



RELATING TO THE SUPERNATURAL
A CASE STUDY OF FOURTH-CENTURY SYRIA AND PALESTINE

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
DECLARATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
ABBREVIATIONS	vii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. METHODOLOGY	
2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 ‘Magic’. The Label	8
2.3 Setting the Parameters	17
2.3.1 Chronological	18
2.3.2 Geographical	20
2.3.3 Practices and the evidence	22
2.3.3.1 Literary evidence	27
2.4 The Approach	28
2.4.1 A brief review of literature	28
2.4.2 Interpreting the late antique authors	38
2.4.3 Reading the social script	41
2.5 Conclusion	50
3. SYRIA AND PALESTINE. A FOURTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND	51
4. CURSES FOR COURSES. HEAVY TACTICS IN THE HIPPODROME	
4.1 Introduction	60
4.2 Syria	62
4.3 Palestine	68
4.4 Motivations	73
4.4.1 Agonistic context	74
4.4.2 Financial concerns	77
4.4.3 Perceiving the charioteer	79

4.5 Conclusion	81
5. SUPERNATURAL SABOTAGE. ENSURING A SUCCESSFUL LIVELIHOOD	
5.1 Introduction	82
5.2 Curses and Invocations	83
5.2.1 Syria	83
5.2.2 Palestine	87
5.2.3 Discussion	91
5.3 The Competitive Career. Surviving accusations	96
5.3.1 Syria	98
5.3.2 Palestine	111
5.3.3 Discussion. Manipulating preternatural power	114
5.4 Conclusion	124
6. DEMANDING DESIRE. RITUALS OF LOVE AND LUST	
6.1 Introduction	125
6.2 Syria	126
6.3 Palestine	135
6.4 Engaging Enchantment	141
6.5 Conclusion	153
7. APOTROPAISM. PROTECTING GOOD FORTUNE	
7.1 Introduction	154
7.2 Syria	156
7.3 Palestine	170
7.4 Ambiguous Evidence for a Broader Practice	173
7.5 The Price of Good Fortune	177
7.6 Conclusion	184
8. ILLNESS AND HEALING. THREATS AND RETALIATION IN A DISCOURSE OF POWER	
8.1 Introduction	186
8.2 Syria	187
8.3 Palestine	201
8.4 Discussion. Motivations and a discourse of power	209

8.4.1 Motivations	210
8.4.2 A discourse of power	214
8.5 Conclusion	218
9. POSSESSION AND EXPULSION. EXPERIENCING AND DISPELLING THE DAIMONIC	
9.1 Introduction	219
9.2 Syria	220
9.3 Palestine	228
9.4 Possession and Expulsion. Some remarks	235
9.4.1 Possession	235
9.4.2 Expulsion	242
9.5 Conclusion	245
10. AMBIGUOUS AND MISCELLANEOUS. MATERIAL NOT EASILY CATEGORISED	
10.1 Introduction	247
10.2 Miscellaneous	248
10.2.1 Squares and Words	248
10.2.2 Miracles and Holy Wonders	250
10.2.3 Fragmentary or Undeciphered Evidence	252
10.3. Ambiguous Assignations	253
10.3.1 <i>Sepher Ha-Razim</i>	253
10.3.2 Semitic Amulets and Bowls	259
10.3.3 Divination	263
10.3.3.1 Astrology	263
10.3.3.2 Oneiromancy	267
10.3.3.3 Theurgy	272
10.4 Concluding Remarks	276
11. CONCLUSION. AMBITIONS, DESIRES, FEARS, AND INSECURITIES	
11.1 Intentions, Parameters, and Interpretation. A recap	278
11.2 From the Circus to the Soul. An overview of the investigation	281
11.3 Society and the Supernatural. Some reflections	294
BIBLIOGRAPHY	296

ABSTRACT

The thesis is an investigation of practices involving the supernatural in Syria and Palestine in the fourth century of the common era. The study involves an examination of the extant evidence from both regions, and this consequently directs the discussion towards consideration of curses, spells, amulets, and accusations related to chariot races, love, livelihood and career, as well as methods involved in protection, healing, possession, and exorcism. Some miscellaneous material is also presented, as well as evidence deemed ambiguous, through dating or provenance, though often associated with Syria and/or Palestine in the fourth century, such as Aramaic bowls, and divination.

In addition to presenting the various forms of evidence available for the fourth-century practices in both regions, these activities involving the supernatural are also discussed with an aim for understanding their place within their social context. Hence the delineation of the restricted geographical area and time period provides the study with a framework within which to examine the practices with due consideration for the economic, political, religious, and social factors that can be seen to frame and influence their use. Various concepts offered by sociological and anthropological studies, such as ideas of envy, limited good, honour, and shame, are also applied to the material in order to gain greater insight into the social constructs that may have shaped beliefs and behaviours related to practices involving the supernatural.

As a result of the investigation it is proposed that the supernatural, and its related daimones, angels and divinities, formed an integral part of the fourth-century world-view in both Syria and Palestine. This involvement, however, did not simply include the incorporation of the supernatural into the terrestrial realm, but rather penetrated the concepts and context that framed social reality. Thus, for instance, constructs of envy and limited good and their close, almost inseparable, association with the supernatural, can be seen to exemplify the intricate intertwining of the supernatural with the tangible world within contemporary understanding, readily manifested in the manipulation of the social system in order to assuage envy, gain the inappropriate or inaccessible, or affect behaviour.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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Date 16/1/04

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Acknowledgment goes also to the University of Adelaide which granted me the P.W.Rice Scholarship allowing me to intermit my PhD to undertake an MA in Religion at Cardiff University, in order to gain greater insight into the socio-religious context of late antiquity, as well as undertake instruction in Syriac and Aramaic.

My friends have also been excellent companions, distractions, and inspirations, who were even wonderful enough not to ask me about the thesis at the right times.

Finally, this would not have been the positive experience it was were it not for my mother and her amazing support, encouragement and reality-checks both during the course of the thesis and in the life which provides its context. Thank you.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ACM Meyer, M., & Smith, R., *Ancient Christian Magic. Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, San Francisco: Harper, 1994.
- AMB Naveh, J., & Shaked, S., *Amulets and Magic Bowls. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1985.
- ANRW *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
- CT *Theodosiani, Libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis*, Voluminis I pars posterior textus cum apparativ, editio secunda lucis ope expressa, ed. Th. Mommsen, 1954.
- DT Audollent, A., *Defixionum Tabellae*, Paris, 1904 (repr. 1967 Frankfurt/Main: Minerva GmbH).
- GMA Kotansky, R., *Greek Magical Amulets. The inscribed Gold, Silver, and Bronze Lamellae*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994.
- GRBS *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
- HAIT Schiffman, L.H., & Swartz, M.D., *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Geniza*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.
- HE Sozomène, *Histoire Ecclésiastique, Livres I-II*, ed. J. Bidez (SC 306) Paris, 1983, & *Histoire Ecclésiastique, Livres III-IV*, ed. J. Bidez (SC 418) Paris, 1996.
- HN Zosimi, *Comitis et Ex Exadvocati Fisci. Historia Nova*, ed. L. Mendelssohn, Lipsia: Aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1887.
- HR Théodoret de Cyr, *Histoire des Moines de Syrie*, 2 vols, (SC 234, 257) P. Canivet & A. Leroy-Molinghen, Paris, 1977-9.
- JbAC *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
- JECS *Journal of Early Christian Studies*
- LH *The Lausiaca History of Palladius. II*, ed. D. Cuthbert Butler, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904.

- MSF Naveh, J., & Shaked, S., *Magic Spells and Formulae. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1993.
- PG Migne, J.P., *Patrologia Graeca*, Paris, 1857-1889.
- PGM Preisendanz, K., *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 3 vols, Berlin, Leipzig, Stuttgart: Verlag B.G. Teubner, 1928-41.
- PL Migne, J.P., *Patrologia Latina*, Paris, 1844-1864.
- SC *Sources chrétiennes*
- SEG *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (Referenced according to volume and inscription number, thus SEG 43.1347.)
- SGD Jordan, D.R., "A Survey of Greek Defixiones Not Included in the Special Corpora," GRBS 36.2 (1985) 151-197.
- SHR *Sepher Ha-razim. The Book of the Mysteries*, tr. M.A. Morgan, Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983.
- SM Daniel, R.W., & Maltomini, F. (eds), *Supplementum Magicum*, 2 vols, (Papyrologia Coloniensia, 16.1-2) Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990-1992.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis began with a simple desire to understand more about the mystical, exciting, and frightening world of ‘ancient magic’. The study which follows emerges from this original intention having, in the process, been subjected to considerable reflection, realignment, and refinement. Its aim now is to convey the excitement, the fear, and the power so intrinsic to this field of spells, charms and curses, and to do so with a full appreciation of the society that accommodated it.

Given the broad range of practices, periods, and regions which the wider subject of magic covers – including all regions and periods of Greco-Roman history, from the time of Homer through to Byzantium – finding a focus for this study was a priority, and required careful consideration of preceding scholarship. The foci of, and influences upon this scholarship varied, for as a field of study ‘ancient magic’ has interested a range of scholars since the nineteenth century and the discovery of the first magical papyri.¹ Since then there has been a variety of work carried out on the subject, influenced both by the availability of evidence and by prevailing trends of academic thought regarding magic and its place within society.²

The early part of last century saw an increasing amount of activity in the field. Of particular note at this time was the work of Preisendanz who in his *Papyri Graecae Magicae* translated and examined hundreds of Greek papyri from Egypt.³ However,

¹ The most commonly used term for supernatural activity, its manipulation and its agency, is ‘magic’. This term is not one which will be freely used within this thesis and the reasons for this will be discussed in Chapter 2. However, in the introduction to study in the field, the terms most commonly found in scholarship – ‘magic’, ‘sorcery’ and ‘witchcraft’ – will be incorporated in the discussion.

² For a history of scholarship on ancient magic see: F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, tr. F. Philip, London & Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press (1997) 8-12; also D.E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” ANRW II.23.2 (1980: 1507-1557) 1507-1509.

³ PGM. For a brief discussion of scholarship on the papyri prior to, and contemporary with, Preisendanz see H.D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation. Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press (1992) xli-xliv. Also n. 2 above.

despite the activity, magic and its study was not assigned scholarly status by many academics who appeared to view it as a pollution of the idealised image of the ancient past.⁴ Such culturally tainted and even pejorative attitudes towards magic were sustained for many decades and were considerably influenced by the works of Tylor and Frazer, the latter particularly affected by Darwinian notions.⁵ Frazer, and others with similar ideas, believed that cultures ‘evolved’ in much the same way as the physical human form had evolved. Thus it was believed that there were ‘primitive’ societies and beliefs, and there were more ‘evolved’ cultural forms. Within this framework, any practices which were deemed magical were primitive and reflected a lower, less-evolved form of ‘superstitious’ belief not to be found in more evolved cultural entities. Such pejorative notions of ancient belief systems were to pervade scholarship for many decades, and in some instances their influence is still apparent.⁶

A revival and renaissance in scholarship on magic has been evident since the early 1990s with significant scholars such as Faraone, Gager, Graf, Jordan, Kotanksy, Luck, Meyer, Mirecki, Shaked, Schaefer, and Swartz providing varied and often insightful studies into various aspects of the field.⁷ The interest of many of these recent studies in the social contexts of magical practices, and their increasing dismissal of the pejorative ideas of the past has spurred on a broader acceptance of magic as a legitimate and noteworthy aspect of mainstream socio-historical studies.

⁴ See Graf, *Ancient Magic*, 10-11, and Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, xliii-xliv.

⁵ E.B. Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press (Abridged edition) 1964; J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic in Religion*, London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1954.

⁶ For example A.D. Vakaloudi, “Demonic-Mantic Practices – the Implication of the Theurgists and Their Power of Submission in the Early Byzantine Empire,” *Byzantinoslavica* 60 (1999) 87-113; & A. Wypustek in a paper delivered at Cardiff University, 2001.

⁷ For instance: C.A. Faraone, & D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; J.G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; Graf, *Ancient Magic*; SGD; GMA; G. Luck, *Arcana Mundi. Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1991; M. Meyer & P. Mirecki (eds), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1995; AMB; P. Schäfer & S. Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza I*, (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum, 42) Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994; see also W.M. Brashear, “Out of the Closet: Recent Corpora of Magical texts,” *Classical Philology* 91.4 (1996) 372-383. This is just a selection of references; see bibliography for more.

Amongst this wide-ranging, extensive, and often enlightening scholarship, there are still many areas and aspects of Greco-Roman magic deserving of attention. The physical, temporal, and geographical nature of the evidence means that most studies of the material have either covered a broad geographical area and a lengthy period of time, or focused their attention on specific forms or functions of practice. These are issues which will receive more considered attention in the following chapter; it suffices to say here that there is scope for more temporally- and regionally-focused studies of the material, especially as the social context becomes increasingly acknowledged and examined. In line with this argument the thesis offers a study clearly defined both geographically and temporally, which addresses the antique evidence with a primary concern for the social context which produced it.

The aim of the thesis is to present and discuss people's utilisation of techniques involving the supernatural in Syria and Palestine in the fourth century of the common era. The study considers the evidence from both regions for practices involving methods such as curses, spells, invocations, and the use of amulets. Such a focus allows for a concentrated study excluding assumptions in regard to the homogeneity of Greco-Roman practice and belief. It also facilitates the social aspect of the investigation which considers the evidence within the fourth-century social setting of Syria and Palestine, drawing upon ideas presented by sociological and anthropological studies that offer insight into understanding the social place of practices involving the supernatural.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2, 'Methodology', addresses the reasoning behind the delineations and ambitions of the study. This discussion includes a review of scholarship regarding 'magic', and presents an argument for the inapplicability of the term and its consequent exclusion from the investigation. In the absence of such a generic label, the subject matter to be incorporated in the study covers those activities involving people's communication with the supernatural for the purposes of protection, or assistance in beneficent or maleficent action.⁸ The discussion then focuses on the restriction of the investigation both to the specific time period of the fourth century of

⁸ As the consistent and frequent use of the term 'supernatural' can lead to a repetitive narrative, 'preternatural' will be used interchangeably with 'supernatural', and the meaning of 'preternatural' taken to be that which equates it with 'supernatural'.

the common era and to the two regions of Syria and Palestine. Thereafter consideration is given to the issue of interpreting the extant and relevant evidence, including an examination of various social studies which investigate similar practices or belief systems, and a determination of the applicability of their approaches to the subject of this study.

Chapter 3, 'Syria and Palestine. A fourth-century background', completes what is effectively the introductory section of the thesis by outlining some of the major aspects of fourth-century society in order to provide a setting for the practices to be investigated. Thus administrative, educational, familial, religious, and gender issues are addressed.

Chapter 4, 'Curses for Courses. Heavy tactics in the hippodrome', begins the investigation of fourth-century practices involving the supernatural in Syria and Palestine. Extant evidence related to the chariot races in both regions is presented and includes curse tablets and hagiographical accounts that illustrate the use of methods involving the supernatural to enhance, inhibit, or protect horses and charioteers. It is argued in the course of the discussion that the agonistic context of the sporting event, individual financial concerns, as well as the social perception of the charioteer, all contributed to appeals to supernatural agents in this sporting arena.

Chapter 5, 'Supernatural Sabotage. Ensuring a successful livelihood', addresses the methods people used to ensure their success or survival in areas of livelihood and career. This included curses, the assistance of holy men, as well as the use of sorcery accusations. This chapter is divided between the evidence dealing with livelihood and career, and that dealing specifically with the sorcery accusations. It is proposed in the discussion of the various forms of evidence that social, economic, and political factors, as well as concepts of honour, envy, and limited good can be seen as having contributed to the use, or alleged use, of practices involving the supernatural in relation to livelihood in this period.

Chapter 6, 'Demanding Desire. Rituals of love and lust', relies heavily on hagiographical accounts in its investigation of love spells and curses. It is argued that in this evidence can be seen the influences and provocations of social constructs of gender,

family, behaviour, honour, and shame, as well as an attempt to reassert and manipulate social norms and expectations.

Chapter 7, 'Apotropaism. Protecting good fortune', investigates the pervasive practice of protecting the individual and his/her property from misfortune. The predominant threat of misfortune lay in the fear of the evil eye, a complex belief closely related to ideas on envy. It is proposed in the discussion of the apotropaic practices that the prevailing social structures and belief systems create a sense of vulnerability, fostered by the notion of limited good and of envy, that bring about this need for apotropaic security from the daimonic and deleterious.

Chapter 8, 'Illness and Healing. Threats and retaliation in a discourse of power', considers the role of the supernatural in the healing practices of the fourth century. It is argued from an examination of the evidence that the fourth-century mind-set associated illness with the malevolent intervention of supernatural forces and that these forces consequently also provided a medium for the healing of maladies. Furthermore it is asserted that the practice of healing provided a powerful forum for the promotion of effective supernatural and religious prowess, particularly by contemporary Christian authorities.

Chapter 9, 'Possession and Expulsion. Experiencing and expelling the daimonic', investigates the activities and rituals related to daimonic possession and expulsion. It is proposed in the discussion that the perception of deviant behaviour, the assertion of religious differentiation, social change, the social perception of vulnerability, as well as issues of power and control, are all evident factors in the quite dramatic context of possession and expulsion.

Chapter 10, 'Ambiguous and Miscellaneous. Material not easily categorised', deals initially with that material which is believed relevant to the thesis' aim of incorporating all extant evidence for the period, but which does not easily fit into the categories addressed in the previous chapters. This material includes: miscellaneous *defixiones*, 'magical squares', miracles and holy wonders, and fragmentary or undeciphered material. Also considered in the chapter is evidence with ambiguous dating or provenance, for which some argument exists suggesting its presence in Syria

and/or Palestine in the fourth century. The evidence presented in the second section of the chapter includes the *Sepher Ha-Razim*, the Semitic amulets and magic bowls, and the divinatory techniques of astrology, oneiromancy, and theurgy.

Chapter 11 is the concluding section of the thesis. It reflects on the aims of the study and the methodology which directed it. In addition it reviews the findings of the investigation and considers the interdependence of social context and belief systems and their role in the use of methods involving the supernatural in the fourth century.

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses those issues relating to evidence and interpretation that shape the investigation. Three main areas are covered. Firstly, the problem of the label of 'magic' and its definition is considered. Secondly, the parameters of date, location, and the form and sources of applicable evidence are discussed – aspects which then determine the inclusion or exclusion of information throughout the thesis. Thirdly, methods for approaching and understanding the material are examined. Initially the manner in which the evidence has been treated and analysed to date is reviewed. Then possible alternative courses for interpretation utilised in other fields of historical or social inquiry are presented.

The delineation of such clear parameters for the study is motivated both by the need to limit the investigation to an amount of evidence sustainable within the length limitations of the thesis, and, with consideration for this restriction, by the aim of delving more substantially into one slice of Greco-Roman history, rather than scanning a larger section in a less complete manner.

The latter aim stems also from the premise that a representative understanding of the ancient world cannot be firmly built upon broad, sweeping uses of ancient material. That is, in order to understand history by taking into account its changes – such as political, social, geographical – the Greco-Roman world of almost two millennia must not be treated as an homogenous, unchanging whole. For instance, political changes were to have a profound affect on borders, trade, religions, as well as social conditions throughout the regions. These influences varied both over the course of time and throughout the different countries and provinces which made up the Greek- and Latin-speaking world. Hence by limiting the investigation to a particular period,

significant contemporary circumstances such as political changes and developments, and the consequent social and economic situations, can be taken into full account in considering the extant evidence. Likewise, by restricting the study to a particular area, in this case two neighbouring regions of the eastern empire, the social, political, economic, religious, and environmental circumstances of this specific geographical context can also be given full weight in relation to the examination and interpretation of the core material. Thus it is hoped that this study will provide an understanding of beliefs and practices within the cultural contexts that fostered them.

2.2 'Magic'. The Label

The discussion must begin with a clear delineation of the subject matter, and thus, as suggested earlier, with the term 'magic'. The use of this term without definition of meaning places any study at the mercy of each researcher's and reader's variable understanding of what magic is. However, definition itself does not necessarily help the situation. Consider, for instance, the difficulty which must be faced when using a definition such as that proposed by Luck which utilises the concept of the 'soul' – a term which is itself open to various problems of interpretation. Luck writes :

I would define magic as a technique grounded in a belief in powers located in the human soul and in the universe outside ourselves, a technique that aims at imposing the human will on nature or on human beings by using supersensual powers. Ultimately, it may be a belief in the unlimited powers of the soul.¹

Unclear terminology is not, however, the only difficulty of definition. The label 'magic' is loaded with the cultural and social meanings, both positive and negative, which have been assigned it over the course of the last millennia. Hence it is necessary to find a definition which proposes a meaning suitably stripped of modern preconceptions and judgements. Yet, even having found this description, it is also imperative that the understanding and conceptions of the period in question are considered. As will be shown, the antique notion of magic can be variable and is not readily restricted to the one label so often sought for it. Thus the term magic itself and

¹ Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 3.

its use pose significant dilemmas for the investigation and must receive due consideration in order to determine a manageable and academically viable approach for the study.

The issue of magic in regard to its relation to religion and its definition has been thoroughly discussed and debated in books and journals for well over a century. However, this discussion has waned in past years and scholars have largely followed the individual approaches deemed most appropriate and culturally responsive to the material and periods under investigation. Recent trends in scholarship display a shift away from traditional pejorative views, distinctions and labels, yet the approaches of scholars do not present a conclusive solution or an easily applicable precedent.

The traditional definition of magic rested largely on scholarly interpretations of its relation with and to religion and, to a lesser degree for the ancient world, science. The dichotomy created a plethora of articles, each providing new markers upon which to place that all important dividing line, crucial to separating magical practice from what were considered the more respectable fields of religion and even science.² The hugely influential works of Frazer and Tylor, for example, which were heavily influenced by a scientific view of the world and subsequent social studies deriving from theories of evolution, were not surprisingly largely focused on separating the ‘primitive’ rites of magic from the more ‘pure and civilised’ forms of Christian religion. The impact of these views can be traced in scholarly studies in the field through to the later part of last century, weighed down as they were by definitions reflecting long defunct

² Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 1507-23, provides an excellent discussion on this topic. Many works are cited in the discussion that follows, however, see also: R.K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, 54; 1993) 1-13. For examples of, and discussion of, magic defined according to religion see: Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 4-5; H. Maguire, “Magic and the Christian Image,” in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic*, Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library (1995: 51-71) 51; F.C.R Thee, *Julius Africanus and the Early Christian View of Magic*, Tübingen (1984) 8; also B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, Glencoe, Il.: The Free Press (1948) 67-70. For a reaction to Malinowski’s treatment see H. Geertz, “An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6.1 (1975: 71-89) 78, 82; and M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1966) 59.

scholarly trends, ethnocentric assumptions, pejorative and subjective attitudes, and anachronistic analyses.³

The anthropologist Emile Durkheim dealt extensively with the issues of magic and religion and their definitions. To Durkheim, Frazer, by failing to define religion, was not able to recognise the profoundly religious character of various beliefs and rites which he had classified as primitive and magic:⁴

So magic is not, as Frazer has held, an original fact, of which religion is only a derived form. Quite on the contrary, it was under the influence of religious ideas that the precepts upon which the art of the magician is based were established, and it was only through a secondary extension that they were applied to purely lay relations.⁵

Durkheim by defining religion diverges from the ideas of Frazer to establish magic as a rite and practice derived from, and similar to, religion. Yet he does differentiate between magic and religion by identifying a social distinction between the two: magic as the practice of the individual, and religion as the practice of the collective.⁶

Evans-Pritchard on the other hand, in his study of the Azande, while recognising the individual nature of most magic, highlights the establishment of magic associations in Azande society.⁷ These associations challenge traditional patterns of behaviour in that society in relation to sex, age and status as well as customary divisions of magic within the community. Evans-Pritchard's work establishes that universal definitions of religion and magic cannot hold true, and he recognises only an ambiguous distinction between magic and religion, placing little importance on the interrelationship between the two.⁸

The last three decades of scholarship on antique practices have seen a move away from traditional and often pejorative views of magic and have increasingly

³ Remnants of these attitudes can still be seen in more recent work; see Chapter 1 n.6. Also pejorative is the attitude that 'magic' is in some way irrational, see for example Thee, *Julius Africanus*, 8-9.

⁴ E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, tr. J.W. Swain, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd (1915) 23.

⁵ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 361.

⁶ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 43-47.

⁷ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1976) 205-220.

⁸ See Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*.

included anthropological and sociological approaches, such as those pioneered by Durkheim and Evans-Pritchard, with varying results. For instance, Aune while still seeking to define magic according to its relationship with religion, utilises modern theoretical concepts of social deviance in his work on early Christian magic. Aune thus states that: “magic is defined as the form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution.”⁹

Jeffers, in contrast, argues that a distinction between magic and religion is largely untenable and reflects an ethnocentric distinction between natural and supernatural which is not made by most religions.¹⁰

Other significant studies have in recent years directed renewed attention to the magic and religion dichotomy, often seeking new approaches and providing fresh directions for examining the subject. The work edited by Faraone and Obbink in *Magika Hiera* is an example.¹¹ This collective study sets out to determine whether the traditional dichotomy between magic and religion helps in any way to conceptualise the objective features of particular magical activities.¹²

The various contributors to *Magika Hiera* did not provide homogenous analyses. For example, Faraone in his examination of early Greek *defixiones* found that a theoretical dichotomy between ‘magic’ and ‘religion’ did not assist in analysing and evaluating the cultural phenomenon of early Greek *defixiones*.¹³ In contrast Versnel, examining the role of *defixiones* and the use of prayer in the ancient world, concluded that the terms magic and religion tended to become less distinct in areas. However, he protested the dismissal of the terms, arguing instead that his findings “should provoke our interest and encourage us to document and explain the conditions and the circumstances that foster the blurring of the boundaries.”¹⁴

⁹ Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 1515.

¹⁰ *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, E.J. Brill (1996) 6-7.

¹¹ Faraone et al., *Magika Hiera*.

¹² Faraone et al., *Magika Hiera*, vi-vii.

¹³ C.A. Faraone, “The Agonistic Context of early Greek Binding Spells,” in Faraone et al., *Magika Hiera*, 20.

¹⁴ H.S. Versnel, “Beyond Cursing: the Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers,” in Faraone et al., *Magika Hiera*, 92.

While the work of the contributors to *Magika Hiera* is significant both in seeking to determine whether the traditional dichotomy of magic and religion is of any benefit, and in doing so within a framework seeking to understand specific rituals in their contexts, it is worth noting that the practices which were examined in the book were often diverse in the periods of time and geographical areas covered, and the treatment of the material by the contributors varied considerably. Diversity in approach and subject matter can be of benefit; however, homogeneity of approach and defined parameters of time, location and practices could conceivably provide a more indicative picture, albeit with a more limited historical scope. That is, if the varied approaches were applied to a particular region or regions over a prescribed period of time, a more representative portrayal of the situation may have been possible and the blurred boundaries of meaning described by Versnel subtly noted.

Segal represents a movement away both from the often artificial distinction of magic and religion and indeed from the application of any definition. He states:

I will argue that no definition of magic can be universally applicable because “magic” can not and should not be construed as a properly scientific term. Its meaning changes as the context in which it is used changes. No single definition of magic can be absolute, since all definitions of magic are relative to the culture and sub-culture under discussion. Furthermore, it is my contention that we have been misled by our own cultural assumptions into making too strict a distinction between magic and religion in the Hellenistic world. As we shall see, in some places the distinction between magic and religion will depend purely on the social context.¹⁵

Gager and his fellow contributors, in *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, extend this point proposing that “magic, as a definable and consistent category of human experience, simply does not exist,” and arguing that, even when scholars insist that there is an overlap between magic and religion, they “must presuppose them somehow to be distinctive and definable entities.”¹⁶ Certainly a dismissal of the use of any such

¹⁵ A.F. Segal, “Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition,” in R. Van den Broek & M.J. Vermaseren (eds), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain, 91) Leiden (1981:349-375) 350-351. On magic and religion see also Geertz, “An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I,”; K. Thomas, “An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, II,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6.1 (1975: 91-109) 94-97; H.S. Versnel “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion,” *Numen* 38 (1991) 177-197; and the discussion in C.R. Phillips III, “The Sociology of Religious Knowledge in the Roman Empire,” *ANRW*, II.16.3 (1986: 2677-2773) 2711-2732.

¹⁶ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 24-5.

label is a move towards minimising subjectivity and the misrepresentation of material by not seeking traditional and often ethnocentric definitions of ‘magic’.

Graf, by contrast, in his work *Magic in the Ancient World*, approaches “the term magic in the sense that the ancients gave it, avoiding not only the Frazerian notions, but also all the other ethnological notions of the term”.¹⁷ In doing this Graf seeks to understand the Greco-Roman concept within its specific social context, and as such this approach is a valuable shift towards a more valid social understanding of magic. Using the antique terms and understanding the roles of *μαγεία* or *γοητεία* for example, as well as those of related practices and practitioners, within their contemporary social contexts is a move towards minimising the influence of the loaded term ‘magic’. However, variations in the meaning of terms according to context, author, and time are inevitable and, though Graf acknowledges these changes in his approach, his study covers a considerable time period and various regions, and allowing for possible deviations in meaning in respect of these influences alone is difficult. Furthermore, when using the terms of the Greco-Roman world there are problems in determining, without influencing the material to some degree, how information should be classified when the ancient authors have not already done this. That is, authors of antiquity will not always label an activity as *μαγεία* or *γοητεία*, for example, while they may, or may not, actually be referring to a practice which they or others would have considered in this way. In cases such as this a modern scholar must determine whether a particular activity would have been perceived to fall into one of the antique categories, and whether it would have retained the same meaning as other examples within the classification. In these situations the Greco-Roman material would be subjected to modern interpretation and an avenue for possible misrepresentation of the primary material would thereby be opened. Furthermore, if for the sake of academic integrity a scholar sought instead to include only material which had been overtly labelled by its

¹⁷ Graf, *Ancient Magic*, 18. Also on the notion of observing the contemporary social definition assigned magic see C.R. Phillips III, “Magic and Politics in the Fourth Century: Parameters and Groupings,” *Studia Patristica* 18.1 (1985: 65-70) 67.

contemporaries, then the study is conversely faced with restrictions of content that could provide a somewhat skewed impression of historical practice and belief.¹⁸

Thus even the utilisation of antique definitions is troublesome. In addition to these considerations there is Versnel's argument that all theoreticians begin with their own concept of magic, whether it be used in inverted commas or introduced by 'so-called'.¹⁹ We are indeed influenced by the society in which we live and are therefore predisposed to an understanding, and even judgement, of certain ideas and behaviours. Engaging these preconceived and ethnocentric ideas in a study of different cultures and periods can thus frame the very way in which data is approached, from the initial questions through to the final analysis, invariably distorting any understanding of antique notions.²⁰ Although it is evidently difficult to eliminate all the preconceived ideas inherent in modern thought and scholarly discourse in relation to magic, it is, nevertheless, possible to be aware of the influence of the researcher in the selection processes related to the antique material.

Also requiring consideration is a problem that is arguably inherent in a study that is both anachronistic and culturally disparate, especially when concerning supernatural subject matter, namely the concept of subject-validity. As Bowie points out, there are ethical and methodological problems associated with the assumption that:

Any cosmological statement or ritual practice is of interest not because it might or might not be true, but for what it reveals of a coherent body of thought that constitutes a culture and its social structure.²¹

So it is the case that, in dismissing the efficacy of the idea or practice by disregarding its importance or validity, a fundamental aspect of that idea and behaviour is already misrepresented by the scholar.

Although in this study the beliefs and practices associated with the supernatural are largely examined for the role which they play in social relations in fourth-century

¹⁸ Heintz approaches the difficulties associated with the use of a restrictive, single definition by also adopting a second anthropological definition. See F.G.P. Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Late Antique Circus*, PhD Dissertation, Harvard University (1999) 6-8.

¹⁹ Versnel, "Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion," 181.

²⁰ Re the influence of an author's own valuations and ideals see also: F. Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion. An Introduction*, Oxford & Malden MA.: Blackwell Publishers (2000) 8.

²¹ Bowie, *Anthropology of Religion*, 5.

Syria and Palestine, they are not examined on the premise that they may or may not have been truly effective, and that this efficacy is to a great extent irrelevant to their existence. It is not the role of a modern observer of the past to dismiss an activity as ineffective, especially when its potency was decidedly relevant for its contemporary users.²² Nor is it necessary that these beliefs and activities be minimised or debased into ‘irrational’ or ‘pseudo-scientific’ intellectual groupings, such that a scholar is justified in accepting, for example, the personal experience of oneiromancy for the Greco-Roman world, while also reducing it to a tradition of ‘willed self-delusion’, hallucinations and delusional acceptance.²³

Thus, without adopting experiential anthropological methods,²⁴ it is possible to accept the basic premise of the technique by attempting to enter the mindset of the late-antique world, at least to the degree practicable given current comprehension of it, in order to appreciate the beliefs and practices of that period within their social contexts. As Bowie writes:

It is certainly possible to remain open to another culture and its beliefs, and perhaps be profoundly affected by them, without feeling it necessary to enter into discussions of truth or falsity.²⁵

This involves the elimination of any assumptions of continuity in the constructs of thought, belief, and behaviour from the antique world through to many modern societies, often considered its loyal descendants/legacy. Eradicating the influences of cultural constructs of thought and belief is not completely achievable, as has already been argued above. However, it is possible for a researcher to diminish such influence through both a consciously sought after appreciation of cultural contexts and constructs of the past, and the instigation of an applicable investigation that is of a chronological

²² See also Lerner’s discussion on relativism and the idea that beliefs, values and practices of any given society are the product of that society and should be seen in relation to the structure and needs of that society, and thus all beliefs are “equally true, rational, and valuable.” (C. Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The politics of popular belief*, A. Macfarlane [ed.], Oxford: Basil Blackwell [1984] 98-99).

²³ R. Gordon, “Reporting the Marvellous: Private Divination in the Greek Magical Papyri,” in P. Schäfer & H.G. Kippenberg (eds), *Envisioning Magic. A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, Leiden & New York: Brill (1997: 65-92) 83-88.

²⁴ For example, Greenwood’s study of modern witchcraft and magic saw her becoming involved with the practices which she studied, an impossible methodology for the student of history. See: S. Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld. An Anthropology*, Oxford & New York: Berg, 2000.

²⁵ Bowie, *Anthropology of Religion*, 10.

and geographical scope that allows such an appreciation to be effectively applied. Ultimately it is within the framework of a particular view of the nature of reality and a culture's unique image of the way in which the world works, that the conceptual foundation for diagnosis and analysis lies.

Thus acceptance of the belief in the practices and powers of the supernatural, combined with a dismissal of the credibility of that belief, is avoided in this study. In contrast, an acknowledgment is made that practices involving the supernatural could possess both meaning and efficacy in their antique context. Therefore this study is based on the assertion that in the Greco-Roman world people believed in the supernatural not because they 'didn't know any better', but because their world included powerful preternatural forces that were able to assist, hinder, or protect them.

Within this study therefore the label 'magic' will not be utilised or defined, given the problems associated with its use discussed above, nor will any supplemental label of such a kind be used or defined. Similarly the debate on the dichotomy between religion and magic will not be entered upon as no definable concept of magic is accepted or asserted as a valid foundation for the study. The elimination of a one-word label such as 'magic' does not, however, allow for a dismissal of all delineation of the subject matter for the study. By contrast, it requires very clear designation of the subject matter to be incorporated in the research.

The subject matter then, will include those activities which involve humanly instigated communication with supernatural entities, such as divinities and daimones,²⁶ for the purpose of protection, or assistance in beneficent or maleficent action. These entities, though neither tangible, visible, nor mortal, are clearly recognised in the late antique evidence as forces upon which humans may have an impact, and which, conversely, may have an impact on humans. Furthermore the form which this communication may take includes verbal, written, and symbolic methods, directly orchestrated by the individual protagonist, or by his or her agent, or facilitated by some

²⁶ In order to avoid modern preconceptions the term *daimon(es)* will be utilised as a transliteration of the Greek δαίμων. This term is increasingly being utilised in studies in the field. See for instance N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World. Pagans, Jews and Christians*, London & New York: Routledge (2001) 27; and for a discussion on the history of the term see J.Z. Smith "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity," ANRW 16.1.2 (1978) 425-439.

form of intermediary device. Finally, in specifying assistance in beneficent or maleficent action, communications with the supernatural will be limited to those instigated in order to affect, in some way, another individual(s), or the protagonist.

2.3 Setting the Parameters

Having established an understanding of the type of evidence to be included in the study, parameters of time, context, and source material must also be set. The thesis will determine specific boundaries within which to base the study and in this way will differentiate itself from much of the scholarship which has dealt with the supernatural to date. Most academic studies can be seen to fall into one of five categories: those which examine a particular practice for the length of time the evidence covers;²⁷ those which look at the literary representations and material evidence for what is sometimes loosely defined as ‘magic’ and its practices over a large time period;²⁸ those which conduct examinations covering different cultural groups ranging from Latin Italy to the Greek East;²⁹ those which, within the context of pluralistic societies, concentrate on groups which they deem to have specific religious affiliations, that is, traditional Greco-Romans, Christians, and Jews;³⁰ and finally, those which, when dealing with the fourth century of the Common Era, deal almost exclusively with the sorcery accusations of the period.³¹ Although several of the scholarly approaches categorised here have resulted in

²⁷ As do many of the collective studies of magical papyri, curse tablets and amulets, such as PGM; Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*; Gager, *Curse Tablets*; ACM; W.M. Brashear, “The Greek Magical Papyri: an Introduction and Survey. Annotated Bibliography (1928-94),” ANRW II.18.5 (1995) 3380-3684; and GMA.

²⁸ For example J.E. Lowe, *Magic in Greek and Latin Literature*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1929; K. Seligmann, *The History of Magic*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1948. In terms of a broad chronological and regional study: Graf, *Ancient Magic*; M.W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, London & New York: Routledge, 2001.

²⁹ For example Luck, *Arcana Mundi*; and Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*.

³⁰ For example ACM; and MSF.

³¹ For example P. Brown, “Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity: from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages,” in M. Douglas (ed.), *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, Tavistock Publications (1970) 17-45; K. Hay, “Sorcery Trials in the Fourth century AD: Magic or Manipulation?,” *Scriptorium* 2.1 (1997) 40-50; and J.O. Ward, “Witchcraft and Sorcery in the Later Roman Empire and the Early Middle Ages,” *Prudentia* 12.2 (1980) 93-108.

significant contributions to the study of antique dealings with the supernatural, there are inherent advantages and disadvantages in the approaches, as will be explained shortly, and consideration of these along with the definition of subject matter set out above (section 2.2) will shape the course of this investigation.

Before moving on to consider which material will be included in the study in line with the definition of subject matter, the parameters of time and place will be set so as to restrict the study according to the aim outlined in the introduction to this chapter, namely to work within a limited chronological and geographical focus.

2.3.1 Chronological

As already noted, several studies in the field deal with practices and beliefs concerning the supernatural over an extensive time period, often spanning several centuries in their discussions.³² Such works do offer broad surveys of the subject; however, their analyses are disadvantaged by the difficulties inherent in trying to account for and represent changes in the occurrence, form, or meaning of practices over such lengthy periods – variations which seem inevitable for organic cultural constructs. Consider for example the papyri from Egypt. Simply the eclectic nature of the prescriptions, such as the inclusion of Christian elements, already illustrates how practices were affected by changing social situations.³³ Hence there may be significant advantage in limiting a study's time frame so that a quite detailed analysis of the social context for each piece of evidence is possible and a more accurate understanding of the inter-relationship of evidence, practice, and social context achieved.

It is a basic premise of this thesis then that the application of a restricted time period for the study will allow for the development of this more representative portrayal of practice and belief. It is by examining a period and drawing on all available primary sources for that time-span that it is possible to begin to form a more complete picture of people's relations with the supernatural and the role that these played in their society.

³² See nn. 28-30 above.

³³ See, for example, ACM.

To delimit a study chronologically requires the selection of a time-frame which takes account of both the nature of the investigation and the variety and amount of material available. The late-Roman world has provided a considerable amount of evidence concerned with practices involving the supernatural, such as the Greek and Demotic magical papyri and numerous written accounts. This evidence, as well as studies of the past which have proposed that the period fostered increased superstition and consequently 'deviant' practices,³⁴ provide enticing incentives to direct research this way. Add to this the political, religious, economic, and social changes of the period, and a dynamic environment presents itself. Hence in consideration of these factors this study will focus on this era in particular, and it will furthermore restrict itself to a single century as an appropriate time-frame. There is an acknowledgment that the selection of one century is an artificial delineation which does not reflect the actual existence, either from their beginning or to their end, of the practices to be considered. However, it does offer a convenient means of restricting this type of study, and the arguments favouring a more limited time span still apply.³⁵

Given the political and religious events of the fourth century CE, as well as the comparatively large amount of evidence, literary and non-literary, which record them, the fourth century provides the study with a rich and well-documented social setting for activities involving the supernatural. Thus it is the fourth century upon which the investigation will focus. It should be noted that on those occasions when evidence overlaps from the previous, or into the proceeding, centuries, allowance will be made for its inclusion as appropriate.

The beliefs and practices of the fourth century of the common era are often referred to within the framework of much larger works dealing with 'magical' practices in the Greco-Roman world, religion in late antiquity, and general scholarly discussions

³⁴ See particularly: A.A. Barb, "The Survival of the Magic Arts," in A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1963) 100-125.; and C. Bonner, "Witchcraft in the Lecture Room of Libanius," *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 63 (1932) 34-44.

³⁵ On historical chronology as an anachronistic and virtually irrelevant criterion for the study of antique societies see F.H. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and its Near Eastern Environment. A Socio-Historical Investigation*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1994) 34-36.

of late antiquity or the fourth century.³⁶ Although it is often suggested that this period provides an abundance of material, few studies have made the activities and beliefs of the period that relate to the supernatural the focus of their work. Those which have, have concentrated on particular aspects of behaviour such as so-called sorcery accusations, and it is these studies that are often used as the expert and, as it were, 'complete' sources for the period by the larger aforementioned studies.³⁷ While there is evident academic merit in the work which has been done, no work has yet encompassed the period and its various supernatural beliefs and activities as a whole. This thesis attempts to bridge this gap in scholarship, utilising the literary and non-literary evidence available for the period.

2.3.2 Geographical

A geographical restriction must also be determined so as to further focus the study. The most immediate restriction concerns the distinction between the eastern and western parts of the empire, more particularly the linguistic divide separating the two. To use examples from both the eastern and western halves of the empire assumes a degree of homogeneity across the Latin and Greek sectors of the realm. Such an assumption makes little allowance for cultural differences between populations of which the differing dominant languages are but one aspect. Many studies on beliefs and practices involving the supernatural have concentrated on the Greco-Roman activities over a number of regions within the empire, often arguing for homogeneity on account of imperialism and resultant cultural infiltration. Studies already mentioned above, such as those by Graf and Luck, fall into this category.³⁸ It is also a common argument that the papyri of Egypt, as well as other evidence uncovered in the region, represent

³⁶ For example: J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, London: Duckworth, 1989.

³⁷ For example: Bonner, "Witchcraft in the Lecture Room"; Barb, "Survival of Magic Arts"; and Brown, "Sorcery and Demons".

³⁸ It is worth noting here Versnel's comments on breaking the language barriers (that is, the Greek and Latin divide) in his study of judicial prayers (see Versnel, "Beyond Cursing," esp. 90).

homogenous practice across the contemporary Greco-Roman world.³⁹ However, despite the cultural infiltration of the Greeks and Romans throughout the Mediterranean, there were indigenous cultural traits and approaches which cannot be excluded from consideration in any socio-historical analysis. For example, if a particular form of love spell which originated in Attic Greece became popular and spread throughout the Greco-Roman world, we cannot assume that this spell would not take on some indigenous trait or traits in another region. Indeed the Egyptian papyri demonstrate both how practices were absorbed by other cultures in the Hellenistic and late Roman periods, and how adopted practices would take on indigenous cultural nuances.⁴⁰ Hence, studies must take into consideration not only the possibility that forms of practice alter in some way, but also that a disregard for differing social conditions in each region risks an assumption of homogenous cultural meanings regardless of social contexts.

There are some studies which have avoided this problem by dealing with specific regions. These include Cryer's work on divination in ancient Israel and the Near East,⁴¹ Faraone's study of 'love magic' in Ancient Greece,⁴² as well as numerous studies which have focussed on aspects of Egyptian tradition.⁴³ These studies deal with cultural practices within provincial regions and specific social contexts; however, it is worth noting that they also tend to focus on particular practices.

Thus the geographical delimitation of the study will take into account linguistic and cultural grouping and will consequently concentrate on the Greek-speaking East and focus on two specific regions in this part of the empire – Palestine and Syria. These two regions are often treated by scholars as one region known as Syro-Palestine.

³⁹ For example: Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 1508; Gordon, "Reporting the Marvellous". In contrast, for reservations about the papyri as valid evidence for all ancient 'magic' (Graf, *Ancient Magic*, 3 n.1).

⁴⁰ See Betz's "Introduction" in PGM, pp.xlv-xlvi.

⁴¹ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel*.

⁴² C.A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, London & Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999.

⁴³ For example J.F. Bourghouts (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Magical Text*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978; D. Frankfurter, "Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category 'Magician'," in P. Schäfer & H.G. Kippenberg (eds), *Envisioning Magic. A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, Leiden & New York: Brill (1997) 115-135 ; Ritner, *Mechanics of Egyptian Magical Practice*.

However, this investigation will adhere to the provincial administrative divisions assigned to the regions in the fourth century by the Roman empire, and thus incorporate Palaestina and Palaestina Salutaris. This does impose an artificial delineation which may not have clearly paralleled social and communal areas, – a point taken up below – but the distinction does allow for a clear outline of regions, following fourth-century borders, and provides a clear boundary for the thesis' investigation.

There is a further incentive for selecting two regions for this study. Syria and Palestine are neighbours and share, to a greater or lesser extent, many similar religious and cultural traits (as will become evident in the next chapter). In examining the two regions simultaneously there is scope to consider whether there is an homogeneity of belief and practice involving the supernatural which can be traced across these two areas. Given that the regions are often grouped together by scholars, this approach could either support their broader cultural delineation, or it could lead to speculation on the justification of studies which readily link the two together. Hence during the course of the investigation the evidence for the two areas is presented separately and, during the ensuing discussion, compared for noteworthy similarities and/or differences.

2.3.3. Practices and the evidence

Having established the chronological and geographical parameters for the thesis, it is necessary to determine which evidence will be included in the study. As has already been mentioned above, many studies concentrate on one particular practice, often for the extent of its existence. Undoubtedly this approach results in important corpora of work on the material. However, in adopting such a course, the social contexts which provoke, foster, and contain the practice, and which are invariably entities that change with time and circumstance, can be overlooked or generalised to allow for an homogenous analysis. This may lead to misconceptions and skewed evaluations of a practice which is fundamentally a social behaviour and hence a product of its society. In addition, such a focus can lead to a delineation of the activity, not allowing for its relationship with other contemporary practices involving the supernatural.

The bulk of such studies were produced in the twentieth century, providing significant scholarship on magical papyri, amulets, magic bowls, and curse tablets, and predominantly focussing on the particular apparatus or practices. While the early works are strongly focused, later works often draw in other apparatus or practices in their notes when similarities of language or inscription are evident.⁴⁴ For the large part, however, these studies can be read on their own as thorough analyses of particular ‘magical genres’, as the following paragraphs will show.

The work of Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, and the more recent English translation edited by Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, are the most significant works on the Greco-Roman and Demotic magical papyri. In addition there are many studies of individual papyri, as well as the formidable work of Brashear, “The Greek Magical Papyri: an Introduction and Survey; Annotated Bibliography (1928-1994)”.⁴⁵ Aramaic and Hebrew texts have also received considerable and noteworthy scholarship in recent decades in the translations and studies of *Sepher Ha-Razim*,⁴⁶ *The Sword of Moses*,⁴⁷ and the Cairo-Geniza texts.⁴⁸ Consequently students of Greco-Roman society now have at their disposal invaluable reference works on practices and ritual formulae recorded on papyrus. The *Papyri Graecae Magicae* and *The Sword of Moses* are not directly associated with Syria and Palestine, and/or the fourth century, and will not be used except as a means of comparison with, and support to, the material incorporated in the investigation. The origin of the *Sepher Ha-Razim* is uncertain, although it is believed most likely to stem from fourth-century Palestine, Syria, or Egypt. However, while expert scholars remain ambivalent, and without confirmation, it will not be used as a main source in the thesis, although, given this scholarly ambivalence, it will receive some attention in Chapter 10.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ For example, Gager, *Curse Tablets*.

⁴⁵ ANRW II.18.5 (1995) 3380-3684.

⁴⁶ SHR.

⁴⁷ *The Sword of Moses. An Ancient Book of Magic*, ed. & tr. M. Gaster, New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1970.

⁴⁸ P. Schäfer et al., *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza I*; and P. Schäfer & S. Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza II*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Siebeck, 1997.

⁴⁹ On SHR see the discussion in Chapter 10 (section 3.1).

The study of extant curse tablets from the Greek and Roman worlds has also flourished. We are fortunate to have, in addition to studies of individual tablets,⁵⁰ the studies of Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*,⁵¹ and Wünsch, *Inscriptiones Atticae*,⁵² as well as the more recent work in English edited by Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*,⁵³ and the catalogues provided by Jordan.⁵⁴

Amulets too have received considerable attention, beginning with Bonner's precedential work.⁵⁵ More recent studies are those of Daniel and Maltomini, *Supplementum Magicum*,⁵⁶ Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*,⁵⁷ and Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*.⁵⁸

'Magical bowls' have received the attention of Naveh and Shaked, who have carried out a significant study on the bowls of Palestine and Sumeria.⁵⁹ The use and function of these artefacts is still largely disputed; only their use in appealing to the supernatural is assured.⁶⁰ Ambiguous dates for these objects makes their inclusion in the study problematic, as a misrepresentation of fourth-century Syria and Palestine in regard to activities involving the supernatural is not sought. However, given that this ambiguity exists, and given the consequent possibility that they do represent fourth-century practice, they will be incorporated into the discussion in Chapter 10.

Work has also been done which focuses not on a particular form of practice involving the supernatural, but rather on one aspect of late antique evidence that relates

⁵⁰ For examples see SGD; Jordan, "New Greek Curse Tablets"; and Gager, *Curse Tablets*.

⁵¹ DT.

⁵² R. Wünsch, (ed.), *Inscriptiones Atticae Aetatis Romanae*, (Inscriptiones Graecae, Vol.3 Pt. 3) Berolini: Georgium Reimerum, 1897.

⁵³ Gager, *Curse Tablets*.

⁵⁴ SGD; and D.R. Jordan, "New Greek Curse Tablets (1985–2000)," GRBS 41 (2000) 5–46.

⁵⁵ *Studies in Magical Amulets. Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1950. I have also been made aware by Tom Burns of the work on gems (S. Michel, *Bunte Steine – Dunkler Bilder*, München: Verlag Biering & Brinkmann, 2001), but I have been unable to obtain a copy in time for the submission of this work.

⁵⁶ SM.

⁵⁷ GMA.

⁵⁸ AMB; as well as MSF.

⁵⁹ AMB; also MSF.

⁶⁰ See the discussion in C.D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Chico, CA: Scholars Press (1975) 4-14.

to the supernatural, namely the ‘sorcery accusations’.⁶¹ Of particular note is Peter Brown’s article which provides great insight into the phenomenon (see Chapter 5).⁶²

In contrast to the above studies, which concentrate on individual methods of supernatural practice, this investigation will examine several forms. Those which it will consider lie within the content parameters set out above, that is, they constitute evidence which portrays or adequately suggests human interaction with the supernatural for the purposes of protection, and/or assistance in beneficent or maleficent action. The inclusion of a broad range of material complies with the aim of the thesis outlined in the introduction to this chapter, namely to undertake an in-depth study of a particular sector of Greco-Roman history. The decision to analyse a range of practices also stems from a belief that such a study will provide a more complete picture of the form, function, and place of these activities within the social setting that frames them.

Such a multi-practice study has been undertaken by Luck in his work *Arcana Mundi*, which covers a number of practices of the Greek and Roman worlds (including miracles, daemonology, divination, astrology, and alchemy).⁶³ Yet Luck only provides a sample of evidence for each category and his focus is particularly linked to the ‘magic-religion’ issue, as is his selection of practices. Therefore while a consideration of many practices can be seen in his study, it produces a distinct portrayal of antique material according to a predetermined association of magic with religion.

The incorporation of an array of evidence dealing with activities involving supernatural forces in this study extends to include material of any religious persuasion. In this regard no attempt will be made to distinguish especially Jewish, Christian, Greco-Roman or indigenous activities, except in those instances where the evidence itself suggests that the religious influences of the source, protagonist, or method should be brought into the discussion.

Closely related to the practices are those who utilise them, yet knowledge of the practitioner, supplier, or consumer will in many cases remain relatively obscure. On

⁶¹ See: Barb, “Survival of the Magic Arts”; R. von Haehling, “Ammianus Marcellinus und der Prozess von Skythopolis,” *JbAC* 21 (1978) 74-101; Hay, “Sorcery Trials”; Ward, “Witchcraft and Sorcery”; also Phillips’ commentary in “Magic and Politics”.

⁶² Brown, “Sorcery and Demons”.

⁶³ Luck, *Arcana Mundi*.

those occasions, however, where relevant information regarding the instigators of supernatural activities becomes apparent, discussion of the relevant protagonists and victims will be offered.

Finally, the practices and behaviours that are examined in the thesis will thus be those which demonstrate human communication with supernatural entities in order to affect another individual or the protagonist for purposes of protection, assistance or aggression. Included in the investigation, therefore, are practices which demonstrate these characteristics, such as curses, spells, and charms which aim at harming or influencing the life of another. In addition, apotropaic material which seeks assistance from the preternatural for protection against ill fortune, from *daimones* or humans, will be utilised. These various methods predominantly fall into groups with a shared purpose, and it is the categorisation of these groups which governs the shape of the investigation. Thus the study is divided into chapters examining activities involving appellations to the supernatural in the areas of entertainment, career, desire, protection, health, and daimonic expulsion. Another chapter presents material which is not so readily classified into these categories, but which falls within the parameters of the thesis, as well as that material which may belong to fourth-century Syria and/or Palestine, but for which specifications of date or locations are as yet ambiguous.

Divination also involved communication with the supernatural, but, while it may have informed action it did not actively seek to affect the outcome of any activity, and therefore does not fall within the study's framework as delineated above. Thus it will not be included in the body of the study. However, where the use of divinatory methods is alleged to affect the life of another, or others, in some way, the evidence is included within the relevant grouping of practice and discussed further in Chapter 10, which briefly deals with oneiromancy, theurgy, and astrology (since those divinatory techniques sometimes involve the practitioner in a role more active than simple interpretation).

2.3.3.1 Literary evidence

The extant evidence for the practices to be included does not reside in physical material, that is artefacts, alone. Written records provide an invaluable source of information which builds on the evidence provided by the extant papyri, amulets, tablets and other material remains.⁶⁴ From these sources it is possible to determine something of the social context of the activities, as well as gain some insight into the mind-set that instigates their use. Furthermore, written records also provide information on practices and beliefs for which no material evidence exists. For example, only written sources inform us of the fourth-century sorcery accusations. This variety in extant source material allows for a clearer understanding of the fourth-century role of the supernatural, of the practices involved with manipulating it, and of those who sought to utilise it.

A considerable amount of written evidence survives for the fourth century. While this material does not deal with the supernatural specifically, it is possible to find several references to methods, beliefs, and even social reactions. As this thesis aims to examine and attempt to understand one niche of history comparatively well, it is prudent to identify and utilise all relevant and available material dealing with the supernatural. Written sources, including Christian material (such as ecclesiastical history,⁶⁵ the writings and oratory of the church fathers,⁶⁶ hagiographies,⁶⁷ Egeria's travel journal,⁶⁸ and church codices⁶⁹), historiographies,⁷⁰ law codes,⁷¹ as well as various Jewish materials,⁷² are utilised in the research. Considerations that need to be taken in regard to the use of this divergent evidence are discussed below in section 2.4.2.

⁶⁴ I realise that writing also exists on papyri and other artefacts, but I believe that such material clearly differs from written records such as histories, hagiographies, and law codes.

⁶⁵ Sozomen, HE.

⁶⁶ The homilies of John Chrysostom in particular, as well as Cyril of Jerusalem.

⁶⁷ Theoderet, HR; and Jerome, *Hilarion*.

⁶⁸ *Egeria's Travels*, ed. & tr. J. Wilkinson, London: SPCK, 1971.

⁶⁹ *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*.

⁷⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*; Eunapius of Sardes, *Vitae Sophistarum*; Zosimus, *Historia Nova*; Libanius, *Selected Works*, and *Autobiography*; Iamblichus, *de Mysteriis*.

⁷¹ CT.

⁷² Including the Palestinian Talmud (J. Barclay, *The Talmud*, London: John Murray, 1878).

2.4 The Approach

The previous sections were concerned with establishing the aims and parameters of the thesis. Having decided upon these, the following pages will be interested in the analytical approach, that is, the interpretation of the evidence. A brief review of the approaches of scholarship dealing with the same or related material opens the discussion. This is followed by a discourse on the options and directions for this study's method for both reading the fourth-century material and for reading and understanding the social script of fourth-century beliefs and behaviours.

2.4.1 A brief review of literature

This review of secondary literature discusses that scholarship which is, in various ways, relevant to the thesis' parameters and aims and thus most closely related to this investigation.⁷³

The earliest scholar to concentrate on a fourth-century figure and the supernatural was Campbell Bonner in 1932.⁷⁴ In his article Bonner discussed aspects of Libanius' work which dealt with his beliefs in, and social experiences with, the supernatural. Libanius was the victim of γοητεία and the victim of accusations of high treason (through divination) and of himself practising γοητεία. The article begins:

A curious happening in his lecture hall was interpreted by Libanius as an attempt to bewitch him. It was a typical case of homeopathic magic, an uncanny animal, a chameleon, used to represent the intended victim. Several other passages in Libanius' writings show that charges of magical practice were freely bandied about, even among educated people; Libanius himself was so accused. Though doubtless innocent, he believed in the efficacy of magic, and in this respect did not rise above the general level of the superstitious age in which he lived.⁷⁵

⁷³ In the following sections the label 'magic' will be used where this is the term expressly utilised in the work under discussion.

⁷⁴ Bonner, "Witchcraft in the Lecture Room".

⁷⁵ Bonner, "Witchcraft in the Lecture Room," 34.

This introduction provides a concise summation of much of Bonner's analysis. While it serves to correct a perhaps previously held notion that dealings with the supernatural were the domain of the lower and working classes, it shows the hallmarks of much of the scholarship of its time. Bonner's pejorative view can best be demonstrated in the attitude directed towards 'magical' or 'superstitious' practices. This view is similarly all too evident in the apologetic manner that Bonner adopts in his attempt to remove the rhetor from blame, and to excuse his actions and beliefs, that is, the actions and beliefs of a 'highly educated' man.

Bonner's idea of magic and its relation to religion is not discussed. However, it is possible to identify an opinion that such 'superstitious' beliefs and practices belong to the uneducated, and there are hints of Frazerian influence on the subject. It is not unexpected, therefore, that Bonner takes on the role of the apologist for the intellectual, even though he acknowledges Libanius' belief in the efficacy of supernatural practice. There are a number of examples throughout the article to demonstrate Bonner's role as apologist. For instance, in a discussion of Libanius' reaction upon finding the chameleon in his lecture room, which served to confirm the supernatural causes of his illness, Bonner states: "His fretful tirade places the aged Valetudinarian in a sorry light, and the episode is perhaps less to the credit of his intellect than any other happening in a life which was, on the whole, active and useful."⁷⁶

Bonner's approach to Libanius and his experience represents the thinking which appeared through much classical scholarship on the topic of the supernatural, as has already been discussed above.⁷⁷ In assigning anachronistic and ethnocentric judgement to the beliefs and practices of antiquity, there is, as has been argued above, a danger of polluting a reading of the antique material and thereby hindering an understanding of the society that produced it. While Bonner's study is of benefit both for drawing scholastic attention to events which were sorely neglected, and for his use of anthropological ideas on homoeopathic magic in discussing the importance of the chameleon in Libanius' account, his study was tainted by the attitude which framed it.

⁷⁶ Bonner, "Witchcraft in the Lecture Room," 37.

⁷⁷ See section 2.2.

This, it can be said, led to an understanding of the fourth century which, to a great degree, exaggerated the situation, yet also influenced the perceptions of others for many decades. Consider, for example, his assertion that: “the fourth century was darkened by the most degrading of superstitions in a manner that can only be compared to the benighted condition of western Europe in the later Middle Ages.”⁷⁸

Bonner’s view was to be supported almost thirty years later by Barb: “we find in the fourth century conditions which in many respects closely resemble the worst witch-hunting centuries at the end of the Middle Ages.”⁷⁹ Such an assertion was made on the basis of a variety of fourth-century sources, including the history of Ammianus Marcellinus, the *Codex Theodosianus*, the writings of Libanius, the church fathers and the papyri. However, considering the process of analysis and the pejorative framework in which Barb built his argument, it is hardly surprising that he reached such a dramatic conclusion. Barb acknowledges, yet dismisses to a large extent, the structural functionalist theories of contemporary scholars, and proposes instead that the most applicable thesis would be a reverse of Frazerian evolutionism.⁸⁰ Thus he inverts the idea that places magic at the early stages of religious evolution and Christianity at the tip, arguing that religion does not build up from magic, the latter is rather the result of the decay of religion. Using a quite striking metaphor he declares that:

The task of a Roman emperor as health officer in things supernatural became increasingly difficult when the syncretistic, rotting refuse-heap of the dead and dying religions of the whole ancient world grew to a mountainous height while wholesome supernatural food became scarce.⁸¹

The visual imagery of ‘rotting refuse’ forms not only part of this reverse-evolutionist theory, but also forcefully highlights the inherent attitude of the author. Barb himself argues that his theory serves to explain the increased number of sorcery accusations in the period, the decline of traditional religions causing an increase in accusations. In the process Barb’s alternative evolutionism largely excuses Christianity from any tainted association with supernatural practices, as magic beliefs in the fourth

⁷⁸ Bonner, “Witchcraft in the Lecture Room,” 44.

⁷⁹ Barb, “Survival of Magic Arts,” 105.

⁸⁰ This idea is discussed in section 2.5.3. See Frazer, *The Golden Bough*; and Tylor, *Early History of Mankind*.

⁸¹ Barb, “Survival of Magic Arts,” 104.

century were a result of the ‘decay’ of pagan religions and, what is more, the result of non-Roman, foreign, influences: “we find again and again that the closest connexion exists between magic and alien imported cults.”⁸²

It is within this conceptual framework of decaying religion, magic as refuse, and the infiltration of alien concepts that Barb builds up his analysis of fourth-century supernatural practices. Considering the source material, his assessment of the period does not seem justified (as will be seen in the course of this investigation). It is Barb’s interpretive framework that produces his results. Barb with his brand of evolutionism argued that religions could devolve, indeed they could completely decay, transforming into ‘refuse’. Furthermore, it can be said that within this interpretive structure he still sought to place Christianity at the top of the scale, thereby associating supernatural practice with all forms of Greco-Roman religion, and not just its ‘decaying’ forms.⁸³

The next significant work on fourth-century magic was a notable advance in the scholarship on the period’s practices. Peter Brown’s examination of sorcery accusations in late Roman society from the period of 300 to 600 CE⁸⁴ has become a classic in this field.⁸⁵ The approach taken by Brown provided new insight into methods for understanding the social stimuli for the sorcery accusations.⁸⁶

The anthropological approach Brown adopted in his analysis sought to demonstrate that anthropological studies could be of benefit to an understanding of sorcery and spirit-possession.⁸⁷ Utilising the socio-anthropological theses of Evans-Pritchard and Mary Douglas, Brown argues that the evidence which is available allows

⁸² Barb, “Survival of Magic Arts,” 102.

⁸³ Barb, “Survival of Magic Arts.”

⁸⁴ Although much of his evidence for the accusations stems firmly from the fourth century through the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus.

⁸⁵ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons”.

⁸⁶ For a detailed critique of Brown’s use of an anthropological framework, see Ward, “Witchcraft and Sorcery”. Ward addresses a number of issues including: Brown’s inconsistent use of Mary Douglas’ theory of inarticulate and articulate power; Brown’s positioning of the professional sorcerer amongst the new aristocracy, the *parvenues*; Brown’s inadequate treatment of “the role of Christianity and Christians in sorcery accusations”; the lack of explanation for the proposed “by-passing, or ‘outmoding’ of sorcery”; Brown’s lack of expansion of the “functional relationship between social groups and the sorcery accusation”; and finally the central position of Brown’s use of anthropological functionalism, that there was an increased incidence of sorcery in the fourth century, a point which Brown himself dismisses as not reflected in the evidence.

⁸⁷ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 17.

us to meet sorcery in its social context. Thus he proposes that the sorcery accusations are the result of an instability resulting from changes amongst the ruling classes of a traditional society.⁸⁸ It is the clash of articulate and inarticulate power (fixed, certain, power versus ambiguous, personal, power) that fostered sorcery accusations. For Brown these accusations are very much a social phenomenon resulting both from power struggles amongst the traditional aristocratic holders of authority and the *parvenu*, and from changes in administration, including an imperial push for control. He writes:

When we see them in this light, we can appreciate how the sorcery accusations of the fourth century mark a stage of conflict on the way to a greater definition of the secular governing class of the Eastern Empire as an aristocracy of service, formed under an emperor by divine right.⁸⁹

Outside of the immediate world of politics and bureaucracy, Brown also argues that sorcery accusations in the fourth century can be understood within the framework of articulate and inarticulate power. For instance, rhetors achieved their status based on their skills, and so naturally operated within an arena of rivalry. It is in this setting of “ill-defined *power*” within this group that accusations occur.⁹⁰ Furthermore the accusations and their credibility can be partially explained by differing attitudes towards personal identity and the perception of attacks on that identity, such that an attack on the skill of the rhetor Libanius was in effect an attack on his identity.⁹¹

Brown does not limit his analysis to political and educational contexts. He also develops his argument to include the religious changes occurring in the period. He argues that because misfortune was unambiguously the work of suprahuman agents for both pagans and Christians:

The Christian Church offered an explanation of misfortune that both embraced all the phenomena previously ascribed to sorcery, and armed the individual with weapons of satisfying precision and efficacy against its suprahuman agents.⁹²

Not unlike Barb, Brown argues that the spread of Christianity is directly related to the decline of sorcery accusations in later centuries, due to its role in subsuming

⁸⁸ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 20.

⁸⁹ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 23.

⁹⁰ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 24.

⁹¹ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 29.

⁹² Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 28.

misfortune and its suprahuman agents under one large umbrella of supernatural evil in which human agents no longer figured.⁹³ That Brown writes that accusations ‘declined’ is somewhat peculiar and contradictory in the light of his insistence early on in the article that it is not possible, given the evidence, to determine whether there was an increase in sorcery accusations, only that there was an increase in the recording of these events.⁹⁴ This initial qualification of the evidence must surely also apply to later sources.⁹⁵

It can be argued that in his analysis Brown makes little allowance for the ‘supernatural’ belief structure in which the sorcery accusations operated. That is, despite acknowledging that accusations can be seen as an exhibition of belief rather than as an event,⁹⁶ the allegations of sorcery are separated from a wider supernatural belief structure, except for an inference of their association with contemporary religious systems. Thus the larger belief system is not adequately acknowledged, and sorcery accusations are in effect dissociated from a context of practices and beliefs. Instead the allegations are placed firmly within a context of various forms of political power and thereby detached from their inherent context of belief.

Peter Brown’s study is an enlightening approach to the field of antique material dealing with activities concerning the supernatural. Its use of contemporary anthropological models pioneered the way for many and identified elements of social power and insecurity in the accusations which successors in the field still pronounce as decisive influences. There are, however, those shortcomings in argument already mentioned, as well as others which receive attention in the discussion of the accusations in Chapter 5.

There have been other studies which have addressed the issue of sorcery accusations in the fourth century, such as those of Funke,⁹⁷ Von Haehling,⁹⁸ Clerc,⁹⁹

⁹³ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 32-3.

⁹⁴ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 20.

⁹⁵ Within this assertion is the inference that a decline in sorcery coincided with the supposed decline in accusations. However, literary and material evidence suggests that various practices in addition to those reported in Libanius and Ammianus survived throughout the period.

⁹⁶ Brown, “Sorcery and Demons,” 18.

⁹⁷ H. Funke, “Majestäts und Magieprozesse bei Ammianus Marcellinus,” *JbAC* 10 (1967) 145-175.

⁹⁸ von Haehling, “Ammianus Marcellinus”.

and Hay.¹⁰⁰ Funke, for instance, is particularly concerned with Ammianus Marcellinus' account of the sorcery accusations and trials, and considering the author's motivations for the narrative asserts that the reports of the accusations and trials serve as an attack by the author on the emperors Constantius, Valens and Valentinian; the setting of accusations and paranoia serving to increase Ammianus' ridicule of the leaders.¹⁰¹ Von Haehling in response considers the trials at Scythopolis and argues for a religio-political motivation for Ammianus' dramatic account of the events in Palestine.¹⁰² Clerc, on the other hand, is strongly influenced by the anthropological approaches of Evans-Pritchard and Peter Brown in his study of the accusations.¹⁰³ Likewise Hay is also influenced by Brown in her treatment of the accusations, proposing that the fourth-century accusations reflect the social and political uncertainty of the time, acting as a political weapon for the powerful.¹⁰⁴ Irrespective of the work of these scholars, however, the work of Peter Brown has, to date, been the most influential on subsequent research on the fourth-century sorcery accusations.

Phillips, in line with more recent trends in scholarship on the supernatural, adds to the pool of work dealing with the fourth century, with his review of the scholarship undertaken.¹⁰⁵ In forming his argument Phillips is critical of the works of both Barb and Brown – Barb for the strongly evolutionary and pejorative approach he took in his work, and Brown for his placing of sorcery accusations under the one massive label of power. Phillips' work condemns the use of labels and asserts quite clearly that traditional dichotomies of religion and magic may not have been relevant in classical antiquity. In dealing with the fourth century, his work could provide a model for further approaches. However, it goes no further than advocating a dismissal of modern labels and criticising the use of ancient definitions.

⁹⁹ J-B. Clerc, *Homines Magic*, Peter Lang, 1995.

¹⁰⁰ Hay, "Sorcery Trials".

¹⁰¹ See particularly, Funke, "Majestäts und Magieprozesse," 175.

¹⁰² See von Haehling, "Ammianus Marcellinus," 100-101.

¹⁰³ Clerc, *Homines Magic*. For reviews on Clerc, see J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz in *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997) 304-305; and C. Kakridi in *Historische Zeitschrift* 265.1 (1997) 172-174.

¹⁰⁴ Hay, "Sorcery Trials".

¹⁰⁵ Phillips, "Magic and Politics".

In addition to these works, which deal predominantly with accusations in secular settings, a small number of studies have investigated the relationship between the church and dealings with the supernatural in late antique society.¹⁰⁶ These studies can often range over considerable time periods and geographic regions, and include both western and eastern church fathers in their analyses. Likewise their approaches differ considerably and swing between the pejorative attitude of Brox¹⁰⁷ and the sociological analysis of Aune.¹⁰⁸ Some scholars have dealt specifically with the Eastern church fathers and their attitudes (along with those of their parishioners and the wider community) towards, and concept of, various supernatural beliefs. They include Wyss, Dickie, Marasco, and Kalleres.¹⁰⁹

Aune, in his work on magic in the early-Christian period, uses a structural-functional approach, arguing that this resists a negative attitude towards magic,¹¹⁰ and delineates magic as deviant social behaviour. Specifically he defines magic “as the form of religious deviance whereby individual or social goals are sought by means alternate to those normally sanctioned by the dominant religious institution.”¹¹¹ Hence his argument throughout adopts the attitude that magic is intricately intertwined with religion as deviant behaviour, and as such is a phenomenon which exists only within the

¹⁰⁶ For example: Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity”; N. Brox, “Magie und Aberglaube an den Anfängen Christentums,” *Trier theologische Zeitschrift* 83 (1974) 157-180; N. Brox, “Der Einfache Glaube und die Theologie,” *Kairos* 14.3 (1972) 161-187; Thee, *Julius Africanus*; also J. Engemann, “Zur Verbreitung magischer Übelabwehr in der nichthristlichen und christlichen Spätantike,” *JbAC* 18 (1975) 22-48.

¹⁰⁷ Brox (“Magie und Aberglaube,” 157) opens his discussion: “Mit der vergleichenden Religionswissenschaft werden Magie und Aberglaube hier nicht als primitive oder archaische Formen von Religion verstanden, aus denen sublime, ‘reine’ Religion sich entwickelt, sondern als ständig drohende Dekadenz und als überall anwesende Perversion von Religion und auch von christlichen Glauben.”

¹⁰⁸ Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity”.

¹⁰⁹ B. Wyss, “Johannes Chrysostomus und der Aberglaube,” *Heimat u. Humanität. Festschrift für K. Menli zum 60 Geburtstag*, Basel: G. Krebs (1951) 262-274; G. Marasco, “Pagani e Cristiani di Fronte alle Arti Magiche nel IV Secolo D.C.: Il caso di Atanasio,” *Quarterni Catanesi di Cultura Classica e Medievale* 3 (1991) 111-134; M.W. Dickie, “The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye,” in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection (1995) 9-34; Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*; and ead., “John Chrysostom and the Apotropaic Power of Baptism: Cursing the Devil to Create a Christian,” in *In Heaven as it is on Earth: Imagined Realms and Earthly Realities*, (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

¹¹⁰ Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 1515-1516.

¹¹¹ Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 1515

matrix of particular religious traditions, and that all related practices are consequently actions of religious deviancy.¹¹² Thus it is not surprising that he writes:

If we have found that magic was a characteristic feature of early Christianity from its very inception, that is because we have regarded magic as a constant if subordinate feature of all religious traditions.¹¹³

While Aune's structural-functionalist and deviance approach provides an interesting view of supernatural practices, his emphasis is on the recognition of these practices within early Christianity. His complete alignment of supernatural practices with religion necessarily places these activities within a religious framework and in effect reintroduces the religion-magic paradigm to the subject. While some practices may operate within this religious framework, the same practices may very well have operated outside of it. Hence to view the practices entirely within a religious matrix – for to argue that magic is religious deviance is to do precisely that – may well misrepresent the practices in their broader social context.

Several studies treat specifically the evidence dealing with, or provided by, prominent fourth-century figures of the church. The work of Wyss, for instance, discusses John Chrysostom and *Aberglaube*, considering numerous passages in the church father's extant material. The article presents a great deal of evidence from the sermons; however, it is predominantly anecdotal.¹¹⁴ More recently, Dickie investigated the ambiguous attitude of some church fathers towards the pervasive social belief of the evil eye and its role in explaining misfortune. His work provides a thorough survey of this complex belief and highlights the church fathers' entrenchment in the cosmological framework of their time.¹¹⁵ Another aspect of supernatural activity and belief has been investigated by Marasco whose research concerned the accusations of sorcery levelled against the Arian bishop, Athanasius, in the fourth century.¹¹⁶ The work of Kalleres on exorcism in the training of baptismal candidates in Antioch and Jerusalem utilises the

¹¹² See Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 1516 & 1551 for a discussion on magical prayer.

¹¹³ Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 1557.

¹¹⁴ Wyss, "Johannes Chrysostomos".

¹¹⁵ For other studies on the evil eye in antiquity see: J. Russell, "The Evil Eye in Early Byzantine Society," *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32.3 (1982) 539-548; and K.M.D. Dunabin & M.W. Dickie, "Invidia Rumpantur Pectora," *JbAC* 26 (1983) 9-37.

¹¹⁶ Marasco, "Pagani e Cristiani".

homilies of John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem, and offers significant insight into the supernal cosmology of the fourth century. Furthermore, in her approach to the ritual language of the baptismal training and its inherent potency, her work is exemplary in demonstrating the benefits of interdisciplinary approaches to historical studies.¹¹⁷

Finally, there have been several other studies in recent years which have made a contribution to our understanding of supernatural practices in late antiquity. Most of these provide new insights in their approaches to the late antique material. Though not dealing specifically with the fourth century, these investigations do include evidence from the period. For instance, the dissertation of Aubin, which is interesting for its focus on the representation of the feminine with magic in Rabbinic sources. Her “reading for gender” approach considers the literary evidence within its late antique cultural context, and presents an argument for the disparity between the information offered by material evidence and literary presentations in the portrayal of gendered magic.¹¹⁸ Heintz’s dissertation, *Agonistic Magic in the Late Antique Circus*, provides an in-depth look at the evidence for supernatural activity in the hippodrome. Presenting an array of extant evidence, Heintz proposes four different functions for these supernatural practices, all ensuring success: performance enhancing, aggressive, defensive, and revelatory.¹¹⁹ Janowitz, though particularly dealing with the first three centuries of the common era, considers notions of ‘magic’, as well as practices and rituals within their cultural context, particularly seeking to understand them within their temporal frame. As such she presents an interesting study on ‘magic’ and the practices of exorcism, love rites, alchemy, and what she terms deification, in the late-Roman world.¹²⁰ Finally, Dickie’s work, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, considers the practitioners of magic from classical Greece through to the end of the seventh century.¹²¹ Dickie deals with a considerable amount of material in his analysis, including that from late antiquity, and his focus on “magicians, witches, sorcerers and sorceresses” over an extensive period of time presents an interest in informing from the

¹¹⁷ Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*; and Kalleres, “John Chrysostom and Baptism”.

¹¹⁸ M. Aubin, *Gendering Magic in Late Antique Judaism*, PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1998.

¹¹⁹ Heintz, *Agonistic Magic*.

¹²⁰ Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*.

¹²¹ Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*.

Greek and Roman sources; however, it is not concerned with the cultural constructs that frame the material and the characters presented.¹²²

The development of scholarship in the field that deals in some way with fourth-century evidence has been enlightening. The pejorative and value-laden sentiments of a century ago have been increasingly abandoned in favour of an acceptance of antique belief systems and a desire to utilise cross-disciplinary techniques in order to gain a greater understanding of the practices, beliefs, and events of the period. It is this dismissal of pejorative and value-laden ideas and the later trends in interdisciplinary approaches which will influence the analytical direction of this investigation. As already established in the previous section, this study will include a broader variety of material than that used by many of the studies of the period. The use and interpretation of that material, particularly the written evidence, is the focus of the section that follows.

2.4.2 Interpreting the late antique authors

The employment of historical written evidence requires an acknowledgment and understanding that this material (including spell books) has already been subjected to at least one round of interpretation. Influences in regard to background, education, and agenda affect the slant and choice of material presented by the late antique writers. Each of these antique authors made a choice of the subject, context, mood, attitude, direction, and use of their data before presenting it; this must be taken into consideration when working with their products.

Consider for instance the major authors from whose works this thesis will be drawing information. Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae* is an important historiographical source intended in the main to inform readers of recent and contemporary military and political events. He was an educated military man, a firm believer in the supremacy of Rome, and an adherent of the traditional Greco-Roman

¹²² For a more detailed commentary on this work see Frankfurter's review in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2002.

religion, and his biases in these areas must be recognised. The renowned rhetor Libanius also recorded numerous social and political details of fourth-century Syria in his autobiography, though these are recounted merely as settings for the presentation of his own achievements and experiences. Libanius' extant orations and correspondence also provide useful information but, as with his autobiography, allowance must be made for such things as the rhetorical style in which the works are framed, the audience for which they were meant, and the personal grievances as well as religious beliefs of their author. One of Libanius' students was the influential and eloquent Christian figure John Chrysostom. Chrysostom's sermons contain a considerable amount of social information, including people's beliefs and practices involving the supernatural, yet his commentary must be read with due consideration for his paedagogical method, rhetorical style, and his intense ambition for rallying his listeners both to the Christian faith and to the Christian church. Also with a decidedly Christian slant, hagiographies are a vital source of information. A major focus of most hagiographies are the miracles worked by holy men and women. These accounts promote the power of the Christian God manifested through the divinity's devout and humble agents, the holy figures, and they seek to impress the converted and unconverted alike. While their reports may seem far-fetched to a modern reader, they must be understood as reflections of the beliefs and attitudes of their society, their audience; as such they provide an invaluable social script. Histories of the church also provide some excellent contextualised information on activities dealing with the supernatural, including sorcery accusations within ecclesiastical politics. Their recordings of events, however, are coloured by religious bias, which condemns and criticises people and activities considered un-orthodox or non-Christian. Finally, a major secular source is the *Codex Theodosianus* which presents secular attitudes towards practices and behaviours involving the supernatural. In this case the degree of social adherence to and application of the laws must be taken into consideration.

