Protective Magic on the Byzantine Periphery: The Development of Apotropaic Devices

Katrina Rosie, *Queen's University*

Anxiety about the safety of one's family, home and health is an age-old concern. I began writing this paper on Byzantine protective magic just as the COVID-19 pandemic broke out; an unseen and harmful force which has sparked a wide variety of (largely ineffective) protective strategies like essential oils, hot baths, garlic and echinacea. For my part, I know that drowning myself in unprecedented amounts of lemon-ginger tea will not keep me from getting sick, but it does make me feel better. In Late Antiquity and the early Byzantine period, one of the most immediate perceived threats to be protected against was demonic activity, a similarly invisible and malevolent force. However, the methods that people adopted to safeguard themselves against harm underwent huge temporal, regional and religious variations. Even within Christianized areas in the early Byzantine period, people tended to adopt a variety of different methods to safeguard themselves from demons. Why did the same desire have such diverse manifestations in different places?

My paper will trace the development of apotropaic (or protective) popular religious practices in areas where Christian ideas had only recently been introduced into pre-existing ritual efficacy frameworks. Examples will be drawn from Mesopotamia and Egypt in the fourth to seventh centuries CE. I argue that new Christian ideas and Graeco-Roman magical forms did not replace

Arc – Journal of The School of Religious Studies, McGill University
Volume 48 (2020): 76–108

existing indigenous belief systems surrounding protective practices. Christian ideas needed to operate within indigenous magical dialects and ideas about how magic "worked"; the structure of magic and ideas about efficacy remained with only a thin veneer of Christianity applied to the exterior.[1] I propose that this phenomenon may be explained, in part, through the use of ritual theory. Ultimately, pre-existing ideas about ritual efficacy were much more resilient than the names of forces invoked and the theologies they implied. When it came to the safety of their homes, health, and families, efficacy generally outweighed orthodoxy. Although this study is primarily focused on apotropaic practices, I hope that these conclusions may have applicability in the broader study of Christianization processes and the nature of ritual change.

Definitions of magic have themselves undergone dramatic change both historically and within academic discourse. Thus, in approaching this subject, it is helpful to provide a brief overview of what is meant by the term in this context, and to highlight some key considerations for approaching magic which have emerged from recent discourse. The earliest definitions tended to define magic in opposition to science, religion and rational thinking.[2] Later scholars

---

1. Although I refer to "Christian influences," I do not mean to imply that there were strict religious distinctions at this time. This is merely a way of identifying new elements added to the *religious koine* (a body of common beliefs and practices) in order to look at their reactive dynamics. As Ra'Anan Boustan and Joseph Sanzo point out, "the field should move beyond simply labeling elements based on their presumed historical or linguistic origins to consider the fluctuating nature of religious idioms and communal boundaries." Ra'Anan Boustan, and Joseph Sanzo, "Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms, and the Shared Magical Culture of Late Antiquity," *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no. 2 (2017): 219.

2. In *The Golden Bough*, J. G. Frazer presents an evolutionary understanding of magic where magic represented a lower level of thinking from which mankind might progress to religious and scientific thinking. For Frazer, magic differs from science primarily through magic's misunderstanding of the laws

called these binaries into question and instead blurred the lines between these categories. The most recent wave of scholarship now advocates for a conceptual integration of magic – or the belief that supernatural power could be harnessed and used for one's own benefit[3] – into a spectrum of Orthodox practices comprising the rhythms of everyday religious life.[4] Therefore, my project will approach magic within the greater context of Orthodox Christian life, and the general variety and complexity of community-specific and individual expressions of faith.[5]

Some have made convincing arguments that in the Byzantine and Late Antique eras, protective rites, spells, and objects were not considered to be "magic" by people who regarded these practices as solely reactionary and defensive. For example, in approaching a collection which had previously been labeled "Coptic

---

of nature, although they share the same goals. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed (London: Macmillan, 1922). 62. Cf. Lynn Thorndike, who adopts a broad definition of magic which encompasses witchcraft, the occult, folklore, divination, astrology and popular superstitions. Like Frazer, Thorndike emphasizes a connection between magic, science and religion in his definition, and presents magic as an undeveloped predecessor to organized religion and science. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Macmillan company, 1923).

3. Richard Greenfield, "A Contribution to Palaeologan Magic," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 219.

4. For an in-depth discussion of the evolution of "magic" in the study of the ancient world, see David Frankfurter, *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Attilio Mastrocinque, Joseph E. Sanzo, and Marianna Scapini, eds., *Ancient Magic: Then and Now* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020); and A. Alexakis, *The Greek Life of St. Leo Bishop of Catania* (BHG 981b), Subs. Hag. 91 (Brussels: Society of Bollandists, 2011), 90–91.

5. Academic journals like *Preturnatural* and *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* advocate a conceptual integration of magic into the spectrum of Orthodox behaviour and a similar approach can be seen at work in Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony and Derek Kreuger, eds., *Prayer and Worship in Eastern Christianities, 5th to 11th Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

magical spells," Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith instead opt to refer to these papyri as "texts of ritual power."[6] However, with these nuances of emic perception in mind, I will use magic as a catch-all term to refer to unorthodox ritual practices and popular religious rites which deviate in major ways from established orthodox practice.

Within the broad category of apotropaic rites, I will focus my analysis on protective devices, including written instructions for the creation of items such as those found in the *Greek Magical Papyri*. The word φυλακτήριον (phylacterion or phylactery) encompassed a wide range of objects with protective intent. It could be applied to crosses, icons, holy books, pilgrim mementos, amulets and other everyday items which had been infused with holy power such as water that had come into contact with a relic or oil from lamps around a shrine.[7] While some practices can be characterized fairly easily as either orthodox (icon veneration) or magical (demon summoning circles), protective magic varied wildly in practice with different instances ranging from "orthodox" to "magical" as well as from highbrow to lowbrow methods (see fig. 1). In this context, "highbrow" refers to the practices of the social elite which often required a significant monetary investment and "lowbrow" refers to the rites common among the general population which carried the connotation of being less cultured or sophisticated.

6. Richard Smith and Martin Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 14.

7. Vicky Foskolou, "The Magic of the Written Word: The Evidence of Inscriptions on Byzantine Magical Amulets." *Δελτίον Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 35 (2014), 330.

