To say that humankind has lived through three stages—magic, religion, and science—is an oversimplification. At every stage in the history of civilization, the three coexisted, as far as we can tell. There always was religion along with magic and science, and one did not exclude the other or take its place completely. Early advances like the discovery of fire or the invention of the wheel were, in a sense, scientific achievements.

What we can say is that magic anticipated modern science and technology. It was dreaming of something that could not be realized for millennia. The dream of flying through the air by magic has now become reality through machines. The dream of healing disease and prolonging life through magical rituals has become true thanks to modern chemistry and pharmacology.

Ancient magic and modern science have some of the same goals. They also formulate laws—laws that happen to be true in the case of science but largely false (from our point of view) in the case of magic. The expectations are the same as well: both magic and scientific technology promise to give us powers that we, as individuals, do not possess.

Today, we use the increasingly complex technology that is at our disposal without really knowing how and why it works. When it breaks down, we call in an expert to repair it, or we throw it away. In our trust that, ultimately, technology will always work for us, we are like the people of ancient times who relied on magic that seemed to work for them and had worked for their ancestors for a very long time.

In his article “In Search of the Occult,” C. R. Phillips III offered a number of valuable remarks on the first English edition of this book. As a starting point, he used the view of magic held by British anthropologists of the nineteenth century. For Edward Tylor, for instance, magic was either bad religion or bad science—bad religion because it had not evolved to Christianity, bad science because it had not evolved to modern
technology. And evolved it should have, because Darwin’s theories, transferred from zoology to the history of civilization, demanded it.

Phillips quotes E. Leach: “First science was distinguished as knowledge and action which depends upon the ‘correct’ evaluation of cause and effect, the specification of what is correct being determined by the syllogisms of Aristotelian logic and the mechanical determinism of Newtonian physics. The residue was superstition. From superstition was then discriminated religion. The minimal definition of religion varied from author to author . . . : the residue was then magic. Magic was then refined by some into white magic (good) and black magic (bad). Black magic, renamed sorcery, was then discriminated from witchcraft, and so on.”

This is clever, but it seems to be another oversimplification. Things did not happen in this straight, linear way. Moreover, magic cannot be neatly separated from superstition, while sorcery and witchcraft are pretty much the same thing today. Sweeping statements concerning religion and magic can only be made from a secure vantage point, which is, nowadays, that of either modern science or an established religion. If we know what true science is, we are also able, we think, to define pseudoscience. Similarly, if we feel comfortable with our religious faith, we are confident to say what constitutes magic.

Subjective certainty of this kind comes from our awareness that we belong to a solid majority and that we can express our convictions without much risk of being attacked. In antiquity, of course, most people believed in magic, ghosts, and supernatural messages. It is a question of the social consensus. If the community, as a whole, believes in the power of magical operations within a spiritual universe, it will insist on the observation of certain rites and the importance of taboos in everyday life. The occasional failure of magic or the prediction that did not come true cannot shake the near-universal faith in the system.

It is difficult to say what distinguishes religion from magic. For one thing, ancient magic seems to have borrowed extensively from religion, possibly from cults and rituals that are no longer attested and therefore only survive as a form of magic. It could be said that magic tends to grow on a substratum of religion, like a fungus, and that it is able to adopt religious ceremonies and divine names. Magic is the great master of disguises. It operates in a twilight zone and deliberately exploits traditions outside its area while claiming that it achieves better results.

Later on, I try to show that both magic and religion can be derived from shamanism. By introducing this term, we do not really solve any problems: we are just placing them on a different level. Still, this shift may bring us a little closer to a new understanding of the problems. To com-
plicate things further, a case can be made for the survival of ancient magic in the early Church as well as in medieval Byzantium.

Some criteria that have been designed to separate religion from magic should be considered as guidelines, not as the ultimate truth. For example, magic is said to be manipulative, whereas religion relies on prayer and sacrifice; magic applies means to specific ends, whereas religion stresses the ends in themselves (spiritual rebirth, salvation, life eternal); magic concentrates on individual (often selfish or immoral) needs, whereas religion is concerned with the well-being of the community (the family, the tribe, the state); magical operations tend to be private, secretive (they often take place at night, in secluded places), whereas religious rites take place in the open, during the day, visible for all; magic is characterized by a kind of business relationship between a practitioner (who expects to be paid) and his client, whereas the relationship typical for religion is that between a founder, leader, prophet, or “holy man” and a group of followers. Prayers to the gods are normally offered aloud, whereas magical incantations addressed to a daemon are usually formulated silently or pronounced with a special hissing sound, the *susurrus magicus*.

Along the same lines, R. Arbesmann makes a well-balanced but not entirely satisfactory statement: “While in prayer man tries by persuasion to move a higher being to gratify his wishes, the reciter of a magic formula attempts to constrain that being or to force the effect of his own ends by the very words of his formula to which he ascribes an unfailling, immanent power. In the first instance, the answer to man’s invocation lies within the will of the higher being; in the second, the binding of the higher being effected by the formula is considered to be absolute, automatically producing the result desired.”

But Arbesmann adds a word of caution: “In many ritual acts, it is true, the two attitudes exist side by side and often blend one into the other so completely that it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide which of the two attitudes is present or dominant. It is also true that of the two attitudes the one taken by the reciter of the magic formula is cruder. But this does not warrant the conclusion that the magic formula is older than the prayer and that the latter grew out of the former.”

This skepticism is confirmed by our ancient sources. According to Philostratus, in his biography of Apollonius of Tyana, the miracle-worker and “holy man” (*Vita Apollonii* 5.12), some magicians believed that they could change fate by torturing the statues of gods. Because the statues are, to some extent, identical with the deities themselves, they would feel the pain inflicted on their effigies on earth and therefore do almost anything the magician demanded.
But the same sort of thing also occurred in the religious sphere. We hear that, in times of crisis, when the people felt that the gods had failed them, they would punish their statues by taking them out of the temples, whipping them, and dragging them through the streets. When the gods seemed to respond to this kind of treatment and the crisis came to an end, the people would return the statues to their temple, anoint and adorn them, and offer them lavish sacrifices and fervent prayers of thanksgiving. Customs like that survived here and there in Christianity.

Some scholars emphasize that magic, as a way of understanding reality and dealing with it, is radically different from our logical approach, magic representing a prelogical or paralogical mentality. This is obviously true, in a sense, though it also shifts the problem to a different level instead of offering a solution. And one should not forget that there is a kind of logic in magic. No matter how “crude” or “primitive” some of its assumptions and techniques may appear to us, ancient magic did pass through a “scientific” phase during the Hellenistic period and, once more, in Neoplatonist circles. Magicians did not think only in terms of cosmic sympathy or mystic participation; they were aware of space and time and causality.∞≠

This is one of the reasons why it can be such a frustrating experience to read a work like Iamblichus’ On the Mysteries. Essentially, this is a defense of theurgy, but on the surface it is a philosophical treatise, using the methodology developed by generations of Platonists. Iamblichus and other Neoplatonists had inherited the magical lore of the past along with the doctrine of their school. They were convinced that the two could be reconciled and used to explain or justify each other.∞∞

Of a theologos, a philosopher or priestlike figure who mainly talked about the gods, no miracles or magical feats could be expected, but a theouragos who claimed to have a certain power over the gods had to prove his supernatural abilities now and then. This is certainly an area where we cannot exclude the possibility of special effects bordering on fraud. When an exalted mortal such as the emperor Julian was about to be initiated into the higher mysteries, nothing was left to chance, one would assume. We are told that Maximus, the Neoplatonist philosopher and theurgist, impressed Julian by his personality and by the seemingly supernatural phenomena he created (smiling statues of the gods) and thus succeeded in drawing him away from the Church.∞≤

Magic generally operates with symbols rather than with concepts. Thanks to the work done by modern anthropologists and psychologists,∞≥ the world of symbols is better understood today than at the time of Tylor. Symbols help people to associate, to remember, to think. They often serve as a kind of shorthand for concepts that are too complicated to be
put into words, and by their very nature they seem to offer a key to reality. No matter how abstruse the drawings in the magical papyri may seem to us, they are symbols for some type of reality and preserve, as “psycho-
grams,” certain kinds of experience.

