

originals remain available), shows that the original decipherments are often defective (no discredit, however, to the pioneers in the field). There is then a pressing need for a single, coherent and systematic new edition of all known curse tablets, and one based, where possible, on new inspections of the texts. Happily, Jordan is engaged in such a task. The availability of such an edition will render all analytical approaches to the tablets much more easy and fruitful.

To some extent the study of curse tablets and other magical texts from classical antiquity has existed in a ghetto, and has not really been fully integrated into mainstream classical scholarship. While at the beginning of this century this isolation may have been caused by a general disdain for the 'irrational' aspects of classical antiquity, it is nowadays probably sustained by the technical difficulties and philological nature of the study of the tablets. It should then be a priority to bring such an integration about. The study of women and the study of religion are perhaps currently the two dominant areas of interest for Classical historians, yet works in these areas seldom refer to magical texts. The above discussion will, I trust, have shown how important magical texts can be for both of these subjects.

Postscript. Of great importance for the history of erotic curses is the detailed publication of a newly discovered and exciting tablet published by Voutiras, E., *Διονυσιοφώντος γάμοι. Marital life and magic in fourth-century Pella* (Amsterdam, 1998). On the representation of witches see Clauss, J.J., and Johnston, S.I., eds. *Medea* (Princeton, 1997) and, more controversially, Rabinowitz, J., *The rotting goddess: the origin of the witch in classical antiquity* (New York 1998). Another good collection of essays on ancient magic is provided by Meyer, M., and Mirecki, P., eds., *Ancient magic and ritual power* (Leiden, 1995). Graf's important general book on ancient magic, 1994a, is now available in English as *Magic in the ancient world* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997). A full and interesting account of exploitable ghosts is provided by Johnston, S.I., *Restless dead. Encounters between the living and the dead in ancient Greece* (Berkeley 1999); see also Felton, D., *Haunted Greece and Rome. Ghost stories from classical antiquity* (Austin, forthcoming). Finally, I mention two works that had not come to my attention at the time of writing. A further useful introduction to the Greek magical papyri is provided by Brashear, W., 'Magical papyri: magic in bookform' in Ganz, P., ed., *Das Buch als magisches und als Repräsentationsobjekt* (Wiesbaden, 1992) 25–59. A detailed and informative edition of a rich erotic attraction curse is provided by Martinez, D. G., *A Greek love charm from Egypt* (P. Mich. 757) P. Michigan xvi (Atlanta, 1991).

PART 2

Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature

Georg Luck

INTRODUCTION

No single, no collective image of the *magos* in antiquity emerges from our sources, but we can draw a composite image from texts of the fifth and sixth centuries (Heraclitus, Euripides, Gorgias, Hippocrates and Plato). We will attempt to sum up these testimonies in modern terms. We must also consider the few clues we have concerning the training of the sorcerer. The great witches of myth – Circe, Medea – will be discussed. The Near East has furnished the concept of the *magos* who could be a priest or king or both, a concept which was later Hellenized and lives on in semi-legendary figures such as Zoroastres, Hystaspes and Otanes.

To Judaism we owe religious leaders who might also be considered as *magoi*: Moses, Solomon and Jesus of Nazareth. As a Greek parallel to the Hellenized *magoi* we then shall consider Orpheus, Pythagoras and Empedocles. They are followed by the Egyptian Nectanebus who is connected with the Alexander romance. Theocritus, the pastoral poet, has given a fascinating portrait of an amateur witch in action, while Horace's Canidia and Lucan's Erictho are clearly professionals, though they are presented in poetry with rhetorical colors and satirical twists. A group of more or less controversial miracle-workers exhibits common features but also striking differences: Simon Magus, Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander the False Prophet. Apuleius of Madaura is a representative of Middle Platonism who was attracted by magic but in the end became an eloquent propagandist of Isis. Neoplatonism finally gives us a new type of Greek *shaman* on a high level, the theurgist, and various occult phenomena are now closely tied up with the traditions of paganism. We return to the old sorcerer with his repertory of tricks in Hippolytus' 'Unmasking'. But some Christians were also attracted by magic, as the curious story of Bishop Sophronius shows.

We have little evidence concerning the actual attire and appearance of the *magos* during the performance of a ritual. It must have varied greatly – from the rags worn by Lucan's Erictho to the priestlike robes embroidered with symbols favoured by theurgists. There are allusions to masks or heavy make-up and strong perfumes.

It might be helpful to study those prominent figures in chronological

progression, as we travel from the ancient Near East to Archaic Greece and further to the Christian Roman Empire.

Greek and Roman magic had some of its roots in the Near East, and in order to understand it, we ought to study the religious and magical beliefs and practices of the Sumerians, the Hittites, the Persians and the Jews. For the purposes of this survey, it will be sufficient to deal with some of the Hellenized *magoi* of Persia and some Old Testament figures such as Moses and Solomon. The formidable witches of Greek myth, Circe and Medea, seem to belong to a non-Greek or pre-Greek culture, but they have influenced Greek thought strongly. Orpheus, Pythagoras and Empedocles are still semi-mythical but can be placed in a historical context. Hellenistic Alexandria played the role of the great melting pot. In Rome, we find, after a historical figure like Nigidius Figulus, some composite literary figures like Vergil's Dido that reflect historical and mythical antecedents. The strong yearning for healing, salvation, and peace, called forth the miracle-workers of the first century AD. Apuleius is partly *magos*, partly philosopher, partly *homme de lettres*. Theurgy, finally, may be seen as a last attack on Christianity. The Christians, for a long time, did not abandon magic completely.

To give an idea of the universality of magical beliefs, a geographical *tour d'horizon* of the Mediterranean world from East to West will be useful. It must begin in the Near East with the countries which have always been associated with magic, astrology, divination and the other occult sciences, i.e. Babylonia and Assyria (the country of the Chaldaeans) and Persia (the country of the *magoi*).

From that part of the world, various occult techniques reached Greece and Italy in the prehistorical period, perhaps via Thessaly, a region traditionally associated with witchcraft. A special method of divination through the livers of sacrificial animals was probably brought by the Etruscans from Asia Minor to Italy and became part of Roman religion. During the Hellenistic period, new ideas and practices travelled to Greece and *Magna Graecia* via Egypt. In all these Western areas, however, there were native conglomerates which combined with the new material. We may assume that many areas preserved some ancient bits of folklore or 'superstition' which cannot be documented anywhere else. At the same time, during the first centuries of our era a kind of common idiom of witchcraft established itself throughout the Roman Empire.

Another approach to the material discussed in the following pages is possible through the range of phenomena from folk religions to the sophisticated urban diversity of Hellenistic Alexandria and Imperial Rome. At these later stages we see a colorful multitude of cults and creeds (including the Mystery religions) on the one hand and philosophical schools competing with each other on the other hand. The history of

ancient magic reflects to an astonishing degree the cultures which have created and shaped it. The roots, the archetypes, may be lost in the dawn of prehistory, but they can be reconstructed to some extent. In the remotest periods, magic probably claimed to provide all the answers which were later furnished by science, technology and philosophy: it was everything to everybody. But the historic cultures of the Near East already had their distinct character. They created large cities with mixed populations besides the smaller rural settlements. There was no doubt even then a lively exchange of ideas across the subcontinents and seas. When we come to the even larger cities of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, everything, of course, happened on a larger scale, and the interaction between various cultures became more intensive.

There are certain issues that have to be addressed in a survey of this kind. Throughout antiquity, we see a general awareness of the kind of person a sorcerer must be and of the powers he is most likely to possess. But there is no single image that fits all cultures and periods. The history of the terms *magos*, *mageia*, suggests an old misunderstanding: What, for the Persians, was their national religion, was, in the eyes of the Greeks, ritual magic. This is a phenomenon that we can observe throughout history: From the outsider's point of view, a foreign religion may be nothing more than hocus pocus. The first practitioners of magic in Greece, as described by Heraclitus, Hippocrates and Plato, were certainly no priestlike figures, but 'itinerant diviners', 'vagabonds of the night'. From these texts, vague as they are, we may establish the main characteristics of these individuals. From a later period we have clues as to the apprenticeship of a magician. The great witches of Greek myth have certain features in common yet remain distinctive personalities. The 'Hellenized Magi' form an important bridge between the Near East and Classical Greece, while Moses and Solomon represent a rather different kind of spiritual power. A specifically Greek type of shaman can be studied in such semi-legendary figures as Orpheus, Pythagoras and Empedocles. Poets like Theocritus, Vergil, Horace, Seneca and Lucan have given us memorable portraits of witches, partly based on timeless myth, but also mixed with contemporary reality (Canidia is supposed to have been a perfume mixer called Grattidia). Jesus of Nazareth, Simon Magus, Apollonius of Tyana, Apuleius and Alexander of Abonuteichos represent different aspects of the type of religious leader, travelling teacher, prophet or miracle worker of the early Christian era. Theurgy, as practiced by some Neoplatonists, is not a completely new type of occult technique, but rather a higher, respectable form of very ancient practices used now to prove the reality of the old gods against the attacks of the Christians. The Christians, in retaliation, unmask fraudulent magicians.

From our modern point of view, witchcraft is not only a kind of

science or technology, it also has a more general cognitive function, i.e., it is a way of perceiving the world, making sense of it, explaining it, using it for its purposes. For a very long time religion and magic were the only ways for people to come to terms with the outside world (the macrocosm) and their own personalities (the microcosm). Religion and mythology provided the answers to all the questions people kept asking. As to dealing with the higher powers on which people depend, religion mainly prescribed prayer and sacrifice and ritual, offered in a humble, submissive, repentant or grateful spirit, while magic normally used coercion, threats, special procedures. This is only a very rough distinction, and there are exceptions to limit its validity. Religion is based on belief and tradition, and so is magic, while science, including psychology, although never completely free from myth and prejudice, is based on logic and experiment. There is, of course, a kind of weird logic in witchcraft as well, and this could explain its appeal and the role it played as a pseudo-science. After Thales of Miletus and the other Ionian scientists appeared, after the work done by Hippocrates and his school, people would seem to have a choice between 'real' science, old and new religion and magic, but very few will have been able to make clear-cut decisions. For a long time, as the example of Anaxagoras shows, to be a scientist was equivalent to being an atheist. The same charge was made against magicians. On the other hand, a Neo-pythagorean miracle-worker like Apollonius of Tyana can say in his own defense that he is not a magician but a scientist. Empedocles was a great thinker as well as a miracle-worker, and E. R. Dodds has asked the intriguing question whether he started out as a *magos* who lost his nerve and took to science, or whether he was a true philosopher who also experimented with magic (like Apuleius, perhaps). The problem, insoluble of course, illustrates the dilemma we are facing. For the theurgist who communicates with the highest gods (via a medium, no doubt), the messages received from another world, no matter how confused or trivial they may seem to us, represent, for the believer, the ultimate truth.

The development of magical beliefs and practices in ancient times offers a number of examples for the tensions and interactions between an 'ignorant' general population and a 'sophisticated' urban elite. Magic has its roots in prehistoric times when these distinctions were meaningless, but as soon as science and philosophy emerge, i.e. since the sixth century BC, we have, roughly speaking, these two segments of the population: an 'enlightened' minority and a 'backward' majority. This dichotomy is clearly visible in Hippocrates' treatise *On the sacred Disease*, where he characterizes the 'diviners, purifiers and humbugs' (who had their public, to be sure) and tacitly differentiates them from the scientific physicians he himself is training on Cos. Naturally, magic was practiced among the rural population, as the Law of the Twelve Tables and the healing

formulas in Cato's *On agriculture* show, but also in the cities, as the curse tablets excavated in Athens prove. Theophrastus' amusing portrait of the 'Superstitious Man' in the *Characters*, written from the point of view of Aristotelian philosophy, would indicate that protective mechanisms against evil powers were used in Athens even during an enlightened period. In Alexandria, ancient beliefs and modern theories combined with a variety of religions to form a complex and sophisticated system of occult sciences, including astrology and alchemy. Long after the victory of Christianity, these ideas and practices survived, in a simplified form, among the *pagani* who were, by definition, backward and removed from the cultural centers.

We are in a good position to study the marketing and commercialization of cults by reading, for instance, Lucian's account of Alexander of Abonuteichos, the 'False Prophet', a masterpiece of satire, based on historical reality. This man was a true genius but also an accomplished charlatan who invented the cult of Glycon, the sacred snake, and appointed himself its chief priest. The naive inhabitants of Abonuteichos were persuaded to build a sanctuary which served as the basis for an ever-expanding religious enterprise. Alexander borrowed freely from other cults and relied on his practical experience as a travelling magician. Above all, he brought to his widespread enterprise a keen business sense. The whole organization is described in detail by Lucian, and what worked so well in this particular context no doubt worked equally well for other cults, in other places. Alexander realized the deep need people felt to believe, to be saved, to be guided, to worship higher powers, and he exploited these needs to the fullest extent.

We know of other cults that were practically created, if not by a single person, at least by committees of priests and politicians. The best example is the cult of Serapis (a combination of Osiris and Apis) in Egypt. The religion of Isis had an army of skilled propagandists, among them no less an accomplished literary and philosophical figure than Apuleius of Madaura.

CONCEPTS AND SEMANTICS

The distinction between 'religion' and 'magic' on the one hand and 'philosophy' and 'magic' on the other are bound to vary according to the historical period, the cultural context, and the personal point of view of the speaker. Our earliest Greek testimonies differentiate between 'witchcraft' as a rather suspect, if not unlawful activity, something that could not possibly be mistaken for religion, because (for example) it took place at night and was not connected with any established sanctuaries and religion.

Another distinction is no less important. Again and again, we see that the religion of one culture, e.g. that of the Persians or the Egyptians or of some 'primitive' or culturally backward people might appear as 'magic' in the eyes of another, more advanced, culture. This discrimination was more often than not based on a simple misunderstanding, as the origin of the word *mageia* illustrates; but it also could be deliberate. Someone like Apollonius of Tyana was called a magician by his enemies, while he saw himself as a philosopher or a true scientist. But there are witches like Canidia or Erichtho who want to be nothing else but practitioners of the black arts; they are proud to be feared and hated; they exult in their sense of power.

The complexity of the problem is partly due to the nature of our sources. Sometimes we depend almost entirely on hostile reports (Simon Magus, Alexander the False Prophet). Sometimes, we listen to the voices of admirers or loyal followers (Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*). Sometimes, we have a fairly well balanced account (e.g. Apuleius who reports the accusations made against him and refutes them convincingly).

It may be useful to define some terms that are more or less frequently used in this chapter. It will be noticed that almost all Greek terms have a fairly close Latin equivalent and vice versa. The following glossary represents only a small selection from the magical vocabulary of Graeco-Roman antiquity whose very size testifies to the importance of the subject. In this respect, the Greeks were not different from, e.g., the Maoris who have, in their language, about twenty synonyms for 'incantation' in general and a number of more specific terms, such as 'incantation to be used by a rejected suitor'. If read with close attention to the linguistic and cultural context, the following list is more than a simple glossary: It helps open up a new understanding of the place occupied by the magical arts in ancient thought and society.

Aegyptius: 'Egyptian', but also 'sorcerer, prophet, wise man'. Hence Engl. 'gypsy' and its connotations.

Agyrtes: Used together with *mantis* by Plato, probably in the sense of 'itinerant wizard' or 'travelling diviner'.

Atheos: Literally a person who rejects the gods of the society, community or culture to which he belongs. Philosophers like Anaxagoras or Theodorus were accused of atheism, and under the Roman Emperors, 'the philosophers' were often banished together with the sorcerers and astrologers. From a pagan view, the Christians, too, could be called 'atheists'; hence the scholarly debate stirred up by Iamblichus, *On the mysteries of Egypt* 3.31 as to whether *atheoi* refers to Christians or sorcerers. In the *Acts*

of the *Disputation of St. Achatius* the Roman magistrate says to the Christians: 'You are *magoi*, because you introduce some new kind of religion.'

Chaldaeus: 'Chaldaean', originally member of the ruling caste of Babylon, a priest or scholarly astrologer. Cf. *Magos*. Later any astrologer or diviner.

Curiositas: 'curiosity', specifically, like its Greek equivalent, *periergia*, 'interest in magic'. One of the themes of Apuleius' novel, *Metamorphoses*. There is another euphemism of this kind: *ta hyper anthropon eidenai*, 'to know that which is beyond a (mere) human being'.

Dynamis: 'power', especially 'supernatural power'. Related to *arete*, *charis* and equivalent to *potestas*, *virtus*. The words have different shades of meaning, varying between 'force', 'effectiveness', 'grace' and 'spiritual gift'. Obviously all of them could have religious connotations. *Exousia* in the sense of 'spiritual power' could also be mentioned. These terms reflect the belief that some people have supernatural powers as a gift. Other terms, such as *techne*, *ars*, *scientia*, reflect the conviction that magic is an art that can be acquired. Ideally, the *magos* should not only have the special gift and be favored by the gods or by nature; he should also study his subject thoroughly.

Epoide: 'charm', 'incantation'. Magical spells were often sung or chanted, and it was thought that the music – in itself a kind of magic, *thelxis* – added to the power of the words and acts. In Latin, *carmen* means 'song' and 'spell'. The English words 'charming' and 'enchanting' still reflect these ancient beliefs.

Fascinatio: 'form of bewitching', hence the English word. Probably related with Greek *baskania*, 'envy'. A person may bewitch another because of envy. According to some modern scholars, envy is, in fact, at the root of all magic. *Fascinum* is an amulet in the shape of a phallus, used as a protection against the Evil Eye.

Goeteia: 'witchcraft', hence *goes*, 'wizard, sorcerer'. Pagans and Christians alike use these terms to denote lower forms of magic, and there almost always is a connotation of fraud and deceit. In this respect, *goeteia* is practically synonymous with *manganeia* which, originally, meant something like 'engineering'. Hence, it would imply natural explanations of seemingly supernatural phenomena and, at the same time, draw attention to fraud and deceit. Alexander, the Pseudoprophet, used *manganeumata* to orchestrate the cult of his god, Glycon.

Mageia. Hence *magos*, *magikos*, *mageuein*. Probably the most general term. A Greek word which originally designated the religious rituals performed by the chief priests of the Persians. These were obviously so different from the rites practiced by the Greeks that they were easily misunderstood and assigned to a different sphere, the realm of magic. This kind of misunderstanding occurs typically when different cultures come into contact with each other. Thus the Romans misinterpreted the religions of some nations they conquered, and the victorious Church suppressed vestiges of pagan rites because it considered them forms of witchcraft and daemon-worship.

Mystes: One who is initiated into one of the Mystery religions. Applies also to the sorcerer who has reached a certain level. *Mysterion* or *telete* could designate a high degree of magical knowledge, while *telesma* (hence 'talismán') also means 'amulet', sometimes called *alexikakon*, 'avertor of evil'. It is remarkable how the language of the sorcerer (for there was such a thing, as we know from Lucian's work on Alexander) borrowed from the language of the Mystery religions, and if it borrowed words, it must also have borrowed ideas and rituals.

Necromancy: Ritual designed to conjure up ghosts and force them to reveal the future. Famous examples: Homer's *Nekyia* (Book 11 of the *Odyssey*) and Lucan's Erictho episode (Book 6 of the *Pharsalia*).

