

**CONTEST AND COMMUNITY:
WONDER-WORKING IN CHRISTIAN POPULAR LITERATURE
FROM THE SECOND TO THE FIFTH CENTURIES CE**

**A THESIS
SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT

Contest and Community: Wonder-working in Christian popular literature from the second to the fifth centuries CE

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In this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that what I call the magic contest tradition, that is the episodes of competitive wonder-working that appear in a wide variety of apocryphal and non-canonical Christian texts, made an important contribution to the development of Christian thought during the second to the fifth centuries CE. This contribution was to articulate ‘the way’ to be a Christian in a world which was not isolated from the secular, and not insulated from the reality of the Roman empire. First, I demonstrate that a tradition of texts which feature magic contests exists within the broader scope of non-canonical Christian literature (looking at this literature across communities, regions and time periods). Second, I identify what the major features of the traditions are, e.g. what form the narratives take, what the form for a magic contest is, and what the principles used to build the magic contests are, and how these principles feature in the texts. The principles I identify are power, authority, ritual, and conversion, as well as their use as historical exempla. Third, I discuss what the texts did in the context of the time period, and for the communities that produced and read them: in other words, how did this tradition work? I show that they served multiple purposes: as tests of faith, religious truth and ways to proclaim such; as constructors and markers of group identity (and the perilous task of identifying the insiders and those who should be outsiders); as calls to unity within the overarching diversity of the times and places, and a unified front for the ‘battle’ against evil. I suggest that the texts present a model for how one could decide what the ‘true faith’ was and how one could practice it in the turbulent environment that early Christians faced both before and after Constantine.

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The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
 An evil soul producing holy witness
 Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
 A goodly apple rotten at the heart:
 O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!
 (*The Merchant of Venice*, I.iii)

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEST AND THE COMMUNITY

*virī Romani, vos nobis veri iudices estote. dico enim me vivo et vero deo credidisse, cuius experimenta polliceor vobis facere, quae iam mihi cognita sunt, sicut et inter vos multi testimonium perhibent. videtis enim, hunc se repraehensum esse mod<o> tacentem me eum exfugasse a Iudaea propter imposturas quas fecit...*¹

I propose seeing in ancient Christianity more than a ‘religion of the Book’ – a ‘religion of the paperback’. More than the traditional or established religions, a marginal religion like Christianity...knew how to best use the new techniques of dissemination of knowledge in order to propagate itself in an effective way.²

Ταῦτα μάγων ἔργα καὶ τοιάδε μυρία, ἃ τῇ τῶν ἐπῶν συμμετρία καὶ τῶν ἀξιοπίστως δρωμένων ἔργων φαντασία πείθει τοὺς ἄφρονας...

In the margins above the first page of the *Acts of Peter with Simon* in Lipsius’ 1891 edition, held in Oxford’s Corpus Christi College Library, some long-ago reader has scrawled a critical evaluation: ‘The Acts in this volume are not very interesting; they are...concerned with the mythical and unedifying contests between the...Apostles and Simon Magus’.⁴ The idea that the *Acts of Peter* and other similar texts do not have anything to offer the historian of religious thought, beyond amusing tales of talking animals and shattered statues, has been hard to avoid. Though there has been a recent increase in interest in ‘apocryphal’ texts, they tend to be considered piecemeal, as compilations that collect interesting stories surrounding the apostles, stories that, although they may be entertaining, or may have interest as examples of ‘Christian narrative fiction’, do not represent any significant views, ideas or doctrines.⁵ There is an

¹ AP 23: ‘Roman men, be true judges for us, for I say I have believed in the living and true God, of whom I promise to make proofs for you, which already are known to me, just as among you many bear witness. For you see that this man has denounced himself by being silent as to the fact that I expelled him from Judaea on account of his deceits’. I have chosen to translate in the footnotes only those texts which are ‘magic contest’ texts as described below.

² Stroumsa (2009), 43.

³ Hippolytus, *Ref.* IV.xlii.

⁴ Dated 19 Dec. 1917.

⁵ Bremmer (1998) on the *Acts of Peter*; Bovon (1999) on the apocryphal acts in general; Bremmer (1995) on the *Acts of John*; and Bremmer (2010) on the *Recognitions*. Jan

assumption that they were not taken seriously, or as true, when they were written and recorded, and that they do not need to be taken seriously now.

I will argue that, on the contrary, the *Acts of Peter* and other texts represent an aspect of Christian imagination and thought that has not been given sufficient attention. The texts we will examine contain a tradition in their narrative, a tradition which formed outside of the mainstream development of Christian discourse.⁶ The texts which contain or are influenced by this tradition contain a contest of wonder-working, between two opponents, one representing the ‘true faith’ (that is, Christianity⁷) and one representing a different faith or system usually based on the figure of Simon Magus.⁸ As a result of this contest, the ‘true faith’ is proclaimed by witnesses, and there are many new converts to the community which has just been successfully defended. Most of the texts in this tradition draw on the *Acts of Peter*, or on the same sources that it was itself drawn from, and some texts show influence from the idea of the contest without direct evidence of similar source material.⁹

WHAT ARE MAGIC CONTESTS? WHAT DO THEY DO?

In this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that what I call the magic contest tradition, that is the episodes of competitive wonder-working that appear in some apocryphal and non-canonical Christian texts, made an important contribution to the development of Christian thought during the second to the fifth centuries CE.¹⁰ This development was not in ‘high impact’ areas such as doctrine. I look at what the episodes *do* say, that is, their content

Bremmer has been a monumental force in convincing the broader scholarly world to take these texts seriously, but there is much more work to be done. The Bremmer volumes are heavily literary-critical and doctrinal in outlook.

⁶ Cameron (1991) 32ff: Christianity as ‘popular culture’ in writing.

⁷ On the concept of ‘orthodoxy’ and its applicability to magic contests, see below.

⁸ Acts 8:11ff. See Adamik (1998), 52-64.

⁹ See below on the relationship of the story of Moses and Pharaoh’s magicians to the contest tradition (also similar, though not so closely related to these texts, are various stories of Elijah).

¹⁰ In this I follow in the footsteps of those who have begun to take these texts, and others like them, much more seriously, such as A. Cameron, J. Bremmer, M. Edwards and E. Pagels.

and concerns, in their ‘paperback’ form. Here I find that these texts, and the magic contest episodes in them, answer questions which cannot even really be asked in other kinds of Christian literature – questions and anxieties about how ordinary, everyday Christians should live their lives in the Roman empire, how and why their ‘simple’ faith mattered, and was true and powerful. Where other, more sophisticated writings looked to the past or future for Christian explanations, seeing God or seeking Christ in prophecy, theology and the promise of salvation, the concerns of the magic contest are very immediate ones, about the meaning of faith and the construction of community. The magic contest episodes served to articulate a way to be a Christian in a world which was not isolated from the secular, not insulated from the reality of the Roman empire, and not obviously ruled by the law of God.

I present my argument thus. First, I demonstrate that a tradition of texts which feature magic contests episodes (magic contest texts, hereafter MCTs) exists within the broader scope of non-canonical Christian literature (looking at this literature across communities, regions and time periods¹¹) and in this way show that there is a ‘tradition’ in these texts as well as the relationship of these texts to the communities that produced them (to the degree that this can be determined). I do not, in general, follow this tradition chronologically, for I find that the themes and features are often more clearly elucidated by looking back in time, starting in the late fourth and fifth centuries, before examining the earlier potential source materials. The magic contest tradition may have been borne in an atmosphere of persecution, but it was widely spread and continually present to mind in the Christian empire, not to mention significantly re-used and re-invented.

Secondly, I identify what the major features of the MCT are, e.g. what form the narratives¹² take, what the formula for a magic contest is, and what the principles used to build the MCTs are, and how these principles feature in the texts. The principles I identify are power, authority, ritual, and conversion, as well as the use of the stories as

¹¹ The chronological approach, looking at the tradition itself for ‘development’, would be a valid method, but I feel that a thematic approach, with limited chronological discussion, illuminates the tradition more fully.

¹² That is, the specific magic contest episodes with their larger texts.

historical exempla. Thirdly, I discuss what the texts did in the context of the time period, and for the communities that produced and read them: in other words, how did the MCTs work? I show that they served multiple purposes: as tests of faith, religious truth and ways to proclaim such; as constructors and markers of group identity (and the perilous task of identifying the insiders and those who should be outsiders); as calls to unity within the overarching diversity of the times and places, and a unified front for the ‘battle’ against evil. Most importantly I suggest that the MCTs present, to borrow Stroumsa’s term, a ‘paperback’ version or model for how one could know what the ‘true faith’ was and how one could practice it in the hostile and turbulent environment that early Christians faced both before and after Constantine.

I begin my analysis by discussing the guiding principles behind the texts, examining closely what the texts say and how they say it. I suggest that the texts produced this ‘paperback’ version, presenting it in the simple format of a contest between good and evil, in a form which was familiar, easily repeated and itself repetitive, in a persuasive¹³ narrative form. These dramatic and exciting stories, in a familiar and popular form, place a premium on the roles of communities and those not ‘blessed’ with special authority or power, all of which combined in such a way that the MCTs became a significant part of the body of Christian stories, which were widely transmitted both orally and in writing.¹⁴

DEFINITIONS

A few definitions might be helpful to begin our examination of this tradition. Throughout this thesis, I use the term ‘wonder-working’ to refer to any reported ‘miraculous’ act, performed in public or at least before an audience. In wonder-working, something must occur which contravenes the natural order, or at least appears to. Thus, for our purposes, wonder-working is a value-neutral term which does not imply anything about the origins of the supernatural power being displayed. I use the term ‘magic contest’ also as a value-neutral description of the confrontation, through both exchanges

¹³ Much has been said about the rhetoric of early Christian texts (Lieu (2004) and Cameron (1991) most effectively; Brown (1995) is also important in adding an understanding on how the repetitiveness was an essential feature.

¹⁴ Thomas (1992), 131-3.

of words and competitive wonder-working, between a representative of the ‘true faith’ and his opponent which forms the climax of the text. With these basic features in place, I suggest that the contest is a vehicle through which the worldview of the writers and compilers of the texts is expressed as well as shaped.

If early Christianity was a ‘religion of the paperback’, as Stroumsa has suggested, then lively tales about dramatic magic contests between one of the apostles and a figure like Simon could certainly have helped to spread the word about Christianity, and about what Christians claimed they could do. Likewise, within groups of Christians, these exciting adventures would have been told and retold, as well as being written down as parts of other important stories. Though many have found them unsophisticated in language and literary features, I suggest that these contest narratives also helped to spread something more important within the Christian communities that shared them: a consistent and clear ideology of what it means to be and act in the world ‘as a Christian’. This ‘paperback’ version is one which is not necessarily represented in the ‘elite’ forms of Christian literature which were being produced during this same time period. A similar view to this is presented in some other non-elite, non-fictional or apocryphal, Christian texts; it is called the ‘Two Ways’; I will look to this theory for help in explaining the magic contest worldview, and show how our texts may have been influenced by similar ideas.¹⁵ In this model the major themes of Christian theology are mostly absent or, even if there, remain unmentioned or unargued. In place of theories of the incarnation, the institution of the Eucharist, debates about the person and nature of Jesus and the formation of the Trinity, the magic contest tradition’s worldview is centred on the life of the Christian and the Christian community. In this world, the battles of the intellect to understand the deeper implications of Christian doctrine are not important. What is important is how one lives (the ‘way’ one chooses), and that one believes in the true God, and thus the true faith.

¹⁵ On ‘the two ways’ see Rordorf (2000), 148-53; Pesthy (2010), 157-163, distinguishing the ‘two ways’ as about human choice, in some texts; Aldridge (1999); Kugler (2001), 77-80, in discussing the Hellenistic Jewish ‘Testament of Asher’ presents the simplest, and best version of how the ‘two ways’ functions in our texts: ‘two inclinations’ which are shaped by human choice.

I suggest that the ‘paperback’ version that the magic contest tradition presents is built on (or may be characterized by), more or less, four principles: 1) that God can be physically active in the world through his power, which is demonstrated under specific conditions and through specific people; 2) that the community of Christians takes its authority and elements of its social structure from the operation of God’s power, and that secular authority is also granted through this divinely-authorised structure; 3) that the power and authority of God in the world, and the place of individuals within this structure can be demonstrated by a variety of rituals, which are not the same as the rituals traditionally associated with Christian practice; and these rituals come together to form a vision of Christianity which looks primarily to externals, actions and speech acts as identifiers, rather than internal views or beliefs and 4) that the inevitable result of the preceding principles should be the conversion of more and more people to the ‘true faith’ and the expansion of the community by these means, and that the primary reason for the continuation of the world after the completion of the incarnation is so that this result can be achieved in this way. Furthermore, these principles are all subsumed under a worldview which sets a stark contrast between the supernatural powers: some are good, and are the ‘power of God’, but some are evil, and have their origin in the devil. The contest narrative constantly circles around this idea: the contest itself, but also every aspect of Christian life as it is depicted, is a confrontation with the devil and his descendents.

TRADITION AND COMMUNITY

The magic contest tradition comes down to us in texts, most of which lack an author or any means by which he could be identified. Furthermore, these texts do not come to us in their ‘original’ form, but in translations and redactions, as well as, probably, expansions, of earlier texts, now lost. The features they present are so consistent, that despite the difficulty in tracing it as a tradition chronologically, I argue that it is possible to speak of them as forming a tradition. Each individual text, as we shall see, may come out of a specific community, and sometimes we can make educated guesses about these communities, but for the purposes of this project, it is what all the communities wherein ‘magic contest’ texts were produced have in common that is interesting. It is precisely

because there are so few identifying details for most of these texts¹⁶ that we can see how the strands of thought and the specific ideas they present form a ‘tradition’ instead of simply being the product of a given time, place or teacher. The ‘community’ as it is represented in these texts is what might be called in other contexts ‘the universal church’. Each community is presented as discrete, the identity of and qualifications for joining the community are emphasised, and details of community living are not discussed as much as in ‘community rule’ texts from the first to third centuries such as the *Didache*. The commitment of these communities, as represented in our texts, is not to maintain separateness between groups, but to join them together in a search for the unity: a unity which is represented by the apostles.

SELF-DEFINITION AND THE OTHER: METHODS

A great deal of scholarship has been produced on Christian self-definition, of this search for unity in contrast to the Other, which was ongoing throughout the first Christian centuries.¹⁷ The work of J. Lieu, in particular her 2004 work *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman World*, has demonstrated how texts engage in this process.¹⁸ In this work, she presents an example of how we can, with appropriate caution, use texts to help us determine the way identity was constructed by Christians, including not only by words but deeds and discussions about actions. Lieu’s work focusses mostly on mainstream Christian literature, but her framework and guidelines work equally well with texts that lack as robust a pedigree. A. Cameron’s *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* provides another helpful approach, asking the question: how did Christians talk about what being a Christian meant, in the past, the present, and looking to their future? In formulating an answer, Cameron looks to non-mainstream or non-elite texts, including some of the apocryphal acts, and she demonstrates that the worldview of Christian discourse drew, in large part, from telling stories and constructing narratives beyond the Scriptures and beyond theology, history or political writing as such. In this thesis, I combine these two approaches and I also incorporate the narratives of Judaism and

¹⁶ Or details which have led to false or misleading identifications, as we shall see in the case of the *Recognitions*.

¹⁷ Achtemeier (1976), points up the ‘religious propaganda’ of the AAA miracle stories.

¹⁸ See her summary 269-97.

heresy which, I will argue, bear on these questions as well.¹⁹ Christians writing about how to be Christians could, and did, define what Christianity was not.²⁰

The magic contest texts exist, in part, because the distinctions between ‘true faith’ and ‘false faith’ or even ‘demonic faith’ could seem small. It was comparatively easy to draw a bright line between Christianity and the Roman state religion and cults, and our texts do not even concern themselves with this task. In fact, as we shall see, our texts (deliberately, I shall argue) muddle the identities of ‘Christian’ and ‘Roman’. It is the shared history of Judaism and Christianity, and the shared outward appearance of what comes to be called ‘heresy’, that the texts seek to distinguish themselves from; how they do this is one important way they differ from other kinds of texts, such as those in the heresiological or hagiographical tradition. The ‘magic contest’ project, then, needs to take a broad view of the methods used by the authors in constructing identity, and a similarly broad view of methods and approaches of analysing this process as it appears in the tradition. Thus, I analyse how the contest tradition presents a distinct worldview, using narrative to express the model of thought which lies underneath;²¹ I seek to determine how the tradition contributed to the development of a distinctly ‘Christian’ worldview, through its message to its Christian audience, addressing this community’s needs and also present some challenges to the notion that the magic contest episodes are ‘merely’ morality tales or entertainment for simple people, empty of any deeper meaning or value for our understanding of Christian thought, especially in the later empire.

¹⁹ Stroumsa (2009) on the simultaneous transformation of Judaism and Christianity; Lightstone (1984); Reed (2007) are all useful here.

²⁰ Edwards (2009), ch. 1.

²¹ Another way in which the MCTs are situated within the Greco-Roman milieu. Edwards (1992), 474: ‘the aim was to set forth arguments that would edify even Christians in a form that even pagans would admire’.

THE CONTEST WORLDVIEW AND CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Just as it is often easier to define Christian identity by what it is not, it is necessary to make clear what the ‘contest worldview’ is, and is not.²² As suggested above, it is a model which is relentlessly group-centred, and one which is concerned with definitions and distinctions, and with presenting a worldview based on some idealised principles, for what a Christian was, and what a Christian should be.²³ But two other ways in which these texts, and others like them, have been discussed in the past are in fact *not* what they are about, and thus it is important to mention this before we can determine what they are.

‘MAGIC V RELIGION’

The most important thing which the magic contest tradition is not about is any attempt to define ‘magic’ against ‘religion’, an attempt which has been made countless times by scholars of ancient, medieval and ‘exotic’ religions.²⁴ The actions in MCTs, which I am classifying as ‘wonder-working’, tell us precious little about what ‘magic’ might be in distinction to ‘religious practice’, for two reasons.²⁵ First, the texts again and again make the point that ‘sorcery’ and ‘miracle’ often look exactly the same.²⁶ It is all the actions, proclamations, and discussions which frame any given act of wonder-working which tell us how it should be viewed. Rather than providing us with a definition of magic, these

²² There is an enormous amount of potential ambiguity explored in our texts; we will only be able to focus on several of the larger points.

²³ A useful comparandum can be found in the view of Kahlos (2007). In her work, she explores the world of debate between Christian and pagans at the end of the fourth century; the nexus of sacrifice being especially important as ‘sacrifice became the distinguishing boundary in Christian self-understanding’ (119). She examines a different part of the ‘contest’ thought-world, one that was focussed on contrast between Christians and paganism, rather than Jews, heretics, or other internal enemies; similar strategies of wonder-working were sometimes employed (177-9). The worldview presented by her work is thus related, but quite distinct in tone and character, as well generally not being presented as narrative.

²⁴ e.g. Thomas (1971), 253-79; Douglas (1966); Mauss (1950).

²⁵ This is very much in contrast to a great deal of scholarship on Greek and Roman views of magic. The most interesting conception of this issue is found in Dickie (1999), 124-161, which provides much more nuance than is usually afforded to this question. For the Jewish side of the question, see the magisterial Bohak (2008).

²⁶ On this see Mauss (1950), ch. 3.

texts assume that everyone knows what magic is, and to a certain extent how it works.²⁷ There is no way to tell the difference between ‘sorcery’ and ‘miracle’ from the actions or words used, and the texts make that clear, in sometimes surprising ways. The other reason why these texts are not about magic versus religion is because they do not say much about ‘religion’, as it is generally understood, that is, about a complex system of beliefs and doctrines. They have a great deal to say about *faith*, as we shall see; faith is for our texts very narrowly defined: faith is to say ‘*credo deo vivo et vero*’²⁸ and little more. Though this may seem to be not much, this simple faith is shown to be more powerful than any system of doctrines or wealth of knowledge. It is important to point out that this view of religion (and faith) should not be confused with the view I present of ritual; rituals in the magic contest texts perform unusual functions and are almost always divorced from what we might be used to calling a religious context.

‘ORTHODOXY V HERESY’

The other very important point is that, in general, the magic contests are not about the fight of something called ‘orthodoxy’ against something called ‘heresy’.²⁹ It is very true that the idea of the threat of heresy, and the surrounding discourse, plays a large role in the development of the tradition, but not much is made of the doctrinal niceties about which the heresiologists fulminated until the end of the fourth century (or later). But, though as we shall see, second century and later heresiologists use the magic contest tradition, the tradition itself is very little concerned with defining ‘heresy’ by means of concrete statements.

Even more so, the tradition is not concerned with a definition of any idea of ‘orthodoxy’. They display an overriding concern with the ‘true faith’, yes, but the more formal

²⁷ There has been a great deal written on how the Romans viewed the workings of magic; the most useful are Dickie (1999); Graf (1997); Beard et al. (1998), 154-6; Gager (1972) and especially Brown (1972), 124, on the competition between articulate and inarticulate power. The apocryphal and later texts do present some oddities within these broad frameworks; where this is the case, I shall mention and discuss why this might be.

²⁸ AP *passim*.

²⁹ Bauer (1934) is still a good survey; Edwards (2009) shows how it was the heretical sects which inspired the creation of orthodoxy.

processes of ‘self-definition’ which created the idea and affirmed the content of ‘orthodoxy’, such as the council-and-creed proceedings of the fourth century and later, have very little impact on the presentation of the ‘true faith’ in the texts. The true faith is primarily predicated upon which God is worshipped, and in particular which God one is openly declaring allegiance to. Any further requirements of ‘true faith’ are of secondary importance. What became ‘orthodoxy’, in fact, looked upon this defence of the true faith through the medium of a wonder-working contest with a good deal of suspicion. Despite this suspicion, however, the tradition endured.

If the contest worldview is not about these things, what is it about? The contest worldview, as it develops over time and space, maintains consistently the four principles above. It is in its emphasis on the community, rather than on the individual and his struggles, that the MCTs are present something different from, or additional to, the hagiographical and biographical traditions, which were developing and becoming influential at this time. Though individuals play important roles as representatives for their community, they do not inhabit these roles as examples for conduct of individuals (just as no one is exhorted to be like Moses), but as a source of authority for their community. Heresy as such, which is so much focussed on individualistic beliefs and interpretations, is thus very much in the background.³⁰

Having discussed what the magic contest tradition is not, in order to examine what it is, the first step is to look at the episodes in texts which comprise the tradition, and discuss their history, their general features, and the specific contests that they present.

THE TRADITION: THE TEXTS

The magic contest tradition, I argue, is a tradition that appears in a number of texts and textual fragments. I am calling it a tradition with the understanding that this does not mean that each text relied upon the previous texts themselves, but rather on common source material and, most likely, oral transmission of aspects of the narrative. Some of

³⁰ On biography as a genre see Swain (2001). Our Christian representatives, though they are apostolic, are not ‘saintly’ as the hagiographical tradition would come to define it (cf. *Vit. Mart.*). The *Acta* are not life stories, but stories about communities.

this common source material would have been widely available (the Old Testament scriptures, Acts of the Apostles) and some of it less so (stories about Simon's exploits in Judaea, stories about apostolic visits to Rome, documents such as the 'Great Announcement' which purported to be written by Simon's followers³¹).

The debate about source texts for the apocryphal acts, and the *Recognitions*, continues.³² Oral transmission of such stories is only one possibility, though it is an attractive one, particularly in view of the formulaic, episodic nature of the texts.³³ As we shall see, the magic contests in our texts tend to form one or more complex episodes, with their own internal structure, which form smaller 'mini-narratives' as a part of larger narratives. These mini-narratives that form the material we are examining themselves follow a distinctive pattern which builds from the collection of these smaller narratives.³⁴ In particular, the magic contest's climactic moment (following on from a series of initial episodes) will almost always involve either an actual resurrection-wonder (of a human or animal), or a healing-wonder which is very close to a resurrection-wonder in style and form. The exact content of this resurrection-wonder, however, changes across time and place; the contest itself may change in form and content slightly, but there is always a 'competitive' aspect – one belief system is competing against another, through the means of a person endowed with the power of God and a certain kind of authority.³⁵

³¹ Hip. *Ref.* VI.9-18.

³² See below on the *Rec.*'s 'Grundschrift'. For questions of AAA sources, see *inter alia* Bovon (1999), ch. 1.

³³ Most of the recent scholarship on the AAA has been narratological in nature; for the most part, I do not feel that I can add to their work, so whilst I have been happy to make use of it, I do not take a particularly narratological view of the texts in this thesis.

³⁴ Two examples of analysis of this kind of structure in the AAA are Misset-van der Weg (1998) on the resurrections in the AP and Bolyki (1995) on the 'ring composition' of the 'miracle stories' in the Acts of John. Whilst none of these kind of analysis *demand* an interpretation of oral transmission underlying it, such a development would parallel other known oral compositions.

³⁵ In general in discussing MCTs, I avoid discussion of textual problems; most questions on these issues either have been settled or never will be. In the thesis I approach the texts as they are, with the knowledge that we are very likely seeing the hand of multiple authors and editors.

The earliest ‘magic contest’, the proto-contest, as it were, is in Exodus 8:1-19: the well-known story, retold every year at Passover, of the confrontation between Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh. Moses, reluctantly, stands before Pharaoh as a representative of his people. He has been given by God the ability to manipulate the physical world (by means of his word or his staff), and Pharaoh confronts Moses with court magicians, whose power is assumed to be on a similar level; indeed they are able to answer Moses’ plague of frogs with their own plague of frogs. Thus it is Moses, and not Jesus, where competitive wonder-working has its foundation.³⁶ The relationship between Moses and God/YHWH and the relationship between the apostles and Jesus is another foundation upon which the magic contest tradition builds.

Book of Jamnes and Jambres

The story of the magic contest tradition really begins with the story of Jamnes and Jambres. The confrontation between Moses and these two magicians (here brothers) is a model for the narrative of the magic contest tradition, and the afterlife of the story of Moses and the magicians, whilst coexisting with the stories of Peter and later variations, has clearly contributed some of the force and emphasis of our tradition, as we shall see. The actual ‘Book’ of Jamnes and Jambres is of uncertain date, though certainly before the mid-third century. However, names and legends about the magicians themselves existed before even the writings in the New Testament (e.g. 2 Timothy 3:8). The traditions about Jamnes and Jambres continued to proliferate alongside the magic contest traditions about Christians, and the parallels between them are striking. The stories tell of the opposition of the magicians to Moses on the order of Pharaoh, and, in some fragments, culminate in a failed attempt at a resurrection. Moses’ victory is total and brings from the magicians an acknowledgement of the true god.

³⁶The association between Moses and competitive wonder-working is amply demonstrated elsewhere in the apocryphal literature, e.g. *Acts of Pilate* 5.1, which has Nicodemus defend Jesus by citing Moses’ competition with the magicians as a proving ground. See below on the Pharaoh’s magicians.

I believe it makes sense to view the source for the Book of Jamnes and Jambres as a pre-Christian work,³⁷ though likely one which was used by early Christians, and perhaps was even known to pagans.³⁸ There is no doubt that Moses' exploits as a magician were one of the most widespread 'facts' about Judaism known to pagans in this period.³⁹ The fragmentary nature, of the text of the 'Book' which still exists, means it is impossible to draw many conclusions about the larger scope of the narrative, but even within the small fragments that remain, we see the basic elements of the magic contest tradition. The likely pre-Christian origins do not detract from its usefulness as a precedent, and may provide us some clues for why the tradition developed in the way that it did. Whilst non-Christians tended to identify Moses and Jesus as two of the same type, the 'magician' or, for those with a negative view, the 'sorcerer', for Christians who wrote and enjoyed magic contest texts, Moses and Peter were the more apt typology or comparison. They were representatives of their people, through whom the power of God and divine authority could be active in the physical world, and through whose performance of certain rituals their people could be exalted and increased.

Acts of the Apostles

The character of Simon Magus is introduced in chapter 8 of Acts of the Apostles.⁴⁰ Here he is not a heretic, but rather a corrupt believer, who wishes to buy the gifts of the holy spirit from Peter.⁴¹ His brief cameo inspired a great deal of extra-biblical speculation, much of which underlies the magic contest tradition specifically, and the more general development of the idea of heresy as originating from Simon and becoming almost a

³⁷ See Pietersma (1994), chh. 1 and 3.

³⁸ Linked to Moses by Pliny in *NH* 30.2.11; mentioned by Platonist Numenius, frag. 10 (on which see Edwards (1990)). On Jewish 'embellishments' of Biblical texts see Gruen (1998), 110ff.

³⁹ e.g. Celsus' 'true doctrine'. See Gager (1972) for a full survey.

⁴⁰ Heintz (1997) goes into the Acts 8 story in the context of the Hellenistic 'accusation of magic.' Edwards (1997) reconstructs as far as possible a Samaritan context for the story of Simon and his religious doings.

⁴¹ Haenchen (1973) investigates the claims about Simon, in particular any 'γῶσις', within the NT.

parallel ‘succession’.⁴² The biographical details established for Simon in Acts do underlie the later traditions, with embellishments of various kinds depending on which aspect of the Simonian personality is to be emphasised.

Acts of Peter

The *Acts of Peter* tell of Peter’s arrival in Rome, his battles with Simon Magus for the souls of the Roman community, and of Peter’s ultimate martyrdom before Nero. The AP contains the largest number of incidents of competitive wonder-working of any of our texts. In summary, Peter arrives in Rome, having been instructed by a vision of Jesus that the Roman Christian community is in danger from a magician called Simon, who is seducing people away from the faith by means of his trickery. Peter’s fears are confirmed on arrival, whereupon he engages in his own propaganda campaign of wonder-working, culminating in a ‘face-off’ between Peter and Simon in the forum, ending with Peter’s victory. Simon is spared from death after his defeat, but following the contest, there is an ‘epilogue’ of sorts wherein Simon makes one more attempt at competition, ending in Peter’s prayer and Simon’s spectacular fall, which leads to his death.

All of the episodes taken together form a larger ‘contest’, but the pivotal, explicitly-designated *contentio* is the central element of the narrative. In this contest, which is performed in the Roman forum before a Roman official, Peter and Simon face off verbally and then compete in the resurrection of a slave boy (and two further resurrections). All in all, there are ten episodes that I will discuss at some point in this thesis. These are divided between ‘preparatory’ wonders (fish), direct challenge wonders (dog, infant), ‘semi-private’ wonder-working in rituals (purification, vision, statue), the resurrection contest (three resurrections), and the final prayer-wonder.

There is not a full scholarly consensus on the date of the Acts of Peter. Part of the problem is that there is still debate over the relative dependence of the *Acts of Paul*, *Acts*

⁴² Ferreiro (2005), 81-110 on polemic about ‘secret heretical succession’; for the succession in all our texts, see ch. 2.

of *Peter* and *Acts of John*.⁴³ There is a *terminus ante quem* of the very early third century, in any case, whatever dependencies may be. As I have no intention of making an argument based on strict transmission between the Acts of Peter, Paul and John (though on balance I think AJ might be a bit later), I do not wish to offer a strong view on this point. On the matter of location of initial writing, and the date and location of translation, I am more fully persuaded that the original text must not have been Roman in origin, likely Asia Minor, and that the Latin translation is datable to the second half of the fourth century.⁴⁴ For the purposes of this project, the fourth century date is certainly interesting and useful, but not essential. These questions will, I suspect, always remain an open one.

The *Acts of Peter* have been more extensively examined than some of the other apocryphal acts. Occasionally they have even been mined for their use in our attempts to understand the early Christian community, or, alternatively and more usefully, their use in helping to create a picture of the idea of a Christian ‘novel’ or semi-fictional narrative. The scholarship tends to see the ‘fictional’ or ‘narrative’ aspect of the AP as more helpful or illuminating than the content itself. I will argue that taken as a whole, within the tradition or thread of thought, the AP is a useful text both for its narrative structure and for its content or themes. The AP is the starting place for my investigation of the magic-contest thread in early Christian writing, and indeed is the major source, or representative of the major source, for this tradition. In particular, the character of Simon Magus and his essential role in the narrative is first elaborated in the AP. The scholarship has tended to focus on the question of the ‘divine man’ and the status of Simon with regards to the ancient understanding of ‘wonder-working’. As I will be developing a different model of wonder-working, which I believe is better-supported by the magic-contest tradition, I will not be so concerned with the divine-man concept, except in Chapter 1, where I will contrast the ‘pagan’ divine men with all the wonder-workers found in the magic-contest

⁴³ Lalleman (1998) defends the priority of AJ. See Bremmer (1998) ch. 1 and earlier Schneemelcher (1963) for the alternate view. Rordorf (1998) finds little evidence for the primacy of the *Acts of Paul*.

⁴⁴ Bremmer (1998), ch. 1. Poupon (1998) suggests that the Latin text may be North African in origin. But see now Baldwin (2005) which is a detailed survey of these, and other, technical aspects of the formation of the text which we call the ‘Acts of Peter’.

tradition, and demonstrate some distinctions which present a different set of beliefs about the role and purpose and origin of the wonder-worker in a popular Christian milieu. There has been much valuable work done on the AP in these areas, most notably the volume edited by Bremmer (1998). The narrative structure and textual history have, in particular, been very clearly analysed and persuasively reconstructed. There are still areas where there is need for further discussion, some of which I take up in this thesis.

The textual tradition of the AP is complicated and ultimate answers about composition, dating, and redaction are elusive or unsatisfying. There is a great deal of evidence⁴⁵ that the Latin translation which comprises the majority of our text and all of the magic-contest portion is a redaction, fourth century at the earliest, of earlier Greek material. The fourth-century context does not lessen the value of the text for us, as it is still possible to draw conclusions about the magic-contest scene without being sure how early they were originally composed; I will be cautious, however, about making claims of outright precedence or dependency for other texts in the tradition. The crux of the matter is that the AP represents one telling of the story of the contest of Peter and Simon, that shares a great deal with other, lost sources which serve as the source for some of the Christian texts which refer to the tradition, but differ, sometimes significantly, but mostly incidentally, in detail. It does seem to be the case, however, that a fourth-century context for the Latin editing of the AP fits in with wide interest across the empire in magic contest stories at that time, and later, a re-interpretation of an *exemplum* from early Christian history for a new, more pro-Christian context, but one that was by no means without conflicts of its own.⁴⁶

Davies in his *Revolt of the Widows* made a brave attempt to position the apocryphal acts as ‘women’s writing’, explaining their larger concern with female characters as understandable in this context. Though his argument is not ultimately convincing, his highlighting of the unique points of view that we find in the AAA, and giving them credit

⁴⁵ Summarised in Thomas (1999).

⁴⁶ See Ch. 4.

for having a coherent organising principle, was a valuable contribution.⁴⁷ Brock⁴⁸ has also provided helpful views of the role of socioeconomic factors in the AP; the diverse utopian vision of the communities presented are again taken seriously as an attempt to present a (somewhat) coherent view of how the Christian communities should be organised, or even how Christians should live.

The ‘accusation of magic’ has been a central focus of much of the scholarship which relates to the AP.⁴⁹ The fear of magic was widespread, especially amongst the imperial elite; theologians, too, were anxious that miracles be distinguished from magic, and that believers seeking divine aid not undertake ‘demonic’ rites in lieu of prayer to God.⁵⁰ I will examine the extent to which this fear is a driving force behind the magic contest tradition, and determine that, in fact, this ‘accusation’ lays less behind the construction of the magic contests than do several other concerns. However, the figure of Simon Magus as sorcerer is indeed developed from pre-Christian and Roman ideas about what a ‘sorcerer’ is and how he behaves,⁵¹ and much of the biographical detail about Simon must come from this tradition.⁵²

The *Acts of Peter*, as such, may not represent the actual source of all the material in the magic contest tradition, but it contains all of the features of the tradition in the form in which we have it. All of our pre-sixth century sources (and some later ones) if not derived from the AP itself, must derive from common sources, though whether these

⁴⁷ Davies (1980), 50-69.

⁴⁸ See Brock (1999), 145ff.

⁴⁹ Poupon (1981); Cameron (1991), 96. The broader question of why societies accuse individuals of ‘magic’ has been of great concern in anthropology. Strathern (1994) is a modern view.

⁵⁰ Aug. *de Doc. Chr.* 2.20, e.g. speaks against use of amulets. See Brown (1967), 413-8.

⁵¹ For example, his Eastern origins, his association with women, his obsession with money. Other discussions of the ‘mode’ of sorcerer include Apul. *de magia* and, from a positive perspective, Philostratus’ biography of Apollonius of Tyana.

⁵² Pietersma (1994) is unnecessarily cautious, in my view, in linking Simon to the Pharaonic magicians.

sources are written or oral is simply not possible to determine.⁵³ Thus, the AP remains the most important touchstone for examining all aspects of the magic contest tradition, even if we must remain cautious about some conclusions.⁵⁴

Clementine Recognitions

The (pseudo-)Clementine *Recognitions* is the longest, most elaborate text which is a part of the magic contest tradition. A novel⁵⁵ in structure, it contains long passages of philosophical exposition and discussion. There is relatively little face-to-face wonder-working in the text, but there is much discussion thereof, and performance of wonder-working in the text is almost entirely in what might be called a competitive atmosphere.

⁵³Schneemelcher's essay (1963) has had enduring importance in the studies of the AP, even if some conclusions have now been put aside (esp. 271-5). Bremmer's 1998 edited volume *The Acts of Peter* collects a number of very useful chapters, dealing with smaller questions than date or authorship, in ways more fruitful than those long debates. For our purposes, those most relevant articles are ch. 4 (Luttikhuisen) on the narrative role of Simon Magus, 5 on the tradition of Simon Magus, 6 (Thomas) on the resurrection tradition in the fifth century and 8 (Misset-van der Weg) a general investigation of the AP's wonder-working. Taken together, this work establishes a firm ground on which investigation into these and other elements can build. Another collection, Ferreiro (2005) present one man's enthusiastic views on a huge variety of topics related to the character of Simon Magus, many of which are not relevant to our period or project; some which are include chh. 1, 3 and 4. For an incredibly thorough investigation on the history of AP scholarship, and on the Latinity of the AP text, see Baldwin (2005), esp. 174-92.

⁵⁴ The AJ is important to mention as well. stands in a hard-to-determine relationship to the magic contest tradition as a whole. For the purpose of this thesis, due to its somewhat problematic relationship, I have not focussed on the AJ and its history. The AJ has been examined both for their narrative structure and their unusual 'Gnostic' orientation in two useful studies by Lalleman (2005) and Bremmer (1995). The work of Boylki on the structure of the miraculous episodes is particularly helpful when contrasting and comparing the AP to the AJ. Though the AJ is not a part of the 'Petrine' magic contest tradition, it is an important comparandum and an example of how the idea of the magic contest was a useful trope, that could be used in a number of different narrative structures to make similar points. The AJ magic contests will be referenced to demonstrate the wide reach of the magic contest, but are tangential to the larger story of the way the contests developed into a tradition and a way of thinking, due to their isolation in Johannine 'sectarianism' (on which see Lalleman (1998b)). The idea of a contest of wonder-working was not, of course, confined to the Petrine tradition, and its use in the AJ is also particularly important in discussions about the way our texts present 'community' and its relationship to the contest.

⁵⁵ Edwards (1992); Czachesz (2010) is more reluctant to proclaim it a 'novel' but does examine novelistic elements.

Peter and Simon are once again opposed in a struggle for followers, though here, in contrast to the AP, they are not battling over apostatising Christians but a new, and very unusual community of potential followers. There are several episodes of wonder-working which will be discussed (Peter's healing of Clement's mother and open-air mass healings, Simon's boy of air, and the final 'dropping of masks' or 'recognition' scenes which form the climax of the narrative). For my purposes, I will focus more on the unique aspect of the *Recognitions*' approach to the question of wonder-working; within the narrative, the text also includes a 'philosophical' commentary on how we should 'read' a wonder-working contest, and how such a contest should be used by individuals as a step on their acceptance and understanding of the truth of Christianity (as it was seen by the text's author).

The date of the *Recognitions* is an even more complex question than that of our other texts. The question of the composition and origin of the *Recognitions* has been a very active one; certain facts must be assumed, but seem very likely to be true at this point. The dating controversy is summarised by Bremmer (2010), ch. 1.⁵⁶ The most important points are these: the *Recognitions* is, like the *Homilies*, based on an earlier, probably third century, 'Grundschrift'. However, the *Recognitions* and *Homilies* are different texts and should not be treated as two sides of the same coin; the *Recognitions* in particular may represent a text closer to the original, preserving the narrative structure. We have a *terminus ante quem* for the translation by Rufinus (411); the original Greek is probably from around 360.⁵⁷ The translation and transmission of the magic contest texts in an atmosphere of combat is no coincidence; though I will argue that seeing in the tradition a strong, focussed anti-heresy movement is a mistake. The environment of the fourth century was a large part of the question 'why': why was the magic contest a popular way to present Christianity, and also the 'how': how could a magic contest seem to be a

⁵⁶ 6-9.

⁵⁷ Bremmer (2010), 9. The best summary of all research on the Rec.'s date, authorship and origin remains Jones (1982).

productive method for presenting a defence of a Christian worldview?⁵⁸ The use of the magic contest in the *Recognitions* will be particularly useful for assessing these questions. The *Recognitions* is also our latest contest narrative within the period (that is, the second to the fifth centuries CE) to stick very closely to the original ‘cast of characters’, though it presents a narrative with many surprising changes.⁵⁹

The *Recognitions*, of all the texts in the magic contest tradition, has inspired the longest and largest scholarly debate. Whilst the initial debate centred heavily on whether Simon Magus in the *Recognitions* was a mask for the apostle Paul (the Tübingen school⁶⁰), there was also a major investigation of the text and its compilation itself, existing in a very unusual dual state, the *Homilies* and *Recognitions* presenting much of the same material in quite different ways. Even amongst those who rejected the Tübingen hypothesis, much ink was spilt over the question of the presentation of ‘Gnostic’ or dualist beliefs by Simon Magus, and his much expanded character was given prominence and attention for the first time. Conclusions have been varied, and a scholarly consensus has only recently emerged, thanks once again to Bremmer, whose recent volume contributes a great deal to these and other aspects of the *Recognitions*.⁶¹

⁵⁸ One answer: “people engaged in contentious arguments...want to tell stories that work’. White (2000), 30, is writing about very different circumstances, but her investigation into vampire stories shows surprising similarities to our texts.

⁵⁹ The date of Epiphanius is in the 370s or so (Young (2010), 194-202). He is a late fourth century link, looking forward to the view that will predominate over the fifth century, presenting a much-modified version of the magic contest which is the first to make it a weapon in the Jewish-Christian disputes of the time. His story contains much of the same tropes as the Petrine magic contests, repurposing them; if he is acting as a reporter, it is evidence that ‘magic-contest attitudes had reached far outside their original audience. If he is a fabricator of the story, it shows he had some familiarity with aspects of the tradition, though his discussion of Simon Magus himself shows more influence from the Irenaean ‘morality’ tradition. On Epiphanius’ narrative see Boyarin (2004).

⁶⁰ Founded by F.C. Baur in the mid-19th c. After A. Harnack came to prominence, the idiosyncratic interpretations of the school quickly fell out of favour.

⁶¹ Of particular interest for our purposes are Bremmer’s ch. 1, ch.2 which addresses the eternal question of genre, ch. 9-10 which deal with the *Homilies* but discuss an issue relevant for interpreting the *Recognitions* (in 9, the function of the ‘two ways’ and in 10 the conversion of families) and ch. 15 which addresses how the ‘speeches’ in the *Recognitions* are meant to communicate.

The text was considered valuable itself for the project of discerning the (highly mythologised) ‘Parting of the Ways,’⁶² works seeking to find the time and means of the final split between Judaism and Christianity. A text so apparently ‘Jewish-Christian’ as the *Recognitions* thus provided a fascinating and challenging case for such a task. Much good work has been done more recently to complicate the picture further, in particular Reed (2007) which addresses the Jewish-Christian milieu but also takes the work on its own terms. From the same volume, A. Cameron sounds a useful warning which will be important in our studies of all this material – making sure that the opponents, and who they are meant to represent, are identified as clearly as possible.⁶³ For the purpose of examining the tradition, the *Recognitions* is also important in the corrective it can play to the assumptions made about ‘Petrine’ texts in general, and their heavy focus on the city, and the see, of Rome. I will argue that though sense of place is an important feature in magic contest texts, the issue of the ‘papacy’ and its relationship to some ideas supposedly present in the texts has been quite overstated.

Where the AP can be read as a strong defence of emerging orthodoxy (mixed with certain idiosyncratic views), the *Recognitions* can be presented as well as a defence of a heterodox sect. That the arguments used, and indeed methods of discernment used, are the same in each case shows how important and reliable the magic contest was seen to be, as an aid to those seeking to determine (for their own community or others) the ‘true faith’. The association of the magic contest with alternate points of view never seems, for the writers and compilers, to have been a reason to avoid it. As Edwards suggests, the *Recognitions* can also be read as a Christianised version of a romance novel, a ‘defence’ itself against pagan literature, using Roman models for Christian ends, an aspect of argument which is present and powerful in all versions of the magic contest narrative.⁶⁴

⁶² Dunn (1989) assembles a collection of articles which place this ‘parting’ much earlier than is now fashionable.

⁶³ This thesis will take the view that, broadly speaking, ‘hidden’ opponents should only be considered secondarily, after the contest with the actual, stated opponent has been addressed. It is unreasonable to criticise these texts as limited in their sophistication and then to suggest that they are ‘covering up’ their true targets.

⁶⁴ This *adaptation* of different models is something we shall return to repeatedly. It is the most compelling explanation for the success of the MCT.

Acts of Silvester

The *Acts of Silvester* (as I will call it; it is often cited as *Actus beati Silvestri*) is the latest text that we will examine in this thesis, but it does not mark the end of the tradition as such.⁶⁵ It shows the tradition moving in a new direction, changing or adapting the underlying contest narrative to fit in with the very different circumstances of its time. After the first ‘book’ which tells an unusual tale of Constantine’s conversion to Christianity,⁶⁶ Constantine set up a debate between Silvester, bishop of Rome and a group of Jewish leaders. After a long ‘scriptural debate’, the last Jewish leader, Zambri,⁶⁷ engages in a magic contest with Silvester which results, as ever, in the defeat of the magician and the conversion of the mixed crowd of observers, the pagan judges, and the emperor’s mother, Helena, who is presented as a ‘Judaizer’.⁶⁸

The date of the *Acts of Silvester* has a fairly narrow window. The references to Constantine’s life and times are all significantly altered from the truth, which would certainly not have been possible at any time close to the time of the events (claimed to be 315). Furthermore, there are several elements which point to a post-Chalcedonian date in

⁶⁵ Canella (2005) examines the AS closely as itself a part of a tradition. She does indeed identify some of the major aspects of what I call a ‘magic contest tradition’ but she is primarily pursuing the textual history of the AS and thus does not look into them too deeply. However, she importantly recognises the AP as the, or a, model for the AS, and in particular the model for the resurrection-wonder (193-7).

⁶⁶ It is this part of the text which has attracted the most scholarly interest; Levison (1924) and Fuhrmann (1959) were looking ahead to the role the Donation of Constantine would have in the middle ages; Pohlkamp has in general followed their lead. Levison’s judgement (201) that “den gerade in der Heiligenliteratur Roms stark vertreten ‘geschichtlichen Romanen’ bei denen ein winziger Bruchteil geschichtlicher Tatsachen in einer Fülle freier Erfindung aufgegangen ist” has not prevented anyone from trying to find the ‘historical truth’ in there. On the saga of Constantine and the various dubious documents that accrued to him, see Edwards (2003), xl-xlvi, on Silvester’s role. Pohlkamp (1992), 181-3 on the circulation of the Silvester legend in Rome. Fowden (1994a), 277 on the attribution to ‘Eusebius of Rome’.

⁶⁷ The similarity of the names ‘Zambri’ and ‘Jambres’ cannot be a coincidence. Pietersma (1994), 34 cautiously suggests a connection.

⁶⁸ Canella (2005), 41-69 on the many sources for the AS.

the Latin text (i.e., terminus post quem of 451).⁶⁹ The text is very familiar with the creeds of the fourth and early fifth century, the Arian controversy, and shows some passing familiarity with Jewish customs, rituals and beliefs, as well as the kinds of ‘debates’ which were held, or composed, to disprove Jewish claims.⁷⁰ The evidence of familiarity with Judaism is not too helpful for dating, in part because the terms used for the Jewish figures do not match up with other available data from any possible date, so the likelihood is that they were made up by the writer. The terminus ante quem is provided by the Syriac sermon of Jacob of Serugh (d. 500), and by the inclusion of the book in the early sixth-century ‘Gelasian Decree’ on non-canonical books.⁷¹

These *Acts* have long been relatively obscure except with regard to their connection to the fraud of the ‘Donation of Constantine’ but they are a fascinating Late Antique document.⁷² Indeed, to date there has been almost no mention, much less serious investigation, of the text in English. They are primarily a text aiming to bolster Constantine’s claims to orthodoxy – presenting an imaginative take on his baptism, as Fowden has demonstrated. The *Acts of Silvester* themselves have been examined by W. Pohlkamp in several articles; he is concerned with broader implications beyond the baptism story, in particular with regard to Constantine’s relationship with paganism, but he too downplays the role of the contest and in particular its connection to the AP and the

⁶⁹ Pohlkamp (1988), 149n160, Fowden (1994a), Yarnold (1993) all agree on, roughly, the third quarter of the fifth century. More recently, Canella (2005), 142-3 and 267. She presents the ‘Constantinian legend’ through the lens of his religious policy, focussing closely on the debate with the Jews, which she follows Pohlkamp in placing its origin much earlier than the text we now have, and in the midst of controversy with Arians and others. The formulations of both the debate questions and the creedal formulations indicate that the council of Chalcedon, at least, had occurred by the time of writing; the Christological position, such as it is, is Chalcedonian. (Pohlkamp (1984) summarises, 464-5. The pro-Roman manipulation of Constantinian facts suggests anxiety on the part of the writer to boost Rome’s importance, which might argue for a later date within the window, perhaps one after the events of 476.

⁷⁰ *Ep. Sev.* relates a historical incident of Jewish mass conversion (following a dispute, theological and political) in 418. See Lieu (1992), 88: the Jews were a real threat due to the continuing prosperity and flourishing of their communities.

⁷¹ Kiraz (2010) places Jacob in his sixth-century Syrian milieu.

⁷² Fried (2007) traces the history of this forgery in great detail, using the AS as some of his evidence.

magic contest.⁷³ T. Canella's doctoral thesis helpfully provides an edition of a portion of the text,⁷⁴ and she recognises the magic contest portion as possibly depending on the AP,⁷⁵ but she does not investigate this, or the contest in general, very closely. The only relatively widely available text is Mombritius', printed 1910. To say it is error-ridden would be generous; where Pohlkamp and Canella have made corrections I follow them, and I also freely correct spelling and punctuation errors without noting them except if relevant.

An aspect of the AS which had caused some controversy is to what extent the AS Jews are meant to represent real (fourth or fifth century) Jews. I argue, in line with scholars such as M. Simon and W. Horbury, that it is a mistake to believe that references to Jews in the AS and other late *adversus Judaeos* literature are 'really' about Arians.⁷⁶ Though there is evidence for association between Arians and Jews,⁷⁷ in particular as an insult in the attacks against Arians, the Jews of the magic contest texts and similarly associated texts may not resemble 'real' Jews but are attacked on grounds which only make sense for Jews.⁷⁸ As I will show, the AS takes the magic contest tradition, which has never been far from issue of Jewish-Christian debate, to the final logical extreme, even in the late Latin version imagining the total conversion of the Jews.

This unusual text, part saint's life, part Constantinian apologia and orthodox revisionist history, and part disputation, will, I argue, demonstrate the enduring power of both the magic contest tradition itself, and the ideological underpinnings of this tradition. This is a power so strong that it survives even the destruction of the Roman empire within which this worldview developed and functioned. The AS is also an essential text to examine to

⁷³ Pohlkamp (1984), 380ff. is interesting in its emphasis on the medical side of the story>

⁷⁴ Canella (2005), 204-18. In her judgement, the contest episode is very similar across all versions of the text; her redaction of Version 'A', and the fragments of Pohlkamp's which have been published, do agree in large part with Mombritius' text.

⁷⁵ Canella (2005), 193-7.

⁷⁶ But they can be about Arians *in addition to* Jews, without losing any meaning.

⁷⁷ As D. Gwynn has noted in the Festal letters of Athanasius (lecture in Oxford, 2008). Cameron (2007).

⁷⁸ See Boyarin (2004) on how the 'Jewishness' is constructed in Severus' letter and Epiphanius' 'Joseph'.

understand how the magic contest's ideology and narrative could survive and even flourish with all of its original elements altered to fit a new reality. The AS functions like the earlier texts on several levels: concern with power and authority, but also by this late date with doctrinal correctness and the issue of what we might call identity politics.

OTHER TEXTS IN THE TRADITION

There are other texts which are clearly in the magic contest tradition but which fall outside the scope of this thesis, due to their date of composition. I mention them briefly here, and if they are particularly relevant I will mention them elsewhere. The first is *the Acts of Peter and Paul*, from the sixth century, which presents a different view on the Simon and Peter story, ending in Simon's leap from a tower and fall to his death.⁷⁹ For whatever reason, the tradition that this AA represents had less of an impact on the literature but did have an impact in art.⁸⁰ The presence of Paul in the story changes things dramatically; no doubt this is why texts concerned with promoting Peter and Peter's rights in Rome would have looked the other way at it later.

Another text which shows evidence of being a part of the magic contest tradition comes from the Eastern hagiographical tradition: the life of Cyprian and Justina. Like Epiphanius' anecdote, the life of Cyprian has the main character, a magician, redeemed in the process of a magic contest with Justina, a virtuous virgin. The devil himself puts in an appearance; Cyprian's character seems to be modelled on the 'morally corrupt magician' character which underlies all the traditions about Simon Magus, though Simon himself is not mentioned in the text. The text may have been of fourth century origin, but we have a seventh-century Syriac version, so links are hard to substantiate. The 'magic' in this case is, again, not one-sided, but it is heavily weighted towards the evil side; the most dramatic magic gesture that Justina (and later Cyprian) makes is the sign of the cross, but as in our other later texts, in magic contest circumstances, the sign of the cross acts not just as a protective measure but an act of wonder-working itself.

⁷⁹ Note the several other sixth-century Acts with relevance; also the 'debate texts' from the fifth-and-sixth c. Also *Acta Archelai* (Vermes (2001)).

⁸⁰ Cartlidge (2001) collects a number of different artistic representations from the AP and the sixth-century acts derived from it.

The ninth-century chronicle of Michael the Syrian features a version of a contest between Simon and Peter, but it is filtered through the tradition as it had changed in the years since Constantine's accession. Most far afield of all, the Jewish text, the *Toledoth Yeshu*, which is undateable except that it must be before the tenth century, features a magic contest where Jesus is the 'magician' character, with Judas the virtuous opponent. There is certainly influence from the Peter-Simon contest (much of the *Toledoth Yeshu* centres on a magic contest in the air) but the primary sources must be Jewish writings and legends about Jesus such as those recorded by the second-century skeptic Celsus.⁸¹ What is made evident from the continuing tradition is that, even after the Roman context which inspired the tradition had long past, the narratives themselves remained fascinating and satisfying to new generations seeing answers, explanations, or entertainment with their interpretation of their faith.

WHO READ THE TEXTS

The question of the audience for the apocryphal acts, or any of the texts in the magic contest tradition, is ultimately an impossible one. We simply have no data on who was reading them (other than Priscillian⁸²). They must have been read and copied, repeated and retold.⁸³ That the audience for these texts must have been a Christian one is not widely disputed today.⁸⁴ All of our main magic contest texts were translated into Latin, Greek and Syriac, which is itself is some indication of readership/audience. The literary question of 'genre' and who would read these narratives is a similar question to that which is asked about the Greek novels, to which these texts and others like them are frequently compared. The level of literacy of the translations and originals is not high, a

⁸¹ On the date of *TY*, John Gager suggested to me it could have been a fourth century text, part of the explosion of interest in such texts at the time; this would be a very early date. Others (Dan (2007)) date it to the seventh or ninth centuries. For Rabbinical attitudes to Jesus, see e.g. Smith (1975); Origen's *CC*.

⁸² And he, of course, is a relative latecomer. Chadwick (1976), 56f on Priscillian and his community's reading of the AAA, points out that the reading of these texts was always an additional charge, never the instigation for one.

⁸³ See Poupon (1997) and (1998); Bovon (1999).

⁸⁴ MacMullen (1984); Cameron (1991) does see some outward-looking aspects, but more importantly sees the communities themselves as highly diverse (36-7).

large part of the reason for the long period of neglect the texts suffered. But in the recent explosion of interest not much progress has been made on the question who these texts might be for. The ‘popular’ designation given by me and by others such as Cameron in discussing the texts seems the only option; the texts were ‘popular’ in the sense that they appear to have appealed to a wide range of people, and ‘popular’ in the sense that they are not ‘literary’ and contain elements of the fantastic.⁸⁵

It is reasonable to suppose a few things about the audience for these texts: that they would not be among the most culturally sophisticated levels of society, but would have some minimal level of education; the audience for the ‘Greek novels’ can be suggested as a parallel.⁸⁶ The wide geographic spread in which the texts or versions of them are found, and (in the later texts) doctrine mentioned shows us that they cannot all come from one community. It is perhaps also a reasonable speculation that the audience for the texts set in Rome is not primarily Roman, given the difficulties with Roman topography⁸⁷ which a Roman reader or listener would have noticed. On the other hand, the Roman setting would have appealed to those who already felt that Rome was a special, or even central, place for Christians and for the world; and so Roman citizenship might be suggested as a probability. Ultimately, the audience for these texts would have to accept their Christian literature as a kind of entertainment, so even though there are some elements praising the ascetic lifestyle, it seems that these texts were meant to reach ‘ordinary’ Christians and were certainly not intended for consecrated Christians, ascetics or the ordained, and would have had little interest for scholars.⁸⁸ It can be assumed that the representation of such a wide social range, and the inclusion of women, in the texts suggests that the authors hoped to reach all sorts of Christians, with a message that had more than just

⁸⁵ Cameron (1991), 96 on the unresolved problems of the audience and composition of the Acts; also 32; 36-7.

⁸⁶ Edwards (1992) (see above).

⁸⁷ See Schneemelcher (1963) and Curran (2000) on the changing topography of fourth-century Rome.

⁸⁸ This is not to say that scholars or priests would not read them, in every case. Origen, for one, shows some knowledge of them.

entertainment value for them, and would speak directly to them about their place in the world and the importance of their own beliefs and actions.⁸⁹

That a Christian narrative should include elements of the supernatural is no surprise; that the narrative is filled with talking animals, visions, and miraculous recognitions might be.⁹⁰ The popularity of the texts does not mean that they do not contain any meaningful, or consistent, ideology, theology, or philosophy.⁹¹ The popular audience for these texts is expected to be familiar with some quite sophisticated concepts and certainly with the details of Christian ritual and belief, as we shall see. That we cannot determine many specific details about our audience should not be a barrier to exploring how the authors and writers of the magic contest tradition tried to reach, and teach, them.

OUTLINE OF MY APPROACH

The magic contest texts present, then, a tradition in which there is a recurring and predictable pattern to the narrative. This pattern of a contest between two opposed sides, each representing their faith, culminates in one or more acts of competitive wonder-working and a number of conversions to the 'true faith'. Within this pattern, there are several principles which can be discerned and explicated, which help to explain why this patterned narrative was so popular and so useful for its authors and audiences. The four principles, identified earlier, which constitute the content of the ideology of the magic contest tradition are not in themselves unique to the tradition. In fact, other Christian texts touch on all of them; but I shall argue that the tradition's emphasis and the way the principles fit together form a thread in the history of Christian thought, and a distinct view for how a Christian should live, for what should matter to them. The ideas in the MCT had a surprising, persistent force, in the three centuries during which Christianity came into the world; they were compelling, repeatable, and spoke to the real concerns of their readers. I will examine, in the course of my thesis, the principles or aspects on

⁸⁹ Cameron (1991), 109.

⁹⁰ See Matthews (1999) on the 'articulate animal' motif across the AAA.

⁹¹ White (2000), 30: '[people] construct and repeat stories that carry the values and meanings that most forcibly get their point across...stories that circulate to explain what happened'.

which the worldview present in the MCT was founded and analyse what the texts do with these principles and how they do it, as well as how the episodes of the contests themselves were used by other writers, pursuing different goals.

POWER

In chapter one, I take up the principle of the ‘power of God’ and how it operates, according to our texts. Divine power and its operation and expression are a major focus of scholarship on late antiquity. Foremost among concepts of such power is the idea of the ‘Holy Man’ or *theios aner*.⁹² In Peter Brown’s influential presentation, these Holy Men proliferated in Late Antiquity and represented a distinctive change in how the divine was considered to operate in the world, as compared to the Roman view. The itinerant holy man was by no means a purely Christian phenomenon, as the lengthy narrative of Apollonius of Tyana demonstrates.⁹³ There has been much debate over how to classify various individuals as ‘divine men’ – the most relevant question, of course, being how, or whether, Jesus is in a different category than Apollonius or even Simon Magus. Origen, in the third century, produced a massive work against the pagan claim that indeed, Jesus was merely a *theios aner*, and nothing further.⁹⁴ But this question – how important is having power at one’s disposal, as opposed to having power as a fundamental aspect of oneself – does not otherwise receive a lot of attention in antiquity. I will look at how the concept of divine power presented in our texts came to be, and how it is used in the texts as the groundwork for their ‘paperback’ worldview.

I argue that the operation of the power of God in the magic contest traditions is different from the Holy Man concept. The magic contests place emphasis not on the individual’s ability to work wonders, but on how and why they have this ability (and they are also shown to be able to transmit or transfer this ability to those who could never be ‘Holy Men’). Instead, the tradition is presenting a view of how God uses his power to make wonder-working possible, and also how it is constructed in the texts so that all acts of wonder-working point to how this divine power works and is accessed by humans, as well as how other kinds of power are forced to confront it. This chapter also addresses the nature of the magic powers demonstrated by the ‘opponent’ figures, and how an

⁹² The bibliography is substantial. See Brown (1983); Gallagher (1983); Kee (1983), 37 for a less enthusiastic appraisal of the concept; Herczeg (1998), among many others.

⁹³ In *Vit. Ap.* VII, Apollonius too winds up pleading his case before the emperor.

⁹⁴ See Gallagher (1983), for a thorough investigation of this topic in Origen’s *CC*.

explanation is provided in the texts for their abilities which does not conflict with their larger emphasis on the divine power present in the apostles.⁹⁵

AUTHORITY

In chapter two, I examine how the magic contest tradition presents a view of authority, both secular and spiritual. The authority which abides in the apostles, and the way the magic contest texts structure their communities in relation to this authority and that of the secular rulers of Roman society, interact in these texts in interesting ways. There has been scholarly attention to the early development of ecclesiastical structure,⁹⁶ and Lieu, W. Meeks and others have demonstrated how the early Christian communities developed rules, structures and practices based on ideas of authority and hierarchy (or the lack thereof). I will examine how these structures are reflected in the magic contest texts, focussing on two under-explored aspects: first, how the lineage of the divine power discussed in chapter one is duplicated by the lineage of Simon Magus and shown to contain within it similar structures of authority. Secondly, I will investigate how the magic contest tradition works within the structures of the secular authority, and in fact repeatedly subverts them, without at any point suggesting their illegitimacy.⁹⁷ I suggest the structure of the secular authority provides the framework within which the magic contest itself is presented, structured, and given its own kind of legitimacy within the narrative.

I will also address the question how the magic contest tradition negotiates the line between the secular and the spiritual through its use of the Roman authorities and a Roman context. The magic contest tradition is situated carefully within the broader context of the Roman world; though there is no message of ‘accommodation’ with the

⁹⁵ And, as Kee (1983), 286, notes, ‘the divine control of history is evident not merely in the events surrounding the access to power or removal from power of the world leaders, but also in the course of the lives of simple, even despised, persons’.

⁹⁶ See Brown (1995) on the link between authority and the idea of the sacred is also useful. See also Drake (2000) for the problems of conflicting authority in the fourth century. Campenhausen (1969), 140f links the authority in the early church to the gift of the spirit; it is interesting that that is not emphasised more in the MCTs.

