

DYNAMICS OF RITUAL EXPERTISE IN ANTIQUITY AND BEYOND: TOWARDS A NEW TAXONOMY OF “MAGICIANS”

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In the last several decades scholarship on popular ritual has made great strides in comprehending the social construction of terms like “magic,” “witchcraft,” and “sorcery.” In historical, classical, biblical, and religious studies there has been a distinct shift from attempts to label descriptively “magical” forms of ritual behavior to discussions of how such slippery terms were applied at various times and by various institutions. The benefits of this approach are obvious: on the one hand, an earnest attempt to dislodge the weighty legacy of James Frazer’s “magical worldview”; on the other hand, the acknowledgment that people in their own cultural systems use such descriptive labels for political, sectarian, or simply taxonomic reasons, even with little reality behind the labels. Practically any practice, that is, might be labelled “magical” or “sorcery” under certain conditions.¹

However, throughout this social-construction-of-religious-categories approach, there has been little advance in the understanding and classification of the historical figures who really *practiced* out there beyond this labelling, regardless of the pressures and dangers such labelling brought with it. Scholars have consistently reached back to an ideal “magician” type such as Weber, Van der Leeuw, or indeed Walt Disney might concoct. And yet this ideal type has been largely shattered by voluminous ethnographic and historical evidence for the location and shape of ritual expertise in local cultures. The Greek Magical Papyri, for example, are now more accurately located among innovative members of the Egyptian priesthood during the third-/fourth-century decline of the Egyptian temple infrastructure than among some putative class of *magoi*, for which we have no docu-

¹ See esp. Charles Robert Phillips, “The Sociology of Religious Knowledge in the Roman Empire to A.D. 284,” *ANRW* II.16.3 (1986):2711-32, and Alan F. Segal, “Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition,” *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity*, *Brown Judaic Studies* 127 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 79-108.

mentary evidence.² But in my own efforts to dispense with the “magician” as an historical type and to construct a more precise model of ritual expertise for Roman Egypt I have depended on cross-cultural comparisons and, indeed, specific patterns of ritual expertise that I found in several modern cultures. Descriptive categories and ideal types are not bad in themselves, then, for they allow the historian of religions to study the relationships between various characteristics or facts that cluster together in apparent patterns: “magic” and social marginality, perhaps, or literacy and spell-composition, or urban environments and charismatic competition, or (to draw from another context) masculinized gods and mountains. Are these characteristics related intrinsically or historically—transiently? One discovers the nature of these patterns through comparison of specific cases in their historical and social context; one constructs descriptive categories to denote those patterns (“magician,” “priest,” “prophet”); but then those categories themselves must be “rectified”—that is, modified according to the nuances we discover through further comparison and testing.³ This is what I propose to do here with the phenomenon I will generally label “ritual expertise,” using examples somewhat arbitrarily from Africa and the African diaspora, medieval and early modern Europe, and, for the sake of this volume’s focus (and my own expertise), the ancient Mediterranean world. (The few examples from beyond these cultural parameters should be taken to suggest that the models proposed are universally applicable).

By “ritual expertise” I mean, at the very least and in the most general sense, the making of amulets and remedies, the performance of small-scale rituals for explicit ends (like healing), and the oral or manual synthesis of local materials and “official” symbols to render sacred power. Certainly everyone in every culture knows some of this lore—or at least has the ability to construct ritual and amulet out of available materials. But some individuals gain this knowledge as members of families that maintain sizeable ritual traditions, handed down along male or female lines.⁴ And some individuals, whether by virtue of this inheritance, their skill at ritual synthesis, their professed

² David Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category ‘Magician’,” *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. by Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 115-35; and *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), chap. 5.

³ See esp. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner’s, 1971), 240-41; Christina Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 143.

intimacy with divine beings, or some other attribute, function as community experts in the ritual negotiation of life and its vicissitudes. That is, one seeks out their blessings, their cures, their talents. It is a type of *charisma*, in the sense of a supernatural prestige with which someone is endowed in the eyes of others: a *social status*.⁵

The variety of concerns that ritual experts address extends from healing and protection to the finding of lost things and the retention of husbands and lovers. Indeed, local cultures invariably have a diversity of ritual experts in various forms of healing and divination; and much as some cultures “map” their regional saint-shrines according to specialty, so also do people perceive and map the diversity of ritual experts according to such features as their specialties, their talents, their means of power, their relative proximity or marginality, their adherence to an official religion or tradition, and their relative novelty.⁶

While acknowledging this *diversity* of ritual expertise, this paper avoids the multiplication of ever more sub-types of ritual experts—diviner, clairvoyant, healer, shaman—since *more* ideal types do not fit historical and cross-cultural actualities any better than the few old ones.⁷ To proceed in the historical and ethnographic understanding of ritual expertise we need not a reformulation of static patterns but rather the framing of a limited series of patterns or clusters of characteristics of ritual experts, a series that admits overlap and aids (rather than resists) historical nuance.

I Community Ritual Experts: Local and Peripheral

The first realm of ritual expertise I want to address consists of that extensive domain of healers, diviners, wise women, and holy people found in virtually every society: conjure-doctors, *houngans* and *mambos*,

⁵ See, e.g., Barbara Kerewsky Halpern and John Miles Foley, “The Power of the Word: Healing Charms as an Oral Genre,” *Journal of American Folklore* 91 (1978): 903-9; Hans Sebald, “Shaman, Healer, Witch: Comparing Shamanism with Franconian Folk Magic,” *Ethnologia Europaea* 14, 2 (1984): 125-42, esp. 128.

⁶ On the mapping of saint shrines: William A. Christian, Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), and Anne H. Betteridge, “Specialists in Miraculous Action: Some Shrines in Shiraz,” *Sacred Journeys: the Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. by Alan Morinis (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1992), 189-209. On the “mapping” of ritual experts, see Willem de Blécourt, “Witch Doctors, Soothsayers, and Priests: On Cunning Folk in European Historiography and Tradition,” *Social History* 19 (1994): 302-3.

