Religious Boundaries in Late Antique Lived Religion

The monk and theologian Sophronius (ca. 560–638 CE), who served as patriarch of Jerusalem toward the end of his life, recounted in his encomium to Cyrus and John a brief tale of a paralytic named Petros who hailed from Herakleion.[1] As a man desperate for healing, Petros sought the help of these martyrs. Cyrus and John instructed him in a dream to go to a baptismal pool called Jordan (named after the river in which Jesus received his baptism) and wash his hands—a gestural nod to "the consumption of the vivifying flesh and blood of Christ."[2] But, unfortunately for Petros, there was a problem. As a faithful anti-Chalcedonian follower of Theodosius of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch, such a Christological acknowledgement was apparently tantamount to a rejection of his faith.[3] Whichever specific eucharistic issue informed the Chalcedonian–anti-Chalcedonian divide in this passage, Sophronius lamented that Petros initially refused the martyrs' orders and "cursed the Council of Chalcedon."[4]

Stubbornly persistent in his alleged heresy, Petros is said to have disobeyed the instructions of the martyrs not once, but several times. In the end, however, the pain proved to be too great. Racked with physical torment, Petros finally consented to their demands. Sophronius further notes in passing that Petros's (repentant) shift in attitude was accompanied by an arousal of his theological curiosity; he asked the oneiric martyrs to explain why they were committed to the Chalcedonian faith. They staunchly replied that "the belief defined by the Council of Chalcedon was orthodox and it was a doctrine of divine inspiration." Readers are left reassured that the formerly recalcitrant Petros took these words to heart, piously shunning his heretical past in obedience to the martyrs and, consequently, receiving a curative reward: "[Petros] executed the martyrs' orders and regained health as a salary for his piety."

This theological and parenetic narrative discloses important information about the perceived—or at least rhetorical—relationship between healing and

religious boundaries in some circles of late antique Christianity.[5] Healing in this and related stories was contingent on religious identity and boundary markers: doctrinal purity was curative; heresy was pathological.[6] Mariangela Monaca has captured the sentiments of Sophronius and his ilk in a more negative formulation: "Who does not believe 'properly' cannot obtain physical healing."[7] But how pervasive were such beliefs in late antiquity? Did a similar conception of the interface of healing and boundary demarcation penetrate the concerns of everyday religion? Did the Christian practitioners responsible for healing in local, quotidian contexts think that religious boundaries were at times important—or even necessary—for ritual efficacy? What did their clients think about such boundaries? Finally, if, in fact, these ritual actors considered religious boundaries between Christian insiders and Others to be important or necessary for curative—and, we might add, apotropaic and even imprecatory—purposes, how did they configure those boundaries? Such questions reside at the analytical center of this chapter.

In this chapter, I argue that religious boundaries—especially apropos of the "Jews"—played an important role in quotidian rituals for healing, protection from demons, and other contexts deemed magical. Yet, I will also contend that the boundaries promoted within these ritual contexts were configured differently than those that ancient patristic and monastic writers promoted and scholars have generally assumed. Consequently, the magical evidence demonstrates that clear-cut religious boundaries between Christians and Others were not simply a concern of "elite" ecclesiastical writers but penetrated diverse social strata—analogous to what we saw for late antique ritual boundaries (chapter 1).

MAGIC AND RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES?

There is a strong tendency in scholarship to situate the policing of—or even concern for—religious boundaries solely within the world of ecclesiastical (and rabbinic) elites. Responding to the then prevailing "parting-of-the-ways" model, for example, Daniel Boyarin emphasized that, while the religious borders between Jews and Christians were drawn in myriad ways, the concern for constructing, maintaining, and enforcing religious boundaries was inextricably linked to one's position within political and social hierarchies. He writes, "just as the border between Mexico and the United States is a border that was imposed by strong people on weaker people, so too is the border between Christianity and Judaism."[8] Likewise, Paula Fredriksen gives voice to this binary in her magisterial study of Augustine's approach to the Jews when she asks:

> Why does there seem to be so little correspondence between the ways that Christian literate elites wrote about Jews and the ways that actual Christians and Jews (and pagans as well) interacted socially within the matrix of the Mediterranean city?[9]

She clarifies this interaction further when she characterizes anti-Jewish literary traditions as "unquestionably abusive" and "Jewish-Christian social relations" as "by and large cooperative and irenic."[10] This dichotomy is also often tacitly operative when scholars contrast the perspectives of Christian difference found in patristic sources with "social reality"—a rubric typically understood as reflecting "messy," "fluid," "blurred," "porous," or "permeable" boundaries between religious "communities."[11]

As we have already seen, magic tends to be understood in the study of late antiquity as one important domain of ostensibly "non-elite" social life. Accordingly, amulets and other types of curative, apotropaic, and imprecatory rituals are not typically associated in scholarship with the concern for clearly demarcated religious boundaries. Éric Rebillard has recently engaged with these kinds of rituals as part of his theoretical analysis of multiple identities in early Christianity.[12] According to Rebillard, the world of late antique amulets and ritual healing practices constituted a domain of social existence in which "Christianness was not the principle on which Christians acted."[13] To be sure, Rebillard's claim has some supporting evidence. As he notes, Augustine seems at times to characterize believers, who use amulets and other ritual technologies designed to assist with temporal needs, as bifurcating their allegiances (e.g., *Exposition on the Psalms* 41.3–4). Rebillard paraphrases Augustine's caricature of their supposedly misguided reasoning: "Let God be worshipped with a view to eternal life, and the Devil be worshipped for this present life."[14]

Nevertheless, Rebillard's approach to this aspect of lived religion is not without problems. His thesis about the lack of "Christianness" in magical contexts not only stands in considerable tension with the extant material record (see chapter 1 and the discussion below), but it also does not accurately describe the entire panoply of early Christian literature; many literary sources claim that "Christianness" in fact figured quite prominently in the Christian use of amulets and similar rituals. As we have already seen, Augustine also claimed that practitioners could *only* deceive Christians into engaging in harmful ritual practices by using Christian idioms. In other words, the occasions of Augustine's writings could result, on the one hand, in claims that Christians separated their Christian identities from forbidden practices and, on the other hand, in the idea that "Christianness" facilitated Christian participation in such rituals. Such inconsistencies and tensions within and between the literary and material records ought to give us pause when relying heavily on literary sources in the construction of ancient lived religion.[15] Taking the material record as one's starting point not only provides a less mediated and contrived picture of quotidian religion, but it also raises new questions to ask of our literary sources.

