

## *Magic in the Biblical World*

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[p.169]

### **I INTRODUCTION**

There can be no doubt that both the Old Testament and the New Testament were born in environments permeated with magical beliefs and practices.<sup>1</sup> It should come as no surprise to find Moses contesting with magicians in Egypt, later identified as Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim. 3:6-8),<sup>2</sup> as magic was a dominant factor in Egyptian

[p.170]

culture.<sup>3</sup> For Egyptians to attain to an afterlife they had to provide themselves with magical incantations such, as the Pyramid Texts in the Old Kingdom, the Coffin Texts in the Middle Kingdom, and the Book of the dead in the New Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Magic was also a potent force in other contemporary cultures, such as that of the Hittites.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Magic is distinct from but closely related to 'divination', the foretelling of the future by various signs. See my essay, 'Divination in the Biblical World', presented to the American Scientific Affiliation, August. 102. My own interest in the subject of magic has grown out of the research for my dissertation, published as *Mandaic Incantation Texts* [hereafter *MIT*] (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1967). As I included an extensive bibliography on magic in this volume (pp. 372-395), I will for the most part refrain from repeating titles listed there. I am indebted to a fellowship from the Institute for Advanced Christian Studies for aid in continued research on ancient magic and divination.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. Hopfner, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauher* (Leipzig: Haessel, 1924), II, Nos. 10-11. For references to Jannes and Jambres in the targums, see M. McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966) 32-96; L. J. Grabbe, 'The Jannes/Jambres Tradition in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and Its Date,' *JBL* 98 (1979) 393-401. For the contrast between the Egyptian magicians and Moses and Aaron, see M. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman, 1969) 152, 169.

<sup>3</sup> For Egyptian magic see P. Ghalioungi, *Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt* (London: Hodder Stoughton, 1963); J. F. Borghouts, *The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); *idem*, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); R. Brier, *Ancient Egyptian Magic* (New York: William Morrow, 1960); K. A. Kitchen, 'Magic and Sorcery. 2. Egyptian and Assyro-Babylonian', *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. Douglas & N. Hillyer (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1980), II, 933-935.

<sup>4</sup> A. de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1935-56) 6 vols.; R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969) 2 vols.; Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature. 1. The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California, 1975) 29-50, 131-133; *idem*, *Ancient Egyptian Literature. 2. The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California, 1976) 119-132.

<sup>5</sup> The relation of the biblical 'Hittites' to the Anatolian 'Hittites' has been a matter of controversy. See H. A. Hoffner, 'Some Contributions of Hittitology to Old Testament Study', *TB* 20 (1969) 27-55; A. Kempinski, 'Hittites in the Bible - What Does Archaeology Say?' *BAR* 5.4 (1979) 20-45. For Hittite magic see H. Otten, *Mythische und magische Texte in hethitischer Sprache* (Berlin: Vorderasiatische Abteilung der Staatlichen Museen, 1943); A. S. Kapelrua, 'The interrelationship between Religion and Magic in Hittite Religion', *Numen* 6 (1959) 32-50; D. Engelhard, 'Hittite Magical Practices' (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1970); I. Wegner, 'Regenzauber im Hattiland', *UF* 10 (1978) 403-410. For applications from Hittite magic to the OT, see H. A. Hoffner, 'Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity', *JBL* 85 (1966) 326-334; *idem*, 'The Hittites and Hurrians' in *POTT* 215-217.

Daniel at Nebuchadnezzar's court in Babylon was a colleague of assorted 'magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers' (Dn. 1:20; 2:2, 10, 27; 4:7; 5:7, 11, 15),<sup>6</sup> who were the heirs of an ancient Mesopotamian

[p.171]

tradition of magic and divination.<sup>7</sup>

Though the Did Testament condemned the heathen practices of magic and divination this did not prevent some Jews from making illicit use of such measures, any more than the prophets' fulminations kept the Israelites from idolatry.<sup>8</sup> Magic was a pragmatic matter which had an ecumenical appeal. The same spells could be used with minor changes by people from different religious backgrounds.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the protests of the rabbis, magic was increasingly used by the common folk in the Talmudic age (3rd-5th century A.D.). Striking evidence for this comes from an important Hebrew manuscript, the *Sepher Ha-Razim*, 'Book of the Secrets', published by M. Margalioth in 1966.<sup>10</sup> in the

[p.172]

medieval period the Jewish mystical tradition of the Kabbalah was filled with magical lore.<sup>11</sup>

In the New Testament we can think of Peter's encounter with Simon Magus (Acts 2:9-24),<sup>12</sup> and Paul's effective opposition to the Jewish sorcerer Elymas Bar Jesus (Acts 13:6-12) on

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<sup>6</sup> In Dn. 1:20 the first word for magician is derived from the Egyptian *hry-tp*; the second word is derived from the Akkad. *āšipu*, 'enchanter'. The latter, which occurs only in Daniel, is placed incongruously in an Egyptian setting in the genesis Apocryphon 20.19. See J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I* (Rome; Pontifical Biblical institute, 1966) 57, 118.

<sup>7</sup> See A. A. van Proosdij, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery* (Leiden: Brill, 1952); MIT 30-M. For a work which includes Egyptian, Babylonian, Hittite magic etc., see *Le monde du sorcier* (Paris: Touzot, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> See MIT 392-394; I. A. Fishbane, 'Studies in Biblical Magic' (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1971).

<sup>9</sup> The same spells which were used by the Mandaeans (MIT) were also used by Jewish clients in their Aramaic bowl incantations and by Christian clients in their Syriac howl incantations. See V. P. Hamilton, 'Syriac incantation Bowls' (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1970); C. D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975). We are all indebted to our mentor, Professor Cyrus H. Gordon (see MIT 379-380), who in turn studied under James A. Montgomery, who published the first major study on the magic bowls of Nippur in 1913.

<sup>10</sup> (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966). An English translation is being prepared by M. Morgan for Scholars Press. See N. Sec, 'Le Sēfer ha-Rāzīm et A Méthode de "combinaison des lettres"', *Revue des études juives* 130 (1971) 295-304; J. Goldin, 'The Magic of Magic and Superstition', in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. by B. S. Fiorenza (Noire Dame: Notre Dame University, 1976) 115-147. Margalioth dated the work to the 3rd century, but I. Groenwald ('Knowledge and vision', *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 [1973] 71) prefers a 5th-6th century date.

<sup>11</sup> G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken, 1969); *idem*, *Kabbalah* (New York: New American Library, 1974); S. Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982) 27-44.

<sup>12</sup> The Apocryphal Acts of Peter describes how Simon astounded the crowds at fore by his magical flights until Peter prayed that he might crash to the ground. See E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (London: Lutterworth, 1965; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), II, 289-216. The early church fathers regarded Simon as the fountainhead of all the Gnostic heresies, though the book of acts, our earliest source, describes him simply as a magician. See R. P. Casey, 'Simon Magus' in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966 reprint), ¶ 151-163; E. M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian*

Cyrus.<sup>13</sup> Many of those converted to Christianity at Ephesus made a bonfire of their magical scrolls (Acts 19:17-20). The so-called 'Ephesian letters', magical combinations of meaningless letters like our 'abracadabra', were famous in

[p.173]

antiquity.<sup>14</sup> Illustrations of ancient incantations are found in abundance in the famous Greek magical papyri published by K. Preisendanz,<sup>15</sup> as well as in classical literature.<sup>16</sup>

[p.174]

### **A. Etymology**

The word 'magic' comes from 'time Greek μαγικός, that is, relating to the magi', who were originally a priestly caste serving the Medes and the Persians,<sup>17</sup> During the Hellenistic period the word *magi* came to denote astrologers, as in the story of the 'wise men' who came to adore the babe at Bethlehem (Mt. 2:1-12).<sup>18</sup> As early as the fifth century B.C. the word μάγος also came to have the pejorative sense of 'sorcerer' or 'quack,' and is thus applied to the activities of Simon (Acts 8:9, 11) and of Elymas (Acts 13: 6, 8).<sup>19</sup>

### **D. Magic vs. Religion**

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*Gnosticism* (London: Tyndale, 1973) 58-65; J. D. M. Derrett, 'Simon Magus Acts 8:9-24', *ZNW* 33 (1962) 52-68.

