

Some Light on Magic and Magicians in Late Antiquity

John Wortley

NO LESS REMARKABLE than the rise of Christian monachism in late antiquity is the extent of the literary débris early monachism bequeathed to posterity. Athanasius' *Life of Antony*¹ is the foundation stone of a huge production which from the beginning diverged into a variety of genres. One of the more attractive but less well known of these is the genre of the spiritually beneficial tales (διηγήσεις ψυχοφελείς). The "beneficial tale" is rarely more than one good paragraph in length; it may or may not involve an allegedly historical person; and, although it was composed by and for monks, it may often speak of people and situations "in the world." There will always be some spiritual benefit in the narrative for readers who have eyes to see with, but it must be admitted that it is not always immediately obvious to the modern reader what this benefit might be. These tales, Halkin wrote, "sont des sortes de paraboles développés dont les héros ne sont pas toujours imaginaires, ... qui incarnent pour ainsi dire en un exemple frappant, voire paradoxal, un enseignement théorique difficile et transcendant."² They may constitute a vast, arcane corpus of which we no longer possess the keys.

Where exactly beneficial tales derive from is a mystery yet to

¹BHG 140, ed. and transl. G. J. M. Bartelink, *Athanase d'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine* (SC 400 [Paris 1994]); English transl. of Evagrius' Latin translation: C. White, *Early Christian Lives* (New York 1998) 1–70, 206–211.

²François Halkin, *Recherches et documents d'hagiographie byzantine* (SubsHagiogr 51 [Brussels 1971]) 261, 303.

be solved, for their substance has very little in common with that of any other known tales-tradition. They might have some connection with ancient Egyptian religious folklore, but this is as yet by no means certain.³ They seem to have sprung into existence with Christian monachism itself for they were already circulating (in Coptic most likely) when the earliest collectors of monastic lore published Greek translations of some of the lore they had picked up during their travels in Egypt.⁴ Many more tales were garnered into the great collections of "Sayings of the Fathers" (Ἀποφθέγματα Πατέρων) made by the Egyptian monks themselves (at Scêtê) in the sixth century⁵ while in the seventh century John Moschos' Λειμών / *Pratum Spirituale* and the tales attributed to Anastasius the Sinaïte saw the light of day, both collections indicating that tales were emerging in

³See J. Wortley, "Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell in Byzantine 'Beneficial Tales,'" *DOP* 59 (2001) 53–69, at 63–64.

⁴From the later fourth century we have *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* composed by monks from Jerusalem, edited by André-Jean Festugière (SubsHagiogr 53 [1971]), his French translation *Les Moines d'Orient IV.1 Enquête sur les moines d'Égypte* (Paris 1964); English transl. by Norman Russel, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (Oxford/Kalamazoo 1981). *Historia Lausiaca* was composed in the early fifth century by Palladius, (later) Bishop of Hellenopolis, edited by E. C. Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius II* (Cambridge 1904) 3–169. English translations by W. K. Lowther Clarke, *The Lausiaca History* (London 1918), and R. T. Meyer, *Ancient Christian Writers* 36 (Westminster 1965), French translation "par les soeurs carmélites de Mazille," *Palladius, Les Moines du Désert: Histoire Lausiaque* (Paris 1981). The *Hist.Mon.* and *Hist.Laus.* contain about forty tales each with some overlapping.

⁵*Apophthegmata Patrum: collectio alphabetica*: J.-B. Cottelier's edition of the Greek text with Latin translation is in *PG* 65.71–440 (supplemented by J.-C. Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des Apophthegmata Patrum* [Brussels 1962]); French transl. Lucien Regnault, *Les Sentences des Pères du désert, Collection alphabétique* (Solesmes 1981); English transl. Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Oxford/Kalamazoo 1975). *Apophthegmata patrum: collectio systematica*, ed. F. Nau, "Histoires des solitaires égyptiens," in *ROrChr* 12–18 (1907–1913) (Greek text of the first four hundred tales found in *Cod. Paris. Coislin* 126 with French translation of tales 1–215); critical edition (partial): *Les Apophthegmes des Pères, Collection systématique, chapitres I–IX*, ed. J.-C. Guy and Bernard Flusin (SC 387 [Paris 1993, two vols. to follow]); Latin transl. of "Pelagius and John" (6th–7th cent.) in *PL* 73.851–1052; French transl. Lucien Regnault, *Les Sentences des Pères du désert, série des anonymes* (Solesmes-Bellefontaine 1985), and *Les sentences des pères du désert: nouveau recueil* (Solesmes 1970). There are about 120 tales in the *Systematic*, but scarcely 50 in the *Alphabetic*.

Syria-Palestine (as well as in Egypt) by then.⁶ These two collections also leave one in no doubt that the cataclysm of Moslem expansion was already occurring, with devastating consequences for monastic life throughout the conquered areas. This may well explain why the fount of beneficial tales now appears to run dry; for, apart from a brief revival associated with Constantinople in the tenth century,⁷ very few tales indeed are known to post-date the seventh century.

