

At the Crossroads of Ritual Practice and Anti-Magical Discourse in Late Antiquity: Taxonomies of Licit and Illicit Rituals in Leiden, Ms. AMS 9 and Related Sources

Joseph E. Sanzo

University of Warwick

Narratives and statements against illicit ritual or “magic” in the ancient Mediterranean world have received considerable scholarly attention over the past several decades.¹ Such scholarly attention is not without intellectual justification; the so-called “discourse of ritual censure” penetrated numerous genres and cultural contexts and in fact constituted one of the primary discursive registers through which ancient writers promoted, maintained, and reflected their social identities.²

This scholarly trend has not been lost on the study of early Christianity. Indeed, several helpful surveys of late antique Christian discourses against illicit or “magical” rituals have emerged over recent years.³ These more recent studies largely reject the approach of prior researchers, such as Alphons A. Barb, who took ecclesiastical testimonies against magic at face value and thus allowed these polemical sources to shape their portraits of late antique apotropaic and curative

¹ E.g., Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

² For the lexeme “discourse of ritual censure,” see David Frankfurter, “Beyond Magic and Superstition,” in *A People’s History of Late Antique Christianity*, ed. Virginia Burrus (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 255–84, at 257.

³ Frankfurter, “Beyond Magic and Superstition”; Francis C. R., *Thee Julius Africanus and the Early Christian View of Magic* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 316–448; H. F. Stander, “Amulets and the Church Fathers,” *Ekklesiastikos pharos* 75 (1993): 55–66; Valerine Flint, “The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, 277–348; Theodore de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 17–42; Joseph E. Sanzo, “Early Christianity,” in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 192–233.

practices.⁴ Scholars now tend to drive a firm wedge between the perspectives of late antique actors who slandered magic and those who practiced it. For instance, Theodore de Bruyn presupposes this dichotomy in the very structuring of his recent book on late-antique Christian amulets, formally separating his study of the statements against magic and the like by patristic, monastic, and other Christian writers from his analysis of the amulets themselves.⁵ David Frankfurter draws a firm distinction between literary depictions of magicians and the actual rituals of practitioners, even claiming that “we should not assume any overlap” between these two kinds of sources.⁶ In short, accusations against illicit ritual and ritual practice are typically seen to reflect two distinct domains of ancient social discourse.⁷

This division between normative discourses – Christian and otherwise – on the one hand, and the material evidence of practitioners, on the other hand, is useful insofar as it reminds us that anti-magic polemic was not designed to characterize ritual practices and their practitioners in an accurate fashion. Nevertheless, the strict adherence of scholars to this binary has, I think, obfuscated the extent to which some early Christian practitioners promoted their own taxonomies of ritual difference, which were framed in highly theological, polemical, and normative ways. Indeed,

⁴ E.g., Alphons A. Barb, “The Survival of Magic Arts,” in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1963), 100–25.

⁵ De Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 17–42. The title of this chapter, which includes a wealth of useful information, is “Normative Christian Discourse.”

⁶ David Frankfurter, “Ancient Magic in a New Key: Refining an Exotic Discipline in the History of Religions,” in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 3–20, at 7. I have also divided sources in this way in my publications (see e.g., Joseph E. Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt: Text, Typology, and Theory* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], 161–65).

⁷ Of course, such a dichotomous posture is not limited to early Christian studies. As part of his deconstructive analysis of the category magic for the study of antiquity, Bernd-Christian Otto drew a firm distinction between what he calls the “discourse of exclusion” (i.e., using “magic” in its negative sense and by outsiders) and the “discourse of inclusion” (i.e., the self-referential use of “magic” terminology among the insiders). Bernd-Christian Otto, “Towards Historicizing ‘Magic’ in Antiquity,” *Numen* 60 (2013): 308–47, at 319–39 (cf. idem, “Magic and Religious Individualization: On the Construction and Deconstruction of Analytical Categories in the Study of Religion,” *Historia Religionum: An International Journal* 9 [2017]: 29–52, at 44–50).

there are cases in which the worlds of ritual practice and fierce anti-magical invective intersect.

This paper focuses on one of the clearest examples of such intersection during late antiquity: *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* (a.k.a. P. Anastasy 9) – a late-antique Coptic codex with spells for exorcism, healing, and protection, which simultaneously engages in fierce rhetoric against illicit rituals.⁸ By highlighting the ways the practitioner behind this codex navigated the distinction between licit and illicit ritual in light of his late antique Mediterranean contexts, this paper also seeks to make a broader statement about anti-magic invective during late antiquity.

1. The Social Contexts of Christian Amulets and Formularies in Late Antiquity

A growing body of scholarship has properly recognized that many of the figures who procured Christian amulets and participated in other ostensibly “Christian magical” rituals operated within the social and spatial orbits of churches or monasteries.⁹ Indeed, diverse evidence from late antiquity suggests that the domains of monks, priests, and magicians overlapped considerably. In addition to numerous amulets and

⁸ For the *editio princeps*, see Willem Pleyte and Pieter A. A. Boeser, *Manuscripts coptes du Musée d'antiquités des Pays-Bas à Leide* (Leiden: Brill, 1897), 441–79. All translations of *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* in this essay have been taken from Smith (Richard Smith in Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999], 314–22). Unfortunately, Smith paginated this codex incorrectly, presumably on account of the unusual pagination habits of the practitioner; the practitioner begins pagination on the verso of folio 1 (which Smith counts as the recto of folio 1). In addition, the scribe has mistakenly paginated folio 7 as folio 8 and continues this incorrect pagination for the remainder of the codex (thus giving the impression that there is a total of 16 folios instead of 15, which is correct). In this article, I follow the practitioner’s correct pagination up to folio 7 (*contra* Smith); I then follow what should have been the correct pagination thereafter had the practitioner remained consistent throughout. I am grateful to Jacques van der Vliet for examining this codex in person and confirming my suspicions about Smith’s erroneous pagination.

⁹ E.g., David Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category ‘Magician,’” in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 115–35, at 128. On monasteries as a locus for the production of late antique “magical” materials, see David Frankfurter, Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Towards a New Taxonomy of ‘Magicians,’” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul A. Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 159–78, at 167–70; David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 226–39.

formularies, which cite or invent Christian creeds,¹⁰ list passages from the Christian scriptures,¹¹ or borrow from the Christian liturgy or local cult of the saints,¹² ecclesiastical canons occasionally condemn clergy for functioning as ritual experts. For instance, a fourth- or fifth-century CE Phrygian canon, which has been unhelpfully absorbed into a single “Council of Laodicea,” reads:

Those who are of the priesthood (ἱερατικούς), or of the clergy (κληρικούς), ought not be magicians, enchanters, numerologists, or astrologers; nor ought they make what are called amulets (φυλακτήρια), which are prisons for their own souls. Those who wear (such objects), we command to be cast out of the Church.¹³

Similarly, a Coptic canon falsely attributed to St. Athanasius entertains the possibility that a clergy member (κληρικός) might possess books of magic (ΖΕΝΧΩΜΕ ΜΜΑΓΙΑ) and demands that this deviant clerical burn his books and fast for three years in order to be readmitted into the “fellowship of Christ” (ΤΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ ΜΠΕΧΣ).¹⁴

¹⁰ E.g., G. H. R. Horsley, “93. Creedal Formula in a Christian Amulet against Fever,” in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 3, *A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1978*, ed. G. H. R. Horsley (North Ryde: Macquarie University, 1983), 114–19; Joseph E. Sanzo, “Wrapped up in the Bible: The Multifaceted Ritual on a Late Antique Amulet (P. Oxy. VIII 1077),” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24.4 (2016): 569–97, at 591–92.

