

**Magic and Communal Boundaries: The Problems with Amulets in Chrysostom,  
*Adv. Iud. 8, and Augustine, In Io. tra. 7***

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A late antique canon falsely attributed to the Council of Laodicea fiercely prohibited both ecclesiastical leaders from functioning as ritual experts and Christians from visiting such practitioners:

Those who are of the priesthood, or of the clergy, ought not be magicians (μάγους), enchanters (ἐπαοιδούς), mathematicians (μαθηματικούς), or astrologers (ἀστρολόγους); nor ought they make what are called amulets (φυλακτήρια), which are chains for their own souls. Those who wear (such objects), we command to be cast out of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

This canon is remarkable for several reasons. First, it reflects a movement toward conceptualizing illicit rituals and their actors as a discrete domain of social existence.<sup>2</sup> Second, this canon supports the extant material record, which also implies that during late antiquity ecclesiastical representatives worked as ritual experts, and parishioners went to

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<sup>1</sup> Transl. H. F. Stander, “Amulets and the Church Fathers,” *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 75 (1993), pp. 55-66, at p. 64 (slightly modified). For the benefit of the reader, I have included Stander’s translations of the various Greek terms used for ritual specialists. It should be stressed, however, that such English terminology hardly reflects the ancient, native (or “emic”) perspective (cf. D. Frankfurter, “Comparison and the Study of Religions of Late Antiquity,” in C. Calame - B. Lincoln (eds.), *Comparer en histoire des religions antiques: Controverses et propositions* [Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2012], pp. 83-98, at p. 85). On the late fourth- or early-fifth century C.E. collection of Phrygian canons attributed to the Council of Laodicea, see P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IV<sup>e</sup>-IX<sup>e</sup> s.)*, vol. 1/2: *Les canons des synodes particuliers* (Vatican: Tipografia Italo-Orientale ‘S. Nilo’, 1962), pp. 127-128; T. de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> See also Pseudo-Athanasius, Canon 41 (cf. Canons 25, 71, and 72). For the Arabic and Coptic texts and English translations of these canons, see W. Riedel - W.E. Crum., *The Canons of Athanasius of Alexandria* (London-Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1904). On the placement of canons condemning ritual practices, their practitioners, and their clients within the broader development of early Christian notions of illegitimate ritual, see J.E. Sanzo, “Imagining Illegitimate Ritual in Early Christian Literature,” in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

them for concerns over health, demonic struggle, and the future.<sup>3</sup> To that end, the souls of the clergy who manufacture φυλακτήρια (i.e., objects worn on the body for healing and for protection from demons) are said to don “chains” (δεσμοτήρια) – presumably a kind of invisible φυλακτήριον ironically signifying eternal damnation. At the same time, this canon threatened those who wore φυλακτήρια with excommunication from the church and thus placed outside of salvation. The message is clear for both practitioners and their clients: avoid φυλακτήρια or face eternal punishment.

The final section of this canon, which deals with the production and use of φυλακτήρια, also provides a convenient starting point for thinking about the dangers that curative ritual objects might have posed to ecclesiastical leadership. The canon admits that Christians visited clerical practitioners to procure φυλακτήρια. Assuming at least a partial convergence between the ritual practices described in this canon and the late antique material record, the term φυλακτήρια would imply that these Christians sought protection from demons<sup>4</sup> or relief from illness or disease.<sup>5</sup> But why would such rituals pose a danger and thus need to be condemned? The figures behind this canon do not explain the nature of this danger. They simply take for granted that clients, practitioners, and ritual objects are a problem that must be removed from the church.

The silence on this danger in the ‘Laodicean’ canon might simply reflect the canonical genre, which often consists of mere prescriptions and condemnations. Of course, this canon is not the only text we have condemning the manufacture and usage of protective and curative objects; in fact, one can find patristic statements against such devices in theological treatises, homilies, and epistles – to name just a few genres.<sup>6</sup> Yet,

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<sup>3</sup> On the relationship between amulets and priests, monks, and other ecclesiastical functionaries, see D. Frankfurter, “Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Towards a New Taxonomy of ‘Magicians,’” in P.A. Mirecki - M.W. Meyer (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141; Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 159-178.

<sup>4</sup> For such ritualized objects, see e.g., P. Haun. III.51, P. Heid. Inv. G. 1386, P. Coll.Youtie II 91; CBd-1497 ([http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/cbd/1497?multiple\\_cond=and&description1=Jesus](http://www2.szepmuveszeti.hu/talismans/cbd/1497?multiple_cond=and&description1=Jesus)).

<sup>5</sup> For such ritualized objects, see e.g., BKT VI 7.1.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of this evidence, see Sanzo, “Imagining Illegitimate Ritual.” To be sure, not all of these statements match the ‘Council of Laodicea’s’ hardline stance against φυλακτήρια. For instance, in their commentaries on Matt 23:5, both Jerome and John Chrysostom draw an analogy between the use of *phylacteria*/φυλακτήρια by the Pharisees and contemporary women’s uses of ritual objects with biblical content: *parvulis Evangelii* (Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 4.23.5) and *εὐαγγέλια* (Chrysostom, *In Matth. hom.* 72). While Jerome and Chrysostom do not paint this practice in a particularly positive light, neither of them calls for the excommunication of the women who use these *phylacteria*/φυλακτήρια. It should be noted that Jerome and Chrysostom (and other authors) almost certainly referred to the suspension

such discussions of illicit rituals of healing or protection were almost always embedded within texts or broader arguments devoted to other concerns and themes. The various categories of protective and curative objects that intersect with our rubric “amulet,” for instance, were often presented as illustrations or specific examples of these other kinds of dangers.

This essay teases out the perceived problems with curative ritual objects in two patristic homilies: John Chrysostom’s eighth *Homily against Judaizing Christians* (*Adv. Iud.* 8) and Augustine’s seventh *Tractate on the Gospel of John* (*In Io. tra.* 7). Despite these homilies’ numerous rhetorical flourishes, their sustained interest in curative ritual objects provide precious insight into the types of dangers that amulets might have actually posed for early Christian leadership. I demonstrate that – in keeping with the genre of the homily – these two texts map the dangers of protective and, especially, curative objects onto perceived local and occasional dangers to the boundaries of their Christian communities. I then contextualize the testimonies of Chrysostom and Augustine with a brief discussion of the complex functions of boundaries in applied curative objects from late antique Egypt. I argue that this evidence might offer further insight into the nature of the danger to communal boundaries that the testimonies of Chrysostom and Augustine imply. I conclude by highlighting how the intersection of amuletic danger and local danger in the homilies likely reveals a larger perceived concern for ecclesiastical leadership – namely, that the various stages of apotropaic and curative ritual encouraged social and symbolic exchanges between local Christian and non-Christian communities and groups. Such exchanges could in turn produce configurations of religious boundaries out of step with those promoted by church functionaries.

## **I. John Chrysostom, *Adv. Iud.* 8**

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of objects with portions of biblical texts and not entire Gospel codices (e.g., T. de Bruyn, “Papyri, Parchments, Ostraca, and Tablets Written with Biblical Texts in Greek and Used as Amulets: A Preliminary List,” in T.J. Kraus - T. Nicklas (eds.), *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach* [Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 5; Leiden: Brill, 2010], pp. 145-189, at p. 160; Stander, “Amulets,” p. 57; J.E. Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt: Text, Typology, and Theory* [Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 84; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], pp. 161-165).

