

HELLENISTIC MAGIC: SOME QUESTIONS OF DEFINITION

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It is a pleasure to contribute this essay to a collection in honor of Dr. Quispel. His own work, like Jung's, has shown that magical texts reveal much about man's religious sentiments. Dr. Quispel has shown that magic, equally with religion, can be seen as an expression of man's deepest psychological processes.¹

This paper will be directed to some definitional questions raised by the continued attention of scholars to the phenomenon of magic. Although many different definitions of "magic" have been offered throughout the history of religions and anthropological research, no one definition has reached general use. Magic's relation both to religion and science has never been clearly delineated. Take the relationship between magic and religion: Religious leaders are often interested in strict distinctions between magic and religion so that the purity of religion can be maintained.² Social scientists hope to isolate

¹ See e.g., *Gnosis als Weltreligion*, Zurich 1951, 40f. and *Gnosis und Religionswissenschaft*, in *Gnostic Studies II*, Istanbul 1975, 261.

² See especially, Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, Cambridge, Mass. 1973 and his recent publication, *Jesus, The Magician*, New York 1978. Also of interest are J.Z. Smith, *The Temple and the Magician*, in *God's Christ and His People*. Studies in honor of N.A. Dahl, ed. by J. Jervell and W.A. Meeks, Oslo 1977, 233-247 and *Good News is No News: Aretalogy and Gospel*, Festschrift for M. Smith, Leiden 1975. H. Remus, in *Pagan-Christian Conflict Over Miracle in the Second Century*, Dissertation, University of Penn., 1979. H. Remus outlines and surveys this approach in admirable detail. He shows that, e.g., Rengsdorf in Kittel's *Wörterbuch* and C.F.D. Moule attempt to distinguish between Christian miracles and pagan wonders on the basis of vocabulary hence preserve an essential difference between them in the texts. His conclusion is that the texts evince more fluid use of the words than either Rengsdorf or Moule allow. See also H. van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, Leiden 1965, 247f., E. Massonneau, *Le crime de Magie dans le droit romain* Paris 1933; F. Martroye, *La répression de la magie et les cultes des gentils au IV^e siècle*, in *Revue historique du droit français et étranger*, Ser. IV, 18, 1930, 669-701. D.L. Tiede *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker*, Missoula 1972; C.P. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism*, Missoula 1977; and John M. Hull *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, Naperville 1974.

phenomena cross-culturally so that a consensus of methodology can be reached,³ hence many attempt to make clear taxonomies. So both anthropologists and religionists seek to make extremely careful definitions in order to carry on their analyses. For instance, Malinowski defined the difference between magic and religion as sharply as possible. Religion refers to the fundamental issues of human existence, while magic always turns round specific, concrete and detailed problems.⁴ Religion is concerned with questions of ultimate concern — salvation, death, the meaning of existence — while magic is concerned with immediate goals — control of the weather, good health, achieving a specific position. Magic is characterized by manipulation and attempts to control nature. Religion is expressive; magic instrumental.

This should appear extremely sensible to us, since it amounts to a concise statement of one of our culture's definitions of magic. A surprising consequence of this definition is that magic can be viewed as an early form of science.⁵ Neat though it is, such a clearcut distinction leads to problems when cases are examined, as we shall see, since (1) it creates an ideal type which can only be approximated by a specific occurrence and (2) it rarely describes what the magician himself thinks he is doing.⁶

In this paper, I will argue that no definition of magic can be universally

³ See Ruth Benedict, *Magic*, in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* for the basic bibliography. More recently R. & M. Wax, *The Magical World View*, in *JSSR* 1, 1962, 179-88. "The Notion of Magic" in *Current Anthropology* 4, 1963, 495-503, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas, London 1970. Lucy Mair, *Witchcraft*, New York 1969. An interesting structural analysis is suggested by E. Leach, *Culture and Communication*, Cambridge 1966.

⁴ *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays*, 200.

⁵ This approach is typical of Frazer and Tylor and Thorndike for example.

⁶ See Remus for the complete history of research. Sensitive to these issues many anthropologists are inclined to resist a sharp distinction between magic and religion. Thus, e.g., R. Firth, P. Worsley talk about interpenetration of magical and religion. See also M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 74ff. Jarl Fossum has called my attention to A. van Gennep, R. Williamson, R. Lowie, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, W. J. Goode, E. Norbeck, C. G. Diehl and others who have noted the similarity between the two phenomena. Though it is not my purpose to outline or review a history of the study of magic in this paper, the extent of this trend in the literature needs to be emphasized as well. Very often it seems to me as though theoretical work has tended to separate the two phenomena while field work has tended to combine them. My point is to recommend that we distinguish between the two enterprises and give more attention to how the term is actually used within the culture under consideration.

applicable because "magic" can not and should not be construed as a properly scientific term. Its meaning changes as the context in which it is used changes. No single definition of magic can be absolute, since all definitions of magic are relative to the culture and sub-culture under discussion. Furthermore, it is my contention that we have been misled by our own cultural assumptions into making too strict a distinction between magic and religion in the Hellenistic world. As we shall see, in some places the distinction between magic and religion will depend purely on the social context.

Since we cannot agree on a suitable definition of magic beforehand, the only way to discuss magic in its Hellenistic context is to start with documents that claim to be magical and see what is in them. Only afterwards can we address the adequacy of our account of the phenomenon or offer a definition.

The easiest place to see the whole paradox is the magical papyri.⁷ They use the terms "magic" and "magical"⁸ while the practitioners call themselves μάγοι, "magicians."⁹ However, scholars quickly discovered that this usage makes a definition of magic harder, not easier. A. D. Nock published one of the earliest attempts to understand the magical papyri.¹⁰ He thought of the phenomenon as having a Greco-Egyptian character, comparing it with many of the reports of magic in classical Greece. Though the papyri may have picked up Persian features, he basically saw them as Greek in character. Thus, he tried to understand them by comparison with the worship of Hecate in ancient Greece.¹¹ Martin Nilsson also turned his attention toward

⁷ See *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, ed. K. Preisendanz et al., 2 vols., Dresden 1928-31, 2nd rev. ed. by A. Henrichs, Stuttgart 1973-1974.

⁸ μαγεία: ἀλήθεια τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν μαγείας, IV, 2453; δύναμις τῆς θείας αὐτοῦ μαγείας, 2449; μύστις τῆς ἱεῖρας μαγείας, I, 127; μαγείης τῆς ἐμῆς βέλος, IV, 2319. μαγικός: μαγικὴν ψυχὴν ἔχων, IV, 210; ἐν τῇ μαγικῇ ἐμπειρίᾳ, I, 331.

⁹ μάγος: πάντων μάγων ἀρχηγέτης, IV, 2289; μάγων καθηγεμῶν, 243; πλείστοι τῶν μάγων, 2081.

¹⁰ A. D. Nock, *Greek Magical Papyri*, in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 15, 1929, 219-235. See also his fine *Paul and the Magus*, in the *Beginnings of Christianity* (ed. Jackson and Lake, Grand Rapids 1966, from London Macmillan edition) 5, 171 and the many fine articles on magical themes now collected in his *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, 1972.

