

MAGIC

The art of pretending to accomplish actions with the help of supernatural forces contrary to the laws of nature. Coptic magic is a particularly rich field for studying the relationships of the ancient Copts with the invisible forces of heaven and hell that were part of the old Egyptian heritage (Lexa, 1925; Brier, 1980).

Angelicus Kropp (1930-1931) gives information on almost all aspects of Coptic magic. His work contains fourteen magical texts in Coptic (Vol. 1), the German translation of seventy-six texts with corrections and notes (Vol. 2), and a general study on Coptic magic. Viaux (1978) studied modern Coptic magic with spells and amulets in Arabic, sometimes influenced by Islamic features (Winkler, 1930, 1931).

As with other countries, one must distinguish between modest amulets and spells recited by a magician in the presence of his customer at certain hours of the day or the night that are almost like a religious ceremony with burning incense. Amulets were worn even by babies and are seen even today protecting their bearer with the help of God, the angels, and the saints.

With both spells and amulets there were examples showing the names of the persons as *dd, dd (deina deinos)*, "N.N." or "So-and- so" and magical texts that effectively worked with the names of the persons mentioned. These texts were followed, as in Egyptian and even in Islamic magic, not by the father's name but by that of the mother, such as Maria, the daughter of Tsibel; Tatore, the daughter of Tsahai; and Andreas, the son of Marthe (Crum, 1896).

The value of a spell or an amulet is more appreciated if it emanates from a well-known source. In the demotic story of Sethorn Khamois, the hero gets hold of a magical book written by the god Thoth, and the magician reciting a spell asserts that "the books of Thoth" were in his hands

(Worrell, 1935). Another spell “to bind a dog,” probably a watchdog, mentions that it was written by Isis (Erman, 1895a). In a reply to King Abgar of Edessa, one author asserts, “I am Jesus Christ, I have written this letter with my own hand” (Krall, 1892).

There is great freedom in the layout of magical texts. [Old Coptic](#) and even Christian texts contain passages on how a peculiar problem was solved by divine help. It is, in fact, a kind of mystery in miniature, in the sense of Greek or Egyptian mysteries, where a particularly important scene of a god’s life is reproduced: as he has helped in the past, he will help in the present case.

Though magical texts present, on the whole, a coherent picture of the existing world, there are so many conflicting features in the details that they do not fit into a comprehensible universe. The following, however, may be considered generally accepted: The seat of God the Father, a combination of throne and chariot, is carried by four cherubim. Under him there are seven heavens and fourteen firmaments supported by four columns apparently placed on the earth.

Noun (noun) is both the abyss of the sea and the hell, but Amente (amnte) is only the hell. The Acheronian Sea, borrowed from Greek mythology, is in the netherworld and must be crossed by the deceased. There is a river of fire for punishment and a sea of fire under the throne of the Father. In Upper Egypt (Luxor, Farshut, etc.) the dead have to cross a river of fire to get into paradise (Vycichl, 1938). One spell even speaks of seven rivers of fire (Worrell, 1935, p. 13).

In some cases, spells contain indications about the magician. They show the magician as the successor of the Egyptian priest. He not only invokes the old divinities under Christian and even under Islamic rule but he must also be “pure” like an Egyptian priest and wear a white linen garment. In one instance, he even wears a wreath of roses; in another one, a wreath of *shapshap*, an unidentified plant. Another magician holds a myrrh twig

in the right hand and a staff, probably a magic wand, in the left hand.

The recitation of a spell is performed like a religious service. In rare cases, offerings of animals are mentioned (chickens, ducks, geese, sheep); the blood is drained from the animal, and the magician and his customer share the meat out between them (Viaux, 1978, p. 41).

In one case, Psalms 39 and 124 are written with the blood of a white pigeon. Hoopoe blood is used to write a particular love charm.

The head of a dog or a cat is used to sow discord in a family and to bring bad luck.

The spells mention balsam, benzoin, dates, grapes, lemon and quince juices, laurel leaves, musk, saffron, wine, and such. They call for several kinds of unguents, made from almonds, roses, and radish oil; also different oils of cotton, lettuce, linseed, radishes, olive (especially the green olive of Palestine), and the “oil of the Apocalypse,” consecrated on Holy Saturday.

Sometimes the kind of water to be used is indicated in the spells. There is fresh water, Nile water, water of a well that has never seen the sun, bath water, and water from dry places. One special water is Tubah water, consecrated in the church on the night of Epiphany in the month of Tubah.

Each spell must be accompanied by a special incense or mixture of incense. The texts mention incense of aloe, acacia grains, bean straw, benzoin, cloves, cardamom, coriander, mastic, olibanum (frankincense), pepper, sandarac, and storax, among others.