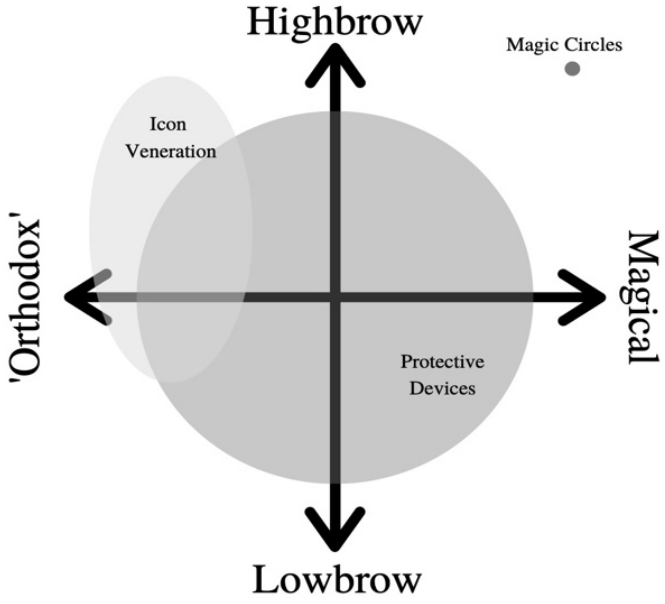

Figure 1: (Author's diagram)

Apotropaic devices were particularly prevalent because of their broad appeal across upper and lower classes. These items provide us with a window into popular practices which are normally clouded by the opinions of the religious authorities who denigrated them as superstitions, old wives' tales, or the ultimate insult, as magic. As Richard Gordon observes: "materiality studies attempt to divert attention from the intentionality of makers, a traditional preoccupation of historians, art historians and archaeologists, towards an appreciation of the effects of existing objects-in-the-world in constructing environments, situating modes of action, and stimulating modes of comprehension."[8] In short, through their visibility and frequency of use, apotropaic devices both reflect and create religious realities across the social spectrum.

8. Richard Gordon, "'Straightening the Paths': Inductive Divination, Materiality and Imagination in the Graeco Roman Period," in *Ritual Matters: Material Remains and Ancient Religion*, ed. Claudia Moser and Jennifer Knust (The American Academy in Rome: Michigan Press, 2017), 120.

As Averil Cameron has observed, "the subject of Byzantine Religion desperately needs more theoretical and sociological analysis than it has had to date."[9] Although there have been a number of excellent studies, few have attempted any sort of sustained and thorough application; the use of sociological and anthropological theory to examine Byzantine religion is still in its infancy.[10] It seems likely that this trend towards theory application will continue and promises to yield some interesting insights in this area. As Byzantinists, we might take our cue from a slightly earlier period of history. In recent years, ritual theory has been applied to the field of Christian Origins and has resulted in some interesting studies.[11] Ritual theory may help us understand why protective magic took different forms at different times and places throughout the Byzantine period and why some practices lasted longer or were more resilient than others.[12]

First, what causes ritual change? Previous definitions of ritual have placed invariance and traditionalism as key elements.[13]

---

9. Averil Cameron, "Thinking with Byzantium," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* vol. 21 (2011): 57.

10. For instance, in *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe*, Frederick S. Paxton opens with a chapter which discusses the relationship between history and ritual. Paxton explains how his book "is informed by closely related fields [...] especially anthropology and the new field of ritual studies" (Paxton, *Christianizing Death* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990], 5). See also Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002).

11. For further discussion see Richard E. DeMaris, Jason T. Lamoreaux and Steven C. Muir, eds., *Early Christian Ritual Life* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), and Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

12. In this discussion, I will use both "classical" ritual theory as well as theoretical advances made in the context of early Christian studies.

13. See Catherine M. Bell, "Characteristics of Ritual-like Activities" in *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions,* ed. Catherine M. Bell and Reza Aslan (Oxford:

However, the concept of ritual innovation,[14] or the idea that ritual can and does change over time, has been gaining ground, and religious practices are now seen as existing in a constant state of flux. Practices mutate and transform in response to (and perhaps even cause) various cultural stimuli, and current scholarship recognizes that there is far more fluidity between religion, magic, culture, family, politics, and other religious traditions than was originally thought. We can think of these forces as streams flowing into a pool of cultural meaning. Determining the causal force of religious change is a difficult endeavour because theology and ritual practice are so deeply interconnected. On one hand, ritual practices are often prohibited by the religious elite when they are not in line with theological imperatives and values. When these bans are enforced, it can deeply affect and even end a specific ritual practice. On the other hand, ritual practice transmits and creates religious knowledge. It is both a reflection of shared religious literacy as well as a way to teach religious practices and ideology to participants and onlookers. Far from being an unthinking overflow of ideology, ritual "thinks" much more than previous generations of scholarship believed.

Oxford University Press, 2009), 138–169.

14. The process by which rituals undergo alteration and development has gone by many names; among them, "transformation," "modification," "alteration," "adaptation," "innovation." There has been a great deal of debate over the differences between ritual modification and ritual adaptation. For further discussion see Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 295; and Richard S. Ascough, "Ritual Modification and Innovation," in *Early Christian Ritual Life*, ed. Richard E. DeMaris, Jason T. Lamoreaux and Steven C. Muir (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 168. However, I will not enter into this debate as it is beyond the scope of this paper, and will instead refer to all manner of ritual adaptations under the umbrella term of "ritual change."

Second, why do rituals endure and why do some last longer than others? At the most basic level, practices persist if people think that they work; their longevity is directly related to their perceived efficacy. Breaking this down further, I propose that the things which make rituals resilient involve (1) exposure to the rite at a young age, (2) repetition and embodied action which make these practices deeply rooted in the body, and (3) emotional currency, where rituals have high physical or spiritual stakes. For the average Christian in Late Antiquity and the Early Byzantine period, there was little instruction on the intricacies of belief and doctrine. Their education came from the spaces that they inhabited during worship, the items they came into contact with, and the rituals they performed. In addition to influencing ideologies, ritual also teaches pre-existing theologies. In *Ritual and Christian Beginnings,* Risto Uro examines the ability of ritual to create religious knowledge.[15] Using the example of baptism, Uro argues that these rituals communicated knowledge about power relationships. The ideas that participants learned about efficacy and power structures tended to last longer than those taught to them by the church later in life. Rituals can either contribute to or interact with (and potentially undermine) theology, hierarchy and social norms.[16] In this way, rituals are efficacious and resilient because of their impact on a generation of religious thinking.