¹¹ Though he and Reitzenstein agreed basically in seeing the papyri as *ignota pietas*, they disagreed as to the cultural milieu at the center. Reitzenstein (*ZNW*, XIII, 13) thought that they had a Persian background.

the papyri.¹² Though he found that the papyri were radically individualistic, he could not believe that the magicians wrote such beautiful hymns and spells without help. Their work must have been copied from some other source. For Nilsson and Nock, the most likely source for the writings of these magicians was Hellenistic religion. Based on the metric structure of the hymns, Nilsson suggested that there was an earlier body of literature, attached to the worship of various greek gods, surviving only in late papyri. The magical texts witnessed to those religious hymns, though the magicians no longer understood them. Through this fairly elaborate theory of literary transmission, Nock and Nilsson were able to explain both the magical and the religious qualities of the writing. But the elaborate enterprise is necessary because they saw magic and religion as totally different and separate phenomena.

The greatest problem with the approach is that no direct literary connections between the magical hymns and religious hymns can be detected. Though there are many similarities between the "magical hymns" and the "religious hymns," no one has been able to demonstrate any direct borrowing. In the absence of such evidence, we should probably assume that the magicians were more creative men than either Nock or Nilsson thought, that hymns could be written in either magical or religious conditions, or, at least, that the material in the papyri is a *mélange* of different phenomena collected and written by people who saw no distinction between the various sections.

E. R. Goodenough and Gershom Scholem have seen the hymns and charms in the Greek magical papyri in the context of sectarian Judaism and late Hellenistic syncretism. In his *magnum opus*, *Jewish symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*,¹³ Goodenough quotes a charm like the ones found in *PGM*:

By the power of those ten holy words of the Lord God, by the Name, I am that I am, God Almighty, Adonai, Lord of Hosts, I bind, excommunicate and destroy, I ward off and cause to vanish, all evil, accursed and maddening pains and sicknesses.

As Goodenough indicated, one God alone is worshipped; the other deities are reduced to the level of angels or demons. Goodenough's

¹² Martin P. Nilsson, *Die Religion in den griechischen Zauberpapyri*, in *Opuscula Selecta*, III, Lund 1960, 129-166.

¹³ Vol. 2, 164.

point is that these hymns reflect a sectarian Judaism, syncretized with a number of other influences. Although most of the spells are not “normative” Christianity or Judaism, they combine aspects of both. In order to maintain strict distinctions between magic and religion then, one would also have to define “orthodoxy” in an analytic way. Even if that could be done, it would take us too far afield. But one conclusion allows us to proceed with analysis: the documents are both religious and magical. Goodenough and Scholem, though differing in other respects, were united in their willingness to call some aspects of the *PGM* religious.

The insights of Goodenough and Scholem can be profitably applied to all the significant hymns of the *PGM*. Many of these seem too sophisticated to be placed in the same category with charms and amulets. In particular, it would be worthwhile to note several of the texts analysed by E. Peterson.¹⁴ Peterson describes the celebrant as trying to escape from Fate to return to the spiritual state from which he has fallen.

Although Peterson tries unsuccessfully to associate the ἄνθρωπος of IV 1177f. with Adam,¹⁵ his basic understanding of the magical praxis appears to be correct. The celebrant prays that, although born mortal (θνητὸς γεννηθεὶς ἐκ θνητῆς ὑστέρας, 517-518) he may be transformed (βεβελτιωμένος) by the god, whose presence he seeks after having made the appropriate consecrations (ἀγίοις ἁγιασθεὶς ἁγιάσμασι, 522). The process of immortalization is accomplished through a heavenly journey, climaxed by a face-to-face vision of the divinity (καὶ ἀτένιζε τῷ θεῷ, 711) in which the divinity of the God empowers the journey and appears to confer immortality:

στὰς οὖν εὐθέως ἔλκε ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀτενίζων εἰς σεαυτὸν τὸ πνεῦμα.
ὅταν οὖν ἀποκατασταθῇ σου ἡ ψυχὴ, λέγε· (628-630).

¹⁴ E. Peterson, *La libération d'Adam de l'anagke*, in *RB*, 1948, 119f. This study has also appeared in a revised German edition, *Die Befreiung Adams aus der Anagke*, in Peterson's *Frühkirche, Judentum, und Gnosis*, Rome-Freiberg-Vienna 1959, 107ff.

¹⁵ The man (ἄνθρωπος) in IV, 1177f. is so-called in distinction to God's other creations: ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ἄνθρωπος, θεοῦ τοῦ ἐν οὐρανῷ πλάσμα κάλλιστον. This does not make him equivalent to the first-born Adam who appears III, 145-147. Rather it emphasizes his earthly origin, which needs to be perfected by the rites into a σῶμα τέλειον, possibly his divine origin image after the rite.

So stand still and at once draw breath from the divine into yourself, while you look intently. When your soul is restored, say: ...

σὺ δὲ εὐθέως μύκωμα μακρόν, βασανίζων τὴν γαστέρα, ἵνα συνκινήσης τὰς πέντε αἰσθήσεις, μακρόν εἰς ἀπόθεσιν, μυκῶ καταφιλῶν πάλιν τὰ φυλακτήρια καὶ λέγων· ἴμοκριμο φεριμοφερερι ζωὴ μου, τοῦ δεῖνα, μένε σύ, νέμε ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ μου, μὴ με καταλείψῃς' (704-710).

And at once produce a long bellowing sound, straining your belly, that you may excite the five senses: Bellow long until the conclusion, and again kiss the amulets and say: MOKRIMO PHERIMOPHERERI, life of me, N, Stay, dwell in my soul, Do not abandon me.¹⁶

In the *Mithras Liturgy*, the salvation is brought by Helios, not Adam; but he grants both immortality and a new birth, implying a new horoscope as well.

κύριε, παλινγενόμενος ἀπογίγνομαι, αὐξόμενος καὶ αὐξηθεὶς τελευτῶ, ἀπὸ γενέσεως ζωογόνου γενόμενος, εἰς ἀπογενεσίαν ἀναλυθεὶς πορεύομαι, ὥς σὺ ἔκτισας, ὥς σὺ ἐνομοθέτησας καὶ ἐποίησας μυστήριον (718-723).

O Lord, while being born again, I am passing away; while growing and having grown, I am dying; while being born from a life generating birth, I am passing on, released to death — as you have founded, as you have decreed, and have established the mystery.¹⁷

More important than whether or not the identity of the mediator figure is Adam is the use of the term "archangel" (ἀρχάγγελος) to describe the function¹⁸ and the manifold use of a mediator in bringing the salvation from the God to man.¹⁹

Let us see what definition of magic and religion is presupposed by the texts. Even a brief look at the *Mithras Liturgy* emphasizes the religious character of the experience being related. The expected result

¹⁶ See *The Mithras Liturgy*, ed. and tr. Marvin Meyer, Missoula 1976, 19, lines 629f. and 705f.

¹⁷ See *The Mithras Liturgy*, ed. Meyer, 21. This was the end of the *Mithras Liturgy*, according to Dieterich.

¹⁸ There are a few places in Jewish tradition where Adam is called an angel or compared with one. See Mekhilta Ex. IV, 29; Gen. R. xxi, 5. Also the material in b. San. 38a and f. suggests Adam's angelic status.

¹⁹ See I, 206f., 219ff., IV, 1190ff., 1200, 1203ff. See the forthcoming dissertation of Jarl Fossum for a discussion of Adam legends in Hellenistic society.

of the long ceremony is not merely to understand the future, though that was involved as well. The expected result is to gain an immortal rebirth (μεταγεννηθέντος, 647) or immortalization (ἀπαθανατισθεις). The rebirth entails a new horoscope and is described often as a mystery. Furthermore, the adept's vision is described as ἐποπτέω (504), a technical term for a participating in the mystery cults. The adept appears to gain his immortality through what he sees and experiences. He rises in an ecstatic heavenly journey by appeasing the various tutelary divinities. His soul is restored through breathing in the divine (630). At the end he appears to be vouchsafed a vision of the great God Helios Mithras, of whom the magician is the archangel. This is as sophisticated and spiritual an idea as one finds in the religious world of late antiquity.