Names and Magical Words

A name is not only a simple means of identification but a part of

personality. He who knows the name, the “true name,” of a god or a demon has a better chance of coming in contact with him. Some of these names are secret. Thus, Jesus Christ possesses a written name that nobody knows except himself. A spell speaks of the “great, true name of the Father,” another of the “great name,” and there are also his “true name” and his “hidden names.”

A frequent palindrome is Ablanathanalba, probably of Semitic origin, often misspelled, a sign that its palindromic character was not always apparent to the Coptic scribe. Agramma Chamari is often used with the preceding name as well as with Iao Sabaoth. It is used frequently and has been explained as the name of an angel. Abraxas is not only the Gnostic name of the highest god but occurs also in the combinations Iao Sabaoth Abraxas and Jesus Abraxas. The name of the Phoenician sun-god, Baalsemes (literally “the Lord of the Sun,” Hebrew *ba'al shemesh*), appears among other sun-gods and once in a list of angelic aeons. Bainchooch, with graphic variants, once written with seven omegas, is Egyptian and means “Spirit of Darkness.”

Marmaraoth (Syriac, “lord of lords”) designates in the Coptic Magical Papyrus of Paris the sun-god Iao. A similar form, Barbaraoth, the name of the highest god in the same papyrus, remains unexplained. Semesilam is from semes, “sun” (Hebrew *shemesh*); the second part of the name has been compared with Hebrew *'olam*, “world.” Maskelli Maskello is a strange formation, once used to designate the goddess of fate. The name Zagoure is once written over the design of Typhon or Seth.

Four bodiless creatures with four faces and six wings in the book of Revelation are called Alpha, Leon, Phone, Aner. Alpha is the bull; Leon, the lion; Aner, the man; and Phone, the eagle. They represent the four evangelists. The seven archangels are called Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Suriel, Zetekiël (Zedekiël), Salathiel, and Anael. The three men of the burning furnace (Dn. 3:19-23) occur in many texts: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The twenty-four elders of Revelation 4:4 have names

beginning with the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet and ending in *-el* (Hebrew for “God”): Achael, Banael, Ganael, Dathiel, and so on.

Coptic magical spells are full of senseless names and deformations. Beth, apparently the name of a spirit and not the Semitic word for “house,” is followed in a spell by Bethai, Betha, Bethari and then by Larouel, Marmarouel, Metetiel, Sriel, Ermiel, and others (Crum, 1905, p. 253).

A love charm begins with the names of demons: Shourin, Shouran, Shoutaban, Shoutaben, Eibonese, Sharsabaner. It is Satanus, the devil, who hits the earth with his stick against the Living God saying, “I, too, I am a god! I implore and call all of you today to descend to me on these [gifts?] that are today in my hands. At the hours when I shall give therefrom to N.N. that she eat or drink of them, you shall bind her heart and her flesh on me forever (. . .)!—Male wheat, blood of the finger.” This spell seems to belong to the Christian period, for Satanus is invoked, and the “Living God,” and there is no trace of Jewish influences.

In Coptic spells and amulets the seven vowels of the Greek alphabet are widely used, either singly (as in ae/iouw) or written seven times (aaaaaaa, eeeeeee, etc.). They are said to have a magical power and some relation to the seven planets. They are found also in other combinations.

Most magical texts are written in Sahidic, and some are Fayyumic, but there is no doubt that there were texts in other dialects as well. The orthography is as a rule irregular. Texts in [Old Coptic](#) frequently use special letters derived from demotic. They have not lost their contact with the pagan terminology and still present other archaic features.

A picture of such an [Old Coptic](#) text can be gotten from some passages of the magical papyrus of Paris (p. 574 of the National Library in Paris; cf. Erman, 1883, p. 94). One here finds invoked the god Osiris, “the King of the Netherworld,” “the Lord of the Burial,” who is “in the South of This,” probably in Abydos. His two titles, King of the Netherworld and Lord of

the Burial, correspond to the Egyptian titles *hk' dw'.t* and *nb krs.t*.

After tin (Egyptian, Tny) still other sacred places are mentioned: Ebot (ebwt), or Abydos, and Pnoub (pnoubc), or Pnubs, in Nubia. Then Althonai appears, certainly Adonai (Hebrew for “My Lord”; adwnai, here written alywnai) and Michael (mi,a/l) the angel (Greek, *angelos*) “who is with God” (ntepnoute, ntepnoute). Sabaoth (cabawy) is mentioned, so the Jewish influence is certain. In this context, one finds such pagan gods as “Anubis on the Mountain” (anoup . . . tbaitwu, anoup . . . tbaitou); Egyptian, *'Inpw tpy dw*) and “Thoth the twice Great” (yoout pio pio, thoout pio pio), with the expression “great of force” (apahte, apahte). Then there are “goddesses” (nterhcime, nterhsime) and “gods” (nterhoout, nterhoout), literally “female gods” and “male gods,” the first part of which corresponds to the Egyptian plural *ntrw*, gods (Erman, 1895b).