Of course, specialists in material culture have likewise tended to characterize magical practice as disinterested in policing religious boundaries. In fact, Vicky A.

Foskolou seems to capture the opinion of most scholars interested in late antique amulets when she writes the following in her analysis of apotropaic and curative gems, which she also aligns with the social sphere of magic:

> in the pluralist religious environment of the Late Roman period in which these objects were created and the corresponding magical practices developed . . . [there was a] "blur[ring]" [of] the boundaries between the various religious traditions of the day. As far as magic is concerned a contributing factor in this erosion of religious boundaries was the notion that using some foreign elements, such as a foreign language, or symbols from another religious tradition, gave the magical practices greater prestige and grandeur and ultimately made them more effective.[16]

According to Foskolou, late antique ritual artifacts reflect a "pluralist religious environment," in which religious boundaries were "blurred." Although much of the evidence at face value seems to lend credence to the portrait that Foskolou articulated, the idea that practitioners intentionally mixed the idioms of "foreign" religious traditions or reflect "blurred boundaries" represents only one possible explanation for the state of the extant material.

The primary assumptions that buttress scholarly views of the relationship between religious difference, identities, and boundaries, on the one hand, and magic, on the other hand, can be reassessed by attending to the category "situational meaning," as proposed by the LAR project (see introduction). The LAR team has illuminated this dimension of lived religion as follows: "religious meanings were not generated by world-views but by the complex interplay of interests, beliefs and satisfactions in specific situations."[17] For my present purposes, it is useful to inquire into the nature of "religious meanings" within the Christian sources deemed magical. In short, did the beliefs, circumstances, and exigencies associated with the objects scholars have traditionally classified as magical at times work in dialogue with the promotion or maintenance of religious identities, differences, and boundaries?

I contend that religious differentiation and related concepts could in fact figure quite prominently within late antique Christian magical rituals; however, those boundaries are difficult to perceive since they differed—albeit to varying degrees—with those promoted in the literary record. Not unlike the disagreement between Augustine and his congregants on the relationship between ritual and Christianity (see introduction), the extant magical evidence—when placed in dialogue with certain patristic and monastic texts—underscores competing visions of the proper boundaries between the "Christian" and the "non-Christian." The prevailing scholarly impulse to frame Christian amulets in terms of religious mixture, blurring, syncretism, and the like is implicitly predicated on a very specific conception of Christian language and, by extension, non-Christian language. It is necessary, therefore, to examine the boundaries of ancient "Christian" language, especially as it pertains to amulets.

AMULETS AND THE SYMBOLIC LIMITS
OF CHRISTIANITY

The adjective "Christian" constitutes one of the primary identifiers used to describe the textual elements found on late antique amulets. But what, in fact, is a "Christian" element? In their catalogue of amulets and formularies (see introduction), de Bruyn and Dijkstra detailed the limits of Christian language on such objects as follows:

> *nomina sacra* . . . crosses, staurograms, or christograms; letters or cryptograms often used in a Christian context; Trinitarian, Christological, Mariological, and hagiographical references; acclamations or sequences from the Christian liturgy; quotations and allusions from Christian canonical and apocryphal scriptures; and Christian narratives or *historiolae*.[18]

As this quotation lays bare, de Bruyn and Dijkstra generated their list of "Christian" elements based on the correspondence between amuletic language and expressions of Christianity in other social domains of late antiquity. This correspondence approach to the label "Christian" for the collection and analysis of amulets is by no means unique to their study. In fact, Walter Shandruk defines Christian language in virtually identical terms to de Bruyn and Dijkstra:

> What will be meant by "Christian" here is any mention of Jesus (Christ) or other prominent New Testament figures, quoting of or reference to the New Testament or Christian Apocrypha in general, doctrinal or liturgical statements such as Trinitarian doxologies and the trisagion, and the presence of manifestly Christian symbols such as crosses, christograms, and the like.[19]

These studies render explicit more or less the parameters of Christian language implicit in many other collections of "Christian amulets," including those found in important volumes, such as *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM), *Supplementum Magicum* (*Suppl.Mag.*), and Meyer and Smith's volume *Ancient Christian Magic* (ACM).[20] In short, the adjective "Christian," when used for collecting and analyzing amulets, has typically been constructed at the intersection of amuletic language and more official—or better yet, idealized—notions of Christian language.[21]

This approach to the label "Christian" has yielded some impressive results, including the collection of numerous amulets and handbooks with overlapping idioms.[22] What is more, several studies using this approach have deftly demonstrated how the advent of Christianity onto the Egyptian landscape, for instance, induced shifts in amuletic language.[23] But, as most scholars are quick to point out, the language on many objects does not correspond to such idealized conceptions of Christianity. Even a quick perusal of the extant amulet record would reveal a proliferation of amulets, which include both idealized "Christian" symbols *and* elements which fall outside of that idealized category (e.g., Abrasax, Adōnai, Iaō Sabaōth, and *charaktēres*).