¹¹ The use of biblical texts on amulets from late antiquity has become a burgeoning field of study in recent decades. See, for instance, Alessandro Biondi, “Le citazioni bibliche nei papiri magici cristiani greci,” *Stud.Pap.* 20 (1979): 93–127; Edwin A. Judge, “The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri,” in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen’s Sixtieth Birthday July 28, 1985*, ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 339–49; Theodore de Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchment, Ostraca, Tablets Written with Biblical Texts in Greek and Used as Amulets: A Preliminary List,” in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 145–89; Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits*; Brice C. Jones, *New Testament Texts on Greek Amulets from Late Antiquity* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016).

¹² For a recent discussion of the use of liturgical elements on Greek amulets, see de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 184–234.

¹³ Trans. taken from Stander, “Amulets,” 64 (slightly modified). On the problems with attributing this canon to a single Council of Laodicea, see P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IV^e–IX^e s.)*, vol. 1/2: *Les canons des synodes particuliers* (Vatican: Tipografia Italo-Orientale ‘S. Nilo’, 1962), 127–28; de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 39. On the implications of this canon for reconstructing early Christian notions of illicit ritual, see Sanzo, “Early Christianity,” 215–17.

¹⁴ Pseudo-Athanasius, Canon §71–72. For the original texts and English translations of these canons, see Wilhelm Riedel and Walter E. Crum, ed. and trans., *The Canons of Athanasius of Alexandria* (London 1904). On the date, see Riedel and Crum, *Canons*, xiv. On Christian book burning, see Dirk Rohmann, *Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity: Studies in Text and Transmission* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); Wolfgang Speyer, *Büchervernichtung und Zensur des Geistes bei Heiden, Juden und Christen* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1981).

Although priests and other clerical representatives almost certainly functioned as ritual experts within their local settings, there is also evidence linking the production of amulets and other ritual objects to Egyptian monasteries and monks. Shenoute of Atripe complained that monks provided local Christians with a wide range of *materia magica*, including snakes' heads (ⲉⲎⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲛ), crocodiles' teeth (ⲉⲎⲛⲁⲭⲉ ⲛⲙⲉⲙⲥⲁⲁ), and fox claws (ⲉⲎⲓⲉⲓⲃ ⲛⲃⲁⲩⲩⲟⲣ). He writes:

...at the time of suffering, those fallen into poverty or in sickness or indeed some other trial abandon God and run after enchanters or diviners or indeed seek other acts of deception, just as I myself have seen: the snake's head (ⲧⲁⲛⲉ ⲙⲛⲟⲩⲛ) tied on someone's hand, another one with the crocodile's tooth (ⲧⲛⲁⲭⲉ ⲙⲛⲉⲙⲥⲁⲁ) tied to his arm, and another with fox claws (ⲉⲎⲓⲉⲓⲃ ⲛⲃⲁⲩⲩⲟⲣ) tied to his legs—especially since it was an official who told him that it was wise to do so! Indeed, when I demanded whether the fox claws would heal him, he answered, “It was a great monk who gave them to me, saying ‘Tie them on you [and] you will find relief.’”¹⁵

As David Frankfurter has recently highlighted, this passage not only testifies to the relationship between monks and laity, but it also shows how monks could draw both on liturgical *eulogia* and local traditions in their rituals, “combining the fox claw amulet with monastic charisma, popular associations with the physical thing, and social understands of ritual healing.”¹⁶

The extant material evidence – especially textualized objects written in Coptic – likewise reflects this association between ritual practice and Egyptian monasteries.¹⁷ For example, a *grimoire* dating to the sixth or seventh century CE was found in a monk's cave in the vicinity of the monastery Deir el-Bakhit.¹⁸ This manual, which

¹⁵ Trans. taken from David Frankfurter, “Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt,” *J ECS* 11 (2003): 339–85, at 375.

¹⁶ Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 70.

¹⁷ For a recent catalogue of the ostensible “magical” texts written in Coptic, see Roxanne Bélanger Sarrazin, “Catalogue des textes magiques coptes,” *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 63/2 (2017): 367–408. Of course, it is difficult to determine in many of these artifacts whether the practitioner was in fact a monk.

¹⁸ P. Cairo 45060. Angelicus Kropp, *Ausgewählte Koptische Zaubertexte*, 3 vols. (Brussels: Édition de la Fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1930–31), vol. 1, no. K; Herbert E. Winlock and Walter E. Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, Part I* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926), 21, 207.

was buried in a jar, includes both ostensibly “magical” symbols (e.g., *vores magicae* and *charaktêres*) and a few traditional Christian expressions and symbols, such as a Trinitarian reference and the *nomen sacrum* for Jesus Christ (inscribed in an image of an upside-down rooster).¹⁹ Biblical and parabiblical texts associated with apotropaic practice have also been found on the walls of several tombs and anchorite grottos in Egypt and Nubia.²⁰ Although many examples date outside the temporal parameters of this paper (ca. XI–XII CE),²¹ the Coptic inscriptions on an eighth-century CE anchorite’s grotto in Nubia include the Nicene Creed, a tale of a monk’s battle with a serpent, and the Gospel *incipits*, the latter of which likewise appear on numerous Greek and Coptic apotropeia from late antique Egypt.²² Beyond this more direct evidence, it is also worth noting that monasteries were one of the few Egyptian institutions in which Coptic literacy was relatively prevalent.²³ To be sure, it is

¹⁹ For a fuller description of this artifact, see de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 84–85. A competitive incantation, which invokes three angels, was found in the monastic complex at Naqlun. For discussion, see Jacques van der Vliet, “Les anges du soleil: à propos d’un texte magique copte récemment découvert à Deir en Naqloun (N. 45/95),” in *Études coptes VII: neuvième journée d’études, Montpellier 3–4 juin 1999*, ed. Nathalie Bosson (Leuven: Peeter, 2000), 319–37; de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 84–85.

²⁰ Adam Łajtar and Jacques van der Vliet have conducted some of the most extensive work on these tombs and grottos (e.g., Adam Łajtar and Jacques van der Vliet, *Qasr Ibrim: The Greek and Coptic Inscriptions Published on Behalf of the Egypt Exploration Society* [Warsaw: The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, 2010], 261–76, 276–80; idem, “An Inscribed Tomb Chamber in Ukma-West,” in *Nubian Voices II: New Texts and Studies on Christian Nubian Culture*, ed. Adam Łajtar, Grzegorz Ochała, and Jacques van der Vliet [Warsaw: The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, 2015], 103–18). See also John M. Plumley, “Nubian Christian Numerical Cryptograms: Some Elucidations,” in *New Discoveries in Nubia*, ed. P. van Moorsel (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1982), 91–97; Stefan Jakobielski, “Das Kloster der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit: Bauphasen des nordwestlichen Anbaus,” in *Dongola-Studien: 35 Jahre polnischer Forschungen im Zentrum des makuritischen Reiches*, ed. Stefan Jakobielski and Piotr O. Scholz (Warszawa: ZAS-PAN, 2001), 141–68, at 164–65; Magdalena Ńaptaś, “Comments on Wall Paintings from ‘House A’ in Old Dongola,” in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit: Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster, 20.–26. Juli 1996*, vol. 1, ed. Stephen Emmel et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1999), 230–37.

²¹ As Adam Łajtar and Jacques van der Vliet note about the inscriptions of the Gospel *incipits* (and *exipits*) on tombs and anchorite grottos, “[t]here can be no doubt that this particular type of decoration had an apotropaic purpose and was designed to protect the tomb and its inhabitants dangers visible and invisible” (Łajtar and van der Vliet, “An Inscribed Tomb Chamber in Ukma-West,” 112).

²² For the *editio princeps*, see Francis L. Griffith, “Oxford Excavations in Nubia,” *LAAA* 14 (1927): 57–116. On the use of Gospel incipits on amulets, see Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits*, esp. 75–99.