Thoth, the god of wisdom venerated in the form of a baboon, is called Panathoout, the Ape Thoth (panayoout, panathoout), just as Seth is called the Ass Seth (iw c/y, io seth; Erman, 1883, pl. 101). Another papyrus has retained two Egyptian words not found elsewhere in Coptic, tkite (tkite), “the sleep” (Egyptian, *qd.t*), and hwb (hob), “to send” (*h'b*) (Erman, 1895b, p. 50). In this context the verb pwwre (poore) still means “to see,” like its Egyptian prototype *ptr*, and not “to dream,” as in Coptic (Erman, 1883, p. 106).

Two interesting verbal forms are found in the [Old Coptic Schmidt Papyrus](#): *neraei naf* (neraei naf), “what I have done to him,” and *neraf nai* (neraf nai), “what he has done to me” (Satzinger, 1975, pp. 40, 43). This spell also mentions “Hathor, the nurse of Anubis” ([h]aywr tmon[e n]anoup, [h]athor tmon[e n]anoup) and the “son of Osiris, the cowherd” (cioucire peloih, siousire peloih).

The Spell

There is no general rule for the disposition of the elements of a spell, but in most cases one can distinguish the following order: (a) invocation of God, gods or goddesses, angels or other spirits, or even objects, such as the nails of the cross or the holy oil; (b) in some cases, a passage about how the invoked person had helped in a similar case; (c) the demand; (d) a final exhortation, such as “Yea, yea, quickly, quickly, straightaway, straightaway.”

As a rule the persons or objects invoked give some indication of the period when the spell was written. There are several phases, beginning with the gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt and moving to the invocation of God and the saints of the Christian church.

Foremost in the pagan pantheon is the Osirian family: Osiris, Isis, Horus, Seth, Nephthys. The “great magician” Isis occupies the first place, followed by her son, Horus. Their names are Coptic: oucire, /ce, hwr, c/y (ousire, ese, hor, seth); only Nephthys is called with her Greek name, nevyuc (nephthys). In the Great Magical Papyrus of Paris one also finds the [Old Coptic](#) form nebyw (nebtho), corrected to nevyw (nephtho) (Erman, 1883, p. 100, l. 40). Osiris is invoked in the Old Coptic [Schmidt Papyrus](#) (Satzinger, 1975). Amon is mentioned as amon (amon), not as Coptic amoun (amoun), with the addition “the three gods,” meaning the Theban triad (Worrell, 1935, p. 30): Amon, Muth, and Khons. Petbe (petbe) is certainly an Egyptian god (Erman, 1895b). Shenoute identifies him with Kronos, just as Hephaistos (/vaictoc) is identified with Ptah (ptah).

While the Egyptian gods are frequently met with in magical spells, Greek gods are encountered only rarely. An exception is Lange’s Fayyumic spell, wherein the magician finishes his incantation with the words, “If thou dost not obey the (words) of my mouth and dost not come at once, I shall invoke Salpiax, Pechiel, Sasmiasus, Mesemaasim and the 70 gods and

Artemis, the mother of all gods, and Apollon and Athena and Kronos and Moira, Pallas and Aphrodite, the Dawn (Eos), Serapis, Uranos: seize him, bring him to my feet” (Lange, 1932, p. 165). Astarte (Greek name of a Phoenician goddess) is misspelled Asparte (acpart/), “the daughter of the devil” (Worrell, 1935, p. 12).

Moira is Greek for “part” or “portion” and is the personification of destiny. In Coptic, the *moira* is mentioned as a divine power: m/ra nibi eny/r nibi (mera nibi enther nibi), “every *moira*, every god” (Crum, 1905, p. 253). Here *mera* (*moira*) replaces the Egyptian god Shai or Agathodaemon. The etymology of *moira* is the same as that of Turkish *kismet*, part, portion, destiny.

Many spells invoke Iao Sabaoth Adonai Eloï, where Iao corresponds to the Hebrew Yahwe. Names of angels like Michael and Gabriel are Jewish, but are also used in Christian texts. A Jewish passage is certainly the invocation of “the God of Abraham, the God of Isak, the God of Iakob” (Hopfner, 1921, Vol. p. 436). This passage is followed by “Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Son of God [in that order] who destroys the realm of the Snake (. . .)” (cf. Gn. 1:14). These forces are invoked to expel “the impure daemon Sadanas [Satanas] who is on him” (Hopfner, 1921, Vol. 1, pp. 435-36). This spell is written in Greek letters.