Even when people do undergo comprehensive instruction later in life, their early experiences may form the deepest bedrock of belief.[17] This may explain why seemingly "pagan" practices persisted even among those who should have "known better," like

15. Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 154.
16. Uro, *Ritual and Christian*, 116, 168.
17. Ronald Grimes, "Ritual Theory and the Environment," *The Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (2003): 34–35.

monks and local priests, by virtue of their theological training.[18] Given that protective devices were common household items, children would have been exposed to them from a young age; they would have witnessed their parents performing the rites associated with these items before they could walk or talk. Thus, even when Christian theologians and ecclesiastical authorities denounced certain rites (sometimes as superstition and sometimes as demonic), people continued to retain these practices.

This leads us to the next indicator of ritual resilience: repetition and embodiment. The bodily experiences of ritual practice interact with instruction on the meaning of these rites and have a lasting impact on religious memory.[19] Within the teaching process of ritual participation, the surrounding environment and physical objects involved serve as visual aids to enhance the lesson. In a recent publication, Nicola Hayward observes that there is a physical dimension to memory inherent in ritual; "embodied memory is shaped through our sensory experience, since it is through our senses that we negotiate our position within the world."[20] Although the ritual itself can evoke remembrance, the objects used in rituals function as mnemonic aids to memory in an embodied experience of remembrance. Hayward argues that objects play a key role in memory, so by examining them in combination with the ritual practice surrounding them, we may be able to re-construct ancient frameworks for remembrance. Alongside this,

18. For instance, icon veneration was frequently denounced on the grounds that this practice was a remnant of bygone paganism. However, Iconophiles (as seen in several eighth and ninth century polemics) countered that the core of the action was directed towards the saints which legitimated the practice.
19. Uro, *Ritual and Christian,* 167.
20. Nicola Hayward, "Early Christian Funerary Ritual," in *Early Christian Ritual Life*, ed. Richard DeMaris, Jason Lamoreaux, and Steven Muir (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 114.

objects can also create, alter, and construct memory.[21] Thus, memory might be better understood as a conversation between ritual, artifact, and participant. Protective devices were items which users would come into frequent contact with. Household devices would have been seen multiple times a day and protective amulets were in constant contact with the wearer. The repetitive and embodied aspects of this form of magic give it a tremendous amount of staying power as it was deeply rooted in the body and memory.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) Durkheim introduces the concept of "collective effervescence."[22] This term refers to the times when communities come together to participate in the same action or communication method. These communal actions produce solidarity, a sense of well-being, exuberance, and joy. I would argue that these communal actions could also be understood to alleviate fear. Collective effervescence is both an interesting way to describe ritual and one that highlights the role of emotion in these practices. For the Byzantines and their near neighbours, demons were perceived as both a pressing and physical threat. Given the stakes, I think we can safely assume that rituals surrounding protection from demons were emotionally charged. This level of emotion gave these rites their longevity and allowed them to resist religious changes. Collective effervescence may also explain the flexibility of protective practices. As new ideas entered a community and were gradually adopted by its members, these people would contribute to the process of enacting and altering protective rituals. However, what gave practices their staying power was the emotional force behind them.

---

21. Hayward, "Early Christian Funerary," 115.
22. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

As Vicky Foskolou observes in her article "Magic of the Written Word," things needed to *sound* magical to be considered efficacious. Across the ancient world, ideas about what made magic "work" varied. A community's efficacy framework was comprised of ideas drawn from various cultural and religious traditions. As new religious identities entered a community, they needed to operate within that society's cultural imagination. Rather than replacing existing forms of magic, Christianity merely added new words to an existing ritual vernacular with its own structure and syntax.

Given that popular religious practices and magic were already on the periphery of orthodoxy, there would have been very little attempt to align these practices with the dominant religious ideology at the time. Christian characters, ideas and practices were added into pre-existing synthetic ideas about magical efficacy. Many elements of protective magic thus cannot be identified as exclusively Christian, Jewish, Egyptian, or Pagan "but were part of a late antique magical koine."[23] As Rangar Cline points out, efficacy was much more important than orthodoxy when it came to protective magic.[24]

Before looking at examples on the fringes of Christendom, it is important to establish a baseline by looking at protective magic found in the centre of the empire. Given that Christianity emerged in the context of traditional Graeco-Roman religions, their influence on the development of Christian faith and practice needs to be addressed. It is best to view Christian traditions not as an *adoption* of pagan practices but as a *continuation* of them. Seeing as Christianity was built upon Graeco-Roman traditions, we cannot

23. Rangar Cline, "Archangels, Magical Amulets and the Defence of Late Antique Miletus," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4, no. 1 (2011): 74.
24. Cline, "Archangels, Magical Amulets," 69.

refer to these as "pagan survivals," since they are really the bedrock of Christian development. The whole spectrum of beliefs ranging from the orthodox to the magical was formed in this way. David Frankfurter reiterates this sentiment and notes that "seemingly archaic religious elements appear in Christian form, not as survivals of bygone 'paganism,' but as building blocks in the *process* of Christianization."[25]

A good example of Graeco-Roman practices being creatively elaborated upon in Christian protective practices is the use of magic gems in otherwise "orthodox" amulets. Reliance on gemstones as healing or protective agents stretches back to classical antiquity (as early as the eighth century CE) where certain types of stones were associated with different powers and curative or protective qualities. For example, green jasper was frequently paired with images of the snake god with a cock's head, while yellow jasper and hematite was thought to be efficacious for the prevention and cure of uterine issues.[26]

As Christianity inherited this tradition, new characters and associations were introduced to this efficacy system. We can see these ideas at work in a hematite intaglio with an incised image of Jesus healing "the Woman with the Issue of Blood" spoken of in Mark 5: 25–34 and Luke 8: 43–48 (fig. 2). In form, this amulet retains the classical shape of oval protective gems and the association with uterine problems but also merges with Christian narrative.[27] At this intermediary stage we can see that Christian

25. David Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2.
26. Carla Sfameni, "Magic in Late Antiquity: Evidence of Magical Gems," in *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, ed. David M. Gwynn and Susanne Bangert (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 444.
27. Foskolou, "The Magic of the Written," 345.

ideas operated within existing magical frameworks before elaborating upon them. This amulet, and many others like it, represent an interesting synthesis of pre-existing popular tradition and new, regionally specific ideas.