⁷ Compare Joachim Wach’s series of nine discrete “Types of Religious Authority,” *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 331-73, a multiplication of Max Weber’s series of ideal types: *Sociology of Religion*, tr. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Boston Press, 1963) chaps. 2, 4.

curanderos, *ngangas*, *eleguns*, *babalawos*, *shuwafas*.⁸ What seems fundamentally to govern the shape of these figures' power and of their amulets and spells is their location vis-à-vis particular communities: *local*—that is, in the immediate neighborhood—or *peripheral*—that is, set off from a community or communities. The implications of relative location of ritual experts echoes roughly those that Victor Turner observed for pilgrimage shrines.⁹ The local wise woman or *curandero* works as a familiar member of the community, who inherited his or her powers from previous familiar members, whose domains of expertise and ritual expand, contract, and change with changes in the immediate community.¹⁰ *Connaissance* is the Voudou word for that special ability in some local ritual experts to *know* clients' problems and the direction their ritual resolution should take; and it is a *social* knowledge, inextricable from the public, performative circumstances in which the ritual expert works.¹¹ Local ritual expertise, then, utilizes and reflects com-

⁸ Useful studies of this area of ritual expertise include: Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 177-92, 200-204, 206-8, 212-22, 227-52; Carl-Martin Edsman, "A Swedish Female Folk Healer from the Beginning of the 18th Century," *Studies in Shamanism*, ed. by Carl-Martin Edsman (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1962), 120-65; Kathryn C. Smith, "The Wise Man and His Community," *Folk Life* 15 (1977):25-35; and Anna-Leena Siikala, "Singing of Incantations in Nordic Tradition," *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names*, ed. by Tore Ahlbäck (Åbo: Donner Institute, 1990), 191-205. On antiquity, see Richard Gordon, "Lucan's Erictho," *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, ed. by M. Whitby and P. Hardie (Bristol: , 1987), 235-36. Recent studies of local and regional ritual expertise in early modern and modern Mesoamerica include Ruth Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil in Late-Colonial Mexico," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987):34-54; Noemí Quezada, "The Inquisition's Repression of *Curanderos*," and Maria Helena Sánchez Ortega, "Sorcery and Eroticism in Love Magic," both in *Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*, ed. by Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 37-57, 58-92 (respectively); and Amos Megged, "Magic, Popular Medicine, and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Mexico: The Case of Isabel de Montoya," *Social History* 19 (1994):189-207.

⁹ Victor Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* 12 (1973):191- 230, esp. 206-7, 211-13, and "Pilgrimages as Social Processes," *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 166-230.

¹⁰ Cf. Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of the Yucatan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 233-36.

¹¹ On *connaissance*, see Harold Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 11, and Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 349, 356. Compare Peter Fry on a Zezura (Zimbabwe) spirit medium's talents, which were "based to a large extent on his empirical awareness of the regularities of Zezura social structure. Due to the great number of divinations which he had carried out he was aware of the structural tensions in Zezuru society and on the basis of this knowledge he was able to predict tensions in particular situations which appeared to his clients as miraculous insight." (*Spirits of Protest: Spirit-*

munity tradition and those immediate, family-based traditions that make up the local cosmos.

On the other extreme, the peripheral, we find people beyond the reach of simple consultation—to whom, rather, one must *travel* or who themselves travel from place to place. Whether itinerant or established on the periphery of settlement, such a ritual expert may be credited with powers that surpass those available in the local milieu. He may attract clients and supplicants over a much broader territory, much as do regional temples or shrines. And yet, this ritual expert may not serve to bind disparate communities—e.g., as do peripheral pilgrimage centers that are attended and honored by numerous regional villages. Indeed, the peripheral ritual expert may be the object of some suspicion, bearing as he does that symbolic outsidersness often taken as danger.¹² Thus his amulets and ritual cures may be seen as somewhat more exotic, but the stories that circulate around him may envision him as sorcerer as well as healer. The appeal of such peripheral ritual experts is well-illustrated in Africa, where regional healing cults can attract people for hundreds of miles around.¹³ The potential danger of such experts in the eyes of local people, on the other hand, is reflected in much African-American folklore, in which itinerant or regional conjurers are credited with darker forms of ritual and described as in tension with local healers. Zora Neale Hurston recorded the story of a rivalry between a rural African-American community ritual expert, “Aunt Judy,” and a more mysterious and powerful expert on the social and geographic periphery, “Uncle Monday.”

Year after year this feeling kept up. Every now and then some little incident would accentuate the rivalry. Monday was sitting on top of the heap, but Judy was not without her triumphs.

Finally she began to say that she could reverse anything that he could put down. She said she could not only reverse it, she could throw it back on him, let alone his client. Nobody talked to him about her boasts.

Mediums and the Articulation of Consensus among the Zezuru of Southern Rhodesia [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 68-69, quoted in Thomas W. Overholt, *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, SBL Sources for Biblical Study 17 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986], 243).

¹² On the danger of the marginal person see Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, tr. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 26-40, and Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: RKP, 1966), 94-113.

¹³ See, e.g., Alison Redmayne, “Chikanga: An African Diviner with an International Reputation,” *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* ASA Monographs 9, ed. by Mary Douglas (London: Tavistock, 1970), 103-28

People never talked to him except on business anyway. Perhaps Judy felt safe in boasting for this reason.¹⁴

A business rivalry thus progressed into a ritual rivalry; and finally (the legend concludes), Uncle Monday defeated Aunt Judy in a frightening display of power. For local people, the result was an extensive body of legends describing Uncle Monday's mysteries and dangers. Indeed, such a folklore of the peripheral expert's danger is common to communities working out the relationships and differences among ritual experts.¹⁵

It must be remembered that this danger is a matter of perception, not of the rituals they actually perform. Some peripheral ritual experts might capitalize on these perceptions and stage exotic or hostile rites for some clients. But there is little evidence for people working this way—"from the left hand"—*by profession*. Rumors and accusations to this effect seem to arise under particular social circumstances—panics or rivalry, for example—and tend to polarize the marginally-based ritual experts as entirely evil "sorcerers."