Suffice it to say that we have discovered a document in which magic and religion are extra-ordinarily well mixed.²⁰ Apparently, in the Hellenistic world, as in our own, the definition of magic was not firmly fixed. This is not surprising because the Hellenistic world was a complex and varied *assemblage* of cultures, resembling our own in its development of cosmopolitanism and individualism.²¹ In order to address the real meaning of "magic" in the Hellenistic world then, we have to discuss both the ostensible definition of magic and the many social contexts in which magic existed.

To a certain extent ambiguity in the distinction between magic

²⁰ This paradox is also illustrated by the scholarly argument about the Mithras Liturgy. In 1903 Albrecht Dieterich proposed that lines 475-834 of the Paris Magical Papyrus were part of the official liturgy of the Mithras cult, hence religion, *Eine Mithras Liturgie*, Berlin 1903. However, since the publication of Dieterich's book, many scholars, notably Cumont and Reitzenstein, have criticized his theory. (See the Nachträge to the third 1923 edition). By the third edition, Dieterich was forced to moderate his claims to admit that the Egyptian magicians had altered the text substantially. Most others have seen the text as Egyptian magic pure and simple, though all have seen significant parallels with the hermetic writings and solar piety. The argument has not ever been satisfactorily resolved. Dieterich's evidence that the document represents a religious mystery is partially sound, yet important aspects of his argument for its mithraic origin can be dismissed. What is important for our current purposes is to note that scholars themselves cannot decide whether the text is magical or religious. The complementary problem is found in some of Morton Smith's writings. Smith notes that the ascent motif is characteristic of magical rites and tries to maintain that Jesus is a magician because he sees evidence of the same practices in Jesus' ministry and teachings. See below p. 367-370.

²¹ See, e.g., E. Brehier, *The Hellenistic and Roman Age*, Chicago 1965.

and religion is due to the semantic range of the terms for magic. The words *magos*, *magicus*, and *mageia*, were used with a variety of connotations — from the religion of the Magi to scurrilous, harmful magic or witchcraft. The Magi were members of the priestly clan of the Persians and therefore could be considered as honest religionists. However, the Greeks and Romans who actually viewed the Persian Empire tended to bring their own intellectual prejudices to bear against religion when they described it. Herodotus, Pliny and Plutarch tended at their hardest to view the religion as little more than fraud.²² Furthermore, since Persia remained Rome's most potent enemy throughout the Imperial Era, any religion practiced there was bound to be viewed as subversive and dangerous.

Then too, many people in the Hellenistic world called themselves *magoi* when they had no real connection with Persia. These people always courted the epithet “γόης,” a less ambiguous term usually meaning “quack.” Though in the *Symposium* (202e) Plato grants γοητεία a measure of efficacy as a function of the demon Eros and hence uses it as equivalent to what we have been calling “μαγεία” almost all other use of the term is derogatory.²³ The problems of candidates for the title “divine man” was to convince the world that they were not *magi* and certainly not γόητες, as detractors might have called them.²⁴

When magic is mentioned in Roman laws, it is always discussed in a negative context. A consensus was established early which viewed harmful acts (and only harmful acts) of magic as criminal. The Laws

²² See Smith, 71f. See also A. Abt. *Die Apologie des Apuleius von Madaura und die antike Zauberei: Beiträge zur Erläuterung der Schrift de Magia*, Giessen 1908. J. Bidez & F. Cumont, *Les Mages Hellénisés*, Paris 1938.

²³ Josephus, for example, (*Wars* II, 261f.; *Antiquities* XX, 92, 167, 188) dismisses miracle-workers with the term.

²⁴ In the case of Apollonius of Tyana the apologetic is present right at the start. Philostratus, his official biographer, shows that, like philosophers, Appollonius was not afraid to learn about occult subjects, but that he never practiced magic. He is also capable of using the same word *Magos* to describe the priests of Persia, who though not all knowing, are nevertheless wise in certain matters. The emphasis is on becoming wise: ὁμιλήσαντες μάγοις καὶ πολλὰ δαιμόνια εἰπόντες, οὐπω ὑπήχθησαν τῇ τέχνῃ, *Vita Apollonii* I: 2. Compare with I: 26: “τί οἱ μαγοί;” τὸν δὲ ἀποκρίνασθαι “σοφοὶ μὲν, ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα”. See also Anitra B. Kolenkow, *A Problem of Power: How Miracle Workers Counter Charges of Magic in the Hellenistic World*, *SBL Seminar Papers*, 1976, v. 1, 105-110.

of the Twelve Tablets (451-450 B.C.) expressly forbid anyone from enticing his neighbor's crops into his own field by magic. Furthermore, the maleficent arts were often considered to be identical with death by poisoning and punishable with equal severity.²⁵ An actual trial for alleged violation of these laws was held before Spurius Albinus in 157 B.C.²⁶ Cornelius Hispallus expelled the Chaldaean astrologers from Rome in 139 B.C. — ostensibly on the grounds that they were magicians.²⁷ In 33 B.C. astrologers and magicians are explicitly mentioned as having been driven from Rome. Twenty years later, Augustus ordered all books on occult subjects to be burned. In 16 A.D. magicians and astrologers were expelled from Italy, which was reinforced by edicts from other emperors in 69 A.D. and 89 A.D. Later, Constantine issued a ruling to cover all charges of magic. In it he distinguished between helpful charms, not punishable, and antagonistic spells:

If any are discovered to have been using magic arts so as to threaten men's safety or pervert modest persons to libidinous practices, their science is to be punished and deservedly penalized according to the severest laws. However, no accusations are to be heard against remedies sought out for human bodies or, in rural districts, to protect the mature grapes from fear of rains or from being crushed by the pounding of hailstones.²⁸

Several observations can be made on the basis of the history of the crime of magic. First, magic was clearly viewed as efficacious; otherwise it would have been prosecuted as fraud.²⁹ Second, though

²⁵ M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 75f.

²⁶ Pliny, *N.H.* 18, 41-43.

²⁷ See Eugene Tavenner, *Studies in Magic from Latin Literature*, New York 1916, 13 and J. E. Lowe, *Magic in Greek and Latin Literature*, Oxford 1929.

²⁸ From Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 76. See *Theodosiani Libri XVI*, ed. Th. Mommsen, Berlin 1962³ from 1954² and 1904¹, IX, 16, 3, p. 460 and tr. by Clyde Pharr, Princeton 1952, 237.

“*Eorum est scientia puniendi et severissimus merito legibus vendicanda, qui magicis adincti artibus aut contra hominum molite salutem aut pudicos ad libidinem deflexisse animos deteguntur. Nullis vero criminationibus implicanda sunt remedia humanis quaesita corporibus aut in agrestibus locis, ne maturis vindemiis metuerentur imbres aut ruentis grandinis lapidatione quaterentur, innocenter adhibita suffragia, quibus non cuiusque salus aut existimatio laederetur, sed quorum proficerent actus, ne divina munera et labores hominum sternerentur*”.

