

Magic as the Local Application of Authoritative Tradition

David Frankfurter

If we admit a category magic, how should it be linked to a concept of religion? Can we define or use the term magic in some way that conveys an aspect of religion that is not inherently crude or derogatory?¹

1 Ancient Magic and Ancient Religions

Since the Reformation, of course, magic and religion have been juxtaposed: as materialistic idolatry versus transcendent piety (Protestants), as distinct ways of attributing causality in the world (Frazer), as collective versus idiosyncratic contexts for rites (Durkheim, Mauss), as the quotidian and protective versus the moral and celebratory (Malinowski), and so on. In line with these older dichotomies, students of ancient religions have customarily applied “religion” to the priestly and intellectual systems associated with temples, and “magic” to popular derivations and misapplications of those systems, often selfish and personal rather than for the greater good.² But for the Mediterranean world of the Greco-Roman period, in the face of a veritable flood of data for magical practices (broadly imagined) and ritual specialists, the relationship of this purported world of magic to ancient or existing temple cults becomes especially confusing.

So let us begin with the august antiquarian Alphonse Barb and his two general essays on magic in the Greco-Roman world, not because they frame things with critical subtlety but because they put in graphic terms how many classical and New Testament scholars perceived magical texts and artifacts through much of the 20th century. Magic, in Barb’s view, comprised the oriental-ized,

¹ This essay represents a revised version of David Frankfurter, “The Great, the Little, and the Authoritative Tradition in Magic of the Ancient World,” *ARG* 16 (2014): 11–30. With thanks to De Gruyter publishers for permission to reproduce the essay.

² See esp. critique by Esther Eidinow, “Networks and Narratives: A Model for Ancient Greek Religion,” *Kernos* 24 (2011): 21–23.

under-rationalized, overspiced and fermented versions of classical Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Egyptian religion: in his own pungent metaphor, magic was the rotten food to the classic cults' fresh tables, "the syncretistic, rotting refuse-heap of the dead and dying religions of the whole ancient world [, which] grew to mountainous height while wholesome supernatural food became scarce."³ This is clearly an extreme judgment, especially coming from a scholar who devoted his life to tracking down the roots of strange symbols and phrases, but it well represents the discomfort that many scholars have felt with the Greek ritual manuals and binding tablets that seem to garble and parody the beautiful paeans to gods in classical literature.

Barb's discomfort stems partly, of course, from an academic romanticism about Greece, Rome, Israel, Egypt, and other ancient kingdoms, of which magic seems like a wholesale perversion. But it also points to a cultural, religious, and even definitional problem: what is the relationship between the so-called "great cults" of the Mediterranean world and "magic"—an as-yet-unarticulated sphere of practice and concern? Especially given the language of gods, myths, sacrifice and altars, even ritual precision in magical texts, is it really so unimaginable to regard "magic" as a kind of parasitical and voracious growth on "religion" properly conceived, mixing and matching wantonly in order to feign authority? Even setting aside the dichotomies of Frazer, Durkheim, Malinowski, and the Protestant Reformers, we must reckon with *some* kind of cultural relationship between—in gross terms—official forms of religion and the forms represented in the magical texts and ritual materials.

This relationship has been addressed in more recent times without recourse to metaphors of rotten food, fungus, cancer, or perverted *demi-mondes*.⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith proposed that, whoever the ritual experts might have been, magic involved a miniaturization of the cosmic practices and equipment of temples.⁵ Others have argued for a more specific demographic overlap between

3 A.A. Barb, "The Survival of the Magic Arts," in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century: Essays*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 101–4 (quotation at 104); Compare idem, "Mystery, Myth, and Magic," in *The Legacy of Egypt*, ed. J.R. Harris (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 155, 159–60 (magic as "a cancerous growth in the body of Egyptian religion").

4 Fungus: Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2; *demi-mondes*: Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 81, 105, *passim*.

5 Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Mirecki, RGRW 129 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 13–27. Cf. Sarah Iles Johnston, "Sacrifice in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Magic and Ritual Power in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer, RGRW 141 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), 344–58; Joachim F. Quack,

the authorities of temples—or churches, or rabbinic Judaism—and the ritual specialists writing magical texts. These scribal religious experts adapted their official traditions for private purposes, either as a covert side-business, *or* as a way of maintaining authoritative tradition after religious institutions were in decline, *or* as a perfectly legitimate and traditional extension of official ritual practices.⁶

But framing the issue in the broader terms of “authoritative tradition”—rather than specific historical links to specific historical cults—allows us to focus on a particular thematic feature running across the textual and archaeological data for magic: not so much the influence of but rather the *appeal* to some religious authority. This is something we see in the use of gods’ names, mythic *historiolae*, citations or imitations of scripture, or even genres like liturgy or epistle. All of these media in some way implied authority in ritual context. Taking the term “authority” as a quality of social role or charisma that is constructed from tradition (often institutional), we should look at the formation of authoritative tradition in magic as a creative, *ad hoc* performance—in any medium—that oscillates expertly between two poles: on the one hand, the immediate, the idiosyncratic, even the subversive context; and, on the other, a sense for what might constitute authoritative tradition in that place and time, as administered by a particular agent. That is, authoritative tradition is both an *image* cultivated in the local milieu and an institution’s or temple’s active effort to influence the local milieu.

The larger goal of this chapter is to explore the value and parameters of the category magic when this category is used to describe, not private or idiosyncratic ritual or material transmissions of power, but rather *the invocation and deployment of an authoritative tradition in a local performative context through the creative agency of a ritual expert and involving various ritual media*. What is gained if we maintain this sense of “magic”—what dimensions of religion can be highlighted, what dynamics of ritual understood?

“Miniaturisierung als Schlüssel zum Verständnis römerzeitlicher ägyptischer Rituale?,” in *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire*, ed. Olivier Hekster, Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner, and Christian Witschel, *Impact of Empire* 9 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009), 349–66.

6 See David Frankfurter, “Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Towards a New Taxonomy of ‘Magicians,’” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), 167–70; David Frankfurter, “The Consequences of Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt: Religious Worlds and Actors,” *ARG* 2, no. 2 (2000): 162–94; Jacco Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual, 100–300 CE*, *RGRW* 153 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2005); Robert K. Ritner, “Egyptian Magical Practice Under the Roman Empire: The Demotic Spells and Their Religious Context,” *ANRW* 11.18.5 (1995): 3333–79.

The goal of this chapter, then is not to distinguish magic *a priori* from other aspects of religion but to develop parameters for the use of the term magic that address a particular aspect of ritual expertise in the local domain, when broad religious systems are interpreted and performed as authoritative tradition for local circumstances.

2 The Redfield Model: Great Tradition ↔ Little Tradition

A particularly useful way to frame authoritative tradition and, indeed, magic itself as a kind of local orientation of authoritative tradition, is in terms of Robert Redfield's classic heuristic dichotomy of the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition.⁷ But many have misrepresented or overly reified these categories, so it is worth explaining them.

What Redfield calls the Great Tradition refers to the systematized form of a religion, developed and maintained by an institution of—usually literate—religious specialists: a kind of priesthood. The Great Tradition involves an institution and hierarchy that knows the religion, writes it out, sustains its central cults, and *from which* certain texts, rituals, charms, images, and even domestic practices will draw their authority. The Little—or what is better rephrased as the *local*—Tradition involves the “village sphere” of religion, revolving around *local* understandings of landscape, society, agriculture, legends of identity, and the various immediate exigencies of life, from fertility to rivalry.

