

CURSE TABLETS AND VOODOO DOLLS

THE MAGICIANS whom we met in the preceding chapters, those people who were driven by an excessive desire for contact with the divine and who took their meals face-to-face with a god, hardly correspond to received ideas about sorcerers. Other activities, widespread and often discussed, are much closer to these ideas, notably the rites of binding (*defixiones*), which are attested to over a very long period of time and which became the very emblem of black magic.

The ritual binding in antiquity has been well investigated, much more so than have other domains of ancient magic, mainly because of the existence of texts.¹ These texts, primarily written on tablets of lead, have sparked the interest of archaeologists and epigraphers. On that account there exist two collections of documents, old but indispensable. First is the one put together by Richard Wünsch in 1897, to conclude the publication of the Attic inscriptions of the *Inscriptiones Graecae*.² A few years later, in his thesis, Auguste Audollent collected all the texts, Greek and Latin, that were not included in Wünsch's publication.³ We are familiar with the progress made in epigraphy

and archaeology since the beginning of this century. A very large number of new tablets have come to light, but only a considerably smaller number have been decently published. The texts are poorly written, often on badly preserved sheets of lead and in sometimes puzzling Greek or Latin, and thus they are difficult to read, to translate, and to understand in their religious and social setting; consequently, they have not proved very attractive to scholars. Still, the collection of texts with translations and comments presented by John Gager is a great step in the right direction and opens this strange world to social historians and historians of religion; all the more urgent is the need for new and comprehensive editions. The catalog published in 1985 by David Jordan has shown the vastness of the territory yet to be cultivated.⁴

LITERARY SOURCES

The practice of ritual binding is not invisible in literary texts. The first instance of binding has been detected in Aeschylus' reference to the "binding hymn" of the Eumenides;⁵ in Cicero's lifetime, Curio could, to excuse his spectacular lapses of memory, accuse his adversary Titinia of having bound his tongue; Pliny the Elder judges binding spells nearly omnipresent in his era; and for the era from Tiberius to Nero, Tacitus reports a whole series of accusations of *devotio*, as do later authors, pagans and Christians alike.⁶

But it is once again Plato who gives us the first detailed information. In the passage of the *Republic* on the itinerant seers, he makes them promise to harm the enemies "by incantations and binding spells."⁷ He comes back to it in the *Laws*, where he not only describes the respective rituals—sorcery, *pharmakeia* with the help of incantations and binding spells, and with "waxen images" that were put under doors and on graves—and

specifies the legal sanctions against them, but also offers a proper psychological theory of injurious magic.⁸ At about the same era, the orator Dinarchus spoke of magical binding, if we are to believe the *lexica*.⁹ The practice thus is well-attested in the fourth century B.C.

However, the goal of these practices, as Plato defines it, "to harm one's enemies," remains vague. A papyrus from the imperial epoch, now in the British Museum, is more detailed: "I bind NN to some particular end: that he be unable to speak, that he does not contradict, that he can neither look at nor speak against me, that he be subject to me as long as this ring is buried. I bind his reason and mind, his thoughts, his actions, so that he be impotent against all men. And if it concerns a woman: let this woman be unable to marry some particular man."¹⁰

The usual objective of ritual binding is, thus, to subject another human being to one's will, to make the person unable to act according to his or her own wishes. The papyrus presupposes that someone specifies this as a function of whatever is the case, erotic or otherwise. Following this casuistry, Audollent had classified the texts as a function of their practical purposes, which makes five rather clearly delimited groups. They are as follows, in Audollent's Latin terminology:¹¹

- (1) the *defixiones iudiciae* ("judicial spells"), in which one attempts to do harm to one's adversaries at a trial. Although these spells most often come from Athens and from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., there are examples in all eras and from all regions;¹²
- (2) the *defixiones amatoriae* ("erotic spells"), which have the aim of causing reciprocal and wild love in a beloved person. A literary subject as early as Sophocles in the *Trachiniae*, this erotic magic is also very widespread;¹³

- (3) the *defixiones agonisticae* ("agonistic spells"), in the context of the amphitheater or other spectacles, and which are especially well attested to in the imperial era;¹⁴
- (4) the *defixiones* against slanderers and thieves; there is an impressive series of them from the sanctuary of Demeter at Cnidos, but also evidence from other places and eras;¹⁵
- (5) the *defixiones* against economic competitors, attested to from the fourth century B.C. up to the imperial era (in the magic papyri).

Magical binding is, above all, a rite. To understand it better, the first thing to do is reflect on the ancient terminology: behind the facts of language appear the facts of ritual.

CATEGORIES AND FORMULAS

Plato and Dinarchus both use the words "to bind" (*katadeîsthai*) and "binding (spell)," *katadesmós*. This was common usage, as is shown by the inscriptions; in the Attic material from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., *katadeîn* is the dominant verb. Literally, it means "to bind (or to tie) down," which leads to the meaning of "to bind (or to tie) fast, immobilize," with a meaning of the preverb *kata-* as in *katékkein*, "to hold low, hold immobile." This semantics fits in most cases, and it is confirmed by an etymological wordplay: "I tie Euandros in ties of lead . . . Euandros the actor." Correspondingly, breaking the spell is expressed in the vocabulary of unbinding of what has been bound: "I bind down and shall never unbind."¹⁶

But, in the world of the magicians, the use of the term "down below" is not always innocent. Consider this other text, both

long and frightful, which is inscribed on a tiny sheet of lead and dates from the beginning of the fourth century B.C.:¹⁷

(A)(1) I bind down Theagenes, his tongue and his soul and the words he uses; (2) I also bind down the hands and feet of Pyrrhias, the cook, his tongue, his soul, his words; (3) I also bind down the wife of Pyrrhias, her tongue and her soul; (4/5) I also bind down the cook Kerkion and the cook Dokimos, their tongues, their souls and the words they use; (6) I also bind down Kineas, his tongue, his soul, and the words with which he helps Theagenes; (7) I also bind down the tongue of Pherekles, his soul, and his testimony in favor of Theagenes; (8) I also bind down the tongue of Seuthes, his soul, and the words he uses, just like his feet, his hands, his eyes, and his mouth; (9) I also bind down the tongue of Lamprias, his soul, and the words he uses, just like his feet, his hands, his eyes, and his mouth.

(B) All these I bind down, I make them disappear, I bury them, I nail them down. At the court and before the judge, when they are to appear and to testify against me, that they cannot appear before a court of justice at all either in words or in deeds.

This text is made up of two very distinct parts. First, there is a list of the victims that uses the two formulas, "I bind A, his tongue, his soul, and the words he uses," and "I bind B, his tongue, his soul, and his words"; one may add "his feet, his hands, his eyes." When specifying the role of a victim, one can vary: "the words with which he helps Theagenes," "the testimony he bears in favor of Theagenes." But always, at the center of this formulary, as simple as it is flexible, is found the verb "I bind down," from which derives the name of "binding spells" (*katadesmoi*) given to these texts already in their time.

The second part is an emphatic summary ("All these I bind down, I make them disappear, I bury them, I nail them down") and the indication of the actual reason for the spell. Theagenes

and the speaking voice (for brevity's sake: the sorcerer) must be confronted at the bar, and the other eight persons are friends and helpers in favor of Theagenes. Thus, the spell, which is meant to prevent them from appearing before the court, belongs to the group of *defixiones iudicariae*. It is because of this function that the text primarily attacks the oratorical and intellectual abilities; the further threat against "his feet, his hands, his eyes" intends to prevent their physical appearance in court.

But the victims are not just bound down—this we could read as a stronger (or more emphatic) way of binding, of "tying tight"—they are also buried and nailed down. These words are more than just emphasis: the victims are pushed down, into the subterranean world; are they to become the victims of the subterranean powers? The answer will become clear after a more searching analysis of the texts.

Judicial spells were very widespread in Athens between the middle of the fifth and the end of the fourth century, during the era of the greatest growth of the Athenian democracy and its judiciary institutions. However, they are attested to already from fifth century Sicily (where Gorgias is witness of the contemporary height of rhetoric), and they were not to disappear completely in the succeeding eras.¹⁸ Cicero knows at least one (not very serious) case in his own era, and among the currently known texts, there are instances from the imperial age. An interesting example comes from the area of the Gallic *Santones*. The text was found with another of the same kind and with coins of Marcus Aurelius, dated into the year 172 A.D.

*denuntio personis infra / scribitis Lentino et Tasgillo, / uti adsint ad Plutonem.
/ quomodo hic catellus nemini / nocuit, sic . . . nec / illi hanc litem vincere
possint. / quomodi nec mater huius catelli / defendere potuit, sic nec advo/cati
eorum eos defendere {non} / possint, sic illos inimicos / . . .* (followed by a

whole series of enigmatic words—either garbled Latin or magical words).

I announce to the persons mentioned hereunder Lentinus and Tasgillus, that they must appear in court before Pluto. As this cat has not harmed anyone, in such a way . . . that they cannot win this trial. And in the same way that the mother of this cat was unable to defend him, let their lawyers be unable to defend them, let these adversaries. . .¹⁹

Much more ambiguous is a text found in Brigantium, on the Lake of Constance, whose letter-forms date back to the first century A.D.:

Domitius Niger et / Lollius et Iulius Severus / et Severus Nigri / servus adversarii Bruttae et quisquis adve/rsus illam loqutus est: omnes perdes.

Domitius Niger, Lollius, Iulius Severus and Severus, the slave of Niger, the enemies of Brutta and all those who spoke against her, you will destroy them all.²⁰

The aim of the spell is somewhat ambiguous. At first sight, the naming of *adversarii*, enemies, would suggest a judicial confrontation (of which we have other examples); the perfect tense (*adversus illam loqutus est*), however, makes one rather think of a talking in the past, i.e., slander. The divinity invoked will have known what it was about.

These three texts present the three types of formulas used by the binding spells: (a) the mere statement in the first-person singular "I bind" (Attic example); (b) the address to a given power, often in the imperative, more rarely in the subjunctive, or, as in the text from Brigantium, in the future; and (c) more complex, the juxtaposing of two parallel facts, of which one depicts the ritual action (among the *Santones* the cruel and gruesome killing of a tomcat) and the other depicts what is wished for the victim. Since Audollent this type of formula has

been called a *similia similibus* formula; Frazer preferred the rather loose term *sympathetic magic*.

Whereas in the first text, from the fourth century, one does not wish to harm permanently, but only to prevent one's adversary from appearing in court, the more recent texts are more menacing. In this case, it is necessary to *perdere*, to ruin one's adversaries, they must go to Pluto; what is sought is the death of the adversaries.

Before exploring these horrors, let us return for a moment to the formulas and their variants, notably the first one, which is fairly widespread and of which the implications are not very clear. Next to the use of the simple utterance "I bind (down)," there exist two major variations, the replacement of the verb with another, more or less synonymous one, and the addition, with the help of a preposition, of a divine name to the syntagm "I bind" and its synonymous expressions.