Figure 2: "Amulet Carved in Intaglio (Incised)," ca. sixth–seventh century CE. Hematite, silver mount. Byzantine Egypt. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, inv. 17.190.491 (Open Access).

As we shift our focus towards interactions between Christianity and other belief systems on the periphery, it is important to be aware that even this baseline of Christian practice at the heart of the empire is fuzzy and flexible. When Christianity encountered other belief systems, we cannot see these interactions as straightforward "Christian + pagan = ?" reactions. Ultimately, there is no "pure" Christian tradition or even a consistent magical methodology that we can see interacting with other indigenous belief systems. Instead, we should think of pre-Christian societies as complex, ongoing chemical reactions to which yet another ingredient is added.

Mesopotamian Apotropaic Bowls

Mesopotamian incantation or apotropaic bowls were generally plain ceramic bowls typical of Sassanian household plainware,[28] but with protective spells inscribed in a spiral on the inside of the bowl circling towards the centre (see fig. 3 and fig. 4). Most of the bowls were inscribed in Judeo-Aramaic, although a number were written in Syriac, Mandaic, Arabic and Persian.[29] An even smaller number were written in pseudo-scripts which attempted to replicate the Aramaic. In archaeological excavations of household sites, these bowls were often found inverted in room corners or buried beneath the threshold of the home. Several of them were found in pairs with the rims sealed together with bitumen. This form of protective magic seems to have been in use between the fourth and eighth centuries CE, but it reached the height of its popularity in the sixth and seventh centuries.[30] The basic idea behind this device was that the bowls would trap demons beneath them, much like an ant trap.

---

28. David Frankfurter "Scorpion/Demon: On the Origin of the Mesopotamian Apotropaic Bowl," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 1 (2015): 9.

29. Although it would be tempting to divide these bowls along linguistic lines in order to associate them with different religions, J. C. Greenfield points out that this approach is far too simplistic. Attention needs to be re-focused on "shared syncretic magic beliefs common to all these religions, and a free borrowing of formulae" (Greenfield, "Notes on some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5 [1973]: 150).

30. Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford and Siam Bhayro, eds., *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, vol. 1 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 1. Although this form of magic flourished under the Sassanians, there is also evidence that it lasted throughout the Rashidun and later Umayyad Caliphates.

Figure 3: “Incantation Bowl with Aramaic Inscription,” ca. fifth–sixth century CE. Ceramic and paint. Sassanian Mesopotamia. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, inv. 86.11.259 (open access).

Figure 4: “Incantation Bowl with Mandaic Inscription,” ca. fifth–sixth century CE. Ceramic. Sassanian Mesopotamia (Ctesiphon). *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, inv. 32.150.89 (open access).

The culture residing in Mesopotamia (encompassing eastern Anatolia, Iraq and central Iran) at the time has been described as "Iranian-Semitic syncretism."[31] Zoroastrians, Jews, and adherents of traditional Sassanian religion were all represented with sizable populations in Babylonia during the third and fourth century CE. Christians, at that point, were relative newcomers. We can be reasonably confident that each group would have had some familiarity with other groups' religious and ritual traditions, and their interactions can be characterized by both religious debate and borrowing. Given their proximity, shared practices and ideas were common and contributed to a common efficacy framework that transcended religious and linguistic boundaries.

As Michael Morony observes, although the incantation bowl texts were written in different languages:

> these texts are regarded as forming a distinct corpus that reflects widespread magic practices in the Levant, Anatolia, Iraq, and western Iran from about the fourth to the seventh centuries CE. These practices represent a continuation of ancient Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian magic and share affinities with the Greek magical literature written on Egyptian papyri as well as to the early Jewish *Hekhalot* literature and the later Jewish magical texts from the Cairo Geniza.[32]

Although Sassanian Babylonians were different in many ways, they shared ideas about how magic worked. Additionally, "the names of the clients testify to the mixed religious population in Late Antique Iraq, where there were Jews, Mandaeans, Zoroastrians, Christians,

31. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 1.
32. Michael Morony, "Religion and the Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 4 (2007): 414.

Manichaeans, and even pagans."[33]

This was a society where the written word carried high prestige,[34] in part, due to the well-established Jewish tradition in Late Antique Mesopotamia. The rise of Jewish written magic corresponds with a trend towards a literary-dependant form of Judaism with an emphasis on written law and scripture. Writing was considered to be ritually efficacious in officially sanctioned as well as popular forms of piety.[35] Like most forms of Jewish magic at this time, these bowls were generally protective or preventative in nature rather than aggressive or reactive.[36] Many bowls contain the formula "This is a [charm/spell] to overturn [sorceries/curses/ evil/vows/spells/ magical rites]."

Sometimes these dark forces are vague, as in VA.2509:1–4: "This is a charm to overturn sorceries and vows and curses and curses and afflictions." Other times a specific force is named, as in VA.2424:3–4: "This is a charm for overturning the evil *Yaror*."[37] The inscriptions tend to follow a general pattern: an opening invocation followed by the purpose of the spell, for instance, "This bowl/amulet is designated for the salvation/sealing of the house etc.,of NN […]." This is followed by the naming of specific parties, the name spell and finally a closing summary.[38]

---

33. Morony, "Religion and the Aramaic," 419.
34. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells,* 4.
35. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 6.
36. Both Dan Levene and E. M. Yamauchi refer to incantation bowls as a form of "White Magic." Although most of these bowls are apotropaic in nature, there are several examples of aggressive forms which Dan Levene examines in his monograph *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia: "May These Curses Go Out and Flee"* (Leiden: Brill 2013), 1. Also see E. M. Yamauchi, "Aramaic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965): 520.
37. *Vorderasiatisches Museum*, inv. VA.2509 and inv. VA.2424 via Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse,* 2.
38. Shaul Shaked, "Jesus in the Magic Bowls. Apropos Dan Levene's '... and

Yaror, Lillith and the evil eye were three of the most pressing evil forces to insure against. A number of bowls phrase their spells as a divorce writ against Lillith. For example, one spell begins with: "This is the deed of divorce of the accursed Lillith, which I have written for Immi daughter of Qaqay."[39] It is unlikely that these texts were read aloud as many contain the tetragrammaton (YHWH)[40] as well as specific demonic names. It is possible that if the name of the Lord was not to be spoken aloud, this same logic would apply to demons who may be summoned by the invocation of their names. Thus, written curse formulae may have been thought to be the best recourse against them.