Christian spells are easily recognizable as they mention the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The name of Jesus Christ (i/couo p,rictoc) is frequently abridged (ic p,). Mary (maria) is sometimes called Mariham (mariham). Here one finds the three men of the burning furnace, the seven archangels, the nails of the cross, the twenty-four elders standing in front of the throne of the Father and the forty martyrs of Sebaste. All these forces appear in the spells with their names (Kropp, 1930, Vol. 3, pp. 40-103).

The appearance of Gnostic ideas corresponds to a completely new conception of the world in which previously existing elements are

inserted with a different meaning. To take just one example, aeon is from the Greek *aion*, “time, duration, eternity, generation,” but in Gnostic texts *aion* is applied to powerful spirits corresponding to the seven planets. In an exorcism they are called Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, Eloï, Elemas, Mixanther, and Abrasax, and the seven archangels are here Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Suriel, Ragouel, Asouel, and Saraphouel (Kropp, Vol. 2, p. 201). The name Mixanther contains eny/r (enther), gods, here used as a singular, an early Bohairic form corresponding to ent/r (enter) in other [Old Coptic](#) texts. The first part, Mix-, is derived according to Kropp from the Greek for “mixed” or a similar form. Abrasax is apparently but a scribal variant of Abraxas. Another aeon is Ialdabaoth, the creator of the world, and Bathouriel, the Great Father, the Father of the heavenly and earthly beings (Kropp, Vol. 3, pp. 31-32).

There is no rigid system in gnosticism. Names and functions change from one text to another. So the seven aeons are called in an exorcism Arimiel, Davithe, Eleleth, Ermoukratos, Adonai (*sic*), Ermousr, pi-Aoraton (the Invisible), and Bainchooch (Crum, 1905, no. 1008; Kropp, 1931, Vol. 1, p. 22). The epithets “Unseizable, Incomprehensible, Invisible, Unpronounceable” as well as “God of the gods” are equally found in the *Gnostic Tripartite Tractate* (Kühner, 1980, pp. 61-64).

Elements of different creeds—Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, Christian, Gnostic—may be found together in the same text. In a purely pagan text where Isis appears, the end reads, “It is me who speaks, the Lord Jesus who gives recovery.” This spell is from the seventh or eighth century, to judge from the handwriting. Two pieces of the same collection are written on Arabic papyri. In one case, one can still distinguish an Arabic word, *al-amir*, the prince.

This proves that Egyptian gods were invoked even after the ARAB CONQUEST OF EGYPT (Erman, 1895c).

In a spell in which the Christian God is invoked “with his true name

Raphael, Adonai, Sabaoth,” this last is adjured in the name of his unique Son “whose true name is Seth, Seth, the living Christ” (Kropp, 1931, Vol. 2, p. 238). It is true that Seth, the son of Adam (Gn. 5:3), is written in exactly the same way as the Egyptian god Seth, but there is no doubt that here the Egyptian god is meant.

The Jewish demon Ashmeday, who had killed seven men who were betrothed to Sarah, one after the other, appears in a Coptic spell with his Greek name, Asmodaios (Kropp, Vol. 1, p. 32). The form Asmodaios certainly proceeds from the Greek translation of the Book of Tobit.

A half-pagan, half-Christian spell tells how Horus had caught a bird in his net, how “he cut it up without a knife, cooked it without fire and (ate) it without salt.” Then his belly began to ache. He wanted to send a demon to his mother, Isis, who could help him. Three demons of Agrippa were ready to go to her. The first could do it in four hours, and the second in two, but the third was the quickest: “I go there with the breath of thy mouth and come back in the breath of thy nose!” In fact, he went to Isis and brought her back at once, and she healed Horus with a spell. At the end of the text, the scribe added, “It is me who calls, the Lord Jesus who gives healing!” (Kropp, Vol. 2, pp. 9-12). Here one sees that the pagan spell was adopted in Christian times. The passage of the three demons is found with a slight modification in an old German story (Erman, 1916).