Pharmakon: 'drug', either as 'poison' or 'remedy'. Hence, *pharmakeia*, 'knowledge of remedies and poisons', but also 'magical knowledge'.

Physikos: Originally 'naturalist' or 'scientist' in the sense of 'investigator of natural phenomena', but sometimes used for 'magician'.

Planos: 'vagabond' or 'deceiver', in a certain context synonymous to *thytes*, 'sacrificer', and probably related to *agyrtes* and *mantis*.

Potio: 'potion', especially 'love potion', corresponds to Greek *philtron*. There is an analogy to *poculum* which could be any 'cup', but specifically a drink that had been drugged. Whenever the possibility of magic was involved, people were careful with their language. Again, the semantic evidence is revealing: German 'Gift' today means only 'poison', but its Germanic ancestor must have meant the same as the English word. It is easy to understand why people preferred to say: 'Something has been given to him' rather than 'someone has poisoned him'.

Shaman: Term borrowed by anthropologists from the Tungusian language to designate the 'medicine-man'. In the Greek world, this was usually a

'divine man', a 'prophet', a 'medium' or an inspired teacher, but it could also be applied to a sorcerer.

Sortarius: A late Latin word for the professional who casts and interprets the *sortes*, i.e. lots, to predict the future. These 'lots' may be sticks or dice or cards with certain symbols. The picking up of the lots was called *sortilegium*. That particular method of divination may have given us the Tarot cards. It is interesting to note the semantic extension by which the practitioner of a special technique, the *sortilegium*, could become the 'sorcerer' pure and simple.

Superstitio: The etymology of this term is controversial, but it seems to have meant, originally, 'left-over piece of an earlier (discarded) culture'. The Greek equivalent, *deisidaimonia*, has a more obvious derivation: it means 'fear of higher powers', *daimones*. This would not necessarily exclude the deities generally worshipped in the city-state. From Theophrastus' 'Portrait of the Superstitious Person', it appears that such a fear had to be really excessive and go far beyond normal devotion and religious practices; it might include the regular worship of half-forgotten native deities and all sorts of exotic gods.

Thaumaturgos: 'Miracle-workers'. The term could be applied to an archaic shaman, like Pythagoras, but also to a great religious teacher like Jesus of Nazareth, worshiped as the Saviour, the Son of God, as well as a travelling Neopythagorean like Apollonius of Tyana. 'Divine man', *theios aner*, and 'deity in human shape', *anthropodaimon*, are closely related terms. Miracles were demanded by those who were ready to be converted, and if the miracles were accepted as such, 'faith', *pistis*, followed.

Theourgia: 'working on the gods' or 'making the gods work', a higher kind of magic, performed in a religious context, by philosophers and priests. They were supposed to make the statues of the ancient gods smile and talk, etc. Some mystic experiences resemble 'séances' and presuppose a medium in trance. These techniques were used by the defenders of paganism in their struggle against the ever-growing popularity of the New Faith.

Thytes: 'sacrificer', perhaps 'wizard' in our earliest witnesses. Any practitioner not attached to one of the traditional sanctuaries, working outside of the established religion of the city-state, but claiming divine revelation, purification and solutions for people's everyday problems.

THE CONVENTIONAL IMAGE OF THE SORCERER

As we look at the main testimonies, we notice only a general awareness of the powers of magic and the personality of the sorcerer (Nock, 1933/1972: *passim*). It becomes clear that there is not a single image, which does not surprise in such a complex culture.

We may start with a passage in Euripides' *Orestes* (408 BC). Here (line 1497) three possible explanations are given for Helen's disappearance: (1) drugs; (2) magical arts; (3) theft by one of the gods. We see that divine action is put on the same level as magical operations, but no clue is given as to what magician could be powerful enough to perform such a feat. It is, however, conceivable that magicians took credit for this kind of spectacular disappearing act, just as they took credit for an eclipse of the moon.

In his *Helen*, Gorgias (c. 480–c. 375) offers four possible explanations for Helen's going to Troy: (1) divine compulsion; (2) human force; (3) persuasion by word; (4) passionate love. He comments on (3) by introducing *epoidai*, i.e. charms that give pleasure or remove pain and explains this by *goeteia* and *mageia*, adding that these employ techniques to influence the soul and deceive the mind. In other words, a powerful sorcerer could make Helen want to go to Troy by giving her some irresistible illusions. There is no doubt a connection between the two texts.

In his treatise *On the sacred Disease* (late v BC) Hippocrates writes: 'The men who first sanctified this disease must, I think, have been of the type of our present-day . . . purifiers and mendicants and humbugs. They actually pretend to be very pious and to have special knowledge.' The author seems to refer to a species of practitioners who might be called low-level *shamans* and are the opposite of the scientific healers Hippocrates wished to train. These travelling medicine men are related to the *manteis kai agyrtai* that Plato (*Republic* p. 364) exposes.

Vettius Valens (ii AD), an astrological author, says (p. 74, 17 Kr.) that a particular stellar juncture produces *magoi*, deceivers (*planoi*), sacrificers (*thytai*), healers, astrologers who lead people astray (i.e. not serious astrologers like Vettius Valens), bankers who counterfeit the currency and forge signatures – all kinds of people who conduct their business through villainy, imposture and deceit. The author does not differentiate between the various occult practitioners, although the terms he uses emphasize certain aspects of their art; he lumps them together with dishonest bankers. They all operate through deceit; they are basically criminals. It is interesting to note that the 'sacrificer' is mentioned together with the *magos* by Hippocrates, *On the sacred Disease* 3.

Plato is an important witness. In the *Symposium* 202 A, Diotima,

discussing daemons, places magic close to religion and says: 'Through their care goes the whole science of divination, the arts of the priests and of all those concerned with sacrifices in initiations and spells and all divining and witchcraft (*goeteia*). God has no intercourse with men: It is through this race that all intercourse happens between gods and men.' Here we have Plato's daemonology in a nutshell. Again, the 'sacrificers' are associated with the magicians; theirs must be *magica sacra*, and the initiation rites are hardly the traditional ones, as practised at Eleusis.

Nock sums up these testimonies and the others he discusses as follows:

What then did the ancients mean by *mageia*? Broadly speaking three things: the profession by private individuals of the possession of technical ability enabling them to supply recipes or perform rites to help their clients and damage their clients' enemies; and . . . 'the religions belonging to aliens or on any general ground disapproved. The third use is natural.

Who are the *agyrtai* and *manteis* mentioned by Plato? Whether we translate them as 'nightwandering wizards' or as 'itinerant diviners and magicians', they remain shadowy figures, working at the margins of society (Graf, 1994a: 32–3, 271 n. 8). May we equate the terms *agyrtai*, *manteis*, and *magoi* or *goetes*? Only Heraclitus associates the *magoi* with the 'vagabonds of the night'. That they operate at night, not during the day, like most priests and seers, also makes them suspicious.

Graf points out another passage (Sophocles, *King Oedipus* 387–8) where *magos* is used in a negative sense (Graf, 1994a: 33). Tiresias, a respected *mantis*, is insulted as a *magos*, a schemer, a crooked begging priest whose eyes are open for gain, but closed for his art. Taking money for predicting the future seems to be a further element defining the charlatan.

Whether these specialists also fabricated curse tablets and 'voodoo dolls' for their clients – for a price, of course – we can only guess. Whatever their specialty or the variety of services they offered, we may call them lower-level *shamans* of the ancient world, the Greek equivalent of the medicine men that many civilizations have produced all over the world.

One further characteristic feature deserves to be pointed out: it is one of the claims of these 'itinerant priests' and 'diviners' or whatever they were, to 'heal the consequences of an injustice done.' This refers almost certainly to sins committed by one of the ancestors of the client. Emotional distress or mental illness is seen by this school of travelling psychiatrists as a result of crimes committed in previous generations. These crimes are most likely of a religious nature. The patient who suffers the consequences is subjected to 'purifications and rites.'

As Graf remarks, the Heraclitus fragment (see below) makes excellent sense when considered from this point of view (Graf, 1994a: 34). The

philosopher threatens the shady practitioners with the same punishment in the afterlife which they promise to spare their patients in this life!

Originally, the *magoi* were Persian priests, members of a special caste or a secret society. They were responsible for the religious ceremonies, the sacrifices, the funerary rites, for divination and the interpretation of dreams. As such, they were high officials of the Empire. Xenophon calls them 'experts in matters concerning the gods.' The author of the *First Alcibiades*, talking about the teachers of the Persian elite, says that they teach the *mageia* which comes from Zoroaster, the son of Horomasdus, and it is the cult of the gods.' Another Platonist, Apuleius (*Apol.* 25), quotes this passage (*Alcibiades* 122 A) to reject the accusations directed against him, and he stresses the fact that the *magoi* were the priests closest to the kings. The religion founded by Zoroaster was, after all, the national religion of the Persians until the Arab conquest (642 AD), and the *magoi* must have fulfilled their original functions during all these centuries.

Apollonius of Tyana apparently did not have too much respect for them; according to Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* 1.26) he said: 'They know a good many things; but there are things that they do not know.'

The word *magos*, like *goes*, had a negative connotation ever since the archaic age. Heraclitus (end of vi BC) associates the *magoi* with the 'vagabonds of the night, bacchants, maenads, mystai.' With the exception of 'vagabond', these terms also had a positive connotation which can only mean that the practitioners of occult arts usurped these terms to suit their more or less shady activities. It is as if a magician called himself the priest of some unknown deity. One only has to think of Alexander, the inventor and high priest of a new god, Glycon. But these people existed in the time of Heraclitus who threatens them with tortures in the afterlife, because what they call their 'mysteries' are, in reality, 'impious rites.'

Heraclitus must have had in mind the *agyrtai* and *manteis*, the 'begging priests'. The fact that these practitioners were 'itinerant' or 'mendicant', i.e., not attached to a sanctuary, made them suspicious. No matter how lowly his status, the Greek *goes* could see himself as a descendant of the Persian *magos*, i.e. as a kind of priest. The religion whose priest he was might be remote or long forgotten, but he might still be proud of his status. But the 'vagabonds of the night', the *magoi*, the bacchants, the maenads, and the *mystai* were threatened by Heraclitus with punishment in the next life. This composite picture is very suggestive. It seems that the *magos* had a little bit of everything – the bacchantic (i.e. ecstatic) element, the initiation rites, the migratory life, the nocturnal activities. Such, no doubt, were Plato's *agyrtai kai manteis*.

According to André Bernard's thesis, the sorcerer is motivated exclusively by envy or jealousy (*phthonos*). In my opinion, the sorcerer is also motivated by greed and by his desire to gain prestige and status. He might

be an astrologer by profession, but he could probably also sell you an amulet to protect you from unfavorable constellations.

Any magical operation presupposes that some sort of energy is available in the universe which can be used by the operator. The modern anthropologists call it *mana*, the Greeks called it *dynamis*, 'power', or *charis*, 'grace', or *arete*, 'effectiveness'. In a polytheistic society, it was only natural that the one Power took on the forms and names of many powers – gods, daemons, heroes, disembodied souls, etc – who were willing, even eager, to work for the *magos*.

Sometimes, the *magos* does not quite understand what is actually working through him and for him. The sorcerer and the witch only know that something is working. The sorcerer can be a priestlike figure – a theurgist in the Neoplatonist style – or, more likely, a charlatan. But he deals with a clientele whose predominant emotions are hope and fear, as Lucian said very clearly in his attack on *Alexander, the Pseudoprophet*. People everywhere are concerned about the same things: health, wealth, good looks, favorable marriage, children, protection from dangers or disasters, and so on. In a sense, the sorcerer feels that he is above the law, above the moral code that ordinary people respect. Though he may not see it in these terms, he is a law unto himself.

The Persian *magoi* were priests, and perhaps what we call magic is the survival of a very ancient religion, the cult of the mother Earth who was worshipped in historical times under a variety of names: Ge or Gaia, Demeter, Ceres, Terra Mater, Bona Dea, Cybele and so on.

This idea of priesthood may survive in the most obscure practitioners of historical times. But the borrowing of names, concepts and rituals from religions is one of the characteristics of ancient magic.

In a sense, magic, understood as a kind of science, has always tried to locate the secret forces (*dynameis*) in nature (*physis*), especially their sympathies and antipathies and use for them for specific purposes. Apollonius of Tyana whom many considered a magician, saw himself, if we can believe his biographer and hagiographer, Philostratus, as a scientist and philosopher, and Apuleius thought of himself in the same terms. Yet the magicians were less interested in knowledge for its own sake, in pure science, than in manipulating the forces in the universe. At the same time, they explored the human soul, the hopes and fears of ordinary people in order to control them. Alexander of Abonuteichos is a good example. Like the *shamans* of so-called primitive tribes, the ancient wizards also knew about the effects of certain plants. They were able to alter states of consciousness in themselves and in others. These gifts and skills were probably not developed in all practitioners to the highest degree.

In Plato's *Laws* (10.908 C/D), the Athenian mentions certain types of 'godless criminals', especially those 'who are convinced that the universe

is without any gods, are the prey of their passions – pleasures and pains – and have an excellent memory and a very sharp mind . . .’ Some of these atheists are frank to the point of being cynical and make fun of the gods; others are more tactful and deceive the people. They are ‘gifted’ and can do a lot of mischief, and from their ranks spring forth ‘many diviners and charlatans . . .’

Here we have the portrait of a very clever operator who does not believe in the gods of the city-state but does not necessarily deny them openly. He is very much on his own, a victim of his emotions, but also able to work on the emotions – the hopes and fears – of others. Plato practically anticipates a figure like Alexander of Abonuteichos, and this can only mean that such figures already existed in his own time. They are outside of society, yet able, because they are so clever and have excellent memories (but of what?) to profit from ordinary people’s superstitions.

How can we sum up from the testimonies we have examined the characteristics of the professional?

1. he/she manipulates higher powers
2. he pursues specific goals
3. his rites are specific, individual, although, to us, they may seem traditional and stereotyped
4. he develops a professional–client relationship. This means, e.g., that he expects satisfied clients to recommend him to other prospective clients, emphasizing what he has done for them
5. when he fails, he modifies his techniques
6. since he cannot rely on a common faith (the gods will help you sooner or later) instant success is everything to him
7. though he may wish to appear as a benefactor to mankind, he does not feel bound by ethics

It is not surprising that the sorcerer, after all, remains a shadowy figure, wrapped in secrecy, because that is his trademark. The sorcerer as a type is, perhaps, never a real person, but always a composite figure: seer, priest, healer, philosopher for those who believe in him, and a fraud, a charlatan, a criminal for those who have no use for him. This is, perhaps, the main problem. We always move in a twilight zone. There are those who need the sorcerer, and there are those who see in him a danger to society.

By the end of the last century BC, Hellenistic magic, as we know it, was fully formed as a system, and all the occult practices that we usually distinguish – ritual magic, daemonology, astrology, alchemy – had become applied sciences that could be studied and learned to a certain extent. Much of the instruction was probably carried out orally, in secret. At the same time, magic was a sacred art, a privilege of the priests of Egypt and

the Hellenized *magoi*. Many magical texts on papyrus are actually religious texts. Some of the rituals described are dramatic performances.

The priests of Egypt were supposed to be the keepers of ancient mysteries that they did not share with outsiders, but they must have admitted apprentices, even though we know very little about their methods of teaching and training which makes them difficult to approach.

We have a number of technical treatises on astrology and alchemy, but they do not seem to cover their subject thoroughly, and oral instruction was no doubt necessary to fill the gaps. The same is true for the treatises on alchemy we have today. And the substantial body of recipes and formulas for specific purposes that we have in the *Magical Papyri* could not take the place of a complete introduction. They were intended for the experienced professional.

One more word about the image of the professional. The practicing *magos* was probably not always an astrologer and an alchemist. As these occult sciences became more and more complex, it was increasingly difficult to master them all. No doubt some sorcerers dabbled in more than one of these arts, and as an ideal, at least, the Faustian type of the magician who is also a great astrologer, alchemist, daemonologist and physician, was recognized. In his sphere, he was not unlike the ‘complete’ scientist trained in the Aristotelian tradition.

THE SORCERER’S APPRENTICESHIP

In Lucian’s *Lovers of Lies* (34–46), Pancrates of Memphis, a ‘holy scribe and an extraordinary scholar who knew everything that Egypt could teach’ tells his travelling companions how he became a sorcerer. He spent twenty-three years in secret, subterranean chambers where Isis herself instructed him in the arts of magic. Lucian must always be taken with more than a grain of salt, but the *adyta* of Egyptian temples are mentioned elsewhere, for instance in the stories rejected by Arnobius, *Against the Gentiles* 43.1, that Jesus, while living in Egypt, had learned the names of ‘powerful angels’ (i.e. daemons) in the secret rooms of Egyptian temples. Long before Jesus, Pythagoras was supposed to have spent some time underground in Egypt, where the ‘Mother’ shared her knowledge with him. This tradition may reflect an initiation rite involving a descent into the land of the dead (Jones, 1986: 48–50).

One should note, perhaps, that magic, like poetry and music, or any art, was considered a gift of the gods. Apollonius of Tyana was chosen by Asclepius to spend three years in his sanctuary at Aigai in Cilicia where higher truths were revealed to him in dreams.

The apocryphal *Confession* of Cyprian (iii AD) who started out as a

magician and rhetor, speaks of a training period of ten years with the priests of Memphis. He was also initiated into a number of mystery cults.

The encounter with a deity, the revelation of arcane knowledge does not always take place underground; it may also happen on the top of a mountain. The experience itself is often described as a *mysterion* or a *telete*, i.e. an initiation (Graf, 1994a: 107–37). We learn from Pliny (*Natural History* 30.16) that the Emperor, Nero, was initiated by an authentic sorcerer, the Armenian Tiridates, 'through magical banquets', but we are not told what these banquets were. Sorcerers sometimes ate figurines that they had made with flour and smoked with incense (Graf, 1994a: 125), but in this case, the sorcerer, perhaps, conjured up tables laden with food and wine (Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.68; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 3.27).

An essential part of the magician's training consisted in acquiring a *paredros*, i.e. an 'assistant' (daemon). This acquisition is a step towards complete initiation, and we find instructions in *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM) 1.1–42.

A period of training, possibly a ritual of initiation, is implied in a story told by Jerome in the *Life of Saint Hilarion* 12.10. A young man fell in love with a 'Virgin of God'. Obviously she had to reject him. Thereupon he devoted himself to the study of magic at the temple of Asclepius in Memphis. After only one year he returned and buried under the threshold of the young woman, among other things, a copper sheet with 'monstrous figurines' sculpted onto it. The young woman promptly loses her mind, rips her headdress off, gets into a state of trance and calls the name of her lover (cf. Goodyear on Tacitus; Goodyear, 1981: 409–11).

In the ancient world there were at all times professional sorcerers of all types, at all levels. The PGM and the Neoplatonist theurgists represent, in my opinion, the most advanced, the most scholarly and sophisticated type, the product of a long tradition transmitted through several ancient civilizations, possible only in the great melting pot of Egypt. But the distant ancestor of this sophisticated Greco-Egyptian *magos* is still the humble, despised travelling *shaman* we have identified in Herachitus and Plato.