⁹⁷ Cameron (1991), ch. 4.

world offered, the way the narratives function with this context shows that we must take seriously the view that for many Christians, submission to Roman authority was a positive good, and one that would not have been discouraged in all cases. In fact, we shall see that it is via the structures established by secular authority that most of the magic contest episodes we will examine have the force and effect that they do. When the time came for the subversion of authority (through a magic contest), we will see that the idea of religious authority, though less well defined, was an equally important concept, even for writers who do not appear to have lived in the Christian religious hierarchies that were developing throughout the period.

RITUAL

I argue that one of the most illuminating ways of analysing the magic contest tradition is from the perspective of ritual theory, as a form of ‘reported ritual’. In chapter three, I investigate how our texts present a surprising and complex view of ritual, which is central to understanding why and how the magic contests are structured the way they are, and possibly why they had enduring popularity. I determine that there are two different ways in which ritual is present in the texts. The first, more familiar, is the description of individual ‘episodes’ of ritual which bear some resemblance (often very close resemblance) to ‘real world’ rituals that would have been familiar to the readers, either from personal experience or from reports of such rituals. This includes episodes such as recited prayers or proclamations of faith, baptism, and even exorcism. The second category of ritual is more complex. The ‘magic contest’ itself is made into a ritual, built on familiar components of ritual from both religious and secular spheres. This magic contest ritual is invented for the purpose of dramatic narrative, but also to fill a gap in the ritual system they were already working with, and to convey difficult to interpret information in an easy to understand way.⁹⁸ The ‘magic contest’, structured competitive wonder-working, presents an ordered, almost ‘liturgical’ solution to a serious problem in the Christian system: how to tell a real believer from a false one, how to determine who is good and who is evil, when they do something which on the surface looks similar. This

⁹⁸ One of the basic purposes of all ritual. Rappaport (1979), 187: ‘ritual...aids in the transduction of information between unlike systems’.

kind of ‘invented ritual’ is different from other examples of ‘invented tradition’⁹⁹ in that the invention remains, within the story itself, rather than being introduced into society, but in other respects it is quite similar. The newly-fabricated ritual of the contest serves the same, or a very similar, role to the first category of ‘familiar’ rituals, for the audience of the magic contest. For the readers and audience of MCTs, and indeed for the performers of the ritual in the text itself,¹⁰⁰ the magic contest becomes a ritual through its shared traits with other, ‘real’ rituals, and through its structure and function within the text (and, eventually, across texts as well. It is a ritual that is new, but it is also one that is familiar, constructed from other sacred and secular rituals.

In order to investigate the role of ritual in these texts, I draw on the theoretical approach of the anthropologist Roy Rappaport. Rappaport’s theory of ritual as ‘the basic social act’¹⁰¹ is a broader definition of ritual than most, but still a useful approach for my purposes. He defines ritual as ‘the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances’¹⁰² which ‘follow...orders established or *taken to have been established*, by others’.¹⁰³ I will demonstrate how ritual, so defined, is an essential element of the magic contest texts from beginning to end – for our texts consist of episodes which are primarily in this very mode. Several other elements of Rappaport’s theory are also helpful in looking at what is unique about magic contest rituals: how the contests themselves become rituals for the external audience,¹⁰⁴ and sometimes even within the narrative, and how the use of rituals helps the magic contest text present their specific worldview. Here, I suggest that Rappaport’s concept of adaptation, based on ‘Romer’s Rule’,¹⁰⁵ is particularly well-suited to understanding the ‘invention’ of the magic contest. For a system to be ‘adaptive’ and thus successful, it needs to ‘preserve the

⁹⁹ See Hobsbawn (1983), 1. Lieu (2004), 70 comments on ‘invention’ as ‘discovery’ – for us, it is discovery in the sense that we see familiar rituals combined into something new.

¹⁰⁰ By analogy, or expansion to other rituals of which they seem more self-aware.

¹⁰¹ Rappaport (1979), 197.

¹⁰² Rappaport (1999), 24.

¹⁰³ Rappaport (1999), 32.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid: ““new” rituals are likely to be largely composed of elements taken from older rituals’.

¹⁰⁵ ‘What does this change maintain unchanged?’ Romer himself was a palaeontologist looking at evolutionary structures.

true value of certain propositions about [itself] in the face of perturbations tending to falsify'¹⁰⁶ it. I will argue that this is the central value of all the rituals in the magic contest texts, rituals which are overwhelmingly focussed on the need to maintain certain, very basic, principles, in the face of a wide variety of attacks, both small (an individual losing faith) and large (the threat of imperial persecution).

Rappaport's view of ritual as not primarily symbolic of, but as in some sense an active presentation of the participant's worldview (or, as he calls it, a 'cognised model') is also important. The 'cognised model' 'is a description of a people's knowledge of their environment and of their beliefs concerning it'.¹⁰⁷ In the interpretation of these models, 'the important question...is not the extent to which they are identical to what the analyst takes to be reality but the extent to which they direct behavior in ways that are appropriate to the...well-being of the actors'.¹⁰⁸ This model or worldview is what underlies the rituals performed. Combined with 'the understanding... that when [people] perform a ritual they are not simply "saying something" about themselves but "doing something" about the state of their world',¹⁰⁹ rituals such as we see in the MCTs, which dramatise this 'doing', can still be seen as ritual discourse, and discourse which helps us understand why magic contests *are* rituals, and how they function as such. The 'cognised model' of the magic contest is that of a world where rituals are not simply communicative,¹¹⁰ but physically effective.¹¹¹ It is within this model that all the rituals are reported, and presented as 'evidence' for the worldview's truth, and thus for the truth of the factors underlying the worldview.

¹⁰⁶ Rappaport (1999), 9.

¹⁰⁷ Rappaport (1979), 96.

¹⁰⁸ Rappaport (1979), 98.

¹⁰⁹ Rappaport (1999), 47.

¹¹⁰ Rappaport does have useful things to say about the communicative aspects of ritual, and ritual language, which will also be necessary to employ, especially given that all the rituals we discuss are reported. Graf (1997), 213-4 points out that there are both horizontal and vertical axes of communication active in works of magic.

¹¹¹ Rappaport, as an anthropologist, is of course writing about the observance of rituals in the 'real world', rather than reported ritual, but even so he is sympathetic to the view of physical effectiveness as a central feature of cognised models.

Using Rappaport's theories, then, I examine the specific rituals present in the texts, and demonstrate how the highly ritualised episodes of wonder-working combine, in texts suffused with ritual, to present both a worldview and the case for why the worldview is true – in particular why it is important for communities, and why it would have been popular amongst its audience, perhaps more popular than other texts which use rituals in a different way. The magic contest model closely resembles the 'Two Ways' model, though it is not necessarily theologically dualistic. In MCTs there is a way of 'being good', which includes believing certain things (which are made more explicit in some texts than others), and which enables the believer, under the right circumstances and the right authority, to perform rituals that both have effects and bring in converts through these effects. There is also a way of 'being bad', which in the model is represented by a failure to understand the truth, and often a deliberate shunning of it, and thus a failure to produce the same kind of physical effect through ritual. Those, in the model, who are possessed of any kind of authority, are under greater pressure to demonstrate which of the two ways they have taken.¹¹²

Ultimately, as we shall see, the texts we are examining demonstrate a 'cognised model' which heavily relies upon both the efficacy and the adaptive nature of Christian rituals of various kinds, in contrast to other, non-Christian, rituals which might bear superficial or 'obvious' resemblance to it. Whilst it is tempting to talk, instead of models, of 'value systems, and indeed 'all cognised models encode values',¹¹³ it is important to remain focussed on the model itself, and the ritual behaviour it demands and predicts, as

¹¹² Wilken (2003), 228ff. has good examples of how this kind of idea made its way into another sort of, more literary, Christian writing.

¹¹³ Ibid, 101.

exemplified in these texts.¹¹⁴ Any search for *values*, in the generally-understood sense, in the magic contest texts will not, ultimately, lead us anywhere.¹¹⁵

The ritualised wonder-working and other rituals depicted in the magic contest texts is in fact more in line with a Roman view of ‘proper’ religious rituals.¹¹⁶ Whilst the Christian ‘takeover’ of the empire is usually credited with the suppression of magic,¹¹⁷ the Romans had a long history of suspicion of, and accusations of, rituals done in private. The outward-facing nature of the rituals, and ritualised events, is one important example of how the magic contests, unlike most other texts for Christians, present themselves very much within a Roman context, though they exploit and even subvert this context in the end. This matrix, of invented Christian ritual¹¹⁸ performed before a mixed audience within a Roman official context, with a dual function of both wonder-working and evangelisation of non-Christians, meant for a Christian audience, is quite complex. Nevertheless, the unique perspective of these contests in their production of a new kind of ritual helps us to understand some of their enduring popularity.

EXEMPLARY HISTORY

Roman historiography has often been noted for its use of exempla.¹¹⁹ In chapter four, I examine how the magic contest tradition was viewed by other Christian in genres outside of theology. I suggest that the MCT, by the third and fourth century, became a useful trope, or *exemplum*, for two themes important to other Christian writers: first, the

¹¹⁴ I believe, and hope to show, that these texts place the responsibility for both words and deeds in conflict very much in the hands of the individuals engaged in conflict; there are, of course, societal origins for much of these conflicts, but it is a mistake to ‘blame the culture’ at large rather than individuals (as portrayed in narrative, or acting in history).

¹¹⁵ Or, at least, anywhere beyond the model itself, and its divisions between good and evil.

¹¹⁶ See Price (1984), Barb (1963).

¹¹⁷ But see Dickie (2001), 251-272.

¹¹⁸ Chronological development is evident, perhaps, here more than elsewhere: Silvester’s contest seems more consciously a ritual than the Peter and Simon contests – though I will argue that these contests can themselves be considered reported rituals.

¹¹⁹ Roller (2009), 216-7 outlines the process of exemplarity in Roman historiography; as a model it works for our texts with only limited alterations.

inevitability of Christian triumph over all other faiths; second, how the contest episode (and especially the character of Simon Magus) takes on a life of its own and becomes seen as both a turning point in the Christian perspective of history, and a ‘morally true’ fable which can be applied to other times and places to make a point about the superiority of Christianity to other systems.

As an event that becomes an exemplum, the magic contest presents a two-faceted message, as described by Chaplin as to an internal and external audience.¹²⁰ There is one message which is directly conveyed within the text; there is a second message which is evident (either through explicit ‘narratorial’ statement or through implication) to the readers or audience for the text itself. I discuss throughout the different roles played by the internal audience, and the different kinds of internal audience. In chapter four, I look at several external audiences, as exemplified by the interpretation of the magic contest episodes outside of the narratives themselves, and in the insertion of magic contest (or magic contest-like) episodes into other narratives.

In this chapter, I also examine to what extent the internal and external audiences appear to be interpreting the narratives in the same way, and how the exemplification of the magic contest episodes contributed to the continuation and expansion of the tradition and its underlying worldview or model. The presence of the external audience, and in particular the changing nature of this audience as it reflected the political changes in the empire, impacts the magic contest narratives themselves. The narratives work as exemplary history in part because they change the details of the example they offer in response to the different concerns of their time, whilst preserving the essential features which make them useful examples in the first place.

¹²⁰ Chaplin (2000), 51ff.

CONVERSION

Much has been written about conversion in antiquity, beginning with AD Nock's 1934 *Conversion* and continuing through R. MacMullen's (1983) *Christianising the Roman Empire* and of course encompassing the whole range of literature about Augustine's *Confessions*.¹²¹ Much of this literature, however, focusses on the individual's conversion and does not address group dynamics or, especially, the Christian presentation thereof. The model of conversion, following a magic contest in which the Christian has emerged victorious through successful, meaningful wonder-working, is presented again and again in the magic contest texts. This conversion is a community conversion – the conversion is about the community and its status before and after the contest;¹²² individuals who are presented as converting in the texts convert overwhelmingly by the same process. In chapter five, I investigate how conversion, the result and reward which is the 'goal' of all the magic contest texts, has a very different look in each of our major texts, reflecting the specific concerns of its time. The troubling question of the Jews and how they in particular become associated with 'magic-contest-model' conversions, to the extent that real life begins to imitate fantasy, is also an important question. Thus, the magic contest tradition, by the end of our period, has ceased to be merely a thread of thought, but has become an ideology which was, in some ways, put into practice. The conversion of the world, the primary 'point' of the magic contest writers, has, by the end of the Roman empire in the West, come to seem a real possibility. The worldview underlying the magic contest texts, I will argue, is part of the reason why.

In summary, I hope to show in this thesis how, by distilling, presenting, and shaping elements of the central beliefs (i.e. the battle for souls between good and evil) of the Christian worldview in 'paperback' form the texts were able to adapt to the changing composition of populations that occurred over this time period, pagans vs. Christians, Christians vs. Jews, and so on. I will demonstrate how the tradition, was developed, disseminated and used in tandem with the writings of heresiologists and the 'inter-

¹²¹ Brown (1967); Chadwick (1986); Courcelle (1968), to name a few. Models for conversion in the same lines as the magic contest exist as well – see Meeks (1983); sociologically speaking, Kee's study (1983) discusses some of the same material.

¹²² See *Rec.* book X for the most detailed narrative of this.

textual' interactions that occurred between the magic contest texts and other texts that sought to do similar things. This process, ironically, ended up marking and stigmatizing these texts in such a way that, until relatively recently, they have been marginalized and even dismissed as nothing more than the 'mythical and unedifying contests between the...Apostles and Simon Magus.'

Chapter One: THE OPERATION OF POWER

*Nolo enim ego cum isto verbis contendere sed aliquid actibus agere, et ostendere efficaciam in dei nostri nomine, quo possit ratio humana divinis virtutibus credere, et quis sit verus deus ipsis indiciis edoceri...*¹²³

*Zambri cum maleficus dixit, quia nomen dei nostri nulla virtus sufferre praevalet...*¹²⁴

*Theofilus, qui erat cunctis potentibus in civitate sublimior, domus suae ingentem basilicam ecclesiae nomine consecraret...*¹²⁵

WHAT IS A 'POWER'? DEFINING THE 'POWER OF GOD'

All texts which present a 'case' for a specific religious point of view must describe the way in which, according to this worldview, the world works. What is the power, the force, that makes the world be as it is? This fundamental force, this power by which the world operates, must be convincing, or everything that follows will fail to convince as well. In our texts, this fundamental force is repeatedly identified, mentioned and implicated: it is called the 'power of God'. In this chapter, we will first define the power of God and its potential implications, looking at the context in which the term is used, then we will examine how and why, for our authors, the power of God was a useful concept, a way of fighting battles both old and new. We will then examine how the magic contest texts theorise about the power of God in the way they present their different views on the contest: how it works, how it (and its opposite) is transmitted, and how the power of God itself was a lively concept and battleground for religious thought all through the period. I purposely do not take a chronological approach, as there is little development in these ideas over time. Where other important concepts in the magic contest show some change in relation to circumstances, the writers who make use of the

¹²³ AS, 525. 'I do not wish to contend with this man in words but to do something in actions, and to show the efficacy in the name of our God, by which human reason may be able to believe in divine powers, and can be taught by these very proofs who is the true god'

¹²⁴ AS, 526. 'Zambri the sorcerer said that no power is strong enough to endure the name of our God.'

¹²⁵ Rec. 10.71. 'Theophilus, who was loftier [in status] than all the powers in the city, consecrated the huge basilica of his own house in the name of the assembly'.

magic contest at the end of the fifth century seem to hold precisely the same view of the power of God as those who wrote in the second, or indeed in the first.¹²⁶

At the most fundamental level, how the divine part of the world interacts with the human part is of primary importance for any religious worldview.¹²⁷ In the magic contest texts, the way in which this interaction operates is described by means of ‘Power’, especially the ‘Power of God’ or ‘divine power’. The term ‘power’ (*δυναμις* or *virtus* or, later, *potestas* or *potentia*¹²⁸) can of course be used in a very large variety of different ways. *Virtus*, especially, can refer to physical strength, great deeds, or manly courage; it was if anything a characteristically ‘Roman’ word, used to describe things positively to be associated with ‘Roman’ values;¹²⁹ nevertheless it is inherently ambiguous in meaning

¹²⁶ Thus, the ‘power of God’ is one aspect of this system which is *immutable*. Rappaport (1979), 147, describes ‘*immutability*, in which some aspect or component of the system is held in what seems to be an absolutely invariant state’ as a primary building block for any ritual system. This role for the power of God has been neglected in studies of the ‘miraculous’ in early Christianity; I hope to demonstrate its importance in this chapter and throughout this thesis.

¹²⁷ See Edwards (1996), ch. 4 for an interesting view on how we should define ‘power’ in ancient religions. 61: ‘Jews generally understood cosmic power as the power of the Jewish god within the parameters of human history,’ as one example. The most important work of classical scholarship to address the question of power is Price (1984), which presented a convincing case for the interaction between secular and religious power in the Roman empire being mediated through rituals (234-9). Foucault’s many writings on power probably form the most influential theoretical framework for power relations in general, though even here divine power is much less stressed, in favour of the power that abides in institutions (e.g. *Discipline and Punish*). There is not as much scholarship as might be expected on how ‘divine power’ was theorised by Romans, particularly outside of the development of the imperial structure. Graf (2007) theorises on magic power: ‘“In the ordinary “religious” prayer, it is the ritual act that legitimates the asking for divine favor...the person who knows the intimate details of divine nature thereby demonstrates that he or she is close to the god’’. In Christian interpretations of power there is a tendency for the ‘power of God’ in particular to remain undefined or assumed, e.g., power ‘was achieved by visionaries; it was ascribed to martyrs and confessors; it was vested above all in bishops’ (Fox [1994], 130).

¹²⁸ Whilst the shift in Latin terminology is intriguing, I cannot find any reason for it, and suspect that it is merely a change of vocabulary or translational artifact.

¹²⁹ See Clark (2007), 6ff on this complicated aspect of Roman ‘cognitive vocabulary’.

and this was exploited much by Roman authors in a wide variety of genres.¹³⁰ But ‘power’ as used in these texts, whatever word used for it, is derived from a specific context: that of the opposition between the ‘power of God’ and other powers which exist in the world and are in some sense, also supernatural.¹³¹ Further, these supernatural powers exist in the world of the texts, a world which is ruled by Roman secular power, the presence of which is central to the narrative, providing the structure within which these competing powers have their contest.¹³² A ‘Power’, then, in the context we are looking at, is a specific agent, and a specific force, of the supernatural operating within the natural world.

POWER IN THE TRIUMPHANT ATMOSPHERE OF THE LATE EMPIRE

καὶ ὁ μὲν οἶα πιστὸς καὶ ἀγαθὸς θεράπων τοῦτ’ ἔπραττε καὶ ἐκήρυττε, δοῦλον ἄντικρυς ἀποκαλῶν καὶ θεράποντα τοῦ παμβασιλέως ὁμολογῶν ἑαυτὸν, θεὸς δ’ αὐτὸν ἐγγύθεν ἀμειβόμενος κύριον καθίστη καὶ δεσπότην νικητήν...οὕτω μὲν θεοφιλῇ καὶ τρισμακάριον, οὕτω δ’ εὐσεβῇ καὶ πανευδαίμονα, ὥς μετὰ πάσης μὲν ῥαστώνης πλειόνων ἢ οἱ ἔμπροσθεν κατασχεῖν ἔθνων, ἄλυστον δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰς αὐτὴν καταλήξαι τελευτήν¹³³

By the end of the fourth century, the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire seemed assured. The state apparatus had changed from periodically persecuting Christians to favouring them; now the panegyrics to emperors spoke of their role as a πιστὸς καὶ ἀγαθὸς θεράπων and of the role of God in the maintenance of the Empire itself. Whilst there were still substantial internal conflicts within Christianity, the majority of the people in the empire were at this point claiming to be Christian, and those

¹³⁰ E.g. Ver. Ecl. 4.26-7: ‘*At simul heroum laudes et facta parentis / iam legere et quae sit poteris cognoscere virtus*’; Caes. BG. 1.2: ‘*perfacile esse, cum virtute omnibus praestarent, totius Galliae imperio potiri*’; Nepos Hannibal 1: *populus Romanus omnes gentes virtute superarit*.

¹³¹ See Brown (1972) for the fullest and most influential elaboration of this aspect of the ‘Late Antique’ worldview; whatever their religious commitment, Romans of our period saw a ‘demon-haunted world’ filled with supernatural entities with the power to affect their lives.

¹³² Cameron (1991), 60: the ‘trope’ of miracle allows ‘the articulation of the relation between the human and divine worlds’.

¹³³ Eus. VC 1.6.

who were not were marginalised and excluded.¹³⁴ The imperial family listened to and respected the instructions of bishops, and if they did not, they often regretted it.¹³⁵ But the fact remained that there were still those who refused to convert to Christianity, even in the face of this exclusion, just as some Christians of the second century had refused to capitulate to the Roman authorities. In looking at the operation of ‘power’ first at the end of our period (in the *Acta Silvestri*), we can begin to understand the importance for many Christians of the opposition of divine power and demonic, and the value of being sure one was on the correct side of the line.¹³⁶ To be a Christian may no longer have been outlawed, but the difficulty of being sure who was speaking the truth and who represented the true God (in the public as well as the private sphere) had not disappeared with the end of the persecutions. It was still possible for Christians to be led astray, and for the leaders of the community to worry that there were ‘deceivers’ in the midst. These deceivers could be those who claimed to be Christians but were not, or those who refused to be Christian and tried to lure Christians away. To anxious Christians, the lack of universal acceptance of Christianity threw their whole world into doubt.¹³⁷ The popularity of these stories is one piece of evidence that, to many, the dangers of the world had not passed. For some Christians in the later Roman empire, in fact, the most important challenges in the world had not changed at all.

Despite the rhetoric of Christian triumph which was routinely invoked across the later Roman empire, there was literature which presented a different view -- a view of the world in which Christian triumph was not secure, and Christian figures still needed to

¹³⁴ I.e. with laws against sacrifice, exclusions from property-owning and office-holding, or even expulsions (see *CTh* XVI).

¹³⁵ As in the influence of Ambrose over Theodosius (as in the 388 Callinicum controversy). See McLynn (1994), 298-309.

¹³⁶ This ‘anxiety’ was an important feature common to Late Antique life. See Dodds (1991) for one, famous, interpretation.

¹³⁷ We will discuss the importance of ‘acceptance’ in ch. 3. Christianity’s status as state religion required it: ‘acceptance...is not a private state, but a public act, visible both to witnesses and to performers themselves’ (Rappaport (1999, 120).

‘make the case’ for basic Christian truth in the public sphere.¹³⁸ To authors and readers of these texts, then, the Christian influence over the Roman state was not a sufficient comfort; the unity and uniformity projected in imperial rescript and recorded law¹³⁹ did not reflect the diversity and confusion which still persisted in their lives. For these individuals, a tradition which was focussed not on the triumphant arrival of a unified Christian empire, but on the ability of Christians to demonstrate their personal connection to a divine, rather than a secular, source of power, was paramount.¹⁴⁰ Second-century texts, written in an environment of oppression, dramatised how the early Christians were able to find converts: a contest in which the prize was, first, the claim to the ‘power of God’ and after that claim had been established, sincere converts. Without any other source of power, these early Christians rejoiced in imagining the public victory of Christianity, victories even more resounding than the actual victory under Constantine seemed to be. The victories had been imagined for so long, that when they actually arrived they were not as important; other battles, more vicious still, had replaced them. The Christian writers of this late period could feel the confidence of the victories of the past, and imagine more victories in the future; the victories of the present, to them, were harder to see.

The author of the *Acta Silvestri*, writing near the end of the western Roman empire, if not after it, was working in this pessimistic tradition. His concern was not for the state and its power; he accepted in a limited way that the imperial power was now on the correct ‘side’. Rather, he looked to the continued existence of those who denied either Christianity altogether, or the more specific manifestation of Christianity that he

¹³⁸ John Chrysostom, in the multicultural Antioch, was perhaps the greatest of these figures. He was also concerned to point out that the divine realm (and its representatives) was superior to the secular (Sandwell (2007), 127).

¹³⁹ See Harries (1999b).

¹⁴⁰ This was a more understandable impulse in the second and third centuries, where apologetic writings do sometimes show evidence of an anti-imperialist line; see Pagels (1985) for this in Justin Martyr. But one did not have to be anti-imperialist to hold such views; e.g. Edwards (1996), 65: ‘Even Roman power operates, from Josephus’ perspective, under the aegis of the Jewish god’.

supported (i.e. one that accepted the primacy of Rome¹⁴¹) as a real and continuing threat in his time. Thus, he produced a text which addresses the concerns of his time (in particular, the continued existence of Jews and heretics), using the model and tradition developed by the authors of such texts as the *Acts of Peter* in the second century, and the Clementine *Recognitions* in the third. But rather than setting his narrative in the now almost mythological apostolic past, he set it at the advent of a new Empire, at a moment when everything seemed to be looking up for Rome and Christianity, when secular power and spiritual power were both seemingly at their peak.

In the earlier versions of this contest-tradition, the Christians seeking converts had to show themselves opposed, not to the legitimate authority of the Roman empire in secular matters, but to their power in determining the answer to questions of divine power.¹⁴² Ultimately, the secular power structure was not equipped to make this determination, which in the texts is left to the people, that is, the crowd of onlookers. Their decision is not merely to acclaim the power, but in a sense to recognise and choose to follow it. The power of the *fides* extends across all secular boundaries imaginable:

*ab illa die unanimiter excolebant: et non solum in urbe Roma sed et in totis finibus Romanae orbis fides catholica per assertionem fidei eius et operum eius virtutibus caelestem ac perpetuam obtinuit palmam*¹⁴³

The author of the AS does not challenge this basic assumption of earlier models, despite the vast change in circumstances. Even though the imperial family is present, and supportive, in his version, he does not allow them to be the judges of ‘truth’. In fact, he imports the structure of the earlier texts completely, and changes things in ways that seem

¹⁴¹ See Pohlkamp (1984), 387f on the role of the (pagan) city of Rome in the AS.

¹⁴² But we see the effect of religious power on those who hold secular power throughout all these texts: Agrippa in AP, several different official in AJ, the judge Zenophilus in the AS. All these representatives have valid authority, but in response to religious power being demonstrated, at least temporarily are subsumed beneath it, and do not exercise their own power. Karasszon (1998), 21-3 on Agrippa’s dual role in the AP.

¹⁴³ AS, 529 (version A1). ‘From that day he was unanimously honoured; and not only in the city of Rome but within all the boundaries of the Roman world, through his assertion of the faith and by the powers of his works, the catholic faith won the heavenly and eternal victory’.

initially superficial.¹⁴⁴ For across time the Christian authors of these texts have a remarkably consistent attitude to power and its operation in the world. The question for the Christians of the late fourth and fifth century was not, as it perhaps was for their forebears, whether Christianity deserved success. It had achieved it, beyond, certainly, the wildest dreams of the first generations of the faithful. The moment of Constantine changed everything, but the universal conversion that some Christians hoped for in its aftermath did not occur. There were still pagans, philosophers, Jews and heretics, who did not any longer have the excuse of ignorance. The popularity of dramatic narratives in which important Christian figures win, in essence, conversion contests, did not wane. It actually seems to have increased, and by virtue of having been translated between Latin, Greek and Syriac,¹⁴⁵ to reach new groups with its message of conversion by the power of God. Those who had never known a world without Christianity in control may have been even more motivated to reach those who seemed to stand out in the obstinacy to the truth, that is, the truth which the early Christians had revealed and which had become accepted.

WHY THE ‘POWER OF GOD’?

Why should contests of this sort have remained a popular way to confront the reality of the lack of universal conversion at this time? By the fourth and fifth centuries, the learned Christian literature was vast, and certainly ways to combat the claims of pagans, Jews and heretics in works such as Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, Arnobius’ *Adversus nationes*, the works of Athanasius and the substantial corpus of *Adversus Judaeos* texts were addressed.¹⁴⁶ But the education required to read, understand and employ the arguments provided by scholars was not available to most Christians. The author of the AS, on the other hand, was clearly able to access at least some of these ‘handbooks’¹⁴⁷ for debates with non-Christians. A large portion of the AS, indeed, draws upon the oft-rehearsed

¹⁴⁴ Canella (2005), 196: ‘la gara di miracoli fra Silvestro e Zambri trovano un significativo *pendant* nel certame fra Pietro e Simon mago degli *Atti di Pietro e Simone*’.

¹⁴⁵ Fowden (1994b), 166f. summarises the complicated competition between religious traditions over the story of Constantine’s baptism. Pohlkamp (1984) finds the ‘pagan’ version of Constantine being reconstructed in the AS.

¹⁴⁶ On *Adversus Judaeos* texts, see the rather odd Williams (1935); also Rajak (1999), 61f on the polemic tradition. Horbury (1998), 21-5 summarising the scholarship.

¹⁴⁷ See Skarsaune (1990), Horbury (1998), 27f.

points of debate between Jews and Christians on such topics as ‘who is a child of Abraham?’, the prophecies of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the importance of the virgin birth.¹⁴⁸ This is not to say that the magic-contest texts are a ‘popular version’ of the apologetic literature, but rather that they can in part serve the same function for a different audience, an audience which was less able to process the more detailed points of the apologist’s arguments (and would thus, perhaps, be more susceptible to persuasion by others). Whilst, as Cameron notes,¹⁴⁹ there is a great deal of preaching in the second-century Christian apocryphal narratives, these early texts nevertheless avoid detailed debate on doctrinal issues.¹⁵⁰

But throughout the tradition, *pace* Cameron,¹⁵¹ the verbal debate is continually de-emphasised as ineffective (or, at least, less effective). The opponents of the Christian representatives in these texts, the AS being no exception, are not convinced in a contest of only words.¹⁵² The magic contest, which produces the real, final conversions, comes after the verbal contest. It is possible that this placement could reflect the judgment that uneducated individuals might not know or care about the points raised in a verbal debate; throughout these texts, as we shall see, there is frequent emphasis on the wide social range of people that these contests could reach.

In the AS, there is another, more specific reason why the verbal ‘handbook’ approach is not good enough. For these authors, human reason is not able, with words alone, to discern the true nature of God, and in particular, his power, ‘*Nolo enim ego cum isto*

¹⁴⁸ Canella (2005), 145-83 summarises and analyses all eleven *altercationes*, examining their texts and comparing the versions.

¹⁴⁹ Cameron (1991), 94ff. Brock (1999), 161-4 points out the modelling of family relationships; this is an example of the kind of ‘preaching’ which these texts focus on.

¹⁵⁰ The author of the AS inserts this debate material where the earlier texts gave space for preaching, possibly with the later Clementine texts mixture of the two also in mind. On the argumentation in the *Rec.*, see Adamik (2010).

¹⁵¹ Cameron (1991), 95: ‘It is the word which converts’. In some cases, particularly fervent disciples are converted by word alone (Thecla is noted by Cameron), but it is hardly common for large numbers to be converted by the word in the AAA.

¹⁵² AP 17: Peter says ‘do not have faith in words, but in works and deeds.’ See also Rappaport (1979), 176ff.

verbis contendere sed aliquid actibus agere...quo possit ratio humana divinis virtutibus credere'.¹⁵³ The operation of divine power in the physical world is demonstrable through actions. It is necessary to show, not just tell.¹⁵⁴ It is through the deeds of the contest, and the *signs*¹⁵⁵ produced by these deeds, and not the words, that human reason will be able to make the correct determination between the two opposing sides. Words may convince, but only deeds can truly effect conversion, because it is through deeds that the power of God operates:

*non enim tantum propter hoc ut verbis suaderem vobis hunc esse Christum quem ego praedico, sed etiam in actis et in virtutibus magnificis hortor vos per fidem quae est in Christo Iesu.*¹⁵⁶

And it is through the power of God only that the case against the non-Christians, the case for *fides quae est in Christo Iesu* can be said to have been successful.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the contest comes to be a contest of wonder-working. Again and again, the Christian 'contestant' is shown to succeed through performing wonders, when their preaching may have failed: converting sinners and the lapsed, and converting the obstinate, the deluded or the arrogant. For the sake of both dramatic and theological necessity, both the Christians and their opponents must be shown to have some kind of access to the supernatural, some way to make their deeds decisive. The contest must, at least at first, seem to be an even one; how else can it be explained that there are those who are deceived?

¹⁵³ AS, 525.

¹⁵⁴ Even in the *Rec.* which demonstrates much faith in human reason, there is the necessity of a contest for the ultimate proof.

¹⁵⁵ Rappaport (1979), 98: 'people compare the states of the systems in which they participate, *as these states are indicated by signs*, with their culturally determined notions of what they think they should be'. Remus (1983) agrees, in a second-century context, 149: 'the 'true' is apt to be that which is regarded as 'true' within [a] social and cultural matrix'.

¹⁵⁶ AP 7. 'Indeed, not only so that I might persuade you by words that it Christ whom I preach, but also in deeds and in wonderful powers, I exhort you through the faith which is in Jesus Christ.'

¹⁵⁷ 'Theology' alone is repeatedly shown to be insufficient; perhaps there is some element here of 'competition' with other apologetic kinds of texts.

DIVINE POWER AND ITS OPPOSITE

The problem for a contest narrative, where conversions are precipitated by the deeds through the power of God, is a well-known one: it is very hard to tell, sometimes, the difference between divine power and its opposite, namely demonic power; even in the course of daily life this may be seen as a problem.¹⁵⁸ The AS goes further than its predecessors in making it very explicit in the pre-contest portion of the text who is representing which ‘powers’. The Jews are representing their idea of God, or more explicitly the *name* of their God, and the bishop Silvester is representing ‘our lord Jesus Christ, of Nazareth, crucified’. This helps the author of this late text to remove some of the ambiguities in the use of the term ‘power of God’ that we find in second-century sources.¹⁵⁹

The confrontation with Simon Magus, in the earlier texts, is framed also as a contest between two individuals who are themselves ‘powers’, who both claim to be, or to have, the Power of God. In the stories set in the apostolic era, this especially close connection (or claimed connection) would have been acceptable from apostolic figures. Simon’s goal in calling himself a/the ‘power of God’ is precisely to create confusion about who can claim to be, personally, closest in their link to the divine power. For the AS, with its dramatic date of 315, the connection to the divine power is of necessity more remote.¹⁶⁰ The power of God, or divine power, in the AS, is something that causes miracles, rather than something that belongs in any sense to an individual. The Jews are not represented here as having in themselves Messianic ambitions (even the sorcerer¹⁶¹), merely to be

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, the story of Cyprian the magician, receiving its fullest elaboration in the *Menologion* of Symeon Metaphrastes (probably tenth century).

¹⁵⁹ It also, I think, draws on the discourse of pairs which is very fully developed in the pseudo-Clementine texts, though it puts them, of course, to a very different use.

¹⁶⁰ The hagiographical tradition was developing at this time in response to a similar feeling; though they share common elements, the direct purpose of hagiography was an individualistic one, which spoke to a desire for individuals to ‘imitate’ those Christians who were special; (See Wilken (2003), 264-66. This impulse is missing from the magic contest texts, especially from the magic contest episodes themselves. The participation in the magic contest is clearly demarcated ‘for demonstration purposes only; do not try this at home’.

¹⁶¹ That is, Zambri the magus.

mistaken about the Messiah's identity and thus, the power of God.¹⁶² It is thus important, perhaps even more important than it was originally, for the AS' author to be clear how the contest will determine whose God is the true one, via access to divine power. It is the pagan Celsus (in the second century), quoted by Origen, who put the problem most forcefully:

[Jesus says] διότι παρέσσονται ὑμῖν καὶ ἕτεροι δυνάμεσιν ὁμοίαις χρώμενοι, κακοὶ καὶ γόητες, καὶ Σατανᾶν τινα τοιαῦτα παραμηνώμενον ὀνομάζει• ὥστ' οὐδὲ αὐτὸς ἑξαρκνός ἐστιν, ὥς ταῦτά γε οὐδὲν θεῖον ἀλλὰ πονηρῶν ἐστὶν ἔργα¹⁶³

If someone claims to have divine power, then, but does not, the only alternative is demonic. Anyone who opposed the claim of someone who is proven to have access to such power, it also follows, is being led astray by Satan.¹⁶⁴ This is how the contest is framed in all the later texts,¹⁶⁵ and in particular is used to explain how it is possible that the Jews, who after all possess at least a part of the truth, and canonical scriptures, could be wrong in their claims.

One verse from the Hebrew Bible is extremely important for all of the contest texts. It is only in the AS, however, that this verse is explicitly cited and identified as coming from the scriptures.¹⁶⁶

*In Deuteronomio ipse deus loquitur dicens, 'videte videte, quoniam ego sum deus et non alius praeter me. Ego occidam et vivere faciam; percutiam et ego sanabo'...*¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² I choose a more charitable reading here, perhaps, than is warranted; there is some evidence, as we shall see, that the author of the AS believes the Jews to be willing conspirators with the devil.

¹⁶³ CC II.49. See also II.51: 'οὐδὲν ὅμοιον ἔχει τὸ δυνάμει θεοῦ ἐπιτελούμενον τῷ γινομένῳ ἀπὸ γοητείας...' It is interesting that Origen does not refer to any apocryphal stories on this topic; he does elsewhere show knowledge of the apocrypha.

¹⁶⁴ This is no less true in the earlier texts, particularly in the set-up to the contest in the AP. See AP 5 and 6 for the 'power of Satan', though it is not here directly opposed to the 'power of God'.

¹⁶⁵ On Simon and Satan, see below in chapter 2.

¹⁶⁶ See Horbury (1998) on the development of Jewish-Christian debate on the Bible.

¹⁶⁷ AS, 526. 'In Deuteronomy God himself speaks, saying, 'Look, look, because I am God and there is no other besides Me. I will kill and I will make live, I will wound and I will heal'...

Silvester explains how the spectators can determine who is telling the truth about the origins of their power.

*nam deus quem ego praedico non solum viventes mortificat sed et mortuos vivificat...tamen si vult ut non credamus hoc nomen daemonis alicuius fuisse quod dixit, dicat modo mortuo illud nomen et suscitet eum. Quod si occidere potest et vivificare non potest constat eum nominasse, qui viventem occidere potest, mortuum vivificare non potest...*¹⁶⁸

In other words, in the AS the ‘power of God’ is not really ambiguous at all. It is defined not just as an ability to work wonders, but as control over what had been identified as the two aspects of the divine power, the executive and the creative: the power that judges good from evil and the power that brings into being.¹⁶⁹ The magic contest, then, is ideally suited to test both of these aspects, as it is also a judgement itself, on the contestants and the witnesses. This Biblical verse is a direct statement from God on what he claims as his own prerogative, his own unique powers. Where our earlier texts make use of these aspects they do not go so far as to define the terms of the contest for their audience, instead just using the ‘prerogative’ to demonstrate this, without explicitly citing the scriptural authority for it; the AS cites the proof text, presumably to clarify the legitimacy of this undertaking.¹⁷⁰ For the author of the AS, his purpose in having Silvester use the methods of Peter to defeat the Jews is more than just showing that the bishop of Rome is correct (in his assertion that he has access to the power of God) and that the Jews are wrong. His goal seems to be to show, *non solum verbis sed etiam actibus*, that the Jews are not even able any longer to interpret their own scripture correctly, and that they have either been misled by the devil or are his willing collaborators. Thus, the verbal debate at

¹⁶⁸ AS, 526. ‘For the God whom I preach not only makes the living die but also makes the dead live...nevertheless if he does not want us to believe that what he said was the name of some demon, let him speak that name now to the dead one and resuscitate him. But if he is able to kill, and he is not able to revive, it is established that he has named one, who is able to kill the living and not able to revive the dead...’

¹⁶⁹ See below in this chapter on Philo’s explanation of this concept.

¹⁷⁰ As the earlier texts do not make this explicit connection to Deut., I think the point of the contest has been missed. It is not just a chance to ‘show off’ what the power of God can do, it is a very narrowly defined task. The various attempts to cast all AAA wonder-working as serving the same purpose are misguided, I think.

the beginning of the text turns out, in the end, to have been about the power of God as well. If the Jews (or even heretics) cannot demonstrate their access to the power of God in their deeds, their frequent claims about their access via words (that is, scripture) are just as invalid. The contest of magic is needed to show the futility of engaging such groups with words.

OTHER KINDS OF POWER

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.¹⁷¹

There are, of course, other kinds of power at work in these magic-contest texts besides the supernatural. Natural human power, or strength, is important, as is the power of the state. Human power is not given much emphasis in the magic contest texts, but it does appear.¹⁷² Specifically, there is one human act that, the texts claim, a human can perform which is necessary: the choice to believe.¹⁷³ The struggle is life or death; the choice to believe (or not) *in the correct things*. When the magician Zambri says ‘no power can endure the name of our God’, we see the role of an aspect of human power: to be subject to the divine power.¹⁷⁴ No amount of human strength or will, both the Jews and Silvester agree, will be sufficient in the face of divine action. The power of any given human is weak, weaker than either the divine or the demonic power which acts upon it throughout the contest. However, even the supernatural within these texts is subject to one aspect of human power; the contest takes place within the bounds of human society and according to human rules. The power of the secular state is fundamental to the impact of many of

¹⁷¹ Deut. 30:19.

¹⁷² See the *Didas.* passage below. Also note AP 20, discussing the transmission of the gospel: *quae perferuntur in humana carne* is obscure; Elliot (2005) takes it as ‘what humanity can bear to understand’.

¹⁷³ On belief manifested as an act, see ch. 3. The *locus classicus* might be Tertullian *Apol.* 18.4: *fiunt, non nascitur Christiani*.

¹⁷⁴ See below on the related, but different in focus, connection between human and divine power/will in the *Recognitions*. Also Herczeg (1998), 38 on the ‘content’ of Peter’s claims being an ‘almost magical use of Jesus’ name’.

the magic contest texts. The authors are confident that God will operate ‘successfully’ (that is, convincingly) even within the bounds of hostile, or at least secular, institutions.

We see in the AS how the traditional rhetoric which opposed Christianity and the state, especially in the magic contest’s structure, remains to a certain extent intact, even after the Christianisation of the secular power structure.¹⁷⁵ The AS takes up the contest format from the tradition, and though the power of the state is not ignored, it is shown to be inadequate to the task of convincing individuals to convert.

The ostensible reason for the contest is to convince the emperor’s own mother of the merits of the Christians as opposed to the Jews.¹⁷⁶ Constantine has been baptised, but his status as a Christian is not enough. His mother, Helena, is ‘moved by the Jews’, and Constantine looks to the bishop of Rome, Silvester, to set up a debate between himself and twelve learned Jews, in order to convince her that she should remain within the Christian fold. Other than this layer of official endorsement, however, the Christianised power of the state is deliberately excluded from having a role in the contest. The character of the ‘secular’ power is preserved by the appointment of two pagans: a philosopher and a prefect, to act as the judges between the two parties. Constantine and his mother are ‘merely’ observers. Thus, the author creates a scenario for his contest which is as close to the scenario depicted in the *Acts of Peter* as it could be. The contests, then, take place in the Roman forum before a large crowd of onlookers ‘from every race’.¹⁷⁷ There is involvement of secular officials, but throughout the tradition, as we shall see, there is a lack of evidence of their opposition to the Christians.¹⁷⁸ This is only more emphatic in the AS. Silvester is more explicit in his statement to the crowd than his

¹⁷⁵ Eg in the insertion of ‘pagan’ judges, the ‘impartiality’ of Constantine, and the references to pagan practices, including the presence of *pontifices* in the crowd.

¹⁷⁶ This is reminiscent, as Drijvers (1992) notes, of Ambrose’s thought on what the imperial relations with the Jews should be. 144: ‘Judaism [is] a force by its nature opposed to Christianity. At the same time he identified Christianity with imperial rule. The emperors recognize Christ and as a consequence they are the opponents of Judaism’.

¹⁷⁷ On the ‘racial theory’ of Christianity see Lieu (2004), 259-68. Also Cameron (2007), 359ff. on this usage in Epiphanius and its explanatory power for heresiology.

¹⁷⁸ See Harries (1999b). It is striking how the Roman protocols for judgement are so scrupulously presented in these texts.

forebears, emphasising the public nature of his actions and demanding to be heard by God in this public forum:

*ego nomen tuum voce publica confiteor ut sciat omnis iste populus ...sancti
tui nominis invocatione reviviscat et ideo audi me servum tuum*¹⁷⁹

It is of course the case that historical ‘debates’, organised by the state authorities, such as the one depicted in the AS did occur.¹⁸⁰ That they were not common, or indeed possible, at the time of the AS and certainly at the time of the earliest magic contest texts is also true. But there is no evidence that the author of the AS was any more concerned with the verisimilitude of his narrative than the rest of the tradition; instead, he ‘updates’ the contest to a Christian context whilst doing as much as he can to minimise the changed circumstances with regard to the secular power.¹⁸¹ To make a public confession as Silvester does, at the time he ostensibly does it, is meant to seem dangerous, despite the official end of persecution; it is not the officials but the crowd who could be the problem. The Christian attitude to the state is only important here insofar as the author of the AS has not allowed the Christianisation of power¹⁸² to mitigate his message or to change the emphasis of his narrative from that set forth in the second century. Nowhere in the magic contest corpus is the Roman state in itself the enemy; it is not initially positive toward the Christian cause, but it is never a target for attack within the contest, and indeed a high priority is placed on winning over those who have secular power.¹⁸³ ‘Performance’ before secular power has a secondary effect of making the victory more ‘real’, and in particular less possible to deny altogether. Direct antagonism is reserved for those who also lack secular power, and who are opposing the Christians only on spiritual/theological grounds.

¹⁷⁹ AS, 528, ‘I confess with public voice your name, so that all these people may know... let him be revived by the invocation of your holy name and so hear me, your servant’.

¹⁸⁰ See Maccoby (1982) on the Paris and Barcelona disputations; also Lieu (1992), 87ff; Simon (1986), 135-56.

¹⁸¹ Keeping the setting the same (the forum) is one way; having the secular power appealed to but not really active (*iubeat produci taurum aliquem ferocissimum ut ostendam hodie in conspectu eius dei omnipotentis*, says Zambri (AS, 525)) is another.

¹⁸² Edwards (1996), 140-5.

¹⁸³ The proper role of secular power, as we see throughout these texts (and on which, see below in the ch. 3), is to facilitate the proper exercise of divine power.

A CONTEST OF POWER

How and why did the idea of a contest to determine the origins of someone's power develop into the fully elaborated narrative of the *Acta Silvestri*? The basic framework for the magic contest narratives and their concern over the 'power of God' is pre-Christian. The development of this conception of 'Power' can be traced back to our earliest 'magic contests', those found in the Hebrew Bible and its apocrypha, as well as in the canonical Christian narratives of Jesus. In the book of Exodus, the source, in a sense, of the essential elements of a 'magic contest' text, Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh, meet in a sort of 'negotiation' before Pharaoh, Moses representing the Israelites and seeking their freedom. The magicians are brought forth in an attempt to duplicate the plagues that Moses has been wreaking upon the Egyptians.

But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals. The magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God'. But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said.¹⁸⁴

Here, the phrase is the 'finger', rather than the 'power', of God, but these terms are fulfilling the same function in the text.¹⁸⁵ 'Finger' is an anthropomorphic metaphor, seen throughout the Hebrew scriptures in phrases such as the 'hand of God', for the interaction of God with the human sphere, i.e. a miraculous occurrence.¹⁸⁶ When the phrase becomes 'power', as we shall see, this strong metaphor is replaced by something much more ambiguous than what we have here. Here, the magicians are not able to produce the insects that Moses could, and are led to the conclusion that Moses has accomplished his feat with the 'finger of God', that is, with the assistance of the divine. The 'finger of God' indicates that, rather than the 'secret arts' of the magicians, Moses has been wonder-working (by definition).¹⁸⁷ The first important distinction made by the use of this sort of language, as we shall see, is between those who have a connection to the divine and those

¹⁸⁴ Ex. 8:18-19.

¹⁸⁵ See below on the Pseudepigraphic usage of 'power' in place of 'finger'.

¹⁸⁶ 'Finger' is also used in Ex. 31:18 and Deut. 9:10 to describe the writing of the Ten Commandments.

¹⁸⁷ That is, Moses' ability to access the 'finger of God' absolves him of magic. There is an extensive literature on the typological links between Moses and Jesus; references to Moses in early Christian magic contest literature are surprisingly few (see AP 8).

that do not. This is also well demonstrated by the New Testament passage which quotes the above. Jesus is casting out demons, and the crowd around him accuses him of being able to do so ‘by Beelzebub’. Jesus replies:

Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.¹⁸⁸

Here, then, there is a direct contrast between doing something ‘magical’ ‘by [the finger/power of] Beelzebub’ and doing so ‘by the finger of God’. In the passage from Exodus, how the magicians obtained their ‘secret arts’ is not made explicit, but in this passage, Jesus is confronted with a variation on what has been called ‘the accusation of magic’ – the claim that the source of his miracles is not God, but something else – indeed, something evil.¹⁸⁹ Jesus’ reply to the accusation lays out the consequences for both himself and his opponents. In particular, there will be a judgment involved. The question is who is responsible not just for Jesus’ wonder-working, but their own (and their followers). But if Jesus’ wonder-working is ‘by the finger of God’, something else rather different has happened – the crowd is witnessing the operation of the divine on earth.

Another text to use the phrase ‘Power of God’ in the sense in which it is used throughout our texts is the ‘Book of Jannes and Jambres’.¹⁹⁰ This text, as we have seen, takes the story of Moses’ encounter with the magicians of Pharaoh and creates an extended narrative of these magicians and their encounter with Moses.¹⁹¹ Due to the extremely fragmentary nature of the text, it is difficult to follow this narrative, but the pattern is fairly clear. The most important moment comes when Moses has defeated one of the

¹⁸⁸ Lk. 11:19-20.

¹⁸⁹ On the ‘accusation of magic’ see Poupon (1997); Heintz (1997), 36-44 as a Hellenistic invective trope.

¹⁹⁰ On the different arguments for the date of the Book, see Pietersma (1994), ch. 1.

¹⁹¹ See Pietersma (1994), 24-35 on the Jannes and Jambres tradition itself; 63-4 he notes similarities to the Simon Magus legend, but is unwilling to commit himself to any strong notions of contact or order of precedence.

magicians. As in Exodus, the magician is moved to recognise that Moses has access to something that he does not:

πρέσβις παρήσαν ἀπο τοῦ βασιλέως
λέγοντες. Τάχιον ἔλθων ἀντιστάθητι
τῷ Μωσῇ τῷ Ἑβραίῳ ποιοῦντι σημεῖα
ὥστε πάντας θαυμάζειν. ἐγεννηθὴ δὲ
ὁ Ἰάννης πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα καὶ ἀντε-
στάθη Μωωσῇ καὶ τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ
ποιῶν ὅσα...
πέμψι πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα λέγων. τοῦτ'
ἐστὶν θε(ε)οῦ ἡ ἐνεργοῦσα δύναμις¹⁹²

The pattern is the same as in Exodus: the magician is called to oppose Moses who is ‘doing signs’, so he does so by copying what Moses has done (unlike in Exodus, however, he appears to be successful, initially). But ultimately, the magician fails in his task,¹⁹³ and in defeat he tells the king ‘this thing is God’s active power’. This does not seem to be a metaphor, but rather a description. What the ‘thing’ is, however, is unclear: does he mean Moses, or what Moses has done? We cannot tell from the text alone, but due to the neuter gender, it seems most likely that it refers to the deeds of Moses, and not Moses himself. What is clear, however, is that the opposing magician, even though he has in this case met with some success, is moved to recognise ‘God’s active power’ as the reason behind Moses’ triumph.¹⁹⁴ The ‘active power’, then, has the same function as the ‘finger’, it is the intervention of God on behalf of a human, to do wonders.

But where the use of the hand or finger metaphor straightforwardly implies that it is God’s intervention that is working wonders, through an individual, the use of the term ‘power’ is much more ambiguous – particularly, as here, where the relationship of the ‘power’ to the humans involved is not specified. As we shall see, the vagueness of the

¹⁹² Chester Beatty frag. 3ab 5-15. Reconstructed and trans. in Pietersma (1994), 151-2: ‘Emissaries from the king arrived and said, ‘Come quickly and withstand Moses the Hebrew who is doing signs so that all are amazed.’ And Jannes came to the king and withstood Moses and his brother by doing whatever they had done...he sent word to the king saying, “This thing is God’s active power.”’

¹⁹³ Though the text is not precisely clear on the sequence of events.

¹⁹⁴ Is there a link here to all the portrayals of Constantine as a Moses-type (Wilson (1998), 107-21)?

term ‘power’ allows the authors of magic contest texts to use it in several different ways, and to create a sort of ‘slippage’ with terminology between different areas. It may be instructive to look briefly at another pre-Christian view of what ‘God’s power’ really meant. The Alexandrian Jew Philo, a Platonist, had a highly developed notion of how God’s power was divided and organised, and one which was highly influential on later Christian thought (some of which may have filtered in to later magic contest texts). For Philo, as for other Jews, pagan monotheists and educated Christians, the ‘organisation’ of the divine was of paramount importance. For God to be both supernatural and transcendent, as well as interventionist in history (and in the present), could be seen as problematic. Philo consequently divides the divine ‘power’ functions into two:

ἔλεγε δέ μοι κατὰ τὸν ἓνα ὄντως ὄντα θεὸν δύο τὰς ἀνωτάτω εἶναι καὶ πρώτας δυνάμεις ἀγαθότητα καὶ ἐξουσίαν, καὶ ἀγαθότητι μὲν τὸ πᾶν γεγεννηκέναι, ἐξουσία δὲ τοῦ γεννηθέντος ἄρχειν, τρίτον δὲ συναγωγὸν ἀμφοῖν μέσον εἶναι λόγον, λόγῳ γὰρ καὶ ἄρχοντα καὶ ἀγαθὸν εἶναι τὸν θεόν.¹⁹⁵

The relevance of this ‘λογος’ concept to early Christians is not difficult to see; for our purposes, the twofold division of God into two spheres of Power is the more important. The ‘ruling’ power of God is that which is transcendent, which is not involved in the physical world, whereas the creative power is how God interacts with the world. The power of creation, then, implies the power of destruction (as God himself proclaimed to Moses in Deut. 32) – if God rules all and creates all, he has the power of life and death over his creation. The creative ‘power of God’, for Philo, was intimately involved with humanity through this power. This kind of use of the term ‘power’, though, creates a further ambiguity; in this view, the ‘power of God’ is something that God *is*, in himself, but also in a sense, something God *has*.¹⁹⁶ God is one, for Philo, but his Oneness consists in two Powers, which he also uses in ruling and in creating/destroying. It is not

¹⁹⁵ Philo *Cher.* 1.27-8.

¹⁹⁶ But Simon is the first to claim it (Garrett (1989), 66-7). Those who ‘have’ the Power of God, but are not themselves God, are able to ‘use’ it in different ways. First and foremost, of course, the Power of God is that which, in a sense, converts (or allows the possibility of conversion, in the *Rec.*). But it has other uses as well, as we shall see, in particular the more ‘practical goods’ of wonder-working.

something, it seems, that can be shared with another being, but rather something which comes into the world.

The magic contest context at first seems clearly to be favouring this sort of Philonic view, where the ‘hand of God’ or the ‘power of God’ is the exercising by God of (one of) his powers, as we have seen. But in the Christian setting in which most of the texts were written, the picture becomes more complicated.

The first complication comes in the canonical Acts, with the introduction of the figure who will come to represent the ‘opponent of truth’ in the magic contest tradition.¹⁹⁷ Simon Magus is the man against whom Peter will fight; the issue about which they will fight, as we shall see, is over who has the true relationship with the ‘Power of God’. The figure of Simon in the canonical Acts does not engage in a magic contest, but it is easy to see how he became the figure of the opponent. Simon sets himself up as having a unique relationship to the Power of God: he *is* it.

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one. To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’ To him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.¹⁹⁸

Where before it was the deeds of the wonder-workers which pointed to the involvement of the divine in the human world, here we see that it is a man, a magician, who is representing himself to be the ‘Power of God’. Acts itself does not point out that this sets up a contrast between Simon and Jesus, and as it happens, the magic contest texts themselves do not investigate Simon’s claims about Jesus, or about his own comparison to Jesus, but rather between the contrasting claims between Simon and the apostles.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Although the Jannes and Jambres tradition is older: See 2 Tim. 8-9: ‘Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.’

¹⁹⁸ Acts 8:9-11.

¹⁹⁹ See also Justin 1 *Apol.* 14, contrasting the secular power with the Logos qua power of God.

Why this is so we will explore later, but here it is important to note the use of the term ‘Power’ to refer to a human person. In the context of ‘sorcery’, it is not that his deeds (or ‘signs’) point to Simon having access to the divine power, as Exodus and Luke represent it, but rather than in his own person, he either possesses or controls this ambiguous ‘Power’. In the context of the Acts passage, of course, it is clear that Simon’s abilities come from no such thing, but it is again the witnesses of Simon’s actions who make the proclamation. It is easy, then, the Acts say, for people witnessing a magician not only to confuse his actions for divinely-derived or related ones, but even his person.

For some people, then, the ‘Power of God’ was an epithet, for a person who was able to work wonders. It is in the Pauline epistles that the language of Jesus as the ‘Power of God’ is first mentioned.²⁰⁰ The magic contests do not generally use such language to describe him. Rather, in the magic contests, when reference is made to Jesus, overwhelmingly the epithet ‘Lord’ is preferred. As we shall see, perhaps this is due to a different conception of what the ‘Power of God’ is.

For in some magic contests, ‘power’ is something which can be possessed and wielded, rather than as an epithet.²⁰¹ It is this kind of power which is referred to in reference to specific acts of wonder-working (eg, ‘by the power of God he was raised’ AP 25). A version of the story of Simon’s entry into Rome shows how the confusion of these two senses of ‘Powers’ is in a sense a necessary consequence of this desire for a direct competition between Simon and the other apostles.²⁰² *The Didascalia Apostolorum*, a third century text relates the whole contest between Peter and Simon in the space of a few sentences:

*et cum venisset Romam, valde depopulatus est ecclesiam multos deexhortans et adoptans sibi, et gentiles **seducebat magicis operationibus et virtutibus**: sicuti in una die procedens vidi illum per aera volantem et ferebatur. Et subsistens dixi: **in virtute sancti***

²⁰⁰ Cf. Rom. 1:16; 1Cor 1:18 and 24; 2Cor 6:7.

²⁰¹ In the AJ, the power of God is exclusively wielded: Αὔριον γίνεσθε ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ ὁπόσοι βούλεσθε τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δύναμιν (31); ὁ Ἰωάννης δυνάμει θεοῦ ἰάσατοπάσας τὰς νόσους (37).

²⁰² See below in this chapter on the ‘contest’ being formed because of the ‘Powers’.

*nominis Iesu excido virtutes tuas'. et sic ruens femur pedis sui fregit.*²⁰³

Here we see a direct contrast between 'powers', representing Simon and Jesus – but in neither case are these powers the identity-markers for the opposing forces, but rather they are abilities, which can be manipulated by individuals. The 'power' of 'magical works' is possessed by Simon; the 'power of the name of Jesus' is possessed by the apostle. As it happens, of course, the 'power of the name of Jesus' is the stronger of the two, and wins the contest. The apostle here uses this power in a way which calls to mind an invocation of a spirit; the name of Jesus itself, rather than Jesus, is used to counteract the magic works of Simon. Simon's 'powers' are his acts of magic, but the power which defeats him is not an act or a deed, it is instead an invocation of the name of a superior being, a being (it is implied) who is in himself much more *powerful* than Simon, so much so that merely his name is enough to destroy Simon's display of power. Other texts demonstrate that the 'power of God' can be even more complicated, and that a direct comparison between the power (i.e. ability) of individuals is not enough to prevent confusion within a community.

'POWER OF GOD' AS IDENTITY-MARKER

The use of the term 'Power [of God]' as a personal epithet, or marker of identity, is frequent in the early magic-contest texts.²⁰⁴ Simon is depicted in the magic contest texts, as well, as claiming first for himself the title of 'Power of God', setting himself against not his actual opponents (the apostles) but against Jesus. His introduction in the *Acts of Peter* is in some ways similar to his introduction in the canonical Acts:

*post paucos autem dies turbatio magna facta est in media aeclesia dicentium visisse se mirabilia per hominem quendam cui nomen erat Simon...adiecit qui se diceret magnam virtutem esse dei et sine deo nihil facere. numquid ipse est Christus?*²⁰⁵

²⁰³ *Didas.* 23.vi.7.

²⁰⁴ This is more specific than '*theios aner*' and should not be used interchangeably; see Herczeg (1998), 31.

²⁰⁵ AP 4: 'A few days later there was a great uproar within the church, of those saying that they had seen wonder-working by a certain man, whose name was Simon...[they]

Already we see one problem with the use of ‘Power of God’ as an identity, as opposed to as a description of actions – it is very easy to slip from being a (or the) Power of God to being, in some sense, God himself. For Christians, of course, in the case of Jesus this was not a problem, and indeed Origen in the *Contra Celsum*, by setting up a contrast between Jesus and Simon, specifically identifies Jesus’ wonder-working as the sign that he was the Power of God.²⁰⁶ But for those people who are claiming a legitimate relationship to the divine, it is a more dangerous claim to *be* the Power of God than to have or possess it. This introduction sets up the contrast between the ‘wonderful works’ of Simon (and his boasting) and his claim to *be* ‘*magna virtus dei*’, and also that ‘*sine deo nihil facit*’ – to have the power of God both as his identity and as his, as it were, animating force. Simon here is appropriating the epithet, but also the other usage of ‘power’ as referring to his deeds. The confusion is caused in the church because this ‘power of God’ sounds rather like ‘the Christ’ that they have heard of from Paul. It is this Christ that they ‘believe in’, but not because Jesus is the ‘power of God’, but because of the deeds of Paul, who has also been working wonders: resurrections and healing. Here there is not yet any claim of the ‘power of God’ relating to Paul or the other apostles. In the rest of the AP, the author addresses the gaps in understanding by way of setting up a contest in which the issue of God’s ‘power’ will be settled definitively.²⁰⁷ Unlike the author of the AS, however, he does not tell his audience explicitly how to do this.

added that he said he was the great power of God and without God did nothing. Is he himself not Christ?’

²⁰⁶ CC II.9: ‘Οὗτος δὲ ἐπεδείξατο ἐν Ἰουδαίοις «θεοῦ δύναμις» ὧν τὸ τοιοῦτον δι’ ὧν παραδόξων ἐποίησεν’. Is this an indication that ‘θεοῦ δύναμις’ may have been a known identity-marker for miracle worker? The evidence is hardly conclusive.

²⁰⁷ Though even in the contest, there is little direct contrast between Peter and Simon on this point: the language of identification with the Power of God is not the most frequent description of the apostle. Far more often, he is called a ‘servant’ of God (cf. Moses in AP 8, *Pharaonem inflammasti et coegisti pugnare contra sanctum servum dei Moysen*, Silvester in the AS, *passim*).

Simon himself is only represented as claiming to be the ‘power of God’ (and, finally ‘son of God’²⁰⁸), but his followers seem to interpret this even more strongly, as if he is ‘God in Italy’ and indeed ‘saviour’. He is able to persuade even the educated, wealthy, upper classes:

*fratres rogabant Petrum, ut expugnaret Simonem, qui se dicebat dei virtutem esse, morantem in domo Marcelli senatoris persuasum carminibus eius, dicentes, ‘crede nobis, frater Petrus, nemo fuit tam sapientior inter homines, quam hic Marcellus.’*²⁰⁹

Simon’s goal in his ‘contention’ is represented as being to gain followers by stirring up confusion in the church. If Simon can present himself as an alternative ‘power of God’ to the Christ of Paul, by, as with the magicians of Pharaoh, imitating the wonder-working of God’s representatives (Moses and the apostles²¹⁰), that is enough to get him described in terms that have henceforth only been used of Christ (God and Saviour). The danger of the false Messiah is hardly a Christian invention, but in this early period, when people’s knowledge of the Christ is only through representatives of his ‘power’, the importance of not underestimating potential opponents is demonstrated by the magic contests which set up a method by which the comparison can be made in such a way as to limit the confusion which was Simon’s ostensible goal. As Marcellus the penitent says, *confiteor autem quoniam me non seduxisset, nisi quod dei virtutem se esse dicebat.*²¹¹ Marcellus’ dream (after his conversion) continues to conceive of Simon still having his power located in a person: *omnes vires Simonis et dei ipsius haec est, quae saltat: decolla eam.*²¹² This passage is clearly intended to be a vision, and not taken literally – as

²⁰⁸ *Rec.* 3.47. This is in a non-trinitarian sense, of course; the *Rec.* presents Simon as a polytheist of sorts.

