benefits.

Humans, due to their need or fear, have been dependent on nature from the very beginning. They used to appeal to gods to ward off evil forces threatening the earth and the sky. It seemed as if they had the deity of lightning, thunderbolt, storm, flood, eclipses, and drought. The ancient people made sacrifices to such deities to get rid of evil deeds. Among these deities and natural myths, the deity of the sun had such a very important place

in people's lives that it still has been worshipped. Not only have the deities of Sun been praised in Iran, India, Japan, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome but they have also been revered by primitive tribes of America, Australia, and Africa as well as every single place in the world. All around the universe have existed the temples of the sun where every nation based on their culture and customs is showing respect and reverence towards the deity of the sun.

A study of the history of religions indicates that the sun used to be worshipped by all the ancient societies. It could be seen that there were relationships between the sun and the darkness, the Underworld or "binome" namely sun-snake in the Egyptian thought and art. This symbol looks like the sun around which a viper has coiled (Eliade, 1993, 135).

It is the sun which prevails wherever is the realm of kings, heroes, and emperors. "Sons of the sun" are presumed to have played an important role in spreading everywhere the religion of sun-worshipping as well as the principles of civilization through their voyages and endless migrations.

The solar deity was gradually losing its power against other celestial gods in such a way that the god of the moon appeared during the matriarchy era. The deity of the sun was initially supposed to be the sign of fertility, having an important place in agricultural communities. However, the goddess of fertility and freshwater then became the sign of productivity and blessing, the manifestation of which, among Aryans, was Anahita, the god of water, and its sign was the moon.

### Hypothesis

The sun was very important to the ancient world and the solar deities were worshipped by the western and eastern tribes. Mitra surpassed the other sun gods and dominated the ancient world for a long time.

### Solar religions in the world

The nations and tribes of the world used to praise and worship nature forces and elements such as the earth,

soil, fire, wind, sky, the moon, the sun, and stars. Comparatively speaking, the sun was at the center of attention and numerous solar deities appeared in the cultures of Iran, Egypt, India, and other regions of the universe. The sun-worshipping was prevalent in all parts of the world, both the West and the East. Rituals related to the sun-worshipping are associated with vows and sacrifices, which have continued to this day in the form of modern religions and beliefs.

In the ancient layers of primitive cultures, the movement of transferring the attributes and belongings of the celestial god to the solar divinity, as well as the connection and fusion of the supreme essence with the solar deity, is evident. Thus, the rainbow as the manifestation of celestial holiness was intertwined with the sun and it was known as the brother of the sun to some tribes like Fuegians. Or otherwise, there was a father-son bond between the sky and the sun. Aborigines of the southwest<sup>1</sup> considered the sun as the son of the creator, the god, and the supporter of humans. Influenced by the matriarchy, they knew the moon as the second son of the sun. To the Aborigines, the sun was a good force, and the moon, evil force. In these regions, the sun tree on which the heads of sacrificial animals are hung is a ritual symbol (ibid., 76).

The sacred signs of the infernal and ancient manifestations of the sun remained in Greek mythology and religions. Helios expressed the tendencies toward the Underworld and Hell. In Crete, Helios is the bull and husband of Ozma's mother, the father of Circe, the witch, and the ancestor of Medea that both are well-known creators of Mehr in Judgment of plants. Medea presents its chariot to him.

In Africa and Indonesia, the sun is called the son of the sky and the moon, its daughter. To some Indian tribes, the sun is very kind and superior to other gods, for which they sacrifice white goats or white roosters. This event takes place in August for the rice harvest.