During the years 386 and 387 C.E., John Chrysostom delivered a series of eight homilies in Antioch which focused on a group of Christians that were participating in the activities of the local Jewish community. These eight homilies are known collectively as the *Homilies against the Judaizing Christians (Adv. Iud.)* – not against the “Jews” – since Chrysostom is primarily interested in reproving believers in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

One of Chrysostom’s major grievances in these homilies is that many Antiochene Christians were visiting Jewish ritual specialists in order to obtain ritual objects for healing. This complaint is especially prominent in his eighth and final homily against the Judaizing Christians, which, as Wendy Pradels, Rudolf Brändle, and Martin Heimgartner have shown, was probably delivered on 19 September 387 C.E. (shortly after the fall Jewish feasts had ended).<sup>8</sup>

His words against amulets and other rituals of healing considered illicit cluster in chapters 5-8 of this homily and form an integral part of his main argument that one ought never give up on believers who fall into sin, specifically the sin of participating in Jewish festivals and rituals.<sup>9</sup> Chrysostom introduces his discussion of ritual objects as part of a prescriptive, yet hypothetical, conversation between a Judaizer, on the one hand, and a Christian who is attempting to save that Judaizer, on the other hand. In this conversation, the Christian is supposed to emphasize, among other things, the Jewish role in the death of Christ and the punishment in Gehenna that awaits the Judaizer for running to Christ’s foes. But, Chrysostom asks, what if, in response to these points, the Judaizer brings up the cures of the Jewish practitioners? Chrysostom responds to his own question, “Then you must reveal the tricks they use, the spells (τὰς ἐπωδὰς), the suspended/worn ritual objects (τὰ περιάμματα), and the potions (φαρμακείας).”<sup>10</sup> For Chrysostom, though the

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<sup>7</sup> See Saint John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians* (transl. P.W. Harkins; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1979), p. x. All translations of these sermons come from Harkins unless otherwise stated.

<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, the discovery and publication of a lost portion of Homily 2 has allowed for a more precise dating of these homilies (W. Pradels - F. Brändle - M. Heidmgartner, “Das bisher vermisste Textstück in Johannes Chrysostomus, *Adversus Judaeos*, Oratio 2,” *ZAC* 5 [2001], pp. 23-49; Id., “The Sequence and Dating of the Series of John Chrysostom’s Eight Discourses *Adversus Judaeos*,” *ZAC* 6 [2002], pp. 81-89). The results were as follows: *Adv. Iud.* 1 (date 386); *Adv. Iud.* 5 (Yom Kippur, 387); *Adv. Iud.* 4 (29 August, 387); *Adv. Iud.* 2 (5 September, 387); *Adv. Iud.* 6 (10 September, 387); *Adv. Iud.* 7 (12 September, 387); *Adv. Iud.* 8 (19 September, 387).

<sup>9</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.1-4 (PG 48.927-935); 8.9 (PG 48.941-942).

<sup>10</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.5.6 (PG 48.935.20-22): ἀνακάλυψον αὐτῶν τὰς μαγανείας, τὰς ἐπωδὰς, τὰ περιάμματα, τὰς φαρμακείας. Translation modified.

Jews have a reputation for healing, they are, for the most part, charlatans. Yet even if they were actually able to heal, he argues, “...it is better to die than to run to God’s enemies and be cured that way.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, health and safety in this world may come at the expense of your eternal salvation.

Chrysostom then frames the issue in historical terms; he discusses several biblical figures – including Job, the man cured at the pool of Bethesda, and Lazarus – who did not turn to ritual experts in their times of need.<sup>12</sup> In Chrysostom’s mind, contemporary Christians have no excuse for visiting Jewish practitioners since these holy heroes endured horrific suffering.<sup>13</sup>

Turning from history to metaphor, Chrysostom compares the Christian who goes to a Jewish ritual specialist to a slave who, after being punished, seeks shelter among his master’s enemies.<sup>14</sup> As Chrysostom asks rhetorically, “If you get some slight illness, will you reject him as your master and rush off to the demons and desert over to the synagogues?”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, for Chrysostom, to visit a Jewish ritual specialist in a synagogue is to commit a sin that not only sears one’s “conscience” (συνειδός),<sup>16</sup> but also leaves the client without an excuse on judgment day.<sup>17</sup>

But what ought this sick Christian do? Although Chrysostom specifically encourages believers to participate in the cult of martyrs for healing – perhaps alluding to the converted tomb of the Maccabean martyrs in Antioch – Christians, in his mind, should be prepared to suffer through the fever and other ailments. In fact, for Chrysostom, the Christian who dies from fever is akin to the martyrs:

You will stand with the martyrs on that day... [because] you chose this day to be flogged and racked with fever and wounds rather than submit to ungodly spells (ἐπωδάς) and suspended/worn ritual objects (περίπτα).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.5.6 (PG 48.935.26-27): βέλτιον ἀποθανεῖν, ἢ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς τοῦ Θεοῦ προσδραμεῖν, καὶ τοῦτον θεραπευθῆναι τὸν τρόπον.

<sup>12</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.6.5 (PG 48.936.33-45).

<sup>13</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.6.6 (PG 48.936.45-55).

<sup>14</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.6.7-8 (PG 48.936.56-48.937.10).

<sup>15</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.6.10 (PG 48.937.29-31): ἀλλ’ ἂν μικρά τις γένηται νόσος, εὐθέως ἀποπηδᾷ αὐτοῦ τῆς δεσποτείας, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς δαίμονας τρέχεις, καὶ πρὸς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτομολεῖς.

<sup>16</sup> On the importance of συνειδός and cognates in Chrysostom more generally, see D. Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Divinations: Rereading Late Antique Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), pp. 14-15.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Adv. Iud.* 8.6.11 (PG 48.937.44-52).

<sup>18</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.7.3 (PG 48.938.17-18; 20-23): μετὰ τῶν μαρτύρων στήση κατ’ ἐκείνην τὴν ἡμέραν... οὕτω καὶ σὺ σήμερον εἴλου μαστίζεσθαι καὶ βασανίζεσθαι παρὰ τοῦ πυρετοῦ καὶ τῶν τραυμάτων, ὥστε μὴ

What is more, even if the Jewish practitioner cures this fever, there will surely be another fever and, even if there is not, everyone will eventually die.<sup>19</sup> Thus, argues Chrysostom, “insult those sorcerers (τοὺς ἐπωδοὺς) and drive them from your house.”<sup>20</sup> Chrysostom insists that such a rebuke of Jewish experts will not only result in eternal reward; it will also result in praise during this lifetime from faithful Christians who learn of this rebuke.<sup>21</sup>

Chrysostom concludes his thoughts on forbidden healing objects and practices by returning again to the theme of martyrdom: “If you reject the spells (τὰς ἐπωδάς), the potions (τὰς φαρμακείας), and the charms (τὰς μαγγανείας), and if you then die of your disease, you will be a perfect martyr.”<sup>22</sup> But, argues Chrysostom, if you accept the kinds of healing the Jewish practitioners can provide, you compromise the faith because “you consider [the Jews] more worthy of your belief than God, even if you do not say it in so many words.”<sup>23</sup>

In assessing the nature of the perceived danger, we must first address the question of Jewish ritual experts in Antioch. Many scholars have assumed a one-to-one correspondence between Chrysostom’s representation of a robust Jewish magical community in Antioch and social reality.<sup>24</sup> Yet Chrysostom is the primary evidence we have for Jewish ritual specialists in Antioch during this period. To be sure, numerous

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προσίεσθαι ἄσεβεῖς ἐπωδάς μηδὲ περιάπτα. Cf. *Adv. Iud.* 8.7.13 (PG 48.939.38-46). Translation modified. It should be noted that Chrysostom seems to use *περιάπτα* and *περιάμματα* synonymously (on this point, see A. Bendlin, “Phylakterion,” in H. Cancik *et al.* (eds.), *Brill’s New Pauly* [Brill Reference Online; 1 Aug. 2017]).