²⁰⁹ AP 8: ‘The brothers begged Peter to combat Simon, who said he was the Power of God, and who was staying at the house of Marcellus, the senator (who had been persuaded by his magical incantations), saying, ‘Believe us, brother Peter, there was no one wiser among men than this man Marcellus.’ *persuasum* should grammatically mean Simon, but that is impossible in sense; no doubt the text is corrupt here, and should be *persuasi*.

²¹⁰ See ch. 2.

²¹¹ AP 10: ‘I confess moreover that he would not have led me astray, except for the fact that he said that he himself was the power of God’.

²¹² AP 22. ‘All the powers of Simon and of his God is this woman who is dancing: behead her!’

Marcellus says, his symbolic killing of the woman/demon in his dream gave him confidence that Simon could be defeated.

The way this confusion of ‘Power’ will be sorted out is through a contest. This contest is presented as being instigated by the actions of Simon, in particular his claim to be the ‘power of God’ (setting himself against Christ) which sets the church in confusion about the identity of Simon and Christ, and by extension the role of the apostles, as we shall see.²¹³ There is no direct contrast or comparison made here at this early stage between Paul or Peter and Simon, even though, Simon’s claim of being the ‘power of God’ is linked to his desire to have a contest, although with whom he seeks a contest is not clear.²¹⁴ He denigrates Jesus as being weak and an unlikely ‘Power’, but his own taking on of the identity leads in the end to the loss of his last followers, who believed his definition of power: *‘tu es dei virtus? quis tibi crus fregit? numquid ipse deus, cuius te virtutem esse dicis?’*²¹⁵ This shows the extra danger, and the potential paradox, involved in being the power, rather than having it: if you are a part of something, and break, then the greater thing is responsible for this breaking, which itself implies that you are not ‘favoured’ in the way you have been claiming.

The internal and external audience for these contests²¹⁶ must have been expected to understand the many uses of ‘power’. In particular, it must be inferred by readers that Simon’s identification as ‘power of God’ was impossible, because there was only one being who could be identified as such, due to his being both divine and human, and thus the manifestation in himself of the intervention of God in the physical world: the

²¹³ See ch. 2.

²¹⁴ Cf. the AS’ more measured introduction to the contest. It is notable, though, that the contests themselves are presented as having a similar level of ‘official’ involvement. On the introduction to the contest, see Canella (2005), 144-5.

²¹⁵ AP 32. ‘Are you the Power of God? Who broke your leg? Was it not God, whose power you say you are...’

²¹⁶ As they were no doubt Christians (see Introduction).

scriptural meaning of God's power.²¹⁷ Even though the magic contests do not define the term technically, the texts are, in a sense about this very question: who has identified the correct individual as being, or having, the power of God, and how can anyone tell? Unless it is Jesus who is being spoken of, it is not an easy call to make.

THE CLOSENESS OF THE POWER OF GOD²¹⁸

Thus, it seems, the picture began as a complicated one, which was gradually simplified. To a certain extent, the disappearance of language about *being* the Power of God in later texts can be attributed to distance from the apostolic age. It is not nearly as troubling to conceive of the apostles as being, or embodying, the Power of God; for bishops and others, what they inherit *qua* bishop is not the Power of God itself, but the ability to wield it. For the second century writers who crafted the apocryphal acts, their apostolic characters had a more direct and obvious claim of closeness to the one certain being who was the Power of God, that is Jesus, who is the identity or equivalent of that term. With this distance, the claims of the opponents could be considered correspondingly stronger. But it is perhaps worth wondering why, when the author of the AS was more than willing to import with little or no change so much of the structure and content of his second-century predecessors, he did not do the same with the 'power of God' as a personal epithet.

Peter in the AP can say *pater sanctus filii tui Iesu Christi, qui nobis virtutem tuam praebuisti*²¹⁹ and he is understood to mean that Jesus has given him the power of God not in any metaphorical sense, but literally, as described in the gospels and canonical Acts. Whilst, as we shall see, the claim of apostleship is made very strongly in all of the 'Petrine' texts, in the AS, the bishop of Rome cannot make a similar claim to that of Peter

²¹⁷ It is interesting to note that the Jewish characters in the AS make almost no 'Simoniac' claims for themselves, other than their possession of the ineffable name of God.

²¹⁸ On the changing attitude to sacred space in Late Antiquity, see Stroumsa (2009), 66-7.

²¹⁹ AP 27. 'Holy father of your son Jesus Christ, who granted us your power'. In Acts, of course, this is describe as the job of the Holy Spirit, who has almost no presence in MCTs.

himself. By the fourth and fifth century, it is ‘signifiers’²²⁰ of Jesus which can make that kind of claim instead:²²¹ making the sign of the cross,²²² praying in the ‘holy name’ of Jesus, even raising the χ - ρ standard; the individual Silvester can manipulate the power to which he has access, but he is not himself a signifier of Jesus; he is a signifier of Peter.²²³ He stands in a line from Peter, and lineage is everything; but the distance of time cannot be overcome. Perhaps the author of the AS felt that in an even stronger way, writing about the time when the empire went from pagan to Christian from a distance of over a century and a half. The urgency he conveys at bringing about the last conversions may spring from a sense that time was running out, that the power of God might be slipping away.

The other, even more noticeable, major change made between the second-century texts and the AS may provide some interesting insight into this anxiety. Whilst the ‘content’ of the contests will primarily be discussed later, in the AS we do see a major development in the final act of wonder-working. Instead of using a human to test the ‘Power of God’ as is done multiple times and many ways in the AP, the AS author has the Jews and Silvester contest over a bull. This does not lessen the dramatic impact of the scene; it does however place the emotional focus away from the act of reviving a human being and place it on the act of being able to revive as the essential point. The ritual aspect of the ‘resurrection’ of the bull is much the same as it is in other texts, but it is itself a symbol/signifier²²⁴ of the acts of wonder-working done by previous generations, and a symbol that stands for the ritual of sacrifice. It does not, unlike the resurrection of a child,

²²⁰ A good example of one of the general principles of ‘symbol’ for Rappaport (1999), 149: ‘notions so abstract that words can barely grasp them are represented by material signs. The most abstract products of human thought and feeling are thus made substantial and in being made substantial are being made comprehensible’.

²²¹ These words and actions carry some ‘residue’, as it were of the Power of God, but still need to be wielded by the right individuals.

²²² It became a commonplace that all that was needed to defeat ‘enchantments’ was the sign of the cross: Athanasius *Vit. Ant.* 78: ἐνθα τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ σταυροῦ γίνεται, ἄσθενεῖ μὲν μαγεία. On the use of the sign of the cross in a fourth century ‘contest’ see below on Joseph of Tiberias; also the *Vit. Cyp.*

²²³ See Rappaport (1979), 179-80 on symbolic communication in ritual (canonical, already encoded in the ritual, vs indexical, added by the participant, messages).

²²⁴ ‘Resurrection’ being the ‘ritual symbol’ in the Turnerian sense. See Turner (1969).

have a great benefit to others living, and the bull certainly cannot count as a ‘convert’ itself.²²⁵ By the time of the AS, it was enough to show that Silvester was symbolically connected to the power over life and death which is identified as ‘God’s’; for the second-century authors, nothing less than a human resurrection was accepted.²²⁶ The second-century metaphor of being ‘reborn’ is absent, replaced with a demonstration of power by Silvester and his God. This is, however, sufficient, and demonstrates most emphatically that the claims of his opponents are either deliberate lies or self-deception. The ‘split’ in the divine power is thus, simply, between lies and truth, and who is the originator of both.

THE LINEAGE THEORY OF DIVINE POWER

The idea of two competing supernatural lineages, God’s and the devil’s, is not an idea that originates with our texts. Suggesting to someone that their father was the devil was a longstanding insult (and one particularly levelled against the Jews). But the magic contest texts develop the idea of the lineage of divine power differently than other texts, such as in heresiology (which was developing at the same time), which sought to trace all heresies back in a single lineage, the easier to demolish them.

Already in the canonical gospels and Acts, we find evidence of the lineage theory of evil.

The most direct ‘accusation of lineage’ is found, famously in John 8:43-44:

Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The *Iudaioi* in this chapter are children of the devil (in contrast to their claim to be the children of Abraham and thus of God).²²⁷ Whilst this assertion results in a constellation of consequences, the most important one is that the devil is ‘father of lies’ and that thus, those who believe a falsehood, or who perpetrate one, are accused of having a bad

²²⁵ See ch. 3 on the ‘ritual objects’ in these texts.

²²⁶ Bynum (1995) traces the increasing ‘metaphorisation’ of the understanding of physical resurrection; see also Stroumsa (2009), 62ff. on this same process in Judaism in this period.

²²⁷ The ‘descent from Abraham’ was a central point of Jewish-Christian debate. It features heavily in the AS; see Canella (2005), 153-6.

parentage, or at least of not having a claim to a divine lineage.²²⁸ It is in John, then, that we see the first attempt to justify why there are some who are not convinced of the ‘power’ that comes from God. In a contest situation, in a conflict over the divine origins of some power, this is the first and most important proof text.²²⁹ The magic-contest texts do not tend to reference the context of this passage but do clearly know it, linking Simon’s lineage to his magic:

*ego enim me tibi praestabo petenti te signa et prodigia, et convertes multos, sed habebis contrarium Simonem per opera patris sui. sed omnia eius adprobabuntur carmina et magica figmenta.*²³⁰

Although the father is not identified here, his identity is not meant to be a mystery; clearly the intended readership would know immediately of what Simon was being accused. In the AP ‘*carmina et magica figmenta*’ are certainly no better than lies. Similarly, in a curse delivered directly to Simon, the father is not stated outright but is ‘talked around’ most elaborately:

*o horrende deo et hominibus, o exterminium veritatis et corruptio<nis> omnis semen pessimum, o infructuosum fructum naturae! sed in brevi et in minimo adparens...de inpudero patre natus, qui numquam in bono, sed in veneno radices emittes, incredibile genus et omni spe destitute...*²³¹

Again, the ‘shameless father’ is not meant to be difficult to identify. The curse does seem to emphasise the lack of fruitfulness of the devil’s child, in contrast to later works that see the evil lineage as extending both far into the past and into the future. The

²²⁸ Underlying some of this might be the concept that Martin Buber articulated, of man’s special responsibility for the evil of lying – certainly in the battle between good and evil, the evil which is routinely demonstrated is that of the lie. ‘the lie is the specific evil which man has introduced into nature’ (Buber (1952), 7).

²²⁹ As opposed to the actual telling of the Simon narrative in Acts 8, which does not seem to be quoted from in any of these texts, perhaps because it ends with Simon’s (at least partial) repentance.

²³⁰ AP 16. ‘For I will stand with you, when you seek signs and wonders, and you will convert many: but you shall have Simon in opposition to you by his father’s works; but everything of his will proved incantations and magical inventions’.

²³¹ AP 15. ‘O thing abhorrent to God and men, O thing beyond the boundary of truth and evil seed of all corruption, O unfruitful fruit of nature! But you appear for a brief and little time...son from a shameless father, you who never produce roots for good but for poison, unbelieving spawn and devoid of every hope’.

euphemistic suppression of the devil in this early part of the text does not hold throughout the AP, however. After the contest has been (mostly) completed, and Simon has been shown to lack the power of resurrection, the crowd bays to kill him. Peter holds them back:

*si enim et hic potest paeniteri, melius. deus enim non memorabitur mala. veniat ergo in lumine Christi. si autem non potest, partem patris sui diabuli possideat.*²³²

The separation of God and evil is thus stated explicitly here (for the first time in the text). Finally, we have a direct contrast between the ‘light of Christ’ and ‘his father the devil’, which is evil.²³³ To kill Simon, Peter seems to say, would be to take some ‘part’ of the devil, a part which defiles.²³⁴ It is that part which enables Simon to kill the boy with a word. Already, then, in the earliest magic contests, we see a direct lineage being set up between, on the one hand, lies/the devil and his supernatural, evil power, and on the other hand, truth/God and his power. Simon’s father is the devil, Simon is a ‘corrupt seed’, a very physical metaphor. Peter’s father is God, and his closeness to the son of God, his selection by him as a ‘spiritual son’, is stated to be the source of his power.

POWER IN THE *RECOGNITIONS*

The concept of the ‘power of God’ does not at first seem a central one in the philosophical discourse of the *Recognitions*. But what it does say on the topic should be examined. It is in the *Recognitions* that the link between the power of God and the lineage of evil receives its fullest elaboration, due to the dualistic philosophy which underlies much of the text.²³⁵ To the author of the *Recognitions*, the world is a constant battleground between pairs of things – one which is good and the other evil; the contest which forms much of the ‘plot’ revolves, in a sense, around this idea.²³⁶ The way in

²³² AP 28. ‘For if even he is able to repent, that would be better. For God will not remember bad deeds. Let him, therefore, come in the light of Christ; but if he is not able, let him have the part of his father the devil’.

²³³ So evil, perhaps, that it might prevent Simon’s ‘coming to Christ’?

²³⁴ Cf. AP 32, though, and see below on the contrast between these two scenes.

²³⁵ Pesthy (2010), 164-5 on the totally distinction in time for the *duae viae* in the *Hom*. The here and now is the way of death, and the heavenly kingdom the way of life.

²³⁶ See below on how the doctrines of ‘pairs’ is used to explain magic contests.

which the lineage of Simon is determined and discussed shows a much fuller development of the ideas present in earlier texts. For this author, it is primarily in Simon's actions that the origin of his power can be determined, and it is within the power of human reason to do so. We will examine how the *Recognitions* constructs and links lineage to power, and investigates in detail how this power, or false assumption of power, can itself be transmitted.

First, unlike most of the other texts we are examining, the *Recognitions* shows some curiosity about the power which is innate in humans. Unlike the pairs of opposites which seem to govern the whole divine sphere, at times it seems as though human *virtus* is much more ambiguous, able to incline in any direction.²³⁷ The human power is thus weak and susceptible, but contains within it some ability to be moulded, at least, correctly. Initially, Peter wishes to evaluate Simon's personal conduct and behaviour, rather than his relationship to the supernatural. But he is persuaded by his own 'informants' that this will result in being misled, due to Simon's ability at deception, both from his own skills and from his connections to the supernatural:

*super haec autem omnia et ipse Simon vehementissimus est orator, in arte dialectica et syllogismorum tendiculis enutritus, quod autem est omnibus gravius, et in arte magica valde exercitatus; et ideo metuo, ne forte tam valide ex omni parte munitus, apud eos qui ignorant eum, falsa allegans putetur vera defendere. neque enim vel nos ipsi eum potuissemus effugere et converti ad dominum, nisi dum adiutores eius et errorum socii sumus, agnovissemus quod deceptor esset et magus.*²³⁸

²³⁷ *Rec.* III.23: *arbitrii potestas est sensus animae, habens virtutem, qua possit ad quos velit actus inclinari.* 'The power of decision is the feeling of the soul, having the power, by which it can be inclined to those acts it wants to be'.

²³⁸ *Rec.* II.5: 'Simon is himself a very forceful speaker, fed on the art of disputation, and in the snares of syllogisms, but what is more serious than everything else, he is very practiced in the magic arts. And so I fear, being so strongly protected on all sides, that among those who are unaware of him, he be thought to defend truth, when despatching lies. For even our own selves could not have escaped and turned to the Lord, except that while we were his helpers and companions of his errors, we had come to know that he was a deceiver and a sorcerer.'

In the *Recognitions*, skill with words becomes a much more prominent sign that one might not be wholly on the side of good; indeed frequently Simon's skill at rhetoric is at least linked by proximity to his magic and other 'wickednesses'. But the *Recognitions* has more to offer on how we can determine the Power of God even in the midst of confusion.²³⁹ Peter's informants²⁴⁰ credit only their own lineal connection to the divine ('inborn' in them) as the reason they were able to escape from his clutches:

*utpote qui a puero malorum eius adiutores fuerimus et ministri, et nisi nos dei amor abrupisset ab eo, in eisdem cum ipso etiam nunc versaremur malis; sed ingenitus quidam nobis erga deum affectus scelera quidem eius exosa, cultum vero dei amabilem fecit. unde et arbitror opus fuisse divinae providentiae, ut nos primo familiares eius effecti notitiam caperemus, quomodo vel quali arte prodigia quae facere videtur efficiat. quis enim est, qui non obstupescat super his, quae facit, mirabilibus et putet eum de caelis deum ad salutem hominum descendisse?*²⁴¹

Here, then, the contrast is between some sort of inborn 'providence' of the divine (not *virtus*, but having in a sense the same function) and the 'manner' in which Simon performs 'wonderful things', which can lead to confusion and belief that Simon is himself a God (as we see the crowd in the AP proclaim several times). The story of the assistants does credit the divine, ultimately, with the rescue, but it seems to be a bit more positive about the role of humans themselves (linked to the divine though they may be) in discernment.²⁴² For these assistants, unlike later groups, did not need a contest to show them the truth.

²³⁹ How important is it that in the third century old certainties about power and authority had fallen away, and had yet to be replaced by the new certainties of the fourth century? Does the socio-political context help explain how such a text could be created?

²⁴⁰ Aquila and Niceta.

²⁴¹ *Rec.* II.6: 'Since childhood we have been his helpers and ministers of evil deeds, and if the love of God had not snatched us from him, even now we would carry on in these same evils with him. But some innate affection toward God made his crimes odious to us, and the worship of God congenial. Hence, I think, it was the work of divine providence, that we, having first been made his friends, should acquire knowledge, that we should understand how and by what means he works the prodigies which he seems to perform. For who would not be amazed by these works of wonder which he does, and not think that he was a God from heaven, come down for the salvation of men?'

²⁴² Cf. *Rec.* III.20.

Simon himself is made to explain his connection to the divine, which he links not to the devil, of course, but to his own power at manipulating a soul. He says, invoking his own kind of dualism,

*secundum locum post deum obtinet anima hominis, cum exuta fuerit a corporis sui tenebris. statim denique et praescientiam habet, propter quod et evocatur ad necromantiam.*²⁴³

But this explanation, as we shall see, is not the whole story. Simon rests almost his whole claim to the divine power on this one act. He usurps, or rather surpasses, the ‘prerogative’ of God the creator:

*ego virtute mea quodam tempore aerem vertens in aquam et aquam rursus in sanguinem carnem que solidans, novum hominem puerum formavi et opus conditore deo multo nobilius protuli. ille enim hominem creavit e terra, ego autem, quod est difficilius.*²⁴⁴

But Peter’s objection is not to the fact of Simon’s ability; it is to its source, and to Simon’s arrogance and presumption that it is possible to do what he has done solely *virtute sua*. Peter returns to the idea that there is an inborn love of (or sense of connection to) God in man, and that this is manipulated by the devil:²⁴⁵

*ut ergo infideles a fidelibus et pii discernantur ab impiis, permissum est maligno uti his artibus, quibus singulorum erga verum parentem probentur affectus.*²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Rec. II.13. ‘After God, a man’s soul has second place, when it has been let out from the shadows of his body. And then immediately it has foreknowledge, why is also why it is summoned for necromancy’. On sacrifice in necromancy, see Ogden (2001), 196-200.

²⁴⁴ Rec. II. 15: ‘I, by my power, at a certain [moment in] time, turning air into water and water, again, into blood, and strengthening it into flesh, a new human, a boy, I created and brought forth a a work far more impressive than the creator god. Indeed, he created man from earth, but I, a thing which is more difficult’. Morgan (2010), 73-4 lists fables of overambition; this aspect of Simon’s character fits in well with this trope; in the *Rec.* he certainly has the aura of *hubris* about him. But the theme is not developed very much.

²⁴⁵ Contrasting with ‘adoptionism’. The debate about so-called ‘Origenism’ in the late fourth-century is relevant here; see Clark (1992).

²⁴⁶ Rec. II.18: ‘So that, therefore, the unfaithful be distinguished from the faithful, and the reverent from the irreverent, it is allowed that the malign one make use of those arts, by which the love of individuals towards the true parent may be tested’.

The author of the *Recognitions* locates the origin of Simon's power both through his connection to evil (by affection and heritage) and his wielding of it. He is both a 'son' of the devil and his instrument. Whilst God is identified here as the true Father of all, it seems some have chosen, by the power of their human will, to 'pass over' into sonship with the 'wicked one'. This leads on to the dispute, which focuses on the existence and origin of evil. Simon posits that, in fact, evil does not exist, and claims authority for this view from the Jews.²⁴⁷ It is only after a long discussion, which seems to remain unresolved, that the question of the divine power is brought back. Peter makes an assertion about the power of God, that it is not bound by law, but rather *is* the law.²⁴⁸ This is the only direct statement about the power of God in this section. More is said about the power of the human will, again, to make the choice in whom to follow, even given this statement about the force of God's will and power.

Finally, Simon does make an assertion about his own power, which has been unfolding throughout this section. First, he accuses Peter of being the deceiver (the implications of that having been laid out previously, as we have seen), and then states boldly his own divine connection, and its implications:

nunc autem tibi ostendam divinitatis meae potentiam, ut repente procidas et adores me. ego sum prima virtus, qui semper et sine initio sum. ego per aerem volavi, igni commixtus unum corpus effectus sum, statuas moveri feci,²⁴⁹ animavi exanima, lapides panes feci, de monte in montem volatu transmeavi... haec non solum feci, sed et nunc

²⁴⁷ Rec. III.17.

²⁴⁸ Rec. III.29.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Lucian *Alexander*, a portrait with many similarities to the Clementine Simon.

facere possum, ut rebus ipsis probem omnibus, quia ego sum filius dei... tua autem verba vana sunt omnia nec ullum potes opus ostendere²⁵⁰ veritatis, sicut et ille qui misit te magus,²⁵¹ qui nec se ipsum potuit liberare de crucis²⁵² poena.²⁵³

This is the first linking of the divine power with specific wonder-working abilities -- which we had perhaps expected to hear more about. But it is only after the long and confusing discourse about evil and its origins that the wonder-working is adduced. For both Simon and Peter, it seems that it is actually the power of evil which is most relevant to their claims, rather than that of God. Simon reverses the charges placed on him, and places them on Jesus (not Peter), taking on the appellation 'son of God' in direct fulfillment of Peter's prediction in the previous discourse on evil. It is almost as if, if the charge of 'magicianhood' is proved, then the non-magician will be proclaimed the power of God. In this section, the groundwork for a contest is laid: it is within the power of the human will to determine who truly possesses the power of God, but it is necessary first to delineate and then to demonstrate the claims made, so that the self-evident²⁵⁴ truth will be revealed, and thus the challenge is made by Peter: *cum omni hac turba pergamus ad domum tuam, et tunc apparebit qui sit magus.*²⁵⁵ Who is not a magician, it is implied, will be the one who has the true power of God.

²⁵⁰ *ostendere* seems to be the regular Latin term for a ritual performance of wonder-working.

²⁵¹ I believe it is only here that the 'opponent' ever calls the apostle himself a magician or deceiver.

²⁵² Cf. taunts of Simon about Jesus in the AP; this is certainly an odd point for those who wanted to link Simon to Paul, the 'prophet of the resurrection'.

²⁵³ Recognitions III.46-7: 'Now I will demonstrate to you the power of my divinity, so that suddenly you will fall and adore me. I am the first power, who always is and is without beginning. I flew through the air, I have made myself one body mixed with fire, I have made statues move, I have animated the dead, I have made bread from stones, I have moved by flight from one mountain to another...not only have I done these things, but even now I can do them, so that I can prove to everyone by the deeds themselves, that I am the son of God...your words are all empty and you are not able to perform any work of truth, as that man who sent you is a sorcerer, who was not able to free himself from the punishment of the cross.'

²⁵⁴ See Rec. III.36.

²⁵⁵ Rec. III.48. 'with all this crowd let us go to your house, and then it will be clear who is a magician'.

THE POWER OF GOD AND THE JEWS OF THE *ACTA SILVESTRI*

All these texts are concerned to show how the devil is the father of deceit, and thus of those who claim falsely to be, or to possess the power of God. In the figure of Simon Magus, we have a ‘son’ of the devil, who uses false signs and wonders²⁵⁶ to convince the gullible that he is the true heir of the divine, and that Christ is not the one who all should follow. As Christianity spread, these stories spread with it, cautionary tales (such as those of Simon and his followers) and wild fantasies of Christian success at the same time.²⁵⁷ But with the favouring of Christianity by Constantine, the popularity of these texts did not wane. If anything, they increased: they were translated into Latin and Syriac and spread throughout the empire. The power of God, it seemed, had finally taken its rightful place. So why did such texts continue to be written?

The threat represented by Simon Magus did not go away for the Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries. Heresies abounded, leading Christians astray. But, even more importantly, there were still those who claimed much as Simon had claimed, that Jesus did not have the power of God, and was himself a magician, and that moreover, it was actually themselves whose lineage was most closely connected with the divine: the Jews. The persistence of the Jews continued to worry Christians: how could they not ‘see the light’ and realise that their claim to divine heritage had been abrogated? Their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was now the ‘father’ only of those who recognised him in Jesus. This point is forcefully made by the prayers of Silvester in his contest with Zambri:

*Tunc Sylvester episcopus expandit suas <manus> ad et dixit, ‘Deus Abraam, Deus Isaac et deus Iacob qui trina inuocatione in his tribus patriarchis ideo te inuocari uoluisti, ut manifestaretur nobis per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum.’*²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ For the contest-discernment process, see ch. 3.

²⁵⁷ Even martyrdom tales could qualify (indeed what else is the story of Perpetua?).

²⁵⁸ AS, 528, ‘Then Silvester the bishop put out his hands and said, “God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Isaac, who wished to be invoked by triple invocation in these three patriarchs, so that it may be manifested to us through our Lord Jesus Christ’.

The power of the God of the patriarchs was now in the Christian lineage, not the Jewish. The textual proliferation in the ‘Christian empire’ shows the anxiety to defeat (what were perceived as) common Jewish arguments against the truth of Christianity, by arguing from the shared scriptures of the Hebrew Bible.²⁵⁹ Even after the end of the debate, the role of human discernment is not dismissed by the Jewish figure, through its ability to sense the power of God.²⁶⁰ Like the Simon figure before him, Zambri is presented as supremely confident in the power he wields, and its source.

In the *Acta Silvestri*, the model of Simon Magus versus Peter is adapted to this old corporate enemy. The Jews claim that they have the divine power (that is, the divine name²⁶¹) through their descent from Abraham. But Silvester shows that in fact, they have lost this connection, and that it is ‘some demon’ who has given them what they thought was divine power. The Jews in the AS take pride in their lineage, but they are said to be mistaken, or lying, about it altogether. Thus, the Jewish leaders in the AS are collectively serving the same role as Simon in the AP and the Clementines; they show that there is no middle ground between being a child of God and a son of the devil. The lineage of the divine power cannot come from a neutral source; if one possesses the ‘truth’ and power, it is the whole truth.²⁶² Whilst the Jews and Silvester are shown to agree on a number of scriptural texts, that is of no consequence, because without complete agreement with the ‘truth’ as the text reveals it, the power must be demonic.²⁶³ That is the only other option,

²⁵⁹ Canella (2005), 156f cites the many similarities of Justin Martyr; see also Simon (1986), 188-207.

²⁶⁰ But cf. the debate about evil in the *Rec.* for the unsatisfactory nature of these kinds of discussions for ‘proof’ in these texts.

²⁶¹ On Jewish magical invocation of the divine name, see Janowitz (2002), esp. ch. 2; Bohak (2008), 376-8 and *passim*. Commented upon in Lightstone (2006) 23ff, especially, for the ‘power of the holy name’.

²⁶² It is worth comparing the AS Jews and their confrontation with wonder-working and the stories of Jewish confrontation in the *Pan.* of Epiphanius and the letter of Severus of Minorca. In all cases, of course, the Jews are defeated, but as we shall see, in these other texts they are represented as having more power of discernment and also of resistance to the dominant Christian culture.

²⁶³ e.g. AS, 526: *ut non credamus hoc nomen daemonis alicuius...dicat modo mortuo illud nomen et suscitetur eum*. ‘So that we don’t believe this is the name of some demon, let him say that name in this way to the dead one, and raise him’.

and the only decision to be made is which power to follow, which representative of power to trust. Throughout the whole tradition, the same message is presented: the representative of the power of God is the only one who can be looked to with authority for the truth. It is the possession of the power of God, in fact, that laid the whole foundation laid for the concept of authority, and for the proper ordering of the community and its way of life.

Chapter Two: THE STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY

*praefectus autem patientiam ad his voluit prestare, ne quid videretur in pie gerere. producit autem praefectus unum de suis alumnis et ad Sim<o>ne sic dixit: hunc accipe, morti trade. Petro dixit: tu vero resuscita eum. et ad populum praefectus dixit: vestrum est nunc iudicare, qui ex illis acceptus sit deo, qui mortificat aut qui vivificat.*²⁶⁴

In this chapter, I examine how the concept of authority is used in the magic contest texts, and in particular how the contests both ask and answer questions about authority, where it comes from, and how it is or should be structured. For the communities in MCTs, authority is of primary importance for their worldview: how can anyone know whom to follow? Should Christians follow only spiritual authority and reject secular authority, or is it possible to follow both kinds of authority and remain a faithful Christian? I look first at how authority as a concept differs from power, and how the two concepts interact. Secondly, how the magic contests put forth a surprising view of the role of secular authority and its interaction with religious groups, and how the secular authority that is intrinsic to public space is exploited by the contests.²⁶⁵ I will then examine how authority is vested in individuals in the texts, both secular and religious, and in particular try to determine how Simon Magus can be presented as having authority, despite his status as an outsider and a deceiver. Similarly, how Jews are presented as also having a kind of limited authority within the scope of debate and contest is also discussed, along with other kinds of limited authority. Ultimately, the magic contests present a view of authority which is limited, both by power and by rituals which express and confirm this authority. Spiritual authority shows its legitimacy in part by its operation within the confines of the secular authority; it is this unusual mixture which produces the contest,

²⁶⁴ AP 25: 'But the prefect wished to show patience to these men, so that he not seem to do anything irreverently. The prefect led out one of his servants and spoke thus to Simon: 'Take this one, hand him over to death.' And he said to Peter: 'And you revive him'. And the prefect said to the people: 'it is now your duty to judge, which of these men is acceptable to God, he who kills or he who revives.'

²⁶⁵ Curran (2000), 116-158 documents the gradual 'Christianisation' of Roman space. From the negative side this is also effective: Pohlkamp (1984), 387: 'Solche im Sinne einer religiösen Topographie negativen Charakterisierungen haben dazu geführt, das der Autor...das römische Kapitol als Schauplatz eines von heidnischen Priestern geplanten rituellen Kindermordes gewählt hat.'

and makes it possible for the contest to have meaning. Whereas spiritual power, as we have seen, is the foundation on which secular power is built, in these texts, it seems, secular authority (also undergirded by divine power) can in some circumstances supersede or control spiritual authority.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POWER AND AUTHORITY

Divine power, as we have seen, is for these authors the physical manifestation of God in the world. Authority is no less divinely ordained, but is not supernatural in its sphere of influence: those in authority have the right to exercise control, make decisions, and in general to lead their group, community or empire.²⁶⁶ Where the texts we are examining speak a great deal about power, at least in the supernatural realm, they speak less directly about authority. Nevertheless, they are much concerned with it, and with the differences between specific kinds of authority. As with power, we find there is a distinction between temporal or secular authority and religious authority assumed to reside in religious figures, as well as authority which is granted temporarily as opposed to that which pertains to a person due to their birth or position. Secular authority is respected in the texts, but it is often manipulated by holders of religious authority (both Christian and otherwise) – manipulated in the sense that it is ‘used’; it is put to a purpose that it does not appear to have intended. Institutional (that is, not ‘personal’ or charismatic²⁶⁷) religious authority, like secular authority, is something which can be held by those who are not, as it were, correct in their religious opinions. Divine power cannot be used in the same way, and authority held by mistaken or deceitful persons does not have either the

²⁶⁶The Roman empire ran on the very abstract concept of *auctoritas* – as something conferred by position but also, it seems, something innate (Roman imperial authority could, e.g. be ‘usurped’ by bishops in order to persecute (Gaddis (2005), 219f.). Brown (1995) delineates how the holy man obtains his authority (ch. 3). Conflicting church/state authority was a major theme of fourth century – Drake (2000), *inter alia*. Gaddis (2005), 240ff. demonstrates that negotiations of authority with Christian communities was ongoing even late in our period. Rappaport (1999), 318 points out that ‘to suggest...that the sanctification of authority is universal..is to approach tautology, for the sanctification of expression is one way to make them authoritative’. The Roman state, so the pagans believed, was only authorised to rule as long as they continued to seek authority from the gods; Christians disagreed only with the identity of that God.

²⁶⁷Luttikuizen (1998) for Simon Magus’ ‘personal’ authority and its irony, 41-5.

force of true, divinely ordained authority or of secular authority; it does operate in the secular world even so. For example, we see Simon wields his authority over his disciples or minions quite successfully, by acting as a ‘boss’:

*illa turbata mente [sc. matrona] pervenit ad legatum, et voce maxima referens quae ei contegissent. quem ut vidit Pompeius legatus turbata mente, quae numquam in publicum processerat, surrexit continuo de tribunali et introivit praetorium et iussit eos perducere et quaestione. ad illi cum essent in tormentis, confessi sunt se Simoni ministerium prestare, ‘adducente nos denariis’.*²⁶⁸

Here, in a passage otherwise dislocated from the main story of the AP, we have a vignette of Simon’s authority, as well as a routine example of the operation of secular authority. Here, the secular authority is portrayed as operating properly, i.e. achieving the right result, and uncovering and exposing the inappropriate use of authority. No religious or spiritual aspect seems to come into it; it is just an vignette demonstrating the character of Simon and his community of followers, and the superior character of the secular authority. It seems, in this episode at least, that a supernatural explanation or solution is not always required.

Whereas secular power is shown to be subordinate to divine power, in magic contests, we see that religious authority structures operate within secular authority, and are in some sense answerable to it. A change from ‘revolution’ to ‘co-ordination’ or subordination of authority is often placed in the Constantinian and post-Constantinian period,²⁶⁹ and indeed it is certainly most clearly evident in these texts. Even in the pre-Constantine texts, though, we find a surprising willingness to accept the imperial status quo and to work ‘within the system’, that is, to allow the secular framework to determine how their

²⁶⁸ AP 17: ‘The matron, of disturbed mind, came to the legate and with a loud voice reported what had happened to her. When the legate Pompeius saw her, in her disturbed mind, she who had never come out in public, he immediately got up from the platform and entered the governor’s palace and ordered the men to be brought out and questioned. And these men, when they were in torment, confessed that they provided service for Simon, “inducing us with money”’.

²⁶⁹ See, e.g., Cameron (1991), 130, ‘In these first generation of imperial support, Christians no longer preached revolution; on the contrary, we can observe a natural and powerful impulse toward demonstrating Christianity’s compatibility with the political system of the empire.’ In the apocryphal literature (much of which Cameron uses as evidence), however, there is precious little evidence for ‘revolution’ in a political sense.

spiritual contest and its fruits will function. As Cameron suggests, these texts show ‘the compatibility with an existing framework and the attraction of a complete change’²⁷⁰ but, pushing this further, it can be suggested that it is possible to present a world where both the framework of one kind of authority and the utter change of another kind can exist quite happily together.

SECULAR AUTHORITY AND STRUCTURE

The right of those in secular authority to rule over others is never questioned by these texts. The role of the secular authority in the ‘dramatic context’ of the wonder-working and debates remains remarkably consistent across time and place. The contest occurs in front of them, and indeed partly for their benefit:

*concurr<u>nt autem et senatores et praefecti et officia. adveniens autem Petrus stetit in medio. universi exclamaverunt: ‘Ostende nobis, Petre, qui sit deus tuus, aut quae maiestas sit, quae tibi fiduciam dedit.’*²⁷¹

or, under a very different emperor:

*igitur conuentu facto Augusto cum Augusta matre sedente. omnes qui intererant sedere iussit et silentium imperatum est...*²⁷²

Whilst it is clear that the authority held by religious figures is more important, the secular authority’s supremacy in the physical world is not challenged. Revolutionary ideas about secular authority are not put forward at any time. Whilst this is not surprising in the Constantinian context of a Christian empire, it perhaps is in a context where the secular authority was authorising persecutions and other hardships for Christians, and as we shall see the picture of authority in the AS itself is more complicated than it first appears.

²⁷⁰ Cameron (1991), 130. This is clearly in line with Rappaport’s adaptiveness criterion (see ch. 3). Rappaport (1999), 6-7: ‘structural transformations in some subsystems made it possible to maintain more basic aspects of the system unchanged’.

²⁷¹ AP 23: ‘Also, the senators and the prefects and the official authorities came together. Peter, also, arriving, stood in the middle, and everyone shouted: Show us, Peter, who your God is or what the greatness is, which gave you assurance’.

²⁷² AS, 516: ‘So when the assembly was made, the emperor was seated with his mother the empress, he told all who were present to be seated and silence was ordered’.

The role of secular authority is presented in a very limited and almost caricatured way. It is this authority that provides for the structure within which the debate and contest will proceed, and it is in this role that the secular authority is presented as neutral, that is, not inclining towards either side before the fact.²⁷³ For the authors, the public setting in which they present their contests is essential to the process of legitimisation which their apostolic figures must undergo, and it is under this structure that the ultimate vision of a Christian world unfolds. This setting is highly secular, evoking nothing more than a Roman law court. The divine power, in this dramatic context, is wielded only by those who are truly representing God, but the authority of the secular world is the structure within which this power is revealed. As we shall see, it is in fact, quite important that this demonstration take place in the secular context. It is this structure within the secular authority which gives a sense of place to the worldview espoused by the contest. The Christian way can still be followed, even within or underneath the Roman culture which surrounds it.²⁷⁴ The structures of authority remain in place at the end of the contests, though the secular representatives of authority have often themselves been subsumed under the *religious* authority which has been demonstrated.

STRUCTURE OF THE CONTEST: HOW A CONTEST IS ORGANISED

It is indeed striking how, across time and place in magic contest texts, these contests are presented as official, even sanctioned proceedings, carried out according to strict rules and in the sight of ‘all’,²⁷⁵ but most especially in the sight of the imperial or other authorities who represent the secular authority and who ensure that the proper procedure is followed and indicate judgements. The high level of organisation of these contests is shown repeatedly. Furthermore, the set-up is structured very much like certain other activities in the forum: legal proceedings which were witnessed by many not directly involved in the case, philosophical disputations, and demonstrations by wandering ‘wonder-workers’ are all familiar, and most of the elements of the contest structure are taken from these kinds of occurrences.

²⁷³ Or, even, slightly pro-Christian from the beginning.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Meeks (1993), 52-65.

²⁷⁵ See Marcion *Institutiones* 3. (Stroumsa (2009), 90).

A contest is structured as follows:²⁷⁶ there is usually an imperial official in charge, and two opposing representatives, in front of a large and mixed crowd. The terms of the contest are agreed to by the parties and usually stated by the official. The contest will begin with a verbal exchange, on which the crowd, acting as a jury, will comment. Then the contest proper will begin, and both representatives will perform their assigned tasks, again with comments from the crowd. Finally, the ‘opponent’ will fail somehow, and the crowd will pass judgement, and sometimes have to be restrained from acting on that judgement by the official in charge. This pattern provides the template for some variation, but the texts do not seem to find the basic set-up noteworthy and there is no discussion on the structure of the contest or on its constituent aspects.

Roman society of this period (and indeed in previous eras) was already familiar with this kind of structured ‘exchange of views’, in particular such an exchange which had legal formulae attached, and which thereby provided legitimacy, among other things, to personal disputes and attempted to prevent the anarchy of feud and violent revolt.²⁷⁷ The use of magic, or apparent magic, might seem to complicate this legal picture. Certainly there were individuals who were disruptive to society and who existed outside the reach of the law courts. In the case of the always-difficult category of magic, trials for ‘sorcery’ and the like occurred, but the individuals tried most often for such offences were of higher social strata and usually were men, even though other literature and papyri in particular present the world of magic as much more egalitarian, if not male-dominated.²⁷⁸ Our magic contests appear to exist in a world where Roman status is acknowledged but not emphasised, even by the non-Christians, and in particular seems to have no effect on the public ‘dispute’. The introduction of both lower social groups and magic into the already existing milieu of the public forum or similar setting (see below on the theatre) is one way in which these texts show their wonder-working to be the opposite of the

²⁷⁶ See introduction for the ‘general summary’ of the contest episodes.

²⁷⁷ On the Roman approach to these issues the history of the mid-first century BC is instructive.

²⁷⁸ *Amm. Marc.* 28.1.16ff presents a good case there was a very real danger of being put on trial for sorcery in the fourth century, at least for elite males.

disruptive social force it was perceived as.²⁷⁹ Here it was able to be tamed, or tethered to the structures of secular authority, and, from the perspective of the community of believers, the power of God would prevail and could even bring about changes in its ruling authority. The indiscriminate acts of wonder-working as performed by Simon in Italy before Peter's arrival have caused disruption and led him to Rome:

*habebis autem agonem fidei veniente sabbato et convertentur multo plures de gentibus et de Iudaeis in nomine meo in me...ego enim me tibi praestabo petenti te signa et prodigia, et convertes multos.*²⁸⁰

Peter's arrival places that *agon* (a word which implies 'official'-ness) in public and uses the secular authority's limits (of a debate²⁸¹) to show how his wonder-working and Simon's differ, and in what respect this matters.

SPACE AND AUTHORITY

The authority of the Roman empire was invested in the public spaces in which the daily business of empire was carried out.²⁸² In particular, the Roman forum came to represent for the magic-contest authors not only the absolute centre of the Roman world, but the most legitimate place in which a dispute could be settled. Increasingly, throughout our period, Rome was considered the only place in which certain kinds of disputes could be settled. This was especially the case in matters of life and death, as in the case of the apostle Paul. Of course, that Peter was bishop and martyred there was paramount to Christians, but even to non-Christians, even after the real centres of imperial power had moved elsewhere,²⁸³ the symbolic power of place held by Rome did not diminish. Other spaces used follow the pattern of spaces in Rome, as adapted to their own civic

²⁷⁹ See e.g. Celsus' in Origen *CC*. But see also Smith (1978).

²⁸⁰ AP 16: [Jesus, in a vision, speaking]: 'But you will have a public contest of faith on the coming Sabbath and many more people from the peoples and from the Jews will be converted in my name to me...for I will be present with you, as you are seeking signs and wonders, and you will convert many.'

²⁸¹ See AP 25, quoted above.

²⁸² See Lieu (2004), 211-238 on Christian demarcation of space (very different than it is presented here).

²⁸³ I.e. to Constantinople.

environment.²⁸⁴ The use of public spaces is one more way in which the contests were inserted into the broader structure of the Roman authority, even in scenarios where this insertion would have been in fact impossible. In particular, all spaces where major acts of wonder-working, especially challenges and contests, occur are made into public spaces and treated as though they are *in conspectu omnium*.²⁸⁵

Forum

It is in the forum that the climax of most contests takes place. The forum was not, like the games or the circus, itself evil.²⁸⁶ It was one focus, however, of Roman public life, and the place where formal and formal disputes and legal proceedings occurred. It was one public place, as well, that a Christian could hardly avoid, no matter how carefully they shunned all of the other enticements of Roman cultural activity. The forum was a dangerous place to make statements that challenged the imperial authority, but within the context of the contest the challenges both sides make are controlled, somewhat in the manner of a legal case. But it seems to be a legal case of some interest:

*ecce enim iuvenes mei, nuntiantes vidisse se in foro anabstras configi, et turba dicentium: 'hic crastina die luce horta certari habent duo Iudaei de conlocutione'*²⁸⁷ *dei*'.²⁸⁸

Public disputes, *altercationes* or *disputationes*, were a relatively frequent occurrence in the forum. We do have several 'disputations' (between Christians and others, normally Jews or Manichees²⁸⁹) attested from at least the third century, though they seem to have

²⁸⁴ Paul goes to the theatre when he arrives in Ephesus, so it is no surprise that John does the same in the AJ. Theatres are obvious places to address large audiences and perform, of course.

²⁸⁵ AP 2, 10, 13, 22, 26.

²⁸⁶ See Tert. Apol. 42.1-3; even for Tertullian all public space was not evil.

²⁸⁷ The meaning is difficult.

²⁸⁸ AP 22: 'For look, indeed, here are my youths announcing that they have seen seating being put together in the forum, and a crowd saying, 'tomorrow at dawn two Jews are having a competition about the *conlocutio* of God'.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Aug. *contra Faustum*, *contra Felicem*. See Lim (1995) on the construction and reality of anti-Manichee disputations; 89: 'One of their famous opening lines was 'Whence evil (*unde malum*)?' Simon in the *Rec.* also disputes at length with Peter upon this point.

become much more common later, after Constantine.²⁹⁰ The legal and commercial history of the forum remained important to Rome's image, even though the centre of activity had moved (at least by the fourth century).²⁹¹

Theatre

In the eastern cities of the Roman empire, the theatre often served in the same role as the forum in the west. Official business was conducted there, and the spaces were public and representative of the imperial authority in a similar way. Public preaching and debates seem to have taken place there. We see this reflected in the AJ, where the theatre is the main setting for the first few episodes, and explicitly the appropriate place for a 'spectacle'.²⁹²

Μετάπεμψαι τὰς νοσοῦσας γραίας καὶ γενοῦ ἅμα αὐταῖς ἐν τῷ
θεάτρῳ καὶ δι' ἐμοῦ θεράπευσον αὐτάς• εἰσὶ γάρ τινες τῶν
ἐρχομένων ἐπὶ τῇ θεᾷ ταύτῃ οὗς διὰ τῶν τοιούτων ἰάσεων εἴ τι
χρήσιμον γενόμενος ἐπιστρέψω.²⁹³

Though theatres were somewhat ambiguous places, especially in Rome, due to their association with stage plays and other activities that Romans and Christians alike agreed were unsuitable for upstanding citizens, their status as primary public space was more important; if the goal was to situate wonder-working in the most public and open space in a city, for the eastern cities of the Roman empire, the theatre was an ideal location.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁰ See Tertullian *Adv. Jud.* I.1.

²⁹¹ See Lim (1995, 148ff.) on the role of the forum in both debate and ridicule.

²⁹² It is useful to bring in the AJ here, as a comparison, as this episode (and one or two others) does seem to be influenced by the Peter-Simon contest. Issues of dependence remain unresolved, see Lalleman (1998) for one view which privileges AJ. To me, AJ reads like the derivative, additive text, as it seems to be borrowing its confrontation from the more fully worked-out narrative of the AP.

²⁹³ AJ 30: '[John says:] Send for the sickly old women and come together with them to the theatre, and heal them through me. For there some of those who come to this show who I will turn by means of these healings, if I prove to have been of any worth.'
Reading γενόμενος, could mean 'making them of some use'.

²⁹⁴ Panayotakis (1997) collects some late antique evidence of stories of conversions taking place onstage, through plays that mock Christianity.

Other spaces: large houses

Some of the action in the texts takes place inside large houses, and in particular in the courtyard area of these houses.

*et haec cum dixisset, oratione facta processit ad atrium domus, in quo erat multitudo plurima populi congregata*²⁹⁵

The kind of authority represented by a house was of course of a different sort than that of the truly public spaces, but in the magic contest texts, houses are in a sense transformed into public places by the addition of crowds of witnesses. This is not without some historical truth, because the courtyard and portico areas of large Roman houses, especially those of public officials, were indeed semi-public spaces, for the receiving of clients and others.²⁹⁶ The scenes in these public areas of houses are outward-looking, including even non-Christians, like the scenes in the forum, but they are more intimate and in a sense more potentially dangerous to the witnesses and participants (as in the statue episode). Scenes which occur inside houses, in inner rooms, (eg Peter's preaching in AP 11, or the 'cleansing ritual'²⁹⁷ are explicitly marked as non-public and inside, and in particular are inward-looking; the authority present in these scenes is solely a religious one. Outside a house, then, even though on private property, the secular authority is represented as most powerful (eg the statue of Nero looming over the courtyard²⁹⁸), and the religious figures operate in the public context.

The positive aspects of the secular authority that are repeatedly emphasised, then, are the legitimacy it confers in its control of the state and its public space. A contest performed under the auspices of the imperial state, pagan or Christian, by its very nature, would seem legitimate and public, and therefore, authoritative. Whereas, as we have seen, the

²⁹⁵ Rec. II.19. 'And when he had said this, having prayed, he went into the courtyard of the house, in which a large crowd of many people had gathered'.

²⁹⁶ The Roman system of *clientela* was one of the most persistent forms of social organisation in the Roman republic and empire; its inequities were mocked by satirists like Juvenal but it was essential for Roman life. We see concern for Christian patronage all throughout our texts, as wealthy and powerful individuals receive some extra attention in their conversion narratives. Misset-van der Weg (1998), 105-6, on the role of wonder-working to confirm Marcellus as patron.

²⁹⁷ AP 19.

²⁹⁸ On the *Rec.*, see below.

secular power wielded by imperial officials is deemed to derive from the divine power allowing it to operate, the secular authority is primary in the texts – its existence allows religious or spiritual authority to be recognised by the public as itself legitimate and authority-producing. The structure of authority produced by the contest is recapitulated in the structure of the religious authority we see in the community represented (on which see below). Though it is reasonable to assume that our authors believed that secular authority itself is granted by God, nowhere in these texts do they explicitly state this.

EMPERORS AND AUTHORITY

The great symbol of authority on earth was, of course, the Roman emperor. In his person, he embodied the empire, its laws and customs, and he was in control, as it were, of all that was accounted ‘Roman’. The fundamental meaning of this for the Christian community changed over time, but this first and most important fact never changed: there was an emperor, and he was Rome.²⁹⁹ All other ideas of authority, in some measure, are reflected in and involve the imperial ideology. This authority is invested in the figure of the emperor himself, rather than in any specific space. Wherever the emperor goes, that is where the court is. But, as we shall see, the emperor’s choice to be in Rome is not incidental, and it is no less true that all the public spaces depicted are in some sense under the emperor’s control, whether he is present or not.

²⁹⁹ Cameron (1991), 125 – the process of ‘sacralising’ the Christian emperors had to be accomplished through language.

Constantine

*Praesentibus itaque Augustis uniuersisque aliis potestatibus intra palatium in basilica factus est conuentus, in quo auditores esse uoluerunt Constantinus Augustus cum Helena matre Augusta. Iudices uero hos dederunt, qui nec Iudaei essent nec Christiani.*³⁰⁰

The first book of the AS shows us how Constantine came to be a Christian;³⁰¹ it is unconcerned with how he came to be an emperor. The second book shows us how he brings about his *altercatio* between the bishop and the Jews. In the actual text of the contest, however, Constantine very much recedes into the background. His presence, though quiet, is never far from the mind, however, as both Silvester and his Jewish opponents refer and gesture in his direction, with typical imperial grovelling, of the sort which stresses his greatness and virtue.³⁰² Constantine is asked to give the order that allows the final wonder-working contest to begin, bringing the bull out to the forum. This could possibly be a reference to Constantine's supposed banning of sacrifice – if so, he would be appealed to in order to grant an exception, so that the contest could go ahead legally, but it could also be a simple gesture of deference and not meant to imply anything about his specific authority in this situation. The figure of Constantine, then, is that of the organising principle. He is not a terrifying figure, either for the bishop Silvester or the Jews, and though it is through him, in a sense, that the whole contest is possible, he is not shown to exercise his authority very actively. But it is also clear that he does not need to exercise his authority in the debate for it to be functioning; the crowd, hearing his announcement of his conversion, even links the fact of his conversion to the truth of Christianity:

³⁰⁰ AS, 515. 'when the whole imperial family and all the other officials were present in the basilica within the palace, the agreement was made, in which Constantine and his mother Helena wanted to be listeners. And they gave these judges, who were neither Jews nor Christians'.

³⁰¹ AS Book I, 508-516.

³⁰² He receives the usual epithet '*clementissimus*'. On the self-presentation of Constantine, see MacMullen (1984), 48f. Drake (2000) emphasises Constantine's self-presentation as unifier and consensus builder, but also, 367ff how he courted the approval of Christians with certain laws, without doing all they sought.

*‘qui saluauit Augustum, ipse est uerus deus’. dictum est tricies.
item ‘qui Christum non colunt, hostes Romanorum sunt’. dictum est decies.*³⁰³

Whilst Constantine is allowed to remain humble and passive, his own conversion grants recognition to religious authority; again, the secular authority is allowed to frame the context for the spiritual. Only the true god would be worshipped by the emperor, and thus Romans who do not worship the emperor’s God have become enemies. Perhaps, then, it is enough that he is present at the debate: his presence alone is what gives the exercise its legitimacy, and is a direct reversal of the Christian-imperial relationship before him. His presence should, perhaps, be more meaningful to the contest than it seems to be (as compared, e.g. to the role of Agrippa in the AP³⁰⁴). It is tempting, indeed, to see in the portrayal of Constantine something a bit more pointed; as his baptism was ‘idealised’ by the author, so perhaps his portrayal in the contest could be read as that of the ideal Christian emperor, who holds his authority lightly in the face of the representative of the religious authority.³⁰⁵

The figure of Constantine, then, owes more to the earlier figures of the prefect or ‘first citizen’ in earlier texts than to the other famous emperor who appears in MCTs, Nero, whose imperial presence is more remote. Like these more lowly officials, he represents the imperial authority but, until the very end of the contest, he does not exercise it, delegating his right to judge to a ‘neutral’ party. Also like these earlier officials, Constantine is even more fully rehabilitated by his participation in the contest; as Fowden has pointed out, the first half of the AS is writing an unambiguously non-Arian baptism narrative, and in the debate Constantine’s non-Arianness is further reinforced by his willing submission to and assent to Silvester’s remarks, requests and commands.

³⁰³ AS, 514. ‘“He who saved [Constantine] Augustus, he is the true God”. This was said thirty times. “They who do not worship Christ, are enemies of the Romans”. This was said ten times’.

³⁰⁴ See Karasszon (1998), which points out that Agrippa’s involvement in the contest changes his character both from the ‘historical’ Agrippa and from other episodes in the AP,.

³⁰⁵ See Canella (2005), 111-4 for the surprising emphasis on Constantine’s religious toleration.

Helena

The role of Helena in the AS is in one sense an innovation, because, as an individual who has been ‘seduced’, rather than a group, she is in essence the ‘excuse’ for the debate to occur in the first place. She is not, of course an innovation when one observes the long history of Romans writing about troublesome imperial women.³⁰⁶ For our writer, she functions symbolically as a kind of internal audience. Though she is not a Jew, nor openly implicated as a heretic, she is shown to be, like the Romans before Simon, susceptible. Her hatred of idolatry leads her, according to the author of the AS, to ‘fall into’ Judaism, and she uses her unique position as Constantine’s mother to try to influence him:

*Domino semper Augusto filio Constantino mater, Helena semper Augusta. ueritatem sapientis animus non recusat, nec fides recta aliquando patitur quancumque iacturam beniuolentiae diuinae reputari debere, quod meruisti simulachrorum figmenta deserere...deus ergo verus qui est deus Iudaeorum ut ostenderet illos.*³⁰⁷

The characterisation of Helena the philo-Semite, *a Iudaeis mota* after her visit to Palestine is not historically plausible.³⁰⁸ It does seem Helena was at least influenced by Arians.³⁰⁹ And given the ‘category confusion’ that there may be in the AS between Arians and Jews, it is perhaps not surprising for her to be associated with Judaism in this way, along with her association with the Holy Land. Her lack of orthodoxy could perhaps be seen as another way of shifting any suspicion from Constantine for lack of orthodoxy. By having his reaction to her views dramatised in this way, she helps to maintain his unimpeached authority. Though her historical position of influence is undeniable; as the

³⁰⁶ e.g. Agrippina for Nero, Livia for Augustus, and so on.

³⁰⁷ AS, 515: ‘To the Lord ever Augustus [my] son Constantine, [your] mother Helena ever Augusta. The soul of a wise man does not reject truth, nor does correct faith ever allow that any rejection of divine goodwill should be envisaged, because you were found worthy to abandon the constructions of images...the true god is the god of the Jews as he shows them.’ This ‘document inclusion’ of a supposed letter may be one reason the AS was ascribed by some to Eusebius.

³⁰⁸ And is odd when linked to the legend of Helena finding the ‘True Cross’ on which see Drijvers (1992), 79-81. See also 35-8 on the historical evidence, such as it is, for Helena’s conversion and the controversial (and disproven) theory that she was of Jewish origin.

³⁰⁹ Also worth noting are the intervening years of Arianising imperial women (such as Justina) and her battles with Ambrose, whom he blamed for much of the trouble.

empress she is in a long line of imperial women who seem to possess influence, and even authority in her own right, though it is of the sort which is conferred by association.³¹⁰

The authority of the emperor was, of course, often extended to other members of the imperial family. This authority, as we have seen, is presented throughout the magic contest texts as wholly legitimate and in some sense of divine origin. It was thus potentially rather threatening if a member of the imperial household was able to be so easily led astray. I think the argument of Fowden might provide a clue as to why this was important for the AS; the historical narratives about Constantine, were a battleground between the orthodox and the Arians.³¹¹ The element of anti-Arianism in the text is suppressed in general and incorporated into polemic against the Jews.³¹² Similarly, the (valid) suspicions of Helena's orthodoxy are also suppressed and instead a curiosity about the Jews is invented, thus providing for the author an ideal platform for the debate and contest which allows the threat to the imperial name, and thus authority, to be real, but not to infiltrate the image of Constantine himself, and in particular to separate Constantine's story of Christian conversion and baptism from Helena's. Thus, the emperor himself can sit in authority over the contest without any dangerous sympathies being attributed to him. The structural role of the presiding authority over the contest is not compromised, and thus the contest itself remains, within these strictures, a valid enterprise. Helena is not placed in a position as judge, even though it is her opinion which the contest is supposed to change.³¹³ This authority must be denied her due to her gender, and it also must be denied her because in the structure of the contest the individual judge(s), as opposed to the crowd, must at least initially be presented as lacking a strong opinion in any direction. The presence of a neutral figure as judge, as we shall see, is

³¹⁰ Drijvers (1992), 39-54 on Helena's changing position at court, and her rapid rise in stature after 324.

³¹¹ Fowden (1994b).

³¹² Which is not to say that the anti-Jewish polemic is not itself sincerely meant Simon (1986), 96; Rajak (1999), 62, 'the intensity is hardly surprising'.

³¹³ In which she is similar to the prefect Agrippa (see Karasszon (1998)).

absolutely essential to the self-presentation of the Christian figures.³¹⁴ Helena's 'defeat' does present to us an example of submission of one kind of authority to a greater kind:

*ipsa quoque Helena Augusta publicis aspectibus abiectis aureis uestibus in
conspectu omnium genua sancti Sylvestri deosculans rogabat sibi locum
poenitentiae dari.*³¹⁵

She is humbled before her son and his greater secular authority and the bishop's spiritual authority, but she still precedes all other penitents and converts in authority. Even in matters of religion, wherein she has been proved wrong, she is still receiving foremost mention.

Nero

Where Constantine stands as the greatest of Roman emperors from a pro-Christian Roman view, Nero stands as the imperial evil *par excellence*. The figure of Nero mostly stands in the background of the Petrine texts; he does not himself appear at the contest, only 'coming on stage' at the end of the narrative, to be disappointed that Peter did not suffer more at his martyrdom.³¹⁶ Nero was, of course, very much proverbially the hater of Christians, and his presence in the story is by no means a positive one. But it is interesting that despite his despised status, in the contest episodes he is never referred to negatively or as if he were illegitimate in exercising his authority, even in his abominable way.

The AP statue episode demonstrates just how much the imperial authority must have impinged on the consciousness of the Christians at the time. No matter how much Nero had become the byword for cruelty, to Christians and non-Christians alike, by the time of

³¹⁴ Helena cannot be a neutral judge, but she can present an individuated response that speaks to the need for someone to suffer a degradation in status as a part of the contest – particularly important given her symbolic position. Helena's limited authority is challenged and responded to, with the result that she is pushed aside, and the true authorities are revealed (for more on how this works in the contest from a literary-theoretical perspective, see Czachesz (1998), 87).

³¹⁵ AS, 528. 'So the empress Helena herself, also, in front of everyone, having cast aside her golden garments, kissing the knees of holy Silvester in the sight of all, she asked if she could be given a place for penitence'.

³¹⁶ AP 41.

the AP's composition, this episode demonstrates both the loyalty of Christians to the idea of the emperor and the way the emperor's presence, even in statue form, could create a space that is itself under imperial authority. This 'imperialisation' of space may be contrasted with the 'sanctification' of space which is put into action by Peter to remove the evil influence of Simon. Simon, then, is able to negatively affect space, whereas the emperor can affect it, but only neutrally. The statue allows the first phase of the contest to happen under a kind of imperial authority, without stretching credulity by having his actual presence, given his well-known hatred of Christians and his appearance after Peter's martyrdom.³¹⁷

*hoc audito iuvenis expulit se, et statuam magnam marmoream, quae in atrio domus posita erat adpraehendens, eam calcibus conminuit. erat enim statua Caesaris... itaque accipio aquam in manibus meis, et in nomine tua spargo lapides istos, ut fiat statua sicut ante fuit integra. si ergo, domine, voluntas tua est, esse me in corpore, et non patiar aliquid a Caesare, sit lapis hic integer sicut ante fuit.*³¹⁸

The presence, then, of an imperial statue in the home of a Christian was not necessarily problematic, once it had been exorcised and reconstituted *integer* (now in effect baptised). And though the desire to avoid trouble for one's faith was not acceptable, if one's faith was strong, this episode seems to tell us, the desire not to suffer from an unintended infraction that is unrelated to faith (such as an accidental shattering of a statue) is not seen as an unfaithful desire. Nero was no threat to Christians when he was represented by a statue, and need not become one for a trivial reason.³¹⁹ He is

³¹⁷ AP 39, wherein he wished to effect more torture upon Peter, rather than simply crucifying him.

³¹⁸ AP 11: 'The demon expelled himself out of the young man, and taking hold of a great marble statue, which previously had been placed in the courtyard of the house, he shattered with his heels. And it was a statue of Caesar... [Marcellus says] I take up water in my hands, and in your name sprinkle these stones, so that they may become a whole stone as it was before. If therefore, Lord, it is your will for me to be in the body (i.e. safe from execution) and that I not suffer anything from Caesar, may this stone be whole as it was before.'

³¹⁹ Not, perhaps, an idle threat: there were controversies about imperial images, in particular the Donatists raged against one Macarius who had supposedly placed imperial images behind the altar (*Optatus* 3.12). Apparently the AP is unconcerned about the possible uses of the imperial statues in idolatry. As Gaddis (2005) notes, this connection inspired much concern about the connection between the church and state in the fourth century (106).

authoritative here, but not dangerous. The fact of his rule is not questioned.³²⁰ The rule of his officials is similarly accepted as legitimate, and engaging with the structures of this secular authority is seen as in fact the correct, and most just, thing to do. Here Christians in the Petrine texts are shown to use the officials of (the persecutor) Rome, in fact, to assist them in their evangelism.³²¹

IMPERIAL OFFICIALS

Prefects and others

The ‘prefect’, that quintessential late Roman office, looms large in the history of late Roman conflict between religions; the prefect Symmachus famously challenged the bishop Ambrose and, by extension, the emperor Gratian, on the importance of maintain long-standing ‘Roman’ traditions in public life, even though Christianity was now favoured. Like all our fictional confrontations, this very real one ended in the dismal defeat of the pagan claimant, loyal subject and official though he was. In the AS, one of the two ‘impartial’ judges holds this office, professing to be neither Christian nor Jewish.

