

MAGICAL PRACTICES AND DISCOURSES OF MAGIC IN EARLY CHRISTIAN  
TRADITIONS: JESUS, PETER, AND PAUL

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## ABSTRACT

Shaily Shashikant Patel: Magical Practices and Discourses of Magic in Early Christian Traditions: Jesus, Peter, and Paul  
(Under the direction of Bart D. Ehrman)

This project represents a methodological intervention in the study of magic in early Christianity. Modern scholars have overwhelmingly adopted post-Enlightenment, exclusively discursive understandings of magic with which to approach ancient evidence. That is to say, contemporary historians believe that the ancient Christians crafted magic in the charge against theological opponents. As a result, magic was a concept empty of all content until it was levied against others. In contrast, the following study attempts to show that while magic was a discursive category in the ancient Graeco-Roman world, certain practices attendant to this discourse demonstrated relative stability. Some activities were more likely to convey the charge of magic than others. Practices like reanimation-necromancy and love spells tended to be associated with magic more often than practices like healing or exorcism. These areas of dynamism and fixity have wide-ranging implications for the study of early Christian magic. Rather than understanding early Christians as either participating in magic or not, the following project shows *how* Christians crafted their distinctive magical tradition along two indices: the narration of magical practices and the subsequent interpretation of these practices. Since Christians overwhelmingly adopted magical practices that engendered discursive flexibility (rather than those practices that remained fixed as magic in the Graeco-Roman imagination), they were able to characterize their own practices as “non-magic” and put the resultant discourses to a number of theological ends: announcing the coming Kingdom of God, affecting

rapprochement between Petrine and Pauline factions of Christianity, and “othering” those practices and ideologies antithetical to nascent orthodoxy. By placing an equal emphasis on magical practices as well as meta-discourses of magic, this study returns conceptual variability to ancient magic, demonstrating that it was a thoroughly polyvalent theological expedient that Christians adopted for myriad ends apart from delineating insiders from outsiders.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

PGM      Greek Magical Papyri

## **INTRODUCTION: ARTICULATING THE UNCERTAIN: MAGIC AND THE STUDY OF GRAECO-ROMAN MAGIC**

The following project represents an intellectual struggle to grasp the obscure. I aim to circumscribe and articulate vast, ambiguous ideas of Graeco-Roman magic and to mobilize these ideas towards the understanding of early Christian texts. This project is, therefore, an exercise in uncertainty. Between anti-essentialist discourses of magic and positivist, essentializing discourses lies an area of ambiguity and dynamism. Any attempt to reconcile the notion that magic is crafted in the charge of magic (anti-essentialism) and the notion that magic has inherent characteristics (positivism) will be necessarily insecure. Such a conciliatory rubric must account for the totality of magical discourse *and* the narration of magical practices, since both discourses and practices make up the magical ideation of any given culture. Furthermore, this understanding of magic must account for areas of magical discourse which display relative stability – i.e., the practices and behaviors that are correlated with the magical more often than not. It must also contend with discursive fluidity, in which practices and behaviors are more amenable to being classed as magic *or* non-magic depending on the circumstances under which they are narrated. These aspects of magic – discourses and practices, and their relative stability or ambiguity – are the subject of this work.

The present project attempts to intervene in polarized scholarly discourses by offering a third option with respect to magic as it is constructed in the literary tradition of formative Christianity. In particular, this work attempts to complicate modern scholarly notions of

ancient magic in some of the earliest Christian narratives – the Gospel of Luke, the canonical Acts of the Apostles, and the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*. In these texts featuring Christian heroes such as Jesus, Peter, and Paul, magic is *both* congeries of practices and discourses about these practices. Some practices enjoy relative stability in terms of the ways in which they are constructed. Such “stable” practices are very often associated with broader Graeco-Roman notions of the magical as socio-religiously transgressive. The overwhelming majority of practices narrated in the Christian tradition, however, are characterized only by their ambiguity. They can be classed as magic or not depending on narrative aspects such as the agency driving the supernatural deed, the legitimacy of the magician, and the final result of the practice narrated. These ambiguous practices represent the bulk of magical practices in the ancient world, but not all practices are so ambiguous, as we will see. Even so, the strategies by which Christians negotiated boundaries between the magical and the non-magical also contribute to larger discourses about magic in the Graeco-Roman world. The following pages are dedicated to delineating how Christianity both reappropriated and modified extant discourses of ancient magic in service of various theological ends.

As a result of the characteristics enumerated above, the most useful understandings of Christian magic must be flexible as well as clear. In the following pages, I propose a typological understanding in which practices expressly termed “magical” are arranged along a continuum. One end of the continuum represents activities more likely to be characterized in transgressive or negative way – the more essentialized activities of magic, as it were. The opposite end of my “magical continuum” features ambiguous practices which are crafted in the charge. These ambiguous practices can be constructed as magical or non-magical depending on the discourse in which they appear. Thus, the continuum proposed here

attempts to reconcile essential and anti-essential understandings of Graeco-Roman magic. It is a methodology drawing upon the strengths of both approaches and aiming to fill lacunae in each respective approach. This method consists of a constant negotiation and re-negotiation between narrated practices and broader discourses of magic; such is the struggle of grasping the uncertain. Any understanding of magic that obtains in one particular text or context will unravel when applied to another.

Yet within this insecurity lies a richness. Since magic is by its very nature both practice and discourse, both static and fluid, it can be mobilized towards many theological and ideological ends. For example, we will see how two Christian writers modified broader understandings of Graeco-Roman magic in order to pursue distinctive theological ends. The author of Luke-Acts uses magic to portend and prefigure the Kingdom of God, to craft a cosmic battle between God and Satan, and to effect a rapprochement between the two early heroes of the Christian tradition, Peter and Paul. The author of the *Acts of Peter* utilizes magic to generate conversion and to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian tradition against “heresies.” These various uses of magic further assert its variability and utility. Magic was as essential to the development of a Christian identity as any other early practice such as baptism or Eucharist.

If magic is an insecure concept with rich and varied utility, then our analyses of magic must be flexible enough to accommodate such insecurity. In the modern academic study of magic, however, oftentimes, the opposite has obtained. Rigid definitions, or, more recently, strict binaries between “magic” and whatever conceptual space “not magic” occupies have limited the heuristic utility of magic. While certain studies have pushed past these trajectories in fields outside the study of early Christianity, the analysis of Christian

origins has been limited by its dependence on very narrow notions of the magical. If we are to move beyond our limited scopes, then we must first understand their limits.

## **Part I. History of Scholarship**

It will help to trace these trajectories of scholarship. Magic is a subject with a staggering bibliography; to include even a large fraction of it here would be impossible. As such, I have opted to limit my treatment in a number of ways. First, I begin with anthropological models. My reasoning is two-fold. The study of religion and the study of other peoples worked hand-in-hand, and as a result, the categorizations of magic, religion, science emerged from these early anthropological and/or sociological works. My second reason emerges from the fact that many of our earlier anthropologists such as James George Frazer and E. B. Tylor trained in Classics, and therefore made assertions about magic and religion (and their interrelationship) based on evidence gathered from both the ancient and contemporary worlds. I should like, therefore, to include these models as part of the history of scholarship of Graeco-Roman magic. My second limiting principle to my history of scholarship is that I will be treating exclusively studies of magic done with respect to early Christianity, with very rare exceptions. Even this is quite an imposing task and must likewise be circumscribed. Therefore, my third principle offers another limit: I will largely analyze studies that analyze “magic” as a whole, prioritizing those that have made significant methodological advancement. What I mean by “methodological advancement” is that I aim to include works that have sought to reconfigure the ways in which magic is handled as a category of inquiry. This will clearly exclude a number of studies that will be taken up in later chapters. For example, Graham H. Twelftree has written a number of volumes on

exorcism in the ancient world, the latest of which is *In the Name of Jesus*.<sup>1</sup> While Twelftree's work is invaluable in understanding how exorcism functioned in gospel narratives, he does not offer a novel means of defining or conceptualizing "magic," choosing instead to limit his analyses to one particular magical practice. I will therefore engage Twelftree's work only when I discuss exorcism in the Gospel of Luke in Chapter 2.

I will further organize the material in a roughly chronological manner in hopes of foregrounding the overarching intellectual trends that have monopolized the study of Christian magic since the inception of Religion as a field of inquiry. I will begin with anthropological studies before treating the work of scholars of early Christianity. My point of departure rests on the work of Morton Smith and his critics, whose work I will analyze in the final section. The subsequent methodological innovation I propose is detailed and outlined in Chapter 1.

### **Part 1A. Anthropology and the Study of Magic**

Herbert Spencer, the British polymath, offered an important conceptualization of an evolutionary model of magic and religion in which magic was designated as a type of proto-religion.<sup>2</sup> But it was his contemporary Edward Burnett Tylor who introduced magic as a major topic of academic inquiry as the first Professor of Anthropology at Oxford University.<sup>3</sup> Tylor's two-volume *Primitive Culture* was first published in 1871. In it, Tylor suggests that "savage thought" has a propensity to mistake "an ideal for a real connexion," thereby making

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<sup>1</sup> Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology, in Three Volumes*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1874-75). For a modern discussion of Spencer's contribution see Owen Davies, *Magic: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford Very Short Introduction Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Davies, *Magic*, 15.



false associations.<sup>4</sup> These false associations are the origins of magical thinking. Only the modern individual has the intellectual faculty to realize that magical analogies are fallacious. Tylor also imagined the duty of anthropologists to be prescriptive, likening so-called “primitive cultures” to children who would need instruction if they were to develop a higher order of thought.<sup>5</sup> Magic, of course, would have to be dispensed with in order for progress to ensure. For Tylor, magic was “one of the most pernicious delusions that ever vexed mankind.”<sup>6</sup> One of the earliest analyses of magic was therefore dedicated to highlighting its association with the illogical and primitive, the ‘savage.’ Tylor’s framework has been largely abandoned and doubtless sounds condescending and imperialist to the modern analyst, but the taint of primitivism yet manages to cling to magic, as we shall see.

The beginning of the 1900s saw the explosion of analyses of travelogues and other data pertaining to the “primitive peoples” encountered in colonial missions and expeditions. It was from these accounts, coupled with Classical sources, that James George Frazer put together the famous *Golden Bough*.<sup>7</sup> In it, he argued a number of things concerning magic. First, he claimed that magic was tantamount to the “misapplications” of the associations of ideas made by “primitive” minds.<sup>8</sup> These misapplications of associations could be further

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, (London: John Murray, 1871), 105.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. rev., (London: John Murray, 1878), 184. See also Davies, *Magic*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 101.

<sup>7</sup> Excerpts from Frazer’s works taken from Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Religion and Magic, Abridged Edition* (New York: MacMillan, 1922). Frazer prepared this abridged edition himself from his twelve-part work. For the entirety of Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, see James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. revised and expanded (London: MacMillan, 1911-1915).

<sup>8</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 12.

subdivided into two types of magical ideation – homeopathic magic and contagious magic.<sup>9</sup> Homeopathic magic was founded on associations based on similarity.<sup>10</sup> This principle of homeopathic magic underlies the idea that blowing on a particular substance might encourage a windstorm – in this case, the movement of air is similar for breath and storm. Contagious magic was founded on associations based on contiguity.<sup>11</sup> Contagious magic is the principle driving the popular culture notion of the “voodoo doll” – by including the victim’s hair or clothing as part of the doll’s “stuffing,” anything the doll is made to suffer can be inflicted on the victim. The idea is that whatever a portion of the body experiences in a magical context is in turn experienced by the whole body. Frazer grouped both types of magic under the umbrella term “sympathetic magic” because he understood that both assumed, “that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether.”<sup>12</sup>

Frazer further developed an evolutionary schema classifying magic, science, and religion that would maintain a hold on the study of these concepts until the 1900s. All societies would progress from magic, to religion, and eventually to science. Religion grew from the failure of magic. Magic was also a type of false science, since it was based on the system of false associations outlined above.<sup>13</sup> Should magic’s principles of association be

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<sup>9</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 12. This idea of cosmic sympathy is not unique to Frazer. Plotinus similarly believed that a cosmic sympathy is what allows magic function (*Enneads* 4.IV.40). See also Robert M. Grant, *Miracles and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1952), 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 49-50.

shown to be legitimately applied, it would not be magic, but science.<sup>14</sup> Yet again, magic is associated with a lack of reason. In Frazer's hands, it becomes the very opposite of proper scientific thinking. Religion, however, occupies a sort of middle ground between the opposite poles of magic and science. This evolutionary schema would hold considerable sway for many years.<sup>15</sup>

A contemporary of Frazer's, Robert Ranulph Marett, argued against Frazer, claiming that magic was closer to religion than it was to science.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Marett argued, religion and magic belong to "the same department of human experience."<sup>17</sup> Marett further suggested that one of Frazer's many distinctions between magic and religion lacked empirical evidence – an uncharitable critique, but not an entirely untrue one. Frazer's claim that magic manipulated supernatural forces while religion maintained an attitude of supplication was untenable in Marett's opinion.<sup>18</sup> Despite Marett's critiques, the Frazerian binary between supplication and manipulation obtains even in modern analyses of magic.<sup>19</sup>

Bronislaw Malinowski ushered in a new age in anthropology and is often thought of as a pioneer in fieldwork.<sup>20</sup> His work in parts of the Pacific and Africa "formed the base of

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<sup>14</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 49-50.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, my critique of Hull's *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* in the following section.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Ranulph Marett, *Anthropology*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1912), 208-9.

<sup>17</sup> Marett, *Anthropology*, 208.

<sup>18</sup> Marett, *Anthropology*, 208-9.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Rodney Stark, "Reconceptualizing Religion, Magic, and Science," *Review of Religious Research* 43:2 (2001), 109; Henk Versnel, "Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion," *Numen* 38:2 (1991), 78.

<sup>20</sup> Davies, *Magic*, 22. Malinowski's work on magic includes *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935); *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon, 1948). Distillations of his thought can be found in the short essay "The Role of Magic and Religion" in William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt eds., *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 102-111; Raymond Firth ed., *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Work of Bronislaw Malinowski* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957).

the functional school of social anthropology that interpreted culture as having arisen to serve a social purpose.”<sup>21</sup> In many ways, Malinowski’s work represents a departure from the work of Tylor, Frazer, and others in that he formed his theories about magic based on first-hand observation and analysis of data, i.e. ethnography. At any rate, although Malinowski was influenced by Frazer, he found that the Trobriand Islanders he studied did not appeal to magical practices out of faulty logic.<sup>22</sup> Rather, magical rituals were sensible and understandable in proper cultural context. They provided reassurance in the face of unavoidable dangers, and inspired solutions when other sources of knowledge were insufficient.<sup>23</sup> Magic was instrumental, a means to an end, goal-oriented, and these were the primary characteristics distinguishing it from religion.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, religion was responsible for creating values and attaining ends directly.<sup>25</sup> One of the clearest differences between Malinowski and Frazer, however, was the fact that Malinowski’s schema did not include an evolutionary teleology, such that magic and religion might be practiced side-by-side, and magic not simply a “survival” of a more primitive past.<sup>26</sup>

A terminological shift began to occur around this time, with categories like “witchcraft” and “sorcery” being foregrounded while “magic” receded.<sup>27</sup> E. E. Evans-

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<sup>21</sup> Davies, *Magic*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*, 14-16.

<sup>24</sup> Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*, 67-69.

<sup>25</sup> Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*, 67-69.

<sup>26</sup> Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*, 67-69.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, *Magic*, 22.

Pritchard was a prime mover of this shift.<sup>28</sup> His work straddled the divide between the two rivals who were his influences – Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown.<sup>29</sup> Like Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard foregrounded the contextual logic of magical practices, claiming that the magic of the Zande people in Central Africa was rooted within their own magico-religious conception of the cosmos, despite seeming irrational to Westerners: “Zande behavior, though mystical, is consistent, and the reasons they give for their behavior, though mystical, are intellectually coherent. If their mystical notions allowed them to generalize their observations they would perceive, as we do, that their faith is without foundations.”<sup>30</sup> Like Radcliffe-Brown, who himself was deeply influenced by Émile Durkheim, Evans-Pritchard understood magic and ritual to go hand-in-hand and therefore emphasized the importance of magical practices.<sup>31</sup>

One of Evans-Pritchard’s most visible influences on anthropology was the introduction of distinct terminology for different classes of magical practices.<sup>32</sup> Owen Davies’ concise explanation is helpful here:

So the Zande word ‘*Mangu*’ was equated with ‘witchcraft’ in the sense of misfortune caused by people possessed of innate power (a physical substance in Zande conception) and inspired by envy or anger. ‘*Ngua*’ broadly encapsulated magic and medicine in terms of ritual action. Evans-Pritchard then created ‘sorcery’ as a distinct

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<sup>28</sup> See in particular the vocabulary used in E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, abridged ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>29</sup> Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion*; Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*; A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders: A Study in Social Anthropology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922). Radcliffe-Brown also used the platform of his 1939 Frazer Lecture to disseminate certain criticisms of Malinowski. These comments were later published in a pamphlet entitled “Taboo.”

<sup>30</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, abridged ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 159.

<sup>31</sup> Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic*.

<sup>32</sup> Davies, *Magic*, 23.

category of Zande *Ngua*. This he defined as the employment of magical techniques, medicines, or rituals to cause illegitimate harm to others.<sup>33</sup>

In this way, “witchcraft” and “sorcery” became more precise manifestations of a general magic. While Evans-Pritchard’s terminology came to influence anthropology for years to come, it was not without its problems. The meanings of “sorcery” and “witchcraft” in the context of the Zande peoples are not universally applicable. Later anthropologists would use “sorcery” to denote harmful magic in general rather than the precise form of harmful magic Evans-Pritchard attempted to circumscribe.<sup>34</sup>

On the sociological end of the study of magic, scholars would claim that the distinction between magic and religion is constructed primarily on social grounds.<sup>35</sup> Émile Durkheim, for example, argued that belief in magic, “does not result in binding together those who adhere to it, nor in uniting them into a group leading a common life.... Between the magician and the individuals who consult him, as between these individuals themselves, there are no lasting bonds which make them members of the same moral community...”<sup>36</sup> The assertion here is that there is no “Church of Magic.” A church, by its very nature, must be a religious *institution*. Magic lies outside the purview of institutions and organizations, and is made magic by its non-official status. If practices deemed magical belonged to an organized, socially-sanctioned cult, they would be religious. In many ways, this Durkheimian

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<sup>33</sup> Davies, *Magic*, 23-25.

<sup>34</sup> Davies, *Magic*, 25. See also Victor W. Turner, “Witchcraft and Sorcery: Taxonomy versus Dynamics,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 34 no. 4 (1964): 314-25.

<sup>35</sup> While Durkheim and Mauss are sociologists, not anthropologists, I include their understandings of magic here simply because many scholars of early Christianity will later echo these sociological constructions of magic.

<sup>36</sup> Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, J. W. Swain, trans. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915; reprint Crowell-Collier, 1961), 60.

conception still maintains a strong currency in the study of formative Christian magic.<sup>37</sup> The same sentiments are echoed (though not exactly) in the work of Durkheim's nephew, Marcel Mauss. Mauss suggested that the prohibition of a practice is what made it a magical practice.<sup>38</sup> The practice itself was not determinative of its classification as magic or religion.<sup>39</sup> Both thinkers concede that magic and religion are difficult to distinguish without the social apparatus as a framework for understanding them.<sup>40</sup>

While evolutionary frameworks were slowly waning, sociological approaches like that of Durkheim and Mauss held sway well into the mid-1900s. In the 1960s, Murray and Rosalie Wax attempted to theorize a new way in which to conceptualize magic.<sup>41</sup> They claimed that both Frazerian and Durkheimian distinctions between magic and religion were based upon Judeo-Christian notions of religion that were inadequate for describing societies that were not Judeo-Christian.<sup>42</sup> The symbols and actions associated with magic had to be understood within a conception of the cosmos that was different from the rationally-bound Western view.<sup>43</sup> A lack of understanding on the part of Western analysts prompted charges of primitivism on the part of the ethnographic subject.<sup>44</sup> This condescension can be mitigated by defining magic “within the context of the magical world view” – a way of viewing the

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<sup>37</sup> See my critiques of David Aune and Alan Segal in the following sections. It is not inappropriate to understand magic sociologically, but by relying exclusively on one methodology we may miss the rich resonances of our object of study.

<sup>38</sup> Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, R. Brain trans., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 22.

<sup>39</sup> Mauss, *General Theory of Magic*, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 61; Mauss, *General Theory of Magic*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Their ideas are most concisely articulated in Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax, “The Magical World View,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1 no. 2 (1962): 179-88.

<sup>42</sup> Wax and Wax, “Magical World View,” 187-88.

<sup>43</sup> Wax and Wax, “Magical World View,” 187-88.

<sup>44</sup> Wax and Wax, “Magical World View,” 180.

interconnectedness of things in the world.<sup>45</sup> The work put forth by the Waxes became instrumental understanding magic not as a manifestation of irrationality, but rather as a mode of meaning-making that operated outside logics dominated by rationality. And thus, the Waxes took up the ideas first proffered by Malinowski and began decoupling magic from the charge of irrationality.

The work of Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah is exemplary of a newer trend in the anthropology of magic. In “The Magical Power of Words,” Tambiah combines linguistics, performance studies, and anthropology to advance an understanding of magical ritual in which words have performative power.<sup>46</sup> In the context of a ritual, words take on a special significance. They may not be intelligible or understandable.<sup>47</sup> Yet, the language can connote divine hierarchies, supernatural power, and can be understood by those demonic entities with which the speaker wishes to communicate.<sup>48</sup> Tambiah’s work focuses on the particulars of magic – here, the words comprising ritual. He unravels the relationship between words and actions in hopes of trying to understand ritual deeply. Tambiah’s work does not depend upon references to rationality, since within the context of the magical ritual, a new type of rationality takes hold. His work is also exemplary of a secondary trend: modern anthropology has largely abandoned Frazerian evolutionary schemes for smaller-scaled endeavors aimed at analyzing particular aspects of magic rather than offering universal conceptualizations.

In summation, anthropology and sociology prompted the creation of the study of magic as a discrete area of modern academic inquiry. While the Frazerian notion of a

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<sup>45</sup> Wax and Wax, “Magical World View,” 186.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words,” *Man* 3 no. 2 (1968): 176.

<sup>47</sup> Tambiah, “Magical Power of Words,” 177-8.

<sup>48</sup> Tambiah, “Magical Power of Words,” 178.



developmental teleology has collapsed, certain of the distinctions between magic and religion set forth by early anthropologists will emerge in our survey of the scholarship on early Christian magic. Sociological approaches to magic retain a kind of currency as well, especially ones that craft magic as an obverse of established or organized cult. Finally, smaller-scaled studies, such as those put forth by Stanley Tambiah and his ilk have come to dominate anthropology, although perhaps their influence has not been felt in fields like early Christianity just yet. In a way, the present project is such a smaller-scaled endeavor exemplified by Tambiah and his colleagues. Rather than putting forth a universal definition of magic that will hold throughout the Graeco-Roman world, I will first outline a flexible, dialectical model for understanding magic in the ancient world. I wish to demonstrate how the discourse of magic is one that has a contextual rationality that may not seem readily comprehensible to the modern mind. The expedient achieved by this seeming incoherence, however, is a staggering flexibility that allows this discourse to be put towards achieving a number of functions in early Christian texts.

## **Part IB. Formative Christianity and the Study of Magic, the Early Works**

Some of the earliest studies of formative Christianity and magic were comparative in nature. Adolf Deissmann, for example, believed he could illuminate the texts of the New Testament through sustained comparison with pagan texts.<sup>49</sup> These texts included non-literary items such as inscriptions, ostraca, lead binding tablets called *defixiones*, and the magical papyri.<sup>50</sup> Deissmann found a number of analogues between what he deemed to be

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<sup>49</sup> Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Lionel R. M. Strachan trans. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 4-5. I use “pagan” to refer to non-Christian, non-Jewish individuals.

<sup>50</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 4-5.

characteristic of Graeco-Roman magic and the New Testament. The incident in which magical books are burned for a large sum in Acts 19 betrays Lucan knowledge of technical magical vocabulary.<sup>51</sup> In Mark 8:35, Jesus heals a man who is both deaf and mute. The “loosening” of the man’s tongue is, in Deissmann’s opinion, akin to a magical spell, since, “running throughout all of antiquity we find the idea that a man can be ‘bound’ or ‘fettered’ by daemonic influences.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, when Paul curses a sinner in 1 Cor. 5:4-5, it should be understood as a magical curse, since the wording is rather similar to those found on *tabellae defixionum*.<sup>53</sup> Deissmann understood these comparisons to be a convention of the sort of syncretism that pervaded the period, especially the middle and lower classes.<sup>54</sup> Deissmann’s work is to be commended for bringing into conversation these two “canons” of texts, but some of his comparisons are thin and his overarching analysis is problematic. Although Deissmann posits a syncretistic religious milieu, he does not seem to allow for this assertion to reach its logical conclusion, claiming that magical texts are, “contemporary with but not belonging to primitive Christianity.”<sup>55</sup> One wonders, precisely, by what criteria texts belong to primitive Christianity or belong to other traditions. That is to say, Deissmann never answers the following question: to what degree do magical texts need to influence primitive Christian texts in order for the Christian texts to be deemed magical? My point in inquiring is simple. Many early comparative studies were quite content to foreground various details in the Christian material which had analogues to magical material found in the Graeco-Roman

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<sup>51</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 323.

<sup>52</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 306.

<sup>53</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 303-5.

<sup>54</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 260.

<sup>55</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 261.

world, yet the same studies displayed a certain reticence when it came to claiming that Christianity had a magical tradition at its core. Instead, the word “miracle” was used to denote the Christian magical tradition.<sup>56</sup>

Samson Eitrem published an essay entitled “Die Versuchung Christi” in 1924.<sup>57</sup> In it, he put forth the foundation for decades of scholarship on early Christian magic that would seek to distinguish magic from miracle based on magic’s association with the demonic, especially Satan.<sup>58</sup> Eitrem’s essay offered a case study of the Temptation account in Q in which he claimed that Satan’s temptations are not designed to entice a would-be Messiah, but rather a magician.<sup>59</sup> A Messiah would not find Satan’s offers tempting in the least, Eitrem claimed.<sup>60</sup> The Temptation, then, is not a means by which Jesus proved himself a Messiah; it is a test in which Jesus proved himself as one who would not be tempted by the evils of magic.<sup>61</sup> Eitrem’s essay suffered from a number of issues, not the least of which was the

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<sup>56</sup> In this way, it is “miracle” and not “magic” that comes with more conceptual baggage. “Miracle,” like the less common “pseudepigrapha,” appears to be vocabulary utilized for the express purpose of not having to associate Christianity with something deemed foreign or “other.” See Anton Fridrichsen, *The Problem of Miracle in Primitive Christianity*, Roy A. Harrisville and John S. Hanson, trans., (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1972). Fridrichsen saw corollaries between magic and the wonderworking of Jesus, yet insisted on terming the latter “miracle.” Likewise, Bultmann also believed that the church defended itself against the charge that Jesus was a magician with stories like the Temptation account. Theological defenses were necessary because Jesus’ activities approximated those of Graeco-Roman magicians. When Bultmann described Jesus’ activities, however, he defaulted to the term “miracle.” See Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., John Marsh, trans., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), 255. For a more recent example, see Achtemeier, Paul J. “The Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, no. 4 (1975): 547-62. Achtemeier concedes that “no author of that period could have been unaware of [the magical practices which pervaded the Hellenistic world (560).” Yet, Achtemeier refers to all wonderworking in Luke oeuvre as “miraculous” and not “magical.” He further insists that Luke has not “subordinated” his presentation of Jesus to a magical world-view (560),” yet can give no incontrovertible evidence to substantiate this claim.

<sup>57</sup> Samson Eitrem, “Die Versuchung Christi,” *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 24 (1923-1924): 3-37.

<sup>58</sup> Sue Garrett later took up Eitrem’s work in her PhD Dissertation and subsequent book. See Sue Garrett, “Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts,” (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1988); Sue Garrett, *Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> Eitrem, “Die Versuchung Christi,” 15.

<sup>60</sup> Eitrem, “Die Versuchung Christi,” 15.

<sup>61</sup> Eitrem, “Die Versuchung Christi,” 23.

issue of exclusivity. I have yet to encounter ancient evidence that would preclude a magician from being a Messiah. In fact, as I hope my study of the Gospel of Luke will demonstrate, Luke's Jesus is quite capable of wearing the mantle of both. Yet, other scholars have followed Eitrem's binary between God and magic/Satan, as we shall see. I should say that Eitrem's conclusions are not necessarily incorrect; at least in Luke's Gospel, the demonic is a concern, but it is also true that Luke uses well-known, stereotypical magical practices to combat Satan. In this way, both Eitrem and his later supporters fail to see the full picture.

Eitrem's later work, "Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament," was published in 1950.<sup>62</sup> It was a comparative work in the mold of Deissmann's *Light from the Ancient East* in which he foregrounded parallels between the healing miracles found in the Gospels and Acts and various texts of the Graeco-Roman world, including ostraca, inscriptions, binding tablets, papyri, and literature. Eitrem appeared rather invested in sparing Jesus from the charge of magic himself, claiming that Jesus' methods differed from those of his magical compatriots without considering the question of variability in magical formulae and redaction amongst Christians.<sup>63</sup> Once again, we find that scholars of early Christianity seem particularly interested in saving Jesus from the charge of magic, despite the fact that many of the details of the Gospel narratives correspond to what we know about magic in the ancient world.

Campbell Bonner published two articles worth mentioning in this short survey of scholarship.<sup>64</sup> Bonner suggested that that Gospel writers had used "conventional

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<sup>62</sup> Samson Eitrem, "Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament," *Symbolae Osloenses* Supp. XXII (1950).

<sup>63</sup> Eitrem, "Some Notes on Demonology," 9.

<sup>64</sup> Campbell Bonner, "Traces of Thaumaturgic Technique in the Miracles," *Harvard Theological Review* 20 (1927): 171-81; "The Technique of Exorcism," *Harvard Theological Review* 36 (1943): 39-49.

thaumaturgic technique” in describing some of Jesus’ miracles.<sup>65</sup> For example, in Mark 7:34 and Mark 8:12, the words “sigh” and “groan” are analogous to uses in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (hereafter PGM) in which these words are meant to amplify the magician’s efficacy.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the deep inhale would signify possession of a spirit.<sup>67</sup> The words as written in the Gospel of Mark, therefore, would have conjured in the minds of the audience the behavior of magicians.<sup>68</sup> He offered a similar word study for other words significant in magical practices. Bonner’s comparisons were thin, but his work was meaningful for other reasons. What was significant about Bonner’s study was that it imagined the formative Christian experience as a lived experience in which texts had audiences and audiences understood texts via a series of references. Bonner presented a possible appreciation of Jesus’ actions within the context of an audience that was familiar with magic and magicians.

In 1933, Arthur Darby Nock published “Paul and the Magus,” a word study on μάγος and μαγεία in conjunction with an exegetical study of the Bar Jesus episode in Acts 13.<sup>69</sup> Nock’s study was useful in foregrounding the ambiguity inherent in these words in antiquity. He also demonstrated how other words related to magic displayed the same ambiguity – words like φάρμακον, φίλτρον, and ἐπωδή. Nock’s study remains relevant and useful, if for no other reason than for its simple reminder that ancient vocabularies are conceptually slippery and do not conform to modern vocabularies. Our “magic” and ancient μαγεία are not

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<sup>65</sup> Bonner, “Traces of Thaumaturgic Technique,” 171.

<sup>66</sup> Bonner, “Traces of Thaumaturgic Technique,” 171-74.

<sup>67</sup> Bonner, “Traces of Thaumaturgic Technique,” 174.

<sup>68</sup> Bonner, “Traces of Thaumaturgic Technique,” 174.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur Darby Nock, “Paul and the Magus,” in *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, 5 vols., F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake eds., (London: Macmillan, 1920-1933), V.164-88.

congruent.<sup>70</sup> Primarily, what Nock wanted to emphasize was that the ancients did not distinguish between magic and religion as we moderns do, therefore the wonders Jesus worked occupied a liminal space difficult for modern minds to compartmentalize.<sup>71</sup> This conceptual slippage is especially useful to the present project, in which I posit that the word *μαγεία* and the concept it signifies are largely ambiguous and exceedingly malleable.

Pierre Samhain's "L'accusation de magie contre le Christ dans les Évangiles" was published in 1938.<sup>72</sup> Continuing Eitrem's project of correlating the magical with the demonic, Samhain argued that in Judeo-Christian circles accusations of magic were considered tantamount to accusations of demonic collusion.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Samhain claimed, the Beelzebul Controversy was truly an accusation of magic – one borne out by Jesus' use of binding language in the Parable of the Strong Man.<sup>74</sup> Samhain also suggested that charges of magic can be found in John's Gospel, particularly in John 7:20, in which Jesus is accused of "having a demon."<sup>75</sup> The idea, then, is that Satanic collusion *was* magic.<sup>76</sup> In many ways, Samhain's analysis was insightful and fruitful, especially concerning the Beelzebul Controversy. But his work was also predicated upon the assertion that the Judeo-Christian conception of magic was created in a cultural vacuum, free from pagan influence. In Samhain's conception (and that of Eitrem, Fridrichsen, and much later, Garrett), the

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<sup>70</sup> Nock, "Paul and the Magos," 170.

<sup>71</sup> Nock, "Paul and the Magos," 170.

<sup>72</sup> Pierre Samhain, "L'accusation de magie contre le Christ dans les Évangiles," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 15 (1938): 449-90.

<sup>73</sup> Samhain, "L'accusation de magie," 454-55.

<sup>74</sup> Samhain, "L'accusation de magie," 471.

<sup>75</sup> Samhain, "L'accusation de magie," 473.

<sup>76</sup> Samhain, "L'accusation de magie," 489.

correlation of magic *solely* with the demonic precluded the possibility that other notions of Christian magic existed. The syncretism highlighted much earlier by Deissmann is testament to the fact that cultures are often in contact with one another, and that this contact produces both differentiation *and* assimilation. Thus far, many of the studies of Christian magic have been solely focused on the former – on delineating how Judeo-Christian traditions of “miracle” are distinct from Graeco-Roman magic. Studies proceeding in the other direction tend to use Graeco-Roman magic as a means to illuminate choice passages in the Christian literary tradition but offer little else.

Carl Kraeling’s article “Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy?” was also a comparative piece, aimed at determining whether or not Jesus’ accusers were accusing him of invoking spirits of the dead for the purposes of divination.<sup>77</sup> Kraeling analysed statements in the Gospel of Mark concerning Jesus and John the Baptist. What he found is that in Mark 6:14-16, the people and Herod likely claimed that Jesus used the spirit of John the Baptist in order to perform his wonders.<sup>78</sup> While his conclusions were not quite convincing, Kraeling’s article is useful, like Bonner’s work, in that it helps us imagine lived communities and their reactions to Jesus’ deeds. What might first century Jews have thought when they encountered Jesus, or stories about Jesus and his followers? I am not certain that claiming Jesus “is John” is tantamount to claiming that Jesus’ ministry is animated by the spirit of John the Baptist, but it is useful to remind oneself that texts, like cultures, are not produced in vacuums.

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<sup>77</sup> Carl H. Kraeling, “Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 59 no. 2 (1940): 147-57.

<sup>78</sup> Kraeling, “Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy?” 155.

Anton Fridrichsen's *The Problem of Miracle in Early Christianity* argued that miracle narratives had been a great tool for generating conversion and enthusiasm.<sup>79</sup> Despite their efficacy, these narratives were also a great source of embarrassment since they invited comparisons with stories about magicians.<sup>80</sup> To mitigate the charge of sorcery, the earliest Christians always offered up miracle narratives with warnings about overvaluing such deeds, especially in comparison to teachings.<sup>81</sup> Fridrichsen's study is a thoroughgoing analysis of early Christian narratives, and his treatment of Celsus and others is erudite and incisive. Yet, the assertion that miracle narratives proved embarrassing for early Christianity is problematic when one considers the fact that our texts appear to celebrate the wonderworking of Jesus and the heroes of the early Church with great aplomb (and hardly contain warnings against the overvalue of deeds as opposed to words). While I am not accusing of Fridrichsen of selecting evidence to support his conclusions, I am suggesting that sustained attention to a wider range of Christian narratives, from Paul to the apocrypha, might have lent his volume a richer resonance. Early Christianity's discourse of magic was multi-faceted, and a fuller treatment of texts could have yielded just such an assessment.

In summation, this period of the study of magic and the New Testament is dominated by finding points of contact among Graeco-Roman paganism, Hellenistic Judaism, and emergent Christianity. Not surprisingly, however, these studies overwhelmingly emerge with the conclusion that while certain points of contact may exist between Christianity and Graeco-Roman traditions, Christianity was, essentially, something different from its pagan

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<sup>79</sup> Fridrichsen, *Problem of Miracle*, 56-63.

<sup>80</sup> Fridrichsen, *Problem of Miracle*, 62-63.

<sup>81</sup> Fridrichsen, *Problem of Miracle*, 146-47.



counterpart. It is true that Christianity was a distinct phenomenon; it is likewise true that Christianity *was* a Graeco-Roman religion. What this means is that it emerged from the same context as the cult of Bacchus or Magna Mater. If we take this assertion seriously, does our understanding of magic in early Christianity change? Perhaps it both changes and remains the same. As I will demonstrate, magic can function as a means of assimilation and differentiation. In Luke's Gospel, for example, Eitrem and Samhain's work will be of invaluable importance as magic and Satanism become intertwined. Luke wishes to distinguish the Kingdom of God from the domains of Satan, and he does so through the use of exorcisms and healings in particular. Yet, in the canonical Acts, this emphasis on the Satanic dimension of magic is elided in favor of demonstrating its efficacy in generating converts and foregrounding the power and authority of *all* of Jesus' apostles, inclusive of Paul. Existing models for understanding how magic correlates with Satanic collusion may be helpful for excavating Luke's Gospel, but new modes of meaning-making will need to be employed for analyzing Acts, since the Satanic does not figure so prominently there. We can gain a foothold on the necessary methodological innovation by analyzing the contributions and lacunae in the latest scholarship.

### **Part IC. Modern Magic: Recent Scholarship on Formative Christianity and Magic**

Recent scholarship represents a new intellectual trajectory. Since the 1980s, the study of magic in relation to early Christianity has become a study of "constructedness." No longer do scholars posit, like Morton Smith, that the Jesus of history was a magician simply because he did "the things that magicians claimed to do."<sup>82</sup> Rather, modern scholarship is more attuned to how the concept of magic is delineated and disseminated in the ancient world.

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<sup>82</sup> Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978), 149.

Take Alan Segal, for example. In his landmark essay “Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition,” he writes the following:

The most interesting question for scholarship is not whether or not the charge of magic against Jesus is true or not. Since he does not claim the title, there can be no possible demonstration or disproof of a charge which is a matter of interpretation in the Hellenistic world. The most interesting question for scholarship is to define the social and cultural conditions and presuppositions that allow such charges and counter-charges to be made.<sup>83</sup>

Many scholars have since taken up Segal’s challenge, attempting, in their way, to give due consideration to the social contexts in which the charges and countercharges of magic were made. The works treated in this section might loosely be divided into two groups: (1) works presupposing that “magic” is a bound category inclusive of certain practices; and, (2) those treating “magic” as a discursive construct. I should like to begin my survey with the first group.

In many ways, much of the most recent scholarship on magic in early Christianity is a reaction to Morton Smith’s landmark 1978 volume *Jesus the Magician*. In this and other monographs, Smith asserts that the Jesus of history was a Graeco-Roman magician since formative Christian texts portray him engaging in activities undertaken by Graeco-Roman magicians.<sup>84</sup> He builds his argument by

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<sup>83</sup> Alan F. Segal, “Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, eds. M. J. Vermaseren and Roel B. Broek (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 369-70.

<sup>84</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 149. See also Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1973), 223-24; Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). I have tabled all discussions of the authenticity of Smith’s Secret Gospel. I do not believe his work on this gospel is relevant to his discussion of Graeco-Roman magic and Christianity found in *Jesus the Magician*. If anything, preoccupation with the Secret Gospel has detracted from Smith’s astute observations on magic and miracle in the formative Christian era. See, for example, Garrett’s dissertation, in which she suggests that Smith’s “analysis of NT materials and his reconstruction of Jesus’ career are closely tied up with his presentation and interpretation of a fragment from ‘the Secret Gospel’ and its accompanying epistle/commentary.” Garrett then abruptly drops any discussion of the Secret Gospel, claiming that the issues involved are too complicated to take up. Garrett, “Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts,” 54.

comparing Jesus' activities with those enumerated in practical texts such as the *Greek Magical Papyri* and related literature.<sup>85</sup> According to Smith, the Gospel writers attempted to excise the most obvious trappings of magical activity from Jesus' legacy.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately, these edits were not carried out with the sort of precision one might expect from a theologically sophisticated redactor, and therefore, our gospel tradition retains magical elements that could never be completely eliminated.<sup>87</sup> Such elements comprised the very core of Christian tradition – Jesus' title as "Son of God", his lengthy miraculous activity, the Eucharist, Jesus' baptism at the hands of John, etc.<sup>88</sup> Jesus' identity was also confirmed by outsiders such as Celsus, whose vehement insistence that Jesus was a magician weighs heavily in favor of such a classification.<sup>89</sup>

In essence, Smith's contention is deceptively simple: for him, a magician is one who performs the activities typically associated with magic.<sup>90</sup> This practical approach is very attractive, and one that I wish to rehabilitate to some extent, but it is not without its problems. One such problem is the fact that individuals sometimes inadvertently perform activities without understanding their full meaning. Simply posed: is every individual well-versed in legerdemain a modern stage magician? More problematic, however, is Smith's positing of a "social type" of the magician – a

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<sup>85</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 98-139.

<sup>86</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 92-93.

<sup>87</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 92-93.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 122.

<sup>89</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 21-80.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 69.

Weberian carryover, no doubt, but lacking Weber's nuanced attention to the malleability of social types.<sup>91</sup> Smith suggests that this magician social type was called by various titles in the ancient world – titles inclusive of “divine man,” “magician” (here he means the Persian loan-word “*magos*”), and “Son of God.”<sup>92</sup> Since all of these individuals essentially performed the same activities, they occupied the same category of religious specialist. That said, the positive or negative valence accorded to this religious specialist depended upon audience perception.<sup>93</sup> He writes, “Once the requirements of social status and decorum are met, the same man will customarily be called *theios aner*, or son of god, by his admirers, a magician by his enemies. Within this area all three terms refer to a single social type.”<sup>94</sup> It is undoubtedly true that one person's wonderworker is another's magician – the debate between Celsus and Origen evidences as much.<sup>95</sup> The problem, however, is the positing of a stable, consistent “social type” that encompasses the *same* actions. To put it another way: what Smith fails to consider is *why* persons performing the very same actions were subject to such ambiguity in reception. He would doubtless claim that the theological enmity of certain groups would demand outsiders be labeled as magicians, despite their performance of similar practices deemed innocuous.<sup>96</sup> I contend that the ambiguity of the practices *themselves* is what allows such charges and countercharges

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<sup>91</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 68-80.

<sup>92</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 68-80.

<sup>93</sup> Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 229; *Jesus the Magician*, 68-93.

<sup>94</sup> Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 229.

<sup>95</sup> See Eugene Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician: Celsus and Origen on Jesus*. SBL Dissertation Series 64 (Chico: Scholars' Press, 1964).

<sup>96</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 45-67.

to be made. This emphasis on practices and their reception is in marked contrast to the work of most subsequent scholars who critique Smith's approach, many of whom limit their critiques to the discursive realm and disregard altogether Smith's emphasis on the practical aspects of magic.

An exception to the preoccupation with the discursive emphasis of scholarly analysis to the neglect of analysis of practices is J. M. Hull's *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*.<sup>97</sup> Hull's work is dedicated to addressing how an awareness of magic might have affected the transmission of the formative Christian tradition. He argues that Graeco-Roman narratives were constructed and interpreted against two possible backgrounds – the eschatological and the magical.<sup>98</sup> For Hull, the expression of these “world views” is not so much explicit as it is implicit in the adoption of certain theological precepts. In the case of magic, he contends that a supernatural feat might betray a magical worldview if it includes the following concepts: they have no cause but the will of the operator; they are based on “a theory of sympathetic bonds of *mana* or something similar”; and they are believed to result from the performance of rituals that are “efficacious in themselves.”<sup>99</sup> Using this operative framework, Hull claims that the synoptic gospels offer numerous examples of magical thinking. For example, Luke's gospel has a “thoroughly magical world-view,” adopting a tangible, real concept of angels and demons and even a working notion of *mana*-like power.<sup>100</sup> In contrast, Matthew's gospel is a tradition “purified” of magic since it has been

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<sup>97</sup>J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1974).

<sup>98</sup>Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 47.

<sup>99</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 54.

<sup>100</sup> In support of his assertion that a *mana*-like understanding of magical power suffuses Luke's gospel, Hull gives the example of the hemorrhaging woman who touches Jesus in Luke 8:43-46. Here, Luke's Jesus claims

purged of details that might lend themselves to a magical interpretation.<sup>101</sup> Unlike Smith, Hull believes that Jesus himself did not think of himself as a magician, but rather that the Christians utilized various aspects of the "myth of the magus" in order to draw attention to Christ's message in the most efficacious manner.<sup>102</sup>

Although Hull is inclusive of discourse and practices in his understanding of Graeco-Roman magic, his overall analysis is exceedingly problematic. His primary contribution to the study of magic in formative Christianity is his argument that supernatural deeds in the Graeco-Roman world were interpreted against either an eschatological or a magical background. Such a distinction is arbitrary at best.<sup>103</sup> Deeds may escape this categorization altogether, or be classed as *both* magical and eschatological. Furthermore, Hull's characterization of a magical worldview, too, is evocative of a rather nefarious primitivism: "...growth in knowledge turns science into pseudo-science, and the divine mysteries into magic."<sup>104</sup> The operative principle here, of course, is that human development has allowed us to term "magic" what the ancients might have called "divine mystery." Old "science" has become the latest "pseudo-science." As humanity moves inexorably forward, ancient ideas devolve in sophistication. The implicit corollary, naturally, is that the modern mind is better equipped to understand the ancient world than the ancients themselves. Perhaps this is why

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that he can feel the power going out of him as the woman touches him. Hull interprets this as evidence of Luke's magical worldview, inclusive of a notion of *mana*. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 160.

<sup>101</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 116.

<sup>102</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 145.

<sup>103</sup> It is influenced by Judeo-Christian theology at worst. Why are "magical" and "eschatological" the only offered options for interpretation, for example? And what about narratives of supernatural deeds that occur in eschatological context? How might we compartmentalize such narratives? Even Hull himself admitted that apocalyptic literature might be rife with magical activity in his discussion of Revelation. See Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 144.

<sup>104</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 59.

Hull insists that it is up to the modern interpreter to decide whether or not a magical worldview undergirds synoptic narratives.<sup>105</sup> Etic methodologies are not inherently inappropriate. In fact, all methodologies are etic to some extent, since the modern interpreter cannot shed her modern sensibilities completely. The problem with Hull's approach is that it imposes an etic definition of magic on the ancient context and then claims that such a definition was part of the ancient worldview, since ancient attitude could be neatly compartmentalized into eschatological or magical worldviews. This type of circular reasoning is hardly useful if we are to make much sense out of ancient magic.

Yet another scholar of formative Christianity who offers up a definition of magic is P. J. Achtemeier. In his article, "The Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," he asserts that Luke's miracle narratives are always buttressed by Jesus' teaching, such that neither wonderworking nor theological instruction is secondary. Achtemeier, like Hull, also adopts the notion of a "magical worldview."<sup>106</sup> The problem is that our Christian writers were rather disparaging of magic, at least on the level of discourse (on a practical, or narrative level, they were far more willing to engage with it). Consequently, Achtemeier and those of his ilk are ill-equipped to explain how the earliest Christians could dabble in magical activities while still being utterly disparaging of magic. He can only offer the following unsatisfactory explanation:

In sum, there is as much evidence that Luke has toned down the magical aspects of Jesus' miracles as there is that he presents such stories under the particular influence of the Hellenistic understanding of magic... That Luke is writing for people who understood, and perhaps even credited, magical practices, could hardly be denied; but

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<sup>105</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 59.

<sup>106</sup> Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 560.

he does more, I would argue to combat such belief than he does, if only inadvertently, to foster it.<sup>107</sup>

It is presumptuous to assume that our early Christian authors inadvertently advanced views contrary to their own theological agendas. If Luke is indeed writing for people who understood magical practices, then does it not seem likely that his inclusion of such practices was both intentional and meaningful rather than inadvertent? Like so many scholars who offer bound definitions of magic, Achtemeier cannot allow for ambiguity.

H. C. Kee, too, argues that magic emerges from a particular worldview which can be distinguished by particular markers.<sup>108</sup> For example, Kee claims that, “magic is concerned with the manipulation of forces; religion is occupied with communication among beings.”<sup>109</sup> This dichotomy between manipulation and communication allows him to assert that the PGM demonstrate the workings of a magical worldview whereas the New Testament exemplifies that of a religious one.<sup>110</sup> Despite exceptions, such as the magical incidents in Acts, the overarching worldview obtains and “the occasional story...does not invalidate the distinction, nor does it warrant ignoring the differences between the respective world views that lie behind magic and miracle.”<sup>111</sup> Kee implores analysts of ancient phenomena to

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<sup>107</sup> Achtemeier, “Lucan Perspective,” 558.

<sup>108</sup> H. C. Kee, *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective*. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980); *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven: Yale, 1983); *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>109</sup> Kee, *Christian Origins*, 64. See also Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic*, 3, in which Kee defines magic as, “a technique, through word or act, by which a desired end is achieved, whether that end lies in the solution to the seeker’s problem or in damage to the enemy who has caused the problem.”

<sup>110</sup> Kee, *Christian Origins*, 65-67. Another problem, of course, is Kee’s uncritical use of the term “religious worldview.” Like the term “magic,” its counterpart “religion” is fraught with ideological baggage of the Judeo-Christian variety.

<sup>111</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic*, 114-116. Despite his overarching claim that a magical worldview underlies the New Testament as a whole, Kee does assert that different worldviews came into favor at different times. The magical worldview held sway during the second century, which is why a later book like Acts betrays more of the magical, so to speak. Interestingly enough, Richard Gordon would later corroborate this assertion in his essay “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic” (164-165, 207, and 229-231). According to Gordon, the



deepen their understandings of ancient contexts, not merely literary, but also social and cultural.<sup>112</sup> Yet, when faced with the problem of the ostensibly magical activities narrated in Acts, Kee does not attempt to widen his contextual scope. Such a deeper understanding might seek to uncover the reasons that contradictions and ambiguity ever obtain in our studies of ancient magic. Rather, Kee merely asserts that these activities are “traces” subject to the book’s overarching “religious” worldview, dismissing altogether his own call for a careful excavation of literary context.

All four of these writers – Smith, Hull, Achtemeier, and Kee – present a category of magic which is bounded by certain characteristics, or in the case of Smith, certain practices. Rather than a convention of interpretation, these analysts believe that magic is magic, despite the context in which it appears. If an activity or a narrative contains certain characteristics, then it can be classed as magical. Such simplicity is alluring, but unfortunately, ancient evidence does not yield itself so readily. In many of our texts, wondrous deeds are done by individuals who are most assuredly not magicians. As such, all of the above scholars must grapple with the problem of inconsistency – why the earliest Christians were able to appropriate magical practices yet espouse a clear disdain for magic.

One method for attending to the issue of ambiguity is to address the charge of magic in view of the context in which such a charge is made. Take David Aune, for example, who offers the following definition of magic:

*Magic is defined as that form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution. Unless religious activities fit that definition, they will not be regarded as magical for the purposes of this study. Religious activities which fit this*

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Principate (and afterwards) would see an increased interest in all things magical, contributing to what he terms a “strong notion” of magic.

<sup>112</sup> Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World*, 3.

first and primary criterion must also fit a second criterion: *goals sought within the context of religious deviance are magical when attained through the management of supernatural powers in such a way that results are virtually guaranteed.*<sup>113</sup>

Aune claims that he is offering up a more flexible definition than those of his predecessors since he considers carefully the context of social deviance in which Jesus and his followers worked their wonders.<sup>114</sup> Yet, certain of the characteristics he posits – “goals sought within the context of religious deviance are magical when attained...in such a way that results are virtually guaranteed” – retain the same sort of stability as something like Kee’s manipulation versus communication dichotomy. Furthermore, as Sue Garrett rightly points out, accusations were not always made by dominant social parties in order to label and control those of subordinate groups.<sup>115</sup> Members within a group could levy the Charge of magic against other group members in order to compel proper behavior, for example.<sup>116</sup> Aune’s understanding of magic would not account for “charges” of magic made in inner-community situations. At any rate, it is unclear how an understanding of magic as social deviance might help an interpreter more fully understand instances of Christian wonderworking. How might understanding Peter as a religious deviant, for example, give a richer resonance to his revivification of the dried tuna fish in the *Acts of Peter*? Classifying this particular wonder as magical simply because Christianity was not the dominant religious form at the time does nothing to deepen our understanding of the deed. In view of the fact that in the text, Peter – though he performs such deeds – is given access to the Roman Senator Marcellus, we must wonder to what extent a proponent of Christianity was seen as “outsider.” Should Christian deeds performed

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<sup>113</sup> Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 1514. Italics his.

<sup>114</sup> Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 1527.

<sup>115</sup> Garrett, “Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts,” 71.

<sup>116</sup> Garrett, “Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts,” 71.

before Constantine be considered magical, while those performed afterwards be relegated firmly to the sphere of religion? If such a policy were adopted, how might one classify the wonders performed by so-called heretics like Montanists? What about deeds performed by a now-legitimate Christian in areas of the empire where Christians were still a demographic minority? The classing of a group as insider or outsider is as subjective as establishing the aforementioned boundary between Christian magic and Christian miracle. In fact, suggesting that Christians engaged in so-called magic only because they were considered outsiders is an exceedingly effective means of “purifying” nascent Christianity from the “taint” of pagan magic. After all, if the Christians had been considered insiders from the very beginning, their practices would not have been considered magical at all. As we will see, Christian practices *were* likely considered magical, by some insiders and outsiders. Magic cannot be so cleanly categorized.

As mentioned above, Alan Segal argued in “Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition” that scholars ought to pay closer attention to how the term magic was used in the culture being studied.<sup>117</sup> In fact, Segal argued that one of the functions of the charge of magic was to provide clarity among a sea of ambiguous activities and persons.<sup>118</sup> He writes, “the charge of “magic” helps distinguish between various groups of people from the perspective of the speaker but does not necessarily imply any essential difference in the actions of the participants.”<sup>119</sup> The Beelzebul controversy, thus, was a means of clarification.<sup>120</sup> Group identity and membership emerges from definition against another group in instances of

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<sup>117</sup> Segal, “Hellenistic Magic,” 369-70.

<sup>118</sup> Segal, “Hellenistic Magic,” 367.

<sup>119</sup> Segal, “Hellenistic Magic,” 367.

<sup>120</sup> Segal, “Hellenistic Magic,” 367.

conflict like the one detailed between Jesus and those drawing demonic power in the Beelzebul Controversy.<sup>121</sup> In contrast, the PGM emerge from a context in which such clarification is unnecessary, since magic and religion are not in conflict in Hellenistic Egypt.<sup>122</sup>

Segal's insistence that no essential characteristic exemplifies the magical is what dominates the most recent studies of magic and early Christianity. In Sue Garrett's Yale University dissertation, she writes, "In the Graeco-Roman world, accusations of magic typically occurred in situations of social conflict. Because the use of magic was regarded as socially unacceptable, labelling someone a 'magician' was an effective way to squelch, avenge, or simply discredit undesirable behavior."<sup>123</sup> For Garrett, questions of ontology are secondary to questions of interpretation.<sup>124</sup> For example, in the case of the Platonic philosopher Apuleius of Madaura, we may not learn much by asking whether or not he was a magician. But by understanding what his accusers wished to accomplish by labeling him as such, we begin to understand something about the social situation in second-century Oea, where Apuleius was tried for *magicorum maleficiorum*.<sup>125</sup>

Garrett compares the work of the ancient historian to the ethnographer. For her, history is essentially an exercise of thick description.<sup>126</sup> The literary critic must, "pay close attention to symbolic forms and to social relationships; must interpret the whole in

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<sup>121</sup> Segal, "Hellenistic Magic," 367.