<sup>19</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.7.4 (PG 48.938.24-25).

<sup>20</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.7.5 (PG 48.938.34-35): Ὅταν γὰρ ἐκβάλῃς τοὺς ἐπωδοὺς μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς ὕβρεως ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας.

<sup>21</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.7.5 (PG 48.938.35-43).

<sup>22</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.8.4 (PG 48.940.16-18): Οὕτω καὶ σὺ, ἂν διακρούσῃ τὰς ἐπωδάς καὶ τὰς φαρμακείας καὶ τὰς μαγγανείας, καὶ ἀποθάνῃς τῇ νόσῳ, μάρτυς ἀπρητισμένος εἶ.

<sup>23</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.8.5 (PG 48.940.32-34): τοῦτους ἀξιοπιστοτέρους ἐκείνου νομίζεις εἶναι δι’ ὧν ποιεῖς, κἂν μὴ λέγῃς τοῦτο τοῖς ῥήμασιν.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., M. Simon, “La polémique anti-juive de S. Jean Chrysostome et le mouvement judaïsant d’Antioche,” in *Mélanges Franz Cumont* (Annuaire de l’Institut de philologie et d’histoire orientales et slaves 4; vol. 1; Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1936), pp. 403-421, at pp. 407-408; Id., *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)* (transl. H. McKeating; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 355-358, 366-367; R.L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 83-87; L. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 405; S. Trzcionka, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth-Century Syria* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 124.

incantation bowls, amulets, and spells written in Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic confirm the existence of Jewish ritual experts in neighboring regions during late antiquity and beyond.<sup>25</sup> It is, therefore, possible that there were at least some Jewish practitioners living in Antioch and that some Christians visited them to acquire aids for healing. But one cannot establish on the basis of material evidence the vibrant world of Jewish practitioners that Chrysostom implies.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, not all perceived dangers are firmly grounded in reality; world history is replete with examples of groups or societies that felt threatened by caricatures or constructs, which had little-to-no basis in fact.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of the reality on the ground, it seems likely that, within the minds of Chrysostom and his audience, the ubiquity of Jewish practitioners in Antioch was a deeply entrenched stereotype and concern.<sup>28</sup> In fact, were it not, Chrysostom's audience would probably have had a difficult time understanding his sermon.

But what was so dangerous – real or imagined – for Chrysostom and his faithful followers about healing rituals, curative objects, and Jewish practitioners? As Katelyn Mesler has recently argued, Chrysostom's concerns in the eighth homily had little to do

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<sup>25</sup> E.g., J. Naveh - S. Shaked. *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1998); Id., *Magic Spells and Formula: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1993); S. Shaked - J.N. Ford - S. Bhayro. *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, Vol. 1. (Leiden: Brill, 2013). Cf. M. Moriggi, *A Corpus of Syriac Incantation Bowls: Syriac Magical Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia* (Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity 3; Leiden: Brill, 2014). On Jewish magic more generally, G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Y. Harari, *Jewish Magic Before the Rise of Kabbalah* (Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology; Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> On the tension between Chrysostom's presentation of Jews and social reality more generally, see already J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study of the Origins of Antisemitism* (London: The Soncino Press, 1934), pp. 163-166. We must also not lose sight of the fact that these homilies – despite coming down to us in written form – were originally performed orally. As Wendy Mayer has noted, it is difficult – if not impossible – to establish what was changed in the process of transferring Chrysostom's oral communication to written word (W. Mayer, "John Chrysostom: Extraordinary Preacher, Ordinary Audience," in M.B. Cunningham - P. Allen (eds.), *Preacher and His Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics* [A New History of the Sermon 1; Leiden: Brill, 1998], pp. 105-137, at p. 108).

<sup>27</sup> Consider, for instance, the paranoia in America during the late 1980s and early 1990s over alleged Satanic ritual performed in daycare centers (D. Frankfurter, "The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic as Religious Studies Data," *Numen* 50 [2003], pp. 108-117). For a broader psychological analysis of such phenomena, see J. de Rivera - J.R. Sarbin, *Believed-In Imaginings: The Narrative Construction of Reality* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Of course, illegitimate healing practice was not the only domain for which Chrysostom and his ilk slandered the Jews. For an analysis of accusations of Jewish sexual carnality, see S. Drake, *Slandering the Jew: Sexuality and Difference in Early Christian Texts* (Divinations: Rereading Late Antique Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

with illicit Jewish rituals – or, as she puts it, “magic” – *per se*.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Chrysostom reflects an interest in Jewish rituals only in so far as it relates to Christians – specifically Christians in his Antiochene community. Although it is difficult to differentiate rhetorical strategy from perceived danger in this homily, Chrysostom seems to have been upset – perhaps erroneously – because Jewish practitioners in Antioch were interacting with local Christians.<sup>30</sup> In particular, Chrysostom especially highlights that Christians were *visiting* Jewish practitioners in synagogues in order to participate in healing rituals, which often involved ritual objects. In a passage we have already seen, Chrysostom asks, “If you get some slight illness, will you reject him as your master and rush off to the demons and desert over to the synagogues?”<sup>31</sup> In response to this apparent practice, Chrysostom dissuades such Judaizers from visiting synagogues for healing by claiming that Jewish practitioners will mock them: “You profess you are a Christian, but you rush off to their synagogues and beg them to help you. Do you not realize how they laugh at you, scoff at you, jeer at you, dishonor you, and reproach you?”<sup>32</sup>

This transgression of spatial boundaries between Jewish and Christian communities is an important theme and concern in the homilies against Judaizing Christians more generally. In these homilies, Chrysostom closely aligns religious identity with space. In fact, in his fifth homily (delivered only 10 days earlier than the eighth homily), Chrysostom called on the Judaizers to demonstrate their faith, in part, by staying away from synagogues:

I want them then to show themselves sincere and genuine Christians. I want them to flee (φεύξονται) the evil gatherings of the Jews and their synagogues, both in the city and in the suburbs, because these are robbers’ dens and dwellings of demons.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> K. Mesler, “Legends of Jewish Sorcery: Reputations and Representations in Late Antiquity and Medieval Europe” (PhD Dissertation; Northwestern University, 2012), p. 149.

<sup>30</sup> I believe Mesler goes too far in assuming that Chrysostom’s entire construction of Jewish magic was simply a rhetorical device to demonstrate the dangers of “misplaced faith” (e.g., visiting synagogues).

<sup>31</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.6.10 (PG 48.937.29-31). See n. 15 above.

<sup>32</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.8.9 (PG 48.941.5-9): Χριστιανὸς μὲν εἶναι ὁμολογῶν, πρὸς δὲ τὰς ἐκείνων τρέχων συναγωγὰς, καὶ τῆς παρ’ ἐκείνων δεόμενος βοηθείας; Οὐκ ἐννοεῖς, ὅσον σου καταχέουσι γέλωτα, ὅσα σκώμματα, ὅσην γλευσσίαν, ὅσην αἰσχύνην, ὅσον ὄνειδος.