*Huic socius datus est Zenophilus praefectorius uir, qui consulatum idcirco promeruit : quia cum saepenumero praefectus fuerit.*³²²

Zenophilus, then, is described of the highest possible social rank, even though he is a pagan. His stature and neutrality are his only qualifications, but, for a Roman judge, that is fairly accurate.³²³ In the AP, the prefect Agrippa’s participation in the contest is very important, and elaborately described.³²⁴ In his administration, he is described as at least

³²⁰ There is reason to assume that the writers of these early texts could not even conceive of a world such as that we see in the AS, where the church is ‘under the secular authority’ is an very different way. Though these texts depict a world where it was possible to be a Christian and a senator, or an official, they do not seem to have a sense of optimism about what this ‘mixing’ of church and state would achieve, in terms of secular safety, for Christians.

³²¹ As we see also eg in the Acts of the Scillitan martyrs, wherein the proconsul apparently allows a Christian to make a small sermon. Here too, the Christian obedience to earthly authority is stressed.

³²² AS, 516: ‘Zenophilus, the prefect, was given as his companion, a man who for this reason deserved the consulship, because he had been prefect repeatedly’.

³²³ Harries (1999b), 214.

³²⁴ A close reading of the character of Agrippa is Karasszon (1998). Of most interest is an intriguing possibility that Agrippa should be identified with the historical, Jewish

attempting to act in a way that is virtuous: he ‘shows patience’, desires to do justice, to give his authority of judgement to the crowd, and he receives proper deference from Peter and even from Simon Magus. He sets the terms of the contest himself and is ultimately blamed by Nero for the whole enterprise. There is never any suggestion that Agrippa’s use of a slave as a ‘test subject’ for the contest is cruel or barbaric (and in his introduction to the contest he is almost made to quote the Deuteronomic ‘prerogative’ that is invoked as how the contest will provide an answer).³²⁵

Agrippa’s role at the contest is like that of the statue of Nero: he places the enterprise, as it were, under his authority. He is, like later judges, no impartial mouthpiece, but rather seems to be on the side of Peter from the beginning. Unlike some officials, however, he is not a Christian, crypto- or otherwise. For the author of the AP, he is a man doing his duty, and his duty includes acting justly, that is, impartially. In his dutiful actions and his appropriate exercise of authority, the ‘correct’ result of the contest will follow. It is a consistent theme in the texts, that imperial officials who, in their authority over the citizenry, perform their duties properly, become instruments of the divine power on a different level than a Christian representative. The officials authorise the contest, in which the ‘true’ power can be discerned. That is to say, it is necessary in the texts that we see the contests unfold under the Roman secular authority,³²⁶ which is thus itself shown to be divinely ordained in its position in its part of ‘proving’ the Christian’s claims.³²⁷

Agrippa. In the AP, Agrippa being a non-pagan would certainly place a different spin on the contest: he would have to be assumed to be hostile to both ‘Jews’ Peter and Simon. But the evidence for this theory is lacking in the text.

³²⁵ AP 25, ‘It is now for you to judge which of these is acceptable unto God, he that kills or he that makes live’.

³²⁶ It is worth looking at the AJ here, which has several examples of this type. The proconsul hears of John’s exploits. Andronicus is the ‘first of the Ephesians’ and initially he is a challenging figure, who instigates the first ‘round’ of the contest with John:

Ἀνδρόνικος δέ τις στρατηγός, πρῶτος ὢν τῶν Ἐφεσίων κατ’ ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ, ἐφήμιζεν ἀδύνατα καὶ ἄπιστα τῷ Ἰωάννῃ ὑπεσχνεῖσθαι. Εἰ δέ τι τοιοῦτον ὅποῖον ἀκούω, ἔλεγεν, ἔχειν, τὸ δημόσιον θέατρον ἀνεωγὸς εἰσιέτω γυμνός, μηδὲν ἐπὶ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ κρατῶν, μηδὲ τὸ μαγικὸν ἐκεῖνο ὀνομαζέτω ὄνομα ὃ ἀκήκοα αὐτοῦ λέγοντος.
(AJ 31)

Marcellus, the senator

The lack of conflict between religious and secular authority is also demonstrated by the case of Marcellus, the senator, in the AP. Marcellus is one of few Christian men (other than Peter) who are named in the AP, in part due to his social status:

*Petre frater, senator sum generis magni*³²⁸

He did, initially, suffer from his Christian affiliation, but in the course of the AP, he becomes convinced that he will not do so in the future.³²⁹ When he is once again received into the community, there is never any suggestion that he should remove himself from the senate or cease his participation in the government of Rome (such as it was for senators under Nero). In all these texts, there seems to be a deliberate attempt to demonstrate the lack of revolutionary qualities in Christian belief, and the complete compatibility between high rank and level of secular authority and conversion to Christianity.³³⁰ Marcellus even received extra authority as a result of his interaction with Peter: he causes the statue wonder, and also has several important dreams which indicate he has been singled out for special knowledge and a higher level of authority on spiritual matters within the community.

However, though the text is difficult, it seems like he is almost immediately convinced by John, and possibly even converted, (see Bolyki (1995), 20-1). before the second, more direct ‘round’ of the contest in the temple. John states in the theatre, in fact, that he has Andronicus in his sights as a goal, that he wishes to ‘conquer his unbelief’; he appears to succeed: ‘ὁ Ἀνδρόνικος ἔφη αὐτοῖς• Ὅποτεν ὁ διδάσκαλος θέλη, τότε πορευθῶμεν’ (AJ 37). In contrast to Agrippa in the AP, these officials in the AJ are more assertive of their participation in the quasi-contest. The Roman authorities, then, are continually shown to be drawn, almost preternaturally, to the side of the Christians, even as the Christians operate under their authority; both sides in some way seem to control the other.

³²⁷ The magic contest texts go further than e.g. martyrdom texts in implicating the secular authority in actually assisting in conversions that result from the contests, accomplishing the divine purpose even more effectively than a hapless proconsul.

³²⁸ AP 22: ‘Brother Peter, I am a senator from a great family’.

³²⁹ AP 8. That Marcellus will remain ‘safe’ in the Christian community is implied strongly by AP 11’s wonder-working.

³³⁰ This is in contrast to other AAA, as noted by Brock (1999), 150ff.

Marcellus' house, of course, is also under his authority. Before he is seduced by Simon, he has become an essential part of the Roman Christian community, because of his wealth and his house:

*viduae omnes sperantes in Christo ad hunc refugium habebant; omnes orfani ab eo pascebantur. quid plura, frater? Marcellum omnes pauperi patronum vocabant; cuius domus peregrinorum et pauperorum vocabulum habebat.*³³¹

It is in his house that the only kind of 'church' is pictured in these early texts. The widows and orphans of the community, in his house for the purpose of instruction and also under his protection, also demonstrate how the community itself is presented in the text as structuring its own social authority.³³²

Philosophers

A philosopher does not, at first, seem a likely candidate for authority in the imperial mould. They are the only group other than imperial officials who become involved in magic contest disputes. The sort of authority they possess is a specific one, one neither political or religious in nature – it is the authority of knowledge. As philosophers were educated pagans, they were respected, at least in the abstract, as preservers of ancient knowledge and for their ability to dissect and destroy bad arguments.³³³ But their authority is over ideas, and is not authority over people, or over a community outside of their philosophical schools. The philosopher-judge in the AS, like the prefect, is meant to be the neutral observer.³³⁴

Iudices uero hos dederunt, qui nec Iudaei essent nec christiani, ne unus e duobus gratiam suae parti seruaret, et ueritatem pro suo cultu assereret. Fuit datus cognitor quidam philosophus Craton nomine tam graeco quam latino eruditus magisterio, qui nunquam suaderi poterat ut ab aliquo aliquid

³³¹ AP 8: 'All the widows hoping in Christ were taking refuge with him, all the orphans were nourished by him. What else, brother? All the poor called Marcellus patron; his house had the name 'of the foreigners and the poor'.

³³² Brock (1999), 149-52 points out that there is a general concern with not 'antagonizing' secular authority in the AP, in contradistinction to other related texts (especially the Acts of Paul). Also of interest are the two women associated with senators, who, though unnamed, are also given special roles in the magic contest.

³³³ See Brown (1995), 35-70 (particularly 58f on *paideia* and the emperor's own power).

³³⁴ The situation in the *Rec.* is different, of course, where it is the philosophers/philosophies themselves being judged.

*loco muneris accepisset. nunquam in iudicio personam regis uel cuiuscumque potestatis accepit. Et cum amicus esset terreni imperii, nihil uoluit habere terrenum.*³³⁵

The philosopher is selected, then, not out of an excessive respect for his judgement, but for his ‘paganism’, which in this dispute, is perceived as meaning that he would be indifferent in a dispute between Christians and Jews’ and for his general learning, as well as the impression that he would be incorruptible, despite the evident irony that he was clearly a ‘friend of the emperor’ and the conflict of interest that might, in a different kind of ‘history’, be implied by such words. Here, though, for a judge to be impartial and also a friend of the emperor seems to be not only possible, but highly desirable.

In the AS, the philosopher is given authority over the contest itself.³³⁶ Like the author of the AP, though, the AS’ author is concerned with bringing everyone into the fold, so the paradigmatic neutrality of the philosopher (which, as ever, is nowhere actually evident in the text) is erased at the end when, along with the crowd, Craton is converted. Thus, philosophers in the AS function in the role that imperial officials also have; their authority is invested in them due to the assumption of both their neutrality, their devotion to duty, and their knowledge of reason. This knowledge of reason, in addition to their prior indifference, could suggest that their power over ideas might predict that the philosophers would see Christian views as competing with theirs, but this aspect of their presence is not exploited.

³³⁵ AS, 515: ‘And they gave judges, who were neither Jews or Christians, fearing that one from the two [competing parties] would protect the interests of his party, and assert the truth of his system of worship. As inquisitor was given a philosopher, Craton by name, learned in accordance with both Greek and Latin teaching, and who was never able to be persuaded by anyone to accept any gift. He never ‘respected’ the person of the emperor or of any powerful person in court. And though he was a friend of the earthly empire, he desired nothing earthly.’ Mark Edwards points out to me that *numquam...accepit* is probably a reference to *non est personarum acceptor Deus* (Deut. 10:17; Acts 10:34). This is thus a strong statement of the evenhandedness of Craton.

³³⁶ Philosophical responses to the Christianisation of the empire do not overwhelmingly back up this confidence of the writer. Macrobius’ *Saturnalia* is a fifth century text which shows that some of those then interested in pagan philosophy were in fact, as it were, counter-culturally committed to preserving pagan culture and ideas.

The author of the *Recognitions* also demonstrates the general regard, or sense of intellectual authority, in which philosophers were held. The narrator himself is a philosopher, a ‘seeker of truth’ whose first stage on the path was the study of ‘pagan’ philosophy.³³⁷ Further, the extensive verbal disputes which form a large part of the first half of the work are in part structured like philosophical arguments³³⁸ and the sort of Christianity which is advocated is presented as if it were, in large part, a philosophical system discoverable by human reason (though in the end, far superior to any philosophy). This might serve to indicate, once again, that philosophers should be able to make an authoritative judgement on these questions purely from following the reasoning presented.³³⁹ The philosophical environment, and the goal of philosophy, rather than any specific philosophers, are given a place of authority in this unusual text. As we shall also see, the structure of the community depicted in the *Recognitions*, and its way of establishing authority, owes more to philosophical schools than to the models we see in the other magic contest texts.³⁴⁰

THE INSTITUTIONAL OR RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

The idea of religious authority in these texts is manifested quite differently from the presentation of secular authority. Whereas the secular authority provides the structure and the legitimacy for the contest, the religious authority provides, as it were, the content. Who, the texts ask, has the right, given by God, to claim authority over a religious community, and how is this demonstrated?

The representation of religious or spiritual authority in the texts is linked to, but by no means the same as, the representation of divine power. The primary distinction between divine power and religious authority is that, whilst those who claimed to have divine power to contest with the Christians had to be shown to possess merely demonic power, it is possible in these texts for there to be other, legitimate sources of authority. Not all who

³³⁷ *Rec.* I.3.

³³⁸ Jedan (2010), 203: ‘the model of philosophy remains strangely decisive’.

³³⁹ In AS, 520ff., the philosophers show a remarkable reluctance to actually judge any arguments.

³⁴⁰ Lieu (2004), 133-4 on this in Clement of Alexandria.

possess authority, even if they are incorrect in their presumption of power, are wrong to claim it. Even the figure of Simon Magus is presented as someone who has some kind of structured authority operating under him, an authority provided more in a ‘bottom-up’ manner (given freely by those whom he has authority over³⁴¹) than in the ‘top-down’ manner of the secular authority. It is seen as reasonable, or natural, for those of lower status (Eubula, Niceta and Aquila, the undifferentiated masses of crowds) to place themselves in the authority of someone who appears of higher status, and greater power, than them; to transfer their allegiance to another authority, one who is ‘better’ their previous master does not seem devastating, but rather logical:

*ponamus...et ex duabus civitatibus, quarum reges sibi invicem sint contrarii, missos esse singulos ad dimicandum duces, et illum quidem boni regis ducem consilium dare, ut uterque exercitus absque sanguinis profusione melioris in regis iura concedat, quo sine periculo omnes salvi fiant, illum vero contrarium dicere: Non, sed pugnetur, ut non qui dignus est, sed qui fortior ipse cum his qui evaserint regnet. quaeso vos, quid magis eligeretis? non dubito quin, ut cum incolumitate omnium regi meliori manus darentur*³⁴²

This is a secular metaphor, used by Peter to make a religious point; the easy transfer of secular allegiance is made on ‘moral’ grounds; so much the more so should religious authority be transferred. The importance of the idea of authority (as conceived, first of all, in a secular way) and its effect on the structure of the worldview of these authors cannot really be overstated.³⁴³ But it is important to note that religious authority operates

³⁴¹ Demonstrated by the story of Eubula and the free actions of Marcellus – both the low and the high are drawn to him and grant him the authority to engage as he does.

³⁴² Rec. II.24. ‘Suppose...that from two states, whose kings are fighting each other, two generals were sent to combat individually, and the good king’s general advised that both armies should place themselves under the authority of the the better king, without bloodletting, so that all would be preserved, without danger. But the opposing general says, ‘no, there must be a battle, so that not the one who is worthy, but the one who is stronger, may rule, [along] with those men who had avoided [death]. I beg you, which one would you rather choose? I don’t doubt that with the safety of everyone [at stake], your hands would be given to the better king.’

³⁴³ As noted by Kelley (2005), 331: ‘Although their debate revolves around a variety of theological subjects, at its core it is a matter of interpretative authority. In focusing almost exclusively on these disputes between Peter and Simon, however, past interpreters have not paid enough attention to the ways in which other elements of the *Recognitions* assume, articulate, and reinforce Peter’s authority.’

on two levels: the structure of the community from a top-down perspective, and the authority granted religious leaders by their group of followers (a bottom-up perspective). The top-down authority has to be given from outside; we do not see that process in our texts. Our authority figures, even those who have obvious personal authority, are granted their authority by the community, in the way they are addressed and what is sought of them:

*praecamur, domine Petre, misericordiam et pietatem illius tribuas et nobis*³⁴⁴

*rogabatur cum magnis adclamationibus, dicentes ei: 'tu est in Italia deus tu Romanorum salvator'*³⁴⁵

The deference that is expressed is that of the lower-status to the higher, and the requests are those of the spiritually-undirected seeking direction. When the direction is granted, the authority is reinforced.³⁴⁶ The Lord is Peter's, and Peter is the lord of the believers. The questions left unanswered by these texts are in a way as revealing as the ones answered: where do Simon's abilities to convince people to follow him come from? It is strongly implied that the devil, who is the source of Simon's actual power, may also be the source of his 'gift', which seems essential along with power, to convince his followers to grant him authority. This is not, however, made explicit in the texts.

Christian leaders in these texts are presented as possessing 'true' authority i.e., that which undergirded by the power of God, which is distinguished from the venal authority of Simon (e.g. over Eubula or Niceta).³⁴⁷ Where the power possessed by the Christian figure is frequently referred to as divine, the authority possessed by him is demonstrated

³⁴⁴ AP 21. 'we beg you, Lord Peter, grant us [Christ's] mercy and *pietas*'. In the AS, Silvester is called *papa* or *episcopus*, or *beatus*.

³⁴⁵ AP 4. 'they begged him with great acclamations, saying to him: you are God in Italy, you are the saviour of Roman men'.

³⁴⁶ These supplication gestures recall nothing more than Greek tragedy; as far as I know there has been no study of the dramatic elements in the AAA. Thomas (1992), 128 mentions the dramatic monologues.

³⁴⁷ AP 27.

rather than explained.³⁴⁸ As the divine power comes from the correct understanding of God, true religious authority can only be exercised by those who understand, accept, and believe openly in the true God.³⁴⁹ Marcellus is a senator, but he only becomes exalted after he has openly demonstrated his faith. Constantine is the Roman emperor, but he needed the authority of the bishop to confirm his faith (and his family's faith). The Jewish leaders study the scriptures every day, but they too need to bishop to teach them the true understanding of these words. Whilst there is no direct attack on those with secular authority, it is demonstrated that those whose authority is not properly grounded will have to be, at the very least, corrected by those with an authoritative lineage from the true God. Some people can exercise power wrongly, through a failure to understand in full the authority they themselves are operating under (this is perhaps the realisation we see Agrippa undergo throughout the AP contest).³⁵⁰

The Bishop of Rome

Though the AP and AS are focused on Rome and on the authority and power of Rome³⁵¹ itself, the AP does not place as much emphasis as might seem to follow on the bishop of Rome himself. This is not true in the AS, where Silvester, as bishop of Rome, is used as the sole Christian representative (other than Constantine) – as bishop he embodies the Roman Christian community himself.

Peter in the AP is not described as a bishop. He is, however, shown to perform the duties of a bishop as they were defined in New Testament Scripture and in other second-century

³⁴⁸ Peter can command dogs, infants, and senators to do his bidding equally. Simon can only command senators, and then only seems in it for the money.

³⁴⁹ Kelley (2005), 316: 'Analysis of one layer of the Recognitions...reveals that it is part of a narrative argument about knowledge and...along with other parts of the story line, it shows that the Apostle Peter has supreme authority because of his knowledge of human and divine things.'

³⁵⁰ Also relevant here are the discussions between Peter and the disciples in the Recognitions regarding the propriety of reuniting with family when they haven't been properly initiated; the disciples challenge Peter's authority but immediately back down (see *Rec. X*).

³⁵¹ Even in the Antioch-partisan *Rec.*, Rome still has a symbolic resonance; I.13: *iter age nobis cum et audi sermonem veritatis, quem habituri sumus per loca singula, usquequo ad ipsam nobis perveniendum sit urbem Romam.*'

writings.³⁵² But it is not Peter's pastoral duties which occupy most of the narrative – rather it is Peter establishing his power and his authority as an apostle.

Apostles and authority

Authority is presented in these texts through an apostolic figure. The apostles in these texts gain their authority through their 'commission', and their personal knowledge of Jesus.

*et dans mihi manum elevavit. et exurgens iterum talem eum vidi
qualem capere potui.*³⁵³

*nos ergo primos elegit duodecim sibi credentes, quos apostolos
nominavit,...ut vel hoc modo recognita imagine Moysei crederet
multitudo, quia hic est, quem praedixit Moyses venturum
prophetam...*³⁵⁴

The apostles in the NT, of course, were those selected by Jesus to spread the gospel, plus Paul and Barnabas.³⁵⁵ The Recognitions here also stresses that Jesus' creation of apostles was itself after the pattern of the religious authority of Moses; the continuity is the important aspect for our texts. The AAA generally relate the further history of these apostles, usually with a close focus on one apostle's work in one, or a small selection, of locations. The AP is, as above, closely focused on Rome, and is situated very much geographically in some important public spaces there; the AJ are similarly focused on Ephesus. Though it is never explicitly stated that these apostles have specific 'calls' to

³⁵² Ignatius of Antioch's letters are the best, and earliest, exposition of this; Also Titus 1:7.

³⁵³ AP 20. 'And giving me his hand, he raised [me]. And getting up I saw him again, in such a way that I could comprehend'.

³⁵⁴ Rec. I.40. The passage is very puzzling. Possible translations could be: 'so he chose us first, twelve who believed in him, and called us apostles ... so that in this way too the multitude would believe, recognising the image of Moses, that he is the prophet who Moses foretold would come' or '... so that in this way too the multitude would believe Moses, recognising the image, because he is the prophet'. In either case, the question remains what 'the image [of Moses]' might be; unfortunately this topic is not elucidated elsewhere in the text.

³⁵⁵ Mt 10: those selected to proclaim the kingdom, in the lifetime of Jesus. There is also the definition of Pentecost in Acts; the inclusion of Paul is problematic but necessary. (1 Cor 12). See below on the problems with looking for 'apostolic succession' in the AAA.

these cities, the apocryphal writings very much give the sense of local pride that is to be expected, several generations later, in these cities and their associations with specific apostles.

The magic contest texts seem to concentrate on some specific aspects of apostolic behaviour. We do see evidence of how the apostolic authority possessed by these figures was meant to function in daily life (see below on the preaching in the AP), but it is in the role of the apostle in the defence of his community from outside corruption, and the demonstration of the power of the 'true religion' that the 'apostolic' aspect of the role is really defined for these authors. The apostle serves as the representative of his community, a position which is seemingly granted to him by the community itself, that is the Christians of 'his' city,³⁵⁶ in the confrontation with the opposition, with the force of evil and its representative.³⁵⁷ This position of the apostle is due to his apostolic role, which is given in two ways: by the possession of the power of God and by his position of spiritual and temporal authority over the Christian community. This may seem a bit circular, but the texts themselves do not focus on this point very much; the apostolic nature of the Christian leaders in the text is if anything, simply assumed. We do not have any doctrine of apostolic succession.³⁵⁸ These narratives of apostles show us, rather than tell us, how to be an apostle, and how an apostle functions within a community.

The apostle, or the 'apostolic figure' is able to represent the Christian community without their explicit consent, and even if, as in the case of Peter, he is not responsible for bringing Christianity to the city in the first place. The authority of the apostle over the city is never questioned, much less rejected. But there is nevertheless an immediate

³⁵⁶ The other major source, underemphasised here, is in the dreams and visions directly from Jesus which give apostolic authority for specific missions and activities (i.e. Joseph of Tiberias' 'contest' in Epiph. *Pan.* 30.10; a version of this is Constantine's vision of Peter and Paul in AS book I, 511, who tell Constantine that he will cure his leprosy by baptism.

³⁵⁷ This model is course familiar from the 'hero cult' of Greek civic religion. Faraone (1991), 43, relates that curses, too, could be linked to heroes on *defixiones* and other textual magic rites.

³⁵⁸ We do get the 'laying on of hands' in AJ.

identification of the apostolic figure with his locality, and in some ways an implied ‘consent of the governed’ in unity against opposition. Because in these texts the role of the apostolic figure is immediately to confront the opposition, his position as representative is established unproblematically by the contest and the surrounding events.

OTHER KINDS OF AUTHORITY

Simon’s authority

It may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that these texts attribute to Simon Magus, or any opponent, any kind of authority, given the divine origins attributed to the, as it were, correct authority invested in the state and in the Christian leaders/apostles. However, just as those in the service of Nero, and even Nero himself, are not denied their authority, it seems that Simon himself, and even his heretical or Jewish descendents, are granted a certain kind of authority. Why is this the case?

First, these texts present a worldview, as I have said, where the daily life of any given individual plays out against a constant struggle between good and evil. In the narrative, good will ultimately triumph, but the fact that good is destined to win does not mean that evil is weak. On the contrary, in the magic contests, it is stressed that both sides are evenly matched in many respects. Good has the power of God on its side, bolstering its authority. But similarly, Simon has the supernatural powers that are opposed to God on his side, and he has authority, and indeed control, over the opposition. He is more than a figurehead or a stand-in and he is not a straw man for Peter and his descendents to beat up. Simon is a real danger, and one of the reasons he is so dangerous is that, on the one hand, he does possess authority over his own ‘community’ and on the other hand that he is able to convince people who are not, in fact, under his authority that they are, or should be:

*me eum expugasse a Iudaea propter imposturas quas fecit Eubulae, honestae feminae et simplicissime, magica arte faciens. unde effugatus a me huc venit, putans quoniam posset latere inter vos: et ecce stat in comminus.*³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ AP 23. ‘[Peter says]: I drove him from Judaea on account of the deceptions which he performed on Eubula, an honourable and very simple woman, doing them by magic.

Without a legitimate opponent, the Petrine victory would be meaningless. Someone who could not ‘stand face to face’ with Peter could not be defeated in such a way as to convince anyone. This kind of detail makes the magic contest narrative much more compelling as a vehicle for its views, by making the content much more ‘reportable’.

What, then, is the origin of Simon’s authority? The texts seem to place it in his own ability at magic and in his money and charm (as opposed to his power, which is demonic). This personal authority, in the case of Simon, is no spiritual gift, but rather a kind of personality trait and his ability to exploit the weak. We do not see in the AP any indication of Simon’s claim to knowledge of a true, and different, doctrine. We merely see him do ‘wonders’ and agitate against a few, specific Christian claims, eg, ‘*virī Romani, deus nascitur? crucifigitur? qui dominum habet, non est deus.*’³⁶⁰ This early focus of Simon on the impossibility of Jesus being the Messiah must have its root in Jewish-Christian disputes, but it is not developed beyond a few comments in the early texts. In the *Recognitions*, Simon’s focus on the lack of necessity for the Judaic law led to his being identified with Paul, but more importantly shows him, in contrast to Peter, as unconcerned with the distinction between good and evil which the law, as far as the author of the *Recognitions* was concerned, helped humans to make. For the *Recognitions*, this ability of moral discernment is an essential part of the whole process of determining whose authority is right and proper, and whose is invalid, or at least, immorally exercised; this determination about authority has far-reaching consequences for communities.³⁶¹

Having been driven from there by me, he came here, thinking that he will be able to hide among you: but look! He stands in contest [with me].’

³⁶⁰ AP 13. ‘Is god born? Crucified? He is not God, who has a lord.’ This is of course an argument about authority itself. Schneemelcher (1963), 273: ‘the doctrine of the arch-heretic is suppressed’. This line, it seems, represents for the AP, whatever ‘doctrine’ Simon had.

³⁶¹ Kelley (2005), 348: at the time of the composition of the *Rec.* ‘apostolic connections continued to be used as a tool for legitimizing and ratifying the authoritative claims of specific Christian communities’.

How is Simon's authority represented?

The first indication we get that Simon has some authority is his ability to take over the Roman Christian community. Whilst we are not told what he says to convince them, we are told that his 'wonderful works' contributed. On the other hand, in the *Recognitions*, his philosophical discussions are sufficient – we hear in great detail how he was able to convince those who were previously committed to another system. Nor are we led to believe that Simon is a mere demagogue, attracting women and slaves³⁶² – because even senators and philosophers are persuaded by him.

We are not given any insight in the AP into what, if any, structure Simon imposed on his community, though it is strongly implied that there is very little, and that Simon himself was an itinerant, in the model of the travelling 'wonder-worker' such as Apollonius of Tyana, characters who were generally considered of very low repute, at least by Jews and Christians.³⁶³ These individuals did not intend, indeed, to build local communities at all, but to accrete followers and increase their own fame. In the case of Simon, the AP and other texts trace his desire to do so especially at the expense of Christian groups back to his experience with the apostles in Samaria, and his failed attempt to purchase the gift of the holy spirit. But it is interesting that most of these texts do not mention the NT source of this story.³⁶⁴ Evidently, then, stories about Simon circulated widely, and centred on him as an avowed enemy of the apostles from very early.

Do we see evidence of Simon attempting to build a community out of the group of followers he has obtained? Those disciples of Simon who choose to remain with him do not play major roles in the texts we have. In the *Recognitions*, however, we see that he appears to have set up a sort of 'academy' or philosophical school and to have changed from the itinerant wonder-worker to the local sage for his model. This later text perhaps reflects a development in ideas about the authority of people like Simon, and how they

³⁶² Though the Eubula story is clearly meant to indicate that this was a significant part of his appeal.

³⁶³ See, e.g., CC 6.13.

³⁶⁴ How likely are second- and third-century groups to have had a text of Acts? It seems plausible.

could best use this authority to produce their desired results. In the case of Simon that is the destruction of ‘true’ Christianity.

The development of rival schools of thought in philosophy and in theology was frequent.³⁶⁵ Certainly most of the later heresiological tradition about Simon is founded upon this ‘school’ model (e.g. Epiphanius and Hippolytus).³⁶⁶ In a ‘school’ community, there is one authority – the teacher, and one group of followers – the students; the successful school, however, breeds more schools of its own, and trains more followers. The AP narrative of Simon infiltrating communities, carries forward a different tradition, also associated with heretics but also with Jews.³⁶⁷ Those who formed alternative communities that co-existed alongside Christian communities were a constant threat not because they were armed with contrasting ‘knowledge’ alone (as in the school model) but because their whole existence was in a sense an affront to the Christian group, or even worse a deliberate attempt to confuse Christians (e.g. the empress Helena). The existence of parallel and competing structures of authority and community, both laying claim to be the ‘true’ one, could not be allowed to stand – there could only be one, unified source of authority.

Jewish ‘apostles’

But figures like Simon were not the only threat our writers saw to their vision of unified authority and the structure that followed. The Jewish leaders in the AS are called ‘*pseudoapostoli*’.³⁶⁸ The implication of this term must be that the Jewish leaders present themselves erroneously as the equivalent, for the Jews, of the apostles.³⁶⁹ The authority possessed by Jewish individuals in magic contest texts is difficult to explain – it is

³⁶⁵ Rec. I.3 gives an unflattering, but not unfamiliar, critique (on which See Jedan (2010)). Some might suggest that the MCTs fit rather well into this description!

³⁶⁶ Ferreiro (2005), 43: ‘the persistent attempt by the Church Fathers...to establish the legitimacy of an apostolic succession was matched by their effort to demonstrate the existence of a parallel pseudo-apostolic succession among the Gnostics’.

³⁶⁷ And indeed with philosophical schools. See Athanassiadi (2002).

³⁶⁸ Epiphanius appears to believe (30.2f) there was a Jewish office-rank of ‘apostle’, though why he does so is unclear; he ranks them as the patriarch’s assistants.

³⁶⁹ There is a similarity of the rabbinical concept of *semicha* with the idea of apostolic succession, but the practice is difficult to date.

definitely religious in nature, and like apostolic authority is focused on one community, but its quality seems to be different. Jewish authority is intellectually focussed, and is linked to temporal authority, but only temporal authority within the community; this authority and the titles given for different levels of authority are clearly based on learning, with the exception of the ‘priests’, one of whom is secretly the magician anyway.³⁷⁰

*Duodecim igitur Iudaiorum electi sunt primu<m>.³⁷¹ Abiathar et Ionas rabites eorum; Zodolias et Aunan scribae ipsorum; Doeck et Chusi Didascali synagogae; Benjamin et Aroel interpretes eorum; Iubal et Thara legisperiti ipsorum; Sileon et Zambri presbyteri eorum. Hic autem Zambri quantum rerum exitus docet etiam magus artificiosissimus celabatur, per quem etiam credebatur sibi de uictoria suae partis praesumere...*³⁷²

The ‘spirituality’ of Jewish leaders is rarely if ever addressed. Jews, by necessity, have to be invested with some portion of authority, specifically that which is derived from their Scriptures³⁷³ – but at the same time, the learning and authority of the Jews must be shown to be insufficient or unfulfilled.³⁷⁴ There is no challenge made to the antiquity of Jewish knowledge, nor to its continuity, and indeed the scholarship and learning of the Jews is, if anything, stressed in the lead-up to the debate. But there is a very strong challenge to the

³⁷⁰ It does make some sense that it would be one of the priests who had access to the divine name.

³⁷¹ These names and ‘job titles’ are fascinating; they show neither total ignorance of Jewish naming and custom nor any real understanding thereof. Canella (2005), 144: ‘dottori giudei puri prodotti di fantasia, non attestati in nessun documento valido della storia giudaica tardoantico e in nessuna iscrizione’. For the hard data on the names of the Jewish Roman community, see Rutgers (2000), 139-151. ‘Didaskalos’ does appear to have been a real title used by Jews; the others are unattested.

³⁷² AS, 517. ‘Therefore, first twelve of the Jews were chosen. Abiathar and Jonas, their rabbis; Zodolias and Aunan, their own scribes; Doeck and Chusi, teachers of the synagogue; Benjamin and Aroel, their interpreters [of the scriptures?]; Jubal and Thara, their own legal experts; Sileon and Zambri their priests. But this man Zambri, a most expert magician – the outcome of events shows how much – was hidden; through him, it was believed, they took for granted the victory of their side’. This final sentence may be corrupt.

³⁷³ On respect for the Jews vis-à-vis their Scriptures, see Reed (2007). The Jews understand the scriptures partially; the heretics misunderstand all scripture deliberately.

³⁷⁴ See Horbury (1998), 215-25 for the disputes about Biblical interpretation which were occurring between Christians and Jews at this time.

divine lineage claimed by the Jews themselves as their authority for their knowledge; they are not lying, necessarily, but they have been deceived.³⁷⁵

*Tunc Zambri insultans beato Syluestro hic tua uerba et argumenta tuorum sermonum finem inuenient. Aut dic nomen dei tui in aure tauri, et probaris omnipotentem colere, aut ego dicam: ut omnes nostrae relligioni concordent. Tunc pene conturbati sunt omnes fidei nostrae fautores. At Syluester intrepidus stabat, et laetus dicens: maiora certamina daemonum maioribus diuinisque auxiliis superantur. Attamen quia initia erant credentium necesse erat, ut tenuis fides tempestate temptationum urgeretur.*³⁷⁶

Zambri thinks he worships the *omnipotens deus*, but he is wrong. Silvester, on the other hand, seeks to use this fact to encourage those of ‘weak faith’, though whether among the Jews or his own flock is unclear. In fact, it seems that the category of ‘Jew’ in this and other similar texts actually means this: one possessed of partial knowledge and authority which leads him to draw erroneous or even dangerous conclusions.³⁷⁷

In the AS, we see several different kinds of Jewish authority, all related to specific areas of knowledge.³⁷⁸ The Jewish leaders are described as ‘rabbis’ collectively. Some are ‘scribes’; some are ‘didaskaloi’, presumably teachers, other are ‘learned in the law’ (a term used about some rabbis in Jewish writings). All of these Jews are pitted against Silvester alone (whose authority, as we have seen, is deliberately shown to be all-encompassing). As an aggregate, these twelve leaders are representatives of a whole community of Jews, who do not themselves have ‘speaking roles’ in the text, but who are

³⁷⁵ Which places them, authority-wise, more in the category of ‘misguided follower’ than ‘demonic demagogue’.

³⁷⁶ AS, 526. ‘Then Zambri, insulting blessed Silvester, said ‘Here your words and the arguments of your speeches will find an end. Either now say the name of your god in the ear of the bull, and prove you worship the All-powerful one or I will say [it], so that everyone will agree with our religion.’ Then almost all the supporters of our faith were greatly disturbed. But Silvester stood fearless, saying cheerfully, ‘greater contests with demons are overcome by greater, divine, assistance. . But because these were the beginnings of the believers, it was necessary for fragile faith to be under pressure from the storm of trials.’

³⁷⁷ In this we can see a similarity to the way the disciples of Simon in the *Recognitions* are described, see below.

³⁷⁸ See below on the social-group authority possessed by some Jews in other texts (e.g. Ephiphanius’ Joseph).

assumed to be a part of the crowd and whose good opinion and change of heart is being sought by Silvester and Constantine.

Zambri, finally, is described as a ‘magus’; it is only he who is allowed to stand as almost an equal in authority to Silvester. He is the ‘Simon’ figure in the AS; the other leaders are shown to be misguided at best, and possibly under Zambri’s control at worst. Zambri’s specific knowledge, the knowledge of what he thinks is the ineffable name of God, is shown to be powerful;³⁷⁹ but ultimately he is shown to be ignorant of ‘the true god’ and thus his *true* name. The knowledge that Zambri possessed, described by him as coming from the authority of his ancestors, turns out to be dangerously wrong – the authority he thought he had from God turns out to have been demonic in origin.

*At vero Zambri cum maleficus dixit, quia nomen dei nostri nulla virtus
sufferre praevalet, nam seniores nostri cum in sacrificio deo tauros
feroces offerent, hoc nomen dei magnum in aure tauri dicebant...
[Silvester ait] ‘tamen si vult ut non credamus hoc nomen daemonis
alicuius fuisse quod dixit, dicat modo mortuo illud nomen et suscitet
eum. Quod si occidere potest et vivificare non potest constat eum
nominasse...’³⁸⁰*

The authority of the Jews on such matters as the name of God was generally assumed; the AS undertakes to show that cultural assumptions about Jewish magic, and Jewish authority in matters of magic, were seriously misplaced.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ See Ch. 1. It is fair to say that ‘the name of Jesus’ functions as a ‘magic word’, but it is not deployed in the same way as other ‘magic words’ (Betz (1986), xlvi, for the magic-practitioner “there was no longer any cultural difference between the Egyptian and the Greek gods, or between them and Jewish god and the Jewish angels; and even Jesus was occasionally assimilated into this truly “Ecumenical” religious syncretism...”).

³⁸⁰ AS [#]: But Zambri the magician said that no power can bear the name of our god, for when our ancestors offered a ferocious bull in sacrifice to God, this great name of God they said in the bull’s ear...[Silvester said] ‘nevertheless if he wants us not to believe that what he spoke was the name of some demon, let him say that name now to the dead one, and let him revive him. But if he is able to kill and not to revive, it is established that he has named [a demon].’

³⁸¹ On Jewish magic from an outsider perspective, see Janowitz (2001). On the insider evidence see Bohak (2008), 143ff. It is interesting that Jews were apparently not, as a whole, shying away from this stereotype.

A related aspect of Jewish authority in these texts also plays on this ambiguity. This is the way conversions from Judaism to the ‘true faith’ are treated. The Jewish leaders in the AS, as well as that of Joseph of Tiberias in Epiphanius’ *Panarion*, both show a pattern of conversion where the Jew with authority requires several more steps for their conversion than a ‘simple’ person, or a pagan. Jews are always seen as needing more persuasion than others to reach conversion; this is because there is the extra step required of showing that the authority which Jews think they share with Christians actually only belongs to the Christians, by virtue of their true understanding of the shared inheritance.³⁸² The Jews are more difficult to separate out from the crowd in other magic contest texts, but it is clear from other evidence all throughout this period that it was believed that it was more difficult to convert Jews,³⁸³ and, thus, in some sense more valuable. Part of this difficulty clearly comes from the learned Jewish knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures, and in the AS we see a continuation of the tradition of Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, which takes this Jewish knowledge seriously while, nevertheless, undermining Jewish claims to ‘real’ or ‘true’ knowledge, and thus to the claim of equal authority. The AS and these other texts show that it was generally accepted that Jews with authority were not ignorant, and that wonder-working alone was not sufficient. In all of these magic-contest narratives which feature Jews either as contestants or observers, there is a verbal portion which is also meant to be important for conversion, and as we shall see, perhaps to ‘open the mind’ of the observers so that the truth revealed in the wonder-working can be properly interpreted. It seems necessary to have a discussion with Jews before wonder-working for it to be effective, whereas with pagans that effort seems less important.

Other works containing wonder-working ‘contests’ of a sort also present Jewish authority as a comparison to the Christian authority which is reinforced by wonder-working; some of the ideas promulgated by MCTs are reflected in works which purport to be reporting

³⁸² And, possibly, due to an innate personality trait, which is implicated in the Deicide accusations, of stubbornness and arrogance. The Jews of the AS suffer this rather less, though, than the Jewish ‘converts’ in historical accounts like the *Ep. Sev.*

³⁸³ Absent from most of these texts is any outright ‘Deicide’ accusation. The climactic AS wonder-working scene can indeed be read that way, but at no point in the verbal debate is there a suggestion that the Jews’ ignorance about Jesus’ real identity means that these, particular, fifth century Jews are guilty.

contemporary, true events, of roughly the time of the AS and the translation of many MCTs. In these cases, once again, it is conversion from Judaism to Christianity which is presented as the inevitable result of the ‘experience’ of wonder-working. In Epiphanius’ story of Joseph of Tiberias,³⁸⁴ initially we see Joseph as close to the Jewish authority, the patriarch.³⁸⁵ This man, it turns out, has the ‘truth’ revealed to him on his deathbed and thus he is converted. Joseph’s process is more complicated.³⁸⁶ Joseph initially seems like a Simon figure – he argues and negotiates and he gains power in the Jewish community through, if not deceitful then at least underhanded, means. His visitation by Jesus in a dream initiates the ‘magic contest’ portion of the story. Unlike Simon, however, Joseph does not misuse his temporarily granted power. Finally Joseph upon winning the contest using water and the sign of the cross, converts. This extended excursus then ends with Joseph being made a ‘count’ by the emperor Constantine! Joseph exchanged an authoritative position in his native Jewish community for an authoritative position in a (secular) Christian milieu, his relative position within *a* community does not change as a result of his use of wonder-working. The Jewish authority that he had, even when he was in open rebellion against what, on some level, he knew to be true, is respected by Epiphanius, and by implication by Jesus too.

³⁸⁴ Epiph. *Pan.* 30.10.

³⁸⁵ Who was, if anything, actually more of a civic authority within the Jewish community than a religious one.

³⁸⁶ On different ‘processes’ to conversion see ch. 5.

The *Epistle of Severus*,³⁸⁷ finally, presents a different perspective on the role of Jewish communities. In this case, the concern is over the power and authority wielded by the Jewish community, represented by one Theodorus³⁸⁸ (who serves as the ‘opponent’ figure). Once again, this concern is mitigated not by eliminating this authority altogether, but by subsuming the community, and in particular its commercial interests³⁸⁹ into the wider community. This is accomplished by enfolding this formerly autonomous community into the wider structure of authority on Minorca. The rabbis and other leading figures are not toppled or removed from their ostensible role, they are just made to pass along their authority further up the chain, remaining as leaders, but lacking the teeth of any real power to go along with the authority of the name. In fact, their authority is ultimately mocked by their conversion – their supposed wisdom did not factor in it at all.³⁹⁰ The community is brought in as a group (forcibly) under the authority of the local bishop – through the use of an episode of wonder-working, reported amongst the people:³⁹¹

*haec, cum odor ex ea mellis fragrare coepisset, a multis quod per viam verberaverat degustata dulcior melle comperta est. multi itaque sapientes cum eadem die filios Israel ab Aegypto perfidiae suae atque a servitute egressos viderent, haec quae facta sunt signis illis, quae in Exodo legimus, comparabant; huic populo, qui Deum credulo corde intuens verum iam Israel meruit, manna crederent renovatum.*³⁹²

The wonder-working episode is perfectly suited to the specific concerns of this small community; in co-opting the greatest miracle of the Hebrew scriptures in this context, it replaces the authority invested by the Jewish community in their leaders, their

³⁸⁷ Bradbury (1996), 4-9 the origin of this text and its interesting mixtures of sources and motivations.

³⁸⁸ Ep. Sev. 6: *qui non solum inter Iudaeos verum etiam inter Christianos eiusdem oppidi, et censu et honore saeculi praecipuus est. siquidem apud illos legis doctor...in civitate autem cunctis curiae muniis exsolutis, et defensor iam et etiam nunc patronus municipum habetur.*

³⁸⁹ See below on the implications of the rituals depicted in this letter.

³⁹⁰ 21: *inveterati illi legis doctores sine ulla altercatione verborum, sine ullo scripturarum certamine crediderunt.*

³⁹¹ See Bradbury (1996). 16-25 for the history of the relic of St Stephen and their journey to Minorca.

³⁹² Ep. Sev. 20.14.

knowledge, and their heritage and turns it to the service of placing them under the new authority (the new, true Israel as represented by Severus and the church). Thus, we see that even beyond the magic contest narratives, wonder-working could be used to manipulate opinions about the proper structure of authority, and entirely rearrange communities as a result. The magic contest narratives do not present, in this case, an entirely fictional image of how wonder-working could be used by authorities.

COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

As I mentioned above, the structure of secular authority seems to be mirrored in the representation of community religious authority in these texts. All members of the community that are mentioned have consistent roles in the texts. We are able to see, both from the contest narratives and from the other material in the texts, that these texts present quite a consistent vision of the structure of a community of believers, and in particular they demonstrate the importance of authority within the community as a protection against outside influences and their power. The extent to which the community is involved in the contest is different in each text, although there are broad patterns visible.³⁹³

Community authorities

The most important part of the community, clearly, is the leadership. These leaders are those whose authority is recognised by the community, even if the figure does not come from the community himself. As we have seen, in the magic contest texts, communities are represented by apostolic figures, or ‘pseudo’ apostles. In the structure of these texts, each city appears to need a leader for its Christian community -- it is implied in the AP that Simon’s arrival in Rome, in fact, was so successful for him because of the leadership vacuum there. There is a clear subtext that the arrival of a leader is required for a community to become fully cohesive and able to defend itself against all enemies. The community, then, after the arrival of the leader, allows itself to be represented in public by this leader, who then is required to take on the majority of the risk of publicity and

³⁹³ Perkins (2005), 227-9; Gallagher (1991).

confrontation. In this act of confrontation, perhaps, a previously fragmented community can draw together behind their leader. Even in the AS, when these risks could not have been foremost in the mind of the author, it seems Silvester takes on this role as representative due to his position as bishop of Rome – he is to speak for the community because he is identified with it by both insiders and outsiders (ie both Constantine and Helena, who is cast in the AS as an outsider).

The other major role of a leader or apostolic figure, of course, is to teach and/or preach to his community. All of the magic-contest texts feature at least a small amount of lecturing and leading in prayer. Perhaps the best example is in AP 6, when Peter preaches using himself as an example, for the community he is about to helm: first, Peter denied Christ, and then he was a witness to wonderworking, and now he is to bring others back as he was brought back by Jesus himself:

*motus misericordia deus omnipotens misit filium suum in saeculo, cui ego interfui; et super aquas ambulavi<t>, cuius testis ipse ego permaneo, tunc saeculo operatum esse per signa et prodigia, quae omnia fecit.*³⁹⁴

So, in this we see Peter's own life offered in a preaching context, as an example to the community. This may be evidence that the wonder-working and representative work of the leader is meant for the 'outsiders' and this teaching is meant for the 'insiders', those who are (some of) the constituent members of the community itself.³⁹⁵ For outsiders, Peter's authority appears to come from his personal power; for insiders, Peter's authority is founded on his connection to Jesus and thus the power of God.

Other Christian leaders

Other members of the community are defined by their role, rather than specifically by the amount or kind of authority they hold. Some of these roles can possess elements of authority for a time, but never in the same way as the leadership. One such group is the

³⁹⁴ AP 7: 'All-powerful God, moved by pity, sent his Son into the world, to whom I attended; and he walked on the waters, of which I myself endure as a witness, and that he then worked in the world by signs and prodigies, all of which he performed.'

³⁹⁵ The 'outsiders' being the internal audience, and the 'insiders' being the external audience.

‘insiders’ in the community. Insiders are members who there is reason to trust, as well as members who are entrusted with special information or duties.³⁹⁶ Who counts as an insider? One qualification that could be advanced for how these texts define insider is if we are given evidence of their ‘true faith’ through some public declaration or ritual. This usually takes the form of a confession of faith, or, as I will call it, an ‘eligibility ritual’.³⁹⁷ This ritual stands in for other, more familiar kinds of ‘tests’ for membership. Those who are ‘eligible’ to participate in ritualised wonder-working are thus ‘insiders’ in the community, a level of membership which was probably very important in real life but whose role seems more fluid in our texts.

In the AS, when the ‘community’ is in fact in a position of authority, the only real insider we see depicted is Constantine himself. Like several other insiders we see across this tradition, Constantine first repents that he was an outsider, and even a persecutor.³⁹⁸ This limited view of the insider is necessary in the AS, given that does not contain material extraneous to the disputation in book II. The focus in is not so much on creating a Christian community (which after all now existed in real life) but on bringing down the alternative community/communities which were still a threat. Thus, the size of enemy is multiplied and the community shrinks, in proportion to both the real political situation and the earlier textual tradition.

Earlier texts place more emphasis on the achievement of ‘insider’ status: we see how Marcellus (AP 11), the mother of Nicostratus (AP 27), Lycomedes (AJ 21ff) and several of the re-converts (Niceta and Aquila and their mother) achieved by Peter in the *Recognitions*, as well as Joseph of Tiberias in a slightly different context, all make a clear, semi-public confession of faith, and see the error of their ways. They are granted special privileges, as we have seen in the case of Marcellus, and are themselves ‘representing’ the ideal Christians of this community, even though they may have been

³⁹⁶ This is rather than the kind of insider that the so-called ‘gnostic gospels’ seeks to make of its own readers (see Pagels [1979]). Here the insiders exist solely in the text.

³⁹⁷ See ch. 3.

³⁹⁸ Some sort of Pauline discourse about going from persecutor to propagator might be lurking underneath here and in a few other characters.

led astray temporarily. This model of repentance and readmission cannot be said to have been uncontroversial, given the fierce disputes that caused major rifts amongst early Christian groups,³⁹⁹ but it is not presented in the texts, from any time period, as having anything unusual or controversial about it. Re-admission is not depicted, for these insiders at least, as an arduous or time-consuming process. In fact, the leader is able to use the readmission process as a way to advance his own claims, both within the community and to the crowd.

Crowds

The last, and largest, group represented in the structure of the community is that of the crowds. It is the crowd that is the most difficult when it comes to the question of authority, for it is in essence the question of who has authority over these diverse crowds which is the animating reason behind much of the magic contest itself. One thing is clear, however: crowds do have an important kind of authority, that is, the authority of judgement; the authority that a Roman jury would ordinarily possess, but also the ‘authority’ of a crowd at an imperial acclamation.⁴⁰⁰

uox populorum per tria horarum spatia haec sunt:
‘qui Christum negant male depereant, quia ipse est uerus deus’.
Dictum est tricies.
Item ‘unus deus christianorum’. *Dictum est quadragies...*
Item ‘qui Christum non colunt, inimici Augustorum sunt’.
*Dictum est quadragies.*⁴⁰¹

A crowd, by its very nature, is an undifferentiated mass; in the context of a contest, it seems they can only be counted on to be fickle. Who are the crowds meant to represent?

³⁹⁹ Especially in the West (Donatism most notably, but see also Cyprian of Carthage *de unitate* and *de lapsis*).

⁴⁰⁰ Roueché (1984), 188, ‘The idea that unanimous acclamations are more than just an expression of opinion, but have a divinely inspired authority, is ancient...It is as manifestations of a divine impulse, as well as of public opinion, that acclamations are significant; and this is most important of all in the validation of the authority of leaders, both secular and ecclesiastical’.

⁴⁰¹ AS, 514. “‘The voice of the people for three hours was this: let all who deny Christ perish, because he is the true god.’ This was said 30 times. Likewise “One is the the god of the Christians.” This was said forty times...Likewise, “they who do not worship Christ, are enemies of the Augusti.” This was said forty times.’

Across the board, in cases both of semi-private houses and in public fora, the crowds seem to represent those on the fringes of the community – they are by no means opposed, officially or otherwise, to the Christians, but they are not above turning against them at the slightest opportunity. They also, of course, represent the potential of the community itself – they are those over whom the community hopes to gain authority by conversion. This ambiguity is one of the most difficult features of the magic contest. How can a group be both in authority over a leader, and the leader ultimately have authority over them? How can a community ever be sure it truly has authority over its undifferentiated membership?

It could be suggested that the undifferentiated nature of the crowd is in some sense a representative of an audience.⁴⁰² The crowd is undecided for most of the text, but ultimately persuaded. But there is no evidence, I think, that we are meant to see the crowd as an ‘ideal reader’ rather than an internal audience; certainly the process of bringing the crowd under Christian authority is not representative of any other kinds of conversion narratives given of individuals, in canonical or theological texts. But as another level of Christian commitment, however, their presence makes sense. They are representative of the first stage of joining the community, and this first stage is represented by their interaction with the apostolic figure – they become convinced of his power and his authority (including, ultimately, his authority over them) by being a witness or audience to the magic contest/debate ritual. As the crowds in the AP declare their final allegiance, they identify the ‘true god’ as the ‘god of Peter’, that is, the God under whose authority Peter operates. In this important process, they cease to be a crowd, and become, instead, an assembly which possesses a less ambiguous authority: a group of witnesses.

TEMPORARY POWER AND TEMPORARY AUTHORITY

Second-order authority

Spiritual authority needs secular authority within which to operate, to demonstrate its existence; secular authority needs spiritual authority in order to be valid. Thus, the

⁴⁰² Czachesz (1998), 86 on the need for a community in a challenge-response pattern.

secular and spiritual authorities are locked in a kind of symbiotic relationship in our texts. Similarly, community authorities need the authority to be granted by their followers, and by the secular authorities, and followers need their authorities in order to have access to a portion of the spiritual authority. When it suits our authors, they include these other community members in the spiritual authorities, as a kind of second-order authority: they are participants in wonder-working, or are themselves healed or raised from the dead.⁴⁰³ Thus, community members are shown as demarcating their own special status.

*puer autem qui a mortuis resurrexit...dicens ad Petrum: 'ecce et ego qui resuscitatus suum duplicem oblationem offero, et me ipsum ex hodiernum loquentem victimam deo.'*⁴⁰⁴

The emphasis on the apostolic figure includes presenting his authority in action, granting further authority. The primary way in which this authority seems to be transmitted is through a physical proximity to the apostle and a need for someone other than the apostle to perform an act of wonder-working, either in a semi-public or private setting. Thus, the divine power works in the secular authority in spite of itself, using the magic contest to affirm one strand of Christian thinking on the interaction between church and state, a paradox which goes back to the writings of Paul.⁴⁰⁵

Those in this position of having extra status are in a sense 'co-opted' by the apostle into participating in the act of wonder-working. This 'collective responsibility' usually takes the form of prayer rather than any physical activity (though it can involve that).⁴⁰⁶ Participation by means of prayer does two things: it sanctifies the act of wonder-working, distinguishing it from the solitary and non-reverent act of the 'magician', and it gives those praying a claim to have helped in the production of a miracle. This temporarily 'flattens' the structure of authority in the community which we see operating more

⁴⁰³ Sometimes literalised, as in the 'laying on of hands' in the AJ.

⁴⁰⁴ AP 29. 'The boy, who was raised from the dead...saying to Peter, "Look, I also who was revived, make a double offering, [I offer] myself from the present day as a speaking sacrifice to God.'" For the fuller context of the quote, see p. 234.

⁴⁰⁵ Rom. 13:1, 'Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.'

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. AP 20's widows with Marcellus' statue in AP 11.

strongly elsewhere. The apostolic figure may be the representative of the community and the one who has the power of God, but his invitation to participate allows the whole community, at least for a moment, to be united and not distinguished by status.⁴⁰⁷

The *Recognitions* presents, on the first glance, a rather different model of authority structure, and of authority transmission. For the author, rather than a Roman household model, it is the philosophical school which provides the structure for the community depicted. Given the philosophical orientation of the work, we are given a bit more insight into organising principles and doctrinal beliefs. But even though the underlying structure is different, the community in the *Recognitions* is shown to have to deal with the same problems as the other communities in the magic contest texts, and to use some of the same tools (ie rituals) to resolve them. But it is also suggested that there is another approach possible, and there is an implication that human reason is more powerful, to the author of the *Recognitions* than to the other authors, as a tool to discern between good and evil, and for good to combat evil. The authority structure of the ‘school’ depicted, then, is more open to the disciples’ own abilities of discernment being used in this crisis. In other words, the *Recognitions* sees the process of discernment as multi-stage, involving more authority being granted to an individual member, and thus a higher bar for membership.

AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES THEMSELVES

Given all these different modes of authority, and methods for determining it, one source of authority remains in the background. There is relatively little discussion in these texts about the role of the scriptures in the Christian community, though all of them show evidence of their importance and use. In the AS, the authority of the scriptures is assumed. If it were not, the entire debate and indeed the entire result of the contest would

⁴⁰⁷ This must surely be further exemplified by the use of e.g. blind widows for one of the private wonder-working events in the AP 20-1, or the many lame and sick healed in the Rec. and AJ; it may also apply to the ‘healing’ of Constantine’s leprosy in the AS. On the implications of the emphasis on healing, see Perkins (1992) and Poupon (1997). *Vit. Apol.* is an obvious comparandum. Were the apocryphal healing stories of Christianity really the message pagans were receiving most clearly from Christian missionaries? It seems plausible; but the AP seems to be concerned, itself, more about other matters.

not have the meaning and impact they do. In the early texts, which are operating primarily without a ‘canon’ of Christian scripture, we do not see the ‘devil citing scripture’ at all, but merely challenging some basic premises. Even in the *Recognitions* the scriptures are not referred to a great deal, rather it is the philosophical doctrines which derive from them which are most openly addressed. Given this, the idea of the ‘authority of the scriptures’ as a basis for Christian communities does not seem to have been foremost in the minds of these authors. The teaching of the scriptures is mentioned as important, and we see the apostolic figures, as part of their duties to the community, teaching from them – in particular about Jesus. Different texts stress different aspects thereof, but there is not, for example, any appeal to scriptural models (even, as in the case of the widows, where such models must have been available to the author) in the depiction of the structure of the community. In general, then, these authors do not appeal to scripture as a source for the authority structure they represent – apostolic figures relate their own experiences of events from scripture (as in AP 18 when Peter rebuts Simon’s argument that he is a coward by giving his own interpretation of the walking-on-water episode) but, in contrast e.g. to Ignatius, the Pauline epistles, and other community-oriented texts are either not mentioned or very much in the background.⁴⁰⁸

LINEAGE OF AUTHORITY: APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION?

Whilst the texts we are examining demonstrate a strong concern with authority and its proper structure within a Christian community, and in particular invest a large amount of authority in apostolic figures, there is no development of the doctrine of ‘apostolic succession’. We see the apostolic figure grant authority, temporarily and sometimes permanently, to other individuals, but there is no indication whether this transmits something ‘apostolic’ to them, or if it is rather a kind of delegation of authority and control by a leader. The ‘spiritual reality’, for lack of a better term, of this apostolically-given authority, is not discussed: nowhere do we hear, from an apostle’s mouth or otherwise, of ‘charisma’ or something analogous. We do hear, however, something about the personal knowledge of Jesus, and proximity to him, that was enjoyed by the apostles:

⁴⁰⁸ See *Rec.* 10.42.

*dominus noster volens me maiestatem videre in monte sancto, autem luminis splendorem eius cum filiis Zebedei, caecidi tamquam mortuus et oculos meos conclusi et vocem eius audiui talem qualem referre non possum, qui me putavi exorbatum ab splendore eius. et pusillum respirans dixi intra me: 'forsitan dominus meus voluit me hic adducere, ut me orbaret'. et dixi: 'et haec tua voluntas est, non contradico, domine'. et dans mihi manum elevavit. et exurgens iterum talem eum vidi qualem capere potui.*⁴⁰⁹

This closeness seems to be the only thing which can explain the transmission of this authority; the closeness indeed continues once Jesus is gone, in the form of dreams or visions, which give direct orders and encouragement as necessary.

In the AS, where the idea of Silvester's 'apostolic succession' might seem the most important, we do not actually find an appeal to Peter as such. Rather, the positioning of the contest at Rome, in the forum, and the association of Peter and Simon Magus lie in the background. The author of the AS, then, was seeing Silvester as a legitimate successor to Peter in large part because he did as Peter did, and achieved as Peter achieved. Similarly, in heresiological literature of the later period, we also find heretics described as 'successors', not through some sort of perversion of Christian apostolicity, but through the continuation of the actions of previous heretics.⁴¹⁰ Jews stand as ever in that difficult space between – though in the AS, of course, we see it is in fact the Jews who place the emphasis on the inheritance of the past. For MCTs, the past is important but it is not definitive; it is possible to be wrong about the past.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ AP 20: 'Our Lord, wishing that I should see his majesty on the sacred mountain, [when] with the sons of Zebedee [I saw] the splendour of his light, I fell as if dead and closed my eyes, and heard a voice of such a kind that I cannot tell, and I thought I was blind from his splendour. I said to myself, breathing a little again, 'perhaps my Lord wanted to bring me here, so that he could blind me.' And I said, 'if this is your will, I won't speak against it, Lord'. And giving me his hand, he raised [me]. And getting up I saw him again, in such a way that I could comprehend'. Note the emphasis on physical closeness and bodily detail (which links directly to the wonder-working he is about to perform).

⁴¹⁰ Ferreiro (2005), 10-13.

⁴¹¹ Cameron (1991), 121 on how the Christians '[laid] claim to past history' in rhetoric. Also Edwards (1996), 42-6.

Authority in the performance of ritual

What is definitive, in determining authority and in presenting its effects, is the mechanism of ritual. The richness of detail in the narratives presents descriptions of rituals – unusual rituals which are associated with, or constitute, what I have been calling ‘magic contests’. These particular rituals, both familiar and surprising, are a way in which the power of God in the physical world, and the structure of authority both within the community and within the larger secular world, is enacted and instituted. The authority to perform this ritual, or rather these series of rituals, is solely available to the apostolic figure.

Chapter Three: A CONTESTED WORLD: Rituals in the magic contest, the magic contest as ritual

Rituals do more than achieve conventional effects through conventional procedures. They establish the conventions in terms of which those effects are achieved.⁴¹²

Καὶ αἰτήσας ἄρτον εὐχαρίστησεν οὕτως• Τίνα αἶνον ἢ ποίαν προσφορὰν ἢ τίνα εὐχαριστίαν κλῶντες τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον ἐπονομάσωμεν ἀλλ' ἢ σὲ μόνον κύριε Ἰησοῦ;⁴¹³

*quis sit verus deus ipsis indiciis edoceri.*⁴¹⁴

*paria quaedam huic mundo destinasse deum: ille qui primus ex paribus venit, a malo est, qui secundus, a bono. in quo unicuique hominum iusti occasio iudicii datur, sive simplex ille sit sive prudens. nam si simplex est et crediderit illi qui primus venit, signis et prodigiis motus, necesse est eadem ratione, ut etiam illi qui secundo venerit, credat; signis enim et prodigiis suadebitur et nunc sicut prius. cum vero crediderit huic secundo, discet ab eo quod primo illi qui a malo venit, credere non debeat, et ita prioris error secundi emendatione corrigitur.*⁴¹⁵

READING RITUALS

The magic contest texts show us a world rife with rituals. Not only is ritual represented in the narrative as the 'basic social act'⁴¹⁶; we also see our protagonists perform a dizzying variety of different kinds of rituals throughout the texts, and ultimately we see in the texts

⁴¹² Rappaport (1999), 126.

⁴¹³ AJ 109. And asking for bread, he gave thanks in this way, 'what praise or what gift or what giving of thanks, will we name, breaking this bread, other than you only, Lord Jesus?'

⁴¹⁴ AS, 525. 'by these very proofs who is the true god can be taught'.

⁴¹⁵ Recognitions 3.59. 'God has established certain pairs in this world: the one who comes first is from evil, the one who comes second is from good. Each man is granted a chance of just judgement between them (lit. in this matter), whether the man is simple or wise. For, if he is simple and believes the one who comes first, influenced by signs and wonders, it is necessary that he believes the one who comes second, for the same reason; he will be convinced by signs and wonders even now as before. Indeed, when he believes the one [who comes] second, he will learn from him that he should not believe the first one, who comes from evil, and thus the prior error is made right by the second correction'.