<sup>122</sup> Segal, "Hellenistic Magic," 371.

<sup>123</sup> Garrett, "Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts," 7.

<sup>124</sup> Garrett, "Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts," 8.

<sup>125</sup> Garrett, "Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts," 7-8.

<sup>126</sup> Garrett, "Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts," 8.

relationship to the parts and vice versa; must highlight recurring patterns in the text; must show how an action performed or word spoken in one place articulates, replicates, or confirms what is elsewhere.”<sup>127</sup> In the book based on her dissertation, Garrett explains that one must interpret biblical texts in light of other texts in which magic is better understood.<sup>128</sup> These texts include the magical papyri.<sup>129</sup>

For Garrett, magic in the Jewish context was understood differently from magic in the pagan context.<sup>130</sup> Taking her lead from Samhain, she claims that in Jewish texts dating from the late Second Temple period through the early second century CE, magic was inextricably linked with false prophecy and satanic agency.<sup>131</sup> Ironically enough, Garrett does assert that magic was an irreducibly ambiguous concept, and that the early Christians believed it to be open to interpretation.<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, she also asserts that the Christian imagination likewise irreducibly associated magic with Satan. Once again, the issue is not that Garrett is incorrect; doubtless *some* Christians did associate magic with such things. But if we are to take seriously the ambiguity of magic as a concept, we must own that it can occupy more spaces than a satanic other and the false obverse of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Jesus never claimed to be a magician according to our extant sources, but he did engage in activities commonly associated with magic. On this point, Morton Smith is

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<sup>127</sup> Garrett, “Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts,” 8.

<sup>128</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 9. Garrett’s dissertation and the book based on her dissertation are invaluable to this study. Garrett added new material to her dissertation before publication, but certain sections were also omitted. As a result, I have opted to consult both works here.

<sup>129</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 9.

<sup>130</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 13.

<sup>131</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 13.

<sup>132</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 18-19.

absolutely correct. The question of excavating the social context in which such associations with magic are made is not a question answered without some degree of intellectual messiness. Was Jesus a magician? Did his followers understand him as such? Did his enemies? Until now, the overwhelming majority of studies of early Christianity and Graeco-Roman magic have sought simple “yes” or “no” answers. Perhaps, however, the answers are more accurately rendered on registers of “both/and.” What I mean is that it is possible for individuals to abhor a thing yet engage in it, or to disavow certain portions of a particular tradition. Christians’ disparaging of magic need not indicate a categorical disavowal of any and all activities that may be associated with magic. Rather, as I hope to demonstrate, it is a partial and contradictory disavowal – a disinclination towards precisely those practices falling under the aegis of magic which are stereotypically considered transgressive or morally reprehensible. Not everything magical is excluded from the Christians’ wonderworking repertoire.

Magic is a polysemous discourse, one whose contours are never sure. Its shape coalesces momentarily before dissipating, only to come together again in another narrative – like smoke obscuring stage magician’s legerdemain. The sources we have for magic’s reconstruction are fragmentary and fractious. Our authors have agendas. They are contradictory. At times we may be able to discern the strategies undertaken by the author of an early Christian text when he describes magical practices in a particular way. Many times, we are left floundering. With so much uncertainty inherent in the subject of inquiry, it is difficult to subscribe wholly to studies whose conclusions seem doubly secure. From Deissmann’s insistence that Graeco-Roman magical texts and primitive Christian texts were separate canons to Kraeling’s assertion that Jesus was indeed accused of necromancy, to

Aune's declaration that deviance determines the categorization, our authors seem relatively clear about what is or is not magic, even when they do not clearly define magic in their work. In my opinion, this clarity has served only to obscure the ancient evidence, to contrive it to fit our notions of what magic ought to be, since we moderns are so certain of its rhetorical contours.

## **Part II. Chapter Summaries**

My aim in the current project is to introduce uncertainty into the study of magic, to give due consideration to the fact that history is never sure and that my object of inquiry is difficult to circumscribe. I will fully detail my fuller methodological recommendations in Chapter 1, but I wish to anticipate some of my conclusions here.

In terms of methodology, we must be cautious. There are things we cannot know. Because documentary evidence is by its nature fragmentary, we must assume that many of the valences of magic in the Graeco-Roman world are irretrievably lost. More important, however, we must allow for conceptual flexibility, contradiction, and lacunae. We must also account for the fact that the ancient world produced at least two types of discourses about magic (although there were likely more): discourses in which individuals conceptualized magic, and discourses in which magical practices were narrated and described. A flexible, comprehensive methodology must take into account both of these types of discourses.

Keeping all of this in mind, I have delineated a "magical stereotype," which I outline in Chapter 1. This stereotype is extracted from an extensive word study of *μάγος* and its variants in Greek and Latin literature. Like Nock and many other scholars, I have included a word study to demonstrate the flexibility and ambiguity attendant to the term. Unlike Nock and others, instead of attempting to ameliorate these ambiguities by offering a coherent

overarching concept of magic, I conduct this word study in order to distill as many of the disparate characteristics of magic as possible, allowing contradictions to remain as they are. What emerges from this word study is a typology or a continuum, in which the word μάγος and its variants are associated with a vast multiplicity of magical *practices*. Some of these practices tend to be more often characterized as transgressive and associated with magic – practices like love spells and necromancy. Other practices – exorcism and healing, for example – are associated with magic but are not necessarily *overwhelmingly* associated with magic. There is freedom for reinterpreting this latter set of ambiguous practices in a manner that may frame them as “non-magical.” The Gospel of Luke is a prime example of how such a reinterpretation might proceed. Magical practices, thus, are arranged along a continuum, ranging from more to less likely of being associated with the rhetorical charge of magic. In turn, the rhetorical charge of magic is built upon these practices. Charges of magic against an individual and practices of magic work in tandem to create a discourse of magic that is dynamic and fluid, conforming to the needs of a particular text by either shedding various characteristics of the practices of magic or by modifying the rhetorical charge of magic. Both strategies are at play in our early Christian texts.

A word about terminology: I have retained the English “magic” to refer to this ancient concept of magic throughout this work. I have no illusions about the applicability of this concept outside the ancient world, but I do wish to maintain some straightforwardness and have not developed a novel vocabulary. I will also use the neutral “wonderworker” from time to time to refer to the stereotypical magical practices outlined in Chapter 1. “Miracle” refers to wonders described solely from the Christians’ point of view.



Essentially, this is a study on texts concerned with the earliest Christian heroes – Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Chapter 2 focuses on Jesus. For the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus represents a “baseline” of Christian magical practices and the exemplar from which the apostles’ magical narratives deviate. Because of this, it is necessary to analyze how Luke crafts Jesus as a magical protagonist. Like all chapters following Chapter 1, Chapter 2 outlines two levels of magical discourse in an early Christian text – what I am terming the practical and rhetorical levels. The practical level of analysis describes how the author narrates magical *practices*. The rhetorical level describes how the author puts the description of magical practices to rhetorical use. In Luke’s Gospel, for example, the practical level of discourse is concerned with demonstrating how Luke makes great effort to remove the stereotypical trappings of magic from the wondrous activities he includes in his Gospel. From the traditions he inherits from Mark, he removes mentions of healings through foreign words, spittle, and the like. These redactions have the effect of “sanitizing” Luke’s Gospel, thereby allowing him to remove some of the association with magic from his text. On the rhetorical level of discourse, this newly-sanitized version of his magical tradition is mobilized against Satan in two ways. First, Luke’s magical practices, like exorcism and healing, portend and prefigure the coming of the Kingdom of God. Second, Luke’s version of the Beelzebul Controversy combines the practice of exorcism with eschatological expectation, resulting in a magical discourse which is uniquely Christian and uniquely Lucan. By stripping the magic from his source and by adding eschatological elements to the magical discourse that remained, Luke frames his Jesus as something much more than a magician.

Chapter 3 likewise proceeds along two levels of analysis. Here, we encounter Peter and Paul as our objects of study in the canonical Acts of the Apostles. The practical analysis

is a comparative undertaking, demonstrating how the stereotypical elements of magic that Luke excised from his Gospel are returned in his second volume. In other words, Luke's Jesus may not heal through proxy, but Luke's apostles certainly do. Luke's Jesus does not perform destructive miracles, but Luke's apostles have no problem putting wayward followers to death. These discrepancies suggest a difference in stature between Jesus and the disciples, subordinating them to Jesus' authority but making them equal to one another. Rhetorically, Luke's theme of egalitarianism obtains as he creates a parallel wonderworking tradition between Peter, who is an established leader of the Jesus Movement, and Paul, whose authority may be in question. The magical discourse in the Acts of the Apostles bears out the thesis that it is a consensus document in which the author seeks a rapprochement between Petrine and Pauline branches of Christianity.

In many ways, the two levels of discourse are perhaps the most clearly seen in Chapter 4, a study of the magical discourse in the *Acts of Peter*. Here, the practical aim of my analysis is to demonstrate the indebtedness of Peter's wonderworking to the traditions of the sorts of magicians who might have used formularies like the PGM. The *Acts of Peter* betrays a thoroughgoing knowledge of magical practice and cannot be thought of as a tradition uninfluenced by Graeco-Roman magic. Rhetorically, however, this practical similarity presents problems for our author, who wishes to capitalize on the spiritual efficacy of the wondrous without subscribing to magic wholesale. The narrative solution is the introduction of a literary foil, namely Simon Magus, who functions here as a "flat" character designed for the sole purpose of bearing the theological evil in the text.

As is evident even from these brief chapter summaries, the rhetorical level of analysis often lends itself well to strict binaries between the approved religious practice being

espoused by the author of a text and a magical “other.” It is this level that has been overemphasized by analysts of magic, much to the neglect of the practical level. Yet, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, the rhetorical level is not the *only* level upon which the magical operates. Narrations of magical practices convey meaning as well as metadiscourses of magic. I hope, in some small way, to begin excavating the various shades of meaning left behind in these narrations.

History is never sure, but this may prove an advantage here. There is value in the uncertainty brought on by the ambiguities inherent in ancient discourses of magic. There is value in beginning with the presupposition that the evidence will not cohere in a manner consistent with modern rationality. Each ambiguity invites the possibility of another nuance, another meaning to contribute to an already polyvalent concept. Each inconsistency opens the prospect of a new perspective on ancient meaning-making. In this case, the fuller the conceptual framework, the more tools we have available to lend a richer resonance to our understanding of the ancient world and its many magics.

## CHAPTER 1: A NEW MAGIC: SUPERNATURAL POWER IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

In 158 CE, the Platonic philosopher Apuleius of Madaura was brought before the proconsul of Africa on charges of *crimen magiae*, i.e. deeds of magic.<sup>133</sup> The resultant text of his defense is an account rich with information about the way the concept of magic was not only understood by ancient literati like Apuleius, but also his accusers. As a result, Apuleius' *Apology* is invaluable to the analyst of ancient magical discourse *and* practice. Alongside this text, many other writings also contribute to our understanding of how magic was understood and disseminated in the ancient world. Many texts explicitly term certain practices as 'magical.' Other texts consider magic in a broader manner. *All* of these texts, however, comprise an overarching discourse of Graeco-Roman magic that demonstrates stability and flexibility. The following chapter represents a distillation of magical activities and discourses about magic from a wide corpus of Graeco-Roman texts.

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133. Despite the fact that his accusers believed him to have murdered his own stepson, the charge of magic was the only one that was brought against Apuleius, *Apology*, Christopher P. Jones, trans., Loeb Classical Library 534 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 25: "Aemelianus rested it entirely on this one point, that I was a magician." Scholars are divided in terms of whether or not Apuleius was tried under the *Lex Cornelia* of 81 CE. Fritz Graf believes so, as does Vincent Hunink. See Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, Franklin Philip, trans., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 66; Vincent Hunink, ed., *Apuleius of Madauros, Pro Se De Magia*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 13; See also Derek Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World*, (Malden, Blackwell, 2008), xiv. The problem with such easy assertions is that the *Lex Cornelia* does not outlaw magic as such, but perhaps only wrongful death brought about by undetected means. See James Rives, "Magic in Roman Law: The Reconstruction of a Crime," *Classical Antiquity* 22, no. 2 (October 2003): 313-339. Keith Bradley offers convincing evidence that Apuleius need not have been brought to trial under the *Lex Cornelia* specifically. He writes that the trial in question exemplified *cognitio extra ordinem*, which did not require the invocation of a *lex*. See Keith Bradley, "Apuleius' *Apology*: Text and Context," in *Apuleius and Africa*, eds. Benjamin Todd Lee, Ellen Finkelpearl, and Luca Graverini, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 23-34. The question of law, and of whether or not magic was explicitly forbidden by Roman legal code is important to consider. Scholars have been rather quick to dismiss magic as having been outlawed, but as Rives so aptly points out, the evidence does not always warrant such blanket statements.

I begin with Apuleius simply because the *Apology* most clearly exemplifies the problem of conceptualizing Graeco-Roman magic and the shortcomings of extant methodologies. According to Apuleius' accusers, he had secured the affections of a very wealthy widow by illicit means.<sup>134</sup> His *Apology* contains the details of this accusation (among others) and the arguments he mounted in his defense. Throughout the text, Apuleius provides his audience with multiple understandings of magic.<sup>135</sup> Consider the first:

For if a magician in the Persian language is what a priest is in ours, as I have read in many authors, what kind of crime is it to be a priest and to have the right information, knowledge and mastery of the ceremonial rules, ritual requirements, and sacred laws? Provided of course that Plato understands what magic is when he recalls the lessons that the Persians use to initiate a youth in kingship.<sup>136</sup>

Here, Apuleius defines magic as an art befitting a king – an art, no less, that involves proper piety towards the gods, proper devotion towards traditional (if foreign) religious precepts. It is a hallowed art, come to the Empire from ancient Persia. It does not seem to be the sort of activity that condemns a person. In fact, the everyday Persian could no more hope to be a

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<sup>134</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 78.

<sup>135</sup>Scholars have debated whether or not the text of the *Apology* represents an accurate record of Apuleius' legal defense. Thomas Nelson Winter suggests that Apuleius' speech could have been recorded and published by stenographers. See Thomas Nelson Winter, "The Publication of Apuleius' *Apology*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 100 (1969): 607-612. Scholars who believe the text of the *Apology* represents an emended record of Apuleius' spoken defense include Paul Vallette, Adam Abt, and Georg Misch: Paul Vallette, *Apulée: Apologie, Florides* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1924 and 1960), xxiv; Adam Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius von Madaura und die antike Zauberei* (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1908), 6-8; and Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, translated by E. W. Dickes and G. Misch (London: Routledge, 1950), 509. I have opted to table discussions of whether or not the words of the *Apology* as received are representative of those spoken. My larger point obtains regardless of the accuracy of Apuleius' recollection of his trial – discursive constructions of magic are inconsistent, dynamic, and often self-contradictory. This assertion would stand whether or not Apuleius spoke the precise words retained in the *Apology* at his trial since his ideas of magic likely did not change between his trial and the publication of his defense.

<sup>136</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 25, trans. Jones. Graf, in his essay, "Theories of Magic in Antiquity," considers the first of my own definitions to be two different definitions: (1) "priest" in the Persian language; (2) specialist involved in the education of Persian elites. Apuleius, however, gives no indication that this priest is *not* the specialist in question, and since both of Graf's conceptions turn on the Persian notion of a "high" magic, I have decided to treat them as one. See Graf, "Theories of Magic in Antiquity," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, eds. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 93.

magician than he or she could hope to become ruler.<sup>137</sup> Far from being something attributed to those bereft of social capital and existing in a context of social deviance, Apuleius defines magic as an activity strictly existing within the purview of the elite. Of course, this valorization of magical practice carries a sort of rhetorical currency; if the accused can prove the innocuous nature of the crime that he has been charged with, then he might escape legal punishment. Even so, it is not insignificant that Apuleius turns to an existing tradition of “high” Persian magic to exonerate himself. The very existence of such a tradition belies the fact that magic’s contours did not solely coalesce in charges of religious deviance. In the Romans’ conception of Persia, at least, magic *was* religion.

Apuleius offers a second definition when he claims that Plato believed magical charms to be merely beautiful words.<sup>138</sup> So, magic now is defined as a type of chanting which may or may not be efficacious. Apuleius does not elaborate upon this notion, apart from claiming that he ought not be reprimanded for being appreciative of linguistic beauty.<sup>139</sup> This, however, is not the extent of the defendant’s understanding of magic. A third definition suggests itself when he mocks, “But if those people have the commonplace idea that “magician” strictly means someone able to fulfill his every wish by spells that have some kind of extraordinary power, I am very puzzled why they are not afraid to accuse someone who they say is so powerful.”<sup>140</sup> Apuleius further claims that the uninitiated often confuse a magician with a philosopher, citing how Epimenides, Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Empedocles

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<sup>137</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 26.

<sup>138</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 26, trans. Jones: “Plato again in another dialogue has written about a certain Zalmoxis, who though Thracian by origin was distinguished in this same art, that ‘his charms are words of beauty’.”

<sup>139</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 26.

<sup>140</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 26, trans. Jones.

were all charged with being magicians.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, magic is also a means by which individuals commune with the gods and produce marvels via strange incantations. It bears a passing resemblance to philosophy, which is why the unsophisticated masses cannot discern the difference between a good Platonist and an evil magician.

Apuleius' *Apology* brings into startling clarity the nature of the problem – in one text alone, we have at least three definitions of ancient magic. And that is not the end of it. Not only must the modern interpreter contend with the ways in which our author defines magic, she must also consider the charge levied against Apuleius – that of performing evil magical deeds. Throughout the course of Apuleius' defense, we get the sense that the charge of magic is attendant to certain practices – the very practices that Apuleius must defend himself against. After all, if his actions were considered innocuous, then they would likely not have been brought up as evidence weighing against him. One need not defend oneself against benign actions. On the other hand, if Apuleius' actions were clearly nefarious and carried no hint of ambiguity, then he likely would not have been exonerated of all charges of magic.<sup>142</sup> Participation in some practices is most likely indefensible, as we shall see.

What practices *did* make an appearance in the Platonist's infamous *Apology*? According to Apuleius' accusers, he had made ill use of a young boy, likely as a conduit for use in magical practices.<sup>143</sup> He had purchased and dissected fish – fish with scandalously suggestive names, no less. These fish could be used in the production of love potions.<sup>144</sup> He

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<sup>141</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.

<sup>142</sup>Given that Apuleius delivers speeches to two other African proconsuls after the trial (*Florida* 9.39; 17.1, 18-21), we can safely infer that he was acquitted.

<sup>143</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.

<sup>144</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.

had kept something hidden in a linen cloth at his household altar.<sup>145</sup> And most alarmingly, he had ostensibly seduced his future wife via love spells.<sup>146</sup> The *Apology* offers these and others among a veritable litany of Apuleius' supposed *magicorum maleficiorum*. As a result, it concomitantly offers the ancient historian some insight into the complicated nature of Graeco-Roman magic. Not only do we have a polemical charge of magic in the text, but we have an individual's multiple understandings of magic advanced in his own defense against such a charge, and furthermore, we have the practices which resulted in Apuleius' being brought before the court in the first place. How, then, might we begin to unravel the variegated and often confusing ways in which magic is constructed – both polemically, as a charge, and practically, as a series of narrated practices?

In hoping to understand the construction of magic in Apuleius' *Apology*, therefore, one should take into account not only what magic is *said to be*, but also what magicians *do*. There is a reason, after all, that these practices are the ones against which Apuleius was compelled to mount his defense. There is a reason that charges of magic stick, so to speak. I will return to Apuleius in a moment, but for now, I would like to explore the contours of the practices that “make the magician” – i.e., those practices associated with the polemical charge of magic in Graeco-Roman literature. The issue is particularly thorny and requires a nuanced, thoroughgoing understanding of the nature of discourses and magic. Such an understanding must necessarily be more complicated than the easy assertions of the prevailing methodology (outlined in the introductory chapter of the present work). It is my

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<sup>145</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.

<sup>146</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.



hope that a wide survey of magic in ancient texts will bring new insight into Apuleius' *Apology* as well as other texts.

## **Part I. Old Magic: Magic in the Graeco-Roman World**

Magic has been a subject of analysis and dissection since the inception of Religious Studies and Cultural Studies as academic fields. In the introductory chapter of the present work, I outlined the various intellectual trajectories that have “made magic” – to adopt the apt phrase used by Randall Styers.<sup>147</sup> My goal in this chapter is more circumscribed; here, I wish to put forward a working concept of magic that will serve in the analysis of the Christian texts treated in subsequent chapters. I make no firm assertions about the universal applicability of such a concept, but it is my hope to begin ameliorating the aforementioned problems encountered in the study of magic and Christianity by offering some modifications to the previous methodologies.

The trend in the study of Christianity – at least after Morton Smith – is to see magic as a discursive “other.” It is the obverse of proper religious praxis, whether this praxis be that of the Christians or their pagan counterparts. In essence, this concept functions solely as a charge whose content coalesces in instances of theological debate. Alan Segal’s belief that activities were magical simply because they occurred in a context of conflict vis-à-vis established practice is a prime example of this type of work.<sup>148</sup> Other modern scholars like Sue Garrett and Kimberly Stratton see “magic” as a label affixed to others in order to malign their traditions. In Garrett’s case, the Christians labeled outsiders as magicians in order to

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<sup>147</sup> Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>148</sup> Segal, “Hellenistic Magic.”

associate them with the devil and declare their own superiority. In the case of Stratton, magic is a gender-specific marker, one men levy against women to control otherwise terrifying female sexuality.<sup>149</sup>

These assessments of how magic works are not wrong, *per se*, but if we reconsider Apuleius' *Apology*, we see that reducing magic *exclusively* to its polemical function cannot account for the philosopher's three conceptions of magic, although such an idea of magic could certainly explain Apuleius' being brought to trial. It might be fruitful to claim that the Madauran philosopher's outsider status is what found him on the defendant's stand, so to speak – indeed, scholars have done just that.<sup>150</sup> But even so, what of the man's claims that magic is a hallowed tradition in which Persian royalty and religious professionals were initiated? What of his declaration of magic as beautiful chanting? Most important, what about the actions associated with the charge which precipitated his appearance before the court?

In the case of Apuleius, magic is not simply a label that affixed to an outsider, although it is most assuredly that. Magic's functions are far more complicated than a cursory polemical analysis will allow. In fact, the most interesting question is not whether our defendant is a magician, or by which conditions he might be labeled as such, but rather, how he can claim *both* to be a magician and to not be a magician.<sup>151</sup> What sorts of arguments does

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<sup>149</sup> Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*; Kimberly Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>150</sup>For example, see Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 68: "Mainly, by laying the charge of magic, the adversaries were trying to incite the very closed society of this town to get rid of an element [i.e., Apuleius] that threatened the established structures..."

<sup>151</sup>In chapter 26 of his treatise, Apuleius claims that he ought to be allowed to study the beautiful words of Zalmoxis or the priestly craft of Zoroaster, both of which he labels as magic. Towards the end of the *Apology*, Apuleius vehemently denies being a magician. See *Apology* 90, trans. Jones.: "All this I could justly say, but I waive it for your benefit, and I am not satisfied just to have cleared myself fully of all your allegations against me, to have allowed not even a slight suspicion of sorcery to stand in any respect." It appears that Apuleius' intention is to draw a distinction between two types of magic: (1) the first, descended from the Persian priesthood, and (2) the second, the lower, vulgar form of magic for which he has been brought to trial. This

he advance to demonstrate that the activities he is undertaking are innocuous, even beneficial ones? What sorts of practices allowed the charge of magic to be made against him in the first place? And since he does not deny performing these practices outright, what interpretations does he give in order to mitigate the taint of illicit activity? Like the concept of magic itself, it seems that the activities attendant to it are subject to interpretation. Considering briefly these issues in Apuleius' *Apology* will lay bare the salient issues pertinent to my imminent discussion of magic in the Graeco-Roman context.

In terms of problematic actions, Apuleius must defend himself against a number of his seemingly peculiar behaviors – behaviors, which, we shall see, correspond unsurprisingly to actions stereotypically associated with magic. In short, according to his accusers, Apuleius acts like a magician. Throughout his *Apology*, the accused takes up each of these accusations in turn. In the first place, he “sent Calpurnianus the powder made from ‘Arabian spices,’ when it would have been more fitting for him to observe that disgusting custom of the Spaniards. They, in Catallus’ words, use their own urine ‘To scrape their teeth and reddish gums’.”<sup>152</sup> Apparently, Apuleius’ ability to mix a toothpaste had brought upon him some measure of suspicion. An imaginative scholar might suggest that mixing toothpaste is not a far cry from mixing potions or even poison. This is perhaps true, but for the moment, I wish to table such imaginings and limit the discussion to enumerating the activities Apuleius’ accusers found problematic.

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second conception of magic is the sort of magical ideation found in those individuals who are unsophisticated and uneducated.

<sup>152</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 6, trans. Jones.

Apuleius can mix a toothpaste. Another of his activities met with suspicion is that of composing poems.<sup>153</sup> Apparently, he had composed verses to the boys of Scribonus Laetus – verses that sounded erotic to his accusers.<sup>154</sup> Once again, these verses could be likened to the composition and uttering of magical charms. But in Apuleius' case, it seems his accusers are more concerned with the amorous and homoerotic subtext of his compositions.<sup>155</sup> In another section of the *Apology*, Apuleius is indicted for owning a mirror.<sup>156</sup>

One of the most fascinating accusations against Apuleius concerns certain fish that he had supposedly procured from fishermen.<sup>157</sup> Part of the accusation stems from the fact that Apuleius had bought the fish as opposed to acquiring them without payment.<sup>158</sup> Of course, Apuleius finds this absurd since it is customary to pay for one's food items. Nevertheless, the fact that money had exchanged hands appears to have been a sticking point in the suit brought against the man. The point is that Apuleius had been attempting to brew some sort of

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<sup>153</sup> Apuleius, *Apology*, 9.

<sup>154</sup> Apuleius, *Apology*, 9.

<sup>155</sup> Apuleius, *Apology*, 9-11, trans. Jones: "Whoever heard so plausible a suspicion expressed, so compelling an inference, so conclusive an argument? 'Apuleius has written poems.' If they were bad, that is an accusation, but still one against a poet, not a philosopher; and if they were good, what is your charge? 'Well, he wrote frivolous, erotic poems.' Are these then your charges against me, and you picked the wrong word when indicting me for magic?" Also on this charge, see Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius von Madaura*, 135-231 and Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 87-92.

<sup>156</sup> Apuleius, *Apology*, 13.

<sup>157</sup> Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.

<sup>158</sup> Apuleius, *Apology*, 29, Jones: "Or was it because I offered to pay for fish that you inferred that I wanted them for black magic? Had I wanted them for a feast, no doubt I would have offered nothing."

potion with the fish.<sup>159</sup> That his accusers believed the fish to have names corresponding to male and female genitalia only serves to strengthen their suspicions.<sup>160</sup>

People tended to fall down in the philosopher's presence, specifically a boy and a young woman.<sup>161</sup> In the case of a boy, Apuleius' accusers claimed the boy had been bewitched in a hidden location (though eyewitnesses were able to see the goings-on at a distance), before a small altar, a lamp, and a few witnesses.<sup>162</sup> The boy had been subject to a charm, and when he came to, he was no longer aware of himself.<sup>163</sup> In another instance, a freedwoman was said to have been brought to Apuleius' home.<sup>164</sup> Supposedly, the philosopher had promised to cure her, but instead he bewitched her, prompting her to collapse as well.<sup>165</sup>

Apuleius also kept something wrapped in a napkin among the items upon his household library.<sup>166</sup> The interesting thing about this accusation, of course, is that the accusers have no idea what is being concealed.<sup>167</sup> Instead, it appears that the act of

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<sup>159</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 32.

<sup>160</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 33, trans. Jones.: "Let us however see what kinds of fish these were, so essential to own and so difficult to find that it was worth agreeing on a price to get them...they said 'sea hare' when it was altogether a different fish...they alleged that I tried to get two 'obscenely named' sea creatures...taken to mean the genital organs of either sex."

<sup>161</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.

<sup>162</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 42.

<sup>163</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 42.

<sup>164</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 48.

<sup>165</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 48.

<sup>166</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.

<sup>167</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 53, trans. Jones.: "For these are more or less the words you used when addressing so grave and perspicacious a judge: 'Apuleius kept certain things wrapped in a cloth in Pontianus' house shrine; what they were I do not know, and hence I insist they were magical'."

concealing something itself is what drives the charge of magic. Secrecy becomes an issue again when Apuleius' wooden figure of Mercury is taken to be evidence of his magic.<sup>168</sup> So, too, with the accusation that Apuleius performed sacred rites at night with his friend Appius Quintianus – rites which were accompanied by the smoke from a torch and bird feathers.<sup>169</sup> Once again, the concern is not the performance of the rite *per se*; Apuleius talks openly about his participation in various rites in the very same section of the *Apology*. Rather, what appears problematic is the nocturnal, hidden aspect of the rites and their strange character. The accusers supposedly spoke of a heap of bird feathers in the courtyard of the rooms Apuleius and his friend had rented.<sup>170</sup> They also claimed the walls of the rooms had been blackened with soot.<sup>171</sup> Such details give the impression that the opposing party wished to impress upon the court a grotesque picture of Apuleius and his co-conspirator engaging nighttime deviltry.

Apuleius' accusers further seem to be suggesting a nefarious aspect to Pudentilla's decision to wed after being a widow for thirteen years.<sup>172</sup> Apparently, she had penned a letter in which she had written that Apuleius was a magician and that she had fallen prey to his magical charms.<sup>173</sup> In Apuleius' hands, this letter tends to read as sarcasm, or even a means

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<sup>168</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 61, trans. Jones: "You say that the statue was made in secret, but how can that be? So far are you from not knowing who made it that you demanded his presence in court."

<sup>169</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 57.

<sup>170</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 58, trans. Jones: "So this is how he wrote that he had found all this out: on returning from Alexandria, he hurried straight home, Quintianus having already moved out; there in the hallway he found many bird feathers, and in addition the walls were besmirched with black soot."

<sup>171</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 58.

<sup>172</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27.

<sup>173</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 78.

of excusing Pudentilla's actions.<sup>174</sup> And since we know that Apuleius and his wife settled together later in Carthage, it seems that perhaps a cynical lens is the best approach to Pudentilla's missive. Presumably, if the letter were a serious indictment of Apuleius, Pudentilla might have joined her husband's accusers in a more active manner. In any case, the *Apology* does suggest that those acting under the influence of magic are not always in their sound minds – or at least, that appears to be the popular opinion.<sup>175</sup>

For each of his suspicious behaviors, the Platonist offers a re-interpretation of the events that cast him firmly as a natural philosopher, who is, in Apuleius' proffered opinion, a type of knowledge-seeker easy to accuse.<sup>176</sup> In the case of his developing toothpaste, Apuleius claims that there should be nothing dirty on a philosopher.<sup>177</sup> This is especially true for mouth, which speaks good and true things.<sup>178</sup> It is incumbent upon a philosopher to keep good hygiene.

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<sup>174</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 79, trans. Jones.: "And yet, even had [Pudentilla] frankly called me a magician, one might think that she preferred to allege compulsion on my part when excusing herself to her son, rather than consent on hers." See also chapter 83, where Apuleius quotes Pudentilla: "I wanted to marry for the reasons I said, and you yourself persuaded me to choose him rather than anyone, since you admired the man and wanted to link him with our family through me. But now that our accusers are stubbornly persuading you otherwise, suddenly Apuleius has become a magician; he has bewitched me and I am in love." On Apuleius' settling in Carthage, see Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World*, 187 n. 79 and Keith Bradley, "Apuleius and Carthage," *Ancient Narrative* 4 (2005):1-29.

<sup>175</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 80 trans. Jones: "Finally, what is it that you are alleging—that she was sane or insane when she wrote? 'Sane,' will you say? Then she was not influenced by magic arts."

<sup>176</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 27, trans. Jones: "But thanks to an almost universal error of the ignorant, philosophers are often faced with this kind of reproach. They think those who investigate the basic, unitary causes of matter to be irreligious, and hence they accuse them of denying the gods' existence... As for that branch, however, which devotes particular study to universal providence and greatly honors the gods, people commonly label 'magicians,' h as if convinced that they can cause things to occur which they know do occur; ancient examples are Epimenides, Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Osthaneas."

<sup>177</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 13.

<sup>178</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 13.

So too when he is confronted with the charge of composing verse to young boys, Apuleius' defense of himself turns upon the notion that he is a philosopher, and that his activities are those characteristic of philosophy. Composing verse is something that philosophers – including Plato – do.<sup>179</sup> And if the verses happen to be aesthetically lacking, the crime is that of a poet, not a philosopher.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, regarding the charge of homoeroticism, Apuleius claims that such a charge is not one endemic to magic; there the issue at stake is something else altogether, though he never names it explicitly.<sup>181</sup> Finally, he claims that writing cannot testify to the strength of one's character and therefore cannot give insight into whether or not he is truly a magician.<sup>182</sup>

In regards to his use of a mirror, Apuleius' refutation of the charge proceeds along the issue of vanity, as though the concern is one of morality. It is not considered vain to have a painting of oneself, he argues, so having a mirror ought not to be considered vain either.<sup>183</sup> Yet, as with previous arguments, this one too is conducted as a defense of philosophy against those who might misunderstand its contours. Apuleius asks his audience,

Do they not say that the philosopher Socrates went so far as to advise his pupils to observe themselves in a mirror often? In that way, if any of them was complacent about his beauty, he should be very careful not to sully the dignity of his body by evil habits: if on the other hand any of them thought himself to have less than attractive looks, he should make every effort to cloak his homeliness by earning praise for virtue.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 10.

<sup>180</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 9.

<sup>181</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 9.

<sup>182</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 11.

<sup>183</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 14.

<sup>184</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 15, trans. Jones.



The implication, of course, is that like Socrates' disciples, Apuleius considers himself in the mirror and contemplates his own dignity and virtues, thereby enabling himself to pursue the highest ideals. This is a far cry from the opposition's presumed insinuation that Apuleius might have been using this mirror in certain magical and divinatory rites.

Perhaps Apuleius' accusers believed that they had trapped him when they presented the evidence concerning the fish with sexually-explicit names. Here too, however, Apuleius is able to deftly turn the argument upon itself by explaining away his actions. Ironically enough, he does betray some knowledge about the brewing of love potions when he claims that there are more efficacious ingredients than the fish that he had been procuring.<sup>185</sup> In fact, his opponents are lying about the names, of course; there is nothing particularly strange or erotic about the sea creatures he wished to acquire.<sup>186</sup> He had been looking for fish in order to understand the natural world more completely, like many philosophers and followers of Plato before him.<sup>187</sup> Part of his philosophical occupation entails the dissection and comprehension of various life forms.<sup>188</sup>

In regards to the young boy who had supposedly fallen unconscious while in Apuleius' presence, here too the opposition is soundly mistaken. According to Apuleius, magical spells require a, "beautiful and unblemished body, acute intelligence, and eloquent speech so that...the divine power can have a sort of suitable home in which to lodge decently."<sup>189</sup> Thallus, the boy in question, was none of these things – in fact, he was epileptic

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<sup>185</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 29.

<sup>186</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 30.

<sup>187</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 36.

<sup>188</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 40.

<sup>189</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 43, Jones.

and prone to seizures.<sup>190</sup> As for the woman, she never collapsed at all.<sup>191</sup> In fact, the sick woman was brought to Apuleius by the doctor in hopes of treatment.<sup>192</sup> As a philosopher, once again, it is important for him to provide his services to people in need.

One of the many interesting aspects of Apuleius' argument concerns his defense of his religious practices. When he is accused of wrapping an item in a linen cloth and worshipping it daily, his answer is simple. Apuleius had participated in many rites and mysteries, the tokens of which he keeps concealed in linen because it is the purest material for keeping divine objects.<sup>193</sup> The nocturnal rites he had supposedly undertaken while renting rooms with a friend are a lie invented by a drunkard.<sup>194</sup> Apuleius denies participating in such rites at all. And of course, he absolutely denies bewitching his wife and securing her hand by magical means.

The *Apology* is a rich text filled with many fascinating details that give us some insight into the contours of ancient magic. What is especially interesting about Apuleius is that in most of the instances of his defense, he does not deny engaging in the activities in question – the strange nocturnal rites are an exception. Rather, he offers an alternative interpretation of the events under consideration. While this gives some credence to the assertion that magic is made only in the charge, what we must likewise consider is that the charge, here, is made from a series of *practices*. Apuleius might have been charged with

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<sup>190</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 43.

<sup>191</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 48.

<sup>192</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 50.

<sup>193</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 56.

<sup>194</sup>Apuleius, *Apology*, 57-59.

being a magician because of familial or societal in-fighting, but what emerges clearly from even a cursory analysis of the *Apology* is that this charge is tied, inextricably, to the activities that he was purported to have engaged in. Charges and behaviors go hand in hand, ambiguous though those behaviors may be.

Layered atop these practices, of course, are the three definitions of magic offered up by Apuleius that I delineated at the beginning of this chapter. The first definition Apuleius puts forth is that magic is a hallowed practice reserved for Persian religious specialists and royalty. The second is that it consists of beautiful words. And the third is the vulgar understanding in which one person is able to gain all their desires through utterances and other manipulations of otherworldly entities. The combination of these factors – implicit and explicit definitions, practices, interpretations of practices, polemical accusations, and cultural stereotypes – all contribute (albeit unequally) to the conception of magic that is operative in the text. With so many constituent parts, it is no wonder that the ideas of magic we can trace in the *Apology* are contradictory and inconsistent at best.

Of course, Apuleius is not the only individual whose understanding of magic is complicated and difficult to articulate clearly. I have included him here because of the sheer clarity of his obscurity, so to speak. Other ancient writers provide ample opportunity for modern analytical frustration, even those whose attitude towards magic is relatively coherent. Consider Pliny's *Natural History* 30, in which he outlines the history of magic, calling it both *vanitates* and *fraudentissima artium*.<sup>195</sup> Fritz Graf treats both of these descriptors together, and it is just as well, since Pliny himself seems to suggest that magic is both empty and

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<sup>195</sup>Pliny the Elder, *NH*, 30.1, ed. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff (Lipsiae: Teubner, 1906).

unfortunately deceitful.<sup>196</sup> In fact, he claims, “it has exercised the greatest influence in every country and in nearly every age. And no one can be surprised at the extent of its influence and authority, when he reflects that by its own energies it has embraced, and thoroughly amalgamated with itself.”<sup>197</sup> It is quite clear that unlike Apuleius, Pliny does not find much redeeming among the magical arts. His attitude is one of unconcealed disdain. Pliny offers yet another description of magic, furthermore, when he claims that it incorporated parts of medicine, religion, and astrology.<sup>198</sup> According to Pliny, then, magic is both empty and fraudulent, yet bastardized from the higher arts. It is a thing to be abhorred, although it holds some fascination since it retains characteristics of humankind’s more worthwhile pursuits.<sup>199</sup>

Pliny’s attitude towards magic is, admittedly, much easier to reconcile than that of Apuleius (though reconciling Pliny to Apuleius is deeply difficult). Graf highlights the most salient points of *Natural History* in the second chapter of his monograph. He writes that Pliny believes magic to have a number of fundamental features.<sup>200</sup> Firstly, though it originated in Persia and is therefore a foreign import to Rome, it has left “traces” among the Italian countries (despite the fact that Pliny’s examples of such traces are not contemporary with his work).<sup>201</sup> Unlike Apuleius, Pliny is quick to denounce Greek philosophers who were seduced

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<sup>196</sup>Pliny, *NH*, 30.1. trans. John Bostock, and H.T. Riley, Esq., (London: Taylor and Francis, 1855); Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 49-56.

<sup>197</sup>Pliny, *NH*, 30.1. trans. Bostock and Riley.

<sup>198</sup>Pliny, *NH*, 30.1.

<sup>199</sup>Pliny, *NH* 30.6.

<sup>200</sup>Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 52; Pliny, *NH* 30.2.

<sup>201</sup>Pliny, *NH* 30.3, trans. Bostock and Riley: “It is clear that there are early traces still existing of the introduction of magic into Italy; in our laws of the Twelve Tables for instance; besides other convincing proofs, which I have already noticed in a preceding book. At last, in the year of the City 657, Cneius Cornelius Lentulus and P. Licinius Crassus being consuls, a decree forbidding human sacrifices was passed by the senate; from

by the magical arts, believing them to be victims of “not a fondness only, but a rage for magic,” incited by Osthanes.<sup>202</sup> Instead of considering the magician an inheritor to a grand intellectual legacy, then, Pliny considers him a misguided fool seduced away from real knowledge. Yet, thereafter, Pliny states: “We may rest fully persuaded then, that magic is a thing detestable in itself. Frivolous and lying as it is, it still bears, however, some shadow of truth upon it; though reflected, in reality, by the practices of those who study the arts of secret poisoning, and not the pursuits of magic.”<sup>203</sup> Here, it seems that once again Pliny is suggesting that magic itself *is* vain and empty, and that only the poisoners associated with it give it any meaning at all. Yet Pliny recounts the magicians’ remedies for a toothache in 30.8 with very little criticism of the recipe (despite being quite critical of the magicians’ treatment of the mole in the immediately previous chapter). So even Pliny, who believes magic to be deceitful and fraudulent, can find something worthwhile about the magical arts. He, too, might look upon a portion of the magical enterprise with acceptance, if not approval.

A third text I wish to consider comes from the so-called *Epistles of Apollonius of Tyana*. While this text does not exhibit the same level of inner-textual contradiction as Apuleius, it does allude to a sort of situational confusion. The text demonstrates a positive evaluation of magic, especially magic associated with the Persian priesthood and philosophically-inclined magic: “You think it your duty to call philosophers who follow Pythagoras, or Orpheus, ‘magicians’ (*magi*). But in my view followers of any philosophy

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which period the celebration of these horrid rites ceased in public, and, for some time, altogether.”; cf. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 52.

<sup>202</sup>Pliny, *NH* 30.2; cf. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 52.

<sup>203</sup> Pliny, *NH* 30.6.

should be called ‘magi’ if they aim to become holy and righteous.’”<sup>204</sup> According to Graf, such a positive evaluation of the magi during the Principate might give us pause.<sup>205</sup> If, like modern scholars of Christian antiquity, we expect the concept of magic to be negatively charged, the correlation between righteousness and magic is unexpected, if not jarring. In other words, if magic is simply a charge, as those like Garrett and Stratton assert, then this sort of positive evaluation is unintelligible.

In these three texts – Apuleius, Pliny, and the *Epistles of Apollonius of Tyana* – magic as a category behaves in ways unexpected to analysts dependent upon the reigning understanding of it. Apuleius offers at least three definitions of magic in his text, and we may glean hints of alternate definitions offered by his accusers with a more intentional read. Doubtless these understandings would differ from those of Apuleius himself. Pliny’s negative evaluation of magic seems to correspond with modern methodologies, but his willingness to accept certain portions of magical practice contravene easy assertions of magic’s place as a deviant art. And the *Epistles of Apollonius of Tyana* represent a situational irony; once again, magic is not unequivocally disparaged when we expect. These three texts, and ancient texts more broadly, present problems for modern methodologies.

It seems that magic is a multifaceted, and yes, sometimes contradictory and confusing discourse. This is just as well. That humans produce coherent, cohesive categories of meaning is not necessary. If anything, history tends to assimilate the lived incoherence of human lives into falsely coherent, cohesive narratives.<sup>206</sup> The history of the study of magic

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<sup>204</sup>*Epist. Apoll. Tyan.* 16, F. C. Conybeare, trans. Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, The Epistles of Apollonius, and the Treatise of Eusebius* (New York: MacMillan, 1912).

<sup>205</sup>Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 164.

<sup>206</sup>For theoretical analyses of this aspect of historiography see Theodor W. Adorno, “The Idea of Natural History,” *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary* 60 (1984): 111-124. See also Michel de Certeau, *The*

seems to suffer from this tendency as much as any other history. Instead of accepting these inconsistencies and obfuscations as part of the negotiations that either made perfect sense to ancient people or did not need to be made sensible, we have re-written the discourses, searching for patterns and coherence, such that these discourses make sense to *us moderns*. While this sort of refraction is inevitable, part of this project entails making space for intellectual inconsistency, for giving due consideration to a fuller concept of magic, as messy and contradictory as the task may seem at times.

## **Part II. Many Magics: ‘Magic’ in Ancient Sources**

One entrée into understanding how magic is understood in the ancient context is to achieve some level of comprehension of the use of the word ‘magic’ itself.<sup>207</sup> In the

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*Possession at Loudun*. The Introduction of de Certeau’s monograph is particularly useful in illustrating the various intellectual slippages that occur when historians contrive history into coherent, linear narratives. My primary concern in this project is that of logical coherence. Most studies of magic impose a sort of internal consistency upon the ancient evidence, although it is clear that the ancient evidence does not lend itself to such clarity. Instead of attempting to articulate overarching trends to circumscribe the concept of magic, it is my aim to dis-articulate modern scholarly notions by drawing attention to magic’s inconsistencies. That said, magic is not completely incoherent; as I will articulate in the following sections, certain practices and characteristics obtain. The task, then, is to allow for magic’s fluidity as a concept while allowing it to maintain utility as a heuristic category.

<sup>207</sup> In the following pages, I will conduct a word study of the Greek and Latin use of the word ‘magus.’ I will proceed roughly chronologically, first with Greek sources, then Latin. I will not prioritize Christian sources, since the aim of this chapter is to determine how magic was understood throughout the Graeco-Roman world, and not merely amongst Christians or Jews. This type of survey is essential to this project for a number of reasons. First, it provides a sense of how the word was used in ancient sources, thereby allowing me to construct the working typology I wish to apply to my Christian texts in subsequent chapters. Second, since the term is an imported term, the *only* means of understanding its meaning is to analyze its use in ancient texts. Third, because the word was associated with a wide range of practices, it is imperative to treat a wide range of sources to cover as many of these practices as possible. My aim is inclusive rather than delimiting; I want to consider the fullest range of evidence possible. Yet, I have limited my survey by two principles: (1) I do not treat occurrences of the word magic that are merely evaluative in nature since I am interested in what sorts of activities magicians undertook; and (2) practices that are repeated in several sources are omitted for the sake of space. Other scholars of ancient magic have undertaken such a study. See Jan Bremmer, “Birth of the Term ‘Magic’,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 126 (1999): 1-12; James B. Rives, “*Magus* and its Cognates in Classical Latin,” in R. L. Gordon and F. Marco Simón, eds., *Magical Practice in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference held at the University of Zaragoza, 30 Sept.-1 Oct. 2005* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 53-77; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 20-60; Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Graeco-Roman World*, (London: Routledge, 2003); Richard Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 178-91.

following survey, I hope to make headway towards such an understanding. While a comprehensive survey is impossible to undertake in these pages, some trends will become apparent. Unlike many other scholars, I have opted to limit my scope to the word *magos* and its abstract variants.<sup>208</sup> For example, Dickie, in his masterful study, includes the work of the witch (*saga*), as do Gordon and Graf.<sup>209</sup> Gordon includes the activities of *rhizotomoi/pharmakapoloι* (root-cutters), and *goētes* (sorcerers).<sup>210</sup> While I appreciate these scholars' efforts to include the fullest account of material available, it is imperative to understand *if* and *why* these activities are considered under the rubric of magic in the first place. In an effort to advance this understanding, I wish to reverse their method; rather than begin with the activities themselves, I will begin with the word(s) *magos/mageia* and determine which sorts of activities are mentioned in close conjunction therewith. The advantage of this method is that it circumvents the justification necessary (but often absent) in order to treat various activities as magic. It assumes that the activities labeled as magic by ancients are, in fact, considered as such by the very same individuals. That said, I am not suggesting that what the ancients labeled as "magic" is in any way akin to what we might consider magic today; what I am suggesting is that what the ancients labeled magic is just that – *their* magic. Understanding their conception of magic can give us a richer, fuller understanding with which to interpret early Christian texts.

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<sup>208</sup>To limit my study, I will be considering some (not all) texts including μάγος, μαγεία, μαγικός, *magi*, *magus*, *magicus*, *magia*, and *magiae*.

<sup>209</sup>Dickie, *Magic and Magicians* (although he does relegate the *saga* and their ilk to different chapters); Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," 184; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 46.

<sup>210</sup>Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," 183.



In some ways, the fact that *magos/mageia* are loan words from the Persian is also beneficial to the modern analyst of ancient magic. One of the various issues at play in any study of the ancient world is that of translation.<sup>211</sup> History is never sure if our translated concept of magic corresponds perfectly to the Greeks' notion. In this case, perhaps the importing of the word used to name the concept under consideration is an intellectual advantage – in all likelihood, the Greeks' notion of magic did not mirror that of the Persians when they borrowed the term. According to Edith Hall, the term likely connoted insult, associating Greek practitioners with Persian foreigners who had become familiar to the Greeks on account of the preceding wars.<sup>212</sup> It was a way of disparaging a Greek's practice by equating it with that of a Persian.<sup>213</sup> Doubtless the majority of Persians might not have appreciated their own priesthood being thusly disparaged, although there are Old Persian inscriptions which do precisely that.<sup>214</sup> Even so, such conceptual incongruity is useful for thinking with; it foregrounds the fact that magic might have had a few common characteristics that may have obtained as it crossed borders and made contact with new

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<sup>211</sup>See James B. Rives, “*Magus* and its Cognates in Classical Latin,” 53-77. Rives, too, stresses issues of translation and is less than sanguine about the possibility of ancient conceptions of “magic” corresponding to modern ones because we translate the Persian loan word with the English term “magic.” As he so aptly points out, similarities in translation do not necessarily signify similarities in the conceptual frameworks that underlie said translations. Where Rives and I differ, however, is that I imagine this incongruity to be useful as an intellectual foothold. Since the word μάγος is a Persian loan word, it is unmoored in a sense, used by the Greeks to signify shifting congeries of activities. Rather than seeing this loss-in-translation as a detriment, I find it to be an asset, a reminder that we can only ever see but pieces of the whole.

<sup>212</sup>Hall, Edith, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (New York: Oxford, 1991), 16.

<sup>213</sup>Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 16.

<sup>214</sup>Schmitt, Rüdger, *The Behistun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Texts* in *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum I* (London: Humphries, 1991), Text 1; W. Hinz, “Die Behistan-Inschrift des Darius,” *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, 7: 1974, 121-134. In the inscription of Behistun, Darius I maligns the false Smerdis as a *maguš*. Therefore, even in the Persian context, the word appeared to carry some sense of ambiguity. Detractors might suggest that one instance does not an ambiguous word make, yet inscriptions must make sense to the audience, so there is some evidence to suggest that the Persian *maguš* could be interpreted as variably as its Greek counterpart.

cultures, but it was a malleable concept, its finer nuances often lost in translation as it shifted from context to context. The loss of these parts of the magical tradition is a natural part of cultural contact and cross-fertilization. This same loss, however, is no excuse to abandon the study of magic or to attempt to smooth over its problems with less fraught signifiers. All language has baggage, after all. The advantage of beginning with *magos* and closely related cognates is that it is *this* concept – that of magic – that is precisely at issue though it is most certainly not the same concept of magic that we moderns hold.<sup>215</sup>

## Part IIA. Early Greek Magic

As far as the literary record will allow reconstruction, the earliest use of the substantive possibly appears around 500 BCE, in a text attributed to Heraclitus of Ephesus.<sup>216</sup> Much about the text is disputed, including its reconstruction and interpretation. The quotation is preserved in Clement of Alexandria and it is difficult to know, for certain, if the wording is that of Clement or Heraclitus. Scholars have included the use of the term ‘*magoi*’ in fragments of Heraclitus, and if these studies are correct in assuming that the term belongs to the source and not the redactor, this fragment represents the earliest Greek importation. In such a case, what is important is that the word ‘*magoi*’ appears in a list of

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<sup>215</sup>The texts I have chosen here are arranged in a rough chronological order, but more importantly, they are texts that venture beyond consigning magic to being good or evil. Rather, the texts I’m interested in presenting are ones that provide characteristics pertaining to magic. My reasoning is simple: my project entails moving beyond understanding magic as a negatively (or even positively) charged rhetorical device; in order to do so, it is imperative to glean the other ways ancient writers talk about magic.

<sup>216</sup>12 B 14a DK, found in Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.22.2. For fuller discussions of the issues surrounding the reconstruction and interpretation of this fragment see Jean Bollack and Heinz Wismann, *Héraclite ou la separation* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972); T. M. Robinson, *Heraclitus: Fragments*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 164. I have used Gordon’s reconstruction here. His reconstruction is convincing due to the internal contrastive structure he discerns. In any case, such a detailed study of this Heraclitus passage is tangential to the larger scope of the current discussion. The most salient point is that the earliest possible Greek usage of the term happens in conjunction with certain practices and particular practitioners.

other practitioners who may offer a false view of the gods and are, according to Clement, destined for “fire”: “people of the night – magi, male bacchants (followers of Bacchus), maenads (female followers of Bacchus), initiates into the mysteries.”<sup>217</sup> Gordon draws a connection between these *magoi* and those appearing in the pseudo-Hippocratic *On the Sacred Disease*.<sup>218</sup> In both texts, the *magoi* seem to have some (pretended?) expertise in healing, and are contrasted with the *mystai* (initiates into a mystery cult).<sup>219</sup> In any case, from the Heraclitus text alone, we can gather that the author believed *magoi* to be part of a class of individuals in the same manner that bacchants and maenads were a group of individuals. We cannot glean much else from the passage, apart from the author’s disparaging attitude towards these groups.

Other uses of the term offer more information. Herodotus uses ‘*magoi*’ in conjunction with the Persian priesthood. They are responsible for prophecies, divination, and the interpretation of dreams.<sup>220</sup> In Herodotus’ view, the Persian *magoi* are religious specialists who are called upon to perform official religious rites; these individuals are a far cry from those in the disputed Heraclitus passage. In one passage, Herodotus recounts how Xerxes’ armies stopped marching in Thrace so that the *magoi* might offer a sacrifice for good

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<sup>217</sup> Heraclitus 12 B 14a D-K, trans. Gordon.

<sup>218</sup>Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 64.

<sup>219</sup>Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 64.

<sup>220</sup>Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), 1.120.1: “...he summoned the same Magi who had interpreted his dream...” 1.120.3: “‘If the boy is alive,’ said the Magi, ‘and has been made king without premeditation, then be confident on this score and keep an untroubled heart: he will not be made king a second time. Even in our prophecies, it is often but a small thing that has been foretold and the consequences of dreams come to nothing in the end’.”; 1.107.1: “He communicated this vision to those of the Magi who interpreted dreams, and when he heard what they told him he was terrified.” 7.19.1: “Xerxes was now intent on the expedition and then saw a third vision in his sleep, which the Magi interpreted to refer to the whole earth and to signify that all men should be his slaves.” See also Carastro, M. “L’apparition de la notion de magie en Grèce ancienne,” *Mémoire de DEA* (1997): 26-33.

omens.<sup>221</sup> Doubtless readers familiar with Graeco-Roman sacrificial practices might have drawn several parallels to Herodotus' story. Yet, the next action that the *magoi* undertake – that of burying alive a number of local youths – likely appeared disturbing.<sup>222</sup> Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain Herodotus' own opinions on the Persian *magoi*. Instead of offering an opinion on them as a class of individuals, he is content to recount their activities. They remain ambivalent figures, and as we shall see, this is not unusual in Graeco-Roman writings.

The correlation of the word *magoi* with Persia is unsurprisingly seen again in the *First Alcibiades*.<sup>223</sup> Here, the author claims that the “science of the *magoi*, owing to Zoroaster....is in fact the worship of the gods.”<sup>224</sup> The connection with Persia is rather fascinating itself for its ambiguity; if Edith Hall is correct that some resentment of foreigners obtained in Greek-speaking lands, then it is not surprising to find such a positive evaluation of Persian practice alongside some uneasy sentiments about *magoi* as well.

We also have magic mentioned in the undisputed writings of Plato and in various Greek playwrights. These references are worth considering. In Euripides' *Orestes*, the chorus of Phrygians relates to the audience the goings-on as Orestes and Pylades attempt to kill

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<sup>221</sup>Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.113.2.

<sup>222</sup>Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.114.1.

<sup>223</sup>Questions of the authorship or text lie outside the scope of the present study. Interestingly enough, however, Apuleius believed that Plato was the author of the *First Alcibiades*, as he used this particular passage to mount his defense in his own *Apology*. For questions of authorship see the bibliographical article by Jakub Jirsa, “Authenticity of the *Alcibiades I*: Some Reflections,” *Listy filologické* 133 no. 3-4 (2009): 225-244; See also H. J. Kramer, *Ältere Akademie, Aristoteles-Peripatos* in H. Flashar, ed., *Die Philosophie der Antike*, vol. 3. (Basel: Schwabe, 1983).