The large number of verbs used to express the one ritual is remarkable. The verb *katadeō* and its Latin homonym *defigo*, which are at the root of the technical terms *katadesmōs* and *defixio*, are not alone, and they are not even dominant in the epigraphic texts. The literary texts and the modern terminology tend to be misleading. Even in Attica itself, where "to bind" is dominant, we also have the verb *katagrāphō*, "to enroll, register," which is rather frequent outside of Attica.²¹ There, it is the religious terms for "to dedicate," *anatilhēmi* and *anierōō*, that are the commonest terms, less frequent "to write down" (*engrāphō*, that is unto the tablet) and "to register" (*apogrāphō*, as with a magistrate—although the preverb might also have the force of "to write away," "to make disappear by writing.")²² Later, we also note "to adjure," *horkízō* and *exhorkízō*. In Latin, setting aside the derivatives of "to bind" (*ligare*, *alligare*, and *obligare*), we find the verbs *dedicare* and *demandare*, "to dedicate," *adiurare*, "to entreat," that is, a terminology formed after the Greek.

Thus, instead of the simple action of "binding" aimed at the victim, there are verbs that seek to define a relationship between the victim and a divinity: one "dedicates" a man to a particular superhuman being, "registers" him in the god's world. It is only natural that rather often, the simple structure (verb and direct object) is completed by the mention of the divinity: "I register Isias, daughter of Autocleia, with Hermes Who Detains. Detain her with you. I bind Isias down to Hermes Who Detains—the hands and feet of Isias, her whole body."²³ This example, dating from about 400 B.C. and found in Euboean Carystus, shows that the different formulas have more or less the same function: "I bind" and "I register" do not differ in their effects; the victim is still delivered to Hermes, who detains (therefore his epithet) him by tying up his limbs.

There are other texts that are even more revealing, which come from the two extremities of the ancient world, one from Cnidus, the other from Arezzo. The one from Cnidus, which dates from the end of the Hellenistic era, was found in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore: "Nanas dedicates Emphanes and Rhodo to Demeter and Kore and to the gods around Demeter and Kore, because they received a deposit from Diocles, but did not return it and embezzled it. Let this be beneficial and salutary for me, and harmful for them who did not return the deposit, even if they are opposed to it."²⁴

The other example, which comes from a mineral spring in the vicinity of Arezzo, can be dated from the middle of the second century A.D. "Q. Letinius Lupus, who is also called Caucadio, who is the son of Sallustia Veneria or Veneriosa: he is the man whom I deliver, dedicate, and sacrifice to your divine power, so that you, Aquae Ferventes, unless you prefer to be called Nymphs and by some other name, so that you kill him, slit his throat this very year."²⁵

These are borderline cases and might be seen, to a certain

degree, as atypical. Although most of our curse tablets come from tombstones, these two texts were left in a sanctuary, the sanctuary of Demeter, Kore, and Pluto at Cnidus and the sanctuary of the Nymphs that was the spring itself. Although rare, these cases are not isolated: we know of other examples from sanctuaries.²⁶ One fact, however, is significant: all these divinities are in contact with the subterranean world; they are Demeter, Kore, Pluto, and the Nymphs. We are not as far from the graves as we might think. Instead of throwing the texts into a spring, as in Arezzo (or, later, Roman Bath), at other places the curse tablets were thrown into wells.²⁷ And the papyrus from the British Museum already quoted considers a whole range of what it calls a "Buried Binding Spell"—the tablet is hidden in the earth or the sea, a river, a water pipe, a tomb, or, again, a well.²⁸ One thus always seeks contact with the subterranean world; and if the dead in their graves constitute preferred and natural intermediaries, that state does not rule out other ways, not only through the intermediary of springs and wells but also through divinities who are concerned with the subterranean realm. This revelation confirms those ancient authors who established a close relationship between magicians and the powers of the netherworld.²⁹ In a reversal characteristic of the magicians, they seek the movement downward, toward the center of the earth, whereas in the daily worship of polis or family, it is the movement upward, toward the celestial divinities, the *superi*, that is sought.

The text from Arezzo shows yet another reversal. The victim is named A. Letinius Lupus, son of Sallustia Veneria or Veneriosa; he is defined by the name of his mother, not by his father's name, as was customary in Greek and Roman society (and already with their Indo-European ancestors). This is a detail found just about everywhere in the world of the *defixiones*, in which the victim and sometimes the sorcerer are defined this way. We have already

encountered this usage in the text found in Carystus, where Isias is called the daughter of Autokleia. One interpretation was to see in it the vestiges of a matrilinearity, if not of a magical tradition deep-rooted in the phase of the *Mutterrecht*, but that is sheer fancy. Somewhat clearer minds have invoked the principle *pater semper incertus*: one can identify only the mother with certainty. In a domain in which, as the text from Arezzo testifies, precision was sought, the patronymic name alone would not have been judged sufficiently precise.³⁰ But is it really a matter of precision when we do not even know whether the mother's *cognomen* is *Veneria* or *Veneriosa*? Biology should not be confused with institutions; magic does not seek a higher precision than do the Greek and Roman civil institutions that are content with the patronymic name. Yet other scholars pointed out that the definition through the name of one's mother was a common Egyptian practice; and, after all, magic comes from Egypt.³¹ This might certainly be true, but it still does not explain why Greeks and Romans took over an Egyptian custom so alien to their own ways. There exists a simple solution: the use of the mother's name, the reverse of the common practice in institutions, is yet another instance of the series of reversals characteristic of magic.

What distinguishes the two latter texts from the huge number of comparable binding spells is the resemblance with the ritual curse or imprecation (*dirae*) as it is known in the Greek and Roman religion.³² Facts of language contributed to the resemblance: the term *devotio*, which is usual for the imprecation in Roman religion, is also the term regularly used by Tacitus to refer to accusations of magical binding. Audollent already saw it; and he went to a lot of trouble to work out the distinction between *defixio* and *devotio*.³³ According to him, the main difference would be that the imprecation is public and spoken before the whole social group, whereas the ritual binding is secret and private. In actual fact, the difference is fundamental. The famous

Dirae Teorum, the official imprecations proclaimed by the city of Teos, had to be uttered by the magistrates in the public space of the theater during the three great festivals of the polis, the Anthesteria, the Heraklea, and the Dia.³⁴ The funerary imprecations were inscribed in the monuments, plainly readable for those who could and wished to read them. Herodes Atticus, the extremely rich sophist of the Antonine epoch, had literally strewn his Attic land with similar imprecations engraved on beautiful steles of Hymettian marble; what we cannot know, though, is whether such funerary curse texts had been accompanied by an appropriate ritual at the time when the grave was closed.³⁵

But this publicity goes together with another situation, to which we shall have to return, which is that the imprecation is a precaution taken against the possible dangers of the future, political rebellions, or the looting of graves. The future being always unpredictable, it is prudent to call on the gods as guardians of what one wants to protect, without one's being naturally able to give the name of the persons against whom the imprecation is directed. The binding spell, in return, is the result of a present crisis with its roots in the individual past. The circumstances are always perfectly clear, and the spell is directed against one person or several contemporary persons of whom it usually gives us the exact names. There are elements that blur the distinction, in that some spells (classified sometimes under the rubric of "judicial prayers") have a performer who is unable to name the victim who had harmed him in the past; also, there are instances of a community cursing someone after damage done, as did the Athenians with Alcibiades.³⁶ The curse that Chryses—whom Homer calls a "curser" (*arētēr*) (the translation as "priest" banalizes the term)—directs against the Greeks, at the beginning of the *Iliad*, is his reaction to a personal crisis caused by an event in the past (his humiliation at the hands of Agamem-

mon); Chryses, however, does not react in public, he curses the Greeks well away from them, on a lone beach.³⁷ Clear differentiations remain constructs, always liable to being contradicted by some facts.

We remember the tomcat from the Santones mentioned earlier. Its killer wished his adversary to be immobilized and maimed in the same way that he had immobilized and maimed the animal. This wish belongs to the category that Audollent named the *similia similibus*. The Gallic example, although late, is not different from what we find in the earlier Greek spells, as they were found from the late fifth century onwards. These texts can be put into two large groups: those that compare the fate of the victim with the fate of the dead person into whose grave the spell is slipped, and those that compare the victim with the lead tablet.

A tablet of lead, coming from a tomb in Megara and dating from the second or first century B.C., bears the following formula: "O Pasianax, when you read these letters (*grámmata*), but you will never read these letters, O Pasianax, and Neophanes will never bring a trial against Aristander, but, O Pasianax, in the same way that you lie here inert, in the same way Neophanes will fall into inertia and nothingness."³⁸ This is a curious text, which professes a cruel irony regarding the dead man, Pasianax. It is one of the rare case in which the name of the deceased who serves as intermediary is found attested to.

Let us be more precise. The text begins with a rather commonplace epistolary formula. After all, *grámmata* does not designate only "the letters" inscribed on the sheet of lead, but also "the letter" sent, like *litterae* in Latin. The binding spell thus takes the form of a letter addressed to the dead man. It is an element that has already been pointed out, and other textual signs have been collected that were thought to confirm the hypothesis that

the curse tablets, at least originally, could have had the form of letters.³⁹ But examples are rare in which, as in our case, the text can be considered a letter addressed to the deceased, and a text like the Attic spell that begins by "I am sending this letter to Hermes and Persephone" is just about unique.⁴⁰ In any case, there is no example old enough for us to be able to conclude that originally the curse tablet was a letter addressed to the infernal divinities.

There is another explanation for this address, which is so often attested to, to the dead man or to the chthonian divinities. The papyri have taught us that it was necessary to recite the text while engraving it on the metal: not only was the spell recited, but also it was put in writing at the same moment. The writing thus has the goal of fixing the language spoken, of making it permanent.⁴¹ It is but natural that often the effects of the spell were conditioned by the physical survival of the written text.⁴² By lodging the text in a tomb or a well, by directing it to the subterranean powers, one tried to get these words made lasting to reach the divine, demonic, or heroic addressee. Thus, we have two actions that are not quite parallel: on the one hand, the inscribing of the text parallel to the spoken prayer shows a redundancy intended to ensure the message's arrival; on the other, lodging it close to the netherworld adds a further dimension. Putting the message in the form of a letter would be from this viewpoint merely a secondary detail. It is still true that, even in this moderate form, the dead man in his tomb becomes a kind of infernal postman who brings the text to the divine or demonic addressees. This could also explain why, in the current state of research, it seems that there exist many tablets with binding spells that were not deposited in the graves of *ábōroi* or *biaiothánatoi*, people who had died at a young age or in a violent death and who were considered the ideal helpers of sorcerers because

they nurtured a grudge against the still living.⁴³ If the dead is only a messenger, it is not necessary to rely on such specific traits.

The opposite of death is not just life: it is the heightened life of love. Thus, it is not surprising that similar comparisons are primarily attested to in erotic binding: "In the same way that the corpse who is buried here be unable to speak or say a word, that she lie close to him [not the corpse, but her lover] in the same way and be unable to speak or say a word." In this text the contrast between death and love, silence and talking, is made very clear.⁴⁴ Some four centuries earlier, a text from Attica has it this way: "Just as this corpse is useless, so may all the words and deeds of Theodora be useless with regard to Charias and the other people."⁴⁵

The second group consists of formulas that compare the victim and the very tablet on which the spell is written. An Attic text from the fourth century, that begins with a list of names, continues as follows: "In the same way that this is cold and 'out of the true,' let the words of Krates be cold and 'out of the true' in the same way, his as well as those of the accusers and lawyers who accompany him."⁴⁶

Written from right to left, the text really is "out of true": in its time, the direction from left to right had long imposed itself. Its reverse, retrograde writing that is not rare among the texts of binding spells,⁴⁷ constitutes one of those reversals characteristic of the world of magic. Normally, the texts do not explain their way of writing; it is sufficient that one acts in the reverse way of what is usually done. The explanation given this time thus seems a secondary improvisation dreamed up by someone who wanted to give meaning to a traditional and independent ritual form.