An important concept, the idea of cosmic sympathy, was formulated by the Stoic philosopher Posidonius of Apamea (ca. 135–ca. 50 B.C.), called “the Rhodian” after the island where he taught. His concept implies that anything that happens in any part of the universe can affect something else in the universe, no matter how distant or unrelated it may seem. The idea itself must be very old and predates the concept of causality. It is fundamental for magic, astrology, and alchemy.∞∂

What is called “sympathetic” magic is based on three principles: similarity (like acts on like); contact (things that touch each other influence each other and may exchange their properties); and contrariety (antipa-
thy works like sympathy). Together, these principles, though they seem partly contradictory, offer explanations to the magus, the astrologer, and the alchemist.

Other ways to describe the workings of cosmic sympathy are “Inside is like outside” or “What is above is like what is below.” The whole idea involves a constant exchange of energies between the outside world (the macrocosm, the universe) and the inside world (the microcosm, the psyche). Everything around us can be used to our advantage, if we just know how to “plug” into the potential that is there. Of course, there are evil powers around us, too, threatening to harm us, until we protect ourselves by amulets and other forms of countermagic. In addition, there are countless messages—dreams, signs, oracles—that need to be observed and deciphered. There is a saying in the Talmud that reflects a widespread belief: “A dream not interpreted is like a letter not read.”

It would be worthwhile to compare cosmic sympathy with C. G. Jung’s concept of synchronicity. Jung introduced this term to designate a coinci-
dence that may not be a coincidence at all. And, perhaps, for someone who believes in magic, there can be no coincidence. Everything that happens has a meaning because a supernatural force is at work, and if one does not understand its significance right away, there are numerous ex-
erts and specialists one can consult.

There is also the distinction between sympathetic and contagious magic, which overlaps, in a sense, with the principles just mentioned. Sympa-
thetic magic seems to work because similar causes produce similar effects. If a man loves a woman who does not desire him, he may fashion an image of her in wax or clay and melt it in fire, hoping that the person represented will feel the heat. This is what happens in Theocritus’ Idylls 2 [no. 6].∞∑
If you wish to harm a person, you also fashion an image representing your enemy and pierce it with nails or bind it or break it into pieces. Such figurines, nowadays called *voodoo dolls* (in German: *Zauberpuppen* or *Rachepuppen*), have been found in Athens and elsewhere. Ways of fabricating them are described in the magical papyri. By burning the image of your enemy or throwing something that belongs to him or was in close contact with his body—his hair, clippings of his finger nails, or a piece of clothing—into the flames, you hurt him indirectly. This, too, is a form of contagious magic.

The cosmic force that can either help or hurt has many names. A typical term is the Greek *dynamis*. It is comparable with the *mana* of so-called primitive civilizations, a term preferred by anthropologists. Because it is not always possible to identify the supernatural power that is at work, generic terms like *mana* or *dynamis* are convenient. They often designate the spectacular event that is produced by the power, which acts through certain exceptional people: the shamans, the miracle-workers, the saints.

*Dynamis* resides in certain things (stones or plants) that are thought to be animated, in utterances (words or names), and in techniques or types of knowledge. The *voces magicae* or *nomina barbara*, the strange, exotic words and names pronounced in rituals had *dynamis*, presumably, because they were unintelligible, but also because some were borrowed from Egyptian and Hebrew. This is true for the Semitic names for the supreme deity, *Adonai* and *Iao*. The former means “Lord,” the latter is a contraction of the sacred tetragrammaton JHWH, which also appears as *Jeu*. Near Eastern (Egyptian and Jewish) sorcerers enjoyed a formidable reputation in the Greco-Roman world.

The power of formulas like “God is One” or “Alpha and Omega” can be explained by their obvious importance in a religion foreign to the magical practitioner. If it seemed to work for “them,” it was certainly worth a try.

Sometimes, the practitioner assumes the identity of a deity in order to acquire *dynamis* and command respect in the spirit world. He proclaims “I am Osiris” or “I am Anubis” or “I am Jesus Christ.” This tells us something about an essential difference between religion and magic. A worshiper of Isis, like the hero of Apuleius’ novel, can achieve a union with the deity as the culminating point of a long, demanding initiation. But the magus (someone like Apuleius’ hero in a former life) often uses the name of a deity to impress lesser daemons. He may pretend to be Anubis today and Jesus Christ tomorrow, ad hoc, just as it suits him. Pretending that one is not a mere human being but a daemon or a deity is a common type of masquerading in the magical papyri and the Hermetic
writings. The *magus* who adopts another identity becomes the person with two images.

There is, however, another aspect to the concept of the double image. The *magus* may not assume the identity of a god or daemon in a calculating, manipulative manner: he may, in trance, become that higher power. There is an element of madness in magic as well as in certain religions. It is the “divine madness” of the shaman. Looking at the evidence, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that trance, ecstasy, enthusiasm, possession—whatever we wish to call an altered state of consciousness—are part of the sorcerer’s world, and if it was not always the real thing, it may have been a good facsimile. The evidence also suggests that, in antiquity, it was much more of a “normal” thing to fall into trance and out of it than today. These views will, perhaps, be treated with skepticism by many researchers, but to me there is no way around them, and here the shamanistic background is particularly important. Once we admit the central role of trance, many things fall into place almost at once, and the nature of the tools and the training of the *magus* become more transparent.

The possible role of certain substances will be discussed later (in the appendix). Here, I want to point out four little-known testimonies, two by Greek authors who lived around the time of Jesus, and one by a Jewish writer who lived a generation or two after them.

In his essay on Demosthenes (par. 22), Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the literary critic who was also a historian, says that whenever he is reading one of the speeches of the great orator, he feels “like those who take part in the Mysteries of the Mother Goddess or the Corybantic rites or similar ceremonies, whether they are inspired by scents [eite osmais] or sights [eit’ opsesin, supplied by Radermacher] or by the spirit of the deities themselves to experience so many different visions [phantasias].”

Strabo, in his *Geographika* (10.3.7), describes the overwhelming psychological effect of “war dances, accompanied by noise and roaring and cymbals and drums and [the clashing of] arms, also by flutes and shouting” on those who participate in the rites of the Curetes, the Corybants, the Cabiri, the Mother Goddess, and other mystery cults.