<sup>224</sup>*First Alcibiades*, 122a, trans. Harold North Fowler and W. R. M. Lamb, *Plato in Twelve Volumes – VIII: The Statesman, Philebus, Ion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

Helen.<sup>225</sup> Immediately after killing the “unlucky Hermione,” the two turn their attention to Helen. But she has disappeared, either by “magical skill or divine theft.” Here, our author believes that magical skills have the ability to make an individual disappear. Another reference in Greek drama comes from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus berates Tiresias the seer as being a “scheming” *magos*.<sup>226</sup> The connotation is clearly negative, but the activity suggested is some derivative of divination. In the king’s mind, the divination is one driven by profit and personal gain, so it is difficult to distinguish between the opinion of the character and the opinion of the author. Nevertheless, passages such as these are only intelligible to audience members if they can *imagine* the truth of a scheme-hatching magician who divines misfortune to ensure personal gain. As a result, we ourselves must imagine that such a magician-figure was within the realm of possibilities when we seek to understand ancient wonderworking.

Plato’s use of the term is equally ambiguous. Naturally, this makes perfect sense, given that as far as we know, there is no extant systematic attempt to analyze the concept of magic as early as the fourth century BCE.<sup>227</sup> There are two references to *magos/mageia* in Plato.<sup>228</sup> The first is in the *Republic*, where Plato claims the *magoi* can incite a youth’s passions for baser appetites when they seek to control him.<sup>229</sup> The implication is that *magoi* could prey upon an individual’s desires. One is tempted to make the connection to love

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<sup>225</sup>Euripides, *Orestes*, 1474-1500.

<sup>226</sup>Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 387, trans. Sir Richard Jebb and F. Storr, *Sophocles, vol. I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone* (New York: William Heinemann, 1912).

<sup>227</sup>Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Graeco-Roman World*, 44.

<sup>228</sup>I have not included material from texts like Plato’s *Republic* 364b or *Laws* 909a-b since he does not use the word *magos* or any of its cognates in these passages.

<sup>229</sup>Plato, *Republic*, 572e-573a.

magic, but the philosopher himself does not. Plato's second mention is that of *mageutike* – suggesting something to the effect of “the art (*technē*) of magic.”<sup>230</sup> Here, the “art of magic” is concerned with *alexipharmaka*.<sup>231</sup> Magic, then, appears to be specialized skill, and perhaps especially concerned with spells. There is no evidence, of course, that Plato devoted serious attention to systematically defining a working theory of magic.<sup>232</sup> Instead, what appears to be the case is that Plato himself participated in the highly malleable, ambiguous discourse of magic that was extant at the time of his writing.<sup>233</sup>

The author of the Hippocratic (or pseudo-Hippocratic) “On the Sacred Disease” concerns himself with distinguishing proper medicine from what he believes to be charlatanry. He writes,

For if a man by magical arts (*mageuōn*) and sacrifices will bring down the moon, and darken the sun, and induce storms, or fine weather, I should not believe that there was anything divine, but human, in these things, provided the power of the divine were overpowered by human knowledge and subjected to it. But perhaps it will be said, these things are not so, but, not withstanding, men being in want of the means of life, invent many and various

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<sup>230</sup>Plato, *Statesman*, 280d.

<sup>231</sup>Plato, *Statesman*, 280e.

<sup>232</sup>Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Graeco-Roman World*, 45.

<sup>233</sup> I should note here that Plato also used a second term to denote what we may refer to as a ‘magician’ – the Greek word “*goēs*,” which I am translating as “sorcerer” to distinguish from “magician.” In his *Symposium*, for example, he writes that Eros, an intermediary between the mortal and immortal realms, makes all divination possible, “and the arts of the priests concerning sacrifices and rites and incantations and all prophecy and sorcery (*goeteia*).” Although my lexical study does not include the word *goēs* and its cognates, I would like to point out the positive valence of this reference in Plato. Overwhelmingly, the word *goēs* and its variants are used in a disparaging, negative manner. Morton Smith, in fact, believed that *goēs* and *magos* signified two different classes of practitioners, who were perceived by the Graeco-Roman populace with varying degrees of skepticism. Yet here, as early as Plato, the word *goēs* is used in a fairly positive manner. Even when the overarching connotations of a word associated with magic are overwhelmingly negative, it is possible to find positive references. This is in keeping with my larger point about ambiguity in the magical discourse insofar as we might trace it.

things, and devise many contrivances for all other things, and for this disease, in every phase of the disease, assigning the cause to a god.<sup>234</sup>

This Hippocratic writer believes magicians claim to do many things through the agency of the divine, although they are certainly not working via divine agency. For the author himself, there is a natural cause to the disease in question, epilepsy, and many other maladies to boot.<sup>235</sup> Graf sees in this text one of the first intellectual moves to define magic, or at least begin distinguishing it from other concepts.<sup>236</sup> In this case, magic is defined over and against natural philosophy. While magic (and to a certain extent, religion) attributes otherworldly causes for disease, our author finds his causes within the natural realm, a realm that is divinely-ordered and therefore not necessarily subject to the machinations of magicians and their ilk.<sup>237</sup> Magic, here, is antithetical to both medicine and divinely-wrought nature.

Around 340 BCE, we have *magoi* mentioned in the enigmatic Derveni papyrus. The papyrus is a roll which was found in a grave at Derveni, several kilometers to the north of Thessalonica.<sup>238</sup> The find represents the first papyrus discovered in mainland Greece, and perhaps the oldest papyrus roll extant.<sup>239</sup> Although the papyrus is fragmentary and lacunose,

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<sup>234</sup>“On the Sacred Disease,” trans. by Adam Charles Darwin, in *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates*. (New York: Dover, 1868), 357.

<sup>235</sup>“On the Sacred Disease,” trans. Adams, *The Genuine Work of Hippocrates*, 356.

<sup>236</sup>Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 30-32.

<sup>237</sup>“On the Sacred Disease,” trans. Adams, *The Genuine Work of Hippocrates*, 359.

<sup>238</sup>Betegh, Gabor, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 56. See also Pierre Boyancé, “Remarques sur le papyrus de Derveni,” *Revue des Études Grecques* 87 no. 141 (1974): 91-110; R. Böhme, “Neue Orpheusverse auf dem Derveni-Papyrus,” *Emerita* 57 (1989): 211-38; Luc Brisson, “Les théogonies Orphiques et le papyrus de Derveni: notes critiques,” *Revue de l'histoire des Religions* 202 (1985): 389-420; M. J. Edwards, “Notes on the Derveni Commentator,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 86 (1991): 203-11; M. Henry, “The Derveni Commentator as Literary Critic,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 116 (1986): 149-64; K. Tsantsanoglou, “The First Columns of the Derveni Papyrus and their Religious Significance,” in André Laks and Glenn W. Most, eds., *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93-128.

<sup>239</sup>Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus*, 132.

the contents appear to be an exegesis of an Orphic poem, allegorical in nature.<sup>240</sup> In col. 6.2, the author speaks about the *magoi*'s ability to placate the *daimones*, who may prove a hindrance to souls. This is done through sacrifices of water and milk and "many-knobbed cakes" representing the many souls.<sup>241</sup> Here we once again encounter the class of religious specialists that seem familiar to us from the Persian tradition. In the Derveni author's opinion, the *magoi* are not necessarily charlatans as they are for the Hippocratic author of "On the Sacred Disease." Rather, they perform a necessary service for souls. The reference here is clearly positive in nature.<sup>242</sup>

Two references to the noun *mageia* will round out our survey of early Greek texts. The first comes from Theophrastus, who talks of a plant called "all-heal" which is supposed to guard against *tas mageias* and *alexipharmaka*.<sup>243</sup> A fragment falsely attributed to Aristotle contains the abstract *mageia* in reference to Persian priests.<sup>244</sup> The writer claims that the Persian priests did not know goetic *mageia*.<sup>245</sup> Gordon takes "goetic" to suggest that the writer makes a distinction between approved and sanctioned practices: "...goetic, meaning in

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<sup>240</sup> Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus*, 132.

<sup>241</sup> *Derveni Papyrus*, col. 6.5-8, ed. and trans. Betegh.

<sup>242</sup> Interestingly enough, the very fact that the Derveni author presents a positive evaluation of *magoi* has prompted some to suggest a connection with Persia, since the scholarly stereotype of magic is that the Greeks held a positive view of Persian magic. See, for example, Tsantsanoglou, "The First Columns of the Derveni Papyrus," 99. Betegh, however, does not believe that a positive valence of '*magoi*' necessitate that the *magoi* described in the Derveni papyrus are Persian. Rather, he believes that the term is used in order to draw attention to the professional nature of their position. Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus*, 79-80.

<sup>243</sup> Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum*, 9.15.7. translated by Arthur Hort, *Theophrastus: Enquiry into Plants and Minor Works on Odours and Weather Signs, Vol. II* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916).

<sup>244</sup> Arist. frg. R<sup>36</sup>. The classic edition of the spurious fragments of Aristotle is still the edition edited by Valentin Rose. See Valentin Rose, *Aristoteles pseudepigraphus*, (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1863).

<sup>245</sup> Arist. frg. R<sup>36</sup>.



this context, as usual, specious or fraudulent claims to magical power.”<sup>246</sup> What Gordon means is that the Persian priests would have known non-goetic, positively-valued, sanctioned magic, but not the “lower” forms of magic denoted by the adjective “goetic.” While he is correct in suggesting the term *goēs* and its variants often have negative connotations, the negative valence of this word family is not the only one possible.<sup>247</sup> It is best, perhaps, to tread carefully, and not draw a firm, universal distinction between “good” and “bad” forms of *mageia* in this pseudo-Aristotle fragment. Certainly one can claim that the author wishes to say the Persians did not know goetic *mageia*, but we cannot make any firm assertions about what such *mageia* entailed.

Unfortunately, evidence from the earliest strata of Graeco-Roman evidence does not yield a thoroughgoing “philosophy of magic,” as it were. Rather, what we have are a congeries of characterizations. The *magoi* are oftentimes associated with Persia’s religious professionals. These individuals were responsible for divination and sacrifices – sacrifices which Herodotus believed included people at times. Persian *magoi* performed funerary rites and dream interpretations as well. Once divorced from their ethnographic marker, we see the *magoi* being compared with bacchantes, maenads, and initiates. The idea of *magoi* as a “class marker” distinguishing a group of professional practitioners is operative in both the Derveni papyrus and “On the Sacred Disease.” In the pseudo-Hippocratic “On the Sacred Disease,” *magoi* are disparaged as being charlatans who claim that they can draw down the moon and other such nonsense, when in fact the diseases they seek to cure through their arts have a simple, natural cause and a similarly uncomplicated cure. The Derveni papyrus praises *magoi*

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<sup>246</sup>Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 164.

<sup>247</sup> See note 101.

as those who can placate *daimones* with sacrifices so that souls may travel unhindered. In Plato the *magoi* are ambiguous figures; neither good, nor bad, they can enflame desires and seem to be concerned with *alexipharmaka*, or magical spells. This summation does not tell us much about what magic is, not in a meta-discursive sense, but it does tell us a bit about what magicians *do*.<sup>248</sup> Magicians divine, performs sacrifices, perhaps heal (or at least claim to), perform funerary rites, interpret dreams, incite desire, and possibly perform spells. In this way, they are not particularly unusual members of ancient Greek society. Others, too, performed the same tasks without incurring the same conceptual baggage. A further foray into the use of magic will prove helpful in understanding the fraught nature of the concept.

## **Part IIB. Magic Emergent during the Principate**

A few of the Latin poets made references of note. Catallus exhibits knowledge of the Persian tradition of *magoi*, although he characterizes the Persian religion as “impious” and incestuous.<sup>249</sup> Vergil’s *Eclogue* warrants brief consideration. *Eclogue* 8.66, composed around 40 BCE, likely contains the very first Latin usage of an adjectival derivative of “*magos*” – the Latin “*magicis*.”<sup>250</sup> Here, the author is adopting the persona of a distressed lover who wishes to “turn astray” his lover’s “saner senses.”<sup>251</sup> Magic, once again, is shown to incite desire, to play upon the target’s passions, to unmoor one from their more rational faculties. This type of imagery is expected in poetry, and in love poetry certainly, so we must tread

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<sup>248</sup> What I mean by meta-discursive is simply that these references, taken together, do not necessarily *define* magic as much as they *describe* it. Rather than providing a heuristic category easily applicable to other texts, what we have in ancient evidence is an application of the term to various activities carrying multiple valences. I will explain in further detail shortly.

<sup>249</sup> Catallus, *Carmina* 90.1-4.

<sup>250</sup> Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 165.

<sup>251</sup> Vergil, *Eclogue* 8.66-70, trans. J. B. Greenough, *Vergil, Eclogues*, (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1895).

carefully. Even so, the reference is worth including in this survey. Horace uses *magus* in conjunction with a sort of ethnographic thinking – that of Thessalian witchcraft: “What *saga*, what *magus* Thessalian spell, what god can save you...”<sup>252</sup>

Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris* uses the term *magos* to refer to Zoroaster, who held a number of beliefs regarding the two gods of the Persians.<sup>253</sup> Important for our purposes is Plutarch’s claim that Zoroaster prescribed particular rules for sacrifice on the part of humans; this, again, recalls the sacrificial duties ascribed to Persian priests.<sup>254</sup> In the same century, recall that Pliny writes, “Let us therefore accept that (the Magian art) is abominable, ineffectual, vain – if there is even a shimmer of truth in it, that shimmer owes more to chemistry than to magic.”<sup>255</sup> Persian magic is not universally vaunted. There is also an exotic, foreign element to magic; Dio Cassius’ *Roman History* tells the story of an Egyptian travelling with Marcus who was capable of weather manipulation.<sup>256</sup> The Persians had their magi. And as we will see, Lucian’s oeuvre is rife with foreigners and their (supposed) adeptness at dealing with the wondrous. It is not surprising, then, that one of magic’s functions is that of othering.<sup>257</sup> Perhaps it is this foreign notion that is amplified in our own

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<sup>252</sup>*Carmina* 1.27.21-2, translation mine. Incidentally, *magus* here appears to be an adjective, the English being rendered as a “magic Thessalian spell”; see also *Epist.* 2.2.208-9, where Horace uses “*magicos*” in conjunction with “*saga*” and Thessaly as an ethnographic marker. Thessalian witchcraft was a stereotype in the ancient world. See Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6; Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 746-57; Statius, *Thebaid*, 3.558-9, where “drawing down the moon” is said to be a Thessalian crime; Ovid, *Amores*, 3.7.27-36, and others. I have chosen to treat magic and witchcraft separately because I am not convinced that they are the same activities, although I own both sets of activities concern manipulation of supernatural power and share certain congruencies.

<sup>253</sup>Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 369e.

<sup>254</sup>Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 369f.

<sup>255</sup>Pliny, *Natural History*, 30.17 trans. Bostock and Riley; cf. Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 217.

<sup>256</sup>Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 72.

<sup>257</sup>The function of magic as a charge is discussed in the introductory chapter of the present work.

modern studies, inducing us to focus on this function of magic to the neglect of the many, varied ways in which it was deployed.

Yet another in the catalogue of many references to Persian magic is Lucian's Mithrobarzanes, who was a follower of Zoroaster's magi.<sup>258</sup> Mithrobarzanes was a necromancer, and in Lucian's work, both the man and his actions are crafted in the most derisive language. I will address the question of necromancy later in this chapter, but for now, let us add it to the growing list of activities that magicians might have been associated with. According to Lucian, Mithrobarzanes (along with other *magoi*) can open up the gates of Hades with various charms and incantations.<sup>259</sup> Perhaps it would be more precise to claim that Lucian's satire turns on the perceived absurdity of the belief in necromancy. In any case, such a belief must have existed in order to prompt so scathing a commentary.

Lucian maligns magic several times in his writings. In his *Lover of Lies*, he tells the story of a Babylonian *magos* who is able to draw out poison from a body via spells.<sup>260</sup> This man can also command snakes to do his bidding.<sup>261</sup> The tone of the passage is as derisive as anything the great satirist produced. In another section of the same text, Lucian writes of a "Hyperborean" *magos* who is paid to secure the affections of a young woman for a love-sick youth who is too distracted to properly engage in his philosophical education.<sup>262</sup> As part of the *magos*' machinations, the man performs necromancy, calling up the spirit of the youth's

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<sup>258</sup> Lucian, *Menippus*. Mithrobarzanes is explicitly called a *magos* in chapter 10.

<sup>259</sup> Lucian, *Menippus*, 6.

<sup>260</sup> Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 12.

<sup>261</sup> Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 12.

<sup>262</sup> Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 14.

father, who expresses his outrage at the love affair.<sup>263</sup> The magician apparently draws down the moon, gives life to inanimate material, and finally, secures the target of our youth's affections.<sup>264</sup> Incidentally, magic's ability to imbue the inanimate with human qualities is also echoed in rather extreme fashion in Pausanias. Pausanias talks of a bronze statue of a mare offered at Olympia whose effect on male horses must be the result of magic, since they are crazed for it.<sup>265</sup> Obviously, all of Lucian's references to magicians and their abilities are written in a disbelieving manner, and it a safe assumption that Lucian himself did not believe in the Hyperborean mage's ability to attract the object of one's affections. That said, the efficaciousness of Lucian's satire rests upon the credulousness of his characters. The young lover who is duped by the Hyperborean – this figure is comical precisely because he is recognizable, because young lovers truly turned to magic to gain their hearts' desires, if our extant collection of ancient grimoires and *tabellae defixionum* are any indication.

Philostratus' opinion is less extreme than that of Lucian. In his *Life of Apollonius*, he writes that his protagonist was accused of being a bad sort of *magos* because he had made contact with a number of foreign sages.<sup>266</sup> Much like Apuleius, Philostratus must engage in apologetics. His Apollonius was seen as a magician because of his powers of prediction and his deep wisdom, and part of Philostratus' aim is to mitigate the charge.<sup>267</sup> He writes:

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<sup>263</sup>Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 14.

<sup>264</sup>Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 14. Lucian's humor turns upon the fact that the lady in question would have come to the youth regardless of her affections, so long as he had any sum of money at his disposal. The magician, despite being ostentatious, is completely unnecessary. The insinuation is that magic is nonsense and its believers are gullible and foolish.

<sup>265</sup>Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 5.27.2-4.

<sup>266</sup>Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 1.2.

<sup>267</sup>Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 1.3, trans. Conybeare.

And indeed who does not know the story of how Anaxagoras at Olympia in a season of intense drought came forward wearing a fleece into the stadium, by way of predicting rain, and how he foretold the fall of the house – and truly, for it did fall; and of how he said that day would be turned into night, and stones would be discharged from heaven round Aegospotami, and of how his predictions were fulfilled?<sup>268</sup>

Philostratus then makes his comparison by asking why such deeds were accorded to Anaxagoras' wisdom, yet Apollonius must endure the charge of magic when he performs them.<sup>269</sup> In later chapters, Philostratus tells us Apollonius visited with the Persian *magoi*, and that while he learned from them, he also taught them. When Apollonius' companion asked about these mysterious priests, the man only said, "They are wise men, but not concerning all things."<sup>270</sup> In striking contrast to Apuleius, then, Philostratus does not elevate the Persian magical tradition beyond the correction of good Greek teaching. This makes a certain sense; perhaps in Apuleius' case, a touch of humility served in endearing him to his audience, whereas Philostratus was creating a spiritual/literary hero. Generic bounds certainly give rise to how magic is constructed in particular texts.

Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* also takes up an ethnographic notion of magic. King Nebuchadnezzar enjoins a number of Chaldeans and magicians to remind him of a wonderful dream he had experienced the night before, threatening them with death if they are unable to do so.<sup>271</sup> Of course, they are unable, and their failure provides an entrée for Daniel into the story.<sup>272</sup> The magicians are characterized as specialists here, ineffectual though they may be.

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<sup>268</sup>Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 1.3.

<sup>269</sup>Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 1.3.

<sup>270</sup>Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 1.26, translation mine.

<sup>271</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.199.

<sup>272</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.200.

They are responsible for dream interpretation and are somehow associated with Chaldeans. Their position is precarious, however, as Nebuchadnezzar sentences them to death after they are unable to prompt his recollection of the dream in question.<sup>273</sup> Once again we see magic in conjunction with foreign-ness and with a special class of practitioners.

Two of the most virulent critics of magic were the pagan philosopher Celsus and his Christian opponent Origen of Alexandria. We do not have Celsus' own writings; we only have Origen's refutation of Celsus' charges against Christianity, but given that the Alexandrian theologian was interested in overturning the philosopher's arguments, we can proceed with some level of confidence that Origen's quotations of Celsus in his *Contra Celsum* are fairly accurate.<sup>274</sup> Books I and II in particular provide a rich repository for the researcher of ancient magic; here, Celsus and Origen debate whether certain characteristics of Jesus make him a magician or not.

One of the charges Celsus levies against Jesus is that he had traveled to Egypt and after learning *mageia* there, he returned to Palestine in order to proclaim himself a god: "[Jesus], having been brought up as an illegitimate child, and having served for hire in Egypt, and then coming to the knowledge of certain miraculous powers, returned from thence to his own country, and by means of those powers proclaimed himself a god."<sup>275</sup> Origen's refutation of Celsus' charge proceeds along moral lines. He claims that a *magos* could not

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<sup>273</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.199.

<sup>274</sup>On the accuracy of the preservation of Celsus' words see Bader, Robert. *Der alethes Logos des Kelsos*. (Stuttgart-Berlin: W. Kohlhammer, 1940); Andresen, Carl, *Logos und Nomos: das Polemik des Celsus wider das Christentum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1955); Borret, Marcel, *Contre Celse, V: Introduction* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1976), 9-28.

<sup>275</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I.38, trans Frederick Crombie, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 4, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company., 1885.)

possibly teach others to act as though they will be judged very shortly by God.<sup>276</sup> *Magoi* lack the moral rectitude for such upright teaching. Furthermore, he writes, “if they indeed wrought miracles, then how can it be believed that magicians exposed themselves to such hazards to introduce a doctrine which forbade the practice of magic?”<sup>277</sup> It is, in Origen’s mind, therefore illogical for Jesus to have been a magician.

The same sentiment is repeated in Chapter 68, where Origen counters Celsus’ charge that Jesus’ wonders are much like the Egyptians in the marketplace who will heal or exorcise demons for a few obols.<sup>278</sup> In response, Origen accedes that the wonders of Jesus and these marketplace magicians may bear superficial similarity, but the magicians in question do not prompt their customers to reform themselves in any meaningful way.<sup>279</sup> In contrast, the works of Jesus and his followers lead to salvation.<sup>280</sup> Consider Origen’s response to Celsus’ assertion that Jesus is no different from other sorcerers:

For if Jesus had simply told his disciples to be on their guard against those who professed to work miracles, without declaring what they would give themselves out to be, then perhaps there would have been some ground for his suspicion. But since those against whom Jesus would have us to be on our guard give themselves out as the Christ— which is not a claim put forth by sorcerers— and since he says that even

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<sup>276</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I.38.

<sup>277</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I.38, trans. Crombie.

<sup>278</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I.68. See also 2.49, trans. Crombie: “But Celsus, wishing to assimilate the miracles of Jesus to the works of human sorcery, says in express terms as follows: O light and truth! He distinctly declares, with his own voice, as you yourselves have recorded, that there will come to you even others, employing miracles of a similar kind, who are wicked men, and sorcerers; and he calls him who makes use of such devices, one Satan. So that Jesus himself does not deny that these works at least are not at all divine, but are the acts of wicked men; and being compelled by the force of truth, he at the same time not only laid open the doings of others, but convicted himself of the same acts. Is it not, then, a miserable inference, to conclude from the same works that the one is God and the other sorcerers? Why ought the others, because of these acts, to be accounted wicked rather than this man, seeing they have him as their witness against himself? For he has himself acknowledged that these are not the works of a divine nature, but the inventions of certain deceivers, and of thoroughly wicked men.”

<sup>279</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I.68.

<sup>280</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 2.49.



some who lead wicked lives will perform miracles in the name of Jesus, and expel demons out of men, sorcery in the case of these individuals, or any suspicion of such, is rather, if we may so speak, altogether banished, and the divinity of Christ established, as well as the divine mission of his disciples.<sup>281</sup>

The implication here is that Christianity is antithetical to magic, even though evil persons may find success by using the name of Jesus to secure their magical ends; this is an important assertion that I will return to in later chapters. Moreover, Christianity's legitimacy also rests in the success of its miracles, according to Origen. Because demons flee from the name of Jesus, the "divinity of Christ is established." For now, I would like to draw our attention to the fact that Origen's disagreement with Celsus proceeds, thus far, along the *interpretation* of actions, not the denial of performing them. He even concedes a similarity between magical actions and those of Jesus on a superficial level.

In another passage, Origen turns his attention to Simon the *magos*, who, like Jesus, claimed for himself divinity.<sup>282</sup> Origen claims that Simon was able to gather followers through magic, although he was unable to keep them.<sup>283</sup> And since so very few of his followers still exist, Simon was in no way divine.<sup>284</sup> Once again, the lines between Christianity and magic are drawn; here, they are crafted along lines of catholicity. The fact that so many people profess the Christian faith gives it legitimacy in Origen's opinion.

For his part, Celsus is claims that, "*mageia* [is] effective with uneducated people and with men of depraved moral character."<sup>285</sup> This he predicates upon the testimony of an

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<sup>281</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 2.49, trans. Crombie.

<sup>282</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.57.

<sup>283</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.57.

<sup>284</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.57.

<sup>285</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.41, trans. Crombie.

Egyptian magician named Dionysius.<sup>286</sup> Like Apuleius, Celsus seems to be working with a multi-tiered notion of magic, or at least a multi-tiered notion of magic's efficacy.

Philosophers and those with a solid moral comportment would be immune to the machinations of magicians. This sentiment has some parallels to Plotinus, who believes that magic is efficacious through sympathia and only works on the vegetative or lower part of an individual's soul. As such, a human being's higher faculties remain impervious to the effects of magic.<sup>287</sup> Likewise, in Celsus, a higher-minded human being remains impervious to magic.

According to Eugene Gallagher, Origen's overall attitude towards magic is fairly ambivalent.<sup>288</sup> He subscribes to the ancient notion that magic originated in Persia, spread to others, but claims that it brings destruction and ruin wherever it goes.<sup>289</sup> Even so, Origen believes that magic operates within a coherent system, one whose principles are known to a select group.<sup>290</sup> This system is operative, for example, in the inherent power of divine names, which, when uttered in their original language, can be efficacious in accomplishing particular ends.<sup>291</sup> Gallagher further contends that, "to accuse someone of an unphilosophical use of

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<sup>286</sup>Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.41.

<sup>287</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads*, 4.4.40.

<sup>288</sup>Eugene Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician: Celsus and Origen on Jesus*. SBL Dissertation Series 64 (Chico: Scholars' Press, 1964), 44.

<sup>289</sup>Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 44; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.80.

<sup>290</sup>Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 44; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.24.

<sup>291</sup>Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 44-45. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.24, trans. Crombie: "If, then, we shall be able to establish, in reference to the preceding statement, the nature of powerful names, some of which are used by the learned among the Egyptians, or by the Magi among the Persians, and by the Indian philosophers called Brahmans, or by the Samanæans, and others in different countries; and shall be able to make out that the so-called magic is not, as the followers of Epicurus and Aristotle suppose, an altogether uncertain thing, but is, as those skilled in it prove, a consistent system, having words which are known to exceedingly few; then we say that the name Sabaoth, and Adonai, and the other names treated with so much reverence among the Hebrews,

magic was to impugn simultaneously one's morals and education."<sup>292</sup> One is tempted to claim that Apuleius would disagree, but that would be an uncharitable read of Gallagher's point. Like the Madauran philosopher, he appears to suggest various types of magic, although he does not go so far as to label them as such.

According to Gordon, the Principate saw the emergence of a "strong notion" of magic.<sup>293</sup> He writes that, "the transition from Republic to Principate occasioned a relatively sharp increase in the visibility of illicit religion, magic linked with private divination: such charges expressed as plainly as anything else the shift from political pluralism to autocracy."<sup>294</sup> We see this "strong notion" in texts like Origen's *Contra Celsum*, where the thought of magic is so odious that our Christian philosopher must do all he can to moralize and rationalize Jesus' wonderworking ability. But magic is not merely correlated with "illicit religion" during the Principate. There is, as in the Greek tradition, a notion of the professional diviner, the Persian religious specialist. In the Latin love poets, magic incites desires and compromises one's rational faculties. In Lucian, it is not so much illicit as it is absurd. Magicians are depicted as claiming to be capable of all sorts of wondrous deeds, from flying to necromancy, although it is clear that Lucian believes these claims to be ridiculous. It would be too easy to class all of these reactions to magic as "negative," but they are not merely that; they are nuanced, and in this nuance lie shades of meaning that could prove invaluable for the modern analyst.

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are not applicable to any ordinary created things, but belong to a secret theology which refers to the Framer of all things."

<sup>292</sup>Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician*, 46.

<sup>293</sup> Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," 166.

<sup>294</sup> Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," 166.

## Part IIC. Practical Magic

The final text – or group of texts – I would like to treat in my brief survey are the Greek and Demotic magical papyri. Although these texts have been edited and translated, much of the work conducted on them has been translation or comparative work designed to foreground connections between these texts and practices narrated in early Christian literature.<sup>295</sup> Scholars like H. S. Versnel and David Frankfurter have produced rare studies excavating the papyri in a more systematic and meaningful manner.<sup>296</sup> Their work has enabled researchers to reconceive of the papyri as a wealth of information about the nature and practice of Egyptian magic, yes, but Graeco-Roman magic more broadly.

The papyri consist of spells and formulae, hymns, prayers, and rituals from the second through the fifth century CE.<sup>297</sup> The extent spells must represent a small portion of similar texts that once existed.<sup>298</sup> Literary evidence such as Acts 19 and Suetonius attests to

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<sup>295</sup>For uses of the papyri as comparative material see Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 94-129; Klauck, *Magic and Paganism*, 99-100; and Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 392-394. Major editions of the papyri include the aforementioned translation by Betz and the following: Robert Daniel and Franco Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum* 2 vols, Sonderreihe Papyrologica Coloniensia 16.1-2 (Opalden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990-1992); Reinhold Merkelbach and Maria Totti, *Abrasax: Ausgewählte Papyri religiösen und magischen Inhalts. 1-2: Gebete*. Papyrologica Coloniensia 17.1-2 (Opalden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990-1991); Reinhold Merkelbach, *Abrasax: Ausgewählte Papyri religiösen und magischen Inhalts. 3: Zwei griechisch-ägyptische Weihezeremonien*. Papyrologica Coloniensia 17.3 (Opalden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992); Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, I-II (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1928-1931). Betz’s translation also includes a bibliography for each individual papyrus on pp. 349-53.

<sup>296</sup>David Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions,” *Helios* 21 (1994): 189-221; David Frankfurter, “Narrating Power. The Theory and Practice of the Magical Historiola in Ritual Spells,” in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki eds., *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power. Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* 129 (Leiden: Brill, 1995): 457-76; Patricia Cox Miller, “In Praise of Nonsense,” in A. H. Armstrong, ed. *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, World Spirituality 15 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 481-505; Henk Versnel, “The Poetics of the Magical Charm: An Essay in the Power of Words,” in Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer eds., *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 105-58.

<sup>297</sup>Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, xli.

<sup>298</sup>Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, xli.

the *idea* that such magical books were suppressed, if indeed these narratives do not detail actual historical events.<sup>299</sup> The *PGM* represent practical texts – non-narratives that were used by individuals in workaday situations.<sup>300</sup>

What is interesting about the papyri is that some of them expressly refer to their users as “magicians.”<sup>301</sup> PGM I.331, for example, refers to the “magical knowledge” that the adept will attain after he or she performs the rites for securing a divine assistant.<sup>302</sup> PGM IV.210 talks of the “magical soul” of the user.<sup>303</sup> PGM I.127 also refers to its users as “initiates” into magic.<sup>304</sup> PGM IV mentions the “divine magic” revealed to Hadrian by the prophet of Heliopolis, Pachrates.<sup>305</sup> In some cases, the spell that is to be spoken during the rite involves calling upon a deity associated with magic, such as the “leader of magicians” in PGM IV.244. If one were searching for references to the words *magos* and *mageia* in Graeco-Roman literature, the *PGM* would prove a veritable goldmine of such references.

Moreover, these texts, in conjunction with amulets, *defixionum tabellae*, and other magical material such as amulets and *kolossoi* (dolls representing the magician’s client or the target of a spell) give the modern interpreter some sense of real, lived interactions with magic

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<sup>299</sup>Acts 19:19; Suetonius, *Augustus* 31.1.

<sup>300</sup>Betz claims the majority of the papyri in the Anastasi collection likely originated from a single collector, possibly from a private or temple library in Thebes (xlii). Since we do not know the circumstances through which Jean d’Anastasi made his purchase, I am hesitant to agree with Betz’s conclusions regarding the find. While the nature of the texts themselves do suggest that they were practical texts, we cannot know for certain that they were the property of a single collector from Thebes.

<sup>301</sup>The following word study would be impossible to conduct without benefit of the searchable online version of the *Léxico de magia y religión en los papiros mágicos griegos*, ed. L. Muñoz Delgado and J. Rodríguez Somolinos, (Madrid, CISC: 2001). (<http://dge.cchs.csic.es/lmpg/index.php>).

<sup>302</sup>τὴν μαγικὴν ἐμπειρίαν

<sup>303</sup>μαγικὴν ψυχὴν

<sup>304</sup>ὦ μα[κάρι]ε μύστα τῆς ἱερᾶς μαγείας

<sup>305</sup>τῆς θείας αὐτοῦ μαγείας

in the ancient world. These items in the archaeological record go beyond stories; they are objects that individuals interacted with. That is to say, individuals sought out professionals – professionals who, if we are to take the PGM seriously, likely thought of themselves as magicians – and engaged with them to procure a range of services. Magic, here, is not some rarefied philosophical concept as it is for some of our earlier sources. It is an everyday reality of everyday Egyptians who sought solutions to their mundane problems ranging from heartbreak to migraine.

The PGM are not one cohesive text, true, but there is good reason for treating them as a loose unit (and therefore drawing tentative conclusions about Graeco-Roman magic from them). First, the presupposition of supernatural manipulation remains consistent throughout, as do various literary characteristics, such as the inclusion of nonsensical words, rhyme schemes, and word plays.<sup>306</sup> Furthermore, although these texts were found in Egypt, the recipes collected therein share striking practical and linguistic similarities with material incorporated in narrative texts from all over the ancient Mediterranean, as I detail in chapter 4. We also have correlations between the papyri and archaeological findings – some of the *tabellae defixionum* are prepared in a manner very similar to instructions provided in the papyri.<sup>307</sup> These binding tablets have been found throughout the Mediterranean basin and

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<sup>306</sup>See again Versnel, “The Poetics of the Magical Charm,” wherein Versnel traces these linguistic similarities across the PGM and other collections of texts, such as household charms.

<sup>307</sup>Major studies on the *defixiones* include: Auguste Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1904); M. Besnier, “Récents travaux sur les *defixionum tabellae* latines 1904-1914,” *Revue de philologie* 44 (1920): 5-30; W. M. Calder III, “The Great *defixio* from Selinus,” *Philologus* 197 (1963): 163-72; Armand Delatte and Philippe Derchain, *Les intailles magiques gréco-égyptiennes* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1964); William Fox, “Submerged *tabellae defixionum*,” *American Journal of Philology* 33 (1912): 301-10; John Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from Antiquity and the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); David Jordan, “A Survey of Greek *defixiones* not included in the Special Corpora,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985): 151-97; David Jordan, “*Defixiones* from a Well near the Southwest Corner of the Athenian Agora,” *Hesperia* 54 (1985): 205-55; David Jordan, “New *Defixiones* from Carthage,” in J. H. Humphrey ed., *The Circus and a Byzantine Cemetery at Carthage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan

suggest a robust and vibrant magical practice throughout and beyond the Empire, both temporally and geographically. We further have collections of amulets, incantation bowls, and *kolossoi* that bear a resemblance to the PGM in language and in method of preparation.<sup>308</sup> Once again, these items are not circumscribed to Egypt. Taken together, these facts suggest that the PGM as extant do not represent some specialized corner of magical practice relegated to Egypt, but rather widespread congeries of activities that could be considered under the umbrella of magic. Practices found in the PGM include:

- Love spells of attraction and separation<sup>309</sup>
- Exorcisms<sup>310</sup>
- Acquisition of a spiritual assistant (*parhedros*)<sup>311</sup>

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Press, 1988), 117-40; E. G. Turner, "A Curse Tablet from Nottinghamshire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 53 (1963): 122-4; R. Wünsch, *Defixionum tabellae* (Berlin: G. Reimerus, 1897).

<sup>308</sup>Relevant studies on this magical material include: P. Aupert and David Jordan, "Magical Inscriptions on Talc Tablets from Amathous," *American Journal of Archaeology* 85 (1981): 184; Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950); Thomas Drew-Bear, "Imprecations from Kourion," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 9 (1972): 85-107; Christopher Faraone, "Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: the Defensive Use of Voodoo Dolls in Ancient Greece," *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1991): 165-205; David Jordan, "The Inscribed Gold Tablet from the Vigna Codini," *American Journal of Archaeology* 89 (1985): 162-7; David Jordan, "A Love Charm with Verses," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 72 (1988): 245-59; David Jordan, "New Archaeological Evidence for the Practice of Magic in Classical Athens," in *Praktika tou xii diethnous synedriou klasikēs archaiologias*, 1983-4 vol. iv (Athens: Hypourgeio Politismou kai Epistēmōn, 1988), 273-7; David Jordan, "A New Reading of a Phylactery from Beirut," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 88 (1991): 61-9; Roy Kotansky, *The Greek Magical Amulets. The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper and Bronze Lamellae, part 1: Published Texts of Known Provenance*, Papyrologica Coloniensia, xxii.1 (Opalden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991); T. D. Mitford, *The Inscriptions of Kourion*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 83 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973); E. Reiner, "Magic Figurines, Amulets, and Talismans," in Ann E. Farkas, Prudence Oliver Harper, and Evelyn B. Harrison eds., *Monsters and Demons in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds: Papers Presented in Honor of E. Porada* (Mainz: Zabern, 1988).

<sup>309</sup>Of attraction: PGM IV.296-466, 1390-1495, 1496-1595, 2891-2942, 2943-66; PGM VII.467-77, 973-80, 981-93; Spells for separation: PGM XII.449-52, 453-65, 466-68.

<sup>310</sup>PGM IV.86-87, 3007-86; LXXXIV.1-6; XCIV.17-21.

<sup>311</sup>PGM I.1-42; III.494-611; XII.14-95; LVII.1-37.

- Healing of everyday ailments such as gout, scorpion stings, and migraines<sup>312</sup>
- Making oneself invisible<sup>313</sup>
- Requests for dreams, revelations, and oracles<sup>314</sup>
- Spells for foreknowledge<sup>315</sup>
- Preparation of phylacteries and amulets<sup>316</sup>
- Necromancy<sup>317</sup>
- Divination spells<sup>318</sup>
- Horoscopes<sup>319</sup>

Aside from these activities, the PGM also share other characteristics. Many of the papyri presuppose secrecy.<sup>320</sup> Unintelligible words and sacred names proliferate. The PGM also provide instructions for preparing the amulets, phylacteries, and *defixiones* used in the above spells.

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<sup>312</sup>PGM VII.149-54 (to keep insects out of the home); VII.193-96 (for a scorpion sting), 197-98 (for discharge of the eyes), 199-201 (for a migraine), 203-5 (for coughs); PDM xiv.554-62 (for a dog bite), 563-74 (for the removal of poison), 956-60 (pregnancy test), 1003-14 (for gout).

<sup>313</sup>PGM I.247-62; VII.619-27.

<sup>314</sup>PGM III.633-731; PGM IV.52-85, 930-1114, 3086-3124, V.54-69, 370-446, VII.250-254.

<sup>315</sup>PGM III.263-75, 479-83, 483-88

<sup>316</sup>PGM IV.86-87, PGM VII.218-21, 317-18, 579-90, PDM.xiv.1003-14, PGM XVIIc.1-14, PGM XVIIIa.1-4, PGM XVIIIb.1-7.

<sup>317</sup>PGM IV.2006-2125, 2125-39, PGM XII.401-44.

<sup>318</sup>PGM IV.154-285, 3209-54, PGM VII.155-67, PGM VII.348-58, 540-78, PDM.xiv.695-700, 701-5.

<sup>319</sup>PGM III.275-81.

<sup>320</sup>PGM LVII and LXXII are written in cryptography, for example. See Hans Dieter Betz, "The Formation of Authoritative Tradition in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, vol. 3: Self-Definition in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. B. F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 161-170.



### **Part IID. Magic in the Ancient Imagination**

Obviously it is impossible to expect any sort of sustained philosophical rumination on the intellectual contours of magic from the papyri. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the possibility that the everyday Roman likely encountered magical practices more often than magical ideation. This is not to suggest that there is a neat bifurcation between practices and ideas; clearly one cannot exist without the other. What I am suggesting is that an individual seeking the services of the professional magician who owned parts of the Anastasi collection, or the marketplace magician so disparaged by Origen, or even someone approximating Lucian's so-called Hyperborean mage might have understood magic to be more than a charge levied at outsiders. The magician's client might have believed magic to be a boon to their everyday troubles, a fearsome thing to be protected against by the use of amulets, or a means to secure wealth and success. If this is the case, then our modern methodologies must take into account the lived realities of ancient individuals. Magic must be more than a purely discursive construct, more than a rhetorical expedient; it must consist of practices as well.

Thus, if we consider the fuller evidence, beyond the PGM, amassed during the Principate and afterwards, we are left with similarly puzzling evidence as that which came before. The Latin poets are aware of the Persian tradition, and of a tradition of love magic. Horace talks of magic in conjunction with the activities of Thessalian witchcraft. An ethnographic notion of magic as a foreign art is carried through Plutarch, Dio Cassius, and especially Lucian, whose derisive attitude towards magic is designed to undermine its credibility. In Philostratus, however, Apollonius of Tyana represents the intellectual superiority over foreign magic since he was able to teach the Persian sages, who are not all-

knowing. Chaldeans are the foreign magicians in Josephus' *Antiquities*, and like the Persian *magi* of Herodotus, they are characterized as dream interpreters.

Magic's ethnographic aspect is echoed in Celsus' charge against Jesus that he learned magic from the Egyptians, but the *Contra Celsum* is much more concerned with defining magic against Christianity than it is merely characterizing magic as a foreign other. In Origen's opinion, the question of magic is one of morality, since Jesus' wonders are always accompanied by Christian teachings and exhortations to reforming oneself. Magic, here, is a question of intent and belief – a necessary foundation for scholars wishing to characterize it solely as a rhetorical charge. In our practical texts (like the PGM), the definition (or at least a basic understanding) of magic is taken for granted. It is not the subject of moralization like in *Contra Celsum*. Rather, magicians performed a number of activities ranging from divination like the Persian *magi*, to exorcisms like the ones performed by Jesus, to the preparation of potions that landed Apuleius before a tribunal.

### **Part III. New Magic: Methodological Reconfigurations**

So how might the modern interpreter understand the disconnect between the type of practice that found Apuleius defending himself against a charge of magic and the type of practice described as “divine” in the PGM? Perhaps Apuleius might suggest that not only his accusers, but also the users of grimoires like the PGM are guilty of subscribing to a more vulgar notion of magic, one that is not as philosophically inclined as is his own. But we cannot take Apuleius at his word. After all, the *Apology* merely claims that the vulgar notion of magic consists of believing an individual could secure his aims through incantations, nothing more. And nothing within the text intimates that Apuleius' accusers believed their own notions to approximate this vulgar understanding; the behaviors they ascribe to the

philosopher go beyond mere incantations.<sup>321</sup> It is likely, then, that magic is not conveniently bifurcated into “sophisticated” and “vulgar” varieties, although scholarship has posited such a rhetorical bifurcation to account for the different ways in which the concept of magic is used in the ancient world.<sup>322</sup>

In recent decades, scholarship has been focused on the rhetoric of magic – on how it is defined and characterized, not necessarily how it is *used*. My contention is that this rhetorical function of magic gives us only part of the picture. As such, we have seen only part of magic’s vastness and multivariability. When taking into account a fuller portion of the evidence, of the ways in which the term *magos* and its cognates were used in the ancient literary evidence, we see that descriptions of magic are not merely relegated to characterizing an individual as outsider, or maligning their theological position (although we certainly have that). Alongside disparagement or exaltation of the magical tradition, we have the description of activities. Activities comprise the charge in the *Apology*. Activities round out the description of the Persian *magoi* in Herodotus – from innocuous dream interpretations to more disturbing human sacrifices. Plato refers to *mageutike*, suggesting that magic involves a *doing*, or *techné*, of sorts. Sacrifices and libations appear throughout the literary record, from Derveni to the numerous mentions of the Persian magi, as does potion-making, healing, and exorcism. The archaeological evidence from Athens to Roman Britain suggests individuals were indulging in the preparation and burial of *defixiones* like the ones described in the PGM. The existence of magical spellbooks outside Egypt is also supported by reports of their

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<sup>321</sup>What *is* interesting, though, is that many of Apuleius’ supposed activities correspond with activities found in the PGM.

<sup>322</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 68-93; Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus*, 78-79.

suppression in writings like Acts 19:19 and Suetonius. All of this taken together suggests that if magic was anything, it was a *practice*. To put it simply: magicians did things.

Understanding magic as a group of practices in conjunction with rhetorical charges provides a useful nuance to the exclusively meta-discursive understandings that have monopolized scholarship thus far. Instead of simply analyzing how the ancients spoke of magical practices, a sustained focus on activities allows the interpreter to read a “discourse of activities,” as it were. For example, in the *Acts of Peter*, the author crafts a battle of supernatural prowess between Simon Magus and Peter.<sup>323</sup> Naturally, Simon’s magic is much maligned while Peter’s miracle-working is elevated. The vitriol in the text is striking, particularly when considered alongside the fact that nearly all of Peter’s activities have analogues among the PGM. What do we make of such sustained disparagement of magic in the face of flagrant use of magical practices? My contention is that the very use of these practices necessitates the strong differentiation between Simon Magus and Peter. By focusing on the practices in the *Acts of Peter*, one can give a richer resonance to the rhetorical differentiation between magic and miracle in the text. One can give a *reason* for such a differentiation. The *Acts of Peter* is not the only text that might benefit from attention paid to magical practices *as well as* meta-discourses of magic. The subsequent chapters of this work detail how ancient Christian texts involving magic can be read on at least two levels – that involving the meta-discourse (what Christians *said* about magic); and that of the practical (how magical activities function). Magical activities in Christian texts formulate their own discourse. They generate converts, affect rapprochement between different factions of Christianity, serve as harbingers of the coming Kingdom, among other things. These

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<sup>323</sup>I will discuss this and other aspects of the magical discourse in the *Acts of Peter* more fully in Chapter 4.

functions – or rather, this discourse of functions – would be lost if we did not attend to practices as meticulously as we do rhetoric.

That said, I do not wish to suggest that all practices are created equal, or even that there was a set list of practices that constituted magic at all times throughout the Roman empire. What I am suggesting is rhetorical charges of magic and magical practices existed in a relationship, with each informing the other. Neither end of the dialectic – the practices nor the discourse – is stable, but it does appear that certain practices were more problematic than others, and more likely to be interpreted in a negative sense. Perhaps it is best, then, to think of the practical aspect of magic as a typology or continuum, in which some activities occupy a more transgressive position while others are more ambiguous. Activities occupying an ambiguous position are more amenable to being interpreted as “not magic,” thereby allowing individuals like Origen to effectively defend Jesus from his detractors. Less ambiguous practices are more often thought of as magical and therefore less likely to be associated with figures who might be interpreted in a positive light.

### **Part IIIA. Less Ambiguous Practices**

I will attempt to sketch the aforementioned continuum, but I should like to include an opening caveat: this continuum is by no means applicable in every situation, but rather represents a general rule to which exceptions surely exist. Magic is nothing if not difficult to classify, after all. Practices falling under the rubric of “less ambiguous” tend to have negative valences, to be associated with transgressive figures (especially witches), and are difficult to interpret in a positive way. Individuals like Jesus of Nazareth, Simon Peter, and Apollonius of Tyana would hardly be portrayed engaging in these sorts of practices – practices inclusive of necromancy and erotic magic.

Necromancy consists of a number of types of activities, generally classed under the rubric of, “communication from the dead in order to receive prophecy from them.”<sup>324</sup> These activities included ghost evocation, oracles of the dead, and reanimation of corpses.<sup>325</sup>

Reanimation is the most loathsome of these practices, unequivocally. Oracles of the dead and ghost evocation enjoy a more favorable reputation, and so these sorts of activities would likely be more amenable to interpretation than the reanimation of a corpse.

In terms of reanimation-necromancy, we have three major authors: Lucan, Heliodorus, and Apuleius. In all three cases, the valence of the text is overwhelmingly negative. Lucan’s account consists of Sextus Pompey, son of Pompey, searching for a means of discerning the outcome of civil war.<sup>326</sup> Instead of seeking out the oracles of Apollo or other sanctioned modes of divination like haruspicy or augury, he sought out divination through necromancy and went to Erictho, a Thessalian witch.<sup>327</sup> The woman herself is described as “miserable,” and “filthy.”<sup>328</sup> Undaunted, she wanders about the plain of bodies freshly-slain in battle.<sup>329</sup> Lucan even tells the reader that she could raise armies of dead to fight if she should choose.<sup>330</sup> After picking a corpse, she drags him back to her dark, dark cave, where sunlight could not possibly penetrate.<sup>331</sup> Her unction for effecting the

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<sup>324</sup>Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xix.

<sup>325</sup>For the sake of convenience, I use Ogden’s categories in Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 179-204.

<sup>326</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.588-589.

<sup>327</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.425-439.

<sup>328</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.624, trans. Ogden.

<sup>329</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.624-641.

<sup>330</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.624-641.

<sup>331</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.642.

reanimation includes all manner of viscera from horrifying creatures, including hyena, vipers, Libyan horned snakes, etc.<sup>332</sup> The dead man speaks his prophecy and immediately asks to be put to death again.<sup>333</sup> The problem is that his soul is no longer immortal, since fate cannot take it twice.<sup>334</sup> The tone is overwhelmingly negative; it is clear the audience should fear Erictho and her necromancy. This is not a practice one should seek. Sextus Pompey is characterized as a weak-willed, impious man for choosing to engage in such a practice.

This characterization obtains in Heliodorus as well, where an old woman reanimates the corpse of her dead son only to be admonished by him in the following manner:

...I put up with you as you broke the laws of humanity, violated the decrees of the gods, and unfixed with your sorceries what was fixed. For, so far as possible, respect for parents is preserved even among the dead... No longer are you dabbling in lawlessness, as at first; now you push it beyond the limit. You compel a dead body not only to stand itself up and nod but even to speak...<sup>335</sup>

Clearly, the issue here is the transgression against the natural order, wherein dead souls are to remain with other dead souls.

The passage in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* is designed to be humorous, but it echoes the same sentiment. Here, the dead soul wonders why he is being called back when he has drunk from the Lethe and wishes to be left in peace.<sup>336</sup> Given the overarching negative attitude towards reanimation necromancy in the ancient world, it is no surprise that the heroes of the Christian tradition never engage in it.

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<sup>332</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.667-718.

<sup>333</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.820.

<sup>334</sup>Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6.821.

<sup>335</sup>Heliodorus, 6.15, trans. Ogden.

<sup>336</sup>Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.29.

Oracles of the dead seem to have existed alongside other types of oracles. Ogden claims incubation was the usual method of obtaining these oracles, since no contradictory evidence exists.<sup>337</sup> In Plutarch's *Moralia*, a man seeks the cause for his son's death from such an oracle.<sup>338</sup> In another of Plutarch's works, a young man who is constantly tormented by the ghost of the concubine he accidentally murdered seeks to appease her at such an oracle at Heracleia.<sup>339</sup> Maximus of Tyre mentions an oracle which will allow consultations with one's ancestors in his *Dissertationes*.<sup>340</sup> More examples of oracles of the dead can be found in ancient literature, but in none of our examples do we get the sense that consulting an oracle of the dead is a suspicious or particularly nefarious activity.

This is a part of the necromantic tradition that is ambiguous, unlike reanimation. Naturally, such a lack of disparagement makes sense; consultation of oracles was part and parcel of ancient religious expression. Furthermore, unlike reanimation, where a corpse is united with a soul that has descended into the underworld, in an evocation or oracular context, there is no union between soul and bodily matter; there is only contact with the soul. Maintaining a strict separation between soul and corpse may have contributed to evocation and oracles being considered more acceptable than reanimation, since here, unlike in the passage from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the fate of the dead soul is not altered.

Ghost evocation appears to be the most ambiguous of the practices of necromancy. According to Ogden, the procedure he terms "ghost-evocation" is first described in *Odyssey*

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<sup>337</sup>Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 188.

<sup>338</sup>Plutarch, *Moralia*, 109b-d.

<sup>339</sup>Plutarch, *Cimon* 6.

<sup>340</sup>Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes* 8.2.



10.488-540, 11.13-149 and remains fairly consistent throughout ancient literature.<sup>341</sup> These rites typically take place at night around a pit and fire, involve libations that are not different from those involved in non-necromantic libations, a sacrifice, an offering of blood to the ghosts, and prayers made to underworld powers who hold sway over the ghosts.<sup>342</sup> In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' journey to Hades is not necessarily depicted as illicit. What is interesting, however, is that the necromantic section of the *Odyssey* was later expanded in Julius Africanus' *Kestoi* to include appeal to supernatural entities mentioned in the PGM (Abraxas/Ablantho), Egyptian deities, and a number of indecipherable words.<sup>343</sup> The interpolated material is dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.<sup>344</sup> Julius offers an explanation for why this material was originally excised from the *Odyssey*: "...either the poet himself passed in silence over the extra passage of the spell to preserve the tone or the narrative, or the Pisistratads excised it when they were making their recension of these verses, because they felt that it had been interpolated into the poem at this point..."<sup>345</sup> The most important issue is that Julius felt as though the strange words and appeal to foreign deities was congruent with the performance of the necromancy – i.e., these characteristics of magic were in keeping with necromantic practice. Necromancy, in Julius' mind, at least, is magic.

That said, not all ghost evocation is so neutrally described. There exists an epigram attributed to Seneca which describes a "chief of an unspeakable religion" who "dared to draw

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<sup>341</sup>Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 179.

<sup>342</sup>Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 179.

<sup>343</sup>Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 183.

<sup>344</sup>Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 183.

<sup>345</sup>Julius Africanus, *Kestoi* 18, trans. Ogden.

Pompey from the ground” as “impious” and “stupid.”<sup>346</sup> Lucian’s *Menippus* also comes to mind as ghost evocation carrying a negative valence. The satirist plays up his protagonist’s gullibility in order to malign the necromancer Mithrobarzanes. Even so, clearly, ghost evocation is more acceptable a practice than reanimation-necromancy.

Erotic magic appears to be rather popular in the ancient world. There are dozens of love spells in the PGM, and many of the binding tablets involve the binding of a lover or the separation of an intended from another person. The negative valences of this type of magic is attested to in some of the works discussed above. Of course, Apuleius’ *Apology* is a testament to the fact that erotic magic had its darker side, a side that could lead to prosecution. In narrative texts, old, decrepit witches preferred to perform erotic magic.<sup>347</sup> In Diodorus, Deianeira accidentally kills Hercules with a love potion, prompting her own suicide out of guilt.<sup>348</sup> Many of these texts represent women scheming to earn the love of men.

On the practical end of matters, love spells may not retain the same sense of transgression. Some erotic amulets contain a few simple words, or a prayer for favor.<sup>349</sup> The love spells in the PGM do not appear to give the impression that the one using them is aware of transgressing some religious taboo. That said, these spells are rather forceful in language and certainly transgress familial/marital bounds if not those of religion or other societal constructs:

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<sup>346</sup>*Latin Anthology* no. 402, Shackleton-Bailey, trans. Ogden.

<sup>347</sup>See the old women who help Simaetha obtain Delphis through knowledge of love charms in Theocritus’ *Idyll* 2. See also Canidia and Sagana in Horace, *Satires* 1.8 and *Epodes* 5.

<sup>348</sup>Diodorus, 4.36.