<sup>33</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 5.12.12 (PG 48.904.20-25): εἰλικρινῆ καὶ γνήσιον τὸν Χριστιανισμὸν ἐπιδείξονται, καὶ τὰς πονηρὰς φεύξονται τῶν Ἰουδαίων διαγωγὰς καὶ συναγωγὰς, τὰς τε ἐν τῇ πόλει, τὰς τε ἐν τῷ προαστείῳ, τὰ σπήλαια τῶν ληστῶν, τὰ τῶν δαιμόνων καταγωγή.



For Chrysostom, therefore, one's allegiance to a community was clearly reflected in his or her spatial and social relations. From this perspective, a group of Christians who visited synagogues for healing and other activities could undermine the ideological and social unity of the church.

To conclude this analysis: the eighth *Homily against Judaizing Christians* focuses on the Judaizing dimensions of acquiring curative ritual objects. Like other Judaizing activities (e.g., participating in Jewish festivals), this ritual practice typically necessitated interactions between Christians and Jews. In some cases, this transaction even required the Christian client to visit a synagogue. Within the context of this homily, therefore, amulets and other putatively Jewish practices opened the door for Christians to violate and perhaps reimagine the social and spatial boundaries between Jewish and Christian communities in Antioch that Chrysostom promoted. For Chrysostom, these violations constituted dangerous, hybridized distortions of Christianity.<sup>34</sup>

## II. Augustine of Hippo, *In Io. tra.* 7

Another example of how the amuletic danger could be mapped onto local concerns is found in Augustine's seventh *Tractate on the Gospel of John*. Tractate 7 was a homily that Augustine probably delivered in 407 C.E., as part of a series he preached on the Gospel of John. This particular homily is based on John 1:34–51 – a passage which includes the *Agnus Dei* and the calling of the disciples Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael.

Alongside this Gospel lection, a primary thrust of the tractate derives from the date on which the homily was delivered. Augustine highlights in several places that he is delivering this homily at the same time as a certain local celebration, specifically a celebration “of the feast of the blood of some woman or other.”<sup>35</sup> According to

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<sup>34</sup> See also *Adv. Iud.* 4.3.6 (PG 48.875.28). For similar constructions of the amuletic danger in *Adv. Iud.*, see Simon, *Verus Israel*, p. 356; J.-M. Spieser, “Christianisme et magie du III<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in V. Dasen - J.-M. Spieser (eds.), *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance* (Firenze: Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014), pp. 333-351; R. Kaczynski, *Das Wort Gottes in Liturgie und Alltag der Gemeinden des Johannes Chrysostomus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), p. 374.

<sup>35</sup> *In Io. tra.* 7.6.1: *festivitatem sanguinis, nescio cuius mulieris*. *St. Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John 1-10* (transl. J.W. Rettig; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), p. 158. All translations of Augustine's tractates have been taken from Rettig unless otherwise stated.

Augustine's presentation, this festival involved the following myth: "A golden earring was snatched... from the ear of the woman, and blood ran; and the gold was placed on a balance or on a scale, and the blood far outweighed it."<sup>36</sup> On account of this spotty description, scholars have yet to offer a convincing identification of this blood festival.<sup>37</sup> Whatever was celebrated during this particular festival, Augustine found it troubling that many in his congregation were celebrating it.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine's claim about the popularity of this blood festival may seem striking given his declaration elsewhere that the city of Hippo could be bifurcated into two groups: Christians and Jews.<sup>39</sup> Éric Rebillard is probably correct when he writes: "Augustine did not live in a Christian world, but in a world in which Christians and non-Christians shared the city – both its space and, for the most part, its values."<sup>40</sup> It is thus plausible – and perhaps likely – that there was in fact a blood festival in Hippo and that some of Augustine's congregants participated in it.

For Augustine, the festival was a demonic counterfeit of the true celebration of the shedding of the blood of the Lamb of God. Demons, Augustine contends, "knew that Jesus Christ would come" because of the proclamation by the angels; they, therefore, created spectacles, such as this blood festival, which resembled the true sacrifice of the Lamb of God in order to deceive the faithful.<sup>41</sup>

Augustine introduces amulets – specifically tied ritual objects (*ligaturae*) – as one of several illustrations that demonstrate how demons use Christian symbols to deceive the faithful. He writes:

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<sup>36</sup> *In Io. tra.* 7.6.1: *de aure mulieris, et cucurrit sanguis, et positum est aurum in trutina vel statera, et praeponderavit multum de sanguine.*

<sup>37</sup> A.-M. La Bonnardière (*Recherches de chronologie augustiniennne* [Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1965], pp. 46-50) suggested that, given the association with the blood of the woman, the festival was the *dies sanguinis* or "Day of Blood," which was celebrated in honor of Cybele (March 24). Yet, as M.-F. Berrouard has noted, in the festival mentioned by Augustine, the blood comes from the ear and has a redemptive association (*Homélie sur l'évangile de saint Jean, I-XVI*, 2 vols. [BA 71-72; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969, 1977], pp. 883-884). By contrast, in the *dies sanguinis* the blood came from the castrati and Attis and was associated with expiation.

<sup>38</sup> *In Io. tra.* 7.2.2.

<sup>39</sup> *Sermo* 196.4. But, despite this way of dichotomizing the population of Hippo, Augustine complains in this latter sermon that Christians participated in a Pagan baptismal ritual (*ibidem*). Thus, even by Augustine's own admission, social reality was more complex than his two-fold division of the population would imply.

<sup>40</sup> É. Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 62.

<sup>41</sup> *In Io. tra.* 7.6.2-4.

For evil spirits contrive certain semblances of honor for themselves that they may in this way deceive those who follow Christ. To such an extent, my brothers, that they (i.e., demons) themselves, who seduce through tied ritual objects (*ligaturas*), through spells (*praecantationes*), and through the artifices of the enemy, mingle (*misceant*) the name of Christ in their spells (*praecantationibus*); because they are no longer able to seduce Christians so that they may give their poisons, they add some honey so that what is bitter may lie hidden in that which is sweet and may be drunk to ruin. To such an extent that I know that at one time the priest of that Pilleatus used to say, ‘Even Pilleatus himself is a Christian.’ Why is this, brothers, except that Christians cannot otherwise be seduced?<sup>42</sup>

Augustine’s illustrations here move across the semantic domains of representation, mixture, disguise, and mislabeling. Augustine uses the theme of false representation (*umbras* – literally, “shadows”) in order to link, on the one hand, his earlier claim that the demonic deception of the blood festival can be found in its similarity to the bloody sacrifice of Christ and, on the other hand, the illustrations that follow.

But the metaphor of representation immediately turns to that of mixture. Augustine focuses on a particular kind of amulet – namely, one in which Christ’s name is mixed (*misceant*) into a presumably non-Christian enchantment – and associates the danger of that kind of amulet with its capacity to deceive believers through its Christian appearance.<sup>43</sup> Augustine then unpacks the amuletic illustration by deploying the common heresiological trope of mixing honey with poison.<sup>44</sup> Although the analogy here is

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<sup>42</sup> *In Io. tra.* 7.6.5: *Fingunt enim spiritus mali umbras quasdam honoris sibimetipsis, ut sic decipiant eos qui sequuntur Christum. Usque adeo, fratres mei, ut illi ipsi qui seducunt per ligaturas, per praecantationes, per machinamenta inimici, misceant praecantationibus suis nomen Christi: quia iam non possunt seducere Christianos, ut dent venenum, addunt mellis aliquid, ut per id quod dulce est, lateat quod amarum est, et bibatur ad perniciem. Usque adeo ut ego noverim aliquo tempore illius Pilleati sacerdotem solere dicere: Et ipse Pilleatus christianus est. Ut quid hoc, fratres, nisi quia aliter non possunt seduci Christiani?* Transl. Rettig, *Tractates*, pp. 159-160 (slightly modified).