To fully understand how these bowls were thought to "work" it is helpful to look at the trajectory of this form of magic. Both David Frankfurter and Ortal-Paz Saar have put forward compelling arguments about the origins and ritual precedents of these bowls. For Frankfurter, the apotropaic bowl of Late Antique Mesopotamia "derived from an earlier domestic practice, attested (so far) only in the Mishnah […] of placing a bowl over a scorpion (or other harmful materials) on the floor of a house to protect household members, especially children, and quite possibly to isolate the scorpion for killing."[41] He draws attention to a number of passages in the Mishnah which make provisions for trapping scorpions under bowls on the sabbath and hypothesises that it is likely that this trapping would be accompanied by protective prayers or incantations against the dangers which the scorpion represented. This practical exercise was eventually elaborated upon

---

by the Name of Jesus ...,'" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1999), 309–319.
39. *Schøyen Collection* inv. JBA 52 (MS 2053/ 231) via Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford and Siam Bhayro, eds., *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 233.
40. Rather than a spoken alternative like *Adonai* or *Hashem*.
41. Frankfurter, "Scorpion/Demon," 17.

and took on magical connotations, and the method could be applied to other dangerous forces like demons. Frankfurter sees the inverted bowl as a "symbolic miniaturization of the room or domestic space" prescribing the demons' proper place within the home to ensure a harmonious relationship.[42]

In a recent article, Ortal-Paz Saar draws a connection between the paired sealed apotropaic bowls and Mesopotamian double-jar burial practices, which are attested to from the second millennium to the sixth century BCE and exhibit similarities of form, content and function.[43] As was previously mentioned, a number of apotropaic bowls have been found sealed together at the rim to form a closed system inside the bowls. These apotropaic bowls occasionally contain human or animal bones or pieces of inscribed eggshells,[44] which may have functioned as offerings or as bait for the demons to be trapped within the bowl sets.

Earlier double-jar burials in Mesopotamia were extremely similar in form; they "consisted of two large, wide-mouthed jars (equally termed "pots"), whose rims faced each other, the deceased being laid to rest in the space between them," and were sealed inside with bitumen. In essence, Saar argues that apotropaic bowls miniaturize these older ritual patterns and apply methods used for burials to demonic forces.[45] These similarities of form may imply that a similar ritual-logic was at work in both practices (see fig. 5). If one accepts this argument, then it appears that these late apotropaic bowls drew upon much older ritual methods with the intention of either literally or figuratively, trapping and burying demons. Like Frankfurter, Saar also proposes a process of ritual

42. Frankfurter, "Scorpion/Demon," 13.
43. Ortal-Paz Saar, "Mesopotamian Double-Jar Burials and Incantation Bowls," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 318, no. 4 (2018): 863–873.
44. Saar, "Mesopotamian Double-Jar," 868.
45. Saar, "Mesopotamian Double-Jar Burials," 871.

development wherein practical procedures become ritualized and infused with magical significance over time.

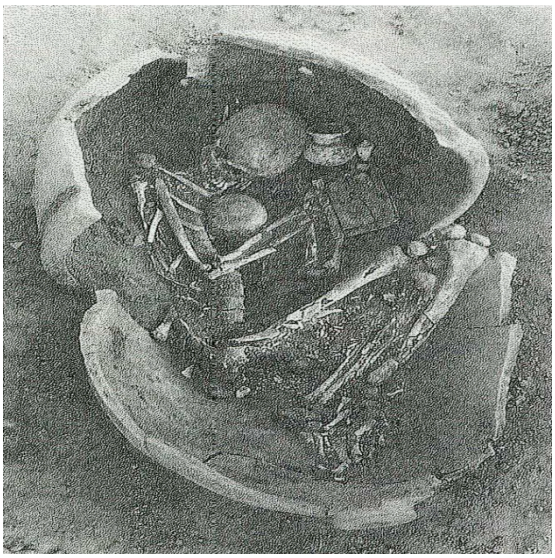

Figure 5: Double-jar burial from Uruk in Boehmer, Pedde and Salje *Uruk: Die Graber* grave 423. After Ortal-Paz Saar (2018).

Whether one agrees with Frankfurter or Saar's claims (or some combination of the two) regarding the origins of Mesopotamian apotropaic bowls, what does seem clear is that demons were thought of as beings that *could* be trapped beneath bowls. In this case, it also seems highly probable that demons were conceived of, if not as scorpions, as some sort of small, dangerous, physical beings which walked or crawled upon the ground. This is perhaps in stark contrast to Egyptian and Graeco-Roman Christian ideas about demons in other parts of the world. It would be hard to imagine Christians in Rome trapping demons beneath bowls when their conceptions of the demonic were much more amorphous. It is equally difficult to imagine Mesopotamian scorpion-like demons being repelled by papyrus or metal amulets with inscribed texts. In this way, we can see that local cosmologies and mental images of demons played a significant role in shaping conceptions of effective ways to repel them.

In sum, these bowls are the result of trends within Judaism interacting with elements found in ancient Mesopotamia's religio-magical culture that existed prior to the introduction of Christianity. They are a good candidate for ritual resilience because these bowls are found in the homes of the average person and are thus considered a lowbrow form of magic. Although much of Jewish magic was an elite pursuit,[46] stemming from a learned tradition, this particular form was reasonably accessible. Bowls were cheap and plentiful and their inscription, although requiring the work of a ritual expert, could be done quickly without any costly materials. Even literacy seems not to have been an inhibitor as many of the bowls were written in a pseudo-script.