<sup>349</sup>Delette and Derchain, nos. 324, 329; Kotansky, no. 24.

...take away the sleep of that woman until she comes to me and pleases my soul...lead [NN] loving, burning on account of her love and desire for me...force her to have sex with me [NN]...impel, force her to come to me loving, burning with love and desire for me [NN] drive [NN] from her parents, from her bedroom...and force her to love me and give me what I want...<sup>350</sup>

This type of magic would be antithetical to Christian values of chastity; it is clear why we do not see Jesus or his disciples engaging in it. But the sheer ubiquity of the spells suggests that their place is not easily understood as “accepted” or “not accepted.” Rather, these spells were seen as a service provided by professional magicians, for good or ill.

### **Part IIIB. Ambiguous Practices**

Unlike the practices included in our last category, ambiguous practices are far less circumscribed and far more amenable to interpretation. These are the practices we will encounter in the following pages – weather manipulation, healings, exorcisms, revivifications, and all manner of minor miracles. These practices are certainly considered magic by the likes of the users of the PGM. Some of our other sources believed one or more of these practices to belong to the magician’s repertoire. The Pseudo-Hippocratic author of “On the Sacred Disease,” for example, believed that magicians claimed to heal the ill, false though these claims may be. Dio Cassius’ Egyptian magician engaged in weather manipulation. Lucian’s Hyperborean mage could fly. Yet, such practices are rarely given a single interpretation.

Take the following from the *Acts of Peter*: In the text, Peter vivifies a smoked tuna fish. Before he does so, however, he asks the gathered crowd, “When you see this [smoked tuna] swimming in the water like a fish, will you be able to believe in whom I preach?”<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>350</sup>Audollent, *defixonem tabellae*, 230.

<sup>351</sup>*APt* 13, trans. Elliott.

Naturally, the crowd says yes, after which Peter utters the following incantation: “O Jesus Christ, in whom they do not yet believe, I say, ‘[Tuna], in the presence of all these, live and swim like a fish.’”<sup>352</sup> Not surprisingly, many believers are gathered into the Christian fold as a result of Peter’s wonder. Let us consider another Christian text. In the *Pseudo-Clementines*, the villain Simon Magus vivifies a statue. In fact, he claims that, “[he] will bring statues to life, in such a way that they will be thought by those that see them to be men.”<sup>353</sup> In terms of effect alone, this is not unlike the effect that Peter’s wonder-working had on the smoked tuna. Yet, this is how Simon is described in the *Pseudo-Clementines*: “He was a mage by trade, but had an excellent education in the Greek liberal arts. He was so eager for glory and opportunities for superhuman ostentation that he wished to be held to be an outstanding power, over and above God the creator.”<sup>354</sup> Here, we see the practice of revivification being used for different ends as those in our earlier text. In this context, revivification is used for self-aggrandizement. Clearly, not all revivifications are created equal. What is the mark of an apostle in the *Acts of Peter* is the mark of a usurper in the *Pseudo-Clementines*.

So, is revivification miracle or magic? One is tempted to class it as miracle in the first instance and magic in the second, since the first wonder is performed by a designated agent of the Christian God and the second performed by a theological opponent. My assertion is that this shift from magic to miracle, and vice versa, is *only* possible on account of the discursive flexibility surrounding the practice of revivification in the broader context—a context inclusive of, but not limited to, Christian discourses of the magical. In other words,

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<sup>352</sup>*APt* 13, trans. Elliott.

<sup>353</sup>*Recognitions* II.9, trans. Roberts and Donaldson.

<sup>354</sup>*Recognitions* II.9, trans. Roberts and Donaldson.

revivification is not as transgressive as necromancy, and therein lies its versatility as a discursive expedient. The ambiguity inherent in the *practice* allows it to be utilized for myriad ends, whether they be assimilatory or contrastive. Magic is a discursive concept, to be sure, but the limits of the discourse are rooted in the practices allied to it. Ambiguous practices associated with the magical lend it more discursive flexibility. Less ambiguous practices render it stable.

In short, practices like revivification fell along a continuum ranging from licit to illicit, from transgressive to typical, and from magic to miracle. These are the sorts of practices that made Jesus, and yes, Peter and Paul, such successful figures of the Christian imagination. The practices themselves gave rise to varying interpretations, and while magic very much functioned as a rhetorical charge in the Graeco-Roman world, its function was not limited as such. Magical practices themselves could constitute a discourse as well, functioning in myriad ways and adding richer resonance to the rhetorical aspect of magic as a category. In the following pages, I hope to demonstrate how the inherent ambiguity of magical practices becomes an expedient for the Christians – a means by which they frame their own identity among the matrix of practices that proliferated in the Graeco-Roman world.

## CHAPTER 2: JESUS THE MAGICIAN: MAGIC AND ESCHATOLOGY IN THE LUCAN IMAGINATION

In Luke 3:22, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus before Jesus begins his ministry. Morton Smith controversially saw this as the descent of a *parhedros*, or magical assistant, who animated the rest of Jesus' work.<sup>355</sup> Some of the essential elements of the "magical stereotype" indeed are present in the baptism narrative, but they require a bit of imagination to call to mind a context like the one of the magicians that might have used the PGM. The appearance of Holy Spirit during Jesus' prayer in 3:22 serves well to illustrate this need for analytical fancy in order to contrive the story to fit perfectly within magical contexts. In magical spells, the *parhedros* often appears via a series of incantations, many involving the recitation of sacred names.<sup>356</sup> No such incantation is mentioned in Luke's Gospel, yet Smith believed that a baptismal formula could quite easily serve as a "stand in" for such incantations.<sup>357</sup> Perhaps, but if baptismal formulae were in fact magical formulae, then would we not expect *other* baptisms narrated to endow the initiate with a divine *parhedros*? Likewise, it is true that Jesus performs his wonders only after he receives the Spirit, much

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<sup>355</sup>Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 99-104.

<sup>356</sup>Take for example PGM I.1-42, which is littered with not only sacred names and *voces magicae*, but also includes drawings and figures. Other examples of magical spells designed to secure a *parhedros* include PGM I.42-195, III.494-611, XII.14-95, LVII.1-37. In each of these spells, the divine assistant summoned via ritual language not readily intelligible.

<sup>357</sup>Smith believed that a ritual likely accompanied Jesus' baptism, and that this ritual was deleted here, presumably since such ritual elements, if confused, could precipitate the charge of magic against Jesus and his followers. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 96

like a spiritual assistant can work various wonders for its magician.<sup>358</sup> Nevertheless it is difficult to disentangle the Spirit's mandate as the driving agency behind Jesus' wonders from the Spirit as the impetus for Jesus' theological pronouncements. That is to say, the Spirit is responsible for much more than animating Jesus' magical deeds. Magic and theology are not mutually exclusive, to be sure, but to limit the Spirit's role to that of a *parhedros* is too simple an assertion given the singular nature of Luke's Holy Spirit.<sup>359</sup> According to Smith, even the dove has an analogue in magical ritual, serving as a messenger for the god Typhon in PGM IV.154-221.<sup>360</sup> This, too, may be true, but such easy comparisons cannot state definitively that Jesus, as depicted in Luke's Gospel, was a Graeco-Roman magician.<sup>361</sup>

Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that comparative work cannot be done carefully and must be dismissed outright. In fact, rather than imagine that formative Christianity emerged in some sort of cultural vacuum, drawing connections to traditions and discourses within the wider Graeco-Roman milieu can deepen our understanding of both Christian

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<sup>358</sup>Luke posits the Holy Spirit as the driving agent behind Jesus' spiritual agency. See Luke 4:1a; 4:14; 4:18; 10:21; 11:20. See also Douglas Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke's Christology*, SNTS Monograph Series 89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 129. This notion of a spiritual entity which "drives" the human's wonderworking is in keeping with the magical tradition in which a *parhedros* is the driving agent fueling a magician's deeds.

<sup>359</sup>The discussion pertaining to Luke's Holy Spirit is tangential to the issue here. That said, what is clear is that Luke's Gospel places a singular emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Jesus' receipt of the Spirit is mentioned in conjunction with the messiah's imminent arrival (1:15; 1:35; 1:41; 1:67; 2:25-27; 3:2) and the power by which Jesus operates (4:1a; 4:14; 4:18; 10:21; 11:20). The implication of messiahship in the Spirit's function precludes it from being perfectly correlative with a divine assistant of the magical tradition. Luke's Spirit might be a *parhedros*, yes, but it is decidedly more than that. A more thoroughgoing investigation of the Spirit's function in Luke-Acts can be found in Edward J Woods, *The Finger of God and Pneumatology in Luke-Acts*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). For comprehensive studies, see also C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, (London: SPCK, 1954); J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press), 1975; Max Turner, "The Spirit and the Power of Jesus' Miracles in the Lucan Conception," *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991): 124-52; John Edmund Yates, *The Spirit and the Kingdom*, (London: SPCK, 1963).

<sup>360</sup>cf. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 103.

<sup>361</sup>Smith goes beyond that, actually, and claims that the *historical* Jesus was a Graeco-Roman magician and that the traditions recorded in the Gospels are in part purged of references to magic. *Jesus the Magician*, 94-139.

origins and historiography more generally. That said, Smith's methodology of drawing comparisons and making positivist assertions presents problems. In the case of the Gospel of Luke, Smith's methodology yields the result that the practices narrated therein tell us more about Smith's construction of the historical Jesus than they do about Luke as a narrator and a creator of a particular discourse of magic.

To be sure, I am sympathetic to Smith's assertions, since I, too, am interested in the practices narrated in Luke's Gospel, but a dogged "yes/no" approach to Luke's text obscures more than it clarifies. To put it another way: by concentrating on whether or not Jesus was a magician, Smith's analysis must necessarily take a comparative approach, searching for the magical in Christian texts. The question dictates the methodology, though the evidence does not necessarily support such uncomplicated assertions. I submit that far more interesting for a study of Luke's Gospel is determining *how* Christians used activities associated with magic which had ambiguous valences to achieve their own ends.

It is true that the marketplace magician was said to perform a wonder for a few obols.<sup>362</sup> It is equally true that Jesus and his disciples performed wonders. The interpretations of the actors' deeds differ, but what of the wonders that remain practically the same? Did Christians understand fully that the heroes of their movement were engaging in activities that correlated with magic? Or were they content to claim that Jesus and his followers were not magicians simply because the interpretations of the activities differed? There is evidence to suggest that Christians writers like Luke were aware that the activities they narrated conformed to activities deemed magical. In Luke's case, he excises from his Markan source

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<sup>362</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I.68.



*precisely* those characteristics of magic that are less amenable to ambiguity – characteristics like secrecy and foreign, indecipherable words.

This redaction of Mark does not, however, suggest that wonderworking in Luke's Gospel is *not* magical. Rather, what it suggests is that the Graeco-Roman magical tradition, like any discursive construct, is malleable, with some parts more susceptible to discursive ambiguity than others. Jesus can work wonders, for example, but those wonders cannot be in private settings and must advance Luke's theological agenda. Furthermore, Jesus cannot work *certain* wonders – like the destruction of the fig tree detailed in Mark 11:12-25.

In a sense, Luke's treatment of magic appears contradictory. On the one hand, he narrates magical practices and valorizes them throughout his Gospel, especially the practice of exorcism. On the other hand, he purges from these practices those details which mark them as less ambiguously magical. This seeming contradiction is precisely the point I wish to foreground. My contention is that the efficacy of magic to convey message made it an effective tool for Christians, and that this efficacy need not be subject to modern notions of logical consistency. It is quite possible to engage in activities deemed magical (knowingly or unknowingly) and dislike magic. In fact, although Luke removes many of the stereotypical trappings of magic from the stories he inherited from Mark, he re-introduces these very same trappings in Acts.<sup>363</sup> What he gains from such a move is the establishment of a hierarchy with Jesus as primary agent at the apex, and Peter and Paul as equal inheritors of Jesus' power. This egalitarian aspect of the magical abilities of these two Christian leaders will be very important in our discussion of Acts, in which Peter's wonderworking activities are

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<sup>363</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3.

placed alongside those of Paul in order to endow Paul with the same authority and power as Peter.

To be clear, the establishment of this spiritual hierarchy is just *one* of the many ways in which the wonders in Luke's Gospel constitute a discourse. Another theological point made through the magical activities in the Third Gospel is that the eschaton approaches and the Kingdom of God is at hand. This is a point made by many scholars of Luke, but one that obtains when analytical focus is brought to bear on narrated magical practices *as well as* what our author says *about* magic.<sup>364</sup> The wonders in Luke are a harbinger of the coming age.<sup>365</sup> Jesus' activities not only portend the Kingdom of God, but prefigure it by demonstrating its more salient characteristics – there will be no hunger, poverty, inequality,

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<sup>364</sup>A concise treatment of the various viewpoints can be found in Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, Studies of the New Testament and its World (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 100-37. The classic theory, put forth by Vielhauer and later expanded by Conzelmann, proposed that the text of Luke's Gospel represents an attempt to recast Jesus' prophecies concerning the eschaton as pertaining to an indefinite future. Luke's impetus was the delayed parousia, which caused a great deal of embarrassment in the early church. See Philipp Vielhauer, "On the Paulinism of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert*, Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn eds. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 33-50 and Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1954). Some scholars have adopted the theory that Luke espouses an "individual eschatology," reworking eschatological language to apply to the end of each person's life. Proponents of this perspective include Jacques Dupont, *Les Tentations de Jésus au Désert*, *Studia Neotestamentica* 4 (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1968), 37-47 and Gerhard Schneider *Parusiegleichnisse im Lukas-Evangelium*, (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1975), 78-84. Others claim that eschatological expectation in Luke is solely a future matter. See Christoph Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge: Traditions- und kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukas' Darstellung der Frühzeit des Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 181-88 and Richard H. Hiers, "Why Will They Not Say, 'Lo Here!'" or "There!""? *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 35 no. 4 (1967), 379-48. My own view approximates that of S. G. Wilson, who claimed that a crisis in the church prompted Luke to address the issue of eschatology on two fronts. To deal with the crises of renewed apocalypticism and loss of faith in the parousia, Luke's Gospel retains a seemingly-contradictory eschatology (or eschatologies) in which both forthcoming arrival and delay are espoused. As I hope to demonstrate, the magical practices in the narrative – exorcism especially – tend to bear out this assertion. While I am not certain that I agree with Wilson's larger point about the crises in the church, I do concur that Luke's Gospel retains the two strands of eschatological thought Wilson delineates. See S. G. Wilson, "Lucan Eschatology," *New Testament Studies*, 16 no. 4 (1970): 330-47.

<sup>365</sup>Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist, A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2/54 (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1993), especially chapter 19, "Miracle and Message in Jesus' Ministry"; Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 129-156.

demon possession, and illness. Magical discourse in Luke's Gospel, then, fulfills *at least* two purposes (though there are certainly more). First, when coupled with the discourse in Acts, it presents Jesus' wonderworking as of a different class than that of the apostles.<sup>366</sup> Jesus' deeds are "less magical" than those of the apostles. As a corollary, this move allows Luke to place Peter and Paul on an equal footing – a rhetorical expedient I will consider more fully in Chapter 3. Second, magical deeds are narrated in a manner both portending and prefiguring the arrival of God's Kingdom. Therefore, Luke's Gospel serves as an invitation of sorts to join the Christian community before the establishment of this Kingdom.

In order to trace these two threads of magical discourse in the Gospel of Luke, I have divided this chapter into two parts. The first section is a redaction-critical study of a number of the narratives of magical deeds in Luke's Gospel. By comparing the Lucan accounts with those of Mark, I wish to foreground the patterns of redaction that purge details corresponding to the "magical stereotype" from the narratives Luke inherits. By doing so, I argue that Luke is left with a strata of the tradition which corresponds to the more ambiguous types of magic I outlined in my first chapter. Upon this initial ambiguous strata of magical discourse, Luke layers a discourse of combat with Satan and eschatological expectation. Such a layering is particularly visible in Luke's exorcism narratives, which, along with healing, are the most important type of magical activities Jesus performs in this Gospel. In the second half of this chapter, I will conduct a case study of exorcism to demonstrate how Luke inflects his initial magical discourse with theological and eschatological themes in order to make it a unique expression of his own ideology. The point of this exercise, then, is to foreground the *function*

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<sup>366</sup>Establishing a hierarchy between the apostles and Jesus would provide an answer to the question posed by Achtemeier, in which he wonders why Luke would omit Mark's withered fig tree yet retain miracles of destruction in Acts. Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 548 n4.

of magic and to show how the malleability of Graeco-Roman magical discourse can be manipulated in order to serve expressly Lucan ends.

### **Part 1. A Tradition Purified of Magic?**

John M. Hull claimed that Luke's Gospel betrayed a "thoroughly magical worldview."<sup>367</sup> Matthew, in contrast, had been purged of all elements which might lend themselves to a magical interpretation.<sup>368</sup> Interestingly enough, when one approaches the Gospel of Luke while keeping in mind the magical activities and their respective stereotypes laid out in Chapter 1, Hull's assertion cannot obtain. Luke has purified Mark's tradition of the trappings of magic – or rather, those trappings of magic that appear to be the least ambiguous in the literary evidence. That is to say, the aspects of Mark's tradition that Luke excises are precisely those aspects of magic that are more likely to be interpreted in a non-ambiguous light.<sup>369</sup> These features include secrecy and/or privacy, healings via *ousia*, and the use of foreign/unintelligible words/phrases. Luke also makes other, subtler emendations to traditions inherited from Mark. Taken together, what emerges from a careful redaction study of Luke's Gospel is a wonderworking tradition whose "more magical" characteristics are subdued, despite the fact that many of the *actions* Jesus performs are very much in keeping with what is expected of literary magicians of the Graeco-Roman world. Luke's Jesus

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<sup>367</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, 116.

<sup>368</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, 116.

<sup>369</sup> Some clarification is necessary here. In Chapter 1, I argued that magical practices were loosely arranged along a continuum, wherein some practices were relatively stable in the discourse, being regarded as overwhelmingly negative and associated with magic. These practices included necromancy and love spells. Some practices, such as exorcisms or healings were more ambiguous in nature and could be interpreted in myriad ways. Likewise, the details that comprised these practices were subject to the same interpretive fluidity. Some characteristics, like prayer, were ambiguous and could support multiple interpretations. Some characteristics, like secrecy, were more likely to be associated with practices coded as magical rather than those practices that were more ambiguous in nature. What I hope to demonstrate in this chapter is that Luke excises the latter class of characteristics – those that are not ambiguous – from his Markan source. He is thus left with narratives of magical practices stripped of "magical markers." Discussion below.

performs magical deeds, yes, but these are deeds softened and reconfigured to fulfill particular theological functions, as I hope to demonstrate.

Since Lucan redactions of Mark clearly demonstrate clear ideological tendencies, this is a simple method by which the modern analyst can trace predominant trends in the Third Gospel. I should like to conduct just such a study here in hopes of highlighting the nuanced, precise manner in which Luke manipulates Markan tradition in order to serve his own ideological ends. I will limit my study by the following criteria: 1.) the passages in question will contain narratives of wonderworking; 2.) minor differences such as word order will not be treated. While a study detailing *all* the differences in magical narratives would doubtless prove invaluable, such a lengthy study is impossible here. Even so, a truncated analysis will yield considerable results.

One of the first significant differences encountered in a redactional study of Luke against Mark is the episode concerning Simon's mother-in-law. Here, Jesus is brought to Simon's house only to find the woman in question ill with a high fever. He cures her, thereby allowing her to perform her household duties for the guests that have assembled in her home. How Luke re-frames this skeleton narrative is most telling indeed:

Table 1. Lucan Redactions of Mark I

<b>Mark 1:29-31</b> <sup>370</sup>	<b>Luke 4:38-39</b>
29: And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.	38: After getting up from the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law had been suffering a great fever, and they spoke to him about her.
30: Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed because she had a fever, and immediately they told him about here.	39: <u>And standing over her, he rebuked (ἐπετίμησεν) the fever, and it left her.</u> After rising immediately, she served them.

<sup>370</sup> All translations of the New Testament are my own or from the NRSV.

31: <u>And after he came towards her, grasping her hand, he raised her up.</u> And the fever left her, and she began to serve them.	
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The difference between Mark 1:29-31 and Luke 4:38-39 is subtle, but appreciable nonetheless. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus comes towards Simon's mother-in-law and heals her through touch; in Luke's Gospel, all he need do is rebuke the fever in order to effect the healing. The issue at hand is not whether or not Jesus touches the patient; rather, the issue concerns *how* Jesus heals. The verb ἐπιτιμάω, used in Luke but not in Mark, has a sense of judgment or legal censure.<sup>371</sup> Subject to Luke's pen, the fever becomes something of a sentient object, an entity deserving a rebuke from Jesus.<sup>372</sup> In contrast, Mark crafts the fever as a simple disease to be healed.

The almost sentient nature of the fever described in the above passage is in keeping with some modern scholarship, in which the prevailing wisdom is to state that the ancients believed diseases were caused by demonic possession.<sup>373</sup> Yet, as we have seen with texts like "On the Sacred Disease," demonic possession was not the only cause for illness. In fact, there were many non-demonic explanations given for diseases, including an imbalance of the four bodily humors, improper diet, a punishing climate, and other factors.<sup>374</sup> Although some

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<sup>371</sup> See the secondary meaning in the LSJ: of judges, *lay a penalty on a person; object to one as blameable*.

<sup>372</sup> I will discuss this in the context of the Kingdom of God working against the dominion of Satan below.

<sup>373</sup> See, as an example, Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). In fairness, not *all* scholars of ancient Christianity simplify ancient medicine. There are studies that give due shrift to the dynamic discourses of Graeco-Roman medicine. See Annette Weissenrieder, *Images of Illness in the Gospel of Luke: Insights of Ancient Medical Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001). Weissenrieder undertakes a meticulous comparative study of ancient medical treatises and healing narratives in Luke's Gospel, searching for medical insight that might be brought to bear upon the Lucan text.

<sup>374</sup> A solid yet accessible digest of many ancient viewpoints can be found in Helen King ed., *Health in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2005). See also H.F.J. Horstmanshoff and M. Stol eds., *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Philip J. van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); W.V. Harris ed., *Popular Medicine in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*:

individuals in the ancient Mediterranean may have believed that fevers were caused by demons and the like, it is not the case that *all* individuals did so. If anything, the ancient world had a robust intellectual interest in medicine, and to suggest that such debates did not occur at the time oversimplifies our object of study. Given the various causes for fever in the ancient world, it is worth considering why the author of the Gospel of Luke might wish to conflate disease with the demonic.

At first blush, Luke's treatment of the fever as a sentient entity could certainly be a symptom of his tendency to see diseases as caused by demons. But there is nothing *necessitating* such an interpretation given other interpretations for fever existed in the ancient world. Neither does the tradition he inherited from Mark treat the fever in such a manner. Rather, attributing a quasi-agency to the fever is a Lucan convention. It is a means by which our author imbues Jesus with the ability to judge, to rebuke – activities *not* in the repertoire of professional magicians.<sup>375</sup> In this small way, perhaps Luke is attempting to craft Jesus as something *more*, or at least *in addition to*, a “mere” magician.<sup>376</sup> The diseases he heals are not simply diseases, but manifestations of the demonic.<sup>377</sup> This is borne out by the healings

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*Explorations* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Ido Israelowich, *Patients and Healers in the High Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); Ildikó Csepregi and Charles Burnett eds., *Ritual Healing: Magic, Ritual and Medical Therapy from Antiquity until the Early Modern Period* (Firenze: Sismel, 2012).

<sup>375</sup> The possible exception to the general rule that magicians do not pass judgment may be the magicians depicted in the Derveni text, who are responsible for the caretaking of souls.

<sup>376</sup> Graham H. Twelftree, “ΕΙ ΔΕ...ΕΓΩ...ΕΚΒΑΛΛΩ ΤΑ ΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΑ!...[Luke 11:19],” in *The Miracles of Jesus*, David Wenham and Craig Blomberg ed., Gospel Perspectives 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 394 n.17; Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker. A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 148; Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 132.

<sup>377</sup> This notion of disease as demonic is invaluable to modern scholarly assertions of Jesus' wonders in Luke's Gospel as harbingers of the coming kingdom of God. If disease represents a tangible presence of demonic power, then Jesus' healings represent victory over the such power. In this way, each healing is a metonymy serving to illustrate the cosmic battle between God and the demonic that seems to undergird all of Luke's Gospel. I will take up this discussion and the scholars who engage in it below.

Jesus performs immediately after the episode concerning Simon's mother-in-law. In Luke 4:40, our author tells us that, "...all those who were sick with various diseases were brought to him. And he placed his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons came out of many..." Contrast this with Mark 1:32, in which the ones who are brought to Jesus in order to be healed are "those who are ill and demoniacs." In Mark, demoniacs and the ill constitute two different groups; in Luke, they are conflated to form a single group of ill individuals from whom demons come out. Other instances in Luke's Gospel betray a similar hesitancy to relegate demoniacs to their own group.<sup>378</sup> This Lucan tendency to conflate two types of magical practices – healings and exorcisms – has theological purpose, as I will demonstrate in the latter half of the present chapter. For now, I wish to bracket this aspect of the Third Gospel as I enumerate further emendations against traditions inherited from Mark.

Another interesting selection of changes happens between Mark 5:35-43 and Luke 8:49-56:

Table 2. Lucan Redactions of Mark II

<b>Mark 5:35-42</b>	<b>Luke 8:49-56</b>
35: And while he was speaking, they came from the ruler of the synagogue's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why do you still trouble the teacher?"	49: And while he was still speaking, one came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, to say, "Your daughter has died; trouble the teacher no longer."
36: But Jesus, having heard what was spoken, he said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear; only believe."	50: But Jesus, having heard, answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be restored."

<sup>378</sup> Luke 4:42, for example, omits Mark 1:39's information about Jesus casting out demons during his preaching tour in Galilee. In 11:14, Luke claims that a mute demon is the cause of a demoniac's muteness, here conflating disability with demonic possession. Luke 7:22 includes a catalog of Jesus' miracles spoken by Jesus himself. Although our omniscient narrator tells us in the verse immediately preceding that Jesus had exorcised demons, Jesus does not list this activity among his deeds in verse 22. When the disciples are granted power and authority in Luke 9:1, their power and authority is over all demons and to cure diseases, intimating that demon possession and illness are linked. In the corresponding verse in Mark's Gospel, authority is given over "unclean spirits" and nothing else, meaning that Luke added the notion of illness when he reframed this portion of Mark for his own audience (6:7). Finally, we get the crippled woman in Luke 13:10-17, who is portrayed as having a "spirit of sickness," once again conflating illness and possession.



<p>37: And he did not allow anyone to follow along with him, but only Peter and James and John, the brother of James.</p> <p>38: <u>And when he came into the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing much.</u></p> <p>39: And after having entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeps.”</p> <p>40: And they laughed at him. <u>But he, after he threw them all out, he took with him the father and the mother of the child, and those with him, and he entered where the child was.</u></p> <p>41: And after he took the hand of the child, he said to her, “<u>Talitha cum</u>,” which is translated, “Little girl, to you I say, get up!”</p> <p>42: And immediately, the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years old). And immediately they were overcome with great amazement.</p>	<p>51: When he entered into the house, he did not allow anyone with him to enter, except Peter, and John, and James, and the mother and father of the child.</p> <p>52: Everyone was weeping and mourning her. But he said, “Do not weep; for she is not dead, but sleeps.”</p> <p>53: And they laughed at him, <u>knowing that she was dead.</u></p> <p>54: But he, after he took her hand, he cried out (ἐφώνησεν), saying, “Child, get up!”</p> <p>55: And her spirit returned, and immediately she arose, and he directed [something] to be given to her to eat.</p> <p>56: And her parents were amazed...</p>
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There are two aspects of the Markan story that are different in Luke’s account in the above passage, and both correspond to stereotypes of ancient magic. These two aspects are secrecy and strange utterings.

In terms of secrecy, Mark’s Jesus is far more amenable to performing his wonders without the benefit of an audience. In both accounts, Jesus initially dispenses with the crowds that have been following him around, permitting only a select group of his followers to enter the synagogue leader’s home (Mark 5:37; cf. Luke 8:51). In Mark’s Gospel, however, Jesus throws out all of the mourners (ἐκβαλὼν πάντας) who laughed at him for insisting that the girl was merely sleeping (5:40). Luke does not include this expulsion of the gathered crowd.

Also in Mark 5:40, it is implied that Jesus, the mother and father of the child, and the three individuals Jesus permitted to accompany him are the only ones present in the chamber where the child is sleeping. As a result, they are the only ones who witness the miracle. There is no indication that Jesus proceeds to a separate chamber in Luke's version of the same story. Rather, it appears that he calls to the girl from amidst the crowd. Jesus is depicted as "crying out" (ἐφώνησεν) his order for the little girl to rise, as opposed to the Markan, "He said" (λέγει). The linguistic intensification is subtle, to be sure, but suggests that Jesus' words in Luke were meant for the entire household, mourners included. Mark's Jesus, on the other hand, was speaking to a much more select group.

Naturally, it is imprudent to claim that we can ever know with certainty why an author chose to craft a narrative in a particular manner, but I wish here to consider the fact that secrecy is associated with magic, and in many cases, it is a part of the magical tradition that might lend itself to unfavorable interpretations. I have touched upon secrecy in the first chapter of the present work, but I wish to consider it more fully here. To be clear: I do not wish to suggest that secrecy itself is sufficient to "make" an act magical, as it were; rather, my point is that the secretive nature of Jesus' miracle in Mark's *could* give an observer the same sort of pause that Apuleius' accusers experienced when they encountered his statue of Mercury which was wrapped up in a linen cloth.<sup>379</sup> Secrecy sprouts suspicion. And if one is engaging in practices that are ambiguous, that are susceptible to being interpreted as magic, then this suspicion is best mitigated.

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<sup>379</sup> Apuleius, *Apology*, 61.

The secrecy surrounding magic is also a professional necessity.<sup>380</sup> In part, this secrecy is a practical matter – the business between a magician and his client is often a personal matter, if existing spells are any indication. In a neutral, non-suspicious demonstration of the clandestine nature of magic, certain spells in the PGM require privacy. Apart from PGM LVII and LXXII, which are written in cryptography, spells like PGM II.1-64 prescribe the performance of the spell to be done, “after you come in from the prayer, before going to bed, while you are placing a lump of frankincense in the wick of the lamp.”<sup>381</sup> Presumably, one does not have an audience immediately before bedtime. Other spells warn against passing on privileged knowledge to outsiders.<sup>382</sup> There is also an invocation of a “secret and unspeakable name” which cannot be uttered with a human mouth.<sup>383</sup>

Again, I wish to be careful. Secrecy itself does not automatically connote magical practice – private rites seem to carry negative associations more broadly. In 186 CE, the Roman Senate passed a number of laws curtailing Bacchic worship. One such law was the prohibition of would-be Bacchic worshippers to form “conspiracies” amongst themselves.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> For a brief but incisive commentary on secrecy in the *PGM* in particular See Hans Dieter Betz, “The Formation of Authoritative Tradition in the Greek Magical Papyri,” in Ben F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders eds., *Jewish and Christian Self Definition, Vol. 3: Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 167.

<sup>381</sup> trans. Betz.

<sup>382</sup> PGM IV.2512; XII.322, trans. Betz.

<sup>383</sup> PGM XIII.763. trans. Betz.

<sup>384</sup> trans. Nina E. Weston, “Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus,” in Oliver J. Thatcher ed., *The Library of Original Sources, Vol. 3* (New York: University Research Extension, 1907), 76-77. An account of the Bacchanalia affair comes from Livy, *History of Rome* 39.8-39.18, and it is scandalous enough prompt understanding of the Roman Senate’s fear of “conspiracies.” A young man, Publius Aebutius is to be initiated into the cult of Bacchus against his will with the support of his lover, the prostitute Hispala Faecina. Aebutius seeks help from an acquaintance who is a consul. During the course of the ensuing investigation, all manner of moral depravity is unearthed. According to Livy, this moral reprehensibility caused precipitated the *senatus consultum* of 186 CE. While Livy’s account is doubtless moralized, the text of the *senatus consultum* seems to indicate a wariness of rites not subject to oversight or public scrutiny.

Pertaining to Christians, the seemingly secret nature of Christian worship brought suspicion upon them as well.<sup>385</sup> Since secrecy itself is problematic without the issue of magic as accompaniment, it is conceivable that Luke wished his Jesus to be a more public figure simply to mitigate misgivings associated with Christianity in general, rather than magic in particular. Perhaps. But it will become clear when we consider *all* of Luke's emendations to Mark that he appears to be modifying those parts of the Jesus tradition that correspond too closely to stereotypes of magic. Or to put it another way: Luke retains the ambiguous features of magic I outlined in Chapter 1, the practices that are discursively amenable to an interpretation of magic *or* miracle. He likewise excises those characteristics of those practices that are less ambiguous, those that would be more difficult to explain as "non-magical," or miraculous (to use the Christian term).

Consider in the above passage the issue of "Talitha cum." Mark takes the trouble to translate what might be a nonsensical word for his audience so that they might understand. Words that are nonsensical or even difficult to decipher in practical magical texts are never translated for the benefit of the audience.<sup>386</sup> Rather, these unintelligible words and phrases appear to be a means of communicating with supernatural entities, addressing them by name, or harnessing their power. Should such a language become readily comprehensible, it would

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<sup>385</sup> See, for example, *Contra Celsum* 8.17, where Christianity is referred to as a "secret and obscure association." Pliny the Elder, too, suggests a hint of suspicion against activities taking place behind closed doors when he claims that he had banned associations in his Letter to Trajan (*Epistulae* 10.96). Though Pliny was talking about all associations, the ban did happily prevent Christians from worshipping, he writes to the emperor.

<sup>386</sup> We do have instances wherein the speaker explicitly claims to be calling upon a deity in his/her "secret name," and then speaks this name, but this is quite different than translating for the benefit of the human audience. Rather, such an address seems to be designed to demonstrate to the otherworldly addressee that the magician is aware of the secret name in question. See, for example, PGM IV.1026-1030: "You who are seated within the 7 poles, AEËIOYŌ, you who have on your head a golden crown and in your hand a Memnonian staff with which you send out the gods, your name is BARBARIËL BARBARAIËL god/ BARBARAËL BËL BOUËL" (Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, 58).

doubtless lose its efficacy. There is no need to seek a magician when one is quite capable of communicating with the divine oneself. In Luke's Gospel, this feature of the healing story is absent, along with its translation. Instead, the efficacious words Jesus speaks are in readily comprehensible Greek.

Upon first glance, this seems to be a simple omission. But understanding the function of nonsensical phrases in the PGM and like spells can offer a richer resonance to our understanding of Luke's erasure of this foreign phrase. H. S. Versnel has convincingly argued that the unintelligibility of some of the language in the magical and household spells is a means by which magicians harness supernatural power.<sup>387</sup> David Frankfurter, too, suggests that characteristics such as *voces magicae*, sacred names, and figures represent a special magical language in which the magician opens up a means of communicating with supernatural entities.<sup>388</sup> The point, then, is that the unintelligible language is what lends efficacy to the magic; it is the portion of the spell which places the magician in direct contact with the divine or daemonic entity through which the spell is worked. By removing phrase "Talitha cum" from the text, Luke's Jesus works the spell through his own, perfectly understandable words. There is nothing extraordinary about the words spoken in Luke's Gospel; only Jesus *himself* is extraordinary. As a corollary, if anyone in Luke's audience is familiar with the function of foreign or nonsensical words in magical spells and how these words engender communication with the divine, then by omitting "Talitha cum" from his

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<sup>387</sup> Versnel, "The Poetics of the Magical Charm." Versnel's essay is still the classic in understanding the mechanics of the *voces magicae* and other features of magical charms.

<sup>388</sup> Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions"; cf. "Narrating Power. The Theory and Practice of the Magical Historiola in Ritual Spells."

narrative, Luke creates the impression that Jesus need not rely on such accoutrements to communicate with the source of his power. He himself is enough.

Attending to some other differences against Mark will bring to the fore additional salient aspects of Luke's magical ideation. In Mark 7:32-36, Jesus heals a deaf man with some sort of speech impediment:

They brought to him a man, both deaf and having a speech impediment. And they begged him so that he might lay his hands. And taking him aside in private, away from the crowd, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up towards heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately, his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Luke omits this particular healing altogether. Given Luke's reticence to include private healings and those involving foreign phrases, it is not entirely surprising that this episode does not appear in his Gospel, even in an emended fashion. One wonders if a minor healing such as the restoration of hearing and sight is not spectacular enough to include when it requires so much redaction. In the case of Mark 5:35-42 (cf. Luke 8:49-56), the impressive nature of raising the dead might have secured a place in Luke's Gospel. That said, this conjecture about the impetus for the removal is just that – conjecture. What *is* clear, however, is that the omission of the above narrative purges from Luke any other phrases that may not be readily understood by his audience, at least those uttered in the context of magical activities.

Another very similar Lucan omission is Mark 8:22-26, in which Jesus heals the blind man of Bethsaida. In this pericope, Jesus' healing is effected using saliva (8:23). Initially, the man's sight is only partly restored, allowing him to see people "walking like trees." (8:24) Jesus lays his hands upon the man again, healing his sight completely (8:25). In Luke's Gospel, Jesus never heals through "substances" such as spittle or other *ousia* (although the

apostles certainly do so in Acts, a fact I will consider in Chapter 3). In contrast, he speaks and/or lays hands and the healing is effected. The use of substances and objects is another stereotype of magic. Magicians' spells make mention of everything from dead animals to lead tablets to hair or clothing belonging to the target of a spell and/or the magician.<sup>389</sup> The idea in Mark's Gospel appears to be that Jesus' bodily substances are imbued with healing power, but Luke jettisons even this notion, completely eliding this physical aspect of Jesus' wonderworking. Jesus, in Luke, works his miracles in a manner different from everyday magicians. He speaks and the act is done. In other cases, he lays hands on the one requiring a healing. Magical power resides in his body, true, but he does not require the use of magical material to achieve his ends.<sup>390</sup>

One of the most interesting omissions in Luke's Gospel is found in Mark 11:12-14, the infamous incident in which Jesus withers a fig tree. Mark informs his audience that Jesus cursed the tree because he was hungry and the tree bore no fruit.<sup>391</sup> It was not the season for figs, but that does not stop Jesus from preventing the tree from producing figs ever again (11:14). Scholars have seen in this episode a metaphor for Judaism, a tradition which did not bear the proper fruit, meaning it did not recognize Jesus as the one to carry forth God's message.<sup>392</sup> This supercessionist message would be in keeping with Luke's overall theme as

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<sup>389</sup> Some of the items used in magical spells include: fingernails and hair (PGM I.1-42), olive oil (PGM I.222-31), a peony plant (PGM I.247-62), mud (PGM II.64-183), dry fruit (PGM III.187-202), a magnetic stone (PGM IV.1716-1870), an umbilical cord (PGM XXXVI.312-20). Beyond magical formularies, we must not forget other literary texts contributing to the stereotype as well. Apuleius' fish, for example, also presents an example of magic being effected through magical material (*Apology*, 27). So, too, are Paul's handkerchiefs in Acts 19.

<sup>390</sup> The episode with the hemorrhaging woman is sufficient evidence to suggest that Luke believes Jesus to be some sort of repository for supernatural power. Here, as the woman touches Jesus' cloak in order to heal herself, he says to the disciples, "I felt the power go out of me." Luke 8:46.

<sup>391</sup> Mark 11:12.

<sup>392</sup> William Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Fig Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and its relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition*

well. Certainly, the Third Gospel seems to suggest that God's message has now passed on to the gentiles as a result of Jewish rejection.<sup>393</sup> The image of Jesus cursing a non-productive portion of God's people is both powerful and evocative, yet Luke omits this curious episode. Incidentally, the withered fig tree represents the only instance of Jesus directly effecting a destructive miracle in the synoptic tradition (he does, however, *indirectly* effect the drowning of a herd of swine in the story of the Gerasene Demoniac). This destruction, too, correlates with the more problematic aspects of magic that I outlined in Chapter 1. While magical practices were not *necessarily* harmful on the whole, there were aspects of magic perceived in a harmful light. Apuleius' being accused of inducing fits is a prime example of just such a perception.<sup>394</sup> Other examples include Plato's assertion that magicians may prey upon an individual's desires<sup>395</sup> and Origen's claim that Simon was able to draw people away from God through the machinations of magic.<sup>396</sup> These are the aspects of magic that contributed to its function (one of many) as maligned other of proper ritual behavior.<sup>397</sup>

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(Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 39-68, 95-127; J. R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *Novum Testamentum* 31 (1989): 193-216; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 261;

<sup>393</sup> Jeffrey S. Siker, "'First to the Gentiles': A Literary Analysis of Luke 4:16-30," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 no. 1 (1992): 73-90; D. L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, The Library of New Testament Studies 12 (Bloombsury: T&T Clark, 1997), 231-40; H. D. Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke's Christology*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 20.

<sup>394</sup> Apuleius, *Apology*, 48.

<sup>395</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 572e-573a.

<sup>396</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.57.

<sup>397</sup> For a thoughtful, nuanced discussion of this particular function of magic, see Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," 191-194. Unlike many of the scholars discussed in the introductory chapter of the present work, Gordon understands that the function of "othering" was just one of the ways in which discourses of magic were mobilized in the ancient world.



In summation, the passages that Luke omits from his treatment of Mark include characteristics such as healings in private, unintelligible utterances, the use of *ousia*, and destructive wonders. None of these instances alone is indicative that Luke aims systematically to purge his Gospel of the more problematic aspects of magic, but taken together, they provide compelling evidence. These four characteristics are marked by their close association with practices perceived to be magical, but they are also generally considered suspicious. As a result, their removal from Luke's text presents no real surprise and does not appear to be mere coincidence.

A corollary suggests itself when we consider if it is likely that Luke was unaware of what magic entailed even though he so carefully redacted his source to make his own narrative "less magical." One cannot help but doubt Luke's ignorance about the contours of magic. Here is where purely polemical understandings of magic fail. Such an understanding could not undertake the above redaction-critical study simply because a polemically-driven methodology must take Luke at his word. If he crafts his wonders in opposition to magic (which he does), then they are not magic. Yet, a more dynamic, multi-faceted understanding of magic could make room for the nuance that what Luke narrates is and is not magic at the same time. The activities narrated are magic in that they conform to the activities found on the ambiguous end of the magical spectrum, but Jesus performs them precisely because they are ambiguous and susceptible to Luke's ability to reconfigure them. Characteristics of these activities that are less ambiguous, which might more readily lend them the interpretation of magic – these very characteristics are removed from the overall picture. This careful editorial

work results in a Jesus that is not a magician, at least not on the surface, although he certainly does that which is expected of a magician.<sup>398</sup>

Perhaps the most curious thing about the omitted characteristics enumerated above is that some of them are returned to the narrative when Luke pens Acts. In his second volume, the disciples heal via *ousia* (Acts 19:12) and engage in destructive wonders (Acts 5:1-10). They speak in untranslated phrases (Acts 9:40) and employ the sort of formulae that litter spells like the PGM (Acts 16:18). We even have instances of wonderworking in private or semi-private settings (Acts 13:8-11). It is clear that the rules Luke applies to Jesus' magical activities have been adjusted when the disciples come to the narrative stage. I will take up the discussion of why Luke might choose to employ different ways of characterizing his protagonists' magical activities in the next chapter. In anticipation of my conclusions there, I should like to reiterate that Jesus' supernatural power seems to reside within his person. He speaks or lays hands, and the miracle is accomplished without benefit of any other accoutrements associated with magical practice. Jesus, therefore, is not the workaday magician who requires spellbooks and various items of divine power; he is something *else*. I would now like to explore further Jesus' identity in Luke's Gospel as related to his magical practice and the purposes of those practices more broadly.

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<sup>398</sup> Important to keep in mind here is that Christians did not live in a solely discursive space. That is to say, simply terming something "magic" or "not magic" was not enough to make it so. Since Christians encountered magicians in their lives, they reserved certain expectations of these magicians. Jesus' activities might have been considered magic by Luke's audience, despite the fact that Luke takes great pains to sanitize his account. A more flexible methodology would leave space for this facet of magical discourse – that Luke's discourse, such as it is, may be appropriated, re-appropriated, and even misunderstood by his audience.

## Part II. Jesus, Magician and More Than

Jesus' first wonder in Luke is the exorcism at Capernaum.<sup>399</sup> The demon, as it comes out of the possessed man, shrieks, "Leave us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God (4:34)." Jesus orders the demon's silence. This call for silence is inherited from Mark's Gospel.<sup>400</sup> Later in Luke, however, Jesus' identity as the "Son of God" is repeated by a demon (4:41). As in Mark, demons correctly identify Jesus in Luke's Gospel (8:28). Rarely in Graeco-Roman literature do we have demons behaving in a similar manner – they do not identify their exorcist by name, and they hardly exhibit any deference towards that same individual.<sup>401</sup> The issue is worth exploration in the context of magic and charges of magic. As I hope to show, the exorcism narratives, and the Beelzebub Controversy in particular, serve as the clearest articulation of Jesus' identity vis-à-vis other possible wonderworkers. It is not surprising, then, that the first demonstration of Jesus' magical power prompts the demon to ask if he has come to destroy them. By the end of the Gospel, the answer to the demon's query becomes inescapably clear – Jesus *has* come to destroy them, and to destroy their master, Satan, as well.

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<sup>399</sup> If one does not consider Luke 4:30, where Jesus "passes through the midst" of the synagogue members who wished to crucify him for speaking so boldly about prophets' lackluster welcomes in their home towns. Since the text of 4:30 does not specify that Jesus' slipping through the crowd was a feat of supernatural power rather than clever side-stepping, I have chosen not to read magic into the text. As such, the exorcism narrative in Luke 4:31-37 is Jesus' first unambiguous supernatural deed.

<sup>400</sup> Mark 1:25; cf. Mark 1:34

<sup>401</sup> I have found one exception – in Lucian's *Philopseudes* 16, demons speak to the extortionist Syrian exorcist, sometimes in foreign languages. Given that Lucian's account is meant to be satirical and Luke's is not, it seems imprudent to take Lucian as point of comparison here. Other non-Christian accounts include demons obeying their exorcists (see Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.20 or *b. Me'il* 17b), but even as they obey and come out of the formerly possessed persons, the demons do not speak to their exorcists in the manner depicted in Luke.

Luke crafts Jesus as a particularly Christian wonderworker by reducing the unambiguous trappings of magic, as I argued above, but also by intertwining message and magic.<sup>402</sup> That is not to say that *other* magicians did not have a message of their own. Every particular discourse of magic has a purpose, and therefore has a message. One of Apuleius' overarching messages, for example, is that magic and philosophy are not incompatible. In the same manner, Luke's Jesus uses his magic to espouse a specific eschatological vision for his Christian followers. The wonders he performs, exorcisms in particular, are especially well-suited to carry this message. Luke's use of magic is efficacious in fulfilling ideological function.

In order to trace how Luke imbues his magic with message, I will discuss three aspects of Luke's Gospel, eventually bringing together my analyses of all three areas in my treatment of the Beelzebul Controversy of Luke 11:14-23. First, I will discuss the predominance of exorcisms and the casting of healings as exorcisms in Luke's Gospel. Then I will demonstrate how Luke balances these exorcisms/healings with his message about the coming of the Kingdom of God. Finally, I will show that the arrival of the Kingdom concomitantly portends the destruction of Satan's domain. When all three of these characteristics are taken together, the overarching message of the magical discourse in Luke's Gospel is that Christian magic is being used to usher in the Kingdom of God and simultaneously defeat Satan. This message is most clearly articulated in the Beelzebul Controversy.

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<sup>402</sup> Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 550.

## Part IIA. The Predominance of Lucan Exorcisms

I have argued that charges of magic and practices of magic work in tandem to create dynamic, fluid discourses of magic. The utterances of demons in the Gospel of Luke represent one set of places where we might see this mutual reinforcement happening. In 6:34, for example, the demons have gained voice to speak of Jesus as the “Holy One of God.” Meanwhile, Jesus performs an exorcism that outs these demons, thereby *compelling* them to speak. Had they remained in possession of the demoniac, they would have remained silent. As they come out of possessed individuals, the demons themselves offer an interpretation of Jesus’ identity. That is to say, the demons’ words render what would otherwise be a typical exorcism account in an atypical manner. By naming Jesus as the “Holy One of God,” Jesus’ exorcistic activity is interpreted in an explicitly Christian light by the entities subject to it. As I will demonstrate, in Luke’s Gospel, painting Jesus’ actions with a Christian patina further removes them from associations with magic (along with the redaction work Luke undertakes above), constructing a binary between Christianity and magic, and as Sue Garrett has pointed out, Christianity and Satanism. Not only the words uttered by the demons, but also the contextual situation in which exorcisms are performed lends theological significance to the deeds themselves. Exorcisms are exceedingly important to Third Evangelist.<sup>403</sup>

The removal of the specter of magic from Jesus’ overarching wonderworking activity does not dampen the importance of the exorcisms themselves in Luke’s Gospel. Although the redactions above give the impression that Luke is wary about magical activity, that wariness

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<sup>403</sup> In terms of frequency, both Mark and Luke contain four major exorcism narratives that are not summary statements. Yet, as Twelftree so aptly points out, Luke increases the prominence of exorcisms through a number of strategies, including casting healings as quasi-exorcisms, coupling exorcism with message, and increasing the later prominence of exorcism whereas Mark’s exorcisms take place near the beginning of his gospel. I will discuss these strategies below. *Twelftree, In the Name of Jesus*, 132.

is absent with regard to exorcisms. In fact, exorcisms take on a heightened significance in comparison even to Mark (where they comprise the largest proportion of Jesus' wonders), mostly by decreasing their *early* significance in favor of enhancing their *ongoing* significance.<sup>404</sup> Luke accomplishes this prioritization of exoricitic activity in two clearly discernible ways.

First, and most importantly, he conflates healings with exorcism. As I mentioned above, this unique Lucan tendency serves to amplify the importance of Jesus' ability to oust demons from followers. The story of Simon's mother-in-law in Luke 4:38-41 signifies the importance of positing a demonic antagonist in Luke's ideology. Other narratives accomplish the same ideological work. In fact, the three initial healing stories in Luke's gospel employ the word "rebuke" in relation to disease.<sup>405</sup> In the last of this trio, Luke 4:40, we are told that Jesus is healing those who are "sick with various kinds of diseases." From this group of ill individuals, demons emerged (4:41). In the initial wonderworking narratives of his Gospel, we see Luke conflating illness with possession, and concomitantly, healing with exorcism.

This trend continues throughout the Third Gospel. The crippled woman in 13:10-17, for example, is characterized as having a "spirit of sickness." She was someone "whom Satan had bound." As much as illness can be indicative of possession (as in the case of the Crippled Woman), so too can possession be indicative of illness. In Luke 6:18, we are told that those with unclean spirits are "cured" and not "rebuked." Twelftree sees in this taxonomic muddling an attempt to elevate exorcism and bring about a balance amongst the various

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<sup>404</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 132.

<sup>405</sup> Luke 4:35, 39, 41. I discuss the significance of this word above.

aspects of Jesus' ministry.<sup>406</sup> This same tendency to conflate healing and exorcism obtains in Acts 5:16 as well, when those "sick and tormented by unclean spirits" were "cured" by Peter.

Clearly, the Third Evangelist understands exorcism and healing to be closely linked, if not identical. In fact, as Twelftree has correctly asserted, for Luke, "all sickness has a demonic dimension (is evil)."<sup>407</sup> The result of combining these two types of magical practices is the heightened importance of exorcism-healing to the overall narrative of Luke. Numerically, healings-exorcisms make up the most prominent class of magical practice in Luke. Furthermore, creating one class of magical practice out of two disparate classes brings a certain level of cohesion to all of Jesus' magical activities, imparting to them the same theological inertia, as it were. By conflating these two practices, Luke is able to send a clearer theological message through Jesus' magic – a point I will take up shortly.

The second manner in which Luke elevates exorcisms is that he mentions exorcism is part of the early Church's ongoing ministry. Two clear instances of this are the encounter with the disciples of John the Baptist in Luke 7:20 and the Return of the Seventy in 10:17. In the first instance, the disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus to ascertain his identity. To the Matthean version of 11:2-6, our author adds that Jesus had restored sight, cured many diseases, and exorcised evil spirits in the presence of the disciples of John. In this passage, the question of Jesus' identity is intimately tied to exorcism.<sup>408</sup> Jesus' work involves battle with demons; his response to the disciples of John makes that inescapably clear. In fact, Jesus

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<sup>406</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 133. See also Leo O'Reilly, *Word and Sign in the Acts of the Apostles: A Study in Lucan Theology*, Analectica Gregoriana 243 (Rome: Gregorian Biblical BookShop, 1987), 217.

<sup>407</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 133-4.

<sup>408</sup> The mention of exorcism is missing in the Matthean account, although the other wonders remain. Furthermore, Jesus does not perform wonders in the presence of the disciples of John, but opts to simply recount his deeds for their benefit.

himself foregrounds his ability to exorcise demons. In Luke 13:32, he instructs, “Go and tell that fox [Herod], ‘Listen, I cast out demons and heal today and tomorrow and the third day I finish my work.’” Exorcisms and healings constitute Jesus’ “work” in Luke’s Gospel, and are therefore indispensable to understanding his theological purpose. In the episode concerning the Return of the Seventy, this power over demonic entities is extended to Jesus’ followers. The Seventy return, and they are joyful that, “even the demons submit in [Jesus’] name.” In fact, the Seventy do not report on any other of their activities at all, seemingly thrilled that demons can be defeated by their hands. This particular passage is invaluable for understanding how Luke interprets the overall significance of exorcisms, but for now, I wish to foreground the fact that Luke’s understanding of Jesus is dominated by his skill as an exorcist/healer.

What is primarily at issue in Luke’s exorcisms/healings is the Christian encounter with the demonic, as I will show. Acts 10:38, a summation of Jesus’ ministry in evidence for his assertion: “he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil.”<sup>409</sup> In this post-ascension description, Jesus’ ministry is characterized by exorcism, but more than that – by freeing those bound by the devil. While the advancement of a particular aspect of Jesus’ ministry is certainly a possible reason for Luke’s emphasis on exorcism and the demonic, there are two salient issues brought to the fore when we consider Luke’s distinctiveness against the backdrop of Graeco-Roman exorcistic traditions: (1) part of the elevation of exorcism has to do with differentiating Jesus from typical Graeco-Roman magicians; and (2) this difference is doubly ensured on account of the expressly

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<sup>409</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 133.



eschatological interpretation offered throughout the narrative, and most especially in the Beelzebul Controversy. I wish to take up these considerations presently.

## **Part IIB. Magic and Message**

It is clear that Luke has a particular interest in foregrounding both the importance and the efficacy of Jesus' exorcisms. In the Third Gospel, exorcisms (and the healings conflated with them) constitute the most important magical practice Jesus and his followers undertake. Yet it would be inaccurate to claim that Jesus is a mere exorcist in Luke's oeuvre. Rather, Luke combines magic and message to offer a unique vision of Jesus that stretches beyond the stereotypes associated with magicians. In this manner, Jesus is both a magician and so much more than a magician. This "conceptual stretching" is possible, in part, because Luke balances his magic with message – and a very particular message at that. I wish here to demonstrate how magic and message occupy equal positions of priority in Luke's Gospel. I will then turn to the content of this theological message in the next section.

Paul Achtemeier has concisely enumerated the ways in which Luke balances teaching with wonderworking. He draws attention to Jesus' first sermon, in which Jesus justifies his activity as a wonderworker and also references his activity as one who proclaims.<sup>410</sup> This pairing is indicated throughout the Gospel. For example, when Luke reproduces Mark's account of the healing of the leper in Mark 1:40-45, Luke clarifies for his audience that the crowds that had come on account of the healing stayed not only to be healed themselves, but also to hear Jesus teach.<sup>411</sup> Luke even brackets his Sermon on the Plain in 6:20-49 with accounts of wonderworking, as opposed to Matthew, who places the wonderworking *after*

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<sup>410</sup> Luke 4:23-27; cf. Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 550.

<sup>411</sup> Luke 5:17; cf. Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 551.

the teaching.<sup>412</sup> And these are not the only instances in which magic is balanced with message. In 1:40-41, after Jesus has healed many, he goes to proclaim “the message” in the synagogues of Judea. Immediately before he heals the paralytic in 5:18-25, Jesus is teaching (5:17). Teaching takes place before Jesus heals the man with the withered hand in 6:6-11. In 6:18, our author tells us that many had, “come to hear him and to be healed.” Jesus’ ministry, then, consists of teaching *and* healing.