<sup>13</sup> A. D. Hock, 'Paul and the Magus', in Foakes Jackson and Lake, *Beginnings*, V, 164-188, reprinted in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1972) ch. 15.

<sup>14</sup> K. Wessely, *Ephesia grammata* (Vienna: Franz-Joseph Gymnasium, 1886); A. Deissmann, 'Ephesia Grammata', *Abhandlungen zur Semitischen Religionskunde and Sprachwissenschaft*, O. W. Frankenberg and F. Kuchler Messon: Töpalman, 1918) 121-124; C. C. McCown, 'The Ephesia Grammata in Popular Belief', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 54 (1923) 128-140; B. M. Metzger, 'St. Paul and the Magicians', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 38 (1944) 27-30; K. Preisendanz, 'Ephesia Grammata', *RAC* 5 (1965) columns 515-520; O. F. A. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Ephesus...* (Athens; Lycabettus, 1973) 90-92.

<sup>15</sup> K. Preisendanz published two volumes of the Greek Magical papyri in 1928 and 1931: *Papyri Graecae Magicae [PGM]* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928, 1931) vols. 1 and 2. Most of the copies of the third volume, published in 1942, were destroyed by an allied air raid upon Berlin (see J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* [London: SCM, 1974] 8). A second edition, edited by A. Hearichs, was published some thirty years later (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973-74). An English translation directed by H. D. Betz and aided by others including D. E. Aune, H. Martin, and M. W. Meyer will be published shortly by Brill. See A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965 reprint of the 1922 ed.) 254-264; A. D. Nock, 'Greek Magical Papyri', *JEA* 15 (1929) 219-235, reprinted in Stewart, *Essays on Religion*, 1, 176-194; C. K. Barren, ed., *The New Testament Background* (London: SPCK, 1956; New York: Harper, 1956) 29-35; M. W. Meyer, 'The Mithras Liturgy' (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976); H. D. Betz, 'Fragments from a Catabasis ritual in a Greek Magical Papyrus', *History of Religions* 19 (1980) 287-295; *idem*, 'The Delphic Maxim "Know Yourself" in the Greek Magical Papyri', *History of Religions* 21 (1981) 156-171.

<sup>16</sup> See *MIT* 391; Éliane Massonneau, *La magie dans L'antiquité romaine* (Paris: Librairie du Recueil, 1934); Jacqueline de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> Pliny (*NH* 30.2) therefore concluded, 'Without doubt magic arose in Persia with Zoroaster'. See G. Messina, *Der Ursprung der Magier and die zarathustrische Religion* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1930); E. Senveniste, *Les mages dans l'ancien Iran* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1938). See *TDNT* 1.73?-738; 4.356-359.

<sup>18</sup> J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénistes* (Paris: 'Les Belles Lettres', 1938) ; A. D. Nock, 'Greeks and Magi', *JRS* 30 (1940) 191-198, reprinted in Stewart, ch. 30. See E. Yamauchi, 'Christmas Metamorphoses: How the Magi Became Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar' *BA* (forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> Homily, *Magic and Rhetoric* 12.

Though magic and religion are not mutually exclusive categories,<sup>20</sup> they have generally been understood to represent two different attitudes. Put simply, in religion

[p.175]

one prays to the gods; in magic one commands the gods.<sup>21</sup> In this sense Egyptian religion was, as often as not, magical.<sup>22</sup> The Egyptian magician threatened the gods by gods by virtue of his magical power.

This prime distinction between magic and religion, which is usually traced back to the pioneer anthropologists, E. B. Tylor and James Frazer, was originally noted by the Protestant Reformers.<sup>23</sup> The element of 'coercion', 'control', or 'manipulation' has been regarded as an essential element of magic in many definitions. For example, H. H. Rowley notes:

The line between magic and religion. is not always easy to define, but broadly we may say that wherever there is the belief that by a technique man can control God, or control events, or discover the future, we have magic.<sup>24</sup>

According to William Howells, an anthropologist, 'magic can compel things to happen, whereas prayer to a god can only attempt to persuade.'<sup>25</sup> The psychologist Walter Houston

[p.176]

Clark declares, 'Typical of the magical attitude is the idea that man may coerce or strongly influence God by adherence to proper rituals or imprecations'.<sup>26</sup>

The anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, further argues that religion deals with ultimate issues, whereas magic focuses on the immediate concerns: 'While the underlying idea and aim is always clear, straightforward, and definite, in the religious ceremony there is no purpose directed toward a subsequent event.'<sup>27</sup>

### **C. Magic and Religion**

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<sup>20</sup> For general discussions see Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*. 1. *During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era* (New York: Columbia University, 1923) vol. 1; G. B. Vetter, *Magic and Religion* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953); M. Bonisson, *Magic: Its History and Principal Rites* (New York; E. P. Dutton, 1960); J. de Vries, 'Magic and Religion', *History of Religions* 1 (1961) 214-221; M. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); R. Garosi, *Magia* (Rome; Bulzoni, 1976).

<sup>21</sup> But note that prayers can contain magical elements. See E. Burriss, 'The Magical Elements in Roman Prayers', *Classical Philology* 25 (1930) 47-55.

<sup>22</sup> C. J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 43-114.

<sup>23</sup> K. Thomas, 'An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, II', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6 (1975) 96. On Sir James G. Frazer's theories about magic see J. C. Jarvie and J. Agassi, 'The Problem of the Rationality of Magic', *The British Journal of Sociology* 18 (1967) 55-74; J. Z. Smith, 'When the Bough Breaks', *History of Religions* 12 (1973) 342-371; R. Ackerman, 'Frazer on Myth and Ritual', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975) 115-134; Mary Douglas, 'Introduction', in J. G. Frazer, *The Illustrated Golden Bough* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978) 9-15.

<sup>24</sup> *The Faith of Israel* (London: SCM, 1961 reprint of the 1956 ed.) 27.

<sup>25</sup> *The Heathens* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948) 64.

<sup>26</sup> *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1958) 146.

<sup>27</sup> *Magic, Science and Religion* (Garden City; Doubleday, 1948) 33.

One difficulty with the traditional views of magic is the objection that such a label is often 'pejorative', and reveals as much about the social attitudes of those using the label as about the beliefs and practices of those who are being described.<sup>28</sup> Social scientists, such as anthropologists and sociologists, have therefore tried to view 'magic' neutrally as 'value-free' observers. For example, Max Marwick defines magic as follows:

This is a morally neutral term in the sense that magic may be used with or without social approval. It refers to the activities or craft of the magician, a person who, suitably prepared, performs rituals aimed at controlling, impersonal supernatural forces held responsible for the succession of events.<sup>29</sup>

[p.177]

Such scholars have viewed magic 'functionally', as in some cases serving to relieve certain social stresses, but in other cases as being disruptive actions of deviant sorcerers.<sup>30</sup>

Without denying the continuum between magic and religion, insofar as both deal with symbolic relations to non-empirical supernatural phenomena, W. J. Goode has stressed eleven distinctive dimensions of the magical 'pole' of the spectrum, including the following:

1. *Concrete specificity of goal* relates most closely to the magical complex.
2. *The manipulative attitude* is to be found most strongly at the magical pole, as against the supplicative, propitiatory, or cajoling, at the religious pole.
3. *The professional-client relationship* is ideally-theoretically to be found in the magical complex. The shepherd-flock, or prophet-follower, is more likely in the religious.
4. *Individual ends* are more frequently to be found toward the magical end of this continuum, as against group ends toward the other.<sup>31</sup>

### III MAGIC AND LOVE

#### A. Charms

Magical texts, in contrast to the official propaganda of kings, reveal the emotions, desires, and fears of common people. The etymologies of many words which are still used in romantic discourse reveal the role that magic once played in the art of love.<sup>32</sup> How many husbands or boy friends realize that when they compliment their wives or girl friends, they are actually calling them 'witches'—etymologically speaking, that is? That should be quite apparent when a man calls a woman 'bewitching' or

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<sup>28</sup> A. F. Segal, 'Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition', *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, ed. R. Van den Brcek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1981) 349-375. D. E. Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity', *Aufstieg und Wedergang der römischen Welt*, W. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1980) II.23.1, 1510-1516, doubts that one can make consistent distinctions between religion and magic.