Additionally, these bowls seem to be common household items, and it is likely that children would have come into contact with them, or with rites surrounding their functionality, at a young age. This, combined with the emotionally charged necessity of protecting the home and its inhabitants, make it reasonable to assume that the practice would be particularly resilient and create a deep imprint on ideas of ritual efficacy for those born into this magical framework. Although Babylon and the surrounding area was never under Christian control during this time frame, Christian ideas would have come across the Byzantine-Sassanian border. As Christianity was introduced into the Near Eastern region, we begin

46. In discussing the work of Michael Swartz, Gideon Bohak observes that "the Jewish magical tradition was not the domain of the lower-classes, as some of its practitioners clearly had good scribal and scriptural training and may perhaps be classified as a 'secondary elite.'" See: Gideon Bohak, "Ancient Jewish Magic," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Jewish Studies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012); Michael Swartz, "Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Kratz (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 699–720. It is also likely that the lower classes would be able to access magical items through these secondary elite.

to see the incorporation of some Christian elements into the apotropaic bowls. However, residual ideas about ritual efficacy continued to inform popular practice.

A number of these apotropaic bowls contain explicit references to Christianity. I will highlight a few of these. M163 from the private collection of Shlomo Moussaieff was published first by Dan Levene in 1999.[47] This bowl follows the general Jewish magical formulae found in other bowls, makes references to the Babylonian Talmud, the Hebrew Mishnah and invokes YHWH and the angels. Although Aramaic would have been common in certain regions of the Near East, knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures was not. We can therefore infer that the writer had insider knowledge of Judaism.

Although most of the text appears to be in line with Jewish belief systems, there are also some possible references to Zoroastrian cosmology.[48] Moreover, the final sentences call upon Jesus and evoke Christian ideas. The incantation concludes with the following sentence:

> By the name of I-am-that-I-am YHWH sb'wt, and by the name of Jesus, who conquered the height and depth by his cross, and by the name of the exalted father, and by the name of the holy spirit(s) forever and eternity. Amen amen selah. This press is true and established.[49]

---

47. Dan Levene, "'... and by the Name of Jesus ...' An Unpublished Magic Bowl in Jewish Aramaic," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1999): 283–308. For further discussion see Shaul Shaked, "Jesus in the Magic Bowls. Apropos Dan Levene's '... and by the Name of Jesus ...'" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1999): 309–319.
48. Shaked, "Jesus in the Magic," 312.
49. *Moussaieff Collection*, inv. M163 via Levene, "…and by the name," 290. Levene notes that the plural (holy spirits) could also be read as the feminine

Although Jesus is one name invoked at the end of a long list of deities in this incantation, as a way to "cover all the bases" of heavenly powers,[50] this text implies a reasonable understanding of the Christian message as well as an intimate knowledge of Judaism. This either implies a synthetic tradition or a Jewish magic user who was comfortable incorporating Christian allusions. However, although new names and ideas were worked in, the general format remains the same regardless of more superficial alterations.

Other apotropaic bowls contain images of the cross, trinitarian formulae, and references to Jesus and to Christian scriptures. For instance, IBC 3 incorporates a New Testament passage from Ephesians.[51] Many are so syncretic that they do not see any contradiction between denouncing Jewish magic and calling upon the Jewish God: one bowl seeks protection from "the curse of Jews" but then goes on to call upon the angels Michael, Mesamsiel

---

neuter singular (302). This is similar to how this name would appear in Greek, for the spirit (πνεῦμα) is a neuter noun but has a feminine declension.

50. Forces invoked range from the explicitly Jewish (El Shaddai, Elohim, YHWH, Sabaoth) to Graeco-Roman gods (Aphrodite, Zeus, Hermes, Protogenos etc.), to Mesopotamian deities (Sin, Samis, Nabu, Bel etc.) to Christian Jesus. Many Babylonian deities are demoted in these bowls and listed as demons. A phenomenon that also occurs with the Iranian deity Bagdana, who is later listed as the king of demons. Morony explains that this trend is a somewhat darker side of the syncretic process in which new belief systems "demonized" earlier religious traditions: "syncretism might not only involve using, adopting, or copying aspects of some other religion in a positive sense; it might also involve reversing the value or meaning of some borrowed aspect and creating a mirror image of the other religion" (Morony, "Religion and the Aramaic," 420).

51. *Bibliothèque Centrale de l'Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik,* inv. IBC 3. For further analysis see Joseph E. Sanzo and Nils H. Korsvoll, "A New Testament Text on a Syrian Incantation Bowl: Eph. 6:10–17 in IBC 3," *Vigiliae Christianae* 71, no. 4 (2017): 417–432.

and Nadiriel as well as Sabaoth.[52] In terms of artwork and figures drawn on the bowls, in addition to images from ancient Mesopotamian magical tradition, their creators tended to adopt iconographic motifs from Christian artwork. These symbolic images were being developed in other areas at that time and included dragons, crosses, and armed figures like the Holy Rider. The use of these hybrid depictions reflects the environment in which they were made and "supports the idea that they drew their inspiration from local magic and religious literature [and that] the Jews adopted their iconography from their non-Jewish neighbours."[53]

It is also worth noting some forms of magic that we *do not* see in this region during this period. Some inscribed metal amulets have survived from Sassanian Mesopotamia, but these are generally written in Mandaic. Almost no papyrus or leather written amulets have been found.[54] Also, although gem and stone amulets are quite common here, they tend to lack any written text and only a handful of inscribed gems have survived.[55] This is in stark contrast to the situation in Palestine where worn amulets with written incantations were wildly popular. This indicates that Graeco-Roman Christian forms of magic were not as resilient here because the Mesopotamians lacked the specific efficacy framework needed to support these forms. "Christian" forms of magic did not displace pre-existing structures but worked their names and symbols into the Mesopotamian magical efficacy framework.

---

52. *Schøyen Collection* inv. JBA 52 (MS 2053/ 231) via Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells,* 232.
53. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells,* 35.
54. This may be at least partially due to the Mesopotamian climate.
55. Shaked, Ford and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells,* 2.