Another characteristic feature is the reference to the special nature of lead: the metal is "cold."⁴⁸ Moreover, it has other

properties exploited by sorcerers; lead is considered "without luster," "without value," or "useless," in the same way that the words and acts of all those whose names will be engraved on the tablet will be useless.⁴⁹

Coldness, absence of luster, value, and utility give the impression of attending to so many personal variations on the characteristics of a metal traditionally destined to receive binding spells. This circumstance too has given rise to a scholarly debate; some scholars have emphasized that the choice of lead for these texts was originally determined by the cold and dead nature of this metal.⁵⁰ But that opinion can no longer be maintained. We have enough spells on sheets of papyrus, coming from Egypt and preserved, no doubt, because of the extremely favorable climate, to venture the hypothesis that such perishable sheets must also have existed in other areas of the ancient world from which have come down to us only texts on the infinitely more resistant sheets of lead. There are recipes on the papyri that recommend the use of papyrus, often of the highest quality ("hieratic paper"), as in one of the papyri of the British Museum that introduces the recipe for a binding spell with the words: "Take some hieratic paper or a sheet of lead."⁵¹ From literary sources we know about binding spells written on wax tablets.⁵² Wax tablets, papyrus, and lead are the three most widespread writing materials in the ancient world, lead being especially important in the archaic and classical eras. There is sufficient evidence to prove that lead was the material ordinarily used for letters in eastern archaic Greece, and much later writers still remember this use as an archaism.⁵³ The choice of material is thus easily explained. It is a secondary development, an *a posteriori* ritualization of a common practice of writing on lead; some of its properties were secondarily charged with an affective and symbolic value not intended in its original use.

Thus, we find the same process in the two categories of *similia*

similibus formulas. The magicians exploit an earlier and traditional usage, the deposition of the tablet in the tomb, the use of lead, the use of retrograde writing, to end up with new and unexpected meanings. This permanent search for new combinations of meaning seems characteristic of the sorcerer's world. It would thus be erroneous to speak of sympathetic magic in these cases. What is at stake is not a mystical, "sympathetic" harmony between objects and people, but rather the construction of a universe in which things and acts carry a new and completely unusual meaning, entirely different from everyday life.

As to the localization of the curse tablets, we glimpse also a chronological development, although the clues are less unequivocal. The binding spells from the classical epoch all seem to come from graves; at the time of the papyri, on the other hand, there exists a whole spectrum of possibilities for the deposition of the texts.⁵⁴ In a recipe for ritual binding with the help of a magic ring, a papyrus from the British Museum recommends depositing the ring in an abandoned well or burying it in the tomb of a person untimely dead, and it gives two curiously contradictory reasons. The dead person would serve as mediator and assistant (it is the well-known theme of the infernal postman), but it would also be necessary to hide the ring, for it would retain its power only as long as it was not found.⁵⁵ This second reason is presumably a later development, deriving from the custom of seeking contact with the subterranean divinities through the dead and their tombs.

RITES

We remember the suggestion that "to bind down" would mean more than simply "immobilize," a suggestion requiring that the force of the prefix of the Greek verb be wholly spelled out. The reconstruction of the ritual (the formulae lead to the ritual) will

supply this specification. It will also complicate things; "to bind" does not always refer to the same procedure, depending on the era and the kinds of ritual.

The first indications capable of providing this specification come from the Attic spell that, in a rather striking formula, sums up what the actor wants to see happen to his or her adversaries: "All of them, I bind them, I make them disappear, I bury them, I nail them down."⁵⁶ This list of actions conjures up a ritual sequence, whose object is not the very person of the adversaries, but the tablet of lead that bears their names. After "binding" the lead, one "makes it disappear" in the tomb where one had hidden it, "one buries it" and "one nails it down." We sometimes find traces of this last practice. Numerous lead tablets have holes, even preserve, though more rarely, the tool that had pierced them, an iron nail; obviously, sometimes the nail was left in the folded or rolled-up tablet.

The hypothesis of a ritual sequence that would be perceptible through our four verbs runs into two difficulties. The first is that the sequence of the actions—binding, making disappear, burying, nailing—is not logical; it would be more satisfying to let the nailing follow immediately after the binding. However, the series of verbs as it is transmitted has a much stronger rhetorical expressivity—the most aggressive act, nailing, forming the climax of the sequence—and one is, after all, in the presence of an oral rite with its own rhetoric. But even if this explanation is accepted, it is still true that the act referred to by the verb "to bind down" is not as clear as the rest. Is this really a separate rite—perhaps the tablets were tied with a thread of organic matter that left no trace in the soil? Or is it only the summing up of the three following actions, so that "making disappear, burying, and nailing down" together constitute the act of "binding"? The answer is yet open; the rituals might give a clue.

A first clue to the actual rites appears in the rare situation in

which systematic and precise excavations have made it possible to preserve the whole context. Such is the case of a tomb from the Athenian Kerameikos which the vases date shortly after 400 B.C.⁵⁷ In addition to these vases and the skeleton of the deceased, the tomb contained a rather worn judicial spell, a list of nine men's names in the nominative and without patronymics (Babrytides, Xophygos, Nikomakhos, Oinokles, Mnesimakhos, and so on) but also carried the threat that the rite was aimed at every person who "will be accuser or witness with them." This laconic formulation is not exceptional in its time. The text of eight lines is printed on a tablet of lead that also serves as a cover for a small lead container (about eleven centimeters long, six centimeters wide, and twenty-four millimeters high); the tablet held a small lead statuette of a man, with prominent genitals, whose arms are tied on the back, while the right leg bears, engraved in tiny characters, the name of Mnesimakhos, who is found on the list. In the meantime, similar figures have been recovered from two neighboring graves.⁵⁸

Not satisfied with writing the text, this person also molded a bound figurine. The fact of tying the figurine prefigures what is going to happen to the victim. "To bind down," thus, is nothing other than immobilizing. There are, moreover, other statuettes of lead with prominent bonds of iron or bronze.⁵⁹ But that is not all. The cover of the container is pierced with two holes that are not accidental but were made by a pointed object, probably a nail, another sign of "nailing down."

The meaning of this ritual act becomes clearer yet in the few cases in which no statuettes were used, but instead live animals, like the tomcat of the Santones, were used. Indeed, we read the following on the second tablet from the same context:

*aversos ab hac lite esse quo/modi hic catellus aversus/ est nec surgere potest,
sic nec illi, sic transpecti sint / quomodo ille.*

Let them be turned away from this trial in the same way that this cat is turned away and cannot get up. Let it be thus for them as well. Let them be pierced through like the cat.⁶⁰

It is not only because it was killed that the cat cannot get up, but also because it was "turned away" or rather "twisted" (*aversus*) and "pierced through" (*transpectus*). The explanation once again comes from these figurines of magical binding of which we have a rather large series, from different eras and different regions, from classical Attica to late Egypt. Among these figurines, some are truly *aversi*, not only tied but with the head turned rigidly toward the back, often with the feet turned in the same direction, thus barring any normal movement, so that the person is truly immobilized. The cat had also undergone the same "reversal" of the head; and Libanius gives an account of a magical chameleon: "Its head was squeezed between its backlegs, one frontleg was missing, the other was stuffed into its mouth in order to make it keep quiet." Other figurines were—and some are still—pierced with nails.⁶¹ The most striking example comes from the Louvre; it is a figurine of a naked young woman, kneeling, her arms tied behind her back, pierced with thirteen needles.⁶² The little cat was probably pierced through in the same way. (It is not by chance that it is a cat, moreover; the "deification"—to repeat the euphemism used in these texts—of a tomcat is relatively frequent in the magic papyri.)⁶³ As to the figurines, even when not pierced by nails or needles, they almost always have been intentionally damaged; two wax figurines, a man and a woman kissing, carefully wrapped in a papyrus bearing an erotic binding spell, are a rare exception.⁶⁴

To obtain further details and even a kind of indigenous commentary, we must turn to the papyri. The great papyrus in the Bibliothèque Nationale contains a ritual called "a marvelous erotic binding spell."⁶⁵ The largest part of this long text is

constituted of the two *logoi*, the verbal rites accompanying other rites. The text begins as follows: "Take some wax [or clay] from a potter's wheel and make two figurines, one male, the other female.⁶⁶ Make the male one armed like Ares, holding in his left hand a sword, which he aims at the right collarbone of the female figurine; let her have her arms tied behind her back and be kneeling, and let the magical essence be set on her head and around her neck." There follows a long list of magic words to be engraved on the body of the female figurine—on her head, ears, eyes, face, right collarbone, arms, hands, heart, belly, genitals, buttocks, and soles of the feet. It is necessary to write on the breast the name of the victim and that of her mother (315) (which proves that the use of the metronym is intentional, not used for lack of anything better). Then we read, "Take thirteen bronze needles, drive one into her brain," saying, "I stab your brain with the needle, NN [name to be filled in], two in your ears, two in your eyes, and so forth," each time saying, "I stab this member of this person so that she thinks only of me, NN." After the figurines, one has to prepare the tablet: "Take a sheet of lead, write the same incantation, recite it and attach the sheet to the figurines with a thread from a spinning frame, making 365 knots and saying, as you know, 'Abraxas, hold tight.'" Finally, the whole is deposited: "Set them at the time of sunset next to the grave of a person who died prematurely or by violence, and also set down some seasonal flowers."

Such is the rite of preparation and deposition. There follow the oral rites, the long incantation recited and inscribed on the sheet of lead, and the "request," the hexametrical prayer recited facing the setting sun at the moment when the tablet and the figurines are set down.

Before analyzing the texts, let us focus on the preparatory rite and especially on the figurine. What relationship is there between the representation (the figurine) and the person repre-

sented (the victim)? What is the purpose of the stabbing with nails or needles? An extensive conception of magic would suggest that the image is more or less identical to the person represented, that what happens to the image also happens to the living person, that the magical mentality is incapable of making the distinction between the representation and the object represented.⁶⁷ The facts from antiquity clarify these vague ideas. There is no doubt that the figurines represent the victims whose names, moreover, they often bear. Thus, on the thigh of the figurines held in the container from the Kerameikos is engraved the name of one of the adversaries, Mnesimakhos, and our text prescribes writing the name of the desired woman on the figurine's breast; there other instances of such a practice as well. It is therefore tempting to assume that even in the cases, the most frequent ones, in which the figure did not bear a name, it was nevertheless a substitute in a way identical to the victim.