<sup>43</sup> There is indeed evidence supporting Augustine’s claim of mixture on amulets. Although one must be cautious about using materials from elsewhere to explain ritual practice in Hippo, it is interesting to note that there are several amulets from Egypt that juxtapose Christ’s name with the names of entities that someone like Augustine would classify as “non-Christian.” For instance, P. Oxy. VIII 1152, a late fifth- or early sixth-century Greek amulet, reads: “Hôr, Hôr, Phôr, Elôei, Adônai, Iaô, Sabaôth, Michaël, Jesus Christ. Help us and this house. Amen” (A. S. Hunt, ed., “1152. Christian Amulet,” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* [ed. A.S. Hunt; vol. 8; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1911], p. 253. It should be underscored that, although Augustine and other leaders would find in this amulet a mixture of Christian and non-Christian motifs, there is no evidence that the practitioner or his or her client would have conceived of their practices in terms of mixture. In fact, as we will see in the following section, many practitioners did not.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ign. *Trall.* 6.2. For a brief discussion of this passage from Ign. *Trall.*, see A. Le Boulluec, *La notion d’hérésie dans la littérature grecque, II<sup>e</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Vol. 1: *De Justin à Irénée* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985), p. 23. This trope was also found in classical literature (e.g., Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.935-942). On Augustine’s knowledge of Lucretius, see Rettig, *Tractates*, p. 160 n. 23; H. Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, 2 vols. (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia, 20;

imprecise, the point again is clear: demons deceive Christians into abandoning the faith by disguising their evils under a false Christian veneer.<sup>45</sup>

Augustine concludes his illustrations of demonic deception with a reference to the fact that a certain priest of the deity Pilleatus was able to “seduce” (*seducere*) believers by calling Pilleatus a Christian.<sup>46</sup> In this final case, demons deceive Christians simply by labeling something “Christian.”

Analogical infelicities notwithstanding, it is clear that, for Augustine, *ligaturae* with Christian language acutely illustrate one of Satan’s deceptive strategies: they confuse the symbolic boundaries between Christian insiders and non-Christian outsiders. According to Augustine’s presentation, Satan and his demonic host were deploying this strategy by associating the local blood festival with the bloody sacrifice of Christ.

The significance that Augustine attributed to confusing the Christian and non-Christian symbolic systems may be further illuminated in reference to his semiotic theory, evident, among other places, in his approach to *magia* (and its cognates). In a classic article titled “Augustine on Magic,” Robert Markus demonstrated that Augustine differentiated illicit local rituals and Christian rituals in reference to intentionality and

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Göteborg: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), pp. 211-212, pp. 382-383; D. van Dusen, *The Space of Time: A Sensualist Interpretation of Time in Augustine, Confessions X to XII* (Supplements to the Study of Time 6; Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Augustine’s emphasis on mixture here perhaps also invites a comparison with the Stoic notion of mixture, typically associated with Chrysippus of Soli. Within this model, mixture is divided into three types: juxtaposition (*παράθεσις*), in which two items do not penetrate one another and thus retain their original identities (e.g., almonds and walnuts in a bowl); fusion (*σύγχυσις*), in which two items completely penetrate one another with the result that they cannot be separated and thus form a third entity (e.g., flour and water becoming dough); and blending (*κρᾶσις*), in which two items penetrate one another, but can be separated afterward (e.g., water and wine). Commenting on Chrysippus’s formulation of this category, Alexander of Aphrodisias writes, “[blending happens] when certain substances and their qualities are mutually coextended through and through, with the original substances and their qualities being preserved in such a mixture” (*Mixt.* 216.14-218.6; transl. taken from LS 48C, as cited in G. Buch-Hansen, “*It is the Spirit that Gives Life*”: A Stoic Understanding of *Pneuma* in *John’s Gospel* [Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 173; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010], p. 76). Alexander also states that in blending (*κρᾶσις*) substances retain their original form – at least, in part – and are thus able again to be separated from one another. He writes, “... for the capacity to be separated again from one another is a peculiarity of blended substances, and this only occurs if they preserve their own natures in the mixture” (*ibidem*).

<sup>46</sup> This unidentified deity might be an alternate name for Attis. The identification with Attis is based on the belief that Attis wore the Phrygian hat called the pilleus (Rettig, *Tractates*, p. 158 n. 18). Pilleatus has also been identified with Pollux and Castor (e.g., M. Comeau, *Saint Augustin, exégète du quatrième évangile* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1930], pp. 14-16).

speech communities.<sup>47</sup> According to Markus, Augustine taught that, alongside good or bad intentions, forbidden ritual objects, such as *ligaturae*, were distinguished from appropriate rites, such as the Christian sacraments, based on the speech communities that validate the respective ritual practices. In Markus's words:

He [Augustine] accounts for magic and sacramental ritual in what are essentially the same, semiotic, terms. Both are systems of signs, in use in rival speech communities. One set of signs has validity in a perverse community of individuals working for their own selfish ends and deceiving each other, the other in a community united in their service to God and to the common good.<sup>48</sup>

In this view, the sacraments and other beneficial practices derive from a Christian speech community, whereas amulets and other evil practices derive from a demonic and pagan speech community. This formulation of Christian and non-Christian ritual practices, however, rests to a large measure on the discreteness of these communities and their respective signs. It is not surprising, therefore, that the demonic domain in *In Io. tra. 7* not only includes a particular cluster of signs, but it also encompasses anything that blurs for Augustine the lines between the demonic and Christian domains – for instance, the indigenous blood festival and illicit ritual formulae that includes Christian language. In short, for Augustine, Satan presided over the realms of mixture and ambiguity.

Augustine's approach to symbolic communities also helps to explain the healing object he condones in this tractate. He writes:

When you have a headache, we commend you if you put the gospel by your head and do not hurry to an amulet (*ligaturam*)... we rejoice when we see that a man, confined to his bed, is tossed by fever and pain and yet has placed no hope anywhere else except that he put the gospel by his head, not because the gospel was made for this but because it has been preferred to amulets.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> R.A. Markus, "Augustine on Magic: A Neglected Semiotic Theory," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 40 (1994), pp. 375-388. Markus constructed this portrait of Augustine's view of magic primarily in reference to *De doctrina*, which was completed around 426/7 (Augustine, *De Doctrina* [transl. R.P.H. Green; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], p. xi); however, as several scholars have noted, much of this work was composed significantly earlier, with some aspects going back to as early as 395. Fritz Graf called into question Markus's claim concerning originality of Augustine's theory of magic; Graf showed that many aspects of Augustine's theory were already present in earlier writings ("Theories of Magic in Antiquity," in Mirecki - Meyer [eds.], *Magic and Ritual*, pp. 92-104).

<sup>48</sup> Markus, "Augustine on Magic," pp. 385-386.