As seen in this brief review, the literature of the fourth century takes on a decidedly religious slant (especially so when compared with preceding years). It can be said that this reflects a change in attitude in the fourth century towards both religion and

literature. It is at this time that new forms of historiography, involving ecclesiastical history and the biographies of the saints or hagiographies,¹²³ begin to outnumber the traditional topics of military and political history. Even amongst pagan historians there is a change of emphasis towards religion and practices relating to the supernatural, such as in the works of Eunapius and Ammianus which sought to follow traditional historiographical forms.¹²⁴

These changes in documentation influence the literary evidence available to modern scholars, providing an abundant supply of information on Christian practices and saints in particular. In using this material it is necessary to consider the biases which may appear in works expressing anti-pagan, anti-semitic, or even anti-Christian sentiments, or in their interpretation of particular phenomena involving supernatural entities as either positive or negative. An awareness of the attitudes which have been expressed in the literature, or which can perhaps be inferred through the delivery and contextualisation of the work, is essential when utilising the information. The existence of reports from sources with differing religious and political backgrounds combined with the non-literary evidence available does provide some counter balance for much of the Christian bias in the material. Nevertheless it is still necessary to make every allowance possible for the partialities inherent in all the accounts in order to achieve as thorough as possible an understanding of fourth-century beliefs and practices dealing with the supernatural.

In addition there is a need to acknowledge that modern historiography has often sought definitions and distinctions in ancient authors without appreciating the mindset of the antique writer (a point already made above in relation to 'magic'). Most antique sources did not define and distinguish the world as the modern writer and scholar seek to do when applying their methods to the description of time and place. As Cryer writes: "The duty of exact observation and systematic description as a precursor to obtaining knowledge of the phenomenal world was not fully realised before the

¹²³ A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1963) 88.

¹²⁴ A. Momigliano, "Popular religious beliefs and the late Roman historians", in C.J. Cuming & D. Baker (eds), *Popular Belief and Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1972:1-18) 5.

seventeenth century.”¹²⁵ Thus, while we must be careful to recognise interpretation and bias in the ancient literature, we must also be careful not to place our own on the way in which we see the sources present and delineate their material.

2.4.3 Reading the social script

As has been stated above, a researcher’s impression of activities related to the supernatural is governed by the sources and their use of the material. Thus, if John Chrysostom is taken as an example, and specifically his comments on the use of protective signs drawn over children by their mothers or nurses,¹²⁶ it is apparent that his criticisms of these methods are founded in his religious objectives as a representative of the church. Yet, if his reproach is contemplated a little further it becomes evident that he does not condemn the desire for protection itself, so much as the means by which it is sought. That is, he directs the women to use the sign of the cross over the children as a better means of protection. It is then apparent that both the members of the laity and arguably the clergy functioned within a belief system that accepted the existence, even malevolence, of supernatural forces, and appreciated the need and effectiveness of protective methods used against them. Thus it is possible to gain some insight into a fourth-century practice and the belief behind it. However, there are numerous questions which could be asked of this evidence such as: does this activity also serve another role in society? Why are people seen as vulnerable to supernatural forces? To which forces are they vulnerable and why? Is this behaviour in any way a reflection of social, political, and religious unrest? The answers to questions such as these lie in the written and physical primary material, and various social and anthropological hypotheses enable the historical evidence to be viewed in such a way that some supposition can be entered into in response to it. Thus in relation to this study, various investigative approaches and theories enable a better understanding of such concepts as the evil eye,

¹²⁵ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel*, 34.

¹²⁶ See Chapter 7 (section 2).

envy, and limited good, which can be seen to underlie the apotropaic protection desired and offered by John Chrysostom and the women about whom he speaks in the example above.

In such a way anthropological and sociological studies, through their observations of various communities – their beliefs, customs, and behaviours – offer new means for observing antique society. The prime objective of this study is to try to understand the practices and beliefs involving the supernatural within the social contexts of fourth-century Syria and Palestine. Interpretational tools based in the social sciences provide alternate and often surprising social insight, and they have in the past been applied to history with rewarding results. Yet it must be said that in the application of these methods a representative portrayal of society is established on the basis of evidence which of course remains open to other forms and means of interpretation and analysis. That is, neither this study nor its results claim to be the definitive analysis of the subject matter, rather they aim, more simply, at the provision of a soundly reasoned and feasible view of antique social practice, belief and behaviour. Furthermore, given the nature of the historical, broad, and often disjointed form of the evidence, the disciplinary limitations of the author, and the aims of the thesis, this investigation will not attempt to become an anthropological and sociological study in itself. On the contrary it hopes to benefit from the endeavours of scholars working in the two disciplines and apply them to fourth-century material where it seems reasonable to do so, even though, in the eyes of strict adherents to the respective disciplines, there must be a degree of dissatisfaction with this eclectic method of analysis (problems associated with the method are discussed shortly). Such an approach has, however, been applied by other scholars of Greco-Roman history and has produced interesting and enlightening interpretations of the antique material, as will be seen below.

Applying various concepts without adherence to a particular sociological and anthropological framework and methodology puts one in danger of misusing the material.¹²⁷ Hence caution must be taken in understanding the methodologies and contexts of these socio-scientific constructs when considering and applying concepts

¹²⁷ See Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel*, 14.

developed within them to different material. For example, the concept of honour and shame identified by anthropologists in various contemporary Mediterranean and Asian communities can not be applied or seen to be reflected in cultures of considerably different belief structures in which group perceptions are not inherently related to an evaluation of individual worth. Furthermore, in utilising such sociological or anthropological concepts in regions and periods often quite removed from those of the original study there is evidently a danger of misapplication and inapplicability when an assumption exists that meanings associated with rituals, actions, and communications might have remained static for almost two thousand years. However, if the theoretical concepts and frameworks offer a means to inform the study rather than commit it overall to a particular interpretation, this latter objection can be reduced. That is, if the historical evidence suggests that a similar meaning was attached to a practice, or that a similar belief underlied behaviour, then an assumption need not be, and in this study is not, made that the practice or behaviour remained static, but rather that at that ‘time and place’ conditions were such that similar concepts and belief systems can be seen to have been operating.

The use of interdisciplinary models for the interpretation of classical societies was first made by Frazer in his legendary volumes of *The Golden Bough*.¹²⁸ Frazer used popular scientific notions of biological and physical evolution to propose a concept of cultural-religious evolution.¹²⁹ To do this he made comparisons between the religious beliefs and practices of ‘primitive’ cultures and those of alleged developed or civilised cultures. He proposed that the existence and overlap of magic and religion was the result of confusion, and that magic was normally restricted to primitive culture.¹³⁰ For Frazer a belief in magic equated to an early stage in the evolution of human culture and intelligence. While diverging from Frazer on the relationship between magic and religion, Tylor was also a supporter of the use of an evolutionary approach towards

¹²⁸ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.

¹²⁹ On the influence of evolutionary theories see also Phillips, *Magic and Politics*, 66.

¹³⁰ For instance in discussing the confusion of magic and religion, Frazer gives the example of Melanesia and states: “the same confusion of magic and religion has survived among peoples that have risen to higher levels of culture”. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 52-3.

magical practice,¹³¹ and both he and Frazer perceived of magic as the original basis of religion. In accordance with their theories, magic was an element of primitive society and while remnants of old superstitions and magical practices could still be found in contemporary rural Europe,¹³² magic was no longer an issue in sophisticated society. In using these approaches any analysis of magical practices in the ancient world was influenced by the attitude that these practices were intrinsic to a primitive belief system and hence required differentiation from evolved religious forms.

Structural functionalism, strongly influenced by the work of Durkheim and Evans-Pritchard, was also to have an effect on studies of Greco-Roman practices involving the supernatural. In structural functionalism, the meaning of social phenomena comes to be equated with their social use, and applications of this approach have “contributed vastly to our understanding of the interplay of the forces active in numerous societies”.¹³³ Structural functionalism presupposes that equilibrium is the goal of social behaviour. However, the characterisations of social phenomena developed by structural functionalism were also “irretrievably anchored in the societies in which they were observed.”¹³⁴ The work of Evans-Pritchard and his student Mary Douglas were utilised in Peter Brown’s influential examination of sorcery accusations in the fourth century and highlighted the role that changing social and religious conditions played in stimulating accusations in areas of conflict and power.¹³⁵ This use of cultural anthropology shed tremendous light on the accusations and shifted ideas away from the traditional views portraying activities involving the supernatural as a sign of an impoverished society which, due to great social change, was falling prone to the primitive ideas of less sophisticated societies.¹³⁶ However, it can be argued that both the work of Peter Brown and the structural-functionalist studies which guided it, in

¹³¹ Tylor, *Early History of Mankind*.

¹³² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 53.

¹³³ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel*, 15-6.

¹³⁴ Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel*, 16.

¹³⁵ See Brown, *Sorcery and Demons*; as well as Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*; and Douglas, *Purity and Danger*. The accusations and Peter Brown’s work receive further attention in Chapter 5.

¹³⁶ For example Barb, *Survival of Magic Arts*.

seeking out the seemingly rational function or role of practices could discount the influence of the beliefs and the cosmology that underpinned them.

Also utilising interdisciplinary approaches to Greco-Roman practices, Winkler and Faraone have produced discerning discussions on Greco-Roman *agoge*, love spells. Winkler, who himself concludes that social anthropology cannot provide an answer, only enable questions and the provision of comparisons to illuminate ancient material,¹³⁷ identifies medical and psychological aspects within a Mediterranean ‘honour and shame’ social setting in the use of *agoge* spells. He writes:

If we correctly place the typical enactment of such rites in the lamp-lit world of a lovesick man alone with his feelings and about to enter the powerful underworld of his own *psyche*, then *agogai* again turn out to make sense as psychodramas in which intensely disturbing emotions are manipulated and treated.¹³⁸

Thus he identifies personal anxiety within the Mediterranean cultural setting, and proposes that the spells “are structured as a system of displacements”, transposing through the intense imaging the protagonist’s illness onto someone else.¹³⁹ He progresses to suggest that the spells in effect acted as a method of therapy, of self-help, for victims of the incurable affliction, *eros*.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore Winkler acknowledges the influence of the social conceptions of gender, family, and honour on the use and form of the spells.

Faraone’s work on *Ancient Greek Love Magic* seeks to locate erotic spells within the Greek concept of *eros*. The violence, images, and victims of erotic spells and curses, as well as the cultural concept of *eros*, are related by Faraone to socially condoned or socially censured relationships. Hence some spells he, argues, can be seen to correspond to two types of Greek matrimony: accepted and consented betrothal marriage; and bridal theft and abduction marriage.¹⁴¹ He writes:

¹³⁷ J.J. Winkler, “The Constraints of Eros,” in C.A. Faraone & D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press (1991: 214-243) 234.

¹³⁸ Winkler, “The Constraints of Eros,” 230.

¹³⁹ Winkler, “The Constraints of Eros,” 226-230. Faraone disagrees with Winkler on this proposal. He argues that: “Winkler’s arguments have been influential, but they are erroneous to the degree that they imply a standardized lovesick performer or client,” and that the vast majority of extant erotic spells give no clue as to the frame of mind or motives of the individual agent (Faraone, *Love Magic*, 82-83).

¹⁴⁰ Winkler, “The Constraints of Eros,” 226-227.

¹⁴¹ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 42-49, 78-80, 85.

I seek to explain the violence of the *agoge* magic not as some universally recognizable feature of a lovesick or jealous practitioner, but rather as a traditional and practical response to problems of access to women of marriageable age.¹⁴²

In addition, Faraone utilises notions of gender to propose an inversion of identities in the use of *philia* charms in Greek society.¹⁴³ His manner of consideration for, and the location of, social behaviours, customs and beliefs, produces a result distinct from his predecessor Winkler. Nevertheless both studies offer perspicacious portrayals of love spells and charms by preserving them in their context and utilising modern methods to investigate and interpret them.

Sociological theories have also been utilised and applied to other fields in historical studies. For example, much work has been done on interpreting New Testament society through concepts of social anthropology.¹⁴⁴ Of particular interest for this study is the work of Esler in his analysis of the social world of the New Testament.¹⁴⁵ Esler's approach involves comparing studies of modern Mediterranean culture with ancient Mediterranean society, identifying similarities, and applying concepts identified in the modern settings to the historical one. Esler argues that:

Our very familiarity with the New Testament texts can itself be a source of difficulty... If we do not pierce the veil of familiarity in which we have wrapped the texts, if we do not recognise the cultural gap and seek to bridge it, we are like boorish and uncomprehending visitors to a foreign country who make no attempt to understand local customs and institutions.¹⁴⁶

Scholars such as Esler and Rohrbaugh¹⁴⁷ argue for a comparative social study between modern Mediterranean and New Testament cultures, based on similarities between their social scripts. Modern anthropology has shown that certain cultural patterns recur across many nationalities, languages, and religious groupings of the Mediterranean. The patterns which emerge include: the prevalence of honour as a pre-eminent social value; the concept of the collective as opposed to the individual; the

¹⁴² Faraone, *Love Magic*, 85.

¹⁴³ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 130.

¹⁴⁴ For example J.H. Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991.

¹⁴⁵ P.F. Esler, *The First Christians in their Social Worlds. Socio-scientific approaches to New Testament interpretation*, London & New York: Routledge, 1994.

¹⁴⁶ Esler, *First Christians*, 22.

¹⁴⁷ R.L. Rohrbaugh, *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers (1996) 43.

competitive and agonistic nature of social relationships not involving kin; the extent to which identity is a matter of corporate and public assessment, and not an individual sense of self-worth; the relegating of females to the private, domestic sphere, while males operate in the public domain; the importance of patronage; in economic areas, the notion of limited good; and the relationship of rural and urban areas within the Mediterranean basin.¹⁴⁸ Utilising such ideas these scholars have applied these cultural traits to New Testament material, providing an exemplary model for other socio-historical investigations.

The present study will follow the interdisciplinary lead of the latter scholars, from Brown through to Esler. The social concepts to be utilised will become clearer in their application during the course of the investigation. They will, however, receive a brief introduction here. Those which will be applied have largely been chosen on the basis of their effective use by scholars of history, or because of their presentation in anthropological studies of communities and behaviours which bear strong resemblances to those of fourth-century Syria and Palestine.

A concept which has been utilised by Esler in his New Testament studies, and Winkler in relation to Greek erotic spells, is the concept of honour and shame. Honour has been a pivotal social value in modern Mediterranean society. "Honour means the perception someone has of his or her own worth and an appreciation of how he or she is rated by a relevant social group." It is a claim to and a social acknowledgment of worth, which is either ascribed or acquired, and only exists in limited amounts.¹⁴⁹ The latter criterion means that one person's honour is obtained at the expense of another person's. As honour is such a fundamental aspect of Mediterranean culture, it has been applied by Esler and others to the New Testament world in an attempt to understand the social script of the New Testament. Likewise it is feasible to apply it to the fourth-century communities of Syria and Palestine in order to identify the possible influence of this social concept on practices related to the supernatural.

¹⁴⁸ Esler, *First Christians*, 22-3, 25. Regarding the concept of the collective, see Rohrbaugh, *Social Sciences and New Testament*, 44.

¹⁴⁹ Esler, *First Christians*, 25.

The notion of limited good is one which has been convincingly applied to studies on belief in the evil eye in a number of cultures.¹⁵⁰ The concept is based on the understanding prevalent in a variety of societies that everything, material and non-material (for example food, honour), is finite. Limited good has also been used in analyses of first-century Mediterranean society in which the perception of the majority, it is argued, includes the idea that all goods are limited.¹⁵¹ Thus:

The basic need for security in a threatening and threatened world, prised through the image of limited good, revealed the sources of power and influence, of wealth and loyalty, at the interfaces of one's closed system as well as among select members of one's peer group.¹⁵²

The relationship could also involve a cosmic patron-client one, in which an:

honourable man also knew how to manipulate the available non-human powerful persons to help in meeting life's problems. This likewise implied a need for knowledge of cosmic patrons, a sort of popular and personalistic natural science along with knowledge of God.¹⁵³

The approach offers numerous opportunities for application, including within the analyses of some ritual recipes for success, love and protection, as well as in relation to the evil eye belief.

Social deviance is also a theoretical concept upon which the investigation will draw. It is an idea that has already been applied by Aune in his study of magic in early Christianity.¹⁵⁴ Social deviance is most often seen as the perceived violation, through behaviours or conditions, of a social system which is shared by members of a group. This violation is perceived by those whose interests in the social system are jeopardised. The reaction can be aggressive and most often results in the negative labelling of the individual(s) who are perceived to have violated the social system.¹⁵⁵ A deviant person then behaves in a way (and increasingly begins to live the demands of the new role)

¹⁵⁰ For example, see A. Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye. A Casebook*, Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

¹⁵¹ B. Malina, *The New Testament World. Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Atlanta & London: SCM Press (1981) 90.

¹⁵² Malina, *New Testament World*, 90.

¹⁵³ Malina, *New Testament World*, 90.

¹⁵⁴ Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," esp. 1522. For applications of deviance theory see Esler, *First Christians*, 114-127; and Neyrey, *Social World of Luke-Acts*, 97-124.

¹⁵⁵ Neyrey, *Social World of Luke-Acts*, 100.

which is characterised by members of the group as deviant “or who is situated socially in a condition of deviance.”¹⁵⁶ Neyrey identifies three steps in the typical process of deviance, a group, community, or society: (1) interprets some behaviour as deviant; (2) defines the alleged people who so behave as deviant; and (3) accords to them the treatment considered appropriate to such deviants.¹⁵⁷ Given its reliance on a clear understanding of the perceptions of the communities and individuals concerned, caution must be taken when utilising this theory. Perceptions can be difficult to determine and, even when a group’s opinions can be ascertained, it must be acknowledged that the perception of social deviance held by these particular individuals may not be valid for another group. For example, the opinions of church figures towards customary Greco-Roman practices may hold that these behaviours are deviant. However, these same practices and their practitioners may be perceived to be acceptable and legitimate by adherents of traditional Greco-Roman religion.

The issue of gender will receive attention throughout the study. Numerous socio-historical studies which have focused on issues of gender and the female identity in the late antique and the Greco-Roman world will be utilised. In particular, use will be made of the works of Gardner, Herrin, and Clark, scholars who have investigated the roles of women in Greco-Roman societies, attempting to locate them within the public and private spheres.¹⁵⁸

Some theories which have been successfully used in other fields of Greco-Roman study and which can be seen to have possible applications for the subject matter of the present investigation, such as new archaeology, identity theory, or phenomenology, were also considered, but ultimately not thought suitable.¹⁵⁹ Therefore

¹⁵⁶ Neyrey, *Social World of Luke-Acts*, 100.

¹⁵⁷ Neyrey, *Social World of Luke-Acts*, 102.

¹⁵⁸ J.F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986; J. Herrin, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” in A. Cameron & A. Kuhrt (eds), *Images of Women in Antiquity*, London & Canberra: Croom Helm (1983) 167-89; & G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

¹⁵⁹ New archaeology involves the application of cultural anthropology to the archaeological study of history, based upon the idea that understanding the past means allowing the archaeological materials, illuminated by appropriate sociological models, to speak for themselves. The limit of this approach is that it privileges material evidence over literary sources, just as traditional approaches often privileged the latter. However, where both forms of evidence exist, it does not seem valid to place a greater value on the

issues of honour and shame, limited good, social deviance, and gender will influence, when applicable, the analyses of those practices and beliefs which form the subject matter of the study.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has thus established the parameters and analytical influences which will frame this study. The subject matter to be included will be those activities which involve human-instigated communication with non-earthly or supernatural entities, such as divinities and daimones, for the purpose of protection, or assistance in beneficent or maleficent action. In line with the aim of providing a study focused on one niche of Greco-Roman history, the study will be confined to the fourth century of the common era and to the regions of Palestine and Syria. The evidence which informs the study is both physical and literary; it includes artefacts such as amulets, phylacteries, curse tablets, and papyri, as well as the written records of historiographies, hagiographies, and sermons. Finally, as each grouping of material, according to function or purpose, is presented, the discussion of the evidence will include the application of various sociological or anthropological notions, such as honour, limited good, and deviance. The application of this methodology aims to produce an academic work which surveys the available and relevant extant and published evidence, and also contributes to an understanding of beliefs and behaviours within their contemporary social contexts.

physical evidence of the curse tablets over the commentaries which condemn them, for instance, as each invaluable informs the other (see Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel*, 28-30).

Identity theory, which is largely based on sociological and psychological models, has recently been adopted by historians in approaching the late Roman and Byzantine world. It seeks to look at the perceptions and identity of the individual by other members and groups within the society. The approach also aims to move away from twentieth century notions towards a social understanding of the period and culture. (See K. Fledelius & P. Schreiner [eds], *Byzantium. Identity, Image and Influence*, XIV International Congress of Byzantine Studies, University of Copenhagen, 1996.)

Phenomenology “encourages the examination of data from as many angles as possible along with self-awareness of the examination and of the reasons for which it is made.” (C.R. Phillips III, “The Sociology of Religious Knowledge in the Roman Empire,” ANRW II.16.3 [1986: 2677-2773] 2689). The approach is non-reductive, and hence does not reduce experiences of the supernatural to social and psychological explanations (Greenwood, *Magic and Witchcraft*, 42).

SYRIA AND PALESTINE
A FOURTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

The first two chapters of the investigation have outlined the aims, structure, and methodology of the thesis. Before heading into the body of the study a brief overview will be provided of the social context which frames the practices and beliefs to be examined. Although more stable than the century that preceded it, conditions in the fourth century could still prove difficult¹ and the period witnessed significant movement away from traditional norms in religious, social, political, and economic activities, which weakened or transformed many existing social barriers.² In the following pages these changes as well as the general circumstances pertaining to administration, education, religion, and family will be addressed.

Both Syria and Palestine were major provinces of the eastern Roman empire and, with the shift of imperial power from Rome to Constantinople, they were increasingly affected by the new capital, especially in terms of their human, economic, and cultural resources.³ Yet, while the entire administrative system was theoretically under the absolute control of the emperor, towns and provincial centres of power could often be separated from the decision-making of the centralised imperial power by delays of weeks and even months, and local authorities exercised a considerable degree of power within their domains.⁴ Power was assigned to a governor who represented the emperor in that area; however, the governor could be boycotted by the local *honorati*

¹ M.L. W. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press (1967) 3-4.

² A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395-600*, London & New York: Routledge (1993) 151.

³ J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1990) 163.

⁴ D.J. Geanakoplos, *Byzantium: Church, Society and Civilization seen through contemporary Eyes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1984) 1.

who were on the same level as him.⁵ (Even so, he could still manipulate or abuse a political situation in order to win praise and promotion within the bureaucratic system.)⁶

Administration of the Palestinian province was, however, somewhat atypical. In the course of the fourth century the province was divided into two (Palaestina and Palaestina Salutaris) and then, by the end of the century, three provinces.⁷ The administration of the cities appointed as capitals of these areas then operated at a subordinate level to that of the overall province. A large number of towns and cities in Palestine, *colonia*, administered their own justice and were exempt from some taxes.⁸ However, during the course of the fourth century cities continually lost more of their independence from the provincial administration in relation to taxation jurisdiction and judicial powers.⁹

In the fourth century there were also significant changes in the operations of the empire, and a high degree of social mobility was made possible.¹⁰ This meant that imperial service proved an attractive career option and, with no hard core of ancient families in Constantinople, opportunities existed for others to make their way up the ranks of power. Official positions and opportunities for career advancement no longer related solely to birth, but to education, and those who had previously been denied opportunities within the state system were now given them, often obtaining senior and powerful positions. As a result, by the middle of the century while the senatorial order had again become the official aristocracy of the empire, its traditional character and

⁵ For a discussion of this issue see P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*, Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press (1992) 22.

⁶ Consider for example Festinus of Tridentum who, while governor of Asia, punishes the practising of *veneficium* and consequently kills a philosopher, an elderly woman, a distinguished townsman, and a young man with stomach troubles, in order to gain promotion (Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, ed. & tr. Rolfe [1939] 29.2, pp.23-28).

⁷ The most popular view is that the area was initially separated from Palaestina Salutaris in 358. At the end of the fourth century then, the original territory of Palestine was split into two, and the three provinces were called Palaestina Prima (capital Caesarea), Palaestina Secunda (capital Scythopolis), and Palaestina Tertia (capital Elusa then Petra). See G. Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land. Palestine in the Fourth Century*, tr. R. Tuschling, Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd (2000) 7-9; also Y.E. Meimaris, *Sacred Names, Saints, Martyrs and Church Officials in the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri pertaining to the Christian Church of Palestine*, (MEΛETHMATA, 2) Athens (1986) 8.

⁸ P. Johnson, *Civilizations of the Holy Land*, London: Book Club Associates (1979) 146.

⁹ Stemberger, *Jews and Christians*, 9.

¹⁰ Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 91.

numbers had changed.¹¹ These new senators of the government in Constantinople were drawn from very varied origins, producing a mixed and non-traditional body, both in origin and religion.¹²

This cultural and religious mix in government reflects the mix of the eastern empire itself. For example, both Syria and Palestine were composed of various ethnic and religious groups which naturally provided for a noticeable degree of cultural diversity. A notable and unifying feature throughout these regions was the hellenisation of sectors of the populace. Greco-Roman cities had long been established throughout the provinces and hellenisation had taken hold of many regions. Consequently individuals could be seen as 'Greek' despite different regional, or even religious, backgrounds, a factor that provided for some degree of homogeneity, at least in many urban areas.¹³

An important aspect of this strand of cultural homogeneity is the nature of the education available across the provinces, especially to those of means. Higher education, in particular, was largely based on skills in rhetoric and relied heavily on a knowledge of classical Greek texts, particularly Euripides, Homer, Menander, and Demosthenes.¹⁴ As part of a standard education these classical authors were taught to students, and by teachers, regardless of the religious persuasions of either.¹⁵ Consider, for example, one of the most famous orators and teachers of the time, and an ardent follower of traditional Greco-Roman religion, Libanius of Antioch. He, and other adherents of traditional beliefs, would foster the styles of many Christian students who were to become influential in the fourth century, such as John Chrysostom, Basil of

¹¹ A.H.M. Jones, "The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity," in A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1963:17-37) 26.

¹² Jones, *Social Background*, 27.

¹³ See H.J.W. Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in id., *History and Religion in Late Antique Syria*, Aldershot, UK; Brookfield, Vt: Variorum (1994: 124-146) 124-127. On Antioch as thoroughly Greek see R.L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1983) 4, 18, 27.

¹⁴ Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture*, 11. Education in classical rhetoric was essential for a career in imperial bureaucracy and any secular office (Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 136).

¹⁵ In Antioch, Jews and Christians mingled freely, and Jews received a Greek education, and followed the same career as others while maintaining their own religious traditions. See Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 35, 49, 59. In contrast see Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture*, 25. Re teaching: Julian's edict against Christians teaching attests to their role as educators. See Geanakoplos, *Byzantium*, 128.

Caesarea, and Gregory of Nazianzus. These men would come to use their classical education in their Christian teachings.¹⁶ Apart from rhetorical education, the philosophical school of the neoplatonists also experienced some degree of popularity in the fourth century, Iamblichus and the emperor Julian being students of some note.¹⁷ Students of Neoplatonism sought to understand the nature of the divine and to evolve a scientific theology, by practising asceticism and prayer, revering the gods, and adopting special ways of invoking them known as theurgy.¹⁸

The common education system, as well as trade, travel, and the common language of Greek, also provided a forum for cultural and religious interaction. This often provoked a flowering of cultural or religious activity in particular regions. Syria provides one such example of cross-cultural infiltration and absorption. In many areas there were overlaps of language with bilingual speakers of Greek and Aramaic/Syriac (Syriac being used amongst all social classes in the fourth century).¹⁹ Indeed it has been argued that the powerful, or better educated, in many regions of Syria were able to communicate in Syriac and Greek, and reflected bi-culturalism as much as bilingualism.²⁰ This is not only evident in epigraphic material, but also in the widespread translation of Greek works into Syriac and vice versa. Greek texts, especially poetry, were often translated into Syriac to increase their accessibility; however, the reverse was also true and Syriac authors were translated into Greek, for example the work of Ephrem.²¹ Indeed the culturally diverse province emerged as a literary force by the middle of the fourth century producing material distinctly influenced by Mesopotamian, Jewish, and Greek literary cultures.²²

¹⁶ R. Browning, "Tradition and Originality in Literary Criticism and Scholarship," in A.R. Littlewood (ed.), *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music*, Oxford: Oxbow Books (1995) 17-28.

¹⁷ See, for example: Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, ed. G. Parthey, Berlin, 1857.

¹⁸ Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 133. See also Chapter 10, section 3.3.3.

¹⁹ S. Brock, "Syriac Culture, 337-425," in A. Cameron & P. Garnsey (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History. The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425*, (The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 13) Cambridge University Press (1998: 708-719) 708-9, 714.

²⁰ Brock, "Syriac Culture," 714. Although an interesting exception to this notion is the prominent Syrian church figure, John Chrysostom, who appears not to have spoken or understood the language.

²¹ Brock, "Syriac Culture," 717.

²² Brock, "Syriac Culture," 708-12. Re Palestine and the development of the Palestinian Talmud and rabbinic biblical commentaries around this time see Stemberger, *Jews and Christians*, 3-4.

Education, literature, bi-culturalism, and social mobility, were, however, not necessarily accessible to the majority, and many in the cities and country had restricted choices and opportunities. The economy and society of the late empire was still basically agrarian.²³ Most typical in this period were the great landed estates on which worked hundreds of sharecroppers, *coloni*, who were bound to their land.²⁴ Legislation in the *Codex Theodosianus* insisting on hereditary occupation does, however, suggest that the government was finding it difficult to tie people to the land and that opportunities may have existed enabling land tenants to move in this period.²⁵ Such movement is seen in Palestine in the fourth century, when taxation burdens on tenants, rents, droughts, and locusts became an increasing burden and led to migration into urban areas.²⁶

In the urban centres, the working population consisted largely of artisans and merchants, and opportunities for work could be seasonal and casual for many. In Antioch, for example, people would wait in the agora in the early mornings hoping to gain work for the day from the merchants who were coming to sell at the market.²⁷ Conditions were not easy for many, and in the fourth century in Antioch alone, there were at least one thousand homeless people and countless thousand others living in poverty.²⁸ Despite the hardships endured by many, the urban centres also offered a myriad of splendours and entertainments for their residents. Cities would boast sporting arenas and events, public entertainment in the theatre, public baths, grand roads, palatial homes, and in Antioch even street lighting.²⁹

In addition to the considerations of income, government, and education, religion was an integral part of life and society for the populace of both town and country. It has

²³ Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 87-88. Re Palestine in particular see A.S. Rappoport, *History of Palestine*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd (1931) 223.

²⁴ CT 5.17.1, 2 and 5.18.1, 3. See Geanakoplos, *Byzantium*, 229; also Jones, "Social Background," 22.

²⁵ Jones, "Social Background," 34. Evidence also suggests that the fourth century marked the beginning of a long period of population growth in the East (Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*, 247).

²⁶ See Stemberger, *Jews and Christians*, 14-15.

²⁷ R. Brändle, *Johannes Chrysostomus. Bischof – Reformier – Märtyrer*, Verlag W. Kohlhammer (1999) 18.

²⁸ Brändle, *Johannes Chrysostomus*, 48.

²⁹ For Antioch, see Brändle, *Johannes Chrysostomus*, 13-18. On the prosperity of Antioch see also J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch, City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1972) 256.

even been said that people of the third and fourth centuries had a greater interest in religion than those of any other period of ancient history.³⁰ This is perhaps largely a reflection of the changes in imperial religion and sanctioned ritual practice which occurred through the course of the century. For many years scholarship suggested that: “It was during the fourth century that Christianity overcame the pagan cult and its magical rites”.³¹ However, material and written evidence say otherwise, for instance the *Great Catechism* by Gregory of Nyssa “strikingly illustrates the extraordinary mixture of religious beliefs and cult that still existed in the empire *circa* A.D. 385,”³² and the work of scholarship in recent years further supports this fourth-century observer.³³

Both Syria and Palestine consisted of varying proportions of Christians, Jews, and adherents of indigenous or Greco-Roman religion, as well as the Samaritans in Palestine. While Christianity was not the dominant religion of the period, its power was increasing and its influence was spreading. Nevertheless the competition between adherents of traditional Greco-Roman religion and Christians, despite imperial and legislative³⁴ support for the latter, was not yet assured of an outcome.³⁵ In Palestine, sectarian disputes reflected religious disharmony in many areas of the province.³⁶ Even within Christianity groups which claimed orthodoxy on the basis of different practices or beliefs, had the potential to cause considerable instability within its community, and posed a real threat to the unity of the church. It is also worth noting that even when Christianity had officially been adopted by individuals, conversion did not necessarily impede adherence to, or practice of, other religious beliefs and rituals. For example, in Antioch John Chrysostom criticises the actions of members of his congregation who frequent synagogues, or seek assistance from traditional healers.³⁷

³⁰ Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture*, 4.

³¹ Seligmann, *History of Magic*, 116.

³² Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture*, 45.

³³ For instance, Trombley’s work on the Christianisation of the empire (*Hellenic Religion and Christianization c.370-529*, R. Van den Broek, H.J.W. Drijvers & H.S. Versnel [eds], Leiden: Brill, 1993). See also R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press (1997) 6-7; and Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 13.

³⁴ Consider edicts against various traditional practices, such as sacrifice (CT 16.10.11) and divination (CT 9.16.5), in the *Codex Theodosianus*.

³⁵ Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 13.

³⁶ Johnson, *Civilizations of Holy Land*, 146.

³⁷ This is discussed further in Chapter 8. See also Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 232-233.

Evidence suggests that rural populations generally held onto their traditional beliefs and ritual practices,³⁸ and the rate of adoption of the new religion, Christianity, varied from region to region.³⁹ Hence it appears that Christianity was mainly an urban religion followed by the lower and middle classes of the towns, such as the manual workers, clerks, shopkeepers and merchants.⁴⁰ Antioch, for example, had already established itself as a largely Christian community, and was one of the powerful cities in the Christian world of that time.⁴¹ It seems that it was the educated who were resistant to the new religion and it was really amongst the students and intellectuals of the East that traditional beliefs and practices survived the longest. Though Libanius is representative of the latter traditionalists, his works do not suggest great personal animosity between non-Christians and Christians. This was not unusual and it appears that Christians and non-Christians in the civic aristocracies were connected by so many ties of family, education, social life, and politics, that real antagonism was not possible.⁴² Though religious affiliations were by and large not assured amongst the governing classes, they were largely determined by social origin; consequently in the East where people had risen from a lower status, the senate was becoming increasingly Christian.⁴³

A notable, and noticeable, aspect of Christianity in the fourth century was monasticism and asceticism.⁴⁴ Holy men and women seeking the ascetic life lived in or around both cities and villages as well as in more remote areas.⁴⁵ The Palestinian and Syrian monks had an influence on neighbouring communities⁴⁶ and, in rural areas, the holy person could become a significant figure in the community, acting as a patron and

³⁸ Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture*, 6; and Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 225.

³⁹ Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*, provides an excellent discussion on religion in the separate regions of the empire.

⁴⁰ Jones, "Social Background," 20.

⁴¹ Although Jews and followers of Greco-Roman religion still made up a considerable section of the community. See also Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 224-226, 232; G. Downey, *Antioch in the Age of Theodosius the Great*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press (1962) 12; Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 43.

⁴² Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 228.

⁴³ Jones, "Social Background," 30. See also MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 22-23.

⁴⁴ Re the fundamental place of asceticism in early Syrian Christianity see S.A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis. John of Ephesus and the "Lives of the Eastern Saints"*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1990) 4. Re types of Monasticism see Geanakoplos, *Byzantium*, 165.

⁴⁵ Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 73.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Civilizations of Holy Land*, 157.

arbitrator, and proving to be essential to the internal workings of the villages.⁴⁷ For posterity the holy figure was recorded in hagiographies as a performer of miracles, healer, exorciser, battler of dragons⁴⁸ and even repairer of the malevolent work of ‘magicians’.⁴⁹

Legislative and religious changes in the fourth century also affected the traditional family structure to some degree. For instance, Constantine’s refinement of traditional laws dealing with marital relationships allowed people, the upper classes in particular, the freedom to reject marriage. This legislation was a considerable break from traditional practices and would have affected perceptions, expectations, and actions, possibly having “profound and disturbing effects” on inheritance and wealth distribution.⁵⁰ Indeed St Anthony is a famous contemporary example of an individual who rejected marriage and accepted asceticism and, as a consequence, and contrary to traditional aristocratic behaviour, redistributed his inherited family wealth with the intention of never perpetuating his family line. In addition to legislative changes, church fathers (in a similar vein to many early Christian communities), such as John Chrysostom, also encouraged celibate Christian marriages and discouraged remarriage, reversing traditional understandings and expectations of marriage as a legitimate means for maintaining or increasing populations.⁵¹ These changing conditions also allowed women to abandon both traditional roles as wife and mother, and the concerns of remarriage, consequently also affecting the distribution of personal wealth.⁵²

⁴⁷ By far the most influential work done on this has been P. Brown, “The rise and function of the Holy Man in late antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) 80-101. For more recent reactions to this work see also: Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 73ff; L.M. Whitby, “Maro the Dendrite: and anti-social holy man,” in Whitby et al. (eds), *Homo Viator. Classical Studies for John Bramble*, Bristol (1987) 309-17; also P. Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971-1997,” *J ECS* 6.3 (1998) 353-376. Monks represented a new power in the countryside, in the secular realm as well as religious. “While we cannot watch the process in detail, the existence in the countryside of this new kind of patron must have had an influence on the perennial struggle between city and countryside, between city-based landowner, or tax collector, or official, and the peasantry.” (Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 239).

⁴⁸ Sozomen, HE, 4.16.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the story of Macarius of Egypt in Palladius, LH, 17.6-9.

⁵⁰ Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 145.

⁵¹ See the discussion in Brändle, *Johannes Chrysostomus*, 34-35.

⁵² Consider for example John Chrysostom’s close friend Olympias who did not remarry and devoted her great personal fortune to the works of the church (See Brändle, *Johannes Chrysostomus*, 68-69). On the impact of Christianity on the repositioning of women into the public sphere see Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 148.

Nevertheless, despite the new leniencies and opportunities for the single or widowed life, traditional views and norms would not have readily succumbed to these new ideas. John Chrysostom himself only pursued an ascetic life in the caves of Mt Silpius once his mother was deceased.⁵³ Furthermore the relative inattention to Christian holy women in hagiographies may reflect the gender bias of contemporary authors and audiences, but may also reflect the fact that fewer women were forsaking traditional roles to partake in the ascetic life.⁵⁴

This outline of the fourth century, though brief, has provided some insight into the setting of the study that follows. Syria and Palestine were provinces of the East affected by various changes in imperial administration and control. Culturally, they shared many similarities including education, languages, and religions, the latter becoming increasingly influential in both provinces over the course of the fourth century. Many of the points covered in this outline prove directly significant in the study of supernatural practices in this period, particularly in dictating reactions to these activities, although such links are not always readily ascertainable. Nevertheless social conditions, whether constant or changing, whether economic, political, governmental, religious or familial all in some way interrelate with, and impact upon, people's lives and their subsequent behaviours, including those involving the supernatural.

⁵³ For further discussion of this see: Brändle, *Johannes Chrysostomus*, 26 (John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, 1).

⁵⁴ For a discussion on the figure of the holy woman as represented in hagiography, see S.A. Harvey, "Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story," in L.L. Coon, K.J. Haldane, & E.W. Sommer (eds), *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia (1990) 36-59.

CURSES FOR COURSES
HEAVY TACTICS IN THE HIPPODROME

4.1 Introduction

The third firmament is filled with storerooms of mist from which the winds go forth, and inside it are encampments of thunder from which lightning emanates. Within, three princes sit on their thrones... RHTY'L is in charge of every chariot of fire causing it to run (successfully) or to fail.¹

That Rhty'l's celestial concern would extend to the terrestrial stadium seems probable.² Indeed, according to extant appeals for their assistance, divine or daimonic beings were concerned with late antique chariot races. It was, after all, a very popular sport. Throughout the Roman empire major cities boasted grand arenas that could hold thousands of spectators, and the staging of competitions could bring towns and cities to a standstill. Palestine and Syria participated in the trend. Antioch's hippodrome, for instance, provided allocated seating for an audience of 80,000.³ Yet even with its great capacity, people still crowded onto rooves and any other places from which they could catch sight of the action. Furthermore, on race days, as John Chrysostom laments, Antioch was brought to a standstill. Race-goers began gathering before dawn, and they were prepared to wait for the event and to enjoy the spectacle, in any weather conditions and at any time of the year.⁴

¹ Tr. Morgan, SHR, 61-2. The *Sepher Ha-Razim* is dated to the fourth century, or possibly late third. It is believed to stem from either Palestine, Syria, or Egypt (Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 86). See Chapter 10 (section 3.1).

² Morgan argues that here: "the circling celestial bodies are viewed as the circling chariots of the hippodrome. Thus RHTY'L appears as the ruler of chariot races and his name (RHT = run) indicates that he was created for this function." SHR, 61 n. 3.

³ Brändle, *Johannes Chrysostomus*, 18.

⁴ John complains that despite a congregation's unwillingness to endure a lengthy sermon, a horse racing audience would endure extremes of physical discomfort without a thought. John Chrysostom, *De Anno Sermo 4* (PG 54. 660-661), *Homily 6 in Genesim* (PG 53. 54-56), and *De mutione nominum homily 4* (PG 51. 147).

Enthusiasm for the event must have been strengthened by people's allegiances to the particular teams (factions) for whom the charioteers and their horses were competing. The most prominent factions were the blues and the greens, although two other smaller teams, reds and whites, also operated.⁵ Fans were dedicated to their particular factions, and fanaticism for the teams, sport, and competitors could be intense and periodically result in dangerous or excessive behaviour.⁶

Within this highly popular and competitive sporting arena, people utilised supernatural methods in order to enhance the performance of, protect, or inhibit, charioteers, and their horses.⁷ Their methods could include charms to protect from malevolent attack, incantations to incite horses, as well as curses to hinder opponents. These methods, for which Palestinian and Syrian evidence exists, will be presented below. It should be noted here, before the material is presented and discussion offered, that in the collation of evidence for the chapter, in line with the overall aims of the thesis, it was intended to include supernatural material linked with any form of entertainment in the fourth century in these regions. However, the evidence did not enable any clear association of supernatural activity with any type of public amusement outside of chariot races for fourth-century Syria and Palestine. This should not be seen as a definite indicator of a fourth-century focus for supernatural attentions relating to entertainment. It may simply reflect the availability of evidence at this time. Consider for instance an extant curse tablet from third-century Apheca aimed at Hyperchious who was performing for the pantomime of the blue team. The existence of this tablet alone arouses suspicions of fourth-century supernatural involvement beyond the racing arena.⁸ Thus the focus of this chapter is dictated by the extant evidence, and hence concerns chariot racing alone, in both Syria and Palestine.

Following the survey of the material, it will be proposed that certain aspects of contemporary social behaviour and belief can be suggested as plausible stimuli for and

⁵ A. Cameron, *Circus Factions. Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1976) 56.

⁶ See Cameron, *Circus Factions*, esp. 56, 75-77 on Pliny's and Procopius' accounts of fans and their behaviour.

⁷ Heintz discusses these various methods: *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 18-40.

⁸ See no.4 in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 51-53.

influences on the use of supernatural methods against those involved in chariot races (including the horses). These influences include: the agonistic context of the sporting event; people's financial concerns regarding the races, for example gambling; and the popular perception of the powerful charioteer.

4.2 Syria

The discussion begins with an investigation of Syria, from where only a limited number of extant fourth-century *defixiones* have been published or deciphered. Unpublished evidence which is still being processed includes tablets from the hippodrome at Antioch.⁹

The evidence which is available includes a fourth-century *defixio* from Damaskos which is fairly fragmentary. However, Jordan argues that certain words in the inscription such as κάμψαι and [μα]σκιλλι μασκελλω suggest that the text is aimed at a charioteer.¹⁰ The evidence from this fourth-century example as well as the unpublished material is scant, but it does suggest that the cursing of charioteers was practised in Syria during this period. Furthermore if examples for the previous and successive centuries are considered, it can be argued that some continuity of practice existed and hence some insight can be gained into the possible motivations and

⁹ Jordan (SGD, 193) reports that Humphrey, *BASOR* 213 (1974) p.40, mentions three. Humphrey (J.H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses. Arenas for Chariot Racing*, London: B.T. Batsford Ltd (1986) 455) also mentions that five lead tablets were found beside the turning posts. Another curse tablet (no.107 in Jordan "New Greek Curse Tablets," 41) was found in the drains around the far turning point in the *meta* of the hippodrome, at Antioch. It dates to the third or fourth century, and is still rolled up. See also F. Heintz, "Magic Tablets and the Games at Antioch," in C. Kondoleon (ed.), *Antioch. The Lost Ancient City*, Princeton: Princeton University Press & Worcester Art Museum (2000: 163-167) 166.

¹⁰ SGD 166; SEG 7.234.

-- σιι-ιιτωται την χ...ντ--ι..μψου ανάγκης [--] ἐπὶ τῷ π-- τα|| ια κάμψαι τήν -- |... και
ματ.ν-τοχ[...| ὄρ]{κυ}κίζω ὑμᾶς, δέμ(ονες) και ἄγ(γελοι [τ]ίμιοι κ(α)τὰ τῆς ανάγκης, ταῦτα |
[μα]σκιλλι μασκελλω φνουκεντα || τι φηλιζατα ρίσιχθων ἱππόχθω(ν) | .λ.νχθων
νιαιανυ ζ(α)ρα μολ. | δέιτε τῶν λεπ(ε)τῶν Φρίξ, Φρώξ αιο μετιξ ἀνάγκη μαντουνωθηλιθ,
ἵνα ὑποτάξηται Δρακόντιν· || [ἔ]τεκεν Μαρθήνη Ἀστερία· ἴσετ[ε παρ]αδεδωκέσαι ὑμῖν, ἰ μη
ἀποπέ [μπει. ν]οῦν, οὐσία[ν] και δίκναλμυν -- | ηνι ὑμῖν ἀνάγκην χυχιλαχυχωακαμ | ..
ξιχυχω χιχως νεως χιχι||.. δωθωηιχωωωχω κρानθιωσις | αχω στῆθι -- | μμαίως
αταωνα --χκαχυχ --.

intentions of fourth-century tablets. Having said this, however, it is acknowledged that *defixiones* generally followed relatively standardised formats, as is demonstrated in the various collections of the tablets from numerous regions of the Greco-Roman world.¹¹ The following two examples precede and succeed the fourth century respectively.

A *defixio* from Beirut dated to the late second or early third century CE,¹² which has also been assigned a date of the fourth or fifth century,¹³ is directed against horses and drivers of the blue faction. A drawn figure resembling a bound human which appears to be under attack from the head of an incomplete figure which is probably a snake accompanies the text on the tablet.¹⁴ The text aims at restraining the horses and charioteers. Accompanying various *voces magicae*¹⁵ on the tablet is the demand that the ἄγιοι ἄγγελοι attack and harm both the horses and the named charioteers of the blue team. The angels are to συνοίτσατε (*sic*) καὶ κατάσχετε them, “attack, bind, overturn, cut up, chop into pieces the horses and the charioteers of the Blue colors”.¹⁶ It is very specific about its victims, and lists the names of the charioteers and horses concerned, four charioteers and the horses grouped into teams of four, concluding with the command: “bind and CHRAB, damage the hands, feet, sinews of the horses and charioteers of the Blue colors.”¹⁷

The second example is from Apamea on the Orontes and dates to the late fifth or early sixth century CE.¹⁸ The text, appealing to χαρακτῆρες, and with notable Jewish characteristics,¹⁹ is concerned with the chariot racing in the hippodrome of Apamea,

¹¹ For a discussion on the form of inscriptions on *defixiones* see Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 4-12.

¹² SEG 15.847, 7.213; SGD 167; and no.5, Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 53-6.

¹³ This dating is set on the basis of circus factions only being attested in the East from 315CE. See Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 213.

¹⁴ For a drawing of the figure see Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 54.

¹⁵ On *voces magicae*, the frequent occurrence of incomprehensible sequences of vowels and consonants, often formulaic, see Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 1549. See also Chapter 10 (section 2.1).

¹⁶ κὲ τὰ νῖν συνέρθατε, δήσατε, καλλταστρέψατε, λεπτοκοπήσατε, <σ>φάλετε Ἰῖππους κὲ ἡνιόχους χροῶς καλαίων (II19-21, SEG 7.213). Trans. see Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 53-6.

¹⁷ χραβ δῆσον ις | – χραβ δηλύσης – | χέρας, πόδας, νεῦρα {οας καλαε} | ἵππων κὲ ἡνιόχων χροῶς <καλλ>αένων (II31-33, SEG 7.213). Trans. in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 53-56. See also Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 213-215.

¹⁸ No.6 in Gager *Curse Tablets*, 56-58; Tablet A in W. van Rengen, “Deux défixions contre les bleus à Apamée (VI siècle apr. J.-C.),” *Apamée de Syrie*, Brussels (1984) 213-34. Also SEG 34.1437. SGD, pp.192-193.

¹⁹ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 56-57.

and as with the previous example is also an attack against members of the Blue team. It reads:

Most holy Lord *Charaktêres*, tie up, bind the feet, the hands, the sinews, the eyes, the knees, the courage, the leaps, the whip (?), the victory and the crowning of Porphuras and Hapsicrates, who are in the middle left, as well as his codrivers of the Blue colors in the stable of Eugenius. From this very hour, from today, may they not eat or drink or sleep; instead, from the (starting) gates may they see *daimones* (of those) who have died prematurely, spirits (of those) who have died violently, and the fire of Hephaestus ... in the hippodrome at the moment when they are about to compete may they not squeeze over, may they not collide, may they not extend, may they not force (us) out, may they not overtake, may they not break off (in a new direction?) for the entire day when they are about to race. May they be broken, may they be dragged (on the ground), may they be destroyed; by Topos and by Zablas. Now, now, quickly, quickly!²⁰

The form, language, and religious nuances of the two tablets show some variation, and are interesting for what they reveal about the form of curses. Of greater relevance and concern, however, for this study is the motivation that lies behind their use. This is most immediately observed in the similar intentions of both examples. These tablets aim to harm and impede the performance of the Blues. The texts seek the assistance of supernatural beings to attack competitors and horses, and use a relatively standard discourse of restraint (binding), damage (including physical harm) and impediment, which is adapted to the racing context (including, for example, collisions and overtaking). It is noteworthy that in both cases the instigators demonstrate specific knowledge of their victims. The first example lists twenty-nine charioteers, and in the case of the second example, while fewer charioteers are named, reference to them is still made, as is the name of the supplying stable. Hence it is clear that curses involving chariot races could include specific ‘team targets’, identifying competitors individually or as members of a group. Such specification implies that the instigators of the curses did not wish ambiguity to hinder the success of the daimonic and angelic assignments.

²⁰ κύριοι ἀγιώτατοι χαρακτῆρες δήσατε καταδήσατε τοὺς πόδα τὰς χῖρας τὰ νερα τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τὰ γόνατα τὰ θράση τὰ ἄλματα τὴν ταύραν τὴν νίκην τὴν στεφάνωσιν Πορφυρᾶν κὲ Ἀψικράτην μεσαρίστερον κὲ τοὺς σὺν αὐτ[οι]ῶ συνελάνοντασ χροᾶσ καλαεῖνων στάβλου Εὐγενίου ἐκ τῆσ ἄρτι ὥρασ ἐκ τῆσ σήμερον ἡμέρασ μὴ φάγωσιν μὴ πίωσιν μὴ κοιμηθῶσιν ἀλλὰ βλεπέτωσαν [ἀ]πὸ θυρῶν δέμ[ο]νας ἄωρο[υ]σ δέμονασ βιέουσ Ἡφέστου πῦρ απ[ca. 4] ἐν τῶ ἰ[ππι]οδρομῶ ὅτε μέλουσιν ἀγωνίζασθε μὴ χιάσωσιν μὴ παραβύσωσιν μὴ ταθῶσι μὴ ἐκβάλω[σιν] μὴ παρέλθωσιν μὴ περικλάσωσιν δι’ ὅλησ τῆσ ἡμέρασ ὅτε μέλουσιν ἀγωνίζασθε κλασθῶσιν συρῶσιν ἀφανισθῶσιν κατὰ τόπο κὲ κατὰ Ζαβλαν ἤδη ἤδη ταχύ ταχύ. Tablet A in Van Rengen, “Deux Défixions,” 215. Trans. from Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 57-58.

Late antique evidence suggests that curse victims as well as the sport's fans were not ignorant of the act of supernatural meddling in the arena. Take for instance a fifth-century hagiographical account in which the audience is told about a sick man who is directed by Cosmas and Damian:

if you find it difficult to drink the three measures of the cedar-flavoured wine for your own salvation, pour them into a jar, and go to your home, and then very late at night, go to the Hippodrome and dig a hole in the far turn of the course, and without letting anyone see you, deposit therein the jar of cedar-flavoured wine.²¹

The sick man did as he was told, but his actions in the hippodrome were observed. This observer saw both that the sick man was burying something in the race course, and that his servants were there yet standing apart, and so he suspected that the sick man “was working magic and sorcery against one of the factions of charioteers.”²² He therefore ran off and quickly returned with reinforcements who seized the suspected sorcerer and threatened to harm him and turn him over to the law unless he revealed both the name of the instigator behind his machinations, and the faction against whom the “magic” was directed.²³

The sick man in the arena on the evening of this account, though a rabid fan of the hippodrome, was not actually seeking, as the witnesses surmised, to affect the outcome of the races, but simply to instigate a cure for a tumour in his chest. Taking into consideration the primary concern of the hagiographical report – to promote the healing powers of Cosmas and Damian – and the problems associated with misreading and misrepresenting the formulaic texts of the genre,²⁴ the excerpt is still illuminating.

²¹ εἰ δυσχεραίνεις ἐπὶ τῇ ἰδίᾳ σωτηρίᾳ πιεῖν τὰς τρεῖς κράσεις τῆς κεδραίας, ταύτας βαλὼν ἐν ἀγγείῳ τινὶ εἰσελθε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου, καὶ φυλάξας βραδεῖαν πάνυ τῆς ἐσπέρας ὥραν ἄπελθε ἐν τῷ ἵππικῷ, καὶ ἐν τῇ ἄνω σφενδόνῃ δι' ἑαυτοῦ ὀρύξας μηδενὸς τὸ σύνολον εἰδότης ἀπόθου τὸ ἀγγεῖον τῆς κεδραίας. (Cosmas and Damian, *Wunder*, 25-29). Tr. H.J.

Magoulias, “The Lives of the Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Magic in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries A.D.: Sorcery, Relics and Icons,” *Byzantion* 37 (1967:228-269) 243.

²² Magoulias, “Lives of the Saints,” 244.

²³ Magoulias, “Lives of the Saints,” 244. See L. Deubner, *Kosmas and Damian. Texte und Einleitung*, Leipzig & Berlin: Scientia Verlag Aalen (1907) 122-128; and the discussion and part translation of the text in Magoulias, “Lives of the Saints,” 243-244.

²⁴ There are various arguments regarding the valid use of hagiographies given their repetitive and formulaic presentations. However Seiber (*The Urban Saint in Early Byzantine Social History*, British Archaeological Reports Supplementary Series 37 [1977: 1-117] 2) points out, that despite their stylised anecdotes which can appear in several sources, “hagiography reflects very reliably how Byzantine society thought of itself and of its worldly surroundings”. Alternately, Dickie has more recently commented that the constant reworking and oral presentation of texts could be seen as influential in the formulaic

The author, in an attempt to appeal to his audience with a familiar and believable context, is providing the modern reader with valuable social information. Given that *defixiones* were buried at night, and racing ones most often deposited in the hippodrome, the suspicion of supernatural activity aroused in the observer firstly suggests that the use and placement of *defixiones* were known. Secondly, the observer actually responded to the perceived malevolent behaviour by seeking to overcome and detain the alleged miscreant. This implies that the alleged supernatural interference was both threatening and unacceptable to the individual in this instance, and suggests that it may have held a similarly objectionable meaning for the wider community. Finally, when he was questioned, the actions, or profession, of the alleged sorcerer were secondary concerns to the revelation of the instigator(s) and targets. This both acknowledges the perceived effectiveness of supernatural methods in its concern for the victims and, in seeking the main protagonists, it also reveals an understanding of the nature of this activity. That is, it suggests that people were aware that the suspected ‘sorcerer’ was not the instigator of the supernatural attack, merely the agent for another maleficent party.

The idea of a public acknowledgment of supernatural sabotage in the arena, and of public concern for such activity is supported by remarks from Libanius. The orator tells us how rumours that a star charioteer had come under a spell would quickly lead to public outcry across the city of Antioch.²⁵ Furthermore, in one oration he complains of his students’ interests being diverted to the circus. In his speech he mentions people seeking out individuals who could reveal which charioteer would win a race, as well as individuals who profited by saying something to the horses, and through them (ie. the horses) to the charioteers. This seems to be a reference to diviners who were able to reveal the results of a race, and the ‘horse-whisperers’ may very well be a reference to *moratores* reciting charms to the horses, the effect of which would be transmitted to the charioteers who drove them.²⁶ In this case, however, Libanius is not so much concerned

character and stereotypical story-patterns of some hagiographical accounts. (M.W. Dickie, “Narrative-patterns in Christian Hagiography,” GRBS 40 [1999] 83-98).

²⁵ Lib. Or. 36.15. For a discussion on Libanius’ comments see Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 87-88. (Note that Heintz cites this passage as Or. 36.20).

²⁶ See Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 89-93.

with the supernatural element of the circus, but with the fact that the races and related activities distract his pupils' attention away from their education.²⁷

Participants' awareness of supernatural attacks is also apparent in the use of apotropaic devices to protect both charioteers and horses.²⁸ Indeed Heintz proposes that magic workshops existed in this period, and that these provided complete 'packages' for clients which included: aggressive devices for use against competitors, encouragement methods for horses, and protective measures for charioteers and horses.²⁹ Furthermore he argues that in the late antique circus 'magic' was universally and routinely employed and "faithfully replicated and transposed onto the supernatural plane what was actually taking place on the track". Thus various supernatural techniques utilised can be seen to parallel aspects of the sport, suggesting quite a complex system of supernatural activity in the arena.³⁰ Such a proposition leaves little room for speculation regarding ignorance of supernatural activities, at least amongst those involved with the sport. As yet, however, no evidence has been presented in this discussion to confirm such an industry in Syria. Even so, Heintz's assertion should not be dismissed, as the fourth-century Syrian evidence presented is limited, and the material from neighbouring Palestine does offer some support for his proposition.

²⁷ Libanius, Or. 35.13-14. See also Heintz's discussion of this excerpt and the argument that divination relating to the outcome of races could be closely linked with the 'next step' of ensuring the outcome. Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 88-93.

²⁸ Heintz, "Magic Tablets at Antioch," 167.

²⁹ Heintz, "Magic Tablets at Antioch," 167; and id., *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 53-55, and on apotropaic seashells, *lunulae*, pendants, and brandmarks, *ibid.*, pp.183-193. See also an example of a spell recipe in the *Sepher Ha-Razim* for making tired horses run 'like the wind' (3rd firmament, ll.36-44 of trans: SHR, 64; no.7, Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 59).

³⁰ See Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 55-57.

4.3 Palestine

The evidence for Palestine is not even as solid as that for Syria, as extant and published material for the region and period is difficult to find. Nevertheless there is some hagiographical evidence which suggests that supernatural activities were not precluded from the Palestinian hippodrome.

Jerome tells us of a charioteer from Gaza who was “stricken by a demon in his chariot” and as a result “became perfectly stiff, so that he could neither move his hand nor bend his neck”.³¹ Upon his conversion to Christianity and his promise to leave his occupation, he was healed by Hilarion. This ailment, which is here clearly assigned a supernatural cause, has striking similarities with the intended outcomes of *defixiones* which often seek to render their victims physically powerless. Consider for instance the command: “just as this rooster has been bound by its feet, hands, and head, so bind the legs and hands and head and heart of Victoricus the charioteer of the Blue team”,³² or “hinder them, hobble them, so that tomorrow morning in the hippodrome they are not able to run or to walk about”.³³

Jerome’s second reference to racing involves a Christian Palestinian, Italicus, who “used to keep horses for the circus to contend against those of the *duumvir* of Gaza who was a votary of the idol god Marnas”.³⁴ The author states that this was an old Roman custom followed in Roman cities. Victory in the races, which involved racing seven times around the circus, lay with the team which tired out their opponents’ horses. “Now the rival of Italicus had in his pay a magician both to incite his horses by certain demoniacal incantations, and keep back those of his opponent on the track.”³⁵

³¹ “Auriga quoque Gazensis in curru percussus daemone totus obriguit: ita ut nec manum agitare, nec cervicem posset reflectere.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 16; PL 23.36 12-15). Translation of Jerome’s *Hilarion* based on that found in NPNF (Series 2, vol. 6 [http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-06/Npnf2-06-05.htm]) with occasional variations where considered appropriate. For further commentary on this passage see Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 95-97.

³² From Carthage. DT 241; trans. no.12, Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 65-67.

³³ DT 237; trans: no. 9, Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 60-62.

³⁴ “Sed et Italicus ejusdem oppidi municeps Christianus, adversus Gazensem Duumvirum, Marnae idolo deditum, Circenses equos nutriebat” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 20; PL 23.38 8-12).

³⁵ “Hic itaque aemulo suo habente maleficum, qui daemoniis quibusdam imprecationibus et hujus impediret equos, et illius concitaret ad cursum” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 20; PL 23.38 16-20).

The Christian Italicus then sought the aid of Hilarion “not so much for the injury of his adversary as for protection for himself”.³⁶ The holy man did not consider this worthwhile and urged Italicus to sell his horses instead. However, the latter:

replied that his office was a public duty, and that he acted not so much from choice as from compulsion, that no Christian man could employ magic, but would rather seek aid from a servant of Christ, especially against the people of Gaza who were enemies of God, and who would exult over the Church of Christ more than over him.³⁷

This persuaded the holy man and he had water poured into one of his cups. Italicus then sprinkled this water over his stable, horses, charioteers, chariot, and the barriers of the course. Jerome’s account of the event following this supernatural preparation is suspenseful:

The crowd was in a marvellous state of excitement, for the enemy in derision had published the news of what was going to be done, and the backers of Italicus were in high spirits at the victory which they promised themselves. The signal is given; the one team flies towards the goal, the other sticks fast: the wheels are glowing hot beneath the chariot of the one, while the other scarce catches a glimpse of their opponents’ backs as they flit past. The shouts of the crowd swell to a roar, and the heathens themselves with one voice declare Marnas is conquered by Christ. After this the opponents in their rage demanded that Hilarion as a Christian magician should be dragged to execution. This decisive victory and several others which followed in successive games of the circus caused many to turn to the faith.³⁸

One can almost hear a racing commentator when reading this account by Jerome. The intention of Christian promotion and conversion is overwhelming. Nevertheless it can be argued that in both of Jerome’s accounts he is playing with the public perception of the circus as an arena for supernatural activity.³⁹ By presenting the

³⁶ “et non tam adversarium laedi, quam se defendi obsecravit”; Jerome, *Hilarion*, 20; PL 23.38 21-22).

³⁷ “ille respondit, functionem esse publicam; et hoc se non tam velle, quam cogi, nec posse hominem Christianum uti magicis artibus; sed a servo Christi potius auxilium petere, maxime contra Gazenses adversarios Dei: et non tam sibi quam Ecclesiae Christi insultantes.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 20; PL 23.38 26-31).

³⁸ “Mira vulgi expectatio: nam et adversarius hoc ipsum irridens, diffamaverat; et fautores Italici sibi certam victoriam pollicentes exsultabant. Igitur dato signo hi advolant, illi praepediuntur. Sub horum curru rotae fervent, illi praetervolantium terga vix cernunt. Clamor fit vulgi nimius: ita ut Ethnici quoque ipsi concreparent: Marnas victus est a Christo. Porro furentes adversarii, Hilarionem maleficum Christianum ad supplicium poposcerunt. Indubitata ergo victoria et illis, et multis retro Circensibus plurimis fidei occasio fuit.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 20; PL 23.38 36 - 39 5).

³⁹ John Chrysostom also commented on chariot races and associated the races with “deeds that are the product of sorcery” (σὺ δὲ εἰς κραυγὰς καὶ θορύβους καὶ αἰσχρὰ ῥήματα, καὶ μάχην καὶ τέρψιν ἄκαιρον, καὶ ἔργα ἀπὸ μαγγανείας γινόμενα τὸν βίον σου καταναλίσκεις εἰκῆ καὶ ἐπὶ κακῶ τῶ τῶ. *In Joannem*, hom 58; PG 59.321). Heintz in support cites as genuine a spurious homily attributed to John Chrysostom, which may or may not be contemporary (PG 59.567). See Heintz, “Magic Tablets at Antioch,” 167; also Heintz’s discussion regarding circus curses and their daimonic

arena with supernatural associations, Jerome is utilising a discourse of power identifiable by his audience in both a physical and supernatural sense. Within this discourse he portrays Christianity as a dominant force. Interestingly he does this by firstly distinguishing the hero from the usual portrayals of potency in the stadium, and secondly by assigning the Christian holy man supremacy of power despite, or because of, this differentiation. That is, firstly, the holy man is distinctive because of his initial dismissal of the event followed by his widely recognised involvement. This occurs only when he is told that it is Italicus' public duty to participate in the event, and that the latter would prefer not to use non-Christian methods in a competition in which the non-Christian opponents would certainly be using supernatural methods against his teams. Secondly, Jerome highlights Hilarion's use of what may have been seen as protective, or defensive, rather than aggressive, strength to defeat the antagonists. That is, Hilarion utilises water (there is no mention of it being blessed by him) which serves to protect Italicus' teams. He does not utilise a curse or spell of any sort against the opponents. In this portrayal can be seen the delicate and manipulated line between Christian, sanctioned, and unsanctioned supernatural authority, an aspect of hagiography which, as is seen several times throughout the thesis, allows Christianity to triumph in the discourse of supernatural ascendancy while dissociating itself from the traditional behaviours that form the discourse.⁴⁰

In opposition to this line of argument, Heintz's reading of Jerome's account should also be considered. He proposes that Hilarion's actions actually contain all three aspects of the supernatural activity that could usually be found in the circus – apotropaic, aggressive, and performance-enhancing.⁴¹ Thus while the sprinkled water is seen as a defensive measure protecting Italicus' teams from his opponent's spells, the extraordinary performance of the horses is seen by Heintz to be the result of performance-enhancement. Furthermore the *duumvir's* teams are also impeded, suggesting that the binding spells he had aimed at Italicus' teams had rebounded, a

associations and locations in F. Heintz, "Circus curses and their archaeological contexts," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 11 (1998) 337-342.

⁴⁰ Heintz comments on the perceptions of the sprinkling of water, and the pious addition of the blessing of the water in some editions of the text. See Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 103-104.

⁴¹ See Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 97-104, esp. 101-102.

possibility of spells often recorded in hagiographical accounts. If Heintz's argument is accepted, then the proposal made above regarding a Christian realignment of supernatural behaviour is invalidated. Nevertheless, Heintz's proposal further strengthens the holy man's position as a potent figure, for Hilarion excelled in all aspects of those practices using the supernatural which were possibly observed in the arena.

Thus it is argued that these hagiographical accounts reveal, in the social settings of their scripts, the use of supernatural methods against, or for, those competing in the Palestinian hippodrome. However, whether these supposed methods, for example those which were apparently to be used against Italicus' horses and charioteers, included the curse tablets seen in the Syrian evidence can not be ascertained with certainty. It can be said though, that the symptoms of the immobile charioteer, as well as the alleged malevolent intentions of Italicus' opponents do imply the use of aggressive methods, of which *defixiones* are a feasible and effective option. Certainly Heintz asserts that the basic facts and protagonists in the account are entirely credible. In addition Heintz also highlights in his discussion of the episode the context for the intensity of the competition that Jerome portrays, lending further credence to the notion of hagiography as a beneficial source of information. The intensity, Heintz argues, can be understood in the political context of the period. The race is being staged by two magistrates, one from Gaza and the other from a rival city, Maiuma. Thus the competition, even hostility, between these two cities, their magistrates, and their inhabitants who made up the audience would have provided an extremely competitive setting not only for the races, but also for Jerome's portrayal of ascendant Christian power.

Before moving on to discuss the possible motivations behind the inclusion of supernatural arts in chariot racing, it is worth considering a decree of the *Codex Theodosianus* which had jurisdiction in both Syria and Palestine. It states:

If anyone should hear of a person who is contaminated with the pollution of magic or if he should apprehend such a person or seize him, he shall drag him out immediately before the public and shall show the enemy of the common safety to the eyes of the courts. But if any charioteer or anyone of any other class of men should attempt to contravene this interdict or should destroy by clandestine punishment a person, even though he is clearly guilty of the evil art of magic, he shall not escape the supreme penalty, since he is subject to a double suspicion, namely, that he has secretly removed a

public criminal from the severity of the law and from due investigation, in order that said criminal might not expose his associates in crime, or that perhaps he has killed in his own enemy a more atrocious plan under the pretence of avenging this crime.⁴²

This section of the Codex is obviously concerned with the public disclosure, labelling and punishment of those individuals who are involved with the *pollutum maleficiorum*. Of special interest is that this section of legislation also specifically refers to the employment of these arts by charioteers and their accomplices, either directly or through others (we could assume that professional practitioners of supernatural arts and the like would be meant here). Not only does it state that they should not disobey this law, but it adds that they should also not ‘destroy’ the person who is guilty of *maleficiae artis*. This insinuates that a charioteer might seek to cover up his own involvement by doing away with the evidence, that is, the individual who used the arts.

The unusual nature of this law does suggest, by its very explicitness, that it reflects some degree of social reality.⁴³ We see from the decree that people, including charioteers, were involved in using the supernatural arts in racing, with a sincere desire to hinder opponents, such that murder could also be a result. Though not involving murder, Ammianus tells us of the use of *veneficium*⁴⁴ by a charioteer in Rome and of the involvement of his alleged upper class accomplices who “were brought to trial on the ground that they were said to be making much of the charioteer Auchenius, and were his accomplices in the use of poisons”.⁴⁵ In this case the accused were acquitted.⁴⁶

⁴² CT 9.16.11: “Quicumque maleficiorum labe pollutum audierit deprehenderit occupaverit, ilico ad publicum protrahat et iudiciorum oculis communis hostem salutis ostendat. Quod so quisquam ex agitatoribus [id est aurigis IVST] seu ex quolibet alio genere hominum contra hoc interdictum venire temptaverit aut clandestinis suppliciis etiam manifestum reum maleficiae artis suppresserit, ultimum supplicium non evadat geminae suspicionis obnoxius, quod aut publicum reum, ne facinoris socios publicaret, severitati legum et debitae subtraxerit quaestioni aut proprium fortassis socios publicaret, severitati legum et debitae subtraxerit quaestioni aut proprium fortassis inimicum sub huius vindictae nomine consilio atrocior confecerit.” (Tr. Pharr, Greenwood Press Publishers [New York] 1952.)

⁴³ Indeed Cameron proposes that: “The curiously complex nature of the law suggests that it was framed with reference to a particular case when a charioteer was accused of doing away with a magician suspected of being his accomplice.” (A. Cameron, *Porphyrus. The Charioteer*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press [1973] 245 n.11.)

⁴⁴ *Veneficium* can refer to poisons, the preparation of drugs, *magica* or *γοητεία*. Yet, even if referring specifically to poisons, the construction of these potions was often accompanied by incantations appealing to supernatural beings.

⁴⁵ “...omnes clarissimi, accessiti in crimen, quod eiusdem conscii veneficiis, aurigam fovere dicebantur Auchenium...” (*Res Gestae*, 28.1.27. All translations of the *Res Gestae* are taken from the Loeb edition [ed. & tr. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Texts, 3 vols, 1935-1939]).

Despite the acquittal of the accused, both Ammianus' account and the legislation of the Codex make it clear that the activities suspected in the hagiographical passages above, and exemplified in the Syrian curse tablets, were neither socially nor legally condoned. Furthermore, Ammianus in particular, and even Libanius,⁴⁷ demonstrate that action was taken by authorities against the perpetrators of, as well as accessories to, the use of performance-inhibiting supernatural methods. Hence the activities for which evidence exists would not have been used lightly by individuals who would have been aware of the possible consequences should their actions or involvement become known.

4.4 Motivations

The image presented by the evidence above is of a popular and competitive sporting event in which curses, supernatural performance-enhancers, and apotropaic devices play a distinctive role. While the popularity of a sport is familiar to a modern observer, the involvement of the supernatural seems unfamiliar and even unusual, although ritualistic behaviours in modern sportsmen and women are recognised as a means for attaining or maintaining good fortune.⁴⁸ In the fourth century, the additional use of more aggressive methods is not readily understood without some comprehension of the society that fostered it. A few contextual social factors seen as influential in the use of these methods are presented for consideration in the following pages. They

⁴⁶ "documentis etiam tum ambiguis, suffragante absoluti sunt Victorino, ut dispersus prodidit rumor, qui erat amicus Maximino iunctissimus" (*Res Gestae*, 28.1.27).

⁴⁷ Libanius mentions that his former teaching assistant is charged with such suspicious involvement in the races (Or. 1.161-162).

⁴⁸ In a relatively recent interview, the world's former number one tennis player was asked about the reason for wearing his hat backwards, the star reluctantly admitted that he wore it that way by chance in his first professional victory, and has subsequently retained the style. For a survey of similar behaviour amongst American professional baseballers see Gmelch who identifies Malinowski's elements of ritual, taboo, and fetishes amongst pitchers and batters as a means of asserting control over chance (G. Gmelch, "Magic in Professional Baseball," in G.P. Stone [ed.], *Games, Sport and Power*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books [1972] 128-137, and id., "Baseball Magic," in R.R. Sands [ed.], *Anthropology, Sport and Culture*, Westport, Connecticut & London: Bergin & Garvey [1999] 191-200).

include: the agonistic context of the event; financial interests; and the power-perception of the charioteer.

4.4.1 Agonistic Context

The agonistic context inherent in chariot racing itself is probably the most provocative motivation for the adoption of supernatural interference with the event. As Gager writes of the *defixio*:

The inconspicuous lead tablet, inscribed, folded, and buried in the dust beneath the starting gates, symbolized the invisible world of Rome – a world of gods, spirits, and *daimones* on the one side, of aspirations, tensions, and implicit power on the other...⁴⁹

Indeed, it has been proposed that the essential feature of circus curses is that they refer to agonistic relationships – relationships of rivalry and competition, which are intensified by the social pressures for status and reputation, made vulnerable through the nature of the competition.⁵⁰ Chariot races provided rivalry and competition in an arena of chance. The outcome of a race remained uncertain and victory was not assured. If we consider Malinowski's work, it is precisely in this environment that supernatural assistance is sought. Malinowski proposed that magic could be found wherever the elements of chance and accident, hope and fear were prevalent and not wherever outcomes were certain, reliable, and controllable.⁵¹ Taking these elements into consideration, a clear provocation for supernatural activity in the races can be established. Yet, for whom were the elements of competition and chance so threatening that supernatural control was required? The charioteers themselves are the most logical candidates given their immediate experience of these factors. However, an argument can also be made for the susceptibility of others to the pressures of competition and chance, namely those involved with staging the event, from aristocrat through to supplier, as well as fans of the sport.

Let us consider the charioteers first. Chariot racing was a popular sport and through victory, charioteers stood to gain fame, glory and fortune. The rivalry between

⁴⁹ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 46.

⁵⁰ See C.A. Faraone "Aeschylus' *Hymnos Desmios* (*Eum.* 306) and Attic Judicial Curse Tablets," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 105 (1985:150-154) 15; and Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 43-44.

⁵¹ Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*.

competitors would have been intense and the uncertainty of the race's outcome, as Malinowski argued, could provide adequate motivation to resort to supernatural methods in order to secure victory. That charioteers would utilise such measures was not a strange notion in late antiquity, as was seen in the decree of the *Codex Theodosianus* and in the accounts of Ammianus Marcellinus mentioned above. Indeed Cameron noted that: "it came to be generally believed that the charioteer not only consulted magicians but was one himself".⁵²

However, charioteers were not the only ones for whom the contest provided an antagonistic environment (although this assertion has recently been negated by Heintz).⁵³ Cameron argues that fans are the main source of the curse tablet, and that their use of it is not related to their playing unfairly, but to the fact that to them it would have seemed obvious that, in order to keep winning, charioteer X must himself be using magic.⁵⁴ Considering the loyalty fans were known to show for competitors and factions, Cameron's assertion is not surprising. Yet the elements of intense rivalry and chance could also feasibly provide motivation for loyal supporters to try to influence results as much as possible. That fans can become emotionally involved with sporting competitions can be seen on any television sports' coverage. That fans could act on their emotions is exemplified in the baseball games of the Pueblo Indians. At the games, serious accusations of witchcraft could be made amongst the (female) supporters aligned with opposing teams, through social and family networks, to explain or excuse results on the field.⁵⁵ Although in this particular case people sought to explain results through the accusations of witchcraft, the Pueblo Indians still demonstrate a belief that the supernatural could affect their games. In addition it was the fans, and not the players, who were associated with the instigation of this interference.

Parties involved with staging the event could also be motivated by the agonistic environment of chariot races. While the emperor was taking over some of the costs in

⁵² Cameron, *Porphyrius*, 245.

⁵³ Heintz argues that there is no strong evidence for the involvement of fans (*Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 17-18).

⁵⁴ Cameron, *Porphyrius*, 245.

⁵⁵ R. Fox, "Pueblo Baseball. A New Use for Old Witchcraft," *Journal of American Folklore* 74 (1961) 9-16.

the fourth century, in the eastern provinces in particular this was not yet the case and the responsibility for the event, and the prestige associated with staging it, was accepted by the high-ranking members of Greco-Roman society, *agonothetes*.⁵⁶ Young city councillors, for example, sponsored the races and games of the new year's festival,⁵⁷ which involved hiring charioteers, horses, veterinarians, and so on.⁵⁸ Magistrates were generally responsible for the upkeep of teams, individual charioteers, and fans.⁵⁹ Since the prestige associated with the event was considerable, there would have been tremendous pressure on the sponsor to ensure that the event went smoothly and was impressive, so that the sponsor's honour could be enhanced. Perhaps, however, there were particular pressures brought about by the staging of the event which would have inspired the use of curse tablets against particular participants. For example, it is possible that others could wish to sabotage the successful running of the event sponsored by a social or political rival. Heintz also argues for a more simple motivation, namely that *agonothetai/editores* would have sought to increase their team's chance of winning.⁶⁰ The involvement of these high-profile figures in practices utilising the supernatural does seem possible, and the evidence of the *Codex Theodosianus* (suggesting illicit involvement by people of any social class), Libanius (in his complaints on his students' inattention), and Jerome (portraying the involvement of the duumvir and Italicus) must also be considered as strong support.

In addition to these parties, those who supplied equipment for the races may also have had motivation to hinder the success of rival suppliers. Recall, for instance, the clear alignment of horses for a particular stable in one of the Syrian examples presented above. In the Eastern provinces of the empire in the fourth century, horses and equipment were still supplied for profit by business men, or *domini factionum*.⁶¹ For these men sabotaging their opponents products, and thereby their business, could have bolstered the sales appeal of their own successful horses and chariots in what must have

⁵⁶ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 7; & *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 412.

⁵⁷ Libanius, *Progy*. 12.5.8.

⁵⁸ Heintz, "Magic Tablets at Antioch," 167.

⁵⁹ Heintz, "Magic Tablets at Antioch," 167.

⁶⁰ Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 17.

⁶¹ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 6.

been a competitive market place. Certainly having successful horses in a race was paramount for the staging of the event.⁶²

4.4.2 Financial concerns

Many of the motivations for interference already mentioned in relation to the agonistic context of the races involved financial concerns. One example is the prize money for charioteers. This could have inspired charioteers' involvement in supernatural activities, for not only would honour and glory be received through victory, but also significant amounts in prize money.⁶³ These combined motives of victory,⁶⁴ fame, honour, and wealth do not seem like unreasonable motives for the utilisation of supernatural methods aimed at impeding rivals. In addition, there were also the financial incentives of those business people who supplied horses and equipment.

It is here suggested that gambling may also have provided an incentive for the use of curse tablets against racing participants. There is no distinct evidence for gambling in fourth-century Syria and Palestine outside of that related to dice games, and Heintz argues that "there seems to be no evidence of a link between betting and magic in late antique chariot racing".⁶⁵ However, it can be argued that the parallels of Syrian tablets to Roman, and the similar enthusiasm for the sport, suggest that gambling may provide a clue for the use of *defixiones* in the hippodrome. This suggestion is largely based on the argument by Toner in his work on leisure in Rome, in which he discusses the extension of gambling in Roman society to include the placing of bets on the races. Toner states that:

Gambling, it is clear, was not just part of the 'emotional glue' which brought the crowd together, it also divided them into factions, and thus framed and shaped the context of the event itself.⁶⁶

⁶² For example, Aurelius Symmachus' desire, years in advance of his son's sponsorship of an event, to find the best Spanish horses. See discussion in Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 8-9.

⁶³ For example, Diocles won 35,863,120 sesterces in prize money alone (Cameron, *Porphyrius*, 245). For further discussion of the involvement of charioteers see especially Cameron, *Porphyrius*, 245.

⁶⁴ A concept stressed by Cameron in his discussion of charioteers' victories and their association with imperial victory (*Porphyrius*, 248-251).

⁶⁵ Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 18.

⁶⁶ J.P. Toner, *Leisure and Ancient Rome*, Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press (1995) 94.