<sup>29</sup> M. Marwick (ed.), *Witchcraft and Sorcery* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 12. Cf. Islwyn Blythin, 'Magic and Methodology', *Numen* 17 (1970) 45-59; D. L. O'Keefe, *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic* (New York: Continuum, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Christian missionaries may profit from these sociological insights. See Miriam A. Adeney, 'What Is "Natural" about Witchcraft and Sorcery?' *Missiology* 2 (1974) 377-395.

<sup>31</sup> W. J. Goode, 'Magic and Religion: A Continuum', *Ethnos* 14 (1949; 172-182.

<sup>32</sup> Compare modern advertisements for perfumes, mouthwashes, etc.!

[p.178]

'spell-binding'. But it is also true when one calls her 'charming', 'enchancing', and 'fascinating'. The word 'charm' comes through the French from the Latin word *carmen*, which could mean 'song' but which also meant 'spell'. 'Enchancing' comes from the Latin *incantare*, 'to cast a spell'.<sup>33</sup> 'Fascinating' comes from the Latin *fascinare* 'to bewitch', which in turn is borrowed from the Greek βασκαίνω, which originally meant 'cast the evil eye'. The latter word occurs once in the New Testament at Galatians 3:1, when Paul asks, 'O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?'<sup>34</sup>

Among the earliest Mesopotamian texts is an Old Akkadian love incantation for a rejected suitor which ends by addressing the beloved maiden: 'By Ishtar and išhara, I conjure you: so long as his neck and your neck are not entwined, may you not find peace!'<sup>35</sup> Some of the numerous love songs from Egypt may have been used as charms.<sup>36</sup>

The Book of Enoch 7:1 has the fallen angels (Gn. 6:2 ff) teaching erotic magic to women, 'And they taught them charms and swells.'<sup>37</sup> Ireneaus (*Demonst.* 16) expanded the statement to make the fallen angels the teachers of all kinds of wickedness to women:

From the angels are learned the virtues of roots and herbs, dyeing in colour and cosmetics, discovery of rare substances, love-potions, aversions, amours, concupiscence, constraints of love, spells of bewitchment, and all sorcery and idolatry hateful to God.

[p.179]

At Tell Sandahannah (ancient Marisa) we have an interesting Greek graffito (3rd century B.C.) in which a woman boasts that she has secured the garment of her beloved, implying what she has thereby secured power magically over his person.<sup>38</sup> The contemporary Greek poet Theocritus describes how a girl attempts to win back her love by a magical wax image and by a love potion made from her lover's garment and ground lizard.<sup>39</sup>

Though Ovid and Plutarch both deplores the use of love charms and potions, the practice was widespread in the Greco-Roman world. Horace writes of the witch Canidia who brewed, it was said, a love potion from the spleen and marrow of an innocent youth. Tibullus writes of a charm made for him by a witch for his beloved Delia.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The Twelve Tablets of Roman Law (449 B.C.) prescribed capital punishment for those guilty of *malum carmem, incantare*. See H. J. Wolff, *Roman Law* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1976) 53, 59.

<sup>34</sup> See below under IV.C 'The Evil Eye'.

<sup>35</sup> Joan and Aage Westenholz, 'Help for Rejected Suitors: The Old Akkadian Love Incantation MAD V 8\*', *Or* 46 (1977) 203; cf. Jack Sasson, 'A Further Cuneiform Parallel to the Song of Songs?' *ZAW* 85 (1973) 359-360. For other Akkadian examples, see E. Ebeling, *Liebeszauber im Alten Orient* (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1925).

<sup>36</sup> Virginia L. Davis, 'Remarks on Michael V. Fox's "The Cairo Love Songs"', *JAOS* 100 (1980) 113.

<sup>37</sup> M. A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1977) 7.

<sup>38</sup> On other magical objects from this site, see below IV.B 'Curses'.

<sup>39</sup> See H. Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963 reprint of the 1932 ed.) 363-376.

<sup>40</sup> See J. Lindsay, *Ribaldry of Ancient Rome* (New York: Frederick Linger, 1965); E. R. Pike, *Love in Ancient Rome* (London: Muller, 1965) *passim*.

Many actual magical charms have been preserved in the Greek papyri from Egypt.<sup>41</sup> These often end with the formula, 'Already, already, quickly, quickly'. Still other examples in Aramaic and Mandaic are known.<sup>42</sup>

[p.180]

### **B. Aphrodisiacs**

Substances which are believed to arouse sexual passions are known as aphrodisiacs. The story of one rivalry between Leah and Rachel (Gn. 30:14; cf. Dt. 7:13) deals with a plant (Heb. **ד'שן**, which is cognate to the word for lover, **ד'ד**<sup>43</sup>) which was widely believed to be an aphrodisiac—the mandrake (Gk. **μανδραγόρας**).<sup>44</sup>

The mandrake plant, popularly known as the 'love apple' grows everywhere in Palestine and Syria, it is related to the nightshade, potato, and tomato.<sup>45</sup> Its stemless leaves are arranged in a rosette. Its purple flowers develop into fruits like plums.<sup>46</sup> It was apparently the peculiar shape of the forked roots, which resemble the lower part of a human body, which gave rise to the idea that the mandrake could induce conception.

The ancient Egyptians believed that lettuce, a plant associated with the fertility god Min, could serve as an aphrodisiac.<sup>47</sup> The Jewish rabbis, following the fifth 'Takkanot' of Ezra, urged the eating of garlic on Friday in preparation for conjugal pleasures on the Sabbath.<sup>48</sup> The Greeks and the Romans also believed, that onions could serve as aphrodisiacs.<sup>49</sup>

[p.181]

Pliny (*NH* 20.227) wrote that the sap of mallows as well as three of its roots bound together worked as an aphrodisiac. Petronius, the arbiter of Nero's tastes, drank myrrh, to arouse his sexual passions. The wife of Pheroras, Herod's brother, purportedly purchased a love potion from a Nabatean woman (Josephus *Ant.* 17.62). Jerome alleged that the Epicurean poet Lucretius went mad from taking too many love potions.

## **IV MAGIC AND HATE**

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<sup>41</sup> L. Koenen, 'Formular eines Liebeszaubers', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 9 (1971) 199-206; R. Daniel, 'Two Love-Charms', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 19 (1975) 249-264.

<sup>42</sup> J. A. Montgomery, 'A Love Charm on an Incantation Bowl', *The Museum Journal* 1 (1910) 46-49; *idem*, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1913) Nos. 13, 28; E. S. Drawer, 'A Mandaean Book of Black Magic', *JRAS* (1943) 167. Cf. H. J. Polotsky, 'Zwei koptische Liebeszauber' *Or* 6 (1937) 119-131; R. Patai, 'The Love Factor in a Hebrew-Arabic Conjurament (?)' *JQR* 70 (1980) 239-253.

<sup>43</sup> For the cognate Ugaritic word *ddy*, see G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) 86-89.

<sup>44</sup> S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen, 1904) 275. Cf. R. C. Cleveland, 'A Comment on the "Floral Nicknames" in the Cairo Geniza Documents', *JAOS* 93 (1973) 201-202.

<sup>45</sup> *Fauna and Flora of the Bible* (London: United Bible Societies, 1972) 138-139. See also M. Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980) 188-189.

<sup>46</sup> The mandrake is depicted in Assyrian reliefs. See Pauline Albenda, 'Grapevines in Ashurbanipal's Garden', *BASOR* 215 (1974) 4 ff.