<sup>49</sup> *In Io. tra. 7.12: Cum caput tibi dolet, laudamus si Evangelium ad caput tibi posueris, et non ad ligaturam cucurreris. Ad hoc enim perducta est infirmitas hominum, et ita plangendi sunt homines qui currunt ad ligaturas, ut gaudeamus quando videmus hominem in lecto suo constitutum, iactari febribus et doloribus,*

Despite its use as a healing device, he does not refer to this gospel artifact as a *ligatura*, but prescribes it as an alternative to a *ligatura* (*laudamus si Evangelium ad caput tibi posueris, et non ad ligaturam cucurreris*). Augustine's support – albeit tentative – of this gospel substitution makes sense in light of his broader approach to signs. This kind of artifact consists solely of ostensibly Christian language and seems to have been used by individuals with what Augustine would regard as pure intentions (i.e., merely trusting in the healing powers of the gospel). Thus, this object does not compromise the integrity of Augustine's version of the Christian speech community. Accordingly, since Augustine places *ligaturae* more generally within the realm of *magicarum artium*<sup>50</sup> – which is part of the demonic speech community – he cannot designate the gospel artifact as a *ligatura*.<sup>51</sup>

In sum, Augustine's seventh *Tractate on the Gospel of John* formulates the dangers of objects we would deem amulets in relation to their ability to confuse and eventually to reorient the boundaries between Christian and non-Christian symbols and communities. For Augustine, the use of Christ's name on some healing objects deceives Christians into thinking that demonic symbols are actually Christian – or, at least, compatible with the Christian faith. In so doing, these devices serve as an illustration of how demons have used Christian motifs to deceive some in his congregation into participating in a local non-Christian festival. Furthermore, while Augustine forbids Christians from wearing amulets, he allows them to place gospel artifacts at their heads for healing. For Augustine, such objects are tolerated because they align completely with the symbols and aims of the Christian speech community.

### **III. Contextualizing the Implied Practitioners and their Clients: Applied Objects and Communal Boundaries**

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*nec alicubi spem posuisse, nisi ut sibi Evangelium ad caput poneret: non quia ad hoc factum est, sed quia praelatum est Evangelium ligaturis.*

<sup>50</sup> E.g., Augustine, *De doctrina* 2.20.30.

<sup>51</sup> For ritualized objects, which make use of Gospel *incipits*, see Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits*, pp. 75-99.

The testimonies of Chrysostom and Augustine might at first blush occasion us to think that the envisioned practitioners and their clients failed to distinguish between Christians, on the one hand, and non-Christians (Jews or Heathens), on the other hand. Indeed, scholars have often assumed that the policing of boundaries was solely or primarily within the purview of ecclesiastical elites; amulets – as an extension of the rubric “magic” – are often set in opposition to such “elite” contexts and, accordingly, tend to be understood as a ritual practice in which boundaries were either not recognized or not respected. Scholars have used different analytical schemes and models to describe and think about the disjuncture between ostensibly magical practices and religious boundaries. For instance, Morton Smith famously emphasized the intentional amuletic use of elements, such as the ubiquitous *Iaô Sabaôth*, *as Jewish*.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Smith argued that such exotic associations might have even provided the primary motivation for their use, whether for advertising purposes or because of the efficacy non-Jewish practitioners attributed to Jewish symbols and expressions or to the Jewish god. More recently, Vicky A. Foskolou has reiterated this view, stressing simultaneously the idea that magic constitutes a realm of boundary blurring. As she writes about Byzantine amulets:

... in the pluralist religious environment of the Late Roman period in which these objects were created and the corresponding magical practices developed... [there was a] ‘blur[ring]’ [of] the boundaries between the various religious traditions of the day. As far as magic is concerned a contributing factor in this erosion of religious boundaries was the notion that using some foreign elements, such as a foreign language, or symbols from another religious tradition, gave the magical practices greater prestige and grandeur and ultimately made them more effective.<sup>53</sup>

According to Foskolou, practitioners crossed the boundaries between religious communities in order to capture the “prestige” of foreign or exotic elements. Such a “pluralistic” posture in turn contributed to a “blurring” of those religious boundaries.

To be sure, even a cursory glance at the extant amulets from late antiquity reveals the juxtaposition of elements that seem to belong to different religious traditions. It is thus tempting to intuit behind such objects a lack of concern or respect for religious

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<sup>52</sup> See especially M. Smith, ‘The Jewish Elements in the Magical Papyri,’ in S.J.D. Cohen (ed.), *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh* (2 vols; Leiden: Brill, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 242-256.

<sup>53</sup> V. A. Foskolou, “The Magic of the Written Word: The Evidence of Inscriptions on Byzantine Magical Amulets,” *ΔΧΑΕ* (2014), pp. 329-348, at p. 346.

difference and boundaries. These objects, however, raise a larger question: whose religious boundaries were crossed or blurred? In order to address this issue, we must first reflect on the rubrics “boundary blurring” and “boundary crossing.” Whether explicit or implicit, these analytical constructs have played an important role in the scholarly analysis of late antiquity, including discussions of late ancient magic and ecclesiastical condemnations of illicit rituals. But boundary blurring and boundary crossing presuppose significantly different ideas about communal relations. Boundary *blurring* stems from and/or results in a lack of clear-cut differences between communities. By contrast, boundary *crossing* – and by extension exoticism and syncretism – presupposes an acute awareness of differences between communities.<sup>54</sup> While continual boundary crossing *might* eventually lead to boundary blurring – as Foskolou seems to imply – these categories do not always stand in a temporal or teleological relationship to one another. It is necessary, therefore, to reflect on the complex ways individual practitioners – and perhaps also their clients – engaged with religious difference and boundaries.

While the vast majority of extant amulets from late antiquity provide insufficient evidence for tracing their practitioners’ conceptions of religious similarity and difference, a few ritual objects reflect both an awareness of religious boundaries and an interest in preserving them.<sup>55</sup> One of the clearest examples of the erection of clear-cut boundaries in an ostensibly “magical” context is found in P. Anastasy 9, a sixth-century C.E. Coptic codex used for protection, exorcism, and healing.<sup>56</sup> This codex preserves a version of Abgar’s letter to Jesus, which builds considerably on the anti-Jewish invective present in other versions of this letter:<sup>57</sup>

I have heard that your race rejected your lordship. They live wickedly and enviously, and they prosecute you, not wanting you to reign over them. They are ignorant of this, that

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<sup>54</sup> On the relationship between exoticism and “syncretism,” see R. Boustan - J.E. Sanzo, “Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms, and the Shared Magical Culture of Late Antiquity,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 110.2 (2017), pp. 217-240, esp. 220-226. See also M. Pye, “Syncretism versus Synthesis,” *MTSR* 6 (1994), pp. 217-229.

<sup>55</sup> For a more substantial review of this evidence, see Boustan - Sanzo, “Christian Magicians,” pp. 233-238.

<sup>56</sup> W. Pleyte - P.A.A. Boeser, *Manuscrits coptes du Musée d'antiquités des Pays-Bas à Leide* (Leiden, 1897), pp. 441-479.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* I.xii.8. The anti-Jewish invective is considerably harsher than that found on P. Oxy. LXV 4469, a fifth-century C.E. Greek amulet for healing (F. Maltomini, “4469. Letter of Abgar to Jesus [Amulet],” in M.W. Haslam *et al.* (eds.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* [vol. 65; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1998], pp. 122-129, at p. 124). As Maltomini notes, P. Oxy. LXV 4469 has affinities with the Syriac version of this tradition (Maltomini, “4469. Letter of Abgar to Jesus,” p. 124).



you are the king of those in the heavens and those who are upon the earth, (you) who gives life to everyone. What, however, is the people of Israel? A dead dog ([ῥ]οῦρορ εἴμοοϋτ), since they reject the living god. For surely they are unworthy of your holy gift. (12r, ll. 16 – 12v, 6)<sup>58</sup>

This practitioner not only stresses the Jewish role in the death of Jesus, but he or she also draws a connection between the Jews and a dead dog. Perhaps ironically, John Chrysostom also compared the Jews to dogs in his first *Homily against the Judaizing Christians*:

Although those Jews had been called to the adoption of sons, they fell into kinship with dogs; we who were dogs received the strength through God's grace to put aside the irrational nature... they [i.e., Jews] became dogs, and we became children.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, this practitioner has not only drawn a clear-cut distinction between Christians and Jews, but he or she appropriated a specific anti-Jewish discourse that John Chrysostom also used.