Fortunately for posterity, even when no new tales were being generated, the extant tales continued to be retold and to be inserted in ever-increasing collections as these were re-copied. But this was by no means true of all the tales. A smaller number of them circulated independently and only survived because some scribe used them to fill up a blank space, some chronicler to enliven his narrative, or a preacher to salt his homily.⁸ This explains why it is impossible to say with any certainty how many tales there might be; previously unknown tales are still being discovered as more manuscripts are analysed.⁹ A repertoire of

⁶*Pratum Spirituale* (120 tales), ed. J. P. Migne (after Fronto Ducaeus and J.-B. Cotelier) with the Latin translation of the Florentine humanist Ambrose Traversari (1346–1439), PG 87.2851–3112; French transl. M.-J. Rouët de Journel, *Le Pré spirituel* (SC 12 [Paris 1946]); Italian transl. Riccardo Maisano, *Giovanni Mosco, Il Prato* (Naples 1982); English transl. J. Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow* (Kalamazoo 1992). Anastasios the Sinaïte, ed. F. Nau, “Le texte grec du moine Anastase sur les saints pères du Sinai” [1–40 + appendix], OC 2 (1902) 58–89, and “Le texte grec des récits utiles à l’âme d’Anastase (le Sinaïte),” 3 (1903) 56–75, but see Bernard Flusin, “Démon et Sarrasins: l’auteur et le propos des *Diègèmata stèriktika* d’Anastase le Sinaïte,” *TravMém* 11 (1991) 381–409. We have only itemised the major collections: there are several smaller ones, e.g. Φιλόθεος Ἱστορία/*Historia religiosa* by Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus, edited with French transl. by Paul Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen, *Histoire des moines de Syrie I–II* (SC 234, 257 [Paris 1977, 1979]).

⁷See J. Wortley, *Les Récits édifiants de Paul, évêque de Monembasie, et d’autres auteurs*, first complete, critical edition of Greek text with French transl. (Paris 1987), and *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul, Bishop of Monembasia and of Other Authors* (Kalamazoo 1996), English transl. with commentary.

⁸For striking instances of a preacher’s use of tales see (Pseudo-) Anastasios the Sinaïte, *Homilia in Psalm vi*, PG 89.1105A–1116B (two tales), and *Oratio de Synax.*, 848C–849C (one tale).

⁹The work of R. P. Joseph Paramelle, S.J., in discovering beneficial tales is outstanding; his long-awaited publication of them is eagerly anticipated.

known tales exists which, over the course of twenty years, has grown to include roughly one thousand items, but it is still expanding.¹⁰ The majority of the tales listed there are in Greek; there are some in Latin¹¹ while considerably more are to be found (and are constantly being found) in Coptic, Georgian, Syriac, etc., which may or may not derive from Greek originals.

Since the avowed object of the tales is to benefit the soul, their primary importance is and must be ascetic; but they do have value for others than would-be ascetics. Still within the spiritual realm theologians, ecclesiastical historians, and hagiologists will find grist for their mills here. But so too (for instance) will folklorists for, within the tales-tradition, there is copious and rare evidence of parallel oral and scribal transmission. Linguists can discover here a wealth of neologisms and loan-words, to say nothing of the various strata of “demoticisation” which are revealed in the successive manuscripts of some tales. Social historians however are probably those beyond the pale of divinity who stand to profit most from the tales. The social history of late antiquity is a notoriously difficult subject: *peu de documents, peu d’histoire*, hence the value of any new evidence is greatly enhanced. The tales undoubtedly present a wealth of new evidence concerning a variety of topics. Almsgiving, baths, clothes, debt, emasculation, food, gardens, graves, Jews—this is a random selection of the many subjects on which something new can be learnt from the tales; but one must not exaggerate its value. Where there appears to be evidence of “everyday life in late antiquity” in the tales, it has to be remembered that the person(s) who generated the tale had no intention of holding up a mirror to contemporary society. The information given *may* be no more reliable than Aesop’s when he makes animals speak

¹⁰J. Wortley, *A Repertoire of Byzantine Beneficial Tales* (= W), available on the Internet at <<http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~wortley>>.

¹¹E.g. in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, ed. A. de Vogüé, with French transl. by Paul Antin (SC 260, 265 [Paris 1979, 1980]).

and think like men. This urges great caution in the use of the tales (especially when credulity is stretched) and a quest for corroborative evidence whenever possible. The object of the present exercise is to examine one topic on which the tales have something useful to say: the topic of magic and magicians; and here, fortunately, there is enough corroborative evidence (and consistency among the tales themselves) to suggest that they here present something far more solid than mere figments of the narrator's imagination. Saints' lives can be a useful source of corroborative evidence; they not infrequently have something to say about magic. A particularly striking example is the chapter (35) on Vigrinos the Magician in *The Life of Saint Andrew the Fool*. This passage gives a fairly comprehensive picture of the doings of one particular *φαρμακός*, a picture which agrees at many points with what the tales have to tell.¹² In addition to texts, there is the evidence of the many artifacts (e.g. amulets/φυλακτήρια) which attest to the widespread use of magic and have been carefully studied.¹³