T According to the author's field research conducted in 1980 in Sahneh, Kermanshah Yarsan people in Sahne, Kermanshah hold a special ceremony which

is accompanied by dancing, singing, performing songs, and reciting Kurdish poems. A white rooster is slaughtered and then it is distributed with rice among the audience. People of Sahne in Kermanshah call their leaders in Timor Island located in the southeast of Asia the sons of the sun. They claim that these leaders were born into the solar deity directly (*ibid.*, 141). In Timor Island, Usi-Neno, the solar deity, is the husband of Usi-Aful, the goddess of the earth; the total world has been born of their sexual intercourse (*ibid.*, 140). Although in Indonesia the dead and spirits of nature are worshipped, the sun is still noteworthy. In Australia, a human and the sun unify in that the human volunteered to redden his hair and cut his hair and beard will die mysteriously; however, as soon as the sun rises the next day, he will be born again, whereby such a mystery he will be the same as the solar hero namely Grogoragally, the son of the great creator.

Sacrificing white and black chicken or white rooster was also common among the various nations of the world for solar deity (*ibid.*, 139).

To the Maya people, the black sun was pictured as a jaguar. For psychoanalysts, the black sun image looks like the unconscious in its very initial status (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2009, 117-123); (Fig. 1).

In some Eastern European beliefs, the dead accompany the sun on its journey across the ocean and they sit in the boats and go on the water. The sun takes only those who have been killed in a conflict to the sky. Ancient megalithic structures are always associated with the sun-worshipping (*ibid.*, 143).

According to the author's field research in 2013 in Paris There are tombstones in the crypts of Parisian churches facing east, which may be evidence of the sun-worshipping that was common in the West .

The sacred and mythical mountain of Egypt called Benben was the center of the world, which later became a sacred stone in the sun of Heliopolis and the symbol of the original holy mountain, and this is the first place of sunlight. Egyptian pyramids as a temple and a tomb were regarded as a symbol of the Benben stone (Hart,



Fig. 1. Tezcatlipoca, the Mexican deity, in a jaguar form about the Shamanic<sup>2</sup> ceremony. Source: <https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/ancient-gods-when-darkness-ruled-world-006067>.

1995); (Fig. 2).

The ancient Egyptians used to have more tendency towards worshipping the sun than any other religion. The steady flow of the Nile River has been crucial to people's lives. The bright rays of the sun, the fertility of the sedimentary layers of the Nile River, and the heatwave bringing death and destruction to the grains, all affected the Egyptians greatly. Consequently, they knew the sun as the main nature force or the deity and called it "Rae".

Depicted by the bull, Atum, the local deities of Heliopolis, symbolizes the setting sun and before sunrise. Horus, the god with the eagle's head, is the symbol of heaven and happiness, victory, and the position of the monarchy. Hathor is the goddess of the sky, the sun, beauty, and femininity. Amenhotep IV (an ancient Egyptian pharaoh) was a monotheist who was the same as the sun-worshipping. Under his rule when he was the only monotheistic pharaoh, the culture and art of Egypt also underwent changes (Figs. 3-4).

Atum-Atun was an Egyptian solar deity, whose religion was spread by the religious reformer, Amenophis IV-Pharaoh. It is the symbol of a single life from which the



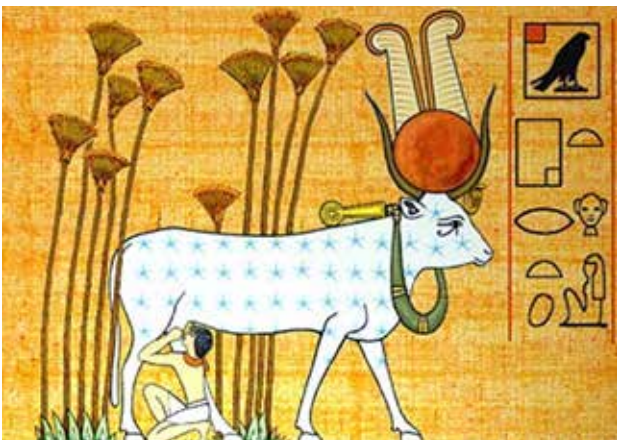
Fig. 2. The Benben stone is the holy stone he tip of the pyramid of Pharaoh in the temple of Phoenix. Source: <https://curiosmos.com/unrecorded-mystery-what-happened-to-the-capstones-of-egypts-ancient-pyramids>.