²³ Cf. Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 10.

possible that individuals outside of the monastic or ecclesiastical spheres (e.g., administrative scribes) had the ability to compose ritual texts in Coptic that make use of biblical and parabiblical traditions.²⁴ Nevertheless, Frankfurter seems to be on the right track when he concludes that the Coptic apotropaic, curative, and divinatory objects from late antiquity “...point to the overlapping social worlds of saint’s shrine, church, and monastery – the spatial centers of Christianity in the late antique Egyptian landscape.”²⁵

2. Ritual Practice Meets Anti-Magic Discourse: *The Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory* in *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*

This shift in the social locus of ritual practice during late antiquity merged old and new cultural competencies – ritual, theological, among others. Aggregations of these competencies or literacies could at times crystalize in unexpected and even counterintuitive ways. One such unexpected manifestation appears in *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, a papyrus codex of fifteen folios (14.5 x 22 cm with a thickness of 5.3 cm),²⁶ which was originally part of the Anastasi collection, but was purchased by the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in 1828. This codex, which is complete with an ornamental leather cover, dates somewhere between the sixth and eighth centuries CE and was probably created by a monk.²⁷ The single scribe behind this codex

²⁴ Alexander Kocar’s recent analysis of the possible scribes behind two miniature divinatory codices from late antique Oxyrhynchus is useful in this regard (see Alexander Kocar, “Oxyrhynchus and Oracles in Late Antiquity,” in *My Lots are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and its Practitioners in Late Antiquity*, ed. AnneMarie Lujendijk and William E. Klingshirn [Leiden: Brill, 2019], 196–210, at 202–210).

²⁵ David Frankfurter, “*Sortes*, Scribality, and Syncretism: Ritual Experts and the Great Tradition in Byzantine Egypt,” in *Your Lots are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and its Practitioners in Late Antiquity*, ed. AnneMarie Lujendijk and William E. Klingshirn, with the assistance of Lance Jenott (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 211–31, at 215.

²⁶ Images of this artifact are available through the Rijksmuseum van Ouheden: <http://www.rmo.nl/collectie/zoeken?object=AMS+9>

²⁷ For the dating of this handbook, see Armando Petrucci, “From the Unitary Book to the Miscellany,” in *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture* by Armando

embedded promises of healing, exorcism, and various kinds of protection into a series of texts, which are written in Sahidic Coptic in an Alexandrian majuscule hand:²⁸ an otherwise unattested *Prayer and Exorcism of Saint Gregory*, an anonymous text, which might be usefully titled, “Hear my Exorcism”;²⁹ the *Letter of Abgar to Jesus*; the *Letter of Jesus to Abgar*; the *Prayer of Judas Cyriacus*; a list of the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus; a list of the names of the 40 Martyrs of Sebaste; the Gospel *incipits*; and LXX Ps 90:1–2.

My analysis will focus on its opening text, the so-called *Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory*, situating it within the contexts of both ancient ritual objects and anti-magic invective. As we will see, this text shows how even the very Christians whose ritual practices might draw ecclesiastical accusations of “magic” could promote clearly demarcated and theological sensitive notions of licit and illicit rituals – what we might usefully describe as a distinction between religion and magic. Accordingly, ostensibly “magical” artifacts, such as *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, were not merely the objects or victims of discourses against magic, but they were also participants in such discourses, promoting their own taxonomies of ritual practice to the exclusion of others. This point, I will further argue, carries implications for how we might imagine discourses of illicit ritual working in late antique lived religion.

2.1. Ritual Practice in *The Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory*

Petrucci, ed. and trans. Charles M. Radding (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1–18, at 10; John A. Szirmai, *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 43 n. 6. On the possibility that it might have been part of a monastic library, see de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 87; M. P. A. Boeser, “Deux textes coptes du Musée D’antiquités des Pays-Bas à Leide,” in *Recueil d’études égyptologiques dédiées à la mémoire de Jean-François Champollion: à l’occasion du centenaire de la lettre à M. Dacier relative à l’alphabet des hiéroglyphes phonétiques, lue à l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres le 27 septembre 1822* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1922), 531–535, at 531.

²⁸ On some of the problems associated with the titles of these texts in the original edition and in subsequent translations, see Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits*, 82, n. 31 and n. 32.

²⁹ The phrase, “Hear my exorcism” (ϣⲟⲩⲧⲙⲉ ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲉⲟⲣⲓⲥⲙⲟⲥ [read ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲉⲟⲣⲓⲥⲙⲟⲥ]) is repeated several times throughout this short text: e.g., 7v, ll. 22–23; 8v, l. 1–2, 7; 9r, ll. 11–12.

In the *Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory* – an otherwise unattested text, which was presumably created by this practitioner – we find a first-person Christian tradition (attributed to a certain ‘Gregory’), which is explicitly called a “prayer” (ΕΥΧΗ) and an “exorcism” (ΕΞΟΡΓΙΣΜΟΣ [read: ΕΞΟΡΚΙΣΜΟΣ]).³⁰ The text begins as follows:

A prayer and exorcism that I wrote, I, Gregory, the servant of the living god, to become an amulet (ΦΥΛΑΚΤΗΡΙΟΝ) for everyone who will receive and read it ... (*Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 1r, 1–13).

As is well known, the first-person narrative was one of the means by which ritual experts achieved efficacy. In the case of *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, the practitioner assumed the identity of a Christian authoritative figure named Gregory. This Gregory, who is hailed in the text as a saint (ΑΓΙΟΣ),³¹ could be Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89) or perhaps even Gregory Thaumaturgus (ca. 212–ca. 270).³² Whatever the case might have been, there are other pseudepigraphic Coptic spells in which the practitioner – or the prospective client – takes on the identity of an authoritative person or preternatural entity. For instance, *Brit. Lib. Or. 5987*, a Coptic spell which probably dates from the seventh or eighth century CE, reads, “For I am Mary, who is hidden in the appearance of Mariam. I am the mother who has given birth to the true light.”³³ Another sixth or seventh-century CE Coptic practitioner takes on the personae of several angelic and divine entities, including Michael, Ouriel, Iaô, Sabaôth, Gabriel, and Abrasax.³⁴

³⁰ In the introduction to his English translation of *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, Richard Smith reasonably concludes that it is likely that the practitioner had in mind either Gregory of Nazianzus or Gregory Thaumaturgus (Richard Smith in Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 311).

³¹ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 7v, l. 13. He is also called “the servant of the living God” (ΠΕΜΒΛΛ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΤΟΝΩ), which, as I argue below, forms part of his considerable knowledge of early Christian traditions and terminology (*Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 1r, l. 3).

³² On the identification of Gregory in this manuscript, see Smith in *Ancient Christian Magic*, 311; Boeser, “Deux textes coptes,” 531 (who is sceptical that one can identify the intended Gregory).

³³ Translation by Richard Smith in *Ancient Christian Magic*, 131 (no. 70). For the *editio princeps* (and the proposed date), see Walter E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1905), 418–20.

³⁴ *P. Macq. I 1* (P. Macq. Inv. 375), ll. 8, 17–27 (*ed. princ.* Malcolm Choat and Iain Gardner, *A Coptic Handbook of Ritual Power* [Turnhout: Brepols, 2013]).