Both authors may have witnessed the orgiastic rites for which the cults they name are famous. Dionysius attributes the visions experienced by the worshipers either to odors (from fumigations, incense offerings) or to sights (if the reading is correct) or to the direct intervention of the deities. Strabo, on the other hand, emphasizes the various sounds (music, shouting, probably singing) and the effect of dancing, which, by itself, can lead to trance. But the goal of all these rites is the same: to “become one” with the deity (*henosis, unio mystica*). Once you have entered trance, you are no longer the worshiper, you become the deity you worship.
On a different level, this is also the goal of the *magus* and the *theourgos*. The psychological or neurological process is the same, and the terms used by the Neoplatonists to describe the experience can be applied: *synaphe* ‘contact’, *synapheia* ‘conjunction’, *koinonia* ‘communion’, *henosis* ‘union’, *homoiosis* ‘assimilation’ (to the deity), *theiosis* ‘deification’. Expressive images are offered to illustrate the experience: spiritual rebirth in the deity, swap of identities, and so on. We find exclamations like: “Hermes, I am you, you are me, your name is my name, and my name is your name.”²² In trance, the *magus*, just like the shaman, may have all kinds of visions—for instance, a trip to heaven or to another world, an experience also attested in the Nag-Hammadi texts and for Apollonius of Tyana.²³

To Josephus, the Jewish historian (c. A.D. 37–c. 111), we owe two more testimonies whose significance has recently been pointed out.²⁴<br>The first is found in *Contra Apionem* 1.232 where the author reports from Manetho, an Egyptian historian, that the Pharaoh Amenophis (perhaps Amenophis IV, 1364–1347 B.C.) wished to become an “observer of the gods” and consulted a seer (or “wise man”), also called Amenophis, who was reputed to “share the nature of the divine because of his ability to predict the future.” Here we have an Egyptian “holy man” who has the gift of prophecy and can teach his king the art of “seeing the gods.”

Josephus says something very similar about Moses (*Antiquitates Iudaicae* 1.19): in order to lead an exemplary life and be a lawgiver, “one must in the mind observe the works of God.” This privilege is equivalent to “seeing God” himself and also to seeing, like God, the whole world from above in a single instant.²⁵<br>Josephus speaks of a mystic experience that can be achieved through the knowledge of certain techniques.

Support for this hypothesis may be found at the beginning of the *Alexander Romance*,²⁶ where Nectanebo(s), another semilegendarily Pharaoh who also happens to be a skilled *magus*, is able to “observe the gods” and to associate with them thanks to *lekanomanteia*, a technique of divination, actually an aid of achieving trance through looking into a bowl filled with a liquid. In trance, he sees his deities and, becoming like them, the whole world. Incidentally, according to Genesis 44:5, Joseph, while living in Egypt, practiced a form of *lekanomanteia*.

*Dynamis*, as we have seen, can be transferred in many ways. In addition to merely pronouncing a name or a formula, the practitioner may absorb it physically by licking or eating it. Thus, at the end of the “Mithras Liturgy” (*PGM* IV.785–89), the devotee is told to write the “eight-letter name” on a leaf and lick the leaf while showing it to the god.²⁷

The story of Simon Magus, as told in Acts (8:9–21) is a good illustration of the meaning of *dynamis*. This man who apparently had considerable influence in Samaria in the first century A.D. can be considered to
be a *magus*, a type of Near Eastern miracle-worker, and the founder of a new religion, but for the Christians he was a pseudoprophet. His supporters, according to the commonly accepted textual form, called him “the power of God which is called great,” *he dynamis tou theou he kaloumene megale*, but the words *tou theou* and *kaloumene* may be a gloss that found its way into the text. What his followers called him (and what he must have called himself) is probably “the great power,” *he dynamis he megale*. Simon was impressed by the *dynamis* of the Apostles, which was clearly superior to his own. He wanted to join them and asked them to sell their special kind of magic, whereupon he was sternly rebuked.

In recent scholarship, a further distinction—*direct* versus *indirect* magic—has been advocated. Examples for direct magic would be amulets or written charms (like those offered in Marcellus’ *De Medicamentis*) and various drugs and concoctions, but also incantations and invocations of the “great name” of a deity or daemon. Indirect magic, on the other hand, might be illustrated by the summoning of the dead in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, because Homer describes a kind of magic that leads to another kind. The hero performs a certain ritual, as he has been instructed by Circe, to conjure up the ghosts in Hades, but he needs one particular ghost, that of the seer Tiresias, who, even in Hades, has kept his prophetic powers.

The distinction between *private* and *official* magic has the disadvantage that most magic, as we understand it, was privately practiced and usually just involved the practitioner and the client. Official magic seems very close to religion: it may include rainmaking or fertility rites (the Sacred Marriage), purifications of a community, and the formal cursing of a foreign nation.

The old distinction between *natural* and *ritual* magic has been revived recently, but it is helpful only to a certain point. In a sense, all magic is ritual. Specific rites that may vary from society to society are essential in all kinds of magic. A simple classification would be: (1) rites that reinforce the *mana* (or the *dynamis*) of an individual or a community, promising success in hunting, fishing, and war; (2) rites that reduce the *mana* of an enemy (black magic); (3) apotropaic measures (protection from the evil eye, from daemons, e.g., by means of amulets); (4) purification rites; and (5) healing rites.

Natural magic, on the other hand, is a kind of applied science, often involving trickery or relatively simple experiments that are miraculous only for the naïve and ignorant. The subject was treated abundantly in the Renaissance, for instance by Giambattista della Porta, in his *Magia Naturalis*, first published in 1558 and reprinted many times. The influence of this work can be seen in the *Disquisitiones Magicae* of Martin Del Rio, first
published in 1599 and also reprinted several times. There, natural magic is defined (1.2) as “the art or ability created by an effort [vi creata], not supernatural, to produce strange and unusual effects whose idea is beyond the common sense and the understanding of people . . . I am speaking of an ‘ability created by an effort’ in order to exclude true miracles.” Here he is speaking as a son of the Church for whom true miracles (such as those attributed to saints) exist.

Another definition of natural (or physical) magic, also found in Del Rio, claims that it is nothing else but a “more accurate knowledge of the secrets of nature” (exactior . . . arcanorum naturae cognitio). This goes back to Apuleius who, in his Apologia sive De Magia, declared himself to be a harmless scientist and philosopher, definitely not a magician or a miracle-worker, and insisted that the seemingly strange experiments he carried out were done in the interest of research. But he was motivated by curiositas—another word for magic—and that made him no less suspicious.

Magika Hiera is the title of a volume published in 1991 that illustrates some trends in contemporary research.33 It assembles essays on various aspects of ancient magic. C. A. Faraone deals with early Greek “binding spells” (katadesmoi); J. H. M. Stubbe (“Cursed Be He That Moves My Bones”) discusses funerary imprecations; H. S. Versnel (“Beyond Cursing”) looks at prayers for justice and confessions of guilt. J. Scarborough investigates the pharmacology of plants, herbs, and roots (they could serve as remedies and as poisons). From an unfinished word by Sam Eitrem (1872–1966) there is a chapter on dreams and divination, translated by D. Obink and prefaced by F. Graf, who also contributes an essay on prayer in magic and religious ritual. J. Winkler’s “The Constraints of Eros” is followed by H. D. Betz on “Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri,” and C. R. Phillips III concludes the volume with a treatment of socioreligious sanctions on magic entitled “Nullum crimem sine lege.”

Versnel’s essay is valuable, it seems to me, because he sheds light on an area that has remained largely in the dark so far. It becomes clear now that there was an alternative to taking an enemy to court or putting a curse on him: it was always possible to appeal to a deity. This probably means that someone who was really anxious to win left nothing to chance and did all three things: he talked to his lawyer, consulted a trusted magical practitioner, and also enlisted the help of the gods.