²⁹ For a rare example of the charge of fraud, see Lucian, *Alexander of Abonuteichus*. Also M. Smith, *Jesus*, 88.

illegal, it must have been widely practiced — or at least believed to be so — to have occasioned such frequent condemnation. Third, it is the *maleficium* — witchcraft — which is proscribed; presumably what we call “white” or non-aggressive magic was no crime, though, to be sure, much that they called “religion” might appear to us to be magic. “White” magic or non-aggressive magic could easily appear to be religion by their standards but notice the further ambiguity. Though the Chaldaean astrologers were religionists and presumably were not aggressive by definition, once their ideology was deemed dangerous, they could be expelled as magicians, on the grounds that they presented a danger to society. This illustrates Morton Smith’s observation that, while in our culture “magic” has the connotation of trickery, in Roman culture it often had the connotation of subversion as well.³⁰

The great witches of Greek legend — Medea, Erichtho, etc. — were literary creations, but the fear of witchcraft and the use of sorcery were obviously quite common. Among the Romans, especially those in the lower classes, sorcery, though illegal, was often practiced or hired as a service by people who were in situations of competition and uncertainty. The charioteer owed his position to personal skill, which was both increased and frequently attacked by magic. So it is not infrequent to find this sort of evocative masterpiece among the collections of curse tablets:

I conjure you up, holy beings and holy names; join in aiding this spell and bind, enchant, thwart, strike, overturn, conspire against, destroy, kill, and break Eucherius, the charioteer and all his horses tomorrow in the circus at Rome. May he not leave the barriers well, may he not be quick in the contest, may he not outstrip anyone; may he not make the turns well; may he not win any prizes; and, if he has pressed someone hard, may he not come off the victor; and, if he follows someone from behind, may he not overtake him; but may he meet with an accident, may he be bound, may he be broken, may he be dragged along by your power in the morning and afternoon races. Now! Now! Quickly! Quickly!³¹

³⁰ See *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, 221.

³¹ This curse may be found in *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*, Paris 1906-27, I, no. 117. The English translation is from *Roman Civilization Sourcebook II: The Empire*, ed. N. Lewis and M. Reinhold, New York 1955, 570. Three hundred examples of *Defixionum Tabellae* were published by Audollent (1904). A supplementary list from central and northern Europe was made by Preisendanz, in ARW

This *defixio* is clearly aggressive magic, it is clearly *maleficium*, and it is definitely illegal. No one would have practiced it with the impression he was practicing a legal and wholesome religious rite, however richly deserved was the damage to the intended victim. Peter Brown gives a special explanation of the frequency of references to chariot races in the tablets.³² The competition faced by the charioteer extended beyond his time in the circus. The charioteer was an undefined mediator in urban society. He was both the client of local aristocracies and the leader of organized groups of fans. As a public figure with considerable popular following, he became a potential leader in urban rioting.³³ Because of the anxiety and charisma associated with such an uncertain life, some charioteers and many of their fans were driven to seek sorcerers.

Thus, when magic was viewed as benign it might easily be coterminous with religion, whereas in the crucial contexts where magic was viewed as antagonistic and illegal it was carefully differentiated. The definition of this crime of “black” magic was made on the basis of its presumed injury and it was treated in many respects as other practices banned for the protection of the body politic. Common sense tells us that, whenever an accusation of magic was made, a distinction between magic and legitimate forms of religion was being made by the accuser. The accuser is claiming that the accused meant to harm society. However, it is not necessarily true that the accuser would say that the “magic” practiced is not religion — since the Persian Magi, Jews, *Mathematici* and philosophers are often grouped together in a ban — only that the practice was aggressive or primitive. Therefore, the

11, 1933. The Attic examples known before 1897 were separately edited by R. Wünsch. (*IG* III,3). Additional Attic curse tablets have been published by Ziebarth (*NachrGött* 1899, 105ff. and *SPAW* 1934, 1022f.). Others have been found subsequently. There seem to be only a few that can be assigned to the fifth century B.C. or earlier; on the other hand, a good many can be shown to belong to the fourth. Still, the majority are Roman and come from much later times. For a complete bibliography, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1968, 204f.

³² On the issue of black magic and witchcraft see Peter Brown, *Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages*, in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* ed. Mary Douglas, London 1970, 17-46. Also see Lucy Mair, *Witchcraft*, cited above and G. Parrinder, *Witchcraft: European and African*, London 1963.

³³ See Macmullen, 171 and nn. 10-12, p. 339-41.

defendant in an accusation of magic might have a different view of what he was doing.

In order to specify further the conditions under which "black" magic and religion were distinguished in the Hellenistic world, we have to review a few actual cases of witchcraft accusations. The *Rhetor* Libanius successfully defended himself against the charge of sorcery several times.³⁴ His righteous indignation at being so wrongly accused, an insult to his ability as a *rhetor*, tempts one to view him as a strict rationalist. But this is far from the case. When his old injury (from being struck by lightning) begins to act up, causing him to suffer unsettling dreams, he suspects sorcery. Finding a dead chamelion in his classroom, he becomes convinced that he has been made a victim of some malevolent force invoked by an enemy. On this basis he is able to blame recent losses in debate on the sorcery of his opponents instead of their superior skill. This phenomenon has also been admirably discussed by Peter Brown.³⁵ Brown sees Libanius as an example of how sorcery beliefs coalesce around areas of competition and uncertainty — conditions which are being aggravated in the third century in a society becoming more and more committed to a vested hierarchy in church and state.³⁶ Certainly this is a case of how sorcery "explains unfortunate events" to rely on Kluckholm's functionalist description of Navajo witchcraft. The sorcery attacks can be seen to counter and explain misfortune in competitive situations in ways that allowed the ostensible victim to escape without damage to his feelings of professional competency. In this case, magic or sorcery is seen as discontinuous with religion because it is aggressive and mean. The

³⁴ *Libanius' Autobiography*, ed. A. F. Norman, Hull 1965, see especially vii-xii, 31, 35, 39-41, 61, 93, 127-129.

³⁵ *Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity* (see note 32), 17-46. This is indeed a valuable and exciting article. It seems to me however that Brown has learned his lessons from Evans-Pritchard imperfectly. Instead of seeing the social value of magic, witchcraft and sorcery in a specific society, Brown imports Zande distinctions between sorcery and witchcraft in order to distinguish Christian and Jewish ideas about magic from pagan ones. This Zande distinction is misleading in several respects, as will be shown below. See also Ramsey Macmullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, Cambridge 1966.

³⁶ Brown, 25. See also C. Kluckholm, *Navaho Witchcraft*, Cambridge 1944, esp. 79-128 for the psychological functions of witchcraft.

accusation is made against colleagues and presumably in the case of Libanius, the accusation of witchcraft was quite straight-forward.

In other, more revealing contexts, the definition of magic is the subject of the controversy. This is illustrated by the experience of Apuleius. In Apuleius' time, many archaeological finds begin to be evidenced on expensive media like papyrus and parchment. Amulets begin to be fashioned of jewels, gold, or silver. All of this suggests that the people with more money were beginning to become interested in magic. When Apuleius is accused of witchcraft by the relatives of his newly married wife, he expresses an ambiguous opinion of *mageia*, which will help us clarify how "magic" and "religion" were differentiated:

I will now deal with the actual charge of magic. You spared no violence in fanning the flame of hatred against me. ... I should therefore like to ask his most learned advocates how precisely they would define a magician? If what I read in a large number of authors be true, namely that "magician" is the Persian word for priest, what is there criminal in being a priest and having due knowledge, science and skill? ...³⁷

But, if you accusers of mine, after the fashion of the common herd, define a magician as one who, by communion or speech with the immortal gods, has the power to do all the marvels that he will through a strange power of incantation, I really wonder that they are not afraid to attack one whom they acknowledge to be so powerful.³⁸

³⁷ His opinion of the magi was shared widely. When Ps-Aristotle affirms that the Magi are not acquainted with τὴν γοητικὴν μαγείαν, he is referring to the orthodox clergy of Persia. In many places, Greek authors go out of their way to declare that the Magi practice *mageia*, not *goeteia*, therefore they are not magicians: "Μαγεία Ζωροάστρου ἐστὶ θεῶν θεραπεία." See Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque* (Paris 1938) I, 144, n. 2. In point of fact, sorcery was equally demonic in Persia, where it was considered to be service to the *devas* (demons) by the *druj* (evil ones). Cf. Darmesteter, *Zend. Avesta*, I, 76, n. 8; 90, n. 53; II, 12, n. 252; *Mon. myst. de Mithra* I, 141.