Despite the absence of an organised betting industry, betting commonly happened informally amongst individuals. These punters were informed of racing details, such as the name of the horse, pedigree, gate number, the trainer, and the charioteer, through the race-cards and placards which advertised horses and their drivers at the circus. However, these details were only secondary concerns to the faction colours. As there were no book makers, the nature of the gambling was simple and readily practicable, secured through betting on teams, rather than on individuals or horses. This could be further simplified by narrowing the stakes to two parties, by joining the smaller teams with the major players (such that the blue and red were joined against the green and white).⁶⁷

As noted, Toner's argument is based on his study of Rome, but, it does seem possible that gambling existed in other provinces.⁶⁸ The races, as already mentioned, were extremely popular and loyalty to particular teams strong. In addition we also know that gambling was widespread throughout the Greco-Roman world. John Chrysostom, for instance, comments on the gaming tables in Syria.⁶⁹

The characteristic preoccupation of the curse tablets with several riders and horses, often clearly aligned with particular teams, was a characteristic not just of Syrian tablets but also those of North Africa and Rome.⁷⁰ This characteristic parallels the placing of bets on teams rather than on individual racers or races. Hence it does seem possible that the use of curse tablets could well be linked to the practice of gambling on the events. The situation may have differed in Antioch, however, where it is alleged that factions were not apparent until the late fifth century.⁷¹

If this assertion is correct and individuals were placing money on the races, there would be inevitable concern with race results. Although Toner argues that betting did not involve high stakes and that the law did not allow for the collection of debts, he does propose that it was related to honour and status, and hence that a lot more than

⁶⁷ Toner, *Leisure*, 92-3.

⁶⁸ Harris provides some discussion on gambling and chariot races, see H.A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, London: Thames and Hudson (1972) 223-226.

⁶⁹ For example, John Chrysostom, *De statuis hom. 15*; series in PG 49.15-222.

⁷⁰ See the examples in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, chapter 1: "Competition in Theater and Circus", 42-77.

⁷¹ Heintz, "Magic Tablets at Antioch," 166.

money was associated with winning.⁷² Gambling for money and honour could provide a motive for individuals to seek to hinder the event, a practice which goes beyond the basic notion of sport fanaticism. Introducing the element of gambling into the mix could also help to explain why the use of supernatural aids would concern members of the public, such that they would call the authorities or prosecute when suspicious of foul play. It may well have been their own money and reputation which was on the line, not just that of their teams.

4.4.3 Perceiving the charioteer

The final influence proposed here involves community perceptions of charioteers. It is of special interest that in the *Codex Theodosianus* and Ammianus' history charioteers are associated with condemned supernatural activities. While the motivations already discussed may have played a significant role in this association, it is here suggested that there is a social perception of a charioteer's power which aligns him with supernatural malpractice. Thus we are slightly realigning and reassessing the idea, contained for example in Cameron's argument mentioned above, that fans used curses against charioteers as they would have assumed the latter to undertake similar actions.

The charioteer was incredibly popular; indeed he has been likened by scholars to the holy man. This was a man of physical strength and ability, whose victory on the racecourse was aligned with imperial victory.⁷³ Is it possible that the power of the charioteer, in public perception, was extended to include the supernatural? Perhaps his profile placed him beyond a level of perceived normality. Consider, for instance, that the charioteer's victory was equated with the emperor's victory. The emperor in the Christian fourth century was closely aligned with the divine and placed above the rest

⁷² For a discussion of honour and its importance in the Roman world see: Esler, *First Christians*, 25-28 ; also J.K. Campbell, "Honour and Shame," in G. Speak (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Greece and the Hellenic Tradition*, London & Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers (2000) 773-775.

⁷³ Cameron, *Porphyrius*, 244-252.

of the empire's residents. Was the association of the charioteer's victory with a victory for the emperor also an acknowledgment of the former's exceptional power?

It is proposed here that an assignment of supernatural power to the charioteer can be understood through consideration of envy in the Greco-roman world. The notion of limited good which pervaded late-Roman thought, and which appears throughout the thesis, conceived of all fortune as limited. That meant for every one person who succeeded, another failed. This win-lose scenario could and would provoke envy.⁷⁴ Envy in this world-view could bring on misfortune – indeed it was expected to do so.

If the charioteer and his fortunes are introduced into this framework of thought, it follows that the skill and success of the charioteer would arouse envy.⁷⁵ Furthermore, considering not just the nature of the game, but also the notion of limited good, continuous victory for one competitor would mean continuous loss for another. This imbalanced amount of success would cause envy. If a high profile charioteer is incurring great envy then he should, by the reasoning of envy, suffer some misfortune. However, what if he does not? It is possible that in public perception the charioteer's victory and exemption from misfortune would suggest that he held exceptional apotropaic powers. In addition, this power to repel misfortune (or to challenge the perceived 'rules' of nature) could be extended to include an understanding that the charioteer was imbued with particular power, strength, or knowledge that enabled him to manipulate supernatural forces. That is, the charioteer's invulnerability to the natural consequences of envy excluded him from the norm and accredited him with power both deviant (in terms of curses for example) and exalted (in terms of supra-human imperial status).

Thus the very nature of the occupation, its popularity and the high profile of its victors (which even included statues in cities), could all serve to imbue the charioteer with supernatural strength. This in turn would mean not only that the charioteer could use supernatural methods such as *defixiones*, but also that in popular perception,

⁷⁴ A more complete discussion of the concept of limited good and envy is offered in Chapter 7. See also Esler, *First Christians*, 35.

⁷⁵ Heintz also discusses charioteers as subjects and victims of envy. Furthermore he points out that horses competing in the races were also considered highly vulnerable to envy. See Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 34-40.

defixiones would be seen as the most appropriate method of inhibiting him. That is, supernatural power was required to fight supernatural power.

4.5 Conclusion

The powers sought and repelled in the arena were only viable within a social context or framework that granted their existence and efficacy. The desired effect of *defixiones*, for example, would have been the successful invocation of the supernatural powers and their consequent ability to hinder the opposition. It is possible that, because the use of the tablets was known amongst the circus and wider community, the direction of them against the opposition was expected and could be used as a form of intimidation or method for unsettling rivals. However, this reason would underscore the point that within their fourth-century contexts these methods were seen as effective or they would not have been able to intimidate or concern those who were their targets. Thus, the successful invocation of the other-worldly forces of god(s), angels, *daimones*, and the spirits of the untimely or violently dead, would grant the instigator a considerable amount of power and a definite unfair advantage in the competition of the race course.

This chapter, then, has presented and discussed the forum for supernatural activities in the racing world of fourth-century Syria and Palestine. Despite scanty evidence it has been argued that these activities were apparent in this period and in these regions, and that their use, though acknowledged, was not condoned. As possible and plausible social influences on the use of these methods several issues were proposed: firstly, the agonistic context of the competition; secondly, the financial concerns of those involved, supporting, or viewing the event; and thirdly, the social perceptions of power assigned to the charioteer. Furthermore, included in these suppositions was an incorporation of the social constructs of honour and envy and the association of these with the provocations of competition, money and power.

SUPERNATURAL SABOTAGE
ENSURING A SUCCESSFUL LIVELIHOOD

5.1 Introduction

Concern for the success and survival of a business, farm or career, is a universal constant. In the fourth century this livelihood-anxiety is demonstrated, or epitomised, in the curse tablets and so-called sorcery accusations of the period, the latter having already received considerable attention both from late antique authors and modern scholars.¹ The Palestinian and Syrian evidence for these practices is varied and, while sparse in material such as curse tablets, is comparatively abundant in evidence for accusations in the period. As all these forms of evidence revolve predominantly around people's livelihoods and career concerns, they are all considered within this chapter. However, the evident disparity between the curses and hagiographical accounts on the one hand, and the sorcery accusations on the other, in both form and apparent socio-economic context, lends itself to a natural separation in the consideration of the evidence. Hence the two strands will be considered independently. The extant curse tablets and relevant hagiographical material will be considered in the first part of the chapter, to be followed by a discussion of the trials for high treason which culminated in accusations of γοητεία.

Social, economic, and political factors can be seen as variably influential in the extant evidence, and it will be proposed in the course of the respective discussions that these elements, in conjunction with the Mediterranean understanding of limited good

¹ Most notably Brown's "Sorcery and Demons". Also Ward, "Witchcraft and Sorcery"; Hay, "Sorcery Trials"; Von Haehling, "Ammianus Marcellinus"; and Funke, "Majestäts und Magieprozesse". Many general studies of Greco-Roman magic also include some commentary on the accusations.

and the associated notion of envy, can be seen as contributing factors in the use, alleged or real, of enhancing or inhibiting supernatural practices.

5.2 Curses and Invocations

Curse tablets and the hagiographical accounts of Theodoret are the main source of evidence in the following section. The material for Syria and Palestine is presented separately, but both regions are considered together in the discussion that follows. It is proposed during the course of the analysis that the agonistic social and economic context, coupled with the belief system incorporating limited good, envy, and honour are influential factors in people's inclusion of the supernatural in matters concerning livelihood.

5.2.1 Syria

The Syrian evidence provided by John Chrysostom illustrates that some business people would take advantage of supernatural measures to ensure their own commercial viability.² In addition, people could seek out seers to find money which they had misplaced.³ In contrast to these activities, and largely concerned with individuals' own fortunes, two Antiochene curses demonstrate that people's ambitions for success were not always so simply directed. In a similar vein to the *defixiones* discussed in the previous chapter, these extant tablets seek to achieve individual aims through hindering the progress of another party.

The first example comes in the form of two curse tablets which had been deposited in a well at the House of the Calendar at Daphne, a wealthy suburb of Antioch. Both tablets are aimed at a greengrocer named Babyllas.⁴ The two curses

² John Chrysostom mentions people's use of supernatural methods to ensure good business (*Ad illuminados catechesis* 2; PG 49.240).

³ John Chrysostom criticises people for going to a seer to find their lost money (*In ep. 1 ad Thess hom 3*; PG 62, 413).

⁴ They are dated third to fourth century. No. 109-110 in Jordan, "New Greek Curse Tablets," 28; also F. Heintz, "Magic Tablets at Antioch," 164-165, no.50-51 (ph.). (Jordan in his commentary on these two

invoke Iao and Seth as well as other daimones and provide them with precise details on how to identify (genealogy) and locate (topography) their target, Babylas. They mention, for example, “the three different aliases the shopkeeper’s mother assumed, as well as the city block and even the precise location on a colonnaded street of his vegetable stall”.⁵ In the familiar style of *defixiones* the protagonist(s) wishes for Babylas to be bound, chilled, and sunk for his impiety and lawlessness, adding to this wish a hope of inflicting harm not upon him alone, but also on his livestock, as well as his household.⁶

It is difficult to determine whether the same person or persons might have been responsible for both curses aimed at Babylas. The specific Jewish elements of only one of the tablets could suggest that the differing religious alignments of the tablets reflect the respective religious affiliations of the protagonists.⁷ However, given the eclectic manner of many curses and the fact that we know that people would freely appeal to divinities not prescribed by their own religious doctrines if they were believed potent, it is not possible to make such an assertion confidently.⁸

The motive for these two attacks on Babylas is also unclear. We know only that he is a greengrocer with a stall on a colonnaded street, and that his property details (home and livestock) were known to others. Indeed even his mother’s details appear to have been well known. According to one tablet Babylas had acted impiously and lawlessly. Yet if he had, we are not enlightened as to how. This may simply reflect the feelings of Babylas’ enemy and/or the formulaic rhetoric of *defixiones*. It is likely, as Heintz argues, that “the curse tablets aimed at Babylas were commissioned by one of

tablets cites an article unpublished at the time, which I have not seen, and which possibly provides the Greek text for both tablets: F. Heintz, A.B. Sigel, A. Hollmann, “The Antioch Curse Tablets: Interim Report,” pp.101-103).

⁵ Heintz, “Magic Tablets at Antioch,” 166.

⁶ No. 109 in Jordan, “New Greek Curse Tablets,” 28.

⁷ One of the tablets has noticeable Jewish elements, through the invocation of Iao and reference to the book of Exodus (no. 109 in Jordan, “New Greek Curse Tablets,” 28).

⁸ Consider, for instance, John Chrysostom’s concern that members of his congregations are going to Jewish healers, or using traditional charms and healing incantations (see Chapter 8). See also Bonner regarding the eclectic nature of practices and the difficulty of assigning a religious affiliation to the curser or victim (C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press [1950] 18).

his fellow, and rival, greengrocers”.⁹ Bickering and even factions were known to develop amongst shopkeepers and craftsmen, and greengrocers, for example, were organised into professional guilds.¹⁰ While the bickering, or even general business rivalry, may have provoked the use of *defixiones* against Babylas, he may perhaps have caused some greater offence or posed a more significant threat, related or unrelated to his business activities. Nevertheless the identification and cursing of Babylas’ occupation and property suggests that financial sabotage was the intention of both tablets. They demonstrate the serious and intense ambitions of the attack and, if, as seems likely, they were instigated by a rival or rivals, they illustrate a business environment in which potentially severe competitive measures were used.

The literary Syrian evidence does not represent the same aggressive form of commercial competition. On the contrary, Theodoret of Cyrrhus’ accounts are more concerned with the supernatural protection of livelihood. The reports are presented in a hagiographical context and hence the material must be considered in light of its innate aim of promoting the figure of the holy person. Yet despite the narrative aims it is possible to gauge in the accounts the concerns, beliefs, and behaviours of the hagiographer’s audience.¹¹

The first of the two accounts that interest us tells of a locust threat to the land and income of a small farmer and his family. The threatened farmer appeals to the holy man, Aphrahat, for assistance. The latter places his hand over some water and asks God “to fill the water with divine power”.¹² The farmer, following instructions, sprinkles the blessed water around the perimeter of his property, and this provides an invincible defence for the fields. The problematic locusts thus, though “crawling or flying like armies”, were unable to breach the barrier and “retreated backwards in fear at the blessing placed upon it”.¹³

⁹ Heintz, “Magic Tablets at Antioch,” 166.

¹⁰ Lib. Or. 29.9, and Or. 54.42; Heintz, “Magic Tablets at Antioch,” 166.

¹¹ See comments already made above, especially Chapter 4, n.23.

¹² δυνάμεως θείας ἐμφορήσαι τὸ νᾶμα (HR, 8.14). The translation of Theodoret’s history used here and in other citations is from *A History of the Monks of Syria*, tr. R.M. Price, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985.

¹³ μέχρι γὰρ τῶν ὄρων ἐκείνων ἔρπουσαί τε καὶ περιπετόμεναι στρατοπέδων δίκην αἱ ἀκρίδες, εἰς τοῦπίσω πάλιν ἐχώρουν τὴν ἐπιτεθεῖσαν εὐλογίαν δειμαίνουσαι. (HR, 8.14).

Theodoret here intended to communicate to his audience the splendour and power of Aphrahat and his God, utilising strong biblical allusions in the narrative in order to do so.¹⁴ Despite these factors, it is plausible that the scenario (that is, locusts) was a familiar one to sections of Theodoret's audience. It is not just the scenario, however, which is conceivable but also the farmer's application for supernatural assistance. The petitioner is an independent farmer and the locusts provide a very real threat. Given a world in which the supernatural was interwoven in so many aspects of daily life, it is hardly surprising that the farmer would appeal for supernatural assistance in situations which threaten his livelihood and for which no tangible solution readily presents itself. Such speculation is supported by a provision in the *Codex Theodosianus*, which permits the use of 'assistance devices' for the well-being of crops. Section 9.16.3 states:

But remedies sought for human bodies shall not be involved in criminal accusation, nor the assistance that is innocently employed in rural districts in order that rains may not be feared nor the ripe grape harvests or that the harvests may not be shattered by the stones of ruinous hail, since by such devices no person's safety or reputation is injured, but by their action they bring about that divine gifts and the labors of men are not destroyed.¹⁵

In another of Theodoret's accounts he writes of a non-Christian landlord of a village, Letoius, pre-eminent in the council of Antioch, who demanded considerable tithes from the village.¹⁶ The holy man, Maësymas, acted as the mediator and on behalf of the community requested kindness and leniency from the landlord, though unsuccessfully.¹⁷ When the latter refused the holy man's application he found that the wheels of his carriage would not move because Maësymas was "imprecating a curse" for which "it was right to conciliate him".¹⁸ As a consequence the socially powerful

¹⁴ For example the plagues of Egypt related in the Old Testament. Also, the sprinkling of divinely blessed water presents a parallel, with both the ingredients and the action, to the blessing and protective properties of baptism. (See Chapter 7). See also the protective capabilities of water sprinkled by a holy man in the discussion of Hilarion and the chariot races in Chapter 4.

¹⁵ "Nullis vero criminationibus implicanda sunt remedia humanis quaesita corporibus aut in agrestibus locis, ne maturis vindemius metuerentur imbres aut ruentis grandinis lapidatione quaterentur, innocenter adhibita suffragia, quibus non cuiusque salus aut existimatio laederetur, sed quorum proficerent actus, ne divina munera et labores hominum sternerentur." (CT 9.16.3; trans. from Pharr, *Codex Theodosianus*, 237).

¹⁶ HR, 14.4.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the holy man as mediator see Brown, "The Holy man in late antiquity," esp. 99; and his later revisions of this paper "The Holy Man revisited".

¹⁸ τῶν εὐνοστέρων τις τῶ Λητοίῳ παρεδρεύων τὴν αἰτίαν σημαίνει, τὸν ἱερέα τὸν

Letoius fell prostrate at the holy man's feet and "begged him to relax his anger".¹⁹ Upon this supplication, the chariot wheels were freed from their 'invisible bonds'.²⁰ This depiction is of interest for its inversion of the typical positions of power by deeming the powerful figure of Letoius unable to proceed because of the superior potency of the holy man. Thus Maësymas is placed in a position of dominance by the hagiographer. In this way the person with social authority ironically also becomes the appellant not just to the ascendancy of the holy man, but also to the community that the latter represents.

Thus from Syria we see examples of curses against a greengrocer, quite possibly instigated by his competition, and we also see the supernatural agency of the holy man benefiting the livelihood of rural residents. The Palestinian evidence which follows propels us back to the medium of the curse tablet and the urban setting, while also directing the discussion towards the issue of gender and the commercial world.

5.2.2 Palestine

Palestine provides two extant published fourth-century curse tablets. While one is well preserved and the inscription extensive, the other is considerably fragmented and does not permit too much discussion beyond that which relates to its specifically litigious setting. Nevertheless both provide further insight into the commercial environment of the fourth century, as their immediate intentions differ to those of the *defixiones* presented above.

Deposited in a well in Beth Shean in Galilee was a curse tablet commissioned (perhaps, though unlikely, also inscribed and even placed by) a Christian woman named Pancharia.²¹ With this *defixio* Pancharia hoped to inhibit the investigations of three individuals who were to have access to her accounts. The subject of the curse is of considerable interest for it presents an aspect of fourth-century commercial life not yet

πρεσβύτην ἐπαρᾶσθαι λέγων καὶ ὡς προσήκει τοῦτον εὐμενῆ καταστῆσαι (HR, 14.4).

¹⁹ καὶ τῶν ποδῶν προκαλινδούμενος καὶ τὰ πιναρὰ ῥάκια περιπτυσσόμενος χαλάσαι τὴν ὄργην ἠντιβόλει (HR, 14.4).

²⁰ ἔλυσε τῶν τροχῶν τοὺς ἀοράτους δεσμοὺς (HR, 14.4).

²¹ Youtie and Bonner's discussion of this tablet includes an extensive analysis of the origin of names, and concludes that Pancharia was most likely a Christian. H.C. Youtie and C. Bonner, "Two Curse Tablets from Beisan," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 68 (1937: 43-77) 48-52, 58-59.

seen in the evidence, namely the dread of auditors. The *defixio*, through various ritual words and signs, and the invocation of both Semitic and Egyptian daimonic entities, seeks to bind the physical and psychological capacities of one man and two women.²²

The sections of the spell from which it is possible to gauge Pancharia's intentions read as follows:

Lord angels, bind, bind fast the tendons and the limbs and the thought and the mind and the intention of Sarmation, to whom Oursa gave birth, and Valent[ia], to whom Eva gave birth, and Saramannas, to whom Eusebius gave birth - muzzle them and blind them and silence them and make them dumb ... blind in the presence of P[ancharia] to whom Thekla gave birth.

Lord angels, muzzle and subject and render subservient and bind and slave and restrain and tie up Sarmation, to whom Oursa gave birth, and Val[entia], to whom Eva gave birth, and Saramannas, to whom Eusebius gave birth, in the presence of Pancharia, to whom Thekla gave birth, choking them, tying up their thoughts, their mind, their hearts, their intention, lest they inquire further after an account or a calculation or anything else ... from Pancharia, but (let) merciful fortune (come to) Pancharia throughout (her) life.²³

This text is intriguing, for it raises numerous questions about Pancharia's activities. Was Pancharia possibly a shopkeeper in the agora? Perhaps she was a land owner? What is she concerned about? The terms of the text certainly suggest that Pancharia has something to fear and probably also has something to hide. It is not possible to determine Pancharia's occupation and fears. Nevertheless, her concerns and the financial association with her three targets do enable some speculation. For instance, perhaps she was a wealthy woman who has attracted an imperial audit. It is possible that Pancharia was a shopkeeper whose financial affairs were being reviewed for reasons of loans or taxation. Alternately she may have been involved with lending

²² No. 77 in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 168-9; Youtie et al., "Two Curse Tablets," 43-72; SGD 164.

²³ [I/2-6] κύριοι ἄγγελοι δήσατε καταδήσατε τὰ ν[ε]ῦρα κὲ τὰ μέλη κὲ τὴν ἐνθύμησιν κὲ τὸν νοῦν κὲ τὴν διάνοιαν Σαρματίωνος ὃν ἔτεκεν Οὔρσα κὲ Οὐαλεντ[ίας] ἣν ἔτεκεν Εὔα κὲ Σαραμάννας ἣν ἔτεκεν Εὐσεβίς· {κω}φίμωσον [α]ὔτ[ο]ὺς κὲ τύφλωσον αὐτοὺς κὲ κώφηνον αὐτοὺς κὲ ποιήσον αὐτοὺς [...]ενους ἀλάλ[ο]υς]ς τυφλοὺς ἐνπροσθεν Π[ανχαρίας] ἥς ἔτεκεν Θέκλα. ...

[I/20-25] κύριοι ἄγγελοι φιμώσ[α]τε κὲ ὑπατάξατε κὲ προσκλίνατε [κὲ] καταδήσατε κὲ [κατα-]δουλώσατε κὲ κατάσχετε κὲ καταδε[σ]μεύσατε Σαρματίωνα ὃν ἔτεκεν Οὔρσα κὲ [Ο]ύαλ[εντίαν] ἣν ἔτεκεν Εὔα κὲ Σαραμάναν ἣν ἔτεκεν Εὐσεβίς ἐνπροσθεν Πανχαρίας ἣν ἔτεκεν Θέκ[λα ἀπο-]πνίγων αὐτοὺς καταδεσμεύων αὐτῶν τὰς ἐνθυμήσεις τὸν νοῦν τὰς φρένας τὴν διάνοια[ν ἵνα μὴ] ἐπιζητήσωσιν λόγ[ο]ιν ἢ ψῆφον ἢ ἕτερόν τι τῶν κοαλίω[ν] παρὰ Πανχαρίου, ἀλλὰ εὐαλίτων Πα[νχαρία τύχ]οι διὰ βίου. (Youtie et al., "Two Curse Tablets," 54-55; trans. in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 168-169).

money, as this occupation required lenders to show their accounts. Indeed in the Roman empire at various times it seems women could be involved in money lending, and all bookkeepers (male or female) were required to show their accounts in times of litigation.²⁴ Possibly Pancharia is seeking to protect her husband's affairs, although one would suspect mention of him, if this were the case. If these scenarios do reflect the context of the tablet, then the *defixio* would raise some interesting points regarding the financial involvement of women in fourth-century Palestinian society.

On the other hand, having raised these various scenarios, it is worth returning to the text and noting the degree of knowledge Pancharia has of her auditors. Pancharia not only knows the names of those concerned, but she also knows the vital names of their mothers. While this information is beneficial and used in most curses,²⁵ acquiring these details cannot have been easy when targeting people relatively unknown to the curse's instigator. This does suggest some degree of familiarity between the parties concerned. Furthermore, two of the targets are females. Perhaps auditors could be female in these periods, but it seems highly unlikely that women would have held such official roles within the imperial administration. Although the employment of women for commercial auditing may have occurred, it does not seem likely given the social and educational expectations of women at the time.²⁶ Hence it is worth considering Youtie and Bonner's proposal that the text demonstrates that Pancharia 'fears' those whom she targets in the curse:

apparently because she has had in her hands, and probably mismanaged or lost, certain property for which they may demand an accounting. Whether a loan, a partnership, or an inheritance is concerned does not appear. The circumstance that more women than men are involved in the quarrel may make the third of these possibilities more probable than the others.²⁷

²⁴ There is a second century reference to a Manilius who claims to have deposited some money with a woman and who had difficulty recovering it. The emperor consequently advises him that the judge can issue an order obliging the woman to show her account books. Gardner argues that this does not necessarily infer that the woman concerned was professionally engaged in banking. See Gardner, *Women in Roman Law*, 235-6.

²⁵ On referring to the mother rather than father in spells as charms, as only the identity of the mother (as parent) provides the certainty needed for the rituals, see J. Goldin, "The Magic of Magic and Superstition," in E.S. Fiorenza (ed.), *Aspects of Religious Propoganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press (1976: 115-147) 124 n.46.

²⁶ Questions could also reasonably be raised here regarding the dishonour of a woman auditing the financial accounts of a man who does not belong to her family.

²⁷ Youtie et al., "Two Curse Tablets," 47.

Although only speculative scenarios have been offered to contextualise the tablets rather than concrete propositions, it is clear that there are several potential settings able to frame this curse. All of these possibilities, however, revolve around key, critical aspects of the tablet's inscription. Firstly, Pancharia is involved in financial matters which require investigation. Furthermore, her fear of exposure as a result of an investigation into her accounts suggests that she is in no way ignorant of the financial affairs about which the interested parties seek information. Finally, the gender of the protagonist, Pancharia, is of interest because she is utilising an aggressive supernatural method to protect herself from an unwanted outcome: "lest they inquire further after an account or a calculation". Thus, she is a woman with knowledge of finances, a fear of retribution or exposure, and the capability to utilise supernatural means to attain her ends.

Another Palestinian tablet was found in a room in a house also in Nysa-Skythopolis (Beth-Shean).²⁸ The tablet provides scanty indications of its concerns, making mention of a lawsuit and a creditor. The text includes angels' names and ritual signs; however, most of the tablet's text is said to be incomprehensible. The curse seems to invoke the $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota<\omicron\iota>$ $\alpha\gamma\iota\omicron\iota$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\iota$ to make ($[\pi\omicron\iota\eta]\sigma\alpha\tau\alpha\iota$ for $-\tau\epsilon$?) a man named Judas, and possibly also others, lose a lawsuit. It also makes mention of an Onias who was a party to the law suit.²⁹ Though there is little information provided by the fragmentary text, we do know of the existence of *defixiones* related to lawsuits from various other regions and periods. Indeed they make up the second largest subgroup of published tablets.³⁰ It has been proposed that the use of curse tablets against opponents in litigation was in fact a regular feature of the legal process in the Greco-Roman world and that, commissioned by prospective defendants, they were deployed in the preliminary phase of the preparations for an anticipated trial.³¹ Thus it is likely that this *defixio* against Judas was formulated and deposited in a similar litigious context.

²⁸ SGD 165. Dated to the last quarter of the third century or the first quarter of the fourth century. (Youtie et al., "Two Curse Tablets," 44, 72-73).

²⁹ See Youtie et al., "Two Curse Tablets," 47-48, 72-77.

³⁰ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 117.

³¹ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 116-150, esp. 117.

These two Palestinian tablets, Pancharia's and that involving a law suit, are quite distinct in intention though similar in motive as both are primarily concerned with the defence or protection of the instigators from the potentially damaging actions of others. Pancharia's curse is especially interesting for the questions it raises, though unfortunately does not easily answer, regarding female commercial interests and occupations. In the following pages these tablets are discussed along with the Syrian evidence and possible motivations for the inclusion of the supernatural in livelihood are proposed.

5.2.3 Discussion

The discussion firstly addresses the *defixiones* presented above. Heintz argues that we see in the commercial curses, in particular the two Babylas examples from Syria, a method for enhancing economic and social success. In his view these spells must be seen within the social systems of late antique Antioch and within a larger, integrated system of ritual power. The magician or supernatural specialist could assist the business person by providing powerful talismans designed to improve trade by attracting customers.³² Hence, for Heintz, these curses represent one aspect of a complete supernatural package which could be supplied to business clients and which included protective methods aimed at both the evil eye³³ and those binding spells directed against individuals by competitors.³⁴ While Heintz sees supernatural activity as a regular part of business, the limited extant number of *defixiones* (due to the hazards of time, trade and locational limitations on excavations) do not allow for an assertion of such prominent use in fourth-century Syria or Palestine.

Heintz's ideas convincingly portray an aspect of the social system within which curses, in particular, operated; they are, however, limited to the context of power and economic success. It is here proposed that other aspects of social belief and behaviour, such as the agonistic context as well as the notion of limited good, can also be seen as influential in the use of the supernatural practices seen above.

³² Heintz, "Magic Tablets and Antioch," 166. See examples: PGM 8.1-63; 4.2359-72, and 4.2373-2440.

³³ For an explanation and discussion of the evil eye see Chapter 7.

³⁴ Heintz, "Magic Tablets at Antioch," 166.

The agonistic nature of social relationships can be seen to be influential in the case of *defixiones*.³⁵ Indeed the previous chapter on practices in the hippodrome discussed not only the competitive and agonistic character of Palestinian and Syrian society in this period, but also how this setting could provoke people to make use of *defixiones*. Such agonistic characteristics are also identifiable in relation to the material evidence presented above.

In a commercial environment the possibility that others were threatening the success of a business would have been a consistent menace and when intensified by the concept of limited good, could indeed provide provocation for the use of a curse against a rival. It is here proposed that the competitive context was intensified due to the notion of limited good. As this prevalent belief decrees that all fortune is limited,³⁶ the deficiencies of one business could be seen as the result of the apparent success of another; after all, one person's gain is another person's loss. Hence, only the impairment of the successful business could rectify the balance and eradicate the failing business' loss, supernatural means providing one option for ensuring this.

The setting of a litigation process is not only competitive and agonistic, it also culminates in a definite win or loss. Thus, when desiring to sway the laws of probability in one's favour, and push the balance of the judicial scales, the supernatural provided an option not only for assistance but also some assurance in an arena of uncertainty.

Finally, the possibility of an investigation into accounts also implies an uncertain and threatening situation which could provoke the use of extraordinary means. Consider especially the possible social, legal, or financial ramifications of faults uncovered in any such investigation.

A further consideration for the context of these aggressive supernatural attacks relates to social behaviour and perception. Honour and shame, for instance, were significant influences on behaviour in the Greco-Roman world. Honour was assigned through the perceptions of the community and affected individual identity, as well as

³⁵ See Faraone, "Agonistic Context," esp. 10-17.

³⁶ The association of the notion of limited good with the fourth-century Greco-Roman belief system receives more detailed attention in Chapter 7.

the image of the family unity.³⁷ Avoidance of shame, and the loss of individual and family honour that would result, could arguably provide considerable inducement for resorting to aggressive supernatural means to influence, or alter, an unfavourable situation. Thus it is possible that Pancharia feared not only the retribution of the three individuals coming to see her books, but also the social shame that could result from any discovery of fraudulence. Yet what of the probable consequences were the use of the *defixio* discovered? If Heintz's proposal is correct and the curses form part of general business practice, then no shame would be associated with using such aggressive supernatural tactics. On the other hand, it was shown in the previous chapter that the use of curses against charioteering teams was not generally viewed favourably by the wider community, even if their utilisation was acknowledged. So why would such a measure be condoned when it directly affected livelihood? It can be argued, then, that the use of *defixiones* against ordinary people (that is, not charioteers) might also have been seen as unacceptable behaviour. Consider as well a phrase in the *Codex Theodosianus* decree cited above in which actions or devices by which "no person's safety or reputation is injured" are accepted. Using a *defixio* to harm someone's business, that is, sabotaging their livelihood, could injure an individual's reputation and security considerably. Therefore, although condemnation or condonation of the use of aggressive spells is not easy to ascertain in this context, it is quite possible that a negative association existed and that by using a *defixio*, Pancharia may have been risking considerable shame should her action be uncovered (although its existence in the well must have provided a reduced risk of discovery). If such an argument is accepted, then the intensity of the provocation which would lead an individual to risk the shame of being discovered using a *defixio* must have been significant.

One final point concerning Pancharia's curse tablet. This *defixio* is especially curious for the gender of its caster. In most cases it is male names that are found on *defixiones*,³⁸ so the involvement of a woman is notable. It could be that Pancharia is

³⁷ For an introductory discussion on the concepts of honour and shame see: Campbell, "Honour and Shame," 773-775. Also: Esler, *First Christians*, 25-28.

³⁸ I make this assertion based on the fact that I have found little evidence of female protagonists, but, at the same time, I have not surveyed the complete corpora of *defixiones* and can not offer such a survey as

involved in a social and financial environment which allows her to utilise the practices considered suitable to the context. Alternatively, it is proposed that perhaps her use of the aggressive supernatural method reflects Pancharia's particular social position, namely that she is viewed as socially (and financially) powerful and therefore able to trespass into a predominantly male domain. However, it is also conceivable that Pancharia could simply have used this method because the penalty and public humiliation of being found guilty of corrupting or mismanaging the books would be unbearable enough to warrant severe avoidance procedures.

It has been suggested here that various social provocations could have led people to utilise supernatural methods, particularly to curse those believed to be a threat. This idea of using the supernatural in an agonistic setting is now expanded to include supernatural practices distinct from *defixiones*. Examples of this are well demonstrated in Theodoret's two hagiographical accounts introduced above. In the hagiographical account portraying Maësymas as a mediator, an agonistic setting is also evident. Pressures existed for rural communities and farmers not only to survive, but also to pay the tithes demanded by the empire to local figures.³⁹ The additional demands of the landlord aggravated an already stressful situation. Hence a supernatural tool, the holy man, is pitted against a significant and powerful threat, the landlord.

As already discussed above, in this instance traditional positions of authority and status are inverted such that the landlord Letoius finds himself in a subservient role. In this display of power the holy man shows remarkable parallels with the idea put forward by Smith regarding Jesus Christ in the Gospels: "For the authors of the gospels, since Jesus controlled spirits, he also controlled men".⁴⁰ In this way Maësymas controlled the socially and economically powerful Letoius, through his ability to command an extraordinary, and supernatural, activity. As a consequence the normal social roles of power were inverted and the economically and politically weak holy man was propelled into the position of control and authority.

support. It is, however, worth noting that in the area of erotic *defixiones* males are the predominant spell casters (see Chapter 6, n.9; also Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 80).

³⁹ On local leading figures acting as tax collectors for empire, see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 26.

⁴⁰ M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, London: Gollancz (1978) 114.

It is noteworthy that it is a curse which transforms an unfair and stressful situation into a favourable one for the holy man and the people he represents.⁴¹ What is more, it is a curse utilised in an agonistic context. In this case, though, no tablet was required since the holy man enabled the action without the need for traditional rituals, producing the same ‘binding’ result. Perhaps it is this setting which provoked such aggressive and unusual behaviour from the holy man. Such activity deviates from the standard hagiographical depiction of the holy figure as a protector through defensive measures (recall for instance the protective measures of the holy man Hilarion in the previous chapter, although note also Heintz’s divergent interpretation of his method). Furthermore this act of cursing is, because of its motive, portrayed as a positive action. That this use of supernatural power against an individual weak in the arena of the preternatural could present the holy man favourably, does suggest that a socially acceptable context for cursing existed – a point reinforced, if Heintz’s interpretation of Hilarion’s influences in the hippodrome are also taken into account.⁴² In the case of Maësymas the curse is effectively rendered positive because of the negative behaviour of the landlord. Furthermore, by using a curse the holy man is excelling in a traditional method and therewith the hagiographer utilises a discourse of supernatural practice understood by his audience, thus presenting the holy man as supreme.

The examples discussed above all involve the use of assertive supernatural activities in order to achieve some form of ‘equity’ within agonistic contexts. The approach of potentially damaging locusts would also have provided considerable anguish for a small farmer. However, there is no human rival against which the farmer is pitched; there is no individual or individuals who can be cursed in order to bring about some form of perceived ‘equity’ to the protagonist. The threat here is environmental; it is out of the control of any human. How would locusts be cursed? Although a threat to livelihood, these pests are not a constant source of rivalry for business in a persistently volatile, and competitive market place. Thus in this case, a protective measure is taken in order to ensure that the non-human threat is rendered

⁴¹ On the exercising of a curse and the holy man, see Brown, “The Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” 88.

⁴² See Chapter 4 (section 3).

ineffective and innocuous. Of interest are the strong parallels between the sprinkled, blessed water and baptism. The latter served not only as an initiation ritual for those entering the Christian faith, but also as a cleansing and apotropaic ritual that protected the initiate from evil spirits which could bring misfortune.⁴³ Thus the blessed water around the field was protecting it from the misfortune of a natural, yet not human, calamity which retreated through 'fear of the blessing'. The extreme threat to the farmer's livelihood still provoked him to seek supernatural assistance, and this inhuman, and virtually infallible foe required that apotropaic protection for supernatural misfortune be assigned it. Dealing with the inhuman was like dealing with the malevolent supernatural.

The material and hagiographical evidence discussed above are products of a social context and belief system within which people were able to seek supernatural assistance for either the benefit or detriment of others. Such daimonic, or divine, assistance could be sought as a remedial response to a competitive and agonistic environment in which livelihood and even identity were under threat and could be detrimentally, perhaps even irreversibly, affected.

5.3 The Competitive Career. Surviving accusations

Also intricately linked with people's livelihoods were the so-called 'sorcery' accusations which marked periods of the fourth century in both Palestine and Syria. These accusations have been relatively well-treated by scholars. Indeed they seem to be the most popular, and often only, aspect of fourth-century supernatural activity which many scholars take into consideration.⁴⁴ Their popularity may to a large degree be associated with the disturbing and dramatic portrayals of the subsequent trials in Ammianus Marcellinus' history,⁴⁵ as well as the reports in Libanius' writings⁴⁶ and the

⁴³ See Chapter 9 for a discussion of baptism, and also Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, regarding the apotropaic quality of baptismal formulae.

⁴⁴ See n.1 of this chapter.

⁴⁵ *Res Gestae* (ed. & tr. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Texts, 3 vols, 1935-1939); and Ammiani Marcellini, *Rerum Gestarum libri qui supersunt*, ed. W. Seyfarth, 2 vols, Stuttgart & Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1999.

later work of the historian Zosimus.⁴⁷ These portrayals by contemporary authors, particularly Ammianus and Libanius, have led many scholars to speculate that the phenomenon was chronologically restricted and hence reflects severe social change and uncertainty in the given period. An example is the now dated argument that proposed: “that the fourth century was darkened by the most degrading of superstitions in a manner that can only be compared to the benighted condition of western Europe in the later Middle Ages”.⁴⁸

Although the recording of such grim accusations and trials is especially noted in the fourth century, it should be acknowledged that the events of the century in general are especially well documented relative to any other period of Greco-Roman history. Furthermore the reports of so-called sorcery accusations occurring in the fourth century reflect the concerns and writing styles of contemporary authors, both of which would change over the following centuries.⁴⁹ Thus the inclusion by antique authors of the accusations and trials does not necessarily reflect an increase, or isolated occurrence of them; rather it reflects the individual motivations of the authors as well as the survival of their particular works.

Consideration must also be given to the religious persuasions of Ammianus, Libanius, and Zosimus,⁵⁰ as they were adherents of the traditional Greco-Roman religions, whose customary practices and beliefs were being increasingly condemned. Thus formerly accepted activities such as the consulting of soothsayers, astrologers, and diviners became, during the course of the century, serious crimes punishable by death.⁵¹ That these laws could be, and were, also enforced in the period is amply demonstrated

⁴⁶ Libanius' orations, in particular his autobiography, Oration 1. (Libanius, *Autobiography and Selected Letters*, Vols I & II, ed. & tr. A.F. Norman [Loeb Classical Library] Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 199; *Libanii Opera*, tr. R. Foerster, Vols 1 & 3, Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1903-1906.; *Libanii Opera*, tr. R. Foerster, Vol. 10, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963).

⁴⁷ Zosimi, *Comitis et Ex Exadvocati Fisci. Historia Nova*, ed. L. Mendelssohn, Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1887.

⁴⁸ Bonner, “Witchcraft in the Lecture Room,” 44. (See a similar sentiment in Wyss, “Johannes Chrysostomos,” 265).

⁴⁹ See Momigliano, “Conflict between Paganism and Christianity,” 81-83, 88.

⁵⁰ It should be noted that although Zosimus is also a source of information and an adherent of traditional Greco-Roman religion, he writes in the early sixth century, so is not as immediately affected by the actions of the fourth century as Libanius and Ammianus. (See the introduction in *Zosimus, New History*, tr. R.T. Ridley, xi-xv).

⁵¹ CT 9.16.4; also 9.40.1, 9.16.1-2.

in the treason trials addressed below, as well as in the personal recollections of Libanius, who was forced to disguise his own correspondence with soothsayers. In sum, it must be noted that the extant impression of the trials and accusations presented for discussion is largely determined by the accounts of men whose traditional belief structures were being gradually undermined and condemned, and that possible and related grievances may shade their reports to varying degrees.

Before progressing to the trials and accusations, it will be apparent that at the core of all the excitement is the charge of high treason which is levelled at people using divination in order to ascertain the emperor's successor. Divination is not included within the parameters of the thesis.⁵² Despite this, it is deemed necessary to include this evidence in this instance because the charges of treason through divination create scenarios of fear and manipulation into which other practices involving the supernatural are drawn.

5.3.1 Syria

When Valentinian had become successor to the imperial throne and was on his way to Constantinople, he became ill “which excited his bad-tempered nature to even greater cruelty and fits of insanity, so that he falsely attributed his sickness to some witchcraft contrived by Julian's friends”.⁵³ Indeed Zosimus records that Valentinian did level accusations against a few famous people, but that these were prudently dismissed by Salustius, the praetorian prefect.

This is not an isolated occurrence of blame and accusation. It seems that throughout the fourth century there were spates of treason trials in which guilty and innocent alike were charged and punished. The accounts which Ammianus, in

⁵² The relation of divination with other supernatural activities, as is represented in the extension of the treason trials presented below, suggests that divination may have been more closely aligned with these practices in social perception and understanding than the thesis, and its methodology, has accounted for. However, the evidence is not sufficient to support this connection with any certainty. The practice does, however, receive some attention in Chapter 10.

⁵³ καὶ τὸ φύσει πρὸς ὀργὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἔτοιμον εἰς ὤμότητα μείζονα καὶ παραφορὰν ἄκραν ἀναστησάσης, ὑποψία μὲν αὐτὸν εἰσῆει ψευδῆς ὡς ἔκ τινος γοητείας ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουλιανοῦ φίλων αὐτῷ σκευωρηθείσης νοσοίη. (Zosimus, HN, 4.1.1). The translation of Zosimus used in the thesis is based on: Zosimus, *New History*, Books I-IV, tr. R.T. Ridley (Byzantina Australiensia 2) Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1982.

particular, provides are shaded by an alarming representation of terror. Although not relating to either Syria and Palestine, the following comment by Ammianus encapsulates the apparent mood of many throughout the events and throughout the empire:

For if anyone consulted a soothsayer about the squeaking of a field-mouse, the meeting with a weasel on the way, or any like portent, or used some old wife's charm to relieve pain (a thing which even medical authority allows), he was indicted (from what source he could not guess), was hauled into court, and suffered death as the penalty.⁵⁴

During the reign of Gallus in 354 a certain Serenianus was tried for treason in Antioch. Ammianus tells us:

It was clearly proved that he had enchanted by forbidden arts a cap which he used to wear, and sent a friend of his with it to a prophetic shrine, to seek for omens as to whether the imperial power was destined to be firmly and safely his, as he desired.⁵⁵

People thought there was no way that he could be acquitted, yet he was freed "almost without any strong public protest".⁵⁶ Thus a man allegedly capable of enchanting his clothing and seeking information on his chance as successor to the throne was not condemned.

Serenianus' case, however, was not to be the last that Antioch saw, and his acquittal did not set a precedent. In the winter war-break of 371/2, the emperor Valens took up residency in Antioch. While he was there two men, Palladius (hired as a poisoner, *veneficum*) and Heliodorus (*fatorum per genituras interpretem*), were accused of having assisted a certain Procopius in his attempt to kill the *comes rei privatae*, Fortunatianus. These two were handed over to the court in order that they might tell what they knew of the matter. However, instead of speaking about this affair Palladius said "he would tell of other things more important and fearful, which had already been plotted with great preparation and, unless foresight were used, would upset the whole

⁵⁴ "Nam si super occentu soricis uel occursu mustelae uel similis signi gratia consulisset quisquam peritum, aut anile incantamentum ad leniendum adhibuisset dolorem, quod medicinae quoque admittit auctoritas, reus, unde non poterat opinari, delatus raptusque in iudicium, poenaliter interibat." (*Res Gestae*, 16.8.2).

⁵⁵ "aperte conuictus, familiarem suum cum pilleo, quo caput operiebat, incantato uetitis artibus, ad templum misisse fatidicum, quaeritatum praesagia, an ei firmum portenderetur imperium ut capiebat et tutum." (*Res Gestae*, 14.7.7).

⁵⁶ "Serenianus dignus execratione cunctorum innoxius modo non reclamante publico uigore discessit." (*Res Gestae*, 14.7.8).

state”.⁵⁷ Thus he alleged that the ex-governor Fidustus, as well as Pergamius and Irenaeus had by detestable predictions (*detestandis praesagiis*) learned the name of Valens’ successor. Fidustus confessed that he had done what was alleged along with Hilarius and Patricius (*vaticinandi peritis*).⁵⁸ Under torture he also admitted that he believed the predicted successor, Theodorus, had attained this information himself from Euserius (*virum praestabilem scientia litterarum*).⁵⁹ After the latter had been imprisoned and Valens informed, a stream of accusations and arrests was instigated, as “Valens’ monstrous savagery spread everywhere like a fiercely blazing torch, and was increased by the base flattery of many men”.⁶⁰ Theodorus was to be brought back from Constantinople and while he was being fetched, “as a result of sundry preliminary trials, which were carried on day and night, a number of men, conspicuous for their high rank and high birth, were brought from widely separate places”.⁶¹ The prisons and dungeons were filled to overflowing and even private houses contained prisoners in irons, all of whom “dreaded their own fate and that of their nearest relatives”.⁶²

That Valens was suspicious of people trying to overthrow and kill him is, according to Ammianus, understandable given that the emperor had experienced many attempts on his life.⁶³

But it was inexcusable that, with despotic anger, he was swift to assail with malicious persecution guilty and innocent under one and the same law, making no distinction in their deserts; so that while there was still doubt about the crime, the emperor had made up his mind about the penalty, and some learned that they had been condemned to death before knowing that they were under suspicion.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ “alia se, si licuerit dicere, monstraturum, metuenda et potiora, quae ingenti molimine iam praestructa, nisi prospectum fuerit, uniuersa confudent.” (*Res Gestae*, 29.1.6).

⁵⁸ *Res Gestae*, 29.1.6-7.

⁵⁹ *Res Gestae*, 29.1.9. Zosimus also refers to Theodorus’ knowledge of the prediction. HN, 4.13.3.

⁶⁰ “prodigiosa feritas in modum ardentissimae facis fusius vagabatur elata turpi adulatione multorum.” (*Res Gestae*, 29.1.10).

⁶¹ “ex praediciis uariis, quae diebus exercebantur et noctibus, plures a disiunctissimis regionibus trahebantur dignitatibus et nobilitate conspicui.” (*Res Gestae*, 29.1.12).

⁶² “et suam et proximi cuiusque vicem omnes horrebant.” (*Res Gestae*, 29.1.13). See also Zosimus, HN, 4.14.3.

⁶³ *Res Gestae*, 29.1.15-17

⁶⁴ “Sed inexplicabile illud erat, quod regaliter turgidus pari eodemque iure nihil inter se distantibus meritis, nocentes innocentesque maligna insectatione uolucriter perurgebat, ut, dum adhuc dubitaretur de crimine, imperatore non dubitante de poena damnatos se quidam prius discerant quam suspectos.” (*Res Gestae*, 29.1.18).

Ammianus criticises the emperor for being at the mercy of others who “through their bloodthirsty flatteries perverted in the worst possible direction” his character.⁶⁵ Both parties, he implies, were greedy and profiting from these capers. The emperor profited from people’s incarceration (or extermination) through the confiscation of their property for his own treasury. Those who survived their condemnation had to resort to beggary.⁶⁶ This confiscation was completely legal. The *Codex Theodosianus* stipulates that the rules of inheritance should be disregarded in those instances in which a person is condemned for crimes of high treason or *magicae* and that the property in such instances should go to the emperor instead.⁶⁷

Ammianus states that many innocent people were accused and found guilty and, though the judges attempted to follow the law, they were regulated by the emperor.⁶⁸ While providing what he calls a brief and summary account of the affair, Ammianus mentions many people of varied social standing and occupation who were accused (particularly in relation to the divination-treason), then tortured for further information and names, and ultimately found guilty and sentenced to death or exile.⁶⁹ While Ammianus mentions that people of all backgrounds were involved, he only tells us of the educated and wealthy who were accused, and Zosimus writes that the emperor suspected and accused “all the most celebrated philosophers and men of letters as well as various honoured men at court”.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ “qui cruentis adulationibus institutum hominis mortem in acie linguae portantis, ad partem pessimam deprauantes.” (*Res Gestae*, 29.1.19-20).

⁶⁶ *Res Gestae*, 29.1.19, 29.1.21. Zosimus openly states that the “aim of these various sacrileges was to collect a fortune for treasury.” (HN, 4.14.4).

⁶⁷ “Sed ita, ut alia fit condicio damnatorum ex crimine Maiestatis, aut Magicae. In his enim, etiamsi liberos damnatus habeat, vel parentes: non condentes poenam, sed relinquentes antiquam, fiseo fieri locum praecipimus.” (CT 9.42.2 [356CE]); and “Uetueramus, bona capite damnatorum fiscali dominio uindicari, excepto crimine Maiestatis & Magicae, ut ea haberent usque ad gradum tertium successores eorum quorum uitam seueritas ademisset: nunc vero bona capite damnatorum fiscali dominio uindicari decernimus, sanctione illa, quam certa condicione dederamus, quiescente.” (CT 9.42.4 [358CE]). The latin text for this note was taken from *Codex Theodosianus cum Perpetuis Commentaris Iacobi Gothofredo*, vol. III, Hildesheim & New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975.

⁶⁸ *Res Gestae*, 29.1.27.

⁶⁹ *Res Gestae*, 29.1.25-44. Also 29.2.5.

⁷⁰ ἅπαντας τοὺς ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίᾳ τηρικαῦτα διαβοήτους ἢ ἄλλως λόγοις ἐντεθραμμένους καὶ προσέτι τῶν ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ τιμωμένων τινάς· καὶ οὗτοι γὰρ ὡς ἐπιβουλευόντες τῷ βασιλεῖ προσηγέλλοντο. (Zosimus, HN, 4.14.2).

There was also apparent suspicion of the validity of confessions and accusations gained through torture. Consider, for instance, Ammianus' comment:

Alypius also, former vice-governor of Britain, a man amiable and gentle, after living in leisure and retirement, ... he was accused with his son Hierocles, a young man of good character, as guilty of magic, on the sole evidence of a certain Diogenes, a man of low origin, who was tortured with every degree of butchery, to lead him to give testimony agreeable to the emperor, or rather to the instigator of the charge.⁷¹

Torture was not, however, the only information-extraction tool; bribery also seems to have played a role. Heliodorus, "that hellish contriver of all evils with Palladius", was enticed by kindness, food, and money for concubines, and as chamberlain displayed "the warrants of the Father of his People, which were to be a cause of grief to many".⁷² Heliodorus abused his power and the privilege of his position as an informant, striking fear into people, and accusing various individuals, such as the consuls Eusebius and Hypatius, of seeking information about the sovereignty.⁷³

However, as the charges and trials spread across the eastern empire, torture and bribery were not the limits of dubious behaviour. We are told that:

in order that even wives should have no time to weep over the misfortunes of their husbands, men were immediately sent to put the seal on the houses, and during the examination of the furniture of the householder who had been condemned, to introduce privy old-wives' incantations or unbecoming love-potions, contrived for the ruin of innocent people. And when these were read in a court where there was no law or scruple of justice to distinguish truth from falsehood, without opportunity for defence young and old without discrimination were robbed of their goods and, although they were found stained by no fault, after being maimed in all their limbs were carried off in litters to execution.⁷⁴

According to Ammianus, people were framed in a period when the possession of 'privy old-wives incantations' and 'love-potions' was a serious offence. Zosimus sums it up:

⁷¹ "autem Alypius ex uicario Britanniarum, placiditatis homo iucundae, post otiosam et repositam uitam ... ut veneficus reus citatus est cum Hierocle filio adolescente indolis bonae, urgente Diogene quodam et uili et solo, ... omnique laniena excruciato, ut uerba placentia principi uel potius accersitori, loqueretur." (*Res Gestae*, 29.1.44).

⁷² "tartareus ille malorum omnium cum Palladio fabricator ... elogia parentis publici praeferens, futura pluribus luctuosa." (*Res Gestae*, 29.2.6-7).

⁷³ *Res Gestae*, 29.2.9-10.

⁷⁴ "Et ne uel coniungibus maritorum uacaret miserias flere, immittebantur confestim, qui signatis domibus inter scrutinia suppellectilis patris addicti incantamenta quaedam anilia uel ludibriosa subderent amatoria ad insontium perniciem concinnata. Quibus in iudico recitatis, ubi non lex, non religio, non aequitas ueritatem a mendaciis dirimebat, indefensi bonis ablatis nullo contacti delicto promiscue iuuenes allique membris omnibus capti ad supplicia sellis gestatoriis ducebantur." (*Res Gestae*, 29.2.3).

Anarchy was so widespread that informers and the mob simply broke into homes at random, looted what property they found and handed over the people to their appointed executioners without any trial.⁷⁵

Amongst this record of suspect allegations and abuses, there were some who, despite incriminating evidence, were acquitted of all charges. A classic example relates to the tribune Numerius.

This man [Numerius] was convicted at that same time on his own confession of having dared to cut open the womb of a living woman and take out her unripe offspring, in order to evoke the ghosts of the dead and consult them about a change of rulers; yet Valens, who looked on him with the eye of an intimate friend, in spite of the murmurs of the whole Senate gave orders that he should escape unpunished, and retain his life, his enviable wealth, and his military rank unimpaired.⁷⁶

Considering the perceived injustices and the frenzy of the persecutors, it is hardly surprising that a mass burning of books ensued. Libraries, which had been pronounced as unlawful were gathered and burnt under the eyes of judges,⁷⁷ while other people, believing that evidence could be planted and fearing incrimination, elected to destroy their entire libraries.⁷⁸ The fear associated with possessing potentially incriminating evidence is exemplified by John Chrysostom who tells of an incident in his youth when he and a friend recovered a book from the river. They were disconcerted when they found their discovery to be a book ἐγγεγραμμένα μαγικά. Their anxieties about being caught in possession of such a document were immediate and soon intensified when they were approached by a soldier. Fortunately, they were able to conceal the article and safely dispose of it later.⁷⁹ Indeed it seems to have been a time of trepidation for many.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ οὕτω δὲ ὁμοῦ πάντα συνεταράττετο ὥστε καὶ τῶν προστυχόντων τὰς οἰκίας ἐπεισιέναι μετὰ πλήθους ἀνέδην τοὺς συκοφάντας, καὶ τοὺς ἀπαντῶντας ἀρπάζειν, ἐκδιδόναι δὲ τοῖς φονεῦειν ἀπαντας καὶ δίχα κρίσεως τεταγμένοις. (Zosimus, HN, 4.15).

⁷⁶ “isdem diebus conuictum, confessumque, quod exsecto uiuae mulieris uentre atque intempestiuo partu extracto infernis manibus excitis de permutatione imperii consulere ausus est, familiaritatis contuitu ordine omni musante abire iussit illaesum salutem et inuidendas opes et militiae statum integrum retenturum.” (*Res Gestae*, 29.2.17).

⁷⁷ *Res Gestae*, 29.1.41.

⁷⁸ *Res Gestae*, 29.2.4.

⁷⁹ *In Acts*, hom. 38; PG 60.275.

⁸⁰ For example, see Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 29.2.4.

The events in Antioch were not, however, the only instances of injustice in Syria. Festus,⁸¹ the governor of Asia, is recorded as having committed extraordinary crimes against those under his rule. Ammianus writes that he punished the innocent in order to gain promotion, having heard that such actions proved successful for another ambitious ruler. Festus' activities even went beyond legislative boundaries with his condemnation of the user of healing amulets, a practice exempted from punishment in the *Codex Theodosianus*.⁸² Nevertheless, Zosimus records that Festus was sent by the emperor "so that no educated person might be left alive".⁸³ Thus the governor executed: a philosopher; an old lady who cured fevers with charms and who had treated his own daughter for a fever; a distinguished townsman who had in his possession an horoscope for Valens, his deceased brother; and a young man who at the bath was touching the marble and his breast while counting seven vowels in order to aid stomach trouble. All were put to death; the latter being tortured and beheaded.⁸⁴

In addition to Ammianus, Libanius offers a first-hand account of an individual accused and maligned. Libanius was a high profile rhetor from a well-regarded and distinguished family in Antioch,⁸⁵ operating in an extremely competitive industry (in which rhetors were known to pay students to attend class),⁸⁶ who maintained a high social standing as a result of his speaking skills and educational instruction. Given Ammianus' and Zosimus' comments regarding those most readily targeted by accusations, it is perhaps not too surprising that Libanius and his colleagues, and/or rivals, were also subject to the levelling and manipulation of treason and γοητεία accusations.

With a similar sentiment to Ammianus', Libanius records the paranoia of Valens:

⁸¹ His name is recorded as both Festus (Zosimus) and as Festinus (Ammianus).

⁸² CT 9.16.3.

⁸³ ὡς ἂν μηδεὶς τῶν περὶ λόγους ἐσπουδακόντων ἀπολειφθείη. (HN, 4.15).

⁸⁴ *Res Gestae*, 29.2.22-28.

⁸⁵ Or. 1.2.

⁸⁶ Libanius alleges that one of his rivals did just this (Or. 1.65). It is worth noting here that it has not been proven that this rivalry and competition for students was restricted to this period of Roman history, as is often implied in studies of sorcery accusations.

Every soothsayer was his foe: so was any who, in his desire to learn from heaven something of his own fortunes, had recourse to this art, for it was hard to believe that, with a soothsayer handy, his services would not be employed on matters of greater moment.⁸⁷

Libanius records that he himself was also one of Valens' targets, saying of the leader: "It is said that he personally asked Irenaeus whether I was party to the plot and was surprised to hear that I was not."⁸⁸ However, Libanius' concerns did not end with this incident. Following Valens' suspicions of him, the rhetor was struck with fear on account of events related to a soothsayer to whom he wrote. In this instance, though Libanius deliberately referred to the practitioner as a physician in his correspondence, a slave of the former had kept his master's letters as a form of protective insurance. He then sought to prosecute his master for the latter's auguries, placing his reliance "upon this correspondence, for the governor would know exactly what 'physicians' meant, and the emperor would in any case set up a hue and cry against anyone so entrapped".⁸⁹ Many people entreated the slave not to take such action, and with relief Libanius writes that eventually the slave changed his mind, returned the letters, and consequently lost the case through lack of evidence.⁹⁰

An unsuccessful threat of associating Libanius with divination and treason was also made against the rhetor. In this instance, he records that Eustathius (the *consularis* in 388-389) allegedly incited the ruined decurion Romulus to accuse him of divination against the emperor.⁹¹

Apart from divination, Libanius was accused of using γοητεία against others, including the emperor. For example, Festus, the *consularis Syriae* of whom Ammianus

⁸⁷ μάντις τε ἅπας ἐχθρὸς ὄτω τε ἐδέησε τῆς τέχνης διδάσκεσθαι τι περὶ τῶν ἰδίων τῶν αὐτοῦ· παρὰ τῶν θεῶν βουλομένων· χαλεπὸν γὰρ δὴ ἐδόκει εἶναι παρόντος μάντεως μὴ ἂν τινα καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς μείζοσι χρήσασθαι τῷ ἀνδρὶ. (Or. 1.171). The translation of Libanius' Or.1. throughout the thesis is based on that published by Norman (*Libanius' Autobiography [Oration I]. The Greek Text*, tr. A.F. Norman, London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁸⁸ λέγεται δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐρέσθαι τὸν Εἰρηναῖον εἰ μετεῖχον τοῦ ἐπιβουλεύματος, θαυμάσαι τε οὐ μετασχεῖν ἀκούσας. (Or. 1.172). Libanius tells that his friend Adelphius was tortured and put to death, though he did not incriminate his friends.

⁸⁹ ἐν τοῖς γράμμασι τούτοις εἶχε τὴν πίστιν· συνήσειν γὰρ δὴ τὸν δικαστὴν, ὃ, τι ἐδήλουν οἱ ἰατροί· ἐμπεσόντι δὲ εἰς τὸ δίκτυον ὅπως οὖν ἐπέκειτ' ἂν εὐθύς κεκραγῶς ὁ βασιλεὺς. (Or. 1.178).

⁹⁰ Or. 1.176-178.

⁹¹ Or. 54.40 (The formulation of this charge is mentioned in *Ep.* 844).

also made mention, appears in Libanius' autobiography as having attempted to link Libanius and Eutropius with activities of a γόητος, Martyrius.⁹² At another point Libanius tells of how, at a time when his "declamations were numerous and of the kind to attract students,"⁹³ a boy was bribed with the promise of being able to sleep with a dancer if he went to the emperor with the allegation that Libanius had decapitated two girls and kept their heads in order to use them against the emperor and his senior colleague.⁹⁴ To the surprise of those behind the allegations, who had anticipated Libanius' immediate execution, the matter was taken to court. However, the boy who made the allegation did not appear, and the case was not pursued.

Libanius points out while relating his story that the boy who was bribed was promised a dancer "who obeyed my rival the sophist's clique in everything".⁹⁵ He is here, Norman proposes, referring to the leader of a faction opposing his own.⁹⁶ Thus it appears that the accusation made against Libanius was made by a fellow sophist, a rival. Taking this into consideration, it is also worth noting that Libanius' opponents, in his view, believed that, in spite of the falsity of the accusation, the emperor would still consider Libanius disloyal and display this publicly. Fortunately for the orator the expected public, imperial suspicion and reproach did not eventuate.

This is not the end of Libanius' troubles. While on a trip to Bithynia, during which he was praised for his oratory, the rhetor was accused of making a professor's wife suffer from mental illness, "and he, refusing to believe that this was due to any physical ailment, tried to pin the blame on to me".⁹⁷ The wife died and the matter was

⁹² "He had a private conversation with Valens about him [Martyrius], telling him that he could easily involve both Eutropius and myself in the business... the result was that Martyrius caused much laughter in court, for the judges could not understand why on earth the proceedings against him should ever have been commenced." (Or. 1.159-159).

⁹³ καὶ οἴων ἐφέλκεσθαι νέους νεανίσκος (Or. 1.98).

⁹⁴ Or. 1. 98-99.

⁹⁵ ἦν δὲ τοῦ ψεύδους ὁ μισθὸς συγκοίμησις ὀρχηστοῦ τινος πάντα πειθομένου τοῖς ἀμφ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν σοφιστήν. (Or 1.98, note b [Loeb edition: Libanius, *Autobiography and Selected Letters*, Vols I & II, ed. & tr. A.F. Norman, Cambridge, Mass., & London: Harvard University Press, 1992]).

⁹⁶ Note on the text, by Norman, Loeb edition, Or. 1.98.

⁹⁷ ὁ δὲ οὐ βουλόμενος ταῦτ' εἶναι τῆς τοῦ σώματος πονηρίας ἐπ' ἐμέ. (Or. 1.62).

taken to court. Libanius himself insisted that the trial be held, and the whole escapade culminated with the humiliation of the professor who had made the accusation.⁹⁸

On a separate occasion, a certain Sabinus produced the head of corpse and alleged with a forged letter that the decapitation had been the deed of Libanius.⁹⁹ Whether this in any way relates to supernatural uses for the corpse or is simply a false accusation of murder is uncertain; it is only clear that Libanius was in conflict with Sabinus over various other matters.¹⁰⁰

Libanius seems to have been a relatively popular target for he was also accused of being “intimate ... with an astrologer who controlled the stars and through them could bring help or harm to men”.¹⁰¹ He states that the accusation came about because his rival, and accuser, could not get to Libanius’ drink in order to infuse it with poison. Thus, “he went around with the fairy tale that he had been worsted by magic” because of Libanius’ apparent connection with a powerful astrologer.¹⁰² The developments of the charge are intriguing. Libanius records that his accuser “could not outstrip me in his oratory any more than he could actually outpace me: there was only one thing for it – to put an end to me”.¹⁰³ To strengthen the allegation, the orator also found allies among schoolmasters and professors.¹⁰⁴ However, Libanius escapes any conviction due both to a lack of evidence and an opportunity to remove himself to Nicomedia. What must also be noted about his extraordinary account, and a point which will receive greater attention later in the discussion, is that Libanius understood that the schoolmasters and professors would join against him as “chagrin, fear, and envy” (λύπη τε καὶ φόβος καὶ φθόνος) made them his accuser’s accomplices.

⁹⁸ Or. 1.62-63.

⁹⁹ Or. 1.194.

¹⁰⁰ See Or. 1.194-196.

¹⁰¹ Ξυνεῖναί με γὰρ ἀνδρὶ τυραννοῦντι τῶν ἄστρων, δι’ ὧν ἐκεῖνον τὸν μὲν εὖ, τὸν δὲ κακῶς ποιεῖν ἀνθρώπων. (Or. 1.43).

¹⁰² γοήτων ἠττήσθαι περιῶν ἐτραγῶδει. (Or 1.43).

¹⁰³ ὅτι λόγοις μὲν οὐκ ἂν ἔτι παρέλθοι λόγους οὐ μᾶλλον γε ἢ ποσὶ πόδας τοὺς ἐμούς τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ, μία δὲ ἀπαλλαγὴ κυρία, εἰ μηκέτ’ εἶην. (Or. 1.42).

¹⁰⁴ εὕρισκεῖ πόνου χωρὶς τοὺς συλληψομένους πρὸς τοῖς σοφισταῖς τοὺς ἀμφὶ τοὺς ποιητάς. (Or. 1.44).

A further point to be made about this incident is that even though declaring that the charge was ridiculous and clearly implying that it was the result of professional rivalry and jealousy, the accusation does suggest that astrology could be seen to be more than a reading of the stars. Intricately linked with the Greco-Roman concept of fate was the idea that all things were predestined and hence an astrologer by reading the stars could understand an individual's predetermined path.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, in this allegation it appears that in the late antique mindset it was also believed that an astrologer could influence the course of the stars; Libanius certainly does not dispute the plausibility of the practitioner's authority. Thus, it can be argued that the very fact that such a charge could make it to court, regardless of its truth, suggests that it may have been widely believed that astrologers could change the alignment of stars and thereby change the course and destiny of people's lives. If this were the case, then an astrologer could be seen to possess extraordinary power.

A final instance in which Libanius is associated with supernatural power occurs after he visits people in prison during a spate of accusations under Gallus. The rhetor writes that the day after he had visited the individuals they were released "and the rumour spread that some kindly spirit had entered with me, and by its agency the storm had been stilled".¹⁰⁶ This form of supernatural agency does not, however, appear to have any of the qualities of the *γοητεία* otherwise mentioned by Libanius. No deliberate supernatural act is here implied, rather Libanius is attributed with bringing good fortune in with him. He is associated with the ability to divert people's fortunes.

The rhetor was not just the alleged protagonist of *γοητεία* and the like; he was also the victim. At the time of Valens' winter of sorcery accusations in Antioch, while Libanius was having trouble with his students, he was also suffering from a migraine (which had not bothered him for sixteen years) and gout. Every day and night was filled with pain for him, and despite this his soothsayer forbade him from opening his veins as

¹⁰⁵ There is a discussion on astrology in Chapter 10 (section 3.3.1).

¹⁰⁶ καὶ τῆς ὑστεραίας ἐλέλυτο καὶ ἐγένετο δόξα συνεισελθεῖν τινά μοι τῶν βελτιόνων δαιμόνων, ὕφ' οὗ στορεσθῆναι τὰ κύματα. (Or. 1.96).

a means of relief. Thus worried by external stresses and physical illness, Libanius had a dream. He explains:

I saw two boys sacrificed, and the dead body of one was put in the temple of Zeus, behind the door. On protesting at this sacrilege, I was told that this would be the position until evening, but that, when evening came, he would be buried. This seemed to portend spells, incantations, and the hostility of sorcerers. And so it turned out in actual fact, when all those fears obsessed me, and I desired nothing save to die.¹⁰⁷

Libanius was consequently terribly distracted by both his malady and by the supernatural cause of it. Furthermore his doctors, because of the cause, were unable to help him, and also attributed his unusually lengthy bout of gout to the same cause: “My doctors bade me seek the cure elsewhere, for there was no remedy for such maladies in their art.”¹⁰⁸ Interestingly once the verdict had been reached that the cause was supernatural and the nature and extent of his maladies were considered, people foretold that he would soon die; this portent as well as the rumour that he had already expired also spread to other cities. As a result Libanius’ friends urged him to prosecute certain people who were rumoured to be responsible for his suffering, but Libanius suggested prayer rather “than to have folk arrested for secret machinations”.¹⁰⁹

Things changed, however, for the ailing Libanius when a dead chameleon appeared in his classroom.¹¹⁰ The long-dead specimen had been placed in a pose that suggested that it was intended to make Libanius both lame and speechless. The chameleon’s head was tucked between its hind legs, one of its front legs was missing, and the other leg closed its mouth in silence.¹¹¹ Despite intimating that following this event he could readily do so, Libanius did not name anyone as responsible for the dead lizard’s appearance. Rather than pursue legal reprisal, Libanius was content with the easing of his suffering, for “it seemed to me that the guilty parties were overcome by

¹⁰⁷ ἐδόκουν μοί τινες θύσαντες δύο παῖδες τοῖν νεκροῖν τὸν ἕτερον θεῖναι ἐν ἱερῷ Διὸς ὄπισθεν τῆς θύρας, ἀγανακτοῦντος δέ μου τῆ τοῦ Διὸς ὑβρεὶ φάναι τινὰς μέχρι τῆς ἑσπέρας τοῦθ’ οὕτως ἔξειν, ἠκούσης δὲ δοθήσεσθαι τάφῳ. φάρμακα δὲ καὶ μαγγανεύματα καὶ πόλεμον ἀπὸ γοήτων ἀνδρῶν ταῦτα ἐδόκει δηλοῦν. καὶ εἶπετο δὲ τὸ ἔργον, φόβοι τε ἐκεῖνοι καὶ πλὴν τελευτῆς οὐδενὸς ἐπιθυμία. (Or. 1.245-246).

¹⁰⁸ ἰατροὶ δὲ τὴν τούτων ἴασιν ἄλλοθι ζητεῖν ἐκέλευον, ὡς οὐκ ὄντων σφίσι τῶν τοιοῦτων ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ φαρμάκων (Or. 1.246; 1.246-247).

¹⁰⁹ μᾶλλον ἢ τινὰς ἔλκειν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐν σκότῳ συντεθέντων. (Or. 1.248).

¹¹⁰ Or. 1.249.

¹¹¹ For a discussion of this see: Bonner, “Witchcraft in the Lecture Room,” esp. 38-39.

panic and relaxed their pressure, so that I was able to move about again”.¹¹² Indeed the rhetor considered it good fortune that “what had been buried deep should lie above ground, exposed for all to see”.¹¹³

Libanius’ illnesses caused him considerable suffering. They were immediate impediments to his ability to perform adequately as a professor and orator. The dream was interpreted by him, and accepted by others, as an unquestionable indicator of the supernatural origin of his maladies. This acceptance that he had been the target of supernatural foul play even led people to predict his speedy death. That his dream was believed to be an accurate informant also seems to be largely accepted by others. This was most likely due to the fact that oneiromancy was a long practised and accepted Greco-Roman method of receiving supernal communications.¹¹⁴ In addition to the acknowledgment of supernatural causes, there was clearly a community acknowledgment that a certain individual or individuals were responsible for the act, since Libanius is encouraged to prosecute those believed to be involved.¹¹⁵ Indeed the appearance of the chameleon offered Libanius not only a release from the spell that was harming him, but also further proof that a supernatural attack had been made against him.¹¹⁶ The use of the chameleon, and its association with such practices, demonstrated to the community that people had truly been out to get him, and vindicated his illness and consequent erratic and confused behaviour (for example, he tells us that he was unable to concentrate in his classes), for it was controlled by the machinations of

¹¹² δέος μέντοι μοι ἔδόκει τοὺς αὐτοῖς τι συνειδότας εἰσελθεῖν καὶ τοὺς μὲν ὑφεῖναι τῆς συνεχείας, ἐμοὶ δὲ αὐθις ἐγγενέσθαι κινεῖσθαι. (Or. 1.250).

¹¹³ τύχης τοίνυν εὐμενεστέρας ἅ κατωρώρηκτο κεῖσθαι ὑπὲρ γῆν τοῖς βουλομένοις ὄραν. (Or. 1.250).

¹¹⁴ Dreams and their potency are discussed in Chapter 10.

¹¹⁵ We are shown here an indication of a genuine belief in the malice behind the accusations (true or false) for which people were brought to trial in regard to supernatural activity. The validity of supernatural practices is not questioned in any of the accounts; it is rather the allegations of involvement that are at issue for the author.

¹¹⁶ This could simply be referring to the unearthing of an instrument by which the curse was able to affect him. The exposure of the tool could remove its power, as it was no longer in a position to appeal to and instruct *daimones* — recall that curse tablets for example are typically buried or deposited in wells, that is, away from sight and in close proximity to *daimones*.

others.¹¹⁷ Despite this, and much to the disappointment of Libanius, people did not adequately display their indignation upon learning that the rhetor's suffering had indeed been the result of maleficent supernatural activity.¹¹⁸

5.3.2 Palestine

Palestine was not exempt from treason and γοητεία charges in the fourth century. In 359, a number of letters of inquiry which had been sent by various individuals to the oracle at Besa in the Thebaid, Egypt, were collected and sent to the emperor Constantius. The emperor became suspicious and promptly had high-treason trials organised.¹¹⁹ Paulus, a man whom history does not portray well, was sent to administer them. Ammianus writes of Paulus that “as his determination to do harm was fixed and obstinate, he did not refrain from secret fraud, devising fatal charges against innocent persons.”¹²⁰ Thus tainted, the treason trials were conducted and held in Scythopolis in Palestine, a location which was both secluded and about half way between Alexandria and Antioch the cities of residence for most of the accused.¹²¹ To the trials at Scythopolis: “men were brought in from almost the whole world, noble and obscure alike; and some of them were bowed down with the weight of chains, others wasted away from the agony of imprisonment.”¹²² People, including those of high social standing or education such as ex-prefects, scholars, and philosophers, were charged and tried for having consulted the oracle at Besa about the succession or gaining of imperial power.¹²³ As with the trials in Antioch, the charges soon diverged from treason-divination to include almost any supernatural practice. Ammianus writes:

¹¹⁷ Compare a fourth-century case in Rome: “But the woman, that she might have strong hope of retaining her life by putting off her punishment, declared that she had been worked upon by evil arts and had suffered violence in the house of Aiginatius.” (*Res Gestae* 28.1.50).

¹¹⁸ Or. 36.1-3 and 36.15. (This text was drawn to my attention by Prof. S. Lieu who also provided a translation of the oration by Sheila Vine.)

¹¹⁹ *Res Gestae*, 19.12. 3-5.

¹²⁰ “Ut enim erat obstinatum fixumque eius propositum ad laedendum, ita nec furtis abstinuit innocentibus exitiales causas affingens, dum in calamitosis stipendiis uersaretur.” (*Res Gestae*, 19.12.2).

¹²¹ *Res Gestae*, 19.12.8.

¹²² “ducebantur ab orbe prope terrarum iuxta nobiles et obscuro, quorum aliquos uinculorum afflixerant nexus, alios claustra poenalia consumpserunt.” (*Res Gestae*, 19.12.7).

¹²³ *Res Gestae*, 19.12.9-13. Note also that, although Ammianus begins by saying that noble and obscure alike were brought to trial, he provides no evidence or detail of people without social standing or education.

if anyone wore on his neck an amulet against the quartan ague or some other complaint, or was accused by the testimony of the evil-disposed of passing by a grave in the evening, on the ground that he was a dealer in poisons, or a gatherer of the horrors of tombs and the vain illusions of the ghosts that walk there, he was condemned to capital punishment and so perished.¹²⁴

Once again a situation developed in which people were readily taken to trial, while intimidation and fear were again prevalent. As with his report on the trials instigated by Valens, Ammianus is understanding of the emperor's position and his need to be vigilant and protective of his leadership. Nevertheless, the historian does not condone the measures and injustices undertaken in the context of the trials.¹²⁵

Ecclesiastical politics was not immune to accusations of *γοητεία*. Athanasius, while bishop of Alexandria, was brought to trial in Tyre. Athanasius caused considerable conflict and controversy in the church during his period as bishop of Alexandria. Sozomen writes that "the plots of the enemies of Athanasius involved him in fresh troubles, excited the hatred of the emperor against him, and stirred up a multitude of accusers".¹²⁶ The Tyre meeting came two and a half years after he avoided the synod to which he had initially been called and to which he had not gone for fear of the opponents who would have influence there. When the synod eventually met at Tyre it was attended by a large number of bishops from the Eastern sees. Numerous charges were brought against Athanasius which included the breaking of a mystical chalice and the throwing of an episcopal chair, as well as more serious allegations concerning his ecclesiastical behaviour.¹²⁷ Sozomen notes that 'as generally happens in plots of this nature' many of those considered his friends were amongst his accusers.¹²⁸ One of the charges involved the claim that he had cut off, for the purposes of magic, Arsenius'

¹²⁴ "Nam si qui remedia quartanae uel doloris alterius collo gestaret siue per monumentum transisse uesperis maleuolorum argueretur indiciis, ut ueneficus sepulchrorumque horrores et errantium ibidem animarum ludibria colligens uana pronuntiatus reus capitis interibat." (*Res Gestae*, 19.12.14).

¹²⁵ "Sed exsultare maestis casibus effrenate non decet." (*Res Gestae*, 19.12.17-18).

¹²⁶ Ἀθανασίῳ δὲ πάλιν αἱ τῶν ἐναντίων ἐπιβουλαὶ ἀνεκίνουσι πράγματα καὶ μῖσος παρὰ τῷ βασιλεῖ κατεσκευάζον καὶ κατηγορῶν ἐπήγειρον πλῆθος. (HE, 2.25.1). Translations of Sozomen throughout the thesis are based on Walford's translation (Sozomen, *The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen. Comprising a History of the Church from A.D. 324 to A.D. 440*, Book I-V, tr. E. Walford, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855).

¹²⁷ HE, 2.25.3-4.

¹²⁸ οἷα φιλεῖ ἐν σπουδαζομένοις ἐπιβουλαῖς. (HE, 2.25.7).

arm. This was proved to be γελοία καὶ συκοφαντίας ἀνάπλεως,¹²⁹ for he later led Arsenius into the trial and showed the judge both of his hands, and then requested his accusers to account for the arm which they had exhibited. The latter devised some story, saying that they believed Arsenius was dead because he had not been seen after apparently escaping from a cell in which he had been enclosed at the instigation of Athanasius.¹³⁰ After several sessions and varied accusations against him, there was great tumult and confusion in the synod and eventually Athanasius had to flee for fear of his life. While he was absent the synod condemned him, and his accusers and a multitude of persons around the tribunal cried aloud that Athanasius ought to be deposed ὡς γόητα καὶ βίαιον καὶ ἱερωσύνης ἀνάξιον.¹³¹

That Athanasius was associated with supernatural activities is also suggested by Ammianus, who records that Athanasius was said to have been highly skilled in the interpretation of the prophetic lots of the omens indicated by birds, and that he had sometimes foretold future events.¹³² Numerous instances outlined above inform us that these were considered serious offences in secular legislation, a concern reflected in the church canons of Laodicaea and the works of various church fathers.¹³³

A final example is offered as a supplement on church attitude. Sozomen reports on Eleusis, who was deposed because he had made a man deacon who had, before his feigned conversion to Christianity, been a priest of Hercules at Tyre. In that position he had been accused of γοήτεια. Eleusis' offence was not that he had somehow himself been involved with these alleged activities, but that "after having been apprized of these circumstances, [he] had not excommunicated him".¹³⁴ Thus the notion of punishing those allegedly involved in supernatural activity is here reinforced with the chastisement of perceived laxity and inappropriate action.

¹²⁹ HE, 2.25.9.

¹³⁰ HE, 2.25.10.