<sup>47</sup> H. Kees, *Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961) 77.

<sup>48</sup> S. Zeitlin, 'Takkanot Ezra', *JQR* 6 (1917-18) 62-74; L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Jewish Pub. Soc., 1959) vol. 6, 444, n. 46.

<sup>49</sup> Licht, *Sexual Life* 513; Ovid, *The Technique of Love*, ET by Paul Turner (London: Panther, 1968) 63.

### **A. Drugs**

One of the practices condemned in the New Testament was the use of drugs for magical ends. The Greek word φάρμακον originally meant a drug, such as one used in medicine (Plato, *Protagoras* 354A, hence our word 'pharmacy'). Its one occurrence in Revelation 9:21 may possibly refer to the use of drugs in erotic incantations because of its association with sexual immorality.<sup>50</sup> The word is used in this sense by Josephus (*Ant.* 15.93) of the means by which Cleopatra kept Antony infatuated with her. For the most part, however, the cognates of φάρμακον refer more often to magical material used for purposes of hate rather than love. Plato (*Laws* 11.932E ff) discusses the use of drugs as poisons. Such practices are listed as one of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:20 (φαρμακεία, 'witchcraft, KZV, NIV; 'sorcery' RSV, NEB).<sup>51</sup> Those who practise such nefarious arts (φαρμακεύς, Rev. 21:8; φαρμακός, Rev. 22:15) will be excluded from heaven.

### **B. Curses**

Whether curses may be regarded as religious sanctions or as magical devices may depend on the circumstances. In the first category I would place formal appeals to the gods to punish those who break treaties and oaths.<sup>52</sup>

[p.182]

In the second category I would place individual imprecations against an enemy. Other examples may be difficult to categorize.

Most ancient Near Eastern treaties included lists of gods who served as witnesses and concluded with a long list of dreadful curses which would befall those who might break their oaths.<sup>53</sup> Scholars believe they can detect the influences of such treaty formulae in passages of the Old Testament.<sup>54</sup>

The Egyptians cursed their enemies in a series of execration texts, some of which were on clay dolls which could be smashed with magical effects. These texts from the Middle Kingdom are important sources for our knowledge of Syria and Palestine in the early second millennium B.C.<sup>55</sup> But M. Weiss has called into

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<sup>50</sup> So J. Moffatt, cited by R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 204, n. 47.

<sup>51</sup> W. Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit* (London: SCM, 1962) 36-39.

<sup>52</sup> See. E. Yamauchi, 'Oaths' in *The Zondervan Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. E. M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison (forthcoming).

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* (London: The British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958); J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967).

<sup>54</sup> S. Gevirtz, 'West-Semitic Curses and the Problem of the Origins of Hebrew Law', *VT* 11 (1961) 137-158; F. C. Fensham, 'Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament', *ZAW* 74 (1962) 1-9; *idem*, 'Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and Kodurru-Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of memos and Isaiah', *ZAW* 75 (1963) 155-175; D. P. Hillers, *Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical institute, 1964); K. J. Cathcart, 'Treaty Curses and the Book of Nahum', *CBQ* 35 (1973) 179-187; T. Wittstruck, 'The influence of Treaty Curse Imagery on the Beast imagery of Daniel 7', *JBL* 97 (1978) 100-102.

<sup>55</sup> K. Sethe, *Die Ächtung feindlicher fürsten, Völker, und Dinge...* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1926); René Dussaud, 'Nouveaux textes égyptiens d'exécration centre les peuples syriens', *Syria* 21 (1940) 170-182; G. Posener, *Princes et pays d'Asie et de Nubie* (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1940); *idem*, 'Les textes Tenvoutement de Mirgissa', *Syria* 43 (1966) 277-287; J. Vercouter, *Mirgissa I* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1970); J. M. Weinstein, 'Egyptian relations with Palestine in the Middle Kingdom', *BASOR* 217 (1975) 1-16.

[p.183]

question the view that there are traces of an execration text pattern in some OT prophetic passages.<sup>56</sup>

Almost everyone has heard of the so-called 'curse' of King Tut, that is, the curse which supposedly led the mysterious deaths of several who participated in the excavation of Tutankhamen's unluted tomb in 1922.<sup>57</sup> Though no text of such a curse was found,<sup>58</sup> it was certainly a common practice to place a curse on tombs to keep them from being desecrated. A predecessor, Amenhotep III, placed the following curse upon those who failed to preserve his mortuary chapel:

He (Amon) shall deliver them into the flaming wrath of the king on the day of his anger; his serpent-diadem shall spit fire upon their heads, shall consume their limbs, shall devour their bodies.... Their sons shall not be put into their places, their wives shall be violated whine their eyes see it....<sup>59</sup>

There are two striking passages in the Old Testament, which seem to reflect the common magical belief that once a curse was uttered, it assumes an independent

[p.184]

existence.<sup>60</sup> In Judges 17:1-6 when a woman found that 1100 shekels of silver had been stolen, she uttered a curse upon the thief. When her son, who was the culprit heard this, he confessed. As she could not simply retract the curse, she countered it with her blessing. Proverbs 26:2 counters the magic notion of a curse by declaring, 'Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest'.<sup>61</sup> Later the rabbis still retained the popular notion of the independent power of a curse, maintaining, 'The curse of a sage, though uttered without cause, takes effect'.<sup>62</sup>

From the Greek world the most common curses against individual enemies were those placed on thin lead sheets (commonly known as *tabellae defixiones*), which were rolled up and

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<sup>56</sup> M. Weiss, 'The Pattern of the "Execration Texts" in the Prophetic Literature', *IEJ* 19 (1969) 150-157.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. C. Aldred, *Tutankhamen* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1963); J. Lawton, 'The Last Survivor', *Aramco World Magazine* 32.6 (Nov.-Dec., 1981) 10-21; R. Brier (see note 3), *Ancient Egyptian Magic* 185.

<sup>58</sup> For the excavation of King Tut's tomb, see also H. Carter & A. C. Mace, *The Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen* (New York: Dover, 1977 reprint); L. Cottrell, *The Lost Pharaohs* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1963) 160-181; T. Hoening, *Tutankhamun: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978).

<sup>59</sup> J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (New York: Russell R Russell, reprint of 1906 ed.) II, 378-379.

<sup>60</sup> On curses in the OT see J. Hempel, 'Die israelitischen Anschauungen von Segen und Fluch im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen', *ZDNG* 4 (1925) 20-110; S. H. Blank, 'The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the oath', *HUCA* 23 (1950-50) 73-95; H. C. Brichto, *The Problem of 'Curse' in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: SBL, 1963); Z. Scharbert, "'Fluchen" and "Segen" im Alten Testament', *Bib* 39 (1958) 1-26. On the independent existence of a curse once uttered, see *MIT* 48-49. A. C. Thiselton, 'The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings', *JTS* 25 (1974) 294-299, however challenges what has become the conventional interpretation. On Judges 17:1-6, see J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (London: Nelson, 1967) 363.

<sup>61</sup> D. Kidner, *The Proverbs* (London: Tyndale, 1964) 161-162; R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs-Ecclesiastes* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) 159; R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972) 152.