Conversely, there are innumerable examples of *cooperation and exchange* between peripheral and local ritual experts, as when local healers claim the authority of or recommend visits to regional shrines, or when more "familiar" experts refer ambiguous matters to peripheral specialists (like exorcists), or when local and regional experts combine forces to negotiate a community problem (e.g., in cases of witch-cleansing, as discussed below). Both local and peripheral experts can gain prestige from such cooperation: the peripheral expert by the deference shown her from the "center," the local expert by signifying his participation in a wider network of ritual expertise and shrines.¹⁶

¹⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* (Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1981), 38.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*, 31-40, and Elizabeth McAlister's discussion of the Haitian *bòkò*: "A Sorcerer's Bottle: The Visual Art of Magic in Haiti," *Sacred Arts of Haitian Voodoo*, ed. by Donald J. Cosentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995), 305, 316. In the testimony of Gregorio, a Navajo "hand-trembler," a neighbor preferred his services to those of itinerant healers from "over the mountain," since his talents were familiar and proven (Alexander H. and Dorothea C. Leighton, *Gregorio, the Hand-Trembler: A Psychobiological Personality Study of a Navaho Indian*, Peabody Museum Papers 40,1 [Cambridge: Peabody Museum, 1949], 55-56, quoted in Overholt, *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 91.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Kingsley Garbett, "Disparate Regional Cults and a Unitary Ritual Field in Zimbabwe," *Regional Cults*, ed. by R.P. Werbner (London: Academic Press, 1977), 55-92, esp. 88-91; and Michel S. Laguerre, *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 95-96, on local *houngan*'s referral of clients and initiates to the regional voodoo shrine of Saut d'Eau (Haiti).

The location of the ritual expert has much bearing on religions of the late antique Mediterranean world. Hagiographical texts refer to the competition between holy men or saints' shrines and local ritual experts; but in so doing they often reflect the intimacy between the experts and their communities, much like Aunt Judy in her secure position of boasting. Gregory of Tours describes "the custom of the rustics [in sixth-century Gaul to] obtain bandages and potions from sortilegi and harioli"; however, Gregory avers, "a little dust of the basilica [of St. Martin] has more power than those men with their witless remedies."¹⁷ It is in a ritual domain of vital concern and tradition—healing—that the St. Martin shrine seeks to compete. So also in sixth-century Asia Minor, a village headman cannot wait for St. Theodore of Sykeon to heal his brother through blessings, so he runs "to a woman who used enchantments" for an amulet.¹⁸ The same Vita of St. Theodore describes a man who "dwelt in the same village as the saint and was a skilled sorcerer, versed in wickedness." It was this person who provided the major ritual services—amulets, healing, protection—in the village of Sykeon, thus posing (like Aunt Judy in the story above) immense competition to St. Theodore, a thaumaturge operating from the periphery.¹⁹ In general, then, one perceives around the Mediterranean a culture of discrete religious worlds, based in village societies. And the ritual experts who aided these worlds were essential parts of those societies. It is no wonder that the attempt to install a Christian cult laying claim to an area much more expansive than just the village environment required such violent competition at the village level.²⁰

Peripheral ritual experts existed as well in antiquity, but the peculiar Roman ambivalence towards marginal or exotic religious practices has left us with little more than the words *goēs* or *magos*, plastered across a diversity of ritual experts in a vain attempt to classify them or

¹⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Miracles of St. Martin*, 26-27, tr. William C. McDermott, *Monks, Bishops, and Pagans: Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy, 500-700*, ed. by Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 169. See the analysis by Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 59-84.

¹⁸ Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon, §143, tr. by Elisabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1977), 181.

¹⁹ Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon, §§37-38, tr. Dawes/Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 113-15.

²⁰ See Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 100-400* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984), and *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997); and Flint, *Rise of Magic*.

to highlight the genuine against a marketplace of frauds.²¹ The most obvious examples of real ritual experts of the peripheral type from the Roman world must be Alexander of Abonoteichos, who established a healing cult of Asclepius in northern Asia Minor in the late second century C.E., and the holy man Apollonius of Tyana. We note also that, according to our sources, Alexander and Apollonius each earned their thaumaturgical reputations in *affiliation* with some well-recognized tradition of the time: the gods Asclepius and Apollo for Alexander, Pythagoreanism for Apollonius.²²

These affiliations do not mean that Alexander and Apollonius were simply “priests” of certain gods or traditions. “Priest” is an unhelpful category if it groups together figures serving within an extensive cultic institution with figures who, by family tradition, initiation, or call, maintain or develop idiosyncratically a small local or regional shrine. Alexander and Apollonius’s “affiliations” highlight one of the crucial skills in ritual experts both local and peripheral, skills particularly well-represented among the independent shrine-professionals of West Africa and Haiti: their ability to synthesize. Whether in the form of an amulet, the staging of an altar, the weaving of prayers and spells, or the codification of gesture, ritual experts the world over bring together the old and the new, the traditional and the exotic, the hand-made and the imported, and—if literate—the authority of writing with the concrete efficacy of the written letter. It may be, indeed, by virtue of his technological expertise that a local individual might be viewed as capable in ritual preparations: for example, local scribes and intellectuals who wrote out amulets for people who asked.²³

²¹ On the use of “magos” for itinerant or otherwise exotic ritual experts see Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt,” 131–35; Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, tr. by Franklin Philip (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), chap. 1; and for eighth- and seventh-century (BCE) Greece, Walter Burkert, “Itinerant Diviners and Magicians: A Neglected Element in Cultural Contacts,” *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation*, ed. by Robin Hägg (Stockholm: Swedish Institute in Athens, 1983), 115–20. Cf. Morton Smith’s classic review of terms for late antique ritual experts in *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 81–93.