¹³¹ HE, 2.25.13.

¹³² *Res Gestae*, 15.7.7-8.

¹³³ Canon 36; see also, for example, the discussion in Chapter 10 (section 3.3).

¹³⁴ καὶ οὐδὲ τοιοῦτον ὄντα μετὰ ταῦτα μαθὼν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐχώρισε. (HE, 4.24.10).

5.3.3 Discussion. Manipulating preternatural power.

It is evident in the material above that laws relating to *mathematici*, *malefici*, and *divinandi* were manipulated and even exploited in order to eliminate threats and competitors in both Syria and Palestine. Consequently it is hardly surprising that various analyses of the accusations often highlight the variable and unstable political and social context in which they were set.¹³⁵ While it is accepted that these factors did contribute, it will be proposed here that social belief systems including honour, limited good, and envy also played an influential role in the accusation phenomenon, promoting a recourse to actions which drew upon a social understanding of the supernatural and its infringement upon and impact on human life.¹³⁶

Taking these points into consideration, the discussion begins by considering the more evident motivations for the imperial trials, both in Antioch and Scythopolis – treason. That both Constantius and Valens were keenly suspicious of individuals seeking to usurp their ruling position is not surprising. It was a volatile age and the seat of the ruler not secure; both emperors had survived assassination attempts while in power.¹³⁷ Thus the instigation of the trials and the initial charges can be seen to represent valid concerns for the protection of the throne.

Having said this, on the face of it seeking some letters on a tripod hardly seems a dastardly plot or assassination attempt. Indeed in the case of the treason trials in Antioch and Scythopolis the emperors were acting upon information relating to revelation – the foretelling of future events only – and not to the actual planning and act of overthrowing the emperor. Given this, it can be argued that in the emperors'

¹³⁵ For example Brown, "Sorcery and Demons"; Hay, "Sorcery Trials".

¹³⁶ It has already been seen in the chapter above, and will be seen in the pages to follow, that many aspects of life were affected by the supernatural. Evidence for belief in this reality also extends across all social strata. Consider for instance Libanius' migraine and gout. Although these ailments have been explained by scholars as a convenient means to deflect criticism and explain misfortune (see for example F. Graf, "How to Cope with a Difficult Life. A View of Ancient Magic," in P. Schäfer & H.G. Kippenberg [eds], *Envisioning Magic. A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, Leiden & New York: Brill [1997: 93-114] 106-107), there is in Libanius' account a clear belief in the efficacy and reality of the supernatural arts.

See also Thomas' argument that magic would not have been practiced if it were not first thought possible, and that witchcraft beliefs were anchored on a culturally accepted view of reality, being part of a larger body of assumptions about the universe. (Thomas, "Anthropology of Religion and Magic," 99-100.)

¹³⁷ On Valens, for example, see *Res Gestae*, 29.1.

immediate and dramatic retaliations to the charges of high treason by divination there can be seen an innate belief in the validity of divination and/or an awareness of other people's belief in its efficacy. This being the case, it was not then the envisaged successor who alone posed the threat, but the possibility of other people's belief, that is the public's belief, in the revelations. Late antiquity had inherited from its predecessors a belief in fate, burdened with the notion that one's future had already been determined and was virtually unalterable.¹³⁸ Recall, for instance, that the tripod revelations that instigated such pandemonium were not dismissed as erroneous, for the future did indeed present the empire with a ruler whose name began with the letters THEOD!¹³⁹ Considering this notion of fate, as well as what seems a fairly widespread belief in divination,¹⁴⁰ the revelation of the tripod, or the oracle, or any other divinatory methods would have been understood as the unveiling of a certain future. If then there resided in a community, or segments of the community, a dissatisfaction with an emperor, and knowledge regarding a successor, possibly a favourable one, was obtained, this could feasibly pose a legitimate threat, or at least some reasoned anxiety, for the emperor. For if fate had already decreed the other as successor, and the emperor could do little to alter destiny, the latter's hold on loyalty and thereby power could be affected, let alone his tenuous grasp on an already insecure life (recall Ammianus' references to assassination attempts). Thus all the measures taken not only to eliminate the threatening Theodorus, but also those who were evidently displeased with the current regime and already shifting loyalty to the next predestined ruler can be understood. These dissenters were loyal to a very real rival to the throne, one who had been destined for it. Such dissension consequently required discipline, and a public display of this. The emperor's own position of power and control could thus be reaffirmed, and the

¹³⁸ See for instance: T. Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, London & New York: Routledge, 1994. On a link between astrology and fatalism see Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 317; and the discussion in W.C. Greene, *Moirai. Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought*, New York & Evanston: Harper Torchbooks (1963) 331-398.

¹³⁹ See *Res Gestae*, 31.14.

¹⁴⁰ The practice had not yet been erased by Christianisation, and as can be seen in Chapter 10 (section 3.3) was popular, and survived, in various forms. Consider also Zosimus' account of Constantine who: "readily believed what he was told and, abandoning his ancestral religion, embraced the one which the Egyptian offered him. He began his impiety by doubting divination; for since many of its predictions about his successes had been fulfilled, he was afraid that people enquiring about the future might hear

revelation furthermore proved to be incorrect (by the eradication of the predicted emperor). It is no wonder then that Firmicus Maternus instructs astrologers to:

see that you give your responses publicly in a clear voice, so that nothing may be asked of you which is not allowed either to ask or to answer. Beware of replying to anyone about the condition of the Republic or the life of the Roman emperor. For it is not right, nor is it permitted, that from wicked curiosity we learn anything about the condition of the Republic.¹⁴¹

Accepting this idea of fate and the consequent threat of divination does not, however, assist in explaining the extension of the treason trials into arenas for unjustified and malevolent attacks on countless individuals across the empire. In a bid better to understand these seemingly rampant accusations, several factors will be discussed as possible influences underlying people's allegations of deviant activities utilising the daimonic.

It is possible that the trials acted as a tool for religious persecution.¹⁴² Divination, auguries, μαντική, oneiromancy, and astrologers, were relevant to the traditional non-Christian religions, and these were the practices which figured prominently in the trials. Thus the sorcery accusations offered a means by which non-Christian figures, especially the more prominent, could be eliminated, exiled, or humiliated and impoverished. Furthermore, the alignment of traditional religious and secular divination with deviant and aggressive supernatural practices may have been an attempt at transforming and tainting perceptions of traditional religious practices.¹⁴³ This could explain the vivid and condemning accounts of the non-Christian informants. However, this being said, the motivation for a religious cleansing is unclear, unless authorities (though unlikely to have been totally Christian) sought to strengthen

prophecies about his misfortunes. For this reason he applied himself to the abolition of divination.” (Zosimus, HN, 2.29.4).

¹⁴¹ “Dabis sane responsa publice et hoc interrogaturis ante praedicito, <quod> omnia quidem illis, de quibus interrogant, clara sis voce dicturus, ne quid a te tale forte quaeratur, quod non liceat nec interrogare nec dicere. Cave ne quando de statu reipublicae vel de vita Romani imperatoris aliquid interroganti respondeas; non enim oportet nec licet, ut de statu reipublicae aliquid nefaria curiositate discamus.” (Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis*, 2.30.3-4). Trans. by J. Rhys Bram (Firmicus Maternus, *Ancient Astrology Theory and Practice. Mathesos Libri VIII*, tr. J. Rhys Bram, Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press [1975] 69).

¹⁴² See, for example, Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 512.

¹⁴³ This is also seen to some degree in the CT (9.16.4).

Christianity's hold at various levels of Greco-Roman society.¹⁴⁴ This argument is also considerably weakened by the record that Christians were counted amongst the victims of the trials.¹⁴⁵ Thus it seems doubtful that religion could have provided motivation for the accusations.

A motive to which Ammianus and Zosimus both alluded was the economic benefit of the trials. In the case of the proceedings in Antioch, we are told that people's property was sealed off and confiscated before the individuals were charged, the author's blunt suggestion being that the imperial coffers were consciously being filled through these exercises.¹⁴⁶ As was mentioned above, the *Codex Theodosianus* decreed that when a person had been found guilty of practising supernatural arts the normal rules of inheritance became invalid and possession of all property was relegated to the state. If, then, the terror that Ammianus describes reflects the reality of the situation, many wealthy individuals were counted amongst the victims of the accusations. With their arrests, their wealth was transferred to the empire. Families were left deprived of their income, and subsequently their social position, and the treasury increased its holdings significantly. Given the reports that people's possessions were immediately acquired upon their arrest, and not their sentence, financial incentive seems a quite feasible motivation for those accusations levelled by the state.

This latter point leads on to another aspect of the accusations, the fact that they successfully eliminated (through death or poverty) many people in prominent social positions. This particularly relates to those officials who pointedly, according to Ammianus, manipulated the actions of the emperors and the subsequent trials. These individuals not only benefited financially from the prosecutions; they also managed to eliminate or impair former or current rivals or enemies. Such attacks on a rival are exemplified in the accusations levelled against Libanius in an attempt to weaken his abilities and position, even to 'eliminate' him. Or as Peter Brown wrote:

¹⁴⁴ MacMullen points out that by 400CE the government in the East is overwhelmingly Christian, but "it is at least apparent that Christianity had made no clean sweep of the summits of power and publicity." MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 22-23.

¹⁴⁵ See Clerc, "Majestäts- und Magieprozesse," 175; and Hay, "Sorcery Trials," 43.

¹⁴⁶ See discussion above.

taken altogether, the purges that followed accusations of sorcery and illicit divination point, not to any increase in a 'terror of magic', but to a more precise, if more prosaic, development – to an increase in the zeal and efficacy of the emperor's servants, and their greater ability to override the vested interests of the traditional aristocracies of the Empire, whether to collect taxes or to chastise the black arts.¹⁴⁷

Thus the trials can be seen as a means for unsettling the traditional ruling structures in the provinces. Aune proposes that accusations could be used "as a means of social control and definition". In keeping with this scenario, the dominant social structure, in this case the emperor and his official governors and rulers, was seeking to control and label (as deviant) those in unstructured and ambiguous areas of society.¹⁴⁸ Brown similarly proposed that "Late Roman society was dominated by the problem of the conflict, between change and stability in a traditional society".¹⁴⁹ The argument held that within a changing society there existed articulate power (the traditional power structure) and inarticulate power (represented by fluidity and mobility within the power structure). When and where these two forms of power overlapped there existed a clash between change and stability, and 'sorcery' accusations could be found.¹⁵⁰ Thus, the accusations were the result of a changing power structure and the need of individuals operating within that framework to assume a position of strength by destabilising those who most threatened that situation.

Both Athanasius and Libanius can be seen as examples of this apparent power-struggle context. They were in ambiguous positions of power in highly competitive and volatile industries, in which success depended largely on public perception and evaluation. To take Libanius as an example, his esteemed position and popularity, and those of his rivals, as both orator and educator were never certain. Given this relative insecurity, and according to Brown and Aune's theories, it is not surprising that Libanius would consequently be subject to accusations. It is thus noteworthy that it was at those periods when he was 'publicly successful', that is, presenting well-received orations and holding classes filled with students, that allegations were levelled against

¹⁴⁷ P. Brown, "Sorcery and Demons," 122. Hay's argument is based on this notion, identifying the increasing imperial control of society by the emperor and his lackeys as a fundamental aspect of the prevalence of accusations in this period. Hay, "Sorcery Trials," 40-50.

¹⁴⁸ See D.E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 1523.

¹⁴⁹ Brown, "Sorcery and Demons," 21.

¹⁵⁰ Brown, "Sorcery and Demons," esp. 20-25.

him. Such accusations, either for γοητεία or some other unacceptable supernatural practice, seemed to offer a very public method in which to attack and also undermine a successful rival. Libanius, however, claims much more sinister ambitions behind such assaults, for he records that accusing him of such behaviour was an easier option for a rival than trying to slip poison into his drink. By making an accusation of behaviour involving the supernatural a public profile and career, already vulnerable to criticism and disfavour, could be publicly labelled as deviant, and severe damage could be done to an individual's image and position. Furthermore were the accusation supported by the decisions of the court, the accused would be a successfully 'eradicated' opponent, for high treason or sorcery carried a penalty of death, or at the very least exile.

It is also proposed that through the elimination or discrediting of influential persons or rivals, such as Libanius, accusations could additionally serve to reinforce faction boundaries.¹⁵¹ For example, the allegation against Libanius concerning his possession of decapitated heads for use against the emperor and his colleague, was made by a rival sophist and his clique. It appears that Libanius was not just an individual competitor in oratory, but also the mouthpiece for an opposing faction.¹⁵² Thus the accusations provided an arena for discrediting or removing a representative of a rival group by asserting the deviant associations of the latter, possibly also tainting the reputation of the entire group.

However, allegations may not have had the sole purpose of rival eradication. It has been proposed that accusations for supernatural practices made in situations of conflict may have acted as a substitute for physical forms of confrontation.¹⁵³ The oratorical and educational arena was certainly an area of conflict and intense competition,¹⁵⁴ so it is possible that accusations made against Libanius were a substitute for physical assaults on him. However, it seems unlikely that the extraordinary situations in Scythopolis and Antioch resulted simply as a means of avoiding physical confrontation, especially when considering that in many cases physical torture formed

¹⁵¹ Esler, *First Christians*, 141.

¹⁵² See note b in Or.1.98, Loeb edition.

¹⁵³ See Esler, *First Christians*, 140.

¹⁵⁴ For example, Libanius speaks of the inability of a rival to outstrip him in his oratory. Or. 1.42.

part of the ordeal. Even in Libanius' case, hiring thugs to take care of the rhetor must also have presented as a relatively easy form of reprisal in comparison with making public and legally legitimate accusations.

It is also conceivable that an accusation of an unacceptable supernatural practice could provide a publicly acceptable explanation for illness and/or poor performance. Libanius once again provides evidence for consideration in his account of his suffering through γοητεία. The resultant illness distracted him from his work and affected his performance, although it did not affect his reason.¹⁵⁵ He tells how, pursuant to his dream and its portent of the use of φάρμακα δὲ καὶ μαγγανεύματα καὶ πόλεμον ἀπὸ γοήτων ἀνδρῶν,¹⁵⁶ his fears obsessed him and he “avoided all the books containing the works of the classics, and the writing and the composition of my orations, and my eloquence was undone”.¹⁵⁷ Thus his work suffered and his eloquence and orations, that is his public performance suffered. Considering such a scenario, it has been argued that orators performing poorly “continued to blame witchcraft for sudden lapses of memory and moments of inexplicable stage fright”.¹⁵⁸ In Libanius' case, in particular, the blaming of γοητεία is seen to have offered not only an explanation for his illness, with the dream being the first step towards self-healing, but also to have provided Libanius and his friends with a strategy for restoring his former personality with minimal damage to his image. This could be achieved because the γοητεία allegation presented an explanation not only accepted by the rhetor but also by his society.¹⁵⁹ If this were the case, it does offer an explanation for why Libanius insists on telling his audience that he and his friends were aware of who would have caused him such trouble. It also helps to explain why the orator devotes an entire speech addressing the affair and exonerating his own behaviour from any provocation (for the attack) and responsibility for its consequence.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Or. 1.243-244.

¹⁵⁶ Or. 1.245.

¹⁵⁷ φυγή μὲν ἀπὸ βιβλίων ἐν οἷς οἱ τῶν ἀρχαίων πόνοι, φυγή δὲ ἀπὸ γραφῆς τε καὶ ποιήσεως λόγων, κατελέλυτο δὲ τὸ λέγειν. (Or. 1.246).

¹⁵⁸ Faraone, “Agonistic Context,” 15.

¹⁵⁹ See Graf, “How to Cope,” 107.

¹⁶⁰ Or. 36 and Or. 1.

However, in adopting such a perspective it is important to recognise the concept of supernaturally-caused illness which allows for such a connection to be made.¹⁶¹ Thus, it is only upon the social understanding of illness, and the possible supernatural cause of it, that such ‘blaming of misfortune’ can be founded. Consider for instance the accusations made against Libanius in regard to the illness of a rival’s wife. This allegation is perceived as legitimate (regardless of whether the accused is found guilty or not) because society accepts that it is possible. Therefore it is probable that accusations provided a forum for the ‘blaming of misfortune’. This provocation alone, however, could not have instigated the flurry of accusations across Syria and Palestine.

It is here proposed that the belief in limited good and the concept of envy may also underlie sorcery accusations in the fourth century, assisting and complementing an understanding of the phenomenon. The prevalent concept of envy, and the related pervasive belief in the evil eye, appear throughout this study, and can be seen to have influenced not only the explanation for misfortune, but also an array of consequent behaviours.¹⁶² Considering this pervasive power of envy, it can be argued that the *γοητεία* accusations were a means by which people’s envy could directly, and often dramatically, affect other people’s fortunes. That envy was indeed a motivating factor behind some accusations can be seen in Libanius’ work, for the rhetor states: “thus it was by good fortune that I was not harmed by the fangs of envy, but passed this time in my usual congenial labours rather than in most unwelcome toils”.¹⁶³ On that occasion when he was wrongfully accused of conspiring with an astrologer against his accuser, the latter gathered up a gang, made up of schoolmasters and professors to support him, and Libanius writes that “chagrin, fear, and envy made them his accomplices – all these emotions in the case of the professors, envy in the case of the rest”.¹⁶⁴

Closely related to envy is the notion of limited good, a concept that also recurs throughout the thesis. It is limited good which can be seen to invoke envy, and

¹⁶¹ See further discussion of this in Chapter 8 (esp. 8.4).

¹⁶² See for example Chapter 7 regarding the evil eye as well as envy.

¹⁶³ τύχης τοίνυν ἀγαθῆς τὸ μὴ κακωθῆναι συκοφαντίας ὁδοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἡδίστοις τε καμάτοις καὶ εἰωθόσιν ἀντὶ τῶν οὐκ εἰωθότων διὰ τοῦδε ἐλθεῖν τοῦ χρόνου. (Or. 1.240).

¹⁶⁴ ἐποίει δὲ αὐτῷ τοὺς συνεργοὺς λύπη τε καὶ φόβος καὶ φθόνος· τοὺς μὲν σοφιστὰς πάντα, τοὺς ἄλλους δὲ τὸ φθονεῖν. (Or. 1.44).

competition, for it dictates that all things, tangible and intangible are finite and in limited supply, and thus one person's gain must necessarily mean another person's loss.¹⁶⁵ This does not on first encounter appear to be a motivating factor in the instances presented above, until honour and success are considered. As a pivotal social value and feature of Mediterranean societies, honour was highly valued, both for individual and familial identity and reputation, and the acquisition of it was solely determined by social perception of behaviour.¹⁶⁶ Thus: "Honour means the perception someone has of his or her own worth and an appreciation of how he or she is rated by a relevant social group."¹⁶⁷ As honour was also something in limited supply, enhancing honour could only be done at the expense of another.¹⁶⁸ If it is thus considered that honour is assigned by others, and if Libanius' situation is once more deliberated, it can be argued that with oratorical success Libanius accrued honour. In the world of the rhetor, success could fluctuate and the receipt of honour was completely reliant on public response and approval. It is noteworthy, then, that it is particularly at these successful moments that the rhetor also seemed the most susceptible to accusations. If the notion of limited good is now considered, Libanius at those favourable periods was acquiring this honour and public esteem at someone else's expense – and once lost, such an important asset was difficult to regain. Is it therefore not possible that in levelling an accusation of supernatural activity and manipulations at an individual, in this case Libanius, an envious rival was granted the opportunity to strip the target of such a valuable asset as honour, by tainting his reputation with the dishonourable accusation of shameful and deviant behaviour (treason or γοητεία)?

This assertion leads on to an interesting question: if honour had been lost, how could it be regained? Here again Libanius provides an example in his claim that γοητεία had been used against him. Indeed it can be argued that Libanius in so doing was able to restore in some measure his honour by associating his maladies and

¹⁶⁵ This is a concept which has been identified in modern eastern Mediterranean cultures, and which has been convincingly used in studies of the New Testament period. See Esler, *First Christians*, 35; also Chapter 7.

¹⁶⁶ Esler, *First Christians*, 29. Also Campell, "Honour and Shame," 773-774.

¹⁶⁷ Esler, *First Christians*, 25. Also Campell, "Honour and Shame," 773.

¹⁶⁸ Esler, *First Christians*, 27. Also Campell, "Honour and Shame," 773-774.

consequent behaviour (suffering orations and motivation) with supernatural causes which he would be helpless to withstand. Thus by associating behaviour with supernatural malevolence and misfortune an individual may have had a means for the retrieval of honour and the consequent recuperation of social standing.

Finally, in support of this argument concerning the influence of envy and limited good, attention remains with Libanius and the rhetor's lament for the *γοητεία* used against him, and his assertion of irreproachable conduct. That is, in one particular oration he addresses those issues which he perceived would have made him insulting or neglectful in some sense to all manner of people, such as commoners, senate members and pupils.¹⁶⁹ By pointing out proper behaviour, he makes a contrast with actions that would have been perceived as offensive or culpable in his social context. Rivalry is not stressed as a cause; instead Libanius stresses that he sought not to outshine his colleagues: "I mix willingly with everyone, and never claim to have some advantage over another teacher, I live with each one of them on a continually equal footing".¹⁷⁰ In doing this Libanius appears to be discounting his own success and, it can be argued, publicly pronouncing that any perception of his unequal receipt of success or honour was erroneous, and that he was therefore not a deserving target of anyone's envy. Within a social world-view that includes limited good, and the evil eye, such modest behaviour can be seen as an attempt to minimise perceptions of the unequal receipt of goods, thereby reducing the likelihood of envy-related misfortune, that is the evil eye.¹⁷¹

Thus envy and limited good help to explain why people valued their assets, tangible and other. Their honour, their good fortune, their success, were all vulnerable to the envy of others, the latter capable of producing misfortune in any number of ways. In the case of the accusations of the fourth century, it can be argued that the competitive and uncertain environment highlighted by Peter Brown provided a context in which

¹⁶⁹ Or. 36.

¹⁷⁰ ἀλλ' ἀναμίγνυμαι μὲν ἅπασιν ἐν οὐδενὶ πλεονεκτεῖν οὐδενὸς ἀξιῶν, ἀλλ' ἀπ' ἴσου τοῦ σχήματος συνδιατρίβων. (Or. 36.12).

¹⁷¹ See parallels for Libanius' behaviour in an Indian community in which members of the same caste seek not to appear to surpass publicly those on the same social level (D.F. Pocock, "The Evil Eye – Envy and Greed Among the Patidar of Central Gujerat," in A. Dundes [ed.], *The Evil Eye. A Casebook*, Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press [1992: 201-210] 204). See also Chapter 7.

these vulnerable assets of honour and good fortune were increasingly threatened, and the allegations of 'sorcery' and other supernatural manipulations provided an opportunity to affect, beneficially or maliciously, those valuable social assets.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has considered a diverse range of material including the curse tablets and hagiographical accounts presented in the first section of the discussion and the comparatively high-profile sorcery accusations presented in the second section.

In the initial discussion on the involvement of curses and holy men in relation to livelihood, it is proposed that the notion of limited good, combined with an agonistic context, as well as honour and shame could be seen as influential in the use of both defensive and aggressive supernatural measures. Hence it is argued that the evidence discussed involved the use of assertive supernatural activities in order to achieve some form of 'equity' within agonistic contexts.

In regard to the sorcery accusations that occurred in both Syria and Palestine, it is proposed that a number of factors could be considered as evident motivators, namely honour, the notion of limited good, envy, and the pervasive belief in supernatural potency. It is argued that the γοητεία accusations were a means by which people's envy could directly, and often dramatically, affect other people's fortunes, within a context of social change and a cultural framework that harboured the concepts of limited good, and honour.

DEMANDING DESIRE
RITUALS OF LOVE AND LUST

6.1 Introduction

Lotions, potions, spells, curses, and charms for love and desire had a long history in the Greco-Roman world. The extant material and literary evidence for these passionate practices is abundant and widespread. As a proportion of extant curse tablets alone, those dealing with ἔρως account for one quarter of the total tablets published.¹ The evidence for both fourth-century Syria and Palestine, however, is limited to hagiographical accounts and an Aramaic amulet. The lack of material evidence is somewhat puzzling given both the popularity of the amatory practices across the Mediterranean, as well as the claim that the aphrodisiac-type curse, for instance, emerges in North Africa and Syria in the second century CE and is evident through to the fourth century CE.² Nevertheless the material which we do have does allow for some speculation to be made on love practices involving the supernatural in the fourth century.

Theodoret's Syrian accounts of Aphrahat and Macedonius are the first to be presented. The Palestinian evidence follows and includes a love amulet and Jerome's account of Hilarion's involvement in assisting the victim of a love spell. These accounts allow for an interesting discussion on the social context and influence of gender roles, family, as well as honour and shame in the use of love spells and potions in both regions. Consequent to these considerations, it is proposed that in the Palestinian and

¹ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 78.

² Faraone, "Agonistic Context," 15, include n.66.

Syrian evidence can be seen an attempt both to reassert social norms and to manipulate social expectations.

6.2 Syria

Theodoret of Cyrrhus provides a glimpse of erotic enchantment in Syria in two episodes recounted in his *Religious History*. As with his and other hagiographical reports utilised above, the evidence must be treated with care, taking into consideration the aims of the author and the narrative style of the genre. The two accounts discussed below present interesting scenarios, aspects of which can be corroborated to varying degrees by curses and spells from the late-antique Greco-Roman world, suggesting not only a degree of credulity in the concerns identified in the accounts, but also the narrator's awareness of both these concerns and contemporary supernatural methods utilised to deal with them.

The first account concerns the monk, Aphrahat, who reluctantly assists a woman whose husband has been bewitched (γοητικῆ) by a courtesan. Theodoret writes:

A woman of noble family, who shared the yoke of marriage with a debauched husband, came to this blessed man bewailing her misfortune. She told how her husband, in his attachment to a concubine, had been bewitched by some magical enchantment and become hostile towards the wife yoked to him in lawful wedlock. ... On this occasion taking pity on the woman as she implored loudly, he quenched the power of the magic by prayer, and blessing by divine invocation a flask of oil she had brought told her to anoint herself with it. Following these instructions, the woman transferred to herself her husband's love, and induced him to prefer the lawful bed to the unlawful one.³

It is possible that Theodoret only incorporated this story because it provided a novel context for another example of Aphrahat's superior supernal abilities. However, while the holy man's actions are seen as noteworthy, the nature of the problem (a

³ Γυνή τις τῶν εὐπατριδῶν ἀκολάστῳ ἀνδρὶ συνέλθουσα τὸν τοῦ γάμου ζυγὸν ἀφίκετο πρὸς τὸν μακάριον ἐκεῖνον ἄνθρωπον τὴν οἰκίαν κωκύουσα συμφορὰν. Ἔφασκε γὰρ τὸν ἄνδρα παλλακίδι προσκείμενον γοητικῆ τινὶ μαγγανείᾳ καταγεγοητεῦσθαι καὶ ἀπεχθάνεσθαι πρὸς αὐτὴν γάμου νόμῳ συνεζευγμένην. ... Τότε τοῖνον οἰκτεῖρας τὴν γυναῖκα ποτνωμένην, εὐχῆ τῆς γοητείας ἀμαυροῖ τὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ ἐλαίου ληκύθιον ὑπ' αὐτῆς προσενεχθὲν τῇ θεῖᾳ ἐπικλήσει καθαγιάσας χρίσασθαι τούτῳ προσέταξεν. Ταύτας ἡ γυνὴ πληρώσασα τὰς ὑποθήκας, μετέθηκεν εἰς ἑαυτὴν τὸν τοῦ ὁμοζύγου ἔρωτα καὶ πέπεικε προαιρεῖσθαι τῆς παρανόμου κοίτης τὴν ἔννομον. (HR, 8.13).

husband's bewitchment by a courtesan) receives no introduction by the author as an anomalous occurrence. Indeed there is a contemporary account of an actress in Antioch who was rumoured to have been so desired by men that she wrecked numerous households, using not just her beauty but γοητεία and φαρμάκκα.⁴ In addition, and most importantly, there are undeniable parallels between Theodoret's account and traditional Greco-Roman practices and spells. Indeed, it is these parallels which strongly suggest an element of social reality to Theodoret's report. Thus it can be argued that the occurrence of this story in the hagiography provides some indication of ἔρωσ practices in the ascetic's social context – namely fourth-century Antioch.⁵

The woman's concern for her husband's bewitchment by his courtesan is the first practice for which parallels can be found. There was a long tradition in the Greco-Roman world that placed the courtesan in the role of bewitcher. The instrument of control that was used by the concubine could involve such common aphrodisiacs as wine and herbal infusions, also associated with *magicae artes*.⁶ However, the degree of influence implied in the passage extends beyond the comparatively limited effect of the aphrodisiac and suggests the use of a love spell with binding properties.⁷ It is not possible to determine what type of enchantment the courtesan may have used in order to bewitch the man concerned, but, extant Greco-Roman evidence does provide some clues, particularly in the papyri and *defixiones*.⁸ Thus the courtesan may have been utilising techniques aimed at maintaining her lover's affections (rituals more commonly

⁴ John Chrysostom, *In Matt. hom.* 67/68; PG 58.636 48 - 637 22 (see also PG 51.216).

⁵ Aphrahat, was based in Antioch from 360/1 CE, and lived there for approximately fifty years (HR, Price trans., p.80).

⁶ C.A. Faraone, "Deianira's Mistake and the Demise of Heracles: Erotic Magic in Sophocles' *Trachinae*," *Helios* 21.2 (1994: 115-136) 124. The Talmud even suggests garlic as an aphrodisiac (*B. Kama* 82a). See T. Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets. Their Decipherment and Interpretation*, London: Routledge and Kegan (1966) 52.

⁷ Extant evidence would here suggest the use of some form of binding spell. Cf. Faraone, who argues in his study of classical Greek practices that such a spell-type forms one of the categories of ritual generally utilised by men to instil erotic passion in women, and that females generally used rituals seeking to maintain or increase affection in men (*Love Magic*, 27).

⁸ See Faraone, *Love Magic*, 149, n.64, in which he cites examples of *eros*-spells used by women (probably courtesans and prostitutes): PGM 15.1-21, 39.1-21, 48.1-20, 16.1-75, 19b.1-3; & 270, 271, DT.

associated with females), or alternatively overwhelming him with ἔρωτες (rituals generally associated with males, but not unknown to have been used by females).⁹

The source of the wife's concern for the courtesan's hold over her husband appears to be his consequent hostility towards her. There are, however, other factors which could have provoked her distress and recourse to action. Certainly the hostility of a husband provides adequate grounds for seeking an altered domestic situation, for such behaviour may have entailed physical or emotional abuse. Perhaps, though, jealousy motivated her response; she was after all his wife, and Theodoret does affirm that the holy man's beneficial assistance ensured that the husband's ἔρωτες was transferred to the wife, thereby asserting the desire of this attention. Yet in addition to these more immediately apparent motivations, it is also possible that the husband's increased hostility to the wife was threatening her position as the matron of the household.¹⁰ For centuries Roman law allowed a married man to have a concubine and even to live with her in a socially accepted relationship when not married. Divorcing a wife would not pose a serious problem for a man and it was common for men to divorce their wives after legitimate offspring had been produced in their union. While the latter scenario has not been alluded to in Theodoret's account, it is nevertheless worth considering that the courtesan posed a threat to the woman's marriage and that this could have provided considerable provocation for the woman to address her husband's 'bewitchment'.

The reason for the wife seeking assistance from a holy man in matters of matrimony is unclear though not implausible given the supernatural control exercised over the husband. Her choice, however, was a good one for Theodoret reports that the original spell of the courtesan was repelled through the simple act of prayer by Aphrahat. What is especially interesting about this account, however, is not only that a holy man had such abilities, for the supernal strengths of holy men are exhibited throughout this study, but that at the point of counteraction and success in this account

⁹ Faraone records that of 81 published erotic spells (ie. used to compel one person to have passion for another, or to come to another for sex), 69 had a female target (of which 2 were homoerotic), 9 had a male target (of which 1 was homoerotic), and 3 targeted either a male or a female (*Love Magic*, 43 n.9). See also Faraone, *Love Magic*, 149-159.

¹⁰ On the topic of a female feeling that her place in the household is threatened see Faraone's discussion on Deianira ("Deianira's Mistake," 120-122).

(that is, breaking the courtesan's bewitchment), Aphrahat takes his treatment one step further. Indeed, the holy man:

blessing by divine invocation a flask of oil she had brought told her to anoint herself with it. Following these instructions, the woman transferred to herself her husband's love, and induced him to prefer the lawful bed to the unlawful one.¹¹

It is intriguing that Aphrahat not only repelled the concubine's spell, but also provided the woman with a lotion of her own, a lotion for which parallels existed in the traditional *philia* potions used to maintain or increase affection in a spouse or lover.¹²

Thus the hagiographer is utilising contemporary discourse on supernatural love rituals, thereby placing the holy man in a role rivalling that of the traditional practitioner. This portrayal allows for the promotion of Christian power in an aspect of life which, given LiDonnici's recent arguments regarding the elite users of love spells, was particularly relevant to the aristocratic patrons of the holy man.¹³ It will furthermore be argued below that this short account has deliberately narrated the holy man's involvement, not that he might be seen as a 'love practitioner' as such, but in order to support a contemporary, emerging Christian construction of marriage and adultery.

One final point on this passage concerns the role of the male victim. In this scenario, the husband is seen only as the pawn between two women, indeed a victim of their supernatural methods. He appears to have no control over his passions and affections, and this impotence is actually maintained through the holy man's assistance. Indeed even his display of hostility towards his wife is portrayed as the result of the courtesan's bewitchment. Such a description of the man may have been used by the

¹¹ ἐλαίου ληκύθιον ὑπ' αὐτῆς προσενεχθὲν τῇ θείᾳ ἐπικλήσει καθαγιάσας χρίσασθαι τούτῳ προσέταξεν. Ταύτας ἢ γυνὴ πληρώσασα τὰς ὑποθήκας, μετέθηκεν εἰς ἑαυτὴν τὸν τοῦ ὁμοζύγου ἔρωτα καὶ πέπεικε προαιρεῖσθαι τῆς παρανόμου κοίτης τὴν ἔννομον. (HR, 8.13).

¹² Faraone proposes that *philia* practices sought to induce affection rather than the desire induced by ἔρωτος spells. See Faraone, *Love Magic*, 29. For a discussion of *philia* see *ibid.* pp.27, 96, 120. Aphrahat's potion was to have a similar effect to the Kestos, a charm which could "enhance the attractiveness of the female wearer, diminish marital strife, or control and subdue an angry or hostile husband" (C.A. Faraone, "Sex and Power: Male-targeting aphrodisiacs in the Greek magic tradition," *Helios* 19:1/2 [1992:92-101] 92-93).

¹³ For a discussion on the elite users of love spells etc. see L. LiDonnici, "Burning for It: Erotic Spells for Fever and Compulsion in the Ancient Mediterranean World," *GRBS* 39 (1998) 63-98. Regarding the wealthy and notable consulting and supporting the holy man, see Brown, "The Holy Man revisited," 372.

narrator merely as a means to highlight the manipulative methods of women. On the other hand, as will be discussed below (section 6.4), such a portrayal within the context of contemporary understanding of ἔρως and masculine control, represents this male as both unacceptably weak and vulnerable.

Theodoret's second account involves the holy man Macedonius, whom he knew personally, and who lived in the mountains outside Antioch. He reports that this holy man expelled a daimon possessing a girl who had been made crazy by a love spell cast on her by a young man. Recounting the affair, he writes:

A girl still kept at home was suddenly possessed by the action of an evil demon. Her father hastened to the godly man with loud and clamorous entreaty, begging that his daughter be cured. Having prayed, he ordered the demon to depart from the girl immediately. He replied that he had not entered her willingly but under the compulsion of magic spells; he even told the name of the man who had compelled him, and revealed that love was the cause of the enchantment.

On hearing this, the father did not contain the on-rush of his anger or wait for his child's cure, but repairing to the official over the chief officials, presiding over several provinces, he brought a charge against the man and related the crime. On appearing before the court, the man denied the charge and called it a false accusation. The father, having no other witness to call except the demon who had served the magic, begged the judge to hasten to the man of God and receive the evidence of the demon. ... Under the pressure of the greatest duress, the demon pointed out the man who had compelled him by magical charms and also the maidservant who had administered the potion to the girl. ... the man of God ordered him to keep silence and to depart somewhere far from the girl and from the city. As if obeying an enactment of the Master, he did what was ordered and rushed away.

Macedonius rescued the girl from her frenzy, and:

also rescued the wretch from the charge and prevented the judge's sentence of death, saying it was not right to inflict the death penalty on the evidence provided by the demon, but rather to grant him the preservation earned by repentance.¹⁴

¹⁴ Κόρης δέ τις ἐτι θαλαμειομένης καὶ πονηροῦ δαίμονος ἐξαπιναίως δεξαμένης ἐνέργειαν, ἔδραμεν ὁ πατήρ πρὸς τὸν θεῖον ἄνθρωπον, ἀντιβोलῶν καὶ ποτνιῶμενος καὶ τυχεῖν ἰάσεως παρακαλῶν τὸ θυγάτριον. Ὁ δὲ προσευξάμενος ἐκέλευσεν ἀπαλλαγῆναι τῆς κόρης παραυτικά τὸν δαίμονα. Ὁ δὲ ἔφασκε μὴ ἐκὼν ὑπεισδύναι, ἀλλὰ μαγγανείᾳ βιασθῆναι γοητευτικῇ· ἔλεγε δὲ καὶ τὴν τοῦ βιασαμένου προσηγορίαν καὶ ἔρωτα εἶναι τὴν τῆς γοητείας αἰτίαν.

Ἄλλὰ τούτων ἀκούσας οὐκ ἤνεγκεν ὁ πατήρ τὴν τοῦ θυμοῦ προσβολὴν οὐδὲ τὴν τῆς παιδὸς ἀνέμεινε θεραπείαν, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῶν μειζόνων ἀρχόντων καταλαβὼν ἄρχοντα τῶν πλειόνων ἐθνῶν προστατεύοντα, γράφεται τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ διηγείται τὸ δρᾶμα. Ὁ δὲ ἀγώγιμος γεγωνῶς ἠρνεῖτο καὶ συκοφαντίαν ὠνόμαζε τὴν γραφὴν. Ὁ δὲ μάρτυρα ἐκάλει οὐχ ἕτερον, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆ γοητεία διακονήσαντα δαίμονα καὶ τὸν δικαστὴν ἰκέτευε παρὰ τὸν θεῖον ἐκείνον ἄνθρωπον δραμεῖν καὶ τὴν τοῦ δαίμονος δέξασθαι μαρτυρίαν. ... Ὁ δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς μεγίστης ἀνάγκης ὠθούμενος καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ὑπεδείκνυ τὸν ταῖς γοητευτικαῖς ᾠδαῖς βιασάμενον καὶ τὴν παιδίσκην δι' ἧς ὁ κυκεῶν ἐκείνος προσηνέχθη τῆ κόρη. ... σιγὴν

Theodoret here presents Macedonius as a supernatural adept, displaying his superior powers of control over daimones. Indeed in curing the afflicted girl, Macedonius proved able to communicate with, command, expel, and exile the daimonic. And once again the author seems to have drawn upon contemporary understanding of practice and belief in his presentation of the holy man and his abilities. As such, several interesting observations can be drawn from this account relating both to the use of supernatural love rituals for which contemporary parallels can be found, and to possible avenues for legal prosecutions in relation to their use, in which motivation, and execution, appear to differ significantly from the trials discussed in the previous chapter.

Let us begin with the startling similarities between this account and the erotic binding spells, *defixiones* and *agoge*.¹⁵ The first information revealed to the audience is that a girl still living at home was suddenly possessed by a daimon. However, this daimonic attack is not recognised as ἔρωσ, until the daimon itself revealed what had compelled it to assault the girl. What is thus apparent from this detail is that the victim had assumed some behaviour deemed as reflective of daimonically possessed behaviour, and that this action or ailment could also be readily perceived to be a symptom of love enchantment. This then allows for some speculation both on the nature of the victim's ailment and on the method used by the protagonist to inflict it. In order to do this, a slight excursion must be made into the antique concept of ἔρωσ and its association with disease, pain, fever, and madness. Winkler writes of ἔρωσ: "the core experience represented in erotic literature is that of powerful involuntary attraction, felt as an invasion and described in a pathology of physical and mental disturbance".¹⁶

ἄγειν ἐκέλευσεν ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος καὶ παραυτικά πόρρω που καὶ τῆς κόρης καὶ τοῦ ἄστεως γενέσθαι. Ὁ δὲ ὡς δεσποτικῶς πειθόμενος νόμῳ τὸ κελευσθὲν ἐποίησε καὶ εὐθὺς ἐδραπέτευεν.

... καὶ τὸν δειλαιὸν ἐκεῖνον ἐξήρπασε τῆς γραφῆς καὶ τοῦ δικαστοῦ τὴν θανατηφόρον ἐκώλυσε ψῆφον, οὐχ ὅσιον εἶναι φήσας τοῖς δι' αὐτοῦ γενομένοις ἐλέγχοις ἐπιτεθῆναι σφαγὴν ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τὴν διὰ μετανοίας αὐτῶ σωτηρίαν χορηγηθῆναι. (HR, 13.10-12).

¹⁵ *Defixiones* (καταδεσμοί) refer to binding spells which seek to bind the victim in some way. *Agogai* are spells which often have the same characteristics, but which also seek to lead the victim back to the spell's instigator. Most late-antique erotic spells are *agogai*.

¹⁶ Winkler, "Constraints of Eros," 223. Also Faraone, *Love Magic*, 43-47; and M.S. Cyrino, *In Pandora's Jar. Lovesickness in Early Greek Poetry*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America (1995) 1-3, 165-

This dramatic notion of ἔρωσ was not, however, merely a literary device. Indeed the affliction of ἔρωσ was treated as a serious topic of medical debate.¹⁷ Recognised as an illness with both physical symptoms and social ramifications,¹⁸ it was relatively easily discerned and diagnosed, but not so easily remedied.¹⁹

It is thus proposed here that the girl has been struck by ἔρωσ, for the latter is seen as an invasion of a person, which produces physical and mental symptoms, and the victim in Theodoret’s scenario has both been invaded – she is daimonically-possessed – and has displayed apparent physical or mental symptoms, indeed a ‘frenzy’ (μανία), that led others to the conclusion that she was possessed.²⁰ There are also distinct similarities between the victim’s ailment and the daimon’s information and extant evidence for Greco-Roman erotic supernatural practices. Furthermore, despite popular literary portrayals,²¹ evidence shows that in the majority of instances females were actually the victims (not instigators) of ἔρωσ rituals, these methods usually being employed by males who sought to instil erotic passion in the women.²² The female victim in Theodoret’s account exhibits the symptoms sought by erotic spells of the period: for example, the desire to make the victim go ‘mad’ with desire (ἔρωτι μανικῶ,²³ “seize Euphemia and drive her to me, to me Theon, loving with mad desire”²⁴) or to be frenzied (“in fear, seeing phantoms, sleepless because of her passion for me and her love for me”²⁵). The objectives of many of the spell formulae include

166.

¹⁷ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 44; see also LiDonnici, “Burning for It,” 74-75.

¹⁸ LiDonnici discusses control of ἔρωσ for social standing: “Burning for It,” 74-75, 87-89.

¹⁹ Winkler, *The Constraints of Eros*, 222-223; also LiDonnici, “Burning for It”.

²⁰ Theod., HR, 13.12.

²¹ Consider for instance, Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*).

²² Faraone, *Love Magic*, 29; and see this chapter n.9.

²³ σιτ `κουμ αιουσω ιηση ιηω υο ιεω αιηου ευ ιση ια ω αειια ιωα ιηω ηα ιαω ωαι. ἀξιῶ καὶ παρακαλῶ τὴν δοίναμήν σου καὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν σου ηκισαεου ασωρ ασκατανφιρι σετωνεκοιι, ἄξον Τερμοῦτιν τὴν ἔτεκεν Σοφία, Ζοήλ, τῶ ἔτεκεν Δροσερ, ἔρωτι μανικῶ καὶ ἀκαταπαύστῶ, ἀφ ᾿Θ’ ἀρτω, ἦδη, ταχύ. (no. 41, SM, 129-131 [unknown provenance, dated III-IV CE]).

²⁴ συνλάβετε Εὐφημίαν καὶ ἄξατέ μοι αὐτήν, ἐμοὶ Θεώνι, φιλοῦσαν ἔρωτι μανιώδη. (l.43, no.45, SM, 162-173 [Provenance North of Assuit, dated V CE]).

²⁵ φοβουμένη, φανταζομένη, ἀγρυπνοῦσα ἐπὶ τῶ ἔρωτί μου | καὶ τῆ ἐμοῦ φίλια, τοῦ δεῖνα, ἦκοι κηκῶ (PGM 7.888-889). Translation of PGM here and throughout the thesis based on Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*. For these symptoms as frenzy see Winkler, “Constraints of Desire,” 87.

burning organs of the victim, which have been interpreted to represent inflaming the victim with desire.²⁶ Thus the spell-caster intends for the victim to be in a frenzy, a frenzy of ἔρωσ.

Theodoret even narrates how the frenzy came to possess the girl. The daimon was compelled by a man μαγγανεία βιασθῆναι γοητευτικῇ and ἔρωτα εἶναι τῆν τῆς γοητείας αἰτίαν. The manner in which the spell was effected was through charms that compelled the daimon, and a potion administered to the victim by a maidservant.²⁷ Contemporary prescriptions provide parallels for such use of a potion as an accompaniment to an erotic spell.²⁸ Furthermore Ammianus Marcellinus makes mention of the ‘old lady’ who supplies love potions to people.²⁹ Thus it is quite credible that Theodoret was describing a known supernatural method for instilling desire in a female.

A significant part of the action of this love drama revolves around the legal action taken by the female victim’s father. The account suggests that accusations of erotic supernatural practice were admissible within Syrian law courts in the fourth century, and also suggests that either local laws banned erotic supernatural attacks, or that the local courts worked with the Roman laws of the period (which, as seen in Chapter 5, could be enforced to prosecute supernatural activities).³⁰ The *Codex*

²⁶ For example: “remain in her heart and burn her guts, her breast, her liver, / her breath, her bones, her marrow, until she comes to me NN, loving me, and until she fulfils all my wishes ... As I burn you up and you are potent, so burn the brain of her, NN, whom I love. Inflammate her and turn her guts inside out, suck out her blood drop by drop, until she comes to me, NN, whose mother is NN.” (καὶ ἔμμενον αὐτῆς ἰ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ καῦσον ἰ αὐτῆς τὰ σπλάγχνα, τὸ στήθος, τὸ ἥπαρ, ἢ τὸ πνεῦμα, τὰ ὀστέα, τοὺς μυελούς, ἰ ἔως ἔλθῃ πρὸς ἐμέ, τὸν δεῖνα, φιλοῦσά με καὶ ποιήσῃ πάντα τὰ θελήματά μου ... ὡς ἰ ἐγὼ σε κατακάω καὶ δυνατῆ εἶ, ἰ οὕτω ἦς φιλῶ, τῆς δεῖνα, κατάκαυσον τὸν ἐγκέφαλον, ἔκκαυσον ἰ καὶ ἐκστρεψον αὐτῆς τὰ σπλάγγχνα, ἔκσταξον αὐτῆς τὸ αἷμα, ἰ ἔως ἔλθῃ πρὸς ἐμέ, τὸν δεῖνα τῆς δεῖνα. //1525-1545, PGM 4.1496-1549). On the intention of ‘heating and burning’ to incite desire see LiDonnici, “Burning for It”.

²⁷ Ο δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς μεγίστης ἀνάγκης ὠθούμενος καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ὑπεδείκνυ τὸν ταῖς γοητευτικαῖς ῥηταῖς βιασάμενον καὶ τὴν παιδίσκην δι’ ἧς ὁ κυκεῶν ἐκεῖνος προσηνέχθη τῇ κόρη.

²⁸ For example: “So now [I too (?)] invoke you today, I, N. son of N., over this wine that is in my hand, in order to give it to N., that she may drink from it, and a pleasant desire may arise within her toward me, like an angel of god, and she {drink} obey me...” (no.78 ACM). See also PDM 14.428-50 & 14.636-69.

²⁹ *Res Gestae*, 29.2.3.

³⁰ While the Roman law codes were known throughout the empire, local laws were often allowed to operate as the predominant legal code. See, for instance, on Palestine, Johnson, *Civilizations of the Holy Land*, 146.

Theodosianus places restrictions on the use of supernatural love practices in an early fourth-century edict, declaring that:

the science of those men who are equipped with magic arts and who are revealed to have worked against the safety of men or to have turned virtuous minds to lust shall be punished and deservedly avenged by the most severe laws.³¹

Theodoret relates that the victim's father, upon hearing that the daimon was brought upon the girl by a spell inspired by love, immediately brought a charge against the perpetrator.³² Furthermore Theodoret is careful to point out that this charge was brought to the ear of a very high official in the region, and the case was admitted into the court. And, as if by the letter of the law prescribed by the *Codex Theodosianus*, the sentence which could have been applied in Theodoret's account was death. Yet, despite the pursuit of the case in court, the inability to provide any proof to rebut the accused's declaration that a false accusation had been brought against him appeared to jeopardise the father's prosecution. Evidence had to be provided in a tangible form. The judge was clearly reluctant to hear the evidence of the possessing daimon and, while he was eventually convinced to consider it, he would not do so within the space of the courtroom. By taking the case outside of the courtroom it can be argued that the judge had dismissed the formal hearing of the trial and would only deliberate on this supernatural evidence informally.³³ However, the daimon's implication of the man, as well as the maidservant who administered the potion (who must have been part of the prosecutor's household, given the proximity required to serve the victim with the potion), highlight the ultimate point of the trial – to make public, and punish, human crimes. That is, while belief in the supernatural is evident, the latter merely served as a tool for human machinations and was not ultimately to be held accountable for those actions.

A final point in relation to the trial concerns the ability and desire of the holy man to dismiss the case and see the instigator of the troubles and afflictions go free.

³¹ "Eorum est scientia punianda et severissimis merito legibus vindicanda, qui magicis adinti artibus aut contra hominum moliti salutem aut pudicos ad libidinem deflexisse animos deteguntur." (CT 9.16.3).

³² Possible reasons for his immediate and official actions are offered in the discussion below (6.4) and relate to concerns of bridal theft or unsanctioned matrimony, as well as family honour.

³³ The editor of Theodoret's HR includes a footnote proposing that by consenting to hear the daimon outside of the courtroom, the judge treated the evidence as judicially inadmissible (HR, p.109 n.8).

While his action seems a little baffling, it could simply be a narrative tool allowing for the incorporation of the Christian message of repentance. On the other hand, it will be argued below that the restoration of family honour and the sanctity of familial consent to marriage may have been a strong motivation for Macedonius' actions.

6.3 Palestine

The fourth-century Palestinian evidence includes an inscribed tablet and an account from Jerome regarding the ascetic Hilarion. There also exists an ἔρωσ spell prescription dated third to fourth century and assigned a provenance of either Egypt or Palestine by Gager.³⁴ However, given the ambiguity of the actual source of this spell, the *Sepher Ha-Razim*, it will not be included in this discussion. The reasons for the exclusion of the latter spell collection, which includes this respective spell text, are discussed in Chapter 10.

The extant curse from Palestine which is included is a pot sherd that was inscribed with Aramaic text before firing. The tablet comes from Horvat Rimon, half a kilometre south of Kibbutz Lahav and 13 km north of Beer-Sheba, and was discovered in excavations near the ancient synagogue.³⁵ It reads:

hr'wt 'tb'wt qwlhwn sptwn swsgr ... You ho[ly (and mighty)] angels [I adjure] you, just as [this sherd] [burns, so shall] burn the heart of R[...son/daughter of] [Mar]ian after me, I .. [.. and you should turn] [his/her heart and mi]nd and kidney, so [that she/he will do] my desire in this ... (*charaktêres*).³⁶

There was some discussion above of the form of the love-spell which most likely brought about the symptoms of the frenzied girl whom Macedonius assisted. This

³⁴ No. 31 in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 106; & SHR, 45-46.

³⁵ No. 26 in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 93-94; & no.10 in AMB, 84-89. Gager, *Curse Tablets*, and Naveh & Shaked suggest different dates for the amulet. Gager dates it 4th-5th century or possibly earlier, whereas Naveh et al. assign a slightly later date of 5th-6th century. I am not in a position to dispute either of the dates, so consider the tablet to belong somewhere between the fourth and sixth centuries, and as such it is an artefact which falls within the period of the study.

³⁶ No.10, AMB; tr. AMB, 84-89.

הראות אתבאות קולחון ספתון סוסגר אתון מלאכיה קד[ישיה (ותקיפיה)]
 [משבע אנה] יתבון במ[ה דיקד חספה] [הדין כן] יקוד לכה דר[... ברה/ברתה]
 [דמר] [יז] בתר [י] אנה [יז]... ותהפכו [לכה והו] [נה ו] כוליתה ו[יתעבד] ציבויני בהד [מוד]

inscribed pot sherd offers similar insight into the love-designs of spell casters. The form of this spell (a pot sherd) is, however, a little different to that of the *defixiones* inscribed and buried under people's doorsteps or disposed of in cemeteries or wells. Nevertheless this method of spell casting is prescribed in spell recipe collections such as the *Sword of Moses*, and in some of the texts of the Cairo Geniza.³⁷ In these documents can be found instructions for inscribing a spell on clay before throwing it in for firing, a method particularly associated with love charms.

Thus this sherd offers an example of an alternative method available for instilling desire in another person. Although the medium differs, the intentions of the text, as well as the narrative style, are extremely similar to contemporary *defixiones* and spell prescriptions.³⁸ The intention of burning the organs of the victim is seen as a means of inciting desire for the caster in the feelings and mind of the victim, as has been mentioned above.³⁹ Two of the more noticeable differences between the *defixiones*, Egyptian papyri, and this sherd relate to the language of the text, and to the invocation of angels as opposed to *daimones* or divinities.⁴⁰ Given, however, the eclectic nature of most texts and the inability to determine the religious affiliations of caster or target from the information provided in such a short inscription, these differences do not allow any cultural or religious inferences to be made.⁴¹ It can, however, be said, that the use of Aramaic might suggest the existence of a localised industry, which though drawing on wider tradition, as is represented in the parallels of formulas, allows for indigenous language (and possibly also practitioners) to be utilised. Unfortunately it is difficult to glean any further information from this artefact; even the gender of both the instigator and the target are unknown.

Providing more information than the pot sherd for the possible use of supernatural love practices in fourth-century Palestine is Jerome's account of Hilarion's role as 'love practitioner'. In a similar vein to Theodoret's hagiographical narrative

³⁷ For example *Sword of Moses*, 15:17-18 . See AMB, 88-89.

³⁸ See examples in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 78-115. On generic spell types see also Faraone, *Love Magic*, 5.

³⁹ Also LiDonnici, "Burning for It".

⁴⁰ On the invocation of angels in the text see AMB, 89.

⁴¹ Regarding the non-Jewish use of Hebrew in incantations and spells, see for instance Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 85.

Jerome tells of a youth in Gaza who:

was desperately in love with one of God's virgins. After he had tried again and again those touches, jests, nods, and whispers which so commonly lead to the destruction of virginity, but had made no progress by these means, he went to a magician at Memphis to whom he proposed to make known his wretched state, and then, fortified with his arts, to return to his assault upon the virgin.

The youth was instructed for a year and:

he came full of the lust which he had previously allowed his mind to entertain, and buried beneath the threshold of the girl's house certain magical formulae: and revolting figures engraven on a plate of Cyprian brass. Thereupon the maid began to show signs of insanity, to throw away the covering of her head, tear her hair, gnash her teeth, and loudly call the youth by name. Her intense affection had become a frenzy.

Her parents brought her to Hilarion, and:

No sooner was this done than the devil began to howl and confess. "I was compelled, I was carried off against my will. How happy I was when I used to beguile the men of Memphis in their dreams! What crosses, what torture I suffer! You force me to go out, and I am kept bound under the threshold. I cannot go out unless the young man who keeps me there lets me go." The old man answered, "Your strength must be great indeed, if a bit of thread and a plate can keep you bound. Tell me, how is it that you dared to enter into this maid who belongs to God?" "That I might preserve her as a virgin," said he. "You preserve her, betrayer of chastity! Why did you not rather enter into him who sent you?" "For what purpose," he answers, "should I enter into one who was in alliance with a comrade of my own, the demon of love?" But the saint would not command a search to be made for either the young man or the charms till the maiden had undergone a process of purgation, for fear that it might be thought that the demon had been released by means of incantations, or that he himself had attached credit to what he said. He declared that demons are deceitful and well versed in dissimulation, and sharply rebuked the virgin when she had recovered her health for having by her conduct given an opportunity for the demon to enter.⁴²

⁴² "De eodem Gazensis emporii oppido, virginem Dei vicinus juvenis deperibat. Qui cum frequenter tactu, jocis, nutibus, sibilis, et caeteris hujusmodi, quae solent moriturae virginitatis esse principia, nihil profecisset, perrexit Memphim, ut confesso vulnere suo, magicis artibus rediret armatus ad virginem. Igitur post annum doctus ab Aesculapii vatibus, non remediantis animas, sed perdentis, venit praesumptum animo stuprum gestiens, et subter limen domus puellae portenta quaedam verborum, et portentosas figuras sculptas in aeris Cyprii lamina defodit. Illico insanire virgo, et amictu capitis abjecto, rotare crinem, stridere dentibus, inclamare nomen adolescentis. Magnitudo quippe amoris se in furorem verterat. Perducta ergo a parentibus ad monasterium, seni traditur: ululante statim et confitente daemone, Vim sustinui, invitus abductus sum: quam bene Memphis somniis homines deludebam! O craces! o tormenta quae patior! Exire me cogis, et ligatus subter limen teneor. Non exeo, nisi me adolescens qui tenet, dimiserit. Tunc senex: Grandis, ait, fortitudo tua, qui licio et lamina strictus teneris. Dic, quare ausus es ingredi puellam Dei? Ut servarem, inquit, eam virginem. Tu servares, proditor castitatis? Cur non potius in eum qui te mittebat, es ingressus? Ut quid, respondit, intrarem in eum, qui habebat collegam meum amoris daemonem? Noluit autem Sanctus antequam purgaret virginem, vel adolcentem, vel signa jubere perquiri, ne aut solutus incantationibus recessisse daemon videretur, aut ipse sermoni ejus accommodasse fidem: asserens fallaces esse daemones, et ad simulandum esse callidos; et magis reddita sanitate increpuit virginem, cur fecisset talia, per quae daemon intrare potuisset." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 21; PL 23.39 7-40 7).

There is a variety of information which can be extracted from this passage concerning not only the use of supernatural passion practices, but also regarding the possible motivation for such action by the male protagonist, the reaction and perception of the victim, and the narrative's role in displacing and minimising traditional practices through a portrayal of Christian supremacy.

Jerome's text suggests a degree of familiarity by the author with the usual Greco-Roman supernatural ἔργως practices.⁴³ Whether this knowledge was shared by his audience is difficult to determine. Nevertheless Jerome's ability to relay an account utilising knowledge of supernatural training and ritual similar to that demonstrated in extant contemporary evidence is noteworthy. The author explains that the love-struck youth decided to go to a magician⁴⁴ in order to be 'fortified with his arts' (*magicis artibus armatus*) so as to be able to use these skills on the girl not returning his attentions. This information conforms to the traditional accounts that such skills could be taught and learnt over a period of time, and that such instruction could be gained in Egypt, even with the priests in Memphis.⁴⁵ While a knowledge of Egyptian magicians might represent popular understanding, Jerome demonstrates more detailed insight when he reveals aspects of ritual and practice. Firstly, he mentions the use of the plate of Cyprian brass inscribed with 'magical formula' and 'revolting figures'.⁴⁶ This reference bears a striking resemblance to the inscriptions found on *defixiones* which, though in most cases made of lead, are inscribed with spell formulae, and often accompanied by *voces magicae* as well as drawings of symbols or figures.⁴⁷ Secondly, Jerome writes of the plate being buried under the threshold. This information suggests that Jerome is certainly referring to a curse tablet, as these were frequently deposited under the threshold of the victim's home. Thirdly, the author makes reference to a thread bound to the plate which served to bind the daimon to the victim's threshold.

⁴³ Dukes argues that Jerome shows the close relationship between love and 'magic' that was probably accepted as a matter of course by his contemporaries (E.D. Dukes, *Magic and Witchcraft in the Dark Ages*, Lanham: University Press of America, Inc. [1996] 90).

⁴⁴ See PL note on this (PL 23.39).

⁴⁵ See Graf, "How to Cope," 94-95.

⁴⁶ "et subter limen domus puellae portenta quaedam verborum, et portentosas figuras sculptas in aeris Cyprii lamina defodit." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 21; PL 23.39 15-18).

⁴⁷ See various examples in Gager, *Curse Tablets*.

This suggests a variation on the practice of sealing the curse which is frequently associated with the lead tablets, although the latter were folded and pierced with a nail (the softness of the lead allowed for such flexibility). Finally, Jerome refers to the need to find the charms in order to disarm the spell. Once again this reference can be paralleled with other evidence suggesting the need to remove the detrimental objects in order to deactivate a binding spell.⁴⁸

Jerome's account also offers some insight into possible motivations for casting such a love spell. In this case we are told that the perpetrator is a youth. He makes all the regular advances and flirtations, and is unsuccessful in all his attempts. It appears that out of desire and the frustration of unrequited love he deliberately sets out to receive tuition from someone able to understand his predicament, and able to train him in a method enabling him to alter the situation to his advantage. Thus the youth is portrayed as a love-struck male, the victim of ἔρωσ, who is unable to win over the girl he desires and consequently resorts to more advanced methods to achieve his ends.

The portrayal of the object of the youth's affections is extremely interesting. This young woman is labelled as pure, mad, and blameworthy through the course of the account. Jerome begins by introducing the victim of the love spell as 'one of God's virgins'. Throughout the account there are several references to her relationship to God and to her chastity. Thus the image is projected of a virginal, chaste maiden, and one who is able to reject the repeated advances of an eager youth. However, we are also made privy to the presentation of the mad victim, the female frenzied with passion for the youth she had previously rejected. Indeed she shows signs of 'insanity', throwing away the covering of her head, tearing her hair, gnashing her teeth, and calling the youth by name. These images portray her as immodest (discarding her head-covering), bestial (gnashing of the teeth), and hysterical (tearing her hair like someone in mourning). The reason for her radical change is made clear; she is possessed as a result of the youth's supernatural machinations (and the similarities of her symptoms with contemporary erotic spells is noteworthy).⁴⁹ Thus she needs to be cleansed; the daimon in her must be

⁴⁸ Graf, "How to Cope," 94.

⁴⁹ In relation to the victim's symptoms and those sought by ἔρωσ spells see, for example, Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 78-115; as well as discussion above.

removed. She must be saved and her purity, her chastity, must be preserved, as Hilarion explains to the daimon: “that I might preserve her as a virgin”.⁵⁰ The virgin is threatened by a youth and saved by the old holy man. However, although she is clearly portrayed as blameless, her innocence in the matter is denied by the holy man. She is ultimately held responsible for her frenzied daimonic possession. Indeed it is her weakness and vulnerability that enabled the daimonic, immodest, threatening, and frenzied possession to affect her in the first place. So she is rebuked “for having by her conduct given an opportunity for the demon to enter”.⁵¹

A final point regarding Jerome’s account concerns his narrative style and intentions. There are noticeable similarities between his account of Hilarion and Theodoret’s record of Macedonius mentioned above. Both concern young women under the frenzied possession of love spells orchestrated by men who are unable to gain the girls’ attentions. In both cases the daimon is exorcised and there is some communication between the respective holy man and the intruding entity. This deliberation provides a generous amount of evidence regarding the perpetrators, while also demonstrating daimonic readiness to act upon the orders of the Christian ascetics. Furthermore in both cases the matter is brought to the attention of the holy men by concerned parents .

Yet in addition to these points, Jerome, like Theodoret is also promoting a Christian agenda. He is seeking to illustrate the supremacy of Christian power, such that his holy man, Hilarion, facetiously says to the daimon: “Your strength must be great indeed if a bit of thread and a plate can keep you bound”.⁵² He is mocking this traditional practice and, by demonstrating the holy man’s prowess in controlling and confronting the daimon, he is minimising its effectiveness. This is further highlighted by the dissociation of the ascetic from behaviours which seem to be aligned with those of the non-Christian practitioner. Hence Hilarion sought to dispel any idea that the daimon had been released by incantations and that he had given the daimon’s words any

⁵⁰ “Ut servarem, inquit, eam virginem.” (*Hilarion*, 21; PL 23.39 30).

⁵¹ “et magis reddita sanitate increpuit virginem, cur fecisset talia, per quae daemon intrare potuisset.” (*Hilarion*, 21; PL 23. 40 5-7).

⁵² “Grandis, ait, fortitudo tua, qui licio et lamina strictus teneris.” (*Hilarion*, 21; PL 23.39 28-29).

credence.

6.4 Engaging Enchantment

Having thus examined the extant evidence, the following section will consider the social beliefs and understandings which may have influenced both the use of love spells in fourth-century Syria and Palestine, and the social reaction to their use. In the course of this discussion issues regarding gender, social perceptions of behaviour, family, honour, and shame will be proposed as relevant social factors in the use of supernatural love practices.

The pot sherd from Palestine unfortunately does not lend itself to any significant discussion given the partial nature of the evidence it presents and the uncertainty concerning its dating. Of course, if it is fourth-century (rather than fifth or sixth), then it does support the idea presented by the hagiographies, in particular Jerome's account of the Gaza incident, that supernatural passion practices were indeed utilised at this time and that the hagiographers' narratives are informed by some knowledge of contemporary activities.

The discussion thus concerns the remaining evidence, the hagiographies of both Theodoret and Jerome. There are two forms of love-spell genre portrayed in this evidence. The first form is that portrayed in the first account presented above in which a courtesan and wife are the two figures to administer love potions to a man. The second form of ἔρωσις practice concerns the impassioned possession of two female victims of love spells cast by men as described by both hagiographers. Thus the two forms will be discussed separately, though there will be some overlap between the two regarding issues of gender and social behaviour.

Firstly, then, let us consider the role of women as the utilisers of love enchantments. The scenario which encapsulates this is the first hagiographical account discussed above – Theodoret's portrayal of the wife who seeks assistance from the holy man Aphrahat in order to reclaim her husband from the bewitchment of a courtesan.

This action by courtesans, it has been argued by Faraone, provides a means for placing them within the socially constructed role of the aggressive female, enabling the courtesan to act as a male would do in the arena of desire. That is, the socially constructed 'passive' female adopts the socially constructed role of the 'aggressive' male, and in so doing inverts the social norm.⁵³ It is evident from Theodoret's account that the wife is concerned that her husband has come under the influence of another woman's spell. That is, he is not in control of his own actions and desires. This victimisation of the male can be seen in much earlier Greek literary accounts of courtesans using male-targeting erotic practices associated with the supernatural. In such situations the erotic supernatural practice involves an "'unnatural' usurpation of male power", by taking control of the culturally conceived natural power of the masculine identity and passion.⁵⁴ However, in this situation, while obviously under the spell of his courtesan, the male victim has become hostile towards his wife. Perhaps the subjugation of his masculinity with his concubine has served to intensify his aggressive masculine role in his relationship with his wife, or perhaps the display of hostility to a female also serves to highlight his weakened masculine role.

Faraone's discussion of *philia* methods and their use amongst Greek literary and non-literary women has interesting parallels with the story related in Theodoret. With *philia* techniques, unlike ἔρωσις rituals utilising binding spells and *agoge*, images of madness, burning passion and torture are entirely absent; instead the results aimed for involve docility and amiability.⁵⁵ Faraone argues that within the Greek literary context:

In nearly all of these situations, the high social status and personal power of the person employing the aphrodisiac depends solely on the esteem and good will of the victim, usually a powerful king or his counterpart in the microcosm of the Greek family the head of the household. In each case the love potions are used by wives almost in a defensive way to prevent the eclipse of their personal influence with their husbands.⁵⁶

In Theodoret's account a woman is being treated with hostility by her husband. She seeks assistance to invalidate the spell she believes is being used against him, but she

⁵³ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 156-160.

⁵⁴ Faraone, "Sex and Power," 100. See also Graf regarding literary fantasies of male wariness of female attacks of magic threatening male autonomy in choosing a mating partner ("How to Cope," 96).

⁵⁵ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 96.

⁵⁶ Faraone, "Deianira's Mistake," 122.

also returns to him using a potion which fixes his attentions and affections on her. Thus, his hostility towards her diminishes and his affection for her increases. It can be argued that what we see here is the continuation of a long tradition of female association with aphrodisiac and *philia* practices in order to maintain or enhance relationships. The use of such techniques has been recorded in literature for centuries; in this case we see the same tradition caught within the new genre of hagiography.

The lot of the husband in this case is almost one of enervation. Indeed the husband seems to be the least in control of his own desires. The passivity of the male brought about by aphrodisiacs and erotic spells has been seen as a threat to male authority, as Greek male sexual identity was invariably linked to the man's ability to control his own sexual desire.⁵⁷ Actions which aimed at increasing masculine desire, unavoidably also weakened the self-control of males, effectively stripping victims of much of their maleness.⁵⁸ Certainly Theodoret's account gives no power to the male in this situation. He is effectively rendered impotent. It could be argued that by restoring the conjugal unit, the holy man had restored the man to his rightful place as head of the family, affirming him as a man who is no longer subject to the whims and controls of his powerful, spell-laden concubine. However, Aphrahat goes one step further and by providing the wife with oil for anointment ensures her husband's affections are directed towards her. By doing this, although the husband regains his role, he is again placed in a weakened and impotent position, this time under the control of his wife.

The holy man's involvement in this affair is a little puzzling. What was Theodoret trying to convey to his audience by including this love story in his collection? It is here proposed that, given the social context, the holy man may have been acting to restore a culturally constructed view of order. For centuries Roman law had allowed the taking of a concubine by a married man. However, laws in Rome in the fourth century suggest that a Christian element was being included in the laws on concubinage. The *Sententiae Pauli* II,20,1 decrees that a Roman could not be married and have a concubine at the same time. One of Constantine's laws (*Codex Justinianus*,

⁵⁷ See LiDonnici, "Burning for It," 74-75; also Faraone, "Deianira's Mistake," 115-116, 126.

⁵⁸ Faraone, "Deianira's Mistake," 126; also LiDonnici, "Burning for It," 76.

5.26.1.) introduced the prohibition which has consequently been considered to result from Christian influence in this period.⁵⁹ It can be argued that Aphrahat involved himself in assisting the woman and providing her with a love potion in order to ensure that the 'new order' of marriage and adultery should be enforced. Indeed Theodoret stresses that the husband is finally enticed away from the 'unlawful' bed and back into the 'lawful' one, thereby making a clear association of concubinage with an unacceptable, 'unlawful', relationship. Thus Theodoret in the telling of this story sought not only to illustrate the superior power of the holy man, but also to present the importance of the conjugal relationship. That is, it can be argued from the narrative that Theodoret sought to highlight the importance of familial stability and respectability, and to promote non-adulterous marriages in which concubinage was no longer acceptable. The story and Aphrahat's involvement appear to assist Theodoret in reinforcing this model of the family unit.

Yet what of Theodoret's and Jerome's accounts of the desperate males instilling frenzied passion and madness in the objects of their desire? These accounts differ considerably from that just discussed. These reports firstly introduce male perpetrators and female victims, and secondly the effect of these love spells is considerably different to the 'bewitchment' under which the husband above was held. Indeed here we have males seriously affecting the minds and bodies of females who have no established relationship with them. What is more, the victims' families take decisive and immediate action in rectifying the unsatisfactory situations.

The forms of love spell which the two respective males utilised have already been discussed. What is under consideration here is the motivation for resorting to enchantments and furthermore why these particularly aggressive supernatural forms were used. Why anyone would want the object of their desire to suffer madness and intense physical discomfort has prompted a number of theories by various scholars. The most prominent of these theories can be broadly categorised as: (1) lovesickness, (2) the transposition of desire, (3) social climbing and lovesickness, and (4) gender

⁵⁹ On concubinage and the law see A. Rousselle, *Porneia. On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, Basil Blackwell (1988) 80-85, esp. 96.

construction and marriage practices. While the physical limits of this study do not allow for a detailed examination of these various approaches, their main arguments can be briefly outlined.

The first classification of ‘lovesickness’ has been predominantly and persuasively presented by Winkler in his study on desire within the context of the social constructions of antiquity.⁶⁰ The approach involves the utilisation of anthropological and especially psychological methods in attempting to understand the ancient mindset, and proposes that the violence of language and gesture in many erotic spells is due to the projected intensity of the performer’s own sense of victimisation by a power he is helpless to control. Therefore the pain he wishes the victim to suffer is a reflection of his own suffering of ἔρωϝ. The actions serve as a last ditch effort and therapy to the love-struck perpetrator. Because of the cultural construction of ἔρωϝ (the intensity of which was discussed above), the control that is exercised by the agent represents a form of control over his own desperation, and may be an attempt to pass the infliction onto someone else. Alternatively, it is proposed that it might be healthy for a self-conceived victim of love to act out a scene of mastery and control to see just what the torments look like.⁶¹

In addition, Winkler argues that the *agoge* spells, which seek to lead a woman to a man, are usually aimed at women who are guarded and watched. In a world with a very strong honour and shame ethos, a woman who acts on her own sexual desires would bring shame with her actions. However, if the family can say that a daimon made her do it, they can minimise family shame. It is argued that the *agogai* spells are a discourse of female desire, and the social implications of this autonomous desire are alluded to in various texts which request the forgetfulness of parents and relatives, husbands and children.⁶²

Closely aligned with Winkler’s ideas is the idea of ‘burning’ presented by LiDonnici, in which the idea of the victim’s body burning represents the inflammation

⁶⁰ Winkler, “Constraints of Eros”.

⁶¹ Winkler, “Constraints of Eros,” esp. 226-230.

⁶² Winkler, “Constraints of Eros,” 233. Winkler cites the following examples: PGM 4.2757-60, 15.4, 19a.53, 61.29-30; DT 266, 268.

of desire in the body and mind of the victim. Inflicting fever is a means of restoring lost self-esteem, due to frustrated love, by placing a higher degree of desire in the victim than that felt by the protagonist (who thereby regains some self-control), or afflicting the victim to the point where the spell-caster is accepted as a lover. LiDonnici argues that both of these notions of reasserted control worked together.⁶³ As ἔρως was a negative force, knowledge of which could damage reputation and career, LiDonnici argues that the secret rituals of these spells could provide psychological benefits through the control of desire. However, she notes that this argument does not explain what spell-casters believed they would achieve, thus asserting that if self-worth included a measure on how one controlled desire, then there would have been few legitimate, socially sanctioned, methods to eliminate ἔρως. Hence when no legitimate means existed for addressing the issue, people went underground and utilised methods which were hidden, that is, 'magic'.⁶⁴ Cyrino's presentation of the poetic image of ἔρως supports LiDonnici's argument. Cyrino writes:

that the poetic image of the physical disease of love expanded so readily to include the ideas of mental disorder and erotic madness seems to derive from the archaic Greek conception of the organs of thoughts and emotion as corporeal entities: the palpitation of the heart easily becomes the more metaphorical heart-ache, which in turn translates into abstractions such as an ailing soul or a mind disturbed by erotic desire. One thing is clear in this equation: the return to health and sanity may only be possible through the fulfilment of shared eros.⁶⁵

The third interpretation of erotic spells and curses proposes that the imagery and desires of the spells represent social competition and love sickness. In this case, when the spells are seen within the general social context of competition, the erotic spell appears to be a way of obtaining a female of good standing, one who would not normally be accessible to a particular male.⁶⁶ This being the aim, it does explain why the spells generally seek a permanent union. Given the seclusion of females and the success, standing, and honour associated with a good marriage, this social ladder-climbing hypothesis seems to provide a good explanation for the desperation apparent

⁶³ LiDonnici, "Burning for It," 95-97.

⁶⁴ LiDonnici, "Burning for It," esp. 92-95.

⁶⁵ Cyrino, *In Pandora's Jar*, 168.

⁶⁶ Also, on men casting spells because of the marginalised position of women see Graf, "How to Cope," 95.

in the *agogai* and binding spells.⁶⁷ Here, however, the few spells made by women and the presence of a few homosexual spells question the role of erotic spells solely as a method in the struggle for position and social goods. Therefore, an element of ‘lovesickness’ is also admitted into this hypothesis, arguing that the spells could be used by an individual in an emotional crisis who is provoked by mad love for a person who seems out of reach.

Faraone suggests that the utilisation of both *philia* (seen in Theodoret’s earlier account) and ἔρωϛ spells allows us to see socially constructed gender (that is, not-biologically-defined gender) in the ancient world. It is argued that the erotic spells, such as the binding and *agoge* spells, seek to invert the ‘natural’ gender construction (passive female and aggressive male) by inflaming the naturally passive and mild female into a passionate individual (hence the use of fire imagery etc.). In essence, they masculinise the feminine. The few anomalous examples of female and homosexually commissioned binding spells serve to highlight how gender is socially constructed in the world of love ‘magic’.⁶⁸

This interpretation further argues that parallels can be drawn between the two types of supernatural love ritual and two types of Greek marriage – betrothal marriage and bridal theft/abduction marriage –⁶⁹, the crucial difference between these two forms of marriage being the public consent involved and the willingness of the bride. Faraone argues that the similarity of abduction marriages and *agoge* spells lies in such aspects as the violent imagery, the unwillingness of the victim, the lack of parental and public consent, as well as the use of transitory violence until the female is free for the man alone.⁷⁰ Faraone writes:

I seek to explain the violence of *agoge* magic not as some universally recognizable feature of a lovesick or jealous practitioner, but rather as a traditional and practical response to problems of access to women of marriageable age.⁷¹

⁶⁷ On the use of ‘marriage magic’ for attaining social position see Graf, “How to Cope,” 104.

⁶⁸ See discussion in Faraone, *Love Magic*, 161-165.

⁶⁹ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 78.

⁷⁰ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 79-80.

⁷¹ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 84.

Thus several alternative, though in many ways interrelated, theories have been proposed and utilised by scholars in understanding the phenomenon of love spells. Given the evidence presented for Syria and Palestine, it seems feasible to argue that all of these approaches to the material are applicable, especially if used in combination. For instance, the final two proposals which include social climbing, and the link of the erotic spells to the inaccessible victim, as well as the parallels which can be drawn between the *agoge* spells, in particular, and abduction marriages, can all be related to both Theodoret's and Jerome's accounts of the possessed girls. Likewise ideas of frustration and psychological torment suffered by the victim of ἔρωτος (the male) could inspire the use of 'burning' passion-rituals on the female. To this can also be added the concept of the female and her sexual shame, the vulnerability of which is highlighted through the use of the ἔρωτος spells – something which is seen in two of the hagiographical accounts above.

Let us begin by looking at the inaccessible spell-victim. In this instance there are two scenarios involving inaccessible females. As has already been outlined above, both the 'lovesickness' and 'lovesickness and social climbing' theories involve the protagonist's desire for the inaccessible female. In Theodoret's account, it is recorded that the girl is still kept at home. This suggests firstly that she is unmarried, and also that she is kept at home out of social contact as social etiquette ordains in this period. This being the case, it also suggests that the victim is not from the lower socio-economic class for whom such isolation may not have been possible. While her inaccessibility may provide some of the motive behind the supernatural, erotic attack, the father's actions suggest that there is a greater threat posed by the use of such a spell. It is here that Faraone's suggestion of bridal theft and its relation to ἔρωτος spells seems applicable. If, as Faraone suggests, parallels can be drawn between the violence of bridal theft and *agoge* spells,⁷² then perhaps we can go one step further and propose a link between the actual use of ἔρωτος spells and a real bride-abduction. That is, perhaps the father was wary that the abduction would follow. There is nothing apparent in

⁷² See below.

Theodoret's account to suggest this. Nevertheless, the impact that knowledge of the spell had on the father, and the spell-caster's apparent love for the girl, do allow for some speculation on this possibility. That is, the supposition can be made that the girl's father objected to the male suitor (hence his immediate reaction) and that the latter could therefore possibly attempt a union without familial consent.⁷³

Jerome's account of the female victim also alludes to her inaccessibility, while the reactions of the family and the holy man suggest that similar concerns to those just discussed are also relevant in this instance. This girl is a virgin of God – she is virginal and labelled as unapproachable – she is in effect portrayed as special, one whose honour must be preserved. It is this social presentation of the girl that the family and the holy man, Hilarion, wish to uphold. She is the ideal, a virgin, and to Hilarion, she is a sacred virgin. The youth is a threat to her honour, her female integrity, and her family's honour. Although his advances are rebuffed, he seeks alternative and more powerful means to win her over. The image presented by Jerome is of religious purity being overcome by daimonic powers.