<sup>62</sup> A. Cohen, *The Proverbs* (Hindhead: Soncino, 1945; London: Soncino, 1952) 173.

pierced with a nail,<sup>63</sup> These were than deposited in wells or graves, presumably for easier access to the infernal spirits. Such tablets

[p.185]

were widely used for over a thousand years from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the 6th century A.D.<sup>64</sup> They and other curses have been found not only in Greece,<sup>65</sup> Cyprus,<sup>66</sup> Italy/Sicily,<sup>67</sup> North Africa,<sup>68</sup> Egypt,<sup>69</sup> Phoenicia,<sup>70</sup> but also in Palestine.<sup>71</sup>

One of the most frequent use of such curses was their employment by a charioteer against his rivals.<sup>72</sup> One such athletic curse reads as follows:

[p.186]

I conjure you up, holy beings and holy names: join in aiding this spell, and bind, enchant, thwart, strike. overturn, conspire against. Destroy, kill, break Eucherius, the charioteer, and all his horses, tomorrow in the circus at Rome. May he not leave the barriers well: may he not be quick in the contest; may he not outstrip anyone; may he not make the turns well; may he not win any prizes, but may he meet with an accident; may he be bound; may he be broken; may he be dragged along by your power, in the morning and afternoon races. Now! Now! Quickly! Quickly!<sup>73</sup>

This was, of course, the antithesis of what Paul had in mind about participating in athletic contests according to the rules in order to win the victor's wreath (1 Cor. 9:24-27).<sup>74</sup>

From the 2nd century A. D. from Tell Sandahannah (Marissa) in southern Palestine F. J. Bliss and A. C. Dickie discovered 'sixteen small human figures in lead, bound in fetters or ropes of

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<sup>63</sup> For a good discussion, see Roll, *Hellenistic Magic* 9-11, 147.

<sup>64</sup> Since the comprehensive treatments by A. Audollent and R. Wünsch early in the century, many more examples have been discovered. The following references supplement those given by Hull, *Hellenistic Magic* 171-179.

<sup>65</sup> C. H. Jeffery, 'Further Comments on Archaic Greek inscriptions', *Annual of the British School at Athens* 50 (1955) 66-84; J. Wiseman, 'Ancient Corinth', *Archaeology* 22.3 (1969) 225; D. R. Jordan, 'A Curse Tablet from a fell in the Athenian Agora', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 19 (1975) 245-248.

<sup>66</sup> T. Drew-Bear, 'Imprecations from Kourion', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 9 (1972) 85-107.

<sup>67</sup> N. Nabers, 'Ten lead Tabellae from morgantina', *AJA* 63 (1979) 463-464.

<sup>68</sup> A. Van den Brendan, 'La plaquette de malédiction de Carthage', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 45 (1969) 307-318.

<sup>69</sup> F. Klein-Franke, 'Eine aramäische Tabella Devotionis', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie and Epigraphik* 7 (1971) 47-52.

<sup>70</sup> P. R. Mouterede, 'Objets et inscriptions magiques de Syrie', *Mélanges de Université Saint-Joseph* 15 (1930-31) 106-123.

<sup>71</sup> H. C. Youtie and C. Bonner, 'Two Curse Tablets from Beisan', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 58 (1937) is one text cited by Hull, who does not discuss the finds from Marissa, however.

<sup>72</sup> See H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1972) 271; J. H. Humphrey, 'Prolegomena to the Study of the Hippodrome at Caesarea Maritima', *BASOR* 213 (1974) 43-44; A. Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (London & New York: Oxford University, 1973); *idem*, *Circus Factions* (London & New York: Oxford University, 1976) 62.

<sup>73</sup> N. Lewis and M. Reinhold, *Roman Civilization: 2, The Empire* (Now York: Harper and Row, 1966) 570.

<sup>74</sup> H. A. Harris, *Greek Athletic and the Jews* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1976); R. R. Chambers, 'Greek Athletics and the Jews - 165 B.C. to A. D. 70' (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Miami University, 1980).

lead, iron or bronze',<sup>75</sup> which were no doubt intended to serve like 'voodoo' dolls in cursing personal enemies. The bound contorted figures recall the similarly fettered figures in the magic bowls from Nippur.<sup>76</sup>

[p.187]

From the same site were recovered about 50 limestone tablets inscribed in Greek with magical curses. In one text Pankles curses two of his enemies with dumbness of speech and sterility, because he believes that they through their magic have caused him to be afflicted with headaches and to lose his job.<sup>77</sup>

### C. *The Evil Eye*

A widespread superstition both in antiquity and at present is the fear of the 'evil eye'.<sup>78</sup> That is, the concept that someone can cause harm by his baleful glance.<sup>79</sup> The usual motive for this form of black magic is envy.<sup>80</sup> Occasions of gaiety and unusual success are especially thought to excite the resentment of those less fortunate.<sup>81</sup>

Any unnatural or diseased eye was especially considered an 'evil eye'. A Mandaic incantation translated by E. S.

[p.188]

Drower warns: 'Tremble! be scared off, Evil Eye and Dimmed (Eye) and Blue (or crossed-) Eye and Eye with white cataract and Shut Eye and Eye with a film on it, and Corroded Eye'.<sup>82</sup>

The 'black' magic of the evil eye and the defensive 'white' magic against it are already attested in ancient Mesopotamia<sup>83</sup> and Egypt.<sup>84</sup> From Arslan Tash in Syria an amulet against the evil eye was published in 1971.<sup>85</sup> It is written in the Phoenician language in the Aramaic script of the early 7th century B.C. As translated by T. H. Gaster it reads:

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<sup>75</sup> F. J. Bliss, *Excavations in Palestine* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1902) 154-155, and plate 85; C. Clermont-Ganneau, 'Royal Ptolemaic Greek Inscriptions and Magic Lead Figures from Tell Sandahannah', *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1901) 58.

<sup>76</sup> R. Pognon, *Inscriptions mandaïtes des coupes de Khouabir* (Paris; Imprimerie Nationale, 1898), plates 14-15; Hamilton, *Syriac Incantation Bowls*, plate 7; C. D. Isbell, 'The Story of the Aramaic Magical incantation Bowls', *BA* 41 (1978) 8.

<sup>77</sup> R. R. Wunsch, 'The Limestone inscriptions of Tell Sandahannah' in Bliss, *Excavations* 182.

<sup>78</sup> C. Maloney, ed., *The Evil Eye* (New York: Columbia University, 1976) xi-xii, shows that the belief seems to have been diffused from the Near East to Europe, north and central Africa, and India. In the new world it is widespread in Mexico.

<sup>79</sup> For older studies see S. Seligmann, *Die böse Blick and verwandtes* (Berlin: K Barsdorf, 1910), 2 vols.; F. T. Elworthy, *The Evil Eye* (London: Julian Press, 1958 reprint of the 1695 edition).

<sup>80</sup> The word 'envy' comes from the Latin *invidia*, about which Cicero observed that such a feeling comes from too much looking at the goods of another.

<sup>81</sup> M. Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 109: 'The conception of hybris and nemesis had a popular background in what the Greeks called *baskania*, the belief, still common in southern Europe, that excessive praise is dangerous and a cause of misfortune'.

<sup>82</sup> E. S. Drower, 'Šafta d-Pišra d-Ainia, "Exorcism of the Evil and Diseased Eyes"', *JRAS* (1937) 597.

<sup>83</sup> E. Ebeling, 'Beschwörungen gegen den Feind and den bösen Blick aus dem Zweistromlande', *Archiv orientální* 17 (1949) 172-211.

<sup>84</sup> J. F. Borghouts, 'The Evil Eye of Apopis', *JEA* 59 (1970) 114-151.

<sup>85</sup> A. Caquot and R. du Mesnil du Buisson, 'La seconde tablette ou "petite amulette" d'Arslan-Tash', *Sur* 48 (1971) 391-406.

Flee, thou caster of the evil eye!  
Keep thy distance from men's heads, thou who puttest an end to their wits  
When(ever) on the head of one who is dreaming (thins evil) eye beats, by virtue of the Unblemished Eye  
it is thy casting of the evil eye that will be brought to an end!<sup>86</sup>

In the Old Testament the Hebrew phrase רע עין, literally 'evil eye', does not mean the magical 'evil eye', contrary to the interpretation of Moss and Cappannari. Citing 1 Samuel 18:9 they conclude, 'An evil eye had entered into Saul'<sup>87</sup> To be sure, Saul was jealous of David, but the

[p.189]

Hebrew verb in this verse (רע) simply means 'eyed' (so the RSV) or 'kept his eye upon'.<sup>88</sup> Other passages (Dt. 15:7-11; Pr. 23:6-7; 28:22; Ecclus, 14:9-10) indicate that the Hebrew phrase in question connotes the selfish attitude of one who is covetous of wealth and who is reluctant to share with those who are less fortunate.