²² Lucian, *Alexander* (overt links with Asclepius: §§19, 13, 43; with Apollo: §§36, 43), on whose historical interpretation see C. P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1986), ch. 12. Philostratus, *V. Apollonius*.

²³ On the idiosyncratic nature of such shrines see Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1993), along with sources on Voudou in n.11 (above), and Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 116–19. On the overlap of ritual expertise and local *literati* see M. Bloch,

The ritual expert, then, is a *bricoleur*. She must be adroit enough in shrine construction, amulet manufacture, and spell composition that clients will perceive not only her grandmother's gifts but also her own remarkable attention to a changing environment. Far from the independent, churchless magician imagined by the Durkheim school, ritual experts often define religious activity in their vicinities, integrating society, supernatural cosmos, landscape, and an immense body of tradition through their séances. In the case of Alexander of Abonoteichos we see an individual who incorporated quite well-known religious idioms in defining his powers—oracles, images, speech-forms, Asclepian allusions—much as contemporary *curanderos*, *santeros*, *mambos*, and *houngans* incorporate Catholic mythology. It is, indeed, in the ritual experts' activities that we can best see the deliberate interaction of what Robert Redfield called the *Little Tradition* and the *Great Tradition*.²⁴

II *Quasi-Institutional Literati: Local and Peripheral*

To make use of Redfield's ideal dichotomy it is important to recognize (as Redfield himself stressed) that neither "tradition" exists by itself, especially in the complicated cultural mixtures that come with Christianization and Islamization. However, it is interesting and important to consider how *representatives of religious institutions are viewed* in the perspective of local communities. They bear with them, either in skill or general "aura," the *authority* of an idealized Great Tradition, supernaturally powerful through its global scope. Here, then, is the second area of ritual expertise to be addressed: those who "stand for" Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or some more inchoate, if recognizable and authoritative, religious ideology—and who serve ritually the needs of local society. It is writing culture itself, Ernest Gellner has observed, that "engender[s] this" class of literate specialists, in alliance

"Astrology and Writing in Madagascar," *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. by Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1968), 278-96, esp. 281-83; Gordon, "Lucan's Erichtho," 236-37; David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 211-13, 257-58. On ritual texts and amulets reflecting the work of local *literati*, see Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "P.Cair.Masp. II 67188 Verso 1-5: the *Gnostica* of Dioscorus of Aphroditto," *Tyche* 2 (1987):95- 97 (6th century Egypt); Roy Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets I*, P.Col. 22,1 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994), #58 (4th century Jordan); and, for early modern England, Smith, "Wise Man and His Community," 27.

²⁴ Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1956), chap. 3, and Eric R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 100-106.

or more often in competition with freelance illiterate thaumaturges”²⁵—that is, such community ritual experts as were described above. But just like the latter, there are observable differences in technique and “performance” between (a) those literate specialists who are *based* locally—local priests, clerics, scribes, rabbis, monks—and thereby become part of local culture; (b) those who are *itinerant*; and (c) those who offer personalized ritual services at peripheral saint-shrines or temples.

The local ecclesiastic, who weaves the cadences and mythology of orthodox liturgy and cosmology with the exigencies and spirits of the local cosmos, has been well-documented in Byzantine and medieval Christian cultures. Karen Jolly’s analysis of Anglo-Saxon elf-charms points over and over to the synthetic capabilities of local priests, while the extensive corpus of Coptic amulets and grimoires reflects local Christian priests and monks in Egypt.²⁶ In ancient Egypt too, so temple documents testify, it was the temple-priests who applied “official” mythology and ritual technique to the realities of healing, childbirth, and protection.²⁷ Ancient Mesopotamia held two categories of literate healing experts, roughly comparable to a healer and a pharmacist, whose cumulatively broad range of ritual activities are reflected in the manuals they used.²⁸ And so also Buddhist monks in Thailand, rabbis of all periods and places, and Muslim clerics in various African communities—all these figures *mediate* the sacred texts, teachings, supernatural world, and authority of their Great Tradition into the local world. They write amulets and utter blessings that combine the offi-

²⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 8.

²⁶ Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), esp. 259-62; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 257-64, 270-72; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 29-36, 202; Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 185-93; and now Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 12-13.

²⁷ Serge Sauneron, “Le monde du magicien égyptien,” *Le monde du sorcier*, Sources orientales 7 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 27-65; Robert Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, SAOC 54 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1993), 204-5, 220-33; Yvan Koenig, *Magie et magiciens dans l’Égypte ancienne* (Paris: Pygmalion, 1994), 19-38; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 210-14. Herman Te Velde nuances the popular ritual expertise of the lector priest further: “Theology, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Egypt,” *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* 3, ed. by J. Sasson et al. (New York: Scribner’s, 1995), 1747.

²⁸ JoAnn Scurlock, “Physician, Exorcist, Conjuror, Magician: A Tale of Two Healing Professionals,” in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretive Perspectives*, ed. by Tzvi Abusch and K. van den Toorn (Groningen: Styx, 1999), 69-79.

cial and local idioms. Their gestures transfer their “charisma of office” into the local arena, its needs and beliefs.²⁹ In many cultures the “Great Tradition”—the sense of a Christianity or Buddhism or Islam—has been only comprehensible through the synthetic acts, spells, and amulets of such literate ritual experts.