In other places, the correlation between message and magic is vaguer than what Achtemeier outlined in his article. Nevertheless, the connections are worth considering. For example, in Luke 5:12-16, after Jesus cleanses a leper through touch, he asks the leper to go to the Temple and make an offering for the cleansing, “for a testimony.” The idea behind Jesus’ instruction here is that God – the God of the Jews – is somehow active in the healing of the leper. Otherwise, there would be no need for the leper to go to the Temple and make an offering as Moses commanded. The precise contours of the message cannot be delineated from this episode alone, but what is clear is that Jesus’ wonders do not happen in isolation from a theological agenda. The same operative principle obtains in the story of the paralytic whose sins are forgiven in 5:18. When Jesus attempts to heal the paralytic by telling the man that his sins are forgiven, the Pharisees ask, “Who but God can forgive sins?” Jesus’ subsequent successful healing of the man hints, once again, that there is something bigger at work in these wonders than what is at work in the wonders of the standard magician. The story of the Gerasene Demoniac also includes instruction in 8:39 to the healed to, “go and declare how much God has done.” All of these instances are indirectly educational; though

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<sup>412</sup> Luke 6:17-19; 7:1-17); cf. Achtemeier, “Lucan Perspective,” 551.

they may not contain Jesus' direct teachings, they do demonstrate that Jesus' wonderworking was linked to a particular message about God.

Finally, we should note that Luke's Jesus also understands his own mission to include disseminating the message: "I must proclaim the Kingdom of God, for I was sent for this purpose (4:43)." The idea, then, is that Luke wishes to emphasize both the ministry *and* the magic of Jesus. The task for the modern analyst is to determine to what end this double emphasis is employed. What, precisely does this message contain? Teaching is not unique to Jesus. The PGM contain spells dedicated to the revelation of knowledge.<sup>413</sup> Teaching was characteristic Apollonius of Tyana, who, like Jesus, engaged in behaviors typical of ancient magicians. It is the content of the teaching that makes Jesus unique. Apuleius, too, claimed to teach others about Platonic philosophy. How, then, does Luke craft Jesus against Apollonius and other figures of the Graeco-Roman magical tradition? One of the clearest methods for distilling Jesus' teachings and their relation to magic is to analyze the magic itself. In Luke's gospel, the exorcisms yield the most fruitful information, since they are the most important magical activity Jesus performs.

### **Part IIC. The Kingdom of God and The Kingdom of Satan**

Twelftree claims that Jesus' wonders are not magical because they happen through the agency of the Holy Spirit.<sup>414</sup> This is perhaps too simple and convenient an understanding of how magical activities function in Luke's narrative. As I have suggested, magic and

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<sup>413</sup> PGM II.1-64; III.187-262; IV.1-25; V.370-446; VII.664-85, 795-845; XII.153-60, to name a few.

<sup>414</sup> See Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 133: "...John Hull has muddied the waters by saying that Luke-Acts is a 'tradition penetrated by magic.' Hull's broad definition of magic is fed by conceptions from across material from ancient Egypt to the church in the middle ages and includes any sort of belief in angels, demons, and exorcism." It is true that Hull's definition of magic is problematic, as I outlined in Chapter 1, but differentiating magic from miracle based on the agent by whom the wonderworker performs their deeds is equally problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that practical texts like the PGM often make no such distinctions, often invoking deities from myriad traditions in the very same spell.

theology are not incompatible. Rather, what distinguishes the Lucan exorcisms from rote exorcism narratives are the manner in which they are linked to a *particular* message – the expectation with respect to the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>415</sup> In Luke’s case, exorcisms, and healings too, provide a harbinger of sorts which demonstrates definitively that the Kingdom of God is coming, indicating a forthcoming eschatology. Furthermore, they indicate the victory of the forces of God and Jesus over those of evil, both now *and* once the Kingdom arrives – a realized eschatology. In this sense, S. G. Wilson is correct in claiming that the overarching purpose of Luke’s eschatology is two-fold: to demonstrate a realized Kingdom and to allude to a coming one.<sup>416</sup> The message of the magic eschatological, dedicated to demonstrating the arrival of the Kingdom of God and the ongoing defeat of the dominion of Satan.<sup>417</sup> This two-fold eschatology is yet another departure from Mark’s gospel, and results in the nuanced understanding of exorcism in Luke, and of magical discourse more broadly. In the following section, I wish to analyze this function of exorcitic activity in Luke to highlight the uniqueness of Lucan exorcisms against the backdrop of Graeco-Roman exorcisms more broadly.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> I will discuss this below.

<sup>416</sup> S. G. Wilson, “Lucan Eschatology,” 530-47.

<sup>417</sup> Scholars have convincingly argued that Lucan eschatology is at least partially realized. That is, Luke believes that the Kingdom of God has “broken in” among the Christians. I do not wish to recapitulate those arguments here, but I wish to contribute to them by excavating how the magical discourse, and particularly that of exorcism, contributes to this understanding of the end of days. The classic study on Lucan eschatology is Hans Conzelmann, *Der Mitte der Zeit*. See also John Carroll, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke’s Gospel*, SBL Dissertation Series 92 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 1988). Note 10 includes further studies of importance concerning Lucan eschatology.

<sup>418</sup> Recall that exorcisms occupy a “contested” or ambiguous space within the broader discourse of Graeco-Roman magic. Because of the ambiguity inherent in exorcitic practices, they are amenable to being painted with the patina of various other discourse – anti-demonic and eschatological in the case of Luke, although this is by no means the only way in which practices such as exorcism could be rendered. And of course, practices such as love potions might never be ambiguous enough to be appropriated for the same ends as exorcism.

In terms of differentiation, the Lucan exorcisms are conveyors of the message that the Kingdom of God is forthcoming. As a corollary, a second function of the exorcisms is to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God's arrival is matched by a diminishing of Satan's hold over the world.<sup>419</sup> That the Kingdom of God is primarily at issue in the message of Luke's magic, so to speak, is quite clear. For example, before the Feeding of the Five Thousand, Luke gives the reader some clue about the message that Jesus has been delivering alongside his magic: "...and he welcomed them and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God and cured those who needed to be cured (9:11)." Here, the Kingdom of God is explicitly connected with healing. The message is given content, as it were. Chapters 13 and 14 include two healings (13:10-17 and 14:1-6) which serve as "bookends" to three lessons about the Kingdom of God: The Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:18-19); The Parable of the Yeast (13:20); and The Narrow Door (13:22-30). If we take seriously the assertion that teachings and magic are balanced in Luke's gospel, sometimes such that one follows the other temporally, then the series of pericopes in chapters 13 and 14 suggest that the Kingdom of God and the wonderworking of Jesus are linked.

The most explicit reference to the Kingdom of God in conjunction with exorcisms occurs in Luke 11:20: "...if I cast out demons in God's finger, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you." The language can be no clearer. But what, precisely, does Luke mean when he links exorcisms so closely with eschatological expectation? Twelftree provides some insight here. He points out that Luke uses the Greek ἐκβάλλω when describing exorcistic activity. This term is associated in the LXX, "with an enemy being cast out so that God's

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<sup>419</sup> This latter point is made especially well by Sue Garrett in *The Demise of the Devil*. I will attempt to distill the most relevant of her findings here.

purpose can be fulfilled.”<sup>420</sup> To those of Luke’s audience familiar with the LXX, then, the casting out that Jesus does is analogous to God’s casting out of his own enemies in order to pave the way for history’s proceeding. Similarly, the exorcisms in Luke represent an ousting of elements antagonistic to God’s design. I will detail the precise identity of these “antagonistic elements” below.

Other linguistic clues also provide insight into how Luke understands the function of exorcisms. ἐπιτιμάω, for example, used to rebuke both demons and illnesses in Luke, has an LXX connotation of God calling down destruction.<sup>421</sup> When Jesus uses this word, it is reminiscent of God’s power working in the world to further God’s ends. We have already seen how our author connects Jesus’ wonders with God in the narratives wherein Jesus instructs his “patients” to submit themselves to the local religious elite or to make offerings. When coupled with the use of words like ἐκβάλλω and ἐπιτιμάω, Jesus emerges as an agent of God who is doing God’s work in the world. Luke further uses παραγγέλλω more than any other gospel writer; the word carries connotations of passing down an order from an authority.<sup>422</sup> This word, too, is meant to give Jesus an air of authority. So, not only does Jesus preach the coming Kingdom of God, he does so as a designated agent of God who wields a power similar to God’s own.

This notion of Jesus being an agent of God is further validated in a number of ways. Primarily, the success of Jesus’ exorcisms and healings are evidence of his validity. True, Luke retains Mark’s propensity to have otherworldly entities recognize Jesus. But, Luke’s

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<sup>420</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 135.

<sup>421</sup> TNDT 2:624, “ἐπιτιμάω.”

<sup>422</sup> Twelftree, 147. The word is used twice in Matthew (10:5, 15:35), twice in Mark (6:8, 8:6), and four times in Luke (5:14, 8:29, 8:56, 9:21). See also TDNT 5:763, “παραγγέλλω.”

Jesus also connects his deeds more closely with God's power. Take, for example, the Lucan redaction of Jesus' injunction in Mark 5:19: "...tell them how much the Lord has done for you." In Luke, Κόπτίος is supplanted with Θεός, clarifying precisely who is animating the wonders done at Jesus' hands. This sentiment is further echoed by the epiphanic reaction to many of the wonders in Luke's Gospel.<sup>423</sup> After many of the deeds that Jesus performs, those who witness the deed or those who are beneficiaries of it praise God. As Achtemeier succinctly states, "the reaction to miracles is to see God behind the activity of Jesus."<sup>424</sup>

Yet relying on a particular agent does not distinguish one magician from another, and it is the *distinction* that I wish to pursue here. It is not simply Luke's insistence that Jesus works miracles through the Judeo-Christian God that makes him distinct from the marketplace magician working spells for a few obols. Rather, what is distinct is the eschatology implicit in this belief in God. The question remains for Achtemeier and others: if the audience is supposed to see the hand of God in the wonderworking narratives of Luke's Gospel, then what, precisely, does that hand of God entail? The Lucan Beatitudes might lend some insight here:

Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the Kingdom of God.  
Blessed are you who are now hungry,  
for you will be filled.  
Blessed are you who now weep,  
for you will laugh,  
Blessed are you when people hate you,  
and when they exclude you and insult you  
and reject your name as evil  
because of the Son of Man.  
Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for great is your reward in heaven. (6:20-23)

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<sup>423</sup> Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 553-4.

<sup>424</sup> Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 554.

Luke follows up his blessings with woes against the rich, the well fed, and those who laugh now (6:26-27). The Kingdom of God, then, appears to bring a reversal of fortunes for those on earth. The same sentiments of inversion are echoed in the apocalyptic prophecy of Luke 17:22-37. Luke 17:33 is rather clear upon this point: “Those to attempt to make their life secure will lose it...” Other places in the Gospel foreground the same apocalyptic reversal as well. In fact, even before Jesus appears on the scene, John the Baptist’s message to his own listeners warns of a coming harvest (3:10-14). In preparation for this reckoning, he instructs them to share food and clothing. Tax collectors must not collect more than the prescribed amount of taxes. Soldiers must not extort money. Luke’s ideological agenda is on display in John’s series of injunctions, and they all appear to be concerned with rectifying the material conditions of the less fortunate members of the early movement. It is no surprise that Jesus himself echoes a very similar message when he characterizes his own mission as bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovering the sight of the blind, freeing the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord (4:18-19).

When considered alongside the types of magical deeds Jesus performs – healings, exorcisms, miraculous feedings, and revivifications – the pattern takes on a striking congruity. Jesus’ magical deeds effect the changes that will ultimately come about as a result of the establishment of the Kingdom. Through his healings and exorcisms, he makes well those who are ill. Through his miraculous feedings, he satisfies those who hunger. He even revivifies the dead for those who mourn. In this manner, his work prefigures the characteristics of the Kingdom as described in the Lucan Beatitudes and in other parts of the Gospel where his mission is laid out explicitly.



To summarize the first major function of Lucan exorcism: in the Third Gospel, the exorcisms convey the message that the Kingdom of God is coming eventually, that Jesus is a designated agent of God and operates using a power very similar if not identical to God's, and that the arrival of the Kingdom will constitute a reversal of fortunes. This reversal is prefigured by Jesus' own miracles.

I wish now to take up the second major function of Lucan exorcisms – to construct Christianity in direct opposition to the demonic forces which pervade the theology of the Gospel.<sup>425</sup> It will be useful here to anticipate my conclusions regarding how the demonic occupies the Lucan imagination. Lucan cosmology appears to be dualistic or at least partly dualistic in nature, with God and Satan at cross purposes. Even a cursory examination of the relevant passages will bear out such an assessment. This dualism functions to set nascent Christianity against Satan, to imbue the magic in the Third Gospel with both theological and eschatological message, and ultimately, to craft Jesus as a (non)magician of God.

In the Temptation narrative in Luke 4:6a, Satan offers to give Jesus authority over “the kingdoms of this world.” This authority, our author tells us, is Satan's to give to whomever he chooses (4:6b).<sup>426</sup> Satan has dominion over the earth, adding a tenor of warfare to the Kingdom language that also infuses Luke's Gospel. Since we know from Luke's emphasis on the Kingdom of God and Jesus' insistence that “if by the finger of God, I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you,” we can assume that the two

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<sup>425</sup> The construction of a binary in Luke prompts one to wonder if scholars of early Christianity who insist magic is but a mere rhetorical expedient designed to “other” begin their analyses with Christian texts in which differentiation is a key aim and then turn their analytical eye upon the greater Graeco-Roman context.

<sup>426</sup> For further studies concerning the temptation narrative, see: Erich Fascher, *Jesus und der Satan: Eine Studie zur Auslegung der Versuchungsgeschichte* Hallische Monographien 11 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1949); Bent Noack, *Satanás und Sotería, untersuchungen zur Neutestamentlichen Dämonologie* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1948); Jacques Dupont, *Les Tentations de Jésus au Désert*, *Studia Neotestamentica* 4 (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1968).

dominions are headed towards a cataclysmic meeting. Satan has dominion over this world, yet Jesus insists his exorcisms demonstrate a weakening of Satan's dominion and the eventual arrival of the Kingdom of God. This binary understanding appears to color the whole of Luke's Gospel.

In Job, Satan is presented as an adversary whose antagonism appears sanctioned by God himself.<sup>427</sup> Conversely, Luke's Gospel implies that Satan's actions are contrary to God's plan.<sup>428</sup> Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness (4:1-13), sets himself against the children of Abraham (13:16), and entices Judas to betrayal (22:3). At no point in Luke's narrative does the audience get the impression that Satan's activities are sanctioned or ordered by God. Scholars have suggested that this shift towards dualism happened during the Hellenistic period, precipitating the sort of worldview that penetrates Luke.<sup>429</sup> Thus, the dualistic cosmology reflected in Luke is simply a recapitulation of the shifting attitudes in Hellenistic Judaism. For our purposes, however, it is enough to note that Luke's Gospel is quite clear about where Satan stands in relation to God, and where Jesus stands in relation to Satan.

The lines amongst the divine entities are sharply articulated; and the results of their battles are demonstrated through the narration of exorcisms. Jesus will make the binary between himself and Satan inescapably clear in our case study, the Beelzebul Controversy, but other parts of the Gospel also support this assertion. For example, when the Seventy return and report to Jesus that demons come out of possessed individuals in his name, Jesus responds by saying, "I saw Satan fall like a flash of lightning," thereby linking the exorcistic

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<sup>427</sup> Job 1:11-12; 2:5-6.

<sup>428</sup> In 11:15, Luke identifies Satan with Beelzebul, and neither is the agent through whom he himself works.

<sup>429</sup> Noack, *Satanás und Sotería*, 41-2, 47; J. H. Charlesworth, "A Critical Comparison of the Dualism in 1QS 3:13-4:26 and the 'Dualism' in the Gospel of John," *New Testament Studies* 15 (1968-69): 389-418.

activities of the Seventy and the fall of Satan (10:18). Interestingly enough, when Jesus had sent them out in 10:1-12, he instructed the Seventy to preach that the Kingdom of God was coming. The activities of the Seventy bring together the three facets of exorcitic discourse in Luke in one coherent narrative – exorcism, the Kingdom of God, and the defeat of Satan.

Luke 10:18 – the fall of Satan -- is essential for understanding how the Lucan imagination is steeped in a cosmic dualism in which the domains of God and Satan are in constant tension. It might be tempting for us moderns to understand “fall like a flash of lightning” as descriptive of an instantaneous event, something that happens as quickly as lightning piercing the skies. Yet, it does not appear that Luke wishes to convey instantaneous aspect to Satan’s fall. In the first place, Satan is able to enter Judas towards the end of the Gospel in 22:3. Clearly, Satan is not vanquished in 10:18. Luke’s use of the word ἐθεώρουν provides a tantalizing hint as well. In Daniel 7:2, ἐθεώρουν is used to preface Daniel’s prophetic vision of the Four Great Beasts. In Daniel’s vision, the beasts represent four kings that will be vanquished and replaced by the Kingdom of God (7:17-19). The word in Luke appears to signify a prophetic vision much like Daniel’s. Luke’s Jesus is predicting that Satan will fall; it is inevitable. As the kings in Daniel are eventually overcome and replaced by God’s Kingdom, so too will Satan. Of note is the fact that the Daniel prophecy does not predict an instantaneous turnover. The four kings each have their reign before the Kingdom arrives. Perhaps this, too, is important in understanding why Satan’s fall is envisioned in 10:18, yet Satan remains active throughout the remainder of the Gospel.

Related to Satan’s fall is the success of the disciples’ exorcisms. Earlier, in Luke 10:15, Jesus asks Capernaum if it will be lifted to the heavens. “No,” he answers, “you will go down to Hades (10:15).” Much like Satan, Capernaum is destined to fall. But why? The

answer lies earlier, in 10:9, where the Seventy are instructed to dust off their feet and declare that “the Kingdom of God has come near” to those towns that reject them. Immediately after this instruction, Jesus launches into a series of woes against cities, including Capernaum (10:13-15). The fall of Capernaum is thus directly related to the rejection of the disciples’ – to Jesus’ own – message.<sup>430</sup> Because the towns rejected this message, and the news of the coming Kingdom, they, like Satan, will fall. The Lucan imagination imposes clear battle lines upon the ancient Christian mission field; either a town accepts the ministry of Jesus and the Kingdom, or rejects it, only to ally with Satan and share his inexorable fate.

That the Gospel of Luke suggests an ongoing battle between God and Satan is evident in a number of additional passages. Immediately after the Temptation, in which Jesus has temporarily defeated the devil, Jesus performs his first wonder (Luke 4:31-37), in which a possessed man is exorcised. The ousted demon recognizes and fears Jesus, asking, “Have you come to destroy us?” The implication is that Jesus’ earlier victory in the wilderness has allowed this one as well, giving him a new position of authority from which to carry out his ministry against Satan and his demons.<sup>431</sup> Jesus’ triumph against the devil’s temptation has caused demons to take note; they now fear that they will be destroyed. Jesus does not answer the demon in 4:37, but Luke’s unarticulated answer to the entity’s question is a resounding “yes.” In fact, as Garrett and others have pointed out, Luke buttresses this initial exorcism with a sermon about releasing captives and another series of healings and exorcisms, even

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<sup>430</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Gordon D. Fee, ed., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 418-19.

<sup>431</sup> Otto Betz, “The Kerygma of Luke,” *Interpretation* 22 (1968): 136; Garrett, “Magic in Luke-Acts,” 134.

further linking healing/exorcism with liberation from Satan's oppression.<sup>432</sup> Every exorcism is therefore one more battle waged against Satan, and every successful exorcism is a small victory prefiguring the complete overthrow of Satan's hold on the corporeal world when the Kingdom of God fully arrives. The idea, then, is that exorcisms in Luke's Gospel serve as a means to loosen the hold of Satan on this world. Concomitantly, they also visibly demonstrate the power of Jesus as the one who will eventually win victory over demonic forces once and for all.

To summarize the broad Lucan trends regarding exorcism: for Luke, demons, the emissaries of Satan, seem to permeate the world. He mentions demons more than Matthew or Mark. As a strategy for managing the demonic, Luke prioritizes exorcisms above all magical activities, even conflating the practices of healing and exorcism. Such a prioritization is not done lightly; for Luke, each exorcism signifies another victory over the forces of Satan, who has authority over this world. Furthermore, they prefigure and portend the coming Kingdom of God. They prefigure it by ousting the representatives of Satan from the Christian community that will comprise the Kingdom and by demonstrating in the present the future societal overhaul that will characterize God's reign. But prefiguring the Kingdom is not the only purpose of the exorcisms (and other magical deeds) in the Gospel of Luke. They also portend the eschaton by exhibiting God's salvific power, which is active and actively at work in the world. Yet, this understanding of Luke's exorcism narratives is not sufficient. My aim is to demonstrate how Luke, by layering interpretive frameworks atop a foundational stratum of magical practice, is able to cast the practice as an eschatological sign. To accomplish this,

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<sup>432</sup> Garrett, "Magic in Luke-Acts," 134; Marvin Henry Miller, "The Character of the Miracles in Luke-Acts," Th.D. Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1971, 155-66; Nils Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 90.

it is necessary to attend carefully to one such narration. I have chosen to undertake a close analysis of the Beelzebul Controversy, which throws in striking relief all of the issues currently under consideration – exorcism, eschatology, and the battle between God and Satan.

### **Part III. The Beelzebul Controversy**

I have argued that Luke has made exorcism the most important magical activity Jesus undertakes in his Gospel. In the Beelzebub Controversy, the importance of exorcisms is coupled with eschatological warning to foreground Luke's concerns about the Kingdom of God and Jesus' place as an agent thereof. In many ways, this pericope serves a metonymy for the entirety of the magical discourse in Luke's Gospel, since it makes manifest the relationships among the central Lucan issues of exorcism, Satan and the demonic, and the Kingdom of God. It is therefore advantageous to the modern scholar to investigate it thoroughly.

I should like to begin with a brief redaction study against Mark's Gospel. Luke's version of the Beelzebul Controversy is considerably expanded from Mark's, which is found in Mark 3:22-27. The Third Evangelist prefaces his narrative with a short exorcism story in which Jesus casts out a "mute" demon (Luke 11:14). It is in response to this particular exorcism that some members of the crowd respond with charges of collusion with Beelzebul in 11:15. Luke further includes the crowd's demand for a sign from heaven (11:16-17), heightening the drama of the situation and intimating a large, public venue. In contrast, Mark claims that "scribes from Jerusalem" are Jesus' accusers, not members of the crowd (Mark 3:22). Most important for our purposes, however, is that Luke includes Jesus' declarations about the powers that drive exorcism (11:18-20) and a more detailed version of the Parable

of the Strong(er) Man (11:21-23). These latter two differences against Mark are invaluable for understanding how Luke imagines the relationship between exorcism and eschatology, and they will be treated in detail below.

Before we encounter the Beelzebul Controversy in 11:14-23, we have already encountered a number of exorcisms.<sup>433</sup> With one exception, the exorcisms have been successful.<sup>434</sup> Overwhelmingly, the reactions to Jesus' exorcisms, as well as those of his disciples, have been positive.<sup>435</sup> This makes the crowd's mixed reaction in the Beelzebul episode especially notable. Here, part of the crowd has turned antagonistic towards Jesus – a trend that will continue and eventually contribute to his crucifixion. They accuse him of colluding with Beelzebul, “the ruler of demons” (11:15). In defiance, Jesus claims that divided houses cannot stand, and concludes with what is known as the Parable of the Strong(er) Man.<sup>436</sup> Each of these components contributes to Jesus' overarching message that he is working his exorcisms through divine assistance. Furthermore, his exorcisms are part of God's larger plan with respect to the vanquishing of the forces of Satan and the eventual establishment of the Kingdom. It would behoove his audience (and that of Luke as well) to take heed and make an unequivocal choice about where they stand in this cosmic duel.

The easy summary above does not encompass the more interesting aspects of the Beelzebul Controversy. A more thoroughgoing approach will yield a richer resonance. For

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<sup>433</sup> Luke 4:31-37, 41, 6:18, 7:21, 8:26-39, 9:27-43, 10:17-20.

<sup>434</sup> The exception is the case of the boy with a demon in Luke 9:37-42. Jesus' disciples are reportedly unable to cast it out, although Jesus himself is able to do so with little trouble. Interestingly enough, Luke omits Mark's description that this “kind [of demon] can only come out through prayer” (Mark 9:29). My inclination is to attribute the change to Luke's propensity to demonstrate that the power necessary to cast out demons resides within Jesus himself, and not within any of his actions.

<sup>435</sup> The exception is the pericope concerning the Gerasene Demoniac, in which the townspeople ask Jesus to leave their presence after he exorcises Legion (Luke 8:37).

<sup>436</sup> Luke 11:17-20; 11:21-23.

example, exorcism was a well-recognized part of magical discourse in Jewish circles.<sup>437</sup> It is this distinctive Jewish component that allows Jesus to be accused of collusion with Beelzebul when workaday magicians or even magicians specializing in exorcisms would hardly face the same charges. After all, it is difficult to maintain a dualistic binary of good versus evil if one's primary worldview is polytheistic. Jesus' audience, presumably Jews, already has in mind an evil entity who might be supplying Jesus' power. Furthermore, the exorcism itself is not under issue in Luke 11:14-23, but rather, its *interpretation*. Once again, the ambiguity attendant to a magical practice forces the issue of its interpretation. The Jewish audience offers a negative interpretation of the event. To counter, Luke must offer some sort of positive valence for this aspect of Jesus' ministry to preclude this particular practice from being (mis)interpreted. Since he has already stripped his Gospel of those practices which would be more likely to lend themselves to the wrong interpretation, the correct interpretation rests completely on the *additions* Luke introduces. These additions are those discussed above in sections dealing with Lucan exorcism more broadly – the arrival of the Kingdom of God and information about the defeat of Satan.

The initial part of the passage proceeds as is typical for Lucan exorcism narratives. Jesus casts out a demon that has rendered an individual mute – once again possession and bodily harm (though perhaps not illness) are conflated (11:14). The exorcism is successful, as indicated by the formerly mute individual's regained speech (11:14). In addition to

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<sup>437</sup> See Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 8.46-49; 1QapGen 20; PGM IV.3007-86 is clearly a spell influenced by Judeo-Christian tradition, despite being attributed to the Egyptian magician Pibechis. A solid discussion of the Judeo-Christian tradition and its close ties to exorcism can be found in Roy Kotansky, "Greek Exorcistic Amulets," 243-78. See also Dennis Duling, "The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus's '*Antiquities Judaicae*' 8.42-49," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 no. ½ (1985): 1-25; Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, "Some Observations on the *Genesis Apocryphon*," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22 (1960): 283-4.



demonstrating standard epiphanic fear and amazement, however, the crowd begins to inquire after the agent driving Jesus' exorcism (11:15). We should note that the success of the exorcism is insufficient in allaying suspicions about Jesus' wonderworking; despite the fact that he was able to oust the demon, he is nevertheless accused of colluding with demons.<sup>438</sup>

In many ways, the Judeo-Christian fascination with agency is unique – as we shall see in the Acts of the Apostles and the *Acts of Peter*, assigning agency to the One God is a means by which Christians seek to distinguish their own discourse of magic from that of others. Agency, however, *must* be coupled with other unique facets in order to offer novel interpretations, since, in the broader tradition of Graeco-Roman magic, the agency by which deeds were performed was not as exclusive or as rigid as Christians imagined. To pagans, exorcising demons in the name of Jesus or God did not necessarily signify one's actions as that of a Christian.<sup>439</sup> Luke's Gospel solves this issue (perhaps unwittingly) through eschatological commitment. Even as Jesus deflects charges of colluding with Beelzebul, he reminds his audience the Kingdom of God has come near and Satan's hold on the world grows ever tenuous (11:20).

In terms of Satan's introduction into the text, there appears a change in appellation between 11:15, in which Jesus' accusers claim that his accomplice is "Beelzebul," and 11:18, in which "Satan" is divided against himself. By placing Beelzebul and Satan in such proximity, Luke invites his audience to make the correlation, yet he does not *explicitly* state

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<sup>438</sup> Luke 11:15. Hans-Josef Klauck sees in this accusation an accusation of false representation, in which Jesus is charged with casting out demons in order to trick Christians into believing that he is working against Satan, when he is in fact working with Satan. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 179. So too Joel Marcus, "The Beelzebul Controversy and the Eschatologies of Jesus," in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans eds., *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 247.

<sup>439</sup> PGM IV.1227-64, 3007-86 both invoke Jesus, as well as other deities, both Jewish and Egyptian.

that Beelzebul *is* Satan. Still, it is clear that the two are congruent in the Lucan imagination. The missing evidence comes from Mark 3:23. In the Markan version of the Beelzebul Controversy, Jesus asks, “How can Satan drive out Satan?” in direct reference to those who have accused him of driving out demons by Beelzebul. Although Luke omits this statement, his retention of the other Markan elements, especially the Parable of the Strong(er) Man, suggest that the correlation obtains in his Gospel as well.<sup>440</sup>

Luke further ossifies his binary between Satan and the agent through whom Jesus works by turning the questions of the crowd against it: “Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert and house falls upon house. If Satan is also divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say I cast out demons by Beelzebul (Luke 11:11-18).” The intimation is that demons cannot be ousted by their own. If Jesus’ exorcisms are successful – and he has proven time and again that they are – then he cannot be working through those agents he dislodges or otherwise harms.<sup>441</sup> Furthermore, he asks, “By whom do your exorcists cast them out?” Here, not only is Jesus drawing a distinction between his *own* exorcisms and those of outsiders, he also includes the work of other Jewish exorcists as belonging to the same class of activities as his own. If other Jewish exorcists are successful,

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<sup>440</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Joseph Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Bible Commentary vol. 28A (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 920-21. According to Moshe Held, by the time the New Testament was being composed, “Beelzebul” had come to represent another name for Satan. See Moshe Held, “The Root ZBL/SBL in Akkadian, Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal for the American Oriental Society* 88 no.1 (1968), 90-96.

<sup>441</sup> Joel Marcus sees in this query a particular species of logical argument, *reduction ad absurdum*. In other words, it is absurd to think that Satan’s kingdom is no longer standing. Since Satan’s kingdom remains standing and is not divided, it cannot be the case that Jesus casts out Satan’s demons by the power of Satan. Hence, Jesus’ agency lies elsewhere. See Marcus, “Beelzebul Controversy,” 248. Also Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetorical Composition and the Beelzebul Controversy,” in B. L. Mack and V. K. Robbins eds., *Patters of Persuasion in the Gospels*, Foundations and Facets: Literary Facets (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1989), 161-93.

then it follows that those exorcists cannot be working through Beelzebul either, since a house divided will fall.

Nevertheless, Jesus' exorcisms are not *quite* the same as those others, and this is manifestly clear in the section concerning the Kingdom of God. I have stated elsewhere in this chapter that Lucan eschatology is what renders the magical discourse in Luke's Gospel uniquely Lucan. The Beelzebul Controversy is exemplary of this assertion. Luke 11:20 will clarify my assertion: "If by the finger of God I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you." As Sue Garrett succinctly sums up, "Not only are the opponents wrong about the source of Jesus' power, but their mistake is causing them to miss the momentous significance of Jesus' wonderworking: it heralds the Kingdom of God."<sup>442</sup>

Yet there is much more to the phrase "finger of God" than appears at first blush. Luke employs "finger of God," as opposed to Matthew's "Spirit of God," and in doing so, has paralleled the work of Jesus and the work of God – as I stated earlier.<sup>443</sup> Specifically, the tradition comes from Exodus, and may also carry resonances of other LXX references. In Exodus 8:19, pharaoh's magicians must admit that Aaron's power comes from a greater entity than the source of their own power. The power animating Aaron's works is referred to

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<sup>442</sup> Garrett, "Magic in Luke-Acts," 138.

<sup>443</sup> Matthew 12:28. Scholars are divided about which of the two versions is the Q version. Two of the more comprehensive surveys of arguments include W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary Series vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 339-40 and J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, *Word Bible Commentary* 35b (Dallas: Zondervan, 1993), 639-40. See also J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the Historical Jesus* vol. II (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 404-23; Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 63; C.S. Rodd, "Spirit or Finger," *Expository Times* 72 (1960-61): 157-58; Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 108. My own contention is that Luke's use of the term "finger" is in keeping with his own ideological framework for understanding how God moves in the world, although admittedly this does not preclude the possibility that "finger" appeared in Q. If Luke did change the tradition he inherited, then it serves to further illustrate my point that he wished to demonstrate the active power of God in the world – to the extent that he emended his source. As we have seen, Luke has no trouble redacting his sources should he deem it necessary.

as the “finger” of God, whereas the magicians are said to work their own deeds via “secret arts.”<sup>444</sup> The context of the passage is the Plague of Gnats, which is sent directly by God in order to liberate his people from Egypt. The “finger of God” in the Exodus account represents God’s intervention in history on behalf of his people. In Exodus 31:38, God gives Moses the two tablets of the covenant which were “written with the finger of God.” The emphasis here seems to be God’s continuing engagement with the Israelites. A third possible reference comes from Psalms 8:4. The text suggests that the heavens are the result of God’s fingers, alluding to the work of creation. When God appears in the world (or creates part of the cosmos), the “finger of God” is operative. The LXX references amount to a metonymy in which God’s finger represents God’s ongoing presence in the history of the world, and as a corollary, the idiom further represents the *intentional* ways in which God uses power to achieve God’s purpose.

Along with above references to the “finger of God,” references to the “hand of God” might add further texture to the Lucan passage. The “hand of God” is used interchangeably with “the Spirit of God” in Ezekiel 8:1 and 11:5. In the first instance, God intercedes in order to curb idolatrous practices amongst the Israelites. The word “hand” is used to describe how Ezekiel receives his charge to deliver God’s message. In 11:5, the word “Spirit” is used to describe how God uses prophet once again. Like finger, then, “hand of God” can connote the *active* power of God on earth.<sup>445</sup> For Luke, the use of “finger of God” in an exorcistic context is quite telling; Jesus operates through the same power that freed the Israelites, wrote the covenant, and called the prophets. By working through this particular agency, Jesus fulfills

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<sup>444</sup> See discussion in Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 43.

<sup>445</sup> Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 108.

God's purpose. As a result of God's intercession in such a tangible way, "the Kingdom of God has come (11:20)." The arrival of the Kingdom is no less a cataclysmic event than the Exodus.

Another message we get from the Beelzebul Controversy is that the arrival of the Kingdom is not a sudden, complete overturning of the world order – an echo of the message found in Luke 10:17. Instead, Jesus' mission is to chip away at Satan's stronghold in increments. This is borne out by the Parable of the Strong(er) Man, which I will discuss below. Other passages in Luke's Gospel also give the sense that Luke's eschatology is not immediately realized but implicated in Jesus' wonderworking (and that of the disciples).<sup>446</sup> When the Seventy are sent out, they are to heal, exorcise, and preach the Kingdom (10:8). In Luke 9:2, the Twelve are sent to do the same. Jesus himself preaches the Kingdom alongside healing.<sup>447</sup> In Luke 17:21, Jesus expressly claims that the Kingdom of God is in "your midst."<sup>448</sup> Yet, despite all these exorcisms/healings which are supposedly signifiers of the arrival of the Kingdom, the total societal inversion expressed in other parts of the Gospel has not occurred. In the Parable of the Strong(er) Man, Jesus indicates that Satan's kingdom has not yet fallen. The man is bound, but not vanquished. Luke imagines the in-breaking of the

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<sup>446</sup> See note 10 in the current chapter for a summary of various positions on Lucan eschatology.

<sup>447</sup> Luke 4:31-37, 6:12-7:17 (Sermon on the Plain), 9:11, for example.

<sup>448</sup> Luke 17:21 is also vital for understanding the partially realized eschatology being advanced in Luke's gospel. Here, Jesus is offering a corrective to the Pharisees, who are expecting a coming Kingdom. They ask him for specifics. When will the Kingdom arrive? In response, Jesus asserts that the Kingdom of God has already arrived and is "among you." The implication is that the Pharisees cannot recognize the Kingdom even when it is in their midst. The translation "the Kingdom of God is within you" has found favor among some because of the ambiguity of the word ἐντός, which can mean both "within" and "among." Although theologically attractive, perhaps, the former translation does not seem to fit within the larger scope of Luke's understanding of the Kingdom as something that is partially realized. This use of ἐντός is supported in Xenophon *Anab.* 1.10.3; *Hellen.* 2.3.19; Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.100.3. See further W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus*, (London: SCM Press, 1961), 35; A. Sledd, "The Interpretation of Luke 17,21," *Expository Times* 50 (1938-1939:378-79; Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke, X-XXIV*, Anchor Bible Commentary, (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1157-59.

Kingdom to be a gradual affair, each exorcism and healing contributing to the eventual victory won by God.

The Parable of the Strong(er) Man clarifies the fact that Satan's kingdom remains standing.<sup>449</sup> In 11:21-22, Luke claims that the "strong man" who stands guard over his home would be secure in knowing that his possessions are protected. Given that Satan has already declared himself the ruler of this world in the Temptation narrative, it is not difficult to make the connection that this strong man refers to Satan and that the possessions in question are those individuals under his power. Luke has also characterized Jesus' mission as release from bondage in 4:18. His exorcisms likewise represent freedom from bondage (13:11-16). Furthermore, in the Lucan imagination, those under Satan's power are not merely demoniacs, but also individuals suffering from illnesses and who might otherwise be oppressed under the power of this world (Acts 10:38). Jesus is the "stronger man" who has come to plunder Satan's domain – a point further borne out by John the Baptist's referral to Jesus as the "stronger one" who would supersede him (3:16). Jesus' mission is to release individuals from bondage to Satan. Doing so ushers in the Kingdom of God, one exorcism at a time.

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<sup>449</sup> C. F. Evans asserts that the Parable of the Divided Kingdom and the Parable of the Strong(er) Man were at odds with each other. In the former, Jesus asserts that Satan's kingdom remains standing and therefore he cannot be casting out demons with the power of Satan. In the latter, however, the implication is that Satan's kingdom is being plundered. See C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, New Testament Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1990), 491. My own contention is that these two parables need not be contradictory if we imagine Luke's eschatological expectation to arrive gradually as opposed to suddenly. Joel Marcus ("Beelzebul Controversy," 250) makes the apt point that the language of binding suggests disempowerment (quoting 1 Enoch 10:4; Jub. 5:6; 10:7-11; T. Levi 18:12; Rev. 20:1-3), but even so, the binding and disempowerment of Satan does not mean that the ushering in of God's Kingdom must happen immediately. If we understand the "plundering" in the Parable of the Strong(er) Man to mean Jesus' reclamation of souls from Satan's power, there is nothing about Satan being bound which suggests such a reclamation ought to happen instantaneously. There is nothing to suggest that the demons, illnesses, or other plights endemic in Satan's Kingdom will loosen their grip on their victims because Satan is bound. Rather, Luke seems to suggest that healing and exorcistic work is an on-going mission and that Satan is not fully defeated, since he returns to influence Judas in Luke 22:3.

The Beelzebul Controversy closes with an injunction: “the one who is not with me is against me, and the one who does not gather with me scatters (11:23).” Again, the language is exceedingly clear. In keeping with the dualism that runs throughout this pericope, and the Gospel more generally, Jesus’ warning demands that his listeners be unequivocal. They must choose. He has demonstrated that he works miracles through the finger of God, meaning that God has chosen to intervene in the history of the world by waging war against the forces of Satan and ushering in the Kingdom. This eschatological outcome has not yet occurred; Satan will regain the upper hand at the crucifixion. Nevertheless, the overarching history detailed in Luke’s Gospel tends towards divine triumph.<sup>450</sup> The magical activities narrated in Luke, especially the exorcisms (as exemplified in Luke 11:14-23), are not only demonstrative of this larger salvation history, but represent tools to ensure its success.

The Gospel of Luke presents a unique eschatological vision in the Beelzebul Controversy. By claiming that Jesus works his magic through the finger of God, Luke imbues his protagonist with the same wonderworking power that animated the work of heroes in Jewish history. Like Aaron and Ezekiel, Jesus is called by God to fulfill a particular task – to demonstrate to God’s people that the Kingdom is upon them. The Beelzebul Controversy’s Parable of the Strong(er) man further intensifies the urgency of this eschatological expectation by presenting an antagonist to God – Satan. Satan’s dominion reigns yet, but as Jesus tells his listeners, Satan is bound, and the Galilean minister has begun to plunder Satan’s possessions. This imagery of conflict and violence runs throughout the gospel, establishing a dualistic worldview in which magic serves the side of good in a cosmic battle.

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<sup>450</sup> See Luke 22:3, 53. See also Ragnar Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), 56-7; C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1958), 67; Jerome Neyrey, *The Passion According to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke’s Soteriology* (New York: Paulist, 1971), 177-80.

#### Part IV. Magic and Eschatology: The Purpose of Luke's Discourse of the Supernatural

Morton Smith did not find eschatological material in the Beelzebul Controversy.<sup>451</sup> For Smith, the Kingdom of God did not represent an eschatological eventuality, but rather, was implicated with the “finger of God” – the name of the magical power by which Jesus worked.<sup>452</sup> While this intellectual position is difficult to sustain given the evidence above, it makes a certain sense for Smith's argument. Because Smith's Jesus was a Graeco-Roman magician, the eschatological expectation found in the Beelzebul Controversy was fashioned later in order to paint Jesus' words in an eschatological light.<sup>453</sup> That is to say, the historical Jesus was a magician, not a prophet. I do not wish to make any assertions about the historical Jesus, but *Smith's* assertions concerning magic should give us pause. Implicit in his understanding is an incompatibility between magic and philosophy and/or theology. His Jesus is limited to *either* magician or prophet; as a result, the eschatological material in the Gospel of Luke must be explained away as a later interpolation. Yet, the ancient evidence does not appear to support this presupposition. In the Gospel of Luke, the opposite obtains. Magic and the message are inextricably bound and mutually reinforced.

Malleability of magical discourse, as well as the ambiguity of certain of its constitutive practices such as exorcism, allows Luke to take advantage of the compelling nature of magic while mitigating those of its characteristics that might come under attack from outside detractors – characteristics such as unintelligible or foreign language, secrecy,

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<sup>451</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 130-34.

<sup>452</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 130. Smith is not clear on *how* the Kingdom is implicated in the power of God. He states, “We have just seen ‘the finger of God’ was a power in magic; that the kingdom of God should be identified with the accessibility of such power is noteworthy.” Yet, he never explicates what is noteworthy about this identification. His endnote does, however, claim that the Parable of the Divided Kingdom is “anti-eschatological (205).”

<sup>453</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 205 (note to p. 130).



and magic worked through *ousia*. Many of these characteristics are those that he excised from the narratives he inherited from Mark's Gospel. By doing so, he is able to craft Jesus as both magician and something more – a Man of God, whose ability to work wonders serves as a signifier for the delayed but still forthcoming arrival of the Kingdom of God. Luke's eschatological discourse inflects the magical deeds performed by Jesus, particularly those of exorcism and healing. By intertwining magic and eschatology, Luke is able to prefigure and portend the Kingdom. Through Jesus' deeds, the characteristics of the Kingdom, as set forth in the Lucan Beatitudes, are introduced into the world. Health, satiety, joy, and freedom from demonic oppression all characterize the earthly ministry of Jesus and the coming Kingdom of God. The magic in the Gospel of Luke conveys a specific eschatological purpose.

This purpose is largely abandoned, or at least downplayed, in Acts. In Luke's second volume, much less time is devoted to eschatology and correspondingly more time is devoted to establishing the apostles as agents of Jesus, much like Jesus was an agent of God. Luke also constructs parallel magical traditions, elevating Paul such that he is equal to Peter. Because of this, the range of wonderworking in Acts is expanded, including everything from miraculous prison escapes to the supernatural death of disobedient members of the Christian community. In Acts, Luke is far less reticent about introducing the more troubling trappings of Graeco-Roman magical discourse into his narrative, as we shall see. In fact, it would be fair to claim that Luke and Acts represent two different discourses of magic, the first dedicated to eschatology and the second to social and theological cohesion.

### CHAPTER 3: MAGIC AND MIRACLE: DISCURSIVE DISTINCTION AND NARRATIVE COHESION IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 5 of the canonical Acts of the Apostles begins with the infamous account of Ananias and Sapphira, a story worth quoting at length:

But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and he kept some of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge, and brought a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter asked, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to withhold part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? Why have you contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us, but to God!" Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. And the young men came and wrapped up his body, then they carried him out and buried him.

After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me, did you sell the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price." Then Peter said to her, "Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." And immediately she fell down at his feet and died. And when the young men came in, they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and all who heard of these things (5:1-11).

Commentators have found this an especially unsettling passage. Wendt wondered if the punishment fit the crime – that is, if Ananias and Sapphira deserved death, considering that they had no opportunity to repent.<sup>454</sup> Certainly the harsh punishment doled out by Peter is difficult to square with Jesus' more forbearing attitude in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>455</sup> As Wendt so

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<sup>454</sup> Hans Hinrich Wendt, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 121.

<sup>455</sup> See, for example, Luke 5:20-24, where Jesus effects a healing by simply forgiving a man's sin. 5:30 in particular makes clear Jesus' stance on sin and forgiveness: "Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." Here, the issues of forgiveness and repentance are both central to Jesus' message. Other examples of Jesus' more indulgent attitude towards sinners include 7:37-39, 15:1-2, and 15:7.

correctly asserts, there is no suggestion for the possibility of penitence – quite a difference, not only from Jesus’ attitude, but also his message with respect to God’s Kingdom. W. L. Knox, for his part, hoped the story of Ananias and Sapphira was merely a legend with no basis in historical reality.<sup>456</sup> Knox’s wishful circumvention is perhaps understandable, but the scholar of Christian antiquity must yet contend with why such an account would appear in Luke’s second volume. After all, even a legendary account must hold some meaning for the author who includes it in his finished work. Haenchen foregrounds the parallels between the Ananias and Sapphira and Achan in Joshua 7.<sup>457</sup> The same logic in my argument against Knox obtains here. Claiming the passage has LXX parallels does not necessarily explain its significance in the context of Luke’s narrative. Among myriad possible LXX references, why does our author include *this* one? To be fair, Haenchen follows up his observation with the uneasy truth that, “Peter does not merely prophesy Sapphira’s death but...wants to kill—and succeeds.”<sup>458</sup> And indeed, there is something discomfiting about one of Jesus’ apostles wishing to kill. It is no wonder, then, that other scholars have labeled the narrative as offensive and repulsive.<sup>459</sup>

For Haenchen and others, the story of Ananias and Sapphira is a cautionary tale, a means by which “God visits a dreadful vengeance on deceivers.”<sup>460</sup> The couple represents

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<sup>456</sup> W. L. Knox, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 63.

<sup>457</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary of the Bible (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1971), 239.

<sup>458</sup> Haenchen, *Acts*, 239.

<sup>459</sup> Gail O’Day claimed the narrative “offends modern sensibilities and defies any rational or psychological explanation.” See Gail R. O’Day, “Acts,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, Carol A Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (London: SPCK, 1992), 398. Much earlier than O’Day, Foakes-Jackson merely called it “frankly repulsive.” See F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), 42.

<sup>460</sup> Haenchen, *Acts*, 241; See also Philippe H. Menoud, “La Mort d’Ananias et de Saphira (Actes 5.1-11),” in *Aux de sources la tradition chrétienne Mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel à l’occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, Oscar Cullman and Phillippe H. Menoud eds., (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé 1950),

the fate of those wishing to participate in the Christian community without making the requisite sacrifices.<sup>461</sup> It also serves as a reminder that a Christian who is filled with the Spirit is capable of discerning deceit in others.<sup>462</sup> I am not opposed to the interpretation that Acts 5:1-11 serves as a Lucan reworking of a cautionary tale inherited from the LXX or other material. But cautionary tales in the New Testament, even in Luke, do not necessarily end in death.<sup>463</sup> Furthermore, cautionary tales, like all narratives, can be polyvalent and need not be circumscribed to the conveyance of moral lessons. I will explore alternate possibilities for interpreting this troublesome passage later, but for now, let me bracket this intellectual disquiet and attend to another feature of the text. In my opinion, the most interesting aspect of the Ananias and Sapphira episode is not necessarily that Peter struck dead two new converts; rather, it is the fact that Luke's Peter has the power to kill when Luke had deliberately redacted the *one* destructive wonder performed by Jesus in the synoptic tradition.<sup>464</sup> From Acts 5:1-11 alone, it is clear that Luke's Jesus and Luke's Peter are vastly different in terms of the discourses of magic surrounding each. Peter *can* kill and does

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146-54; Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 66; David R. McCabe, *How to Kill things with Words: Ananias and Sapphira Under the Prophetic Speech-Act of Divine Judgment (Acts 4.32-5.11)*, Library of New Testament Studies (New York: T&T Clark, 2011).

<sup>461</sup> Haenchen, *Acts*, 240.

<sup>462</sup> Haenchen, *Acts*, 241.

<sup>463</sup> See, for example, Luke 9:5, where Jesus instructs the ministering disciples to “shake the dust off their feet” should they be unwelcome in any town. In Matthew, this instruction is coupled with the curse, “Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than that town” (Matt 10:15). Luke softens the imprecation. Luke's Jesus also rebukes James and John for wishing to call down fire upon the Samaritans for rejecting Jesus (9:55). The exception is the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). But even in this parable, death is not the *punishment* for deceit or sin. Rather, the afterlife serves as the punishment after the occurrence of a natural death. When compared with the trend in Luke's Gospel, the Ananias and Sapphira episode is rather unusual for its unhindered use of violence against members of the Christian community, even sinful ones.

<sup>464</sup> Mark 11:12-25, Jesus cursing the fig tree.

so unhesitatingly. Luke's Jesus, in contrast, rebukes his followers for *wishing* to call down fire upon nonbelievers (Luke 9:54).

My aim in this chapter is to explore these distinctions between Luke's Jesus and Luke's apostles, Peter and Paul in particular. The magical discourse surrounding Luke's apostles conforms more closely to the less ambiguous aspects of the typology of magic I presented in Chapter 1. This wider, more diverse discourse of magic is subsequently mobilized towards two ends: (1) distinguishing insiders from outsiders based on the indices of agency and legitimacy; and, (2) elevating Paul to the level of Peter, thereby presenting a unified Christian leadership in response to the outsiders mentioned above. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two parts, each half corresponding to the function of the magical discourse in Acts. The first half will treat inside/outside group dynamics, delineating how Luke understands the fledgling Jesus community vis-à-vis other groups. The latter part of this chapter will then demonstrate how this community's cohesion is further constructed magically, through Luke's use of parallel magical traditions to achieve parity between Peter and Paul.

### **Part I. Magic in Luke, Magic in Acts**

The distinctiveness of the magical discourse in Acts (when compared with Luke) is not limited to the Ananias and Sapphira episode or the person of Peter. In the Gospel, Luke's Jesus prioritizes healing and exorcism (particularly his adversarial relationship to demonic entities), never heals through the use of *ousia* or other accoutrements, and his supernatural authority rests in his own person. In fact, Luke redacts those aspects of Mark's Gospel that do not accord with his very specific understanding of Jesus' wonderworking ability. Furthermore, Jesus' message concerning the Kingdom of God imbues the magical discourse

with an eschatological expectation set against Satan – an expectation that renders the magical discourse of the Gospel as something unique to Luke’s first volume. Jesus’ magic is a harbinger of the coming Kingdom, a series of signs both prefiguring and portending its arrival by ousting the enemies of God, one healing and/or exorcism at a time.

These characteristics of magical discourse do not obtain when applied to Jesus’ successors in Acts. The discourse of magic in Acts is more permissive in terms of the types of magical activity performed. Not only do Peter and Paul perform exorcisms, healings, revivifications, but they can also destroy enemies of the Church. On the whole, the disciples are depicted as being far more assimilatory to ancient tropes of the magician than Luke’s Jesus. Peter’s shadow can heal, as can Paul’s handkerchiefs, betraying the fact that Luke is much less reticent about the use of magical items and proxies when it comes to Jesus’ followers.<sup>465</sup> They use formulae of invocation recalling the language of the PGM with far more frequency than anything spoken by Luke’s Jesus.<sup>466</sup> Finally, while the same sort of eschatological expectation pervades Acts, it is not foregrounded by emphasizing the role of the demonic. In fact, rather than Satan, the theological enemies in Acts appear to be human detractors.

Our author mobilizes the magical discourse of Acts towards ends no longer eschatological, but very much “this-worldly”: differentiation between the apostles and “outsiders” and rapprochement between Petrine and Pauline Christian factions. By creating a

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<sup>465</sup> Acts 5:15 (Peter’s shadow); Acts 19:12 (Paul’s handkerchiefs).

<sup>466</sup> See Acts 3:6 (“In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”); 4:10-11 (“...this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone...’”). These sorts of invocations “in the name of” are reminiscent of the invocations littering the PGM, in which the names of various deities are invoked in order to work various spells.

discourse of magic distinct from *and* subordinate to that of Jesus, yet parallel between his two heroes, Luke promotes a cohesive Christian community and coherent Christian message in the face of perceived persecution and faction. This sort of program would prove unnecessary for Jesus. Jesus was the progenitor of the movement and the sole authority until his crucifixion. The positions of Jesus' apostles are rather more tenuous. Peter's authority as one of the Twelve has been secured via tradition, but Paul's own authority may not have carried a similar currency. Not being a member of Jesus' inner circle, never having met the living Messiah, persecuting the early church – each of these things could undercut Paul's legitimacy as a Christian leader.<sup>467</sup> Luke's second volume serves to elevate Paul to the level of Peter. As a result of this purpose, the magical discourse in the Acts of the Apostles must necessarily be different from the Gospel of Luke.

With all of these marked distinctions between Luke's two volumes, it is remarkable that no one has undertaken a sustained study of the differing magical discourses found therein. In fact, rather than treat each text as a discrete entity with discrete ideological ends, scholars tend to combine the two texts when attempting to trace a discourse of magic in what they consider a single unit – "Luke-Acts."<sup>468</sup> My aim is to interrogate the hyphenated moniker, to instantiate a discourse of difference, and ultimately, to take seriously the

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<sup>467</sup> Luke seems to hint that they did when he writes in 9:26, "When [Saul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple." This reticence on the part of the Jerusalem leaders is mitigated later in the text, but mention of this strife between Paul and the Twelve gives the reader evidence to suggest that Luke, at least, believed some modicum of faction existed among the early Church.

<sup>468</sup> See Sue Garrett, "Magic in Luke-Acts" and *Demise of the Devil*; Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity"; Francois Bovon, "Miracles, Magic, and Healing in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles," in *Studies in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 353-67. The exception could be Hans-Josef Klauck's *Magic and Paganism*, which is self-purported to be limited in scope to Acts, yet Klauck never undertakes any theorizing in terms of offering an overarching understanding of the magical discourse in Acts. Scholars who talk of magic in early Christianity as a whole tend to homogenize as well.

assertions of Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard Pervo by treating each of Luke's volumes as its own work, complete with its own ideological agenda.<sup>469</sup> In the case of magic and the characterizations corollary to its practice, such a treatment yields fruitful data for understanding how Luke envisions the relationship between Jesus and his apostles, and subsequently, among the apostles themselves.

To this end, this chapter will proceed in three parts. First, I will discuss the differences in magical discourse between Acts and Luke, emphasizing the greater confluence of Acts to the less ambiguous aspects of magic that I detailed in Chapter 1. Second, I will elucidate the ways in which Jesus' followers are distinguished from outsiders in Acts. Although Jesus and his apostles work through the same agent – i.e., the Holy Spirit – not all followers are endowed with equal capabilities when it comes to performing wondrous deeds. Peter emerges as a leader in the beginning of Acts, primarily through his awesome wonderworking skill. Finally, I will demonstrate how Paul is elevated to the same status as Peter via a parallel magical tradition to that of Peter. This elevation has the effect of creating a rapprochement between Petrine and Pauline factions, a point famously (and correctly) articulated by Baur.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). See in particular pp. 1-20, where Parsons and Pervo claim that accepting singular authorship for Luke-Acts does not necessarily imply that the purposes of the two books are unified. Parsons and Pervo outline various types of "unity" including narrative, generic, and theological. My contention is that the discourse of magic outlined in Acts is yet another aspect of the two books that is distinct in each.