Coptic Magic in the Islamic Period

After the Arabic conquest (641) Coptic magic gradually lost a bit of its originality. The most striking feature was the adoption of the Arabic language and script. Original creations were replaced by copies of Psalms with magical squares in which letters and figures were inserted, each letter representing a figure according to the Arabic system (*abgad*, *hawwaz*, *hutti*, *kalamun*, *sa’afas*, *qarashat*, *thakhadha*, *dazagha*). Seals and squares were taken over from Arabic models (Winkler, 1930). They had to be written with a special ink, such as rose water, musk, or saffron

essence (Viaux, 1978, p. 46). Special incense was to be burnt: *qaquli*, a kind of cardamom; Turkish mastic; *gawi tanasiri* (benzoin); and red sandalwood. When writing, the scribe had to sit on the earth to keep in constant touch with the underworld forces.

Several prayers were often copied for amulets: the prayer of Apa Nub the Confessor, Anba Samuel the Recluse, and Saint Cyprian. The prayer of the *qarinah* was written for a woman who gave birth. It also protected children under seven years of age. The prayer was written after a dream of King Solomon. The *qarinah* corresponds to *aberselia* in Coptic texts, today *warzaliyyah*, a female demon who threatens women in child-bed and their babies (Winkler, 1931). In Arabic she was also called *Umm al-Subyan*, not “Mother of the Children,” as one might think, but “the (Witch) of the Children,” who kills them. Modern Coptic magic frequently uses Psalms. Every Psalm is used for a special purpose.

The objectives of spells may be the same as in old times, perhaps with the addition of a spell to find hidden treasures or attract a customer into a shop, or an amulet against flies. Four of the latter amulets must be hung upside down on the four walls of a room, and this must be done on Easter, because the flies disappear at that time of the year, the so-called *khamsin*, or the fifty days between Easter and Whitsun.

A Christian text beginning with the palindrome *Sator Areto Tenet Otera Rotas*, which means nothing but is a wide spread magical formula, addresses Iao Sabaoth, but mentions the Crucified One, and asks for health for Hew, daughter of Maria (Krall, 1892, p. 119). There are texts against an eye disease, fever, and against sickness and demons (Kropp, 1930, Vol. 2).

A spell to heal a sick eye first tells the story of Jesus and a hind. Jesus coming out of the door of paradise saw a hind weeping and shedding tears, because her eye had been hurt.

Jesus: "Why, hind, dost thou weep and shed tears?"

The hind: "I raised my eyes to the heaven and said: Sun do not become red, Moon do not rise, Henoah, the scribe, do not dip thy reed into thy ink until Michael descends and heals my eye!"

Jesus sends Michael, who comes from the sky, and says: "The wound [?] will be healed, the darkness will be dissolved!

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!" (Kropp, Vol. 2, pp. 66-67)

A spell against an aching molar and one against fever for the protection of the mother's bosom and the uterus end with "the seven names" of Mary and of the archangels (without mentioning them). There are, in fact, several spells for the protection of a pregnant woman, for a mother and her child against all powers of darkness.

The "nine Guardians of the Paradise" are invoked "to grant force to Damiane, the son of Kyra Kale" and "to protect him from every evil." Another spell is recited "to get a good voice."

To become strong, a man appeals to Michael, who says, "What dost thou want? I shall do it to thee. If thou wantest the stone, I break it, the iron, I make it water!" But the man answers, "I do not want this or that, but I want the whole force of thy arm for my force and my right arm." Michael directs him to a place where he finds Echouch, Belouch, and Barbarouch, who fulfill his wish (Erman, 1895c, p. 44).

Erman thinks the dog is "bound" by the spell that enables a thief to go into a house to steal (Erman, 1895a) but the reciter may be simply afraid of the animal. A long, important spell is directed against a dog. The object is not clear. The dog may be "bound" to hinder it from warning of thieves breaking into a house, or the reciter may simply be afraid of an animal

that attacked him when he passed by.

Love charms have appeared frequently at all times. As far as one can tell, it is always the man who makes wishes “to fulfill his heart’s desire,” never the woman. The oldest pagan spells are almost poetical. There are parallelisms, repetitions, and questions and answers that excite the listener’s interest. In the pagan manuscript [Schmidt 1](#), Horus is in love with seven virgins, and his mother Isis helps him:

Listen to Horus who is weeping, listen to Horus who is sighing!

Horus: I have suffered while I was longing (?) for seven virgins, from the third hour of the day, to the fourth hour of the night. None of them slept, None of them slumbered.

His mother, Isis, answers him from the temple of Habin, her face being turned toward the seven virgins, who have turned toward her:

What hast thou, Horus, that thou weepest, What hast thou, Horus, that thou sighest?

Horus: Thou wilt not that I weep, thou wilt not that I sigh, from the third hour of the day, to the fourth hour of the night, as I am longing (?) for seven virgins, none of them slept, none of them slumbered?