In Athens, in Rome and elsewhere, archaeologists have unearthed caches of curse-tablets, sometimes written by the same hand. These were obviously the working materials of professionals, ready to be used. Some of these professionals probably worked for lawyers whose clients were desperate to win their case. A sorcerer also might collaborate with a politician who was eager to get elected, or with the supporters of certain athletes or charioteers who wanted their favorite to win (no doubt having bet large sums on his victory).

In his introduction to the PGM, H. D. Betz has sketched (1992: xlvi) two different types of magicians. One may be associated with sanctuaries

of Egyptian and Greek deities. We may see him as a resident member of the temple priesthood (with easy access to the temple library and the archives, I would add). On the other hand, we see the wandering practitioner for whom the gods from various cults gradually merged, and 'as their natures became blurred, ... often changed into completely different deities.'

Anyone who is trying to define what type of sorcerer emerges from the scrolls known as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* could hardly improve on three succinct paragraphs in H. D. Betz' Introduction (1992: xlvii):

Applying his craft, the magician could give people the feeling that he could make things work in a world where nothing seemed to work the way it used to. He had handbooks of magic which contained the condensed wisdom of the past, wisdom made effective to solve the problems of the present.

The magician claimed to know and understand the traditions of various religions. While other people could no longer make sense of the old religions, he was able to. He knew the code words needed to communicate with the gods, the demons and the dead. He could tap, regulate and manipulate the invisible energies. He was a problem solver who had remedies for a thousand petty troubles plaguing mankind: everything from migraine to runny nose to bedbugs to horse races, and, of course, all the troubles of love and money.

In short, it was this kind of world in which the magician served as power and communications expert, crisis manager, miracle healer and inflicter of damages, an all-purpose therapist and agent of worried, troubled, and troublesome souls.

This is an excellent assessment, and it explains the feeling of power that we sense in these texts. One might add that the magician must have derived some of his strength – by a kind of bio-feedback – from his clients. He was not only in close contact with gods, he was also in close contact with people. This makes him a kind of intermediary, something priestlike, and this awareness is clearly present in the texts.

The scribes of the PGM are quite educated. Some of them were obviously trained scholars. At least five scrolls come from the library of an Egyptian specialist who was fluent in Coptic as well as in Greek and had a deep interest in theology as well as magic. H. D. Betz points out in his Introduction to the PGM (1992: xlii–iii) that although the person who collected the Anastasi papyri remains shadowy, comparable figures are known from later Egyptian literature. He draws attention to Prince Khamwas, the fourth son of King Ramses II and high priest of Ptah in Memphis, and apparently also a great magician and theurgist, a legendary figure who belongs to the *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*, published

by Francis Llewellyn Griffith. What is said of him (Betz quotes from volume III of Miriam Lichtheim's *Ancient Egyptian Literature*) could apply to some scribes or editors or collectors of the *PGM*:

Prince Kham . . . was a very learned scribe and magician who spent his time in the study of ancient . . . books. One day he was told of the existence of a book of magic written by the god Thoth himself and kept in the tomb of a prince named . . . Na-nefer-ka-ptah . . . who lived in the distant past and was buried somewhere in the vast necropolis of Memphis. After a long search, Prince Khamwas . . . found the tomb . . . and entered it. He saw the magic book, which radiated a strong light and tried to seize it. But the spirits of [the dead prince and his wife] . . . rose up to defend their cherished possession . . .

CIRCE

The first magical operation recorded in Greek is found in Book 10 of the *Odyssey*. It is one of many adventures that the hero of the epic had to endure on his way back from Troy. The epic was probably composed in the eighth century BC, but it reflects the world of the Heroic Age which coincided roughly with the second half of the second millennium BC. Homer, in other words, is writing about events that were supposed to have taken place about five hundred years before he was born. He works from oral tradition – folk tales, myths, legends and, perhaps, short folk ballads that were already in verse form. The witch-like character, Circe, is found in folk tales of many cultures. Circe's magic involves the use of a wand, and Odysseus protects himself against her by a magical herb called *moly* which has been revealed to him by the god, Hermes. Several requisites of magic are here combined: A mysterious tool that looks like a stick but is obviously endowed with special powers; an herb that is not easy to find; a god who reveals to one of his favorites a secret that will save him. Thus at the beginning of recorded Greek literature we have already three ingredients that are typical for magical operations.

Circe is a beautiful woman, a seductress and temptress like Calypso, not at all the stereotypical old hag. It is not clear why she wants to change Odysseus and his companions into swine; perhaps, because she has a very low opinion of men.

Circe is the daughter of the Sun, one of the Titans, just as Medea is the granddaughter of the Sun. The Titans represent an earlier dynasty of gods, vanquished by the Olympians. So she is no ordinary witch. Not only can she transform people into animals (and give them back their human shape), she can also predict the future. Through her predictions and

instructions, Odysseus is able to proceed on his voyage and carry out the necromantic scene described in Book 11 of the epic.

Odysseus confronts a great sorceress on her own territory. She accomplishes her magic by mixing a drug into a special cheese mixture that she serves Odysseus' companions, and by touching them with her wand. Here we see the typical *modus operandi* of the witch, but no chant, no spells are mentioned, just a direct order. In mythological terms, Circe may be a minor goddess, a survivor from an earlier generation of gods and removed, after the victory of the Olympians, to a distant island, like Kronos. There she is no danger to the world at large, only to those who are bold enough to visit her little realm.

ODYSSEUS IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD

The earliest extant necromantic ceremony is described in Book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey*. It is one of the models for Aeneas' descent to the underworld in Book 6 of Vergil's *Aeneid* and the magical operations of the witch, Erichtho, in Book 6 of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. Odysseus is not a 'professional', but he follows the instructions of Circe.

He has to dig a ditch – apparently not a very deep one – which serves as an access to Hades. Around it he pours libations – milk, honey, wine and the blood of a black ram. The ghosts are eager to drink in order to regain, at least for a short time, some semblance of life. Tiresias, the seer, appears and tells Odysseus what he wants to know, or at least part of it. He is still a seer, even in Hades, and the way he speaks seems to indicate that Odysseus, too, has descended to Hades. This is strange, for he has been standing, if we read the text closely, near the pit. Perhaps we must assume that, by magical substitution, the pit represents the underworld. Through magic, Odysseus descends symbolically, or, possibly, part of his being actually descends while his body remains above.

In the end, Homer's Odysseus, like Goethe's Faust, is granted visions of the beautiful heroines of Greek myth whom he could not have known on earth, because they died long before his time. Here we may detect Homer's sense of humor: his hero, who was so strongly attracted to live women, is allowed to enjoy, as a special privilege, at least a glimpse of some celebrated beauties of the past.

MEDEA

Medea is one of the main characters of the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes, an epic poet of the third century BC. She fell in love with Jason,

the leader of the Argonauts, betrayed her own people and helped the Greeks obtain the Golden Fleece. On the way back from the Black Sea, she used her magic again to save them, notably in an episode which is told in 4.1635–90. The Greek heroes wish to land on the island of Crete, but its shores are patrolled by a monster called Talos, 'a bronze giant who broke off lumps of rock to hurl at them.' This colossus is introduced by the poet as a leftover of the Bronze Age, and he naturally terrifies the Argonauts (great heroes though they are). They would have rowed away, though they were exhausted, had Medea not come to their rescue.

It is obviously time for her magic, and this quasi-magical monster is a real challenge. But she knows that she will be able to destroy Talos, unless there is immortal life in him – that is, unless he is a god. A mere product of magic can be destroyed by countermagic.

The text describes the struggle between Medea and the bronze giant. She wins, because she can control and concentrate the powers of evil in and around her and direct them towards the enemy, so that he is literally knocked over. Medea works herself into a state of trance during which her hatred becomes a deadly weapon, and the 'images of death' she conjures up in her mind assume a reality all their own. This is, perhaps, the most explicit description of the power of the evil eye and the effects of black magic in all of ancient literature. The poet professes to be shocked by the mere thought that someone can be hurt at a distance, not only by an arrow, but by an invisible magical power. Whether the poet himself believed in this power or not, most of his contemporaries did, and his whole epic is actually a mine of information for folklore and so-called superstitions.

Medea may be in the same class as Circe. Later ages labelled her as a witch, but she may be a minor goddess or the priestess of a goddess from a distant age, a foreign civilization. Ovid was fascinated by Medea. Unfortunately, we no longer have the celebrated tragedy, supposed to be his greatest work, but we have a substantial episode in his epic, the *Metamorphoses* (7.179–293) which may give us, along with Seneca's *Medea*, at least an idea of the lost play. In this episode, Ovid stresses the daemonic nature of the legendary enchantress with a wealth of brilliant details that leave the reader breathless. She invokes the powers of darkness – the Night, Hecate, the Underworld – asserts her godlike power over all of nature and then mounts her chariot drawn by dragons, and flies through the air in search of precious herbs. The whole passage reads like an interpretation of some enigmatic cult-image left over from a half-forgotten civilization. This Medea has cosmic powers, and even the gods are astonished and jealous. Lucan (sect. 21) has exaggerated the *thaumata* in his Erichth episode but left out the more humorous features.

In his tragedies, Seneca (c. 5 BC – 65 AD) often deals with the themes

of magic, necromancy and the like. From the dialogue between Deianira and her nurse (*Hercules on Mount Oeta* 449–472) we learn that it was not unusual for jealous wives to consult witches; as it turns out, most conveniently, the nurse is a witch herself. Deianira offers to pluck herbs in remote places, but she is not sure that her own magic will work in the case of her unfaithful husband, Heracles. There is an implication here, that a hero of his greatness cannot be influenced by magical means, just as a philosopher, according to Plotinus, is immune. In the end he is overcome by a deadly poison that Deianira has given him, believing it to be a potent love charm.

When we read Seneca's *Medea*, we notice how the image of Medea has changed in the three centuries since Apollonius wrote his epic. Her invocations and incantations are no longer left to the reader's imagination: they are spelled out in detail. Her power of hating which she can switch on and off, so to speak, is still the dominant theme, but Medea now has a regular cabinet of horrors from which to select the most efficient engines of destruction. Her magic now involves the whole universe; she even claims that she can force down the constellation of the Snake.

The magical papyri illustrate the sense of power that fills the operator during the course of his ritual. Alchemistic texts describe a similar experience. In fact, such texts seem to be designed to build up this very sense of power or to reinforce it. Seneca probably knew similar documents, but he gave them a fine rhetorical structure, a literary polish of which the professional magicians were, as a rule, not capable. Like Horace in his *Canidia* poems, he endows the possibilities of magic with a terrifying reality. Whether these plays were actually performed on a stage or simply recited, they must have shocked a contemporary audience, and shock, *ekplexis*, was thought to have therapeutic value.

In his *Medea*, Seneca presents the heroine as a witch whose powers have no limits. Two scenes (6–23 and 670–843) are typical. In the first she invokes various deities in order to curse her enemies. Like Deianira, like Dido, she feels abandoned and betrayed by the man she loved, and she is determined to hurt him as deeply as she can. What distinguishes her from these other heroines is the fact that she is a professional witch, not just an amateur. The second passage must have been one of the models for Lucan's witchcraft scene in Book 6 of the *Pharsalia*. Here, Medea invokes the powers of the underworld while she cooks in her cauldron all kinds of magical herbs. Much of both scenes is sheer rhetoric, designed to create a mood of fear and awe. To us it is just one rather tedious detail after another, but contemporary audiences or readers probably experienced the kind of *frisson* that one gets nowadays from horror movies.

DEIANIRA'S INVOLUNTARY BLACK MAGIC

Heracles' death through a sort of love magic that went wrong was dramatized by Sophocles in *The women of Trachis* and by Seneca (if the play is genuine) in *Heracles on Mount Oeta*. The myth itself embodies the ancient belief – or the experience – that certain drugs are destructive, even if they are absorbed by the skin rather than ingested.

Deianira had been carried across a river by the Centaur, Nessus, who provided this service to travellers. When he attempted to make love to her in midstream, Heracles shot and killed him from the other side with his poisoned arrows. The dying Centaur persuaded Deianira to preserve some of his blood, telling her that it was a potent love charm, to be used when she felt that Heracles was unfaithful to her. This happens, and she impregnates a new garment with the Centaur's poisonous blood. When her husband puts it on, he dies a slow and painful death, but according to another version, he cannot die and has to burn himself on a gigantic pyre constructed on Mount Oeta. Perhaps Vergil had this scene in mind when he described Dido's suicide on top of a pyre (sect. 15).

Deianira's conversation with her nurse reveals the fact that the old woman is a witch who knows that wives often pull their marriages together by magical arts and prayers. Deianira has her doubts whether this will work in the case of her husband, a hero of superhuman stature.

THE HELLENIZED MAGI

J. Bidez and F. Cumont have collected in two volumes entitled *Les mages hellénisés* (Paris, 1938) the testimonies concerning three semi-legendary figures, Zoroastres, Hystaspes and Ostanès. They were Persians, but they seem to have played a major role in the transmission of magical doctrines and practices from the East to the West. Zoroastres was probably born shortly after 600 BC. He was called to the religious life at the age of thirty after fasting and praying in the desert (typical of the apprenticeship of the shaman), and became a fierce opponent of the ruling religion of Mithras with its sacrifice of the bull and its narcotic Haoma drug. He had to flee and found a refuge near Vishtaspa (Hystaspes) of Chorasmia, who listened to his message and converted with his whole court. Zoroastres was essentially the prophet of a new religion, but his doctrine and the cult of fire that he introduced were misunderstood as magic in the West.

The 'Oracles of Hystaspes' probably composed by a later 'Hellenized magos', are a kind of apocalypse.

Ostanès (Vishtana) was a religious adviser to King Xerxes and accompanied

him on his disastrous campaign against the Greeks. He is supposed to have introduced the occult sciences of Persia into Greece. Apuleius mentions him as a great magician next to Carmendas, Damigeron and – Moses. Many writings were attributed to Ostanès: on the occult forces of animals, plants and stones; on alchemy; on medical prescriptions. He is said to have taught Democritus who, in turn, is said to have taught a more shadowy figure, Bolus of Mendes in Egypt. These Persian *magoi* live on somehow in the 'three wise men' from the Orient who come to pay their tribute to Jesus. They are priests or kings or both, and astrologers as well.

MOSES THE MAGICIAN

According to *Acts* 7:22, Moses had been 'taught the whole wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in words and in deeds.' This probably means that, among other things, Moses was in the eyes of the early Christians (and the Jews; Philo, *Life of Moses* 1.5) a great magician in the Egyptian style (Schürer, 1901–09: ii, 343ff.). Having lived in Egypt for a long time, it was assumed that he was initiated into the art of Pharaoh's magicians. The same story circulated about Jesus among Jewish opponents.

An amulet from Acrae on Sicily tells how Moses became *physikos* (i.e. a 'magician'; cf. Plotinus, *Enneades* 4.4), after having climbed the Sacred Mountain (*IG* XIV 2413, 17; Graf, 1994a: 15–16; 283, nn. 25, 26).

According to Pliny (*Natural History* 30.11) Moses founded a 'sect of magic', *magices factio*, of which 'Iannes' and 'Iotapes' were also members. Pliny probably found these names in Hermippus, the Peripatetic philosopher, who was a student of Callimachus'. The whole idea must be ultimately based on the confrontation between the Jewish leaders, Moses and Aaron on the one side and the Egyptian magicians on the other, as told in *Exodus* 7: 8; 8:15. For an ancient reader – even for a philosopher – Moses was performing magic of the same sort as the Egyptians, but his magic was better, because he was serving God.

The miracles performed by Moses in his contest with the Egyptian wizards (*Exodus* 7) have been called magical in nature, but for Josephus (*Antiquitates Judaicae* 2.284 ff.) they are proof of divine authenticity. He makes Moses say that the deeds performed by him are superior to the magical arts of the Egyptians, because things divine are superior to things human.

Moses' performance is better than that of the Egyptians, because it is not magic for effect or for profit, but a kind of miracle to demonstrate that his god is superior to their gods. This makes it legitimate.

The Eighth Book of Moses is a magical text found on the Leiden Papyrus. There is a magical formula (*PGM* V 109) in which the sorcerer

claims to be Moses (as he may claim to be Adam or even God: Harrauer, 1987: 32, 44, 79n.83).

The name of God, spoken by Moses, kills an Egyptian, and, inscribed on his staff, divides the waters of the Red Sea.

SOLOMON THE SORCERER

The *Testament of Solomon* is a curious document written in Greek, but based on a Jewish text. The Greek version was probably composed in the early third century AD. It is an amazing combination of 'folktales and a magician's *vademecum*', as Chester Charlton McCown (in his edition, Leipzig, 1922, p. 1) has pointed out. In McCown's opinion, its magical formulae and recipes relate it to the execration tablets, the amulets and the Greek Magical Papyri. He has identified (pp. 43–51) the chief ideas of this document, i.e. daemonology, astrology, angelology, magic and medicine.

Solomon is depicted on medallions as a rider on horseback, piercing with his lance a half-naked woman lying on the ground. The woman may originally have represented a Lilith. These medallions were worn as phylacteries (Alexander, 1986).

The *Testament of Solomon* deserves the most careful study, because, in a sense, it adds a dimension to the PGM. It shows the magician who calls himself King Solomon in action and gives us a good idea of his spiritual world which is rather complex. This magician was not a simple charlatan, travelling through the cities of the Near East. He was a scholar, a missionary and a kind of mystic, more like an Egyptian occultist.

The much better known *Wisdom of Solomon*, considered apocryphal by Jews and Protestants, was probably composed in the first century BC (Winston, 1979: 172–3). The author of this book was familiar with Middle Platonism and belonged, perhaps, to the circle of Philo of Alexandria.

In it Solomon says:

God . . . gave me true knowledge of things, as they are; an understanding of the structure of the world and the way in which elements work, the beginning and the end of eras and what lays in-between . . . the cycles of the years and the constellations . . . the thoughts of men . . . the powers of spirits . . . the virtues of roots . . . I learned it all, secret or manifest.

Clearly, Solomon is pictured as the greatest scientist, but also as the greatest occultist, of his time: he has studied astrology, plant magic,

daemonology, divination but also *ta physika*, 'natural science'. He reminds one of Bolus of Mendes, the disciple of Democritus.

Some translators obscure these facts; they write, e.g., 'the power of the winds', when the context shows that daemons are meant. Josephus certainly understood the passage in this way. He comments (*Antiquitates Judaicae* 8.45): 'God gave him (Solomon) knowledge of the art that is used against daemons, in order to heal and benefit men.' He specifically adds that Salomon was a great exorcist and left instructions on how to perform this kind of healing. This could mean, among other things, that in Josephus' time, a magical text existed which taught how to exorcise daemons in the name of Solomon.

ORPHEUS, PYTHAGORAS AND EMPEDOCLES

During the archaic age of Greece, a number of men with supernatural abilities emerge who cannot be labeled or classified precisely, though they are often described as – among other things – sorcerers. They concern the historian of philosophy and science as well as the student of Greek religion.