It is important to recognize that, in actual practice, these two traditions are in perpetual dialectic, such that one can really only pick up differences by comparison: say, the local Jewish world of the demon-protection bowls from Iraq by comparison with the systematizing world projected in the Babylonian Talmud. And while all premodern (and most modern) cultures have some sort of local tradition of religious organization and meaning, it can sometimes be hard to perceive on the basis of historical documents without the benefit of some model, like Redfield's, to direct us to the subtle dimensions of local religion. In antiquity we notice such local devotion in the recent excavations of local springs, like that of Anna Perenna in Rome and the cave of the nymphs in Corinth, and in hagiographical depictions of religious practices peculiar to a

7 See Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1956), applied to forms of Egyptian religion in the Roman period in Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 97–98.

village or group of homes: the *Life of St. Martin*, for example, which describes a local village martyr shrine in fourth-century Gaul that Martin has destroyed.⁸ Much of the data for religious practice to which we are accustomed reflects local expressions of some Great Tradition or attempts to render some local cult in terms of some great tradition.

As Redfield also points out, there may be several “Great Traditions” in play, as in post-conquest Latin America or modern India between Sanskritic Hinduism and Islam.⁹ In fact, for our purposes in the ancient world, it would do Redfield’s model no violence to imagine a potential *multiplicity* of such authoritative traditions, from a current, hegemonic Great Tradition (e.g., Roman priestly institutions in second-century Gaul) to alternate or exotic Great Traditions (e.g., the Mithras or Christ cult in second-century Gaul).¹⁰ All these would signify authority and system in the world of the Local Tradition, but differently in each local world.

This dichotomy resembles (and may have partly inspired) Jonathan Z. Smith’s categories of the (domestic) religion of “Here” and the (cult) religion of “There,” although Redfield emphasized the *textuality* of the Great Tradition and, recognizing the interpenetration of small communities, a broader cultural territory for the Local Tradition. Smith’s categories allowed the framing of a hybrid and dynamic intermediary phenomenon, the religion of “Everywhere” that partakes symbolically of both poles.¹¹ In the same way, the interests of the Redfield school—Srinivas and Marriott in India, Scott in Southeast Asia, Sallnow in Peru, Christian in Spain, Redfield himself in Mexico, and many others—have lain not in the *reification* of the Great/Local dichotomy but in the dialectic: how (for example) the invariably literate specialists of the Great Tradition draw upon local gods of the Local Tradition and systematize them in literature or cult, and how the ritual specialists of the Local Tradition—often seers or shamans—reinterpret the authoritative gods of the Great Tradition

8 See, e.g., David Jordan, “Inscribed Lamps from a Cult at Corinth in Late Antiquity,” *HTR* 87, no. 2 (1994): 223–29; Marina Piranomonte, “Religion and Magic at Rome: The Fountain of Anna Perenna,” in *Magical Practice in the Latin West*, ed. Richard L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón, RGRW 168 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010), 191–213; Jürgen Blänsdorf, “The Texts from the Fons Annae Perennae,” in *Magical Practice in the Latin West*, 215–44. Legend of St. Martin: Sulpicius Severus, *Life of Martin*. 11.

9 Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*.

10 On the interaction of such traditions (without direct use of the Redfield model), see Ton Derks, *Gods, Temples, and Religious Practices: The Transformation of Religious Ideas and Values in Roman Gaul*, Amsterdam Archaeological Studies 2 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998).

11 Jonathan Z. Smith, “Here, There, and Anywhere,” in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 323–39.

for relevance in the local domain.¹² In the dialectic we see the localized forms of Isis or Mary and the “scripturalized” forms of Sobek or Santo Niño de Atocha or San la Muerte or Saint Guinefort, the thirteenth-century French healing dog.¹³ In this dialectic we can see both the agency of the Local Tradition and its charismatic specialists *and* the perceived authority of the Great Tradition and its literate specialists and media. And, as Redfield demonstrated in his classic study of the Yucatan, it is cities where we have the most complex, even competitive representations of both Great and Local traditions. But overall, it is the “Great-ness,” as it were, of a religious tradition that gives it authority and that allows a ritual object, word, name, or verse to imply a larger authoritative *system* behind it.

So in this perspective, magic would amount to *the ritual or material context in which a Great Tradition (that may or may not be associated with living cults or temples) is interpreted by a ritual expert, located in time and space, and linked with particular social circumstances*: e.g., a rivalry, an illness, a fear—that is, mediated into the immediate circumstances of the Local Tradition.

For those who work on Christian ritual practices this model—ritual or talismanic authority based in a Great Tradition—is immediately recognizable in the perennial migration of institutionally sanctioned substances and equipment, like oil, holy water, Eucharists, relics, and statuary, from ecclesiastical to domestic zones. Sometimes this movement is facilitated by official ritual specialists, like priests, monks, and minor clerics.¹⁴ Often, as we know from medieval legends around Eucharistic magic, their appropriation is the work of maverick local ritual specialists.¹⁵ But the function of the substances and

12 Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of the Yucatan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); McKim Marriott, “Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization,” in *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*, ed. McKim Marriott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 171–222; James C. Scott, “Protest and Profanation: Agrarian Revolt and the Little Tradition,” *Theory and Society* 4 (1977): 1–38, 211–46; M.N. Srinivas, *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); Michael J. Sallnow, *Pilgrims of the Andes: Regional Cults in Cusco* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1987); William A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

13 Santo Niño and San la Muerte: see the exemplary study by Frank Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion: Folk Saints of Spanish America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children Since the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

14 See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 25–50, 177–279; Edina Bozóky, “Les moyens de la protection privée,” *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* 8 (2001): 175–92.

15 Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 187–90, 223–32.

equipment is the same: to establish and direct the authoritative power associated with a Great Tradition for quotidian, domestic, erotic, even subversive purposes. It is important to recognize that magic is not the *misuse* or *misunderstanding* of these materials but simply their use *outside of* their institutional setting as potent symbols of authoritative tradition.

While to Barb the literature of Greco-Roman and late antique magic seemed to invent, distort, or otherwise depart entirely from the Great Traditions of the Mediterranean world (that is, cultivated and developed among temples), in fact the data shows ritual specialists' regular verbal or material gestures to a Great Tradition—an official or well-known god and his cult. By way of example, the Greek ritual manuals from Roman Egypt include three parallel texts for ritual procedures to gain a dream-vision of the folk-god Bes.¹⁶ Now, Bes was as much a god of the Local Tradition as you could get in Egypt, deeply rooted in folk culture yet deftly worked into official temple texts and iconography as well.¹⁷ How interesting, then, that these PGM spells involve esoteric references to Bes's attendance by Osiris's body, suggesting some kind of scribal systematization—that is, with a Great Tradition—in the sense of Bes's (re)integration with priestly Osiris traditions through the agency of priests. And, in fact, these ritual texts were circulating at the same time as a major oracle cult of Bes at Abydos that developed from an older oracle cult of Osiris, the work of a literate priesthood and its mythological systematization, all evidence of an effort to form an institution, a Great Tradition of sorts. Indeed, that very systematization led to the shrine's imperial closure in the fourth century CE.¹⁸ Thus what might appear entirely "local" or "invented" tradition in popular ritual can often involve the mediation of a respected Great Tradition like a major oracle cult.

Clearly the representation of authority in magical texts can be deceptive. Is the text invoking a local or a great god? Does the language reflect what would

16 PGM VII.222–49; VIII.64–110; CII.1–17.

17 See in general Michel Malaise, "Bes et les croyances solaires," in *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 680–729; Jan Assmann, "Magic and Theology in Ancient Egypt," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg, *Studies in the History of Religion* 75 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 1–18.