Fig.3. Rae, the solar deity, in the boat with two apes- the ceremony of sunrise. Source: Marie & Hagen, 1999.



A



B

Fig. 4. Hathor and the sun over its head. Source: <https://www.everythingselectric.com/suckling/>

living have appeared (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2009, 76). Moreover, the goddess embodied the moon in Artemis religion as a derivative of Asian and Aegean grandmother (ibid., 108).

From a long time ago, Shu, the god of peace, was a celestial face who later merged with the sun. Rae is the most powerful god of the sun, which the ancient Egyptians believed to be the god who dwells in the sun and perpetuates light and heat and embodies the character of Nimroz (Rae's eye), who is the female counterpart of Rae, the solar deity. The most powerful gods of the three eras of Egypt were Rae, the solar deity, Amun, the god of secrets, and the mother goddess, or Isis. Rae once merged with At (Fig. 5).

As much as the existence of the sun is full of contradictions, so multidimensional is its symbolism. To many nations, if the sun is not God himself, it is the manifestation of divinity (the manifestation of the God of Ormazd). Sometimes the sun is considered the son of God Almighty and the brother of the rainbow. In Australia, the sun is considered the son of the Creator, the image of God, and the god of mankind. Some of these Australian tribes call the sun and the moon the eyes of the sky: The sun is the eye of bliss and the moon is the eye of evil. The sun is fertile on the one hand and scorching and deadly on the other.

Solar effects in India, such as the sun's rays, sometimes compared to Shiva's hair, are traditionally seven rays assigned to the six dimensions of space and the super-cosmic dimension, the latter being represented by the center of the rays. The connection between solar flares and cosmic geometry in Greece is expressed through Pythagorean symbolism.

Hindu texts consider the sun as the source of everything, the beginning and the end of everything that is apparent and nourishes everyone (ibid., 117-118). The sun, sing-bong, is at the head of the Munda gods of Bengal (Eliade, 1993, 138). Surya, the Indian solar deity, appears with a masculine face and is composed of a chariot with seven horses seen in the altars of southern India. Mitra, the Aryan solar deity of India, is in the form of a man

ascending to heaven in a chariot of four horses (Figs. 6 & 7). The chariot with the four compound horses of Helios is also the Greek solar deity (Ibid, 148); (Figs. 8 & 9).

The sun has also been a symbol of Vishnu and Buddha (Fig. 10); (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2009, 117-118). As stated in some texts: The Golden Man or Buddha Sun, and the sign of Christ whose rays gate are the twelve apostles: Christ is the sun of justice, Sol Invictus, and also the eternal sun (Unconquered Sun”) (Figure of Jesus Christ).

Apollo, the god of the sun, and the mystical power of the Hyperboreans had an arrow as the sun’s ray (Fig. 11).

Hokhius from Batus stated that Christ is like the sun that promotes equality, that is, like the spiritual sun and the heart of the world. “Christ is the sun of truth” stated Philotheus of Sinai. And Hakham the Great, a Jewish sect, carries a golden tablet on her chest, which is a symbol of the divine sun. The sun is the universal symbol of the emperor and the heart of the country. Khagan-Wu’s mother from the Han dynasty dreamed of the time when the sun entered her breast and she gave birth to her son Wu. Thus the sun is a symbol of fertility and empire (The figure of Khagan with the sun on the breast). Nihon or Nippon is the name of Japan and means the origin of the sun, and the shining sun is the symbol of this country, which is also visible in the form of the red sun on the flag of Japan. The element of the sun has been compared to many flowers and animals, including chrysanthemums, lotuses, sunflowers, eagles, deer, lions, etc., as well as the gold, which is the sun of metals in alchemy. In Chinese’s view, the sun is Yang which is male and Yin is the female moon.

The full solar position of the eagle in the shamanic tribes stems from the beliefs based on the American Indian tradition that the sunset is not taken as death, unlike the three lunar days, but the setting of the sun star in the lower climates or the underworld. According to ancient Mexicans, we live in the fifth sun. The previous four suns are tiger, wind, rain, sun (or fire), and water.