Scarborough shows in detail that real “scientific” knowledge of the properties of plants was available in antiquity. This kind of knowledge—especially if kept secret—represented a powerful kind of magic.

Graf argues that one commonly used criterion to distinguish religion
from magic—the religious person approaches the gods respectfully and humbly, whereas the *magus* attempts to force them—is not valid.

Phillips must be right when he says that neither the lawgiver nor the priest nor the philosopher had an interest in clearly defining “unsanctioned religious activities.” It seems, however, that attempts were made from time to time. Even so, not surprisingly, a twilight zone remained, and this places us at a disadvantage. If the average Athenian or Roman could not be sure where the boundaries between normal, acceptable practices and strange, possibly illegal, immoral or irreligious activities should be traced, how can we be certain today?

It would be so convenient if we could label all these different areas properly as *religion* and *magic* and *medicine* and so on, but in reality they overlap. In our world—and already in ancient Rome, to a certain extent—things tend to be compartmentalized. For one type of problem, we consult a physician; for another type, a lawyer; for yet another concern, we go to a priest. But we no longer seek the advice of a witch or a sorcerer, because magic is no longer that kind of reality to us, at least not for the academics who write books about it.

In ancient times, magic was essentially a way of dealing with all sorts of problems in life. Still, we have to go back very far in time before we find the *magus*, the one great figure of authority in a society where people talked freely about supernatural experiences and took them for granted—needed them, in fact. Perhaps that figure, a kind of supershaman, is a projection, but it lived on in Greece in the traditions about Orpheus, Empedocles, and Pythagoras and the many miracle-workers (*theioi andres* ‘divine men’) who came after them.

The divine men have some common characteristics: they practice an ascetic life-style, travel widely (necessary to learn and to reach people), are able to heal (through exorcisms), perform miracles, and spread a message. Some are poets, musicians, creators of myths, philosophers. But their god-given ability to transcend the laws of nature is, so to speak, their passport.

It is more than likely that the archaic shaman was also able to communicate with the dead. The myth of Orpheus certainly points in this direction, and the various techniques of approaching the dead have a long history in Greece, as in Egypt. It makes sense that you consult a specialist if you want to get in touch with your ancestors or a hero or any famous figure of the past.

There were many forms of *psychagogia* ‘conjuring up of souls’ or necromancy in antiquity.\(^34\) Famous “oracles of the dead” (*nekyomanteia*) are attested already for the fifth century B.C., for example, at Heracleia...
Pontica, at Tainaron, at the Acheron in Thesprotia, and at Avernus in southern Italy. They are sometimes, but not always, situated in caves which were believed to be an access to the underworld.

_Necromancy_ may not be such a good term, because predictions of the future were only a relatively small part of the whole business of dealing with the dead. _Psychagogia_, though it has other meanings as well, is perhaps a better word. The _psychagogoi_, especially those from Italy, were much in demand in the classical period and after, though they are hard to distinguish, as a class, from the ordinary _goetes_.

The ritual must have varied from place to place, but incubation—a link to healing rituals—clearly played a role. The oldest form of incubation seems to have been the sleeping (or the resting in a state of trance) on the tomb of an ancestor. Here, it was essential to be stretched out completely, to be in touch with the earth as much as possible. Sleeping—or going into trance—in caves, near springs, and under trees or near points where three ways come together (triodoi) was also a form of incubation.

While evocated ghosts are usually experienced in sleep or trance, they are sometimes portrayed as rising before the _waking_ eyes of the consulter. Perhaps we should assume a twilight zone between waking and sleeping; this is often, as the annals of psychiatry show, the time when hallucinations occur. There may also have been programming through the priests, who probably used hypnosis and psychoactive substances.

Ventriloquists were more likely to practice a deliberate kind of fraud. The mysterious voice coming out of nowhere could bring a message from a dear departed or from a legendary figure of the past or even from a deity. One thing that the _goes_, who was also a ventriloquist, may have claimed to do for the family dead was granting them absolution (retroactively) for sins committed in this life through a purification ritual for which the descendants had to pay. This may be the meaning of the “initiation of the dead,” which is mentioned more than once.

The professionals apparently addressed the dead in a sort of ghost-language, a “mixture of high-pitch squeaking and low droning.” Whether this was done in trance or not, it reminds one of shamans in action. It is also reminiscent of the special effects (strange words, gibberish, hissing, and whistling) that the _magus_ uttered during his rituals. Perhaps there is also a connection with the peculiar language that the Homeric gods spoke among each other.

But why consult the dead in the first place? What exactly did they know, and how did they acquire their knowledge? One has the impression (in Egypt it may have been different) that the knowledge of the Greek and Roman dead was limited or selective. Some of it they could
derive from other ghosts. There is the idea of a marketplace in the underworld (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.444; *Tristia* 4.10.87–88), analogous to the Athenian Agora and the Roman Forum, where the latest news, along with gossip and rumors, was exchanged.

The image of the mythical supershaman seems to live on in the Persian magos who, as a spiritual heir of Zoroaster, serves within the hierarchy of the state religion, but also in the Egyptian priest who is attached to the sanctuary of a syncretistic deity and may, at the same time, be an expert in various other areas, such as magic or medicine. This is only a hypothesis, but it finds support in the fragmentary evidence we have about the apprenticeship of the magus and the initiation rites he had to undergo.\(^{35}\)

To understand Greco-Roman magic, we must look at other cultures, too. Just as Greek religion and mythology cannot be studied in isolation, without considering the Near Eastern influences, magic and folklore should be seen in a larger context.

For the Hittites, magic was a technique that had been invented by their gods.\(^{36}\) A Hittite practitioner of magic seems to have belonged to a privileged group, a caste (like the Persian magoi, the Egyptian priests, or the Celtic Druids), entrusted with secrets that were faithfully transmitted from generation to generation, ever since they were first revealed by a deity. This secret knowledge conferred power and status.

Sumero-Accadian magic, as far as it is known, exhibits familiar features.\(^{37}\) An elaborate daemonology furnishes details that are not always spelled out in our Greek sources. Daemons are invisible; they are also innumerable (remember the daemon in Mark 5:9, 15 who says that his name is “Legion”); they are mostly evil, yet share somehow in the nature of the divine, and their names are preceded by the divine ideogram; they move very fast; they can penetrate walls; they control the elements. Obviously, a very fertile imagination was at work. It seems that the witches and sorcerers in this society were mostly women and foreigners. There are parallels to this in Greco-Roman culture where the figure of the witch is well established and foreigners like the “Egyptian prophet” or the “Etruscan diviner” or the “Marsian enchanter” are fairly common. These practitioners are sometimes seen as tools of the daemons, but one needs them for protection. They produce amulets made from gems and shiny stones, dyed in certain colors, and worn around the neck, waist, wrists, and ankles.\(^{38}\)

Thanks to an abundance of written texts and surviving monuments, Egyptian magic, or heka, is quite well known.\(^{39}\) It was considered an attribute of Re, sometimes represented as an anthropomorphic deity grasping a serpent in each hand. Professional magicians were called “prophets
"Arcana Mundi"

of *heka*” or “those who know,” a kind of euphemism that occurs in other cultures; thus the voodoo term for the *bokor*, the enchanter, is *un qui a connaissance*.

Magic per se was apparently not illegal in ancient Egypt. Only one criminal case, the “Harem Conspiracy” under Ramses III, is documented (from the Papyrus Lee): in this particular case, wax images of gods and men served as voodoo dolls. The sorcerer behind it was put to death for conspiring against the life of the Pharaoh.