Although examples are not in short supply, consider P.Oxy. 8.1152 (fig. 2), a late fifth- or early sixth-century Greek amulet, the text of which we have already seen (see chapter 1): "Hōr, Hōr, Phōr, Elōei, Adōnai, Iaō, Sabaōth, Michaēl, Jesus Christ. Help us and this house. Amen."[24] In this text, Michaēl the Archangel (e.g., Revelation 12:7–12) and Jesus Christ—whose onomastic pedigrees barely require an introduction—are listed together with sacred names of diverse cultural origins: "Hōr" and "Phōr" are most likely references to the Egyptian god Horus, with the Greek *phi* in the name "Phōr" reflecting the combination of the Coptic masculine definite article (*p*) and the Coptic letter *hori*;[25] "Elōei" likely derives from the Hebrew expression ʾēlî (meaning "my God");[26] "Adōnai" is also an originally Hebrew expression (meaning "my Lord"), and it has traditionally been used by Jews as a spoken substitute for the written name of God (YHWH)—also known as the Tetragrammaton; similarly, the name Iaō is probably a Greek rendering of the Tetragrammaton itself;[27] when Iaō is placed alongside Sabaōth (as here), it typically carries its original association with the Tetragrammaton and, together with Sabaōth, thus means, "Lord of Hosts"—a phrase that, within the Septuagint (or the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), is usually written with the combination *Kurios Sabaōth*.[28]

Scholars—operating according to idealized notions of "Christian" language—have tended to divide the elements that occur on such amulets into the categories "Christian," on the one hand, and "Jewish" and "pagan" (or some equivalent), on the other. For instance, de Bruyn and Dijkstra explicitly claim that P.Oxy. 8.1152 invokes both a "Christian" name (i.e., Jesus Christ) and "Graeco-Roman and Jewish powers."[29] In his more recent analysis of such objects, de Bruyn has preferred the more general term "customary" to describe these and other "non-Christian" elements.[30]

Yet the juxtaposition of religious elements of ostensibly diverse cultural origins on objects, such as P.Oxy. 8.1152, involves complex social dynamics that demand further methodological reflection. Indeed, as intuitive as it might be, the impulse to divide the language on a given object into multiple categories of religious or ethnic affiliation—based primarily on origins—obscures several possible orientations toward similarity and difference from the perspectives of late ancient practitioners.[31] Indeed, should we assume that an originally "Jewish" element (e.g., Iaō), for instance, retained its "Jewishness" or Otherness in the minds of practitioners regardless of the temporal and social contexts in which they operated? Similarly, a general model of syncretism—such as the one outlined by David Frankfurter (see Introduction)—might help us trace the broader processes by which religious elements of diverse cultural backgrounds were "indigenized" and "rendered comprehensible in particular cultural domains"; however, syncretism in this general sense likewise has limited explanatory power as an interpretive or hermeneutical tool. The application of a single rubric (syncretism) to the objects created during the vast temporal period we call late antiquity (e.g., approximately from the second to

the seventh or eighth centuries CE) runs the risk of conflating the diverse symbolic dynamics—and, consequently, conceptions of religious similarity and difference—at play at an early stage of the indigenization process with those operative after that indigenization process was well underway or even completed. Should syncretism apply *both* to situations during "late antiquity" in which Christian practitioners viewed elements like Iaō as Jewish or Other *and* to those (later) contexts in which they were seen as fully "Christian"? If so, syncretism possesses limited utility for understanding individual texts and objects. If not, which term should we use to classify the use of elements once they are (mostly) indigenized? The issues at the center of this discussion are not trivial; nor are they merely a matter of nomenclature. As we will see below, the ways in which select ritual objects conceived of religious similarity and difference have bearing not only on how we interpret the language of specific ritual objects but also on how we reconstruct perceptions of religious differentiation in late antique lived religion.

Interpreting Religious Language on Late Antique Magical Objects: Exoticism, Syncretism, and Assimilation

When analyzing the religious language on a given late antique magical object and assessing that language for questions of religious boundaries, we should first of all take into consideration the interpretive framework that Foskolou explicitly highlighted and that de Bruyn and Dijkstra seem to presuppose. According to this perspective, the apparent juxtaposition of different traditions in fact reflects the intentional usage of elements of otherness on account of their perceived foreignness or exoticism or for some other unknown reason—an approach to religious language that has at times also been associated with the category "syncretism" in scholarship on ancient magic.[32] It must be stressed at the outset, however, that this particular syncretistic model is fundamentally predicated on well-defined distinctions between religious or ethnic entities and involves the (conceptual) crossing of religious or ethnic boundaries. To state the matter a bit differently, syncretism in this sense does not stem from blurred boundaries but from clearly delineated notions of insiders and outsiders.[33] In fact, it is precisely that cultural distance that creates the attraction in the first place. But this attractiveness tends to be temporally limited, often confined to moments of initial contact between religious traditions—that is, when one can most clearly see the differences between "us" and "them." Unfortunately, syncretism in this exoticized sense is quite difficult to identify in the primary sources; therefore, *clear* evidence for it in late antique ritual practice is limited.

To be sure, some late antique ritual objects seem to reflect a situation in which the exoticism, foreignness, or Otherness of elements played an active role in the creation of ritual efficacy. For example, we can observe this social phenomenon on the magical artifacts that explicitly mark the "Hebrew" origin of a given term.[34] We might also cite in this regard a late antique Mesopotamian incantation bowl,

which was once part of the vast private collection of Shlomo Moussaieff (M163). As part of its lengthy incantation, which is written in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, we find the following adjuration:

> and by the name of Jesus [ʾyšw], who pressed the height and the depth by his cross, and by the name of his exalted father, and by the name of the holy spirits/his holy spirit [rwḥy] forever."[35]

The foreign or even exoticized character of this Trinitarian reference is quite likely, not only given the primary language used (Jewish Babylonian Aramaic) and its inclusion of certain Hebraisms that were uncommon outside Jewish contexts, but also in light of the text's unusual orthography. For instance, the name "Jesus" is spelled ʾyšw and not the expected yšw (i.e., without the initial aleph) or yšwʿ. As Dan Levene (the bowl's original editor) and Shaul Shaked have noted, this oddly spelled reference to Jesus appears to be a phonetic rendering of the Syriac Īšōʿ.[36] In addition, Levene postulated that, although the extant consonants rwḥy corre-spond to the plural form (i.e., rūḥê ["spirits"]), one might reconstruct the text of the bowl as rwḥy<h>, thus reflecting the Syriac rūḥēh (meaning "his spirit").[37] Levene, Shaked, and others have reasonably concluded that the text on this bowl most likely reflects a situation in which a Jewish practitioner wrote down as best as he could a Trinitarian formula, which he learned from a Christian Syriac context.[38] If this hypothesis is in fact correct, then it would imply that this Jewish practitioner intended to incorporate foreign—in this case "Christian"—elements into his ritual text.[39] Consequently, we might productively characterize the text of this bowl as an instance of syncretism (in the exoticized sense noted above).