Egyptian Amulet Instructions and Protective Grave Goods

Before looking at the specific examples of written amulets and apotropaic "grave goods" (items buried with the deceased meant to aid them in the afterlife), it is helpful to first examine the broader trends of the Christianization process in Egypt. Before the arrival of Christianity, Egypt already had a well-developed demonology and a syncretic "religious vocabulary" in which indigenous Egyptian religions had been (often forcibly) blended with Hellenic ideas.[56] As Christianity was introduced, it slowly began to add new words into this religious lingua-franca.[57]

As Peter Brown observes in "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," holy men played an important role in introducing Christianity to the Egyptian populace and influenced the development of Egyptian Christianity.[58] David Frankfurter expands upon these ideas in his article "The Threat of Headless Beings," where he highlights the role of the monk as a mediator between the quiet, contemplative world of monasticism and the chaotic world of the laity wracked by social, economic and spiritual stressors. Monks served these communities as ritual experts specializing in the identification and eradication of demons. Their status as demon specialists gave them a certain degree of "improvisational capacity" which they used to synthesize indigen-

---

56. Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in the Fourth-Century Papyri* (Turnout: Brepols, 2006).

57. It is important to note that these "religious vocabularies" took on what I will call "regional dialects" as they were exposed to different elements in different places around Egypt. To complicate this even further, demons were often conceived of as being attached to different features of the landscape and thus rural demonology would look very different from urban perceptions.

58. Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (January 1, 1971): 80–101.

ous and Christian ideas about demons.[59] This emphasis by monks created a snowballing supply and demand effect which tended to compound existing preoccupations with dark forces and culminated in a "helplessly demon-ridden cosmos."[60]

However, the Christianization process was not only top-down but also occurred at the grassroots level. In fact, it is perhaps most observable at the level of popular religion which shows "a Christianity in gradual, creative assemblage, whose principle or immediate agents may have been local scribes, mothers protecting children, or artisans."[61] In other words, syncretism was a process in which everyone participated. For these participants, incorporating Christian ideas was often a simple matter of substitution. For example, Jesus often comes to replace the Egyptian Horus with a minimum of disruption in popular stories.[62] Ultimately the forms of traditional Egyptian magic stayed the same but with new characters introduced to the extensive existing cast.

The Greek Magical Papyri is the title given to the body of literature from Graeco-Roman Egypt containing a variety of magical spells, diagrams, instructions, hymns and rituals.[63] These fragments range in age from the second century BCE to the fifth century CE. This study will focus on the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM) subset. Many of the prescribed rituals and incantations here

---

59. David Frankfurter, "The Threat of Headless Beings: Constructing the Demonic in Christian Egypt," in *Fairies, Demons and Nature Spirits: 'Small' Gods at the Margins of Christendom*, ed. Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 61.
60. David Frankfurter, "Protective Spells" in *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power,* ed. Richard Smith and Martin Meyer (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 106.
61. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 5.
62. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 1.
63. Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), xli.

combine elements of Greek, Egyptian and Jewish religion. Hans Dieter Betz argues that "this syncretism is more than a hodge-podge of heterogeneous items. In effect, it is a new religion altogether displaying unified religious attitudes and beliefs."[64] I would argue that this is evidence of a shared body of ritual knowledge and that these texts provide insight into popular religion at the time.

Literacy was an important component in Late Antique Egyptian protective magic. The written text of the charms takes on magical qualities of its own, aside from the spirits that it calls upon. This draws from the logic behind Greek and Jewish *phylacteries* where the text itself has magical properties rather than just being an aid to devotion. Additionally, these magical instructions seemed to be aimed at individuals who could perform these spells on their own, rather than purchasing them through an intermediary. This would imply that literacy was an essential prerequisite for using magic.[65]

Naming the demons and spirits seems to be the main way in which they were bound to the magic user's will. Magic users attempted to hedge their bets by listing a variety of forces and even giving multiple names for the same spirit. These instructions invoke supernatural powers from Egyptian, Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions. They frequently call upon Greek gods like Persephone, Hermes and Bacchus and often use both the Greek and Roman names for the same gods or goddesses, for example, Kore and Persephone.[66] However, these spells also invoke Egyptian gods like Anubis and Thoth. The spirit "Amoun"[67] could refer to either the Egyptian god of life or to the early fourth century Christian ascetic

64. Betz, *The Greek Magical*, xlv–xlvi.
65. In this period (fourth to seventh century CE), literacy would generally be restricted to men.
66. *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM) IV. 296–433.
67. PGM IV. 296–433.

popular in Egypt. Finally, *Barbaradonai* may be a combination of the Greek βάρβαρος indicating a foreigner or non-Greek speaker, and '*adonai*' (Ἀδωναί) a Hebrew word for the Jewish God. Other spirits are listed that do not fit neatly into any orthodox religious tradition, like *Ichanarmentho Chasar*,[68] *Abrasax*, and *Ablanathanalba*.[69] The invocation of these new forces not found in other faith systems could indicate an established tradition combined with a shared magical vernacular.[70] After listing a number of spirits, gods and demons to call upon, many of the instructions add that the user can "add the usual, whatever you wish."[71] Here it is assumed that the reader knows what forces to invoke and the implicit understanding that different forces might be chosen in different circumstances, which shows that these practitioners had a certain degree of magical literacy in this hybrid vernacular.

We will now turn to a few examples of amulet texts and instructions. I am focusing purely on protective texts here and have not included reactive *phylacteries* and those which seek to heal existing medical conditions, as this begins to muddy the waters. In these magical instructions, we can often see Christian figures woven into the "exorcistic and apotropaic formulae employed in classical Egyptian texts."[72] Recurring phrases like "every demon, whether male or female" carry on but with Christian figures entering these formulae.[73] In PGM P6a (P. Oxy VIII 1152) Jesus Christ is named

68. PGM VII. 462–466.
69. PGM LXXI. 1–8.
70. It is also worth noting the tone and language used in invoking these forces. Invocations are phrased like commands rather than requests. Magic users seemed to have power *over* rather than power *through* the spirits that they called.
71. PGM VII. 459–61.
72. Frankfurter, "Protective Spells," 108.
73. Frankfurter, "Protective Spells," 108.

alongside Egyptian and Jewish figures in the magical tradition of "listing":

> Ὦρ, Ὦρ, Φωρ, Ἐλωεί, Ἀδωναί, Ἰάω, Σαβαώθ, Μιχαήλ, Ἰεσοῦ Χριστέ· Βοήθι ἡμῖν καὶ τούτῳ οἴκῳ. ἀμήν. Hôr, Hôr, Phôr, Elôei, Adônai, Iaô, Sabaôth, Michaêl, Jesus Christ. Help us and this house. Amen.[74]