But representation does not mean identity. The figurine does not need to be a portrait; it suffices that it bears some very superficial resemblance to the identity.⁶⁸ The spell from Carystus mentioned earlier concerns a woman, but it is nevertheless engraved on a lead figurine that is not female, which is perhaps male, but more probably of indeterminate sex; it is somewhat difficult to spot an intention of gender differentiation in this hastily executed piece.⁶⁹ A vague resemblance to the human figure is sufficient; the figurine is not the more or less identical substitute for the absent person, but the symbol for him.

The same is true for the ritual of our papyrus. The sorcerer-lover makes two figurines, not only the one of the kneeling and tied-up woman but also the one of an Ares who threatens her with his sword. With this figure of the Greek god of war, we leave the space of the simple mimesis of some reality to enter into myth, that is, symbolic representation.

A ritual detail is added. It is necessary to fix "the magical

essence" (*ousía*) on the head or the neck of the female figurine. This essence consists of elements that have been in contact with the woman—fingernails, hair, fabric from her clothing. In rare finds from Egyptian graves, along with the binding spell on lead or papyrus, a lock of hair was preserved.⁷⁰ But not all of this is designed to perfect the identity between the statuette and the woman. We find the essence in the same rite during the recitation of the final prayer; the sorcerer speaks it "holding on to the essence of the tomb" (435). A passage of this same prayer, addressed to Helios, shows the function of the "essence": "Send to me at the hour of midnight this demon NN, whose remains I hold in my hands."⁷¹ The "essence" does not identify the sorcerer to the deceased but instead has the role of a pointer that establishes a symbolic relationship between two points, of which one is the object referred to (the "signified": in our case, the actual girl) and the other is the sign (the "signifying": in our case, the figurine).

Since the figurine is not identical to the victim, neither is the piercing of the figurine's members with needles or nails an act of ritual binding or even magical wounding; the performer has no intention to maim or wound the victim. The aim is clearly stated in the text. Each time that he injects a needle, the sorcerer must say, "I pierce this limb of this person, so that she thinks of me alone, the NN." After all, the rite is called a "binding spell": "binding" is the central act. This verb appears only twice, both times in the *lógos*, and only the second occurrence is useful to us. In the last part of the prayer, the sorcerer orders the demon thus: "Carry this out, bind for all time and force this woman to be obedient to me."⁷² The bond created by the demon must be lasting and never-ending.

Let us combine the two ideas. In both cases, the sorcerer seeks to monopolize the beloved woman by removing her from all other men. The members affected by the needles are those that

are useful for this relationship. From this point of view, our text constitutes a veritable erotico-magic anatomy of the female body, an analysis of the way in which this total male domination of the female body functions. The eyes, the ears, the mouth, and the brain are useful for sensual and intellectual contact; the feet and the hands create the necessary physical contact (first by bringing her to the lover, than by taking hold of him); the belly and the sexual organs are destined for erotic contacts. But what is sought is not only the monopoly of erotic contact. At the end of his prayer (which the text labels a "request"), the lover-sorcerer commands the demon, "Seize her by the hair, by the entrails, by the sex, by the soul, until she comes to my home and remains without separating from me; do it, bind her for as long as my life lasts, force her to be obedient to me, let her not separate from me at any hour of my life." What is at stake is thus total submission, destined to last a lifetime.

That the goal of the piercing was to monopolize the contact between the man and the woman—to "bind her for as long as my life lasts"—may seem vague in reality. What effect did the magic have in the life of the victim? We find again some indications of it in the "request": the sorcerer-lover asks the demon to act in such a way that the woman can no longer eat or drink, nor sleep nor remain strong and healthy. These are rather commonplace consequences of the erotic desire that we find detailed in both Latin poetry and Greek romances: she has to fall in love, once and for all. The same explanation fits the wish that she not have sexual contact with another man, that her one desire makes her renounce any other liaison.

I stress this because there are cases in which a ritual binding seems to provoke illness.⁷³ Especially disturbances affecting sexuality are explained as the consequence of a magical attack: Ovid tries to explain his impotence by a binding spell, already Hipponax had recommended a ritual healing for it; and in the

ancient East, such rituals were quite common.⁷⁴ A more serious instance comes from the Byzantine collection of miracles, the *Lives of the Saints Cyrus and John the Pennyless (Anargyri)*; a certain Theophilus had been magically tied hand and foot, and he suffered from almost unbearable pains in the extremities thus affected.⁷⁵ The saints advised him to have fishermen fish in the sea, which he did without even being puzzled by such advice, so great was his confidence in their knowledge. The fishermen brought in a small box containing a figurine in bronze that bore the features of Theophilus, with four nails piercing its hands and feet. The nails were taken out one after the other, and each time a nail was removed, Theophilus recovered the health in the corresponding member.

But this little story—as impressive as it is—does not fit in very well with the ideology of ritual binding. It remains vague about the exact nature of the ritual employed (it is his enemies who wished to do harm to Theophilus, with the help of the demon), and it does not fit into one of the five categories mentioned. It would be advisable to guard against the idea that binding spells could produce diseases by means of similar punctures made in a figurine. The perforation of the members does not have such precise and simple consequences—the mechanism is not so direct.

Another Christian story, taken this time from the *Life of Saint Hilarion*, written by Jerome, confirms this skepticism. A young man fell in love with a "virgin of God" (*virgo Dei*) in Gaza, thus an impossible love. Finally, the young man had himself initiated in magic at the temple of Aesculapius in Memphis, Egypt. Returning after a year, he buried "verbal monsters and monstrous figurines sculpted in a sheet of bronze from Cyprus" under the threshold of the virgin's house. We readily recognize the combination of the text and magic figurines, which Plato already knew were buried under thresholds.⁷⁶ The girl's reaction was

unexpected: "The virgin went insane; after throwing the cap from her head, she twirled her hair, gnashed her teeth, and called the name of the young man."⁷⁷ The binding magic does not give rise to a specific disease, but to a total amorous madness.

It remains to explain the other rite, which in the papyrus is performed with the female figurine. Before sticking the members with needles, one engraves magical words on other parts of the body: head, ears, eyes, face, right collarbone, arms, hands, heart, belly, genitals, buttocks, and the soles of the feet. This list of parts covered with magical words is not identical to the list of members pierced by the thirteen needles, as is shown by simply counting; there are thirteen needles, hence thirteen parts, but sixteen members to be written on. Nevertheless, the two lists are close. There are correspondences (ears, eyes, hands, and soles of the feet); some differences are easy to understand; the head instead of the brain (the head is engraved, the brain is pierced), and the face instead of the mouth (same reason). Finally, there are some additions like the arms (for a technical reason: the arms are easy to write on even if they are tied behind the back, and it is harder to pierce them) and the collarbone, brought into relief by the gesture of Ares, who thrusts his sword into it.

Despite the differences, the lists are thus very close. The second list can be understood as the result of the man's desire to monopolize the erotic relationship with the woman. We can glimpse the same explanation for the first list, apart from the collarbone. The magic words to be inscribed on the different parts are not devoid of sense. They are the names of divinities and demons, and behind some of them appear known names. The name of Thoth is thus written on the heart, that of Ammon on the face, derivatives of the Semitic *melech*, "king," on the arms and hands (it is a widespread divine and demonic name, as on the statuette ascribed to Apuleius and called "King"), and the

name ΙΑΩ, Jahweh, on the head; there is a hierarchy. At any rate, the different parts of the body, of which the head forms the most important point, are ritually dedicated to different powers, divine and demonic, even though, at the current stage of research, several aspects of the demonology remain unknown; and the consecration concerns, with some minor variations, the same parts of the female body, which he is going to pierce later. In the world of the magician, the dedication is only a variant of the action of binding: already the text from Carystus identified the two actions. But the magician does not just pierce the members for the purpose of binding them, he also dresses a list of the parts and of their superhuman protectors on whom he has an influence. Besides, assigning the members to divinities is a well-known ritual of healing, called *Gliedervergottung* (deification of limbs) by German Egyptologists. Always, the members of the body are entrusted to the protection of specific divinities; always, as in our text, the list begins with the head and ends with the feet.⁷⁸ Seen from this historical perspective, the magical practice appears as evident reversal of this ritual of healing, creating not health but erotic fervor.⁷⁹

This detour via Egypt could shed light on certain facts in Greece proper, beginning with the nature of the ritual act referred to by the verb "to bind." If we again follow the papyrus, after engraving the sheet of lead, the magician ties it with a thread of linen to the figurines, saying "Abraxas, hold it tight." Abraxas is the demon, the letters of whose name, when read as figures, add up to 365, the number of the days in a year; he represents duration, the year, or even better, the Great Year. The tablet itself is tied to the figurine with 365 knots; the bond should last forever, and Abraxas guarantees this. The verb used in his apostrophe, "to hold tight" (*katékhein*), also appears very often on the Attic curse tablets; the magician prays one of these infernal divinities to "hold tight" the victim, in particular Her-

mes, who draws from there his epithet *Kátachos*. Would it not be possible that someone tied and carefully knotted around sheets a thread that disappeared in the Greek earth over the centuries?

However that may be, in Egypt a ritual was found that combines two figurines (with the name of a victim) and one lead tablet, whereas for the rest of the ancient world, there are only very rare figurines and a huge mass of tablets. Must we conclude that the combination of tablet and figurines was necessary and that the figurines simply were lost? The possibility must be considered that the images were fashioned with other materials less durable than lead; the papyrus speaks of wax or clay, two materials that are not preserved outside of Egypt, and our literary texts, from Plato to the Augustan poets, often enough mention statuettes of wax.⁸⁰ But even in Egypt, where statuettes of clay and wax have been preserved, there are examples of texts without statuettes. The goal of the binding ritual must thus have been achieved by the single consecration of the text. This conclusion confirms what we said about the purely symbolic nature of the ritual: the effect of the binding did not depend on a "sympathetic" act performed with the help of voodoo dolls.

The concept of sympathetic magic, however, is still worrisome; there are always spirits to be exorcized, notably Frazerian spirits. It is obvious (and already said) that sorcerers did not wish to wound the victim's members in the same way that they pierced the members of a figurine. Moreover, because, as we have seen, there exists no homology between the performance of the rite and the goal sought after, the sorcerers by all accounts did not wish to kill, or bury, or pierce with nails the victims of the judiciary spell of the fourth century. What they wanted was to act so as to prevent adversaries from appearing in court or, if they did appear, to hinder them from pleading or testifying. No tablet, Athenian or otherwise, earlier than the Roman era expresses the desire to kill an adversary; and even later, the ex-

pression of this desire is extremely rare, and not only in the erotic spells, in which it had no reason for being. This sympathetic homology thus exists only in the mind of a superficial observer; it is not surprising that it appears for the first time with a Christian writer.

Another spirit to be exorcized is the psychological spirit, so dear to certain scientific ancestors. Could not psychology help to understand these violent acts, of an unconcealed hostility, that consist of sticking needles in human figurines, of driving a nail into a carefully written text of lead? Would not this be a violence directed against enemies or objects of desire that prove inaccessible, but diverted and channeled toward substitutes? The thesis is well-known, but it too raises difficulties.⁸¹ The first is that the act of violence is an immediate and spontaneous discharge, although there is nothing spontaneous in the rituals. The binding ritual of the papyrus from the Bibliothèque Nationale is extremely complex. We must first fashion two identifiable figurines of clay or wax; how much time does that take? Next, the names of the demons, which are relatively complicated words, must be inscribed. Then, a long and complex incantation must be inscribed and recited. Finally, a hymn must be recited in hexameters. Among these acts requiring a great deal of concentration, the sorcerer pricks the figurine with exactly thirteen needles, in precise places, while reciting precise words. There is no place in this ritual for a spontaneous discharge of erotic frustrations. And even the rituals that we catch sight of behind the judiciary spell of the fifth and fourth centuries seem too complex to suggest the spontaneous outbursts of violent hatred.