In his important book *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), E. R. Dodds suggested for them the term *shaman* which has won approval, for they certainly look like highly sophisticated medicine-men of a specifically Greek type. Thanks to anthropological research we know a great deal about *shamans* of other cultures, but it is not clear to what extent we may apply this knowledge to the ancient Greeks. Was animism, was ancestor worship involved? Was a rigorous training period, harsh asceticism required? Probably. One hears about periods of strict isolation from the community, about fasting and praying, about monotonous exercises such as whirling that leads to trance, about the use of drugs. We do not have this kind of specific information about the early Greek *shamans*, but they probably used some of the same techniques but kept them secret or passed them on to their favorite disciples.

Perhaps the three most striking *magoi* between Homer and the Hellenistic period when magic became a kind of applied science were Orpheus, Pythagoras and Empedocles. All three have similar features, but each has an identity of his own. Orpheus is a largely mythical figure, but Orphism, the movement he founded, is attested since the sixth century BC in various parts of the Greek world.

Orpheus and Pythagoras are associated with important religious and philosophical schools, while Empedocles remains a rather solitary phenomenon, though he did have followers and the medical school which he is said to have founded in Sicily flourished for a long time. All three are

known to have expressed their ideas in poetry and prose, and at some point many of their words must have been written down, but few of their original writings are extant; what we have are fragments or later substitutions and elaborations.

Nevertheless, the similarities between these three figures are impressive enough to suggest the existence, in Greek civilization, of a type of sage and miracle-worker who was also an original thinker and a great teacher, someone in touch with beings of a higher order, someone who offered a new theory to explain the universe and the human soul – macrocosm and microcosm – someone who may also have been a musician and a poet. In all three instances we face the timeless image of the *shaman*, but superimposed, as it were, on a great Greek philosopher, teacher, poet or priestlike figure.

Shaman is a useful term because it is more neutral than *magos* or *thaumaturge* or 'sorcerer', but we will use these terms as synonyms in this section. A *shaman*, as Dodds has written, is a 'psychically unstable person' who has received a call to the religious (or philosophic) life, who undergoes ascetic discipline (fasting, long periods of prayer in solitude) and acquires supernatural powers. He can heal the sick, understands the language of animals or seemingly inanimate objects, can be at different places at the same time, and so on. Of course, these are modern terms, but they seem to fit the traditional *imago*.

They fit Orpheus, Pythagoras, Empedocles and a number of others – including Apollonius of Tyana, who appears much later, at the time of Jesus Christ, as a kind of new Pythagoras – quite well. Dodds has been able to show, in particular, that tradition has given Orpheus the main characteristics of the *shaman*: He is a poet, *magos*, oracle-giver, prophet and religious teacher. With his music – a kind of magical charm in itself – he is able to summon birds, soothe wild animals, and even make trees follow him, as he sings and plays on his instrument. Like *shamans* in other cultures, he descends alive into the realm of the dead and returns to life in this world. His magical self lives on as a singing head that continues giving oracles for many years after his death which is, therefore, no ordinary death at all.

The attribution of magical powers to Pythagoras has been discarded by many historians of Greek philosophy, but such scholars as W. Burkert are willing to accept it as part of the genuine tradition (Burkert, 1972: 162ff). Pythagoras had a golden thigh; he was greeted by rivers with a resounding 'Hail, Pythagoras!'; he had the gift of prophecy; he could be at different places at the same time. Like Orpheus, he had power over animals and in turn respected them to the degree that he preached a strict vegetarianism. All these characteristics indicate that Pythagoras was no ordinary human being: he was a 'divine man', *theios aner*, or a *shaman*, to use the more objective term.

Empedocles ascribed to himself the powers to heal the sick and rejuvenate the old (Medea did that sort of thing, according to myth); he also claimed that he could predict the weather and influence it, and he was able to summon the dead. It is evident that the people of Agrigentum – at least for a while – thought of him as a miracle worker. How could he also be a great thinker and scientist? Did he start as a magician who lost his nerve and took to natural science, or was he a philosopher who later converted to a form of Orphism? This is how Dodds, amusingly, states the problem we face, but he adds, in a more serious manner, that we should not ask such questions, for Empedocles was a *shaman*, a combination of teacher, poet, scientist and *magos*. To him and to his admirers there was clearly no contradiction between these various skills, as there is to us. After the death of Empedocles, the scale and variety of these unusual gifts in certain individuals seem to shrink, and *shamanism* becomes specialized, so to speak. One either has the gift of healing or the gift of prophecy, but no longer the universal range of supernatural powers with which these early *shamans* were blessed. Compared to the great thaumaturges of archaic Greece, the later practitioners of one occult science or another seem like *shamans* who have lost the full range of their original powers. If we look at later figures, such as Simon Magus, Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abonuteichos, their lives and legends clearly reflect the great miracle-workers of the distant past, but there is something artificial, fabricated, second-hand about them.

Through his legend and his doctrine, Pythagoras had great influence on Platonism, and Plato himself refers to seers and sorcerers. In his *Laws* (933A–E) he takes healers, prophets and practitioners of magic for granted. They had to be reckoned with and controlled by law. But one does not need to be afraid of them, Plato adds: 'Their powers are real, but they themselves represent a rather low form of life.'

NECTANEBUS

An extraordinary episode figures in the Alexander Romance attributed to Callisthenes (c. 370–327 BC), but probably composed in the fourth century AD. The Egyptian Pharaoh Nectanebus who claims to be the real father of Alexander the Great is a formidable magician and astrologer. In order to seduce Olympias, the wife of Philip of Macedon, he picks certain plants which will induce dreams and extracts their juices. Then he shapes a wax figure of a woman and writes the name Olympias on it. He also lights lamps and pours out the juice he prepared, and with secret oaths he invokes the 'spirits appointed to perform this function', so that Olympias may have a vision of the god, Ammon, embracing her. This whole

magical operation will enable the Pharaoh to pose as the god, Ammon, and take his place in Olympias' royal bed, thus fathering Alexander the Great.

THE AMATEUR WITCH OF THEOCRITUS

Theocritus (c. 310–c. 250 BC) is mainly known as a pastoral poet, but he composed several 'idylls', describing everyday life in Alexandria, the capital of Hellenistic Egypt. One of these, No. 2 in modern editions, has the traditional title *Pharmakeutria*, i.e. 'The Witches': the masculine equivalent would be *pharmakeutai*, 'sorcerers'. Both nouns are derived from *pharmakon*, 'drug', 'poison', 'spell', 'remedy'. We do not know whether the poet himself or an ancient editor gave the poem this title, but it is appropriate, even though the two women participating in the magical rites are not professionals.

The text is a long monologue that furnishes all the circumstances the reader needs to know. Simaetha, a young Greek woman, is in love with a young athlete. It was love at first sight, and for a short time they were very happy together. But now, since he has not shown himself at her house for eleven days, she has decided to draw him back by magical means, threatening more powerful measures if this does not work. She has already consulted some professionals, but without success: 'Did I skip the house of any old woman who knows magical songs?' Apparently, if the matter was serious, it was necessary to see as many practitioners as possible, just as you saw more than one physician and prayed in many temples, if you were very sick.

Only then, according to the 'do-it-yourself' principle, she sets up, with a few fairly simple prerequisites, a magical operation in or near her own house. The ingredients she uses are barley groats, bay leaves, bran, wax, liquids (wine, milk, or water) for libations, furthermore coltsfoot (an herb) and pulverized lizard. Her tools are a magical wheel, a bull-roarer, and a bronze gong. She has also kept a fringe from her lover's cloak – any object belonging to a person represents that person – and she shreds it and throws it into the flames. Moreover, she addresses various spells and incantations to the full moon in the sky and to Hecate in the underworld.

NIGIDIUS FIGULUS, MYSTERY MAN

We now meet a totally different sort of person. Nigidius Figulus was a prominent figure in Rome, a scholar, a prolific author and an occultist. He was a friend of Cicero's and shared some of Varro's interests. He dealt

with Roman religion and Etruscan lore. If he could be described as a 'Pythagorean and *magos*' he would appear to be a Roman version of Apollonius of Tyana and Anaxilaus of Larissa (exiled from Italy in 28 BC). Apparently, he did not start any kind of movement, but he was credited with supernatural powers (telepathy, clairvoyance) and he wrote extensively on meteorology, astrology, anthropology, zoology and other subjects. Pliny the Elder used him as a source, but we have only meager remains of his many works; therefore, he is, for us, a mystery man in many ways, a man who lived on different levels, a man who might have become a thaumaturge in the Middle East, but not in Rome.

VERGIL'S WITCH

Vergil's 8th *Eclogue* is, in part, an adaptation of Theocritus' 2nd *Idyll*. It stays close to the original in most details and does not reveal any typical Italic witchcraft, it seems. The magical wheel and the bull-roarer of Theocritus are replaced by two dolls, one made of clay, the other of wax. Vergil also introduces the werewolf theme: Moeris, a local sorcerer who has sold Simaetha, the amateur witch, certain powerful herbs, can transform himself into a wolf.

Poems like these are not meant to be factual reports of rituals. Rather, they create an atmosphere that makes the reader understand the meaning of such ceremonies. In a sense, the poetry provides a kind of magic, too.

DIDO, THE TRAGIC QUEEN

The hero of Vergil's epic has landed on the coast of North Africa, where he meets Queen Dido, who has begun to build a new city, Carthage. She is not a witch but rather resembles an oriental fairy tale queen with a tragic past. She falls in love with Aeneas and invites him to stay as her prince consort. In a sense she is modelled on Circe. One is also reminded of the encounter of Jason and Medea in Apollonius' *Argonautica*. In these legends, a travelling hero with a mission meets a beautiful exotic woman who is potentially dangerous, although kind and hospitable, as long as her love for the hero lasts.

When Aeneas leaves Dido because Fate demands that he found an empire of his own, Dido's love turns to hate (*Aeneid* 4). Determined to destroy her faithless lover and herself, she stages a complex magical rite, although she really despises magic. She builds a gigantic pyre in the main courtyard of her palace and prepares, with the assistance of a famous priestess-witch, an elaborate sacrifice to the powers of the underworld.

When she realizes that no love-magic can bring Aeneas back to her, she kills herself in despair, giving an ultimate emphasis of doom to her curse.

It was commonly believed that suicides, murder victims, men killed in battle – in short, those who died before their time – could unleash enormous powers of destruction at the moment of their death.

Dido, however, did not destroy Aeneas who, like Odysseus, was protected by his own gods and reached the coast of Italy safely after many other adventures. Her curse lingered on through the centuries and conjured up an avenger, Hannibal, who almost crushed Rome, but once again, Rome's gods prevented the worst from happening.

In her last wish to hurt Aeneas – and Rome – Dido is more like Medea than Circe. But she also resembles Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, who, in Vergil's lifetime, had love affairs with two Romans: Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. Cleopatra's power over these two men could easily be explained as witchcraft, an art which she might have learned from Egyptian priests. But she also died a tragic death by suicide, when her armed forces were defeated by Rome. Thus Dido is a very complex figure, combining features of at least two heroines of Greek myth and one historical figure.

CANIDIA, THE LOVE-WITCH

Canidia appears in Horace's poem more than once. She seems to have been a real person, a pharmacist or perfume-maker by the name of Grattidia, but for the poet, she is an evil witch. His fifth *Epode* is remarkable, because a child is about to be murdered by witches for magical purposes. Led by Canidia, they have kidnapped a Roman boy of noble birth and buried him up to his chin in the ground. Close to his head they have placed a dish of food which he cannot reach, to stimulate his appetite. They intend to starve him to death and then remove his liver, which, they believe, will grow bigger because of his growing hunger. In vain does the boy plead with the hags: they need his liver, in order to brew an especially potent love potion, perhaps designed to win the poet himself. The intended victim is a man called Varus, and since he has not responded to Canidia's spells and brews, she assumes that he is protected by some counter-magic given to him by a redoubtable rival of hers. The boy, realizing that he does not have a chance, directs a terrible curse against the witches, and this curse is a form of magic too, for the spirits of those who die before their time and those who die a violent death can turn into daemons of vengeance.

Satire 1.8 deals with witchcraft in a more humorous vein. Here, a wooden statue of the god Priapus is speaking. This statue has been placed

in a beautiful park on the Esquiline in Rome as a threat to thieves and birds. But this park was once a cemetery for the poor, and at night, in the light of the moon, witches, again led by Canidia, still haunt the place, digging for human bones or calling up the shades of the dead for necromantic purposes. They also perform other kinds of magic, and their rituals are so revolting that even Priapus – who is not a very refined god – loses his nerve and lets out a resounding fart. This works like a charm: the witches run away screaming; one of them loses her wig, the other her false teeth.

One might say that Horace is debunking the witchcraft scene. It was real: there were sorcerers and witches, and people were afraid of them. But Horace seems to say that they are mainly weird and grotesque and ineffectual in the end, so ordinary citizens should not be afraid of them or pay them money for their services. This was exactly what Augustus' legislation intended, though we do not understand its consequences in detail. But it seems that Horace contributed his share to the Imperial message.

WITCHES IN THE LATIN LOVE ELEGY

Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid give us glimpses of the Roman demi-monde. The ladies they love consult witches, and the poets, according to their mood, take magic seriously or make it look slightly ludicrous. While the practitioners of the PGM seem to be mostly male, those we get to know through the elegiac poets of the Augustan age, are all female, with the exception of the astrologer, Horus, of Propertius 4.1, who may be an occultist in the style of Nigidius Figulus.

Propertius gives us, in 4.5, the satirical portrait of a witch called Acanthis who is also a bawd. These women can make a man impotent (Tibullus 1.5.49–42; Ovid, *Amores* 3.7.27–36), but they can also enhance his potency (cf. Petronius, *Satyricon* 131). A theme that appears in many variations is the contrast between 'internal' and 'external' magic. A woman who is truly beautiful and talented has the 'internal' magic that charms men, while those who are less fortunate must resort to the powers of witches. Once, Propertius' mistress is dangerously ill, and a witch is summoned to her bedside, after the gods have not responded and the physicians – presumably – did not leave much hope (2, 28). Finally the poet prays to Jupiter once more, and Cynthia recovers. Tibullus 1.2.39–64 is also a remarkable testimony (Luck, 1962: 45–7).

JESUS OF NAZARETH

Jesus has been called a 'magician', both in the past by some Jews and some gentiles and, more recently, by Morton Smith in a book that created a certain sensation (*Jesus the Magician*, 1978). From an outsider's point of view, to be sure, Jesus may have looked like the typical miracle-worker. He exorcised daemons, he healed the sick, he raised Lazarus from the dead, he predicted future events. On the other hand, apart from walking on waves, he never performed the kind of ostentatious magic that Moses and Aaron performed when they frustrated the magicians of Pharaoh. Neither did he practice necromancy.

Nevertheless, within three hundred years of his birth, he was accused of stealing the 'names of the angels of might' from Egyptian temples (Arnobius, *Against the Gentiles* 1.43). These 'angels of might' are probably mighty daemons who may be conjured up by pronouncing their names.

Jesus' life, as told in the Gospels, is coloured by certain features that have parallels elsewhere – he is of divine origin; his birth is of an unusual nature; he is in grave danger as an infant; he is initiated into his ministry by a precursor who yields before him; he has to face Satan, a great daemon representing the evil forces in this world and refuses to make a deal with him (i.e. he refuses to be just an ordinary magician), winning the upper hand in a trial of spiritual strength.

The important point seems to be this: Whenever Jesus is challenged to prove his divinity by performing the kind of magic that people seem to expect, he refuses to do so. He does perform 'magic' of a kind, but he does so out of compassion, not merely to impress the sceptics or score a point; in fact, he is sometimes rather impatient with those who require 'signs and wonders' in order to believe in him. It almost seems that magic 'flows' out of him, not as a conscious effort or the result of elaborate rituals, but simply because it is a power (*dynamis*) that he transmits. The power works when the patient and the bystander have faith in Jesus (*Luke* 8), but it also works when the patient is unaware of being healed (*Matthew* 8). Faith does matter, but it is not always a condition; faith helps create the miracle, but the miracle also generates faith.

It should also be noted that Jesus never claimed to perform miracles by himself; rather, he taught that his power came from the Father and was readily available, without complex rituals and spells. Moreover, Jesus did not accept any fees or gifts for what he did: He considered it part of his ministry to heal the sick, and he passed on his spiritual gifts to his disciples, without fee. The point of view of the early Christian Church is stated by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 6, 3). The pagans, he says, are wrong to

reject the miracles recounted in the Gospels, for God is infinitely great and can easily cause miracles to be performed without any help from magical arts.

Matthew's report that Jesus was taken to Egypt as an infant was used by hostile sources to construe a sort of sorcerer's apprenticeship; according to one rabbinical version, he came back tattooed with spells. According to another rabbinical tradition, Jesus was 'mad', which probably means 'emotionally unstable', and this is one of the characteristics of the *shaman*. It could also mean that he was able to get into a state of trance, for instance, when receiving a vision. What a Christian would call the 'descent of the Spirit', an outsider might call 'possession by a daemon'. It has even been suggested that Jesus' tacit claim to status as the 'Son of God' is essentially a formula used in magical rites by the operator who identifies himself closely with the supernatural power he invokes.

A word of caution should be added here concerning these and similar theories, for that is all they are. Some of the material on which they are based comes from sources hostile to Jesus and the early Church. Superficial parallels from the magical papyri are of doubtful value, for they may already be influenced by stories circulating about Jesus.

The professional magicians were always eager to add to their repertory of formulas, rites and powerful names, especially if these seemed to work within the context of a new religious movement. To such professionals, Jesus may have appeared like a very successful fellow-magician from whom a great deal could be learned. This is more or less the attitude of Simon towards the Apostles. But the outsiders were incapable of understanding what was new and different in this religion, and they reduced it to their own level.

M. Goodman sees a difference between Greeks and Jews as far as illness and the healing process are concerned (Goodman, 1987: 100ff). The Greeks rely more on diet, drugs, baths, although they also employ magic. The Jews are inclined to attribute sickness to pollution and sin and resort more often to exorcism and magical rituals to heal patients. Jesus could be seen as a very successful, though not very typical Jewish healer. In *Acts* (8:9–13; 13:6–12; 16; 16–18; 19:13–19) we sense a certain animosity towards outside healers and magicians.

SIMON MAGUS

Simon is the name of a religious leader mentioned in *Acts* 8:9 ff and elsewhere, for example in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*. He was active in Samaria at about the time of the Crucifixion, and his disciples called him 'the Power of God which is called the Great Power', but the Greek text

is not altogether reliable, and the words 'which is called' may be an old interpolation in the manuscripts.

Simon was impressed by the Apostle Philip's cures and exorcisms and by the gift of the Spirit which came from the Apostles' laying on of hands. Consequently, he not only 'believed and was baptized', but he asked the Apostles to sell him their special gift so that he might practice it too. This is, of course, the typical attitude of the professional *magos*. To Simon, the specific charisma of this new religion is a kind of powerful magic that can be purchased, for a price, and he is prepared to pay the price, just as he must have paid for the kind of magic he had learned before. The sharp rebuke he draws from Peter shows the line that the early Church drew between itself and the old-fashioned practitioners of magic such as Simon who is flexible enough to take it in good grace.

It is difficult to label Simon, but he looks like a *magus* who, inspired by the example of Jesus and the Apostles, developed into a cult figure by borrowing from early Christianity (and from some pagan cults) whatever suited him. He may be called a practitioner of occult science (which he was supposed to have studied in Egypt) with Christlike aspirations.