Then Isis answers him: “Though thou hast not found me, though thou hast not found my name, take a cup with a little water. With a little breath, a breath of thy mouth, a breath of thy nose speak the magic word: Pkechp (. . .)!”

Another spell invokes “Oil, Oil, Oil, Holy Oil! Oil that flows from under the throne of Iao Sabaoth! Oil with which Isis anointed the bones of Osiris!”

I cry to thee, Oil!

The sun and the moon cry to thee the stars of the heaven cry to thee, the consecrators of the sun cry to thee!

He explains his wish: “Mayest thou bring So-and-So to me (. . .) and make love arise in her heart and hers in mine, in the manner of a brother and a sister (. . .). I desire to beget her children (. . .)!” (Worrell, 1935, pp. 184-86). “Brother” and “sister” here mean “companions.” In this case, the object of the charm is honest love and matrimony. The manuscript [Schmidt 2](#) (Satzinger, 1975) begins with an introduction. Horus speaks:

I went in through a stone door,

I went out through an iron door,

I went in with the head downwards, I went in with the feet downwards,

I have found seven virgins, sitting on a water well,

I wished, but they did not wish,

I persuaded [or sim.], but they were not persuaded, I wanted to love N.N., the daughter of N.N.

But she did not want to accept my kiss (. . .).

After a long dialogue with his mother, Isis, Horus gets to know of the magic spell and adds:

Thou Great one amongst the Spirits, I wish N.N., the daughter of N.N., to spend forty days and forty nights, hanging on me, like a bitch on a dog, like a sow on a boar (. . .)!

A spell invoking King Solomon expresses the lover’s wishes as follows (Crum, 1934, pp. 195-200): (. . .) that I may become honey in her belly, manna on her tongue, and that she desire me as it were the sun and love

me as it were the moon and hang upon me like a drop of water upon a jar and that she be like a honey (bee) seeking (honey), a bitch prowling, a cat going from house to house, like unto a mare going beneath horses in heat!

A love charm to recover an unfaithful husband's affection reproduces a passage from Plutarch's "De Iside et de Osiride." The Great Magical Papyrus of Paris describes the situation as follows: "Isis comes from the mountain, at noon, in summer, her face covered with dust, her eyes full of tears, her heart full of sighs. Her father, Thoth the Great came to her and asked her, "Why my daughter Isis, covered with dust, are thy eyes full of tears, is thy heart full of sighs, the (. . .) of thy garment soiled? Wipe thy tears!"

Then Isis explains her case: "It is not my fault, my father, I have found a fault my father, Ape Thoth, Ape Thoth, my father, I have been supplanted by my companion, I have found a fault [or sim.], yes, Nephthys sleeps with Osiris."

Here Thoth is her father, not Kronos. There were four children, two brothers, Osiris and Seth, and two sisters, Isis and Nephthys. Then Osiris, the husband of Isis, slept inadvertently with her sister, Nephthys, whose husband was Seth. The love charm advises Isis how to punish Osiris and to recover his affection (Preisendanz, 1928, Vol. 1, p. 71). In a similar way the magician's "customer" will punish her unfaithful husband and recover his affection.

This charm for women has an addendum for men against an unfaithful wife: "When she drinks, when she eats, when she sleeps with another man, I shall bewitch her heart (. . .) until she comes to me, who knows what is in her heart, what she does and what she thinks (. . .)." This short addition replaces the mythological introduction on Osiris and Nephthys and was certainly followed by a long incantation (not reproduced here) and a detailed description of the cruel punishment for

the adulteress.

By the force of his spell the Coptic magician is able to treat the invoked god or spirit as his subaltern and to menace him if he does not obey (Hopfner, 1921, pp. 139-143).

In one love charm an unnamed god is menaced: "If thou dost not obey according to the utterings of my mouth and the works of my hand, I shall descend into the Netherworld, bring up the *Tartarouchos* [Chief of the Hell] and say to him: "Thou too, thou art a god. Be complaisant and fulfil my desire for N.N., the daughter of N.N.!' Then the god answers: "If thou wishest, I split the stone, I transform iron into water, I quickly destroy the iron doors until I bind the heart of N.N., the daughter of N.N. (. . .). If then she does not come, I shall hold back the sun in his cart and the moon on her way, the star crown on Jesus' head, until I quickly accomplish thy desire.'" It is possible that the threat is directed against God the Father, as Jesus Christ is mentioned in the spell.

In another spell, a man invokes Ouriel and Michael to get a "good voice" without hoarseness, without splitting (?), without roughness, "but tender, with a musical sound and diffusing sweetness between the people." But if the angels do not obey, he will "hold back the sun in the east and the moon in the west and fight with the creatures of the sky," and he will tell the sky, "Become copper and give no dew to the earth," and the earth, "Become iron and give no fruit until the Father will send Davithea, who will accomplish my desire."