<sup>470</sup> F. C. Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ. His Life and Work, his Epistles, and his Doctrine: a contribution to a critical history of primitive Christianity*, A. Menzies, trans., (London: Williams and Norgate), 1875. Haenchen discusses the influence of Baur's thesis in subsequent scholarship. See Haenchen, *Acts*, 17-24.



## Part II. Acts and the Apostles: A Different Magic

Unlike Jesus himself, his deputized subordinates readily display those characteristics I enumerated as being of the more ambiguous sort when analyzing the full spectrum of activities that might be considered magic. In response to this, Sue Garrett insists that,

The evangelists did not share modern readers' frequent assumption that identity of appearance necessarily entails ontological identity, and therefore identity of meaning or significance. As the Beelzebub incident (Mark 3:22-27 and parallels) demonstrates, the evangelists acknowledged that, with regard to appearance, miraculous deeds could be ambiguous.<sup>471</sup>

Garrett is indeed correct in her assertion that ambiguity reigned in the performance of certain wondrous deeds, yet this is but part of the whole. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, ambiguity was *more* attendant to specific magical deeds. There is a reason the apostles do not perform love spells, for example. Nor do they engage in traditional reanimation-necromancy. For other, less clear deeds, the narration of the act can be manipulated to cast the performance in a more positive light. Luke accomplishes this sort of clarification in his Gospel by removing a number of the stereotypical trappings of magic from his source material. Given the Third Evangelist's precise redaction, his reintroduction of these characteristics in Acts cannot be mere coincidence. Rather, like Apuleius' *Apology*, our text capitalizes on the ambiguity of magic as a trope while attributing its least desirable aspects to ideological rivals.

Let me clarify. On the *practical level* (that of the activities narrated), for Luke to ensure the apostles' power is as extraordinary as that of rival wonderworkers populating the ancient Mediterranean religious marketplace, their magical deeds must appear peerless. On the *rhetorical level*, however, our author must not allow his heroes to occupy the polemical

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<sup>471</sup> Garrett, "Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts," 5

space reserved for the lowest type of magicians, those who were charlatans and deceivers.<sup>472</sup>

In order to accomplish this delicate balance, the Evangelist increases how closely his heroes—Peter and Paul—approximate stereotypical magic users while at the same time having them fight those expressly labeled as magicians. This two-pronged approach obtains in all three of the texts I consider in this project. Since the Christian heroes' activities conform, more or less, to the ambiguous activities of magicians, these activities must be accompanied by interpretation. It is on this meta-critical level, that of offering interpretation, that magic *can* be configured as a rhetorical charge to levy against theological outsiders. In the Gospel of Luke, the outsiders were bound to Satan. In Acts, the outsiders are non-Christian magicians who frustrate the mission of Peter and Paul.

As with Luke's Gospel, retaining a flexible, dynamic model of magic can ameliorate some of the scholarly disagreements that have cropped up in the wake of the "miracle" traditions in Luke and Acts. For example, Paul Achtemeier claims that Luke had "full awareness of the magical views and practices which pervaded the Hellenistic world."<sup>473</sup> Despite this awareness, Luke does not allow the "traditions of the faith" to be "penetrated by magic."<sup>474</sup> Achtemeier does not explain what he means by this, but he does devote considerable attention to demonstrating how Luke's miracles are not aimed at proving that prophecy has been fulfilled.<sup>475</sup> His implication appears to be that Luke neither allowed traditions of the faith to be penetrated by magic nor mobilized wonderworking for the

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<sup>472</sup> A point made quite correctly by Morton Smith. *Jesus the Magician*, 92.

<sup>473</sup> Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 560.

<sup>474</sup> Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 560.

<sup>475</sup> Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 561-2.

purpose of showcasing prophecy fulfillment.<sup>476</sup> So, the magic in Luke-Acts is neither Graeco-Roman, nor an expedient designed to foreground Jesus' Jewishness. The question he cannot answer is what, precisely, distinguishes Lucan miracle from Graeco-Roman magic if it is not the fulfillment of prophecy. Another approach is that of Sue Garrett, who claims that Luke's retention of magical themes is not magical simply because Luke does not craft his protagonists as magicians in their own right.<sup>477</sup> Since magic is an exclusively rhetorical charge, Luke's refusal to label his heroes as such is sufficient indication that Peter and Paul were not magicians. In contrast to both Achtemeier and Garrett, I contend that the problem is not in the *interpretation* of the data but rather the ambiguity of the data itself. It is not sufficient to analyze what Luke *claims* his heroes' deeds to be (Garrett) or suggest that magical discourse retained in Christian texts, as opposed to pagan texts, must be inadvertent or inscrutable (Achtemeier). Rather, it seems more fruitful to understand magic as congeries of practices working in tandem with rhetorical charges.<sup>478</sup>

In the case of the Acts of the Apostles, this understanding of magic as a group of practices, each having polysemous valence, can help us understand why the apostles' actions seem to differ from those of Jesus. In Acts, many characteristics of the wonderworking traditions of the Lucan Jesus obtain. The apostles perform exorcisms, healings, and revivifications.<sup>479</sup> These are all familiar to the audience of Luke's first volume, and likely expected, since Jesus had given to the disciples the authority to "overcome all the power of

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<sup>476</sup> Achtemeier, "Lucan Perspective," 561-2.

<sup>477</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, esp. 1-36.

<sup>478</sup> See the introduction of the present work for a more thoroughgoing explanation.

<sup>479</sup> Exorcisms: 5:16; 8:7; 16:16-18; 19:12; Healings: 3:1-5; 5:12-16; 9:33, 34; 14:8-10; Revivifications: 9:36-41; 20:7-12.

the enemy” (Luke 10:9). That is, Jesus had given to his followers *his* power. It makes sense, therefore, that the apostles would carry on certain of his magical practices. Moreover, since healings and exorcisms are so closely related in Luke’s writings, and since they are directed towards defeating Satan, one can interpret the apostles’ healings and exorcisms in Acts as continuing this mission against Satan (at least in the background). In fact, as in his first volume, Luke conflates two separate categories of tormented individuals – the ill and the possessed. In Acts 5:16, the disciples heal (ἐθεραπεύοντο) both “the sick and those being tormented by unclean spirits.” The use of ἐθεραπεύοντο in the context of demonic possession is a Lucan convention, one retained from the Gospel. Even so, exorcisms as a whole comprise a much smaller part of the magical repertoire in Acts. Unlike the Gospel, Acts’ exorcisms are narrated in summation.<sup>480</sup> The exception is Acts 16:8-10, in which Paul exorcises a spirit of divination from a soothsaying slave girl. In *none* of these Acts passages does Luke describe demon possession in the same language of bondage to Satan that pervades passages like Luke 13:10-17. Satan’s continuing defeat may be a concern in Acts, but it certainly seems a secondary concern.<sup>481</sup>

Even without the strong emphasis on the Satanic, Lucan emphasis on the Kingdom of God obtains in Acts. Although the eschatological aspect of the magical discourse is subdued, the arrival of the Kingdom is echoed in passages like the summation of Jesus’ ministry in Acts 1:3: “After his suffering, he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs,

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<sup>480</sup> See 5:16; 8:7; 19:12 for other examples. See also Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 142 and Rick Strelan, *Strange Acts: Studies in the Cultural World of the Acts of the Apostles*. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 101-2.

<sup>481</sup> Contra Garrett, who sees Acts’ wonders as engaging with the demonic. See Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 61-97, in which she discusses the Simon Magus episode, Paul’s encounter with Elymas, and the Sons of Sceva episode in the context of fighting the Satanic. I do not necessarily disagree with Garrett, but I do not believe that combatting Satanism is Luke’s *primary* objective in Acts, though it was in Luke.

appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God.” A similar sentiment reoccurs only a few verses later when the disciples ask Jesus, “Is this the time you will restore the Kingdom to Israel (1:6)?” These mentions of the Kingdom do not happen in the context of magical activity; however, their position at the very beginning of the text and as characteristic of the ministry of Jesus is telling. Every wondrous deed may not be tied to eschatological expectation as in the Gospel of Luke, but eschatological expectation inflects the narrative nonetheless. In this manner, Luke’s second volume represents a continuation of Jesus’ ministry through the activities of his followers.<sup>482</sup>

In Luke, Jesus’ ministry is validated by magic.<sup>483</sup> Acts supplies the same supernatural validation, for both Jesus and his designated followers in 2:22 and 10:38-39. In 2:22, Jesus is described as being “attested to [the Israelites] by deeds of power, wonders, and signs.” Similarly, God anoints Jesus with the “Holy Spirit and with power” in 10:38. The work of the apostles is also described as “wonders and signs” in 2:43, 5:12, 6:8, 14:3, and 15:12. Yet, the “signs and wonders” done by the apostles, when they are described in full, are vastly different from those performed by Jesus. Along with the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, we have other instances of the apostles performing the sorts of deeds that Luke deliberately excised from his first volume. The apostles not only engage in destructive wonders, but they also speak in foreign phrases, employ formulae that litter spells like the PGM, and do their wonderworking in private. They behave in ways contrary to Luke’s Jesus.

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<sup>482</sup> Barrett, *Acts*, 1:66-7; Bruce, *Acts* (1990), 98; Beverly R. Gaventa, *Acts*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 63.

<sup>483</sup> See, for example, Luke 4:14, 18-19; 7:22-23. cf. Achtemeier, “Lucan Perspective,” 552-3.

Consider the presence of destructive wonders in Acts. In Luke, our author redacted Jesus' destruction of the fig tree in Mark 11:12-14. Jesus' magic never harms.<sup>484</sup> In Acts, in addition to the episode in Acts 5, Paul blinds the sorcerer Elymas (13:6-11). One might also consider Peter's cursing of Simon Magus in 8:20 to be a destructive wonder, although Luke is unclear about whether or not Peter's curse is inevitable. Certainly, Simon's plea that Peter pray on his behalf, "so that nothing [he] has said may come to pass" suggests the efficacy of Peter's imprecation (8:42).

As with the Ananias and Sapphira episode, scholars find these instances rather puzzling. Kolenkow suggested that not all "punitive miracles" were considered magic in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>485</sup> She further suggests that a "man of power" could perform both harmful and helpful deeds, thereby disarticulating the clear dissimilarity between good and bad magic.<sup>486</sup> The problem with this position is that Luke *does* seem to see a distinction between harmful and helpful deeds, at least with respect to Jesus. Moreover, simply because the same individual performs a deed does not mean that the deeds themselves are imbued with the equal moral valence. Any individual is capable of both good and evil, after all. Kee suggests that these punitive wonders betrayed places in the Lucan corpus where "magical features are apparent."<sup>487</sup> This sentiment is echoed by Conzelmann.<sup>488</sup> The question for Kee and Conzelmann, then, is why *these* places betray a dependence on magical features when

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<sup>484</sup> The one exception could be the swine in 8:32-33. Here, Jesus' responsibility for the destruction of the swine is mitigated by the fact that they drowned themselves as a result of demonic possession. Jesus gave the demons permission to enter the swine, true, but he did not actively destroy the herd.

<sup>485</sup> Kolenkow, "Problem," 107.

<sup>486</sup> Kolenkow, "Problem" 107.

<sup>487</sup> Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic*, 115.

<sup>488</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts*, 38, 110.

other places in the Lucan oeuvre do not. It seems that Conzelmann and Kee's analyses themselves betray certain tendencies – tendencies to see Graeco-Roman magic as the harmful legacy incorporated into Luke's Gospel.

Perhaps a solution presents itself if we table issues of good and evil in order to consider the accounts themselves. In Acts 5:3, Ananias is accused of lying to the Holy Spirit. Sapphira, in 5:9, puts the Holy Spirit "to the test." A similar concern with the Spirit obtains in Acts 8:18-24. Simon Magus, who has just converted, attempts to purchase the power to confer the Holy Spirit in 8:19. As in the Acts 5 narrative, Peter's anger is kindled on behalf of God and the Spirit. Compare this with Paul blinding the sorcerer Elymas in 13:7-11. Elymas is the court sorcerer of the proconsul Sergius Paulus. The proconsul was well on his way to converting when Elymas intervenes, trying to "turn the proconsul from the faith" (13:8). In response, Paul, "filled with the Holy Spirit," curses the man and causes him to go blind (13:9). He accuses Elymas of "perverting the ways of the Lord" (13:10). In each of these destructive wonders, the work of the Lord or the Holy Spirit is directly threatened. Like Satan in Luke's Gospel, these actors have set themselves against God's active work in the world. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, they lied to the Spirit and attempted to test it. Furthermore, in this passage, Luke conflates God and the Spirit, such that offense against one is offense against both.<sup>489</sup> Simon Magus attempts to purchase the Spirit. And Elymas thwarts the conversion of Sergius Paulus, making crooked God's paths. The implication is clear; actions taken against God and the Holy Spirit will be met with swift reprisal.<sup>490</sup> Rather than

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<sup>489</sup> In 5:3, Peter asks, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" Later, Peter says, "You did not lie to us, but to God!"

<sup>490</sup> See also Robert F. O'Toole, "You Did Not Lie to Us [Human Beings] but to God' (Acts 5.4c), *Biblica* 76.2 (1996): 182-209.

searching for the “Graeco-Roman background” of such stories, it appears more fruitful to consider their function within Luke’s larger theological program. Luke’s concern, thus, is to preserve the sanctity of the Spirit, and by extension, of God.

In addition to destructive wonders, Luke’s apostles also heal in private. In Acts 9:36-42, for example, Peter is prevailed upon to revivify a woman named Tabitha. Interestingly, here Luke offers the Greek for Tabitha’s name (“Dorcas” in 9:36). In the Gospel, Luke’s approach to foreign words is excision altogether when it comes to Jesus. Yet in Acts, Luke continues to refer to the woman as “Tabitha” despite giving her Greek name. At any rate, Tabitha grew ill and died before Peter arrived in Joppa (9:37). Two men plead with Peter to raise Tabitha (9:38). Peter enters an upstairs room, which is “filled with widows who were weeping (9:39).” Before he raises Tabitha, he asks everyone to leave (9:40). Compare this to Luke 8:49-56, in which Jesus does not clear the room before raising the daughter of the synagogue leader. Peter also instructs, “Tabitha, get up,” although Jesus’ instruction of “Talitha cumi” (Mark 5:41) is omitted from Luke’s narrative (Luke 9:40). As I mentioned, the use of foreign or unintelligible words and the proclivity towards privacy intensify the stereotype of the ancient magician.

Another difference between the magical discourse in Acts and that of Luke’s Gospel is the use of magical material to effect healings. Luke omits Mark’s narratives of Jesus healing with spittle from his Gospel.<sup>491</sup> Jesus’ healings in Luke’s first volume generally proceed via verbal command or the laying of hands. In Acts, however, magic can be indirect, as in the case of Peter’s shadow in 5:15 and Paul’s handkerchiefs in Acts 19:12. In the case of Peter’s shadow, Twelftree mentions the importance of shadows as “powerful” entities in

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<sup>491</sup> Mark 7:33, 8:23.



their own right in ancient Egyptian literature.<sup>492</sup> PGM III.612-32, for example, contains a spell to gain control of one's shadow. A shadow reveals magical knowledge in PGM VII.846-61. The appearance of a shadow is proof of Helios' arrival in PGM III.494-731. Shadows have a certain magical efficacy in the papyri. In Luke's work, however, Peter's shadow is an aside: "...people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, so that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by..." (5:15). Earlier, we are told that, "more and more believers were brought to the Lord." Rather than emphasizing the power of the *shadow*, Luke's emphasis appears to be the power and popularity of the Christian leaders. The same focus obtains in Acts 19:11-12: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick." Once again, the narrative emphasis is on Paul's appeal and his power.

Finally, the difference between Luke's Jesus and Luke's apostles also proliferate in the formulae they use to effect their respective wonders. We shall see various strategies Luke uses to authorize and legitimate Peter and Paul by way of the deeds they perform. But while these acts are done exclusively through Jesus' authority in Luke's Gospel, in Acts, the protagonists must appeal to the name of Jesus to perform magical deeds.<sup>493</sup> In fact, apart from summary statements, every single one of the miracles performed by the apostles is accompanied by a declaration of the supernatural agent animating the miracles, either Jesus or the Lord.

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<sup>492</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 143. See also, Pieter W. van der Horst, "Peter's Shadow: The Religio-Historical Background of Acts 5:15," *New Testament Studies* 23 (1976-77): 204-212.

<sup>493</sup> Acts 3:12, 16; 19:13-15.

In summation, in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke reintroduces certain trappings of magic that he had excised from his Gospel. Peter and Paul perform destructive wonders, do magic in private, use foreign words, and heal through the use of *ousia*. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, these trappings were associated with the magical tradition, and by removing them, Luke was able recast the magical deeds of Jesus as serving a very explicit eschatological purpose. In Acts, the reintroduction of these deeds serves a number of other purposes. The apostles are shown to wield an awesome and terrifying power. They perform a larger variety of deeds than Jesus as well. While it is impossible to discern with perfect clarity why Luke would add more diversity to the Christians' wonderworking repertoire, one reason may be to amplify their power in the face of competing magicians like Elymas or Simon Magus. Another reason will present itself when we consider Peter's wonders alongside those of Paul. Their skills are parallel and expanding each apostle's set of magical deeds beyond healings and exorcisms gives the author a greater data set with which to make comparisons. Many of Jesus' disciples could heal and exorcise demons, but Peter and Paul shared specific abilities that ossified their parity.

This is a deliberate positioning of religious hierarchy. By making the apostles the designated agents of Jesus, and the *only* ones allowed to use his name in service of performing magic, Luke sanctions a particular emergent orthodoxy in the face of theological competition – one that seeks rapprochement between Peter and Paul.<sup>494</sup> Klauck claims that the first Christians had to assert themselves among rival traditions against whom they were in very real, very visible competition.<sup>495</sup> In fact, he goes on to suggest that the best place to look

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<sup>494</sup> A point I will further explicate below.

<sup>495</sup> Klauck, *Magic and Paganism*, 1-2; cf. Franz Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain: conférences faites au Collège de France* (Paris: E Leroux, 1909), 178.

for New Testament evidence of such religious competition is in the Acts of the Apostles, due to the book's missionary program and stated theological end.<sup>496</sup> He has a point. If we imagine the historical situation of the fledgling church, it is not inconceivable that it felt compelled to carve out for itself a distinctive magical tradition which appeared superior to anything on offer by outsiders – a tradition whose heroes were so wondrous and powerful they could strike dead those who tested the Holy Spirit, for example. But in doing so, this new tradition had to tread carefully; too much of the magical and it would appear no better than Celsus' marketplace magicians. The question then remains: how did Luke capitalize on the efficacy of the magical while insulating his heroes from external scorn? To that end, our author mobilizes at least two rhetorical expedients I wish to take up in further detail – authority and legitimacy, although other such expedients are certainly possible.<sup>497</sup>

### **Part III. Strategies of Differentiation: Agency and Legitimacy**

In service of securing his theological agenda, Luke employs similar strategies of differentiation as those employed in his Gospel. In Acts, however, they are nuanced such that they apply more appropriately to Jesus' designated agents rather than Jesus himself. For example, instead of Jesus' use of magical acts to establish himself as the legitimate conduit

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<sup>496</sup> Klauck, *Magic and Paganism*, 2. The stated theological end being the dissemination of the Christian message from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth in Acts 1:8.

<sup>497</sup> A note on terminology: by 'agency,' I refer to the spiritual entity by which the wonderworker performs his deeds. In Acts, the agent is always the Holy Spirit or Jesus. Although I do not subscribe to the position that agency is the sole method by which an author might differentiate between magicians (since magical formulae often employ multiple agents), I do believe that Luke attempted to differentiate the heroes of the Christian movement in this manner. 'Legitimacy' refers to the rightful authority by which a wonderworker invokes a particular agent. In Luke's works, only certain individuals have legitimate claim over the power of the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus. Outsiders are treated as usurpers, as I hope to demonstrate. Let me explain. When the heroes of Christendom come into contact with outsiders in Acts, Luke employs the indices of agency and legitimacy to draw clear distinctions between Christians and non-Christians. Christians always emerge victorious from these small battles, lending a validity to the entire magical enterprise. It should be noted, furthermore, that I have compartmentalized these concepts merely for the sake of organization and convenience; there is considerable overlap among them.

of God's power, the disciples use such deeds to establish themselves as the true inheritors of *Jesus'* legacy. That is, if Luke's Gospel details the "in-breaking" of the Kingdom of God, an event which is continually manifest in the miracles performed by Jesus as part of his mission, then Acts details the apostles' preparations as they await the full realization of the Kingdom of God. To this end, Peter and the apostles also inherit Jesus' miraculous power.<sup>498</sup> Jesus himself says as much in Luke 9:1, in which the Twelve receive "power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases."<sup>499</sup>

Yet even as the characters in Acts demonstrate their magical prowess to establish themselves as Jesus' spiritual heirs, they must also establish themselves *against* outsiders who have not been appointed by the Lord or possessed by the Holy Spirit. In the following section, I will attempt to demonstrate how our author employs two rhetorical strategies by attending to each via a case study. Agency will be treated by means of an analysis of the Sons of Sceva episode in Acts 19. I will consider legitimacy through the lens of the Samaritan Mission in Acts 8. These two case studies serve as metonymies for Luke's overarching ideation concerning theological outsiders. The full scope of the Christian missionary program is brought to the fore in these narratives, as is Luke's comportment towards conversion, retention, and theological competition.

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<sup>498</sup> Acts 1:6, 2:14-36, 8:12, 13:14-42.

<sup>499</sup> Note here that Paul does not inherit the power along with Peter and the others. This will become important for my discussion below.

### Part IIIA. Agency and the Sons of Sceva

In Acts, the power to perform supernatural deeds comes as a result of the Holy Spirit's descent during Pentecost.<sup>500</sup> Before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, there are no wonders narrated in the book.<sup>501</sup> The Spirit's descent, of course, echoes the baptism scene in Luke's Gospel. It is only *after* receiving the Spirit that *either* Jesus or his disciples are depicted as performing wondrous deeds. Jesus himself claims as much in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Luke is exceedingly transparent about the power animating his heroes' work.

In fact, Luke's entire oeuvre places a great deal emphasis on the Holy Spirit. In comparison with Mark's gospel, he mentions the Spirit nearly five times more often.<sup>502</sup> He heaps a number of attributes upon it including "the power of the most high" (Luke 1:35); "what the Father has promised" (Luke 24:49a); "the power from on high" (Luke 24:49b); and perhaps wisdom itself (Luke 21:15; cf. Acts 6:10).<sup>503</sup> This emphasis on the Holy Spirit is vital to understanding why such clear boundaries obtain between the apostles' and outsiders' magic when magic itself was fraught with ambiguity and complexity, and when magicians could appeal to various divine entities to seek their ends. In contrast to the syncretism that pervades Graeco-Roman magic, in Luke's work, outsiders very clearly do not have the Spirit. Consequently, they are not invested with the proper authority to perform Christian miracles.

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<sup>500</sup> Acts 2:1-31. Recall that in Luke's Gospel, Jesus' wonderworking activity commences only after the Holy Spirit descends during his baptism in 3:22. It is the Spirit which animates the magical activity of Jesus and his followers.

<sup>501</sup> Possible exceptions include Jesus' ascension in Acts 1:9-11 and the "many proofs" he performed to convince the disciples he was indeed alive (1:3).

<sup>502</sup> Douglas Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke's Christology*, vol. 89, Studiorum Novi Testamentum Societas Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 128.

<sup>503</sup> Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke's Christology*, 139.

For example, when Paul blinds the sorcerer Elymas, he is said to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (13:9). The Pentacost narrative maintains that the followers of Christ began speaking in tongues after being filled with the Spirit (2:4). Stephen sees a vision of Jesus at the right hand of God while filled with the Spirit (7:54). Even Peter’s speech before the religious elders in 4:8 is prefaced by our author claiming that Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit.” This ordering and differentiating function of the Holy Spirit is strikingly manifest in the Sons of Sceva episode.<sup>504</sup>

The Book of Acts not only maintains this emphasis on the Holy Spirit, but couples to it an added preoccupation with expressly naming the ascended Jesus as another agent by which the disciples perform their works. In Acts 3:11, Peter addresses a crowd of Jews who are amazed at his healing the lame man near the “Beautiful Gate.” He offers the following explanation for his supernatural prowess: “You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ....faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of you (3:11-16).” Jesus’ involvement in healing is again repeated in 4:8-10 – this time in answer to the priests’ inquiry into the power by which the apostles effected the very public healing of the lame man. Additionally, in 4:29, we are told that, “...signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” Our author further demonstrates Jesus’ continuing presence early church. The Lord chooses Judas’ replacement in 2:24, the Lord adds to the

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<sup>504</sup> I mentioned in Chapter 2 that I do not believe the supernatural agent by which a magician works can be the *only* distinguishing factor delineating Christian magicians from their counterparts. The material evidence we have suggests that magicians were far less discerning about the agents they invoked than the Evangelists. On the ground, it seems agency might have represented one of *many* strategies of differentiation between the magicians of one group and outsiders. Yet Luke tends to emphasize the issue of agency in Acts. The Sons of Sceva episode, for example, appears to mark a clear boundary between who is rightfully and effectively able to invoke the name of Jesus and who is not. Whether or not the episode reflects reality, it does reflect a Lucan preoccupation with who is able to inherit Jesus’ legacy and who is therefore a usurper.

number of converts in 2:47, and the Lord actively engages with our heroes through visions (9:4, 10:13). In Luke's second volume, Jesus' miraculous efficacy has not dimmed in the slightest; it is merely conveyed by the apostles.

This emendation – that it is Jesus Christ who animates supernatural works – is now a necessity since the apostles' spiritual power does not appear to reside in their own persons, but is rather bestowed upon them. If Jesus' power was correlated to the “finger of God” in Luke's gospel, then the apostles are once-removed.<sup>505</sup> The repetition of the formula “in the name of Jesus” serves to emphasize the fact that the apostles are not Jesus and cannot directly use the “finger of God.”<sup>506</sup> Any failure to make explicit that the Twelve work their wondrous deeds through Jesus would disrupt the supernatural hierarchy established among God, Jesus, and Jesus' followers. Like the centurion who wished Jesus to heal his slave with a single command, the rules governing the use of spiritual authority and its invocation are quite fixed in the Lucan imagination (Luke 7:1-10). Jesus need not appeal to the name of another since he himself is the conduit of God's power; the apostles, however, must appeal to a higher authority.<sup>507</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a strange sort of contradiction at play in the mediation of supernatural power.<sup>508</sup> While it is clear that the Holy Spirit animates the ministry of Jesus and the disciples, it remains unclear why the disciples must invoke Jesus' name to access the Spirit's power if it is, indeed, the very same power. The invocation of Jesus' name appears

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<sup>505</sup> Luke 11:20. See also my discussion on “finger of God” in Chapter 2 of the present work. See Also Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 141.

<sup>506</sup> Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16, 4:18; 5:40; 8:16; 9:27; 10:48; 16:18; 19:5, 13, 17; 21:13; 25:19.

<sup>507</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 141.

<sup>508</sup> A point also made by Harold Remus, *Pagan Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Series*, Patristic Monograph Series 10, (Cambridge: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983), 245.

superfluous at first glance. Yet, this invocation makes a certain sense if we understand Jesus' apostles as being once-removed from the Spirit and having to mediate it via Jesus' own person.<sup>509</sup> The Holy Spirit is not equally distributed among believers, as I hope to show. Perhaps Luke's apostles do not retain the same measure of Spirit as Luke's Jesus.

Despite his inconsistency regarding access to the Spirit, Luke demonstrates a clear preoccupation with proper agency, and most especially with naming Jesus as the author of miraculous work. In no other text is this concern as clearly manifest as in the pericope concerning the Sons of Sceva. The narrative proceeds thus:

Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But in reply, the evil spirit said to them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, and mastered them all, and overpowered them so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was amazed; and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. Also many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices (19:13-18).

Dibelius claims this story was designed for entertainment purposes rather than spiritual edification.<sup>510</sup> For him, the demon's humorous abuse of the Sons is central to understanding the function of the passage.<sup>511</sup> Several other scholars see a distinction between magic and non-magic, based on the failed exorcism detailed above coupled with the inclusion of the

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<sup>509</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 141: "This control of the demons [by the apostles] was not done on the basis of the disciples' own power-authority. This is in sharp contrast to Jesus' all-but-unique method whereby, although he declared that he exorcised "by the finger of God" (Luke 11:20), in practical terms, he appeared to rely on his own power-authority." Here, Twelftree is absolutely correct.

<sup>510</sup> Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Heinrich Green (London: SCM Press, 1956), 19, 198 n. 15.

<sup>511</sup> Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 19.



Ephesians' burning of magical books immediately afterwards in 19:19.<sup>512</sup> Deissmann writes that this pericope is rife with magical language, although most of his exemplars such as *πραξάντων* and *τὰς βίβλους* need not necessarily carry a valence of magic (and are limited to 19:19, where the subject is explicitly magic).<sup>513</sup> Klein, initially more circumspect in his analysis, believes the passage displays Lucan opposition to non-Christians using the name of Jesus.<sup>514</sup> His analysis deteriorates, however, when he claims that there is no anti-magic polemic in the text.<sup>515</sup> Certainly, there is a cast of anti-magic polemic in Acts 19:13-18, else the Sons' fate would not precipitate the burning of magical books in Acts 19:19. Overall, scholarship appears unsure about this particular narrative. In my opinion, however, many of these scholars neglect Luke's overarching magical ideation when analyzing Acts 19:13-18. In contrast, I wish to consider the Sons of Sceva episode against the backdrop of Luke's broader magical discourse.

My discussion of exorcism in Luke's Gospel revealed that Luke wishes to re-cast exorcism as something other than a "mere" magical practice. In Luke's hands, Christian exorcism is a harbinger of the coming Kingdom, a means to demonstrate God's active power in the world.<sup>516</sup> The problem in the Sons of Sceva episode is that the Sons are not Christians, and so their attempted exorcism does not fit into the larger program of Lucan eschatological

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<sup>512</sup> See Haenchen, *Acts*, 565-7; Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 163; Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Herder Theologische Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 5, (Wein: Herder, 1980-82), 257; Jürgen Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Neue Testament Deutsch 5, 17<sup>th</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981).

<sup>513</sup> Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, 323 n. 5.

<sup>514</sup> G. Klein, "Der Synkretismus als theologisches Problem in der ältesten christlichen Apologetik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 64 (1967), 56

<sup>515</sup> G. Klein, "Der Synkretismus," 56.

<sup>516</sup> See Chapter 2.

expectation. The salient issue in Acts 19:13-18 is not the presence or lack of magic, but rather, how our author conceives of magical practice and how he crafts Christian practices as unique and efficacious. The most important issue here is that of supernatural agency.

In 19:1, we are told that Paul came to Ephesus. Ephesus was historically connected with magic, as evidenced by “Ephesian writings,” a term that later became a general referent to ancient magical documents.<sup>517</sup> As we have seen, Ephesus is not the only location mired in the magical in the second century. This period saw a proliferation in both the discursive preoccupation with the magical and the performance of magical deeds.<sup>518</sup> We must keep in mind that such a stereotype of Ephesus exists and may inflect the tenor of Luke’s narrative.

Upon his arrival in the city, Paul encounters some “disciples” who have not received the Holy Spirit (19:1-2). These disciples have not even heard of a Holy Spirit, claiming that they have been baptized instead in the name of John the Baptizer (19:3). These Ephesian believers are, in a sense, “incomplete” Christians. Paul brings them fully into the fold by laying hands and conferring the Spirit, but he goes beyond this as well. In 19:8 he speaks in the synagogue, preaching the message that was inextricably bound to Jesus’ own magical works in Luke’s Gospel – the coming of the Kingdom of God. In fact, before the Sons of Sceva appear, Paul has been preaching for two years, in the synagogue and later in the lecture

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<sup>517</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, 706D; Clement, *Stromateis*, I.15.73; PGM VII.450. See also Porter, “Magic in the Book of Acts,” 120; E. Kuhnert, “Ephesia grammata,” *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 5 (1905), cols. 2771-73. A solid, detailed study on the Ephesia Grammata and similar magical expedients can be found in Alberto Bernabé, “Ephesia Grammata: Genesis of a Magical Formula,” in Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink, *The Getty Hexameters: Poetry, Magic, and Mystery in Ancient Selinous*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 71-96.

<sup>518</sup> This is evidenced not only by the increase of the “magical” as a topic of discussion in Graeco-Roman texts of the period, but also in the increased proliferation of magical accouterments dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century onward – accouterments including, but not strictly limited to *defixiones*, amulets, papyri, incantation bowls, and even a marked increase in the *voces magicae* found in texts like the magical papyri. See Gordon on the “strong notion” of Graeco-Roman magic in Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 163.

hall of Tyrannus when he is ousted from the synagogue (19:8-9). Our author relates that “all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord” (19:10).

Thus, the Sons of Sceva have had ample opportunity to hear the word of God and accord themselves properly. Before Luke introduces these exorcists, however, he informs his audience that Paul’s wonders were quite extraordinary: even cloth that touched his skin could be used to cure diseases and expel demons (19:12).<sup>519</sup> Klauck believes that these cloths suggest, “that the miraculous power is thought of in material terms, so that it can be ‘tapped’ from the person of the wonder-worker and stored for subsequent use. The cloths take on the function of amulets and talismans which were so common in the magic of antiquity.”<sup>520</sup>

While Klauck is correct in assuming that power might be tapped, it is difficult to claim these cloths were analogous to magical amulets, since amulets were made for the express purpose of prophylactic protection and Paul’s handkerchiefs were incidentally effective in such a manner. That said, we do have evidence of special materials being used to convey and/or attain power in magical spells. PGM II.41-42 asks the magician to sleep with specially-prepared cinquefoil in his mouth in order to improve memory. PGM IV. 1331-89 calls for numerous aides in the concoction of the magical spell, including a phylactery with animal hairs, a single-shooted Egyptian onion, and palm fibers. PGM IV.79 asks the user to procure the blood of a pregnant woman. And a naked youth must be wrapped in linen to contact

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<sup>519</sup> Acts 19:12. Sue Garrett makes an excellent point here about the “effortlessness” of Paul’s healings. She writes, “The remarkable nature of the healings, accomplished by transported cloths, underscores the totality of this eclipse [of the power of God vested in Paul versus the power of the demons]: there is no contest here between “the authority of Satan” and “the authority of God” because the latter has completely overshadowed the former.” Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 91. While Garrett’s notational assertion that Luke did not see Paul’s actions as magical is problematic, the fact that Christian leaders in Acts are portrayed as especially good at the magical arts certainly obtains. We will see this notion repeated in the Simon Magus pericope and in Paul’s confrontation with the court sorcerer Elymas.

<sup>520</sup> Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*. 98.

Helios in PGM IV.88. Yet, these examples are not congruent correlates, either. The material prepared in the PGM is often prepared in a particular manner or at a particular time. Wood is carved with special characters, for example.<sup>521</sup> Spells requiring scarlet headbands and palm fronds are performed on the sixth hour of the day.<sup>522</sup> Olive branches are gathered in groups of seven.<sup>523</sup> This sort of ritual preparation is absent in our Acts text. Nevertheless, even without such specific ritual preparation, it is evident that Paul's power (and Peter's too) can be conveyed through material objects, much like some types of magical power in the wider Graeco-Roman world.

Given this congruence, it is no surprise that Luke might have excised this type of material from his Markan source in reference to Jesus. Yet here, he *retains* this material aspect of the disciples' power. This is another way in which the disciples are distinguished from Jesus. Their wonderworking is more ambiguous, more likely to be interpreted as magic by outsiders since it incorporates more of the magical stereotype than Jesus' work. As a result, Luke uses narratives like the Sons of Sceva episode to clarify that his heroes are not, in point of fact, Graeco-Roman magicians. They, like Jesus, are something *more*, despite how closely they may conform to the magical stereotype.

We finally encounter the Sons of Sceva in 19:13. They are itinerant Jewish exorcists, much like Paul and Barnabas (and Jesus). Also like Paul and his compatriots, they use a formula to expel demons.<sup>524</sup> Furthermore, they say of Jesus that he is "the one whom Paul

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<sup>521</sup> PGM III.291-92.

<sup>522</sup> PGM III.615-17.

<sup>523</sup> PGM IV.1250-51.

<sup>524</sup> Acts 19:13: "Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus..."

proclaims” (19:13). The Sons of Sceva attempt to harness the efficacy of the names of powerful charismatic individuals, both Jesus and Paul. Paul had amassed a considerable reputation as a miracle-worker, according to Acts 19:1-8. It should not be surprising that others desired to take part in that success, perhaps by mimicking his behavior.<sup>525</sup> Magicians were also thought to exploit the spirits of the recently dead in order to obtain assistance for the performance of magical deeds.<sup>526</sup> Given Jesus’ own recent and violent death, his name could be used in magical ritual.<sup>527</sup> The Sons of Sceva appear to represent a relatively common practice in the ancient Mediterranean – itinerant exorcisms invoking a deity’s assistance.<sup>528</sup>

Luke, however, is more concerned with the things that make his heroes *uncommon*, and because of this preoccupation with differentiation, the Sons of Sceva cannot succeed, though their exorcism is procedurally correct. Their attempt fails, and fails spectacularly. The demon they aim to dislodge does not respond to the otherwise efficacious formula, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims (19:12).” In fact, in 19:15 the demon questions the

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<sup>525</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 92; Twelfree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 151; W. A. Strange, “The Sons of Sceva and the Text of Acts 19:14,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 38 (1987): 97.

<sup>526</sup> See for example Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 9.29-31; Tertullian, *De Anima*, 56-57. See also Klauck, *Magic and Paganism*, 99; Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 146. Traditional Graeco-Roman necromancy is predicated upon this notion that the recently dead are available for manipulation by magicians. The idea is that some souls are not at rest. See Plato’s *Phaedo* 81c-d, trans. Ogden: “One must imagine this corporeal element to be burdensome, heavy, earthy, and visible. The sort of soul who has it is weighed down and drawn back to the realm of the physical.” In the *Aeneid* 6.325-30, entire categories of individuals cannot enter the Underworld proper: the unburied, the wrongly executed, suicides, and those killed in battle. Those with fraught deaths occupy a space somewhere between this life and the next, making their spirits especially susceptible to magical manipulation. Jesus, being perceived as wrongfully executed or even improperly buried, could likewise find his spirit subject to use by a particularly savvy wonderworker. In fact, it is this popular belief that the souls of the dead are used in magic which leads Tertullian to posit that magicians do not call up the souls of the dead, but rather demons masquerading as such in order to deceive through magic. The true Christian recognizes magic as demonic (*De Anima*, 56-57).

<sup>527</sup> In fact, it *was* used in magical spells, although there Jesus’ name is vaunted for divinity rather than violent death: PGM 1227-64; 3007-86.

<sup>528</sup> See my discussion of exorcism in Chapter 1.

exorcists: “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Klauck writes that “this does not mean that he is unacquainted with the seven Sons of Sceva; rather, he is dismissing every claim they make to authority as exorcists. Unlike Paul, they have usurped the name of Jesus, to which they have no rights, so it is impossible for them to expel the demon, who stays put.”<sup>529</sup> Furthermore, the demon itself binds together Jesus and Paul as master and follower and sets the divine duo over and against the Sons by using a contrastive μὲν... δὲ construction to distinguish the Jesus-Paul duo from the Sons themselves (referred to as “you”).<sup>530</sup> The differentiation between Paul and the Sons of Sceva is intensified again by the repeated use of the word “Jew” to describe the Sons in verses 13 and 14.<sup>531</sup> The reader must remember Paul’s own tenuous history with “the Jews” in Luke’s second volume. He is repeatedly persecuted by “Jews” for his missionary activities and therefore the Jewish Sons’ use of Jesus’ name is especially ironic.<sup>532</sup> Clearly, whoever these Sons of Sceva are, they are not part of the Christian community.

The situation devolves into comedy via the demon’s next actions. It “leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded (19:17).” The Sons of Sceva are not only unsuccessful exorcists, but they are humiliated and shown for absurd charlatans. Twelfree claims that the demons’ questioning of the Sons and their subsequent embarrassment suggests that the Sons are not known in the

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<sup>529</sup> Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 100.

<sup>530</sup> Twelfree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 151.

<sup>531</sup> Todd Klutz, “Naked and Wounded: Foregrounding, Relevance, and Situation in Acts 19:13-20, in *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament: Approaches and Results*, eds. Stanley E Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 170 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 259-260.

<sup>532</sup> The Jews plot to kill Paul in 9:23-24, 20:19, and 23:12-14. Three months after arriving in Ephesus, Paul is chased out of a synagogue for preaching about the Kingdom in Acts 19:8-9.

spiritual realm like Paul and Jesus.<sup>533</sup> The intervention of these unknown exorcists thus obviates the efficacy of Jesus' name.<sup>534</sup> I am not prepared to claim that the Sons of Sceva were unknown in the spiritual realm; there is no evidence to suggest as much. What we *can* say is that the Sons of Sceva are unable to effect exorcisms by using the name of Jesus. It seems, then, that this story demonstrates that "anyone who wishes to misuse sacred Christian names for magical aims is laboring under a fundamental misunderstanding. The intended miracle will rebound on him and punish the plagiarist."<sup>535</sup> According to Luke, the Sons of Sceva do not share in the divine agent that would allow them to effectively exorcise this demon – that agent being the Holy Spirit, which is given through Jesus Christ. The great irony of Jewish exorcists being so exceedingly inept is that the Jewish stereotypes often included magic as a signifier, most especially exorcism.<sup>536</sup>

We should note, however, that the demon emerges the victor in this contest and is not exorcised. Paul does not step up as the reluctant hero of the narrative to save the exorcists from their plight. This does not contradict the notion that Paul is the one with the power to expel the demon. That the demon "knows Paul" seems to suggest its probable submission to

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<sup>533</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 151.

<sup>534</sup> Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 151; cf. Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 93.

<sup>535</sup> Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 100.

<sup>536</sup> See the story of the Jewish Exorcist in Lucian's *Lover of Lies*, for example. My treatment of Jewish magic is necessarily short. For fuller accounts of the magical tradition associated with ancient Judaism, see *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries* (trans. M. A. Morgan; Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations 25, Chico: Scholars Press, 1983); L. Blau, *Das altjüdische Zauberwesen*, 2nd ed. (Strassburg: Tübnner, 1914); P. S. Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," in E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC – AD 135)*, 3 vols. rev. and ed. M. Black et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973-1986); J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk-Religion*, 5 vols., (Leiden: Brill, 1965-1970) 4.330-62 and D. C. Duling, "The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus' *Antiquitates Juae* 8.42-49," *Harvard Theological Review* (1985) 1-25.

Paul's exorcitic prowess.<sup>537</sup> After all, in this narrative, only Paul is imbued with the proper agency to exorcise in Jesus' name.

Interestingly enough, our author's attitude in Acts 19 contrasts sharply with that of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. When Jesus is told of a rival exorcist driving out demons in his name, he says, "Do not stop him...for whoever is not against you is for you (Luke 9:50)." One wonders why Luke's Jesus is far more forgiving towards those who capitalize on the power of his name than Luke himself. It is impossible here to make any certain assertions, of course, but the protagonists' respective authority levels come to mind. Luke's Jesus does not have competitors; he is the founder of a new movement. Announcing the Kingdom is the primary program of Luke's gospel. As such, Jesus feels no need to stymie exorcists who use his name and concomitantly spread the word. Acts, however, has another goal altogether: Luke's second volume is dedicated to creating a consensus among Christians, and therefore, *all* authority – supernatural and otherwise – must be centralized while all rivals are discouraged. To this end, proper divine agency is disseminated through the Holy Spirit by Jesus to his designated followers. This creates a narrative tension between the insiders who are deputized by the Holy Spirit and those who are not. To put it another way: proper agency in Luke is one means of distinguishing his Christian heroes from mere exorcists or mere magicians. Agency, however is not the sole means by which Luke isolates his protagonists from outsiders. He is also concerned with legitimacy, as is evidenced by the Simon Magus episode.

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<sup>537</sup> Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 100; Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 151.



### **Part IIIB. Legitimacy and Simon Magus**

Another means of differentiating Christian leaders from outsiders is legitimacy. It, too, offers nuance to the discourse of magic in Acts. If authority is a “top-down” index describing the agent by which the apostles perform their feats, then legitimacy is its “bottom-up” counterpart, elucidating how the apostles verify that they and the supernatural agent they represent are not of the same ilk as magicians. Let us recall that Christian discourses of magic must be both alike and dissimilar; they must be representative enough of typical magical discourses to be efficacious in establishing the power and authority of Jesus and his followers. They must also be sufficiently distinctive such that the legitimacy of Christian leaders is unassailable vis-à-vis that of everyday magicians. Luke’s second volume reappropriates extant understandings of magic and re-casts them in a manner more appropriate to Christianity by creating rhetorical differentiations between legitimate Christian magic and the wonderworking traditions of outsiders. This is especially evident in the episode concerning Simon Magus and the Samaritan Mission.

The Samaritan Mission is prefaced by a number of inside-outside political tensions warranting careful consideration. We are told in Acts 6:2-4 that the “Hebrew” disciples are searching for Hellenistic assistants to aid the movement as they fast and pray. Philip the Deacon is assigned as an itinerant, and he finds himself in the “city of Samaria” (8:4). The Samaritan mission and other missions is the indirect result of “the Hellenists [complaining] against the Hebrews” because of the distribution of food to Hellenist widows (6:1). Because of these complaints, the Hebrew disciples suggest that Hellenists in the group should put forth representatives of their own choosing to “wait tables” (6:3). Philip is elected from his

own group to serve. He embarks to Samaria, and his actions there do not resemble waiting tables in the least.

Philip's work in Samaria has unusual efficacy for the work of someone who is not one of the Twelve, although, as we will see, there are limits to what he can accomplish. Luke writes that, "The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearings and seeing the signs that he did, for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. So there was great joy in that city (8:6-8)." Philip's actions may not be correlative with the task appointed him, but they certainly correspond to those of Jesus in Luke's Gospel and the work of Peter thus far detailed in Acts.

Despite Philip's success, Simon Magus emerges as a stubborn, unbelieving antagonist in this pericope.<sup>538</sup> He appears after Philip's conversion of the Samaritan masses. In Acts 8:9-10, Luke writes:

Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." And they listened to him eagerly because for a long time he amazed them with his magic.

Simon represents the very antithesis of Philip, although both men are quite similar at first glance. Luke's love of literary parallel is on full display in the narrative: Philip came into the city, proclaimed Christ, did great acts of power, was followed by the people, and elicited

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<sup>538</sup> A detailed investigation into Simon's character is beyond the scope of this chapter. I will make more detailed comments on Simon in Chapter 4. Important studies on Simon in early Christian thought include Stephen Harr, *Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003); Karlmann Beyschlag, *Simon Magus und die christliche Gnosis*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1974); Alberto Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval, and Early Modern Traditions*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

great joy and belief from the Samaritans.<sup>539</sup> Simon Magus was already in the city, proclaimed himself great, did magic, was followed by the people, and elicited the Samaritans' joyful reaction to himself (8:9-10). Nevertheless, after Philip performs a number of miracles in the city, it is Simon who reacts to Philip's signs.<sup>540</sup>

Garrett believes that Luke's tendency to balance miracle with message leads to the special efficacy of Philip's magical deeds.<sup>541</sup> Because message and miracle go hand-in-hand, they are mutually reinforced.<sup>542</sup> Thus, magic is distinguished from miracle on the basis of message. Miracle presents with message; magic does not. While compelling, and somewhat applicable to Luke's Gospel, this argument does not account for the full extent of the evidence in Acts. Let me explain. Philip is not the only one who espouses a message; Simon, too, has a ministry, such as it is. Luke tells us that Simon's followers believed that he was "the Power of God that is called Great."<sup>543</sup> Simon also proclaims himself as someone great (8:9). Perhaps this is not a particularly tasteful message, nor one as fully-articulated as that of Philip, but it is a message nonetheless. So, the distinction between Philip and Simon Magus cannot rest upon the presence of message alone. The function of Simon Magus' character is

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<sup>539</sup> Acts 8:4-8. See Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 63-69 for a fuller discussion of the Philip-Simon parallels.

<sup>540</sup> V. J. Samkuty, *The Samaritan Mission in Acts*, The Library of New Testament Studies 328 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 161.

<sup>541</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 63: "Philip's 'signs' were not regarded by Luke as random displays of power (as were, presumably, Simon's unspecified magic tricks)."

<sup>542</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 63.

<sup>543</sup> Acts 8:10. The significance of the title has been the subject of much scholarly debate. See Karlmann Beyschlag, *Simon Magus und die christliche Gnosis*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1974), pp. 99-104; F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity: Part I, The Acts of the Apostles* (London, MacMillan, 1933), 4:91. My point rests not so much on the precise meaning of the title as the existence of the title itself. According to Luke, Simon Magus was preaching *something*. He was not merely performing magical deeds in order to amuse or make money. Garrett's assertion that Simon did "random displays of power," therefore, is erroneous. See Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 63.

more than that of theologically-bankrupt enemy. Rather, he represents an illegitimate and therefore ineffective understanding of the power through which Philip works. This becomes clearer when we consider in careful detail what Luke tells us about Simon's incomplete conversion in Acts 8:14-24.

Initially, it appears that Philip's ministry has succeeded in spectacular fashion; even the magician who had entranced the Samaritans converts in 8:13. Simon's awe and submission suggest that Philip's power is capable of miracles or signs that his own power is not.<sup>544</sup> In fact, Luke tells us that Simon remains with Philip after his baptism (8:13). He was "amazed" when he saw Philip's wondrous deeds, despite his longstanding familiarity with wonderworking (8:13). Simon's own awe parallels the fact that he had dazzled the crowds earlier in the text.<sup>545</sup> So it seems that Simon, despite having proclaimed himself great, recognizes that Philip (or the agent through whom Philip works) is greater, and submits himself to Philip's ministry. The narrative would represent a marked triumph of the Christian wonderworker over the Graeco-Roman magician had Simon's story ended in 8:13.<sup>546</sup> But this literary triumph of the Christian magical tradition is aborted by our author in the subsequent verses. One wonders why Luke would abandon such a compelling narrative. I contend that the answer lies within Simon's attempt to purchase the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:20.

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<sup>544</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 69.

<sup>545</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 69.

<sup>546</sup> Scholars have suggested that Acts 8:14 marks Luke's transition to a different source. See C. K. Barrett, "Light on the Holy Spirit from Simon Magus (Acts 8.4-25)," J. Kremer, ed., *Les Actes des Apôtres. Tradition, Redaction, Théologie*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 48, 283; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 307; Hans Conzelmann, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 64. My aim here is to analyze the passage as it appears in the text. Luke may have used a different source beginning in 8:14, but one must account for why such a source seemed compelling enough to the Third Evangelist to include in a story that had been so neatly concluded.

As evident from my earlier discussion, Luke is especially transparent about the agency behind the disciples' powerful actions. Luke also claims that wondrous deeds legitimate the wonderworker: "...Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power (Acts 2:22)." That is, agency and legitimacy are mutually reinforcing. A designated Christian leader is able to use the Holy Spirit to perform wonders; likewise, a Spirit-possessed leader is very much a legitimate Christian. We should remember here that Luke believes outsiders to wield supernatural power as well – a point this particular pericope makes inescapably clear.<sup>547</sup> Outsiders do not employ the same agent as the Christian heroes, nor are they legitimate wonderworkers in the sense that they have not been deputized by this agent in the first place. This cycle of agency and legitimacy is brought to the fore in the Simon Magus narrative.

After watching John and Peter confer the Holy Spirit by laying hands, Simon offers the apostles money and implores them: "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit (8:19)." Scholars link Simon's attempt to purchase the Holy Spirit to magic.<sup>548</sup> It is true that many of our ancient writers believed magicians to be particularly greedy.<sup>549</sup> Yet, we have no evidence that Simon was making money from his miracle-working; only that he was making quite a name for himself. His offer to pay for the Spirit seems gauche, true, but Luke does not claim that Simon hoped to *sell* the Spirit in order to enrich himself. Modern authors appear to make this assumption because Simon is labeled a magician and magic and money are associated in ancient literature. Scholarly

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<sup>547</sup> Luke 19:19; cf. 4:6; Acts 13:6-12, as well as the pericope under consideration here.

<sup>548</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 70; Barrett, "Light," 287.

<sup>549</sup> See Plato, *Laws* 909a-b; cf. 933a; Philo, *Special Laws* 3.100; Lucian *Lover of Lies* 15, 16; Celsus, *Contra Celsum* 1.68; Juvenal *Satire* 6.546; Philostratus *Life of Apollonius*, 8.7, among others.

preoccupation with Simon's avarice, however, may obscure an important facet of this passage. The gift of the Spirit cannot be bought. If the Holy Spirit is present in an individual, then this presence is the result of proper conversion and the laying of hands by legitimate Christian agents.<sup>550</sup> Marketplace magicians cannot confer the Holy Spirit, in other words. They are not legitimate agents of the Christian God.

A rather fascinating aspect of the apostles' encounter with Simon Magus is Luke's revelation that not *all* of Jesus' followers could convey the Holy Spirit, although they may be Spirit-possessed themselves. It is Peter and John who must deliver the Spirit to the Samaritans, not Philip, even though Philip is responsible for their conversion. In Acts, Jerusalem leaders *do* come and oversee the progress of a newly-converted group; this is not unusual.<sup>551</sup> Garrett suggests that Luke may have designed this expedient – the delay of the conferral of the Spirit – in order to bring Simon Peter and Simon Magus into conflict.<sup>552</sup> Others claim that Luke's introduction of Peter is a means to involve the Jerusalem leaders in the conversion of Samaria.<sup>553</sup> Perhaps. But it seems the explanation might be much simpler. As I discussed above, Paul too must convey the Holy Spirit to a group of "incomplete"

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<sup>550</sup> The Samaritan Mission itself suggests a rather formalized procedure for conversion: (1) believing the proclamation of Christian leaders (8:5-7); water baptism (8:12); conferral of the Holy Spirit (8:15-17).

<sup>551</sup> Barnabas must investigate the conversion of those in Antioch in 11:22, for example.

<sup>552</sup> Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*, 70; Otto Bauernfeind, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1939), 124.

<sup>553</sup> Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 65; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Literary Function of Possessions*, 214. Haenchen, Conzelmann, and Schneider believed an earlier tradition was behind 8:18-24. See Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 307; Conzelmann, *Acts*, 64; Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 480. Lüdemann's analysis of the language and style of Acts 8:4-25 further suggests that the passage is Lucan. See Lüdemann, "The Acts of the Apostles and the Beginnings of Simonian Gnosis," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 94-97. For discussions on the relationship between water baptism and the conferral of the Holy Spirit, see J. C. O'Neill, "The Connection between Baptism and the Gift of the Spirit in Acts," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 63 (1996), 87-103; D. A. Goch, "Geistbesitz, Geistverleihung und Wundermacht: Erwägungen zur Tradition und zur lukanischen Redaktion in Acts 8:5-25," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1986), 64-82.

converts in Acts 19. The Samaritan Conversion is not unique in this regard. The implication of these stories, then, is that there can be a delay between water baptism and the conferral of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, it seems that only *some* of Jesus' designated agents are able to confer the Spirit – Peter, John, and Paul are named as explicit carriers. Apparently, magical ability is not equal among the Christian fold; some magic users have skills that others do not – a point that will become invaluable in the last section of this chapter.

Yet another remarkable outcome of the Samaritan Mission in Acts is the fact that it is Peter, not Philip, who emerges as Simon's nemesis in later Christian tradition.<sup>554</sup> This is quite remarkable given that Peter's involvement in the entire episode is limited to the conferral of the Holy Spirit and a brief rebuke of Simon at the very end of the mission. A number of reasons might explain the early Christians' foregrounding of Peter: Peter is the more "senior" disciple; Peter's rebuke to Simon enjoyed a wide popularity in oral and written transmission of early church traditions; Peter had been the protagonist of Acts until this episode and is thus considered the protagonist here despite his minimal involvement. Peter's character development might also prove compelling; having denied Christ three times, this apostle is now one of the most vocal defenders of Christ's legacy. Peter's identity as a legitimate agent of Christ's power is deeply important for the latter part of this chapter. For now, however, let us remember that the Spirit legitimates its users, separating Christians from outsiders. Despite its legitimating aspect, not all Christian leaders have equal facility with the Holy Spirit in the Lucan imagination.