In the pyramid of the Gods, the Great solar deity,



Fig. 5. Amenhotep IV & Atun in the sun form. Source: [https://studme.org/367198/istoriya/raskopki\\_goroda\\_peskah\\_ahetaton\\_stolitsa\\_faraona\\_ehnatona](https://studme.org/367198/istoriya/raskopki_goroda_peskah_ahetaton_stolitsa_faraona_ehnatona).



Fig. 6. Surya on the chariot. Source: <http://www.harekrsna.de/surya/12adityas.htm>

Aztec, was depicted as an eagle in the form of Huito Yapocheitli, carrying a snake full of night stars in his beak (Fig. 12).

Myths associated with the solar deity in India (seven suns) in China (ten suns) and in Sumatra Indonesia are



Fig. 7. Entrance to the temple in southern India, Mitra with a 4-horse chariot. Photo: Fereydoun Avarzamani, 2001.



Fig. 8. Mitra on the chariot of four horses. Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Greek-mythology/Types-of-myths-in-Greek-culture>.



Fig. 9. Helios on the chariot drawn by four horses. Source: <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/dictionary/Dict/image/helios2.jpg>



Fig. 10. Buddha Sun, painted by Jing Shi Ming . Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/318840848590131004>.

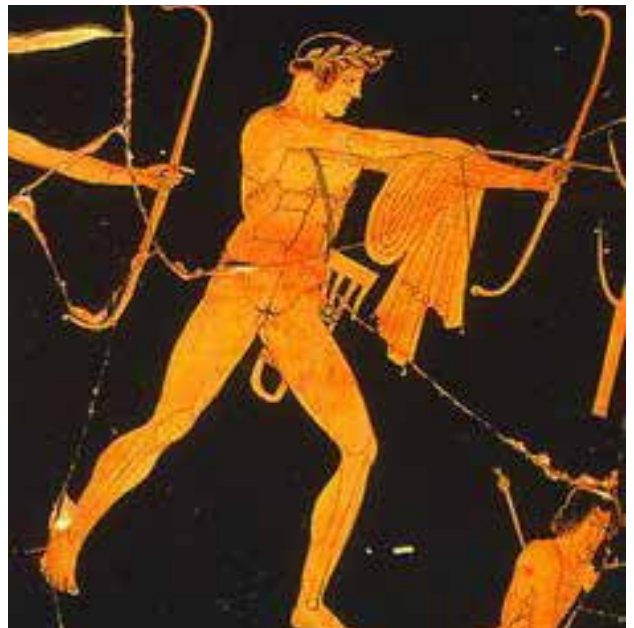


Fig. 11. Apollo along with the arrow. Source: <https://www.pinterest.com>.

seven suns (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2009,122-123). Inti, the solar deity of the Inca, was the chief god for a long time. These people believed in the origin of human beings from the sun, the seafloor, and the waves. To the Aztecs, before this world and human habitation on earth, there were four worlds with the former sun, each characterized by a specific deity and a specific race of humans. The sun is associated with the four elements of earth, wind, fire, and water. These suns were related to the creation and destruction of the universe (A group of autors, 2020).

### The character of Mitra, the solar deity

The solar deities appeared mostly in masculine form. As can be seen from the descriptions of Avesta, Persian Mehr is a tall and handsome young man, strong in stature and a helper of true warriors. She wears a conical hat or a golden crown with rays of sunlight. Mitra sacrifices the sacred cow so that from its blood, humans, animals, and plants' life may be blessed and endured.

In French, Italian and Spanish the sun is male and the moon is female. In Persian literature and poetry, and the folklore of our pop culture, it is called Khorshid Khanoum (Ms. Sun), and in the decorative images of Iranian art, Khorshid Khanoum is seen, while Mitra is

a male deity, but later her name is given to girls. These cases have not been thoroughly investigated so far, which requires further research. The moon in Iran is always female and attributed to the goddess Anahita, the goddess of fertility, and according to some narrations, Miss Anahita is the mother of love.