Among these quasi-institutional *literati*, the principal dynamics of their charisma as ritual specialists lie in two crucial features. First, their *literacy*, particularly in the texts and scripts of the Great Tradition, endows them with a unique prestige in the community, for they can transform the rational or “informative” sense of sacred texts into a “performative” sense, producing the numinous, empowered letter, amulet, or edible verse out of the official words, prayers, and pages of scripture. Craftsmen of the written word, they can turn mere letters into gods, shapes, images, and all manner of “performative” or illocutionary arrangements.³⁰ Secondly—and related to their control over sacred texts—their charisma lies in their *official or quasi-official status* as designated representatives—authorized extensions—of the Great Tradition. In a sense, this official status sets him apart from the rest of his social environment. How are these *literati*, like the commu-

²⁹ Buddhist monks: Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, “Literacy in a Buddhist Village in North-East Thailand,” *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, 107-12, 123-24, 128-30, and *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Part 3. Low-caste Vedic teachers in India: Kathleen Gough, “Literacy in Kērala,” *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, 149-50. Local Muslim clerics: Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, “Drinking the Koran: The Meaning of Koranic Verses in Berti erasure,” *‘Popular Islam’ South of the Sahara (Africa 55, 4)*, ed. by J. D. Y. Peel and C. C. Stewart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 414-31; Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 286-87, 298; David Sperling, “The Frontiers of Prophecy: Healing, the Cosmos, and Islam on the East African Coast in the Nineteenth Century,” *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History*, ed. by David M. Anderson and Douglas H. Johnson (London: Currey, 1995), 90-92; and Winifred Blackman, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt* (London: Harrap, 1927 repr. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), chaps. 11-12, 14-15 (including Coptic clerics). Rabbis: William Scott Green, “Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition,” *ANRW* 2.19.2 (1979), 619-47, with surveys of later—Hekhalot, Kabbalistic, Hasidic—ritual expertise by Michael Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), and Moshe Idel, “On Judaism, Jewish Mysticism, and Magic,” *Envisioning Magic*, 195-214, although both these authors ascribe “magical” practices to a “secondary”—extra-rabbinic—elite.

³⁰ On the categories “performative” and “informative” as variant modes of textual meaning, see Sam D. Gill, “Non-Literate Traditions and Holy Books,” *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective*, ed. by Frederick M. Denny and Rodney L. Taylor (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 234-39; cf. Osman El-Tom, “Drinking the Koran”. On formulations of the numinous letter in antiquity see David Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions,” *Helios* 21,2 (1994): 189-221.

nity ritual experts above, perceived differently according to their locations—within communities or on the periphery? The Coptic “magical” corpora, for example, reflect people journeying *from* their homes to monasteries or saints’ shrines, to get amulets, oracles, or healing from monks and scribes. Moroccan Muslim pilgrims to the mountain shrines of saints (*walis*) find there official guardians (*muqaddams*) who can interpret dreams, advise, and provide amulets and prayers in the name of the saint.³¹ Ethiopian villagers receive the *itinerant* services of the *debtera*, a minor cleric responsible for both official liturgical duties and exorcistic healing, with multiple roles in between.³²

In the case of the Coptic monastery and the shrine of the Muslim saint in North Africa, the ritual expert seems to become a relatively impersonal representative of what Turner called “the Center Out There”—that is, the pilgrimage goal, the culminative sacred place.³³ The shrine expert is simply the person who provides pilgrims with the mantic advice and concrete blessings they seek. In the case of the Ethiopian *debtera*, however, his itinerant lifestyle and his specialty in exorcism and the manipulation of demons have created suspicion and even stigma in the eyes of villagers.³⁴ Thus, as the monk or shrine functionary provides ritual services in an air of anonymity and established sanctuary, the itinerant cleric plies his ritual crafts on the cusp of Great Tradition, local tradition, and personal innovation—and as a bearer of that alternately dangerous and alluring “charisma of otherness” some anthropologists have described.³⁵

III *Prophets*

As we scan the field of ritual experts from those “next-door,” ensconced in local tradition, to those on the outskirts of and even alien to local tradition, we find some who are most extreme in their marginality to culture—almost pitted against it. The amulets they dis-

³¹ Elizabeth W. Fernea, *Saints and Spirits: Religious Expression in Morocco* [film and guide] (Austin, Texas: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1979).

³² See Allan Young, “Magic as a ‘Quasi-Profession’: The Organization of Magic and Magical Healing Among Amhara,” *Ethnology* 14 (1975):245-65; Jacques Mercier, *Ethiopian Magical Scrolls*, tr. by Richard Pevear (New York: Braziller, 1979); and Kay Kaufman Shelemay, “The Musician and Transmission of Religious Tradition: The Multiple Roles of the Ethiopian Dābtāra,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 22 (1992):242-60.

³³ Turner, ““The Center Out There”” (above, n.9).

³⁴ Young, “Magic as a ‘Quasi-Profession’.”

³⁵ See above, n.12.

pense and efficacious gestures they cast carry the prestige not of tradition so much as of some new ideology. We often apply the word “prophet” to such figures, but it is less helpful to invoke Weber here than to follow modern anthropologists in seeing the prophet, too, as a *bricoleur*—a combiner of immediate and distant idioms, local and broad scopes of identity, and a sense of the radically new with the recognizability of something altogether traditional.³⁶ As we see them in Melanesia, in Africa, in native America, in Medieval Europe, and in the deserts of Byzantium, prophet-figures articulate a new frame of reference: a new scheme of the cosmos and of social relations. But more importantly, they place themselves in the middle of these ideologies as thaumaturges—miracle-workers, ritual experts, mediators of the supernatural world. They develop new rituals, new protective amulets (especially for warfare), and new healing rites.³⁷ Thaumaturgy and the ritual expertise that brings it are so central to the roles prophets occupy because they dramatize the new ideology and its promises.³⁸ The emphasis on the expulsion of demons, for example, that one so often finds among Christian prophet-figures reflects not the native cosmos of capricious and beneficial spirits but rather the Christian ideology as it encounters and polarizes the native cosmos. The Christian prophet-figure, then, both perceives and has the power to expel this new cosmic moiety of demons.

This model of ritual expertise is borne out especially well among Egyptian desert monks like Antony and Shenoute, whose writings,

³⁶ Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of “Cargo” Cults in Melanesia* (2nd ed.; New York: Schocken, 1968), xiv-xviii; Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 30-32, 153-63. Cf. Elizabeth Colson, “A Continuing Dialogue: Prophets and Local Shrines among the Tonga of Zambia,” *Regional Cults*, 119-39.