The possible wedlock of a daughter to a suitor not approved of by the family was a serious issue in antiquity. The father not only had practical issues of inheritance, and the lack of control over finding a 'suitable' match for his daughter, but there was also the cultural taboo of shame against unsanctioned marriage. Faraone uses bridal theft as a model to explain the violence of the *agoge* spell as a necessary but transitory step in creating a new social alliance not altogether welcomed by a female's family.⁷⁴ Certainly in Theodoret's account the idea of the alliance is not welcome, and the contemporary threat of bridal-theft provides an applicable model.⁷⁵ A woman's status defines the status of the males related to her; as a result maintaining a female family

⁷³ On the need for a rejected male suitor to reclaim his honour, and abduction providing an effective method of doing so, see J. Evans-Grubbs, "Abduction Marriage in Antiquity: A law of Constantine (*CTh* IX.24.1) and its social context," *Journal of Roman Studies* 79 (1989: 59-83) 62.

⁷⁴ Faraone, *Love Magic*, 85.

⁷⁵ On the edict of Constantine, *CT* 9.24.1, relating to bridal-theft and the punishment of virtually all involved in an abduction including the victim and her family, see Evans-Grubbs, *Abduction Marriage in Antiquity*, esp. 59-61, 64-83. On the concept of abductions and individual, familial, and social shame see *ibid.*, 61-64.

member's honour is crucial to maintaining the father's.⁷⁶ Consider for instance Campbell's argument that

the law of reciprocity applies: when insulted or injured the man of honour must retaliate in at least equal measure if his personal prestige is to be upheld, and the man of honour is at his most sensitive when a woman from within the family group is in any way threatened.⁷⁷

The Mediterranean world in this period was ordered very much by public opinion and the honour and shame that accompanied it. In Jerome's account, the very identity of the female is constructed as that of a 'virgin of God'. The youth with his effective erotic spells threatens to pollute her integrity and ultimately that of her family. He threatens to make an unsanctioned union.

By bringing the matter to the attention of the courts in Theodoret's account, and thereby making it a public matter, the father possibly sought to restore any honour which had been lost, or alternatively to ensure that no shame could be brought upon his family.⁷⁸ This is not just an attack against the female victim, but against her family. The shame is a family shame, not an individual shame. The *Codex Theodosianus* supports this idea, for it is the codex itself which states that bad practices such as love spells can damage a person's safety and reputation.⁷⁹ This implies that turning another's mind to lust *magicae artes* would damage a victim's safety and reputation. Within a Mediterranean social context this can be extended to include the reputation of the victim's family.⁸⁰

The force of ἔρωϛ, which has been mentioned a number of times in this chapter, was uncontrollable and could have tremendous psychological and physical effects on an

⁷⁶ Winkler, "Constraints of Eros," 217.

⁷⁷ Campbell, "Honour and Shame," 773.

⁷⁸ Possibly also protecting his family from any possible prosecution in relation to abduction marriage. See CT 9.24.1, as well as Evans-Grubbs' discussion of the law (Evans-Grubbs, "Abduction Marriage in Antiquity").

⁷⁹ This is inferred from CT 9.16.3 which states: "Eorum est scientia punienda et severissimis merito legibus vindicanda, qui magicis adinti artibus aut contra hominum moliti salutem aut pudicos ad libidinem deflexisse animos detegentur." It also states that healing or acts to help rural districts are acceptable because "quibus non cuiusque salus aut existimatio laederetur, sed quorum proficerent actus".

⁸⁰ Campbell writes about the extremely protective attitude towards female relatives which develops as a consequence of an 'obsession with personal and family honour' which depends upon appearance and the acknowledgement of others ("Honour and Shame," 773.) Also regarding the linking of honour amongst family see Esler, *First Christians*, 31.

individual. Furthermore it imposed itself forcibly on an individual from an external position of power, and it was ἔρως that was utterly in control of the stricken individual's destiny.⁸¹ Hence it is necessary to take into account the male protagonists of the two ἔρως spells one final time. If the power of ἔρως is considered, then these males are in effect not to be seen as deliberately out to disrupt social order by instigating their devious supernatural behaviours. Indeed they could be regarded as the frustrated victims of ἔρως, powerless over their actions. If this ancient view of all-powerful and destructive ἔρως is here used to explain the actions of the youths, then it can be said that they appear to have a passive role of diminished responsibility (possibly a reason why they receive very little punishment in both hagiographical accounts). Furthermore, if the argument made above regarding unsanctioned matrimony and family honour is extended a little, this limited liability on the part of the youths, had their spells been successful and the holy men not interfered, may also have diminished some of the shame associated with their actions, and the consequent shame they cast on the girl and her family. That is, if an alternative outcome is considered (one of unsanctioned marriage, abduction or another scenario, with which a family must attempt to appear socially honourable), by saying 'ἔρως made me do it' the youth cannot be blamed. He is not responsible for his deviant behaviour. In such a scenario where the union is achieved (the spell is successful) the family can possibly maintain some respect by associating all the deviant action of spells and inflamed passions (by both the afflicted male and female) with the supernatural force of ἔρως.

Having thus considered the male protagonist as himself a poor suffering victim of ἔρως, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that the most immediate victims of the intense ἔρως spells are the inaccessible females. Although the men are the dominant players in these two accounts, the female victims also play a particular role. They, after all, are the ones who are daimonically possessed. They are the targets for men's desires and must be protected from any physical advances. Furthermore, if the male protagonist in each case was struck by the uncontrollable and devastating force of ἔρως, then it was

⁸¹ Cyrino, *In Pandora's Jar*, 2, 166.

not their female victims who were responsible for igniting their desire. Indeed both hagiographical accounts support such a notion by stressing the girls' inaccessibility and even disinterest, and as such they are dismissed as the causes of the desire. Thus there is a representation of innocence, an image of which the girls' families can be proud, an honourable picture.

In contrast to this notion of purity and honour, however, stands the portrayal of the frenzied girls, the possessed girls, whose behaviours, and their male associations, threaten the family unit. That their behaviours and the cause of them would threaten the family's reputation can be understood within the framework of sexuality in the Mediterranean, and the alignment of sexual shame with women. Thus women were to avoid provocative behaviour and protect their virginal reputations, as the hagiographical heroines and their authors did.⁸² Unfortunately failure to uphold this behaviour compromised the honour of all members of the family and could lead to the fall of the family's reputation.⁸³ The love-spell victims compromised their behaviour by falling subject to the erotic spells of their male admirers. Thus, given this social script it is hardly surprising that Jerome so overtly lays the shame and blame on the female victim by way of Hilarion's rebuke of the girl and her own weakness and vulnerability to the daimonic assault. Indeed in these accounts, and thus perhaps in fourth-century society, it is ultimately the female victims of love spells who are assigned the precarious roles that threaten family and male honour through their gendered responsibility to adhere to social expectations of appropriate and reputable behaviour.

Finally, a proposition is introduced, already alluded to, concerning a further motivation for the holy men's (or their hagiographers') involvement in these issues of unrequited and unsanctioned love. It has been argued above that the portrayal of Aphrahat's involvement in love practices could be seen as a means of presenting the restoration of the conjugal unit. Here it is proposed that Macedonius and Hilarion sought not to restore, but to *preserve* the integrity of the family unit and the sanctity of sanctioned marriage. Thus the erotic spells are thwarted and the girls are restored to

⁸² Campbell ("Honour and Shame," 774) refers to women's sexual shame as *dropi*.

⁸³ Based on Campbell's comments on modern Mediterranean societies ("Honour and Shame," 774).

their family unit. If this view is considered, then it can be said that Macedonius saved the accused youth from a charge being laid against him by the judge, because such action would be deemed unnecessary once the family's honour had been reinstated by the daimon's revelations and the family unit preserved (as the female was saved from an unsanctioned alliance).

6.5 Conclusion

Given the clear parallels between the hagiographical accounts presented above and the extant evidence of erotic spells, tablets, and papyri and other literary forms from the Greco-Roman world, the hagiographical accounts have been seen to represent identifiable scenarios, practices, and the concerns of the cultures and societies in which they were set. Thus the accounts as well as the extant Aramaic sherd from Palestine, allowed for the supposition that there was some utilisation of supernatural love rituals in both Syria and Palestine in the fourth century.

Through the discussion of these accounts it has been argued that social concerns for family unity, marriage, honour, and shame, are notions which can be seen as significant motivators in the scenarios of the supernatural love practices. These concerns, intertwined with social conceptions of sexuality and gender, created situations of frustrated desire and fevered passion, instigated by the powerful and destructive force of ἔρως, the eradication of which required serious supernatural assistance. Furthermore, given the nuances of the narratives in taking into consideration all those aspects of life, family, and society, with which the audience contended, it can be argued that in these hagiographical accounts the promotion of the ascetics' sensibilities to the concerns of their society provided an important discourse in which their hagiographers could best portray their relevance and prowess. As a consequence they provide a unique view into the possible social contexts of, and hence motivations for, and reactions to, the ἔρως rituals of fourth-century Syria and Palestine.

**THE APOTROPAIC
PROTECTING GOOD FORTUNE**

Οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ λέγεται καὶ τοῦτον τὸν πόλεμον ἐπιδείξει Κωνσταντίνῳ διὰ σημείων καὶ ὄνειράτων ὅσης θειόθεν ἠξίωτο προνοίας.¹

7.1 Introduction

May the angel, who has rescued me from all harm, bless them! May my name and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac live on through these boys! May they have many children and many descendents!

Genesis 48:16, an often recommended Jewish prophylactic against the evil eye, introduces us to the apotropaic realm of late antiquity.² Apotropaic devices of all forms, shapes, and sizes sought to influence supernatural forces so as to protect people, animals, and property from the attacks of evil influences. There were various methods of protection which ranged from personal amulets worn or carried on the body to inscriptions and decorations on private and public buildings.

Both the Syrian and the Palestinian evidence demonstrates that these regions' fourth-century residents also sought to protect themselves from the malevolent through a variety of means. These endeavours will be discussed shortly. Before embarking on this discussion, however, the most prominent and pervasive threat in the Greco-Roman world, the evil eye, will be introduced. Usually called *baskania* or *phthonos*, this belief

¹ “It is said that, during this war, Constantine perceived clearly, by means of signs and visions, that the special protection of Divine Providence had been extended to him.” (Sozomen, HE, 1.8.9).

² In the verse, Genesis 48:16, in the original Hebrew, ‘and let them grow into a multitude’ means literally ‘and let them multiply as fishes’. Schrire argues that because fish live and are unseen beneath the surface of the water, and are thus traditionally immune to the effects of the Evil Eye, this explains the use of the passage as protection against the evil eye. Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets*, 102.

prescribed that misfortune could result from envy.³ Thus those aspects of life which could induce envy were the most vulnerable, such as success, fame, fortune, beauty, pregnancy and youth.⁴ These were susceptible to the envy of humans or daimones, an envy which would result in an attack of misfortune. Heliodorus provides one perspective on how such an attack could occur, in his novel *Aethiopica*:

whenever anyone looks with envy upon beautiful objects, the ambient air becomes charged with a malignant quality, and that person's breath, laden with bitterness, blows hard upon the person near him. This breath, made up of the finest particles, penetrates to the very bones and marrow, and engenders in many cases the disease of envy, which has received the appropriate name of the influence of the evil eye.⁵

That envy posed some threat to individuals is a notion evident amongst intellectuals throughout late antiquity.⁶ Consider for instance the fourth-century bishop Basil of Caesarea who also reflects on this phenomenon and its perceived effect:

some think that envious persons bring bad luck merely by a glance, so that healthy persons in the full flower and vigour of their prime are made to pine away under their spell, suddenly losing all their plumpness which dwindles and wastes away under the gaze of the envious, as if washed away by a destructive flood.⁷

His contemporary John Chrysostom does not deny the power of envy, though he is reluctant to associate people's eyes with the power of envious harm.⁸ Regardless of its

³ Belief in the evil eye is almost universal. It can be traced throughout most periods of recorded history, and apart from variation in the forms of protection, it pays little heed to religious affiliations.

⁴ See also Dickie, "Fathers of the Church," 12,30.

⁵ ὥστε ὅπῳτ' ἂν σὺν φθόνῳ τις ἴδῃ τὰ καλὰ, τὸ περιέχον τε δυσμενοῦς ποιότητος ἀνέπλησε καὶ τὸ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ πνεῦμα πικρίας ἀνάμεστον εἰς τὸν πλησίον διερρίπισε, τὸ δὲ ἄτε λεπτομερές ἄχρις ἐπ' ὅστέα καὶ μυελούς αὐτοῦ εἰσδύεται καὶ νόσος ἐγένετο πολλοῖς ὁ φθόνος, οἰκείον ὄνομα βασκανίαν ἐπιδεξάμενος. *Les Éthiopiennes*, 3.7.3; tr. Lamb (Heliodorus, *Ethiopian Story*, tr. W. Lamb, London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. [1961] 75-6).

⁶ On the inability of the highly educated and sophisticated, particularly Christians, to dismiss ideas of envy lending malign power to eyes see Dickie, "Fathers of the Church," esp. 9.

⁷ τοὺς δὲ φθονερούς τινες οἶονται καὶ δι' ὀφθαλμῶν μόνων τὴν βλάβην ἐπιβάλλειν· ὥστε τὰ εὐεκτικὰ σώματα, καὶ ἐκ τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν ἀκμῆς εἰς τὴν ἄκραν ὥραν ὑπερανθήσαντα, τήκεσθαι παρ' αὐτῶν καταβασκαινόμενα, καὶ ὅλον ἀθρόως συναναιρεῖσθαι τὸν ὄγκον, οἷον ρεύματός τινος ὀλεθρίου ἐκ τῶν φθονερῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀπορρέοντος, καὶ λυμαινομένου καὶ διαφθείροντος. (Homily 11, "On Envy"; PG 31.380 28-35). Tr. M.M. Wagner in *The Fathers of The Church*, vol. 9, Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 1950.

⁸ For an in-depth discussion of the fourth-century church fathers' views on the evil eye and envy see Dickie, "Fathers of the Church". On John Chrysostom in particular, see Dickie, esp. 22-24. On the evil eye in the New Testament, see Yamauchi's interesting discussion on the evil eye and Galatians (E.M. Yamauchi, "Magic in the Biblical World," *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 [1983: 169-200] 36); and Elliot's discussion on the evil eye in Galatians (J.H. Elliott, "Paul, Galatians, and the Evil Eye," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17.4 [1990: 262-273] 263).

perceived method of attack, however, belief in the evil eye was widespread and, as will be seen, it also pervaded Palestinian and Syrian thinking.

Thus it is this notion of the evil eye that is central to much of the evidence discussed below. The apotropaic material is here presented in a similar format to previous chapters. The evidence from both regions is first presented with some preliminary discussion. As a slight deviation from previous chapters, an intermediate section will follow which will mention the protective practices usually believed, or assumed by scholars, to have existed in late antique Syria and Palestine, but for which no fourth-century evidence has been uncovered in the course of this study. This slight deviation is presented on account of the popular argument for the homogeneity of apotropaic practices,⁹ which suggests that other activities, apart from the extant evidence presented below, may have existed in these regions in the fourth century. Having examined the extant evidence, and also speculated on other possible methods, the discussion will then turn to consider the motivations for protective supernatural practices. It will be proposed in the course of this analysis that the utilisation of apotropaic protection was intrinsically linked to a cultural perception, and estimation, of good fortune and an appreciation that this ‘blessing’ was the most vulnerable to supernatural attack. Furthermore, it will be suggested that fortune was coveted and highly prized due to the notion of limited good, and that it was this underlying belief system and its relation to envy that led to the prevalent need for protection against malevolent supernatural harbingers of misfortune.

7.2 Syria

Libanius provides us with a glimpse at the consequences of certain behaviour and resultant envy. Consider for instance his words of condolence to a friend who had suffered a misfortune. The rhetor writes: “By rights, your whole household should be

⁹ For example, see J. Russell, “The Archaeological Context of magic in the early Byzantine Period,” in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic*, Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection (1995: 35-50) 36.

safe, with no shaft of Envy, either small or great, to attack you: the humanity you employed towards your subjects, the gods should employ towards you”.¹⁰ Thus it is apparent from Libanius’ comments that the perceived behaviour of Salustius was such that it could not attract envy, and therefore should not have attracted misfortune. In contrast Libanius feels that the praise given to three boys would put them at risk from the gaze of the evil eye.¹¹ Praise, it seems, invoked the attention of the malevolent force. Thus for Libanius envy (φθονος) and the behaviour which incited it did pose a threat to individuals. That he was aware of these factors in regard to his own behaviour is apparent from several references made in his orations in relation to the attitude of others to him or his work. Consider for instance the examples discussed in Chapter 5 when accusations were levelled against him by those whom he considered as envious. Consider alternatively his assertion in another oration of his own humble behaviour which could not attract the attention or scorn of others, arguably including envy.¹²

Libanius’ references to envy largely concern behaviour and its appropriate modification so as not to attract the attention of the evil eye and, thereby, misfortune. Yet, behaviour was not the sole option available to people in Syria hoping to protect themselves from the misfortune of envy; various devices were available to serve as deterrents. One instance is a fourth-century amulet from a tomb in Beirut. The lamella, a narrow strip of silver encased in a bronze tubular capsule, has its protective inscription written across the width of the silver.¹³ The text opens with an adjuration:

I adjure you the one above heaven, *Sabaôth*, the one who comes above the *Elaôth*; (by?) the one above the *Chthothai*. Protect Alexandra whom Zoê bore from every demon and from every compulsion of demons, and from demons and sorceries and binding-spells.¹⁴

The amulet then continues to call upon a series of angels.¹⁵ Finally it concludes:

¹⁰ "Ἐδει μὲν σοι τὸν οἶκον ἅπαντα εἶναι σῶν καὶ μήτε μικρὸν μήτε μείζον ἀπὸ τοῦ Φθόνου βέλος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἐλθεῖν, ἀλλ' ἦ σὺ κέχρησαι περὶ τοὺς ἀρχομένους φιλανθρωπία, ταύτη πρὸς σὲ τοὺς θεούς. (*Ep.* 127.1).

¹¹ *Ep.* 1403.1-2; See Dickie, "The Fathers of the Church," 13.

¹² See Chapter 5 (section 3.1).

¹³ Kotanksy gives the amulet considerable attention. For his valuable commentary see: amulet no.52 GMA, 270-300.

¹⁴ Ὁρκίζω σε τὸν ἐπάνω τ(οῦ) οὐρανοῦ Σαβαώθ τὸν ἐλθόν(τα) ἐπάνω τοῦ Ἐλαωθ τὸν ἐπάνω τοῦ Χθοθαί, διαφύλαξον Ἀλεξάνδραν ἣν ἔτεκεν Ζοή *vac.* ἀπὸ παντὸς δέμονος καὶ πάσης ἀνάγκης(ς) δεινόμενων καὶ ἀπὸ δεινόμενων καὶ φαρμάκων καὶ καταδέσμων. (*Il.* 1-13, no.52, GMA; tr. Kotanksy).

the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, protect Alexandra whom Zoê bore from demons and sorceries and dizziness and from all passion and from all frenzy. I adjure you by the living God in Zoar(abem) of the nomadic Zabadeans, the one who thunders and lightnings, *EBIEMATHALZERÔ*, a new staff (?), by the one who treads, by *THESTA*, by *EIBRADIBAS BARLIOIS EIPSATHAÔTHARIATH PHELCHAPHIAÔN* that all male <demons?> and frightening demons and all bindings-spells flee from Alexandra whom Zoê bore, to beneath the founts and the Abyss of *Mareôth*, lest you harm or defile her, or use magic drugs on her, either by a kiss, or from an embrace, or a greeting; either with food or drink; either in bed or intercourse; either by the (evil) eye or a piece of clothing; as she prays, either on the street or abroad; or while river-bathing or a bath. Holy and mighty and powerful names, protect Alexandra from every daimon, male and female, and from every disturbance of demons of the night and of the day. Deliver Alexandra whom Zoê bore, now, now; quickly quickly. One God and his Christ, help Alexandra. SSSS.¹⁶

The text of this amulet provides significant insight into the wide spectrum of protection and power that an amulet could offer. In this case Alexandra was to be protected from daimones of day and night, male or female, and so on. Furthermore, she was to be defended from any number of methods by which harm could be inflicted, such as daimones, καταδέσμοι, φάρμακα, food, an embrace, and the eye (ὄφθλαμός – most probably the evil eye).¹⁷ This was indeed an all-encompassing apotropaic amulet.

Yet, although this amulet seems to aim to protect Alexandra from many things, there is a notable concern with protecting her sexual honour. Note for instance, that the amulet is to protect her from passion (πάθους), frenzy (μανία), καταδέσμοι,

¹⁵ Kotansky has suggested that the long litany of angelic names given, identifying the heaven in which each rules and the realm of influence, appears to be a well-circulated and widely documented tractate which probably had an independent existence before it became part of this spell. The catalogue probably has Alexandrian Hellenistic Jewish community derivations. GMA, 270-3.

¹⁶ ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ ὁ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ ὁ θεὸς Ἰακώβ, διαφυλάξον· Ἀλεξάνδραν ἣν ἔτεκεν Ζοὴ ἀπὸ δαιμονίων καὶ φαρμάκων καὶ σκοτοδινίας καὶ ἀπὸ παντὸς πάθους καὶ ἀπὸ πάσης μανίας. ἐπί· ορκίζω σε τὸν ζῶντα θεὸν ἐν Ζαοροβὲμ νομάδων Ζαμάδων, τὸν ἀστράπτοντα καὶ βρόν· τοῦ· τα Εβιεμαθαλαζερῶ ῥάβδον καὶ νὸν τὸν πατήσαντα τὸν Θεστα, τὸν Ειβραθιβας βαρβλιοις εἰσαθαῶαθαριαθ ελχαφιαων ὄν πάντα τὰ ἀ(ρ)ρενικὰ καὶ πάντα τὰ φοβερά καταδέσματα, φύγετε ἀπὸ· Ἀλεξάνδρας ἣν ἔτεκεν Ζοὴ ὑποκάτω τῶν πηγῶν καὶ τῆς ἀβύσσου Μ[αρ]εώθ, ἵνα μὴ βλάβητε μήτε μολύνητε ἢ φαρμακώσητε αὐτήν· μήτε ἀπὸ φιλήματος μήτε ἀπὸ ἀσπασμοῦ μήτε ἀπὸ ἀπάντη·ς, μήτε ἐν βρώσ(ε)ι μήτε ἐν πόσει μήτε ἐπὶ κῦτης μήτε ἐν συνουσιασμῶ, μήτε ἀπὸ ὄφθλαμοῦ, μήτε τῶ ἱματίῳ, μή[τε] προσευχομένη·ν, μήτε ἐν ὄδῳ, μήτε ἐπὶ ξένης μήτε ἐν ποταμίῳ ἐμβάσι, μήτε ἐν βαλαν[ί]ῳ. Ἅγια καὶ εἰσχυρὰ καὶ δυνατὰ ὀνόματα, διαφυλάξατε Ἀλεξάνδραν ἀπὸ [π]αντὸς δαιμονίου ἀρενικοῦ καὶ θηλικ[οῦ], καὶ ἀπὸ πάσης ὀχλή[σε]ως δαιμόνων· νυκτηρίων καὶ ἡμερινῶν, ἀπαλά[ξε]τε Ἀλεξάνδραν ἣν ἔτε[κε]ν Ζοὴ, ἦδη, ἦδη, ταχύ, ταχύ. Εἰς Θεὸς καὶ Ὁριστὲ αὐτοῦ, βοήθῃ Ἀλεχάνδραν. S S S S (ll.71-121, Amulet 52, GMA; tr. Kotansky).

¹⁷ Kotansky translated it as evil eye.

defilement, and φάρμακα. These all seem to relate very strongly to sexual passion and more particularly the supernatural methods which relate to them, such as those which we have already come across in the previous chapter. Kotansky in his presentation of this amulet notes that it is not clear how “personalised” the charm really is in the sections which relate to Alexandra’s activities, or the procedures which threaten to malign her sexually, as the text in these instances seems to follow patterned formulas.¹⁸ Nevertheless it is worth considering this content a little further in order to gauge better the concerns and reasons for the inclusion of such passages and, given their formulaic nature, the concerns of the wider community also.

These passionate threats reflect the danger of uncontrollable and undesirable ἔρωσ posed by outsiders. For Alexandra to be assailed, for instance, by a binding spell (καταδέσμος) could render her struck by a passion for an individual undesirable to her or her family. Here the love spells discussed in Chapter 6 are directly relevant as they, it was argued, were a means for suitors to influence passions outside of familial sanction and control.¹⁹ Hence there could be some impetus to protect Alexandra from the undesirable behaviours associated with ἔρωσ spells and with the objectionable love match which they could force.

In addition, the καταδέσμοι and φάρμακα, as the amulet itself says, could ‘harm or defile her’ (ἵνα μὴ βλάπτητε μήτε μολύνητε ... αὐτήν). This they could do through a greeting, an embrace, a kiss, or even intercourse. If the social context of this tablet is considered, the position of the chaste or faithful female which set the standard role model is here epitomised in the negative behaviours from which Alexandra is to be protected. Such physical interaction and especially the intercourse, which given the context is arguably implied, would tarnish the reputation and social standing of any family, for it would be perceived as socially deviant behaviour, that is, conduct outside the bounds of socially accepted female behaviour. For a woman to be defiled would not just affect her honour, but also that of her family. Hence this amulet can be seen to seek to protect Alexandra from social dishonour or shame.

¹⁸ GMA, 270.

¹⁹ See Chapter 6, esp. 6.4 above.

This leads on to an interesting query regarding who might have commissioned the amulet and its inscription. The answer can only be a matter of speculation as the evidence does not allow clarity on this point; nevertheless it is worth noting that the aims of the amulet may reflect the concerns of its commissioner. It may have been Alexandra herself, a relative, or even a husband who sought out this formula for the amulet. All parties could have been equally concerned with maintaining Alexandra's honour and keeping her undefiled and unharmed.

One final point to be made about this amulet relates to the apparent vulnerability of the target. It seems Alexandra is vulnerable to the threat of daimones, spells, drugs, and the evil eye (ὄφθαλμός). Furthermore she is exposed when sleeping, eating, drinking, when looked at by others, and whenever she is outdoors, praying, bathing, travelling, or simply in the street. While the threat of eating and drinking is clear, as drugs can be administered in food and drink, the other activities seem less obvious at first glance. However, if we consider the public setting for many of these activities, the relevance of including them becomes more apparent. Public activities expose her to the envious looks of people, and to the lustful looks of men. Thus Alexandra is vulnerable to the machinations and feelings of others, including men. Interestingly this very vulnerability also highlights the paradoxical role of the female, as being both socially perceived as susceptible in public places to the scrutiny and opinions of her community, yet at the same time perceived as possessing a strength of beauty, fortune, and/or behaviour which could bring about the envy and/or lust of others.²⁰

The next relevant amulet seeks to protect a man named Thomas. This amulet is a fourth- or fifth-century Syrian silver phylactery, consisting of a tubular case worn as a pendant, inside of which was rolled an inscribed sheet of metal. The Greek inscription on the sheet begins with an invocation to thirty-six supernatural figures hailed as "holy, mighty and powerful".²¹ The forces are asked:

to preserve and protect from all witchcraft and sorcery, from curse tablets, from those who died an untimely death, from those who died violently and from every evil thing,

²⁰ Campbell, "Honour and Shame," 775.

²¹ The opening list of names and formulaic language of this phylactery are similar to certain curse tablets. Heintz, "Magic Tablets," 166.

the body, the soul and every limb of the body Thomas, whom Maxima bore, from this day forth through his entire time to come.²²

As with the Alexandra amulet, this phylactery seeks to protect Thomas from human machinations involving the supernatural, keeping him safe from sorcery and ‘witchcraft’, curse tablets, and the spirits of the untimely and/or violently dead.²³ This amulet, along with Alexandra’s, shows a definite awareness of the supernatural activities of other people. Indeed Heintz argues that:

Phylacteries such as Thomas’ forced magicians engaged in cursing operations to take countermeasures; they would include special clauses in their curse tablets urging the demon to break through the amuletic shield surrounding his target.²⁴

Hence what is seen in both examples is the need in fourth-century Syria to be protected from the harm caused by others. That others could be deleterious has been seen in the curse tablets and malevolent supernatural measures used against both Babylas and Libanius discussed in Chapter 5.

There is no apparent concern about possible ‘defilement’ in the amulet for Thomas. That a male might not be concerned about being attacked by a love spell reflects the trend of most ἔρωσις curse tablets, instigated as they are by males against females. However, perhaps the lack of concern also reflects the social perceptions of gendered sexuality, according to which female virtue is expected, but (except in ascetic circles) less emphasis or vigilance is placed on male activity.

In addition to this extant material evidence, John Chrysostom makes reference to the use of amulets in the fourth-century. For instance, the preacher speaks about people in Antioch “who use charms and amulets, and encircle their heads and feet with copper coins of Alexander of Macedon”.²⁵ These Alexander medallions are known to have been used in the Greco-Roman world as charms of good-fortune and protection.²⁶

²² Heintz, “Magic Tablets,” 166. I have been unable to obtain a copy of the Greek text.

²³ That is, those spirits who are most often called upon to act in curses through invocation and/or location.

²⁴ Heintz, “Magic Tablets,” 166.

²⁵ περὶ τῶν ἐπωδαῖς καὶ περιάπτοις κεχρημένων, καὶ νομίσματα χαλκᾶ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνοιο ταῖς κεφαλαῖς καὶ τοῖς ποσὶ περιδεσμοῦντων. (John Chrysostom, *Ad illuminandos catechesis* 2.5; PG 49.240. Translations of Chrysostom here and throughout the thesis are based on the *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* [<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>], unless otherwise cited). Many Alexander amulets have been found; see Wyss, “Johannes Chrysostomos,” 266.

²⁶ For the use of coins as apotropaic devices see H. Maguire, “Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 72.4 (1997) 1037-1054. On the popularity and potency of coins with a depiction of

For Chrysostom, however, the wearing of these amulets is not a praiseworthy action. Indeed he criticises people for placing hope in an image of a former Greek king.

Chrysostom also makes other more general references to people's use of amulets. In the same homily he berates his congregation thus:

Do you not only always have amulets with you, but incantations bringing drunken and half-witted old women into your house, and are you not ashamed, and do you not blush, after so great philosophy, to be terrified at such things?²⁷

Clearly John observed that people were usually wearing amulets and carrying them on, and even all over, their persons, for this was not to be the only occasion on which he dismissed the use of amulets.²⁸ Indeed it appears from Canon 36 of the council of Laodicea that the leaders of the wider church community, like John Chrysostom, were also keen to reduce the use of amulets.²⁹ What is striking about John's retort, however, is his disbelief that amulet-users are unashamed to fear such things now that they have heard the Christian message. At first there may be an inclination to think that John is dismissing the fear of the harmful spirits repelled by these practices. Yet, it becomes clear that his concern lies not with people's fear of daimones, but with the persistence of that fear despite the protection of the Christian God. Thus he urges them to say: "I leave your ranks, Satan, and your pomp, and your service, and I join the ranks of Christ. And never go forth without this word."³⁰ For John these words:

shall be a staff to you, this your armour, this an impregnable fortress, and accompany this word with the sign of the cross on your forehead. For thus not only a man who meets

Alexander the Great on them, see esp. p.1040. Regarding the potency of the image in late antiquity, and particularly its supposed popularity with charioteers, see also Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 178-182.

²⁷ Οὐ περίαπτα δὲ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπωδᾶς σαυτῶ περιάγεις, γράφδια μεθύοντα καὶ παραπαίοντα εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν σου εἰσάγων· καὶ οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ οὐδὲ ἐρυθριᾶς μετὰ τοσαύτην φιλοσοφίαν πρὸς ταῦτα ἐπτοημένος; (John Chrysostom, *Ad illuminandos Cat. 2*; PG 49.240 33-35). For further discussion on the 'old-women' see Chapter 8 (section 2).

²⁸ See also John Chrysostom, *Hom. 8 on Col.*, where those using amulets would retort that they did not constitute idolatry they were simply charms (ἐπωδῆ), PG 62.358. Also *Hom. 4 on 1 Cor.*, PG 61.38 14-20; and *Hom. 10 on 1 Tim.*, PG 62.552.

²⁹ This ruling prohibited the clergy from themselves providing amulets. It is unknown what form these amulets took – whether Christian or non-Christian – in their divine or religious appellations. They could quite possibly have been strictly Christian in form but still of a prophylactic medium considered illegitimate in the eastern church.

³⁰ Ἀποτάσσομαί σοι, Σατανᾶ, καὶ τῇ πομπῇ σου καὶ τῇ λατρείᾳ σου, καὶ συντάσσομαί σοι, Χριστέ· καὶ μηδέποτε χωρὶς τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης ἐξέλθῃς. (*Ad illuminandos Cat. 2*; PG 49.240 53-55).

you, but even the devil himself, will be unable to hurt you at all, when he sees you everywhere appearing with these weapons.³¹

John encourages the same action to be used for children to protect them from the evil eye and other dangers.³² As a representative of the Christian church he is promoting a stronger kind of protection, involving allegiance to the Christian God, the signing of the cross on the body, and the wearing of the cross as an amulet.³³

Protection through the signing of the cross on the forehead would presumably not have involved the marking of the face in a method leaving any visible trace. Rather the signing would have required only the gesticulation of the holy symbol over the brow, much as is the custom amongst various Christian followers today. Therefore thanks to John Chrysostom we have a record of an easy and affordable apotropaic practice which appealed for the protection of God with a simple symbolic act (and for which archaeology can offer us no physical trace).

It is clear that Chrysostom hopes to promote the use of the Christian symbol of the cross as the ultimate defence against the supernatural dangers that threaten people. He believes that his God is the only true means to combat evils. Wilken raises an interesting point in relation to John's promotion of the cross in the context of his homilies on the Judaizers. Wilken argues that for John Judaism posed a threat because it may have seemed more powerful to his congregation than Christianity and would thus have been able to swing people's allegiance. John's primary goal, in his view, was therefore to win back Judaizers to the Christian rites and to provide them with the power of the "sign of the cross" which could ward off daimones.³⁴ Wilken's point is a valid reminder of the need to consider the competitive supernatural context within which the Christian cross was operating. The mixed religious tones of many amulets and the various means which people used to protect themselves demonstrate that there

³¹ Καὶ μετὰ τοῦ ῥήματος τούτου καὶ τὸν σταυρὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου διατύπωσον· οὕτω γὰρ οὐ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἀπαντῶν, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ αὐτὸς ὁ διάβολος βλάψαι τι δυνήσεται, μετὰ τούτων σε δρῶν τῶν ὀπλῶν πανταχοῦ φαινόμενον. (John Chrysostom, *Ad illuminandos cat.* 2, PG 49.240 57-61). On the apotropaic features of the ritual language prescribed in baptismal instructions see Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*. This work is particularly addressed in Chapter 9.

³² *In ep 1 ad Cor. hom.* 12, PG 61.106.

³³ For other references to the use of the cross see: John Chrysostom, *Hom 8 in Col.*, PG 62.357-8; *Adv. Jud. Or.* 8, PG 48.940.

³⁴ Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 87-8.

was little hesitation amongst Syrians in utilising whichever methods would be thought most effective. This they did regardless of the religious affiliation of the individual and the religious or traditional source of the method.

In the protection of babies or children, in particular, a number of traditional or local practices were used in Syria. Amulets and bells were hung around babies for luck,³⁵ and inscriptions (γραμματαία) put on their head immediately after birth.³⁶ Children also had red ribbon tied around them.³⁷ In addition women and nurses marked children's faces with mud while bathing them in order to avert the evil eye, fascination, and envy (recall here that bathing was also an activity which made Alexandra vulnerable to daimonic harm), and ash and salt also held apotropaic powers.³⁸ For John Chrysostom the concern lay in this action compromising the sealing which was provided by the priest at the child's baptism.³⁹ This complaint suggests that though some people may have been following the encouragement of Chrysostom and were adopting Christian symbols and rituals as a form of protection, they were merely adding this to those methods which were already in use.

A method by which people also incorporated apotropaic power into their lives was through ligatures (*legaturae*), which were texts, such as gospel texts, written on paper and kept in a sack worn around the neck. Chrysostom was also against these:

Do you not see how women and little children suspend Gospels from their necks as a powerful amulet, and carry them about in all places wherever they go. Thus write the commands of the Gospel and its laws upon your mind. Here there is no need of gold or property, or of buying a book; but of the will only, and the affections of the soul awakened, and the Gospel will be your surer guardian, carrying it as you will then do, not outside, but treasured up within; yes, in the soul's secret chambers.⁴⁰

³⁵ John Chrysostom, *Hom. 12 in 1 Cor.*; PG 61.105. Also regarding bell ringing in order to keep away demons, as a practice transferred from traditional Greco-Roman ritual to Christian, see MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 143.

³⁶ John Chrysostom, *Comm. on Galatians*; PG 61.623.

³⁷ John Chrysostom, *Hom. 12 on 1 Cor.*; PG 61.105.

³⁸ *Hom. 12 on 1 Cor.*; PG 61.106 9-38. On salt, soot, and ash (σποδός και άσβόλη και άλες), see John Chrysostom, *On Col. hom. 8*; PG 62.359.

³⁹ Maguire, "Magic and Christian Image," 61. It should be noted here that the baptism of infants was probably minimal compared to adult and death-bed baptism.

⁴⁰ Ούχ όρας, πώς αί γυναίκες και τά μικρά παιδιά άντι φυλακής μεγάλης Εύαγγέλια έξαρτώσι του τραχήλου, και πανταχοϋ περιφέρουσιν, όπουπερ άν άπίωσιν; Σύ τά παραγγέλματα του Εύαγγελίου και τούς νόμους έγγραφόν σου τή διανοία. Ού χρεία χρυσίου και κτημάτιον ένταϋθα, οϋτε βιβλίον πρίασθαι, προαιρέσεως δέ μόνης και διαθέσεως ψυχής διεγηγεμένης, και άσφαλέστερον έξεις τό Εύαγγέλιον, ούκ έξωθεν

The power of the gospel is not here denied, merely the form in which it is used. As with the sign of the cross, John Chrysostom promotes an apotropaic power which is differentiating itself from traditional and popular methods, that is, he places it in intangible objects. He assigns power to a gesture (in the case of the cross) and to memory and learning in the case of gospel texts. By dismissing tangible forms of protection, John Chrysostom is asking people to shift their understanding and perception of how the daimonic could be communicated with, controlled, and repelled. Kalleres' argument regarding the exorcistic and apotropaic nature of the ritual language taught in baptismal training also supports this argument. In accordance with this proposal the arming of Christians with ritualised language provided them with an effective form of protection from the daimonic (as well as a method for expelling it; see Chapter 9).⁴¹

Another form of Christian protection, apparently sanctioned, was also available to Syrians through the holy person. Even while alive the holy man, as Brown argues, “was supposed to replace the prophylactic spell to which anyone could have access; his blessing made amulets unnecessary”.⁴² Theodoret provides a personal account, commenting on how the holy man James provided him with considerable protection. He tells how an old cloak of James' which lay under his head acted as a strong defence for him.⁴³ Indeed James provided him with such protection that he writes:

They tried to make war invisibly by using magic spells and having recourse to the cooperation of evil daimons. Once by night there came a wicked daimon, who exclaimed in Syriac, ‘Why, Theodoret, do you make war on Marcion? Why on earth have you joined battle with him? What harm has he ever done to you? End the war, stop your hostility, or you will learn by experience how good it is to stay quiet. Know well that I would long ago have pierced you through, if I had not seen the choir of the martyrs with James protecting you.’⁴⁴

περιφέρειον, ἀλλ' ἔνδον αὐτὸ τοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀποτιθέμενος ταμείois. (John Chrysostom, *De statuis hom.* 19; PG 49.196 37-46.

⁴¹ Kalleres provides a strong argument for the potency of ritual language in emerging Christian baptismal discourse. (See Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, esp. Introduction & Chapters 1-3, which relate to John Chrysostom).

⁴² Brown, “The Holy man in late antiquity,” 100.

⁴³ HR, 21.10.

⁴⁴ Καὶ γοητευτικαῖς χρώμενοι μαγγανείαις καὶ δαίμοσι πονηροῖς συνεργοῖς κεχρημένοι ἀοράτως πολεμεῖν ἐπειρῶντο. Καὶ ποτε νύκτωρ ἦκέ τις βοῶν ἀλιτήριος δαίμων καὶ τῆ σῦρα κεχρημένος φωνῆ· « Τί πολεμεῖς, ὁ δεῖνα, Μαρκίῳνι ; Τί δῆποτε δὲ τὴν πρὸς τοῦτον

This saintly power could extend to protect an entire community,⁴⁵ in life and even in death. It is not surprising then, given the power it represented, to read of the frenzy that could surround the acquisition of a holy relic. Theodoret records how at Abraham's death people had to be deterred through violence.⁴⁶ Indeed relics and the buildings that housed them offered a tangible, sanctioned, means of protecting people against evil – a measure even accepted by John Chrysostom.⁴⁷

Concerns for protection from malevolent forces also extended to the defence of property. For instance, various symbols served prophylactic roles on mosaics in private and public buildings in order to protect those residing within them. These images found on fourth-century Syrian mosaics⁴⁸ included sandals,⁴⁹ lions, and peacocks.⁵⁰ In addition to these images, patterns of knots are also attributed an apotropaic quality,⁵¹ such as the

ἀναδέδεξαι μάχην ; Τί σοι λυπηρὸν εἰργάσατο πῶποτε ; Λῦσον τὸν πόλεμον, κατὰπαυσον τὴν δυσμένειαν ἢ τῇ πείρᾳ μαθήσῃ ὅσον ἀγαθὸν ἡσυχία. Εὖ ἴσθι γὰρ ὡς πάλαι ἄν σε κατηκόντισα, εἰ μὴ τὸν τῶν μαρτύρων χορὸν σὺν Ἰακώβῳ φρουροῦντά σε ἐώρων ». (HR, 21.15).

⁴⁵ For instance Symeon the Stylite's protection of an entire community early in the following century. (Theodoret, HR, 26.28).

⁴⁶ Theodoret, HR, 17.10.

⁴⁷ J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, & B. Dehandschutter, *'Let Us Die That We May Live'. Greek homilies on Christian martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria, c.AD350-AD450*, London & New York: Routledge (2003) 127-128.

⁴⁸ Levi (D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Vol. 1, Princeton: Princeton University Press, London: Oxford University Press, & The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff [1947] 321-323) mentions a mosaic with nine peacocks spreading their tails, arranged in an arch, and each under an arch in the narthex of a church in Nikopolis. (See also K.M.D Dunabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Earlier Antiochene examples include the second-century evil eye mosaic in the aptly named House of the Evil Eye in the village of Jekmejah south-west of Antioch (Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, 28-34). This mosaic depicts the evil eye being attacked by a sword or spear and a trident, as well as a snake, scorpion, centipede, a raven who pecks it, a barking dog that bounds against it, and a panther that rushes upon it. These representations are also accompanied by an ithyphallic dwarf (or goblin) holding rods, and the inscription ΚΑΙ ΣΥ (*ibid.*, 32-34; and see also Heintz, "Magic Tablets," 163). Underneath this panel is an earlier mosaic depicting a mythological scene of Heracles which Levi identifies as also apotropaic in purpose, on account of the qualities of the god, and the prophylactic characters of, and association with, the snake and the ithyphallic and deformed goblin (or dwarf) with the words ΚΑΙ ΣΥ (Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, 32-34).

⁴⁹ Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, 262-263.

⁵⁰ Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, 262-263, 321-323.

⁵¹ H. Maguire, "Garments pleasing to God: The Significance of Domestic Textile Designs in the Early Byzantine Period," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990: 215-224) 216.

Solomon knot which can be found in the centre of a fourth-century figural mosaic from Apamea.⁵²

Door lintels also protected homes from malevolent spirits entering them.⁵³ Prentice in his study of “magical formulae on door lintels” writes that the name of God and symbols and phrases containing the name of God or Christ were potent charms against evil in the East, and “that these were carved or scratched or painted everywhere, even on the interior walls of stables, wine-presses, and shops”, the most common location being the lintel or some part of the frame of a door or a window.⁵⁴ The situation

⁵² No. 175 in Dunabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, 169. For a diagram of the Solomon knot, see *ibid.* p.341.

⁵³ Downey and Prentice recorded several lintel inscriptions from Antioch, but their dating is either vague or concerned with a slightly later period (Downey’s seventeen Antiochene examples, given the context of the book, are possibly from the fourth century, however Prentice’s material begins with fifth-century inscriptions, and Downey depends largely on Prentice. See: Downey, *Antioch in the Age of Theodosius*, 133-134; and W.K. Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels of the Christian Period in Syria,” *American Journal of Archaeology* [Second Series. Journal of the Archaeological Institute of America] 10.2 [1906] 137-150). Downey thought many of his examples to be Antiochene declarations of Christian faith: ‘The Christian inscriptions were the open expression, in a world still partly pagan, of a deep and pervasive piety. Individually they were witness to the desire of their owners to try to remember God in all their activities.’ (Downey, *Antioch in the Age of Theodosius*, 134). One example is a quotation from the psalms, Κύριος φυλάξει τὴν εἴσοδόν σου καὶ τὴν ἔξοδον (‘The Lord shall guard your coming in and your going out.’ Ps. 70:8) which has also been identified as a cryptogram HNA on a Syrian church lintel (Prentice argues that the numerical values of the letters is 8051 which is the numerical value of the letters which compose this verse. See “Magical Formulae on Lintels,” 149). Yet despite Downey’s view, the tone of this quotation can be seen as protective. Indeed Prentice also argues for the apotropaic character of psalm-inscriptions, including this one (Downey, *Antioch in the Age of Theodosius*, 133; Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels,” 141-142, 149). Downey also identifies as a Christian religious declaration a similar inscription accompanied by crosses which reads: “Of this house the Lord shall guard the entrance and the exit; for the cross being set before, no malignant eye shall prevail against it”. (Downey, *Antioch in the Age of Theodosius*, 133). The reference to the malignant eye is a clear reference to the evil eye. Though the inhabitants may also have been Christian, the inscription alone is no clear indicator of their religious belief, only of their belief in the efficacy of Christian power to protect them and their abode.

⁵⁴ Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels,” 138. Common formulae on lintels in Syria (a practice also observed by the church [John Chrysostom, *On Matt. hom 54/55*, PG 58.537]) included: ἦεις θεος μονος (Prentice [“Magical Formulae on Lintels,” 139-40] suggests this formula has a Jewish origin subscribing to the commands of Deuteronomy 6.9.); κυρι βοήθι; ΧΜΓ (This is considered to mean Χ[ριστός], Μ[ιχαήλ], Γ[αβριήλ]; Χ[ριστός] Μ[αριάς] γ[ενηθείς]; or to represent some form of cryptogram. See Prentice, “Magical Formulae of Lintels,” [146-147], for discussion); ΙΧΘΥΣ (“fish” but also signifies Ἰησοῦς] Χ[ριστός], Θ[εοῦ] Υ[ιός], Σ[ωτήρ]); and the trisagion (“Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us”. On these formulae see Russell, “Archaeological Context of magic,” 38; and Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels,” esp.145-147). A particularly Syrian trait which Prentice points out is the *disk* (which could be circular, square, some were two squares crossed, and some hexagons or octagons), which formed a frame for all types of symbols and inscriptions, Christian, Jewish (it is possible that given their prevalence in spell types, the inscription of the names of archangels could also be identified as Jewish), or Greco-Roman (including the Christian χρ combination, ΑΩ, the name of

of these inscriptions was determined because: “as is well known, evil spirits, however ethereal, do not penetrate solid walls, but, like the rest of us, enter by the door or perhaps through the window.”⁵⁵ One inscription: Ἐν ἔτει ςψ ἐτελέσθη. ὑπ(ό)κιμε πρὸς εὐψυχίαν τῶν ἐνθάδε κατ[οικούντων],⁵⁶ has been found on a fourth-century broken lintel from ‘Odjeh. Prentice identifies it as a formula intended to avert evil and has argued that “the main purpose of both inscriptions and symbols was either to bring good luck or to avert evil”.⁵⁷ Downey also acknowledges the apotropaic purpose of the text and declares that this inscription demonstrates that “in spite of Christian teaching, the belief in the evil eye had not wholly disappeared”.⁵⁸ The question of whether contemporary Christian teaching even sought to dispel ideas on the evil eye is certainly not as apparent as Downey seems to believe,⁵⁹ nor is the apotropaic message in this inscription more lucid than in others which Downey dismisses. Thus the interpretation of such evidence is open to debate. On the contrary, given the social understanding of the supernatural and the malevolent threat of the evil eye, it seems reasonable to accept that inscriptions on doors, such as potent symbols and biblical passages, acted through their embedded meanings of supernatural potency to defend a property and its inhabitants from misfortune.

Objects used within the household could also hold apotropaic significance in fourth-century Syria. One instance is a silver mirror dated to the third-fourth century. This mirror has a handle soldered onto its back in the shape of a knot of Hercules.⁶⁰ This knot, like those found on mosaics, could have apotropaic powers.⁶¹ That protective

God, Christ, as well as Emmanuel or the name of archangels such as Michael and Gabriel; and non-Christian symbols: circles filled with curved lines raying from centres, and stars of five, six or eight points, possibly in imitation of the effective shapes of amulets. See Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels,” 138-9, 143-144).

⁵⁵ Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels,” 138.

⁵⁶ “In the year 706 (=394 AD). I am set for the peace of those that dwell here.” Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels,” 141.

⁵⁷ Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels,” 138.

⁵⁸ Downey, *Antioch in the Age of Theodosius*, 133.

⁵⁹ See for instance the introductory discussion of the evil eye belief above, and Chrysostom’s advice on Christian methods to deal with the threat, rather than dispel it. See also Dickie, “Fathers of the Church.”

⁶⁰ No. 118 in E.D. Maguire, H.P. Maguire, & M.J. Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House*, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press (1989) 194.

⁶¹ See Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, 3-4.

artefacts formed part of the household is also suggested by the material evidence from an early fourth-century family vault in Amman, which includes amongst its household equipment a phylactery tube, bronze bells and two gold plaques in the shape of the evil eye. The presence of the artefacts also suggests the acceptance of apotropaic devices as ordinary, everyday articles.⁶²

Fundamental to the existence of much of the Syrian population were crops, livestock,⁶³ and businesses,⁶⁴ valuable assets that were vulnerable to malevolent attack from the evil eye or malevolent spells.⁶⁵ One of the curses directed against Babylas the greengrocer, discussed in Chapter 5, is a case in point. Here it was evident that the caster of the curse hoped to harm Babylas' livestock. Thus part of Babylas' livelihood was threatened by the machinations of another individual(s). In the face of this Babylas would have required some form of apotropaic method to shield himself from such an attack. He might not have known of this particular curse used against him, but it is likely that he would have been aware that misfortune could approach, and would have

⁶² Russell, "Archaeological Context of Magic," 45. Evidence from other regions also suggests that terracottas provided protection for homes and streets, as did oil lamps. The use of images on such articles illustrates a need to protect oneself within the home and the town. In addition, grave stelae and the entrances to tombs are also provided with protection from the evil eye, suggesting that a fear of misfortune was a strong enough belief for people to consider protecting themselves at death. (For examples see: Dunabin et al., "Invidia Rumpantur Pectora," 21-2; Engemann, "Zur Verbreitung magischer Übelabwehr," 26, 29; Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 99).

⁶³ In the fourth century there was an unprecedented rise in the amount of small farmholds held throughout the province. This, in addition to the remaining *coloni* on large landholdings, as well as those living in small communities and villages dependent on nearby food provisions, meant that crops and livestock were particularly important. It has been argued that throughout the Roman world at this time the greatest threat to these fundamentals of survival was the unseen force of the evil eye, which could maim livestock and blight crops (Russell, "Archaeological Context of Magic," 37). Consequently herds and flocks were said to have had crosses marked on their heads in order to protect them from pests (MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 143).

⁶⁴ It is worth noting here Prentice's assertion that people also protected their shops with inscriptions. Indeed protection of a trading premises may also have been achieved through other means, as we have a reference to a Roman practice of placing an image of saint Symeon in front of the building in order to protect the business. Theodoret writes of the next century in relation to Symeon Stylites: "It is said that the man became so celebrated in the great city of Rome that at the entrance of all the workshops men have set up small representations of him, to provide thereby some protection and safety for themselves." (Φασί γὰρ οὕτως ἐν Ῥώμῃ τῇ μεγίστῃ πολυθρύλητον γενέσθαι τὸν ἄνδρα, ὡς ἐν ἅπασιν τοῖς τῶν ἐργαστηρίων προπυλαίοις εἰκόνας αὐτῶ βραχείας ἀναστηλῶσαι, φυλακὴν τινα σφίσι αὐτοῖς καὶ ἀσφάλειαν ἐντεῦθεν πορίζοντας. HR, 26.11).

⁶⁵ See Chapters 4 and 5.

taken appropriate action, possibly by such methods as already described above.⁶⁶ Relevant also is Theodoret's account of Aphrahat discussed in Chapter 5. In that instance it is reported that the ascetic Aphrahat protected a farmer's crop from an attack of locusts, a threat of potentially significant misfortune. The defensive measure required the farmer to line his borders with water that had been blessed by the holy man. This then acted as an impenetrable force protecting the man's crop.

7.3 Palestine

A fourth-century amulet introduces us to apotropaic activities in Palestine. This example from Caesareum reads:

(circum delineationem) ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ Ο ΝΙΚΩΝ ΤΑ ΚΑΚΑ
(In ipsa armilla) ΕΙΣ Ε[ΕΘΟΣ-----] ⁶⁷

'One god the one who conquers evils' is certainly a monotheistic declaration, which suggests a Jewish or Christian origin. However, this actually tells us very little about the possessor of the amulet, except that this one God, whether Christian or Jewish, was considered an effective force in conquering τὰ κακά. That these evils included the evil eye is suggested by the illustration which accompanies the inscription. The scene depicts a man on a horse who is spearing a low-lying enemy,⁶⁸ a popular image for averting the evil eye.⁶⁹ Thus the amulet was intended to protect the wearer from all forms of evil without any of the specifics, such as the wearer's name, appearing to be

⁶⁶ See also Heintz's argument for a package of products that included aggressive and defensive supernatural techniques ("Magic Tablets," 166-167). On the measures taken in the circus to protect vulnerable charioteers and their horses from malevolent supernatural attacks, see Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 174-195.

⁶⁷ Dated fourth-fifth centuries. SEG 18.625.

⁶⁸ SEG records: "Fragmentum armillae aeneae c.delineatione incisa equitis qui hostem iacentem hasta transfigit."

⁶⁹ Another popular iconographic form, the rider saint, is closely linked with the image of Solomon. This figure on horseback is generally depicted piercing an eye through with his spear, and would often be complemented by the motif of the 'much-suffering eye'. Some Syrian bronzes from the third century to Byzantine times have on their obverse the figure on horseback (Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 99).

included in the inscription. The amulet probably exemplifies a form commonly used, as any individual would have been able to purchase such a charm ready made.⁷⁰

In addition to this tangible example, Cyril of Jerusalem, much like John Chrysostom, takes time to denounce the use of amulets and encourage the use of Christian power, and in so doing affirms their use. Cyril is not merely concerned with the use of phylacteries though, and extends his condemnation to a wide range of supernatural activities. He advises his congregation not to follow such practices as omens, divination, or to use amulets, or charms written on leaves, μαγείας, or κακοτεχνίας, as such things are services of the devil.⁷¹ Cyril in his reference to amulets and charms, seems to be associating the use of a phylactery with sorceries (μαγείας) and other evil arts (κακοτεχνίας). While amulets and charms were used for many other purposes apart from protection, as already seen in the chapters above, another comment by Cyril does suggest that apotropaic devices were also included in his list of taboos, for he says that it is ‘Jesus Christ who is the charm able to scare evil spirits;’⁷² he provides the seal for the soul at which daimons tremble.⁷³ Thus the fourth-century bishop is discouraging traditional practices and promoting the adoption of Christian supernatural power, although the apotropaic method is a little ambiguous.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ A comparative example from Palestine is slightly later (it dates to the fifth-sixth century), but also demonstrates the same combination of references to God and to the targets of the amulet. This Jewish bronze Aramaic phylactery, however, achieves this in a lengthier and more specific manner. That is, it identifies the possessor of the amulet as the object of the protection: “A good amulet for Esther, daughter of Tettius”. It protects Esther by threatening evil forces with the awesome power of the God: “If only you will obey the Lord your God, if you will do what is right in his eyes, if you will listen to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the sufferings which I brought on the Egyptians; for I am the Lord, your healer.” Furthermore, while the former example encapsulated the target of the threat with its depiction of the holy rider, this amulet identifies the threats from which the amulet would protect Esther: “to save her from evil tormentors, from the evil eye, from spirits, from daimons, from night ghosts, from all evil tormentors, from the evil eye, from ..., from impure spirits.” (no. 127 in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 236; No. 13, AMB, 98-101). The amulet lists the evils and daimons, yet unlike the two Syrian examples above it makes no clearly identifiable reference to human-instigated curses and spells. Perhaps they are incorporated into all the forms evil spirits could take, including those directed by people; nevertheless it is a point worth noting.

⁷¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. hom. 1; Catecheses ad illuminandos 1-18*, PG 53.369-1060.

⁷² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. hom. 1*.

⁷³ ... σφράγιδα ἦν τρέμουσα δαίμονες. *Cat. hom. 17.35*. On the rite of the Seal see Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, 146-149.

⁷⁴ Kalleres discusses Cyril’s promotion of the potency of Christian ritual language in his baptismal training, particularly in relation to exorcising the daimonic from heretics. See *Exorcising the Devil*, Part II, pp.133-245.

Nevertheless it seems that Cyril, like John Chrysostom, is advocating the dismissal of traditional, tangible forms of protection. This is an idea also promoted by Jerome in his commentary on Matthew, in which he demonstrates a particularly negative view of phylacteries and *legaturae*.⁷⁵

Apart from corporeal devices and individual defences, as in Syria, property in Palestine also exhibited protective measures. For instance Palestinian buildings, particularly Jewish and Christian religious buildings, could be protected by mosaics. Though many of these mosaics have a distinctively religious design, there are several fourth-century examples, either in a single panel or accompanied by other illustrations, of figures or symbols with apparent apotropaic purposes, such as sandals, peacocks, lions, and different forms of knots.⁷⁶ Two examples are the floor of a cave at Beth Sahur which includes a Solomon's knot,⁷⁷ and an entrance mosaic to a monastery at Tell Basul depicting peacocks.⁷⁸ Another mosaic at this monastery has a clearly apotropaic purpose shown in the biblical inscriptions included in its design.⁷⁹ In a medallion within a square in the centre of a room Ps. 121:8 is presented: "The Lord will guard your coming in and going out, henceforth and forever",⁸⁰ and on the threshold of the room the extant section of an inscription stems from Ps. 118:20, reading: "This is the gate of the Lord which the righteous shall enter".⁸¹ These inscriptions bring to mind the biblical passages seen as apotropaic when inscribed on door lintels in Syria, presented above, and relate to the *Mezuza* discussed below. That these texts served an apotropaic function is probable considering both their prominent positioning, the one residing on the threshold, the other in the centre of the room, as well as their manifest messages of protection. That is, the one inscription asserts that all who read it will be protected in that space by God

⁷⁵ Jerome, *Comm. in Matt.*, 4.23; CChr 77, 211-12.

⁷⁶ Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, fig.103, pp.262-263, fig.135, pp.321-323.

⁷⁷ No. 22, "The Sacred Natural Cave", in R. & A. Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, (Bibliotheca Archaeologica, 6) Rome: <<L'Erma>> Di Bretschneider (1987) 24. Later example: no.19, *ibid.*, 21-23.

⁷⁸ No. 235, Ovadiah, *Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, 137-138.

⁷⁹ No. 235, Ovadiah, *Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, 138.

⁸⁰ Κ(ύριος) φ[υλάξει] τήν (ε)ἴσοδόν σου καὶ τήν ἔξο[δόν σου] ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν (καὶ) ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος. (Ovadiah, *Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, 138).

⁸¹ Αὕτη ἡ πύλη (τοῦ) Κυρίου, δί[κ(αιοι) εἰσελεύσ(οντα)ι] ἐν αὐτῇ. (Ovadiah, *Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, 138).

(and even upon leaving it), and the other ensures that no malevolent forces (that is, the unrighteous) shall even cross the threshold into the room.⁸²

Protection also extended to the security of individual households, which could even be defended by the pious resident virginal daughter of a Christian. Indeed the piety and chastity of the virgin was honoured to such a degree in many regions, including Jerusalem, that households allegedly began to encourage their daughters to follow this path.⁸³

It also seems likely that Palestinians, like their contemporary Syrian neighbours, felt the need to protect their animals or livestock. This is argued on the basis of Jerome's hagiographical account of Hilarion who exorcised animals.⁸⁴ The ascetic emphasised that animals, along with humans, were also subject to daimonic attack as they were prized and needed by people. Indeed it was their value to people that made them vulnerable to an assault. Thus it can be supposed that when taking into consideration that such daimonic threats to livestock existed, people would have taken some measures to protect their animals and incomes from such malevolent threats.

7.4 Ambiguous Evidence for a Broader Practice

Although specific fourth-century Syrian and Palestinian examples have been presented above, apotropaic practices are generally believed to have been generic in style and form and spread throughout the Greco-Roman world. Thus, for example, an homogeneity is identified in the iconography of evil eye protective devices, particularly in the regions of Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine.⁸⁵ Indeed across the eastern empire

⁸² There is also a possibly apotropaic fourth-century mosaic in a Samaritan synagogue at Sha'albim: Salbit which includes a Hebrew inscription of Exodus 15:18, "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever". (no. 213, Ovadiah, *Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, 126.) On biblical passages and their supernatural power, especially against the evil eye see Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets*, esp. 89, 91-92, 102. On the potency of Old Testament verses see J. Goldin, "The Magic of Magic," 124.

⁸³ See P. Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York: Columbia University Press, (1988) 259-284, esp. 263-265.

⁸⁴ The exorcisms are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.

⁸⁵ Russell, "Archaeological Context of Magic," 36.

there appear to have been a few popular types of amulet designs or inscriptions used for this purpose, such as: the seal of Solomon;⁸⁶ the much-suffering eye;⁸⁷ the rider saint;⁸⁸ the Alexander medallions;⁸⁹ formulaic phrases;⁹⁰ and representations of certain animals.⁹¹ While reference has been made in the discussion above to the Alexander medallions, as well as to the depiction of certain animals, the prevalence of the other types in the Greco-Roman world, and their absence from the extant evidence presented above, does warrant further consideration. It is possible that these styles were not evident in either Syria or Palestine in the fourth century and that arguments for homogeneity should be treated with caution. However, it seems more likely that limited extant evidence could be skewing the picture. This assertion is supported by the existence of two amulets, discussed below, which are both broadly dated and loosely assigned provenances, incorporating both the regions of Syria and Palestine and the fourth century. That is, they are both dated between the fourth and seventh centuries and assigned a provenance of Syria or Palestine, with neither of the regions isolated. These amulets, furthermore, display many of the popular iconographic traits just mentioned.

The first is a bronze, pear-shaped amulet, of which both sides are inscribed. The design on the obverse face, drawing on the popular theme of Solomon, shows a rider

⁸⁶ The Solomon gems usually involve Solomon depicted on horseback piercing an enemy (sometimes a female victim, possibly Lilith or a lion. See Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 210), or more simply involve the inscription of the text of the trisagion - σφραγίς <ο>λλομονος [ἐ]χί τευ βασκανίαν. (Russell, "The Evil Eye in Byzantine Society," 541.) A good example is a round terracotta mould decorated with a cross which displays a prostrate daimoness, a bounding lion, the Eye (evil), the trisagion as well as Solomon on horseback (Russell, "Evil Eye in Byzantine Society," 542-543. For an example from Syria, see SEG 7.232 (Gem: one side: Σο[λομῶν]; other: [σ]φρ[ι]α[γί]ς | [Θ]εοῦ).

⁸⁷ The assaults on the eye usually included: wounding from above by a spear, a trident, or by one or more daggers; an attack of animals such as dogs and lions; pecking by cranes and ibises; and stinging by scorpions and snakes (Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 97). This image sought to discourage daimons by illustrating the endless torture which would be suffered. Russell proposes that through such a depiction the evil power embodied in the eye is cancelled by the 'magical' effect of the suffering it undergoes from the various hostile forces depicted as attacking it (Russell, "Archaeological Context of Magic," 41-42).

⁸⁸ Already mentioned above. See also examples of the rider saint, or suffering eye, from Syria, in SEG 36.1313-1318. An example of the rider saint, SEG 35.1558, has an illustration on one side and an inscription on the other, reading: [Εἶς] Θεος ὁ νικῶν τὰ κα[κα].

⁸⁹ Mentioned below.

⁹⁰ See especially Bonner and his collection of Syrian, and Palestinian amulets (*Magical Amulets*, 208-228. On the use of a few words of a verse or using abbreviations see MSF, 23.

⁹¹ For instance, the representations of large birds, such as wading birds, as well as attacking snakes and other reptiles, were "widely accepted as symbols of the victory of good over evil of every kind." (Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 214.)

spearling a now unidentifiable figure which, given depictions on comparable amulets, was most likely a recumbent human figure or a lion. Above this image ΝΙΚΩΝ is inscribed. The reverse of the amulet is reminiscent of the image of the ‘much-suffering eye’. It shows the evil eye being attacked by a trident from above, and by a dagger or spear from either side. The indistinct forms of various harmful animals are attacking the eye from below (and could include any of the most familiar animals found on similar images, such as the lion, ibis, snake, scorpion, dog, or leopard). The words ΙΑΩCA / ΒΑΩΘ ΜΙΧ / ΑΗΛ ΒΟΗΘΙ “Jehovah, Sabaoth, Michael, help!” are inscribed above the illustration of the suffering eye.⁹²

The design on the obverse of the second bronze amulet is similar again to the seal of Solomon. It shows a rider holding a cross-headed spear with which he strikes a prostrate enemy (indicated by a few indistinct strokes). The reverse of the amulet bears the inscription Ο ΚΑΤΥΚ (for Ο ΚΑΤΟΙΚΩΝ), the first words of Psalm 91, a common apotropaic formula.⁹³ Thus both amulets utilise images and formulae to repel misfortune and, more particularly, the evil eye, from their wearers.

While these images and formulaic inscriptions appeared on amulets, they were also utilised on domestic textiles in many parts of the Greco-Roman world including Syria, as John Chrysostom alludes to the practice.⁹⁴ Clothing, like amulets, provided individuals with protection through the inclusion of words, symbolic motifs, or illustrations, most frequently placed in inconspicuous or concealed locations.⁹⁵

In addition to the apotropaic types just discussed, contemporary Talmudic prescriptions may also have been influential on the Jewish populations of both Syria and Palestine. In contrast to Christian teachings and texts, the Jewish *Sabbath* acknowledged amulets and drew a distinction between the acceptable use of amulets for curative purposes and the unacceptable use of those which had a prophylactic function

⁹² For a plate of the image and discussion of the inscription see Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, 216.

⁹³ For photographs of both sides of the amulets, as well as a description see Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers*, 217.

⁹⁴ See Maguire, “Magic and the Christian Image,” 61; and *ibid.*, “Garments pleasing to God,” 218, n.30.

⁹⁵ Maguire, “Magic and the Christian Image,” 63-64. The textile evidence which survives stems from Egypt due to its dry environment. However, it has been argued that this apotropaic practice was more widespread (for example, Maguire, “Garments pleasing to God,” 215-224).

or were aimed at the prevention of disease and, or, misfortune.⁹⁶ Whether the Jewish community abided by this prescription though, is impossible to determine. Yet given that texts on amulets and bowls (see Chapter 10) were often inscribed in Aramaic, it seems likely that a proportion, at least, might have been utilised by Jews.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the *Talmud* also prescribes that Jewish phylacteries, such as the cloth holding a leather box containing portions of Jewish Law, be tied around the arms and/or forehead.⁹⁸ There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Talmudic phylacteries were used to turn away envy or ill-fortune.

The *Talmud* also prescribes the *Mezuza*, the sign prescribed for the door post of a house. This involved two portions of script written on vellum which was rolled up and put in a cylindrical tube of lead or tin. The word *Shaddai* was written on the outside of the roll, which was then nailed to a door post. Some people would also write the name of three angels (*Coozu, Bomuchsaz, Coozu*).⁹⁹ The *Mezuza* was intended to remind all who entered the house that God was watching them:

Whoever has the phylacteries bound to his head and arm, and the fringes thrown over his garments, and the *Mezuza* fixed on the door-post, is safe from sin: for these are excellent memorials, and the angels secure him from sin; as it is written "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them" (Ps.34.)¹⁰⁰

It can be argued that the *Mezuza* could also have provided a house with supernatural protection, especially if the parallels between these and the Syrian biblical lintel inscriptions are considered.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the assertion that no Jewish equivalents to the Samaritan epigraphy on lintels have been found outside Palmyra, suggest that the Talmudic *Mezuza* may have been considered generally apotropaic, as no inscriptions were thus required on Jewish houses.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets*, 14.

⁹⁷ For a discussion on the use of amulets see Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets*, 13-15, 50.

⁹⁸ Barclay, *The Talmud*, 360-362.

⁹⁹ Barclay, *The Talmud*, 363.

¹⁰⁰ Barclay, *The Talmud*, 363.

¹⁰¹ See the discussion referring to lintels in 7.2 above, and the Palestinian mosaics in 7.3.

¹⁰² Samaritans wrote various texts from the Pentateuch on doorposts and on house entrances with the intention of protecting their households from harm and affliction. (MSF, 30.)

7.5 The Price of Good Fortune

Having examined the evidence for Syria and Palestine in the fourth century, the discussion will now consider the social context which influenced the use of apotropaic practices in both regions.

The evidence presented above included amulets and phylacteries that protected their wearers against the evil eye, general evils (τὰ κακά), and people's curses. Also evident were other methods which people utilised, such as the marking of children's foreheads with mud, or making the sign of the Christian cross, or household inscriptions and mosaics. The evidence for both Syria and Palestine was largely similar, diverging mainly through added focus on curses and spells in the amulets of Alexandra and Thomas which have survived from Syria. Although the evident concern for protection against human-orchestrated curses in Syria might seem to be a reflection of a response to a more supernaturally aggressive society in this region, the evidence for Palestinian cursing presented in various chapters above does not support such speculation. The material presented therefore, while specific in mentioning curses as targets in the case of two of the amulets, is more general in nature in the case of the remaining fourth-century evidence. Hence it can be argued that the evidence reflects both the specific threat of curses, and the more general, though equally serious, threat of evil daimones, particularly in the form of the evil eye.

To dismiss the prevalence of apotropaic devices as a characteristic of an 'intensely superstitious society' as has been done in the past, is to miss the point of these methods and beliefs in their social context. The Greco-Roman world was one in which the supernatural played a regular role and apotropaic devices were a means of guarding against unwanted spirits or daimones, much as heavy doors and secured windows protected households from unwanted intruders. In line with this way of thinking, some possible reasons for the need for such supernatural security will here be proposed. Although the interpretation to be offered is in no way intended to be a conclusive or definitive method by which to view the apotropaic phenomenon, it does offer one means for understanding it. Three cultural realities come into play here, which

have already been identified several times throughout the course of the thesis, namely vulnerability and envy, as well as the concept inextricably linked to both of them, the notion of limited good.

Let us begin with vulnerability, a fundamental element, it can be argued, of all apotropaic protection. It provided a sense that one is at any time at the mercy of the elements, particularly the element of misfortune in whatever manner it might come. This is amply represented in the evidence, which reveals the sense of vulnerability of all members of society regardless of gender, age, or wealth. Mentioned above, for instance, were the numerous methods used to protect children from evil forces. These included the wearing of ribbons and bells, the signing of the cross, as well as the placing of mud on their faces. That children were considered susceptible to supernatural attack is perhaps best reflected in their physical and social position. Physically they are weak and, in the case of infants, they are completely dependent on others. Socially they have a somewhat different role, for they represent not just new and young life, but also hope – hope for the family, its happiness, its livelihood, its longevity (especially in an age of high child-mortality rates), not to mention the honour associated with having and rearing children. These characteristics place the child in a position of certain esteem, and it is argued below that it is precisely the social esteem associated with children which makes them so vulnerable to misfortune. We have not, for example, come across an express reference to the protection of the elderly, a similarly physically weak and dependent group.

The association of gender with protection has already been mentioned above. The first tablet discussed in this chapter concerned Alexandra, and carefully sought to guard her against all the dangers of the supernatural, of human or non-human instigation. Females were believed to be physically vulnerable as was seen in Chapter 6 in the accounts of the frenzy and mania of the victims of ἔρωσ spells, and also socially vulnerable, especially in matters of sexuality, a point particularly targeted in Alexandra's phylactery. Maintaining a woman's chastity, especially her virginity, was an important aspect of Greco-Roman cultural expectations of behaviour.¹⁰³ For instance,

¹⁰³ The importance of a female's sexual virtue was discussed in Chapter 6.

John Chrysostom praises as a martyr a young woman who commits the usually unacceptable act of suicide rather than placing her virginity at risk.¹⁰⁴ The esteem that was associated with chastity would have made it vulnerable (a point which if not clear now, will become so over the next few pages). In addition, the perceived weakness of women, along with their perceived ‘passive’ natures (as opposed to the aggressive male), left them somewhat compromised by their very natures.¹⁰⁵

Consider also the importance of marriage in late antique society. The value of this contract for the family, and the required good behaviour of the female in attaining a suitable and desirable match, ultimately made the woman vulnerable. That is, she was physically vulnerable through the threat of male aggressors, as demonstrated, for example, in the phenomenon of bridal thefts in this period.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, she and her family were also susceptible to the shame associated with such deviant behaviour, should she be compromised, regardless of her status as a victim (as was seen in Chapter 6, the innocent female could still be saddled with both blame and shame in matters relating to social sexuality).

The apotropaic methods illustrated above, as well as Thomas’ amulet, show that men too were considered vulnerable. Thomas’ concern was that he not be touched by the curses and spells which might be made against him. His vulnerability lay not in his sexual, but in his physical and social susceptibility. In a competitive society, career or livelihood and honour were always exposed to the machinations and plots of others. Relevant examples here are Libanius’, or even John Chrysostom’s, countless woes regarding relentless attacks against their professional and social positions, and the curses made against charioteers in the hippodrome.¹⁰⁷ Success was a highly valued

¹⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, *Hom. on St Pelagia*; PG 50.579-582. For a recent translation see Leemans et al., ‘*Let us Die*’, 148-157. The same approval is found in Chrysostom’s homily on the female martyrs Domnina, Prosdoke, and Bernike (*On Saints Bernike and Prosdoke*; PG 50.638-40).

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 6, especially sections 6.1 & 6.4 (related to Theodoret’s account concerning an hostile husband).

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter 6; Faraone, *Love Magic*, 80, 85; as well as Evans-Grubbs, “Abduction Marriage in Antiquity”.

¹⁰⁷ Re Libanius and the charioteers see Chapter 5. For a discussion of John Chrysostom’s troubles see Brändle, *Johannes Chrysostomos*.

social commodity, and as such, as will become clear, that made it and the men who claimed it in any area of life, vulnerable.

Thus it can be argued that men, women and children were not just physically vulnerable; they were socially vulnerable, susceptible, that is, to the views, perceptions, and actions of others in their social worlds. Furthermore, it would seem that when something was valued by society, such as youth, virginity, and success, that is precisely when it became vulnerable to attack. Hence social vulnerability implied susceptibility to supernatural harm.

What is linked to this vulnerability in so many cases is that the valued asset is threatened by envy. Keeping in mind the conclusions on the vulnerability of the valued, let us look at an early twentieth-century passage from an essay on *Das Unheimlich* by Freud. He wrote:

One of the most uncanny and most universal forms of superstition is the fear of the evil eye. Apparently, man always knew the source of that fear. Whoever possesses something precious yet frail, fears the envy of others. He projects onto them the envy he himself would feel in their place. Such sentiments are betrayed by glances, even if we suppress their verbal expression.¹⁰⁸

Though this is a comment from the twentieth century, there are distinct similarities between the mindset portrayed here and that which is seen represented in the evidence above.¹⁰⁹ We have already seen that the material suggests that what is valued is vulnerable. This is actually reiterated in a homily by John Chrysostom when, in using a metaphor involving the hazards of possessing treasure, he mentions that wealth which is visible is exposed to the eyes of the envious.¹¹⁰ But he is more clear on what he means in his commentary on Galatians, in which he says:

And when you hear of jealousy in this place, and in the Gospel, of an evil eye, which means the same, you must not suppose that the glance of the eye has any natural power

¹⁰⁸ Freud, "Das Unheimlich" (c.1917-20) in H. Schoeck, "The Evil Eye. Forms and Dynamics of a Universal Superstition," in A. Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye. A Casebook*, Madison, Wis: The University of Wisconsin Press (1992: 192-200) 195.

¹⁰⁹ Pocock, similarly, in a study on Indian society comments that Najar, the evil eye, "is an inevitable feature of a world in which men set store by looks, or health, or goods, or any pleasant thing" and because of the human and widespread characteristics of these properties there will always be someone worse off than another, and hence no one is completely immune from envy and the consequent najar. (Pocock, "Evil Eye. Envy and Greed," 203,205).

¹¹⁰ *In Paralyticum demissum per tectum*; PG 51.49 7-8. "βασκάνων ὀφθαλμοῦς διεγείρων."

to injure those who look upon it. For the eye, that is, the organ itself, cannot be evil; but Christ in that place means jealousy by the term.¹¹¹

Hence we can see from John Chrysostom the fourth-century Syrian association of envy with the evil eye and the belief that it is not the human eye which is the danger but the jealousy it manifests. It follows then that those things which could invoke jealousy, such as wealth, are vulnerable to harm.¹¹²

We have seen then that people when in possession of something socially valued, tangible or intangible, were vulnerable, and that that which threatened them would often be envy. Here it is proposed that their susceptibility and the fear of envy can be related to the notion of limited good – which has already been mentioned in other chapters – the belief that all goods are limited, both material and non-material (for example, food and honour), and that as such these goods are all finite. Thus, as there is only a particular amount of anything available, when one person gains, it is at the expense of another.¹¹³ This idea of limited good, it is proposed, can be connected with the social concepts of vulnerability and envy, and ultimately be seen as a catalyst for intensifying the threat of attack on people or property. That is, a person with sufficient or abundant health and/or wealth would have felt threatened by those who had little of either.¹¹⁴

We now expand this concept a little. It has been seen that that which is valued is vulnerable. It is often vulnerable to envy. Both of these can be seen as responses to the idea that all goods (even the intangible such as honour and health) are limited in their distribution. It follows that if everything is finite, the possession of it would be highly

¹¹¹ “Ὅταν δὲ φθόνον ἀκούσης ἐνταῦθα, καὶ ἐν τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ ὀφθαλμὸν πονηρὸν τὸ αὐτὸ δηλοῦντα, μὴ τοῦτο νομίσης, ὅτι ἡ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν βολὴ τοὺς ὀρώντας βλάπτειν πέφυκεν· ὀφθαλμὸς γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἴη πονηρὸς, αὐτὸ τὸ μέλος· ἀλλ’ ἐνταῦθα ὁ Χριστὸς οὕτω τὸν φθόνον λέγει. (*In Cap 3 Ep. ad Gal.*; PG 61.648 32-37).

¹¹² Interestingly for John, and his contemporary Basil of Caesarea, the envious are victims of their own jealousy: “For they are the injured persons, having a continual worm gnawing through their heart, and collecting a fountain of poison more bitter than any gall.” Αὐτοὶ γὰρ εἰσιν οἱ ἡδίκημένοι, σκώληκα ἔχοντες διηνεκῆ διατρῶγοντα αὐτῶν τὴν καρδίαν, καὶ πηγὴν ἰοῦ συνάγοντες πάσης χολῆς πικροτέραν. (*On I Cor. hom. 31*; PG 61.264 21-23). See also: Chrysostom, *On 2nd Cor. hom. 27*, PG 61.586-588; *On Gen. hom. 46*, PG 54.427-428; *On I Cor. hom. 31*, PG 61.262-264; *On Rom. hom. 7*, PG 60.447-452. In addition Basil, *Hom. 11, On Envy*, PG 31.371-386.

¹¹³ Esler, *First Christians*, 35.

¹¹⁴ A. Dundes, “Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye: An essay in Indo-European and Semitic Worldview,” in A. Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye. A Casebook*, Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, (1992:257-312) 266.

prized. Accordingly, deprivation of the same subjects the possessor to greater envy, as it is understood by others (those deprived) that they cannot all have the same amount of that blessing. That is, when one person has something of value, for example health, honour, success, and children, he/she has it at the expense of another, who will in some way feel envy towards him/her.

Because envy can manifest itself in daimonic misfortune, it has the ability to destroy what is already limited and thus so valuable. Consider, for instance, Basil of Caesarea's comment on envy:

persons who suffer from this malady of envy are supposed to be even more dangerous than poisonous animals, since these inject their venom by piercing their victim then gradually, putrefaction spreads over the infected area, ... this I do say: the devils, who are enemies of all that is good, use for their own ends such free acts as they find congenial to their wishes. In this way, they make even the eyes of the envious persons serviceable to their own purposes.¹¹⁵

The threat of the evil eye (βασκανία, ὀφθαλμός) and envy (φθόνος) appears in all the evidence above to have a supernatural, daimonic dimension, and Basil's comment, while dismissing popular beliefs as "old wives' tales", clearly also designates the human emotion of envy as a means for daimonic interference in people's lives. Thus it is not portrayed as a deliberate action, as much as an action of which the daimonic entities take advantage – a negative human reaction becomes daimonised and harmful. It is not surprising then that people required all manner of techniques for protecting themselves from this harm, as such a belief, involving limited good, vulnerability, and envy, would necessitate the supernatural defence of all that could be coveted.