Unlike Jesus, Simon uses daemons for his purposes, practices necromancy and even claims, according to the *Clementine Recognitions* (2.15), to have created a human being. The text may be corrupt, but on the whole the meaning seems to be that Simon claimed to have invoked the soul of an innocent boy who had been murdered and ordered it to enter a new body that he had made from air. When people demand to see this *homunculus*, Simon answers that he has already made him disappear into air again.

The moment of truth comes when, according to the *Acts of Peter*, Simon and Peter challenge each other before the Emperor Nero in Rome. Like other confrontations between a mere magician and a true religious leader (cf. *Exodus* 7; *Acts* 13: 6-12), this is a contest of spiritual powers. Simon actually manages to fly through the air for a short time, but Peter breaks the spell and makes him crash to earth so badly that he breaks his leg and never recovers. His resurrection within three days, which he himself had predicted, provided he be buried alive, never takes place, 'because he was not the Christ', as Hippolytus (*Refutatio omnium haeresium* 6.20.3) notes sarcastically. According to him, Simon 'perverted many in Samaria by magical acts, but he was convicted and denounced by the Apostles.' At one point he sets up a religion of his own which borrows from Judaism, Christianity and some religions of Hellenistic paganism. His supreme deity may have been a mixture of Jahveh and Zeus (and perhaps Sabazius).

Like all *magi*, Simon is a great imitator; he wants to be like Christ, like the Apostles.

It was only natural that a provincial *magos* and thaumaturge would sooner or later appear in Rome. The *Acts of Peter* report that he performed a miracle there, in the absence of Paul. This detail is important, for as soon as Paul is present, Simon's magic does not work as well as before. He flies over a city gate in a shiny cloud, and people worship him as God or Christ. His 'tuneful voice' (cf. Alexander of Abonuteichos) makes an impression on many newly converted Christians, and some of them even turn against Paul, calling him a sorcerer and a deceiver. Very few remain steadfast and loyal. For the time being, Simon's 'incantation', his 'wickedness' triumph. These *Acts* are designed for entertainment, instruction and edification; they show what people expected a wizard to do.

In *Acts of Peter* we find an episode which is strangely reminiscent of a story told in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*. This could mean that Philostratus was not only familiar with the canonical Gospels and Acts but also with some *Apocrypha* (Palmer and More, 1936).

This particular episode is preceded by a miracle performed by Peter. The Apostle goes to the house of Marcellus who is Simon's host in Rome and tells the doorkeeper that he wishes to see Simon. The doorkeeper, however, has strict orders not to let Peter in – obviously, Simon is scared of him – whereupon Peter says very politely: 'You shall see a great and marvellous wonder.' Then he lets loose a large dog who had been tied with a massive chain. The dog asks Peter: 'You servant of the ineffable living God, what do you want me to do?' Peter dispatches him to summon Simon, the 'wicked man' and 'troubler of simple souls' which the dog does, lifting his forefeet. Simon and the simple souls who had listened to him were dumbfounded, and he 'lost his deceitful words.' Marcellus, Simon's host, who had, among other things, set up a statue to 'Simon, the young God' (i.e. Simon, the son of God?), now asks Peter for forgiveness and would have offered him cash (like Simon in *Acts*), had he not known that Peter strongly disapproved of such transactions. Peter gives him absolution and hugs him.

Now comes the episode reminiscent of a story in the *Life of Apollonius* (4.20). The dog finds Simon and delivers a message that goes beyond what Peter told him and involves Simon in a serious contest which is not specified. In ch. 5, the power-game, played by Peter, Simon and the dog, continues. It is the dog who denounces Simon – in the presence of his former admirer, Marcellus – as a 'cheat' and 'deceiver' and curses him as an enemy of Christ. The dog then runs away, followed by everybody, predicts another great contest between Simon and himself and a reward from God; finally, he collapses at Peter's feet and gives up his spirit. The crowd is amazed at the speaking dog but demands another 'sign' (i.e. miracle) so they can really believe him, because Simon had impressed

them by his signs, too. The new signs Peter shows them are really feats of magic, but his magic is better than Simon's, just as Moses' magic was better than that of Pharaoh's sorcerers. And he does it in the name of Christ. One wonders whether Simon also invoked a sacred name as he performed his own 'magic'? Or did he do it in his own name, since he considered himself the 'true' son of God? All this is not told in so many words in this tantalizing text, but it is somehow suggested between the lines.

A smoked tuna-fish that Peter has thrown into a pond comes to life again and swims around, and people throw bread into the water for it. Clearly, this is no delusion, for the fish eats the bread. Hence, large crowds now follow Peter and listen to his words.

Marcellus berates Simon, has him thrown out of his house and beaten up by the servants. Pots full of filth are emptied over the head of the unmasked charlatan. But Simon is a tough customer. He runs to the house where Peter is staying and calls out: 'Here I am, Simon; so come down, Peter, and I will convict you of believing in a mere human being, a Jew, the son of a carpenter!'

This can only mean that, for Simon, as for other enemies or rivals of the early Church, Jesus is not the son of God, not the Messiah, but a Jew of humble origin. One is reminded of Jesus' saying that a prophet is despised in his own country (*Matthew* 13:57; *Mark* 6:4; *Luke* 4:24; *John* 4:44).

It is time for Peter to perform another miracle. He chooses a baby held by his mother, and this baby, with the voice of a grown man, curses Simon, making it quite clear that God and Jesus Christ speak through him. After the dog, the babe from whose mouth comes the truth (cf. *Matthew* 21:16)! Simon is told to depart from Rome until the coming sabbath. He obeys, clearly not knowing what is happening to him. The woman, Peter and the other brethren glorify the Lord who has 'shown those things to men'.

In ch. 6, Jesus, smiling and clothed in a robe of splendor, appears to Peter in the night and tells him that through the 'signs' which he has performed in his name, many brethren have found their way back to him. But the battle is not yet won. There will be a 'trial by faith' on the coming sabbath, as predicted by the baby. Jesus will show himself to Peter when he asks for 'signs and miracles.' Then many will be converted to him in his name, for even though Simon will oppose Peter with the 'works of his father' (i.e. the Devil; cf. *John* 8:44; *Acts* 13:10), these works will be exposed as 'charms and illusions of magic'.

Peter reports how Simon did much harm by his 'incantation' in Judaea. Accompanied by 'two other like himself' (i.e. two other sorcerers) who were invisible to the household, he secretly entered the house of a rich

lady by the name of Eubula, one of his followers. By means of a spell they robbed Eubula of her gold and vanished.

Peter fasts for three days and prays that this crime will come to light. In a vision, he sees two disciples and a naked boy who is bound. The boy offers him a loaf of wheat bread and tells him that he will see the 'wonderful works of God', if he holds out. The things stolen by Simon and 'the others' from the rich lady's house by 'magical arts' and by 'creating a delusion' will be sold by the crafty thieves to a goldsmith, a Christian sympathizer, whose name and address are furnished. Peter now goes to Eubula, informs her of his vision and then visits the goldsmith's workshop to give him specific instructions. Two suspicious characters trying to sell stolen objects (*inter alia*, a satyr in gold) are seized, brought before a magistrate and confess under torture that Simon had given them money (obviously, he thinks money can do everything) to commit the crime. Simon who is looking for them sees them bound with chains, realizes what has happened and runs away, while Eubula gives the property she recovered to the poor. And Marcellus, Simon's former host and patron, is anxious to purify his house, as if an evil daemon had dwelled there too long.

Peter's new contest with Simon is told in ch. 8. The Roman crowd (a fixture in all these miracle tales, the indispensable witnesses, the 'chorus') urges Peter to tell them who is (the true) God and what his (specific) greatness consists in – after they have seen what Simon has to offer. Simon starts off with denying (as he did before) that Jesus is divine. Clearly, the Christians now have to prove that Simon is not divine.

The Prefect sets a task for the two contestants. Simon is to kill a boy before everyone's eyes (and he does this by saying something into the boy's ear), and Peter is to bring him back to life again (which he does by telling the Prefect to shake the boy's hand). Next, he revives the dead son of a widow. The crowd cheers and praises Peter's God, the Savior, the Invisible. A third corpse is brought into the Forum, and Simon is challenged to revive it. He seems to be successful at first because of the devious techniques he uses, and the crowd is ready to burn Peter who keeps telling them that they are 'bewitched' – and, indeed, the dead man is unable to stand up which would be the requirement for a true miracle. (In the necromantic scene of Book 6 of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the corpse does this most dramatically.) Now the crowd is all set to kill Simon, but Peter protects his enemy and performs the miracle for him in the name of Christ. From that same hour Peter is 'venerated as a god', and people bring him their sick so he can heal them.

As a *magos* or *thaumaturgos*, Simon boasts that he can throw himself from a high mountain and land safely on earth, 'as if he were held up' (*Clementine Recognitions* 2.9). This is exactly the offer that the Devil makes

to Jesus (*Matthew* 4:5–7), but Jesus rejects it. Clearly, the purpose of the Temptation was to induce Jesus to become a magician instead of the Savior of mankind. This was suggested by S. Eitrem, but very few scholars paid attention to him at the time (Eitrem, 1924a). Some other things that Simon claimed he could do can be paralleled from Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*. But Simon also practiced theurgy: he made statues laugh, like Maximus, the Neoplatonist.

APOLLONIUS OF TYANA

The question whether Apollonius was a sorcerer or a true philosopher has been debated for centuries. St. Jerome (*Epistulae* 53.1) states the dilemma without giving an answer. Neither does St. John Chrysostom (*De Laudibus S. Pauli Apost.*, in *Hom.* 4.2.493 M.):

Tell me then, whence came his great power? 'He was a sorcerer,' is the allegation. Then he must have been a unique kind of sorcerer. You have surely heard that sorcerers are and have always been common enough among Persians and the Indians; but they never count at all. 'Ah,' says he, 'but the man of Tyana, that impostor and charlatan – he also had a brilliant success.' Where and when? In a little portion of the world and for a short while; he was soon extinguished and abolished, leaving behind him no church, no people, nothing of the sort. (tr. J.S. Phillimore; see also Augustine, *Epist.* 102.32)

I shall argue that the historical Apollonius was a sorcerer as well as a philosopher and that his *Life* by Philostratus, our main source, is an attempt to defend the hero from the charge of magic posthumously but retains too much material that was simply part of the tradition to achieve its goal.

To prove my point, I shall first discuss some of Apollonius' 'miracles', *thaumata*, and then some of his predictions and visions. First, we shall look at the *thaumata*, not only those he produced but some that he witnessed, for they also help create an atmosphere of the miraculous.

His birth is predicted by Proteus who appears to his mother in a dream. The birth itself is accompanied by a miracle, so that the natives of Tyana say he is the son of Zeus. As he is travelling with his companions in bright moonlight, they meet with an apparition: It is an Empusa which assumes various shapes and sometimes vanishes altogether. He knows right away what it is, curses the hag and tells his companions to do the same, whereupon the Empusa beats a hasty retreat, 'squeaking like the devil' (2.4). An Empusa is a vampire or ghoulish creature with a donkey's hoof, not harmless at all and obviously a very real thing for the philosopher. Similarly,

Apollonius unmasks a Lamia – a related figure – in Corinth, 'the most celebrated of the stories about him'. Once he very cleverly catches an invisible Satyr, another character of Greek folklore.

The Brahmins he visits in India can levitate two cubits off the ground, and other wonderful things happen in their domain: Pythian three-legged tables move by themselves and flow with wine and water. He makes the writing disappear from the scroll his Roman prosecutor is holding. According to police reports, he can detect 'spirits and apparitions of idols'. He revives a girl who is mourned for dead; he talks with Achilles' ghost and describes him in detail. A tree talks to him which reminds one of the legend that Pythagoras was greeted by rivers (trees and rivers are divine). Animals – like the lion who is really King Amasis – recognize his superior nature. Like Pythagoras, he can be at two places at the same time, but nothing is said about the golden thigh which Alexander of Abonuteichos faked. He knows all the languages 'and all the silences of mankind'.

Naturally, he performs healings and exorcisms. As a prisoner in Rome, he extricates his leg from the fetter, to impress and comfort his companion, Damis. Simon Magus boasts of a similar feat in *Clementine Recognitions* 2.32. Philostratus uses this episode to digress briefly on the nature of sorcery (7.38–9):

The sillier sort of people ascribe this power to sorcerers . . . professional athletes call in their services, and so do all sorts of competitors; it contributes nothing to their victory, but the unhappy men rob themselves of the credit for their . . . successes and account them to these arts. Even the defeated do not lose faith in them: 'If only I had offered such and such a sacrifice, or burnt this and that incense, the victory would not have slipped through my fingers'. The sorcerer is a frequent visitor at the door of the merchants . . . We shall find them also crediting their lucky strokes of business to (the sorcerer) and their failures to their parsimony and the neglect of the appropriate sacrifice. But lovers more than all others are attached to this art . . . They will listen even to old women talking of magic; so it is no wonder if they resort to these professors . . . The sorcerer gives them a girdle or amulet to wear – mystical stones they got from the earth or the moon or the stars and spices of aromatic Indian plants, make them pay a handsome fee . . . and does nothing for it.

If their magic has been successful, they extol their craft as all-powerful; if not, the clients worry about having omitted something.

Philostratus is important here (*Lives of the Sophists* 5.12): Apollonius has foreknowledge of certain events, and this is due to 'supernatural prompting', but it does not make him a *magos*. Sorcerers are wretched people. They profess to alter the course of destiny (a) by torturing daemons; (b)

by outlandish rites or charms or plasters. Apollonius, on the other hand, accepts destiny. His Second Sight is entirely due to divine revelation. He is impressed by the magic of the Indian Brahmins but does not really want to know how it works. He despises 'certain needy vagabonds' (i.e. the *metragyrtaí* described by Lucian, *Lucius* 35 and *De dea Syria*; cf. Apul. *Met.* 8.24) who go about with an image of Demeter or Dionysus hung about their persons and profess to be supported by the deities they carry – but 'to feed on the gods with an insatiable appetite is a strange kind of madness'.

Apollonius also insists on the difference between himself and 'certain old wives who go round among shepherds and cowherds with a sieve hung over their arms and heal sick beasts by their incantations – they claim to be called 'wise women' and more scientific than the regular prophets...' This is a clear reference to *koskinomanteia* (see Lucian, *Alexander* 9; Theocritus *Idylls* 3.31, cf. Gow, 1952: ad loc).

Philostratus is careful to point out that his hero, although he seems to act occasionally like a sorcerer, is in fact a philosopher, a scientist in the tradition of Pythagoras, and that the suspicions of outsiders – the Roman authorities, for example – are completely unjustified. True, Apollonius does not charge fees, and the satiric image of the sorcerer – almost a caricature – drawn by his hagiographer, does not fit him at all. Nevertheless, the investigations made by the Roman police were on solid ground. But could they hold a man who miraculously disappeared from the Emperor's tribunal? No one else but Philostratus seems to refer to this truly sensational piece of magic, and he does so 'shyly, shamefacedly, . . . (without) the proper emphasis of conviction' (Phillimore, vol. 1, p. xviii). The suggestion is that he flew through the air. There are several accounts of his death, bordering on the miraculous; if he did die, no tomb is shown anywhere.

Perhaps we should distinguish his visions and predictions from the *thaumata*, because here we enter the field of parapsychology, and these are phenomena that are not utterly phantastic. Cases of Second Sight are fairly well documented (Anaxagoras, Socrates, Swedenborg). He seems to have thought about this specific gift of his. He has dreams that come true. He has knowledge and foreknowledge of what is right for him to do. How does this work? 'A sober soul, . . . discerning the prophetic significance of dreams . . . Soothsayers will never expound any vision without first asking the time at which a person saw it.'

For the sages of India it is normal to know what the future brings. They are omniscient, because they begin with self-knowledge. Second Sight is discussed at some length. Apollonius predicts his initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries by a hierophant other than the one who rejected him once. He has a significant dream before sailing to Italy. The plague at

Ephesus is predicted and averted; catastrophic events in Smyrna, Chios, Miletus and other places are foreseen.

To predict the future and to worship the gods properly are part of his specific 'science'. How this 'science' works is discussed in his own 'apologia'. He also proposes a theory explaining how divination by the entrails works. His ambiguous prediction that Nero will narrowly escape death makes him suspicious to the secret police. But he refuses to prophesy to Tigellinus, because he is no 'prophet'. In another context, however, he correctly describes in advance the 'year of three Emperors'; he knows that Vespasian will rule after that and Nerva after him. This kind of prognosis could be very dangerous for the seer, as we know from Ammianus Marcellinus 29.1.25–32. While staying in Ephesus, he sees the assassination of Domitian, as it happens, in vivid detail, a feat that is also recorded by Dio Cassius, *Epit.* 67.17–18, even though he considers Apollonius (77.18.4) an 'errant sorcerer.'

May we consider Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* as the portrait of a sorcerer? I do not think so, although it furnishes – against the will of the author – evidence that Apollonius was, among other things, a *magos*. This type of writing is, of course, quite different from what we have in the *PGM*. In the *Life* we read of magical feats and predictions, without any real explanations; in the *PGM* we read the recipes, the instructions, but we can only assume that they really worked.

In addition to what was said above about his *thaumata* and prophetic visions, I would like to assemble some evidence from the *Life* that would justify the suspicion of magic.

He travels to meet the Babylonian *magoi* and the Indian Brahmins, just as Pythagoras travelled before him, but he could have been motivated by purely philosophical interests. On the other hand, the miracles he observes abroad hint at other interests. Did he really travel to these countries, or are these trips symbolic fictions designed to illustrate his attachment to Brahmin philosophy and Greek Cynicism? He also travelled in the Greek world and was seen at the shrines, the religious centers and the great fairs where he would meet ordinary sorcerers and interpreters of dreams. Antioch and Ephesus attracted him especially.

The official charges brought against him are: (1) his peculiar dress and life-style; (2) the fact that people call him god; (3) his prediction of the plague at Ephesus; (4) the ritual murder of a child. On his diet and life style we are told this: He avoids meat, lives mainly on vegetables and dried fruit. Wine is a clean drink but tends to muddy the spirit. He walks barefoot, wears linen clothes, long hair and a beard and lives in temples (like Diogenes the Cynic). He imposes silence upon himself for long periods of time. At sunrise and at other times of the day he performs certain private rites. He begins the day by communicating with the gods;

next he converses with others about the gods; only after that does he deal with human affairs. He considers it his duty to repair old cemeteries and pour libations on neglected tombs. The last charge (4) which has a political context (Domitian's secret police suspects a plot to elevate Nerva to the throne) is probably the most serious. We are not told specifically why the boy had to die, but we read in Dio Cassius (69.11) that Hadrian had a favorite, Antinous, murdered, because he 'required a willing soul for his purposes' (Dölger, 1929–36, iv: 211–12).