Only about twenty tales (ca 2% of the entire corpus) tell of magic and magicians in one way or another. The terminology may vary somewhat indiscriminately: γόης-γοητεία, μάγος-μαγεία, φαρμακός-φαρμακεία, κακουργός-κακουργία, etc., as it does in English (magician, sorcerer, wizard, etc.); but we are left in no doubt that "the black arts" and those who practiced them were both flourishing. It is common knowledge that wizardry (in a variety of forms) was "a normal phenomenon in the life of late Roman society," in which "an ambivalent

¹²*The Life of St. Andrew the Fool*, ed. and transl. Lennart Rydén (Uppsala 1995) II 170–184 (lines 2425–2647). Although the narrator claims a fifth-century origin, the text is now generally believed to be a tenth-century fiction. Since however it is for the most part a collection of tales, much of the material may well derive from early models. See also H. J. Magoulias, "The Lives of Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Medicine in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries," *BZ* 57 (1964) 127–150.

¹³See e.g. Garry Vikan, "Art, Medicine and Magic in Early Byzantium," *DOP* 38 (1988) 65–86, and "Amulet," *ODByz* I 82–83.

attitude toward magic was typical even of intellectuals."¹⁴ So far as church intellectuals were concerned, this ambivalence arose in part from a certain similarity: while magic in the normal sense of the word was very clearly allied with the forces of darkness (the devils),¹⁵ relics and the saints sometimes operated in ways which could scarcely be distinguished from the works of wizards etc. (other than by the nature of the invisible power on which they called). Healing the sick, foretelling the future, detecting the location of lost treasure, discerning the secrets of men's hearts, convening for weekly meetings—these are only a few of the similar effects which opposing forces appeared to produce. Yet appearances can be deceptive; in fact the distinction is very precise between the "the works of darkness" and "the armour of light" (Rom 13:12). And if the *Eύχολόγιον* of the Eastern church—which appears to contain prayers and rites for every other conceivable situation—appears to offer no explicit protection against the sorcerer and his charms, this is precisely because the church regarded itself and all its works as the very antithesis of the powers of darkness. Thus, to cite again the recent *DOByz*, "the church fought against sorcery until the very end of the empire." As is well known, constant opposition is the clearest indication of the continued vigour of that which is opposed. Hence there is good reason to question whether the church, for all its opposition to the works of darkness, ever gained any success in countering sorcery.

While the church opposed it, the state long regarded sorcery as a dangerous crime. Nevertheless, as the Chevalier de Jaucourt observes, "quoique les lois divines et humaines sévissent contre cet art illusoire [de magie] il fut pratiqué dans presque tous les

¹⁴Kazhdan and Taft, "Magic," *ODByz* II 1265.

¹⁵In the *Life of Andrew the Fool* magicians are said always to be accompanied by demons (2636–37). Magic is equated with evil-doing, *κακουργία* (2463), while Andrew sees *τοὺς μάγους καὶ τοὺς φαρμακοὺς ὡς τοὺς ὄφεις* (2362–63).

temps par un grand nombre d'imposteurs."¹⁶ And a dangerous business it was. Merely to be suspected of it was a serious matter. Thus in the second century Lucius in *The Golden Ass* hesitates to eat the roses and restore his human form because the brigands he is with might then put him to death *on suspicion of magic* (Apul. *Met.* 3.28). Two centuries later, Macarius the Egyptian (the Great) of Scêtê regarded a charge of magic and φαρμακεία as one of the worst things that might befall a Christian.¹⁷

Given the severity of the offence, it is hardly surprising to discover a tale which warns that one could all too easily become suspected of sorcery. It concerns a monk who was always leaving one community after another for some reason, becoming in fact a gyrovague. In order to mend his wandering ways, he wrote down all the reasons for his moves, with the words: "In the name of Jesus Christ, I am persevering." Then, at last, he entered a community in which he managed to remain. Whilst he was living there, he would consult the paper tucked in his girdle so often that *the monks began charging him with magic*. The higoumen stipulated three days of prayer; he also discreetly examined the document the brother carried around with him whilst he was asleep. Then he let the monks forcibly remove it and read it out publicly: which made everybody very ashamed indeed.¹⁸ (In this connection it is worth noting that there was a marked tendency to *assume* that demons or magicians or both were at work when anything suspicious occurred: thus the little Georgian tale of a girl who inadvertently struck an icon with an apple. "Immediately the girl collapsed on her face. She was being suffocated by a demon and she was vomiting. Many other

¹⁶*L'Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné* (Diderot and D'Alembert) IX (1765) 851.

¹⁷οἱ καὶ μάγοι καὶ φαρμακοὶ ὀνομάζοντο, Letter 4.2, ed. Paul Géhin, "Le dossier macarien de *l'Atheniensis gr.* 2492," *RecAug* 31 (1999) 89–147.