But, again, clear instances of intentional appropriations of elements from other religious groups are exceedingly rare. It is telling that Gideon Bohak and Lynn LiDonnici were only able to find a few certain instances in which the practitio-ners behind the Greek Magical Papyri intentionally made reference to exotic "Jew-ish" elements.[40] And this difficulty persists to an even greater degree when trying to find clear instances of Jewish foreignness or exoticism—for instance, on the later Christian amulets (i.e., since such elements were even further removed from their original cultural contexts).[41] In the end, the usage of syncretism to interpret individual objects tends either to conflate diverse possible approaches to religious similarity and difference under a single rubric or to involve the automatic pre-sumption of intentional appropriation in cases where elements of diverse cultural or religious origins appear together. Both tendencies can interfere with our inter-pretations of some early Christian magical texts and, as I will argue below, with our reconstructions of the perspectives on religious boundaries in late antique lived religion.

Such problems require us to consider explanatory models and frameworks other than syncretism or exoticism for understanding conceptions of religious similarity and difference on many of the extant early Christian magical objects.

We might in theory take our cue from Rebillard's analysis of the literary record (see above) and thus postulate that the juxtaposition of elements that originated in diverse contexts reflects a lack of "Christianness" or the inapplicability of religious identities in such magical contexts. But can we in fact extrapolate from the mere appearance of shared religious elements of diverse cultural origins on a given object that these elements possessed no religious associations or that its practitioner did not appreciate religious boundaries or difference? As we already saw in chapter 1, early Christian practitioners often juxtaposed "customary" elements with biblical texts, liturgical formulations, creedal statements, and the like. Such evidence renders claims about a lack of "Christianness" or the absence of religious identities in magical contexts unconvincing.

Any discussion of the relationships between religious boundaries, religious identities, and elements of diverse cultural origins must take into consideration the dynamic and unstable nature of religious symbols. The meanings of words, images, and other cultural and religious elements can radically shift over time and across space. As Matthew Canepa has noted about the meaning of objects:

> Different objects could have different meanings according to how they are used by new owners and users and interpreted by the differently conditioned eyes of the new host society.[42]

We have already seen how even the name "Jesus" could carry significantly different meanings as it was deployed by practitioners from different regions—and, presumably, different religious groups (see also chapter 4). In an essay on the category "syncretism," Michael Pye underscored the complex and ever-shifting meanings at play when elements of diverse cultural origins are juxtaposed with one another in a given setting.[43] As part of his analysis, Pye characterizes syncretism as "a *temporary* ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts" that tends to find resolution, especially "after a long period or cultural history or repeatedly in the experience of individuals."[44] In this model, "assimilation" emerges as one form of resolution of syncretism that is characterized by "the outright dominance of one strand of meaning by another."[45] This approach to "assimilation"—as a subsequent resolution of an earlier syncretism—provides a useful conceptual framework for thinking about similarity and difference in early Christian magic, as it invites us to take seriously the possibility that certain symbols (e.g., Iaō Sabaōth), which perhaps had their origins in foreign religious or ethnic contexts, could lose those specific associations and undergo a complete theological transformation after they had entered into a dominantly Christian ritual setting. Consequently, this model reveals that the application of idealized notions of the rubrics "Christian" and "non-Christian" to the late antique magical evidence not only presupposes the very thing that it must prove, but, in so doing, also significantly limits the range of possible religious meanings that might be attached to certain symbols at a given time and place. Over time and under the

right conditions, a "non-Christian" element could become a fully "Christian" element. To interpret or label such an element as "non-Christian" (e.g., Jewish, pagan, or "customary") could fundamentally invert its meaning on an object.

The appreciation of such symbolic shifts not only provides a useful hermeneutical lens through which we might view anew the language on specific ritual objects, but it also carries implications for the question of religious boundaries in late antique lived contexts. Instead of assuming that Christian ritual objects, which deploy widely shared cultural/religious/magical elements, reflect an intentional appropriation of "Otherness" ([conceptual] "boundary crossing") or a lack of recognition of or appreciation for religious or ethnic boundaries on the part of their practitioners ("blurred boundaries"), the dynamic and ever-shifting nature of religious symbols prompts us to entertain an alternative explanation: such Christian practitioners recognized and appreciated differences between religious or ethnic groups but understood the culturally shared elements as fully part of their Christian identities—or, at the very least, not reflecting a different religious tradition. It is important to note that this latter scenario involves neither "boundary crossing" nor "boundary blurring" from the perspectives of the practitioners. The practitioners, in this view, simply operated according to different definitions of Christianity than ancient Christian writers promoted (and contemporary scholars have generally assumed), thus merely giving the false impression of crossed or blurred boundaries. Unfortunately, the vast majority of extant amulets and the like from late antiquity (e.g., P.Oxy. 8.1152 [see above]) do not offer sufficient evidence to allow us to trace their practitioners' conceptions of religious similarity and difference. That said, selected magical objects and literary sources suggest that many practitioners and their clients held to discrete religious boundaries, even if they conceived of those boundaries in ways that do not fully align with our inherited taxonomies.

RITUAL PRACTICE AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE: THE MATERIAL RECORD

Some ritual practitioners engaged in explicit forms of religious differentiation, while configuring their religious boundaries in ways that might seem counterintuitive to us. Probably the clearest manifestation of this phenomenon can be found in practitioners' uses of anti-Jewish invective, specifically the appropriation of the Christian belief that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. The idea that the "Jews" were categorically culpable for the death and persecution of Jesus and his early followers played a prominent role in early Christian imagination, figuring into biblical gospels (e.g., John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), (pseudepigraphical) letters (e.g., Athanasius, *Letter to Marcellinus* 15; the Abgar–Jesus correspondence [see discussion below]), dialogues (e.g., *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* 41.17), pseudepigraphical gospels (e.g., *Gospel of Peter* 2.5–4.12; 12.50, 12), homilies (e.g.,