³⁷ European: Norman Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium* (rev. ed.; London: Temple Smith, 1970), 41, 42-43, 49-50, 69-70. African indigenous: Douglas H. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), esp. 85-88. Handsome Lake (18th century Seneca): Arthur C. Parker, *The Code of Handsome Lake, The Seneca Prophet* (Albany: State Museum, 1913), 49-50, quoted in Overholt, *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 113. Short Bull (Sioux apostle of Ghost Dance): James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Washington: Gov’t Printing Office, 1896; abr. repr. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 30-31. In general on the use of thaumaturgical performance and claims by prophetic figures see Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), chap. 6, and Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), chaps. 3-6.

³⁸ Cf. Anitra Bingham Kolenkow, “Relationships between Miracle and Prophecy in the Greco-Roman World and Early Christianity,” *ANRW* 2.22.2 (1980), 1470-1506.

sermons, and (particularly in Antony's case) hagiographies describe these saints' special interests in and powers against demons. But even today one sees this pattern in Christian exorcistic cults and their specialists. In Sri Lanka, for example, a Father Jayamanne gained enormous regional charisma for his dramatic exorcisms at the Marian shrine of a small village. A typical pattern thus begins to emerge in the interconnection between the promotion of a new ideology (e.g., Christ's power over demonic local gods), dramatic exorcistic ritual, and widespread thaumaturgical reputation. The same pattern seems also to explain early traditions of Jesus as a thaumaturge: both the Synoptic Sayings Source (Q) and the Gospel of Mark reflect a peculiar emphasis on exorcism and demonology.³⁹

But Egyptian monks did not just do exorcisms; they offered healing, divination, spells, blessings, and amulets, a phenomenon recorded in all kinds of sources. For many villages monks came to function as *the* chief ritual experts, addressing all manner of everyday misfortune from their cells and caves with all types of ritual and gesture—even to the point of winning disapproval from some official quarters for unorthodox practice. So, for example, the fifth-century Coptic abbot Shenoute complains how, in his time,

... those fallen into poverty or in sickness or indeed some other trial abandon God and run after enchanterers or diviners or indeed seek other acts of deception, just as I myself have seen: the snake's head tied on someone's hand, another one with the crocodile's tooth tied to his arm, and another with fox claws tied to his legs— especially since it was an official who told him that it was wise to do so! Indeed, when I demanded whether the fox claws would heal him, he answered, "It was a great monk who gave them to me, saying 'Tie them on you (and) you will find relief.'"

Moreover, this is the manner that they anoint themselves with oil or that they pour over themselves water while receiving (ministrations) from enchanterers or drug-makers, with every deceptive kind of relief.... Still

³⁹ See especially Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 186-93, 273-77. On Antony's own interest in demons see Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 139-41, 216-24, and on Shenoute's: Jacques van der Vliet, "Chénouté et les démons," *Actes du IV^e congrès copte* 2, ed. by M. Rassart-Debergh and J. Ries (Louvain: Institut orientaliste, 1992), 41-49. Sri Lanka: R. L. Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting: Sinhala Catholics in Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chaps. 4-5, 7, and on contemporary Christian exorcists, Stephen Hunt, "Managing the Demonic: Some Aspects of the Neo-Pentecostal Deliverance Ministry," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 13, 2 (1998):215-30. On Jesus, see exorcistic material in Q (Lk 11:14-26) as well as Mark (1:23ff and *passim*).

again, they pour water over themselves or anoint themselves with oil from elders of the church, or even from monks!⁴⁰

Shenoute here finds that monks have come to fit into the whole complex array of ritual experts available to fifth-century Coptic villagers. In this aspect of monks' everyday ritual services there is considerable overlap between the desert prophet type and the "basic" community ritual expert type, and it would not be useful to make a hard distinction. Indeed, it seems as if Christian "prophet" figures were progressively assimilated to the local environment, to fit local Egyptian needs.⁴¹ But what distinguishes these monks in early Coptic Egypt—distinguishes them from other indigenous ritual experts—is their *simultaneous reflection* of the Christian cosmos and the exorcistic and thaumaturgical authority that that cosmos brought with it. In the eyes of clients they stand for the Christian power to heal and protect. The monk's charisma as ritual expert came from that novel worldview in which all misfortune and illness must devolve upon hostile demons, and those demons could be smashed *only* by a "friend of God."⁴²

IV *The Healer's Enemy: Magos, Sorcerer, Witch*

With our attention on ideologies that promote thaumaturgy and that position their prophets as ritual experts of astounding power, I want

⁴⁰ Shenoute, *Contra Origenistas*, ed. Tito Orlandi (Rome 1985), 255-59, my translation. Stephen Emmel lists this text as "Acephalous Work A14" in "Shenoute's Literary Corpus" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1993), 480, 1010. See Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 214-17. Compare also *Martyrdom of Apa Shenoufe*, Pierpont Morgan Codex M 583, f. 119, ed. E.A.E. Reymond and J.W.B. Barns, *Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 102, 203; Paphnutius, *History of the Monks of Upper Egypt* 99-138, tr. Tim Vivian, CS 140 [Kalamazoo MI 1993], 121-40; and the *Life of Bishop Pisentius*, ed. & tr. E.A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London: British Museum, 1913; repr. New York: AMS, 1977), 75-127. In general, see Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1982), 103-52, and *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 57-78; and Frankfurter, "Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt," 127-28.

⁴¹ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 257-64. Cf. Matthew Schoffeleers, "Christ in African Folk Theology: The *Nganga* Paradigm," *Religion in Africa*, ed. by Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E.A. van Beek, and Dennis L. Thomson (London: Currey, 1994), 72-88.