Lucian seems to have taken him for a charlatan, for he refers in his *Alexander* 5 to the 'great' Apollonius and his whole *tragoidia*, a term which Phillimore translates as 'mummery', while Diskin Clay speaks of 'solemn farce'. Origen in *Against Celsus* 6.41 calls Apollonius a *magos*. What Apollonius calls his 'science' could easily be taken as magic science (*scientia*, *technē*) by an enemy. On the other hand he disapproves of those who use deadly drugs and 'violate the tombs of ancient kings', probably in order to steal their magical books (cf. the PGM). To the Roman authorities he says: 'If you regard me as a sorcerer, how will you chain me? And if you are going to chain me, how can you say that I am a sorcerer?' The future Emperor Vespasian discussed matters of the greatest importance with Apollonius in private (only Ephrates and Dio Chrysostomus were present). Vespasian even said to Apollonius: 'Make me an Emperor', and he knows Vespasian would want to be the ideal ruler that Plato had in mind and that he, Apollonius, prays for. But if Vespasian, a shrewd judge of people, had thought him to be a sorcerer, he would not have confided in him. He would have said: 'Force the Fates, force Zeus to make me supreme ruler of the Empire' or 'Fake some weather-prodigies for me' or 'Make the sun rise in the west'. For these were the claims usually made by sorcerers.

The argument that Apollonius speaks publicly and openly in temples, while sorcerers avoid such places and prefer the night for their operations does not really work; for the one does not exclude the other. Moreover, he hints at least once that he could do more impressive feats if he really wanted, but as he says, the Delphic Apollo reveals the truth without too much drama.

One big question remains: If his 'superhuman spiritual gifts' are entirely due to his 'scientific methods', why did he not teach his methods? Or are we to assume that there was some esoteric teaching that Philostratus does not mention?

Apollonius is not interested in astrology and 'all other supernatural dealings of that kind'. But he is interested in everything that is in the human soul, the human mind. Only men of extraordinary spiritual power understand, as he says, the depths of the soul whose 'immortal and unbegotten part is the origin of all being'. He probably saw it as his role

to activate the collective soul of a group, and the phenomena that happen as a result of that might be called 'magic'.

One of his main defences is based on his behaviour during the last illness of his great friend Philiscus of Melos. Apollonius would have done anything to save him – even descend to the underworld – but he did none of the things a true sorcerer would have done (i.e. he did not use talismans, nor recited 'Orphic songs'). The attending physicians and their students are witnesses that he did none of these things. If he is not a sorcerer, what is he? Or is he a sorcerer plus something else? He seems to model himself after Pythagoras, and what tradition says about Pythagoras can be applied to him. Perhaps he wanted to be considered a reincarnation of Pythagoras. Or was he, as Phillimore (vol. I, p. xiv) suggests, a divinity of second-class rating, a daemon? 'Daemonships were easily obtained in the heyday of Syncretism,' Phillimore adds sarcastically. Unlike Jesus he was not a religious founder, though he became a cult figure long after his death. He was not an original thinker, not a great scholar, not a great orator, it would seem, but an effective speaker with a sense of humor, and a shrewd observer of human beings.

According to the *Vita Alexandri Severi* 29, he was *anima sanctorum*, but even Hierocles did not call him a god. Ammianus Marcellinus 21.14.5 compared him to Hermes Trismegistus and Plotinus! This alone would show how difficult it was and is to label this man. Between Apollonius' death – or his 'disappearance from among men' – and Philostratus' work, a mass of lore accumulated and could be presented effectively, as literary propaganda, encouraged by the Imperial court. Phillimore has made it quite clear that it is Philostratus' purpose to honour Apollonius, to introduce him as the ideal philosopher. This is not so much a biography as a biographical novel, reminiscent of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. His admiration for Apollonius has a genuine ring. We may ask, with Phillimore (vol. I, p. lxxxii) what he saw in his hero: 'The picturesqueness of the character; the dramatic fascination of the period which includes Nero and Domitian; the splendid afternoon of a Hellenism which still understood and found its passwords in the language of the thousand-year-old poet.'

Philostratus vigorously defends his hero from the suspicion of being a *magos* by attributing his *thaumata* and predictions to 'science' and by differentiating him time and again from the vulgar *goēs*. According to Roman law, both Apollonius and Apuleius could have been condemned as sorcerers. Apuleius defended himself successfully, as did Apollonius, but Apollonius was also whitewashed posthumously by his hagiographer. Why was this necessary? Because Apollonius had by now become a cult figure, with devotees in the highest circles. To worship someone who had really been a *magos* was unthinkable for someone like Julia Domna; therefore,

Philostratus had to work hard to emphasize the divine, superhuman nature of his hero.

That Apollonius himself knew of Jesus and imitated him consciously is very unlikely. But the literary tradition represented by Philostratus was very much aware of the Gospels, of *Acts* and some *Apocrypha* and thus created an image of Apollonius that pitted him against Christ. There is some anti-Jewish propaganda in the *Life* (5.33; 27; cf. Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.5). 'The Jews are inveterate rebels, not against Rome only, but against mankind.' This no doubt includes the Christians who were still considered by some an extremist Jewish sect.

There are striking parallels between the *Vita*, the canonical Gospels, *Acts* and some *Apocrypha*. Most of the parallels are found in Luke, while there is a cluster of New Testament reminiscences in Kayser, pp. 342–3 (*Mark, Luke, Acts*). There is an important parallel in the *Acts of Peter* 11 (cf. *Life* 4.20). The *Life* is not a direct attack on the Gospels, but it furnishes material for potential polemic of pagans against the Christians.

One point that I think has not been made: The Old Testament prophecies of Jesus' ministry have a parallel in the *Life*, too. Apollonius is a reincarnation of mythological figures and – in a sense – of previous philosophers, such as Pythagoras. This legitimizes him, confers a special status on him, just as the Old Testament predictions quoted in the Gospels define Jesus as the Messiah.

Incidentally, Apollonius lives on as Belinas, the great oriental sorcerer (Hempel, 1912: 6–12). Like Apuleius, he firmly denied being a magician, because, like Apuleius, he knew how dangerous such a claim could be. But in fact, he was a magician, and we can easily imagine him writing texts for amulets, though probably not for curse tablets. He practiced white magic, not black magic. Not to say what you were or what you thought you were was perhaps a necessary precaution. Jesus does refer to himself as 'Son of God', though rarely apart from the Gospel of John; on the other hand, God himself calls him his beloved son, and the daemons know this for a fact. Much more often Jesus calls himself the 'Son of Man'; but this title is never found in an address to him nor in a saying or tale about him.

The two pagan philosophers who emphasized that they were not magicians, were both in danger of being executed under Roman law. There is a certain irony in this. Of course, they both escaped: Apollonius through his very superior magic, Apuleius more through his rhetoric. Jesus was executed, but not as a magician.

The image of Apollonius that Philostratus projects is that of the 'Holy Man' or the 'Divine Man'. He is, in a sense, part of the religious establishment of paganism, for he is certified by various oracles (Colophon, Didyma) and shrines (Pergamon) as a true healer. In fact, he 'saves' people,

absolves them from evil and ensures the peace of the dead by purifying them posthumously or letting them be purified by the local specialists. This connects him with Pythagoras and Empedocles who were great purifiers but also with the shady practitioners threatened by Heraclitus.

Edward Gibbon maintained that early Christianity was successful largely thanks to its appeal to miracles. This statement has been challenged recently by R. P. C. Hanson who declares that 'the market for miracles in the world of Christian antiquity was saturated. Everybody either performed miracles or claimed to do so, from the most despicable travelling charlatan to highly respectable philosophers like Apollonius of Tyana' (Hanson, 1980: 930). According to Hanson, there is another reason: Miracles were associated with magic, and a charge of operating with magic was one which all well-informed Christians were anxious to avoid. We might add that even 'well-informed' pagans like Apollonius and Apuleius were anxious – for very obvious reasons – to avoid this charge.

Hence there was a certain dilemma. On the one hand, if you wanted to make an impression, found a new movement, gain followers, you had to perform miracles or magic of some sort. On the other hand, if you made too much of an impression, you were likely to become the target of an investigation.

LUCAN'S SUPERWITCH, ERICTHO

In Book 6 of the *Pharsalia*, his epic on the Civil War between Julius Caesar and Pompey, Lucan has created a kind of superwitch, who seems like all the former witches, from Medea to Canidia, wrapped in one. She resides in Thessaly, the classical country of sorcery, and is consulted there by Pompey's son on the eve of the decisive battle of Pharsalus (48 BC). Lucan obviously wished to compete with Books 4 (Dido's magical sacrifice) and 6 (Aeneas' descent into the underworld) of the *Aeneid*, but also with the images of Medea, as given by Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses*, and by his uncle, Seneca, in his tragedy, *Medea*.

The poet first mentions the power of witches in general. Then he enumerates various methods of divination and adds that for Pompey's son, necromancy is the only reliable way of exploring the future. The rites involved are monstrous and disgusting, but the poet goes on and on, as if he enjoyed all the gruesome details. To be sure, he professes to be shocked and dismayed, but he manages to pass on the thrill he experiences to his readers.

Erictho has enormous powers. She emerges as a kind of minor daemon who has no scruples and is not responsible to any divine or human law. The central idea of the passage – the revival of a corpse – may have been

discussed as a scientific problem at the time. Shelley, who admired Lucan, must have read this passage with his wife, Mary, for it almost certainly gave her the idea for her *Frankenstein*.

Was Lucan's treatment, so obviously influenced by literary sources, also based on a real person, someone like Horace's Canidia? Perhaps, but his rhetoric is so overpowering, his verbal artistry so sparkling that any connection with the world of everyday experience becomes very tenuous.

PETRONIUS' SORCERESS

Encolpius ('Bosom Pal'), the narrator and anti-hero of Petronius' novel *Satyricon*, describes an embarrassing episode. A beautiful woman named Chrysis ('Goldie') had allowed him to make love with her, but he had completely failed in her arms. Naturally, he is more than anxious to restore his sexual powers. First, he tries the conventional remedies: a spicy meal of onions and snails (considered an aphrodisiac) and just a little wine – not too much. He goes for a leisurely stroll and abstains from sex with his boyfriend, Giton. The next day, when he meets Chrysis again, he discovers that she, too, has given the problem some thought and brought her own witch, a little old woman, with her. First the witch ties a kind of amulet around his neck, for his temporary impotence might have been caused by black magic (a jealous rival, for instance). Three threads of 'different colors' (probably black, white and red) are twisted together and tied around his neck. She also takes some dirt, mixes it with her spittle and makes a mark on his forehead. Then she recites a spell and tells him to spit three times and to drop inside his garment three times in a row some pebbles over which she had said a spell and which she had wrapped in purple cloth. According to ancient belief, stones had occult powers, spittle, too, of course. Finally, the witch 'tests the power of his loins' by touching him there. The result is most satisfactory.

APULEIUS' SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Among the works of Apuleius of Madaura, the Platonist and travelling lecturer, two deal with magic. One is a speech he delivered in his own defense around 160 AD before the Proconsul, Claudius Maximus, in Sabratha (North Africa). It is entitled *Apologia sive de Magia*; the other is an autobiographical novel entitled *Metamorphoses*.

Apuleius' defense was successful; if not, he could have been sentenced to death. His main argument is that he is a philosopher and scientist and, as such, interested in all kinds of phenomena that might appear bizarre. It

is this intellectual curiosity of his that makes him suspicious. In fact, *curiositas* is practically a synonym of the pursuit of magic. There are certain things that one should leave alone.

Vague rumors have been spread in the community in which Apuleius is still a stranger. He has married a wealthy widow. There has been a mysterious death. One knows about certain experiments he has conducted.

Apuleius builds his defense on the various connotations of the term *magos*. On the one hand, it could mean an ordinary sorcerer, a *goes*, on the other hand it could mean a priestlike figure, and that, Apuleius argues, was its original meaning. He quotes Plato's *Charmides* and his *First Alcibiades* (if it is genuine) to show how highly the Persians regarded these original 'magi'. Apuleius then tries to show that his experiments were harmless, only conducted in the interest of science and thoroughly misunderstood by his accusers who did not believe in the reality of witchcraft at all, for if he really were the great magician they made him out to be, they would have a great deal to worry about.

Apuleius defends not only himself, but the cause of philosophy – today we would say, the cause of pure research. As a philosopher, a Platonist, he feels free to investigate all sorts of problems, including occult phenomena. There is a bridge between philosophy and magic, just as there are bridges between religion and magic.

But, of course, the outsiders, the ordinary people, did not see it like this. Apuleius was, to them, a dangerous person. The specific accusations are the following: (1) his bride, the wealthy widow, whose relatives dislike Apuleius, called him a wizard, because she fell in love with him; (2) he bought three kinds of fish, in order to dissect them; (3) a young woman and a boy fell into trance in Apuleius' presence; (4) he owned *instrumenta magiae*; (5) he and some friends performed *nocturnalia sacra*; (6) someone made for him in secret from precious material a statue in the form of a skeleton which he worshiped in a costly ritual and which he called 'King', *basileus*.

Apuleius' defense was successful, but was he innocent? It depends. According to Roman Law, he could almost certainly have been sentenced to death. Fortunately, the judge was enlightened.

In his great picaresque novel, *Metamorphoses* (also known as the *Golden Ass*), a piece of fiction which must have autobiographical elements, the hero, Lucius, dabbles in magic, gets into serious trouble, is finally rescued by the goddess, Isis, and then finds true knowledge, salvation and peace in her religion.

The transformation of Lucius, the hero of the novel, into an ass is described in Book 3. The main characters of this part of the work are Lucius, eager young lover and student of magic, who is determined to learn the secrets of transformation, even though he has been warned of

the risks; and Photis, the attractive young witch whose mistress, Pamphila, a more advanced sorceress, has a kind of magical workshop on the roof of her house – a wooden shelter hidden from view but open to the winds and full of her requisites: herbs, metal plates inscribed with magical characters, various ointments in little boxes, and, most gruesome of all, parts of dead bodies stolen from cemeteries or places of executions.

What makes it difficult to compare such figures as Apollonius of Tyana, Simon Magus, Apuleius of Madaura and Alexander the 'False Prophet' is the nature of our evidence. In the case of Apollonius we have mainly the testimony of an uncritical admirer who lived a few centuries later. In the case of Simon and Alexander we have practically only the hostile tradition. As far as Apuleius is concerned, we have his own story – in two versions.

But it is conceivable that a brilliant young man like Apuleius, a representative of 'Middle Platonism', wished to explore the possibilities of magic, natural or otherwise, just as some Neoplatonists were attracted, later on, by the possibilities of theurgy. The message of the novel seems to be that Apuleius found salvation in religion through a kind of spiritual pilgrimage, connected with much real hardship. This does not mean that he gave up philosophy, and we do not even know whether he renounced magic for good.

LUCIAN ON MAGICIANS

Lucian was born at about the same time as Apuleius (c. 125 AD); he died after 180 AD. Like Apuleius he travelled from city to city, giving lectures. He had studied philosophy but did not belong to any particular school, though he sympathized with the Epicureans, because they fought superstition under all its disguises.

Superstition is, indeed, one of the recurrent themes of Lucian's writings. It appears, for instance, in a devastating satire on the fraudulent founder of a new religion, Alexander of Abonuteichos, a contemporary of Lucian's whom he knew personally and detested sincerely.

Alexander, the 'Pseudoprophet', claimed to have control over a new manifestation of the god, Asclepius, in the form of a snake called Glycon. Thanks to this divine agent, he dispensed oracles and conducted mystery rites to which outsiders, especially Christians and Epicureans, were not admitted. In his essay, Lucian takes great pleasure in revealing the fraudulent magic that Alexander employed in order to capture the ignorant and credulous. The questions submitted to the oracle were sealed and came back with answers, the seals apparently unbroken, but Alexander had several techniques for opening them, adding a response and cleverly replacing the seal.

Alexander was probably just one of many accomplished impostors of later antiquity. He obviously knew how to manipulate crowds by his appearance, his delivery of the message and his use of mechanical devices (*manganeumata*) to produce sham miracles. Another type of fraud is discussed in the *Lovers of Lies*. Several philosophers, including a Stoic, a Peripatetic, and a Platonist, along with a physician, talk about miraculous cures. Some amazing instances are quoted. This leads to love-magic and other astonishing phenomena.

And here we come across the earliest version of the story of the sorcerer's apprentice, as told by the apprentice himself. His name is Eucrates, and he has studied with a great magician called Pancrates, who had spent twenty-three years underground learning magic from Isis herself. Pancrates needed no servants: he took a piece of wood – a broomstick, for instance – dressed it in some clothes and made it into a kind of robot that looked like a human being to all outsiders. One day, the apprentice overheard the master whispering a magical formula of three syllables and when the master was away tried it on the broomstick. The results are well known from Goethe's poem *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.

At the end of this conversation, even the sceptic (Lucian himself, presumably) is confused and has lost faith in the venerable philosophers who are supposed to teach the young the truth yet perpetuate ancient superstitions instead. Still, he is not quite sure what to believe and what not to believe. As far as the story of the great Hyperborean magician is concerned (*Lovers of Lies* 14–18), Lucian seems to put his finger on the main problem. The magician charges a large fee for a feat that would take place anyway, due to purely natural causes. But his prestige, the build-up in front of his audience, and the whole hocus-pocus are all so impressive that people willingly pay and gladly give him credit.

In his dialogue *Menippus on Necromancy*, Lucian uses motifs from Book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey* but produces a picture of a more complex necromantic ritual. The satirist, Menippus, one of Lucian's heroes, wishes to visit the underworld, and he travels all the way to Babylon to consult one of the *magoi*. The preparations he has to make are formidable: Purification by ablutions and fumigations, strict diet, sleeping out of doors, taking special precautions.

After all has been said, it still remains difficult to draw the line between philosophers (or scientists) who were just that and philosophers who also did or were supposed to do magic. The archaic combination of both (Orpheus, Pythagoras, Empedocles) survives into later antiquity, but on a lower level, as it were. Neo-Pythagoreans like Apollonius of Tyana and Middle Platonists like Apuleius of Madaura may be accused of being sorcerers, and in their defence they could simply say: 'As a philosopher (or scientist) I am interested in everything and anxious to investigate every

phenomenon under the sun. If there is such a thing as magic – and almost everyone seems to believe that there is – I want to find out whether it works or not. But let me assure you that this does not make me a magician, and any miracles that I seem to perform can be explained in purely scientific terms.'

Apuleius was a highly educated man, but many real magicians were not. Augustine (*Contra academicos* 1.7.19ff) was impressed by Albicerius, a sorcerer, who had helped him find a silver spoon and could 'thought-read' lines from Vergil in the mind of a proconsul. But this practitioner, according to Augustine, lacked education; therefore, he could not be 'good'. On the other hand, it is sometimes said that an educated person, a 'philosopher', can never become the victim of magic.

In the *Lovers of Lies* (10–13) Lucian tells through one of the interlocutors the story of a Babylonian miracle-worker who instantly healed a man who had been bitten by a snake. This Babylonian could also destroy all the snakes that infested the farm on which the accident had happened; moreover, he was able to fly through the air (like Simon Magus) and walk on water. This has all the characteristics of folklore and tall tales, and the way in which it is presented suggests that the narrator himself doubts the stories he passes on. The old dragon who fails to obey the wizard's command seems like a built-in clue, and so are the heavy brogues the wizard wears as he sails through the air. By retelling such folk tales with a satiric twist Lucian manages to refute them.