Yet, at the same time, this practitioner utilizes divine names, such as Adonai Eloei Elemas Sabaoth (1r, ll. 9-10; 2v, 5-6; 9r, ll. 14-15), which have Jewish origins and, accordingly, many scholars have labeled "Jewish."<sup>60</sup> Given the anti-Jewish rhetoric in the practitioner's version of the letter of Abgar to Jesus, we ought neither intuit here a crossing of boundaries between Christians and Jews nor a blurring of boundaries between these communities. Instead, these elements, which might have been originally associated with Jews, lost their "Jewishness" for this practitioner and became part of his/her Christian ritual idiom.<sup>61</sup> In other words, P. Anastasy 9 presents a different *version* of

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<sup>58</sup> Translation by R. Smith in M. Meyer - R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 320.

<sup>59</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 1.2.1-2. For the comparison of the Jews with dogs in the high Middle Ages, see K. Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters; Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* (Stanford, CA, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> E.g., G. Lacerenza, "Jewish Magicians and Christian Clients in Late Antiquity: The Testimony of Amulets and Inscriptions," in L.V. Rutgers (ed.), *What Athens has to do with Jerusalem: Essays on Classical, Jewish, and Early Christian Archaeology in Honor of Gideon Foerster* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 396-419, at p. 411; T. de Bruyn - J.H.F. Dijkstra "Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets," *BASP* 48 (2011), pp. 163-216, at pp. 181-182.

<sup>61</sup> On the occurrence of this phenomenon in the so-called Greek Magical Papyri, see L. LiDonnici, "According to the Jews:" Identified (and Identifying) "Jewish" Elements in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, in L. LiDonnici - A. Lieber (eds.), *Heavenly Tablets: Interpretation, Identity and Tradition in Ancient Judaism* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 119; Leiden, 2007), pp. 87-108.

Christianity than ancient Christian heresiologists promoted and contemporary scholars have assumed – thus merely giving the false impression of boundary crossing or boundary blurring. It is important to note that, while the practitioner behind P. Anastasy 9 configured the boundaries between Christianity and non-Christianity differently than writers, such as Chrysostom and Augustine, his or her boundaries were no less strictly defined. By any account, this practitioner drew a clear-cut distinction between Christians and Jews.

Despite its Egyptian provenance, P. Anastasy 9 challenges us to reconsider the danger amulets might have posed to the religious boundaries that ecclesiastical leaders, such as Chrysostom and Augustine, promoted. Specifically, this codex requires us not only to consider boundary blurring or boundary crossing as informing and motivating Chrysostom's and Augustine's presentations of amulets, but also to entertain another scenario. The three possible scenarios are as follows: First, these authors might have assumed that the ritual participants operated according to a lack of clear-cut distinctions between religious communities (i.e., the boundaries were *blurred*). In this case, Augustine and Chrysostom would have presumed that practitioners or clients were unaware of or unconcerned with distinctions between Christians and non-Christians. Second, these ecclesiastical writings might presuppose that the ritual participants marked distinctions between Jews, Christians, and Pagans in accordance with the taxonomies that Chrysostom and Augustine promoted, but *purposely* decided to transgress those boundaries on account of convenience, custom, exoticism, etc. (i.e., the boundaries were *crossed*). Third, P. Anastasy 9 (mentioned above) challenges us to consider the possibility that Chrysostom and Augustine envisioned a situation in which ritual participants drew clear distinctions between Jews, Christians, and Pagans, but configured those boundaries differently than they did, especially as it pertains to religious space, ritual practice, and local celebrations (i.e., religious boundaries were neither blurred nor crossed from the perspectives of the ritual participants). This final scenario presumes that boundary demarcation *per se* was not at stake in these texts; Augustine and Chrysostom would have taken for granted that their audiences distinguished Christians from religious/ethnic others. Instead, these church leaders would have been promoting *specific configurations* of religious boundaries – especially regarding the domains of space and

ritual – to the exclusion of all other configurations of boundaries. In other words, Chrysostom and Augustine were trying to convince congregants that amuletic rituals transgressed the boundaries between the Christian and the non-Christian – boundaries that the amulet users in their congregations would have otherwise respected. The question remains: which of these three scenarios do Augustine and Chrysostom presuppose?

It should be conceded at the outset that the ritual participants in these texts are rhetorical constructs; both authors mention these actors as part of hypothetical conversations. Nevertheless, the statements of Chrysostom and Augustine provide insight into some of their presumptions about those who would use these ritual technologies. In the first part of his homily, Chrysostom implies that the ostensible Judaizers recognize the distinctions between Christians and Jews. As part of his advice to those in his congregation who would admonish the Judaizer, Chrysostom suggests the following tactic:

Say to him, ‘Tell me, do you approve of the Jews for crucifying Christ, for blaspheming him as they still do, and for calling him a lawbreaker?’ If the man is a Christian, he will never put up with this; even if he be a Judaizer times without number, he will never bring himself to say: ‘I do approve.’ Rather, he will stop up his ears and say to you: ‘Heaven forbid! Be quiet, man.’ Next, after you find that he agrees with you, take up the matter again and say: ‘How is it that you attend their services, how is it you participate in the festival, how is it you join them in observing the fast?’<sup>62</sup>

In this hypothetic conversation, Chrysostom presupposes that the Judaizer will agree (1) that Jews are separate from Christians and (2) that he will disapprove of the Jews’ role in the death of Jesus and for their putative blasphemy against Jesus. In fact, Chrysostom assumes that such ideas are common to all Christians (i.e., “if the man is a Christian, he will never put up with this...”). It is clear, therefore, that Chrysostom’s envisioned Judaizer would recognize a distinction – at least on some level – between Christians and Jews. At the same time, Chrysostom encourages the hypothetical pious interlocutor to draw a direct logical connection between the sins of the historical Jews against Jesus and the sin of participating in their ritual practices. For Chrysostom here, the Christian ought

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<sup>62</sup> *Adv. Iud.* 8.5.4 (PG 48.934): Ἐπαινεῖς, εἰπέ μοι, τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, ὅτι τὸν Χριστὸν ἐσταύρωσαν, καὶ βλασφημοῦσιν εἰς αὐτὸν νῦν, καὶ παράνομον αὐτὸν καλοῦσι; Πάντως οὐκ ἀνέξεται, ἐὰν ἡ Χριστιανὸς, κὰν μυριάκις ἰουδαῖζη, οὐκ ἀνέξεται εἰπεῖν ὅτι Ἐπαινῶ· ἀλλ’ ἐμφράζει τὴν ἀκοὴν καὶ ἐρεῖ πρὸς σέ, Μὴ γένοιτο, εὐφήμει, ἄνθρωπε. Εἶτα ὅταν αὐτοῦ λάβῃς τὴν συγκατάθεσιν, πάλιν ἐπανάλαβε, καὶ εἰπέ· Πῶς οὖν αὐτοῖς κοινωνεῖς, εἰπέ μοι; πῶς μετέχεις τῆς ἐορτῆς, πῶς μετ’ ἐκείνων νηστεύεις;

to have nothing to do with the Jews because of their sins against Jesus. In this case, however, Chrysostom seems to presume that the Judaizer would not draw this inference. The Judaizer must be *shown* that participating in the festivals of the Jews constitutes a violation of religious boundaries. In short, Chrysostom takes for granted that the Judaizer distinguishes between Christians and Jews, but assumes that he or she does not consider the participation in Jewish ritual practices to be a disruption of the boundaries between Jews and Christians. According to Chrysostom's rhetoric, therefore, the hypothetical Judaizers did not think they had blurred the boundaries between Jews and Christians or crossed the boundaries between religious communities.