Melito of Sardis, *On the Passover* 72, ll. 505–8; 73, ll. 520, 524; 96, ll. 711–16), and even early Christian hymns.[46] This vituperative trope of the murderous or persecuting Jews was part of a much broader negative presentation of the Jewish people, which even spilled into early intra-Christian disputes; the label "Jews" could thus at times be used as a metaphorical or taxonomic lens through which early Christians might view and characterize their internecine opponents and, therefore, distinguish themselves from various Christian Others, such as Arians or Chalcedonians.[47] In sum, the purpose of evoking the category "Jews"—whether socially, historically, or metaphorically framed—was by and large to define, maintain, or enforce Christian boundaries.[48]

We have already seen that scholars have tended to associate the negative portrayal of the Jews—and the boundary demarcation it implies—with "elite" Christian circles. Yet, as Ra'anan Boustan and I have already highlighted in another venue, anti-Jewish invective, especially the accusation of Jewish violence against Jesus, was used on amulets from late antique Egypt.[49] For instance, P.Heid. inv. G 1101 includes the following *historiola*:

> For our Lord was pursued by the Jews [*Ioudeon*], and he came to the Euphrates River and stuck in his staff, and the water stood still. Also you, discharge, stand still from head to toe-nails in the name of our Lord, who was crucified . . . (ll. 8–11)[50]

Perhaps drawing on the exodus story, the practitioner behind this fifth- or sixth-century healing amulet from Egyptian Babylon contextualizes his brief analogical narrative with a reference to the antagonistic Jews, who are said to have pursued Jesus to the Euphrates River.[51]

Practitioners also strengthened the anti-Jewish sentiments found in preexisting traditions—for example, Abgar's pseudepigraphical letter to Jesus. As part of this letter—in which Abgar, king of Edessa, requests healing from Jesus—Abgar references Jesus's problems with the Jews. The Eusebian version of this letter records Abgar's words as follows: "I heard that the Jews are mocking you, and wish to ill-treat you."[52] A late fifth-century CE healing amulet from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt (P.Oxy. 65.4469) intensifies this anti-Jewish invective: "for I have heard that the Jews murmur against you and persecute you, desiring to kill you."[53] If we return to Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, we can find an even stronger version of this tradition in the practitioner's version of Abgar's letter to Jesus:

> I heard that your nation rejected your lordship, being wicked and envious, and they persecute you, and they do not want to let you reign over them, being ignorant of this: that you are the king [of] those in the heavens and those upon the earth, who gives life to everyone. And what indeed is the people of Israel? The dead dog, because they have rejected the living God. For indeed, they are not worthy of your holy gift. (Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, 11v, l. 16–12r, l. 7)

In this passage, the Jews are not merely blamed for persecuting Jesus; they are even compared with a "dead dog" (*ouhor etmoout*). The language of dogs here resonates

with the sentiments of some late antique patristic writers, who might also associate Jews with dogs as part of a strategy of religious differentiation.[54] Much like Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, John Chrysostom's first *Discourse Against Judaizing Christians* includes the following words:

> Although those Jews had been called to the adoption of sons, they fell into kinship with dogs; we who were dogs received the strength through God's grace to put aside the irrational nature . . . they [i.e., Jews] became dogs, and we became children.[55]

In this passage, the negative—perhaps impure (see below)—connotations associated with dogs stands alongside the positive image of children to facilitate Chrysostom's construction of an ironic, temporal, and vituperative acrostic: those (Jews) who were supposed to be children became dogs; those (Christians) who were dogs became children. The practitioner behind Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, therefore, appropriated for his ritual purposes a dark, supercessionist motif that was part of late antique boundary demarcation in other Christian contexts.

But the anti-Jewish invective in the Abgar text worked in dialogue with an untitled composition from Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, which proclaims:

> Rejoice, all you creatures, for the Lord rose from the dead on the third day and he freed the entire race of Adam, and he despoiled the Jews, who were ashamed of what they had done. (Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, 10r, ll. 4–12)[56]

In this case, the Jews (*nioudai*) are specifically blamed for the murder of Jesus, and God has punished them for this act—presumably a reference to the subsequent suffering of the Jewish people (e.g., the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and their expulsion from Jerusalem and Egypt).[57] A similar emphasis on the act of betraying Jesus is found on Brit. Lib. Or. 5986, a late antique Coptic curse, in which we find references made to various biblical characters, mostly antagonists:

> Let me watch Victor Hatre and David his son, let me watch him, being inflicted by the spirit of the world. You must bring upon them all the sufferings of Job. O god, you must bring down Papnoute from his height. Abandon him to demons. Number them with Judas on the day of judgment. *You must liken them to those who have said, "His blood is upon us for three generations."* You must liken them to Cain, who murdered Abel [his] brother.

There are many interesting aspects to highlight about the particular coordination of characters in this curse (e.g., the references to Judas and Cain). For our present purposes, however, it is worth highlighting that the practitioner writes that God should liken Victor Hatre, Papnoute, and his son David "to those who have said, 'His blood is upon us for three generations.'" I think it is likely that the reference here is to the Jews, who, from the perspectives of the gospel writers, violently called for the death of Jesus instead of Barabbas. In Matt 27:20–27, we read:

> Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want

me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (NRSV)

In this passage, we find the presentation of what many scholars consider to be an unlikely situation; Pontius Pilate—a man known for violently suppressing uprisings—is persuaded to put an innocent man to death to appease a Jewish mob.[58] Notwithstanding the tradition's dubious historical grounding, the practitioner seemed to have believed in this biblical account; much like what we find in Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, the practitioner predicates ritual efficacy on early Christian notions of the Jewish culpability for the death of Christ—and, perhaps even deicide—which played an important role in early Christian boundary construction vis-à-vis the Jews.[59] The ritual logic seems to be as follows: may Victor Hatre, Papnoute, and his son David be subjected to the destruction that characterized God's punishment of the Jews for their role in the death of Jesus.