LUCIAN, ALEXANDER OR THE FALSE PROPHET

Lucian addresses his 'unmasking' of Alexander, the 'false prophet', to an Epicurean named Celsus who had himself written a work 'Against the Magicians' (cf. 21; Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.68; 5.86; Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 4.28–42). Hippolytus in his chapters against the magicians (Ganschinietz, 1913: 1ff) seems to have used this lost work, but there are also remarkable parallels between Hippolytus and Lucian. Lucian's work has several definite themes. One of them appears right at the beginning: Alexander's operation is really a *tragoidia*, a 'solemn farce', as Diskin Clay translates who lists related terms: *drama*, *skeue* etc. in Lucian and his contemporaries and compares *agonizomai* in Philostratus (of the performances of sophists). He adds 'Lucian's Peregrinus Proteus and his Alexander are very much at home in . . . [the] theatrical culture [of the second sophistic]. They are always on stage and . . . histrionic; their success hung on their ability to convince their audience' (Clay, 1992: 3418).

Lucian leaves no doubt from the beginning of his treatise, our main source, that, for him, Alexander is a 'sorcerer' (*goes*) and 'an accursed

villain'. At the same time, he is tall and handsome, 'truly godlike', with radiant eyes that look divinely inspired (3). He is highly intelligent, vivacious and businesslike; he has intellectual curiosity and a quick grasp of any subject. All these admirable qualities make him, in effect, a very dangerous criminal, and though he sees himself as a new Pythagoras, he is a master of lies, deceit, perjury and 'evil art' (*kakotechnia*, i.e. magic). He is unscrupulous, bold, works hard to realize his plans; he is also persuasive, inspires confidence and disguises his evil intentions under a mask of kindness (4; cf. his reception of Lucian, 55). He gives the impression of being honest, pleasant, rather simple-minded and naive. Add to this his tendency to 'think big' and execute grand schemes and his rejection of everything that is on a modest scale (4) – and you have the portrait of a real wizard of antiquity.

As a boy, he was very handsome, and one of his lovers was a professional sorcerer (*goes*), one of those who promised magical operations (*mageias*), miraculous incantations and love charms and curses against enemies, as well as the 'digging up' of hidden treasures and inheritances (perhaps by hastening the death of a wealthy relative?). Alexander proves to be a talented sorcerer's apprentice and accomplice in crime; so his lover gives him a thorough education and employs him as an assistant, servant and domestic. The teacher – incidentally a disciple of the 'great Apollonius of Tyana' – pretends to be a healer, and, in fact, he knows 'how to mix good and bad drugs'. Alexander inherits all this knowledge from him. He now takes an associate by the name of Kokkonas who 'participated in compositions' and was even more corrupt than Alexander himself. As sellers of medicine and tellers of fortunes, as wizards and sorcerers, but not yet specialized on oracles, they travel around. What they are doing, they call in their slang, 'fleecing the fatsoes'. It is interesting to note that these travelling frauds had their own slang, perhaps comparable to the *Rotwelsch* of medieval crooks in Central Europe. Alexander and his congenial accomplice are characterized as 'very wicked', as 'daredevils', as 'totally willing to commit any crime'.

One basic fact these villains – who are much more dangerous than the characters in picaresque novels, such as Petronius' *Satyricon* – understand very well is this: human beings are governed by hope and fear (cf. Vettius Valens, *Anthol.* 5.4), and if you know how to manipulate these emotions you will get rich fast. Those who hope and those who fear depend on the arts of divination; this is the reason why the famous Oracles (Delphi, Clarus, etc.) flourished for such a long time. Lucian is in agreement with Oenomaus of Gadara, the Cynic, who 'debunked the charlatans', i.e. unmasked the incompetence and fraudulence of the Oracles.

Alexander and Kokkonas are joined by a rich Macedonian lady who encourages them, and as they 'twist' and 'churn' their ideas and

experiences, they hit upon the idea of establishing a new prophetic shrine. They do this and succeed beyond their own 'prognosis and their boldest hopes' — one of Lucian's typical jokes.

The two accomplices operate in a rational, businesslike manner. They are aware of the stupidity of the Paphlagonians: If any charlatan accompanied by a flute-player, predicting the future with a sieve, comes to town, these people stare at him in awe, as if he had just come down from heaven. Needless to say, Alexander is much more sophisticated.

They plot their strategy and get the population prepared for a new cult by planting bronze tablets in the old sanctuary of Apollo in Chalcedon. Kokkonas remains there and fabricates 'ambiguous, obscure, impenetrable oracles', anticipating Alexander's later techniques. Soon afterwards he departs from this life. In the meantime, the people of Abonuteichos start the construction of a temple. Alexander now creates an even more impressive image of himself: Long, flowing locks, a purple *chiton* with white stripes, a white mantle, in his hand a *harpe*, i.e. a kind of sickle, and he now calls himself the 'divine Alexander.' The Paphlagonians, hopeless fools that they are, believe in him, although they are fully aware of his humble origins.

Another oracle, skilfully concocted, announces in Pythagorean terms the arrival of a great prophet. Alexander manages to fake states of trance by chewing root of soapwort. The foam that comes out of his mouth strikes the simpletons as something 'divine' and 'awesome'. He now fashions a dragon's head that looks vaguely human and can be manipulated with horse hair, like a marionette. And, of course, there is the tame snake from Pella, nurtured in secret, destined to become one of the main actors in this show. His mystic arrival in this world is prepared by means of an egg. Then Alexander leaps into the market-place, clad only in a golden loin-cloth, carrying a sickle, shaking his flowing locks in the manner of the fanatical dervish priests of the Great Mother. Here, as elsewhere in Lucian's account, and through the stories concerning Simon Magus, it becomes clear, that a great *magos* is always a great imitator. He climbs onto a high altar and starts addressing the crowd, congratulating the city on the imminent epiphany of 'the god'. Practically the whole population is there. The people are awestruck, fall on their knees and pray. Alexander now utters a series of unintelligible words (perhaps the *onomata barbara* of the papyri; Lucian says they could have been Hebrew or Phoenician), and the names 'Apollo' and 'Asclepius' occur frequently.

The rest of this 'epiphany' is told by Lucian with superb skill. Every detail counts, but what seems particularly relevant is Alexander's declaration that he now holds Asclepius in the form of Glycon, i.e. he is the priest, the manager or impresario and (who knows?) the son of Glycon; at any rate, he is in control of him. The crowd, once more, is amazed.

(There always seems to be a crowd in ancient cities, ready to stare and listen, to admire a true or false prophet, and to embrace a new religion, if the miracles they see are good enough.)

Alexander creates a kind of mass hysteria through *ekplexis*, 'shock', and feeds the hopes, intensifies the fears of the average person. What are those hopes? Lucian tells us: wealth, health 'and the rest' (14). Now he waits for the rumors to go around; then he installs himself in a room, on a couch, 'in very goodlike fashion'. The first viewing of the divine snake is staged as a miracle by Alexander; it is also a cleverly arranged show.

His tricks, his sorcery are so accomplished that only very superior minds such as Democritus or Epicurus, would have realized that everything is deceit (*pseudos*) and cannot possibly be real.

But so far everything is only an elaborate preparation for the biggest humbug of all, i.e. the oracle that Alexander wants to establish. This is his real specialty, and as soon as the temple stands, the stage is set. Alexander's tricks are fairly obvious to Lucian and his friend, Celsus, but to the simpletons they seem a miracle, and they experience great wonderment. Some of Alexander's specific devices are revealed, although Celsus, an authority on fake magic, is probably familiar with them. The oracles that are given in response to the people's questions are sometimes obscure, sometimes downright unintelligible, but his medical advice is often based on common sense and reflects his knowledge of 'useful drugs'. He employs a large staff of paid helpers, assistants and spies, including secretaries and interpreters. This is no longer a two-man enterprise, this is a big business with international connections, for Alexander now sends his agents abroad to propagate the cult. He advertises his ability to catch runaway-slaves, thieves and robbers, to dig up hidden treasures (a specialty of certain sorcerers), to heal the sick and to restore the dead to life. The response is most heartening, but now he is attacked by a few sensible people, mostly Epicureans, but implicitly also Christians of whom, in his opinion, there are too many around. His 'magic', the secrets of his *mise-en-scène*, are by now fairly obvious to them. In his defense he uses shock-tactics against the Epicureans and the Christians. Naturally, a sorcerer type like Alexander, a friend of the marvellous must hate an 'inflexible' thinker like Epicurus who had undermined the religious establishment and denounced superstition in its various forms. With Platonists, Stoics, and Neo-Pythagoreans Alexander lives in peace.

With the help of an accomplice, he produces another *ekplexis*: The god now emits oracles *viva voce*, directly. Another very clever trick works as follows. When events prove one of his oracles wrong, he furnishes recantations *ex eventu*. He is also an expert on generating rumors, and through his knowledge of questions submitted to the oracle, he is in a position to blackmail the rich and the powerful. No ordinary crook would

have hit upon this idea, Lucian says with reluctant admiration. Alexander also decides to export his oracles over the whole Roman Empire, warning the population against plagues, fires, earthquakes and other catastrophes and assuring them of his help. A hexameter attached to the city gates would act as a kind of talisman. Unfortunately, it proves to be completely ineffective, probably because people, in a false feeling of safety, neglect all the normal precautions, Lucian says. His army of spies in Rome informs him of people's thoughts even before they reach his shrine in the form of specific questions. One is impressed at the network of communications that must have been at the man's disposal. Lucian sees such activities as 'preparatory tricks'.

In Abonuteichos, Alexander now organizes initiation rites modelled after those practices at the Mystery Cults in Eleusis and elsewhere. They involve torchbearers, hierophants and dramatized myths. Christians and Epicureans are strictly excluded from these ceremonies (*orgia*), which culminate in the representation of the *hieros gamos*, the 'sacred marriage', of Alexander-Endymion and Selene; the goddess is played by a beautiful woman, the wife of a Roman official. She is lowered from the ceiling (probably by the kind of *machina* used to produce a stage-deity) and the two then hug and kiss on a couch before the eyes of her husband. Then Alexander appears dressed as a hierophant, and into the profound silence he shouts '*le, Glycon!*' to which the crowd responds '*le Alexander!*' As Alexander jumps around in 'mystic dances', his gold thigh becomes clearly visible in the light of the torches, indicating that he is a reincarnation of Pythagoras himself.

Many women are in love with him and bear him children, and their husbands are proud of this. He encourages the belief that he is really a god who spends a certain time on earth – his *epidemia*. The word, incidentally, has a similar meaning in *First Clement* 5:59, and some followers of Apollonius of Tyana think of him in this way.

Who was Alexander, after all? A charlatan? An *anthropodaimon*? Lucian's judgement is clear: Alexander was not a harmless eccentric, not an ordinary charlatan, but a master-criminal, ruthless and extremely dangerous under a mask of kindness and concern. Any critic or challenger who dared to unmask him, including Lucian himself, would risk his life. His hatred of true philosophers who see through him takes on grotesque forms; thus, he burns the 'Main Principles' of Epicurus in public with such zeal, as if he were burning the Master himself. Epicureanism is, for Lucian, a sane, sensible philosophy, the very opposite of Alexander's obscurantism and deceit, for it provides peace of mind and happiness and real purification.

What emerges from Lucian's account, even though he does not stress it, is the fact that a sorcerer of Alexander's type is, among other things, a great imitator who borrows shamelessly what snits him from various cults,

religious rituals, occult practices and ancient doctrines. He manipulates the emotions of the people who seek his help and operates with phantoms, with carefully staged miracles. Caster (1937: 47–9, in his commentary on para. 26) compares the 'speaking statues' in Egyptian and Graeco-Roman temples, and he specifically mentions a bronze statue of Diana, found in a temple of Apollo in Pompeii whose lips are half open and whose neck has a hole through which a tube could be inserted. He also makes a very interesting point: the people were not completely fooled; most of them probably knew that those statues were being manipulated by the priests. When the Emperor Julian was initiated at Ephesus, under the direction of Maximus, the theurgist, he saw a statue of Hecate smiling, moving, her torches being lit spontaneously, etc. He almost certainly knew that this was not a true miracle but had to be understood symbolically. It was a show, but a very good show, and it had a strong emotional effect on the faithful.

During Marcus Aurelius' campaign against the Marcomanni and the Quadi, Alexander issues a major oracle, involving sacrifices, aromatic essences and two hapless lions. He invents 'nocturnal oracles', just as fraudulent as the others, and once more Lucian emphasizes the element of 'shock' and 'amazement', but concedes that even Democritus might have been disturbed for a moment, but he would soon have understood the principle behind the 'miracle' and spat out in disgust. Lucian amuses himself at playing a trick on the 'prophet' in order to test him: He asks, through an agent: 'When will Alexander be unmasked as a charlatan?' It is a case of his *mechane* versus that of Alexander. But the charlatan gets bolder and bolder: he has coins with the image of Glycon minted to propagate his cult. Once more, Lucian refers to Alexander's 'magic' as *tragoidia*: 'This was the end of Alexander's show, and such was the dénouement of the drama, that one might have supposed that something like this was the work of providence, even though it happened by chance.' In the very last section Lucian briefly characterizes the purpose of his work. He wants it to be a *deigma*, an example, and he hopes that it will be useful by exposing fraud and deceit and reassure people that there is such a thing as reality and common sense.

As a work of 'unmasking' Lucian's satire is related to the 'Unmasking of the Charlatans' by Oenomaus of Gadara, a Cynic who was slightly older. It has been pointed out that Oenomaus' work, preserved in excerpts by Eusebius, has parallels in Lucian's *Jupiter Confutatus*.

In my summary of the *Alexander* I have drawn attention to the author's high opinion of Alexander's intelligence and the cleverness of his magical tricks. As a contrast we find everywhere references to the amazing stupidity of his followers. Since Alexander's operation is really a show, it has its protagonist (Alexander himself), its deuteragonist (the divine snake,

Glycon) and its chorus of dumb Paphlagonians. Lucian has a whole palette of epithets for them: They are thick-headed, naive, superstitious, brainless, witless, distinguishable from animals only by their appearance, confused, easily frightened, impressed in advance, buoyed by vain hopes, stupid and with dripping noses. The thumbnail-sketch of Rutilianus, a worthy, but exceptionally superstitious Roman, deserves to be read in its entirety; he is – sarcastically – called ‘very sharp’ and is one of the ‘foolish wise’ (*morosophoi*); he is also mindless and deranged. Lucian would not be Lucian if he did not deliver, *en passant*, a kick to the representatives of philosophical schools he dislikes: They are just as stupid as the dumbest Paphlagonians! How different was Epicurus!

PLOTINUS AND THE EGYPTIAN PRIEST

According to Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* 56–60, the leading Neoplatonist (c. 205–270 AD) had ‘some very special gifts’ from the time of his birth. ‘Special’ means ‘occult’ or ‘psychic’. Once, an Egyptian priest (i.e. a theurgist) came to Rome and wanted to give Plotinus a demonstration of his own ‘science’. He invited him to be present at an appearance of his (Plotinus’) ‘familiar spirit’. The conjuring took place in the temple of the Egyptian goddess Isis, because this was, as the Egyptian priest declared, the only ‘pure place’ to be found in all of Rome. But when the spirit was asked to show himself, a god appeared that did not belong to ‘that category of spirits’. At this point, the Egyptian cried: ‘Blessed are you who have a god as a familiar and not a spirit of the lower class!’ Unfortunately there was no opportunity to ask the apparition any questions or even to look at it any longer, for the friend who shared the experience strangled the chickens that he held as a safeguard, ‘either because he was jealous or because he was afraid of something.’ Since Plotinus had a higher divine being as a familiar, Porphyry adds, he concentrated his ‘divine eye’ for a while on that being. This experience prompted him to write a monograph, *On the Spirit That Alotted Us to Himself*. A monograph with this title is preserved among Plotinus’ writings (Tract 15 Harder = *Enneads* 3.4), but no mention is made of this particular incident.

What the priest granted to Plotinus was a vision, *autopsia*, of his own familiar spirit, *genius*, his personal ‘daemon’. The priest, who had expected an ordinary *genius*, was amazed that a deity of a higher order appeared. A theurgist was, of course, able to spot these differences.

We also learn that an attendant was needed to hold a couple of chickens. This adds a touch of simple folklore to theurgic rites of the highest order. The chickens must be strangled at once if the spirit that appears turns out to be awesome. Such a sacrifice was probably conceived

as an instant peace offering, after which the spirit would leave without harming any of the participants. In this case the attendant panics, and the spirit departs prematurely, but the priest – and, of course, Plotinus – at least had a look at him.

PLOTINUS AND THE EVIL SORCERER

Plotinus had an enemy, Olympus of Alexandria, who tried to hurt him through magic. In Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* 53–5, we are told that this sorcerer first appealed to the stars, but in vain. Second, we learn that Plotinus, being a ‘wise man’, was able to resist the evil forces directed against him, and in fact, redirected them against the enemy who had unleashed them in the first place. Thus, the very real anguish that Plotinus had felt at one point, rebounded on the magician. All this sounds like a personal experience that Plotinus told his disciples: His body had felt like a purse whose strings are pulled together. The message is this: A great philosopher like Plotinus can hurt hostile magicians, not by technical sorcery, but by his wisdom.

The two stories illustrate Plotinus’ attitude towards magic and theurgy. Ordinary ‘black’ magic can hurt him slightly, but he is able to defend himself. Theurgy of a higher order reveals his rank on earth.

THE THEURGIST AS MAGOS

Theurgy was considered a higher form of magic, designed to establish a contact between the practitioner – a more priestlike figure than the ordinary *magos* – and deities of the highest order. According to Proclus (*In theologiam Platonis*, ed. Dodds [1963]), theurgy is a ‘power higher than all human wisdom, embracing the blessings of divination, the purifying powers of initiation, and in a word all the operations of divine possession.’

Theurgy, as opposed to the more vulgar *goeteia*, i.e. ‘witchcraft’, was supposed to be grander, more exalted, full of a deep religious feeling, but its principles and procedures were not essentially different. Naturally, a Neoplatonist philosopher who was also a priest and practised theurgy, was quite different from the shady practitioners who sold love-charms and interpreted dreams for money at fairs and festivals all over the Greek world.

Porphyry gives us the portrait of a theurgist (*Philosophy from Oracles*, ed. Wolff [1856]: 164–5; cf. Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 4.50ff). He actually describes a statue but the reference to a living theurgist is unmistakable. We hear of the head wreathed with bandages and flowery branches, the

face anointed or actually painted, the laurel twig in one hand, the magical symbols on the shoes. Fine robes, liquids, flowers, scents and certain gestures and sounds were also distinctive.

Iamblichus (c.250–c.330 AD), the Neoplatonist philosopher and theurgist, wrote among other works a treatise *On the Pythagorean Life* which is essentially a highly romanticized biography of the Master, with an outline of his doctrines.