This seems also to be the background for the New Testament use of the phrase ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρός, literally 'evil eye', used by Jesus (Mt. 6:23; 20:15; Mk. 7:22) as opposed to the concept of the 'single eye', which as the context (Mt. 6:19-34) indicates, means a generous spirit.<sup>89</sup>

There is, to be sure, a clear reference to the fear of the evil eye in the New Testament at Galatians 3:1,<sup>90</sup> though this has been obscured by the translations and the lexicons.<sup>91</sup> Earlier scholars, such as J. B. Lightfoot, clearly recognized the allusions implicit in the use of the Greek verb βασκαίνω here:

O ye senseless Gauls, what bewitchment is this? I placarded Christ crucified before your eyes. You suffered them to wander from this gracious proclamation of your King. They rested on the withering eye of the sorcerer. They yielded to the fascination and were riveted there. And the life of your souls has been drained out of you by than envious gaze.<sup>92</sup>

[p.190]

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<sup>86</sup> T. H. Garter, 'A Hang-up for Hang-ups: The Second Amuletic Plaque from Arslan Tash', *BASOR* 209 (1973) 13; cf. also F. M. Cross, 'eaves from an Epigraphist's Notebook', *CBQ* 36 (1974) 486-494; Y. Avishur, 'The Second Amulet incantation from Arslan-Tash', *UF* 10 (1978) 29-36.

<sup>87</sup> L. W. Moss and S. C. Cappannari, 'The Mediterranean' in Maloney, *The Evil Eye* 6.

<sup>88</sup> J. Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel* (London: Oliphants, 1971) 139.

<sup>89</sup> R. L. Roberts, 'An Evil Eye (Mt 6.23)', *Restoration Quarterly* 7 (1963) 143-147. R. H. Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 113, however, believes that the phrase originally had reference to a clear vision of the eschatological times. On Luke 11:34 see I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1976; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 489.

<sup>90</sup> Deissmann (*Light* 193 n. 10) notes that in the papyri ἀβάοκαντος ('unbewitched') is a common expression for averting evil, equivalent to the wish, 'whom may no evil eye injure'.

<sup>91</sup> For example, Arndt 136.

<sup>92</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan reprint of the 1865 edition) 133. Roberts, 'An Evil Eye', 143 n. 1, comments: 'it seems that Paul uses this as a familiar figure showing by graphic illustration how the Galatians had been fooled, not that he recognized anything but the existence of the idea as superstition known especially in Babylon and Syria as well as in the vicinity of Galatia'.

The implications of this word incline me to favour F. W. Farrar's interpretation of Paul's so-called 'thorn (more accurately 'stake') in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12:7) as acute ophthalmia, brought on in part by the blinding vision on the road to Damascus. This widely prevalent disease was both excruciatingly painful and disfiguring.<sup>93</sup> It would explain why Paul wrote with such 'large letters' (Gal. 6:12) his greeting to the Galatians. Furthermore the inflammation of his eyes would help to explain: (1) why Paul may have been a trial to them for 'my temptation' as in the KJV; the better MSS read 'your') so they may have been tempted to regard Paul as one with an evil eye (Gal. 4:14); (2) why they were willing to pluck out their own eyes to give them to Paul (Gal. 4:15); and (3) why Paul now rebukes them for failing under the evil eye of the Judaizers (Gal. 3:1).

We have rabbinical references to the evil eye. Rabbi Arika went so far as to aver that 99 of 100 people died because of the evil eye! An exception to the ban on work on the Sabbath was the uttering of a spell against the evil eye. A man could take his right thumb in the left hand and vice versa, and say for protection, 'I, A, son of B, come from the seed of Joseph, against whom the evil eye has no Power'.<sup>94</sup> The belief persisted among Jews in the Middle Ages. Rashi reported that a man would call his handsome son 'Ethiop' (the equivalent of 'Nigger') to avoid the envious evil eye.<sup>95</sup>

[p.191]

References to the evil eye in Roman literature indicate that it could be warded off by spitting into one's coat. Boys were given a *bulla*, a gold amulet to wear until they assumed the *toga virilis* about the age of 14. The amulet was often in the shape of a phallus, which was intended to so 'fascinate' the evil eye that it could see nothing else.<sup>96</sup>

It is quite clear that the fear of the evil eye continued through the Christian era as evidenced by numerous amulets, paintings, and mosaics.<sup>97</sup> A mosaic from Antioch, for example, shows the evil eye being attacked by various animals and weapons.<sup>98</sup> One aspect of the hostile relations between Christians and Jews was the suspicion that Jews had this malevolent magical power. The Canon of Elvira no. 49 (305 A.D.) forbade Jews from standing in ripening grain, lest they cause the crops to wither by their gaze.

The Jews of England were forbidden to attend the coronation of Richard the Lion-Hearted (1189) for fear that an evil eye might harm the crown. So feared was the purported power of the Jew that the German word for evil eye remains *Judenblick* (Jew's glance).<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> F. W. Farrar, *The Life and Word of St. Paul* (London: Cassell, 1903) 265, places the following words in Paul's mouth: 'at that time weak, agonised with pain, liable to fits of delirium, with my eyes red and ulcerated by that disease by which it pleases God to let Satan buffet me, you might well have been tempted to regard me as a deplorable object'.

<sup>94</sup> Moss and Cappannari in Maloney, *The Evil Eye* 8.

<sup>95</sup> J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (Cleveland: World, 1961) 55.

<sup>96</sup> Licht, *Sexual Life* 369.

<sup>97</sup> J. Engemann, 'Zur Verbreitung magischer Übelabwehr in der nichtchristlichen and christiichen Spätantike', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 18 (1975) 22-48.

<sup>98</sup> D. Levi, 'The Evil Eye and the Lucky Hunchback', *Antioch-on-the-Orontes: The Excavations 1937-39*, ed. R. Stillwell (Princeton: Princeton University, 1941), III, 220-232; G. Downey, *Ancient Antioch* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1963) 213 and fig. 63.

<sup>99</sup> Moss and Cappannari in Maloney, *The Evil Eye* 8.

In Italy the fear of the *mal'occhio* is still widespread, as is the use of charms such as the *cornio*, amulets shaped like a goat's horn to protect against the evil eye.<sup>100</sup>

[p.192]

In modern Greece charms called *σπλακτά* are widely used against the evil eye. In North Africa a prophylactic symbol often employed is the hand with the fingers outstretched. Furthermore, 'Children are often left filthy and never washed, in order to protect them from the evil eye'.<sup>101</sup>

## V MAGIC AND DANGERS

### A. Serpents

One of the great dangers for which people of the ancient world sought magical protection were poisonous snakes.<sup>102</sup> in the Sinai wilderness the Lord sent a judgment of 'fiery serpents' (הַבַּחֲשִׁים הַשֵּׂרֵפִיִּים) to afflict the rebellious people until they repented.<sup>103</sup> They were miraculously healed when they beheld a bronze serpent made by poses and set upon a pole (Nu. 21:4-9). Although some have regarded gees as an act of homeopathic magic,<sup>104</sup> the rabbis understood that it was not their

[p.193]

gazing at the bronze serpent itself which healed them but God's grace through their repentance and faith.<sup>105</sup> It was Yahweh who could heal, not any of the serpent gods or amulets of Egypt.<sup>106</sup> Later when the Israelites made the *Nehushtan* or bronze serpent the object of idolatrous worship. Hezekiah destroyed it (2 Ki. 18:4).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> W. Appel, 'Italy: The Myth of the Jettatura', in Maloney, *The Evil Eye* chapter 2. See G. De Rosa, *Vescovi, popolo e magia nel Sud* (Naples: Gulch, 1971); A. Di Nola, *Gli aspetti magico-religiosi de una cultura subalterna itailana* (Turin: Boringhieri, 1976); C. Ginzburg, "Stregoneria, magia e superstizione in Europa fra medio evo ed età moderna", *Ricerche di Stories Sociale e Religiosa* 11 (1977) 119-123, for popular magic in Italy.