But there is another fact, one much more puzzling for those who believe in a psychological approach. According to Plato, it was not the laypersons, those adversaries involved in a complicated trial, who performed the rite, but rather itinerant specialists, to whom no one would think of ascribing feelings of hatred

or frustration. Other literary and juridical texts refer to these specialists, but it is the magic texts themselves that often enough suggest this hypothesis.⁸² The very fact that the long, erotic binding rite in Paris comes from a book, from a carefully written collection of magic rites, shows the existence of professionals; and the complexity of the rite and its imprecations corroborates this impression. The professional knew how to make figurines, could write, and had a good memory for recalling long oral texts. This professionalism explains that the text from this book has been employed several times in real binding rituals, attested by leaden tablets and spells on papyrus;⁸³ the unhappy lover would thus have done nothing other than follow the ritual course indicated to him by a professional, performing a particular gesture, pronouncing a particular word—without forgetting to pay the professional afterward (the reputation of greediness has stuck to the magician over the centuries).⁸⁴ Now, such a scenario no more allows for spontaneity than it does for violence. If it is really necessary to look to psychoanalysis to understand these rituals, psychoanalysis and psychopathology can only bring to light the very distant psychological foundations of these rituals.

Another observation on the lead tablets goes in the same direction. In the cases in which we find—in Athens, Cyprus, Rome—an entire cache of texts that were not all addressed by the same person to the same adversaries, we could note that they came from the same hand (or from a small number of hands); they were obviously written by the same professional sorcerer. In addition, there was found in a hoard, next to some ten tablets all written in the same hand, with identical formulas but addressed by different persons to different adversaries, a tablet bearing the same text but clumsily written by someone who had not yet achieved sufficient ease in engraving texts of this length on small sheets of lead. Clearly, we are dealing with a sorcerer and his apprentice.⁸⁵

But the rite in the Paris papyrus has more to show. We still have to look at the two oral rites, the spell written also on the tablet, and the hexametrical "request."

The spell is addressed to the infernal powers:⁸⁶ "I entrust this binding spell to you, infernal gods HYSEMIGADON and Maiden Persephone, Ereskhigal and Adonis BARBARATHA, Infernal Hermes Thoth [more magical names],⁸⁷ and to mighty Anubis Psirinth who holds the keys to Hades, to the infernal gods and demons, to men and women who have died untimely deaths, to youths and maidens, year after year, month after month, day after day, hour after hour." It is a variant of a well-known prayer formula, in which the sorcerer addresses all the powers of a place, those whose names are known and those referred to only by their group name, in order to make sure that no demon or god feels neglected and would therefore take revenge. Thanks to this invocation, the objects that are deposited go into the possession of the powers and must remain so forever.

Yet this is not the central goal of the invocation. Whereas the gods and the infernal demons are the guardians of the magic objects entrusted to them, certain other demons have different but no less precise functions: "I beseech all the demons of this place to stand as assistants beside this demon here."⁸⁸ The sorcerer implores the demons who inhabit this particular cemetery—all the powerful dead that there are—to help their new colleague, the deceased, who like them has died before his time and who has suffered a violent death; and it is at his grave that the statuettes and the tablet have been deposited. It is to him alone that the rest of the text is addressed. He is to wake up and to bring the woman desired; if she is unwilling and resists, let him treat her roughly until she comes: "If you perform this for me, I shall right away leave you in peace."⁸⁹

The superhuman and infernal beings who figure in this text

thus have special tasks. A particular demon is isolated as the agent intended to fulfill the magician's desire, and the others are the guardians of the magic objects or are the assistants for their colleague, depending on their position on a topographical grid whose center is the grave selected.

The final hexametrical prayer brings in a new element.⁹⁰ The prayer is addressed to the sun: "When you have arrived in the depths of the earth at the abode of the dead, send, at the hour of midnight, this demon to me, NN, whose bodily remains I hold in my hands [this text must be uttered holding in one's hands the magical essence, some parts of the dead person], and who will come constrained by you, to carry out everything that I have in my heart, appearing gentle, harmless, and devoid of hostile thoughts toward me." This prayer is, so to speak, an action parallel to the depositing of the tablet in the grave. The goal of the deposition was to make the sorcerer's text reach the dead person, to go from our world to the infernal world, from up on high to the underworld. Theoretically, one could stop there. But the sun is also a mediator between these two worlds, notably in Egyptian thinking: present in our world, in the heights of the sky, during the day, the sun crosses the world below during the night and then encounters the world of the dead. It is significant that the sun must be addressed at the precise moment when it sets, that is, at the moment that it goes from high to low. We may, incidentally, wonder whether this frequent magical hymn to the sun points not, here again, to a reversal.⁹¹ While so many philosophers and charismatics, models of piety from Socrates to Proclus, passing through Apollonius of Tyana, adore the sun that rises, the sorcerer, on the other hand, adores the setting sun.⁹²

The prayer thus adds two things. It guarantees that the demon will arrive without exhibiting either irritation or anger regarding the sorcerer (a rather frequent preoccupation that means that

the sorcerers protect themselves with amulets); and it forces the demon to respond to the sorcerer's call, which seems a superfluous action, for one might think that the deposition of the tablet in the grave suffices to bring that about. But two conceptions concerning the abode of the dead coexist here. On the one hand, the dead are considered to inhabit the grave and the cemetery (that is why one asks for the help of the demons, after the depositing of the object); and on the other hand, they are supposed to inhabit a vaguely distant world beyond, beneath the earth, where the gods also live, to whom the first invocation of the tablet is addressed, and where the sun spends each night.

The papyrus mentions the special category of beings constituted by the *ábōroi* and *biaiothánatoi*, those who have died before their life could reach its fulfillment. The concept is an old one; these beings appear already in the texts found on curse tablets from classical Athens. Since Erwin Rohde, scholars have studied these unruly souls, an inexhaustible reservoir of malevolent spirits for the sorcerers.⁹³ Having quit life before reaching its goal, marriage and procreation, they were reputed to be envious of the survivors and for this reason ready to put themselves at the service of magicians.

Besides the term *ábōroi*, "those who have died an untimely death," found both in the papyri and the actual spells, at least an Attic spell of the fourth century has an even more telling expression—if only it were generally accepted. The text, which deserves closer scrutiny, is written on both faces of a lead tablet; although a crucial part is mutilated, its sense is clear. The first side reads like this:⁹⁴ "I bind Theodora to the one at Persephone's side [that is, Hecate] and to the *atélestoi*. May she be herself *atelēs*, and whenever she is about to chat with Kallias and with Charias, whenever she is about to discuss deeds and words and business [...] words, whatever he indeed says. I bind Theodora to remain *atelēs* towards Charias and Charias to forget Theodora, and

Charias to forget [...] Theodora and sleeping with Theodora." The meaning of *atelēs* and *atélestoi* is controversial. It is clear that in the text, the two words are set into relation to each other; the infernal *atélestoi* have a hand in Theodora being *atelēs*. Literally, both words designate someone who has not reached his or her goal. It is not only Theodora who does not reach her aim, the same holds true for her words and deeds; there are texts from Sicily that bind someone into being unsuccessful.⁹⁵ It is also obvious that Theodora is cursed to be unsuccessful in love; the open question is only what exactly the infernal *atélestoi* are.⁹⁶ The second face is helpful: "Just as this corpse lies *atelēs*, so may all the words and deeds of Theodora be *atélestoi*."⁹⁷ It is a *similia similibus* formula that likens the fate of the corpse to the fate of Theodora's words and deeds; the two Greek expressions are thus synonymous. It could follow from this that the *atélestoi* would be all the dead; but why would they be unsuccessful? In a context of erotic contest, it is preferable that they be people who died unmarried: *télos*, after all, is a common Greek word denoting "marriage"; another text from Attica hopes that the victim, a woman, should be "without the goal of marriage."⁹⁸ The word *atélestoi*, in this text, then would be "unmarried ones," ideally suited to help prevent poor Theodora from marrying.

THE SPELL PUT TO USE

This is what can be learned from the papyrus book in Paris. It constitutes, as we have said, a collection of recipes; therefore it shows blanks (NN) where individual names would be inserted. But we also have—and this is a unique case—six texts that derive from the recipe attested to by the papyrus.⁹⁹ A study of these texts reveals two things. The first observation is that the copyists used the original text very freely. They of course always put the abstract information into concrete form, inserting concrete

names into the blanks (other papyrus recipes even prescribe to do so); but they also shortened or lengthened their original in such a way that it is impossible to say whether it is really our papyrus that serves as a model or another text of the same tradition. Again, as with the *Eighth Book of Moses*, these texts, although secret, were not transmitted with the precision and care taken with literary texts. A second and more surprising observation is that a sorcerer could not, because of this imprecision, learn to perform a rite by means of a book. The most significant indication is the making of the figurines. Although the papyrus prescribes the fashioning of an Ares and a woman, excavations have preserved only female figurines, and even the so-well-investigated city of Antinoupolis has not yielded a single figurine of Ares. In addition, the female figurines never bear the inscription stipulated by the papyrus. This second omission is more easily explained. The dedication of particular body parts to superhuman powers constitutes a ritual parallel to that of sticking with needles, which can on this account be omitted. The other omission is harder to explain. Perhaps the sorcerer left out the mythological scene because it was too complicated and did not provide any additional benefit. Thus, not only is the papyrus text more redundant, but because it contains the Egyptian rite and the Greek myth, it is also more learned and traditional than the concrete performances.

The last question, which brings us to daily life, is that of the situations, the motivations, that could lead a person of antiquity to perform a ritual binding. Christopher Faraone studied this long-neglected problem in a fine essay; to the extent to which I share the conclusions already expressed in the title of his work—"the agonistic context"—I shall be brief.¹⁰⁰

Since Audollent, as we have seen, binding spells have been classified into five categories: juridical, erotic, commercial, agonistic, and against thieves and slander. To modern feelings,

these categories lie on different levels: only the first four presuppose a common situation of rivalry (what Faraone calls an agonistic situation). There are always two opposing parties—adversaries in court, rivals who solicit the same erotic favors, circus artists or professionals, business competitors. Always—and this is the central point—ritual binding occurs at a moment when the result of this confrontation is not yet clear. The ritual is thus not an act of vengeance that accompanies the defeat, but rather is a means intended to influence the course of the competition.