⁴¹⁶ Rappaport (1979), 197.

a kind of ritual which only exists on the page: the magic contest.⁴¹⁷ The magic contest texts present to us, then, both narrative representations of ‘real world’ rituals, familiar to us and to their audience in the second to fifth centuries, but they also create something new, built from these other, familiar rituals to create something new, something impossible⁴¹⁸ and yet essential. The magic contest is made up of other rituals which are more familiar: the *altercatio*, healings, the rituals of the law courts, imperial acclamations, and so on, with a distinct ritual purpose and new kind of ritual communication – to determine the truth of religious claims made by competing authorities. But in this world of the magic contest, we also see the textual communities pray, baptise, exorcise, proclaim their faith,⁴¹⁹ we also see them witnessing impossible feats of wonder-working in public and the spontaneous conversions that follow – we see in all of these how, for our texts, rituals both demonstrate, and inculcate, belief. Both of these levels on which ritual operates in the text, the familiar and the unfamiliar or invented, are important; taken together these reported rituals form the bulk of the narratives, and thus also the largest body of evidence for how the authors and perhaps their audience thought about their world, the that they sought to present and to bolster in these texts.⁴²⁰

Roy Rappaport’s theories of ritual help to illuminate how rituals function within these texts. As he sees it, rituals do not only reflect models and worldviews, they help create them. Ritual is defined as ‘the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances’⁴²¹ which ‘follow...orders established or *taken to have been established*, by others’.⁴²² Within the text, we see again and again the use of ritual formula, repetitive action, and stylized reactions, e.g.:

⁴¹⁷ The texts are also suffused with performance, an essential element of ritual: ‘“unless there is a performance there is no ritual” (Rappaport (1999), 33).

⁴¹⁸ White (2000), 50-1 on the ‘imaginary’ as a source for (personal) history.

⁴¹⁹ In, e.g. the many variations of ‘I believe in [you,] Lord Jesus Christ’.

⁴²⁰ Douglas (1966), 117: ‘ritual recognises the potency of disorder’. The magic contest ritual, as we shall see, is born of disorder but creates order.

⁴²¹ Rappaport (1999), 24.

⁴²² Rappaport (1999), 32.

*unus deus, unus deus Petri*⁴²³
 Εἷς θεὸς Ἰωάννου, εἷς θεὸς ὁ ἐλεῶν ἡμᾶς⁴²⁴
 εἷς θεός, ὁ βοηθῶν τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς⁴²⁵
 ‘*unus deus christianorum*’. *Dictum est quadragies*.⁴²⁶

This feature, as has been noticed by Brown,⁴²⁷ an essential component of ritual, but also of stories which are memorable and popular.⁴²⁸ These ‘established orders’ create a sense of familiarity, what might be called a ‘warm feeling’ in which these repetitive elements serve as reassurance and aid;⁴²⁹ they also allow the author to convey a message through narrative which otherwise would be dry and uninteresting.⁴³⁰ When a cry of ‘God is one’ breaks out, we know that something wonderful, something that reinforces safety and confirms beliefs, has just occurred, even if we were not present.⁴³¹

These messages conveyed through reported ritual are part of what Rappaport calls a ‘cognised model’, a model, embedded in the texts, which underlies the ritual system and explains why the participants in ritual (or the audience for a retold, reported ritual) believe the rituals to be necessary and effective. Rituals in our texts function within the

⁴²³ AP 26. ‘God is one, one is the God of Peter!’

⁴²⁴ AJ 42. ‘One is the God of John, one is the God who is merciful to us!’

⁴²⁵ Epiph. *Pan.* 30.12. ‘God is one, who comes to help the Christians’

⁴²⁶ AS, 514. ‘God is one, one is the God of the Christians’.

⁴²⁷ Brown (1995), 68ff.

⁴²⁸ Rappaport (1999), 151: ‘it is virtually definitive of ritual speech that it is stereotyped and stylized...is repeated under particular, usually well-established circumstances, and great stress is often laid upon its precise enunciation’.

⁴²⁹ White (2000), 35, goes even further and suggests that repeating stories can even change the language and fundamental communication: ‘“when these new [stories] are taken up and transformed into personal narratives—when circulating stories are refashioned into personal experiences and the knowledge such experiences contain...people participate in shaping the language with which they describe the world’.

This language, we shall see, is essential in discussing rituals and their place in the world.

⁴³⁰ Cf., e.g., the early martyr acts, which convey much of the same kinds of messages, but do not produce the same kinds of feelings in the reading as they no doubt would have for actual witnesses; by the time of the *Martyrdom of Perpetua*, not much later than our earlier texts, this had begun to change.

⁴³¹ This kind of ‘hearsay’ works both within the text as a dramatic device, and for the readers, who are obviously receiving this information at secondhand. Cameron (1991), 109, even claims ‘most Christians converted...because of personal contact or hearsay’. These small rituals are a part of that hearsay process.

model that shows us how to determine who is correct, who is powerful, who is with us or against us, and also who is doomed, lost, or forever deceived.⁴³²

Through the examination of this ‘cognised model’ or worldview, we see how rituals work; in particular, we see how they allow certain things to change, whilst maintaining the most basic principles as unchanged, even in the face of hostility, trauma, or disruption.⁴³³ This is the central principle of *adaptiveness*, the maintenance of certain aspects of a system by allowing other aspects to change.⁴³⁴ Rituals which change something important whilst seeming to maintain the status quo allow a much larger scope in our understanding of ritual communication and effectiveness;⁴³⁵ rituals in the magic contest are particularly adaptive as they are not constrained by the principles of non-fiction.⁴³⁶ ‘Adaptive effectiveness’ is what allows rituals to be repeatedly performed, and to produce the desired results; for our textual rituals, this adaptiveness is also manifested in the portability and repeatability of actions – rituals that require minimal investment of

⁴³² Rappaport (1999), 72: there are three bases of meaningfulness: ‘distinction, similarity, and unification or identity – all of which are important in ritual’. The magic contest’s ‘invented’ ritual is concerned with precisely these three thorny issues: how to make distinctions, how to investigate claims of similarity, and how to draw people together into a unified identity.

⁴³³ It is fair to note that one criticism frequently levied against Rappaport’s ‘systems theory’ is that it explains maintenance and stability, but not change. For our purposes, looking at a highly static system, this criticism should not bear too heavily.

⁴³⁴ Rappaport (1999), 6-7: “structural transformations in some subsystems [make] it possible to maintain more basic aspects of the system unchanged’. ‘Subsystems’ here should not be interpreted too literally; in a textual context, perhaps a ‘narrative episode’ could be described similarly.

⁴³⁵ Perhaps the greatest example of this principle is the ‘transformation’ of Judaism in this period and several centuries after. The system of the second temple was destroyed, in one sense, when the temple fell. But the Rabbinic system, in replacing it, maintained observances and priestly lineages as if the temple still stood; the calendar and the orientation of worship remained centred on Jerusalem. However, sacrifice and the power of the priests was over time completely overtaken by prayer, textual study, and the intellectual authority of the rabbis, but themselves completely divorced from the temple context. The Judaism of the rabbis, now, does not resemble the Temple cult in any respect, but all of these ‘maintained’ observances are still in place.

⁴³⁶ Perkins (1992), 448: ‘By repeating the same message in many voices, it closes off the possibility of ambiguity or openness of meaning’.

time and energy from the witnesses, in particular, help make the magic contest ritual particularly effective.

For the magic contests, effectiveness does not have to be inferred – the success of rituals is as obvious as a man coming back to life, or a dog speaking in a human voice. This kind of possible result for a ritual is an important aspect of the magic contest ‘cognised model’ or worldview. In this world, more than most, both words and deeds can make things happen – as long as the words and deeds are performed in the right way, in the right context, and by the right people:

*fratres, carissimi ac dilectissimi, ieiunemus invicem precantes dominum. qui eum inde expugavit et hinc potens est eum extirpare. et det nobis virtutem contraresistere ei et carminibus magicis ipsius, et adprobare eum angelum satanae esse.*⁴³⁷

Words (prayer), deeds (fasting), recognition of power, performing a task to achieve an active resolution to a problem of daily life – rituals in the MCTs are all these things. Rituals, as Rappaport notes, and as we see in the magic contest texts, can dramatise ‘doing’ rather than saying, and not serve just as symbols, whilst still being seen as ritual discourse.⁴³⁸ This discourse helps us understand why magic contests *are* rituals, and how they function as such. This, I will argue, is the central value of all the rituals in the magic contest texts, rituals which are overwhelmingly focussed on the need to maintain certain, very basic, principles, in the face of a wide variety of attacks, both small (an individual losing faith) and large (the threat of imperial persecution, or even an attack from Satan himself⁴³⁹). This is true of both small rituals, such as a belief-proclamation, and the larger, ‘invented’ ritual of the magic contest itself, in which ritualised elements, familiar from Roman and Christian life, combine to present something which is both an embedded model and the demonstration of the truth of that model, a convention that establishes itself. The rituals in the contest narratives, as Rappaport says above, establish their own

⁴³⁷ AP 18: ‘Brothers, most dear and most loved, let us fast, praying in turn to the Lord. For he who drove him from there is able also to remove him from here: and may he give us power to resist him and his magical incantations, and to show that he is the angel of Satan.’

⁴³⁸ Rappaport (1999), 47f.

⁴³⁹ AP 7: ‘et in vobis inplanator satanas sagittas suas tendit, ut discederetis a via.’

conventions (based on conventions discernible, and familiar to all) through which their effects will be achieved.

In this examination of invented and interpreted ritual, we are not here imagining that we are seeing written descriptions of ‘actual ritual’, in contrast to, for example, the *Didache*.⁴⁴⁰ These texts do not lay out for us a rule of life, with delineated rituals as a part of the life-cycle and daily routine, but like the *Didache*, they do present to us one vision of an idealised Christian life and kind of Christian community, one modelled partially on the canonical *Acts*, which is centred on a different kind of ritual than that which would become the focus of Christian intellectual development. The rituals connected to the life of Jesus and other ‘canonical’ rituals are absent or of limited importance. The literalisation of metaphors of battle, and the flattening or eliminating of obstacles to Christian achievement of goals, enable a very specific kind of vision, one which should be allowed its place in the discussion of Christian imagination, Christian theological ideas, and modes of Christian living. It is in part through the rituals depicted, that we see how the model of Christian life can be enacted, and the results which are to be expected in this idealised state. Through rituals, Christian adapt themselves and their environment to conform with the model they are seeking to promote or demonstrate.

THE MAGIC CONTEST AS RITUAL

Rappaport suggests that “‘new” rituals are likely to be largely composed of elements taken from older rituals’”.⁴⁴¹ In addition to the presence of accounts of ritual performance, which suffuse the magic contest narratives, the contest itself should be read as an ‘invented’ ritual. What makes it unique is that it is a ritual put together from other rituals, familiar ones for the most part, but unlike the ‘invented traditions’ discussed by Hobsbawm,⁴⁴² this is a ritual that exists only in these texts. Its invention is a purely

⁴⁴⁰ Draper (2000), 139, reading the *Didache* 7-10 as an ‘aggregation ritual’, which is close to what is going on in MCTs, ‘would expect from orally formulated material ...stereotypical patterning, parallelism, repetition, dense metonymic reference and redundancy form an important part of composition’. See also Tugwell (1989), 10-7 on the principles of this text.

⁴⁴¹ Rappaport (1999), 32.

⁴⁴² Hobsbawm (1983), 1-15.

intellectual one; it is an imagined ritual, conjured into existence to address a situation that no existing rituals could:

*ut ergo infideles a fidelibus et pii discernantur ab impiis, permissum est maligno uti his artibus, quibus singulorum erga verum parentem probentur affectus.*⁴⁴³

Rituals in the texts become ways of testing, and confirming, the ‘cognised model’ which the texts themselves are presenting; the ‘faithful’ being the ones whose cognised model, in the author’s opinion, aligns with his. How rituals can do this is difficult of course, and possibly more frequently debated than any other topic in ancient religion.⁴⁴⁴ In this chapter, I will examine the ritual aspects of these texts from a particular perspective, one which attempts to show how each ritual episode fits into the broader model expressed and shaped by these texts, and in part already explored in the previous discussions of divine power and religious or secular authority. Here we will see how the accounts of ritual, familiar and invented, bolster, whilst at the same time relying upon, both individual and institutional authority. The way rituals function in this model is not that which we see in ‘standard’ Christian discourse on ritual.⁴⁴⁵ I think it helpful to move beyond ideas that these texts express a form of ‘popular piety’ and to try to determine if there are any elements of how this piety is expressed in the use of wonder-working in a ritualised context. I argue that it is possible to find in these texts rather more awareness of the nature of religious practice and its difficult place in the world than has sometimes been

⁴⁴³ *Rec.* II.18. ‘So that, therefore, the unfaithful be distinguished from the faithful, and the reverent from the irreverent, it is allowed that the malicious one make use of those arts, by which the love of individuals towards the true parent may be tested’. The magic contest may be an invented tradition, but other methods for determining the faithfulness of individuals accused of sorcery/witchcraft, such as trials by ordeal, were certainly very real. Strathern (1994), 158, notes that some trials by ordeal involved the laying on of hands on dead bodies. Beard et al (1998), 168-9 ‘short accounts tend to mystify rather than explain’ the problems of Roman religious ritual.

⁴⁴⁴ Bell (1992), 19-30, for a good summary of the many axes of debate and controversy.

⁴⁴⁵ Such as what we find in the *Didache*, or the *Apostolic Constitutions*. These texts are what Rappaport calls ‘liturgical orders’, 196-204 on the importance of the sequencing of time for ritual order. Markus (1990), 125-35 is a brilliant meditation on the process of ‘re-sequencing’ ritual time and space in the process of Christianisation.

assumed. For these texts tell us that ritual is one way to find, not just to express the truth.⁴⁴⁶

It will also be useful to look further at how the described rituals, some familiar and some fantastic, help to construct the model that lies behind all of these texts – a Christian life as a battle, for every individual and every community, against evil. The categories of ritual to be discussed range from public or semi-public prayer, open debates, cleansing rituals, through many different kinds of ritualised public wonder-working, culminating in the contest of resurrections, through public confessions of belief, exorcisms, baptisms, and the laying on of hands. The ritual of the contest includes the resurrection wonder-working, but importantly is also includes the results of that wonder-working – the acceptance and belief of the audience.

I hope to show that the constructions, and accounts, of ritual in these texts are more than just pervasive, but also persuasive. The rituals and ritualised actions presented in the text are in itself a part of the argument that the texts make, for the supremacy of the Christian worldview and way of life, and of the antagonism between this way of life and all others, whose source is the devil. The way in which rituals are presented does not divide the rituals into ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ – no category of ritual is absent just as no public space is to be avoided. Instead we see presented another way in which the proper response to evil is not to flee from it and/or establish an ‘alternative’ to what is called ‘the world’, but to overtake and subsume it, and one important way of accomplishing this is to incorporate it into rituals.⁴⁴⁷ Ritual, especially public ritual, is used to promote what might be called a ‘totalising’ view: the ‘purpose’ or ‘goal’ is always paramount and always the same. All the rituals, all the time, are shown to lead to conversion, and in

⁴⁴⁶ On ‘popular piety’ as the impulse for the AAA, see Cameron 1996, 107ff, and the Schneemelcher (1962, 273-5), who sees the themes as ‘edification and entertainment’. In a way, the goal of the magic contest is the same as the goal of certain ‘magic’ practices, such as divination: to determine the truth with certainty, to see the future without having to imagine it.

⁴⁴⁷ The issue of how much these texts are **deliberately** presenting a view that is distinct from later Christian theories of ritual is a fair one. I will argue that intent here is less important than the overall effect created.

some cases conversion of the entire group, through ritual action expressed in different ways and on different levels.

As we saw in the previous chapters, in MCTs the Christian place in the secular world is not a place of direct confrontation with the secular authorities, and yet it is continually presented as the right and duty of at least some Christians to enter into conflict within the secular context. Similarly, it is shown that whilst it is acceptable for there to be private rituals, it is also acceptable for public, non-Christian rituals to be Christian-ised, or for neutral public spaces to be used to perform Christian acts. Rituals can occur anytime, anywhere, and as we shall see, they do not necessarily require an audience of the sort most ritual theories assume to be necessary.⁴⁴⁸ The magic contest rituals are not unified in appearance, though they do form a relatively coherent group. They are broadly ‘performative’⁴⁴⁹ they are also different in the forms they take, and in how much we might recognise them as a ‘religious ritual’ (or, especially, a ‘Christian religious ritual’) today, but they leave no doubt as to their effectiveness.⁴⁵⁰

In this chapter, I will examine the multiplicity of rituals found in our texts, looking at why they do what they do, when and for whom they do it. Rappaport’s theories help us find a way through the mass of reported rituals in the text. First, I will look at the way rituals can be looked as performances and how language is used in conveying and reporting our ‘textual rituals’; then, I will examine how words and deeds interact in the model of ritual that is presented, and in particular how rituals seem to produce or create beliefs as well as simply stating what they are, such as the acclamations above.⁴⁵¹ I will examine a number of different ritual types that are reported in the texts, and their

⁴⁴⁸ A private ritual, as far as these theories go, has a receptive audience of one – the performer. Rappaport (1999), on the multiple levels of ‘private systems’, and the need to translate that into the public system.

⁴⁴⁹ Rappaport (1999), 117. ‘performativeness...provide[s] a basis for for <occult> efficacy in general, including the magical power of words in particular’.

⁴⁵⁰ Again, in the technical sense, on which see below.

⁴⁵¹ Rappaport (1999), 120, remarks on this process of ‘acceptance’ in modern Judaism: “‘Judaism does not require the devout to believe, for belief is not subject to command. It does, however, demand of them that they *accept* the law, and this acceptance is signalled by, and is intrinsic to, conformity to the ritual observances that pervade all of life’.

particular relevance to the worldview that is being expressed; rituals will be looked at as individual episodes which help to build this model, as well as explain it. Most important amongst these are the resurrection-wonder episodes which form the climax of the narratives, as a part of the invented ritual of the magic contest.⁴⁵² Finally, I will look at how the tradition itself has commented on the role of rituals in the ‘cognised model’ which the MCTs present, and how this model was useful beyond the boundaries of the texts themselves, finding its way into the broader stream of developing Christian discourse.

RITUAL PERFORMANCES

Most theories of ritual classify ritual as a kind of performance, dependent on the nexus of space, actor and audience all being in agreement on the symbolic meaning of the specific action being performed in the ritual itself.⁴⁵³ The rituals we see enacted in the magic contest texts may, however, present a challenge to this view, even though some take place in theatres,⁴⁵⁴ and the contest in the forum charges admission and has bleachers set up.⁴⁵⁵ One important difference would be that the performances in these narratives often feature an audience that was not by any means in agreement with the performers, an audience that is waiting to be convinced by the performance. I would like to posit a category of *confrontational* ritual. It is possible, I suggest, to have a ritual where only a portion of those involved agree on, or understand, the meaning of the ritual.⁴⁵⁶ In the magic contests, this aspect of ritual is stressed – what is important is not what Simon, eg, thinks he is about to do; rather, what is important is how the witnesses interpret what he

⁴⁵² Thomas (1998), 75, from a literary-critical perspective, identifies the generic features common to all the resurrection-wonders in the Petrine tradition, even extending outside of the texts focussed on in this thesis. The details are remarkably consistent. The ‘resurrectee’ remains the same, the challenge to Simon as well. Places and times and witnesses change.

⁴⁵³ Turner (1975), ch. 1, is a good example. See also Bell (1998), ch. 3, for performance aspect of ritual more generally.

⁴⁵⁴ AJ 31-7.

⁴⁵⁵ AP 22: *vidisse se in foro anabstras configi*; 23: *convenerunt autem et fratres et quicumque Romae erant, occupantes loca singulis aureis*.

⁴⁵⁶ A straightforward Christian example would be the (Roman Catholic) Eucharist. Even if the audience does not understand the language of the priest, **what is actually happening** is believed to be the same for all witnesses and actors.

does. One ‘new’ aspect of magic contests as rituals is that they do not need ‘co-operation’ to be effective. Resistance, as it were, is futile; if the ritual is properly performed, it will succeed. The confrontational ritual is the whole contest: the preparatory challenge and response wonder-working,⁴⁵⁷ the contest itself, and the aftermath, either extended or brief, wherein the contest results in conversions and additions to the community.

In many ritual theories, it is essential that the external context and audience for the ritual be harmonious on some level with the performers, and as we shall see this is an insufficient explanation for many kinds of rituals, especially those performed in public. The Roman ‘performance context’,⁴⁵⁸ which in itself might seem to confront, rather than support, Christian religious rituals, nevertheless pervades the texts, and is actually an essential aspect of how the rituals are able to do what they are supposed to. *Adaptive* ritual will maintain unchanged those things which are essential (for example, certain propositional beliefs) whilst confronting either internal or external threats or changes in a process of change itself (i.e. by performing wonder-works in the context of a debate on propositions). The adaptive rituals are part of the model presented by our texts, which help to maintain the structures of the community and in particular what Rappaport calls its ‘values’ in the face of a threat from an opposing set of values.

One important ‘value’ that might be helpful to introduce into this discussion is the concept of how much we expect ritual to produce ‘results’ (true faith) or to be *effective*. The magic contest texts present a view of ritual effectiveness which bears little resemblance to any ‘real-world’ ideology of ritual effectiveness, and that is part of their particular emphasis, their particular vision of the Christian place in the world. These texts stand, in the technical language we will use and develop, much more heavily within *adaptation* rather than *cognition* in their view of ritual; so much so, in fact, that the claim could be made that the texts as a whole, probably unintentionally, demonstrate for us a view of Christianity as the only way precisely because of its highly adaptive

⁴⁵⁷ Czachesz (1998), 90-2.

⁴⁵⁸ These rituals are, as we have seen, deliberately placed in Roman (or provincial Roman) places and allow the two spheres to interact with each other.

characteristics. Christianity, in a word, is the true faith because it *works*.⁴⁵⁹ And the many ways in which it works are represented in the text by a wide range of rituals.

Simply performing ritual actions is not enough.⁴⁶⁰ The role of belief is highly important in the texts, and it is a requirement for being eligible to participate in or perform ritual. Thus, it seems, proper belief might also be required for *adaptive effectiveness*. The method for determining belief-eligibility is also shown throughout to involve ritual: there is a formulaic statement which must be made, then some symbolic action undertaken – which, if the believer is true, will result in something more than symbolic: the wonder-working will succeed – the statue will come back together, the dead will rise, the magician will fall from the sky – and will also succeed in the real final goal, the ‘adaptation’, or conversion, of bystanders. Rituals are adaptive, and precisely because of that, extra care must always be taken that rituals are not performed in the wrong context or by the wrong people. In other words, we must always be aware of these two views of how ‘adaptive’ any given ritual might be, and try to determine how that interacts with the views put forward on how ritual is performed, and how it works. What we find, indeed, is a unique view of ritual that does not in the end find a place in broader avenues of Christian theology, but which may lie behind or even drive certain tendencies into a later period.⁴⁶¹ The underlying views we find in these texts are remarkable for how much, indeed, they allow to remain unchanged in their demonstration of ritual – how undramatic, in some ways, is the adaptation required for fairly spectacular kinds of ritual performance.

⁴⁵⁹ And, perforce, it works because, as we have seen, in its apostolic figures it has a link to divine power and a properly structured matrix of authority.

⁴⁶⁰ Even Peter needs to perform rituals in order to access his power, unlike Jesus in the gospels; his wonder-working is in part couched in this ritual context to help distinguish him from Jesus (another typological connection to Moses, although in the OT Moses’ ritual wonder-working is less emphasised than in the pseudepigraphic material).

⁴⁶¹ Much has been written on the continuity between the late antique attitude toward ‘magic’ and medieval attitudes toward ‘witchcraft’, for example. I would argue that more important in our period is the underlying shared matrix of beliefs about demons across religious boundaries. Whilst MacMullen (1983)’s views have been criticised as simplistic, it is worthwhile considering how much these adaptive, shared platforms might have enabled certain conversations to start which might not have been possible otherwise. For a fuller discussion of this, see the next chapter.

These views of ritual adaptation (and effectiveness, as we shall see) form a large part, then, of the ‘cognised model’ of ritual which is presented in these texts. The model which we have been developing throughout this thesis is one which privileges, first and foremost, distinguishing between good and evil (and the sources thereof), and structuring society and community in such a way as to avoid confusion of this distinction. It is by means of various kinds of rituals that this model is presented and propagated, and in this model we get a glimpse of how one group of authors was able to make sense of the Christian duty of living ‘in the world’ but not ‘of it’⁴⁶² – or, in the terms we have been using, how to remain adaptive and effective whilst engaged in confrontation with active and powerful opposition. The power of God and the apostolic authority having been properly identified through ritual, this model then predicts that the larger environment itself will change, on both an individual and societal level, and lead further into a world of conversion, itself a process of adaptation in a more familiar sense.

sources of ritual meaning

Whilst a great deal has been written about the ‘heterodox’ nature of many of these texts, as I have argued above this is a misreading of their priorities. The magic contest texts find the source of meaning for their rituals from two ‘thought-worlds’, the idiosyncratic communities of their origin, and the broader, non-Roman cultural matrix. The authors felt no compunction, it seems, about using these Roman sources of meaning when it helped to make a broader point, and in some cases may have in fact avoided using a Christian source of meaning. This will be developed further; here it is most relevant to say that the authors, whilst no masters of ‘literary’ skill, were without doubt aware that they were at times occupying ambiguous grounds, and we see how they deal with that in their choices of symbols which can be interpreted in multiple ways, and in the way they use ritual to demonstrate power and authority, and demonstrate that the effectiveness of these rituals is dependent on these very things. Through their presentation of ritual, they create a convention, in which the encoded model is demonstrated, the model within which the battle of the ‘two ways’ is played out.

⁴⁶² In the classic formulation, Rom. 12.2 ‘be not conformed to this world’ and Jn 15.19.

This role of convention is emphasised by Rappaport. Convention is in part responsible for providing meaning to the very basic form of the ritual: a dispute in the forum, for instance, is a widely-known social event, but the way the dispute progresses, though adhering to its own established rules, is not the way a dispute might be expected to progress.⁴⁶³ It is possible, and I believe the evidence will show, to describe a convention-breaking ritual that is nevertheless accepted by the internal and external audience. In the breaking of these conventions, the magic contests are establishing new ones, which would have a long and healthy existence of their own. But in order to establish these new conventions, to present its unique view, the rituals need to build on already known conventions. In particular, the magic contest texts use the language of other conventional rituals in their own ways.

LANGUAGE OF RITUAL

In this section, I examine the way language functions in these texts and how rituals are described and presented. I more systematically categorise the different kinds of rituals below. Here I wish to discuss elements which are common in the language of these texts' reported ritual.

the lack of the metaphorical

There is a noticeable lack of metaphorical language in the rituals that are described.⁴⁶⁴ The language throughout heavily emphasises literal terms and explanations, short phrases that lack multiple interpretations. Even when the context might suggest to us that there is a metaphorical subtext, we do not see it incorporated into the rituals, in particular the rituals of wonder-working. Where Rappaport and others do see an important role in some kinds of rituals for mystification, in the kinds of rituals that are performed by the apostolic figure, even the slightest suggestion of mystification or metaphor is resisted. A case in point might be the 'reviving of the fish':

⁴⁶³ However, it could be argued that the magic-contest becomes, by the time of our later texts, its own kind of convention, within the broader dispute convention.

⁴⁶⁴ On the usual role of metaphor in religious texts, see Soskice (1987); also Ricoeur (1975).

Petrus...respiciens sardam ad fenestram suspen<s>am, adpraehendens eam ad populum dixit: 'si videretis nunc hunc in aqua natantem sicut piscem, credere poteritis in eum quem praedico?' illi autem unianimes dixerunt: vere credimus tibi. tunc piscinae adiacenti natatoriae dixit: 'in nomine tuo, Iesu Christe, quo usque adhuc non creditur, coram omnibus istis vive et nata tamquam piscis.' et misit sardam in piscinam, et vixit et natare coepit...secuti sunt autem plurimi hoc viso et crediderunt domini.⁴⁶⁵

The resonance of Peter being a fisherman, or of the apostolic task to be 'fishers of men', or even the Christian symbol of the fish,⁴⁶⁶ might come to mind, but they are certainly not present in the ritual language used. What we do see here, rather than metaphor or mystification, is the language of negotiation (if the fish swims, will you be able to believe?, followed by the 'acceptance' of the audience), which instead of any metaphorical language is used as the way to define the boundaries of the ritual event itself. It might be argued that the authors of these texts did not understand that what they were doing is describing rituals; but, as I think will be made clear, especially by the *Recognitions*, is that the construction of all these episodes is deliberate and toward a consistent goal. We shall also see, particularly in the *Recognitions*, that the refusal of metaphor and allegory can be a deliberate choice that presents itself as an important communication in its absence: the ritual, and the associated beliefs, must be accepted as they are presented, and not in the half-hearted way which is allowed when metaphor and allegory are used to explain them.

The ritual then proceeds, described straightforwardly. In particular, the negotiation is completed; the transaction occurs in the predicted manner. We will use this small episode (compared with a few others) to examine other common features of ritual language in our text. In addition to an absence of metaphor, we must examine the kinds of 'formula' that recur, as well as the kinds of repeated messages which are either explicitly stated by those

⁴⁶⁵ AP 13. 'Peter, seeing a sardine hanging in a window and taking it, said to the people: 'if now you see this thing swimming in the water like a fish, could you believe in him whom I preach?' They said unanimously: 'Truly, we believe you.' Then he said (at) the nearby swimming-pool: 'in your name, Jesus Christ, in which until now there is no belief, before everyone, live and swim like a fish!' And he put the sardine into the pool, and it lived and began to swim...and having seen this, many people followed [him] and believed in the Lord.' They do test to make sure it is a real fish!

⁴⁶⁶ Aug. *civ. Dei*. 18.23.

performing the ritual or are affirmed by the other participants, and also we need to look at the interactions between language and objects. Does a consistent theory of Christian ritual underlie these texts? If so, how does this theory relate to the wider model we have been examining.

rituals and formula

For it to be recognised as ritual, there must be, according to most theories, some aspect of an event which is ‘repetitive’.⁴⁶⁷ In these texts there are certainly repetitive elements, and in particular use of ‘formula’. These formulae increase the familiarity of the unfamiliar situations described, and help to make each episode of wonder-working both similar to other such episodes, but to other experiences. The model presented in each of these episodes of wonder-working as one moment in a continual battle can thus easily incorporate these ‘movable’ parts, which can be transferred across situations with ease, and help to remind readers of what they have read, building on this to present rituals that demonstrate power and authority in ways that will be accepted, even though in some sense new. Formula, then, is an essential way through which rituals can be ‘invented’ out of other ritual processes, as well as providing an immediate context for the reader or audience.⁴⁶⁸

The formulae we see are much more identifiable as ‘religious’ formulae (as opposed to ‘magic’ formulae like, for example, ὀρκίζω σε Ἰαω, Σαβαωθ, Ἀδωναί, Ἀβρασὰξ καὶ κατὰ τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ...⁴⁶⁹), even if the rituals involving the formula do not meet the expected definition for religious (or ‘liturgical’⁴⁷⁰) rituals. It is probably easiest to demonstrate how this works by examples. A good, roughly contemporaneous example which looks more familiar to us as a religious ritual is this, from the *Acts of Thomas*,⁴⁷¹ which is constructed almost entirely of recognisable religious formulae:

⁴⁶⁷ Rappaport (1999), 50.

⁴⁶⁸ And the sheer number certainly gives the texts the feeling of ‘orality’, as mentioned above.

⁴⁶⁹ Preisendanz (1973), 36; *PGM* III.77. On these kinds of formulae see Janowitz (2002), ch. 2.

⁴⁷⁰ Rappaport (1999), ch. 6.

⁴⁷¹ Many of the prayers in the AT have been well studied. See Johnson (1999), 171-205.

Καὶ ἐπιθεὶς αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας εὐλόγησεν αὐτοὺς εἰπών•
 Ἔσται ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.
 Καὶ αὐτοὶ εἶπον• Ἀμήν.
 Ἐδεήθη δὲ αὐτοῦ ἡ γυνὴ λέγουσα•
 Ἀπόστολε τοῦ ὑψίστου
 δός μοι τὴν σφραγίδα,
 ἵνα μὴ ὑποστρέψῃ εἰς ἐμὲ πάλιν ὁ ἐχθρὸς ἐκεῖνος.
 Τότε ἐποίησεν αὐτὴν ἐγγὺς αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι,
 καὶ ἐπιθεὶς ἐπ' αὐτῇ τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ
 ἐσφράγισεν αὐτὴν εἰς ὄνομα πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ ἁγίου
 πνεύματος.⁴⁷²

Even though this reported ritual is very different than the ones in our texts, many of the formulaic elements are there, familiar to us as to its intended audience. I will argue that this straightforward ritual description is also used in the more unfamiliar contexts that we are dealing with. The rituals we see are almost never the kind of in-group, closed rituals such as from the AT, but rather are rituals which are outward-looking, non-metaphorical, and demonstrative, with a minimum of explanatory commentary. Looking at the episode of the 'fish' wonder-working above, we find in just this small paragraph a number of formulae, providing a repetitive, ritualised context in which the wonder-working is to be interpreted:

'If you now see....will you believe...'
 'And they said with one voice...'
 'In your name, Jesus Christ...in the sight of all these people, Live!'
 'Seeing this...many followed Peter and believed'

These formulae, and other similar ones, recur throughout our texts. The most important of the formulae are in reported speech and thus provide a ritualised, repeated context in which the wonder-working occurs. This level of 'ritual' is indicated for the audience, not the performers themselves; the formula used to express the actions of the people, some of which are themselves ritualised actions (such as falling at someone's feet) helps to

⁴⁷² AT 49. 'He put his hands on them and made a blessing on them, saying, 'may the grace of our Lord Jesus be on you for all time'. And they said, 'Amen'. The woman entreated him, saying, 'Apostle of the Most High [God], give me the seal, so that that enemy does not come back again to me'. Then he made her be near to him, and put his hands on her, and made the seal in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

indicated that the actions are not to be taken in isolation, but as part of the broader, invented ritual.⁴⁷³ The difference between the AT rituals and the others is in the set-up and witnesses of the performance.⁴⁷⁴ This is, of course, a very brief passage, but as we can see, there is an obvious structure established by these formulae, providing a beginning, a middle and an end to the ritual, as well as a ‘result’ which proves the two-fold effectiveness of the ritual, and shows the ritual itself as a vehicle for adaptation.⁴⁷⁵ A part of another, more complex ritual will illustrate some other similar formulae (I have bolded the formulae):

*haec cum dixisset canis, **caecidit ante pedes apostoli Petri et deposuit spiritum**. vidente autem turba magna cum admiratione canem loquentem, coeperunt ergo alii **prosternere se pedibus Petri**, alii autem dicebant: ‘alium signum nobis ostende ut **credamus tibi tamquam ministro dei vivi**, et Simon multa signa praesentia nostri fecit, et ideo secuti sumus eum’.*⁴⁷⁶

The spoken words (of the dog) reflect the actions indicated to occur afterwards – this is language of ritual negotiation, or even of prophecy. We also see formulae used to indicate repetitive ritual actions, whose meaning is clear (eg the supplication gesture). In writing down rituals, of course, it is especially important to use language to help indicate the progress of the ritual; using formulaic language helps to preserve this sentiment. When reporting speech, prayer-formula can help to do the same. We are occasionally stymied

⁴⁷³ The problem of how to ‘describe’ ritual so as to preserve some sense of the ritual ‘atmosphere’ is not one which the texts still deal with consistently.

⁴⁷⁴ Bell (1997), 72-6 on theories of ritual performance.

⁴⁷⁵ As Ferreiro (2005) notes (164), the dog-confrontation scene was itself adapted in numerous ways, most notably as funerary art on sarcophagi. The image of Peter, Simon and the talking dog was compelling enough that people used it in a setting where what seems to be the most salient point, that the dog is talking, is very difficult to convey. But those attracted to such an image were obviously reinforcing something else through the use of it.

⁴⁷⁶ AP 12. When the dog had said these things, he fell at the feet of the apostle Peter and gave up his spirit. The great crowd, seeing with wonderment the speaking dog, some began to prostrate themselves at Peter’s feet, but others said: ‘show us another sign so that we believe in you as a minister of the living god, even Simon did many signs before us and therefore we followed him.’

by textual problems, but we do see that there are similar formulae across different texts.⁴⁷⁷

νῦν γὰρ μάλιστα ἢ αὐτοὶ ἐπιστρέψατε διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ μου ἢ αὐτὸς ἀποθανοῦμαι διὰ τῆς θεᾶς ὑμῶν· εὕξομαι γὰρ ἐνώπιον ὑμῶν παρακαλέσας μου τὸν θεὸν ἐλεηθῆναι ὑμᾶς. Καὶ εἰπὼν ταῦτα προσηύξατο οὕτως· Ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑπὲρ πάντων λεγομένων θεῶν ὑπάρχων θεός· ὁ μέχρι σήμερον ἐν τῇ Ἐφεσίων πόλει ἀθετούμενος· ὁ ὑπερβαλὼν μου τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐλθεῖν εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦτον ὃν οὐδέποτε ἐν νῶ εἶχον· ὁ πᾶσαν θεοσέβειαν ἐλέγξας διὰ τῆς σῆς ἐπιστροφῆς· οὗ ὀνόματι πᾶν εἰδωλὸν φεύγει καὶ πᾶς δαίμων δύνάμις τε καὶ πᾶσα ἀκάθαρτος· καὶ νῦν φεύγων τῷ ὀνόματι τῷ σῷ τοῦ ἐνθάδε ἀκάθαρτος· καὶ νῦν φεύγων τῷ ὀνόματι τῷ σῷ τοῦ ἐνθάδε δαίμονος, ὅστις πλανᾷ τοσοῦτον ὄχλον, δεῖξον τὸ σὸν ἔλεος ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ.⁴⁷⁸

*ego nomen tuum uoce publica confiteor, ut sciat omnis iste populus...*⁴⁷⁹

And sometimes these formulae are visible, even in summaries of actions, perhaps showing us that the authors themselves were seeing the episodes as ritualised, formulaic, and transferable.

*ceteri vero **fixis genibus prostrabant** se Petro, super quos ille **invocato dei nomine** alios daemonia habentes curavit, alios etiam languentes sanavit, et ita **laetantem populum dimisit**.*⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ The AJ passage is textually problematic but I don't think it interferes with any of the formulae-expressions.

⁴⁷⁸ AJ 40-42. '[John says]: 'For now, especially, you will be turned by my God or I myself will die by your goddess. For I will pray before you, entreating my God to be merciful to you. And have said these things he prayed in this way, 'O God who has dominion over all those called gods, who until today, in the city of the Ephesians, has been discounted, who has prevailed upon my thoughts that I should come to this place, which had never occurred to me, who, through your turning, confutes every [kind of] religiosity, whose name causes all idols and every demon and all the impure powers to flee, and now here, the putting to flight of this demon by your name, who is leading such a crowd astray, show your mercy in this place.'

⁴⁷⁹ AS, 528. 'I confess your name / with public voice / so that all these people may know'.

⁴⁸⁰ Rec 2.70. 'the rest prostrated themselves with bent knees before Peter, over whom he, having invoked the name of God, cured some of being possessed by demons, and others who were ill, he made healthy, and so he sent the people away happy'.

We also have a formula which proclaims the success of the reported rituals:

ὁ οὖν ὄχλος Ἐφεσίων ἐβόα• **Εἷς θεὸς Ἰωάννου**, εἷς θεὸς ὁ ἐλεῶν
ἡμᾶς, ὅτι **σὺ μόνος θεός**, νῦν ἐπεστρέψαμεν ὁρῶντές σου τὰ
θαυμάσια• ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ὡς **θέλεις**.⁴⁸¹

Similarly, we find a formula that is very pervasive indeed, that when the apostolic figure is speaking, he identifies Jesus or God as, again and again, the ‘one whom I preach’.⁴⁸² Formulae accruing to help identify the supernatural power being addressed are of course extremely familiar from Greco-Roman culture.⁴⁸³ This sort of language is particularly important for Christians, and particularly in an adversarial context, where, unlike in most ritual situations, the identity of this being is actually in question.

But it is important to look beyond formulaic language as well, into how the language used to describe ritual is used for other purposes, in particular in communicating messages, in this non-metaphorical world. Is it possible for such heavily formulaic language to convey meaning beyond the basic, literal statements made? Can we find in the rituals and ritual language of these texts a more complex system of communication?

ritual and communication

For Rappaport and others, one of the essential elements of ritual is the communication of a message, that is, a message about the wider context rather than just the simple, non-metaphorical message contained within the rituals. He refers to this process as ‘encoding’. It operates differently in accounts of ritual working on multiple levels (encoding of ritual action or performing within the text, and encoding for those reading or hearing the text). What we see in magic contests and their associated preparatory or

⁴⁸¹ AJ 42. ‘And so the crowd of the Ephesians shouted: **‘The God of John is one**, the God who has mercy on us is one, for **you alone are God**. Now, seeing your wonder-working, we are turned! Pity us, O God, as is your will.’ See above on this as an acclamation.

⁴⁸² AP 7: ‘*suaderet vobis hunc esse Christum quem ego praedico*’; AS, 528, ‘*iussu domini nostri Iesu Christi Nazareni crucifixi in cuius nomine dicitur*’, ‘by the order of our Lord Jesus Christ the Nazarene, crucified, in whose name it is spoken’ and elsewhere.

⁴⁸³ *passim* in Greek magical prayers; even including Christian and Jewish prophets and holy men. The goal was to name as many possible epithets, so as not to offend the god.

related rituals of wonder-working is that the encoding is really a two-step process, a process which is mirrored by the process by which one becomes a Christian, and thus an in-group member. The first step is the encoding which all agree upon, at the level of Rappaportian acceptance.⁴⁸⁴ Simon Magus' portrayed agreement to participate in the contest is an acceptance that the contest will be constructed to show which, of two options, is the true god. This message is agreed upon by all.⁴⁸⁵ The second level of encoding is available only to those already on the 'inside'; this encoding tells us⁴⁸⁶ that it is not a 'fair' contest, an open-ended ritual where anything can happen, but that this contest will occur in such a way that the truth of Peter's claims will be demonstrated, understood, and accepted by all who witness them:

*si enim veritatis inquirendae studio sermo moveatur, etiam si quid minus plene pro humana fragilitate dicemus, deus pro ineffabili sua bonitate ea quae desunt latenter auditorum sensibus adimplebit.*⁴⁸⁷

The encoded ritual is a performance of the message 'Christianity shall triumph' in all conditions. Peter's words can be accepted by all, even his opponents, but those 'in the know' understand the true intention of his words, that this is nearly an invocation prayer.

For Rappaport, the communication of encoded messages is usually found in liturgical contexts.⁴⁸⁸ A liturgical context in Rappaport is narrower than what we have here,

⁴⁸⁴ The most 'accepted' idea in antiquity was the role played by spirits or demons. 'Belief in..the pervasive power of demons cut across religious boundaries and was shared by all in LA society' (Sandwell (2007), 273.

⁴⁸⁵ The importance of encoding, of 'being on the same page', is demonstrated by the elaborate preamble to the debate between Peter and Simon in the *Rec.* II; they have to agree on the terms of the debate, and on what a 'result' will be; this proves to be difficult! But the author clearly realised that the debate would be meaningless without such a discussion.

⁴⁸⁶ There is also 'narrative encoding' aka dramatic irony, such as is reflected in the *Rec.* 3.59 quotation above; the second to go is always going to be the winner!

⁴⁸⁷ *Rec.* II.25, 'but if my speaking is moved by eagerness to seek the truth, even if I say something less fully because of human weakness, God, through his ineffable goodness, will secretly fill up the senses of those listening with that which is missing'.

⁴⁸⁸ Rappaport (1999), 52-3, notes that a prayer can remain invariant on one level of message, but the changed circumstances can change the pray-er's interpretation. Bell (1992), 176, in Rappaport's view, 'rites... encode a basic worldview' which requires invariance.

generally requiring a ‘script’ though not necessarily a written one or one with no possible variations. Though there are some liturgical elements to certain rituals, many rituals here are not best described as liturgical; though they may contain formulae of prayer or other religious formulae, they are not the kind of ritual with a set ‘script’ or magic ‘text’ which is being tested for effectiveness. Nonetheless, this kind of ritual is often used to convey a message, one understood by all the witnesses and performers, and this certainly true in our texts; the message is sometimes verbal and sometimes lies in the actions, but they will almost always have a verbal component.

The communication is both internal, amongst the participants of the ritual, and external, to the audience of the text. There is usually a formula to signify the beginning of the message-bearing portion of the ritual by the performer speaking ‘in a loud voice’ or similar. The most frequent basic message of individual ritual episodes involves an *adaptation* of belief. Different figures, via the rituals, go from non-belief to belief, or from weak belief to strong belief. That ‘belief’ itself is never defined is a strength of this kind of communication.⁴⁸⁹ The episode from the AP in which Marcellus purifies his house is a good example. The strength of Marcellus’ belief still seems uncertain here, but this ritual is one of the ways in which Marcellus is readmitted into the community.

supervenit et Marcellus, qui dixit: ‘Petre, ego tibi totam donum meam permundavi a vestigiis Simonis et scelesti pulveris ipsius perstirpavi. accepi[t] enim aquam et invocans nomen Iesu Christi sanctum cum ceteris servis ipsius pertinentibus ad eum, adsparsi omnem domum meam et omnia triclinia et omnem porticationem usque foris ad ianuam’⁴⁹⁰ dixi: ‘scio te,

⁴⁸⁹ Rappaport on ‘encoding’ and message-providing: (1999), 32f. ‘Belief’ is such a difficult concept in ancient religion; Christianity is supposed to make it simpler, but there is little evidence from these texts which leads us to that conclusion. Rappaport is less willing to commit himself to a systematic explanation of belief than of acceptance.

⁴⁹⁰ Doors seem to have a special power of boundary-definition and protection in Roman and Jewish thought (e.g. the *mezuzah*, or the various door-related hijinks in Petronius’ *Satyricon*). Marksches (1999), 118 notes the early Christians continued to think similarly, pinning imprecations and warnings on doors (saying, e.g. ‘the power of our Lord has become mighty, and the Lord has gone to the door, and he has not allowed the exterminator to come in’).

domine Iesu Christe, mundum et intactum esse ob omni immunditia, ut exfugetur hostis et inimicus meus a conspecto tuo'. et nunc, beatissime, iussi convenire in domum communem viduas et seniores ad te, ut orent nobiscum.'⁴⁹¹

What does it mean to say that the 'communication' of this ritual is significant? As Rappaport puts it, thinking of rituals as communication eliminates much that is difficult or 'weird' about them: 'the effectiveness of signals is enhanced if they are easy to distinguish from ordinary technical acts'.⁴⁹² The entire point of this ritual, then, is to make a statement which communicates itself more convincingly in the ritual context; in particular, the use of the name of Jesus, as we shall see, marks the action as ritualistic and potentially dangerous for a non-believer.⁴⁹³ Earlier in the story, Simon has been forcibly driven from the house. The message of this ritual (which appears to have been spontaneously generated by Marcellus) is obviously one of purification. The elements of sprinkled water and the 'holy name' of Jesus are combined to remove even the 'dust' of Simon's presence, in other words, this is no simple cleaning.

There is no indication that this was an established practice, nor that Simon was 'impure' in an specific way, other than being wicked. The ritual is explicitly meant to communicate to Peter, that the house is 'cleaned', not just physically of Simon's presence, but also of his influence over Marcellus' mind. Thus, the use of the specific words, and the sprinkling of water (rather than, for example, an amount which might actually physically clean it) shows that Marcellus understands the message that Peter had previously conveyed in several different rituals, about the centrality of Marcellus' mental attitude. Unlike most of the other rituals we see performed, it is not a ritual involving

⁴⁹¹ AP 19. 'Marcellus...came in, and said: 'Peter, I have thoroughly cleaned my whole house of Simon's traces, for joy, and even rooted out his evil dust. I took water, and ,invoking **the holy name of Jesus Christ**, with the rest of my servants who cling to him, and sprinkled my whole house and all the dining rooms and every portico **all the way up to the outer door** and I said: 'I know you, **Lord Jesus Christ**, are clean and undefiled by anything foul, so let my enemy and opponent be **driven from your sight**'.⁴⁹¹ Now, most blessed one, I have ordered the widows and the elderly to come to you in my house, [which is] open to all, so that they can pray with us.'

⁴⁹² Rappaport (1999), 50.

⁴⁹³ On the 'name of Jesus' formulae see Meeks (1983), 148.

wonder-working or conversion; nothing supernatural appears to happen or to be expected. The ritual also marks out, for Peter, the whole of Marcellus' house as a 'safe' place, a place where Christian rituals can now occur without any worry that they will be corrupted or fail because of the previous presence of evil. As we shall see, in a confrontational setting, these kinds of self-referential 'rituals to determine if rituals can occur' are very common.⁴⁹⁴

language and objects of ritual

Can we find any language that can help us determine the relation between ritual objects and ritual speech in the system which is being developed in these texts? There is relatively little reference to objects in these rituals.⁴⁹⁵ At no point are incantations said over objects. Most often, objects are commanded (in the imperative) to behave in a miraculous manner. Sometimes, objects are simply used in a ritual and are remarked upon in that context. Objects are almost always, then, secondary to actions and words as a part of ritual, and their presence in ritual is usually minor. But some of the language used surrounding these objects is nevertheless interesting.

Water is seen in various contexts to possess special power.⁴⁹⁶ Peter uses a fish, a dog and a baby (who, being mute, is an object for the purpose for which he is being used), as well as a statue to demonstrate Peter's ability to control the environment; John uses a partridge and a snake, though he does not manipulate the animals himself. Silvester and Zambri, of course, use a bull in their ultimate contest. For all of these objects, living or not, there is the sense that they are there purely as a vehicle for the ritual (especially for wonder-working rituals). They are seen, certainly, as less important than the words used and the message conveyed. The dead fish swims, and the mute dog and baby talk, and make

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. the rules for Roman augury before the assembly was allowed to go ahead. (Lindsay Driediger-Murphy, pers. comm.). This would be, I suppose, a meta-ritual, for which (Rappaport (1999), 133) implies another level of convention lying behind.

⁴⁹⁵ In contrast, e.g., to the AT passage above.

⁴⁹⁶ Epiph. *Pan.* 30.12, for instance: 'γένηται δύναμις ἐν τούτῳ τῷ ὕδατι εἰς ἀθέτησιν πάσης φαρμακείας καὶ μαγείας', 'may there be power in this water to ward off all potions and magic'.

accusations against the opponent which would seem spiteful, rather than miraculous, if spoken by the apostle.⁴⁹⁷

There is no physical blessing of the objects/creatures used like this, almost certainly to avoid the negative associations of incantations and ‘sorcery’ which would have occurred. The objects, then, are made to use language, and/or to be an extension of the apostle’s power. The rituals, in these texts, are physical in that they frequently involve changes in physical states (from the normal to the impossible) or in specific actions, but even in worship rituals we see that rituals involving objects are not common and are handled very carefully to avoid ambiguity.⁴⁹⁸ We once again find an absence of metaphorical or symbolic language about objects. However, when we look closely at the formulae and other ritual language in the texts, one theme emerges very strongly: the connection between words and deeds, and the higher importance of the latter in the ritual system that is presented.

WORDS AND DEEDS

The rituals we find written about in these texts are all composed of the two traditional elements, words and deeds, which combine into one ‘ritual action’. Here I will also make use of Rappaport’s theories, though departing from him in one important point. The role of effective physical change, invariantly interpreted as supernatural intervention in the natural world, in these descriptions of rituals is much stronger than in any anthropological theory of ‘real’ ritual. In this sense, rituals do not symbolise in MCTs, they actualise. For Rappaport, though, words and acts/deeds form the essence of what a ritual is,⁴⁹⁹ and we

⁴⁹⁷ AP 15, *o horrendo deo et hominibus, o exterminium veritatis et corruptio<nis> omnis semen pessimum, o infructuosum fructum naturae*, ‘Abhorrent thing to God and men, beyond the boundary of truth and evil seed of all corruption, unfruitful fruit of nature!’.

⁴⁹⁸ The potential use of people as objects is one of the stranger aspects of this; the texts go to some length to make it clear that there is always a human who is acting on behalf of the dead persons. This is perhaps to avoid the appearance of presenting Peter as engaging in necromancy. (cf. Jamnes and Jambres, whose legend ends in a failed attempt at necromancy (Chester Beatty frag 5a-f).

⁴⁹⁹ Rappaport (1979), 177, ‘ritual not only communicates something but is taken by those performing it to be “doing something” as well’.

see, perhaps surprisingly, an awareness of this concept in our texts, and a privileging, very clearly, of deeds as probative, particularly in a confrontational-ritual context:

*Petrus dixit: 'non est in verbis habenda fides, sed in operibus et factis.'*⁵⁰⁰

*Nolo enim ego cum isto verbis contendere sed aliquid actibus agere, et ostendere efficaciam in dei nostri nomine*⁵⁰¹

Words are subordinated to deeds, in a ritual, because it is the action which is deemed authoritative – it cannot be manipulated as effectively. Thus, for anthropologists, what the performers imagine might be possible is less important than what happens, whereas we see here that what is imagined as possible is represented as in fact coming to pass. There is no gap between what can happen and what does.⁵⁰² However, it will be important for us to be careful and note those cases where words and deeds are themselves opposed by those performing or witnessing rituals, and to ask where and why this dichotomy is being used in the process of drawing distinctions and determining, or producing 'truth'.

performativity

The theory of speech acts, as initially put forward by J.L. Austin and developed by others, has proved immensely useful to scholars of ritual. It is particularly useful to those who need to interpret a ritual from a page rather than a live performance. It is also important, in using speech-act theory to help us interpret these rituals, to make sure that we are not abusing it. As I have said, all the rituals we will examine involve the nexus of words, acts, and wonder-working (that is, divine power), and even those words which themselves act are still under the control, as far as the ritual authors are concerned, of another force. Incorporating performativity into our larger framework, a performative is one aspect of ritual which allows or enables 'adaptation' to occur. He does this by

⁵⁰⁰ AP 17. Peter said: 'do not have faith in words, but in works and deeds'.

⁵⁰¹ AS, 525: 'For I don't want to contend with him with words, but [also] do something with actions and show [my] power in the name of God'.

⁵⁰² Cf. AP 11's near-quotation of Mt. 19:26. '*per quem omnia impossibilia possibilia sunt*'. This quotation serves as a justification for the contest, although leaves the authors to explain why Simon is able to do the seemingly impossible as well.

causing a change through only the use of words, in some cases, without altering the wider environment or circumstances. But it is important not to overstate how large a role performatives play in the ritual action – it is an undeniable aspect, but the view held in our texts of the power of words (with a few exceptions) is limited by their deployment under the power of God. The performatives in our texts are all partially, or even primarily, perlocutionary in their function,⁵⁰³ as well; they cause something to happen, and as a secondary cause, they try to persuade the hearers to change their minds.⁵⁰⁴

It is, though, by means of speech that this other force enables the ritual to occur and to be effective. This ritual speech can often be categorised as ‘performative’ in the now-classic sense. This means that, as Rappaport formulates it, ‘the force of ...“performatives”...does not depend in any simple and direct way upon the effect of these acts and utterances upon the minds and hearts of those exposed to them’.⁵⁰⁵ Thus, Rappaport is here saying that the effect of the performative utterance does not have to change anything insofar as those who witness it can see; they can feel neutrally about the naming of the ship, but the ship is still named. This is true equally of the performatives we find in our texts, dramatised very obviously in the wonder-working; it does not matter what a witness thinks when the fish is made alive again, as the fish swimming away is all that is necessary; the ritual is complete when the effective performative is acknowledged by the witnesses.

In particular, the speech act which causes something to happen to someone or something else does not involve the feelings of this other party about what is happening. We see this in our texts in a large percentage of the wonder-working events, particularly those involving an object or non-human animal. The wonder-working performative becomes complicated in two ways: first, when a preliminary ‘exploratory’ ritual must be

⁵⁰³ On ritual formality as imparting its own perlocutionary force, see Rappaport (1999), 116-7.

⁵⁰⁴ Austin (1962), 101: ‘saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them’

⁵⁰⁵ Rappaport (1999), 114.

performed, a test for ‘eligibility’ as I have called it, and second, when prayer and performative combine (or, in fewer cases, when there is a prayer-performative-action triad and it is difficult to locate the exact ritual action).⁵⁰⁶ We will examine both of these problems in detail below. First we must analyse the ways in which more basic performatives appear in the rituals described.

The kinds of performative ‘speech acts’ we see in the texts are more ‘literal’ than the usual performative examples that are discussed in speech-act theory. ‘I name thee John’ is performative because it is the act of naming which makes someone have a given name. The attitude towards how words function in a ritual context is a bit different for us. As we shall see below, the largest number of performatives that we see are not of this symbolic or abstract type, where the performative is a word which refers to an action which is purely verbal, but rather more often we see the use of concrete descriptive words (sometimes in combination with actions), where the speaking of a simple word causes the described action to occur. This is the difference between saying, ‘I hereby declare that you are a Christian’ (which does not occur) and to say (in a slight rephrasing) ‘open your eyes’ and thereby curing blindness. It is in this distinction that wonder-working can be incorporated into ritual language.

The ‘act’ of wonder-working is thus sometimes a verbal act; for all that ‘words’ are subordinated to deeds in the rhetorical formulae used, words can be powerful as well.⁵⁰⁷ The ritual of verbal action is less obvious in a written text than in an observed ritual performance, but it is nevertheless present. The impression is certainly given, for example, that a command to ‘Rise!’ to a dead body in a resurrection-wonder is what

⁵⁰⁶ On prayer-performative, see below on Peter’s prayer in AP 32. On prayer-performative-action, see on AJ’s central resurrection in 44ff.

⁵⁰⁷ One other kind of ritual made of words only is the *defixiones* curse tablets. In this case, the act of writing it down has a spiritual effect, however. See Gager (1992) and Faraone (1991), 20 who quite clearly explicates how *defixiones* can themselves be a kind of textual contest: ‘primarily used by individuals involved in often-lopsided agonistic situations, to bind the power of their opponents’.

carries the force of the supernatural. The context of the action matters, but it is still performed by use of the word only.⁵⁰⁸

effectiveness

One of the more difficult to understand aspects of ritual theory is ‘effectiveness’. In the magic contest texts, rituals are effective when, along with successful wonder-working or creative action, they also result in conversion and the exposure of truth. The idea of effectiveness is often divided into physical and emotional or psychological effectiveness.⁵⁰⁹ In most rituals, the effectiveness (of either kind) thereof is not known immediately, if ever, by the ritual actors and witnesses. But in our narratives, of course, this is not the case. Nothing short of one-hundred-percent effectiveness is acceptable for the purposes of the rituals being performed. The omnipotence of God is, perhaps, theologically of such great importance that no seeming failure is allowed to stand for long; his representatives cannot ever be placed in a position where they can be reasonably doubted.⁵¹⁰ The opposition, indeed, is shown as having themselves a high rate of effectiveness, but inevitably at the last hurdle they, lacking a truly omnipotent source of power, must fail.⁵¹¹

Effectiveness is also important from the perspective of the audience. Given that the ritual performance is meant not only to be effective but persuasive, the audience reaction is also important to include. As we have seen, the audience for all of these rituals (the ‘crowd’) is highly persuadable – any effective ritual impresses them. A further element beyond

⁵⁰⁸ AP 26. *quem Simon tangens occidit tu, domine, per meam vocem tua virtute suscita eum.*

⁵⁰⁹ Rappaport (1999), 108-13 draws a distinction between the physical and the meaningful. I don’t see in our texts (during the magic contests) any evidence of such a distinction being drawn; Gnostic views, of course, are in a sense founded on this distinction. See Edwards (2009), 44-8 on the problem of creation ‘out of nothing’ in the battle with heretics.

⁵¹⁰ Though the AS dances close to the edge of this for dramatic purposes, delaying the bull-resurrection for some paragraphs by first getting all the ‘major characters’ to agree that if Silvester successfully resurrects the bull, they will convert to Christianity.

⁵¹¹ Simon might be able to fly, but he cannot be allowed to fly away, escaping punishment.

effectiveness is then needed, and so provided. That is the final step, as it were, in the ritual process: the audience is provided with an explanation of how the ritual was able to be one hundred percent effective, and this contextualisation is usually where we are left at the end of any given ritual episode.

belief and acceptance

The contextualisation of the ritual, is part of what Rappaport calls ‘acceptance’. This is not the same thing as belief; it is rather less intense, and is what is required in order, as an observer, to properly understand the ritual and what it means. To ‘accept’ the ritual is to agree to its formal structure and to agree, by silence or assent, to witness that the ritual is in fact occurring. It is, as Rappaport puts it, ‘not a private state but a public act’,⁵¹² and is thus well suited to the purposes of our authors as well as those who perform rituals in real life. The ‘acclamations’ of the crowds upon the conclusion of the contests⁵¹³ are the most obvious ‘acceptance’ rituals that we have. To state ‘God is one’ or, even more ambiguously, ‘God is one, who helps the Christians’ is not to say, ‘I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things seen and unseen’. To say, ‘God is one’ is to accept the existence of the one God,⁵¹⁴ but not to promise to follow him, nor to understand him in any specific way, and not even to make a strong connection between the ‘power of God’ and the God being acknowledged.⁵¹⁵ For it does not matter if those who ‘accept’ the ritual are sincere or not.⁵¹⁶ This process is what allows the fickle crowd, and the false magician, to agree to take part in a ritual such as a magic contest.

⁵¹² Rappaport (1999), 120.

⁵¹³ See above in the introduction to this chapter.

⁵¹⁴ ‘God/the Lord is one’ is, of course, the central statement of the *Shema*, the most important Jewish prayer. It is interesting to me that, given Judaism’s emphasis on actions rather than beliefs, the central prayer seems to reflect this, in its being formulated as a statement of acceptance. ‘God *is* one’, not ‘I *believe* that God is one’. Perhaps these acclaiming crowds are being shown to accept the reality of God, or the God of Peter, etc. because of the wonder-working, and thus, Peter needs another kind of ritual when a point about *belief* is being made.

⁵¹⁵ And given that we are told Simon was worshipped as a God, and the AP even tells us Peter was, seemingly unproblematically (AP 29), this kind of statement is not sufficient for us to declare the speakers ‘believers’ in any reasonable sense.

⁵¹⁶ Seligman (2008), 61-4 on ambiguity in ancient Greek dramatic ritual is interesting here.

They are willing to ‘give it a try’; the fact that they don’t agree with the performer on what is going to happen is immaterial. Rappaport suggests that the act of acceptance is a performative; it may sometimes be, but in our texts the act of acceptance is more often expressed by a simple eagerness to watch the contest, or to demonstrate one’s own powers in a contest setting. As we shall see, in our texts *belief* is also almost a performative; it is certainly a public act, the act of replying ‘*credo*’ or ‘*credo deo vero*’. Private thoughts do not exist on the page, and they do not suffice for the rituals in the text, but neither do we see the texts interrogate the meaning of *credo* very deeply.

participation

Acceptance is all that is required to be a passive observer of one of these rituals, or to function as the ‘opponent’. Belief, a somewhat more stringent bar, is required for active participation therein. Whilst, as we have seen, these rituals are all performed in public or semi-public spaces (in order to counter the claims of secrecy often made against Christians), because of the strict boundaries and guidelines for the rituals being performed, and the aforementioned complete effectiveness expected, participation by a non-believer could be disastrous. Belief, in our texts, must itself be determined by a simple ritual of this type:

*Petrus dixit: ‘Credes in deum meum per quem filius tuus resurrecturus est?’
mater autem cum voce magna dixit cum lacrimis: ‘Credo, Petre, credo’.*⁵¹⁷

This brief episode is unique in these texts in that whether or not the reported ritual has been effective cannot be known until the second ritual is performed. I will call these rituals ‘eligibility’ rituals: they establish whether or not someone is able to participate along with the apostolic figure in his larger, usually *confrontational* ritual, either directly or indirectly. The inclusion of this kind of ritual brings us beyond ‘acceptance’ and into participation and belief. The role this extra layer of ritual plays in the ‘cognised model’ that we are developing will be explored below; here it is necessary to say that these extra rituals help to demonstrate the awareness of the authors of the different levels of

⁵¹⁷ AP 28. ‘Peter said: Will you believe in my God, through whom your son will be resurrected? And the mother said with a loud voice, with tears: I believe, Peter, I believe!’

cognitive commitment⁵¹⁸ that were possible, and that could be engendered by certain kinds of rituals such as they were depicting. All the players in the contest (or in other confrontational rituals) need to accept, but they do not need to believe. In fact, for a confrontational ritual, this demarcation between acceptance and belief is the space in which the ‘result’ of the ritual will be found.