In addition to delineating the need for apotropaic tools of protection, the belief in the malevolence of envy and the ideas of vulnerability and limited good that influence it may also have ultimately affected people's behaviour. It is a fact that the evil eye has often been identified in societies within which a strict social hierarchy

¹¹⁵ "Ἦδη δὲ καὶ τῶν ἰσβόλων αὐτῶν ὀλεθριώτεροι εἶναι οἱ νοσοῦντες τὴν βασκανίαν ὑπονενοῦνται· εἴπερ τὰ μὲν διὰ πληγῆς ἐνίησι τὸν ἰόν, καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν σηπεδόσι τὸ δηχθὲν ἐπινέμεται... ἐκεῖνο δὲ φημι, ὅτι οἱ μισόκαλοι δαίμονες, ἐπειδὴν οἰκείας ἑαυτοῖς εὐρωσι προαιρέσεις, παντοίως αὐταῖς πρὸς τὸ ἴδιον ἀποκέχρηται βούλημα· ὥστε καὶ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς τῶν βασκάνων εἰς ὑπηρεσίαν χρῆσθαι τοῦ ἰδίου θελήματος. (*Hom. 11, On Envy*; PG 31.380 24-42).

dominates, and is most feared by those who should be equal, but are not.¹¹⁶ Pocock, for example, argues that in the case of the Patidar, a society governed by hierarchical principles in which status is given by birth, the superiority of another is not regarded a deprivation, nor a subject of envy, as it is unattainable. However, amongst social equals a rising above the norm does stimulate envy.¹¹⁷ Thus when people within the same caste accumulate wealth, *najjar*, the evil eye, defines the way that the wealth may be enjoyed, and that is with ‘modesty’.¹¹⁸ People who accumulate wealth have to be seen to be modest by those in the same social class, as well as generous according to their means.¹¹⁹ Hence the evil eye belief, and the notion of limited good, can be seen as regulating in some manner social behaviour in some communities.

In considering the notion that belief in the evil eye could act as a means for regulating behaviour and social interaction,¹²⁰ Libanius’ references to behaviour incurring the attention of envy can be recalled. In the case of the rhetor, it is clear that his conduct, or that of others, could be seen to attribute to the receipt of envy. Indeed he implies in the assertion of his own moderate behaviour that he himself did not warrant negative attention, thereby at least publicly affirming that he was not in receipt of more good fortune (as success or praise) than his peers.¹²¹ However, what about the lack of inhibition in displaying wealth, an apparent feature of the antique world?¹²² Here no behaviour modification is immediately apparent. Nevertheless what is evident is the protection of homes (a key manifestation of wealth), with inscriptions, mosaics, and various potent objects within (as, for example, the mirror presented above). Likewise, though garments or jewellery could be flashy, clothing could include apotropaic symbols in their design, and numerous apotropaic devices could also be worn at any one

¹¹⁶ See especially Pocock, “Evil Eye. Envy and Greed,” 201.

¹¹⁷ Pocock, “Evil Eye. Envy and Greed,” 204.

¹¹⁸ Pocock, “Evil Eye. Envy and Greed,” 209.

¹¹⁹ Pocock, “Evil Eye. Envy and Greed,” 209.

¹²⁰ Elliott, “Paul, Galatians and the Evil Eye,” 266. Malina in his study of the first century has linked it with the patron-client relationship evident in Greco-Roman society.

¹²¹ See Chapter 5, and 7.1 above.

¹²² See, for example, Brändle’s discussion of Antioch (*Johannes Chrysostomus*, 13-18).

time.¹²³ Thus wealth was indeed put on display, but many measures were possibly taken against the envy it might stimulate – a different kind of behaviour modification.

So far much of this discussion has focussed on envy and the evil eye, as many of the phylacteries are predominantly aimed at this threat. There was, however, another threat revealed in the evidence above, the threat which a person's action posed. It can be argued that the concepts which have been discussed can also be applied to these threats. Thus when Thomas is threatened by curses of men, these can reasonably be seen as being motivated by envy of his success in business or in any aspect of his life, given the competitive nature of the society. In other words, if people believed all factors of life finite, then it is no surprise that they might adopt actions to injure others or to protect themselves from that harm. In the case of Alexandra, the harm caused by other people rested in the love-spell. A love-spell directed against her would pose two risks, physical and social – firstly, the unwanted physical and mental disturbance caused by its instigator, and secondly, the shame that these actions would bring to Alexandra and her family. The frenzy, the passion, and the unsanctioned love-match would all affect the social perception of the honour allotted Alexandra and her family.¹²⁴ Thus even the section of the amulet related to humanly instigated supernatural attacks was concerned with protecting physical and social vulnerability – a vulnerability enhanced by the social importance of chastity and honour, and by the idea that, given their limited supply, these were not attributes which could be easily replaced.

7.6 Conclusion

It is written in the corpus of curse tablets edited by Gager that:

the protective function of amulets can thus be seen to embody a counterstrategy of individual action, undergirded by feelings of self-confidence, optimism, and the ability to formulate and achieve goals.¹²⁵

The evidence and discussion presented in this chapter proposes a different interpretative emphasis in considering protective devices, by suggesting that their existence and use

¹²³ See the discussion in Maguire, "Garments pleasing to God".

¹²⁴ Re female chastity and family honour see Chapter 6.

¹²⁵ Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 221.

can best be understood in the light of the social constructs of limited good and envy – systems of understanding, as it was argued, that promote an awareness of the vulnerability of individuals, their possessions, and actions. Such a way of thinking meant that people had to be alert to all possible threats from exposure to harm and that they had to protect themselves, their households, animals, and community by whatever means possible and from very real and ever-present dangers.

ILLNESS AND HEALING

THREATS AND RETALIATION IN A DISCOURSE OF POWER

ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰς ἀρχάς, πρὸς τὰς ἐξουσίας, πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις. διὰ τοῦτο ἀναλάβετε τὴν πανοπλίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ.¹

8.1 Introduction

This chapter turns to the role of the supernatural in the healing practices of the fourth century. Although professional medical practitioners were available to treat people's ailments, in both Syria and Palestine people also sought supernatural assistance to overcome, and even to incite, the malevolent forces culpable for inflicting illness. The extant evidence for both regions shows that a variety of methods were utilised in healing, or harming, including such familiar items as amulets and curse tablets. From these artefacts as well as the homiletic comments of John Chrysostom and hagiographical accounts relating to both provinces, it will be argued in the course of the discussion that the notion of supernaturally caused illness is a fundamental element underlying practices involving sickness. Furthermore, it is this notion which, contrary to popular scholarly consensus, situates supernatural healing methods not as the final remedial resort, but as a common alternative option to that provided by contemporary medical practitioners. Finally, it will be proposed that the practice of healing consequently provided a powerful forum for the promotion of effective supernatural prowess, and subsequently its religious or supernal affiliation.

¹ "Because the battle for us is not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the powers, against the cosmic lords of this darkness, against the spiritual things of wickedness in the heavens. Because of this take up the full armour of God." Ephesians 6:12-13.

8.2 Syria

The examination of the fourth-century Syrian evidence begins with two examples of healing amulets. These two specimens form part of a corpus of healing amulets from various regions and periods of the Greco-Roman world. Many of these contained Christian, Jewish, Greco-Roman and indigenous religious elements, in isolation or combination, and generally formed a part of the over-all healing ritual.² The two examples discussed below seek to heal their bearers of epilepsy, headache, and ophthalmia, and demonstrate Jewish and Christian characteristics.

The first amulet bears an inscription which indicates that relief was sought for both epilepsy and headache, ailments suffered by an individual named Ampelion. The text of the amulet reads:

I call upon *Iaô Michaël Ouriël Arbathiaô Arbathiaô Adônai Ablanathanalba Sabaôth Sesengenbarpharangês Akrammachamari Semesilamps laalam Chôrbêth thaubarrabau thôbarimmauô Elôai aeëiouô* (magic signs) headache (?) (magic signs). Sovereign archangels, gods, and divine characters, drive away all harm and all epilepsy and all [head?]ache of Ampe[elion] whom Orê[---] bore, from this very day and from this present hour, for the whole time [of her life ...] ...³

The text's Jewish character and its appeal to Iao, Adonai, and the archangels is not uncommon, nor are the ailments it seeks to alleviate.⁴ The language of the text, that is the use of ἀπολαύνειν, also suggests, as Kotansky argues, that the epilepsy and headaches are already established ailments suffered by Ampelion. Thus the amulet, and one can assume the ritual that accompanied it, sought to provide an immediate and

² Evidence suggests that most amulets were accompanied by some form of incantation as part of the healing ritual. See 33, MSF. For examples of healing amulets and prescriptions see: no. 9, 11, 12, 14, 22 in SM; no. 17, 19, 21, 24, 31 in MSF; no. 1, 2, 3 in AMB; no. 45, 53, 56, 57 in GMA; TS K1.94, TS K1.127 in HAIT; & SHR, 23-4, 51-52, 59.

³ [Ἐπι]καλοῦμαι Ἰάω Μιχαήλ Γαβριήλ Οὐ[ρ]ιήλ Ἀρβαθιαω Ἀρβαθιαω [Ἄδ]ω[ν]αὶ Ἀβλαναθανάλβα [Σ]αβαώθ Σεσενγενβαρφαρανγῆς Ἀκραμμαχαμαρι Σεμεσίλαμψ λααλαμ Χωρβηθ θαυβαρραβαν θω[β]αριμμαω Ἐλωαι αε[η] [ι]ουω (magic signs) σοιλ λαργ[ι]α (magic signs) κύριοι ἀρχάγγελοι θεοὶ καὶ θῆοι χαρακτῆρες ἀπελάσατε πᾶν κακὸν καὶ πᾶσαν [ἐπί]λημψιν καὶ πᾶσαν [κεφαλ]αργίαν Ἀμπ[ε]λίου ἦν ἔτεκε[ν] Ὁρη[... ἀ]πὸ τῆς σήμερ(ον) [ἡμέρας] καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἄρτι [εἰς τ]ὸν πάντα χρόνον [---] τῆς η.[---] [---] υμου [---] [---] λωι [---]. (no. 57, GMA, 326-330; SEG 31.1398). Text translated and discussed by Kotansky (GMA) who dates it from the fourth to fifth century.

⁴ See examples listed in n.2 above, as well as various prescriptions in PGM, & no. 72, 84 in SM.

long-lasting remedy by expelling illnesses which inhabited the body. However, in addition to these maladies, the κύριοι ἀρχάγγελοι θεοὶ καὶ θῖοι χαρακτῆρες are also directed to drive away πᾶν κακόν. Such concern for πᾶν κακόν is reminiscent of the apotropaic devices discussed in the previous chapter. However, it can be argued, that in this case πᾶν κακόν is seen to inhabit the body and to be associated with the epilepsy and headache, and that thus it is also necessary for this evil to be driven out of the body it is seen to affect.

The other Syrian amulet, a gold lamella, comes from a tomb near Tyre and is dated from the third to fifth centuries. The inscription reads:

In the name of God and Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit, *Raba Skanomka loula amrikorathena thabytharorak*, I pray to you, O great name of *Iaô*: turn aside the afflicting ophthalmia and no longer permit any onset of ophthalmia to occur.⁵

This amulet, identified as Christian, seeks to rid the holder of ophthalmia, a condition involving the inflammation of the eye.⁶ Unlike the previous example the ophthalmia is not to be driven out, but turned aside.⁷ This then appears to be a temporary affliction. This language suggests that the affliction is not seen to inhabit the body as in the previous example, because the illness need only be turned aside, not driven out – the ophthalmia afflicts, but does not reside. Despite the ailment's transient nature, this amulet also seeks to protect the wearer from ophthalmia in the future. Such a direction suggests that the amulet may have been worn beyond the period required to heal the complaint.⁸

These two examples are not, however, the sole source of information on the use of amulets in Syria. Libanius, for example, mentions the use of charms, possibly similar

⁵ Ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰη(σο)ῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ καὶ πν(εύματο)ς ἁγίου, ραβα σκανομκα λουλα αμρικτο ραθην αθαβαθα ρουρακ, ἐπεύχομέ σοι, τὸ μέγα ὄνομα Ἰάω, ἀπόστρεψον τὴν ἐπιφερομένην ὀφθαλμίαν καὶ μη[κέ]τι ἐάσης ὀφθαλμ[ίας] τιν' ἐνβο[λήν] γένεσθαι]. Trans. and commentary by Kotansky who also assigns it the Christian status (no. 53, GMA, 301-305).

⁶ For other spells for eye-diseases, see no. 32, SM; & no. 31, GMA.

⁷ On 'turning aside' (ἀπόστρεψον) ophthalmia, see also R. Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets," in C.A. Faraone & D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press (1991: 107-137) 120.

⁸ On epilepsy, as an example, requiring constant wearing of a healing amulet, see Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers," 118.

to that used by Ampelion above, in the case of his brother's sudden blindness, in order to receive some assistance through them.⁹

John Chrysostom's inclusion of amulet use in his homilies also provides some insight into both those who provided these ritual objects and the contemporary church's attitude towards their use. In one sermon, for instance, the preacher refers to the practice of using charms, some with amulets and other things, to remedy severe sickness, an act which he considers idolatrous. Therefore it is the rejection of this behaviour which he sees as praiseworthy. For Chrysostom the 'crown of martyrdom' would be brought upon those who opted to reject the amulets and charms and to bear the sufferings of illness instead.¹⁰ It is not then surprising that he glowingly praises a lady who did indeed refuse to use amulets when her child fell ill. The lady, we are told, was so determined in her resolve that despite the advice of others, she thought it better for her child to die rather than be debased by such action.¹¹ The mother's behaviour and Chrysostom's reference to martyrdom, an act which necessarily requires death, both betray in their apparent brave stance a belief in the efficacy of healing utilising the supernatural. For if such methods were ineffective as well as idolatrous, there would be no life-or-death ramifications involved in not using them. What a relief then, that John was able to offer people an alternative technique: the word of God and the sign of the cross on the forehead. These are for John the ultimate weapons,¹² and thus he tells his congregations: "Are you one of the faithful? sign the Cross; say that 'this is my only weapon; this my remedy; and I know no other'".¹³

Chrysostom was not alone in his condemnation of the use of amulets.¹⁴ A strong indicator that others in the Christian community (at least amongst those holding positions of authority in the church) held similar views is suggested in one of the canons of the Synod of Laodicea, which states:

⁹ πολλὰ μὲν δὴ χεῖρες ἰατρῶν, μυρία δὲ φάρμακα, πλείω δὲ περίπτα. (Or. 1.201).

¹⁰ *In ep. 1 ad Thess. hom. 3*, PG 62.413; *In ep. ad Col. hom. 8*, PG 62.357-358; *Ad illuminandos cat. 2*, PG 49.240.

¹¹ *In ep. ad Col. hom. 8*, PG 62.357-258; *Ad illum. cat. 2*, PG 49.240.

¹² *Ad illum. cat. 2*, PG 49.240.

¹³ Πιστὴ εἶ; σφράγιτον, εἰπέ. Τοῦτο ἔχω τὸ ὄπλον μόνον, τοῦτο το φάρμακον· ἄλλο δὲ οὐκ οἶδα. (*In Col hom.8*; PG 62.358 8-10).

¹⁴ For example, Caesarius (see MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 141).

They who are of the priesthood, or of the clergy, shall not be magicians, enchanters, mathematicians, or astrologers; nor shall they make what are called amulets, which are chains for their own souls. And those who wear such, we command to be cast out of the church.¹⁵

It is not possible to ascertain whether a particular type of amulet (in regard to purpose) was meant in this instruction, but, given its ambiguous or broad use, it seems sensible to include healing amulets amongst its intentions. It is interesting that this canon is concerned not only with the production of amulets by members of the clergy, but also with their use of them. This concern and the consequent prohibition suggest that both forms of behaviour were actually occurring within the church at that time. Furthermore, in this legislation the church associates the use and manufacture of amulets with magicians, enchanters, mathematicians and astrologers, professions condoned neither by ecclesiastical nor secular authorities.¹⁶ Thus the church was aligning amulets, their use and production, with behaviour delineated as deviant, that is, unacceptable and diverging from the norm. Indeed this behaviour was deemed so inexcusable that the wearing of an amulet by a member of the clergy would lead to his expulsion. Given this condition, it is not surprising that their manufacture would also be prohibited. The Canon is also not lucid on whether priests, or members of the clergy, were producers of amulets for their own use or that of others, although describing the objects as “chains for their own souls” could be interpreted to mean they were manufacturing the amulets for themselves. Thus it is possible that the manufacture of the amulets may have been a service provided to the wider Christian, even non-Christian, community. If this were indeed the case, by prohibiting this source of supply the church may have sought to control, in some way, the customary use of amulets within the broader community.

Having, however, made this latter point, it is necessary to acknowledge that such influence on community practice may indeed have been marginal as the Christian clergy were only one set amongst many that potentially contributed to healing services

¹⁵ “Quoniam non oportet ministros altaris, aut clericos, magos et incantatores esse; aut facere quae dicuntur phylacteria: quae sunt magna obligamenta animarum. Hos autem, qui talibus rebus utuntur, projici ab Ecclesia jussimus.” (Canon 36. Trans in *NPNF. The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, XIV, Second Series, ed. Percival, Michigan: W.M. Eerdman Publishing Co. [1956] 151. For the full acts of the councils see J. Hefele & H. Leclercq, *Histoire des conciles d’après les documents originaux*, I-XI, Paris [1907-1952] I.2, pp.989-1028).

¹⁶ CT 9.16.

involving the supernatural. Other individuals also provided a medley of therapeutic methods, including Jewish healers, female practitioners, and the μάγτις.

The first of these, the Jewish healers, actually caused some concern for John Chrysostom, who complains of Christians running to Jews to be healed by ‘charms, incantations and amulets’.¹⁷ These people, he claims, would use potions to heal, and would also go to people’s homes with their remedial potions.¹⁸ Chrysostom, an opponent of this non-Christian assistance, in a manner reminiscent of his attitude towards healing amulets, propounded that it was better to remain ill than to be cured by Jewish healers, practitioners whom he classified amongst other dubious individuals who used herbs or supernatural methods.¹⁹ Despite John’s opinions, it is apparent from his complaints that Jewish healers in Antioch proved an attractive healing option for members of the Christian community and, it would be thought, also for the broader community. Indeed it is because of their popularity that John Chrysostom perceives them to be a threat.²⁰ That Chrysostom’s intimations regarding their attraction reflect reality and do not amount to a rhetorical exaggeration, is suggested by legislation that indicates that rabbis in Antioch did have a reputation for being able to effect remarkable cures.²¹

It is possible to ascertain a few details regarding at least some of the healing methods utilised by the Jewish practitioners.²² For instance, John Chrysostom refers to them using amulets, charms, incantations, and potions. The idea that amulets were used for healing by these practitioners is strengthened by evidence suggesting their use amongst the Jewish community in as much as the *Sabbath* acknowledges and condones

¹⁷ ... τὰς μαγγανείας, τὰς ἐπωδὰς, τὰ περιάμματα, τὰς φαρμακείας. (*Adv. Judaeos hom.8*; PG 48.935).

¹⁸ τρέχομεν ἐπὶ συναγωγὰς, καὶ τοὺς φαρμακοὺς καὶ γόητας εἰς τὰς οἰκίας καλοῦμεν τὰς ἑαυτῶν. (*Adv. Judaeos hom.8*; PG 48.936).

¹⁹ *Adv. Jud. hom. 8*, PG 48.937, & 935-936; cf. *Comm. in Ep. ad Gal.*, PG 61.623. See also Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 83-84; and Wyss, *Johannes Chrysostomos*, 269.

²⁰ For John Chrysostom’s association of Jewish magic with the work of the devil, see Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 87.

²¹ See Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 233.

²² It is difficult to discern whether these individuals were authoritative members of the Jewish communities, so they will simply be referred to as practitioners, meaning those members of the Jewish community who healed petitioners using supernatural methods.

the use of amulets for curative purposes.²³ Extant amulets also reveal Jewish characteristics, such as the example presented above.²⁴ However, as has been mentioned previously, the appellations of an amulet do not necessarily reflect the religious beliefs or affiliations of the user. They do, though, reflect a belief in the efficacy of the supernal entities invoked on them. Therefore it can be said that extant amulets also imply a perception of efficacious Jewish divinities (including the archangels). In addition to the use of amulets, criticism in the *Palestinian Talmud* is levelled at the practice of whispering charms over wounds, intimating that such behaviour may also have been widespread.²⁵ Certainly the use of amulets and incantations were common aspects of healing ritual used throughout the Greco-Roman world.²⁶ Thus the Jewish healers were at least utilising some methods that were familiar and popular with the wider community, that is, amulets and incantations. It was not, however, their methods that necessarily distinguished them from their counterparts; it was the perceived potency of their methods that would have informed their reputation and popularity.

Providing a similar service to that of the Jewish practitioners were female healers labelled by John Chrysostom as ‘drunken and half-witted old women’.²⁷ These women apparently attended to people in their homes and healed the ill with incantations and charms.²⁸ That their services were generally utilised in the community and even acknowledged by both contemporary medical and secular authorities is also suggested by other fourth-century evidence.²⁹ However, having said that such healing methods

²³ *Sabbath* 67a, 132a. See Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets*, 12-14; as well as J. Goldin, “The Magic of Magic,” 124.

²⁴ See above and nn. 3-4.

²⁵ Goldin argues this point; see Goldin, “The Magic of Magic,” 120.

²⁶ See n. 2 above. Also Kotansky, “Incantations and Prayers,” 110.

²⁷ γραιῖδια μεθύοντα καὶ παραπαίοντα εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν σου εἰσάγων (John Chrysostom, *Ad illuminandos* *Cat.* 2; PG 49.240 33-35).

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *Ad illum. cat.* 2; PG 49.240. Ammianus Marcellinus also mentions female healers who used incantations (“to introduce privily old-wives’ incantations or unbecoming love-potions – incantamenta quaedam anilia uel ludibriosa subderent amatoria ad insontium perniciem concinnata.” *Res Gestae*, 29.2.3). He recalls the fate of one particular “simple-minded old woman who was in the habit of curing intermittent fevers with a harmless incantation.” (“Anum quendam simplicem interuallatis febribus mederi leni carmine consuetam.” *Res Gestae*, 29.2.26).

²⁹ Ammianus writes that if someone used an ‘old wives’ charm’ to relieve pain the individual was denounced, even though the practice was allowed by medical authority (“aut anile incantamentum ad leniendum adhibuisset dolorem, quod medicinae quoque admittit auctoritas, reus unde non poterat opinari admittit auctoritas.” [*Res Gestae*, 16.8.1-2]); also CT 9.16.3.

were accepted – that is, amulets and incantations as well as female involvement – it seems that the latter was not so readily condoned for a married woman. The *Codex Theodosianus*, for instance, records that assuming the role of *medicamentaria* provided sufficient grounds for a man to divorce his wife,³⁰ an offence thereby comparable to criminal activity and homicide.

From this evidence it is possible to ascertain that women could and did provide supernatural healing in Syria and that their methods included charms and incantations. For John Chrysostom, however, concern lay not simply with the existence of these practitioners and their activities, both unsanctioned by the church, but with their apparent affront in claiming Christian affiliation in their work. He complains to his congregation:

For when we deliver these exhortations, and lead them away, thinking that they defend themselves, they say, that the woman is a Christian who makes these incantations, and utters nothing else than the name of God. On this account I especially hate and turn away from her, because she makes use of the name of God, with a view to ribaldry.³¹

It is the female healer's association, or her clientele's association of her, with Christianity which offends him. John's lament allows for two propositions. It is possible, for instance, that people were claiming that these healers invoked the Christian God in order to placate the bishop (even though, given his reaction, this intention was clearly unsuccessful). Alternately, it is also conceivable that the female practitioner could have incorporated the Christian deity into her repertoire because she herself was a Christian, or because there was evidence of an increasing social perception of that God's efficacious power (and hence she was making her product more attractive to consumers). If the latter were the case, it does suggest some degree of flexibility in the characteristics of fourth-century healing practices.

³⁰ "In the case of a man also, if he should send a notice of divorce, inquiry shall be made as to the following three charges, namely, if he wishes to divorce her as an adulteress, a *medicamentariam*, or a procuress." ("... in masculis etiam, si repudium mittant, haec tria crimina inquiri conveniet, si moecham vel medicamentariam vel conciliatricem repudiare voluerit. nam si ab his criminibus liberam eiecerit, omnem dotem restituere debet et aliam non ducere." [CT 3.16.1; tr. Pharr]).

³¹ ὅταν γὰρ παραινῶμεν ταῦτα καὶ ἀπάγωμεν, δοκοῦντες ἀπολογεῖσθαί φασιν, ὅτι Χριστιανὴ ἐστὶν ἡ γυνὴ ἢ ταῦτα ἐπάδουσα, καὶ οὐδὲν ἕτερον φθέγγεται, ἢ τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὄνομα. Διὰ τοῦτο μὲν οὖν αὐτὴν μάλιστα μισῶ καὶ ἀποστρέφομαι, ὅτι τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς ὑβρίν κατακέχρηται, ὅτι λέγουσα Χριστιανὴ εἶναι, τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐπιδείκνυται. (*Ad illum. cat. 2*, PG 49.240; see also *In ep. ad Col. hom. 8*, PG 62.358).

In addition to these practitioners, the μάντις also provided healing services to fourth-century Syrians. Libanius, for instance, appealed to a μάντις regarding the chronic migraine from which he suffered.³² The rhetor's comments regarding one of these incidents are interesting. In this case, he records that the μάντις had forbidden him to open his veins for bleeding, and that this was fortunate, for the ἰατρός had told him that such an action would have been the end of him. Indeed once Libanius had had the dream that seemed to portend φάρμακα δὲ καὶ μαγγανεύματα καὶ πόλεμον ἀπὸ γοήτων ἀνδρῶν, his doctors even told him to seek a cure elsewhere as their profession could not provide a remedy for such maladies (including his gout).³³ In this account, then, it can be seen not only that the esteemed rhetor consulted a μάντις, but that the latter's advice was also supported by medical practitioners. Thus it is clear that people could seek healing assistance from both supernatural and medical practitioners, and that both, at least in the case of the μάντις, could provide advice regarding physical therapy. That is, the μάντις did not simply offer Libanius a supernatural remedy (of which no mention is actually made); he gave direction regarding his physical treatment (not to let blood).

There was another healing option available to fourth-century Syrians, which included a variety of methods that were particularly Christian. The promotion of some of these has already been seen above in John Chrysostom's responses to the use of amulets by his Christian congregation, and included the making of the sign of the cross and the use of the 'word' of God.³⁴ Other methods, however, also formed part of the contemporary Christian repertoire, including the use of holy oil, the laying on of hands, as well as the potent intervention of the holy man.³⁵

³² Or. 1.243-250, & 1.268. See also Or. 1.173.

³³ ἰατροῖ δὲ τὴν τούτων ἴασιν ἄλλοθι ζητεῖν ἐκέλευον, ὡς οὐκ ὄντων σφίσι τῶν τοιούτων ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ φαρμάκων. Or. 1.246. This is also discussed in Chapter 5 as well as Chapter 10 (section 3.3.2).

³⁴ See also *In ep. ad. Col. hom. 8* (PG 62.357-8), in which Chrysostom urges people to use the sign of the cross to ward off demons and heal the sick; and *Adv. Jud. 8*.

³⁵ The masculine is intentionally used here as there appear to have been no female figures endowed with the gift of healing (apart from the healing shrine of St Thecla, who lived several centuries earlier).

Interestingly, despite his apparent aversion to the use of lotions and potions, John Chrysostom was not against the use of blessed oil as a healing ointment. Indeed he reports on an instance when oil from the church had successfully healed an individual.³⁶ His account is not isolated, for blessed oil also proved remedial in contemporary hagiographical accounts. For instance, Palladius recounts the story of Benjamin and the healing abilities of oil blessed by him. He writes that Benjamin:

at the age of eighty years having reached the perfection of asceticism was counted worthy of the gift of healing, so that every one on whom he laid his hands or to whom he gave oil after blessing it was cured of every ailment.³⁷

Furthermore, in this account Palladius introduces another healing technique utilised by Benjamin – the laying on of hands. Apart from these reports, John Chrysostom also tells of a priest who cured the emperor of a fever through the laying on of hands and prayer, and he did so when all other arts had not worked for the ruler.³⁸

The holy man Benjamin is only one example of a relatively large group of ascetics who were credited with miraculous healing powers in fourth-century Syria.³⁹ The hagiographical accounts of healing are in fact too numerous, and often too similar, to warrant individual and detailed discussion here. Therefore only examples and exceptions to this potent and promoted form of Christian behaviour will be presented, and all related accounts appropriately cited.

Peter the Galatian, an ascetic who spent much of his life in Antioch, receives considerable attention from Theodoret, having been of particular service to the latter's mother on several occasions. The hagiographer writes that his mother first visited Peter on the advice of some friends who told her that the ascetic had performed a miracle on a powerful man of the East, healing, through prayer and the sign of the cross, the same ailment of which she complained. Theodoret, taking pains to emphasise the humility of

³⁶ *In Matt. hom.* 32/33; PG 57.384.

³⁷ βιώσας ἐπὶ ὀγδοήκοντα ἔτη καὶ εἰς ἄκρον ἀσκήσας, κατηξιώθη χαρίσματος ἰαμάτων, ὡς πάντα ᾧ ἂν χεῖρα ἐπετίθει ἢ ἔλαιον εὐλογήσας ἐδίδου, πάσης ἀπαλλάττεσθαι ἀρρωστίας. (Palladius, LH, 12).

³⁸ *Hom. 5 De incomprehensibilitate de natura*; SC 28 bis 308.

³⁹ For example Palladius also mentions Stephen, and Julian of Edessa (Palladius, LH, 24.1, 42, 12.1).

the holy man,⁴⁰ writes that Peter was initially reluctant to cure the woman's eye complaint and only agreed after continued emotional appeals, replying:

that it was God who heals these things and always grants the petitions of those who believe: 'So now too,' he said, 'will he grant it, not showing favor to me but recognizing your faith. So if you have faith pure and unmixed and free of all doubt, then, bidding farewell to doctors and medicines, accept this medicine given by God.' Saying this, he placed his hand on her eye and forming the sign of the saving cross drove out the disease.⁴¹

Thus Peter was able to heal an eye complaint (an ailment perhaps similar to the ophthalmia targeted by the amulet described above) through laying his hand on the mother's eye and making the sign of the cross, having healed a similar condition previously through the sign of the cross and prayer.

Prayer, as utilised by Peter, also proved effective for other ascetics.⁴² One such example is Julian, who had the power to expel daimons and heal all types of diseases through prayer alone.⁴³ A further example is Maësymas who cured a young child by placing it at the foot of an altar and "entreating the physician of souls and bodies", after which the child became healthy.⁴⁴

Already mentioned above was John Chrysostom's insistence on the power of the 'word' of God. In hagiographical accounts the words of a holy man could also provide relief to a sufferer. According to Theodoret, his mother was saved from dying of a violent fever by Peter the Galatian who, through saying to her "Peace be with you, child" (Εἰρήνη σοι, τεκνίον) in greeting, brought about an immediate change in her condition.⁴⁵ Thallasius was also able to cure by blessing through a small window of his

⁴⁰ Peter "protested that he was a man with the same nature as her and carrying a great burden of sins which deprived him of familiar access to God". (Ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος μὲν ἔλεγεν εἶναι καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχειν φύσιν αὐτῆς, πολὺν δὲ ἁμαρτημάτων φορυτὸν ἐπιφέρεισθαι καὶ τούτου γε εἵνεκα τῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν παρρησίας ἀπεστερηῆσθαι. [HR, 9.7]). HR, 9.5-7.

⁴¹ τὸν θεὸν ἔφη τούτων εἶναι θεραπευτὴν, χορηγεῖν δὲ αἰεὶ τοῖς πιστεύουσι τὰς αἰτήσεις· « Δώσει τοίνυν, εἶπε, καὶ νῦν, οὐκ ἐμοὶ τὴν χάριν δωρούμενος, ἀλλὰ τὴν σὴν πίστιν θεώμενος. Εἰ τοίνυν ταύτην ἔχεις ἀκραιφνῆ καὶ εἰλικρινῆ καὶ πάσης ἀμφιβολίας ἀπηλλαγμένην, ἐρρώσθαι καὶ ἰατροῖς φράσασα καὶ φαρμάκοις, τοῦτο δέξαι τὸ θεόδοτον φάρμακον ». Ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἐπέθηκε τὴν χεῖρα τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ καὶ τοῦ σωτηρίου σταυροῦ τὸ σημεῖον τυπώσας τὴν νόσον ἀπήλασεν. (HR, 9.7).

⁴² For example Thalelaeus (HR, 28.5).

⁴³ HR, 3.14, as well as 2.20. On the power of prayer to heal, see also Theodoret (HR, 2.18) for an example of the improvement of an ascetic's own health.

⁴⁴ τὸν τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ σωμάτων ἀντιβολῶν ἰατρόν (HR, 14.3).

⁴⁵ HR, 9.14.

cell and using the name of Christ, in addition to utilising the sign of the cross, prayer, and the invocation of God.⁴⁶

Thus through various techniques of blessing, prayer and other words, and gesture, the Christian holy men became significant healers in fourth-century Syria.⁴⁷ What is more, with these techniques they were able to cure eye complaints and fevers (ailments targeted in the amulets discussed above), and all manner of diseases. Other afflictions which could be remedied, or for which the holy men could provide assistance, included conditions related to fertility and childbirth, problems for which healing correlations can be found in extant Aramaic amulets.⁴⁸ A couple of examples can be found in the accounts of Romanus and Macedonius. The humble Romanus, for instance, “often drove out serious diseases, and to many sterile women he gave the gift of children”.⁴⁹ It is also recorded that Macedonius promised to ask God for a single son for Theodoret’s mother and the child was conceived three years later. Furthermore, during her pregnancy Macedonius also saved Theodoret’s mother from a miscarriage. He achieved this by both making her repeat her promise that she would give her son to God, and by drinking the water given to her by the holy man.⁵⁰

In addition to the curing of ailments, pain relief and prevention were also available to supplicants. Theodoret, for example, records that Peter the Galatian instead of healing someone of cancer, provided pain relief to the sufferer.⁵¹ Furthermore, Julian is recorded as having protected people through preventative techniques.⁵²

Finally, the holy men were also credited with some extraordinary feats for which amuletic parallels may be difficult to find. For example, Julian was able to make a lame man walk,⁵³ and even more extraordinarily James brought a dead child back to life.⁵⁴ In the latter instance Theodoret writes of a family living in the suburbs whose children had

⁴⁶ HR, 22.3-5.

⁴⁷ Also HR, 13.9.

⁴⁸ For example see no. 38, MSF.

⁴⁹ ... πολλάκις χαλεπὰς ἀπήλασε νόσους, πολλαῖς δὲ γυναῖξι στερίφαις ἐχαρίσατο παῖδας. (HR, 11.4).

⁵⁰ HR, 13.16-17.

⁵¹ HR, 9.13.

⁵² HR, 21.14.

⁵³ HR, 2.19.

⁵⁴ HR, 21.14.

all died prematurely. As a consequence, on the birth of their next child the father went to James begging to obtain a long life for his child and promising to dedicate it to God should it live. The child died four years later while the father was absent, yet upon the latter's return he decided that:

‘It is fitting that I fulfil my promise and give the child, even though dead, to the man of God’. So he took it as he had promised, and laid it before those holy feet, saying what he had already said to his household. The man of God, placing the child before him and kneeling down, lay prostrate as he entreated the Master of life and death. In the late afternoon the child made utterance and called its father.⁵⁵

Having thus outlined the role of the ascetic as a powerful healer of people's numerous and varied ailments, there is one additional aspect of their healing prowess which needs to be discussed – the healing of animals. Theodoret, for instance, reports that Aphrahat was called upon to cure one of the emperor's horses,⁵⁶ while camels, asses and mules also benefited from Thalelaeus' healing abilities. Considering the importance of livestock, this must have provided a great service to the local community, a point supported by the resultant religious conversion of the community.⁵⁷

It has been pointed out above that the Jewish healers, in particular, were well known and well frequented for their healing expertise. The Christian holy men also experienced a considerable degree of popularity. Indeed their actions brought them wide acclaim and a great demand for their abilities. The fame of Maron, for instance, an ascetic living in the region of Cyrrhus, is reported to have circulated everywhere and “attracted everyone from every side and taught by experience the truth of the report”.⁵⁸ Symeon the Elder was also sought out by petitioners once his healing abilities were known. Theodoret records that:

This event not only filled the local inhabitants with awe, but also made the whole city hasten there – I mean Antioch, for to this city the place is subject – as one person begged

⁵⁵ «Προσῆκει, ἔφη, πληρῶσαί με τὴν ὑπόσχεσιν καὶ τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ τεθνεὸς ἀποδοῦναι». Ἀπεκόμισεν οὖν ὡς προεῖρηκε καὶ τέθηκε πρὸ τῶν ἁγίων ἐκείνων ποδῶν, λέγων ἐκεῖνα ἃ καὶ τοῖς οἰκείοις εἰρήκει. Ὁ δὲ θεῖος ἄνθρωπος προτεθηκῶς τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὰ γόνατα κλίνας ἔκειτο πρηνῆς τὸν ζωῆς καὶ θανάτου δεσπότην ἀντιβολῶν. Δείλης δὲ ὀψίας ἀφῆκε τὸ παιδίον φωνῆν καὶ τὸν πατέρα ἐκάλεσεν. (HR, 21.14).

⁵⁶ HR, 8.11.

⁵⁷ ... ἀλλὰ καὶ καμήλων καὶ ὄνων καὶ ἡμιόνων θεραπείας ἀπολαύοντων. Ἐντεῦθεν ἀσεβεῖα πάσαι κατεχόμενον ἅπαν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἔθνος τὴν μὲν πατρῶαν ἐξαπάτην ἠρνήθη, τοῦ θεοῦ δὲ φωτὸς τὴν αἴγλην ἐδέξατο. (HR, 28.5).

⁵⁸ πάντας δὲ πάντοθεν ἐφελκύσασθαι καὶ τῇ πείρᾳ διδάξαι τῆς φήμης τὸ ἀληθές. (HR, 16.2).

to be freed from demonic fury, another for an end to fever, another for a cure to some other trouble.⁵⁹

Both the fame and force of these healers also spread beyond life.⁶⁰ Consider, for example, Palladius' popularity after death:

To the splendor of his life bear witness the miracles performed after his death: even today his tomb pours forth cures of every kind – the witnesses are those who through faith draw them forth in abundance there.⁶¹

In this posthumous ability to perform miracles can be seen a transference of the piety and power of the ascetic to his corporeal remains and to the structure that contains them. Such posthumous powers were also present at the tombs of other holy figures, both ascetic and martyr. In the latter case, the powers that arose from death through faithfulness demonstrated, it can be argued, an extension of the long-standing Greco-Roman belief in the supernatural powers of those who suffered a violent and untimely death. Examples of such potent curative areas include: the healing tombs of Anuphusa and Zebinas;⁶² the tomb of Ammonius which was “said to cure all sufferers from shivery fever”;⁶³ the healing spring at the place of the martyrs Eugenius and Macarius;⁶⁴ the church of Saints Cosmas and Damian at Cyrrhus; and the relics of the martyr Julian buried near Antioch.⁶⁵

That tombs and relics⁶⁶ were popular and desirable is also attested in the accounts of numerous sources that tell of the competition that ensued after the death of an ascetic in order to secure the deceased's body, as in, for example, Theodoret's account of Maron:

⁵⁹ Τοῦτο οὐ μόνον τοὺς περιοίκους ἐνέπλησε δειμάτων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἄπασαν - τὴν Ἀντιόχου λέγω - ὑπὸ ταύτην γὰρ τὸ χωρίον ἐτέλει - θέειν ἐκεῖ κατηνάγκασε καὶ τὸν μὲν ἐπαγγέλλειν δαιμονικῆς λύττης ἀπαλλαγὴν, τὸν δὲ πυρετοῦ παῦλαν, τὸν δὲ ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν ἐνοχλούντων ἰατροῖαν. (HR, 6.6). The later Symeon (Stylites) was also to attract large crowds, such that people would travel great distances to see him and receive his assistance (HR, 26.11).

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom refers to healing through martyrs. See PG 48.938-939; 62.357f, & 412; 49.240.

⁶¹ Μαρτυρεῖ δὲ τῆ λαμπρότητι τῆς ζωῆς τὰ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν ἐνεργούμενα θαύματα. Ἀναβλύζει γὰρ ἡ ἐκείνου θήκη μέχρι καὶ τήμερον παντοδαπὰς θεραπειὰς καὶ μάρτυρες οἱ ταύτας ἐκεῖθεν ἀφθόνως διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἀρρόμοι. (HR, 7.4).

⁶² Anuphus in Sozomen (HE, 3.14); Zebinas in Theodoret (HR, 24.2).

⁶³ οὗ τὸ μνήμα λέγεται θεραπεύειν πάντας τοὺς ῥιγιαζομένους (Palladius, LH, 11).

⁶⁴ “*Artemii passio*,” tr. M. Vermes, in S.N.C. Lieu & D. Montserrat (eds), *From Constantine to Julian: Pagan and Byzantine Views. A Source History*, London & New York: Routledge (1996: 224-262) 239.

⁶⁵ Mayer in Leemans et al., “*Let us Die*”, 127-128, & trans. 129-140.

⁶⁶ Peter's girdle also had the ability to heal (HR, 15).

A bitter war over his body arose between his neighbors. One of the adjacent villages that was well-populated came out in mass, drove off the others and seized this thrice desired treasure; building a great shrine, they reap benefit therefore even to this day, honoring this victor with a public festival. We ourselves reap his blessing even at a distance; for sufficient for us instead of his tomb is his memory.⁶⁷

While the benefit reaped undoubtedly refers to the supernatural assistance provided to the appellants, it may also refer to the commercial benefits received by the community through the influx of pilgrims known to visit such sites.⁶⁸

Shrines deemed especially beneficial for those seeking healing often supported ‘incubation’ in order to effect the required remedy. Incubation involved suppliants sleeping at the shrine and receiving a dream which would heal them or direct them in finding a cure by providing pharmacological or some form of therapeutic advice.⁶⁹ A popular site for this kind of activity near Antioch was the shrine of the Maccabees at the Cave of Matrona.⁷⁰

The final exceptional example of supernatural healing involves the assignment of Christian healing powers to a tree. Sozomen relates an account of the expulsion of a daimon from a tree which people worshipped and the consequent imbuing of the tree “with the property of healing those who believed”.⁷¹ Thereby a site of significance was cleansed of its traditional religious affiliations, and assigned new religious power through the medium of healing.

⁶⁷ πόλεμος δὲ περὶ τοῦ σώματος τοῖς γειτονεύουσι συνέστη σφοδρός. Κώμη δὲ τις τῶν ὁμόρων πολυάνθρωπος πανδημεί παραγενομένη τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους ἐσκέδασε, τὸν δὲ τριπόθητον ἐκείνον ἤρπασε θησαυρὸν καὶ σηκὸν οἰκοδομησάμενοι μέγιστον τὴν ἐκεῖθεν μέχρι καὶ τήμερον ὠφέλειαν καρποῦνται δημοτελεῖ πανηγύρει τὸν νικηφόρον ἐκείνον γεραίροντες. Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ ἀπόντες τὴν εὐλογίαν καρπούμεθα · ἀρκεῖ γὰρ ἡμῖν ἀντὶ τῆς θήκης ἡ μνήμη. (HR 16.4). For other examples of competition to secure bodies of holy men see Theodoret, HR, 10.8, 17.10, 21.9.

⁶⁸ See P. Maraval, *Lieux Saints et Pèlerinages D'Orient. Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf (1985) 212; also L. De Light & P. De Neeve, “Ancient Periodic Markets: Festivals and Fairs,” *Athenaeum* 67 (1988) 391-416.

⁶⁹ See Chapter 10. Also, on non-Christian shrines and their testimony to healing (through inscriptions on walls) see Macmullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 54-55.

⁷⁰ Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 233. See Chapter 10 (section 3.3.2).

⁷¹ Ἀπελαθέντος δὲ τοῦ δαίμονος, εἰς μαρτυρίαν τοῦ συμβεβηκότος ἔμεινε τὸ φυτὸν, τοὺς πίστει χρωμένους ἰώμενον. (Sozomen, HE, 5.21). Another example of healing flora is provided by Sozomen in an account of an effective remedial herb that grew at the base of a statue of Christ (HE, 5.21).

Thus in fourth-century Syria there were various options for an individual seeking to be healed with the assistance of supernatural power. Healing could be provided by the *μάγντις*, the female healer, or the specifically Jewish or Christian healers and relics. These individuals could offer services which called upon one or numerous divinities and daimones in a variety of different ways in order to remedy the afflicted. It appears that an assortment of illnesses were treated by healers and their techniques, ranging from simple headaches through to fevers, epilepsy, and sterility. That a fourth-century Syrian would necessarily turn to the healer most clearly affiliated with the suppliant's religious beliefs is clearly not the case. The remonstrations of John Chrysostom and the conversion accounts of the hagiographies demonstrate that people sought out those whom they believed would be the most efficacious. Hence supernatural healing methods could offer individuals both assistance and hope in matters minor and major, affecting not only individual health but also family units (such as in the case of sterility), and thereby playing an important role in fourth-century well-being.

8.3 Palestine

The extant Palestinian evidence provides several parallels with the Syrian practices discussed above both in terms of the amulets and the narrative interests of the hagiographers. The investigation begins with an examination of a third-fourth century copper amulet from Kh Muslih aimed at extinguishing a fever suffered by a certain Cassius. The inscription is in Greek and Hebrew and is largely composed of Jewish liturgical language. It reads:

[...] *HNHHHY*, *YHWH* and *SABAOTH*, *YHWH ELOHIM*, I-am-who-I-am, the God *YHWH*, the God *ELOHIM*, art thou *ELOHIM YHWH EL* [God], and *EL* [God], the *EL* [God], art thou, *EL* (is) your name, *EL BBL*, *EL*, *YYYYYY HHHHHHH WWWWWW HHHHHHH*. *YHWH* [in circle] 'Holy is the Lord!' May the God himself who by his Word created all things, by the same Word, grant health [and] salvation for the whole body of Cassius whom Metradotion ['given-by-the-womb'] bore:
'And let there be' cessation from every pain, and rest.'

‘And let there be’ (that) the fever extinguishes itself from him, [both] the great and the slight (fever).’
 And by (the) names, both his hidden and his excellent, I adjure by the One who made the heavens and founded the earth and established the sea <and> who made everything, *Iaô Sabaôth*.⁷²

Kotansky comments that the writer of this therapeutic ‘prayer’ was possibly borrowing directly from recommendations found in contemporary medical diagnosis, and that the language may have simply originated in formal prayers to be spoken over the sick.⁷³ The amulet seeks to stop the pain from which Cassius is suffering, more specifically, fever. Kotansky’s proposal that, given the use of ἀνάπαισις, the amulet addresses a fever that has already flared up and is raging and hence needs to be extinguished, not warded off, seems valid.

The second extant artefact is a lead tablet found near Hebron, south of Jerusalem.⁷⁴ The tablet, dated between the third and fifth centuries of the common era, includes an inscription and *charaktêres* represented by figures drawn on four lines above the text. The inscription reads:

I invoke you *charaktêres* to lay Eusebios low, to whom the pious mother Megalê gave birth, with suffering and injury; cast him into a fever. Lay him low with suffering and death and headaches. Quickly, quickly, now, now!⁷⁵

This tablet, unlike the previous examples in this chapter, seeks to inflict and not assuage or alleviate fever. In this case Eusebios is meant to be disabled by the fever, even to die as a result. Why Eusebios deserves this curse is not indicated, although as has been seen in several instances above, curse tablets usually sought to inflict great misfortune on

⁷² (no. 56, GMA, 312-325)

[...] הנההההי יהוה וצבאות יהוה אלוהימ [אה]יה אשר אהיה האל יהוה האל האלוהימ
 אתה אלוהימ יהוה אל ואל האל אתה אל שמך אל בכל אל יייייי ההההההה
 וווווו תההההההה [...] הנההההי יהוה וצבאות יהוה אלוהימ

“Ἅγιος κύριος· αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἐν τῷ αἰὺ]τοῦ λόγῳ κτίσας τὰ πάντα, ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ λόγῳ δωρήσε ὑγίαν, σωτηρίαν παντὸς τοῦ σώματος Κασίου οὗ ἔτεκεν Μητραδῶτιον. καὶ ἔστω ἀνάπαισις παντὸς πόνου καὶ ἡσυχί[α], καὶ ἔστω ἀποσβῆναι ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὁ πυρετός, κ[αί] ὁ μέγας καὶ ὁ λεπτός. Καὶ κ[ατὰ] ὀνομ[ά]των, κ[αί] τῶν ἀποκρύφῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ καλῶν αὐτοῦ, ὀρκίζω εἰς τὸν ποιήσοντα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ θεμ[ελιῶ]σαντα γῆν καὶ ἐδράσαντα θάλ[λ]ασσαν, τὸν ποή[σαντα] πάντα, Ἰάω Σαβαῶθ.

⁷³ For a discussion on prayers and invocations, see Kotansky, “Incantations and Prayers”. See also Kotansky’s comments on this amulet GMA, 312-325. The Babylonian Talmud also includes a prescription for an inflammatory fever; see Shabbat 67a (Goldin, “The Magic of Magic,” 124).

⁷⁴ No. 106 in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 203. See also no. 163, SGD.

⁷⁵ Tr. from Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 203.

their targets. None, however, have so clearly demanded illness and death. Indeed it appears the caster wanted Eusebios to suffer as well as die, and if LiDonnici's arguments regarding the shame associated with males suffering from fever are taken into account, then Eusebios would definitely be suffering both physically and socially from his ailment.⁷⁶ Though no consolation to Eusebios, it is unlikely that he was a solitary victim of such an illness-curse. Of relevance here is an account from a later period which demonstrates how curses were acknowledged as plausible causes of illness. Cyril of Skythopolis relates the story of Euthemius:

"I am Euthemius, summoned here in faith. There is no need to be afraid. Show me where your pain is." When he pointed to his stomach, the apparition (the saint) straightened out his fingers, cut open the spot as if with a sword and withdrew from his stomach a tin strip which had certain *charaktères* on it and placed it on the table in front of him. He then wiped clean the spot with his hand and closed the incision.⁷⁷

The discussion now turns from the physical Palestinian evidence to the written accounts of the fourth century. The first example concerns locational healing, and those which follow pertain to the feats of Hilarion.

First then, the healing abilities of 'place'. Similar to the transformed tree mentioned above, Sozomen tells of a spot just beyond Nicopolis where Christ is said to have washed his feet in a fountain. The latter, Sozomen declares, consequently possessed the ability to remove all forms of disease from both people and animals.⁷⁸ In this scenario an area had been assigned religious significance. It was not just the place, however, but the water which came from the fountain, blessed by Christ himself, which provided the remedial assistance. A noteworthy point in Sozomen's account, however, does not relate purely to the healing properties of the fountain's water, but to the inclusion of animals in the account. That is, the author notes that animals were also healed by the water. The incorporation of this detail serves to inform the reader not only of the site's power, but also of its broad benefit. Animals, particularly rural livestock, as has already been mentioned above, were an important aspect of antique life. Therefore

⁷⁶ LiDonnici argues that although fever could be a natural condition (socially), it was also frequently associated with heating that resulted from passion or desire. For men, particularly competitive men, fever could be a social disease with social consequences. It could indicate an inability to control desire, with both the illness and its treatment considered as shameful. ("Burning for It," 86-86, 89).

⁷⁷ *Life of Saint Euthymius*, ch.57, cited in Gager, no. 164, *Curse Tablets*, 262. Mid sixth century.

⁷⁸ HE, 5.21.

the opportunity to have beasts cured of ailments would have provided significant assistance to the community.

The remaining Palestinian material relates, once again, to Jerome's hagiographical subject, Hilarion. His account is interesting, for the repertoire of the holy man's healing abilities and ailments virtually mirrors many of those recorded in Theodoret's work. Such similarities highlight the need to approach the hagiographical narrative with care. Nevertheless, the inclusion of such themes in the texts does suggest that contemporary audiences were associating, or being encouraged to associate, these types of abilities and powers with healers. Furthermore, that these figures were truly seen to possess healing powers, whether or not they were exactly those recorded, is demonstrated by the popularity of such figures in the period.⁷⁹ Thus these accounts must be read for the messages they sought to convey to their audiences both in the form of the ailments presented and in the manner in which they were remedied.

Jerome's first account of Hilarion's healing abilities concerns a woman "who found that she was despised by her husband on account of her sterility (for in fifteen years she had borne no fruit of wedlock)".⁸⁰ Although he initially shunned the woman's advances, the ascetic eventually asked the woman the reason for her approach and appeal to him. "On learning this he raised his eyes to heaven and bade her have faith, then wept over her as she departed. Within a year he saw her with a son."⁸¹ This is an interesting account for a number of reasons. The idea of female infertility is raised, an issue already seen above. In this account, however, we are told that the woman was, as a consequence of her perceived barrenness, despised by her husband. The importance of reproduction in the antique world is well documented, and this account demonstrates not only the significance of child-bearing, but also the ramifications of the perceived failure in achieving this. In this case the woman was despised by her husband; she carries the burden of shame for the couple's infertility. In this account the holy man is

⁷⁹ See, for instance, the discussion above regarding the popularity of the Syrian holy men and the shrines of saints and martyrs.

⁸⁰ "Cum interim mulier quaedam Eleutheropolitana cernens despectui se haberi a viro ob sterilitatem (jam enim per annos quindecim nullos conjugii fructus dederat)." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 13; PL 23.34 32-35).

⁸¹ "Et postquam didicit, levatis ad coelum oculis, fidere jussit: euntemque lacrymis prosecutus, exacto anno vidit cum filio." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 13; PL 23.34 44-47).

moved by the woman's plight. It would appear that he is well aware of the perception of a childless woman by others (such as the husband) and the social importance of having children. It is this plight which moves him to act.

It is also interesting that Jerome, like his counterpart Theodoret, records that the child which results from Hilarion's treatment is male. Considering the importance of male offspring in antiquity, it seems reasonable to assert that the hagiographers sought to impress upon their audience the extraordinary abilities of the ascetics, not just in their prowess in enabling fertility in the first place, but also in that the final outcome of their treatment was the most prized offspring of all, a son.

A final point in regard to this account is Hilarion's method of curing the infertility – weeping and raising his eyes to heaven. The holy man's turning to heaven can be seen to represent a direct appeal to the heavens, or God, through the raised face and possible silent prayer (invocation) that accompanied it. The weeping, on the other hand, may have served to tell the audience any number of things. Perhaps it simply represented the extreme pity that the holy man felt for the woman. Or the tears may have represented blessed water. However, the hagiographer, may also have been drawing on Gospel accounts of Jesus and his weeping for the death of Lazarus, thereby presenting a parallel in this account of the ascetic.⁸²

In another description of Hilarion's healing prowess, the supplicant is again a woman. This time, however, she is already a mother who seeks a remedy for her sons. Jerome writes:

Aristnete the wife of Elpidius who was afterwards pretorian prefect, a woman well known among her own people, still better known among Christians, on her return with her husband, from visiting the blessed Antony, was delayed at Gaza by the sickness of her three children; for there, whether it was owing to the vitiated atmosphere, or whether it was, as afterwards became clear, for the glory of God's servant Hilarion, they were all alike seized by a semi-tertian ague and despaired of by the physicians.⁸³

⁸² John 11:35. Jesus also wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

⁸³ "Aristaenete Elpidii, qui postea praefectus praetorio fuit, uxor, valde nobilis inter suos, et inter Christianos nobilior, revertens cum marito et tribus liberis a beato Antonio, Gazae propter eorum infirmitatem remorata est. Ibi enim sive ob corruptum aerem, sive (ut postea claruit) propter gloriam Hilarionis servi Dei, hemitritaeco pariter arrepti, omnes a medicis desperati sunt." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 14; PL 23.34 51 - 23.35 6).

When the mother found out that Hilarion was in the “neighbouring wilderness,” she immediately set out to find the holy man with only her handmaids and eunuchs, “forgetting her matronly state (she only remembered she was a mother).”⁸⁴ Aristnete besought Hilarion, telling him that should he assist, the Lord’s name would be glorified in the city of gentiles, and “then shall his servants enter Gaza and the idol Marnas shall fall to the ground”.⁸⁵ The holy man initially refused her entreaties, saying that he never left his cell nor entered the city, “but she threw herself upon the ground and cried repeatedly, ‘Hilarion, servant of Christ, give me back my children: Antony kept them safe in Egypt, do you save them in Syria’”.⁸⁶ Everyone wept including Hilarion, and the woman did not leave until he agreed to assist. The ascetic went to Gaza after sunset and:

on coming there he made the sign of the cross over the bed and the fevered limbs of each, and called upon the name of Jesus. Marvellous efficacy of the Name! As if from three fountains the sweat burst forth at the same time: in that very hour they took food, recognised their mourning mother, and, with thanks to God, warmly kissed the saint’s hands.⁸⁷

News of the matter even spread abroad and people flocked to Hilarion from Syria and Egypt, and Jerome writes that many converted to Christianity, some adopting the monastic life.⁸⁸

There are a number of points worth considering about this report. Firstly, Jerome’s suppliant is not only a woman, she is an important woman. Not only is this stated at the beginning of the account, but it is also emphasised in the commentary when the extent of Aristnete’s accompanying retinue is recorded. Jerome also implies that this collection of escorts would still have been considered inappropriate. Indeed in taking the limited retinue and hurrying to the holy man so expediently the concerned

⁸⁴ “Oblita matronalis pompae (tantum se matrem noverat) vadit comitata ancillulis et eunuchis.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 14; PL 23.35 10-12).

⁸⁵ “Et ingrediatur servus ejus Gazam, et idolum Marnas corruat.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 14; PL 23.35 17-19).

⁸⁶ “Prostravit se humi crebro clamitans: Hilarion, serve Christi, redde mihi liberos meus, Quos Antonius tenuit in Aegypto, a te serventur in Syria.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 14; PL 23.35 22-24).

⁸⁷ “Quo postquam venit, singulorum lectulos et ardentia membra consignans, invocavit Jesum. Et, o mira virtus! quasi de tribus fontibus sudor pariter erupit: eadem hora acceperunt cibos, lugentemque matrem cognoscentes, et benedicentes Deum, sancti manus deosculati sunt.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 14; PL 23.35 28-33).

⁸⁸ Jerome, *Hilarion*, 14.

mother was not acting honourably, but we are assured by Jerome that this was all right as she was acting as a good mother. Therefore, while her female honour was imminently threatened through her behaviour, it was saved through her exceptional actions as a parent. This reflection can be related to another point worthy of consideration and one which is paralleled in Theodoret – that is, the need for women to plead for the holy man’s assistance. This inclusion in the narrative probably serves to highlight the humility of the holy figure, who shuns the advances of women as part of the ascetic abstention from sexual conduct.⁸⁹ However, it may also reflect the social idea that a woman of good family was not meant to be entreating a strange man, an idea supported by Jerome’s stress on Aristnete’s behaviour.

Another point of interest in regard to this account is the idea that healing the woman’s sons would promote Christianity in Gaza and overcome the idol of Marnas. This suggests an awareness by the supplicant of the influence healing ability could have on people’s religious allegiance (especially when promoted by individuals with power and sway). Indeed this idea is exemplified at the end of the account when, upon healing the boys, the news of Hilarion’s success spread widely and attracted people from far and wide, many subsequently converting to Christianity.

Hilarion again weeps in this account, although clearly through emotion rather than for healing (suggesting that his weeping above also expressed his emotions). The holy man’s remedy is here provided through making the sign of the cross above the ailing boys and their limbs, while also invoking Jesus. This therapy is strikingly similar to that propounded by John Chrysostom as effective for all Christians (and not only those individuals deemed worthy of receiving divine gifts and abilities from God, such as ascetics⁹⁰). This simple method, one apparently available to all believers, cured ill youths of whom physicians had despaired. Thus Hilarion is portrayed as healing those whom secular medicine could not assist. This could suggest that healing through the supernatural was in this case indeed a last resort. However, it does provide the author

⁸⁹ There are a number of accounts in hagiographies in which the ascetic is reluctant to respond to the entreaties of women. Note also Dukes’ comment regarding Jerome’s “linkage between heresy, magic, and women; all of them in their own way tools and pawns of the devil”. (*Magic and Witchcraft*, 94).

⁹⁰ The abilities of holy figures are often justified in hagiographical texts as rewards for extraordinary piety and devotion.

with a very effective narrative tool, strengthening the position of the holy man as the ultimate healer through simply portraying him as able to heal that which others, with respected abilities, could not.

In a brief report, Jerome tells of another instance in which Hilarion proved beneficial. The account relates “to Majomites of Gaza which it is impossible to pass over in silence”.⁹¹ On this occasion, the man called Majomites was paralysed while quarrying building stones near the monastery. The disabled man was carried to Hilarion, and following his visit “immediately returned to his work in perfect health”.⁹²

There is not much detail to be gleaned from this account, although a few aspects can be briefly considered. Firstly, Hilarion is portrayed as able to heal the paralysed. This demonstrates extraordinary ability, for which parallels can also be found in the Gospel texts and Theodoret’s hagiography, as discussed above. Secondly, this account highlights the immediacy of the holy man’s treatment. That is, not only was the injured Majomites treated promptly, but his cure took effect straight away. Indeed the patient did not even require a period of recuperation! Such a portrayal could have conferred upon its audience a sense not only of the immediate nature of the holy healing, but also of the extreme relevance of this Christian remedy to everyday life, for through Hilarion this working man was able to return to his work unhindered. The holy man and his abilities were thus relevant and extremely beneficial to the working person for whom any lengthy period of treatment and recovery would have been detrimental.

Jerome’s final account of Hilarion’s abilities highlights the popularity of the holy man and healer. The hagiographer writes:

his sixty-third year found the old man at the head of a grand monastery and a multitude of resident brethren. There were such crowds of persons constantly bringing those who suffered from various kinds of sickness or were possessed of unclean spirits, that the whole circuit of the wilderness was full of all sorts of people.⁹³

⁹¹ “Quis vero silentio praeterire, quod Gazanus Majomites haud longe a monasterio ejus.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 19; PL 23.37 40-42).

⁹² “Totus paralysi dissolutus, et ab operis sociis delatus ad sanctum, statim sanus ad opus reversus est.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 19; PL 23.38 1-3).

⁹³ “Igitur sexagesimo tertio vitae anno cernens grande monasterium, et multitudinem fratrum secum habitantium; turbasque eroumi qui diversis languoribus, et immundis spiritibus occupatos ad se deducebant, ita ut omni genere hominum solitudo per circuitum repletur.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 29; PL 23.44 13-19).

Hilarion, however, lamented both his popularity and the consequence that “the people of Palestine and the adjoining province think me of some importance”.⁹⁴ He eventually fled through travel, but fame never eluded him. Upon his death, though, his relics, like those of his mentor Antony, were hidden, enabling the monk to finally attain some peace.⁹⁵ This report certainly highlights the degree to which abilities requiring the supernatural, including healing, were valued and sought. Furthermore the need to hide Hilarion’s remains demonstrates that these abilities were considered ceaseless, effective even beyond death. The required posthumous concealment also illustrates the degree of demand for supernaturally-endowed artefacts in late antiquity.⁹⁶ Finally, it can be argued that even though healing is presented as a divine gift closely intertwined with religious commitment, it is not this holiness that is sought by petitioners, but the manifestation of this piety in applicable, effective, and beneficial gifts.

8.4. Discussion. Motivations and a Discourse of Power

The material presented above has offered some insight into both the methods and the individuals that people in the fourth century sought after for assistance in healing, or even causing, illness in both Syria and Palestine. There is considerable similarity in the evidence from both regions, although more information on healers is available for Syria, and Palestine boasts the single sickness-curse of the two. Such discrepancies may reflect divergences between the two areas; however, given other parallels, it seems more likely that they stem from the limited amount of evidence available. Given the minimal distinction between the methods and intentions of the two regions then, they will be considered conjointly in much of the discussion that follows. This discussion will fall into two main areas considered to be the most relevant in relation to the material and the aims of the study. Thus, the motivations of those seeking

⁹⁴ “En homines Palaestinae, et vicinae provinciae existimant me alicujus esse momenti.” (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 29; PL 23.44 23-25).

⁹⁵ Jerome, *Hilarion*, 45-47. On Antony’s hidden corpse, see Jerome, *Hilarion*, 31.

⁹⁶ The demand for relics and popularity of those places which housed them has been discussed above.

healing assistance involving the supernatural will be discussed, followed by an examination of the assertion of Christian power in the traditional discourse of supernatural healing.

8.4.1 Motivations

In the fourth century there were various healing options open to people residing in both Syria and Palestine. For instance, physicians were readily available in urban centres, and they were entreated to attend all manner of ailments. Indeed in the agora of Antioch one could even observe an operation taking place.⁹⁷ Hospitals were also developing in this period, heavily supported by contemporary Christian bishops, and these provided assistance for all strata of society, including those sufferers of serious and debilitating illnesses such as leprosy and elephantiasis.⁹⁸ Given the accessibility of these forms of healing, people's continued appeal to methods involving the preternatural may seem a little puzzling. It is thus proposed here that an association of the supernatural with illness underlies the continuing and even burgeoning industry of supernatural healing in the fourth century.

It is a general assertion of modern scholarship that supernatural assistance for healing was sought as a last resort.⁹⁹ Such an argument even appears to be supported in several hagiographical accounts in which it is emphasised that the holy figure was only consulted after physicians were unable to assist in providing a remedy for the particular ailment.¹⁰⁰ Yet, as already suggested, surely such a statement in a hagiographical text has something to do with the text's intention of highlighting the superiority of Christian supernatural healing over and above other popular methods? In other words, by emphasising the inabilities of doctors, the author highlighted the exceptional ability of

⁹⁷ John Chrysostom comments on this practice (*In paralyticum*; PG 51.55).

⁹⁸ T.S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire*, Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press (1985) 21-23.

⁹⁹ For example, Baldwin points out that the healing saint in hagiographies is often the last resort, and that people went to doctors. Do-it-yourself medicine applied to those people who lived far away from urban centres. (B. Baldwin, "Beyond the House Call: Doctors in Early Byzantine History and Politics," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 [1984: 15-19] 19). This assertion is also based on the ideas of scholars with whom I have spoken on matters such as healing.

¹⁰⁰ See discussion above. This was already mentioned in relation to Jerome's account of Aristnete's appeal to Hilarion. Also HR, 13.9.

the holy man. Having said this, however, the discussion that follows will lead to the suggestion that the hagiographer in pointing out the ineffectiveness of doctors is not so much competing as transferring the illness out of the arena of the physical and into the realm of the supernatural, in which forum the holy man could be appropriately depicted as ascendant. Thus, supported by the argument which follows regarding the supernatural cause of illness, it is proposed in the following pages that a realignment of our thinking about supernatural healing methods is necessary in order to appreciate their role in fourth-century society. They were not the last resort, but an acknowledged and acceptable alternative to the more secular, medicinal methods of the physicians.

In support of this argument it is firstly worth acknowledging that neither in the written evidence of the hagiographical accounts nor Libanius can there be seen an element of doubt relating to methods utilising the supernatural for healing. Yet dubiety must surely be requisite for a *last resort*. Nor is there any apparent social association of supernatural healing methods with deviancy. John Chrysostom would appear to provide an exception to this assertion, until it is acknowledged that his remonstrations concern the 'brand' of the service and not the validity of the service itself. Thus there is no manifest social stigma attached *per se* to seeking assistance from such healers, or for utilising healing methods appealing to the supernatural.

A further support for the argument of supernatural healing as an alternative, not aberrant, service is the notion that illness was the result of daimonic assault. Only two decades ago Murdock in his study of illness theories argued that spirit aggression theories of illness were virtually universal, and that the association of supernatural causes with sickness outweighed that of natural causes in the belief systems of people throughout the world.¹⁰¹ That such a belief was also evident in fourth-century Syria and Palestine is also likely. Consider, for instance, the association of general misfortune, including illness, with the daimonic as demonstrated through the prevalent use of apotropaic methods to protect against the malevolent impact of daimones.¹⁰² The specific association of the daimonic with illness is also identifiable in the curse tablet

¹⁰¹ G.P. Murdock, *Theories of Illness. A World Survey*, Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press (1980) 26, 72.

¹⁰² See Chapter 7.

presented earlier in this chapter, a *defixio* through which the *charaktêres* invoked could instil serious illness in the spell's victim. In addition, hagiographical narrative supports this notion. An example is an account reported by Theodoret in which a woman falls ill with gluttony and her ailment is considered by some to be the result of a daimonic attack.¹⁰³ Finally, as already noted, Libanius' sicknesses of migraine and gout were also associated by the rhetor, his society, and his doctors with supernatural causes that the latter practitioners were unable to remedy.

When considering the idea that illness results from daimonic assault, the evidence available does suggest a degree of homogeneity across the Greco-Roman world. Thus, for instance, Naveh and Shaked in their study of late antique Aramaic spells and formulae argue that in the supernatural treatment of illness the source of the disorder is typically recognised as the intervention of evil spirits, either as a general phenomenon, or as specific evil agents responsible for particular problems.¹⁰⁴ These spirits that caused disease or a particular ailment were not always easy to distinguish. Yet references to spirits being present in a body would serve to explain the presence of disease, as well as the machinations of other people to harm an individual.¹⁰⁵ These scholars of late antique supernatural practices are not alone in their view. Kotansky, for example, makes a similar argument in reference to the contemporary Greek Magical Papyri.¹⁰⁶ He writes that:

The spells given in the magical papyri and those preserved on the extant amulets often do not differentiate between the specific ailment afflicting the patient and the daemonic influence held responsible for the disease. Descriptions of bodily ailments do occur, but they are usually made with special references as well to the malignant, preternatural influence behind the disease's manifestation.¹⁰⁷

Thus, the daimonic could be seen as intricately linked to the cause of illness. It was not necessarily the case that medical practitioners shared such views regarding this

¹⁰³ οἰκτεῖραντες οἱ προσήκοντες τὸν θεῖον ἐκεῖνον ἰκετεύουσιν ἄνθρωπον. Ὁ δὲ ἀφίκετο καὶ προσήξατο καὶ ὕδατι τὴν δεξιὰν ἐπιθείς καὶ τὴν σωτήριον ἐντυπώσας σφραγίδα καὶ πιεῖν κελεύσας τὸ πάθος ἰάσατο. (HR, 13.9).

¹⁰⁴ MSF, 34.

¹⁰⁵ MSF, 35.

¹⁰⁶ See also Trombley who writes of daimones being seen as the cause of physical dysfunctions and psychoneurotic disorders in Christian thought (*Hellenic Religion and Christianization*, 88).

¹⁰⁷ Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers," 117.

association. However, when they did, they may not have sought to treat the ailment, as was the case with Libanius' doctors who declared their inability to deal with the maladies, given their supernatural cause. These physicians were expressing a notion also reflected in broader evidence for medical and supernatural healing in late antiquity. For instance, medical texts recorded instructions which aimed at being physically efficacious. Their directions did not incorporate intentions to control or subdue the malevolent supernatural entities that may have caused an ailment.¹⁰⁸ This being the case, the argument for preternatural healers as alternative healers is further strengthened, for supernaturally caused illness could apparently only be treated supernaturally.

Thus it is possible to comprehend the complementary existence of both practitioners of physical medicine and those healers who utilised supernatural forces.¹⁰⁹ In the fourth century, it was understood that illness could be caused by malevolent supernatural forces. When such ailments were recognised, the treatment of a medical practitioner was not necessarily suitable and thus an individual required the resources of those offering supernaturally potent services. Within this framework of belief in preternatural prevalence and efficacy, the supernatural healer offered a viable and effective alternative to the medical healer. Considering that this context also set the backdrop for hagiographical accounts, the assertion of medical ineffectiveness can be seen to have served as a tool for the association of an ailment with the supernatural, and enabled the transference of the affliction into the framework of the narrative – divine power and the holy man. Hence, taking these arguments into consideration, it is here proposed that in order to benefit an understanding of antique beliefs and practices, it is necessary to realign thinking which views supernatural and non-supernatural methodologies as inherently opposed.

Having thus considered why people sought supernatural methods for healing their afflictions, it is also necessary to consider why people might have sought

¹⁰⁸ Naveh and Shaked record that this difference in aim (despite a seemingly 'magical' element to some medical texts and a degree of overlapping), means that there is little difficulty in distinguishing between 'magical' and medical writings. (MSF, 32).

¹⁰⁹ This helps to explain how Christianity can both support the establishment of hospitals, and promote the healing potency of the cross, etc., and the holy man. On Christian theology's acceptance of medicine, see particularly Miller, *Birth of the Byzantine Hospital*, 54-56.

conversely to inflict illness upon others through the invocation of daimonic powers. Unfortunately the extant example of such a curse, presented above, provides little detail as to the motivations of its caster. However, it is possible that many of those motivations already discussed in previous chapters may have provided provocation. In Libanius' sphere, for instance, the association of both his illnesses and the sufferings of his rivals with malicious supernatural methods can be linked with ideas of honour, shame, and envy, coupled with the provocations of the variable and competitive social world of fourth-century Syria.¹¹⁰ As has already been mentioned above, inflicting fever on Eusebios, as well as death, probably expressed a desire for him to suffer both physically and socially. Thus in addition to the discomfort and pain of the fever, Eusebios may also have been subject to social shame and the loss of reputation due to the nature of the ailment,¹¹¹ and the caster's motivation may therefore also have involved the shaming of his target.

8.4.2 A discourse of power

Now there has never been a time when a new prince disarmed his subjects; on the contrary, when he has found them unarmed he has always armed them, because when armed those arms become yours; those whom you suspect become faithful, and those who were faithful remain so, and they become your partisans rather than your subjects. And since all of your subjects cannot be armed, when those you arm are favoured you can deal more securely with the others; and that distinction in treatment which they recognize toward themselves makes them obliged to you; the others excuse you, judging it necessary that those who are in more danger and who hold more responsibility should have more reward.¹¹²

The final section of this chapter, dictated by the heavily Christian bias of the evidence, including the sermons of Chrysostom and the hagiographies, deals with similar 'Machiavellian' aspects of the fourth-century Christian healing discourse.

The extant fourth-century evidence overwhelmingly indicates the formation of a Christian form of supernatural healing which not only differentiated itself from traditional and popular forms, but also undermined the latter and diverted healing into a

¹¹⁰ For a discussion on these accusations and possible provocations for them, see Chapter 5 (section 3.3).

¹¹¹ See Lidonnici, "Burning for It," 87-89, 94-5.

¹¹² N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, tr. P. Bondanella & M. Musa, Oxford University Press (1984) 70.

Christian realm. In this way the church both made clear to its fourth-century audience the supreme power of the Christian God, and increased its own following through the impression of this power.

John Chrysostom provides an example of a Christian figure who directly remonstrates with his congregation for appealing to non-Christian healers to remedy their ills. In the case of the female practitioner, his concern lies both in people's appeals to a non-Christian source, and in the fact that that unsanctioned source was allegedly aligning herself with Christian power. He initially subverts the credibility of the female practitioner by labelling her as the 'drunken old woman', neither a flattering nor inspiring title for a healer. He furthermore condemns both the absorption of Christian features into her ritual, and her alleged claim to being a Christian (though she is possibly not). For Chrysostom the affront would have involved the tainting of Christianity both by way of the unbelieving healer, and the mix of Christian ritual and symbolism with the non-Christian.

In response, John Chrysostom asserts the power of Christian belief, symbolism, and ritual. The word of Christ and the sign of the Cross will serve as weapons and represent a mighty power. He promotes the power of the Christian God, accessible through the methods he condones, and steers away from traditional techniques which included the use of amulets (a form also condemned by the wider church in the canon of the Synod of Laodicea discussed above).

In the case of Chrysostom's criticisms of those venturing to Jewish healers, his perception of a rival is evident. As has been discussed above, John saw these practitioners as a threat, as they were in effect competing for the attentions of his flock. His concerns lay both with the supernatural nature of the power and its potency, and the capricious allegiance of his congregation who sought to utilise those powers that they perceived to be the most beneficial.¹¹³ In attracting the attention of Christians through healing prowess, the Jewish healer could also influence the religious allegiance of those supplicants. Indeed, the healing powers of a practitioner and his or her supernatural

¹¹³ People wanted to be healed and more than likely they would have used whoever was available and successful, Christian or non-Christian. See MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 138.

source was a significant influence on people's religious beliefs, as is suggested by the mass conversions attested to in hagiographical accounts.¹¹⁴ Hence, the effective Jewish healer could potentially sway petitioners away from Christianity towards Judaism. It is thus not surprising that Chrysostom is concerned, nor that he seeks to promote a stronger healing force in both the Christian ritual and deity.¹¹⁵

Contemporary Christian hagiographical accounts also provided a forum for the distinction and promotion of a supreme healing power – Christianity and the Christian God. The holy men described in the Syrian and Palestinian hagiographies are portrayed as socially aberrant individuals pursuing severe ascetic lifestyles and observing extreme religious piety. These significantly distinguishing features allowed them to perform often remarkable acts such as divinely-guided healing. The holy men consequently boasted a huge repertoire of healing abilities, proving extremely useful for anything from fevers through to paralysis. Such capabilities provided not just effective services but also benefits that were notably salient in their social relevance. For instance, the ability to provide a son for an infertile couple, or the treatment of livestock that were essential to rural communities.

In presenting and advancing the holy men and the supreme power that supported their activities, the hagiographers emphasised their role as the ultimate sources of healing by illustrating the ascetic's effectiveness, as well as his reputation, the status of his clientele, and his preeminence over contemporary alternatives. Hence they report that not only were these ascetics popular locally, but their abilities were also sought by people from often quite distant regions. In addition, it is also made apparent that important, respectable and influential people would seek out the holy men's assistance, assuring the audience of the quality of the ascetic's clientele.

¹¹⁴ For examples see the discussion above. See also G.P. Corrington, *'The Divine Man': His Origin and Function in Hellenistic Popular Religion*, Peter Lang (1986) 127, 224. Also Wilken on this point in relation to Sozomen (HE, 5.15) who states that the story "illustrates the religious power of effective magic" (*John Chrysostom*, 87).

¹¹⁵ Regarding healing as influential in religious conversion see also: MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 8-9. It is interesting that in modern Thailand, those who are healed will often make a pledge to change their religion, generally Buddhist to Muslim or vice-versa; however, this tends to be a token gesture of an offering of some sort, rather than an actual religious conversion. One wonders whether such token conversion may also have been evident in the fourth century. (See L. Golomb, *An Anthropology of Curing in Multiethnic Thailand*, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press [1985] 220-221).

As well as presenting the ascendancy of the Christian ascetics, hagiographers also stress that the result of the various remedies provided was not only the health of the body, but also the health of the soul. That is, healing often culminated in a change in religious belief, a conversion. In effect healing is presented as a tool for the promotion and tangible display of the Christian God. An awareness of this is also seen in John Chrysostom's comments, as seen above. In the case of the hagiographical narrative, however, the author not only presents his audience with impressive examples of Christian prowess, but also plants the suggestion that conversion is the expected reaction to the display of such power. The author is thus not necessarily attempting purely to maintain and bolster the Christian allegiance of his audience, such as John Chrysostom sought to do, but also to encourage religious conversion.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the relics of holy figures and martyrs and the sites which housed them also served to distinguish Christian healing power and promote its potency. These remains demonstrated the eternal strength of Christian authority. This efficacy, as with the salvation offered by the religion, was not diminished by mortal death, but could continue to serve and benefit in an effective and accessible form.

Thus various Christian sources can be seen to have asserted Christian sovereignty in the arena of supernatural healing. To do so they appear to have denigrated their opponents, casting aspersions on their powers, and condemned the use of traditional supernatural methods, such as amulets. This enabled them not only to assert their own authority but also to diminish the power-base of their opponents. In addition Christian authorities actively promoted alternative, efficacious methods of curing, such as the word of Christ, the sign of the cross and the high-profile holy man. By following this path Christianity positioned itself as a supreme force in the socially important discourse of healing,¹¹⁶ and consequently encouraged the conversion, as well as the firm allegiance, of those living in both Syria and Palestine.

¹¹⁶ A point also briefly made by S. Jackson-Case, *Experience with the Supernatural in Early Christian Times*, New York: Century (1929) 33.