We have seen this for judiciary spells: their goal was to make the adversaries incapable of appearing before the court. Some earlier scholars, who were disinclined to attribute to the Greeks such unfair behavior, interpreted these texts as the expression of bitterness provoked by loss at a trial. But debate over this was settled by the evidence of an Athenian text that gives the date of the trial, with the verb in the future tense.¹⁰¹ Further evidence is given by the two cases in which a sudden loss of language during a trial was explained by a binding spell.¹⁰² The same observation holds good for the erotic binding spells. The Attic text against Theodora is quite frank: "[I wish] that Theodora be unsuccessful with Charias, that Charias forgets Theodora and Theodora's child, and that Charias forgets the love with Theodora."¹⁰³ The situation of rivalry is obvious; to win Theodora, Charias (perhaps the father of her child?) must be removed by means of the ritual. Our modern sensibility is perhaps offended by the fact that the victim of the ritual act is not Charias, but Theodora. But the rite functions in the same way as in the erotic spell of the Paris papyrus book. There too, the recipe assumes the existence of rivals; in the spell, the sorcerer prays that the victim would be unable to have sexual relations (very precisely detailed) with a person other than the sorcerer (or his client). The actually performed ritual texts, which were based on this

recipe, very faithfully repeat this manifestly very important passage. The papyrus book also considers the possibility that the victim is married. However, the husband is not cast aside, and the woman is concentrated on: "Do not let NN try to seek pleasure with another man, not even with her husband, with the exception of me" (line 374). This time the passage is not repeated in any of the three copies, because the victims pursued were not married.

There is, however, a difference between the Egyptian papyrus and the Attic text: only the latter tries to reach its goal by explicitly fostering dissension between a couple. This kind of text, which is very clear in another Attic text of the fourth century—"I turn aside Euboula of Aineas, her face, her eyes"—is attested to mainly in Greece proper.¹⁰⁴ Although late literary sources generally accuse the magicians of trying to separate married couples, and the papyri contain recipes in order to achieve this,¹⁰⁵ these texts are in reality very rare in the rest of the ancient world.¹⁰⁶ Here the usual proceeding is to attract, with the help of a powerful demon, the object of one's desire, whether a man or a woman, whether of the same or of the opposite sex.¹⁰⁷ We have seen that rivalry is not absent in these texts, whether the women are already connected with other men or whether the man is the rival of other potential suitors of the young woman.

It is Faraone who has called attention to the commercial spells. Texts have long been known in which victims were referred to by their profession and targeted by their work: "I bind the shop and the professional activity"; "I bind the helmet factory of Dionysios, his house, his activity, his work and his means of subsistence"; "I bind . . . his craft and his tools."¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, this kind of ritual has not always been clearly enough distinguished from judiciary spells. It was often thought

that the professions were only additional details concerning the persons aimed at. It seems evident, though, that these texts must be put in a special class, as is shown by a text on lead from the early third century B.C., coming from a necropolis in Metapontum: "I bind the first workshop of these people. I bind so that they are unable to work, but are unemployed and in misery," followed by the names of seventeen doctors.¹⁰⁹ There is only one explanation for this curious text: a group of (young) doctors founded a private hospital, the first in the city, no doubt against the will of an already-established colleague, who thus wishes them total unemployment.

Finally, for the agonistic spells, it is not necessary to demonstrate the situation of rivalry. Although there exist some examples from the classical and Hellenistic age, most of these texts are of a later date. The spells concerning athletes—runners, wrestlers—are almost banal.¹¹⁰ More interesting are those concerning the chariot races and that come from the amphitheaters of Rome, Carthage, or other cities. All of them are of rather late date.¹¹¹ The victims of these spells are primarily drivers of chariots or their horses. A fairly typical text from Carthage begins with a long list of names of horses (these texts constitute, incidentally, the main source for the names of Greek and Roman horses), followed by an invocation of a demon, which is called by a whole series of Greek magic words (his secret names) and by a Latin invocation (of which I keep the unorthodox orthography):

excito te, / demon, qui ic convers/ans: trado tibi os/ equos ut detineas/ illos et implicentur / nec se movere possent.

I call on you, demon, who lie here [in a grave, from which the text comes]: I deliver these horses to you so that you hold them back and that they get tangled up [in their harness] and are unable to move.¹¹²

There are much more precise texts in which the failure of the bound driver is described in full detail (and where there is a sudden leap from horses to drivers, easily understandable to the concerned sorcerer, more confusing for the modern reader):

I bind to them [to the horses] the race, the feet, the victory, the strength, the soul, the speed, drive them crazy, without muscles, without limbs, so that tomorrow, in the hippodrome, they will be unable to run or walk or conquer or leave the starting gates or go around the course, but let them fall with their drivers . . . Bind their hands, steal their victory, their sight, so that they are unable to see their opponents, rather, drag them their own chariots and throw them on the ground so that they fall down throughout the hippodrome, but particularly around the course, with their own horses.¹¹³

And as the turns had to be the places particularly favorable for falls, we see that it is not miracles that are expected of demons.

All this looks quite straightforward. Nevertheless, there are certain difficulties. Certainly, some of these rites were performed by the rival drivers themselves (which puts them in the same category as commercial spells). Towards the end of the fourth century A.D., imperial legislation is directed against those drivers who commissioned a binding spell against a rival. The law threatens capital punishment, in case they should either cover or do away with the sorcerer instead of handing the sorcerer over to the law.¹¹⁴ But there are more cases in which the rituals were commissioned by their supporters:¹¹⁵ in a sport which does not yet know betting, there must be different motives at work.¹¹⁶ In the imperial society, the drivers constituted important social mediators between the elite of their noble patrons and the masses of their supporters, so much so that each race brought into play social structures and that the victory of one party was perceived as the affirmation of a particular social group. The

agonistic situation is still present, but transferred from the individual to the group.

This circumstance becomes strikingly visible when the two conflicting groups are pagans and Christians, as shown in a story also reported in the *Life of Hilarion*. The *duumviri* of Gaza held horse races that caused numerous rivalries between the two administrators. In this exact case, the pagan colleague made sure of the help of a magician so that his drivers would win; it thus belonged to the saint to help the other *duumvir*, a good Christian, to wield a stronger magic to thwart the pagan one. The saint is first reluctant to help, quite understandably; finally, he offers holy water as an antidote—and, of course, the Christian horses win. This victory does not help just the magistrate; the crowd, disappointed by the pagan god Marnes, turns to Christianity.¹¹⁷

What all these cases of ritual binding have in common is that they are performed in the context of a crisis. It is always a situation in which a great uncertainty predominates, one that will be resolved by a future decision, while the ways to influence the result are very limited. It may be a matter of people taking part in an imminent trial, merchants or professionals faced with new competitors (like the doctors of Metapontum), or people who practiced professions based on techniques difficult to master (like bronze founders or potters whose pots broke in the fire because of incantations).¹¹⁸ As a competitor in an agonistic struggle, an individual needed a strategy for overcoming a feeling of uncertainty increased by that of a certain powerlessness. The performance (or commission) of a spell made it possible to regain the initiative and the hope that one could affect the outcome. The ritual thus offered both the community and the individual a means to master emotionally an otherwise difficult crisis.¹¹⁹

The Greco-Roman culture had other strategies for putting an end to similar crises produced by the feeling of uncertainty.

Divination thus obtained information about the future, without one's thinking of manipulating the unfolding of events; it was enough to replace uncertainty by certitude. On the other hand, the performance of what we may call positive magical rites was intended to manipulate and influence the outcome of events by strengthening the individual's personal energy (whereas the ritual binding—negative magic—aimed at eliminating or diminishing the energy of the adversary or competitor). To the commercial spell, there existed a reverse process in order to protect one's shop and one's work by a charm; in the papyri this rite, which promised to enrich its practitioners, is called "Charm for Acquiring Business and for Calling in Customers."¹²⁰ To the judiciary and agonistic spells, there were corresponding practices, which were considered to procure victory, or amulets, which were capable of protecting against failure. A papyrus from the British Museum thus contains a "Victory Charm" and also a "Victory Charm for Chariot Races."¹²¹ A papyrus from Oxyrhynchus promises "victory and safety in the stadium and the crowds."¹²² Finally, the amulet of a mime was supposed to procure charm, physical beauty, and victory "to Sphyridas whom Thinousiris gave birth to."¹²³

This polyvalent use of the amulet, supposed to procure both physical beauty and sexual attractiveness as well as victory, is very often found in the spells of the papyri. What our categories single out—victory in a trial, commercial success, success in love—is not always separated in the thinking of the ancients. A prayer to Helios, in the Papyrus Mimaut of the Louvre, thus furnishes a long and mixed list of desired qualities: "Come to me with a happy face, on a bed of your choice, giving me, NN, sustenance, health, safety, wealth, the blessing of children, knowledge, a good name, goodwill [on the part of other men], sound judgment, honor, memory, grace, shapeliness, beauty in the eyes of all men who see me; you, who hear me in everything

whatsoever, give persuasiveness with words, great god, to the [there follow magic words, the demoniacal name of the sorcerer, who has become a superhuman being], I beg, master, accept my prayers."¹²⁴

This rather striking list gives the portrait of the ideal man as conceived in Imperial Greco-Roman society, combining what we would call the social virtues—which serve to secure an elevated position in its society (a good name, benevolence, persuasiveness)—with what in our eyes constitute private virtues (health and the like), without forgetting "physical beauty in the eyes of others," that is to say, sexual attractiveness. It is a long list of goods necessary for social success in this society, an ideal self-portrait that has largely escaped the attention of scholars on the lookout for information about the social history of the ancient world.

This agonistic model admits of only rare exceptions. There are only few but striking cases in which instead of the term *competition*, it would be preferable to use *jealousy*.¹²⁵ An illustration is a text from Cremona, which dates from the very beginning of the Christian era and in which a certain Q. Domatius curses several persons in order to remain the sole heir, and adds, as if it were a matter of a votive gift, "I curse them at my own expense so that they perish."¹²⁶ This text might just happen to be a pathological exaggeration of rivalry. There is also the category of spells directed against thieves and slanderers, which can hardly be called agonistic. But we can understand how this category fits into our analysis and why the ancients did not separate it from other binding spells, with which it shares not only the external form of the lamella of lead but also the depositing in wells or in the sanctuaries of the chthonian gods.¹²⁷ It is always a matter of past events, misfortunes already undergone, but for which the person responsible is often unknown.¹²⁸ What this kind of spell has in common with the other categories

is that here again, it is performed in a crisis provoked by a lack of information, this time concerning not some future situation but the person who can be accused of committing the crime. In this situation of uncertainty, it is once again the powers down below who help. They are considered to know the victim and to punish the crime. It could also be hoped that the sorcerer would find the guilty one; among other texts, the papyri offer recipes making it possible to find a thief.¹²⁹

The first texts of this kind came from the sanctuary of Demeter in Cnidus, made famous by the excavations by Charles Newton. Since then, examples have been found throughout the whole ancient world, including the British Isles. The sanctuary of Cnidus, and it alone, also offers another kind of text for defending oneself against the accusation of magic. The most typical example runs as follows:

Antigone dedicates to Demeter and Kore, to Pluto, to all the gods and goddesses who surround Demeter. If I gave poison to Asklepiades or if I intended in my soul to harm him, or if I called his wife to the sanctuary and if I gave her three half-mines for her to cast him out of the world of the living, let Antigone go up to the temple of Demeter, burning with fever and let her not succeed in obtaining the favor of Demeter, but let her suffer great pain. If someone spoke to Asklepiades against me, and if he tampered with a woman by giving her money . . .¹³⁰

The second part fits into the typology already analyzed, that of the spell against crimes or slander committed by persons unknown. The first part contains the defense of a woman, Antigone, against the accusation of having attempted to poison a certain Asklepiades or having incited another woman to do so. All this clearly has the air of *mageia*, of *veneficium*, and the meeting in the sanctuary to obtain the poison has a surprising parallel in Cicero.¹³¹ The defense of the alleged witch consists of a curse

against herself. She invokes the wrath of the divinity against herself in the event that she is guilty: that the goddess punishes her by sending her an illness.¹³² It is a process very close to the ancient oath, which also was nothing other than a conditional curse directed against the person who took the oath; the person called for divine wrath on himself or herself if the person was guilty of perjury. We once again note the affinity existing between the binding spell and the curse.¹³³

VIEWPOINT OF THE VICTIMS OF RITUAL BINDING

In what circumstances could someone think of being the victim of an instance of binding spell, and what were the defenses against such an attack? It is no easier to answer this question for antiquity than for the modern world.¹³⁴ We do not have, as a matter of fact, detailed descriptions, with the exception of three anecdotes dating from late antiquity and related earlier, the one concerning the Virgin of God from Gaza, reported in Jerome's *Life of St. Hilarion*, and the later ones on Theodorus and Theophilus, told by Sophronius.