The labels our practitioner uses to describe *The Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory* are worth noting; as we have already seen, he explicitly claims that his “prayer” (εΥΧΗ) or “exorcism” (εΞΟΡΚΙΣΜΟΣ) becomes an “amulet” (ΦΥΛΑΚΤΗΡΙΟΝ [hereafter: *phylactêrion* or *phylactêria* (plural)]).³⁵ Yet, despite this initial claim of transformation, the practitioner continues to call his text a *prayer*, even when it is clearly used as an amuletic object; the specialist notes not only that his “prayer” (εΥΧΗ and its cognates) can be read³⁶ and recited,³⁷ but that it can also be deposited³⁸ and worn,³⁹ and has the capability to deflect the “violent deeds” (ΝΑΧΙΝΘΟΝΣ) of the “magician” (ΜΑΓΟΣ [hereafter: *magos*]) back upon him.⁴⁰ As is clear from this text, the practitioner conceptualized prayers and *phylactêria* as overlapping on textual, material, depositional, and functional registers.⁴¹

This practitioner’s emphasis on the language of prayer no doubt worked in dialogue with his well-informed Christian faith, evinced by a rather impressive knowledge of global Christian traditions about God and biblical history. In addition to the various Christian texts included in the codex (e.g., Abgar-Jesus correspondence; the Prayer of Judas Cyriacus), he also uses numerous Christian expressions, such as

³⁵ Peter Artz-Grabner and Kristin De Troyer have recently noted that the emphasis of *phylactêrion* falls not on its suspended quality (in contrast to *amuletum* and περίαπτον/περίαμια), but more generally “to the power attributed to [the object]” (Peter Artz-Grabner and Kristin De Troyer, “Ancient Jewish and Christian Amulets and How Magical They Are,” *Biblische Notizen* 176 [2018]: 5–46). As we have seen above, the canon from the so-called “Council of Laodicea” condemns *phylactêria* and demands that those who make use of such objects be excommunicated. On the placement of *phylactêrion* within the wider ancient Mediterranean world of protection, see Christopher Faraone, *The Transformation of Greek Amulets in Roman Imperial Times* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 185–87.

³⁶ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 1r, l. 5; 4v, l. 27.

³⁷ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 1v, l. 21; 2r, l. 25; 3r, l. 10; 3v, l. 26.

³⁸ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 1v, l. 28; 3r, l. 12; 4r, ll. 25–26; 5r, l. 1; 6r, l. 27.

³⁹ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 1v, l. 21; 4r, l. 1

⁴⁰ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 3r, l. 15–3v, l. 7

⁴¹ On the relationship between prayer, magic, and religion, see Fritz Graf, “Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual,” in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic & Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 188–213.

“the servant of the living god” (π̄ζ̄μ̄ζ̄αλ μ̄π̄νο̄υτε̄ ε̄το̄ν̄ζ̄),⁴² the “Holy Trinity” (τε̄τρ̄ῑᾱς̄ ε̄το̄ῡᾱᾱβ̄),⁴³ “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (π̄ε̄ῑω̄τ̄ μ̄π̄ε̄ν̄χ̄ο̄ε̄ῑς̄ ῑς̄ π̄ε̄χ̄ς̄),⁴⁴ and the “holy, consubstantial, and life-giving Trinity” (τε̄τρ̄ῑᾱς̄ ε̄το̄ῡᾱᾱβ̄ ν̄ζ̄ο̄μ̄ο̄ο̄ῡγ̄ῑο̄ν̄ λ̄γ̄ω̄ ν̄ρ̄ε̄φ̄τ̄ᾱν̄ζ̄ο̄).⁴⁵ Moreover, we find the following summary of the Exodus and Decalogue narratives, which are bracketed by adjuration formulae:⁴⁶

I adjure all you violent deeds, by the great and glorious name (of) god almighty, who brought his people out of the land of Egypt with a strong hand and a raised arm, who struck Pharaoh and his entire force, who spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai, who gave his law and his commandments to the children of Israel and made <them> eat manna, that you flee far away and not at all continue to stay in the place where this prayer is deposited (*Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 4r, ll. 5–26).⁴⁷

This practitioner’s knowledge of several (extra-)canonical Christian texts, Christological and Trinitarian expressions, and the Exodus story and Moses’ reception of the Decalogue suggests that, if not a monk, he at least had considerable training in biblical traditions. In either case, the practitioner’s substantial religious education allowed him to use these biblical traditions as historical precedents for the might of God, whose name supports the adjuration of the “violent deeds” (ν̄χ̄ῑν̄ζ̄ο̄ν̄ς̄).

⁴² *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 1r, l. 3; 1v, l. 1; 4v, l.1. In 2r, ll. 24–25, we find a similar phrase: “(Gre)gory, the servant of Jesus (Christ)” ([ΓΡΗ]ΓΟΡΙΟΣ Π̄Ζ̄Μ̄Ζ̄ΑΛ ΝΙΣ [Π̄ΕΧ̄Σ]).

⁴³ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 7r, ll. 12, 13; 7v, l. 5. *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* also includes an extended Trinitarian statement: “The father and the son and the holy spirit are unified, and unity is a Trinity. It is a single divinity with three realizations, with a single lordship and a single rule and a single power, and a single activity with every authority, and a single person, and a single baptism, a single lord, a single god, the father and the son and the spirit” (*Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 6v, ll. 12–28). In addition, *The Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory* concludes with the following acclamation: “The holy Trinity must be with us. Glory and honor and greatness and power to the holy, consubstantial, and life-giving Trinity, now and at all times, forever and ever, Amen” (*Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 7v, ll. 5–12). On the use of Trinitarian formulae on Greek amulets, see de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 195–97.

⁴⁴ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 1v, ll. 2–3; 1v, ll. 16–17; 4v, ll. 5–6.

⁴⁵ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 7v, ll. 9–12 (trans. Smith in *Ancient Christian Magic*, 318 [modified]).

⁴⁶ Theodore de Bruyn emphasizes that practitioners often frame “a customary incantation by incorporating Christian elements at the beginning or the end” of the ritual text (*Making Amulets Christian*, 91). In the case of *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, however, the practitioner has framed a “Christian” narrative with “customary” incantations.

⁴⁷ This rather positive presentation of the “children of Israel” (Ν̄Ω̄Η̄Ρ̄Ε̄ Μ̄Π̄ῙΗ̄Λ̄) stands in marked contrast to the fierce anti-Jewish invective in other parts of this codex (esp. *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 11r, ll. 16–12r, l. 6; 10r, ll. 4–12). On this anti-Jewish invective, see fn. 84 below.

2.2. Discourse Against Illicit Rituals in *The Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory*

As part of the *Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory*, the practitioner also discusses the negative rituals that his *phylaktêrion* counteracts. What I find particularly interesting about this discussion is how the practitioner frames these negative rituals. For instance, he deems the illicit ritual activities of the *magos* both demonic (6r, l. 14) and as an operation of the devil (7r, ll. 19–20). The practitioner also emphasizes the theme of evil. We read that his amuletic-prayer will “destroy every action (ἐνεργία) that is instigated by evil people, whether sorcery, or incantations, or binding of people by various diseases ... (1r, l. 1–13).” In this passage, the practitioner slanders as “evil” (πονηρός) the people who engage in “sorcery” (μῆντρῆφρζῖκνε), “invocations” (μῆντρῆφμοῦτε), and the “binding of people by various diseases” (ζενμῆντρῆφμοῦρ ἄζενρῶμε ἄν ζενῶῶνε εὔῶῶβε). In another section of this text, the practitioner requests that the person in possession of this *phylactêrion* be spared from “every wicked and every evil thing” (ζῶβ ἄνιμ ἄπονηρός ἀῶ εἰεῶῶῶ).⁴⁸

Beyond the link to evil and the demonic, *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* also connects illicit ritual with ethnic alterity.⁴⁹ The practitioner explicitly lists Persians, Chaldeans, Hebrews, and Egyptians among the unsavory characters, whose rituals he aims to counteract (3r, ll. 26–3v, l. 5): “whether the person is...a male Persian or a female Persian, or is a Chaldean or a female Chaldean, or is a Hebrew or a female Hebrew, or is an Egyptian or female Egyptian, in general, whoever it is.”⁵⁰ Of course, the

⁴⁸ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 4r, ll. 2–4.