Despite their interests in distinguishing Christians from Jews, several of the practitioners who made these artifacts did not construct the boundaries in the same ways as patristic writers (or modern scholars). On Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, for instance, the practitioner utilizes divine names, such as Iaō, Adōnai, Elōei, Elemas, and Sabaōth (Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, 1v, ll. 9–10; 3r, 5–6; 8v, ll. 14–15; 9v, 19–20), which we might say have "Jewish" or "Hebrew" origins and, as we have seen in our discussion of P.Oxy. 8.1152, scholars have often labeled "Jewish." Other objects likewise use divine names, such as Iaō Sabaōth and Elōe (P.Heid. inv. G 1101, l. 6; P.Oxy. 65.4469, ll. 39–40). Although de Bruyn does not discuss Leiden, Ms. AMS 9 in this regard, he does note that the so-called "customary" elements in P.Oxy. 65.4469 were "deemed to be entirely appropriate as resources for healing incantations."[60] But, if we set aside the idealized limits between "Christian" and "non-Christian" (or "customary"), I think we can make an even stronger claim: given the interest of these practitioners in religious differentiation—specifically against Jews (however understood)—it seems likely that they considered these names simply to be Christian.[61] This identification is almost certain in the case of Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, where we read in the *Prayer of Saint Gregory* the following words: "I entreat you, O Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, god of gods, king of all kings, the imperishable, unpolluted, uncreated, untouchable, morning star, the hand that rules, Adōnai Elōei Elemas Sabaōth" (Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, 1v, ll. 1–10).[62]

The assimilation of such names into a Christian theological system can be found in many other late antique Egyptian amulets and spells. For instance, Brit. Lib. Or. 6796(4), 6796—an early seventh-century Coptic spell for exorcism that we have already seen (see chapter 1; see also chapter 4)—calls Jesus "the force

[*dynamis*] of Iaō Sabaōth." Again, this reconceptualization of originally Jewish or Hebrew terms in such Christian artifacts should not necessarily be surprising since such elements probably did not come directly from Jewish practitioners but likely came into Egyptian Christian ritual culture via Egyptian ritual culture more generally, within which these names circulated for generations (as is evident from the Greek Magical Papyri).[63] It is no wonder, therefore, that the symbolic limits of exclusionary versions of Christianity in lived religion extended well beyond idealized portraits of "Christian" language—whether ancient or scholarly.

In sum, the artifacts discussed above attest neither to a crossing of the boundaries between Christians and Jews nor to a blurring of boundaries between these ostensible groups; instead, they merely reflect that names, such as Iaō, Adōnai, and Sabaōth, had lost their "Jewishness" and were assimilated into the practitioners' exclusionary Christian ritual idiom. Accordingly, these artifacts present a different *version* of the boundaries between Christianity and Judaism than early patristic writers promoted and many contemporary scholars have assumed. It is important to highlight again that, while the boundaries of Christian language differed from those promoted in ecclesiastical literature (and assumed in contemporary scholarship), these religious boundaries were no less strictly defined. By all accounts, these practitioners conceptualized the "Jews" as completely distinct from their own religious tradition.[64]

RELIGIOUS DIFFERENTIATION AND RITUAL PURITY

We have just seen how late antique Christian practitioners were, at times, highly interested in religious differentiation and boundary demarcation—albeit in ways that did not completely align with what we find in many patristic and monastic texts. An important question, however, remains: *why* were they so interested in religious boundaries? How might boundary demarcation relate to ritual efficacy? In short, what was the "situational meaning" that resided at the intersection of magical ritual and religious differentiation?

The story of Sophronius mentioned at the beginning of this chapter might offer us a clue. Sophronius tells us that Petros was not able to receive healing until he abandoned his anti-Chalcedonian heresy. In other words, theological purity was inextricably linked to curative efficacy.

When we examine the texts, objects, and rituals we identify as magical, we find a similar approach to the relationship between various forms of purity and efficacy. As Miriam Blanco Cesteros and Eleni Chronopoulou have appropriately noted:

> To be pure, usually as the result of carrying out an established purification procedure, was seen as a precondition of contact with deities, who had to be approached with the greatest caution . . . the magical tradition demonstrates the same preoccupation with purity. The surviving testimonies of magical practice exhibit a special

concern with purity and purification, considering them as essential for the execution of the spells.[65]

In many magical artifacts, we see purity functioning as a prerequisite or preparation for the ritual itself. PGM I. 290–291 reads: "[You must refrain] from all unclean things and from all eating of fish and from all sexual intercourse, so that you may bring the god into the greatest desire toward you . . ."[66] In this text, we can presume that the practitioner assumed that ritual efficacy was impeded by certain foods and sexual intercourse—not to mention "from all unclean things [*apo pantōn mysarōn pragmatōn*]."

It is noteworthy that there is evidence in the Coptic record that ritual purity was especially important when divine names, such as Adōnai and Elōi, were used for apotropaic or curative purposes. For instance, we are told in the *Discourse on Saint Michael the Archangel* that cryptograms connected with Adōnai (ⲱⲝ[ⲋ?]) and Elōi (ⲱⲙⲉ), which form part of a "covenant" (*duathukē*),[67] can be used as an amulet (*phylaktērion*);[68] however, on account of their power, the text explicitly instructs the reader that they cannot be placed in a location with defilement (*sōōf*).[69]

But purity was not always conceived of in relation to material things (e.g., food), physical contact (e.g., sex), and depositional spaces. Scholars like Ivana Petrovic and Andrej Petrovic have argued that purity extended to the moral, intellectual, and mental spheres—what is sometimes called "purity of the mind."[70] For instance, we read in an inscription at the entrance of the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidaurus a phrase that might be translated as "purity is to think religiously correct thoughts."[71] Yair Furstenberg has likewise noted that Second Temple Judaism developed a similar pattern concerning the interfusion of ritual and moral forms of impurity. As he puts it, "the blurring between the two types of impurity is characteristic of a wide range of Second Temple sources and found a variety of ritual expressions during that period."[72]

Religious definition and the policing of religious boundaries was a central concern during late antiquity. Averil Cameron has convincingly argued that the late antique world witnessed "a competitive process of system construction, a persistent impulse towards definition."[73] Within this competitive and definitional context, purity became increasingly associated with religious affiliation and, perhaps more importantly, with religious differentiation, especially within ritual contexts. As Moshe Blidstein has noted, early Christian baptismal rites functioned as sites at which internal and external forms of purity, including the removal of demons and the maintenance of religious difference, played out.[74] Symbolic language associated with purity, such as washing, was mixed with notions of the removal of sin and the rejection of and protection from demonic intrusion.[75] According to Blidstein, these intersecting forms of purity took place within a social context, in which similarities between Christian baptism and Jewish ritual washing were apparent and thus in need of differentiation.[76] It is not surprising, therefore, that

early Christian writers, such as Justin Martyr and the author behind the *Epistle of Barnabas*, framed their views of baptism in contrast with Jewish purification rites.[77] This point usefully dovetails with Furstenburg's observation that one of the governing assumptions behind early Christian baptism—namely, that all those seeking to get baptized must undergo an exorcism (whether as a simple procedure or in a multistep process)—implies that those who were not part of the community of believers were demonically unclean.[78] In other words, communal and traditional boundaries marked, among other things, the line between the (spiritually) pure and the impure.