The cases of Theodorus and Theophilus suggest a process that unfolds in two stages. Everything begins with an inexplicable illness. When the saints are consulted, they declare an attack of magic. It is then a matter of finding the magic object responsible in order to confirm the diagnosis and to undo the effects of the magic. In the case of Theodorus, the magical objects are disinterred from the threshold of his house. In the case of Theophilus, it is necessary to find the objects in the sea—an easy task for saints, one suspects.¹³⁵

The case of the virgin is simpler and, at the same time, less logical. We are dealing with behavior that is absurd and aggressive, contrary to everything that the prior life and social role of the victim lead us to expect. A virgin, who is devoted to God

and who therefore resisted the advances of a young lover, is suddenly seized by a frenzied love, ecstatic and without control. The saint is consulted; he diagnoses demonic possession resulting from an erotic binding spell and then exorcizes the demon. Although the author meticulously describes for us the making of the magical objects, he does not, however, make the success of the healing depend on the detection of these objects. It is a literary rehandling of which Jerome is fully conscious: "The saint did not wish to give the order to seek out the young man or the statuettes before the virgin is purified, to avoid giving the impression that the demon had gone away, freed of the incantations, that he believed the demon's words, for he knew that demons are deceitful and crafty in order to impose themselves."¹³⁶

The saint obviously knows the protocol to follow in such a case, but if he had first found and destroyed the sacred objects, he would have allowed the demon to go away without having been able to make him swear never to return. In closer analysis, it appears that this departure results from the superposition and combination of two demonologies, that of possession and that of the binding spell. Although they were acquainted with possession and exorcism, the pagans did not confound them with the binding rituals, where, in their eyes, the demonic helper of the sorcerer did not possess his victim, but tortured him. It is thus the Christians who broaden the field of exorcism by making it the most common means for resolving any problem in which superhuman forces come into play. Always, they exorcize the demon with the help of a more forceful name than the one that had forced the demon into the victim: "I adjure you in the name of the living god," in a Jewish exorcism;¹³⁷ "I adjure you in the name of the Nazarene, Jesus Christ, and the holy apostles," in the Christian liturgy.¹³⁸

The rare cases from the pagan world yield further informa-

tion. Take the case of Germanicus as recounted by Tacitus. The prince, hitherto healthy and strong, is suddenly stricken with an inexplicable illness from which he dies, without any remedy capable of helping him. Someone suspects a *veneficium* and seeks traces of it: "One found in the ground and in the walls the remains of human bodies, incantations and binding spells and the name of Germanicus inscribed on tablets of lead, ashes half burned and full of rot, and other things by which one thinks of dedicating men to the infernal divinities."¹³⁹

Sudden death leads to suspicion of magic. The search confirms these suspicions and points in the direction of a more searching diagnosis, that of a binding spell. Tacitus is explicit: he mentions the typical curse tablets of lead with the victim's name, the magical essence taken from a tomb and which must have served to obtain the help of a demon; he also explains the process of the ritual binding as an action with the goal of dedicating (*sacrare*) a man to the infernal divinities, which the non-Attic texts on lead confirm. We have already seen that the verbs with the root "to bind" are often replaced by verbs that denote consecration.

We could consider Tacitus's story an example of literature that can be exploited only with reservations. We know, however, of several inscriptions from the imperial era that report cases of unexpected death resulting from a magic intervention; in most of them, Helios is asked to punish the unknown sorcerer.¹⁴⁰ One text, the grave inscription for the wife of an officer who had died at the age of 28 after prolonged immobility, held an incantation responsible: "Cursed by incantations, she lay mute for a long time"—perhaps in a coma that the contemporary doctors did not understand?¹⁴¹ Whatever the reason, the celestial or the infernal gods will punish the perpetrators. A metrical inscription from the imperial era, now at the museum of Verona, is even more touching: "Growing in my third year, I was cap-

tured and killed, while I could have been the delight of my mother and father; the cruel hand of a witch (*saga*) took me, while she remains on the earth and harms by her art. Parents, beware of your children so that the pain does not end up filling your heart."¹⁴²

The situation is ambiguous: are we facing a sudden and unexpected death attributed by the parents to the intervention of a witch, or is it a matter of one of those child sacrifices mentioned by so many stories? We shall never know. The first hypothesis, however, seems more probable.

There are still other cases. There is the funny anecdote reported by Cicero about Curio, who attributed his forgetfulness to an incantation made by his adversary. Because the story is not completely serious, we must not expect concrete proofs of it. It is nevertheless significant that we are dealing again with someone who proves incapable of playing the role that was expected of him, like the virgin of Gaza.

Libanius, another orator stricken by a malevolent magic, speaks of it in his autobiography.¹⁴³ In the middle of a highly successful career, he was attacked by headaches so violent that he wanted to die: "I avoided all the books containing the works of the ancients, I avoided the writing and composition of my orations, and my eloquence was undone, even though my pupils loudly demanded for it."¹⁴⁴ To this malady was added another, an arthritis that hampered his movements. The cure is performed in two phases. A dream first revealed that Libanius was the victim of witchcraft, then his friends began looking for traces and remedies.¹⁴⁵ Libanius did not believe in the diagnosis—but he had to yield to the facts: "However, a chameleon turned up in my classroom, coming from I don't know where. It was a very old chameleon and had been dead for several months, but we saw that its head was tucked between its hind legs, that one of its front legs was missing while the other closed its mouth to

silence it." Although no lead tablet was found, this discovery pointed to ritual binding. The chameleon had its head turned around like the cat of the Santones, a symbolic expression of all the misfortunes that had to befall the victim, and the missing leg and the leg that closed the mouth more specifically represented what someone wanted to see happen to Libanius, the loss of movement and speech. After this discovery, the healing was not long in coming. In another discourse, Libanius suggests that it was some colleagues who had practiced this feat of magic; the fact that these same colleagues in turn suspected Libanius of having worked magic might explain the skepticism he affects in his autobiography.¹⁴⁶

The final case belongs to quite a different category. It is an oracle that was published not long ago and that poses very interesting problems; the text was found in the Ephesus excavations, but it concerns another town in western Asia Minor, difficult to identify. The town had suffered from the great plague brought by the armies of Lucius Verus from Mesopotamia in 165 A.D. An oracle was then consulted, probably that of Apollo at Clarus (we know other oracles regarding this plague and who came from this sanctuary), and Apollo gave a strange answer. The townspeople should obtain a statue of Ephesian Artemis, all in gold and carrying two torches (not the image, thus, of the *multimamma* that does not carry torches); install it in a sanctuary of Artemis Soteira, the "Savior"; and organize a festival. During the festival, the torches of the goddess then would melt the wax figurines made by an unknown sorcerer.¹⁴⁷

The plague thus was attributed to the binding spell of a sorcerer. Sorcerers could be thought to act against a whole town; when contrary winds had slowed the supply fleet for Constantinople and thus created a public uproar, the emperor Constantine executed the philosopher Sopater because he had, "through an excess of cleverness," magically bound the winds.¹⁴⁸ Sopater

presumably had done nothing at all; he just happened to be a pagan philosopher hated by some powerful figures at court. The sorcerer who had worked the plague remained unknown: it was the crisis—the plague, like the hunger in Constantinople—alone that produced this response; nor were magical objects found. The cure was obtained solely by divine intervention that melted down the figurines, and if humans did not know where to find the figurines, Artemis knew. The destruction of the magical objects alone, here even only symbolic and imaginary, sufficed to free the town of the consequences of this magic attack.

There are particularly two situations in which the ancients suspected magic and, more precisely, ritual binding: disease or sudden death that was medically inexplicable; and unexpected and inexplicable professional failure. We might hesitate to classify the madness of the girl of Gaza rather as a disease or a professional failure. What matters is that not every case of professional failure or disease finds such an explanation, but only those that escape the reasoning of the medical or professional technician. The plague under Lucius Verus belonged to this category; in other oracles, the plague is explained by the wrath of the gods or of the infernal heroes, which enters into the same explanatory scheme. The ailments of Libanius, arthritis and headaches, are also of those diseases against which amulets could provide protection, such as epilepsy or the fever.¹⁴⁹ As in the era of Hippocrates, magic always served to explain what escaped medical diagnosis; even the skeptical Pliny knows of ailments for which a magical cure might be advisable.¹⁵⁰

Professional failure is even more revealing of what the accusation of magical binding implies in the ancient societies. The lawyer who forgets his speech for the defense, the teacher of rhetoric who no longer wants to speak, the chaste *virgo Dei* who runs about the streets, her hair flying in the wind and shouting the name of a young man: all are behaving in an unexpected

way contrary to what the society expects of them. Such behavior, which would be completely remiss if it were under their control, might jeopardize their privileged social position. Therefore, explanations attributing odd behavior to a binding spell implied that other people, sorcerers and demons, were responsible, and an exorcism could reestablish the former social position. It must be stressed that society accepted this strategy. It is not an individual subterfuge meant to protect oneself from the consequences of a reprehensible act (even in the case of Jerome's virgin, in which the saint seems to have had some doubts: Hilarion had a long talk with her and pointed out that one never should give a hold to demons. . . .); but rather, it is a legitimate way offered by society, not the least to its prominent members, to resolve a limited crisis that, ultimately, could have endangered its cohesion, even if, in the case of Curio, Cicero was certainly not the only one to smile. It is also an efficient strategy to explain maladies that defied scientific medicine, without jeopardizing the status of scientific medicine as such. That does not mean that the strategy was not vulnerable to personal misuse. Curio, after all, came rather close to it.