¹⁸W633, *Apophth.Sys.* 644, BHG 1442kb, *de chartula iuramenti*, unpublished, *Cod.Paris.Coislin* 126 f.351^{r/v}.

evils befell her such as those suffer who are possessed of demons *or subject to magic.*")¹⁹

Terrible indeed were the punishments which awaited those who indulged (or were under suspicion of indulging) in magic; among the *ca* twenty tales which mention the subject, four tell of convicted or suspected sorcerers being burnt, one of two deacons being beheaded.²⁰ Nor was it only the secular arm that meted out these punishments: there was a yet higher justice. Most curious (and perhaps requiring caution) is this tale of a sorcerer dying by the intervention of a saint. It is a story set in the time of Gennadios, Patriarch of Constantinople 458–471:

[Gennadios] was troubled by many people complaining about a cleric who was leading a very dissolute life, a man named Charisios. The Patriarch sent for him and tried to correct him by exhortation. Then, when nothing was achieved by this, he proceeded to chastise and discipline him after the manner of a father and a churchman. The patriarch realised that this was doing the cleric no good, for now he was indulging in murder and dabbling in witchcraft (ἔσχολλάζεν ... τοῖς φόνοις καὶ γοητείαις). So he sent one of the agents in his service, ordering him to say to the holy martyr Eleutherios (in whose oratory Charisios served as lector): "Saint Eleutherios, your officer is a great sinner. Either reform him, or get rid of him." So the agent came to the oratory of the holy martyr Eleutherios and, standing before the altar, turning towards the apse, he stretched out his hand and said to the martyr: "Holy martyr of Christ, the Patriarch Gennadios declares to you, through me, sinner though I be, that your officer is deeply in sin. You are either to reform him or get rid of him." Next day, [Charisios] that worker of evil deeds was found dead. All were amazed and glorified God.²¹

¹⁹W951, Gérard Garitte, "'Histoires édifiantes' géorgiennes," *Byzantion* 36 (1966) 396–423 no. 26, "A Persian who knew the virtue of an icon."

²⁰W117, *BHG* 1444v, *de presbytero mago* (Anastasius the Sinaïte no. 49 Nau); W118, not in *BHG*, *de Hebræo mago* (Anastasius no. 50); W854, *BHG* 1444v *bis*, *de presbytero mago*; W953, Garitte 28, "A priest and two deacons accused of magic."

²¹W334, *Prat.Spir.* 145.

Given the hazardous nature of the calling, what kind of person would willingly subject himself to the dangers of practicing wizardry? Jews had a reputation for dabbling therein and, in fact, two sorcerers appear in the tales who are said to be Jews: one named Daniel, the other simply described as “a highly infamous Jew, the devil’s servant.”²² But, whatever their race, presumably men practiced sorcery primarily because it was profitable. Simon Magus certainly had money with which he tried to buy the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:13–24). Sorcerers hired themselves out and it does not seem to have been very difficult to contact one of them. We get a fairly clear idea from the tales of what kind of services they offered. These include: afflicting a man with paralysis and dropsy by putting an inscribed tin plate or tablet in his body,²³ preventing a new ship from running down the slip-way (W300), and even (perhaps) turning a woman into a mare (W171, W187). The shipyard story is from a collection made *ca* 600 A.D.:

About twenty miles from the [Skopelos] monastery there is a market town called Leptê Akra. In that market town there was a ship-owner who had a vessel with a capacity of about 35,000 *modii* [= *ca* 750 tonnes] which he wanted to launch. He spent two weeks with many workmen on this task (he said he employed three hundred workmen each day). However he could neither get the vessel to the sea nor even move it from the spot where it lay; for it was under [the influence of] men who were workers of evil (*ἀπὸ ἀνδρῶν κακούργων*). The owner of the ship was very

²²W118; W507, Ἐβραῖος, ἀκουστὸς πάνυ, τοῦ διαβόλου ὑπουργός.

²³W728, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Palestinian Monks*, Euthymios 57: Romanos, secular brother of the monastery priest Abba Achthabios of Bêtakabea near Gaza, was the victim of one who wanted his land and hired magicians in Eleutheropolis to afflict him with paralysis and dropsy so that doctors despaired of his life. Euthymios appeared to him when he prayed, accusing neglect of religious exercises. He opened up Romanos with his fingers, extracted an inscribed tin tablet and healed him up. The patient rose, excreted everything, and was made whole. He offers a public feast on the anniversary of his healing. Ed. Eduard Schwartz (*Texte u. Untersuch.* 49.2 [Leipzig 1939]); English transl., *Lives of the Monks of Palestine by Cyril of Scythopolis*, by R. M. Price with notes by John Binns (Kalamazoo 1991).