8.5 Conclusion

The various forms of evidence that have been presented in this chapter suggest that healing utilising the supernatural was a factor of both Palestinian and Syrian society in the fourth century. Assorted methods, such as amulets, incantations, and supplications to holy men, were utilised as efficacious remedies for illness, while a curse tablet could be seen as an effective measure for inflicting it. It has been argued that the use and popularity of these measures was intrinsically linked to a social belief in the association of the malevolent daimonic with illness, and that recourse to supernatural healing is to be seen as an alternative to physical medicine rather than a last resort. Furthermore, given the significance that prowess in subduing the malevolent supernatural held in both communities, it is proposed that the hagiographical emphasis on the ineffectiveness of physical medicine facilitates the transference of healing from the physical realm to the non-physical. Within this realm, it is proposed that Christianity was able to assert itself within the arena of healing-power as a potent and ascendant force, with the holy man playing a particularly potent role.

POSSESSION AND EXPULSION
EXPERIENCING AND DISPELLING THE DAIMONIC

9.1 Introduction

Adjured are you, spirit, in the name of I-am-who-I-am and in the name of his holy angels, that you may move away and be expelled and keep far from Klara daughter of Kyrana, and that you may have no longer from now on power over her. May you (ie. the spirit) be bound and kept away from her, in the name of Afarkha'el, Ahi'el, Raphael, Mafri'el, Ofafi'el, Kefuya'el, 'Ami'el, Turi'el, and in the name of Michael, Besam'el, Nedav'el. (May) she (ie. Klara) (be) sealed (away) from you and also from all evil. In the name of the word of the Holy one of the World, dd nnn ... Quick, Klara. (*magic characters*) ...¹

This inscription encapsulates the essence of this chapter – the daimonic possession of individuals and the curing rite of daimonic expulsion. In this scenario the notion of malevolent affliction, exemplified numerous times above, is intensified as the daimonic takes possession of, and thereby resides within, the corporeal and cerebral faculties of its victim. This malignant and disturbing trespass consequently necessitated potent and effective supernal expulsion.

¹ No. 18, MSF, 57-60; tr. MSF.

משבעת רוחה בשמה דאדיה אשר אדיה ובשמ מ
לאבו קדישה דתווע ותנער ותרחק מן קלארא ברתה
דקראנה ולא תהי לך עוד מבנן רשו בה אסר את ומרחק
מנה בשמה דאפרכאל אודאל רפאל מפריאל אופפאל
כפריאל עמיאל טוריאל ובשמה דמיכאל בסמאל נדנאל
חתימה מנן ועוד מן כל ביש בשמה דמימר קדיש ילמה דד ננן
נג חם E*E חקק (*magic characters*) עקצסכרד E אפסס פנע סעצכקסס
גמ אתי רוחה עברי מ (*magic characters and Hebrew letters*)
חזש קלארא ⊖ חנפ A⊙A AN*ANA AMANACHA BB
יה יה יה (*magic characters and Hebrew letters*)
כתראת ותבדי בא כמון קתר מנין דימר לים
אנברויה מיקונכוס גור תמב גסת יללום זוכה

The provenance is unknown, but it is believed to be from either Syria or Lebanon.

It is worthwhile noting that this concept of possession and the resultant need for expulsion, commonly referred to as exorcism, is believed to have had Semitic origins and, in the New Testament period at least, the idea was specifically local to the Syro-Palestinian world.² Kotansky points out that such an idea was initially foreign to Greek concepts of the daimonic. Greek formulae thus tended to evoke the daimonic while Jewish types exorcised: “the Semitic πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is an entity to be expelled from the sufferer (the demon-possessed); the Greek δαίμων is a genie awakened from the dead to render service”.³

This chapter thus investigates the activities and rituals related to supernatural possession and expulsion. The material which deals with exorcism is overwhelmingly Christian and is contained predominantly in the extant hagiographies. Nevertheless, despite this source bias, it is still possible to gain insight into the phenomenon in both Syria and Palestine. The investigation begins with a look at the extant evidence for the regions and then continues with a discussion of possession and expulsion, speculating on its place within the world-view of the fourth century. It is thus proposed that within the framework of supernatural belief, daimonic possession and expulsion provide a significant forum for the exploitation of vulnerability and the manifestation of potency in a dramatic contest of submission and control.

9.2 Syria

Theodoret provides insight into Syrian daimonic expulsion in his now familiar hagiography. The first two accounts concern the holy man Marcianus. In the first instance, Theodoret tells of a Syrian military commander from a noble family in Beroea

² For a discussion on the Semitic origin of the concept see Kotansky, as well as Merkelbach. (R. Kotansky, “Greek Exorcistic Amulets,” in M. Meyer & P. Mirecki [eds], *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill [1995: 243-277] 264; R. Merkelbach, *ABRASAX. Ausgewählte Papyri Religiösen und Magischen Inhalts. Exorzismen und Jüdisch/Christlich Beeinflusste Texte*, vol. 4, Westdeutscher Verlag [1996] 1).

³ Kotansky, “Greek Exorcistic Amulets,” 276. On the language of Greek amulets supporting the long-standing position that Greek exorcism represents a phenomenon largely indebted to traditional Jewish practice, see Kotansky, “Greek Exorcistic Amulets,” 246.

who had a daughter. This girl had for sometime “been delirious and raving, troubled by an evil demon.”⁴ Thus the father sought assistance from the holy man, Marcianus. He had an oil flask placed in front of Marcianus’ hut, and there it was blessed by the ascetic:

with instructions to return the flask to the giver. As he gave this order, the demon at a distance of four days’ journey cried out at the power of the one who was driving him out. Marcianus was effecting in Beroea the work of judges, using as it were executioners against the demon, driving out the miscreant and freeing the girl of his activity. The father of the girl ascertained this exactly.⁵

Marcianus also proved beneficial when another parent sought a cure for her daughter. Theodoret writes of the holy man:

He had received such grace from God that a woman of the nobility, distinguished in birth and wealth, hastened to him from Antioch and begged him to help her daughter who was beset by a demon: ‘I had a dream,’ she said, ‘that bade me hasten here and get healing for my daughter from the head of the monastery.’ ... When they realized whom she was seeking ... they persuaded him to come to the woman, and immediately she recognized his face. The evil demon cried out and departed from the girl.⁶

Both of these scenarios show parents of high status and wealth (a fact Theodoret seems to emphasise), seeking assistance from the holy man for their daughters of an unknown age. Whether there is anything to be read into Theodoret’s assertion of the wealth and status of the subjects of his account is uncertain. Such note of social standing is often made by Theodoret in his other hagiographical tales and so may be nothing more than part of his literary technique. However, by stressing social standing perhaps he also sought to give greater legitimacy to the holy person’s practice, and add further interest, or impress, his audience.

⁴ ... ἐπὶ χρόνῳ πολλῶ κορυβαντιώσης καὶ ὑπὸ πονηροῦ δαίμονος ἐνοχλουμένης καὶ λυττώσης. (HR, 3.9).

⁵ ἀπέπεμψεν ἀποδοῦναι τῷ δεδωκότι κελεύσας. Καὶ ὁ μὲν ταῦτα ἐκέλευε· τέτταρας δὲ σταθμοὺς ὁ δαίμων ἀφεστηκῶς τοῦ ἐξελαύνοντος ἐβόα τὴν δύναμιν· καὶ Μαρκιανὸς ἐν Βεροίᾳ τὰ δικαστῶν εἰργάζετο δημίους τισὶ κατὰ τοῦ δαίμονος χρώμενος, καὶ τὸν ἀλιτήριον ἐξελαύνων, καὶ τὴν κόρην καθαρὰν τῆς ἐνεργείας ἀποφαίνων ἐκείνου. Καὶ τοῦτο μεμάθηκεν ἀκριβῶς ὁ τῆς κόρης πατήρ. (HR, 3.9).

⁶ Τοσαύτην δὲ χάριν θεόθεν ἐδέξατο ὡς γυναῖκά τινα τῶν ἐπισήμων καὶ ἐπὶ γένει καὶ πλοῦτῳ σεμνυνομένων ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀντιοχείων αὐτόσε δραμεῖν καὶ ἰκετεῦσαι ἐπαμῦναι τῇ θυγατρὶ ὑπὸ δαίμονος πολεμουμένη. « Ὅναρ γάρ, φησιν, ἔθεασάμην τινὰ ἐνταῦθα δραμεῖν παρεγγυῶντα καὶ ταῖς εὐχαῖς τοῦ τῆς μονῆς ἡγεμονεύοντος τῇ θυγατρὶ πορίσαι τὴν σωτηρίαν. » ... Ὡς δὲ ἔγνωσαν τὸν ζητούμενον... πείσαντες αὐτὸν ἤγαγον πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ παραυτίκα ἢ μὲν ἐπέγνω τὸ πρόσωπον· ὁ δὲ πονηρὸς δαίμων βοήσας τὴν κόρην κατέλιπεν. (HR, 3.22).

While each possessed girl was troubled by a daimon and one had for a long time “been delirious and raving”, the symptoms which afflict the girls are not described in any detail. We know only that Theodoret claims that their parents thought them possessed. Anxious parents are also mentioned by John Chrysostom, who comments on them seeking out the holy people in the mountains and harassing them to free their sons of the daimonic mania which beset them.⁷ The mania from which John Chrysostom’s and Theodoret’s victims suffered is an ailment, the form of which is difficult to determine. However, given the hagiographer’s use of terms including raving and frenzy, as well as making reference to insanity,⁸ it would appear that he may be referring to some form of mental illness, and, more definitely, forms of behaviour perceived to be aberrant (such as raving). Indeed these afflictions are so severe that both Theodoret and John Chrysostom can only attribute them to daimonic possession. This suggests that the demonstrated behaviour of the victim is in some way significantly deviating from the individual’s regular manner. However, the daimonic association may also imply that the exhibited behaviour is diverging from the ‘human norm’ in that it can only be attributed to the immediate, residing influence of the non-human, the daimonic.

Curing these daimonic possessions did not require any involved and intricate ritual. Instead, both exorcisms needed only the assent and will of the holy man himself. The oil was not even used to anoint the first victim. Merely the command to hand over the flask of blessed oil was enough to evict the daimon, which was at that point a considerable distance away. The second victim was likewise cured from a distance and without any ritual. Here, though, the role of the dream was significant. In this instance the mother is led by a dream-vision⁹ to the monk, and it is when she recognises the face of Marcianus, upon his appearance, that the daimon departs from her daughter. In this way the dream provides a trigger for the exorcism. In giving the dream such a pivotal

⁷ John Chrysostom, *In illud vidua eligatur*; PG 51.331 18-21.

⁸ ... κορυβαντιώσης καὶ ὑπὸ πονηροῦ δαίμονος ἐνοχλουμένης καὶ λυττώσης (HR, 3.9); and Theodoret writes that one victim is cured of her ‘insanity’ through the exorcism. (HR, 3).

⁹ Term borrowed from Miller (P.C. Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity. Studies in the Imagination of a Culture*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). For more discussion on revelatory dreams Chapter 10 (section 3.3.2). Miller also provides an excellent study on dreams in the late antique Greco-Roman world.

role in the process of expelling the daimon, it can be argued that the narrator is drawing upon the antecedence of traditional Greco-Roman divinatory and healing practice. Indeed dreams, as a medium for supernatural communication, were both revelatory and therapeutic in late antiquity. In Theodoret's account both the image of the holy man is presented to the woman and, it would seem, some form of direction for finding him.¹⁰ Thus the hagiographer is utilising contemporary understanding of supernatural dreams, their form and their function, to promote the efficacy of the Christian God and the holy man.

In the other accounts that refer to daimonic expulsion it is the power of prayer, holy water, the name of the saviour, and the sign of the cross, that Palladius¹¹ and Theodoret record as having been effective. For instance, Peter the Galatian was approached by a "raving maniac, full of the action of the evil daimon", and this maniacal individual was "cleansed" and freed from his "diabolical frenzy" through prayer.¹²

Consider also Macedonius' treatment using prayer and blessed-water. In this instance, the holy man is recorded as having, through praying and blessing the water given to a wealthy woman, cured the latter of her 'insanity'. Furthermore, the author writes that the husband who had supplicated the holy man to assist his wife actually acted against the advice of the doctors who had said that she was suffering from an illness of the brain and prescribed their own 'ineffectual remedies'.¹³ That this woman was treated for an 'insanity' which doctors considered an illness of the brain, does suggest some association of mental illness with possession, for symptoms seen as related to the brain by doctors were also viewed as symptoms of daimonic possession.

¹⁰ The idea that dreams could provide beneficial suggestions was not uncommon. See Chapter 10 (section 3.3.2).

¹¹ Palladius, LH, 18.22.

¹² Ἐπεὶ δὲ τις ἀφίκετο κορυβαντιῶν καὶ μεμηνῶς καὶ τῆς τοῦ πονηροῦ δαίμονος ἐνεργείας ἀνάπλεως, ἐκάθηρε μὲν αὐτὸν προσευξάμενος καὶ τῆς διαβολικῆς ἐκείνης ἠλευθέρωσε βακχείας. (HR, 9.4); See also Thalladius in HR, 22.3. To be noted in addition is that Sozomen tells of Arsacius, a Persian turned Christian who could predict events and exorcise daimons, but he provides very little detail about his actions. Sozomen, HE, 4.16.

¹³ HR, 13.13.

Theodoret's reference to doctors, and their inefficacy, is not limited to this account of Macedonius. On several occasions the author, in a manner reminiscent of similar assertions discussed in Chapter 8, seeks to promote the ascendant role of the holy figure in supernatural healing, and in doing so presents the inefficacy of practitioners of physical medicine. An example is the case of the ascetic Maron:

One could see fevers quenched by the dew of his blessing, shivering quieted, demons put to flight, and varied diseases of every kind cured by a single remedy; the progeny of physicians apply to each disease the appropriate remedy, but the prayer of the saint is a common antidote for every distress.¹⁴

Theodoret, notably, does not here dismiss the abilities of doctors. He acknowledges that they can offer appropriate remedies for various ailments. However, he asserts the holy man's superiority by saying that the latter is able to treat all of these problems with one potent method, prayer. That the remedies of physicians could have been seen as an alternative to the supernatural approach has been argued above, and, given this quote, the same argument can aptly be applied to the sphere of expulsion also. Even when, as in the former account, Theodoret records that physicians were ineffectual in contrast to the abilities of the holy man, the notion of the acknowledged co-existence of the two healing forms remains. In this case the husband appealed to Marcianus after consulting the physicians. It could be said that his act was that of a 'last resort'; however, given the supernatural association with illness, the concept of daimonic possession, and the intentions of the author to present the 'ultimate' healer or exorcist, then this sequence of consultation is not altogether surprising.

Another point to be raised in relation to Theodoret's accounts of daimonic expulsion concerns several instances in which an analogy is made between this process and the secular legal system. For example in the first narrative mentioned above, Marcianus is given the role of judge and executioner: "Marcianus was effecting in Beroea the work of judges, using as it were executioners against the demon, driving out the miscreant and freeing the girl of his activity". The same analogy is drawn in a report

¹⁴ ἦν γὰρ ἰδεῖν καὶ πυρετοὺς σβεννυμένους τῇ δρόσῳ τῆς εὐλογίας καὶ φρίκην παυομένην καὶ δαίμονας δραπετεύοντας καὶ τὰ παντοδαπὰ καὶ ποικίλα παθήματα ἐνὶ φαρμάκῳ θεραπευόμενα. Ἰατρῶν μὲν γὰρ παῖδες ἐκάστῳ παθήματι τὸ κατάλληλον προσφέρουσι φάρμακον, ἡ δὲ τῶν ἁγίων προσευχὴ κοινὸν ἐστὶ παθῶν ἀπάντων ἀλεξιφάρμακον. (HR, 16.2).

on Peter (the Galatian), in which Theodoret writes that his mother brought her cook to the holy man to be exorcised. The latter having prayed, then:

ordered the demon to tell the cause of his power over one of God's creatures, like some murderer or burglar standing before the judge's seat and ordered to say what he had done; so he proceeded through everything, compelled by fear to tell the truth, contrary to his want.¹⁵

In accord with Peter's demand, the daimon confesses that he sought to know the way that the monks exorcise, and he promises to depart at the ascetic's command.

In another instance, Peter again uses prayer and his interrogative style of exorcism to address a daimon that had possessed a 'rustic' and to command it to flee on behalf of Christ, at which the victim is subsequently freed of his 'frenzy' (λύττη).¹⁶

In these situations, the holy men are portrayed as potent figures capable not only of expelling possessing-daimones, but also of controlling them (they can demand information from them, for example). Furthermore, in their role as adjudicators the ascetics are presented in positions of public responsibility, enabled to assert the rule of propriety over deviance. Finally, this judicial framework also provides interesting parallels with antique Jewish and Christian liturgical exorcisms which, it has been argued, were believed to be efficacious because of a litigious conceptualisation of the cosmos. Within such a conceptual context, Jewish exorcism, in particular, saw God as the ultimate witness and judge of a daimon which had crossed the boundary set by the deity by harassing or possessing a person.¹⁷ If this notion is applied to Theodoret's accounts, the holy man as God's representative can be seen to be taking on the role of divine adjudicator.

A final, brief note on the hagiographical accounts concerns the popularity of the ascetics capable of expelling daimones from the possessed. For instance, Theodoret records that Symeon the Elder's healing and exorcisms "not only filled the local

¹⁵ ἐκέλευσε τῶν δαίμονι τῆς κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ποιήματος ἐξουσίας τὴν αἰτίαν εἰπεῖν.
 Ὁ δὲ καθάπερ τις ἀνδροφόνος ἢ τοιχωρύχος πρὸ δικαστικοῦ βήματος ἐστῶς καὶ λέγειν ἅ
 δέδρακε προσταττόμενος οὕτως ἅπαντα διεξήει παρὰ τὸ εἰωθος ὑπὸ δέους ἀληθεύειν
 ἀναγκαζόμενος. (HR, 9.9).

¹⁶ HR, 9.10.

¹⁷ See Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, 58.

inhabitants with awe, but also made the whole city [Antioch] hasten to him".¹⁸ Thus, as was the case with healing, daimonic-expulsion abilities could impact on an ascetic's reputation and appeal amongst the wider community.

Theodoret's narrative above all sought, and managed, to demonstrate the power of the Christian holy man and divinity over daimones who, though powerful enough to take over humans, provided very little opposition for the Christian ascetic. Furthermore this potency was enacted through a variety of methods, consistent only in their appellation, and attribution, to the Christian deity.

Extant evidence also confirms that relics and martyria were popular and effective venues for executing exorcisms. For instance, John Chrysostom expounds on the force of the martyria of St Babylas and St Julian near Antioch.¹⁹ On the martyrdom of Julian he states:

What's more I won't just guarantee this from what happened a long time ago, but also from what still happens even now. I mean that, if you grab someone who's demon-possessed and exhibiting manic behaviour and take them in to that holy tomb where the martyr's remains lie, without a doubt you'll see them jumping back and fleeing. For they instantly leap right out of the front doors as if about to set foot on hot coals, and they don't dare to look directly at the coffin itself.²⁰

The audience is told that the daimon is blinded and subsequently expelled from its victim, by the emission of an invisible flash of light from the martyr's tomb.²¹ In this case the possessing daimon is affected by proximity to the holy relic, and expelled by the deceased martyr in a manner invisible to a human observer, yet powerfully anti-daimonic and effective.

The final set of evidence relating to daimonic-expulsion in fourth-century Syria involves the exorcistic rites performed as part of baptismal training. There is the instance of an extant amulet with text based on, and itself possibly even used in, the

¹⁸ Τοῦτο οὐ μόνον τοὺς περιοίκους ἐνέπλησε δείματος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἅπασαν ... θέειν ἐκεῖ. (HR, 6.6).

¹⁹ *De s. Babyla*, SC 362.294-312. See also trans. W. Mayer in Leemans et al., *Let us Die*, 142-148.

²⁰ Καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν πάλαι συμβεβηκόπων πιστώσομαι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἔτι καὶ νῦν γινομένων. Λαβὼν γὰρ τινα δαιμονῶντα καὶ μαινόμενον εἰσάγαγε πρὸς τὸν ἅγιον τάφον ἐκεῖνον, ἐνθα τοῦ μάρτυρος τὰ λείψανα, καὶ ὄψει πάντως ἀποπηδῶντα καὶ φεύγοντα. Καθάπερ γὰρ ἀνθράκων μέλλων ἐπιβαίνειν, οὕτως ἐξ αὐτῶν εὐθέως ἐξάλλεται τῶν προθύρων, οὐδὲ πρὸς τὴν θήκην αὐτὴν ἀντιβλέψαι τολμῶν. (*In s. Julianum*; PG 50.669 57 - 670 5). Tr. W. Mayer in Leemans et al., *Let us Die*, 132-133.

²¹ John Chrysostom, *In s. Julianum*; PG 50.669 52 - 670 5.

pre-baptismal exorcisms of catechumens before their admission into the catechumenate.²² The amulet from third or fourth-century Antiochia Caesarea (Pisidia) records a simple exorcistic formula deriving from a Christian liturgical (baptismal) context. It reads: “For (evil) spirits: ‘Phôathphro, depart from Basilius, by the right hand of God, and by the blood of Christ, and by her (*sic*) angels and (the =) Church.’”²³

That candidates would utilise exorcistic methods in their baptismal training is not unusual; indeed John Chrysostom incorporated a daily exorcism ritual in his candidate’s preparation regime. However, in the case of Chrysostom,²⁴ his baptismal-training candidates were sent “to the words of the exorcists”,²⁵ and equipped with words to terrify, and cause to flee, even the fiercest and most cruel daimones.²⁶ They were not equipped with, nor even allowed to use, charms. On the exorcistic ritual, Chrysostom states:

You must understand why, after daily instruction, we send you to the words of the exorcists. For the rite does not take place without aim or purpose; you are going to receive the King of heaven to dwell within you. This is why, after we have admonished you, those appointed to this task take you and, as if they were preparing a house for a royal visit, they cleanse your mind by those awesome words, putting to flight every device of the wicked one and making it worthy of the royal presence. For even if the daimon be fierce and cruel, after these terrifying words and invocation of the common Master of all thing, he must withdraw with all speed.²⁷

²² Kotansky, GMA, 177.

²³ Πρὸς πνεύματα; Φωαθρο, ἀναχώρησον ἀπὸ Βασελίου, τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρ[ί] τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὸ ἔμα τοῦ Χ(ριστοῦ) καὶ τοῖς ἀγγέλοις α(ὐ)τῆς καὶ ἰκλησίᾳ. (no. 35 in GMA, 169-180; tr. Kotansky). On fourth-century spells as baptismal formulae for exorcism, see MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 92 n.44.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, *Cat. hom.* 2 & 10.

²⁵ ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν ἐξορκιζόντων ὑμᾶς φωνὰς παραπέμπομεν. (*Cat. hom.* 2.12; SC 50 bis).

²⁶ μετὰ τὰς φωνὰς ἐκείνας τὰς φοβερὰς καὶ τὴν ἐπίκλησιν τοῦ κοινοῦ πάντων δεσπότης μὴ μετὰ πολλοῦ τοῦ τάχους αὐτῶν ἀποστῆναι. (*Cat. hom.* 2.12; SC 50 bis).

²⁷ Δεῖ τοίνυν ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι τίνος ἕνεκεν μετὰ τὴν διδασκαλίαν τὴν καθημερινὴν ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν ἐξορκιζόντων ὑμᾶς φωνὰς παραπέμπομεν. Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπλῶς οὐδὲ εἰκῆ τοῦτο γίνεται, ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ μέλλετε ἔνοικον δέχεσθαι τὸν ἐπουράνιον βασιλέα διὰ τοῦτο μετὰ τὴν παρ’ ἡμῶν νοθεσίαν παραλαμβάνοντες ὑμᾶς οἱ εἰς τοῦτο τεταγμένοι, καθάπερ οἰκίαν τινὰ εὐτρεπίζοντες τῶ μέλλοντι παραγίνεσθαι βασιλεῖ, οὕτως ἐκκαθαίρουσιν ὑμῶν τὴν διάνοιαν διὰ τῶν φοβερῶν ἐκείνων λόγων, φυγαδεύοντες πᾶσαν τοῦ πονηροῦ τὴν μηχανήν, καὶ ἀξίαν τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως παρουσίας κατασκευάζοντες. Οὐδὲ γὰρ οἶόν τε, κἂν ἄγριος ἢ τις δαίμων κἂν ἀπηνής, μετὰ τὰς φωνὰς ἐκείνας τὰς φοβερὰς καὶ τὴν ἐπίκλησιν τοῦ κοινοῦ πάντων δεσπότης μὴ μετὰ πολλοῦ τοῦ τάχους αὐτῶν ἀποστῆναι. (SC 50bis 139-140; tr. from Kalleres. *Cat. hom.* 2.12).

This exorcism forms a daily part of a baptismal candidate's training and preparation. According to the words of Chrysostom, it effectively serves to cleanse the candidate's mind of the daimonic in preparation for the acceptance of God at baptism. Thus this daily process of daimonic-expulsion makes the candidate ready with the resources – words (albeit terrifying ones) – to battle and expel influential daimones. As Kalleres argues, baptismal candidates were provided with the 'oral weaponry' with which to partake in spiritual warfare between Christ and Satan.²⁸

9.3 Palestine

The main source for daimonic-expulsions in fourth-century Palestine is Jerome's *Life of St Hilarion*, which provides several noteworthy accounts of the popular Hilarion's triumphs over the daimonic.²⁹ For instance, Jerome records that the holy man exorcised countless numbers amongst the Saracens, and what is more, that he did this despite the non-Christian religious affiliations of the nation.³⁰

The reference to the Saracens is brief, so our discussion really begins with Jerome's presentation of Marsitas' possession. The author tells us that this powerful youth had become possessed by a daimon.³¹ As a consequence of the daimonic intrusion the strong youth became a violent and threatening person who injured many others, even biting off ears and noses, and breaking people's feet and legs. As a possessed person he was a terrifying threat not just to himself, but also to those around him. Indeed Jerome tells us how all people, including monks, feared him. Hilarion, however, showed no fear and, when the youth was brought to him bound in chains, he ordered

²⁸ See Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, 4-5, 72-107.

²⁹ On the popularity of the holy man, see earlier references above, as well as Jerome's account of the crowds who sought him out at the monastery: "turbasque eorum qui diversis languoribus, et immundis spiritibus occupatos ad se deducebant, ita ut omni genere hominum solitudo per circumitum repleretur." ("There were such crowds of persons constantly bringing those who suffered from various kinds of sickness or were possessed of unclean spirits, that the whole circuit of the wilderness was full of all sorts of people." [*Hilarion*, 29; PL 23.44 16-19]). Also, recording Hilarion's ability to expel a demon by "calling on the name of Christ", see Sozomen HE, 5.15.

³⁰ *Hilarion*, 25.

³¹ Jerome, *Hilarion*, 17.

that the victim be freed of the irons. Then he commanded Marsitas to bow his head and come to him. The pacified victim of possession obeyed him and went to the ascetic, and though unable to look him in the face, proceeded to lick the holy man's feet. Jerome writes: "At last the daimon which had possessed the young man being tortured by the saint's adjurations came forth on the seventh day".³²

This account is noticeably different from Theodoret's Syrian reports, although there are manifest similarities in the exemplification of the power and effectiveness of the holy man. For instance, the image of the daimon-possessed victim is not only more vivid, but also more frightening. Marsitas was not only affected by the daimonic intrusion, he was affecting others through his consequent violent behaviour, such that he had to be chained in order to protect people from him. This is almost a bestial image, which is effectively opposed by the description of the victim's submissiveness when in the presence of Hilarion. Thus, Jerome portrays a victim of possession whose behaviour is not only dramatically altered as a result of the daimonic intrusion, but which also has a detrimental impact on his community. This makes Hilarion's display of courage all the more noteworthy and the victim's passivity an impressive presentation of the holy man's control over the daimonic-possessor. Yet despite Hilarion's evident authority over the daimon and its victim, the torture and expulsion of the intruder is not successful until seven days of adjuration have passed. This, however, does not bring Hilarion's potency into question. On the contrary, given the daimon's subservience to the holy man (demonstrated by Marsitas licking his feet) this week-long process merely serves to illustrate the strength of the daimon, and ultimately the superior force of the holy man able to expel it.

That violent behaviour could ensue from possession is also evident in another account in which the victim of possession was also bound in chains. In this case Jerome writes about a leading and wealthy man in the community whose 'eyes portended raging madness' and who was possessed by a 'legion of daimones'.³³ Once again the ascetic

³² "Adjuratus itaque daemon, et tortus, qui juvenem possederat, septima die egressus est." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 17; PL 23.36 39-41).

³³ "a legione possessus daemonum, ... furorisque saevitiam torvi oculi minabantur." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 18; PL 23.37 2-4).

does not fear the possessed, and apparently dangerous, man, showing no fear when the latter threateningly grabs and lifts him. Instead Hilarion:

bent back his hand over his shoulder till he touched the man's head, seized his hair and drew him round so as to be foot to foot with him; he then stretched both his hands in a straight line, and trod on his two feet with both his own, while he cried out again and again, "To torment with you! you crowd of demons, to torment!" The sufferer shouted aloud and bent back his neck till his head touched the ground, while the saint said, "Lord Jesus, release this wretched man, release this captive. Yours it is to conquer many, no less than one."³⁴

Then Jerome recounts: "What I now relate is unparalleled. From one man's lips were heard different voices and as it were the confused shouts of a multitude. Well, he too was cured."³⁵

There are a number of noteworthy features about this incident. For instance, the victim of possession, Orion, was again a man and, what is more, a man of status and power. He was also an individual whose madness (*furor*) was manifested in behaviour that required that he be bound in chains: "Hands, neck, sides, feet were laden with iron, and his glaring eyes portended an access of raging madness,"³⁶ a menacing image intensified by the report of the monks' fears when the possession-victim grabbed Hilarion. Thus again there is the representation of daimonic possession being especially shown in violent, anti-social behaviour.

Also of particular interest is the hagiographer's report that Orion was possessed by numerous daimones. That multi-daimonic possession could occur is unparalleled in any of the evidence presented in this chapter, unless the daily baptismal ritual can be seen to represent a similar notion. Nevertheless, that a "legion of daimones" were possessing the man is reaffirmed by Jerome when he writes of the different voices and

³⁴ "Ac sic reflexa super humeros manu, caput ejus tetigit: apprehensoque crine, ante pedes adduxit: stringens e regione ambas manus ejus, et plantas utroque calcans pede, simulque ingeminans, torquere [*Al.*, torquere, ait], daemonum turba, torquere. Cumque ille ejularet, et reflexa cervice terram vertice tangeret: Domine, inquit, Jesu, solve miserum, solve captivum. Ut unum, ita et plures vincere tuum est." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 18; PL 23.37 12-20).

³⁵ "Rem luquor inauditam, ex uno hominis ore diversae voces, et quasi confusus populi clamor audiebatur. Curatus itaque et hic." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 18; PL 23.37 20-23).

³⁶ "Manus, cervix, latera, pedes ferro onerati erant, furorisque saevitiam torvi oculi minabantur" (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 18; PL 23.37 3-4). This bondage imagery is reminiscent of the intentions of many of the curses discussed above, which seek to bind their victim to the daimon or daimones adjured in the invocations. Perhaps this reference can also then be seen as a metaphor for a curse's effect, that is, the man is daimonically bound, because of a binding-spell/curse.

confused shouts of a multitude that emanated from Orion as the daimones were expelled by Hilarion. That the holy man was able to drive out this multitude of daimones also serves to accentuate his abilities and the potency of his God.

The latter point in regard to Hilarion's potency and the ascendancy of his God is further emphasised by the stance that the ascetic appears to adopt through the procedure. That is, Hilarion stood on Orion's feet (presumably so that the latter could not run) with his arms outstretched. This presents a physical image representative of the cross. If this interpretation is correct, it must be noted that such a portrayal could have served to evoke in the audience, through a recognition of the religious significance of the image, an association with the source of the exorcistic power, the Christian God.

Thus in this account, Hilarion's potency, his stature, and his commands to the daimones and prayer to Jesus, all serve to release Orion from his multi-daimonic affliction.

In another instance, Jerome records how Hilarion's reputation spread across the empire, such that an officer of the Emperor Constantius from the Western provinces came to seek his help. This man:

had long, that is to say from infancy, been pursued by a devil, who forced him in the night to howl, groan, and gnash his teeth. He therefore secretly asked the Emperor for a post-warrant, plainly telling him why he wanted it, and having also obtained letters to the legate at Palestine came with great pomp and a large retinue to Gaza.³⁷

We are told that:

Immediately on being questioned by the servant of God the man sprang up on tiptoe, so as scarcely to touch the ground with his feet, and with a wild roar replied in Syriac in which language he had been interrogated. Pure Syriac was heard flowing from the lips of a barbarian who knew only French and Latin, and that without the absence of a sibilant, or an aspirate, or an idiom of the speech of Palestine. The demon then confessed by what means he had entered into him. Further, that his interpreters who knew only Greek and Latin might understand, Hilarion questioned him also in Greek, and when he gave the same answer in the same words and alleged in excuse many occasions on which spells had been laid upon him, and how he was bound to yield to magic arts, "I care not," said the saint, "how you came to enter, but I command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to come out."³⁸

³⁷ "Antiquo, hoc est, ab infantia possessus daemone, qui noctibus eum ululare, ingemiscere, fremere dentibus compellebat, secreto ab imperatore Evectionem, petiit, causam ei simpliciter indicans. Et acceptis ad Consularem quoque Palaestinae litteris, cum ingenti honore et comitatu Gazam deductus est." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 22; PL 23.40 16-22).

³⁸ "Statim ergo ad interrogationem Dei servi suspensus homo, vix terram pedibus tangere coepit, et immane rugiens, Syro quo interrogatus fuerat sermone, respondit. Videres de ore barbaro, et qui Francam

This account provides a wealth of interesting information, for instance, the idea that the emperor was fully aware of his officer's affliction, and also supported his trip. Indeed while the purpose of his travels was not known to the wider community, his journey was in no way discrete as he was accompanied by a large retinue and great pomp. Jerome even writes that the community around Hilarion became very concerned when the officer and his entourage arrived seeking out the holy man and, unaware of his purpose, immediately rallied to show their support for Hilarion (suggesting that this had not always been the case). This portrayal of a figure with a public profile and private affliction also extended to the execution of the daimon-expulsion, which in contrast to the previous example was not witnessed by a crowd.

The possession and expulsion are also very interesting. This man suffers from his daimon at night and howls, groans, and gnashes his teeth – his symptoms of possession are dog-like, they are bestial. Thus the manifestation of this man's possession, while perhaps not physically threatening to others (for we are not told that he is deleterious), is still portrayed as irregular, perhaps even frightening, and certainly not human, behaviour

Also noteworthy is that this long-term affliction had, according to the intruding daimon, been brought about by *magicae artes*. Thus the reader is led to believe that a spell or curse cast on the officer as an infant produced this lengthy possession. Considering the duration and effectiveness of the possession, there is certainly an inference of strength in this supernatural machination. Such an evident association between daimonic possession and supernatural practices, such as curses, has not been made in any of the cases considered above.³⁹ This is not to say, however, that such an association would not have been made by Jerome or his contemporary audience, who were drawing upon similar social knowledge and supernatural awareness. All that can

tantum et Latinam linguam noverat, Syra ad purum verba resonare: ut non stridor, non aspiratio, non idioma aliquod Palaestina deesset eloquii. Confessus est itaque, quo in eum intrasset ordine. Et ut interpretes ejus intelligerent, qui Graecam tantum et Latinam linguam noverant, Graece quoque eum interrogavit. Quo similiter et in verba eadem repondente, multasque incantationum occasiones et necessitates magicarum artium obtendente, non curo, ait, quomodo intraveris; sed ut ex eas in nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi, impero." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 22; PL 23.41 2-17).

³⁹ Unless the above suggestion (n.39), linking the bondage imagery of possession-victims with binding spells, is considered.

be said here, though, is that Jerome's account illustrates that daimonic possession could be understood to be the product of a human utilising a supernatural agency. Furthermore, the inclusion of this detail, and therefore Hilarion's confrontation of this spell-bound daimon, serve to place the Christian holy man as an ascendant force in the contemporary sphere of supernatural power and manipulation.

A further significant aspect of this account is the role of language in the execution of the expulsion. That is, Jerome makes special reference to the fact that while the victim of the possession spoke only French and Latin, his daimonic possessor was able to communicate in both pure Syriac and Greek. This suggests that supernatural entities were not perceived to be bound by cultural and geographical borders. The inclusion of this detail served both to highlight the truly pervasive influence of the daimonic, and consequently the holy man's international relevance in being able to control it. It is possible that this language reference was also some subtle allusion to the language of curses, and to the possible provincial or religious background of the caster. Given, however, the eclectic linguistic and religious nature of many extant inscriptions, this does not seem likely. Nevertheless it is worth noting that this linguistic aspect of the account and its role in the expulsion of the daimon may suggest some degree of social understanding of ritual language in exorcism, upon which Jerome was drawing.⁴⁰

The final reference by Jerome to daimonic possession and expulsion concerns the affliction of an animal. That this act was included in Hilarion's hagiographical repertoire relates to a belief that animals were vulnerable to daimonic attack, because of their value to people. Jerome writes:

brute animals were also daily brought to him in a state of madness, and among them a Bactrian camel of enormous size amid the shouts of thirty men or more who held him tight with stout ropes. He had already injured many. His eyes were bloodshot, his mouth filled with foam, his rolling tongue swollen, and above every other source of terror was his loud and hideous roar. Well, the old man ordered him to be let go. ...The saint went by himself to meet him, and addressing him in Syriac said, "You do not alarm me, devil, huge though your present body is. Whether in a fox or a camel you are just the same." Meanwhile he stood with outstretched hand. The brute raging and looking as if he would devour Hilarion came up to him, but immediately fell down, laid its head on the ground,

⁴⁰ This is in effect a ritualisation of language. On this concept see Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, esp. 72-107.

and to the amazement of all present showed suddenly no less tameness than it had exhibited ferocity before.⁴¹

The madness of this camel is pronounced. It is a violent and dangerous animal which had injured people and could apparently only be restrained by ropes held by thirty men. As in the human incidents, Hilarion does not fear the mad raging creature as others do, and declares this to the daimon that possesses it. His brave manner and the immediately submissive behaviour of the camel, reminiscent of earlier accounts, effectively asserts his authority and strength over the daimon that is promptly released from the animal. This restoration of the animal, through the effective expulsion of the daimon, would have proved beneficial both to its owners, in restoring part of their livelihood, and to the community, by eliminating the threat of a dangerous animal.

Lastly, the pilgrim Egeria in her letters to the nuns back in the Latin West tells of a Palestinian custom in which those preparing for baptism during the season of the Lenten fast go to be exorcised by the clergy first thing in the morning, directly after the morning dismissal in the Anastasis.⁴² This practice is also discussed by Cyril of Jerusalem who, like John Chrysostom in Syria, included a daily exorcistic rite in the training of baptismal candidates; indeed for Cyril a soul could not be purified without exorcism.⁴³ Cyril tells his baptismal candidates: "You will receive arms that cause terror to daimons; and if you do not cast your arms away, but keep the seal upon your soul, the daimon will not approach; he will cower away in fear; for by the Spirit of God daimons are cast out."⁴⁴ Thus the Palestinian baptismal candidate also received the 'weaponry'

⁴¹ "Parum est de hominibus loqui, bruta quoque animalia quotidie ad eum furentia pertrahebantur, in quibus Bactrum camelum enormis magnitudinis, qui jam multos obtriverat, trigenta et eo amplius viri distentum solidissimis funibus cum clamore adduxerunt. Sanguinei erant oculi, spumabat os, volubilis lingua turgebat, et supor omnem terrorem rugitus personabat immanis. Jussit igitur eum dimitti senex. Statim vero et qui adduxerant, et qui cum sene erant, usque ad unum omnes diffugere. Porro illi solus perrexit obviam, et sermone Syro: Non me, inquit, terres, diabole, tanta mole corporis: et in vulpecula, et in camelo unus atque idem es. Et interim porrecta stabat manu. Ad quem dum ferens et quasi eum devoratura bellua pervenisset, statim corruit: submissumque caput terrae coaequavit, mirantibus cunctis qui aderant, post tantam ferociam, tantam subito mansuetudinem." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 23; PL 23.41 22-39).

⁴² *Egeria's Travels*, J. Wilkinson ed., London: SPCK (1971) 46.1.

⁴³ *Proto catechesis* 9.

⁴⁴ (ἐκβάλλεται) tr. in Kalleres. *Cat. hom.* 17.35. See also *Cat. hom.* 20 (NPNF II.7.3); and for Cyril's concept of possession see *Cat. hom.* 16.15. For an indepth study of the exorcistic rituals in baptismal training in Cyril's homilies see Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, esp.133-245.

by which daimons would be driven away (and repelled – weapons that are therefore exorcistic and apotropaic) and the soul cleansed of, and protected from, the daimonic.

9.4 Possession and Expulsion. Some remarks

It is here proposed that the supernatural drama of squatters and evictors, daimonic possession and expulsion, is ultimately a display of social control in two strands: firstly, the desire to control and explain unacceptable conditions (of affliction) or perceived deviant or irregular behaviour, and secondly, the desire to restore that behaviour or condition to an understood norm. These points will be explained further in the discussion below, which will consider possession and expulsion separately in an attempt to understand and position this phenomenon within its social context.

9.4.1 Possession

The discussion begins with a consideration of possession in both Syria and Palestine. The evidence from both regions portrays a conception of possession clearly linked with the daimonic invasion of an individual's being both physically and mentally (for example in violent, raving, and manic behaviour). Although writing about late twentieth century Sinhalese beliefs and practices, Kapferer's statement of invading demons seems to suit the fourth century setting also:

Thus the characterization of demon personality and action presents them as the extreme, disordering potential of nature incarnate, gaining power in culture through their domination of it. They present in their being and action all-consuming anger, lust and greed, and as polluting and uncivilized creatures subvert the cultural order, disrupting and subordinating it to the ordered disorder of the demonic.⁴⁵

The sense of disorder which Kapferer expresses is most evident in the manner in which daimonic possession manifests itself. The Syrian examples were limited in their description of afflictions; for example, we were told by Theodoret and John

⁴⁵ B. Kapferer, "Exorcisms and the Symbolic Identity of Women," in *ibid.*, *A Celebration of Demons. Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*, Providence, Oxford, & Washington: Berg Publishers Limited, & Smithsonian Institution Press (1991) 144.

Chrysostom of raving, delirious behaviour and mania. Jerome's Palestinian account, on the other hand, included the ability for a victim of possession, or more precisely the invading daimon, to speak fluently in numerous languages (though the holy man was not outdone in this either), as well as the somewhat more vivid images of violently mad people who were decidedly frightening to those around them.

It is noteworthy that no identifiable 'type' of individual appears most disposed to this daimonic affliction. That is, the hagiographical accounts present a wide variety of victims of possession. The Syrian reports, for instance, concern children, wives, the household cook, and a 'rustic', while the Palestinian material, in contrast, deals specifically with males. This may reflect the social reality of possession in the two regions, that is, a variety of victims in Syria, and only men in Palestine. However, this is difficult to determine, particularly without more substantial material evidence from each region to lend support to such an assertion.⁴⁶ A common feature amongst many of the sufferers was, however, a degree of wealth and social status; the cook, presumably the 'rustic', and Marsitas being the notable exceptions. Although, given that it has been noted in several other hagiographical instances recounted above, this attribute is clearly not exclusive to victims of daimonic possession and expulsion. Another notable feature relates to portrayals of behaviour. Thus while the male victims, particularly in Jerome's account, displayed aggressive or bestial behaviour, Theodoret's women and children were simply recorded as raving, being insane or in a frenzy, and the behavioural imagery of uncontrolled violence is absent. Having said this, however, any possible association of behavioural forms with gender in this case is more likely to reflect the narrative styles of the hagiographers, rather than gender-related manifestations of daimonic possession. That is, in portraying all the daimonically possessed victims subdued by Hilarion as strong and threatening males, Jerome, for instance, presented to his audience an especially potent holy man.

Being thus able to determine, to varying degrees, the nature of possession, the form of its manifestation, and the variety of its victims, it is left to ascertain the reason

⁴⁶ Several exorcistic amulets have been published by Naveh and Shaked, assigned a provenance of Syria-Palestine, and dated to late antiquity. These seek protection for both males and females.

for its infliction. Jerome, as an example, provides some idea in his report of the commanding officer from the Western empire whose daimon was expelled by Hilarion. In this account he records that *magicae artes* instigated the daimonic possession, and hence it was the work of an individual or individuals who sought to harm the man as an infant. Yet even though the method for instilling the daimonic occupation is revealed, the motivation for afflicting this on an individual, let alone an infant, is not asserted. The discussion therefore turns to consider the inclusion of daimonic possession in the supernatural discourse of fourth-century Syria and Palestine. Here it will be suggested that social perception of illness and deviant behaviour, the need to assert religious differentiation, as well as the social perception of vulnerability, can all be considered as influential factors in the occurrence of daimonic possession in the fourth century.

The deliberation begins with a contemplation of the social perception of illness, and its role in the identification of the daimonically possessed. The conception of illness, or an overt affliction such as fever, in the Greco-Roman world was not necessarily positive, as evidenced, for instance, in the fourth-century Syrian practice of exiling the seriously ill, such as ‘elephantiasis’ (leprosy) and cancer sufferers, and occasionally also epileptics, from the city.⁴⁷ Also pointing to a less than positive conception of illness is LiDonnici’s argument regarding the social shame associated with men suffering fever, because of the association of this illness with desire. Thus the manifestation of the fever was perceived to demonstrate the sufferer’s shameful inability to control his own desire.⁴⁸

In the instances discussed above, the victims’ afflictions manifested themselves – raving, frenzies, and manias – to the degree that some individuals even had to be physically restrained. Considering community reaction to illnesses such as epilepsy and fever, it can be argued that afflictions exposing elements of frenzy and mania would not have been viewed positively by society. Certainly most of the individuals in Jerome’s accounts were a real threat to their community (even the distressed camel posed a similar danger). If the threat that these people posed is considered, as well as the fact

⁴⁷ For example, John Chrysostom, *Ad Stagirium* 3; PG 47.489-490.

⁴⁸ LiDonnici, “Burning for It,” 83-89.

that individuals suffering from various ailments could be physically or socially (in the case of fever, for example) exiled from communities, is it not therefore possible that people (and even animals) who were struck by such complaints faced communal exile in some form? If this notion is accepted, then it can be reasoned further that afflictions manifesting themselves in behaviour which would have threatened the sufferers with social alienation could be attributed to daimonic influences, in particular possession.

This assertion of a social impetus behind the attribution of daimonic influence to affliction is better explained if we consider Janowitz's argument for the negative late antique concept of the body and its social association with evil forces. Janowitz writes:

With the rise of the utopian worldview, the human body gained prominence as the battleground for conflicts between human and supernatural forces. Evil forces were so closely intertwined with life on earth the war had to be fought one body at a time.⁴⁹

Janowitz argues that a fight against evil is at the core of exorcistic practice. If we accept Janowitz's notion of the body as the arena in which evil is seen to manifest itself in the late antique world, then it is not surprising that serious ailments which display themselves in behaviour that threatens people would be explained as daimonic. Furthermore, if this negative association with the body existed, then arguably the negative association of the complaint with the sufferer was reduced if that affliction could be blamed on daimonic forces. Perhaps this is why in the case of the Western officer who came to Hilarion, his possession was said to have affected him as an innocent infant, and more importantly was blamed on *artes magicae*. This could completely exonerate the officer from association with the affliction, but further it would make him a completely separate entity from the evil that inhabited his body. Basically this ensured that he could in no way be perceived badly for his unusual behaviour and his character could not be associated with the daimonic. Thus his leadership abilities could not be called into question by his behaviour (or, one would think, the respect he demanded affected), for his 'possession' spared him any association with it.

A further reason for the association of daimonic possession with behaviour could be related to issues of deviant forms of activity. That is, we are not always told of

⁴⁹ Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 46.

the symptoms of the victims in the hagiographical accounts. As far as we know, the assertion of someone's possession-status could simply depend on those who were around the victim, such as family, friends and the community. Interestingly several of the accounts involved parents seeking assistance for their children or a husband seeking a cure for his wife. These victims are all in less powerful roles or, in anthropological terms, in positions of ambiguous status. Various modern anthropological studies have observed that overwhelmingly women and those of subservient, ambiguous, or low social status are more vulnerable to daimonic possession, and that their condition is often understood as symbolic of wider problems affecting others as well as themselves.⁵⁰

Now, if this argument is extended to consider Golomb's point that daimonic possession is a socially sanctioned cathartic outlet, especially in the context of the public nature of possession and exorcism,⁵¹ then perhaps daimonic intrusion in the fourth century can also be seen as an expression of dissatisfaction or frustration. Golomb's study in Thailand discussed, for example, the correlation of possession with marital insecurity. An example is the scenario of a wife who, aware of and frustrated by a husband's favour of another woman, would become possessed, and her frustration and insecurity would then be addressed through the process of possession and exorcism.⁵² There is no clear evidence to support this idea in the fourth century. Nevertheless the notion is worth considering, as we do see in the Syrian evidence at least the daimonic invasion of those for whom possession could be a cathartic outlet, such as children possibly seeking the attention of parents, and wives the attention of their husbands.

One more point along this line is the possibility that it was the behaviour of the victims which was perceived as deviant and hence had to be labelled as such by the family and community. Consider, for example, the possibility that the children, both daughters and sons, being cured by holy men of their 'manias' of which we know very little, were in fact displaying behavioural forms considered socially deviant within the family or community setting (much as some rebellious teenage behaviour is considered

⁵⁰ See, for example, Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*.

⁵¹ Golomb, *An Anthropology of Curing*, 232.

⁵² Golomb, *An Anthropology of Curing*, 238-241.

to be today). If the supposition is made that the frenzied, raging, and manic behaviour of alleged victims of daimonic possession is perceived by the family and community to be deviant, that is, to be in violation of appropriate conduct within their social system, then these individuals would also be labelled as such.⁵³ Neyrey argues that deviance: “refers to those behaviors and conditions judged to jeopardize the interests and social standing of persons who negatively label the behavior or condition”.⁵⁴ If this is applied to the case of the children’s possessions, then their frenzied and manic behaviours could be considered deviant by the family, and thus possibly by the community also, and this deviance would jeopardise the interests and reputations of the victims and their families. Given the wealthy status which is often noted in these instances, issues of honour and reputation may have been especially significant.⁵⁵ Thus in order to avoid the loss of honour and accumulation of shame, the existent supernatural discourse allowed for the attribution of the affliction to the daimonic, which would consequently reduce the accountability of the victim and any associated social perceptions of the victim and his or her family.

From these concepts, assertions of daimonic possession could be seen to work as a method for maintaining group cohesion by designating inappropriate behaviour as deviant and associating it with the daimonic (in which case the interrogative nature of many possessions would assist in making the victim blameless in his or her affliction).⁵⁶

As Leeper writes:

An accusation, then, can serve both to label certain actions and behaviors as unacceptable to the point of societal abomination, and, in so doing, point to and sanction the opposite behaviors as socially normative and desirable.⁵⁷

⁵³ Neyrey identifies three steps in the typical deviance process. Firstly, a group, community or society interprets some behaviour as deviant. Secondly, those people who behave in the manner deemed to be deviant, are themselves labelled as such. And thirdly, a treatment is accorded which is considered appropriate for such deviants. (Neyrey, *Social World of Luke-Acts*, 102.)

⁵⁴ Neyrey, *Social World of Luke-Acts*, 100.

⁵⁵ The notion that the loss of one person’s honour affected that of the whole family unit has already been discussed above. See in particular the discussion in Chapter 6 (6.4).

⁵⁶ For a discussion of possession and exorcism as a means for maintaining group cohesion see E.A. Leeper, “The Role of Exorcism in Early Christianity,” *Studia Patristica* 26.7 (1993: 59-62) 62. See also Golomb, *Anthropology of Curing*, 231, 237-238.

⁵⁷ Leeper, “Role of Exorcism,” 62.

Another social issue is the association of daimones with religious deviance, allowing for the assertion of religious differentiation and pre-eminence,⁵⁸ for example, the Christian association of the non-Christian with the daimonic. This was seen in the allusion to the non-Christian associations of the Saracens and the countless exorcisms which Hilarion had performed amongst them. In Christian thought daimones were associated with non-Christian beliefs, therefore even state activities which involved traditional Greco-Roman practices were seen as daimonic.⁵⁹ By aligning such behaviour with the daimonic, Christianity was redrawing its internal boundaries and clearly differentiating itself from unsanctioned behaviour and belief.⁶⁰ This is exemplified in the daily exorcistic ritual that formed part of baptismal training. Positioning these activities, particularly in Syria, within a framework of oaths and obligation, Kalleres asserts that daimones were deemed to be in possession of all individuals until their supernatural contracts were cancelled through baptism.⁶¹ Thus, in the context of pre-baptismal training, the church was clearly aligning the non-Christian past of their candidates with the daimonic, and effectively declaring them possessed until such time as they could be declared cleansed and thus acceptable to the Christian group.

The final point is a brief reference to the concept of vulnerability. That men, women and children were considered physically and socially vulnerable and hence susceptible to supernatural attack has already been discussed in Chapter 7.⁶² This concept can also be applied to the victims of daimonic possession. These individuals may have been in socially vulnerable positions, such as those discussed above. However, the account which best exemplifies the idea of social vulnerability does not involve a human, but a camel. Indeed in the report in which Hilarion exorcised the Bactrian camel, Jerome makes it clear that the holy man expelled daimones from

⁵⁸ It has been asserted by many scholars that power over daimones proved a key attraction of Christianity, and an assertion of its religious power. See, for instance, Chapter 8, n.112.

⁵⁹ Leeper, "Role of Exorcism," 59; and for a discussion of Eusebius' association of those who teach divergent forms of faith or who slip from Christianity as being subject to daimonic spirits (Eusebius, *HE*, 2.14.1, 3.26, 4.11.9, 5.14) (Leeper, "Role of Exorcism," 60).

⁶⁰ See Leeper, "Role of Exorcism," 62.

⁶¹ Kalleres, "John Chrysostom and Baptism". This concept is revisited below in relation to the act of exorcism and Kalleres' assertion that the ritual was a daily realignment of the contract between the candidate and the devil.

⁶² See 7.5.

animals because they belonged to people, and thus their suffering affected the latter. An animal was therefore vulnerable to daimonic attack, including possession, because it held a position of value in society. Likewise the daimonic invasion of livestock and valuable animals, such as camels, made the community vulnerable, both through the physical threat of a dangerous animal (such as the possessed camel) and through the impact on livelihood that the loss of the animal could have.

In the case of daimonic possession the vulnerability which is most evident is corporeal and cerebral. The result of this daimonic occupation was an affliction which most apparently manifested itself in overt behaviours of frenzy, mania, and violence; behaviours which, it has been suggested above, may have been deemed as socially deviant. Considering the cultural perceptions and consequences of such manners, as well as the prevalent understanding of the pervasive influence of the supernatural, daimonic possession must have been perceived of as a clear display of human vulnerability. Such an awareness was arguably heightened in Jerome's portrayal of physically and powerfully strong men falling prey to daimonic invasions: if these men were vulnerable, it made all people vulnerable.

9.4.2 Expulsion

The discussion now moves on to consider daimonic expulsion in Syria and Palestine. The evidence demonstrates that daimonic expulsion in the fourth century involved the release of a individual from the possession of a daimon or daimones by driving the latter force out of its place of occupation. Consequently daimonic expulsion was a discourse of power and control.

Reflecting the overwhelmingly Christian and hagiographical nature of the extant evidence, this power was predominantly displayed through the potent agency of the Christian holy man. The latter's form of expulsion varies, but generally involves the supplication of God or Christ, prayer, blessed ointment (such as oil), and adjurations to the daimonic, and in one instance a dream. In the case of the daily exorcism rituals prepared for baptismal candidates, the power of daimonic expulsion was contained in words.

The display of supernatural prowess was in a few instances enhanced by the inclusion of physical confrontation in the narrative. In these instances, particularly involving Hilarion, the ascetic's courage is strongly contrasted with the fears of others around him, intensifying the potency of the figure. Such presentations of supernatural prowess overcoming the physical and daimonic conform to the image presented by Peter Brown, who asserts that exorcism in the late-Roman world was an operetta based on the theme of violence and authority.⁶³

The discourse of power and control is particularly exemplified in those accounts in which daimonic expulsion is portrayed as a metaphorical, or supernatural, law court. In these instances the treatment of the daimon, in address, examination, judgment, and sentencing, strongly reinforces the ascendant role of the ascetic as both judge and executioner.

Regardless of the manner of the exorcism, all hagiographical expulsions were displays of power and control, performed by individuals imbued with a great amount of supernal strength. These ascetics, acting as agents of Christian divine power, provided a service highly regarded in its fourth-century context (bear in mind the recorded popularity of exorcistic ascetics) which ultimately served to highlight and promote the supreme power of their supernal force, the Christian God.

From examining the form of expulsion, discussion now moves to a consideration of the role of daimonic expulsion in fourth-century Syrian and Palestinian society. First and foremost exorcism combated the power and intrusion of daimonic forces. People who were possessed by a daimon that was affecting their well-being and conduct could be cured by the authority and power of a daimon-expeller who could alleviate the individual's affliction and suffering. However, in addition to this more apparent service, daimonic expulsion can also be seen to have addressed other social issues, particularly those related to possession as discussed above, namely the perception of affliction, social deviancy, religious alignment, and vulnerability.

The first issue to be discussed here is expulsion and its relation to the perception of illness. It was argued above that in considering the social perception of illness in the

⁶³ Brown, "The Holy man in late antiquity," 88.

Greco-Roman world, afflictions such as frenzy, raving, and mania, consequences of daimonic possession, may have been negatively perceived by fourth-century society. This proved especially so when the afflictions manifested themselves in behaviour which may have posed a threat to the individual and the community. The display of possession could furthermore potentially lead to physical or social alienation. This being the case, expulsion of the possessing daimon would provide considerable relief to the victim of the occupation. Firstly, it would alleviate the raving, frenzy, and mania, and secondly it would address the social consequences of the affliction, such as the negative perceptions and possible social alienation, by eliminating the source of the problems and reinstating a physically and socially healthy individual.

Also proposed above, was the association of daimonic possession and deviant behaviour. It was suggested that the frenzied, raging, and manic behaviour of alleged victims of daimonic possession could have been perceived as deviant behaviour, and thus the victims of the occupation as themselves deviant. Furthermore, this association of deviance would have significant social ramifications for the individual and his or her family (through reputation and honour). If this argument is accepted, then the expulsion of the possessing-daimon was a means of correcting the unacceptable conduct and removing the victim from the marginal position of social deviant. In addition, the restoration of socially-accepted behaviour in the former possession-victim would reaffirm not only the family unit's social standing within the community, but also confirm and thus further delineate that social system's boundaries of acceptable, as opposed to deviant, behaviour.

It can further be argued that the expulsion of a possessing-daimon also served to rectify concepts of social and physical vulnerability. That is, in the use of human agency to expel the supernatural and restore normality to an individual who had proved vulnerable to the daimonic invasion, there was an assertion that humanity, though exposed to the supernatural, was ultimately not subservient to it as a result of that susceptibility.

Thus, by eliminating the daimonic, the exorcism restored the physical, and social, status quo to the individual, his or her family, and the community. However, in

the process of defeating daimonic force, expulsion not only affected social behaviour in restoring people and their situations back to their expected or perceived norms, it also symbolised society's ultimate ability to control the pervasive supernatural.

Finally, daimonic expulsion played a definitive role in the assertion of religious differentiation and deviance. This is seen in Jerome's account of the Saracens and in the training of the Syrian and Palestinian catechumens. While possession highlighted the daimonic association of non-Christian individuals, exorcism served as the cleansing tool that would allow for religious transformation and conversion.⁶⁴ Thus Cyril, in his inclusion of expulsion rituals in pre-baptismal training sought to cleanse the candidates' minds and prepare them for a spiritual warfare with those not conforming to the same sanctioned beliefs.⁶⁵ In a similar vein Kalleres has proposed that the daily rituals sanctioned by John Chrysostom, when viewed within a contextual framework of oaths and obligations (ἐξορκίζειν, ὀρκίζειν),⁶⁶ served to announce to the devil the revocation of the candidate's contract with him (something automatically held by all non-Christians) and the preparation of a new allegiance with Christ. As the latter was sealed at baptism, the daily exorcistic ritual thus served to renegotiate new territorial boundaries with the devil, gradually minimising, and finally denying, his access to the baptismal candidate's body and soul.⁶⁷

9.5 Conclusion

It is here proposed that within the framework of fourth-century supernatural belief daimonic possession and expulsion provided a forum for the display of supernatural and human power and control. Daimonic power was demonstrated in the possession of, and influence on, the human victim, which also highlighted human vulnerability. Human potency was thus demonstrated through its control of the

⁶⁴ Indeed potency in exorcism did actually effect conversions in late antiquity.

⁶⁵ See Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, 133-140.

⁶⁶ Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, 50-60.

⁶⁷ Kalleres, *Exorcising the Devil*, 61-62.

Relating to the Supernatural

supernatural, and its ability to expel daimonic forces, ultimately inverting human subservience to the daimonic. It was proposed in the course of the discussion that in the phenomenon of daimonic possession there can be identified the cultural conceptions of affliction, vulnerability, and behaviour (acceptable and deviant), and that in the exercise of daimonic expulsion can be seen not only a statement of power, but also one of social control exemplified through the reassertion of social norms and expectations.

**AMBIGUOUS AND MISCELLANEOUS
MATERIAL NOT EASILY CATEGORISED**

10.1 Introduction

The bulk of the extant evidence has already been discussed in the preceding chapters. There exists, however, some further material that is relevant to this study, but which does not readily conform to the common genres of practice designated and discussed above. This evidence which includes amulets, curses, and hagiographical accounts does, however, fall within the temporal, geographical, and supernatural parameters defined for this study. Therefore this somewhat scattered material is here discussed within the loosely defined categories of 'squares and words', 'miracles and holy wonders', and 'fragmentary or undeciphered evidence'.

In addition to this material, classified as miscellaneous, evidence will also be discussed which is relatively ambiguous in regard to date and/or provenance, but which is generally associated with the fourth century and/or Syria and Palestine. It is considered worthwhile to introduce this ambiguous evidence not only for the sake of completeness, but also to present practices and beliefs which may have been manifest as well as complementary to the material already considered, and to demonstrate that supernatural practices were not necessarily limited to the evidence presented above. The material to be discussed was not included in the body of the investigation because its ambiguous nature meant that it did not definitively fall within the study's criteria.

As these two forms of evidence, miscellaneous and ambiguous, are relatively divergent, they will be treated separately. The first section of the chapter will thus discuss the 'miscellaneous' group of artefacts and reports, such as *voces magicae*, squares, and atypical wonders, discussing the purpose and provenance of the examples. The second section will focus on the ambiguous evidence and practices, and will

include some discussion of late antique astrology, oneiromancy, and theurgy, as well as the Aramaic bowls, and the prescriptions of the *Sepher Ha-Razim*.

10.2 Miscellaneous

10.2.1 Squares and Words

Words ascribed supernatural powers, *voces magicae*, often form part of the curse texts or inscriptions on amulets, tablets, and other phylacteries.¹ An example of such a text can be found on an amulet which stems from Emesa (Homs), Syria, and is dated to the fourth or fifth century. The text contains no meaningful Greek, and Kotanksy suggests that it is possibly a cipher, cryptogram, or a system of scrambled words, with Egyptian or Semitic origin. The text is divided into six sections divided by lines, and reads:²

A	1 αγεοηλε	B	13 χουουφη	E	26 λαβλανα αν
	2 κωφαζει		14 αριγμενου		27 λσσας
	3 βολκοσε		15 μειγε ουρπορ	F	28 χμαχεενς ZNHHC
	4 ναθμουθ		16 ΧΜΗ		29 N
	5 θειγος ει	C	17 αστουρτομ		
	6 ταμηλσεφ		18 ιορνυση		
	7 αστραχε		19 τομιαβη		
	8 λαμσαρε		20 Σαβαώθ		
	9 σκιοφωρφ	D	21 βαλμινθω		
	10 ηκταζη		22 sign π sign ε αα		
	11 οκταζειν		23 ρ sign βη		
	12 αμφαυνε		24 αλ		
			25 magic sign		

¹ Several undated examples exist from Syria, such as these two examples from Beroea, Syria:
SEG 7.52: Σαλαιμαλαξα | βαμειααξα.

SEG 7.53: ... Αβραικαδαβα | χαμβηχι | βιθεθιωθ || βεριε βωθ | μελχιψκ | ... ννα
² No. 49, GMA, 257-261. A parallel for this inscription can be found in no. 96, SM. Although translations have been included in the text and the original Greek and Latin text presented in the footnotes up to this point, this example and that which follows consist of words for which no meaningful translation can be given. Hence the Greek is included within the body of the text.

Another example is a gold lamella found near Haifa, which is tentatively dated to the third or fourth century. The inscription consists of a series of *voces magicæ*, some of which are drawn within an *ouroboros*,³ and reads:

1 .δ.ενιαραβουμα	9 Ζωναχβα Ζων-
2 ραυβαυ ιαθαω	10 Ζαναφιβα αχβ-
3 .ασλα Ζαναβεαν	11 Ζαβαμεα ηνα-
4 αλαχβε δει	12 Ζεζων χα
5 μβουμα .. μδαμα.	13 σσ .. ια
6 μαυ σαβ μεησελεμ	14 traces (+ left margin)
7 αλαμαβαμαβεα	15 .α
8 δαβ traces	16 βεμα
	17 μεινωσ α ω αα εα .?
	18 σεμεια

The exact intention of the amulet and *lamella* is unclear, however, the use of *voces magicæ* indicates that they sought to invoke supernatural entities to assist or protect the bearers in some way.

Various forms of ‘magical squares’ are also known to have been utilised in late antiquity. Schrire mentions several types of squares found on Hebrew amulets. There were, for example, nine lettered ‘magic squares’ in which every row added up to fifteen. The sixteen lettered examples of these squares specifically worked against evil dreams, and incorporated the initial letters of the first four words of Psalm 91:15.⁴ Jordan mentions a curse tablet from Caesarea Maritima, found in a well in the courtyard of the praetorium of Herod.⁵ This tablet has a ‘magic square’ inscribed on it which is composed of the word ΒΡΑΚΒΑΚ which is repeated numerous times. While the specific intention of the curse is unclear, it is apparent that the ΒΡΑΚΒΑΚ square forms part of the invocation to the daimons that are sought and commanded.

³ No. 55, GMA, 310-311.

⁴ See Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets*, 63-66.

⁵ No. 95, Jordan, “New Greek Curse Tablets,” 25.

10.2.2 Miracles and Holy Wonders

Hagiographical accounts have already provided evidence in all the areas of supernatural practice discussed above. There are, however, further instances of these holy figures' supernatural abilities recorded in the texts. These activities cannot, though, be easily aligned with the main areas of the study. Some accounts are simply vague references mentioning the performance of so-called miracles.⁶ For example, Theodoret writes that Polychronius was granted God's grace through the many miracles he worked by his prayers,⁷ while Symeon was able to perform innumerable miracles through the use of God's name.⁸ Other accounts, however, include specific mentions of activities such as weather control and dragon-battling; actions which, it has been argued, simply formed part of the standard repertoire of the late Roman miracle-worker.⁹

It is Hilarion, we are told, who possessed great weather powers. This Palestinian monk eased a long-standing drought while visiting Egypt. Upon being entreated to provide rain, Jerome records that: "Hilarion when he saw them was strangely affected with compassion, raising his eyes to heaven and lifting up both his hands, he at once obtained their petition".¹⁰ It is worth noting that Hilarion's blessing of rain subsequently produced a large number of snakes and poisonous animals, the deadly wounds of which then had to be healed with oil blessed by him.

It was not only rain that Hilarion could affect, however. Sozomen records that the monk was also able, through prayer, to calm the sea: "repressing an inundation of the sea and restoring waves to their proper bounds".¹¹

⁶ As this thesis is not concerned with traditional labels, such as magic, it is also not the forum for a discussion of the term miracle and the frequent application of this label to the actions of the ascetics recorded in hagiographies. For some discussion of the concept of miracle, however, see Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 135-139; as well as H. Remus, "Magic or Miracle? Some Second Century Instances," *The Second Century. A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2.3 (1982) 127-156.

⁷ HR, 24-25.7.

⁸ HR, 26.17.

⁹ Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 116. See also MacMullen on the association of the weather man with the wonder workers (*Christianity and Paganism*, 64).

¹⁰ "Quos ille cernens, mire doluit. Elevatisque in coelum oculis, et utrasque in sublime erigens palmas, statim impetravit quod rogaverant." (Jerome, *Hilarion*, 32; PL 23.47 26-29).

¹¹ ὡς καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν εὐχῇ στῆσαι ἐξ ὑπονοστήσεως ἐπικλύσαι τὴν ξηρὰν κατατρέχουσαν, πάλιν ἔνθεν ἀνεχώρησεν. (Sozomen, HE, 5.10).

Supernatural activities could also prove helpful in times of war. Theodoret tells of James who during a battle scattered the Persians through a prayer which sent gnats and mosquitos against the enemy.¹²

Finally, there is an account of the Persian turned Christian holy man, Arsacius, who, while able to predict events and exorcise daimons, also:

performed many other actions beyond the power of man. There was a dragon or some other species of reptile which had intrenched itself in a cavity of the road-side, and which destroyed those who passed by with its breath. Arsacius went to the spot and engaged in prayer and the serpent voluntarily crept forth from its hole, dashed its head twice against the ground, and killed itself. All these details I have obtained from persons who heard them stated by those who had seen Arsacius.¹³

Arsacius' actions benefited, and saved, the entire community by alleviating the deadly δράκων by the road-side. It is noteworthy that the holy man battles this extraordinary creature not through physical contact, but rather through prayer which inspires the beast to flail itself. Thus his spiritual, not physical, power serves to save his community.

The holy men, who are recorded as having these extraordinary abilities, are represented as powerful individuals capable of saving communities from deleterious weather, seas, and serpents. If it is the case that such powers as weather-changing abilities simply formed part of the standard repertoire of the supernatural practitioner, then these hagiographical accounts, rather than promoting the 'exceptional', actually serve to establish the Christian holy figure's prowess in the traditional discourse of supernatural power. However, by demonstrating this facility within a clearly outlined context of communal benefit and gratitude, the holy person is portrayed in hagiography as the social benefactor *par excellence*.

¹² Theodoret, HR, 21.2.

¹³ Πεπόνητο δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα ὑπὲρ ἀνθρωπεῖαν δύναμιν καὶ τέχνην καὶ μέντοι καὶ τόδε. Δράκων ἦν ἡ ἕτερον ἔρπετοῦ ἰ γένος πρὸ τῆς πόλεως, ὃ τοὺς παροδίτας τῷ φυσήματι ἀπώλλυε· παρὰ γὰρ λεωφόρον ἐφώλευεν. Ἐνθα δὴ παραγενόμενος Ἀρσάκιος ἠύξατο, καὶ ὁ ὄφιν αὐτομάτως τοῦ φωλεοῦ ἐξῆλθε καὶ δις τῷ ἐδάφει τὴν κεφαλὴν προσρήξας ἑαυτὸν ἀνείλε. Καὶ τὰ μὲν ὧδε ἀφηγήσαντο, οἱ παρὰ τῶν Ἀρσάκιον αὐτὸν θεασαμένων ἀκηκοέναι ἔφασαν. (Sozomen, HE, 4.16.13).

10.2.3 Fragmentary or Undeciphered Evidence

There is also some extant fourth-century Syrian and Palestinian fragmentary or indiscernible evidence in the form of amulets and tablets. Such is a gold lamella from Epiphania (Hamâh) in Syria, dating from the fourth to fifth century. It is a fragmentary adjuration of the Pantokrator which, Kotansky suggests, may be an exorcistic amulet. Despite difficulty in reading the text due to its small size, cursive characters, and the damage sustained in rolling and unrolling the tablet, Kotansky offers this reading of the inscription: "I bind you by oath, (by) the All-powerful God ... the heavenly (?), from Kolloutharion (?) whom Seraia bore (?)." ¹⁴ Thus it is an example of a binding spell; however, there is little more information that can be gleaned from it.

Kotansky also records a 'magic text' of the fourth or fifth century, from Heliopolis (Baálbek). ¹⁵ The text is difficult to decipher, and Mouterde and Kotansky provide significantly different readings of it. ¹⁶ However, Kotansky has included it in his corpus of *Greek Magical Amulets* as a published example with a known provenance (*Fundort*), and several words have parallels in the PGM. ¹⁷ Neither of the two readings of the amulet shed much light on the intention of the lamella.

Mouterde's reading

- 1 ἀγήρ(αια) ἄλυρα λ[ά]β[ρα] ἴε (?) ἴφι (?)
ἔχισ Σ(υριγμός)
- 2 ὄργια, φτάρθε <μά> [τ]ρυλλε Ζέ[θ]. Εἷς ἦς
- 3 ΑΝΙΦΝΑΦΤΑΦ ἄώρων Σ(υριγμός)
ύγι(έ)ν(εις) (?) Κυ-
- 4 νοκυμι (?) κύλιξι ΑΣΒΡΑΥΡΑΥ
- 5 ΡΒΕΣΡΡΡΑΨΤΣ ΞΤΣ ΦΤΙΑΩΘ
- 6 ΙΣΤΙΣΜΙΑ ΦΦΑΔΚΩΝ ΩΜΣ ἔνψ(υχέ)
- 7 Φᾶθ' ᾶρ' ἴε [π]αθάξη(ς) ψάε κυ[ν]ωψις
- 8 ΜΩΩ ΜΩ ΜΜΙΩ ΡΑ ΑΩ
- 9 ΜΩΜΙ ἄρμαστῶς <σ>ν[ε]κῶς
- 10 [Ἄ]μω[ν]ίου (?) τὸ μά(λα) νῆκος

Kotansky's suggestion:

αβη ... ιυριοι ... βερβερ εχ .βε

βε .βιορβ.θε μ θυλλεη
αυ. φυα φρα φεων αμ ευρε .
κυ
μα κυμι κυλι βραυβαυ
..ε . ρ ε θιαψιε . βε βμαωθ
ε ...αι αφφε . α . μωμε ... ψ
φαθαραξ ραθαξ ηψαεκυωψις
..ωη . μαμαμαων . μ φιμων
ψαω Μαρμαραιω .. ενας
λοσα ιουτον ...

¹⁴ ὀρκὸ σε τὼ παντοκράτορα θεῶν. ἐξ ... πησ τὴν οὐράνιαν τκυκ.λου.ορτιου .ετγην ση ραιας ταχυ. (no. 47, GMA, 245-247; tr. Kotansky).

¹⁵ No. 50, GMA, 262-264.

¹⁶ Kotansky comments on the difficulties of deciphering the published photographs, and provides a facsimile of the text. (GMA, 262-263).

¹⁷ Kotansky notes similarities with PGM 4.284, 36.352, & 29a.34 (GMA, 264).

Finally, there is also a gold tablet from Palestine which is dated to the fourth century and, although recorded as being of an ‘unknown character’, is said to be similar to the Orphic gold leaflets from Italy as well as ‘magic’ tablets.¹⁸ However, the supernatural intentions of the text are not overt. The text reads:

Τους δυο συνκρεινων, Διοηυσιον και Ι σε
Θανοντας, ελλκει -νον ζητων, Ι σε ποθω, Ι Λιβανει
αμφοτεροι πιστοι ΙΙ, ο τακλας Ι φ vac.¹⁹

There are also various tablets from Syria which have yet to be published. Downey, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, simply records the excavation of fifteen lead tablets in Antioch and Daphne for which the date and purpose are as yet unknown.²⁰ Jordan also mentions a fourth-century tablet from Palestine-Syria, which is to be published by S. Gaffino.²¹ Excavations of an early Christian necropolis in Tyre have also uncovered more than 80 rolled-up lead tablets with Greek letters visible on them. They were unpublished at the time of the collation of Jordan’s SGD.²² In addition to these tablets, Gager notes a hoard of sixteen lead figurines from Palestine, which he claims may have been the inventory of a professional *magos* at Marissa.²³

10.3 Ambiguous Assignations

10.3.1 *Sepher Ha-Razim*

There are several Semitic documents of the late antique period which deal with supernatural material, such as *The Sar-Torah*, dated between the third and eighth centuries of the common era.²⁴ However, it is the *Sepher Ha-Razim* which is the most

¹⁸ SEG 29.1615.

¹⁹ Translation offered here: ‘Comparing the two, Dionysius and you having died, although seeking him, I long for you, Libanus. Both of you faithful, [I am] the wretched one.’ (SEG 29.1615). Although the physical nature of the tablet may well align it with other supernatural practices, the inscription is more poetic than spell-like, and it is therefore difficult to assign it a supernatural intention.

²⁰ SGD, 193.

²¹ No. 114 in Jordan “New Greek Curse Tablets,” 29.

²² SGD, 192.

²³ No. 108 in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 204-205.

²⁴ This text is discussed and translated in M.D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic. Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

closely associated with this study's period and regions of focus. The book is generally assigned a date of the late third or early fourth century, and although the oldest fragments of the *Sepher Ha-Razim* are preserved in Egypt, this is largely attributed to the climatic conditions of the area, and it is thought by some to stem from Egypt, Syria or Palestine.²⁵ On the other hand, even relatively broad geographical demarcation of the text has been dismissed by Morgan, who asserts that even attempting "to locate a single place of origin would be futile."²⁶

Though the dating and the origin of the text is ambiguous, it has still been closely associated with both Syria and Palestine in the fourth century, and therefore while this dubiety leads to its exclusion from the main corpus of this study, it also prescribes that it receive some attention in the current chapter. Hence, in the following pages, a sample collection of spells and instructions will be presented, which exemplify the variety of spells and incantations which appear in the text. The *Sepher Ha-Razim* itself provided supernatural formulas for all sorts of ambitions, particularly male,²⁷ which drew on earlier traditions,²⁸ and close parallels for these can be found in the material preserved in the *Greek Magical Papyri* and the Aramaic incantation bowls.²⁹ The text is divided into the seven firmaments of the heavens. Each firmament has specific ruling angels and encampments, and supernatural formulae are included in the firmaments.³⁰

²⁵ Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 86; SHR, 8, 10; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, 106.

²⁶ SHR, 11.

²⁷ Regarding the gendered statement of the book's utilisers/audience, see Goldin who writes that the level of the culture of the writing suggests that it is unlikely that the book was intended for women to read. For instance, the book will tell a male how to win a female, but not vice versa. ("The Magic of Magic," 131-137). I would also argue that the purity spell prescribed for the second firmament suggests that the instructions are meant for men: "If you wish to ask something of any who stand on the steps of the second firmament, cleanse yourself for three weeks ... and do not approach a woman in her impurity..." (SHR, 43-4).

²⁸ For a discussion regarding the *baqqasha*-formula, of which instruction the *Sepher Ha-Razim*, provides the most comprehensive collection, see P. Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990: 75-91) 85.

²⁹ SHR, 8-9.

³⁰ For an introduction to these firmaments see SHR, 6-7. See also on: first firmament 'Shamayim' pp.21-26; second firmament 'heaven of heavens' pp.43-51; third firmament (related to fire) p.61; fourth firmament (rivers of fire and water) p.67; fifth firmament (12 months of year) p.73; sixth firmament (storehouses of honey) p.77; seventh firmament (storehouses of lives and souls) p.81.

The corpus of spells includes prescriptions for healing,³¹ aggression,³² prophecy,³³ patronage and favour,³⁴ passion and love,³⁵ astral intentions,³⁶ necromancy,³⁷ bounty hunting,³⁸ oneiromancy,³⁹ justice,⁴⁰ anti-harm,⁴¹ fire,⁴² apotropaic defence and protection,⁴³ and races and games⁴⁴. The examples provided here are closely aligned with those categories already discussed above.

The first example in our discussion concerns chariot racing. The text provides instructions for preparing a *lamella* for horses to perform well in the hippodrome. It reads:

If you wish to race horses, (even) when they are exhausted, so that they will not stumble in their running, that they will be swift as the wind, and the foot of no living thing will pass them, and they will win popularity in their running, take a silver *lamella* and write upon it the names of the horses and the names of the angels of the prince [RHTY'L] who is over them and say:

I adjure you angels of running, who run amid the stars, that you will gird with strength and courage the horses that N is racing and his charioteer who is racing them. Let them run and not become weary nor stumble. Let them run and be swift as an eagle. Let no animals stand before them, and let no other magic or witchcraft affect them.

Take the *lamella* and conceal it in the racing lane (of the one) you wish to win.⁴⁵

This prescription imparts insight into how supernatural methods could be used to improve performance and also protect horses from any curses which would be used against them, such as those seen in Chapter 4. It is noteworthy that the directions given, such as the inscription of a *lamella* and its interment in the hippodrome, are the same as those used for the curses aimed at impairing performance.⁴⁶

³¹ 1st firmament, 1st encampment; 2nd firm., 12th step. & 6th step

³² 1st firm., 2nd encamp.; 2nd firm., 4th step.

³³ 1st firm., 3rd encamp.; 5th firm.

³⁴ 1st firm., 4th encamp.; 2nd firm., 11th step.

³⁵ 1st firm., 4th encamp.; 2nd firm., 2nd step.

³⁶ 1st firm., 5th encamp.; 4th firm.

³⁷ 1st firm., 5th encamp; 2nd firm., 2nd step.

³⁸ 1st firm., 6th encamp.