We do not know whether Curio really went to the trouble of searching for the magical object; it seems doubtful that he did. At any rate, the scarce information we have about how to undo ritual binding makes one thing clear: the most important step was to find the magical object. This fact clearly appears in the stories about Theodorus, Theophilus, and the *virgo* from Gaza, as well as in the experience of Libanius and in the papyri; in each case the spell loses all its power as soon as the lead tablet and the other ritual objects are found. That is why they must be hidden as much as possible, even thrown into the sea; at least one lead tablet was found in the sands of the Mediterranean. On the other hand, it could be important to undo the binding again; therefore, one papyrus advises marking the spot where a

curse tablet was buried. There is even the advice to hang the magical ring or tablet on a cord into the sea or river in order to recover it again for undoing.¹⁵¹ Perhaps it was enough to find the magic objects, but more probably it was also necessary to destroy them: that is what Theodorus did. In the Ephesian oracle, the destruction of the figurines is paramount.

On the other hand, there were cases (like that in the Ephesus oracle) when it was unnecessary to find an object; at least the account about "godly" Plotinus concentrates on the battle of the minds. Plotinus wards off the magical attacks of an enemy (typically enough, an Egyptian philosopher), relying solely on his powerful soul. The philosopher Maximus, Julian's teacher, saved his pupil Sosipatra (one of the few female philosophers of later antiquity) in a similar way, having heard that she was plagued by erotic magic.¹⁵² In the spiritualized world of theurgy, the countermeasures against harmful magic take philosophical and spiritual forms; there was no necessity to rely upon the material world. The story that Saint Hilarion talked to the demon and made him leave the virgin of Gaza long before the magical objects had been found, expresses a similar concern, this time in the service of powerful Christian spiritualization.¹⁵³

If in the imperial era, it was apparently enough to find the curse tablets or the other magical objects and to destroy them, things are less clear in earlier times. Countermeasures seem to have been more complicated: the ritual binding asked for a ritual unbinding. This could be difficult; a spell from Republican Rome even asserts, "Nobody shall undo me if not he, who did this."¹⁵⁴ Despite this assertion, there existed specialists for these counter-rituals. The comical poet Magnes, a contemporary of Aristophanes, combines interpreters of dreams and "untiers," and a late lexicon on the Attic classics explains that "to cleanse ritually" means "to untie a man under a spell."¹⁵⁵ Such rites were cathartic

and brought healing, as did the dreams; witness the popular healing sanctuaries of Asclepius or Amphiaraus.

The most spectacular evidence from the classical epoch, however, remains more than doubtful. The tomb of the Kerameikos, which contained not only a binding spell but also a figurine in its container of lead, surprised its excavator.¹⁵⁶ When the flagstones were opened that had remained intact since the classical era, an unusual fact was discovered. The content of the grave was so much in disarray that the excavator thought that the body of the deceased had been cut into pieces, and that the container, the cover bearing the inscription, and the figurine had been intentionally separated from each other. This he took to be a countermeasure against a binding ritual introduced immediately after the burial and detected shortly after this. Such a proceeding, however, appears highly improbable in the light of the evidence investigated so far; and the final publication of the grave refrains from such an interpretation, and rightly so—although it would have been a most spectacular case.

AN EASTERN PREHISTORY

Magic, the Greeks and Romans tell us, comes from the East, from the Persians and especially from the Egyptians. We have seen that this assertion must not be considered an objective and true historical account, but a definition of the place occupied by magic in the thinking and society of the Greeks and the Romans. It is not enough, however, to brush aside the question of the relations between Greek magic and Eastern magic.¹⁵⁷ After all, the *mágos* appears for the first time in Greek with a subject of the Persian kings, Heraclitus; and in the domain of ritual binding notably, a certain number of Eastern practices make it possible

to establish extremely suggestive parallels with Greco-Roman magic.¹⁵⁸

These parallels, however, point neither to Persia nor to Egypt, but to Mesopotamia, which has had a long tradition of magic. Although the texts attesting to it come mostly from the royal library of Assurbanipal in Nineveh, we glimpse a scholarly transmission that continued over the centuries and that survived at least up to the era of the Seleucid kings, if not until later epochs.¹⁵⁹ The history of this tradition is still widely unknown; however, the indications that we have point to a consistent picture. In the walls of the chamber of the palace in Antiochia where Germanicus was the alleged victim of binding magic, magic paraphernalia were found; and the chameleon was found, after a long search, in Libanius' lecture room, presumably thus on the floor or in the walls. Now the Assyrian texts, in their accusations of witchcraft, describe the depositing of magical objects in the walls.¹⁶⁰ A Greco-Egyptian recipe on papyrus gives directions to perform a rite "on the banks of the river, where no man's foot has trod"; we find the same instruction, almost literally, in an Assyrian rite that is also otherwise rather close to it in detail.¹⁶¹ Even more significantly, the name of Ereskhigal, the queen of the Sumerian hell, disappeared from documents for almost two thousand years only to reappear in the magic papyrus books and on the curse tablets.¹⁶² The same tradition stands behind the Ephesian oracle that advised the melting down of the wax figurines that had caused the plague. To burn or melt figurines is a current practice in Mesopotamian cathartic and exorcistic rituals, thus giving its name to the main ritual books on the topic.¹⁶³

What strikes the observer in these two magic cultures are the affinities between the texts (and the rites) of the Assyrians and those of the Greeks, notably in the world of ritual binding. Certainly, many of these resemblances are not specific. It is

rather common in many cultures to make figurines of the victim,¹⁶⁴ to determine its identity with the help of what the Greeks call "magical essence," for example, hair or pieces of fabric from a garment belonging to the victim,¹⁶⁵ and finally, to tie the victim's figurine up in fetters.¹⁶⁶ The custom of depositing these figurines in graves is much less frequent; as for their deposition in the grave of close relatives, it is mentioned only in the Assyrian Maqlû and in Plato.¹⁶⁷ It is also very rare that the victim's name must be inscribed on the left thigh, which is stipulated in the Assyrian texts and is found on a figurine from Attica and two figurines from Etruria.¹⁶⁸ To deposit a figurine under the doorstep is a way of making certain that the victim will, sooner or later, get into contact with it; this procedure appears in the Maqlû, in Plato, and, much later, in the Christian fictions.¹⁶⁹

The list of functions allotted to these rituals is nearly as close.¹⁷⁰ If we set aside the more important role devolving upon the magic rites in the protection against malicious demons in Assyria and the absence of agonistic spells in societies that did not have sports, the list is still the same: assistance in erotic affairs, either to make a conquest of the person loved or to get him or her back; assistance in commercial activities; and, finally, in the Babylonian and Assyrian society, in which hierarchy is much more important than in Greece, assistance for calming the anger of a superior, which returns, much later, in the magical papyri of imperial Egypt.¹⁷¹

These resemblances are too obvious to be only the result of convergences. Now, the Babylonian and Assyrian magic is the business of well-trained specialists, possessors of considerable knowledge, who therefore enjoy a rather high social position; these specialists converse with kings, even Seleucid kings.¹⁷² They also can travel. Walter Burkert has stressed the important role that these itinerant specialists had in the orientalizing epoch

of early Archaic Greece. Yet the most similar practices that concern us here date from the fifth and fourth centuries, and for the same era Plato attests, for Greece, the existence of itinerant specialists in magic and ritual.¹⁷³ We recall that we have traced the history of these specialists since the era of Heraclitus, an era in which the Mesopotamian world, through the Persian empire, reached the borders of Greece. Nothing would be simpler than to imagine contacts through these itinerant magi, traveling on the excellent roads of the Persian empire to Ionia and Attica.

There is a fundamental difference, however. In the Mesopotamian world, we can make out two types of magic texts, the exorcisms built on the accusation of magic, and active magic, two types of magic that are strictly separate. Exorcism, represented by some great books like the *Maqlû* and the *Shurpu*, serves to heal or to protect oneself.¹⁷⁴ The rite will lead to the healing of illness, but will also repair the social failures and lack of success caused by the intervention of a demon, triggered by a sorcerer or witch. Also, the rite constitutes a precaution for guarding against attacks foreseen by divination. In the thinking of the neo-Assyrian texts, the sorcerer's intervention destroys the protection of the gods who usually defend humans against the demons' evil influences. The purpose of exorcism was thus to restore this protection and this divine benevolence. Active magic, moreover, attested to by many so far uncollected texts, concerns practices for providing assistance in various personal problems, such as love, commerce, and social status.¹⁷⁵ All this is what can be called positive magic; whereas negative, harmful magic is punished with death, all these practices, according to the Assyrian laws, are perfectly legitimate.¹⁷⁶ Injurious magic, on the other hand, is not attested to in the archaeological material from Mesopotamia; there are neither voodoo dolls nor lead tablets from the Near Eastern Bronze age, in marked contrast to

the Greco-Roman world. We know of these rituals only through the accusations contained in the exorcisms; and these accusations depict an entirely fantastic and surrealist image of the sorcerers and their rites. There is an obvious conclusion, that these rites existed only in the imagination of the exorcists—a situation that closely corresponds to what Evans-Pritchard found among the Azande. Harmful magic, the binding magic performed with the help of figurines, did not exist in the Assyrian society.

The Assyro-Babylonian world thus knew of the binding spell only in the theory of the accusation, whereas the Greeks practiced it. This surprising difference is explained by the very mechanisms of transmission. In the Babylonian society, these rites were indeed conceived of, but, out of a fear of sanctions, they were not carried out. The absence of their practice did not prevent people from believing in their effectiveness, however. When these rites were transplanted to a different society, which was unacquainted with such sanctions (and Plato explicitly attests to this for Athens), there was a great temptation to make these rites a reality, and nothing stood in the way. Quite the contrary: the competitive and unhierarchical society of the Greeks incited the use of this means of self-affirmation.

One question, however, remains open: that of chronology. While in Attica, the attestations begin in the course of the fifth century, there are texts from Sicily and Magna Graecia that already date to the later sixth century.¹⁷⁷ There are two possible explanations. Either the practice started in Attica, but then the Athenians wrote their early spells exclusively on perishable matter, such as wood, papyrus, and wax, and only later started using lead; it is a perfectly reasonable option. Or the rite came from Sicily and Magna Graecia into mainland Greece; this origin would tie in with many details of afterlife and eschatology

developed in Western Pythagoreanism and brought later to Athens.¹⁷⁸ For the moment, there is no convincing answer. But it has become increasingly clear from archaeology that, in Greece, the practice of ritual binding had begun well before the fourth century (a date favored by an earlier generation of scholars) and that it did not originate from a breakdown of Greek enlightenment.¹⁷⁹

LITERARY REPRESENTATION OF MAGIC

THE LITERARY and epigraphical documentation for ancient magic and its rituals sets in towards the end of the sixth century B.C. The lead tablets begin to be numerous in the later part of the fifth and the first half of the following century; this first peak is caused mainly by the Athenians and their passion for writing. Curse tablets become much rarer in the Hellenistic era to peak a second time in the imperial epoch; here, they are omnipresent, from Arabia to Britannia. The Egyptian finds belong to the same epoch, both the large papyrus books and the single spells on small sheets of papyrus, whose number is still rapidly growing. On the other hand, in the Hellenistic epoch and the beginning of the empire, there exist some literary texts that describe magical practices in colorful detail. It is tempting to use them in order to fill the gap in the epigraphical documentation, and too many scholars have uncritically yielded to this temptation.¹

But this procedure is dangerous. Works of literature have their own laws, and it is always risky to disregard laws—although in this case, the literary critics long con-

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