⁴² See Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, A.D. 150-750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 53-56, 101-2, and *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1975), chap. 4.

finally to shift my focus from real ritual experts to imagined ones: that is, witches, sorcerers, and plain *magoi*. We are familiar with the polemical, even paranoid worldviews that have led Roman governors, early Christian bishops, early modern inquisitors, and the leaders of African witch-purges to regard certain forms of ritual expertise or practice as evil and subversive and their practitioners as *types* of evil and subversion. But we often forget that such terms of castigation against “other” ritual specialists, real or imagined, arise in popular culture itself, among local ritual experts. One repeatedly finds indigenous dichotomies between positive ritual expertise—invariably “ours”—and negative ritual expertise—that is, intrinsically subversive, out of bounds, “of the left hand.” Philostratus, for example, describes a *goēteia* ostensibly distinct from the thaumaturgy of Apollonius of Tyana, a base sphere of ritual meant for sports or business competition or love, and promulgated by charlatans (VII.39). In Heliodorus’s novel *Aethiopika*, the idealized Egyptian priest Kalasiris can aid the hero and heroine with all manner of “authentic” Egyptian potions, but he still juxtaposes his own craft to another sphere of ritual that is

... of low rank and, you might say, crawls upon the earth; it waits upon ghosts and skulks around dead bodies; it is addicted to magic herbs, and spells are its stock-in-trade; no good ever comes of it; no benefit ever accrues to its practitioners; generally it brings about its own downfall, and its occasional successes are paltry and mean-spirited—the unreal made to appear real, hopes brought to nothing; it devises wickedness and panders to corrupt pleasures.⁴³

What is particularly interesting about this picture of alien or subversive ritual is the role of *and benefit to* real ritual experts in conjuring such an enemy. Theodore of Sykeon is hardly unique in the history of religions in recasting a rival ritual expert as an enemy; and indeed, it is significant that he casts this rival as the very source of the problems he (Theodore) must resolve by the good ritual. Certainly Christian materials show this demonizing of the competition in most vivid terms. But one finds this kind of polarizing of ritual spheres, in which “our” healer resolves the *maleficium* brought by “that” sorcerer, across cultures and religious situations. The mid-twentieth-century Nuer prophet Ngundeng “waged a consistent campaign against magicians, insisting that they bury their magic in [his specially-constructed

⁴³ Heliodorus, *Aethiopika* 3.16, tr. J.R. Morgan, “Heliodorus: An Ethiopian Story,” *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. by B. P. Reardon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 421, on which see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 233-37.

shrine,] the Mound. He denounced magicians in his songs and accused some pretended prophets of conjuring.” The early-nineteenth-century Seneca prophet Handsome Lake railed against witches as the primary threat to community health and welfare, who would soon defer to his revelation and confess their sins. A Melanesian shaman of the 1950’s, taken over by a local goddess, warned her communities especially about sorcery, inspiring several purges.⁴⁴ In such cases a world of evil ritual and ritual expertise became the foil—the antitype—to the charisma of the newly established ritual expert.

European historians are increasingly noting the dynamic presence of local “witch-diviners”—“cunning folk” in English tradition—in identifying witchcraft scourges in their very communities.⁴⁵ They may initiate a lynching by pointing out a specific “witch,” or they may articulate a more amorphous witch-scurge that could only be resolved through their own spiritual warfare. Carlo Ginzberg and others have identified fraternities of local seers who insured fertility and protected community fortune by battling witches while in dream-states.⁴⁶ So also in late second-century Anatolia a regional oracle recommended that a town hold a public festival to rid itself of a pestilence brought by *magoi*.⁴⁷ In these cases, local or regional diviners articulate cosmic misfortune in terms of witchcraft; then they recom-

⁴⁴ Ngundeng: Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*, 96 (see further, 97-99); Handsome Lake: Overholt, *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective* 105, 112, 117; Melanesian shaman: Matthew Tamoane, “Kamoai of Darapap and the Legend of Jari,” *Prophets of Melanesia*, ed. by Garry Trompf (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1977), 174-211, excerpted in Overholt, *ibid.*, 285-95, esp. 292-93.

⁴⁵ Keith Thomas, “The Relevance of Social Anthropology to the Historical Study of English Witchcraft,” *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, 60-61; Tekla Dömötör, “The Cunning Folk in English and Hungarian Witch Trials,” *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Venetia J. Newall (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1980), 183-87; Sebald, “Shaman, Healer, Witch,” 127-28; de Blécourt, “Witch Doctors, Soothsayers, and Priests”; Jacqueline Simpson, “Witches and Witchbusters,” *Folklore* 107 (1996):5-18; Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Viking, 1996), 174-95, 207-8, 217-18..

⁴⁶ Carlo Ginzberg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, tr. by John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), esp. 25-26; Mircea Eliade, “Some Observations on European Witchcraft,” *HR* 14 (1975):158-65; Dömötör, “The Cunning Folk in English and Hungarian Witch Trials,” 184; Gustav Henningsen, “‘The Ladies from Outside’: An Archaic Pattern of the Witches’ Sabbath,” *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, ed. by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 191-215.

⁴⁷ Fritz Graf, “An Oracle Against Pestilence from a Western Anatolian Town,” *ΖΡΕ* 92 (1992):267-79.

mend, or themselves lead, the rites to neutralize that witchcraft. Examples of such cunning people in England and France and of professional witch-finders in Africa continue through the twentieth century, often with quite insidious effects. More often than not, witch-finders tend to be ritual experts themselves, the eclectic purveyors of amulets, remedies, and divination from the center or, more often, the periphery.⁴⁸ In African witch-cleansings, for example, the expert is often an outsider, but conversant in the idioms and expectations of local communities.⁴⁹ On the other hand, some witch-finders' entire "practices" may focus exclusively on the resolution of the witchcraft and sorcery plagues they identify: they become "professionals in supernatural evil," much like early Christian exorcistic prophets and contemporary investigators and therapists of "Satanic Ritual Abuse."⁵⁰

In every case one can see a relationship between the *image* of hostile magic (or sorcery or witchcraft) and the charisma of the one who identifies the problem, articulates its scope and nature, and provides effective remedies and *apotropaia* against it.⁵¹ Why a ritual expert, independent or official, might focus her clairvoyant powers on some poor old lady as the antitype rather than a more *inchoate* witchcraft, and then why witchcraft might be a more compelling diagnosis than demons or the untimely dead, is due to immediate social, historical, or even psychological circumstances.⁵²

In some historical cases the image of subversive ritual experts becomes a matter of official tradition. Entire priestly institutions have projected a witch-scourge, or simply an inverse, dangerous ritual—a

⁴⁸ Cf. I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 1989), 96, and Brown, *Mama Lola*, 188-89, on projections of evil wizardry in voodoo.