<sup>101</sup> E. Spooner, 'Anthropology and the Evil Eye', in Maloney, *The Evil Eye* 81.

<sup>102</sup> Among the unpublished texts discovered at Ebla are spells directed at serpents and scorpions, according to G. Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1931) 192.

<sup>103</sup> The snakes in question were probably Carpet vipers, which are numerous, aggressive and highly venomous. See G. S. Cansdale, *All the Animals of the Bible Lands* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 206-208.

<sup>104</sup> Some scholars view the tale as aetiological, or see behind the text allusions to an Egyptian or Canaanite serpent cult. See Karen R. Joines, 'The Bronze Serpent in the Israelite Cult', *JBL* 87 (1968) 245-256; *idem*, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Haddonfield: Haddonfield House, 1974); R. S. Boraas, 'Of Serpents and Gods', *Dialog* 17 (1978) 273-279.

<sup>105</sup> A. Cohere, ed., *The Soncino Chumash* (London: Soncino, 1947) 907.

<sup>106</sup> The Cobra or Uraens was one of the chief deities of Egypt. See J. Vandier, *La religion égyptienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949) 39, 42, 67. According to E. A. W. Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1958 reprint of the 1899 edition) 59: 'The amulet of the serpent's head was placed on the dead body to keep it from being bitten by snakes'. We have stelae depicting Horus, standing on crocodiles and wringing in his hands scorpions and serpents. See R. Otto, 'Gott als Better in Ägypten', *Tradition and Glaube*, ed. Gert Jeremias *et al.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971) 19; F. Lexa, *La magie dan l'Égypte antique de l'Ancien Empire...* (Paris: Geuthner, 1925) 11, 66 ff, plates 27-30. See also Brier, *Ancient Egyptian Magic* 290, 294-2957 ANET<sup>2</sup> 326.

<sup>107</sup> D. M. Beegle, *Moses, The Servant of Yahweh* (Ann Arbor: Pryor Pettingill, 1979) 313-314. Joines ('The Bronze Serpent', 245-246, notes 2-5) lists examples of seven bronze serpents recovered from Megiddo, Gezer,

The Egyptian magicians knew how to transform a cobra into the form of a lifeless stick (Ex. 7:8-13), probably by applying pressure to its neck.<sup>108</sup> The traditional Indian snake charmer plays a pipe.<sup>109</sup> But inasmuch as all snakes, and not only the 'deaf adder' (Ps. 58:4-5) are deaf, the snake charmer must hold the attention of the snakes by his movements.<sup>110</sup>

[p.194]

In 1968 an incantation against snakebite from Ugarit (RŠ 24.224=UT 507) was published.<sup>111</sup> Few texts have aroused as much discussion. Translators differ as to whether to place more weight upon one mythological or the magical elements of the text.<sup>112</sup> The former deal with the courtship between a *Mare* goddess and the god Horan. There is, however, relatively little disagreement about the translation of lines 4-5, which Young renders:

My fate is the bite of a snake,  
The sting of the serpent <sup>c</sup>qšr,  
From him let the charmer exhaust,  
From him he should remove the venom.<sup>113</sup>

What is of special interest to the OT scholar is the fact that the Ugaritic word for 'charmer' *mlhš* is cognate with the Hebrew words for snake charmers in the Old Testament. These were literally מְלַחְשִׁים, 'whisperers', from the verb לַחַשׁ. An Isaiah 3:3 'the expert in whispering' is not to be interpreted as 'the eloquent' (following the Targum, Vulgate, Syriac) but as the 'clever enchanter' (NIV).<sup>114</sup> In Jeremiah 8:17 the Lord threatens to send venomous snakes which cannot be charmed. Ecclesiastes 10:11 relates the proverb, 'if a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer' (כַּעַל הַלְשׁוֹן), literally 'master of the tongue'. Ecclesiasticus 12:13 Notes, 'Who will pity a charmer that is bitten by a serpent?'

[p.195]

a family who worked on rebuilding the wall with Nehemiah (Ne. 3:12) has the intriguing name which originally meant 'enchanter' or 'snake-charmer'.<sup>115</sup> It is striking that this is the only case where a man has daughters working with him on the wall.

## B. Amulets

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Hazor, and Shechem. For the gilded snake found at the Egyptian shrine at Tirana, see B. Rothenberg, *Timna* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972); Suzanne Singer, "'From These Hills...'", *Biblical Archaeology Review* 4.2 (1978) 16-25.

<sup>108</sup> Kitchen, 'Magic' in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, II, 934.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. N. L. Corkill, 'Snake Specialists in Iraq', *Iraq* (1939) 45-52.

<sup>110</sup> Cansdale, *All the Animals* 206.

<sup>111</sup> C. Virolleaud, 'yes nouveaux textes mythologiques et liturgiques de Ras Shamra', *Ugaritica* 5 (Paris: Mission de Ras Shamra, 1968) 564-574; M. Astour, 'Two Ugaritic Serpent Charms', *JNES* 27 (1968) 13-36.

<sup>112</sup> See D. Pardee, 'A Philological and Prosodic analysis of the Ugaritic Serpent Incantation UT 607', *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 10 (1976) 73-107; and M. Tsevat, 'Den Schlangentext von Ugarit UT 607...', *UF* 11 (1979) 759-778, who summarize earlier discussions.

<sup>113</sup> D. W. Young, 'The Ugaritic Myth of the God Ḥōrān and the Mare', *UF* 11 (1979) 343.

<sup>114</sup> E. J. Kissane, *Isaiah* (Dublin; Browne & Nolan, 1960) 36.

<sup>115</sup> F. Michaeli, *Les livres des Chroniques, d'Esdras et de Néhémie* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1967) 316; H. Brockington, *Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (Loneon: Nelson, 1969) 139.

One of the magical means of protection against such dangers as serpents, the evil eye, and demons was the wearing of amulets.<sup>116</sup> Such objects have been found in Mesopotamia from prehistoric times.<sup>117</sup> Even the god Marduk relied on an amulet in his conflict with Tiamat.<sup>118</sup>

Amulets are magical objects, usually worn about the neck. They may be either uninscribed or inscribed. In the former category are the pig astragali (knuckle bones) found by Paul Lapp at Taanach.<sup>119</sup> In the second category is the Arslan Tash tablet (7th century B.C.) from Syria.<sup>120</sup>

[p.196]

A number of passages in the Scriptures may be taken a reference to objects used as amulets. The earrings which Jacob buried under the oak at Shechem were probably not just ornamental but also amuletic (Gn. 35:4).<sup>121</sup> The ornaments which Gideon took off the camels' necks were שֶׁהָגִים, i.e. 'crescents' (Jdg. 8:21). They were worn both by men (Jdg. 8:26) and by women (Is. 3:18) as decorative amulets. Such crescent amulets have been found, e.g. at Tell el-Ajjūl, and are still worn by Arabs today. As John Gray observes:

The nomads have always observed astral cults. The crescents were used as amulets on the camels or as ornaments; and today blue beads of glass are often hung on children, animals, and even on motor-buses and cars among the more primitive Arabs, to avert the influence of the evil eye.<sup>122</sup>

The statement in Proverbs 17:8, 'A bribe is a charm to the one who gives is a reference to אֶבֶן-חַיִּים, literally to a 'stone of grace' (KJV, RV 'precious stone'; RSV 'magic stone'). The sense is the notion that one can count on a bribe like a magic amulet.<sup>123</sup> McKane would paraphrase the statement, 'A bribe works like magic'.<sup>124</sup>

Despite the biblical condemnation in Isaiah 3 of various amuletic ornaments including לְחַשְׁמֵיטָה (v. 20), Jews of all periods continued to wear illicit amulets as well as the prescribed phylacteries.<sup>125</sup> A typical later Jewish amulet reads:

[p.197]

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<sup>116</sup> A. Wiedemann, *Die Amulette der alter Aegypter* (Leipzig: C. Hinrichs, 1910); E. A. W. Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1961 reprint of 1930 edition); J. Marquès-Rivière, *Amulettes, Talismans et Pentacles* (Paris: Payot, 1972); F. M. and J. H. Schwartz, 'Engraved Gems in the Collection of the American Numismatic Society: 1. Ancient Magical Amulets', *Museum Notes* 24 (1979) 149-197.