RELIGIOUS RITUALS

We see a huge variety of rituals in these texts. Some are clearly identified as such, whilst others seem to be a spontaneous response to events, but a response which is presented to the external audience with ritualistic elements. If actions are not ritualised, they cannot contain this encoded meaning, and thus, they cannot lead to the correct, affirmative result, or provide an interpretive framework to the external audience for interpreting this result in the proper way. Across this group of texts, I will look first at those rituals which do not seem to have their primary origins in a Christian context. Since I argue that what is going on in the texts is a construction of a system in which the Christian community can exist in the wider Roman context without too much disruption, it is not surprising that there would be rituals that are not distinctively Christian in appearance as a part of the system. The few references to these types, primarily sacrifice, will be mentioned below in the context they occur.

purification rituals

A ritual purification makes a public space, or person, ‘clean’ again in a spiritual sense. We have already examined the purification of Marcellus’ house in the AP. As mentioned above, this ritual is one of the few which lacks a straightforward supernatural element. There is no reference anywhere in the texts, however, of purification associated with the dead – perhaps because the dead are rarely permanently in that state. The only things which has need of purity is the soul. We do see a significant amount of rhetoric about the need for purity,⁵¹⁹ and in fact the teachings of the AP and AJ on purity are one of the

⁵¹⁸ This is one area where our texts demonstrate some surprising sophistication; there is perhaps more to be said in another project.

⁵¹⁹ e.g. *Rec.* IX.10.

reasons the texts were declared heterodox, but in terms of demonstration, there is very little. Similarly, in the context of healing there is no mention of any need for purification.⁵²⁰

manipulation of creation

As discussed above regarding objects, the texts do not hesitate to manipulate the natural world in rituals. This manipulation is done, like other rituals, in a non-metaphorical way. It is also done in contrast to the manipulations of the opponent. At all times, one standard ancient theory of wonder-working⁵²¹ is at work: non-divine-powered wonder-workers, placing themselves as rivals to Christ, show their true selves in their lack of good will. It is difficult, however, for us to see at first how this kind of manipulation-ritual is demonstrating the good will of Peter.⁵²² It does show, however, Peter's power extending beyond that of his opponent's ability, which is classified as mechanical. Peter's manipulation imparts something more than that, it makes the objects themselves into active performers, and gives them self-will within the ritual context. The episode with the dog⁵²³ shows us how Peter sees the whole of the natural world, not just other humans, as able to participate with him in his wonder-working and in his power. I quote the entire passage so the process of the wonder-working and its consequences is clear.

et conversus Petrus ad populum sequentem se dixit: 'magnum et mirabilem nostrum visuri estis. et respiciens Petrus canem magnum catena grande ligatum, accedens soluit eum. canis autem solutus, vocem humanam accipiens dixit ad Petrum: 'quid me iubes facere, servus inenarrabilis dei vivi?'

⁵²⁰ The *Rec.*, expressing that community's unusual 'Jewish-Christianity', does go further; see below in Ch. 5.

⁵²¹ Best encapsulated by Origen, *CC* 6.11.

⁵²² As is exemplified in the 'commentary' of *Rec.* 3.59: *ille qui a malo est, signa quae facit, nulli prosunt; illa vero quae facit bonus, hominibus prosunt*. 'He who is from evil benefits no one with the wonders he works; but the deeds which a good man does, benefit men'.

⁵²³ For a detailed discussion of all the possible resonances of this episode, see Ferreiro (2005), 147-200. It is interesting to note that this episode was by far the most frequently represented in art, from as early as the fourth century (*Ibid.*, 164). Its delightful oddness seems to have captured the imagination of a wide variety of people in Late Antiquity (14: 'the dog stories in the acts of Peter...did not fade, rather they became some of the most enduring and popular legends well beyond the third century').

cui Petrus dixit: 'intra et dic Simoni in medio conventu suo, "dicit tibi Petrus: procede in publicum – tui enim causa Romae veni, inprobe et sollicitator animarum simplicium"'.

et loco currens canis introivit et inpetum faciens in medio eorum qui Simoni aderant et erigens priores pedes voce maxima usus est et dixit: 'tu Simon, dicit tibi Petrus Christi servus ad ianua stans:⁵²⁴ procede in publicum – propter te enim Romae veni, inprouissime et seductor animarum simplicium'...

sed Simon intus ad canem ita dixit: 'dic Petro, intus me non esse'. ad quem canis...ait: 'inprouissime et inpuerate et inimicissime omnium animantium et credentium in Christum Iesum, missum ad te mutum animal et vocem humanam accipientem, ut te argueret et conprobaret planum et deceptorum. tot <h>oris cogitasti, ut diceres: 'dic quia non sum hic'...

pervenit canis ad Petrum sedentem cum turba, ut viderent faciem Petri; et canis renuntians quid gessisset cum Simone. haec autem locutus est canis... 'Petre, agonem magnum habebis contra Simonem inimicum Christi et servientibus illi, multos autem convertes in fidem seductos ab eo. propter quod accipies mercedem a deo operis tui. haec cum dixisset canis, caecidit ante pedes apostoli Petri et deposuit spiritum.⁵²⁵ vidente autem turba magna cum admiratione canem loquentem, coeperunt ergo alii prosternere se pedibus Petri, alii autem dicebant: 'alium signum nobis ostende ut credamus tibi tamquam ministro dei vivi, et Simon multa signa praesentia nostri fecit, et ideo secuti sumus eum.'⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Again, we see a door marking a boundary between good and evil – Peter will not enter the house whilst Simon is inside. Is this concern about impurity?

⁵²⁵ On the death of animals in the AAA, see Matthews (1999), 223-4.

⁵²⁶ AP 9; 12. 'Peter turned to the people following him and said, 'You will see something of ours, great and wondrous'. Seeing a large dog bound with a great chain, he approached and untied him. When he was untied, the dog, receiving a human voice, said to Peter, 'What do you ask me to do, servant of the ineffable living God?'

To him Peter said, 'enter and tell Simon amongst his crowd, "Peter says to you, come out in public – on account of you I have come to Rome, you evil one and worrier of simple minds"'. And the dog, running to the place, entered and charging into the middle of these who were attending Simon and, raising his front paws, in a loud voice said, 'You, Simon – Peter, Christ's servant, standing at the door, says to you, "come out in public – on account of you I have come to Rome, you very evil man and seducer of simple minds."' Inside, Simon spoke to the dog thusly, 'Tell Peter I am not inside.' The dog answered him... 'Most evil and shameless man, most inimical to everyone who lives and believes in Jesus Christ, this is a mute animal that has been sent to you, that has received a human voice, so that it may denounce you and prove you a cheat and a deceiver. So many hours you have been thinking, just to say, "Say that I'm not here"?...And the dog came to Peter, sitting with the crowd that would see Peter in person, and the dog told what had happened with Simon. And the dog said this: 'Peter, you will have a great contest with Simon, the enemy of Christ and his servants, but you will convert to the faith many men seduced by him. On account of this you will receive the reward from God for your work.

The dog, then, is not just a miraculous recording device, meant to repeat a message to Simon. He is also the first one to engage in a contest with Simon, for he is in a sense granted by Peter for this moment some of his apostolic power.⁵²⁷ The dog is not a mere toy to be manipulated, he is turned for the moment into a creature with a man's voice, and the posture of a man performing a ritual (on two legs, in a loud voice). It is the dog's contest ritual which serves as a foretaste of the larger contest ritual, and indeed it is his own manipulation of creation which informs Peter of this; there is no indication that Peter knew beforehand any of this would happen.⁵²⁸ This dog, then, is more than just a miracle, he is a true disciple, and this is expressed via the dog's ritualised use of language. Like others below, the dog is given a test, of sorts, which it then passes. Peter did not 'bless' the dog to make him an exemplary disciple as such. This occurred because Peter granted him a man's voice, and with it a will. The effective ritual here is analogous to the enlivening of the fish; the power of God can create through performative words; and the gift of language can allow even non-human (or infant) actors to participate in the ritualised wonder-working in their own right.

eligibility rituals

It is by the aforementioned 'eligibility' rituals that the limits of this power are drawn. The most elaborate will be discussed below, but it is worth saying here that there is nothing in particular which suggests that these kinds of rituals convey any more meaning based on the specific content to which the performer is being asked to swear. The most famous eligibility ritual of the period, of course, was the imperial Roman practice of demanding

When the dog had said these things, he fell at the feet of the apostle Peter and gave up his spirit. The great crowd was amazed, seeing the speaking dog, [and] some began to prostrate themselves at Peter's feet, and others said: 'show us another sign so that we believe in you as a minister of the living god, Simon also did many signs before us and therefore we followed him'

⁵²⁷ On transmission of power, see ch. 1.

⁵²⁸ This is perhaps what is most odd about this passage. Here we have an indication that, though the rituals do seem to have a pre-determined endpoint, what happens along the way is liable to change. Thus, is this evidence that in the magic contest worldview there is any middle ground, any possibility for rituals to have unexpected outcomes? If this is not a theophany (see previous note), I am not sure how to explain this.

that Christians to sacrifice to the emperor or demonstrate otherwise their allegiance to the Roman gods.⁵²⁹ The eligibility ritual in these texts takes that practice and turns it on its head. Where the Roman ritual was to determine whether or not an individual had a right to be seen as a full citizen, with all the rights thereof,⁵³⁰ and to participate in society, these rituals determine if an individual has a right to participate in a Christian activity, but within the context of Roman society. The willingness of the martyrs to refuse the Roman ritual is mirrored here by the eagerness of the various people called upon to participate in the public Christian declaration; only in these texts the ending is different: life in this world, and life in the community, rather than death and martyrdom.⁵³¹

Peter demands an eligibility ritual test of many in the AP; Joseph of Tiberias undergoes a protracted eligibility process before he undertakes his own contest.⁵³² Before any of these figures are able to enact their most elaborate rituals, the rituals in which they confront a whole opposing structure, they must perform these smaller rituals to determine who is on their ‘side’. Silvester in the AS demands that unbelievers be physically separated before undertaking a prayer (which is to proceed his actions in the contest), lest God decide those who are praying with Silvester are unworthy participants:

‘sequestrent se ab infidelibus fideles et increduli a credentibus,’⁵³³ ut nos omnes qui credimus Christo in una parte stantes flectamus genua domino omnes unanimiter postulantes, ut dignetur petitionibus nostris annuere et dominum nostrum Iesum Christum suum esse filium demonstrare’ Ad hanc uocem segregati sunt omnes increduli a credentibus, et facta est oratio per unam fere horam.⁵³⁴

⁵²⁹ E.g. Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs, 3-6: *Saturninus dixit: simplex est religio nostra, et iuramus per genium domini nostri imperatoris et pro salute eius supplicamus...Speratus dixit: ego imperium huius saeculi non cognosco, sed magis illi Deo servio...*

⁵³⁰ Rupke (2007), 35: ‘From [212], the concept of Roman citizenship functioned not as an exclusionary term but as an universal entitlement to certain rights – and the correlative obligation to perform certain duties...the requirement that everyone should sacrifice to the traditional pantheon offered practical opportunities for discrimination’.

⁵³¹ See Lieu (2004), 136: confession of Jesus is the ‘ultimate choice’ that is ‘experientially and rhetorically fixed in the later martyrological tradition’

⁵³² Epiph. *Pan.* 30.

⁵³³ Though it is tempting to make more of it, I think the distinction between ‘faithful’ and ‘believing’ is just rhetorical multiplication here.

⁵³⁴ AS, 528. ‘Let the faithful separate themselves from the unfaithful, and the unbelievers from the believers, so that all of us who believe in Christ, standing in one

Distinctions between eligible and ineligible are usually, then, as simple as ‘believers and unbelievers’. It is possible that the eligibility-ritual comes into these texts so pervasively as to become almost a form of in-group greeting, allowing any interaction that follows to be accepted, even if the individual is problematic:

*superveniens autem quidam de via amicus Simonis, nomine Gemellus a quo Simon multa acceperat, videns eum crure fracto...currens autem ipse Gemellus ad Petrum dixit: ‘ecce ego de credentibus Iesu Christi unus opto esse.’ Petrus dixit ei: ‘quae invidia hic est, frater? veni et fac consuetudinem.’*⁵³⁵

Gemellus’ version of ‘hello’ is thus ‘I want to be a believer’; this is almost apotropaic. As with any social group, the Christians in these texts show that they have developed in this kind of ritual a method of determining status and safety, both for ritual and for simple living. To declare that one is ‘of them that believe in Christ’ before joining a group is to put oneself on the same level of risk if discovered as the rest. The eligibility of those in such a group, then, comes to be confirmed automatically. The model for how to ‘test’ an unknown individual is thus set out in its simplest form.⁵³⁶ In the *Recognitions*, we see that this text, which has a different process for how to be ‘eligible’ as a member of the group, also adjusts these kinds of identifications, keeping the baptised and the unbaptised separate until the ultimate ritual-confirmation of their in-group status.⁵³⁷

area, shall bend our knees to pray together to the Lord, asking that he deem it worthy to approve our prayers and to demonstrate that our Lord Jesus Christ is his son’. At this speech, all the unbelievers were separated from the believers, and they prayed for almost one hour.’

⁵³⁵ AP 32. ‘A certain friend of Simon’s, called Gemellus, from whom Simon had received many things, when he arrived from the road, he saw [Simon], his leg broken...Gemellus himself, running to Peter, said, ‘Look! I wish to be one of those who believe in Jesus Christ.’ Peter said to him, ‘What prejudice is here, brother? Come and make yourself comfortable.’

⁵³⁶ See Westra (1998) on creedal forms in the AP; the evidence is not overwhelming that the AP actually was familiar with any creeds.

⁵³⁷ *Rec. passim* in the later, narrative books. The process of *recognitio*, is itself presented as a protracted ritualised action to determine eligibility, but it is not exactly present in other branches of the magic contest tradition.

abjuration rituals

Along with rituals to define who is *in* the group, there are rituals of abjuration or cursing. These rituals provide a way of verbally marking the ‘out-group’, those who are ‘excommunicated’ or otherwise removed from the community. All cultures need a dramatic way to designate individuals as, as it were, unacceptable. Most interesting for our analysis is the most ambiguous case, Peter’s prayer at the end of the AP.⁵³⁸ This prayer is sometimes described as a curse, but I classify it as a prayer, because the formal ritual elements it has show similarity to a prayer. The fact that it is a negative prayer or has a bad result does not mean it does not count.⁵³⁹ As these abjurations show, negative and even vicious language is part and parcel of these texts; to ‘speak plainly’ and speak against evil, is as much a part of the role of the apostle as to demonstrate what is good.⁵⁴⁰ However, it is the case that the texts certainly spend more time on rituals which are about distinguishing good and evil, and in particular advancing a specific, Christian-based procedure for so doing, and in so doing building towards the climax of the contest-ritual.

‘CHRISTIAN’ RITUALS

Although the rituals above are performed in a Christian context, they are not uniquely Christian, indeed they are only so due to the references made to Jesus or Christ.⁵⁴¹ The kinds of rituals described below, on the other hand, are presented as Christian in a far more thoroughgoing manner. These rituals are all in some sense preparatory to the contest rituals; sometimes they serve a dramatic purpose as well as a theological one. Mostly, though, these Christian rituals in these texts help to make clear the model on which the contest will ultimately be based, and negotiate the way in which the contest ritual can occur and have the correct results.

⁵³⁸ AP 32. See below in this chapter.

⁵³⁹ A parallel from the NT is Paul, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

⁵⁴⁰ The whole of the middle books of the *Rec.* discuss the discernment of ‘truth’ having laid the groundwork with discussion of wonder-working and how to discern the ‘good’. See Reed (2007), 213ff.

⁵⁴¹ Though there is relatively little, ‘I curse you, in the name of Christ’ in any of our texts.

prayer

The most common Christian ritual, in our texts and elsewhere, is prayer. Like preaching, an argument could be made that prayer does not have all of the features of ritual as generally understood.⁵⁴² However, in addition to the use of ritualised, formal prayer language, we see that prayer in the magic contest world is different than prayer in general. Like ‘real’ prayer, prayers in the MCTs follow ‘established orders’; but these established orders have a twist. Prayers, at least some of them, are shown to be effective, and to produce the physical and ‘correct’ results of faith, and prayers are regularly answered.⁵⁴³ There is much prayer, both public and private, demonstrated by the apostolic figure; however relatively little corporate prayer or prayer led by others is present. There is, however, so much prayer in the texts, as to make it impossible here to analyse in detail.⁵⁴⁴ The use of prayer formulae is very prevalent, in particular in requests for mercy and help, and elaboration upon the name of God:

sed Iesum Christum non omnes oculi vident. sed nunc, domine, dulce et sanctum nomen tuum succurras istis: tu tange oculos earum, tu enim potens es, ut hae videant luminibus suis...miserere nobis, domine, servis tuis. quae possumus, domine, subportare, tu nobis praesta: haec enim nec videre nec subportare possumus...magnificans itaque Petrus dominum dicens: ‘tu solus dominus deus, cui laudem perferre quanta labia nobis opus sunt, ut secundum misericordiam tuam gratias tibi agere possumus?’⁵⁴⁵

Here, Peter’s prayer is not an unexpected prayer; it follows a model of liturgical prayer familiar to us as it would have been to its audience. But the apostolic figure can also use prayer for purposes beyond these, to suggest other models, to ‘score points’ against the

⁵⁴² On forms of prayer in the apocryphal acts, see Houghton (2004).

⁵⁴³ These prayers are adaptive, in that they present and thus reaffirm the basic values (mercy etc.) underneath them with a minimal change on the part of the performer (a public statement).

⁵⁴⁴ There is relatively little recorded prayer in the narrative of the *Rec*. It tends to be included in a ritual summary, e.g. 5.36. A good part of these ‘incidental prayers’ is still clearly ritualised, but they are not ‘results-oriented’ the way most ritual depictions are.

⁵⁴⁵ AP 21. ‘The eyes of all do not see Jesus Christ. But now, Lord, may your sweet and holy name help these people: touch their eyes, for you are powerful, so that these women may see with their eyes...Have mercy on us, your servants, Lord. What things we can handle, Lord, provide us: for these things we can neither see or handle...Peter said, glorifying the Lord, ‘You alone are the Lord God, to whom how many of our lips do we need to give you praise, so that we can thank you according to your mercy?’

opposition. In the AS, as we have seen, Silvester borrows a Jewish prayer formula, which then becomes a Christian creed, as he prays for God's help in performing his wonder-working:

*Deus Abraam, Deus Isaac, et deus Iacob qui trina inuocatione in his tribus patriarchis ideo te inuocari uoluisti, ut manifestaretur nobis per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, quod in trinitate pater cum filio et spiritus sancto unus sis deus uerus...Te itaque inuoco Iesum Nazarenum crucifixum magnae resurrectionis auctorem... Et ideo audi me seruum tuum...*⁵⁴⁶

The combination of these two prayer formulae in one prayer is unusual and makes a point about which model Silvester is demanding for his hearers, and which name or conception of the divine is the correct one, the one that will be heard.⁵⁴⁷ Another prayer that is worth noting for how it works on several levels is Peter's prayer which could be said to end the contest between him and Simon. It is, to be sure, a unique prayer:

*si passus fueris hunc quod conatus est facere, omnes qui crediderunt in te scandalizantur, et quaecumque dedisti per me signa erunt fincta. citius ergo, domine, fac gratiam tuam et ostende omnibus qui me adtendunt virtutem tuam. sed non peto ut moriatur, sed aliquid in membris suis vexetur. et continuo caecidit ad terram, fregit crus in tres partes.*⁵⁴⁸

This may seem absurd as a prayer, but it is enough to say that it certainly qualifies as prayer. It follows the form of a petitionary prayer,⁵⁴⁹ is in the name of the Lord, and does not directly cause or pray for Simon's death. It is, however, a more amazing demonstration of the prayer-performative (or the 'power of prayer') and a more direct

⁵⁴⁶ AS, 528, "God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Isaac, who wished to be invoked by triple invocation in these three patriarchs, so that it may be manifested to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, that you are one true God in the trinity [of] the father with the son and the holy spirit ... and so I invoke you, Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified author of the great resurrection...and so, hear me, your servant...'

⁵⁴⁷ Given the understanding that if you name the god incorrectly when invoking him, he will not come to your aid, a common trope of magic texts.

⁵⁴⁸ AP 32: 'If you let this man do what he has tried to, everyone who believes in you will be caused to stumble, and whichever signs you have granted through me will be considered feigned. Therefore, Lord, quickly make your grace [known] and **show your power to everyone** who attends me. But I do not seek that he should die, but that he should be injured somewhat in his limbs.' And immediately he fell to the earth and broke his leg in three pieces.'

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. *Ap. Const.* IV.39.

statement from Peter about his role in using this power than we find elsewhere. Here, Peter prays to accomplish a wonder (where elsewhere he is usually in the imperative mood) and explicitly links this wonder in a chain with all of his other wonders. This also mentions the belief-causing effectiveness of these signs and wonders and describes ‘grace’ as God’s granting Peter’s prayer to work (as opposed, usually, to his power). The exact relationship between Peter’s power and the effectiveness of ritual is complex, to be sure, but in this prayer is perhaps the most difficult-to-untangle crux. Peter is represented as believing that his ritual effectiveness must be absolute, or the faith of the people, not to mention the entire system in which it operates (power, authority and the other rituals), will be of no use. This anxiety is expressed many times in the rituals of the contest.

baptism

Given all the anxieties we see expressed in prayer in these texts in regard to correcting and instilling belief, the inevitable result of this focus on belief is not as frequently mentioned as might be expected. The initiatory ritual of Christianity, baptism, plays a surprisingly small role in some of our texts. We are told about conversions, to be sure, but in many of our texts these converts are not depicted as being baptised. Their conversion is not ‘confirmed’ or sealed by anything other than their proclamations of faith or their communal life. The community of Christians depicted in these early texts might have had good reasons for delaying baptism or for not depicting it in the texts.⁵⁵⁰

In the *Recognitions*, we are told of large numbers of baptisms. We are also told a great deal about how necessary baptism is,⁵⁵¹ and the rituals that must precede it. We hear that it should be preceded by fasting, but there is very little description of or focus on the ritual itself, as opposed to the intellectual process that leads to conversion.⁵⁵² There is no doubt, however that the view of baptism as an initiation (the general view, and certainly

⁵⁵⁰ The ‘mysteries’ remain hidden in the AP and AJ: even though these were insider texts, perhaps some of the readers were catechumens, and thus not meant to see these?

⁵⁵¹ See *Rec.* 6.8-9.

⁵⁵² Eg *Rec.* 7.34. *per quem mihi fides eius claruit et qui indicium dedit credulitatis eius; alioquin multis eam diebus oportebat ante instrui et doceri.* This ‘*indiciu credulitatis*’ is, for the *Rec.*, just a sign of acceptance, and not enough for belief to be proven.

the view that seems prevalent in the canonical Christian writings) is not the view of baptism held by our texts. It is a sign that one has gone from ignorance to knowledge. It is also a strong commitment to a Christian life and community for the future which is meant to be manifestly different than the previous one. In the *Recognitions*, those who have been baptised are kept apart from the unbaptised in social settings. Baptism is both effective and adaptive; it takes a person from one community and places him in another, whilst leaving him externally the same⁵⁵³ But baptism takes place after a large number of other rituals, or series of rituals, must take place, including an intellectual confrontation for each individual, opposing good and evil and engaging in this fight himself.⁵⁵⁴

Our other later texts also discuss baptism and clearly view it as highly important, though perhaps not urgent. The story of the baptism of Constantine in the AS is the part of that text which has received by far the most scholarly attention.⁵⁵⁵ The baptism, and its effectiveness in curing Constantine's leprosy, is depicted as by far the most far-reaching 'adaptive' ritual in the history of Christendom – it, in a manner of speaking, caused Christendom to be created.⁵⁵⁶ It is performed by the bishop of Rome,⁵⁵⁷ authorised in a dream by the apostles Peter and Paul:

*Nos sumus Petrus et Paulus...missi sumus a Christo Iesu domino nostro... Sylvester episcopus ciuitatis Romae ad montem...persecutiones tuas fugiens.. Hunc cum ad te adduxeris. ipse tibi piscinam pietatis ostendet, in quam dum te tertio merserit omnis te ista deseret leprae ualitudo.*⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵³ In this way it is one of the most effective rituals of all; for an extreme interpretation of this effectiveness, see Panayatokis (1997) on some late-antique examples of 'accidental' baptism and its aftermath.

⁵⁵⁴ Rec. 8.53.

⁵⁵⁵ For a summary of the battle over this narrative see Fowden (1994b), 153-168.

⁵⁵⁶ Fried (2007), 2: the 'image of the past conjured up from memory' of the Constantine legend had more impact than the 'real' history.

⁵⁵⁷ Pohlkamp (1984), 380ff on the legend of Constantine's leprosy and his relationship to the pagan priests of Rome.

⁵⁵⁸ AS, 511. 'We are Peter and Paul, we have been sent from our Lord Jesus Christ...Silvester the bishop of the city of Rome has fled your persecutions [by going] to the mountain. When you have brought him to you, he himself will show you the pool of piety, in which when you have immersed yourself three times, all sickness of that leprosy will leave you'. (See Pohlkamp (1986) 453-4 on this episode).

This baptism, then, is not just a ‘regular’ baptism, but also a healing ritual, and is in a sense done by Peter and Paul through Silvester.⁵⁵⁹ The baptism is also the impetus for Constantine’s involvement in religious polemic and the ostensible reason for the confrontation between Silvester and the rabbis which culminates in the contest. Constantine’s baptism is the only baptism which is discussed in the text, and there is no discussion of the general need for new believers to be baptised. For our texts, even those which spend time in discussing baptism, and its ritual effectiveness, the actual baptismal ritual remains relatively opaque and almost tangential.⁵⁶⁰ Instead our texts spend more time in reporting those rituals which we classify as ‘wonder-working’.

exorcism

Exorcism is the apostolic ritual *par excellence*. It is pervasive in all early Christian narratives.⁵⁶¹ It was, unlike many other kinds of wonder-working, strongly associated with Jesus. Stories of demons and demonic possession seem to have had a particular hold on the late antique imagination, across all religious boundaries.⁵⁶² For dramatic re-telling of a ritual, exorcism is also more promising than baptism, and was not associated with ‘insider-only’ rituals that might prevent it being described more fully; it is an ideal ‘demonstration’ of a God’s power, and one which can be done, it seems, regularly by those who are not proper believers. Joseph of Tiberias, for example, exorcises in the name of Jesus whilst still identifying as a Jew.⁵⁶³ But exorcism is very similar to baptism in its form and in its effectiveness and role. It is if anything even more effective in a

⁵⁵⁹ See Perkins (1992) for the thesis that, in discourse with pagans, the main ‘selling point’ of Christianity was as medicine.

⁵⁶⁰ But see Epiph. *Pan.* 30.1-2 on the ‘secret’ baptism of the Jewish patriarch. In this text, as well, a baptism is the catalyst for further wonder-working to effect conversions. See below in Ch. 5.

⁵⁶¹ For a late Christian text that bears some relationship to the magic contest tradition, see the Life of Cyprian the magician (on which see introduction); in this text ‘wonder-working’ and ‘exorcism’ are almost synonymous.

⁵⁶² Anthropologically speaking, exorcism might be the most widely-performed ritual world-wide. Jews were especially associated with exorcism in this period (Knox (1930)). See Bonner (1943) for the rituals thereof. Levinson (2010), 69-70, reports that exorcism was even associated with the creation of rabbinical sages.

⁵⁶³ Epiph. *Pan.* 30.10.

confrontational context, where the definition of demon is expanded to include other human beings and their gods.

‘Competitive exorcism’ is not attested only in Christian literature.⁵⁶⁴ Its popularity is not difficult to understand or appreciate. But exorcism is displaced, in our texts, by the more highly structured contest of resurrection. When it is spoken of, it is mostly as an afterthought, as is healing. One exorcism in the AP in particular deserves discussion, because it is the instigation for a unique combination of so many ritual types into one. It is an exorcism-proxy baptism-manipulation wonder.

the statue: three rituals in one

The episode of the statue is really two episodes. The first is the exorcism; this is followed by the baptism-eligibility ritual-‘resurrection’. As a continuous ritual, it could be considered to be ‘symbolic’ of the Christian life-narrative of demonic nature-faith-rebirth-resurrection, but this is not made explicit in the text.⁵⁶⁵ This interpretation is an obvious one, however, and it is reasonable to assume it was intended for the audience to see it as such, without a need to state it directly. It is also a demonstration of the possibility of living as a Christian in a non-Christian world, a world that contains statues of the emperor; it is the first *confrontational* ritual in the texts, and in some ways it is the most important. The story of the statue informs the whole of the magic-contest worldview. I will quote the passage in full, divided into ‘sub-rituals’.⁵⁶⁶

exorcism

*Petrus autem dixit: ‘et tu itaque, quicumque es daemon, in nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi exi a iuvene, nihil nocens eum; ostende te omnibus adstantibus. hoc audito iuvenis expulit se, et statuam magnam marmoream, quae in atrio domus posita erat adpraehendens, eam calcibus conminuit. erat enim statua Caesaris.’*⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ See Levinson (2010) for a good collection of Jewish ‘competition’ for exorcism. Bohak (2008) 94-114 provides a well-categorised summary of the different types of Jewish evidence.

⁵⁶⁵ On statue metaphors in discussion of resurrections, see Bynum (1995), 94ff.

⁵⁶⁶ AP 11.

⁵⁶⁷ Peter said, ‘You also, whatever demon you are, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ leave this young man, harming him not at all; show yourself to all onlookers.’ Having

This is an absolutely standard exorcism. The statue of Caesar is there, presumably, because Marcellus is a senator. We see that once again, metaphorical language is eschewed in favour of simple, formulaic statements, with a stress on the public revealing of the demon.

demonstration of weakness – ritual instruction

hoc audito iuvenis expulit se, et statuam magnam marmoream, quae in atrio domus posita erat adpraehendens, eam calcibus comminuit. erat enim statua Caesaris. quo viso Marcellus frontem sibi percutiens ad Petrum dixit: magnum flagitium est. si enim hoc innotuerit Caesari per aliquem de curiosis, magnis poenis nos affliget. cui Petrus dixit: non te talem video sicut paulo ante: dicebas enim paratum te esse, omnem substantiam tuam erogare velle ut animam tuam salvam facias. sed si vere paenitentiam agis, ex toto corde credens in Christo, excipe desalientem aquam manibus tuis et ora dominum, et in nomine ipsius sparge super fragmenta statuae, et erit sicut ante fuit integra⁵⁶⁸

Peter explains the eligibility-ritual to Marcellus. This eligibility-ritual is not just for readmission into the community, however, but is also a granting of power to Marcellus, as Peter explains. The emphasis on repentance is not unique but is somewhat rare in the eligibility-rituals in our texts. The sprinkling of the water recalls the purification ritual that Marcellus performs on his house to satisfy Peter later. We see, then, the apostolic figure accepting that Marcellus himself has some authority within the secular world, and

heard this the demon expelled himself from the young man, and taking hold of a great marble statue, which previously had been placed in the courtyard of the house, he shattered with his heels. And it was a statue of Caesar.

⁵⁶⁸ Seeing this, Marcellus struck his forehead and said to Peter, ‘This is a very wicked deed. If this comes to the attention of Caesar by way of some nosy man, he will afflict us with great punishments.’ To him Peter said, ‘I do not see you as such a man as I did a little while ago; for you were saying that you were prepared, that you wanted to pay out your whole wealth so that you make your spirit safe. But if you are truly repentant, from your whole heart believing in Christ, take this running water in your hands and pray to the Lord, and in his very name sprinkle [it] over the pieces of the statue, and it will be whole as it was before.’ Cf. ὁ γὰρ ἐν ᾧ γέννηται in Epiph. *Pan.* 30.12; Jn 5:9.

Peter establishes this ritual to preserve both the Christian and some of the secular standing of Marcellus.⁵⁶⁹

eligibility ritual

*Marcellus autem nihil dubitans, sed credens ex toto corde, antequam acciperet aquam, manibus suis su<r>sum adtendens dixit: credo in te, domine Iesu Christe. etenim ab apostolo Petro arguor an bene credam in nomine tuo sancto. itaque accipio aquam in manibus meis, et in nomine tua spargo lapides istos, ut fiat statua sicut ante fuit integra. si ergo, domine, voluntas tua est, esse me in corpore, et non patiar aliquid a Caesare, sit lapis hic integer sicut ante fuit.*⁵⁷⁰

Marcellus repeats the formula given by Peter; repetition of ritual forms is elaborated from Peter's instructions ('from your whole heart' -> 'from his whole heart'; 'Christ' -> 'Lord Jesus Christ'; 'his very name' -> 'his holy name'; 'to believe properly' seems to paraphrase Peter's demand for repentance. This is the only case we have where the eligibility element is acknowledged ('I am tested by your apostle'); this is perhaps an indicator of the future 'testing' which Peter will do.

baptism-resurrection

*et sparsit super lapides aquam, et statua integra facta est. Petro itaque gloriantes quod non dubitasset in petendo dominum, sed et Marcello in spiritu exaltabatur, quod tale signum primum inter manus eius factum fuisset. credens ergo ex totis praecordiis [usuis] in nomine Iesu Christi filii dei, per quem omnia impossibilia possible sunt.*⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ On the social implications of this kind of hierarchy, see Davies (1980). See below for further implications of social significance in resurrections.

⁵⁷⁰ 'Marcellus, doubting not at all, but believing from his whole heart, before he would take up the water, extending his own hands up, said, 'I believe in you, Lord Jesus Christ. And I am tested by your apostle Peter whether I believe properly in your holy name. And so I take up water in my hands, and in your name sprinkle these stones, so that they may become a whole as it was before. If therefore, Lord, it is your will for me to be in the body, and that I not suffer anything from Caesar, may this stone be whole as it was before.'

⁵⁷¹ 'And he sprinkled the water over the stones, and the statue was made whole. And there was exaltation in the spirit for Peter, that he did not hesitate in seeking the Lord, and also for Marcellus, because such a had been made first from his hands. Believing therefore with his whole heart, in the name of Jesus Christ the son of God, through whom all impossible things are possible.' (The final sentence seems to be missing a main verb).

The statue is thus reconstituted, providing all with the proof of Marcellus' eligibility, and the statue's rebirth mirrors the safety that is presumed for Marcellus' soul, which has been made safe by the successful result.⁵⁷² The *coda*, providing the Matthaean quotation,⁵⁷³ provides a justification for the whole event, and for the whole enterprise which is about to be undertaken, a confrontation which will define the boundaries of this idea of possibility in a ritual context. For in our texts, all of these rituals fall by the wayside in comparison with the ritual confrontation that they also enact, the moment of 'truth', when the proponents are to do battle against evil, and demonstrate that all their other rituals, and their whole system and community, are not empty and in vain. In the contest of resurrections, the power of God in ritual is tested to the utmost.

RESURRECTIONS

In this milieu, in which all aspects of the narrative become in some ways ritualised, we come finally to the ritual expression of the event at the centre of Christian life: the resurrection-wonders. The presentation of resurrections marries spiritual authority, power and ritual to wonder-working and with dramatic results. These ritualised resurrections take place in the context, which we have been building up, of an 'invented ritual' which is the magic contest, and this invented ritual is also contextualised within a broader narrative which is heavily results-oriented. The resurrections performed by wonder-working are, like other actions of the apostolic figure, performed with other rituals and in a ritualistic way, in order to produce the indisputable evidence the magic contest seeks, and also to dramatise the essential truth which the Christian figure is attempting to convey, in order to lead to conversion.

*Si veritatis ego sum praeco, ad confirmandam fidem horum omnium qui adsistunt, ut sciant et credant quia unus est deus qui caelum fecit ac terram, in nomine Iesu Christi filii eius surgat haec mulier. et statim ut haec Petrus dixit, surrexit sana et procidit ad pedes Petri*⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷² It is the statue which is baptised, but it is Marcellus' soul which seems to have had the ritual performed on it. In changing the external statue, Marcellus maintains the integrity of his soul, and his social status.

⁵⁷³ Mt 19:26.

⁵⁷⁴ Rec. 7.23. "If I am a herald of the truth, to confirm the faith of all these men who are here, so that they may know and believe that God is one, he who made heaven and earth, in the name of Jesus Christ his son, may this woman rise up". Immediately when Peter

The ritualised resurrections in our texts form the climax of their narrative, and provide the side of ‘good’ with a victory against evil or error.⁵⁷⁵ It is with resurrection that our authors found a way to make the final distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between sorcery and the power of God. But these resurrections are in themselves rituals; and unlike most of the other rituals we are told of in these texts, an aspect of the ritual is the confrontation. These resurrection wonders, unlike the healings and even the exorcisms, are not just a handy way to show off the power and authority of the apostle; they are also a contest, to the victor of which goes the spoils of the souls of their entire audience. The resurrection-contest is, like some others, a ritual stitched together from the fabric of many rituals, to create a persuasive and unique ritual, one even more powerful than the works of a holy man.⁵⁷⁶

It is perhaps most fruitful to look first at the AS, to examine how the resurrection ritual is described and used in its most elaborate form. By the late fourth century-early fifth century, we see in the Peter-Simon tradition a shift away from the ‘apostolic’ context of the AAA.⁵⁷⁷ We find that, though still resolutely non-metaphorical in language, this act of wonder-working displaces the ‘symbolism’ of the resurrection wonder a bit further; another layer of communication is provided by these later rituals. For example, in the AS, we are not dealing with Peter and Simon, even, but with their descendents.⁵⁷⁸ Instead of providing us with a bodily resurrection, we have that of a bull. This resurrection does not provide a walking witness to the power of God in the same way as in the earlier texts, but it does show us the power of ritual in a much more dramatic way.

said this, she rose up healthy and fell at Peter’s feet’. The language of this ritual is ‘resurrectionistic’, even though the woman is not in fact dead; viz. the use of ‘*surgo*’. Also note that the creedal formula here means the Rec. Peter has more specific requirements for the resurrection/healing than we see elsewhere, more specific knowledge that is necessary: they must ‘know’ and ‘believe’.

⁵⁷⁵ Bynum (1995), 29: ‘[the text(s)] explicitly understand resurrection both as a victory over persecution and as an extension of – if you will, an extreme case of – healing’.

⁵⁷⁶ It is more powerful than the holy man because a holy man does not (necessarily) build a stable community from his wonder-working; the contest ritual does.

⁵⁷⁷ See ch. 4 on the role of time and distance in the interpretation of these episodes

⁵⁷⁸ On lineage theory, see ch. 2.

The use of the bull as the object of the resurrection ritual is striking; it recalls pagan sacrifices, or even the bull of the Mithraic *taurobolium*,⁵⁷⁹ as well as the Jewish temple sacrifices it is explicitly standing in for (*nam seniores nostri cum in sacrificio deo tauros feroces offerent*⁵⁸⁰). In 315 CE, of course, Jewish sacrifice had long ended but pagan sacrifice was still prevalent, which may explain this pagan-seeming substitution.⁵⁸¹ At the time the AS was composed all were equally remote, and an entire discourse had occurred which described the temple sacrifice as a ‘type’ of the sacrifice of Jesus, and/or a way of preparing the people and the world for this coming sacrifice.⁵⁸² Furthermore, the contest itself can be considered typologically here, as a recapitulation of the contest between Moses and the Pharaonic magicians.⁵⁸³ Given this background, we can make certain assumptions about the resurrection-ritual that we are presented with. The ‘established order’ for this ritual resurrection is the resurrection of Jesus, and perforce the death of the bull is following the ‘established order’ of the death of Jesus.⁵⁸⁴ This leads to several interesting implications; first, the magician figure is rather more culpable here than in earlier versions, even though what is being killed is in itself less valuable, since it is not human.

⁵⁷⁹ Pohlkamp (1984), 382.

⁵⁸⁰ AS, 526: ‘for our ancestors would offer fierce bulls in sacrifice to god’.

⁵⁸¹ Kahlos (2007), 119-23, shows that debate about sacrifice was still a live issue at the end of the fourth century and beginning of the fifth. Canella (2005), 183: ‘L’idolatria è descritta come una degenerazione della legge stessa, che prevedeva una serie di sacrifici animali a Dio e che, a causa della tentazione diabolica, sfociò in adorazione di idoli.’ In the Jewish-Christian debate, the Jews are still represented as defending animal sacrifice, because they are forced to defend ‘the law’ and not whatever rabbinic practices fifth century Jews would have been practicing.

⁵⁸² From the ‘Jewish-Christian perspective’ see *Rec.*, 1.36, on the restraint from idolatry this offered. Stroumsa (2009), 62: ‘blood sacrifices represent our own lives, which we are symbolically offering’; in this case, of course, it is the life of Jesus being offered symbolically.

⁵⁸³ See introduction, for this proto-contest. Here Moses and the magicians have, as it were, switched sides.

⁵⁸⁴ See Rappaport (1999), 125-6 on the Mass working in a similar way.

The ritual elements are as follows. The *magus* Zambri asks the emperor to lead out a bull, in formal language:

*Sed audiat me claementissimum imperium, iubeat produci taurum aliquem ferocissimum ut ostendam hodie in conspectu eius dei omnipotentis*⁵⁸⁵

The terms of the contest are then laid out.⁵⁸⁶ Zambri refers to the ritual of sacrifice, as mentioned above, and then performs the killing ritual (as if performing this sacrifice), as Simon did before him, though in this text we are told more about how the ritual works. Zambri tells us how the ritual was (and will be) performed, and predicts the result, which does appear to come to pass.

*hoc nomen dei magnum in aure tauri dicebant. Statim mugitum gemitumque reddentes simul etiam spiritum exhallabant. Nulla enim virtus sicut dixi hoc audiens nomen vivere potest... At ubi abiit Zambri, et dixit in aure tauri, statim miser factus dedit mugitum et violentissime ejectis oculis expiravit*⁵⁸⁷

We see the ritualised ‘prediction’ formula here, where a statement is made describing an action, which is then performed, and confirmed in its effectiveness. Silvester, then, responds with a two-part ritual. The first part is prayer and quoting what I have called the ‘Deuteronomic prerogative’ of God, the scriptural quotation which established the grounds of the contest.⁵⁸⁸ In other words, if Silvester’s ritual is also effective, it will supersede the previous ritual in its demonstration of the power of the ‘real name’ of God.

⁵⁸⁵ AS, 525: ‘But may the most merciful emperor hear me, and order some most ferocious bull to be led out so that I may make a demonstration, today, in his sight <and> the sight of almighty God’.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. *Nolo enim ego cum isto verbis contendere sed aliquid actibus agere, et ostendere efficaciam in dei nostri nomine, quo possit ratio humana divinis virtutibus credere, et quis sit verus deus ipsis indiciis edoceri.* See p. 41, n. 123.

⁵⁸⁷ AS, 526, [our ancestors] said the great name of God in the bull’s ear. Immediately emitting moans and groans, at the same time the bulls exhaled their last breath. For no power, as I said, hearing this name is able to live.’ And when Zambri went and spoke into the ear of the bull, immediately the bull, made wretched, gave a moan and, its eyes most forcefully popping out, it died’.

⁵⁸⁸ See ch. 1. AS, 526, *In deuteronomio ipse deus loquitur dicens, “videte videte, quoniam ego sum deus et non alius praeter me. Ego occidam et vivere faciam; percutiam et ego sanabo”.* Canella (2005), 146-7 looks at the various fifth and century century uses of highly popular verse in discussions of the Trinity. It seems to have been a very difficult verse to translate without leaving some ambiguity.

This statement of prerogative leads then into the resurrection ritual itself, once again filled with some familiar formulae:

ego nomen tuum voce publica confiteor ut sciat omnis iste populus ...sancti tui nominis invocatione reviviscat et ideo audi me servum tuum et excitetur iste taurus ab omnipotenti dextera tua et cum omni mansuetudine surgens quasi agnus ad gregem suum cum omni lenitate perveniat...’ et haec dixit... ‘ita egredere iussu domini nostri Iesu Christi Nazareni crucifixi in cuius nomine dicitur tibi, Taure surge! Et cum haec dixisset recuperato flatu Taurus surrexit cum omni mansuetudine.’⁵⁸⁹

Thus, the ritual forms we have seen elsewhere are recapitulated: invocation or identification, petition, prediction, and result (of complete effectiveness). We see other formulae at work: The name of the true God is confessed ‘in a loud voice’, and invoked several times, the performative-command is issued and simultaneously has effect.

For the first time we see a deliberate use of metaphor (*quasi agnus*), and it is this metaphor which makes this a ritual drama, an enactment of a text which is not spoken.⁵⁹⁰ The ‘lamb’ is not a coincidence; it must be the lamb of God. Whilst our other texts use resurrection-rituals to make the same point as the AS, that the Christian life is the only way, the ability for a ritual to mean two things is shown here. Along with the ‘proof’ that is sought, we also have a story, of a sacrifice offered, killed by a Jewish leader (using an incorrect understanding of the name, and power, of God), and ultimately raised up by the correct understanding of God’s name (the use of the correct, unique signifier *dominus noster Iesus Christus Nazarenus crucifixus*), the nature of the sacrifice having changed the ferocious bull into the gentle lamb. This ritual drama that plays out underneath the contest shows that it was possible not only for rituals to demonstrate ‘adaptation’ by their

⁵⁸⁹ AS, 528. I *confess your name with a loud voice* so that all these people may know...by the invocation of *your holy name* may it be revived and so hear me, your servant, and let this bull be raised **by your almighty right hand** and with every tameness, rising **like a lamb**, let it come toward its flock with every gentleness...and he said these things... ‘therefore, go out by the order of *our Lord Jesus Christ*, the crucified Nazarene, *in whose name it is said*, Rise, Bull!’ And when he had said this, the bull, having recovered its breath, arose with all tameness.

⁵⁹⁰ But see Rappaport (1999), 41-6 for a cautionary note re: conflating these two categories.

performance, but for their own meaning to be maintained-with-change, for a ritual to change or accrete its meaning without changing its form, but only the environment surrounding it. The resurrection-contest began as a way to show that those like Simon Magus, who claimed to know the true God, or to be him, were wrong, and powerless in the face of the power given through Christ to his apostolic figures. But it could just as well be used to return to the 'source' as it were, and demonstrate how another group, the Jews, who claimed to know and worship the same God, were not in fact doing so, and were in fact, killing him all over again in their continued resistance to the Christians.⁵⁹¹

the narrative structure of the resurrection-rituals

The narrative of resurrection in the earlier texts, though, resists attempts to explain itself apart from as a kind of textual ritual, even though the resurrection rituals in the AP and the AJ have been well-studied from a literary-critical point of view.⁵⁹² As rituals, they are imitating (or reflecting) the basic pattern of the resurrections/healings performed by Jesus in the canonical gospels, with the not-insignificant addition in some cases that the one to be resurrected must first be actively killed. This is one element of the wonder-working which is only readily explained as a ritual. If you are going around healing people, even using magic, you will rarely, though not never, be accused of doing something bad. But if you are killing people first, unless there is some kind of external guarantee (either from the point of view of the narrative, or as an external audience) that those killed will not remain dead, your story of wonder-working will not have the desired effect – instead of conversion, there would be disgust and condemnation. The patterned, structured acts of resurrection wonder-working, prevents in the audience, any disruptive feelings of uncertainty; rituals have conclusions, known in detail; narrative events do not necessarily.

⁵⁹¹ And were hiding their true allegiance to magic, as Zambri does, or their 'secret formula' for salvation (the baptism of the Jewish patriarch in the *Panarion*) from 'ordinary' Jews, who are then, just deceived. It is very much the leaders who are attacked in these texts.

⁵⁹² See Boylki (1995) (AJ); Thomas (1998) (AP). The threefold and sevenfold structure must be important.

I have focussed on the single resurrection ritual in the AS, above, which follows the pattern set in the early texts, but without the complicated narrative structure which underlies the AP,⁵⁹³ and without any of the eligibility-rituals preceding it. The basic resurrection ritual is exemplified by Peter's resurrection of Agrippa's slave boy:

producit autem praefectus unum de suis alumnis et ad Simonem sic dixit: 'hunc accipe, morti trade'. Petro dixit: 'tu vero resuscita eum.' et ad populum praefectus dixit: 'vestrum est nunc iudicare, qui ex illis acceptus sit deo, qui mortificat aut qui vivificat.' et continuo Simon ad aurem pueri locutus est et sine voce fecit tacere et mori... praefectus...dixit...'ecce puer mortuus iacet...sed confidens in te et in dominum tuum quem praedicas, si vere certi et veri estis: ideo hunc volui mori.' Petrus autem dixit... 'sed quoniam nunc temptatur inter vos deus et dominus meus Iesus Christus, et tanta signa et prodigia faciens per me in conversatione peccatorum suorum: et nunc in conspectu omnium, quem Simon tangens occidit tu, domine, per meam vocem tua virtute suscita eum.' et dixit Petrus domino pueri: 'vade, tene dexteram eius et habebis eum vivum et tecum ambulantiem.' Agrippa vero praefectus cucurrit et venit ad puerum et tenens manum eius suscitavit eum.⁵⁹⁴

All the ritual elements we identified above are presented here: discussion of contest rules and tasks, direction to the witnesses, killing ritual, discussion of the role of the power(s), the delivery of the 'message' of faith, the resurrection itself, and finally the public acclamation and indeed acceptance of Peter's God as true. It is worth noting that here, too, it is not the apostle's idea to have the contest as such, and that the link between the

⁵⁹³ The narratology of the AP and AJ has been extensively studied in Bremmer (1995) and (1998). The literary form which interweaves multiple plot threads serves to heighten tension, add symmetry and invoke the mystical number of the Trinity.

⁵⁹⁴ AP 25-6. 'The prefect led out one of his servants and spoke thus to Simon: 'Take this one, hand him over to death.' And he said to Peter: 'And you revive him'. And the prefect said to the people: 'it is now your duty to judge, which of these men is acceptable to God, he who kills or he who revives. And immediately Simon spoke into the boy's ear, and he was struck dumb, and he died...The prefect said, 'Look! The boy lies dead. But I was trusting in you and in your lord whom you preach, if truly certain and true you are; therefore I wanted him to die.' Peter said... 'Since now my God and Lord Jesus Christ is tried among you, even performing such signs and prodigies through me in order to turn you away from your sins – now in the sight of everyone, he whom Simon, by touch, killed, you, Lord, through my voice revive him by your power'. And Peter said to the boy's master, 'Go, take his right hand and you will have him, living and walking with you.' And Agrippa the prefect ran and came to the boy and, holding his hand, raised him.'

use of wonder-working and the result of repentance is once again made explicit.⁵⁹⁵ The immediate result is that the effectiveness is demonstrated, and the persuasive force of this ritual is also demonstrated by the acclamation of the people. The ritual's real result is not just the resurrection, but the *adaptation* it effects in the witnesses, a conversion moment. Who is 'acceptable' to God is determined by who is 'accepted' as ritually effective by the crowd. The details of who it is that Peter is representing in his resurrection-wonder are clear, since it is repeatedly stated to be 'Lord Jesus Christ', but what that means is not, within the context of this ritual, mentioned.

the role of the resurrection of Jesus

Given the eligibility rituals, and the emphasis throughout the texts on correctly connecting Jesus (as Lord) to the apostolic figure, it is somewhat striking that in the context of a resurrection ritual, the resurrection of Jesus himself goes unmentioned (though his crucifixion does not).⁵⁹⁶ And yet, this most central event in history, and most important event in terms of the claims that Christians made about Jesus, remains a curiously absent topic in these rituals. The 'facts' of who Jesus was, and that he both performed resurrection-wonders and was himself resurrected from the dead, things which are explicitly mentioned in the 'insider' scenes and contextualise the wonder-working of those episodes, is entirely absent from the contest itself. It is the 'word', or 'name' which is required for ritual effectiveness. No understanding beyond that is necessary and seems to be deliberately avoided.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁵ Is there anything in here about the rhetoric of human sacrifice? Christians were of course accused of it; this ritual presents a human sacrifice in such a way as to 'explain' the accusation away without revealing any of the Eucharistic mystery; there were no sacrifices, only resurrections. See Rives (1995) on competitive rhetoric about human sacrifice.

⁵⁹⁶ He is called 'author of the great resurrection' in the AS, but not during the actual ritual performance.

⁵⁹⁷ In fact, all details about Jesus' human life are deliberately obscured in the contests, beyond the virginity of his mother, mentioned in AP 24. The author allows Simon to make statements about who Jesus was which, in effect, go unchallenged here.

the resurrection ritual and 'belief' versus 'truth'

This suppression of details about Jesus leads us to question whether there is any semantic content, any communication of a message going on when the crowds exclaim their allegiance to the God of the apostolic figure. Above, we saw that the communication in these texts is operating with different levels of conventional understanding of the rituals presented. There is one understanding for those who are insiders and one understanding for the internal audience, who have an incomplete understanding of the grounds on which the rituals work. For much of what has happened to make sense, it must be that there is some kind of effective communication occurring. As a matter of fact, the resurrection rituals are overdetermined. We are provided with several explanations for their effectiveness. No indications are given to us (the external audience), in the descriptions of these rituals, whether any of these explanations is better than the other.⁵⁹⁸ The two most important explanations could be described as the 'explanation from belief' and the 'explanation from truth'.

The explanation from 'belief' is the explanation provided by the presence of eligibility rituals, and by the constant, careful identifying invocations. Here, the apostolic figure is determined to use his power in the service of the belief of his fellow-participant.⁵⁹⁹ His or her belief shares in the wonder-working, and 'proves' both itself and the supernatural effectiveness of the power believed in. Thus, having witnessed this event, this ritual which has produced something undeniable, the unencoded observer will be inspired to become initiated, and thus, it is implied, gain the understanding he previously lacked. This is modelled by the resurrection of the senator's son, Nicostratus. The mother of the dead man performs the eligibility ritual; Peter is thus identified with her, and with Jesus. This, we see, enables both Peter's success and Simon's failure to raise him:

*nolite ergo me intendere tamquam meae virtuti faciam quae facio, sed
domini mei Iesu Christi...credens in eo, missus ab ipso, confido mihi*

⁵⁹⁸ But see below on the Rec.'s different approach.

⁵⁹⁹ Which is why most 'real' Christian rituals would not make sense in this context; there needs to be some further kind of effective communication before the 'real' rituals would be encoded for this participant.

*invocare eum, mortuos suscitare...et aestimate quis nostrum deo vivo credat, hic aut ego*⁶⁰⁰

Thus, the judgement in this form of explanation is about who ‘believes’ (or, as in the statue episode, who ‘believes properly’) in the (living) God. This explanation is not about ‘truth’ exactly, but about the mental states of the actors. The God they ‘believe’ in acts through them and achieves the resurrection-wonder.

The ‘explanation from truth’ is, on the face of it, a more objective standard, demonstrated by Agrippa’s statement above about whether or not what Peter preached was ‘true’. The rituals, resurrections, healings and otherwise, also bolster this view; the apostolic figure succeeds, producing the anticipated result, whereas the opponent always fails.⁶⁰¹ This is also what we see in the AS and the *Recognitions* – the wonder-working will be accomplished not by a standard of belief, but by whose organising principle or God is true/the truth:

*Qui audierint per ordinem sermonem veritatis, contradicere omnino non possunt, sed sciunt verum esse quod dicitur, si tamen libenter etiam vitae instituta suscipiant.*⁶⁰²

If one is correctly orientated, the truth should be obvious, or so it seems. The distinction here is that there is no question of what belief is about – both Peter and Simon, both the Jews and the bishop of Rome, are assumed to believe in something, and to, for whatever it is worth, do what their beliefs tell them is ‘true’; the ‘truth’ exists outside of anyone’s beliefs. But all that belief is, is saying ‘I believe in’ and then naming what the object of the belief is. Wrong belief, then, comes not from misunderstanding propositions, but from *doing* things the wrong way. The understanding of what mental processes that might entail is absent from the texts. We see what belief makes people do, but not how it makes

⁶⁰⁰ AP 28. ‘Therefore do not follow me as if I do by my power the things I do, but by [the power of] my Lord Jesus Christ...believing in him, sent by him, I have faith to invoke him to revive the dead...decide which of us believes in the living God, he or I’

⁶⁰¹ It can certainly be argued that this, being based on unambiguous presence (and benevolence toward Christians) of the supernatural in the texts, is where the ‘popular’ nature of the texts, and their simple faith, is most evidence.

⁶⁰² *Rec.* 3.36: ‘Those who hear a statement of the truth, that is in order, cannot by any means contradict [it], but they know that what is said is true, if however they freely undertake the principles of life’.

them think. In all our texts, we see both of these ways of determining what is happening occurring at the same time. The rituals can be read, achieving the same result, regardless of which approach any individual audience member (internal or external) is taking. In the end, the only belief worth having is one that is true, but that is not something we see expressed in these texts. One kind of belief, the truth, is life. Any other kind of belief is false, and is death.

resurrection and life

The resurrection-rituals, without using metaphorical language, exemplify an element of so-called ‘two ways’ theology, ‘Ὅδοι δύο εἰσί, μία τῆς ζωῆς καὶ μία τοῦ θανάτου, διαφορὰ δὲ πολλὴ μεταξὺ τῶν δύο ὁδῶν.’⁶⁰³ But the area of difference can be ambiguous, and it is this that the magic-contest, and in particular its central confrontational ritual, explore.⁶⁰⁴ We sometimes find ourselves at a loss to explain how the rituals we read about in these texts are able to make distinctions between very similar things; the process of confrontation, of life and death, is also a ritualised conflict between belief systems. The exact content of these systems is secondary to their role in the conflict.

⁶⁰³ *Didache*, I. ‘There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between the two’.

⁶⁰⁴ *Rec.* 8.54. See also Pesthy (2010) on the more-pronounced *duae viae* in the *Hom.*

RITUALISED CONFLICT: *RECOGNITIONS* AS COMMENTARY

*est ergo pugna quaedam, quae gerenda nobis est in hac vita; sermo enim veritatis et scientiae necessario separat homines ab errore et ignorantia.*⁶⁰⁵

There are no resurrection wonders as such in the *Recognitions*. Instead, it uses a dramatic device familiar from the secular novels of the period⁶⁰⁶ and provides a series of ‘Recognitions’, which function as quasi-resurrections, in that they produce, alive, someone thought long dead, or demonstrate that someone is not who they appear to be, but is something better. These ‘recognitions’ are not large-scale wonder-working; as a whole, the wonder-working done by Peter and Simon in the *Recognitions* happens primarily offstage. The recognitions are ‘miraculous’, but they are, in keeping with the general tenor of the text, not a sudden realisation, but a process.

Along with this process of ‘recognition’, the whole of the *Recognitions* itself functions as a commentary on the ritualised conflict of the Peter-Simon Magus tradition (and, by extension, other ritualised-conflict stories). Though it displaces the context and changes the antagonists until they are hard to recognise themselves from the earlier texts, we see that for a ritualised conflict, exactly who is versus who is on one level rather unimportant. For the *Recognitions*, a ritualised conflict is a *necessary* part of the process by which one can come to know the truth, be shielded from error, and come to ‘recognise’ the world from a new perspective. This text, then, shows us how the narratological and ritual elements combine with an intellectual process to produce their desired result.

how to imagine a ritual

The most important commentary on the contest is provided within an explanation of the origins of good and evil. Where other MCTs speak of good as embodied in Jesus and his apostolic figures, and evil as the devil and his disciples, the *Recognitions* instead presents an elaborate discussion of how Jesus came to be, as well as the devil, and how, in

⁶⁰⁵ *Rec.* 6.4: ‘there is a certain fight, which we must wage in this life; but speaking of truth and knowledge necessarily separates men from their error and ignorance’.

⁶⁰⁶ Boylki (2010), 196-9 on how the *recognitio* can be used in a religious context.

essence, they come to fight for good and evil. Within this larger discussion, the way a confrontational rituals, such as a resurrection-contest, might occur, and how it might lead to the results we see described in our texts, is also discussed.

The origins of the confrontational approach, as we have seen, lie in the conflict of Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh:

*sicut enim tunc Moyseo hortante regem ut crederet deo, obsistebant magi quasi ostentatione similium signorum et a salute incredulos prohibebant, ita et nunc cum ego exierim docere omnes gentes ut credant vero deo, Simon magus resistit, eadem agens adversum me, quae et illi tunc egerunt adversum Moysen, ut si qui sunt ex gentibus, qui non recto iudicio utuntur, appareant, salventur autem qui signorum rectum discrimen habuerint.*⁶⁰⁷

How to ‘correctly distinguish signs’ also requires a process, which looks rather like a ritualised contest, such as we see in our other texts, and indeed in the *Recognitions* itself, a much-expanded and mostly verbal one though it may be:

*et nunc ergo quid peccant hi qui Simoni credunt, cum videant eum tanta facere mirabilia? aut non est mirabile per aerem volare..et alia his similia, quae utique discretionem nescientibus satis mira sunt?*⁶⁰⁸

The rituals of Simon are impressive, so they must be countered with equally impressive rituals that, nevertheless, communicate something beyond their own marvellousness. The rituals will, apparently, proceed in an orderly, easy-to-recognise form:

*paria quaedam huic mundo destinasse deum: ille qui primus ex paribus venit, a malo est, qui secundus, a bono. in quo unicuique hominum iusti occasio iudicii datur, sive simplex ille sit sive prudens.*⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁷ *Rec.* 3.56. ‘For just as, then, while Moses was exhorting the king to believe in God, the magicians stood against him as if by a performance of similar signs and hindered the unbelieving from safety, so, now, when I have come out to teach all peoples to believe in the true God, Simon the magician resists, doing the same against me, as they did then against Moses, so that those ‘gentiles’ who do not make use of proper judgement, shall be evident, and that those who correctly make distinction of signs may be saved.’

⁶⁰⁸ *Rec.* 3.57. ‘And therefore, now, how are they sinning, the ones who believe in Simon, because they see him performing such great wonders? Or is it not wonderful to fly through the air...and other things similar to these, which are amazing enough to the one who do not know [how to make] distinction?’

⁶⁰⁹ *Rec.* 3.59. (see this chapter, n.1).

Here, we see, is the crux of the ritual: let the bad guy go first! It might seem absurd, but in the context of the theo-philosophical argument of the *Recognitions*, this is a sign predicated on the pairs that God has provided for the world.⁶¹⁰ Without knowing this doctrine, it sounds rather farfetched a conclusion to make. How confidence in the ‘goodness’ of signs and wonders comes about is also explained:

*nam si simplex est et crediderit illi qui primus venit, signis et prodigiis motus, necesse est eadem ratione, ut etiam illi qui secundo venerit, credat; signis enim et prodigiis suadebitur et nunc sicut prius. cum vero crediderit huic secundo, discet ab eo quod primo illi qui a malo venit, credere non debeat, et ita prioris error secundi emendatione corrigitur.*⁶¹¹

An alternate solution must be found for those who are more easily persuadable, such as the many crowds we have encountered. It duly is found, and Peter continues to expound the doctrinal implications of this intellectualised ritual. This elaboration of the process or ritual by which distinction is to be made is then, supposedly, borne out by comparison to Peter’s own works (though again they are not written about extensively).

The ultimate result of this process of examining signs is demonstrated by a deserter from Simon, who having witnessed much of Simon’s deeds, came to realise they did not bear the marks of divine favour and power, through the process which has just been described. The final step, in the *Recognitions*, is baptism. Unlike our other MCTs, the *Recognitions* is concerned that this ritual be undertaken by those who have successfully arrived at the end stage of the process; who have grasped the wisdom that Peter is imparting, and seen it demonstrated by signs:

baptizabitur autem unusquisque vestrum in aquis perennibus nomine trinae beatitudinis invocato super se, perunctus primo oleo per orationem

⁶¹⁰ *Rec* 3.61. The choice of pairs is strange: *Cain et Abel unum fuit par...tertium Pharaonis et Abraham (?)*; *sextum magorum et legislatoris Moysi*; *septimum temptatoris et filii hominis*; *octavum Simonis et meum, Petri...* The Pharaoh and Abraham certainly makes no sense; how did the Pharaoh ‘come first’ in that pair? For that matter, in what sense did Simon come *before* Peter?

⁶¹¹ *Rec.* 3.59. ‘For, if he is simple and believes the first one, influenced by signs and wonders, it is necessary for the same reason that he also believes the second one; he will be convinced by signs and wonders even now as before. Indeed, when he believes the second, he will learn from him that the first, who comes from evil, he should not believe, and thus the previous error is corrected by the correction of the second’.