disturbed and at a loss what to do next. By the providence of God, it happened that the elder (γέρων: John, higoumen of Skopelos) came that way. When the ship-owner saw the elder, because he had some knowledge of his qualities, he said to him: "Abba, please pray for my ship, sir. On account of enchantment (ἀπὸ μαγείας), it cannot be launched." The elder said to the shipmaster: "Go get me something to eat and God will come to your aid." The elder said this so that the ship-owner would go away to his own house.²⁴ The monk approached the ship alone, made three prostrations before God and three times he signed the vessel with the sign of the cross, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The elder then came to the house of the ship-owner and said to him: "Go now and launch your vessel." Putting his trust in the elder, the ship-owner went with a very few men and, as soon as they took the strain, the ship was found to be in the sea. And everybody glorified God.²⁵

The curious story of the woman transformed into a mare comes in two versions: one fairly simple from the end of the fourth century²⁶ and a somewhat more sophisticated one from the early fifth century which goes as follows:

There was an Egyptian who was in love with a married free-woman. Failing to seduce her, he got in touch with a sorcerer and said to him: "Either get her to love me or do something to make her husband reject her." Then, having received an adequate fee, the sorcerer employed his quack wizardry (ταῖς γοητικαῖς μαγγανείαις)²⁷ to make the woman look like a mare. When the husband came in from the field he was flabbergasted that there was a mare lying in his bed. He wept and sighed; he spoke to the beast but got no answer. He sent for the village priests, brought them in and showed [her to] them, unable to grasp what had happened. For three days [the creature] neither ate grass like a mare nor bread like a man but abstained from both kinds of food.

²⁴ Presumably the elder did not want the shipmaster to see what he did, lest he be suspected of wizardry himself.

²⁵ W300, *Prat.Spir.* 83.

²⁶ W171, *Hist.Mon.Aeg.* 21.17.

²⁷ The same word occurs in the *Life of Andrew the Fool* 779–784 to describe the wiles of the devil. The root implies also trickery and deceit.

In the end (this so that God would be glorified and the virtue of the holy Macarius be displayed) the idea came into her husband's mind of taking her into the desert. He slipped a halter on her as you would for a horse and led her into the desert. As they came near, brothers were standing near the cell of Macarius. These contended with her husband saying: "Why have you brought that grazing animal here [*scil.* where there is no fodder?]" "To obtain mercy [Mtt 5:7]" he told them. "What is wrong with it?" they asked him. Her husband replied that this was his wife who had been transformed into a horse and that it was now three days since she had eaten anything. They reported this to the saint [Macarius] who was praying, within. [The matter] had already been revealed to him and he was praying for her, so the holy Macarius answered the brothers, saying to them: "It is you who are horses and have horse's eyes. That is a woman, transformed only in the eyes of the deceived." He blessed water and prayed as he poured it from her head to her naked [body] and immediately he caused her to appear as a woman to all. He gave her food and made her eat; then he dismissed her with her own husband, she giving thanks to the Lord. He gave her this advice: "Never stay away from church, never abstain from communion. This happened to you for absenting yourself from the mysteries for five weeks."²⁸

At first glance this story seems to cry out for a Palaephatus (the author of *Περὶ ἀπίστων*)²⁹ to provide some rational explanation, such as an ambivalent meaning of the word for a mare in Coptic. This, however is not necessary for, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that whatever change there was took place, not in the woman, but in the beholders of the woman. Macarius alone, with his discerning eye (*διορατικὸς ὀφθαλμός*), is not deceived. Hypnotists have been known to do as much in the modern world; hence this story is not altogether incredible and may even indicate that not all sorcerers were mere quacks.

In this last story the object of the exercise was to gain posses-

²⁸W187, *Hist.Laus.* 17.

²⁹Edited and translated by Jacob Stern, *On Unbelievable Tales* (Wauconda 1996).

sion of the wife by making her husband reject her. That is why her lover hired the sorcerer: so he could have her, willy-nilly. This is one of several stories in which sorcery is employed for erotic purposes; we might not greatly err in supposing that to have been one of its more usual functions.³⁰ We even know the name—Cyprian—of the Antiochene μάγος whom Aglaidês, a pagan σχολαστικός, employed to get himself into bed with the fair Justina. Their stratagem met with only partial success because all their efforts were opposed by Justina with the two most certain antidotes: prayer and the sign of the cross.³¹

A certain young man of Caesarea was however more successful in winning the hand of his master's daughter by use of the black arts:

A faithful senator named Proterius once went to visit the holy and venerable places [Jerusalem etc.] where his daughter wished to be tonsured and enter one of the distinguished houses of the monasteries, to make a sacrifice [of herself] to God. Jealous of her godly intention, the evil one provoked a servant of the senator, causing him to fall in love with the maiden by means of a charm. The servant was totally unsuitable for this *liaison* but, since he could not fall *out* of love, he spoke to one of the abominable workers of charms (ἐνὶ τῶν ἀπευκταίων ἐπαιδῶν), contracting with him that if he were to get the better of her, he would give [the sorcerer] a large sum of money. The sorcerer (φαρμακός) said to him: "Oh man, I am not capable of that but, if you wish, I will send you to the devil who is my superior and he will accomplish what you desire—if you will do what he wishes." The other said to him: "I will do whatever he says." "Even deny Christ in writing?" asked the sorcerer and he answered: "Yes." Then the worker of iniquity said to him: "If you are prepared to do that, I will be your co-worker," and the other: "I am prepared; just let me achieve my desire." The servant of evil-doing composed a letter to the devil and gave it to him. This was its tenor: "Since I

³⁰Such is certainly the case with Vigrinos in the *Life of Andrew the Fool* (see 293 above); he seems to have had quite a *clientèle* for his services.