Coptic magicians of the Christian period never invoke Satan and the forces of evil. They remain within the sphere of the good, invoking God, the angels, holy martyrs, the holy oil, and the like:

The poor Jacob adjures God the Almighty, Sabaoth, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, the God of the [Cherubim](#) and the Seraphim, the creator of the sun, the moon and the stars, also the seven Archangels, the other Angels,

the three holy men of the burning furnace, the four animals, the blood of Jesus Christ and the 24 presbyters to do every evil to Maria, the daughter of Tsibel. He wishes her illness and to her family too. "Put her in the hand of an evil daemon who tortures her, day and night!" (Crum, 1896)

The "holy martyrs" are invoked by "Theodora, this wronged woman" against Jor and his wife:

I cast myself down before your good selves that you may do my will with Jor and his wife and smite them and scatter them abroad and that the curse and the worm and the scattering abroad may overtake them and the wrath of God may overtake Jor (. . .). Holy Martyrs, may you hasten and execute my judgement upon them.

(Worrell, 1835, pp. 3-4) The association of God and biblical matters, such as the nails of the cross, with evil human intent is a particularly repugnant feature of some spells (Polotsky, 1935, pp. 421-23).

People in Magical Texts

There were several kings of the town of Edessa (now Urfa, Turkey) named Abgar (132 B.C.-A.D. 216). One of them was a contemporary of Jesus Christ, who invited him to live in Edessa and to share the kingship. This letter is widely used for amulets as well as Jesus Christ's answer, not only in Coptic but also in Greek, Aramaic, Ethiopian, and other languages. The letter begins, "Abgar, the king of the town of Edessa, writes to the Great King, the son of the Living God, Jesus Christ." Christ's answer begins, "Copy of the letter of Jesus Christ, the son of the Living God. He writes to Abgar, the king of Edessa." One passage of the answer gives the following promises: "Thy sickness will be healed, if thou, as a human being, hast committed many sins, they will be forgiven to thee, and Edessa will be blessed for ever!" This passage was undoubtedly the reason that both letters were so widely used for amulets in Oriental countries.

The spells of Kyprianos fill pages 1-325 in Bilabel's (1934) collection, in both Coptic and Arabic. Kyprianos was initially a pagan. Then he was converted to [Christianity](#) by his love for the virgin Justina. Martyred under DIOCLETIAN, he is celebrated on 20 Babah.

Before his conversion he was a magician, and it may be interesting to see how the Copts perceived the apprenticeship of this profession. As a boy he went to Olympus, the mountain of the gods, and learned there the secrets of the divine statues (*eikon*) and how they used to speak. He saw choruses of demons there. Some of them sang hymns; others were waylaying, cheating, and making disturbances. There were armies of each god and each goddess. He spent forty days and forty nights there. At the age of fifteen he was instructed by priests, especially the seven priests of the devil and his prophetess. He learned how the earth was fixed on its foundation and the laws of the air and the ether. He invaded the sea and went down to the underworld (Tartarus).

At Argos he took part in the feast of Hera and was taught how to separate women from their husbands and how to sow hatred between brothers and friends. In Lacedaemon (Sparta) he learned the mysteries of Helios and Artemis, the laws of light and darkness and the celestial appearances. Among the Phrygians, whose language he understood, he was initiated into the seer's art, learning the language of the ravens and other birds and interpreting predictions.

Lecanoscropy

The art of seeing hidden or future things by looking into a cup filled with oil is called *mandal* in Arabic. In Coptic it is *shen-hin* (sen-hin), asking the cup, corresponding to *shn-hn* in demotic, attested in the Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden (Erichsen, 1954, p. 514). The earliest attestation of lecanoscropy in Egypt is found in the Bible (Gn. 44:5), which says that Joseph in Egypt had a silver cup from which he drank and which he used to augur.

In modern times Copts and Muslims use a cup without handles filled with oil (Viaux, 1978, p. 55). The magician who reads the spell burns a mixture of incenses and places a boy who has not yet arrived at puberty in a circle drawn on the earth. The boy sees in the cup future events or hidden things, such as the identity of a thief. The circle is to protect the child from demons.