18 Imperial closure: Ammianus Marcellinus 19.12. In general on aspects of the Bes oracle see David Frankfurter, "Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category 'Magician,'" in *Envisioning Magic*, 122–25; Françoise Dunand, "La consultation oraculaire en Égypte tardive: L'Oracle de Bès à Abydos," in *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité: Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 15–17 juin 1995*, ed. Jean-Georges Heintz (Paris: De Boccard, 1997), 65–84; David Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck, RGRW 155 (Leiden; Boston: E.J. Brill, 2005), 238–43.

have been read or heard in temple context or rather the speech of a local seer? How do we discriminate and describe the representations of authority that lie in-between? This essay tries to make sense of the ancient materials by examining, first, the ways in which iconographic and written and oral genres communicate the authority of the Great Tradition. Then I will turn to two cases in which a Great Tradition is presumed, even projected, despite the non-existence of any scribal or cultic institution.

3 The Great Tradition in Iconographic Media

Iconography itself is one of the principal contexts for the mediation of a Great Tradition in the local domain and for the promotion of the Local Tradition in media or frameworks sanctioned by the Great Tradition. A local god is painted with the head-dress or accoutrements of a principal temple god; the Virgin Mary is celebrated in her local appearance with smoke-darkened face, holding a familiar local bird. But approximations or innovations of official iconographic schemes will often carry a magical efficacy into their new contexts, a concentration or miniaturization of the authority of the Great Tradition in the intimate world of the local tradition.

There are many ways to construct a sense of authority or efficacy in visual media such that an object carries this kind of magical potency. Through attributes like crowns or animals, bodily features, distinctive gestures and clothing, and simply workshops' spatial proximity to a central shrine a craftsman or scribe can indicate that a figure on an amulet, stela, or other medium represents a deity recognized as authoritative and potent. For example, the widely distributed oil ampullae from the (Christian) cult of St. Menas, near Alexandria, Egypt (v–VIII CE), displayed a crude image of St. Menas himself standing in *orans* position between two camels, molded into either or both sides of the vessel. That image seems to have corresponded to a “master” icon, quite likely in mosaic, that visitors could behold at the basilica. Far from that basilica, the efficacy of that oil and the ampulla itself derived from the assemblage's iconographic capacity to point to an authoritative master or source.¹⁹

In another example, from earlier antiquity, one of the most distinctive magical iconographies in the Greco-Roman world was the Horus *cippus*: a stone or

19 See discussions of artifacts and iconography in Christian Cannuyer, “Saint Mina aux châteaux: Autour des origines d'un iconotype copte,” *Le monde copte* 27/28 (1997): 139–54; Zsolt Kiss, *Les ampoules de saint Ménas découvertes à Kôm El-Dikka (1961–1981)*, Alexandrie 5 (Warsaw: PWN, 1989).

wood stela that depicted the god Harpocrates (Horus in child form) in frontal position, standing on crocodiles and holding in his hands a selection of “Sethian” beasts (deemed chaotic and unlucky in Egyptian priestly tradition), like snakes, scorpions, and antelopes.²⁰ In the earliest examples (first millennium BCE), the rest of the stela—usually in stone—would be covered with hieroglyphic spells adjuring the power of poison; and the stela might sit on a stone base above a small pool, to catch water that had been poured over the object and thus impregnated with the incantations themselves.²¹ Presumably these stelae stood in temple precincts and thus indicated both spatially and materially the authority of Harpocrates as a royal god administered through the temple institution. In later examples, from the early Roman period (and often in wood), the hieroglyphic writing had become entirely gratuitous, while the image of Harpocrates (with a mask of Bes above him) became the pre-eminent, apotropaic representation on the stelae.²²

Through the Hellenistic period we see an increasing inclination on the part of workshops to craft small, probably domestic versions of the Horus *cippus*. And gemstone artisans appropriated this same authoritative iconography for more portable amulets, improvising with the depiction of the child Horus (or even another, hybrid god) or the placement of the animals he dominated for

20 Over the history of the cippi and those materials (like gems) inspired by their iconography it remains ambiguous whether Harpocrates (or whichever god is central) repels the dangerous fauna or gains apotropaic power by assimilating their characteristics. The latter interpretation is the insight of Jan Quaegebeur, “Divinités égyptiennes sur des animaux dangereux,” in *L’animal, l’homme, le dieu dans le proche-orient ancien: Actes du colloque de Cartigny 1981*, ed. Philippe Borgeaud, Yves Christe, and Ivanka Urió (Louvain: Peeters, 1985), 131–43.

21 See Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 46–48, drawing on important studies by Pierre Lacau, “Les Statues ‘guérisseuses’ dans l’ancienne Égypte,” *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Commission de la Fondation Piot, Monuments et mémoires* 25 (1921): 189–209; Keith C. Seele, “Horus on the Crocodiles,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6 (1947): 43–52; Adolf Klasens, *Magical Statue Base (Socle Behague) in the Museum of Antiquities at Leiden* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1952); Robert K. Ritner, “Horus on the Crocodiles: A Juncture of Religion and Magic in Late Dynastic Egypt,” in *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, ed. James P. Allen (New Haven, CT: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1989), 103–16; Heike Sternberg-El Hotabi, *Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Horusstelen: ein Beitrag zur Religionsgeschichte Ägyptens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 62 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999); Annie Gasse, *Les stèles d’Horus sur les crocodiles* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2004). See also above, Frankfurter, Chapter 23.

22 Heike Sternberg-El Hotabi, “Der Untergang der Hieroglyphenschrift: Schriftverfall und Schrifttod im Ägypten der griechisch-römischen Zeit,” *Chronique d’Égypte* 69 (1994): 218–45.

apotropaic effect.²³ With this iconography the gemstones become surrogates of a well-known magical image. Thus, over the Greco-Roman period, representations of the *cippus* might be manufactured in a variety of workshops (in and beyond Egypt), for a variety of domestic and local uses, and with a range of skills and adherence to original details. But in their traditional iconography—frontal depiction of the child Horus amidst dangerous fauna—the *cippi* and the gems always beckoned towards priestly traditions about Harpocrates and his powers. It is in that beckoning towards a Great Tradition (or some sort of authoritative tradition) of Egyptian temple mythology that the apotropaic Horus *cippus* iconography offered magical power rather than in the arrangement of symbols *per se*.

Whereas both the Horus *cippus* and the St. Menas ampules invoked the authority of specific shrines and/or institutional iconographies, miniature versions of the central bull-slaying image in the Mithraic ritual chambers invoked an iconography standardized across the Roman Empire that seems in itself to have sustained Mithraism as a Great Tradition. One of the remarkable features of Mithraism is its utter lack of textual remains, making scholars dependent on artifacts, inscriptions, and iconography to make sense of the religious movement. The iconography of Mithras slaying the bull, which occupied a central position in every known Mithraeum, has clear astrological significance, suggesting that ceremonies before it must have celebrated some connection with the cosmos.²⁴ But what purpose would the miniatures have had? Private devotions apart from the Mithraeum? Votive offerings? Many miniature depictions deviate from the standard iconography in important ways and seem to have functioned as private devotional objects, in many cases in an amuletic or protective capacity.²⁵ But then what kind of efficacy would this iconography have carried in miniature form, outside of the ritual chambers? Christopher Faraone has argued that the bull-slaying iconography itself seems to have derived from an apotropaic visual assemblage well-known (but widely improvised) in the

23 See, e.g., Simone Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum*, ed. Peter and Hilde Zazoff, 2 vols. (London: British Museum Press, 2001); Attilio Mastrocinque, *Les intailles magiques du département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2014). See also above, Dasen and Nagy, Chapter 17, section 3.1.