The Egyptian deities themselves, like those of the Hittites, practiced magic, and the idea is not totally foreign to Greek myth, if one thinks of minor figures like Circe, who may belong to a pre-Greek pantheon. It was by magical means that Thoth and Isis were able to heal young Horus. On the other hand, even the gods were sometimes powerless against the magic aimed at them by the living and the dead.

For the Egyptians believed that the dead had special powers. They could predict the future, like the ghosts conjured up by the necromancers of the Greeks. They were also held responsible—as the “Letters to the Dead,” a special literary genre, testify—for some of the evils that befall the living. The dead were even able to put pressure on the gods by chanting spells and reciting secret names.

That can only mean that Egyptian sorcerers had a “working relationship” with the dead, much like Lucan’s witch Erictho. The Greek concept of the *nekydaimon*, the powerful spirit of a deceased person, may have its roots in Egypt. Such spirits were willing or could be forced to perform services for the enchanter. Essentially, this is the concept of the “zombie” in voodoo witchcraft, although it now appears that these creatures are not really dead.

The Egyptian ritual of the “Opening of the Mouth” seems to survive in Greek theurgy. Their priests were able, it is said, to animate by certain formulas (and fumigations?) the statues of the gods and make them smile and speak. Obviously, such a phenomenon—or the illusion—had an overwhelming effect on believers and skeptics, because it showed that the gods were alive and well and caring.

Egyptian sorcerers used particular spells to protect their powers in this world and make sure that they would serve them in the next life as well. Some of them were apparently buried with their books and other tools so that they could continue to practice their craft after death. To this belief in the permanence of secret knowledge we probably owe the preservation of the magical papyri.

On the whole, the spells of ancient Egypt were similar to those found in the Greek papyri. There seems to be a kind of *koine* of magic that
reflects a similar way of thinking in different cultures. We are inclined to look for influences, but, as in the world of mythology and folklore, certain ideas, tales, and customs may originate independently. Curse tablets and voodoo dolls have been found in large numbers in Egypt, as in the rest of the Mediterranean world. In the Egyptian texts, the ritual gestures to be executed are often described, but the study of the written documents was probably not sufficient, and one would assume that years of apprenticeship under an established master, followed by initiation rites, were required.

Magic and medicine were like twin sisters in Egypt. Trying to cure an illness is sometimes seen as a struggle between the magician-physician and the daemon of the illness, or, more accurately, the assistant daemon of the practitioner and the evil daemon plaguing the patient. This kind of magical medicine was practiced in Greece long before Hippocrates or one of his disciples wrote the treatise on the “sacred disease.”

Particular to Egypt, not yet found in Greco-Roman culture (yet conceivable), are the “healing statues,” of which the best-known example is the Statue of Djedher in the Cairo Museum. It represents a kneeling person, arms crossed on the knees, the body covered with pictures and written texts. In front of the statue there is a stele of Horus on crocodiles. A basin around the statue communicates, through a channel, with another, deeper one. Liquids poured over the statue absorbed the dynamis of texts and images and could be consumed by the patient, who then bathed in the larger basin or drank from the smaller one. It is the same idea of the physical absorption of magical power we have seen above.

Occult arts are often mentioned in the Bible. Most forms of sorcery documented in other Near Eastern countries were known, at one time or another, to the Hebrews, but they were often practiced by women or foreigners (as among the Hittites), and foreign religions (as among the Greeks) were considered a kind of magic. This seems to be a recurrent pattern.

A very old testimony for the practice of lekanomanteia is found in Genesis 44:5, where we hear of the silver cup from which Joseph, while living in Egypt, drinks and which he uses for divination. This could mean that he saw God, under certain circumstances, when he gazed into the liquid in the cup. The “witch of Endor,” actually a medium specializing in necromancy, was consulted in secret by Saul, the king of Israel (1 Samuel 28:7), after he had officially banished the “wizards” from his kingdom. The Book of Daniel, probably composed in the second century B.C., tells the story of a young Jewish hostage at the court of the king of Babylon who is more powerful than all the renowned Babylonian
magicians and diviners. The author of Wisdom, probably a Hellenized Jew who lived around the middle of the first century B.C., condemns “sorcery and unholy rites” (12:4).

We see clear sanctions against magic in the Mosaic code (Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:9–13), and these were upheld by the prophets who also attack the magic of foreign nations (Isaiah 44:25). In the Old Testament, magic is often associated with idolatry and the worship of daemons, because it depends, by definition, on a multitude of powers.

A theme of confrontation, of a power contest, runs through the Bible. One could describe it as “our kind of magic versus their kind of magic” or “our religion versus their magic.” It is always the true religion that triumphs over a form of magic. Joseph humiliates the Egyptian diviners (Genesis, ch. 41); Moses is more successful than the magicians of Pharaoh (Exodus 7:10–13, 19–23; 8:1–3).

In the New Testament, we witness the confrontation between the Apostles and Simon Magus; the conflict with Elymas, the Jewish consultant (a psychic in residence or a black magician?) to the Roman proconsul (Acts 13: 6–12); and the Jewish exorcists of Ephesus (Acts 19:13–20). In a pointed, dramatic form, the new challenges the old, and the true religion unmasks the false one that is branded as a kind of magic, and not a very good one at that.

On later Jewish magic we are now well informed thanks to the reconstruction of the Sepher Ha-Razim by M. Margalioth. This is a magical handbook from the early Talmudic period, and its prescriptions are similar to the ones offered by the Greek magical papyri.

When we talk about Greco-Roman magic, we usually mean Hellenistic magic, as documented by the papyri. This syncretistic, multicultural conglomerate took shape in Egypt when it was ruled by Macedonian kings, before it became a province of the Roman Empire. Syncretism does not only apply to the history of religion: it also characterizes the blend of Egyptian, Babylonian, Jewish, and Greek elements that came together and interacted in Alexandria, the great melting pot of the postclassical period. Even though the magical papyri date from a later period, the system they reflect is Hellenistic. They are a very important source for our knowledge of ancient magic, along with the curse tablets, voodoo dolls, and amulets.

The Greek texts, published by K. Preisendanz and A. Henrichs, are now available in English translations, with introductions, notes, and a glossary, thanks to H. D. Betz and a team of scholars. No fewer than fifty recently discovered or newly published texts are included in the first volume, and the Demotic portions of the bilingual Greek-Demotic papyri are also translated. The second volume will include an index of
Greek words, a subject index based on the translations, a collection of parallels between the magical papyri and early Christian literature, and a comprehensive bibliography.43

The series *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, edited by G. H. R. Horsley and others, includes a number of magical texts and is useful because of the detailed comments it offers.

What remains to be done is, among other things, an overview of the theology, the religious mood that reveals itself in the magical papyri. There is still considerable disagreement among the specialists. E. R. Dodds, for instance, says that these texts “constantly operate with the debris of other people’s religions,”44 while A.-J. Festugière feels that some documents could be called religious.45 This is also the view of M. P. Nilsson who wrote, “Several invocations are quite beautiful and marked by a genuine religious spirit.”46

The prescriptions given in these “working copies of practical magicians” (A. D. Nock) could easily be copied onto other materials. A recently found love charm on a lead tablet shows this process. It was probably written by a professional magician in the third or fourth century A.D. on the basis of *PGM* IV.296–434 or a closely related text.47 The rolled-up lead tablet, roughly eleven square centimeters in size, was found inside a clay vase, together with a clay statuette of a kneeling woman, with her hands bound behind her back and her body pierced with needles. Such a set of objects looks like a combination of the curse tablet and the voodoo doll. Sometimes, the curse is inscribed on the doll, and occasionally the doll is broken into pieces.48

New studies of amulets and magical gems have been published in recent years.49 It may also be worthwhile pointing out the Byzantine tradition about Apollonius of Tyana and the unusual talismans he set up in many cities:50 they were large monuments, sacred objects, designed to protect the people from plagues and diseases. A large sculpture of a scorpion, for example, would protect the whole population from scorpion bites. Obviously, one single monumental amulet was sufficient to protect thousands of people, making it unnecessary for them to carry individual amulets at all times.