Augustine's discussion of *ligaturae* also seems to presuppose that users made distinctions between Christian and local religious symbols, but naively grounded those distinctions on competing taxonomies of religious differentiation. There is an important qualification, however: despite his presentation of *users* as neither blurring nor crossing boundaries (from their perspectives), Augustine castigates the (non-Christian?) *practitioners* behind *ligaturae* for *crossing* the boundaries between religious communities. As he notes, they intentionally "mix" (*misceant*) the name of Jesus into their ritual texts in order to deceive the users into thinking that the objects are Christian.<sup>63</sup>

Augustine seems to assume that the Christian users of *ligaturae* were at least partially aware of religious boundaries; his argument implies that they would not otherwise engage in such rituals. Thus, Augustine proclaims:

I know that at one time the priest of that Pilleatus used to say, 'Even Pilleatus himself is a Christian.' Why is this, brothers, except that Christians cannot otherwise be seduced?<sup>64</sup>

The implied initial resistance or hesitation to local practices – ultimately thwarted by the specialists' use of Christian language – suggests that Augustine assumes that these believers recognized distinctions between Christian and non-Christian symbols and practices. In other words, the boundaries for these congregants were not blurred. But neither does the text presuppose that these individuals believed that they crossed religious boundaries when they used *ligaturae*. To be sure, Augustine claims that the Christian

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<sup>63</sup> *In Io. tra.* 7.6.5.

<sup>64</sup> *In Io. tra.* 7.6.5: *Usque adeo ut ego noverim aliquo tempore illius Pilleati sacerdotem solere dicere: Et ipse Pilleatus christianus est. Ut quid hoc, fratres, nisi quia aliter non possunt seduci Christiani?*

soul (*anima*), after using a *ligatura* or other illicit ritual object, “has lost the sign of Christ; it has received the sign of the devil.”<sup>65</sup> For Augustine, these individuals are no longer part of the Christian community. Nevertheless, Augustine entertains the possibility that this “Christian” might respond, “I did not lose the sign of Christ.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, Augustine acknowledges a disagreement between his configuration of the boundaries between Christian and non-Christian ritual and the views of those who engage in inappropriate ritual practice. Accordingly, Augustine’s rhetoric presupposes that *both* he *and* this hypothetical Christian – no doubt a synecdoche for a larger group of believers who engage in illicit local practices and rituals – assumed a clear-cut distinction between Christian and non-Christian symbols and communities, just different ones.

In sum, the attempts of Chrysostom and Augustine to align certain symbols, rituals, and spaces with Jewishness, Paganism/Heathenism, etc. implicitly testify to the fact that the (hypothetical) violators recognized differences between religious communities. Toward that end, the complaints of these leaders by no means suggest that users of forbidden ritual objects failed to recognize any differences between Jews, Christians, and Pagans/Heathens. At the same time, these texts do not claim that the users purposely crossed religious boundaries. Instead, the texts suggest that these believers operated according to a version of Christianity in which ritual practices, spaces, and institutions that Chrysostom and Augustine aligned with Jews and Pagans/Heathens were – albeit for various reasons – understood as Christian or compatible with Christianity.<sup>67</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Both Chrysostom and Augustine participated in global discourses on illicit ritual objects, at least insofar as they drew a connection between these objects and the realms of *magia*

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<sup>65</sup> *In Io. tra. 7.7.4: Perdidit signum Christi, accepit signum diaboli.*

<sup>66</sup> *In Io. tra. 7.7.4: An forte dicat: Non perdidit signum Christi.*

<sup>67</sup> Reimagining the operative dispute in these texts as one of different configurations of religious boundaries – rather a dichotomy between the religious boundaries of ‘elites’ and a lack thereof among the ‘regular’ folk – also allows us to account for incidents of religious violence against Jews, for instance, by the Christian masses. Indeed, local bishops from diverse locales, such as Calinicum, Minorca, and Alexandria, were able to persuade their congregants to despoil synagogues and commit other acts of violence against Jews and “Others.” For a discussion of these events, see J.E. Sanzo - R. Boustán, “Jewish Culture and Society in a Christianizing Empire,” in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 358-375. Such a situation is easily explicable if we imagine that most “regular” Christians recognized and appreciated the differences between “Christians” and “Jews,” even if they imagined those differences in ways that did not comport with their local priests and bishops.

(and its cognates) and demons.<sup>68</sup> Yet, these authors mapped such global constructs onto perceived local and occasional dangers. In his *Eighth Homily against Judaizing Christians*, Chrysostom imagined the amuletic danger primarily in reference to the practitioner-client relationship and used it as a specific example of local Jewish-Christian exchanges. In Augustine's seventh *Tractate on the Gospel of John*, however, a particular kind of amulet – namely, one that juxtaposed Christian and non-Christian elements – served as an illustration of demonic deception through symbolic mixture. But Augustine's discussion of *ligaturae* was ultimately meant to dissuade Christians from participating in a local festival. Moreover, Augustine also stressed the human-object relation in his condemnation of Christians who wear amulets, on the one hand, and in his approval of Christians who place gospel artifacts at their heads for healing, on the other hand. We should not, however, imagine that Chrysostom and Augustine believed that their congregants, who used amulets and visited ritual experts, were either ignorant of or indifferent to distinctions between Christians, Jews, and Pagans/Heathens. Their arguments presuppose that these believers would have recognized distinctions between Christians and non-Christians.

Despite the rhetorical nature of their depictions of curative rituals and contiguous actors, the homilies of Chrysostom and Augustine bring to the fore what was probably one of the most pernicious aspects of curative ritual objects for ecclesiastical leadership: the various stages of the healing ritual – from the visit to the practitioner to the composition of the ritual text to the wearing of the object – were believed to have opened up spaces for believers to reimagine the boundaries between the Christian and the non-Christian, perhaps under the direct influence of the local expert.<sup>69</sup> Ostensibly magical objects (e.g., P. Anastasy 9), which draw religious boundaries differently than such ecclesiastical leaders, corroborate this boundary-redrawing dimension of ritual practice. The capacity of the curative ritual to facilitate diverse configurations of Christian identity on social, spatial, symbolic, and material registers would indeed have represented a

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<sup>68</sup> See V. Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," in B. Ankarloo - S. Clark (eds.) *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 277-348.

<sup>69</sup> It is likely that certain kinds of ritual objects, such as gems, required different practitioners for different stages of production (cf. Á.M. Nagy, "Engineering Ancient Amulets: Magical Gems of the Roman Imperial Period," in D. Boschung - J.N. Bremmer [eds.], *The Materiality of Magic* [Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015], pp. 205-240, at p. 211).

significant danger for leaders, such as Chrysostom and Augustine. Such rituals would have directly undermined their authority and thus their ability to organize, promote, and protect their preferred distinctions between local religious communities.