De Bruyn and Diijkstra observe that in these inclusions of Christian elements we see:

> varying degrees of continuity and change in the form that the invocation takes. Several charms employ a traditional form of incantation whereby evil spirits are adjured (ὁρκίζω) to leave someone or to do something. Others call upon God or Christ to heal as they once called upon the gods. Magical signs (χαρακτῆρες) are still enjoined to heal […] But alongside pre-existing forms of incantation we also find petitions phrased as prayers.[75]

Additionally, protective amulets with Christian elements can also be seen in charms to protect houses like PGM P2, P2a and P3 which include crosses.[76] In this early stage in the Christianization of Egypt, traditional forms remained but acquired new characters in the lists of the forces they invoked and the symbols that they used. It seems likely that the written traditions and formulae in the magical papyri remained consistent because they were thought to be effective and had a long history of past success. The amulets made using these

74. PGM P6a via Boustan and Sanzo, "Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms," 217.
75. Theodore S. De Bruyn and Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, "Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 48 (January 1, 2011): 178–179.
76. De Bruyn and Dijkstra, "Greek Amulets," 186–187.

instructions would be worn daily and carried the emotional weight of their owner's hope for security, thus making them a particularly long-lasting form of magic. Ritual participants in Egypt retained the core elements of their magical recipes but began to introduce some Christian ingredients to create a "new and improved" formula which would better reflect the regional flavours present in their changing religious landscape.

Another form of protective magic into which we see Christian ideas being woven is apotropaic grave goods. As Eric Rebillard observes, "in Late Antiquity, Christianity was not concerned with the burial of the dead, nor even to a great extent with their memory."[77] Even by the sixth century, the family, not the church, was responsible for burial and commemoration as there were no ecclesiastically imposed rituals to follow. Therefore, it was easy for Christian converts to continue to work within the pre-existing efficacy systems for burials, commemoration, and the protection of the dead against demonic forces.

Depositing apotropaic items into the graves of friends and family members was already an ancient tradition in Egypt before the arrival of Christianity. Many of the items found in graves in the fourth to sixth century are in line with those found hundreds of years earlier, pointing to a continuance of tradition. Even before the arrival of Christianity, the later Pharaonic period saw an increasing preoccupation with providing protection to the deceased through apotropaic and amuletic magic.[78] It would seem that this inclination

---

77. Eric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 177–178.

78. Anne Marie Luijendijk, "Jesus Says: 'There Is Nothing Buried That Will Not Be Raised': A Late-Antique Shroud with Gospel of Thomas Logion 5 in Context," *Zeitschrift fur Antikes Christentum/ Journal of Ancient Christianity* 15, no. 3 (2011): 405.

grew stronger over the years and drew further strength from the increasing fear of demons spurred on by Christian monastics.

Older studies have often operated under the assumption that an absence of buried items in Egyptian cemeteries was an indicator of Christianization. However, more recent scholarship is increasingly coming to the conclusion that new Christians carried on traditional Egyptian practices of burying protective items alongside the deceased and merely applied Christian images, names and scriptures to these items.[79] As Alexandra Plesa observes, these communities "developed particular burial practices and beliefs that were strongly linked to old local traditions, mixing elements of traditional and Christian beliefs."[80] We can also see the use of apotropaic grave goods as a continuation of worn amulet tradition. The charms that people wore in life would go with them into the grave and then into the afterlife.

In some cases, Christian scripture was inscribed or embroidered onto clothing or shrouds. For example, AnneMarie Luijendijk draws attention to a linen shroud with a verse from the Gospel of Thomas written on it which was evidently intended to protect the recipient until the resurrection: λέγει Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν τεθαμμένον ὃ οὐκ ἐγερθήσεται (Jesus says: There is nothing buried that will not be raised). Other funerary garments depicted scenes from the Bible. Images narrating the life of Joseph were particularly popular on children's clothing and were likely thought to protect the wearer from similar misfortunes (see fig. 6).[81]

---

79. Alexandra D. Plesa, "Religious Belief in Burial, Funerary Dress and Practice at the Late Antique and Early Islamic Cemeteries at Matmar and Mostagedda, Egypt (Late Fourth–Early Ninth Centuries CE)," *Ars Orientalis* 47 (2017): 35.

80. Plesa, "Religious Belief in Burial," 32.

81. Edmund C. Ryder, "Popular Religion: Magical Uses of Imagery in Byzantine Art," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The

Figure 6: "Roundel Illustrating Episodes from the Biblical Story of Joseph," ca. seventh century CE. Textile Brocade. Coptic Egypt. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, inv. 63.178.2 (open access).

Crosses and other Christian symbols like the *chi-rho* worked their way into apotropaic jewelry, caskets, and textiles.[82] New, explicitly Christian items like prayer books or miniature gospels meant to keep demons away or perhaps to serve as guidebook for the deceased as they navigated the increasingly treacherous way to heaven were also included. Although the living would not have been exposed to this form of magic on a day-to-day

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008).

82. Plesa, "Religious Belief in Burial," 30–32. See also Henry Maguire's discussion of Christian images on textiles and funerary shrouds in his "Magic and the Christian Image," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 51–71.

basis, funerals were frequent occurrences, as were visits to the graves of the deceased. Given the frequency of people's exposure to these items as well as the heightened emotional context of that exposure, this form of magic was seen as efficacious and enjoyed a long life (and afterlife) in Egypt.

In conclusion, both today and in the Byzantine eras, people have searched for the best ways to protect their families, health, and homes from destructive forces. The protective strategies that people in newly Christianized areas employed tended to be those which were most deeply rooted in their community. Although these forms of magic might employ ideas, figures and symbols from Christianity, their protective practices tended to rely on old, proven methods. Through participants' exposure to these rites at a young age, repetition, embodied action and emotional charge, these actions had become ritually resilient. Jumping forward a millennium and a half, I think that my tea-based defence against COVID-19 likely stems from memories of my mother and grandmother making it for me as a child at the first sign of any flu symptoms. These repetitive, emotionally charged precautions have influenced the way I think about illness and the best ways to fight it today. Taking a step back from the phenomena we observe whether it be in the forms of viruses or demons, allows us further insight into the larger trends of ritual life. This vantage point also provides us with greater empathy towards the impulse to return to the comfort of well-worn ritual paths.