It is very easy to imagine all the fears, all the obsessions that tortured the superstitious (see Theophrastus’ *Portrait* for the type). If one constantly worried about lurking dangers—snakes, scorpions, the evil eye—one would have to wear not just one amulet but many, one for each specific danger, not to mention the endless rituals of purification. The truly superstitious must have been loaded down by the sheer weight of the amulets they carried around the neck, on the wrists, the ankles, the fingers, on every part of the body. Jewelry (precious and semiprecious
stones and gems) may originally have served as a protective device, not as an ornament. The same may be true of tattoos and perfumes. The alchemists attached to the temples and the royal palaces of Egypt who manufactured perfumes and incense were bound by secrecy and worked for the priests and the kings. All these substances and devices were meant to concentrate the forces of the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars and make them useful.

The Hellenistic conglomerate traveled from Egypt to Italy and mixed with native beliefs and rituals, but it is difficult to separate the koine from the local traditions.\textsuperscript{51} We know very little about Etruscan magic\textsuperscript{52} and even less about the sorcerers and witches of the various Italic tribes (the Marsi, the Osci, the Sabelli, for instance), though some of them enjoyed a certain reputation. It is possible that some distinctive features of Roman magic and folklore are really Etruscan. The Etruscan influence is more evident in other areas, but it cannot be excluded in the area that concerns us here.

Divination was one of the specialties of the Etruscans, and the “Etruscan seer” was a familiar figure. Etruscan techniques of predicting the future were integrated into the Roman state religion, even though they could be called “magical” and “foreign” since they must have had their origin in Asia Minor. According to Seneca (\textit{Naturales Quaestiones} 2.32.2) the Etruscans “believe that things do not reveal the future because they occur, but they occur because they are meant to reveal the future.”

Cicero’s friend Nigidius Figulus no doubt played an important role in the way Hellenistic magic became accepted in Italy: he was a scholar, an astrologer, a clairvoyant—a very unusual type of Roman.\textsuperscript{53} If we knew more about him, we would gain a better understanding of the occult arts as they were practiced in Rome.

Through the Law of the Twelve Tables (fifth century B.C.) we catch a glimpse of some ancient types of magic practiced in Italy (and probably elsewhere). One of them is the technique of \textit{fruges excantare} by which a sorcerer could ruin a farmer’s harvest or transfer it to another property.\textsuperscript{54}

It must have happened, time and again, that in the same year, one farmer did better than the others, although everybody had offered the same prayers and sacrifices to the gods. Hence the one farmer who was more successful than the others must have, in the popular opinion, done something special in secret, and this additional something could only be magic. You could even say that magic is the “extra something” that one does in addition to one’s normal religious duties. This strategy is not unusual. The fact that there was an ancient law against this proves that the suspicion was always alive, and envy may have been a powerful motiva-
tion. There is also the tendency to blame certain individuals for collective misfortunes, such as famines and epidemics.

The Law of the Twelve Tables (known to us only in fragments) also makes it a criminal offense to recite a *malum carmen*, a spell designed to hurt a person. The law uses the verb *incantare* (as opposed to *excantare*). There is a legal distinction between *malum carmen* and *famosum carmen*, which means “libel” or “defamation.” The latter hurts the person’s reputation; the former hurts the person physically.\(^{55}\)

New curse tablets in Latin or Greek come to light from time to time. A fairly recent example is a bilingual inscription on a gold tablet from Dacia, from the late imperial period. In the Greek part, *Adonai* ‘Lord’ and *theoi hypsistoi* ‘highest gods’ are invoked, while the Latin part reads as follows: *Demon immunditiae te agitet, Aeli Firme. Stet supra caput Iuliae Surillae* (May the daemon of impurity pursue you, Aelius Firmus. May it stand over the head of Julia Surilla). The letter *F* in the first name is pierced with a needle, and a small cross stands beside the letter *S* of the second name. Incidentally, the oldest specimen of this kind of *defixio* found in Greece dates from the fifth century B.C., and the oldest one found in Italy dates from the fourth century B.C.\(^{56}\)

In Italy, the belief in the evil eye must be old. *Fascinum* designates a spell caused by envy. The word is probably related to Greek *baskania* ‘envy, jealousy’, which would mean that there is a common Indo-European root, and that takes us back even further. For the ancients, being jealous of another person’s good fortune was at the root of black magic. Even the gods could feel so jealous of a mortal’s happiness and success that they would decide to destroy him.

How could you protect yourself against the envy of the gods, the daemons, your fellow mortals? First of all, you must not show any *hybris* ‘pride’ or ‘arrogance’. Second, to feel safe, you must not display your belongings and achievements and everything that is dear to yourself. If someone praises the beauty of your baby, you must spit on it to pretend that it is worthless to you—a precaution that can still be observed in remote parts of Greece. If anyone admires something that you possess, give it to that person at once. It is better to part with a prized possession right away than to live in constant fear of *baskania*. Third, wear an amulet as a protection and make sure that your children also wear one. Amulets, talismans, and *phylakteria* have been found in large numbers in the Mediterranean world.\(^{57}\) Sometimes, they have abstract shapes; sometimes they represent a part of the human body: an eye (the evil eye) pierced with an arrow, an open hand (the defensive gesture against the evil eye), a phallus (also called *fascinum*).
It is impossible to say which features of Italic magic are unique, but the following practices seem to be characteristic: the “breaking of snakes” (angues ruptae), perhaps a kind of fakir trick (a specialty of the Oriental snake charmer); the werewolf phenomenon (versipellis ‘one who can change the skin’); and the existence of striges or strigae, that is, women who could transform themselves into birds and were feared as vampires.

Some curious customs cannot easily be labeled as “magical” or “religious.” A good example is the rite of Tacita, “The Silent One,” an obscure deity, the mother of the Lares, who was worshiped during a period of nine days in February that was sacred to the memory of the family dead. The young girls of a family gathered together around an old woman who did not belong to the clan and who, with three fingers, placed three grains of incense on the threshold of the house, as an offering to the Manes. She then tied a lead doll with threads, recited some formulas, and chewed seven black beans. After that, she cooked the head of a sardine that had been pierced by a bronze needle. After having poured out a few drops of wine, she drank a large share, divided the rest among the girls, and said: “We have tied the hostile tongues, the mouths of our enemies.” And as she spoke these words, the old woman left the house, probably not entirely sober.

This is the ritual as described by Ovid, Fasti 2.569–82, and much has been written about it. It may be understood as an apotropaic rite, more magical than religious in nature. The old woman who was not part of the family but summoned from outside for this specific purpose looks very much like your friendly neighborhood witch. It was her job to protect the family against the “evil tongue,” which could do just as much damage as the evil eye. But what is the connection with the cult of the Manes and the Lares? Is it an attempt to integrate a magical ritual into mainstream religion?