³⁸ Apuleius, *Apology and Florida*. tr. H. E. Butler, ch. 25, 26, p. 55f., 56f. See Apulée, *Apologie et Florides* ed. Paul Vallette, Paris 1960, 31, 33:

"Aggredior enim iam ad ipsum crimen magiae, quod ingenti tumultu ad invidiam mei accensum frustrata exspectatione omnium per nescio quas anilis fabulas defraglavit... et ideo mihi libet quaerere ab eruditissimis eius aduocatis quid sit magus.

Nam si, quod ego apud plurimos lego, Persarum lingua magus est qui nostra sacerdos, quod tandem est crimen sacerdotem esse et rite nosse atque scire atque callere leges ceremoniarum, fas sacrorum, ius religionum? ... Sin uero more uulgari eum isti proprie magum existimant, qui communione loquendi cum deis immortalibus ad omnia quae uelit incredibili quadam ui cantaminum polleat, oppido miror cur accusare non timuerint quem posse tantum fatentur. Neque enim tam occulta et diuina potentia cauere potest itidem ut

Since Apuleius, a young man, had managed to marry an elderly woman of considerable fortune, her relatives feared that they might be disinherited. Yet he had violated no specific law, so they attempted to press their claim by maintaining that he used magic to win his wealthy wife. This is surely an example of the use of the charge of magic to clarify an ambiguous and threatening situation, a use which we will investigate further. The threat to the traditional expectation about inheritance is countered by a charge that the social order was upset by demonic action.

More interesting still is Apuleius' reply to the charge. In wonderful rhetorical fashion, he rebukes the illogicality of his accusers. If "magicus" is a Persian priest, he has done no harm. On the other hand, if it is what the common herd thinks it is, he marvels that they are not afraid to attack one they acknowledge to be so powerful.

Though Apuleius admits that the common people see magicians as all-powerful, he denies only that he has the power to do what he will. The possibility that he might be a Persian priest is taken as an unjustified compliment. This is to be explained by the trend in the first centuries of our era to see magic, philosophy, and wonder-working as essentially similar, as Morton Smith and others have shown us. Hence there arises quite often a distinction between what a critical outsider might call the act in question and the experience of the participant.

Apuleius' usage reflects a growing upper-class flirtation with "magical" arts. But Apuleius' full view of magic *per se* is most fully expressed in his picaresque novel, *The Golden Ass*. The hero of this novel, Lucius, is led by a mistress (herself a servant of a witch) into careless experimentation with magic. The result is that Lucius is transformed into an ass, a predicament which continues until the end of the novel, when Lucius finally regains his original shape because of a rose-leaf antidote. No doubt, Apuleius' story about a human in the shape of a donkey made the Romans behave more circumspectly in the presence of their beasts. But it was more than a comic invention for

cetera. Sicarium qui in iudicium uocat, comitatus uenit; qui uenenarium accusat, scrupulosius cibatur; qui furem arguit, sua custodit; enimvero qui magum qualem isti dicunt in discrimen capitis deducit, quibus comitibus, quibus scrupulis, quibus custodibus perniciem caecam et ineuitabilem prohibeat? nullis scilicet; et ideo id genus crimen non est eius accusare, qui credit."

a burlesque novel. The antidote to the witchcraft is a very serious account of the hero's salvation through the intervention of Isis. After this is accomplished, the priest of Isis delivers a speech which explains the basic meaning of the whole story (XI,15):

After enduring many different troubles and after being driven by the wildest storms of Fortune and her heaviest gales, at last, Lucius, you have come to the haven of Rest and the altar of Mercy. Your high birth was of no avail to you nor even your position in society, nor yet the learning in which you are so rich, but on the slippery path of your hotheaded youth you fell into low pleasures and you have gained a grim reward for your ill-starred curiosity. Nevertheless the blindness of Fortune, while it tortured you with the worst of dangers, yet led you in its unforeseeing evil to your state of religious bliss. Let her quit now and rage in her wildest frenzy and seek another object for her cruelty. For hostile fate has no power over those whose lives have been claimed by the majesty of our goddess. What avail to wicked Fortune were the robbers, the wild beasts, the slavery, the hardships of journeys that winded on and back, and the daily fear of death? Now you have been received into the protection of a Fortune who is not blind, but sees, and who illumines the other gods too with the radiance of her light.

Show, then, a happier face in keeping with the white cloak you have assumed. Follow the procession of the Saviour Goddess with triumphant step. Let the unbelievers take note, let them take note and acknowledge their mistake: behold, here is Lucius! He has been freed from his former sufferings and, rejoicing in the providence of mighty Isis, he is victorious over his Fortune. But to be safer and better equipped, enrol your name in this holy military service, whose solemn oath you were asked to take not long ago, and vow yourself from this moment to the ministry of our religion. Accept of your own free will the yoke of service. For when you have begun to serve the goddess, then will you better realize the result of your freedom.³⁹

³⁹ J. Gwyn Griffiths, Apuleius of Madauros, *The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses Book XI)* (EPRO 39), Leiden 1975, 87-89.

"Multis et variis exanclatis laboribus magnisque Fortunae tempestatibus et maximis actus procellis ad portum Quietis et aram Misericordiae tandem, Luci, venisti. nec tibi natales ac ne dignitas quidem, vel ipsa, qua flores, usquam doctrina profuit, sed lubrico virentis aetatulae ad serviles delapsus voluptates curiositatis inprosperae sinistrum praemium reportasti. sed utcumque Fortunae caecitas, dum te pessimis periculis discruciat, ad religiosam istam beatitudinem inprovida produxit malitia. eat nunc et summo furore saeviat et crudelitati suae materiem quaerat aliam; nam in eos, quorum sibi vitas deae nostrae maiestas vindicavit, non habet locum casus infestus. quid latrones, quid ferae, quid servitium, quid asperriorum itinerum ambages reciprocae, quid metus mortis cotidiana nefariae Fortunae profuit? in tutelam iam receptus es Fortunae, sed videntis, quae suae lucis

Apuleius' final understanding of "magic" is negative. Magic represents the world under the power of blind chance, a world in which Lucius had been enslaved until the grace of the goddess saved him. Just as magic represents the ill-starred world under the influence of fate, so the religion of Isis is defined as the special knowledge and care of the goddess that saves from fate. Lucius' salvation is through the mystery cult of Isis, whose public ceremonies were known to all in the Hellenistic world but whose secrets were known only to the initiates. We have no better description of the inner ritual or goals of the mystery religions than Apuleius' work. It is this specific characteristic of the cult which makes it a legitimate religion for Apuleius.

The striking aspect of Apuleius' account, however, is how completely it resembles the experience in the magical papyri. The magical adept, like Lucius, is seeking the power to be free of the fates and demons, through a heavenly ascent and theurgic power. Thus, while the insider in this case distinguishes between magic and religion, his description of true religion matches some aspects of magical practice elsewhere.