⁴⁹ Cf. Juvenal, *Satires* 3.58–78.

⁵⁰ On the association of Chaldeans and Egyptians with the inventors of astrology and occult sciences among Greek-speaking people, see Salvatore Costanza, “Fateful Spasms: Palmomancy and Late Antique Lot Divination,” in *My Lots are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and its Practitioners in Late Antiquity*, ed. AnneMarie Luijendijk and William E. Klingshirn (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 78–100, at 90. Jews were also commonly associated with illicit ritual activity (e.g., Augustine, *De civitate dei* 22.8; Chrysostom, *Adv. Jud.* 8.5). By the time our practitioner was writing, the Persians had long been linked to the ritual via the μαγ-stem (see Jan Bremmer, “The Birth of the Term Magic,” *ZPE* 126 (1999): 1–12, esp. 2–4). See also Pliny, *HN* 30.1–13. On ethnic alterity and magic more generally, see Faraone, *Transformation*, 8–9.

Egyptian men and women mentioned here would have presumably possessed a different kind of alterity for this *Egyptian* practitioner. In any case, the practitioner's list no doubt operated synecdochically, encompassing all possible magicians by way of reference to a few ethnic exemplars, as is especially evident from the inclusion of the final phrase "whoever it is" (πῆτ ἐντοῦ πῆ).

The practitioner also provides a considerable list of the harms, which these troublemakers cause, including not only "magic" (μῆτμαγοῦ), but also actions which "produce terror and convulsions and dumbness and deafness and speechlessness and disgrace and pains of every kind" (4r, l. 27–4v, l. 20). As we will see below, this list of potential troubles (especially "speechlessness") reflects widespread fears about the nature of harmful magic in the ancient world.⁵¹ The practitioner also seems to be drawing on popular ideas about magic – and perhaps even lived experience – when he enumerates the various places that the *magos* might practice his craft or deposit harmful objects. He asks God to do away with violent deeds directed against a place, which has been bound with a ritual object, whether that object is:

...hidden in its foundations, or in its open places, or at its entrance, or at its exit, or by the door, or by the window, or in the sleeping room, or in the livestock pen, or in the dining room, or in the central courtyard, or in the field, or with the fruit, or in the orchards, or in a garment...or in any place (*Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, 2r, l. 18–2v, l. 20*).

Although the final, all-encompassing phrase, "in any place" (ἐν τῷ τόπῳ πῆ) would have sufficed, this practitioner – as we have already seen – has invested considerable value in the paratactic list.⁵² In this passage, it is clear that he assumes that the

⁵¹ On the various ailments ancient writers attributed to magic, see Gordon's paper in this issue.

⁵² Of course, this practitioner is by no means alone in the value he attributes to the list. For the use of lists in ancient magical contexts, see Richard Gordon, "What's in a List? Listing in Greek and Graeco-Roman Malign Magical Texts," in *The World of Ancient Magic: Papers from the First International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4–8 May 1997*, ed. David R. Jordan, Hugo Montgomery, and Einar Thomassen (Bergen: The Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1999), 239–77.

domestic sphere is particularly susceptible to attack. That this fear was widespread in Egypt and beyond is evident from the other practitioners, who expressed the need to protect the house.⁵³ To offer just one example, *P.Oxy.* 8.1152, a late-fifth or early sixth-century CE amulet from Oxyrhynchus: “Hôr, Hôr, Phôr, Elôei, Adônai, Iaô, Sabaôth, Michaël, Jesus Christ. Help us *and this house* (καὶ τοῦτο οἶκον). Amen.”⁵⁴

3. Anti-Magic Discourse and Ritual Practice: Lived Religion at the Intersection of Ritual, Greco-Roman, and Christian Contexts

It is useful at this point to situate our Coptic practitioner within the world of claims against illicit ritual practice – what we might tentatively call negative magic. Taxonomies and accusations of magic or illicit ritual in antiquity were disputed within and across various social, literary, and institutional contexts. As I hope to demonstrate, the distinction in *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* between the practitioner’s positive *phylactêrion* and adjurations, on the one hand, and the incantations, idols, sorcery, and bindings of the evil, demonic *magos*, on the other hand, demonstrates how the diverse cultural competencies of practitioners might crystalize into taxonomies of licit and illicit ritual, which, while differing from those of certain church leaders, were still clearly demarcated and theologically oriented.

This practitioner’s claim that his prayer could be used as a *phylactêrion* placed him within a robust early Christian debate about the proper boundaries of ritual practice. Indeed, the term *phylactêrion* was evaluated in various ways within early Christian imagination. Much like *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, many papyrus and parchment

⁵³ On the late-antique home as a perceived space of vulnerability and thus in need of protection, see Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 54–63.

⁵⁴ Arthur S. Hunt, ed., “1152. Christian Amulet,” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 8, ed. Arthur S. Hunt (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1911), 253.

amulets from Egypt and many amuletic gems from various regions of the ancient Mediterranean use *phylactêrion* as a self-designator.⁵⁵

On the other side of the spectrum, we have already seen that the Phrygian canon – falsely attributed to a single Council of Laodicea – condemned the production of *phylactêria* by clericals and priests and demanded excommunication for their users. In addition, an early sixth-century Coptic copy of the so-called Apostolic Tradition⁵⁶ bars from baptism a host of illicit ritual practitioners, ranging from the *magos* to the “the one who makes *phylactêria*” (ΠΕΤΤΑΜΙΟ Ν̄ΖΕΝΦΥΛΑΚΤΗΡΙΟΝ).⁵⁷ To be sure, not all church leaders upheld such a negative posture against *phylactêria*, presumably on account of their mostly beneficial functions. Commenting on Matthew 23:5, in which Jesus criticized the Pharisees for drawing attention to themselves by, *inter alia*, broadening their *phylactêria*,⁵⁸ Jerome and John Chrysostom both draw a comparison between the Pharisees and the curative/prophylactic uses of Gospel objects by women.⁵⁹ While these authors do not frame this ritual practice in a particularly favourably way, they do not forbid congregants from using biblical artifacts for prophylactic or curative purposes.⁶⁰

Although the self-identification of *Leiden, Ms AMS 9* as a *phylactêrion* launched the practitioner and his object into a cultural fray, his slandering of negative

⁵⁵ E.g., *P. Haun. III 51*; *P. Heid. inv. G 1386*; *P. Köln inv. 851*.

⁵⁶ W. Till and J. Leipoldt, ed. *Der koptische Text der Kirchenordnung Hippolyts* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1954), 12.

⁵⁷ *Trad. Ap.* 16.14. Till and Leipoldt, *Kirchenordnung Hippolyts* 12. On the tradition of prohibiting practitioners of illicit rituals from participating in baptism and catechesis in late antique and early medieval Christianity, see de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 36–37.

⁵⁸ This is the only New Testament passage in which the term *phylactêria* occurs and the first attested instance in which the Greek *phylactêria* are equated with the Jewish *tefillin* (Yehudah Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text: Tefillin in the Ancient World* (Providence, RI 2008), 110). On the apotropaic function of *tefillin* in antiquity, Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text*; R. S. Fagen, Phylacteries, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:368–79.

⁵⁹ Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 4.23.5; John Chrysostom, *In Matth. hom.* 72. Both writers are likely referring to artifacts with only a few Gospel passages (not entire codices). For discussion, see e.g., De Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchment,” 160; Stander, “Amulets,” 57; Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits*, 161–65.