24 Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The God and His Mysteries*, trans. Richard Gordon (New York: Routledge, 2000), 78–90; Roger Beck, “Reading Iconography as Narrative,” in *Religion: Narrating Religion*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston, Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks: Religion (Farmington Hills, MI: Cengage/Macmillan Reference USA, 2017), 177–90.

25 See esp. Richard Gordon, “Small and Miniature Reproductions of the Mithraic Icon: Reliefs, Pottery, Ornaments and Gems,” in *Roman Mithraism: The Evidence of the Small Finds*, ed. Marleen Martens and Guy De Boe (Brussels: Museum het Toreke, 2004), 259–83.

ancient world: the so-called “suffering-eye” image.²⁶ Faraone’s proposal would imply that the miniature images of the Mithraic tauroctony for apotropaic purposes were both reflecting the essential iconography of the Mithraic Great Tradition (such as we could imagine this constituted iconographically) and revitalizing the original function of the bull-slaying image. In any case, like the Menas ampules and the amuletic or crude images of Horus on the crocodiles, the miniature Mithras images draw upon “official” iconography, from a Great Tradition, though constituted differently in each case—to offer apotropaic protection in their local, domestic, or private environments.

4 The Great Tradition in the Interface Between the Written and the Oral

Perhaps no gesture, no medium, in the ancient Mediterranean world more immediately pointed toward authoritative tradition than writing itself— or the pretense that a charm derived from writing. The charisma of the written word in the semi-literate culture is one of the singular theoretical observations of the anthropologist Jack Goody. Goody’s paradigmatic examples are Egyptian hieroglyphs, which naturally oscillated in function between talismanic efficacy and alphabetic functionality, as well as the amuletic use of Qur’an in northern Africa, worn and even steeped in water for ritual consumption.²⁷ (The magic of writing *per se* is discussed in Chapter 23, above.)

But writing, or sacred writing, also involved an intrinsic gesture to a religious tradition identified with that writing.²⁸ The efficacy of the Qur’anic suras written on tablets and washed off for drinking derived not only from the nature of the written word but also from the mediation that the specific lines of Arabic provided *between* the Great Tradition and the Local Tradition—as concentrations of the cosmic authority of the true religion, Islam, and the materialized word of the God it reveals. Hebrew provided a similar charismatic symbolism:

26 Christopher Faraone, “The Amuletic Design of the Mithraic Bull-Wounding Scene,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 103 (2013): 96–116; Katherine M.D. Dunbabin and M.W. Dickie, “*Invidia Rumpantur Pectora*: The Iconography of *Phthonos/Invidia* in Graeco-Roman Art,” *JAC* 26 (1983): 7–37.

27 See Jack Goody, “Restricted Literacy in Northern Ghana,” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 198–264; Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, “Drinking the Koran: The Meaning of Koranic Verses in Berti Erasure,” *Africa* 55 (1985): 414–31.

28 Marcello Carastro, “Les liens de l’écriture: *Katadesmoi* et instances de l’enchaînement,” in *Architecturer l’invisible: Autels, ligatures, écritures*, Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses 138 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 263–91.

not just holy writing in general but writing that drew its power from a Great Tradition—an image of Judaism: phrases from scripture or recalling biblical materials, angelic or other divine names. This is not to imply that a Judaism existed in the Greco-Roman period in any monolithic or governing sense, only that the *idea* or *notion* of a systematic codification of Jewish tradition existed, whether based in priesthoods, Torah, or heaven, such that Jews, non-Jews, and everyone else would imagine some substance to a Great Tradition of the Jews. And Hebrew letters, names, and scripture verses—as in the *tefillin*—served as symbols of that tradition, their magical efficacy due to the letters' and sounds' mediation of a Great Tradition that suggested priests and books and cult.²⁹ Jewish “magic,” as it were, involved the mediation of scriptural authority into everyday life through the medium of writing.³⁰

The Jesus movement, as an extension of Judaism, also imbued text with a charisma that gestured towards the distinctive powers of an authoritative tradition that in turn sanctioned Christian power and authority. The early Christian evidence shows a concerted effort (by the third century) to produce a Christian “scripture magic” through (a) the expansion of *nomina sacra*, a scribal technique for amplifying the symbolism of divine names;³¹ (b) the amuletic use of Christian texts, like gospel verses and *incipits*, and even (as Chrysostom describes) miniature gospel books;³² and (c), by the fifth century,

29 On *tefillin*, see Yehudah B. Cohn, *Tangled Up In Text: Tefillin and the Ancient World*, Brown Judaic Studies 351 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2008). On the concept of a Jewish authoritative tradition—albeit mutable and regional—current in the Roman and late antique world, independent of Jewish ritualists, and regularly drawn into magical materials: see, e.g., Giancarlo Lacerenza, “Jewish Magicians and Christian Clients in Late Antiquity: The Testimony of Amulets and Inscriptions,” in *What Athens has to do with Jerusalem: Essays on Classical, Jewish, and Early Christian Art and Archaeology in Honor of Gideon Foerster*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 393–419; Lynn R. LiDonnici, “According to the Jews’: Identified (and Identifying) ‘Jewish’ Elements in the Greek Magical Papyri,” in *Heavenly Tablets: Interpretation, Identity and Tradition in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Lynn R. LiDonnici and Andrea Lieber (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007), 87–108.

30 On the notion of a Jewish authoritative or Great Tradition as deployed in magic, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 291–350.

31 See in general Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 26–48; Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 95–134.

32 E.A. Judge, “The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri,” in *Perspectives on Language and Text*, ed. E.W. Conrad and E.G. Newing (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 339–49; Michael J. Kruger, “P. Oxy. 840: Amulet or Miniature Codex?,” *JTS* 53, no. 1 (2002): 81–94; Theodore de Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchments, Ostraca, and Tablets Written with Biblical Texts in Greek and Used as Amulets: A Preliminary List,” in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas

the imitation of *liturgy* to convey performative efficacy.³³ In all these cases the magic of the written medium and of its associated gestures and ritual expertise could be seen as an appeal to a greater—scriptural—authority—to something larger and more cosmic than the immediate world of the ritual expert. Here were carefully selected verses from the powerful texts of the Christians, the distinctive hand gestures and imprecations of the Christians, and a specialist who claimed expertise in the lore and secrets of the Christians. The use of Christian writing—or writing meant to symbolize Christianity—itself functioned as an appeal to a kind of Great Tradition.³⁴

Scripture magic thus serves as a charismatic medium of a Great Tradition, both in the the “performance” of the scribal ritual expert who delivers efficacious passages of scripture and in the client’s encounter and use. The efficacy of scripture, and even of writing designed to approximate or recall scripture, depends on the power and authority of some broader religious context that dictates scripture as its medium: a Great Tradition of Christianity. But as with Judaism, the conjuring of this Great Tradition through such local performative media should not imply an historically monolithic or coherent religious system, only the appearance and authority of such a tradition imagined through the medium of the amulet. A Great Tradition is always a mythic idea, even if sustained institutionally.