Given the importance of purity within a range of ritual and Christian contexts, more generally, it is worth noting that a type of purity, which we might usefully called "traditional" or "communal" purity, infiltrated early Christian magical rituals in a significant way. David Frankfurter has explained how such notions of purity—along with others—related to utterances directed toward divinities ("directive utterance") in magical objects:

> In the case of the directive utterance, which includes prayer and magical command, the speaker's mind-set, preparation, traditional status, and purity are of paramount importance since the force of that utterance explicitly comes from that "I" who says the words.[79]

Some objects draw particular attention to the client's Christian faith as a prerequisite for ritual efficacy. For example, a group of amulets from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt written to protect female clients from various fevers and chills use a shared formula that underscores the clients' faith.[80] Thus, P.Oxy. 6.924 reads: "You shall do these things [graciously] and completely, first on account of your will and also *on account of her faith* [*kata tēn pistin autēs*], because she is a handmaid of the living god . . ."[81] These words are followed by a series of divine names (the Trinity and, interestingly, Abrasax).[82] The inclusion of divine names seems to suggest that *pistis* in P.Oxy. 6.924 extended to all dimensions of the client's Christian faith (however that faith might have been configured), including the rejection of heresy and improper social relations.[83]

In sum, the Christian magical objects inherited views of purity that transcended physical, ritual, theological, and communal boundaries and that were directly relevant to ritual efficacy. As part of this broader Mediterranean context, religious differentiation and ritual purity could at times merge, especially within late antique Christian circles. The anti-Jewish invective that we find on protective and curative objects, such as P.Heid. inv. G 1101, P.Oxy. 65.4469, and Leiden, Ms. AMS 9, seems to fit within this larger Christian framework; ritual efficacy was apparently grounded in the broader Christian notion that God was more likely to heal or protect those with proper beliefs and who did not violate religious or communal boundaries (cf. the story of Sophronius of Jerusalem above). Moreover, it is worth noting that each of the magical artifacts highlighted in this discussion

employs at least one directive utterance, thus bridging this material with David Frankfurter's thoughts on traditional purity (see above). In short, the practitioners behind these artifacts seem to be operating from the assumption that God, on whom they are directly calling, would have been more likely to grant their clients' requests because they were pure Christians, not tainted by any association with the Jews.

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RITUAL PRACTICE AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE:
THE LITERARY RECORD

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The extant magical evidence suggests that practitioners often held to well-defined notions of religious insiders and outsiders. In fact, many objects seem to have predicated their notions of efficacy on this very idea. But what about their clients? Is there any clear evidence that the clients, who visited ritual experts, appreciated religious boundaries? To address this issue, it is useful to look at the literary evidence describing clients from various regions of the Mediterranean, which can supplement the material evidence from Egypt. Although the proscriptive comments about Christian ritual clients are diverse in their presentations and condemnations and occur in very rhetorical contexts, some do in fact offer insight into the question of religious differentiation—especially if we bear in mind the idea drawn from the material record that Christians could still hold to clear-cut religious boundaries even if they configured those boundaries in ways that disagreed with certain patristic and monastic writers.

We have already noted how the Christians whom Augustine envisioned in his homily on the Gospel of John were so committed to the symbols of Christianity (in that case, the name of Jesus) that practitioners could trick them into engaging in rituals by simply incorporating Jesus's name into their incantations (see introduction). Not surprisingly, therefore, ritual specialists associated with local Christian institutions likewise seem to have had a special appeal to believers. When Shenoute of Atripe inquired into the reasons why believers thought objects, such as snakes' heads, crocodiles' teeth, and fox claws, possessed healing powers, he was apparently told, "It was a great monk who gave them to me, saying 'Tie them on you [and] you will find relief.'"[84] The reader should also recall the canon falsely attributed to a single Council of Laodicea, which implies that Christian clergy often served as ritual functionaries (e.g., *magoi, epaoidoi, mathēmatikoi*, and *astrologoi*) for their local parishioners and, accordingly, provided them with applied ritual objects (*phylaktēria*).[85] Although self-identifying Christians certainly did not visit Christian practitioners exclusively (see below),[86] many Christians seemed to have attributed to Christian heroes and institutional representatives a certain charisma that was inextricably linked to religious identification.[87]

Perhaps more importantly, even in cases in which patristic writers complain about Christian clients crossing spatial and social boundaries to procure amulets

and other healing devices, these writers do not typically claim that such Christians failed to distinguish the Christian from the non-Christian more generally. By contrast, patristic writers at times even stress that such Christian clients framed their distinctions between the Christian and the Other in quite vitriolic terms. In his eighth *Discourse Against Judaizing Christians*, for instance, John Chrysostom sets up the following hypothetical conversation between a Chrysostom-approved believer and one who visits synagogues for various ritual practices, which we later learn included the purchasing of ritual healing objects:

> Say to him [i.e., the Judaizer], "Tell me, do you approve of the Jews for crucifying Christ, for blaspheming him as they still do, and for calling him a lawbreaker?" If the man is a Christian, he will never put up with this; even if he be a Judaizer times without number, he will never bring himself to say: "I do approve." Rather, he will stop up his ears and say to you: "Heaven forbid! Be quiet, man." Next, after you find that he agrees with you, take up the matter again and say: "How is it that you attend their services, how is it you participate in the festival, how is it you join them in observing the fast?" [88]