⁶⁰ On this point, see especially Sanzo, “Early Christianity,” 235–36; Robert Matthew Calhoun, “The Gospel(-Amulet) as God’s Power for Salvation,” *Early Christianity* 10 (2019): 21–55.

ritual – or what we might call magic – merged less controversial discourses within and across ritual and ecclesiastical spheres. His claim that the rites of the *magos* fell squarely within the realm of the devil and his demonic minions certainly resonated with global Christian discourses about illicit ritual. This theme is present in the anti-magic testimonies of several late-antique church writers. As early as Justin Martyr, we find the connection between demons and the world of *mageia* and its cognates:

For we forewarn you to be on your guard, lest those demons (δαίμονες) whom we have been accusing should deceive you, and quite divert you from reading and understanding what we say. For they strive to hold you their slaves and servants; and sometimes by appearances in dreams, and sometimes by magical impositions (διὰ μαγικῶν στροφῶν), they subdue all who make no strong opposing effort for their own salvation.⁶¹

For Justin, illicit ritual activity constituted one of the primary ways demons deceive believers. The demonic association continued to characterize ecclesiastical denunciation of illicit ritual throughout late antiquity, for example in the work of writers such as Tertullian of Carthage (160–220 CE), Origen of Alexandria (184–253 CE), Arnobius of Sicca (255–330 CE), and Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE).⁶²

This demonic–ritual interface was also a persistent motif among ancient practitioners. A wide array of sources from the Mediterranean and ancient Near East include counter-magical incantations, which link rituals harmful for their clients with evil spirits and demons. Although examples are not in short supply, we might consider a certain Jewish Babylonian Aramaic incantation bowl now housed in the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, which requests that Goray son of Buzanduk and his family be spared from a host of malevolent forces, including: “...all evil spirits, demons, plagues, devils, afflictions, satans, bans, tormentors, spirits of barrenness,

⁶¹ Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 14:1–3 (translation taken from Marcus Dods and George Reith in ANF 1). See also Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 26.2, 4; 56.1; *2 Apol.* 5; *Dial.* 85.3.

⁶² E.g., Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 1.2.1, 2.10.2–3; Origen, *Contra Cels.* 6.40; Arnobius of Sicca, *Adv. nat.* 1.43; Augustine, *De doct.* 2.20.30. For a useful discussion of this motif in early Christian literature, see Flint, “The Demonisation of Magic.”

spirits of abortion, sorcerers, vows, curses, magic rites, idols, wicked pebble spirits, errant spirits, shadow spirits, liliths...and all evil doers of harm.”⁶³ This bowl – and many others from late antique Mesopotamia – stand alongside *Leiden, MS. AMS 9* in promising protection from the intersecting worlds of illicit ritual and malicious spiritual attack.

The association of illicit ritual with a host of ethnic others – including Persians, Chaldeans, Hebrews, and Egyptians – also transcended the ostensible divide between the worlds of practitioners, early patristic writers, and Greco-Roman writers in general. For instance, James Nathan Ford and Ohad Abudraham have recently published a lacunose Syriac incantation bowl (T27983) written in Manichaean script, which utilizes ethnic categories to organize ritual practices considered harmful to the client, emphasizing, among others, the Arab, Persian, and Jewish origins of the witchcraft (*ḥrsʿ*).⁶⁴ Likewise, the redactor behind the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* participated in the far-reaching ethnographic stereotype linking Egypt with magic when he placed on the lips of the fictional Clement the following words:

I shall proceed to Egypt, and there I shall cultivate the friendship of the hierophants or prophets, who preside at the shrines. Then I shall win over a magician by money, and entreat him, by what they call the necromantic art, to bring me a soul from the infernal regions, as if I were desirous of consulting it about some business.⁶⁵

As David Frankfurter has noted, this third or fourth-century text merely provides a Christian version of an Egyptomania already well embedded in literary imagination,

⁶³ Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1993), 115 (bowl 15).

⁶⁴ James Nathan Ford and Ohad Abudraham, “Syriac and Mandaic Incantation Bowls,” in *Finds Gone Astray: ADCA Confiscated Items*, edited by Dalit Regev and Hananya Hizmi (Jerusalem: The Antiquities Department of the Civil Administration, 2018), 75–111, at 77–78. This practitioner occasionally confuses the *ḥēṭ* and the *hē* and, therefore, uses both the spellings *ḥrsʿ* as *hrsʿ*.

⁶⁵ Pseudo-Clemen, *Rec.* 1.5 (trans. taken from David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999], 218).

evident in the writings of Lucian, Apuleius, and others.⁶⁶ We might say that *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* presents an even later version of this tradition.

The practitioner's resonance within and across Greco-Roman and Christian contexts is also found in his description of the signs that might indicate the operation of illicit ritual. As I noted above, he emphasizes that the negative rituals, which his *phylaktêrion* counteracts, inflict a wide range of harms, including those that affect communication (esp. "speechlessness" [ἄγλωσση]).⁶⁷ The belief that imprecatory utterances could alter speech was central to the ritual texts of several *defixiones*, especially those concerned with influencing judicial rulings. For instance, a *defixio* from Athens dating to around 300 BCE includes the following words:

Theagenês, the butcher/cook, I bind (καταδῶ) the tongue and soul and speech (λόγον) that is practicing. Purrias, I bind the hands and feet and tongue and soul and speech that he is practicing...Dokimos, the butcher/cook, the tongue and soul and speech that they are practicing...If they lay any counterclaim before the arbitrator or the court, let them seem to be of no account, either in word (ἐ[ν λό]γῳ) or in deed.⁶⁸

As is clear from such curse tablets, practitioners believed they could negatively impact the speech abilities of individuals, so that they could not, *inter alia*, perform properly in court.

The idea that there were harmful rituals, which could affect one's speech, also crept into early Christian literary imagination. Jerome mentions in his *Life of Hilarion* that a young man wielded an amatory spell against a young Christian girl, with whom he was smitten. We learn that, on account of the spell, "...the virgin went mad, threw aside her veil, tore her hair, gnashed her teeth, and shouted the name of the young man (*inclamare nomen adolescentis*)" (21.4). Like the practitioner behind *Leiden, Ms.*

⁶⁶ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 218. Cf. Lucian, *Lover of Lies* 34; Apuleius, *Metam.* 2.27–29. See also Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 218–20.

⁶⁷ *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, 4r, 1.27–4v, 21.

⁶⁸ Trans. taken from John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 131–32 (no. 44).

AMS 9, Jerome's tale presupposes that spells could alter one's bodily movements, including speech. Indeed, according to this story, the young girl was unable to control her verbal utterances – involuntarily calling out the name of her curser – up until the moment Hilarion exorcized the spirit inside her.

Scholars have tended to understand the counter-magical practices on ritual objects, such as *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, by and large in dialogue with a kind of pragmatically oriented notion of magic: in other words, if a ritual helps the client (even if it harms someone else), it is presented as positive; if it harms the client, it is framed as negative. In short, this perspective assumes that practitioners' views of ritual practice were primarily – or exclusively – determined by the practical needs of their clients – and could change accordingly. This interpretation is not without supporting evidence. Yuval Harari has recently highlighted how the overlaps between protective and aggressive magic in the Jewish incantation bowls from Mesopotamia suggest that practitioners served a dual function for clients:

On the one hand, they [the practitioners behind the bowls] functioned as agents of harmful magic in the service of whoever wanted to harm another. On the other, they offered protection from such acts of witchcraft with the same linguistic and ritual means, but this time to offset the witchcraft. We need not assume that the same writer was responsible for both aspects in any particular case, but in the broad social perspective reflected in the bowls, as professionals skilled in the activation of ritual power in the service of the individual, they served the interests of both parties.⁶⁹

The textual overlaps between apotropaic, curative, and imprecatory incantation bowls from Mesopotamia are quite intriguing and lend credence to the idea that *some* practitioners might have created both protective and aggressive bowls. Nevertheless, a purely pragmatic interpretation of the counter-magical testimonies on such objects frames *a priori* their approaches to ritual differentiation solely within the ostensible

⁶⁹ Yuval Harari, *Jewish Magic before the Rise of Kabbalah*, trans. Batya Stein (Detroit; Wayne State University Press, 2017), 248.

world of magic – as a quasi-capitalistic sphere of social existence in which religious beliefs or identities were irrelevant or unimportant.⁷⁰

But, as we have seen, the practitioner behind *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* not only shares a good deal with ancient practitioners, but he also finds kindred spirits among early Christian writers, framing his anti-magical statements in a highly theological way. For instance, he calls his *phylaktêrion* a “prayer” (ΕΥΧΗ); he draws on well-known trinitarian and Christological phrases and Christian textual traditions; and he associates other practitioners with demons and the devil and calls them and their rituals “evil” (ΠΟΝΗΡΟΣ), placing that evil in direct contrast to his Christian ritual practice. This theological dimension should not necessarily be surprising since, as I noted above, much scholarship over the past couple decades has shown that Christian ritual experts during late antiquity were often monks, priests, and others operating within or on the margins of Christian institutions, such as monasteries and churches. Again, in my estimation, our practitioner was likely a monk – or at least trained in a monastery.