But how far, we may ask, can local improvisation *deviate* from official formulae, or from the central legends and scriptures of a Great Tradition, yet still invoke and draw authority from a Great Tradition? For this question it is helpful to examine the ritual speech genre called the *historiola*, in which a healing, protective, or curse act is completed by verbal reference to a paradigmatic narrative of crisis and resolution. Many *historiolae* seem to play fast and loose with authoritative tradition, with characters and stories entirely unrelated to

(Leiden; Boston: E.J. Brill, 2010), 145–89; Joseph E. Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 84 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Miniature gospels as amulets: Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 19.14.

33 On the imitation of liturgy in practical and healing ritual see esp. Theodore de Bruyn, “The Use of the Sanctus in Christian Greek Papyrus Amulets,” *Studia Patristica* 40 (2006): 15–19, and more generally de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), chap. 6; and David Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), chap. 6.

34 See Walter M. Shandruk, “Christian Use of Magic in Late Antique Egypt,” *J ECS* 20, no. 1 (2012): 31–57; Joseph E. Sanzo, “The Innovative Use of Biblical Traditions for Ritual Power: The Crucifixion of Jesus on a Coptic Exorcistic Spell (Brit. Lib. Or. 6796[4], 6796) as a Test Case,” *ARG* 16 (2014): 67–98. See also above, Van der Vliet, Chapter 14.

scripture or official legends. The following examples are from early Christian Egypt, but *historiolae* have been widely discussed for medieval and modern Europe as well as ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece.³⁵ The heroes of *historiolae* are implicitly those recognized locally as paradigmatic of human experience—e.g., they can suffer—but who are capable through their supernatural powers or ability to invoke supernatural aid—e.g., to gain resolution from suffering.

Modern scholars have analyzed this kind of magical speech in terms of typology, performative efficacy, ritual context, and evolution over time and space. But it is important to consider the nature of their heroes as derivations from and symbols of a Great Tradition—even when they may not be entirely recognizable, as with Isis and Horus in the oft-discussed Philinna papyrus: “[The most majestic goddess’ child] was set / Aflame as an initiate—and on / The highest mountain peak was set aflame—/ And fire did greedily gulp] seven springs / Of wolves, seven of bears, seven of lions, / But seven dark-eyed maidens with dark urns / Drew water and becalmed the restless fire.”³⁶ Neither the “child” nor the “maidens” are named here; and yet they function as references, crystallizations of “official” traditions and their mythic heroes that would have been recognizable as Egyptian—if only in a general sense. That is to say, the efficacy of the verses stems from their reflection of Egyptian authoritative tradition about Isis and Horus.

Berlin 8313a is another typical *historiola* (quoted earlier, Chapter 22):

[O holy] of holies, unshakable, indestructible rock! Child of the maiden, firstborn [of your father] and mother! Jesus our Lord came walking

35 On *historiolae* in Egyptian magic, see Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, “The Argument in Ancient Egyptian Magical Formulae,” *Acta Orientalia* 45 (1984): 5–19; Thomas Schneider, “Die Waffe der Analogie. Altägyptische Magie als System,” in *Das Analogiedenken: Vorstöße in ein neues Gebiet der Rationalitätsforschung*, ed. Karen Gloy and Manuel Bachmann (Freiburg: Alber, 2000), 37–85; David Frankfurter, “Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical Historiola in Ritual Spells,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 457–76; Edina Bozók, *Charmes et prières apotropaiques*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 86 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); Lea Olsan, “Charms in Medieval Memory,” in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. Jonathan Roper (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 59–88; Jonathan Roper, “Typologising the English Charm,” in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, 128–44. See also above, Frankfurter, Chapter 22.

36 PGM XX.4–10, tr. GMPT, 258–59. On the mythological references in this text see Christopher Faraone, “The Mystodokos and the Dark-Eyed Maidens: Multicultural Influences on a Late-Hellenistic Incantation,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 297–333; Robert K. Ritner, “The Wives of Horus and the Philinna Papyrus (PGM XX),” in *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years*, ed. Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors, and Harco Willems, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 84 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 1027–41.

[upon] the Mount of Olives in the [midst] of his twelve apostles and found a doe.... in pain [...] in labor pains. It spoke [to him in these words]: 'Greetings, child of the maiden! Greetings, [firstborn of your] Father and Mother! You must come and help me in this time of need.' He rolled his eyes and said, "You are not able to tolerate my glory, nor to tolerate that of my twelve apostles. But though I flee, Michael the archangel will come to you with his [wand] in his hand and receive an offering of wine. [And he will] invoke my name down upon [it] with the name of the apostles, for 'whatever is crooked, let it be straight.' [Let the baby?] come to the light!" The will of [my heart happens] quickly. It is I who speak, the Lord Jesus....³⁷

This text, describing an encounter between Jesus and a doe undergoing labor pains, was composed with little relationship to any Christian text and is clearly illustrative of the creativity and agency of ritual experts in the local domain. It is they who compose the *historiola* as much from the symptom or circumstance as from ecclesiastical lore.³⁸ And yet the story as edited here depends for its content and efficacy on the mythic heroes of the Christian institution. The "magic" lies not only in the performative nature of the *historiola* in recounting a legend of crisis resolved, but also in the *appropriation* of authoritative characters for that purpose. The model for the performative efficacy of these materials, as we see in the latter part of the spell, is in fact the liturgy, the performative hallmark of the Great Tradition.³⁹ Thus, even in the case of the *historiola*'s often innovative deviations from official texts and formulae, a Great Tradition and its authority will still be invoked for the efficacy of the charm. Here too the category magic covers the appropriation and reframing of authoritative elements of the Great Tradition within the context of the Local Tradition—its oral forms, its specialists, its landscape, social world, and crises.

5 Social Agency in the Representation and Mediation of a Great Tradition

In the discussion of *historiolae* and the sanctioning of magical substances in the Local Tradition, one must inevitably confront the creative or entrepreneurial

37 ACM no. 49recto = Berlin 8313, trans. ACM, 96.

38 See esp. Olsan, "Charms in Medieval Memory."

39 See Bozóký, *Charmes et prières apotropaiques*, 38–39, 98–103; W.F. Ryan, "Eclecticism in the Russian Charm Tradition," in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, 122; and Van der Vliet, above, Chapter 14.

agency of the local ritual specialist, perhaps even a priest or attendant, responsible for the reassignment of such materials—Eucharistic hosts, holy oil and water, Latin incantations, etc.—to quotidian ritual purposes.⁴⁰ The magic of these substances, as I have been framing it, derives from their continuing gesture towards (in this case) ecclesiastical authority—the Great Tradition—as the larger context in which all these substances carry meaning and potency. But it is important to consider agency (and, indeed, entrepreneurship) in the very construction and representation of any Great Tradition. In late antique Egypt or Syria, for example, the only “Christianity” many villages knew was that articulated and embodied in the local holy man. Consequently, the holy man and the gestural or material “blessings” he or his acolytes issued conveyed the authority of a Great Tradition, for sure, but only in immediate, local terms. Invariably phrased in terms of material powers, the magic was as much a function of his charisma as that of the institution or religion that appeared to sanction him. So if he dispensed amulets of fox-claws or bird-feathers, perhaps accompanied by an oral blessing, that too became a medium of the Christian Great Tradition.⁴¹