³¹W508, L. Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen zur Faustsage* (SBWien 206.4 [1927]) 122–130.

must eagerly strive to please my master, my mentor, and my director and separate myself from the religion of the Christians, I beseech your benevolence to fulfil your part. I have sent to you him who carries this letter and who is wounded with love for a girl. I beg you that he might achieve what he longs for, that I might exult in it and also yet more vigorously bring together those who love you." He gave him the letter saying: "At such and such an hour of the night, go and stand over the tomb of a pagan (Ἑλληνικοῦ) and raise this paper in the air. Those will come to you who must take you to the devil." The fellow promptly did what he was told to do, lifting up his miserable voice to call for the devil's aid. Immediately there were with him the rulers of the powers of darkness, the spirits of fornication (πονηρία). They took the deceived one and, with great joy, led him off to where the devil was, whom they showed to him, sitting on a high throne, the spirits of iniquity standing around. [The devil] received the sorcerer's letters and said to the wretch: "Do you believe in me?" "I believe." "Do you renounce your Christ?" "I renounce him." The devil said to him: "You Christians are senseless; you come to me when you need me. When you have what you want, you deny me and cling to your Christ. He, being good and kind (φιλόανθρωπος), receives you back. So make me now, of your own free will, a written renunciation (ἀπόταξις) of your Christ and of your baptism. Make a perpetual engagement to me of your own free will and [a promise] that you will be with me in the day of judgement, sharing with me the eternal punishments prepared for me—and I will immediately fulfil your desire." [The wretch] executed the letter in his own hand just as was required of him. The soul-destroying dragon immediately dispatched the demons responsible for fornication (οἱ ἐπὶ πορνείας δαίμονες) and by means of a potion (πρὸς φίλτρον) they caused the maiden to fall in love with the man. Throwing herself to the ground she began to cry to her father: "Have mercy on me, wretch that I am, wickedly tormented on account of this servant of ours. Feel for me with your compassion; show fatherly affection for your only child and marry me to the youth I have chosen. If you do not wish to do so, you will soon see me die a bitter death and will have to give account to God for me at the day of judgement."

She was eventually married to the servant but they did not live

happily ever after, for then it was noticed that *he* never went to church any more. Basil the Great was approached for help; he learnt all from the lad, whom he imprisoned, first for three days, then for “a few” days, then for forty days, after which all was forgiven. A great vigil was held in which Basil carried on a dialogue with the devil. Finally the youth’s written denunciation floated down into the hands of the waiting people.³²

In the former case the lad got what he wanted; in another story, an Antiochene named Anthemius was only partially successful when he hired a φαρμακός to get himself into bed with a certain Mary, the daughter of a pious widow: the girl was able to talk herself out of the situation. Anthemius was so frustrated he went to the sorcerer and asked to become a sorcerer too. The price shows great similarity to the foregoing story: he had to make a written denial of Christ. But when he saw the chief of the demons taunting him with the document he had written, he repented of his sin and everything came right in the end.³³

It may be a mere coincidence that there is no evidence in the tales of women practicing the black arts, since witches and sorceresses seem to have been known to most other generations. *E silentio nihil*, of course, but the silence of the tales is somewhat borne out by *The Life of Saint Andrew the Fool*. That text does once speak of a *magicienne*, a wicked woman from Pontus, βακχεύτρια, τοῦ διαβόλου θυγάτηρ, μάγισσα καὶ ἀρενοθηλυμανής (3962–63), but this seems to be a stock apocalyptic figure. Elsewhere the devil is seen in the form of an old woman, but this too is something else. The Greeks and Romans

³² W794, BHG 253, Pseudo-Amphilochian *Vita Basilii* (ed. François Combefis, with Latin transl.: *Sanctorum patrum Amphilochii Iconiensis, Methodii Patarensis et Andreae Cretensis opera omnia quae supersunt* [Paris 1644] 155–225) 43, *de iuvene qui Christum negaverat*; also in Radermacher (*supra* n.31) 122–148.

³³ W054, BHG 1045, *Maria virgo Antiochiaae*; ἡ φρίκτη τούτη διήγησις a scribe has called this tale. W053, BHG 1317], *de filia Theodotae*, is a very similar tale.

certainly knew of sorceresses, as did the Hebrews (*e.g.* the Witch of Endor) and the medieval west. All one can say at this stage is that the existence of *magiciennes* in the world of the Tales has yet to be established.