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<sup>554</sup> For more thoroughgoing discussions concerning Philip and his relationship to Simon and the other disciples, see C. R. Matthews, *Philip: Apostle and Evangelist: Configurations of a Tradition*, Novum Testamentum Supplement Series 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2002); F. S. Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts: A Study of Roles and Relations*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 67, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

## Part IV. Strategies of Cohesion

In addition to strategies of differentiation from outsiders – namely the use of proper agency and legitimacy, Luke must also offer certain strategies for cohesion. That is to say, Luke’s concern in Acts appears to be two-fold: to legitimate the Christian message against outsiders, and to present it as a unified front in the face of these outsiders. In this section, I would like to discuss various strategies of cohesion designed to bring Paul and Peter into greater conformity, thereby standardizing Christian belief and bringing about a rapprochement between these two factions.<sup>555</sup>

One such strategy for cohesion is the re-introduction of the magical tropes excised from Luke’s gospel – healings through *ousia*, private healings, the use of foreign words, and “punitive” magic. In broad terms, Luke’s concern is that of crafting an emergent orthodoxy – a “correct” system of standardization that will unify Christians of all sorts.<sup>556</sup> This agenda is clearly visible in the episode with Ananias and Sapphira. Before Peter strikes dead Ananias and Sapphira, our author tells us the following about the new Christians that had been added to the Jerusalem community:

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<sup>555</sup> F. C. Baur very famously argued that Acts attempted to “soften” the edges of what he termed “Paulinism” in order to harmonize conflicting views between Pauline Christianity and a more Judaized mainstream Christianity. See F. C. Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, p. 1. Werner Georg Kümmel offers a summation of the importance of Baur’s argument to subsequent scholarship on Paul in Acts. See Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, S. McLean Gilmour and Howard Clark Kee, trans. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 129-32. I agree with Baur that Acts represents a consensus document, although my interest lies less in the softening of Paul’s theology and more in the ways in which Luke crafts Paul as a wonderworker akin to the Twelve. In any case, Baur’s overarching point obtains, and my aim here is to demonstrate how the discourse of magic in Luke further contributes to his initial observations.

<sup>556</sup> While I will demonstrate how Luke uses magical practices to standardize what he believes to be a correct set of practices, I do not go so far as other scholars to suggest that Luke’s theology represents nascent Catholicism. For discussion of Lukan theology and nascent Catholicism, see Philipp Vielhauer, “On the ‘Paulinism’ of Acts,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn, eds. (London: SPCK, 1968), 49; Overbeck, “Zur Einleitung in die Apostelgeschichte,” in W. M. L. de Wette, *Kurze Erklärung der Apostelgeschichte*, (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1870), xxxi-xxxii; Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 123-27.



Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership over any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet. And it was distributed to each as any had need (4:32-35).

Luke even tells us of a Levite who sells his field to bring the money to the apostles. This man, Joseph, was re-named Barnabas ("son of encouragement") by the apostles (4:36-37). His actions demonstrate the sort of belief that is required of new adherents to the faith. Barnabas' actions are sharply contrasted with those of Ananias and Sapphira in the next section. Whereas Barnabas unhesitatingly relinquishes his land, his money, his status, and even his name for the new movement, the couple in question refuses to do so and is punished by Peter for their deceit.

Notice that the phrase, "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" appears in the middle of the descriptors of a selfless and generous Christian community (4:32-35). Here, Luke explicitly ties deeds of power with the behavior expected of new Christians. When the community behaves according to prescribed precepts, the apostles' power testifies to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (4:33). When the believers act like Ananias and Sapphira, the apostles' power is capable of terrifying deeds. The irony is that 4:33 foregrounds the resurrection of the Lord while 5:1-11 highlights the immediate death of those who "put the Holy Spirit to the test." Magic, here, goes beyond the message of the Kingdom of God; it has the power to enforce communal rules.

The Ananias and Sapphira episode is not the only instance in which Luke links the apostles' wonderworking power with the accepted behavioral norms of the Christian community. In Acts 2:43-45, Luke writes, "Awe came upon everyone, because many

wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” Once again, we see that the apostles’ wondrous deeds serve to compel particular behavior on the part of Christian converts – selling off possessions in 2:45, and later breaking bread together and praising God in 2:47. The Samaritan Conversion is also predicated upon the Samaritans’ awe of Philip’s deeds. In response to Philip, the new converts receive a water baptism (8:12). In the Sons of Sceva episode, the failure of the Sons’ exorcism and the demon’s recognition of Jesus and Paul as proper authorities prompts the selling of the Ephesians’ magical books (19:18-19). In each of these instances, proper behavior comes upon the heels of magical deeds (or *attempted* magical deeds in the case of the Sons of Sceva). If wondrous deeds are efficacious for bringing followers into the fold, then it seems such deeds are likewise effective at banishing those who break the community’s rules. Ananias and Sapphira represent what happens when believers do not fully conform to the ideals of Christianity; they are not fit to be part of the community.<sup>557</sup>

Another strategy of cohesion in Luke’s second volume is the reconciliation of Petrine and Pauline factions of Christianity. Previous scholars have considered this conciliatory aspect of Acts.<sup>558</sup> But no one, to my knowledge, has systematically explored how the magical discourse of Luke’s second volume establishes Peter and Paul as co-leaders of the

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<sup>557</sup> I have discussed scholars’ moral outrage concerning this story above in the footnotes. The scholarship is overwhelming indeed. In contrast to many studies, I do not wish to express any such outrage myself, nor do I wish to pass judgment upon the scholars who do find this story repugnant. My concern here is simply to understand *how* magical power is disseminated in Luke’s oeuvre. For Luke, it seems the outrage was Ananias and Sapphira’s inability to conform to Christian rules rather than Peter’s use of extraordinary power.

<sup>558</sup> F. C. Baur, *Paul, Apostle of Christ*; Helmet Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. 2: History and Literature of Early Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 321: “Luke must have belonged to the circle of churches that claimed Peter and Paul as their authorities.”; For a fuller discussion on the history of scholarship concerning the conciliatory *Tendenz* in Acts, see Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 17-24.

Christian movement. In this section, I wish to contribute to arguments initially put forward by Baur by highlighting how Acts attempts to bring about a standardization of belief through the use of magic. By describing Paul as performing the same sorts of deeds as Peter, Luke lends Paul the same authority as Peter, despite the fact that Paul had never ministered alongside Jesus. Paul's deeds are comparable in authority, legitimacy, and power to those of Peter. I would like to discuss a few of these deeds, though this analysis is by no means exhaustive. Rather, I wish to foreground what is, essentially, a larger pattern in the magical discourse of Acts.

If we place Peter and Paul's magical deeds side-by-side, we emerge with parallel trajectories. Consider the following:

Table 3. Magical Parallels between Peter and Paul

<b>Peter's Deeds</b>	<b>Paul's Deeds</b>
General description of "many wonders and miraculous signs" (2:43)	Paul does many signs in Iconium (14:3-4)
Peter heals the leper at the Beautiful Gate (3:1-10)	Paul heals a lame man from birth at Lystra (14:8-11)
Peter curses Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)	Paul blinds the sorcerer Elymas (13:6-12)
Peter's shadow heals (5:15)	Paul's handkerchiefs heal (19:12)
Peter grants the gifts of the Spirit (8:17)	Paul grants the gifts of the Spirit (19:6)
Peter heals Aeneas, who was bedridden (9:34)	Peter heals Publius' father, who was bedridden (28:7-8)
Peter raises Tabitha (9:40)	Paul raises Eutychus (20:9-12)
Peter is set free (12:7)	Paul is set free (16:26)
	Paul exorcises a demon from a soothsayer (16:16-18)

Luke has created a startlingly similar discourse of magic for his protagonists. There is only one major deed with no parallel – Paul’s exorcism of a demon in 16:16-18.<sup>559</sup> In every other case, Peter’s wonderworking matches Paul’s rather precisely.<sup>560</sup>

Certain smaller details of these healings also function to bring the two men into greater conformity. For example, Paul uses the same magical formula as Peter. In 3:6, Peter heals the leper with the formula, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Paul uses nearly the same words to exorcise the soothsaying slave girl in 16:18. Incidentally, the Sons of Sceva are unable to produce a successful result through invocation of Jesus’ name, thereby lending more credibility to the assertion that Peter and Paul are equally legitimate agents of Jesus. Paul’s revivification of Eutychus in 20:9-12 mirrors Peter’s revivification of Dorcas in Acts 9:36-42. Only Peter, Paul, and Jesus are shown performing revivifications in Luke’s oeuvre. Peter and Paul are shown to have the same wondrous ability as Jesus. Divine agents are also rather interested in the completion of both men’s mission; both are miraculously freed from prison (although Paul chooses to remain within).<sup>561</sup> Both leaders have the ability to confer the Holy Spirit. In the Samaritan Conversion, Peter grants the Spirit to the Samaritans who had initially been converted by Philip (8:17). Upon his arrival to Ephesus, Paul too must grant the Spirit to those who have been baptized but not given the gift of the Spirit (19:6). As we saw, not all of Jesus’ disciples are capable of conferring the Holy Spirit

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<sup>559</sup> Luke does, however, give summary statements about Peter’s exorcistic activity in Acts 5:16.

<sup>560</sup> I should note here that I do intend to discuss Pauline and Petrine theology, but only the manner in which they accomplish their magical deeds. While the theology of Luke’s two protagonists is also brought into conformity (as is evidenced in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15), Lucan theological ideation is tangential to the scope of this chapter, which is dedicated to excavating magical congruence.

<sup>561</sup> Acts 12:3-9, parallel to Acts 16:5-35.

in Luke's writings. The fact that Paul, like Peter, has this gift lends more gravitas to his authority.

It is clear from these correlations that the parallels in Acts are not merely aesthetic. Luke effects more than narrative symmetry in crafting these complementary discourses. We might understand the inertia of his narrative if we consider once more the episode of the leper at the Beautiful Gate. The story begins simply enough. Peter and John are walking into the Temple when they pass a leper who is daily carried in so that he might beg for alms from passersby (3:2-3). Peter says, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk (3:4)." The leper's rehabilitation causes an uproar among the crowd, and in response, Peter asks the following: "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected...And by faith in [Jesus'] name, his name itself has made this man strong." Jesus is the animating power behind the miracles of the apostles; he is the one who endows his designated deputies with the proper agency to perform wonders in his name. This power rests within his followers, ready to be called forth in service of spreading the gospel.

But what of Paul? Paul was not present in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus imparted the authority to perform miracles. Neither was Paul present during Pentacost. How, then, does Paul legitimately claim the inheritance given to Jesus' followers? Luke legitimates Paul's ministry in several ways: he crafts Paul's conversion in language characteristic of

prophetic call;<sup>562</sup> he highlights the fact that Paul's persecutions happened at the same hands as those of the other Christian leaders;<sup>563</sup> he has Paul narrate his conversion three times in the text;<sup>564</sup> he makes Paul's miracles as efficacious as those of Peter,<sup>565</sup> and finally, most important for our purposes, he ensures that Paul receives the Spirit in 9:17. Furthermore, Luke has Paul engage with competitors of the Christian tradition – the *true* outsiders. It is no coincidence that it is Paul, not Peter, who must contend with the Sons of Sceva and Bar-Jesus. Peter has already battled outsiders, but Paul's identity as a *former* outsider must be mitigated completely if Luke is to achieve any rapprochement between Petrine and Pauline factions of Christianity. In fact, in Acts 13:16-41, Paul's speech to the "Israelites" solidifies his new identity as a member of the Jesus' followers. When he says, "we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors, he has fulfilled for us...by raising Jesus," Paul effectively grafts the new Christian community onto Israel's history as God's chosen people, solidifying his place as one who understands Jesus' unique role in salvation history.

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<sup>562</sup> Paul's conversion involves a number of conventions found in "prophetic call" narratives: God's double use of Saul's name (Gen 22:11, 46:12; Ex. 3:4; 1 Sam 3:4, 10); the response "Here I am, Lord" (Gen 22:11, Ex 3:4, 1 Sam 3:4, 3:6, 12:3; Is 6:8); falling to the ground (Ezek 1:28, Dan 10:9).

<sup>563</sup> In 4:3-22 and 5:17-42, Peter and John are arrested by Sadducees and questioned by the Sanhedrin. In 6:8-8:1, Stephen is arrested by "the elders and the scribes" and questioned before the Sanhedrin before being executed by stoning. In 12:1-5, King Herod executes James and imprisons Peter. Paul's persecutors are often referred to as Jews (9:23-24, 20:19, 23:12-14), although he is subject to persecution by Gentiles as well (16:16-24 and 19:23-41). Paul is explicitly subject to more persecution than any other character in Acts, thereby fulfilling Jesus' pronouncement in 21:17 that his followers will be hated for his name.

<sup>564</sup> Acts 9:1-19, 22:4-16; 26:12-18. Although these accounts are contradictory, the repetition of Paul's encounter with Jesus serves to remind the reader that Paul's conversion was based on a personal encounter with the risen Christ, much like the apostles' own encounter in 1:6-8. All of Jesus' apostles, therefore, encountered him face-to-face.

<sup>565</sup> Like Peter, Paul's miracles appear effortless. I discussed the episode concerning Paul's handkerchiefs. Like Peter's shadow in Acts 5:15-16, Paul's handkerchiefs demonstrate the efficacy of the wonderworker and the effortlessness with which he performs magical deeds. Furthermore, Like Peter, Paul's wonders are always successful, underscored by the words of the demon in the Sons of Sceva episode discussed above. The demon's recognition of Paul as a designated agent of Jesus further serves to legitimate and elevate Paul. The same obtains in Acts 16:17, who announces Paul and Silas as "slaves of the Most High God."

Paul no longer belongs to the “Jews” who persecuted Christians; he has switched allegiances, and this address to the “Israelites” makes clear his position.

More than these grand speeches, however, words spoken during the performance of wondrous deeds also support the conclusion that Peter and Paul are designed to be equally authoritative to the formative church. If we compare the words that Peter and Paul speak to rival magicians (Simon Magus and Elymas, respectively), there too a pattern emerges. In response to Simon Magus asking for the power which allows Peter to convey the Holy Spirit, Peter says, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God’s gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God (8:20-21).” Compare this to Paul’s words in 13:10-11: “You son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the ways of the Lord? Now listen—the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.” In both instances, the Christian leader rebukes their rival with charges of outsider status. Peter claims Simon has no part in the movement (even though Simon had been baptized) and Paul tells Elymas that he is making crooked the ways of the Lord and that the hand of the Lord is against him. The magic performed in both instances is directed towards producing conformity by casting aside those who do not assimilate to early Christian norms. In Peter’s case, Simon’s offer to buy the power to convey the Holy Spirit is suggestive of the fact that the magician is not a true believer. A true Christian would have known that such a power cannot be bought or sold; it is a gift given by God. In Paul’s situation, the conformity is enforced when Elymas is struck blind and thereby unable to lead others astray. The proconsul, seeing the state of his court magician, then believes – not in the false gospel preached by Elymas, but in the true gospel taught by Paul (13:12). The Christian

movement gains a powerful new follower. Not only do Peter and Paul perform the same sorts of miracles, but their miracles effect the same ends of conversion and exclusion of those who do not conform to Christian norms.

Audience reactions to our heroes' healings are strikingly similar as well. Returning briefly to Peter's healing at the Beautiful Gate, recall that this healing caused such a commotion as to attract the attention of the crowds, who run together on Solomon's Portico (3:11). This prompts Peter to insist that Jesus animates his miracles, and that the Jews must now come to a proper understanding of Jesus' identity as God's chosen (3:16). The Sadducees and the priests also make an appearance, eventually arresting Peter and John (4:3). Paul, after his healing in Lystra, also causes a rather chaotic reaction. The crowds believe Paul and Barnabas to be Hermes and Zeus (19:11-12). In this case, the priests of Zeus come out to place garlands about the necks of our heroes and offer a sacrifice (19:13). Paul must offer a corrective to the beliefs of the pagans (much like Peter to the Jews). He claims that the crowds must, "turn from these worthless things to the living God (15:15)." Here, too, Luke places his protagonist in danger. The Jews come from Antioch and win over the crowds, stoning Paul and dragging him out of the city (19:19). At issue is fact that Peter and Paul buttress their miracles with teachings about the Kingdom of God – teachings which are equally dangerous to the both of them. The gospel message has a great popular currency when placed on both their lips. And unfortunately, the Jews seek to harm Peter and Paul with equal fervor. The narrative antagonists certainly recognize that the two men represent the same level of threat to the current religious establishment. For any Christians paying close attention, this parallelism between Peter and Paul imbues Paul with the same authority as Peter.



As we can see, the magical discourse in Acts serves not only a function of differentiation, but one of cohesion as well, particularly in terms of reconciling Peter and Paul. This is done through a number of assimilatory strategies, including the creation of parallel discourse of magic in which both heroes perform the same deeds; the individual details of these deeds such as the words used and the reactions of the audience; and the efficacy of each leader, such as the ability to confer the Holy Spirit. In short, Paul's magic grants him the same agency and legitimacy as Peter, thereby ossifying his place as a Christian leader in Luke's ideation.

### **Part V. Magic in Acts**

Scholars tend to hyphenate "Luke-Acts" without interrogating the moniker, without questioning how, precisely, Luke's two volumes cohere. We tend to take Luke-Acts for granted as a literary unit with a single, cohesive message. Yet, if we attend to the discourse of magic in each, we find that Luke's use of magical practices differs between Luke and Acts. What is acceptable for the apostles, the inheritors of Jesus' legacy, appears to be unacceptable to Jesus himself. Jesus' magic does not harm; but Peter has no problem killing for the sake of the Spirit. Jesus heals in public, yet Peter will unabashedly clear a room to revivify a woman in private. Jesus does not use magical formulae or any words that might approximate incantations, but both Peter and Paul *only* work wonders in the name of Jesus. It would be too simple to dismiss these discrepancies as inadvertent or ignorant – the work of an unenlightened ancient writer less concerned with logic and more concerned with fanciful ideations about his heroes. Rather, when examined in light of the theological agenda towards which Lucan magical discourse is mobilized, these inconsistencies take on a contextual rationality all their own. There is method in chaos, purpose in contradiction.

Luke's method is marked by two related aims: (1) the differentiation of early Christianity from competing religious movements, and (2) the assimilation of Petrine and Pauline factions of Christianity into one coherent, cohesive emergent orthodoxy. In many ways, these goals are self-evident. That said, what seems less evident at first blush is magic's instrumental role in achieving both. In Luke's works, early Christians do not differ from their competitors because they do different sorts of magical deeds or because they only call outsiders "magicians." Rather, they differ in that the magical tradition they offer is superior to other traditions. It operates via a more powerful entity whose designated agents are imbued with proper legitimacy – the Holy Spirit. The agency and legitimacy Luke painstakingly attributes to his heroes are means by which Christians not only distinguished themselves, but also precluded the possibility that their magical tradition was usurped by non-Christians such as the Sons of Sceva. The question of insider-outsider dynamics is especially important for Luke's second volume, given that one of his protagonists – Paul of Tarsus – is not a member of the Twelve. In order to craft Paul as an insider rather than an outsider, Luke parallels his miraculous deeds with an established leader in early Christianity – Peter. By doing so, our author crafts a unified nascent Christianity in which two powerful factions are resolved.

Christian texts following the canonical Acts of the Apostles would intensify the trend demonstrated by Luke across his two volumes. Like Acts, the apocrypha incorporate more and more of the magical stereotype in order to achieve their respective theological ends. In fact, in some texts, like the *Acts of Peter*, the heroes of early Christianity need not be reliant on message to succeed as leaders of the emergent church; the magic itself suffices.

The magic of the second century apocrypha *matters*, and it matters in a manner wholly distinct from both Luke and Acts, once again prompting questions about the coherence of “Christian magical discourse” as a category.

## CHAPTER 4: MAGIC MATTERS: LITERARY AND PRACTICAL EFFICACY IN THE ACTS OF PETER

In the opening chapter of the *Acts of Peter*, the Christians at Rome find themselves facing an uncertain future.<sup>566</sup> Until now, they have been under the guidance of the apostle Paul, who has been converting and instructing many new followers in their city.<sup>567</sup> Once the drama of the narrative commences, Paul receives instruction in a vision from God to go to Spain and become a “physician to the Spaniards” (1). So our newly-minted Christians must suddenly contend with the possibility that they will have no leader. And that is not the worst of it. As Paul makes his preparations to leave, the Roman Christians beg him not to stay away more than a year, lest they be left like “children without a mother” (1). In this desperate

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<sup>566</sup> Two episodes external to the *Vercelli Acts*, one concerning Peter’s daughter (Codex Berolinensis 8504.2), and another concerning a gardener’s daughter (from the *Epistle of Titus*), are often considered in scholarship as part of the *Acts of Peter*. I do not include the episodes of Peter’s daughter and the gardener’s daughter in my treatment of the *Acta Petri*. The evidence supporting the incorporation of these texts into the *Acts of Peter* proper is slim, based largely on the presupposition that accounts of Peter performing miracles belong to the same text. Augustine mentions both episodes together in *Contra Adamantum* 17, but does not claim that they belong to the *Acts of Peter*, only “the apocrypha.” See Christine M. Thomas, *The Acts of Peter, Gospel Literature, and the Ancient Novel: Rewriting the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18. Given that no conclusive relationship exists among these three texts, the more secure course of action is to omit the episodes of Peter’s Daughter and the Gardener’s Daughter from my analysis. For a fuller treatment of the Coptic Act of Peter and its independence from the *Acts of Peter* proper see Andrea Lorenzo Molinari, *‘I Never Knew the Man’: The Coptic Act of Peter (Papyrus Berolinensis 8502.4): Its Independence from the Apocryphal Acts of Peter, Genre and Legendary Origins*, (Paris: Peeters Louvain, 2002). For scholars who support the assertion that these texts comprise one *Acts of Peter* see Schmidt, *Die alten Petrusaktender apokryphen Apostellitteratur nebst einem neuentdeckten Fragment*, (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1903). Generally speaking, Schmidt’s assertions were received well, as evidenced by the following reviews: Ernst von Dobschütz, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 12 (1903): 352-55; M. R. James, *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1904): 293-96 and J. Flamion, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 5 (1904): 820-29. The *Act of Peter* is published as part of the *Acts of Peter* in Edgar Hennecke, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in Verbindung mit Fachgelehrten in deutscher Übersetzung und mit Einleitungen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1904), 383-423.

<sup>567</sup> *Apt* 1, trans. J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*. (New York: Oxford, 1993). All translations taken from Elliott unless otherwise noted.

circumstance, it is a voice from the heavens, not the apostle, who answers their pleas for a swift return:

And while they were beseeching him with tears a sound was heard from heaven and a very loud voice, saying, 'Paul, the servant of God, is chosen to the ministry for the rest of his life; under the hands of Nero, the wicked and bad man, he will be perfected before your eyes.' And there was a great fear among the brethren because of the voice, which had come from heaven, and they were more confirmed in the faith (1).

Not only is Paul leaving for Spain, but he is sure to be martyred once he returns. So much, then, for the community quickly regaining their leader. Despite our author's declaration that the Roman Christians were "more confirmed in the faith" upon word of Paul's imminent martyrdom, there remains an uneasiness among the faithful. In fact, they implore God to bring Paul back to them on account of a "weakness which is still in [them]" (2).

Not for nothing are the Roman Christians concerned about the weakness of the neophytes. In fact, this very weakness of the recently-converted sets the stage for the rest of the story. Our author appears to suggest that neophytes are more susceptible to backsliding and heretical enticement than veteran members of the faith. In the mere span of a few days after Paul's departure, many of the Christians find themselves fascinated by the *mirabilia* done by a certain Simon (4).<sup>568</sup> Initiates would instantly recognize this figure as the infamous Simon Magus from Chapter 8 of the canonical Acts of the Apostles. Nevertheless, there is a vast chasm of difference between the Simon of canon and the Simon encountered in the *Acta Petri*. No longer is the man some misunderstanding, second-rate magician who is merely trying to fleece the gullible or purchase power; he is a dangerous usurper who

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<sup>568</sup> Latin taken from Latin taken from Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* vol. I (Leipzig, 1891; repr. Hildesheim, 1959).

seduces wayward Christians away from the correct path. There is *intent* in Simon's evil, and this perceived intent colors our author's understanding of wondrous power, whether that power be demonic or divine. In either case, in this text, power speaks with all the authority of sermons. Signs are not simply demonstrative in the *Acts of Peter*; they have a purpose beyond showing the divine favor or demonic assistance imparted to a certain individual. It is my aim here to illuminate the ways in which such signs function in this remarkable text.

Unfortunately, scholarship on the *Acts of Peter* is exceedingly thin, and has thus far largely eschewed discussions of literary character and function in favor of more "traditional" topics. As one of the earliest exemplars of the apocryphal acts, initial studies of the *Acts of Peter* were overburdened by discussions of dating, composition, and provenance.<sup>569</sup> In recent years, the conversation has begun to consider the content of the text.<sup>570</sup> Despite this new analytical development, however, two competing trends have left a noticeable lacuna in the study of this and other apocryphal acts. On the one hand, these texts are treated as a homogenous bloc, their differences dissolved in service of offering a generic analysis of their content and purpose. For instance, Francois Bovon's essay "Miracles, Magic, and Healing in

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<sup>569</sup> See for example Carl Schmidt, *Die alten Petrusakten* (Leipzig, 1903); Gerhard Ficker, *Die Petrusakten. Beiträge zu ihrem Verständnis* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1903); and Jean Flamion "Les Actes Apocryphes de Pierre" in *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 9 (1908): 233-54, 465-90; 10: (1909) 5-29, 215-77; 11: (1910) 5-28, 223-56, 447-70, 675-92; 12 (1911): 209-30, 437-50. See also *Semeia* 80, an entire volume dedicated to the intertextual relationships among the apocryphal acts: Robert F. Stoops, ed., *Semeia 80: The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles in Intertextual Perspective* (1997). In general, the apocryphal acts are woefully under-studied, with the possible exception of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. The overwhelming portion of scholarship is dedicated to the excavation of textual relationships. I will cite relevant studies treating issues beyond textual relationships as I discuss apocrypha other than the *Acts of Peter*.

<sup>570</sup> See Judith Perkins, "The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: a Roman à These?" *Arethusa* 25.3 (1992): 445-58 and several studies undertaken by Robert F. Stoops Jr, including "Patronage in the *Acts of Peter*" *Semeia* 28 (1986): 91-100; "Christ as Patron in the *Acts of Peter*," *Semeia* 56 (1992): 143-157; "Departing to Another Place: The *Acts of Peter* and the Canonical Acts of the Apostles," in E. H. Lovering (ed) *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, 1994): 390-404. For relatively recent studies, see Jan Bremmer (ed), *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998); Meghan Henning, "Paralysis and Sexuality in Medical Literature and the Acts of Peter," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8.2 (2015): 306-21, and Thomas, *The Acts of Peter*.

the Apocryphal Acts” provides cursory observations true of most of the apocryphal acts, but in doing so, elides dissimilarities amongst the narratives.<sup>571</sup> On the other hand, analyses of individual acts rarely consider how any given text functions within the larger scope of the corpus, or against the backdrop of early Christian literature more broadly. Jan Bremmer’s introductory essay in his volume, *The Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* falls prey to this tendency.<sup>572</sup> It is my hope here to combine these opposing methodologies by considering one aspect of the *Acta Petri* – its discourse of magic – and first analyzing it as it functions within the confines of the text before comparing it against larger discursive patterns in the apocryphal acts. This chapter is thus divided in two: (1) the first section will analyze how magic functions within the *Acts of Peter* and the manner in which magic is differentiated from miracle; and (2) the second section will compare these acts against other exemplars from the apocryphal acts. By proceeding in this manner, I hope to demonstrate that the magical discourse the *Acts of Peter* fulfills a purpose quite distinct from that found in contemporary acts. In fact, this text seems to find kinship not among other acts, but rather among hagiographical texts of later provenance. I will return to this literary affinity later, but for now, I would like to circumscribe my comments to the text in question.

One of the most striking aspects of the *Acts of Peter* is that its so-called miracle uncannily resembles magic. That is to say, the activities undertaken by Peter correlate with activities stereotypically associated with magic in the ancient world.<sup>573</sup> This is particularly

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<sup>571</sup> Bovon, Francois. “Miracles, Magic, and Healing in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” in *Studies in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) pp. 353-267

<sup>572</sup> Bremmer, Jan. “Aspects of the *Acts of Peter*: Women, Magic, Place and Date,” in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) pp. 1-20.

<sup>573</sup> These activities are the subject of chapter 1. My argument, is that certain activities are more likely to be attendant to the charge of magic than others. The point is that while ‘magic’ can certainly function as a charge designed to delegitimize the wonder-working of one’s ideological and theological opponents, it is not a charge empty of content. Apuleius, for example, felt compelled to mount his apology against certain of his activities

interesting given that in the text, Peter's actions are rather sharply contrasted with those of Simon. On the one hand, Peter is an agent of god, invested by Christ to work *miracles* in his name in order to gather followers and to rehabilitate those who have strayed since Paul's departure. On the other hand, Simon Magus performs *magical* charlatanry in order to seduce members of Christ's flock away from the true faith. What the text describes is a game of attrition with no middle ground between two poles; either one performs wonders through divine authority or demonic assistance.<sup>574</sup>

Despite these differences posited between the apostle and the magician, however, the *similarities* between Peter's miracle and ancient magic are many, as we shall see. This rhetorical differentiation in the face of practical similarity is in keeping with the work of scholars like David Aune and Alan Segal, for whom miracle and magic differ in terms of their respective contexts: miracle belongs to the realm of approved religious praxis while magic transgresses socio-religious norms.<sup>575</sup> Implicit in such studies is the oftentimes unarticulated notion that there is no concrete difference between miracle and magic. As demonstrated in the introductory chapter of the present work, the arbitrariness of such labeling does obtain, at least in part, in the ancient world. A supernatural act can be classed as miracle or magic depending upon the circumstances within which it is performed. The

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and not others – cutting up strange fish, having hidden idols, performing rites at night, uttering unusual words, etc. Discourses are fluid by nature, but this fluidity is not necessarily consistent throughout. Parts of a discourse may be more stable than others. A discourse in which this tension between stability and fluidity is manifest is that of ancient magic, and the *Acts of Peter* in particular. In essence, what I am suggesting is that the narrative drama in this text would unravel if were it not for this tension between fixity and fluidity in the discourse of ancient magic.

<sup>574</sup> Magda Misset-Van de Weg, "The Lord always takes Care of His Own: The Purpose of the Wondrous Works and Deeds in the Acts of Peter," in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: magic, miracles and Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 97.

<sup>575</sup> David Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 369-370 and Alan Segal, "Hellenistic Magic," 401.



charge of magic, then, can be a discursive means to delegitimize the wonderworking traditions of others. Yet some practices are overwhelmingly constructed as negative or socially transgressive—reanimation-necromancy, for example.<sup>576</sup> Practices such as revivification and exorcism are more easily amenable to being categorized as magic *or* miracle; these practices appear in both transgressive and assimilatory contexts.<sup>577</sup> When such ambiguous practices are described, the rhetorical distinction attendant to them must be clear in order to ameliorate the ambiguity. This trend of rhetorical clarification in the face of practical similarity obtains in all our texts – the Gospel of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, and in the *Acts of Peter*. Magic is always implicated in a dialectical discourse in which practices of magic work in tandem with rhetorical charges of magic. But perhaps in no other Christian text is this dialectical relationship more visible than in the *Acts of Peter*, a text in which the ambiguous nature of the “miraculous” seems to compel discursive differentiation of the decidedly unambiguous sort.

Like any other discourse of magic in our ancient texts, the one found in the *Acta Petri* is polysemous, fulfilling more than one purpose simultaneously. On the level of the metanarrative, the discursive differentiation of miracle from magic is used to discredit the wonderworking traditions of Simon and those of his ilk. This maligning of an outsider’s supernatural tradition is used to promote apostolic Christianity against an illegitimate, if

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<sup>576</sup> While some practices of necromancy (such as evocation of dead spirits) did not necessarily transgress social norms (see, for example *Odyssey* 10.488-540, 11.13-149), the reanimation of a corpse in service of working spells or divination is always performed in a negative context. That is to say, reanimation-necromancy is always socio-religiously transgressive. See Lucan’s *Pharsalia* 6.588-830, Heliodorus 6.12-5, and Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* 2.21-30.

<sup>577</sup> See chapter 18 of the *Acts of Peter*, in which both Simon and Peter perform a revivification. The short duration and temporary effects of Simon’s revivification class it as charlatanry whereas the permanent nature of Peter’s revivification distinguishes it from mere illusion. While the actions performed by both men are the same, the manner in which their respective actions are rhetorically represented is different.

vaguely characterized, usurper of the Jesus legacy. This is a rhetorical strategy of differentiation familiar to the readers of the canonical Acts. On the *practical* or descriptive level, however, the wondrous acts performed by Peter serve their own purposes. Not only are these deeds a means by which Christian “re-conversion” is carried out; they are, as presented in the *Acts of Peter*, a *sufficient* means for solidifying this move towards conversion. In our text, Peter’s miracles do not serve as an entrée to catechetical instruction or another sort of religious formation; they are enough to bring Christians back into the fold without benefit of lifestyle emendations or additional theological training. Indeed, given that the Christians at Rome presumably had been instructed in the correct comportment necessitated by their faith, it is surprising that their widespread backsliding is not addressed via a more rigorous instructional approach but rather through a series of wondrous deeds. In the latter half of the present chapter, I will explore more fully the implications of this fact by offering a thoroughgoing comparison between the *Acta Petri* and other apocryphal acts. When considered alongside exemplars of the same genre, the *Acts of Peter* emerges as a fascinating anomaly that prioritizes belief precipitated by charismatic awe over belief precipitated through religious instruction. In this text, the magic matters.

### **Part I. Simon the Literary Foil**

The sheer vehemence with which the author of the *Acts of Peter* maligns Simon and his magic invites questions about the function of such vitriol. Simon is described as an agent of Satan (5), the enemy of the Lord (5), an extortionist (8), one who causes blasphemy (8), a “destroyer of simple souls” (9), and a cheat and deceiver (12). Initially, it appears strange that such a marginal figure of Christian tradition should become the subject of such preoccupation. Nevertheless, in the Christian literary tradition after the New Testament,

Simon becomes an arch-heretic on par with the infamous Marcion, despite the fact that this later tradition represents a marked departure from the Simon material in the canonical Acts of the Apostles.

The interaction between Peter and Simon is but one episode of many in the canonical Acts. Yet here, our author has expanded that exchange to encompass the drama of his entire text. In the *Acta Petri*, Simon is not simply woefully uncomprehending, as he is in the Acts narrative; he is dangerous and willfully malicious, more akin to what we will find in Christian heresiologists of the second and third century. Rather than vulgarly seeking to purchase apostolic authority, in the apocryphal narrative, Simon is a powerful usurper whose works present a real threat to the fledgling Christian community at Rome.

While Simon's actions in our text may not differ much from the Acts account, the vitriol directed at him is rather distinctive and bears similarity to non-narrative texts. Recall that the *entirety* of Luke's material about Simon is included in Acts 8:9-13. He relates the following:

Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized he stayed with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

Later, after witnessing Peter and John laying hands upon the converted Samaritans, Simon offers them money in order that, "anyone upon whom [he] lay[s] [his] hands may receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:19)." As I argued in the previous chapter, while this move does not necessarily imply avarice (or the magic that is usually associated with avarice), what

it *does* imply is a misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit. It also intimates that Simon has a proclivity towards usurpation; although not being a designated agent of the Spirit, he nevertheless attempts to exert authority over its conveyance. Even so, Luke's Simon is largely harmless (if unforgivably foolish) and his message, such as it is, is very easily overcome by the ministry of Philip and the laying of hands of Peter and John. The Magician's followers all become Christians and his attempted pretension is thwarted by John and Peter. Simon even repents and asks for the apostles to pray on his behalf (Acts 8:20).

In Christian tradition after the New Testament, Simon's behavior takes on darker, more menacing contours. He is no longer a recalcitrant or insincere convert; he is unequivocally and unabashedly evil. Justin Martyr, for example, expands upon the account in the canonical Acts, and includes a great deal of additional material about Simon, including a bit of his theology. According to Justin, Simon's followers believed him to be the first god; his companion – a prostitute named Helen – was the first thought generated by him.<sup>578</sup> Justin claims that a statue of Simon erected in Rome contributed to the city's descent into demonic corruption. According to Justin, "even after Christ's ascent into heaven, the demons have promoted certain individuals who claimed to be gods. Those [Romans] have not only not persecuted but even glorified."<sup>579</sup> Simon's ability to perform magic likewise originates from demons.<sup>580</sup> William Adler notes that the second-century apologists tended to associate idolatry with malevolent demons.<sup>581</sup> Adler's observation adds a richer resonance to our

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<sup>578</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 26.1. For a fuller discussion of Justin's description of Simon, see Haar, *Simon Magus*, 83-89.

<sup>579</sup> Justin, *First Apology* 26.1, trans. Haar.

<sup>580</sup> Justin, *First Apology*, 26.2.

<sup>581</sup> Adler, "The Origins of the Proto-Heresies: Fragments from a Chronicle in the First Book of Epiphanius' Panarion," *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990): 477.

understanding of the *Acta Petri* (and other Christian texts, no doubt). In the *Acts of Peter*, the correlation between Simon and idolatry is especially fitting. Both texts depict Simon as a usurper figure who seduces followers into worshipping him rather than God – in this sense, Simon is the purveyor of idolatry rather than its performer. Nevertheless, as early as the mid-second century, the Christian literary tradition displays very strong opinions about Simon, and these opinions are clearly manifest in our text.

Christian writers other than Justin had plenty to say about Simon as well. Irenaeus named him the “father of all heresies.”<sup>582</sup> As Haar points out, Book I.23-28 of *Adversus haereses* is structured in such a manner that each of the heretics mentioned shares some characteristic teaching with Simon, the progenitor of heresy.<sup>583</sup> The troublesome teaching that originated from Simon is termed “Gnostic,” which Irenaeus deems a bastardization of philosophy that has been stripped of all goodness and logical reason.<sup>584</sup> Simon, according to Irenaeus, styled himself the “first god” and was called “great power” – a claim much like Justin’s.<sup>585</sup> Irenaeus further states that Simon’s followers did not adhere to the precepts outlined in scripture, but rather engaged in a sort of libertinism, since it was Simon’s grace, and not their own actions, that had saved them.<sup>586</sup> Irenaeus, like Justin, correlates Simon with heresy – with a particular belief that was antithetical to his idea of Christianity.<sup>587</sup> Key for

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<sup>582</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* I.23.2: *ex quo universae haereses substiterunt*.

<sup>583</sup> Haar, *Simon Magus*, 90.

<sup>584</sup> *Adversus haereses* II, 14.2-7; IV.33.3.

<sup>585</sup> *Adversus haereses* I.23.1.

<sup>586</sup> *Adversus haereses* I.23.4.

<sup>587</sup> Scholars have engaged in robust debate about the theology of the historical Simon (and his existence in general). Relevant studies include Haenchen, *Acts*, 307 Gerd Lüdemann, *Untersuchungen zur simonischen Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 42. Both Haenchen and Lüdemann believed that Luke reinvented Simon as a magician in order to mitigate his Gnostic background. Other scholars claim that Simon was not a Gnostic, but rather a simple magician. See C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on*

our purposes is that both Irenaeus and Justin deign to outline some of Simon's own beliefs for the benefit of their audience. Simon is not the same ignorant fool in these church fathers that he is in the text of the canonical Acts; rather he appears to have very much earned his infamy and ill repute.

Hippolytus, in his 3<sup>rd</sup> century *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, sets about refuting all heresies. Hippolytus includes material attributed Simon in section of Book Six, from a source known as the *Apophysis Megalé*.<sup>588</sup> Here, he recounts certain beliefs that Simon's followers supposedly held. According to Hippolytus' source, Simon is "the one who stood, stands, and will stand."<sup>589</sup> Simon suffered in Judaea as "Son" and in Samaria as "Father"; among the other nations, he was "Holy Spirit."<sup>590</sup> This tripartite identification suggests that Simon styled himself after Christ. Hippolytus even recounts the story of a Simon of Samaria who had his followers bury him alive, promising that he would rise on the third day. This would-

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*the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 407. Haar sees no reason why a Gnostic could not also be a magician, and so proposes that Simon was likely a Gnostic *and* a magician: Haar, *Simon Magus*. Meeks, for his part, was pessimistic about uncovering much detail about the historical Simon. See Wayne Meeks, "Simon Magus in Recent Research," *Religious Studies Review* 3 (1997): 141. The literary Simon encountered in the *Acts of Peter* is clearly a magician, but the tenor of his philosophy or theology cannot be discerned with any clarity. It is impossible to claim that he is a Gnostic since the author of the *Acta Petri* does not relate any of Simon's beliefs. At any rate, more interesting for my purposes is the fact that our author characterizes Simon in a vitriolic manner similar to the heresiologists yet denies his audience much rationale for such a characterization. I will discuss this point below.

<sup>588</sup> Like so much about Simon, this section of Hippolytus has come under much scholarly scrutiny. Some scholars believe that Book Six represents material that has come from Simon's own hand or those of his followers. See Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzer Geschichte des Urchristentums* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), 181; Waitz, "Simon Magus in der altchristlichen Literatur," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 5 (1904): 138; Cerfaux, "La Gnose simonienne: nos sources principales," *Religious Studies Review* 16 (1926): 5-20, 265-85, 481-503. Beyschlag is less optimistic about tracing this material back to the historical Simon. Karlmann Beyschlag, *Simon Magus und die christliche Gnosis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1974), 39. But perhaps it is Wilson's sobering assessment that is much needed here: "The problem is that we have no means of proving for this period that the alleged author of a book ever wrote it." R. McL. Wilson, "Simon and Gnostic Origins," *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum Louvaniensium* 48 (1979): 489.

<sup>589</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutations*, VI.18.4.

<sup>590</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutations*, VI.19.6.

be usurper remained in the grave, of course, since he was no Christ.<sup>591</sup> Like Justin and Irenaeus before him, Hippolytus correlates Simon with heresy and usurpation, most especially the usurpation of Christ as the divine son.

The author of the *Acts of Peter* will also make the same associations between Simon and heresy; yet, our author does not offer many specifics to dislike about his antagonist. That is to say, whereas heresiologists provide some content to Simon's heresy, some *reason* why he should be reviled and discussed in the most condemning language, the author of the *Acta Petri* does not do so. Part of this methodological difference is generic, no doubt; heresiologists, by definition, must root out and expose heresy. Nevertheless, as I will show, the "emptiness" of Simon's character in the *Acts of Peter* is rhetorically expedient. It allows the author to construct a literary foil for his hero, Peter. Moreover, as Haar so astutely observes, oral traditions concerning Simon were proliferating concomitantly with written texts.<sup>592</sup> While the *Acts of Peter* does not delimit the contours of Simon's heresy in-text, it *does* participate in an overarching Christian discourse in which Simon is unequivocally evil. And if we are to take Adler's assertions seriously, the worship of Simon is tantamount to idolatry.

From our brief survey of heresiologists, it is clear that second-century Christianity was notoriously diverse, a battleground wherein each group fought to establish itself as the

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<sup>591</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutations* VI.20.3.

<sup>592</sup> Haar, *Simon Magus*, 77-79. Studies on the orality of the Christian tradition include Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Pieter J. J. Botha, *Orality and Literacy in early Christianity*, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012); William A. Johnson and Holt Parker, eds., *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

true inheritor of the Jesus legacy against various others.<sup>593</sup> This period saw the proliferation of texts written to combat Marcionites, various Docetists, and many Gnostic groups, among others. Given the wide range of theological enemies from which to choose, the *Acta Petri*'s maligning a mere magician appears rather a trivial. But we must keep in mind the traditions circulating about Simon in this developmental period of Christianity when we consider the *Acts of Peter*. Simon's reputation as the arch-heretic might be operative in the background of the text. I contend that what emerges from a careful excavation of the text in question is the fact that our author considers non-affiliate miracle workers to be as dangerous as any so-called heresy. This danger is only amplified if we further imagine that the author of the *Acts of Peter* was aware of the traditions concerning Simon.<sup>594</sup>

The characterization of Simon in our text is unique in that it combines the vitriol present in the heresiological treatments with the theological "emptiness" of the canonical Acts.<sup>595</sup> At the beginning of the *Acts of Peter*, left in the absence of a guiding hand, the Christians in Italy find themselves quite susceptible to Simon's teachings, much like the canonical Samaritans. But Simon's influence is extended in the apocryphal account, his position elevated. He is proclaimed as *in Italia deus* (4). Furthermore, he is called *tu Romanorum salvator* (4). While the canonical account called Simon "great" and the "power of God that is called great," he is never elevated to the level of being a god himself.

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<sup>593</sup> The classic study is Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Robert Kraft (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

<sup>594</sup> There is evidence to suggest that our author is at least partly aware of some of the oral traditions. The assertion that Simon called himself "great" is repeated in all three of our heresiologists and the canonical Acts. Also, the statue erected by Marcellus in *APet* 10 recalls Justin's warning about the statue of Simon that was erected in Rome. Finally, although Simon does not call himself "God" in the canonical Acts, he does so in the *Acts of Peter*, suggesting that the author of our text was familiar with traditions familiar to our heresiologists who claimed that Simon believed himself to be a god.

<sup>595</sup> A point explicated in detail below.



According to Bremmer, while the latter title might be applied to a human, the former unequivocally denotes Simon as God.<sup>596</sup> Even Simon's attempt at usurpation is heightened. He has gone from claiming to be God's power to claiming to be God.

Let us remember that in Luke's Gospel, Jesus himself exercised the power of God when he ousted demons through the "finger of God" (Luke 11:20). Jesus furthermore identifies himself with God in Luke 5:22-26, although the identification is not nearly as direct as that of Simon in the *Acta Petri*. Rather, Jesus, by forgiving sins, answers the Pharisees' query of "Who but God alone can forgive sins?" No doubt, by the time the author of the *Acts of Peter* set pen to parchment, Jesus had become more closely identified with God in some Christian circles. So both Simon and Jesus, then, have traditions surrounding them in which they claim to work through the power of God and *are* God. By setting up this (false) comparison with Jesus, our author implies that Simon Magus is a pretender seeking the throne that should belong to Christ alone, and consequently, he is far more treacherous than his canonical counterpart.

Any residual doubts as to Simon's character are ameliorated once Peter enters the picture. Even Peter's mission to Rome is instigated by Simon's success (5). Peter must come to Rome to fill the power vacuum left by Paul because Simon has "perverted by the cunning and power of Satan" all those who believed (5). In Chapter 8, Peter places his opponent's wonder-working activities squarely in line with a number of demonic deeds from Judeo-Christian history: Simon's magic is akin to enticing the first man to evil lust; to forcing Judas to betray Jesus; to hardening the heart of Herod; to kindling Pharaoh against Moses; to emboldening Caiphas to deliver Jesus to the "cruel multitude." The ensuing battle between

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<sup>596</sup> Bremmer, "Aspects of the *Acts of Peter*," 10.

the two central figures of the text – Peter and Simon – serves as a metonymy for a cosmic battle between God and sin.<sup>597</sup> Only heresiologists could craft a more evil antagonist.

Curiously, apart from claiming himself as a God, the author of the *Acta Petri* provides no other clue as to the nature of Simon’s “heresy.” We are told that he is a Jew and that by magical sayings he has perverted all of Rome (6). As Luttikhuizen points out, our antagonist does not espouse a type of Simonian Gnosis or any other well-defined ideology; he does not appear to espouse much of anything at all.<sup>598</sup> This is rather surprising, given the robust tradition surrounding Simon in our period. The heresiologists, for example, had plenty to say about the nature of Simon’s beliefs. Nevertheless, the Simon of the *Acts of Peter* sets about to prove his own superiority via deeds and not words. The emphasis on the actions of the primary players in the narrative drama will become hugely important later. For now, let us keep in mind that even as a literary character, Simon Magus appears to exist as a foil for Peter, an evil “other” who absorbs our author’s bitter invective.

My contention is that this acerbity against Simon functions to sever any possible connections between Peter and Simon, and simultaneously, between Christianity and magic. Certainly a similar discursive move is found in many Christian texts like the Gospel of Luke and the canonical Acts, as we have seen. A corollary, however, is that such a distinction here is absolutely necessary for the simple fact that the deeds performed by Peter in *this* text conform, perhaps far too closely, to deeds commonly associated with ancient magic. To put it

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<sup>597</sup> J. K. Elliott, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 392. The correlation of Simon with sin is especially sharp when one considers the opinions of the heresiologists.

<sup>598</sup> Gerard Luttikhuizen, “Simon Magus as a Narrative Figure in the *Acts of Peter*,” in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: magic, miracles, and Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 41. Apart from these characteristics of Simon’s ministry, we are told that he was considered a god and the Savior of Rome (4). The audience, much like the audience of the canonical Acts, never knows *why* Simon is so well-received (apart from his ability to perform magic).

bluntly: Simon and his magic must serve as a literary foil for Peter and his miracles because the miracles in the *Acts of Peter* appear too magical to ancient audiences familiar with the more troubling aspects of magic.<sup>599</sup>

In our other texts, the charge of magic functioned to delineate theological positions and to secure insiders from the threat of outsiders. In the Gospel of Luke, magic was associated with the demonic, thereby defining the nascent Christian community as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God over and against a satanic domain. In the canonical Acts, strategies of differentiation including agency and legitimacy were employed in order to distinguish a Petrine-Pauline emergent orthodoxy over and against outsiders like Jews and pagans. In the *Acts of Peter*, however, the enemy is magic itself. Simon does not represent an outsider group, but rather the seductive lure of non-Christian magic. Moreover, the remedy to his seduction is *also* magic. The two types of magic must be set apart to prevent the sort of confusion that instantiates the drama of the narrative. And so, our author must make Simon a foil and Peter a superlative magician of the Christian tradition.

## **Part II. Peter the Magician**

It should pose no surprise that commentators have often remarked on what they deem to be the strange nature of Peter's wonder-working in these particular acts.<sup>600</sup> What is surprising, though, is that while scholars have felt quite comfortable either dismissing these

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<sup>599</sup> The function of the "charge" of magic and the activities typically attendant to it are discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>600</sup> Bremmer, "Aspects of the *Acts of Peter*," 12. See also Bovon, "Miracles, Magic and, Healing," in which he writes the following: "Trivial and apparently useless, and even fantastic, marvels in the *Acts of Peter* are used to attest to the superhuman power of the apostle and to accelerate the process of conversion: thus the speaking dog and the broken statue that is rehabilitated in the end." While I agree with Bovon that these miracles do accelerate the process of conversion, I am less inclined to accept his assertion that they are "trivial" or "apparently useless." Furthermore, his explanation does nothing to account for the "trivial" character of the deeds themselves; presumably there are less useless means of accelerating conversion. So why does our author choose to depict these deeds in particular?

acts as products of a popular (read: theologically insignificant) piety or classing them as unusual with respect to other items in the repertoire of Christian supernatural deeds, no scholar, to my knowledge, has offered evidence substantiating *why* Peter's actions seem so extraordinary.<sup>601</sup> My aim here is to begin filling this lacuna in the study of these *Acts*. A possible answer emerges if we apply a more nuanced understanding of magic to this text. If, as scholars of Christian antiquity assert, magic is an empty charge that takes on content only in polemical contexts, then why do so many find something *inherently* unusual about the supernatural deeds narrated in the *Acts of Peter*? What makes the revivification of a smoked tuna fish distinct from giving sight to a blind individual? As stated previously, my assertion is that while activities like the former are not *inherently* magical, some activities were more likely to be classed in such a manner by the ancients than others. Discourses are fluid by nature, true; but it is also true that within the stream of discursive construction lie areas which are less susceptible to the ebb and flow of definition and redefinition. Once again, let us recall that there is a reason Apuleius of Madaura felt compelled to mount a defense against certain of his practices and not others.

There are a number of methods one might employ in supporting the assertion that Peter's activities fall into the middle, ambiguous area on the continuum between the magical and the miraculous. One might, for example, compare the activities performed by the apostle in the *Acts of Peter* with the list of "more magical" activities outlined in Chapter 1 of the present work, drawing correlations between classes of deeds that are stable insofar as they are considered magic. In the interest of offering a more pointed and succinct analysis,

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<sup>601</sup> For the assumption that the apocryphal acts were the product of popular piety, see Lipsius, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden* (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1883-90; reprint Amsterdam: Philo, 1976), 78. and Rosa Soeder, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhafte Literatur der Antike* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1952), 186-87.

however, I have opted here to compare the wonders narrated in the *Acts of Peter* with a single group of texts – the PGM. I have chosen these texts as the basis for comparison for the simple fact that some of them expressly refer to their users as “magicians.”<sup>602</sup> Some users of the PGM, therefore, likely thought of themselves as magicians. Thus, the PGM are a means by which the modern scholar might glean the characteristics of the ancient magician, or at least the sorts of spells that would comprise the magician’s catalogue. Scholars have certainly used the PGM to illuminate magical aspects of early Christianity.<sup>603</sup> More than the texts of the New Testament, however, the *Acts of Peter*’s conformity to the PGM is both incredibly striking and telling.

When these magicians’ spells – spells that the author of the *Acts of Peter* accuses Simon Magus of utilizing, no less – are placed alongside Peter’s activities, a remarkable correspondence emerges.<sup>604</sup> Peter, the apostle of Christ, performs incantations that would be quite at home amongst the trappings of the ancient specialists who would have traded in the sorts of *carmina* that comprise the PGM. We have seen this correspondence between magical formulae and the apostles’ use of the name of Jesus in Acts, but here the affinities are much closer. A brief exorcism story from the text will fully illustrate my point. In terms of context, this story takes place after Peter has converted Marcellus and his household in chapter 11:

Peter turned to the multitude who stood beside him when he saw one man laughing, in whom was a very bad devil. ... And Peter said, “Demon, whoever you are, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, depart from this man without hurting him. Show yourself to all present.”

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<sup>602</sup> PGM I.331 “τὴν μαγικὴ ἐμπειρία”; PGM IV.210 “μαγικὴν ψυχὴν.” See Chapter 1 for further examples.

<sup>603</sup> Klauck, *Magic and Paganism*, 99-100; Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 126-27; Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 407-411.

<sup>604</sup> In chapter 6 of the *Acts of Peter*, Simon is said to pervert the entire Christian community through the use of *magico carmine*, or magical sayings. This charge against Simon is especially fascinating since in the text, it is Peter, not Simon, who performs incantations.

Compare this episode with the following spell found in PGM IV. This particular spell is labelled as an “excellent rite for driving out daimons”:

Hail, God of Abraham; hail, God of Isaac; hail, God of Jacob; Jesus Chrestos, the Holy Spirit, the Son of the Father, who is above the Seven/who is within the Seven. Bring Iao Sabaoth; may your power issue forth from him, [*insert name of possessed individual*] until you drive away this unclean daimon Satan, who is in him. I conjure you, daimon, whoever you are, by this god, [*voces magicae indicating the name of the god in question*]. Come out, daimon, whoever you are and away from him, now, now; immediately, immediately.<sup>605</sup>

Peter’s words in the *Acta Petri* bear an undeniable resemblance to the spell found in the PGM. Both address the demon directly, binding it “whoever” it is; both include a simple exhortation for the demon to “come out” of the possessed individual; and both call upon the supernatural authorities of a named divinity or several divinities. Exorcisms were part of the stock and trade of ancient magicians and often employed formulas such as the above. In fact, there are multiple spells in the PGM dedicated to the expulsion of demons.<sup>606</sup> It would not be wholly inappropriate to suggest that Peter’s exorcism was a feat of magic, at least in terms of the formulaic manner in which his actions are framed. I would like to take this assertion one step further and claim that it would also not be wholly inappropriate to suggest that audience members might also recognize this spell as belonging to a class of activities typically understood to be magical. Texts do not exist in cultural vacuums, after all, and the *Acts of Peter* is no exception. If oral traditions about Simon comprise the cultural background of this text, so too do oral traditions about magic.

Furthermore, the use of epithets in solicitation of the divine suggests a connection to magical activity. Such epithets, often replete with *voces magicae*, are littered throughout the

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<sup>605</sup> PGM IV.1227-64, trans. Betz.

<sup>606</sup> See PGM IV.3007-86 and XCIV.17-21, amongst others. Betz presents a catalog in the front of his translated volume indicating the purpose for each spell. Exorcisms, along with healings, are the most numerous.