Recognizing indigenous or entrepreneurial agency in the representation of a Great Tradition is vital but methodologically complex. On the one hand the historian may effectively delegitimize the authenticity of religious tradition in the local domain or ignore the value of authoritative tradition itself by deeming it the utter invention of local ritual experts. On the other hand, in giving too little credit to these local experts, the historian may be presuming a Great Tradition too stable or monolithic ever to have existed and local agency reduced to an essentially passive or ministerial role. Yet with Judaism (and Christian forms before the fourth century) and with migrating forms of Egyptian, Phrygian, Syrian, Babylonian, Mazdaian, and other religious traditions in the Roman world, their historical or geographical roots in priesthoods and temple institutions does not mean that their migrating forms reflected a Great Tradition in the sense of a real or meaningful entity. As Heidi Wendt has argued, the image of some ethnically-coded religious heritage in the Greco-Roman world was often the performative construction of a “freelance expert”

40 See Frankfurter, “Dynamics of Ritual Expertise,” esp. 167–70.

41 Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, chap. 3, extending the observations of Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101. Cf. Stanley J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

who idiosyncratically assembled teachings, ritual styles, accoutrements, and a hoary foreignness in dialectic with popular notions and desires.⁴²

It may be easiest to see this idiosyncratic agency in the invention of an Egyptian authoritative tradition. Evidence from the Greek and demotic Egyptian Magical Papyri, as well as a range of ancient novels, points to a particular situation for temple priests in the early Roman period. It seems that some Egyptian priests, disenfranchised through Roman reorganization of the temple economy in the early third century CE, and facing a market of Greeks and Romans already captivated by the “guru” possibilities of oriental priests, creatively appropriated the stereotypes cast upon them. They styled themselves and the religious, textual, and ritual traditions they knew instead in Hellenistic terms—in the language of Greek cosmology, wisdom, and erotic conquest.⁴³ It has also been suggested that this refashioning of Egyptian priestly tradition could have developed internally, without the market advantages of “stereotype appropriation”; but the historical consequences are the same: the “Egyptian tradition” that one might encounter in the person of a self-professed Egyptian priest at a shrine in Corinth probably bore little resemblance to Egyptian authoritative tradition as one might find it among the principal temples and villages of Egypt.⁴⁴

But authenticity is not the point here; rather, we are trying to identify a magic in the local performance of a Great or authoritative tradition. It does not matter whether the god Anubis is a binder of souls in local Egyptian tradition if clients in Antioch or Alexandria credit his invocation, by someone convincingly acting as an Egyptian priest, with ritual efficacy. Outside of indigenous context, that is, traditional forms of religious authority become exotic and, thus, magical, no matter how loosely they are transmogrified for new audiences.

But this observation—that individual ritual specialists (or “freelance experts”) might transmogrify or invent religious traditions wholesale—itself carries important implications. On the one hand, as Wendt herself points out, it can become almost impossible to designate a particular historical individual as a “representative” of a particular religious tradition since all such figures were fundamentally idiosyncratic and entrepreneurial. On the other

42 Heidi Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

43 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 214–37; Frankfurter, “The Consequences of Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt: Religious Worlds and Actors.”

44 Richard Gordon, “Shaping the Text: Innovation and Authority in Graeco-Egyptian Malign Magic,” in *Kykeon: Studies in Honour of H. S. Versnel*, ed. H.F.J. Horstmanshoff et al., RGRW 142 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), 69–112.

hand, more pertinent to this essay, individual agents could (and did) represent themselves as specialists in Great or authoritative traditions that never existed historically in the form of local or “lived” religions. Thus we shift to two of the principal complications to the Redfield model as applied to the ancient world.

6 Complications: The Great Tradition Without Institutional Grounding

It is easy to see the dialectic between Local and Great Traditions as constitutive of magic in late antique Christianity, rabbinic Judaism, Islam—as well as Buddhism, Taoism, Sanskritic Hinduism, and other religions distinguished by scriptures and ranks of religious specialists popularly credited with control of an “official” mythology. But as we have just seen with entrepreneurial ritual experts in Greco-Roman antiquity, Great Traditions were often a function of *projection* from individual ritual experts—a performative pretense, as it were—rather than the historical influence of actual institutional entities. Yet the magic works the same way: the ritual expert claims knowledge or affiliation with some kind of institutional tradition; and charms and texts refer to broadly recognized mythic figures as linked to an established, official, or even textual lore. Thus, to the audience, ritual authority seems to come from the expert’s or spell’s mediation of a Great Tradition into the immediate circumstances of a Local Tradition. It is a shared investment in and enactment of authority.

We will look at two examples of this process: first, the representation of a Solomon tradition as a type of Jewish magic; and second, a type of Egyptian Christian spell whose mythology maintains a sense of authoritative tradition long after the institutions sustaining it collapsed.

6.1 *The Invented Great Tradition: Early Jewish “Solomonica”*

The ritual expertise both imputed to and performed by Jews in Greco-Roman antiquity was diverse and local in nature, a reputation gathered through others’ views of their ethnic alterity and identification with sacred scriptures. Insider materials, as Gideon Bohak has shown, give more evidence of typical oral charming and popular ritual preparations—“charms and root-cutting, ... the loosening of spells,” as the *Book of the Watchers* puts it (1 *Enoch* 8)—than of a widespread and distinctive Jewish tradition of esoteric ritual practice.⁴⁵ There

45 See Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enoch Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 37–44; Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Gendering Heavenly Secrets? Women, Angels, and the Problem

are occasional references to specialists from the priesthood, the *kohanim*, extending their facility with esoteric books and names to the production of (e.g.) exorcisms, as Qumran texts have shown and the Book of Acts imagines (19:13–16).⁴⁶ Through the Roman period “Jewish magic” came to be associated with scripture and with angels’ names, both of which fields implied a Great Tradition of scripture and scripture expertise.⁴⁷

But there was another sphere of ritual performance, oriented especially towards exorcism and the control of spirits and associated especially with Jewish experts, which pretended to draw on the traditions of Solomon the king. And this Solomon tradition was essentially invented, like the secret books and inscriptions invoked in the Nag Hammadi and Greek magical texts as sources of authority.⁴⁸

In biblical legend, of course, Solomon is depicted as master of all sorts of sciences and wisdom to build the first temple and rule Israel (1 Kgs 4:29–34); but by the Roman period he was noted for his knowledge of demons and their modes of expulsion. Josephus proudly notes that Solomon “composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved and left behind forms of exorcisms with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return.”⁴⁹ Indeed, Josephus continues, he himself watched a public exorcism of a man in the emperor Vespasian’s court in which the Jewish ritual expert used commands, strong scents, and a magical ring, “speaking Solomon’s name and reciting the incantations which he [Solomon] had composed.” Finally, this Jewish exorcist had the demon tip over a bowl of water on its escape. “And when this was done,” Josephus concludes, “the understanding and wisdom of Solomon were clearly revealed” to everyone in the audience.⁵⁰

From little more than this folklore and the freelance experts who drew on it for such ritual performances, Solomon’s name became a preeminent authority for spells and amulets against demonic attack in the Mediterranean world of

of Misogyny and ‘Magic,’” in *Daughters of Hekate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, ed. Kimberly Stratton and Dayna Kalleres (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 111–25; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 135–42.

46 Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 105–12, 140; Florentino García Martínez, “Magic in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Metamorphosis of Magic, from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and J.R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 13–33.

47 Lacerenza, “Jewish Magicians and Christian Clients”; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 298–313.

48 On invented books cited in ancient documents, see David Frankfurter, “Apocalypses Real and Alleged in the Mani Codex,” *Numen* 44, no. 1 (1997): 60–73.

49 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8.45, trans. Louis H. Feldman, Loeb Classical Library 433 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). Cf. Wisdom 7:20.