Theurgy, more than anything else, represents the force that transformed "magical" acts into acceptable religion in the Roman Empire. Theurgy itself had been brought into the Roman Empire through the agency of the Chaldeans. As far as we know, the earliest person claiming this art was Julianus, a contemporary of Marcus Aurelius.⁴⁰ He, in turn, claimed an association with an earlier Julianus, who gave him the secrets of the *Chaldean Oracles*. The technique of theurgy became more and more associated with the late neo-platonic school, to such an extent that Proclus could define theurgy grandly as "a power higher than all human wisdom, embracing the powers of divination, the purifying powers of initiation, and, in short, all the operations

splendore ceteros etiam deos illuminat. sume iam vultum laetiozem candido isto habitu tuo congruentem, comitare pompam deae sospitatrixis inovanti gradu. videant inreligiosi, videant et errorem suum recognoscant: en ecce pristinis aerumnis absolutus Isidis magnae providentia gaudens Lucius de sua Fortuna triumphat. quo tamen tutior sis atque munitior, da nomen sanctae huic militiae, cuius non olim sacramento etiam rogaboris, teque iam nunc obsequio religionis nostrae dedica et ministerii iugum subi voluntarium. nam cum coeperis deae servire, tunc magis senties fructum tuae libertatis."

⁴⁰ See Morton Smith, *Observations on Hekhaloth Rabbati*, in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann, Cambridge, Mass. 1963. See also Jamblique, *Les Mystères d'Égypte*, ed. E. des Places, Paris 1966. Also *Oracles Chaldaïques*, ed. E. des Places, Paris 1971.

of divine possession.”⁴¹ This explains why magic became acceptable in some aristocratic circles. Simply, it became a consistent religion, appealing to philosophers as well as their aristocratic students because of its independence from organized cults.

However, even in this particular context, the term “magic” often continued to be viewed with contempt. Porphyry accused Iamblichus of dealing only with demons and so forced Iamblichus to write a long justification of theurgy as a means of controlling gods as well as demons. It is not difficult to see in this conflict an attempt to define magic again. Iamblichus is actually defending himself against the charge that he is merely dealing in magic by attempting to show that his beliefs form a philosophically coherent system and involve communications with the gods.

This is a clue to the most obvious reason why the definition of magic continued to be ambiguous even in non-aggressive contexts. It appears that magic was often tacitly defined as worship of demons, while religion was defined as worship of the gods. Since both gods and demons were most often invisible, their effects alone being palpable, it was difficult to tell who was at work. Before it was clear whether “magic” or “religion” was the best explanation of the marvelous event, a complicated social ambiguity had to be resolved.

The most important example of this distinction may be found in Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*, 10:

Among those making profession of philosophy at Rome was one Olympius, an Alexandrian, who had been for a while a pupil of Ammonius. This man’s jealous envy showed itself in continual insolence, and finally he grew so bitter that he even ventured sorcery, seeking to crush Plotinus by star-spells. But he found his experiments recoiling upon himself, and he confessed to his associates that Plotinus possessed “a mighty soul, so powerful as to be able to hurl every assault back upon those that sought his ruin.” Plotinus had felt the operation and declared that at that moment Olympius’ limbs “were convulsed and his body shrivelling like a money-bag pulled tight.” Olympius, perceiving on several attempts that he was endangering himself rather than Plotinus, desisted.

In fact, Plotinus possessed by birth something more than is accorded to other men. An Egyptian priest who had arrived in Rome and, through some friend, had been presented to the philosopher, became desirous of

⁴¹ Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* I, 26 (Saffrey-Westerink I, 113).

displaying his powers to him, and he offered to evoke a visible manifestation of Plotinus' presiding spirit. Plotinus readily consented and the evocation was made in the Temple of Isis, the only place, they say, which the Egyptian could find pure in Rome.

At the summons, a divinity appeared, not a being of the spirit ranks, and the Egyptian exclaimed: "You are singularly blessed; the guiding-spirit within you is none of the lower degree, but a God." It was not possible, however, to interrogate or even to contemplate this God any further, for the priest's assistant, who had been holding the birds to prevent them from flying away, strangled them, whether through jealousy or in terror. Thus, Plotinus had for indwelling spirit a being of the more divine degree, and he kept his own divine spirit unceasingly intent upon that inner presence. It was this preoccupation that led him to write his treatise upon *Our Tutelary Spirit*, an essay in the explanation of the differences among spirit-guides.

Amelius was scrupulous in observing the Day of the New Moon and other holy days, and once asked Plotinus to join in such celebration: Plotinus refused: "It is for such beings to come to me, not for me to go to them." What was in his mind in so lofty an utterance we could not explain to ourselves and we dared not ask him.⁴²

There are very complicated and ambiguous relationships between magic and religion here. In the first paragraph Plotinus' power is distinguished from pure magic on the basis of superiority in quantity, not essence. Therefore, either Plotinus is being called a magician or Porphyry sees a continuum between religion and magic. In the second and succeeding paragraphs, it is clear that the latter alternative is to be chosen. Plotinus is to be distinguished from magicians because his power (as a god or coming from a god) is greater. Plotinus' claim to have divine power is upheld by a religious authority of some stature — an Egyptian priest. Though the practice sounds magical to us, it is clear that Porphyry is interested in it precisely because a priest of Isis is a religious defender of Plotinus' great power. Thus, after Porphyry has proven that Plotinus is a "divine man" with a god as tutelary spirit, he can digress to tell us of several great feats which were performed by him. In this context, as with other divine-men, we are to interpret the great feats as "miracles" not as magical manipulations, precisely because a religious claim is being made about the performer.

⁴² Plotinus, *The Enneads*, tr. Stephen MacKenna, rev. by B.S. Page, London 1965, 8.

In other words, there is no universal definition of magical procedure in Hellenistic culture. Instead, the charge of magic and its meaning depended on a complicated series of assumptions, not all of which were clear at the beginning of the social interaction. One of the results of the interaction was to produce that clarity. Thus, the charge of "magic" helps distinguish between various groups of people from the perspective of the speaker but does not necessarily imply any essential difference in the actions of the participants. In a narrative about the event, the narrator will attempt to clarify his grounds for distinction.

It is in this context that I believe we should put the disputes about Jesus in Mk. 2,3, Mt. 10, John 7, etc., as well as the accusations against Apollonius of Tyana and the other evidence that Morton Smith has given us.⁴³ As we would expect, the exorcism stories have been edited to discuss the question of the source of Jesus' power. In the Beelzebul controversy (Mk. 3: 19-27; Mt. 12: 22-30; Lk. 11: 14-16, 17-23) the ambiguity over the source of Jesus' power is clear, but it is also combined with the issue of dissent within the movement, which serves to obscure the conclusion of the gospel writer on the question of magic. The first question is raised by Jesus' followers (οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ) in the Markan version. Seeing the overwhelming crowds and anticipating the difficulty feeding them, some of his own disciples begin either to think that Jesus is insane or unaware of the problem by virtue of an ecstatic trance. (ἐλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη).⁴⁴ After this situation is outlined, the charge of the scribes of Jerusalem is introduced, combining a different but similar tradition of attack on the motivation for Jesus' actions, this time from outside the movement. The scribes are represented as believing that Jesus' power is not from God but from Beelzebul. This is logical because, if Jesus were from God, he could not oppose the legitimate authorities of Judea. Since he does, his power must have other sources. The New Testament portrayal however takes no account of the opponents' position. Jesus points out that he is casting out demons, therefore he must be from God, since Satan would not consent to overthrow his own kingdom. This argument only makes

⁴³ Note M. Smith, *Jesus: The Magician*. See also Anitra Bingham Kolenkow, *A Problem of Power: How Miracle-Doers Counter Charges of Magic in the Hellenistic World*, in *SBL 1976 Seminar Papers*.