³⁹ 1st firm., 7th encamp.

⁴⁰ 2nd firmament, 1st step; 2nd firm., 10th step.

⁴¹ 2nd firm., 3rd step; 2nd firm., 7th step. See also 2nd firm., 10th step re saving a friend from a bad judgement.

⁴² 2nd firm., 5th step; 3rd firm., 1st prince & 3rd prince.

⁴³ 2nd firm., 8th step & 9th step; 6th firm..

⁴⁴ 3rd firm., 2nd prince.

⁴⁵ 3rd firm., SHR, 64; tr. Morgan.

⁴⁶ See also Heintz's discussion of this text in *Agonsitic Magic in the Circus*, 155-158.

Another example from the *Sepher Ha-Razim* concerns inspiring a woman with desire for a man. The instruction reads:

If you wish to put the love of a man into the heart of a woman, or to arrange for a poor man to wed a rich woman, take two copper *lamellae* and write upon them, on both sides, the names of these angels, [those which stand on the second step of the second firmament.] and the name of the man and the name of the woman and say thus:
I ask of you, angels who rule the fates of the children of Adam and Eve, that you do my will and bring in conjunctions the planet of N son of N into conjunction with (the planet of) the woman N daughter of N. Let him find favor and affection in her eyes and do not let her belong to any man except him.

Place one (*lamella*) in a fiery furnace and the other in her ritual bath.⁴⁷ Do this on the twenty-ninth of the month when the moon has waned completely. Take care to keep yourself from intercourse, from wine, and from all (kinds of) meat for three days.⁴⁸

This direction for a love spell demonstrates many similarities with contemporary *defixiones* and papyri, and the practices discussed in Chapter 6. Furthermore in this example there can be found complementary evidence for notions of inaccessibility realised through the use of love curses. This is particularly apparent in this instance, which directs the spell recipe to the poor man who wishes to wed a rich woman.

The following three extracts from the *Sepher Ha-Razim* involve different forms of protection. The first example seeks to protect a man in battle from physical injury. The instruction reads:

If you wish that a man going forth to war be protected from arrow, sword, or any blow, take seven leaves of a bay tree and write these names on them, two on each and every one of them, and put them in spikenard oil, and on the day he goes forth to war, let him smear (the oil) upon his flesh and upon his sword and bow and arrows. Again write (the names of the angels) on a silver *lamella*, put them in a bronze tubular case, and let him tie it over his heart, then no blow will touch him.⁴⁹

These instructions are for the preparation of a phylactery. The directions to inscribe a *lamella*, encase it, and then to wear or carry it on the body, can be paralleled with the considerable physical evidence which has survived in which *lamellae* have been contained within casings and appear to have been worn or carried. This instruction from the *Sepher Ha-Razim*, however, offers significant insight into the ritual which could

⁴⁷ Ritual bath for women who are about to be married or are already married.

⁴⁸ 2nd firm., 2nd step, SHR, 45-6; tr. Morgan.

⁴⁹ 2nd firm. 9th step. SHR, 55; tr. Morgan. Like all Second Firmament spells, this one requires a period for cleansing (see SHR, 43-4).

accompany the use of such a phylactery, that is, in the preparation and anointing with protective oil.

The second example of protection seeks to rend impotent any attacks made on an individual, either physically or with thoughts. It reads:

If you wish to nullify a great man's intentions towards you, or the thoughts of an army officer, or the intentions of military men, or any other evil intentions or thoughts (directed against you); go out at midnight when the moon is full, barefoot, and pure, and wrapped in a new cloak. Stand under the moon and say twenty-one times the names of the angels written above, (those) who stand on the third step of the "heaven of heavens," [the second firmament] and say:

Moon, Moon, O Moon, bring my words before the angels who stand upon the third step: nullify the thought concerning me of N son of N and the intention of his heart and his plot. Let his mouth be unable to speak against me, destroy his knowledge, and thwart his intentions, and let his purpose [heart] be devastated, so that every time he sees me he will be filled with love for me, and let him be changed so that he becomes my friend, and let him not remember any hatred of me, and let me find favor and affection in his eyes.

Then write (the names of) the angels and these (following) characters upon a silver lamella; put them on a tablet over your heart, and during all the days you wear it you shall succeed.⁵⁰

Having already discussed the danger perceived to exist in thoughts (particularly envious ones) in Chapter 7, it seems sensible to assign an apotropaic intention to this prescription. Thus this instruction demonstrates not only how people could be protected, but also why. The preoccupation of these directions with military personnel suggests that it would have been provided to a military man. It furthermore not only illustrates just how harmful thoughts could be, but also the fear that words or talk could hold. That is, the potential damage that the words (or accusations) of others could cause. This is a notion already discussed in Chapter 5, and well exemplified in this case.

The third example of protection is concerned with a woman in childbirth. It instructs the spell's practitioner:

If you wish to drive off an evil spirit so it will not come to a woman when she is in childbirth and so it will not kill her child, before the woman's pregnancy, write (the names of) these angels on a golden lamellae and place it in a silver tubular case and let her wear it, and at the time of childbirth take four silver lamellae and write upon them (the names of) the angels and place them in the four sides of the house and no (evil) spirit will come in.⁵¹

⁵⁰ 2nd firm., 3rd step. SHR, 47-48; tr. Morgan.

⁵¹ 2nd firm., 8th step. SHR, 54; tr. Morgan.

In this prescription can be seen the threat of malevolent daimones and illness. In this case the threat is great when the female and child are most vulnerable, that is at the time of labour and birth. Thus the woman's body, and hence the foetus inside her, are protected by her wearing a phylactery. In addition, her house, the place where she will deliver the baby, is also guarded against harmful spirits through the four *lamellae* placed in the walls (presumably the external walls), literally offering a wall of protection.

The final example prescribes the cure for a headache, a malady which, as has already been seen in Chapter 8, could often require supernatural assistance. The *Sepher Ha-Razim* reads:

If you wish to cure a headache (affecting) half the head or to bind or rebuke the spirit causing blindness, take fat that covers the brain of a black ox, and while in (a state of) purity, write on it the names of these angels and place it in a silver tubular case, then bind the tube with seven colours and place it beside the pain. (In order to succeed) abstain from meat, from wine, from (contact with) the dead, from menstruating women, and from every unclean thing.⁵²

This remedy is somewhat different to the headache cures seen in Chapter 8. This is firstly because the entire required ritual is here prescribed, whereas only the resultant inscribed amulet is presented above (thus providing some insight into the possible context of some healing ritual in Syria and/or Palestine), and secondly because even the form of the inscription directed here does not seem to require any adjuration or spell formula to outline its intentions, only the names of the appropriate angels.⁵³ However, a noteworthy parallel between this prescription and both the evidence and discussion in the previous chapter is the notion of supernaturally caused illness, apparent in the reference to the spirit causing blindness.

The various examples from the *Sepher Ha-Razim* presented here, demonstrate that this contemporary text deals with similar concerns to those already discussed in the study. Thus although the origin and dating of the text are ambiguous, the concerns of the spell formulas and even to some extent the methodologies utilised for dealing with them, do suggest that the *Sepher Ha-Razim* should be acknowledged as a possible

⁵² 2nd firm., 12th step. SHR, 59; tr. Morgan.

⁵³ Some similarities can be identified between this prescription and the Greek papyri. See PGM 7:199, 7:271.

source of supernatural guidance in either, or both, Syria and Palestine in the fourth century, and thus as complementary to the material presented in the study.

10.3.2 Semitic Amulets and Bowls

Various collections of Aramaic and Hebrew bowls,⁵⁴ amulets, and spell recipes have been published, providing a wealth of information on supernatural activities throughout the Mediterranean. This material spans the earliest period of the common era through to the tenth century Cairo Genizah texts.⁵⁵ There are also a series of late antique bowls and amulets from the regions of the Eastern Mediterranean,⁵⁶ some of which have been assigned a provenance of Syria or Palestine, and remain undated, or are provided ambiguous or slightly later dates. Associations have also been made between the amulets, bowls, and incantations, for instance, from late antique Palestine and the literature of the *Hekhalot*, the prescriptions of the *Greek Magical Papyri* and the *Sepher Ha-Razim*.⁵⁷ Thus these extant artefacts can be seen to represent the attitudes and activities of people throughout late antiquity, including the fourth century. It can be argued then that, given the evidence's ambiguous nature, it is possible and plausible that this material reflects, to an indiscernible degree, practices of fourth-century Syria and Palestine. Accepting this possibility, it is then worthwhile and prudent to consider at least a selection of the material, so as to identify methods which may offer further insight into fourth-century Syrian and Palestinian practice.

Amulets concerned with the prevention or cure of illness are the most common in the extant Aramaic evidence, and these could target the general or specific

⁵⁴ Isbell has produced a corpus of Aramaic Incantation Bowls, the texts of which come from inscriptions on bowls from Sassanian Babylonia before and after 600CE. These bowls demonstrate some similarity with certain parts of the Talmud. Various theories have been proposed about the bowls' functions and the way that these were performed. (See Isbell, *Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, 2-14).

⁵⁵ For instance: HAIT; Schäfer et al., *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza. I*; Schäfer et al., *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza. II*.

⁵⁶ See Isbell, *Aramaic Incantation Bowls*. As well as W.H. Rossell, *A Handbook of Aramaic Magical Texts*, G.D. Young & E.B. Smick (eds), New Jersey: Department of Semitics of Shelton College, 1953.

⁵⁷ See MSF, 17-19; and P.S. Alexander, *Incantations and Books of Magic*, in Schuerer, Vermes, Millas, & Goodman (eds), *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175BC - AD135)*, vol. 3.1, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd. (1986: 342-379) 361.

malevolent spirits seen as responsible for the particular ailments.⁵⁸ Consider, for instance, an amulet from Horvat Kanaf which associates fever and shivers with the evil eye.⁵⁹ Although it does not cite the cause of the illness, it is useful to consider also another amulet which deals with fever, the most conspicuous subject of the Semitic amulets.⁶⁰ The following amulet from Tiberias seeks to rid Ina of fever and illness. The inscription reads:

[An amulet proper for saving and healing Ina] [daughter of Ze]’irti from all hectic fever [and ill]ness and sickness. In the name of hw’ yzwt yh yh [y]h, that was written on his front plate which was [unrol]led on the wreath of Aaron the High Priest who was serving with it, and he descended in order to fu[lfil] [...] and his name, who carries those on high [and] those below, <and all> tremble before him [?]. This is it. yrp’ šwmr’k mrkby’t zzzz the living god ‘lyz’ šm’ryh (II11-16 – 70 times yh) Eradicate from the body of Ina daughter of Ze’irti a[ll] hectic fever and illness and sickness in the name of yhw who is enthroned among the cherubim, Amen Amen Selah. Blessed be He. “The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob our refuge Selah” (Ps.46:8,12). Holy (x4) The glorious name ‘blt (II24-28 – magic names) holy, splendid, splendid Eradicate from the body of Ina the daughter of Ze’irti all hectic fever and illness and sickness from this day to eternity. Amen amen Selah (II34-36 – Around the margins:) Holy (x12), magnificent (x2), splendid.⁶¹

The aims and method of this amulet are very similar to those already discussed in Chapter 8. The daimones are invoked in the name of YHWH to eradicate sickness and fever from Ina and to do so immediately and for always.

⁵⁸ MSF, 31, 34-35. Naveh and Shaked note that it is not always easy to distinguish between the spirits or agents that cause a disease or particular ailment as the “spirits whose presence in the body ‘explains’ the presence of disease, and factors that embody the evil motive of other people to harm the client.” (MSF, 35)

⁵⁹ No. 2, AMB.

⁶⁰ MSF, 36.

⁶¹ No.17, MSF; tr. MSF.

ברתה דז]עירתי מכל אשא דקיק[ה] [ובו]ש ומרע בשמ הוא יזות יה יה
 [י]ה דהוה על ציצה כתיב דהוא [גל]ל על כלילה דאחרן כהנה רבה
 [דה]וא הוא משמש בה ונחת למלא[ה] [ה] [נה הוא שמה דסבל עלאי
 [י]א[רעאי] (ר) עדין מנה הרה הוא ירפא שומראך
 מרכביאת זוזו אלהים חיים עליזא שמאריה
 יה (written seventy times) עקור מן גופה דאינה ברתה דעירתי כ[ל]
 [א]שא דקיקה ובוש ומרע בשם יהוה [י]ושב הכרובים אמן אמן סלה ברוך ה[וא]
 [י]הוה צבאות עמנו משגב לנו אלהי יעקב [ם]לה
 קדוש קדוש קדוש קדוש שמא המפואר אכלת אשמאזה אוז מזה

For further healing examples see: no.31 MSF, no.11 AMB. For an example of expelling evil spirits causing illness see: no.19, 21, & 24 MSF.

Also relatively common are the extant amulets intended to protect pregnant women. An example of these is an Aramaic amulet, possibly Palestinian, which because of its similarity with some ‘magical’ bowls, has been identified as an amulet seeking to protect a woman and her child in labour. The inscription reads:

Sammit gave birth to sons. [They were killed by] [Side]ros. She fled from h[im.] ... She stood in She built a house for herself in ... [She provided it with] gates of iron and she locked the gate ... swny and swswny and snygly knocked on We shall pass and get in ... [She stood] up and opened (the door) for them. There came in with [them.] [Side]ros and killed her son. She cried [at] swny and swswny and snygly: Why did (he) do (so)? [Side]ros [heard], opened (the door) and fled from [them.] [Having] seen (him), they chased him and found him in *pelagos* of the sea ... to kill him. He said to them: [I] swear to you in (the name) of He “who has measured the water in the hollow of his hand” (Is. 40:12), that wherever [people] mention the name of swny and swswny and snygly, I shall not [kill] Antonina, daughter of and her son. Blessed art Thou y[yyy] the living God, King of the world. [May He exorcise] the spirits from your presence.⁶²

Without drawing on parallels between this text and that of several bowls, as Naveh and Shaked do, the intention of this amulet would not be immediately clear. However, understanding its purpose, and realising that the *Sepher Ha-Razim* and *Greek Magical Papyri* prescribe amulets for the same purpose, it does seem plausible to suggest that such amulets may have been in use in fourth-century Syria and Palestine. This assertion is perhaps strengthened when considering the hagiographical accounts discussed in Chapter 8 in which women were assisted by holy men not simply for infertility, but also in preventing miscarriage.⁶³

The importance of daimonic expulsion was discussed above in Chapter 9. The same concerns for possession and expulsion can also be seen in the Semitic amulets.

⁶² No. 15, AMB; tr. AMB.

[] סממית יל י דת בנין [... קמלהוין] [סדר] רוס ערקת מן ק[דומי] [] [] קמת (ל) ה ברא(ש)
 [] בנת לה בית ברא [] [] [ל]ה תרעין דפרז(ל) [ה] [] [] ה וטרדת בא
 [] ית תרעה לידא סוני [וס] [וני] וסניגלי ארתקו על [] [] [] בין נעבר וניעל לע(ל) []
 [] [] ת ופתחת להוין על עב(ה) [וין] [סדר] רוס וקמל לברה וצו(ח) [ת] [ע] (ל) יהוין סוני וסוסי
 [וס] [וניגלי] מה עבר (הבין ש) [מע] [סדר] רוס ופתח וערק(ק) מ(ג) [הוין] [מן] חוין רדפו בתרה וא[ש]
 [ב] [חוי] בשעולא דימה (הג) [] [] [ל] מקמול יתה אמר להוין [אנה] (מ) שתבע לבון במן דאב[יל]
 [מ] [יה] בשעולא דכל הן ד [] [] [] מרכרין {ש} שמה דס[וני] וסוסי וסניגלי לא א[קמול]
 לאנמונינה ברתה ד(ג) [] [] [] (וב) רה ברנד אתה י[וי] (אל) קים מלך חולם [ינער] הרחות מלפנד

For further examples from Syria and Palestine protecting pregnant women and their unborn children, or protecting women in childbirth see: no. 27, 28, & 30, MSF.

⁶³ Note in particular the case of Theodoret's mother.

Here, an example is the Aramaic exorcistic formula on an amulet of unknown date, the text of which reads:

An amulet proper for Teo daughter of Matriona, that she may be healed from the excrescence that has seized her [and from] every evil spirit that has cast an (evil) glance at her, and every (spirit) [that has terror] [of] sorcery (?) on its heart shall not approach her [for] evil.⁶⁴

It is also worth noting the association of the evil eye (that is, evil glance) with the possession that this tablet seeks to expel from Teo.⁶⁵

There is also a selection of amulets from Palestine and Syria that serve to protect against the evil eye and other harmful spirits which, as has been seen in the previous example and in Chapter 7, can inflict considerable harm and illness on an individual. One example is the following amulet of unknown provenance and a loosely assigned date of late antiquity, which reads:

I adjure all evil occurrences (?) and [en-]counters, (whether) with a male or a female, (whether) with a man or a woman, (whether) with a Gentile or an Israelite, that come up rushing against Habibi son of Herta. In the name of drqwn, dwqwn, dwqwn, stqtw, sld'qlyp, sqwpq šnqq. In the name of the angel Admiel and in the name of the angel Kokhbiel. In the name of these angels I adjure you (fem. sg.) evil spirit, whether flying or resting, that you should not touch Habibi son of Herta, and that you should not appear to him by any likeness by which you appear to people. Remember what I have adjured you, (evil-)gazed spirit. In the name of the angels ...⁶⁶

This amulet reflects similar sentiments regarding fears related to the evil eye. It also provides further insight into the evil eye construct in that it protects Habibi from any “likeness by which you appear to people,” suggesting a tangible, that is a physical,

⁶⁴ No. 23 in MSF, 77-80.

קמיע מצב למי ברת מטרונא (ח) דתתאסי מן מתלתולה דאחד לנה ומן כל רוח בישה
דסקרה בה ובל דד(ח)לתה (ד)בורינה על לבה לא קרבה בה [ל(ב)ישה

See also further exorcism examples: no.9, & 14 in AMB; no.18, & 25 MSF. For examples clearly dated to the fifth/sixth centuries see: no.3, 11, 12, & 13, AMB.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the evil eye see Chapter 7.

⁶⁶ No. 26 MSF.

משביע אני יל כל אוערות ון [רעות רעות עם זכר עם נקבה עם אי(ש)
עם אשה עם גוי עם ישראל (המחג) המתנרשים לבוא על חביבי ברה
דחרתה בשם דרקון דוקון דוקון אסמקמון סלדאקליה סקופק
ש(ג)קק בשם אדמיאל מלאכה (ובש) ובשם מוכביאל מלאכה בשם
מלאכה אלין אשבעית עלכי רוחא בישתה דפרחא ודשכנה
דילה תקרובין (ב)חביבי ברה דחרתה ולה תדמין לה בכל דמוין

דאתי מדמיה בחון לכני אנשא אדכרי במה אשבעתך רוחא מסקור[ית]תה (בשם מלאכה) (...)

For further examples of Syrian and Palestinian protective formulas against the evil eye and/or evil spirits, see: no. 29, MSF; no. 3, 12, 13, AMB.

element to the evil eye. While, this is not the place to begin speculations on the increasing complexity of the evil eye belief, it is possible to note that the belief system may have been more complex than the evidence in Chapter 7 alone suggests.

10.3.3 Divination

There is a wide choice of method, O Queen. There are horoscope casters, sign solvers, dream specialists, oracular ventriloquists, bird observers, birth-date examiners, and those called *magoi*, who have the gift of prophecy.⁶⁷

Thus the Queen in Pseudo-Callisthenes' popular late antique novel, *The Alexander Romance*, is told of her revelatory options. Indeed there were many forms of divination available to those living in the late antique world. The popular practice of divination does not actually fall within the parameters of the study because of its predominant purpose of ascertaining, and not influencing, individual fate. However, there are a few areas of divination in the fourth century which are often connected with so-called 'magical' practices either by contemporaries or classical scholarship,⁶⁸ or which can be associated with other supernatural practices, such as the healing aspects of dreams. Thus three methods of revelation – astrology, oneiromancy, and theurgy – are briefly discussed in this chapter in order to introduce the reader to the areas often perceived to overlap those included in this study.

10.3.3.1 Astrology

The discussion begins with an examination of late antique astrology. This science⁶⁹ had a long and distinguished history in the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek,

⁶⁷ Πολυσιχιδῆς μὲν ἔστιν ἡ τῆς σκέψεως αἴρεσις, ᾧ βασίλισσα· εἰσὶ γὰρ ὠροσκόποι, σημειολύται, ὄνειροπόλοι, ἐγγαστρίμυθοι, ὄρνεομάντεις, γενεθλιολόγοι, οἱ καλούμενοι μάγοι, οἷς τὰ μαντεῖα ἐπέστρωται. (Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alexander Romance*, 1.4; in K. Müller (ed.), *The Fragments of the Lost Historians of Alexander the Great. Fragmenta Scriptorum de Rebus Alexandri Magni, Psuedo-Callisthenes, Itinerarium Alexandri*, Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc., 1979).

⁶⁸ See for instance attitudes towards astrology in Chapter 5 (section 3). On modern scholarship see for example Vakaloudi's association of astrology with occultism and theurgy and 'ritual magic' (A.D. Vakaloudi, "Demoniac-Mantic Practices," 87-88). Also Heintz's assertion, based on a comment by Libanius, that there was only a fine line separating the use of a diviner to foretell the outcome of a chariot race, and the next step of seeking a practitioner's assistance in determining that a favourable outcome was consequently assured (Heintz, *Agonistic Magic in the Circus*, 90).

⁶⁹ For a discussion of astrology as a science see Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, x-xiv, 5-7.

and Roman worlds.⁷⁰ It was a highly technical and learned science based on mathematics and complex rules of interpretation.⁷¹ Its basic premise prescribed that the stars were divine beings which were able to influence life on earth. Understanding an individual's alignment with the stars and thus interpreting his or her life according to the movement of the planets and their inherent influence, enabled astrologers to chart individuals' destinies and assist people with predictions and specific decisions. This *techne* carried intellectual prestige in the Roman empire and was especially utilised by emperors, although other individuals were also known to have their own horoscopes charted.⁷² Barton introduces the topic well in utilising Firmicus Maternus' guide for the astrologer.⁷³ Firmicus writes:

See that you give your responses publicly in a clear voice, so that nothing may be asked of you which is not allowed either to ask or to answer. Beware of replying to anyone about the condition of the Republic or the life of the Roman emperor. For it is not right, nor is it permitted, that from wicked curiosity we learn anything about the condition of the Republic. In drawing up the chart, I do not wish you to show up the vices of men too clearly, but whenever you come to such a point, delay your responses with a certain reticence, in case you seem not only to explain but also to approve what the evil course of the stars decrees for the man.⁷⁴

For Firmicus then, while astrologers provided individuals with information on the course that their lives were to take, they were not permitted to inquire into affairs of the state. However, this would not have been the case were the emperor the source of the query.⁷⁵ Firmicus' warning relating to predictions of the State rings alarmingly true in

⁷⁰ See Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 1-63; as well as D. Pingree, "Classical and Byzantine Astrology in Sassanian Persia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989) 227-239.

⁷¹ See Luck's discussion in *Arcana Mundi*, 309-320.

⁷² On Roman emperors and their use of astrology see Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 44-49. On fourth-century individual horoscopes see, for example, Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 29.2.27.

⁷³ Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 2.

⁷⁴ "Dabis sane responsa publice et hoc interrogaturis ante praedicto, <quod> omnia quidem illis, de quibus interrogant, clara sis voce dicturus, ne quid a te tale forte quaeratur, quod non liceat nec interrogare nec dicere. Cave ne quando de statu reipublicae vel de vita Romani imperatoris aliquid interroganti respondeas; non enim oportet nec licet, ut de statu reipublicae aliquid nefaria curiositate discamus... Nolo te vitia hominum in tractatu geniturarum manifestius explicare, sed, quotienscumque ad hunc locum veneris, responsum tuum cum quadam ruboris trepidatione suspende, ne, quod homini malus stellarum decrevit cursus, non dicere, sed exprobrare videaris." (Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis*, 2.30.3-4, 11). Trans. by J. Rhys Bram (Firmicus Maternus, *Ancient Astrology Theory and Practice. Mathesos Libri VIII*, tr. J. Rhys Bram, Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press [1975] 69-70).

⁷⁵ See Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 44-49.

light of the trials of Antioch and Scythopolis discussed in Chapter 5 and the charges of treason associated with divinations concerning the fate of the empire.

Also seen in Chapter 5 was the manner in which matters relating to divination could be extended to include supernatural practices such as healing, and the use of charms and amulets.⁷⁶ Hence there was, at least during those periods of particular suspicion, an association made between divination and other practices involving utilising the supernatural for individual assistance. The association between divination and other supernatural practice during this period was brought even closer when claims were made regarding astrologers' abilities to manipulate the course of the planets. This assertion, that some astrologers could also break or counteract the influence of the stars on individuals' destinies by recruiting the assistance of supernatural powers, has also been made in more recent years.⁷⁷ The accusation levelled against Libanius, for instance, alleging some involvement with an astrologer, not in order to foresee the fate of the emperor, but in order to change it, is an indication that such a connection, regarding astrologers and their abilities, could be made.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, while these references suggest that the practice of astrology may have extended beyond the act of divination, at least in the perceptions of some individuals, for the most part the evidence and discourse on astrology does not provide any insight into these abilities or the utilisation of them.

Although astrology is not necessarily linked with the manipulation of fate through the realignment of planets, an astrological fragment from Haifa does suggest that the *techne* could inform supernatural practice.⁷⁹ That is, the fragment, dated to the third or fourth century, appears to be judging certain planetary alignments as favourable for some supernatural incantations. Hence the astrological information is not creating the favourable context, but rather advising on the time of its occurrence.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of this evidence see Chapter 5 (section 3).

⁷⁷ Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 317.

⁷⁸ Or. 1.43. On this accusation against Libanius see Chapter 5 (section 3.1). Tertullian had propounded the same idea some two centuries earlier: see A.B. Kolenkow, "Relationships between Miracle and Prophecy in the Greco-Roman World and Early Christianity," ANRW II.23.2 (1980: 1470-1506) 1476.

⁷⁹ No. 54 in GMA, 306-309.

Finally it is worth briefly considering the attitude of secular and religious authorities to this practice. The secular ruling on the practice of astrology is seen in the *Codex Theodosianus*, which does not condone its use.⁸⁰ In Christian canon there is likewise a restriction on its practice.⁸¹ Also, in the *Constitutions of the Apostles*, a Syrian document of the late fourth century which contains a series of regulations: “astrologers, along with debauchers, magicians and philosophers, are to be refused baptism or damned”.⁸² It has been argued that the church’s reaction to the practice included the notion that astrology offered practitioners an independent means of discovering the future and truth, which consequently rivalled the church’s authority.⁸³ However, also influential in their attitude was the argued opposition between God and the stars, for if “the stars controlled the fates of humans, humans appeared to be out of God’s hands”.⁸⁴ Such opposition appears in the preachings of John Chrysostom, who advises people to minimise conversation with astrologers; not because the astrologers have power, but because astrology and belief in fate are perverse and Chrysostom fears that people are weak, and hence susceptible, to the doctrine.⁸⁵

Astrological beliefs are also frequently rejected in Rabbinic writings, apart from some notable exceptions.⁸⁶ However, that being said, there is also abundant archaeological evidence suggesting a Jewish interest in zodiacal images and signs by the fourth century. These images, particularly zodiacal wheels and other astrological symbols, can be found in Palestinian floor mosaics, including a fourth-century mosaic in Tiberias.⁸⁷ This does not necessarily suggest that the astrological beliefs were

⁸⁰ CT 9.16.1,4,6,9,12.

⁸¹ Canon 36 of the Council of Laodicea; see Chapter 8, n.15.

⁸² Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 78. (Consider also Ephrem’s comments on astrology in *Contra Haereses* 1, 4-6, 8-9, 13).

⁸³ Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 72.

⁸⁴ Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 84. For a discussion of early Christian reactions to astrology and divination in the wider Greco-Roman world see, for example, R.W. Thomson, “‘Let Now the Astrologers Stand up’: The Armenian Christian Reaction to Astrology and Divination,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992) 305-312.

⁸⁵ *On Fate and Providence* 8; PG 50.756-757; see Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 77. Also, for John Chrysostom against astrology see *On Acts hom. 13*, PG 61.106; *On Eph. hom. 12*, PG 62.92; *In Kalends*, PG 48.954-5.

⁸⁶ J.H. Charlesworth, “Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Psuedepigrapha, The Dead Sea Scrolls, and Early Palestinian Synagogues,” *Harvard Theological Review* 70.3/4 (1977: 183-200) 185-193.

⁸⁷ Charlesworth, “Jewish Astrology in the Talmud,” 193-198.

adopted; however, their inclusion in decoration likewise scarcely indicates ignorance of their meaning and significance.⁸⁸

Thus divination through astrology appears to have been popular and pervasive in Greco-Roman society. However, it was also perceived of as a potentially powerful tool both for its revelatory techniques and the opportunities these could provide for the manipulation of individual fate.

10.3.3.2 Oneiromancy

Another popular form of divination, and the subject of several Greco-Roman manuscripts,⁸⁹ was oneiromancy – the idea that revelations could be transmitted to an individual through a dream.⁹⁰ A core idea of this prophetic dream experience was the belief that the dream had a divine or supernatural nature that allowed it to function as a form of revelation.⁹¹ Thus dreams, and their interpretation, provided people in late antiquity with a medium for superior contact with the gods or god.⁹² To quote Miller:

In a world so thickly populated with invisible powers, the dream was a fitting technology for making contact with them – a daemonic fabrication to match daemonic being that functioned to make the invisible visible.⁹³

This is not to say that all the dreams of late antiquity were supernaturally inspired and revelatory. However, there were some clearly identified as such,⁹⁴ which were consequently able to assist in matters of love, marriage, health, and economic

⁸⁸ Charlesworth, "Jewish Astrology in the Talmud," 198-199.

⁸⁹ For example, the second-century work of Artemidorus (for a discussion of this work see, for example, M. Foucault, *The Care of the Self. The History of Sexuality*, vol.3, tr. R. Hurley, Penguin Books [1986] 4-36, esp. 4-25), through to later Byzantine texts (see Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, esp. 239; and G. Calofonos, "Dream Interpretation: A Byzantinist Superstition?," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 9 [1984/85: 215-220] esp. 219).

⁹⁰ For an in-depth discussion of dreams in late antiquity and their role as a medium of communication, see Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*. Also for a discussion on the so-called period of 'prolific dreamers' see, P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, London & Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press (1978) 65.

⁹¹ J.S. Hanson, "Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity," ANRW II.23.2 (1980: 1395-1427) 1396.

⁹² Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, 65.

⁹³ Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 51.

⁹⁴ For example, dreams were distinguished as either predictive and caused by gods, *oneiroi*, or fantasies, *enupnia* (P. Athanassiadi, "Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus," *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 [1993: 115-130] 124.) Philo of Alexandria, *De Somniis*, identified a five-tier classification of dreams, of which three had a true divine origin (*oneiros*; *horama*; *chresmos*) and were prophetic (R.M. Berchman, "Arcana Mundi: Magic and Divination in the *De Somniis* of Philo of Alexandria," in R.M. Berchman [ed.], *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of Prophecy, Divination, Dreams, and Theurgy in Mediterranean Antiquity*, Atlanta: Scholars Press [1998] 133).

fortune.⁹⁵ Dreams have thus been seen as a means for managing hopes, fears, and anxieties.⁹⁶ These dream-visions⁹⁷ were especially significant when experienced by kings, priests, and prophets because: “since dreams come from God – or from a god – only he who has the divine spirit in him will be able to understand them”.⁹⁸

An important factor of dream-visions was understanding them, and indeed there were considerable and immediate social advantages, patronage, and power for those, either polytheists or Christians, who could claim the required “intimate relations with invisible patrons”.⁹⁹ That such interpreters could readily be found is suggested by a Talmudic account in which a Rabbi tells of approaching twenty-four interpreters in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Rabbi Hisda is quoted in the Talmud as saying that “a dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read,” which suggests, as Miller argues, that there was a wider understanding in the community that “a message of significance lay encoded in the dream”.¹⁰¹ However, dream-interpreters were not always seen favourably. For example, Basil of Caesarea expounds the evils of dream-interpreters who would explain visions in sleep in such a way as to serve their own ends and who posed a real threat to people’s well-being. For the church father, dream interpreters were acting as agents of false prophecies and destroying souls.¹⁰² Later secular authorities would also condemn the practice with the Justinianic ban on dream interpreters (although it has been suggested that this ban may not have been observed).¹⁰³

There were popular locations deemed as effective for receiving and understanding dreams, such as shrines.¹⁰⁴ These venues were so well frequented that

⁹⁵ Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 8.

⁹⁶ See Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, part 1.

⁹⁷ A label adopted from Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*.

⁹⁸ Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 232.

⁹⁹ D. Potter, *Prophets and Emperors. Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius*, London & Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press (1994) 167; see also Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, 63-4.

¹⁰⁰ Berakoth 55b, see Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 74.

¹⁰¹ Berakoth 55a, see Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 74.

¹⁰² See, for example, Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 210.6; PG 32.777.

¹⁰³ *Codex Iustinianus* 9.18.6; see G. Calofonos, “Dream Interpretation,” 217-19.

¹⁰⁴ MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 55. Athanassiadi comments on dream-oracles being the most common method of divination by the end of the fifth century (“Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 127).

whilst the traditional, great oracular centres were falling silent, the shrines from which prophecy was dispensed through incubation¹⁰⁵ thrived: “such was their popularity that in many cases they were allowed to go into abeyance only once their functions had been assumed by the church”.¹⁰⁶

It was not, however, the incubatory centres alone which provided suitable locations for dream revelation. The *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, for instance, include several spell recipes for the instigation of dream-visions.¹⁰⁷ Libanius, on the other hand, appears to have had revelatory dreams without any preparation for doing so, either in relation to place or ritual.¹⁰⁸

The fourth-century Syrian neoplatonist and theurgist Iamblichus also discusses prophetic dreams and offers some insight on the theurgic interpretation of their function in the cosmos.¹⁰⁹ Iamblichus encouraged incubation, and believed that medicine was the fruit of mantic dreams.¹¹⁰ However, it was only the theurgist who could guarantee that the *oneiroi* were ‘θεοπεμπτοι’ through his experience of divine union.¹¹¹ As will be seen in the section to follow, Iamblichus and his fellow theurgists offered people another effective method of divination.

Christian attitudes to dreams as revelatory were generally positive, and oneiromancy, with its affinity to God-sent prophetic dreams, and incubation in churches offered a revelatory experience within the church’s fold.¹¹² For instance, such leading

¹⁰⁵ Incubation related to the process of sleeping in a shrine or temple in order to receive a beneficial dream.

¹⁰⁶ Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 125. On the usage and popularity of shrines and temples for incubation see: MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 126; and Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 231.

¹⁰⁷ For example PGM 4.3172-3208, 7.109-16, 7.222-249, 7.250-254, 7.359-369, 7.664-85, 7.703-26. See S. Eitrem, “Dreams and Divination in Magical Ritual,” in C.A. Faraone, & D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press (1991: 175-187) 176.

¹⁰⁸ Or. 1. 67, 1.143, 1.245. & Ep. 177.

¹⁰⁹ *de Mysteriis*, 3.2-3, 23; Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 124. For a discussion of the similarity of Iamblichus’ dream theory to that of Philo see Finamore, “Iamblichean Dream Theory,” in R.M. Berchman (ed.), *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of prophecy, Divination, Dreams, and Theurgy in Mediterranean Antiquity*, Atlanta: Scholars Press (1998: 155-166) 155.

¹¹⁰ Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 125.

¹¹¹ *de Mysteriis*, 3.2; Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 127. For a discussion on Iamblichus’ division of dreams sent by gods or not, see Finamore, “Iamblichean Dream Theory,” 156.

¹¹² Calofonos, “Dream Interpretation,” 218.

figures as Gregory of Nyssa,¹¹³ Gregory of Nazianzus,¹¹⁴ and Jerome¹¹⁵ were open about their dreams and in their spiritual interpretation of them. Likewise Synesius of Cyrene argued that dream-prophecy could lead to God.¹¹⁶ Contemporary church fathers express the idea, through their homilies, treatises and letters, that dreams of a powerful type, whether it be prophetic, healing, or salvific, did originate with the divine, and were thus spiritual experiences. This idea is reiterated in the prophetic dreams of the holy men expounded in hagiographies. However, Basil of Caesarea argued that dreams could “bring strife and division and destruction of love,” and provide a means for the devil to attack souls during sleep,¹¹⁷ comments which are not surprising given his opinion of dream-interpreters mentioned above.

As has already been seen, contemporary Jewish authorities also acknowledged that a dream could be divinely inspired and would need to be appropriately interpreted for its meaning. The popularity of the Jewish healing shrine at the Cave of Matrona certainly attests to some degree of acceptance of oneiromancy not just by Jewish authorities, but also by the wider community.

Dreams were not, however, used solely as a divinatory tool. They also provided a medium for healing. Indeed, whilst in the crises of physical disease and mental distress, many people in the Greco-Roman era turned to dreams for the healing of their ailments, and temples and shrines had special ‘incubation’ chambers where sleepers sought the healing dreams that would assist them.¹¹⁸ John Chrysostom, in his homilies against the Judaizers, acknowledges the popularity of dream incubation at the cave of “Matrona”, the Jewish healing shrine near Antioch mentioned above.¹¹⁹ The bishop is

¹¹³ On Gregory of Nyssa on divinely inspired dreams see: *De opificio hominis* 13 (“A Rationale of sleep, of yawning, and of dreams”); PG 44.124-256. Gregory in works such as the treatise on virginity, and book 2 of *Contra Eunomium* also writes of the “illusions of dreams” and the dreamers who style their own fantastic revelations from them, such as old wives and drunkards.

¹¹⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 18 (“On the death of his father”; PG 35.985-1044) demonstrates the role that the dream could play in asserting spiritual identity.

¹¹⁵ See discussion in Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 205-231.

¹¹⁶ Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 130. Also Calofonos, “Dream Interpretation,” 217.

¹¹⁷ Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 210.6; PG 32.777.

¹¹⁸ Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 106.

¹¹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Adv. Jud. Or. I*; PG 48.852. (For further information on the cult and the shrine see: M. Vinson, “Gregory Nazianzen’s Homily 15 and the Genesis of the Christian Cult of the Maccabean Martyrs,” *Byzantion* 64 [1994: 166-192] esp.181[on incubation]).

most discouraging of his congregation frequenting Matrona, although such condemnation does not seem to reflect the effectiveness or alternately the perceived futility of the exercise, rather the religious affiliation of the Jewish, as opposed to Christian, shrine.

The wider popularity of dream-healings is seen in the contemporary Christian incubatory, cultic centre of St Thecla in Seleucia. Thecla, the patron saint of the centre, healed supplicants by appearing to them in their dreams while they were sleeping in the church.¹²⁰ This form of therapy through the dream experience itself was not, however, the only way in which dreams could be remedial. The dreams could also reveal therapeutic instructions to the sick. In such types of ‘pharmacological’ dreams the dreamer was directed to take various potions and mixtures, and even to undertake various types of exercise.¹²¹

Alternatively, there was the healing-dream which was beneficial purely through its interpretation, as seen in the case of Libanius, who experienced remedial dreams on two occasions.¹²² One of these experiences concerned the rhetor’s vision in a dream that enabled him to understand the cause of his migraine and ultimately to be able to recognise its treatment.¹²³ That is, by understanding the supernatural cause of his suffering, as made known to him through the dream, Libanius was able to recognise that the dead chameleon in his lecture room signified both the end of the curse placed against him and the end of his sickness. Thus the cryptic information of the rhetor’s dream proved pivotal to his recovery. Oneiromancy proved a beneficial assistant.

¹²⁰ Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 117.

¹²¹ Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 114.

¹²² Or. 1.143, 245.

¹²³ Or. 1.245-246. This has been discussed in Chapter 5, and also to some degree in Chapter 8.

10.3.3.3 Theurgy

The final form of divination to be considered here is theurgy, particularly that linked with the neoplatonic movement of late antiquity. Perhaps the best known practitioners of theurgy in the fourth century were Maximus, adviser to the imperial court,¹²⁴ Chrysanthius of Lydia, and Iamblichus, with the emperor Julian being a notable enthusiast.¹²⁵ It is through Iamblichus and his surviving works, in particular his *de Mysteriis*,¹²⁶ that some insight can be gained into how theurgy was perceived and promoted in this period in the Eastern empire.

Neoplatonism provides a context, or back-drop, for theurgic activity, particularly in the fourth century. Indeed it is said that it is in this era, especially under the influence of Iamblichus, that theurgy was introduced to neoplatonism,¹²⁷ and that even in the generation succeeding Iamblichus, theurgy was not yet fully accepted into the neoplatonic school.¹²⁸ Neoplatonism had a long life in the Greco-Roman world¹²⁹ and it was a movement and philosophy that:

sought to understand the nature of the divine and to evolve a scientific theology, practised asceticism, contemplation and prayer, revered the gods, and adopted special ways of invoking them ('theurgy'). They believed in the possibility of divine revelation, especially through the so-called 'Chaldaean Oracles'".¹³⁰

Thus theurgy was only one aspect of the philosophy, teachings, and experiences of the neoplatonists.¹³¹

Iles Johnston recently described theurgy as an esoteric, revelatory religion, that took the Chaldaean Oracles as its authoritative basis.¹³² While such a definition seems

¹²⁴ Maximus was ultimately fined, tortured, and executed on a charge of conspiracy against the emperors in 371. See: Eunapius, "Lives of the Philosophers," 478-479; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 29.1.42; and Zosimus, NH, 4.15.

¹²⁵ On Julian, see E.R. Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1951) 288.

¹²⁶ *de Mysteriis* is dated to c.300 or early fourth century. Athanassiadi, "Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination," 116.

¹²⁷ Vakaloudi, "Demonic-Mantic Practices," 91.

¹²⁸ Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 288.

¹²⁹ Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture*, 24.

¹³⁰ Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 133. The *Chaldaean Oracles* prescribed philosophical theology and theurgic ritual; see B.P. Copenhaver (ed.), *HERMETICA. The Greek "Corpus Hermeticum" and the Latin "Asclepius" in a new English translation, with notes and introduction*, Cambridge University Press (1992) xxv.

¹³¹ See P. Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, tr. B.A. Archer, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press (1990) 46.

apt, it is perhaps Proclus who best defines it, when he states that theurgy is: “a power higher than all human wisdom, embracing the blessings of divination, the purifying powers of initiation, and in a word all the operations of divine possession.”¹³³ Thus theurgy was fundamentally a ritualised experience of the divine. The practice required the practitioners, theurgists, to know the words and actions that could invoke the gods, who would respond with information or teachings. So when they sought information on the workings of the cosmos and the role of the individual within it, theurgists would call on the gods and request answers.¹³⁴ Calling on the gods required training and a development of the soul which was intricately linked with neoplatonic ideas of the world, the soul, the intellect, and the One, as well as the Chaldaean Oracles. Thus theurgy offered a revelatory approach that was immediate in its service. It did not wait for revelations to occur, rather its practitioners were able to instigate them. Furthermore, as theurgy located its power within an individual it was transportable and not restricted to any particular locations, such as cultic centres or shrines.¹³⁵

Theurgy and its divinatory techniques, utilising human mediums (such as theurgists or children) or even statues (τελεστική), as well as the broader powers assigned its famous practitioners in earlier periods (such as bringing about storms and stopping plagues)¹³⁶ are often associated with so-called magical practice. For Iamblichus, one of its main protagonists, however, it was a ritual performance of actions understood by the gods who would react as they deemed appropriate.¹³⁷

¹³² S. Iles Johnston, “Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in its Cultural Milieu,” in P. Schäfer & H.G. Kippenberg (eds), *Envisioning Magic. A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, Leiden & New York: Brill (1997: 165-194) 165. Another definition of theurgy is offered by Athanassiadi: “Attempting a provisional definition based on Iamblichus’ understanding of the term, I would describe theurgy as the often involuntary manifestation of an inner state of sanctity deriving from a combination of goodness and knowledge in which the former element prevails.” (“Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 116).

¹³³ *Theol. Plat.* p.63, quoted in Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 291.

¹³⁴ Iles Johnston, “Rising to the Occasion,” 170.

¹³⁵ For a discussion of theurgy as an ‘immediate’ process see: Iles Johnston, “Rising to the Occasion,” 174.

¹³⁶ Second century CE; see Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 285.

¹³⁷ *de Mysteriis*. 2; see H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy. Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the later Roman Empire*, Le Claire: Imprimerie de l’Institut Francais d’archeologie Orientale (1956) 462.

Indeed Iamblichus contended that theurgy was the only legitimate form of divination, as true prophecy was a gift of the gods,¹³⁸ and theurgical divination was a stage in the mystical union.¹³⁹ It was this dialogue with the divine, or rather ‘illumination of excess of energy’ (περιουσία(ι) δυνάμεως), that provided legitimate revelation, as opposed to such techniques as astrology or the use of magical symbols.¹⁴⁰ In Iamblichus’ opinion divinatory methods involving the computation of tables were useless techniques based on the ‘externals of astrology’, while divine prophecy was proof that divine powers existed beyond the soul.¹⁴¹ Thus, as Athanassiadi argues, the equating of theurgy with ‘magic’, would “have horrified Iamblichus”.¹⁴²

Expanding on this last point, modern scholars have opposing viewpoints on the topic of theurgy and its relation to magic and, or, sorcery, although a link between them often occurs in terms of parallels identified between theurgical ritual and the Chaldaean Oracles, and those techniques prescribed in the contemporary Greek papyri.¹⁴³ There are two opposing camps. The first clearly sees theurgy as magic or sorcery,¹⁴⁴ while the second strongly argues against this. Here a few of the arguments on either side will be mentioned. Noteworthy and influential is Dodds, who definitively states that theurgy was a special branch of magic, and the creator of this skill consequently not a neoplatonist but a magician.¹⁴⁵ Indeed for Dodds “theurgy became the refuge of a despairing intelligentsia which already felt *la fascination de l’abime*.”¹⁴⁶

¹³⁸ Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, 257. Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 119-120

¹³⁹ Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 120.

¹⁴⁰ *de Mysteriis*, 3, on the condemnation of divination based on magical symbols that Iamblichus was condemning (Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 120-122).

¹⁴¹ Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 121. See also the discussion in G. Shaw, “Divination in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus,” in R.M. Berchman (ed.), *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of Prophecy, Divination, Dreams, and Theurgy in Mediterranean Antiquity*, Atlanta: Scholars Press (1998) 233-234.

¹⁴² Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 123.

¹⁴³ See Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 283. See also Vakaloudi, “Demonic-Mantic Practices,” 94; and Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, 228.

¹⁴⁴ Peters, for instance, writes that several historians have pointed out that there was no visible difference between the *theurgia* practised by learned magicians and the *goeteia* practised by the low magicians. See E. Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law*, University of Pennsylvania Press (1978) 8.

¹⁴⁵ Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 283, 285, 291.

¹⁴⁶ Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 288.

Vakaloudi has adopted a similar line to Dodds. She broadly labels theurgy as ‘occultism’, and claims that theurgists had lost interest in philosophy and sought to establish themselves as representatives of the gods and thus to be seen as powerful mediums and saviours.¹⁴⁷ To Vakaloudi, then, theurgy consisted of the same rituals as the ‘magic arts’, including the malevolent ‘black arts’.¹⁴⁸ The divinatory practice of theurgy is thus identified as detrimental to individual participants, with the invocation of daimones able to cause serious nervous and psychological disorders and damage.¹⁴⁹

Contrary to Dodds and Vakaloudi, several scholars see no relation between theurgy and the so-called notion of ‘magic’. For instance, Shaw clearly differentiates theurgy from sorcery, arguing that for Iamblichus theurgic activity was always cosmogenic activity and, although sorcerers, like theurgists, demonstrated a knowledge of cosmic sympathies, their spells did not “preserve the analogy with divine creation” and thus were not theurgic.¹⁵⁰

Although proposing a different argument, Iles Johnston likewise does not support the ‘magic’ association. She proposes that theurgy stands in contrast to traditional magic when considering the activities of the practitioners. That is, while the magician sought isolation, that is separation, from culture, the theurgist strove to build a community of like-minded people.¹⁵¹ Hence this fundamental difference in practice and approach serves to distinguish the two.

Athanassiadi also argues for a distinction between the practices and is critical of Dodds’ approach. The basis for Athanassiadi’s distinction lies in the assertion that although Iamblichus and others of the late third and early fourth centuries would influence later divinatory practice, the theurgy of the neoplatonists was a religious, even a “mystical union” which was distinct from other divinatory techniques. For Athanassiadi, theurgy distinguished itself from other divinatory practices because it was

¹⁴⁷ Vakaloudi, “Demonic-Mantic Practices,” 88.

¹⁴⁸ Vakaloudi, “Demonic-Mantic Practices,” 88.

¹⁴⁹ Vakaloudi, “Demonic-Mantic Practices,” 92.

¹⁵⁰ G. Shaw, “Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite,” *J ECS* 7.4 (1999: 573-599) 596.

¹⁵¹ Iles Johnston, “Rising to the Occasion,” 178.

fundamentally a dynamic and constantly changing state of mind – the theurgist’s mind.¹⁵²

Theurgy provided an increasingly popular revelatory technique in late antiquity. However, although theurgy could provide revelatory information, it did so within a religious and philosophical framework which aimed at the spiritual development of the theurgist and not specifically at satisfying the curiosities of the inquirer. Thus it is difficult to associate it with those supernatural practices which have been discussed in this study. Furthermore, apart from the isolated association of theurgy with weather- and plague-influencing powers,¹⁵³ the practice is clearly related to revelation. Consequently despite its apparently strong influence in late antiquity, theurgy was by and large both spiritual enlightenment and divination, but not a method that sought to influence or alter the lives of individuals outside of those choosing the path of spiritual, neoplatonic development. Hence associations of theurgy with other supernatural practices in the late antique world should be made with caution, taking care to separate ritual technique from intention.

10.4 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the diverse range of material which has been discussed or introduced in this chapter has lent support to the idea that a broad array of supernatural options and avenues were available to Syrians and Palestinians. Some of the examples presented, furthermore, parallel practices already discussed in the study, suggesting that activities were perhaps more widespread or popular than could be understood in the previous chapters given the sometimes limited (chronologically and regionally applicable) evidence available. In addition, the presentation of this additional material prompts the consideration that a broader range of material could help inform not just on the popularity of practices, but also on the cultural constructs that framed them, for

¹⁵² Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 116.

¹⁵³ These are not related to fourth-century Syria or Paletine.

example the belief in the evil eye. Finally, the discussion has also demonstrated how the task of differentiating or labelling various practices is neither simple nor consentient, particularly in relation to a practice such as divination, and must as a consequence always be subject to the biases and limitations of both the modern and antique mind-sets.

CONCLUSION

AMBITIONS, DESIRES, FEARS, AND INSECURITIES.

11.1 Intentions, parameters, and interpretation. A recap

This study has provided a glimpse into the supernatural beliefs and related practices evident in the late antique world. The intention of the investigation was to focus on one niche of Greco-Roman history in order better to understand something of the social world of antiquity. Thus the thesis has sought to investigate supernatural practices within their social context, with consideration for the constructs of belief and behaviour that frame that context.

Rejecting traditional definitions of magic, the subject of the study has been that extant evidence which presents or represents activities involving humanly instigated communication with the supernatural for the purpose of protection or assistance in beneficent or maleficent action. The surviving material that falls within this restriction was predominantly associated with six principle concerns: entertainment, desire, livelihood, protection, health, as well as daimonic intrusion and expulsion. The information for the related practices and beliefs was provided by artefacts, such as curse tablets and amulets, and written records, such as homilies, historiographies, and hagiographies.

The provenance and date of antique evidence determined the inclusion, or exclusion, of material utilised in the study and it was on this basis that information pertaining to fourth-century Syria and Palestine was collated. These parameters of time and place were set in order to provide a strict delineation of the historical social niche to be considered, in this case the two provinces in the fourth century, and the evidence they supplied for supernatural practices that fit within the criteria outlined above. By delimiting the study it became possible to undertake an appropriate examination of

influential cultural and environmental factors. Thus, for example, influential changes in imperial fortunes and governmental structure, the increasing presence of Christianity, and the unique role of the Christian ascetic, could all be taken into due consideration.

Furthermore, a focus on two neighbouring regions allowed for some degree of reflection on correlations or differences in practice and belief. No significant differences were apparent in the utilisation of practices in the two regions. This was particularly of note in the hagiographical accounts. As was frequently highlighted above, the narrative style and intentions of the hagiographer could have played a determining factor in such correlations. However, the authors do reveal in their texts a knowledge of contemporary practices evident outside the regions, which suggests that they were drawing upon activities familiar to contemporary social understanding. Thus no distinguishable disparities are apparent between the two regions. Given the many cultural similarities of, and influences on, the two provinces, this is perhaps not surprising. Yet, were more fourth-century examples available, it is possible that these correspondences may not have been so marked. Nevertheless, it can be said that in respect of the research presented above, there was no discernible evidence to repudiate scholarly assertions that a degree of homogeneity in supernatural belief and practice existed across the Mediterranean, Greco-Roman world, especially in relation to the provinces of Syria and Palestine.

A final comment in relation to the methodological parameters determined for the study concerns the apparent disadvantages in adopting such an approach. The most prominent concern relates to the inclusion and exclusion of material, a problem already identified in the discussion of ambiguous material in Chapter 10 (10.3). By setting clearly defined chronological and geographical limits, an attempt was made to present a study untroubled by the assumptions of cultural homogeneity reflected in research involving considerably broader, even unspecified, delineation in these areas (see Chapter 2). However, in doing so, that material deemed ambiguous in provenance and date was excluded, and thus extant evidence which may have represented actual practice and provided a broader perspective has been exempted from the investigation. Therefore, while the evidence for activities involving the supernatural in Syria and

Palestine in the fourth century is scant when compared with other periods and regions, possibly reflecting on their popularity, this result may stem to some degree from the study's methodology. Having said that, however, the ambiguous material, in regard to date and specific provenance, such as the prescriptions of the *Sepher Ha-Razim* and the Aramaic amulets and bowls, presents similar motivations and intentions to those identified amongst the extant evidence incorporated within the main investigation. Thus had such evidence been included, the results of the study may not in fact have diverged significantly.

A prominent aspect of this investigation has been the analysis of the extant evidence utilising a variety of social concepts in order to gain insight into the social constructs and understandings that produced and fostered practices involving the supernatural. These interpretations have not been offered as conclusive means for comprehending the antique evidence in its social constructs. However, they have been suggested as possible and reasonable ways for viewing the fourth-century information in order better to understand the interrelationship between the belief system of the supernatural and the lives of fourth-century Syrians and Palestinians. The concepts which have been proposed most frequently included limited good, envy, as well as honour and shame, antique notions increasingly identified in studies of Greco-Roman society. By associating these ideas with the intentions and social contexts of the practices discussed, it has been demonstrated in each of the discussions (Chapters 4-9) that these activities are not related to deviant understandings of the world (and therefore aberrations from it), but rather that they are social concepts which could be seen as pervading all Syrian and Palestinian thought (see 11.3 below).

A review of the practices and their interpretations is presented in the following pages, preceded by a reflection on the study's findings and possible directions for future research.

11.2 From the circus to the soul. An overview of the investigation

In this section, Chapters 4 through 10 are summarised, with consideration given to the evidence, the practices that it presented, and the interpretation offered regarding the context that fostered their use.

Chapter 4 investigated practices involving the supernatural in matters of entertainment. For both Syria and Palestine extant evidence concerned the activities of chariot racing. The material from Syria included a fragmentary *defixio* from Damascus, and it was argued that this tablet, as well as unpublished material from the hippodrome at Antioch, suggested that the cursing of charioteers was known in the region during the fourth century. Furthermore, it was argued that when considering examples for the previous and successive centuries some continuity could be identified and hence some insight gained into fourth-century tablets. Therefore an earlier tablet from Beirut, and a later example from Apamea on the Orontes were considered, both of which were aimed at charioteers and horses of the Blue team. From Palestine two hagiographical accounts about Hilarion involved charioteers and supernatural machinations at the hippodrome. In one instance a charioteer was healed by the ascetic of a paralysis, an ailment with striking similarities to the intended outcomes of *defixiones*. The second account concerned Hilarion's assistance with the racing at Gaza. In this case Italicus was to sponsor a racing team that was to compete against that of a rival city. He appealed to the ascetic for protection against the supernatural attacks of his competitor. The holy man assisted by defending Italicus' horses, as well as by enhancing their abilities and deflecting the opponents' binding spells (which rebounded on to them).

Thus it was established through this varied evidence that chariot racing was a popular and competitive sporting event in which curses, supernatural performance-enhancers, and apotropaic devices played a distinctive role. A few contextual, social factors were suggested as influential in people's use of supernatural practices in this arena, such as: the agonistic context of the event; financial interests; and the power-perception of the charioteer.

Regarding the argument for the agonistic context, it was proposed that the competitive and uncertain nature of the event led to a situation in which people sought to affect particular outcomes. This provocation to take action could be relevant to charioteers, individuals involved with staging the event, *agonothetes*, as well as the suppliers of horses and equipment. All of these groups had money and reputation on the line, and these factors could have been a significant stimulus for seeking to influence the racing results. It was also proposed that, while financial concerns relating to prize money and staging the event were of significance, gambling may also have provided some impetus for the involvement of supernatural aids and hindrances. This, it was suggested, could include any number of people, including fans. The argument was largely based on a study of gambling in Rome in the same period, in which certain characteristics of gambling were highlighted, such as betting on teams rather than individuals. Thus specific aspects of gambling practice could be linked with features of the racing *defixiones*. Finally, it was also proposed that there existed a social perception of a charioteer's power which aligned him with supernatural malpractice and provoked the use of supernatural attacks against him. Envy and limited good were prominent in this supernatural association with the competitor and the methods used against him. For instance, as success was limited, it was gained at someone else's expense, and this would provoke envy and supernatural action. Therefore it follows that if a high-profile competitor, seen as a prime target of envy, was not seen to be suffering the consequent misfortunes of envy, then it would be thought that he possessed some exceptional supernatural powers that enabled him to repel the threat. Thus, since the charioteer's invulnerability to the natural consequences of envy might have excluded him from the norm and accredited him with exceptional power, the only way to inhibit him would, therefore, have been supernatural.

Chapter 5 was concerned with matters of livelihood. An evident disparity between the curses and hagiographical accounts, on the one hand, and the sorcery accusations on the other, led to a separation in the consideration of the evidence. Hence the extant curse tablet and relevant hagiographical material was first considered,

followed by a discussion of the trials for high treason which culminated in accusations of γοητεία.

The evidence for the first section of the chapter involved two curse tablets from Antioch aimed at the greengrocer, Babylas, with the intention of bringing misfortune upon him and his livestock. Theodoret provided further information with two hagiographical accounts. His narrative included a story of a farmer who received assistance from the ascetic Aphrahat in order to repel locusts threatening his crops. The other account concerned the holy man, Maësymas, acting as the community mediator in requesting leniency of a landlord and using a curse against the latter's transport. The Palestinian evidence included two extant curse tablets, one of which indicated a litigious setting and little else in its fragmentary form. The other from Galilee was commissioned by Pancharia, a woman seeking to impede an investigation of her financial affairs by binding the physical and psychological capacities of the man and women who were to be conducting it.

It was proposed that the notion of limited good, combined with an agonistic context, could be seen as influential in the use of these supernatural measures, both defensive and aggressive. Thus it was argued that the notion of limited good, when applied to livelihood, would have been intensified by the competitive commercial environment. Hence, only the impairment of a successful business could assist in eradicating another's loss, and supernatural methods provided competitors with an option for attaining such an outcome. In relation to Theodoret's hagiographical accounts, it was argued that the additional demands of the landlord aggravated an already stressful situation. Hence the holy man, pitted against a significant and powerful threat, used a curse and consequently inverted the power balance, propelling himself into the position of control and authority. Honour and shame, were also proposed as noteworthy aspects of supernatural activity in areas of livelihood, particularity in relation to Pancharia's curse. It was suggested that in this instance Pancharia may not have solely feared the retribution of the three individuals coming to audit her books, but also the social shame that could result from any discovery of fraudulence. It was thus argued that these examples all involved the use of assertive supernatural activities in

order to achieve some form of 'equity' within agonistic contexts. Thus daimonic, or divine, assistance could be sought as a remedial response to a competitive and agonistic environment in which livelihood and even social identity were under threat and could be detrimentally, perhaps even irreversibly, affected.

The second section of Chapter 5 addressed the sorcery accusations that marked periods of the fourth century in both Palestine and Syria. The main source of evidence for these events was Libanius, Ammianus Marcellinus, and to a lesser extent Zosimus. Aspects of the trials including the torture, frenzy, and alleged false accusations, particularly reported by Ammianus, were discussed, in addition to Libanius' personal experiences and accounts of accusations, and Sozomen's record of Athanasius' trial at Tyre. This evidence suggested a period in which the use of practices involving the supernatural could be condemned and even harshly punished – a situation somewhat surprising considering how the evidence in other chapters suggested that use of such practices was relatively widespread. However, by taking into account the social context that framed the accusation periods, the situation became somewhat more intelligible.

It was proposed that a number of factors be considered when investigating this phenomenon of accusations. These included: honour, limited good, and envy, as well as the pervasive belief in supernatural potency. Thus it was argued that underlying the Antiochene treason accusation was not just the threat of a successor, but the actual valid identification of that figure provided by divination. This, however, did not serve to explain the extension of the treason trials into arenas for unjustified and malevolent attacks on countless individuals across the empire. In an attempt to understand this expansion of prosecution, ideas pertaining to religious persecution, economic benefits, and the elimination of rivals were also advanced. Notions of religious persecution were largely dismissed, except in the case of the trial against Athanasius. The economic benefits derived from the confiscation of the property of the prosecuted did, however, seem a feasible provocation for the numerous accusations. The elimination of rivals through accusations also offered a valid inducement for levelling accusations. Indeed Libanius proved a fine exemplar of this point, also highlighting how the elimination or discrediting of influential persons or rivals through accusations could further serve to

reinforce faction boundaries. The idea that allegations could substitute for physical forms of confrontation was also considered, but not supported. Furthermore, the supposition was made that an accusation of an unacceptable supernatural practice could provide a publicly acceptable explanation for illness and/or poor performance. However, this provocation alone could not have instigated the flurry of accusations across Syria and Palestine.

Finally, it was proposed that the notion of limited good, envy, and honour may also have underlain sorcery accusations in the fourth century. It was argued that the *γοητεία* accusations were a means by which people's envy could directly, and often dramatically, affect other people's fortunes, an idea supported by Libanius' comments. Related to this were the concepts of limited good and honour. As honour was also something in limited supply, enhancing it could only be done at the expense of another. It was thus advanced that in levelling an accusation of supernatural activity and manipulation at an individual, envious rivals had an opportunity to strip their target of a valuable asset, like honour, by tainting the latter's reputation with the dishonourable accusation of shameful and deviant behaviour (treason or *γοητεία*). Furthermore, by associating behaviour with supernatural malevolence and misfortune, an individual may have had an outlet for the recovery of social identity and honour.

Chapter 6 was concerned with love and desire – *ἔρως*. Theodoret's accounts of Aphrahat and Macedonius in Syria, and Jerome's account of Hilarion's involvement in assisting the victim of a love spell, as well as a Palestinian curse, constituted the evidence. Theodoret in two accounts recorded two different scenarios involving erotic enchantment in Syria. The first concerned Aphrahat's assistance of a woman whose husband had been bewitched by a courtesan. Theodoret's second account recorded Macedonius' dismissal of a daimon possessing a girl who had been made crazy by a love spell cast on her by a young man. In both cases similarities were noted between contemporary Greco-Roman love spells from elsewhere and the portrayals in the hagiographical text. From Palestine, an extant pot sherd revealed a curse aimed at instilling desire in its target. However, the inscription provided little detail about its caster or victim. Hilarion's story, though, provided additional Palestinian information,

with an account of a youth who fell in love with an unattainable and unenticeable girl. The love-struck youth thus went to Egypt to learn the skills required for an effective love spell, which consequently sent the girl mad with frenzy and passion for him (much to the concern of her parents).

It was proposed that issues of gender, behaviour, family, honour, and shame were related to the use of supernatural love practices. The use of love enchantments by women, portrayed in Theodoret's initial account, were first addressed. This discussion included a consideration of the courtesan's use of supernatural techniques, and the inversion of the socially prescribed, female sexual nature thus demonstrated, through the adoption of the sexually aggressive, masculine role. Also reviewed were the wife's motivations for seeking to divert the husband's attentions away from the courtesan, utilising Faraone's discussion of *philia* methods in considering her retaliation. Furthermore, it was argued that the role of the male was rendered effectively impotent by the hagiographer, in that he was portrayed merely as the pawn of female machinations. Finally, it was advanced that the holy man's involvement could be seen as part of a narrative attempt, possibly reflecting contemporary ideas, to present a restored family unit and promote marriages of fidelity.

In the scenarios of desperate males instilling frenzied passion and madness into the objects of their desire, it was proposed that various modern approaches to supernatural love practices are applicable to these accounts, especially when used in combination. Thus incorporated into the discussion were: ideas of social climbing; the inaccessible victim; abduction marriages; the frustration and psychological torment suffered by the victim of ἔρωσ (the male); as well as the concept of female sexual shame.

Regarding the inaccessible victim, it was argued that both female victims were presented as inaccessible in some way. The one girl was still kept at home, therefore probably unmarried, and the other, in Jerome's account, was noted as being a virgin of God. Thus a link was drawn between these accounts – including the girls' inaccessibility, and their families' reactions to their passioned frenzy – and bridal theft, a proposal made by Faraone in relation to *agoge* spells. The suggestion was made that

the girls' families objected to the male suitors (hence their reactions) and feared that the men could seek a union with their daughters without familial consent. This would incur a loss of honour for the victims and their families. Consequently bringing the matter before the court could be seen as a means for restoring a degree of lost honour. Thus the idea was strongly conveyed that turning another's mind to lust by the *magicae artes* would damage a victim's safety and reputation.

Also considered in the discussion were the male protagonists of the spells, and the influential force of ἔρως. It was proposed that if these youths were regarded as the frustrated victims of ἔρως, they could therefore be perceived to be powerless over their actions. If this were the case, they could thus be assigned a passive role of diminished responsibility, this idea of reduced accountability helping to explain the treatment of the youths once their victims had been released from their spells.

The role of the female victims in these scenarios was also addressed. In both the Syrian and Palestinian accounts the girls were portrayed as inaccessible and respectable, except when under the bond of the love-spells, which rendered them frenzied and impassioned. These spells thus compromised their honourable behaviour. It was argued in the analysis that in these narratives, by falling subject to the erotic spells of their male admirers, it was ultimately the female victims of love spells who were assigned the precarious roles that threatened both family and male honour because of their inability to adhere to social expectations of appropriate and reputable female behaviour.

Finally, it was proposed that Theodoret and Jerome, and their holy men, in these two accounts sought not only to restore, but also to preserve the integrity of the family unit and the sanctity of sanctioned marriage. Thus the erotic spells were thwarted and the girls restored to their families. Also, given the nuances of the narratives in taking into consideration all those aspects of life, family, and society with which the audience contended, it was suggested that the hagiographers were utilising contexts in which they could best portray the ascetics' relevance and prowess.

Chapter 7 investigated apotropaic beliefs and practices that aimed at defending people and property from misfortune and the evil eye. The Syrian evidence was provided by Libanius, John Chrysostom, and various artefacts. The church father

referred to various practices involving amulets or devices (such as ribbons) which, although he condemned them, people used to protect themselves and their children from misfortune and the evil eye. The preacher promoted as alternatives making the sign of the cross, and the word of Christ. The physical evidence from Syria included mosaics, a mirror, a door inscription, as well as two amulets. One of the amulets was a lamella aimed at protecting Alexandra, which offered significant insight into the wide spectrum of protection and power that could be assigned a phylactery. Alexandra was protected from daimones, κατάδεσμοι, φάρμακα, food, an embrace, and the evil eye. Sexual honour, however, was a notable concern, with the device aiming to protect her from various symptoms, or acts, related to sexual passion and the supernatural methods that incited it. Another Syrian amulet aimed to protect Thomas from human machinations involving the supernatural, keeping him safe from sorcery and witchcraft, curse tablets, and the spirits of the untimely and/or violently dead. These two Syrian examples therefore illustrated a need for protection from supernatural attacks incited by others.

The extant evidence from Palestine included an amulet, mosaics, the denouncement of amulets by Cyril of Jerusalem, and a hagiographical account about Hilarion protecting animals. The amulet aimed to conquer τὰ κακά, and its inscription was accompanied by the common depiction of Solomon.

As a variant on the usual presentation of material, also discussed in Chapter 7 was the evidence for practices generally believed to be prevalent throughout the eastern empire, but not exemplified in the extant fourth-century Palestinian and Syrian material. Introduced under this category were popular images and inscriptions depicted on amulets, objects, mosaics, and clothing such as the seal of Solomon, the much-suffering eye, and the rider saint. It was also proposed that *Mezuza* may have acted as apotropaic items protecting homes and their inhabitants.

It was argued that the evidence reflected both the specific threat of curses, and the more general, though equally serious, threat of malevolent daimones, particularly in the form of the evil eye. Thus as the Greco-Roman world was one in which the supernatural played a regular role, apotropaic devices provided a means of guarding against unwanted spirits or daimones, and consequent misfortune. Three factors of

social understanding were identified as related to the need for protection, namely vulnerability, envy, and the notion of limited good. Vulnerability was identified in children through their valued status in society, in women through their gendered, sexual identity, and in men through public perception and a competitive environment. Thus it was argued that men, women and children possessed attributes of social value which were physically and socially vulnerable, and this meant susceptibility to supernatural harm. Envy was then linked with this idea of vulnerability, in as much as that which was valued in society, tangible or intangible, was vulnerable, and that which threatened those in possession of what was valued would often be envy. It was further proposed that susceptibility and fear of envy could be related to the notion of limited good, which could ultimately be seen as a catalyst intensifying the threat of attack on people or property. That is, a person with sufficient or abundant health and/or wealth would have felt threatened by those who had little of either. Because envy could manifest itself in daimonic misfortune, it had the ability to destroy what was already limited and thus valuable. Therefore people required all manner of techniques, or behaviours, for protecting themselves from the harm posed by the evil eye or curses.

Chapter 8 turned to the involvement of supernatural forces in healing practices. The extant evidence for both regions demonstrated that a variety of methods were utilised in healing or harming. The discussion included two Syrian amulets. One aimed at providing relief for both epilepsy and headache, while the other amulet sought to rid the holder of ophthalmia. Libanius and John Chrysostom also provided evidence in relation to the use of amulets and related practices for healing. John Chrysostom condemned non-Christian healing methods (that involved the supernatural), proposing that the word of Christ and the signing of the cross would prove superior alternatives.

Several types of healing practitioners were also identified as operating in Syria in the fourth century, including Jewish healers, female practitioners, *μάντις*, and some Christian holy men. With a reputation for effective results, the Jewish healers posed a particular threat to John Chrysostom, as the perception of their healing prowess threatened his congregation's allegiance to Christianity. Female healers attended to people in their homes, providing a service that was acknowledged by both

contemporary medical and secular authorities. Information on the *μάντις* demonstrated that this figure offered advice on the treatment of ailments, such as the migraine suffered by Libanius. The feats of the Christian ascetics were presented by Theodoret's hagiography, in which these identities were recorded as healing ailments including eye complaints, fevers, and infertility. Finally, relics of holy figures and martyrs were also deemed as potent healing forms in fourth-century Syria.

The Palestinian evidence provided several parallels with the Syrian material and included an amulet to stop the pain, particularly fever, suffered by the wearer. Of especial note was an extant tablet which sought to inflict, and not assuage or alleviate, fever on its target, Eusebios. Furthermore, Jerome's accounts of Hilarion provided information on the Christian ascetics in Palestine, who demonstrated a similar repertoire to that of those featured in Theodoret's work.

The discussion in Chapter 8 covered two areas. Firstly, the possible reasons for incorporating the supernatural in matters of health and, secondly, the promotion of Christian power in the traditional discourse of supernatural healing. In contrast to the assertion that supernatural assistance for healing was sought as a last resort, it was argued that it was actually treated as an alternative form of assistance. This, it was proposed related to a late antique belief in the supernatural cause of illness. Thus within a framework of belief in preternatural prevalence and efficacy, the supernatural healer offered a viable and effective alternative to the medical healer. In regard to the potential motivations for inflicting harm, exemplified by the Palestinian amulet, it was not possible to propose a great deal, given the limited information provided by the amulet. Nevertheless it was suggested that similar motivations to those already ascribed to various curses discussed in the study might be considered applicable.

The second section of the discussion in Chapter 8 examined healing as a discourse of power, and the assertion of a Christian ascendancy within that framework. It was argued that the extant evidence indicates that in the fourth century there could be seen a development of a Christian form of healing which not only differentiated itself from traditional and popular forms, but also sought to undermine the latter and divert healing into the Christian realm. Thus traditional and non-Christian sources of healing

were criticised, and alternate Christian methods promoted as the most effective. Furthermore, contemporary Christian hagiographical accounts provided a forum for the distinction and promotion of a supreme healing power – Christianity and the Christian God. The holy men’s capabilities provided not just effective services but also benefits that were notably salient in their social relevance. It was thus argued that in presenting and advancing the holy men and the supreme power that supported their activities in a relevant context, the hagiographers emphasised their role as potent sources of healing. Finally, relics also served to distinguish Christian healing power and promote its potency, demonstrating the continuing strength of Christian authority. Thus through these various Christian sources it was suggested that the religion sought to position itself as a supreme force in the socially important discourse of healing, and consequently secure the conversion, and allegiance, of both Syrians and Palestinians.

Chapter 9 looked at the daimonic possession of individuals and the rite of daimonic expulsion as presented by the predominantly Christian evidence. Theodoret provided insight into Syrian practice, portraying concerned parents and spouses, afflicted victims (raving, delirious, and frenzied), and the potent capabilities of the Christian holy men. The latter proved adept at expelling possessing-daimones through a variety of methods, including gestures, prayers, and adjurations. In addition to the hagiographical accounts, relics and martyria appeared popular and effective avenues for executing daimonic-expulsions in the fourth century. Furthermore, exorcistic rites were performed as part of Christian baptismal training, as recorded in the homiletic prescriptions of John Chrysostom and the inscription of an extant amulet.

The Palestinian evidence was provided by Jerome’s account of Hilarion. He recorded that the holy man expelled daimones from countless Saracens, as well as several powerful men (and a camel), the victims often noted for their violent or bestial behaviour. Also evident in fourth-century Palestine was the inclusion of exorcisms in baptismal training, a rite reported by Egeria and Cyril of Jerusalem.

It was proposed in Chapter 9 that daimonic possession and expulsion were ultimately an exhibition of social control. Firstly, the desire to control and explain unacceptable conditions (of affliction) or perceived deviant or irregular behaviour and,

secondly, the desire to restore that behaviour or condition to an understood norm. Possession and expulsion, in line with this argument were considered separately in the discussion.

It was proposed that possession could be associated with several aspects of social behaviour and perception. Thus it was argued that afflictions that manifested themselves in behaviour which would have threatened the sufferers with social alienation, could be attributed to daimonic influences, in particular possession. Furthermore, it was suggested that possession manifested itself in behaviour that would have been deemed deviant both by the family and the community. Therefore, in order to avoid loss of honour and the accumulation of shame, the existence of the supernatural discourse allowed for the attribution of the affliction to the daimonic, which would consequently reduce the accountability of the victim and any associated social perceptions of the daimonically assaulted individual and his or her family. In addition to these factors it was argued that possession could be seen as the ultimate display of human vulnerability. Finally, it was proposed that the identification of possession could be utilised as an assertion of religious differentiation and pre-eminence.

Expulsion of the daimonic was a display of power and control, performed by individuals imbued with potent, supernal strength, that addressed the social issues of possession outlined above. As such, expulsion would not only alleviate the raving, frenzy, and mania of possession, it would also address the social consequences of the affliction. Therefore negative perceptions of the suffering, and possible social alienation which ensued, were negated through the elimination of the source of the problems, and the reinstatement of a physically, and socially, healthy individual. Furthermore, if possession were seen as a form of deviant behaviour, then the expulsion of the possessing-daimon was a means of correcting the unacceptable conduct and removing the victim from a marginal position of social deviance. Thereby a family's social standing was also restored within the mainstream, and that social system's boundaries of acceptable, as opposed to deviant, behaviour confirmed and further delineated. The expulsion of a possessing-daimon also served to qualify concepts of social and physical vulnerability, by demonstrating that humanity, though vulnerable to the supernatural,

was ultimately not subservient. Thus in eliminating the daimonic, expulsion affected social behaviour by restoring people and their situations to their expected or perceived norms, and it also manifested society's ultimate ability to control the pervasive supernatural.

Finally, daimonic expulsion also played a definitive role in the assertion of religious differentiation and deviance. This was exemplified in the rites included in baptismal training, which sought to cleanse candidates' minds of past, daimonic, affiliations and prepare them for a new allegiance to Christian divinity.

Chapter 10 consisted of two sections. Firstly it considered material that was relevant to the study, though not readily aligned with the categorisations of practice designated in previous chapters. This evidence included *voces magicae*, 'magical' squares, the atypical wonders found in hagiographical accounts, and fragmentary or undeciphered material. Secondly, the chapter discussed that evidence which was relatively ambiguous in regard to date and/or provenance, but which was generally associated with the fourth century and/or Syria and Palestine. This then incorporated an introduction to the Aramaic amulets and bowls, and the prescriptions of the *Sepher Ha-Razim*. Also considered was the divinatory evidence deemed ambiguous for its occasional association with practices already investigated in the study.

The various examples covered in the course of the chapter thus emphasised the diversity of practices which involved the supernatural. Consideration of the ambiguous material (in terms of date and provenance) furthermore demonstrated similar concerns and intentions to those revealed in the evidence discussed in preceding chapters. Finally, in considering divinatory practices, and the modern and antique association of various aspects of revelation with 'magical' practices, it was argued that these methods were not readily aligned with the material defined as relevant to this study, because the overwhelming intention of divination concerned the revelation of the future and not its alteration.

11.3 Society and the Supernatural. Some reflections

Perhaps the most overwhelming aspect of the social world of late antiquity as reflected in the evidence, is that the supernatural, and all related daimones, angels, and divinities, formed an integral part of the late antique world-view. The existence, and prevalence, of preternatural beings were acknowledged by secular laws, historiographers, hagiographers, and church fathers, as well those who read the works of these individuals, and those who made use of the various available supernatural devices. It is then not so surprising that the realm of the supernatural was seen to interrelate with the human, and that the latter would seek assistance or protection from that realm.

However, when the extreme, or relatively aggressive, measures people would utilise are considered, then it is apparent that it was not simply an incorporation of the supernatural that involved the latter in the terrestrial realm, but the concepts and context that framed social reality. This intricate intertwining of the supernatural with the tangible world is seen to be especially highlighted through the interaction of social concepts – such as envy, limited good, and the source of illness – with the supernatural. This interrelationship allowed for the supernatural to act as an applicable method for the manipulation of the social system, exemplified, for instance, in the ability to assuage envy, gain the inappropriate or inaccessible, or affect behaviour. Furthermore this interaction of social constructs with the supernatural explains why concepts such as limited good, envy, and social vulnerability, can be seen as influential in so many aspects of the activities discussed above. It likewise demonstrates why social views and values such as honour and shame (including sexual), related so closely to vulnerability, envy, and limited good, are also prevalent in the supernatural discourse of the fourth century.

A final point refers to the traditional method of defining magic and aligning it with either the religious or irreligious. To have applied such a distinction in this study would have meant neglecting the prevalent world-view identified herein, namely that the tangible and supernatural worlds were intricately connected, and would have

imposed delineations not readily apparent within that world-view. The application of such a division would have risked the misrepresentation of the material, both anachronistically and ethnocentrically, and the alignment of behaviours with this dualistic interpretation rather than with the social constructs that do frame them. Indeed where religion (particularly Christianity) was seen to be involved with the practices discussed above, the authorities did not dismiss the beliefs associated with these activities (for they operated within the framework of the same world-view); they merely prescribed the adoption of new methodologies in order to differentiate their supernal associations and potency from those of traditional and alternative practices and religious groups.

In conclusion, this study has provided an interpretative examination of one aspect of Greco-Roman social history, namely activities involving the supernatural in Palestine and Syria in the fourth century. The material covered, though diverse, has highlighted the role that the supernatural could play in people's daily lives, and the intricate association of the preternatural with the social environment that accommodated it. In order to ever increase modern understandings of antique beliefs and practices, it is believed that further focussed studies which also avoid inapplicable definitions could provide valuable insight into, and information on, both the field of supernatural studies and our understanding of Greco-Roman society. There is tremendous scope for such research into the prevalent supernatural discourse of the antique world. Indeed, a comparative study in which the cultural groupings are not so closely related as those of the Syrians and Palestinians, could prove particularly illuminating, and a useful next step. For now, though, this present investigation draws to a close:

ἀλλὰ ἐπὶ νίκην, χάριν, δόξαν, δύναμιν, τῷ φοροῦντι σου τὴν δόξαν,
ἤδη ἤδη, ταχύ ταχύ, ἀμήν.¹

¹ *Il.* 43-44, no. 58, GMA, 332-333.

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