50 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8.47, 49.

the Roman period. Many of these amulets referred merely to a “Seal of Solomon” that could repel demons, a mythical object that each ritual expert or craftsman could design in his own way.⁵¹ But among the craftsmen of magical gems, there did develop a consistent iconography of Solomon as conqueror of demons. On these gems Solomon is depicted—sometimes by name—on horseback, spearing a prone female demon, and surrounded with angelic and other magical names.⁵² Of course, this apotropaic rider figure also assumed other names and traditional associations as it was reproduced around the Roman Empire, and it bore little relationship to the biblical legend of Solomon. Thus the authority of Solomon did not lead to but rather gained from a broader Mediterranean “rider iconography.” While maintaining his roots in Jewish legend, Solomon had become a Mediterranean hero of apotropaic power—a trans-regional authority.⁵³ In fact by the Roman period we find good evidence that non-Jewish ritual experts and craftsmen were adopting Solomon traditions as well: “I conjure you, every demonic spirit, ... by the seal which Solomon placed on the tongue of Jeremiah, and he told.”⁵⁴ And by the time someone first composed a *Testament of Solomon*, a veritable manual of demon names, habitats, and protective remedies, the Solomon tradition had become a Christian literary project more than a Jewish one. The *Testament of Solomon* is itself a Christian text of about the fourth century CE, although it clearly stands in line with the early Jewish traditions of Solomon.⁵⁵

51 Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993); David Jordan and Roy D. Kotansky, “A Solomonic Exorcism,” in *Kölner Papyri* 8, P. Coloniensia, 7.8 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997), 53–69.

52 Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 2: 227–32; Paul Perdrizet, *Negotium Perambulans in Tenebris: Étude de démonologie gréco-orientale*, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l’Université de Strasbourg 6 (Strasbourg: Istra, 1922). See above, Dasen and Nagy, Chapter 17, Illustration 17.1.

53 Gustave Schlumberger, “Amulettes byzantins anciens destinés à combattre les maléfices et maladies,” *Revue des études grecques* 5 (1892): 73–93; Todd E. Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon: Tradition, Conflict and Identity in a Late Antique Pseudepigraphon* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 83–87.

54 *PGM* IV.3036–40, tr. *GMPT*, 96. On the ambiguity of religious self-definition in the composition of putatively Jewish spells in the *PGM* see LiDonnici, “According to the Jews.” In this case I am taking the completed compilation of *PGM* IV as evidence of circulation beyond a Jewish matrix, even if not excluding Jews’ use of such Solomon spells.

55 Émil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973), 3: 376–77; Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon*; Sarah L. Schwarz, “Reconsidering the Testament of Solomon,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 16 (2007): 203–37. See also P. Ianda 14 = *PGM* P17 = *ACM* no. 21, with Ra’anan Boustan and Michael Beshay, “Sealing the

Now as much as modern historians, and probably ancient clients, have tended to associate this Solomon tradition with Judaism, as “Jewish magic,” the actual folklore and craft traditions that led to the seals, the rider gems, and the exorcistic tradition had little to do with a Jewish Great Tradition properly conceived: that is, the production of *kohanim* or rabbis, or an expression of scripture. They were, through and through, products of local tradition, enterprising ritual experts, and adept gem-carvers, using a mythic hero associated with books—or simply with the power of the oral incantation.⁵⁶ And yet the image of the Solomon tradition involved the appearance—the pretense—of an official system linked intrinsically to a Great Tradition of Judaism: the institution of scripture, temple, and their associated lore and secrets. Although there was no institutional or scriptural substance, it was still an authoritative tradition, passing down and enacting the inscribed wisdom of the great Jewish King Solomon, and thus a unique juggernaut against demons. The efficacy of the gems, amulets, and charms depended on that myth of an authoritative tradition. But that myth was invented; what passed into the performative circumstances of the Local Tradition was a rather flexible notion or pretense of Great Tradition.

6.2 *Authoritative Tradition after the Institution's Demise*

Another way the model of the Great Tradition has to be adjusted to address Roman and late antique realities is provoked by a set of Coptic spells from the sixth and later centuries. Each spell invokes ancient Egyptian deities like Isis and Horus—not only by name and *historiola* but according to archaic speech formulas. For example,

Hear Horus crying, hear Horus sighing: “I am troubled, poured out (?) for seven maidens, from the third hour of the day until the fourth hour of the night. Not one of them sleeps, not one of them dozes.” Isis his mother replied to him within the temple of Habin with her face turned toward the seven maidens (and) seven maidens turned toward her face: “Horus, why are you crying? Horus, why are you sighing?” [Horus:] “Do you wish that I do not cry, do you wish that I not sigh, from the third hour of the day until the fourth hour of the night, while I am poured out for seven

Demons, Once and For All: The Ring of Solomon, the Cross of Christ, and the Power of Biblical Kingship,” *ARG* 16 (2014): 99–129.

56 See, e.g., the unusual gem showing Solomon as a youth in Hellenistic dress, holding a scroll in his right hand and (presumably) adjuring spirits with his left hand, in Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, fig. 1056.

maidens, not one of whom sleeps, not one of whom dozes?" "Even <if> [you] have not [found me] and have not found my name, take a cup [with] a little water; whether it is a small breath or the breath of your mouth or the breath of [your nose], call down to them, ... "You two angels, who imposed sleep upon Abimelech for seventy-two [years], impose upon NN and be a burden upon his head like a millstone, upon his eyes like a sack of sand, until I complete my request to accomplish the desire of my heart, now now, quickly quickly.⁵⁷

This charm recites an incantatory dialogue between the child Horus, in this case afflicted with insomnia (and longing for seven maidens?), and his mother Isis, whose words ultimately hold the power to heal Horus's affliction. It is the kind of charm one might expect to find in Egyptian spell-manuals of the Pharaonic period, yet here it is inscribed on papyrus in the sixth or seventh century CE. Still, what challenges a simplistic explanation of these spells—that Isis/Horus devotion might have persisted in institutional form somewhere in sixth-century Egypt—is that by this period the Great Tradition was monophysite Christianity, monumentalized in monasteries and churches. Any institutional or cultic grounding for the ritual veneration of Egyptian gods that had still lingered in the fourth century would certainly have collapsed by the time of these spells; and the Coptic writing and Christian apocryphal references in these spells probably mean the scribes were monks.

So where did they come from? It is most likely that these are edited versions of oral charms maintained in popular domestic culture: for example, given the rarity of insomnia curses and remedies in late antiquity, the unusual goal of sleep (exemplified in the text above) probably points to a lullaby context.⁵⁸ Another, in the Coptic miscellany designated Michigan 136, is clearly a cattle-blessing song:

Cow, cow of Amun, mother of the cattle, they have drawn near you. In the morning you must go forth to feed (them). They have drawn near you. In the evening you must come in to let them drink. Say, watch out for these 7 things that are bad for producing milk: The sheath, the lid, the worm of Paope that has not yet spread, the barley that has not yet produced shoots,

57 ACM no. 48 = Schmidt 1, trans. ACM, 94–95. Compare ACM nos. 47, 49, 72, 82.

58 David Frankfurter, "The Laments of Horus in Coptic: Myth, Folklore, and Syncretism in Late Antique Egypt," in *Antike Mythen: Medien Transformationen und Konstruktionen*, ed. Ueli Dill and Christine Walde (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2009), 229–47; and Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 206–11. See also above, Frankfurter, Chapter 22.