It is something of a surprise in the story of Charisios (*supra* 296) that he was able to maintain his clerical status in spite of his misdoings; he is not alone. There was a priest at Triachides in Cyprus who became an adept magician (φαρμακός), eating and drinking from the sacred vessels, together with loose women and other magicians. This was when Arcadios [d. 625] was archbishop. He was brought to judgement and accused; he admitted everything, except that he claimed not to have defiled the eucharist. Whenever he went to celebrate (he said) an angel came and bound him to a column ὀπισθάγκωνα, performing the sacred act in his stead.³⁴ The people shouted: “Let us not judge the priests, for it is angels who consecrate Christ’s mysteries and give us communion” (μὴ κρίνωμεν τοὺς ἱερεῖς. ἄγγελοι τὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μυστήρια ἡμῖν ἀγιάζουσι καὶ μεταδιδούσι, clearly the main point of the story). He was nevertheless burnt to death.³⁵ In what looks like another version of the same story a priest and two deacons were accused of magic and taken for questioning. The priest told how for six years one dressed in white would come at the liturgy, bind him, and stand him in a corner (celebrating the liturgy himself) until the dismissal. But after nine years, the priest was bound as soon as he came to the church. He did not receive communion: that is how he was found out. Invited to another priest’s liturgy, he hid the sacrament, dropping it on the way to the house. Geese gathered

³⁴ This is a familiar topos: at least eight tales include it and there is one other tale (W122, BHG 1444y, *de sanatione tuberis*, attributed to Anastasius the Sinaïte) which asserts that angels, not men, are the true celebrants at any eucharist.

³⁵ W117, BHG 1444v, *de presbytero mago*, attributed to Anastasius the Sinaïte.

and indicated its presence; thus the priest was apprehended. He was condemned to be burned, the deacons to be beheaded.³⁶

Per contra, we learn of sorcerers who became holy men. A Jerusalem monk said that some years ago he saw a layman always within the ambulatory (περίπατος) of the Holy Sepulchre. When asked, this man explained that he was a magician (φαρμακός) and, although the devils dare not enter there, they were waiting for him at the gate. Taken to the Patriarch Modestus [632–633/4], he was catechised and given a cell in the upper ambulatory of Saint Constantine (κελλίον εἰς τὸν ἄνω περίπατον τοῦ ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου) and there he stayed for the rest of his life.³⁷

A more sensational conversion concerns Cyprian the sorcerer, mentioned above (300), all of whose efforts to get Aglaidês and Justina together were defeated by the girl's prayers and her use of the sign of the cross. Finally Cyprian gave in; he handed over his *grimoires* to be burned and became a Christian; then a priest and finally a bishop. He placed Justina with the ascetics (says the text) so presumably Aglaidês remained disappointed to the end.

As this last tale suggests, the sign of the cross was held to be particularly effective against sorcery (although Abba Macarius used holy water or oil, depending upon the version of the story).³⁸ Antony the Great enunciated the principle very clearly: "Where the sign of the cross is made, sorcery wastes away and poison does not work."³⁹ Hence it is not surprising that John of

³⁶ W953, Garitte 28. "Urbain Grandier curé & chanoine de Loudun, fut brûlé vif comme magicien l'an 1629" (*L'Encyclopédie* IX 853); "le 18 août 1634 à Loudun pour avoir usé les malefices envers les religieuses du couvent des Ursulines ... [Alexandre] Dumas l'a mis dans ses *Crimes célèbres* (1839–1841) et porté à la scène (*Urbain Grandier*, 1850)," *Les Trois Mousquetaires* &C, ed. Pléiade 1676 n.3. In *Vingt ans après* ch. xviii, Dumas has a guard remark: "J'étais de garde au bûcher, et je l'ai vu rôtir," ed. Pléiade 864.

³⁷ W114 (not in *BHG*), attributed to Anastasius the Sinaïte, ed. Nau no. 46.

³⁸ W171, W187, *supra* 299.

³⁹ ἔνθα τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ σταυροῦ γίνεται, ἀσθενεῖ μὲν μαγεία, οὐκ ἐνεργεῖ δὲ φαρμακεία, *V. Antonii* 78.5.

Skopelos (*supra* 298) released the ship which would not go down the slip-way with a triple sign of the cross. Then there is the story of Mesitês, a magician (φαρμακός) at Constantinople in the time of the Emperor Maurice (582–602), who tried to lead astray a Christian clerk (νοτάριος). He took him on horse-back to a deserted spot where there was a great fortification containing the dining hall of the demons. The chief demon was enthroned there in the centre. Mesitês was given the place of honour, whence he introduced the clerk. The chief was inviting him to become his servant when the clerk made the sign of the cross—whereupon everything disappeared except the horses.⁴⁰