PGM and other practical magical texts.<sup>607</sup> The Christians' adaptation of this magical trope, as it were, was inconsistent. As we saw in Luke's Gospel, Jesus himself rarely names the entity by which he works his miracles and never does he address his God with title upon title, as is common in many texts of practical magic. In the canonical Acts, the apostles do invoke Jesus with simple exhortations like "our Lord," yet they do not venture to compound this address with several parallel appellations. In our apocryphal text, however, when Peter addresses Christ, even in contexts outside of the performance of supernatural deeds, he heaps epithets upon Jesus: "We worship you, O Lord, the Shepherd of the sheep which once were scattered, but now will be brought together through you (10)." Consider another example: "Let us therefore bend our knees before Christ, who hears us though we have not called upon him; who sees us though he is not seen with these eyes; but is within us (11)." While not all of Peter's invocations of Jesus' name carry a trail of obsequious descriptors, the ones that do would doubtless be familiar to the ancient magician:

All-mighty is the god, but you are greatest,  
Immortal one; I beg you, shine forth now,  
Lord of the world, Sabaoth, who veil sunset  
From dawn, Adonai, who, being a world,  
Alone among immortals, tour the world, self-taught,  
un-tutored, through the world's mist traveling  
to those who with a cry raise you at night.<sup>608</sup>

The two texts are not perfectly correlative. In the PGM, the deity is invoked in a ritual context, not an exhortation to worship.<sup>609</sup> The PGM address is also more elaborate, appending several additional epithets to Sabaoth than the two or three Peter attributes to

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<sup>607</sup> See Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 4-12; Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*; Versnel, "Poetics of the Magical Charm."

<sup>608</sup> PGM III.18-24, trans. Betz.

<sup>609</sup> For the use of such texts in magical ritual, see David Frankfurter, "Narrating Power." See also Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words."

Jesus. Nevertheless, the operative logic behind both sets of utterings remains the same. In the *Acts of Peter* and the PGM deities are invoked by the recollection of their deeds and most salient characteristics. Christ hears though Christians have not called upon him much like Sabaoth travels to those who raise him at night with a cry. The *Acta Petri* also represents a departure from the canonical Acts' typical address, which is limited to "the name of Jesus."<sup>610</sup> So while Luke's Gospel, and to a lesser degree the canonical Acts, minimize the stereotypical trappings of magic, the *Acts of Peter* demonstrates the opposing inclination – incorporation of more and more of the magical, so to speak.

Peter's resurrection of the prefect's slave in Chapter 26 further elucidates the point. In raising the young man, Peter utters the following incantation: "In your power, revive now through my voice, O Lord, in the presence of all, him whom Simon killed by his touch.' ...And Peter said to master of the lad, 'Come, take hold of him by the right hand and you shall have him alive and walking with you.'" PGM XIII.279-282 contains a very similar formula for performing a resurrection: "I conjure you, spirit coming in air, enter, inspire, empower, resurrect by the power of the eternal god, this body; and let it walk about in this place, for I am he who acts with the power of Thayth, the holy god." Both incantations make mention of the power of divinity through whom the agent works. Again, this is par for the course for most magicians. Both demonstrate publicly the efficacy of the resurrection by causing the revived corpse to walk about. And both wonderworkers mention their own connection to the divinity through whom they operate. Peter implores the Lord to work through his voice and the magician of the PGM declares that he or she acts with the power of

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<sup>610</sup> Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16, 4:18; 5:40; 8:16; 9:27; 10:48; 16:18; 19:5, 13, 17; 21:13; 25:19.



Thayth. Like the spell effecting exorcism, this resurrection narrative in the *Acts of Peter* conforms closely to a pattern characteristic of magical formulae.

One of the most curious incidents in the *Acta Petri* happens in Chapter 9, when Peter charms a dog to speak in order to pass a message along to Simon, who has refused to receive him. Despite the seemingly unique nature of this “great and wonderful sign,” it too shares certain similarities with spells found in the PGM. PGM XIX.4-18, for example, contains a love spell of attraction over a dog. It prescribes the following: “Onto a cutting of hieratic papyrus write with myrrh and dedicate it to one who has died a violent death (presumably the dog), I adjure you by [*voces magicae*], you who are able, [raise] your body and go [to her NN], until she is [willing]...” Another magical spell that uses a dog as proxy is PGM XXXVI.361-71. Here, the spell is a “fetching charm for an unmanageable woman which works on the same day.” It instructs, “Put the magical material inside with vetch and place it in the mouth of a dead dog, and it will attract her within the hour.” The most important similarity here is the working of the spell by proxy, in each case a dog. And while the dog in the PGM is a dead one—dead souls were considered especially effective in terms of magical utility—the dogs in each story seem to serve the same function: they serve as an intermediary between the magician and their target. In all three spells, the dog conveys a calling of sorts from the wonderworker: in Peter’s case, it is the message that he is outside waiting for Simon; in the case of the PGM, it is the summoning of a romantic interest or, yes, an unmanageable woman. Again, we see that Peter’s activities correlate with practices perceived to be magical.

It is possible to find magical analogues not just for these three acts but for *all* of Peter’s wonderworking in the *Acts of Peter*. It is not surprising, then, that scholars consider

this text to be somewhat unusual, at least in terms of the sorts of wondrous deeds the eponymous apostle performs. Furthermore, compared with the deeds in the New Testament, certain of the wonders narrated here appear markedly less wondrous to the modern interpreter. Peter's reviving a dead tuna fish might not compare in terms of scale with Jesus stilling a storm or Paul blinding a Roman proconsul's magician, but these apocryphal deeds are not trivial, as we shall see. For now, however, I should like to return to the second part of my thesis, i.e. because the *practical* activities of Peter correspond to those undertaken by ancient magicians in the *Acta Petri*, the *rhetorical* distinction between Peter's so-called miracle and Simon's magic must be clearly demarcated.

### **Part III. Rhetorical Differentiation between Peter and Simon**

Much like the Gospel of Luke and the canonical Acts of the Apostles, in the *Acts of Peter*, rhetorical differentiation between Christian "miracle" and non-Christian magic proceeds along several indices. The most obvious of these demarcations are constructed along the lines of agency, quality, and effect. In terms of agency, the supernatural entity through which Peter and Simon perform their respective deeds is either demonic or deific; there is no room for ambiguity, despite the fact that the Graeco-Roman world is not neatly bifurcated into diabolic and divine realms. Rather, our Christian author must impose a strict binary on the otherworldly powers that proliferate in the ancient world. Such a neat division serves to correlate magic not only with theological transgression, but also with evil, a trend that reaches its height in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. Qualitative difference between miracle and magic is foregrounded in the nature of Simon's activities, the effects of which are temporary at best and disastrous at worst. In short, Simon is not as skilled a wonder-worker as Peter. Finally, and most importantly, in terms of effect, Simon's magic seduces believers away

from the true faith whereas Peter's miracle brings lapsed believers back into the Christian fold. Magic and miracle differ in their respective intentions and effects.

### **Part IIIA. Agency**

The author of the *Acts of Peter* betrays an abiding concern for the agency through which both miracle and magic work. This is not unusual, given that agency was a primary preoccupation of the author of Luke-Acts as well. Both Simon and Peter display extraordinary power, yet the divine and demonic beings through which they achieve this power are opposing forces. In fact, the climactic magicians' duel between the two men is cast, in many ways, as a cosmic contest between the powers of good and evil.<sup>611</sup> Earlier, in Chapter 5, Jesus appears to Peter in a vision and says to him, "Peter, Simon, whom you expelled from Judaea after having exposed him as a magician has forestalled you at Rome...all who believed in me he has perverted by the cunning and power of Satan, whose agent he proves to be." Here, even before Peter arrives in Rome to face Simon, he learns that his enemy is supported by "the power of Satan." In fact, Simon is not only Peter's enemy, but he appears to be the enemy of all Christendom.<sup>612</sup> In the beginning of the narrative, when Paul is charged with going to Spain and thus leaves the newly-formed flock without an apostolic leader, Simon comes from Judea and manages to seduce Paul's converts away from the faith. The situation has become so dire that by the time Peter arrives, all but three of those whom Paul had managed to convert had been "lost through the power of Satan (6)." Given this widespread backsliding, it is not surprising that Peter "must go to Rome and subdue the *opponent* of the Lord and our brethren (5)."

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<sup>611</sup> Pal Herczeg, "Theos Aner Traits in the *Acts of Peter*," in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 32.

<sup>612</sup> Herczeg, "Theios Aner Traits," 36.

What is distinct from Luke's oeuvre is that the apocryphal Simon is depicted as an exceedingly successful deceiver and swindler.<sup>613</sup> In Acts, he is a magician who dazzles the Samaritans, but not necessarily a fraud. In the *Acta Petri*, Simon is not only a usurper, but a common criminal as well, using deceptive means to dupe gullible victims in order to steal their valuables (17). Despite his facility with deceit, however, Simon's abilities are "restricted to constant defense and furious resistance" once Peter arrives in Rome.<sup>614</sup> The Simon in the *Acta Petri* may be the vilest sort of magician, true, and one that is both deceptive and demonic, but his danger is diminished along with his allure as soon as Peter begins working miracles among the Roman Christians. The implication is that Simon is no match for Peter and his God.

Upon first glance, differentiation along the lines of divine backing seems an obvious rhetorical expedient. That said, we must remember that the Roman world was one teeming with divine entities; attachment to one being did not preclude a human from forging an attachment to another. This tolerance is manifest in the practical magical texts. The users of the PGM did not find it unusual to call upon more than one god to achieve their ends, often invoking gods of multiple traditions with no regard to the compatibility of these traditions. For example, the following spell invokes Jesus and the deities Yao, Sabao, and Brinthao: "[Christ! I adjure] you, O lord, almighty, first-begotten, self-begotten, begotten without semen...as well as all-seeing are you, and Yao, Sabao, Brinthao: Keep me as a son, protect me from every evil spirit, and subject to me every spirit of impure, destroying demons-on the

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<sup>613</sup> Herczeg, "Theios Aner Traits," 37.

<sup>614</sup> Herczeg, "Theios Aner Traits," 36.

earth, under the earth, of the water and of the land-and every phantom. Christ!”<sup>615</sup> It is difficult to imagine Peter uttering a similarly-addressed request in the *Acts of Peter*. There is but one divine agent who fuels his wonderworking; to appeal to any other would grant a modicum of legitimacy to Simon’s position. After all, if other gods were as powerful as Peter’s, then other gods could be accorded the same worship.

While the author of the *Acta Petri* maintains this strict binary between the supernatural power undergirding Christian acts of power and the acts performed by others, this division did not originate in the text under consideration. We see the rhetorical expedient of magical “othering” as early as Mark’s Gospel. In that text, the apostle John informs Jesus that an unaffiliated exorcist is using Christ’s name to cast out demons. Instead of balking at the perceived slight, Jesus merely instructs his overeager disciple not to stop the man. “For no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us,” he claims (Mark 9:39). Luke retains this Markan saying in 9:50. The characters in the canonical Acts also express binary understandings of the magical world, although they are more exclusive than the New Testament Jesus. In Acts, all wonderworkers external to the Christian tradition are enemies. This literary insistence on defining insiders over and against outsiders comes to characterize the Christian miracle tradition. In short, those who do not work their wonders in Christ’s name are not merely “others”; they are opponents. Peter’s actions in the *Acts of Peter* fall in line with discursive trends expressed in Christian ideology more broadly.

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<sup>615</sup> Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith. *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 46.

### Part IIIB. Quality

Alongside agency, a second index with which the author contrasts miracle and magic is the quality of each, and concomitantly, the skill of wonderworker. While Simon is initially portrayed as a terribly gifted magician whose great deeds inspire his worship, it becomes clear that Peter is far more skilled. This is demonstrated many times throughout the text. After Peter arrives in Rome, he is asked to “overcome Simon’s claim that he (meaning Simon) was the power of God (8).” Peter is then told that Simon is staying with the senator Marcellus, who used to be a patron of the poor and a friend of Christians (8). Through Simon’s persuasion, however, Marcellus has abandoned the community and even resorted to violence against pilgrims who appear on his doorstep (8). Naturally, Peter alights to Marcellus’ house, only to be denied entry (8). In response to this less-than-cordial welcome, he enchants the aforementioned dog to speak and sends it along in his stead (9). Having received Peter’s message through the dog, Simon is rendered utterly speechless (9). This is terribly problematic for a magician; for without the power of speech, he loses the power of incantation. And the reader already knows that much of Simon’s power came from the *carmina* he performed with such prowess. Simon eventually recovers his speech, but only hours later, and only after Peter has managed make a show of his own supernatural efficacy (11). This episode seems to suggest that Peter could put an end to Simon’s ignoble career if he should choose. All he need do is render the man speechless permanently.

In no other episode is Peter’s superiority as a wonder-worker foregrounded more clearly than in the climactic contest between Peter and Simon that takes place in the Julian forum.<sup>616</sup> We are told that “the brethren and all who were in Rome came together (11).” The

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<sup>616</sup> Interestingly, when the *Acts of Peter* are recapitulated in texts dating after 400CE, this contest in the Julian forum is omitted by some of the iterations of the text. The fourth-century version in Lipsius, for example,

stakes are high. Before such a large audience, each man is asked to perform certain feats of supernatural ability in service of determining whose power is the greater, that of Simon or Peter. The first test of skill involves killing and resurrecting the prefect's slave (25). It is *a propos* that Simon is asked to put the man to death; the destructive nature of his magical activity has already been demonstrated throughout the text. Simon obeys, whispering into the man's ear and immediately rendering him lifeless (25).<sup>617</sup> It falls to Peter, then, to revive the man. In the meantime, a widow amongst the crowd has asked Peter to revive her dead son as well (25). Unsurprisingly, Peter is able to perform both resurrections with minimal fuss. Our author is not the subtle sort. Peter's miracles are live-giving, much like the Christian message is live-giving. It is important to note here that Simon also attempts to revivify a third man. While he is able temporarily to reanimate the corpse, he fails at effecting a true resurrection (28). The message is clear: while the effects of magic may bear a superficial resemblance to those of miracle, they are fleeting. Only miracles performed through proper divine agency have permanent effect, and only Peter has a legitimate claim to such agency.

### **Part IIIC. Effects**

A third index by which the author of the *Acts of Peter* distinguishes miracle from magic is through the effects generated by each. Miracle, since it is predicated upon divine assistance, has the effect of turning people towards the Christian God. Magic, being resultant

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begins with Peter's arrest. Lipsius and Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, 1.1-22. A sixth-century version attributed to Marcellus makes this famous dispute verbal instead of magical. See Lipsius and Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*. See also Christine Thomas, "...Revivifying Resurrection Accounts: techniques of composition and rewriting in the *Acts of Peter* cc.25-28," J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 65. These omissions demonstrate a polyvalent Christian attitude towards magic, one in which magic is accepted as a vehicle for missionary work by one community and perhaps rejected by another.

<sup>617</sup> In a Pseudo-Hegesippus' later recapitulation of this climactic battle, Simon's actions are expanded to include the chanting of "horrifying spells." Pseudo-Hegesippus, 185.26-9, trans. Thomas.

of demonic machinations, seduces people away from God and the true faith. In fact, in contrast to the synoptic gospels, in the *Acta Petri*, miracle is designed to *inculcate* belief. Nowhere in the text is this more clearly demonstrated than in the curious episode concerning the revived tuna fish. In Chapter 12, the Roman crowd implores Peter, “Show us another miracle that we may believe in you as a servant of the living God, for Simon too did many wonders in our presence, and on that account we followed him (13).” In response, Peter revivifies a smoked tuna fish, causing it to swim “not only for that hour, but lest they said that it was a deception, he made it swim longer, thereby attracting crowds from all parts... (13).” As a result, many were confirmed in the faith (13).

Yet magic too can inculcate belief, wrong though this belief may be. It was Simon’s ability to fly (or to look as though he were flying), for example, that prompted the Roman Christians to turn away from Christ in Chapter 4. In Chapter 31, Simon again attempts to fly over the *Via Sacra*. He says that he will “ascend to the father” and explicitly claims to be a son of God. This time, he comes crashing to the ground as a result of Peter’s prayer. “If you allow him to do what he has undertaken,” Peter cries to Jesus, “all who believed in you shall be overthrown, and the signs and wonders, which you have shown them through me, will not be believed (32).” Here, the author of the *Acts of Peter* forges a direct link between wonder-working and belief. From the very beginning, the magicians’ contest has been framed as a battle between two cosmic powers, the god of Peter and the “God” of Simon (i.e. Simon himself).<sup>618</sup> In his introductory remarks, the prefect says to Peter: “Show us, Peter, who your God is or which majesty it is which gave you such confidence. Be not disaffected to the

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<sup>618</sup> Tamás Adamik, “The Image of Simon Magus in the Christian Tradition,” in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 64.



Romans; they are lovers of the gods. We have had evidence from Simon, let us have yours also; show us, both of you, *whom we must believe* (emphasis mine).” The legitimacy of the Christian faith hinges upon Peter’s performance in the subsequent contest. And Peter cannot disappoint; Christ is stronger than the devil, after all.<sup>619</sup>

This notion of Simon’s comparatively impotent magic comes full circle, once more, to the depiction of the charlatan as a literary character. Luttikhuizen has pointed out that in the *Acta Petri*, Simon Magus seems to be a rather empty embodiment of evil.<sup>620</sup> We are told in the text that Simon is a “most wicked and shameless man, worst enemy of all who live and believe in Christ Jesus,” a “cheat and deceiver,” and “enemy and destroyer of the way of Christ’s truth” (12). In almost every instance, specifics are elided for vague assertions of dastardliness. He is a flat character, not even given the ideology of a “heretic”—like Simon Magus in the heresiologists, for example. We know nothing of his theology apart from his own claims to divinity and the author’s insistence that he works his magic through demonic agency. In fact, his sole function seems that of a literary foil designed to foreground the distinctions between miracle and magic, between Peter and himself—a necessary expedient in the *Acta Petri*, since Peter’s activities closely conform to ancient magical practices.

Morton Smith delineated two contradictory tendencies in some early Christian traditions: the first, to minimize the wondrous in order to mitigate possible charges of magic; and the second, to foreground supernatural power as evidence substantiating the superiority of the Christian God.<sup>621</sup> With its emphasis on the spiritual efficacy of the miraculous while

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<sup>619</sup> Adamik, “The Image of Simon Magus,” 64.

<sup>620</sup> Luttikhuizen, “Simon Magus as a Narrative Figure,” 41.

<sup>621</sup> Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 95.

simultaneously disparaging the wrong kinds of miracle (read: magic), the *Acts of Peter* seems caught between these two opposing rhetorical trends, and as the main antagonist of the text, Simon, too is similarly ensnared between the need for charismatic allure and theological unassailability.

#### **Part IV. Magic Matters**

In his “Miracles, Magic, and Healing in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” François Bovon claims that the apocryphal acts might be treated as a whole by invoking the same *episteme* – this, in the Foucaultian sense of the word.<sup>622</sup> He further claims that these texts presuppose, “an identical conception of eternal life that goes beyond doctrinal and ethical divergences.”<sup>623</sup> This tendency to treat the apocrypha as a homogenous bloc obtains in most studies of magic in the apocryphal acts.<sup>624</sup> Bovon insists that the miracle narratives in the apocryphal acts all express the fundamental conviction that beyond the tangible, sensible world is a divine realm which is the only one that matters.<sup>625</sup> My analysis of the *Acts of Peter* and its place within the genre of Christian acts offers a corrective to Bovon’s assertion. While it is true that the supernatural activity performed by the apostles in the Christian apocrypha prefigure, or at least *suggest* the existence a divine realm, the discourse created by the

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<sup>622</sup> Bovon, “Miracles, Magic, and Healing in the Apocryphal Acts,” 254.

<sup>623</sup> Bovon, “Miracles, Magic, and Healing in the Apocryphal Acts” p. 255.

<sup>624</sup> See François Bovon and Éric Junod, “Reading the Apocryphal Acts,” *Semeia* 38 (1986): 167-69; G. Poupon, “L’accusation de magie dans les Acts Apocryphes,” “Reading the Apocryphal Acts,” *Semeia* 38 (1986): 161-171; P. J. Achtemeier, “Jesus and the Disciples as Miracle Workers in the Apocryphal New Testament,” in Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza ed., *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 149-86. Exceptions to this scholarly propensity to treat the apocryphal acts as a homogenous bloc include the Studies on the Early Christian Apocrypha series edited published by Peeters. In the volume dedicated to the *Acts of Peter*, discussions of magic are limited to its text. Another exception includes Kaspar Dalgaard, “Peter and Simon in the Acts of Peter: A Supernatural Fight between Magic and Miracles,” in *Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World*, Biblical Intersections 11 (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2013), 169-181.

<sup>625</sup> Bovon, “Miracles, Magic, and Healing in the Apocryphal Acts” p. 255.

narration of such activities is not limited to describing such a realm. In fact, a discourse of magic can have many functions. Furthermore, if we treat the discourses of magic offered in each of the apocryphal – and indeed the canonical – acts as discrete subjects of inquiry, we might be able to discern nuances in the function and message of each of these narratives – differences that have been elided by our scholarly penchant to analyze the acts as a collection rather than individually.

It is with an eye towards delineating distinction that I wish to move beyond articulating the function of the discourse of the supernatural within the text of the *Acta Petri* alone and consider how this discourse compares with those found in the other apocryphal acts. Magda Misset-van de Weg has pointed out that Peter's supernatural wonders are always followed by his amazed audience converting to Christianity.<sup>626</sup> In this model, then, the magical discourse in the *Acts of Peter* is a vehicle which inculcates and/or stabilizes proper faith. The text certainly bears out this assertion; both "divine" and "demonic" beliefs are predicated upon deeds and not words. Simon is called "God in Italy" because of his acts of power (4). He offers no preaching to buttress his magic. The same is true of Peter as well, despite the assertion of Thomas, who seems intent on seeing magic coupled with message in the *Acta Petri*.<sup>627</sup> Crowds implore the apostle to work wonders so that they may believe, and he does so willingly (13). This is in marked contrast to Jesus, whose attitude towards those demanding a sign is far less indulgent (Matt 12:38-39).

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<sup>626</sup> Magda Misset-van de Weg, "'For the Lord always takes Care of His own.' The Purpose of the Wondrous Works and Deeds in the *Acts of Peter*," in J. Bremmer, *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 97-110.

<sup>627</sup> Thomas, "...Revivifying Resurrection Accounts," 68.

The indulgent attitude of the *Acts of Peter* with respect to wondrous works suggests that the magical practices narrated in the text provide a contrast, if not a corrective, to the ways in which magical practices are narrated not only in the canonical acts but also in some of the traditions that would later comprise other apocryphal acts and portions of the Christian tradition. Let me be clear. I am not suggesting that the *Acta Petri* stands against a homogenous bloc comprised of all the other acts. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the majority of the supernatural acts narrated in this apocryphal text exhibit a different purpose than those narrated in many of the other acts. Naturally, there will be outlying examples on both sides of the divide, but nevertheless, I hope to demonstrate that a pattern obtains despite exceptions to the rule.

So, what then, is this pattern? Or more precisely, what is it that is being corrected by the discourse of magic articulated in the *Acts of Peter*? Overall, the apocryphal acts use magic as a means of conveying message. Bovon stresses this when he writes, “Scholars have repeatedly stressed that the narration of a miracle had to lead to faith, but in the case of the apocryphal acts this was a weak faith, prompted only by visible proofs.”<sup>628</sup> In his schema, the many, varied supernatural wonders found in the apocrypha and the awe they inspire are the first step towards turning one’s attention to the divine realm. Magic may inspire belief, but this belief must be solidified through a modification of behavior, typically renunciation of worldly pleasures or a period of theological instruction. This assertion is borne out by several details in some of the earliest apocryphal acts themselves – those of Andrew, John, Thomas, and Paul. In these texts, one finds ample evidence corroborating Bovon’s argument that signs and wonders inspire belief that is initially incomplete.

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<sup>628</sup> Bovon, “Miracles, Magic, and Healing in the Apocryphal Acts,” 257.

The *Acts of Andrew* opens with the apostle in residence at Patras.<sup>629</sup> Within the city arrives a man named Stratocles, whose servant, Alcman, is possessed by a demon (7).

Andrew exorcises this demon with several persons in witness and when Stratocles is struck with awe by what has just happened, Andrew replies with the following:

O Stratocles... I know well that you are moved by what has happened, but I am also certain that I must bring out into the open the person now latent within you. Your total bewilderment and pondering of the source and cause of what has happened are the greatest proofs that the soul within you is troubled, and the perplexity, hesitation, and astonishment in you please me (7).

Andrew goes on to claim that Stratocles is beginning to see his former pagan faith is hollow (7). Our narrator then informs us that Stratocles remains with Andrew day and night, “sometimes examining, learning from, and interrupting him, and other time remaining silent and enjoying himself, having truly become enamored of saving attentiveness (7).” Here we see clearly the pattern of conversion that will characterize many of the apocryphal acts: a wonder is performed, a former nonbeliever is amazed and wants to become a believer, a new member is added to the Christian fold after their faith is ratified through learning and/or baptism. The ongoing nature of this process is made all the clearer in *AAnd* 10, in which our author informs us that Stratocles and the newly-healed Alcman were “being confirmed in Christ night and day.” It is not surprising, then, that Stratocles later forsakes all his possessions and devotes himself to the faith (11).

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<sup>629</sup> The apocryphal acts are rarely studied individually. Studies of the *Acts of Andrew* include Jan N. Bremmer, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of Andrew*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: the Odyssey, Plato, and the Acts of Andrew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, “The Acts of Andrew: A New Perspective on the Primitive Text,” *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica. Estudios Griegos e Indoeuropeos* 20 (2010): 247-59; Mariko Yakiyama, “Maximilla’s Redressing the Ignorance of Eve through Sexual Renunciation: A Comparison of The Acts of Andrew and the Writings of Clement of Alexandria,” PhD diss, Claremont Graduate University, 2007.

Other instances in the *Acts of Andrew* betray a similar preoccupation with the outcome resultant from the wonder rather than the deed itself. In the story concerning Maximilla and her proconsul husband Aegeates, Andrew's miracle keeps an ill Aegeates confined to the chamber pot while his wife remains chaste (13). Maximilla's desire for chastity betrays the allure of Christianity; she displays no trouble whatsoever in maintaining her resolve.<sup>630</sup> So the apostle must ensure this resolve is rewarded. Andrew's prayer reveals the purpose of his magical activity: "...may her soul remain forever pure, sanctified by your name...cause her to sleep apart from her visible husband and wed her to her inner husband... (16)." The narrative emphasis of this passage is on Maximilla's chastity, not the wonder itself. A similar trend continues throughout the *Acts of Andrew*. In other instances, signs are performed to further facilitate Christian education and protect the brethren.<sup>631</sup> It is the word, *coupled* with the deed, which drives conversion in the *Acts of Andrew*. The majority of the miracles in this text are concerned with preserving what the author considers a Christian way of life.

Another text that follows the same general pattern is the *Acts of Paul*.<sup>632</sup> Here, too, the wonders offer assists to the more emphatic thrust of the text – that the Christian way

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<sup>630</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts*, Studies in Women and Religion 23 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 35.

<sup>631</sup> AAnd 32, 34. See also 38, in which Andrew gives an extensive farewell speech outlining the teachings of Christianity to those that have come to see him in prison before his martyrdom. See especially 47, where Andrew says, "You saw acts performed through me which you yourselves cannot disbelieve; such signs performed that perhaps even mute nature would have cried out in acclaim. I have handed over to you words which I pray you have received in the way the words themselves would want..." The point here is that the word is absolutely necessary to produce and confirm a true Christian faith.

<sup>632</sup> Important studies concerning the *Acts of Paul* include Carl Schmidt, 'Acta Pauli', *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 28 (1936), 352–4; W. Schneemelcher, "Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas und die Acta Pauli," in W. Eltester, ed., *Apophoreta*, (Berlin, 1964): 236–50; Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Richard Pervo, *The Acts of Paul: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014); Glen E. Snyder, *The Acts of Paul: The Formation of a Pauline Corpus*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

demands a lifestyle change consisting of a withdrawal from the tangible, sensible world. We see this quite clearly in the speech Paul gives on his way to Rome. In it, Paul talks of Jesus' many deeds and recalls the Savior's words to Simon: "You will pray for the works which I myself will do...But the other works I will do at once. For these I do for the sake of a temporary deliverance in the time during which they are in these places, that they may believe in him who sent me (Corinth section)." The implication is clear – miracles performed by Paul *or* Jesus are temporary placeholders. "What then is the work that is greater than these except the raising of the dead and the feeding of such a crowd?" the author of the *Acts of Paul* asks (Corinth section). The assertion coming immediately upon the heels of this query, is that there *is* something beyond the wonderworking that the true believer must aspire to, namely proper faith and an ideological orientation focused on spiritual rather than worldly matters. In the words of Paul himself, "Gold perishes, riches are consumed, clothes become worn out. Beauty grows old, and great cities are changed...God alone abides...(Ephesus section)." Like the *Acts of Andrew*, signs in the *Acts of Paul* are performed in service of some end, not as the end themselves. Once again, the narrative emphasis seems to be on the divine realm, much like Bovon claims.

Let me offer another example, from the *Acts of Thomas* this time.<sup>633</sup> In the fifth act, the apostle encounters a woman who has been possessed by a lustful demon for five years (42). Thomas easily exorcises this demon (42). He follows up this deed with a rather lengthy address to the living Christ, asking him to allow his peace to dwell within those present (47).

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<sup>633</sup> Important studies on the *Acts of Thomas* include Susan E. Myers, *Spirit epiclesis in the Acts of Thomas*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Michael LaFargue, *Language and gnosis: The Opening Scenes of the Acts of Thomas*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); William "Chip" Gruen, "Contested Spaces and Contested Meanings in the *Acts of Thomas*," *Religion and Theology* 20.3-4 (2014): 219-33.

Upon her liberation from daily torment, the woman begs the apostle to seal her in the faith (47). Thomas acquiesces, going so far as to offer the Eucharist to the newly converted (47). The emphasis of the story is not on the exorcism itself, but rather the ways in which the characters respond to the miracle, most especially on their continuing theological growth. Their confirmation is sealed through the rite of the Eucharist. Again, Christian apocryphal acts demonstrate a tendency to prioritize theological development over magical deeds. But perhaps it is the *Acts of John* that offers the most succinct summation of the point I am attempting to articulate. “Is it any great matter if bodily sicknesses are cured?” the author asks (34). The answer, of course, is that bodily healing pales in comparison to spiritual renewal.

Nevertheless, we should exercise caution. Not *all* the miracles in the apocryphal acts outside the *Acts of Peter* serve a larger catechetical or theological purpose. In fact, there is evidence that other apocryphal writers, like the author of the *Acta Petri*, imagined wonderworking to be sufficient in generating and maintaining conversion. In the *Acts of John*, for example, we have the famous episode concerning the temple of Artemis of the Ephesians (37-55).<sup>634</sup> Before John destroys the Ephesians’ temple, he says, “you are unchangeably hostile to true piety, and you perish in your old idolatry. How many miraculous deeds did you see me perform, how many cures (39)!” He challenges the Ephesians, who have gathered for a festival, to “Pray to [Artemis] that [John] alone die[s] (39).” For his part, John prays to God that the “deity of this place” “give way” so that God

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<sup>634</sup> Important independent studies concerning the *Acts of John* include E. Junod and J. D. Kaestli, “Les traits caractéristiques de la théologie des *Actes de Jean*,” *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 26 (1976): 125–45; Pieter Lalleman, *The Acts of John: A Two-Stage Initiation into Johannine Gnosticism*, (Leuven: Peeters, 1998); Melody Gabrielle Beard-Shouse, “The Circle Dance of the Cross in the ‘Acts of John’: An Early Christian Ritual,” PhD Diss, University of Kansas, 2010; Barbara E. Bowe, “Dancing into the Divine: The Hymn of the Dance in the ‘Acts of John’,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.1 (1999): 83-104.



may “show mercy” on the temple (41). Mercy comes in the form of the temple being destroyed, its hall destroyed, its priest killed (42). The Ephesians, in response, cry out, “now we have become converted, since we saw your miraculous deeds (42).”

The connection between wondrous deeds and belief is rather clear in the *Acts of John*. The Ephesians believe because their temple was destroyed. This much is clear from the text, but this belief is then later solidified by John’s receiving the new converts in the home of Andronicus, where he preaches a homily, offers prayer and Eucharist, and also lays hands to confer the Holy Spirit (46). The text intimates that these followers are the same ones who had converted upon the heels of the temple’s destruction because John calls out the family of the former priest of the temple (46). Even when belief is precipitated upon a grand wonder, like the destruction of an entire temple, the author of the *Acts of John* later ensures that new converts receive proper instruction and initiation. In a sense, this narrative in the *Acts of John* follows the pattern put forth by the author of the *Acta Petri*; wondrous deeds are *sufficient* to drive conversion. Yet, indirectly, the *Acts of John* also elevates catechetical instruction and initiation, though there is a marked delay between the initial conversion and the instruction received by these new converts. On the whole, however, the overarching trend that obtains in most of the narratives of wonderworking in the apocrypha obtains in the *Acts of John* – wonders alone cannot substantiate faith.

In the *Apocryphal Acts of Andrew, Paul, Thomas, and John* at least, the narrative emphases of the discourses of magic overwhelmingly point to something beyond the miraculous deed itself – whether that be teaching, or baptism, or even the glorification of an ascetic or semi-ascetic lifestyle. While these other aspects of the Christian lifestyle are

oftentimes combined with wonderworking in the other apocryphal acts, in the *Acts of Peter*, the miracles seem to stand alone as a means to inculcate and/or ossify faith.

Consider theological ideation in the aforementioned examples alongside a fuller description of one of the previous anecdotes from the *Acta Petri*. When Peter arrives in Rome, he is persuaded to go to the home of the senator Marcellus, who is hosting Simon the Magician (9). Peter asks that Simon come to the door, only to be refused. In response, he turns to the crowd and says, “You are about to see a great and wonderful sign (9).” He then charms a large dog into speaking and asks the dog to tell Simon to come down (9). It is not Simon, though, but Marcellus himself who comes down and prostrates himself at the feet of Peter (9). And then, something quite interesting happens. Marcellus claims that he was enticed to apostasy because Simon had claimed himself to be a God (9). His own faith “was not firm (9).” But upon seeing the talking dog, Marcellus realized his folly and is now prepared to come back into the Christian fold (9). At this point, we would expect our author to tell us that Marcellus had been re-baptized or that Peter had provided him further instruction – *anything* to suggest that his full conversion was not predicated upon the miracle alone. After all, according to Origen, one of the features distinguishing Christian miracle from base magic is its message.<sup>635</sup> Instead, the author of the *Acta Petri* launches into Peter’s next miracle without any such exposition (9). In fact, when Marcellus relapses later in the story, it takes another supernatural feat – this one performed by his own hands – to firm up his faith (11).<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.57.

<sup>636</sup> For the cultural significance of this episode see Callie Callon, “Images of Empire, Imagining the Self: The Significance of the Imperial Statue Episode in the *Acts of Peter*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 106.3 (2013): 331-55.

This is not the only passage to suggest that the magical discourse featured in the *Acts of Peter* has a slightly different emphasis from those featured in the other apocryphal acts. Let us return, once more, the words of the crowds when the talking dog falls dead at Peter's feet in section 12: "Show us another miracle," they say, "that we may believe in you as a servant of the living God, for Simon too did many wonders in our presence, and on that account we followed him." Immediately afterwards, we encounter the very famous incident wherein Peter revivifies a dried tuna fish and makes it swim for hours, thereby converting many people (12). If the reader were at all confused about whether or not supernatural acts alone are enough to produce true conversion, then the words of Jesus in Peter's vision serve to clarify the issue greatly: "I will show myself to you when you shall ask for signs and wonders and you shall convert many (4)." Even Peter himself says, "We must not believe in words, but works and deeds (17)." In fact, the text lacks a great deal of direct speech, giving it an air of theatrical performance – a medium based on *action*.<sup>637</sup> That is not to say that there are *no* exhortations in the *Acta Petri*; rather, what I am suggesting is that the magical acts themselves are *sufficient* for the establishment of belief in the overwhelming majority of instances. Peter may exhort his believers to turn away from worldly riches or repent their sins after they have been confirmed in the faith, but the confirmation comes first and he rarely, if ever, uses supernatural feats to buttress his theological exhortations. Unlike Andrew, Thomas, or John, Peter's ministry seems to prioritize wonder-working over and above catechetical instruction or initiation rites like Eucharist.

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<sup>637</sup> Misset-Van de Weg, "For the Lord Always Takes Care of His Own," 97; cf Poupon, "L'accusation de magie," 77.

We can only venture very tentative assertions about why the discourse of magic in the *Acts of Peter* is distinct from those found in similar generic exemplars. Internal narrative concerns might explain why our author appears to prioritize belief based on deeds rather than instruction. For instance, we must remember that the Christians depicted in this text are lapsed Christians and not Gentiles being converted for the first time. Presumably, our Roman brethren have already been instructed in the trappings of the faith and have undergone baptism. While it is not inconceivable that lapsed Christians might be re-baptized, it is not hard to imagine that our author might dispense with the ritual, believing it to be redundant. The absence, therefore, of baptism occurring on the heels of re-confirmed belief is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is the lack of re-education. One might expect Peter to firm up the fledgling community's faith by giving them exhortations on the proper Christian way of life – a way that precludes participating in the sort of magical activities performed by Simon. Yet Peter's hortatory speeches are few; instead the narrative is monopolized by his miracles.

We must also consider the protagonist of the text and the nature of oral tradition. The story of Peter's defeat of Simon the Magician in the canonical Acts must have been disseminated throughout the Christian world by the time the author of the *Acts of Peter* sets pen to parchment. It is quite clear that our author had access to oral traditions comprising the canonical Acts at the very least. Given the compelling nature of Simon as an antagonist, it is not unreasonable to believe that an author might wish to describe what happened to Simon after his exit in Acts 8. Certainly we have evidence of early Christian writers "filling in the gaps," so to speak. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, for instance, spans precisely the years of Jesus' life omitted by the Gospel of Luke.

Perhaps the most interesting explanation for the odd nature of the magical discourse in this text has to do with the historical situation from which it emerged. After all, in a tradition replete with healings, exorcisms, and revivifications – the typical repertoire of the Christian miracle-worker – what use is a talking dog or a revived tuna fish? In the second century, we see a striking trend in Graeco-Roman religiosity. This is the period that Richard Gordon refers to as having a “strong notion” of magic.<sup>638</sup> This particular period saw an increase in the visibility of magical practices, especially divination.<sup>639</sup> It is an era wherein the religious discourse was littered with words like *superstitio* and *prava religio*.<sup>640</sup> Correspondingly, sanctions were levied against certain practices deemed dangerous.<sup>641</sup> Incidentally, even the magical spells themselves undergo an expansion of sorts. From the second century onward, the spells that are written on binding tablets found all over the Mediterranean basin are longer, more complex, and contain many more *voces magicae* than their earlier iterations.

Magic was in the water, so to speak, and it colored the religious discourse of the time. People both feared and coveted this power. In a literary context teeming with magical ideation, it is not unthinkable that one of our early Christian authors would not only incorporate magical wonders into his text, but foreground their efficacy. Unlike many other of our other Christian writers, the author of the *Acta Petri* believes that the magic is sufficient to bear the full weight of the faith. This is a subtle difference, but an important one. Magic may be means to an end in similar texts, but there is no indication that the faith generated by

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<sup>638</sup> Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic” 166.

<sup>639</sup> Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic” 166.

<sup>640</sup> Henk Versnel, “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-religion” *Numen* 38.2 (1991): 182.

<sup>641</sup> Henk Versnel, “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-religion,” 182.

wondrous awe is incomplete or insincere in the *Acts of Peter*. To *believe* on the heels of a marvel is enough. From the second century onward, the preoccupation with magic would only grow, leading more and more Christians to explore the utility of magical deeds to express theological concerns.

In fact, the *Acts of Peter's* emphasis on the efficacy of miracles seems better suited to later hagiographical material than it does the “canon” of apocryphal acts.<sup>642</sup> I can only make some tentative comparisons in the following section, but even a cursory survey will unearth striking affinities between hagiographical material and the *Acta Petri*. In the hagiographical texts, it is not unusual for a brief encounter with a saint to result in conversion, even without benefit of extended catechetical instruction or ritual initiation. Take the story of Apa Apollo in the late fourth-century *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (*HM*).<sup>643</sup> The text, which is essentially the travelogue of a group of Egyptian hermits, describes Apollo's encounter with a procession from a temple at Hermopolis (8.25-29).<sup>644</sup> The procession is described in wild, barbaric fashion, complete with a wooden image of a god (8.27). Apollo magically stops the procession in its tracks through a number of incantations (8.29). All the temple devotees stand unmoving in the Egyptian heat until they are magically released by Apollo, who only does so on the condition of their conversion (8.29). While not a perfectly congruent anecdote to the stories contained in our text, the Apa Apollo narrative does present a number of

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<sup>642</sup> I wish to exercise caution here. I am not suggesting that we disrupt the canon of the apocryphal acts and maintain the canon of hagiography. The hagiographical material clearly betrays signs of intertextual borrowing; it, too, did not emerge in a literary vacuum. See Andrew Cain, *The Greek Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 74-92. My point is to foreground literary affinities which may have been neglected due to our proclivity to compartmentalize early Christian texts.

<sup>643</sup> On the dating of the *HM*, see Cain, *The Greek Historia Monachorum*, 39; cf. Hammond, “The Last Ten Years of Rufinus' Life,” in Adalbert de Vogüé, *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique dans l'antiquité* 3, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 317-20.

<sup>644</sup> *Historia monachorum*, ed. A-J Festugiere [Subsidia Hagiographica 34] (Brussels, 1961), 56-58.

striking similarities: both Apollo and Peter make use of magical incantations; both Apollo and Peter seem more concerned with conversion rather than education or ritual; and finally, both Apollo and Peter are depicted as working their miracles against a threat to the Christian faith rather than some nameless demon or disease.

Let us consider another, more substantial example. The following comes from Gregory of Tours' sixth-century *Suffering and Miracles of St. Julian* (VJ):

While the pagans celebrated their festivals at this sanctuary, and while these lifeless people were offering incense to their lifeless [gods], two young men were provoked to a quarrel in the middle of the crowd. One drew his sword and tried to kill the other. But the other man realized that no pardon was available because his own gods would not protect him. So he sought the protection of our religion, the pardon of our confession, the remedy of our community, and the shrine of the glorious martyr. His pursuer was then unable to attack and assault him with his sword...

While these events were taking place it happened that a priest was traveling on that road. When he learned what had occurred, he promised the parents [of the young man] that they would receive their son back in good health if they abandoned their paganism...Four days later when the pagans wished again to offer sacrifices to their gods, the priest sadly knelt before the saint's tomb, wept, and prayed that the brightness of divine power would finally visit these pagans who were trapped in darkness. While the priest was praying, immediately the thunder rumbled, lightning bolts flashed, a storm that combined lightning and hail poured down, and everything was in chaos. The entire crowd of pagans rushed together to the shrine and knelt before the priest. Their wailing was mixed with their weeping, and everyone begged for the mercy of the Lord. They all promised the priest that if the storm departed, they would abandon the cult of images, request the martyr to be their patron, and with pure hearts convert to his God.<sup>645</sup>

In writing his text, Gregory initially understood his purpose to relate the martyrdom of St. Julian and to describe the inception and growth of his cult at Brioude.<sup>646</sup> He also wished to provide some indication of the miraculous power operative at Brioude and

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<sup>645</sup> Gregory of Tours, "The Suffering and Miracles of St. Julian," in Raymond van Dam, ed. *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). 167-168.

<sup>646</sup> van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, 162.

demonstrate how the saint had provided special assistance to his family.<sup>647</sup> Like the author of the *Acta Petri*, Gregory's preoccupation is with the business of wonder and its effect on believers. The text above demonstrates precisely how this preoccupation is mobilized towards the construction of a magical discourse.

Upon cursory examination, this passage bears very little resemblance to those found in the *Acts of Peter*. That said, while there are few superficial similarities, the *function* of both narratives aligns quite well. In the hagiographical text, no miracles are solicited directly from Jesus himself, but rather from the dead martyr who yet lives through his intercessory capabilities. Such was Gregory's purpose – to demonstrate St. Julian's power. Furthermore, there is no evidence of magical incantations or other accoutrements stereotypical of the activities associated with magic; these miracles seem quite in keeping with what is expected from Christian fare – prophylactic and healing miracles and weather manipulation solicited via prayer. We find no revived tuna or talking dogs. Finally, while the *VJ* narrates the various wondrous deeds performed by the martyr, the *Acta Petri* offers a fuller narrative of conversion rather than an executive summary comprised of one miracle story after another.

Even so, there are connections we might draw across the two texts. In the latter text, the priest's prayer to St. Julian to perform a wonder in order to convert the pagans bears an undeniable resemblance to Peter's supplication to Jesus to ensure Simon's machinations fail: "Make haste, O Lord, show your mercy and let [Simon] fall down and become crippled but not die; let him be disabled and break his leg in three places (32)." In both narratives, a deity is invoked in order to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity vis-à-vis competing traditions and, consequentially, to inculcate faith. Furthermore, in both texts, wondrous deeds

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<sup>647</sup> van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, 162.



are solicited from divine intercessors in order to generate converts. The moment of conversion is prioritized over ensuring proper behavior among the members of the community. Again, witnessing the miracle is sufficient to effect the conversion; in neither text do we see a preference for more “traditional” rites of initiation, including Eucharist or baptism.

Admittedly, two examples do not constitute a pattern. A thoroughgoing investigation into the literary affinities among apocryphal acts and hagiographical material must be conducted to bring to light other possible patterns. Nevertheless, in light of the affinity that the *Acts of Peter* shares with these texts, it seems *a propos* to question why scholars are compelled to treat the apocryphal texts as an isolated corpus rather than individual texts, each with varying affinities and resonances to other texts of the Christian literary tradition. Discourses of magic cut across genres; fascinating connections might be drawn if we learn to transgress literary boundaries. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that we now group the *Acta Petri* with texts like the *Suffering and Miracles of St. Julian*. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the very idea of an apocryphal corpus may offer little intellectual purchase when it comes to analyzing these texts. In fact, in the case of the unique discourse of magic contained in the narrative under present examination, positing a “canon” to which the *Acts of Peter* belongs obscures many of its more intriguing qualities and elides its kinship with other writings from Christian literary history. As we have seen, the *Acta Petri* betray similarities to heresiologies and hagiographies, inviting questions of the intellectual utility of generic classification.

## Part V. The *Acts of Peter* and Christian Magical Tradition

The *Acts of Peter* represents the clearest articulation of how narrated practices of magic work in tandem with rhetorical charges of magic. In the text, Simon Magus is cast as the epitome of evil – a characterization familiar in the heresiologists but not quite as sharp in the canonical Acts. Despite Simon’s dastardliness, he offers no theological viewpoint for the audience to critique. Instead, he is reviled because of his magic. His deeds draw believers away from the true God. Such an antagonist requires an equally capable protagonist, and Peter is characterized as a divinely-sanctioned magician whose extraordinary deeds combat those of Simon and bring lapsed believers back into the Christian fold.

The *Acts of Peter*, like some later hagiographies, foregrounds the utility of magical deeds in service of conversion and retention. These texts inspire awe and fear based on magic alone. Here, the magic is not merely a segue to theological ideation; it *is* theological ideation. This small assertion – that magic matters – bears significant implications. Our tendency to see the Christian magical tradition as a bastardization of “real” theology is an invention of modern sensibilities and modern prejudices. The Enlightenment unmasked all magic as illusion or charlatanry. And as a corollary, it has interiorized religious expression. This post-Enlightenment ideal informs our analysis of ancient texts. Religion, and Christianity in particular, becomes a rarefied, intellectual endeavor stripped of all so-called superstition. While many of our ancient Christian texts did in fact espouse an understanding of their tradition that required intellectual or behavioral investment to solidify faith, the *Acts of Peter* seek to enchant the would-be or lapsed believer through the magic alone.

This exclusive reliance on magic represents a marked departure from texts like the canonical Acts and the Gospel of Luke, where magic and message were combined in order to

advance the Christian agenda. In Luke, magic prefigures and portends and eschatological expectation by ousting demons and illnesses from among Jesus' followers. In Acts, the magic is used to put forward the message that Christianity is a cohesive unit, inclusive of Jews and Gentiles. In contrast, the magic in the *Acts of Peter* is there to demonstrate the awesome power of a God who can work wonders through agents that are far more impressive than those of outsiders.

The texts in the apocryphal acts, and in Christianity in general, do not betray a single cohesive discourse of magic. Rather, the magical is applied to various theological ends, not all of which are aimed at othering. A text like the *Acts of Peter*, with its emphasis on magical deeds, is an anomaly since most Christian texts couple magic with message, but it should not be disparaged as deviant. It, too, is part of a larger, multifaceted discourse of Christian magic.

## CONCLUSION: ARTICULATING THE UNCERTAIN

The *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* are written from the perspective of Clement of Rome. They include a rather philosophical account of Clement's travels to the East, where he meets Peter and witnesses Peter's many conflicts with Simon.<sup>648</sup> In one of the many theological discussions that litter the text, Peter is questioned by Niceta in the following manner:

In what regard did the Egyptians sin in not believing Moses, since the magicians wrought like signs, even although they were done rather in appearance than truth? For if I had been there then, should I not have thought, from the fact that the magicians did like things to those which Moses did, either that Moses was a magician, or that the magicians wrought their signs by divine commission? For I should not have thought it likely that the same things could be effected by magicians, even in appearance, which he who was sent by God performed. And now, in what respect do they sin who believe Simon, since they see him do so great marvels?<sup>649</sup>

Texts like these contribute to the scholarly assertion that magic operated exclusively as a rhetorical charge. Here, Niceta foregrounds the practical similarity between the Egyptian magicians' wondrous deeds and those of Moses. Their respective wonders are the same, and that similarity engenders theological confusion which Peter must then ameliorate through his teachings. It is no surprise that Sue Garrett begins her dissertation with the same text from the *Recognitions*.<sup>650</sup> Emphasizing the practical similarity of magical deeds in the face of

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<sup>648</sup> Elliott, *The New Testament Apocrypha*, 431.

<sup>649</sup> *Clementine Recognitions*, 3.57, trans. T. Smith, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903).

<sup>650</sup> Garrett, "Magic and Miracle in Luke-Acts," 1

rhetorical differentiation is in keeping with her larger methodology, and the methodologies of those with solely rhetorical interests.

But we can discern more nuance if we consider Peter's answer to Niceta's query: "For tell me, I pray you, what is the use of showing statues walking, dogs of brass or stone barking, mountains dancing, of flying through the air, and such like things, which you say that Simon did? But those signs which are of the good One, are directed to the advantage of men... (3.60)." If the Peter of the *Clementine Recognitions* is unimpressed by walking statues or barking stone and brass, then he may be equally unimpressed with the version of himself that is depicted in the *Acts of Peter*. Or perhaps he might be impressed, since the *Acta Petri*'s magical discourse is, in fact, mobilized towards "the advantage of [humankind]"?

My point is that no singular, overarching understanding can encompass the various modes in which the Graeco-Roman world, including Christians, conceived of the magical. Authors employed various strategies to marshal the discourse of magic and apply it to the particular theological ends they wished to pursue. In the *Pseudo-Clementine* literature, for example, the Simon Magus we encounter is not the same as the one who menaces the narrative in the *Acta Petri*. Edwards claims his heresy is at times Marcionite, though not indicative of a consistent Marcionism.<sup>651</sup> On the other hand, Côté sees anti-Paulinism in one passage (*Hom.* 17.14.2), but no thoroughgoing anti-Paul sentiment.<sup>652</sup> Simon Magus is both Marcionite and anti-Pauline, as contradictory as that seems. The reason for such a theological

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<sup>651</sup> Mark Edwards, "The Clementina: A Christian Response to the Pagan Novel," *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 462.

<sup>652</sup> Côté, "La fonction littéraire de Simon le Magicien dans les Pseudo-Clémentines," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 37 (2001): 515-16.

inconsistency is simple: Simon represents a composite figure, one representing multiple “heresies.”<sup>653</sup> Simon the Magician, in the Clementina, thus represents heresy in general.

Here, we encounter a clear connection between magic and heterodox religious belief.

As I explained in the introductory chapter, scholars have seized upon this association between magic and heresy. I am not convinced that magic represents heterodox religious belief in all formative Christian texts. In fact, when considered alongside broader Graeco-Roman discourses, it seems that the Christian literary tradition provides as much diversity in its conception of magic as its pagan counterparts.

In the Gospel of Luke, the practical aspect of magical discourse serves to distinguish Jesus as something more than a stereotypical magician. By stripping the more troubling aspects of the magical stereotype from his Markan source, Luke crafts an entirely ambiguous figure in Jesus. This ambiguity must be ameliorated in order to ensure that Luke’s audience reaches the proper conclusions. As a result, Luke imbues Jesus’ magic with eschatological expectation. With this nuance, Jesus becomes an agent of God who serves as a messenger for the coming Kingdom of God. His magical deeds, especially exorcisms, demonstrate the power and presence of the Kingdom and set God’s work against that of Satan.

In the canonical Acts of the Apostles, the practical magical deeds serve myriad ends. Destructive magic performed by Peter and Paul serves to compel conformity to specific Christian norms and to mitigate any threats to God or the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, parallel magical traditions between Luke’s two protagonists serve to elevate Paul to the level of Peter, providing him with the same authority as the leader of Twelve. Acts also employs

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<sup>653</sup> Côté, “La fonction,” 517-19; Edwards, “Clementina,” 562. See also Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Heresy in the (Judeo-)Christian Novel,” in Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zeller, eds., *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 280.

rhetorical strategies to differentiate the magic of Peter and Paul over and against that of outsiders. Only the designated leaders of emergent Christianity are agents of the Holy Spirit; only they have the legitimate power to work wonders in Jesus' name.

In the *Acts of Peter*, the magical practices narrated generate converts. Our author's emphasis on deeds rather than words contributes to a discourse of magic in which wonders are sufficient to ossify faith. This type of efficacy has certain affinities with later hagiographical material, prompting questions about the utility of generic compartmentalizations. Despite this emphasis on deeds, there is a rhetorical discourse of magic in the *Acta Petri*. Here, our author constructs Simon as a rather empty literary foil against which Peter's magical superiority is demonstrated. The purpose of such a characterization coalesces into clarity when we consider Peter's deeds as deeds corresponding to those done by magicians. This text must have an antagonist against which non-Christian magic is constructed simply because Peter's deeds could very easily be understood as the wrong sort of magic if no clarification is offered.

Far from demonstrating a cohesive, coherent idea of "Christian magic," these three texts present a fragmentary and contradictory set of discourses. And many other texts of formative Christianity remain unexplored. In the Petrine cycle alone, alongside the *Pseudo-Clementines*, we have the *Kerygmata Petrou*, and various accounts of Peter's martyrdom which also recount his wondrous deeds. If the pattern displayed in the texts treated here is any indication, each of these additional texts represents a unique discourse of magic that may provide nuance, confusion, or both to our ongoing understanding of Peter as magician, and more than – much like Jesus before him and Paul after.

I began this project with the premise that history is never sure. I do not wish to contradict that premise now by suggesting that the ways of understanding magical discourses outlined here are the *only* ways of understanding. I have prioritized a two-pronged approach, treating both practices of magic and the rhetorical charge of magic, but magic is far too slippery a concept to be neatly caught by any single method. My approach is one way of analyzing this material, and such an approach highlights but a few salient features of any given text. I have foregrounded the utility of magical practices, perhaps to the detriment of other facets of magical discourse. Other scholars will no doubt find new details in these and other Christian narratives.

That said, our texts do suggest one overarching constant: that like the images reflected in a stage magician's smoke and mirrors, the discourse of magic in the Graeco-Roman world shifts and turns, coalescing in one text and dissipating altogether before taking shape yet again in another. It is contrary at times, like Luke's excision of Mark's troublesome details in his Gospel and his subsequent re-introduction of them in his second volume. It is mobilized towards various ends: theological differentiation, to be sure, but rapprochement as well, alongside conversion and conformity to community standards.

History is never sure; our canons of knowledge are never secure. Our assertions are merely gestures at making meaning from smoke and mirrors. The history of magic in early Christianity may not offer perfect certainty, *per se*, but it does offer an appreciation for how deeply entrenched magical practices and magical ideation were to formative Christian identity.



We may not understand completely the ways in which magic inflected the world of the earliest Christians, but we do know that they lived in a world teeming with the magical. My aim here has been, in some small way, to re-enchant their history by demonstrating the vitality and dynamism attendant to ancient understandings of the magical.

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