Like many early Christian writers, this practitioner presumably drew from a host of traditions about evil rituals that cut across the ostensible worlds of early Christian literature, Greco-Roman literature, and ritual practice. And, like these Christian writers, he framed his presentation of negative ritual in Christian theological terms. In short, he fully participated in what we might call anti-magical discourse. It is no wonder, therefore, that, although the practitioner’s promotion of his *phylaktêrion* put him in direct opposition to the taxonomies of illicit ritual found in the Canon of Laodicea and the Coptic copy of the *Apostolic Tradition*, his theologically oriented distinction between his *phylaktêrion* and the rituals of the *magos* aligns quite closely

⁷⁰ For the claim that religious identities were not “activated” in ostensibly magical contexts, see Éric Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 CE* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), 73.

with the presentations of certain Christian heroes' counter-magical activities. For instance, in his fourth-century *Life of Antony*, which was highly influential, Athanasius of Alexandria attributes to Antony the following words: “[w]here the sign of the cross is made, sorcery (μαγεία) wastes away and poison (φαρμακεία) does not work.”⁷¹ Much like Antony, who is here said to have rendered *mageia* and *pharmakeia* ineffective by virtue of his ritual gesturing of the cross, the practitioner behind *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* seems to have understood his “prayer” (εὔχη) or “amulet” (*phylaktêrion*) to be an antidote to illicit rituals. Consider also Marcarius of Egypt, who, according to one tradition, was said to have counteracted a love spell that turned a young girl into a mare with a combination of prayer, genuflection, and *materia magica* (i.e., sacred oil).⁷² This confluence of speech (specifically prayer), gesture, and material in Marcarius' story is not altogether different from the way *The Prayer of Gregory* is said to have worked as a protective device.

Of course, one might productively frame the counter-magical materials in *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* and in these and other Christian (monastic) texts together within the world of late antique ritual or magical practice.⁷³ But, in addition to “lowering” the monks to magicians, it seems to me equally interesting to allow the monastic testimonies to “lift up” ancient practitioners by demonstrating that the use of what we might call “magical rituals” did not necessarily stifle anti-magical sentiment.

⁷¹ *Vit. Ant.* 78.5 (SC 400:334); trans. based on John Wortley, “Some Light on Magic and Magicians in Late Antiquity,” *GRBS* 42 (2001): 289–307. Cf. Athanasius, *De incarn. Verbi Dei* 47–48. For the influence of the Antony tradition on subsequent vitae, see, for instance, William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 97–100.

⁷² *Historia monachorum* (Greek) 21.17 (see also Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 17.6–9; Rufinus, *Historia monachorum* [Latin] 28.3.1–4). For discussion of the differences between the accounts of this story in the *Historia monachorum* (Greek) and in Palladius, see David Frankfurter, “The Perils of Love: Magic and Countermagic in Coptic Egypt,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001): 480–500, at 480–81. For discussion of the differences between the Greek and Latin versions of this story in the *Historia monachorum*, see Andrew Cain, *The Greek Historia Monachorum in Aegypto: Monastic Historiography in the Late Fourth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 262–65.

⁷³ See, for instance, Frankfurter, “The Perils of Love.”

Differences in genre notwithstanding, the counter-magical rituals in *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* align with those described in the monastic literary texts – at least insofar as they map early Christian symbols, materials, and gestures vociferously hailed as non-magical, legitimate, and god-fearing onto long-standing Mediterranean counter-magical paradigms. In this way, we might say that in all of these sources anti-magic discourse was linked to alternative – and “proper” – ritual practice.

By attending to this merging of anti-magic testimony and ritual practice, we can better contextualize and understand discourses against illicit ritual in late antique lived religion. The Coptic practitioner’s promotion of his *phylaktêrion* was in no way in conflict with his firm distinction between proper and improper rituals. To state the matter somewhat differently, he did in fact presuppose a concept that resembles our category “magic” (in its negative sense), but it did not encompass the recitation, suspension, or deposition of a *phylaktêrion* (in contrast, again, to certain ecclesiastical voices).⁷⁴

Of course, *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* is unique because it gives us an extraordinarily clear expression of a strongly demarcated Christian taxonomy of licit and illicit rituals, which conflicts with conventional portraits of early Christian ritual practice. Nevertheless, this Coptic codex seems to reflect a broader trend in late antiquity. For instance, the practitioner behind *Brit. Lib. Or. 6796(4), 6796* – a late sixth- or early-seventh century CE Coptic spell for exorcism – distinguishes his text from illicit rituals, such as “sorcery” [ΦΑΡΜΑΚΩ] and “magic” [ΜΑΓΙΑ], and from demons.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ It is important to note that other late antique practitioners occasionally classified *phylactêria* and *mag(e)ia* under a single category of ritual practice. In fact, the practitioner behind *Brit. Lib. Or. 1013A*, an eighth-century CE amulet that includes a binding spell for a dog, uses both *phylactêrion* and *magia* to describe his own ritual activities (*Brit. Lib. Or. 1013A*, ll. 14, 20). For the *ed. princ.* of *Brit. Lib. Or. 1013A*, see A. Erman, “Zauberspruch für einen Hund,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache* 33 (1895): 132–35 (= *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 123).

⁷⁵ *Brit. Lib. Or. 6796(4), 6796*, ll. 34–40 read: “...cast out every unclean spirit of the defiled aggressor, from a hundred years downward and twenty-one miles around, whether a male demon (ΤΕΜΟΝ [read ΔΑΙΜΩΝ]) or a female demon (ΤΕΜΟΝ [read ΔΑΙΜΩΝ]), whether a male potion (ΦΑΡΜΑΚΩ

patristic and conciliar voices; both objects, *inter alia*, draw from the long-standing practice of inscribing *charaktères* on ritual texts when they incorporate rings around the letters of select divine names (*Brit. Lib. Or. 6796[4]*, 6796, ll. 53–59; *P. Vindob. K 8302[a]*, ll. 6–8).⁷⁹ Indeed, Augustine explicitly condemned the use of such *caracteres*, emphasizing their demonic origin and their association with the “art of magic” (*magicarum artium*).⁸⁰

Alongside the evidence gleaned from such ritual objects, literary texts occasionally suggest that alternative taxonomies of ritual practice could even be held by users of ostensibly “magical” materials. In *Homily 8 in Colossians 5*, John Chrysostom includes a hypothetical conversation he has with a Christian woman, who uses an “incantation” (ἐπιφθῆ): “Tell me, then, if someone says, ‘Take him to an idol’s temple, and he will live,’ would you allow it? ‘No’ she says. ‘Why not?’ ‘Because he is urging me to commit idolatry. ‘In this case,’ she says, ‘there is no idolatry (εἰδωλολατρεία), but only incantation (ἐπιφθῆ).’”⁸¹ If we focus on the perspective of this hypothetical woman, the passage seems to corroborate what we find in the material record: people who participated in what certain ecclesiastical leaders regarded as illicit rituals could themselves have clearly demarcated notions of licit vs. illicit ritual, which were at least partially impacted by normative Christian traditions. Indeed, for this hypothetical woman, participation in the temple cult constituted an illicit, idolatrous practice. We do not find here an absence of normative Christian ritual, but a different configuration of it than the one Chrysostom promoted.