Shams is the Mesopotamian solar deity, the son of the moon goddess and the god of the spirits of the dead, who raises the dead and is the god of justice and judgment (Fig. 13).

The equivalent of Iranian-Aryan Anahita is the goddess Nanna-Nāneh in Mesopotamia and Diana-Artemis in ancient Rome and Greece, which are the female characters. Therefore, in European languages, the moon is also female and in Persian culture and literature, a beautiful woman is compared to the moon. As the sun is a symbol of women's beauty, but the dichotomies and differences that exist in literature, poetry, and pop culture with male and female myths and gods should be pursued with extensive research to reveal the root causes of these differences and changes over time.

### The superiority of Mitra over other solar deities

Among the tribes and nations of the world, they have had a high position since the most ancient times. The



Fig. 12. A. Aztec, the solar deity, the sun of eagle (or Hummingbird) Huitzilopochtli, a design in Telleriano-Remensis documentation. Source: <http://toltecayotl.org/tolteca/?id=16947>.



Fig. 12. B. Viracocha, the solar deity of the Inca with lightning in his hand and solar crown on his head and rainy tear. Source: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldcivilization/chapter/aztec-religion/>.



Fig. 12. C. Kinich Ahau the solar deity in Mayan mythology. Source: <https://culturalmaya.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Rey-Maya.jpg>.



Fig. 13. Shams, the solar deity, Mesopotamia. Source: <https://www.ethicalsystems.org/compliance-ethics-programs>.

solar deities have been formed and manifested in every land arising from indigenous beliefs. Sometimes there are similarities between this world of myths, some of which have been transferred from one ethnic group to another.

Mitra, the Aryan solar deity in the empires of Iran and Rome (two superpowers of the ancient world), has had such a strong and influential presence for a long time that we have seen its symbolic representation in the east and west of the world. It seems that the reason for the superiority of Mitra, the myth of the Aryan sun, which in Iran is the god of gods, is that it has all the attributes of goodness and is the symbol of light and brightness of the sun, so it is different from other solar deities and god worshipping of other tribes.

The Persian Mehr is the supporter of the true warriors who defend the homeland, the god of the covenant, and the manifestation of the divine light. Worshipping the

gods by Romans who imagined them in human form, led to the appearance of Mitra, the god of the Persian war, who migrated from Persian to Rome during the relations between the two empires; in Rome, it appeared as other gods in human form, and remained there for about five centuries. It was also the official religion of the empire in the early centuries AD until Constantine declared Christianity the official religion.

Many Mithraic customs and even church architecture are derived from Mithraic temples, and there is strong evidence of this influence throughout the Roman Empire, including present-day Europe, large parts of the Middle East, the Mediterranean countries, Turkey, Shamat, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and parts of Africa, and the relics of the Mehr religion have still survived and have influenced the Christian and Islamic culture and art of the region (Javadi, 2018).

After the end of her mission, which is the awareness and propagation of her religion, Mehr goes to heaven in a chariot drawn by four horses and returns to this world on the last day for the intercession of her followers, as Christ (PBUH) ascended after the Last Supper with his companions and will return on the Day of Judgment to intercede for his companions. In Greece and Italy, the Mehr religion is sometimes mixed with Eastern Gnosticism.

Aryan-Iranian solar worship (Mehr worship) transferred to Rome from the Parthian and Sassanid eras during its relations with the Roman Empire, and its effects on Christianity are still evident. After accomplishing her mission, Mitra, like Christ, eats the last supper with her companions and ascends heaven to return to earth on the last day to intercede for the followers (figure of the chariot).

Mitra, after the migration of the Aryans to Iran as a manifestation of the light and brightness of the sun and the great Aryan god, had a sacred and prominent presence in the great Parthian and Sassanid empires. The role of this god was so important that even after the advent of the Prophet Zoroaster and the monotheistic religion and worship of Ahuramazda, Mitra, and



Anahita, the goddess of fertility and pure water, were still present as companions of Ahuramazda (Figs. 14 & 15).