*sanctificato, ut ita demum per haec consecratus possit percipere de sanctis.*⁶¹²

This ‘understanding of the holy’, then, is the final goal. We see here a real, effective, interpretation of Christian mystery and the Christian life as a whole, filtered through a clearly-defined ritual process. The confrontational ritual allows a deeper knowledge or understanding to emerge, even from a confusing and static external vision. This is dramatised by the episodes of ‘Recognitions’, in which communication has occurred without the participants initially being aware of it. In our other texts, lacking the reflexiveness of the *Recognitions*, where we see the ritual simply described, here it is interpreted as a process of adaptation. This is a process by which things that look the same can be distinguished, and in the same way, after a catechumenate, the baptism itself can be performed. This effective baptism will then grant a further access, it seems, to the ‘understanding of the holy’. Thus, the *Recognitions* imagine a ritual process towards enlightenment, in the same way that the AP, AJ and AS imagine a resurrection-ritual – as a confrontation between one’s old self and the new, between former, incorrect beliefs and new, salvific ones, and between sides, that is, good and evil. The *Recognitions* ritual process serves as commentary on both its own demonstration of this process, ending in recognition and the recreation of a new family and community, and as a model in itself of the magic contest worldview, perhaps it is a meta-model. If we use the *Recognitions* to read our other texts (written before or after it), we thus can model for ourselves the intellectual process that the Clementine author was trying to model for his readers. To read of Peter’s triumph against Simon, then, was to attain, in some small measure, access to that understanding which was desired by so many, and the debate over which would be the arena in which the foundational definitions of ‘the holy’ would be fought over.

⁶¹² *Rec.* 3.67. ‘Each one of you will be baptised in everlasting waters, with the name of the Triple Blessedness invoked upon him, having first been anointed with oil, which has been made holy in prayer, so that finally, having been consecrated by means of these things, he is able to understand holy matters.’

RITUAL MODELS

In conclusion, we have determined that, from an unpromising start, the magic contests in the texts present us with a fairly complex, consistent, and useful ‘invented’ ritual in which the normally invisible ‘adaptive structures’ of ritual and belief are made manifest in the fictional, fantastical form of narratives about competitive wonder-working. As I have argued, embedded in the magic contest texts is the model of ‘two ways’,⁶¹³ or two paths, and it is through this ritual of the contest that first, the two ways are demarcated, and second, those who follow the wrong way can be identified, and third that more can be brought over to follow the true way. In these rituals, distinction, similarity, and identification⁶¹⁴ are accomplished openly, instead of mystically or ‘spiritually’, as rituals are usually understood to work. We see that the model developed is sophisticated and complex enough to have even generated a commentary alongside, or rather self-reflexively, within it. Rituals which can only be imagined are presented to us as dramas, both announcing what the true way and recapitulating it through the action of the ritual. Only God can make things live, and only in conflict can good triumph over evil.

Each of our texts strives mightily to present this worldview, and the God of its world, as the power and authority which allowed its ritual system to exist and to be effective. In this context, the rituals performed by Christians have an effect substantially more impressive than those which can oppose it. This models also strives, in particular, to show us how to be an ‘adaptive’ Christian, a Christian who exists in the ‘real world’. The Christian ‘way of life’ that is contrasted with the ‘way of death’ in the confrontation-rituals is not one of removal and separation from the world,⁶¹⁵ but of engagement in it and defeat of it, or at least of its deceivers. We see in the rituals of the contest all the powers of the earth aligned by the power of God to fight against evil. Rituals are performed which are ‘works of wonder’ but also which make positive statements of belief. The statue is made whole, like Marcellus’ soul; the dog is made a prophet, with a man’s voice that has given him vision even beyond Peter’s; a bull is killed and raised

⁶¹³ But, following Kugler (2001), 77-80, this is a decision theology, not a dualistic one.

⁶¹⁴ Rappaport’s ‘three mode of ritual meaningfulness’, see above in this chapter.

⁶¹⁵ For this in the *Rec.* see ch. 5.

again in a dramatic tableau of the central message of Christian faith: death is followed by resurrection, a model of the model prepared by Jesus, and rejected by the Jews, who are presented as paradigmatic followers of the 'wrong way'. Here, in the contests, even they are given the chance for redemption. The reported rituals have the power to be effective within a simple telling of a story or debate about doctrine precisely because they are non-metaphorical explanations and depictions of the Christian worldview and the truths which are seen to underlie it.⁶¹⁶

The tools needed in order to do all these things are presented in our texts, as ritual description and as philosophising commentary on this ritual. Rituals, we shall find, define communities, through eligibility rituals, initiation rituals, and even resurrections, but they can also be used as a tool to change and adapt communities to new or difficult circumstances. The way rituals can produce such results in connection with wonder-working is a large part of what makes the stories told by these texts compelling, and which enabled them to be used and interpreted by a large number of individuals who were not themselves members of any given group of Christians as is depicted in these texts. The power of wonder-working, as depicted in these texts, established its own conventions, extended beyond ritual effectiveness and into the ability of such depictions to be useful for 'real' Christians, interpreting their own place in the world, and the appropriate tasks for a Christian confronted with a world he cannot control.

⁶¹⁶ Geertz (1980) in Price (1984), 239: 'The dramas...mimetic of themselves, were, in the end, neither illusions nor lies, neither sleight of hand nor make-believe. They were what there was'.

Chapter Four: THE CONTEST: Examples and models in Christian history

‘τοῦτο τρίτον τῷ Ἰωσήπῳ κατηχήσεως ἔργον ἐγίνετο, ὅτι οὐκ ἴσχυσεν, ἔνθα ὄνομα Χριστοῦ καὶ σφραγὶς σταυροῦ, φαρμακείας δύνανται. οὐ μὴν δὲ ἤδη ἐπέισθη Χριστιανὸς γενέσθαι.⁶¹⁷

‘We should not underestimate the importance of the stereotyped and repetitive quality of so many of the incidents that were narrated in the lives of Christian holy men.’⁶¹⁸

‘Circulating stories...helped a person understand what had previously been incomprehensible’⁶¹⁹

So far, we have been focussed on the MCTs themselves, and how they do what they do, in presenting a model for Christian living. But the stories told by the magic contest texts did not stay only within the narrative ‘fictive’ environment.⁶²⁰ The episodes of competitive wonder-working were also of interest to Christian writers working in other genres, who used these episodes as *exempla* or refashioned them into superficially different narratives for their own purposes.⁶²¹ As we have seen, in the Christian empire there seems to have been an increase in interest in the MCTs themselves; we see the same pattern in the third and fourth century writers, writing heresiology and history, trying to make sense of Christian life, and Christian history in their own way. In this chapter, I will examine how the magic contest episodes from the MCTs work as *exempla*, and then examine how writers from a variety of genres used these magic contest *exempla* in new, and sometimes surprising ways.

Much of the scholarship about Simon Magus and his contest with Peter has focussed relentlessly on the citations of Simon in the patristic writers.⁶²² In this chapter, I hope to

⁶¹⁷ Epiphanius *Pan.* 30.8.8.

⁶¹⁸ Brown (1995), 68.

⁶¹⁹ White (2000), 31.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 50: ‘the imaginary as a source for...history’ is an important, and neglected area.

⁶²¹ Wheeldon (1989), 38-9.

⁶²² Some recent examples include Heintz (2007), 4-8; Tuzlak (2002); Ferreiro (2005), ch. 1.

look briefly beyond the MCT itself, which otherwise there is not space in this thesis to do, but in doing so to provide a new perspective on how these writers outside our tradition used these stories, that is, as a literary trope and historical exemplum. First, we will examine the problems Christian writers faced in exploring new genres such as Christian history and heresiology, and how the use of exempla, by no means a new concept in Roman history-writing, contributed to their projects.

Irenaeus, in the second century, already saw the Simon-Peter story as a moral example for Christians; for Origen in the third century the magic contest got to a central question for Christians looking to define themselves and their leaders against others, as well as questions about how Christians can know truth; for the *Didascalia* Simon and Peter's contest was a central moment for Christian self-definition; Hippolytus saw in the tale a moral warning, like Irenaeus. In the fourth century, Eusebius' new 'Christian history' tried to recast all of world history from a Christian perspective, and found the Simon-Peter contest an essential point that touched on a number of his stated themes and goals.⁶²³ He was 'looking for an underlying truth in history...gives every indication of having believed fervently in the answer he discovered'.⁶²⁴ Epiphanius' history of heresy bore witness to the 'moral story' but also saw in the magic contest a trope which he could re-fashion and put to use in a new story, which retained the basic elements and essential underpinnings of the Simon and Peter contest whilst bolstering his virulent anti-Semitism and providing a kind of verisimilitude to his discourse against Judaism. For all these writers, then, the model for Christian life which the MCTs present was secondary to the other purposes they saw for these episodes; however, in using these texts as moral exempla, they too reinforced the basic message of the magic contest tradition. Finally, we will look at one way the MCT itself seems to engage in 'exemplification', using the 'moral truth' of the magic contest narrative in a way which changed as time advanced and circumstances changed.

⁶²³ See Grant (1980a). Drake (2000), 363, points out the construction of the history had in mind the 'dual mission of Rome and Christianity' together.

⁶²⁴ Drake (2000), 360.

The problem that Christians thinking about history in these first centuries had, was that history continued, and the world continued, but the pagans, Jews and heretics were not ‘seeing the light’.⁶²⁵ Christians had to carry on in this world, which was hostile to them, even after such a time as the government was not.⁶²⁶ The history of the world in the post-apostolic period, then, was a history of frustrations recurring, as Christians tried and failed to make the world see why they, whether pagan or Jew or ‘heretic’, needed to be Christian. The magic contest texts, as we have seen, present a model of this problem and its solution; they also find themselves changing along with the passage of time. The magic contests’ content comes to be used in a variety of ways, as exempla of the necessary triumph of Christianity, or even as fables with ‘accept Christianity’ as a kind of moral.⁶²⁷ Texts which address the same or similar issues often use the material of the magic contests to help them to explain this problem, and indeed sometimes why the solution has not yet worked, in their own way.

Not all those who were constructing a ‘historical’ narrative of Christianity were writing in a genre which even resembled that of the ancient historiography of Livy, Tacitus or Dio Cassius.⁶²⁸ But in writing chronological narratives, the same patterns and tropes that we find in the writing of ancient history still appear.⁶²⁹ In this chapter I look briefly at how the magic contests become a kind of *exemplum* in the construction of Christian historical narrative. As *exempla* the episodes are then put to a variety of uses, which play

⁶²⁵ On the connections between images of ‘light’ in AP and *Rec.*, see Baldwin (2008).

⁶²⁶ And of course, during the various controversies, sometimes the government remained just as hostile.

⁶²⁷ On how fables were constructed in the Roman empire, see Morgan (2010), 57-83.

⁶²⁸ See e.g. Genette (1980) on the methodology narrative history. Levene (1993), 2-6 is useful on the difficulties of the supernatural in history-writing.

⁶²⁹ Davies (2009); but in Christian history, fate is replaced by providence (see Edwards (1992) for this trope in the *Rec.*). Roller (2009), 216-7 is a good summary on how the ‘process of exemplarity’ functions in historiography. We find in the MCTs many tropes of history-writing: morality of the ‘bad guys’; prodigies and prophets (K. Shannon very kindly sent me some remarks on prodigies in Tacitus: ‘Prodigies, unlike omens, are fundamentally negative, representing a general feeling of foreboding rather than a prediction of a specific event’); the religious interests of the emperor; the persecutions from the perspective of the persecuted. Cameron (1991), 66 on the use of allegory and signs in apocryphal texts – competing with other genres, perhaps?

upon the features of the magic contest in whatever way is most suited to the larger project. What comes from this survey is that the magic contest, either anchored in time and place to the apostolic period, or moved across ages and geographical locations, proves to be a very useful recurring trope of Christian narrative, a trope which ties in very well with the models the magic contest texts themselves are focussed on. This trope is also related to the practice of typology, and typological exegesis, which sees in Moses a prefiguration of Jesus; we see an alternative typology here, with Moses standing as a prefigure of Peter (and then Peter standing as a prefigure of others).⁶³⁰ Typology requires, of course, a Christianisation of history, and handles the present in a similar way that those using the magic contest as *exempla* do: by seeing in the present a recapitulation of the past – which is also a helpful indication of the inevitability of the future.⁶³¹

The magic contest texts do not present a standard view of the concept of history. Whilst the narratives are all presented as ‘historical narratives,’ i.e. narratives about the past, there is a tension in them between the narrative of a historical event, i.e. an event the writer believes to have happened in the past, and presenting an *exemplum* of God’s role in the physical world, and the way in which God’s intervention in the world reveals the true faith, through power, authority and ritual. In this way, aspects of the magic contest are reduced almost to a fable, an event which is ‘morally true’ but the details of which are not as important as the structure and conclusion.⁶³² The exemplary nature of the history presented in these texts is not as sophisticated as, for instance, Livy’s presentation of moralised historical episodes.⁶³³ Nor, indeed, is the author’s hand so evident as it is in

⁶³⁰ On ‘trope’ see Soskice (1985), 54-67.

⁶³¹ On typology in this period, see Kelly (2000), 69-75. Also, as Rappaport (1979), 200 notes, ‘whereas acts and substances represent substantially that which is of the here and now, the words...can connect the here and now to the past, or even to the beginning of time, and to the future, or even to time’s end’. When the magic contest episodes, and the magic contest ‘ritual’ are removed from their original context, that does not diminish the power of its moral truth to connect across time and space, to communicate their message.

⁶³² On the difficulties of religion’s ‘narratives’, in particular the negotiation between individuals and groups, see Roof (1993), 303.

⁶³³ Chaplin (2001) 62-70 is a good example, on the Roman response to Cannae, with the multiple levels of exemplarity.

Tacitus' scornful depictions of the Julio-Claudians.⁶³⁴ The magic contest texts must be read within the wider scope of the Christian narratives, both written scripture and unwritten stories, which were the material from which all Christians had to construct their understanding of the world. These narratives, stretching back to the pre-Christian past, presented an historical path that led directly to the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but after these events, the 'forward drive' of history is lost, and is partly replaced by stories which reflect or repeat narratives and 'morals' which point back to Jesus and the time of the earliest Christians. These general 'morals' are broadly applicable to writings about the apostles, but we also see this attitude in writers who were not recounting these narratives themselves, but using them as a part of a larger project. For Christians who were living some distance in time from the apostolic age, the interpretation of the past, and its *exempla*, gave both structure and meaning to their own narratives, and their own adaptations for the new reality of an outwardly Christian political system.⁶³⁵

As Cameron has noted,⁶³⁶ fourth century Christians found themselves in a brave new world, where the previous paradigm of secrecy and persecution was in abeyance. From their new position, they sought control over the past, even the recent past, with its confusing events and continual upheavals within the Christian communities, and so '[they] accommodate[d] themselves to the modes of discourse that already prevailed, and thereby almost...take their audience by stealth, in particular by laying claim to past history'.⁶³⁷ This control was manifest as Christians related to stories they told, and had told for some time. Now, the imaginary world in which the second-century Christians had set their stories, the world in which Christians would more often than achieve

⁶³⁴ See e.g. Ginsburg (1993).

⁶³⁵ There is the problem of 'forward momentum' in Christian history; a falling away inevitably occurs after the 'Jesus event', as we see in the way Epiphanius organises his project. The 'endpoint' of the παρουσία is hovering indefinitely out of view; 'Christian history' generally seeks to provide a trajectory forward to that point through the narrative of gradual and increasing triumph and increasing disaster for the deniers (Lactantius *dMP* is the clearest example here).

⁶³⁶ Cameron (1991), 121. 'Christianity did proceed to capture the centres of cultural power and thus to acquire their symbolic capital'. In the magic contests, we are given a dramatic account of how this is imagined to have happened in Rome (and Antioch).

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

victory, became in part a reality. The close relationship between secular power and authority and the divine had, so it seemed, come into being and so had history *secundum Christianos*.⁶³⁸

The magic contest trope was useful for the fourth-century and later Christians in another way; it remained a convincing narrative; the specific details presented did not make it more or less convincing.⁶³⁹ The framework fit into the emerging pattern of history as it was being reimagined by those seeking to Christianise the past and provide a narrative for a Christian present.⁶⁴⁰ The course of Christian history is one which is faced with a problem: history until the coming of Christ must be envisioned as linear. All things lead up to the moment of the incarnation.

φέρει δὲ ἤδη...ἤδη λοιπὸν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνσάρκου τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν
ἐπιφανείας οἷά τινος ὁδοιπορίας ἐφαψώμεθα, τὸν τοῦ λόγου
πατέρα θεὸν καὶ τὸν δηλούμενον αὐτὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν
σωτῆρα καὶ κύριον ἡμῶν, τὸν οὐράνιον τοῦ θεοῦ λόγον,
βοηθὸν ἡμῖν καὶ συνεργὸν τῆς κατὰ τὴν διήγησιν ἀληθείας
ἐπικαλεσάμενοι.⁶⁴¹

But after the ‘salvation event’, ie in the time in which all the authors are living, there is no longer a clear direction of history. There is, instead, a non-linear new purpose: bringing the world into the fold, converting the unbelievers and punishing those who stand against ‘the truth’. But there is no convenient end to the story, and indeed it seems to repeat itself, rather than proceeding nicely toward the endpoint that hovers out of reach, the *eschaton*.

⁶³⁸ Though the attitudes of those at the end of the fourth century were rather more muted than the attitude of Eusebius – Epiphanius’ attitude toward the godly king seems surprisingly unenthusiastic (30.8.7).

⁶³⁹ There is a modern analogy to ‘repeatable’ stories of unverifiable veracity, for example ‘urban legends’.

⁶⁴⁰ And a wholly-Christian future.

⁶⁴¹ Eus. *EH* 1.5.

The tradition of the magic contests stands apart from these concerns, having a convenient place for an ending: conversions of their internal audiences.⁶⁴² Their idealised presentation cannot be read as, and surely was not meant to be read as, a historical narrative. They exist located in time only vaguely by their choice of apostolic figures, and in the later permutations even that moment is displaced. But, as in moralising history of the sort which the Romans always favoured,⁶⁴³ the structure they have, that is, the framework itself, helps to provide one thing that Romans and others sought to find in history, and that is a purpose or ‘moral’; a reason why events had to have occurred as presented.⁶⁴⁴ That this is presented in a repetitive way is, thus, a necessary part of the trope.⁶⁴⁵ If the results (of the contest, and of the aftermath of the contest) were not consistent or predictable,⁶⁴⁶ as we have discussed above in chapter 3, the message would be ineffective.

The stories of the clash between Peter and Simon, or other such contests, do not always fit neatly in the larger, external to the tradition, narratives in which they appear. However, they can still serve as a lynchpin for a view of the course and purpose of history after the incarnation, or what might be called ‘Christian history’, as expressed by writers of narrative (including the ‘Church Orders’), theology, and heresiology. Along with the explanatory power of the magic contest in its discourse on power, authority, and ritual, the contests in other texts become something more, something that had an impact on the ‘real world’ in which fourth century and later Christians were living. The purpose of all Christians, and thus of (the continuation of) history, was, simply, to convert the world.

⁶⁴² Cf. Livy’s audience reactions in Champlin (2001), Ch. 2. See also Price (2001), 132f on Minucius Felix for a Christian example of how this kind of reaction is ‘managed’.

⁶⁴³ Wheeldon (1989) answers the question of ‘why did Romans read inaccurate history’ by suggesting that the moral truths were more appreciated. Morgan (2010), 148-9 identifies a desire to find the message of the past in much more ‘popular’ literature as well.

⁶⁴⁴ The ‘result’ of Augustus’ imperial power seems to accrete these kind of ideas, as an example.

⁶⁴⁵ As the Brown quote at the beginning of this chapter points out.

⁶⁴⁶ Romer’s Rule again. Whatever the circumstances, the contest allows the result to be the same, and thus to maintain the structures of belief and community which they are representing.

This discourse on conversion, how to achieve it, and when and why it did not occur, was still relevant and of concern to most Christian authors. The concern that the whole world had not joined the true faith because they were not convinced by ‘mere words’ is demonstrated by ‘historical’ reports of conversions which relied on miraculous occurrences and coercion.⁶⁴⁷ The fact that the magic contest framework reappears and is incorporated into larger projects is not surprising in this context. The magic element is not an ‘intrusion’ on a purely theological discourse, but stands apart from it, again, as an *exemplum*, or trope, for how the conversion of the world might be made to come to pass. Words alone were not enough.

For the writers of magic contests, and of Christian history, it is religious truth, not historical truth, and, as we have seen, a quite narrowly-defined view of what that religious truth is, which it is the role of the contest to determine. Once the Roman empire became the Christian empire, the connection of the advancement of Christianity to the advancement of the empire became its own trope,⁶⁴⁸ and helped to develop the Christian political discourse so carefully demonstrated by Cameron.⁶⁴⁹ In this new political context, however, there still remained questions about faith and truth, for which the newly-improved political situation did not necessarily provide clear answers and sometimes created more problematic questions.⁶⁵⁰

In the late fourth century, the distance of the modern Christian from the idealised apostolic period was perhaps felt especially keenly. But the lack of unity and peace seems to have stimulated interest in this earlier ‘golden age’, and in the narratives about them

⁶⁴⁷ See Bradbury (1996), and ch. 1, for a demonstration of attitudes toward Jewish conversion in this later period – it is clearly an additional trope that Jews need more than others to be convinced. See also Gaddis (2006), 249f on ‘soldiers of Christ’.

⁶⁴⁸ Within Eusebius and the Christian political theorists such as Themistius (Cameron (1991), 131-3).

⁶⁴⁹ See Cameron (1991), ch. 4; see also Cameron (2007) on the Jewish-Heretic problem in ‘Christian history’ texts.

⁶⁵⁰ Constantine and the Donatists, eg. The role of Constantine is very much not the super-interventionist Constantine of the Donatist controversy.

which had been transmitted since that time.⁶⁵¹ The magic contest itself seems to have been of particular interest to various different individuals and groups in the fourth century and later to help ask, and provide answers for, some of the questions which remained.⁶⁵² The idealised communities and individuals, and the specific power relations and authoritative structures, as well as the ritualised contest itself, could become a powerful symbol in a new period of doubt. In this process they provided a blueprint, on the one hand for a way to confront outsiders and on another as a way to incorporate them into the community. But in order for this to happen, some of the important details of the contest narratives had to be used in surprising or counter-intuitive ways, or abandoned altogether.

MAGIC CONTESTS AND THE ESSENTIAL THREAT

*o viri fratres, qui in nomine Iesu Christi convenistis: et in vobis inplanator satanas sagittas suas tendit, ut discederetis a via.*⁶⁵³

We have spoken above about the role of adaptation in the different permutations of the magic contest, and also how the use of the magic contest as a trope helped to reinforce specific views. This use of contest *exempla* must partly be an expression of the broader explosion in Christian writing and in the interpretation, now able to be done freely, of all aspects of society from a Christian perspective. But another part of it is the use of the magic contest to negotiate, or smooth out, a major shift in the relationship between the Christian community and the broader society, and in particular the definition of Christianity as opposed to false religion. The boundaries had shifted, and with them the challenges. This is seen, from an elite perspective, in the continual worries from Christian educators about the relationship between Christians and ‘classical culture’ and literature.⁶⁵⁴ It was not enough to have ‘won’, the danger of the conquered conquering the

⁶⁵¹ Cameron (1991), 74-6 on the rhetorical trope of decline, always popular in Roman discourse. Christians were no different: “the central problem for fourth century Christians was their own past” (Markus (1990), 85).

⁶⁵² About Christianity and the state, social status, the role of the imperfect Christian (on which see Markus (1990), 45-62).

⁶⁵³ AP 7. ‘Men, brothers, who have come together in the name of Jesus Christ, against you Satan, who deceives, aims his arrows, in order that you might forsake the Way.’

⁶⁵⁴ Aug. *de Doc. Chr.*; Jerome’s attempts to found a school in the holy land; See Brown (1995), 123ff.

conquerors was still a very real fear, for the educated, but just as much for the uneducated.⁶⁵⁵

The model of Christian life of the magic contest texts only makes sense in a context in which there is a constant threat to the community, where Satan's arrows are coming from every side.⁶⁵⁶ The contest for the true faith needs defined enemies against which the claims of those who are speaking the truth can be tested. The wider context of the empire and secular power is not sufficient, either pre- or post-Constantine and in any case, the empire as such is not the enemy for our authors, at any point. Mere support from the empire cannot be used as a claim of truth, any more than imperial opposition could be used as a claim of falsehood in the past, and indeed for the most part the uneasy relationship between the 'truth' and the secular authorities remains ambiguous across the board.⁶⁵⁷ The magic contest texts present a view that there are always threats which need either to be discovered, or are already known and need to be finally stamped out. These enemies, whether heretics or Jews, assume even greater importance when the texts are examined from a fourth-century perspective. At the moment of Christian triumph, at least with regard to secular power, the threat of disunity and confusion was felt most keenly by many writers, coming from many different perspectives.⁶⁵⁸ There was a sense, broadly felt across all communities, as Stroumsa has outlined, that matters hung very much in the balance.⁶⁵⁹ It was not only a sense of complacency that was being fought against, but also a genuine concern that without a threat, or indeed multiple threats, the 'unity' aspect of the community, as the apostolic age was perceived to represent, could not be maintained.⁶⁶⁰ However, it could be looked to, and was, again and again.

⁶⁵⁵ See Stroumsa (2009) 52ff.

⁶⁵⁶ Pace Brown (1983), 3, which suggests 'states of affairs' cannot exemplify.

⁶⁵⁷ See Young (2010) on the wide-ranging and problematic discourse that the fourth-century councils wrought.

⁶⁵⁸ There was a late fourth century flowering of debate texts, on which see Kahlos (2007) and Lim (1995).

⁶⁵⁹ Stroumsa (2009), 43 on 'textual cultures' brought into being from this disquiet.

⁶⁶⁰ Bynum (1995) ch. 2 on the period 200-400 as essential for forming these discourses.

LINEAGE: TIME AND DISTANCE

This approach, looking at the use of the contest as a kind of exemplary history, also needs to situate the texts within the tradition of genealogical history. This kind of history has its origins in the Jewish scriptures rather than in Roman culture, though there is nothing ‘anti-Roman’ about it. One of the primary effects of the use of the magic contest narrative outside the tradition itself is that the individuals involved actually become less important as characters and more important for what they represented.⁶⁶¹ The magic contest tradition itself, as I have argued, is in part derived from a genealogical-typological exercise wherein Peter takes on the role of Moses. In dealing with the ‘recent’ history of post-incarnation times, rather than typology a direct relationship by transmission of ideas and community is presented.

With many more generations of time between the important events in which Peter participated or which he witnessed, there was less of a need for verisimilitude, such as it might be, and a greater need for connections to be drawn from the past to contemporary events. On the opposition side, the figure of Simon Magus is sometimes seen as merely a placeholder for a series of different heretics by the time of the major writings of the fourth-century.⁶⁶² But Simon’s particular ‘biographical details’ place him ideally in the role of arch-heretic, and in particular as the one who establishes the pattern under which heresiological discourse will be carried out.⁶⁶³ This is not to say, at all, that the writers of the fourth century any less believed him to be a ‘real’ person than the original writers and tellers of the apocryphal acts did. Indeed, his biography is substantially expanded by later writers. The largest area of expansion, however, is in his connection with those heretical

⁶⁶¹ This could be considered a process of idealisation. See Cooper (1996) for how this worked for a different social group; Davies (1980) thinks that the idealisation comes from a self-presentation, but it is just as likely to have come from the imagination of the writer.

⁶⁶² For the multiplicity of Simons, see Tuzlak (2002), 423ff on the patristic evidence; Meeks (1977) provides a background for how Simon has been read over the past 150 years.

⁶⁶³ This is so much the case that his biography gets exchanged for that of the other ‘gnostic arch-heretic’ Mani, as demonstrated by Spät (2004).

ideas which, in lineage theory as it had developed, proceeded all other heretical ideas, and in essence were needed by them. Thus, Simon's role and reputation grew, both in his threat to Peter/the Church and in his 'life' as a character.⁶⁶⁴

By the late fourth century, Epiphanius could see Simon Magus as the literal father of all heretical ideas, and a number of detailed attempts are made to trace this lineage and produce some kind of explanation for it. Indeed, in the writings of this time, there seem to be more words spent on the descent of heretics than on anything we might label 'apostolic succession'. Christianity, it seems, was still not considered to be 'genetic', even in fourth century writers, but heresy was more easily passed down. The influence of the contest tradition is straightforward in this presentation of history, but it also affects the heresiological project in other, more subtle ways. There is, first of all, an assumption that heretics, like Christians, have certain ways of transmitting their teachings, and form communities in a similar manner. One problem for heresiology is that it looks at the anthropology of 'heretical communities'⁶⁶⁵ – communities which are often credited by scholars with helping the project of self-definition by being excluded from the Christian community.⁶⁶⁶ These heresiological attempts at classification are not usually made by the magic contest writers, who obscure the details of the opponent's arguments as much as possible.⁶⁶⁷

Adversus Judaeos

The magic contest *exemplum* was able to retain its place alongside another tradition of Christian writing, which was in fact even more ancient: the *adversus Judaeos* tradition.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁴ Adamik (1998), analyses the split in Simon's image; of particular interest is how anti-Simon texts deliberately obscure his image and thus undercut some of their potential message (43-5).

⁶⁶⁵ In the process, creating 'orthodox' communities (as demonstrated by Boyarin (2004)).

⁶⁶⁶ Lieu (2004), 293ff on the construction of Christians as very much alone; the impact of this embattled self-image is evident all through MCTs.

⁶⁶⁷ Or elaborate them wildly beyond comprehension; these two different approaches taken by the AP and the *Rec.* show that the doctrine was not a part of the exemplarity of the contest.

⁶⁶⁸ Catalogued exhaustively by Williams (1935). See Horbury (1998), 21-5 for a good summary of *adv. Jud.* scholarship.

The first anti-Jewish polemic dates from the same time, roughly, as the first AP writings. This polemic, initially, also took a ‘debate’ as its frame, in the *Dialogue* of Justin Martyr. It made sense to use this polemic amongst the first generations of Christians, but by the third century would have seemed, if not irrelevant, then certainly less useful. Whilst, like the AAA, it is generally thought that the polemical writings were aimed at least in part at an internal rather than external audience,⁶⁶⁹ they contain at least some material which would be understood by outsiders. They follow a similar pattern as the magic contest in the assertion that the older, first, earlier Judaism had been superceded by the newer, second covenant of Christ; they, too, believed that it was a sensible guide to follow that ‘the first of the pairs is evil, the second, good’; even if it is not framed in exactly those terms:

*Noster uero populus, id est posterior, relictis idolis, quibus ante deseruiebat, ad eundem deum conuersus est, a quo Israel, ut supra memorauius, abscesserat.*⁶⁷⁰

These *adversus Judaeos* texts, then, formed some ‘debate’ material that is very similar to what we find in our later texts.⁶⁷¹ The two halves, the debate and the contest, were then sometimes stitched together. The idea of a magic contest preceded by a debate, which we have addressed somewhat earlier, is not perhaps all that surprising. But over time, we see that the opponents who are being debated are given more space, not just as characters, but especially as debaters; the contest ceases to be a major part of the narrative, becoming an exemplum to supply a *coda*, if it appears. The greater space for debate is particularly for debate with Jews.⁶⁷² The problem with the Jews, as has been discussed, was in some ways similar to the problem with heretics: they had misinterpreted the ‘truth’. In essence, the magic contest authors provided a framework on which a great deal of pre-existing argument could be hung. However, the case of the Jews is more complicated than that of heretics when it comes to their interaction with this sort of framework. For one thing, the

⁶⁶⁹ Edwards et al (1999), 8.

⁶⁷⁰ Tert. *Adv. Jud.* 1.

⁶⁷¹ Canella (2005), as mentioned above, has found much in Justin Martyr’s apologies that has made its way relatively unscathed to the fifth century.

⁶⁷² Maccoby (1982) translates several real-life such debates from the medieval period. I agree with Horbury (1998), 180-99 that it is most useful to read these texts as genuinely deriving from preaching to Jews.

Jewish tradition offers its own traditions involving competitive or challenging magic,⁶⁷³ and even ultimately confronts the Christian magic contest trope head on, by an opposing tradition such as we see in the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition.⁶⁷⁴ The ‘history’ of Jewish-Christian relations is, in a sense, told through the exemplary nature of the magic contest tradition that we have been exploring.⁶⁷⁵

This tangled tale is one that progresses from mere error in interpretation to an ideology of demonic opposition; similar to the progression of the heretic narrative, the Jewish narrative becomes much more prominent in the post-Constantinian period. The Jews, unlike heretics, were not an internal enemy, and indeed are almost paradigmatically the Other. But, as Lieu and others have shown, the Jews (again, unlike heretics⁶⁷⁶) are essential to Christian self-definition. The change of tone as regards Jews is often pegged to a Christian belief that the continued existence of Judaism was a threat, and indicated that the only reason for Jews to remain Jews was a demonic obstinacy, rather than any other reason.⁶⁷⁷ There is some support for this view to be found in the magic contest tradition. But I think we shall see it is more complicated than that. It is within the magic contest tradition that we can see the earliest threads of what might be called a ‘policy’

⁶⁷³ Lightstone (2006), 18ff. Honi the Circle-Maker is a Talmudic example. The boundaries of his magic abilities are very clearly defined, but an argument could be made that this kind of text is exemplary as well. Bokser (1985) presents a more difficult case, that of Hanina ben Dosa. Ben Dosa was famous enough to appear on incantation bowls (Bohak (2008), 340).

⁶⁷⁴ Gager (1975). Bohak (2008), 398-401 and elsewhere on the rabbis vs the *minim* is the closest comparison; rabbinical literature, as Bohak amply demonstrates, takes a multi-pronged approach to the controversy with these *minim*, Christians or ‘heretics’.

⁶⁷⁵ See Dan (2007). It seems plausible to me that the oral stories that formed the basis of parts of the *TY* are not only similar, but in fact the same stories which are in the background of the *AP*, with additional material from the Judas Gospels.

⁶⁷⁶ But, as Cameron (2007), 346 says: ‘both groups are made to partake of the same range of characteristics’.

⁶⁷⁷ This, at least, seems to be the view of John Chrysostom, who worried very much about the existence of the Jews and its implications for Christian identity (See Sandwell (2007), 125-53).

toward the Jews, and we also see the policy in action in ‘real life’, though heavily influenced by this narrative of *exempla*.⁶⁷⁸

The magic contest tradition remained, despite everything else that had changed, an excellent tactic when dealing with Jews. The ‘debate’ was possible because of the shared source material of the Scriptures and shared views on the issue of lineage-theory. The magic contest aspect was possible because, to Christians and to others, as we have seen, the Jews were so closely associated with magic practices and were considered to have more ‘tricks up their sleeve’.⁶⁷⁹ That Jewish and anti-Jewish groups would continue to draw new life from the magic contest tradition during and after our period is thus not surprising. We must ask how the tradition itself interpreted the role of the Jews in the wider model being presented,⁶⁸⁰ and the special concern about the assimilation/conversion of Jews that is evident, in parallel with the other developing concerns of the fourth century. Those writers who use or refer to the magic contest narratives often have a distinct point to make about the Jews and the meaning of their continuing existence.

Those who wrote ‘histories of heresy’, foremost among them Epiphanius, were engaged in a different project than those who were writing detailed theological refutations of heresy (e.g. Irenaeus or Hippolytus) or those who incorporate the ‘story’ of heresy into their larger projects (Origen, the writers of the Church Order documents).⁶⁸¹ The heresy-historian’s project is more similar to the contest traditions, and thus more interesting for our purposes. Both the compilers of the magic contest, i.e. those who did the translating, editing and redacting of texts in the magic contest tradition, and the historians of heresy had some of the same motivations. They were concerned, in their different ways, with the

⁶⁷⁸ For an example of this policy, see Bradbury (1996), 69-72. The debate-challenge *exemplum* took a different turn in real life, causing a riot, but had the same end, according to Severus: the conversion of the 540-strong Jewish community of Menorca.

⁶⁷⁹ Gager (1972); Edwards (1990); Dickie (2001), 287-93.

⁶⁸⁰ The status of Judaism as a *religio licita* is implicitly challenged in the fourth and fifth century texts; Eusebius traces their fate explicitly as an *exemplum*. The earlier texts address the Jews either indifferently or in the unusual way of the *Rec.* (see Reed (2007)).

⁶⁸¹ Clark (1992), 99-101 on Epiphanius’ methodology.

need for all Christians, apparently including laypeople, to be engaged in the ‘fight’ against heresy. Even in this later period, or perhaps especially, the ‘fighting spirit’ which is exemplified in the magic contest, is promoted as hugely important. The worldview of Christianity as constant battle, then, has not faded and is reinforced by actual and exemplary history, and the two kinds of projects, in this historical period, seem to converge. Despite this similarity of purpose, however, it is necessary to point out that the heresiologists saw their task as a systematic one, and use the unsystematic ‘history’ of the magic contest narratives towards the goal, as they saw it, of eliminating heresy by making its history known, and its advocates easy to identify.

Internal v external exempla

The question how the exemplarity of the magic contest worked is related to how the exempla were used. The narratives themselves, without a particularly moralising tone or explicit *coda*, nevertheless have a clear episodic structure wherein each individual act of wonder-working, surrounding the major contest episode, has its own ending showing the triumph of the apostolic figure over the opponent.⁶⁸² The *coda* is usually, as we shall see below, conversion of one or more witnesses, confirming the triumph and, by inference, the truth of the claims of the ‘winner’. Thus, from within the narrative, each episode is meant to be an example to the witnesses – an example of how to either prove faith, or to be convinced. As we have seen, there is close attention paid to the internal witnesses of these episodes, and a wide variety of examples of witnesses are provided, showing a wide variety of initial responses – in contrast to the uniformity of their result. These internal exempla are constructed with different amounts of attention to detail and with different focuses, depending on the different texts and different internal audiences, but they present a consistent approach and a repeated ‘moral’, as well as recapitulating the ritual process of wonder-working and thus the more obscure underpinnings of the power of faith and trust in the right system. The witnesses then become ‘insiders’ instead of ‘outsiders’, through their participation.

⁶⁸² Boylki (1995), 16 postulates that the triumph in the AJ is meant to map the progress of the apostle’s mission.

The narratives taken as a whole serve the larger ‘exemplary’ purpose of presenting a ‘case’, that is, providing exempla which can be understood externally to the MCTs. The system advocated by the winners is consistent and successful, in the face of a large number of different situations, and thus should be taken, as a whole, as a story of both the inevitability and the correctness of conversion to (whichever form of) Christianity, for individuals who are not, for whatever reason, themselves aligned with the devil and his descendents. There is no doubt some value in this larger exemplary narrative, even for an audience which is already fully converted – the encouragement to continue the project, the resoluteness of spirit which produces results, and the reaffirmation of the worldview which is shown again and again to be the only one which can be the truth.⁶⁸³ The example set by the texts is not really an example for outsiders, but a reinforcing model for insiders (*about* outsiders).⁶⁸⁴

Results-orientated contests

Now, we will examine how these external exempla are placed, and function, in the other texts in which they are found. In the fourth century the magic contest texts, now distant in time from the dramatic date of the apocryphal story, can be situated in the contexts of the ‘results’ which the texts present as the inevitable consequence of the exempla which they depict; writers will begin to see the magic contests as exempla within the broad sweep of Christian experience, both positive and negative. The results in these cases, of course, are the conversion of all, indeed even the whole world, to the ‘true faith’. Stated simply, this result does not seem too terribly different from the results hoped for or demanded by other kinds of Christian literature, but the way it is accomplished, in the texts, is more interesting material than is sometimes assumed. This is what is meant by ‘results-orientation’, namely the use of an episode or event primarily for its *result*, rather than any other detail. Moralising narratives are nothing new to the time or the religious context, but the way in which these results are depicted demonstrate the unique character of the magic contest as a part of a Christian mindset, which contained a set of stories or tropes,

⁶⁸³ Davies (2009), 220 on the reinforcing value of *exempla*.

⁶⁸⁴ This is rather different from the entirely internal-looking *exempla* in Roman historians; the bi-directionality of these exempla is one of the most difficult aspects of the tradition, but is another example of its own adaptiveness.

as well as doctrines and beliefs, and help us to illuminate features of this mindset which remain remarkably consistent across time, place, and affiliation; the chronological development that we see in Epiphanius' heresy history is worth noting, as he clearly adapts the MCT more dramatically than anyone else for the sake of his own virulent anti-Semitism and fanatical pursuit of his anti-heresy hunting.

THE CONTEST IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Irenaeus

Irenaeus, writing sometime in the second century, probably before the first version of the AP was ever set on parchment, made a first attempt to classify and demolish heresy. Unsurprisingly, he draws on the Simon and Peter confrontation, though the 'legend' at this time was not heavily developed. There are telling aspects of Irenaeus' discussion which demonstrate that the main thrust of the magic contest tradition, and its place in the wider array of Christian narratives, was already established by this time. Irenaeus, though he spends more time on the biblical account of Simon, summarises the contest briefly:

*et cum adhuc magis non credidisset Deo, et cupidus intendit contendere adversus apostolos, uti et ipse gloriosus videretur esse et universam magicam adhuc amplius scrutans, ita ut in stuporem cogeret multos hominem.*⁶⁸⁵

Simon makes this turn, according to Irenaeus, when he discovers that he cannot buy the gift of the Holy Spirit; but he also says that before he even tried to do so, his faith was 'feigned'. For Irenaeus, Simon serves as an example of a person who claims faith but does not have it, and this leads him to set himself up as a god, in direct competition to Jesus.⁶⁸⁶ Here, he is cast, for the first time, as the arch-heretic, who founded a sect which engages in immoral practices. Simon is presented as assuming that he and the apostles are on a level playing-field, because he believes them to be magicians as well. This illustrates another interesting recurring theme: the pagan belief in the equivalence of Jewish and Christian wonder-working claims with those of magicians and wandering wonder-workers such as Apollonius, here imputed to one of the magicians himself.

⁶⁸⁵ Ir. 1.23.

⁶⁸⁶ This clearly parallels Justin Martyr's account (1 *Apol.* 26) – one could be the source of the other, possibly.

The asymmetry between Simon and the apostles is presented in two ways. First, it is shown that he is not working from the same playbook as the apostles. Secondly, he presents himself as a counterpart to Jesus,⁶⁸⁷ whereas the apostles are only claiming to represent the power of Jesus/God, not to embody it themselves. Simon's desire to be a 'wonderful being' seems necessarily to involve control over the 'multitudes', and indeed a recurring theme throughout the references to the contest stories is Simon's need and ability to have both a large crowd of followers and some particularly close disciple to whom he could transmit his 'teachings'.⁶⁸⁸ The contest is never depicted as being passed along to this disciple however. The defeat of Simon, then, outside of the magic contest narratives themselves, is shown to be at the same time comprehensive and not sufficiently long-lasting. Those who wrote about how heresy developed produce Simon as an example of 'what heretics are like' and how they persist, but unlike the narratives, these writers have to confront their continued presence in the world.

Origen and the Didascalia

Origen's *Contra Celsum* and the *Didascalia* are both from the transitional third century. Whilst they both designate Simon as the father of heresy, they are also more influenced by the later development of the tradition, and show awareness of the contest and its role in discernment.⁶⁸⁹ In CC II.48-51, Origen speaks at some length about the confusion that comes about when individuals (like Simon, though he is not mentioned in this passage) work wonders, sometimes even in the name of Jesus, even without faith in him. Origen finds a moral evaluation that should be suitable for determining the 'lineage' of the wonder-worker.

Καὶ ὡςπερ λύκος κυνὶ οὐχ ὁμογενῆς, καὶ δοκῇ ἔχειν τι
παραπλήσιον ἐν τῷ τοῦ σώματος σχήματι καὶ τῇ φωνῇ, οὐδὲ

⁶⁸⁷ See Chapter 1.

⁶⁸⁸ Irenaeus brings in a story about Simon's consort Helena, who forms her own sort of trope of the 'heretical woman' (Ferreiro (2005), 39f.). This seems to bear no relationship to the AP's Eubula story.

⁶⁸⁹ For Origen's view of bodily resurrection, such an important element of these stories, see Chadwick (1948). Origen does not mention in CC Peter and Simon having such a contest, however, despite his evident familiarity with such stories of wonder-working.

φάσσα τῇ περιστερῶ. οὕτως οὐδὲν ὅμοιον ἔχει τὸ δυνάμει θεοῦ ἐπιτελούμενον τῷ γινομένῳ ἀπὸ γοητείας...
 Καὶ τοῦτό γε δοκεῖ μοι ὥσπερ ἐπὶ πάντων δεῖν παρατιθέναι, ὅτι ὅπου τι χεῖρον προσποιούμενον εἶναι ὁμογενὲς τῷ κρείττονι, ἐκεῖ πάντως ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου ἐστὶ τι κρείττον...Εἰ δ' ἅπαξ παραδεξόμεθα ἀκόλουθον εἶναι τῷ ὑποστατὴν εἶναι μαγείαν καὶ γοητείαν... τὸ καὶ <τὰ> ἀπὸ θείας δυνάμεως δεῖν εὐρίσκεσθαι ἐν ἀνθρώποις• διὰ τί οὐχὶ καὶ βεβασανισμένως τοὺς ἐπαγγελλομένους τὰς δυνάμεις ἐξετάσομεν...καὶ τῶν ἐπακολουθούντων ταῖς δυνάμεσιν ἥτοι εἰς βλάβην τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἢ εἰς ἡθῶν ἐπανόρθωσιν⁶⁹⁰

Here, then, we see Origen's results-orientated analysis, which is very much in line with the rhetoric of the magic contest texts themselves. Origen also differs from the heresiological tradition in his analysis of the historical position of these earliest heretics. Twice, Origen's point about the problem of wonder-workers appeals to the historical failure of Simonianism – he has failed the 'species' test posed by Origen, and we can tell that he has failed because his particular following has vanished.⁶⁹¹ Origen's point is not so much about heresy here, as it is about restating of the overarching 'twin' theory of the 'two ways', through which a magic contest must help us negotiate our own path.

The *Didascalia*, also from the third century, is a very different document to any of the other writings we examine here. It is a pseudepigraphical account of the actions of the apostles, and thus shares some of the same narrative territory as the AAA.⁶⁹² But it is more concerned with practical matters than narrative. The *Didascalia* must share some of the same source material as the AP, or perhaps is derived from it, though the details are, as ever, not an exact match. But, as in Irenaeus and Epiphanius, the story of Simon in this text is another version of the 'founding' of heresy, and its inevitable association with a bad life and a bad death. Simon and his followers are explicitly 'false apostles' and again are set up in contention with the real ones.⁶⁹³ The story ends:

⁶⁹⁰ CC II.51.

⁶⁹¹ CC I.57 and 6.11.

⁶⁹² For the *Didascalia*'s 'power of God', see ch.1.

⁶⁹³ *Didas.* 6.8 *diabolus et concitavit plebem ut mitterent post nos pseduoapostolos ad intaminationem verbi*. 'Pseudoapostolus' also appears in AS in reference to Jews.

*et sic ruens femur pedis sui fregit. multi quidem tunc abscesserunt ab eo. alii autem, qui digni illo fuerunt, manserunt cum ipso*⁶⁹⁴

The moral drawn from this was that only those who could continue to follow Simon after the spectacular failure of his attempted wonder-working were thus, apparently, ‘worthy’ of him, and the rest, who turned back, were presumably re-absorbed into the community for which the *Didascalia* lays out the rules. This narrative episode stands out in the text, which is mostly concerned with practical matters, and thus seems even more an example, almost a ‘Just-So’ story, which offers another view of the explanation for the continuation of opposition.⁶⁹⁵

Hippolytus

Hippolytus’ association with Rome indicates that his emphasis on the importance of Simon, and of the contention between him and the apostles, continued to be of interest in Rome itself, as well as in the east, in the third century.⁶⁹⁶ Hippolytus, like Epiphanius after him, begins his *Refutation of All Heresies* far in advance of the time of Christ, finding in Greek philosophy the first stages of thought which need to be addressed. But nevertheless the real ‘refutations’ begin with Simon. Hippolytus’ version contains yet more new details on the framework, these new details finding yet another way to demonstrate both the founding of heresy and the ultimate fate of heretics as entirely contained within Simon’s story:

ἕως καὶ τῇ Ῥώμῃ ἐπιδημήσας ἀντέπεσε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις• πρὸς
ὃν πολλὰ Πέτρος ἀντικατέστη, μαγείαις πλανῶντα πολλούς.
Οὗτος ἐπὶ τέλει ἐλθὼν ἐν τ(ῇ) Γί(τ)τῃ, ὑπὸ πλάτανον
καθεζόμενος ἐδίδασκε. καὶ δὴ λοιπὸν ἐγγὺς τοῦ ἐλέγχεσθαι
γινόμενος διὰ τὸ ἐγχρονίζειν, ἔφη ὅτι εἰ χωσθείη ζῶν
ἀναστήσεται τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ. καὶ δὴ τάφρον κελεύσας ὀρυγῆναι

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid. ‘and he fell and broke the thigh-bone. Then, many went away from him, but others who were worthy of him, remained with him’.

⁶⁹⁵ *Didas* 6.25 offers a rare practical narrative of the approach towards those who have gone astray, an approach which is altogether in line with what we see in its magic-contest sources for this episode.

⁶⁹⁶ For Hippolytus’ troubled history, see Brent (1995), 458-500. On connecting Simon to Valentinus – does this have slightly more connection to reality than our texts from outside of Rome? See Lampe (2002), 292-318.

ὑπὸ τῶν μαθητῶν ἐκέλευσε χωσθῆναι• οἰμὲν οὖν τὸ προσταχθὲν
ἐποίησαν, ὁ δὲ ἀπέμεινεν ἕως νῦν• οὐ γὰρ ἦν ὁ Χριστός.⁶⁹⁷

Peter's repeated opposition is mentioned, but it is Simon's competition with Jesus which leads to his demise, rather than any action of Peter's (direct or indirect). This refinement of the *exemplum* has the added bonus of Simon appearing not to reject Christ and his system, but to directly claim to be him, and to imitate him, but to fail in this imitation in the same way that Simon always fails in imitation: he is unable to work a true resurrection. The trope for Hippolytus, as for many of these texts, is more about Simon than about Peter – the contest is the means by which Simon is forced to expose himself, but the *exemplum*, the moralising example, is usually about Simon in isolation, and in particular, as we have seen, about Simon's failure as a wonder-worker leading to his demise. The claim to the power of God (or to claim to be God) is the most dangerous thing, and the fact that heresy flows from that origin is all, the texts seem to tell us, that we should need to know.

Eusebius

Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, written in the first part of the fourth century and issued in several editions, is the first chronological history from a Christian perspective, and its approach fits well within the framework of exemplary history, whilst also attempting to accomplish something new in the combination of Christianity and historiography.⁶⁹⁸ Eusebius' use of documents is the innovation for which he is most often credited, but in his use of the magic contest tradition, he cites none.⁶⁹⁹ Eusebius grants two paragraphs to the Simon-Peter story. He gives his version of how Simon draws Peter into the contest:

ἐπιβὰς δὲ τῆς Ῥωμαίων πόλεως, συναιρομένης αὐτῷ τὰ μεγάλα τῆς
ἐφεδρευούσης ἐνταῦθα δυνάμεως, ἐν ὀλίγῳ τοσοῦτον τὰ τῆς
ἐπιχειρήσεως ἥγνυστο... παρὰ πόδας γοῦν ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς Κλαυδίου
βασιλείας ἢ πανάγαθος καὶ φιλανθρωποτάτη τῶν ὅλων πρόνοια τὸν

⁶⁹⁷ Ref. VI.20.

⁶⁹⁸ Eus. *EH* 1.1 tells of his thematic approach, on which see Grant (1980), ch. 1. For Eusebius' goals and motives, more obvious than some, see Barnes 'Constantine and Eusebius'.

⁶⁹⁹ This 'documentary inclusion' as an aspect of Christian history writing is reflected in the AS itself, with Helena's 'letter'.

καρτερόν καὶ μέγαν τῶν ἀποστόλων, τὸν ἀρετῆς ἕνεκα τῶν λοιπῶν ἀπάντων προήγορον, Πέτρον, ἐπὶ τὴν Ῥώμην ὡς ἐπὶ τηλικούτον λυμεῶν βίου χειραγωγεῖ• ὃς οἶά τις γενναῖος θεοῦ στρατηγὸς τοῖς θείοις ὅπλοις φραξάμενος, τὴν πολυτίμητον ἐμπορίαν τοῦ νοητοῦ φωτὸς ἐξ ἀνατολῶν τοῖς κατὰ δύσιν ἐκόμιζεν, φῶς αὐτὸ καὶ λόγον ψυχῶν σωτήριον, τὸ κήρυγμα τῆς τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείας, εὐαγγελιζόμενος.⁷⁰⁰

The importance of Simon, in his role in bringing Peter to the West, is if anything overemphasised here, in what is an interesting positioning of the Roman setting. Peter's position is certainly made much more of in this telling, and the metaphors of battle are made explicit here as they generally are not, outside of the AP itself. The contest *exemplum* once again happily co-exists with the 'father of heresy' trope, which is mentioned in the previous paragraph:

πάσης μὲν οὖν ἀρχηγὸν αἰρέσεως πρῶτον γενέσθαι τὸν Σίμωνα παρειλήφαμεν• ἐξ οὗ καὶ εἰς δεῦρο οἱ τὴν κατ' αὐτὸν μετιόντες αἵρεσιν τὴν σώφρονα καὶ διὰ καθαρότητα βίου παρὰ τοῖς πᾶσιν βεβοημένην Χριστιανῶν φιλοσοφίαν ὑποκρινόμενοι.⁷⁰¹

This depiction of Simon's heresy is much more in line with the image presented in the AP and other texts, in particular the emphasis on feigning and its combination with Simon himself being worshipped. Eusebius defers on the issue of doctrine; that is immaterial in terms of wickedness. It is more that Simon set himself up against the apostles, than any of the specific things he is credited with doing or saying, which is his grave crime. Eusebius, being our first 'historian', quotes his sources as Irenaeus and Justin, but does show other influences which he does not cite, drawing his storyline from the AP tradition which has been absorbed both by his named sources and in the narrative which underlies both these texts and the 'popular' narrative. As we have seen, the nature of the contest between Peter and Simon is such that it enables all of these authors, engaging in such a wide variety of tasks, to find support for their work by drawing from the tradition.

⁷⁰⁰ EH 2.14. The *agon*-istic introduction to this passage is: 'τοιούτων κακῶν πατέρα καὶ δημιουργὸν τὸν Σίμωνα κατ' ἐκείνο καιροῦ ὥσπερ εἰ μέγαν καὶ μεγάλων ἀντίπαλον τῶν θεσπεσίων τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν ἀποστόλων ἢ μισόκαλος καὶ τῆς ἀνθρώπων ἐπίβουλος σωτηρίας πονηρὰ δύναμις προστήσατο.'

⁷⁰¹ EH 2.13.

Eusebius' view also closely adheres to some of the language and concerns of the narrative texts. Simon is an opponent (and his 'father' is the an evil power) and Peter a commander in a battle, strongest of all the apostles, who is indwelt by the divine word, and they each have as seconds their 'powers'. Here it is a contest between 'evil' and 'truth', and the battle is presented as an intellectual one. But it seems in Eusebius's assessment of Simon as heretic he is closer to the magic contest character who sets himself up as a god, a founder of a competing cult, rather than the Gnostic philosopher, but we do see that both of these character profiles can exist without disharmony. Peter, too, is both a warrior, then, and a merchant, coming West. At the dawn of the Christian empire, then, we see that all the uses and meanings of this magic contest are still very much in play, and continue to be useful now that Christianity has favour. In fact, it is hard to see any difference in tone at all, between Eusebius and the others, and in his use of the contest as such an important episode in Christian history.

Epiphanius

Epiphanius' project in his *Panarion* is unusual, even in the heated climate of heresy-hunting of the late fourth century. Writing in the mid or later fourth century, his focus is on the shift from (imagined) unity to the very real disunity throughout the church at this time. His *Panarion* was an attempt to, by writing the history of heresy, correct this fault.⁷⁰² Whereas I have stressed elsewhere that the difficult issues that attended the problem of heresy are not really a concern in the magic contests, that does not preclude their use by those who are so concerned. As we shall see, it is in another aspect of the *Panarion* that the magic contest has its greatest impact, namely in its virulently anti-Jewish episodes. But the MCT influence is clear in several places in Epiphanius' compendium of heresies. In it we see a picture of the 'problem' of Christian history, full of *exempla*, digressions and discourses on the detailed groups and lineages of heresy.

⁷⁰² Young (2010), 197, points out that Epiphanius' personal fascination with lists and compendia is evident in the *Pan*. This may account for the unusual nature of the text; Epiphanius was a hoarder of information. Williams (2009), xxiii, postulates a compulsion to include everything in his work, even metaphors. Perhaps Epiphanius should have been a graduate student instead of a heresiologist.

The moment of unity and perfection, to which all αἱρέσεις were leading, is but a brief candle. Almost immediately, and continually, Epiphanius determines, heresies destroyed that unity. Simon Magus is as ever tagged as the first and greatest heretic. Epiphanius' work is highly moralistic, and the personal details of heretics are often given more time than their heretical doctrines, and this is no exception.⁷⁰³ But Epiphanius' view of Simon's character aside, his approach to the role of the Jews in history is unusual and shows some influence from the magic contest tradition, or at least the same underlying principles. Epiphanius is in a sense an excellent example of an individual whose own interpretation of Christianity is highly informed by the same priorities and values we see exemplified in the magic contest texts, and his views on conversion of the Jews are very instructive. Epiphanius shares with the magic contest writers a results-orientation, and is the clearest example of a writer whose desire for an almost mythical unity and a battle against heresy are expressed in strongly moral terms, along with his use of exemplary tropes in part to make his points.

The *Panarion* as a whole takes a rather larger view of this project of writing Christian history and considers everything to be a αἱρέσις, including Judaism up to the time of Jesus (which he divides into the traditional categories of Pharisee, Saduccee, Essene and others). There is some sense that the Jews had possessed some portion of the truth initially, but that in the post-Moses era this was decayed by αἱρέσις, i.e. factionalism, and ultimately, of course, by the rejection of Jesus.⁷⁰⁴ In that historical moment, then, the Jews are excised from the 'family tree' of Christianity, and inserted into the genealogy of error, which is Epiphanius' project. In this different view, the magic contest is not a matter of further refinement, but a front in the larger battle against error. The fate of all αἱρέσεις for Epiphanius is to diverge from the whole truth, the 'one faith'. In the late fourth century, the unification of belief was of course a primary concern of many Christian writers; Epiphanius goes perhaps further than any in his detailed examination of all the groups who fell away from this unity, even before it existed in time.

⁷⁰³ *Pan.* 21.1.1.

⁷⁰⁴ Also one of Eusebius' stated themes in *EH* 1.1.

Simon, as in all the earlier writers, is the first sect to be founded after the emergence of the *one faith*. As usual, Epiphanius identifies him with basic Gnostic beliefs, though his character as a sorcerer is as usual emphasised. He is accused of ‘mimicking the apostles’; his willingness to display his demonic connections is also paramount. His death in the ‘middle of Rome’ is of course a reference to the magic contest tradition, though Epiphanius here does not indulge in detailed narrative, preferring to focus on his assertions against Simon’s morality.⁷⁰⁵

Epiphanius’ text also includes a unique example of exemplary use of the ideas and concepts we have been exploring. This episode is explicitly an example of how wonder-working, on a model very similar indeed to the contest model though on a small scale, can effect conversion. A personal narrative, in the context of the Jewish-Christian Ebionite⁷⁰⁶ αἰρέσις, of one Joseph of Tiberias, presents a path for Jewish conversion through the use of miraculous power, although in this case the purveyor of the power of God is *himself* a part of the internal audience for the wonder-working ritual. For Epiphanius, the use of wonder-working, both confrontational and exemplary, can lead to sincere conversion on an individual level as well as in confrontation with heretical groups; the rituals are patterned after the Simon-Peter confrontation,⁷⁰⁷ but the conversion is made much more explicit by the ‘negotiations’ between Jesus and Joseph in his dream.

At the beginning of the digression, Joseph overhears the Jewish patriarch being baptised secretly on his deathbed, and is placed in charge of the patriarch’s son.⁷⁰⁸ The attempt to procure a woman for the lovesick son of the now-dead Jewish patriarch leads to the

⁷⁰⁵ Epiph. 21.1.1ff.

⁷⁰⁶ Boyarin (2004) postulates that it is no mistake or random occurrence that this ‘digression’ has ended up here, but rather than it is a deliberate creation of the idea of orthodoxy – on the one side, orthodox Christianity, and on the other orthodox Judaism, both acceptable (though not both preferred); in the middle are Judaisers like the Ebionites. It is an intriguing explanation for this otherwise inexplicable passage.

⁷⁰⁷ Magic arts discovered; female chastity protected; exorcism; sprinkling with holy water; concern with community patronage, and more.

⁷⁰⁸ Epiph. approves of the ‘lack of usurpation of authority’ amongst the Jews. Hierarchy is always to be respected.

discovery of a complicated magic ritual (8,1-8,4). This magic disturbs Joseph greatly; he is able on some level to know it is wrong immediately, and he sees the magic vanquished by the sign of the cross: ὡς οὖν οὐ κατίσχυσαν οἱ γόητες διὰ γὰρ τῆς σφραγίδος τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ πίστεως ἐβοηθήθη ἡ γυνή.⁷⁰⁹ His series of dreams (9,1f) is the final piece of the puzzle – he is ill, and Jesus promises to heal him if he will believe. Jesus appears and presents a wonder-working/belief contract which is similar to the eligibility-rituals we have discussed above, but inverted:

ὁ δὲ κύριος πάλιν πρὸς αὐτὸν κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φιланθρωπίαν δι' ὀράματος ἐνυπνίου «ἰδού» φησὶν «ἰώμαί σε, ἀλλὰ ἀναστὰς πίστευε». ἀναστὰς δὲ πάλιν ἀπὸ τῆς νόσου οὐκ ἐπίστευσεν. ὑγιαίνουντι δὲ αὐτῷ φαίνεται ὁ κύριος πάλιν κατ' ὄναρ, ἐγκαλῶν αὐτῷ δι' ἣν αἰτίαν οὐκ ἐπίστευσεν. ἐπαγγέλλεται δὲ αὐτῷ λέγων ὁ κύριος ὅτι εἰς πληροφορίαν πίστεως εἴ τι βούλει ἐν ὀνόματί μου θεοσημεῖον ἐργάσασθαι, ἐπικάλεσαί με καὶ γὰρ ποιήσω.⁷¹⁰

Joseph then becomes a wonder-worker, and he acts, in a temporary way, as the apostolic figure.⁷¹¹ Even though Joseph is not yet a believer, he performs a ritual exorcism, using language very familiar to us from the magic contest texts.⁷¹² He then goes on to face an entire community of Jews who were engaging in sorcery, and overcomes them through the 'power of water', the name of Jesus, and the sign of the cross:

μεγάλη τῇ φωνῇ ὁ ἀνὴρ σταυροῦ σφραγίδα ἐπιθεὶς τῷ ἀγγεῖῳ διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου δακτύλου καὶ ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ εἶπεν οὕτως «ἐν ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου, οὗ ἐσταύρωσαν οἱ πατέρες μου καὶ τούτων πάντων τῶν περιεστώτων, **γένηται δύναμις ἐν τούτῳ τῷ ὕδατι** εἰς ἀθέτησιν πάσης φαρμακείας καὶ μαγείας ἧς οὗτοι ἔπραξαν καὶ εἰς ἐνέργειαν δυνάμεως τῷ πυρὶ εἰς τὸ ἐπιτελεσθῆναι τὸν οἶκον κυρίου». καὶ οὕτως λαμβάνει τὸ ὕδωρ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ καὶ ῥαίνει ἐκάστῳ φούρνακι ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος. καὶ ἀνελύετο μὲν τὰ φάρμακα, τὸ πῦρ δὲ ἐνώπιον πάντων ἀνεβλαστάνεν. οἱ δὲ

⁷⁰⁹ *Pan.* 30.8.8. Cf. Athanasius, *Vit. Ant.* 78.