Recently, M. W. Dickie has shed new light on ancient witches. He argues convincingly that the worlds of female magic and prostitution intersected in some ways. The bawd who is also a witch and happens to be addicted to wine is a recurrent theme in Greek comedy and Roman love poetry. This cannot be just a literary cliché, because the tipsy old woman who is summoned to cure the sick by incantations and amulets is also found, at a later date, in the Church fathers. But what does this mean? Were witches always old and habitually drunk? Or were elderly female alcoholics invariably witches and bawds? Something seems to escape us here.

Temple areas apparently were the places in major cities where one could pick up prostitutes, listen to sophists, and consult sorcerers and interpreters of dreams. The same would be true of marketplaces. Again,
we see how easily different spheres intersected in the ancient world. Wrestlers, acrobats, charioteers, theatrical entertainers, and other people who were notoriously superstitious always needed professional help. There must have been a regular mafia of athletes and black magicians (the hit men of witchcraft), an underworld of ambition, greed, hatred, and jealousy—not a pretty picture, but all too human.

The crowds, so often present when certain types of miracles happened (as opposed to rituals performed at night, in secrecy) apparently developed a momentum of their own, a *dynamis* that the skillful *goes* exploited, creating an aura in which the impossible became real. Some itinerant magicians may have performed “gypsy” tricks based on hypnosis and mass suggestion.

A good deal of work has been done in recent years on the miracle-workers, the “holy men,” and the “pseudoprophets” of the first and second centuries A.D. Something has been said already about them in connection with such half-legendary figures as Orpheus and Pythagoras. By writing “holy men” in quotation marks, I do not want to suggest that such later figures were always charlatans and impostors. The fact that there were “pseudoprophets” does not disprove the reality of the genuine phenomenon.

Apollonius of Tyana, often represented as a pagan imitator of Jesus, still fascinates historians. He was definitely a cult figure, and new evidence has been found for his cult; there is also a fairly recent edition of his letters. It has been said that the miraculous feats he performed are not essentially different from those reported in the Gospels. On the other hand, it could be argued that Apollonius, unlike Jesus, was inclined to suggest to people that they were possessed and needed to be exorcised by him. There is a curious inconsistency in Philostratus’ *Vita*: on the one hand, he presents his hero as a “wise man” along the lines of Pythagoras; on the other, he enriches this tradition with a substantial amount of colorful folklore, perhaps to satisfy the taste of his time.

Simon Magus has already been mentioned. It would be useful to compare him with Alexander of Abonuteichos, the “pseudoprophet,” or the kind of *magus* that Apuleius, at one point, apparently wanted to become.

All these figures are quite different, and yet they have something in common: they aspire to revive the ancient image of the great shaman. What makes it difficult to compare them and describe their common features is the nature of the evidence. In the case of Apollonius, we have mainly the testimony of Philostratus, an uncritical admirer. In the case of Simon Magus and Alexander of Abonuteichos, we have mainly a hostile tradition. As far as Apuleius is concerned, we have his own testimony, but
it must be used with caution, because one part of it (the *Apologia*) is, by necessity, self-serving, and the other (the *Metamorphoses*) is partly fiction.

Still, it is not difficult to understand why a brilliant young man, like Apuleius, a Platonist, wished to become a *magus*. He was, as he indicates himself, motivated by *curiositas*, which is, like its Greek equivalent, *periegeria*, practically a synonym of magic. Apuleius learned the hard way (*pathei mathos!* that religion is a far better thing than magic, and he found peace of mind in the mysteries of Isis. His novel is the story of a spiritual pilgrimage that leads the hero from Platonism via the magical arts to salvation.°

In conclusion, it may be worthwhile to review briefly the opposition to magic and the occult arts in antiquity. More will be said about this in the epilogue on the survival of magic within the Church.

We have seen so far that magic is often represented as a caricature or parody of religion, something strange and foreign and difficult to control. In Greece as well as in ancient Italy, there was a powerful religious establishment. Any esoteric, nonconformist groups were eo ipso suspicious and could be denounced as subversive. In some cultures, as in Egypt, magic was easily tolerated as part of the fabric of daily life, but that was the exception rather than the rule.

In Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, the hero conjures up the souls of the dead. This is essentially a magical ritual, and his instructions come from Circe, who is described as a sorceress. There is no indication that Odysseus is breaking a law or defying a taboo. The fact that he, the great Odysseus, performs such a ritual seems to make it all right.

In the “Homeric” *Hymn to Demeter* (vv. 228–30), on the other hand, witchcraft, here called *epelysie* (perhaps “something that comes upon somebody”), is rejected, but the text is not sound, and the very word has been restored on the basis of another uncertain passage in the *Hymn to Hermes* (v. 37). It is difficult to date the *Hymns*, but, on the whole, they seem to be younger than the Homeric epics.

The evidence is slim, but it appears that, from the point of view of the earliest Greek poets, the Heroic Age accepted magical practices, side by side with religious rituals, without any discrimination. This is documented for Egypt, and it may well be true for the Minoan Age. If this is correct, the criminalization of magic in Greece must have come later, perhaps during the formation of the first city-states.

Plato condemns the abuses of *pharmakeia* but seems to consider them a fact of life. Later philosophers, the Neoplatonists especially, were attracted by magic, daemonology, and theurgy. The Stoics, with few exceptions, believed in divination because they believed in fate.

The oldest Roman legislation known to us, the Law of the Twelve
General Introduction

Tables, condemns various forms of witchcraft. Later, in the late republic and under the emperors, there were drastic measures against the magicians and the astrologers, sometimes also against the philosophers, but the laws were not always strictly enforced.π∞

An edict on an Egyptian papyrus dated 189/90 is particularly intriguing. It was sent out during the reign of Septimius Severus, notorious before his accession to the throne for his habit of consulting astrologers, and notorious afterward for his determination of making this an illegal practice. Just to ask an astrologer the questions, “When will our emperor die? Who will be the next emperor?” was a serious offense, as we know from Ammianus Marcellinus (29.1.25ff.), because it could indicate a conspiracy.π≤

What was the attitude of the Church? For the early Church, the existence of daemons and prophetic utterances in a state of trance were facts of life. It was clearly impossible for the new faith to sweep away many deeply ingrained beliefs and habits overnight. The converts were still somewhat in awe of the power of the ancient idols around them, and they obviously worried about evil spirits in this world. Thus, they wore amulets and practiced protective magic to be on the safe side.π≥

The fourth century witnessed a stiffening of the resistance of the Church against all forms of magic and “pagan superstitions.” We see this, for instance, from the writings of Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Augustine and from canon 36 of the Council of Laodicea, held between 341 and 381. This canon specifies that “priests and clergy may not be sorcerers [magoi], enchanter[s] [epaoidoi] or astrologers [mathematikoi] and must not make amulets [phylakteria], which are poison for the soul.” Those who still wore such amulets were to be cast out of the Church.π∂ If these practices were condemned so strongly, they must have been fairly common, and the archaeological evidence suggests that they did not cease for a long time.

NOTES

acknowledged with thanks. Axel Michaels’ bibliography “Magie, Stand Oktober 2000” on the Internet (www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de) has been useful to me.