Coptic magic employs the “Prayer of Abu Tarbu (or Anba Tarbu),” named after a holy man who had saved the only son of a woman bitten by a mad dog. The ceremony is performed exactly as it was by Abu Tarbu, with seven loaves of bread, seven cheeses, a little wine, a little good oil, seven dates, and a small cup of water (Galtier, 1905, pp. 124-27; Viaux, 1978, pp. 87-89). Seven boys who have not yet reached the age of puberty are present. The priest reads several prayers and “the life of Abu Tarbu,” who is unknown to the Coptic Synaxarion, and Psalms 19, 22, 118, and 120. Then he recites a prayer for the person bitten by the dog and groups the seven boys around the victim, and the children begin to circle him seven times. In the meantime, the priest reads an incomprehensible text: *Pesthe napas eshsheperikas, sharrasonthas kershni, pershn, soupenin soukenin pistherpou!*

When the children have circled the bitten one seven times, the cantor or the [archdeacon](#) greets the priest, “Peace to thee, Master!” The priest replies, “Peace to thee my child. What dost thou wish?” The reply is, “I have come to ask for the recovery and the health on the part of God and the Saint Abu Tarbu!” Then the priest puts a mouthful of bread, cheese, and dates into the cantor’s or archdeacon’s mouth, retrieves it, and throws it into the lap of the person who was bitten by the dog. Each of the seven boys says, “I have come to ask for the recovery and the health on the part of God and the Saint Abu Tarbu!” Then each of them takes pieces of bread, cheese, and dates and gives them to the victim. He will eat such a piece every morning and drink a bit of wine and water from the church. At the end, the priest anoints the bitten one with the oil he had brought and leaves him with the blessing of God and Saint Abu Tarbu.

This is the ceremony according to Viaux, but there are some local differences in the various parts of the country. At al-Ziniyyah Qibli, north of Luxor, the boys mime dogs and menace the victim as if to bite him.

The seal (Arabic, *khatm*) of the *mandal* is written on white unlined paper. At the four sides of the square are the names of the four angels: Mika'il, Gabra'il, 'Azra'il, Israfil. The four strokes that form the square read *Qulluh (qul lahu) al-haqq wa lahu al-mulk* ("tell him the truth and he has the power"). The square in the middle bears the inscription, *Qaddus rabb al-mala'ikah* (Holy is the Lord of the Angels). Above are written the alphabetic letters *sn* and *nun* and between them *ya-Nuh* (O Noah) and beneath *wa-al-ruh* ("and the spirit") with two letters, *qaf* and *ha*, upside down.

The young boy holds this seal in his right hand during the whole ceremony (Viaux, 1978, p. 103).

An invocation to the angel Hrouphos (apparently Rufus) is written in a spiral form, beginning from a center marked with a big black dot. The beginning reads, "I adjure thee today, O angel Hrouphos!" (Kosack, 1974, p. 297).

The form of this amulet (ghost trap) is certainly of Jewish origin. The Hebrews who lived in the quarters of the eastern half of Babylon and in the western suburbs of the city used to invert terra-cotta bowls inscribed with magical texts to protect their houses from the attacks of all kinds of evil spirits. The disposition of these spells is exactly the same as that of the Coptic ghost trap.

The British Museum possesses a very large collection of these bowls inscribed with the square Hebrew characters or with Syriac or Mandaic letters. Budge calls these texts in circular form "devil traps" and has published about four of them (1961, pp. 284-89). There is but one difference: the Jewish texts are written on terra-cotta bowls, but the

Coptic ghost trap is written on paper.

Similar additions are found in cabalistic amulets where the extremities of Hebrew letters bear a small circle (Budge, p. 404). The circles on the edges of the letters seem to imitate cuneiform writing, but with circles instead of triangles. The following amulet (Bilabel, 1934, p. 380) consists of a short prayer and two lines of letters with small circles:

The prayer reads, “ti pjoeis pnoute ko nai ebol ena nope menaanomia je anok pe pekhhmal anok iob-me aio aio . . . jakhe takhe,” “O Lord God, forgive me my sins and my iniquities, for I am thy servant. I am Iob, son of Me. . . . Yea, yea, quickly, quickly!” The two lines below the prayer read, a a w pnteuo (= w pnoute), a o pnteuo (= o pnoute), and kw ai ebol (= kw nai ebol), ko ai ebol (ko nai ebol), meaning “O God, forgive me!” The scribe was not familiar with this writing, so he wrote pnteuo (pnteuo) instead of pnoute (pnoute) and ai (ai) instead of nai (nai). Also, stars and other ornaments bear these small circles.

The Coptic amulet in Arabic script shown here was written in 1974 for a student who had to undergo examinations at the university. There are seven pentagrams and a text. The letters are separated and use no diacritical points, and there is no space between the words, so that the contents of the amulet are incomprehensible (Viaux, 1978, p. 47).

In the last line appears the Arabic *Allah*, God, to the left, nearly at the end of the Arabic line.

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