⁷¹⁰ *Pan.* 30.10.1-2.

⁷¹¹ See ch. 2 on Josephus' authority and wonder-working connections, and ch. 1 on this parallel to the other wonder-workers on the side of 'good'.

⁷¹² *Pan.* 30.10. 'παραλαμβάνει...τὴν ἰδίαν γύμνωσιν'. The exorcism also seems to grant the madman knowledge between good and evil, as exemplified by his regained shame of nakedness, another subtle way this MCT theme appears here.

παρόντες ὄχλοι κραυγάζαντες «εἰς θεός, ὁ βοηθὼν τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς»
ἀνεχώρησαν». ⁷¹³

Only being granted the power and authority of the wonder-worker, is not enough to convince Joseph to become a Christian; he is only convinced himself when his wonder-working takes place in a confrontational environment, he emerges the victor, and the Jews at least acknowledge the truth of the Christian's God. Joseph is, in a way, both the Silvester and the Zambri in his own contest. The conversion of Joseph, despite its protracted and bizarre character, is portrayed by Epiphanius as sincere and praiseworthy; Joseph meets Constantine, receives a title of nobility, and becomes a patron of churches. Joseph embodies the power of the magic contest tradition, though his story seems at first blush to have little in common with it. For a fourth-century Christian, concerned that the Jews survive and about Jewish magic, the magic contest here performs the same function. All the fears of such a concerned person are confirmed by the story, in the most prejudicial way, but the remedy to the situation is available to the Christians, even if weak and outnumbered. The results of the magic contest can be achieved by those who do not at first seem like they can stand in for Peter in any sense. And the Jews can be confronted just as effectively as the heretics, by the same methods.

Epiphanius, then, makes connections that are left implicit in other writers, between the Simon-Peter story, ritualised wonder-working, and sincere conversion. In all of these texts, the exemplary nature of the magic contest exists quite comfortably with the larger discussion of the history of heresy and its place in Christianity, in particular the creation of 'orthodoxy'. ⁷¹⁴ The *τοπος* of the bad end, and the negative exemplum of Simon and his characters, combine with the historical exempla of magic contests and their inevitable results, and leave us with the sense that the idea of the magic contest was more present to the mind of many Christian writers than we had previously understood. All of these

⁷¹³ Pan. 30.12.

⁷¹⁴ Boyarin (2004), 25: 'There is a new moment in fifth-century Christian heresiological discourse. Where in previous times the general move was to call Christian heretics 'Jews' (a motif that continues alongside the "new" one), only at this time (notably in Epiphanius and Jerome) is distinguishing Judaizing heretics from orthodox Jews central to the Christian discursive project'.

writers, in seeking to interpret history as Christians, find that magic contest elements are a part of the explanation, necessary for understanding history. They are particularly useful for describing how and why the world has failed to align with the Christian vision – and to perhaps provide a moral truth, an encouragement to Christians to continue to strive anyway.

THE HISTORY OF IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

Adaptation

One reason why the magic contest tradition proved so adaptable is that the narrative created an imagined world which the real world wound up looking rather like, much more so than the original authors could have anticipated. The ‘adaptation’ of presenting debates about Christianity in public locations in the fourth century and beyond was actually no adaptation at all because this practice became uncontroversial, even proverbial.⁷¹⁵ The incongruities that we see in Roman imperial officials being involved in the contests would not have seemed implausible in a world where imperial officials were called upon to make theological judgments and/or convene ecclesiastical councils. No real adjustment needed to be made in reading these texts in the fourth century; if anything we might be tempted to suggest that the fourth century context, in which the threat was so limited, is the one that has been handed down to us in the redactions and translation we now have.⁷¹⁶ This cannot be the whole story, though, as the whole idea of the contest comes about in the wonder-working tradition, where this practice of defiance, as we have seen, is an integral part of the programme, and considered essential to achieving the goal of respectability and conversions.

⁷¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa’s famous quip is relevant here: ‘If you ask the price of bread, the reply is “The Father is greater and the Son inferior”’ (*Orat. de Deit. Fil.* MPG XLVI.557).

⁷¹⁶ This is most plausible, certainly, with the *Rec.* As Kelley (2005) notes, 345: ‘The text’s interest in providence, fate, and the nature of God (to take just a few examples) reflects the author’s own situation in fourth-century Syria, which was characterized by the continued existence and power of religious movements begun in earlier times. In other words, the *Recognitions* shows us that topics attributed to the “age of the apologists” continued to be relevant in new ways for fourth-century Christians’.

Most of our magic contests texts come down to us in the form they were in in the fourth century or later. Whilst we do have earlier sources, they are few and fragmentary. It seems that in this later period there was an explosion or revival of interest in recording the tradition. Of course, it was in the fourth century that copying, translating and editing of Christian documents ceased to be dangerous. However, there remained serious threats. The newly-empowered Christians of the post-Constantinian era, as we have seen, remained just as concerned about preserving and protecting their ‘true faith’ as they were before. Now, though, how these concerns manifested themselves had changed. Ideas of heresy, or more neutrally, ideas which came to be classified as heterodox, which had certainly existed in previous centuries, now coalesced into a real threat. The enemy was still there, but his guise had shifted. Most of the magic contest material, without any change in content, took on a new colour in this new context; but this new colour was not without its own set of difficulties.

The proliferation of Christian literature meant new battlegrounds in the unending fight to keep the devil and his descendents out, but it also meant there were many more players in the game. New fronts in what would today no doubt be called the War on Heresy were opening all the time. The magic contest tradition was one front; it was, however popular, one vulnerable to being used to promote any doctrinal position. The model we have been exploring in these texts was open-ended. Because it was not heavily tied into doctrine, it could be adopted and adapted by almost any group to promote their own agenda. In the fourth and fifth century, indeed, we find groups doing just this, either by using the narrative almost unchanged or by taking elements of it and incorporating it into a larger ‘historical’ or non-historical (‘exemplary’) account. The magic contest tradition moves in this period out of the realm of didactic narrative or entertaining story and into a narrative entwined with the history of triumphalism and anti-heretical activity in the newly empowered church. The history of Christianity was, by necessity, the history of impossible things; the contest *exemplum* was one, very productive, example.

'Moral truth'

The idea of exemplarity and the multiple levels of *exempla* which exist in the magic contest texts show us, in looking at the texts across time and indeed with regard for specific doctrines, that there is one point, and in fact one point only, that we are told should be considered: which person, or religious system, represents the true faith.⁷¹⁷ The episodes of wonder-working in these texts are tied loosely to historical times and places, but they do not exist in those times and places only – they are examples of the moral truth of Christianity, and the result of that moral truth, which is ultimate triumph – in heaven and on earth. The 'moral' of wonder-working, beyond its contribution to the model we have examined, is to present essential details and facets of the 'true faith' in a wonder-working contest, and contrast them with 'wonder-working' which can only be associated with magic, and thus the demonic realm.⁷¹⁸ These contrasting episodes, then, exemplify not only the status of Christianity as the true faith, but contain within them some of the reasons why this is so. The only legitimate response, for both the internal and the external audiences, is conversion and participation in the Christian community.⁷¹⁹

Through examples of the power of God in wonder-working, the values and worldview of each writers' version of community is presented, but there is often much which is left unsaid, or said indirectly, about how the wonder-working should provoke this appropriate response. What is universally said, however, is that it does, indeed, provoke such a response. Circularly, the fact that such responses are provoked is taken as further evidence that the moral, or theological, claims of the Christians are true. The wonder-working structure which underlies this exemplification of moral truth is in essence the only way, within the parameters that these contests establish, that any moral truth can be determined, and thus acted upon.

⁷¹⁷ Cameron (1991), 92 on the tricky relationship between narrative and 'truth'.

⁷¹⁸ The trope of the flying magician might be one of the most productive, with its overtones of arrogance; it appears in the AP, the acts which derive from it, and the Toledot Yeshu. Flying is the kind of wonder-working which cannot be used in any 'morally positive' sense.

⁷¹⁹ Gaddis (2005), 208-250 on this impulse manifesting in holy 'contests' in real life of the fourth and fifth century.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY: THE EVOLUTION OF AN *EXEMPLUM*

The development of the magic contest tradition has been traced in several different ways; we have seen how the fundamental principles have remained the same whilst details have changed. In this chapter, we have examined how the exempla of the contest have been used, re-imagined and interpreted by other authors with other projects. It might also be useful to trace the development, more or less chronologically, of one of the fundamental aspects of the tradition in isolation as an *exemplum* itself. Here, we shall see how the magic contest texts themselves interacted with history, in a way that reflects exemplarity, in how they present one of the most important elements of their narrative. The way that magic contests changed might indicate to us that the writers were working with an awareness of the Roman tradition of history,⁷²⁰ and in particular with an awareness of the previous narratives telling the same story, but for the sake of their own morals, their own desire to put across a certain message (the content of which we have been exploring), they have adapted their narrative in relation to how best to present the exemplum that they wish.

The climactic moment in each magic contest, the moment of a contest of resurrection-magic, is an important part of each of the texts, though as we have seen it operates in many ways. But there is one theme all the way through the resurrection-magic element of the tradition which shows a clear progression. The resurrections become further removed from the reality of human death, a prerequisite, one might think, for the idea of resurrection to have force. This might be an example of the ‘external audience’ for the magic contest tradition having some influence on the narrative itself. Along with the exemplary use of the magic contest by other writers, the magic contest writers themselves show in their handling of the resurrection magic a concern for the episode itself as an *exemplum*. The authors of some of our MCTs, then, almost seem to perceive that the importance of the episodes, in particular those of resurrection wonder-working, was in the moral truths that they illustrated, rather than the technical or dramatic details of how and why they occurred.

⁷²⁰ Cameron (1991), 139f. on how Christian literature adapted itself to the wider culture in order to compete with it.

One early example of the resurrection-wonder in a magic contest comes from the story of Jamnes and Jambres.⁷²¹ The magicians appear to engage in an act of necromancy, with negative consequences.⁷²² Due to the fragmentation of the text, it is hard to reconstruct completely, but it seems clear that they were warned against the raising of the (long) dead in this way, and certainly Moses does not respond in kind. Instead, the necromancy is itself the undoing of the magicians.⁷²³ In the AP, of course, there is no concern about raising the dead, though it may be significant that those raised are depicted as having been recently dead (very recently, in the case of the slave boy killed by Simon). Raising the dead within the bounds of the contest format is given explicit status as the way in which the contest will be decided; raising the dead in this way is linked, of course, to the miracles of Jesus, although the deeds of Jesus remains curiously absent from the discussion.⁷²⁴ In the AJ, the resurrections are performed with a similar lack of concern about necromancy, though the resurrected individuals are demarcated as ‘special’ and as existing explicitly within the mission of the community, so it is debatable to what extent the resurrections are meant to be interpreted as fully physical. But in both cases, those raised were certainly dead, and this raising is considered to be not a negative, but in fact positive, and proof of claims made.

In the *Recognitions*, there is miraculous healing, but the status of the woman in 7.24⁷²⁵ as alive or dead is ambiguous as compared with the certainty we see in the AP and AJ. Simon Magus, rather than competing in healing or resurrection, is shown trying to create life on his own, out of nothing, and also disguising one person as another, creating

⁷²¹ See Pietersma (1994), ch. 1, for uncertain date.

⁷²² Ibid, 218 on the Latin evidence for this scene.

⁷²³ The violent death of the firstborn Egyptians could be considered, perhaps, a reversal of the trope that ‘the good guys resurrect’, but the Exodus story, other than the one episode with the ‘finger of God’, really stands apart as the inspiration for, rather than part of, the tradition.

⁷²⁴ But see AP 20, where the names of Jesus are enumerated, showing a familiarity with the gospels. This passage could be a later interpolation, possibly.

⁷²⁵ See ch. 3.

deception that leads to recognition, rather than resurrection.⁷²⁶ There is a clear, moral distinction continually drawn between the kinds of wonder-working each ‘side’ can perform, and this distinction is kept up throughout the text. The woman who is resurrected, whether alive or dead, is considered to be a positive good and an important piece of evidence, but, unlike in the apocryphal texts, she is still required to be ‘vetted’ and to go through the initiation process; the author of the *Recognitions* clearly does not want us to simply accept her word for it that she has been changed by the process. There is evidence, then, of concern about making definitive claims for raising the dead as a part of proof-giving wonder-working, and also for the dead who are raised as being given any special status.

In the AS, we move on in dramatic date and in *dramatis personae*: we are in fourth-century Rome, and though we have ‘representatives’ of Peter and Simon, we do not have them themselves. There is no suggestion or attempt to perform the magic contest with people as the guinea-pigs, as it were. The substitution of the bull allows a further point about Jewish (and pagan) sacrifice to be made,⁷²⁷ and brings in the association of other wonder-working that involved animals from the AAA.⁷²⁸ The author no longer deems it appropriate, then, for the emperor to sanction, or the representative of Peter to perform, wonder-working on human subjects. Precisely the same claim is made, and proof is offered, with an animal subject standing in.

This concern for removing the potential problem of necromancy or ‘murder for nefarious purposes’ may reflect the increasingly negative attitude to all forms of magic in the post-Theodosian Code period, or it may reflect a more mundane concern for believability, or simply a desire to remove the spectre of such practices from the narrative and replace them with a resurrection which can instead target the still-held beliefs about animal sacrifice which existed at the time. In any case, the external changes in Roman society

⁷²⁶ *Rec.* 2.15. Larger metaphor for ‘magic’ intended here?

⁷²⁷ Kahlos (2007), 110ff. notes that, along with sacrifice, pagans and Jews were often assimilated in discussions of magic.

⁷²⁸ Matthews (1999), as mentioned above in discussing the dog-wonder.

have once again influenced the choice of the writer. There is no ambiguity, as there might be in a healing miracle, and no negative association with banned practices.

Interestingly, in a retelling of the Peter-Simon story much after our period, the ninth-century chronicler Michael the Syrian brings the threads all together, having Peter and Simon conduct their contest by use of a sacrificial bull.⁷²⁹ By this late date, even the otherwise unimpeachable authority and power of the apostles was not to be shown through the use of a human subject. The *exemplum* survived its many incarnations with the main thrust of the narrative intact, and the magic contest structure intact as well, but all the external ‘baggage’ that might bring along negative associations has been shed. In the process of becoming an *exemplum*, both outside of the magic contest narratives, and within them, this elimination of associations in fact strengthens the message without losing its explanatory or entertaining power. The idea of the contest is so strong, so helpful to Christians seeking to understand some of the most profound disappointments of the first Christian centuries, that it does not need an apostle, or any important individual to make it compelling. Indeed, in the removal of context for magic contests, we see a realisation that it is possible to have access to some of the power and authority of the apostles whilst very distant in time and place from them. even when they are not really stories about the apostles any more, their stories will always be true, as if apostolic authority in is now granted to the contest itself, and its use as an explanatory aid.

The magic contest do, in fact, have something to explain when it comes to the denouement of these great wonders -- that is, conversion. In the next chapter, we will investigate how MCT conversion works, and what it is supposed to achieve, in the light of the wonder-working displays presented, and the examples that these displays provide, for good conduct and ritual action, as well as the relationship of these acts of wonder-working to specific doctrines and beliefs.

⁷²⁹ *Chron.* 6.1.

Chapter Five: CONVERSION: the end in the beginning

*operum vero ratio potestati et arbitrio uniuscuiusque permittitur, et hoc ipsorum est proprium. desiderium vero habere erga doctorem veritatis, hoc a patre caelesti donatum est.*⁷³⁰

Up to this point, we have been examining what goes into a magic contest, to make it compelling, effective, and ultimately popular. Now, in this final chapter, we are going to look at what comes *out* of a magic contest, namely, conversion. Magic contest conversions do look a little different from our other sources about conversion, and the way they confront the idea of conversion shows that what the texts are ultimately concerned about is not the individuals who convert, but the communities they then join and live among. Magic contests are for winning souls, but they are more than that – they are expressions of anxieties about how communities are constructed in Late Antiquity, how communities of ordinary Christians can exist and what they should do. The MCTs show us that conversion, the desired result of the magic contest rituals which manifest the power of God and demonstrate the proper authority, was, on the one hand, the *beginning* of a new ‘way of life’ and, on the other hand, its *end* or purpose – for conversion brought individuals into a community, for the purpose of bringing about more conversions, until there would be no more need for conversion, because the world itself will have converted.

CONVERSION IN THE *ACTS OF SILVESTER*: BEGINNING AND CODA

To begin at the end, of our period and of our texts, the world in which the *Acts of Silvester* was produced was, legally, a wholly Christian one. Its author imagines the world as having become this way through the mechanism of the contest and its result:

*et in totis finibus Romanae orbis fides catholica per assertionem fidei eius et uirtutes operum perpetuam obtinuit palmam.*⁷³¹

⁷³⁰ *Rec.* 4.5. ‘Indeed the reckoning of works is granted to the power and conscience of each person, and this is their own. But to have an inclination toward a teacher of the truth, this is granted from the heavenly father.’

⁷³¹ AS, 529.

In the 'real world' the picture was not quite so clear. To be sure, pagan and other sacrifices had been banned. Though there remained those, like Macrobius, who clung to the old Roman rites and philosophies, they did so in the knowledge that their time was running out. Likewise, Jews, Manichaeans, and members of various 'heretical' sects continued to practice, but were driven underground by laws, prejudice, and limited opportunities. Those who were non-Christians by the mid-fifth century were, as it were, guests at the pleasure of the emperor or the ecclesiastical establishment. This had been, increasingly, the case since the accession of Theodosius I in 379.⁷³² But the political and legal fiction of the Theodosian Code⁷³³ masked, rather than alleviated, the continued anxieties of the Christian population that, no matter what was the law, the empire was rife with those who were not, in their hearts, believers in the true faith. This anxiety resulted in more than just philosophical debates, but could sometimes erupt in real violence.⁷³⁴ The turmoil of the fourth century may have seemed, to those who had hoped for the imperial recognition and endorsement of Christianity, to have been a great disappointment. The persecutions may have ended, but at least in persecution there was a sense of unity, and an opportunity for martyrdom. In the fourth century and later, it seemed, there was neither of these, and the world still defied the truth.

There was another complication due to the changing political situation. The turmoil within Christianity, unlike when the apocryphal acts were being written, had become a politically dangerous issue, with even criminal liability a possibility for being on the wrong side of a dispute. After his reign, the figure of Constantine was lauded and exalted by Christians, but his actual views on Christian doctrine, and his insertion of the political

⁷³² McLynn (1994), 263-75 on the rise of Ambrose and his complicated, symbiotic relationship with Theodosius.

⁷³³ See, e.g. XVI.i.2.

⁷³⁴ See Gaddis (2005) for an excellent discussion of the seriousness of these disputes. 70-1: 'In the post-Constantinian empire, the rhetorical construction and polemical representation of violence played a key role in defining the "imagined community" of Nicene orthodox Christianity, marking the boundaries of that community and dividing "true" Christians from...enemies of the faith.'

into the ecclesiastical power struggles, could not be viewed so positively.⁷³⁵ Those on every side of the debates wanted reassurance that Constantine was in their camp; in some sense his life became even more open to interpretation than those luminaries of the Christian faith, of whom, we have seen, the details of their life could be imagined and put to work in the service of presenting a viewpoint without too much danger of contradiction. The life of Constantine needed to be fit into some broad historical outline, but its details, too, were open-ended. He could be put to use, a solution to some of these anxieties, as the paradigm of Christian conversion and the paradigm of imperial power.

Constantine's conversion was not the ultimate point, but it was a place to begin. Now, the baptised emperor introduces a new magic contest, a contest which will have a universal effect: this contest, with its paragon emperor, will shine a beacon which will finally convert the whole world – those in open defiance, demonically-assisted Jews and others, those in neutral indifference, such as pagan philosophers, and those who work in secret to destroy Nicene orthodoxy, the Arians and other waging a *bellum intestinum*, never referred to openly but no doubt lurking in the crowd of the internal audience, and perhaps in the external audience as well. The AS operates as a more thorough 'exorcism' of all the forces arranged against the true faith than all the proceeding texts; all the threats to the Christian way of life are neutralised in one fell swoop:

*moxque omnis populus simul cum Augusto ac iudicibus cunctisque iudaeis una uoce per tria horarum spatia clamauerunt dicentes, uerus deus et uerus dei filius Dominus Iesus Christus. eo die amplius quam tria milia Iudaeorum conuersi sunt ad fidem Christi. ipsaque Helena Augusta cum omnibus filiis ac filiabus suis credidit Christo. omnesque simul cubicularii crediderunt. sed et ipsi iudices Zenophilus et Craton. omnesque amici eorum Iesum Christum filium dei uerum deum esse crediderunt.*⁷³⁶

Writing at a time when the authors of the AP or the *Recognitions* can be imagined to feel great joy at the force of Christianity in the world, the author of the AS felt more fear and

⁷³⁵ By no means was Constantine an uncomplicatedly admired figure, even as he loomed so large in the typology and rhetoric of the day. The AS may be a part of the legend of Constantine, but it is willing to show him considering murdering innocent children to cure his leprosy – in other words, to be shown as Herod. Even given that it is a conversion story, that level of negativity is surprising.

⁷³⁶ AS, 528.

anger than the earlier writers and editors seem to have. Nothing was acceptable except the conversion of all people. And there was nothing in the preceding century and a half which had succeeded in this; not even the *Codex Theodosianus*, and not the Constantinopolitan councils. The author of the AS looked at all the history and all the writings of the church and Christians, and found one thing that just might work. The power, authority and rituals of Peter against the magician, who stood for all the anxiety-causing categories of people, could be brought back, repurposed and arrayed anew, to create an imagined world wherein these fears and anxieties could not exist. The careful, specific concerns of the earlier tradition with regard to conversion were tossed aside. Everything in the AS must lead to the climax – no indecisive crowd here, no judges interceding with human concerns.⁷³⁷ The battle for the souls of all the world is placed in the hands of Constantine, revised, and Peter, poured into the holder of his office. The side of the opponent is peopled not by the whole array of those who had not converted, but by the original deniers – and the original destroyers of unity and faith, in the view of the time – the Jews, assisted by learning but more importantly by demonic magic.⁷³⁸

RITUAL AND ANXIETY IN CONVERSION

Thus, by looking first at the last, we see that what Markus astutely calls ‘uncertainty’⁷³⁹ about how to be a Christian ‘in the world’ was hardly something which only mattered in the second century or during periods of persecution. As he points out, the post-Constantine and post-Theodosius periods show a greater anxiety, even, than times

⁷³⁷ Lim (1999), 201, points out the involvement of the emperor in such a dispute means it could be presented as having an enforceable outcome, unlike a random dispute in the marketplace.

⁷³⁸ Cf. *Ep. Sev.* 21: *mirum dictu, inveterati illi legis doctores sine ulla altercatione verborum, sine ullo scripturarum certamine crediderunt*. Was this kind of coerced conversion of Jews happening elsewhere, without leaving us records? It seems plausible, and it also seems plausible that the AS, written 30-50 years later, could reflect the same trend.

⁷³⁹ Markus (1990), 27-45. 27, ‘the drift into respectable Christianity’ as the reaction to Theodosian policies. But, 31: ‘what was special [now] about the calling of a Christian?’ See also 32ff on the potential of the influx of hypocrites.

before.⁷⁴⁰ Martyrdom, the previous ‘cognised model’ for Christian perfection, was not, in general, any longer an option.⁷⁴¹ Anxious elite Christians turned towards theological controversies and asceticism.⁷⁴² The magic contest was another avenue within which ways to combat this persistent anxiety could be explored; models of Christian perfection, manifesting itself in the dramatic, comprehensive ritual of the magic contest.⁷⁴³ Through this ritual, the audience or the world is converted, is brought onto the right path, and the coherence of the worldview is thus reaffirmed.

CONVERSION AND COHERENCE

Does the magic contest tradition, then, in its many different manifestations, show any coherent picture of how conversion should work? Does it ultimately answer the question of how Christian conversion can be assured to be legitimate and trustworthy? What we see emerging from the MCTs and the texts that draw on them for *exempla* is indeed a fairly coherent picture, if not a wholly satisfying one.⁷⁴⁴ It is by combining our understanding of the role of wonder-working and the invented rituals surrounding a ‘magic contest’, and interpreting this tradition in light of the interpretations of it we see begin to be made in the third, fourth and fifth centuries, that we can start to see a kind of

⁷⁴⁰ The late fourth century had its Ambrose, but also its Augustine. Despite its apparent confidence, I think I have demonstrated that the MCTs are more for the Augustines than the Ambroses.

⁷⁴¹ The genre of hagiography, however, stepped in to provide reportable and repeatable martyrdom experiences. The AS is more a ‘hagiobiography’ (Wilson (1998), 107), but as we have seen in the *altercatio* it is concerned with these broader issues and Constantine and Silvester are not, exactly, acting as themselves.

⁷⁴² Augustine’s controversy with Donatism and Pelagianism (and to a lesser extent Manichaeism) shows him fighting the claim that Christians needed to be perfect. See the melancholy Brown (1967), 330-54. But the MCTs show us that this kind of anxiety was not just for the educated elite.

⁷⁴³ Cf. *Vit. Cyp*, which takes this anxiety to a new place with the ‘new Jambres’ being the one redeemed in the end. Like Joseph of Tiberias, he can be both Peter and Simon in his own story.

⁷⁴⁴ The most satisfying picture is probably that which is provided by the AJ, which stands apart from the tradition here, in particular. The questions of what happens after the magic contest conversions, i.e. do they ‘stick’, is not addressed by most texts, but in the AJ we see the continuity of the community and how the conversions are used in missions a bit more clearly (See e.g. AJ 46-7). I do think much of what is said explicitly in AJ is implicit in parts of the rest of the MCT, but we have to look a bit harder (see below on the *Rec.*).

coherence.⁷⁴⁵ The importance of the magic contest tradition is not just in its unusual fertility of concept, but also in how it provided a path towards self-understanding and understanding of others that, though not heavily theological, creates its own world that aligns with what was becoming the ‘orthodox’ Christian worldview.⁷⁴⁶

The invention of a ritualised way in which conversions from heresy and Judaism, rather than from the originally-dominant paganism, can be handled, is also an important point. The original narratives were constructed out of a non-dominant culture, and, as we have seen, are unwilling to condemn the dominant cultural structures, which makes the transition to a dominant cultural structure quite straightforward. Indeed, pagans are enfolded into MCTs as officials, judges and finally witnesses, incorporating all three ‘races’ into the one faith, and the true people of God. We see this process of accommodation connected to the process of conversion in some way in all the texts. The MCTs find a way for their narrative to make sense in their own context, as we have seen, and find in conversion a way to make sense of their own narrative.

THE CONVERSION NARRATIVE: EXEMPLARY INTERPRETATIONS AND META-INTERPRETATIONS

The *Recognitions* at first seems like the odd one out in the magic contest tradition; its origins, after all, stem from a sect which was clearly out of the mainstream. Due to the complex and mostly impenetrable textual history, we cannot be entirely sure how it came to be, but it does seem to be the case that much of the doctrinally-specific material was added later (or removed and then added back in).⁷⁴⁷ For our purposes, most of the doctrinal material is irrelevant: what is more important is the *Recognitions*’ status, discussed in chapter three, as a commentary upon itself and the whole magic contest

⁷⁴⁵ Forkman (1972), 189-90 posits that the ‘kingdom of God’ is the community concept (superceding old ways of defining community); I see counter-evidence of this in the texts. The old ways of community are still strong, even reinforced.

⁷⁴⁶ From the perspective of the late fourth and fifth centuries, in the wake of the heresy-hunters and the church councils, it is fair, I think, to use the word.

⁷⁴⁷ Bremmer (2010, 1-10; Jones (1982).

tradition. Whether in the novelistic sections or the disputations, the *Recognitions* present consistent notions of conversion.

Earlier, we saw how the *Recognitions* interpreted the magic contest itself as a ritual of discernment, one step on the way to conversion, and a part of the larger ritual process. This ritual was situated within the larger process of conversion. And this process of conversion was situated within a larger view of the world, what some call a ‘gnostic’ view of the world composed of opposites. Whilst the *Recognitions* itself takes this view to an extreme, elements of this can be found throughout the tradition, and can aid in our interpretation thereof. For the author of the *Recognitions*, uniquely, and revealingly, an understanding of history, and the historical recurrence of magic contests as tests of religious truth, is necessary in order for a conversion to be valid or successful. It is possible that there is some understanding of this idea of historic precedent that underlies all of the magic contest tradition. This tradition, then, is seeking to situate any given magic contest in greater history, through which God’s real power and appropriate authority can best, or even only, be further discerned by such a test. The *Recognitions*, again, takes this interpretation to be true on an individual level, whereas many of the other texts which use the tradition see this responsibility of discernment as something which operates more on a communal level. It is not usually left up to the individual to determine what is true and what is heresy; being left to a contest, the determination is made by this set-up of neutrality that we have discussed, and the conversions which follow are thus given at least a partial sanction by the process of the contest.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁸ The AJ has functioned for us throughout as a kind of contrast, and also an example of the more general idea of the ‘magic contest’ and its presentation of ideals about the community; the AJ community has of course been heavily speculated about (Bovon, Lalleman et al). The AJ spends much more time in the community, developing a narrative of how to reinforce community and community standards which does use wonder-working, but in a much less challenging way. The wonder-working ‘contests’ of the AJ are all public displays, like in the rest of the magic contests, but they are directed against the ‘pagans’ very clearly. The new converts made are not backsliders but instead are presented as genuine pagans who have ‘seen the light’, in part at least due to the wonder-working contests John stages against the absent pagan deities. Also worth noting is the use of ‘laying on of hands’ in the AJ, and not elsewhere in the tradition. (AJ 46-7).

THE PROCESS OF CONVERSION

The magic contest texts all show a great deal of concern with the idea of conversion, but the form this concern takes varies. In the *Acts of Peter*, we encounter a community that is fractured and in need of cohesion. In the *Recognitions* we see a dislocated group of individuals that needs to undergo an intellectual as well as spiritual process in order for its survival and rectitude to be assured. In all these texts, the confrontation of the opponent in a contest of wonder-working is a part of this conversion process, and indeed in many respects the most important part, but the contest functions for each text in a different way. The authors of these texts, then, used a similar format to express their concerns, in particular using apostolic characters to model for their audience what, to them, would be the true, appropriate way for a community of Christians, first, to be constituted (in a process of conversion for individuals) and second, to behave (as a community) after this conversion. What we do not have in these texts is something that tells us about the mindset of individual converts themselves. The magic contest texts, whilst stressing the importance of conversion both of individuals and of communities as a whole, does not let us in on the process as seen by these converts, but rather from the perspective of the authority figures who are directing the process. Reports of the positive effects of the conversions for those converted are in fact kept to a minimum. These texts, then, model a process but do not elaborate on the aftermath of that process.

Now, having begun with the end, with the ‘totalising vision’⁷⁴⁹ of the AS’ conversion narrative, I will look at how two earlier texts (the *Acts of Peter* and the *Recognitions*) presents an idealised image of how the process of conversion works, in order to create a well-ordered and stable community of believers in the ‘true way’. In each section, I will focus especially on how the contest itself is structured with the goal of conversion in mind, and how the contest relates to how the newly constituted community is meant to conceive of itself. The place of the contest itself in the process is central. As we have seen, the contest acts as visible, tangible proof of first of all the apostle’s veracity, and secondly, therefore, the truth of his claims, in particular his claims about resurrection and

⁷⁴⁹ Drake (2000), 360; about Eusebius, but equally applicable here.

the centrality of resurrecting oneself in the Christian way.⁷⁵⁰ The final step in the process, generally incorporated into the contest part of the narrative and often the climax thereof, is conversion. The conversion moment is connected to the contest not just in that it precipitates it; it is also essential for its modelling, as we have seen, the central battle of living the Christian faith, as it was conceived by the authors of these texts.⁷⁵¹ The moment of conversion was the moment, quite simply, that one crossed from one side to the other.

ACTS OF PETER: CONVERSION OF THE LOST SHEEP

In the AP, the Christian community of Rome is in disarray. The wonder-working of Peter is threaded through the narrative both of individuals re-aligning themselves with him and, after the contest in the forum, of the majority of the community (and some new converts) coming back into the fold. The processes of these conversions are presented in varying levels of detail, with some episodes focusing on individuals and others on larger groups.⁷⁵²

Wonder-working in these texts has been said to be for the purpose of conversion,⁷⁵³ and this is true, but it is only part of the picture. In some cases, the conversion happens before the wonder-working; in these cases, it is the wonder-working (and often the handing-over of power to do wonders) which offers evidence of the conversion rather than a rationale for it. In the AP, the community depicted is riven from within, and thus a number of the conversions are in some sense *re*-conversions or strengthening of faith, rather than *ab initio* conversion. The conversions are presented in a community context,⁷⁵⁴ but in this case, the community is in danger of disintegration. Before the contest between the two

⁷⁵⁰ On resurrection as baptism see ch. 3.

⁷⁵¹ See Meeks (1993) ch. 7.

⁷⁵² What we don't encounter is any discourse on *how* the magic-induced conversion affects the converted individual, in particular how, if at all, such a conversion differs from other kinds. *That* they have been converted, at least provisionally, is what is important.

⁷⁵³ See e.g. MacMullen (1983) and Misset-van der Weg (1998), 102-6; 108 on mothers and sons as a focus of wonder-working.

⁷⁵⁴ Namely, the narrative is about the 'return' of the community as a whole, and most scenes take place in front of a group.

representatives, Peter goes among the former Christians and seeks to convince them to re-join the fold. The model offered of the penitent senator Marcellus in the AP is the most clear and elaborate example of a re-conversion and re-incorporation into the community.⁷⁵⁵

Marcellus in his confession of faith both narrates his own conversion first to Simon and then his return to the true faith, and also refers to Peter's own moment of falling away,⁷⁵⁶ which will be used against him by Simon before the contest. This could be an attempt by the AP author to marshal biblical support for the idea that it was possible to be received back into the fold – an idea which was not by any means universally held.⁷⁵⁷ Despite Peter's doubt, he was given the power and authority to do wonders. Marcellus' story reflects the same pattern, in a small way; as Peter is the spiritual centre of the community, Marcellus, and his house, is the physical centre and remains so. Other narratives of conversion or re-version are linked more closely to the resurrection-contest itself; of particular interest is the status within the community of those who were themselves resurrected:

*puer autem qui a mortuis resurrexit cum vidisset nemini se donasse, venit ad domum et aperuit armarium et ipse obtulit quattuor milia aureorum dicens ad Petrum: 'ecce et ego qui resuscitatus suum duplicem oblationem offero, et me ipsum ex hodiernum loquentem victimam deo.'*⁷⁵⁸

The resurrected boy becomes a 'living sacrifice' and also a 'double offering' – of his own body, and his money.⁷⁵⁹ What should this 'speaking sacrifice' do? The implication is that he could be a vehicle for further conversions, through the offering of his testimony, and

⁷⁵⁵ AP 10.

⁷⁵⁶ Interesting here is Frankfurter (1995), 457. on the recounting of stories with magic rituals (*historiolae*). I think there is a case to be made that there are a few *historiolae* in the MCTs, and this may be one.

⁷⁵⁷ With continuing persecutions it was an issue which would not be resolved for some time (until the end of the Donatist controversy at least). From this period, Tertullian is perhaps the most rigorist voice.

⁷⁵⁸ AP 29. 'The boy who rose from the dead, when he saw that he himself had given to no one, went to the house and opened the chest and himself bestowed four thousand gold pieces, saying to Peter, 'Look, even I who was revived, I bestow a double offering, and I offer myself from today as a speaking sacrifice to God.'

⁷⁵⁹ One of the most interesting features of the AP community is the concern with money. See Grant (1980a), 22-3.

the hearsay regarding it.⁷⁶⁰ Similarly, when Peter is asked to resurrect Nicostratus, he ascertains from his petitioning mother that she is already a believer, so that she herself can be a vehicle for her son's conversion:

*mater cuiusdam senatoris supervenit, misit se per mediam turbam et caecidit ad pedes Petri dicens: didici a meis, esse te ministrum dei misericordis, et gracia ipsius communicare omnibus desiderantibus lumen hoc. communicare ergo et filio lumen, quoniam cognovi te nulli invidum esse: matrona te rogante non te avertas. cui Petrus dixit: credes in deum meum per quem filius tuus resurrecturus est. mater autem cum voce magna dixit cum lacrimis: credo, Petre, credo. universus populus clamavit: condona matri filium.*⁷⁶¹

The mother does not make a full confession like Marcellus, though the implication is that she has come to believe only recently.⁷⁶² Peter seems reluctant to perform the wonder, but because she is a believer, he does so, explicitly in order to represent the true power, that is, Jesus, and to communicate his light.⁷⁶³ However, this demonstration of truth is not an end in itself, but a part of the process of Christianisation which is presented by these texts – the Christianisation not yet of the outward society and its structures but of the individuals within it.⁷⁶⁴ The community of Christians in the AP still very much exists as a

⁷⁶⁰ This is one aspect of conversion which has been well-studied. See e.g. Lofland (1981) for a systematising, social science approach; for the AAA see Gallagher (1991), esp. on the AJ (24: the 'clearest' understanding of resurrection and conversion as passage from death to life).

⁷⁶¹ AP 28. The mother of a certain senator came, thrust herself through the middle of the crowd and fell at Peter's feet, saying, 'I have learned from my family that you are a minister of the merciful God, by his grace, communicate this light to all who long for it. Therefore communicate the light to my son, since I know that you are prejudiced against no one. Don't turn away a matron begging you.' To her Peter said, 'will you believe in my God, through whom your son will be resurrected? The mother with a loud voice said, with tears: 'I believe, Peter, I believe'. All the people shouted, 'Present the mother with her son.'

⁷⁶² Her faith, like the boy of the 'speaking sacrifice' must be there to guide other to the 'way of life'.

⁷⁶³ On *lumen* in the MCTs, Baldwin (2008), 77 makes a good connection between the use of *lumen* in wonder-working in AP 20-1 and *Rec.* 10.71.

⁷⁶⁴ The individual Joseph of Tiberias presents a different view, more suitable perhaps to the fourth century. Joseph converts in opposition to a community, rather than an individual, which is not the norm in our texts (and then becomes a wealthy patron of his new community, which is).

part of Roman society, and whilst this is seen as problematic, it is not condemned (as it is in the AJ) nor seen as the source of the disintegration – it is Simon and the devil who are really to blame. The outer society, then, does not represent ‘true evil’ against the ‘true good’ of Peter; it is a one-to-one confrontation between the source of evil and the source of good, in which good triumphs, which brings about the true conversion.

We have discussed group conversions mostly. One question is whether the MCTs have anything different to say about the conversion of individuals.⁷⁶⁵ As we have seen, individuals are generally investigated before their conversions are accepted, because their conversions are not deemed reliable,⁷⁶⁶ because these individuals are consistently represented as having made in some sense a choice – normally at the start of the narrative, a wrong choice, such as to follow a deceiver such as Simon Magus.⁷⁶⁷ That they may not have had all the facts when they chose wrongly is acknowledged⁷⁶⁸ but it is nevertheless not in doubt that these misled individuals are not only in personal peril but also run the risk, if not carefully vetted before re-admission into the fold, of themselves bringing other people along with them along a wrong path. This path can include wrong, or insufficient, motivations for conversion. The idea that some individuals were motivated by a sort of *credo quia vincis* (one common, but insufficient reason for claiming conversion) is frequently shown to be inadequate, as the texts posit that the victories will only come after the true faith is securely held.⁷⁶⁹ Whatever may have been the motivation of individuals in fact, the magic contests texts go to some lengths to

⁷⁶⁵ On this more generally see Nock (1934).

⁷⁶⁶ For a different take on an individual conversion there is Justin Martyr’s multi-stage conversion (*Dial.* 1-9). Also MacMullen (1983), 183: ‘the specific moments and details of conversion seem not to have been much studied’. The exception, in every sense, is of course Augustine.

⁷⁶⁷ See introduction on the ways of describing and dealing with Simon’s magic.

⁷⁶⁸ See below on the exposition of the process in the *Rec.*

⁷⁶⁹ MacMullen (1983), 185. See above on the resurrection miracles.

discourage the view that a bargain could be struck.⁷⁷⁰ We do not generally see dramatised what really happens in group conversion, they are rather given in summary.⁷⁷¹

RECOGNITIONS: CONVERSION AS AN INTELLECTUAL PROCESS

The *Recognitions* is even more concerned than the AP or AJ⁷⁷² with how individuals undergo a *proper* process of conversion, to make sure they arrive at the correct conclusions and thus are not misled before even beginning, but it also demonstrates a concern for the larger groups of believers that would ostensibly have been brought in by the sort of disputations it depicts. How a ‘magic contest’ conversion actually works, or should work, is developed in the abstract, as if a part of the discourse itself. The *Recognitions* both tells of, in the disputation sections, and shows, in the ‘romance’ sections, the ideal process of conversion.⁷⁷³

The focus is much less on the aspect of the ‘community’ per se, even when large groups are focused on. In fact, the philosophical approach presented in the *Recognitions* presents a radically different programme, in which the individual alone is concerned. Despite this, it is similar in its presentation of the contest, in which the two contestants are ‘battling for the souls’ of the individuals who constitute their respective communities – individuals

⁷⁷⁰ Indeed the Simon Magus story in Acts 8 serves as the jumping-off point for this concept.

⁷⁷¹ Rec. 3.72 is a good example: *interea per dies singulos disputans et docens propositum tempus in doctrinae labore conplevit. et cum advenisset dies festus, super decem milia baptizati sunt.*

⁷⁷² The AJ shows us most clearly how individual conversions translate into groups or communities. There is much to be said about the community-formation of wonder-working in the AJ, but though interesting, it is beyond the scope of this thesis, as it does not primarily rely on the environment of competitive wonder-working, and is much more focussed on the details of the communities’ idiosyncrasies. The AJ is more concerned about the role of conversion *after* wonder-working than others, and what the conversion is both *to* and *for*; also, the opponents in AJ are presented as more obviously distinct from the apostle and his group. In this sense, the AJ is a more standard take on the idea of identity formation as the setting of (one’s own group of) insiders against a group of foreign) outsiders. In a context where the enemy is well-defined, the ‘contest’ is on a more straightforward plane – but what happens after the contest is not equally straightforward.

⁷⁷³ Even though likely an artifact of the multi-layered composition, there is a sense here of the text being in conversation with itself.

must make the right choice of ‘side’. Their role as leaders is, thus, even more essential than in the AP and AJ. The language of community living is used frequently (‘brothers’ and the like), but constantly the individuality of the process is stressed.

The *Recognitions*, more than any other magic contest text, addresses the idea of conversion as a *process*, in which a magic contest is seen to play an important role, though in narrative terms, the contest forms a relatively small part in the plot. In the AP, the community needed to be reconstructed due to internal dissent, and in the AJ it needed to present a strong face toward an external enemy. In the *Recognitions*, this sense of existence within a wider political world is lessened.⁷⁷⁴ The focus is much more on the philosophical (or rather, theological) approach to life. Central to the philosophy of the Clementine literature is an ‘intellectualising’ approach which is almost entirely absent from other magic contest texts.⁷⁷⁵ We are on the one hand given a plot with superficial similarities to the magic contest tradition, and on the other, and concurrently, a sort of commentary on it which expounds for its readers how one should go about ‘reading’ a magic contest, and thus recognising who should ‘win’ and thus who is the propagator of the truth.⁷⁷⁶

The *Recognitions* thus both depicts the drama of the contest and discusses the process of how the contest works for an individuals, leading to certain effects. However, unlike in

⁷⁷⁴ Though it should not be understated how the community represented by the *Recognitions* itself was embroiled in serious political conflict. Gager (1992) on the cause of some of this conflict. John Chrysostom’s homilies against the Jews are the fullest articulation of this seemingly perpetual problem of self-definition. See Kelley (2005), 346: ‘In an environment characterized by a multitude of competing truth claims, the *Recognitions* functions as a multipronged attack not just against one group such as the Marcionites or Pauline Christians, but against several different varieties of belief’.

⁷⁷⁵ Reed (2007) 197: ‘Both [*Homilies*] and [*Recognitions*] legitimize their teachings by means of an overarching narrative about the conversion...of Clement of Rome’. It is the specific teachings in the *Recognitions* which are of primary importance, in contrast to the doctrinal sparseness of other magic contest texts.

⁷⁷⁶ See *Recognitions* 4.5.1-5 on ‘teachers of truth’ (in this case Moses and Jesus) and their value. See Introduction for a discussion on the parallels between Moses and Jesus in magic contest texts generally. See also Reed (2007) 213ff; for the reverse trope, see Spät (2004) on Simon Magus in the *Acta Archelai*. ‘Teachers of lies’ have developed their own interchangeable biographies.

the other magic contest narratives, we do not get as clear a picture of the ‘wonder-working’ itself. The focus is relentlessly on the intellectual content and results of the conflict.

The position of the *Recognitions* is, as is the case with the AP and other AAA, a strongly binary one. Either you are on the side of good, or you are on the side of evil. A magic contest is a physical, dramatic depiction of this essentially spiritual contest.⁷⁷⁷ It would be a mistake to label this explanation as dualist or Gnostic.⁷⁷⁸ Rather, it conforms to the ‘lineage theory’ we have seen developed in the magic contest tradition.⁷⁷⁹ He who represents the ‘power of God’ can claim an apostolic, lineal relationship to the divine; he who represents any other ‘power’ is accused of having descent from the devil himself.⁷⁸⁰ The protagonists throughout the *Recognitions* are Peter and Simon, but it is not their souls that are in contention. Rather it is the assembled audience (conveniently of twelve), who are bright young men seeking their path in life. The *Recognitions* posits a process by which a magic contest (and possibly *only* a magic contest) is the mechanism by which an effective conversion can be obtained, and thus the only way that a community of those who follow the truth can be formed.⁷⁸¹ The first stage in the development of the process of conversion in the *Recognitions* (III) is set in motion by the placing in opposition of those first contestants, Moses and the magicians, and asking why/how an individual should be able to distinguish between them.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁷ See the ‘Testament of Asher’ 1.3-5 for a similar pronouncement of this view. There are two ‘faces’, good and evil, and in some sense, ‘goodness’ is the source of God. The ‘Testament of the twelve patriarchs’ seems to come from a similar ‘in-between’ milieu to that of the *Rec.*, only from an earlier period.

⁷⁷⁸ Which is not to deny the Gnostic aspects which are present in the text. See Jones (1982).

⁷⁷⁹ See ch. 2.

⁷⁸⁰ See ch. 1.

⁷⁸¹ Reed (2007) thinks that the *Rec.* suggests that there are perhaps multiple ‘ways’ for this community to form, from either a Jewish-by-birth or a Gentile-by-birth beginning, but in III, in the magic contest analysis, the *Recognitions* does not identify the community as explicitly as it develops this idea in IV-VI.

⁷⁸² *Rec.* 3.57: *et Niceta ait: Quid peccaverunt Aegyptii, si non crediderunt Moysi, cum et magi similia signa fecerint, etiamsi viderentur potius fieri quam veritate fierent? nam et*

The explanation of this question will introduce the idea of the opposition of good and evil in all things (and the implication that this is most straightforwardly manifested in the physical world by acts of wonder-working). The process of discernment is a multi-stage one, here as elsewhere. The *Recognitions* more than other magic contest texts stresses the usefulness of a prior belief in Moses and his wonders and worthiness, as a part of the general intellectual process of finding ‘types’ in the scriptures.⁷⁸³ But here the steps to understanding and thus correct belief are clearly laid out, as well as the places where there might be doubt.⁷⁸⁴

The ability to make a distinction between good and bad ‘signs’ is available to all men, with the application of a simple intellectual process and by the seeking of external benefit of the miracles performed.⁷⁸⁵ Once this determination has been made by an individual, he then may proceed from the purely intellectual to the ritual (combined with the continuation of learning) which begins his conversion. As a part of this process, a person must realise that his community is with other disciples, not with his family – at least until his family also converts.⁷⁸⁶

*nos unum colimus deum qui mundum fecit; huius et legem servamus...sed et illud observamus mensam cum gentilibus non habere communem, nisi cum crediderint et recepta veritate baptizati fuerint ac trina quadam beati nominis invocatione consecrati, et tunc cum eis cibum sumimus. alioquin etiam si pater aut mater sit aut uxor aut filii aut fratres, non possumus cum eis mensam habere communem.*⁷⁸⁷

si ego fuissem tunc, ex eo quod magi similia faciebant, nonne aut Moysen magum credidissem, aut magos quae ostendebant, divinitus facere putassem?

⁷⁸³ There is a contrast here between I.27-71 and later books. Throughout the Clementine literature there is a strong emphasis on Moses and the Law. This heavily Moses-based orientation has been one of the factors that has led to the *Recognitions* being branded, unhelpfully, as an ‘Ebionite’ text. (On *Rec.* I, see Jones (1995)).

⁷⁸⁴ *Rec.* 3.59. See above in ch. 3 on the ritual-commentary function of this passage.

⁷⁸⁵ On this also see Origen *CC*, I.

⁷⁸⁶ Horn (2010), 177-83.

⁷⁸⁷ *Rec.* 7.29. ‘We worship one god, who made the world, and we follow his law...but we also observe this, that we do not have a common table with the “gentiles”, unless, when they believe and have received the truth, they are baptised and consecrated with the triple invocation of a certain blessed name, and then we take food with them. Otherwise, ever if they are father, mother, wife, sons or brothers, we cannot have common table with them’.

Here we see, really, the first indication of how a ‘Recognitions’ Christian community might operate, post-conversion. The physical ritual of initiation⁷⁸⁸ has both spiritual and physical effects.⁷⁸⁹

The physical ritual of the baptism, then, has the spiritual effect of banishing the ‘former evil’ and preparing for the possibility of attaining ‘heavenly blessings’ in the future. The physical rituals are a ‘consecration’, a necessary step, like the stage of discernment, before the final goal, which is ‘perception’ or understanding of holy things. But, as in the AJ, that is not the final stage of the process. There is need of a confirmation period for at least most new believers (though it seems that Peter’s disciples are there more to assist Peter than to be ‘confirmed’ themselves):

*Consideremus, fratres, quod iustum est; debemus enim auxilium aliquod ferre gentibus, quae ad salutem vocatae sunt. ipsi audistis quod Simon praecedere volens iter nostrum profectus est, quem oportuerat et e vestigio insequi, ut sicubi aliquos subvertere temptaret continuo confutaretur a nobis. sed quoniam iniustum mihi videtur, ut derelictis his qui iam conversi sunt ad deum, eorum qui adhuc longe sunt curam proferamus, rectum puto tribus mensibus permanere me cum his qui in hac civitate conversi sunt ad fidem.*⁷⁹⁰

This is a more explicit ‘mission message’ than we see elsewhere in the magic contest texts.⁷⁹¹ It addresses the continuing nature of the contest, bringing in the possibility that one single contest may not be the truly decisive event that it is portrayed as elsewhere. Here there is also no mention of the continuation of wonder-working, even though in the text itself the need for wonder-working in the disputes with Simon does not cease. More immediately, however, the discussion of wonder-working and its role ends with a very

⁷⁸⁸ See ch. 3 for a full discussion of the role of ritual in magic contest texts.

⁷⁸⁹ *Rec. 3.67. Et cum haec atque his similia praecepisset, pronuntiavit ad populum dicens: Quoniam tres menses statui facere vobis cum, si quis vestrum desiderat, baptizetur, ut exutus prioribus malis, de reliquo pro bonis actibus heres bonorum caelestium ex gestis propriis fiat.* There is also fasting and anointing, along with the long wait times.

⁷⁹⁰ *Recognitions 3.68.*

⁷⁹¹ This is much more strongly presented in the AJ, as mentioned above.

large indeed ‘group conversion’ via baptism, and following on from that a community founded through the patronage of a wealthy convert.⁷⁹²

*plus quam decem milia hominum credentes deo baptizati sunt et sanctificatione consecrati, ita ut omni aviditatis desiderio Theofilus, qui erat cunctis potentibus in civitate sublimior, domus suae ingentem basilicam ecclesiae nomine consecraret, in qua Petro apostolo constituta est ab omni populo cathedra, et omnis multitudo cotidie ad audiendum verbum conveniens.*⁷⁹³

Here it is credited once again primarily to Peter’s teaching that so many were converted, but as we have seen a major aspect of Peter’s teaching has been his explanation of discernment between claimants in a contest of wonder-working. This explanation has then been modelled by the extended contrast between Peter and Simon’s modes and methods of wonder-working.⁷⁹⁴ The full-scale process, as we have seen, must begin with the physical, namely the competition of wonder-working, before it can proceed to the ritual (a combination of the physical and the spiritual) before finally the spiritual understanding is possible and full membership in the community of believers is assured. This part of the process is novelistically dramatised as the series of ‘recognitions’ which fit into the place of the ‘resurrections’ of other texts. The deaths were only assumed, and only spiritual; assumptions are corrected and spiritual death removed by ritual. Only the last stage of the process even occurs in the context of community life. Once the community is joined, the bond is permanent, however, and the whole of the text which precedes this final step lays out, by means of an adversarial debate and contest, the ‘community rule’ which must be followed by the converted.

⁷⁹² Cf. AP’s concern with money throughout. Here, the money can be used for an *ecclesia* (his house is clearly meant to be seen rather differently than the house of Marcellus). Not only does the community have more money, they also have the extra apostolic authority and power derived from the *cathedra*, and also appear to be healthy in numbers. The picture of this community, in other words, is one in a very different state than the second-century texts, even post-contest.

⁷⁹³ *Rec.* 10.71: ‘More than ten thousand men, believing in God, were baptised and consecrated with sanctification, so that Theophilus, with every desire of eagerness, and who was loftier in status than all the powers in the city, consecrated in his house a huge basilica in the name of the church, in which the chair of Peter the apostle was established by all the people and the whole crowd every day gathered to hear the Word.’

⁷⁹⁴ See ch. 3.

The AS, AP and *Recognitions* present three models of the process of conversion, and in particular of the relationship between individuals' conversion and the formation of a community, as well as the final shape that this 'community of believers', which has been formed, or re-formed, through the mechanism of the magic contest will take. This community, whether universal, or exclusive, is shown, through the experience of a magic contest, to affirm the power of the true God, the proper structuring of authority, the use of ritual in testing, worship, and association, and even is able to be situated in the grand sweep of Christian history thanks to the 'moral truth' that is provided by the contest and the resulting conversions.

Whilst the narratives of these texts are all very different, they all find in the magic contest a way to delineate a model for the ideal way of Christian living, to help sustain the community itself (through care and protection of its members, in both a physical and spiritual sense) and present its face to the world, for the presentation of its 'case'. The magic contest presents the Christian community, and their apostle-leaders, as constantly engaged in a battle between life and death, good and evil, waging a battle for the 'way of life'. For all these authors, the only path to ultimate victory is through the confirmation of conversions and the creation and continuation of robust communities.

CONCLUSION

ad aedificationem sancta idem Romana ecclesia... suscipi non prohibet scripturas:...
actus beati Silvestri apostolicae sedis praesulis, licet eius qui conscripserit nomen ignoretur, a multis tamen in urbe Roma catholicis legi cognovimus et pro antiquo usu multae hoc imitantur ecclesiae...
*cetera quae ab hereticis sive scismaticis conscripta vel praedicata sunt, nullatenus recipit catholica et apostolica Romana ecclesia; e quibus pauca, quae ad memoriam venerunt et a catholicis vitanda sunt, credidimus esse subdenda...*⁷⁹⁵

The writer of the ‘Gelasian Decree’, probably in the early sixth century, certainly not before 496, looked upon a world filled with despair. The western Roman empire had fallen, taking with it, for a time, much of the apparatus of church and state. In the emperor’s place there now stood foreign leaders, who worshipped in a way which was now, according to the so-called practitioners of ‘orthodoxy’, heretical. Rome had not only been sacked, but the barbarians were going to stay this time. And, so it seemed, the great project imputed to Constantine, and longed for fervently by clerics ever since, the ideal of a church, universally and enthusiastically followed, and a state in communion with that church, was gone forever. The *urbs Roma* and the *orbis Romanus* were, in a very real sense, no more.

The church persisted, though the optimism of the fourth century seemed as far away as the apostolic age. In these circumstances, then, this writer had before him a vast array of Christian writings, and he undertook to examine and categorise them. Many of them, it seems, were suspect, including all three of our main magic contest texts, and others influenced by the tradition:

<i>Itinerarium nomine Petri apostoli, quod appellatur sancti Clementis libri...</i>	<i>apocryphum</i>
<i>Actus nomine Petri apostoli</i>	<i>apocryphi...</i>
<i>Liber qui appellatur Paenitentia sancti Cypriani</i>	<i>apocryphus</i>
<i>Liber qui appellatur Paenitentia Iamne et Mambre</i>	<i>apocryphus...</i>
<i>Haec et his similia quae Simon Magus... Priscillianus ab Hispania... et omnes heresei hereseorumque discipuli sive scismatici docuerent vel</i>	

⁷⁹⁵ Dec. Gelas. IV.

*conscripserunt...cum suis auctoribus sequacibus sub anathematis insolubili vinculo in aeternum confitemur esse damnata.*⁷⁹⁶

In the end, the *Acts of the blessed Silvester* was reluctantly accepted – the author may be unknown, but the readers were not. The crowd in Rome was convinced, and thus the Church; they even ‘imitated’ the *Acts*, presumably in *altercations* with Jews and heretics, real or imagined. But the *Acts of Peter*, *Acts of John*, the *Recognitions*, and the stories of the magicians Cyprian and Jamnes and Jambres, are not given the benefit of the doubt, and they are denounced and damned, joined with the ‘writings’ of Simon Magus himself in their perdition. From this writer’s perspective, such texts were no longer an acceptable expression of a Christian worldview, and indeed were worse than that, the texts themselves were potentially dangerous. It was best to read works by authors whose names were known, and thus whose opinions could be carefully investigated. This writer was uncomfortable with the multiplicity of views he saw expressed in the list of texts he condemned; rather than Christians trying to find their way in the world, he saw the snares of the devil and the evils of the deceivers. Little did he realise that perhaps his feelings were the same as those of the authors and audiences for our texts, and others like them.

Our authors saw the world just as ‘Gelasius’ did, a world where choices were limited but of extreme importance: you could choose the system of Christianity, that of the apostles, their power and obedience to their authority, and choose thereby the way of life. Or you could choose the other system, Simon’s false claims to power and wayward authority, secret magic rituals, and obscene practices, and thereby choose the way of death. The obvious nature of the choice, it seemed, did not prevent men, even educated and powerful men like Priscillian,⁷⁹⁷ from making the wrong choice, and indeed paying for it with their lives. It was not only those accused of practicing the magic arts to see if they could win the empire who suffered, but now those who read the wrong books, and came up with the wrong ideas for how Christians should live their lives and engage with the world, who were thought to be sorcerers.

⁷⁹⁶ *Dec. Gelas. 5.*

⁷⁹⁷ See Burrus (1995), 102-25 on how Priscillian was constructed as a heretic; also Chadwick (1976), 141 on Priscillian and others as victims of hysteria.

It is perhaps because of the process of fitting Simon and his descendents in literature into this kind of role, as not just a sorcerer but a deceiver, someone with a theological system who places himself at the centre of it and constructs a sort of parallel Christianity, that we see the largest and strangest effect of the attitude of those who wrote about the magic contest. The fact that these contests could so easily be inserted into any kind of narrative which sought to do similar things as these texts, became a liability to the texts themselves. The individual heresy-hunters, in the aftermath of more than a century of Christological debate and controversy, did not focus on the contest narratives *per se*, and in any case at this time, the contest stories had become almost unexceptional⁷⁹⁸ as they had leached into the background of other stories which were themselves extra-canonical. Instead, the heresy-hunters mined these early texts for doctrine and found in them the very heresies that authors were using the magic contest narrative to construct defenses against.⁷⁹⁹

Unexpected scrutiny of the texts meant that the texts themselves were no longer sufficient as a story of good combating evil, and the search for heresy which they partially inspired was now used to exclude them from acceptability.⁸⁰⁰ This shows, in a way, that the project of the heresy-hunters and the thundering debate and mutual condemnations of the church councils was a doomed one. The contest was supposed to be between good and evil, but it wound up being about different ways of conceptualizing this battle. It became, almost, a battle about a battle. The magic contest texts were on the whole inoffensive; they were unwieldy, perhaps ham-handed, and even contained material which had been declared, long after they were written, not to be ‘authentically’ Christian: extreme ideas about sexual purity, unusual depictions of a ‘Judaising’ community, some views about

⁷⁹⁸ Thomas (1998) on the similar stories in sixth century acts.

⁷⁹⁹ Edwards (2009); Clark (1992) on how something similar happened to Origen posthumously.

⁸⁰⁰ And are used today by those seeking concrete evidence for what so-called ‘heretical’ communities believed. Lieu (2003), 24: constructing communities on the so-called ‘doctrine’ in these texts is very shaky.

Jesus which did not look good in the wake of the Arian controversy,⁸⁰¹ among others. But these views were almost incidental to the structure, and indeed the content, of the texts which contained them. These works of ‘popular’ literature were expressions of the ideas and struggles of Christians who would never get a chance to make their case at a council, or who would not have known how to speak to a bishop. They *were* authentic documents, not of that which became orthodox Christianity, and certainly because they recounted events which actually happened, but they were authentic in their characterisation of the need for Christians in the first three centuries to dramatise the central conflict in their own lives, and in the lives of their communities. Who could say they did not have a Pharaoh of their own, that they would strike dumb if they had the power? For the orthodox Christian in Rome at the end of the fifth century, it must have seemed as if Pharaoh was now ruling them once again.

The visions of success, even of utopia, of victory over the devil, his Pharaohs and all his demons, that the texts express are all different, but they share common threads, threads which even the most hard-line heresy-hunters, such as Epiphanius, found irresistible themselves. The magic contest texts would survive, despite skepticism of the decree writer, and despite the fate of Priscillian and others like him. They would survive themselves, their exciting tales of triumph compelling in dark days, even if the reading of such texts had to be done in private. They would survive as moments in other stories, stories of saints and heroes, where the victory might be won against a demon on the road by making the sign of the cross, or a pagan temple might be destroyed at the command of a holy man and a company of angels.⁸⁰² They would also survive in one of the strongest ‘literary traditions’ of all, in the west. Whilst the direct links are not immediately apparent, it is clear that we have always been fascinated by the idea that it was possible to bargain with the devil to gain ultimate power. The other side of the story, that casting one’s lot with God would gain you even more power, has had a curiously less successful

⁸⁰¹ I have not had space in this thesis to examine closely the differing views of Jesus and his role in the MCTs; it is not an area on which they have much agreement, despite the large amount of agreement they have about what his power and his name can do.

⁸⁰² *Vit. Mart.* 14.

afterlife. The ‘Faust’ legend, generally traced to the story of Simon Magus,⁸⁰³ remains a powerful story to this day, but in its one-sided view it loses something important which the magic contest tradition emphasised. The stars of the show might have been the apostle and the magician, but the texts themselves express the concerns and anxieties of the people who would have to choose which of the two to follow. The world was full of power – where did it come from, and was it safe? For the people who wrote, read, and enjoyed these ‘mythical and unedifying contests’, that our long-ago reader dismissively put aside, these questions were very real and very important. Christianity, in all its many forms, may have said many things about magic:

It claimed the sole right to work magic, denied that it was magic, appealed to its success in working magic as proof of its beliefs, and said magic was unimportant.⁸⁰⁴

But it said only one thing about human choice, about how people should live: ‘there are two ways, one the way of life and one of the way of death’.⁸⁰⁵ Magic, and the obsession with it, was a distraction from this one central point. The magic contest texts ignored the problems of magic and miracle, sorcery and heresy and gave to its audience a compelling story, a story they could share with friends and neighbours, could console themselves with in their troubles: they told a story about how to choose the way of Life.

⁸⁰³ Palmer (1936).

⁸⁰⁴ Mason (1983), 109.

⁸⁰⁵ *Didache* 1.

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