⁴⁹ Witchcraft specialists: Redmayne, "Chikanga"; R.G. Willis, "Instant Millennium: The Sociology of African Witch-Cleansing Cults," *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, 129-39; Maia Green, "Witchcraft Suppression Practices and Movements: Public Politics and the Logic of Purification," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39 (1997):319-45. Robin Briggs associates professional witch-finding with *peripheral* ritual experts: *Witches and Neighbors*, 174-75, 200.

⁵⁰ See Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, tr. by Catherine Cullen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), (quotation from p.8), and Hunt, "Managing the Demonic". On contemporary Satanic abuse investigators, see Robert D. Hicks, "The Police Model of Satanism Crime," and Ben Crouch and Kelly Dampousse, "Law Enforcement and the Satanic Crime Connection: A Survey of 'Cult Cops,'" *The Satanism Scare*, ed. by James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley (New York: De Gruyter, 1991), 175-89, 191-204.

⁵¹ On structural relations between experts/accusers/healers and witch/sorcerer-stereotypes, see Gábor Klaniczay, "Hungary: The Accusations and the Universe of Popular Magic," *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 238-43, and Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 182, 184.

⁵² See Lucy Mair, *Witchcraft* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1969), 11-27.

“magic”—in order to bolster their priestly charisma and ritual authority. Late Egyptian texts often excoriate a folk “magic” as inferior to their own.⁵³ In ancient Babylonian witch-execration rites the vivid (supernatural) witch-figure that brings all manner of misfortune functions as a structural antitype to the priestly ritual expert.⁵⁴

V Conclusions

“A civilization,” Redfield described, “is an organization of specialists, of kinds of role-occupiers in characteristic relations to one another and to lay people and performing characteristic functions concerned with the transmission of tradition.”⁵⁵ Indeed, any discussion of ritual experts must appreciate the complex distribution of skills, authority, lore, and claims that permeate even the smallest society. Designation as a ritual expert can depend on family lineage and heritage, acquired skills, physical appearance, intellectual idiosyncrasy, supernatural claims, and institutional affiliation. As much as Redfield emphasized individuals’ connections with an outside world and the prestige thus acquired, so the student of “magic” must be concerned equally with the very individuality of villagers, the natural distribution of skills and prestige in supernatural mediation that arises simply by living alongside one another in time and space.

The “dynamics of ritual expertise” covered in this paper in each case affect the way that local communities would understand and credit the rites, amulets, authority, and charisma of ritual experts. Among these dynamics are a figure’s (1) proximity or marginality to the community; (2) abilities as combiner of new and old idioms and technologies; (3) institutional affiliation and literate training, through which the Great Tradition could be mediated with local tradition and needs; (4) projection, as prophet, of a compelling new ideology ac-

⁵³ See Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 233-24, on evidence from Ipuwer, Papyrus Harris, Heliiodorus, and PGM XII.

⁵⁴ Tzvi Abusch, “The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature: The Reworking of Popular Conceptions by Learned Exorcists,” *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and In Conflict*, ed. by Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul V.M. Flesher (New York: Oxford, 1989), 27-58, and “The Socio-Religious Framework of the Babylonian Witchcraft Ceremony *Maqlû*: Some Observations on the Introductory Section of the Text, Part II,” *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, ed. by Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 467-94. Cf. Ugaritic priestly incantations against sorcerers: RIH 78/20, tr. Fleming, and 1992.2014, tr. Pardee, *The Context of Scripture 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. by William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 301-2, 327-28.

⁵⁵ Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, 102.

cording to which he himself stands as *thaumaturge extraordinaire*; and finally, (5) ability to articulate a world of dangerous ritual expertise and to resolve it on his own terms. The latter phenomenon stands outside the taxonomy of historical ritual expertise, representing rather the indigenous construction of an “anti-ritualist” competitor or enemy.

In its cross-cultural survey of ritual experts this study is, to be sure, preliminary. I have offered here a spatial—center/periphery—model for understanding indigenous conceptions of ritual expertise, its powers and dangers. But the paper should also, hopefully, advance the basic issue of taxonomy in the history of religions—that is, the interpretive value and function of models and types—beyond the simple, *static* classifications of Weber and Van der Leeuw. The taxonomy of patterns of ritual expertise presented here purposely allows a certain fluidity among “types”—e.g., between community ritual experts local and peripheral, and between such experts and the quasi-institutional literati. This fluidity allows productive comparative analysis of those cases that lie at the interstices of these “types,” and it best serves the understanding of popular spell-composition and amulet-dispensing. But one might propose further sub-categories according to different criteria: for example, according to an expert’s form of relationship with some supernatural figure (possession? communication? ritual orientation?), or an expert’s restriction to certain ritual forms or services (healing? spell-removal? exorcism? divination?), or the indigenous labels or role-distinctions held by various societies (“wise-woman,” “conjure-doctor”; the separate roles *babalawo* and *elegun* among Yoruba of West Africa).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Cf. Victor Turner, “Religious Specialists: An Anthropological View,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968), 13:437-44. I am grateful to Ethel Sara Wolper, Funso Afolayan, and Jonathan Z. Smith for criticisms and suggestions on previous drafts.