In this hypothetical conversation, Chrysostom presupposes that, despite their predilection for visiting synagogues and participating in other so-called "Jewish" rituals, the Judaizers would agree (1) that Jews are separate from Christians and (2) that they are culpable for the death of Jesus and for blaspheming against him.[89] The underlying problem for Chrysostom in this passage is, therefore, not a lack of religious differentiation, per se. Instead, he is upset that the Judaizers configured their Christian identities in accordance with a different interpretation of what *he* regarded as intrinsically Jewish rituals and spaces.[90]

In sum, much of the literary evidence—like much of the material evidence— suggests that "Christianness" often played a major role in amuletic rituals. In some instances, "Christianness" was even placed in opposition to categories of "non-Christianness" (e.g., the Jews). Taken together, the extant evidence not only supports the idea that Christian idioms and Christian ritual experts were particularly attractive to Christian users of amulets; it also implies that even the very Christians who seemingly crossed religious boundaries to procure amulets and other ritual objects often operated according to clearly defined and vituperative notions of religious insiders and outsiders.

RELIGIOUS DIFFERENTIATION ACROSS DIVERSE SOCIAL STRATA

It is useful at this point to step back and reflect on the broader implications of the foregoing analysis for the question of religious differentiation across diverse social strata in late antique Christianity. The material and literary evidence that I have discussed suggests that religious differentiation and even outright slander could be operative in contexts in which Christians shared symbols, rituals, and spaces

with other groups—even the very groups who bore the brunt of their invective. This point carries implications for how we ought to understand the relationship between cultural symbols and religious identities in late ancient lived practice. The anti-Jewish ritual objects—which simultaneously incorporate names like Iaō and Sabaōth—ought to prevent us from *automatically* concluding either that cultural symbols retain their original associations or that shared elements remain religiously "neutral." Concerning the latter conclusion, we would do well to keep in mind that *common* is *not generic*. Despite our knowledge that Iaō and Sabaōth might be described as originally "Jewish"—yet subsequently shared among various traditions—practitioners behind objects like Leiden, Ms. AMS 9 operated within a context in which these names were assimilated into their exclusionary Christian taxonomies. In short, such practitioners neither marked these names as exotically "Jewish" nor considered them to be religiously neutral; they were unequivocally Christian.

The literary evidence examined as part of this analysis suggests that many of those who used amulets also had a strong sense of Christian affiliation and held to discrete distinctions between the Christian and the non-Christian. This literary evidence likewise implies that clearly demarcated religious identities could even apply to those who crossed social and spatial boundaries—at least relative to the taxonomies expressed in patristic and monastic literature. Despite his attempt to slander the Judaizers (however real such a group might have been), Chrysostom insists that those who used amulets and participated in what Chrysostom considered to be "Jewish" festivals were keen to frame distinctions between Christians and Jews in highly inflammatory ways. To be sure, it is quite unlikely that such "Judaizers"—if, again, there was such a group in reality—would have viewed these festivals as specifically or exclusively "Christian" (as seems to have been the case with the Christian use of names, such as Iaō Sabaōth, on ritual objects). Nevertheless, Chrysostom makes it abundantly clear that participation in "Jewish" festivals in no way stifled anti-Jewish sentiments.

The literary evidence describing amuletic clients thus matches the material remains of practitioners in an important way: both sets of evidence point to late antique religious agents, who clearly distinguished religious insiders from outsiders, yet framed their boundaries quite differently from those found in patristic and monastic writings—and, for that matter, in many later scholarly analyses. As we saw in chapter 1, what seems to be blurred boundaries from our perspective—or from the perspectives of early Christian literary sources—should not necessarily be taken to imply a lack of interest in differentiation in our ancient material evidence.

Once we take into serious consideration, first, that the connotations and associations of religious symbols could dramatically shift over time and, second, that shared symbols, spaces, and rituals could simultaneously coexist with fierce invective and religious differentiation, then much of the evidence used to suggest blurred boundaries or even friendly relations in lived religion among groups such

as Jews and Christians (e.g., the municipal function of synagogues; the proximity of crosses to *menorot* in public spaces; and the use of ostensibly "Jewish" and "Christian" elements on amulets) is completely recast and only raises further questions. Most important, how, if at all, did spatial and symbolic overlap or sharing relate to participants' taxonomies of religious similarity and difference? Indeed, such data do not intrinsically point to a particular kind of social relationship or to a specific approach to differentiation (or lack thereof) in lived religion. One must prove on additional grounds that exoticism or blurred boundaries or friendly relations (or, for that matter, clearly distinct religious identities) were operative, taking into account the complex dynamics of symbolic reception over time and across region (see also chapter 3). Unfortunately, most sources offer insufficient evidence to demonstrate the operation of these social dynamics or the underlying intercultural realities in lived contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have provided evidence, which suggests that interest in religious differentiation extended well beyond the realms of patristic writings, heresiologies, and other so-called "elite" Christian contexts.[91] With the LAR rubric "situational meaning" in mind, we saw that the fundamental concerns of apotropaic and curative rituals could at times work in conjunction with notions of distinct religious boundaries. I am not arguing, however, that clearly demarcated religious boundaries—or even invective—always or often resulted in religious violence or conflict.[92] The layout of the late antique city, local customs, imperial pressures, economic needs, and a range of quotidian concerns required interreligious contact and discouraged Christians from engaging in open conflict with local non-Christians.[93]

Nevertheless, although most late antique Christians did not compose—or even read—anything like a heresiology or *adversus Ioudaios* text, the less rosy picture of interreligious discourse that emerges from the magical objects and related literary sources suggests that the exclusionary and abusive sentiments behind such genres would have had a much broader appeal than is commonly acknowledged in current scholarship. As was the case with notions of harmful ritual (see chapter 1), the magical evidence also demonstrates that, while purveyors and users of amulets and similar ritual technologies articulated religious boundaries that only partially overlapped with those disclosed in patristic and monastic texts (on theological, lexical, and communal registers), the vitriolic tone with which such ritual actors voiced their well-defined religious boundaries could match in intensity the invective found in other normative ecclesiastical contexts.