⁴⁴ See the rabbinic comment on Simeon b. Zoma, b. Hagigah 15a.

sense if one assumes a unified evil hegemony in opposition to God and that the demons, now considered helpers of Satan, are evil — a presupposition central to the New Testament, which is only partly shared by the Pharisees and certainly not by all Jews, as Goodenough showed us above. In any event, in the New Testament it is enough to silence the opposition from the outside. Therefore the New Testament is not really interested in analyzing the social situation. More important to the story in the present context is the lesson that follows. Those followers who criticize the marvelous deeds of the savior risk blasphemy in the name of the Holy Spirit, a sin much worse than the accusation of the scribes, which appears only as external hostility. So the story of the charge of magic is combined with the issue of internal dissent which became the central issue for the church.

In Luke and Matthew, the controversy is complicated by a *tu quoque* argument which destroys the logic of the parable of the house divided but again reflects the unsolved ambiguity of the charge of magic: "If I cast out demons in the name of Beelzebul, in whose name do your sons exorcise?" This implies what we knew all along — that there were Jews who claimed to work similar acts to what Jesus had accomplished and who also claimed divine favor. Therefore, this version spells out the implication that Christianity is certainly "religion" if other kinds of Jewish exorcism can be. But the conclusion about magic is purchased at the price of the logic of the Markan version. The later gospels then fasten on the term "kingdom" and convert the story to a kingdom saying about the coming of the end of time. Matthew even eliminates the original charge of Jesus' followers, as a sensitive issue, by attributing the entire charge to Jesus' outside enemies, who are called "Pharisees" for the first time. No doubt this reflects a later time when Pharisees could have been expected to have made just such a charge, based on their conviction that Jesus' power was not from God, just as the scribes could have done so in Jesus' lifetime. Each additional comment gives us a further example of the difficulty in defining magic. If someone called himself a magician, that was one thing. But more often, people who appeared to have divine favor or who exercised supernatural power could be charged with the crime of magic by their detractors. There were no objective criteria separating the miracle worker from the magician. So, it was often necessary for an adept to prove himself a miracle worker and not a magician.

Furthermore, one sees from this particular context that the conflict has slightly different overtones than in the pagan examples. Here, worship or partnership with demons is not merely viewed as low, unsophisticated and potentially harmful. It was also a threat to monotheism, — heresy. Even when accepted as tutelary spirits, one had to decide whether the “demons” were angels — as some Jewish exorcists were evidently claiming⁴⁵ — or devils. Most often the judgment of the orthodox group was that these demons were evil, hence our use of the term “demonic” in contradistinction to the less morally loaded pagan understanding of the term.

Particularly striking in this respect is the remarkable similarity between Jesus’ “I am” statements and the claims of magicians in the magical papyri.⁴⁶ To find such little noted similarities takes an acute mind and years of research. The data clearly demonstrate the essential unity of all men claiming spiritual powers in late antiquity. Such similarities further demonstrate why the Gospel writers were sensitive to the charge of magic brought against Jesus. A defense against the charge of magic is not only characteristic of the polemics of the church fathers and evangelists, it goes back to the earliest traditions of the church. But it does not prove that Jesus was a magician. The early charge of magic against Jesus is not so much clear proof that Jesus was a magician as a clear example of the social manipulation of the charge of magic. When Jesus is accused of magic, it is his credentials as miracle worker that are under scrutiny. Since the determinants of Jesus’ credentials are not objectively verifiable, whether or not he is a magician is the subject of the controversy. There is no evidence that Jesus wished to claim the title of magician. To the contrary, the Gospel presents his teachings as well as the titles of divine favor as a defense against the accusation, just as Plotinus and Porphyry defend themselves.

The most interesting question for scholarship, as I see it, is not whether the charge of magic against Jesus is true or not. Since he does not claim the title, there can be no possible demonstration or disproof of a charge which is a matter of interpretation in the Hellenistic world.

⁴⁵ The Jewish exorcists described in the Gospel of Matthew certainly existed. See *Sefer Harazim* where Jewish magicians prayed to inferior “angels” to help them accomplish their ends.

⁴⁶ See M. Smith, 126.

The most interesting question for scholarship is to define the social and cultural conditions and presuppositions that allow such charges and counter-charges to be made.

Though I have been arguing that no single generalization can hold for the use of the charge of magic in Hellenistic society, a few general statements can be made, if they are understood as probabilities rather than essential distinctions. The charge of magic is likely to be made by legitimate religious leaders against people who are viewed as threatening the social order but who have as yet done no other prosecutable criminal offense. For instance, *Mathematici*, Jews, and Christians could be seen as subversive by the Roman government, so it was logical to charge them with "magic" even though the charge might be factually groundless and impress us as absurd. On the other hand, there were real Jewish and Christian sorcerers, whose existence was probably all the more detested because they could get the entire group into trouble. With this observation most of the usages of the word "magic" can be easily explained. In succeeding centuries, Christians and Jews shared the upper-class disgust with magic for different reasons. Orthodox Christians and Jews appear to have generalized the negative implication of magic to every outside group, including each other. Since every other religion was false, it stands to reason that every other religion was working with demons, not God. Therefore, every other religion was either magic (if it was *puissant*), or it was nothing at all. In this sense, both orthodox Christianity and Judaism appeared as a kind of "anti-witchcraft cult," a characteristic which was to add to their success considerably. Their enemies — Jesus in Judaism, Simon in Christianity — could be called magicians. Both could promise that their believers were free from the powers of fate.⁴⁷ Hence, they serve the same function as did the cult of Isis from Lucius in Apuleius' novel. But the impetus against witchcraft was the belief in one God.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See above, p. 355.

⁴⁸ Brown is mistaken in believing that Christianity was the first to use "witch" in the Zande sense — a fictional creature who is evil by essence. The Christian and Jewish disgust with magic was mediated by real experiences with sorcerers in the Greco-Roman period. Only later does the monotheistic contention that magic is worship of the daimons necessarily become equivalent with a coherent theory of satanic opposition to God. This theory of witchcraft cannot come into being until the Empire is completely

Even as the orthodox Christianity and Judaism opposed magic as worship of the demons, pagan opinions of magic seem to have grown more tolerant. However, since the late neo-platonic schools, those most famous for indulging in magic, were sensitive to the charge of magic, how then are we to explain the magical papyri's mixture of magic and religion? The answer, it seems to me, has to do with a situation outside of a strict Jewish or Christian setting, and outside of the aristocratic setting in a context where no accusation of magic is overtly made. An important factor is Egypt itself where spells and curses to protect the dead had been part of state religion since its inception. In these cases magic is most clearly a "conflict" crime — that is, a criminal act to some but not to all members of the society. This was the "ecological niche" of the Hellenized magi.

One of the clearest examples of the use of the term magic as a religious act comes from the autobiography of Thessalos.⁴⁹

Thessalos, after finding both that Greek rhetoric and traditional magic are not satisfactory, wanders in Egypt in search of a revelation. His question is whether any "magical energy" might still survive (ἐἴ τι τῆς μαγικῆς ἐνεργείας σώζεται).⁵⁰ The priests are either afraid of the legal repercussions of the term "magic" or more likely merely

Christianized. As Brown says: "... learned sorcery, of course, will survive into the Middle Ages, both in the West, in clerical circles, and even more so in the Eastern Mediterranean, among societies that remained in touch with their ancient roots — in Byzantium, Islam and the Jewish communities. At the end of our period, however, it is joined by another theme. We meet the *witch* in the full sense, a person who either is born with or achieves an inherent character of evil. In this case, it is not an unconscious mystical quality; it is gained by a conscious act. But the power is gained by a binding contract with the ultimate pole of evil — the Devil; and, once this quality is gained, it is rare (outside of pious stories) that the Christian authorities accept the recantation of the new-style witch. The contents of this new belief are well known. What matters is to seize the exact date and milieu in which it comes to the fore." (Brown, 35). It seems to me that such a concept is still too closely tied with Azande rather than Christian and Jewish belief. Furthermore, it becomes most important in a period much later than Brown implies. It is more characteristic of the Protestant Reformation. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, New York: 1971.