the real weed that does not provide shelter (?) For a shepherd does not provide a staff for a herder, does not provide a goad for a cowherd. They have come to me, my shepherd, my herder, my cowherd, with their garments torn, a strap on the front of their shoe(s) fastened with ... of reed. What is it with you, that you are running, that you are in a hurry, my shepherd, my herder, my cowherd, with your garments torn? What is it with you, with a strap on the front of your shoe fastened with fibers of reed? 7 white (?) sheep, 7 black sheep, 7 young heifers, 7 great cows—Let every cow and every domestic animal receive its offspring! For Yao Sabaoth has spoken. Go north of Abydos, go south of Thinis, until you find these two brothers calling and running north, and you run after them, and they run south. Then say, Express the thoughts of your heart(s), that every domestic animal may receive its offspring!⁵⁹

The figures addressed in this text change from one divine figure to another, including (remarkably) the ancient god Amun, and the halting structure may well reflect a dialogue, like the Isis/Horus spell above. Yet the overarching theme remains the well-being of cattle, and the speaker's words of blessing concern cattle. Such cattle-blessing songs were still found among the Nuer and Dinka people in the late twentieth century.⁶⁰ They demonstrate the close relations of people and their livestock, the embeddedness of song traditions in specific social and economic activities like herding, and the magic of those song traditions.⁶¹

But this hypothetical life-context for these spells opens up precisely the general question of how magical mediation—in this case, ritual speech consisting of *historiolae* in some form—can gesture toward a Great Tradition. For what constituted and maintained the authority of these songs and their mythic characters when no temple institution, no Great Tradition, persisted? In this case the magical mediation of a Great Tradition has taken on a life of

59 ACM no. 43 = Michigan 136, 5–7, trans. ACM, 85–86.

60 See, e.g., Francis Mading Deng, *The Dinka and Their Songs*, Oxford Library of African Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 96–158; Terese Svoboda, *Cleaned the Crocodile's Teeth: Nuer Song* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1985), 14, 32, 101, and passim.

61 See Andromache Karanika, "Folk Songs as Ritual Acts: The Case of Work-Songs," in *Finding Persephone: Women's Religions in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Maryline Parca and Angeliki Tzanetou (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 137–53. Cf. Vesna A. Wallace, "Mongolian Livestock Rituals: Appropriations, Adaptations, and Transformations," in *Understanding Religious Ritual: Theoretical Approaches and Innovations*, ed. John P. Hoffmann (New York: Routledge, 2012), 168–85; and see above, Frankfurter, Chapter 22.

its own in the world of the Local Tradition, continuing long after the demise of any sustaining institution for the Great Tradition.⁶²

One conceivable context for this kind of performative invocation of a Great Tradition no longer in effective existence would be the local ritual expert and his or her skill in recalling and improvising such materials. Thus the authoritative traditions become not just common memory-store but specifically the art of a charismatic, skilled individual. Another context for their perpetuation beyond the historical existence of the Great Tradition would be the *Sitz-im-Leben* or life circumstances of the charms: that is, their embeddedness in the experience of fussy babies and the fortunes of livestock. And a third context would be their performative genre—in song. (Indeed, it is quite possible that specific melodies helped maintain their currency and authority). But beyond these performative circumstances and the habits and gestures that linked them to such songs, the *historiolae* do indeed point to traditions—mythologies—that had *once* been worked through, systematized, and ritually performed by temple priests and also incorporated in the diverse folklore genres of the Local Tradition. They are not distant improvisations from some dim heathen regime. The magic of these texts, that is, lies in the invocation of a Great Tradition into the life-world, just as in earlier times.

7 Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let me propose three roughly distinct ways in which magical act and invocation gain performative efficacy by reference to (or appropriation from) a Great Tradition. The clearest, most basic mode—observed by anthropologists in innumerable cultures—is the direct *mediation* of a living religious institution, its gods and gestures and *sacra*, by an authoritative representative of that institution: monk, priest, rabbi. As Keith Thomas documented for early modern Europe (and manuscripts attest), the latitude such authorized specialists assumed for translating their official traditions was extensive.⁶³ Clearly this magical mediation of the Great Tradition, its materials and mythological and performative idioms, does not exhaust the ways that local experts might interpret the traditions of a religious institution. We

62 On the centrifugal shift of ritual traditions to the domestic sphere as a response to institutional religious decline, see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 143–44.

63 Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. See also Karen Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

have to consider these ad-hoc ritual functions alongside other local interpretations of the Great Tradition, like the moral, the pedagogical, and the prophetic, all of which might ultimately shade into magical functions. For example, a local prophet might communicate a demonology that draws on the terms of the Great Tradition and that he materializes through the dispensing of special amulets.⁶⁴ The *magical* mediation of the Great Tradition thus pertains to invocations of authoritative tradition that stress material, therapeutic, protective, aggressive, and practical areas of ritual expression.

But we have also seen evidence of another way in which a magical act gains performative efficacy by reference to a Great Tradition: when a ritual expert of the Local Tradition improvises elements of a living *or moribund* Great Tradition. His gestures and *historiolae* still presume and invoke a system, a sense of institutional authority, but that system may be long gone, as in the Coptic Isis songs, or it may be officially opposed to these improvisations, as when church fathers and rabbis complained about the misuse of scripture.

The third way of expressing a Great Tradition as the source of authority is to invent it, as we saw in the case of the Jewish, then Christian, Solomon tradition. An invented Great Tradition is not the same as the invented traditions described by Hobsbawm and Ranger in their influential 1983 volume.⁶⁵ A Great Tradition implies, in an ideal sense, an institution and hierarchy that knows the religion, writes it out, sustains its central cults, and *from which* certain texts, charms, images, or practices draw their authority. The late antique dissemination of Solomon gems and *historiolae* seemed to imply such an authoritative tradition that some ritual expert might claim to know or be part of. But it never existed as such—not even in Byzantine times with the promulgation of the *Testament of Solomon*.

In these three ways a Great Tradition will operate as the source of authority and the basis of magic: as a living religious system distinct from the Local Tradition; as a moribund religious system invoked still in the Local Tradition, and as an invented source of authority.

Redfield's model thus serves as a heuristic framework for observing the invocation and innovation of authoritative traditions in local milieux, often by enterprising ritual experts or by artisans creating apotropaic images. Whether they existed as actual or idealized institutions, promulgating scriptures or liturgical chants, the Great Traditions discussed here are envisioned as the source of magic: authority rendered in functional forms.

64 See Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, chap. 3.

65 Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–14.

Suggested Readings

- Assmann, Jan, "Magic and Theology in Ancient Egypt," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg, Studies in the History of Religion 75 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 1–18.
- Bozóky, Edina, *Charmes et prières apotropaïques*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 86 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).
- de Bruyn, Theodore, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Frankfurter, David, "Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Towards a New Taxonomy of 'Magicians,'" in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, RGRW 141 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), 159–78.
- Frankfurter, David, "Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical *Historiola* in Ritual Spells," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Mirecki, RGRW 129 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 457–76.
- Marriott, McKim, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization," in *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*, ed. McKim Marriott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 171–222.
- Redfield, Robert, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1956).
- Sanzo, Joseph E., "The Innovative Use of Biblical Traditions for Ritual Power: The Crucifixion of Jesus on a Coptic Exorcistic Spell (Brit. Lib. Or. 6796[4], 6796) as a Test Case," *ARG* 16 (2014): 67–98.
- Sanzo, Joseph E., *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 84 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).
- Scott, James C., "Protest and Profanation: Agrarian Revolt and the Little Tradition," *Theory and Society* 4 (1977): 1–38, 211–46.
- Smith, Jonathan Z., "Here, There, and Anywhere," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, ed. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 323–39.
- Wendt, Heidi, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).