Iamblichus himself was the subject of a hero-worshipping biography composed by Eunapius (c.345 – c.420 AD), the sophist and historian who admired the Emperor Julian and hated the Christians. He tells how Iamblichus' disciples once asked him to perform something special (i.e. a *thauma*) for them. He does not oblige them at once but puts them off until a suitable occasion arises. This reluctance stems from his own doctrine: to demand a miracle from the gods is an act of arrogance, in a sense, and could be dangerous. But he also teaches that some 'miracles' are not caused by divine intervention at all. In the end he succeeds in materializing two divine presences, Eros and Anteros, from two separate hot springs. The two divine beings look like handsome young boys; they hug Iamblichus and cling to him as if he were their father. 'After this, the crowd of his pupils demanded nothing more, but considering the proofs that had been given to them, clung to him as if by an unbreakable chain', concludes Eunapius. This is a typical pattern: Unbelief or doubt, however timid, demands a *thauma*, and the *thauma*, duly performed, produces *pistis*, 'belief'.

HECATE AND THE THEURGIST

Maximus of Ephesus, the most famous theurgist of the fourth century, had great influence on the Emperor, Julian, but was executed under Valens. Eunapius dedicated a biographical sketch to Maximus in which he tried to do justice to his charismatic teaching. At least once Maximus performed the miracle that was practically required from this type of teacher and theurgist. He takes a number of people into the temple of Hecate, reverences the statue of the goddess, burns a grain of incense and chants to himself 'some sort of hymn' from one end to other. At this the statue of the goddess begins to smile and even appears to laugh. Then flames burst out of the torches she holds in her hands. Everybody is impressed by the show. But Eunapius warns his readers not to admire any of these things: he certainly does not. Rather, one should believe that 'purification through reason is something very important.' This may be Eunapius' way of saying that miracles can be arranged and should not be over-estimated; they serve only as a symbol, a reinforcement of serious philosophical

training. But when the 'divine Julian' heard this, Eunapius adds, he left the teacher whom he had at the time and departed for Ephesus at once, in order to satisfy his 'thirst for occult science' (Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, pp. 473–5 Boissonade [1849]).

SOSIPATRA, A 'DIVINE WOMAN', AND ANTONINUS, HER SON

Thanks to Eunapius (pp. 456–60) we have an impressive portrait of Sosipatra who was roughly his contemporary (iv AD). She was a great philosophical teacher and a psychic, as we would say today. The story of her early youth sounds like a fairy-tale: One day, two old men arrive at her father's estate and offer, under certain conditions, to educate the little girl who 'is brightened by beauty and good manners.' The father does not have much choice, and the old men – whether they were actually minor gods or major daemons, is not clear – take the girl away and bring her back five years later, fully trained and initiated into 'ancient mysteries'. During her absence, her father's business flourishes beyond belief. When she returns, she is tall and 'of a different kind of beauty'. She gives an impressive demonstration of her Second Sight and the so-called Chaldaean wisdom she has achieved. Before her mentors leave, they bestow on her a whole set of robes, add certain mystic symbols and put certain scrolls into her chest. Never having had any other teachers, she is able to quote the poets, philosophers and orators.

The story can be read as a piece of pagan propaganda. Eunapius, like Julian, seems to say that the ancient gods are not dead. They still walk the earth and take care of their favourites, as they did during the Golden Age.

In the middle of a serious philosophical discussion, Sosipatra, now a respected philosopher and teacher, has a telepathic experience. This convinces everyone that she is omnipresent, and whenever anything happens, she is there, 'which is what the philosophers say about the gods' (p. 470).

In another part of his *Lives*, Eunapius records the impressive career of Sosipatra's son, Antoninus 'the anchorite', a priest, philosopher and – so it would appear – theurgist who seems to have inherited his 'psychic' gifts from his mother. Antoninus served as a priest in the temple at the Canobic mouth of the Nile and trained candidates for the priesthood. The rites of the gods worshiped there were secret, as Eunapius implies. Antoninus must have been a theurgist as well as a teacher, but not openly. When he lectured on Plato, he avoided any 'theological' (which means no doubt 'theurgical') questions. Eunapius uses a picturesque phrase worth quoting: 'Whoever proposed one of the more divine problems, encountered a statue.' That can only mean that the teacher froze and acted as if nothing

had been said. One had to be careful. Theurgy had flourished under Julian, but there was a reaction under his successors, and Maximus was one of its victims.

One day Antoninus had a vision which came true. He told his disciples that soon after his death (he died in 390 AD), the temple would cease to be the great sanctuary it was, and that the magnificent shrine of Sarapis would be transformed into 'the dark and shapeless', and that 'something fabulous and formless' (i.e. fictitious and hideous) would rule over the most beautiful things on earth. This prophecy is also recorded – but not credited to Antoninus – in the Hermetic dialogue *Asclepius* (Luck, 1986: 153–6).

Eunapius describes in some detail the ways in which the prediction was fulfilled:

The temple of Sarapis was demolished, the temple of Canopus, too. The statues of the gods and the votive offerings were removed. Only the vast floor of the temple of Sarapis was left intact for some time, because the stone slabs were too heavy to be carried off. Monks took over the ancient sacred sites, and the bones and skulls of criminals (i.e. the remains of martyrs) were buried inside the sanctuaries and worshiped there.

The Sarapeion was destroyed in 391 AD, and the temples of Canopus were ransacked between 390, the year of Antoninus' death, and 412 AD.

A NECROMANTIC SCENE IN A LOVE ROMANCE

Heliiodorus, author of the novel, *Ethiopian Tales*, or *The Story of Theagenes and Charicleia*, probably lived in the third century AD. He seems to have been a Neopythagorean, at least for part of his life. Later, according to tradition, he converted to Christianity and became Bishop of Tricca in Thessaly.

In Book 6 of his novel (14–15) the beautiful heroine, Charicleia, accompanied by Calasiris, an elderly Egyptian priest, comes across a large number of bodies. It looks as though very recently Egyptians and Persians had fought a fierce battle. The only living being they see is an old Egyptian woman who mourns the loss of a son. She tells the two travellers to spend the night there and promises to escort them to the next village in the morning. As they try to rest on top of a little hill they observe in the bright moonlight, much against their will, a gruesome necromantic scene. The old woman who is a witch tries to revive the corpse of her own son who lies among the slain. The motive is similar to the scene in Book 6 of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, but the ditch she digs, the libation she pours

and the sword she handles, are reminiscent of the Homeric *Nekyia* (Book 11 of the *Odyssey*). She also uses a kind of voodoo doll made of dough mixed with fennel and laurel. The operation is successful up to a point, but the witch is told by her son that she is committing a sin, because she violates the Fates. Death – actually provided by Roman law for such rituals – would be the appropriate punishment for her. Moreover – this we also know from Lucan – the dead resent being called back to life. All this is made even worse by the fact that a priest, a holy man beloved by the gods, is forced to be a witness to this horrible scene. The dead man knows this well and reproaches his mother. We learn from Heliodorus that priests attached to certain cults were not allowed to watch magical rites, much less perform them.

THE SORCERER UNMASKED

In Hippolytus' *Refutatio* 4.28–42, we have a pamphlet 'Against the Magicians', perhaps of the type that Lucian's friend, Celsus, wrote. Text and interpretation are often doubtful, but Ganschietz and others have cleared up a number of problems. We meet here the type of *magos* or *goes*, described so memorably in Lucian's *Alexander* and his *sympaiktai*, 'assistants', literally 'playmates' (perhaps an idiom from the sorcerers' slang). These assistants are often boys who can be easily influenced (perhaps hypnotized) by the sorcerer.

The information that Hippolytus (c.165 – c.235 AD) passes on is not always well organized. He may have used several sources and possibly misunderstood some technical details. He certainly does not want to tell people how they can become sorcerers. Thus, even though his sources may have been highly technical, he seems to stop at a certain point. To him, it is enough to show without going into details how fraud and deceit were feasible. Thus the reader gets impressions and snatches of information rather than solid instruction throughout.

There is a secret chamber (*adyton*). Messages in exotic languages are carried back and forth. Sacrifices are performed. One of the boys gets into a trance and behaves like an epileptic (cf. Apuleius, *Apologia* 42). His screams frighten the people who are waiting for an answer to the questions they have proposed to the great Egyptian god Rê (who takes the place of Alexander's Glycon). The boy appears by now to be unconscious, and the sorcerer places him on a mattress and pronounces magical formulas over him. Then the room is plunged into darkness, because divine beings of a higher rank (higher than Rê?) are expected to appear. An assistant mumbles prayers while the sorcerer beats on a gong. Then he orders silence, and at this point, apparently, the speaking tubes come into action

(cf. Lucian, *Alexander* 26). A sort of lecanomancy is practiced: the sorcerer places a (papyrus?) sheet that seems to be empty into a bowl full of water mixed with vitriol. The message, written with a *pharmakon* (in this case the juice of oak-apples) now becomes visible. A wonder!

An excursus on various techniques to frighten the boys follows. The author then lists some tricks from the repertoire of *magia naturalis* based on simple chemistry. They enable the sorcerer to give the impression that a house is on fire, to produce thunder claps, to stick his hands into hot pitch without getting them burnt, to walk barefoot on a bed of glowing coals, to swallow and spit fire. Some of these tricks were probably used in stage productions over a long period of time.

Most of the effects described above apparently served as a kind of prelude to the epiphany of a 'fiery' Asclepius, not so much a theurgical operation, it would seem, as a kind of necromancy. The various techniques were not always neatly separated. After that we find out how to open a seal and substitute another one (cf. Lucian, *Alexander* 19). We are also told that sorcerers can fake ecstasy (cf. Lucian 40).

This, as G. Anderson says, represents an impressive inventory of the 'hardware' of *goeteia* (Anderson, 1994: 68). Two motifs are stressed: the quasi-miraculous distractions and atmospheric effects and the techniques of writing down something on a sheet so that it disappears but then can be reread. He also points out that the deception lies in the arbitrary association of these techniques with the invocation of a deity. It is interesting that nothing is said about the technique of the *engastrimythoi*, the ancient ventriloquists.

Eusebius of Caesarea (c.263–339 AD) wrote his *Preparation of the Gospel* to prove that even before the ministry of Jesus, pagans had at least a glimpse of the word of God. He rejects what are, to him, the errors of paganism, but he does not dismiss all the claims made for magic in general. He thinks that many 'supernatural' events are not the work of gods or daemons but the result of human fraud. He is also aware of the psychological factors that enter into this process. A mood of expectation can be created in certain ways (Alexander of Abonuteichos was very skilful at this) and there is such a thing as mass suggestion. In 4.1.6–9 Eusebius seriously considers the possibility that all 'occult' phenomena are mystifications produced by sorcerers and, therefore, fraudulent in nature. He continues as follows:

Certain perfumes go to the head and make you sleepy, while others produce visions. Moreover, the places, the locations where something is going on, also contribute a great deal, not to mention the instruments and the apparatus which sorcerers have held ready long beforehand . . . They also benefit from all sorts of outside assistance . . . The inner

sanctum and the recesses inside the temple, which are not accessible to the public, also hide many secrets. The darkness certainly helps them in their fraudulent scheme.

THE BISHOP DABBLES IN MAGIC

In a chapter entitled 'Die geheimen Praktiken eines syrischen Bischofs', E. Peterson (*Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis*, Herder 1959, pp. 222–45) deals with a fascinating testimony which has been overlooked by many historians of witchcraft in antiquity. It is found in the records, written in Syriac, of the so-called Robber Synod of Ephesus, 449. Here, Sophronius, the Bishop of Tella is accused not only of being a heretic, but also of being a magician and an astrologer.

The Bishop had lost a sum of money while traveling. He rounded up some suspects and made them first swear on the Gospel that they were innocent. Then he forced them to undergo the 'cheese-sandwich' test (*tyromanteia*).

In a note (p. 334, n. 2) Peterson documents how often people went to consult magicians when they had lost money or had been the victims of theft. Apuleius (*Apologia* 42) had read in Varro that Nigidius Figulus, the famous occultist, thanks to his gift of clairvoyance, once apprehended a thief, and Porphyry, in his *Life of Plotinus* 11, tells a similar story of the great Neoplatonist who had a special gift of *emblepein*, 'visionary intuition'.

As the cheese-sandwiches were offered, the Bishop attached the following spell to a tripod: 'Lord Iao, Bringer of Light, deliver the thief I am looking for,' observing the suspects, because the one who was unable to eat his sandwich must be the thief. The test was inconclusive (apparently all the suspects ate their sandwiches). The Bishop next tried *phialomanteia*. He poured water and oil into a bowl. We must assume that either Sophronius himself or a medium then conjured up a daemon or a ghost (of a *biaiothanatos*, i.e. a murder victim or a suicide) and asked who the culprit was. This operation was successful.

The Bishop practiced *phialomanteia* on at least one other occasion in his mansion. The son of his personal servant and a Deacon were summoned to the Bishop's bedroom where they saw a table, a 'frankincense offering' under the table and a bowl filled with oil and water on the table. The boy was told to stand naked beside the table, and everything was covered with a linen sheet. (According to the Demotic Magical Papyri, the boy medium normally wears a linen shirt). The Bishop himself plays the role of the professional magician, and the Deacon whispers magical words which the Bishop recites into the boy's ears.

Peterson assumes that the deity or daemon or ghost summoned now

establishes himself on the table and manifests his presence in the bowl. The boy first sees lightning (the prelude of an epiphany) in the magical bowl, then a man, sitting on a golden throne, clothed in a golden robe, a crown on his head. Who is this? A pagan god? Or Iao? Or Jesus Christ? Or an angel?

The following operation seems to be a separate ritual, not a continuation of the preceding one. Oil and water are poured into a hole 'behind the door', and the boy is asked to describe what he sees. Peterson (p. 341) thinks that this happens out of doors, not in the Bishop's bedroom, and that the hole is in the ground. The boy sees the Bishop's son, sitting on a black mule, accompanied by two men, returning from Constantinople. The truth of this telepathic experience is confirmed by the son himself, after his return. Peterson compares this to Sosipatra's vision, as told by Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, pp. 469-70, and other reports.

An egg is now produced and the white of it poured out, whereupon the boy sees in the egg once more the Bishop's son, travelling. This technique is called *ooskopia*, and it seems to be very ancient. After all this the boy medium undergoes a serious emotional crisis which lasts for eight months. He is 'without his mind' during that time and has hallucinations: each time he goes for a walk, he sees seven men in white walking ahead of him. Those who care for him take him to the 'holy places' and anoint him with 'holy oil' and finally manage to cure him, but with great efforts. The disastrous effects of the Bishop's occult experiments on the boy's health were no doubt the main reason why these charges, based on eyewitness reports, were brought against him.

CONCLUSION

What has the journey from Homer to Julian the Apostate taught us about the cultural and social dynamics of religion and magic? We have seen that Circe and Medea, the great sorceresses of Greek prehistory actually had the rank of goddesses. Circe, to be sure, must obey the commands of higher deities, but Medea is a law unto herself and literally gets away with murder in a hostile society. The practitioners mentioned by Hippocrates and Plato are shady, controversial figures on the margin of society, feared rather than respected. This situation probably did not change over the centuries. Though most practitioners may have been despised and ridiculed, like Horace's Canidia, they might have been filled with self-importance, and some of them, as we know from Tacitus, were formidable poisoners with very real scientific knowledge. The 'divine men' of the early Christian era were essentially travelling teachers who also performed

exorcisms and miracles but wished to be seen as true scientists or philosophers or prophets. Apuleius was a Platonist, a lecturer and storyteller whose *curiositas* transcended philosophy and got him into trouble, but in the end he found salvation in the religion of Isis and became as successful in the existing social order as anyone could be. Within the context of the pagan resistance against Christianity theurgy, as practiced by priests and philosophers in holy places, became the highest and noblest form of magic and re-established for a short time a system of values reminiscent of the age of myth when gods freely communicated with human beings.

Two further issues should be addressed: What was the impact of Empires (the kingdom of Alexander, the Roman world)? What was the impact of urbanization? The history of ancient civilizations may be understood as a succession of smaller and larger Empires: Egypt, Persia, Athens, Macedonia, the Diadochi, Rome. The Romans, the last imperialists in this series, recognized its immanent law clearly and predicted their own decline and fall. Through the territorial conquests which led to the formation of the greatest Empire ever, various cultures with their native religions and customs were brought into close contact with each other. Alexander, for example, founded new cities and settled Greeks in them. Thus, Greek culture spread throughout the East, and there was an exchange of ideas and lifestyles. The conquered nations usually adopted the religion of their conquerors, and their own religion was more often than not degraded to the level of magic, while their main gods became minor deities or evil daemons in the new hierarchy. Moreover, the capitals of these Empires were more than political centers. They propagated a new unified culture thanks to a common language (Greek in Alexander's realm, Latin in the Roman Empire). The urbanization favored intellectual centers (the Alexandrian Library, for instance), and the large cities became melting pots for a great variety of movements, cults and philosophical schools.

Magic, being to a certain extent based on imitation and adaptation, profited greatly from these conditions. For a long time, Egypt was considered a 'Holy Land', and its 'Mysteries' were propagated vigorously. Alexandria was seen as a center of pagan religions at the time when the old rituals had been abandoned elsewhere. Wherever Christianity found roots, it could claim a new universality, because its power was not of this world and did not depend on the ancient sanctuaries. Antiochia provides another example. Berossus, a Hellenized *magos*, was attached to the Seleucid court at this Eastern capital (c.280 BC) and composed substantial works on Babylonian 'wisdom' (i.e. magic) and astrology. The concept underlying these systems copies, in a sense, the hierarchy of a Hellenistic court, just as daemonology of a later period copies the hierarchy of the Roman army. Power structures observed in real life were superimposed

on the ranks and orders of planetary gods and daemons, and the same laws of politics, diplomacy and etiquette which promised success in this world were applied to spiritual realms.

Another consequence of urbanization was the disintegration of many features of village life, as observed in Egypt in the third century AD. The temples were allowed to decay, and along with them the knowledge of religious and magical texts written in hieroglyphs lapsed into oblivion.

Finally we should consider the significance of the Christian attitude towards miracles both in a religious and in a magical context. Every culture tends to define magic according to its own roots, norms and specific needs. And every culture assumes that there actually are women and men endowed with unusual powers. The problem is how to define these powers, how to explain them and how to make them work for you.

During the first few centuries of our era, Christians were not expressly forbidden to practice magic. Priests provided amulets and charms for the faithful, and a fifth-century Bishop was very familiar with pagan magic.

It is impossible, sometimes, to separate religious rituals from magical rites, because they could be performed alongside throughout one and the same ceremony. This kind of synthesis or accumulation was not unusual in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, it seems, and one only has to think of the Satanists of the late nineteenth century to realize how little had changed.

But in 391 the Roman temples were closed, and in 529 Justinian shut down the Academy of Athens which was then under the leadership of Damascius, the distinguished Neoplatonist and militant opponent of the new religion. This dealt the last blow to theurgy, but lower forms of magic no doubt lived on everywhere and survived until the Middle Ages and later. As far as miracles are concerned, we must remember that the Church for the first few centuries was the Church militant *par excellence*. It had to fight the outside enemy, paganism, as well as a host of heresies inside. Hence the intensity of the struggle, the reliance not only on sound dogma but on miracles which had to prove that the God of the new religion was more powerful than all the deities of the old one. Miraculous cures became the domain of holy men, especially monks, and even today, the Roman Catholic Church requires two attested miracles for canonization.

PART 3

Imagining Greek and Roman Magic

Richard Gordon

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