⁴⁹ See the recent article by J. Z. Smith, *The Temple and the Magician in God's Christ and His People* etc.) who summarizes all the research done on this document and presents the experience in it as characteristic of the religious life of late antiquity. He shows that the traditional forms of religion represented by the Temple are in decay making necessary a new form of individual experience with the divine.

⁵⁰ I, 13 Friedrich, p. 49 l., 16.

embarrassed by the belief in an act they could not practice.⁵¹ After much searching, one priest promises him a vision, if he can accomplish the requisite purification. At a pre-arranged place⁵² Thessalos asks to see Asclepius, alone "one to one".⁵³

Interestingly enough, though the promise of divinization is made through this theophany, it is the gift of the knowledge of proper times and places which occupies the attention of the narrator.

Again, as in the magical papyri, the mix of overtly magical claims with clearly religious desire of individual divinization makes it impractical to distinguish between magic and religion, for now magic is even taken, in opposition to the temple cults, to be the only really effective religion.

Although there is an implicit polemic against established religion, there is no social competition in the document, rather a description of the internal working of the minds that produced such documents and their location on the social map of the Roman Empire. A most helpful way of understanding the mix of what we call "vulgar magic" and "religion" in these syncretistic works is suggested by the anthropological study of the Aladura cult in Africa. Robin Horton postulates that :

A basic African cosmology ... has a two tier structure, the first tier being that of the lesser spirits and the second that of the supreme being. The lesser spirits underpin events and process in the microcosm of the local community and its environment, whilst the supreme being underpins events and processes in the macrocosm — *i.e.*, in the world as a whole.⁵⁴

This theory suggests that the distinction between lesser deities and the high God is not an arbitrary one. Obviously, the African analogy

⁵¹ See Smith, 235 on this point.

⁵² Called an OIKOS but not a temple. See Smith 235.

⁵³ Like "face to face," this term has an obvious theophanic association. See refs. brought by Smith, 243 n. 40 to Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Numenius and Eusebius from E. Peterson, *Herkunft und Bedeutung der monos pros monon-formel bei Platon in Philologus*, 88, 1933, 30-41.

⁵⁴ R. Horton, *On the Rationality of Conversion*, Pt. 1, in *Africa* 34, 1975, 220. The article runs from 219-235, and Pt. 2, *Ibid.*, 373-398. See also *African Conversion*, in *Africa* 41, 1971, 85-107. Against Horton, see H. Fisher, *Conversion Reconsidered: Some Historical Aspects of Religious Conversion in Black Africa*, in *Africa* 43, 1973, 27-40. Also Richard Bruce, *Conversion Amongst the Pyem*, unpublished paper, Dept. of Sociology, Zaria.

cannot be taken over in entirety. But it appears likely that the celebrants of the rites described in the magical papyri had a similar concept of the world. For the microcosmic aspects of life — little micro-political battles — it was enough to call on one or more demons to help balance the score. But when the meaning of processes in the macrocosm was sought, a greater kind of salvation was needed. Therefore the cosmos needs to contain two orders of divinity. In both black Africa and Egypt, it is the everyday affairs of local community which are being ordered when the divine inhabitants of the second rung are invoked. A rich plethora of lesser spirits and a wealth of techniques for manipulating them form the matrix of the second order of the cosmos. As with other magical charms, presumed control handles the anxiety of daily life. The bulk of the magical papyri contain description of rites important to the local community. But as individuals find themselves in the larger world of the Empire, they begin to perceive a higher moral code and spirituality for the governance of this wider life. Since the demons are not necessarily evil creatures in Egypt, and the papyri are specifically addressed to gods as well, the path from magic to religion could be seen as continuous in the papyri, — even if among other subgroups a distinction between magic and religion was necessary. Our confusion is that, following our Jewish and Christian forebears, we call the worship of demons and other Gods “magic,” which we take as contrary to religion. In the minds of those who were interested in the magical papyri, magic and religion were united.⁵⁵ Magic was religion.

There is no precise analogy between the African high god and the upper tier of the Hellenistic magical system. Although the Hellenistic texts give us a high god often, the really significant pattern of religion in the third century is not the name or attribute of the high god but the theophanic encounter with him through theurgic praxis (as in Thessalos’ case) or the heavenly journey of the soul to him by means of the psychopomp (as in *PGM*).

Now, this analysis of the similarity of magic and religion is intellec-

⁵⁵ This sociological observation is independently confirmed by Javier Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East*, Princeton 1977. See p. 4, for example: “To discuss the immortality of the soul or how to acquire true gnoses were not popular concerns.”

tualist and structuralist. Nevertheless, the analysis does have social consequences. Following Horton's train of thought, we ought to be able to define some of the social circumstances under which "magic" will be acceptable (i.e., under local micro-political pressures) as opposed to times when it will be necessary to rely on one of the higher religious ideologies and when any magical interpretation will be excluded. Where social relations are limited (i.e., confined to the microcosm), we should expect religious life to be centred on the demons or lesser spirits. But when social life grows more broad to involve greater contact with the macrocosm, religious life is likely to be somewhat different. Less attention will be paid to the spirits and more to the underpinning of events and processes in the macrocosm. Whether the processes are called "magic" or religion depends on the context. These suggestions of Horton can be helpful to us in studying the syncretistic activities of the late Empire. The magical scrolls pay an inordinate amount of attention to the tutelary deities of the Hellenistic world, so we should expect that they reflect basically a parochial society. But the story of Thessalos and other aspects of the scrolls reflect a sophisticated sense of the greater world. Indeed the story of Thessalos is interested in showing precisely that the traditional religions are bankrupt, that a new dispensation is needed in imperial times. It is arguing that the information found within magic is the only true science of spirituality. No doubt some magicians were trying to compete with other religions in the area, but this does not change the fact that the people who valued the scrolls understood and were occasionally interested in the great spiritual problems of the Roman Empire. We should then expect that some of the clientele of the magicians like Thessalos himself were educated in international sciences and were groping towards a more elaborate concept of deity, one that was in greater consonance with the world religions of their day. However, the acceptance of the rites of those religions appears to have been selective and serendipitous. This suggests that the phenomenon which we call syncretism (as a term of reproach) may equally well be understood as the coming to knowledge of various groups within the Empire of the vast system of political, economic and cultural exchange to which they belonged. Furthermore, it would suggest that the great religions of the Empire faced the same social problems, understood

something similar about imperial rule, and expressed it through the similar structures — either as ascent to or a descent of the God, which imparted knowledge of how to attain personal immortality. For a while the similarity in structure was enough. Finally, it was the Christian variety of the ascent-descent myth which was to serve as the single ideology which united the entire empire.

As for the definitional problems in the study of magic, this survey has tried to show that functionalist definitions (and to some degree certain structuralists as well) have brushed over several crucial factors “internal” to the situation. These approaches tend to produce definitions of concepts for analytical use but they often miss the subtleties and dramatic presentiment of the term in the situation itself or in their drive for taxonomic clarity fail adequately to distinguish between social perspectives.