The sorcerers themselves confessed the power of the cross, but also something else which is scarcely mentioned elsewhere. Anastasius the Sinaïte speaks of a Christ-loving man of Babylon in Egypt (who was still alive) who was once in charge of a prison in which there were some magicians (φαρμακοί) whom he had to “examine” in order to get written statements to take before the authorities. One of the magicians warned the man always to examine them having made his communion and wearing a cross, for his own sake. “If demons and magicians confess it, how true must it be that the body of Christ and the cross are powerful against them?”⁴¹ And when Daniel the Jew, accused of magic (φαρμακεία) was about to be burnt, he said that he was forced by an angel to reveal, against his will, that magic cannot in the least hurt a Christian man who makes his communion each day.⁴²

Enough has been said already to indicate that sorcerers were believed to act in close cooperation with the devils or demons

⁴⁰ W519, *BHG* 801, *de Mesita*, attributed to Anastasius the Sinaïte; Latin transl. in *Johannes Monachus, “Liber de Miraculis”*, ed. Michael Huber (*Sammlung mittellateinischer Texte* 7 [Heidelberg 1913]). It is possible that *Mesitês* is not really a name but a description of his rôle—as a “go-between” or middle-man between the forces of darkness and this world; see Lampe *s.v.*

⁴¹ W116, not in *BHG*, Anastasius the Sinaïte no. 48 Nau.

⁴² W118, *supra* 297.

(the two words are used indiscriminately.) Nearly half the stories about sorcery take this for granted. The famous Hebrew sorcerer to whom Theophilus, the *oekonomos* of Adana in Cilicia Secunda, went in search of revenge when he was dismissed from his office on a slander charge, is expressly said to have been the servant of the devil (W507). The rich young man in love with Theodote's daughter was sent by the sorcerer he consulted to meet with devils and in a very similar story it is the chief of the devils who taunts a youth with having denied Christ in writing.⁴³ Cyprian the sorcerer, who, as we saw, ended up a bishop, employed demons to try to get Aglaidês the desired girl, and in one of the Basilian tales the local sorcerer sends a youth to meet with a devil.⁴⁴ Yet there is one story (and only one) in which sorcerers are actually asked to expel devils: The daughter-in-law of a certain *grande dame*, having enjoyed her new husband in the night, went with her mother-in-law to the dedication of Saint Sebastian's chapel in the morning. But when the saint's relics entered the chapel, an evil spirit (*spiritus malignus*) invaded the girl. The priest tried (in vain) to set matters right by covering her with the altar-cloth. Then they led her away to magicians who immersed her in the river, but their incantations only expelled one demon to permit the entry of legion (a reference to Mark 5:9, 15.) The parents took her to Bishop Fortunatus who received her as his guest. After some days of prayer he restored her to her parents safe and sound (*sanam atque incolumen*).⁴⁵ The *sous-entendu* is clearly that the forces of evil trying to cast out the forces of evil is a house divided against itself; how can Satan cast out Satan? (Mark 3.23–24 etc.)

Finally a tale about Christian sorcery—for we do find evi-

⁴³ W053, W054, *supra* n.33.

⁴⁴ *Supra* n.32: yet another version of W053/W054.

⁴⁵ W385, Gregory the Great, *Dial.* 1.10.1–5.

dence of such a thing.⁴⁶ A noble and beautiful woman devoted to virginity was much coerced to sacrifice in the time of Diocletian, but in vain. She was given to an officer under pain of death if she did not submit to him. Anthemius of Nicomedia advised her that it was better to arrive with one's garments (*i.e.* one's body) torn rather than one's soul (*i.e.* chastity) damaged. She however tried to have the best of both worlds: "Do me no harm," she said to the officer, "and I will give you a charm (φάρμακον) against death." This she did by compounding a φυλακτήριον (a cross? an icon of Christ?) of oil and wax. But when she was placing this object around the officer's neck, he raised his sword and cut off her head. Thus she won the double crown of martyrdom and chastity, comments the narrator.⁴⁷

In conclusion let it be noted that if indeed there really was any magic which could provoke love, there appears to have been none to withstand it. Or at least so a pagan text of the second century seems to say (indicating three kinds of φάρμακον: to eat, to drink, and to chant or recite): ἔρωτος γὰρ οὐδὲν φάρμακον, οὐ πινόμενον οὐκ ἐσθιόμενον, οὐκ ἐν ᾠδαῖς λεγόμενον, ὅτι μὴ φίλημα καὶ περιβολὴ καὶ συγκατακλιθῆναι γυμνοῖς σώμασι.⁴⁸

July, 2002

Department of History
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 5V5
wortley@cc.umanitoba.ca

⁴⁶ The Chevalier de Jaucourt admits the existence of *La magie divine*, as opposed to *La magie surnaturelle*, qui "est la magie proprement dite, cette magie noire qui se prend toujours en mauvaise part, que produisent l'orgueil, l'ignorance & le manque de Philosophie": *L'Encyclopédie* IX 852–853.

⁴⁷ W501, BHG 1442k (*partim*), Georgius Monachus, *Chronicon* (ed. de Boor) 3.173, PG 110.569.

⁴⁸ Thus Philetas in *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.7.