It is, of course, not surprising that those participating in ostensibly “magical” rituals during late antiquity would appropriate the symbols and idioms of early

⁷⁹ For a helpful analysis of *charaktères*, see R. Gordon, “Charakterês between Antiquity and Renaissance: Transmission and Re-Invention,” in *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l’Antiquité à la Renaissance*, ed. V. Dasen and J.-M. Spieser (Florence: Sismel, 2014) 253–300.

⁸⁰ Augustine, *De doct.* 2.20.30.

⁸¹ Trans. taken from de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 29.

Christian institutions.⁸² Theodore de Bruyn has persuasively demonstrated the great extent to which practitioner's drew upon the symbols, rituals, and idioms of what he calls "the institutional Christian culture."⁸³ But, if we examine the evidence with an eye toward broader Mediterranean discourses of licit and illicit ritual, many of the extant "magical" objects reveal another kind of ecclesiastical impact; they gesture toward a world in which at least some late antique ritual practitioners and participants were also influenced by *Christian normativity itself* (even if they adhered to different versions or configurations of normative Christian discourse).⁸⁴ Accordingly, individuals whom ancient ecclesiarches or contemporary scholars might call *magoi* could themselves happily condemn *mageia* and *magoi*, complete with the usual claims of demonic influence or exotic ethnic origin. Evidence of this kind reveals the co-existence of *different configurations* of illicit ritual, which were no less vehement or clearly demarcated than those promoted by many late-antique church leaders.⁸⁵ These diverse, yet clearly demarcated, configurations of ritual practice should prompt us to consider a broader methodological point: what appears to be blurred boundaries between magic and religion relative to our inherited categories should not necessarily

⁸² The "magical" use of symbols drawn from the dominant tradition is by no means unique to late antiquity. In his classic articulation of doxa, orthodoxy, and heresy, Pierre Bourdieu argued, *inter alia*, that the heretical power of figures, such as "sorcerers," must rely on the "authorizing language" of orthodoxy, even when those sorcerers challenge their orthodox antagonists (P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 159–71]).

⁸³ De Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*.

⁸⁴ In my opinion, Theodore de Bruyn thus draws too strong of a distinction between "normative" Christian discourses and amulets (see de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, esp. 17–42).

⁸⁵ The insistence in *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, in particular, upon normative and clear-cut boundaries between licit and illicit ritual also resonates with the approach to clear-cut boundaries between religious insiders and outsiders articulated in this codex. This emphasis upon religious outsiders is especially evident in the practitioner's anti-Jewish invective. Despite his positive presentation of the "children of Israel" in his descriptions of the exodus from Egypt and of Moses' reception of the Decalogue on Mount Sinai (see above), this practitioner displays elsewhere a generally hostile attitude toward the Jews. On the taxonomic and methodological implications of his approach to ostensibly "Jewish" elements and anti-Jewish invective, see Ra'anan Boustan and Joseph E. Sanzo, "Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms, and the Shared Magical Culture of Late Antiquity," *The Harvard Theological Review* 110.2 (2017): 217–40, at 235–37. On the implications of this passage for the threat posed by amuletic production to ecclesiastical leaderships, see Joseph E. Sanzo, "Magic and Communal Boundaries: The Problems with Amulets in Chrysostom, *Adv. Iud.* 8, and Augustine, *In Io. tra. 7*," *Henocho* 38.2 (2017): 227–46.

be taken to imply blurred boundaries – or a lack of interest in ritual differentiation – in our ancient sources. What at first glance seems to be a melting pot turns out on further inspection to be more like a collage.

As a corollary to this point, the objects and texts that I have discussed seem to shed light on the proliferation of discourses against magic in late antiquity. Discourses against illicit ritual did not merely come from the highest echelons of society (e.g., ecclesiastical and political elites), but also seem to have come from minor local practitioners (whether monks or priests) and perhaps even from parishioners. These various actors constructed taxonomies of ritual difference in dialogue with several – at times intersecting – cultural competencies – theological, ritual, ascetic, and the like. The boundary between illicit and licit ritual – or, might we dare say, magic and religion – was in effect being negotiated within and across multiple social strata.

To be sure, condemnations of illicit practices in these sources do not make claims against specific individuals and do not focus on legal arbitration.⁸⁶ What is more, the particular taxonomies of local practitioners or parishioners would probably not have had as broad of an impact or influence as those operating more directly or officially within institutional centers of Christianity.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the denunciations of illicit ritual in *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* and related texts suggest that *discourses* of ritual censure, including claims of improper ritual behavior, might have been regular features of late antique quotidian life.

4. Conclusions

⁸⁶ For examples of witchcraft accusations against specific individuals, see the article by Almuth Lotz in this volume.

⁸⁷ On the relationship between institutional power and cultural influence in Judaism, see Ra'anan Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow, eds. *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1–28.

In conclusion, this paper focused on *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9*, a Coptic papyrus codex that demonstrates how developments at the intersection of late-antique ritual practice and anti-magic discourse might reveal themselves in late antiquity. Its Egyptian practitioner drew from a repository of traditional tropes against *magoi* (e.g., their foreignness, their harmful practices, and demonic influence), many of which also made their way into early Christian anti-magic literary traditions. His ritual practice likewise reflects his adroit ability to navigate the intersection of early Christian and traditional Mediterranean ritual discourses. He not only incorporated into his codex a wide range of Christian idioms and insisted on referring to his text as a “prayer” (εὐχῆ) – which he attributed to a Christian authority – but he also made use of long-standing invocatory formulae and assumed the validity of well-established traditions regarding the recitation, deposition, and suspension of textualized objects.⁸⁸

The approach to negative ritual found in *Leiden, MS. AMS 9* is especially worth noting since it carries broader implications for the study of late antiquity. Despite the claims that his prayer could function as an “amulet” (*phylaktêrion*) – thus placing him in direct opposition with certain church leaders (e.g., those behind the so-called “Council of Laodicea” and the Coptic copy of the “Apostolic Tradition”) – the practitioner operated according to strict distinctions between proper and improper ritual. This Coptic codex ought to remind us, therefore, that Christian objects, which appear to us to blur the boundaries between “religion” and “magic,” might in fact simply reflect different configurations of licit and illicit ritual – no less stringently demarcated than those of ecclesiastical and political elites. Indeed, as heirs to local ritual practices, Christian idioms, and both traditional Mediterranean and Christian discourses of ritual censure, individuals operating within or on the margins of

⁸⁸ For a useful analysis of continuity and innovation in early Christian uses of *charitêsia*, see Theodore de Bruyn, “An Anatomy of Tradition: The Case of the *Charitêsion*,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 16 (2015): 31–50.

monasteries and churches could integrate invective against *mageia* and the like into their Christian healing, exorcistic, and apotropaic rituals without any hint of intellectual tension or contradiction. All indications suggest that, despite the claims of certain Christian leaders, local specialists often viewed their amulets and spells as falling squarely within the world of Christianity. For them, *mageia* was the antithesis of what they were doing and, therefore, needed to be condemned and combatted. The verbal strategies and contexts that *Leiden, Ms. AMS 9* embodies thus give palpable expression to the multiple discursive worlds behind and created by anti-magic statements.