<sup>117</sup> Beatrice L. Goff, *Symbols of Prehistoric Mesopotamia* (New Haven: Yale University, 1963).

<sup>118</sup> H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962) 303. For amulets from Mesopotamia, see MIT 383-386; G. Wilhelm, 'Ein neues Lamaštu-Amulett', *ZA* 69 (1979) 34-40.

<sup>119</sup> P. A. Lapp, *The Tale or the Tell* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975) 97-98.

<sup>120</sup> See ANET<sup>3</sup> 658; in addition to the bibliography listed there, see A. Caquot, 'observations sur la première tablette magique d'Arslan Tash', *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5 (1973) 45-51; G. Garbini, 'Gli incantesimi fenici di Arslan Tas', *Oriens Antiquus* 20 (1931) 277-294.

<sup>121</sup> J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930) 423. For illustrations see D. J. Wiseman, 'Amulets', *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1, 46-47.

<sup>122</sup> J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (London: Nelson, 1967). 312. These crescent ornaments were culled in Greek *μηνίσκοι* and in Latin *lumulae*.

<sup>123</sup> D. Kidner, *The Proverbs* (Leicester: IVP, 1964; Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1964) 124; R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (Garden City: Doubleday, (1965) 110.

<sup>124</sup> W. McKane, *Proverbs* (London: SCM, 1970; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 502.

<sup>125</sup> On phylacteries, see Y. Yadin, *Tefilin from Qumran* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1969).

An effective amulet, tested and tried, against the evil eye and evil spirits, for grace, against imprisonment and the sword, for intelligence, to be able to instruct people in moral, against all sorts of disease and reverses, and against loss of property; 'In the name of Shaddai, who created heaven and earth, and in the name of the angel Raphael...'.<sup>126</sup>

Amulets were widely used in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>127</sup> Even the emperor Augustus (Suetonius, *Aug.* 90) carried with him a piece of seal skin as a protection against lightning. Though we cannot be certain that the so-called 'Gnostic' amulets<sup>128</sup> were used by the Gnostics, the latter were often charged with the use of magic by the church fathers.<sup>129</sup>

[p.198]

The church frequently condemned the use of amulets, e.g., the *Descretum Galasium* (6<sup>th</sup> century): 'All amulets which have been compiled not, as those persons feign, in the name of the angels, but rather in that of the demons'. But many Christians continued to use amulets, including copies of the Scripture.<sup>130</sup>

One fascinating text which was sometimes used by later Christians as an amulet is the famous SATOR-ROTAS square.

S A T O R  
A R E P O  
T E N E T  
O P E R A  
R O T A S

This is a kind of palindrome in that it can be read in more than one direction. Inasmuch as the letters can be rearranged to form the words 'Our Father' and the Alpha and Omega in Latin, a Christian origin for the square has been proposed.

We now have eleven examples of this square, including one found at Conimbriga, Portugal in 1971, and another found at Manchester in 1978. The two earliest examples come from the

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<sup>126</sup> Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic* 139. On Jewish amulets or amulets found in Palestine, see *MIT* 393-394; B. Lifshitz, 'Einige Amulette aus Caesarea Palaestinae', *ZDPV* 80 (1964) 80-34; T. Schrire, *Hebrew Amulets* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); J. T. Milik, 'Une amulette judéo-araméenne', *Bib* 48 (1967) 450-451; E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (Princeton; Princeton University, 1962), XIII, 53; T. Schrire, 'Samaritan Amulets, "Yat" and Exodus 14:20', *IEJ* 22 (1972) 153-155; J. Kaplan, 'A Second Samaritan Amulet from Tel Aviv', *IEJ* 25 (1975) 157-159; J. Bowman, 'Five Persian Jewish Amulets', *Abr-Nahrain* 17 (1976-77) 13-19; J. Kaplan, 'A Samaritan Amulet from Corinth', *IEJ* 30 (1980) 196-198; L. Y. Rahmani, 'A Magic Amulet from Nahariyya', *HTR* 74 (1981) 387-397.

<sup>127</sup> See *MIT* 388-389; H. J. Rose, 'A Blood Staunching Amulet', *HTR* 44 (1951) 59-60; B. M. Metzger, 'A Magical Amulet for Curing Fever', *Historical and Literary Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1968; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 104-109.

<sup>128</sup> Appearing on these amulets is the name *Abrasax*, which was the name of the ruler of the heavens in the system of the Gnostic Basilides. Cf. Schwartz, 'Engraved Gems' 155 ff; M. Philonenko, 'Une intaille magique au nom de IAO', *Semitica* 30 (1980) 57-60.

<sup>129</sup> See R. M. Grant, W., *Gnosticism* (London: Collins, 1961; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 23, 30, 34, 37.

<sup>130</sup> See F. Eckstein and J. H. Waszink, 'Amulett', *RAC* 397-411; R. A. Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers 3: Barnabas and the Didache* (London & New York: Nelson, 1965) 144; C. Müller and G. Detlef, 'Von Teufel, Mittagsdämon und Amuletten', *Jahrbuch für Antike and Christentum* 17 (1974) 91-102; N. Brox, 'Magie and Aberglaube an den Anfängen des Christentams', *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 83 (1974) 157-180.

ruins of Pompeii, which was buried along with Herculaneum by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79.<sup>131</sup>

[p.199]

Though the point has been disputed, these squares may be taken as evidence of the presence of Christians there.<sup>132</sup>

## VI CONCLUSIONS

It is quite clear from the Scriptures themselves, from extra-biblical texts, and from archaeological discoveries that the Word of God came to Jews and Christians who lived in a world which was steeped with occult beliefs and practices. The biblical revelation did not come to sinless humans but reached them in their cultural situations.

Though it is true that reliance upon magic is quite incompatible with simple trust in God, we need not excuse or gloss over magical practices such as reliance upon mandrakes as aphrodisiacs.<sup>133</sup>

The sovereign God, who condemned idolatry, nonetheless used idolaters for His purposes. He used belief in necromancy to rebuke Saul, and popular astrology to guide the Magi to Bethlehem. He spoke through the false prophet Balaam, and

[p.200]

even through Balaam's ass. It would be an altogether mistaken conclusion therefore to seek God's guidance from the braying of asses.<sup>134</sup>

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<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

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<sup>131</sup> The impress of a cross on the wall of a building at Herculaneum has also been taken as evidence of the presence of Christians. J. Deiss, *Herculaneum* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1966) 68-69; J. Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 249-250.

<sup>132</sup> See F. V. Filson, 'were There Christians in Pompeii?' *BA* 2 (1939) 13-16; C. Kraeling, 'The Sator Acrostic', *Crozer Quarterly* 22 (1945) 28-38; J. Meysing, 'Le diagramme Sator-Arepe', *Revue des sciences religieuses* 40 (1966) 321-352; D. Fishwick, 'on the origin of the Rotas-Sator Square', *HTR* 57 (1964) 39-53; H. Polge, 'La fausse énigme du carré magique', *RHR* 175 (1969) 155-163; C. J. Hemer, 'The Manchester Rotas-Sator Square', *FT* 105 (1978) 36-40; H. Hoffmann, 'Sator-Quadrat', *PE Supplementary Volume XV* (1978) 477-565; E. Dinckler, 'Miscellanea Archaeologiae Christianae', *TR* 46 (1981) 219-224.

<sup>133</sup> As does J. S. Wright, 'Magic and Sorcery', *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, II, 933, when he says of the mandrakes, 'Since modern investigations have shown that primitive medicines often contain some element that is really effective, it would be foolish to dismiss this example as magic'.

<sup>134</sup> The complex subject of 'Diseases, Demons, and Exorcisms' will be treated by the author in another essay.