8. These guidelines were suggested by W. J. Goode, in Ethnos 14 (1949): 172–82. I have developed a few details.
12. On Maximus, the theurgist who was instrumental in drawing the emperor Julian away from Christianity, see A. Lippold, “Iulianus I (Kaiser),” RAC 19 (2001), cols. 448, 467.
14. Frazer, The Golden Bough, 1:52–219, is still valid in some ways, but see also M. Mauss, A General Theory of Magic (London, 1972). Swedenborg, in a way, seems to have rediscovered this ancient concept and based his own occult philosophy on it; see his Clavis Hieroglyphica Arcanorum per Viam Representationum et Correspondentiarum (1784). For him, the universe consists of a number of analogous realms whose elements interact, serve as each others’ symbols, and are permeated by Divine Light in different degrees of intensity, thereby revealing their properties. Among scientists who explored analogy as a cosmic principle, one should mention E. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Principes de philosophie zoologique (Paris, 1830), esp. p. 97.
16. Cf. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testa-
General Introduction

ment, 5th ed. (Chicago, 1979), s.v.; J. Roehr, Der okkulte Kraftbegriff im Altertum (Leipzig, 1923).


19. Ibid., no. 22.


25. Corpus Hermeticum 4.2 and 5.5, cited by Dillery, in ibid.


31. For instance by Habel, Powers, Plumes and Piglets.


34. See Ogden, Greek and Roman Necromancy.

35. For Aristotle, the magoi were Persian priests as well as philosophers who had inherited the teachings of Zoroaster. See A. de Jong, Zoroastrianism in Greek and Roman Literature (Leiden, 1997); J. B. Rives, “Aristotle, Antisthenes of Rhodes, and the Magikos,” Rheinisches Museum für Philologie 147 (2004): 35–54. Their priestly status probably required initiation rites, perhaps conducted by an archimagos, but what these rites were like is a matter of speculation. Perhaps they involved a “baptism” with blood, in analogy to the taurobolium attested for the cults of Cybele and Mithras. The apprenticeship of the Hellenistic magus may also have ended with an initiation; see R. Turcan, “Initiation,” RAC 19 (2001), cols. 121–22.

37. See R. Largement, in Dictionnaire de la Bible, suppl. 5 (1953), pp. 706–21.

38. On amulets in general, see note 49.


General Introduction

Romero (Madrid, 1987), there is now a Spanish translation of selected texts. The material presented in *Supplementum Magicum* is conveniently divided into six categories: (a) *phylakteria* ‘amulets’; (b) *agogai* ‘love spells’; (c) *arai* ‘curses’; (d) *thymokatocha* ‘restrainers of wrath’; (e) *charitesia* ‘spells to win someone’s favor’; (f) *manteia* ‘predictions’. This complements the classification found in the *PGM*: (g) how to conjure up an “assistant daemon”; (h) how to conjure up the dead; (i) how to perform black magic; (j) how to heal an illness; (k) how to produce minor miracles (to win in a game or to make yourself invisible). See also Meyer and Mirecki, *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*. Love magic (next to hate magic) occupied people’s minds at all times. The essential procedure is explained very well by A. Touwaide, in *Der Neue Pauly* 9 (2000), p. 900: You needed *philtra*, made from minerals, plants, or animals. The *materia magica* of choice was burned in a ritual performed by a professional magus who could also use other objects, for example, lead tablets with magical inscriptions or a doll representing the target of the operation. Smoke was produced in order to conjure up a deity. Sometimes, the substance was dissolved in a drink (*poculum desiderii*) or brought into contact with the body of the person you desired.

44. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, 73.
49. See F. Eckstein and J. H. Waszink, *RAC* 1 (1950), cols. 397–411; A. Delatte and Ph. Derchain, *Les Entailles magiques Gréco-Egyptiennes* (Paris, 1964); D. Wortmann, *Bonner Jahrbücher* 175 (1975): 63–82; M. Smith, “Salvation in the Gospels, Paul and the Magical Papyri,” *Helios* 13 (1986): 63–74; Th. Gelzer et al., *Lamella Bernensis: Ein spätantikes Goldamulett und verwandte Texte* (Bern, 1999). Amulets made for children have been studied by V. Dasen, “Les Amulettes d’enfants dans le monde gréco-romain,” *Latomus* 62 (2003): 275–89. It appears that the tombs of women and children are often furnished with all kinds of magical protections. Children’s amulets sometimes have the form of a little bell, which the child could ring to chase evil spirits away. The *bulla*, which the Romans inherited from the Etruscans, served the same purpose when filled with pebbles. Snakes shown on Greek amulets are a very old theme that may go back via Crete (Early Minoan Period) to Egypt; see A. Trcková-Flamee, “Motif of the Snake and Its Meaning in the Minoan Iconography,” *Eirene* 39 (2003): 119–49. The animals that the *magus* needed for protection (the cat, the hedgehog, the ibis, and others) are typical of shamanism and comparable with the assistant (*paredros*) daemon invoked in ritual magic; see M. Weber, *RAC* 17 (1996), cols. 129–31; M. Weber, *RAC Lieferung* 158 (2003), col. 693; F. Witek, *RAC Lieferung* 17 (1996), cols. 917–18. The “ghost traps,” terracotta bowls inscribed with magical texts, may also be considered as amulets. They have been found, e.g., in Babylon, in certain quarters where He-
Arcana Mundi


52. See A. Quattruci, Miti, riti, magie e misteri degli Etruschi (Milan, 1992).

53. See the excellent treatment of D. P. Harmon, ANRW 2.16.3 (1986), pp. 1909–73.


55. Ibid., col. 2595.

56. On the gold tablet from Dacia, see Horsley, New Documents, 2: no. 12. A well-known example, CIL 1.2.2520 (cf. W. S. Fox, American Journal of Philology 33, supp. 1 [1912]), has been discussed by Tupet, “Rites magiques,” pp. 2602–3.


65. R. J. Penella, in Mnemosyne suppl. 56 (Leiden, 1979). Of the 115 letters
preserved as a corpus, together with 16 preserved in Philostratus’ *Vita*, Penella rejects or suspects roughly one-third. On no. 53, see C. P. Jones, in *Chiron* 12 (1983): 137–44.

66. See Petzke, *Die Traditionen über Apollonios von Tyana und das Neue Testament*.


72. On the Egyptian papyrus, see Horsley, *New Documents*, 1: no. 49. On Ammianus Marcellinus as a source for religious beliefs and magical practices, see Phillips, “In Search,” 260, 263–64. On the burning of magical books and related texts, see W. Speyer, “Büchervernichtung,” in *RAC Suppl.*, Lieferung 10 (2003), cols. 188–89. This was done by the emperors (under Augustus more than 2,000 prophecies in Greek and Latin were destroyed) and by the Church (Speyer, cols. 209–11). Nevertheless, such books have survived. The magical papyri were probably buried in Egypt with their owners. We can only guess under what conditions other books were preserved. On Iulius Africanus and his *Kestoi* (incomplete), see F. Winkelmann, “Iulius Africanus,” *RAC* 19 (2001), cols. 508–18; on the *Cyranides*, a Greek treatise on the healing powers of stones, plants, and animals in four books, see J. Scarbrough, “Hermetic and Related Texts,” in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, ed. I. Merkel and A. G. Debus (Berlin, 1988), pp. 19–44. The two authors, “Cyranus” and “Harpocration,” clearly believed in the powers of the pagan deities to whom certain stones or birds were sacred. They also give instructions on how to make amulets. A similar text, only preserved in Latin, is the *Compendium Aureum*. It deals with the role of plants and animals in magic. See A. Delatte, in *Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l’Université de Liège* 93 (1942).