The Mithraic religion once transformed in Zoroastrianism and then in Islamic religions, and so far we have noticed its effects in various forms throughout Iran. Since Mehr has all the attributes of goodness and the manifestation of blessings and abundance for humans, plants, and animals, it has been remarkably fruitful.

The religion of Zoroastrianism and Islam have also confirmed its positive aspects, and the aspects which did not contradict but overlap with Zoroastrian and Islamic religions have been preserved, and so far we have observed many Islamic rituals and rites that date back to the time of Mehr religion (Javadi & Nikoei, 2007).

Mitra was introduced in India along with Surya, Varuna, and other gods, and sometimes there was a clear manifestation of the existence of Buddha (Buddha-Mitra). Mitra temples are still present in southern India

Mitra and Surya, the Aryan-Vedic solar deities, were present along with other gods. In the Aryan's migration to India, Mitra coexisted with other Hindu deities. Surya is a secondary Vedic deity who is also called the eye of the sky or the eye of Varuna and Mitra. The sun has been born from the eyes of Prosha (a cosmic monster) and in Hindu belief, the sun both gives birth to its child and devours it. Man and the sun bring the human being into the world, and therefore the sun is equated with death (Eliade, 1993, 148-150).

In Japan, the "Zayer" religion includes worship of the underworld and the earth. Every year, groups of young people with painted faces called demons of the sun rush to meet people, that is, they go from village to village to ensure the fertility of the earth next year.

In Europe, ceremonies such as the spinning of ignited wheels on the occasion of the solar revolution and other similar ceremonies are the magical reconstruction of the solar forces. By sacrificing captives for the



Fig. 14. Appointment of Ardashir II to the kingdom. From Left to Right: Mitra, Shapur II, Ahuramazda. Below: Julian, the Roman Emperor, Taq Bostan ("Arch of the Garden"). Source: Javadi & Avarzamani, 2016, 73.



Fig. 15. The coronation of Ardashir II of Ahura Mazda in the presence of Mitra, Bostan Arch. Source: Javadi & Avarzamani, 2016, 164-165.

sun, the Mexicans secured its permanence because they believed that they would guarantee the renewal of the finished energy of the constellation. We can observe these solar heroes with African shepherds, Turks, Mongols, and Samson Jews, and among Indo-European nations (ibid, 153); (Fig. 16).

## Conclusion

Among the celestial and terrestrial elements is the sun which is very useful for human life and has been an important and influential myth in all ancient beliefs and religions. The solar deities have had a special place in



Fig.16. Samson & Deliale, Anthony Van Dick  
Source: <https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/645>.

the east and west of the world since ancient times, and the rituals related to the worship of this great god from the past to the present are performed in various forms in primitive and modern societies today. The sun, the symbol of divine light, has always been present in poetry and literature, art, and culture of the peoples of the world, and people have made a lot of sacrifices to God to preserve this vital force. The worship of the sun, which is accompanied by the rising and setting of this star and its radiance at noon, midday, and sunset, is found among Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other religious denominations.

Mehr, the Great Aryan god, for having all the positive attributes of goodness, which is the god of the covenant, the helper and supporter of warriors, and the manifestation of the light and brightness of the sun, surpassed other solar deities and myths so much

that over time the beliefs and rituals of East and West were impressed and it is still existing in the minds and customs of the people of the world.

### Endnote

1. Polynesia: Asian tribes who migrated to the Pacific Islands. From 1889, the Polynesian complex was occupied by France. It is located around the triangle of the Polynesian Islands of Hawaii, New Zealand, and the Easter Islands.
2. Shamanism is a tradition of some primitive tribes around the world. The medical magic that shamans, or elders or clergymen, believe in is traveling with their souls to other worlds and communicating with other spirits and establishing a connection between the material and spiritual worlds, as well as having an ability to predict the future and diagnose disease and suffering through contact with ghosts.

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